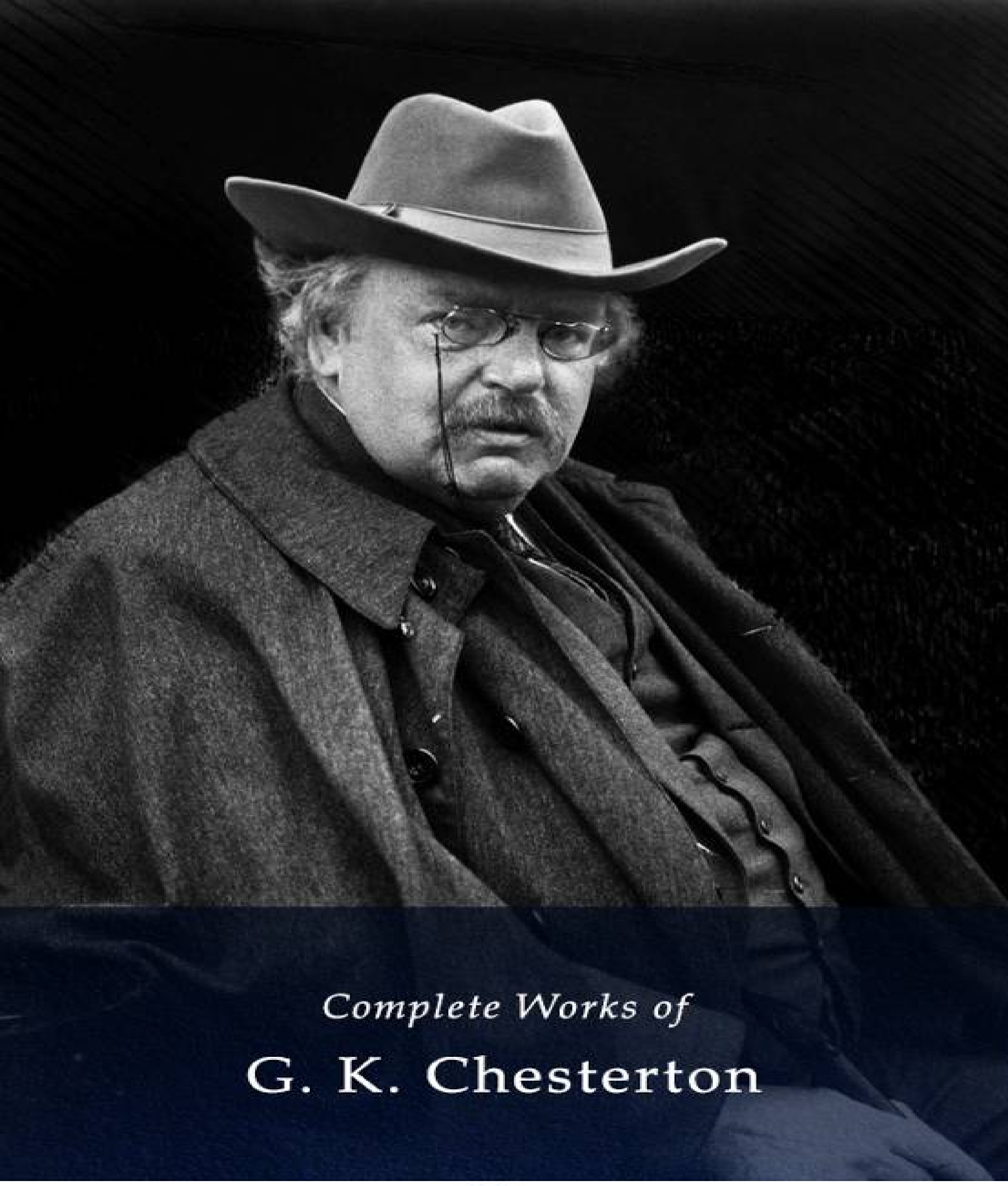

Complete Works of

G. K. Chesterton

DELPHI CLASSICS

Series Two

The Complete Works of
G. K. CHESTERTON
(1874–1936)

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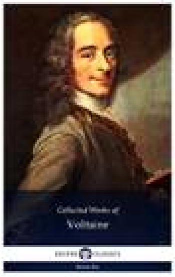

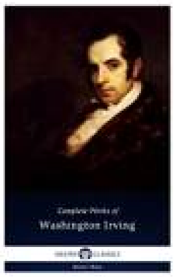
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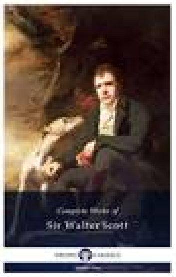
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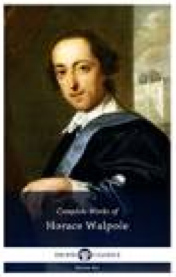
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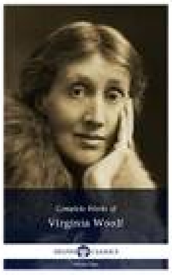
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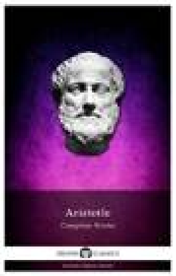

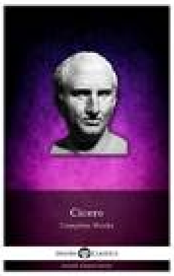

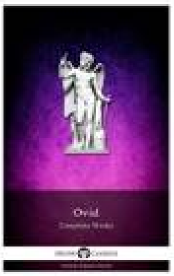

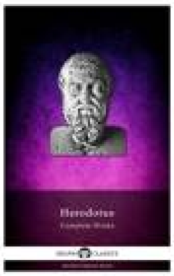

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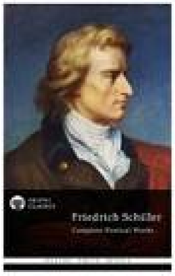
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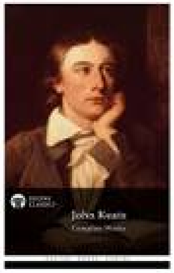

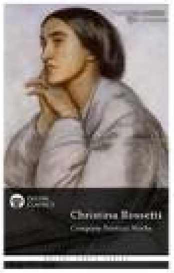
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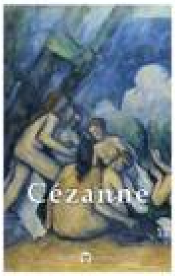

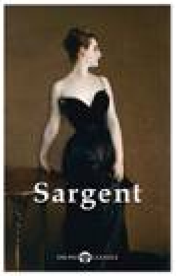

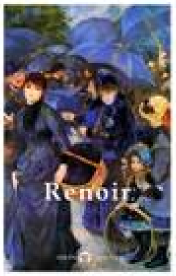

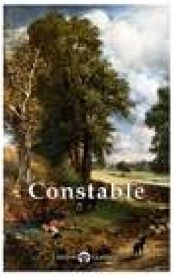

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G. K. CHESTERTON

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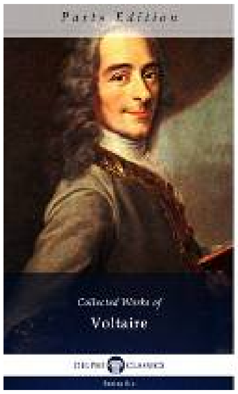
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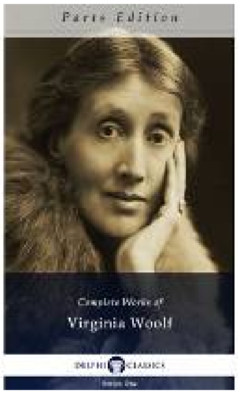
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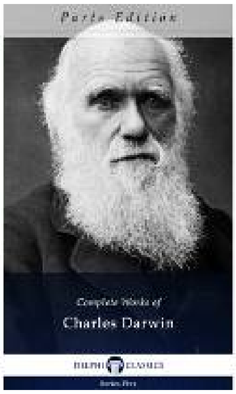
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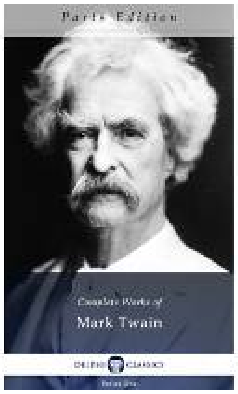
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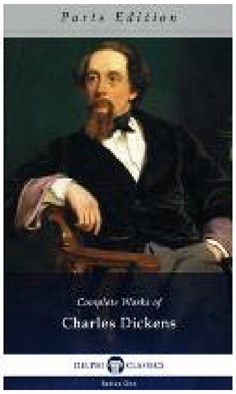
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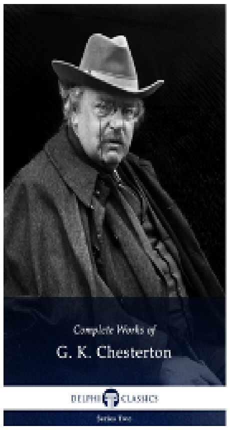
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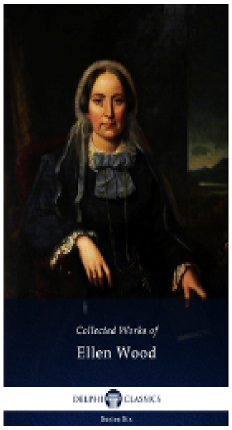
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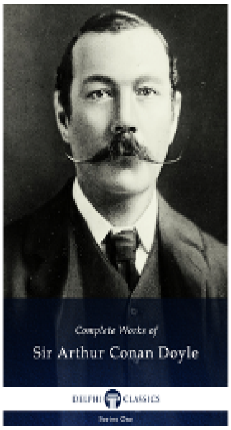
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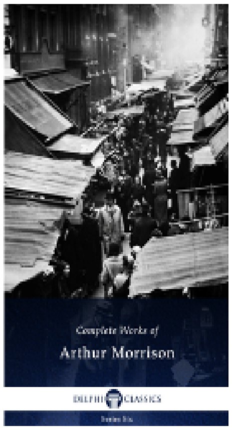
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Father Brown Stories

Chesterton’s birthplace — Campden Hill, Kensington, London

Kensington, 1870

THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN

Illustrated by Sydney Seymour Lucas

Father Brown is Chesterton’s most famous creation, appearing in 52 short stories, which were later compiled in five books. The stories originally appeared in journals such as *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The Story-Teller*, with the first story appearing in the former magazine on July 23, 1910. The stories were an instant success.

Chesterton based the character on Father John O’Connor (1870–1952), a parish priest in Bradford who was involved in the author’s conversion to Catholicism in 1922. Father Brown is depicted as a short, stumpy Catholic priest, from Cobhole in Essex, and now working in London, with shapeless clothes and a large umbrella, and uncanny insight into human evil. Unlike the more famous fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, Father Brown’s methods tend to be intuitive rather than deductive. He makes his first appearance in the story *The Blue Cross* and continues through the five volumes of short stories, often assisted by the reformed criminal Flambeau. Father Brown is characteristically humble and tends to handle crimes with a steady, realistic approach, he believes in the supernatural as the greatest reason of all.

The Innocence of Father Brown, the first book of Father Brown stories, was published in 1911, followed by *The Wisdom of Father Brown* (1914), *The Incredulity of Father Brown* (1926), *The Secret of Father Brown* (1927) and *The Scandal of Father Brown* (1935).

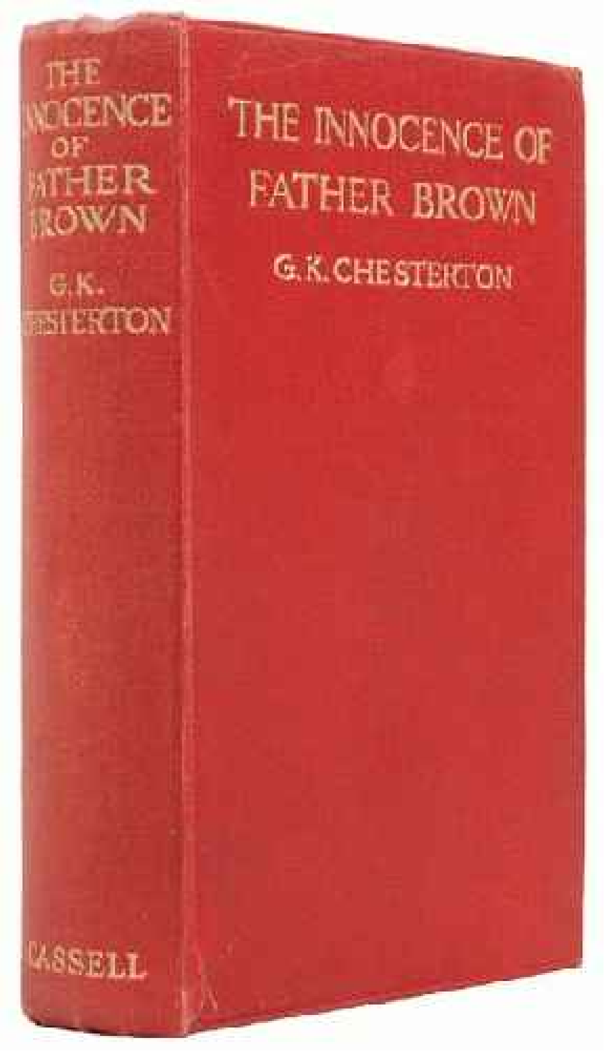
THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN
G.K. CHESTERTON
CASSELL

The 1911 first edition of this story collection

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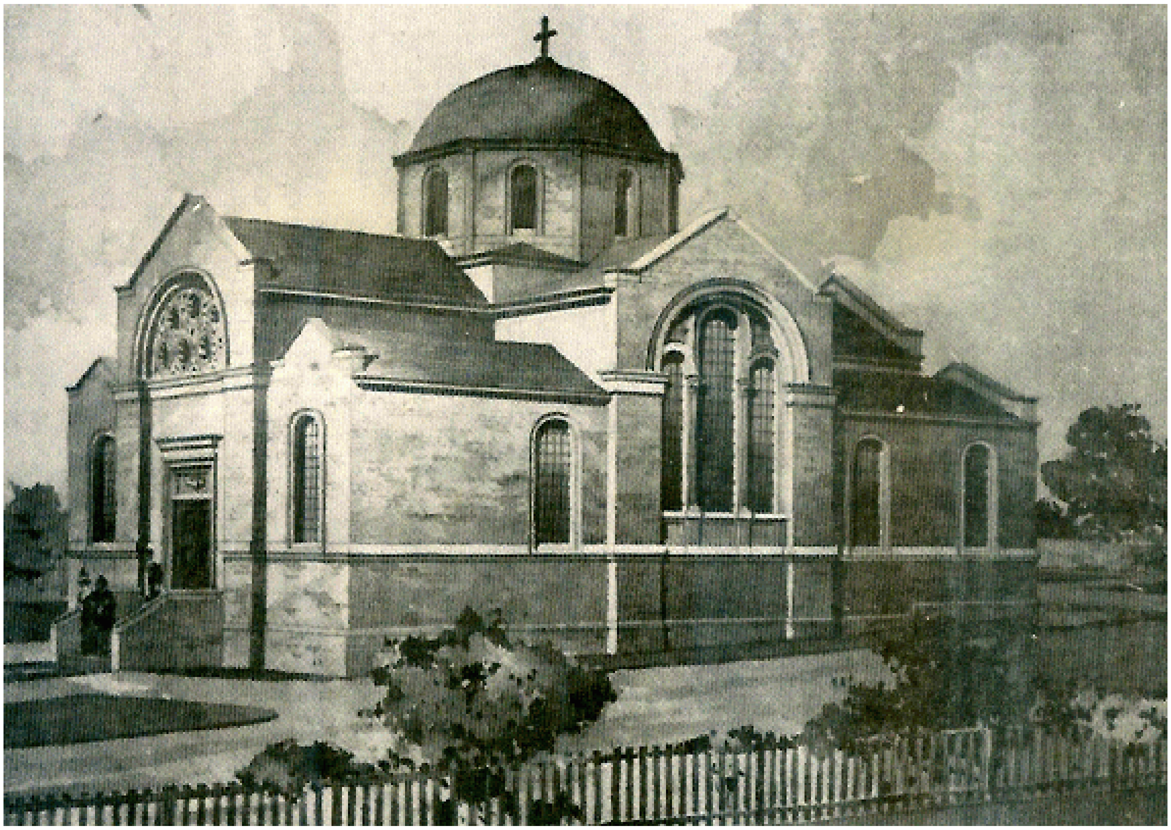

The Parish of the Holy Spirit, Heckmondwike, where Father John O’Connor, the inspiration for Father Brown, preached

The Blue Cross

Between the silver ribbon of morning and the green glittering ribbon of sea, the boat touched Harwich and let loose a swarm of folk like flies, among whom the man we must follow was by no means conspicuous — nor wished to be. There was nothing notable about him, except a slight contrast between the holiday gaiety of his clothes and the official gravity of his face. His clothes included a slight, pale grey jacket, a white waistcoat, and a silver straw hat with a grey-blue ribbon. His lean face was dark by contrast, and ended in a curt black beard that looked Spanish and suggested an Elizabethan ruff. He was smoking a cigarette with the seriousness of an idler. There was nothing about him to indicate the fact that the grey jacket covered a loaded revolver, that the white waistcoat covered a police card, or that the straw hat covered one of the most powerful intellects in Europe. For this was Valentin himself, the head of the Paris police and the most famous investigator of the world; and he was coming from Brussels to London to make the greatest arrest of the century.

Flambeau was in England. The police of three countries had tracked the great criminal at last from Ghent to Brussels, from Brussels to the Hook of Holland; and it was conjectured that he would take some advantage of the unfamiliarity and confusion of the Eucharistic Congress, then taking place in London. Probably he would travel as some minor clerk or secretary connected with it; but, of course, Valentin could not be certain; nobody could be certain about Flambeau.

It is many years now since this colossus of crime suddenly ceased keeping the world in a turmoil; and when he ceased, as they said after the death of Roland, there was a great quiet upon the earth. But in his best days (I mean, of course, his worst) Flambeau was a figure as statuesque and international as the Kaiser. Almost every morning the daily paper announced that he had escaped the consequences of one extraordinary crime by committing another. He was a Gascon of gigantic stature and bodily daring; and the wildest tales were told of his outbursts of athletic humour; how he turned the juge d’instruction upside down and stood him on his head, “to clear his mind”; how he ran down the Rue de Rivoli with a policeman under each arm. It is due to him to say that his fantastic physical strength was generally employed in such bloodless though undignified scenes; his real crimes were chiefly those of ingenious and wholesale robbery. But each of his thefts was almost a new sin, and would make a story by itself. It was he who ran the great Tyrolean Dairy Company in London, with no dairies, no cows, no carts, no milk, but with some thousand subscribers. These he served by the simple operation of moving the little milk cans outside people's doors to the doors of his own customers. It was he who had kept up an unaccountable and close correspondence with a young lady whose whole letter-bag was intercepted, by the extraordinary trick of photographing his messages infinitesimally small upon the slides of a microscope. A sweeping simplicity, however, marked many of his experiments. It is said that he once repainted all the numbers in a street in the dead of night merely to divert one traveller into a trap. It is quite certain that he invented a portable pillar-box, which he put up at corners in quiet suburbs on the chance of strangers dropping postal orders into it. Lastly, he was known to be a startling acrobat; despite his huge figure, he could leap like a grasshopper and melt into the tree-tops like a monkey. Hence the great Valentin, when he set out to find Flambeau, was perfectly aware that his adventures would not end when he had found him.

But how was he to find him? On this the great Valentin's ideas were still in process of settlement.

There was one thing which Flambeau, with all his dexterity of disguise, could not cover, and that was his singular height. If Valentin's quick eye had caught a tall apple-woman, a tall grenadier, or even a tolerably tall duchess, he might have arrested them on the spot. But all along his train there was nobody that could be a disguised Flambeau, any more than a cat could be a disguised giraffe. About the people on the boat he had already satisfied himself; and the people picked up at Harwich or on the journey limited themselves with certainty to six. There was a short railway official travelling up to the terminus, three fairly short market gardeners picked up two stations afterwards, one very short widow lady going up from a small Essex town, and a very short Roman Catholic priest going up from a small Essex village. When it came to the last case, Valentin gave it up and almost laughed. The little priest was so much the essence of those Eastern flats; he had a face as round and dull as a Norfolk dumpling; he had eyes as empty as the North Sea; he had several brown paper parcels, which he was quite incapable of collecting. The Eucharistic Congress had doubtless sucked out of their local stagnation many such creatures, blind and helpless, like moles disinterred. Valentin was a sceptic in the severe style of France, and could have no love for priests. But he could have pity for them, and this one might have provoked pity in anybody. He had a large, shabby umbrella, which constantly fell on the floor. He did not seem to know which was the right end of his return ticket. He explained with a moon-calf simplicity to everybody in the carriage that he had to be careful, because he had something made of real silver "with blue stones" in one of his brown-paper parcels. His quaint blending of Essex flatness with saintly simplicity continuously amused the Frenchman till the priest arrived (somehow) at Tottenham with all his parcels, and came back for his umbrella. When he did the last, Valentin even had the good nature to warn him not to take care of the silver by telling everybody about it. But to whomever he talked, Valentin kept his eye open for someone else; he looked out steadily for anyone, rich or poor, male or female, who was well up to six feet; for Flambeau was four inches above it.

He alighted at Liverpool Street, however, quite conscientiously secure that he had not missed the criminal so far. He then went to Scotland Yard to regularise his position and arrange for help in case of need; he then lit another cigarette and went for a long stroll in the streets of London. As he was walking in the streets and squares beyond Victoria, he paused suddenly and stood. It was a quaint, quiet square, very typical of London, full of an accidental stillness. The tall, flat houses round looked at once prosperous and uninhabited; the square of shrubbery in the centre looked as deserted as a green Pacific islet. One of the four sides was much higher than the rest, like a dais; and the line of this side was broken by one of London's admirable accidents — a restaurant that looked as if it had strayed from Soho. It was an unreasonably attractive object, with dwarf plants in pots and long, striped blinds of lemon yellow and white. It stood specially high above the street, and in the usual patchwork way of London, a flight of steps from the street ran up to meet the front door almost as a fire-escape might run up to a first-floor window. Valentin stood and smoked in front of the yellow-white blinds and considered them long.

The most incredible thing about miracles is that they happen. A few clouds in heaven do come together into the staring shape of one human eye. A tree does stand up in the landscape of a doubtful journey in the exact and elaborate shape of a note of interrogation. I have seen both these things myself within the last few days. Nelson does die in the instant of victory;

and a man named Williams does quite accidentally murder a man named Williamson; it sounds like a sort of infanticide. In short, there is in life an element of elfin coincidence which people reckoning on the prosaic may perpetually miss. As it has been well expressed in the paradox of Poe, wisdom should reckon on the unforeseen.

Aristide Valentin was unfathomably French; and the French intelligence is intelligence specially and solely. He was not “a thinking machine”; for that is a brainless phrase of modern fatalism and materialism. A machine only is a machine because it cannot think. But he was a thinking man, and a plain man at the same time. All his wonderful successes, that looked like conjuring, had been gained by plodding logic, by clear and commonplace French thought. The French electrify the world not by starting any paradox, they electrify it by carrying out a truism. They carry a truism so far — as in the French Revolution. But exactly because Valentin understood reason, he understood the limits of reason. Only a man who knows nothing of motors talks of motoring without petrol; only a man who knows nothing of reason talks of reasoning without strong, undisputed first principles. Here he had no strong first principles. Flambeau had been missed at Harwich; and if he was in London at all, he might be anything from a tall tramp on Wimbledon Common to a tall toast-master at the Hotel Metropole. In such a naked state of nescience, Valentin had a view and a method of his own.

In such cases he reckoned on the unforeseen. In such cases, when he could not follow the train of the reasonable, he coldly and carefully followed the train of the unreasonable. Instead of going to the right places — banks, police stations, rendezvous — he systematically went to the wrong places; knocked at every empty house, turned down every cul de sac, went up every lane blocked with rubbish, went round every crescent that led him uselessly out of the way. He defended this crazy course quite logically. He said that if one had a clue this was the worst way; but if one had no clue at all it was the best, because there was just the chance that any oddity that caught the eye of the pursuer might be the same that had caught the eye of the pursued. Somewhere a man must begin, and it had better be just where another man might stop. Something about that flight of steps up to the shop, something about the quietude and quaintness of the restaurant, roused all the detective’s rare romantic fancy and made him resolve to strike at random. He went up the steps, and sitting down at a table by the window, asked for a cup of black coffee.

It was half-way through the morning, and he had not breakfasted; the slight litter of other breakfasts stood about on the table to remind him of his hunger; and adding a poached egg to his order, he proceeded musingly to shake some white sugar into his coffee, thinking all the time about Flambeau. He remembered how Flambeau had escaped, once by a pair of nail scissors, and once by a house on fire; once by having to pay for an unstamped letter, and once by getting people to look through a telescope at a comet that might destroy the world. He thought his detective brain as good as the criminal's, which was true. But he fully realised the disadvantage. "The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic," he said with a sour smile, and lifted his coffee cup to his lips slowly, and put it down very quickly. He had put salt in it.

He looked at the vessel from which the silvery powder had come; it was certainly a sugar-basin; as unmistakably meant for sugar as a champagne-bottle for champagne. He wondered why they should keep salt in it. He looked to see if there were any more orthodox vessels. Yes; there were two salt-cellars quite full. Perhaps there was some speciality in the condiment in the salt-cellars. He tasted it; it was sugar. Then he looked round at the restaurant with a refreshed air of interest, to see if there were any other traces of that singular artistic taste which puts the sugar in the salt-cellars and the salt in the sugar-basin. Except for an odd splash of some dark fluid on one of the white-papered walls, the whole place appeared neat, cheerful and ordinary. He rang the bell for the waiter.

When that official hurried up, fuzzy-haired and somewhat blear-eyed at that early hour, the detective (who was not without an appreciation of the simpler forms of humour) asked him to taste the sugar and see if it was up to the high reputation of the hotel. The result was that the waiter yawned suddenly and woke up.

"Do you play this delicate joke on your customers every morning?" inquired Valentin. "Does changing the salt and sugar never pall on you as a jest?"

The waiter, when this irony grew clearer, stammeringly assured him that the establishment had certainly no such intention; it must be a most curious mistake. He picked up the sugar-basin and looked at it; he picked up the salt-cellar and looked at that, his face growing more and more bewildered. At last he abruptly excused himself, and hurrying away, returned in a few seconds with the proprietor. The proprietor also examined the sugar-basin and then the salt-cellar; the proprietor also looked bewildered.

Suddenly the waiter seemed to grow inarticulate with a rush of words.

“I zink,” he stuttered eagerly, “I zink it is those two clergy-men.”

“What two clergymen?”

“The two clergymen,” said the waiter, “that threw soup at the wall.”

“Threw soup at the wall?” repeated Valentin, feeling sure this must be some singular Italian metaphor.

“Yes, yes,” said the attendant excitedly, and pointed at the dark splash on the white paper; “threw it over there on the wall.”

Valentin looked his query at the proprietor, who came to his rescue with fuller reports.

“Yes, sir,” he said, “it’s quite true, though I don’t suppose it has anything to do with the sugar and salt. Two clergymen came in and drank soup here very early, as soon as the shutters were taken down. They were both very quiet, respectable people; one of them paid the bill and went out; the other, who seemed a slower coach altogether, was some minutes longer getting his things together. But he went at last. Only, the instant before he stepped into the street he deliberately picked up his cup, which he had only half emptied, and threw the soup slap on the wall. I was in the back room myself, and so was the waiter; so I could only rush out in time to find the wall splashed and the shop empty. It don’t do any particular damage, but it was confounded cheek; and I tried to catch the men in the street. They were too far off though; I only noticed they went round the next corner into Carstairs Street.”

The detective was on his feet, hat settled and stick in hand. He had already decided that in the universal darkness of his mind he could only follow the first odd finger that pointed; and this finger was odd enough. Paying his bill and clashing the glass doors behind him, he was soon swinging round into the other street.

It was fortunate that even in such fevered moments his eye was cool and quick. Something in a shop-front went by him like a mere flash; yet he went back to look at it. The shop was a popular greengrocer and fruiterer’s, an array of goods set out in the open air and plainly ticketed with their names and prices. In the two most prominent compartments were two heaps, of oranges and of nuts respectively. On the heap of nuts lay a scrap of cardboard, on which was written in bold, blue chalk, “Best tangerine oranges, two a penny.” On the oranges was the equally clear and exact description, “Finest Brazil nuts, 4d. a lb.” M. Valentin looked at these two placards and fancied he had met this highly subtle form of humour before, and that somewhat recently. He drew the attention of the red-faced fruiterer, who was looking rather sullenly up and down the street, to this inaccuracy in his advertisements. The fruiterer said nothing, but sharply put each card into its proper place. The detective, leaning elegantly on his walking-cane, continued to scrutinise the shop. At last he said, “Pray excuse my apparent irrelevance, my good sir, but I should like to ask you a question in experimental psychology and the association of ideas.”

The red-faced shopman regarded him with an eye of menace; but he continued gaily, swinging his cane, “Why,” he pursued, “why are two tickets wrongly placed in a greengrocer’s shop like a shovel hat that has come to London for a holiday? Or, in case I do not make myself clear, what is the mystical association which connects the idea of nuts marked as oranges with the idea of two clergymen, one tall and the other short?”

The eyes of the tradesman stood out of his head like a snail’s; he really seemed for an instant likely to fling himself upon the stranger. At last he stammered angrily: “I don’t know what you ‘ave to do with it, but if you’re one of their friends, you can tell ’em from me that I’ll knock their silly ‘eads off, parsons or no parsons, if they upset my apples again.”

“Indeed?” asked the detective, with great sympathy. “Did they upset your apples?”

“One of ’em did,” said the heated shopman; “rolled ’em all over the street. I’d ‘ave caught the fool but for havin’ to pick ’em up.”

“Which way did these parsons go?” asked Valentin.

“Up that second road on the left-hand side, and then across the square,” said the other promptly.

“Thanks,” replied Valentin, and vanished like a fairy. On the other side of the second square he found a policeman, and said: “This is urgent, constable; have you seen two clergymen in shovel hats?”

The policeman began to chuckle heavily. “I ‘ave, sir; and if you arst me, one of ’em was drunk. He stood in the middle of the road that bewildered that—”

“Which way did they go?” snapped Valentin.

“They took one of them yellow buses over there,” answered the man; “them that go to Hampstead.”

Valentin produced his official card and said very rapidly: “Call up two of your men to come with me in pursuit,” and crossed the road with such contagious energy that the ponderous policeman was moved to almost agile obedience. In a minute and a half the French detective was joined on the opposite pavement by an inspector and a man in plain clothes.

“Well, sir,” began the former, with smiling importance, “and what may — ?”

Valentin pointed suddenly with his cane. “I’ll tell you on the top of that omnibus,” he said, and was darting and dodging across the tangle of the traffic. When all three sank panting on the top seats of the yellow vehicle, the inspector said: “We could go four times as quick in a taxi.”

“Quite true,” replied their leader placidly, “if we only had an idea of where we were going.”

“Well, where are you going?” asked the other, staring.

Valentin smoked frowningly for a few seconds; then, removing his cigarette, he said: “If you know what a man’s doing, get in front of him; but if you want to guess what he’s doing, keep behind him. Stray when he strays; stop when he stops; travel as slowly as he. Then you may see what he saw and may act as he acted. All we can do is to keep our eyes skinned for a queer thing.”

“What sort of queer thing do you mean?” asked the inspector.

“Any sort of queer thing,” answered Valentin, and relapsed into obstinate silence.

The yellow omnibus crawled up the northern roads for what seemed like hours on end; the great detective would not explain further, and perhaps his assistants felt a silent and growing doubt of his errand. Perhaps, also, they felt a silent and growing desire for lunch, for the hours crept long past the normal luncheon hour, and the long roads of the North London suburbs seemed to shoot out into length after length like an infernal telescope. It was one of those journeys on which a man perpetually feels that now at last he must have come to the end of the universe, and then finds he has only come to the beginning of Tufnell Park. London died away in draggled taverns and dreary scrubs, and then was unaccountably born again in blazing high streets and blatant hotels. It was like passing through thirteen separate vulgar cities all just touching each other. But though the winter twilight was already threatening the road ahead of them, the Parisian detective still sat silent and watchful, eyeing the frontage of the streets that slid by on either side. By the time they had left Camden Town behind, the policemen were nearly asleep; at least, they gave something like a jump as Valentin leapt erect, struck a hand on each man's shoulder, and shouted to the driver to stop.

They tumbled down the steps into the road without realising why they had been dislodged; when they looked round for enlightenment they found Valentin triumphantly pointing his finger towards a window on the left side of the road. It was a large window, forming part of the long facade of a gilt and palatial public-house; it was the part reserved for respectable dining, and labelled "Restaurant." This window, like all the rest along the frontage of the hotel, was of frosted and figured glass; but in the middle of it was a big, black smash, like a star in the ice.

"Our cue at last," cried Valentin, waving his stick; "the place with the broken window."

"What window? What cue?" asked his principal assistant. "Why, what proof is there that this has anything to do with them?"

Valentin almost broke his bamboo stick with rage.

"Proof!" he cried. "Good God! the man is looking for proof! Why, of course, the chances are twenty to one that it has nothing to do with them. But what else can we do? Don't you see we must either follow one wild possibility or else go home to bed?" He banged his way into the restaurant, followed by his companions, and they were soon seated at a late luncheon at a little table, and looked at the star of smashed glass from the inside. Not that it was very informative to them even then.

"Got your window broken, I see," said Valentin to the waiter as he paid the bill.

"Yes, sir," answered the attendant, bending busily over the change, to which Valentin silently added an enormous tip. The waiter straightened himself with mild but unmistakable animation.

"Ah, yes, sir," he said. "Very odd thing, that, sir."

"Indeed?" Tell us about it," said the detective with careless curiosity.

"Well, two gents in black came in," said the waiter; "two of those foreign parsons that are running about. They had a cheap and quiet little lunch, and one of them paid for it and went out. The other was just going out to join him when I looked at my change again and found he'd paid me more than three times too much. 'Here,' I says to the chap who was nearly out of the door, ‘you’ve paid too much.’ ‘Oh,’ he says, very cool, ‘have we?’ ‘Yes,’ I says, and picks up the bill to show him. Well, that was a knock-out.”

“What do you mean?” asked his interlocutor.

“Well, I’d have sworn on seven Bibles that I’d put 4s. on that bill. But now I saw I’d put 14s., as plain as paint.”

“Well?” cried Valentin, moving slowly, but with burning eyes, “and then?”

“The parson at the door he says all serene, ‘Sorry to confuse your accounts, but it’ll pay for the window.’ ‘What window?’ I says. ‘The one I’m going to break,’ he says, and smashed that blessed pane with his umbrella.”

All three inquirers made an exclamation; and the inspector said under his breath, “Are we after escaped lunatics?” The waiter went on with some relish for the ridiculous story:

“I was so knocked silly for a second, I couldn’t do anything. The man marched out of the place and joined his friend just round the corner. Then they went so quick up Bullock Street that I couldn’t catch them, though I ran round the bars to do it.”

“Bullock Street,” said the detective, and shot up that thoroughfare as quickly as the strange couple he pursued.

Their journey now took them through bare brick ways like tunnels; streets with few lights and even with few windows; streets that seemed built out of the blank backs of everything and everywhere. Dusk was deepening, and it was not easy even for the London policemen to guess in what exact direction they were treading. The inspector, however, was pretty certain that they would eventually strike some part of Hampstead Heath. Abruptly one bulging gas-lit window broke the blue twilight like a bull’s-eye lantern; and Valentin stopped an instant before a little garish sweetstuff shop. After an instant’s hesitation he went in; he stood amid the gaudy colours of the confectionery with entire gravity and bought thirteen chocolate cigars with a certain care. He was clearly preparing an opening; but he did not need one.

An angular, elderly young woman in the shop had regarded his elegant appearance with a merely automatic inquiry; but when she saw the door behind him blocked with the blue uniform of the inspector, her eyes seemed to wake up.

“Oh,” she said, “if you’ve come about that parcel, I’ve sent it off already.”

“Parcel?” repeated Valentin; and it was his turn to look inquiring.

“I mean the parcel the gentleman left — the clergyman gentleman.”

“For goodness’ sake,” said Valentin, leaning forward with his first real confession of eagerness, “for Heaven’s sake tell us what happened exactly.”

“Well,” said the woman a little doubtfully, “the clergymen came in about half an hour ago and bought some peppermints and talked a bit, and then went off towards the Heath. But a second after, one of them runs back into the shop and says, ‘Have I left a parcel!’ Well, I looked everywhere and couldn’t see one; so he says, ‘Never mind; but if it should turn up, please post it to this address,’ and he left me the address and a shilling for my trouble. And sure enough, though I thought I’d looked everywhere, I found he’d left a brown paper parcel, so I posted it to the place he said. I can’t remember the address now; it was somewhere in Westminster. But as the thing seemed so important, I thought perhaps the police had come about it.”

“So they have,” said Valentin shortly. “Is Hampstead Heath near here?”

“Straight on for fifteen minutes,” said the woman, “and you’ll come right out on the open.” Valentin sprang out of the shop and began to run. The other detectives followed him at a reluctant trot.

The street they threaded was so narrow and shut in by shadows that when they came out unexpectedly into the void common and vast sky they were startled to find the evening still so light and clear. A perfect dome of peacock-green sank into gold amid the blackening trees and the dark violet distances. The glowing green tint was just deep enough to pick out in points of crystal one or two stars. All that was left of the daylight lay in a golden glitter across the edge of Hampstead and that popular hollow which is called the Vale of Health. The holiday makers who roam this region had not wholly dispersed; a few couples sat shapelessly on benches; and here and there a distant girl still shrieked in one of the swings. The glory of heaven deepened and darkened around the sublime vulgarity of man; and standing on the slope and looking across the valley, Valentin beheld the thing which he sought.

Among the black and breaking groups in that distance was one especially black which did not break — a group of two figures clerically clad. Though they seemed as small as insects, Valentin could see that one of them was much smaller than the other. Though the other had a student’s stoop and an inconspicuous manner, he could see that the man was well over six feet high. He shut his teeth and went forward, whirling his stick impatiently. By the time he had substantially diminished the distance and magnified the two black figures as in a vast microscope, he had perceived something else; something which startled him, and yet which he had somehow expected. Whoever was the tall priest, there could be no doubt about the identity of the short one. It was his friend of the Harwich train, the stumpy little cure of Essex whom he had warned about his brown paper parcels.

Now, so far as this went, everything fitted in finally and rationally enough. Valentin had learned by his inquiries that morning that a Father Brown from Essex was bringing up a silver cross with sapphires, a relic of considerable value, to show some of the foreign priests at the congress. This undoubtedly was the “silver with blue stones”; and Father Brown undoubtedly was the little greenhorn in the train. Now there was nothing wonderful about the fact that what Valentin had found out Flambeau had also found out; Flambeau found out everything. Also there was nothing wonderful in the fact that when Flambeau heard of a sapphire cross he should try to steal it; that was the most natural thing in all natural history. And most certainly there was nothing wonderful about the fact that Flambeau should have it all his own way with such a silly sheep as the man with the umbrella and the parcels. He was the sort of man whom anybody could lead on a string to the North Pole; it was not surprising that an actor like Flambeau, dressed as another priest, could lead him to Hampstead Heath. So far the crime seemed clear enough; and while the detective pitied the priest for his helplessness, he almost despised Flambeau for condescending to so gullible a victim. But when Valentin thought of all that had happened in between, of all that had led him to his triumph, he racked his brains for the smallest rhyme or reason in it. What had the stealing of a blue-and-silver cross from a priest from Essex to do with chucking soup at wall paper? What had it to do with calling nuts oranges, or with paying for windows first and breaking them afterwards? He had come to the end of his chase; yet somehow he had missed the middle of it. When he failed (which was seldom), he had usually grasped the clue, but nevertheless missed the criminal. Here he had grasped the criminal, but still he could not grasp the clue.

The two figures that they followed were crawling like black flies across the huge green contour of a hill. They were evidently sunk in conversation, and perhaps did not notice where they were going; but they were certainly going to the wilder and more silent heights of the Heath. As their pursuers gained on them, the latter had to use the undignified attitudes of the deer-stalker, to crouch behind clumps of trees and even to crawl prostrate in deep grass. By these ungainly ingenuities the hunters even came close enough to the quarry to hear the murmur of the discussion, but no word could be distinguished except the word “reason” recurring frequently in a high and almost childish voice. Once over an abrupt dip of land and a dense tangle of thickets, the detectives actually lost the two figures they were following. They did not find the trail again for an agonising ten minutes, and then it led round the brow of a great dome of hill overlooking an amphitheatre of rich and desolate sunset scenery. Under a tree in this commanding yet neglected spot was an old ramshackle wooden seat. On this seat sat the two priests still in serious speech together. The gorgeous green and gold still clung to the darkening horizon; but the dome above was turning slowly from peacock-green to peacock-blue, and the stars detached themselves more and more like solid jewels. Mutely motioning to his followers, Valentin contrived to creep up behind the big branching tree, and, standing there in deathly silence, heard the words of the strange priests for the first time.

After he had listened for a minute and a half, he was gripped by a devilish doubt. Perhaps he had dragged the two English policemen to the wastes of a nocturnal heath on an errand no saner than seeking figs on its thistles. For the two priests were talking exactly like priests, piously, with learning and leisure, about the most aerial enigmas of theology. The little Essex priest spoke the more simply, with his round face turned to the strengthening stars; the other talked with his head bowed, as if he were not even worthy to look at them. But no more innocently clerical conversation could have been heard in any white Italian cloister or black Spanish cathedral.

The first he heard was the tail of one of Father Brown’s sentences, which ended: “... what they really meant in the Middle Ages by the heavens being incorruptible.”

The taller priest nodded his bowed head and said:

“Ah, yes, these modern infidels appeal to their reason; but who can look at those millions of worlds and not feel that there may well be wonderful universes above us where reason is utterly unreasonable?”

"No," said the other priest; "reason is always reasonable, even in the last limbo, in the lost borderland of things. I know that people charge the Church with lowering reason, but it is just the other way. Alone on earth, the Church makes reason really supreme. Alone on earth, the Church affirms that God himself is bound by reason."

The other priest raised his austere face to the spangled sky and said:

"Yet who knows if in that infinite universe — ?"

"Only infinite physically," said the little priest, turning sharply in his seat, "not infinite in the sense of escaping from the laws of truth."

Valentin behind his tree was tearing his fingernails with silent fury. He seemed almost to hear the sniggers of the English detectives whom he had brought so far on a fantastic guess only to listen to the metaphysical gossip of two mild old parsons. In his impatience he lost the equally elaborate answer of the tall cleric, and when he listened again it was again Father Brown who was speaking:

"Reason and justice grip the remotest and the loneliest star. Look at those stars. Don't they look as if they were single diamonds and sapphires? Well, you can imagine any mad botany or geology you please. Think of forests of adamant with leaves of brilliants. Think the moon is a blue moon, a single elephantine sapphire. But don't fancy that all that frantic astronomy would make the smallest difference to the reason and justice of conduct. On plains of opal, under cliffs cut out of pearl, you would still find a notice-board, 'Thou shalt not steal.'"

Valentin was just in the act of rising from his rigid and crouching attitude and creeping away as softly as might be, felled by the one great folly of his life. But something in the very silence of the tall priest made him stop until the latter spoke. When at last he did speak, he said simply, his head bowed and his hands on his knees:

"Well, I think that other worlds may perhaps rise higher than our reason. The mystery of heaven is unfathomable, and I for one can only bow my head."

Then, with brow yet bent and without changing by the faintest shade his attitude or voice, he added:

"Just hand over that sapphire cross of yours, will you? We're all alone here, and I could pull you to pieces like a straw doll."

The utterly unaltered voice and attitude added a strange violence to that shocking change of speech. But the guarder of the relic only seemed to turn his head by the smallest section of the compass. He seemed still to have a somewhat foolish face turned to the stars. Perhaps he had not understood. Or, perhaps, he had understood and sat rigid with terror.

"Yes," said the tall priest, in the same low voice and in the same still posture, "yes, I am Flambeau."

Then, after a pause, he said:

"Come, will you give me that cross?"

"No," said the other, and the monosyllable had an odd sound.

Flambeau suddenly flung off all his pontifical pretensions. The great robber leaned back in his seat and laughed low but long.

"No," he cried, "you won't give it me, you proud prelate. You won't give it me, you little celibate simpleton. Shall I tell you why you won't give it me? Because I've got it already in my own breast-pocket."

The small man from Essex turned what seemed to be a dazed face in the dusk, and said, with the timid eagerness of "The Private Secretary":

"Are — are you sure?"

Flambeau yelled with delight.

"Really, you're as good as a three-act farce," he cried. "Yes, you turnip, I am quite sure. I had the sense to make a duplicate of the right parcel, and now, my friend, you've got the duplicate and I've got the jewels. An old dodge, Father Brown — a very old dodge."

"Yes," said Father Brown, and passed his hand through his hair with the same strange vagueness of manner. "Yes, I've heard of it before."

The colossus of crime leaned over to the little rustic priest with a sort of sudden interest.

"You have heard of it?" he asked. "Where have you heard of it?"

"Well, I mustn't tell you his name, of course," said the little man simply. "He was a penitent, you know. He had lived prosperously for about twenty years entirely on duplicate brown paper parcels. And so, you see, when I began to suspect you, I thought of this poor chap's way of doing it at once."

"Began to suspect me?" repeated the outlaw with increased intensity. "Did you really have the gumption to suspect me just because I brought you up to this bare part of the heath?"

"No, no," said Brown with an air of apology. "You see, I suspected you when we first met. It's that little bulge up the sleeve where you people have the spiked bracelet."

“How in Tartarus,” cried Flambeau, “did you ever hear of the spiked bracelet?”

“Oh, one’s little flock, you know!” said Father Brown, arching his eyebrows rather blankly. “When I was a curate in Hartlepool, there were three of them with spiked bracelets. So, as I suspected you from the first, don’t you see, I made sure that the cross should go safe, anyhow. I’m afraid I watched you, you know. So at last I saw you change the parcels. Then, don’t you see, I changed them back again. And then I left the right one behind.”

“Left it behind?” repeated Flambeau, and for the first time there was another note in his voice beside his triumph.

“Well, it was like this,” said the little priest, speaking in the same unaffected way. “I went back to that sweet-shop and asked if I’d left a parcel, and gave them a particular address if it turned up. Well, I knew I hadn’t; but when I went away again I did. So, instead of running after me with that valuable parcel, they have sent it flying to a friend of mine in Westminster.” Then he added rather sadly: “I learnt that, too, from a poor fellow in Hartlepool. He used to do it with handbags he stole at railway stations, but he’s in a monastery now. Oh, one gets to know, you know,” he added, rubbing his head again with the same sort of desperate apology. “We can’t help being priests. People come and tell us these things.”

Flambeau tore a brown-paper parcel out of his inner pocket and rent it in pieces. There was nothing but paper and sticks of lead inside it. He sprang to his feet with a gigantic gesture, and cried:

“I don’t believe you. I don’t believe a bumpkin like you could manage all that. I believe you’ve still got the stuff on you, and if you don’t give it up — why, we’re all alone, and I’ll take it by force!”

“No,” said Father Brown simply, and stood up also, “you won’t take it by force. First, because I really haven’t still got it. And, second, because we are not alone.”

Flambeau stopped in his stride forward.

“Behind that tree,” said Father Brown, pointing, “are two strong policemen and the greatest detective alive. How did they come here, do you ask? Why, I brought them, of course! How did I do it? Why, I’ll tell you if you like! Lord bless you, we have to know twenty such things when we work among the criminal classes! Well, I wasn’t sure you were a thief, and it would never do to make a scandal against one of our own clergy. So I just tested you to see if anything would make you show yourself. A man generally makes a small scene if he finds salt in his coffee; if he doesn't, he has some reason for keeping quiet. I changed the salt and sugar, and you kept quiet. A man generally objects if his bill is three times too big. If he pays it, he has some motive for passing unnoticed. I altered your bill, and you paid it."

The world seemed waiting for Flambeau to leap like a tiger. But he was held back as by a spell; he was stunned with the utmost curiosity.

"Well," went on Father Brown, with lumbering lucidity, "as you wouldn't leave any tracks for the police, of course somebody had to. At every place we went to, I took care to do something that would get us talked about for the rest of the day. I didn't do much harm — a splashed wall, spilt apples, a broken window; but I saved the cross, as the cross will always be saved. It is at Westminster by now. I rather wonder you didn't stop it with the Donkey's Whistle."

"With the what?" asked Flambeau.

"I'm glad you've never heard of it," said the priest, making a face. "It's a foul thing. I'm sure you're too good a man for a Whistler. I couldn't have countered it even with the Spots myself; I'm not strong enough in the legs."

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked the other.

"Well, I did think you'd know the Spots," said Father Brown, agreeably surprised. "Oh, you can't have gone so very wrong yet!"

"How in blazes do you know all these horrors?" cried Flambeau.

The shadow of a smile crossed the round, simple face of his clerical opponent.

"Oh, by being a celibate simpleton, I suppose," he said. "Has it never struck you that a man who does next to nothing but hear men's real sins is not likely to be wholly unaware of human evil? But, as a matter of fact, another part of my trade, too, made me sure you weren't a priest."

"What?" asked the thief, almost gaping.

"You attacked reason," said Father Brown. "It's bad theology."

And even as he turned away to collect his property, the three policemen came out from under the twilight trees. Flambeau was an artist and a sportsman. He stepped back and swept Valentin a great bow.

"Do not bow to me, mon ami," said Valentin with silver clearness. "Let us both bow to our master."

And they both stood an instant uncovered while the little Essex priest blinked about for his umbrella.

The Secret Garden

Aristide Valentin, Chief of the Paris Police, was late for his dinner, and some of his guests began to arrive before him. These were, however, reassured by his confidential servant, Ivan, the old man with a scar, and a face almost as grey as his moustaches, who always sat at a table in the entrance hall — a hall hung with weapons. Valentin's house was perhaps as peculiar and celebrated as its master. It was an old house, with high walls and tall poplars almost overhanging the Seine; but the oddity — and perhaps the police value — of its architecture was this: that there was no ultimate exit at all except through this front door, which was guarded by Ivan and the armoury. The garden was large and elaborate, and there were many exits from the house into the garden. But there was no exit from the garden into the world outside; all round it ran a tall, smooth, unscalable wall with special spikes at the top; no bad garden, perhaps, for a man to reflect in whom some hundred criminals had sworn to kill.

As Ivan explained to the guests, their host had telephoned that he was detained for ten minutes. He was, in truth, making some last arrangements about executions and such ugly things; and though these duties were rootedly repulsive to him, he always performed them with precision. Ruthless in the pursuit of criminals, he was very mild about their punishment. Since he had been supreme over French — and largely over European — political methods, his great influence had been honourably used for the mitigation of sentences and the purification of prisons. He was one of the great humanitarian French freethinkers; and the only thing wrong with them is that they make mercy even colder than justice.

When Valentin arrived he was already dressed in black clothes and the red rosette — an elegant figure, his dark beard already streaked with grey. He went straight through his house to his study, which opened on the grounds behind. The garden door of it was open, and after he had carefully locked his box in its official place, he stood for a few seconds at the open door looking out upon the garden. A sharp moon was fighting with the flying rags and tatters of a storm, and Valentin regarded it with a wistfulness unusual in such scientific natures as his. Perhaps such scientific natures have some psychic prevision of the most tremendous problem of their lives. From any such occult mood, at least, he quickly recovered, for he knew he was late, and that his guests had already begun to arrive. A glance at his drawing-room when he entered it was enough to make certain that his principal guest was not there, at any rate. He saw all the other pillars of the little party; he saw Lord Galloway, the English Ambassador — a choleric old man with a russet face like an apple, wearing the blue ribbon of the Garter. He saw Lady Galloway, slim and threadlike, with silver hair and a face sensitive and superior. He saw her daughter, Lady Margaret Graham, a pale and pretty girl with an elfish face and copper-coloured hair. He saw the Duchess of Mont St. Michel, black-eyed and opulent, and with her her two daughters, black-eyed and opulent also. He saw Dr. Simon, a typical French scientist, with glasses, a pointed brown beard, and a forehead barred with those parallel wrinkles which are the penalty of superciliousness, since they come through constantly elevating the eyebrows. He saw Father Brown, of Cobhole, in Essex, whom he had recently met in England. He saw — perhaps with more interest than any of these — a tall man in uniform, who had bowed to the Galloways without receiving any very hearty acknowledgment, and who now advanced alone to pay his respects to his host. This was Commandant O'Brien, of the French Foreign Legion. He was a slim yet somewhat swaggering figure, clean-shaven, dark-haired, and blue-eyed, and, as seemed natural in an officer of that famous regiment of victorious failures and successful suicides, he had an air at once dashing and melancholy. He was by birth an Irish gentleman, and in boyhood had known the Galloways — especially Margaret Graham. He had left his country after some crash of debts, and now expressed his complete freedom from British etiquette by swinging about in uniform, sabre and spurs. When he bowed to the Ambassador's family, Lord and Lady Galloway bent stiffly, and Lady Margaret looked away.

But for whatever old causes such people might be interested in each other, their distinguished host was not specially interested in them. No one of them at least was in his eyes the guest of the evening. Valentin was expecting, for special reasons, a man of world-wide fame, whose friendship he had secured during some of his great detective tours and triumphs in the United States. He was expecting Julius K. Brayne, that multi-millionaire whose colossal and even crushing endowments of small religions have occasioned so much easy sport and easier solemnity for the American and English papers. Nobody could quite make out whether Mr. Brayne was an atheist or a Mormon or a Christian Scientist; but he was ready to pour money into any intellectual vessel, so long as it was an untried vessel. One of his hobbies was to wait for the American Shakespeare — a hobby more patient than angling. He admired Walt Whitman, but thought that Luke P. Tanner, of Paris, Pa., was more “progressive” than Whitman any day. He liked anything that he thought “progressive.” He thought Valentin “progressive,” thereby doing him a grave injustice.

The solid appearance of Julius K. Brayne in the room was as decisive as a dinner bell. He had this great quality, which very few of us can claim, that his presence was as big as his absence. He was a huge fellow, as fat as he was tall, clad in complete evening black, without so much relief as a watch-chain or a ring. His hair was white and well brushed back like a German’s; his face was red, fierce and cherubic, with one dark tuft under the lower lip that threw up that otherwise infantile visage with an effect theatrical and even Mephistophelean. Not long, however, did that salon merely stare at the celebrated American; his lateness had already become a domestic problem, and he was sent with all speed into the dining-room with Lady Galloway on his arm.

Except on one point the Galloways were genial and casual enough. So long as Lady Margaret did not take the arm of that adventurer O’Brien, her father was quite satisfied; and she had not done so, she had decorously gone in with Dr. Simon. Nevertheless, old Lord Galloway was restless and almost rude. He was diplomatic enough during dinner, but when, over the cigars, three of the younger men — Simon the doctor, Brown the priest, and the detrimental O’Brien, the exile in a foreign uniform — all melted away to mix with the ladies or smoke in the conservatory, then the English diplomatist grew very undiplomatic indeed. He was stung every sixty seconds with the thought that the scamp O’Brien might be signalling to Margaret somehow; he did not attempt to imagine how. He was left over the coffee with Brayne, the hoary Yankee who believed in all religions, and Valentin, the grizzled Frenchman who believed in none. They could argue with each other, but neither could appeal to him. After a time this “progressive” logomachy had reached a crisis of tedium; Lord Galloway got up also and sought the drawing-room. He lost his way in long passages for some six or eight minutes: till he heard the high-pitched, didactic voice of the doctor, and then the dull voice of the priest, followed by general laughter. They also, he thought with a curse, were probably arguing about “science and religion.” But the instant he opened the salon door he saw only one thing — he saw what was not there. He saw that Commandant O'Brien was absent, and that Lady Margaret was absent too.

Rising impatiently from the drawing-room, as he had from the dining-room, he stamped along the passage once more. His notion of protecting his daughter from the Irish-Algerian n'er-do-weel had become something central and even mad in his mind. As he went towards the back of the house, where was Valentin's study, he was surprised to meet his daughter, who swept past with a white, scornful face, which was a second enigma. If she had been with O'Brien, where was O'Brien! If she had not been with O'Brien, where had she been? With a sort of senile and passionate suspicion he groped his way to the dark back parts of the mansion, and eventually found a servants' entrance that opened on to the garden. The moon with her scimitar had now ripped up and rolled away all the storm-wrack. The argent light lit up all four corners of the garden. A tall figure in blue was striding across the lawn towards the study door; a glint of moonlit silver on his facings picked him out as Commandant O'Brien.

He vanished through the French windows into the house, leaving Lord Galloway in an indescribable temper, at once virulent and vague. The blue-and-silver garden, like a scene in a theatre, seemed to taunt him with all that tyrannic tenderness against which his worldly authority was at war. The length and grace of the Irishman's stride enraged him as if he were a rival instead of a father; the moonlight maddened him. He was trapped as if by magic into a garden of troubadours, a Watteau fairyland; and, willing to shake off such amorous imbecilities by speech, he stepped briskly after his enemy. As he did so he tripped over some tree or stone in the grass; looked down at it first with irritation and then a second time with curiosity. The next instant the moon and the tall poplars looked at an unusual sight — an elderly English diplomatist running hard and crying or bellowing as he ran.

His hoarse shouts brought a pale face to the study door, the beaming glasses and worried brow of Dr. Simon, who heard the nobleman's first clear words. Lord Galloway was crying: "A corpse in the grass — a blood-stained corpse." O'Brien at last had gone utterly out of his mind.

"We must tell Valentin at once," said the doctor, when the other had brokenly described all that he had dared to examine. "It is fortunate that he is here;" and even as he spoke the great detective entered the study, attracted by the cry. It was almost amusing to note his typical transformation; he had come with the common concern of a host and a gentleman, fearing that some guest or servant was ill. When he was told the gory fact, he turned with all his gravity instantly bright and businesslike; for this, however abrupt and awful, was his business.

“Strange, gentlemen,” he said as they hurried out into the garden, “that I should have hunted mysteries all over the earth, and now one comes and settles in my own back-yard. But where is the place?” They crossed the lawn less easily, as a slight mist had begun to rise from the river; but under the guidance of the shaken Galloway they found the body sunken in deep grass — the body of a very tall and broad-shouldered man. He lay face downwards, so they could only see that his big shoulders were clad in black cloth, and that his big head was bald, except for a wisp or two of brown hair that clung to his skull like wet seaweed. A scarlet serpent of blood crawled from under his fallen face.

“At least,” said Simon, with a deep and singular intonation, “he is none of our party.”

“Examine him, doctor,” cried Valentin rather sharply. “He may not be dead.”

The doctor bent down. “He is not quite cold, but I am afraid he is dead enough,” he answered. “Just help me to lift him up.”

They lifted him carefully an inch from the ground, and all doubts as to his being really dead were settled at once and frightfully. The head fell away. It had been entirely sundered from the body; whoever had cut his throat had managed to sever the neck as well. Even Valentin was slightly shocked. “He must have been as strong as a gorilla,” he muttered.

Not without a shiver, though he was used to anatomical abortions, Dr. Simon lifted the head. It was slightly slashed about the neck and jaw, but the face was substantially unhurt. It was a ponderous, yellow face, at once sunken and swollen, with a hawk-like nose and heavy lids — a face of a wicked Roman emperor, with, perhaps, a distant touch of a Chinese emperor. All present seemed to look at it with the coldest eye of ignorance. Nothing else could be noted about the man except that, as they had lifted his body, they had seen underneath it the white gleam of a shirt-front defaced with a red gleam of blood. As Dr. Simon said, the man had never been of their party. But he might very well have been trying to join it, for he had come dressed for such an occasion.

Valentin went down on his hands and knees and examined with his closest professional attention the grass and ground for some twenty yards round the body, in which he was assisted less skillfully by the doctor, and quite vaguely by the English lord. Nothing rewarded their grovellings except a few twigs, snapped or chopped into very small lengths, which Valentin lifted for an instant's examination and then tossed away.

"Twigs," he said gravely; "twigs, and a total stranger with his head cut off; that is all there is on this lawn."

There was an almost creepy stillness, and then the unnerved Galloway called out sharply:

"Who's that! Who's that over there by the garden wall!"

A small figure with a foolishly large head drew waveringly near them in the moonlit haze; looked for an instant like a goblin, but turned out to be the harmless little priest whom they had left in the drawing-room.

"I say," he said meekly, "there are no gates to this garden, do you know."

Valentin's black brows had come together somewhat crossly, as they did on principle at the sight of the cassock. But he was far too just a man to deny the relevance of the remark. "You are right," he said. "Before we find out how he came to be killed, we may have to find out how he came to be here. Now listen to me, gentlemen. If it can be done without prejudice to my position and duty, we shall all agree that certain distinguished names might well be kept out of this. There are ladies, gentlemen, and there is a foreign ambassador. If we must mark it down as a crime, then it must be followed up as a crime. But till then I can use my own discretion. I am the head of the police; I am so public that I can afford to be private. Please Heaven, I will clear everyone of my own guests before I call in my men to look for anybody else. Gentlemen, upon your honour, you will none of you leave the house till tomorrow at noon; there are bedrooms for all. Simon, I think you know where to find my man, Ivan, in the front hall; he is a confidential man. Tell him to leave another servant on guard and come to me at once. Lord Galloway, you are certainly the best person to tell the ladies what has happened, and prevent a panic. They also must stay. Father Brown and I will remain with the body."

When this spirit of the captain spoke in Valentin he was obeyed like a bugle. Dr. Simon went through to the armoury and routed out Ivan, the public detective's private detective. Galloway went to the drawing-room and told the terrible news tactfully enough, so that by the time the company assembled there the ladies were already startled and already soothed. Meanwhile the good priest and the good atheist stood at the head and foot of the dead man motionless in the moonlight, like symbolic statues of their two philosophies of death.

Ivan, the confidential man with the scar and the moustaches, came out of the house like a cannon ball, and came racing across the lawn to Valentin like a dog to his master. His livid face was quite lively with the glow of this domestic detective story, and it was with almost unpleasant eagerness that he asked his master’s permission to examine the remains.

“Yes; look, if you like, Ivan,” said Valentin, “but don’t be long. We must go in and thrash this out in the house.”

Ivan lifted the head, and then almost let it drop.

“Why,” he gasped, “it’s — no, it isn’t; it can’t be. Do you know this man, sir?”

“No,” said Valentin indifferently; “we had better go inside.”

Between them they carried the corpse to a sofa in the study, and then all made their way to the drawing-room.

The detective sat down at a desk quietly, and even without hesitation; but his eye was the iron eye of a judge at assize. He made a few rapid notes upon paper in front of him, and then said shortly: “Is everybody here?”

“Not Mr. Brayne,” said the Duchess of Mont St. Michel, looking round.

“No,” said Lord Galloway in a hoarse, harsh voice. “And not Mr. Neil O’Brien, I fancy. I saw that gentleman walking in the garden when the corpse was still warm.”

“Ivan,” said the detective, “go and fetch Commandant O’Brien and Mr. Brayne. Mr. Brayne, I know, is finishing a cigar in the dining-room; Commandant O’Brien, I think, is walking up and down the conservatory. I am not sure.”

The faithful attendant flashed from the room, and before anyone could stir or speak Valentin went on with the same soldierly swiftness of exposition.

“Everyone here knows that a dead man has been found in the garden, his head cut clean from his body. Dr. Simon, you have examined it. Do you think that to cut a man’s throat like that would need great force? Or, perhaps, only a very sharp knife?”

“I should say that it could not be done with a knife at all,” said the pale doctor.

“Have you any thought,” resumed Valentin, “of a tool with which it could be done?”

“Speaking within modern probabilities, I really haven’t,” said the doctor, arching his painful brows. “It’s not easy to hack a neck through even clumsily, and this was a very clean cut. It could be done with a battle-axe or an old headsman’s axe, or an old two-handed sword.”

“But, good heavens!” cried the Duchess, almost in hysterics, “there aren’t any two-handed swords and battle-axes round here.”

Valentin was still busy with the paper in front of him. “Tell me,” he said, still writing rapidly, “could it have been done with a long French cavalry sabre?”

A low knocking came at the door, which, for some unreasonable reason, curdled everyone’s blood like the knocking in Macbeth. Amid that frozen silence Dr. Simon managed to say: “A sabre — yes, I suppose it could.”

“Thank you,” said Valentin. “Come in, Ivan.”

The confidential Ivan opened the door and ushered in Commandant Neil O’Brien, whom he had found at last pacing the garden again.

The Irish officer stood up disordered and defiant on the threshold. “What do you want with me?” he cried.

“Please sit down,” said Valentin in pleasant, level tones. “Why, you aren’t wearing your sword. Where is it?”

“I left it on the library table,” said O’Brien, his brogue deepening in his disturbed mood. “It was a nuisance, it was getting—”

“Ivan,” said Valentin, “please go and get the Commandant’s sword from the library.” Then, as the servant vanished, “Lord Galloway says he saw you leaving the garden just before he found the corpse. What were you doing in the garden?”

The Commandant flung himself recklessly into a chair. “Oh,” he cried in pure Irish, “admirin’ the moon. Communing with Nature, me bhoy.”

A heavy silence sank and endured, and at the end of it came again that trivial and terrible knocking. Ivan reappeared, carrying an empty steel scabbard. “This is all I can find,” he said.

“Put it on the table,” said Valentin, without looking up.

There was an inhuman silence in the room, like that sea of inhuman silence round the dock of the condemned murderer. The Duchess’s weak exclamations had long ago died away. Lord Galloway’s swollen hatred was satisfied and even sobered. The voice that came was quite unexpected.

“I think I can tell you,” cried Lady Margaret, in that clear, quivering voice with which a courageous woman speaks publicly. “I can tell you what

Mr. O’Brien was doing in the garden, since he is bound to silence. He was asking me to marry him. I refused; I said in my family circumstances I could give him nothing but my respect. He was a little angry at that; he did not seem to think much of my respect. I wonder,” she added, with rather a wan smile, “if he will care at all for it now. For I offer it him now. I will swear anywhere that he never did a thing like this.”

Lord Galloway had edged up to his daughter, and was intimidating her in what he imagined to be an undertone. “Hold your tongue, Maggie,” he said in a thunderous whisper. “Why should you shield the fellow? Where’s his sword? Where’s his confounded cavalry—”

He stopped because of the singular stare with which his daughter was regarding him, a look that was indeed a lurid magnet for the whole group.

“You old fool!” she said in a low voice without pretence of piety, “what do you suppose you are trying to prove? I tell you this man was innocent while with me. But if he wasn’t innocent, he was still with me. If he murdered a man in the garden, who was it who must have seen — who must at least have known? Do you hate Neil so much as to put your own daughter —”

Lady Galloway screamed. Everyone else sat tingling at the touch of those satanic tragedies that have been between lovers before now. They saw the proud, white face of the Scotch aristocrat and her lover, the Irish adventurer, like old portraits in a dark house. The long silence was full of formless historical memories of murdered husbands and poisonous paramours.

In the centre of this morbid silence an innocent voice said: “Was it a very long cigar?”

The change of thought was so sharp that they had to look round to see who had spoken.

“I mean,” said little Father Brown, from the corner of the room, “I mean that cigar Mr. Brayne is finishing. It seems nearly as long as a walking-stick.”

Despite the irrelevance there was assent as well as irritation in Valentin’s face as he lifted his head.

“Quite right,” he remarked sharply. “Ivan, go and see about Mr. Brayne again, and bring him here at once.”

The instant the factotum had closed the door, Valentin addressed the girl with an entirely new earnestness.

“Lady Margaret,” he said, “we all feel, I am sure, both gratitude and admiration for your act in rising above your lower dignity and explaining the Commandant’s conduct. But there is a hiatus still. Lord Galloway, I understand, met you passing from the study to the drawing-room, and it was only some minutes afterwards that he found the garden and the Commandant still walking there.”

“You have to remember,” replied Margaret, with a faint irony in her voice, “that I had just refused him, so we should scarcely have come back arm in arm. He is a gentleman, anyhow; and he loitered behind — and so got charged with murder.”

“In those few moments,” said Valentin gravely, “he might really—”

The knock came again, and Ivan put in his scarred face.

“Beg pardon, sir,” he said, “but Mr. Brayne has left the house.”

“Left!” cried Valentin, and rose for the first time to his feet.

“Gone. Scooted. Evaporated,” replied Ivan in humorous French. “His hat and coat are gone, too, and I’ll tell you something to cap it all. I ran outside the house to find any traces of him, and I found one, and a big trace, too.”

“What do you mean?” asked Valentin.

“I’ll show you,” said his servant, and reappeared with a flashing naked cavalry sabre, streaked with blood about the point and edge. Everyone in the room eyed it as if it were a thunderbolt; but the experienced Ivan went on quite quietly:

“I found this,” he said, “flung among the bushes fifty yards up the road to Paris. In other words, I found it just where your respectable Mr. Brayne threw it when he ran away.”

There was again a silence, but of a new sort. Valentin took the sabre, examined it, reflected with unaffected concentration of thought, and then turned a respectful face to O’Brien. “Commandant,” he said, “we trust you will always produce this weapon if it is wanted for police examination. Meanwhile,” he added, slapping the steel back in the ringing scabbard, “let me return you your sword.”

At the military symbolism of the action the audience could hardly refrain from applause.

For Neil O’Brien, indeed, that gesture was the turning-point of existence. By the time he was wandering in the mysterious garden again in the colours of the morning the tragic futility of his ordinary mien had fallen from him; he was a man with many reasons for happiness. Lord Galloway was a gentleman, and had offered him an apology. Lady Margaret was something better than a lady, a woman at least, and had perhaps given him something better than an apology, as they drifted among the old flowerbeds before breakfast. The whole company was more lighthearted and humane, for though the riddle of the death remained, the load of suspicion was lifted off them all, and sent flying off to Paris with the strange millionaire — a man they hardly knew. The devil was cast out of the house — he had cast himself out.

Still, the riddle remained; and when O'Brien threw himself on a garden seat beside Dr. Simon, that keenly scientific person at once resumed it. He did not get much talk out of O'Brien, whose thoughts were on pleasanter things.

"I can't say it interests me much," said the Irishman frankly, "especially as it seems pretty plain now. Apparently Brayne hated this stranger for some reason; lured him into the garden, and killed him with my sword. Then he fled to the city, tossing the sword away as he went. By the way, Ivan tells me the dead man had a Yankee dollar in his pocket. So he was a countryman of Brayne's, and that seems to clinch it. I don't see any difficulties about the business."

"There are five colossal difficulties," said the doctor quietly; "like high walls within walls. Don't mistake me. I don't doubt that Brayne did it; his flight, I fancy, proves that. But as to how he did it. First difficulty: Why should a man kill another man with a great hulking sabre, when he can almost kill him with a pocket knife and put it back in his pocket? Second difficulty: Why was there no noise or outcry? Does a man commonly see another come up waving a scimitar and offer no remarks? Third difficulty: A servant watched the front door all the evening; and a rat cannot get into Valentin's garden anywhere. How did the dead man get into the garden? Fourth difficulty: Given the same conditions, how did Brayne get out of the garden?"

"And the fifth," said Neil, with eyes fixed on the English priest who was coming slowly up the path.

"Is a trifle, I suppose," said the doctor, "but I think an odd one. When I first saw how the head had been slashed, I supposed the assassin had struck more than once. But on examination I found many cuts across the truncated section; in other words, they were struck after the head was off. Did Brayne hate his foe so fiendishly that he stood sabring his body in the moonlight?"

"Horrible!" said O'Brien, and shuddered.

The little priest, Brown, had arrived while they were talking, and had waited, with characteristic shyness, till they had finished. Then he said awkwardly:

"I say, I'm sorry to interrupt. But I was sent to tell you the news!"

"News?" repeated Simon, and stared at him rather painfully through his glasses.

"Yes, I'm sorry," said Father Brown mildly. "There's been another murder, you know."

Both men on the seat sprang up, leaving it rocking.

"And, what's stranger still," continued the priest, with his dull eye on the rhododendrons, "it's the same disgusting sort; it's another beheading. They found the second head actually bleeding into the river, a few yards along Brayne's road to Paris; so they suppose that he—"

"Great Heaven!" cried O'Brien. "Is Brayne a monomaniac?"

"There are American vendettas," said the priest impassively. Then he added: "They want you to come to the library and see it."

Commandant O'Brien followed the others towards the inquest, feeling decidedly sick. As a soldier, he loathed all this secretive carnage; where were these extravagant amputations going to stop? First one head was hacked off, and then another; in this case (he told himself bitterly) it was not true that two heads were better than one. As he crossed the study he almost staggered at a shocking coincidence. Upon Valentin's table lay the coloured picture of yet a third bleeding head; and it was the head of Valentin himself. A second glance showed him it was only a Nationalist paper, called The Guillotine, which every week showed one of its political opponents with rolling eyes and writhing features just after execution; for Valentin was an anti-clerical of some note. But O'Brien was an Irishman, with a kind of chastity even in his sins; and his gorge rose against that great brutality of the intellect which belongs only to France. He felt Paris as a whole, from the grotesques on the Gothic churches to the gross caricatures in the newspapers. He remembered the gigantic jests of the Revolution. He saw the whole city as one ugly energy, from the sanguinary sketch lying on Valentin's table up to where, above a mountain and forest of gargoyles, the great devil grins on Notre Dame.

The library was long, low, and dark; what light entered it shot from under low blinds and had still some of the ruddy tinge of morning. Valentin and his servant Ivan were waiting for them at the upper end of a long, slightly-sloping desk, on which lay the mortal remains, looking enormous in the twilight. The big black figure and yellow face of the man found in the garden confronted them essentially unchanged. The second head, which had been fished from among the river reeds that morning, lay streaming and dripping beside it; Valentin's men were still seeking to recover the rest of this second corpse, which was supposed to be afloat. Father Brown, who did not seem to share O'Brien's sensibilities in the least, went up to the second head and examined it with his blinking care. It was little more than a mop of wet white hair, fringed with silver fire in the red and level morning light; the face, which seemed of an ugly, empurpled and perhaps criminal type, had been much battered against trees or stones as it tossed in the water.

"Good morning, Commandant O'Brien," said Valentin, with quiet cordiality. "You have heard of Brayne's last experiment in butchery, I suppose?"

Father Brown was still bending over the head with white hair, and he said, without looking up:

"I suppose it is quite certain that Brayne cut off this head, too."

"Well, it seems common sense," said Valentin, with his hands in his pockets. "Killed in the same way as the other. Found within a few yards of the other. And sliced by the same weapon which we know he carried away."

"Yes, yes; I know," replied Father Brown submissively. "Yet, you know, I doubt whether Brayne could have cut off this head."

"Why not?" inquired Dr. Simon, with a rational stare.

"Well, doctor," said the priest, looking up blinking, "can a man cut off his own head? I don't know."

O'Brien felt an insane universe crashing about his ears; but the doctor sprang forward with impetuous practicality and pushed back the wet white hair.

"Oh, there's no doubt it's Brayne," said the priest quietly. "He had exactly that chip in the left ear."

The detective, who had been regarding the priest with steady and glittering eyes, opened his clenched mouth and said sharply: "You seem to know a lot about him, Father Brown."

"I do," said the little man simply. "I've been about with him for some weeks. He was thinking of joining our church."

The star of the fanatic sprang into Valentin's eyes; he strode towards the priest with clenched hands. "And, perhaps," he cried, with a blasting sneer, "perhaps he was also thinking of leaving all his money to your church."

"Perhaps he was," said Brown stolidly; "it is possible."

"In that case," cried Valentin, with a dreadful smile, "you may indeed know a great deal about him. About his life and about his—"

Commandant O'Brien laid a hand on Valentin's arm. "Drop that slanderous rubbish, Valentin," he said, "or there may be more swords yet."

But Valentin (under the steady, humble gaze of the priest) had already recovered himself. "Well," he said shortly, "people's private opinions can wait. You gentlemen are still bound by your promise to stay; you must enforce it on yourselves — and on each other. Ivan here will tell you anything more you want to know; I must get to business and write to the authorities. We can't keep this quiet any longer. I shall be writing in my study if there is any more news."

"Is there any more news, Ivan?" asked Dr. Simon, as the chief of police strode out of the room.

"Only one more thing, I think, sir," said Ivan, wrinkling up his grey old face, "but that's important, too, in its way. There's that old buffer you found on the lawn," and he pointed without pretence of reverence at the big black body with the yellow head. "We've found out who he is, anyhow."

"Indeed!" cried the astonished doctor, "and who is he?"

"His name was Arnold Becker," said the under-detective, "though he went by many aliases. He was a wandering sort of scamp, and is known to have been in America; so that was where Brayne got his knife into him. We didn't have much to do with him ourselves, for he worked mostly in Germany. We've communicated, of course, with the German police. But, oddly enough, there was a twin brother of his, named Louis Becker, whom we had a great deal to do with. In fact, we found it necessary to guillotine him only yesterday. Well, it's a rum thing, gentlemen, but when I saw that fellow flat on the lawn I had the greatest jump of my life. If I hadn't seen Louis Becker guillotined with my own eyes, I'd have sworn it was Louis Becker lying there in the grass. Then, of course, I remembered his twin brother in Germany, and following up the clue—"

The explanatory Ivan stopped, for the excellent reason that nobody was listening to him. The Commandant and the doctor were both staring at

Father Brown, who had sprung stiffly to his feet, and was holding his temples tight like a man in sudden and violent pain.

"Stop, stop, stop!" he cried; "stop talking a minute, for I see half. Will God give me strength? Will my brain make the one jump and see all? Heaven help me! I used to be fairly good at thinking. I could paraphrase any page in Aquinas once. Will my head split — or will it see? I see half — I only see half."

He buried his head in his hands, and stood in a sort of rigid torture of thought or prayer, while the other three could only go on staring at this last prodigy of their wild twelve hours.

When Father Brown's hands fell they showed a face quite fresh and serious, like a child's. He heaved a huge sigh, and said: "Let us get this said and done with as quickly as possible. Look here, this will be the quickest way to convince you all of the truth." He turned to the doctor. "Dr. Simon," he said, "you have a strong head-piece, and I heard you this morning asking the five hardest questions about this business. Well, if you will ask them again, I will answer them."

Simon's pince-nez dropped from his nose in his doubt and wonder, but he answered at once. "Well, the first question, you know, is why a man should kill another with a clumsy sabre at all when a man can kill with a bodkin?"

"A man cannot behead with a bodkin," said Brown calmly, "and for this murder beheading was absolutely necessary."

"Why?" asked O'Brien, with interest.

"And the next question?" asked Father Brown.

"Well, why didn't the man cry out or anything?" asked the doctor; "sabres in gardens are certainly unusual."

"Twigs," said the priest gloomily, and turned to the window which looked on the scene of death. "No one saw the point of the twigs. Why should they lie on that lawn (look at it) so far from any tree? They were not snapped off; they were chopped off. The murderer occupied his enemy with some tricks with the sabre, showing how he could cut a branch in mid-air, or what-not. Then, while his enemy bent down to see the result, a silent slash, and the head fell."

"Well," said the doctor slowly, "that seems plausible enough. But my next two questions will stump anyone."

The priest still stood looking critically out of the window and waited.

"You know how all the garden was sealed up like an air-tight chamber," went on the doctor. "Well, how did the strange man get into the garden?"

Without turning round, the little priest answered: "There never was any strange man in the garden."

There was a silence, and then a sudden cackle of almost childish laughter relieved the strain. The absurdity of Brown's remark moved Ivan to open taunts.

"Oh!" he cried; "then we didn't lug a great fat corpse on to a sofa last night? He hadn't got into the garden, I suppose?"

"Got into the garden?" repeated Brown reflectively. "No, not entirely."

"Hang it all," cried Simon, "a man gets into a garden, or he doesn't."

"Not necessarily," said the priest, with a faint smile. "What is the nest question, doctor?"

"I fancy you're ill," exclaimed Dr. Simon sharply; "but I'll ask the next question if you like. How did Brayne get out of the garden?"

"He didn't get out of the garden," said the priest, still looking out of the window.

"Didn't get out of the garden?" exploded Simon.

"Not completely," said Father Brown.

Simon shook his fists in a frenzy of French logic. "A man gets out of a garden, or he doesn't," he cried.

"Not always," said Father Brown.

Dr. Simon sprang to his feet impatiently. "I have no time to spare on such senseless talk," he cried angrily. "If you can't understand a man being on one side of a wall or the other, I won't trouble you further."

"Doctor," said the cleric very gently, "we have always got on very pleasantly together. If only for the sake of old friendship, stop and tell me your fifth question."

The impatient Simon sank into a chair by the door and said briefly: "The head and shoulders were cut about in a queer way. It seemed to be done after death."

"Yes," said the motionless priest, "it was done so as to make you assume exactly the one simple falsehood that you did assume. It was done to make you take for granted that the head belonged to the body."

The borderland of the brain, where all the monsters are made, moved horribly in the Gaelic O'Brien. He felt the chaotic presence of all the horsemen and fish-women that man's unnatural fancy has begotten. A voice older than his first fathers seemed saying in his ear: “Keep out of the monstrous garden where grows the tree with double fruit. Avoid the evil garden where died the man with two heads.” Yet, while these shameful symbolic shapes passed across the ancient mirror of his Irish soul, his Frenchified intellect was quite alert, and was watching the odd priest as closely and incredulously as all the rest.

Father Brown had turned round at last, and stood against the window, with his face in dense shadow; but even in that shadow they could see it was pale as ashes. Nevertheless, he spoke quite sensibly, as if there were no Gaelic souls on earth.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “you did not find the strange body of Becker in the garden. You did not find any strange body in the garden. In face of Dr. Simon’s rationalism, I still affirm that Becker was only partly present. Look here!” (pointing to the black bulk of the mysterious corpse) “you never saw that man in your lives. Did you ever see this man?”

He rapidly rolled away the bald, yellow head of the unknown, and put in its place the white-maned head beside it. And there, complete, unified, unmistakable, lay Julius K. Brayne.

“The murderer,” went on Brown quietly, “hacked off his enemy’s head and flung the sword far over the wall. But he was too clever to fling the sword only. He flung the head over the wall also. Then he had only to clap on another head to the corpse, and (as he insisted on a private inquest) you all imagined a totally new man.”

“Clap on another head!” said O’Brien staring. “What other head? Heads don’t grow on garden bushes, do they?”

“No,” said Father Brown huskily, and looking at his boots; “there is only one place where they grow. They grow in the basket of the guillotine, beside which the chief of police, Aristide Valentin, was standing not an hour before the murder. Oh, my friends, hear me a minute more before you tear me in pieces. Valentin is an honest man, if being mad for an arguable cause is honesty. But did you never see in that cold, grey eye of his that he is mad! He would do anything, anything, to break what he calls the superstition of the Cross. He has fought for it and starved for it, and now he has murdered for it. Brayne’s crazy millions had hitherto been scattered among so many sects that they did little to alter the balance of things. But Valentin heard a whisper that Brayne, like so many scatter-brained sceptics, was drifting to us; and that was quite a different thing. Brayne would pour supplies into the impoverished and pugnacious Church of France; he would support six Nationalist newspapers like The Guillotine. The battle was already balanced on a point, and the fanatic took flame at the risk. He resolved to destroy the millionaire, and he did it as one would expect the greatest of detectives to commit his only crime. He abstracted the severed head of Becker on some criminological excuse, and took it home in his official box. He had that last argument with Brayne, that Lord Galloway did not hear the end of; that failing, he led him out into the sealed garden, talked about swordsmanship, used twigs and a sabre for illustration, and—”

Ivan of the Scar sprang up. “You lunatic,” he yelled; “you’ll go to my master now, if I take you by—”

“Why, I was going there,” said Brown heavily; “I must ask him to confess, and all that.”

Driving the unhappy Brown before them like a hostage or sacrifice, they rushed together into the sudden stillness of Valentin’s study.

The great detective sat at his desk apparently too occupied to hear their turbulent entrance. They paused a moment, and then something in the look of that upright and elegant back made the doctor run forward suddenly. A touch and a glance showed him that there was a small box of pills at Valentin’s elbow, and that Valentin was dead in his chair; and on the blind face of the suicide was more than the pride of Cato.

The Queer Feet

If you meet a member of that select club, “The Twelve True Fishermen,” entering the Vernon Hotel for the annual club dinner, you will observe, as he takes off his overcoat, that his evening coat is green and not black. If (supposing that you have the star-defying audacity to address such a being) you ask him why, he will probably answer that he does it to avoid being mistaken for a waiter. You will then retire crushed. But you will leave behind you a mystery as yet unsolved and a tale worth telling.

If (to pursue the same vein of improbable conjecture) you were to meet a mild, hard-working little priest, named Father Brown, and were to ask him what he thought was the most singular luck of his life, he would probably reply that upon the whole his best stroke was at the Vernon Hotel, where he had averted a crime and, perhaps, saved a soul, merely by listening to a few footsteps in a passage. He is perhaps a little proud of this wild and wonderful guess of his, and it is possible that he might refer to it. But since it is immeasurably unlikely that you will ever rise high enough in the social world to find “The Twelve True Fishermen,” or that you will ever sink low enough among slums and criminals to find Father Brown, I fear you will never hear the story at all unless you hear it from me.

The Vernon Hotel at which The Twelve True Fishermen held their annual dinners was an institution such as can only exist in an oligarchical society which has almost gone mad on good manners. It was that topsy-turvy product — an “exclusive” commercial enterprise. That is, it was a thing which paid not by attracting people, but actually by turning people away. In the heart of a plutocracy tradesmen become cunning enough to be more fastidious than their customers. They positively create difficulties so that their wealthy and weary clients may spend money and diplomacy in overcoming them. If there were a fashionable hotel in London which no man could enter who was under six foot, society would meekly make up parties of six-foot men to dine in it. If there were an expensive restaurant which by a mere caprice of its proprietor was only open on Thursday afternoon, it would be crowded on Thursday afternoon. The Vernon Hotel stood, as if by accident, in the corner of a square in Belgravia. It was a small hotel; and a very inconvenient one. But its very inconveniences were considered as walls protecting a particular class. One inconvenience, in particular, was held to be of vital importance: the fact that practically only twenty-four people could dine in the place at once. The only big dinner table was the celebrated terrace table, which stood open to the air on a sort of veranda overlooking one of the most exquisite old gardens in London. Thus it happened that even the twenty-four seats at this table could only be enjoyed in warm weather; and this making the enjoyment yet more difficult made it yet more desired. The existing owner of the hotel was a Jew named Lever; and he made nearly a million out of it, by making it difficult to get into. Of course he combined with this limitation in the scope of his enterprise the most careful polish in its performance. The wines and cooking were really as good as any in Europe, and the demeanour of the attendants exactly mirrored the fixed mood of the English upper class. The proprietor knew all his waiters like the fingers on his hand; there were only fifteen of them all told. It was much easier to become a Member of Parliament than to become a waiter in that hotel. Each waiter was trained in terrible silence and smoothness, as if he were a gentleman's servant. And, indeed, there was generally at least one waiter to every gentleman who dined.

The club of The Twelve True Fishermen would not have consented to dine anywhere but in such a place, for it insisted on a luxurious privacy; and would have been quite upset by the mere thought that any other club was even dining in the same building. On the occasion of their annual dinner the Fishermen were in the habit of exposing all their treasures, as if they were in a private house, especially the celebrated set of fish knives and forks which were, as it were, the insignia of the society, each being exquisitely wrought in silver in the form of a fish, and each loaded at the hilt with one large pearl. These were always laid out for the fish course, and the fish course was always the most magnificent in that magnificent repast. The society had a vast number of ceremonies and observances, but it had no history and no object; that was where it was so very aristocratic. You did not have to be anything in order to be one of the Twelve Fishers; unless you were already a certain sort of person, you never even heard of them. It had been in existence twelve years. Its president was Mr. Audley. Its vice-president was the Duke of Chester.

If I have in any degree conveyed the atmosphere of this appalling hotel, the reader may feel a natural wonder as to how I came to know anything about it, and may even speculate as to how so ordinary a person as my friend Father Brown came to find himself in that golden galley. As far as that is concerned, my story is simple, or even vulgar. There is in the world a very aged rioter and demagogue who breaks into the most refined retreats with the dreadful information that all men are brothers, and wherever this leveller went on his pale horse it was Father Brown’s trade to follow. One of the waiters, an Italian, had been struck down with a paralytic stroke that afternoon; and his Jewish employer, marvelling mildly at such superstitions, had consented to send for the nearest Popish priest. With what the waiter confessed to Father Brown we are not concerned, for the excellent reason that that cleric kept it to himself; but apparently it involved him in writing out a note or statement for the conveying of some message or the righting of some wrong. Father Brown, therefore, with a meek impudence which he would have shown equally in Buckingham Palace, asked to be provided with a room and writing materials. Mr. Lever was torn in two. He was a kind man, and had also that bad imitation of kindness, the dislike of any difficulty or scene. At the same time the presence of one unusual stranger in his hotel that evening was like a speck of dirt on something just cleaned. There was never any borderland or anteroom in the Vernon Hotel, no people waiting in the hall, no customers coming in on chance. There were fifteen waiters. There were twelve guests. It would be as startling to find a new guest in the hotel that night as to find a new brother taking breakfast or tea in one’s own family. Moreover, the priest’s appearance was second-rate and his clothes muddy; a mere glimpse of him afar off might precipitate a crisis in the club. Mr. Lever at last hit on a plan to cover, since he might not obliterate, the disgrace. When you enter (as you never will) the Vernon Hotel, you pass down a short passage decorated with a few dingy but important pictures, and come to the main vestibule and lounge which opens on your right into passages leading to the public rooms, and on your left to a similar passage pointing to the kitchens and offices of the hotel. Immediately on your left hand is the corner of a glass office, which abuts upon the lounge — a house within a house, so to speak, like the old hotel bar which probably once occupied its place.

In this office sat the representative of the proprietor (nobody in this place ever appeared in person if he could help it), and just beyond the office, on the way to the servants’ quarters, was the gentlemen’s cloak room, the last boundary of the gentlemen’s domain. But between the office and the cloak room was a small private room without other outlet, sometimes used by the proprietor for delicate and important matters, such as lending a duke a thousand pounds or declining to lend him sixpence. It is a mark of the magnificent tolerance of Mr. Lever that he permitted this holy place to be for about half an hour profaned by a mere priest, scribbling away on a piece of paper. The story which Father Brown was writing down was very likely a much better story than this one, only it will never be known. I can merely state that it was very nearly as long, and that the last two or three paragraphs of it were the least exciting and absorbing.

For it was by the time that he had reached these that the priest began a little to allow his thoughts to wander and his animal senses, which were commonly keen, to awaken. The time of darkness and dinner was drawing on; his own forgotten little room was without a light, and perhaps the gathering gloom, as occasionally happens, sharpened the sense of sound. As Father Brown wrote the last and least essential part of his document, he caught himself writing to the rhythm of a recurrent noise outside, just as one sometimes thinks to the tune of a railway train. When he became conscious of the thing he found what it was: only the ordinary patter of feet passing the door, which in an hotel was no very unlikely matter. Nevertheless, he stared at the darkened ceiling, and listened to the sound. After he had listened for a few seconds dreamily, he got to his feet and listened intently, with his head a little on one side. Then he sat down again and buried his brow in his hands, now not merely listening, but listening and thinking also.

The footsteps outside at any given moment were such as one might hear in any hotel; and yet, taken as a whole, there was something very strange about them. There were no other footsteps. It was always a very silent house, for the few familiar guests went at once to their own apartments, and the well-trained waiters were told to be almost invisible until they were wanted. One could not conceive any place where there was less reason to apprehend anything irregular. But these footsteps were so odd that one could not decide to call them regular or irregular. Father Brown followed them with his finger on the edge of the table, like a man trying to learn a tune on the piano.

First, there came a long rush of rapid little steps, such as a light man might make in winning a walking race. At a certain point they stopped and changed to a sort of slow, swinging stamp, numbering not a quarter of the steps, but occupying about the same time. The moment the last echoing stamp had died away would come again the run or ripple of light, hurrying feet, and then again the thud of the heavier walking. It was certainly the same pair of boots, partly because (as has been said) there were no other boots about, and partly because they had a small but unmistakable creak in them. Father Brown had the kind of head that cannot help asking questions; and on this apparently trivial question his head almost split. He had seen men run in order to jump. He had seen men run in order to slide. But why on earth should a man run in order to walk? Or, again, why should he walk in order to run? Yet no other description would cover the antics of this invisible pair of legs. The man was either walking very fast down one-half of the corridor in order to walk very slow down the other half; or he was walking very slow at one end to have the rapture of walking fast at the other. Neither suggestion seemed to make much sense. His brain was growing darker and darker, like his room.

Yet, as he began to think steadily, the very blackness of his cell seemed to make his thoughts more vivid; he began to see as in a kind of vision the fantastic feet capering along the corridor in unnatural or symbolic attitudes. Was it a heathen religious dance? Or some entirely new kind of scientific exercise? Father Brown began to ask himself with more exactness what the steps suggested. Taking the slow step first: it certainly was not the step of the proprietor. Men of his type walk with a rapid waddle, or they sit still. It could not be any servant or messenger waiting for directions. It did not sound like it. The poorer orders (in an oligarchy) sometimes lurch about when they are slightly drunk, but generally, and especially in such gorgeous scenes, they stand or sit in constrained attitudes. No; that heavy yet springy step, with a kind of careless emphasis, not specially noisy, yet not caring what noise it made, belonged to only one of the animals of this earth. It was a gentleman of western Europe, and probably one who had never worked for his living.

Just as he came to this solid certainty, the step changed to the quicker one, and ran past the door as feverishly as a rat. The listener remarked that though this step was much swifter it was also much more noiseless, almost as if the man were walking on tiptoe. Yet it was not associated in his mind with secrecy, but with something else — something that he could not remember. He was maddened by one of those half-memories that make a man feel half-witted. Surely he had heard that strange, swift walking somewhere. Suddenly he sprang to his feet with a new idea in his head, and walked to the door. His room had no direct outlet on the passage, but let on one side into the glass office, and on the other into the cloak room beyond. He tried the door into the office, and found it locked. Then he looked at the window, now a square pane full of purple cloud cleft by livid sunset, and for an instant he smelt evil as a dog smells rats.

The rational part of him (whether the wiser or not) regained its supremacy. He remembered that the proprietor had told him that he should lock the door, and would come later to release him. He told himself that twenty things he had not thought of might explain the eccentric sounds outside; he reminded himself that there was just enough light left to finish his own proper work. Bringing his paper to the window so as to catch the last stormy evening light, he resolutely plunged once more into the almost completed record. He had written for about twenty minutes, bending closer and closer to his paper in the lessening light; then suddenly he sat upright. He had heard the strange feet once more.

This time they had a third oddity. Previously the unknown man had walked, with levity indeed and lightning quickness, but he had walked. This time he ran. One could hear the swift, soft, bounding steps coming along the corridor, like the pads of a fleeing and leaping panther. Whoever was coming was a very strong, active man, in still yet tearing excitement. Yet, when the sound had swept up to the office like a sort of whispering whirlwind, it suddenly changed again to the old slow, swaggering stamp.

Father Brown flung down his paper, and, knowing the office door to be locked, went at once into the cloak room on the other side. The attendant of this place was temporarily absent, probably because the only guests were at dinner and his office was a sinecure. After groping through a grey forest of overcoats, he found that the dim cloak room opened on the lighted corridor in the form of a sort of counter or half-door, like most of the counters across which we have all handed umbrellas and received tickets. There was a light immediately above the semicircular arch of this opening. It threw little illumination on Father Brown himself, who seemed a mere dark outline against the dim sunset window behind him. But it threw an almost theatrical light on the man who stood outside the cloak room in the corridor.

He was an elegant man in very plain evening dress; tall, but with an air of not taking up much room; one felt that he could have slid along like a shadow where many smaller men would have been obvious and obstructive. His face, now flung back in the lamplight, was swarthy and vivacious, the face of a foreigner. His figure was good, his manners good humoured and confident; a critic could only say that his black coat was a shade below his figure and manners, and even bulged and bagged in an odd way. The moment he caught sight of Brown's black silhouette against the sunset, he tossed down a scrap of paper with a number and called out with amiable authority: "I want my hat and coat, please; I find I have to go away at once."

Father Brown took the paper without a word, and obediently went to look for the coat; it was not the first menial work he had done in his life. He brought it and laid it on the counter; meanwhile, the strange gentleman who had been feeling in his waistcoat pocket, said laughing: "I haven't got any silver; you can keep this." And he threw down half a sovereign, and caught up his coat.

Father Brown's figure remained quite dark and still; but in that instant he had lost his head. His head was always most valuable when he had lost it. In such moments he put two and two together and made four million. Often the Catholic Church (which is wedded to common sense) did not approve of it. Often he did not approve of it himself. But it was real inspiration — important at rare crises — when whosoever shall lose his head the same shall save it.

"I think, sir," he said civilly, "that you have some silver in your pocket."

The tall gentleman stared. "Hang it," he cried, "if I choose to give you gold, why should you complain?"

"Because silver is sometimes more valuable than gold," said the priest mildly; "that is, in large quantities."

The stranger looked at him curiously. Then he looked still more curiously up the passage towards the main entrance. Then he looked back at Brown again, and then he looked very carefully at the window beyond Brown's head, still coloured with the after-glow of the storm. Then he seemed to make up his mind. He put one hand on the counter, vaulted over as easily as an acrobat and towered above the priest, putting one tremendous hand upon his collar.

"Stand still," he said, in a hacking whisper. "I don't want to threaten you, but—"

"I do want to threaten you," said Father Brown, in a voice like a rolling drum, "I want to threaten you with the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched."

"You're a rum sort of cloak-room clerk," said the other.

“I am a priest, Monsieur Flambeau,” said Brown, “and I am ready to hear your confession.”

The other stood gasping for a few moments, and then staggered back into a chair.

The first two courses of the dinner of The Twelve True Fishermen had proceeded with placid success. I do not possess a copy of the menu; and if I did it would not convey anything to anybody. It was written in a sort of super-French employed by cooks, but quite unintelligible to Frenchmen. There was a tradition in the club that the hors d’oeuvres should be various and manifold to the point of madness. They were taken seriously because they were avowedly useless extras, like the whole dinner and the whole club. There was also a tradition that the soup course should be light and unpretending — a sort of simple and austere vigil for the feast of fish that was to come. The talk was that strange, slight talk which governs the British Empire, which governs it in secret, and yet would scarcely enlighten an ordinary Englishman even if he could overhear it. Cabinet ministers on both sides were alluded to by their Christian names with a sort of bored benignity. The Radical Chancellor of the Exchequer, whom the whole Tory party was supposed to be cursing for his extortions, was praised for his minor poetry, or his saddle in the hunting field. The Tory leader, whom all Liberals were supposed to hate as a tyrant, was discussed and, on the whole, praised — as a Liberal. It seemed somehow that politicians were very important. And yet, anything seemed important about them except their politics. Mr. Audley, the chairman, was an amiable, elderly man who still wore Gladstone collars; he was a kind of symbol of all that phantasmal and yet fixed society. He had never done anything — not even anything wrong. He was not fast; he was not even particularly rich. He was simply in the thing; and there was an end of it. No party could ignore him, and if he had wished to be in the Cabinet he certainly would have been put there. The Duke of Chester, the vice-president, was a young and rising politician. That is to say, he was a pleasant youth, with flat, fair hair and a freckled face, with moderate intelligence and enormous estates. In public his appearances were always successful and his principle was simple enough. When he thought of a joke he made it, and was called brilliant. When he could not think of a joke he said that this was no time for trifling, and was called able. In private, in a club of his own class, he was simply quite pleasantly frank and silly, like a schoolboy. Mr. Audley, never having been in politics, treated them a little more seriously. Sometimes he even embarrassed the company by phrases suggesting that there was some difference between a Liberal and a Conservative. He himself was a Conservative, even in private life. He had a roll of grey hair over the back of his collar, like certain old-fashioned statesmen, and seen from behind he looked like the man the empire wants. Seen from the front he looked like a mild, self-indulgent bachelor, with rooms in the Albany — which he was.

As has been remarked, there were twenty-four seats at the terrace table, and only twelve members of the club. Thus they could occupy the terrace in the most luxurious style of all, being ranged along the inner side of the table, with no one opposite, commanding an uninterrupted view of the garden, the colours of which were still vivid, though evening was closing in somewhat luridly for the time of year. The chairman sat in the centre of the line, and the vice-president at the right-hand end of it. When the twelve guests first trooped into their seats it was the custom (for some unknown reason) for all the fifteen waiters to stand lining the wall like troops presenting arms to the king, while the fat proprietor stood and bowed to the club with radiant surprise, as if he had never heard of them before. But before the first chink of knife and fork this army of retainers had vanished, only the one or two required to collect and distribute the plates darting about in deathly silence. Mr. Lever, the proprietor, of course had disappeared in convulsions of courtesy long before. It would be exaggerative, indeed irreverent, to say that he ever positively appeared again. But when the important course, the fish course, was being brought on, there was — how shall I put it? — a vivid shadow, a projection of his personality, which told that he was hovering near. The sacred fish course consisted (to the eyes of the vulgar) in a sort of monstrous pudding, about the size and shape of a wedding cake, in which some considerable number of interesting fishes had finally lost the shapes which God had given to them. The Twelve True Fishermen took up their celebrated fish knives and fish forks, and approached it as gravely as if every inch of the pudding cost as much as the silver fork it was eaten with. So it did, for all I know. This course was dealt with in eager and devouring silence; and it was only when his plate was nearly empty that the young duke made the ritual remark: “They can’t do this anywhere but here.”

“Nowhere,” said Mr. Audley, in a deep bass voice, turning to the speaker and nodding his venerable head a number of times. “Nowhere, assuredly, except here. It was represented to me that at the Cafe Anglais—"

Here he was interrupted and even agitated for a moment by the removal of his plate, but he recaptured the valuable thread of his thoughts. "It was represented to me that the same could be done at the Cafe Anglais. Nothing like it, sir," he said, shaking his head ruthlessly, like a hanging judge. "Nothing like it."

"Overrated place," said a certain Colonel Pound, speaking (by the look of him) for the first time for some months.

"Oh, I don't know," said the Duke of Chester, who was an optimist, "it's jolly good for some things. You can't beat it at—"

A waiter came swiftly along the room, and then stopped dead. His stoppage was as silent as his tread; but all those vague and kindly gentlemen were so used to the utter smoothness of the unseen machinery which surrounded and supported their lives, that a waiter doing anything unexpected was a start and a jar. They felt as you and I would feel if the inanimate world disobeyed — if a chair ran away from us.

The waiter stood staring a few seconds, while there deepened on every face at table a strange shame which is wholly the product of our time. It is the combination of modern humanitarianism with the horrible modern abyss between the souls of the rich and poor. A genuine historic aristocrat would have thrown things at the waiter, beginning with empty bottles, and very probably ending with money. A genuine democrat would have asked him, with comrade-like clearness of speech, what the devil he was doing. But these modern plutocrats could not bear a poor man near to them, either as a slave or as a friend. That something had gone wrong with the servants was merely a dull, hot embarrassment. They did not want to be brutal, and they dreaded the need to be benevolent. They wanted the thing, whatever it was, to be over. It was over. The waiter, after standing for some seconds rigid, like a cataleptic, turned round and ran madly out of the room.

When he reappeared in the room, or rather in the doorway, it was in company with another waiter, with whom he whispered and gesticulated with southern fierceness. Then the first waiter went away, leaving the second waiter, and reappeared with a third waiter. By the time a fourth waiter had joined this hurried synod, Mr. Audley felt it necessary to break the silence in the interests of Tact. He used a very loud cough, instead of a presidential hammer, and said: "Splendid work young Moocher's doing in Burmah. Now, no other nation in the world could have—"

A fifth waiter had sped towards him like an arrow, and was whispering in his ear: “So sorry. Important! Might the proprietor speak to you?”

The chairman turned in disorder, and with a dazed stare saw Mr. Lever coming towards them with his lumbering quickness. The gait of the good proprietor was indeed his usual gait, but his face was by no means usual. Generally it was a genial copper-brown; now it was a sickly yellow.

“You will pardon me, Mr. Audley,” he said, with asthmatic breathlessness. “I have great apprehensions. Your fish-plates, they are cleared away with the knife and fork on them!”

“Well, I hope so,” said the chairman, with some warmth.

“You see him?” panted the excited hotel keeper; “you see the waiter who took them away? You know him?”

“Know the waiter?” answered Mr. Audley indignantly. “Certainly not!”

Mr. Lever opened his hands with a gesture of agony. “I never send him,” he said. “I know not when or why he come. I send my waiter to take away the plates, and he find them already away.”

Mr. Audley still looked rather too bewildered to be really the man the empire wants; none of the company could say anything except the man of wood — Colonel Pound — who seemed galvanised into an unnatural life. He rose rigidly from his chair, leaving all the rest sitting, screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and spoke in a raucous undertone as if he had half-forgotten how to speak. “Do you mean,” he said, “that somebody has stolen our silver fish service?”

The proprietor repeated the open-handed gesture with even greater helplessness and in a flash all the men at the table were on their feet.

“Are all your waiters here?” demanded the colonel, in his low, harsh accent.

“Yes; they’re all here. I noticed it myself,” cried the young duke, pushing his boyish face into the inmost ring. “Always count ’em as I come in; they look so queer standing up against the wall.”

“But surely one cannot exactly remember,” began Mr. Audley, with heavy hesitation.

“I remember exactly, I tell you,” cried the duke excitedly. “There never have been more than fifteen waiters at this place, and there were no more than fifteen tonight, I’ll swear; no more and no less.”

The proprietor turned upon him, quaking in a kind of palsy of surprise. “You say — you say,” he stammered, “that you see all my fifteen waiters?”

"As usual," assented the duke. "What is the matter with that!"

"Nothing," said Lever, with a deepening accent, "only you did not. For one of zem is dead upstairs."

There was a shocking stillness for an instant in that room. It may be (so supernatural is the word death) that each of those idle men looked for a second at his soul, and saw it as a small dried pea. One of them — the duke, I think — even said with the idiotic kindness of wealth: "Is there anything we can do?"

"He has had a priest," said the Jew, not untouched.

Then, as to the clang of doom, they awoke to their own position. For a few weird seconds they had really felt as if the fifteenth waiter might be the ghost of the dead man upstairs. They had been dumb under that oppression, for ghosts were to them an embarrassment, like beggars. But the remembrance of the silver broke the spell of the miraculous; broke it abruptly and with a brutal reaction. The colonel flung over his chair and strode to the door. "If there was a fifteenth man here, friends," he said, "that fifteenth fellow was a thief. Down at once to the front and back doors and secure everything; then we'll talk. The twenty-four pearls of the club are worth recovering."

Mr. Audley seemed at first to hesitate about whether it was gentlemanly to be in such a hurry about anything; but, seeing the duke dash down the stairs with youthful energy, he followed with a more mature motion.

At the same instant a sixth waiter ran into the room, and declared that he had found the pile of fish plates on a sideboard, with no trace of the silver.

The crowd of diners and attendants that tumbled helter-skelter down the passages divided into two groups. Most of the Fishermen followed the proprietor to the front room to demand news of any exit. Colonel Pound, with the chairman, the vice-president, and one or two others darted down the corridor leading to the servants' quarters, as the more likely line of escape. As they did so they passed the dim alcove or cavern of the cloak room, and saw a short, black-coated figure, presumably an attendant, standing a little way back in the shadow of it.

"Hallo, there!" called out the duke. "Have you seen anyone pass?"

The short figure did not answer the question directly, but merely said: "Perhaps I have got what you are looking for, gentlemen."

They paused, wavering and wondering, while he quietly went to the back of the cloak room, and came back with both hands full of shining silver, which he laid out on the counter as calmly as a salesman. It took the form of a dozen quaintly shaped forks and knives.

"You — you—" began the colonel, quite thrown off his balance at last. Then he peered into the dim little room and saw two things: first, that the short, black-clad man was dressed like a clergyman; and, second, that the window of the room behind him was burst, as if someone had passed violently through. "Valuable things to deposit in a cloak room, aren't they?" remarked the clergyman, with cheerful composure.

"Did — did you steal those things?" stammered Mr. Audley, with staring eyes.

"If I did," said the cleric pleasantly, "at least I am bringing them back again."

"But you didn't," said Colonel Pound, still staring at the broken window.

"To make a clean breast of it, I didn't," said the other, with some humour. And he seated himself quite gravely on a stool. "But you know who did," said the, colonel.

"I don't know his real name," said the priest placidly, "but I know something of his fighting weight, and a great deal about his spiritual difficulties. I formed the physical estimate when he was trying to throttle me, and the moral estimate when he repented."

"Oh, I say — repented!" cried young Chester, with a sort of crow of laughter.

Father Brown got to his feet, putting his hands behind him. "Odd, isn't it," he said, "that a thief and a vagabond should repent, when so many who are rich and secure remain hard and frivolous, and without fruit for God or man? But there, if you will excuse me, you trespass a little upon my province. If you doubt the penitence as a practical fact, there are your knives and forks. You are The Twelve True Fishers, and there are all your silver fish. But He has made me a fisher of men."

"Did you catch this man?" asked the colonel, frowning.

Father Brown looked him full in his frowning face. "Yes," he said, "I caught him, with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread."

There was a long silence. All the other men present drifted away to carry the recovered silver to their comrades, or to consult the proprietor about the queer condition of affairs. But the grim-faced colonel still sat sideways on the counter, swinging his long, lank legs and biting his dark moustache.

At last he said quietly to the priest: “He must have been a clever fellow, but I think I know a cleverer.”

“He was a clever fellow,” answered the other, “but I am not quite sure of what other you mean.”

“I mean you,” said the colonel, with a short laugh. “I don’t want to get the fellow jailed; make yourself easy about that. But I’d give a good many silver forks to know exactly how you fell into this affair, and how you got the stuff out of him. I reckon you’re the most up-to-date devil of the present company.”

Father Brown seemed rather to like the saturnine candour of the soldier. “Well,” he said, smiling, “I mustn’t tell you anything of the man’s identity, or his own story, of course; but there’s no particular reason why I shouldn’t tell you of the mere outside facts which I found out for myself.”

He hopped over the barrier with unexpected activity, and sat beside Colonel Pound, kicking his short legs like a little boy on a gate. He began to tell the story as easily as if he were telling it to an old friend by a Christmas fire.

“You see, colonel,” he said, “I was shut up in that small room there doing some writing, when I heard a pair of feet in this passage doing a dance that was as queer as the dance of death. First came quick, funny little steps, like a man walking on tiptoe for a wager; then came slow, careless, creaking steps, as of a big man walking about with a cigar. But they were both made by the same feet, I swear, and they came in rotation; first the run and then the walk, and then the run again. I wondered at first idly and then wildly why a man should act these two parts at once. One walk I knew; it was just like yours, colonel. It was the walk of a well-fed gentleman waiting for something, who strolls about rather because he is physically alert than because he is mentally impatient. I knew that I knew the other walk, too, but I could not remember what it was. What wild creature had I met on my travels that tore along on tiptoe in that extraordinary style? Then I heard a clink of plates somewhere; and the answer stood up as plain as St. Peter’s. It was the walk of a waiter — that walk with the body slanted forward, the eyes looking down, the ball of the toe spurning away the ground, the coat tails and napkin flying. Then I thought for a minute and a half more. And I believe I saw the manner of the crime, as clearly as if I were going to commit it."

Colonel Pound looked at him keenly, but the speaker's mild grey eyes were fixed upon the ceiling with almost empty wistfulness.

"A crime," he said slowly, "is like any other work of art. Don't look surprised; crimes are by no means the only works of art that come from an infernal workshop. But every work of art, divine or diabolic, has one indispensable mark — I mean, that the centre of it is simple, however much the fulfilment may be complicated. Thus, in Hamlet, let us say, the grotesqueness of the grave-digger, the flowers of the mad girl, the fantastic finery of Osric, the pallor of the ghost and the grin of the skull are all oddities in a sort of tangled wreath round one plain tragic figure of a man in black. Well, this also," he said, getting slowly down from his seat with a smile, "this also is the plain tragedy of a man in black. Yes," he went on, seeing the colonel look up in some wonder, "the whole of this tale turns on a black coat. In this, as in Hamlet, there are the rococo excrescences — yourselves, let us say. There is the dead waiter, who was there when he could not be there. There is the invisible hand that swept your table clear of silver and melted into air. But every clever crime is founded ultimately on some one quite simple fact — some fact that is not itself mysterious. The mystification comes in covering it up, in leading men's thoughts away from it. This large and subtle and (in the ordinary course) most profitable crime, was built on the plain fact that a gentleman's evening dress is the same as a waiter's. All the rest was acting, and thundering good acting, too."

"Still," said the colonel, getting up and frowning at his boots, "I am not sure that I understand."

"Colonel," said Father Brown, "I tell you that this archangel of impudence who stole your forks walked up and down this passage twenty times in the blaze of all the lamps, in the glare of all the eyes. He did not go and hide in dim corners where suspicion might have searched for him. He kept constantly on the move in the lighted corridors, and everywhere that he went he seemed to be there by right. Don't ask me what he was like; you have seen him yourself six or seven times tonight. You were waiting with all the other grand people in the reception room at the end of the passage there, with the terrace just beyond. Whenever he came among you gentlemen, he came in the lightning style of a waiter, with bent head, flapping napkin and flying feet. He shot out on to the terrace, did something to the table cloth, and shot back again towards the office and the waiters' quarters. By the time he had come under the eye of the office clerk and the waiters he had become another man in every inch of his body, in every instinctive gesture. He strolled among the servants with the absent-minded insolence which they have all seen in their patrons. It was no new thing to them that a swell from the dinner party should pace all parts of the house like an animal at the Zoo; they know that nothing marks the Smart Set more than a habit of walking where one chooses. When he was magnificently weary of walking down that particular passage he would wheel round and pace back past the office; in the shadow of the arch just beyond he was altered as by a blast of magic, and went hurrying forward again among the Twelve Fishermen, an obsequious attendant. Why should the gentlemen look at a chance waiter? Why should the waiters suspect a first-rate walking gentleman? Once or twice he played the coolest tricks. In the proprietor's private quarters he called out breezily for a syphon of soda water, saying he was thirsty. He said genially that he would carry it himself, and he did; he carried it quickly and correctly through the thick of you, a waiter with an obvious errand. Of course, it could not have been kept up long, but it only had to be kept up till the end of the fish course.

"His worst moment was when the waiters stood in a row; but even then he contrived to lean against the wall just round the corner in such a way that for that important instant the waiters thought him a gentleman, while the gentlemen thought him a waiter. The rest went like winking. If any waiter caught him away from the table, that waiter caught a languid aristocrat. He had only to time himself two minutes before the fish was cleared, become a swift servant, and clear it himself. He put the plates down on a sideboard, stuffed the silver in his breast pocket, giving it a bulgy look, and ran like a hare (I heard him coming) till he came to the cloak room. There he had only to be a plutocrat again — a plutocrat called away suddenly on business. He had only to give his ticket to the cloak-room attendant, and go out again elegantly as he had come in. Only — only I happened to be the cloak-room attendant."

"What did you do to him?" cried the colonel, with unusual intensity. "What did he tell you?"

"I beg your pardon," said the priest immovably, "that is where the story ends."

“And the interesting story begins,” muttered Pound. “I think I understand his professional trick. But I don’t seem to have got hold of yours.”

“I must be going,” said Father Brown.

They walked together along the passage to the entrance hall, where they saw the fresh, freckled face of the Duke of Chester, who was bounding buoyantly along towards them.

“Come along, Pound,” he cried breathlessly. “I’ve been looking for you everywhere. The dinner’s going again in spanking style, and old Audley has got to make a speech in honour of the forks being saved. We want to start some new ceremony, don’t you know, to commemorate the occasion. I say, you really got the goods back, what do you suggest?”

“Why,” said the colonel, eyeing him with a certain sardonic approval, “I should suggest that henceforward we wear green coats, instead of black. One never knows what mistakes may arise when one looks so like a waiter.”

“Oh, hang it all!” said the young man, “a gentleman never looks like a waiter.”

“Nor a waiter like a gentleman, I suppose,” said Colonel Pound, with the same lowering laughter on his face. “Reverend sir, your friend must have been very smart to act the gentleman.”

Father Brown buttoned up his commonplace overcoat to the neck, for the night was stormy, and took his commonplace umbrella from the stand.

“Yes,” he said; “it must be very hard work to be a gentleman; but, do you know, I have sometimes thought that it may be almost as laborious to be a waiter.”

And saying “Good evening,” he pushed open the heavy doors of that palace of pleasures. The golden gates closed behind him, and he went at a brisk walk through the damp, dark streets in search of a penny omnibus.

The Flying Stars

“The most beautiful crime I ever committed,” Flambeau would say in his highly moral old age, “was also, by a singular coincidence, my last. It was committed at Christmas. As an artist I had always attempted to provide crimes suitable to the special season or landscapes in which I found myself, choosing this or that terrace or garden for a catastrophe, as if for a statuary group. Thus squires should be swindled in long rooms panelled with oak; while Jews, on the other hand, should rather find themselves unexpectedly penniless among the lights and screens of the Cafe Riche. Thus, in England, if I wished to relieve a dean of his riches (which is not so easy as you might suppose), I wished to frame him, if I make myself clear, in the green lawns and grey towers of some cathedral town. Similarly, in France, when I had got money out of a rich and wicked peasant (which is almost impossible), it gratified me to get his indignant head relieved against a grey line of clipped poplars, and those solemn plains of Gaul over which broods the mighty spirit of Millet.

“Well, my last crime was a Christmas crime, a cheery, cosy, English middle-class crime; a crime of Charles Dickens. I did it in a good old middle-class house near Putney, a house with a crescent of carriage drive, a house with a stable by the side of it, a house with the name on the two outer gates, a house with a monkey tree. Enough, you know the species. I really think my imitation of Dickens’s style was dexterous and literary. It seems almost a pity I repented the same evening.”

Flambeau would then proceed to tell the story from the inside; and even from the inside it was odd. Seen from the outside it was perfectly incomprehensible, and it is from the outside that the stranger must study it. From this standpoint the drama may be said to have begun when the front doors of the house with the stable opened on the garden with the monkey tree, and a young girl came out with bread to feed the birds on the afternoon of Boxing Day. She had a pretty face, with brave brown eyes; but her figure was beyond conjecture, for she was so wrapped up in brown furs that it was hard to say which was hair and which was fur. But for the attractive face she might have been a small toddling bear.

The winter afternoon was reddening towards evening, and already a ruby light was rolled over the bloomless beds, filling them, as it were, with the ghosts of the dead roses. On one side of the house stood the stable, on the other an alley or cloister of laurels led to the larger garden behind. The young lady, having scattered bread for the birds (for the fourth or fifth time that day, because the dog ate it), passed unobtrusively down the lane of laurels and into a glimmering plantation of evergreens behind. Here she gave an exclamation of wonder, real or ritual, and looking up at the high garden wall above her, beheld it fantastically bestridden by a somewhat fantastic figure.

"Oh, don't jump, Mr. Crook," she called out in some alarm; "it's much too high."

The individual riding the party wall like an aerial horse was a tall, angular young man, with dark hair sticking up like a hair brush, intelligent and even distinguished lineaments, but a sallow and almost alien complexion. This showed the more plainly because he wore an aggressive red tie, the only part of his costume of which he seemed to take any care. Perhaps it was a symbol. He took no notice of the girl's alarmed adjuration, but leapt like a grasshopper to the ground beside her, where he might very well have broken his legs.

"I think I was meant to be a burglar," he said placidly, "and I have no doubt I should have been if I hadn't happened to be born in that nice house next door. I can't see any harm in it, anyhow."

"How can you say such things!" she remonstrated.

"Well," said the young man, "if you're born on the wrong side of the wall, I can't see that it's wrong to climb over it."

"I never know what you will say or do next," she said.

"I don't often know myself," replied Mr. Crook; "but then I am on the right side of the wall now."

"And which is the right side of the wall?" asked the young lady, smiling.

"Whichever side you are on," said the young man named Crook.

As they went together through the laurels towards the front garden a motor horn sounded thrice, coming nearer and nearer, and a car of splendid speed, great elegance, and a pale green colour swept up to the front doors like a bird and stood throbbing.

"Hullo, hullo!" said the young man with the red tie, "here's somebody born on the right side, anyhow. I didn't know, Miss Adams, that your Santa Claus was so modern as this."

"Oh, that's my godfather, Sir Leopold Fischer. He always comes on Boxing Day."

Then, after an innocent pause, which unconsciously betrayed some lack of enthusiasm, Ruby Adams added:

"He is very kind."

John Crook, journalist, had heard of that eminent City magnate; and it was not his fault if the City magnate had not heard of him; for in certain articles in The Clarion or The New Age Sir Leopold had been dealt with austerely. But he said nothing and grimly watched the unloading of the motor-car, which was rather a long process. A large, neat chauffeur in green got out from the front, and a small, neat manservant in grey got out from the back, and between them they deposited Sir Leopold on the doorstep and began to unpack him, like some very carefully protected parcel. Rugs enough to stock a bazaar, furs of all the beasts of the forest, and scarves of all the colours of the rainbow were unwrapped one by one, till they revealed something resembling the human form; the form of a friendly, but foreign-looking old gentleman, with a grey goat-like beard and a beaming smile, who rubbed his big fur gloves together.

Long before this revelation was complete the two big doors of the porch had opened in the middle, and Colonel Adams (father of the furry young lady) had come out himself to invite his eminent guest inside. He was a tall, sunburnt, and very silent man, who wore a red smoking-cap like a fez, making him look like one of the English Sirdars or Pashas in Egypt. With him was his brother-in-law, lately come from Canada, a big and rather boisterous young gentleman-farmer, with a yellow beard, by name James Blount. With him also was the more insignificant figure of the priest from the neighbouring Roman Church; for the colonel's late wife had been a Catholic, and the children, as is common in such cases, had been trained to follow her. Everything seemed undistinguished about the priest, even down to his name, which was Brown; yet the colonel had always found something companionable about him, and frequently asked him to such family gatherings.

In the large entrance hall of the house there was ample room even for Sir Leopold and the removal of his wraps. Porch and vestibule, indeed, were unduly large in proportion to the house, and formed, as it were, a big room with the front door at one end, and the bottom of the staircase at the other. In front of the large hall fire, over which hung the colonel's sword, the process was completed and the company, including the saturnine Crook, presented to Sir Leopold Fischer. That venerable financier, however, still seemed struggling with portions of his well-lined attire, and at length produced from a very interior tail-coat pocket, a black oval case which he radiantly explained to be his Christmas present for his god-daughter. With an unaffected vain-glory that had something disarming about it he held out the case before them all; it flew open at a touch and half-blinded them. It was just as if a crystal fountain had spurted in their eyes. In a nest of orange velvet lay like three eggs, three white and vivid diamonds that seemed to set the very air on fire all round them. Fischer stood beaming benevolently and drinking deep of the astonishment and ecstasy of the girl, the grim admiration and gruff thanks of the colonel, the wonder of the whole group.

"I'll put 'em back now, my dear," said Fischer, returning the case to the tails of his coat. "I had to be careful of 'em coming down. They're the three great African diamonds called 'The Flying Stars,' because they've been stolen so often. All the big criminals are on the track; but even the rough men about in the streets and hotels could hardly have kept their hands off them. I might have lost them on the road here. It was quite possible."

"Quite natural, I should say," growled the man in the red tie. "I shouldn't blame 'em if they had taken 'em. When they ask for bread, and you don't even give them a stone, I think they might take the stone for themselves."

"I won't have you talking like that," cried the girl, who was in a curious glow. "You've only talked like that since you became a horrid what's-his-name. You know what I mean. What do you call a man who wants to embrace the chimney-sweep?"

"A saint," said Father Brown.

"I think," said Sir Leopold, with a supercilious smile, "that Ruby means a Socialist."

"A radical does not mean a man who lives on radishes," remarked Crook, with some impatience; "and a Conservative does not mean a man who preserves jam. Neither, I assure you, does a Socialist mean a man who desires a social evening with the chimney-sweep. A Socialist means a man who wants all the chimneys swept and all the chimney-sweeps paid for it."

"But who won't allow you," put in the priest in a low voice, "to own your own soot."

Crook looked at him with an eye of interest and even respect. "Does one want to own soot?" he asked.

“One might,” answered Brown, with speculation in his eye. “I’ve heard that gardeners use it. And I once made six children happy at Christmas when the conjuror didn’t come, entirely with soot — applied externally.”

“Oh, splendid,” cried Ruby. “Oh, I wish you’d do it to this company.”

The boisterous Canadian, Mr. Blount, was lifting his loud voice in applause, and the astonished financier his (in some considerable deprecation), when a knock sounded at the double front doors. The priest opened them, and they showed again the front garden of evergreens, monkey-tree and all, now gathering gloom against a gorgeous violet sunset. The scene thus framed was so coloured and quaint, like a back scene in a play, that they forgot a moment the insignificant figure standing in the door. He was dusty-looking and in a frayed coat, evidently a common messenger. “Any of you gentlemen Mr. Blount?” he asked, and held forward a letter doubtfully. Mr. Blount started, and stopped in his shout of assent. Ripping up the envelope with evident astonishment he read it; his face clouded a little, and then cleared, and he turned to his brother-in-law and host.

“I’m sick at being such a nuisance, colonel,” he said, with the cheery colonial conventions; “but would it upset you if an old acquaintance called on me here tonight on business? In point of fact it’s Florian, that famous French acrobat and comic actor; I knew him years ago out West (he was a French-Canadian by birth), and he seems to have business for me, though I hardly guess what.”

“Of course, of course,” replied the colonel carelessly— “My dear chap, any friend of yours. No doubt he will prove an acquisition.”

“He’ll black his face, if that’s what you mean,” cried Blount, laughing. “I don’t doubt he’d black everyone else’s eyes. I don’t care; I’m not refined. I like the jolly old pantomime where a man sits on his top hat.”

“Not on mine, please,” said Sir Leopold Fischer, with dignity.

“Well, well,” observed Crook, airily, “don’t let’s quarrel. There are lower jokes than sitting on a top hat.”

Dislike of the red-tied youth, born of his predatory opinions and evident intimacy with the pretty godchild, led Fischer to say, in his most sarcastic, magisterial manner: “No doubt you have found something much lower than sitting on a top hat. What is it, pray?”

“Letting a top hat sit on you, for instance,” said the Socialist.

“Now, now, now,” cried the Canadian farmer with his barbarian benevolence, “don’t let’s spoil a jolly evening. What I say is, let’s do something for the company tonight. Not blacking faces or sitting on hats, if you don't like those — but something of the sort. Why couldn't we have a proper old English pantomime — clown, columbine, and so on. I saw one when I left England at twelve years old, and it's blazed in my brain like a bonfire ever since. I came back to the old country only last year, and I find the thing's extinct. Nothing but a lot of snivelling fairy plays. I want a hot poker and a policeman made into sausages, and they give me princesses moralising by moonlight, Blue Birds, or something. Blue Beard's more in my line, and him I like best when he turned into the pantaloon."

"I'm all for making a policeman into sausages," said John Crook. "It's a better definition of Socialism than some recently given. But surely the get-up would be too big a business."

"Not a scrap," cried Blount, quite carried away. "A harlequinade's the quickest thing we can do, for two reasons. First, one can gag to any degree; and, second, all the objects are household things — tables and towel-horses and washing baskets, and things like that."

"That's true," admitted Crook, nodding eagerly and walking about. "But I'm afraid I can't have my policeman's uniform? Haven't killed a policeman lately."

Blount frowned thoughtfully a space, and then smote his thigh. "Yes, we can!" he cried. "I've got Florian's address here, and he knows every costumier in London. I'll phone him to bring a police dress when he comes." And he went bounding away to the telephone.

"Oh, it's glorious, godfather," cried Ruby, almost dancing. "I'll be columbine and you shall be pantaloon."

The millionaire held himself stiff with a sort of heathen solemnity. "I think, my dear," he said, "you must get someone else for pantaloon."

"I will be pantaloon, if you like," said Colonel Adams, taking his cigar out of his mouth, and speaking for the first and last time.

"You ought to have a statue," cried the Canadian, as he came back, radiant, from the telephone. "There, we are all fitted. Mr. Crook shall be clown; he's a journalist and knows all the oldest jokes. I can be harlequin, that only wants long legs and jumping about. My friend Florian 'phones he's bringing the police costume; he's changing on the way. We can act it in this very hall, the audience sitting on those broad stairs opposite, one row above another. These front doors can be the back scene, either open or shut. Shut, you see an English interior. Open, a moonlit garden. It all goes by magic.” And snatching a chance piece of billiard chalk from his pocket, he ran it across the hall floor, half-way between the front door and the staircase, to mark the line of the footlights.

How even such a banquet of bosh was got ready in the time remained a riddle. But they went at it with that mixture of recklessness and industry that lives when youth is in a house; and youth was in that house that night, though not all may have isolated the two faces and hearts from which it flamed. As always happens, the invention grew wilder and wilder through the very tameness of the bourgeois conventions from which it had to create. The columbine looked charming in an outstanding skirt that strangely resembled the large lamp-shade in the drawing-room. The clown and pantaloon made themselves white with flour from the cook, and red with rouge from some other domestic, who remained (like all true Christian benefactors) anonymous. The harlequin, already clad in silver paper out of cigar boxes, was, with difficulty, prevented from smashing the old Victorian lustre chandeliers, that he might cover himself with resplendent crystals. In fact he would certainly have done so, had not Ruby unearthed some old pantomime paste jewels she had worn at a fancy dress party as the Queen of Diamonds. Indeed, her uncle, James Blount, was getting almost out of hand in his excitement; he was like a schoolboy. He put a paper donkey’s head unexpectedly on Father Brown, who bore it patiently, and even found some private manner of moving his ears. He even essayed to put the paper donkey’s tail to the coat-tails of Sir Leopold Fischer. This, however, was frowned down. “Uncle is too absurd,” cried Ruby to Crook, round whose shoulders she had seriously placed a string of sausages. “Why is he so wild?”

“He is harlequin to your columbine,” said Crook. “I am only the clown who makes the old jokes.”

“I wish you were the harlequin,” she said, and left the string of sausages swinging.

Father Brown, though he knew every detail done behind the scenes, and had even evoked applause by his transformation of a pillow into a pantomime baby, went round to the front and sat among the audience with all the solemn expectation of a child at his first matinee. The spectators were few, relations, one or two local friends, and the servants; Sir Leopold sat in the front seat, his full and still fur-collared figure largely obscuring the view of the little cleric behind him; but it has never been settled by artistic authorities whether the cleric lost much. The pantomime was utterly chaotic, yet not contemptible; there ran through it a rage of improvisation which came chiefly from Crook the clown. Commonly he was a clever man, and he was inspired tonight with a wild omniscience, a folly wiser than the world, that which comes to a young man who has seen for an instant a particular expression on a particular face. He was supposed to be the clown, but he was really almost everything else, the author (so far as there was an author), the prompter, the scene-painter, the scene-shifter, and, above all, the orchestra. At abrupt intervals in the outrageous performance he would hurl himself in full costume at the piano and bang out some popular music equally absurd and appropriate.

The climax of this, as of all else, was the moment when the two front doors at the back of the scene flew open, showing the lovely moonlit garden, but showing more prominently the famous professional guest; the great Florian, dressed up as a policeman. The clown at the piano played the constabulary chorus in the “Pirates of Penzance,” but it was drowned in the deafening applause, for every gesture of the great comic actor was an admirable though restrained version of the carriage and manner of the police. The harlequin leapt upon him and hit him over the helmet; the pianist playing “Where did you get that hat?” he faced about in admirably simulated astonishment, and then the leaping harlequin hit him again (the pianist suggesting a few bars of “Then we had another one”). Then the harlequin rushed right into the arms of the policeman and fell on top of him, amid a roar of applause. Then it was that the strange actor gave that celebrated imitation of a dead man, of which the fame still lingers round Putney. It was almost impossible to believe that a living person could appear so limp.

The athletic harlequin swung him about like a sack or twisted or tossed him like an Indian club; all the time to the most maddeningly ludicrous tunes from the piano. When the harlequin heaved the comic constable heavily off the floor the clown played “I arise from dreams of thee.” When he shuffled him across his back, “With my bundle on my shoulder,” and when the harlequin finally let fall the policeman with a most convincing thud, the lunatic at the instrument struck into a jingling measure with some words which are still believed to have been, “I sent a letter to my love and on the way I dropped it.”

At about this limit of mental anarchy Father Brown’s view was obscured altogether; for the City magnate in front of him rose to his full height and thrust his hands savagely into all his pockets. Then he sat down nervously, still fumbling, and then stood up again. For an instant it seemed seriously likely that he would stride across the footlights; then he turned a glare at the clown playing the piano; and then he burst in silence out of the room.

The priest had only watched for a few more minutes the absurd but not inelegant dance of the amateur harlequin over his splendidly unconscious foe. With real though rude art, the harlequin danced slowly backwards out of the door into the garden, which was full of moonlight and stillness. The vamped dress of silver paper and paste, which had been too glaring in the footlights, looked more and more magical and silvery as it danced away under a brilliant moon. The audience was closing in with a cataract of applause, when Brown felt his arm abruptly touched, and he was asked in a whisper to come into the colonel’s study.

He followed his summoner with increasing doubt, which was not dispelled by a solemn comicality in the scene of the study. There sat Colonel Adams, still unaffectedly dressed as a pantaloon, with the knobbed whalebone nodding above his brow, but with his poor old eyes sad enough to have sobered a Saturnalia. Sir Leopold Fischer was leaning against the mantelpiece and heaving with all the importance of panic.

“This is a very painful matter, Father Brown,” said Adams. “The truth is, those diamonds we all saw this afternoon seem to have vanished from my friend’s tail-coat pocket. And as you—”

“As I,” supplemented Father Brown, with a broad grin, “was sitting just behind him—”

“Nothing of the sort shall be suggested,” said Colonel Adams, with a firm look at Fischer, which rather implied that some such thing had been suggested. “I only ask you to give me the assistance that any gentleman might give.”

“Which is turning out his pockets,” said Father Brown, and proceeded to do so, displaying seven and sixpence, a return ticket, a small silver crucifix, a small breviary, and a stick of chocolate.

The colonel looked at him long, and then said, “Do you know, I should like to see the inside of your head more than the inside of your pockets. My daughter is one of your people, I know; well, she has lately—” and he stopped.

"She has lately," cried out old Fischer, "opened her father's house to a cut-throat Socialist, who says openly he would steal anything from a richer man. This is the end of it. Here is the richer man — and none the richer."

"If you want the inside of my head you can have it," said Brown rather wearily. "What it's worth you can say afterwards. But the first thing I find in that disused pocket is this: that men who mean to steal diamonds don't talk Socialism. They are more likely," he added demurely, "to denounce it."

Both the others shifted sharply and the priest went on:

"You see, we know these people, more or less. That Socialist would no more steal a diamond than a Pyramid. We ought to look at once to the one man we don't know. The fellow acting the policeman — Florian. Where is he exactly at this minute, I wonder."

The pantaloon sprang erect and strode out of the room. An interlude ensued, during which the millionaire stared at the priest, and the priest at his breviary; then the pantaloon returned and said, with staccato gravity, "The policeman is still lying on the stage. The curtain has gone up and down six times; he is still lying there."

Father Brown dropped his book and stood staring with a look of blank mental ruin. Very slowly a light began to creep in his grey eyes, and then he made the scarcely obvious answer.

"Please forgive me, colonel, but when did your wife die?"

"Wife!" replied the staring soldier, "she died this year two months. Her brother James arrived just a week too late to see her."

The little priest bounded like a rabbit shot. "Come on!" he cried in quite unusual excitement. "Come on! We've got to go and look at that policeman!"

They rushed on to the now curtained stage, breaking rudely past the columbine and clown (who seemed whispering quite contentedly), and Father Brown bent over the prostrate comic policeman.

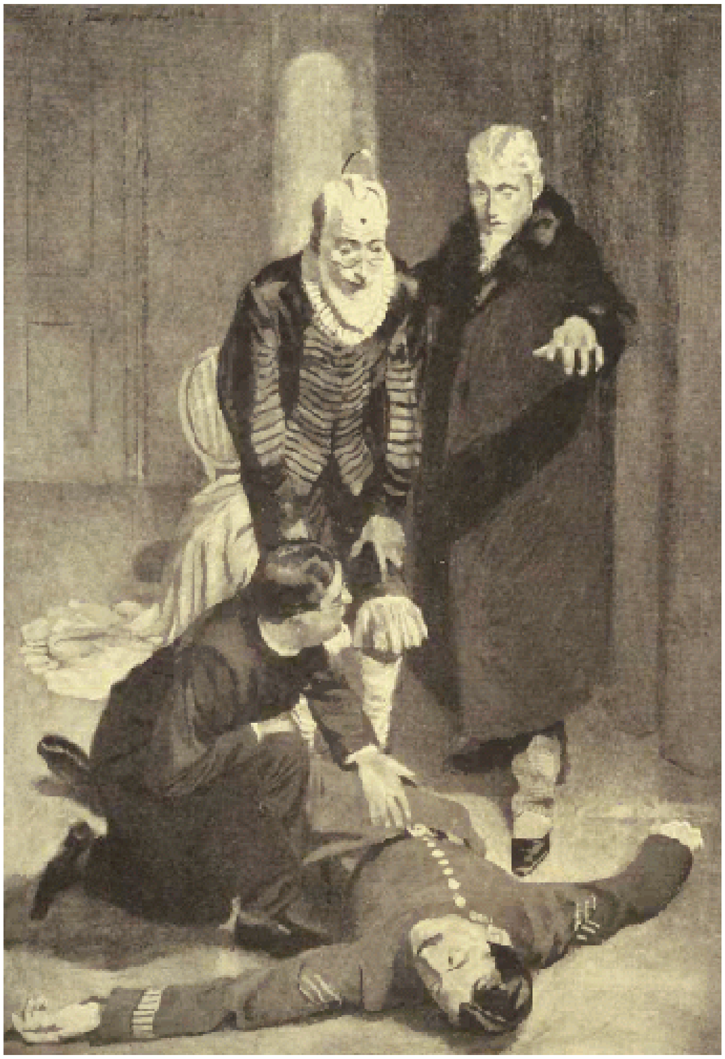

“Chloroform,” he said as he rose; “I only guessed it just now.”

There was a startled stillness, and then the colonel said slowly, “Please say seriously what all this means.”

Father Brown suddenly shouted with laughter, then stopped, and only struggled with it for instants during the rest of his speech. “Gentlemen,” he gasped, “there’s not much time to talk. I must run after the criminal. But this great French actor who played the policeman — this clever corpse the harlequin waltzed with and dandled and threw about — he was—” His voice again failed him, and he turned his back to run.

“He was?” called Fischer inquiringly.

“A real policeman,” said Father Brown, and ran away into the dark.

There were hollows and bowers at the extreme end of that leafy garden, in which the laurels and other immortal shrubs showed against sapphire sky and silver moon, even in that midwinter, warm colours as of the south. The green gaiety of the waving laurels, the rich purple indigo of the night, the moon like a monstrous crystal, make an almost irresponsible romantic picture; and among the top branches of the garden trees a strange figure is climbing, who looks not so much romantic as impossible. He sparkles from head to heel, as if clad in ten million moons; the real moon catches him at every movement and sets a new inch of him on fire. But he swings, flashing and successful, from the short tree in this garden to the tall, rambling tree in the other, and only stops there because a shade has slid under the smaller tree and has unmistakably called up to him.

"Well, Flambeau," says the voice, "you really look like a Flying Star; but that always means a Falling Star at last."

The silver, sparkling figure above seems to lean forward in the laurels and, confident of escape, listens to the little figure below.

"You never did anything better, Flambeau. It was clever to come from Canada (with a Paris ticket, I suppose) just a week after Mrs. Adams died, when no one was in a mood to ask questions. It was cleverer to have marked down the Flying Stars and the very day of Fischer's coming. But there's no cleverness, but mere genius, in what followed. Stealing the stones, I suppose, was nothing to you. You could have done it by sleight of hand in a hundred other ways besides that pretence of putting a paper donkey's tail to Fischer's coat. But in the rest you eclipsed yourself."

The silvery figure among the green leaves seems to linger as if hypnotised, though his escape is easy behind him; he is staring at the man below.

"Oh, yes," says the man below, "I know all about it. I know you not only forced the pantomime, but put it to a double use. You were going to steal the stones quietly; news came by an accomplice that you were already suspected, and a capable police officer was coming to rout you up that very night. A common thief would have been thankful for the warning and fled; but you are a poet. You already had the clever notion of hiding the jewels in a blaze of false stage jewellery. Now, you saw that if the dress were a harlequin's the appearance of a policeman would be quite in keeping. The worthy officer started from Putney police station to find you, and walked into the queerest trap ever set in this world. When the front door opened he walked straight on to the stage of a Christmas pantomime, where he could be kicked, clubbed, stunned and drugged by the dancing harlequin, amid roars of laughter from all the most respectable people in Putney. Oh, you will never do anything better. And now, by the way, you might give me back those diamonds."

The green branch on which the glittering figure swung, rustled as if in astonishment; but the voice went on:

"I want you to give them back, Flambeau, and I want you to give up this life. There is still youth and honour and humour in you; don't fancy they will last in that trade. Men may keep a sort of level of good, but no man has ever been able to keep on one level of evil. That road goes down and down. The kind man drinks and turns cruel; the frank man kills and lies about it. Many a man I've known started like you to be an honest outlaw, a merry robber of the rich, and ended stamped into slime. Maurice Blum started out as an anarchist of principle, a father of the poor; he ended a greasy spy and tale-bearer that both sides used and despised. Harry Burke started his free money movement sincerely enough; now he's sponging on a half-starved sister for endless brandies and sodas. Lord Amber went into wild society in a sort of chivalry; now he's paying blackmail to the lowest vultures in London. Captain Barillon was the great gentleman-apache before your time; he died in a madhouse, screaming with fear of the "narks" and receivers that had betrayed him and hunted him down. I know the woods look very free behind you, Flambeau; I know that in a flash you could melt into them like a monkey. But some day you will be an old grey monkey, Flambeau. You will sit up in your free forest cold at heart and close to death, and the tree-tops will be very bare."

Everything continued still, as if the small man below held the other in the tree in some long invisible leash; and he went on:

"Your downward steps have begun. You used to boast of doing nothing mean, but you are doing something mean tonight. You are leaving suspicion on an honest boy with a good deal against him already; you are separating him from the woman he loves and who loves him. But you will do meaner things than that before you die."

Three flashing diamonds fell from the tree to the turf. The small man stooped to pick them up, and when he looked up again the green cage of the tree was emptied of its silver bird.

The restoration of the gems (accidentally picked up by Father Brown, of all people) ended the evening in uproarious triumph; and Sir Leopold, in his height of good humour, even told the priest that though he himself had broader views, he could respect those whose creed required them to be cloistered and ignorant of this world.

The Invisible Man

In the cool blue twilight of two steep streets in Camden Town, the shop at the corner, a confectioner's, glowed like the butt of a cigar. One should rather say, perhaps, like the butt of a firework, for the light was of many colours and some complexity, broken up by many mirrors and dancing on many gilt and gaily-coloured cakes and sweetmeats. Against this one fiery glass were glued the noses of many gutter-snipes, for the chocolates were all wrapped in those red and gold and green metallic colours which are almost better than chocolate itself; and the huge white wedding-cake in the window was somehow at once remote and satisfying, just as if the whole North Pole were good to eat. Such rainbow provocations could naturally collect the youth of the neighbourhood up to the ages of ten or twelve. But this corner was also attractive to youth at a later stage; and a young man, not less than twenty-four, was staring into the same shop window. To him, also, the shop was of fiery charm, but this attraction was not wholly to be explained by chocolates; which, however, he was far from despising.

He was a tall, burly, red-haired young man, with a resolute face but a listless manner. He carried under his arm a flat, grey portfolio of black-and-white sketches, which he had sold with more or less success to publishers ever since his uncle (who was an admiral) had disinherited him for Socialism, because of a lecture which he had delivered against that economic theory. His name was John Turnbull Angus.

Entering at last, he walked through the confectioner's shop to the back room, which was a sort of pastry-cook restaurant, merely raising his hat to the young lady who was serving there. She was a dark, elegant, alert girl in black, with a high colour and very quick, dark eyes; and after the ordinary interval she followed him into the inner room to take his order.

His order was evidently a usual one. "I want, please," he said with precision, "one halfpenny bun and a small cup of black coffee." An instant before the girl could turn away he added, "Also, I want you to marry me."

The young lady of the shop stiffened suddenly and said, "Those are jokes I don't allow."

The red-haired young man lifted grey eyes of an unexpected gravity.

"Really and truly," he said, "it's as serious — as serious as the halfpenny bun. It is expensive, like the bun; one pays for it. It is indigestible, like the bun. It hurts."

The dark young lady had never taken her dark eyes off him, but seemed to be studying him with almost tragic exactitude. At the end of her scrutiny she had something like the shadow of a smile, and she sat down in a chair.

"Don't you think," observed Angus, absently, "that it's rather cruel to eat these halfpenny buns? They might grow up into penny buns. I shall give up these brutal sports when we are married."

The dark young lady rose from her chair and walked to the window, evidently in a state of strong but not unsympathetic cogitation. When at last she swung round again with an air of resolution she was bewildered to observe that the young man was carefully laying out on the table various objects from the shop-window. They included a pyramid of highly coloured sweets, several plates of sandwiches, and the two decanters containing that mysterious port and sherry which are peculiar to pastry-cooks. In the middle of this neat arrangement he had carefully let down the enormous load of white sugared cake which had been the huge ornament of the window.

"What on earth are you doing?" she asked.

"Duty, my dear Laura," he began.

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, stop a minute," she cried, "and don't talk to me in that way. I mean, what is all that?"

"A ceremonial meal, Miss Hope."

"And what is that?" she asked impatiently, pointing to the mountain of sugar.

"The wedding-cake, Mrs. Angus," he said.

The girl marched to that article, removed it with some clatter, and put it back in the shop window; she then returned, and, putting her elegant elbows on the table, regarded the young man not unfavourably but with considerable exasperation.

"You don't give me any time to think," she said.

"I'm not such a fool," he answered; "that's my Christian humility."

She was still looking at him; but she had grown considerably graver behind the smile.

"Mr. Angus," she said steadily, "before there is a minute more of this nonsense I must tell you something about myself as shortly as I can.'"

"Delighted," replied Angus gravely. "You might tell me something about myself, too, while you are about it."

“Oh, do hold your tongue and listen,” she said. “It’s nothing that I’m ashamed of, and it isn’t even anything that I’m specially sorry about. But what would you say if there were something that is no business of mine and yet is my nightmare?”

“In that case,” said the man seriously, “I should suggest that you bring back the cake.”

“Well, you must listen to the story first,” said Laura, persistently. “To begin with, I must tell you that my father owned the inn called the ‘Red Fish’ at Ludbury, and I used to serve people in the bar.”

“I have often wondered,” he said, “why there was a kind of a Christian air about this one confectioner’s shop.”

“Ludbury is a sleepy, grassy little hole in the Eastern Counties, and the only kind of people who ever came to the ‘Red Fish’ were occasional commercial travellers, and for the rest, the most awful people you can see, only you’ve never seen them. I mean little, loungy men, who had just enough to live on and had nothing to do but lean about in bar-rooms and bet on horses, in bad clothes that were just too good for them. Even these wretched young rotters were not very common at our house; but there were two of them that were a lot too common — common in every sort of way. They both lived on money of their own, and were wearisomely idle and over-dressed. But yet I was a bit sorry for them, because I half believe they slunk into our little empty bar because each of them had a slight deformity; the sort of thing that some yokels laugh at. It wasn’t exactly a deformity either; it was more an oddity. One of them was a surprisingly small man, something like a dwarf, or at least like a jockey. He was not at all jockeyish to look at, though; he had a round black head and a well-trimmed black beard, bright eyes like a bird’s; he jingled money in his pockets; he jangled a great gold watch chain; and he never turned up except dressed just too much like a gentleman to be one. He was no fool though, though a futile idler; he was curiously clever at all kinds of things that couldn’t be the slightest use; a sort of impromptu conjuring; making fifteen matches set fire to each other like a regular firework; or cutting a banana or some such thing into a dancing doll. His name was Isidore Smythe; and I can see him still, with his little dark face, just coming up to the counter, making a jumping kangaroo out of five cigars.

“The other fellow was more silent and more ordinary; but somehow he alarmed me much more than poor little Smythe. He was very tall and slight, and light-haired; his nose had a high bridge, and he might almost have been handsome in a spectral sort of way; but he had one of the most appalling squints I have ever seen or heard of. When he looked straight at you, you didn't know where you were yourself, let alone what he was looking at. I fancy this sort of disfigurement embittered the poor chap a little; for while Smythe was ready to show off his monkey tricks anywhere, James Welkin (that was the squinting man's name) never did anything except soak in our bar parlour, and go for great walks by himself in the flat, grey country all round. All the same, I think Smythe, too, was a little sensitive about being so small, though he carried it off more smartly. And so it was that I was really puzzled, as well as startled, and very sorry, when they both offered to marry me in the same week.

"Well, I did what I've since thought was perhaps a silly thing. But, after all, these freaks were my friends in a way; and I had a horror of their thinking I refused them for the real reason, which was that they were so impossibly ugly. So I made up some gas of another sort, about never meaning to marry anyone who hadn't carved his way in the world. I said it was a point of principle with me not to live on money that was just inherited like theirs. Two days after I had talked in this well-meaning sort of way, the whole trouble began. The first thing I heard was that both of them had gone off to seek their fortunes, as if they were in some silly fairy tale.

"Well, I've never seen either of them from that day to this. But I've had two letters from the little man called Smythe, and really they were rather exciting."

"Ever heard of the other man?" asked Angus.

"No, he never wrote," said the girl, after an instant's hesitation. "Smythe's first letter was simply to say that he had started out walking with Welkin to London; but Welkin was such a good walker that the little man dropped out of it, and took a rest by the roadside. He happened to be picked up by some travelling show, and, partly because he was nearly a dwarf, and partly because he was really a clever little wretch, he got on quite well in the show business, and was soon sent up to the Aquarium, to do some tricks that I forget. That was his first letter. His second was much more of a startler, and I only got it last week."

The man called Angus emptied his coffee-cup and regarded her with mild and patient eyes. Her own mouth took a slight twist of laughter as she resumed, "I suppose you've seen on the hoardings all about this 'Smythe's

Silent Service'? Or you must be the only person that hasn't. Oh, I don't know much about it, it's some clockwork invention for doing all the housework by machinery. You know the sort of thing: 'Press a Button — A Butler who Never Drinks.' 'Turn a Handle — Ten Housemaids who Never Flirt.' You must have seen the advertisements. Well, whatever these machines are, they are making pots of money; and they are making it all for that little imp whom I knew down in Ludbury. I can't help feeling pleased the poor little chap has fallen on his feet; but the plain fact is, I'm in terror of his turning up any minute and telling me he's carved his way in the world — as he certainly has."

"And the other man?" repeated Angus with a sort of obstinate quietude.

Laura Hope got to her feet suddenly. "My friend," she said, "I think you are a witch. Yes, you are quite right. I have not seen a line of the other man's writing; and I have no more notion than the dead of what or where he is. But it is of him that I am frightened. It is he who is all about my path. It is he who has half driven me mad. Indeed, I think he has driven me mad; for I have felt him where he could not have been, and I have heard his voice when he could not have spoken."

"Well, my dear," said the young man, cheerfully, "if he were Satan himself, he is done for now you have told somebody. One goes mad all alone, old girl. But when was it you fancied you felt and heard our squinting friend?"

"I heard James Welkin laugh as plainly as I hear you speak," said the girl, steadily. "There was nobody there, for I stood just outside the shop at the corner, and could see down both streets at once. I had forgotten how he laughed, though his laugh was as odd as his squint. I had not thought of him for nearly a year. But it's a solemn truth that a few seconds later the first letter came from his rival."

"Did you ever make the spectre speak or squeak, or anything?" asked Angus, with some interest.

Laura suddenly shuddered, and then said, with an unshaken voice, "Yes. Just when I had finished reading the second letter from Isidore Smythe announcing his success. Just then, I heard Welkin say, 'He shan't have you, though.' It was quite plain, as if he were in the room. It is awful, I think I must be mad."

"If you really were mad," said the young man, "you would think you must be sane. But certainly there seems to me to be something a little rum about this unseen gentleman. Two heads are better than one — I spare you allusions to any other organs and really, if you would allow me, as a sturdy, practical man, to bring back the wedding-cake out of the window—”

Even as he spoke, there was a sort of steely shriek in the street outside, and a small motor, driven at devilish speed, shot up to the door of the shop and stuck there. In the same flash of time a small man in a shiny top hat stood stamping in the outer room.

Angus, who had hitherto maintained hilarious ease from motives of mental hygiene, revealed the strain of his soul by striding abruptly out of the inner room and confronting the new-comer. A glance at him was quite sufficient to confirm the savage guesswork of a man in love. This very dapper but dwarfish figure, with the spike of black beard carried insolently forward, the clever unrestful eyes, the neat but very nervous fingers, could be none other than the man just described to him: Isidore Smythe, who made dolls out of banana skins and match-boxes; Isidore Smythe, who made millions out of undrinking butlers and unflirting housemaids of metal. For a moment the two men, instinctively understanding each other’s air of possession, looked at each other with that curious cold generosity which is the soul of rivalry.

Mr. Smythe, however, made no allusion to the ultimate ground of their antagonism, but said simply and explosively, “Has Miss Hope seen that thing on the window?”

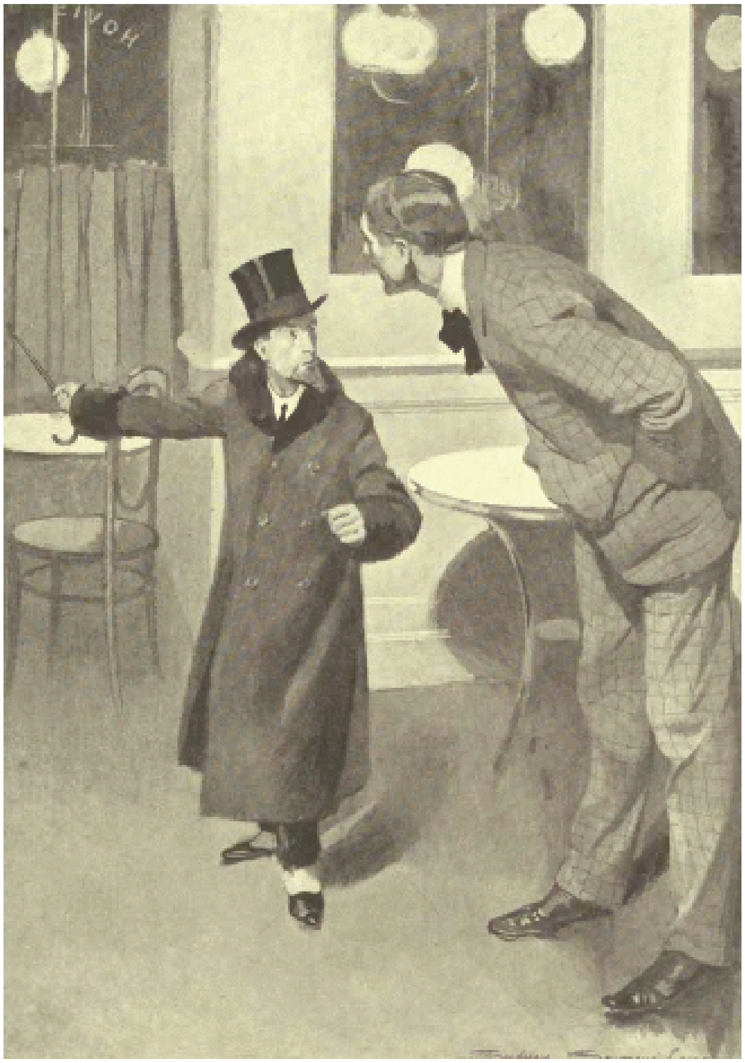

"On the window?" repeated the staring Angus.

"There's no time to explain other things," said the small millionaire shortly. "There's some tomfoolery going on here that has to be investigated."

He pointed his polished walking-stick at the window, recently depleted by the bridal preparations of Mr. Angus; and that gentleman was astonished to see along the front of the glass a long strip of paper pasted, which had certainly not been on the window when he looked through it some time before. Following the energetic Smythe outside into the street, he found that some yard and a half of stamp paper had been carefully gummed along the glass outside, and on this was written in straggly characters, "If you marry Smythe, he will die."

"Laura," said Angus, putting his big red head into the shop, "you're not mad."

“It’s the writing of that fellow Welkin,” said Smythe gruffly. “I haven’t seen him for years, but he’s always bothering me. Five times in the last fortnight he’s had threatening letters left at my flat, and I can’t even find out who leaves them, let alone if it is Welkin himself. The porter of the flats swears that no suspicious characters have been seen, and here he has pasted up a sort of dado on a public shop window, while the people in the shop—”

“Quite so,” said Angus modestly, “while the people in the shop were having tea. Well, sir, I can assure you I appreciate your common sense in dealing so directly with the matter. We can talk about other things afterwards. The fellow cannot be very far off yet, for I swear there was no paper there when I went last to the window, ten or fifteen minutes ago. On the other hand, he’s too far off to be chased, as we don’t even know the direction. If you’ll take my advice, Mr. Smythe, you’ll put this at once in the hands of some energetic inquiry man, private rather than public. I know an extremely clever fellow, who has set up in business five minutes from here in your car. His name’s Flambeau, and though his youth was a bit stormy, he’s a strictly honest man now, and his brains are worth money. He lives in Lucknow Mansions, Hampstead.”

“That is odd,” said the little man, arching his black eyebrows. “I live, myself, in Himylaya Mansions, round the corner. Perhaps you might care to come with me; I can go to my rooms and sort out these queer Welkin documents, while you run round and get your friend the detective.”

“You are very good,” said Angus politely. “Well, the sooner we act the better.”

Both men, with a queer kind of impromptu fairness, took the same sort of formal farewell of the lady, and both jumped into the brisk little car. As Smythe took the handles and they turned the great corner of the street, Angus was amused to see a gigantesque poster of “Smythe’s Silent Service,” with a picture of a huge headless iron doll, carrying a saucepan with the legend, “A Cook Who is Never Cross.”

“I use them in my own flat,” said the little black-bearded man, laughing, “partly for advertisements, and partly for real convenience. Honestly, and all above board, those big clockwork dolls of mine do bring your coals or claret or a timetable quicker than any live servants I’ve ever known, if you know which knob to press. But I’ll never deny, between ourselves, that such servants have their disadvantages, too.”

“Indeed?” said Angus; “is there something they can’t do?”

“Yes,” replied Smythe coolly; “they can’t tell me who left those threatening letters at my flat.”

The man’s motor was small and swift like himself; in fact, like his domestic service, it was of his own invention. If he was an advertising quack, he was one who believed in his own wares. The sense of something tiny and flying was accentuated as they swept up long white curves of road in the dead but open daylight of evening. Soon the white curves came sharper and dizzier; they were upon ascending spirals, as they say in the modern religions. For, indeed, they were cresting a corner of London which is almost as precipitous as Edinburgh, if not quite so picturesque. Terrace rose above terrace, and the special tower of flats they sought, rose above them all to almost Egyptian height, gilt by the level sunset. The change, as they turned the corner and entered the crescent known as Himylaya Mansions, was as abrupt as the opening of a window; for they found that pile of flats sitting above London as above a green sea of slate. Opposite to the mansions, on the other side of the gravel crescent, was a bushy enclosure more like a steep hedge or dyke than a garden, and some way below that ran a strip of artificial water, a sort of canal, like the moat of that embowered fortress. As the car swept round the crescent it passed, at one corner, the stray stall of a man selling chestnuts; and right away at the other end of the curve, Angus could see a dim blue policeman walking slowly. These were the only human shapes in that high suburban solitude; but he had an irrational sense that they expressed the speechless poetry of London. He felt as if they were figures in a story.

The little car shot up to the right house like a bullet, and shot out its owner like a bomb shell. He was immediately inquiring of a tall commissionaire in shining braid, and a short porter in shirt sleeves, whether anybody or anything had been seeking his apartments. He was assured that nobody and nothing had passed these officials since his last inquiries; whereupon he and the slightly bewildered Angus were shot up in the lift like a rocket, till they reached the top floor.

“Just come in for a minute,” said the breathless Smythe. “I want to show you those Welkin letters. Then you might run round the corner and fetch your friend.” He pressed a button concealed in the wall, and the door opened of itself.

It opened on a long, commodious ante-room, of which the only arresting features, ordinarily speaking, were the rows of tall half-human mechanical figures that stood up on both sides like tailors' dummies. Like tailors' dummies they were headless; and like tailors' dummies they had a handsome unnecessary humpiness in the shoulders, and a pigeon-breasted protuberance of chest; but barring this, they were not much more like a human figure than any automatic machine at a station that is about the human height. They had two great hooks like arms, for carrying trays; and they were painted pea-green, or vermilion, or black for convenience of distinction; in every other way they were only automatic machines and nobody would have looked twice at them. On this occasion, at least, nobody did. For between the two rows of these domestic dummies lay something more interesting than most of the mechanics of the world. It was a white, tattered scrap of paper scrawled with red ink; and the agile inventor had snatched it up almost as soon as the door flew open. He handed it to Angus without a word. The red ink on it actually was not dry, and the message ran, "If you have been to see her today, I shall kill you."

There was a short silence, and then Isidore Smythe said quietly, "Would you like a little whiskey? I rather feel as if I should."

"Thank you; I should like a little Flambeau," said Angus, gloomily. "This business seems to me to be getting rather grave. I'm going round at once to fetch him."

"Right you are," said the other, with admirable cheerfulness. "Bring him round here as quick as you can."

But as Angus closed the front door behind him he saw Smythe push back a button, and one of the clockwork images glided from its place and slid along a groove in the floor carrying a tray with syphon and decanter. There did seem something a trifle weird about leaving the little man alone among those dead servants, who were coming to life as the door closed.

Six steps down from Smythe's landing the man in shirt sleeves was doing something with a pail. Angus stopped to extract a promise, fortified with a prospective bribe, that he would remain in that place until the return with the detective, and would keep count of any kind of stranger coming up those stairs. Dashing down to the front hall he then laid similar charges of vigilance on the commissionaire at the front door, from whom he learned the simplifying circumstances that there was no back door. Not content with this, he captured the floating policeman and induced him to stand opposite the entrance and watch it; and finally paused an instant for a pennyworth of chestnuts, and an inquiry as to the probable length of the merchant's stay in the neighbourhood.

The chestnut seller, turning up the collar of his coat, told him he should probably be moving shortly, as he thought it was going to snow. Indeed, the evening was growing grey and bitter, but Angus, with all his eloquence, proceeded to nail the chestnut man to his post.

"Keep yourself warm on your own chestnuts," he said earnestly. "Eat up your whole stock; I'll make it worth your while. I'll give you a sovereign if you'll wait here till I come back, and then tell me whether any man, woman, or child has gone into that house where the commissionaire is standing."

He then walked away smartly, with a last look at the besieged tower.

"I've made a ring round that room, anyhow," he said. "They can't all four of them be Mr. Welkin's accomplices."

Lucknow Mansions were, so to speak, on a lower platform of that hill of houses, of which Himylaya Mansions might be called the peak. Mr. Flambeau's semi-official flat was on the ground floor, and presented in every way a marked contrast to the American machinery and cold hotel-like luxury of the flat of the Silent Service. Flambeau, who was a friend of Angus, received him in a rococo artistic den behind his office, of which the ornaments were sabres, harquebuses, Eastern curiosities, flasks of Italian wine, savage cooking-pots, a plumy Persian cat, and a small dusty-looking Roman Catholic priest, who looked particularly out of place.

"This is my friend Father Brown," said Flambeau. "I've often wanted you to meet him. Splendid weather, this; a little cold for Southerners like me."

"Yes, I think it will keep clear," said Angus, sitting down on a violet-striped Eastern ottoman.

"No," said the priest quietly, "it has begun to snow."

And, indeed, as he spoke, the first few flakes, foreseen by the man of chestnuts, began to drift across the darkening windowpane.

"Well," said Angus heavily. "I'm afraid I've come on business, and rather jumpy business at that. The fact is, Flambeau, within a stone's throw of your house is a fellow who badly wants your help; he's perpetually being haunted and threatened by an invisible enemy — a scoundrel whom nobody has even seen." As Angus proceeded to tell the whole tale of Smythe and Welkin, beginning with Laura's story, and going on with his own, the supernatural laugh at the corner of two empty streets, the strange distinct words spoken in an empty room, Flambeau grew more and more vividly concerned, and the little priest seemed to be left out of it, like a piece of furniture. When it came to the scribbled stamp-paper pasted on the window, Flambeau rose, seeming to fill the room with his huge shoulders.

"If you don't mind," he said, "I think you had better tell me the rest on the nearest road to this man's house. It strikes me, somehow, that there is no time to be lost."

"Delighted," said Angus, rising also, "though he's safe enough for the present, for I've set four men to watch the only hole to his burrow."

They turned out into the street, the small priest trundling after them with the docility of a small dog. He merely said, in a cheerful way, like one making conversation, "How quick the snow gets thick on the ground."

As they threaded the steep side streets already powdered with silver, Angus finished his story; and by the time they reached the crescent with the towering flats, he had leisure to turn his attention to the four sentinels. The chestnut seller, both before and after receiving a sovereign, swore stubbornly that he had watched the door and seen no visitor enter. The policeman was even more emphatic. He said he had had experience of crooks of all kinds, in top hats and in rags; he wasn't so green as to expect suspicious characters to look suspicious; he looked out for anybody, and, so help him, there had been nobody. And when all three men gathered round the gilded commissionaire, who still stood smiling astride of the porch, the verdict was more final still.

"I've got a right to ask any man, duke or dustman, what he wants in these flats," said the genial and gold-laced giant, "and I'll swear there's been nobody to ask since this gentleman went away."

The unimportant Father Brown, who stood back, looking modestly at the pavement, here ventured to say meekly, "Has nobody been up and down stairs, then, since the snow began to fall? It began while we were all round at Flambeau's."

"Nobody's been in here, sir, you can take it from me," said the official, with beaming authority.

"Then I wonder what that is?" said the priest, and stared at the ground blankly like a fish.

The others all looked down also; and Flambeau used a fierce exclamation and a French gesture. For it was unquestionably true that down the middle of the entrance guarded by the man in gold lace, actually between the arrogant, stretched legs of that colossus, ran a stringy pattern of grey footprints stamped upon the white snow.

“God!” cried Angus involuntarily, “the Invisible Man!”

Without another word he turned and dashed up the stairs, with Flambeau following; but Father Brown still stood looking about him in the snow-clad street as if he had lost interest in his query.

Flambeau was plainly in a mood to break down the door with his big shoulders; but the Scotchman, with more reason, if less intuition, fumbled about on the frame of the door till he found the invisible button; and the door swung slowly open.

It showed substantially the same serried interior; the hall had grown darker, though it was still struck here and there with the last crimson shafts of sunset, and one or two of the headless machines had been moved from their places for this or that purpose, and stood here and there about the twilit place. The green and red of their coats were all darkened in the dusk; and their likeness to human shapes slightly increased by their very shapelessness. But in the middle of them all, exactly where the paper with the red ink had lain, there lay something that looked like red ink spilt out of its bottle. But it was not red ink.

With a French combination of reason and violence Flambeau simply said “Murder!” and, plunging into the flat, had explored, every corner and cupboard of it in five minutes. But if he expected to find a corpse he found none. Isidore Smythe was not in the place, either dead or alive. After the most tearing search the two men met each other in the outer hall, with streaming faces and staring eyes. “My friend,” said Flambeau, talking French in his excitement, “not only is your murderer invisible, but he makes invisible also the murdered man.”

Angus looked round at the dim room full of dummies, and in some Celtic corner of his Scotch soul a shudder started. One of the life-size dolls stood immediately overshadowing the blood stain, summoned, perhaps, by the slain man an instant before he fell. One of the high-shouldered hooks that served the thing for arms, was a little lifted, and Angus had suddenly the horrid fancy that poor Smythe’s own iron child had struck him down. Matter had rebelled, and these machines had killed their master. But even so, what had they done with him?

“Eaten him?” said the nightmare at his ear; and he sickened for an instant at the idea of rent, human remains absorbed and crushed into all that acephalous clockwork.

He recovered his mental health by an emphatic effort, and said to Flambeau, “Well, there it is. The poor fellow has evaporated like a cloud and left a red streak on the floor. The tale does not belong to this world.”

“There is only one thing to be done,” said Flambeau, “whether it belongs to this world or the other. I must go down and talk to my friend.”

They descended, passing the man with the pail, who again asseverated that he had let no intruder pass, down to the commissionaire and the hovering chestnut man, who rigidly reasserted their own watchfulness. But when Angus looked round for his fourth confirmation he could not see it, and called out with some nervousness, “Where is the policeman?”

“I beg your pardon,” said Father Brown; “that is my fault. I just sent him down the road to investigate something — that I just thought worth investigating.”

“Well, we want him back pretty soon,” said Angus abruptly, “for the wretched man upstairs has not only been murdered, but wiped out.”

“How?” asked the priest.

“Father,” said Flambeau, after a pause, “upon my soul I believe it is more in your department than mine. No friend or foe has entered the house, but Smythe is gone, as if stolen by the fairies. If that is not supernatural, I —”

As he spoke they were all checked by an unusual sight; the big blue policeman came round the corner of the crescent, running. He came straight up to Brown.

“You’re right, sir,” he panted, “they’ve just found poor Mr. Smythe’s body in the canal down below.”

Angus put his hand wildly to his head. “Did he run down and drown himself?” he asked.

“He never came down, I’ll swear,” said the constable, “and he wasn’t drowned either, for he died of a great stab over the heart.”

“And yet you saw no one enter?” said Flambeau in a grave voice.

“Let us walk down the road a little,” said the priest.

As they reached the other end of the crescent he observed abruptly, “Stupid of me! I forgot to ask the policeman something. I wonder if they found a light brown sack.”

“Why a light brown sack?” asked Angus, astonished.

“Because if it was any other coloured sack, the case must begin over again,” said Father Brown; “but if it was a light brown sack, why, the case is finished.”

“I am pleased to hear it,” said Angus with hearty irony. “It hasn’t begun, so far as I am concerned.”

“You must tell us all about it,” said Flambeau with a strange heavy simplicity, like a child.

Unconsciously they were walking with quickening steps down the long sweep of road on the other side of the high crescent, Father Brown leading briskly, though in silence. At last he said with an almost touching vagueness, “Well, I’m afraid you’ll think it so prosy. We always begin at the abstract end of things, and you can’t begin this story anywhere else.

“Have you ever noticed this — that people never answer what you say? They answer what you mean — or what they think you mean. Suppose one lady says to another in a country house, ‘Is anybody staying with you?’ the lady doesn’t answer ‘Yes; the butler, the three footmen, the parlourmaid, and so on,’ though the parlourmaid may be in the room, or the butler behind her chair. She says ‘There is nobody staying with us,’ meaning nobody of the sort you mean. But suppose a doctor inquiring into an epidemic asks, ‘Who is staying in the house?’ then the lady will remember the butler, the parlourmaid, and the rest. All language is used like that; you never get a question answered literally, even when you get it answered truly. When those four quite honest men said that no man had gone into the Mansions, they did not really mean that no man had gone into them. They meant no man whom they could suspect of being your man. A man did go into the house, and did come out of it, but they never noticed him.”

“An invisible man?” inquired Angus, raising his red eyebrows. “A mentally invisible man,” said Father Brown.

A minute or two after he resumed in the same unassuming voice, like a man thinking his way. “Of course you can’t think of such a man, until you do think of him. That’s where his cleverness comes in. But I came to think of him through two or three little things in the tale Mr. Angus told us. First, there was the fact that this Welkin went for long walks. And then there was the vast lot of stamp paper on the window. And then, most of all, there were the two things the young lady said — things that couldn’t be true. Don’t get annoyed,” he added hastily, noting a sudden movement of the Scotchman’s head; “she thought they were true. A person can’t be quite alone in a street a second before she receives a letter. She can’t be quite alone in a street when she starts reading a letter just received. There must be somebody pretty near her; he must be mentally invisible.”

“Why must there be somebody near her?” asked Angus.

“Because,” said Father Brown, “barring carrier-pigeons, somebody must have brought her the letter.”

“Do you really mean to say,” asked Flambeau, with energy, “that Welkin carried his rival’s letters to his lady?”

“Yes,” said the priest. “Welkin carried his rival’s letters to his lady. You see, he had to.”

“Oh, I can’t stand much more of this,” exploded Flambeau. “Who is this fellow? What does he look like? What is the usual get-up of a mentally invisible man?”

“He is dressed rather handsomely in red, blue and gold,” replied the priest promptly with precision, “and in this striking, and even showy, costume he entered Himylaya Mansions under eight human eyes; he killed Smythe in cold blood, and came down into the street again carrying the dead body in his arms—”

“Reverend sir,” cried Angus, standing still, “are you raving mad, or am I?”

“You are not mad,” said Brown, “only a little unobservant. You have not noticed such a man as this, for example.”

He took three quick strides forward, and put his hand on the shoulder of an ordinary passing postman who had bustled by them unnoticed under the shade of the trees.

“Nobody ever notices postmen somehow,” he said thoughtfully; “yet they have passions like other men, and even carry large bags where a small corpse can be stowed quite easily.”

The postman, instead of turning naturally, had ducked and tumbled against the garden fence. He was a lean fair-bearded man of very ordinary appearance, but as he turned an alarmed face over his shoulder, all three men were fixed with an almost fiendish squint.

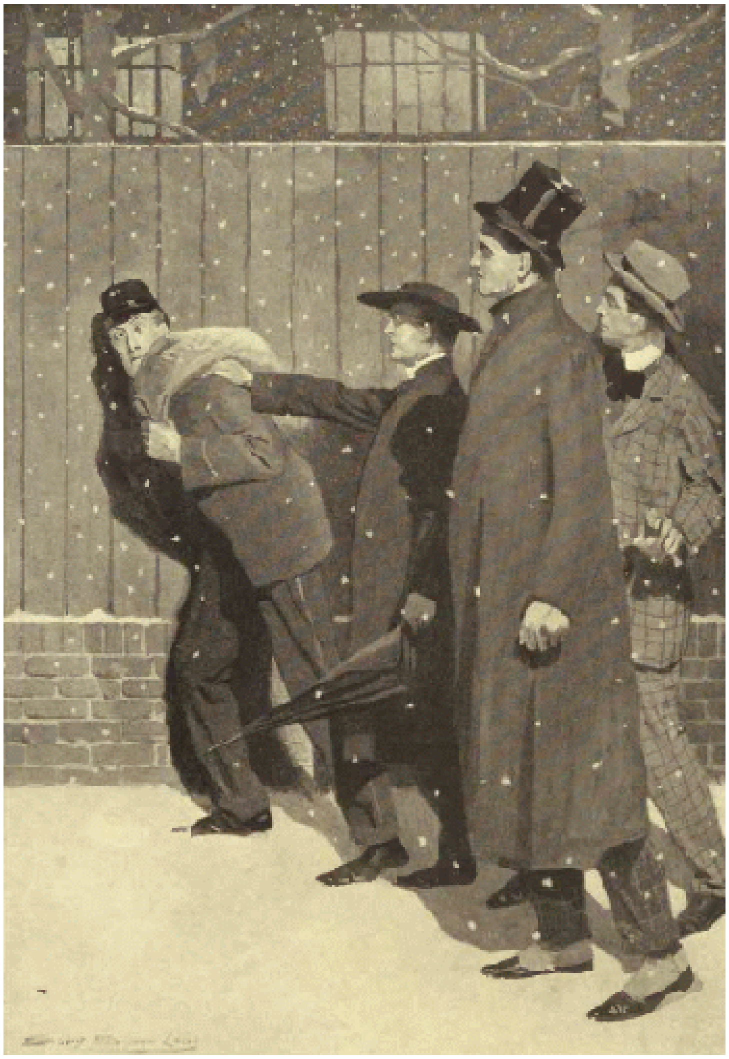

Flambeau went back to his sabres, purple rugs and Persian cat, having many things to attend to. John Turnbull Angus went back to the lady at the shop, with whom that imprudent young man contrives to be extremely comfortable. But Father Brown walked those snow-covered hills under the stars for many hours with a murderer, and what they said to each other will never be known.

The Honour of Israel Gow

A stormy evening of olive and silver was closing in, as Father Brown, wrapped in a grey Scotch plaid, came to the end of a grey Scotch valley and beheld the strange castle of Glengyle. It stopped one end of the glen or hollow like a blind alley; and it looked like the end of the world. Rising in steep roofs and spires of seagreen slate in the manner of the old French-Scotch chateaux, it reminded an Englishman of the sinister steeple-hats of witches in fairy tales; and the pine woods that rocked round the green turrets looked, by comparison, as black as numberless flocks of ravens. This note of a dreamy, almost a sleepy devilry, was no mere fancy from the landscape. For there did rest on the place one of those clouds of pride and madness and mysterious sorrow which lie more heavily on the noble houses of Scotland than on any other of the children of men. For Scotland has a double dose of the poison called heredity; the sense of blood in the aristocrat, and the sense of doom in the Calvinist.

The priest had snatched a day from his business at Glasgow to meet his friend Flambeau, the amateur detective, who was at Glengyle Castle with another more formal officer investigating the life and death of the late Earl of Glengyle. That mysterious person was the last representative of a race whose valour, insanity, and violent cunning had made them terrible even among the sinister nobility of their nation in the sixteenth century. None were deeper in that labyrinthine ambition, in chamber within chamber of that palace of lies that was built up around Mary Queen of Scots.

The rhyme in the country-side attested the motive and the result of their machinations candidly:

As green sap to the simmer trees
Is red gold to the Ogilvies.

For many centuries there had never been a decent lord in Glengyle Castle; and with the Victorian era one would have thought that all eccentricities were exhausted. The last Glengyle, however, satisfied his tribal tradition by doing the only thing that was left for him to do; he disappeared. I do not mean that he went abroad; by all accounts he was still in the castle, if he was anywhere. But though his name was in the church register and the big red Peerage, nobody ever saw him under the sun.

If anyone saw him it was a solitary man-servant, something between a groom and a gardener. He was so deaf that the more business-like assumed him to be dumb; while the more penetrating declared him to be half-witted. A gaunt, red-haired labourer, with a dogged jaw and chin, but quite blank blue eyes, he went by the name of Israel Gow, and was the one silent servant on that deserted estate. But the energy with which he dug potatoes, and the regularity with which he disappeared into the kitchen gave people an impression that he was providing for the meals of a superior, and that the strange earl was still concealed in the castle. If society needed any further proof that he was there, the servant persistently asserted that he was not at home. One morning the provost and the minister (for the Glengyles were Presbyterian) were summoned to the castle. There they found that the gardener, groom and cook had added to his many professions that of an undertaker, and had nailed up his noble master in a coffin. With how much or how little further inquiry this odd fact was passed, did not as yet very plainly appear; for the thing had never been legally investigated till Flambeau had gone north two or three days before. By then the body of Lord Glengyle (if it was the body) had lain for some time in the little churchyard on the hill.

As Father Brown passed through the dim garden and came under the shadow of the chateau, the clouds were thick and the whole air damp and thundery. Against the last stripe of the green-gold sunset he saw a black human silhouette; a man in a chimney-pot hat, with a big spade over his shoulder. The combination was queerly suggestive of a sexton; but when Brown remembered the deaf servant who dug potatoes, he thought it natural enough. He knew something of the Scotch peasant; he knew the respectability which might well feel it necessary to wear “blacks” for an official inquiry; he knew also the economy that would not lose an hour’s digging for that. Even the man’s start and suspicious stare as the priest went by were consonant enough with the vigilance and jealousy of such a type.

The great door was opened by Flambeau himself, who had with him a lean man with iron-grey hair and papers in his hand: Inspector Craven from Scotland Yard. The entrance hall was mostly stripped and empty; but the pale, sneering faces of one or two of the wicked Ogilvies looked down out of black periwigs and blackening canvas.

Following them into an inner room, Father Brown found that the allies had been seated at a long oak table, of which their end was covered with scribbled papers, flanked with whisky and cigars. Through the whole of its remaining length it was occupied by detached objects arranged at intervals; objects about as inexplicable as any objects could be. One looked like a small heap of glittering broken glass. Another looked like a high heap of brown dust. A third appeared to be a plain stick of wood.

“You seem to have a sort of geological museum here,” he said, as he sat down, jerking his head briefly in the direction of the brown dust and the crystalline fragments.

“Not a geological museum,” replied Flambeau; “say a psychological museum.”

“Oh, for the Lord’s sake,” cried the police detective laughing, “don’t let’s begin with such long words.”

“Don’t you know what psychology means?” asked Flambeau with friendly surprise. “Psychology means being off your chump.”

“Still I hardly follow,” replied the official.

“Well,” said Flambeau, with decision, “I mean that we’ve only found out one thing about Lord Glengyle. He was a maniac.”

The black silhouette of Gow with his top hat and spade passed the window, dimly outlined against the darkening sky. Father Brown stared passively at it and answered:

“I can understand there must have been something odd about the man, or he wouldn’t have buried himself alive — nor been in such a hurry to bury himself dead. But what makes you think it was lunacy?”

“Well,” said Flambeau, “you just listen to the list of things Mr. Craven has found in the house.”

“We must get a candle,” said Craven, suddenly. “A storm is getting up, and it’s too dark to read.”

“Have you found any candles,” asked Brown smiling, “among your oddities?”

Flambeau raised a grave face, and fixed his dark eyes on his friend.

“That is curious, too,” he said. “Twenty-five candles, and not a trace of a candlestick.”

In the rapidly darkening room and rapidly rising wind, Brown went along the table to where a bundle of wax candles lay among the other scrappy exhibits. As he did so he bent accidentally over the heap of red-brown dust; and a sharp sneeze cracked the silence.

“Hullo!” he said, “snuff!”

He took one of the candles, lit it carefully, came back and stuck it in the neck of the whisky bottle. The unrestful night air, blowing through the crazy window, waved the long flame like a banner. And on every side of the castle they could hear the miles and miles of black pine wood seething like a black sea around a rock.

"I will read the inventory," began Craven gravely, picking up one of the papers, "the inventory of what we found loose and unexplained in the castle. You are to understand that the place generally was dismantled and neglected; but one or two rooms had plainly been inhabited in a simple but not squalid style by somebody; somebody who was not the servant Gow. The list is as follows:

"First item. A very considerable hoard of precious stones, nearly all diamonds, and all of them loose, without any setting whatever. Of course, it is natural that the Ogilvies should have family jewels; but those are exactly the jewels that are almost always set in particular articles of ornament. The Ogilvies would seem to have kept theirs loose in their pockets, like coppers.

"Second item. Heaps and heaps of loose snuff, not kept in a horn, or even a pouch, but lying in heaps on the mantelpieces, on the sideboard, on the piano, anywhere. It looks as if the old gentleman would not take the trouble to look in a pocket or lift a lid.

"Third item. Here and there about the house curious little heaps of minute pieces of metal, some like steel springs and some in the form of microscopic wheels. As if they had gutted some mechanical toy.

"Fourth item. The wax candles, which have to be stuck in bottle necks because there is nothing else to stick them in. Now I wish you to note how very much queerer all this is than anything we anticipated. For the central riddle we are prepared; we have all seen at a glance that there was something wrong about the last earl. We have come here to find out whether he really lived here, whether he really died here, whether that red-haired scarecrow who did his burying had anything to do with his dying. But suppose the worst in all this, the most lurid or melodramatic solution you like. Suppose the servant really killed the master, or suppose the master isn't really dead, or suppose the master is dressed up as the servant, or suppose the servant is buried for the master; invent what Wilkie Collins' tragedy you like, and you still have not explained a candle without a candlestick, or why an elderly gentleman of good family should habitually spill snuff on the piano. The core of the tale we could imagine; it is the fringes that are mysterious. By no stretch of fancy can the human mind connect together snuff and diamonds and wax and loose clockwork."

"I think I see the connection," said the priest. "This Glengyle was mad against the French Revolution. He was an enthusiast for the ancien regime, and was trying to re-enact literally the family life of the last Bourbons. He had snuff because it was the eighteenth century luxury; wax candles, because they were the eighteenth century lighting; the mechanical bits of iron represent the locksmith hobby of Louis XVI; the diamonds are for the Diamond Necklace of Marie Antoinette."

Both the other men were staring at him with round eyes. "What a perfectly extraordinary notion!" cried Flambeau. "Do you really think that is the truth?"

"I am perfectly sure it isn't," answered Father Brown, "only you said that nobody could connect snuff and diamonds and clockwork and candles. I give you that connection off-hand. The real truth, I am very sure, lies deeper."

He paused a moment and listened to the wailing of the wind in the turrets. Then he said, "The late Earl of Glengyle was a thief. He lived a second and darker life as a desperate housebreaker. He did not have any candlesticks because he only used these candles cut short in the little lantern he carried. The snuff he employed as the fiercest French criminals have used pepper: to fling it suddenly in dense masses in the face of a captor or pursuer. But the final proof is in the curious coincidence of the diamonds and the small steel wheels. Surely that makes everything plain to you? Diamonds and small steel wheels are the only two instruments with which you can cut out a pane of glass."

The bough of a broken pine tree lashed heavily in the blast against the windowpane behind them, as if in parody of a burglar, but they did not turn round. Their eyes were fastened on Father Brown.

"Diamonds and small wheels," repeated Craven ruminating. "Is that all that makes you think it the true explanation?"

"I don't think it the true explanation," replied the priest placidly; "but you said that nobody could connect the four things. The true tale, of course, is something much more humdrum. Glengyle had found, or thought he had found, precious stones on his estate. Somebody had bamboozled him with those loose brilliants, saying they were found in the castle caverns. The little wheels are some diamond-cutting affair. He had to do the thing very roughly and in a small way, with the help of a few shepherds or rude fellows on these hills. Snuff is the one great luxury of such Scotch shepherds; it's the one thing with which you can bribe them. They didn't have candlesticks because they didn't want them; they held the candles in their hands when they explored the caves."

"Is that all?" asked Flambeau after a long pause. "Have we got to the dull truth at last?"

"Oh, no," said Father Brown.

As the wind died in the most distant pine woods with a long hoot as of mockery Father Brown, with an utterly impassive face, went on:

"I only suggested that because you said one could not plausibly connect snuff with clockwork or candles with bright stones. Ten false philosophies will fit the universe; ten false theories will fit Glengyle Castle. But we want the real explanation of the castle and the universe. But are there no other exhibits?"

Craven laughed, and Flambeau rose smiling to his feet and strolled down the long table.

"Items five, six, seven, etc.," he said, "and certainly more varied than instructive. A curious collection, not of lead pencils, but of the lead out of lead pencils. A senseless stick of bamboo, with the top rather splintered. It might be the instrument of the crime. Only, there isn't any crime. The only other things are a few old missals and little Catholic pictures, which the Ogilvies kept, I suppose, from the Middle Ages — their family pride being stronger than their Puritanism. We only put them in the museum because they seem curiously cut about and defaced."

The heady tempest without drove a dreadful wrack of clouds across Glengyle and threw the long room into darkness as Father Brown picked up the little illuminated pages to examine them. He spoke before the drift of darkness had passed; but it was the voice of an utterly new man.

"Mr. Craven," said he, talking like a man ten years younger, "you have got a legal warrant, haven't you, to go up and examine that grave? The sooner we do it the better, and get to the bottom of this horrible affair. If I were you I should start now."

"Now," repeated the astonished detective, "and why now?"

"Because this is serious," answered Brown; "this is not spilt snuff or loose pebbles, that might be there for a hundred reasons. There is only one reason I know of for this being done; and the reason goes down to the roots of the world. These religious pictures are not just dirtied or torn or scrawled over, which might be done in idleness or bigotry, by children or by Protestants. These have been treated very carefully — and very queerly. In every place where the great ornamented name of God comes in the old illuminations it has been elaborately taken out. The only other thing that has been removed is the halo round the head of the Child Jesus. Therefore, I say, let us get our warrant and our spade and our hatchet, and go up and break open that coffin."

"What do you mean?" demanded the London officer.

"I mean," answered the little priest, and his voice seemed to rise slightly in the roar of the gale. "I mean that the great devil of the universe may be sitting on the top tower of this castle at this moment, as big as a hundred elephants, and roaring like the Apocalypse. There is black magic somewhere at the bottom of this."

"Black magic," repeated Flambeau in a low voice, for he was too enlightened a man not to know of such things; "but what can these other things mean?"

"Oh, something damnable, I suppose," replied Brown impatiently. "How should I know? How can I guess all their mazes down below? Perhaps you can make a torture out of snuff and bamboo. Perhaps lunatics lust after wax and steel filings. Perhaps there is a maddening drug made of lead pencils! Our shortest cut to the mystery is up the hill to the grave."

His comrades hardly knew that they had obeyed and followed him till a blast of the night wind nearly flung them on their faces in the garden. Nevertheless they had obeyed him like automata; for Craven found a hatchet in his hand, and the warrant in his pocket; Flambeau was carrying the heavy spade of the strange gardener; Father Brown was carrying the little gilt book from which had been torn the name of God.

The path up the hill to the churchyard was crooked but short; only under that stress of wind it seemed laborious and long. Far as the eye could see, farther and farther as they mounted the slope, were seas beyond seas of pines, now all aslope one way under the wind. And that universal gesture seemed as vain as it was vast, as vain as if that wind were whistling about some unpeopled and purposeless planet. Through all that infinite growth of grey-blue forests sang, shrill and high, that ancient sorrow that is in the heart of all heathen things. One could fancy that the voices from the under world of unfathomable foliage were cries of the lost and wandering pagan gods: gods who had gone roaming in that irrational forest, and who will never find their way back to heaven.

"You see," said Father Brown in low but easy tone, "Scotch people before Scotland existed were a curious lot. In fact, they're a curious lot still. But in the prehistoric times I fancy they really worshipped demons. That," he added genially, "is why they jumped at the Puritan theology."

"My friend," said Flambeau, turning in a kind of fury, "what does all that snuff mean?"

"My friend," replied Brown, with equal seriousness, "there is one mark of all genuine religions: materialism. Now, devil-worship is a perfectly genuine religion."

They had come up on the grassy scalp of the hill, one of the few bald spots that stood clear of the crashing and roaring pine forest. A mean enclosure, partly timber and partly wire, rattled in the tempest to tell them the border of the graveyard. But by the time Inspector Craven had come to the corner of the grave, and Flambeau had planted his spade point downwards and leaned on it, they were both almost as shaken as the shaky wood and wire. At the foot of the grave grew great tall thistles, grey and silver in their decay. Once or twice, when a ball of thistledown broke under the breeze and flew past him, Craven jumped slightly as if it had been an arrow.

Flambeau drove the blade of his spade through the whistling grass into the wet clay below. Then he seemed to stop and lean on it as on a staff.

"Go on," said the priest very gently. "We are only trying to find the truth. What are you afraid of?"

"I am afraid of finding it," said Flambeau.

The London detective spoke suddenly in a high crowing voice that was meant to be conversational and cheery. "I wonder why he really did hide himself like that. Something nasty, I suppose; was he a leper?"

"Something worse than that," said Flambeau.

"And what do you imagine," asked the other, "would be worse than a leper?"

"I don't imagine it," said Flambeau.

He dug for some dreadful minutes in silence, and then said in a choked voice, "I'm afraid of his not being the right shape."

"Nor was that piece of paper, you know," said Father Brown quietly, "and we survived even that piece of paper."

Flambeau dug on with a blind energy. But the tempest had shouldered away the choking grey clouds that clung to the hills like smoke and revealed grey fields of faint starlight before he cleared the shape of a rude timber coffin, and somehow tipped it up upon the turf. Craven stepped forward with his axe; a thistle-top touched him, and he flinched. Then he took a firmer stride, and hacked and wrenched with an energy like Flambeau's till the lid was torn off, and all that was there lay glimmering in the grey starlight.

"Bones," said Craven; and then he added, "but it is a man," as if that were something unexpected.

"Is he," asked Flambeau in a voice that went oddly up and down, "is he all right?"

"Seems so," said the officer huskily, bending over the obscure and decaying skeleton in the box. "Wait a minute."

A vast heave went over Flambeau's huge figure. "And now I come to think of it," he cried, "why in the name of madness shouldn't he be all right? What is it gets hold of a man on these cursed cold mountains? I think it's the black, brainless repetition; all these forests, and over all an ancient horror of unconsciousness. It's like the dream of an atheist. Pine-trees and more pine-trees and millions more pine-trees—"

"God!" cried the man by the coffin, "but he hasn't got a head."

While the others stood rigid the priest, for the first time, showed a leap of startled concern.

"No head!" he repeated. "No head?" as if he had almost expected some other deficiency.

Half-witted visions of a headless baby born to Glengyle, of a headless youth hiding himself in the castle, of a headless man pacing those ancient halls or that gorgeous garden, passed in panorama through their minds. But even in that stiffened instant the tale took no root in them and seemed to have no reason in it. They stood listening to the loud woods and the shrieking sky quite foolishly, like exhausted animals. Thought seemed to be something enormous that had suddenly slipped out of their grasp.

"There are three headless men," said Father Brown, "standing round this open grave."

The pale detective from London opened his mouth to speak, and left it open like a yokel, while a long scream of wind tore the sky; then he looked at the axe in his hands as if it did not belong to him, and dropped it.

“Father,” said Flambeau in that infantile and heavy voice he used very seldom, “what are we to do?”

His friend’s reply came with the pent promptitude of a gun going off.

“Sleep!” cried Father Brown. “Sleep. We have come to the end of the ways. Do you know what sleep is? Do you know that every man who sleeps believes in God? It is a sacrament; for it is an act of faith and it is a food. And we need a sacrament, if only a natural one. Something has fallen on us that falls very seldom on men; perhaps the worst thing that can fall on them.”

Craven’s parted lips came together to say, “What do you mean?”

The priest had turned his face to the castle as he answered: “We have found the truth; and the truth makes no sense.”

He went down the path in front of them with a plunging and reckless step very rare with him, and when they reached the castle again he threw himself upon sleep with the simplicity of a dog.

Despite his mystic praise of slumber, Father Brown was up earlier than anyone else except the silent gardener; and was found smoking a big pipe and watching that expert at his speechless labours in the kitchen garden. Towards daybreak the rocking storm had ended in roaring rains, and the day came with a curious freshness. The gardener seemed even to have been conversing, but at sight of the detectives he planted his spade sullenly in a bed and, saying something about his breakfast, shifted along the lines of cabbages and shut himself in the kitchen. “He’s a valuable man, that,” said Father Brown. “He does the potatoes amazingly. Still,” he added, with a dispassionate charity, “he has his faults; which of us hasn’t? He doesn’t dig this bank quite regularly. There, for instance,” and he stamped suddenly on one spot. “I’m really very doubtful about that potato.”

“And why?” asked Craven, amused with the little man’s hobby.

“I’m doubtful about it,” said the other, “because old Gow was doubtful about it himself. He put his spade in methodically in every place but just this. There must be a mighty fine potato just here.”

Flambeau pulled up the spade and impetuously drove it into the place. He turned up, under a load of soil, something that did not look like a potato, but rather like a monstrous, over-domed mushroom. But it struck the spade with a cold click; it rolled over like a ball, and grinned up at them.

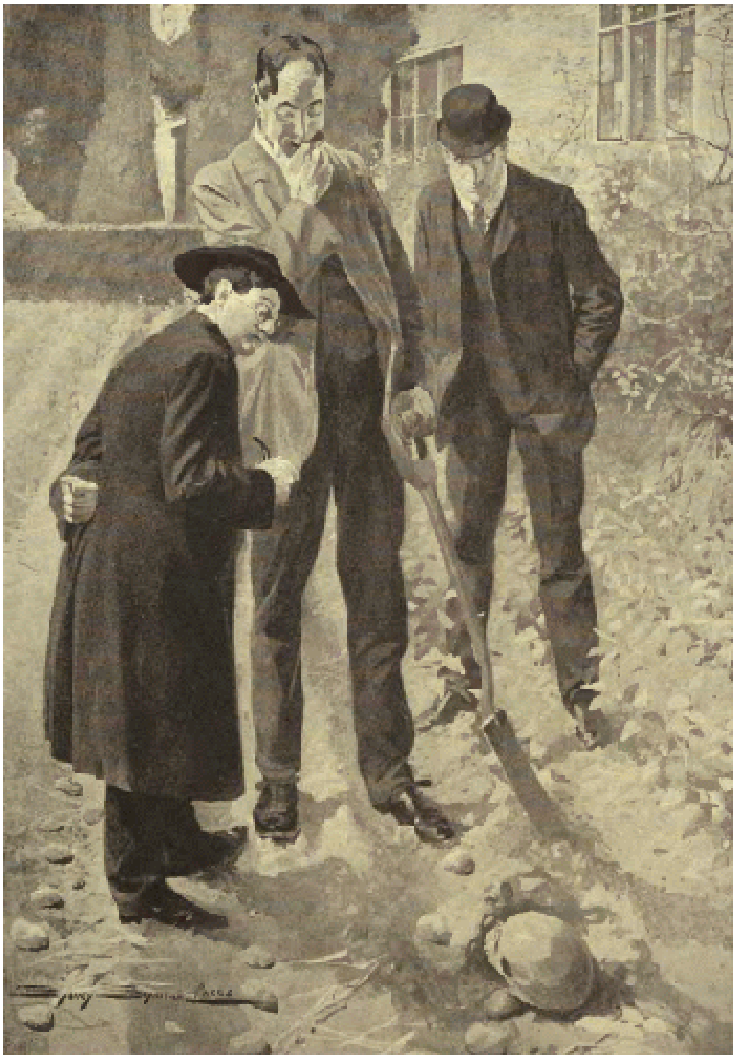

"The Earl of Glengyle," said Brown sadly, and looked down heavily at the skull.

Then, after a momentary meditation, he plucked the spade from Flambeau, and, saying "We must hide it again," clamped the skull down in the earth. Then he leaned his little body and huge head on the great handle of the spade, that stood up stiffly in the earth, and his eyes were empty and his forehead full of wrinkles. "If one could only conceive," he muttered, "the meaning of this last monstrosity." And leaning on the large spade handle, he buried his brows in his hands, as men do in church.

All the corners of the sky were brightening into blue and silver; the birds were chattering in the tiny garden trees; so loud it seemed as if the trees themselves were talking. But the three men were silent enough.

"Well, I give it all up," said Flambeau at last boisterously. "My brain and this world don't fit each other; and there's an end of it. Snuff, spoilt Prayer

Books, and the insides of musical boxes — what—”

Brown threw up his bothered brow and rapped on the spade handle with an intolerance quite unusual with him. “Oh, tut, tut, tut, tut!” he cried. “All that is as plain as a pikestaff. I understood the snuff and clockwork, and so on, when I first opened my eyes this morning. And since then I’ve had it out with old Gow, the gardener, who is neither so deaf nor so stupid as he pretends. There’s nothing amiss about the loose items. I was wrong about the torn mass-book, too; there’s no harm in that. But it’s this last business. Desecrating graves and stealing dead men’s heads — surely there’s harm in that? Surely there’s black magic still in that? That doesn’t fit in to the quite simple story of the snuff and the candles.” And, striding about again, he smoked moodily.

“My friend,” said Flambeau, with a grim humour, “you must be careful with me and remember I was once a criminal. The great advantage of that estate was that I always made up the story myself, and acted it as quick as I chose. This detective business of waiting about is too much for my French impatience. All my life, for good or evil, I have done things at the instant; I always fought duels the next morning; I always paid bills on the nail; I never even put off a visit to the dentist—”

Father Brown’s pipe fell out of his mouth and broke into three pieces on the gravel path. He stood rolling his eyes, the exact picture of an idiot. “Lord, what a turnip I am!” he kept saying. “Lord, what a turnip!” Then, in a somewhat groggy kind of way, he began to laugh.

“The dentist!” he repeated. “Six hours in the spiritual abyss, and all because I never thought of the dentist! Such a simple, such a beautiful and peaceful thought! Friends, we have passed a night in hell; but now the sun is risen, the birds are singing, and the radiant form of the dentist consoles the world.”

“I will get some sense out of this,” cried Flambeau, striding forward, “if I use the tortures of the Inquisition.”

Father Brown repressed what appeared to be a momentary disposition to dance on the now sunlit lawn and cried quite piteously, like a child, “Oh, let me be silly a little. You don’t know how unhappy I have been. And now I know that there has been no deep sin in this business at all. Only a little lunacy, perhaps — and who minds that?”

He spun round once more, then faced them with gravity.

“This is not a story of crime,” he said; “rather it is the story of a strange and crooked honesty. We are dealing with the one man on earth, perhaps, who has taken no more than his due. It is a study in the savage living logic that has been the religion of this race.

“That old local rhyme about the house of Glengyle —

As green sap to the simmer trees
Is red gold to the Ogilvies —

was literal as well as metaphorical. It did not merely mean that the Glengyles sought for wealth; it was also true that they literally gathered gold; they had a huge collection of ornaments and utensils in that metal. They were, in fact, misers whose mania took that turn. In the light of that fact, run through all the things we found in the castle. Diamonds without their gold rings; candles without their gold candlesticks; snuff without the gold snuff-boxes; pencil-leads without the gold pencil-cases; a walking stick without its gold top; clockwork without the gold clocks — or rather watches. And, mad as it sounds, because the halos and the name of God in the old missals were of real gold; these also were taken away.”

The garden seemed to brighten, the grass to grow gayer in the strengthening sun, as the crazy truth was told. Flambeau lit a cigarette as his friend went on.

“Were taken away,” continued Father Brown; “were taken away — but not stolen. Thieves would never have left this mystery. Thieves would have taken the gold snuff-boxes, snuff and all; the gold pencil-cases, lead and all. We have to deal with a man with a peculiar conscience, but certainly a conscience. I found that mad moralist this morning in the kitchen garden yonder, and I heard the whole story.

“The late Archibald Ogilvie was the nearest approach to a good man ever born at Glengyle. But his bitter virtue took the turn of the misanthrope; he moped over the dishonesty of his ancestors, from which, somehow, he generalised a dishonesty of all men. More especially he distrusted philanthropy or free-giving; and he swore if he could find one man who took his exact rights he should have all the gold of Glengyle. Having delivered this defiance to humanity he shut himself up, without the smallest expectation of its being answered. One day, however, a deaf and seemingly senseless lad from a distant village brought him a belated telegram; and Glengyle, in his acrid pleasantry, gave him a new farthing. At least he thought he had done so, but when he turned over his change he found the new farthing still there and a sovereign gone. The accident offered him vistas of sneering speculation. Either way, the boy would show the greasy greed of the species. Either he would vanish, a thief stealing a coin; or he would sneak back with it virtuously, a snob seeking a reward. In the middle of that night Lord Glengyle was knocked up out of his bed — for he lived alone — and forced to open the door to the deaf idiot. The idiot brought with him, not the sovereign, but exactly nineteen shillings and eleven-pence three-farthings in change.

"Then the wild exactitude of this action took hold of the mad lord's brain like fire. He swore he was Diogenes, that had long sought an honest man, and at last had found one. He made a new will, which I have seen. He took the literal youth into his huge, neglected house, and trained him up as his solitary servant and — after an odd manner — his heir. And whatever that queer creature understands, he understood absolutely his lord's two fixed ideas: first, that the letter of right is everything; and second, that he himself was to have the gold of Glengyle. So far, that is all; and that is simple. He has stripped the house of gold, and taken not a grain that was not gold; not so much as a grain of snuff. He lifted the gold leaf off an old illumination, fully satisfied that he left the rest unspoilt. All that I understood; but I could not understand this skull business. I was really uneasy about that human head buried among the potatoes. It distressed me — till Flambeau said the word.

"It will be all right. He will put the skull back in the grave, when he has taken the gold out of the tooth."

And, indeed, when Flambeau crossed the hill that morning, he saw that strange being, the just miser, digging at the desecrated grave, the plaid round his throat thrashing out in the mountain wind; the sober top hat on his head.

The Wrong Shape

Certain of the great roads going north out of London continue far into the country a sort of attenuated and interrupted spectre of a street, with great gaps in the building, but preserving the line. Here will be a group of shops, followed by a fenced field or paddock, and then a famous public-house, and then perhaps a market garden or a nursery garden, and then one large private house, and then another field and another inn, and so on. If anyone walks along one of these roads he will pass a house which will probably catch his eye, though he may not be able to explain its attraction. It is a long, low house, running parallel with the road, painted mostly white and pale green, with a veranda and sun-blinds, and porches capped with those quaint sort of cupolas like wooden umbrellas that one sees in some old-fashioned houses. In fact, it is an old-fashioned house, very English and very suburban in the good old wealthy Clapham sense. And yet the house has a look of having been built chiefly for the hot weather. Looking at its white paint and sun-blinds one thinks vaguely of pugarees and even of palm trees. I cannot trace the feeling to its root; perhaps the place was built by an Anglo-Indian.

Anyone passing this house, I say, would be namelessly fascinated by it; would feel that it was a place about which some story was to be told. And he would have been right, as you shall shortly hear. For this is the story — the story of the strange things that did really happen in it in the Whitsuntide of the year 18 — :

Anyone passing the house on the Thursday before Whit-Sunday at about half-past four p.m. would have seen the front door open, and Father Brown, of the small church of St. Mungo, come out smoking a large pipe in company with a very tall French friend of his called Flambeau, who was smoking a very small cigarette. These persons may or may not be of interest to the reader, but the truth is that they were not the only interesting things that were displayed when the front door of the white-and-green house was opened. There are further peculiarities about this house, which must be described to start with, not only that the reader may understand this tragic tale, but also that he may realise what it was that the opening of the door revealed.

The whole house was built upon the plan of a T, but a T with a very long cross piece and a very short tail piece. The long cross piece was the frontage that ran along in face of the street, with the front door in the middle; it was two stories high, and contained nearly all the important rooms. The short tail piece, which ran out at the back immediately opposite the front door, was one story high, and consisted only of two long rooms, the one leading into the other. The first of these two rooms was the study in which the celebrated Mr. Quinton wrote his wild Oriental poems and romances. The farther room was a glass conservatory full of tropical blossoms of quite unique and almost monstrous beauty, and on such afternoons as these glowing with gorgeous sunlight. Thus when the hall door was open, many a passer-by literally stopped to stare and gasp; for he looked down a perspective of rich apartments to something really like a transformation scene in a fairy play: purple clouds and golden suns and crimson stars that were at once scorchingly vivid and yet transparent and far away.

Leonard Quinton, the poet, had himself most carefully arranged this effect; and it is doubtful whether he so perfectly expressed his personality in any of his poems. For he was a man who drank and bathed in colours, who indulged his lust for colour somewhat to the neglect of form — even of good form. This it was that had turned his genius so wholly to eastern art and imagery; to those bewildering carpets or blinding embroideries in which all the colours seem fallen into a fortunate chaos, having nothing to typify or to teach. He had attempted, not perhaps with complete artistic success, but with acknowledged imagination and invention, to compose epics and love stories reflecting the riot of violent and even cruel colour; tales of tropical heavens of burning gold or blood-red copper; of eastern heroes who rode with twelve-turbaned mitres upon elephants painted purple or peacock green; of gigantic jewels that a hundred negroes could not carry, but which burned with ancient and strange-hued fires.

In short (to put the matter from the more common point of view), he dealt much in eastern heavens, rather worse than most western hells; in eastern monarchs, whom we might possibly call maniacs; and in eastern jewels which a Bond Street jeweller (if the hundred staggering negroes brought them into his shop) might possibly not regard as genuine. Quinton was a genius, if a morbid one; and even his morbidity appeared more in his life than in his work. In temperament he was weak and waspish, and his health had suffered heavily from oriental experiments with opium. His wife — a handsome, hard-working, and, indeed, over-worked woman objected to the opium, but objected much more to a live Indian hermit in white and yellow robes, whom her husband insisted on entertaining for months together, a Virgil to guide his spirit through the heavens and the hells of the east.

It was out of this artistic household that Father Brown and his friend stepped on to the door-step; and to judge from their faces, they stepped out of it with much relief. Flambeau had known Quinton in wild student days in Paris, and they had renewed the acquaintance for a week-end; but apart from Flambeau's more responsible developments of late, he did not get on well with the poet now. Choking oneself with opium and writing little erotic verses on vellum was not his notion of how a gentleman should go to the devil. As the two paused on the door-step, before taking a turn in the garden, the front garden gate was thrown open with violence, and a young man with a billycock hat on the back of his head tumbled up the steps in his eagerness. He was a dissipated-looking youth with a gorgeous red necktie all awry, as if he had slept in it, and he kept fidgeting and lashing about with one of those little jointed canes.

"I say," he said breathlessly, "I want to see old Quinton. I must see him. Has he gone?"

"Mr. Quinton is in, I believe," said Father Brown, cleaning his pipe, "but I do not know if you can see him. The doctor is with him at present."

The young man, who seemed not to be perfectly sober, stumbled into the hall; and at the same moment the doctor came out of Quinton's study, shutting the door and beginning to put on his gloves.

"See Mr. Quinton?" said the doctor coolly. "No, I'm afraid you can't. In fact, you mustn't on any account. Nobody must see him; I've just given him his sleeping draught."

"No, but look here, old chap," said the youth in the red tie, trying affectionately to capture the doctor by the lapels of his coat. "Look here. I'm simply sewn up, I tell you. I—"

"It's no good, Mr. Atkinson," said the doctor, forcing him to fall back; "when you can alter the effects of a drug I'll alter my decision," and, settling on his hat, he stepped out into the sunlight with the other two. He was a bull-necked, good-tempered little man with a small moustache, inexpressibly ordinary, yet giving an impression of capacity.

The young man in the billycock, who did not seem to be gifted with any tact in dealing with people beyond the general idea of clutching hold of their coats, stood outside the door, as dazed as if he had been thrown out bodily, and silently watched the other three walk away together through the garden.

"That was a sound, spanking lie I told just now," remarked the medical man, laughing. "In point of fact, poor Quinton doesn't have his sleeping draught for nearly half an hour. But I'm not going to have him bothered with that little beast, who only wants to borrow money that he wouldn't pay back if he could. He's a dirty little scamp, though he is Mrs. Quinton's brother, and she's as fine a woman as ever walked."

"Yes," said Father Brown. "She's a good woman."

"So I propose to hang about the garden till the creature has cleared off," went on the doctor, "and then I'll go in to Quinton with the medicine. Atkinson can't get in, because I locked the door."

"In that case, Dr. Harris," said Flambeau, "we might as well walk round at the back by the end of the conservatory. There's no entrance to it that way, but it's worth seeing, even from the outside."

"Yes, and I might get a squint at my patient," laughed the doctor, "for he prefers to lie on an ottoman right at the end of the conservatory amid all those blood-red poinsettias; it would give me the creeps. But what are you doing?"

Father Brown had stopped for a moment, and picked up out of the long grass, where it had almost been wholly hidden, a queer, crooked Oriental knife, inlaid exquisitely in coloured stones and metals.

"What is this?" asked Father Brown, regarding it with some disfavour.

"Oh, Quinton's, I suppose," said Dr. Harris carelessly; "he has all sorts of Chinese knickknacks about the place. Or perhaps it belongs to that mild Hindoo of his whom he keeps on a string."

"What Hindoo?" asked Father Brown, still staring at the dagger in his hand.

"Oh, some Indian conjuror," said the doctor lightly; "a fraud, of course."

"You don't believe in magic?" asked Father Brown, without looking up.

"O crickey! magic!" said the doctor.

"It's very beautiful," said the priest in a low, dreaming voice; "the colours are very beautiful. But it's the wrong shape."

"What for?" asked Flambeau, staring.

“For anything. It’s the wrong shape in the abstract. Don’t you ever feel that about Eastern art? The colours are intoxicatingly lovely; but the shapes are mean and bad — deliberately mean and bad. I have seen wicked things in a Turkey carpet.”

“Mon Dieu!” cried Flambeau, laughing.

“They are letters and symbols in a language I don’t know; but I know they stand for evil words,” went on the priest, his voice growing lower and lower. “The lines go wrong on purpose — like serpents doubling to escape.”

“What the devil are you talking about?” said the doctor with a loud laugh.

Flambeau spoke quietly to him in answer. “The Father sometimes gets this mystic’s cloud on him,” he said; “but I give you fair warning that I have never known him to have it except when there was some evil quite near.”

“Oh, rats!” said the scientist.

“Why, look at it,” cried Father Brown, holding out the crooked knife at arm’s length, as if it were some glittering snake. “Don’t you see it is the wrong shape? Don’t you see that it has no hearty and plain purpose? It does not point like a spear. It does not sweep like a scythe. It does not look like a weapon. It looks like an instrument of torture.”

“Well, as you don’t seem to like it,” said the jolly Harris, “it had better be taken back to its owner. Haven’t we come to the end of this confounded conservatory yet? This house is the wrong shape, if you like.”

“You don’t understand,” said Father Brown, shaking his head. “The shape of this house is quaint — it is even laughable. But there is nothing wrong about it.”

As they spoke they came round the curve of glass that ended the conservatory, an uninterrupted curve, for there was neither door nor window by which to enter at that end. The glass, however, was clear, and the sun still bright, though beginning to set; and they could see not only the flamboyant blossoms inside, but the frail figure of the poet in a brown velvet coat lying languidly on the sofa, having, apparently, fallen half asleep over a book. He was a pale, slight man, with loose, chestnut hair and a fringe of beard that was the paradox of his face, for the beard made him look less manly. These traits were well known to all three of them; but even had it not been so, it may be doubted whether they would have looked at Quinton just then. Their eyes were riveted on another object.

Exactly in their path, immediately outside the round end of the glass building, was standing a tall man, whose drapery fell to his feet in faultless white, and whose bare, brown skull, face, and neck gleamed in the setting sun like splendid bronze. He was looking through the glass at the sleeper, and he was more motionless than a mountain.

"Who is that?" cried Father Brown, stepping back with a hissing intake of his breath.

"Oh, it is only that Hindoo humbug," growled Harris; "but I don't know what the deuce he's doing here."

"It looks like hypnotism," said Flambeau, biting his black moustache.

"Why are you unmedical fellows always talking bosh about hypnotism?" cried the doctor. "It looks a deal more like burglary."

"Well, we will speak to it, at any rate," said Flambeau, who was always for action. One long stride took him to the place where the Indian stood. Bowing from his great height, which overtopped even the Oriental's, he said with placid impudence:

"Good evening, sir. Do you want anything?"

Quite slowly, like a great ship turning into a harbour, the great yellow face turned, and looked at last over its white shoulder. They were startled to see that its yellow eyelids were quite sealed, as in sleep. "Thank you," said the face in excellent English. "I want nothing." Then, half opening the lids, so as to show a slit of opalescent eyeball, he repeated, "I want nothing." Then he opened his eyes wide with a startling stare, said, "I want nothing," and went rustling away into the rapidly darkening garden.

"The Christian is more modest," muttered Father Brown; "he wants something."

"What on earth was he doing?" asked Flambeau, knitting his black brows and lowering his voice.

"I should like to talk to you later," said Father Brown.

The sunlight was still a reality, but it was the red light of evening, and the bulk of the garden trees and bushes grew blacker and blacker against it. They turned round the end of the conservatory, and walked in silence down the other side to get round to the front door. As they went they seemed to wake something, as one startles a bird, in the deeper corner between the study and the main building; and again they saw the white-robed fakir slide out of the shadow, and slip round towards the front door. To their surprise, however, he had not been alone. They found themselves abruptly pulled up and forced to banish their bewilderment by the appearance of Mrs. Quinton, with her heavy golden hair and square pale face, advancing on them out of the twilight. She looked a little stern, but was entirely courteous.

“Good evening, Dr. Harris,” was all she said.

“Good evening, Mrs. Quinton,” said the little doctor heartily. “I am just going to give your husband his sleeping draught.”

“Yes,” she said in a clear voice. “I think it is quite time.” And she smiled at them, and went sweeping into the house.

“That woman’s over-driven,” said Father Brown; “that’s the kind of woman that does her duty for twenty years, and then does something dreadful.”

The little doctor looked at him for the first time with an eye of interest. “Did you ever study medicine?” he asked.

“You have to know something of the mind as well as the body,” answered the priest; “we have to know something of the body as well as the mind.”

“Well,” said the doctor, “I think I’ll go and give Quinton his stuff.”

They had turned the corner of the front facade, and were approaching the front doorway. As they turned into it they saw the man in the white robe for the third time. He came so straight towards the front door that it seemed quite incredible that he had not just come out of the study opposite to it. Yet they knew that the study door was locked.

Father Brown and Flambeau, however, kept this weird contradiction to themselves, and Dr. Harris was not a man to waste his thoughts on the impossible. He permitted the omnipresent Asiatic to make his exit, and then stepped briskly into the hall. There he found a figure which he had already forgotten. The inane Atkinson was still hanging about, humming and poking things with his knobby cane. The doctor’s face had a spasm of disgust and decision, and he whispered rapidly to his companion: “I must lock the door again, or this rat will get in. But I shall be out again in two minutes.”

He rapidly unlocked the door and locked it again behind him, just balking a blundering charge from the young man in the billycock. The young man threw himself impatiently on a hall chair. Flambeau looked at a Persian illumination on the wall; Father Brown, who seemed in a sort of daze, dully eyed the door. In about four minutes the door was opened again.

Atkinson was quicker this time. He sprang forward, held the door open for an instant, and called out: “Oh, I say, Quinton, I want—”

From the other end of the study came the clear voice of Quinton, in something between a yawn and a yell of weary laughter.

“Oh, I know what you want. Take it, and leave me in peace. I’m writing a song about peacocks.”

Before the door closed half a sovereign came flying through the aperture; and Atkinson, stumbling forward, caught it with singular dexterity.

“So that’s settled,” said the doctor, and, locking the door savagely, he led the way out into the garden.

“Poor Leonard can get a little peace now,” he added to Father Brown; “he’s locked in all by himself for an hour or two.”

“Yes,” answered the priest; “and his voice sounded jolly enough when we left him.” Then he looked gravely round the garden, and saw the loose figure of Atkinson standing and jingling the half-sovereign in his pocket, and beyond, in the purple twilight, the figure of the Indian sitting bolt upright upon a bank of grass with his face turned towards the setting sun. Then he said abruptly: “Where is Mrs. Quinton!”

“She has gone up to her room,” said the doctor. “That is her shadow on the blind.”

Father Brown looked up, and frowningly scrutinised a dark outline at the gas-lit window.

“Yes,” he said, “that is her shadow,” and he walked a yard or two and threw himself upon a garden seat.

Flambeau sat down beside him; but the doctor was one of those energetic people who live naturally on their legs. He walked away, smoking, into the twilight, and the two friends were left together.

“My father,” said Flambeau in French, “what is the matter with you?”

Father Brown was silent and motionless for half a minute, then he said: “Superstition is irreligious, but there is something in the air of this place. I think it’s that Indian — at least, partly.”

He sank into silence, and watched the distant outline of the Indian, who still sat rigid as if in prayer. At first sight he seemed motionless, but as Father Brown watched him he saw that the man swayed ever so slightly with a rhythmic movement, just as the dark tree-tops swayed ever so slightly in the wind that was creeping up the dim garden paths and shuffling the fallen leaves a little.

The landscape was growing rapidly dark, as if for a storm, but they could still see all the figures in their various places. Atkinson was leaning against a tree with a listless face; Quinton's wife was still at her window; the doctor had gone strolling round the end of the conservatory; they could see his cigar like a will-o'-the-wisp; and the fakir still sat rigid and yet rocking, while the trees above him began to rock and almost to roar. Storm was certainly coming.

"When that Indian spoke to us," went on Brown in a conversational undertone, "I had a sort of vision, a vision of him and all his universe. Yet he only said the same thing three times. When first he said 'I want nothing,' it meant only that he was impenetrable, that Asia does not give itself away. Then he said again, 'I want nothing,' and I knew that he meant that he was sufficient to himself, like a cosmos, that he needed no God, neither admitted any sins. And when he said the third time, 'I want nothing,' he said it with blazing eyes. And I knew that he meant literally what he said; that nothing was his desire and his home; that he was weary for nothing as for wine; that annihilation, the mere destruction of everything or anything—"

Two drops of rain fell; and for some reason Flambeau started and looked up, as if they had stung him. And the same instant the doctor down by the end of the conservatory began running towards them, calling out something as he ran.

As he came among them like a bombshell the restless Atkinson happened to be taking a turn nearer to the house front; and the doctor clutched him by the collar in a convulsive grip. "Foul play!" he cried; "what have you been doing to him, you dog?"

The priest had sprung erect, and had the voice of steel of a soldier in command.

"No fighting," he cried coolly; "we are enough to hold anyone we want to. What is the matter, doctor?"

"Things are not right with Quinton," said the doctor, quite white. "I could just see him through the glass, and I don't like the way he's lying. It's not as I left him, anyhow."

"Let us go in to him," said Father Brown shortly. "You can leave Mr. Atkinson alone. I have had him in sight since we heard Quinton's voice."

"I will stop here and watch him," said Flambeau hurriedly. "You go in and see."

The doctor and the priest flew to the study door, unlocked it, and fell into the room. In doing so they nearly fell over the large mahogany table in the centre at which the poet usually wrote; for the place was lit only by a small fire kept for the invalid. In the middle of this table lay a single sheet of paper, evidently left there on purpose. The doctor snatched it up, glanced at it, handed it to Father Brown, and crying, “Good God, look at that!” plunged toward the glass room beyond, where the terrible tropic flowers still seemed to keep a crimson memory of the sunset.

Father Brown read the words three times before he put down the paper. The words were: “I die by my own hand; yet I die murdered!” They were in the quite inimitable, not to say illegible, handwriting of Leonard Quinton.

Then Father Brown, still keeping the paper in his hand, strode towards the conservatory, only to meet his medical friend coming back with a face of assurance and collapse. “He’s done it,” said Harris.

They went together through the gorgeous unnatural beauty of cactus and azalea and found Leonard Quinton, poet and romancer, with his head hanging downward off his ottoman and his red curls sweeping the ground. Into his left side was thrust the queer dagger that they had picked up in the garden, and his limp hand still rested on the hilt.

Outside the storm had come at one stride, like the night in Coleridge, and garden and glass roof were darkened with driving rain. Father Brown seemed to be studying the paper more than the corpse; he held it close to his eyes; and seemed trying to read it in the twilight. Then he held it up against the faint light, and, as he did so, lightning stared at them for an instant so white that the paper looked black against it.

Darkness full of thunder followed, and after the thunder Father Brown’s voice said out of the dark: “Doctor, this paper is the wrong shape.”

“What do you mean?” asked Doctor Harris, with a frowning stare.

“It isn’t square,” answered Brown. “It has a sort of edge snipped off at the corner. What does it mean?”

“How the deuce should I know?” growled the doctor. “Shall we move this poor chap, do you think? He’s quite dead.”

“No,” answered the priest; “we must leave him as he lies and send for the police.” But he was still scrutinising the paper.

As they went back through the study he stopped by the table and picked up a small pair of nail scissors. “Ah,” he said, with a sort of relief, “this is what he did it with. But yet—” And he knitted his brows.

“Oh, stop fooling with that scrap of paper,” said the doctor emphatically. “It was a fad of his. He had hundreds of them. He cut all his paper like that,” as he pointed to a stack of sermon paper still unused on another and smaller table. Father Brown went up to it and held up a sheet. It was the same irregular shape.

“Quite so,” he said. “And here I see the corners that were snipped off.” And to the indignation of his colleague he began to count them.

“That’s all right,” he said, with an apologetic smile. “Twenty-three sheets cut and twenty-two corners cut off them. And as I see you are impatient we will rejoin the others.”

“Who is to tell his wife?” asked Dr. Harris. “Will you go and tell her now, while I send a servant for the police?”

“As you will,” said Father Brown indifferently. And he went out to the hall door.

Here also he found a drama, though of a more grotesque sort. It showed nothing less than his big friend Flambeau in an attitude to which he had long been unaccustomed, while upon the pathway at the bottom of the steps was sprawling with his boots in the air the amiable Atkinson, his billycock hat and walking cane sent flying in opposite directions along the path. Atkinson had at length wearied of Flambeau’s almost paternal custody, and had endeavoured to knock him down, which was by no means a smooth game to play with the Roi des Apaches, even after that monarch’s abdication.

Flambeau was about to leap upon his enemy and secure him once more, when the priest patted him easily on the shoulder.

“Make it up with Mr. Atkinson, my friend,” he said. “Beg a mutual pardon and say ‘Good night.’ We need not detain him any longer.” Then, as Atkinson rose somewhat doubtfully and gathered his hat and stick and went towards the garden gate, Father Brown said in a more serious voice: “Where is that Indian?”

They all three (for the doctor had joined them) turned involuntarily towards the dim grassy bank amid the tossing trees purple with twilight, where they had last seen the brown man swaying in his strange prayers. The Indian was gone.

“Confound him,” cried the doctor, stamping furiously. “Now I know that it was that nigger that did it.”

“I thought you didn’t believe in magic,” said Father Brown quietly.

"No more I did," said the doctor, rolling his eyes. "I only know that I loathed that yellow devil when I thought he was a sham wizard. And I shall loathe him more if I come to think he was a real one."

"Well, his having escaped is nothing," said Flambeau. "For we could have proved nothing and done nothing against him. One hardly goes to the parish constable with a story of suicide imposed by witchcraft or auto-suggestion."

Meanwhile Father Brown had made his way into the house, and now went to break the news to the wife of the dead man.

When he came out again he looked a little pale and tragic, but what passed between them in that interview was never known, even when all was known.

Flambeau, who was talking quietly with the doctor, was surprised to see his friend reappear so soon at his elbow; but Brown took no notice, and merely drew the doctor apart. "You have sent for the police, haven't you?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Harris. "They ought to be here in ten minutes."

"Will you do me a favour?" said the priest quietly. "The truth is, I make a collection of these curious stories, which often contain, as in the case of our Hindoo friend, elements which can hardly be put into a police report. Now, I want you to write out a report of this case for my private use. Yours is a clever trade," he said, looking the doctor gravely and steadily in the face. "I sometimes think that you know some details of this matter which you have not thought fit to mention. Mine is a confidential trade like yours, and I will treat anything you write for me in strict confidence. But write the whole."

The doctor, who had been listening thoughtfully with his head a little on one side, looked the priest in the face for an instant, and said: "All right," and went into the study, closing the door behind him.

"Flambeau," said Father Brown, "there is a long seat there under the veranda, where we can smoke out of the rain. You are my only friend in the world, and I want to talk to you. Or, perhaps, be silent with you."

They established themselves comfortably in the veranda seat; Father Brown, against his common habit, accepted a good cigar and smoked it steadily in silence, while the rain shrieked and rattled on the roof of the veranda.

"My friend," he said at length, "this is a very queer case. A very queer case."

“I should think it was,” said Flambeau, with something like a shudder.

“You call it queer, and I call it queer,” said the other, “and yet we mean quite opposite things. The modern mind always mixes up two different ideas: mystery in the sense of what is marvellous, and mystery in the sense of what is complicated. That is half its difficulty about miracles. A miracle is startling; but it is simple. It is simple because it is a miracle. It is power coming directly from God (or the devil) instead of indirectly through nature or human wills. Now, you mean that this business is marvellous because it is miraculous, because it is witchcraft worked by a wicked Indian. Understand, I do not say that it was not spiritual or diabolic. Heaven and hell only know by what surrounding influences strange sins come into the lives of men. But for the present my point is this: If it was pure magic, as you think, then it is marvellous; but it is not mysterious — that is, it is not complicated. The quality of a miracle is mysterious, but its manner is simple. Now, the manner of this business has been the reverse of simple.”

The storm that had slackened for a little seemed to be swelling again, and there came heavy movements as of faint thunder. Father Brown let fall the ash of his cigar and went on:

“There has been in this incident,” he said, “a twisted, ugly, complex quality that does not belong to the straight bolts either of heaven or hell. As one knows the crooked track of a snail, I know the crooked track of a man.”

The white lightning opened its enormous eye in one wink, the sky shut up again, and the priest went on:

“Of all these crooked things, the crookedest was the shape of that piece of paper. It was crookeder than the dagger that killed him.”

“You mean the paper on which Quinton confessed his suicide,” said Flambeau.

“I mean the paper on which Quinton wrote, ‘I die by my own hand,’” answered Father Brown. “The shape of that paper, my friend, was the wrong shape; the wrong shape, if ever I have seen it in this wicked world.”

“It only had a corner snipped off,” said Flambeau, “and I understand that all Quinton’s paper was cut that way.”

“It was a very odd way,” said the other, “and a very bad way, to my taste and fancy. Look here, Flambeau, this Quinton — God receive his soul! — was perhaps a bit of a cur in some ways, but he really was an artist, with the pencil as well as the pen. His handwriting, though hard to read, was bold and beautiful. I can’t prove what I say; I can’t prove anything. But I tell you with the full force of conviction that he could never have cut that mean little piece off a sheet of paper. If he had wanted to cut down paper for some purpose of fitting in, or binding up, or what not, he would have made quite a different slash with the scissors. Do you remember the shape? It was a mean shape. It was a wrong shape. Like this. Don't you remember?"

And he waved his burning cigar before him in the darkness, making irregular squares so rapidly that Flambeau really seemed to see them as fiery hieroglyphics upon the darkness — hieroglyphics such as his friend had spoken of, which are undecipherable, yet can have no good meaning.

"But," said Flambeau, as the priest put his cigar in his mouth again and leaned back, staring at the roof, "suppose somebody else did use the scissors. Why should somebody else, cutting pieces off his sermon paper, make Quinton commit suicide?"

Father Brown was still leaning back and staring at the roof, but he took his cigar out of his mouth and said: "Quinton never did commit suicide."

Flambeau stared at him. "Why, confound it all," he cried, "then why did he confess to suicide?"

The priest leant forward again, settled his elbows on his knees, looked at the ground, and said, in a low, distinct voice: "He never did confess to suicide."

Flambeau laid his cigar down. "You mean," he said, "that the writing was forged?"

"No," said Father Brown. "Quinton wrote it all right."

"Well, there you are," said the aggravated Flambeau; "Quinton wrote, 'I die by my own hand,' with his own hand on a plain piece of paper."

"Of the wrong shape," said the priest calmly.

"Oh, the shape be damned!" cried Flambeau. "What has the shape to do with it?"

"There were twenty-three snipped papers," resumed Brown unmoved, "and only twenty-two pieces snipped off. Therefore one of the pieces had been destroyed, probably that from the written paper. Does that suggest anything to you?"

A light dawned on Flambeau's face, and he said: "There was something else written by Quinton, some other words. 'They will tell you I die by my own hand,' or 'Do not believe that—'"

"Hotter, as the children say," said his friend. "But the piece was hardly half an inch across; there was no room for one word, let alone five. Can you think of anything hardly bigger than a comma which the man with hell in his heart had to tear away as a testimony against him?”

“I can think of nothing,” said Flambeau at last.

“What about quotation marks?” said the priest, and flung his cigar far into the darkness like a shooting star.

All words had left the other man’s mouth, and Father Brown said, like one going back to fundamentals:

“Leonard Quinton was a romancer, and was writing an Oriental romance about wizardry and hypnotism. He—”

At this moment the door opened briskly behind them, and the doctor came out with his hat on. He put a long envelope into the priest’s hands.

“That’s the document you wanted,” he said, “and I must be getting home. Good night.”

“Good night,” said Father Brown, as the doctor walked briskly to the gate. He had left the front door open, so that a shaft of gaslight fell upon them. In the light of this Brown opened the envelope and read the following words:

> DEAR FATHER BROWN, — Vicisti Galilee. Otherwise, damn your eyes, which are very penetrating ones. Can it be possible that there is something in all that stuff of yours after all?
>
> I am a man who has ever since boyhood believed in Nature and in all natural functions and instincts, whether men called them moral or immoral. Long before I became a doctor, when I was a schoolboy keeping mice and spiders, I believed that to be a good animal is the best thing in the world. But just now I am shaken; I have believed in Nature; but it seems as if Nature could betray a man. Can there be anything in your bosh? I am really getting morbid.
>
> I loved Quinton’s wife. What was there wrong in that? Nature told me to, and it’s love that makes the world go round. I also thought quite sincerely that she would be happier with a clean animal like me than with that tormenting little lunatic. What was there wrong in that? I was only facing facts, like a man of science. She would have been happier.
>
> According to my own creed I was quite free to kill Quinton, which was the best thing for everybody, even himself. But as a healthy animal I had no notion of killing myself. I resolved,

therefore, that I would never do it until I saw a chance that would leave me scot free. I saw that chance this morning.

I have been three times, all told, into Quinton’s study today. The first time I went in he would talk about nothing but the weird tale, called “The Cure of a Saint,” which he was writing, which was all about how some Indian hermit made an English colonel kill himself by thinking about him. He showed me the last sheets, and even read me the last paragraph, which was something like this: “The conqueror of the Punjab, a mere yellow skeleton, but still gigantic, managed to lift himself on his elbow and gasp in his nephew’s ear: ‘I die by my own hand, yet I die murdered!’” It so happened by one chance out of a hundred, that those last words were written at the top of a new sheet of paper. I left the room, and went out into the garden intoxicated with a frightful opportunity.

We walked round the house; and two more things happened in my favour. You suspected an Indian, and you found a dagger which the Indian might most probably use. Taking the opportunity to stuff it in my pocket I went back to Quinton’s study, locked the door, and gave him his sleeping draught. He was against answering Atkinson at all, but I urged him to call out and quiet the fellow, because I wanted a clear proof that Quinton was alive when I left the room for the second time. Quinton lay down in the conservatory, and I came through the study. I am a quick man with my hands, and in a minute and a half I had done what I wanted to do. I had emptied all the first part of Quinton’s romance into the fireplace, where it burnt to ashes. Then I saw that the quotation marks wouldn’t do, so I snipped them off, and to make it seem likelier, snipped the whole quire to match. Then I came out with the knowledge that Quinton’s confession of suicide lay on the front table, while Quinton lay alive but asleep in the conservatory beyond.

The last act was a desperate one; you can guess it: I pretended to have seen Quinton dead and rushed to his room. I delayed you with the paper, and, being a quick man with my hands, killed Quinton while you were looking at his confession of suicide. He was half-asleep, being drugged, and I put his own hand on the

> knife and drove it into his body. The knife was of so queer a shape that no one but an operator could have calculated the angle that would reach his heart. I wonder if you noticed this.
>
> When I had done it, the extraordinary thing happened. Nature deserted me. I felt ill. I felt just as if I had done something wrong. I think my brain is breaking up; I feel some sort of desperate pleasure in thinking I have told the thing to somebody; that I shall not have to be alone with it if I marry and have children. What is the matter with me?... Madness... or can one have remorse, just as if one were in Byron’s poems! I cannot write any more.
>
> James Erskine Harris.

Father Brown carefully folded up the letter, and put it in his breast pocket just as there came a loud peal at the gate bell, and the wet waterproofs of several policemen gleamed in the road outside.

The Sins of Prince Saradine

When Flambeau took his month’s holiday from his office in Westminster he took it in a small sailing-boat, so small that it passed much of its time as a rowing-boat. He took it, moreover, in little rivers in the Eastern counties, rivers so small that the boat looked like a magic boat, sailing on land through meadows and cornfields. The vessel was just comfortable for two people; there was room only for necessities, and Flambeau had stocked it with such things as his special philosophy considered necessary. They reduced themselves, apparently, to four essentials: tins of salmon, if he should want to eat; loaded revolvers, if he should want to fight; a bottle of brandy, presumably in case he should faint; and a priest, presumably in case he should die. With this light luggage he crawled down the little Norfolk rivers, intending to reach the Broads at last, but meanwhile delighting in the overhanging gardens and meadows, the mirrored mansions or villages, lingering to fish in the pools and corners, and in some sense hugging the shore.

Like a true philosopher, Flambeau had no aim in his holiday; but, like a true philosopher, he had an excuse. He had a sort of half purpose, which he took just so seriously that its success would crown the holiday, but just so lightly that its failure would not spoil it. Years ago, when he had been a king of thieves and the most famous figure in Paris, he had often received wild communications of approval, denunciation, or even love; but one had, somehow, stuck in his memory. It consisted simply of a visiting-card, in an envelope with an English postmark. On the back of the card was written in French and in green ink: “If you ever retire and become respectable, come and see me. I want to meet you, for I have met all the other great men of my time. That trick of yours of getting one detective to arrest the other was the most splendid scene in French history.” On the front of the card was engraved in the formal fashion, “Prince Saradine, Reed House, Reed Island, Norfolk.”

He had not troubled much about the prince then, beyond ascertaining that he had been a brilliant and fashionable figure in southern Italy. In his youth, it was said, he had eloped with a married woman of high rank; the escapade was scarcely startling in his social world, but it had clung to men’s minds because of an additional tragedy: the alleged suicide of the insulted husband, who appeared to have flung himself over a precipice in Sicily. The prince then lived in Vienna for a time, but his more recent years seemed to have been passed in perpetual and restless travel. But when Flambeau, like the prince himself, had left European celebrity and settled in England, it occurred to him that he might pay a surprise visit to this eminent exile in the Norfolk Broads. Whether he should find the place he had no idea; and, indeed, it was sufficiently small and forgotten. But, as things fell out, he found it much sooner than he expected.

They had moored their boat one night under a bank veiled in high grasses and short pollarded trees. Sleep, after heavy sculling, had come to them early, and by a corresponding accident they awoke before it was light. To speak more strictly, they awoke before it was daylight; for a large lemon moon was only just setting in the forest of high grass above their heads, and the sky was of a vivid violet-blue, nocturnal but bright. Both men had simultaneously a reminiscence of childhood, of the elfin and adventurous time when tall weeds close over us like woods. Standing up thus against the large low moon, the daisies really seemed to be giant daisies, the dandelions to be giant dandelions. Somehow it reminded them of the dado of a nursery wall-paper. The drop of the river-bed sufficed to sink them under the roots of all shrubs and flowers and make them gaze upwards at the grass. “By Jove!” said Flambeau, “it’s like being in fairyland.”

Father Brown sat bolt upright in the boat and crossed himself. His movement was so abrupt that his friend asked him, with a mild stare, what was the matter.

“The people who wrote the mediaeval ballads,” answered the priest, “knew more about fairies than you do. It isn’t only nice things that happen in fairyland.”

“Oh, bosh!” said Flambeau. “Only nice things could happen under such an innocent moon. I am for pushing on now and seeing what does really come. We may die and rot before we ever see again such a moon or such a mood.”

“All right,” said Father Brown. “I never said it was always wrong to enter fairyland. I only said it was always dangerous.”

They pushed slowly up the brightening river; the glowing violet of the sky and the pale gold of the moon grew fainter and fainter, and faded into that vast colourless cosmos that precedes the colours of the dawn. When the first faint stripes of red and gold and grey split the horizon from end to end they were broken by the black bulk of a town or village which sat on the river just ahead of them. It was already an easy twilight, in which all things were visible, when they came under the hanging roofs and bridges of this riverside hamlet. The houses, with their long, low, stooping roofs, seemed to come down to drink at the river, like huge grey and red cattle. The broadening and whitening dawn had already turned to working daylight before they saw any living creature on the wharves and bridges of that silent town. Eventually they saw a very placid and prosperous man in his shirt sleeves, with a face as round as the recently sunken moon, and rays of red whisker around the low arc of it, who was leaning on a post above the sluggish tide. By an impulse not to be analysed, Flambeau rose to his full height in the swaying boat and shouted at the man to ask if he knew Reed Island or Reed House. The prosperous man's smile grew slightly more expansive, and he simply pointed up the river towards the next bend of it. Flambeau went ahead without further speech.

The boat took many such grassy corners and followed many such reedy and silent reaches of river; but before the search had become monotonous they had swung round a specially sharp angle and come into the silence of a sort of pool or lake, the sight of which instinctively arrested them. For in the middle of this wider piece of water, fringed on every side with rushes, lay a long, low islet, along which ran a long, low house or bungalow built of bamboo or some kind of tough tropic cane. The upstanding rods of bamboo which made the walls were pale yellow, the sloping rods that made the roof were of darker red or brown, otherwise the long house was a thing of repetition and monotony. The early morning breeze rustled the reeds round the island and sang in the strange ribbed house as in a giant pan-pipe.

"By George!" cried Flambeau; "here is the place, after all! Here is Reed Island, if ever there was one. Here is Reed House, if it is anywhere. I believe that fat man with whiskers was a fairy."

"Perhaps," remarked Father Brown impartially. "If he was, he was a bad fairy."

But even as he spoke the impetuous Flambeau had run his boat ashore in the rattling reeds, and they stood in the long, quaint islet beside the odd and silent house.

The house stood with its back, as it were, to the river and the only landing-stage; the main entrance was on the other side, and looked down the long island garden. The visitors approached it, therefore, by a small path running round nearly three sides of the house, close under the low eaves. Through three different windows on three different sides they looked in on the same long, well-lit room, panelled in light wood, with a large number of looking-glasses, and laid out as for an elegant lunch. The front door, when they came round to it at last, was flanked by two turquoise-blue flower pots. It was opened by a butler of the drearier type — long, lean, grey and listless — who murmured that Prince Saradine was from home at present, but was expected hourly; the house being kept ready for him and his guests. The exhibition of the card with the scrawl of green ink awoke a flicker of life in the parchment face of the depressed retainer, and it was with a certain shaky courtesy that he suggested that the strangers should remain. "His Highness may be here any minute," he said, "and would be distressed to have just missed any gentleman he had invited. We have orders always to keep a little cold lunch for him and his friends, and I am sure he would wish it to be offered."

Moved with curiosity to this minor adventure, Flambeau assented gracefully, and followed the old man, who ushered him ceremoniously into the long, lightly panelled room. There was nothing very notable about it, except the rather unusual alternation of many long, low windows with many long, low oblongs of looking-glass, which gave a singular air of lightness and unsubstantialness to the place. It was somehow like lunching out of doors. One or two pictures of a quiet kind hung in the corners, one a large grey photograph of a very young man in uniform, another a red chalk sketch of two long-haired boys. Asked by Flambeau whether the soldierly person was the prince, the butler answered shortly in the negative; it was the prince's younger brother, Captain Stephen Saradine, he said. And with that the old man seemed to dry up suddenly and lose all taste for conversation.

After lunch had tailed off with exquisite coffee and liqueurs, the guests were introduced to the garden, the library, and the housekeeper — a dark, handsome lady, of no little majesty, and rather like a plutonic Madonna. It appeared that she and the butler were the only survivors of the prince's original foreign menage the other servants now in the house being new and collected in Norfolk by the housekeeper. This latter lady went by the name of Mrs. Anthony, but she spoke with a slight Italian accent, and Flambeau did not doubt that Anthony was a Norfolk version of some more Latin name. Mr. Paul, the butler, also had a faintly foreign air, but he was in tongue and training English, as are many of the most polished men-servants of the cosmopolitan nobility.

Pretty and unique as it was, the place had about it a curious luminous sadness. Hours passed in it like days. The long, well-windowed rooms were full of daylight, but it seemed a dead daylight. And through all other incidental noises, the sound of talk, the clink of glasses, or the passing feet of servants, they could hear on all sides of the house the melancholy noise of the river.

“We have taken a wrong turning, and come to a wrong place,” said Father Brown, looking out of the window at the grey-green sedges and the silver flood. “Never mind; one can sometimes do good by being the right person in the wrong place.”

Father Brown, though commonly a silent, was an oddly sympathetic little man, and in those few but endless hours he unconsciously sank deeper into the secrets of Reed House than his professional friend. He had that knack of friendly silence which is so essential to gossip; and saying scarcely a word, he probably obtained from his new acquaintances all that in any case they would have told. The butler indeed was naturally uncommunicative. He betrayed a sullen and almost animal affection for his master; who, he said, had been very badly treated. The chief offender seemed to be his highness’s brother, whose name alone would lengthen the old man’s lantern jaws and pucker his parrot nose into a sneer. Captain Stephen was a ne’er-do-weel, apparently, and had drained his benevolent brother of hundreds and thousands; forced him to fly from fashionable life and live quietly in this retreat. That was all Paul, the butler, would say, and Paul was obviously a partisan.

The Italian housekeeper was somewhat more communicative, being, as Brown fancied, somewhat less content. Her tone about her master was faintly acid; though not without a certain awe. Flambeau and his friend were standing in the room of the looking-glasses examining the red sketch of the two boys, when the housekeeper swept in swiftly on some domestic errand. It was a peculiarity of this glittering, glass-panelled place that anyone entering was reflected in four or five mirrors at once; and Father Brown, without turning round, stopped in the middle of a sentence of family criticism. But Flambeau, who had his face close up to the picture, was already saying in a loud voice, “The brothers Saradine, I suppose. They both look innocent enough. It would be hard to say which is the good brother and which the bad.” Then, realising the lady’s presence, he turned the conversation with some triviality, and strolled out into the garden. But Father Brown still gazed steadily at the red crayon sketch; and Mrs. Anthony still gazed steadily at Father Brown.

She had large and tragic brown eyes, and her olive face glowed darkly with a curious and painful wonder — as of one doubtful of a stranger’s identity or purpose. Whether the little priest’s coat and creed touched some southern memories of confession, or whether she fancied he knew more than he did, she said to him in a low voice as to a fellow plotter, “He is right enough in one way, your friend. He says it would be hard to pick out the good and bad brothers. Oh, it would be hard, it would be mighty hard, to pick out the good one.”

“I don’t understand you,” said Father Brown, and began to move away.

The woman took a step nearer to him, with thunderous brows and a sort of savage stoop, like a bull lowering his horns.

“There isn’t a good one,” she hissed. “There was badness enough in the captain taking all that money, but I don’t think there was much goodness in the prince giving it. The captain’s not the only one with something against him.”

A light dawned on the cleric’s averted face, and his mouth formed silently the word “blackmail.” Even as he did so the woman turned an abrupt white face over her shoulder and almost fell. The door had opened soundlessly and the pale Paul stood like a ghost in the doorway. By the weird trick of the reflecting walls, it seemed as if five Pauls had entered by five doors simultaneously.

“His Highness,” he said, “has just arrived.”

In the same flash the figure of a man had passed outside the first window, crossing the sunlit pane like a lighted stage. An instant later he passed at the second window and the many mirrors repainted in successive frames the same eagle profile and marching figure. He was erect and alert, but his hair was white and his complexion of an odd ivory yellow. He had that short, curved Roman nose which generally goes with long, lean cheeks and chin, but these were partly masked by moustache and imperial. The moustache was much darker than the beard, giving an effect slightly theatrical, and he was dressed up to the same dashing part, having a white top hat, an orchid in his coat, a yellow waistcoat and yellow gloves which he flapped and swung as he walked. When he came round to the front door they heard the stiff Paul open it, and heard the new arrival say cheerfully, “Well, you see I have come.” The stiff Mr. Paul bowed and answered in his inaudible manner; for a few minutes their conversation could not be heard. Then the butler said, “Everything is at your disposal;” and the glove-flapping Prince Saradine came gaily into the room to greet them. They beheld once more that spectral scene — five princes entering a room with five doors.

The prince put the white hat and yellow gloves on the table and offered his hand quite cordially.

“Delighted to see you here, Mr. Flambeau,” he said. “Knowing you very well by reputation, if that’s not an indiscreet remark.”

“Not at all,” answered Flambeau, laughing. “I am not sensitive. Very few reputations are gained by unsullied virtue.”

The prince flashed a sharp look at him to see if the retort had any personal point; then he laughed also and offered chairs to everyone, including himself.

“Pleasant little place, this, I think,” he said with a detached air. “Not much to do, I fear; but the fishing is really good.”

The priest, who was staring at him with the grave stare of a baby, was haunted by some fancy that escaped definition. He looked at the grey, carefully curled hair, yellow white visage, and slim, somewhat foppish figure. These were not unnatural, though perhaps a shade prononcé, like the outfit of a figure behind the footlights. The nameless interest lay in something else, in the very framework of the face; Brown was tormented with a half memory of having seen it somewhere before. The man looked like some old friend of his dressed up. Then he suddenly remembered the mirrors, and put his fancy down to some psychological effect of that multiplication of human masks.

Prince Saradine distributed his social attentions between his guests with great gaiety and tact. Finding the detective of a sporting turn and eager to employ his holiday, he guided Flambeau and Flambeau’s boat down to the best fishing spot in the stream, and was back in his own canoe in twenty minutes to join Father Brown in the library and plunge equally politely into the priest’s more philosophic pleasures. He seemed to know a great deal both about the fishing and the books, though of these not the most edifying; he spoke five or six languages, though chiefly the slang of each. He had evidently lived in varied cities and very motley societies, for some of his cheerfullest stories were about gambling hells and opium dens, Australian bushrangers or Italian brigands. Father Brown knew that the once-celebrated Saradine had spent his last few years in almost ceaseless travel, but he had not guessed that the travels were so disreputable or so amusing.

Indeed, with all his dignity of a man of the world, Prince Saradine radiated to such sensitive observers as the priest, a certain atmosphere of the restless and even the unreliable. His face was fastidious, but his eye was wild; he had little nervous tricks, like a man shaken by drink or drugs, and he neither had, nor professed to have, his hand on the helm of household affairs. All these were left to the two old servants, especially to the butler, who was plainly the central pillar of the house. Mr. Paul, indeed, was not so much a butler as a sort of steward or, even, chamberlain; he dined privately, but with almost as much pomp as his master; he was feared by all the servants; and he consulted with the prince decorously, but somewhat unbendingly — rather as if he were the prince's solicitor. The sombre housekeeper was a mere shadow in comparison; indeed, she seemed to efface herself and wait only on the butler, and Brown heard no more of those volcanic whispers which had half told him of the younger brother who blackmailed the elder. Whether the prince was really being thus bled by the absent captain, he could not be certain, but there was something insecure and secretive about Saradine that made the tale by no means incredible.

When they went once more into the long hall with the windows and the mirrors, yellow evening was dropping over the waters and the willowy banks; and a bittern sounded in the distance like an elf upon his dwarfish drum. The same singular sentiment of some sad and evil fairyland crossed the priest's mind again like a little grey cloud. "I wish Flambeau were back," he muttered.

"Do you believe in doom?" asked the restless Prince Saradine suddenly.

"No," answered his guest. "I believe in Doomsday."

The prince turned from the window and stared at him in a singular manner, his face in shadow against the sunset. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that we here are on the wrong side of the tapestry," answered Father Brown. "The things that happen here do not seem to mean anything; they mean something somewhere else. Somewhere else retribution will come on the real offender. Here it often seems to fall on the wrong person."

The prince made an inexplicable noise like an animal; in his shadowed face the eyes were shining queerly. A new and shrewd thought exploded silently in the other's mind. Was there another meaning in Saradine's blend of brilliancy and abruptness? Was the prince — Was he perfectly sane? He was repeating, "The wrong person — the wrong person," many more times than was natural in a social exclamation.

Then Father Brown awoke tardily to a second truth. In the mirrors before him he could see the silent door standing open, and the silent Mr. Paul standing in it, with his usual pallid impassiveness.

"I thought it better to announce at once," he said, with the same stiff respectfulness as of an old family lawyer, "a boat rowed by six men has come to the landing-stage, and there's a gentleman sitting in the stern."

"A boat!" repeated the prince; "a gentleman?" and he rose to his feet.

There was a startled silence punctuated only by the odd noise of the bird in the sedge; and then, before anyone could speak again, a new face and figure passed in profile round the three sunlit windows, as the prince had passed an hour or two before. But except for the accident that both outlines were aquiline, they had little in common. Instead of the new white topper of Saradine, was a black one of antiquated or foreign shape; under it was a young and very solemn face, clean shaven, blue about its resolute chin, and carrying a faint suggestion of the young Napoleon. The association was assisted by something old and odd about the whole get-up, as of a man who had never troubled to change the fashions of his fathers. He had a shabby blue frock coat, a red, soldierly looking waistcoat, and a kind of coarse white trousers common among the early Victorians, but strangely incongruous today. From all this old clothes-shop his olive face stood out strangely young and monstrously sincere.

"The deuce!" said Prince Saradine, and clapping on his white hat he went to the front door himself, flinging it open on the sunset garden.

By that time the new-comer and his followers were drawn up on the lawn like a small stage army. The six boatmen had pulled the boat well up on shore, and were guarding it almost menacingly, holding their oars erect like spears. They were swarthy men, and some of them wore earrings. But one of them stood forward beside the olive-faced young man in the red waistcoat, and carried a large black case of unfamiliar form.

"Your name," said the young man, "is Saradine?"

Saradine assented rather negligently.

The new-comer had dull, dog-like brown eyes, as different as possible from the restless and glittering grey eyes of the prince. But once again Father Brown was tortured with a sense of having seen somewhere a replica of the face; and once again he remembered the repetitions of the glass-panelled room, and put down the coincidence to that. “Confound this crystal palace!” he muttered. “One sees everything too many times. It’s like a dream.”

“If you are Prince Saradine,” said the young man, “I may tell you that my name is Antonelli.”

“Antonelli,” repeated the prince languidly. “Somehow I remember the name.”

“Permit me to present myself,” said the young Italian.

With his left hand he politely took off his old-fashioned top-hat; with his right he caught Prince Saradine so ringing a crack across the face that the white top hat rolled down the steps and one of the blue flower-pots rocked upon its pedestal.

The prince, whatever he was, was evidently not a coward; he sprang at his enemy’s throat and almost bore him backwards to the grass. But his enemy extricated himself with a singularly inappropriate air of hurried politeness.

“That is all right,” he said, panting and in halting English. “I have insulted. I will give satisfaction. Marco, open the case.”

The man beside him with the earrings and the big black case proceeded to unlock it. He took out of it two long Italian rapiers, with splendid steel hilts and blades, which he planted point downwards in the lawn. The strange young man standing facing the entrance with his yellow and vindictive face, the two swords standing up in the turf like two crosses in a cemetery, and the line of the ranked towers behind, gave it all an odd appearance of being some barbaric court of justice. But everything else was unchanged, so sudden had been the interruption. The sunset gold still glowed on the lawn, and the bittern still boomed as announcing some small but dreadful destiny.

“Prince Saradine,” said the man called Antonelli, “when I was an infant in the cradle you killed my father and stole my mother; my father was the more fortunate. You did not kill him fairly, as I am going to kill you. You and my wicked mother took him driving to a lonely pass in Sicily, flung him down a cliff, and went on your way. I could imitate you if I chose, but imitating you is too vile. I have followed you all over the world, and you have always fled from me. But this is the end of the world — and of you. I have you now, and I give you the chance you never gave my father. Choose one of those swords."

Prince Saradine, with contracted brows, seemed to hesitate a moment, but his ears were still singing with the blow, and he sprang forward and snatched at one of the hilts. Father Brown had also sprung forward, striving to compose the dispute; but he soon found his personal presence made matters worse. Saradine was a French freemason and a fierce atheist, and a priest moved him by the law of contraries. And for the other man neither priest nor layman moved him at all. This young man with the Bonaparte face and the brown eyes was something far sterner than a puritan — a pagan. He was a simple slayer from the morning of the earth; a man of the stone age — a man of stone.

One hope remained, the summoning of the household; and Father Brown ran back into the house. He found, however, that all the under servants had been given a holiday ashore by the autocrat Paul, and that only the sombre Mrs. Anthony moved uneasily about the long rooms. But the moment she turned a ghastly face upon him, he resolved one of the riddles of the house of mirrors. The heavy brown eyes of Antonelli were the heavy brown eyes of Mrs. Anthony; and in a flash he saw half the story.

"Your son is outside," he said without wasting words; "either he or the prince will be killed. Where is Mr. Paul?"

"He is at the landing-stage," said the woman faintly. "He is — he is — signalling for help."

"Mrs. Anthony," said Father Brown seriously, "there is no time for nonsense. My friend has his boat down the river fishing. Your son's boat is guarded by your son's men. There is only this one canoe; what is Mr. Paul doing with it?"

"Santa Maria! I do not know," she said; and swooned all her length on the matted floor.

Father Brown lifted her to a sofa, flung a pot of water over her, shouted for help, and then rushed down to the landing-stage of the little island. But the canoe was already in mid-stream, and old Paul was pulling and pushing it up the river with an energy incredible at his years.

"I will save my master," he cried, his eyes blazing maniacally. "I will save him yet!"

Father Brown could do nothing but gaze after the boat as it struggled up-stream and pray that the old man might waken the little town in time.

"A duel is bad enough," he muttered, rubbing up his rough dust-coloured hair, "but there's something wrong about this duel, even as a duel. I feel it in my bones. But what can it be?"

As he stood staring at the water, a wavering mirror of sunset, he heard from the other end of the island garden a small but unmistakable sound — the cold concussion of steel. He turned his head. Away on the farthest cape or headland of the long islet, on a strip of turf beyond the last rank of roses, the duellists had already crossed swords. Evening above them was a dome of virgin gold, and, distant as they were, every detail was picked out. They had cast off their coats, but the yellow waistcoat and white hair of Saradine, the red waistcoat and white trousers of Antonelli, glittered in the level light like the colours of the dancing

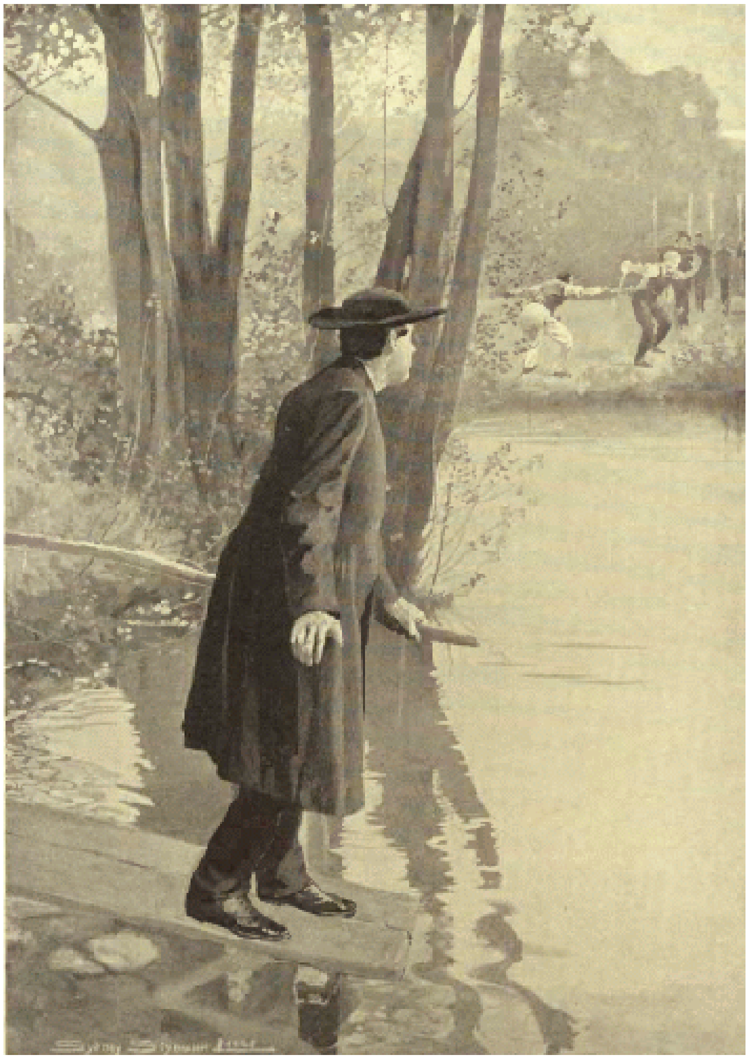

clockwork dolls. The two swords sparkled from point to pommel like two diamond pins. There was something frightful in the two figures appearing so little and so gay. They looked like two butterflies trying to pin each other to a cork.

Father Brown ran as hard as he could, his little legs going like a wheel. But when he came to the field of combat he found he was born too late and too early — too late to stop the strife, under the shadow of the grim Sicilians leaning on their oars, and too early to anticipate any disastrous issue of it. For the two men were singularly well matched, the prince using his skill with a sort of cynical confidence, the Sicilian using his with a murderous care. Few finer fencing matches can ever have been seen in crowded amphitheatres than that which tinkled and sparkled on that forgotten island in the reedy river. The dizzy fight was balanced so long that hope began to revive in the protesting priest; by all common probability Paul must soon come back with the police. It would be some comfort even if Flambeau came back from his fishing, for Flambeau, physically speaking, was worth four other men. But there was no sign of Flambeau, and, what was much queerer, no sign of Paul or the police. No other raft or stick was left to float on; in that lost island in that vast nameless pool, they were cut off as on a rock in the Pacific.

Almost as he had the thought the ringing of the rapiers quickened to a rattle, the prince's arms flew up, and the point shot out behind between his shoulder-blades. He went over with a great whirling movement, almost like one throwing the half of a boy's cart-wheel. The sword flew from his hand like a shooting star, and dived into the distant river. And he himself sank with so earth-shaking a subsidence that he broke a big rose-tree with his body and shook up into the sky a cloud of red earth — like the smoke of some heathen sacrifice. The Sicilian had made blood-offering to the ghost of his father.

The priest was instantly on his knees by the corpse; but only to make too sure that it was a corpse. As he was still trying some last hopeless tests he heard for the first time voices from farther up the river, and saw a police boat shoot up to the landing-stage, with constables and other important people, including the excited Paul. The little priest rose with a distinctly dubious grimace.

"Now, why on earth," he muttered, "why on earth couldn't he have come before?"

Some seven minutes later the island was occupied by an invasion of townsfolk and police, and the latter had put their hands on the victorious duellist, ritually reminding him that anything he said might be used against him.

"I shall not say anything," said the monomaniac, with a wonderful and peaceful face. "I shall never say anything more. I am very happy, and I only want to be hanged."

Then he shut his mouth as they led him away, and it is the strange but certain truth that he never opened it again in this world, except to say "Guilty" at his trial.

Father Brown had stared at the suddenly crowded garden, the arrest of the man of blood, the carrying away of the corpse after its examination by the doctor, rather as one watches the break-up of some ugly dream; he was motionless, like a man in a nightmare. He gave his name and address as a witness, but declined their offer of a boat to the shore, and remained alone in the island garden, gazing at the broken rose bush and the whole green theatre of that swift and inexplicable tragedy. The light died along the river; mist rose in the marshy banks; a few belated birds flitted fitfully across.

Stuck stubbornly in his sub-consciousness (which was an unusually lively one) was an unspeakable certainty that there was something still unexplained. This sense that had clung to him all day could not be fully explained by his fancy about "looking-glass land." Somehow he had not seen the real story, but some game or masque. And yet people do not get hanged or run through the body for the sake of a charade.

As he sat on the steps of the landing-stage ruminating he grew conscious of the tall, dark streak of a sail coming silently down the shining river, and sprang to his feet with such a backrush of feeling that he almost wept.

"Flambeau!" he cried, and shook his friend by both hands again and again, much to the astonishment of that sportsman, as he came on shore with his fishing tackle. "Flambeau," he said, "so you're not killed?"

"Killed!" repeated the angler in great astonishment. "And why should I be killed?"

"Oh, because nearly everybody else is," said his companion rather wildly. "Saradine got murdered, and Antonelli wants to be hanged, and his mother's fainted, and I, for one, don't know whether I'm in this world or the next. But, thank God, you're in the same one." And he took the bewildered Flambeau's arm.

As they turned from the landing-stage they came under the eaves of the low bamboo house, and looked in through one of the windows, as they had done on their first arrival. They beheld a lamp-lit interior well calculated to arrest their eyes. The table in the long dining-room had been laid for dinner when Saradine's destroyer had fallen like a stormbolt on the island. And the dinner was now in placid progress, for Mrs. Anthony sat somewhat sullenly at the foot of the table, while at the head of it was Mr. Paul, the major domo, eating and drinking of the best, his bleared, bluish eyes standing queerly out of his face, his gaunt countenance inscrutable, but by no means devoid of satisfaction.

With a gesture of powerful impatience, Flambeau rattled at the window, wrenched it open, and put an indignant head into the lamp-lit room.

"Well," he cried. "I can understand you may need some refreshment, but really to steal your master's dinner while he lies murdered in the garden—"

"I have stolen a great many things in a long and pleasant life," replied the strange old gentleman placidly; "this dinner is one of the few things I have not stolen. This dinner and this house and garden happen to belong to me."

A thought flashed across Flambeau's face. "You mean to say," he began, "that the will of Prince Saradine—"

"I am Prince Saradine," said the old man, munching a salted almond.

Father Brown, who was looking at the birds outside, jumped as if he were shot, and put in at the window a pale face like a turnip.

"You are what?" he repeated in a shrill voice.

"Paul, Prince Saradine, A vos ordres," said the venerable person politely, lifting a glass of sherry. "I live here very quietly, being a domestic kind of fellow; and for the sake of modesty I am called Mr. Paul, to distinguish me from my unfortunate brother Mr. Stephen. He died, I hear, recently — in the garden. Of course, it is not my fault if enemies pursue him to this place. It is owing to the regrettable irregularity of his life. He was not a domestic character."

He relapsed into silence, and continued to gaze at the opposite wall just above the bowed and sombre head of the woman. They saw plainly the family likeness that had haunted them in the dead man. Then his old shoulders began to heave and shake a little, as if he were choking, but his face did not alter.

"My God!" cried Flambeau after a pause, "he's laughing!"

“Come away,” said Father Brown, who was quite white. “Come away from this house of hell. Let us get into an honest boat again.”

Night had sunk on rushes and river by the time they had pushed off from the island, and they went down-stream in the dark, warming themselves with two big cigars that glowed like crimson ships’ lanterns. Father Brown took his cigar out of his mouth and said:

“I suppose you can guess the whole story now? After all, it’s a primitive story. A man had two enemies. He was a wise man. And so he discovered that two enemies are better than one.”

“I do not follow that,” answered Flambeau.

“Oh, it’s really simple,” rejoined his friend. “Simple, though anything but innocent. Both the Saradines were scamps, but the prince, the elder, was the sort of scamp that gets to the top, and the younger, the captain, was the sort that sinks to the bottom. This squalid officer fell from beggar to blackmailer, and one ugly day he got his hold upon his brother, the prince. Obviously it was for no light matter, for Prince Paul Saradine was frankly ‘fast,’ and had no reputation to lose as to the mere sins of society. In plain fact, it was a hanging matter, and Stephen literally had a rope round his brother’s neck. He had somehow discovered the truth about the Sicilian affair, and could prove that Paul murdered old Antonelli in the mountains. The captain raked in the hush money heavily for ten years, until even the prince’s splendid fortune began to look a little foolish.

“But Prince Saradine bore another burden besides his blood-sucking brother. He knew that the son of Antonelli, a mere child at the time of the murder, had been trained in savage Sicilian loyalty, and lived only to avenge his father, not with the gibbet (for he lacked Stephen’s legal proof), but with the old weapons of vendetta. The boy had practised arms with a deadly perfection, and about the time that he was old enough to use them Prince Saradine began, as the society papers said, to travel. The fact is that he began to flee for his life, passing from place to place like a hunted criminal; but with one relentless man upon his trail. That was Prince Paul’s position, and by no means a pretty one. The more money he spent on eluding Antonelli the less he had to silence Stephen. The more he gave to silence Stephen the less chance there was of finally escaping Antonelli. Then it was that he showed himself a great man — a genius like Napoleon.

“Instead of resisting his two antagonists, he surrendered suddenly to both of them. He gave way like a Japanese wrestler, and his foes fell prostrate before him. He gave up the race round the world, and he gave up his address to young Antonelli; then he gave up everything to his brother. He sent Stephen money enough for smart clothes and easy travel, with a letter saying roughly: ‘This is all I have left. You have cleaned me out. I still have a little house in Norfolk, with servants and a cellar, and if you want more from me you must take that. Come and take possession if you like, and I will live there quietly as your friend or agent or anything.’ He knew that the Sicilian had never seen the Saradine brothers save, perhaps, in pictures; he knew they were somewhat alike, both having grey, pointed beards. Then he shaved his own face and waited. The trap worked. The unhappy captain, in his new clothes, entered the house in triumph as a prince, and walked upon the Sicilian’s sword.

“There was one hitch, and it is to the honour of human nature. Evil spirits like Saradine often blunder by never expecting the virtues of mankind. He took it for granted that the Italian’s blow, when it came, would be dark, violent and nameless, like the blow it avenged; that the victim would be knifed at night, or shot from behind a hedge, and so die without speech. It was a bad minute for Prince Paul when Antonelli’s chivalry proposed a formal duel, with all its possible explanations. It was then that I found him putting off in his boat with wild eyes. He was fleeing, bareheaded, in an open boat before Antonelli should learn who he was.

“But, however agitated, he was not hopeless. He knew the adventurer and he knew the fanatic. It was quite probable that Stephen, the adventurer, would hold his tongue, through his mere histrionic pleasure in playing a part, his lust for clinging to his new cosy quarters, his rascal’s trust in luck, and his fine fencing. It was certain that Antonelli, the fanatic, would hold his tongue, and be hanged without telling tales of his family. Paul hung about on the river till he knew the fight was over. Then he roused the town, brought the police, saw his two vanquished enemies taken away forever, and sat down smiling to his dinner.”

“Laughing, God help us!” said Flambeau with a strong shudder. “Do they get such ideas from Satan?”

“He got that idea from you,” answered the priest.

“God forbid!” ejaculated Flambeau. “From me! What do you mean!”

The priest pulled a visiting-card from his pocket and held it up in the faint glow of his cigar; it was scrawled with green ink.

“Don’t you remember his original invitation to you?” he asked, “and the compliment to your criminal exploit? ‘That trick of yours,’ he says, ‘of getting one detective to arrest the other’? He has just copied your trick. With an enemy on each side of him, he slipped swiftly out of the way and let them collide and kill each other.”

Flambeau tore Prince Saradine’s card from the priest’s hands and rent it savagely in small pieces.

“There’s the last of that old skull and crossbones,” he said as he scattered the pieces upon the dark and disappearing waves of the stream; “but I should think it would poison the fishes.”

The last gleam of white card and green ink was drowned and darkened; a faint and vibrant colour as of morning changed the sky, and the moon behind the grasses grew paler. They drifted in silence.

“Father,” said Flambeau suddenly, “do you think it was all a dream?”

The priest shook his head, whether in dissent or agnosticism, but remained mute. A smell of hawthorn and of orchards came to them through the darkness, telling them that a wind was awake; the next moment it swayed their little boat and swelled their sail, and carried them onward down the winding river to happier places and the homes of harmless men.

The Hammer of God

The little village of Bohun Beacon was perched on a hill so steep that the tall spire of its church seemed only like the peak of a small mountain. At the foot of the church stood a smithy, generally red with fires and always littered with hammers and scraps of iron; opposite to this, over a rude cross of cobbled paths, was “The Blue Boar,” the only inn of the place. It was upon this crossway, in the lifting of a leaden and silver daybreak, that two brothers met in the street and spoke; though one was beginning the day and the other finishing it. The Rev. and Hon. Wilfred Bohun was very devout, and was making his way to some austere exercises of prayer or contemplation at dawn. Colonel the Hon. Norman Bohun, his elder brother, was by no means devout, and was sitting in evening dress on the bench outside “The Blue Boar,” drinking what the philosophic observer was free to regard either as his last glass on Tuesday or his first on Wednesday. The colonel was not particular.

The Bohuns were one of the very few aristocratic families really dating from the Middle Ages, and their pennon had actually seen Palestine. But it is a great mistake to suppose that such houses stand high in chivalric tradition. Few except the poor preserve traditions. Aristocrats live not in traditions but in fashions. The Bohuns had been Mohocks under Queen Anne and Mashers under Queen Victoria. But like more than one of the really ancient houses, they had rotted in the last two centuries into mere drunkards and dandy degenerates, till there had even come a whisper of insanity. Certainly there was something hardly human about the colonel’s wolfish pursuit of pleasure, and his chronic resolution not to go home till morning had a touch of the hideous clarity of insomnia. He was a tall, fine animal, elderly, but with hair still startlingly yellow. He would have looked merely blonde and leonine, but his blue eyes were sunk so deep in his face that they looked black. They were a little too close together. He had very long yellow moustaches; on each side of them a fold or furrow from nostril to jaw, so that a sneer seemed cut into his face. Over his evening clothes he wore a curious pale yellow coat that looked more like a very light dressing gown than an overcoat, and on the back of his head was stuck an extraordinary broad-brimmed hat of a bright green colour, evidently some oriental curiosity caught up at random. He was proud of appearing in such incongruous attires — proud of the fact that he always made them look congruous.

His brother the curate had also the yellow hair and the elegance, but he was buttoned up to the chin in black, and his face was clean-shaven, cultivated, and a little nervous. He seemed to live for nothing but his religion; but there were some who said (notably the blacksmith, who was a Presbyterian) that it was a love of Gothic architecture rather than of God, and that his haunting of the church like a ghost was only another and purer turn of the almost morbid thirst for beauty which sent his brother raging after women and wine. This charge was doubtful, while the man's practical piety was indubitable. Indeed, the charge was mostly an ignorant misunderstanding of the love of solitude and secret prayer, and was founded on his being often found kneeling, not before the altar, but in peculiar places, in the crypts or gallery, or even in the belfry. He was at the moment about to enter the church through the yard of the smithy, but stopped and frowned a little as he saw his brother's cavernous eyes staring in the same direction. On the hypothesis that the colonel was interested in the church he did not waste any speculations. There only remained the blacksmith's shop, and though the blacksmith was a Puritan and none of his people, Wilfred Bohun had heard some scandals about a beautiful and rather celebrated wife. He flung a suspicious look across the shed, and the colonel stood up laughing to speak to him.

"Good morning, Wilfred," he said. "Like a good landlord I am watching sleeplessly over my people. I am going to call on the blacksmith."

Wilfred looked at the ground, and said: "The blacksmith is out. He is over at Greenford."

"I know," answered the other with silent laughter; "that is why I am calling on him."

"Norman," said the cleric, with his eye on a pebble in the road, "are you ever afraid of thunderbolts?"

"What do you mean?" asked the colonel. "Is your hobby meteorology?"

"I mean," said Wilfred, without looking up, "do you ever think that God might strike you in the street?"

"I beg your pardon," said the colonel; "I see your hobby is folk-lore."

"I know your hobby is blasphemy," retorted the religious man, stung in the one live place of his nature. "But if you do not fear God, you have good reason to fear man."

The elder raised his eyebrows politely. “Fear man?” he said.

“Barnes the blacksmith is the biggest and strongest man for forty miles round,” said the clergyman sternly. “I know you are no coward or weakling, but he could throw you over the wall.”

This struck home, being true, and the lowering line by mouth and nostril darkened and deepened. For a moment he stood with the heavy sneer on his face. But in an instant Colonel Bohun had recovered his own cruel good humour and laughed, showing two dog-like front teeth under his yellow moustache. “In that case, my dear Wilfred,” he said quite carelessly, “it was wise for the last of the Bohuns to come out partially in armour.”

And he took off the queer round hat covered with green, showing that it was lined within with steel. Wilfred recognised it indeed as a light Japanese or Chinese helmet torn down from a trophy that hung in the old family hall.

“It was the first hat to hand,” explained his brother airily; “always the nearest hat — and the nearest woman.”

“The blacksmith is away at Greenford,” said Wilfred quietly; “the time of his return is unsettled.”

And with that he turned and went into the church with bowed head, crossing himself like one who wishes to be quit of an unclean spirit. He was anxious to forget such grossness in the cool twilight of his tall Gothic cloisters; but on that morning it was fated that his still round of religious exercises should be everywhere arrested by small shocks. As he entered the church, hitherto always empty at that hour, a kneeling figure rose hastily to its feet and came towards the full daylight of the doorway. When the curate saw it he stood still with surprise. For the early worshipper was none other than the village idiot, a nephew of the blacksmith, one who neither would nor could care for the church or for anything else. He was always called “Mad Joe,” and seemed to have no other name; he was a dark, strong, slouching lad, with a heavy white face, dark straight hair, and a mouth always open. As he passed the priest, his moon-calf countenance gave no hint of what he had been doing or thinking of. He had never been known to pray before. What sort of prayers was he saying now? Extraordinary prayers surely.

Wilfred Bohun stood rooted to the spot long enough to see the idiot go out into the sunshine, and even to see his dissolute brother hail him with a sort of avuncular jocularity. The last thing he saw was the colonel throwing pennies at the open mouth of Joe, with the serious appearance of trying to hit it.

This ugly sunlit picture of the stupidity and cruelty of the earth sent the ascetic finally to his prayers for purification and new thoughts. He went up to a pew in the gallery, which brought him under a coloured window which he loved and always quieted his spirit; a blue window with an angel carrying lilies. There he began to think less about the half-wit, with his livid face and mouth like a fish. He began to think less of his evil brother, pacing like a lean lion in his horrible hunger. He sank deeper and deeper into those cold and sweet colours of silver blossoms and sapphire sky.

In this place half an hour afterwards he was found by Gibbs, the village cobbler, who had been sent for him in some haste. He got to his feet with promptitude, for he knew that no small matter would have brought Gibbs into such a place at all. The cobbler was, as in many villages, an atheist, and his appearance in church was a shade more extraordinary than Mad Joe's. It was a morning of theological enigmas.

"What is it?" asked Wilfred Bohun rather stiffly, but putting out a trembling hand for his hat.

The atheist spoke in a tone that, coming from him, was quite startlingly respectful, and even, as it were, huskily sympathetic.

"You must excuse me, sir," he said in a hoarse whisper, "but we didn't think it right not to let you know at once. I'm afraid a rather dreadful thing has happened, sir. I'm afraid your brother—"

Wilfred clenched his frail hands. "What devilry has he done now?" he cried in voluntary passion.

"Why, sir," said the cobbler, coughing, "I'm afraid he's done nothing, and won't do anything. I'm afraid he's done for. You had really better come down, sir."

The curate followed the cobbler down a short winding stair which brought them out at an entrance rather higher than the street. Bohun saw the tragedy in one glance, flat underneath him like a plan. In the yard of the smithy were standing five or six men mostly in black, one in an inspector's uniform. They included the doctor, the Presbyterian minister, and the priest from the Roman Catholic chapel, to which the blacksmith's wife belonged. The latter was speaking to her, indeed, very rapidly, in an undertone, as she, a magnificent woman with red-gold hair, was sobbing blindly on a bench. Between these two groups, and just clear of the main heap of hammers, lay a man in evening dress, spread-eagled and flat on his face. From the height above Wilfred could have sworn to every item of his costume and appearance, down to the Bohun rings upon his fingers; but the skull was only a hideous splash, like a star of blackness and blood.

Wilfred Bohun gave but one glance, and ran down the steps into the yard. The doctor, who was the family physician, saluted him, but he scarcely took any notice. He could only stammer out: “My brother is dead. What does it mean? What is this horrible mystery?” There was an unhappy silence; and then the cobbler, the most outspoken man present, answered: “Plenty of horror, sir,” he said; “but not much mystery.”

“What do you mean?” asked Wilfred, with a white face.

“It’s plain enough,” answered Gibbs. “There is only one man for forty miles round that could have struck such a blow as that, and he’s the man that had most reason to.”

“We must not prejudge anything,” put in the doctor, a tall, black-bearded man, rather nervously; “but it is competent for me to corroborate what Mr. Gibbs says about the nature of the blow, sir; it is an incredible blow. Mr. Gibbs says that only one man in this district could have done it. I should have said myself that nobody could have done it.”

A shudder of superstition went through the slight figure of the curate. “I can hardly understand,” he said.

“Mr. Bohun,” said the doctor in a low voice, “metaphors literally fail me. It is inadequate to say that the skull was smashed to bits like an eggshell. Fragments of bone were driven into the body and the ground like bullets into a mud wall. It was the hand of a giant.”

He was silent a moment, looking grimly through his glasses; then he added: “The thing has one advantage — that it clears most people of suspicion at one stroke. If you or I or any normally made man in the country were accused of this crime, we should be acquitted as an infant would be acquitted of stealing the Nelson column.”

“That’s what I say,” repeated the cobbler obstinately; “there’s only one man that could have done it, and he’s the man that would have done it. Where’s Simeon Barnes, the blacksmith?”

“He’s over at Greenford,” faltered the curate.

“More likely over in France,” muttered the cobbler.

“No; he is in neither of those places,” said a small and colourless voice, which came from the little Roman priest who had joined the group. “As a matter of fact, he is coming up the road at this moment."

The little priest was not an interesting man to look at, having stubbly brown hair and a round and stolid face. But if he had been as splendid as Apollo no one would have looked at him at that moment. Everyone turned round and peered at the pathway which wound across the plain below, along which was indeed walking, at his own huge stride and with a hammer on his shoulder, Simeon the smith. He was a bony and gigantic man, with deep, dark, sinister eyes and a dark chin beard. He was walking and talking quietly with two other men; and though he was never specially cheerful, he seemed quite at his ease.

"My God!" cried the atheistic cobbler, "and there's the hammer he did it with."

"No," said the inspector, a sensible-looking man with a sandy moustache, speaking for the first time. "There's the hammer he did it with over there by the church wall. We have left it and the body exactly as they are."

All glanced round and the short priest went across and looked down in silence at the tool where it lay. It was one of the smallest and the lightest of the hammers, and would not have caught the eye among the rest; but on the iron edge of it were blood and yellow hair.

After a silence the short priest spoke without looking up, and there was a new note in his dull voice. "Mr. Gibbs was hardly right," he said, "in saying that there is no mystery. There is at least the mystery of why so big a man should attempt so big a blow with so little a hammer."

"Oh, never mind that," cried Gibbs, in a fever. "What are we to do with Simeon Barnes?"

"Leave him alone," said the priest quietly. "He is coming here of himself. I know those two men with him. They are very good fellows from Greenford, and they have come over about the Presbyterian chapel."

Even as he spoke the tall smith swung round the corner of the church, and strode into his own yard. Then he stood there quite still, and the hammer fell from his hand. The inspector, who had preserved impenetrable propriety, immediately went up to him.

"I won't ask you, Mr. Barnes," he said, "whether you know anything about what has happened here. You are not bound to say. I hope you don't know, and that you will be able to prove it. But I must go through the form of arresting you in the King’s name for the murder of Colonel Norman Bohun.”

“You are not bound to say anything,” said the cobbler in officious excitement. “They’ve got to prove everything. They haven’t proved yet that it is Colonel Bohun, with the head all smashed up like that.”

“That won’t wash,” said the doctor aside to the priest. “That’s out of the detective stories. I was the colonel’s medical man, and I knew his body better than he did. He had very fine hands, but quite peculiar ones. The second and third fingers were the same length. Oh, that’s the colonel right enough.”

As he glanced at the brained corpse upon the ground the iron eyes of the motionless blacksmith followed them and rested there also.

“Is Colonel Bohun dead?” said the smith quite calmly. “Then he’s damned.”

“Don’t say anything! Oh, don’t say anything,” cried the atheist cobbler, dancing about in an ecstasy of admiration of the English legal system. For no man is such a legalist as the good Secularist.

The blacksmith turned on him over his shoulder the august face of a fanatic.

“It’s well for you infidels to dodge like foxes because the world’s law favours you,” he said; “but God guards His own in His pocket, as you shall see this day.”

Then he pointed to the colonel and said: “When did this dog die in his sins?”

“Moderate your language,” said the doctor.

“Moderate the Bible’s language, and I’ll moderate mine. When did he die?”

“I saw him alive at six o’clock this morning,” stammered Wilfred Bohun.

“God is good,” said the smith. “Mr. Inspector, I have not the slightest objection to being arrested. It is you who may object to arresting me. I don’t mind leaving the court without a stain on my character. You do mind perhaps leaving the court with a bad set-back in your career.”

The solid inspector for the first time looked at the blacksmith with a lively eye; as did everybody else, except the short, strange priest, who was still looking down at the little hammer that had dealt the dreadful blow.

“There are two men standing outside this shop,” went on the blacksmith with ponderous lucidity, “good tradesmen in Greenford whom you all know, who will swear that they saw me from before midnight till daybreak and long after in the committee room of our Revival Mission, which sits all night, we save souls so fast. In Greenford itself twenty people could swear to me for all that time. If I were a heathen, Mr. Inspector, I would let you walk on to your downfall. But as a Christian man I feel bound to give you your chance, and ask you whether you will hear my alibi now or in court.”

The inspector seemed for the first time disturbed, and said, “Of course I should be glad to clear you altogether now.”

The smith walked out of his yard with the same long and easy stride, and returned to his two friends from Greenford, who were indeed friends of nearly everyone present. Each of them said a few words which no one ever thought of disbelieving. When they had spoken, the innocence of Simeon stood up as solid as the great church above them.

One of those silences struck the group which are more strange and insufferable than any speech. Madly, in order to make conversation, the curate said to the Catholic priest:

“You seem very much interested in that hammer, Father Brown.”

“Yes, I am,” said Father Brown; “why is it such a small hammer?”

The doctor swung round on him.

“By George, that’s true,” he cried; “who would use a little hammer with ten larger hammers lying about?”

Then he lowered his voice in the curate’s ear and said: “Only the kind of person that can’t lift a large hammer. It is not a question of force or courage between the sexes. It’s a question of lifting power in the shoulders. A bold woman could commit ten murders with a light hammer and never turn a hair. She could not kill a beetle with a heavy one.”

Wilfred Bohun was staring at him with a sort of hypnotised horror, while Father Brown listened with his head a little on one side, really interested and attentive. The doctor went on with more hissing emphasis:

“Why do these idiots always assume that the only person who hates the wife’s lover is the wife’s husband? Nine times out of ten the person who most hates the wife’s lover is the wife. Who knows what insolence or treachery he had shown her — look there!”

He made a momentary gesture towards the red-haired woman on the bench. She had lifted her head at last and the tears were drying on her splendid face. But the eyes were fixed on the corpse with an electric glare that had in it something of idiocy.

The Rev. Wilfred Bohun made a limp gesture as if waving away all desire to know; but Father Brown, dusting off his sleeve some ashes blown from the furnace, spoke in his indifferent way.

“You are like so many doctors,” he said; “your mental science is really suggestive. It is your physical science that is utterly impossible. I agree that the woman wants to kill the co-respondent much more than the petitioner does. And I agree that a woman will always pick up a small hammer instead of a big one. But the difficulty is one of physical impossibility. No woman ever born could have smashed a man’s skull out flat like that.” Then he added reflectively, after a pause: “These people haven’t grasped the whole of it. The man was actually wearing an iron helmet, and the blow scattered it like broken glass. Look at that woman. Look at her arms.”

Silence held them all up again, and then the doctor said rather sulkily: “Well, I may be wrong; there are objections to everything. But I stick to the main point. No man but an idiot would pick up that little hammer if he could use a big hammer.”

With that the lean and quivering hands of Wilfred Bohun went up to his head and seemed to clutch his scanty yellow hair. After an instant they dropped, and he cried: “That was the word I wanted; you have said the word.”

Then he continued, mastering his discomposure: “The words you said were, ‘No man but an idiot would pick up the small hammer.’”

“Yes,” said the doctor. “Well?”

“Well,” said the curate, “no man but an idiot did.” The rest stared at him with eyes arrested and riveted, and he went on in a febrile and feminine agitation.

“I am a priest,” he cried unsteadily, “and a priest should be no shedder of blood. I — I mean that he should bring no one to the gallows. And I thank God that I see the criminal clearly now — because he is a criminal who cannot be brought to the gallows.”

“You will not denounce him?” inquired the doctor.

“He would not be hanged if I did denounce him,” answered Wilfred with a wild but curiously happy smile. “When I went into the church this morning I found a madman praying there — that poor Joe, who has been wrong all his life. God knows what he prayed; but with such strange folk it is not incredible to suppose that their prayers are all upside down. Very likely a lunatic would pray before killing a man. When I last saw poor Joe he was with my brother. My brother was mocking him.”

“By Jove!” cried the doctor, “this is talking at last. But how do you explain—”

The Rev. Wilfred was almost trembling with the excitement of his own glimpse of the truth. “Don’t you see; don’t you see,” he cried feverishly; “that is the only theory that covers both the queer things, that answers both the riddles. The two riddles are the little hammer and the big blow. The smith might have struck the big blow, but would not have chosen the little hammer. His wife would have chosen the little hammer, but she could not have struck the big blow. But the madman might have done both. As for the little hammer — why, he was mad and might have picked up anything. And for the big blow, have you never heard, doctor, that a maniac in his paroxysm may have the strength of ten men?”

The doctor drew a deep breath and then said, “By golly, I believe you’ve got it.”

Father Brown had fixed his eyes on the speaker so long and steadily as to prove that his large grey, ox-like eyes were not quite so insignificant as the rest of his face. When silence had fallen he said with marked respect: “Mr. Bohun, yours is the only theory yet propounded which holds water every way and is essentially unassailable. I think, therefore, that you deserve to be told, on my positive knowledge, that it is not the true one.” And with that the old little man walked away and stared again at the hammer.

“That fellow seems to know more than he ought to,” whispered the doctor peevishly to Wilfred. “Those popish priests are deucedly sly.”

“No, no,” said Bohun, with a sort of wild fatigue. “It was the lunatic. It was the lunatic.”

The group of the two clerics and the doctor had fallen away from the more official group containing the inspector and the man he had arrested. Now, however, that their own party had broken up, they heard voices from the others. The priest looked up quietly and then looked down again as he heard the blacksmith say in a loud voice:

“I hope I’ve convinced you, Mr. Inspector. I’m a strong man, as you say, but I couldn’t have flung my hammer bang here from Greenford. My hammer hasn’t got wings that it should come flying half a mile over hedges and fields.”

The inspector laughed amicably and said: “No, I think you can be considered out of it, though it’s one of the rummiest coincidences I ever saw. I can only ask you to give us all the assistance you can in finding a man as big and strong as yourself. By George! you might be useful, if only to hold him! I suppose you yourself have no guess at the man?”

“I may have a guess,” said the pale smith, “but it is not at a man.” Then, seeing the scared eyes turn towards his wife on the bench, he put his huge hand on her shoulder and said: “Nor a woman either.”

“What do you mean?” asked the inspector jocularly. “You don’t think cows use hammers, do you?”

“I think no thing of flesh held that hammer,” said the blacksmith in a stifled voice; “mortally speaking, I think the man died alone.”

Wilfred made a sudden forward movement and peered at him with burning eyes.

“Do you mean to say, Barnes,” came the sharp voice of the cobbler, “that the hammer jumped up of itself and knocked the man down?”

“Oh, you gentlemen may stare and snigger,” cried Simeon; “you clergymen who tell us on Sunday in what a stillness the Lord smote Sennacherib. I believe that One who walks invisible in every house defended the honour of mine, and laid the defiler dead before the door of it. I believe the force in that blow was just the force there is in earthquakes, and no force less.”

Wilfred said, with a voice utterly undescribable: “I told Norman myself to beware of the thunderbolt.”

“That agent is outside my jurisdiction,” said the inspector with a slight smile.

“You are not outside His,” answered the smith; “see you to it,” and, turning his broad back, he went into the house.

The shaken Wilfred was led away by Father Brown, who had an easy and friendly way with him. “Let us get out of this horrid place, Mr. Bohun,” he said. “May I look inside your church? I hear it’s one of the oldest in England. We take some interest, you know,” he added with a comical grimace, “in old English churches.”

Wilfred Bohun did not smile, for humour was never his strong point. But he nodded rather eagerly, being only too ready to explain the Gothic splendours to someone more likely to be sympathetic than the Presbyterian blacksmith or the atheist cobbler.

"By all means," he said; "let us go in at this side." And he led the way into the high side entrance at the top of the flight of steps. Father Brown was mounting the first step to follow him when he felt a hand on his shoulder, and turned to behold the dark, thin figure of the doctor, his face darker yet with suspicion.

"Sir," said the physician harshly, "you appear to know some secrets in this black business. May I ask if you are going to keep them to yourself?"

"Why, doctor," answered the priest, smiling quite pleasantly, "there is one very good reason why a man of my trade should keep things to himself when he is not sure of them, and that is that it is so constantly his duty to keep them to himself when he is sure of them. But if you think I have been discourteously reticent with you or anyone, I will go to the extreme limit of my custom. I will give you two very large hints."

"Well, sir?" said the doctor gloomily.

"First," said Father Brown quietly, "the thing is quite in your own province. It is a matter of physical science. The blacksmith is mistaken, not perhaps in saying that the blow was divine, but certainly in saying that it came by a miracle. It was no miracle, doctor, except in so far as man is himself a miracle, with his strange and wicked and yet half-heroic heart. The force that smashed that skull was a force well known to scientists — one of the most frequently debated of the laws of nature."

The doctor, who was looking at him with frowning intentness, only said: "And the other hint?"

"The other hint is this," said the priest. "Do you remember the blacksmith, though he believes in miracles, talking scornfully of the impossible fairy tale that his hammer had wings and flew half a mile across country?"

"Yes," said the doctor, "I remember that."

"Well," added Father Brown, with a broad smile, "that fairy tale was the nearest thing to the real truth that has been said today." And with that he turned his back and stumped up the steps after the curate.

The Reverend Wilfred, who had been waiting for him, pale and impatient, as if this little delay were the last straw for his nerves, led him immediately to his favourite corner of the church, that part of the gallery closest to the carved roof and lit by the wonderful window with the angel. The little Latin priest explored and admired everything exhaustively, talking cheerfully but in a low voice all the time. When in the course of his investigation he found the side exit and the winding stair down which Wilfred had rushed to find his brother dead, Father Brown ran not down but up, with the agility of a monkey, and his clear voice came from an outer platform above.

“Come up here, Mr. Bohun,” he called. “The air will do you good.”

Bohun followed him, and came out on a kind of stone gallery or balcony outside the building, from which one could see the illimitable plain in which their small hill stood, wooded away to the purple horizon and dotted with villages and farms. Clear and square, but quite small beneath them, was the blacksmith’s yard, where the inspector still stood taking notes and the corpse still lay like a smashed fly.

“Might be the map of the world, mightn’t it?” said Father Brown.

“Yes,” said Bohun very gravely, and nodded his head.

Immediately beneath and about them the lines of the Gothic building plunged outwards into the void with a sickening swiftness akin to suicide. There is that element of Titan energy in the architecture of the Middle Ages that, from whatever aspect it be seen, it always seems to be rushing away, like the strong back of some maddened horse. This church was hewn out of ancient and silent stone, bearded with old fungoids and stained with the nests of birds. And yet, when they saw it from below, it sprang like a fountain at the stars; and when they saw it, as now, from above, it poured like a cataract into a voiceless pit. For these two men on the tower were left alone with the most terrible aspect of Gothic; the monstrous foreshortening and disproportion, the dizzy perspectives, the glimpses of great things small and small things great; a topsy-turvydom of stone in the mid-air. Details of stone, enormous by their proximity, were relieved against a pattern of fields and farms, pygmy in their distance. A carved bird or beast at a corner seemed like some vast walking or flying dragon wasting the pastures and villages below. The whole atmosphere was dizzy and dangerous, as if men were upheld in air amid the gyrating wings of colossal genii; and the whole of that old church, as tall and rich as a cathedral, seemed to sit upon the sunlit country like a cloudburst.

“I think there is something rather dangerous about standing on these high places even to pray,” said Father Brown. “Heights were made to be looked at, not to be looked from.”

“Do you mean that one may fall over,” asked Wilfred.

"I mean that one's soul may fall if one's body doesn't," said the other priest.

"I scarcely understand you," remarked Bohun indistinctly.

"Look at that blacksmith, for instance," went on Father Brown calmly; "a good man, but not a Christian — hard, imperious, unforgiving. Well, his Scotch religion was made up by men who prayed on hills and high crags, and learnt to look down on the world more than to look up at heaven. Humility is the mother of giants. One sees great things from the valley; only small things from the peak."

"But he — he didn't do it," said Bohun tremulously.

"No," said the other in an odd voice; "we know he didn't do it."

After a moment he resumed, looking tranquilly out over the plain with his pale grey eyes. "I knew a man," he said, "who began by worshipping with others before the altar, but who grew fond of high and lonely places to pray from, corners or niches in the belfry or the spire. And once in one of those dizzy places, where the whole world seemed to turn under him like a wheel, his brain turned also, and he fancied he was God. So that, though he was a good man, he committed a great crime."

Wilfred's face was turned away, but his bony hands turned blue and white as they tightened on the parapet of stone.

"He thought it was given to him to judge the world and strike down the sinner. He would never have had such a thought if he had been kneeling with other men upon a floor. But he saw all men walking about like insects. He saw one especially strutting just below him, insolent and evident by a bright green hat — a poisonous insect."

Rooks cawed round the corners of the belfry; but there was no other sound till Father Brown went on.

"This also tempted him, that he had in his hand one of the most awful engines of nature; I mean gravitation, that mad and quickening rush by which all earth's creatures fly back to her heart when released. See, the inspector is strutting just below us in the smithy. If I were to toss a pebble over this parapet it would be something like a bullet by the time it struck him. If I were to drop a hammer — even a small hammer—"

Wilfred Bohun threw one leg over the parapet, and Father Brown had him in a minute by the collar.

"Not by that door," he said quite gently; "that door leads to hell."

Bohun staggered back against the wall, and stared at him with frightful eyes.

“How do you know all this?” he cried. “Are you a devil?”

“I am a man,” answered Father Brown gravely; “and therefore have all devils in my heart. Listen to me,” he said after a short pause. “I know what you did — at least, I can guess the great part of it. When you left your brother you were racked with no unrighteous rage, to the extent even that you snatched up a small hammer, half inclined to kill him with his foulness on his mouth. Recoiling, you thrust it under your buttoned coat instead, and rushed into the church. You pray wildly in many places, under the angel window, upon the platform above, and a higher platform still, from which you could see the colonel’s Eastern hat like the back of a green beetle crawling about. Then something snapped in your soul, and you let God’s thunderbolt fall.”

Wilfred put a weak hand to his head, and asked in a low voice: “How did you know that his hat looked like a green beetle?”

“Oh, that,” said the other with the shadow of a smile, “that was common sense. But hear me further. I say I know all this; but no one else shall know it. The next step is for you; I shall take no more steps; I will seal this with the seal of confession. If you ask me why, there are many reasons, and only one that concerns you. I leave things to you because you have not yet gone very far wrong, as assassins go. You did not help to fix the crime on the smith when it was easy; or on his wife, when that was easy. You tried to fix it on the imbecile because you knew that he could not suffer. That was one of the gleams that it is my business to find in assassins. And now come down into the village, and go your own way as free as the wind; for I have said my last word.”

They went down the winding stairs in utter silence, and came out into the sunlight by the smithy. Wilfred Bohun carefully unlatched the wooden gate of the yard, and going up to the inspector, said: “I wish to give myself up; I have killed my brother.”

The Eye of Apollo

That singular smoky sparkle, at once a confusion and a transparency, which is the strange secret of the Thames, was changing more and more from its grey to its glittering extreme as the sun climbed to the zenith over Westminster, and two men crossed Westminster Bridge. One man was very tall and the other very short; they might even have been fantastically compared to the arrogant clock-tower of Parliament and the humbler humped shoulders of the Abbey, for the short man was in clerical dress. The official description of the tall man was M. Hercule Flambeau, private detective, and he was going to his new offices in a new pile of flats facing the Abbey entrance. The official description of the short man was the Reverend J. Brown, attached to St. Francis Xavier's Church, Camberwell, and he was coming from a Camberwell deathbed to see the new offices of his friend.

The building was American in its sky-scraping altitude, and American also in the oiled elaboration of its machinery of telephones and lifts. But it was barely finished and still understaffed; only three tenants had moved in; the office just above Flambeau was occupied, as also was the office just below him; the two floors above that and the three floors below were entirely bare. But the first glance at the new tower of flats caught something much more arresting. Save for a few relics of scaffolding, the one glaring object was erected outside the office just above Flambeau's. It was an enormous gilt effigy of the human eye, surrounded with rays of gold, and taking up as much room as two or three of the office windows.

"What on earth is that?" asked Father Brown, and stood still. "Oh, a new religion," said Flambeau, laughing; "one of those new religions that forgive your sins by saying you never had any. Rather like Christian Science, I should think. The fact is that a fellow calling himself Kalon (I don't know what his name is, except that it can't be that) has taken the flat just above me. I have two lady typewriters underneath me, and this enthusiastic old humbug on top. He calls himself the New Priest of Apollo, and he worships the sun."

"Let him look out," said Father Brown. "The sun was the cruellest of all the gods. But what does that monstrous eye mean?"

“As I understand it, it is a theory of theirs,” answered Flambeau, “that a man can endure anything if his mind is quite steady. Their two great symbols are the sun and the open eye; for they say that if a man were really healthy he could stare at the sun.”

“If a man were really healthy,” said Father Brown, “he would not bother to stare at it.”

“Well, that’s all I can tell you about the new religion,” went on Flambeau carelessly. “It claims, of course, that it can cure all physical diseases.”

“Can it cure the one spiritual disease?” asked Father Brown, with a serious curiosity.

“And what is the one spiritual disease?” asked Flambeau, smiling.

“Oh, thinking one is quite well,” said his friend.

Flambeau was more interested in the quiet little office below him than in the flamboyant temple above. He was a lucid Southerner, incapable of conceiving himself as anything but a Catholic or an atheist; and new religions of a bright and pallid sort were not much in his line. But humanity was always in his line, especially when it was good-looking; moreover, the ladies downstairs were characters in their way. The office was kept by two sisters, both slight and dark, one of them tall and striking. She had a dark, eager and aquiline profile, and was one of those women whom one always thinks of in profile, as of the clean-cut edge of some weapon. She seemed to cleave her way through life. She had eyes of startling brilliancy, but it was the brilliancy of steel rather than of diamonds; and her straight, slim figure was a shade too stiff for its grace. Her younger sister was like her shortened shadow, a little greyer, paler, and more insignificant. They both wore a business-like black, with little masculine cuffs and collars. There are thousands of such curt, strenuous ladies in the offices of London, but the interest of these lay rather in their real than their apparent position.

For Pauline Stacey, the elder, was actually the heiress of a crest and half a county, as well as great wealth; she had been brought up in castles and gardens, before a frigid fierceness (peculiar to the modern woman) had driven her to what she considered a harsher and a higher existence. She had not, indeed, surrendered her money; in that there would have been a romantic or monkish abandon quite alien to her masterful utilitarianism. She held her wealth, she would say, for use upon practical social objects. Part of it she had put into her business, the nucleus of a model typewriting emporium; part of it was distributed in various leagues and causes for the advancement of such work among women. How far Joan, her sister and partner, shared this slightly prosaic idealism no one could be very sure. But she followed her leader with a dog-like affection which was somehow more attractive, with its touch of tragedy, than the hard, high spirits of the elder. For Pauline Stacey had nothing to say to tragedy; she was understood to deny its existence.

Her rigid rapidity and cold impatience had amused Flambeau very much on the first occasion of his entering the flats. He had lingered outside the lift in the entrance hall waiting for the lift-boy, who generally conducts strangers to the various floors. But this bright-eyed falcon of a girl had openly refused to endure such official delay. She said sharply that she knew all about the lift, and was not dependent on boys — or men either. Though her flat was only three floors above, she managed in the few seconds of ascent to give Flambeau a great many of her fundamental views in an off-hand manner; they were to the general effect that she was a modern working woman and loved modern working machinery. Her bright black eyes blazed with abstract anger against those who rebuke mechanic science and ask for the return of romance. Everyone, she said, ought to be able to manage machines, just as she could manage the lift. She seemed almost to resent the fact of Flambeau opening the lift-door for her; and that gentleman went up to his own apartments smiling with somewhat mingled feelings at the memory of such spit-fire self-dependence.

She certainly had a temper, of a snappy, practical sort; the gestures of her thin, elegant hands were abrupt or even destructive.

Once Flambeau entered her office on some typewriting business, and found she had just flung a pair of spectacles belonging to her sister into the middle of the floor and stamped on them. She was already in the rapids of an ethical tirade about the “sickly medical notions” and the morbid admission of weakness implied in such an apparatus. She dared her sister to bring such artificial, unhealthy rubbish into the place again. She asked if she was expected to wear wooden legs or false hair or glass eyes; and as she spoke her eyes sparkled like the terrible crystal.

Flambeau, quite bewildered with this fanaticism, could not refrain from asking Miss Pauline (with direct French logic) why a pair of spectacles was a more morbid sign of weakness than a lift, and why, if science might help us in the one effort, it might not help us in the other.

“That is so different,” said Pauline Stacey, loftily. “Batteries and motors and all those things are marks of the force of man — yes, Mr. Flambeau, and the force of woman, too! We shall take our turn at these great engines that devour distance and defy time. That is high and splendid — that is really science. But these nasty props and plasters the doctors sell — why, they are just badges of poltroonery. Doctors stick on legs and arms as if we were born cripples and sick slaves. But I was free-born, Mr. Flambeau! People only think they need these things because they have been trained in fear instead of being trained in power and courage, just as the silly nurses tell children not to stare at the sun, and so they can’t do it without blinking. But why among the stars should there be one star I may not see? The sun is not my master, and I will open my eyes and stare at him whenever I choose.”

“Your eyes,” said Flambeau, with a foreign bow, “will dazzle the sun.” He took pleasure in complimenting this strange stiff beauty, partly because it threw her a little off her balance. But as he went upstairs to his floor he drew a deep breath and whistled, saying to himself: “So she has got into the hands of that conjurer upstairs with his golden eye.” For, little as he knew or cared about the new religion of Kalon, he had heard of his special notion about sun-gazing.

He soon discovered that the spiritual bond between the floors above and below him was close and increasing. The man who called himself Kalon was a magnificent creature, worthy, in a physical sense, to be the pontiff of Apollo. He was nearly as tall even as Flambeau, and very much better looking, with a golden beard, strong blue eyes, and a mane flung back like a lion’s. In structure he was the blonde beast of Nietzsche, but all this animal beauty was heightened, brightened and softened by genuine intellect and spirituality. If he looked like one of the great Saxon kings, he looked like one of the kings that were also saints. And this despite the cockney incongruity of his surroundings; the fact that he had an office half-way up a building in Victoria Street; that the clerk (a commonplace youth in cuffs and collars) sat in the outer room, between him and the corridor; that his name was on a brass plate, and the gilt emblem of his creed hung above his street, like the advertisement of an oculist. All this vulgarity could not take away from the man called Kalon the vivid oppression and inspiration that came from his soul and body. When all was said, a man in the presence of this quack did feel in the presence of a great man. Even in the loose jacket-suit of linen that he wore as a workshop dress in his office he was a fascinating and formidable figure; and when robed in the white vestments and crowned with the golden circlet, in which he daily saluted the sun, he really looked so splendid that the laughter of the street people sometimes died suddenly on their lips. For three times in the day the new sun-worshipper went out on his little balcony, in the face of all Westminster, to say some litany to his shining lord: once at daybreak, once at sunset, and once at the shock of noon. And it was while the shock of noon still shook faintly from the towers of Parliament and parish church that Father Brown, the friend of Flambeau, first looked up and saw the white priest of Apollo.

Flambeau had seen quite enough of these daily salutations of Phoebus, and plunged into the porch of the tall building without even looking for his clerical friend to follow. But Father Brown, whether from a professional interest in ritual or a strong individual interest in tomfoolery, stopped and stared up at the balcony of the sun-worshipper, just as he might have stopped and stared up at a Punch and Judy. Kalon the Prophet was already erect, with argent garments and uplifted hands, and the sound of his strangely penetrating voice could be heard all the way down the busy street uttering his solar litany. He was already in the middle of it; his eyes were fixed upon the flaming disc. It is doubtful if he saw anything or anyone on this earth; it is substantially certain that he did not see a stunted, round-faced priest who, in the crowd below, looked up at him with blinking eyes. That was perhaps the most startling difference between even these two far divided men. Father Brown could not look at anything without blinking; but the priest of Apollo could look on the blaze at noon without a quiver of the eyelid.

“O sun,” cried the prophet, “O star that art too great to be allowed among the stars! O fountain that flowest quietly in that secret spot that is called space. White Father of all white unwearied things, white flames and white flowers and white peaks. Father, who art more innocent than all thy most innocent and quiet children; primal purity, into the peace of which—”

A rush and crash like the reversed rush of a rocket was cloven with a strident and incessant yelling. Five people rushed into the gate of the mansions as three people rushed out, and for an instant they all deafened each other. The sense of some utterly abrupt horror seemed for a moment to fill half the street with bad news — bad news that was all the worse because no one knew what it was. Two figures remained still after the crash of commotion: the fair priest of Apollo on the balcony above, and the ugly priest of Christ below him.

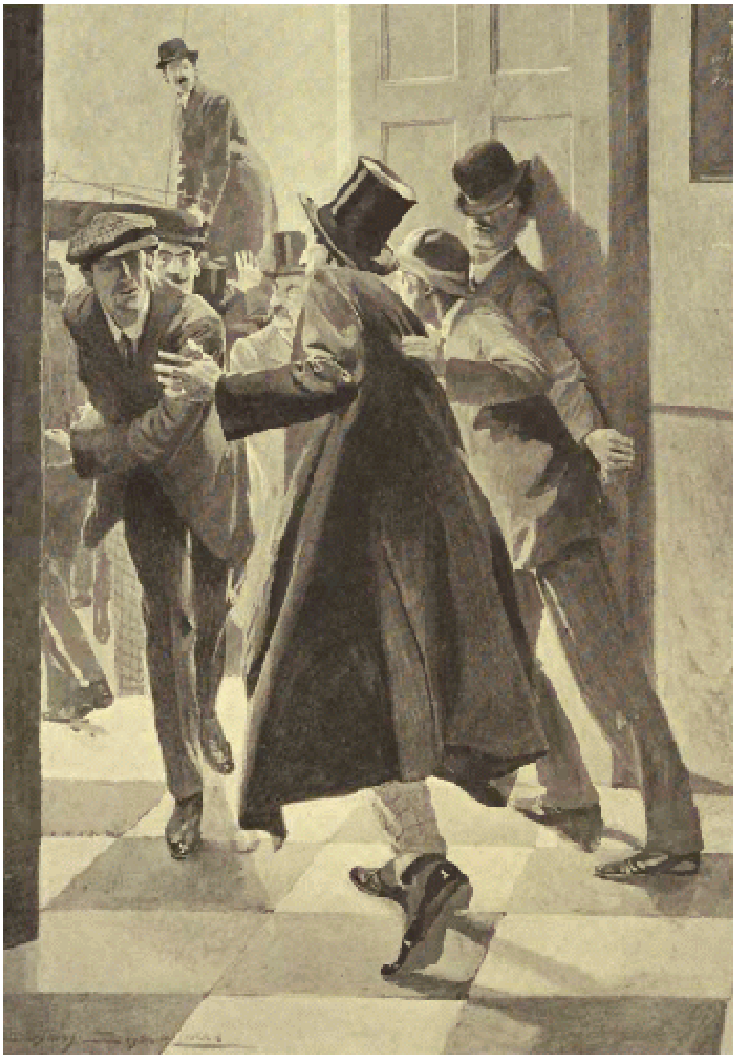

At last the tall figure and titanic energy of Flambeau appeared in the doorway of the mansions and dominated the little mob. Talking at the top of his voice like a fog-horn, he told somebody or anybody to go for a surgeon; and as he turned back into the dark and thronged entrance his friend Father Brown dipped in insignificantly after him. Even as he ducked and dived through the crowd he could still hear the magnificent melody and monotony of the solar priest still calling on the happy god who is the friend of fountains and flowers.

Father Brown found Flambeau and some six other people standing round the enclosed space into which the lift commonly descended. But the lift had not descended. Something else had descended; something that ought to have come by a lift.

For the last four minutes Flambeau had looked down on it; had seen the brained and bleeding figure of that beautiful woman who denied the existence of tragedy. He had never had the slightest doubt that it was Pauline Stacey; and, though he had sent for a doctor, he had not the slightest doubt that she was dead.

He could not remember for certain whether he had liked her or disliked her; there was so much both to like and dislike. But she had been a person to him, and the unbearable pathos of details and habit stabbed him with all the small daggers of bereavement. He remembered her pretty face and priggish speeches with a sudden secret vividness which is all the bitterness of death. In an instant like a bolt from the blue, like a thunderbolt from nowhere, that beautiful and defiant body had been dashed down the open well of the lift to death at the bottom. Was it suicide? With so insolent an optimist it seemed impossible. Was it murder? But who was there in those hardly inhabited flats to murder anybody? In a rush of raucous words, which he meant to be strong and suddenly found weak, he asked where was that fellow Kalon. A voice, habitually heavy, quiet and full, assured him that Kalon for the last fifteen minutes had been away up on his balcony worshipping his god. When Flambeau heard the voice, and felt the hand of Father Brown, he turned his swarthy face and said abruptly:

“Then, if he has been up there all the time, who can have done it?”

“Perhaps,” said the other, “we might go upstairs and find out. We have half an hour before the police will move.”

Leaving the body of the slain heiress in charge of the surgeons, Flambeau dashed up the stairs to the typewriting office, found it utterly empty, and then dashed up to his own. Having entered that, he abruptly returned with a new and white face to his friend.

“Her sister,” he said, with an unpleasant seriousness, “her sister seems to have gone out for a walk.”

Father Brown nodded. “Or, she may have gone up to the office of that sun man,” he said. “If I were you I should just verify that, and then let us all talk it over in your office. No,” he added suddenly, as if remembering something, “shall I ever get over that stupidity of mine? Of course, in their office downstairs.”

Flambeau stared; but he followed the little father downstairs to the empty flat of the Staceys, where that impenetrable pastor took a large red-leather chair in the very entrance, from which he could see the stairs and landings, and waited. He did not wait very long. In about four minutes three figures descended the stairs, alike only in their solemnity. The first was Joan Stacey, the sister of the dead woman — evidently she had been upstairs in the temporary temple of Apollo; the second was the priest of Apollo himself, his litany finished, sweeping down the empty stairs in utter magnificence — something in his white robes, beard and parted hair had the look of Dore's Christ leaving the Pretorium; the third was Flambeau, black browed and somewhat bewildered.

Miss Joan Stacey, dark, with a drawn face and hair prematurely touched with grey, walked straight to her own desk and set out her papers with a practical flap. The mere action rallied everyone else to sanity. If Miss Joan Stacey was a criminal, she was a cool one. Father Brown regarded her for some time with an odd little smile, and then, without taking his eyes off her, addressed himself to somebody else.

"Prophet," he said, presumably addressing Kalon, "I wish you would tell me a lot about your religion."

"I shall be proud to do it," said Kalon, inclining his still crowned head, "but I am not sure that I understand."

"Why, it's like this," said Father Brown, in his frankly doubtful way: "We are taught that if a man has really bad first principles, that must be partly his fault. But, for all that, we can make some difference between a man who insults his quite clear conscience and a man with a conscience more or less clouded with sophistries. Now, do you really think that murder is wrong at all?"

"Is this an accusation?" asked Kalon very quietly.

"No," answered Brown, equally gently, "it is the speech for the defence."

In the long and startled stillness of the room the prophet of Apollo slowly rose; and really it was like the rising of the sun. He filled that room with his light and life in such a manner that a man felt he could as easily have filled Salisbury Plain. His robed form seemed to hang the whole room with classic draperies; his epic gesture seemed to extend it into grander perspectives, till the little black figure of the modern cleric seemed to be a fault and an intrusion, a round, black blot upon some splendour of Hellas.

"We meet at last, Caiaphas," said the prophet. "Your church and mine are the only realities on this earth. I adore the sun, and you the darkening of the sun; you are the priest of the dying and I of the living God. Your present work of suspicion and slander is worthy of your coat and creed. All your church is but a black police; you are only spies and detectives seeking to tear from men confessions of guilt, whether by treachery or torture. You would convict men of crime, I would convict them of innocence. You would convince them of sin, I would convince them of virtue.

"Reader of the books of evil, one more word before I blow away your baseless nightmares for ever. Not even faintly could you understand how little I care whether you can convict me or no. The things you call disgrace and horrible hanging are to me no more than an ogre in a child's toy-book to a man once grown up. You said you were offering the speech for the defence. I care so little for the cloudland of this life that I will offer you the speech for the prosecution. There is but one thing that can be said against me in this matter, and I will say it myself. The woman that is dead was my love and my bride; not after such manner as your tin chapels call lawful, but by a law purer and sterner than you will ever understand. She and I walked another world from yours, and trod palaces of crystal while you were plodding through tunnels and corridors of brick. Well, I know that policemen, theological and otherwise, always fancy that where there has been love there must soon be hatred; so there you have the first point made for the prosecution. But the second point is stronger; I do not grudge it you. Not only is it true that Pauline loved me, but it is also true that this very morning, before she died, she wrote at that table a will leaving me and my new church half a million. Come, where are the handcuffs? Do you suppose I care what foolish things you do with me? Penal servitude will only be like waiting for her at a wayside station. The gallows will only be going to her in a headlong car."

He spoke with the brain-shaking authority of an orator, and Flambeau and Joan Stacey stared at him in amazed admiration. Father Brown's face seemed to express nothing but extreme distress; he looked at the ground with one wrinkle of pain across his forehead. The prophet of the sun leaned easily against the mantelpiece and resumed:

"In a few words I have put before you the whole case against me — the only possible case against me. In fewer words still I will blow it to pieces, so that not a trace of it remains. As to whether I have committed this crime, the truth is in one sentence: I could not have committed this crime. Pauline Stacey fell from this floor to the ground at five minutes past twelve. A hundred people will go into the witness-box and say that I was standing out upon the balcony of my own rooms above from just before the stroke of noon to a quarter-past — the usual period of my public prayers. My clerk (a respectable youth from Clapham, with no sort of connection with me) will swear that he sat in my outer office all the morning, and that no communication passed through. He will swear that I arrived a full ten minutes before the hour, fifteen minutes before any whisper of the accident, and that I did not leave the office or the balcony all that time. No one ever had so complete an alibi; I could subpoena half Westminster. I think you had better put the handcuffs away again. The case is at an end.

"But last of all, that no breath of this idiotic suspicion remain in the air, I will tell you all you want to know. I believe I do know how my unhappy friend came by her death. You can, if you choose, blame me for it, or my faith and philosophy at least; but you certainly cannot lock me up. It is well known to all students of the higher truths that certain adepts and illuminati have in history attained the power of levitation — that is, of being self-sustained upon the empty air. It is but a part of that general conquest of matter which is the main element in our occult wisdom. Poor Pauline was of an impulsive and ambitious temper. I think, to tell the truth, she thought herself somewhat deeper in the mysteries than she was; and she has often said to me, as we went down in the lift together, that if one's will were strong enough, one could float down as harmlessly as a feather. I solemnly believe that in some ecstasy of noble thoughts she attempted the miracle. Her will, or faith, must have failed her at the crucial instant, and the lower law of matter had its horrible revenge. There is the whole story, gentlemen, very sad and, as you think, very presumptuous and wicked, but certainly not criminal or in any way connected with me. In the short-hand of the police-courts, you had better call it suicide. I shall always call it heroic failure for the advance of science and the slow scaling of heaven."

It was the first time Flambeau had ever seen Father Brown vanquished. He still sat looking at the ground, with a painful and corrugated brow, as if in shame. It was impossible to avoid the feeling which the prophet's winged words had fanned, that here was a sullen, professional suspecter of men overwhelmed by a prouder and purer spirit of natural liberty and health. At last he said, blinking as if in bodily distress: "Well, if that is so, sir, you need do no more than take the testamentary paper you spoke of and go. I wonder where the poor lady left it."

"It will be over there on her desk by the door, I think," said Kalon, with that massive innocence of manner that seemed to acquit him wholly. "She told me specially she would write it this morning, and I actually saw her writing as I went up in the lift to my own room."

"Was her door open then?" asked the priest, with his eye on the corner of the matting.

"Yes," said Kalon calmly.

"Ah! it has been open ever since," said the other, and resumed his silent study of the mat.

"There is a paper over here," said the grim Miss Joan, in a somewhat singular voice. She had passed over to her sister's desk by the doorway, and was holding a sheet of blue foolscap in her hand. There was a sour smile on her face that seemed unfit for such a scene or occasion, and Flambeau looked at her with a darkening brow.

Kalon the prophet stood away from the paper with that loyal unconsciousness that had carried him through. But Flambeau took it out of the lady's hand, and read it with the utmost amazement. It did, indeed, begin in the formal manner of a will, but after the words "I give and bequeath all of which I die possessed" the writing abruptly stopped with a set of scratches, and there was no trace of the name of any legatee. Flambeau, in wonder, handed this truncated testament to his clerical friend, who glanced at it and silently gave it to the priest of the sun.

An instant afterwards that pontiff, in his splendid sweeping draperies, had crossed the room in two great strides, and was towering over Joan Stacey, his blue eyes standing from his head.

"What monkey tricks have you been playing here?" he cried. "That's not all Pauline wrote."

They were startled to hear him speak in quite a new voice, with a Yankee shrillness in it; all his grandeur and good English had fallen from him like a cloak.

"That is the only thing on her desk," said Joan, and confronted him steadily with the same smile of evil favour.

Of a sudden the man broke out into blasphemies and cataracts of incredulous words. There was something shocking about the dropping of his mask; it was like a man's real face falling off.

"See here!" he cried in broad American, when he was breathless with cursing, "I may be an adventurer, but I guess you're a murderess. Yes, gentlemen, here's your death explained, and without any levitation. The poor girl is writing a will in my favour; her cursed sister comes in, struggles for the pen, drags her to the well, and throws her down before she can finish it. Sakes! I reckon we want the handcuffs after all."

"As you have truly remarked," replied Joan, with ugly calm, "your clerk is a very respectable young man, who knows the nature of an oath; and he will swear in any court that I was up in your office arranging some typewriting work for five minutes before and five minutes after my sister fell. Mr. Flambeau will tell you that he found me there."

There was a silence.

"Why, then," cried Flambeau, "Pauline was alone when she fell, and it was suicide!"

"She was alone when she fell," said Father Brown, "but it was not suicide."

"Then how did she die?" asked Flambeau impatiently.

"She was murdered."

"But she was alone," objected the detective.

"She was murdered when she was all alone," answered the priest.

All the rest stared at him, but he remained sitting in the same old dejected attitude, with a wrinkle in his round forehead and an appearance of impersonal shame and sorrow; his voice was colourless and sad.

"What I want to know," cried Kalon, with an oath, "is when the police are coming for this bloody and wicked sister. She's killed her flesh and blood; she's robbed me of half a million that was just as sacredly mine as —"

"Come, come, prophet," interrupted Flambeau, with a kind of sneer; "remember that all this world is a cloudland."

The hierophant of the sun-god made an effort to climb back on his pedestal. "It is not the mere money," he cried, "though that would equip the cause throughout the world. It is also my beloved one's wishes. To Pauline all this was holy. In Pauline's eyes—"

Father Brown suddenly sprang erect, so that his chair fell over flat behind him. He was deathly pale, yet he seemed fired with a hope; his eyes shone.

"That's it!" he cried in a clear voice. "That's the way to begin. In Pauline's eyes—"

The tall prophet retreated before the tiny priest in an almost mad disorder. "What do you mean? How dare you?" he cried repeatedly.

“In Pauline’s eyes,” repeated the priest, his own shining more and more. “Go on — in God’s name, go on. The foulest crime the fiends ever prompted feels lighter after confession; and I implore you to confess. Go on, go on — in Pauline’s eyes—”

“Let me go, you devil!” thundered Kalon, struggling like a giant in bonds. “Who are you, you cursed spy, to weave your spiders’ webs round me, and peep and peer? Let me go.”

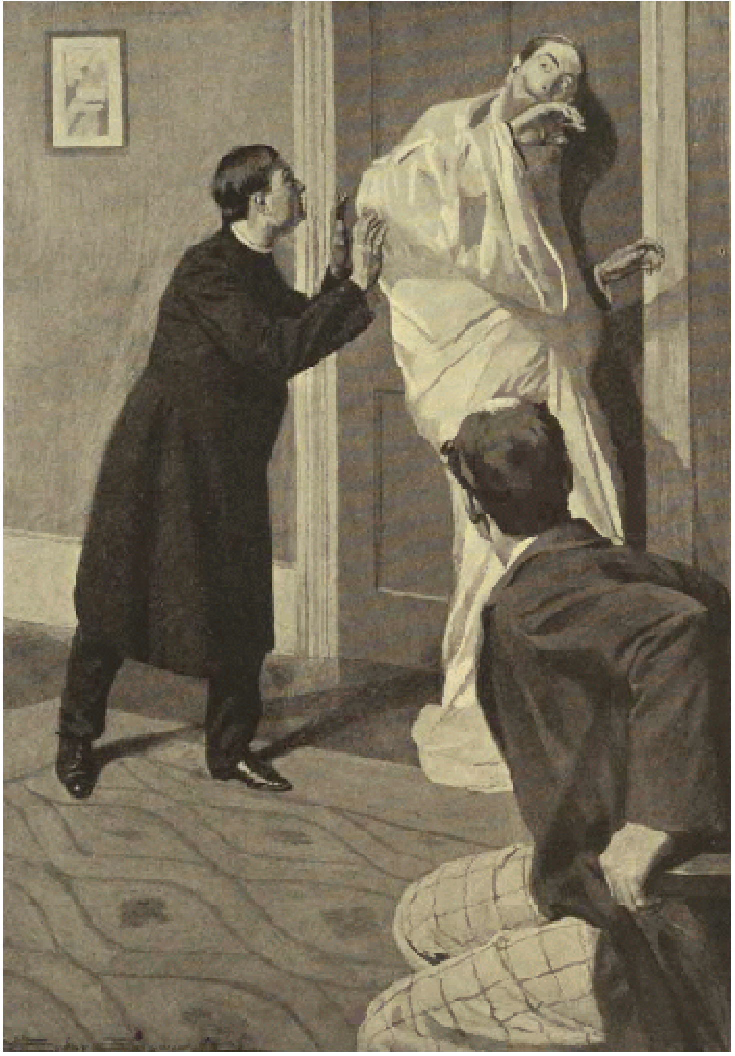

“Shall I stop him?” asked Flambeau, bounding towards the exit, for Kalon had already thrown the door wide open.

“No; let him pass,” said Father Brown, with a strange deep sigh that seemed to come from the depths of the universe. “Let Cain pass by, for he belongs to God.”

There was a long-drawn silence in the room when he had left it, which was to Flambeau’s fierce wits one long agony of interrogation. Miss Joan

Stacey very coolly tidied up the papers on her desk.

"Father," said Flambeau at last, "it is my duty, not my curiosity only — it is my duty to find out, if I can, who committed the crime."

"Which crime?" asked Father Brown.

"The one we are dealing with, of course," replied his impatient friend.

"We are dealing with two crimes," said Brown, "crimes of very different weight — and by very different criminals."

Miss Joan Stacey, having collected and put away her papers, proceeded to lock up her drawer. Father Brown went on, noticing her as little as she noticed him.

"The two crimes," he observed, "were committed against the same weakness of the same person, in a struggle for her money. The author of the larger crime found himself thwarted by the smaller crime; the author of the smaller crime got the money."

"Oh, don't go on like a lecturer," groaned Flambeau; "put it in a few words."

"I can put it in one word," answered his friend.

Miss Joan Stacey skewered her business-like black hat on to her head with a business-like black frown before a little mirror, and, as the conversation proceeded, took her handbag and umbrella in an unhurried style, and left the room.

"The truth is one word, and a short one," said Father Brown. "Pauline Stacey was blind."

"Blind!" repeated Flambeau, and rose slowly to his whole huge stature.

"She was subject to it by blood," Brown proceeded. "Her sister would have started eyeglasses if Pauline would have let her; but it was her special philosophy or fad that one must not encourage such diseases by yielding to them. She would not admit the cloud; or she tried to dispel it by will. So her eyes got worse and worse with straining; but the worst strain was to come. It came with this precious prophet, or whatever he calls himself, who taught her to stare at the hot sun with the naked eye. It was called accepting Apollo. Oh, if these new pagans would only be old pagans, they would be a little wiser! The old pagans knew that mere naked Nature-worship must have a cruel side. They knew that the eye of Apollo can blast and blind."

There was a pause, and the priest went on in a gentle and even broken voice. "Whether or no that devil deliberately made her blind, there is no doubt that he deliberately killed her through her blindness. The very simplicity of the crime is sickening. You know he and she went up and down in those lifts without official help; you know also how smoothly and silently the lifts slide. Kalon brought the lift to the girl's landing, and saw her, through the open door, writing in her slow, sightless way the will she had promised him. He called out to her cheerily that he had the lift ready for her, and she was to come out when she was ready. Then he pressed a button and shot soundlessly up to his own floor, walked through his own office, out on to his own balcony, and was safely praying before the crowded street when the poor girl, having finished her work, ran gaily out to where lover and lift were to receive her, and stepped—"

"Don't!" cried Flambeau.

"He ought to have got half a million by pressing that button," continued the little father, in the colourless voice in which he talked of such horrors. "But that went smash. It went smash because there happened to be another person who also wanted the money, and who also knew the secret about poor Pauline's sight. There was one thing about that will that I think nobody noticed: although it was unfinished and without signature, the other Miss Stacey and some servant of hers had already signed it as witnesses. Joan had signed first, saying Pauline could finish it later, with a typical feminine contempt for legal forms. Therefore, Joan wanted her sister to sign the will without real witnesses. Why? I thought of the blindness, and felt sure she had wanted Pauline to sign in solitude because she had wanted her not to sign at all.

"People like the Staceys always use fountain pens; but this was specially natural to Pauline. By habit and her strong will and memory she could still write almost as well as if she saw; but she could not tell when her pen needed dipping. Therefore, her fountain pens were carefully filled by her sister — all except this fountain pen. This was carefully not filled by her sister; the remains of the ink held out for a few lines and then failed altogether. And the prophet lost five hundred thousand pounds and committed one of the most brutal and brilliant murders in human history for nothing."

Flambeau went to the open door and heard the official police ascending the stairs. He turned and said: "You must have followed everything devilish close to have traced the crime to Kalon in ten minutes."

Father Brown gave a sort of start.

“Oh! to him,” he said. “No; I had to follow rather close to find out about Miss Joan and the fountain pen. But I knew Kalon was the criminal before I came into the front door.”

“You must be joking!” cried Flambeau.

“I’m quite serious,” answered the priest. “I tell you I knew he had done it, even before I knew what he had done.”

“But why?”

“These pagan stoics,” said Brown reflectively, “always fail by their strength. There came a crash and a scream down the street, and the priest of Apollo did not start or look round. I did not know what it was. But I knew that he was expecting it.”

The Sign of the Broken Sword

The thousand arms of the forest were grey, and its million fingers silver. In a sky of dark green-blue-like slate the stars were bleak and brilliant like splintered ice. All that thickly wooded and sparsely tenanted countryside was stiff with a bitter and brittle frost. The black hollows between the trunks of the trees looked like bottomless, black caverns of that Scandinavian hell, a hell of incalculable cold. Even the square stone tower of the church looked northern to the point of heathenry, as if it were some barbaric tower among the sea rocks of Iceland. It was a queer night for anyone to explore a churchyard. But, on the other hand, perhaps it was worth exploring.

It rose abruptly out of the ashen wastes of forest in a sort of hump or shoulder of green turf that looked grey in the starlight. Most of the graves were on a slant, and the path leading up to the church was as steep as a staircase. On the top of the hill, in the one flat and prominent place, was the monument for which the place was famous. It contrasted strangely with the featureless graves all round, for it was the work of one of the greatest sculptors of modern Europe; and yet his fame was at once forgotten in the fame of the man whose image he had made. It showed, by touches of the small silver pencil of starlight, the massive metal figure of a soldier recumbent, the strong hands sealed in an everlasting worship, the great head pillowed upon a gun. The venerable face was bearded, or rather whiskered, in the old, heavy Colonel Newcome fashion. The uniform, though suggested with the few strokes of simplicity, was that of modern war. By his right side lay a sword, of which the tip was broken off; on the left side lay a Bible. On glowing summer afternoons wagonettes came full of Americans and cultured suburbans to see the sepulchre; but even then they felt the vast forest land with its one dumpy dome of churchyard and church as a place oddly dumb and neglected. In this freezing darkness of mid-winter one would think he might be left alone with the stars. Nevertheless, in the stillness of those stiff woods a wooden gate creaked, and two dim figures dressed in black climbed up the little path to the tomb.

So faint was that frigid starlight that nothing could have been traced about them except that while they both wore black, one man was enormously big, and the other (perhaps by contrast) almost startlingly small.

They went up to the great graven tomb of the historic warrior, and stood for a few minutes staring at it. There was no human, perhaps no living, thing for a wide circle; and a morbid fancy might well have wondered if they were human themselves. In any case, the beginning of their conversation might have seemed strange. After the first silence the small man said to the other:

“Where does a wise man hide a pebble?”

And the tall man answered in a low voice: “On the beach.”

The small man nodded, and after a short silence said: “Where does a wise man hide a leaf?”

And the other answered: “In the forest.”

There was another stillness, and then the tall man resumed: “Do you mean that when a wise man has to hide a real diamond he has been known to hide it among sham ones?”

“No, no,” said the little man with a laugh, “we will let bygones be bygones.”

He stamped his cold feet for a second or two, and then said: “I’m not thinking of that at all, but of something else; something rather peculiar. Just strike a match, will you?”

The big man fumbled in his pocket, and soon a scratch and a flare painted gold the whole flat side of the monument. On it was cut in black letters the well-known words which so many Americans had reverently read: “Sacred to the Memory of General Sir Arthur St. Clare, Hero and Martyr, who Always Vanquished his Enemies and Always Spared Them, and Was Treacherously Slain by Them At Last. May God in Whom he Trusted both Reward and Revenge him.”

The match burnt the big man’s fingers, blackened, and dropped. He was about to strike another, but his small companion stopped him. “That’s all right, Flambeau, old man; I saw what I wanted. Or, rather, I didn’t see what I didn’t want. And now we must walk a mile and a half along the road to the next inn, and I will try to tell you all about it. For Heaven knows a man should have a fire and ale when he dares tell such a story.”

They descended the precipitous path, they relatched the rusty gate, and set off at a stamping, ringing walk down the frozen forest road. They had gone a full quarter of a mile before the smaller man spoke again. He said: “Yes; the wise man hides a pebble on the beach. But what does he do if there is no beach? Do you know anything of that great St. Clare trouble?”

"I know nothing about English generals, Father Brown," answered the large man, laughing, "though a little about English policemen. I only know that you have dragged me a precious long dance to all the shrines of this fellow, whoever he is. One would think he got buried in six different places. I've seen a memorial to General St. Clare in Westminster Abbey. I've seen a ramping equestrian statue of General St. Clare on the Embankment. I've seen a medallion of St. Clare in the street he was born in, and another in the street he lived in; and now you drag me after dark to his coffin in the village churchyard. I am beginning to be a bit tired of his magnificent personality, especially as I don't in the least know who he was. What are you hunting for in all these crypts and effigies?"

"I am only looking for one word," said Father Brown. "A word that isn't there."

"Well," asked Flambeau; "are you going to tell me anything about it?"

"I must divide it into two parts," remarked the priest. "First there is what everybody knows; and then there is what I know. Now, what everybody knows is short and plain enough. It is also entirely wrong."

"Right you are," said the big man called Flambeau cheerfully. "Let's begin at the wrong end. Let's begin with what everybody knows, which isn't true."

"If not wholly untrue, it is at least very inadequate," continued Brown; "for in point of fact, all that the public knows amounts precisely to this: The public knows that Arthur St. Clare was a great and successful English general. It knows that after splendid yet careful campaigns both in India and Africa he was in command against Brazil when the great Brazilian patriot Olivier issued his ultimatum. It knows that on that occasion St. Clare with a very small force attacked Olivier with a very large one, and was captured after heroic resistance. And it knows that after his capture, and to the abhorrence of the civilised world, St. Clare was hanged on the nearest tree. He was found swinging there after the Brazilians had retired, with his broken sword hung round his neck."

"And that popular story is untrue?" suggested Flambeau.

"No," said his friend quietly, "that story is quite true, so far as it goes."

"Well, I think it goes far enough!" said Flambeau; "but if the popular story is true, what is the mystery?"

They had passed many hundreds of grey and ghostly trees before the little priest answered. Then he bit his finger reflectively and said: "Why, the mystery is a mystery of psychology. Or, rather, it is a mystery of two psychologies. In that Brazilian business two of the most famous men of modern history acted flat against their characters. Mind you, Olivier and St. Clare were both heroes — the old thing, and no mistake; it was like the fight between Hector and Achilles. Now, what would you say to an affair in which Achilles was timid and Hector was treacherous?"

"Go on," said the large man impatiently as the other bit his finger again.

"Sir Arthur St. Clare was a soldier of the old religious type — the type that saved us during the Mutiny," continued Brown. "He was always more for duty than for dash; and with all his personal courage was decidedly a prudent commander, particularly indignant at any needless waste of soldiers. Yet in this last battle he attempted something that a baby could see was absurd. One need not be a strategist to see it was as wild as wind; just as one need not be a strategist to keep out of the way of a motor-bus. Well, that is the first mystery; what had become of the English general's head? The second riddle is, what had become of the Brazilian general's heart? President Olivier might be called a visionary or a nuisance; but even his enemies admitted that he was magnanimous to the point of knight errantry. Almost every other prisoner he had ever captured had been set free or even loaded with benefits. Men who had really wronged him came away touched by his simplicity and sweetness. Why the deuce should he diabolically revenge himself only once in his life; and that for the one particular blow that could not have hurt him? Well, there you have it. One of the wisest men in the world acted like an idiot for no reason. One of the best men in the world acted like a fiend for no reason. That's the long and the short of it; and I leave it to you, my boy."

"No, you don't," said the other with a snort. "I leave it to you; and you jolly well tell me all about it."

"Well," resumed Father Brown, "it's not fair to say that the public impression is just what I've said, without adding that two things have happened since. I can't say they threw a new light; for nobody can make sense of them. But they threw a new kind of darkness; they threw the darkness in new directions. The first was this. The family physician of the St. Clares quarrelled with that family, and began publishing a violent series of articles, in which he said that the late general was a religious maniac; but as far as the tale went, this seemed to mean little more than a religious man.

"Anyhow, the story fizzled out. Everyone knew, of course, that St. Clare had some of the eccentricities of puritan piety. The second incident was much more arresting. In the luckless and unsupported regiment which made that rash attempt at the Black River there was a certain Captain Keith, who was at that time engaged to St. Clare's daughter, and who afterwards married her. He was one of those who were captured by Olivier, and, like all the rest except the general, appears to have been bounteously treated and promptly set free. Some twenty years afterwards this man, then Lieutenant-Colonel Keith, published a sort of autobiography called 'A British Officer in Burmah and Brazil.' In the place where the reader looks eagerly for some account of the mystery of St. Clare's disaster may be found the following words: 'Everywhere else in this book I have narrated things exactly as they occurred, holding as I do the old-fashioned opinion that the glory of England is old enough to take care of itself. The exception I shall make is in this matter of the defeat by the Black River; and my reasons, though private, are honourable and compelling. I will, however, add this in justice to the memories of two distinguished men. General St. Clare has been accused of incapacity on this occasion; I can at least testify that this action, properly understood, was one of the most brilliant and sagacious of his life. President Olivier by similar report is charged with savage injustice. I think it due to the honour of an enemy to say that he acted on this occasion with even more than his characteristic good feeling. To put the matter popularly, I can assure my countrymen that St. Clare was by no means such a fool nor Olivier such a brute as he looked. This is all I have to say; nor shall any earthly consideration induce me to add a word to it.'"

A large frozen moon like a lustrous snowball began to show through the tangle of twigs in front of them, and by its light the narrator had been able to refresh his memory of Captain Keith's text from a scrap of printed paper. As he folded it up and put it back in his pocket Flambeau threw up his hand with a French gesture.

"Wait a bit, wait a bit," he cried excitedly. "I believe I can guess it at the first go."

He strode on, breathing hard, his black head and bull neck forward, like a man winning a walking race. The little priest, amused and interested, had some trouble in trotting beside him. Just before them the trees fell back a little to left and right, and the road swept downwards across a clear, moonlit valley, till it dived again like a rabbit into the wall of another wood. The entrance to the farther forest looked small and round, like the black hole of a remote railway tunnel. But it was within some hundred yards, and gaped like a cavern before Flambeau spoke again.

“I’ve got it,” he cried at last, slapping his thigh with his great hand. “Four minutes’ thinking, and I can tell your whole story myself.”

“All right,” assented his friend. “You tell it.”

Flambeau lifted his head, but lowered his voice. “General Sir Arthur St. Clare,” he said, “came of a family in which madness was hereditary; and his whole aim was to keep this from his daughter, and even, if possible, from his future son-in-law. Rightly or wrongly, he thought the final collapse was close, and resolved on suicide. Yet ordinary suicide would blazon the very idea he dreaded. As the campaign approached the clouds came thicker on his brain; and at last in a mad moment he sacrificed his public duty to his private. He rushed rashly into battle, hoping to fall by the first shot. When he found that he had only attained capture and discredit, the sealed bomb in his brain burst, and he broke his own sword and hanged himself.”

He stared firmly at the grey facade of forest in front of him, with the one black gap in it, like the mouth of the grave, into which their path plunged. Perhaps something menacing in the road thus suddenly swallowed reinforced his vivid vision of the tragedy, for he shuddered.

“A horrid story,” he said.

“A horrid story,” repeated the priest with bent head. “But not the real story.”

Then he threw back his head with a sort of despair and cried: “Oh, I wish it had been.”

The tall Flambeau faced round and stared at him.

“Yours is a clean story,” cried Father Brown, deeply moved. “A sweet, pure, honest story, as open and white as that moon. Madness and despair are innocent enough. There are worse things, Flambeau.”

Flambeau looked up wildly at the moon thus invoked; and from where he stood one black tree-bough curved across it exactly like a devil’s horn.

“Father — father,” cried Flambeau with the French gesture and stepping yet more rapidly forward, “do you mean it was worse than that?”

“Worse than that,” said Paul like a grave echo. And they plunged into the black cloister of the woodland, which ran by them in a dim tapestry of trunks, like one of the dark corridors in a dream.

They were soon in the most secret entrails of the wood, and felt close about them foliage that they could not see, when the priest said again:

“Where does a wise man hide a leaf? In the forest. But what does he do if there is no forest?”

“Well, well,” cried Flambeau irritably, “what does he do?”

“He grows a forest to hide it in,” said the priest in an obscure voice. “A fearful sin.”

“Look here,” cried his friend impatiently, for the dark wood and the dark saying got a little on his nerves; “will you tell me this story or not? What other evidence is there to go on?”

“There are three more bits of evidence,” said the other, “that I have dug up in holes and corners; and I will give them in logical rather than chronological order. First of all, of course, our authority for the issue and event of the battle is in Olivier’s own dispatches, which are lucid enough. He was entrenched with two or three regiments on the heights that swept down to the Black River, on the other side of which was lower and more marshy ground. Beyond this again was gently rising country, on which was the first English outpost, supported by others which lay, however, considerably in its rear. The British forces as a whole were greatly superior in numbers; but this particular regiment was just far enough from its base to make Olivier consider the project of crossing the river to cut it off. By sunset, however, he had decided to retain his own position, which was a specially strong one. At daybreak next morning he was thunderstruck to see that this stray handful of English, entirely unsupported from their rear, had flung themselves across the river, half by a bridge to the right, and the other half by a ford higher up, and were massed upon the marshy bank below him.

“That they should attempt an attack with such numbers against such a position was incredible enough; but Olivier noticed something yet more extraordinary. For instead of attempting to seize more solid ground, this mad regiment, having put the river in its rear by one wild charge, did nothing more, but stuck there in the mire like flies in treacle. Needless to say, the Brazilians blew great gaps in them with artillery, which they could only return with spirited but lessening rifle fire. Yet they never broke; and Olivier’s curt account ends with a strong tribute of admiration for the mystic valour of these imbeciles. ‘Our line then advanced finally,’ writes Olivier, ‘and drove them into the river; we captured General St. Clare himself and several other officers. The colonel and the major had both fallen in the battle. I cannot resist saying that few finer sights can have been seen in history than the last stand of this extraordinary regiment; wounded officers picking up the rifles of dead soldiers, and the general himself facing us on horseback bareheaded and with a broken sword.' On what happened to the general afterwards Olivier is as silent as Captain Keith."

"Well," grunted Flambeau, "get on to the next bit of evidence."

"The next evidence," said Father Brown, "took some time to find, but it will not take long to tell. I found at last in an almshouse down in the Lincolnshire Fens an old soldier who not only was wounded at the Black River, but had actually knelt beside the colonel of the regiment when he died. This latter was a certain Colonel Clancy, a big bull of an Irishman; and it would seem that he died almost as much of rage as of bullets. He, at any rate, was not responsible for that ridiculous raid; it must have been imposed on him by the general. His last edifying words, according to my informant, were these: 'And there goes the damned old donkey with the end of his sword knocked off. I wish it was his head.' You will remark that everyone seems to have noticed this detail about the broken sword blade, though most people regard it somewhat more reverently than did the late Colonel Clancy. And now for the third fragment."

Their path through the woodland began to go upward, and the speaker paused a little for breath before he went on. Then he continued in the same business-like tone:

"Only a month or two ago a certain Brazilian official died in England, having quarrelled with Olivier and left his country. He was a well-known figure both here and on the Continent, a Spaniard named Espado; I knew him myself, a yellow-faced old dandy, with a hooked nose. For various private reasons I had permission to see the documents he had left; he was a Catholic, of course, and I had been with him towards the end. There was nothing of his that lit up any corner of the black St. Clare business, except five or six common exercise books filled with the diary of some English soldier. I can only suppose that it was found by the Brazilians on one of those that fell. Anyhow, it stopped abruptly the night before the battle.

"But the account of that last day in the poor fellow's life was certainly worth reading. I have it on me; but it's too dark to read it here, and I will give you a resume. The first part of that entry is full of jokes, evidently flung about among the men, about somebody called the Vulture. It does not seem as if this person, whoever he was, was one of themselves, nor even an Englishman; neither is he exactly spoken of as one of the enemy. It sounds rather as if he were some local go-between and non-combatant; perhaps a guide or a journalist. He has been closeted with old Colonel Clancy; but is more often seen talking to the major. Indeed, the major is somewhat prominent in this soldier's narrative; a lean, dark-haired man, apparently, of the name of Murray — a north of Ireland man and a Puritan. There are continual jests about the contrast between this Ulsterman's austerity and the conviviality of Colonel Clancy. There is also some joke about the Vulture wearing bright-coloured clothes.

"But all these levities are scattered by what may well be called the note of a bugle. Behind the English camp and almost parallel to the river ran one of the few great roads of that district. Westward the road curved round towards the river, which it crossed by the bridge before mentioned. To the east the road swept backwards into the wilds, and some two miles along it was the next English outpost. From this direction there came along the road that evening a glitter and clatter of light cavalry, in which even the simple diarist could recognise with astonishment the general with his staff. He rode the great white horse which you have seen so often in illustrated papers and Academy pictures; and you may be sure that the salute they gave him was not merely ceremonial. He, at least, wasted no time on ceremony, but, springing from the saddle immediately, mixed with the group of officers, and fell into emphatic though confidential speech. What struck our friend the diarist most was his special disposition to discuss matters with Major Murray; but, indeed, such a selection, so long as it was not marked, was in no way unnatural. The two men were made for sympathy; they were men who 'read their Bibles'; they were both the old Evangelical type of officer. However this may be, it is certain that when the general mounted again he was still talking earnestly to Murray; and that as he walked his horse slowly down the road towards the river, the tall Ulsterman still walked by his bridle rein in earnest debate. The soldiers watched the two until they vanished behind a clump of trees where the road turned towards the river. The colonel had gone back to his tent, and the men to their pickets; the man with the diary lingered for another four minutes, and saw a marvellous sight.

"The great white horse which had marched slowly down the road, as it had marched in so many processions, flew back, galloping up the road towards them as if it were mad to win a race. At first they thought it had run away with the man on its back; but they soon saw that the general, a fine rider, was himself urging it to full speed. Horse and man swept up to them like a whirlwind; and then, reining up the reeling charger, the general turned on them a face like flame, and called for the colonel like the trumpet that wakes the dead.

"I conceive that all the earthquake events of that catastrophe tumbled on top of each other rather like lumber in the minds of men such as our friend with the diary. With the dazed excitement of a dream, they found themselves falling — literally falling — into their ranks, and learned that an attack was to be led at once across the river. The general and the major, it was said, had found out something at the bridge, and there was only just time to strike for life. The major had gone back at once to call up the reserve along the road behind; it was doubtful if even with that prompt appeal help could reach them in time. But they must pass the stream that night, and seize the heights by morning. It is with the very stir and throb of that romantic nocturnal march that the diary suddenly ends."

Father Brown had mounted ahead; for the woodland path grew smaller, steeper, and more twisted, till they felt as if they were ascending a winding staircase. The priest's voice came from above out of the darkness.

"There was one other little and enormous thing. When the general urged them to their chivalric charge he half drew his sword from the scabbard; and then, as if ashamed of such melodrama, thrust it back again. The sword again, you see."

A half-light broke through the network of boughs above them, flinging the ghost of a net about their feet; for they were mounting again to the faint luminosity of the naked night. Flambeau felt truth all round him as an atmosphere, but not as an idea. He answered with bewildered brain: "Well, what's the matter with the sword? Officers generally have swords, don't they?"

"They are not often mentioned in modern war," said the other dispassionately; "but in this affair one falls over the blessed sword everywhere."

"Well, what is there in that?" growled Flambeau; "it was a twopence coloured sort of incident; the old man's blade breaking in his last battle. Anyone might bet the papers would get hold of it, as they have. On all these tombs and things it's shown broken at the point. I hope you haven't dragged me through this Polar expedition merely because two men with an eye for a picture saw St. Clare's broken sword."

"No," cried Father Brown, with a sharp voice like a pistol shot; "but who saw his unbroken sword?"

"What do you mean?" cried the other, and stood still under the stars. They had come abruptly out of the grey gates of the wood.

"I say, who saw his unbroken sword?" repeated Father Brown obstinately. "Not the writer of the diary, anyhow; the general sheathed it in time."

Flambeau looked about him in the moonlight, as a man struck blind might look in the sun; and his friend went on, for the first time with eagerness:

"Flambeau," he cried, "I cannot prove it, even after hunting through the tombs. But I am sure of it. Let me add just one more tiny fact that tips the whole thing over. The colonel, by a strange chance, was one of the first struck by a bullet. He was struck long before the troops came to close quarters. But he saw St. Clare's sword broken. Why was it broken? How was it broken? My friend, it was broken before the battle."

"Oh!" said his friend, with a sort of forlorn jocularity; "and pray where is the other piece?"

"I can tell you," said the priest promptly. "In the northeast corner of the cemetery of the Protestant Cathedral at Belfast."

"Indeed?" inquired the other. "Have you looked for it?"

"I couldn't," replied Brown, with frank regret. "There's a great marble monument on top of it; a monument to the heroic Major Murray, who fell fighting gloriously at the famous Battle of the Black River."

Flambeau seemed suddenly galvanised into existence. "You mean," he cried hoarsely, "that General St. Clare hated Murray, and murdered him on the field of battle because—"

"You are still full of good and pure thoughts," said the other. "It was worse than that."

"Well," said the large man, "my stock of evil imagination is used up."

The priest seemed really doubtful where to begin, and at last he said again:

"Where would a wise man hide a leaf? In the forest."

The other did not answer.

"If there were no forest, he would make a forest. And if he wished to hide a dead leaf, he would make a dead forest."

There was still no reply, and the priest added still more mildly and quietly:

"And if a man had to hide a dead body, he would make a field of dead bodies to hide it in."

Flambeau began to stamp forward with an intolerance of delay in time or space; but Father Brown went on as if he were continuing the last sentence:

"Sir Arthur St. Clare, as I have already said, was a man who read his Bible. That was what was the matter with him. When will people understand that it is useless for a man to read his Bible unless he also reads everybody else's Bible? A printer reads a Bible for misprints. A Mormon reads his Bible, and finds polygamy; a Christian Scientist reads his, and finds we have no arms and legs. St. Clare was an old Anglo-Indian Protestant soldier. Now, just think what that might mean; and, for Heaven's sake, don't cant about it. It might mean a man physically formidable living under a tropic sun in an Oriental society, and soaking himself without sense or guidance in an Oriental Book. Of course, he read the Old Testament rather than the New. Of course, he found in the Old Testament anything that he wanted — lust, tyranny, treason. Oh, I dare say he was honest, as you call it. But what is the good of a man being honest in his worship of dishonesty?

"In each of the hot and secret countries to which the man went he kept a harem, he tortured witnesses, he amassed shameful gold; but certainly he would have said with steady eyes that he did it to the glory of the Lord. My own theology is sufficiently expressed by asking which Lord? Anyhow, there is this about such evil, that it opens door after door in hell, and always into smaller and smaller chambers. This is the real case against crime, that a man does not become wilder and wilder, but only meaner and meaner. St. Clare was soon suffocated by difficulties of bribery and blackmail; and needed more and more cash. And by the time of the Battle of the Black River he had fallen from world to world to that place which Dante makes the lowest floor of the universe."

"What do you mean?" asked his friend again.

"I mean that," retorted the cleric, and suddenly pointed at a puddle sealed with ice that shone in the moon. "Do you remember whom Dante put in the last circle of ice?"

“The traitors,” said Flambeau, and shuddered. As he looked around at the inhuman landscape of trees, with taunting and almost obscene outlines, he could almost fancy he was Dante, and the priest with the rivulet of a voice was, indeed, a Virgil leading him through a land of eternal sins.

The voice went on: “Olivier, as you know, was quixotic, and would not permit a secret service and spies. The thing, however, was done, like many other things, behind his back. It was managed by my old friend Espado; he was the bright-clad fop, whose hook nose got him called the Vulture. Posing as a sort of philanthropist at the front, he felt his way through the English Army, and at last got his fingers on its one corrupt man — please God! — and that man at the top. St. Clare was in foul need of money, and mountains of it. The discredited family doctor was threatening those extraordinary exposures that afterwards began and were broken off; tales of monstrous and prehistoric things in Park Lane; things done by an English Evangelist that smelt like human sacrifice and hordes of slaves. Money was wanted, too, for his daughter’s dowry; for to him the fame of wealth was as sweet as wealth itself. He snapped the last thread, whispered the word to Brazil, and wealth poured in from the enemies of England. But another man had talked to Espado the Vulture as well as he. Somehow the dark, grim young major from Ulster had guessed the hideous truth; and when they walked slowly together down that road towards the bridge Murray was telling the general that he must resign instantly, or be court-martialled and shot. The general temporised with him till they came to the fringe of tropic trees by the bridge; and there by the singing river and the sunlit palms (for I can see the picture) the general drew his sabre and plunged it through the body of the major.”

The wintry road curved over a ridge in cutting frost, with cruel black shapes of bush and thicket; but Flambeau fancied that he saw beyond it faintly the edge of an aureole that was not starlight and moonlight, but some fire such as is made by men. He watched it as the tale drew to its close.

“St. Clare was a hell-hound, but he was a hound of breed. Never, I’ll swear, was he so lucid and so strong as when poor Murray lay a cold lump at his feet. Never in all his triumphs, as Captain Keith said truly, was the great man so great as he was in this last world-despised defeat. He looked coolly at his weapon to wipe off the blood; he saw the point he had planted between his victim’s shoulders had broken off in the body. He saw quite calmly, as through a club windowpane, all that must follow. He saw that men must find the unaccountable corpse; must extract the unaccountable sword-point; must notice the unaccountable broken sword — or absence of sword. He had killed, but not silenced. But his imperious intellect rose against the facer; there was one way yet. He could make the corpse less unaccountable. He could create a hill of corpses to cover this one. In twenty minutes eight hundred English soldiers were marching down to their death."

The warmer glow behind the black winter wood grew richer and brighter, and Flambeau strode on to reach it. Father Brown also quickened his stride; but he seemed merely absorbed in his tale.

"Such was the valour of that English thousand, and such the genius of their commander, that if they had at once attacked the hill, even their mad march might have met some luck. But the evil mind that played with them like pawns had other aims and reasons. They must remain in the marshes by the bridge at least till British corpses should be a common sight there. Then for the last grand scene; the silver-haired soldier-saint would give up his shattered sword to save further slaughter. Oh, it was well organised for an impromptu. But I think (I cannot prove), I think that it was while they stuck there in the bloody mire that someone doubted — and someone guessed."

He was mute a moment, and then said: "There is a voice from nowhere that tells me the man who guessed was the lover... the man to wed the old man's child."

"But what about Olivier and the hanging?" asked Flambeau.

"Olivier, partly from chivalry, partly from policy, seldom encumbered his march with captives," explained the narrator. "He released everybody in most cases. He released everybody in this case."

"Everybody but the general," said the tall man.

"Everybody," said the priest.

Flambeau knit his black brows. "I don't grasp it all yet," he said.

"There is another picture, Flambeau," said Brown in his more mystical undertone. "I can't prove it; but I can do more — I can see it. There is a camp breaking up on the bare, torrid hills at morning, and Brazilian uniforms massed in blocks and columns to march. There is the red shirt and long black beard of Olivier, which blows as he stands, his broad-brimmed hat in his hand. He is saying farewell to the great enemy he is setting free — the simple, snow-headed English veteran, who thanks him in the name of his men. The English remnant stand behind at attention; beside them are stores and vehicles for the retreat. The drums roll; the Brazilians are moving; the English are still like statues. So they abide till the last hum and flash of the enemy have faded from the tropic horizon. Then they alter their postures all at once, like dead men coming to life; they turn their fifty faces upon the general — faces not to be forgotten."

Flambeau gave a great jump. "Ah," he cried, "you don't mean—"

"Yes," said Father Brown in a deep, moving voice. "It was an English hand that put the rope round St. Clare's neck; I believe the hand that put the ring on his daughter's finger. They were English hands that dragged him up to the tree of shame; the hands of men that had adored him and followed him to victory. And they were English souls (God pardon and endure us all!) who stared at him swinging in that foreign sun on the green gallows of palm, and prayed in their hatred that he might drop off it into hell."

As the two topped the ridge there burst on them the strong scarlet light of a red-curtained English inn. It stood sideways in the road, as if standing aside in the amplitude of hospitality. Its three doors stood open with invitation; and even where they stood they could hear the hum and laughter of humanity happy for a night.

"I need not tell you more," said Father Brown. "They tried him in the wilderness and destroyed him; and then, for the honour of England and of his daughter, they took an oath to seal up for ever the story of the traitor's purse and the assassin's sword blade. Perhaps — Heaven help them — they tried to forget it. Let us try to forget it, anyhow; here is our inn."

"With all my heart," said Flambeau, and was just striding into the bright, noisy bar when he stepped back and almost fell on the road.

"Look there, in the devil's name!" he cried, and pointed rigidly at the square wooden sign that overhung the road. It showed dimly the crude shape of a sabre hilt and a shortened blade; and was inscribed in false archaic lettering, "The Sign of the Broken Sword."

"Were you not prepared?" asked Father Brown gently. "He is the god of this country; half the inns and parks and streets are named after him and his story."

"I thought we had done with the leper," cried Flambeau, and spat on the road.

"You will never have done with him in England," said the priest, looking down, "while brass is strong and stone abides. His marble statues will erect the souls of proud, innocent boys for centuries, his village tomb will smell of loyalty as of lilies. Millions who never knew him shall love him like a father — this man whom the last few that knew him dealt with like dung. He shall be a saint; and the truth shall never be told of him, because I have made up my mind at last. There is so much good and evil in breaking secrets, that I put my conduct to a test. All these newspapers will perish; the anti-Brazil boom is already over; Olivier is already honoured everywhere. But I told myself that if anywhere, by name, in metal or marble that will endure like the pyramids, Colonel Clancy, or Captain Keith, or President Olivier, or any innocent man was wrongly blamed, then I would speak. If it were only that St. Clare was wrongly praised, I would be silent. And I will."

They plunged into the red-curtained tavern, which was not only cosy, but even luxurious inside. On a table stood a silver model of the tomb of St. Clare, the silver head bowed, the silver sword broken. On the walls were coloured photographs of the same scene, and of the system of wagonettes that took tourists to see it. They sat down on the comfortable padded benches.

"Come, it's cold," cried Father Brown; "let's have some wine or beer."

"Or brandy," said Flambeau.

The Three Tools of Death

Both by calling and conviction Father Brown knew better than most of us, that every man is dignified when he is dead. But even he felt a pang of incongruity when he was knocked up at daybreak and told that Sir Aaron Armstrong had been murdered. There was something absurd and unseemly about secret violence in connection with so entirely entertaining and popular a figure. For Sir Aaron Armstrong was entertaining to the point of being comic; and popular in such a manner as to be almost legendary. It was like hearing that Sunny Jim had hanged himself; or that Mr. Pickwick had died in Hanwell. For though Sir Aaron was a philanthropist, and thus dealt with the darker side of our society, he prided himself on dealing with it in the brightest possible style. His political and social speeches were cataracts of anecdotes and "loud laughter"; his bodily health was of a bursting sort; his ethics were all optimism; and he dealt with the Drink problem (his favourite topic) with that immortal or even monotonous gaiety which is so often a mark of the prosperous total abstainer.

The established story of his conversion was familiar on the more puritanic platforms and pulpits, how he had been, when only a boy, drawn away from Scotch theology to Scotch whisky, and how he had risen out of both and become (as he modestly put it) what he was. Yet his wide white beard, cherubic face, and sparkling spectacles, at the numberless dinners and congresses where they appeared, made it hard to believe, somehow, that he had ever been anything so morbid as either a dram-drinker or a Calvinist. He was, one felt, the most seriously merry of all the sons of men.

He had lived on the rural skirt of Hampstead in a handsome house, high but not broad, a modern and prosaic tower. The narrowest of its narrow sides overhung the steep green bank of a railway, and was shaken by passing trains. Sir Aaron Armstrong, as he boisterously explained, had no nerves. But if the train had often given a shock to the house, that morning the tables were turned, and it was the house that gave a shock to the train.

The engine slowed down and stopped just beyond that point where an angle of the house impinged upon the sharp slope of turf. The arrest of most mechanical things must be slow; but the living cause of this had been very rapid. A man clad completely in black, even (it was remembered) to the dreadful detail of black gloves, appeared on the ridge above the engine, and waved his black hands like some sable windmill. This in itself would hardly have stopped even a lingering train. But there came out of him a cry which was talked of afterwards as something utterly unnatural and new. It was one of those shouts that are horridly distinct even when we cannot hear what is shouted. The word in this case was “Murder!”

But the engine-driver swears he would have pulled up just the same if he had heard only the dreadful and definite accent and not the word.

The train once arrested, the most superficial stare could take in many features of the tragedy. The man in black on the green bank was Sir Aaron Armstrong’s man-servant Magnus. The baronet in his optimism had often laughed at the black gloves of this dismal attendant; but no one was likely to laugh at him just now.

So soon as an inquirer or two had stepped off the line and across the smoky hedge, they saw, rolled down almost to the bottom of the bank, the body of an old man in a yellow dressing-gown with a very vivid scarlet lining. A scrap of rope seemed caught about his leg, entangled presumably in a struggle. There was a smear or so of blood, though very little; but the body was bent or broken into a posture impossible to any living thing. It was Sir Aaron Armstrong. A few more bewildered moments brought out a big fair-bearded man, whom some travellers could salute as the dead man’s secretary, Patrick Royce, once well known in Bohemian society and even famous in the Bohemian arts. In a manner more vague, but even more convincing, he echoed the agony of the servant. By the time the third figure of that household, Alice Armstrong, daughter of the dead man, had come already tottering and waving into the garden, the engine-driver had put a stop to his stoppage. The whistle had blown and the train had panted on to get help from the next station.

Father Brown had been thus rapidly summoned at the request of Patrick Royce, the big ex-Bohemian secretary. Royce was an Irishman by birth; and that casual kind of Catholic that never remembers his religion until he is really in a hole. But Royce’s request might have been less promptly complied with if one of the official detectives had not been a friend and admirer of the unofficial Flambeau; and it was impossible to be a friend of Flambeau without hearing numberless stories about Father Brown. Hence, while the young detective (whose name was Merton) led the little priest across the fields to the railway, their talk was more confidential than could be expected between two total strangers.

“As far as I can see,” said Mr. Merton candidly, “there is no sense to be made of it at all. There is nobody one can suspect. Magnus is a solemn old fool; far too much of a fool to be an assassin. Royce has been the baronet’s best friend for years; and his daughter undoubtedly adored him. Besides, it’s all too absurd. Who would kill such a cheery old chap as Armstrong? Who could dip his hands in the gore of an after-dinner speaker? It would be like killing Father Christmas.”

“Yes, it was a cheery house,” assented Father Brown. “It was a cheery house while he was alive. Do you think it will be cheery now he is dead?”

Merton started a little and regarded his companion with an enlivened eye. “Now he is dead?” he repeated.

“Yes,” continued the priest stolidly, “he was cheerful. But did he communicate his cheerfulness? Frankly, was anyone else in the house cheerful but he?”

A window in Merton’s mind let in that strange light of surprise in which we see for the first time things we have known all along. He had often been to the Armstrongs’, on little police jobs of the philanthropist; and, now he came to think of it, it was in itself a depressing house. The rooms were very high and very cold; the decoration mean and provincial; the draughty corridors were lit by electricity that was bleaker than moonlight. And though the old man’s scarlet face and silver beard had blazed like a bonfire in each room or passage in turn, it did not leave any warmth behind it. Doubtless this spectral discomfort in the place was partly due to the very vitality and exuberance of its owner; he needed no stoves or lamps, he would say, but carried his own warmth with him. But when Merton recalled the other inmates, he was compelled to confess that they also were as shadows of their lord. The moody man-servant, with his monstrous black gloves, was almost a nightmare; Royce, the secretary, was solid enough, a big bull of a man, in tweeds, with a short beard; but the straw-coloured beard was startlingly salted with grey like the tweeds, and the broad forehead was barred with premature wrinkles. He was good-natured enough also, but it was a sad sort of good-nature, almost a heart-broken sort — he had the general air of being some sort of failure in life. As for Armstrong’s daughter, it was almost incredible that she was his daughter; she was so pallid in colour and sensitive in outline. She was graceful, but there was a quiver in the very shape of her that was like the lines of an aspen. Merton had sometimes wondered if she had learnt to quail at the crash of the passing trains.

“You see,” said Father Brown, blinking modestly, “I’m not sure that the Armstrong cheerfulness is so very cheerful — for other people. You say that nobody could kill such a happy old man, but I’m not sure; ne nos inducas in tentationem. If ever I murdered somebody,” he added quite simply, “I dare say it might be an Optimist.”

“Why?” cried Merton amused. “Do you think people dislike cheerfulness?”

“People like frequent laughter,” answered Father Brown, “but I don’t think they like a permanent smile. Cheerfulness without humour is a very trying thing.”

They walked some way in silence along the windy grassy bank by the rail, and just as they came under the far-flung shadow of the tall Armstrong house, Father Brown said suddenly, like a man throwing away a troublesome thought rather than offering it seriously: “Of course, drink is neither good nor bad in itself. But I can’t help sometimes feeling that men like Armstrong want an occasional glass of wine to sadden them.”

Merton’s official superior, a grizzled and capable detective named Gilder, was standing on the green bank waiting for the coroner, talking to Patrick Royce, whose big shoulders and bristly beard and hair towered above him. This was the more noticeable because Royce walked always with a sort of powerful stoop, and seemed to be going about his small clerical and domestic duties in a heavy and humbled style, like a buffalo drawing a go-cart.

He raised his head with unusual pleasure at the sight of the priest, and took him a few paces apart. Meanwhile Merton was addressing the older detective respectfully indeed, but not without a certain boyish impatience.

“Well, Mr. Gilder, have you got much farther with the mystery?”

“There is no mystery,” replied Gilder, as he looked under dreamy eyelids at the rooks.

“Well, there is for me, at any rate,” said Merton, smiling.

“It is simple enough, my boy,” observed the senior investigator, stroking his grey, pointed beard. “Three minutes after you’d gone for Mr. Royce’s parson the whole thing came out. You know that pasty-faced servant in the black gloves who stopped the train?”

“I should know him anywhere. Somehow he rather gave me the creeps.”

"Well," drawled Gilder, "when the train had gone on again, that man had gone too. Rather a cool criminal, don't you think, to escape by the very train that went off for the police?"

"You're pretty sure, I suppose," remarked the young man, "that he really did kill his master?"

"Yes, my son, I'm pretty sure," replied Gilder drily, "for the trifling reason that he has gone off with twenty thousand pounds in papers that were in his master's desk. No, the only thing worth calling a difficulty is how he killed him. The skull seems broken as with some big weapon, but there's no weapon at all lying about, and the murderer would have found it awkward to carry it away, unless the weapon was too small to be noticed."

"Perhaps the weapon was too big to be noticed," said the priest, with an odd little giggle.

Gilder looked round at this wild remark, and rather sternly asked Brown what he meant.

"Silly way of putting it, I know," said Father Brown apologetically. "Sounds like a fairy tale. But poor Armstrong was killed with a giant's club, a great green club, too big to be seen, and which we call the earth. He was broken against this green bank we are standing on."

"How do you mean?" asked the detective quickly.

Father Brown turned his moon face up to the narrow facade of the house and blinked hopelessly up. Following his eyes, they saw that right at the top of this otherwise blind back quarter of the building, an attic window stood open.

"Don't you see," he explained, pointing a little awkwardly like a child, "he was thrown down from there?"

Gilder frowningly scrutinised the window, and then said: "Well, it is certainly possible. But I don't see why you are so sure about it."

Brown opened his grey eyes wide. "Why," he said, "there's a bit of rope round the dead man's leg. Don't you see that other bit of rope up there caught at the corner of the window?"

At that height the thing looked like the faintest particle of dust or hair, but the shrewd old investigator was satisfied. "You're quite right, sir," he said to Father Brown; "that is certainly one to you."

Almost as he spoke a special train with one carriage took the curve of the line on their left, and, stopping, disgorged another group of policemen, in whose midst was the hangdog visage of Magnus, the absconded servant.

“By Jove! they’ve got him,” cried Gilder, and stepped forward with quite a new alertness.

“Have you got the money!” he cried to the first policeman.

The man looked him in the face with a rather curious expression and said: “No.” Then he added: “At least, not here.”

“Which is the inspector, please?” asked the man called Magnus.

When he spoke everyone instantly understood how this voice had stopped a train. He was a dull-looking man with flat black hair, a colourless face, and a faint suggestion of the East in the level slits in his eyes and mouth. His blood and name, indeed, had remained dubious, ever since Sir Aaron had “rescued” him from a waitership in a London restaurant, and (as some said) from more infamous things. But his voice was as vivid as his face was dead. Whether through exactitude in a foreign language, or in deference to his master (who had been somewhat deaf), Magnus’s tones had a peculiarly ringing and piercing quality, and the whole group quite jumped when he spoke.

“I always knew this would happen,” he said aloud with brazen blandness. “My poor old master made game of me for wearing black; but I always said I should be ready for his funeral.”

And he made a momentary movement with his two dark-gloved hands.

“Sergeant,” said Inspector Gilder, eyeing the black hands with wrath, “aren’t you putting the bracelets on this fellow; he looks pretty dangerous.”

“Well, sir,” said the sergeant, with the same odd look of wonder, “I don’t know that we can.”

“What do you mean?” asked the other sharply. “Haven’t you arrested him?”

A faint scorn widened the slit-like mouth, and the whistle of an approaching train seemed oddly to echo the mockery.

“We arrested him,” replied the sergeant gravely, “just as he was coming out of the police station at Highgate, where he had deposited all his master’s money in the care of Inspector Robinson.”

Gilder looked at the man-servant in utter amazement. “Why on earth did you do that?” he asked of Magnus.

“To keep it safe from the criminal, of course,” replied that person placidly.

“Surely,” said Gilder, “Sir Aaron’s money might have been safely left with Sir Aaron’s family.”

The tail of his sentence was drowned in the roar of the train as it went rocking and clanking; but through all the hell of noises to which that unhappy house was periodically subject, they could hear the syllables of Magnus's answer, in all their bell-like distinctness: "I have no reason to feel confidence in Sir Aaron's family."

All the motionless men had the ghostly sensation of the presence of some new person; and Merton was scarcely surprised when he looked up and saw the pale face of Armstrong's daughter over Father Brown's shoulder. She was still young and beautiful in a silvery style, but her hair was of so dusty and hueless a brown that in some shadows it seemed to have turned totally grey.

"Be careful what you say," said Royce gruffly, "you'll frighten Miss Armstrong."

"I hope so," said the man with the clear voice.

As the woman winced and everyone else wondered, he went on: "I am somewhat used to Miss Armstrong's tremors. I have seen her trembling off and on for years. And some said she was shaking with cold and some she was shaking with fear, but I know she was shaking with hate and wicked anger — fiends that have had their feast this morning. She would have been away by now with her lover and all the money but for me. Ever since my poor old master prevented her from marrying that tipsy blackguard—"

"Stop," said Gilder very sternly. "We have nothing to do with your family fancies or suspicions. Unless you have some practical evidence, your mere opinions—"

"Oh! I'll give you practical evidence," cut in Magnus, in his hacking accent. "You'll have to subpoena me, Mr. Inspector, and I shall have to tell the truth. And the truth is this: An instant after the old man was pitched bleeding out of the window, I ran into the attic, and found his daughter swooning on the floor with a red dagger still in her hand. Allow me to hand that also to the proper authorities." He took from his tail-pocket a long horn-hilted knife with a red smear on it, and handed it politely to the sergeant. Then he stood back again, and his slits of eyes almost faded from his face in one fat Chinese sneer.

Merton felt an almost bodily sickness at the sight of him; and he muttered to Gilder: "Surely you would take Miss Armstrong's word against his?"

Father Brown suddenly lifted a face so absurdly fresh that it looked somehow as if he had just washed it. “Yes,” he said, radiating innocence, “but is Miss Armstrong’s word against his?”

The girl uttered a startled, singular little cry; everyone looked at her. Her figure was rigid as if paralysed; only her face within its frame of faint brown hair was alive with an appalling surprise. She stood like one of a sudden lassooed and throttled.

“This man,” said Mr. Gilder gravely, “actually says that you were found grasping a knife, insensible, after the murder.”

“He says the truth,” answered Alice.

The next fact of which they were conscious was that Patrick Royce strode with his great stooping head into their ring and uttered the singular words: “Well, if I’ve got to go, I’ll have a bit of pleasure first.”

His huge shoulder heaved and he sent an iron fist smash into Magnus’s bland Mongolian visage, laying him on the lawn as flat as a starfish. Two or three of the police instantly put their hands on Royce; but to the rest it seemed as if all reason had broken up and the universe were turning into a brainless harlequinade.

“None of that, Mr. Royce,” Gilder had called out authoritatively. “I shall arrest you for assault.”

“No, you won’t,” answered the secretary in a voice like an iron gong, “you will arrest me for murder.”

Gilder threw an alarmed glance at the man knocked down; but since that outraged person was already sitting up and wiping a little blood off a substantially uninjured face, he only said shortly: “What do you mean?”

“It is quite true, as this fellow says,” explained Royce, “that Miss Armstrong fainted with a knife in her hand. But she had not snatched the knife to attack her father, but to defend him.”

“To defend him,” repeated Gilder gravely. “Against whom?”

“Against me,” answered the secretary.

Alice looked at him with a complex and baffling face; then she said in a low voice: “After it all, I am still glad you are brave.”

“Come upstairs,” said Patrick Royce heavily, “and I will show you the whole cursed thing.”

The attic, which was the secretary’s private place (and rather a small cell for so large a hermit), had indeed all the vestiges of a violent drama. Near the centre of the floor lay a large revolver as if flung away; nearer to the left was rolled a whisky bottle, open but not quite empty. The cloth of the little table lay dragged and trampled, and a length of cord, like that found on the corpse, was cast wildly across the windowsill. Two vases were smashed on the mantelpiece and one on the carpet.

"I was drunk," said Royce; and this simplicity in the prematurely battered man somehow had the pathos of the first sin of a baby.

"You all know about me," he continued huskily; "everybody knows how my story began, and it may as well end like that too. I was called a clever man once, and might have been a happy one; Armstrong saved the remains of a brain and body from the taverns, and was always kind to me in his own way, poor fellow! Only he wouldn't let me marry Alice here; and it will always be said that he was right enough. Well, you can form your own conclusions, and you won't want me to go into details. That is my whisky bottle half emptied in the corner; that is my revolver quite emptied on the carpet. It was the rope from my box that was found on the corpse, and it was from my window the corpse was thrown. You need not set detectives to grub up my tragedy; it is a common enough weed in this world. I give myself to the gallows; and, by God, that is enough!"

At a sufficiently delicate sign, the police gathered round the large man to lead him away; but their unobtrusiveness was somewhat staggered by the remarkable appearance of Father Brown, who was on his hands and knees on the carpet in the doorway, as if engaged in some kind of undignified prayers. Being a person utterly insensible to the social figure he cut, he remained in this posture, but turned a bright round face up at the company, presenting the appearance of a quadruped with a very comic human head.

"I say," he said good-naturedly, "this really won't do at all, you know. At the beginning you said we'd found no weapon. But now we're finding too many; there's the knife to stab, and the rope to strangle, and the pistol to shoot; and after all he broke his neck by falling out of a window! It won't do. It's not economical." And he shook his head at the ground as a horse does grazing.

Inspector Gilder had opened his mouth with serious intentions, but before he could speak the grotesque figure on the floor had gone on quite volubly.

"And now three quite impossible things. First, these holes in the carpet, where the six bullets have gone in. Why on earth should anybody fire at the carpet? A drunken man lets fly at his enemy's head, the thing that's grinning at him. He doesn't pick a quarrel with his feet, or lay siege to his slippers. And then there's the rope" — and having done with the carpet the speaker lifted his hands and put them in his pocket, but continued unaffectedly on his knees— "in what conceivable intoxication would anybody try to put a rope round a man's neck and finally put it round his leg? Royce, anyhow, was not so drunk as that, or he would be sleeping like a log by now. And, plainest of all, the whisky bottle. You suggest a dipsomaniac fought for the whisky bottle, and then having won, rolled it away in a corner, spilling one half and leaving the other. That is the very last thing a dipsomaniac would do."

He scrambled awkwardly to his feet, and said to the self-accused murderer in tones of limpid penitence: "I'm awfully sorry, my dear sir, but your tale is really rubbish."

"Sir," said Alice Armstrong in a low tone to the priest, "can I speak to you alone for a moment?"

This request forced the communicative cleric out of the gangway, and before he could speak in the next room, the girl was talking with strange incisiveness.

"You are a clever man," she said, "and you are trying to save Patrick, I know. But it's no use. The core of all this is black, and the more things you find out the more there will be against the miserable man I love."

"Why?" asked Brown, looking at her steadily.

"Because," she answered equally steadily, "I saw him commit the crime myself."

"Ah!" said the unmoved Brown, "and what did he do?"

"I was in this room next to them," she explained; "both doors were closed, but I suddenly heard a voice, such as I had never heard on earth, roaring 'Hell, hell, hell,' again and again, and then the two doors shook with the first explosion of the revolver. Thrice again the thing banged before I got the two doors open and found the room full of smoke; but the pistol was smoking in my poor, mad Patrick's hand; and I saw him fire the last murderous volley with my own eyes. Then he leapt on my father, who was clinging in terror to the window-sill, and, grappling, tried to strangle him with the rope, which he threw over his head, but which slipped over his struggling shoulders to his feet. Then it tightened round one leg and Patrick dragged him along like a maniac. I snatched a knife from the mat, and, rushing between them, managed to cut the rope before I fainted."

"I see," said Father Brown, with the same wooden civility. "Thank you."

As the girl collapsed under her memories, the priest passed stiffly into the next room, where he found Gilder and Merton alone with Patrick Royce, who sat in a chair, handcuffed. There he said to the Inspector submissively:

"Might I say a word to the prisoner in your presence; and might he take off those funny cuffs for a minute?"

"He is a very powerful man," said Merton in an undertone. "Why do you want them taken off?"

"Why, I thought," replied the priest humbly, "that perhaps I might have the very great honour of shaking hands with him."

Both detectives stared, and Father Brown added: "Won't you tell them about it, sir?"

The man on the chair shook his tousled head, and the priest turned impatiently.

"Then I will," he said. "Private lives are more important than public reputations. I am going to save the living, and let the dead bury their dead."

He went to the fatal window, and blinked out of it as he went on talking.

"I told you that in this case there were too many weapons and only one death. I tell you now that they were not weapons, and were not used to cause death. All those grisly tools, the noose, the bloody knife, the exploding pistol, were instruments of a curious mercy. They were not used to kill Sir Aaron, but to save him."

"To save him!" repeated Gilder. "And from what?"

"From himself," said Father Brown. "He was a suicidal maniac."

"What?" cried Merton in an incredulous tone. "And the Religion of Cheerfulness—"

"It is a cruel religion," said the priest, looking out of the window. "Why couldn't they let him weep a little, like his fathers before him? His plans stiffened, his views grew cold; behind that merry mask was the empty mind of the atheist. At last, to keep up his hilarious public level, he fell back on that dram-drinking he had abandoned long ago. But there is this horror about alcoholism in a sincere teetotaler: that he pictures and expects that psychological inferno from which he has warned others. It leapt upon poor Armstrong prematurely, and by this morning he was in such a case that he sat here and cried he was in hell, in so crazy a voice that his daughter did not know it. He was mad for death, and with the monkey tricks of the mad he had scattered round him death in many shapes — a running noose and his friend’s revolver and a knife. Royce entered accidentally and acted in a flash. He flung the knife on the mat behind him, snatched up the revolver, and having no time to unload it, emptied it shot after shot all over the floor. The suicide saw a fourth shape of death, and made a dash for the window. The rescuer did the only thing he could — ran after him with the rope and tried to tie him hand and foot. Then it was that the unlucky girl ran in, and misunderstanding the struggle, strove to slash her father free. At first she only slashed poor Royce’s knuckles, from which has come all the little blood in this affair. But, of course, you noticed that he left blood, but no wound, on that servant’s face? Only before the poor woman swooned, she did hack her father loose, so that he went crashing through that window into eternity.”

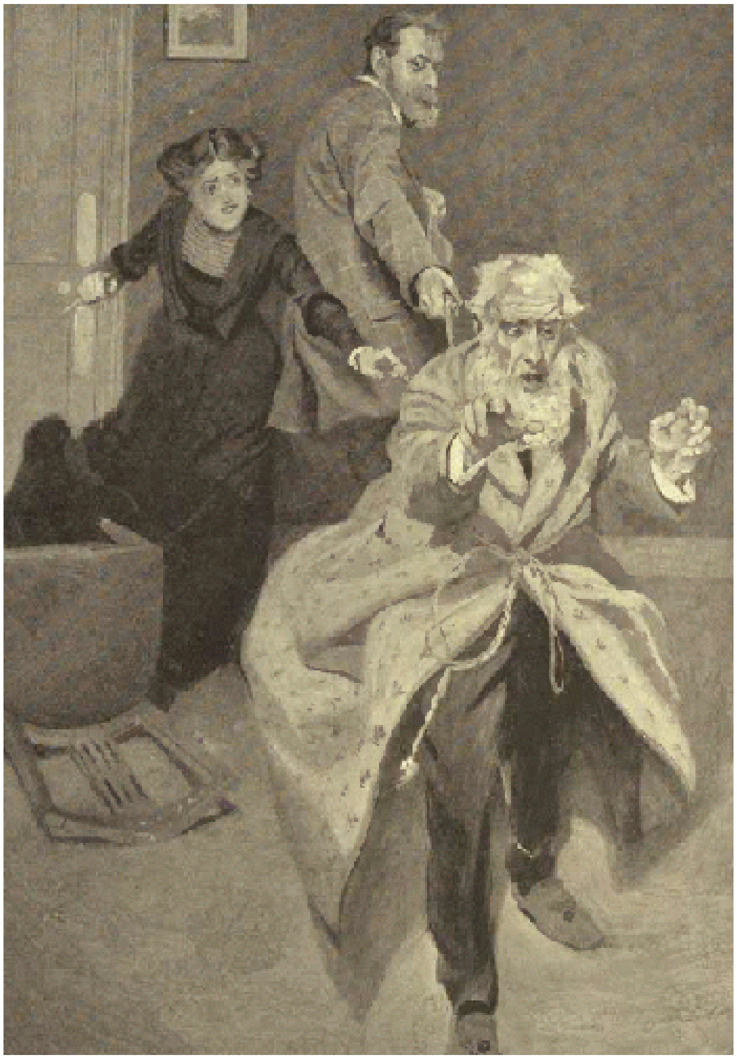

There was a long stillness slowly broken by the metallic noises of Gilder unlocking the handcuffs of Patrick Royce, to whom he said: “I think I should have told the truth, sir. You and the young lady are worth more than Armstrong's obituary notices."

"Confound Armstrong's notices," cried Royce roughly. "Don't you see it was because she mustn't know?"

"Mustn't know what?" asked Merton.

"Why, that she killed her father, you fool!" roared the other. "He'd have been alive now but for her. It might craze her to know that."

"No, I don't think it would," remarked Father Brown, as he picked up his hat. "I rather think I should tell her. Even the most murderous blunders don't poison life like sins; anyhow, I think you may both be the happier now. I've got to go back to the Deaf School."

As he went out on to the gusty grass an acquaintance from Highgate stopped him and said:

"The Coroner has arrived. The inquiry is just going to begin."

"I've got to get back to the Deaf School," said Father Brown. "I'm sorry I can't stop for the inquiry."

THE WISDOM OF FATHER BROWN

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The first edition

The Absence of Mr Glass

THE consulting-rooms of Dr Orion Hood, the eminent criminologist and specialist in certain moral disorders, lay along the sea-front at Scarborough, in a series of very large and well-lighted french windows, which showed the North Sea like one endless outer wall of blue-green marble. In such a place the sea had something of the monotony of a blue-green dado: for the chambers themselves were ruled throughout by a terrible tidiness not unlike the terrible tidiness of the sea. It must not be supposed that Dr Hood's apartments excluded luxury, or even poetry. These things were there, in their place; but one felt that they were never allowed out of their place. Luxury was there: there stood upon a special table eight or ten boxes of the best cigars; but they were built upon a plan so that the strongest were always nearest the wall and the mildest nearest the window. A tantalus containing three kinds of spirit, all of a liqueur excellence, stood always on this table of luxury; but the fanciful have asserted that the whisky, brandy, and rum seemed always to stand at the same level. Poetry was there: the left-hand corner of the room was lined with as complete a set of English classics as the right hand could show of English and foreign physiologists. But if one took a volume of Chaucer or Shelley from that rank, its absence irritated the mind like a gap in a man's front teeth. One could not say the books were never read; probably they were, but there was a sense of their being chained to their places, like the Bibles in the old churches. Dr Hood treated his private book-shelf as if it were a public library. And if this strict scientific intangibility steeped even the shelves laden with lyrics and ballads and the tables laden with drink and tobacco, it goes without saying that yet more of such heathen holiness protected the other shelves that held the specialist's library, and the other tables that sustained the frail and even fairylike instruments of chemistry or mechanics.

Dr Hood paced the length of his string of apartments, bounded — as the boys' geographies say — on the east by the North Sea and on the west by the serried ranks of his sociological and criminologist library. He was clad in an artist's velvet, but with none of an artist's negligence; his hair was heavily shot with grey, but growing thick and healthy; his face was lean, but sanguine and expectant. Everything about him and his room indicated something at once rigid and restless, like that great northern sea by which (on pure principles of hygiene) he had built his home.

Fate, being in a funny mood, pushed the door open and introduced into those long, strict, sea-flanked apartments one who was perhaps the most startling opposite of them and their master. In answer to a curt but civil summons, the door opened inwards and there shambled into the room a shapeless little figure, which seemed to find its own hat and umbrella as unmanageable as a mass of luggage. The umbrella was a black and prosaic bundle long past repair; the hat was a broad-curved black hat, clerical but not common in England; the man was the very embodiment of all that is homely and helpless.

The doctor regarded the new-comer with a restrained astonishment, not unlike that he would have shown if some huge but obviously harmless sea-beast had crawled into his room. The new-comer regarded the doctor with that beaming but breathless geniality which characterizes a corpulent charwoman who has just managed to stuff herself into an omnibus. It is a rich confusion of social self-congratulation and bodily disarray. His hat tumbled to the carpet, his heavy umbrella slipped between his knees with a thud; he reached after the one and ducked after the other, but with an unimpaired smile on his round face spoke simultaneously as follows:

“My name is Brown. Pray excuse me. I’ve come about that business of the MacNabs. I have heard, you often help people out of such troubles. Pray excuse me if I am wrong.”

By this time he had sprawlingly recovered the hat, and made an odd little bobbing bow over it, as if setting everything quite right.

“I hardly understand you,” replied the scientist, with a cold intensity of manner. “I fear you have mistaken the chambers. I am Dr Hood, and my work is almost entirely literary and educational. It is true that I have sometimes been consulted by the police in cases of peculiar difficulty and importance, but—”

“Oh, this is of the greatest importance,” broke in the little man called Brown. “Why, her mother won’t let them get engaged.” And he leaned back in his chair in radiant rationality.

The brows of Dr Hood were drawn down darkly, but the eyes under them were bright with something that might be anger or might be amusement. “And still,” he said, “I do not quite understand.”

“You see, they want to get married,” said the man with the clerical hat. “Maggie MacNab and young Todhunter want to get married. Now, what can be more important than that?”

The great Orion Hood’s scientific triumphs had deprived him of many things — some said of his health, others of his God; but they had not wholly despoiled him of his sense of the absurd. At the last plea of the ingenuous priest a chuckle broke out of him from inside, and he threw himself into an arm-chair in an ironical attitude of the consulting physician.

“Mr Brown,” he said gravely, “it is quite fourteen and a half years since I was personally asked to test a personal problem: then it was the case of an attempt to poison the French President at a Lord Mayor’s Banquet. It is now, I understand, a question of whether some friend of yours called Maggie is a suitable fiancee for some friend of hers called Todhunter. Well, Mr Brown, I am a sportsman. I will take it on. I will give the MacNab family my best advice, as good as I gave the French Republic and the King of England — no, better: fourteen years better. I have nothing else to do this afternoon. Tell me your story.”

The little clergyman called Brown thanked him with unquestionable warmth, but still with a queer kind of simplicity. It was rather as if he were thanking a stranger in a smoking-room for some trouble in passing the matches, than as if he were (as he was) practically thanking the Curator of Kew Gardens for coming with him into a field to find a four-leaved clover. With scarcely a semi-colon after his hearty thanks, the little man began his recital:

“I told you my name was Brown; well, that’s the fact, and I’m the priest of the little Catholic Church I dare say you’ve seen beyond those straggly streets, where the town ends towards the north. In the last and straggliest of those streets which runs along the sea like a sea-wall there is a very honest but rather sharp-tempered member of my flock, a widow called MacNab. She has one daughter, and she lets lodgings, and between her and the daughter, and between her and the lodgers — well, I dare say there is a great deal to be said on both sides. At present she has only one lodger, the young man called Todhunter; but he has given more trouble than all the rest, for he wants to marry the young woman of the house.”

“And the young woman of the house,” asked Dr Hood, with huge and silent amusement, “what does she want?”

"Why, she wants to marry him," cried Father Brown, sitting up eagerly. "That is just the awful complication."

"It is indeed a hideous enigma," said Dr Hood.

"This young James Todhunter," continued the cleric, "is a very decent man so far as I know; but then nobody knows very much. He is a bright, brownish little fellow, agile like a monkey, clean-shaven like an actor, and obliging like a born courtier. He seems to have quite a pocketful of money, but nobody knows what his trade is. Mrs MacNab, therefore (being of a pessimistic turn), is quite sure it is something dreadful, and probably connected with dynamite. The dynamite must be of a shy and noiseless sort, for the poor fellow only shuts himself up for several hours of the day and studies something behind a locked door. He declares his privacy is temporary and justified, and promises to explain before the wedding. That is all that anyone knows for certain, but Mrs MacNab will tell you a great deal more than even she is certain of. You know how the tales grow like grass on such a patch of ignorance as that. There are tales of two voices heard talking in the room; though, when the door is opened, Todhunter is always found alone. There are tales of a mysterious tall man in a silk hat, who once came out of the sea-mists and apparently out of the sea, stepping softly across the sandy fields and through the small back garden at twilight, till he was heard talking to the lodger at his open window. The colloquy seemed to end in a quarrel. Todhunter dashed down his window with violence, and the man in the high hat melted into the sea-fog again. This story is told by the family with the fiercest mystification; but I really think Mrs MacNab prefers her own original tale: that the Other Man (or whatever it is) crawls out every night from the big box in the corner, which is kept locked all day. You see, therefore, how this sealed door of Todhunter's is treated as the gate of all the fancies and monstrosities of the 'Thousand and One Nights'. And yet there is the little fellow in his respectable black jacket, as punctual and innocent as a parlour clock. He pays his rent to the tick; he is practically a teetotaller; he is tirelessly kind with the younger children, and can keep them amused for a day on end; and, last and most urgent of all, he has made himself equally popular with the eldest daughter, who is ready to go to church with him tomorrow."

A man warmly concerned with any large theories has always a relish for applying them to any triviality. The great specialist having condescended to the priest's simplicity, condescended expansively. He settled himself with comfort in his arm-chair and began to talk in the tone of a somewhat absent-minded lecturer:

"Even in a minute instance, it is best to look first to the main tendencies of Nature. A particular flower may not be dead in early winter, but the flowers are dying; a particular pebble may never be wetted with the tide, but the tide is coming in. To the scientific eye all human history is a series of collective movements, destructions or migrations, like the massacre of flies in winter or the return of birds in spring. Now the root fact in all history is Race. Race produces religion; Race produces legal and ethical wars. There is no stronger case than that of the wild, unworldly and perishing stock which we commonly call the Celts, of whom your friends the MacNabs are specimens. Small, swarthy, and of this dreamy and drifting blood, they accept easily the superstitious explanation of any incidents, just as they still accept (you will excuse me for saying) that superstitious explanation of all incidents which you and your Church represent. It is not remarkable that such people, with the sea moaning behind them and the Church (excuse me again) droning in front of them, should put fantastic features into what are probably plain events. You, with your small parochial responsibilities, see only this particular Mrs MacNab, terrified with this particular tale of two voices and a tall man out of the sea. But the man with the scientific imagination sees, as it were, the whole clans of MacNab scattered over the whole world, in its ultimate average as uniform as a tribe of birds. He sees thousands of Mrs MacNabs, in thousands of houses, dropping their little drop of morbidity in the tea-cups of their friends; he sees—"

Before the scientist could conclude his sentence, another and more impatient summons sounded from without; someone with swishing skirts was marshalled hurriedly down the corridor, and the door opened on a young girl, decently dressed but disordered and red-hot with haste. She had sea-blown blonde hair, and would have been entirely beautiful if her cheek-bones had not been, in the Scotch manner, a little high in relief as well as in colour. Her apology was almost as abrupt as a command.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you, sir," she said, "but I had to follow Father Brown at once; it's nothing less than life or death."

Father Brown began to get to his feet in some disorder. "Why, what has happened, Maggie?" he said.

"James has been murdered, for all I can make out," answered the girl, still breathing hard from her rush. "That man Glass has been with him again; I heard them talking through the door quite plain. Two separate voices: for James speaks low, with a burr, and the other voice was high and quavery."

"That man Glass?" repeated the priest in some perplexity.

"I know his name is Glass," answered the girl, in great impatience. "I heard it through the door. They were quarrelling — about money, I think — for I heard James say again and again, 'That's right, Mr Glass,' or 'No, Mr Glass,' and then, 'Two or three, Mr Glass.' But we're talking too much; you must come at once, and there may be time yet."

"But time for what?" asked Dr Hood, who had been studying the young lady with marked interest. "What is there about Mr Glass and his money troubles that should impel such urgency?"

"I tried to break down the door and couldn't," answered the girl shortly, "Then I ran to the back-yard, and managed to climb on to the window-sill that looks into the room. It was an dim, and seemed to be empty, but I swear I saw James lying huddled up in a corner, as if he were drugged or strangled."

"This is very serious," said Father Brown, gathering his errant hat and umbrella and standing up; "in point of fact I was just putting your case before this gentleman, and his view—"

"Has been largely altered," said the scientist gravely. "I do not think this young lady is so Celtic as I had supposed. As I have nothing else to do, I will put on my hat and stroll down town with you."

In a few minutes all three were approaching the dreary tail of the MacNabs' street: the girl with the stern and breathless stride of the mountaineer, the criminologist with a lounging grace (which was not without a certain leopard-like swiftness), and the priest at an energetic trot entirely devoid of distinction. The aspect of this edge of the town was not entirely without justification for the doctor's hints about desolate moods and environments. The scattered houses stood farther and farther apart in a broken string along the seashore; the afternoon was closing with a premature and partly lurid twilight; the sea was of an inky purple and murmuring ominously. In the scrappy back garden of the MacNabs which ran down towards the sand, two black, barren-looking trees stood up like demon hands held up in astonishment, and as Mrs MacNab ran down the street to meet them with lean hands similarly spread, and her fierce face in shadow, she was a little like a demon herself. The doctor and the priest made scant reply to her shrill reiterations of her daughter's story, with more disturbing details of her own, to the divided vows of vengeance against Mr Glass for murdering, and against Mr Todhunter for being murdered, or against the latter for having dared to want to marry her daughter, and for not having lived to do it. They passed through the narrow passage in the front of the house until they came to the lodger's door at the back, and there Dr Hood, with the trick of an old detective, put his shoulder sharply to the panel and burst in the door.

It opened on a scene of silent catastrophe. No one seeing it, even for a flash, could doubt that the room had been the theatre of some thrilling collision between two, or perhaps more, persons. Playing-cards lay littered across the table or fluttered about the floor as if a game had been interrupted. Two wine glasses stood ready for wine on a side-table, but a third lay smashed in a star of crystal upon the carpet. A few feet from it lay what looked like a long knife or short sword, straight, but with an ornamental and pictured handle, its dull blade just caught a grey glint from the dreary window behind, which showed the black trees against the leaden level of the sea. Towards the opposite corner of the room was rolled a gentleman's silk top hat, as if it had just been knocked off his head; so much so, indeed, that one almost looked to see it still rolling. And in the corner behind it, thrown like a sack of potatoes, but corded like a railway trunk, lay Mr James Todhunter, with a scarf across his mouth, and six or seven ropes knotted round his elbows and ankles. His brown eyes were alive and shifted alertly.

Dr Orion Hood paused for one instant on the doormat and drank in the whole scene of voiceless violence. Then he stepped swiftly across the carpet, picked up the tall silk hat, and gravely put it upon the head of the yet pinioned Todhunter. It was so much too large for him that it almost slipped down on to his shoulders.

"Mr Glass's hat," said the doctor, returning with it and peering into the inside with a pocket lens. "How to explain the absence of Mr Glass and the presence of Mr Glass's hat? For Mr Glass is not a careless man with his clothes. That hat is of a stylish shape and systematically brushed and burnished, though not very new. An old dandy, I should think."

"But, good heavens!" called out Miss MacNab, "aren't you going to untie the man first?"

“I say ‘old’ with intention, though not with certainty” continued the expositor; “my reason for it might seem a little far-fetched. The hair of human beings falls out in very varying degrees, but almost always falls out slightly, and with the lens I should see the tiny hairs in a hat recently worn. It has none, which leads me to guess that Mr Glass is bald. Now when this is taken with the high-pitched and querulous voice which Miss MacNab described so vividly (patience, my dear lady, patience), when we take the hairless head together with the tone common in senile anger, I should think we may deduce some advance in years. Nevertheless, he was probably vigorous, and he was almost certainly tall. I might rely in some degree on the story of his previous appearance at the window, as a tall man in a silk hat, but I think I have more exact indication. This wineglass has been smashed all over the place, but one of its splinters lies on the high bracket beside the mantelpiece. No such fragment could have fallen there if the vessel had been smashed in the hand of a comparatively short man like Mr Todhunter.”

“By the way,” said Father Brown, “might it not be as well to untie Mr Todhunter?”

“Our lesson from the drinking-vessels does not end here,” proceeded the specialist. “I may say at once that it is possible that the man Glass was bald or nervous through dissipation rather than age. Mr Todhunter, as has been remarked, is a quiet thrifty gentleman, essentially an abstainer. These cards and wine-cups are no part of his normal habit; they have been produced for a particular companion. But, as it happens, we may go farther. Mr Todhunter may or may not possess this wine-service, but there is no appearance of his possessing any wine. What, then, were these vessels to contain? I would at once suggest some brandy or whisky, perhaps of a luxurious sort, from a flask in the pocket of Mr Glass. We have thus something like a picture of the man, or at least of the type: tall, elderly, fashionable, but somewhat frayed, certainly fond of play and strong waters, perhaps rather too fond of them. Mr Glass is a gentleman not unknown on the fringes of society.”

“Look here,” cried the young woman, “if you don’t let me pass to untie him I’ll run outside and scream for the police.”

“I should not advise you, Miss MacNab,” said Dr Hood gravely, “to be in any hurry to fetch the police. Father Brown, I seriously ask you to compose your flock, for their sakes, not for mine. Well, we have seen something of the figure and quality of Mr Glass; what are the chief facts known of Mr Todhunter? They are substantially three: that he is economical, that he is more or less wealthy, and that he has a secret. Now, surely it is obvious that there are the three chief marks of the kind of man who is blackmailed. And surely it is equally obvious that the faded finery, the profligate habits, and the shrill irritation of Mr Glass are the unmistakable marks of the kind of man who blackmails him. We have the two typical figures of a tragedy of hush money: on the one hand, the respectable man with a mystery; on the other, the West-end vulture with a scent for a mystery. These two men have met here today and have quarrelled, using blows and a bare weapon."

"Are you going to take those ropes off?" asked the girl stubbornly.

Dr Hood replaced the silk hat carefully on the side table, and went across to the captive. He studied him intently, even moving him a little and half-turning him round by the shoulders, but he only answered:

"No; I think these ropes will do very well till your friends the police bring the handcuffs."

Father Brown, who had been looking dully at the carpet, lifted his round face and said: "What do you mean?"

The man of science had picked up the peculiar dagger-sword from the carpet and was examining it intently as he answered:

"Because you find Mr Todhunter tied up," he said, "you all jump to the conclusion that Mr Glass had tied him up; and then, I suppose, escaped. There are four objections to this: First, why should a gentleman so dressy as our friend Glass leave his hat behind him, if he left of his own free will? Second," he continued, moving towards the window, "this is the only exit, and it is locked on the inside. Third, this blade here has a tiny touch of blood at the point, but there is no wound on Mr Todhunter. Mr Glass took that wound away with him, dead or alive. Add to all this primary probability. It is much more likely that the blackmailed person would try to kill his incubus, rather than that the blackmailer would try to kill the goose that lays his golden egg. There, I think, we have a pretty complete story."

"But the ropes?" inquired the priest, whose eyes had remained open with a rather vacant admiration.

"Ah, the ropes," said the expert with a singular intonation. "Miss MacNab very much wanted to know why I did not set Mr Todhunter free from his ropes. Well, I will tell her. I did not do it because Mr Todhunter can set himself free from them at any minute he chooses."

"What?" cried the audience on quite different notes of astonishment.

"I have looked at all the knots on Mr Todhunter," reiterated Hood quietly. "I happen to know something about knots; they are quite a branch of criminal science. Every one of those knots he has made himself and could loosen himself; not one of them would have been made by an enemy really trying to pinion him. The whole of this affair of the ropes is a clever fake, to make us think him the victim of the struggle instead of the wretched Glass, whose corpse may be hidden in the garden or stuffed up the chimney."

There was a rather depressed silence; the room was darkening, the sea-blighted boughs of the garden trees looked leaner and blacker than ever, yet they seemed to have come nearer to the window. One could almost fancy they were sea-monsters like krakens or cuttlefish, writhing polypi who had crawled up from the sea to see the end of this tragedy, even as he, the villain and victim of it, the terrible man in the tall hat, had once crawled up from the sea. For the whole air was dense with the morbidity of blackmail, which is the most morbid of human things, because it is a crime concealing a crime; a black plaster on a blacker wound.

The face of the little Catholic priest, which was commonly complacent and even comic, had suddenly become knotted with a curious frown. It was not the blank curiosity of his first innocence. It was rather that creative curiosity which comes when a man has the beginnings of an idea. "Say it again, please," he said in a simple, bothered manner; "do you mean that Todhunter can tie himself up all alone and untie himself all alone?"

"That is what I mean," said the doctor.

"Jerusalem!" ejaculated Brown suddenly, "I wonder if it could possibly be that!"

He scuttled across the room rather like a rabbit, and peered with quite a new impulsiveness into the partially-covered face of the captive. Then he turned his own rather fatuous face to the company. "Yes, that's it!" he cried in a certain excitement. "Can't you see it in the man's face? Why, look at his eyes!"

Both the Professor and the girl followed the direction of his glance. And though the broad black scarf completely masked the lower half of

Todhunter’s visage, they did grow conscious of something struggling and intense about the upper part of it.

“His eyes do look queer,” cried the young woman, strongly moved. “You brutes; I believe it’s hurting him!”

“Not that, I think,” said Dr Hood; “the eyes have certainly a singular expression. But I should interpret those transverse wrinkles as expressing rather such slight psychological abnormality—”

“Oh, bosh!” cried Father Brown: “can’t you see he’s laughing?”

“Laughing!” repeated the doctor, with a start; “but what on earth can he be laughing at?”

“Well,” replied the Reverend Brown apologetically, “not to put too fine a point on it, I think he is laughing at you. And indeed, I’m a little inclined to laugh at myself, now I know about it.”

“Now you know about what?” asked Hood, in some exasperation.

“Now I know,” replied the priest, “the profession of Mr Todhunter.”

He shuffled about the room, looking at one object after another with what seemed to be a vacant stare, and then invariably bursting into an equally vacant laugh, a highly irritating process for those who had to watch it. He laughed very much over the hat, still more uproariously over the broken glass, but the blood on the sword point sent him into mortal convulsions of amusement. Then he turned to the fuming specialist.

“Dr Hood,” he cried enthusiastically, “you are a great poet! You have called an uncreated being out of the void. How much more godlike that is than if you had only ferreted out the mere facts! Indeed, the mere facts are rather commonplace and comic by comparison.”

“I have no notion what you are talking about,” said Dr Hood rather haughtily; “my facts are all inevitable, though necessarily incomplete. A place may be permitted to intuition, perhaps (or poetry if you prefer the term), but only because the corresponding details cannot as yet be ascertained. In the absence of Mr Glass—”

“That’s it, that’s it,” said the little priest, nodding quite eagerly, “that’s the first idea to get fixed; the absence of Mr Glass. He is so extremely absent. I suppose,” he added reflectively, “that there was never anybody so absent as Mr Glass.”

“Do you mean he is absent from the town?” demanded the doctor.

“I mean he is absent from everywhere,” answered Father Brown; “he is absent from the Nature of Things, so to speak.”

“Do you seriously mean,” said the specialist with a smile, “that there is no such person?”

The priest made a sign of assent. “It does seem a pity,” he said.

Orion Hood broke into a contemptuous laugh. “Well,” he said, “before we go on to the hundred and one other evidences, let us take the first proof we found; the first fact we fell over when we fell into this room. If there is no Mr Glass, whose hat is this?”

“It is Mr Todhunter’s,” replied Father Brown.

“But it doesn’t fit him,” cried Hood impatiently. “He couldn’t possibly wear it!”

Father Brown shook his head with ineffable mildness. “I never said he could wear it,” he answered. “I said it was his hat. Or, if you insist on a shade of difference, a hat that is his.”

“And what is the shade of difference?” asked the criminologist with a slight sneer.

“My good sir,” cried the mild little man, with his first movement akin to impatience, “if you will walk down the street to the nearest hatter’s shop, you will see that there is, in common speech, a difference between a man’s hat and the hats that are his.”

“But a hatter,” protested Hood, “can get money out of his stock of new hats. What could Todhunter get out of this one old hat?”

“Rabbits,” replied Father Brown promptly.

“What?” cried Dr Hood.

“Rabbits, ribbons, sweetmeats, goldfish, rolls of coloured paper,” said the reverend gentleman with rapidity. “Didn’t you see it all when you found out the faked ropes? It’s just the same with the sword. Mr Todhunter hasn’t got a scratch on him, as you say; but he’s got a scratch in him, if you follow me.”

“Do you mean inside Mr Todhunter’s clothes?” inquired Mrs MacNab sternly.

“I do not mean inside Mr Todhunter’s clothes,” said Father Brown. “I mean inside Mr Todhunter.”

“Well, what in the name of Bedlam do you mean?”

“Mr Todhunter,” explained Father Brown placidly, “is learning to be a professional conjurer, as well as juggler, ventriloquist, and expert in the rope trick. The conjuring explains the hat. It is without traces of hair, not because it is worn by the prematurely bald Mr Glass, but because it has never been worn by anybody. The juggling explains the three glasses, which Todhunter was teaching himself to throw up and catch in rotation. But, being only at the stage of practice, he smashed one glass against the ceiling. And the juggling also explains the sword, which it was Mr Todhunter's professional pride and duty to swallow. But, again, being at the stage of practice, he very slightly grazed the inside of his throat with the weapon. Hence he has a wound inside him, which I am sure (from the expression on his face) is not a serious one. He was also practising the trick of a release from ropes, like the Davenport Brothers, and he was just about to free himself when we all burst into the room. The cards, of course, are for card tricks, and they are scattered on the floor because he had just been practising one of those dodges of sending them flying through the air. He merely kept his trade secret, because he had to keep his tricks secret, like any other conjurer. But the mere fact of an idler in a top hat having once looked in at his back window, and been driven away by him with great indignation, was enough to set us all on a wrong track of romance, and make us imagine his whole life overshadowed by the silk-hatted spectre of Mr Glass."

"But What about the two voices?" asked Maggie, staring.

"Have you never heard a ventriloquist?" asked Father Brown. "Don't you know they speak first in their natural voice, and then answer themselves in just that shrill, squeaky, unnatural voice that you heard?"

There was a long silence, and Dr Hood regarded the little man who had spoken with a dark and attentive smile. "You are certainly a very ingenious person," he said; "it could not have been done better in a book. But there is just one part of Mr Glass you have not succeeded in explaining away, and that is his name. Miss MacNab distinctly heard him so addressed by Mr Todhunter."

The Rev. Mr Brown broke into a rather childish giggle. "Well, that," he said, "that's the silliest part of the whole silly story. When our juggling friend here threw up the three glasses in turn, he counted them aloud as he caught them, and also commented aloud when he failed to catch them. What he really said was: 'One, two and three — missed a glass one, two — missed a glass.' And so on."

There was a second of stillness in the room, and then everyone with one accord burst out laughing. As they did so the figure in the corner complacently uncoiled all the ropes and let them fall with a flourish. Then, advancing into the middle of the room with a bow, he produced from his pocket a big bill printed in blue and red, which announced that ZALADIN, the World’s Greatest Conjurer, Contortionist, Ventriloquist and Human Kangaroo would be ready with an entirely new series of Tricks at the Empire Pavilion, Scarborough, on Monday next at eight o’clock precisely.

The Paradise of Thieves

THE great Muscari, most original of the young Tuscan poets, walked swiftly into his favourite restaurant, which overlooked the Mediterranean, was covered by an awning and fenced by little lemon and orange trees. Waiters in white aprons were already laying out on white tables the insignia of an early and elegant lunch; and this seemed to increase a satisfaction that already touched the top of swagger. Muscari had an eagle nose like Dante; his hair and neckerchief were dark and flowing; he carried a black cloak, and might almost have carried a black mask, so much did he bear with him a sort of Venetian melodrama. He acted as if a troubadour had still a definite social office, like a bishop. He went as near as his century permitted to walking the world literally like Don Juan, with rapier and guitar.

For he never travelled without a case of swords, with which he had fought many brilliant duels, or without a corresponding case for his mandolin, with which he had actually serenaded Miss Ethel Harrogate, the highly conventional daughter of a Yorkshire banker on a holiday. Yet he was neither a charlatan nor a child; but a hot, logical Latin who liked a certain thing and was it. His poetry was as straightforward as anyone else’s prose. He desired fame or wine or the beauty of women with a torrid directness inconceivable among the cloudy ideals or cloudy compromises of the north; to vaguer races his intensity smelt of danger or even crime. Like fire or the sea, he was too simple to be trusted.

The banker and his beautiful English daughter were staying at the hotel attached to Muscari’s restaurant; that was why it was his favourite restaurant. A glance flashed around the room told him at once, however, that the English party had not descended. The restaurant was glittering, but still comparatively empty. Two priests were talking at a table in a corner, but Muscari (an ardent Catholic) took no more notice of them than of a couple of crows. But from a yet farther seat, partly concealed behind a dwarf tree golden with oranges, there rose and advanced towards the poet a person whose costume was the most aggressively opposite to his own.

This figure was clad in tweeds of a piebald check, with a pink tie, a sharp collar and protuberant yellow boots. He contrived, in the true tradition of ‘Arry at Margate, to look at once startling and commonplace. But as the Cockney apparition drew nearer, Muscari was astounded to observe that the head was distinctly different from the body. It was an Italian head: fuzzy, swarthy and very vivacious, that rose abruptly out of the standing collar like cardboard and the comic pink tie. In fact it was a head he knew. He recognized it, above all the dire erection of English holiday array, as the face of an old but forgotten friend name Ezza. This youth had been a prodigy at college, and European fame was promised him when he was barely fifteen; but when he appeared in the world he failed, first publicly as a dramatist and a demagogue, and then privately for years on end as an actor, a traveller, a commission agent or a journalist. Muscari had known him last behind the footlights; he was but too well attuned to the excitements of that profession, and it was believed that some moral calamity had swallowed him up.

"Ezza!" cried the poet, rising and shaking hands in a pleasant astonishment. "Well, I've seen you in many costumes in the green room; but I never expected to see you dressed up as an Englishman."

"This," answered Ezza gravely, "is not the costume of an Englishman, but of the Italian of the future."

"In that case," remarked Muscari, "I confess I prefer the Italian of the past."

"That is your old mistake, Muscari," said the man in tweeds, shaking his head; "and the mistake of Italy. In the sixteenth century we Tuscans made the morning: we had the newest steel, the newest carving, the newest chemistry. Why should we not now have the newest factories, the newest motors, the newest finance — the newest clothes?"

"Because they are not worth having," answered Muscari. "You cannot make Italians really progressive; they are too intelligent. Men who see the short cut to good living will never go by the new elaborate roads."

"Well, to me Marconi, or D'Annunzio, is the star of Italy" said the other. "That is why I have become a Futurist — and a courier."

"A courier!" cried Muscari, laughing. "Is that the last of your list of trades? And whom are you conducting?"

"Oh, a man of the name of Harrogate, and his family, I believe."

"Not the banker in this hotel?" inquired the poet, with some eagerness.

"That's the man," answered the courier.

"Does it pay well?" asked the troubadour innocently.

"It will pay me," said Ezza, with a very enigmatic smile. "But I am a rather curious sort of courier." Then, as if changing the subject, he said abruptly: “He has a daughter — and a son.”

“The daughter is divine,” affirmed Muscari, “the father and son are, I suppose, human. But granted his harmless qualities doesn’t that banker strike you as a splendid instance of my argument? Harrogate has millions in his safes, and I have — the hole in my pocket. But you daren’t say — you can’t say — that he’s cleverer than I, or bolder than I, or even more energetic. He’s not clever, he’s got eyes like blue buttons; he’s not energetic, he moves from chair to chair like a paralytic. He’s a conscientious, kindly old blockhead; but he’s got money simply because he collects money, as a boy collects stamps. You’re too strong-minded for business, Ezza. You won’t get on. To be clever enough to get all that money, one must be stupid enough to want it.”

“I’m stupid enough for that,” said Ezza gloomily. “But I should suggest a suspension of your critique of the banker, for here he comes.”

Mr Harrogate, the great financier, did indeed enter the room, but nobody looked at him. He was a massive elderly man with a boiled blue eye and faded grey-sandy moustaches; but for his heavy stoop he might have been a colonel. He carried several unopened letters in his hand. His son Frank was a really fine lad, curly-haired, sun-burnt and strenuous; but nobody looked at him either. All eyes, as usual, were riveted, for the moment at least, upon Ethel Harrogate, whose golden Greek head and colour of the dawn seemed set purposely above that sapphire sea, like a goddess’s. The poet Muscari drew a deep breath as if he were drinking something, as indeed he was. He was drinking the Classic; which his fathers made. Ezza studied her with a gaze equally intense and far more baffling.

Miss Harrogate was specially radiant and ready for conversation on this occasion; and her family had fallen into the easier Continental habit, allowing the stranger Muscari and even the courier Ezza to share their table and their talk. In Ethel Harrogate conventionality crowned itself with a perfection and splendour of its own. Proud of her father’s prosperity, fond of fashionable pleasures, a fond daughter but an arrant flirt, she was all these things with a sort of golden good-nature that made her very pride pleasing and her worldly respectability a fresh and hearty thing.

They were in an eddy of excitement about some alleged peril in the mountain path they were to attempt that week. The danger was not from rock and avalanche, but from something yet more romantic. Ethel had been earnestly assured that brigands, the true cut-throats of the modern legend, still haunted that ridge and held that pass of the Apennines.

"They say," she cried, with the awful relish of a schoolgirl, "that all that country isn't ruled by the King of Italy, but by the King of Thieves. Who is the King of Thieves?"

"A great man," replied Muscari, "worthy to rank with your own Robin Hood, signorina. Montano, the King of Thieves, was first heard of in the mountains some ten years ago, when people said brigands were extinct. But his wild authority spread with the swiftness of a silent revolution. Men found his fierce proclamations nailed in every mountain village; his sentinels, gun in hand, in every mountain ravine. Six times the Italian Government tried to dislodge him, and was defeated in six pitched battles as if by Napoleon."

"Now that sort of thing," observed the banker weightily, "would never be allowed in England; perhaps, after all, we had better choose another route. But the courier thought it perfectly safe."

"It is perfectly safe," said the courier contemptuously. "I have been over it twenty times. There may have been some old jailbird called a King in the time of our grandmothers; but he belongs to history if not to fable. Brigandage is utterly stamped out."

"It can never be utterly stamped out," Muscari answered; "because armed revolt is a recreation natural to southerners. Our peasants are like their mountains, rich in grace and green gaiety, but with the fires beneath. There is a point of human despair where the northern poor take to drink — and our own poor take to daggers."

"A poet is privileged," replied Ezza, with a sneer. "If Signor Muscari were English he would still be looking for highwaymen in Wandsworth. Believe me, there is no more danger of being captured in Italy than of being scalped in Boston."

"Then you propose to attempt it?" asked Mr Harrogate, frowning.

"Oh, it sounds rather dreadful," cried the girl, turning her glorious eyes on Muscari. "Do you really think the pass is dangerous?"

Muscari threw back his black mane. "I know it is dangerous:" he said. "I am crossing it tomorrow."

The young Harrogate was left behind for a moment emptying a glass of white wine and lighting a cigarette, as the beauty retired with the banker, the courier and the poet, distributing peals of silvery satire. At about the same instant the two priests in the corner rose; the taller, a white-haired Italian, taking his leave. The shorter priest turned and walked towards the banker’s son, and the latter was astonished to realize that though a Roman priest the man was an Englishman. He vaguely remembered meeting him at the social crushes of some of his Catholic friends. But the man spoke before his memories could collect themselves.

“Mr Frank Harrogate, I think,” he said. “I have had an introduction, but I do not mean to presume on it. The odd thing I have to say will come far better from a stranger. Mr Harrogate, I say one word and go: take care of your sister in her great sorrow.”

Even for Frank’s truly fraternal indifference the radiance and derision of his sister still seemed to sparkle and ring; he could hear her laughter still from the garden of the hotel, and he stared at his sombre adviser in puzzledom.

“Do you mean the brigands?” he asked; and then, remembering a vague fear of his own, “or can you be thinking of Muscari?”

“One is never thinking of the real sorrow,” said the strange priest. “One can only be kind when it comes.”

And he passed promptly from the room, leaving the other almost with his mouth open.

A day or two afterwards a coach containing the company was really crawling and staggering up the spurs of the menacing mountain range. Between Ezza’s cheery denial of the danger and Muscari’s boisterous defiance of it, the financial family were firm in their original purpose; and Muscari made his mountain journey coincide with theirs. A more surprising feature was the appearance at the coast-town station of the little priest of the restaurant; he alleged merely that business led him also to cross the mountains of the midland. But young Harrogate could not but connect his presence with the mystical fears and warnings of yesterday.

The coach was a kind of commodious wagonette, invented by the modernist talent of the courier, who dominated the expedition with his scientific activity and breezy wit. The theory of danger from thieves was banished from thought and speech; though so far conceded in formal act that some slight protection was employed. The courier and the young banker carried loaded revolvers, and Muscari (with much boyish gratification) buckled on a kind of cutlass under his black cloak.

He had planted his person at a flying leap next to the lovely Englishwoman; on the other side of her sat the priest, whose name was Brown and who was fortunately a silent individual; the courier and the father and son were on the banc behind. Muscari was in towering spirits, seriously believing in the peril, and his talk to Ethel might well have made her think him a maniac. But there was something in the crazy and gorgeous ascent, amid crags like peaks loaded with woods like orchards, that dragged her spirit up alone with his into purple preposterous heavens with wheeling suns. The white road climbed like a white cat; it spanned sunless chasms like a tight-rope; it was flung round far-off headlands like a lasso.

And yet, however high they went, the desert still blossomed like the rose. The fields were burnished in sun and wind with the colour of kingfisher and parrot and humming-bird, the hues of a hundred flowering flowers. There are no lovelier meadows and woodlands than the English, no nobler crests or chasms than those of Snowdon and Glencoe. But Ethel Harrogate had never before seen the southern parks tilted on the splintered northern peaks; the gorge of Glencoe laden with the fruits of Kent. There was nothing here of that chill and desolation that in Britain one associates with high and wild scenery. It was rather like a mosaic palace, rent with earthquakes; or like a Dutch tulip garden blown to the stars with dynamite.

“It’s like Kew Gardens on Beachy Head,” said Ethel.

“It is our secret,” answered he, “the secret of the volcano; that is also the secret of the revolution — that a thing can be violent and yet fruitful.”

“You are rather violent yourself,” and she smiled at him.

“And yet rather fruitless,” he admitted; “if I die tonight I die unmarried and a fool.”

“It is not my fault if you have come,” she said after a difficult silence.

“It is never your fault,” answered Muscari; “it was not your fault that Troy fell.”

As they spoke they came under overwhelming cliffs that spread almost like wings above a corner of peculiar peril. Shocked by the big shadow on the narrow ledge, the horses stirred doubtfully. The driver leapt to the earth to hold their heads, and they became ungovernable. One horse reared up to his full height — the titanic and terrifying height of a horse when he becomes a biped. It was just enough to alter the equilibrium; the whole coach heeled over like a ship and crashed through the fringe of bushes over the cliff. Muscari threw an arm round Ethel, who clung to him, and shouted aloud. It was for such moments that he lived.

At the moment when the gorgeous mountain walls went round the poet’s head like a purple windmill a thing happened which was superficially even more startling. The elderly and lethargic banker sprang erect in the coach and leapt over the precipice before the tilted vehicle could take him there. In the first flash it looked as wild as suicide; but in the second it was as sensible as a safe investment. The Yorkshireman had evidently more promptitude, as well as more sagacity, than Muscari had given him credit for; for he landed in a lap of land which might have been specially padded with turf and clover to receive him. As it happened, indeed, the whole company were equally lucky, if less dignified in their form of ejection. Immediately under this abrupt turn of the road was a grassy and flowery hollow like a sunken meadow; a sort of green velvet pocket in the long, green, trailing garments of the hills. Into this they were all tipped or tumbled with little damage, save that their smallest baggage and even the contents of their pockets were scattered in the grass around them. The wrecked coach still hung above, entangled in the tough hedge, and the horses plunged painfully down the slope. The first to sit up was the little priest, who scratched his head with a face of foolish wonder. Frank Harrogate heard him say to himself: “Now why on earth have we fallen just here?”

He blinked at the litter around him, and recovered his own very clumsy umbrella. Beyond it lay the broad sombrero fallen from the head of Muscari, and beside it a sealed business letter which, after a glance at the address, he returned to the elder Harrogate. On the other side of him the grass partly hid Miss Ethel’s sunshade, and just beyond it lay a curious little glass bottle hardly two inches long. The priest picked it up; in a quick, unobtrusive manner he uncorked and sniffed it, and his heavy face turned the colour of clay.

“Heaven deliver us!” he muttered; “it can’t be hers! Has her sorrow come on her already?” He slipped it into his own waistcoat pocket. “I think I’m justified,” he said, “till I know a little more.”

He gazed painfully at the girl, at that moment being raised out of the flowers by Muscari, who was saying: “We have fallen into heaven; it is a sign. Mortals climb up and they fall down; but it is only gods and goddesses who can fall upwards.”

And indeed she rose out of the sea of colours so beautiful and happy a vision that the priest felt his suspicion shaken and shifted. “After all,” he thought, “perhaps the poison isn’t hers; perhaps it’s one of Muscari’s melodramatic tricks.”

Muscari set the lady lightly on her feet, made her an absurdly theatrical bow, and then, drawing his cutlass, hacked hard at the taut reins of the horses, so that they scrambled to their feet and stood in the grass trembling. When he had done so, a most remarkable thing occurred. A very quiet man, very poorly dressed and extremely sunburnt, came out of the bushes and took hold of the horses’ heads. He had a queer-shaped knife, very broad and crooked, buckled on his belt; there was nothing else remarkable about him, except his sudden and silent appearance. The poet asked him who he was, and he did not answer.

Looking around him at the confused and startled group in the hollow, Muscari then perceived that another tanned and tattered man, with a short gun under his arm, was looking at them from the ledge just below, leaning his elbows on the edge of the turf. Then he looked up at the road from which they had fallen and saw, looking down on them, the muzzles of four other carbines and four other brown faces with bright but quite motionless eyes.

“The brigands!” cried Muscari, with a kind of monstrous gaiety. “This was a trap. Ezza, if you will oblige me by shooting the coachman first, we can cut our way out yet. There are only six of them.”

“The coachman,” said Ezza, who was standing grimly with his hands in his pockets, “happens to be a servant of Mr Harrogate’s.”

“Then shoot him all the more,” cried the poet impatiently; “he was bribed to upset his master. Then put the lady in the middle, and we will break the line up there — with a rush.”

And, wading in wild grass and flowers, he advanced fearlessly on the four carbines; but finding that no one followed except young Harrogate, he turned, brandishing his cutlass to wave the others on. He beheld the courier still standing slightly astride in the centre of the grassy ring, his hands in his pockets; and his lean, ironical Italian face seemed to grow longer and longer in the evening light.

“You thought, Muscari, I was the failure among our schoolfellows,” he said, “and you thought you were the success. But I have succeeded more than you and fill a bigger place in history. I have been acting epics while you have been writing them.”

“Come on, I tell you!” thundered Muscari from above. “Will you stand there talking nonsense about yourself with a woman to save and three strong men to help you? What do you call yourself?”

“I call myself Montano,” cried the strange courier in a voice equally loud and full. “I am the King of Thieves, and I welcome you all to my summer palace.”

And even as he spoke five more silent men with weapons ready came out of the bushes, and looked towards him for their orders. One of them held a large paper in his hand.

“This pretty little nest where we are all picnicking,” went on the courier-brigand, with the same easy yet sinister smile, “is, together with some caves underneath it, known by the name of the Paradise of Thieves. It is my principal stronghold on these hills; for (as you have doubtless noticed) the eyrie is invisible both from the road above and from the valley below. It is something better than impregnable; it is unnoticeable. Here I mostly live, and here I shall certainly die, if the gendarmes ever track me here. I am not the kind of criminal that ‘reserves his defence,’ but the better kind that reserves his last bullet.”

All were staring at him thunderstruck and still, except Father Brown, who heaved a huge sigh as of relief and fingered the little phial in his pocket. “Thank God!” he muttered; “that’s much more probable. The poison belongs to this robber-chief, of course. He carries it so that he may never be captured, like Cato.”

The King of Thieves was, however, continuing his address with the same kind of dangerous politeness. “It only remains for me,” he said, “to explain to my guests the social conditions upon which I have the pleasure of entertaining them. I need not expound the quaint old ritual of ransom, which it is incumbent upon me to keep up; and even this only applies to a part of the company. The Reverend Father Brown and the celebrated Signor Muscari I shall release tomorrow at dawn and escort to my outposts. Poets and priests, if you will pardon my simplicity of speech, never have any money. And so (since it is impossible to get anything out of them), let us, seize the opportunity to show our admiration for classic literature and our reverence for Holy Church.”

He paused with an unpleasing smile; and Father Brown blinked repeatedly at him, and seemed suddenly to be listening with great attention. The brigand captain took the large paper from the attendant brigand and, glancing over it, continued: “My other intentions are clearly set forth in this public document, which I will hand round in a moment; and which after that will be posted on a tree by every village in the valley, and every cross-road in the hills. I will not weary you with the verbalism, since you will be able to check it; the substance of my proclamation is this: I announce first that I have captured the English millionaire, the colossus of finance, Mr Samuel Harrogate. I next announce that I have found on his person notes and bonds for two thousand pounds, which he has given up to me. Now since it would be really immoral to announce such a thing to a credulous public if it had not occurred, I suggest it should occur without further delay. I suggest that Mr Harrogate senior should now give me the two thousand pounds in his pocket.”

The banker looked at him under lowering brows, red-faced and sulky, but seemingly cowed. That leap from the failing carriage seemed to have used up his last virility. He had held back in a hang-dog style when his son and Muscari had made a bold movement to break out of the brigand trap. And now his red and trembling hand went reluctantly to his breast-pocket, and passed a bundle of papers and envelopes to the brigand.

“Excellent!” cried that outlaw gaily; “so far we are all cosy. I resume the points of my proclamation, so soon to be published to all Italy. The third item is that of ransom. I am asking from the friends of the Harrogate family a ransom of three thousand pounds, which I am sure is almost insulting to that family in its moderate estimate of their importance. Who would not pay triple this sum for another day’s association with such a domestic circle? I will not conceal from you that the document ends with certain legal phrases about the unpleasant things that may happen if the money is not paid; but meanwhile, ladies and gentlemen, let me assure you that I am comfortably off here for accommodation, wine and cigars, and bid you for the present a sportsman-like welcome to the luxuries of the Paradise of Thieves.”

All the time that he had been speaking, the dubious-looking men with carbines and dirty slouch hats had been gathering silently in such preponderating numbers that even Muscari was compelled to recognize his sally with the sword as hopeless. He glanced around him; but the girl had already gone over to soothe and comfort her father, for her natural affection for his person was as strong or stronger than her somewhat snobbish pride in his success. Muscari, with the illogicality of a lover, admired this filial devotion, and yet was irritated by it. He slapped his sword back in the scabbard and went and flung himself somewhat sulkily on one of the green banks. The priest sat down within a yard or two, and Muscari turned his aquiline nose on him in an instantaneous irritation.

“Well,” said the poet tartly, “do people still think me too romantic? Are there, I wonder, any brigands left in the mountains?”

“There may be,” said Father Brown agnostically.

“What do you mean?” asked the other sharply.

“I mean I am puzzled,” replied the priest. “I am puzzled about Ezza or Montano, or whatever his name is. He seems to me much more inexplicable as a brigand even than he was as a courier.”

“But in what way?” persisted his companion. “Santa Maria! I should have thought the brigand was plain enough.”

“I find three curious difficulties,” said the priest in a quiet voice. “I should like to have your opinion on them. First of all I must tell you I was lunching in that restaurant at the seaside. As four of you left the room, you and Miss Harrogate went ahead, talking and laughing; the banker and the courier came behind, speaking sparely and rather low. But I could not help hearing Ezza say these words— ‘Well, let her have a little fun; you know the blow may smash her any minute.’ Mr Harrogate answered nothing; so the words must have had some meaning. On the impulse of the moment I warned her brother that she might be in peril; I said nothing of its nature, for I did not know. But if it meant this capture in the hills, the thing is nonsense. Why should the brigand-courier warn his patron, even by a hint, when it was his whole purpose to lure him into the mountain-mousetrap? It could not have meant that. But if not, what is this disaster, known both to courier and banker, which hangs over Miss Harrogate’s head?”

“Disaster to Miss Harrogate!” ejaculated the poet, sitting up with some ferocity. “Explain yourself; go on.”

“All my riddles, however, revolve round our bandit chief,” resumed the priest reflectively. “And here is the second of them. Why did he put so prominently in his demand for ransom the fact that he had taken two thousand pounds from his victim on the spot? It had no faintest tendency to evoke the ransom. Quite the other way, in fact. Harrogate’s friends would be far likelier to fear for his fate if they thought the thieves were poor and desperate. Yet the spoliation on the spot was emphasized and even put first in the demand. Why should Ezza Montano want so specially to tell all Europe that he had picked the pocket before he levied the blackmail?”

“I cannot imagine,” said Muscari, rubbing up his black hair for once with an unaffected gesture. “You may think you enlighten me, but you are leading me deeper in the dark. What may be the third objection to the King of the Thieves?” “The third objection,” said Father Brown, still in meditation, “is this bank we are sitting on. Why does our brigand-courier call this his chief fortress and the Paradise of Thieves? It is certainly a soft spot to fall on and a sweet spot to look at. It is also quite true, as he says, that it is invisible from valley and peak, and is therefore a hiding-place. But it is not a fortress. It never could be a fortress. I think it would be the worst fortress in the world. For it is actually commanded from above by the common high-road across the mountains — the very place where the police would most probably pass. Why, five shabby short guns held us helpless here about half an hour ago. The quarter of a company of any kind of soldiers could have blown us over the precipice. Whatever is the meaning of this odd little nook of grass and flowers, it is not an entrenched position. It is something else; it has some other strange sort of importance; some value that I do not understand. It is more like an accidental theatre or a natural green-room; it is like the scene for some romantic comedy; it is like....”

As the little priest’s words lengthened and lost themselves in a dull and dreamy sincerity, Muscari, whose animal senses were alert and impatient, heard a new noise in the mountains. Even for him the sound was as yet very small and faint; but he could have sworn the evening breeze bore with it something like the pulsation of horses’ hoofs and a distant hallooing.

At the same moment, and long before the vibration had touched the less-experienced English ears, Montano the brigand ran up the bank above them and stood in the broken hedge, steadying himself against a tree and peering down the road. He was a strange figure as he stood there, for he had assumed a flapped fantastic hat and swinging baldric and cutlass in his capacity of bandit king, but the bright prosaic tweed of the courier showed through in patches all over him.

The next moment he turned his olive, sneering face and made a movement with his hand. The brigands scattered at the signal, not in confusion, but in what was evidently a kind of guerrilla discipline. Instead of occupying the road along the ridge, they sprinkled themselves along the side of it behind the trees and the hedge, as if watching unseen for an enemy. The noise beyond grew stronger, beginning to shake the mountain road, and a voice could be clearly heard calling out orders. The brigands swayed and huddled, cursing and whispering, and the evening air was full of little metallic noises as they cocked their pistols, or loosened their knives, or trailed their scabbards over the stones. Then the noises from both quarters seemed to meet on the road above; branches broke, horses neighed, men cried out.

"A rescue!" cried Muscari, springing to his feet and waving his hat; "the gendarmes are on them! Now for freedom and a blow for it! Now to be rebels against robbers! Come, don't let us leave everything to the police; that is so dreadfully modern. Fall on the rear of these ruffians. The gendarmes are rescuing us; come, friends, let us rescue the gendarmes!"

And throwing his hat over the trees, he drew his cutlass once more and began to escalade the slope up to the road. Frank Harrogate jumped up and ran across to help him, revolver in hand, but was astounded to hear himself imperatively recalled by the raucous voice of his father, who seemed to be in great agitation.

"I won't have it," said the banker in a choking voice; "I command you not to interfere."

"But, father," said Frank very warmly, "an Italian gentleman has led the way. You wouldn't have it said that the English hung back."

"It is useless," said the older man, who was trembling violently, "it is useless. We must submit to our lot."

Father Brown looked at the banker; then he put his hand instinctively as if on his heart, but really on the little bottle of poison; and a great light came into his face like the light of the revelation of death.

Muscari meanwhile, without waiting for support, had crested the bank up to the road, and struck the brigand king heavily on the shoulder, causing him to stagger and swing round. Montano also had his cutlass unsheathed, and Muscari, without further speech, sent a slash at his head which he was compelled to catch and parry. But even as the two short blades crossed and clashed the King of Thieves deliberately dropped his point and laughed.

"What's the good, old man?" he said in spirited Italian slang; "this damned farce will soon be over."

“What do you mean, you shuffler?” panted the fire-eating poet. “Is your courage a sham as well as your honesty?”

“Everything about me is a sham,” responded the ex-courier in complete good humour. “I am an actor; and if I ever had a private character, I have forgotten it. I am no more a genuine brigand than I am a genuine courier. I am only a bundle of masks, and you can’t fight a duel with that.” And he laughed with boyish pleasure and fell into his old straddling attitude, with his back to the skirmish up the road.

Darkness was deepening under the mountain walls, and it was not easy to discern much of the progress of the struggle, save that tall men were pushing their horses’ muzzles through a clinging crowd of brigands, who seemed more inclined to harass and hustle the invaders than to kill them. It was more like a town crowd preventing the passage of the police than anything the poet had ever pictured as the last stand of doomed and outlawed men of blood. Just as he was rolling his eyes in bewilderment he felt a touch on his elbow, and found the odd little priest standing there like a small Noah with a large hat, and requesting the favour of a word or two.

“Signor Muscari,” said the cleric, “in this queer crisis personalities may be pardoned. I may tell you without offence of a way in which you will do more good than by helping the gendarmes, who are bound to break through in any case. You will permit me the impertinent intimacy, but do you care about that girl? Care enough to marry her and make her a good husband, I mean?”

“Yes,” said the poet quite simply.

“Does she care about you?”

“I think so,” was the equally grave reply.

“Then go over there and offer yourself,” said the priest: “offer her everything you can; offer her heaven and earth if you’ve got them. The time is short.”

“Why?” asked the astonished man of letters.

“Because,” said Father Brown, “her Doom is coming up the road.”

“Nothing is coming up the road,” argued Muscari, “except the rescue.”

“Well, you go over there,” said his adviser, “and be ready to rescue her from the rescue.”

Almost as he spoke the hedges were broken all along the ridge by a rush of the escaping brigands. They dived into bushes and thick grass like defeated men pursued; and the great cocked hats of the mounted gendarmerie were seen passing along above the broken hedge. Another order was given; there was a noise of dismounting, and a tall officer with cocked hat, a grey imperial, and a paper in his hand appeared in the gap that was the gate of the Paradise of Thieves. There was a momentary silence, broken in an extraordinary way by the banker, who cried out in a hoarse and strangled voice: “Robbed! I’ve been robbed!”

“Why, that was hours ago,” cried his son in astonishment: “when you were robbed of two thousand pounds.”

“Not of two thousand pounds,” said the financier, with an abrupt and terrible composure, “only of a small bottle.”

The policeman with the grey imperial was striding across the green hollow. Encountering the King of the Thieves in his path, he clapped him on the shoulder with something between a caress and a buffet and gave him a push that sent him staggering away. “You’ll get into trouble, too,” he said, “if you play these tricks.”

Again to Muscari’s artistic eye it seemed scarcely like the capture of a great outlaw at bay. Passing on, the policeman halted before the Harrogate group and said: “Samuel Harrogate, I arrest you in the name of the law for embezzlement of the funds of the Hull and Huddersfield Bank.”

The great banker nodded with an odd air of business assent, seemed to reflect a moment, and before they could interpose took a half turn and a step that brought him to the edge of the outer mountain wall. Then, flinging up his hands, he leapt exactly as he leapt out of the coach. But this time he did not fall into a little meadow just beneath; he fell a thousand feet below, to become a wreck of bones in the valley.

The anger of the Italian policeman, which he expressed volubly to Father Brown, was largely mixed with admiration. “It was like him to escape us at last,” he said. “He was a great brigand if you like. This last trick of his I believe to be absolutely unprecedented. He fled with the company’s money to Italy, and actually got himself captured by sham brigands in his own pay, so as to explain both the disappearance of the money and the disappearance of himself. That demand for ransom was really taken seriously by most of the police. But for years he’s been doing things as good as that, quite as good as that. He will be a serious loss to his family.”

Muscari was leading away the unhappy daughter, who held hard to him, as she did for many a year after. But even in that tragic wreck he could not help having a smile and a hand of half-mocking friendship for the indefensible Ezza Montano. “And where are you going next?” he asked him over his shoulder.

“Birmingham,” answered the actor, puffing a cigarette. “Didn’t I tell you I was a Futurist? I really do believe in those things if I believe in anything. Change, bustle and new things every morning. I am going to Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Hull, Huddersfield, Glasgow, Chicago — in short, to enlightened, energetic, civilized society!”

“In short,” said Muscari, “to the real Paradise of Thieves.”

The Duel of Dr Hirsch

M. MAURICE BRUN and M. Armand Armagnac were crossing the sunlit Champs Elysee with a kind of vivacious respectability. They were both short, brisk and bold. They both had black beards that did not seem to belong to their faces, after the strange French fashion which makes real hair look like artificial. M. Brun had a dark wedge of beard apparently affixed under his lower lip. M. Armagnac, by way of a change, had two beards; one sticking out from each corner of his emphatic chin. They were both young. They were both atheists, with a depressing fixity of outlook but great mobility of exposition. They were both pupils of the great Dr Hirsch, scientist, publicist and moralist.

M. Brun had become prominent by his proposal that the common expression "Adieu" should be obliterated from all the French classics, and a slight fine imposed for its use in private life. "Then," he said, "the very name of your imagined God will have echoed for the last time in the ear of man." M. Armagnac specialized rather in a resistance to militarism, and wished the chorus of the Marseillaise altered from "Aux armes, citoyens" to "Aux greves, citoyens". But his antimilitarism was of a peculiar and Gallic sort. An eminent and very wealthy English Quaker, who had come to see him to arrange for the disarmament of the whole planet, was rather distressed by Armagnac's proposal that (by way of beginning) the soldiers should shoot their officers.

And indeed it was in this regard that the two men differed most from their leader and father in philosophy. Dr Hirsch, though born in France and covered with the most triumphant favours of French education, was temperamentally of another type — mild, dreamy, humane; and, despite his sceptical system, not devoid of transcendentalism. He was, in short, more like a German than a Frenchman; and much as they admired him, something in the subconsciousness of these Gauls was irritated at his pleading for peace in so peaceful a manner. To their party throughout Europe, however, Paul Hirsch was a saint of science. His large and daring cosmic theories advertised his austere life and innocent, if somewhat frigid, morality; he held something of the position of Darwin doubled with the position of Tolstoy. But he was neither an anarchist nor an antipatriot; his views on disarmament were moderate and evolutionary — the Republican

Government put considerable confidence in him as to various chemical improvements. He had lately even discovered a noiseless explosive, the secret of which the Government was carefully guarding.

His house stood in a handsome street near the Elysee — a street which in that strong summer seemed almost as full of foliage as the park itself; a row of chestnuts shattered the sunshine, interrupted only in one place where a large cafe ran out into the street. Almost opposite to this were the white and green blinds of the great scientist’s house, an iron balcony, also painted green, running along in front of the first-floor windows. Beneath this was the entrance into a kind of court, gay with shrubs and tiles, into which the two Frenchmen passed in animated talk.

The door was opened to them by the doctor’s old servant, Simon, who might very well have passed for a doctor himself, having a strict suit of black, spectacles, grey hair, and a confidential manner. In fact, he was a far more presentable man of science than his master, Dr Hirsch, who was a forked radish of a fellow, with just enough bulb of a head to make his body insignificant. With all the gravity of a great physician handling a prescription, Simon handed a letter to M. Armagnac. That gentleman ripped it up with a racial impatience, and rapidly read the following:

I cannot come down to speak to you. There is a man in this house whom I refuse to meet. He is a Chauvinist officer, Dubosc. He is sitting on the stairs. He has been kicking the furniture about in all the other rooms; I have locked myself in my study, opposite that cafe. If you love me, go over to the cafe and wait at one of the tables outside. I will try to send him over to you. I want you to answer him and deal with him. I cannot meet him myself. I cannot: I will not.

There is going to be another Dreyfus case.

P. HIRSCH

M. Armagnac looked at M. Brun. M. Brun borrowed the letter, read it, and looked at M. Armagnac. Then both betook themselves briskly to one of the little tables under the chestnuts opposite, where they procured two tall glasses of horrible green absinthe, which they could drink apparently in any weather and at any time. Otherwise the cafe seemed empty, except for one soldier drinking coffee at one table, and at another a large man drinking a small syrup and a priest drinking nothing.

Maurice Brun cleared his throat and said: “Of course we must help the master in every way, but—”

There was an abrupt silence, and Armagnac said: “He may have excellent reasons for not meeting the man himself, but—”

Before either could complete a sentence, it was evident that the invader had been expelled from the house opposite. The shrubs under the archway swayed and burst apart, as that unwelcome guest was shot out of them like a cannon-ball.

He was a sturdy figure in a small and tilted Tyrolean felt hat, a figure that had indeed something generally Tyrolean about it. The man’s shoulders were big and broad, but his legs were neat and active in knee-breeches and knitted stockings. His face was brown like a nut; he had very bright and restless brown eyes; his dark hair was brushed back stiffly in front and cropped close behind, outlining a square and powerful skull; and he had a huge black moustache like the horns of a bison. Such a substantial head is generally based on a bull neck; but this was hidden by a big coloured scarf, swathed round up the man’s ears and falling in front inside his jacket like a sort of fancy waistcoat. It was a scarf of strong dead colours, dark red and old gold and purple, probably of Oriental fabrication. Altogether the man had something a shade barbaric about him; more like a Hungarian squire than an ordinary French officer. His French, however, was obviously that of a native; and his French patriotism was so impulsive as to be slightly absurd. His first act when he burst out of the archway was to call in a clarion voice down the street: “Are there any Frenchmen here?” as if he were calling for Christians in Mecca.

Armagnac and Brun instantly stood up; but they were too late. Men were already running from the street corners; there was a small but ever-clustering crowd. With the prompt French instinct for the politics of the street, the man with the black moustache had already run across to a corner of the cafe, sprung on one of the tables, and seizing a branch of chestnut to steady himself, shouted as Camille Desmoulins once shouted when he scattered the oak-leaves among the populace.

“Frenchmen!” he volleyed; “I cannot speak! God help me, that is why I am speaking! The fellows in their filthy parliaments who learn to speak also learn to be silent — silent as that spy cowering in the house opposite! Silent as he is when I beat on his bedroom door! Silent as he is now, though he hears my voice across this street and shakes where he sits! Oh, they can be silent eloquently — the politicians! But the time has come when we that cannot speak must speak. You are betrayed to the Prussians. Betrayed at this moment. Betrayed by that man. I am Jules Dubosc, Colonel of Artillery, Belfort. We caught a German spy in the Vosges yesterday, and a paper was found on him — a paper I hold in my hand. Oh, they tried to hush it up; but I took it direct to the man who wrote it — the man in that house! It is in his hand. It is signed with his initials. It is a direction for finding the secret of this new Noiseless Powder. Hirsch invented it; Hirsch wrote this note about it. This note is in German, and was found in a German's pocket. 'Tell the man the formula for powder is in grey envelope in first drawer to the left of Secretary's desk, War Office, in red ink. He must be careful. P.H.'"

He rattled short sentences like a quick-firing gun, but he was plainly the sort of man who is either mad or right. The mass of the crowd was Nationalist, and already in threatening uproar; and a minority of equally angry Intellectuals, led by Armagnac and Brun, only made the majority more militant.

"If this is a military secret," shouted Brun, "why do you yell about it in the street?"

"I will tell you why I do!" roared Dubosc above the roaring crowd. "I went to this man in straight and civil style. If he had any explanation it could have been given in complete confidence. He refuses to explain. He refers me to two strangers in a cafe as to two flunkeys. He has thrown me out of the house, but I am going back into it, with the people of Paris behind me!"

A shout seemed to shake the very facade of mansions and two stones flew, one breaking a window above the balcony. The indignant Colonel plunged once more under the archway and was heard crying and thundering inside. Every instant the human sea grew wider and wider; it surged up against the rails and steps of the traitor's house; it was already certain that the place would be burst into like the Bastille, when the broken french window opened and Dr Hirsch came out on the balcony. For an instant the fury half turned to laughter; for he was an absurd figure in such a scene. His long bare neck and sloping shoulders were the shape of a champagne bottle, but that was the only festive thing about him. His coat hung on him as on a peg; he wore his carrot-coloured hair long and weedy; his cheeks and chin were fully fringed with one of those irritating beards that begin far from the mouth. He was very pale, and he wore blue spectacles.

Livid as he was, he spoke with a sort of prim decision, so that the mob fell silent in the middle of his third sentence.

"...only two things to say to you now. The first is to my foes, the second to my friends. To my foes I say: It is true I will not meet M. Dubosc, though he is storming outside this very room. It is true I have asked two other men to confront him for me. And I will tell you why! Because I will not and must not see him — because it would be against all rules of dignity and honour to see him. Before I am triumphantly cleared before a court, there is another arbitration this gentleman owes me as a gentleman, and in referring him to my seconds I am strictly—"

Armagnac and Brun were waving their hats wildly, and even the Doctor's enemies roared applause at this unexpected defiance. Once more a few sentences were inaudible, but they could hear him say: "To my friends — I myself should always prefer weapons purely intellectual, and to these an evolved humanity will certainly confine itself. But our own most precious truth is the fundamental force of matter and heredity. My books are successful; my theories are unrefuted; but I suffer in politics from a prejudice almost physical in the French. I cannot speak like Clemenceau and Deroulede, for their words are like echoes of their pistols. The French ask for a duellist as the English ask for a sportsman. Well, I give my proofs: I will pay this barbaric bribe, and then go back to reason for the rest of my life."

Two men were instantly found in the crowd itself to offer their services to Colonel Dubosc, who came out presently, satisfied. One was the common soldier with the coffee, who said simply: "I will act for you, sir. I am the Duc de Valognes." The other was the big man, whom his friend the priest sought at first to dissuade; and then walked away alone.

In the early evening a light dinner was spread at the back of the Cafe Charlemagne. Though unroofed by any glass or gilt plaster, the guests were nearly all under a delicate and irregular roof of leaves; for the ornamental trees stood so thick around and among the tables as to give something of the dimness and the dazzle of a small orchard. At one of the central tables a very stumpy little priest sat in complete solitude, and applied himself to a pile of whitebait with the gravest sort of enjoyment. His daily living being very plain, he had a peculiar taste for sudden and isolated luxuries; he was an abstemious epicure. He did not lift his eyes from his plate, round which red pepper, lemons, brown bread and butter, etc., were rigidly ranked, until a tall shadow fell across the table, and his friend Flambeau sat down opposite. Flambeau was gloomy.

"I'm afraid I must chuck this business," said he heavily. "I'm all on the side of the French soldiers like Dubosc, and I'm all against the French atheists like Hirsch; but it seems to me in this case we've made a mistake. The Duke and I thought it as well to investigate the charge, and I must say I'm glad we did."

"Is the paper a forgery, then?" asked the priest

"That's just the odd thing," replied Flambeau. "It's exactly like Hirsch's writing, and nobody can point out any mistake in it. But it wasn't written by Hirsch. If he's a French patriot he didn't write it, because it gives information to Germany. And if he's a German spy he didn't write it, well — because it doesn't give information to Germany."

"You mean the information is wrong?" asked Father Brown.

"Wrong," replied the other, "and wrong exactly where Dr Hirsch would have been right — about the hiding-place of his own secret formula in his own official department. By favour of Hirsch and the authorities, the Duke and I have actually been allowed to inspect the secret drawer at the War Office where the Hirsch formula is kept. We are the only people who have ever known it, except the inventor himself and the Minister for War; but the Minister permitted it to save Hirsch from fighting. After that we really can't support Dubosc if his revelation is a mare's nest."

"And it is?" asked Father Brown.

"It is," said his friend gloomily. "It is a clumsy forgery by somebody who knew nothing of the real hiding-place. It says the paper is in the cupboard on the right of the Secretary's desk. As a fact the cupboard with the secret drawer is some way to the left of the desk. It says the grey envelope contains a long document written in red ink. It isn't written in red ink, but in ordinary black ink. It's manifestly absurd to say that Hirsch can have made a mistake about a paper that nobody knew of but himself; or can have tried to help a foreign thief by telling him to fumble in the wrong drawer. I think we must chuck it up and apologize to old Carrots."

Father Brown seemed to cogitate; he lifted a little whitebait on his fork. "You are sure the grey envelope was in the left cupboard?" he asked.

"Positive," replied Flambeau. "The grey envelope — it was a white envelope really — was—"

Father Brown put down the small silver fish and the fork and stared across at his companion. "What?" he asked, in an altered voice.

"Well, what?" repeated Flambeau, eating heartily.

"It was not grey," said the priest. "Flambeau, you frighten me."

"What the deuce are you frightened of?"

"I'm frightened of a white envelope," said the other seriously, "If it had only just been grey! Hang it all, it might as well have been grey. But if it was white, the whole business is black. The Doctor has been dabbling in some of the old brimstone after all."

"But I tell you he couldn't have written such a note!" cried Flambeau. "The note is utterly wrong about the facts. And innocent or guilty, Dr Hirsch knew all about the facts."

"The man who wrote that note knew all about the facts," said his clerical companion soberly. "He could never have got 'em so wrong without knowing about 'em. You have to know an awful lot to be wrong on every subject — like the devil."

"Do you mean — ?"

"I mean a man telling lies on chance would have told some of the truth," said his friend firmly. "Suppose someone sent you to find a house with a green door and a blue blind, with a front garden but no back garden, with a dog but no cat, and where they drank coffee but not tea. You would say if you found no such house that it was all made up. But I say no. I say if you found a house where the door was blue and the blind green, where there was a back garden and no front garden, where cats were common and dogs instantly shot, where tea was drunk in quarts and coffee forbidden — then you would know you had found the house. The man must have known that particular house to be so accurately inaccurate."

"But what could it mean?" demanded the diner opposite.

"I can't conceive," said Brown; "I don't understand this Hirsch affair at all. As long as it was only the left drawer instead of the right, and red ink instead of black, I thought it must be the chance blunders of a forger, as you say. But three is a mystical number; it finishes things. It finishes this. That the direction about the drawer, the colour of ink, the colour of envelope, should none of them be right by accident, that can't be a coincidence. It wasn't."

"What was it, then? Treason?" asked Flambeau, resuming his dinner.

"I don't know that either," answered Brown, with a face of blank bewilderment. "The only thing I can think of.... Well, I never understood that Dreyfus case. I can always grasp moral evidence easier than the other sorts. I go by a man's eyes and voice, don't you know, and whether his family seems happy, and by what subjects he chooses — and avoids. Well, I was puzzled in the Dreyfus case. Not by the horrible things imputed both ways; I know (though it's not modern to say so) that human nature in the highest places is still capable of being Cenci or Borgia. No — , what puzzled me was the sincerity of both parties. I don't mean the political parties; the rank and file are always roughly honest, and often duped. I mean the persons of the play. I mean the conspirators, if they were conspirators. I mean the traitor, if he was a traitor. I mean the men who must have known the truth. Now Dreyfus went on like a man who knew he was a wronged man. And yet the French statesmen and soldiers went on as if they knew he wasn't a wronged man but simply a wrong 'un. I don't mean they behaved well; I mean they behaved as if they were sure. I can't describe these things; I know what I mean."

"I wish I did," said his friend. "And what has it to do with old Hirsch?"

"Suppose a person in a position of trust," went on the priest, "began to give the enemy information because it was false information. Suppose he even thought he was saving his country by misleading the foreigner. Suppose this brought him into spy circles, and little loans were made to him, and little ties tied on to him. Suppose he kept up his contradictory position in a confused way by never telling the foreign spies the truth, but letting it more and more be guessed. The better part of him (what was left of it) would still say: 'I have not helped the enemy; I said it was the left drawer.' The meaner part of him would already be saying: 'But they may have the sense to see that means the right.' I think it is psychologically possible — in an enlightened age, you know."

"It may be psychologically possible," answered Flambeau, "and it certainly would explain Dreyfus being certain he was wronged and his judges being sure he was guilty. But it won't wash historically, because Dreyfus's document (if it was his document) was literally correct."

"I wasn't thinking of Dreyfus," said Father Brown.

Silence had sunk around them with the emptying of the tables; it was already late, though the sunlight still clung to everything, as if accidentally entangled in the trees. In the stillness Flambeau shifted his seat sharply — making an isolated and echoing noise — and threw his elbow over the angle of it. "Well," he said, rather harshly, "if Hirsch is not better than a timid treason-monger..."

"You mustn't be too hard on them," said Father Brown gently. "It's not entirely their fault; but they have no instincts. I mean those things that make a woman refuse to dance with a man or a man to touch an investment. They've been taught that it's all a matter of degree."

"Anyhow," cried Flambeau impatiently, "he's not a patch on my principal; and I shall go through with it. Old Dubosc may be a bit mad, but he's a sort of patriot after all."

Father Brown continued to consume whitebait.

Something in the stolid way he did so caused Flambeau's fierce black eyes to ramble over his companion afresh. "What's the matter with you?" Flambeau demanded. "Dubosc's all right in that way. You don't doubt him?"

"My friend," said the small priest, laying down his knife and fork in a kind of cold despair, "I doubt everything. Everything, I mean, that has happened today. I doubt the whole story, though it has been acted before my face. I doubt every sight that my eyes have seen since morning. There is something in this business quite different from the ordinary police mystery where one man is more or less lying and the other man more or less telling the truth. Here both men.... Well! I've told you the only theory I can think of that could satisfy anybody. It doesn't satisfy me."

"Nor me either," replied Flambeau frowning, while the other went on eating fish with an air of entire resignation. "If all you can suggest is that notion of a message conveyed by contraries, I call it uncommonly clever, but...well, what would you call it?"

"I should call it thin," said the priest promptly. "I should call it uncommonly thin. But that's the queer thing about the whole business. The lie is like a schoolboy's. There are only three versions, Dubosc's and Hirsch's and that fancy of mine. Either that note was written by a French officer to ruin a French official; or it was written by the French official to help German officers; or it was written by the French official to mislead German officers. Very well. You'd expect a secret paper passing between such people, officials or officers, to look quite different from that. You'd expect, probably a cipher, certainly abbreviations; most certainly scientific and strictly professional terms. But this thing's elaborately simple, like a penny dreadful: 'In the purple grotto you will find the golden casket.' It looks as if... as if it were meant to be seen through at once."

Almost before they could take it in a short figure in French uniform had walked up to their table like the wind, and sat down with a sort of thump.

"I have extraordinary news," said the Duc de Valognes. "I have just come from this Colonel of ours. He is packing up to leave the country, and he asks us to make his excuses sur le terrain."

"What?" cried Flambeau, with an incredulity quite frightful—"apologize?"

"Yes," said the Duke gruffly; "then and there — before everybody — when the swords are drawn. And you and I have to do it while he is leaving the country."

"But what can this mean?" cried Flambeau. "He can't be afraid of that little Hirsch! Confound it!" he cried, in a kind of rational rage; "nobody could be afraid of Hirsch!"

"I believe it's some plot!" snapped Valognes— "some plot of the Jews and Freemasons. It's meant to work up glory for Hirsch..."

The face of Father Brown was commonplace, but curiously contented; it could shine with ignorance as well as with knowledge. But there was always one flash when the foolish mask fell, and the wise mask fitted itself in its place; and Flambeau, who knew his friend, knew that his friend had suddenly understood. Brown said nothing, but finished his plate of fish.

"Where did you last see our precious Colonel?" asked Flambeau, irritably.

"He's round at the Hotel Saint Louis by the Elysee, where we drove with him. He's packing up, I tell you."

"Will he be there still, do you think?" asked Flambeau, frowning at the table.

"I don't think he can get away yet," replied the Duke; "he's packing to go a long journey..."

"No," said Father Brown, quite simply, but suddenly standing up, "for a very short journey. For one of the shortest, in fact. But we may still be in time to catch him if we go there in a motor-cab."

Nothing more could be got out of him until the cab swept round the corner by the Hotel Saint Louis, where they got out, and he led the party up a side lane already in deep shadow with the growing dusk. Once, when the Duke impatiently asked whether Hirsch was guilty of treason or not, he answered rather absently: "No; only of ambition — like Caesar." Then he somewhat inconsequently added: “He lives a very lonely life; he has had to do everything for himself.”

“Well, if he’s ambitious, he ought to be satisfied now,” said Flambeau rather bitterly. “All Paris will cheer him now our cursed Colonel has turned tail.”

“Don’t talk so loud,” said Father Brown, lowering his voice, “your cursed Colonel is just in front.”

The other two started and shrank farther back into the shadow of the wall, for the sturdy figure of their runaway principal could indeed be seen shuffling along in the twilight in front, a bag in each hand. He looked much the same as when they first saw him, except that he had changed his picturesque mountaineering knickers for a conventional pair of trousers. It was clear he was already escaping from the hotel.

The lane down which they followed him was one of those that seem to be at the back of things, and look like the wrong side of the stage scenery. A colourless, continuous wall ran down one flank of it, interrupted at intervals by dull-hued and dirt-stained doors, all shut fast and featureless save for the chalk scribbles of some passing gamin. The tops of trees, mostly rather depressing evergreens, showed at intervals over the top of the wall, and beyond them in the grey and purple gloaming could be seen the back of some long terrace of tall Parisian houses, really comparatively close, but somehow looking as inaccessible as a range of marble mountains. On the other side of the lane ran the high gilt railings of a gloomy park.

Flambeau was looking round him in rather a weird way. “Do you know,” he said, “there is something about this place that—”

“Hullo!” called out the Duke sharply; “that fellow’s disappeared. Vanished, like a blasted fairy!”

“He has a key,” explained their clerical friend. “He’s only gone into one of these garden doors,” and as he spoke they heard one of the dull wooden doors close again with a click in front of them.

Flambeau strode up to the door thus shut almost in his face, and stood in front of it for a moment, biting his black moustache in a fury of curiosity. Then he threw up his long arms and swung himself aloft like a monkey and stood on the top of the wall, his enormous figure dark against the purple sky, like the dark tree-tops.

The Duke looked at the priest. “Dubosc’s escape is more elaborate than we thought,” he said; “but I suppose he is escaping from France.”

“He is escaping from everywhere,” answered Father Brown.

Valognes’s eyes brightened, but his voice sank. “Do you mean suicide?” he asked.

“You will not find his body,” replied the other.

A kind of cry came from Flambeau on the wall above. “My God,” he exclaimed in French, “I know what this place is now! Why, it’s the back of the street where old Hirsch lives. I thought I could recognize the back of a house as well as the back of a man.”

“And Dubosc’s gone in there!” cried the Duke, smiting his hip. “Why, they’ll meet after all!” And with sudden Gallic vivacity he hopped up on the wall beside Flambeau and sat there positively kicking his legs with excitement. The priest alone remained below, leaning against the wall, with his back to the whole theatre of events, and looking wistfully across to the park palings and the twinkling, twilit trees.

The Duke, however stimulated, had the instincts of an aristocrat, and desired rather to stare at the house than to spy on it; but Flambeau, who had the instincts of a burglar (and a detective), had already swung himself from the wall into the fork of a straggling tree from which he could crawl quite close to the only illuminated window in the back of the high dark house. A red blind had been pulled down over the light, but pulled crookedly, so that it gaped on one side, and by risking his neck along a branch that looked as treacherous as a twig, Flambeau could just see Colonel Dubosc walking about in a brilliantly-lighted and luxurious bedroom. But close as Flambeau was to the house, he heard the words of his colleagues by the wall, and repeated them in a low voice.

“Yes, they will meet now after all!”

“They will never meet,” said Father Brown. “Hirsch was right when he said that in such an affair the principals must not meet. Have you read a queer psychological story by Henry James, of two persons who so perpetually missed meeting each other by accident that they began to feel quite frightened of each other, and to think it was fate? This is something of the kind, but more curious.”

“There are people in Paris who will cure them of such morbid fancies,” said Valognes vindictively. “They will jolly well have to meet if we capture them and force them to fight.”

“They will not meet on the Day of Judgement,” said the priest. “If God Almighty held the truncheon of the lists, if St Michael blew the trumpet for the swords to cross — even then, if one of them stood ready, the other would not come."

"Oh, what does all this mysticism mean?" cried the Duc de Valognes, impatiently; "why on earth shouldn't they meet like other people?"

"They are the opposite of each other," said Father Brown, with a queer kind of smile. "They contradict each other. They cancel out, so to speak."

He continued to gaze at the darkening trees opposite, but Valognes turned his head sharply at a suppressed exclamation from Flambeau. That investigator, peering into the lighted room, had just seen the Colonel, after a pace or two, proceed to take his coat off. Flambeau's first thought was that this really looked like a fight; but he soon dropped the thought for another. The solidity and squareness of Dubosc's chest and shoulders was all a powerful piece of padding and came off with his coat. In his shirt and trousers he was a comparatively slim gentleman, who walked across the bedroom to the bathroom with no more pugnacious purpose than that of washing himself. He bent over a basin, dried his dripping hands and face on a towel, and turned again so that the strong light fell on his face. His brown complexion had gone, his big black moustache had gone; he — was clean-shaven and very pate. Nothing remained of the Colonel but his bright, hawk-like, brown eyes. Under the wall Father Brown was going on in heavy meditation, as if to himself.

"It is all just like what I was saying to Flambeau. These opposites won't do. They don't work. They don't fight. If it's white instead of black, and solid instead of liquid, and so on all along the line — then there's something wrong, Monsieur, there's something wrong. One of these men is fair and the other dark, one stout and the other slim, one strong and the other weak. One has a moustache and no beard, so you can't see his mouth; the other has a beard and no moustache, so you can't see his chin. One has hair cropped to his skull, but a scarf to hide his neck; the other has low shirt-collars, but long hair to bide his skull. It's all too neat and correct, Monsieur, and there's something wrong. Things made so opposite are things that cannot quarrel. Wherever the one sticks out the other sinks in. Like a face and a mask, like a lock and a key..."

Flambeau was peering into the house with a visage as white as a sheet. The occupant of the room was standing with his back to him, but in front of a looking-glass, and had already fitted round his face a sort of framework of rank red hair, hanging disordered from the head and clinging round the jaws and chin while leaving the mocking mouth uncovered. Seen thus in the glass the white face looked like the face of Judas laughing horribly and surrounded by capering flames of hell. For a spasm Flambeau saw the fierce, red-brown eyes dancing, then they were covered with a pair of blue spectacles. Slipping on a loose black coat, the figure vanished towards the front of the house. A few moments later a roar of popular applause from the street beyond announced that Dr Hirsch had once more appeared upon the balcony.

The Man in the Passage

TWO men appeared simultaneously at the two ends of a sort of passage running along the side of the Apollo Theatre in the Adelphi. The evening daylight in the streets was large and luminous, opalescent and empty. The passage was comparatively long and dark, so each man could see the other as a mere black silhouette at the other end. Nevertheless, each man knew the other, even in that inky outline; for they were both men of striking appearance and they hated each other.

The covered passage opened at one end on one of the steep streets of the Adelphi, and at the other on a terrace overlooking the sunset-coloured river. One side of the passage was a blank wall, for the building it supported was an old unsuccessful theatre restaurant, now shut up. The other side of the passage contained two doors, one at each end. Neither was what was commonly called the stage door; they were a sort of special and private stage doors used by very special performers, and in this case by the star actor and actress in the Shakespearean performance of the day. Persons of that eminence often like to have such private exits and entrances, for meeting friends or avoiding them.

The two men in question were certainly two such friends, men who evidently knew the doors and counted on their opening, for each approached the door at the upper end with equal coolness and confidence. Not, however, with equal speed; but the man who walked fast was the man from the other end of the tunnel, so they both arrived before the secret stage door almost at the same instant. They saluted each other with civility, and waited a moment before one of them, the sharper walker who seemed to have the shorter patience, knocked at the door.

In this and everything else each man was opposite and neither could be called inferior. As private persons both were handsome, capable and popular. As public persons, both were in the first public rank. But everything about them, from their glory to their good looks, was of a diverse and incomparable kind. Sir Wilson Seymour was the kind of man whose importance is known to everybody who knows. The more you mixed with the innermost ring in every polity or profession, the more often you met Sir Wilson Seymour. He was the one intelligent man on twenty unintelligent committees — on every sort of subject, from the reform of the

Royal Academy to the project of bimetallism for Greater Britain. In the Arts especially he was omnipotent. He was so unique that nobody could quite decide whether he was a great aristocrat who had taken up Art, or a great artist whom the aristocrats had taken up. But you could not meet him for five minutes without realizing that you had really been ruled by him all your life.

His appearance was “distinguished” in exactly the same sense; it was at once conventional and unique. Fashion could have found no fault with his high silk hat — , yet it was unlike anyone else’s hat — a little higher, perhaps, and adding something to his natural height. His tall, slender figure had a slight stoop yet it looked the reverse of feeble. His hair was silver-grey, but he did not look old; it was worn longer than the common yet he did not look effeminate; it was curly but it did not look curled. His carefully pointed beard made him look more manly and militant than otherwise, as it does in those old admirals of Velazquez with whose dark portraits his house was hung. His grey gloves were a shade bluer, his silver-knobbed cane a shade longer than scores of such gloves and canes flapped and flourished about the theatres and the restaurants.

The other man was not so tall, yet would have struck nobody as short, but merely as strong and handsome. His hair also was curly, but fair and cropped close to a strong, massive head — the sort of head you break a door with, as Chaucer said of the Miller’s. His military moustache and the carriage of his shoulders showed him a soldier, but he had a pair of those peculiar frank and piercing blue eyes which are more common in sailors. His face was somewhat square, his jaw was square, his shoulders were square, even his jacket was square. Indeed, in the wild school of caricature then current, Mr Max Beerbohm had represented him as a proposition in the fourth book of Euclid.

For he also was a public man, though with quite another sort of success. You did not have to be in the best society to have heard of Captain Cutler, of the siege of Hong-Kong, and the great march across China. You could not get away from hearing of him wherever you were; his portrait was on every other postcard; his maps and battles in every other illustrated paper; songs in his honour in every other music-hall turn or on every other barrel-organ. His fame, though probably more temporary, was ten times more wide, popular and spontaneous than the other man’s. In thousands of

English homes he appeared enormous above England, like Nelson. Yet he had infinitely less power in England than Sir Wilson Seymour.

The door was opened to them by an aged servant or “dresser”, whose broken-down face and figure and black shabby coat and trousers contrasted queerly with the glittering interior of the great actress’s dressing-room. It was fitted and filled with looking-glasses at every angle of refraction, so that they looked like the hundred facets of one huge diamond — if one could get inside a diamond. The other features of luxury, a few flowers, a few coloured cushions, a few scraps of stage costume, were multiplied by all the mirrors into the madness of the Arabian Nights, and danced and changed places perpetually as the shuffling attendant shifted a mirror outwards or shot one back against the wall.

They both spoke to the dingy dresser by name, calling him Parkinson, and asking for the lady as Miss Aurora Rome. Parkinson said she was in the other room, but he would go and tell her. A shade crossed the brow of both visitors; for the other room was the private room of the great actor with whom Miss Aurora was performing, and she was of the kind that does not inflame admiration without inflaming jealousy. In about half a minute, however, the inner door opened, and she entered as she always did, even in private life, so that the very silence seemed to be a roar of applause, and one well-deserved. She was clad in a somewhat strange garb of peacock green and peacock blue satins, that gleamed like blue and green metals, such as delight children and aesthetes, and her heavy, hot brown hair framed one of those magic faces which are dangerous to all men, but especially to boys and to men growing grey. In company with her male colleague, the great American actor, Isidore Bruno, she was producing a particularly poetical and fantastic interpretation of Midsummer Night’s Dream: in which the artistic prominence was given to Oberon and Titania, or in other words to Bruno and herself. Set in dreamy and exquisite scenery, and moving in mystical dances, the green costume, like burnished beetle-wings, expressed all the elusive individuality of an elfin queen. But when personally confronted in what was still broad daylight, a man looked only at the woman’s face.

She greeted both men with the beaming and baffling smile which kept so many males at the same just dangerous distance from her. She accepted some flowers from Cutler, which were as tropical and expensive as his victories; and another sort of present from Sir Wilson Seymour, offered later on and more nonchalantly by that gentleman. For it was against his breeding to show eagerness, and against his conventional unconventionality to give anything so obvious as flowers. He had picked up a trifle, he said, which was rather a curiosity, it was an ancient Greek dagger of the Mycenaean Epoch, and might well have been worn in the time of Theseus and Hippolyta. It was made of brass like all the Heroic weapons, but, oddly enough, sharp enough to prick anyone still. He had really been attracted to it by the leaf-like shape; it was as perfect as a Greek vase. If it was of any interest to Miss Rome or could come in anywhere in the play, he hoped she would —

The inner door burst open and a big figure appeared, who was more of a contrast to the explanatory Seymour than even Captain Cutler. Nearly six-foot-six, and of more than theatrical thews and muscles, Isidore Bruno, in the gorgeous leopard skin and golden-brown garments of Oberon, looked like a barbaric god. He leaned on a sort of hunting-spear, which across a theatre looked a slight, silvery wand, but which in the small and comparatively crowded room looked as plain as a pike-staff — and as menacing. His vivid black eyes rolled volcanically, his bronzed face, handsome as it was, showed at that moment a combination of high cheekbones with set white teeth, which recalled certain American conjectures about his origin in the Southern plantations.

"Aurora," he began, in that deep voice like a drum of passion that had moved so many audiences, "will you—"

He stopped indecisively because a sixth figure had suddenly presented itself just inside the doorway — a figure so incongruous in the scene as to be almost comic. It was a very short man in the black uniform of the Roman secular clergy, and looking (especially in such a presence as Bruno's and Aurora's) rather like the wooden Noah out of an ark. He did not, however, seem conscious of any contrast, but said with dull civility: "I believe Miss Rome sent for me."

A shrewd observer might have remarked that the emotional temperature rather rose at so unemotional an interruption. The detachment of a professional celibate seemed to reveal to the others that they stood round the woman as a ring of amorous rivals; just as a stranger coming in with frost on his coat will reveal that a room is like a furnace. The presence of the one man who did not care about her increased Miss Rome's sense that everybody else was in love with her, and each in a somewhat dangerous way: the actor with all the appetite of a savage and a spoilt child; the soldier with all the simple selfishness of a man of will rather than mind; Sir Wilson with that daily hardening concentration with which old Hedonists take to a hobby; nay, even the abject Parkinson, who had known her before her triumphs, and who followed her about the room with eyes or feet, with the dumb fascination of a dog.

A shrewd person might also have noted a yet odder thing. The man like a black wooden Noah (who was not wholly without shrewdness) noted it with a considerable but contained amusement. It was evident that the great Aurora, though by no means indifferent to the admiration of the other sex, wanted at this moment to get rid of all the men who admired her and be left alone with the man who did not — did not admire her in that sense at least; for the little priest did admire and even enjoy the firm feminine diplomacy with which she set about her task. There was, perhaps, only one thing that Aurora Rome was clever about, and that was one half of humanity — the other half. The little priest watched, like a Napoleonic campaign, the swift precision of her policy for expelling all while banishing none. Bruno, the big actor, was so babyish that it was easy to send him off in brute sulks, banging the door. Cutler, the British officer, was pachydermatous to ideas, but punctilious about behaviour. He would ignore all hints, but he would die rather than ignore a definite commission from a lady. As to old Seymour, he had to be treated differently; he had to be left to the last. The only way to move him was to appeal to him in confidence as an old friend, to let him into the secret of the clearance. The priest did really admire Miss Rome as she achieved all these three objects in one selected action.

She went across to Captain Cutler and said in her sweetest manner: “I shall value all these flowers, because they must be your favourite flowers. But they won’t be complete, you know, without my favourite flower. Do go over to that shop round the corner and get me some lilies-of-the-valley, and then it will be quite lovely.”

The first object of her diplomacy, the exit of the enraged Bruno, was at once achieved. He had already handed his spear in a lordly style, like a sceptre, to the piteous Parkinson, and was about to assume one of the cushioned seats like a throne. But at this open appeal to his rival there glowed in his opal eyeballs all the sensitive insolence of the slave; he knotted his enormous brown fists for an instant, and then, dashing open the door, disappeared into his own apartments beyond. But meanwhile Miss

Rome's experiment in mobilizing the British Army had not succeeded so simply as seemed probable. Cutler had indeed risen stiffly and suddenly, and walked towards the door, hatless, as if at a word of command. But perhaps there was something ostentatiously elegant about the languid figure of Seymour leaning against one of the looking-glasses that brought him up short at the entrance, turning his head this way and that like a bewildered bulldog.

"I must show this stupid man where to go," said Aurora in a whisper to Seymour, and ran out to the threshold to speed the parting guest.

Seymour seemed to be listening, elegant and unconscious as was his posture, and he seemed relieved when he heard the lady call out some last instructions to the Captain, and then turn sharply and run laughing down the passage towards the other end, the end on the terrace above the Thames. Yet a second or two after Seymour's brow darkened again. A man in his position has so many rivals, and he remembered that at the other end of the passage was the corresponding entrance to Bruno's private room. He did not lose his dignity; he said some civil words to Father Brown about the revival of Byzantine architecture in the Westminster Cathedral, and then, quite naturally, strolled out himself into the upper end of the passage. Father Brown and Parkinson were left alone, and they were neither of them men with a taste for superfluous conversation. The dresser went round the room, pulling out looking-glasses and pushing them in again, his dingy dark coat and trousers looking all the more dismal since he was still holding the festive fairy spear of King Oberon. Every time he pulled out the frame of a new glass, a new black figure of Father Brown appeared; the absurd glass chamber was full of Father Browns, upside down in the air like angels, turning somersaults like acrobats, turning their backs to everybody like very rude persons.

Father Brown seemed quite unconscious of this cloud of witnesses, but followed Parkinson with an idly attentive eye till he took himself and his absurd spear into the farther room of Bruno. Then he abandoned himself to such abstract meditations as always amused him — calculating the angles of the mirrors, the angles of each refraction, the angle at which each must fit into the wall...when he heard a strong but strangled cry.

He sprang to his feet and stood rigidly listening. At the same instant Sir Wilson Seymour burst back into the room, white as ivory. "Who's that man in the passage?" he cried. "Where's that dagger of mine?"

Before Father Brown could turn in his heavy boots Seymour was plunging about the room looking for the weapon. And before he could possibly find that weapon or any other, a brisk running of feet broke upon the pavement outside, and the square face of Cutler was thrust into the same doorway. He was still grotesquely grasping a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley. “What’s this?” he cried. “What’s that creature down the passage? Is this some of your tricks?”

“My tricks!” hissed his pale rival, and made a stride towards him.

In the instant of time in which all this happened Father Brown stepped out into the top of the passage, looked down it, and at once walked briskly towards what he saw.

At this the other two men dropped their quarrel and darted after him, Cutler calling out: “What are you doing? Who are you?”

“My name is Brown,” said the priest sadly, as he bent over something and straightened himself again. “Miss Rome sent for me, and I came as quickly as I could. I have come too late.”

The three men looked down, and in one of them at least the life died in that late light of afternoon. It ran along the passage like a path of gold, and in the midst of it Aurora Rome lay lustrous in her robes of green and gold, with her dead face turned upwards. Her dress was torn away as in a struggle, leaving the right shoulder bare, but the wound from which the blood was welling was on the other side. The brass dagger lay flat and gleaming a yard or so away.

There was a blank stillness for a measurable time, so that they could hear far off a flower-girl’s laugh outside Charing Cross, and someone whistling furiously for a taxicab in one of the streets off the Strand. Then the Captain, with a movement so sudden that it might have been passion or play-acting, took Sir Wilson Seymour by the throat.

Seymour looked at him steadily without either fight or fear. “You need not kill me,” he said in a voice quite cold; “I shall do that on my own account.”

The Captain’s hand hesitated and dropped; and the other added with the same icy candour: “If I find I haven’t the nerve to do it with that dagger I can do it in a month with drink.”

“Drink isn’t good enough for me,” replied Cutler, “but I’ll have blood for this before I die. Not yours — but I think I know whose.”

And before the others could appreciate his intention he snatched up the dagger, sprang at the other door at the lower end of the passage, burst it open, bolt and all, and confronted Bruno in his dressing-room. As he did so, old Parkinson tottered in his wavering way out of the door and caught sight of the corpse lying in the passage. He moved shakily towards it; looked at it weakly with a working face; then moved shakily back into the dressing-room again, and sat down suddenly on one of the richly cushioned chairs. Father Brown instantly ran across to him, taking no notice of Cutler and the colossal actor, though the room already rang with their blows and they began to struggle for the dagger. Seymour, who retained some practical sense, was whistling for the police at the end of the passage.

When the police arrived it was to tear the two men from an almost ape-like grapple; and, after a few formal inquiries, to arrest Isidore Bruno upon a charge of murder, brought against him by his furious opponent. The idea that the great national hero of the hour had arrested a wrongdoer with his own hand doubtless had its weight with the police, who are not without elements of the journalist. They treated Cutler with a certain solemn attention, and pointed out that he had got a slight slash on the hand. Even as Cutler bore him back across tilted chair and table, Bruno had twisted the dagger out of his grasp and disabled him just below the wrist. The injury was really slight, but till he was removed from the room the half-savage prisoner stared at the running blood with a steady smile.

“Looks a cannibal sort of chap, don’t he?” said the constable confidentially to Cutler.

Cutler made no answer, but said sharply a moment after: “We must attend to the...the death...” and his voice escaped from articulation.

“The two deaths,” came in the voice of the priest from the farther side of the room. “This poor fellow was gone when I got across to him.” And he stood looking down at old Parkinson, who sat in a black huddle on the gorgeous chair. He also had paid his tribute, not without eloquence, to the woman who had died.

The silence was first broken by Cutler, who seemed not untouched by a rough tenderness. “I wish I was him,” he said huskily. “I remember he used to watch her wherever she walked more than — anybody. She was his air, and he’s dried up. He’s just dead.”

“We are all dead,” said Seymour in a strange voice, looking down the road.

They took leave of Father Brown at the corner of the road, with some random apologies for any rudeness they might have shown. Both their faces were tragic, but also cryptic.

The mind of the little priest was always a rabbit-warren of wild thoughts that jumped too quickly for him to catch them. Like the white tail of a rabbit he had the vanishing thought that he was certain of their grief, but not so certain of their innocence.

“We had better all be going,” said Seymour heavily; “we have done all we can to help.”

“Will you understand my motives,” asked Father Brown quietly, “if I say you have done all you can to hurt?”

They both started as if guiltily, and Cutler said sharply: “To hurt whom?”

“To hurt yourselves,” answered the priest. “I would not add to your troubles if it weren’t common justice to warn you. You’ve done nearly everything you could do to hang yourselves, if this actor should be acquitted. They’ll be sure to subpoena me; I shall be bound to say that after the cry was heard each of you rushed into the room in a wild state and began quarrelling about a dagger. As far as my words on oath can go, you might either of you have done it. You hurt yourselves with that; and then Captain Cutler must have hurt himself with the dagger.”

“Hurt myself!” exclaimed the Captain, with contempt. “A silly little scratch.”

“Which drew blood,” replied the priest, nodding. “We know there’s blood on the brass now. And so we shall never know whether there was blood on it before.”

There was a silence; and then Seymour said, with an emphasis quite alien to his daily accent: “But I saw a man in the passage.”

“I know you did,” answered the cleric Brown with a face of wood, “so did Captain Cutler. That’s what seems so improbable.”

Before either could make sufficient sense of it even to answer, Father Brown had politely excused himself and gone stumping up the road with his stumpy old umbrella.

As modern newspapers are conducted, the most honest and most important news is the police news. If it be true that in the twentieth century more space is given to murder than to politics, it is for the excellent reason that murder is a more serious subject. But even this would hardly explain the enormous omnipresence and widely distributed detail of “The Bruno

Case,” or “The Passage Mystery,” in the Press of London and the provinces. So vast was the excitement that for some weeks the Press really told the truth; and the reports of examination and cross-examination, if interminable, even if intolerable are at least reliable. The true reason, of course, was the coincidence of persons. The victim was a popular actress; the accused was a popular actor; and the accused had been caught red-handed, as it were, by the most popular soldier of the patriotic season. In those extraordinary circumstances the Press was paralysed into probity and accuracy; and the rest of this somewhat singular business can practically be recorded from reports of Bruno’s trial.

The trial was presided over by Mr Justice Monkhouse, one of those who are jeered at as humorous judges, but who are generally much more serious than the serious judges, for their levity comes from a living impatience of professional solemnity; while the serious judge is really filled with frivolity, because he is filled with vanity. All the chief actors being of a worldly importance, the barristers were well balanced; the prosecutor for the Crown was Sir Walter Cowdray, a heavy, but weighty advocate of the sort that knows how to seem English and trustworthy, and how to be rhetorical with reluctance. The prisoner was defended by Mr Patrick Butler, K.C., who was mistaken for a mere flaneur by those who misunderstood the Irish character — and those who had not been examined by him. The medical evidence involved no contradictions, the doctor, whom Seymour had summoned on the spot, agreeing with the eminent surgeon who had later examined the body. Aurora Rome had been stabbed with some sharp instrument such as a knife or dagger; some instrument, at least, of which the blade was short. The wound was just over the heart, and she had died instantly. When the doctor first saw her she could hardly have been dead for twenty minutes. Therefore when Father Brown found her she could hardly have been dead for three.

Some official detective evidence followed, chiefly concerned with the presence or absence of any proof of a struggle; the only suggestion of this was the tearing of the dress at the shoulder, and this did not seem to fit in particularly well with the direction and finality of the blow. When these details had been supplied, though not explained, the first of the important witnesses was called.

Sir Wilson Seymour gave evidence as he did everything else that he did at all — not only well, but perfectly. Though himself much more of a public man than the judge, he conveyed exactly the fine shade of self-effacement before the King’s justice; and though everyone looked at him as they would at the Prime Minister or the Archbishop of Canterbury, they could have said nothing of his part in it but that it was that of a private gentleman, with an accent on the noun. He was also refreshingly lucid, as he was on the committees. He had been calling on Miss Rome at the theatre; he had met Captain Cutler there; they had been joined for a short time by the accused, who had then returned to his own dressing-room; they had then been joined by a Roman Catholic priest, who asked for the deceased lady and said his name was Brown. Miss Rome had then gone just outside the theatre to the entrance of the passage, in order to point out to Captain Cutler a flower-shop at which he was to buy her some more flowers; and the witness had remained in the room, exchanging a few words with the priest. He had then distinctly heard the deceased, having sent the Captain on his errand, turn round laughing and run down the passage towards its other end, where was the prisoner’s dressing-room. In idle curiosity as to the rapid movement of his friends, he had strolled out to the head of the passage himself and looked down it towards the prisoner’s door. Did he see anything in the passage? Yes; he saw something in the passage.

Sir Walter Cowdray allowed an impressive interval, during which the witness looked down, and for all his usual composure seemed to have more than his usual pallor. Then the barrister said in a lower voice, which seemed at once sympathetic and creepy: “Did you see it distinctly?”

Sir Wilson Seymour, however moved, had his excellent brains in full working-order. “Very distinctly as regards its outline, but quite indistinctly, indeed not at all, as regards the details inside the outline. The passage is of such length that anyone in the middle of it appears quite black against the light at the other end.” The witness lowered his steady eyes once more and added: “I had noticed the fact before, when Captain Cutler first entered it.” There was another silence, and the judge leaned forward and made a note.

“Well,” said Sir Walter patiently, “what was the outline like? Was it, for instance, like the figure of the murdered woman?”

“Not in the least,” answered Seymour quietly.

“What did it look like to you?”

“It looked to me,” replied the witness, “like a tall man.”

Everyone in court kept his eyes riveted on his pen, or his umbrella-handle, or his book, or his boots or whatever he happened to be looking at.

They seemed to be holding their eyes away from the prisoner by main force; but they felt his figure in the dock, and they felt it as gigantic. Tall as Bruno was to the eye, he seemed to swell taller and taller when an eyes had been torn away from him.

Cowdray was resuming his seat with his solemn face, smoothing his black silk robes, and white silk whiskers. Sir Wilson was leaving the witness-box, after a few final particulars to which there were many other witnesses, when the counsel for the defence sprang up and stopped him.

"I shall only detain you a moment," said Mr Butler, who was a rustic-looking person with red eyebrows and an expression of partial slumber. "Will you tell his lordship how you knew it was a man?"

A faint, refined smile seemed to pass over Seymour's features. "I'm afraid it is the vulgar test of trousers," he said. "When I saw daylight between the long legs I was sure it was a man, after all."

Butler's sleepy eyes opened as suddenly as some silent explosion. "After all!" he repeated slowly. "So you did think at first it was a woman?"

Seymour looked troubled for the first time. "It is hardly a point of fact," he said, "but if his lordship would like me to answer for my impression, of course I shall do so. There was something about the thing that was not exactly a woman and yet was not quite a man; somehow the curves were different. And it had something that looked like long hair."

"Thank you," said Mr Butler, K.C., and sat down suddenly, as if he had got what he wanted.

Captain Cutler was a far less plausible and composed witness than Sir Wilson, but his account of the opening incidents was solidly the same. He described the return of Bruno to his dressing-room, the dispatching of himself to buy a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley, his return to the upper end of the passage, the thing he saw in the passage, his suspicion of Seymour, and his struggle with Bruno. But he could give little artistic assistance about the black figure that he and Seymour had seen. Asked about its outline, he said he was no art critic — with a somewhat too obvious sneer at Seymour. Asked if it was a man or a woman, he said it looked more like a beast — with a too obvious snarl at the prisoner. But the man was plainly shaken with sorrow and sincere anger, and Cowdray quickly excused him from confirming facts that were already fairly clear.

The defending counsel also was again brief in his cross-examination; although (as was his custom) even in being brief, he seemed to take a long time about it. “You used a rather remarkable expression,” he said, looking at Cutler sleepily. “What do you mean by saying that it looked more like a beast than a man or a woman?”

Cutler seemed seriously agitated. “Perhaps I oughtn’t to have said that,” he said; “but when the brute has huge humped shoulders like a chimpanzee, and bristles sticking out of its head like a pig—”

Mr Butler cut short his curious impatience in the middle. “Never mind whether its hair was like a pig’s,” he said, “was it like a woman’s?”

“A woman’s!” cried the soldier. “Great Scott, no!”

“The last witness said it was,” commented the counsel, with unscrupulous swiftness. “And did the figure have any of those serpentine and semi-feminine curves to which eloquent allusion has been made? No? No feminine curves? The figure, if I understand you, was rather heavy and square than otherwise?”

“He may have been bending forward,” said Cutler, in a hoarse and rather faint voice.

“Or again, he may not,” said Mr Butler, and sat down suddenly for the second time.

The third, witness called by Sir Walter Cowdray was the little Catholic clergyman, so little, compared with the others, that his head seemed hardly to come above the box, so that it was like cross-examining a child. But unfortunately Sir Walter had somehow got it into his head (mostly by some ramifications of his family’s religion) that Father Brown was on the side of the prisoner, because the prisoner was wicked and foreign and even partly black. Therefore he took Father Brown up sharply whenever that proud pontiff tried to explain anything; and told him to answer yes or no, and tell the plain facts without any jesuitry. When Father Brown began, in his simplicity, to say who he thought the man in the passage was, the barrister told him that he did not want his theories.

“A black shape was seen in the passage. And you say you saw the black shape. Well, what shape was it?”

Father Brown blinked as under rebuke; but he had long known the literal nature of obedience. “The shape,” he said, “was short and thick, but had two sharp, black projections curved upwards on each side of the head or top, rather like horns, and—”

“Oh! the devil with horns, no doubt,” ejaculated Cowdray, sitting down in triumphant jocularity. “It was the devil come to eat Protestants.”

"No," said the priest dispassionately; "I know who it was."

Those in court had been wrought up to an irrational, but real sense of some monstrosity. They had forgotten the figure in the dock and thought only of the figure in the passage. And the figure in the passage, described by three capable and respectable men who had all seen it, was a shifting nightmare: one called it a woman, and the other a beast, and the other a devil....

The judge was looking at Father Brown with level and piercing eyes. "You are a most extraordinary witness," he said; "but there is something about you that makes me think you are trying to tell the truth. Well, who was the man you saw in the passage?"

"He was myself," said Father Brown.

Butler, K.C., sprang to his feet in an extraordinary stillness, and said quite calmly: "Your lordship will allow me to cross-examine?" And then, without stopping, he shot at Brown the apparently disconnected question: "You have heard about this dagger; you know the experts say the crime was committed with a short blade?"

"A short blade," assented Brown, nodding solemnly like an owl, "but a very long hilt."

Before the audience could quite dismiss the idea that the priest had really seen himself doing murder with a short dagger with a long hilt (which seemed somehow to make it more horrible), he had himself hurried on to explain.

"I mean daggers aren't the only things with short blades. Spears have short blades. And spears catch at the end of the steel just like daggers, if they're that sort of fancy spear they had in theatres; like the spear poor old Parkinson killed his wife with, just when she'd sent for me to settle their family troubles — and I came just too late, God forgive me! But he died penitent — he just died of being penitent. He couldn't bear what he'd done."

The general impression in court was that the little priest, who was gobbling away, had literally gone mad in the box. But the judge still looked at him with bright and steady eyes of interest; and the counsel for the defence went on with his questions unperturbed.

"If Parkinson did it with that pantomime spear," said Butler, "he must have thrust from four yards away. How do you account for signs of struggle, like the dress dragged off the shoulder?” He had slipped into treating his mere witness as an expert; but no one noticed it now.

“The poor lady’s dress was torn,” said the witness, “because it was caught in a panel that slid to just behind her. She struggled to free herself, and as she did so Parkinson came out of the prisoner’s room and lunged with the spear.”

“A panel?” repeated the barrister in a curious voice.

“It was a looking-glass on the other side,” explained Father Brown. “When I was in the dressing-room I noticed that some of them could probably be slid out into the passage.”

There was another vast and unnatural silence, and this time it was the judge who spoke. “So you really mean that when you looked down that passage, the man you saw was yourself — in a mirror?”

“Yes, my lord; that was what I was trying to say,” said Brown, “but they asked me for the shape; and our hats have corners just like horns, and so I —”

The judge leaned forward, his old eyes yet more brilliant, and said in specially distinct tones: “Do you really mean to say that when Sir Wilson Seymour saw that wild what-you-call-him with curves and a woman’s hair and a man’s trousers, what he saw was Sir Wilson Seymour?”

“Yes, my lord,” said Father Brown.

“And you mean to say that when Captain Cutler saw that chimpanzee with humped shoulders and hog’s bristles, he simply saw himself?”

“Yes, my lord.”

The judge leaned back in his chair with a luxuriance in which it was hard to separate the cynicism and the admiration. “And can you tell us why,” he asked, “you should know your own figure in a looking-glass, when two such distinguished men don’t?”

Father Brown blinked even more painfully than before; then he stammered: “Really, my lord, I don’t know unless it’s because I don’t look at it so often.”

The Mistake of the Machine

FLAMBEAU and his friend the priest were sitting in the Temple Gardens about sunset; and their neighbourhood or some such accidental influence had turned their talk to matters of legal process. From the problem of the licence in cross-examination, their talk strayed to Roman and mediaeval torture, to the examining magistrate in France and the Third Degree in America.

"I've been reading," said Flambeau, "of this new psychometric method they talk about so much, especially in America. You know what I mean; they put a pulsometer on a man's wrist and judge by how his heart goes at the pronunciation of certain words. What do you think of it?"

"I think it very interesting," replied Father Brown; "it reminds me of that interesting idea in the Dark Ages that blood would flow from a corpse if the murderer touched it."

"Do you really mean," demanded his friend, "that you think the two methods equally valuable?"

"I think them equally valueless," replied Brown. "Blood flows, fast or slow, in dead folk or living, for so many more million reasons than we can ever know. Blood will have to flow very funnily; blood will have to flow up the Matterhorn, before I will take it as a sign that I am to shed it."

"The method," remarked the other, "has been guaranteed by some of the greatest American men of science."

"What sentimentalists men of science are!" exclaimed Father Brown, "and how much more sentimental must American men of science be! Who but a Yankee would think of proving anything from heart-throbs? Why, they must be as sentimental as a man who thinks a woman is in love with him if she blushes. That's a test from the circulation of the blood, discovered by the immortal Harvey; and a jolly rotten test, too."

"But surely," insisted Flambeau, "it might point pretty straight at something or other."

"There's a disadvantage in a stick pointing straight," answered the other. "What is it? Why, the other end of the stick always points the opposite way. It depends whether you get hold of the stick by the right end. I saw the thing done once and I've never believed in it since." And he proceeded to tell the story of his disillusionment.

It happened nearly twenty years before, when he was chaplain to his co-religionists in a prison in Chicago — where the Irish population displayed a capacity both for crime and penitence which kept him tolerably busy. The official second-in-command under the Governor was an ex-detective named Greywood Usher, a cadaverous, careful-spoken Yankee philosopher, occasionally varying a very rigid visage with an odd apologetic grimace. He liked Father Brown in a slightly patronizing way; and Father Brown liked him, though he heartily disliked his theories. His theories were extremely complicated and were held with extreme simplicity.

One evening he had sent for the priest, who, according to his custom, took a seat in silence at a table piled and littered with papers, and waited. The official selected from the papers a scrap of newspaper cutting, which he handed across to the cleric, who read it gravely. It appeared to be an extract from one of the pinkest of American Society papers, and ran as follows:

"Society's brightest widower is once more on the Freak Dinner stunt. All our exclusive citizens will recall the Perambulator Parade Dinner, in which Last-Trick Todd, at his palatial home at Pilgrim's Pond, caused so many of our prominent debutantes to look even younger than their years. Equally elegant and more miscellaneous and large-hearted in social outlook was Last-Trick's show the year previous, the popular Cannibal Crush Lunch, at which the confections handed round were sarcastically moulded in the forms of human arms and legs, and during which more than one of our gayest mental gymnasts was heard offering to eat his partner. The witticism which will inspire this evening is as yet in Mr Todd's pretty reticent intellect, or locked in the jewelled bosoms of our city's gayest leaders; but there is talk of a pretty parody of the simple manners and customs at the other end of Society's scale. This would be all the more telling, as hospitable Todd is entertaining in Lord Falconroy, the famous traveller, a true-blooded aristocrat fresh from England's oak-groves. Lord Falconroy's travels began before his ancient feudal title was resurrected, he was in the Republic in his youth, and fashion murmurs a sly reason for his return. Miss Etta Todd is one of our deep-souled New Yorkers, and comes into an income of nearly twelve hundred million dollars."

"Well," asked Usher, "does that interest you?"

"Why, words rather fail me," answered Father Brown. "I cannot think at this moment of anything in this world that would interest me less. And, unless the just anger of the Republic is at last going to electrocute journalists for writing like that, I don't quite see why it should interest you either."

"Ah!" said Mr Usher dryly, and handing across another scrap of newspaper. "Well, does that interest you?"

The paragraph was headed "Savage Murder of a Warder. Convict Escapes," and ran: "Just before dawn this morning a shout for help was heard in the Convict Settlement at Sequah in this State. The authorities, hurrying in the direction of the cry, found the corpse of the warder who patrols the top of the north wall of the prison, the steepest and most difficult exit, for which one man has always been found sufficient. The unfortunate officer had, however, been hurled from the high wall, his brains beaten out as with a club, and his gun was missing. Further inquiries showed that one of the cells was empty; it had been occupied by a rather sullen ruffian giving his name as Oscar Rian. He was only temporarily detained for some comparatively trivial assault; but he gave everyone the impression of a man with a black past and a dangerous future. Finally, when daylight had fully revealed the scene of murder, it was found that he had written on the wall above the body a fragmentary sentence, apparently with a finger dipped in blood: 'This was self-defence and he had the gun. I meant no harm to him or any man but one. I am keeping the bullet for Pilgrim's Pond — O.R.' A man must have used most fiendish treachery or most savage and amazing bodily daring to have stormed such a wall in spite of an armed man."

"Well, the literary style is somewhat improved," admitted the priest cheerfully, "but still I don't see what I can do for you. I should cut a poor figure, with my short legs, running about this State after an athletic assassin of that sort. I doubt whether anybody could find him. The convict settlement at Sequah is thirty miles from here; the country between is wild and tangled enough, and the country beyond, where he will surely have the sense to go, is a perfect no-man's land tumbling away to the prairies. He may be in any hole or up any tree."

"He isn't in any hole," said the governor; "he isn't up any tree."

"Why, how do you know?" asked Father Brown, blinking.

"Would you like to speak to him?" inquired Usher.

Father Brown opened his innocent eyes wide. "He is here?" he exclaimed. "Why, how did your men get hold of him?"

"I got hold of him myself," drawled the American, rising and lazily stretching his lanky legs before the fire. "I got hold of him with the crooked end of a walking-stick. Don’t look so surprised. I really did. You know I sometimes take a turn in the country lanes outside this dismal place; well, I was walking early this evening up a steep lane with dark hedges and grey-looking ploughed fields on both sides; and a young moon was up and silvering the road. By the light of it I saw a man running across the field towards the road; running with his body bent and at a good mile-race trot. He appeared to be much exhausted; but when he came to the thick black hedge he went through it as if it were made of spiders’ webs; — or rather (for I heard the strong branches breaking and snapping like bayonets) as if he himself were made of stone. In the instant in which he appeared up against the moon, crossing the road, I slung my hooked cane at his legs, tripping him and bringing him down. Then I blew my whistle long and loud, and our fellows came running up to secure him.”

“It would have been rather awkward,” remarked Brown, “if you had found he was a popular athlete practising a mile race.”

“He was not,” said Usher grimly. “We soon found out who he was; but I had guessed it with the first glint of the moon on him.”

“You thought it was the runaway convict,” observed the priest simply, “because you had read in the newspaper cutting that morning that a convict had run away.”

“I had somewhat better grounds,” replied the governor coolly. “I pass over the first as too simple to be emphasized — I mean that fashionable athletes do not run across ploughed fields or scratch their eyes out in bramble hedges. Nor do they run all doubled up like a crouching dog. There were more decisive details to a fairly well-trained eye. The man was clad in coarse and ragged clothes, but they were something more than merely coarse and ragged. They were so ill-fitting as to be quite grotesque; even as he appeared in black outline against the moonrise, the coat-collar in which his head was buried made him look like a hunchback, and the long loose sleeves looked as if he had no hands. It at once occurred to me that he had somehow managed to change his convict clothes for some confederate’s clothes which did not fit him. Second, there was a pretty stiff wind against which he was running; so that I must have seen the streaky look of blowing hair, if the hair had not been very short. Then I remembered that beyond these ploughed fields he was crossing lay Pilgrim’s Pond, for which (you will remember) the convict was keeping his bullet; and I sent my walking-stick flying.”

“A brilliant piece of rapid deduction,” said Father Brown; “but had he got a gun?”

As Usher stopped abruptly in his walk the priest added apologetically: “I’ve been told a bullet is not half so useful without it.”

“He had no gun,” said the other gravely; “but that was doubtless due to some very natural mischance or change of plans. Probably the same policy that made him change the clothes made him drop the gun; he began to repent the coat he had left behind him in the blood of his victim.”

“Well, that is possible enough,” answered the priest.

“And it’s hardly worth speculating on,” said Usher, turning to some other papers, “for we know it’s the man by this time.”

His clerical friend asked faintly: “But how?” And Greywood Usher threw down the newspapers and took up the two press-cuttings again.

“Well, since you are so obstinate,” he said, “let’s begin at the beginning. You will notice that these two cuttings have only one thing in common, which is the mention of Pilgrim’s Pond, the estate, as you know, of the millionaire Ireton Todd. You also know that he is a remarkable character; one of those that rose on stepping-stones—”

“Of our dead selves to higher things,” assented his companion. “Yes; I know that. Petroleum, I think.”

“Anyhow,” said Usher, “Last-Trick Todd counts for a great deal in this rum affair.”

He stretched himself once more before the fire and continued talking in his expansive, radiantly explanatory style.

“To begin with, on the face of it, there is no mystery here at all. It is not mysterious, it is not even odd, that a jailbird should take his gun to Pilgrim’s Pond. Our people aren’t like the English, who will forgive a man for being rich if he throws away money on hospitals or horses. Last-Trick Todd has made himself big by his own considerable abilities; and there’s no doubt that many of those on whom he has shown his abilities would like to show theirs on him with a shot-gun. Todd might easily get dropped by some man he’d never even heard of; some labourer he’d locked out, or some clerk in a business he’d busted. Last-Trick is a man of mental endowments and a high public character; but in this country the relations of employers and employed are considerably strained.

“That’s how the whole thing looks supposing this Rian made for Pilgrim’s Pond to kill Todd. So it looked to me, till another little discovery woke up what I have of the detective in me. When I had my prisoner safe, I picked up my cane again and strolled down the two or three turns of country road that brought me to one of the side entrances of Todd’s grounds, the one nearest to the pool or lake after which the place is named. It was some two hours ago, about seven by this time; the moonlight was more luminous, and I could see the long white streaks of it lying on the mysterious mere with its grey, greasy, half-liquid shores in which they say our fathers used to make witches walk until they sank. I’d forgotten the exact tale; but you know the place I mean; it lies north of Todd’s house towards the wilderness, and has two queer wrinkled trees, so dismal that they look more like huge fungoids than decent foliage. As I stood peering at this misty pool, I fancied I saw the faint figure of a man moving from the house towards it, but it was all too dim and distant for one to be certain of the fact, and still less of the details. Besides, my attention was very sharply arrested by something much closer. I crouched behind the fence which ran not more than two hundred yards from one wing of the great mansion, and which was fortunately split in places, as if specially for the application of a cautious eye. A door had opened in the dark bulk of the left wing, and a figure appeared black against the illuminated interior — a muffled figure bending forward, evidently peering out into the night. It closed the door behind it, and I saw it was carrying a lantern, which threw a patch of imperfect light on the dress and figure of the wearer. It seemed to be the figure of a woman, wrapped up in a ragged cloak and evidently disguised to avoid notice; there was something very strange both about the rags and the furtiveness in a person coming out of those rooms lined with gold. She took cautiously the curved garden path which brought her within half a hundred yards of me — , then she stood up for an instant on the terrace of turf that looks towards the slimy lake, and holding her flaming lantern above her head she deliberately swung it three times to and fro as for a signal. As she swung it the second time a flicker of its light fell for a moment on her own face, a face that I knew. She was unnaturally pale, and her head was bundled in her borrowed plebeian shawl; but I am certain it was Etta Todd, the millionaire’s daughter.

“She retraced her steps in equal secrecy and the door closed behind her again. I was about to climb the fence and follow, when I realized that the detective fever that had lured me into the adventure was rather undignified; and that in a more authoritative capacity I already held all the cards in my hand. I was just turning away when a new noise broke on the night. A window was thrown up in one of the upper floors, but just round the corner of the house so that I could not see it; and a voice of terrible distinctness was heard shouting across the dark garden to know where Lord Falconroy was, for he was missing from every room in the house. There was no mistaking that voice. I have heard it on many a political platform or meeting of directors; it was Ireton Todd himself. Some of the others seemed to have gone to the lower windows or on to the steps, and were calling up to him that Falconroy had gone for a stroll down to the Pilgrim's Pond an hour before, and could not be traced since. Then Todd cried 'Mighty Murder!' and shut down the window violently; and I could hear him plunging down the stairs inside. Repossessing myself of my former and wiser purpose, I whipped out of the way of the general search that must follow; and returned here not later than eight o'clock.

"I now ask you to recall that little Society paragraph which seemed to you so painfully lacking in interest. If the convict was not keeping the shot for Todd, as he evidently wasn't, it is most likely that he was keeping it for Lord Falconroy; and it looks as if he had delivered the goods. No more handy place to shoot a man than in the curious geological surroundings of that pool, where a body thrown down would sink through thick slime to a depth practically unknown. Let us suppose, then, that our friend with the cropped hair came to kill Falconroy and not Todd. But, as I have pointed out, there are many reasons why people in America might want to kill Todd. There is no reason why anybody in America should want to kill an English lord newly landed, except for the one reason mentioned in the pink paper — that the lord is paying his attentions to the millionaire's daughter. Our crop-haired friend, despite his ill-fitting clothes, must be an aspiring lover.

"I know the notion will seem to you jarring and even comic; but that's because you are English. It sounds to you like saying the Archbishop of Canterbury's daughter will be married in St George's, Hanover Square, to a crossing-sweeper on ticket-of-leave. You don't do justice to the climbing and aspiring power of our more remarkable citizens. You see a good-looking grey-haired man in evening-dress with a sort of authority about him, you know he is a pillar of the State, and you fancy he had a father. You are in error. You do not realize that a comparatively few years ago he may have been in a tenement or (quite likely) in a jail. You don't allow for our national buoyancy and uplift. Many of our most influential citizens have not only risen recently, but risen comparatively late in life. Todd's daughter was fully eighteen when her father first made his pile; so there isn't really anything impossible in her having a hanger-on in low life; or even in her hanging on to him, as I think she must be doing, to judge by the lantern business. If so, the hand that held the lantern may not be unconnected with the hand that held the gun. This case, sir, will make a noise."

"Well," said the priest patiently, "and what did you do next?"

"I reckon you'll be shocked," replied Greywood Usher, "as I know you don't cotton to the march of science in these matters. I am given a good deal of discretion here, and perhaps take a little more than I'm given; and I thought it was an excellent opportunity to test that Psychometric Machine I told you about. Now, in my opinion, that machine can't lie."

"No machine can lie," said Father Brown; "nor can it tell the truth."

"It did in this case, as I'll show you," went on Usher positively. "I sat the man in the ill-fitting clothes in a comfortable chair, and simply wrote words on a blackboard; and the machine simply recorded the variations of his pulse; and I simply observed his manner. The trick is to introduce some word connected with the supposed crime in a list of words connected with something quite different, yet a list in which it occurs quite naturally. Thus I wrote 'heron' and 'eagle' and 'owl', and when I wrote 'falcon' he was tremendously agitated; and when I began to make an 'r' at the end of the word, that machine just bounded. Who else in this republic has any reason to jump at the name of a newly-arrived Englishman like Falconroy except the man who's shot him? Isn't that better evidence than a lot of gabble from witnesses — if the evidence of a reliable machine?"

"You always forget," observed his companion, "that the reliable machine always has to be worked by an unreliable machine."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked the detective.

"I mean Man," said Father Brown, "the most unreliable machine I know of. I don't want to be rude; and I don't think you will consider Man to be an offensive or inaccurate description of yourself. You say you observed his manner; but how do you know you observed it right? You say the words have to come in a natural way; but how do you know that you did it naturally? How do you know, if you come to that, that he did not observe your manner? Who is to prove that you were not tremendously agitated? There was no machine tied on to your pulse."

"I tell you," cried the American in the utmost excitement, "I was as cool as a cucumber."

“Criminals also can be as cool as cucumbers,” said Brown with a smile. “And almost as cool as you.”

“Well, this one wasn’t,” said Usher, throwing the papers about. “Oh, you make me tired!”

“I’m sorry,” said the other. “I only point out what seems a reasonable possibility. If you could tell by his manner when the word that might hang him had come, why shouldn’t he tell from your manner that the word that might hang him was coming? I should ask for more than words myself before I hanged anybody.”

Usher smote the table and rose in a sort of angry triumph.

“And that,” he cried, “is just what I’m going to give you. I tried the machine first just in order to test the thing in other ways afterwards and the machine, sir, is right.”

He paused a moment and resumed with less excitement. “I rather want to insist, if it comes to that, that so far I had very little to go on except the scientific experiment. There was really nothing against the man at all. His clothes were ill-fitting, as I’ve said, but they were rather better, if anything, than those of the submerged class to which he evidently belonged. Moreover, under all the stains of his plunging through ploughed fields or bursting through dusty hedges, the man was comparatively clean. This might mean, of course, that he had only just broken prison; but it reminded me more of the desperate decency of the comparatively respectable poor. His demeanour was, I am bound to confess, quite in accordance with theirs. He was silent and dignified as they are; he seemed to have a big, but buried, grievance, as they do. He professed total ignorance of the crime and the whole question; and showed nothing but a sullen impatience for something sensible that might come to take him out of his meaningless scrape. He asked me more than once if he could telephone for a lawyer who had helped him a long time ago in a trade dispute, and in every sense acted as you would expect an innocent man to act. There was nothing against him in the world except that little finger on the dial that pointed to the change of his pulse.

“Then, sir, the machine was on its trial; and the machine was right. By the time I came with him out of the private room into the vestibule where all sorts of other people were awaiting examination, I think he had already more or less made up his mind to clear things up by something like a confession. He turned to me and began to say in a low voice: ‘Oh, I can’t stick this any more. If you must know all about me—’

“At the same instant one of the poor women sitting on the long bench stood up, screaming aloud and pointing at him with her finger. I have never in my life heard anything more demoniacally distinct. Her lean finger seemed to pick him out as if it were a pea-shooter. Though the word was a mere howl, every syllable was as clear as a separate stroke on the clock.

“‘Drugger Davis!’ she shouted. ‘They’ve got Drugger Davis!’

“Among the wretched women, mostly thieves and streetwalkers, twenty faces were turned, gaping with glee and hate. If I had never heard the words, I should have known by the very shock upon his features that the so-called Oscar Rian had heard his real name. But I’m not quite so ignorant, you may be surprised to hear. Drugger Davis was one of the most terrible and depraved criminals that ever baffled our police. It is certain he had done murder more than once long before his last exploit with the warder. But he was never entirely fixed for it, curiously enough because he did it in the same manner as those milder — or meaner — crimes for which he was fixed pretty often. He was a handsome, well-bred-looking brute, as he still is, to some extent; and he used mostly to go about with barmaids or shop-girls and do them out of their money. Very often, though, he went a good deal farther; and they were found drugged with cigarettes or chocolates and their whole property missing. Then came one case where the girl was found dead; but deliberation could not quite be proved, and, what was more practical still, the criminal could not be found. I heard a rumour of his having reappeared somewhere in the opposite character this time, lending money instead of borrowing it; but still to such poor widows as he might personally fascinate, but still with the same bad result for them. Well, there is your innocent man, and there is his innocent record. Even, since then, four criminals and three warders have identified him and confirmed the story. Now what have you got to say to my poor little machine after that? Hasn’t the machine done for him? Or do you prefer to say that the woman and I have done for him?”

“As to what you’ve done for him,” replied Father Brown, rising and shaking himself in a floppy way, “you’ve saved him from the electrical chair. I don’t think they can kill Drugger Davis on that old vague story of the poison; and as for the convict who killed the warder, I suppose it’s obvious that you haven’t got him. Mr Davis is innocent of that crime, at any rate.”

“What do you mean?” demanded the other. “Why should he be innocent of that crime?”

“Why, bless us all!” cried the small man in one of his rare moments of animation, “why, because he’s guilty of the other crimes! I don’t know what you people are made of. You seem to think that all sins are kept together in a bag. You talk as if a miser on Monday were always a spendthrift on Tuesday. You tell me this man you have here spent weeks and months wheedling needy women out of small sums of money; that he used a drug at the best, and a poison at the worst; that he turned up afterwards as the lowest kind of moneylender, and cheated most poor people in the same patient and pacific style. Let it be granted — let us admit, for the sake of argument, that he did all this. If that is so, I will tell you what he didn’t do. He didn’t storm a spiked wall against a man with a loaded gun. He didn’t write on the wall with his own hand, to say he had done it. He didn’t stop to state that his justification was self-defence. He didn’t explain that he had no quarrel with the poor warder. He didn’t name the house of the rich man to which he was going with the gun. He didn’t write his own, initials in a man’s blood. Saints alive! Can’t you see the whole character is different, in good and evil? Why, you don’t seem to be like I am a bit. One would think you’d never had any vices of your own.”

The amazed American had already parted his lips in protest when the door of his private and official room was hammered and rattled in an unceremonious way to which he was totally unaccustomed.

The door flew open. The moment before Greywood Usher had been coming to the conclusion that Father Brown might possibly be mad. The moment after he began to think he was mad himself. There burst and fell into his private room a man in the filthiest rags, with a greasy squash hat still askew on his head, and a shabby green shade shoved up from one of his eyes, both of which were glaring like a tiger’s. The rest of his face was almost undiscoverable, being masked with a matted beard and whiskers through which the nose could barely thrust itself, and further buried in a squalid red scarf or handkerchief. Mr Usher prided himself on having seen most of the roughest specimens in the State, but he thought he had never seen such a baboon dressed as a scarecrow as this. But, above all, he had never in all his placid scientific existence heard a man like that speak to him first.

"See here, old man Usher," shouted the being in the red handkerchief, "I'm getting tired. Don't you try any of your hide-and-seek on me; I don't get fooled any. Leave go of my guests, and I'll let up on the fancy clockwork. Keep him here for a split instant and you'll feel pretty mean. I reckon I'm not a man with no pull."

The eminent Usher was regarding the bellowing monster with an amazement which had dried up all other sentiments. The mere shock to his eyes had rendered his ears, almost useless. At last he rang a bell with a hand of violence. While the bell was still strong and pealing, the voice of Father Brown fell soft but distinct.

"I have a suggestion to make," he said, "but it seems a little confusing. I don't know this gentleman — but — but I think I know him. Now, you know him — you know him quite well — but you don't know him — naturally. Sounds paradoxical, I know."

"I reckon the Cosmos is cracked," said Usher, and fell asprawl in his round office chair.

"Now, see here," vociferated the stranger, striking the table, but speaking in a voice that was all the more mysterious because it was comparatively mild and rational though still resounding. "I won't let you in. I want—"

"Who in hell are you?" yelled Usher, suddenly sitting up straight.

"I think the gentleman's name is Todd," said the priest.

Then he picked up the pink slip of newspaper.

"I fear you don't read the Society papers properly," he said, and began to read out in a monotonous voice, "'Or locked in the jewelled bosoms of our city's gayest leaders; but there is talk of a pretty parody of the manners and customs of the other end of Society's scale.' There's been a big Slum Dinner up at Pilgrim's Pond tonight; and a man, one of the guests, disappeared. Mr Ireton Todd is a good host, and has tracked him here, without even waiting to take off his fancy-dress."

"What man do you mean?"

"I mean the man with comically ill-fitting clothes you saw running across the ploughed field. Hadn't you better go and investigate him? He will be rather impatient to get back to his champagne, from which he ran away in such a hurry, when the convict with the gun hove in sight."

"Do you seriously mean—" began the official.

“Why, look here, Mr Usher,” said Father Brown quietly, “you said the machine couldn’t make a mistake; and in one sense it didn’t. But the other machine did; the machine that worked it. You assumed that the man in rags jumped at the name of Lord Falconroy, because he was Lord Falconroy’s murderer. He jumped at the name of Lord Falconroy because he is Lord Falconroy.”

“Then why the blazes didn’t he say so?” demanded the staring Usher.

“He felt his plight and recent panic were hardly patrician,” replied the priest, “so he tried to keep the name back at first. But he was just going to tell it you, when” — and Father Brown looked down at his boots— “when a woman found another name for him.”

“But you can’t be so mad as to say,” said Greywood Usher, very white, “that Lord Falconroy was Drugger Davis.”

The priest looked at him very earnestly, but with a baffling and undecipherable face.

“I am not saying anything about it,” he said. “I leave all the rest to you. Your pink paper says that the title was recently revived for him; but those papers are very unreliable. It says he was in the States in youth; but the whole story seems very strange. Davis and Falconroy are both pretty considerable cowards, but so are lots of other men. I would not hang a dog on my own opinion about this. But I think,” he went on softly and reflectively, “I think you Americans are too modest. I think you idealize the English aristocracy — even in assuming it to be so aristocratic. You see a good-looking Englishman in evening-dress; you know he’s in the House of Lords; and you fancy he has a father. You don’t allow for our national buoyancy and uplift. Many of our most influential noblemen have not only risen recently, but—”

“Oh, stop it!” cried Greywood Usher, wringing one lean hand in impatience against a shade of irony in the other’s face.

“Don’t stay talking to this lunatic!” cried Todd brutally. “Take me to my friend.”

Next morning Father Brown appeared with the same demure expression, carrying yet another piece of pink newspaper.

“I’m afraid you neglect the fashionable press rather,” he said, “but this cutting may interest you.”

Usher read the headlines, “Last-Trick’s Strayed Revellers: Mirthful Incident near Pilgrim’s Pond.” The paragraph went on: “A laughable occurrence took place outside Wilkinson’s Motor Garage last night. A policeman on duty had his attention drawn by larrikins to a man in prison dress who was stepping with considerable coolness into the steering-seat of a pretty high-toned Panhard; he was accompanied by a girl wrapped in a ragged shawl. On the police interfering, the young woman threw back the shawl, and all recognized Millionaire Todd’s daughter, who had just come from the Slum Freak Dinner at the Pond, where all the choicest guests were in a similar deshabille. She and the gentleman who had donned prison uniform were going for the customary joy-ride.”

Under the pink slip Mr Usher found a strip of a later paper, headed, “Astounding Escape of Millionaire’s Daughter with Convict. She had Arranged Freak Dinner. Now Safe in—”

Mr Greenwood Usher lifted his eyes, but Father Brown was gone.

The Head of Caesar

THERE is somewhere in Brompton or Kensington an interminable avenue of tall houses, rich but largely empty, that looks like a terrace of tombs. The very steps up to the dark front doors seem as steep as the side of pyramids; one would hesitate to knock at the door, lest it should be opened by a mummy. But a yet more depressing feature in the grey facade is its telescopic length and changeless continuity. The pilgrim walking down it begins to think he will never come to a break or a corner; but there is one exception — a very small one, but hailed by the pilgrim almost with a shout. There is a sort of mews between two of the tall mansions, a mere slit like the crack of a door by comparison with the street, but just large enough to permit a pigmy ale-house or eating-house, still allowed by the rich to their stable-servants, to stand in the angle. There is something cheery in its very dinginess, and something free and elfin in its very insignificance. At the feet of those grey stone giants it looks like a lighted house of dwarfs.

Anyone passing the place during a certain autumn evening, itself almost fairylike, might have seen a hand pull aside the red half-blind which (along with some large white lettering) half hid the interior from the street, and a face peer out not unlike a rather innocent goblin’s. It was, in fact, the face of one with the harmless human name of Brown, formerly priest of Cobhole in Essex, and now working in London. His friend, Flambeau, a semi-official investigator, was sitting opposite him, making his last notes of a case he had cleared up in the neighbourhood. They were sitting at a small table, close up to the window, when the priest pulled the curtain back and looked out. He waited till a stranger in the street had passed the window, to let the curtain fall into its place again. Then his round eyes rolled to the large white lettering on the window above his head, and then strayed to the next table, at which sat only a navvy with beer and cheese, and a young girl with red hair and a glass of milk. Then (seeing his friend put away the pocket-book), he said softly:

“If you’ve got ten minutes, I wish you’d follow that man with the false nose.”

Flambeau looked up in surprise; but the girl with the red hair also looked up, and with something that was stronger than astonishment. She was simply and even loosely dressed in light brown sacking stuff; but she was a lady, and even, on a second glance, a rather needlessly haughty one. “The man with the false nose!” repeated Flambeau. “Who’s he?”

“I haven’t a notion,” answered Father Brown. “I want you to find out; I ask it as a favour. He went down there” — and he jerked his thumb over his shoulder in one of his undistinguished gestures— “and can’t have passed three lamp-posts yet. I only want to know the direction.”

Flambeau gazed at his friend for some time, with an expression between perplexity and amusement; and then, rising from the table; squeezed his huge form out of the little door of the dwarf tavern, and melted into the twilight.

Father Brown took a small book out of his pocket and began to read steadily; he betrayed no consciousness of the fact that the red-haired lady had left her own table and sat down opposite him. At last she leaned over and said in a low, strong voice: “Why do you say that? How do you know it’s false?”

He lifted his rather heavy eyelids, which fluttered in considerable embarrassment. Then his dubious eye roamed again to the white lettering on the glass front of the public-house. The young woman’s eyes followed his, and rested there also, but in pure puzzledom.

“No,” said Father Brown, answering her thoughts. “It doesn’t say ‘Sela’, like the thing in the Psalms; I read it like that myself when I was wool-gathering just now; it says ‘Ales.’”

“Well?” inquired the staring young lady. “What does it matter what it says?”

His ruminating eye roved to the girl’s light canvas sleeve, round the wrist of which ran a very slight thread of artistic pattern, just enough to distinguish it from a working-dress of a common woman and make it more like the working-dress of a lady art-student. He seemed to find much food for thought in this; but his reply was very slow and hesitant. “You see, madam,” he said, “from outside the place looks — well, it is a perfectly decent place — but ladies like you don’t — don’t generally think so. They never go into such places from choice, except—”

“Well?” she repeated.

“Except an unfortunate few who don’t go in to drink milk.”

“You are a most singular person,” said the young lady. “What is your object in all this?”

"Not to trouble you about it," he replied, very gently. "Only to arm myself with knowledge enough to help you, if ever you freely ask my help."

"But why should I need help?"

He continued his dreamy monologue. "You couldn't have come in to see protegees, humble friends, that sort of thing, or you'd have gone through into the parlour...and you couldn't have come in because you were ill, or you'd have spoken to the woman of the place, who's obviously respectable...besides, you don't look ill in that way, but only unhappy.... This street is the only original long lane that has no turning; and the houses on both sides are shut up.... I could only suppose that you'd seen somebody coming whom you didn't want to meet; and found the public-house was the only shelter in this wilderness of stone.... I don't think I went beyond the licence of a stranger in glancing at the only man who passed immediately after.... And as I thought he looked like the wrong sort...and you looked like the right sort.... I held myself ready to help if he annoyed you; that is all. As for my friend, he'll be back soon; and he certainly can't find out anything by stumping down a road like this.... I didn't think he could."

"Then why did you send him out?" she cried, leaning forward with yet warmer curiosity. She had the proud, impetuous face that goes with reddish colouring, and a Roman nose, as it did in Marie Antoinette.

He looked at her steadily for the first time, and said: "Because I hoped you would speak to me."

She looked back at him for some time with a heated face, in which there hung a red shadow of anger; then, despite her anxieties, humour broke out of her eyes and the corners of her mouth, and she answered almost grimly: "Well, if you're so keen on my conversation, perhaps you'll answer my question." After a pause she added: "I had the honour to ask you why you thought the man's nose was false."

"The wax always spots like that just a little in this weather," answered Father Brown with entire simplicity.

"But it's such a crooked nose," remonstrated the red-haired girl.

The priest smiled in his turn. "I don't say it's the sort of nose one would wear out of mere foppery," he admitted. "This man, I think, wears it because his real nose is so much nicer."

"But why?" she insisted.

"What is the nursery-rhyme?" observed Brown absent-mindedly. "There was a crooked man and he went a crooked mile.... That man, I fancy, has gone a very crooked road — by following his nose."

"Why, what's he done?" she demanded, rather shakily.

"I don't want to force your confidence by a hair," said Father Brown, very quietly. "But I think you could tell me more about that than I can tell you."

The girl sprang to her feet and stood quite quietly, but with clenched hands, like one about to stride away; then her hands loosened slowly, and she sat down again. "You are more of a mystery than all the others," she said desperately, "but I feel there might be a heart in your mystery."

"What we all dread most," said the priest in a low voice, "is a maze with no centre. That is why atheism is only a nightmare." "I will tell you everything," said the red-haired girl doggedly, "except why I am telling you; and that I don't know."

She picked at the darned table-cloth and went on: "You look as if you knew what isn't snobbery as well as what is; and when I say that ours is a good old family, you'll understand it is a necessary part of the story; indeed, my chief danger is in my brother's high-and-dry notions, noblesse oblige and all that. Well, my name is Christabel Carstairs; and my father was that Colonel Carstairs you've probably heard of, who made the famous Carstairs Collection of Roman coins. I could never describe my father to you; the nearest I can say is that he was very like a Roman coin himself. He was as handsome and as genuine and as valuable and as metallic and as out-of-date. He was prouder of his Collection than of his coat-of-arms — nobody could say more than that. His extraordinary character came out most in his will. He had two sons and one daughter. He quarrelled with one son, my brother Giles, and sent him to Australia on a small allowance. He then made a will leaving the Carstairs Collection, actually with a yet smaller allowance, to my brother Arthur. He meant it as a reward, as the highest honour he could offer, in acknowledgement of Arthur's loyalty and rectitude and the distinctions he had already gained in mathematics and economics at Cambridge. He left me practically all his pretty large fortune; and I am sure he meant it in contempt.

"Arthur, you may say, might well complain of this; but Arthur is my father over again. Though he had some differences with my father in early youth, no sooner had he taken over the Collection than he became like a pagan priest dedicated to a temple. He mixed up these Roman halfpence with the honour of the Carstairs family in the same stiff, idolatrous way as his father before him. He acted as if Roman money must be guarded by all the Roman virtues. He took no pleasures; he spent nothing on himself; he lived for the Collection. Often he would not trouble to dress for his simple meals; but pattered about among the corded brown-paper parcels (which no one else was allowed to touch) in an old brown dressing-gown. With its rope and tassel and his pale, thin, refined face, it made him look like an old ascetic monk. Every now and then, though, he would appear dressed like a decidedly fashionable gentleman; but that was only when he went up to the London sales or shops to make an addition to the Carstairs Collection.

"Now, if you've known any young people, you won't be shocked if I say that I got into rather a low frame of mind with all this; the frame of mind in which one begins to say that the Ancient Romans were all very well in their way. I'm not like my brother Arthur; I can't help enjoying enjoyment. I got a lot of romance and rubbish where I got my red hair, from the other side of the family. Poor Giles was the same; and I think the atmosphere of coins might count in excuse for him; though he really did wrong and nearly went to prison. But he didn't behave any worse than I did; as you shall hear.

"I come now to the silly part of the story. I think a man as clever as you can guess the sort of thing that would begin to relieve the monotony for an unruly girl of seventeen placed in such a position. But I am so rattled with more dreadful things that I can hardly read my own feeling; and don't know whether I despise it now as a flirtation or bear it as a broken heart. We lived then at a little seaside watering-place in South Wales, and a retired sea-captain living a few doors off had a son about five years older than myself, who had been a friend of Giles before he went to the Colonies. His name does not affect my tale; but I tell you it was Philip Hawker, because I am telling you everything. We used to go shrimping together, and said and thought we were in love with each other; at least he certainly said he was, and I certainly thought I was. If I tell you he had bronzed curly hair and a falconish sort of face, bronzed by the sea also, it's not for his sake, I assure you, but for the story; for it was the cause of a very curious coincidence.

"One summer afternoon, when I had promised to go shrimping along the sands with Philip, I was waiting rather impatiently in the front drawing-room, watching Arthur handle some packets of coins he had just purchased and slowly shunt them, one or two at a time, into his own dark study and museum which was at the back of the house. As soon as I heard the heavy door close on him finally, I made a bolt for my shrimping-net and tam-o'-

shanter and was just going to slip out, when I saw that my brother had left behind him one coin that lay gleaming on the long bench by the window. It was a bronze coin, and the colour, combined with the exact curve of the Roman nose and something in the very lift of the long, wiry neck, made the head of Caesar on it the almost precise portrait of Philip Hawker. Then I suddenly remembered Giles telling Philip of a coin that was like him, and Philip wishing he had it. Perhaps you can fancy the wild, foolish thoughts with which my head went round; I felt as if I had had a gift from the fairies. It seemed to me that if I could only run away with this, and give it to Philip like a wild sort of wedding-ring, it would be a bond between us for ever; I felt a thousand such things at once. Then there yawned under me, like the pit, the enormous, awful notion of what I was doing; above all, the unbearable thought, which was like touching hot iron, of what Arthur would think of it. A Carstairs a thief; and a thief of the Carstairs treasure! I believe my brother could see me burned like a witch for such a thing, But then, the very thought of such fanatical cruelty heightened my old hatred of his dingy old antiquarian fussiness and my longing for the youth and liberty that called to me from the sea. Outside was strong sunlight with a wind; and a yellow head of some broom or gorse in the garden rapped against the glass of the window. I thought of that living and growing gold calling to me from all the heaths of the world — and then of that dead, dull gold and bronze and brass of my brother's growing dustier and dustier as life went by. Nature and the Carstairs Collection had come to grips at last.

"Nature is older than the Carstairs Collection. As I ran down the streets to the sea, the coin clenched tight in my fist, I felt all the Roman Empire on my back as well as the Carstairs pedigree. It was not only the old lion argent that was roaring in my ear, but all the eagles of the Caesars seemed flapping and screaming in pursuit of me. And yet my heart rose higher and higher like a child's kite, until I came over the loose, dry sand-hills and to the flat, wet sands, where Philip stood already up to his ankles in the shallow shining water, some hundred yards out to sea. There was a great red sunset; and the long stretch of low water, hardly rising over the ankle for half a mile, was like a lake of ruby flame. It was not till I had torn off my shoes and stockings and waded to where he stood, which was well away from the dry land, that I turned and looked round. We were quite alone in a circle of sea-water and wet sand, and I gave him the head of Caesar.

"At the very instant I had a shock of fancy: that a man far away on the sand-hills was looking at me intently. I must have felt immediately after that it was a mere leap of unreasonable nerves; for the man was only a dark dot in the distance, and I could only just see that he was standing quite still and gazing, with his head a little on one side. There was no earthly logical evidence that he was looking at me; he might have been looking at a ship, or the sunset, or the sea-gulls, or at any of the people who still strayed here and there on the shore between us. Nevertheless, whatever my start sprang from was prophetic; for, as I gazed, he started walking briskly in a bee-line towards us across the wide wet sands. As he drew nearer and nearer I saw that he was dark and bearded, and that his eyes were marked with dark spectacles. He was dressed poorly but respectably in black, from the old black top hat on his head to the solid black boots on his feet. In spite of these he walked straight into the sea without a flash of hesitation, and came on at me with the steadiness of a travelling bullet.

"I can't tell you the sense of monstrosity and miracle I had when he thus silently burst the barrier between land and water. It was as if he had walked straight off a cliff and still marched steadily in mid-air. It was as if a house had flown up into the sky or a man's head had fallen off. He was only wetting his boots; but he seemed to be a demon disregarding a law of Nature. If he had hesitated an instant at the water's edge it would have been nothing. As it was, he seemed to look so much at me alone as not to notice the ocean. Philip was some yards away with his back to me, bending over his net. The stranger came on till he stood within two yards of me, the water washing half-way up to his knees. Then he said, with a clearly modulated and rather mincing articulation: 'Would it discommode you to contribute elsewhere a coin with a somewhat different superscription?'

"With one exception there was nothing definably abnormal about him. His tinted glasses were not really opaque, but of a blue kind common enough, nor were the eyes behind them shifty, but regarded me steadily. His dark beard was not really long or wild — , but he looked rather hairy, because the beard began very high up in his face, just under the cheek-bones. His complexion was neither sallow nor livid, but on the contrary rather clear and youthful; yet this gave a pink-and-white wax look which somehow (I don't know why) rather increased the horror. The only oddity one could fix was that his nose, which was otherwise of a good shape, was just slightly turned sideways at the tip; as if, when it was soft, it had been tapped on one side with a toy hammer. The thing was hardly a deformity; yet I cannot tell you what a living nightmare it was to me. As he stood there in the sunset-stained water he affected me as some hellish sea-monster just risen roaring out of a sea like blood. I don’t know why a touch on the nose should affect my imagination so much. I think it seemed as if he could move his nose like a finger. And as if he had just that moment moved it.

“‘Any little assistance,’ he continued with the same queer, priggish accent, ‘that may obviate the necessity of my communicating with the family.’

“Then it rushed over me that I was being blackmailed for the theft of the bronze piece; and all my merely superstitious fears and doubts were swallowed up in one overpowering, practical question. How could he have found out? I had stolen the thing suddenly and on impulse; I was certainly alone; for I always made sure of being unobserved when I slipped out to see Philip in this way. I had not, to all appearance, been followed in the street; and if I had, they could not ‘X-ray’ the coin in my closed hand. The man standing on the sand-hills could no more have seen what I gave Philip than shoot a fly in one eye, like the man in the fairy-tale.

“‘Philip,’ I cried helplessly, ‘ask this man what he wants.’

“When Philip lifted his head at last from mending his net he looked rather red, as if sulky or ashamed; but it may have been only the exertion of stooping and the red evening light; I may have only had another of the morbid fancies that seemed to be dancing about me. He merely said gruffly to the man: ‘You clear out of this.’ And, motioning me to follow, set off wading shoreward without paying further attention to him. He stepped on to a stone breakwater that ran out from among the roots of the sand-hills, and so struck homeward, perhaps thinking our incubus would find it less easy to walk on such rough stones, green and slippery with seaweed, than we, who were young and used to it. But my persecutor walked as daintily as he talked; and he still followed me, picking his way and picking his phrases. I heard his delicate, detestable voice appealing to me over my shoulder, until at last, when we had crested the sand-hills, Philip’s patience (which was by no means so conspicuous on most occasions) seemed to snap. He turned suddenly, saying, ‘Go back. I can’t talk to you now.’ And as the man hovered and opened his mouth, Philip struck him a buffet on it that sent him flying from the top of the tallest sand-hill to the bottom. I saw him crawling out below, covered with sand.

"This stroke comforted me somehow, though it might well increase my peril; but Philip showed none of his usual elation at his own prowess. Though as affectionate as ever, he still seemed cast down; and before I could ask him anything fully, he parted with me at his own gate, with two remarks that struck me as strange. He said that, all things considered, I ought to put the coin back in the Collection; but that he himself would keep it 'for the present'. And then he added quite suddenly and irrelevantly: 'You know Giles is back from Australia?'"

The door of the tavern opened and the gigantic shadow of the investigator Flambeau fell across the table. Father Brown presented him to the lady in his own slight, persuasive style of speech, mentioning his knowledge and sympathy in such cases; and almost without knowing, the girl was soon reiterating her story to two listeners. But Flambeau, as he bowed and sat down, handed the priest a small slip of paper. Brown accepted it with some surprise and read on it: "Cab to Wagga Wagga, 379, Mafeking Avenue, Putney." The girl was going on with her story.

"I went up the steep street to my own house with my head in a whirl; it had not begun to clear when I came to the doorstep, on which I found a milk-can — and the man with the twisted nose. The milk-can told me the servants were all out; for, of course, Arthur, browsing about in his brown dressing-gown in a brown study, would not hear or answer a bell. Thus there was no one to help me in the house, except my brother, whose help must be my ruin. In desperation I thrust two shillings into the horrid thing's hand, and told him to call again in a few days, when I had thought it out. He went off sulking, but more sheepishly than I had expected — perhaps he had been shaken by his fall — and I watched the star of sand splashed on his back receding down the road with a horrid vindictive pleasure. He turned a corner some six houses down.

"Then I let myself in, made myself some tea, and tried to think it out. I sat at the drawing-room window looking on to the garden, which still glowed with the last full evening light. But I was too distracted and dreamy to look at the lawns and flower-pots and flower-beds with any concentration. So I took the shock the more sharply because I'd seen it so slowly.

"The man or monster I'd sent away was standing quite still in the middle of the garden. Oh, we've all read a lot about pale-faced phantoms in the dark; but this was more dreadful than anything of that kind could ever be.

Because, though he cast a long evening shadow, he still stood in warm sunlight. And because his face was not pale, but had that waxen bloom still upon it that belongs to a barber’s dummy. He stood quite still, with his face towards me; and I can’t tell you how horrid he looked among the tulips and all those tall, gaudy, almost hothouse-looking flowers. It looked as if we’d stuck up a waxwork instead of a statue in the centre of our garden.

“Yet almost the instant he saw me move in the window he turned and ran out of the garden by the back gate, which stood open and by which he had undoubtedly entered. This renewed timidity on his part was so different from the impudence with which he had walked into the sea, that I felt vaguely comforted. I fancied, perhaps, that he feared confronting Arthur more than I knew. Anyhow, I settled down at last, and had a quiet dinner alone (for it was against the rules to disturb Arthur when he was rearranging the museum), and, my thoughts, a little released, fled to Philip and lost themselves, I suppose. Anyhow, I was looking blankly, but rather pleasantly than otherwise, at another window, uncurtained, but by this time black as a slate with the final night-fall. It seemed to me that something like a snail was on the outside of the window-pane. But when I stared harder, it was more like a man’s thumb pressed on the pane; it had that curled look that a thumb has. With my fear and courage re-awakened together, I rushed at the window and then recoiled with a strangled scream that any man but Arthur must have heard.

“For it was not a thumb, any more than it was a snail. It was the tip of a crooked nose, crushed against the glass; it looked white with the pressure; and the staring face and eyes behind it were at first invisible and afterwards grey like a ghost. I slammed the shutters together somehow, rushed up to my room and locked myself in. But, even as I passed, I could swear I saw a second black window with something on it that was like a snail.

“It might be best to go to Arthur after all. If the thing was crawling close all around the house like a cat, it might have purposes worse even than blackmail. My brother might cast me out and curse me for ever, but he was a gentleman, and would defend me on the spot. After ten minutes’ curious thinking, I went down, knocked on the door and then went in: to see the last and worst sight.

“My brother’s chair was empty, and he was obviously out. But the man with the crooked nose was sitting waiting for his return, with his hat still insolently on his head, and actually reading one of my brother’s books under my brother's lamp. His face was composed and occupied, but his nose-tip still had the air of being the most mobile part of his face, as if it had just turned from left to right like an elephant's proboscis. I had thought him poisonous enough while he was pursuing and watching me; but I think his unconsciousness of my presence was more frightful still.

"I think I screamed loud and long; but that doesn't matter. What I did next does matter: I gave him all the money I had, including a good deal in paper which, though it was mine, I dare say I had no right to touch. He went off at last, with hateful, tactful regrets all in long words; and I sat down, feeling ruined in every sense. And yet I was saved that very night by a pure accident. Arthur had gone off suddenly to London, as he so often did, for bargains; and returned, late but radiant, having nearly secured a treasure that was an added splendour even to the family Collection. He was so resplendent that I was almost emboldened to confess the abstraction of the lesser gem — , but he bore down all other topics with his over-powering projects. Because the bargain might still misfire any moment, he insisted on my packing at once and going up with him to lodgings he had already taken in Fulham, to be near the curio-shop in question. Thus in spite of myself, I fled from my foe almost in the dead of night — but from Philip also.... My brother was often at the South Kensington Museum, and, in order to make some sort of secondary life for myself, I paid for a few lessons at the Art Schools. I was coming back from them this evening, when I saw the abomination of desolation walking alive down the long straight street and the rest is as this gentleman has said.

"I've got only one thing to say. I don't deserve to be helped; and I don't question or complain of my punishment; it is just, it ought to have happened. But I still question, with bursting brains, how it can have happened. Am I punished by miracle? or how can anyone but Philip and myself know I gave him a tiny coin in the middle of the sea?"

"It is an extraordinary problem," admitted Flambeau.

"Not so extraordinary as the answer," remarked Father Brown rather gloomily. "Miss Carstairs, will you be at home if we call at your Fulham place in an hour and a half hence?"

The girl looked at him, and then rose and put her gloves on. "Yes," she said, "I'll be there"; and almost instantly left the place.

That night the detective and the priest were still talking of the matter as they drew near the Fulham house, a tenement strangely mean even for a temporary residence of the Carstairs family.

“Of course the superficial, on reflection,” said Flambeau, “would think first of this Australian brother who’s been in trouble before, who’s come back so suddenly and who’s just the man to have shabby confederates. But I can’t see how he can come into the thing by any process of thought, unless...”

“Well?” asked his companion patiently.

Flambeau lowered his voice. “Unless the girl’s lover comes in, too, and he would be the blacker villain. The Australian chap did know that Hawker wanted the coin. But I can’t see how on earth he could know that Hawker had got it, unless Hawker signalled to him or his representative across the shore.”

“That is true,” assented the priest, with respect.

“Have you noted another thing?” went on Flambeau eagerly, “this Hawker hears his love insulted, but doesn’t strike till he’s got to the soft sand-hills, where he can be victor in a mere sham-fight. If he’d struck amid rocks and sea, he might have hurt his ally.”

“That is true again,” said Father Brown, nodding.

“And now, take it from the start. It lies between few people, but at least three. You want one person for suicide; two people for murder; but at least three people for blackmail”

“Why?” asked the priest softly.

“Well, obviously,” cried his friend, “there must be one to be exposed; one to threaten exposure; and one at least whom exposure would horrify.”

After a long ruminant pause, the priest said: “You miss a logical step. Three persons are needed as ideas. Only two are needed as agents.”

“What can you mean?” asked the other.

“Why shouldn’t a blackmailer,” asked Brown, in a low voice, “threaten his victim with himself? Suppose a wife became a rigid teetotaller in order to frighten her husband into concealing his pub-frequenting, and then wrote him blackmailing letters in another hand, threatening to tell his wife! Why shouldn’t it work? Suppose a father forbade a son to gamble and then, following him in a good disguise, threatened the boy with his own sham paternal strictness! Suppose — but, here we are, my friend.”

“My God!” cried Flambeau; “you don’t mean—”

An active figure ran down the steps of the house and showed under the golden lamplight the unmistakable head that resembled the Roman coin.

"Miss Carstairs," said Hawker without ceremony, "wouldn't go in till you came."

"Well," observed Brown confidently, "don't you think it's the best thing she can do to stop outside — with you to look after her? You see, I rather guess you have guessed it all yourself."

"Yes," said the young man, in an undertone, "I guessed on the sands and now I know; that was why I let him fall soft."

Taking a latchkey from the girl and the coin from Hawker, Flambeau let himself and his friend into the empty house and passed into the outer parlour. It was empty of all occupants but one. The man whom Father Brown had seen pass the tavern was standing against the wall as if at bay; unchanged, save that he had taken off his black coat and was wearing a brown dressing-gown.

"We have come," said Father Brown politely, "to give back this coin to its owner." And he handed it to the man with the nose.

Flambeau's eyes rolled. "Is this man a coin-collector?" he asked.

"This man is Mr Arthur Carstairs," said the priest positively, "and he is a coin-collector of a somewhat singular kind."

The man changed colour so horribly that the crooked nose stood out on his face like a separate and comic thing. He spoke, nevertheless, with a sort of despairing dignity. "You shall see, then," he said, "that I have not lost all the family qualities." And he turned suddenly and strode into an inner room, slamming the door.

"Stop him!" shouted Father Brown, bounding and half falling over a chair; and, after a wrench or two, Flambeau had the door open. But it was too late. In dead silence Flambeau strode across and telephoned for doctor and police.

An empty medicine bottle lay on the floor. Across the table the body of the man in the brown dressing-gown lay amid his burst and gaping brown-paper parcels; out of which poured and rolled, not Roman, but very modern English coins.

The priest held up the bronze head of Caesar. "This," he said, "was all that was left of the Carstairs Collection."

After a silence he went on, with more than common gentleness: "It was a cruel will his wicked father made, and you see he did resent it a little. He hated the Roman money he had, and grew fonder of the real money denied him. He not only sold the Collection bit by bit, but sank bit by bit to the basest ways of making money — even to blackmailing his own family in a disguise. He blackmailed his brother from Australia for his little forgotten crime (that is why he took the cab to Wagga Wagga in Putney), he blackmailed his sister for the theft he alone could have noticed. And that, by the way, is why she had that supernatural guess when he was away on the sand-dunes. Mere figure and gait, however distant, are more likely to remind us of somebody than a well-made-up face quite close.”

There was another silence. “Well,” growled the detective, “and so this great numismatist and coin-collector was nothing but a vulgar miser.”

“Is there so great a difference?” asked Father Brown, in the same strange, indulgent tone. “What is there wrong about a miser that is not often as wrong about a collector? What is wrong, except... thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image; thou shalt not bow down to them nor serve them, for I...but we must go and see how the poor young people are getting on.”

“I think,” said Flambeau, “that in spite of everything, they are probably getting on very well.”

The Purple Wig

MR EDWARD NUTT, the industrious editor of the Daily Reformer, sat at his desk, opening letters and marking proofs to the merry tune of a typewriter, worked by a vigorous young lady.

He was a stoutish, fair man, in his shirt-sleeves; his movements were resolute, his mouth firm and his tones final; but his round, rather babyish blue eyes had a bewildered and even wistful look that rather contradicted all this. Nor indeed was the expression altogether misleading. It might truly be said of him, as for many journalists in authority, that his most familiar emotion was one of continuous fear; fear of libel actions, fear of lost advertisements, fear of misprints, fear of the sack.

His life was a series of distracted compromises between the proprietor of the paper (and of him), who was a senile soap-boiler with three ineradicable mistakes in his mind, and the very able staff he had collected to run the paper; some of whom were brilliant and experienced men and (what was even worse) sincere enthusiasts for the political policy of the paper.

A letter from one of these lay immediately before him, and rapid and resolute as he was, he seemed almost to hesitate before opening it. He took up a strip of proof instead, ran down it with a blue eye, and a blue pencil, altered the word “adultery” to the word “impropriety,” and the word “Jew” to the word “Alien,” rang a bell and sent it flying upstairs.

Then, with a more thoughtful eye, he ripped open the letter from his more distinguished contributor, which bore a postmark of Devonshire, and read as follows:

DEAR NUTT, — As I see you’re working Spooks and Dooks at the same time, what about an article on that rum business of the Eyres of Exmoor; or as the old women call it down here, the Devil’s Ear of Eyre? The head of the family, you know, is the Duke of Exmoor; he is one of the few really stiff old Tory aristocrats left, a sound old crusted tyrant it is quite in our line to make trouble about. And I think I’m on the track of a story that will make trouble.

Of course I don’t believe in the old legend about James I; and as for you, you don’t believe in anything, not even in journalism. The legend, you’ll probably remember, was about the blackest business in English history — the poisoning of Overbury by that witch’s cat Frances Howard, and the quite mysterious terror which forced the King to pardon the murderers. There was a lot of alleged witchcraft mixed up with it; and the story goes that a man-servant listening at the keyhole heard the truth in a talk between the King and Carr; and the bodily ear with which he heard grew large and monstrous as by magic, so awful was the secret. And though he had to be loaded with lands and gold and made an ancestor of dukes, the elf-shaped ear is still recurrent in the family. Well, you don't believe in black magic; and if you did, you couldn't use it for copy. If a miracle happened in your office, you'd have to hush it up, now so many bishops are agnostics. But that is not the point The point is that there really is something queer about Exmoor and his family; something quite natural, I dare say, but quite abnormal. And the Ear is in it somehow, I fancy; either a symbol or a delusion or disease or something. Another tradition says that Cavaliers just after James I began to wear their hair long only to cover the ear of the first Lord Exmoor. This also is no doubt fanciful.

The reason I point it out to you is this: It seems to me that we make a mistake in attacking aristocracy entirely for its champagne and diamonds. Most men rather admire the nobs for having a good time, but I think we surrender too much when we admit that aristocracy has made even the aristocrats happy. I suggest a series of articles pointing out how dreary, how inhuman, how downright diabolist, is the very smell and atmosphere of some of these great houses. There are plenty of instances; but you couldn't begin with a better one than the Ear of the Eyres. By the end of the week I think I can get you the truth about it. — Yours ever, FRANCIS FINN.

Mr Nutt reflected a moment, staring at his left boot; then he called out in a strong, loud and entirely lifeless voice, in which every syllable sounded alike: “Miss Barlow, take down a letter to Mr Finn, please.”

DEAR FINN, — I think it would do; copy should reach us second post Saturday. — Yours, E. NUTT.

This elaborate epistle he articulated as if it were all one word; and Miss Barlow rattled it down as if it were all one word. Then he took up another strip of proof and a blue pencil, and altered the word “supernatural” to the word “marvellous”, and the expression “shoot down” to the expression “repress”.

In such happy, healthful activities did Mr Nutt disport himself, until the ensuing Saturday found him at the same desk, dictating to the same typist, and using the same blue pencil on the first instalment of Mr Finn's revelations. The opening was a sound piece of slashing invective about the evil secrets of princes, and despair in the high places of the earth. Though written violently, it was in excellent English; but the editor, as usual, had given to somebody else the task of breaking it up into sub-headings, which were of a spicier sort, as “Peeress and Poisons”, and “The Eerie Ear”, “The Eyres in their Eyrie”, and so on through a hundred happy changes. Then followed the legend of the Ear, amplified from Finn’s first letter, and then the substance of his later discoveries, as follows:

I know it is the practice of journalists to put the end of the story at the beginning and call it a headline. I know that journalism largely consists in saying “Lord Jones Dead” to people who never knew that Lord Jones was alive. Your present correspondent thinks that this, like many other journalistic customs, is bad journalism; and that the Daily Reformer has to set a better example in such things. He proposes to tell his story as it occurred, step by step. He will use the real names of the parties, who in most cases are ready to confirm his testimony. As for the headlines, the sensational proclamations — they will come at the end.

I was walking along a public path that threads through a private Devonshire orchard and seems to point towards Devonshire cider, when I came suddenly upon just such a place as the path suggested. It was a long, low inn, consisting really of a cottage and two barns; thatched all over with the thatch that looks like brown and grey hair grown before history. But outside the door was a sign which called it the Blue Dragon; and under the sign was one of those long rustic tables that used to stand outside most of the free English inns, before teetotallers and brewers between them destroyed freedom. And at this table sat three gentlemen, who might have lived a hundred years ago.

Now that I know them all better, there is no difficulty about disentangling the impressions; but just then they looked like three very solid ghosts. The dominant figure, both because he was bigger in all three dimensions, and because he sat centrally in the length of the table, facing me, was a tall, fat man dressed completely in black, with a rubicund, even apoplectic visage, but a rather bald and rather bothered brow. Looking at him again, more strictly, I could not exactly say what it was that gave me the sense of antiquity, except the antique cut of his white clerical necktie and the barred wrinkles across his brow.

It was even less easy to fix the impression in the case of the man at the right end of the table, who, to say truth, was as commonplace a person as could be seen anywhere, with a round, brown-haired head and a round snub nose, but also clad in clerical black, of a stricter cut. It was only when I saw his broad curved hat lying on the table beside him that I realized why I connected him with anything ancient. He was a Roman Catholic priest.

Perhaps the third man, at the other end of the table, had really more to do with it than the rest, though he was both slighter in physical presence and more inconsiderate in his dress. His lank limbs were clad, I might also say clutched, in very tight grey sleeves and pantaloons; he had a long, sallow, aquiline face which seemed somehow all the more saturnine because his lantern jaws were imprisoned in his collar and neck-cloth more in the style of the old stock; and his hair (which ought to have been dark brown) was of an odd dim, russet colour which, in conjunction with his yellow face, looked rather purple than red. The unobtrusive yet unusual colour was all the more notable because his hair was almost unnaturally healthy and curling, and he wore it full. But, after all analysis, I incline to think that what gave me my first old-fashioned impression was simply a set of tall, old-fashioned wine-glasses, one or two lemons and two churchwarden pipes. And also, perhaps, the old-world errand on which I had come.

Being a hardened reporter, and it being apparently a public inn, I did not need to summon much of my impudence to sit down at the long table and order some cider. The big man in black seemed very learned, especially about local antiquities; the small man in black, though he talked much less, surprised me with a yet wider culture. So we got on very well together; but the third man, the old gentleman in the tight pantaloons, seemed rather distant and haughty, until I slid into the subject of the Duke of Exmoor and his ancestry.

I thought the subject seemed to embarrass the other two a little; but it broke the spell of the third man’s silence most successfully. Speaking with restraint and with the accent of a highly educated gentleman, and puffing at intervals at his long churchwarden pipe, he proceeded to tell me some of the most horrible stories I have ever heard in my life: how one of the Eyres in the former ages had hanged his own father; and another had his wife scourged at the cart tail through the village; and another had set fire to a church full of children, and so on.

Some of the tales, indeed, are not fit for public print — , such as the story of the Scarlet Nuns, the abominable story of the Spotted Dog, or the thing that was done in the quarry. And all this red roll of impieties came from his thin, genteel lips rather primly than otherwise, as he sat sipping the wine out of his tall, thin glass.

I could see that the big man opposite me was trying, if anything, to stop him; but he evidently held the old gentleman in considerable respect, and could not venture to do so at all abruptly. And the little priest at the other end of the-table, though free from any such air of embarrassment, looked steadily at the table, and seemed to listen to the recital with great pain — as well as he might.

“You don’t seem,” I said to the narrator, “to be very fond of the Exmoor pedigree.”

He looked at me a moment, his lips still prim, but whitening and tightening; then he deliberately broke his long pipe and glass on the table and stood up, the very picture of a perfect gentleman with the framing temper of a fiend.

“These gentlemen,” he said, “will tell you whether I have cause to like it. The curse of the Eyres of old has lain heavy on this country, and many have suffered from it. They know there are none who have suffered from it as I have.” And with that he crushed a piece of the fallen glass under his heel, and strode away among the green twilight of the twinkling apple-trees.

“That is an extraordinary old gentleman,” I said to the other two; “do you happen to know what the Exmoor family has done to him? Who is he?”

The big man in black was staring at me with the wild air of a baffled bull; he did not at first seem to take it in. Then he said at last, “Don’t you know who he is?”

I reaffirmed my ignorance, and there was another silence; then the little priest said, still looking at the table, “That is the Duke of Exmoor.”

Then, before I could collect my scattered senses, he added equally quietly, but with an air of regularizing things: “My friend here is Doctor Mull, the Duke’s librarian. My name is Brown.”

“But,” I stammered, “if that is the Duke, why does he damn all the old dukes like that?”

“He seems really to believe,” answered the priest called Brown, “that they have left a curse on him.” Then he added, with some irrelevance, “That’s why he wears a wig.”

It was a few moments before his meaning dawned on me. “You don’t mean that fable about the fantastic ear?” I demanded. “I’ve heard of it, of course, but surely it must be a superstitious yarn spun out of something much simpler. I’ve sometimes thought it was a wild version of one of those mutilation stories. They used to crop criminals’ ears in the sixteenth century.”

“I hardly think it was that,” answered the little man thoughtfully, “but it is not outside ordinary science or natural law for a family to have some deformity frequently reappearing — such as one ear bigger than the other.”

The big librarian had buried his big bald brow in his big red hands, like a man trying to think out his duty. “No,” he groaned. “You do the man a wrong after all. Understand, I’ve no reason to defend him, or even keep faith with him. He has been a tyrant to me as to everybody else. Don’t fancy because you see him sitting here that he isn’t a great lord in the worst sense of the word. He would fetch a man a mile to ring a bell a yard off — if it would summon another man three miles to fetch a matchbox three yards off. He must have a footman to carry his walking-stick; a body servant to hold up his opera-glasses—”

“But not a valet to brush his clothes,” cut in the priest, with a curious dryness, “for the valet would want to brush his wig, too.”

The librarian turned to him and seemed to forget my presence; he was strongly moved and, I think, a little heated with wine. “I don’t know how you know it, Father Brown,” he said, “but you are right. He lets the whole world do everything for him — except dress him. And that he insists on doing in a literal solitude like a desert. Anybody is kicked out of the house without a character who is so much as found near his dressing-room door.

“He seems a pleasant old party,” I remarked.

“No,” replied Dr Mull quite simply; “and yet that is just what I mean by saying you are unjust to him after all. Gentlemen, the Duke does really feel the bitterness about the curse that he uttered just now. He does, with sincere shame and terror, hide under that purple wig something he thinks it would blast the sons of man to see. I know it is so; and I know it is not a mere natural disfigurement, like a criminal mutilation, or a hereditary disproportion in the features. I know it is worse than that; because a man told me who was present at a scene that no man could invent, where a stronger man than any of us tried to defy the secret, and was scared away from it.”

I opened my mouth to speak, but Mull went on in oblivion of me, speaking out of the cavern of his hands. “I don’t mind telling you, Father, because it’s really more defending the poor Duke than giving him away. Didn’t you ever hear of the time when he very nearly lost all the estates?”

The priest shook his head; and the librarian proceeded to tell the tale as he had heard it from his predecessor in the same post, who had been his patron and instructor, and whom he seemed to trust implicitly. Up to a certain point it was a common enough tale of the decline of a great family’s fortunes — the tale of a family lawyer. His lawyer, however, had the sense to cheat honestly, if the expression explains itself. Instead of using funds he held in trust, he took advantage of the Duke’s carelessness to put the family in a financial hole, in which it might be necessary for the Duke to let him hold them in reality.

The lawyer’s name was Isaac Green, but the Duke always called him Elisha; presumably in reference to the fact that he was quite bald, though certainly not more than thirty. He had risen very rapidly, but from very dirty beginnings; being first a “nark” or informer, and then a money-lender: but as solicitor to the Eyres he had the sense, as I say, to keep technically straight until he was ready to deal the final blow. The blow fell at dinner; and the old librarian said he should never forget the very look of the lampshades and the decanters, as the little lawyer, with a steady smile, proposed to the great landlord that they should halve the estates between them. The sequel certainly could not be overlooked; for the Duke, in dead silence, smashed a decanter on the man’s bald head as suddenly as I had seen him smash the glass that day in the orchard. It left a red triangular scar on the scalp, and the lawyer’s eyes altered, but not his smile.

He rose tottering to his feet, and struck back as such men do strike. “I am glad of that,” he said, “for now I can take the whole estate. The law will give it to me.”

Exmoor, it seems, was white as ashes, but his eyes still blazed. “The law will give it you,” he said; “but you will not take it.... Why not? Why? because it would mean the crack of doom for me, and if you take it I shall take off my wig.... Why, you pitiful plucked fowl, anyone can see your bare head. But no man shall see mine and live.”

Well, you may say what you like and make it mean what you like. But Mull swears it is the solemn fact that the lawyer, after shaking his knotted fists in the air for an instant, simply ran from the room and never reappeared in the countryside; and since then Exmoor has been feared more for a warlock than even for a landlord and a magistrate.

Now Dr Mull told his story with rather wild theatrical gestures, and with a passion I think at least partisan. I was quite conscious of the possibility that the whole was the extravagance of an old braggart and gossip. But before I end this half of my discoveries, I think it due to Dr Mull to record that my two first inquiries have confirmed his story. I learned from an old apothecary in the village that there was a bald man in evening dress, giving the name of Green, who came to him one night to have a three-cornered cut on his forehead plastered. And I learnt from the legal records and old newspapers that there was a lawsuit threatened, and at least begun, by one Green against the Duke of Exmoor.

Mr Nutt, of the Daily Reformer, wrote some highly incongruous words across the top of the copy, made some highly mysterious marks down the side of it, and called to Miss Barlow in the same loud, monotonous voice: “Take down a letter to Mr Finn.”

DEAR FINN, — Your copy will do, but I have had to headline it a bit; and our public would never stand a Romanist priest in the story — you must keep your eye on the suburbs. I’ve altered him to Mr Brown, a Spiritualist.

Yours,

E. NUTT.

A day or two afterward found the active and judicious editor examining, with blue eyes that seemed to grow rounder and rounder, the second instalment of Mr Finn’s tale of mysteries in high life. It began with the words:

I have made an astounding discovery. I freely confess it is quite different from anything I expected to discover, and will give a much more practical shock to the public. I venture to say, without any vanity, that the words I now write will be read all over Europe, and certainly all over America and the Colonies. And yet I heard all I have to tell before I left this same little wooden table in this same little wood of apple-trees.

I owe it all to the small priest Brown; he is an extraordinary man. The big librarian had left the table, perhaps ashamed of his long tongue, perhaps anxious about the storm in which his mysterious master had vanished: anyway, he betook himself heavily in the Duke’s tracks through the trees. Father Brown had picked up one of the lemons and was eyeing it with an odd pleasure.

"What a lovely colour a lemon is!" he said. "There's one thing I don't like about the Duke's wig — the colour."

"I don't think I understand," I answered.

"I dare say he's got good reason to cover his ears, like King Midas," went on the priest, with a cheerful simplicity which somehow seemed rather flippant under the circumstances. "I can quite understand that it's nicer to cover them with hair than with brass plates or leather flaps. But if he wants to use hair, why doesn't he make it look like hair? There never was hair of that colour in this world. It looks more like a sunset-cloud coming through the wood. Why doesn't he conceal the family curse better, if he's really so ashamed of it? Shall I tell you? It's because he isn't ashamed of it. He's proud of it"

"It's an ugly wig to be proud of — and an ugly story," I said.

"Consider," replied this curious little man, "how you yourself really feel about such things. I don't suggest you're either more snobbish or more morbid than the rest of us: but don't you feel in a vague way that a genuine old family curse is rather a fine thing to have? Would you be ashamed, wouldn't you be a little proud, if the heir of the Glamis horror called you his friend? or if Byron's family had confided, to you only, the evil adventures of their race? Don't be too hard on the aristocrats themselves if their heads are as weak as ours would be, and they are snobs about their own sorrows."

"By Jove!" I cried; "and that's true enough. My own mother's family had a banshee; and, now I come to think of it, it has comforted me in many a cold hour."

"And think," he went on, "of that stream of blood and poison that spurted from his thin lips the instant you so much as mentioned his ancestors. Why should he show every stranger over such a Chamber of Horrors unless he is proud of it? He doesn't conceal his wig, he doesn't conceal his blood, he doesn't conceal his family curse, he doesn't conceal the family crimes — but—"

The little man's voice changed so suddenly, he shut his hand so sharply, and his eyes so rapidly grew rounder and brighter like a waking owl's, that it had all the abruptness of a small explosion on the table.

"But," he ended, "he does really conceal his toilet."

It somehow completed the thrill of my fanciful nerves that at that instant the Duke appeared again silently among the glimmering trees, with his soft foot and sunset-hued hair, coming round the corner of the house in company with his librarian. Before he came within earshot, Father Brown had added quite composedly, “Why does he really hide the secret of what he does with the purple wig? Because it isn’t the sort of secret we suppose.”

The Duke came round the corner and resumed his seat at the head of the table with all his native dignity. The embarrassment of the librarian left him hovering on his hind legs, like a huge bear. The Duke addressed the priest with great seriousness. “Father Brown,” he said, “Doctor Mull informs me that you have come here to make a request. I no longer profess an observance of the religion of my fathers; but for their sakes, and for the sake of the days when we met before, I am very willing to hear you. But I presume you would rather be heard in private.”

Whatever I retain of the gentleman made me stand up. Whatever I have attained of the journalist made me stand still. Before this paralysis could pass, the priest had made a momentarily detaining motion. “If,” he said, “your Grace will permit me my real petition, or if I retain any right to advise you, I would urge that as many people as possible should be present. All over this country I have found hundreds, even of my own faith and flock, whose imaginations are poisoned by the spell which I implore you to break. I wish we could have all Devonshire here to see you do it.”

“To see me do what?” asked the Duke, arching his eyebrows.

“To see you take off your wig,” said Father Brown.

The Duke’s face did not move; but he looked at his petitioner with a glassy stare which was the most awful expression I have ever seen on a human face. I could see the librarian’s great legs wavering under him like the shadows of stems in a pool; and I could not banish from my own brain the fancy that the trees all around us were filling softly in the silence with devils instead of birds.

“I spare you,” said the Duke in a voice of inhuman pity. “I refuse. If I gave you the faintest hint of the load of horror I have to bear alone, you would lie shrieking at these feet of mine and begging to know no more. I will spare you the hint. You shall not spell the first letter of what is written on the altar of the Unknown God.”

“I know the Unknown God,” said the little priest, with an unconscious grandeur of certitude that stood up like a granite tower. “I know his name; it is Satan. The true God was made flesh and dwelt among us. And I say to you, wherever you find men ruled merely by mystery, it is the mystery of iniquity. If the devil tells you something is too fearful to look at, look at it.

If he says something is too terrible to hear, hear it. If you think some truth unbearable, bear it. I entreat your Grace to end this nightmare now and here at this table."

"If I did," said the Duke in a low voice, "you and all you believe, and all by which alone you live, would be the first to shrivel and perish. You would have an instant to know the great Nothing before you died."

"The Cross of Christ be between me and harm," said Father Brown. "Take off your wig."

I was leaning over the table in ungovernable excitement; in listening to this extraordinary duel half a thought had come into my head. "Your Grace," I cried, "I call your bluff. Take off that wig or I will knock it off."

I suppose I can be prosecuted for assault, but I am very glad I did it. When he said, in the same voice of stone, "I refuse," I simply sprang on him. For three long instants he strained against me as if he had all hell to help him; but I forced his head until the hairy cap fell off it. I admit that, whilst wrestling, I shut my eyes as it fell.

I was awakened by a cry from Mull, who was also by this time at the Duke's side. His head and mine were both bending over the bald head of the wigless Duke. Then the silence was snapped by the librarian exclaiming: "What can it mean? Why, the man had nothing to hide. His ears are just like everybody else's."

"Yes," said Father Brown, "that is what he had to hide."

The priest walked straight up to him, but strangely enough did not even glance at his ears. He stared with an almost comical seriousness at his bald forehead, and pointed to a three-cornered cicatrice, long healed, but still discernible. "Mr Green, I think." he said politely, "and he did get the whole estate after all."

And now let me tell the readers of the Daily Reformer what I think the most remarkable thing in the whole affair. This transformation scene, which will seem to you as wild and purple as a Persian fairy-tale, has been (except for my technical assault) strictly legal and constitutional from its first beginnings. This man with the odd scar and the ordinary ears is not an impostor. Though (in one sense) he wears another man's wig and claims another man's ear, he has not stolen another man's coronet. He really is the one and only Duke of Exmoor. What happened was this. The old Duke really had a slight malformation of the ear, which really was more or less hereditary. He really was morbid about it; and it is likely enough that he did invoke it as a kind of curse in the violent scene (which undoubtedly happened) in which he struck Green with the decanter. But the contest ended very differently. Green pressed his claim and got the estates; the dispossessed nobleman shot himself and died without issue. After a decent interval the beautiful English Government revived the "extinct" peerage of Exmoor, and bestowed it, as is usual, on the most important person, the person who had got the property.

This man used the old feudal fables — properly, in his snobbish soul, really envied and admired them. So that thousands of poor English people trembled before a mysterious chieftain with an ancient destiny and a diadem of evil stars — when they are really trembling before a guttersnipe who was a pettifogger and a pawnbroker not twelve years ago. I think it very typical of the real case against our aristocracy as it is, and as it will be till God sends us braver men.

Mr Nutt put down the manuscript and called out with unusual sharpness: "Miss Barlow, please take down a letter to Mr Finn."

DEAR FINN, — You must be mad; we can't touch this. I wanted vampires and the bad old days and aristocracy hand-in-hand with superstition. They like that But you must know the Exmoors would never forgive this. And what would our people say then, I should like to know! Why, Sir Simon is one of Exmoor's greatest pals; and it would ruin that cousin of the Eyres that's standing for us at Bradford. Besides, old Soap-Suds was sick enough at not getting his peerage last year; he'd sack me by wire if I lost him it with such lunacy as this. And what about Duffey? He's doing us some rattling articles on "The Heel of the Norman." And how can he write about Normans if the man's only a solicitor? Do be reasonable. — Yours, E. NUTT.

As Miss Barlow rattled away cheerfully, he crumpled up the copy and tossed it into the waste-paper basket; but not before he had, automatically and by force of habit, altered the word "God" to the word "circumstances."

The Perishing of the Pendragons

FATHER BROWN was in no mood for adventures. He had lately fallen ill with over-work, and when he began to recover, his friend Flambeau had taken him on a cruise in a small yacht with Sir Cecil Fanshaw, a young Cornish squire and an enthusiast for Cornish coast scenery. But Brown was still rather weak; he was no very happy sailor; and though he was never of the sort that either grumbles or breaks down, his spirits did not rise above patience and civility. When the other two men praised the ragged violet sunset or the ragged volcanic crags, he agreed with them. When Flambeau pointed out a rock shaped like a dragon, he looked at it and thought it very like a dragon. When Fanshaw more excitedly indicated a rock that was like Merlin, he looked at it, and signified assent. When Flambeau asked whether this rocky gate of the twisted river was not the gate of Fairyland, he said "Yes." He heard the most important things and the most trivial with the same tasteless absorption. He heard that the coast was death to all but careful seamen; he also heard that the ship's cat was asleep. He heard that Fanshaw couldn't find his cigar-holder anywhere; he also heard the pilot deliver the oracle "Both eyes bright, she's all right; one eye winks, down she sinks." He heard Flambeau say to Fanshaw that no doubt this meant the pilot must keep both eyes open and be spry. And he heard Fanshaw say to Flambeau that, oddly enough, it didn't mean this: it meant that while they saw two of the coast lights, one near and the other distant, exactly side by side, they were in the right river-channel; but that if one light was hidden behind the other, they were going on the rocks. He heard Fanshaw add that his country was full of such quaint fables and idioms; it was the very home of romance; he even pitted this part of Cornwall against Devonshire, as a claimant to the laurels of Elizabethan seamanship. According to him there had been captains among these coves and islets compared with whom Drake was practically a landsman. He heard Flambeau laugh, and ask if, perhaps, the adventurous title of "Westward Ho!" only meant that all Devonshire men wished they were living in Cornwall. He heard Fanshaw say there was no need to be silly; that not only had Cornish captains been heroes, but that they were heroes still: that near that very spot there was an old admiral, now retired, who was scarred by thrilling voyages full of adventures; and who had in his youth found the last group of eight Pacific

Islands that was added to the chart of the world. This Cecil Fanshaw was, in person, of the kind that commonly urges such crude but pleasing enthusiasms; a very young man, light-haired, high-coloured, with an eager profile; with a boyish bravado of spirits, but an almost girlish delicacy of tint and type. The big shoulders, black brows and black mousquetaire swagger of Flambeau were a great contrast.

All these trivialities Brown heard and saw; but heard them as a tired man hears a tune in the railway wheels, or saw them as a sick man sees the pattern of his wall-paper. No one can calculate the turns of mood in convalescence: but Father Brown’s depression must have had a great deal to do with his mere unfamiliarity with the sea. For as the river mouth narrowed like the neck of a bottle, and the water grew calmer and the air warmer and more earthly, he seemed to wake up and take notice like a baby. They had reached that phase just after sunset when air and water both look bright, but earth and all its growing things look almost black by comparison. About this particular evening, however, there was something exceptional. It was one of those rare atmospheres in which a smoked-glass slide seems to have been slid away from between us and Nature; so that even dark colours on that day look more gorgeous than bright colours on cloudier days. The trampled earth of the river-banks and the peaty stain in the pools did not look drab but glowing umber, and the dark woods astir in the breeze did not look, as usual, dim blue with mere depth of distance, but more like wind-tumbled masses of some vivid violet blossom. This magic clearness and intensity in the colours was further forced on Brown’s slowly reviving senses by something romantic and even secret in the very form of the landscape.

The river was still well wide and deep enough for a pleasure boat so small as theirs; but the curves of the country-side suggested that it was closing in on either hand; the woods seemed to be making broken and flying attempts at bridge-building — as if the boat were passing from the romance of a valley to the romance of a hollow and so to the supreme romance of a tunnel. Beyond this mere look of things there was little for Brown’s freshening fancy to feed on; he saw no human beings, except some gipsies trailing along the river bank, with faggots and osiers cut in the forest; and one sight no longer unconventional, but in such remote parts still uncommon: a dark-haired lady, bare-headed, and paddling her own canoe. If Father Brown ever attached any importance to either of these, he certainly forgot them at the next turn of the river which brought in sight a singular object.

The water seemed to widen and split, being cloven by the dark wedge of a fish-shaped and wooded islet. With the rate at which they went, the islet seemed to swim towards them like a ship; a ship with a very high prow — or, to speak more strictly, a very high funnel. For at the extreme point nearest them stood up an odd-looking building, unlike anything they could remember or connect with any purpose. It was not specially high, but it was too high for its breadth to be called anything but a tower. Yet it appeared to be built entirely of wood, and that in a most unequal and eccentric way. Some of the planks and beams were of good, seasoned oak; some of such wood cut raw and recent; some again of white pinewood, and a great deal more of the same sort of wood painted black with tar. These black beams were set crooked or crisscross at all kinds of angles, giving the whole a most patchy and puzzling appearance. There were one or two windows, which appeared to be coloured and leaded in an old-fashioned but more elaborate style. The travellers looked at it with that paradoxical feeling we have when something reminds us of something, and yet we are certain it is something very different.

Father Brown, even when he was mystified, was clever in analysing his own mystification. And he found himself reflecting that the oddity seemed to consist in a particular shape cut out in an incongruous material; as if one saw a top-hat made of tin, or a frock-coat cut out of tartan. He was sure he had seen timbers of different tints arranged like that somewhere, but never in such architectural proportions. The next moment a glimpse through the dark trees told him all he wanted to know and he laughed. Through a gap in the foliage there appeared for a moment one of those old wooden houses, faced with black beams, which are still to be found here and there in England, but which most of us see imitated in some show called “Old London” or “Shakespeare’s England’. It was in view only long enough for the priest to see that, however old-fashioned, it was a comfortable and well-kept country-house, with flower-beds in front of it. It had none of the piebald and crazy look of the tower that seemed made out of its refuse.

“What on earth’s this?” said Flambeau, who was still staring at the tower.

Fanshaw’s eyes were shining, and he spoke triumphantly. “Aha! you’ve not seen a place quite like this before, I fancy; that’s why I’ve brought you here, my friend. Now you shall see whether I exaggerate about the mariners of Cornwall. This place belongs to Old Pendragon, whom we call the Admiral; though he retired before getting the rank. The spirit of Raleigh and Hawkins is a memory with the Devon folk; it's a modern fact with the Pendragons. If Queen Elizabeth were to rise from the grave and come up this river in a gilded barge, she would be received by the Admiral in a house exactly such as she was accustomed to, in every corner and casement, in every panel on the wall or plate on the table. And she would find an English Captain still talking fiercely of fresh lands to be found in little ships, as much as if she had dined with Drake."

"She'd find a rum sort of thing in the garden," said Father Brown, "which would not please her Renaissance eye. That Elizabethan domestic architecture is charming in its way; but it's against the very nature of it to break out into turrets."

"And yet," answered Fanshaw, "that's the most romantic and Elizabethan part of the business. It was built by the Pendragons in the very days of the Spanish wars; and though it's needed patching and even rebuilding for another reason, it's always been rebuilt in the old way. The story goes that the lady of Sir Peter Pendragon built it in this place and to this height, because from the top you can just see the corner where vessels turn into the river mouth; and she wished to be the first to see her husband's ship, as he sailed home from the Spanish Main."

"For what other reason," asked Father Brown, "do you mean that it has been rebuilt?"

"Oh, there's a strange story about that, too," said the young squire with relish. "You are really in a land of strange stories. King Arthur was here and Merlin and the fairies before him. The story goes that Sir Peter Pendragon, who (I fear) had some of the faults of the pirates as well as the virtues of the sailor, was bringing home three Spanish gentlemen in honourable captivity, intending to escort them to Elizabeth's court. But he was a man of flaming and tigerish temper, and coming to high words with one of them, he caught him by the throat and flung him by accident or design, into the sea. A second Spaniard, who was the brother of the first, instantly drew his sword and flew at Pendragon, and after a short but furious combat in which both got three wounds in as many minutes, Pendragon drove his blade through the other's body and the second Spaniard was accounted for. As it happened the ship had already turned into the river mouth and was close to comparatively shallow water. The third Spaniard sprang over the side of the ship, struck out for the shore, and was soon near enough to it to stand up to his waist in water. And turning again to face the ship, and holding up both arms to Heaven — like a prophet calling plagues upon a wicked city — he called out to Pendragon in a piercing and terrible voice, that he at least was yet living, that he would go on living, that he would live for ever; and that generation after generation the house of Pendragon should never see him or his, but should know by very certain signs that he and his vengeance were alive. With that he dived under the wave, and was either drowned or swam so long under water that no hair of his head was seen afterwards."

"There's that girl in the canoe again," said Flambeau irrelevantly, for good-looking young women would call him off any topic. "She seems bothered by the queer tower just as we were."

Indeed, the black-haired young lady was letting her canoe float slowly and silently past the strange islet; and was looking intently up at the strange tower, with a strong glow of curiosity on her oval and olive face.

"Never mind girls," said Fanshaw impatiently, "there are plenty of them in the world, but not many things like the Pendragon Tower. As you may easily suppose, plenty of superstitions and scandals have followed in the track of the Spaniard's curse; and no doubt, as you would put it, any accident happening to this Cornish family would be connected with it by rural credulity. But it is perfectly true that this tower has been burnt down two or three times; and the family can't be called lucky, for more than two, I think, of the Admiral's near kin have perished by shipwreck; and one at least, to my own knowledge, on practically the same spot where Sir Peter threw the Spaniard overboard."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Flambeau. "She's going."

"When did your friend the Admiral tell you this family history?" asked Father Brown, as the girl in the canoe paddled off, without showing the least intention of extending her interest from the tower to the yacht, which Fanshaw had already caused to lie alongside the island.

"Many years ago," replied Fanshaw; "he hasn't been to sea for some time now, though he is as keen on it as ever. I believe there's a family compact or something. Well, here's the landing stage; let's come ashore and see the old boy."

They followed him on to the island, just under the tower, and Father Brown, whether from the mere touch of dry land, or the interest of something on the other bank of the river (which he stared at very hard for some seconds), seemed singularly improved in briskness. They entered a wooded avenue between two fences of thin greyish wood, such as often enclose parks or gardens, and over the top of which the dark trees tossed to and fro like black and purple plumes upon the hearse of a giant. The tower, as they left it behind, looked all the quainter, because such entrances are usually flanked by two towers; and this one looked lopsided. But for this, the avenue had the usual appearance of the entrance to a gentleman's grounds; and, being so curved that the house was now out of sight, somehow looked a much larger park than any plantation on such an island could really be. Father Brown was, perhaps, a little fanciful in his fatigue, but he almost thought the whole place must be growing larger, as things do in a nightmare. Anyhow, a mystical monotony was the only character of their march, until Fanshaw suddenly stopped, and pointed to something sticking out through the grey fence — something that looked at first rather like the imprisoned horn of some beast. Closer observation showed that it was a slightly curved blade of metal that shone faintly in the fading light.

Flambeau, who like all Frenchmen had been a soldier, bent over it and said in a startled voice: "Why, it's a sabre! I believe I know the sort, heavy and curved, but shorter than the cavalry; they used to have them in artillery and the—"

As he spoke the blade plucked itself out of the crack it had made and came down again with a more ponderous slash, splitting the fissiparous fence to the bottom with a rending noise. Then it was pulled out again, flashed above the fence some feet further along, and again split it halfway down with the first stroke; and after waggling a little to extricate itself (accompanied with curses in the darkness) split it down to the ground with a second. Then a kick of devilish energy sent the whole loosened square of thin wood flying into the pathway, and a great gap of dark coppice gaped in the paling.

Fanshaw peered into the dark opening and uttered an exclamation of astonishment. "My dear Admiral!" he exclaimed, "do you — er — do you generally cut out a new front door whenever you want to go for a walk?"

The voice in the gloom swore again, and then broke into a jolly laugh. "No," it said; "I've really got to cut down this fence somehow; it's spoiling all the plants, and no one else here can do it. But I'll only carve another bit off the front door, and then come out and welcome you."

And sure enough, he heaved up his weapon once more, and, hacking twice, brought down another and similar strip of fence, making the opening about fourteen feet wide in all. Then through this larger forest gateway he came out into the evening light, with a chip of grey wood sticking to his sword-blade.

He momentarily fulfilled all Fanshaw's fable of an old piratical Admiral; though the details seemed afterwards to decompose into accidents. For instance, he wore a broad-brimmed hat as protection against the sun; but the front flap of it was turned up straight to the sky, and the two corners pulled down lower than the ears, so that it stood across his forehead in a crescent like the old cocked hat worn by Nelson. He wore an ordinary dark-blue jacket, with nothing special about the buttons, but the combination of it with white linen trousers somehow had a sailorish look. He was tall and loose, and walked with a sort of swagger, which was not a sailor's roll, and yet somehow suggested it; and he held in his hand a short sabre which was like a navy cutlass, but about twice as big. Under the bridge of the hat his eagle face looked eager, all the more because it was not only clean-shaven, but without eyebrows. It seemed almost as if all the hair had come off his face from his thrusting it through a throng of elements. His eyes were prominent and piercing. His colour was curiously attractive, while partly tropical; it reminded one vaguely of a blood-orange. That is, that while it was ruddy and sanguine, there was a yellow in it that was in no way sickly, but seemed rather to glow like gold apples of the Hesperides — Father Brown thought he had never seen a figure so expressive of all the romances about the countries of the Sun.

When Fanshaw had presented his two friends to their host he fell again into a tone of rallying the latter about his wreckage of the fence and his apparent rage of profanity. The Admiral pooh-poohed it at first as a piece of necessary but annoying garden work; but at length the ring of real energy came back into his laughter, and he cried with a mixture of impatience and good humour:

"Well, perhaps I do go at it a bit rabidly, and feel a kind of pleasure in smashing anything. So would you if your only pleasure was in cruising about to find some new Cannibal Islands, and you had to stick on this muddy little rockery in a sort of rustic pond. When I remember how I've cut down a mile and a half of green poisonous jungle with an old cutlass half as sharp as this; and then remember I must stop here and chop this matchwood, because of some confounded old bargain scribbled in a family Bible, why, I—”

He swung up the heavy steel again; and this time sundered the wall of wood from top to bottom at one stroke.

“I feel like that,” he said laughing, but furiously flinging the sword some yards down the path, “and now let’s go up to the house; you must have some dinner.”

The semicircle of lawn in front of the house was varied by three circular garden beds, one of red tulips, a second of yellow tulips, and the third of some white, waxen-looking blossoms that the visitors did not know and presumed to be exotic. A heavy, hairy and rather sullen-looking gardener was hanging up a heavy coil of garden hose. The corners of the expiring sunset which seemed to cling about the corners of the house gave glimpses here and there of the colours of remoter flowerbeds; and in a treeless space on one side of the house opening upon the river stood a tall brass tripod on which was tilted a big brass telescope. Just outside the steps of the porch stood a little painted green garden table, as if someone had just had tea there. The entrance was flanked with two of those half-featured lumps of stone with holes for eyes that are said to be South Sea idols; and on the brown oak beam across the doorway were some confused carvings that looked almost as barbaric.

As they passed indoors, the little cleric hopped suddenly on to the table, and standing on it peered unaffectedly through his spectacles at the mouldings in the oak. Admiral Pendragon looked very much astonished, though not particularly annoyed; while Fanshaw was so amused with what looked like a performing pigmy on his little stand, that he could not control his laughter. But Father Brown was not likely to notice either the laughter or the astonishment.

He was gazing at three carved symbols, which, though very worn and obscure, seemed still to convey some sense to him. The first seemed to be the outline of some tower or other building, crowned with what looked like curly-pointed ribbons. The second was clearer: an old Elizabethan galley with decorative waves beneath it, but interrupted in the middle by a curious jagged rock, which was either a fault in the wood or some conventional representation of the water coming in. The third represented the upper half of a human figure, ending in an escalloped line like the waves; the face was rubbed and featureless, and both arms were held very stiffly up in the air.

“Well,” muttered Father Brown, blinking, “here is the legend of the Spaniard plain enough. Here he is holding up his arms and cursing in the sea; and here are the two curses: the wrecked ship and the burning of Pendragon Tower.”

Pendragon shook his head with a kind of venerable amusement. “And how many other things might it not be?” he said. “Don’t you know that that sort of half-man, like a half-lion or half-stag, is quite common in heraldry? Might not that line through the ship be one of those parti-per-pale lines, indented, I think they call it? And though the third thing isn’t so very heraldic, it would be more heraldic to suppose it a tower crowned with laurel than with fire; and it looks just as like it.”

“But it seems rather odd,” said Flambeau, “that it should exactly confirm the old legend.”

“Ah,” replied the sceptical traveller, “but you don’t know how much of the old legend may have been made up from the old figures. Besides, it isn’t the only old legend. Fanshaw, here, who is fond of such things, will tell you there are other versions of the tale, and much more horrible ones. One story credits my unfortunate ancestor with having had the Spaniard cut in two; and that will fit the pretty picture also. Another obligingly credits our family with the possession of a tower full of snakes and explains those little, wriggly things in that way. And a third theory supposes the crooked line on the ship to be a conventionalized thunderbolt; but that alone, if seriously examined, would show what a very little way these unhappy coincidences really go.”

“Why, how do you mean?” asked Fanshaw.

“It so happens,” replied his host coolly, “that there was no thunder and lightning at all in the two or three shipwrecks I know of in our family.”

“Oh!” said Father Brown, and jumped down from the little table.

There was another silence in which they heard the continuous murmur of the river; then Fanshaw said, in a doubtful and perhaps disappointed tone: “Then you don’t think there is anything in the tales of the tower in flames?”

“There are the tales, of course,” said the Admiral, shrugging his shoulders; “and some of them, I don’t deny, on evidence as decent as one ever gets for such things. Someone saw a blaze hereabout, don’t you know, as he walked home through a wood; someone keeping sheep on the uplands inland thought he saw a flame hovering over Pendragon Tower. Well, a damp dab of mud like this confounded island seems the last place where one would think of fires."

"What is that fire over there?" asked Father Brown with a gentle suddenness, pointing to the woods on the left river-bank. They were all thrown a little off their balance, and the more fanciful Fanshaw had even some difficulty in recovering his, as they saw a long, thin stream of blue smoke ascending silently into the end of the evening light.

Then Pendragon broke into a scornful laugh again. "Gipsies!" he said; "they've been camping about here for about a week. Gentlemen, you want your dinner," and he turned as if to enter the house.

But the antiquarian superstition in Fanshaw was still quivering, and he said hastily: "But, Admiral, what's that hissing noise quite near the island? It's very like fire."

"It's more like what it is," said the Admiral, laughing as he led the way; "it's only some canoe going by."

Almost as he spoke, the butler, a lean man in black, with very black hair and a very long, yellow face, appeared in the doorway and told him that dinner was served.

The dining-room was as nautical as the cabin of a ship; but its note was rather that of the modern than the Elizabethan captain. There were, indeed, three antiquated cutlasses in a trophy over the fireplace, and one brown sixteenth-century map with Tritons and little ships dotted about a curly sea. But such things were less prominent on the white panelling than some cases of quaint-coloured South American birds, very scientifically stuffed, fantastic shells from the Pacific, and several instruments so rude and queer in shape that savages might have used them either to kill their enemies or to cook them. But the alien colour culminated in the fact that, besides the butler, the Admiral's only servants were two negroes, somewhat quaintly clad in tight uniforms of yellow. The priest's instinctive trick of analysing his own impressions told him that the colour and the little neat coat-tails of these bipeds had suggested the word "Canary," and so by a mere pun connected them with southward travel. Towards the end of the dinner they took their yellow clothes and black faces out of the room, leaving only the black clothes and yellow face of the butler.

"I'm rather sorry you take this so lightly," said Fanshaw to the host; "for the truth is, I've brought these friends of mine with the idea of their helping you, as they know a good deal of these things. Don't you really believe in the family story at all?"

"I don't believe in anything," answered Pendragon very briskly, with a bright eye cocked at a red tropical bird. "I'm a man of science."

Rather to Flambeau's surprise, his clerical friend, who seemed to have entirely woken up, took up the digression and talked natural history with his host with a flow of words and much unexpected information, until the dessert and decanters were set down and the last of the servants vanished. Then he said, without altering his tone.

"Please don't think me impertinent, Admiral Pendragon. I don't ask for curiosity, but really for my guidance and your convenience. Have I made a bad shot if I guess you don't want these old things talked of before your butler?"

The Admiral lifted the hairless arches over his eyes and exclaimed: "Well, I don't know where you got it, but the truth is I can't stand the fellow, though I've no excuse for discharging a family servant. Fanshaw, with his fairy tales, would say my blood moved against men with that black, Spanish-looking hair."

Flambeau struck the table with his heavy fist. "By Jove!" he cried; "and so had that girl!"

"I hope it'll all end tonight," continued the Admiral, "when my nephew comes back safe from his ship. You looked surprised. You won't understand, I suppose, unless I tell you the story. You see, my father had two sons; I remained a bachelor, but my elder brother married, and had a son who became a sailor like all the rest of us, and will inherit the proper estate. Well, my father was a strange man; he somehow combined Fanshaw's superstition with a good deal of my scepticism — they were always fighting in him; and after my first voyages, he developed a notion which he thought somehow would settle finally whether the curse was truth or trash. If all the Pendragons sailed about anyhow, he thought there would be too much chance of natural catastrophes to prove anything. But if we went to sea one at a time in strict order of succession to the property, he thought it might show whether any connected fate followed the family as a family. It was a silly notion, I think, and I quarrelled with my father pretty heartily; for I was an ambitious man and was left to the last, coming, by succession, after my own nephew."

"And your father and brother," said the priest, very gently, "died at sea, I fear."

"Yes," groaned the Admiral; "by one of those brutal accidents on which are built all the lying mythologies of mankind, they were both shipwrecked. My father, coming up this coast out of the Atlantic, was washed up on these Cornish rocks. My brother's ship was sunk, no one knows where, on the voyage home from Tasmania. His body was never found. I tell you it was from perfectly natural mishap; lots of other people besides Pendragons were drowned; and both disasters are discussed in a normal way by navigators. But, of course, it set this forest of superstition on fire; and men saw the flaming tower everywhere. That's why I say it will be all right when Walter returns. The girl he's engaged to was coming today; but I was so afraid of some chance delay frightening her that I wired her not to come till she heard from me. But he's practically sure to be here some time tonight, and then it'll all end in smoke — tobacco smoke. We'll crack that old lie when we crack a bottle of this wine."

"Very good wine," said Father Brown, gravely lifting his glass, "but, as you see, a very bad wine-bibber. I most sincerely beg your pardon": for he had spilt a small spot of wine on the table-cloth. He drank and put down the glass with a composed face; but his hand had started at the exact moment when he became conscious of a face looking in through the garden window just behind the Admiral — the face of a woman, swarthy, with southern hair and eyes, and young, but like a mask of tragedy.

After a pause the priest spoke again in his mild manner. "Admiral," he said, "will you do me a favour? Let me, and my friends if they like, stop in that tower of yours just for tonight? Do you know that in my business you're an exorcist almost before anything else?"

Pendragon sprang to his feet and paced swiftly to and fro across the window, from which the face had instantly vanished. "I tell you there is nothing in it," he cried, with ringing violence. "There is one thing I know about this matter. You may call me an atheist. I am an atheist." Here he swung round and fixed Father Brown with a face of frightful concentration. "This business is perfectly natural. There is no curse in it at all."

Father Brown smiled. "In that case," he said, "there can't be any objection to my sleeping in your delightful summer-house."

"The idea is utterly ridiculous," replied the Admiral, beating a tattoo on the back of his chair.

“Please forgive me for everything,” said Brown in his most sympathetic tone, “including spilling the wine. But it seems to me you are not quite so easy about the flaming tower as you try to be.”

Admiral Pendragon sat down again as abruptly as he had risen; but he sat quite still, and when he spoke again it was in a lower voice. “You do it at your own peril,” he said; “but wouldn’t you be an atheist to keep sane in all this devilry?”

Some three hours afterwards Fanshaw, Flambeau and the priest were still dawdling about the garden in the dark; and it began to dawn on the other two that Father Brown had no intention of going to bed either in the tower or the house.

“I think the lawn wants weeding,” said he dreamily. “If I could find a spud or something I’d do it myself.”

They followed him, laughing and half remonstrating; but he replied with the utmost solemnity, explaining to them, in a maddening little sermon, that one can always find some small occupation that is helpful to others. He did not find a spud; but he found an old broom made of twigs, with which he began energetically to brush the fallen leaves off the grass.

“Always some little thing to be done,” he said with idiotic cheerfulness; “as George Herbert says: ‘Who sweeps an Admiral’s garden in Cornwall as for Thy laws makes that and the action fine.’ And now,” he added, suddenly slinging the broom away, “Let’s go and water the flowers.”

With the same mixed emotions they watched him uncoil some considerable lengths of the large garden hose, saying with an air of wistful discrimination: “The red tulips before the yellow, I think. Look a bit dry, don’t you think?”

He turned the little tap on the instrument, and the water shot out straight and solid as a long rod of steel.

“Look out, Samson,” cried Flambeau; “why, you’ve cut off the tulip’s head.”

Father Brown stood ruefully contemplating the decapitated plant.

“Mine does seem to be a rather kill or cure sort of watering,” he admitted, scratching his head. “I suppose it’s a pity I didn’t find the spud. You should have seen me with the spud! Talking of tools, you’ve got that swordstick, Flambeau, you always carry? That’s right; and Sir Cecil could have that sword the Admiral threw away by the fence here. How grey everything looks!”

“The mist’s rising from the river,” said the staring Flambeau.

Almost as he spoke the huge figure of the hairy gardener appeared on a higher ridge of the trenched and terraced lawn, hailing them with a brandished rake and a horribly bellowing voice. “Put down that hose,” he shouted; “put down that hose and go to your—”

“I am fearfully clumsy,” replied the reverend gentleman weakly; “do you know, I upset some wine at dinner.” He made a wavering half-turn of apology towards the gardener, with the hose still spouting in his hand. The gardener caught the cold crash of the water full in his face like the crash of a cannon-ball; staggered, slipped and went sprawling with his boots in the air.

“How very dreadful!” said Father Brown, looking round in a sort of wonder. “Why, I’ve hit a man!”

He stood with his head forward for a moment as if looking or listening; and then set off at a trot towards the tower, still trailing the hose behind him. The tower was quite close, but its outline was curiously dim.

“Your river mist,” he said, “has a rum smell.”

“By the Lord it has,” cried Fanshaw, who was very white. “But you can’t mean—”

“I mean,” said Father Brown, “that one of the Admiral’s scientific predictions is coming true tonight. This story is going to end in smoke.”

As he spoke a most beautiful rose-red light seemed to burst into blossom like a gigantic rose; but accompanied with a crackling and rattling noise that was like the laughter of devils.

“My God! what is this?” cried Sir Cecil Fanshaw.

“The sign of the flaming tower,” said Father Brown, and sent the driving water from his hose into the heart of the red patch.

“Lucky we hadn’t gone to bed!” ejaculated Fanshaw. “I suppose it can’t spread to the house.”

“You may remember,” said the priest quietly, “that the wooden fence that might have carried it was cut away.”

Flambeau turned electrified eyes upon his friend, but Fanshaw only said rather absently: “Well, nobody can be killed, anyhow.”

“This is rather a curious kind of tower,” observed Father Brown, “when it takes to killing people, it always kills people who are somewhere else.”

At the same instant the monstrous figure of the gardener with the streaming beard stood again on the green ridge against the sky, waving others to come on; but now waving not a rake but a cutlass. Behind him came the two negroes, also with the old crooked cutlasses out of the trophy. But in the blood-red glare, with their black faces and yellow figures, they looked like devils carrying instruments of torture. In the dim garden behind them a distant voice was heard calling out brief directions. When the priest heard the voice, a terrible change came over his countenance.

But he remained composed; and never took his eye off the patch of flame which had begun by spreading, but now seemed to shrink a little as it hissed under the torch of the long silver spear of water. He kept his finger along the nozzle of the pipe to ensure the aim, and attended to no other business, knowing only by the noise and that semi-conscious corner of the eye, the exciting incidents that began to tumble themselves about the island garden. He gave two brief directions to his friends. One was: "Knock these fellows down somehow and tie them up, whoever they are; there's rope down by those faggots. They want to take away my nice hose." The other was: "As soon as you get a chance, call out to that canoeing girl; she's over on the bank with the gipsies. Ask her if they could get some buckets across and fill them from the river." Then he closed his mouth and continued to water the new red flower as ruthlessly as he had watered the red tulip.

He never turned his head to look at the strange fight that followed between the foes and friends of the mysterious fire. He almost felt the island shake when Flambeau collided with the huge gardener; he merely imagined how it would whirl round them as they wrestled. He heard the crashing fall; and his friend's gasp of triumph as he dashed on to the first negro; and the cries of both the blacks as Flambeau and Fanshaw bound them. Flambeau's enormous strength more than redressed the odds in the fight, especially as the fourth man still hovered near the house, only a shadow and a voice. He heard also the water broken by the paddles of a canoe; the girl's voice giving orders, the voices of gipsies answering and coming nearer, the plumping and sucking noise of empty buckets plunged into a full stream; and finally the sound of many feet around the fire. But all this was less to him than the fact that the red rent, which had lately once more increased, had once more slightly diminished.

Then came a cry that very nearly made him turn his head. Flambeau and Fanshaw, now reinforced by some of the gipsies, had rushed after the mysterious man by the house; and he heard from the other end of the garden the Frenchman's cry of horror and astonishment. It was echoed by a howl not to be called human, as the being broke from their hold and ran along the garden. Three times at least it raced round the whole island, in a way that was as horrible as the chase of a lunatic, both in the cries of the pursued and the ropes carried by the pursuers; but was more horrible still, because it somehow suggested one of the chasing games of children in a garden. Then, finding them closing in on every side, the figure sprang upon one of the higher river banks and disappeared with a splash into the dark and driving river.

“You can do no more, I fear,” said Brown in a voice cold with pain. “He has been washed down to the rocks by now, where he has sent so many others. He knew the use of a family legend.”

“Oh, don’t talk in these parables,” cried Flambeau impatiently. “Can’t you put it simply in words of one syllable?”

“Yes,” answered Brown, with his eye on the hose. “‘Both eyes bright, she’s all right; one eye blinks, down she sinks.’”

The fire hissed and shrieked more and more, like a strangled thing, as it grew narrower and narrower under the flood from the pipe and buckets, but Father Brown still kept his eye on it as he went on speaking:

“I thought of asking this young lady, if it were morning yet, to look through that telescope at the river mouth and the river. She might have seen something to interest her: the sign of the ship, or Mr Walter Pendragon coming home, and perhaps even the sign of the half-man, for though he is certainly safe by now, he may very well have waded ashore. He has been within a shave of another shipwreck; and would never have escaped it, if the lady hadn’t had the sense to suspect the old Admiral’s telegram and come down to watch him. Don’t let’s talk about the old Admiral. Don’t let’s talk about anything. It’s enough to say that whenever this tower, with its pitch and resin-wood, really caught fire, the spark on the horizon always looked like the twin light to the coast light-house.”

“And that,” said Flambeau, “is how the father and brother died. The wicked uncle of the legends very nearly got his estate after all.”

Father Brown did not answer; indeed, he did not speak again, save for civilities, till they were all safe round a cigar-box in the cabin of the yacht. He saw that the frustrated fire was extinguished; and then refused to linger, though he actually heard young Pendragon, escorted by an enthusiastic crowd, come tramping up the river bank; and might (had he been moved by romantic curiosities) have received the combined thanks of the man from the ship and the girl from the canoe. But his fatigue had fallen on him once more, and he only started once, when Flambeau abruptly told him he had dropped cigar-ash on his trousers.

“That’s no cigar-ash,” he said rather wearily. “That’s from the fire, but you don’t think so because you’re all smoking cigars. That’s just the way I got my first faint suspicion about the chart.”

“Do you mean Pendragon’s chart of his Pacific Islands?” asked Fanshaw.

“You thought it was a chart of the Pacific Islands,” answered Brown. “Put a feather with a fossil and a bit of coral and everyone will think it’s a specimen. Put the same feather with a ribbon and an artificial flower and everyone will think it’s for a lady’s hat. Put the same feather with an ink-bottle, a book and a stack of writing-paper, and most men will swear they’ve seen a quill pen. So you saw that map among tropic birds and shells and thought it was a map of Pacific Islands. It was the map of this river.”

“But how do you know?” asked Fanshaw.

“I saw the rock you thought was like a dragon, and the one like Merlin, and—”

“You seem to have noticed a lot as we came in,” cried Fanshaw. “We thought you were rather abstracted.”

“I was sea-sick,” said Father Brown simply. “I felt simply horrible. But feeling horrible has nothing to do with not seeing things.” And he closed his eyes.

“Do you think most men would have seen that?” asked Flambeau. He received no answer: Father Brown was asleep.

The God of the Gongs

IT was one of those chilly and empty afternoons in early winter, when the daylight is silver rather than gold and pewter rather than silver. If it was dreary in a hundred bleak offices and yawning drawing-rooms, it was drearier still along the edges of the flat Essex coast, where the monotony was the more inhuman for being broken at very long intervals by a lamp-post that looked less civilized than a tree, or a tree that looked more ugly than a lamp-post. A light fall of snow had half-melted into a few strips, also looking leaden rather than silver, when it had been fixed again by the seal of frost; no fresh snow had fallen, but a ribbon of the old snow ran along the very margin of the coast, so as to parallel the pale ribbon of the foam.

The line of the sea looked frozen in the very vividness of its violet-blue, like the vein of a frozen finger. For miles and miles, forward and back, there was no breathing soul, save two pedestrians, walking at a brisk pace, though one had much longer legs and took much longer strides than the other.

It did not seem a very appropriate place or time for a holiday, but Father Brown had few holidays, and had to take them when he could, and he always preferred, if possible, to take them in company with his old friend Flambeau, ex-criminal and ex-detective. The priest had had a fancy for visiting his old parish at Cobhole, and was going north-eastward along the coast.

After walking a mile or two farther, they found that the shore was beginning to be formally embanked, so as to form something like a parade; the ugly lamp-posts became less few and far between and more ornamental, though quite equally ugly. Half a mile farther on Father Brown was puzzled first by little labyrinths of flowerless flower-pots, covered with the low, flat, quiet-coloured plants that look less like a garden than a tessellated pavement, between weak curly paths studded with seats with curly backs. He faintly sniffed the atmosphere of a certain sort of seaside town that he did not specially care about, and, looking ahead along the parade by the sea, he saw something that put the matter beyond a doubt. In the grey distance the big bandstand of a watering-place stood up like a giant mushroom with six legs.

“I suppose,” said Father Brown, turning up his coat-collar and drawing a woollen scarf rather closer round his neck, “that we are approaching a pleasure resort."

"I fear," answered Flambeau, "a pleasure resort to which few people just now have the pleasure of resorting. They try to revive these places in the winter, but it never succeeds except with Brighton and the old ones. This must be Seawood, I think — Lord Pooley's experiment; he had the Sicilian Singers down at Christmas, and there's talk about holding one of the great glove-fights here. But they'll have to chuck the rotten place into the sea; it's as dreary as a lost railway-carriage."

They had come under the big bandstand, and the priest was looking up at it with a curiosity that had something rather odd about it, his head a little on one side, like a bird's. It was the conventional, rather tawdry kind of erection for its purpose: a flattened dome or canopy, gilt here and there, and lifted on six slender pillars of painted wood, the whole being raised about five feet above the parade on a round wooden platform like a drum. But there was something fantastic about the snow combined with something artificial about the gold that haunted Flambeau as well as his friend with some association he could not capture, but which he knew was at once artistic and alien.

"I've got it," he said at last. "It's Japanese. It's like those fanciful Japanese prints, where the snow on the mountain looks like sugar, and the gilt on the pagodas is like gilt on gingerbread. It looks just like a little pagan temple."

"Yes," said Father Brown. "Let's have a look at the god." And with an agility hardly to be expected of him, he hopped up on to the raised platform.

"Oh, very well," said Flambeau, laughing; and the next instant his own towering figure was visible on that quaint elevation.

Slight as was the difference of height, it gave in those level wastes a sense of seeing yet farther and farther across land and sea. Inland the little wintry gardens faded into a confused grey copse; beyond that, in the distance, were long low barns of a lonely farmhouse, and beyond that nothing but the long East Anglian plains. Seawards there was no sail or sign of life save a few seagulls: and even they looked like the last snowflakes, and seemed to float rather than fly.

Flambeau turned abruptly at an exclamation behind him. It seemed to come from lower down than might have been expected, and to be addressed to his heels rather than his head. He instantly held out his hand, but he could hardly help laughing at what he saw. For some reason or other the platform had given way under Father Brown, and the unfortunate little man had dropped through to the level of the parade. He was just tall enough, or short enough, for his head alone to stick out of the hole in the broken wood, looking like St John the Baptist's head on a charger. The face wore a disconcerted expression, as did, perhaps, that of St John the Baptist.

In a moment he began to laugh a little. "This wood must be rotten," said Flambeau. "Though it seems odd it should bear me, and you go through the weak place. Let me help you out."

But the little priest was looking rather curiously at the corners and edges of the wood alleged to be rotten, and there was a sort of trouble on his brow.

"Come along," cried Flambeau impatiently, still with his big brown hand extended. "Don't you want to get out?"

The priest was holding a splinter of the broken wood between his finger and thumb, and did not immediately reply. At last he said thoughtfully: "Want to get out? Why, no. I rather think I want to get in." And he dived into the darkness under the wooden floor so abruptly as to knock off his big curved clerical hat and leave it lying on the boards above, without any clerical head in it.

Flambeau looked once more inland and out to sea, and once more could see nothing but seas as wintry as the snow, and snows as level as the sea.

There came a scurrying noise behind him, and the little priest came scrambling out of the hole faster than he had fallen in. His face was no longer disconcerted, but rather resolute, and, perhaps only through the reflections of the snow, a trifle paler than usual.

"Well?" asked his tall friend. "Have you found the god of the temple?"

"No," answered Father Brown. "I have found what was sometimes more important. The Sacrifice."

"What the devil do you mean?" cried Flambeau, quite alarmed.

Father Brown did not answer. He was staring, with a knot in his forehead, at the landscape; and he suddenly pointed at it. "What's that house over there?" he asked.

Following his finger, Flambeau saw for the first time the corners of a building nearer than the farmhouse, but screened for the most part with a fringe of trees. It was not a large building, and stood well back from the shore — , but a glint of ornament on it suggested that it was part of the same watering-place scheme of decoration as the bandstand, the little gardens and the curly-backed iron seats.

Father Brown jumped off the bandstand, his friend following; and as they walked in the direction indicated the trees fell away to right and left, and they saw a small, rather flashy hotel, such as is common in resorts — the hotel of the Saloon Bar rather than the Bar Parlour. Almost the whole frontage was of gilt plaster and figured glass, and between that grey seascape and the grey, witch-like trees, its gimcrack quality had something spectral in its melancholy. They both felt vaguely that if any food or drink were offered at such a hostelry, it would be the paste-board ham and empty mug of the pantomime.

In this, however, they were not altogether confirmed. As they drew nearer and nearer to the place they saw in front of the buffet, which was apparently closed, one of the iron garden-seats with curly backs that had adorned the gardens, but much longer, running almost the whole length of the frontage. Presumably, it was placed so that visitors might sit there and look at the sea, but one hardly expected to find anyone doing it in such weather.

Nevertheless, just in front of the extreme end of the iron seat stood a small round restaurant table, and on this stood a small bottle of Chablis and a plate of almonds and raisins. Behind the table and on the seat sat a dark-haired young man, bareheaded, and gazing at the sea in a state of almost astonishing immobility.

But though he might have been a waxwork when they were within four yards of him, he jumped up like a jack-in-the-box when they came within three, and said in a deferential, though not undignified, manner: “Will you step inside, gentlemen? I have no staff at present, but I can get you anything simple myself.”

“Much obliged,” said Flambeau. “So you are the proprietor?”

“Yes,” said the dark man, dropping back a little into his motionless manner. “My waiters are all Italians, you see, and I thought it only fair they should see their countryman beat the black, if he really can do it. You know the great fight between Malvoli and Nigger Ned is coming off after all?”

“I’m afraid we can’t wait to trouble your hospitality seriously,” said Father Brown. “But my friend would be glad of a glass of sherry, I’m sure, to keep out the cold and drink success to the Latin champion.”

Flambeau did not understand the sherry, but he did not object to it in the least. He could only say amiably: “Oh, thank you very much.”

“Sherry, sir — certainly,” said their host, turning to his hostel. “Excuse me if I detain you a few minutes. As I told you, I have no staff—” And he went towards the black windows of his shuttered and unlighted inn.

“Oh, it doesn’t really matter,” began Flambeau, but the man turned to reassure him.

“I have the keys,” he said. “I could find my way in the dark.”

“I didn’t mean—” began Father Brown.

He was interrupted by a bellowing human voice that came out of the bowels of the uninhabited hotel. It thundered some foreign name loudly but inaudibly, and the hotel proprietor moved more sharply towards it than he had done for Flambeau’s sherry. As instant evidence proved, the proprietor had told, then and after, nothing but the literal truth. But both Flambeau and Father Brown have often confessed that, in all their (often outrageous) adventures, nothing had so chilled their blood as that voice of an ogre, sounding suddenly out of a silent and empty inn.

“My cook!” cried the proprietor hastily. “I had forgotten my cook. He will be starting presently. Sherry, sir?”

And, sure enough, there appeared in the doorway a big white bulk with white cap and white apron, as befits a cook, but with the needless emphasis of a black face. Flambeau had often heard that negroes made good cooks. But somehow something in the contrast of colour and caste increased his surprise that the hotel proprietor should answer the call of the cook, and not the cook the call of the proprietor. But he reflected that head cooks are proverbially arrogant; and, besides, the host had come back with the sherry, and that was the great thing.

“I rather wonder,” said Father Brown, “that there are so few people about the beach, when this big fight is coming on after all. We only met one man for miles.”

The hotel proprietor shrugged his shoulders. “They come from the other end of the town, you see — from the station, three miles from here. They are only interested in the sport, and will stop in hotels for the night only. After all, it is hardly weather for basking on the shore.”

“Or on the seat,” said Flambeau, and pointed to the little table.

“I have to keep a look-out,” said the man with the motionless face. He was a quiet, well-featured fellow, rather sallow; his dark clothes had nothing distinctive about them, except that his black necktie was worn rather high, like a stock, and secured by a gold pin with some grotesque head to it. Nor was there anything notable in the face, except something that was probably a mere nervous trick — a habit of opening one eye more narrowly than the other, giving the impression that the other was larger, or was, perhaps, artificial.

The silence that ensued was broken by their host saying quietly: “Whereabouts did you meet the one man on your march?”

“Curiously enough,” answered the priest, “close by here — just by that bandstand.”

Flambeau, who had sat on the long iron seat to finish his sherry, put it down and rose to his feet, staring at his friend in amazement. He opened his mouth to speak, and then shut it again.

“Curious,” said the dark-haired man thoughtfully. “What was he like?”

“It was rather dark when I saw him,” began Father Brown, “but he was —”

As has been said, the hotel-keeper can be proved to have told the precise truth. His phrase that the cook was starting presently was fulfilled to the letter, for the cook came out, pulling his gloves on, even as they spoke.

But he was a very different figure from the confused mass of white and black that had appeared for an instant in the doorway. He was buttoned and buckled up to his bursting eyeballs in the most brilliant fashion. A tall black hat was tilted on his broad black head — a hat of the sort that the French wit has compared to eight mirrors. But somehow the black man was like the black hat. He also was black, and yet his glossy skin flung back the light at eight angles or more. It is needless to say that he wore white spats and a white slip inside his waistcoat. The red flower stood up in his buttonhole aggressively, as if it had suddenly grown there. And in the way he carried his cane in one hand and his cigar in the other there was a certain attitude — an attitude we must always remember when we talk of racial prejudices: something innocent and insolent — the cake walk.

“Sometimes,” said Flambeau, looking after him, “I’m not surprised that they lynch them.”

“I am never surprised,” said Father Brown, “at any work of hell. But as I was saying,” he resumed, as the negro, still ostentatiously pulling on his yellow gloves, betook himself briskly towards the watering-place, a queer music-hall figure against that grey and frosty scene— “as I was saying, I couldn’t describe the man very minutely, but he had a flourish and old-fashioned whiskers and moustachios, dark or dyed, as in the pictures of foreign financiers, round his neck was wrapped a long purple scarf that thrashed out in the wind as he walked. It was fixed at the throat rather in the way that nurses fix children's comforters with a safety-pin. Only this," added the priest, gazing placidly out to sea, "was not a safety-pin."

The man sitting on the long iron bench was also gazing placidly out to sea. Now he was once more in repose. Flambeau felt quite certain that one of his eyes was naturally larger than the other. Both were now well opened, and he could almost fancy the left eye grew larger as he gazed.

"It was a very long gold pin, and had the carved head of a monkey or some such thing," continued the cleric; "and it was fixed in a rather odd way — he wore pince-nez and a broad black—"

The motionless man continued to gaze at the sea, and the eyes in his head might have belonged to two different men. Then he made a movement of blinding swiftness.

Father Brown had his back to him, and in that flash might have fallen dead on his face. Flambeau had no weapon, but his large brown hands were resting on the end of the long iron seat. His shoulders abruptly altered their shape, and he heaved the whole huge thing high over his head, like a headsman's axe about to fall. The mere height of the thing, as he held it vertical, looked like a long iron ladder by which he was inviting men to climb towards the stars. But the long shadow, in the level evening light, looked like a giant brandishing the Eiffel Tower. It was the shock of that shadow, before the shock of the iron crash, that made the stranger quail and dodge, and then dart into his inn, leaving the flat and shining dagger he had dropped exactly where it had fallen.

"We must get away from here instantly," cried Flambeau, flinging the huge seat away with furious indifference on the beach. He caught the little priest by the elbow and ran him down a grey perspective of barren back garden, at the end of which there was a closed back garden door. Flambeau bent over it an instant in violent silence, and then said: "The door is locked."

As he spoke a black feather from one of the ornamental firs fell, brushing the brim of his hat. It startled him more than the small and distant detonation that had come just before. Then came another distant detonation, and the door he was trying to open shook under the bullet buried in it. Flambeau's shoulders again filled out and altered suddenly. Three hinges and a lock burst at the same instant, and he went out into the empty path behind, carrying the great garden door with him, as Samson carried the gates of Gaza.

Then he flung the garden door over the garden wall, just as a third shot picked up a spurt of snow and dust behind his heel. Without ceremony he snatched up the little priest, slung him astraddle on his shoulders, and went racing towards Seawood as fast as his long legs could carry him. It was not until nearly two miles farther on that he set his small companion down. It had hardly been a dignified escape, in spite of the classic model of Anchises, but Father Brown's face only wore a broad grin.

"Well," said Flambeau, after an impatient silence, as they resumed their more conventional tramp through the streets on the edge of the town, where no outrage need be feared, "I don't know what all this means, but I take it I may trust my own eyes that you never met the man you have so accurately described."

"I did meet him in a way," Brown said, biting his finger rather nervously — "I did really. And it was too dark to see him properly, because it was under that bandstand affair. But I'm afraid I didn't describe him so very accurately after all, for his pince-nez was broken under him, and the long gold pin wasn't stuck through his purple scarf but through his heart."

"And I suppose," said the other in a lower voice, "that glass-eyed guy had something to do with it."

"I had hoped he had only a little," answered Brown in a rather troubled voice, "and I may have been wrong in what I did. I acted on impulse. But I fear this business has deep roots and dark."

They walked on through some streets in silence. The yellow lamps were beginning to be lit in the cold blue twilight, and they were evidently approaching the more central parts of the town. Highly coloured bills announcing the glove-fight between Nigger Ned and Malvoli were slapped about the walls.

"Well," said Flambeau, "I never murdered anyone, even in my criminal days, but I can almost sympathize with anyone doing it in such a dreary place. Of all God-forsaken dustbins of Nature, I think the most heart-breaking are places like that bandstand, that were meant to be festive and are forlorn. I can fancy a morbid man feeling he must kill his rival in the solitude and irony of such a scene. I remember once taking a tramp in your glorious Surrey hills, thinking of nothing but gorse and skylarks, when I came out on a vast circle of land, and over me lifted a vast, voiceless structure, tier above tier of seats, as huge as a Roman amphitheatre and as empty as a new letter-rack. A bird sailed in heaven over it. It was the Grand Stand at Epsom. And I felt that no one would ever be happy there again."

"It's odd you should mention Epsom," said the priest. "Do you remember what was called the Sutton Mystery, because two suspected men — ice-cream men, I think — happened to live at Sutton? They were eventually released. A man was found strangled, it was said, on the Downs round that part. As a fact, I know (from an Irish policeman who is a friend of mine) that he was found close up to the Epsom Grand Stand — in fact, only hidden by one of the lower doors being pushed back."

"That is queer," assented Flambeau. "But it rather confirms my view that such pleasure places look awfully lonely out of season, or the man wouldn't have been murdered there."

"I'm not so sure he—" began Brown, and stopped.

"Not so sure he was murdered?" queried his companion.

"Not so sure he was murdered out of the season," answered the little priest, with simplicity. "Don't you think there's something rather tricky about this solitude, Flambeau? Do you feel sure a wise murderer would always want the spot to be lonely? It's very, very seldom a man is quite alone. And, short of that, the more alone he is, the more certain he is to be seen. No; I think there must be some other — Why, here we are at the Pavilion or Palace, or whatever they call it."

They had emerged on a small square, brilliantly lighted, of which the principal building was gay with gilding, gaudy with posters, and flanked with two giant photographs of Malvoli and Nigger Ned.

"Hallo!" cried Flambeau in great surprise, as his clerical friend stumped straight up the broad steps. "I didn't know pugilism was your latest hobby. Are you going to see the fight?"

"I don't think there will be any fight," replied Father Brown.

They passed rapidly through ante-rooms and inner rooms; they passed through the hall of combat itself, raised, roped, and padded with innumerable seats and boxes, and still the cleric did not look round or pause till he came to a clerk at a desk outside a door marked "Committee". There he stopped and asked to see Lord Pooley.

The attendant observed that his lordship was very busy, as the fight was coming on soon, but Father Brown had a good-tempered tedium of reiteration for which the official mind is generally not prepared. In a few moments the rather baffled Flambeau found himself in the presence of a man who was still shouting directions to another man going out of the room. “Be careful, you know, about the ropes after the fourth — Well, and what do you want, I wonder!”

Lord Pooley was a gentleman, and, like most of the few remaining to our race, was worried — especially about money. He was half grey and half flaxen, and he had the eyes of fever and a high-bridged, frost-bitten nose.

“Only a word,” said Father Brown. “I have come to prevent a man being killed.”

Lord Pooley bounded off his chair as if a spring had flung him from it. “I’m damned if I’ll stand any more of this!” he cried. “You and your committees and parsons and petitions! Weren’t there parsons in the old days, when they fought without gloves? Now they’re fighting with the regulation gloves, and there’s not the rag of a possibility of either of the boxers being killed.”

“I didn’t mean either of the boxers,” said the little priest.

“Well, well, well!” said the nobleman, with a touch of frosty humour. “Who’s going to be killed? The referee?”

“I don’t know who’s going to be killed,” replied Father Brown, with a reflective stare. “If I did I shouldn’t have to spoil your pleasure. I could simply get him to escape. I never could see anything wrong about prize-fights. As it is, I must ask you to announce that the fight is off for the present.”

“Anything else?” jeered the gentleman with feverish eyes. “And what do you say to the two thousand people who have come to see it?”

“I say there will be one thousand nine-hundred and ninety-nine of them left alive when they have seen it,” said Father Brown.

Lord Pooley looked at Flambeau. “Is your friend mad?” he asked.

“Far from it,” was the reply.

“And look here,” resumed Pooley in his restless way, “it’s worse than that. A whole pack of Italians have turned up to back Malvoli — swarthy, savage fellows of some country, anyhow. You know what these Mediterranean races are like. If I send out word that it’s off we shall have Malvoli storming in here at the head of a whole Corsican clan.”

“My lord, it is a matter of life and death,” said the priest. “Ring your bell. Give your message. And see whether it is Malvoli who answers.”

The nobleman struck the bell on the table with an odd air of new curiosity. He said to the clerk who appeared almost instantly in the doorway: “I have a serious announcement to make to the audience shortly. Meanwhile, would you kindly tell the two champions that the fight will have to be put off.”

The clerk stared for some seconds as if at a demon and vanished.

“What authority have you for what you say?” asked Lord Pooley abruptly. “Whom did you consult?”

“I consulted a bandstand,” said Father Brown, scratching his head. “But, no, I’m wrong; I consulted a book, too. I picked it up on a bookstall in London — very cheap, too.”

He had taken out of his pocket a small, stout, leather-bound volume, and Flambeau, looking over his shoulder, could see that it was some book of old travels, and had a leaf turned down for reference.

“‘The only form in which Voodoo—’” began Father Brown, reading aloud.

“In which what?” inquired his lordship.

“‘In which Voodoo,’” repeated the reader, almost with relish, “‘is widely organized outside Jamaica itself is in the form known as the Monkey, or the God of the Gongs, which is powerful in many parts of the two American continents, especially among half-breeds, many of whom look exactly like white men. It differs from most other forms of devil-worship and human sacrifice in the fact that the blood is not shed formally on the altar, but by a sort of assassination among the crowd. The gongs beat with a deafening din as the doors of the shrine open and the monkey-god is revealed; almost the whole congregation rivet ecstatic eyes on him. But after—’”

The door of the room was flung open, and the fashionable negro stood framed in it, his eyeballs rolling, his silk hat still insolently tilted on his head. “Huh!” he cried, showing his apish teeth. “What this? Huh! Huh! You steal a coloured gentleman’s prize — prize his already — yo’ think yo’ jes’ save that white ‘Talian trash—”

“The matter is only deferred,” said the nobleman quietly. “I will be with you to explain in a minute or two.”

“Who you to—” shouted Nigger Ned, beginning to storm.

“My name is Pooley,” replied the other, with a creditable coolness. “I am the organizing secretary, and I advise you just now to leave the room.”

“Who this fellow?” demanded the dark champion, pointing to the priest disdainfully.

“My name is Brown,” was the reply. “And I advise you just now to leave the country.”

The prize-fighter stood glaring for a few seconds, and then, rather to the surprise of Flambeau and the others, strode out, sending the door to with a crash behind him.

“Well,” asked Father Brown rubbing his dusty hair up, “what do you think of Leonardo da Vinci? A beautiful Italian head.”

“Look here,” said Lord Pooley, “I’ve taken a considerable responsibility, on your bare word. I think you ought to tell me more about this.”

“You are quite right, my lord,” answered Brown. “And it won’t take long to tell.” He put the little leather book in his overcoat pocket. “I think we know all that this can tell us, but you shall look at it to see if I’m right. That negro who has just swaggered out is one of the most dangerous men on earth, for he has the brains of a European, with the instincts of a cannibal. He has turned what was clean, common-sense butchery among his fellow-barbarians into a very modern and scientific secret society of assassins. He doesn’t know I know it, nor, for the matter of that, that I can’t prove it.”

There was a silence, and the little man went on.

“But if I want to murder somebody, will it really be the best plan to make sure I’m alone with him?”

Lord Pooley’s eyes recovered their frosty twinkle as he looked at the little clergyman. He only said: “If you want to murder somebody, I should advise it.”

Father Brown shook his head, like a murderer of much riper experience. “So Flambeau said,” he replied, with a sigh. “But consider. The more a man feels lonely the less he can be sure he is alone. It must mean empty spaces round him, and they are just what make him obvious. Have you never seen one ploughman from the heights, or one shepherd from the valleys? Have you never walked along a cliff, and seen one man walking along the sands? Didn’t you know when he’s killed a crab, and wouldn’t you have known if it had been a creditor? No! No! No! For an intelligent murderer, such as you or I might be, it is an impossible plan to make sure that nobody is looking at you.”

“But what other plan is there?”

"There is only one," said the priest. "To make sure that everybody is looking at something else. A man is throttled close by the big stand at Epsom. Anybody might have seen it done while the stand stood empty — any tramp under the hedges or motorist among the hills. But nobody would have seen it when the stand was crowded and the whole ring roaring, when the favourite was coming in first — or wasn't. The twisting of a neck-cloth, the thrusting of a body behind a door could be done in an instant — so long as it was that instant. It was the same, of course," he continued turning to Flambeau, "with that poor fellow under the bandstand. He was dropped through the hole (it wasn't an accidental hole) just at some very dramatic moment of the entertainment, when the bow of some great violinist or the voice of some great singer opened or came to its climax. And here, of course, when the knock-out blow came — it would not be the only one. That is the little trick Nigger Ned has adopted from his old God of Gongs."

"By the way, Malvoli—" Pooley began.

"Malvoli," said the priest, "has nothing to do with it. I dare say he has some Italians with him, but our amiable friends are not Italians. They are octoroons and African half-bloods of various shades, but I fear we English think all foreigners are much the same so long as they are dark and dirty. Also," he added, with a smile, "I fear the English decline to draw any fine distinction between the moral character produced by my religion and that which blooms out of Voodoo."

The blaze of the spring season had burst upon Seawood, littering its foreshore with famines and bathing-machines, with nomadic preachers and nigger minstrels, before the two friends saw it again, and long before the storm of pursuit after the strange secret society had died away. Almost on every hand the secret of their purpose perished with them. The man of the hotel was found drifting dead on the sea like so much seaweed; his right eye was closed in peace, but his left eye was wide open, and glistened like glass in the moon. Nigger Ned had been overtaken a mile or two away, and murdered three policemen with his closed left hand. The remaining officer was surprised — nay, pained — and the negro got away. But this was enough to set all the English papers in a flame, and for a month or two the main purpose of the British Empire was to prevent the buck nigger (who was so in both senses) escaping by any English port. Persons of a figure remotely reconcilable with his were subjected to quite extraordinary inquisitions, made to scrub their faces before going on board ship, as if each white complexion were made up like a mask, of greasepaint. Every negro in England was put under special regulations and made to report himself; the outgoing ships would no more have taken a nigger than a basilisk. For people had found out how fearful and vast and silent was the force of the savage secret society, and by the time Flambeau and Father Brown were leaning on the parade parapet in April, the Black Man meant in England almost what he once meant in Scotland.

"He must be still in England," observed Flambeau, "and horridly well hidden, too. They must have found him at the ports if he had only whitened his face."

"You see, he is really a clever man," said Father Brown apologetically. "And I'm sure he wouldn't whiten his face."

"Well, but what would he do?"

"I think," said Father Brown, "he would blacken his face."

Flambeau, leaning motionless on the parapet, laughed and said: "My dear fellow!"

Father Brown, also leaning motionless on the parapet, moved one finger for an instant into the direction of the soot-masked niggers singing on the sands.

The Salad of Colonel Cray

FATHER BROWN was walking home from Mass on a white weird morning when the mists were slowly lifting — one of those mornings when the very element of light appears as something mysterious and new. The scattered trees outlined themselves more and more out of the vapour, as if they were first drawn in grey chalk and then in charcoal. At yet more distant intervals appeared the houses upon the broken fringe of the suburb; their outlines became clearer and clearer until he recognized many in which he had chance acquaintances, and many more the names of whose owners he knew. But all the windows and doors were sealed; none of the people were of the sort that would be up at such a time, or still less on such an errand. But as he passed under the shadow of one handsome villa with verandas and wide ornate gardens, he heard a noise that made him almost involuntarily stop. It was the unmistakable noise of a pistol or carbine or some light firearm discharged; but it was not this that puzzled him most. The first full noise was immediately followed by a series of fainter noises — as he counted them, about six. He supposed it must be the echo; but the odd thing was that the echo was not in the least like the original sound. It was not like anything else that he could think of; the three things nearest to it seemed to be the noise made by siphons of soda-water, one of the many noises made by an animal, and the noise made by a person attempting to conceal laughter. None of which seemed to make much sense.

Father Brown was made of two men. There was a man of action, who was as modest as a primrose and as punctual as a clock; who went his small round of duties and never dreamed of altering it. There was also a man of reflection, who was much simpler but much stronger, who could not easily be stopped; whose thought was always (in the only intelligent sense of the words) free thought. He could not help, even unconsciously, asking himself all the questions that there were to be asked, and answering as many of them as he could; all that went on like his breathing or circulation. But he never consciously carried his actions outside the sphere of his own duty; and in this case the two attitudes were aptly tested. He was just about to resume his trudge in the twilight, telling himself it was no affair of his, but instinctively twisting and untwisting twenty theories about what the odd noises might mean. Then the grey sky-line brightened into silver, and in the broadening light he realized that he had been to the house which belonged to an Anglo-Indian Major named Putnam; and that the Major had a native cook from Malta who was of his communion. He also began to remember that pistol-shots are sometimes serious things; accompanied with consequences with which he was legitimately concerned. He turned back and went in at the garden gate, making for the front door.

Half-way down one side of the house stood out a projection like a very low shed; it was, as he afterwards discovered, a large dustbin. Round the corner of this came a figure, at first a mere shadow in the haze, apparently bending and peering about. Then, coming nearer, it solidified into a figure that was, indeed, rather unusually solid. Major Putnam was a bald-headed, bull-necked man, short and very broad, with one of those rather apoplectic faces that are produced by a prolonged attempt to combine the oriental climate with the occidental luxuries. But the face was a good-humoured one, and even now, though evidently puzzled and inquisitive, wore a kind of innocent grin. He had a large palm-leaf hat on the back of his head (suggesting a halo that was by no means appropriate to the face), but otherwise he was clad only in a very vivid suit of striped scarlet and yellow pyjamas; which, though glowing enough to behold, must have been, on a fresh morning, pretty chilly to wear. He had evidently come out of his house in a hurry, and the priest was not surprised when he called out without further ceremony: “Did you hear that noise?”

“Yes,” answered Father Brown; “I thought I had better look in, in case anything was the matter.”

The Major looked at him rather queerly with his good-humoured gooseberry eyes. “What do you think the noise was?” he asked.

“It sounded like a gun or something,” replied the other, with some hesitation; “but it seemed to have a singular sort of echo.”

The Major was still looking at him quietly, but with protruding eyes, when the front door was flung open, releasing a flood of gaslight on the face of the fading mist; and another figure in pyjamas sprang or tumbled out into the garden. The figure was much longer, leaner, and more athletic; the pyjamas, though equally tropical, were comparatively tasteful, being of white with a light lemon-yellow stripe. The man was haggard, but handsome, more sunburned than the other; he had an aquiline profile and rather deep-sunken eyes, and a slight air of oddity arising from the combination of coal-black hair with a much lighter moustache. All this

Father Brown absorbed in detail more at leisure. For the moment he only saw one thing about the man; which was the revolver in his hand.

“Cray!” exclaimed the Major, staring at him; “did you fire that shot?”

“Yes, I did,” retorted the black-haired gentleman hotly; “and so would you in my place. If you were chased everywhere by devils and nearly—”

The Major seemed to intervene rather hurriedly. “This is my friend Father Brown,” he said. And then to Brown: “I don’t know whether you’ve met Colonel Cray of the Royal Artillery.”

“I have heard of him, of course,” said the priest innocently. “Did you — did you hit anything?”

“I thought so,” answered Cray with gravity.

“Did he—” asked Major Putnam in a lowered voice, “did he fall or cry out, or anything?”

Colonel Cray was regarding his host with a strange and steady stare. “I’ll tell you exactly what he did,” he said. “He sneezed.”

Father Brown’s hand went half-way to his head, with the gesture of a man remembering somebody’s name. He knew now what it was that was neither soda-water nor the snorting of a dog.

“Well,” ejaculated the staring Major, “I never heard before that a service revolver was a thing to be sneezed at.”

“Nor I,” said Father Brown faintly. “It’s lucky you didn’t turn your artillery on him or you might have given him quite a bad cold.” Then, after a bewildered pause, he said: “Was it a burglar?”

“Let us go inside,” said Major Putnam, rather sharply, and led the way into his house.

The interior exhibited a paradox often to be marked in such morning hours: that the rooms seemed brighter than the sky outside; even after the Major had turned out the one gaslight in the front hall. Father Brown was surprised to see the whole dining-table set out as for a festive meal, with napkins in their rings, and wine-glasses of some six unnecessary shapes set beside every plate. It was common enough, at that time of the morning, to find the remains of a banquet over-night; but to find it freshly spread so early was unusual.

While he stood wavering in the hall Major Putnam rushed past him and sent a raging eye over the whole oblong of the tablecloth. At last he spoke, spluttering: “All the silver gone!” he gasped. “Fish-knives and forks gone.

Old cruet-stand gone. Even the old silver cream-jug gone. And now, Father Brown, I am ready to answer your question of whether it was a burglar."

"They're simply a blind," said Cray stubbornly. "I know better than you why people persecute this house; I know better than you why—"

The Major patted him on the shoulder with a gesture almost peculiar to the soothing of a sick child, and said: "It was a burglar. Obviously it was a burglar."

"A burglar with a bad cold," observed Father Brown, "that might assist you to trace him in the neighbourhood."

The Major shook his head in a sombre manner. "He must be far beyond trace now, I fear," he said.

Then, as the restless man with the revolver turned again towards the door in the garden, he added in a husky, confidential voice: "I doubt whether I should send for the police, for fear my friend here has been a little too free with his bullets, and got on the wrong side of the law. He's lived in very wild places; and, to be frank with you, I think he sometimes fancies things."

"I think you once told me," said Brown, "that he believes some Indian secret society is pursuing him."

Major Putnam nodded, but at the same time shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose we'd better follow him outside," he said. "I don't want any more — shall we say, sneezing?"

They passed out into the morning light, which was now even tinged with sunshine, and saw Colonel Cray's tall figure bent almost double, minutely examining the condition of gravel and grass. While the Major strolled unobtrusively towards him, the priest took an equally indolent turn, which took him round the next corner of the house to within a yard or two of the projecting dustbin.

He stood regarding this dismal object for some minute and a half — , then he stepped towards it, lifted the lid and put his head inside. Dust and other discolouring matter shook upwards as he did so; but Father Brown never observed his own appearance, whatever else he observed. He remained thus for a measurable period, as if engaged in some mysterious prayers. Then he came out again, with some ashes on his hair, and walked unconcernedly away.

By the time he came round to the garden door again he found a group there which seemed to roll away morbidities as the sunlight had already rolled away the mists. It was in no way rationally reassuring; it was simply broadly comic, like a cluster of Dickens's characters. Major Putnam had managed to slip inside and plunge into a proper shirt and trousers, with a crimson cummerbund, and a light square jacket over all; thus normally set off, his red festive face seemed bursting with a commonplace cordiality. He was indeed emphatic, but then he was talking to his cook — the swarthy son of Malta, whose lean, yellow and rather careworn face contrasted quaintly with his snow-white cap and costume. The cook might well be careworn, for cookery was the Major's hobby. He was one of those amateurs who always know more than the professional. The only other person he even admitted to be a judge of an omelette was his friend Cray — and as Brown remembered this, he turned to look for the other officer. In the new presence of daylight and people clothed and in their right mind, the sight of him was rather a shock. The taller and more elegant man was still in his night-garb, with tousled black hair, and now crawling about the garden on his hands and knees, still looking for traces of the burglar; and now and again, to all appearance, striking the ground with his hand in anger at not finding him. Seeing him thus quadrupedal in the grass, the priest raised his eyebrows rather sadly; and for the first time guessed that "fancies things" might be an euphemism.

The third item in the group of the cook and the epicure was also known to Father Brown; it was Audrey Watson, the Major's ward and housekeeper; and at this moment, to judge by her apron, tucked-up sleeves and resolute manner, much more the housekeeper than the ward.

"It serves you right," she was saying: "I always told you not to have that old-fashioned cruet-stand."

"I prefer it," said Putnam, placably. "I'm old-fashioned myself; and the things keep together."

"And vanish together, as you see," she retorted. "Well, if you are not going to bother about the burglar, I shouldn't bother about the lunch. It's Sunday, and we can't send for vinegar and all that in the town; and you Indian gentlemen can't enjoy what you call a dinner without a lot of hot things. I wish to goodness now you hadn't asked Cousin Oliver to take me to the musical service. It isn't over till half-past twelve, and the Colonel has to leave by then. I don't believe you men can manage alone."

"Oh yes, we can, my dear," said the Major, looking at her very amiably. "Marco has all the sauces, and we've often done ourselves well in very rough places, as you might know by now. And it's time you had a treat, Audrey; you mustn’t be a housekeeper every hour of the day; and I know you want to hear the music.”

“I want to go to church,” she said, with rather severe eyes.

She was one of those handsome women who will always be handsome, because the beauty is not in an air or a tint, but in the very structure of the head and features. But though she was not yet middle-aged and her auburn hair was of a Titianesque fullness in form and colour, there was a look in her mouth and around her eyes which suggested that some sorrows wasted her, as winds waste at last the edges of a Greek temple. For indeed the little domestic difficulty of which she was now speaking so decisively was rather comic than tragic. Father Brown gathered, from the course of the conversation, that Cray, the other gourmet, had to leave before the usual lunch-time; but that Putnam, his host, not to be done out of a final feast with an old crony, had arranged for a special dejeuner to be set out and consumed in the course of the morning, while Audrey and other graver persons were at morning service. She was going there under the escort of a relative and old friend of hers, Dr Oliver Oman, who, though a scientific man of a somewhat bitter type, was enthusiastic for music, and would go even to church to get it. There was nothing in all this that could conceivably concern the tragedy in Miss Watson’s face; and by a half conscious instinct, Father Brown turned again to the seeming lunatic grubbing about in the grass.

When he strolled across to him, the black, unbrushed head was lifted abruptly, as if in some surprise at his continued presence. And indeed, Father Brown, for reasons best known to himself, had lingered much longer than politeness required; or even, in the ordinary sense, permitted.

“Well!” cried Cray, with wild eyes. “I suppose you think I’m mad, like the rest?”

“I have considered the thesis,” answered the little man, composedly. “And I incline to think you are not.”

“What do you mean?” snapped Cray quite savagely.

“Real madmen,” explained Father Brown, “always encourage their own morbidity. They never strive against it. But you are trying to find traces of the burglar; even when there aren’t any. You are struggling against it. You want what no madman ever wants.”

“And what is that?”

“You want to be proved wrong,” said Brown.

During the last words Cray had sprung or staggered to his feet and was regarding the cleric with agitated eyes. “By hell, but that is a true word!” he cried. “They are all at me here that the fellow was only after the silver — as if I shouldn’t be only too pleased to think so! She’s been at me,” and he tossed his tousled black head towards Audrey, but the other had no need of the direction, “she’s been at me today about how cruel I was to shoot a poor harmless house-breaker, and how I have the devil in me against poor harmless natives. But I was a good-natured man once — as good-natured as Putnam.”

After a pause he said: “Look here, I’ve never seen you before; but you shall judge of the whole story. Old Putnam and I were friends in the same mess; but, owing to some accidents on the Afghan border, I got my command much sooner than most men; only we were both invalided home for a bit. I was engaged to Audrey out there; and we all travelled back together. But on the journey back things happened. Curious things. The result of them was that Putnam wants it broken off, and even Audrey keeps it hanging on — and I know what they mean. I know what they think I am. So do you.

“Well, these are the facts. The last day we were in an Indian city I asked Putnam if I could get some Trichinopoli cigars, he directed me to a little place opposite his lodgings. I have since found he was quite right; but ‘opposite’ is a dangerous word when one decent house stands opposite five or six squalid ones; and I must have mistaken the door. It opened with difficulty, and then only on darkness; but as I turned back, the door behind me sank back and settled into its place with a noise as of innumerable bolts. There was nothing to do but to walk forward; which I did through passage after passage, pitch-dark. Then I came to a flight of steps, and then to a blind door, secured by a latch of elaborate Eastern ironwork, which I could only trace by touch, but which I loosened at last. I came out again upon gloom, which was half turned into a greenish twilight by a multitude of small but steady lamps below. They showed merely the feet or fringes of some huge and empty architecture. Just in front of me was something that looked like a mountain. I confess I nearly fell on the great stone platform on which I had emerged, to realize that it was an idol. And worst of all, an idol with its back to me.

“It was hardly half human, I guessed; to judge by the small squat head, and still more by a thing like a tail or extra limb turned up behind and pointing, like a loathsome large finger, at some symbol graven in the centre of the vast stone back. I had begun, in the dim light, to guess at the hieroglyphic, not without horror, when a more horrible thing happened. A door opened silently in the temple wall behind me and a man came out, with a brown face and a black coat. He had a carved smile on his face, of copper flesh and ivory teeth; but I think the most hateful thing about him was that he was in European dress. I was prepared, I think, for shrouded priests or naked fakirs. But this seemed to say that the devilry was over all the earth. As indeed I found it to be.

"'If you had only seen the Monkey's Feet,' he said, smiling steadily, and without other preface, 'we should have been very gentle — you would only be tortured and die. If you had seen the Monkey's Face, still we should be very moderate, very tolerant — you would only be tortured and live. But as you have seen the Monkey's Tail, we must pronounce the worst sentence, which is — Go Free.'

"When he said the words I heard the elaborate iron latch with which I had struggled, automatically unlock itself: and then, far down the dark passages I had passed, I heard the heavy street-door shifting its own bolts backwards.

"'It is vain to ask for mercy; you must go free,' said the smiling man. 'Henceforth a hair shall slay you like a sword, and a breath shall bite you like an adder; weapons shall come against you out of nowhere; and you shall die many times.' And with that he was swallowed once more in the wall behind; and I went out into the street."

Cray paused; and Father Brown unaffectedly sat down on the lawn and began to pick daisies.

Then the soldier continued: "Putnam, of course, with his jolly common sense, pooh-poohed all my fears; and from that time dates his doubt of my mental balance. Well, I'll simply tell you, in the fewest words, the three things that have happened since; and you shall judge which of us is right.

"The first happened in an Indian village on the edge of the jungle, but hundreds of miles from the temple, or town, or type of tribes and customs where the curse had been put on me. I woke in black midnight, and lay thinking of nothing in particular, when I felt a faint tickling thing, like a thread or a hair, trailed across my throat. I shrank back out of its way, and could not help thinking of the words in the temple. But when I got up and sought lights and a mirror, the line across my neck was a line of blood.

“The second happened in a lodging in Port Said, later, on our journey home together. It was a jumble of tavern and curiosity-shop; and though there was nothing there remotely suggesting the cult of the Monkey, it is, of course, possible that some of its images or talismans were in such a place. Its curse was there, anyhow. I woke again in the dark with a sensation that could not be put in colder or more literal words than that a breath bit like an adder. Existence was an agony of extinction; I dashed my head against walls until I dashed it against a window; and fell rather than jumped into the garden below. Putnam, poor fellow, who had called the other thing a chance scratch, was bound to take seriously the fact of finding me half insensible on the grass at dawn. But I fear it was my mental state he took seriously; and not my story.

“The third happened in Malta. We were in a fortress there; and as it happened our bedrooms overlooked the open sea, which almost came up to our window-sills, save for a flat white outer wall as bare as the sea. I woke up again; but it was not dark. There was a full moon, as I walked to the window; I could have seen a bird on the bare battlement, or a sail on the horizon. What I did see was a sort of stick or branch circling, self-supported, in the empty sky. It flew straight in at my window and smashed the lamp beside the pillow I had just quitted. It was one of those queer-shaped war-clubs some Eastern tribes use. But it had come from no human hand.”

Father Brown threw away a daisy-chain he was making, and rose with a wistful look. “Has Major Putnam,” he asked, “got any Eastern curios, idols, weapons and so on, from which one might get a hint?”

“Plenty of those, though not much use, I fear,” replied Cray; “but by all means come into his study.”

As they entered they passed Miss Watson buttoning her gloves for church, and heard the voice of Putnam downstairs still giving a lecture on cookery to the cook. In the Major’s study and den of curios they came suddenly on a third party, silk-hatted and dressed for the street, who was poring over an open book on the smoking-table — a book which he dropped rather guiltily, and turned.

Cray introduced him civilly enough, as Dr Oman, but he showed such disfavour in his very face that Brown guessed the two men, whether Audrey knew it or not, were rivals. Nor was the priest wholly unsympathetic with the prejudice. Dr Oman was a very well-dressed gentleman indeed; well-featured, though almost dark enough for an Asiatic. But Father Brown had to tell himself sharply that one should be in charity even with those who wax their pointed beards, who have small gloved hands, and who speak with perfectly modulated voices.

Cray seemed to find something specially irritating in the small prayer-book in Oman's dark-gloved hand. "I didn't know that was in your line," he said rather rudely.

Oman laughed mildly, but without offence. "This is more so, I know," he said, laying his hand on the big book he had dropped, "a dictionary of drugs and such things. But it's rather too large to take to church." Then he closed the larger book, and there seemed again the faintest touch of hurry and embarrassment.

"I suppose," said the priest, who seemed anxious to change the subject, "all these spears and things are from India?"

"From everywhere," answered the doctor. "Putnam is an old soldier, and has been in Mexico and Australia, and the Cannibal Islands for all I know."

"I hope it was not in the Cannibal Islands," said Brown, "that he learnt the art of cookery." And he ran his eyes over the stew-pots or other strange utensils on the wall.

At this moment the jolly subject of their conversation thrust his laughing, lobsterish face into the room. "Come along, Cray," he cried. "Your lunch is just coming in. And the bells are ringing for those who want to go to church."

Cray slipped upstairs to change; Dr Oman and Miss Watson betook themselves solemnly down the street, with a string of other churchgoers; but Father Brown noticed that the doctor twice looked back and scrutinized the house; and even came back to the corner of the street to look at it again.

The priest looked puzzled. "He can't have been at the dustbin," he muttered. "Not in those clothes. Or was he there earlier today?"

Father Brown, touching other people, was as sensitive as a barometer; but today he seemed about as sensitive as a rhinoceros. By no social law, rigid or implied, could he be supposed to linger round the lunch of the Anglo-Indian friends; but he lingered, covering his position with torrents of amusing but quite needless conversation. He was the more puzzling because he did not seem to want any lunch. As one after another of the most exquisitely balanced kedgerees of curries, accompanied with their appropriate vintages, were laid before the other two, he only repeated that it was one of his fast-days, and munched a piece of bread and sipped and then left untasted a tumbler of cold water. His talk, however, was exuberant.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do for you,” he cried — , “I’ll mix you a salad! I can’t eat it, but I’ll mix it like an angel! You’ve got a lettuce there.”

“Unfortunately it’s the only thing we have got,” answered the good-humoured Major. “You must remember that mustard, vinegar, oil and so on vanished with the cruet and the burglar.”

“I know,” replied Brown, rather vaguely. “That’s what I’ve always been afraid would happen. That’s why I always carry a cruet-stand about with me. I’m so fond of salads.”

And to the amazement of the two men he took a pepper-pot out of his waistcoat pocket and put it on the table.

“I wonder why the burglar wanted mustard, too,” he went on, taking a mustard-pot from another pocket. “A mustard plaster, I suppose. And vinegar” — and producing that condiment— “haven’t I heard something about vinegar and brown paper? As for oil, which I think I put in my left—”

His garrulity was an instant arrested; for lifting his eyes, he saw what no one else saw — the black figure of Dr Oman standing on the sunlit lawn and looking steadily into the room. Before he could quite recover himself Cray had cloven in.

“You’re an astounding card,” he said, staring. “I shall come and hear your sermons, if they’re as amusing as your manners.” His voice changed a little, and he leaned back in his chair.

“Oh, there are sermons in a cruet-stand, too,” said Father Brown, quite gravely. “Have you heard of faith like a grain of mustard-seed; or charity that anoints with oil? And as for vinegar, can any soldiers forget that solitary soldier, who, when the sun was darkened—”

Colonel Cray leaned forward a little and clutched the tablecloth.

Father Brown, who was making the salad, tipped two spoonfuls of the mustard into the tumbler of water beside him; stood up and said in a new, loud and sudden voice— “Drink that!”

At the same moment the motionless doctor in the garden came running, and bursting open a window cried: “Am I wanted? Has he been poisoned?”

“Pretty near,” said Brown, with the shadow of a smile; for the emetic had very suddenly taken effect. And Cray lay in a deck-chair, gasping as for life, but alive.

Major Putnam had sprung up, his purple face mottled. “A crime!” he cried hoarsely. “I will go for the police!”

The priest could hear him dragging down his palm-leaf hat from the peg and tumbling out of the front door; he heard the garden gate slam. But he only stood looking at Cray; and after a silence said quietly:

“I shall not talk to you much; but I will tell you what you want to know. There is no curse on you. The Temple of the Monkey was either a coincidence or a part of the trick; the trick was the trick of a white man. There is only one weapon that will bring blood with that mere feathery touch: a razor held by a white man. There is one way of making a common room full of invisible, overpowering poison: turning on the gas — the crime of a white man. And there is only one kind of club that can be thrown out of a window, turn in mid-air and come back to the window next to it: the Australian boomerang. You’ll see some of them in the Major’s study.”

With that he went outside and spoke for a moment to the doctor. The moment after, Audrey Watson came rushing into the house and fell on her knees beside Cray’s chair. He could not hear what they said to each other; but their faces moved with amazement, not unhappiness. The doctor and the priest walked slowly towards the garden gate.

“I suppose the Major was in love with her, too,” he said with a sigh; and when the other nodded, observed: “You were very generous, doctor. You did a fine thing. But what made you suspect?”

“A very small thing,” said Oman; “but it kept me restless in church till I came back to see that all was well. That book on his table was a work on poisons; and was put down open at the place where it stated that a certain Indian poison, though deadly and difficult to trace, was particularly easily reversible by the use of the commonest emetics. I suppose he read that at the last moment—”

“And remembered that there were emetics in the cruet-stand,” said Father Brown. “Exactly. He threw the cruet in the dustbin — where I found it, along with other silver — for the sake of a burglary blind. But if you look at that pepper-pot I put on the table, you’ll see a small hole. That’s where Cray’s bullet struck, shaking up the pepper and making the criminal sneeze.”

There was a silence. Then Dr Oman said grimly: “The Major is a long time looking for the police.”

“Or the police in looking for the Major?” said the priest. “Well, good-bye.”

The Strange Crime of John Boulnois

MR CALHOUN KIDD was a very young gentleman with a very old face, a face dried up with its own eagerness, framed in blue-black hair and a black butterfly tie. He was the emissary in England of the colossal American daily called the Western Sun — also humorously described as the "Rising Sunset". This was in allusion to a great journalistic declaration (attributed to Mr Kidd himself) that "he guessed the sun would rise in the west yet, if American citizens did a bit more hustling." Those, however, who mock American journalism from the standpoint of somewhat mellower traditions forget a certain paradox which partly redeems it. For while the journalism of the States permits a pantomimic vulgarity long past anything English, it also shows a real excitement about the most earnest mental problems, of which English papers are innocent, or rather incapable. The Sun was full of the most solemn matters treated in the most farcical way. William James figured there as well as "Weary Willie," and pragmatists alternated with pugilists in the long procession of its portraits.

Thus, when a very unobtrusive Oxford man named John Boulnois wrote in a very unreadable review called the Natural Philosophy Quarterly a series of articles on alleged weak points in Darwinian evolution, it fluttered no corner of the English papers; though Boulnois's theory (which was that of a comparatively stationary universe visited occasionally by convulsions of change) had some rather faddy fashionableness at Oxford, and got so far as to be named "Catastrophism". But many American papers seized on the challenge as a great event; and the Sun threw the shadow of Mr Boulnois quite gigantically across its pages. By the paradox already noted, articles of valuable intelligence and enthusiasm were presented with headlines apparently written by an illiterate maniac, headlines such as "Darwin Chews Dirt; Critic Boulnois says He Jumps the Shocks" — or "Keep Catastrophic, says Thinker Boulnois." And Mr Calhoun Kidd, of the Western Sun, was bidden to take his butterfly tie and lugubrious visage down to the little house outside Oxford where Thinker Boulnois lived in happy ignorance of such a title.

That fated philosopher had consented, in a somewhat dazed manner, to receive the interviewer, and had named the hour of nine that evening. The last of a summer sunset clung about Cumnor and the low wooded hills; the romantic Yankee was both doubtful of his road and inquisitive about his surroundings; and seeing the door of a genuine feudal old-country inn, The Champion Arms, standing open, he went in to make inquiries.

In the bar parlour he rang the bell, and had to wait some little time for a reply to it. The only other person present was a lean man with close red hair and loose, horsey-looking clothes, who was drinking very bad whisky, but smoking a very good cigar. The whisky, of course, was the choice brand of The Champion Arms; the cigar he had probably brought with him from London. Nothing could be more different than his cynical negligence from the dapper dryness of the young American; but something in his pencil and open notebook, and perhaps in the expression of his alert blue eye, caused Kidd to guess, correctly, that he was a brother journalist.

“Could you do me the favour,” asked Kidd, with the courtesy of his nation, “of directing me to the Grey Cottage, where Mr Boulnois lives, as I understand?”

“It’s a few yards down the road,” said the red-haired man, removing his cigar; “I shall be passing it myself in a minute, but I’m going on to Pendragon Park to try and see the fun.”

“What is Pendragon Park?” asked Calhoun Kidd.

“Sir Claude Champion’s place — haven’t you come down for that, too?” asked the other pressman, looking up. “You’re a journalist, aren’t you?”

“I have come to see Mr Boulnois,” said Kidd.

“I’ve come to see Mrs Boulnois,” replied the other. “But I shan’t catch her at home.” And he laughed rather unpleasantly.

“Are you interested in Catastrophism?” asked the wondering Yankee.

“I’m interested in catastrophes; and there are going to be some,” replied his companion gloomily. “Mine’s a filthy trade, and I never pretend it isn’t.”

With that he spat on the floor; yet somehow in the very act and instant one could realize that the man had been brought up as a gentleman.

The American pressman considered him with more attention. His face was pale and dissipated, with the promise of formidable passions yet to be loosed; but it was a clever and sensitive face; his clothes were coarse and careless, but he had a good seal ring on one of his long, thin fingers. His name, which came out in the course of talk, was James Dalroy; he was the son of a bankrupt Irish landlord, and attached to a pink paper which he heartily despised, called Smart Society, in the capacity of reporter and of something painfully like a spy.

Smart Society, I regret to say, felt none of that interest in Boulnois on Darwin which was such a credit to the head and hearts of the Western Sun. Dalroy had come down, it seemed, to snuff up the scent of a scandal which might very well end in the Divorce Court, but which was at present hovering between Grey Cottage and Pendragon Park.

Sir Claude Champion was known to the readers of the Western Sun as well as Mr Boulnois. So were the Pope and the Derby Winner; but the idea of their intimate acquaintanceship would have struck Kidd as equally incongruous. He had heard of (and written about, nay, falsely pretended to know) Sir Claude Champion, as “one of the brightest and wealthiest of England’s Upper Ten”; as the great sportsman who raced yachts round the world; as the great traveller who wrote books about the Himalayas, as the politician who swept constituencies with a startling sort of Tory Democracy, and as the great dabbler in art, music, literature, and, above all, acting. Sir Claude was really rather magnificent in other than American eyes. There was something of the Renascence Prince about his omnivorous culture and restless publicity — , he was not only a great amateur, but an ardent one. There was in him none of that antiquarian frivolity that we convey by the word “dilettante”.

That faultless falcon profile with purple-black Italian eye, which had been snap-shotted so often both for Smart Society and the Western Sun, gave everyone the impression of a man eaten by ambition as by a fire, or even a disease. But though Kidd knew a great deal about Sir Claude — a great deal more, in fact, than there was to know — it would never have crossed his wildest dreams to connect so showy an aristocrat with the newly-unearthed founder of Catastrophism, or to guess that Sir Claude Champion and John Boulnois could be intimate friends. Such, according to Dalroy’s account, was nevertheless the fact. The two had hunted in couples at school and college, and, though their social destinies had been very different (for Champion was a great landlord and almost a millionaire, while Boulnois was a poor scholar and, until just lately, an unknown one), they still kept in very close touch with each other. Indeed, Boulnois’s cottage stood just outside the gates of Pendragon Park.

But whether the two men could be friends much longer was becoming a dark and ugly question. A year or two before, Boulnois had married a beautiful and not unsuccessful actress, to whom he was devoted in his own shy and ponderous style; and the proximity of the household to Champion’s had given that flighty celebrity opportunities for behaving in a way that could not but cause painful and rather base excitement. Sir Claude had carried the arts of publicity to perfection; and he seemed to take a crazy pleasure in being equally ostentatious in an intrigue that could do him no sort of honour. Footmen from Pendragon were perpetually leaving bouquets for Mrs Boulnois; carriages and motor-cars were perpetually calling at the cottage for Mrs Boulnois; balls and masquerades perpetually filled the grounds in which the baronet paraded Mrs Boulnois, like the Queen of Love and Beauty at a tournament. That very evening, marked by Mr Kidd for the exposition of Catastrophism, had been marked by Sir Claude Champion for an open-air rendering of Romeo and Juliet, in which he was to play Romeo to a Juliet it was needless to name.

"I don't think it can go on without a smash," said the young man with red hair, getting up and shaking himself. "Old Boulnois may be squared — or he may be square. But if he's square he's thick — what you might call cubic. But I don't believe it's possible."

"He is a man of grand intellectual powers," said Calhoun Kidd in a deep voice.

"Yes," answered Dalroy; "but even a man of grand intellectual powers can't be such a blighted fool as all that. Must you be going on? I shall be following myself in a minute or two."

But Calhoun Kidd, having finished a milk and soda, betook himself smartly up the road towards the Grey Cottage, leaving his cynical informant to his whisky and tobacco. The last of the daylight had faded; the skies were of a dark, green-grey, like slate, studded here and there with a star, but lighter on the left side of the sky, with the promise of a rising moon.

The Grey Cottage, which stood entrenched, as it were, in a square of stiff, high thorn-hedges, was so close under the pines and palisades of the Park that Kidd at first mistook it for the Park Lodge. Finding the name on the narrow wooden gate, however, and seeing by his watch that the hour of the "Thinker's" appointment had just struck, he went in and knocked at the front door. Inside the garden hedge, he could see that the house, though unpretentious enough, was larger and more luxurious than it looked at first, and was quite a different kind of place from a porter's lodge. A dog-kennel and a beehive stood outside, like symbols of old English country-life; the moon was rising behind a plantation of prosperous pear trees, the dog that came out of the kennel was reverend-looking and reluctant to bark; and the plain, elderly man-servant who opened the door was brief but dignified.

“Mr Boulnois asked me to offer his apologies, sir,” he said, “but he has been obliged to go out suddenly.”

“But see here, I had an appointment,” said the interviewer, with a rising voice. “Do you know where he went to?”

“To Pendragon Park, sir,” said the servant, rather sombrely, and began to close the door.

Kidd started a little.

“Did he go with Mrs — with the rest of the party?” he asked rather vaguely.

“No, sir,” said the man shortly; “he stayed behind, and then went out alone.” And he shut the door, brutally, but with an air of duty not done.

The American, that curious compound of impudence and sensitiveness, was annoyed. He felt a strong desire to hustle them all along a bit and teach them business habits; the hoary old dog and the grizzled, heavy-faced old butler with his prehistoric shirt-front, and the drowsy old moon, and above all the scatter-brained old philosopher who couldn’t keep an appointment.

“If that’s the way he goes on he deserves to lose his wife’s purest devotion,” said Mr Calhoun Kidd. “But perhaps he’s gone over to make a row. In that case I reckon a man from the Western Sun will be on the spot.”

And turning the corner by the open lodge-gates, he set off, stumping up the long avenue of black pine-woods that pointed in abrupt perspective towards the inner gardens of Pendragon Park. The trees were as black and orderly as plumes upon a hearse; there were still a few stars. He was a man with more literary than direct natural associations; the word “Ravenswood” came into his head repeatedly. It was partly the raven colour of the pine-woods; but partly also an indescribable atmosphere almost described in Scott’s great tragedy; the smell of something that died in the eighteenth century; the smell of dank gardens and broken urns, of wrongs that will never now be righted; of something that is none the less incurably sad because it is strangely unreal.

More than once, as he went up that strange, black road of tragic artifice, he stopped, startled, thinking he heard steps in front of him. He could see nothing in front but the twin sombre walls of pine and the wedge of starlit sky above them. At first he thought he must have fancied it or been mocked by a mere echo of his own tramp. But as he went on he was more and more inclined to conclude, with the remains of his reason, that there really were other feet upon the road. He thought hazily of ghosts; and was surprised how swiftly he could see the image of an appropriate and local ghost, one with a face as white as Pierrot's, but patched with black. The apex of the triangle of dark-blue sky was growing brighter and bluer, but he did not realize as yet that this was because he was coming nearer to the lights of the great house and garden. He only felt that the atmosphere was growing more intense, there was in the sadness more violence and secrecy — more — he hesitated for the word, and then said it with a jerk of laughter — Catastrophism.

More pines, more pathway slid past him, and then he stood rooted as by a blast of magic. It is vain to say that he felt as if he had got into a dream; but this time he felt quite certain that he had got into a book. For we human beings are used to inappropriate things; we are accustomed to the clatter of the incongruous; it is a tune to which we can go to sleep. If one appropriate thing happens, it wakes us up like the pang of a perfect chord. Something happened such as would have happened in such a place in a forgotten tale.

Over the black pine-wood came flying and flashing in the moon a naked sword — such a slender and sparkling rapier as may have fought many an unjust duel in that ancient park. It fell on the pathway far in front of him and lay there glistening like a large needle. He ran like a hare and bent to look at it. Seen at close quarters it had rather a showy look: the big red jewels in the hilt and guard were a little dubious. But there were other red drops upon the blade which were not dubious.

He looked round wildly in the direction from which the dazzling missile had come, and saw that at this point the sable facade of fir and pine was interrupted by a smaller road at right angles; which, when he turned it, brought him in full view of the long, lighted house, with a lake and fountains in front of it. Nevertheless, he did not look at this, having something more interesting to look at.

Above him, at the angle of the steep green bank of the terraced garden, was one of those small picturesque surprises common in the old landscape gardening; a kind of small round hill or dome of grass, like a giant mole-hill, ringed and crowned with three concentric fences of roses, and having a sundial in the highest point in the centre. Kidd could see the finger of the dial stand up dark against the sky like the dorsal fin of a shark and the vain moonlight clinging to that idle clock. But he saw something else clinging to it also, for one wild moment — the figure of a man.

Though he saw it there only for a moment, though it was outlandish and incredible in costume, being clad from neck to heel in tight crimson, with glints of gold, yet he knew in one flash of moonlight who it was. That white face flung up to heaven, clean-shaven and so unnaturally young, like Byron with a Roman nose, those black curls already grizzled — he had seen the thousand public portraits of Sir Claude Champion. The wild red figure reeled an instant against the sundial; the next it had rolled down the steep bank and lay at the American's feet, faintly moving one arm. A gaudy, unnatural gold ornament on the arm suddenly reminded Kidd of Romeo and Juliet; of course the tight crimson suit was part of the play. But there was a long red stain down the bank from which the man had rolled — that was no part of the play. He had been run through the body.

Mr Calhoun Kidd shouted and shouted again. Once more he seemed to hear phantasmal footsteps, and started to find another figure already near him. He knew the figure, and yet it terrified him. The dissipated youth who had called himself Dalroy had a horribly quiet way with him; if Boulnois failed to keep appointments that had been made, Dalroy had a sinister air of keeping appointments that hadn't. The moonlight discoloured everything, against Dalroy's red hair his wan face looked not so much white as pale green.

All this morbid impressionism must be Kidd's excuse for having cried out, brutally and beyond all reason: "Did you do this, you devil?"

James Dalroy smiled his unpleasing smile; but before he could speak, the fallen figure made another movement of the arm, waving vaguely towards the place where the sword fell; then came a moan, and then it managed to speak.

"Boulnois.... Boulnois, I say.... Boulnois did it... jealous of me...he was jealous, he was, he was..."

Kidd bent his head down to hear more, and just managed to catch the words:

"Boulnois...with my own sword...he threw it..."

Again the failing hand waved towards the sword, and then fell rigid with a thud. In Kidd rose from its depth all that acrid humour that is the strange salt of the seriousness of his race.

“See here,” he said sharply and with command, “you must fetch a doctor. This man’s dead.”

“And a priest, too, I suppose,” said Dalroy in an undecipherable manner. “All these Champions are papists.”

The American knelt down by the body, felt the heart, propped up the head and used some last efforts at restoration; but before the other journalist reappeared, followed by a doctor and a priest, he was already prepared to assert they were too late.

“Were you too late also?” asked the doctor, a solid prosperous-looking man, with conventional moustache and whiskers, but a lively eye, which darted over Kidd dubiously.

“In one sense,” drawled the representative of the Sun. “I was too late to save the man, but I guess I was in time to hear something of importance. I heard the dead man denounce his assassin.”

“And who was the assassin?” asked the doctor, drawing his eyebrows together.

“Boulnois,” said Calhoun Kidd, and whistled softly.

The doctor stared at him gloomily with a reddening brow — , but he did not contradict. Then the priest, a shorter figure in the background, said mildly: “I understood that Mr Boulnois was not coming to Pendragon Park this evening.”

“There again,” said the Yankee grimly, “I may be in a position to give the old country a fact or two. Yes, sir, John Boulnois was going to stay in all this evening; he fixed up a real good appointment there with me. But John Boulnois changed his mind; John Boulnois left his home abruptly and all alone, and came over to this darned Park an hour or so ago. His butler told me so. I think we hold what the all-wise police call a clue — have you sent for them?”

“Yes,” said the doctor, “but we haven’t alarmed anyone else yet.”

“Does Mrs Boulnois know?” asked James Dalroy, and again Kidd was conscious of an irrational desire to hit him on his curling mouth.

“I have not told her,” said the doctor gruffly — , “but here come the police.”

The little priest had stepped out into the main avenue, and now returned with the fallen sword, which looked ludicrously large and theatrical when attached to his dumpy figure, at once clerical and commonplace. “Just before the police come,” he said apologetically, “has anyone got a light?”

The Yankee journalist took an electric torch from his pocket, and the priest held it close to the middle part of the blade, which he examined with blinking care. Then, without glancing at the point or pommel, he handed the long weapon to the doctor.

"I fear I'm no use here," he said, with a brief sigh. "I'll say good night to you, gentlemen." And he walked away up the dark avenue towards the house, his hands clasped behind him and his big head bent in cogitation.

The rest of the group made increased haste towards the lodge-gates, where an inspector and two constables could already be seen in consultation with the lodge-keeper. But the little priest only walked slower and slower in the dim cloister of pine, and at last stopped dead, on the steps of the house. It was his silent way of acknowledging an equally silent approach; for there came towards him a presence that might have satisfied even Calhoun Kidd's demands for a lovely and aristocratic ghost. It was a young woman in silvery satins of a Renascence design; she had golden hair in two long shining ropes, and a face so startingly pale between them that she might have been chryselephantine — made, that is, like some old Greek statues, out of ivory and gold. But her eyes were very bright, and her voice, though low, was confident.

"Father Brown?" she said.

"Mrs Boulnois?" he replied gravely. Then he looked at her and immediately said: "I see you know about Sir Claude."

"How do you know I know?" she asked steadily.

He did not answer the question, but asked another: "Have you seen your husband?"

"My husband is at home," she said. "He has nothing to do with this."

Again he did not answer; and the woman drew nearer to him, with a curiously intense expression on her face.

"Shall I tell you something more?" she said, with a rather fearful smile. "I don't think he did it, and you don't either." Father Brown returned her gaze with a long, grave stare, and then nodded, yet more gravely.

"Father Brown," said the lady, "I am going to tell you all I know, but I want you to do me a favour first. Will you tell me why you haven't jumped to the conclusion of poor John's guilt, as all the rest have done? Don't mind what you say: I — I know about the gossip and the appearances that are against me."

Father Brown looked honestly embarrassed, and passed his hand across his forehead. “Two very little things,” he said. “At least, one’s very trivial and the other very vague. But such as they are, they don’t fit in with Mr Boulnois being the murderer.”

He turned his blank, round face up to the stars and continued absentmindedly: “To take the vague idea first. I attach a good deal of importance to vague ideas. All those things that ‘aren’t evidence’ are what convince me. I think a moral impossibility the biggest of all impossibilities. I know your husband only slightly, but I think this crime of his, as generally conceived, something very like a moral impossibility. Please do not think I mean that Boulnois could not be so wicked. Anybody can be wicked — as wicked as he chooses. We can direct our moral wills; but we can’t generally change our instinctive tastes and ways of doing things. Boulnois might commit a murder, but not this murder. He would not snatch Romeo’s sword from its romantic scabbard; or slay his foe on the sundial as on a kind of altar; or leave his body among the roses, or fling the sword away among the pines. If Boulnois killed anyone he’d do it quietly and heavily, as he’d do any other doubtful thing — take a tenth glass of port, or read a loose Greek poet. No, the romantic setting is not like Boulnois. It’s more like Champion.”

“Ah!” she said, and looked at him with eyes like diamonds.

“And the trivial thing was this,” said Brown. “There were finger-prints on that sword; finger-prints can be detected quite a time after they are made if they’re on some polished surface like glass or steel. These were on a polished surface. They were half-way down the blade of the sword. Whose prints they were I have no earthly clue; but why should anybody hold a sword half-way down? It was a long sword, but length is an advantage in lunging at an enemy. At least, at most enemies. At all enemies except one.”

“Except one,” she repeated.

“There is only one enemy,” said Father Brown, “whom it is easier to kill with a dagger than a sword.”

“I know,” said the woman. “Oneself.”

There was a long silence, and then the priest said quietly but abruptly: “Am I right, then? Did Sir Claude kill himself?”

“Yes” she said, with a face like marble. “I saw him do it.”

“He died,” said Father Brown, “for love of you?”

An extraordinary expression flashed across her face, very different from pity, modesty, remorse, or anything her companion had expected: her voice became suddenly strong and full. “I don’t believe,” she said, “he ever cared about me a rap. He hated my husband.”

“Why?” asked the other, and turned his round face from the sky to the lady.

“He hated my husband because...it is so strange I hardly know how to say it...because...”

“Yes?” said Brown patiently.

“Because my husband wouldn’t hate him.”

Father Brown only nodded, and seemed still to be listening; he differed from most detectives in fact and fiction in a small point — he never pretended not to understand when he understood perfectly well.

Mrs Boulnois drew near once more with the same contained glow of certainty. “My husband,” she said, “is a great man. Sir Claude Champion was not a great man: he was a celebrated and successful man. My husband has never been celebrated or successful; and it is the solemn truth that he has never dreamed of being so. He no more expects to be famous for thinking than for smoking cigars. On all that side he has a sort of splendid stupidity. He has never grown up. He still liked Champion exactly as he liked him at school; he admired him as he would admire a conjuring trick done at the dinner-table. But he couldn’t be got to conceive the notion of envying Champion. And Champion wanted to be envied. He went mad and killed himself for that.”

“Yes,” said Father Brown; “I think I begin to understand.”

“Oh, don’t you see?” she cried; “the whole picture is made for that — the place is planned for it. Champion put John in a little house at his very door, like a dependant — to make him feel a failure. He never felt it. He thinks no more about such things than — than an absent-minded lion. Champion would burst in on John’s shabbiest hours or homeliest meals with some dazzling present or announcement or expedition that made it like the visit of Haroun Alraschid, and John would accept or refuse amiably with one eye off, so to speak, like one lazy schoolboy agreeing or disagreeing with another. After five years of it John had not turned a hair; and Sir Claude Champion was a monomaniac.”

“And Haman began to tell them,” said Father Brown, “of all the things wherein the king had honoured him; and he said: ‘All these things profit me nothing while I see Mordecai the Jew sitting in the gate.'"

"The crisis came," Mrs Boulnois continued, "when I persuaded John to let me take down some of his speculations and send them to a magazine. They began to attract attention, especially in America, and one paper wanted to interview him. When Champion (who was interviewed nearly every day) heard of this late little crumb of success falling to his unconscious rival, the last link snapped that held back his devilish hatred. Then he began to lay that insane siege to my own love and honour which has been the talk of the shire. You will ask me why I allowed such atrocious attentions. I answer that I could not have declined them except by explaining to my husband, and there are some things the soul cannot do, as the body cannot fly. Nobody could have explained to my husband. Nobody could do it now. If you said to him in so many words, 'Champion is stealing your wife,' he would think the joke a little vulgar: that it could be anything but a joke — that notion could find no crack in his great skull to get in by. Well, John was to come and see us act this evening, but just as we were starting he said he wouldn't; he had got an interesting book and a cigar. I told this to Sir Claude, and it was his death-blow. The monomaniac suddenly saw despair. He stabbed himself, crying out like a devil that Boulnois was slaying him; he lies there in the garden dead of his own jealousy to produce jealousy, and John is sitting in the dining-room reading a book."

There was another silence, and then the little priest said: "There is only one weak point, Mrs Boulnois, in all your very vivid account. Your husband is not sitting in the dining-room reading a book. That American reporter told me he had been to your house, and your butler told him Mr Boulnois had gone to Pendragon Park after all."

Her bright eyes widened to an almost electric glare; and yet it seemed rather bewilderment than confusion or fear. "Why, what can you mean?" she cried. "All the servants were out of the house, seeing the theatricals. And we don't keep a butler, thank goodness!"

Father Brown started and spun half round like an absurd teetotum. "What, what?" he cried seeming galvanized into sudden life. "Look here — I say — can I make your husband hear if I go to the house?"

"Oh, the servants will be back by now," she said, wondering.

"Right, right!" rejoined the cleric energetically, and set off scuttling up the path towards the Park gates. He turned once to say: "Better get hold of that Yankee, or ‘Crime of John Boulnois’ will be all over the Republic in large letters.”

“You don’t understand,” said Mrs Boulnois. “He wouldn’t mind. I don’t think he imagines that America really is a place.”

When Father Brown reached the house with the beehive and the drowsy dog, a small and neat maid-servant showed him into the dining-room, where Boulnois sat reading by a shaded lamp, exactly as his wife described him. A decanter of port and a wineglass were at his elbow; and the instant the priest entered he noted the long ash stand out unbroken on his cigar.

“He has been here for half an hour at least,” thought Father Brown. In fact, he had the air of sitting where he had sat when his dinner was cleared away.

“Don’t get up, Mr Boulnois,” said the priest in his pleasant, prosaic way. “I shan’t interrupt you a moment. I fear I break in on some of your scientific studies.”

“No,” said Boulnois; “I was reading ‘The Bloody Thumb.’” He said it with neither frown nor smile, and his visitor was conscious of a certain deep and virile indifference in the man which his wife had called greatness. He laid down a gory yellow “shocker” without even feeling its incongruity enough to comment on it humorously. John Boulnois was a big, slow-moving man with a massive head, partly grey and partly bald, and blunt, burly features. He was in shabby and very old-fashioned evening-dress, with a narrow triangular opening of shirt-front: he had assumed it that evening in his original purpose of going to see his wife act Juliet.

“I won’t keep you long from ‘The Bloody Thumb’ or any other catastrophic affairs,” said Father Brown, smiling. “I only came to ask you about the crime you committed this evening.”

Boulnois looked at him steadily, but a red bar began to show across his broad brow; and he seemed like one discovering embarrassment for the first time.

“I know it was a strange crime,” assented Brown in a low voice. “Stranger than murder perhaps — to you. The little sins are sometimes harder to confess than the big ones — but that’s why it’s so important to confess them. Your crime is committed by every fashionable hostess six times a week: and yet you find it sticks to your tongue like a nameless atrocity.”

“It makes one feel,” said the philosopher slowly, “such a damned fool.”

“I know,” assented the other, “but one often has to choose between feeling a damned fool and being one.”

“I can’t analyse myself well,” went on Boulnois; “but sitting in that chair with that story I was as happy as a schoolboy on a half-holiday. It was security, eternity — I can’t convey it... the cigars were within reach...the matches were within reach... the Thumb had four more appearances to...it was not only a peace, but a plenitude. Then that bell rang, and I thought for one long, mortal minute that I couldn’t get out of that chair — literally, physically, muscularly couldn’t. Then I did it like a man lifting the world, because I knew all the servants were out. I opened the front door, and there was a little man with his mouth open to speak and his notebook open to write in. I remembered the Yankee interviewer I had forgotten. His hair was parted in the middle, and I tell you that murder—”

“I understand,” said Father Brown. “I’ve seen him.”

“I didn’t commit murder,” continued the Catastrophist mildly, “but only perjury. I said I had gone across to Pendragon Park and shut the door in his face. That is my crime, Father Brown, and I don’t know what penance you would inflict for it.”

“I shan’t inflict any penance,” said the clerical gentleman, collecting his heavy hat and umbrella with an air of some amusement; “quite the contrary. I came here specially to let you off the little penance which would otherwise have followed your little offence.”

“And what,” asked Boulnois, smiling, “is the little penance I have so luckily been let off?”

“Being hanged,” said Father Brown.

The Fairy Tale of Father Brown

THE picturesque city and state of Heiligwaldenstein was one of those toy kingdoms of which certain parts of the German Empire still consist. It had come under the Prussian hegemony quite late in history — hardly fifty years before the fine summer day when Flambeau and Father Brown found themselves sitting in its gardens and drinking its beer. There had been not a little of war and wild justice there within living memory, as soon will be shown. But in merely looking at it one could not dismiss that impression of childishness which is the most charming side of Germany — those little pantomime, paternal monarchies in which a king seems as domestic as a cook. The German soldiers by the innumerable sentry-boxes looked strangely like German toys, and the clean-cut battlements of the castle, gilded by the sunshine, looked the more like the gilt gingerbread. For it was brilliant weather. The sky was as Prussian a blue as Potsdam itself could require, but it was yet more like that lavish and glowing use of the colour which a child extracts from a shilling paint-box. Even the grey-ribbed trees looked young, for the pointed buds on them were still pink, and in a pattern against the strong blue looked like innumerable childish figures.

Despite his prosaic appearance and generally practical walk of life, Father Brown was not without a certain streak of romance in his composition, though he generally kept his daydreams to himself, as many children do. Amid the brisk, bright colours of such a day, and in the heraldic framework of such a town, he did feel rather as if he had entered a fairy tale. He took a childish pleasure, as a younger brother might, in the formidable sword-stick which Flambeau always flung as he walked, and which now stood upright beside his tall mug of Munich. Nay, in his sleepy irresponsibility, he even found himself eyeing the knobbed and clumsy head of his own shabby umbrella, with some faint memories of the ogre’s club in a coloured toy-book. But he never composed anything in the form of fiction, unless it be the tale that follows:

“I wonder,” he said, “whether one would have real adventures in a place like this, if one put oneself in the way? It’s a splendid back-scene for them, but I always have a kind of feeling that they would fight you with pasteboard sabres more than real, horrible swords.”

“You are mistaken,” said his friend. “In this place they not only fight with swords, but kill without swords. And there’s worse than that.”

“Why, what do you mean?” asked Father Brown.

“Why,” replied the other, “I should say this was the only place in Europe where a man was ever shot without firearms.”

“Do you mean a bow and arrow?” asked Brown in some wonder.

“I mean a bullet in the brain,” replied Flambeau. “Don’t you know the story of the late Prince of this place? It was one of the great police mysteries about twenty years ago. You remember, of course, that this place was forcibly annexed at the time of Bismarck’s very earliest schemes of consolidation — forcibly, that is, but not at all easily. The empire (or what wanted to be one) sent Prince Otto of Grossenmark to rule the place in the Imperial interests. We saw his portrait in the gallery there — a handsome old gentleman if he’d had any hair or eyebrows, and hadn’t been wrinkled all over like a vulture; but he had things to harass him, as I’ll explain in a minute. He was a soldier of distinguished skill and success, but he didn’t have altogether an easy job with this little place. He was defeated in several battles by the celebrated Arnhold brothers — the three guerrilla patriots to whom Swinburne wrote a poem, you remember:

Wolves with the hair of the ermine,
  Crows that are crowned and kings —
These things be many as vermin,
  Yet Three shall abide these things.

Or something of that kind. Indeed, it is by no means certain that the occupation would ever have been successful had not one of the three brothers, Paul, despicably, but very decisively declined to abide these things any longer, and, by surrendering all the secrets of the insurrection, ensured its overthrow and his own ultimate promotion to the post of chamberlain to Prince Otto. After this, Ludwig, the one genuine hero among Mr Swinburne’s heroes, was killed, sword in hand, in the capture of the city; and the third, Heinrich, who, though not a traitor, had always been tame and even timid compared with his active brothers, retired into something like a hermitage, became converted to a Christian quietism which was almost Quakerish, and never mixed with men except to give nearly all he had to the poor. They tell me that not long ago he could still be seen about the neighbourhood occasionally, a man in a black cloak, nearly blind, with very wild, white hair, but a face of astonishing softness."

"I know," said Father Brown. "I saw him once."

His friend looked at him in some surprise. "I didn't know you'd been here before," he said. "Perhaps you know as much about it as I do. Anyhow, that's the story of the Arnholds, and he was the last survivor of them. Yes, and of all the men who played parts in that drama."

"You mean that the Prince, too, died long before?"

"Died," repeated Flambeau, "and that's about as much as we can say. You must understand that towards the end of his life he began to have those tricks of the nerves not uncommon with tyrants. He multiplied the ordinary daily and nightly guard round his castle till there seemed to be more sentry-boxes than houses in the town, and doubtful characters were shot without mercy. He lived almost entirely in a little room that was in the very centre of the enormous labyrinth of all the other rooms, and even in this he erected another sort of central cabin or cupboard, lined with steel, like a safe or a battleship. Some say that under the floor of this again was a secret hole in the earth, no more than large enough to hold him, so that, in his anxiety to avoid the grave, he was willing to go into a place pretty much like it. But he went further yet. The populace had been supposed to be disarmed ever since the suppression of the revolt, but Otto now insisted, as governments very seldom insist, on an absolute and literal disarmament. It was carried out, with extraordinary thoroughness and severity, by very well-organized officials over a small and familiar area, and, so far as human strength and science can be absolutely certain of anything, Prince Otto was absolutely certain that nobody could introduce so much as a toy pistol into Heiligwaldenstein."

"Human science can never be quite certain of things like that," said Father Brown, still looking at the red budding of the branches over his head, "if only because of the difficulty about definition and connotation. What is a weapon? People have been murdered with the mildest domestic comforts; certainly with tea-kettles, probably with tea-cosies. On the other hand, if you showed an Ancient Briton a revolver, I doubt if he would know it was a weapon — until it was fired into him, of course. Perhaps somebody introduced a firearm so new that it didn't even look like a firearm. Perhaps it looked like a thimble or something. Was the bullet at all peculiar?"

“Not that I ever heard of,” answered Flambeau; “but my information is fragmentary, and only comes from my old friend Grimm. He was a very able detective in the German service, and he tried to arrest me; I arrested him instead, and we had many interesting chats. He was in charge here of the inquiry about Prince Otto, but I forgot to ask him anything about the bullet. According to Grimm, what happened was this.” He paused a moment to drain the greater part of his dark lager at a draught, and then resumed:

“On the evening in question, it seems, the Prince was expected to appear in one of the outer rooms, because he had to receive certain visitors whom he really wished to meet. They were geological experts sent to investigate the old question of the alleged supply of gold from the rocks round here, upon which (as it was said) the small city-state had so long maintained its credit and been able to negotiate with its neighbours even under the ceaseless bombardment of bigger armies. Hitherto it had never been found by the most exacting inquiry which could—”

“Which could be quite certain of discovering a toy pistol,” said Father Brown with a smile. “But what about the brother who ratted? Hadn’t he anything to tell the Prince?”

“He always asseverated that he did not know,” replied Flambeau; “that this was the one secret his brothers had not told him. It is only right to say that it received some support from fragmentary words — spoken by the great Ludwig in the hour of death, when he looked at Heinrich but pointed at Paul, and said, ‘You have not told him...’ and was soon afterwards incapable of speech. Anyhow, the deputation of distinguished geologists and mineralogists from Paris and Berlin were there in the most magnificent and appropriate dress, for there are no men who like wearing their decorations so much as the men of science — as anybody knows who has ever been to a soiree of the Royal Society. It was a brilliant gathering, but very late, and gradually the Chamberlain — you saw his portrait, too: a man with black eyebrows, serious eyes, and a meaningless sort of smile underneath — the Chamberlain, I say, discovered there was everything there except the Prince himself. He searched all the outer salons; then, remembering the man’s mad fits of fear, hurried to the inmost chamber. That also was empty, but the steel turret or cabin erected in the middle of it took some time to open. When it did open it was empty, too. He went and looked into the hole in the ground, which seemed deeper and somehow all the more like a grave — that is his account, of course. And even as he did so he heard a burst of cries and tumult in the long rooms and corridors without.

"First it was a distant din and thrill of something unthinkable on the horizon of the crowd, even beyond the castle. Next it was a wordless clamour startlingly close, and loud enough to be distinct if each word had not killed the other. Next came words of a terrible clearness, coming nearer, and next one man, rushing into the room and telling the news as briefly as such news is told.

"Otto, Prince of Heiligwaldenstein and Grossenmark, was lying in the dews of the darkening twilight in the woods beyond the castle, with his arms flung out and his face flung up to the moon. The blood still pulsed from his shattered temple and jaw, but it was the only part of him that moved like a living thing. He was clad in his full white and yellow uniform, as to receive his guests within, except that the sash or scarf had been unbound and lay rather crumpled by his side. Before he could be lifted he was dead. But, dead or alive, he was a riddle — he who had always hidden in the inmost chamber out there in the wet woods, unarmed and alone."

"Who found his body?" asked Father Brown.

"Some girl attached to the Court named Hedwig von something or other," replied his friend, "who had been out in the wood picking wild flowers."

"Had she picked any?" asked the priest, staring rather vacantly at the veil of the branches above him.

"Yes," replied Flambeau. "I particularly remember that the Chamberlain, or old Grimm or somebody, said how horrible it was, when they came up at her call, to see a girl holding spring flowers and bending over that — that bloody collapse. However, the main point is that before help arrived he was dead, and the news, of course, had to be carried back to the castle. The consternation it created was something beyond even that natural in a Court at the fall of a potentate. The foreign visitors, especially the mining experts, were in the wildest doubt and excitement, as well as many important Prussian officials, and it soon began to be clear that the scheme for finding the treasure bulked much bigger in the business than people had supposed. Experts and officials had been promised great prizes or international advantages, and some even said that the Prince's secret apartments and strong military protection were due less to fear of the populace than to the pursuit of some private investigation of—"

“Had the flowers got long stalks?” asked Father Brown.

Flambeau stared at him. “What an odd person you are!” he said. “That’s exactly what old Grimm said. He said the ugliest part of it, he thought — uglier than the blood and bullet — was that the flowers were quite short, plucked close under the head.”

“Of course,” said the priest, “when a grown up girl is really picking flowers, she picks them with plenty of stalk. If she just pulled their heads off, as a child does, it looks as if—” And he hesitated.

“Well?” inquired the other.

“Well, it looks rather as if she had snatched them nervously, to make an excuse for being there after — well, after she was there.”

“I know what you’re driving at,” said Flambeau rather gloomily. “But that and every other suspicion breaks down on the one point — the want of a weapon. He could have been killed, as you say, with lots of other things — even with his own military sash; but we have to explain not how he was killed, but how he was shot. And the fact is we can’t. They had the girl most ruthlessly searched; for, to tell the truth, she was a little suspect, though the niece and ward of the wicked old Chamberlain, Paul Arnhold. But she was very romantic, and was suspected of sympathy with the old revolutionary enthusiasm in her family. All the same, however romantic you are, you can’t imagine a big bullet into a man’s jaw or brain without using a gun or pistol. And there was no pistol, though there were two pistol shots. I leave it to you, my friend.”

“How do you know there were two shots?” asked the little priest.

“There was only one in his head,” said his companion, “but there was another bullet-hole in the sash.”

Father Brown’s smooth brow became suddenly constricted. “Was the other bullet found?” he demanded.

Flambeau started a little. “I don’t think I remember,” he said.

“Hold on! Hold on! Hold on!” cried Brown, frowning more and more, with a quite unusual concentration of curiosity. “Don’t think me rude. Let me think this out for a moment.”

“All right,” said Flambeau, laughing, and finished his beer. A slight breeze stirred the budding trees and blew up into the sky cloudlets of white and pink that seemed to make the sky bluer and the whole coloured scene more quaint. They might have been cherubs flying home to the casements of a sort of celestial nursery. The oldest tower of the castle, the Dragon

Tower, stood up as grotesque as the ale-mug, but as homely. Only beyond the tower glimmered the wood in which the man had lain dead.

“What became of this Hedwig eventually?” asked the priest at last.

“She is married to General Schwartz,” said Flambeau. “No doubt you’ve heard of his career, which was rather romantic. He had distinguished himself even, before his exploits at Sadowa and Gravelotte; in fact, he rose from the ranks, which is very unusual even in the smallest of the German...”

Father Brown sat up suddenly.

“Rose from the ranks!” he cried, and made a mouth as if to whistle. “Well, well, what a queer story! What a queer way of killing a man; but I suppose it was the only one possible. But to think of hate so patient—”

“What do you mean?” demanded the other. “In what way did they kill the man?”

“They killed him with the sash,” said Brown carefully; and then, as Flambeau protested: “Yes, yes, I know about the bullet. Perhaps I ought to say he died of having a sash. I know it doesn’t sound like having a disease.”

“I suppose,” said Flambeau, “that you’ve got some notion in your head, but it won’t easily get the bullet out of his. As I explained before, he might easily have been strangled. But he was shot. By whom? By what?”

“He was shot by his own orders,” said the priest.

“You mean he committed suicide?”

“I didn’t say by his own wish,” replied Father Brown. “I said by his own orders.”

“Well, anyhow, what is your theory?”

Father Brown laughed. “I am only on my holiday,” he said. “I haven’t got any theories. Only this place reminds me of fairy stories, and, if you like, I’ll tell you a story.”

The little pink clouds, that looked rather like sweet-stuff, had floated up to crown the turrets of the gilt gingerbread castle, and the pink baby fingers of the budding trees seemed spreading and stretching to reach them; the blue sky began to take a bright violet of evening, when Father Brown suddenly spoke again:

“It was on a dismal night, with rain still dropping from the trees and dew already clustering, that Prince Otto of Grossenmark stepped hurriedly out of a side door of the castle and walked swiftly into the wood. One of the innumerable sentries saluted him, but he did not notice it. He had no wish to be specially noticed himself. He was glad when the great trees, grey and already greasy with rain, swallowed him up like a swamp. He had deliberately chosen the least frequented side of his palace, but even that was more frequented than he liked. But there was no particular chance of officious or diplomatic pursuit, for his exit had been a sudden impulse. All the full-dressed diplomatists he left behind were unimportant. He had realized suddenly that he could do without them.

"His great passion was not the much nobler dread of death, but the strange desire of gold. For this legend of the gold he had left Grossenmark and invaded Heiligwaldenstein. For this and only this he had bought the traitor and butchered the hero, for this he had long questioned and cross-questioned the false Chamberlain, until he had come to the conclusion that, touching his ignorance, the renegade really told the truth. For this he had, somewhat reluctantly, paid and promised money on the chance of gaining the larger amount; and for this he had stolen out of his palace like a thief in the rain, for he had thought of another way to get the desire of his eyes, and to get it cheap.

"Away at the upper end of a rambling mountain path to which he was making his way, among the pillared rocks along the ridge that hangs above the town, stood the hermitage, hardly more than a cavern fenced with thorn, in which the third of the great brethren had long hidden himself from the world. He, thought Prince Otto, could have no real reason for refusing to give up the gold. He had known its place for years, and made no effort to find it, even before his new ascetic creed had cut him off from property or pleasures. True, he had been an enemy, but he now professed a duty of having no enemies. Some concession to his cause, some appeal to his principles, would probably get the mere money secret out of him. Otto was no coward, in spite of his network of military precautions, and, in any case, his avarice was stronger than his fears. Nor was there much cause for fear. Since he was certain there were no private arms in the whole principality, he was a hundred times more certain there were none in the Quaker's little hermitage on the hill, where he lived on herbs, with two old rustic servants, and with no other voice of man for year after year. Prince Otto looked down with something of a grim smile at the bright, square labyrinths of the lamp-lit city below him. For as far as the eye could see there ran the rifles of his friends, and not one pinch of powder for his enemies. Rifles ranked so close even to that mountain path that a cry from him would bring the soldiers rushing up the hill, to say nothing of the fact that the wood and ridge were patrolled at regular intervals; rifles so far away, in the dim woods, dwarfed by distance, beyond the river, that an enemy could not slink into the town by any detour. And round the palace rifles at the west door and the east door, at the north door and the south, and all along the four facades linking them. He was safe.

“It was all the more clear when he had crested the ridge and found how naked was the nest of his old enemy. He found himself on a small platform of rock, broken abruptly by the three corners of precipice. Behind was the black cave, masked with green thorn, so low that it was hard to believe that a man could enter it. In front was the fall of the cliffs and the vast but cloudy vision of the valley. On the small rock platform stood an old bronze lectern or reading-stand, groaning under a great German Bible. The bronze or copper of it had grown green with the eating airs of that exalted place, and Otto had instantly the thought, ‘Even if they had arms, they must be rusted by now.’ Moonrise had already made a deathly dawn behind the crests and crags, and the rain had ceased.

“Behind the lectern, and looking across the valley, stood a very old man in a black robe that fell as straight as the cliffs around him, but whose white hair and weak voice seemed alike to waver in the wind. He was evidently reading some daily lesson as part of his religious exercises. ‘They trust in their horses...’

“‘Sir,’ said the Prince of Heiligwaldenstein, with quite unusual courtesy, ‘I should like only one word with you.’

“‘...and in their chariots,’ went on the old man weakly, ‘but we will trust in the name of the Lord of Hosts....’ His last words were inaudible, but he closed the book reverently and, being nearly blind, made a groping movement and gripped the reading-stand. Instantly his two servants slipped out of the low-browed cavern and supported him. They wore dull-black gowns like his own, but they had not the frosty silver on the hair, nor the frost-bitten refinement of the features. They were peasants, Croat or Magyar, with broad, blunt visages and blinking eyes. For the first time something troubled the Prince, but his courage and diplomatic sense stood firm.

“‘I fear we have not met,’ he said, ‘since that awful cannonade in which your poor brother died.’

“‘All my brothers died,’ said the old man, still looking across the valley. Then, for one instant turning on Otto his drooping, delicate features, and the wintry hair that seemed to drip over his eyebrows like icicles, he added: ‘You see, I am dead, too.’

“‘I hope you’ll understand,’ said the Prince, controlling himself almost to a point of conciliation, ‘that I do not come here to haunt you, as a mere ghost of those great quarrels. We will not talk about who was right or wrong in that, but at least there was one point on which we were never wrong, because you were always right. Whatever is to be said of the policy of your family, no one for one moment imagines that you were moved by the mere gold; you have proved yourself above the suspicion that...’

“The old man in the black gown had hitherto continued to gaze at him with watery blue eyes and a sort of weak wisdom in his face. But when the word ‘gold’ was said he held out his hand as if in arrest of something, and turned away his face to the mountains.

“‘He has spoken of gold,’ he said. ‘He has spoken of things not lawful. Let him cease to speak.’

“Otto had the vice of his Prussian type and tradition, which is to regard success not as an incident but as a quality. He conceived himself and his like as perpetually conquering peoples who were perpetually being conquered. Consequently, he was ill acquainted with the emotion of surprise, and ill prepared for the next movement, which startled and stiffened him. He had opened his mouth to answer the hermit, when the mouth was stopped and the voice strangled by a strong, soft gag suddenly twisted round his head like a tourniquet. It was fully forty seconds before he even realized that the two Hungarian servants had done it, and that they had done it with his own military scarf.

“The old man went again weakly to his great brazen-supported Bible, turned over the leaves, with a patience that had something horrible about it, till he came to the Epistle of St James, and then began to read: ‘The tongue is a little member, but—’

“Something in the very voice made the Prince turn suddenly and plunge down the mountain-path he had climbed. He was half-way towards the gardens of the palace before he even tried to tear the strangling scarf from his neck and jaws. He tried again and again, and it was impossible; the men who had knotted that gag knew the difference between what a man can do with his hands in front of him and what he can do with his hands behind his head. His legs were free to leap like an antelope on the mountains, his arms were free to use any gesture or wave any signal, but he could not speak. A dumb devil was in him.

“He had come close to the woods that walled in the castle before he had quite realized what his wordless state meant and was meant to mean. Once more he looked down grimly at the bright, square labyrinths of the lamp-lit city below him, and he smiled no more. He felt himself repeating the phrases of his former mood with a murderous irony. Far as the eye could see ran the rifles of his friends, every one of whom would shoot him dead if he could not answer the challenge. Rifles were so near that the wood and ridge could be patrolled at regular intervals; therefore it was useless to hide in the wood till morning. Rifles were ranked so far away that an enemy could not slink into the town by any detour; therefore it was vain to return to the city by any remote course. A cry from him would bring his soldiers rushing up the hill. But from him no cry would come.

“The moon had risen in strengthening silver, and the sky showed in stripes of bright, nocturnal blue between the black stripes of the pines about the castle. Flowers of some wide and feathery sort — for he had never noticed such things before — were at once luminous and discoloured by the moonshine, and seemed indescribably fantastic as they clustered, as if crawling about the roots of the trees. Perhaps his reason had been suddenly unseated by the unnatural captivity he carried with him, but in that wood he felt something unfathomably German — the fairy tale. He knew with half his mind that he was drawing near to the castle of an ogre — he had forgotten that he was the ogre. He remembered asking his mother if bears lived in the old park at home. He stooped to pick a flower, as if it were a charm against enchantment. The stalk was stronger than he expected, and broke with a slight snap. Carefully trying to place it in his scarf, he heard the halloo, ‘Who goes there?’ Then he remembered the scarf was not in its usual place.

“He tried to scream and was silent. The second challenge came; and then a shot that shrieked as it came and then was stilled suddenly by impact. Otto of Grossenmark lay very peacefully among the fairy trees, and would do no more harm either with gold or steel; only the silver pencil of the moon would pick out and trace here and there the intricate ornament of his uniform, or the old wrinkles on his brow. May God have mercy on his soul.

“The sentry who had fired, according to the strict orders of the garrison, naturally ran forward to find some trace of his quarry. He was a private named Schwartz, since not unknown in his profession, and what he found was a bald man in uniform, but with his face so bandaged by a kind of mask made of his own military scarf that nothing but open, dead eyes could be seen, glittering stonily in the moonlight. The bullet had gone through the gag into the jaw; that is why there was a shot-hole in the scarf, but only one shot. Naturally, if not correctly, young Schwartz tore off the mysterious silken mask and cast it on the grass; and then he saw whom he had slain.

"We cannot be certain of the next phase. But I incline to believe that there was a fairy tale, after all, in that little wood, horrible as was its occasion. Whether the young lady named Hedwig had any previous knowledge of the soldier she saved and eventually married, or whether she came accidentally upon the accident and their intimacy began that night, we shall probably never know. But we can know, I fancy, that this Hedwig was a heroine, and deserved to marry a man who became something of a hero. She did the bold and the wise thing. She persuaded the sentry to go back to his post, in which place there was nothing to connect him with the disaster; he was but one of the most loyal and orderly of fifty such sentries within call. She remained by the body and gave the alarm; and there was nothing to connect her with the disaster either, since she had not got, and could not have, any firearms.

"Well," said Father Brown rising cheerfully "I hope they're happy."

"Where are you going?" asked his friend.

"I'm going to have another look at that portrait of the Chamberlain, the Arnhold who betrayed his brethren," answered the priest. "I wonder what part — I wonder if a man is less a traitor when he is twice a traitor?"

And he ruminated long before the portrait of a white-haired man with black eyebrows and a pink, painted sort of smile that seemed to contradict the black warning in his eyes.

THE INCREDULITY OF FATHER BROWN

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The Resurrection of Father Brown

THERE was a brief period during which Father Brown enjoyed, or rather did not enjoy, something like fame. He was a nine days' wonder in the newspapers; he was even a common topic of controversy in the weekly reviews; his exploits were narrated eagerly and inaccurately in any number of clubs and drawing-rooms, especially in America. Incongruous and indeed incredible as it may seem to any one who knew him, his adventures as a detective were even made the subject of short stories appearing in magazines.

Strangely enough, this wandering limelight struck him in the most obscure, or at least the most remote, of his many places of residence. He had been sent out to officiate, as something between a missionary and a parish priest, in one of those sections of the northern coast of South America, where strips of country still cling insecurely to European powers, or are continually threatening to become independent republics, under the gigantic shadow of President Monroe. The population was red and brown with pink spots; that is, it was Spanish-American, and largely Spanish-American-Indian, but there was a considerable and increasing infiltration of Americans of the northern sort — Englishmen, Germans, and the rest. And the trouble seems to have begun when one of these visitors, very recently landed and very much annoyed at having lost one of his bags, approached the first building of which he came in sight — which happened to be the mission-house and chapel attached to it, in front of which ran a long veranda and a long row of stakes, up which were trained the black twisted vines, their square leaves red with autumn. Behind them, also in a row, a number of human beings sat almost as rigid as the stakes, and coloured in some fashion like the vines. For while their broad-brimmed hats were as black as their unblinking eyes, the complexions of many of them might have been made out of the dark red timber of those transatlantic forests. Many of them were smoking very long, thin black cigars; and in all that group the smoke was almost the only moving thing. The visitor would probably have described them as natives, though some of them were very proud of Spanish blood. But he was not one to draw any fine distinction between Spaniards and Red Indians, being rather disposed to dismiss people from the scene when once he had convicted them of being native to it.

He was a newspaper man from Kansas City, a lean, light-haired man with what Meredith called an adventurous nose; one could almost fancy it found its way by feeling its way and moved like the proboscis of an ant-eater. His name was Snaith, and his parents, after some obscure meditation, had called him Saul, a fact which he had the good feeling to conceal as far as possible. Indeed, he had ultimately compromised by calling himself Paul, though by no means for the same reason that had affected the Apostle of the Gentiles. On the contrary, so far as he had any views on such things, the name of the persecutor would have been more appropriate; for he regarded organized religion with the conventional contempt which can be learnt more easily from Ingersoll than from Voltaire. And this was, as it happened, the not very important side of his character which he turned towards the mission-station and the groups in front of the veranda. Something in their shameless repose and indifference inflamed his own fury of efficiency; and, as he could get no particular answer to his first questions, he began to do all the talking himself.

Standing out there in the strong sunshine, a spick-and-span figure in his Panama hat and neat clothes, his grip-sack held in a steely grip, he began to shout at the people in the shadow. He began to explain to them very loudly why they were lazy and filthy, and bestially ignorant and lower than the beasts that perish, in case this problem should have previously exercised their minds. In his opinion it was the deleterious influence of priests that had made them so miserably poor and so hopelessly oppressed that they were able to sit in the shade and smoke and do nothing.

‘And a mighty soft crowd you must be at that,’ he said, ‘to be bullied by these stuck-up josses because they walk about in their mitres and their tiaras and their gold copes and other glad rags, looking down on everybody else like dirt — being bamboozled by crowns and canopies and sacred umbrellas like a kid at a pantomime; just because a pompous old High Priest of Mumbo-Jumbo looks as if he was the lord of the earth. What about you? What do you look like, you poor simps? I tell you, that’s why you’re way-back in barbarism and can’t read or write and—’

At this point the High Priest of Mumbo-Jumbo came in an undignified hurry out of the door of the mission-house, not looking very like a lord of the earth, but rather like a bundle of black second-hand clothes buttoned round a short bolster in the semblance of a guy. He was not wearing his tiara, supposing him to possess one, but a shabby broad hat not very dissimilar from those of the Spanish Indians, and it was thrust to the back of his head with a gesture of botheration. He seemed just about to speak to the motionless natives when he caught sight of the stranger and said quickly:

‘Oh, can I be of any assistance? Would you like to come inside?’

Mr Paul Snaith came inside; and it was the beginning of a considerable increase of that journalist’s information on many things. Presumably his journalistic instinct was stronger than his prejudices, as, indeed, it often is in clever journalists; and he asked a good many questions, the answers to which interested and surprised him. He discovered that the Indians could read and write, for the simple reason that the priest had taught them; but that they did not read or write any more than they could help, from a natural preference for more direct communications. He learned that these strange people, who sat about in heaps on the veranda without stirring a hair, could work quite hard on their own patches of land; especially those of them who were more than half Spanish; and he learned with still more astonishment that they all had patches of land that were really their own. That much was part of a stubborn tradition that seemed quite native to natives. But in that also the priest had played a certain part, and by doing so had taken perhaps what was his first and last part in politics, if it was only local politics.

There had recently swept through that region one of those fevers of atheist and almost anarchist Radicalism which break out periodically in countries of the Latin culture, generally beginning in a secret society and generally ending in a civil war and in very little else. The local leader of the iconoclastic party was a certain Alvarez, a rather picturesque adventurer of Portuguese nationality but, as his enemies said, of partly Negro origin, the head of any number of lodges and temples of initiation of the sort that in such places clothe even atheism with something mystical. The leader on the more conservative side was a much more commonplace person, a very wealthy man named Mendoza, the owner of many factories and quite respectable, but not very exciting. It was the general opinion that the cause of law and order would have been entirely lost if it had not adopted a more popular policy of its own, in the form of securing land for the peasants; and this movement had mainly originated from the little mission-station of Father Brown.

While he was talking to the journalist, Mendoza, the Conservative leader, came in. He was a stout, dark man, with a bald head like a pear and a round body also like a pear; he was smoking a very fragrant cigar, but he threw it away, perhaps a little theatrically, when he came into the presence of the priest, as if he had been entering church; and bowed with a curve that in so corpulent a gentleman seemed quite improbable. He was always exceedingly serious in his social gestures, especially towards religious institutions. He was one of those laymen who are much more ecclesiastical than ecclesiastics. It embarrassed Father Brown a good deal, especially when carried thus into private life.

‘I think I am an anti-clerical,’ Father Brown would say with a faint smile; ‘but there wouldn’t be half so much clericalism if they would only leave things to the clerics.’

‘Why Mr Mendoza,’ exclaimed the journalist with a new animation, ‘I think we have met before. Weren’t you at the Trade Congress in Mexico last year?’

The heavy eyelids of Mr Mendoza showed a flutter of recognition, and he smiled in his slow way. ‘I remember.’

‘Pretty big business done there in an hour or two,’ said Snaith with relish. ‘Made a good deal of difference to you, too, I guess.’

‘I have been very fortunate,’ said Mendoza modestly.

‘Don’t you believe it!’ cried the enthusiastic Snaith. ‘Good fortune comes to the people who know when to catch hold; and you caught hold good and sure. But I hope I’m not interrupting your business?’

‘Not at all,’ said the other. ‘I often have the honour of calling on the padre for a little talk. Merely for a little talk.’

It seemed as if this familiarity between Father Brown and a successful and even famous man of business completed the reconciliation between the priest and the practical Mr Snaith. He felt, it might be supposed, a new respectability clothe the station and the mission, and was ready to overlook such occasional reminders of the existence of religion as a chapel and a presbytery can seldom wholly avoid. He became quite enthusiastic about the priest’s programme — at least on its secular and social side — and announced himself ready at any moment to act in the capacity of a live wire for its communication to the world at large. And it was at this point that Father Brown began to find the journalist rather more troublesome in his sympathy than in his hostility.

Mr Paul Snaith set out vigorously to feature Father Brown. He sent long and loud eulogies on him across the continent to his newspaper in the Middle West. He took snapshots of the unfortunate cleric in the most commonplace occupations, and exhibited them in gigantic photographs in the gigantic Sunday papers of the United States. He turned his sayings into slogans, and was continually presenting the world with ‘A message’ from the reverend gentleman in South America. Any stock less strong and strenuously receptive than the American race would have become very much bored with Father Brown. As it was, he received handsome and eager offers to go on a lecturing tour in the States; and when he declined, the terms were raised with expressions of respectful wonder. A series of stories about him, like the stories of Sherlock Holmes, were, by the instrumentality of Mr Snaith, planned out and put before the hero with requests for his assistance and encouragement. As the priest found they had started, he could offer no suggestion except that they should stop. And this in turn was taken by Mr Snaith as the text for a discussion on whether Father Brown should disappear temporarily over a cliff, in the manner of Dr Watson’s hero. To all these demands the priest had patiently to reply in writing, saying that he would consent on such terms to the temporary cessation of the stories and begging that a considerable interval might occur before they began again. The notes he wrote grew shorter and shorter; and as he wrote the last of them, he sighed.

Needless to say, this strange boom in the North reacted on the little outpost in the South where he had expected to live in so lonely an exile. The considerable English and American population already on the spot began to be proud of possessing so widely advertised a person. American tourists, of the sort who land with a loud demand for Westminster Abbey, landed on that distant coast with a loud demand for Father Brown. They were within measurable distance of running excursion trains named after him, and bringing crowds to see him as if he were a public monument. He was especially troubled by the active and ambitious new traders and shopkeepers of the place, who were perpetually pestering him to try their wares and to give them testimonials. Even if the testimonials were not forthcoming, they would prolong the correspondence for the purpose of collecting autographs. As he was a good-natured person they got a good deal of what they wanted out of him; and it was in answer to a particular request from a Frankfort wine-merchant named Eckstein that he wrote hastily a few words on a card, which were to prove a terrible turning-point in his life.

Eckstein was a fussy little man with fuzzy hair and pince-nez, who was wildly anxious that the priest should not only try some of his celebrated medicinal port, but should let him know where and when he would drink it, in acknowledging its receipt. The priest was not particularly surprised at the request, for he was long past surprise at the lunacies of advertisement. So he scribbled something down and turned to other business which seemed a little more sensible. He was again interrupted, by a note from no less a person than his political enemy Alvarez, asking him to come to a conference at which it was hoped that a compromise on an outstanding question might be reached; and suggesting an appointment that evening at a cafe just outside the walls of the little town. To this also he sent a message of acceptance by the rather florid and military messenger who was waiting for it; and then, having an hour or two before him, sat down to attempt to get through a little of his own legitimate business. At the end of the time he poured himself out a glass of Mr Eckstein's remarkable wine and, glancing at the clock with a humorous expression, drank it and went out into the night.

Strong moonlight lay on the little Spanish town, so that when he came to the picturesque gateway, with its rather rococo arch and the fantastic fringe of palms beyond it, it looked rather like a scene in a Spanish opera. One long leaf of palm with jagged edges, black against the moon, hung down on the other side of the arch, visible through the archway, and had something of the look of the jaw of a black crocodile. The fancy would not have lingered in his imagination but for something else that caught his naturally alert eye. The air was deathly still, and there was not a stir of wind; but he distinctly saw the pendent palm-leaf move.

He looked around him and realized that he was alone. He had left behind the last houses, which were mostly closed and shuttered, and was walking between two long blank walls built of large and shapeless but flattened stones, tufted here and there with the queer prickly weeds of that region — walls which ran parallel all the way to the gateway. He could not see the lights of the cafe outside the gate; probably it was too far away. Nothing could be seen under the arch but a wider expanse of large-flagged pavement, pale in the moon, with the straggling prickly pear here and there. He had a strong sense of the smell of evil; he felt queer physical oppression; but he did not think of stopping. His courage, which was considerable, was perhaps even less strong a part of him than his curiosity. All his life he had been led by an intellectual hunger for the truth, even of trifles. He often controlled it in the name of proportion; but it was always there. He walked straight through the gateway, and on the other side a man sprang like a monkey out of the tree-top and struck at him with a knife. At the same moment another man came crawling swiftly along the wall and, whirling a cudgel round his head, brought it down. Father Brown turned, staggered, and sank in a heap, but as he sank there dawned on his round face an expression of mild and immense surprise.

There was living in the same little town at this time another young American, particularly different from Mr Paul Snaith. His name was John Adams Race, and he was an electrical engineer, employed by Mendoza to fit out the old town with all the new conveniences. He was a figure far less familiar in satire and international gossip than that of the American journalist. Yet, as a matter of fact, America contains a million men of the moral type of Race to one of the moral type of Snaith. He was exceptional in being exceptionally good at his job, but in every other way he was very simple. He had begun life as a druggist's assistant in a Western village, and risen by sheer work and merit; but he still regarded his home town as the natural heart of the habitable world. He had been taught a very Puritan, or purely Evangelical, sort of Christianity from the Family Bible at his mother's knee; and in so far as he had time to have any religion, that was still his religion. Amid all the dazzling lights of the latest and even wildest discoveries, when he was at the very edge and extreme of experiment, working miracles of light and sound like a god creating new stars and solar systems, he never for a moment doubted that the things 'back home' were the best things in the world; his mother and the Family Bible and the quiet and quaint morality of his village. He had as serious and noble a sense of the sacredness of his mother as if he had been a frivolous Frenchman. He was quite sure the Bible religion was really the right thing; only he vaguely missed it wherever he went in the modern world. He could hardly be expected to sympathize with the religious externals of Catholic countries; and in a dislike of mitres and croziers he sympathized with Mr Snaith, though not in so cocksure a fashion. He had no liking for the public bowings and scrapings of Mendoza and certainly no temptation to the masonic mysticism of the atheist Alvarez. Perhaps all that semi-tropical life was too coloured for him, shot with Indian red and Spanish gold. Anyhow, when he said there was nothing to touch his home town, he was not boasting. He really meant that there was somewhere something plain and unpretentious and touching, which he really respected more than anything else in the world. Such being the mental attitude of John Adams Race in a South American station, there had been growing on him for some time a curious feeling, which contradicted all his prejudices and for which he could not account. For the truth was this: that the only thing he had ever met in his travels that in the least reminded him of the old wood-pile and the provincial proprieties and the Bible on his mother's knee was (for some inscrutable reason) the round face and black clumsy umbrella of Father Brown.

He found himself insensibly watching that commonplace and even comic black figure as it went bustling about; watching it with an almost morbid fascination, as if it were a walking riddle or contradiction. He had found something he could not help liking in the heart of everything he hated; it was as if he had been horribly tormented by lesser demons and then found that the Devil was quite an ordinary person.

Thus it happened that, looking out of his window on that moonlit night, he saw the Devil go by, the demon of unaccountable blamelessness, in his broad black hat and long black coat, shuffling along the street towards the gateway, and saw it with an interest which he could not himself understand. He wondered where the priest was going, and what he was really up to; and remained gazing out into the moonlit street long after the little black figure had passed. And then he saw something else that intrigued him further. Two other men whom he recognized passed across his window as across a lighted stage. A sort of blue limelight of the moon ran in a spectral halo round the big bush of hair that stood erect on the head of little Eckstein, the wine-seller, and it outlined a taller and darker figure with an eagle profile and a queer old-fashioned and very top-heavy black hat, which seemed to make the whole outline still more bizarre, like a shape in a shadow pantomime. Race rebuked himself for allowing the moon to play such tricks with his fancy; for on a second glance he recognized the black Spanish sidewhiskers and high-featured face of Dr Calderon, a worthy medical man of the town, whom he had once found attending professionally on Mendoza. Still, there was something in the way the men were whispering to each other and peering up the street that struck him as peculiar. On a sudden impulse he leapt over the low window-sill and himself went bareheaded up the road, following their trail. He saw them disappear under the dark archway, and a moment after there came a dreadful cry from beyond; curiously loud and piercing, and all the more blood-curdling to Race because it said something very distinctly in some tongue that he did not know.

The next moment there was a rushing of feet, more cries, and then a confused roar of rage or grief that shook the turrets and tall palm trees of the place; there was a movement in the mob that had gathered, as if they were sweeping backwards through the gateway. And then the dark archway resounded with a new voice, this time intelligible to him and falling with the note of doom, as someone shouted through the gateway:

'Father Brown is dead!'

He never knew what prop gave way in his mind, or why something on which he had been counting suddenly failed him; but he ran towards the gateway and was just in time to meet his countryman, the journalist Snaith, coming out of the dark entrance, deadly pale and snapping his fingers nervously.

'It's quite true,' said Snaith, with something which for him approached to reverence. 'He's a goner. The doctor's been looking at him, and there's no hope. Some of these damned Dagos clubbed him as he came through the gate — God knows why. It'll be a great loss to the place.'

Race did not or perhaps could not reply, but ran on under the arch to the scene beyond. The small black figure lay where it had fallen on the wilderness of wide stones starred here and there with green thorn; and the great crowd was being kept back, chiefly by the mere gestures of one gigantic figure in the foreground. For there were many there who swayed hither and thither at the mere movement of his hand, as if he had been a magician.

Alvarez, the dictator and demagogue, was a tall, swaggering figure, always rather flamboyantly clad, and on this occasion he wore a green uniform with embroideries like silver snakes crawling all over it, with an order round his neck hung on a very vivid maroon ribbon. His close curling hair was already grey, and in contrast his complexion, which his friends called olive and his foes octoroon, looked almost literally golden, as if it were a mask moulded in gold. But his large-featured face, which was powerful and humorous, was at this moment properly grave and grim. He had been waiting, he explained, for Father Brown at the cafe when he had heard a rustle and a fall and, coming out, had found the corpse lying on the flagstones.

‘I know what some of you are thinking,’ he said, looking round proudly, ‘and if you are afraid of me — as you are — I will say it for you. I am an atheist; I have no god to call on for those who will not take my word. But I tell you in the name of every root of honour that may be left to a soldier and a man, that I had no part in this. If I had the men here that did it, I would rejoice to hang them on that tree.’

‘Naturally we are glad to hear you say so,’ said old Mendoza stiffly and solemnly, standing by the body of his fallen coadjutor. ‘This blow has been too appalling for us to say what else we feel at present. I suggest that it will be more decent and proper if we remove my friend’s body and break up this irregular meeting. I understand,’ he added gravely to the doctor, ‘that there is unfortunately no doubt.’

‘There is no doubt,’ said Dr Calderon.

John Race went back to his lodgings sad and with a singular sense of emptiness. It seemed impossible that he should miss a man whom he never knew. He learned that the funeral was to take place next day; for all felt that the crisis should be past as quickly as possible, for fear of riots that were hourly growing more probable. When Snaith had seen the row of Red Indians sitting on the veranda, they might have been a row of ancient Aztec images carved in red wood. But he had not seen them as they were when they heard that the priest was dead.

Indeed they would certainly have risen in revolution and lynched the republican leader, if they had not been immediately blocked by the direct necessity of behaving respectfully to the coffin of their own religious leader. The actual assassins, whom it would have been most natural to lynch, seemed to have vanished into thin air. Nobody knew their names; and nobody would ever know whether the dying man had even seen their faces. That strange look of surprise that was apparently his last look on earth might have been the recognition of their faces. Alvarez repeated violently that it was no work of his, and attended the funeral, walking behind the coffin in his splendid silver and green uniform with a sort of bravado of reverence.

Behind the veranda a flight of stone steps scaled a very steep green bank, fenced by a cactus-hedge, and up this the coffin was laboriously lifted to the ground above, and placed temporarily at the foot of the great gaunt crucifix that dominated the road and guarded the consecrated ground. Below in the road were great seas of people lamenting and telling their beads — an orphan population that had lost a father. Despite all these symbols that were provocative enough to him, Alvarez behaved with restraint and respect; and all would have gone well — as Race told himself — had the others only let him alone.

Race told himself bitterly that old Mendoza had always looked like an old fool and had now very conspicuously and completely behaved like an old fool. By a custom common in simpler societies, the coffin was left open and the face uncovered, bringing the pathos to the point of agony for all those simple people. This, being consonant to tradition, need have done no harm; but some officious person had added to it the custom of the French freethinkers, of having speeches by the graveside. Mendoza proceeded to make a speech — a rather long speech, and the longer it was, the longer and lower sank John Race's spirits and sympathies with the religious ritual involved. A list of saintly attributes, apparently of the most antiquated sort, was rolled out with the dilatory dullness of an after-dinner speaker who does not know how to sit down. That was bad enough; but Mendoza had also the ineffable stupidity to start reproaching and even taunting his political opponents. In three minutes he had succeeded in making a scene, and a very extraordinary scene it was.

'We may well ask,' he said, looking around him pompously; 'we may well ask where such virtues can be found among those who have madly abandoned the creed of their fathers. It is when we have atheists among us, atheist leaders, nay sometimes even atheist rulers, that we find their infamous philosophy bearing fruit in crimes like this. If we ask who murdered this holy man, we shall assuredly find—'

Africa of the forests looked out of the eyes of Alvarez the hybrid adventurer; and Race fancied he could see suddenly that the man was after all a barbarian, who could not control himself to the end; one might guess that all his 'illuminated' transcendentalism had a touch of Voodoo. Anyhow, Mendoza could not continue, for Alvarez had sprung up and was shouting back at him and shouting him down, with infinitely superior lungs.

'Who murdered him?' he roared. 'Your God murdered him! His own God murdered him! According to you, he murders all his faithful and foolish servants — as he murdered that one,' and he made a violent gesture, not towards the coffin but the crucifix. Seeming to control himself a little, he went on in a tone still angry but more argumentative: 'I don't believe it, but you do. Isn't it better to have no God than one that robs you in this fashion? I, at least, am not afraid to say that there is none. There is no power in all this blind and brainless universe that can hear your prayer or return your friend. Though you beg Heaven to raise him, he will not rise. Though I dare Heaven to raise him, he will not rise. Here and now I will put it to the test — I defy the God who is not there to waken the man who sleeps for ever.'

There was a shock of silence, and the demagogue had made his sensation.

'We might have known,' cried Mendoza in a thick gobbling voice, 'when we allowed such men as you—'

A new voice cut into his speech; a high and shrill voice with a Yankee accent.

'Stop! Stop!' cried Snaith the journalist; 'something's up! I swear I saw him move.'

He went racing up the steps and rushed to the coffin, while the mob below swayed with indescribable frenzies. The next moment he had turned a face of amazement over his shoulder and made a signal with his finger to Dr Calderon, who hastened forward to confer with him. When the two men stepped away again from the coffin, all could see that the position of the head had altered. A roar of excitement rose from the crowd and seemed to stop suddenly, as if cut off in mid-air; for the priest in the coffin gave a groan and raised himself on one elbow, looking with bleared and blinking eyes at the crowd.

John Adams Race, who had hitherto known only miracles of science, never found himself able in after-years to describe the topsy-turvydom of the next few days. He seemed to have burst out of the world of time and space, and to be living in the impossible. In half an hour the whole of that town and district had been transformed into something never known for a thousand years; a medieval people turned to a mob of monks by a staggering miracle; a Greek city where the god had descended among men. Thousands prostrated themselves in the road; hundreds took vows on the spot; and even the outsiders, like the two Americans, were able to think and speak of nothing but the prodigy. Alvarez himself was shaken, as well he might be; and sat down, with his head upon his hands.

And in the midst of all this tornado of beatitude was a little man struggling to be heard. His voice was small and faint, and the noise was deafening. He made weak little gestures that seemed more those of irritation than anything else. He came to the edge of the parapet above the crowd, waving it to be quiet, with movements rather like the flap of the short wings of a penguin. There was something a little more like a lull in the noise; and then Father Brown for the first time reached the utmost stretch of the indignation that he could launch against his children.

‘Oh, you silly people,’ he said in a high and quavering voice; ‘Oh, you silly, silly people.’

Then he suddenly seemed to pull himself together, made a bolt for the steps with his more normal gait, and began hurriedly to descend.

‘Where are you going, Father?’ said Mendoza, with more than his usual veneration.

‘To the telegraph office,’ said Father Brown hastily. ‘What? No; of course it’s not a miracle. Why should there be a miracle? Miracles are not so cheap as all that.’

And he came tumbling down the steps, the people flinging themselves before him to implore his blessing.

‘Bless you, bless you,’ said Father Brown hastily. ‘God bless you all and give you more sense.’

And he scuttled away with extraordinary rapidity to the telegraph office, where he wired to his Bishop’s secretary: ‘There is some mad story about a miracle here; hope his lordship not give authority. Nothing in it.’

As he turned away from his effort, he tottered a little with the reaction, and John Race caught him by the arm.

‘Let me see you home,’ he said; ‘you deserve more than these people are giving you.’

John Race and the priest were seated in the presbytery; the table was still piled up with the papers with which the latter had been wrestling the day before; the bottle of wine and the emptied wine-glass still stood where he had left them.

‘And now,’ said Father Brown almost grimly, ‘I can begin to think.’

‘I shouldn’t think too hard just yet,’ said the American. ‘You must be wanting a rest. Besides, what are you going to think about?’

‘I have pretty often had the task of investigating murders, as it happens,’ said Father Brown. ‘Now I have got to investigate my own murder.’

‘If I were you,’ said Race, ‘I should take a little wine first.’

Father Brown stood up and filled himself another glass, lifted it, looked thoughtfully into vacancy, and put it down again. Then he sat down once more and said:

‘Do you know what I felt like when I died? You may not believe it, but my feeling was one of overwhelming astonishment.’

‘Well,’ answered Race, ‘I suppose you were astonished at being knocked on the head.’

Father Brown leaned over to him and said in a low voice, ‘I was astonished at not being knocked on the head.’

Race looked at him for a moment as if he thought the knock on the head had been only too effective; but he only said: ‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean that when that man brought his bludgeon down with a great swipe, it stopped at my head and did not even touch it. In the same way, the other fellow made as if to strike me with a knife, but he never gave me a scratch. It was just like play-acting. I think it was. But then followed the extraordinary thing.’

He looked thoughtfully at the papers on the table for a moment and then went on:

‘Though I had not even been touched with knife or stick, I began to feel my legs doubling up under me and my very life failing. I knew I was being struck down by something, but it was not by those weapons. Do you know what I think it was?’ And he pointed to the wine on the table.

Race picked up the wine-glass and looked at it and smelt it.

‘I think you are right,’ he said. ‘I began as a druggist and studied chemistry. I couldn’t say for certain without an analysis; but I think there’s something very unusual in this stuff. There are drugs by which the Asiatics produce a temporary sleep that looks like death.’

‘Quite so,’ said the priest calmly.’ The whole of this miracle was faked, for some reason or other. That funeral scene was staged — and timed. I think it is part of that raving madness of publicity that has got hold of Snaith; but I can hardly believe he would go quite so far, merely for that. After all, it’s one thing to make copy out of me and run me as a sort of sham Sherlock Holmes, and—’

Even as the priest spoke his face altered. His blinking eyelids shut suddenly and he stood up as if he were choking. Then he put one wavering hand as if groping his way towards the door.

‘Where are you going?’ asked the other in some wonder.

‘If you ask me,’ said Father Brown, who was quite white, ‘I was going to pray. Or rather, to praise.’

‘I’m not sure I understand. What is the matter with you?’

‘I was going to praise God for having so strangely and so incredibly saved me — saved me by an inch.’

‘Of course,’ said Race, ‘I am not of your religion; but believe me, I have religion enough to understand that. Of course, you would thank God for saving you from death.’

‘No,’ said the priest. ‘Not from death. From disgrace.’

The other sat staring; and the priest’s next words broke out of him with a sort of cry. ‘And if it had only been my disgrace! But it was the disgrace of all I stand for; the disgrace of the Faith that they went about to encompass. What it might have been! The most huge and horrible scandal ever launched against us since the last lie was choked in the throat of Titus Oates.’

‘What on earth are you talking about?’ demanded his companion.

‘Well, I had better tell you at once,’ said the priest; and sitting down, he went on more composedly: ‘It came to me in a flash when I happened to mention Snaith and Sherlock Holmes. Now I happen to remember what I wrote about his absurd scheme; it was the natural thing to write, and yet I think they had ingeniously manoeuvred me into writing just those words. They were something like ‘I am ready to die and come to life again like Sherlock Holmes, if that is the best way.’ And the moment I thought of that, I realized that I had been made to write all sorts of things of that kind, all pointing to the same idea. I wrote, as if to an accomplice, saying that I would drink the drugged wine at a particular time. Now, don’t you see?’

Race sprang to his feet still staring: ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I think I began to see.’

‘They would have boomed the miracle. Then they would have bust up the miracle. And what is the worst, they would have proved that I was in the conspiracy. It would have been our sham miracle. That’s all there is to it; and about as near hell as you and I will ever be, I hope.’

Then he said, after a pause, in quite a mild voice: ‘They certainly would have got quite a lot of good copy out of me.’

Race looked at the table and said darkly: ‘How many of these brutes were in it?’

Father Brown shook his head. ‘More than I like to think of,’ he said; ‘but I hope some of them were only tools. Alvarez might think that all’s fair in war, perhaps; he has a queer mind. I’m very much afraid that Mendoza is an old hypocrite; I never trusted him, and he hated my action in an industrial matter. But all that will wait; I have only got to thank God for the escape. And especially that I wired at once to the Bishop.’

John Race appeared to be very thoughtful. ‘You’ve told me a lot I didn’t know,’ he said at last, ‘and I feel inclined to tell you the only thing you don’t know. I can imagine how those fellows calculated well enough. They thought any man alive, waking up in a coffin to find himself canonized like a saint, and made into a walking miracle for everyone to admire, would be swept along with his worshippers and accept the crown of glory that fell on him out the sky. And I reckon their calculation was pretty practical psychology, as men go. I’ve seen all sorts of men in all sorts of places; and I tell you frankly I don’t believe there’s one man in a thousand who could wake up like that with all his wits about him; and while he was still almost talking in his sleep, would have the sanity and the simplicity and the humility to—’ He was much surprised to find himself moved, and his level voice wavering.

Father Brown was gazing abstractedly, and in a rather cockeyed fashion, at the bottle on the table. ‘Look here,’ he said, ‘what about a bottle of real wine?’

The Arrow of Heaven

IT is to be feared that about a hundred detective stories have begun with the discovery that an American millionaire has been murdered; an event which is, for some reason, treated as a sort of calamity. This story, I am happy to say, has to begin with a murdered millionaire; in one sense, indeed, it has to begin with three murdered millionaires, which some may regard as an embarras de richesse. But it was chiefly this coincidence or continuity of criminal policy that took the whole affair out of the ordinary run of criminal cases and made it the extraordinary problem that it was.

It was very generally said that they had all fallen victims to some vendetta or curse attaching to the possession of a relic of great value both intrinsically and historically: a sort of chalice inlaid with precious stones and commonly called the Coptic Cup. Its origin was obscure, but its use was conjectured to be religious; and some attributed the fate that followed its possessors to the fanaticism of some Oriental Christian horrified at its passing through such materialistic hands. But the mysterious slayer, whether or no he was such a fanatic, was already a figure of lurid and sensational interest in the world of journalism and gossip. The nameless being was provided with a name, or a nickname. But it is only with the story of the third victim that we are now concerned; for it was only in this case that a certain Father Brown, who is the subject of these sketches, had an opportunity of making his presence felt.

When Father Brown first stepped off an Atlantic liner on to American soil, he discovered as many other Englishman has done, that he was a much more important person than he had ever supposed. His short figure, his short-sighted and undistinguished countenance, his rather rusty-black clerical clothes, could pass through any crowd in his own country without being noticed as anything unusual, except perhaps unusually insignificant. But America has a genius for the encouragement of fame; and his appearance in one or two curious criminal problems, together with his long association with Flambeau, the ex-criminal and detective, had consolidated a reputation in America out of what was little more than a rumour in England. His round face was blank with surprise when he found himself held up on the quay by a group of journalists, as by a gang of brigands, who asked him questions about all the subjects on which he was least likely to regard himself as an authority, such as the details of female dress and the criminal statistics of the country that he had only that moment clapped his eyes on. Perhaps it was the contrast with the black embattled solidarity of this group that made more vivid another figure that stood apart from it, equally black against the burning white daylight of that brilliant place and season, but entirely solitary; a tall, rather yellow-faced man in great goggles, who arrested him with a gesture when the journalists had finished and said: ‘Excuse me, but maybe you are looking for Captain Wain.’

Some apology may be made for Father Brown; for he himself would have been sincerely apologetic. It must be remembered that he had never seen America before, and more especially that he had never seen that sort of tortoise-shell spectacles before; for the fashion at this time had not spread to England. His first sensation was that of gazing at some goggling sea-monster with a faint suggestion of a diver’s helmet. Otherwise the man was exquisitely dressed; and to Brown, in his innocence, the spectacles seemed the queerest disfigurement for a dandy. It was as if a dandy had adorned himself with a wooden leg as an extra touch of elegance. The question also embarrassed him. An American aviator of the name of Wain, a friend of some friends of his own in France, was indeed one of a long list of people he had some hope of seeing during his American visit; but he had never expected to hear of him so soon.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said doubtfully, ‘are you Captain Wain? Do you — do you know him?’

‘Well, I’m pretty confident I’m not Captain Wain,’ said the man in goggles, with a face of wood. ‘I was pretty clear about that when I saw him waiting for you over there in the car. But the other question’s a bit more problematical. I reckon I know Wain and his uncle, and old man Merton, too. I know old man Merton, but old man Merton don’t know me. And he thinks he has the advantage, and I think I have the advantage. See?’

Father Brown did not quite see. He blinked at the glittering seascape and the pinnacles of the city, and then at the man in goggles. It was not only the masking of the man’s eyes that produced the impression of something impenetrable. Something in his yellow face was almost Asiatic, even Chinese; and his conversation seemed to consist of stratified layers of irony. He was a type to be found here and there in that hearty and sociable population; he was the inscrutable American.

‘My name’s Drage,’ he said, ‘Norman Drage, and I’m an American citizen, which explains everything. At least I imagine your friend Wain would like to explain the rest; so we’ll postpone The Fourth of July till another date.’

Father Brown was dragged in a somewhat dazed condition towards a car at some little distance, in which a young man with tufts of untidy yellow hair and a rather harassed and haggard expression, hailed him from afar, and presented himself as Peter Wain. Before he knew where he was he was stowed in the car and travelling with considerable speed through and beyond the city. He was unused to the impetuous practicality of such American action, and felt about as bewildered as if a chariot drawn by dragons had carried him away into fairyland. It was under these disconcerting conditions that he heard for the first time, in long monologues from Wain, and short sentences from Drage, the story of the Coptic Cup and the two crimes already connected with it.

It seemed that Wain had an uncle named Crake who had a partner named Merton, who was number three in the series of rich business men to whom the cup had belonged. The first of them, Titus P. Trant, the Copper King, had received threatening letters from somebody signing himself Daniel Doom. The name was presumably a pseudonym, but it had come to stand for a very public if not a very popular character; for somebody as well known as Robin Hood and Jack the Ripper combined. For it soon became clear that the writer of the threatening letter did not confine himself to threatening. Anyhow, the upshot was that old Trant was found one morning with his head in his own lily-pond, and there was not the shadow of a clue. The cup was, fortunately, safe in the bank; and it passed with the rest of Trant’s property to his cousin, Brian Horder, who was also a man of great wealth and who was also threatened by the nameless enemy. Brian Horder was picked up dead at the foot of a cliff outside his seaside residence, at which there was a burglary, this time on a large scale. For though the cup apparently again escaped, enough bonds and securities were stolen to leave Horder’s financial affairs in confusion.

‘Brian Horder’s widow,’ explained Wain, ‘had to sell most of his valuables, I believe, and Brander Merton must have purchased the cup at that time, for he had it when I first knew him. But you can guess for yourself that it’s not a very comfortable thing to have.’

‘Has Mr Merton ever had any of the threatening letters?’ asked Father Brown, after a pause.

‘I imagine he has,’ said Mr Drage; and something in his voice made the priest look at him curiously, until he realized that the man in goggles was laughing silently, in a fashion that gave the newcomer something of a chill.

‘I’m pretty sure he has,’ said Peter Wain, frowning. ‘I’ve not seen the letters, only his secretary sees any of his letters, for he is pretty reticent about business matters, as big business men have to be. But I’ve seen him real upset and annoyed with letters; and letters that he tore up, too, before even his secretary saw them. The secretary himself is getting nervous and says he is sure somebody is laying for the old man; and the long and the short of it is, that we’d be very grateful for a little advice in the matter. Everybody knows your great reputation, Father Brown, and the secretary asked me to see if you’d mind coming straight out to the Merton house at once.’

‘Oh, I see,’ said Father Brown, on whom the meaning of this apparent kidnapping began to dawn at last. ‘But, really, I don’t see that I can do any more than you can. You’re on the spot, and must have a hundred times more data for a scientific conclusion than a chance visitor.’

‘Yes,’ said Mr Drage dryly; ‘our conclusions are much too scientific to be true. I reckon if anything hit a man like Titus P. Trant, it just came out of the sky without waiting for any scientific explanation. What they call a bolt from the blue.’

‘You can’t possibly mean,’ cried Wain, ‘that it was supernatural!’

But it was by no means easy at any time to discover what Mr Drage could possibly mean; except that if he said somebody was a real smart man, he very probably meant he was a fool. Mr Drage maintained an Oriental immobility until the car stopped, a little while after, at what was obviously their destination. It was rather a singular place. They had been driving through a thinly-wooded country that opened into a wide plain, and just in front of them was a building consisting of a single wall or very high fence, round, like a Roman camp, and having rather the appearance of an aerodrome. The barrier did not look like wood or stone, and closer inspection proved it to be of metal.

They all alighted from the car, and one small door in the wall was slid open with considerable caution, after manipulations resembling the opening of a safe. But, much to Father Brown’s surprise, the man called Norman

Drage showed no disposition to enter, but took leave of them with sinister gaiety.

‘I won’t come in,’ he said. ‘It ‘ud be too much pleasurable excitement for old man Merton, I reckon. He loves the sight of me so much that he’d die of joy.’

And he strode away, while Father Brown, with increasing wonder, was admitted through the steel door which instantly clicked behind him. Inside was a large and elaborate garden of gay and varied colours, but entirely without any trees or tall shrubs or flowers. In the centre of it rose a house of handsome and even striking architecture, but so high and narrow as rather to resemble a tower. The burning sunlight gleamed on glass roofing here and there at the top, but there seemed to be no windows at all in the lower part of it. Over everything was that spotless and sparkling cleanliness that seemed so native to the clear American air. When they came inside the portal, they stood amid resplendent marble and metals and enamels of brilliant colours, but there was no staircase. Nothing but a single shaft for a lift went up the centre between the solid walls, and the approach to it was guarded by heavy, powerful men like plain-clothes policemen.

‘Pretty elaborate protection, I know,’ said Wain. ‘Maybe it makes you smile a little, Father Brown, to find Merton has to live in a fortress like this without even a tree in the garden for anyone to hide behind. But you don’t know what sort of proposition we’re up against in this country. And perhaps you don’t know just what the name of Brander Merton means. He’s a quiet-looking man enough, and anybody might pass him in the street; not that they get much chance nowadays, for he can only go out now and then in a closed car. But if anything happened to Brander Merton there’d be earthquakes from Alaska to the Cannibal Islands. I fancy there was never a king or emperor who had such power over the nations as he has. After all, I suppose if you’d been asked to visit the tsar, or the king of England, you’d have had the curiosity to go. You mayn’t care much for tsars or millionaires; but it just means that power like that is always interesting. And I hope it’s not against your principles to visit a modern sort of emperor like Merton.’

‘Not at all,’ said Father Brown, quietly. ‘It is my duty to visit prisoners and all miserable men in captivity.’

There was a silence, and the young man frowned with a strange and almost shifty look on his lean face. Then he said, abruptly:

‘Well, you’ve got to remember it isn’t only common crooks or the Black Hand that’s against him. This Daniel Doom is pretty much like the devil. Look how he dropped Trant in his own gardens and Horder outside his house, and got away with it.’

The top floor of the mansion, inside the enormously thick walls, consisted of two rooms; an outer room which they entered, and an inner room that was the great millionaire’s sanctum. They entered the outer room just as two other visitors were coming out of the inner one. One was hailed by Peter Wain as his uncle — a small but very stalwart and active man with a shaven head that looked bald, and a brown face that looked almost too brown to have ever been white. This was old Crake, commonly called Hickory Crake in reminiscence of the more famous Old Hickory, because of his fame in the last Red Indian wars. His companion was a singular contrast — a very dapper gentleman with dark hair like a black varnish and a broad, black ribbon to his monocle: Barnard Blake, who was old Merton’s lawyer and had been discussing with the partners the business of the firm. The four men met in the middle of the outer room and paused for a little polite conversation, in the act of respectively going and coming. And through all goings and comings another figure sat at the back of the room near the inner door, massive and motionless in the half-light from the inner window; a man with a Negro face and enormous shoulders. This was what the humorous self-criticism of America playfully calls the Bad Man; whom his friends might call a bodyguard and his enemies a bravo.

This man never moved or stirred to greet anybody; but the sight of him in the outer room seemed to move Peter Wain to his first nervous query.

‘Is anybody with the chief?’ he asked.

‘Don’t get rattled, Peter,’ chuckled his uncle. ‘Wilton the secretary is with him, and I hope that’s enough for anybody. I don’t believe Wilton ever sleeps for watching Merton. He is better than twenty bodyguards. And he’s quick and quiet as an Indian.’

‘Well, you ought to know,’ said his nephew, laughing. ‘I remember the Red Indian tricks you used to teach me when I was a boy and liked to read Red Indian stories. But in my Red Indian stories Red Indians seemed always to have the worst of it.’

‘They didn’t in real life,’ said the old frontiersman grimly.

‘Indeed?’ inquired the bland Mr Blake. ‘I should have thought they could do very little against our firearms.’

‘I’ve seen an Indian stand under a hundred guns with nothing but a little scalping-knife and kill a white man standing on the top of a fort,’ said Crake.

‘Why, what did he do with it?’ asked the other.

‘Threw it,’ replied Crake, ‘threw it in a flash before a shot could be fired. I don’t know where he learnt the trick.’

‘Well, I hope you didn’t learn it,’ said his nephew, laughing.

‘It seems to me,’ said Father Brown, thoughtfully, ‘that the story might have a moral.’

While they were speaking Mr Wilton, the secretary, had come out of the inner room and stood waiting; a pale, fair-haired man with a square chin and steady eyes with a look like a dog’s; it was not difficult to believe that he had the single — eye of a watchdog.

He only said, ‘Mr Merton can see you in about ten minutes,’ but it served for a signal to break up the gossiping group. Old Crake said he must be off, and his nephew went out with him and his legal companion, leaving Father Brown for the moment alone with his secretary; for the negroid giant at the other end of the room could hardly be felt as if he were human or alive; he sat so motionless with his broad back to them, staring towards the inner room.

‘Arrangements rather elaborate here, I’m afraid,’ said the secretary. ‘You’ve probably heard all about this Daniel Doom, and why it isn’t safe to leave the boss very much alone.’

‘But he is alone just now, isn’t he?’ said Father Brown.

The secretary looked at him with grave, grey eyes. ‘For fifteen minutes,’ he said. ‘For fifteen minutes out of the twenty-four hours. That is all the real solitude he has; and that he insists on, for a pretty remarkable reason.’

‘And what is the reason?’ inquired the visitor. Wilton, the secretary, continued his steady gaze, but his mouth, that had been merely grave, became grim.

‘The Coptic Cup,’ he said. ‘Perhaps you’ve forgotten the Coptic Cup; but he hasn’t forgotten that or anything else. He doesn’t trust any of us about the Coptic Cup. It’s locked up somewhere and somehow in that room so that only he can find it; and he won’t take it out till we’re all out of the way. So we have to risk that quarter of an hour while he sits and worships it; I reckon it’s the only worshipping he does. Not that there’s any risk really; for I’ve turned all this place into a trap I don’t believe the devil himself could get into — or at any rate, get out of. If this infernal Daniel Doom pays us a visit, he'll stay to dinner and a good bit later, by God! I sit here on hot bricks for the fifteen minutes, and the instant I heard a shot or a sound of struggle I'd press this button and an electrocuting current would run in a ring round that garden wall, so that it 'ud be death to cross or climb it. Of course, there couldn't be a shot, for this is the only way in; and the only window he sits at is away up on the top of a tower as smooth as a greasy pole. But, anyhow, we're all armed here, of course; and if Doom did get into that room he'd be dead before he got out.'

Father Brown was blinking at the carpet in a brown study. Then he said suddenly, with something like a jerk: 'I hope you won't mind my mentioning it, but a kind of a notion came into my head just this minute. It's about you.'

'Indeed,' remarked Wilton, 'and what about me?'

'I think you are a man of one idea,' said Father Brown, 'and you will forgive me for saying that it seems to be even more the idea of catching Daniel Doom than of defending Brander Merton.'

Wilton started a little and continued to stare at his companion; then very slowly his grim mouth took on a rather curious smile. 'How did you — what makes you think that?' he asked.

'You said that if you heard a shot you could instantly electrocute the escaping enemy,' remarked the priest. 'I suppose it occurred to you that the shot might be fatal to your employer before the shock was fatal to his foe. I don't mean that you wouldn't protect Mr Merton if you could, but it seems to come rather second in your thoughts. The arrangements are very elaborate, as you say, and you seem to have elaborated them. But they seem even more designed to catch a murderer than to save a man.'

'Father Brown,' said the secretary, who had recovered his quiet tone, 'you're very smart, but there's something more to you than smartness. Somehow you're the sort of man to whom one wants to tell the truth; and besides, you'll probably hear it, anyhow, for in one way it's a joke against me already. They all say I'm a monomaniac about running down this big crook, and perhaps I am. But I'll tell you one thing that none of them know. My full name is John Wilton Border.' Father Brown nodded as if he were completely enlightened, but the other went on.

'This fellow who calls himself Doom killed my father and uncle and ruined my mother. When Merton wanted a secretary I took the job, because

I thought that where the cup was the criminal might sooner or later be. But I didn’t know who the criminal was and could only wait for him; and I meant to serve Merton faithfully.’

‘I understand,’ said Father Brown gently; ‘and, by the way, isn’t it time that we attended on him?’

‘Why, yes,’ answered Wilton, again starting a little out of his brooding so that the priest concluded that his vindictive mania had again absorbed him for a moment. ‘Go in now by all means.’

Father Brown walked straight into the inner room. No sound of greetings followed, but only a dead silence; and a moment after the priest reappeared in the doorway.

At the same moment the silent bodyguard sitting near the door moved suddenly; and it was as if a huge piece of furniture had come to life. It seemed as though something in the very attitude of the priest had been a signal; for his head was against the light from the inner window and his face was in shadow.

‘I suppose you will press that button,’ he said with a sort of sigh.

Wilton seemed to awake from his savage brooding with a bound and leapt up with a catch in his voice.

‘There was no shot,’ he cried.

‘Well,’ said Father Brown, ‘it depends what you mean by a shot.’

Wilton rushed forward, and they plunged into the inner room together. It was a comparatively small room and simply though elegantly furnished. Opposite to them one wide window stood open, over-looking the garden and the wooded plain. Close up against the window stood a chair and a small table, as if the captive desired as much air and light as was allowed him during his brief luxury of loneliness.

On the little table under the window stood the Coptic Cup; its owner had evidently been looking at it in the best light. It was well worth looking at, for that white and brilliant daylight turned its precious stones to many-coloured flames so that it might have been a model of the Holy Grail. It was well worth looking at; but Brander Merton was not looking at it. For his head had fallen back over his chair, his mane of white hair hanging towards the floor, and his spike of grizzled beard thrust up towards the ceiling, and out of his throat stood a long, brown painted arrow with red feathers at the other end.

‘A silent shot,’ said Father Brown, in a low voice; ‘I was just wondering about those new inventions for silencing firearms. But this is a very old invention, and quite as silent.’

Then, after a moment, he added: ‘I’m afraid he is dead. What are you going to do?’

The pale secretary roused himself with abrupt resolution. ‘I’m going to press that button, of course,’ he said, ‘and if that doesn’t do for Daniel Doom, I’m going to hunt him through the world till I find him.’

‘Take care it doesn’t do for any of our friends,’ observed Father Brown; ‘they can hardly be far off; we’d better call them.’

‘That lot know all about the wall,’ answered Wilton. ‘None of them will try to climb it, unless one of them ... is in a great hurry.’

Father Brown went to the window by which the arrow had evidently entered and looked out. The garden, with its flat flower-beds, lay far below like a delicately coloured map of the world. The whole vista seemed so vast and empty, the tower seemed set so far up in the sky that as he stared out a strange phrase came back to his memory.

‘A bolt from the blue,’ he said. ‘What was that somebody said about a bolt from the blue and death coming out of the sky? Look how far away everything looks; it seems extraordinary that an arrow could come so far, unless it were an arrow from heaven.’

Wilton had returned, but did not reply, and the priest went on as in soliloquy. ‘One thinks of aviation. We must ask young Wain ... about aviation.’

‘There’s a lot of it round here,’ said the secretary.

‘Case of very old or very new weapons,’ observed Father Brown. ‘Some would be quite familiar to his old uncle, I suppose; we must ask him about arrows. This looks rather like a Red Indian arrow. I don’t know where the Red Indian shot it from; but you remember the story the old man told. I said it had a moral.’

‘If it had a moral,’ said Wilton warmly, ‘it was only that a real Red Indian might shoot a thing farther than you’d fancy. It’s nonsense your suggesting a parallel.’

‘I don’t think you’ve got the moral quite right,’ said Father Brown.

Although the little priest appeared to melt into the millions of New York next day, without any apparent attempt to be anything but a number in a numbered street, he was, in fact, unobtrusively busy for the next fortnight with the commission that had been given him, for he was filled with profound fear about a possible miscarriage of justice. Without having any particular air of singling them out from his other new acquaintances, he found it easy to fall into talk with the two or three men recently involved in the mystery; and with old Hickory Crake especially he had a curious and interesting conversation. It took place on a seat in Central Park, where the veteran sat with his bony hands and hatchet face resting on the oddly-shaped head of a walking-stick of dark red wood, possibly modelled on a tomahawk.

'Well, it may be a long shot,' he said, wagging his head, 'but I wouldn't advise you to be too positive about how far an Indian arrow could go. I've known some bow-shots that seemed to go straighter than any bullets, and hit the mark to amazement, considering how long they had been travelling. Of course, you practically never hear now of a Red Indian with a bow and arrows, still less of a Red Indian hanging about here. But if by any chance there were one of the old Indian marksmen, with one of the old Indian bows, hiding in those trees hundreds of yards beyond the Merton outer wall — why, then I wouldn't put it past the noble savage to be able to send an arrow over the wall and into the top window of Merton's house; no, nor into Merton, either. I've seen things quite as wonderful as that done in the old days.'

'No doubt,' said the priest, 'you have done things quite as wonderful, as well as seen them.'

Old Crake chuckled, and then said gruffly: 'Oh, that's all ancient history.'

'Some people have a way of studying ancient history,' the priest said. 'I suppose we may take it there is nothing in your old record to make people talk unpleasantly about this affair.'

'What do you mean?' demanded Crake, his eyes shifting sharply for the first time, in his red, wooden face, that was rather like the head of a tomahawk.

'Well, since you were so well acquainted with all the arts and crafts of the Redskin—' began Father Brown slowly.

Crake had had a hunched and almost shrunken appearance as he sat with his chin propped on its queer-shaped crutch. But the next instant he stood erect in the path like a fighting bravo with the crutch clutched like a cudgel.

‘What?’ he cried — in something like a raucous screech— ‘what the hell! Are you standing up to me to tell me I might happen to have murdered my own brother-in-law?’

From a dozen seats dotted about the path people looked to-wards the disputants, as they stood facing each other in the middle of the path, the bald-headed energetic little man brandishing his outlandish stick like a club, and the black, dumpy figure of the little cleric looking at him without moving a muscle, save for his hinging eyelids. For a moment it looked as if the black, dumpy figure would be knocked on the head, and laid out with true Red Indian promptitude and dispatch; and the large form of an Irish policeman could be seen heaving up in the distance and bearing down on the group. But the priest only said, quite placidly, like one answering an ordinary query:

‘I have formed certain conclusions about it, but I do not think I will mention them till I make my report.’

Whether under the influence of the footsteps of the policeman or of the eyes of the priest, old Hickory tucked his stick under his arm and put his hat on again, grunting. The priest bade him a placid good morning, and passed in an unhurried fashion out of the park, making his way to the lounge of the hotel where he knew that young Wain was to be found. The young man sprang up with a greeting; he looked even more haggard and harassed than before, as if some worry were eating him away; and the priest had a suspicion that his young friend had recently been engaged, with only too conspicuous success, in evading the last Amendment to the American Constitution. But at the first word about his hobby or favourite science he was vigilant and concentrated enough. For Father Brown had asked, in an idle and conversational fashion, whether much flying was done in that district, and had told how he had at first mistaken Mr Merton’s circular wall for an aerodrome.

‘It’s a wonder you didn’t see any while we were there,’ answered Captain Wain. ‘Sometimes they’re as thick as flies; that open plain is a great place for them, and I shouldn’t wonder if it were the chief breeding-ground, so to speak, for my sort of birds in the future. I’ve flown a good deal there myself, of course, and I know most of the fellows about here who flew in the war; but there are a whole lot of people taking to it out there now whom I never heard of in my life. I suppose it will be like motoring soon, and every man in the States will have one.’

‘Being endowed by his Creator,’ said Father Brown with a smile, ‘with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of motoring — not to mention aviation. So I suppose we may take it that one strange aeroplane passing over that house, at certain times, wouldn’t be noticed much.’

‘No,’ replied the young man; ‘I don’t suppose it would.’

‘Or even if the man were known,’ went on the other, ‘I suppose he might get hold of a machine that wouldn’t be recognized as his. If you, for instance, flew in the ordinary way, Mr Merton and his friends might recognize the rig-out, perhaps; but you might pass pretty near that window on a different pattern of plane, or whatever you call it; near enough for practical purposes.’

‘Well, yes,’ began the young man, almost automatically, and then ceased, and remained staring at the cleric with an open mouth and eyes standing out of his head.

‘My God!’ he said, in a low voice; ‘my God!’

Then he rose from the lounge seat, pale and shaking from head to foot and still staring at the priest.

‘Are you mad?’ he said; ‘are you raving mad?’

There was a silence and then he spoke again in a swift hissing fashion. ‘You positively come here to suggest—’

‘No; only to collect suggestions,’ said Father Brown, rising. ‘I may have formed some conclusions provisionally, but I had better reserve them for the present.’

And then saluting the other with the same stiff civility, he passed out of the hotel to continue his curious peregrinations.

By the dusk of that day they had led him down the dingy streets and steps that straggled and tumbled towards the river in the oldest and most irregular part of the city. Immediately under the coloured lantern that marked the entrance to a rather low Chinese restaurant he encountered a figure he had seen before, though by no means presenting itself to the eye as he had seen it.

Mr Norman Drage still confronted the world grimly behind his great goggles, which seemed somehow to cover his face like a dark musk of glass. But except for the goggles, his appearance had undergone a strange transformation in the month that had elapsed since the murder. He had then, as Father Brown had noted, been dressed up to the nines — up to that point, indeed, where there begins to be too fine a distinction between the dandy and the dummy outside a tailor's shop. But now all those externals were mysteriously altered for the worse; as if the tailor's dummy had been turned into a scarecrow. His top hat still existed, but it was battered and shabby; his clothes were dilapidated; his watch-chain and minor ornaments were gone. Father Brown, however, addressed him as if they had met yesterday, and made no demur to sitting down with him on a bench in the cheap eating-house whither he was bound. It was not he, however, who began the conversation.

'Well?' growled Drage, 'and have you succeeded in avenging your holy and sainted millionaire? We know all millionaires are holy and sainted; you can find it all in the papers next day, about how they lived by the light of the Family Bible they read at their mother's knee. Gee! if they'd only read out some of the things there are in the Family Bible, the mother might have been startled some. And the millionaire, too, I reckon. The old Book's full of a lot of grand fierce old notions they don't grow nowadays; sort of wisdom of the Stone Age and buried under the Pyramids. Suppose somebody had flung old man Merton from the top of that tower of his, and let him be eaten by dogs at the bottom, it would be no worse than what happened to Jezebel. Wasn't Agag hacked into little pieces, for all he went walking delicately? Merton walked delicately all his life, damn him — until he got too delicate to walk at all. But the shaft of the Lord found him out, as it might have done in the old Book, and struck him dead on the top of his tower to be a spectacle to the people.

'The shaft was material, at least,' said his companion.

'The Pyramids are mighty material, and they hold down the dead kings all right,' grinned the man in the goggles. 'I think there's a lot to be said for these old material religions. There's old carvings that have lasted for thousands of years, showing their gods and emperors with bended bows; with hands that look as if they could really bend bows of stone. Material, perhaps — but what materials! Don't you sometimes stand staring at those old Eastern patterns and things, till you have a hunch that old Lord God is still driving like a dark Apollo, and shooting black rays of death?'

'If he is,' replied Father Brown, 'I might call him by another name. But I doubt whether Merton died by a dark ray or even a stone arrow.'

'I guess you think he's St Sebastian,' sneered Drage, 'killed with an arrow. A millionaire must be a martyr. How do you know he didn't deserve it? You don’t know much about your millionaire, I fancy. Well, let me tell you he deserved it a hundred times over.’

‘Well,’ asked Father Brown gently, ‘why didn’t you murder him?’

‘You want to know why I didn’t?’ said the other, staring. ‘Well, you’re a nice sort of clergyman.’

‘Not at all,’ said the other, as if waving away a compliment.

‘I suppose it’s your way of saying I did,’ snarled Drage. ‘Well, prove it, that’s all. As for him, I reckon he was no loss.’

‘Yes, he was,’ said Father Brown, sharply. ‘He was a loss to you. That’s why you didn’t kill him.’

And he walked out of the room, leaving the man in goggles gaping after him.

It was nearly a month later that Father Brown revisited the house where the third millionaire had suffered from the vendetta of Daniel Doom. A sort of council was held of the persons most interested. Old Crake sat at the head of the table with his nephew at his right hand, the lawyer on his left; the big man with the African features, whose name appeared to be Harris, was ponderously present, if only as a material witness; a red-haired, sharp-nosed individual addressed as Dixon seemed to be the representative of Pinkerton’s or some such private agency; and Father Brown slipped unobtrusively into an empty seat beside him.

Every newspaper in the world was full of the catastrophe of the colossus of finance, of the great organizer of the Big Business that bestrides the modern world; but from the tiny group that had been nearest to him at the very instant of his death very little could be learned. The uncle, nephew, and attendant solicitor declared they were well outside the outer wall before the alarm was raised; and inquiries of the official guardians at both barriers brought answers that were rather confused, but on the whole confirmatory. Only one other complication seemed to call for consideration. It seemed that round about the time of the death, before or after, a stranger had been found hanging mysteriously round the entrance and asking to see Mr Merton. The servants had some difficulty in understanding what he meant, for his language was very obscure; but it was afterwards considered to be also very suspicious, since he had said something about a wicked man being destroyed by a word out of the sky.

Peter Wain leaned forward, the eyes bright in his haggard face, and said:

‘I’ll bet on that, anyhow. Norman Drage.’

‘And who in the world is Norman Drage?’ asked his uncle.

‘That’s what I want to know,’ replied the young man. ‘I practically asked him, but he has got a wonderful trick of twisting every straight question crooked; it’s like lunging at a fencer. He hooked on to me with hints about the flying-ship of the future; but I never trusted him much.’

‘But what sort of a man is he?’ asked Crake.

‘He’s a mystagogue,’ said Father Brown, with innocent promptitude. ‘There are quite a lot of them about; the sort of men about town who hint to you in Paris cafes and cabarets that they’ve lifted the veil of Isis or know the secret of Stonehenge. In a case like this they’re sure to have some sort of mystical explanations.’

The smooth, dark head of Mr Barnard Blake, the lawyer, was inclined politely towards the speaker, but his smile was faintly hostile.

‘I should hardly have thought, sir,’ he said, ‘that you had any quarrel with mystical explanations.’

‘On the contrary,’ replied Father Brown, blinking amiably at him. ‘That’s just why I can quarrel with ‘em. Any sham lawyer could bamboozle me, but he couldn’t bamboozle you; because you’re a lawyer yourself. Any fool could dress up as a Red Indian and I’d swallow him whole as the only original Hiawatha; but Mr Crake would see through him at once. A swindler could pretend to me that he knew all about aeroplanes, but not to Captain Wain. And it’s just the same with the other, don’t you see? It’s just because I have picked up a little about mystics that I have no use for mystagogues. Real mystics don’t hide mysteries, they reveal them. They set a thing up in broad daylight, and when you’ve seen it it’s still a mystery. But the mystagogues hide a thing in darkness and secrecy, and when you find it, it’s a platitude. But in the case of Drage, I admit he had also another and more practical notion in talking about fire from heaven or bolts from the blue.’

‘And what was his notion?’ asked Wain. ‘I think it wants watching whatever it is.’

‘Well,’ replied the priest, slowly, ‘he wanted us to think the murders were miracles because . . . well, because he knew they weren’t.’

‘Ah,’ said Wain, with a sort of hiss, ‘I was waiting for that. In plain words, he is the criminal.’

‘In plain words, he is the criminal who didn’t commit the crime,’ answered Father Brown calmly.

‘Is that your conception of plain words?’ inquired Blake politely.

‘You’ll be saying I’m the mystagogue now,’ said Father Brown somewhat abashed, but with a broad smile, ‘but it was really quite accidental. Drage didn’t commit the crime — I mean this crime. His only crime was blackmailing somebody, and he hung about here to do it; but he wasn’t likely to want the secret to be public property or the whole business to be cut short by death. We can talk about him afterwards. Just at the moment, I only want him cleared out of the way.’

‘Out of the way of what?’ asked the other.

‘Out of the way of the truth,’ replied the priest, looking at him tranquilly, with level eyelids.

‘Do you mean,’ faltered the other, ‘that you know the truth?’

‘I rather think so,’ said Father Brown modestly.

There was an abrupt silence, after which Crake cried out suddenly and irrelevantly in a rasping voice:

‘Why, where is that secretary fellow? Wilton! He ought to be here.’

‘I am in communication with Mr Wilton,’ said Father Brown gravely; ‘in fact, I asked him to ring me up here in a few minutes from now. I may say that we’ve worked the thing out together, in a manner of speaking.’

‘If you’re working together, I suppose it’s all right,’ grumbled Crake. ‘I know he was always a sort of bloodhound on the trail of his vanishing crook, so perhaps it was well to hunt in couples with him. But if you know the truth about this, where the devil did you get it from?’

‘I got it from you,’ answered the priest, quietly, and continued to gaze mildly at the glaring veteran.’ I mean I made the first guess from a hint in a story of yours about an Indian who threw a knife and hit a man on the top of a fortress.’

‘You’ve said that several times,’ said Wain, with a puzzled air; ‘but I can’t see any inference, except that this murderer threw an arrow and hit a man on the top of a house very like a fortress. But of course the arrow wasn’t thrown but shot, and would go much further. Certainly it went uncommonly far; but I don’t see how it brings us any farther.’

‘I’m afraid you missed the point of the story,’ said Father Brown. ‘It isn’t that if one thing can go far another can go farther. It is that the wrong use of a tool can cut both ways. The men on Crake’s fort thought of a knife as a thing for a hand-to-hand fight and forgot that it could be a missile like a javelin. Some other people I know thought of a thing as a missile like a javelin and forgot that, after all, it could be used hand-to-hand as a spear. In short, the moral of the story is that since a dagger can be turned into an arrow, so can an arrow be turned into a dagger.'

They were all looking at him now; but he continued in the same casual and unconscious tone: 'Naturally we wondered and worried a good deal about who shot that arrow through the window and whether it came from far away, and so on. But the truth is that nobody shot the arrow at all. It never came in at the window at all.'

'Then how did it come there?' asked the swarthy lawyer, with a rather lowering face.

'Somebody brought it with him, I suppose,' said Father Brown; 'it wouldn't be hard to carry or conceal. Somebody had it in his hand as he stood with Merton in Merton's own room. Somebody thrust it into Merton's throat like a poignard, and then had the highly intelligent idea of placing the whole thing at such a place and angle that we all assumed in a flash that it had flown in at the window like a bird.'

'Somebody,' said old Crake, in a voice as heavy as stone.

The telephone bell rang with a strident and horrible clamour of insistence. It was in the adjoining room, and Father Brown had darted there before anybody else could move.

'What the devil is it all about?' cried Peter Wain, who seemed all shaken and distracted.

'He said he expected to be rung up by Wilton, the secretary,' replied his uncle in the same dead voice.

'I suppose it is Wilton?' observed the lawyer, like one speaking to fill up a silence. But nobody answered the question until Father Brown reappeared suddenly and silently in the room, bringing the answer.

'Gentlemen,' he said, when he had resumed his seat, 'it was you who asked me to look into the truth about this puzzle; and having found the truth, I must tell it, without any pretence of softening the shock. I'm afraid anybody who pokes his nose into things like this can't afford to be a respecter of persons.'

'I suppose,' said Crake, breaking the silence that followed, 'that means that some of us are accused, or suspected.'

'All of us are suspected,' answered Father Brown. 'I may be suspected myself, for I found the body.'

‘Of course we’re suspected,’ snapped Wain. ‘Father Brown kindly explained to me how I could have besieged the tower in a flying-machine.’

‘No,’ replied the priest, with a smile; ‘you described to me how you could have done it. That was just the interesting part of it.’

‘He seemed to think it likely,’ growled Crake, ‘that I killed him myself with a Red Indian arrow.’

‘I thought it most unlikely,’ said Father Brown, making rather a wry face. I’m sorry if I did wrong, but I couldn’t think of any other way of testing the matter. I can hardly think of anything more improbable than the notion that Captain Wain went careering in a huge machine past the window, at the very moment of the murder, and nobody noticed it; unless, perhaps, it were the notion that a respectable old gentleman should play at Red Indians with a bow and arrow behind the bushes, to kill somebody he could have killed in twenty much simpler ways. But I had to find out if they had had anything to do with it; and so I had to accuse them in order to prove their innocence.’

‘And how have you proved their innocence?’ asked Blake the lawyer, leaning forward eagerly.

‘Only by the agitation they showed when they were accused,’ answered the other.

‘What do you mean, exactly?’

‘If you will permit me to say so,’ remarked Father Brown, composedly enough, ‘I did undoubtedly think it my duty to suspect them and everybody else. I did suspect Mr Crake and I did suspect Captain Wain, in the sense that I considered the possibility or probability of their guilt. I told them I had formed conclusions about it; and I will now tell them what those conclusions were. I was sure they were innocent, because of the manner and the moment in which they passed from unconsciousness to indignation. So long as they never thought they were accused, they went on giving me materials to support the accusation. They practically explained to me how they might have committed the crime. Then they suddenly realized with a shock and a shout of rage that they were accused; they realized it long after they might well have expected to be accused, but long before I had accused them. Now no guilty person could possibly do that. He might be snappy and suspicious from the first; or he might simulate unconsciousness and innocence up to the end. But he wouldn’t begin by making things worse for himself and then give a great jump and begin furiously denying the notion he had himself helped to suggest. That could only come by his having really failed to realize what he was suggesting. The self-consciousness of a murderer would always be at least morbidly vivid enough to prevent him first forgetting his relation with the thing and then remembering to deny it. So I ruled you both out and others for other reasons I needn’t discuss now. For instance, there was the secretary —

‘But I’m not talking about that just now. Look here, I’ve just heard from Wilton on the phone, and he’s given me permission to tell you some rather serious news. Now I suppose you all know by this time who Wilton was, and what he was after.’

‘I know he was after Daniel Doom and wouldn’t be happy till he got him,’ answered Peter Wain; ‘and I’ve heard the story that he’s the son of old Horder, and that’s why he’s the avenger of blood. Anyhow, he’s certainly looking for the man called Doom.’

‘Well,’ said Father Brown, ‘he has found him.’

Peter Wain sprang to his feet in excitement.

‘The murderer!’ he cried. ‘Is the murderer in the lock-up already?’

‘No,’ said Father Brown, gravely; ‘I said the news was serious, and it’s more serious than that. I’m afraid poor Wilton has taken a terrible responsibility. I’m afraid he’s going to put a terrible responsibility on us. He hunted the criminal down, and just when he had him cornered at last — well, he has taken the law into his own hands.’

‘You mean that Daniel Doom—’ began the lawyer.

‘I mean that Daniel Doom is dead,’ said the priest. ‘There was some sort of wild struggle, and Wilton killed him.’

‘Serve him right,’ growled Mr Hickory Crake.

‘Can’t blame Wilton for downing a crook like that, especially considering the feud,’ assented Wain; ‘it was like stepping on a viper.’

‘I don’t agree with you,’ said Father Brown. ‘I suppose we all talk romantic stuff at random in defence of lynching and lawlessness; but I have a suspicion that if we lose our laws and liberties we shall regret it. Besides, it seems to me illogical to say there is something to be said for Wilton committing murder, without even inquiring whether there was anything to be said for Doom committing it. I rather doubt whether Doom was merely a vulgar assassin; he may have been a sort of outlaw with a mania about the cup, demanding it with threats and only killing after a struggle; both victims were thrown down just outside their houses. The objection to Wilton's way of doing it is that we shall never hear Doom's side of the case.'

'Oh, I've no patience with all this sentimental whitewashing of worthless, murderous blackguards,' cried Wain, heatedly. 'If Wilton croaked the criminal he did a jolly good day's work, and there's an end of it.'

'Quite so, quite so,' said his uncle, nodding vigorously.

Father Brown's face had a yet heavier gravity as he looked slowly round the semicircle of faces. 'Is that really what you all think?' he asked. Even as he did so he realized that he was an Englishman and an exile. He realized that he was among foreigners, even if he was among friends. Around that ring of foreigners ran a restless fire that was not native to his own breed; the fiercer spirit of the western nation that can rebel and lynch, and above all, combine. He knew that they had already combined.

'Well,' said Father Brown, with a sigh, 'I am to understand, then, that you do definitely condone this unfortunate man's crime, or act of private justice, or whatever you call it. In that case it will not hurt him if I tell you a little more about it.'

He rose suddenly to his feet; and though they saw no meaning in his movement, it seemed in some way to change or chill the very air in the room.

'Wilton killed Doom in a rather curious way,' he began.

'How did Wilton kill him?' asked Crake, abruptly.

'With an arrow,' said Father Brown.

Twilight was gathering in the long room, and daylight dwindling to a gleam from the great window in the inner room, where the great millionaire had died. Almost automatically the eyes of the group turned slowly towards it, but as yet there was no sound. Then the voice of Crake came cracked and high and senile in a sort of crowing gabble.

'What you mean? What you mean? Brander Merton killed by an arrow. This crook killed by an arrow—'

'By the same arrow,' said the priest, 'and at the same moment.'

Again there was a sort of strangled and yet swollen and bursting silence, and young Wain began: 'You mean—'

'I mean that your friend Merton was Daniel Doom,' said Father Brown firmly;' and the only Daniel Doom you'll ever find. Your friend Merton was always crazy after that Coptic Cup that he used to worship like an idol every day; and in his wild youth he had really killed two men to get it, though I still think the deaths may have been in a sense accidents of the robbery. Anyhow, he had it; and that man Drage knew the story and was blackmailing him. But Wilton was after him for a very different purpose; I fancy he only discovered the truth when he'd got into this house. But anyhow, it was in this house, and in that room, that this hunt ended, and he slew the slayer of his father.'

For a long time nobody answered. Then old Crake could be heard drumming with his fingers on the table and muttering:

'Brander must have been mad. He must have been mad.'

'But, good Lord!' burst out Peter Wain; 'what are we to do? What are we to say? Oh, it's all quite different! What about the papers and the big business people? Brander Merton is a thing like the President or the Pope of Rome.'

'I certainly think it is rather different,' began Barnard Blake, the lawyer, in a low voice. 'The difference involves a whole—'

Father Brown struck the table so that the glasses on it rang; and they could almost fancy a ghostly echo from the mysterious chalice that still stood in the room beyond.

'No!' he cried, in a voice like a pistol-shot. 'There shall be no difference. I gave you your chance of pitying the poor devil when you thought he was a common criminal. You wouldn't listen then; you were all for private vengeance then. You were all for letting him be butchered like a wild beast without a hearing or a public trial, and said he had only got his deserts. Very well then, if Daniel Doom has got his deserts, Brander Merton has got his deserts. If that was good enough for Doom, by all that is holy it is good enough for Merton. Take your wild justice or our dull legality; but in the name of Almighty God, let there be an equal lawlessness or an equal law.'

Nobody answered except the lawyer, and he answered with something like a snarl: 'What will the police say if we tell them we mean to condone a crime?'

'What will they say if I tell them you did condone it?' replied Father Brown. 'Your respect for the law comes rather late, Mr Barnard Blake.'

After a pause he resumed in a milder tone: 'I, for one, am ready to tell the truth if the proper authorities ask me; and the rest of you can do as you like. But as a fact, it will make very little difference. Wilton only rang me up to tell me that I was now free to lay his confession before you; for when you heard it, he would be beyond pursuit.’

He walked slowly into the inner room and stood there by the little table beside which the millionaire had died. The Coptic Cup still stood in the same place, and he remained there for a space staring at its cluster of all the colours of the rainbow, and beyond it into a blue abyss of sky.

The Oracle of the Dog

'YES,' said Father Brown, 'I always like a dog, so long as he isn't spelt backwards.'

Those who are quick in talking are not always quick in listening. Sometimes even their brilliancy produces a sort of stupidity. Father Brown's friend and companion was a young man with a stream of ideas and stories, an enthusiastic young man named Fiennes, with eager blue eyes and blond hair that seemed to be brushed back, not merely with a hair-brush but with the wind of the world as he rushed through it. But he stopped in the torrent of his talk in a momentary bewilderment before he saw the priest's very simple meaning.

'You mean that people make too much of them?' he said. 'Well, I don't know. They're marvellous creatures. Sometimes I think they know a lot more than we do.'

Father Brown said nothing, but continued to stroke the head of the big retriever in a half-abstracted but apparently soothing fashion.

'Why,' said Fiennes, warming again to his monologue, 'there was a dog in the case I've come to see you about: what they call the 'Invisible Murder Case', you know. It's a strange story, but from my point of view the dog is about the strangest thing in it. Of course, there's the mystery of the crime itself, and how old Druce can have been killed by somebody else when he was all alone in the summer-house—'

The hand stroking the dog stopped for a moment in its rhythmic movement, and Father Brown said calmly: 'Oh, it was a summer-house, was it?'

'I thought you'd read all about it in the papers,' answered Fiennes.' Stop a minute; I believe I've got a cutting that will give you all the particulars.' He produced a strip of newspaper from his pocket and handed it to the priest, who began to read it, holding it close to his blinking eyes with one hand while the other continued its half-conscious caresses of the dog. It looked like the parable of a man not letting his right hand know what his left hand did.

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Many mystery stories, about men murdered behind locked doors and windows, and murderers escaping without means of entrance and exit, have come true in the course of the extraordinary events at Cranston on the coast of Yorkshire, where Colonel Druce was found stabbed from behind by a dagger that has entirely disappeared from the scene, and apparently even from the neighbourhood.

The summer-house in which he died was indeed accessible at one entrance, the ordinary doorway which looked down the central walk of the garden towards the house. But, by a combination of events almost to be called a coincidence, it appears that both the path and the entrance were watched during the crucial time, and there is a chain of witnesses who confirm each other. The summer-house stands at the extreme end of the garden, where there is no exit or entrance of any kind. The central garden path is a lane between two ranks of tall delphiniums, planted so close that any stray step off the path would leave its traces; and both path and plants run right up to the very mouth of the summer-house, so that no straying from that straight path could fail to be observed, and no other mode of entrance can be imagined.

Patrick Floyd, secretary of the murdered man, testified that he had been in a position to overlook the whole garden from the time when Colonel Druce last appeared alive in the doorway to the time when he was found dead; as he, Floyd, had been on the top of a step-ladder clipping the garden hedge. Janet Druce, the dead man’s daughter, confirmed this, saying that she had sat on the terrace of the house throughout that time and had seen Floyd at his work. Touching some part of the time, this is again supported by Donald Druce, her brother — who overlooked the garden — standing at his bedroom window in his dressing-gown, for he had risen late. Lastly, the account is consistent with that given by Dr Valentine, a neighbour, who called for a time to talk with Miss Druce on the terrace, and by the Colonel’s solicitor, Mr Aubrey Traill, who was apparently the last to see the murdered man alive — presumably with the exception of the murderer.

All are agreed that the course of events was as follows: About half past three in the afternoon, Miss Druce went down the path to ask her father when he would like tea; but he said he did not want any and was waiting to see Traill, his lawyer, who was to be sent to him in the summer-house. The girl then came away and met Traill coming down the path; she directed him to her father and he went in as directed. About half an hour afterwards he came out again, the Colonel coming with him to the door and showing himself to all appearance in health and even high spirits. He had been somewhat annoyed earlier in the day by his son's irregular hours, but seemed to recover his temper in a perfectly normal fashion, and had been rather markedly genial in receiving other visitors, including two of his nephews, who came over for the day. But as these were out walking during the whole period of the tragedy, they had no evidence to give. It is said, indeed, that the Colonel was not on very good terms with Dr Valentine, but that gentleman only had a brief interview with the daughter of the house, to whom he is supposed to be paying serious attentions.

Traill, the solicitor, says he left the Colonel entirely alone in the summer-house, and this is confirmed by Floyd's bird's-eye view of the garden, which showed nobody else passing the only entrance. Ten minutes later, Miss Druce again went down the garden and had not reached the end of the path when she saw her father, who was conspicuous by his white linen coat, lying in a heap on the floor. She uttered a scream which brought others to the spot, and on entering the place they found the Colonel lying dead beside his basket-chair, which was also upset. Dr Valentine, who was still in the immediate neighbourhood, testified that the wound was made by some sort of stiletto, entering under the shoulder-blade and piercing the heart. The police have searched the neighbourhood for such a weapon, but no trace of it can be found.

'So Colonel Druce wore a white coat, did he?' said Father Brown as he put down the paper.

'Trick he learnt in the tropics,' replied Fiennes, with some wonder. 'He'd had some queer adventures there, by his own account; and I fancy his dislike of Valentine was connected with the doctor coming from the tropics, too. But it's all an infernal puzzle. The account there is pretty accurate. I didn't see the tragedy, in the sense of the discovery; I was out walking with the young nephews and the dog — the dog I wanted to tell you about. But I saw the stage set for it as described; the straight lane between the blue flowers right up to the dark entrance, and the lawyer going down it in his blacks and his silk hat, and the red head of the secretary showing high above the green hedge as he worked on it with his shears. Nobody could have mistaken that red head at any distance; and if people say they saw it there all the time, you may be sure they did.

This red-haired secretary, Floyd, is quite a character; a breathless bounding sort of fellow, always doing everybody's work as he was doing the gardener's. I think he is an American; he's certainly got the American view of life — what they call the view-point, bless 'em.'

'What about the lawyer?' asked Father Brown. There was a silence and then Fiennes spoke quite slowly for him. 'Traill struck me as a singular man. In his fine black clothes he was almost foppish, yet you can hardly call him fashionable. For he wore a pair of long, luxuriant black whiskers such as haven't been seen since Victorian times. He had rather a fine grave face and a fine grave manner, but every now and then he seemed to remember to smile. And when he showed his white teeth he seemed to lose a little of his dignity, and there was something faintly fawning about him. It may have been only embarrassment, for he would also fidget with his cravat and his tie-pin, which were at once handsome and unusual, like himself. If I could think of anybody — but what's the good, when the whole thing's impossible? Nobody knows who did it. Nobody knows how it could be done. At least there's only one exception I'd make, and that's why I really mentioned the whole thing. The dog knows.'

Father Brown sighed and then said absently: 'You were there as a friend of young Donald, weren't you? He didn't go on your walk with you?'

'No,' replied Fiennes smiling. 'The young scoundrel had gone to bed that morning and got up that afternoon. I went with his cousins, two young officers from India, and our conversation was trivial enough. I remember the elder, whose name I think is Herbert Druce and who is an authority on horse-breeding, talked about nothing but a mare he had bought and the moral character of the man who sold her; while his brother Harry seemed to be brooding on his bad luck at Monte Carlo. I only mention it to show you, in the light of what happened on our walk, that there was nothing psychic about us. The dog was the only mystic in our company.'

'What sort of a dog was he?' asked the priest.

'Same breed as that one,' answered Fiennes. 'That's what started me off on the story, your saying you didn't believe in believing in a dog. He's a big black retriever, named Nox, and a suggestive name, too; for I think what he did a darker mystery than the murder. You know Druce's house and garden are by the sea; we walked about a mile from it along the sands and then turned back, going the other way. We passed a rather curious rock called the Rock of Fortune, famous in the neighbourhood because it's one of those examples of one stone barely balanced on another, so that a touch would knock it over. It is not really very high but the hanging outline of it makes it look a little wild and sinister; at least it made it look so to me, for I don’t imagine my jolly young companions were afflicted with the picturesque. But it may be that I was beginning to feel an atmosphere; for just then the question arose of whether it was time to go back to tea, and even then I think I had a premonition that time counted for a good deal in the business. Neither Herbert Druce nor I had a watch, so we called out to his brother, who was some paces behind, having stopped to light his pipe under the hedge. Hence it happened that he shouted out the hour, which was twenty past four, in his big voice through the growing twilight; and somehow the loudness of it made it sound like the proclamation of something tremendous. His unconsciousness seemed to make it all the more so; but that was always the way with omens; and particular ticks of the clock were really very ominous things that afternoon. According to Dr Valentine’s testimony, poor Druce had actually died just about half past four.

‘Well, they said we needn’t go home for ten minutes, and we walked a little farther along the sands, doing nothing in particular — throwing stones for the dog and throwing sticks into the sea for him to swim after. But to me the twilight seemed to grow oddly oppressive, and the very shadow of the top-heavy Rock of Fortune lay on me like a load. And then the curious thing happened. Nox had just brought back Herbert’s walking-stick out of the sea and his brother had thrown his in also. The dog swam out again, but just about what must have been the stroke of the half-hour, he stopped swimming. He came back again on to the shore and stood in front of us. Then he suddenly threw up his head and sent up a howl or wail of woe — if ever I heard one in the world.

‘‘What the devil’s the matter with the dog?’ asked Herbert; but none of us could answer. There was a long silence after the brute’s wailing and whining died away on the desolate shore; and then the silence was broken. As I live, it was broken by a faint and far-off shriek, like the shriek of a woman from beyond the hedges inland. We didn’t know what it was then; but we knew afterwards. It was the cry the girl gave when she first saw the body of her father.’

‘You went back, I suppose,’ said Father Brown patiently. ‘What happened then?’

‘I’ll tell you what happened then,’ said Fiennes with a grim emphasis. ‘When we got back into that garden the first thing we saw was Traill, the lawyer; I can see him now with his black hat and black whiskers relieved against the perspective of the blue flowers stretching down to the summerhouse, with the sunset and the strange outline of the Rock of Fortune in the distance. His face and figure were in shadow against the sunset; but I swear the white teeth were showing in his head and he was smiling. The moment Nox saw that man the dog dashed forward and stood in the middle of the path barking at him madly, murderously, volleying out curses that were almost verbal in their dreadful distinctness of hatred. And the man doubled up and fled, along the path between the flowers.'

Father Brown sprang to his feet with a startling impatience. 'So the dog denounced him, did he?' he cried. 'The oracle of the dog condemned him. Did you see what birds were flying, and are you sure whether they were on the right hand or the left? Did you consult the augurs about the sacrifices? Surely you didn't omit to cut open the dog and examine his entrails. That is the sort of scientific test you heathen humanitarians seem to trust when you are thinking of taking away the life and honour of a man.'

Fiennes sat gaping for an instant before he found breath to say: 'Why, what's the matter with you? What have I done now?' A sort of anxiety came back into the priest's eyes — the anxiety of a man who has run against a post in the dark and wonders for a moment whether he has hurt it.

'I'm most awfully sorry,' he said with sincere distress. 'I beg your pardon for being so rude; pray forgive me.'

Fiennes looked at him curiously. 'I sometimes think you are more of a mystery than any of the mysteries,' he said. 'But anyhow, if you don't believe in the mystery of the dog, at least you can't get over the mystery of the man. You can't deny that at the very moment when the beast came back from the sea and bellowed, his master's soul was driven out of his body by the blow of some unseen power that no mortal man can trace or even imagine. And as for the lawyer — I don't go only by the dog — there are other curious details, too. He struck me as a smooth, smiling, equivocal sort of person; and one of his tricks seemed like a sort of hint. You know the doctor and the police were on the spot very quickly; Valentine was brought back when walking away from the house, and he telephoned instantly. That, with the secluded house, small numbers, and enclosed space, made it pretty possible to search everybody who could have been near; and everybody was thoroughly searched — for a weapon. The whole house, garden, and shore were combed for a weapon. The disappearance of the dagger is almost as crazy as the disappearance of the man.'

‘The disappearance of the dagger,’ said Father Brown, nodding. He seemed to have become suddenly attentive.

‘Well,’ continued Fiennes, ‘I told you that man Traill had a trick of fidgeting with his tie and tie-pin — especially his tie-pin. His pin, like himself, was at once showy and old-fashioned. It had one of those stones with concentric coloured rings that look like an eye; and his own concentration on it got on my nerves, as if he had been a Cyclops with one eye in the middle of his body. But the pin was not only large but long; and it occurred to me that his anxiety about its adjustment was because it was even longer than it looked; as long as a stiletto in fact.’

Father Brown nodded thoughtfully. ‘Was any other instrument ever suggested?’ he asked.

‘There was another suggestion,’ answered Fiennes, ‘from one of the young Druces — the cousins, I mean. Neither Herbert nor Harry Druce would have struck one at first as likely to be of assistance in scientific detection; but while Herbert was really the traditional type of heavy Dragoon, caring for nothing but horses and being an ornament to the Horse Guards, his younger brother Harry had been in the Indian Police and knew something about such things. Indeed, in his own way he was quite clever; and I rather fancy he had been too clever; I mean he had left the police through breaking some red-tape regulations and taking some sort of risk and responsibility of his own. Anyhow, he was in some sense a detective out of work, and threw himself into this business with more than the ardour of an amateur. And it was with him that I had an argument about the weapon — an argument that led — to something new. It began by his countering my description of the dog barking at Traill; and he said that a dog at his worst didn’t bark, but growled.’

‘He was quite right there,’ observed the priest.

‘This young fellow went on to say that, if it came to that, he’d heard Nox growling at other people before then; and among others at Floyd, the secretary. I retorted that his own argument answered itself; for the crime couldn’t be brought home to two or three people, and least of all to Floyd, who was as innocent as a harum-scarum schoolboy, and had been seen by everybody all the time perched above the garden hedge with his fan of red hair as conspicuous as a scarlet cockatoo.

‘I know there’s difficulties anyhow,’ said my colleague, ‘but I wish you’d come with me down the garden a minute. I want to show you something I don’t think any one else has seen.’ This was on the very day of the discovery, and the garden was just as it had been. The step-ladder was still standing by the hedge, and just under the hedge my guide stopped and disentangled something from the deep grass. It was the sheers used for clipping the hedge, and on the point of one of them was a smear of blood.

There was a short silence, and then Father Brown said suddenly; ‘What was the lawyer there for?’

‘He told us the Colonel sent for him to alter his will,’ answered Fiennes. ‘And, by the way, there was another thing about the business of the will that I ought to mention. You see, the will wasn’t actually signed in the summer-house that afternoon.’

‘I suppose not,’ said Father Brown; ‘there would have to be two witnesses.’

‘The lawyer actually came down the day before and it was signed then; but he was sent for again next day because the old man had a doubt about one of the witnesses and had to be reassured.’

‘Who were the witnesses?’ asked Father Brown.

‘That’s just the point,’ replied his informant eagerly, ‘the witnesses were Floyd, the secretary, and this Dr Valentine, the foreign sort of surgeon or whatever he is; and the two had a quarrel. Now I’m bound to say that the secretary is something of a busybody. He’s one of those hot and headlong people whose warmth of temperament has unfortunately turned mostly to pugnacity and bristling suspicion; to distrusting people instead of to trusting them. That sort of red-haired red-hot fellow is always either universally credulous or universally incredulous; and sometimes both. He was not only a Jack-of-all-trades, but he knew better than all tradesmen. He not only knew everything, but he warned everybody against everybody. All that must be taken into account in his suspicions about Valentine; but in that particular case there seems to have been something behind it. He said the name of Valentine was not really Valentine. He said he had seen him elsewhere known by the name of De Villon. He said it would invalidate the will; of course he was kind enough to explain to the lawyer what the law was on that point. They were both in a frightful wax.’

Father Brown laughed. ‘People often are when they are to witness a will,’ he said; ‘for one thing, it means that they can’t have any legacy under it. But what did Dr Valentine say? No doubt the universal secretary knew more about the doctor’s name than the doctor did. But even the doctor might have some information about his own name.’

Fiennes paused a moment before he replied. ‘Dr Valentine took it in a curious way. Dr Valentine is a curious man. His appearance is rather striking but very foreign. He is young but wears a beard cut square; and his face is very pale, dreadfully pale — and dreadfully serious. His eyes have a sort of ache in them, as if he ought to wear glasses, or had given himself a headache with thinking; but he is quite handsome and always very formally dressed, with a top hat and a dark coat and a little red rosette. His manner is rather cold and haughty, and he has a way of staring at you which is very disconcerting. When thus charged with having changed his name, he merely stared like a sphinx and then said with a little laugh that he supposed Americans had no names to change. At that I think the Colonel also got into a fuss and said all sorts of angry things to the doctor; all the more angry because of the doctor’s pretensions to a future place in his family. But I shouldn’t have thought much of that but for a few words that I happened to hear later, early in the afternoon of the tragedy. I don’t want to make a lot of them, for they weren’t the sort of words on which one would like, in the ordinary way, to play the eavesdropper. As I was passing out towards the front gate with my two companions and the dog, I heard voices which told me that Dr Valentine and Miss Druce had withdrawn for a moment in the shadow of the house, in an angle behind a row of flowering plants, and were talking to each other in passionate whisperings — sometimes almost like hissings; for it was something of a lovers’ quarrel as well as a lovers’ tryst. Nobody repeats the sort of things they said for the most part; but in an unfortunate business like this I’m bound to say that there was repeated more than once a phrase about killing somebody. In fact, the girl seemed to be begging him not to kill somebody, or saying that no provocation could justify killing anybody; which seems an unusual sort of talk to address to a gentleman who has dropped in to tea.’

‘Do you know,’ asked the priest, ‘whether Dr Valentine seemed to be very angry after the scene with the secretary and the Colonel — I mean about witnessing the will?’

‘By all accounts,’ replied the other, ‘he wasn’t half so angry as the secretary was. It was the secretary who went away raging after witnessing the will.’

‘And now,’ said Father Brown, ‘what about the will itself?’

‘The Colonel was a very wealthy man, and his will was important. Traill wouldn’t tell us the alteration at that stage, but I have since heard only this morning in fact — that most of the money was transferred from the son to the daughter. I told you that Druce was wild with my friend Donald over his dissipated hours.’

‘The question of motive has been rather over-shadowed by the question of method,’ observed Father Brown thoughtfully. ‘At that moment, apparently, Miss Druce was the immediate gainer by the death.’

‘Good God! What a cold-blooded way of talking,’ cried Fiennes, staring at him. ‘You don’t really mean to hint that she—’

‘Is she going to marry that Dr Valentine?’ asked the other.

‘Some people are against it,’ answered his friend. ‘But he is liked and respected in the place and is a skilled and devoted surgeon.’

‘So devoted a surgeon,’ said Father Brown, ‘that he had surgical instruments with him when he went to call on the young lady at teatime. For he must have used a lancet or something, and he never seems to have gone home.’

Fiennes sprang to his feet and looked at him in a heat of inquiry. ‘You suggest he might have used the very same lancet—’

Father Brown shook his head. ‘All these suggestions are fancies just now,’ he said. ‘The problem is not who did it or what did it, but how it was done. We might find many men and even many tools — pins and shears and lancets. But how did a man get into the room? How did even a pin get into it?’

He was staring reflectively at the ceiling as he spoke, but as he said the last words his eye cocked in an alert fashion as if he had suddenly seen a curious fly on the ceiling.

‘Well, what would you do about it?’ asked the young man. ‘You have a lot of experience; what would you advise now?’

‘I’m afraid I’m not much use,’ said Father Brown with a sigh. ‘I can’t suggest very much without having ever been near the place or the people. For the moment you can only go on with local inquiries. I gather that your friend from the Indian Police is more or less in charge of your inquiry down there. I should run down and see how he is getting on. See what he’s been doing in the way of amateur detection. There may be news already.’

As his guests, the biped and the quadruped, disappeared, Father Brown took up his pen and went back to his interrupted occupation of planning a course of lectures on the Encyclical Rerum Novarum. The subject was a large one and he had to recast it more than once, so that he was somewhat similarly employed some two days later when the big black dog again came bounding into the room and sprawled all over him with enthusiasm and excitement. The master who followed the dog shared the excitement if not the enthusiasm. He had been excited in a less pleasant fashion, for his blue eyes seemed to start from his head and his eager face was even a little pale.

'You told me,' he said abruptly and without preface, 'to find out what Harry Druce was doing. Do you know what he's done?' The priest did not reply, and the young man went on in jerky tones: I'll tell you what he's done. He's killed himself.'

Father Brown's lips moved only faintly, and there was nothing practical about what he was saying — nothing that has anything to do with this story or this world.

'You give me the creeps sometimes,' said Fiennes. 'Did you — did you expect this?'

'I thought it possible,' said Father Brown; 'that was why I asked you to go and see what he was doing. I hoped you might not be too late.'

'It was I who found him,' said Fiennes rather huskily. 'It was the ugliest and most uncanny thing I ever knew. I went down that old garden again, and I knew there was something new and unnatural about it besides the murder. The flowers still tossed about in blue masses on each side of the black entrance into the old grey summer-house; but to me the blue flowers looked like blue devils dancing before some dark cavern of the underworld. I looked all round, everything seemed to be in its ordinary place. But the queer notion grew on me that there was something wrong with the very shape of the sky. And then I saw what it was. The Rock of Fortune always rose in the background beyond the garden hedge and against the sea. The Rock of Fortune was gone.'

Father Brown had lifted his head and was listening intently.

'It was as if a mountain had walked away out of a landscape or a moon fallen from the sky; though I knew, of course, that a touch at any time would have tipped the thing over. Something possessed me and I rushed down that garden path like the wind and went crashing through that hedge as if it were a spider's web. It was a thin hedge really, though its undisturbed trimness had made it serve all the purposes of a wall. On the shore I found the loose rock fallen from its pedestal; and poor Harry Druce lay like a wreck underneath it. One arm was thrown round it in a sort of embrace as if he had pulled it down on himself; and on the broad brown sands beside it, in large crazy lettering, he had scrawled the words: 'The Rock of Fortune falls on the Fool'.' —

'It was the Colonel's will that did that,' observed Father Brown. 'The young man had staked everything on profiting himself by Donald's disgrace, especially when his uncle sent for him on the same day as the lawyer, and welcomed him with so much warmth. Otherwise he was done; he'd lost his police job; he was beggared at Monte Carlo. And he killed himself when he found he'd killed his kinsman for nothing.'

'Here, stop a minute!' cried the staring Fiennes. 'You're going too fast for me.'

'Talking about the will, by the way,' continued Father Brown calmly, 'before I forget it, or we go on to bigger things, there was a simple explanation, I think, of all that business about the doctor's name. I rather fancy I have heard both names before somewhere. The doctor is really a French nobleman with the title of the Marquis de Villon. But he is also an ardent Republican and has abandoned his title and fallen back on the forgotten family surname. With your Citizen Riquetti you have puzzled Europe for ten days.'

'What is that?' asked the young man blankly.

'Never mind,' said the priest. 'Nine times out of ten it is a rascally thing to change one's name; but this was a piece of fine fanaticism. That's the point of his sarcasm about Americans having no names — that is, no titles. Now in England the Marquis of Hartington is never called Mr Hartington; but in France the Marquis de Villon is called M. de Villon. So it might well look like a change of name. As for the talk about killing, I fancy that also was a point of French etiquette. The doctor was talking about challenging Floyd to a duel, and the girl was trying to dissuade him.'

'Oh, I see,' cried Fiennes slowly. 'Now I understand what she meant.'

'And what is that about?' asked his companion, smiling.

'Well,' said the young man, 'it was something that happened to me just before I found that poor fellow's body; only the catastrophe drove it out of my head. I suppose it's hard to remember a little romantic idyll when you've just come on top of a tragedy. But as I went down the lanes leading to the Colonel's old place I met his daughter walking with Dr Valentine. She was in mourning, of course, and he always wore black as if he were going to a funeral; but I can’t say that their faces were very funereal. Never have I seen two people looking in their own way more respectably radiant and cheerful. They stopped and saluted me, and then she told me they were married and living in a little house on the outskirts of the town, where the doctor was continuing his practice. This rather surprised me, because I knew that her old father’s will had left her his property; and I hinted at it delicately by saying I was going along to her father’s old place and had half expected to meet her there. But she only laughed and said: ‘Oh, we’ve given up all that. My husband doesn’t like heiresses.’ And I discovered with some astonishment they really had insisted on restoring the property to poor Donald; so I hope he’s had a healthy shock and will treat it sensibly. There was never much really the matter with him; he was very young and his father was not very wise. But it was in connexion with that that she said something I didn’t understand at the time; but now I’m sure it must be as you say. She said with a sort of sudden and splendid arrogance that was entirely altruistic:

‘‘I hope it’ll stop that red-haired fool from fussing any more about the will. Does he think my husband, who has given up a crest and a coronet as old as the Crusades for his principles, would kill an old man in a summer-house for a legacy like that?’ Then she laughed again and said, ‘My husband isn’t killing anybody except in the way of business. Why, he didn’t even ask his friends to call on the secretary.’ Now, of course, I see what she meant.’

‘I see part of what she meant, of course,’ said Father Brown. ‘What did she mean exactly by the secretary fussing about the will?’

Fiennes smiled as he answered, ‘I wish you knew the secretary, Father Brown. It would be a joy to you to watch him make things hum, as he calls it. He made the house of mourning hum. He filled the funeral with all the snap and zip of the brightest sporting event. There was no holding him, after something had really happened. I’ve told you how he used to oversee the gardener as he did the garden, and how he instructed the lawyer in the law. Needless to say, he also instructed the surgeon in the practice of surgery; and as the surgeon was Dr Valentine, you may be sure it ended in accusing him of something worse than bad surgery. The secretary got it fixed in his red head that the doctor had committed the crime, and when the police arrived he was perfectly sublime. Need I say that he became, on the spot, the greatest of all amateur detectives? Sherlock Holmes never towered over Scotland Yard with more Titanic intellectual pride and scorn than Colonel Druce's private secretary over the police investigating Colonel Druce's death. I tell you it was a joy to see him. He strode about with an abstracted air, tossing his scarlet crest of hair and giving curt impatient replies. Of course it was his demeanour during these days that made Druce's daughter so wild with him. Of course he had a theory. It's just the sort of theory a man would have in a book; and Floyd is the sort of man who ought to be in a book. He'd be better fun and less bother in a book.'

'What was his theory?' asked the other.

'Oh, it was full of pep,' replied Fiennes gloomily. 'It would have been glorious copy if it could have held together for ten minutes longer. He said the Colonel was still alive when they found him in the summer-house, and the doctor killed him with the surgical instrument on pretence of cutting the clothes.'

'I see,' said the priest. 'I suppose he was lying flat on his face on the mud floor as a form of siesta.'

'It's wonderful what hustle will do,' continued his informant. 'I believe Floyd would have got his great theory into the papers at any rate, and perhaps had the doctor attested, when all these things were blown sky high as if by dynamite by the discovery of that dead body lying under the Rock of Fortune. And that's what we come back to after all. I suppose the suicide is almost a confession. But nobody will ever know the whole story.'

There was a silence, and then the priest said modestly: 'I rather think I know the whole story.'

Fiennes stared. 'But look here,' he cried; 'how do you come to know the whole story, or to be sure it's the true story? You've been sitting here a hundred miles away writing a sermon; do you mean to tell me you really know what happened already? If you've really come to the end, where in the world do you begin? What started you off with your own story?'

Father Brown jumped up with a very unusual excitement and his first exclamation was like an explosion.

'The dog!' he cried. 'The dog, of course! You had the whole story in your hands in the business of the dog on the beach, if you'd only noticed the dog properly.'

Fiennes stared still more. 'But you told me before that my feelings about the dog were all nonsense, and the dog had nothing to do with it.'

‘The dog had everything to do with it,’ said Father Brown, ‘as you’d have found out if you’d only treated the dog as a dog, and not as God Almighty judging the souls of men.’

He paused in an embarrassed way for a moment, and then said, with a rather pathetic air of apology: ‘The truth is, I happen to be awfully fond of dogs. And it seemed to me that in all this lurid halo of dog superstitions nobody was really thinking about the poor dog at all. To begin with a small point, about his barking at the lawyer or growling at the secretary. You asked how I could guess things a hundred miles away; but honestly it’s mostly to your credit, for you described people so well that I know the types. A man like Traill, who frowns usually and smiles suddenly, a man who fiddles with things, especially at his throat, is a nervous, easily embarrassed man. I shouldn’t wonder if Floyd, the efficient secretary, is nervy and jumpy, too; those Yankee hustlers often are. Otherwise he wouldn’t have cut his fingers on the shears and dropped them when he heard Janet Druce scream.

‘Now dogs hate nervous people. I don’t know whether they make the dog nervous, too; or whether, being after all a brute, he is a bit of a bully; or whether his canine vanity (which is colossal) is simply offended at not being liked. But anyhow there was nothing in poor Nox protesting against those people, except that he disliked them for being afraid of him. Now I know you’re awfully clever, and nobody of sense sneers at cleverness. But I sometimes fancy, for instance, that you are too clever to understand animals. Sometimes you are too clever to understand men, especially when they act almost as simply as animals. Animals are very literal; they live in a world of truisms. Take this case: a dog barks at a man and a man runs away from a dog. Now you do not seem to be quite simple enough to see the fact: that the dog barked because he disliked the man and the man fled because he was frightened of the dog. They had no other motives and they needed none; but you must read psychological mysteries into it and suppose the dog had super-normal vision, and was a mysterious mouthpiece of doom. You must suppose the man was running away, not from the dog but from the hangman. And yet, if you come to think if it, all this deeper psychology is exceedingly improbable. If the dog really could completely and consciously realize the murderer of his master he wouldn’t stand yapping as he might at a curate at a tea-party; he’s much more likely to fly at his throat. And on the other hand, do you really think a man who had hardened his heart to murder an old friend and then walk about smiling at the old friend’s family, under the eyes of his old friend’s daughter and post-mortem doctor — do you think a man like that would be doubled up by mere remorse because a dog barked? He might feel the tragic irony of it; it might shake his soul, like any other tragic trifle. But he wouldn’t rush madly the length of a garden to escape from the only witness whom he knew to be unable to talk. People have a panic like that when they are frightened, not of tragic ironies, but of teeth. The whole thing is simpler than you can understand.

‘But when we come to that business by the seashore, things are much more interesting. As you stated them, they were much more puzzling. I didn’t understand that tale of the dog going in and out of the water; it didn’t seem to me a doggy thing to do. If Nox had been very much upset about something else, he might possibly have refused to go after the stick at all. He’d probably go off nosing in whatever direction he suspected the mischief. But when once a dog is actually chasing a thing, a stone or a stick or a rabbit, my experience is that he won’t stop for anything but the most peremptory command, and not always for that. That he should turn round because his mood changed seems to me unthinkable.’

‘But he did turn round,’ insisted Fiennes; ‘and came back without the stick.’

‘He came back without the stick for the best reason in the world,’ replied the priest. ‘He came back because he couldn’t find it. He whined because be couldn’t find it. That’s the sort of thing a dog really does whine about. A dog is a devil of a ritualist. He is as particular about the precise routine of a game as a child about the precise repetition of a fairy-tale. In this case something had gone wrong with the game. He came back to complain seriously of the conduct of the stick. Never had such a thing happened before. Never had an eminent and distinguished dog been so treated by a rotten old walking-stick.’

‘Why, what had the walking-stick done?’ inquired the young man.

‘It had sunk,’ said Father Brown.

Fiennes said nothing, but continued to stare; and it was the priest who continued: ‘It had sunk because it was not really a stick, but a rod of steel with a very thin shell of cane and a sharp point. In other words, it was a sword stick. I suppose a murderer never gets rid of a bloody weapon so oddly and yet so naturally as by throwing it into the sea for a retriever.’

‘I begin to see what you mean,’ admitted Fiennes, ‘but even if a sword-stick was used, I have no guess of how it was used.’

‘I had a sort of guess,’ said Father Brown, ‘right at the beginning when you said the word summer-house. And another when you said that Druce wore a white coat. As long as everybody was looking for a short dagger, nobody thought of it; but if we admit a rather long blade like a rapier, it’s not so impossible.’

He was leaning back, looking at the ceiling, and began like one going back to his own first thoughts and fundamentals.

‘All that discussion about detective stories like the Yellow Room, about a man found dead in sealed chambers which no one could enter, does not apply to the present case, because it is a summer-house. When we talk of a Yellow Room, or any room, we imply walls that are really homogeneous and impenetrable. But a summer-house is not made like that; it is often made, as it was in this case, of closely interlaced but separate boughs and strips of wood, in which there are chinks here and there. There was one of them just behind Druce’s back as he sat in his chair up against the wall. But just as the room was a summer-house, so the chair was a basket-chair. That also was a lattice of loopholes. Lastly, the summer-house was close up under the hedge; and you have just told me that it was really a thin hedge. A man standing outside it could easily see, amid a network of twigs and branches and canes, one white spot of the Colonel’s coat as plain as the white of a target.

‘Now, you left the geography a little vague; but it was possible to put two and two together. You said the Rock of Fortune was not really high; but you also said it could be seen dominating the garden like a mountain-peak. In other words, it was very near the end of the garden, though your walk had taken you a long way round to it. Also, it isn’t likely the young lady really howled so as to be heard half a mile. She gave an ordinary involuntary cry, and yet you heard it on the shore. And among other interesting things that you told me, may I remind you that you said Harry Druce had fallen behind to light his pipe under a hedge.’

Fiennes shuddered slightly. ‘You mean he drew his blade there and sent it through the hedge at the white spot. But surely it was a very odd chance and a very sudden choice. Besides, he couldn’t be certain the old man’s money had passed to him, and as a fact it hadn’t.’

Father Brown’s face became animated. ‘You misunderstand the man’s character,’ he said, as if he himself had known the man all his life. ‘A curious but not unknown type of character. If he had really known the money would come to him, I seriously believe he wouldn’t have done it. He would have seen it as the dirty thing it was.’

‘Isn’t that rather paradoxical?’ asked the other.

‘This man was a gambler,’ said the priest, ‘and a man in disgrace for having taken risks and anticipated orders. It was probably for something pretty unscrupulous, for every imperial police is more like a Russian secret police than we like to think. But he had gone beyond the line and failed. Now, the temptation of that type of man is to do a mad thing precisely because the risk will be wonderful in retrospect. He wants to say, ‘Nobody but I could have seized that chance or seen that it was then or never. What a wild and wonderful guess it was, when I put all those things together; Donald in disgrace; and the lawyer being sent for; and Herbert and I sent for at the same time — and then nothing more but the way the old man grinned at me and shook hands. Anybody would say I was mad to risk it; but that is how fortunes are made, by the man mad enough to have a little foresight.’ In short, it is the vanity of guessing. It is the megalomania of the gambler. The more incongruous the coincidence, the more instantaneous the decision, the more likely he is to snatch the chance. The accident, the very triviality of the white speck and the hole in the hedge intoxicated him like a vision of the world’s desire. Nobody clever enough to see such a combination of accidents could be cowardly enough not to use them! That is how the devil talks to the gambler. But the devil himself would hardly have induced that unhappy man to go down in a dull, deliberate way and kill an old uncle from whom he’d always had expectations. It would be too respectable.’

He paused a moment, and then went on with a certain quiet emphasis.

‘And now try to call up the scene, even as you saw it yourself. As he stood there, dizzy with his diabolical opportunity, he looked up and saw that strange outline that might have been the image of his own tottering soul; the one great crag poised perilously on the other like a pyramid on its point, and remembered that it was called the Rock of Fortune. Can you guess how such a man at such a moment would read such a signal? I think it strung him up to action and even to vigilance. He who would be a tower must not fear to be a toppling tower. Anyhow, he acted; his next difficulty was to cover his tracks. To be found with a sword-stick, let alone a blood-stained sword-stick, would be fatal in the search that was certain to follow. If he left it anywhere, it would be found and probably traced. Even if he threw it into the sea the action might be noticed, and thought noticeable — unless indeed he could think of some more natural way of covering the action. As you know, he did think of one, and a very good one. Being the only one of you with a watch, he told you it was not yet time to return, strolled a little farther, and started the game of throwing in sticks for the retriever. But how his eyes must have rolled darkly over all that desolate sea-shore before they alighted on the dog!'

Fiennes nodded, gazing thoughtfully into space. His mind seemed to have drifted back to a less practical part of the narrative.

'It's queer,' he said, 'that the dog really was in the story after all.'

'The dog could almost have told you the story, if he could talk,' said the priest. 'All I complain of is that because he couldn't talk you made up his story for him, and made him talk with the tongues of men and angels. It's part of something I've noticed more and more in the modern world, appearing in all sorts of newspaper rumours and conversational catchwords; something that's arbitrary without being authoritative. People readily swallow the untested claims of this, that, or the other. It's drowning all your old rationalism and scepticism, it's coming in like a sea; and the name of it is superstition.' He stood up abruptly, his face heavy with a sort of frown, and went on talking almost as if he were alone. 'It's the first effect of not believing in God that you lose your common sense and can't see things as they are. Anything that anybody talks about, and says there's a good deal in it, extends itself indefinitely like a vista in a nightmare. And a dog is an omen, and a cat is a mystery, and a pig is a mascot, and a beetle is a scarab, calling up all the menagerie of polytheism from Egypt and old India; Dog Anubis and great green-eyed Pasht and all the holy howling Bulls of Bashan; reeling back to the bestial gods of the beginning, escaping into elephants and snakes and crocodiles; and all because you are frightened of four words:

'He was made Man'.'

The young man got up with a little embarrassment, almost as if he had overheard a soliloquy. He called to the dog and left the room with vague but breezy farewells. But he had to call the dog twice, for the dog had remained behind quite motionless for a moment, looking up steadily at Father Brown as the wolf looked at St Francis.

The Miracle of Moon Crescent

MOON CRESCENT was meant in a sense to be as romantic as its name; and the things that happened there were romantic enough in their way. At least it had been an expression of that genuine element of sentiment — historic and almost heroic — which manages to remain side by side with commercialism in the elder cities on the eastern coast of America. It was originally a curve of classical architecture really recalling that eighteenth-century atmosphere in which men like Washington and Jefferson had seemed to be all the more republicans for being aristocrats. Travellers faced with the recurrent query of what they thought of our city were understood to be specially answerable for what they thought of our Moon Crescent. The very contrasts that confuse its original harmony were characteristic of its survival. At one extremity or horn of the crescent its last windows looked over an enclosure like a strip of a gentleman's park, with trees and hedges as formal as a Queen Anne garden. But immediately round the corner, the other windows, even of the same rooms, or rather 'apartments', looked out on the blank, unsightly wall of a huge warehouse attached to some ugly industry. The apartments of Moon Crescent itself were at that end remodelled on the monotonous pattern of an American hotel, and rose to a height, which, though lower than the colossal warehouse, would have been called a skyscraper in London. But the colonnade that ran round the whole frontage upon the street had a grey and weather-stained stateliness suggesting that the ghosts of the Fathers of the Republic might still be walking to and fro in it. The insides of the rooms, however, were as neat and new as the last New York fittings could make them, especially at the northern end between the neat garden and the blank warehouse wall. They were a system of very small flats, as we should say in England, each consisting of a sitting-room, bedroom, and bathroom, as identical as the hundred cells of a hive. In one of these the celebrated Warren Wynd sat at his desk sorting letters and scattering orders with wonderful rapidity and exactitude. He could only be compared to a tidy whirlwind.

Warren Wynd was a very little man with loose grey hair and a pointed beard, seemingly frail but fierily active. He had very wonderful eyes, brighter than stars and stronger than magnets, which nobody who had ever seen them could easily forget. And indeed in his work as a reformer and regulator of many good works he had shown at least that he had a pair of eyes in his head. All sorts of stories and even legends were told of the miraculous rapidity with which he could form a sound judgement, especially of human character. It was said that he selected the wife who worked with him so long in so charitable a fashion, by picking her out of a whole regiment of women in uniform marching past at some official celebration, some said of the Girl Guides and some of the Women Police. Another story was told of how three tramps, indistinguishable from each other in their community of filth and rags, had presented themselves before him asking for charity. Without a moment's hesitation he had sent one of them to a particular hospital devoted to a certain nervous disorder, had recommended the second to an inebriates' home, and had engaged the third at a handsome salary as his own private servant, a position which he filled successfully for years afterwards. There were, of course, the inevitable anecdotes of his prompt criticisms and curt repartees when brought in contact with Roosevelt, with Henry Ford, and with Mrs Asquith and all other persons with whom an American public man ought to have a historic interview, if only in the newspapers. Certainly he was not likely to be overawed by such personages; and at the moment here in question he continued very calmly his centrifugal whirl of papers, though the man confronting him was a personage of almost equal importance.

Silas T. Vandam, the millionaire and oil magnate, was a lean man with a long, yellow face and blue-black hair, colours which were the less conspicuous yet somehow the more sinister because his face and figure showed dark against the window and the white warehouse wall outside it; he was buttoned up tight in an elegant overcoat with strips of astrakhan. The eager face and brilliant eyes of Wynd, on the other hand, were in the full light from the other window over-looking the little garden, for his chair and desk stood facing it; and though the face was preoccupied, it did not seem unduly preoccupied about the millionaire. Wynd's valet or personal servant, a big, powerful man with flat fair hair, was standing behind his master's desk holding a sheaf of letters; and Wynd's private secretary, a neat, red-haired youth with a sharp face, had his hand already on the door handle, as if guessing some purpose or obeying some gesture of his employer. The room was not only neat, but austere to the point of emptiness; for Wynd, with characteristic thoroughness, had rented the whole floor above, and turned it into a loft or storeroom, where all his other papers and possessions were stacked in boxes and corded bales.

‘Give these to the floor-clerk, Wilson,’ said Wynd to the servant holding the letters, ‘and then get me the pamphlet on the Minneapolis Night Clubs; you’ll find it in the bundle marked ‘G’. I shall want it in half an hour, but don’t disturb me till then. Well, Mr Vandam, I think your proposition sounds very promising; but I can’t give a final answer till I’ve seen the report. It ought to reach me to-morrow afternoon, and I’ll phone you at once. I’m sorry I can’t say anything more definite just now.’

Mr Vandam seemed to feel that this was something like a polite dismissal; and his sallow, saturnine face suggested that he found a certain irony in the fact.

‘Well, I suppose I must be going,’ he said.

‘Very good of you to call, Mr Vandam,’ said Wynd, politely; ‘you will excuse my not coming out, as I’ve something here I must fix at once. Fenner,’ he added to the secretary,’ show Mr Vandam to his car, and don’t come back again for half an hour. I’ve something here I want to work out by myself; after that I shall want you.’

The three men went out into the hallway together, closing the door behind them. The big servant, Wilson, was turning down the hallway in the direction of the floor-clerk, and the other two moving in the opposite direction towards the lift; for Wynd’s apartment was high up on the fourteenth floor. They had hardly gone a yard from the closed door when they became conscious that the corridor was filled with a marching and even magnificent figure. The man was very tall and broad-shouldered, his bulk being the more conspicuous for being clad in white, or a light grey that looked like it, with a very wide white panama hat and an almost equally wide fringe or halo of almost equally white hair. Set in this aureole his face was strong and handsome, like that of a Roman emperor, save that there was something more than boyish, something a little childish, about the brightness of his eyes and the beatitude of his smile. ‘Mr Warren Wynd in?’ he asked, in hearty tones.

‘Mr Warren Wynd is engaged,’ said Fenner; ‘he must not be disturbed on any account. I may say I am his secretary and can take any message.’

‘Mr Warren Wynd is not at home to the Pope or the Crowned Heads,’ said Vandam, the oil magnate, with sour satire. ‘Mr Warren Wynd is mighty particular. I went in there to hand him over a trifle of twenty thousand dollars on certain conditions, and, he told me to call again like as if I was a call-boy.'

'It's a fine thing to be a boy,' said the stranger, 'and a finer to have a call; and I've got a call he's just got to listen to. It's a call of the great good country out West, where the real American is being made while you're all snoring. Just tell him that Art Alboin of Oklahoma City has come to convert him.'

'I tell you nobody can see him,' said the red-haired secretary sharply. 'He has given orders that he is not to be disturbed for half an hour.'

'You folks down East are all against being disturbed,' said the breezy Mr Alboin, 'but I calculate there's a big breeze getting up in the West that will have to disturb you. He's been figuring out how much money must go to this and that stuffy old religion; but I tell you any scheme that leaves out the new Great Spirit movement in Texas and Oklahoma, is leaving out the religion of the future.'

'Oh; I've sized up those religions of the future,' said the millionaire, contemptuously. 'I've been through them with a tooth-comb and they're as mangy as yellow dogs. There was that woman called herself Sophia: ought to have called herself Sapphira, I reckon. Just a plum fraud. Strings tied to all the tables and tambourines. Then there were the Invisible Life bunch; said they could vanish when they liked, and they did vanish, too, and a hundred thousand of my dollars vanished with them. I knew Jupiter Jesus out in Denver; saw him for weeks on end; and he was just a common crook. So was the Patagonian Prophet; you bet he's made a bolt for Patagonia. No, I'm through with all that; from now on I only believe what I see. I believe they call it being an atheist.'

'I guess you got me wrong,' said the man from Oklahoma, almost eagerly. 'I guess I'm as much of an atheist as you are. No supernatural or superstitious stuff in our movement; just plain science. The only real right science is just health, and the only real right health is just breathing. Fill your lungs with the wide air of the prairie and you could blow all your old eastern cities into the sea. You could just puff away their biggest men like thistledown. That's what we do in the new movement out home: we breathe. We don't pray; we breathe.'

'Well, I suppose you do,' said the secretary, wearily. He had a keen, intelligent face which could hardly conceal the weariness; but he had listened to the two monologues with the admirable patience and politeness (so much in contrast with the legends of impatience and insolence) with which such monologues are listened to in America.

‘Nothing supernatural,’ continued Alboin, ‘just the great natural fact behind all the supernatural fancies. What did the Jews want with a God except to breathe into man’s nostrils the breath of life? We do the breathing into our own nostrils out in Oklahoma. What’s the meaning of the very word Spirit? It’s just the Greek for breathing exercises. Life, progress, prophecy; it’s all breath.’

‘Some would allow it’s all wind,’ said Vandam; ‘but I’m glad you’ve got rid of the divinity stunt, anyhow.’

The keen face of the secretary, rather pale against his red hair, showed a flicker of some odd feeling suggestive of a secret bitterness.

‘I’m not glad,’ he said, ‘I’m just sure. You seem to like being atheists; so you may be just believing what you like to believe. But. I wish to God there were a God; and there ain’t. It’s just my luck.’

Without a sound or stir they all became almost creepily conscious at this moment that the group, halted outside Wynd’s door, had silently grown from three figures to four. How long the fourth figure had stood there none of the earnest disputants could tell, but he had every appearance of waiting respectfully and even timidly for the opportunity to say something urgent. But to their nervous sensibility he seemed to have sprung up suddenly and silently like a mushroom. And indeed, he looked rather like a big, black mushroom, for he was quite short and his small, stumpy figure was eclipsed by his big, black clerical hat; the resemblance might have been more complete if mushrooms were in the habit of carrying umbrellas, even of a shabby and shapeless sort.

Fenner, the secretary, was conscious of a curious additional surprise at recognizing the figure of a priest; but when the priest turned up a round face under the round hat and innocently asked for Mr Warren Wynd, he gave the regular negative answer rather more curtly than before. But the priest stood his ground.

‘I do really want to see Mr Wynd,’ he said. ‘It seems odd, but that’s exactly what I do want to do. I don’t want to speak to him. I just want to see him. I just want to see if he’s there to be seen.’

‘Well, I tell you he’s there and can’t be seen,’ said Fenner, with increasing annoyance. ‘What do you mean by saying you want to see if he’s there to be seen? Of course he’s there. We all left him there five minutes ago, and we’ve stood outside this door ever since.’

‘Well, I want to see if he’s all right,’ said the priest.

‘Why?’ demanded the secretary, in exasperation. ‘Because I have a serious, I might say solemn, reason,’ said the cleric, gravely, ‘for doubting whether he is all right.’

‘Oh, Lord!’ cried Vandam, in a sort of fury; ‘not more superstitions.’

‘I see I shall have to give my reasons,’ observed the little cleric, gravely. ‘I suppose I can’t expect you even to let me look through the crack of a door till I tell you the whole story.’ He was silent a moment as in reflection, and then went on without noticing the wondering faces around him. ‘I was walking outside along the front of the colonnade when I saw a very ragged man running hard round the corner at the end of the crescent. He came pounding along the pavement towards me, revealing a great raw-boned figure and a face I knew. It was the face of a wild Irish fellow I once helped a little; I will not tell you his name. When he saw me he staggered, calling me by mine and saying, ‘Saints alive, it’s Father Brown; you’re the only man whose face could frighten me to-day.’

‘I knew he meant he’d been doing some wild thing or other, and I don’t think my face frightened him much, for he was soon telling me about it. And a very strange thing it was. He asked me if I knew Warren Wynd, and I said no, though I knew he lived near the top of these flats. He said, ‘That’s a man who thinks he’s a saint of God; but if he knew what I was saying of him he should be ready to hang himself.’ And he repeated hysterically more than once, ‘Yes, ready to hang himself.’ I asked him if he’d done any harm to Wynd, and his answer was rather a queer one. He said: ‘I took a pistol and I loaded it with neither shot nor slug, but only with a curse.’ As far as I could make out, all he had done was to go down that little alley between this building and the big warehouse, with an old pistol loaded with a blank charge, and merely fire it against the wall, as if that would bring down the building. ‘But as I did it,’ he said, ‘I cursed him with the great curse, that the justice of God should take him by the hair and the vengeance of hell by the heels, and he should be torn asunder like Judas and the world know him no more.’

‘Well, it doesn’t matter now what else I said to the poor, crazy fellow; he went away quieted down a little, and I went round to the back of the building to inspect. And sure enough, in the little alley at the foot of this wall there lay a rusty antiquated pistol; I know enough about pistols to know it had been loaded only with a little powder, there were the black marks of powder and smoke on the wall, and even the mark of the muzzle, but not even a dent of any bullet. He had left no trace of destruction; he had left no trace of anything, except those black marks and that black curse he had hurled into heaven. So I came back here to ask for this Warren Wynd and find out if he's all right.'

Fenner the secretary laughed. 'I can soon settle that difficulty for you. I assure you he's quite all right; we left him writing at his desk only a few minutes ago. He was alone in his flat; it's a hundred feet up from the street, and so placed that no shot could have reached him, even if your friend hadn't fired blank. There's no other entrance to this place but this door, and we've been standing outside it ever since.'

'All the same,' said Father Brown, gravely, 'I should like to look in and see.'

'Well, you can't,' retorted the other. 'Good Lord, you don't tell me you think anything of the curse.'

'You forget,' said the millionaire, with a slight sneer, 'the reverend gentleman's whole business is blessings and cursings. Come, sir, if he's been cursed to hell, why don't you bless him back again? What's the good of your blessings if they can't beat an Irish larrykin's curse?'

'Does anybody believe such things now?' protested the Westerner.

'Father Brown believes a good number of things, I take it,' said Vandam, whose temper was suffering from the past snub and the present bickering. 'Father Brown believes a hermit crossed a river on a crocodile conjured out of nowhere, and then he told the crocodile to die, and it sure did. Father Brown believes that some blessed saint or other died, and had his dead body turned into three dead bodies, to be served out to three parishes that were all intent on figuring as his home-town. Father Brown believes that a saint hung his cloak on a sunbeam, and another used his for a boat to cross the Atlantic. Father Brown believes the holy donkey had six legs and the house of Loretto flew through the air. He believes in hundreds of stone virgins winking and weeping all day long. It's nothing to him to believe that a man might escape through the keyhole or vanish out of a locked room. I reckon he doesn't take much stock of the laws of nature.'

'Anyhow, I have to take stock in the laws of Warren Wynd,' said the secretary, wearily, 'and it's his rule that he's to be left alone when he says so. Wilson will tell you just the same,' for the large servant who had been sent for the pamphlet, passed placidly down the corridor even as he spoke, carrying the pamphlet, but serenely passing the door. 'He'll go and sit on the bench by the floor-clerk and twiddle his thumbs till he's wanted; but he won't go in before then; and nor will I. I reckon we both know which side our bread is buttered, and it'd take a good many of Father Brown's saints and angels to make us forget it.'

'As for saints and angels—' began the priest.

'It's all nonsense,' repeated Fenner. 'I don't want to say anything offensive, but that sort of thing may be very well for crypts and cloisters and all sorts of moonshiny places. But ghosts can't get through a closed door in an American hotel.'

'But men can open a door, even in an American hotel,' replied Father Brown, patiently. 'And it seems to me the simplest thing would be to open it.'

'It would be simple enough to lose me my job,' answered the secretary, 'and Warren Wynd doesn't like his secretaries so simple as that. Not simple enough to believe in the sort of fairy tales you seem to believe in.'

'Well,' said the priest gravely, 'it is true enough that I believe in a good many things that you probably don't. But it would take a considerable time to explain all the things I believe in, and all the reasons I have for thinking I'm right. It would take about two seconds to open that door and prove I am wrong.'

Something in the phrase seemed to please the more wild and restless spirit of the man from the West.

'I'll allow I'd love to prove you wrong,' said Alboin, striding suddenly past them, 'and I will.'

He threw open the door of the flat and looked in. The first glimpse showed that Warren Wynd's chair was empty. The second glance showed that his room was empty also.

Fenner, electrified with energy in his turn, dashed past the other into the apartment.

'He's in his bedroom,' he said curtly, 'he must be.'

As he disappeared into the inner chamber the other men stood in the empty outer room staring about them. The severity and simplicity of its fittings, which had already been noted, returned on them with a rigid challenge. Certainly in this room there was no question of hiding a mouse, let alone a man. There were no curtains and, what is rare in American arrangements, no cupboards. Even the desk was no more than a plain table with a shallow drawer and a tilted lid. The chairs were hard and high-backed skeletons. A moment after the secretary reappeared at the inner door, having searched the two inner rooms. A staring negation stood in his eyes, and his mouth seemed to move in a mechanical detachment from it as he said sharply: ‘He didn’t come out through here?’

Somehow the others did not even think it necessary to answer that negation in the negative. Their minds had come up against something like the blank wall of the warehouse that stared in at the opposite window, gradually turning from white to grey as dusk slowly descended with the advancing afternoon. Vandam walked over to the window-sill against which he had leant half an hour before and looked out of the open window. There was no pipe or fire-escape, no shelf or foothold of any kind on the sheer fall to the little by-street below, there was nothing on the similar expanse of wall that rose many stories above. There was even less variation on the other side of the street; there was nothing whatever but the wearisome expanse of whitewashed wall. He peered downwards, as if expecting to see the vanished philanthropist lying in a suicidal wreck on the path. He could see nothing but one small dark object which, though diminished by distance, might well be the pistol that the priest had found lying there. Meanwhile, Fenner had walked to the other window, which looked out from a wall equally blank and inaccessible, but looking out over a small ornamental park instead of a side street. Here a clump of trees interrupted the actual view of the ground; but they reached but a little way up the huge human cliff. Both turned back into the room and faced each other in the gathering twilight where the last silver gleams of daylight on the shiny tops of desks and tables were rapidly turning grey. As if the twilight itself irritated him, Fenner touched the switch and the scene sprang into the startling distinctness of electric light.

‘As you said just now,’ said Vandam grimly, ‘there’s no shot from down there could hit him, even if there was a shot in the gun. But even if he was hit with a bullet he wouldn’t have just burst like a bubble.’

The secretary, who was paler than ever, glanced irritably at the bilious visage of the millionaire. ‘What’s got you started on those morbid notions? Who’s talking about bullets and bubbles? Why shouldn’t he be alive?’

‘Why not indeed?’ replied Vandam smoothly. ‘If you’ll tell me where he is, I’ll tell you how he got there.’

After a pause the secretary muttered, rather sulkily: ‘I suppose you’re right. We’re right up against the very thing we were talking about. It’d be a queer thing if you or I ever came to think there was anything in cursing. But who could have harmed Wynd shut up in here?’

Mr Alboin, of Oklahoma, had been standing rather astraddle in the middle of the room, his white, hairy halo as well as his round eyes seeming to radiate astonishment. At this point he said, abstractedly, with something of the irrelevant impudence of an enfant terrible: ‘You didn’t cotton to him much, did you, Mr Vandam?’

Mr Vandam’s long yellow face seemed to grow longer as it grew more sinister, while he smiled and answered quietly: ‘If it comes to these coincidences, it was you, I think, who said that a wind from the West would blow away our big men like thistledown.’

‘I know I said it would,’ said the Westerner, with candour; ‘but all the same, how the devil could it?’

The silence was broken by Fenner saying with an abruptness amounting to violence: ‘There’s only one thing to say about this affair. It simply hasn’t happened. It can’t have happened.’

‘Oh, yes,’ said Father Brown out of the corner; ‘it has happened all right.’

They all jumped; for the truth was they had all forgotten the insignificant little man who had originally induced them to open the door. And the recovery of memory went with a sharp reversal of mood; it came back to them with a rush that they had all dismissed him as a superstitious dreamer for even hinting at the very thing that had since happened before their eyes.

‘Snakes!’ cried the impetuous Westerner, like one speaking before he could stop himself; ‘suppose there were something in it, after all!’

‘I must confess,’ said Fenner, frowning at the table, ‘that his reverence’s anticipations were apparently well founded. I don’t know whether he has anything else to tell us.’

‘He might possibly tell us,’ said Vandam, sardonically, ‘what the devil we are to do now.’

The little priest seemed to accept the position in a modest, but matter-of-fact manner. ‘The only thing I can think of,’ he said, ‘is first to tell the authorities of this place, and then to see if there were any more traces of my man who let off the pistol. He vanished round the other end of the Crescent where the little garden is. There are seats there, and it's a favourite place for tramps.'

Direct consultations with the headquarters of the hotel, leading to indirect consultations with the authorities of the police, occupied them for a considerable time; and it was already nightfall when they went out under the long, classical curve of the colonnade. The crescent looked as cold and hollow as the moon after which it was named, and the moon itself was rising luminous but spectral behind the black tree-tops when they turned the corner by the little public garden. Night veiled much of what was merely urban and artificial about the place, and as they melted into the shadows of the trees they had a strange feeling of having suddenly travelled many hundred miles from their homes. When they had walked in silence for a little, Alboin, who had something elemental about him, suddenly exploded.

'I give up,' he cried; 'I hand in my checks. I never thought I should come to such things; but what happens when the things come to you? I beg your pardon, Father Brown; I reckon I'll just come across, so far as you and your fairy-tales are concerned. After this, it's me for the fairy-tales. Why, you said yourself, Mr Vandam, that you're an atheist and only believe what you see. Well, what was it you did see? Or rather, what was it you didn't see?'

'I know,' said Vandam and nodded in a gloomy fashion.

'Oh, it's partly all this moon and trees that get on one's nerves,' said Fenner obstinately. 'Trees always look queer by moonlight, with their branches crawling about. Look at that—'

'Yes,' said Father Brown, standing still and peering at the moon through a tangle of trees. 'That's a very queer branch up there.'

When he spoke again he only said: 'I thought it was a broken branch.'

But this time there was a catch in his voice that unaccountably turned his hearers cold. Something that looked rather like a dead branch was certainly dependent in a limp fashion from the tree that showed dark against the moon; but it was not a dead branch. When they came close to it to see what it was Fenner sprang away again with a ringing oath. Then he ran in again and loosened a rope from the neck of the dingy little body dangling with drooping plumes of grey hair. Somehow he knew that the body was a dead body before he managed to take it down from the tree. A very long coil of rope was wrapped round and round the branches, and a comparatively short length of it hung from the fork of the branch to the body. A long garden tub was rolled a yard or so from under the feet, like the stool kicked away from the feet of a suicide.

'Oh, my God!' said Alboin, so that it seemed as much a prayer as an oath. 'What was it that man said about him?— "If he knew, he would be ready to hang himself." Wasn't that what he said, Father Brown?'

'Yes,' said Father Brown.

'Well,' said Vandam in a hollow voice, 'I never thought to see or say such a thing. But what can one say except that the curse has worked?'

Fenner was standing with hands covering his face; and the priest laid a hand on his arm and said, gently, 'Were you very fond of him?'

The secretary dropped his hands and his white face was ghastly under the moon.

'I hated him like hell,' he said; 'and if he died by a curse it might have been mine.'

The pressure of the priest's hand on his arm tightened; and the priest said, with an earnestness he had hardly yet shown: 'It wasn't your curse; pray be comforted.'

The police of the district had considerable difficulty in dealing with the four witnesses who were involved in the case. All of them were reputable, and even reliable people in the ordinary sense; and one of them was a person of considerable power and importance: Silas Vandam of the Oil Trust. The first police-officer who tried to express scepticism about his story struck sparks from the steel of that magnate's mind very rapidly indeed.

'Don't you talk to me about sticking to the facts,' said the millionaire with asperity. 'I've stuck to a good many facts before you were born and a few of the facts have stuck to me. I'll give you the facts all right if you've got the sense to take 'em down correctly.'

The policeman in question was youthful and subordinate, and had a hazy idea that the millionaire was too political to be treated as an ordinary citizen; so he passed him and his companions on to a more stolid superior, one Inspector Collins, a grizzled man with a grimly comfortable way of talking; as one who was genial but would stand no nonsense.

'Well, well,' he said, looking at the three figures before him with twinkling eyes, 'this seems to be a funny sort of a tale.'

Father Brown had already gone about his daily business; but Silas Vandam had suspended even the gigantic business of the markets for an hour or so to testify to his remarkable experience. Fenner’s business as secretary had ceased in a sense with his employer’s life; and the great Art Alboin, having no business in New York or anywhere else, except the spreading of the Breath of Life religion or the Great Spirit, had nothing to draw him away at the moment from the immediate affair. So they stood in a row in the inspector’s office, prepared to corroborate each other.

‘Now I’d better tell you to start with,’ said the inspector cheerfully, ‘that it’s no good for anybody to come to me with any miraculous stuff. I’m a practical man and a policeman, and that sort of thing is all very well for priests and parsons. This priest of yours seems to have got you all worked up about some story of a dreadful death and judgement; but I’m going to leave him and his religion out of it altogether. If Wynd came out of that room, somebody let him out. And if Wynd was found hanging on that tree, somebody hung him there.’

‘Quite so,’ said Fenner; ‘but as our evidence is that nobody let him out, the question is how could anybody have hung him there?’

‘How could anybody have a nose on his face?’ asked the inspector. ‘He had a nose on his face, and he had a noose round his neck. Those are facts; and, as I say, I’m a practical man and go by the facts. It can’t have been done by a miracle, so it must have been done by a man.’

Alboin had been standing rather in the background; and indeed his broad figure seemed to form a natural background to the leaner and more vivacious men in front of him. His white head was bowed with a certain abstraction; but as the inspector said the last sentence, he lifted it, shaking his hoary mane in a leonine fashion, and looking dazed but awakened. He moved forward into the centre of the group, and they had a vague feeling that he was even vaster than before. They had been only too prone to take him for a fool or a mountebank; but he was not altogether wrong when he said that there was in him a certain depth of lungs and life, like a west wind stored up in its strength, which might some day puff lighter things away.

‘So you’re a practical man, Mr Collins,’ he said, in a voice at once soft and heavy. ‘It must be the second or third time you’ve mentioned in this little conversation that you are a practical man; so I can’t be mistaken about that. And a very interesting little fact it is for anybody engaged in writing your life, letters, and table-talk, with portrait at the age of five, daguerreotype of your grandmother and views of the old home-town; and I’m sure your biographer won’t forget to mention it along with the fact that you had a pug nose with a pimple on it, and were nearly too fat to walk. And as you're a practical man, perhaps you would just go on practising till you've brought Warren Wynd to life again, and found out exactly how a practical man gets through a steel door. But I think you've got it wrong. You're not a practical man. You're a practical joke; that's what you are. The Almighty was having a bit of fun with us when he thought of you.'

With a characteristic sense of drama he went sailing towards the door before the astonished inspector could reply; and no after-recriminations could rob him of a certain appearance of triumph.

'I think you were perfectly right,' said Fenner. 'If those are practical men, give me priests.'

Another attempt was made to reach an official version of the event when the authorities fully realized who were the backers of the story, and what were the implications of it. Already it had broken out in the Press in its most sensationally and even shamelessly psychic form. Interviews with Vandam on his marvellous adventure, articles about Father Brown and his mystical intuitions, soon led those who feel responsible for guiding the public, to wish to guide it into a wiser channel. Next time the inconvenient witnesses were approached in a more indirect and tactful manner. They were told, almost in an airy fashion, that Professor Vair was very much interested in such abnormal experiences; was especially interested in their own astonishing case. Professor Vair was a psychologist of great distinction; he had been known to take a detached interest in criminology; it was only some little time afterwards that they discovered that he was in any way connected with the police.

Professor Vair was a courteous gentleman, quietly dressed in pale grey clothes, with an artistic tie and a fair, pointed beard; he looked more like a landscape painter to anyone not acquainted with a certain special type of don. He had an air not only of courtesy, but of frankness.

'Yes, yes, I know,' he said smiling; 'I can guess what you must have gone through. The police do not shine in inquiries of a psychic sort, do they? Of course, dear old Collins said he only wanted the facts. What an absurd blunder! In a case of this kind we emphatically do not only want the facts. It is even more essential to have the fancies.'

'Do you mean,' asked Vandam gravely, 'that all that we thought facts were merely fancies?'

‘Not at all,’ said the professor; ‘I only mean that the police are stupid in thinking they can leave out the psychological element in these things. Well, of course, the psychological element is everything in everything, though it is only just beginning to be understood. To begin with, take the element called personality. Now I have heard of this priest, Father Brown, before; and he is one of the most remarkable men of our time. Men of that sort carry a sort of atmosphere with them; and nobody knows how much his nerves and even his very senses are affected by it for the time being. People are hypnotized — yes, hypnotized; for hypnotism, like everything else, is a matter of degree; it enters slightly into all daily conversation: it is not necessarily conducted by a man in evening-dress on a platform in a public hall. Father Brown’s religion has always understood the psychology of atmospheres, and knows how to appeal to everything simultaneously; even, for instance, to the sense of smell. It understands those curious effects produced by music on animals and human beings; it can—’

‘Hang it,’ protested Fenner, ‘you don’t think he walked down the corridor carrying a church organ?’

‘He knows better than to do that,’ said Professor Vair laughing. ‘He knows how to concentrate the essence of all these spiritual sounds and sights, and even smells, in a few restrained gestures; in an art or school of manners. He could contrive so to concentrate your minds on the supernatural by his mere presence, that natural things slipped off your minds to left and right unnoticed. Now you know,’ he proceeded with a return to cheerful good sense, ‘that the more we study it the more queer the whole question of human evidence becomes. There is not one man in twenty who really observes things at all. There is not one man in a hundred who observes them with real precision; certainly not one in a hundred who can first observe, then remember, and finally describe. Scientific experiments have been made again and again showing that men under strain have thought a door was shut when it was open, or open when it was shut. Men have differed about the number of doors or windows in a wall just in front of them. They have suffered optical illusions in broad daylight. They have done this even without the hypnotic effect of personality; but here we have a very powerful and persuasive personality bent upon fixing only one picture on your minds; the picture of the wild Irish rebel shaking his pistol at the sky and firing that vain volley, whose echoes were the thunders of heaven.’

‘Professor,’ cried Fenner, ‘I’d swear on my deathbed that door never opened.’

‘Recent experiments,’ went on the professor, quietly, ‘have suggested that our consciousness is not continuous, but is a succession of very rapid impressions like a cinema; it is possible that somebody or something may, so to speak, slip in or out between the scenes. It acts only in the instant while the curtain is down. Probably the patter of conjurors and all forms of sleight of hand depend on what we may call these black flashes of blindness between the flashes of sight. Now this priest and preacher of transcendental notions had filled you with a transcendental imagery; the image of the Celt like a Titan shaking the tower with his curse. Probably he accompanied it with some slight but compelling gesture, pointing your eyes and minds in the direction of the unknown destroyer below. Or perhaps something else happened, or somebody else passed by.’

‘Wilson, the servant,’ grunted Alboin, ‘went down the hallway to wait on the bench, but I guess he didn’t distract us much.’

‘You never know how much,’ replied Vair; ‘it might have been that or more likely your eyes following some gesture of the priest as he told his tale of magic. It was in one of those black flashes that Mr Warren Wynd slipped out of his door and went to his death. That is the most probable explanation. It is an illustration of the new discovery. The mind is not a continuous line, but rather a dotted line.’

‘Very dotted,’ said Fenner feebly. ‘Not to say dotty.’

‘You don’t really believe,’ asked Vair, ‘that your employer was shut up in a room like a box?’

‘It’s better than believing that I ought to be shut up in a room like a padded cell,’ answered Fenner. ‘That’s what I complain of in your suggestions, professor. I’d as soon believe in a priest who believes in a miracle, as disbelieve in any man having any right to believe in a fact. The priest tells me that a man can appeal to a God I know nothing about to avenge him by the laws of some higher justice that I know nothing about. There’s nothing for me to say except that I know nothing about it. But, at least, if the poor Paddy’s prayer and pistol could be heard in a higher world, that higher world might act in some way that seems odd to us. But you ask me to disbelieve the facts of this world as they appear to my own five wits. According to you, a whole procession of Irishmen carrying blunderbusses may have walked through this room while we were talking, so long as they took care to tread on the blind spots in our minds. Miracles of the monkish sort, like materializing a crocodile or hanging a cloak on a sunbeam, seem quite sane compared to you.'

'Oh, well,' said Professor Vair, rather curtly, 'if you are resolved to believe in your priest and his miraculous Irishman I can say no more. I'm afraid you have not had an opportunity of studying psychology.'

'No,' said Fenner dryly; 'but I've had an opportunity of studying psychologists.'

And, bowing politely, he led his deputation out of the room and did not speak till he got into the street; then he addressed them rather explosively.

'Raving lunatics!' cried Fenner in a fume. 'What the devil do they think is to happen to the world if nobody knows whether he's seen anything or not? I wish I'd blown his silly head off with a blank charge, and then explained that I did it in a blind flash. Father Brown's miracle may be miraculous or no, but he said it would happen and it did happen. All these blasted cranks can do is to see a thing happen and then say it didn't. Look here, I think we owe it to the padre to testify to his little demonstration. We're all sane, solid men who never believed in anything. We weren't drunk. We weren't devout. It simply happened just as he said it would.'

'I quite agree,' said the millionaire. 'It may be the beginning of mighty big things in the spiritual line; but anyhow, the man who's in the spiritual line himself, Father Brown, has certainly scored over this business.'

A few days afterwards Father Brown received a very polite note signed Silas T. Vandam, and asking him if he would attend at a stated hour at the apartment which was the scene of the disappearance, in order to take steps for the establishment of that marvellous occurrence. The occurrence itself had already begun to break out in the newspapers, and was being taken up everywhere by the enthusiasts of occultism. Father Brown saw the flaring posters inscribed 'Suicide of Vanishing Man', and 'Man's Curse Hangs Philanthropist', as he passed towards Moon Crescent and mounted the steps on the way to the elevator. He found the little group much as he left it, Vandam, Alboin, and the secretary; but there was an entirely new respectfulness and even reverence in their tone towards himself. They were standing by Wynd's desk, on which lay a large paper and writing materials; they turned to greet him.

'Father Brown,' said the spokesman, who was the white-haired Westerner, somewhat sobered with his responsibility, 'we asked you here in the first place to offer our apologies and our thanks. We recognize that it was you that spotted the spiritual manifestation from the first. We were hard-shell sceptics, all of us; but we realize now that a man must break that shell to get at the great things behind the world. You stand for those things; you stand for the super-normal explanation of things; and we have to hand it to you. And in the second place, we feel that this document would not be complete without your signature. We are notifying the exact facts to the Psychical Research Society, because the newspaper accounts are not what you might call exact. We've stated how the curse was spoken out in the street; how the man was sealed up here in a room like a box; how the curse dissolved him straight into thin air, and in some unthinkable way materialized him as a suicide hoisted on a gallows. That's all we can say about it; but all that we know, and have seen with our own eyes. And as you were the first to believe in the miracle, we all feel that you ought to be the first to sign.'

'No, really,' said Father Brown, in embarrassment. 'I don't think I should like to do that.'

'You mean you'd rather not sign first?'

'I mean I'd rather not sign at all,' said Father Brown, modestly. 'You see, it doesn't quite do for a man in my position to joke about miracles.'

'But it was you who said it was a miracle,' said Alboin, staring.

'I'm so sorry,' said Father Brown; 'I'm afraid there's some mistake. I don't think I ever said it was a miracle. All I said was that it might happen. What you said was that it couldn't happen, because it would be a miracle if it did. And then it did. And so you said it was a miracle. But I never said a word about miracles or magic, or anything of the sort from beginning to end.'

'But I thought you believed in miracles,' broke out the secretary.

'Yes,' answered Father Brown, 'I believe in miracles. I believe in man-eating tigers, but I don't see them running about everywhere. If I want any miracles, I know where to get them.'

'I can't understand your taking this line, Father Brown,' said Vandam, earnestly. 'It seems so narrow; and you don't look narrow to me, though you are a parson. Don't you see, a miracle like this will knock all materialism endways? It will just tell the whole world in big print that spiritual powers can work and do work. You'll be serving religion as no parson ever served it yet.'

The priest had stiffened a little and seemed in some strange way clothed with unconscious and impersonal dignity, for all his stumpy figure. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘you wouldn’t suggest I should serve religion by what I know to be a lie? I don’t know precisely what you mean by the phrase; and, to be quite candid, I’m not sure you do. Lying may be serving religion; I’m sure it’s not serving God. And since you are harping so insistently on what I believe, wouldn’t it be as well if you had some sort of notion of what it is?’

‘I don’t think I quite understand,’ observed the millionaire, curiously.

‘I don’t think you do,’ said Father Brown, with simplicity. ‘You say this thing was done by spiritual powers. What spiritual powers? You don’t think the holy angels took him and hung him on a garden tree, do you? And as for the unholy angels — no, no, no. The men who did this did a wicked thing, but they went no further than their own wickedness; they weren’t wicked enough to be dealing with spiritual powers. I know something about Satanism, for my sins; I’ve been forced to know. I know what it is, what it practically always is. It’s proud and it’s sly. It likes to be superior; it loves to horrify the innocent with things half understood, to make children’s flesh creep. That’s why it’s so fond of mysteries and initiations and secret societies and all the rest of it. Its eyes are turned inwards, and however grand and grave it may look, it’s always hiding a small, mad smile.’ He shuddered suddenly, as if caught in an icy draught of air. ‘Never mind about them; they’ve got nothing to do with this, believe me. Do you think that poor, wild Irishman of mine, who ran raving down the street, who blurted out half of it when he first saw my face, and ran away for fear he should blurt out more, do you think Satan confides any secrets to him? I admit he joined in a plot, probably in a plot with two other men worse than himself; but for all that, he was just in an everlasting rage when he rushed down the lane and let off his pistol and his curse.’

‘But what on earth does all this mean?’ demanded Vandam. ‘Letting off a toy pistol and a twopenny curse wouldn’t do what was done, except by a miracle. It wouldn’t make Wynd disappear like a fairy. It wouldn’t make him reappear a quarter of a mile away with a rope round his neck.’

‘No,’ said Father Brown sharply; ‘but what would it do?’

‘And still I don’t follow you,’ said the millionaire gravely.

‘I say, what would it do?’ repeated the priest; showing, for the first time, a sort of animation verging on annoyance. ‘You keep on repeating that a blank pistol-shot wouldn’t do this and wouldn’t do that; that if that was all, the murder wouldn't happen or the miracle wouldn't happen. It doesn't seem to occur to you to ask what would happen. What would happen to you if a lunatic let off a firearm without rhyme or reason right under your window? What's the very first thing that would happen?'

Vandam looked thoughtful. 'I guess I should look out of the window,' he said.

'Yes,' said Father Brown, 'you'd look out of the window. That's the whole story. It's a sad story, but it's finished now; and there were extenuating circumstances.'

'Why should looking out of the window hurt him?' asked Alboin. 'He didn't fall out, or he'd have been found in the lane.'

'No,' said Father Brown, in a low voice. 'He didn't fall. He rose.'

There was something in his voice like the groan of a gong, a note of doom, but otherwise he went on steadily: 'He rose, but not on wings; not on the wings of any holy or unholy angels. He rose at the end of a rope, exactly as you saw him in the garden; a noose dropped over his head the moment it was poked out of the window. Don't you remember Wilson, that big servant of his, a man of huge strength, while Wynd was the lightest of little shrimps? Didn't Wilson go to the floor above to get a pamphlet, to a room full of luggage corded in coils and coils of rope? Has Wilson been seen since that day? I fancy not.'

'Do you mean,' asked the secretary, 'that Wilson whisked him clean out of his own window like a trout on a line?'

'Yes,' said the other, 'and let him down again out of the other window into the park, where the third accomplice hooked him on to a tree. Remember the lane was always empty; remember the wall opposite was quite blank; remember it was all over in five minutes after the Irishman gave the signal with the pistol. There were three of them in it of course; and I wonder whether you can all guess who they were.'

They were all three staring at the plain, square window and the blank, white wall beyond; and nobody answered.

'By the way,' went on Father Brown, 'don't think I blame you for jumping to preternatural conclusions. The reason's very simple, really. You all swore you were hard-shelled materialists; and as a matter of fact you were all balanced on the very edge of belief — of belief in almost anything. There are thousands balanced on it today; but it's a sharp, uncomfortable edge to sit on. You won't rest till you believe something; that's why Mr

Vandam went through new religions with a tooth-comb, and Mr Alboin quotes Scripture for his religion of breathing exercises, and Mr Fenner grumbles at the very God he denies. That's where you all split; it's natural to believe in the supernatural. It never feels natural to accept only natural things. But though it wanted only a touch to tip you into preternaturalism about these things, these things really were only natural things. They were not only natural, they were almost unnaturally simple. I suppose there never was quite so simple a story as this.'

Fenner laughed and then looked puzzled. 'I don't understand one thing,' he said. 'If it was Wilson, how did Wynd come to have a man like that on such intimate terms? How did he come to be killed by a man he'd seen every day for years? He was famous as being a judge of men.'

Father Brown thumped his umbrella on the ground with an emphasis he rarely showed.

'Yes,' he said, almost fiercely; 'that was how he came to be killed. He was killed for just that. He was killed for being a judge of men.'

They all stared at him, but he went on, almost as if they were not there.

'What is any man that he should be a judge of men?' he demanded. 'These three were the tramps that once stood before him and were dismissed rapidly right and left to one place or another; as if for them there were no cloak of courtesy, no stages of intimacy, no free-will in friendship. And twenty years has not exhausted the indignation born of that unfathomable insult in that moment when he dared to know them at a glance.'

'Yes,' said the secretary; 'I understand ... and I understand how it is that you understand — all sorts of things.'

'Well, I'm blamed if I understand,' cried the breezy Western gentleman boisterously. 'Your Wilson and your Irishman seem to be just a couple of cut-throat murderers who killed their benefactor. I've no use for a black and bloody assassin of that sort, in my morality, whether it's religion or not.'

'He was a black and bloody assassin, no doubt,' said Fenner quietly. 'I'm not defending him; but I suppose it's Father Brown's business to pray for all men, even for a man like—'

'Yes,' assented Father Brown, 'it's my business to pray for all men, even for a man like Warren Wynd.'

The Curse of the Golden Cross

Six people sat around a small table, seeming almost as incongruous and accidental as if they had been shipwrecked separately on the same small desert island. At least the sea surrounded them; for in one sense their island was enclosed in another island, a large and flying island like Laputa. For the little table was one of many little tables dotted about in the dining saloon of that monstrous ship the Moravia, speeding through the night and the everlasting emptiness of the Atlantic. The little company had nothing in common except that all were travelling from America to England. Two of them at least might be called celebrities; others might be called obscure, and in one or two cases even dubious.

The first was the famous Professor Smaill, an authority on certain archaeological studies touching the later Byzantine Empire. His lectures, delivered in an American University, were accepted as of the first authority even in the most authoritative seats of learning in Europe. His literary works were so steeped in a mellow and imaginative sympathy with the European past, that it often gave strangers a start to hear him speak with an American accent. Yet he was, in his way, very American; he had long fair hair brushed back from a big square forehead, long straight features and a curious mixture of preoccupation with a poise of potential swiftness, like a lion pondering absent-mindedly on his next leap.

There was only one lady in the group; and she was (as the journalists often said of her) a host in herself; being quite prepared to play hostess, not to say empress, at that or any other table. She was Lady Diana Wales, the celebrated lady traveller in tropical and other countries; but there was nothing rugged or masculine about her appearance at dinner. She was herself handsome in an almost tropical fashion, with a mass of hot and heavy red hair; she was dressed in what the journalists call a daring fashion, but her face was intelligent and her eyes had that bright and rather prominent appearance which belongs to the eyes of ladies who ask questions at political meetings.

The other four figures seemed at first like shadows in this shining presence; but they showed differences on a close view. One of them was a young man entered on the ship’s register as Paul T. Tarrant. He was an American type which might be more truly called an American antitype.

Every nation probably has an antitype; a sort of extreme exception that proves the national rule. Americans really respect work, rather as Europeans respect war. There is a halo of heroism about it; and he who shrinks from it is less than a man. The antitype is evident through being exceedingly rare. He is the dandy or dude: the wealthy waster who makes a weak villain for so many American novels. Paul Tarrant seemed to have nothing whatever to do but change his clothes, which he did about six times a day; passing into paler or richer shades of his suit of exquisite light grey, like the delicate silver changes of the twilight. Unlike most Americans, he cultivated very carefully a short, curly beard; and unlike most dandies, even of his own type, he seemed rather sulky than showy. Perhaps there was something almost Byronic about his silence and his gloom.

The next two travellers were naturally classed together; merely because they were both English lecturers returning from an American tour. One of them was described as Leonard Smyth, apparently a minor poet, but something of a major journalist; long-headed, light-haired, perfectly dressed, and perfectly capable of looking after himself. The other was a rather comic contrast, being short and broad, with a black, walrus moustache, and as taciturn as the other was talkative. But as he had been both charged with robbing and praised for rescuing a Roumanian Princess threatened by a jaguar in his travelling menagerie, and had thus figured in a fashionable case, it was naturally felt that his views on God, progress, his own early life, and the future of Anglo-American relations would be of great interest and value to the inhabitants of Minneapolis and Omaha. The sixth and most insignificant figure was that of a little English priest going by the name of Brown. He listened to the conversation with respectful attention, and he was at that moment forming the impression that there was one rather curious thing about it.

‘I suppose those Byzantine studies of yours, Professor,’ Leonard Smyth was saying, ‘would throw some light on this story of a tomb found somewhere on the south coast; near Brighton, isn’t it? Brighton’s a long way from Byzantium, of course. But I read something about the style of burying or embalming or something being supposed to be Byzantine.’

‘Byzantine studies certainly have to reach a long way,’ replied the Professor dryly. ‘They talk about specialists; but I think the hardest thing on earth is to specialize. In this case, for instance: how can a man know anything about Byzantium till he knows everything about Rome before it and about Islam after it? Most Arab arts were old Byzantine arts. Why, take algebra—'

'But I won't take algebra,' cried the lady decisively. 'I never did, and I never do. But I'm awfully interested in embalming. I was with Gatton, you know, when he opened the Babylonian tombs. Ever since then I found mummies and preserved bodies and all that perfectly thrilling. Do tell us about this one.'

'Gatton was an interesting man,' said the Professor. 'They were an interesting family. That brother of his who went into Parliament was much more than an ordinary politician. I never understood the Fascisti till he made that speech about Italy.'

'Well, we're not going to Italy on this trip,' said Lady Diana persistently, 'and I believe you're going to that little place where they've found the tomb. In Sussex, isn't it?'

'Sussex is pretty large, as these little English sections go,' replied the Professor. 'One might wander about in it for a goodish time; and it's a good place to wander in. It's wonderful how large those low hills seem when you're on them.'

There was an abrupt accidental silence; and then the lady said, 'Oh, I'm going on deck,' and rose, the men rising with her. But the Professor lingered and the little priest was the last to leave the table, carefully folding up his napkin. And as they were thus left alone together the Professor said suddenly to his companion:

'What would you say was the point of that little talk?'

'Well,' said Father Brown, smiling, 'since you ask me, there was something that amused me a little. I may be wrong; but it seemed to me that the company made three attempts to get you to talk about an embalmed body said to be found in Sussex. And you, on your side, very courteously offered to talk — first about algebra, and then about the Fascisti, and then about the landscape of the Downs.'

'In short,' replied the Professor, 'you thought I was ready to talk about any subject but that one. You were quite right.'

The Professor was silent for a little time, looking down at the tablecloth; then he looked up and spoke with that swift impulsiveness that suggested the lion's leap.

'See here. Father Brown,' he said, 'I consider you about the wisest and whitest man I ever met.'

Father Brown was very English. He had all the normal national helplessness about what to do with a serious and sincere compliment suddenly handed to him to his face in the American manner. His reply was a meaningless murmur; and it was the Professor who proceeded, with the same staccato earnestness: ‘You see, up to a point it’s all simple enough. A Christian tomb of the Dark Ages, apparently that of a bishop, has been found under a little church at Dulham on the Sussex coast. The Vicar happens to be a good bit of an archaeologist himself and has been able to find a good deal more than I know yet. There was a rumour of the corpse being embalmed in a way peculiar to Greeks and Egyptians but unknown in the West, especially at that date. So Mr Walters (that is the Vicar) naturally wonders about Byzantine influences. But he also mentions something else, that is of even more personal interest to me.’

His long grave face seemed to grow even longer and graver as he frowned down at the tablecloth. His long finger seemed to be tracing patterns on it like the plans of dead cities and their temples and tombs.

‘So I’m going to tell you, and nobody else, why it is I have to be careful about mentioning that matter in mixed company; and why, the more eager they are to talk about it, the more cautious I have to be. It is also stated that in the coffin is a chain with a cross, common enough to look at, but with a certain secret symbol on the back found on only one other cross in the world. It is from the arcana of the very earliest Church, and is supposed to indicate St Peter setting up his See at Antioch before he came to Rome. Anyhow, I believe there is but one other like it, and it belongs to me. I hear there is some story about a curse on it; but I take no notice of that. But whether or no there is a curse, there really is, in one sense, a conspiracy; though the conspiracy should only consist of one man.’

‘Of one man?’ repeated Father Brown almost mechanically.

‘Of one madman, for all I know,’ said Professor Smaill. ‘It’s a long story and in some ways a silly one.’

He paused again, tracing plans like architectural drawings with his finger on the cloth, and then resumed: ‘Perhaps I had better tell you about it from the beginning, in case you see some little point in the story that is meaningless to me. It began years and years ago, when I was conducting some investigations on my own account in the antiquities of Crete and the Greek islands. I did a great deal of it practically single-handed; sometimes with the most rude and temporary help from the inhabitants of the place, and sometimes literally alone. It was under the latter circumstances that I found a maze of subterranean passages which led at last to a heap of rich refuse, broken ornaments and scattered gems which I took to be the ruins of some sunken altar, and in which I found the curious gold cross. I turned it over, and on the back of it I saw the Ichthus or fish, which was an early Christian symbol, but of a shape and pattern rather different from that commonly found; and, as it seemed to me, more realistic — more as if the archaic designer had meant it to be not merely a conventional enclosure or nimbus, but to look a little more like a real fish. It seemed to me that there was a flattening towards one end of it that was not like mere mathematical decoration, but rather like a sort of rude or even savage zoology.

‘In order to explain very briefly why I thought this find important, I must tell you the point of the excavation. For one thing, it had something of the nature of an excavation of an excavation. We were on the track not only of antiquities, but of the antiquarians of antiquity. We had reason to believe, or some of us thought we had reason to believe, that these underground passages, mostly of the Minoan period, like that famous one which is actually identified with the labyrinth of the Minotaur, had not really been lost and left undisturbed for all the ages between the Minotaur and the modern explorer. We believed that these underground places, I might almost say these underground towns and villages, had already been penetrated during the intervening period by some persons prompted by some motive. About the motive there were different schools of thought: some holding that the Emperors had ordered an official exploration out of mere scientific curiosity; others that the furious fashion in the later Roman Empire for all sorts of lurid Asiatic superstitions had started some nameless Manichaean sect or other rioting in the caverns in orgies that had to be hidden from the face of the sun. I belong to the group which believed that these caverns had been used in the same way as the catacombs. That is, we believed that, during some of the persecutions which spread like a fire over the whole Empire, the Christians had concealed themselves in these ancient pagan labyrinths of stone. It was therefore with a thrill as sharp as a thunderclap that I found and picked up the fallen golden cross and saw the design upon it; and it was with still more of a shock of felicity that, on turning to make my way once more outwards and upwards into the light of day, I looked up at the walls of bare rock that extended endlessly along the low passages, and saw scratched in yet ruder outline, but if possible more unmistakable, the shape of the Fish.

‘Something about it made it seem as if it might be a fossil fish or some rudimentary organism fixed for ever in a frozen sea. I could not analyse this analogy, otherwise unconnected with a mere drawing scratched upon the stone, till I realized that I was saying in my sub-conscious mind that the first Christians must have seemed something like fish, dumb and dwelling in a fallen world of twilight and silence, dropped far below the feet of men and moving in dark and twilight and a soundless world.

‘Everyone walking along stone passages knows what it is to be followed by phantom feet. The echo follows flapping or clapping behind or in front, so that it is almost impossible for the man who is really lonely to believe in his loneliness. I had got used to the effects of this echo and had not noticed it much for some time past, when I caught sight of the symbolical shape scrawled on the wall of rock. I stopped, and at the same instant it seemed as if my heart stopped, too; for my own feet had halted, but the echo went marching on.

‘I ran forward, and it seemed as if the ghostly footsteps ran also, but not with that exact imitation which marks the material reverberation of a sound. I stopped again, and the steps stopped also; but I could have sworn they stopped an instant too late; I called out a question; and my cry was answered; but the voice was not my own.

‘It came round the corner of a rock just in front of me; and throughout that uncanny chase I noticed that it was always at some such angle of the crooked path that it paused and spoke. The little space in front of me that could be illuminated by my small electric torch was always as empty as an empty room. Under these conditions I had a conversation with I know not whom, which lasted all the way to the first white gleam of daylight, and even there I could not see in what fashion he vanished into the light of day. But the mouth of the labyrinth was full of many openings and cracks and chasms, and it would not have been difficult for him to have somehow darted back and disappeared again into the underworld of the caves. I only know that I came out on the lonely steps of a great mountain like a marble terrace, varied only with a green vegetation that seemed somehow more tropical than the purity of the rock, like the Oriental invasion that has spread sporadically over the fall of classic Hellas. I looked out on a sea of stainless blue, and the sun shone steadily on utter loneliness and silence; and there was not a blade of grass stirred with a whisper of flight nor the shadow of a shadow of man.

‘It had been a terrible conversation; so intimate and so individual and in a sense so casual. This being, bodiless, faceless, nameless and yet calling me by my name, had talked to me in those crypts and cracks where we were buried alive with no more passion or melodrama than if we had been sitting in two armchairs at a club. But he had told me also that he would unquestionably kill me or any other man who came into the possession of the cross with the mark of the fish. He told me frankly he was not fool enough to attack me there in the labyrinth, knowing I had a loaded revolver, and that he ran as much risk as I. But he told me, equally calmly, that he would plan my murder with the certainty of success, with every detail developed and every danger warded off, with the sort of artistic perfection that a Chinese craftsman or an Indian embroiderer gives to the artistic work of a life-time. Yet he was no Oriental; I am certain he was a white man. I suspect that he was a countryman of my own.

‘Since then I have received from time to time signs and symbols and queer impersonal messages that have made me certain, at least, that if the man is a maniac he is a monomaniac. He is always telling me, in this airy and detached way, that the preparations for my death and burial are proceeding satisfactorily; and that the only way in which I can prevent their being crowned with a comfortable success is to give up the relic in my possession — the unique cross that I found in the cavern. He does not seem to have any religious sentiment or fanaticism on the point; he seems to have no passion but the passion of a collector of curiosities. That is one of the things that makes me feel sure he is a man of the West and not of the East. But this particular curiosity seems to have driven him quite crazy.

‘And then came this report, as yet unsubstantiated, about the duplicate relic found on an embalmed body in a Sussex tomb. If he had been a maniac before, this news turned him into a demoniac possessed of seven devils. That there should be one of them belonging to another man was bad enough, but that there should be two of them and neither belonging to him was a torture not to be borne. His mad messages began to come thick and fast like showers of poisoned arrows, and each cried out more confidently than the last that death would strike me at the moment when I stretched out my unworthy hand towards the cross in the tomb.

‘‘You will never know me,’ he wrote, ‘you will never say my name; you will never see my face; you will die, and never know who has killed you. I may be in any form among those about you; but I shall be in that alone at which you have forgotten to look.’

‘From those threats I deduce that he is quite likely to shadow me on this expedition; and try to steal the relic or do me some mischief for possessing it. But as I never saw the man in my life, he may be almost any man I meet. Logically speaking, he may be any of the waiters who wait on me at table. He may be any of the passengers who sit with me at table.’

‘He may be me,’ said Father Brown, with cheerful contempt for grammar.

‘He may be anybody else,’ answered Smaill seriously. ‘That is what I meant by what I said just now. You are the only man I feel sure is not the enemy.’

Father Brown again looked embarrassed; then he smiled and said: ‘Well, oddly enough, I’m not. What we have to consider is any chance of finding out if he really is here before he — before he makes himself unpleasant.’

‘There is one chance of finding out, I think,’ remarked the Professor rather grimly. ‘When we get to Southampton I shall take a car at once along the coast; I should be glad if you would come with me, but in the ordinary sense, of course, our little party will break up. If any one of them turns up again in that little churchyard on the Sussex coast, we shall know who he really is.’

The Professor’s programme was duly carried out, at least to the extent of the car and its cargo in the form of Father Brown. They coasted along the road with the sea on one side and the hills of Hampshire and Sussex on the other; nor was there visible to the eye any shadow of pursuit. As they approached the village of Dulham only one man crossed their path who had any connexion with the matter in hand; a journalist who had just visited the church and been courteously escorted by the vicar through the new excavated chapel; but his remarks and notes seemed to be of the ordinary newspaper sort. But Professor Smaill was perhaps a little fanciful, and could not dismiss the sense of something odd and discouraging in the attitude and appearance of the man, who was tall and shabby, hook-nosed and hollow-eyed, with moustaches that drooped with depression. He seemed anything but enlivened by his late experiment as a sightseer; indeed, he seemed to be striding as fast as possible from the sight, when they stopped him with a question.

‘It’s all about a curse,’ he said; ‘a curse on the place, according to the guide-book or the parson, or the oldest inhabitant or whoever is the authority; and really, it feels jolly like it. Curse or curse, I’m glad to have got out of it.’

‘Do you believe in curses?’ asked Smaill curiously.

‘I don’t believe in anything; I’m a journalist,’ answered the melancholy being— ‘Boon, of the Daily Wire. But there’s a something creepy about that crypt; and I’ll never deny I felt a chill.’ And he strode on towards the railway station with a further accelerated pace.

‘Looks like a raven or a crow, that fellow,’ observed Smaill as they turned towards the churchyard. ‘What is it they say about a bird of ill omen?’

They entered the churchyard slowly, the eyes of the American antiquary lingering luxuriantly over the isolated roof of the lynch-gate and the large unfathomable black growth of the yew looking like night itself defying the broad daylight. The path climbed up amid heaving levels of turf in which the gravestones were tilted at all angles like stone rafts tossed on a green sea, till it came to the ridge beyond which the great sea itself ran like an iron bar, with pale lights in it like steel. Almost at their feet the tough rank grass turned into a tuft of sea-holly and ended in grey and yellow sand; and a foot or two from the holly, and outlined darkly against the steely sea, stood a motionless figure. But for its dark-grey clothing it might almost have been the statue on some sepulchral monument. But Father Brown instantly recognized something in the elegant stoop of the shoulders and the rather sullen outward thrust of the short beard.

‘Gee!’ exclaimed the professor of archaeology; ‘it’s that man Tarrant, if you call him a man. Did you think, when I spoke on the boat, that I should ever get so quick an answer to my question?’

‘I thought you might get too many answers to it,’ answered Father Brown.

‘Why, how do you mean?’ inquired the Professor, darting a look at him over his shoulder.

‘I mean,’ answered the other mildly, ‘that I thought I heard voices behind the yew-tree. I don’t think Mr Tarrant is so solitary as he looks; I might even venture to say, so solitary as he likes to look.’

Even as Tarrant turned slowly round in his moody manner, the confirmation came. Another voice, high and rather hard, but none the less feminine, was saying with experienced raillery: ‘And how was I to know he would be here?’ It was borne in upon Professor Smaill that this gay observation was not addressed to him; so he was forced to conclude in some bewilderment, that yet a third person was present. As Lady Diana Wales came out, radiant and resolute as ever, from the shadow of the yew, he noted grimly that she had a living shadow of her own. The lean dapper figure of Leonard Smyth, that insinuating man of letters, appeared immediately behind her own flamboyant form, smiling, his head a little on one side like a dog’s.

‘Snakes!’ muttered Smaill; ‘why, they’re all here! Or all except that little showman with the walrus whiskers.’

He heard Father Brown laughing softly beside him; and indeed the situation was becoming something more than laughable. It seemed to be turning topsy-turvy and tumbling about their ears like a pantomime trick; for even while the Professor had been speaking, his words had received the most comical contradiction. The round head with the grotesque black crescent of moustache had appeared suddenly and seemingly out of a hole in the ground. An instant afterwards they realized that the hole was in fact a very large hole, leading to a ladder which descended into the bowels of the earth; that it was in fact the entrance to the subterranean scene they had come to visit. The little man had been the first to find the entrance and had already descended a rung or two of the ladder before he put his head out again to address his fellow-travellers. He looked like some particularly preposterous Grave-digger in a burlesque of Hamlet. He only said thickly behind his thick moustaches, ‘It is down here.’ But it came to the rest of the company with a start of realization that, though they had sat opposite him at meal-times for a week, they had hardly ever heard him speak before; and that though he was supposed to be an English lecturer, he spoke with a rather occult foreign accent.

‘You see, my dear Professor,’ cried Lady Diana with trenchant cheerfulness, ‘your Byzantine mummy was simply too exciting to be missed. I simply had to come along and see it; and I’m sure the gentlemen felt just the same. Now you must tell us all about it.’

‘I do not know all about it,’ said the Professor gravely, not to say grimly, ‘In some respects I don’t even know what it’s all about. It certainly seems odd that we should have all met again so soon, but I suppose there are no limits to the modern thirst for information. But if we are all to visit the place it must be done in a responsible way and, if you will forgive me, under responsible leadership. We must notify whoever is in charge of the excavations; we shall probably at least have to put our names in a book.'

Something rather like a wrangle followed on this collision between the impatience of the lady and the suspicions of the archaeologist; but the latter's insistence on the official rights of the Vicar and the local investigation ultimately prevailed; the little man with the moustaches came reluctantly out of his grave again and silently acquiesced in a less impetuous descent. Fortunately, the clergyman himself appeared at this stage — a grey-haired, good-looking gentleman with a droop accentuated by doublet eyeglasses; and while rapidly establishing sympathetic relations with the Professor as a fellow-antiquarian, he did not seem to regard his rather motley group of companions with anything more hostile than amusement.

'I hope you are none of you superstitious,' he said pleasantly. 'I ought to tell you, to start with, that there are supposed to be all sorts of bad omens and curses hanging over our devoted heads in this business. I have just been deciphering a Latin inscription which was found over the entrance to the chapel; and it would seem that there are no less than three curses involved; a curse for entering the sealed chamber, a double curse for opening the coffin, and a triple and most terrible curse for touching the gold relic found inside it. The two first maledictions I have already incurred myself,' he added with a smile; 'but I fear that even you will have to incur the first and mildest of them if you are to see anything at all. According to the story, the curses descend in a rather lingering fashion, at long intervals and on later occasions. I don't know whether that is any comfort to you.' And the Reverend Mr Walters smiled once more in his drooping and benevolent manner.

'Story,' repeated Professor Smaill, 'why, what story is that?'

'It is rather a long story and varies, like other local legends,' answered the Vicar. 'But it is undoubtedly contemporary with the time of the tomb; and the substance of it is embodied in the inscription and is roughly this: Guy de Gisors, a lord of the manor here early in the thirteenth century, had set his heart on a beautiful black horse in the possession of an envoy from Genoa, which that practical merchant prince would not sell except for a huge price. Guy was driven by avarice to the crime of pillaging the shrine and, according to one story, even killing the bishop, who was then resident there. Anyhow, the bishop uttered a curse which was to fall on anybody who should continue to withhold the gold cross from its resting-place in his tomb, or should take steps to disturb it when it had returned there. The feudal lord raised the money for the horse by selling the gold relic to a goldsmith in the town; but on the first day he mounted the horse the animal reared and threw him in front of the church porch, breaking his neck. Meanwhile the goldsmith, hitherto wealthy and prosperous, was ruined by a series of inexplicable accidents, and fell into the power of a Jew money-lender living in the manor. Eventually the unfortunate goldsmith, faced with nothing but starvation, hanged himself on an apple-tree. The gold cross with all his other goods, his house, shop, and tools, had long ago passed into the possession of the money-lender. Meanwhile, the son and heir of the feudal lord, shocked by the judgement on his blasphemous sire, had become a religious devotee in the dark and stern spirit of those times, and conceived it his duty to persecute all heresy and unbelief among his vassals. Thus the Jew, in his turn, who had been cynically tolerated by the father, was ruthlessly burnt by order of the son; so that he, in his turn, suffered for the possession of the relic; and after these three judgements, it was returned to the bishop's tomb; since when no eye has seen and no hand has touched it.'

Lady Diana Wales seemed to be more impressed than might have been expected. 'It really gives one rather a shiver,' she said, 'to think that we are going to be the first, except the vicar.'

The pioneer with the big moustaches and the broken English did not descend after all by his favourite ladder, which indeed had only been used by some of the workmen conducting the excavation; for the clergyman led them round to a larger and more convenient entrance about a hundred yards away, out of which he himself had just emerged from his investigations underground. Here the descent was by a fairly gradual slope with no difficulties save the increasing darkness; for they soon found themselves moving in single file down a tunnel as black as pitch, and it was some little time before they saw a glimmer of light ahead of them. Once during that silent march there was a sound like a catch in somebody's breath, it was impossible to say whose; and once there was an oath like a dull explosion, and it was in an unknown tongue.

They came out in a circular chamber like a basilica in a ring of round arches; for that chapel had been built before the first pointed arch of the Gothic had pierced our civilization like a spear. A glimmer of greenish light between some of the pillars marked the place of the other opening into the world above, and gave a vague sense of being under the sea, which was intensified by one or two other incidental and perhaps fanciful resemblances. For the dog-tooth pattern of the Norman was faintly traceable round all the arches, giving them, above the cavernous darkness, something of the look of the mouths of monstrous sharks. And in the centre the dark bulk of the tomb itself, with its lifted lid of stone, might almost have been the jaws of some such leviathan.

Whether out of the sense of fitness or from the lack of more modern appliances, the clerical antiquary had arranged for the illumination of the chapel only by four tall candles in big wooden candlesticks standing on the floor. Of these only one was alight when they entered, casting a faint glimmer over the mighty architectural forms. When they had all assembled, the clergyman proceeded to light the three others, and the appearance and contents of the great sarcophagus came more clearly into view.

All eyes went first to the face of the dead, preserved across all those ages in the lines of life by some secret Eastern process, it was said, inherited from heathen antiquity and unknown to the simple graveyards of our own island. The Professor could hardly repress an exclamation of wonder; for, though the face was as pale as a mask of wax, it looked otherwise like a sleeping man, who had but that moment closed his eyes. The face was of the ascetic, perhaps even the fanatical type, with a high framework of bones; the figure was clad in a golden cope and gorgeous vestments, and high up on the breast, at the base of the throat, glittered the famous gold cross upon a short gold chain, or rather necklace. The stone coffin had been opened by lifting the lid of it at the head and propping it aloft upon two strong wooden shafts or poles, hitched above under the edge of the upper slab and wedged below into the corners of the coffin behind the head of the corpse. Less could therefore be seen of the feet or the lower part of the figure, but the candle-light shone full on the face; and in contrast with its tones of dead ivory the cross of gold seemed to stir and sparkle like a fire.

Professor Smaill’s big forehead had carried a big furrow of reflection, or possibly of worry, ever since the clergyman had told the story of the curse. But feminine intuition, not untouched by feminine hysteria, understood the meaning of his brooding immobility better than did the men around him. In the silence of that candle-lit cavern Lady Diana cried out suddenly: ‘Don’t touch it, I tell you!’

But the man had already made one of his swift leonine movements, leaning forward over the body. The next instant they all darted, some forward and some backward, but all with a dreadful ducking motion as if the sky were falling.

As the Professor laid a finger on the gold cross, the wooden props, that bent very slightly in supporting the lifted lid of stone, seemed to jump and straighten themselves with a jerk. The lip of the stone slab slipped from its wooden perch; and in all their souls and stomachs came a sickening sense of down-rushing ruin, as if they had all been flung off a precipice. Smaill had withdrawn his head swiftly, but not in time; and he lay senseless beside the coffin, in a red puddle of blood from scalp or skull. And the old stone coffin was once more closed as it had been for centuries; save that one or two sticks or splinters stuck in the crevice, horribly suggestive of bones crunched by an ogre. The leviathan had snapped its jaws of stone.

Lady Diana was looking at the wreck with eyes that had an electric glare as of lunacy; her red hair looked scarlet against the pallor of her face in the greenish twilight. Smyth was looking at her, still with something dog-like in the turn of his head; but it was the expression of a dog who looks at a master whose catastrophe he can only partly understand. Tarrant and the foreigner had stiffened in their usual sullen attitudes, but their faces had turned the colour of clay. The Vicar seemed to have fainted. Father Brown was kneeling beside the fallen figure, trying to test its condition.

Rather to the general surprise, the Byronic lounger, Paul Tarrant, came forward to help him.

‘He’d better be carried up into the air,’ he said. ‘I suppose there’s just a chance for him.’

‘He isn’t dead,’ said Father Brown in a low voice, ‘but I think it’s pretty bad; you aren’t a doctor by any chance?’

‘No; but I’ve had to pick up a good many things in my time,’ said the other. ‘But never mind about me just now. My real profession would probably surprise you.’

‘I don’t think so,’ replied Father Brown, with a slight smile. ‘I thought of it about halfway through the voyage. You are a detective shadowing somebody. Well, the cross is safe from thieves now, anyhow.’

While they were speaking Tarrant had lifted the frail figure of the fallen man with easy strength and dexterity, and was carefully carrying him towards the exit. He answered over his shoulder:

‘Yes, the cross is safe enough.’

‘You mean that nobody else is,’ replied Brown. ‘Are you thinking of the curse, too?’

Father Brown went about for the next hour or two under a burden of frowning perplexity that was something beyond the shock of the tragic accident. He assisted in carrying the victim to the little inn opposite the church, interviewed the doctor, who reported the injury as serious and threatening, though not certainly fatal, and carried the news to the little group of travellers who had gathered round the table in the inn parlour. But wherever he went the cloud of mystification rested on him and seemed to grow darker the more deeply he pondered. For the central mystery was growing more and more mysterious, actually in proportion as many of the minor mysteries began to clear themselves up in his mind. Exactly in proportion as the meaning of individual figures in that motley group began to explain itself, the thing that had happened grew more and more difficult to explain. Leonard Smyth had come merely because Lady Diana had come; and Lady Diana had come merely because she chose. They were engaged in one of those floating Society flirtations that are all the more silly for being semi-intellectual. But the lady’s romanticism had a superstitious side to it; and she was pretty well prostrated by the terrible end of her adventure. Paul Tarrant was a private detective, possibly watching the flirtation, for some wife or husband; possibly shadowing the foreign lecturer with the moustaches, who had much the air of an undesirable alien. But if he or anybody else had intended to steal the relic, the intention had been finally frustrated. And to all mortal appearance, what had frustrated it was either an incredible coincidence or the intervention of the ancient curse.

As he stood in unusual perplexity in the middle of the village street, between the inn and the church, he felt a mild shock of surprise at seeing a recently familiar but rather unexpected figure advancing up the street. Mr Boon, the journalist, looking very haggard in the sunshine, which showed up his shabby raiment like that of a scarecrow, had his dark and deep-set eyes (rather close together on either side of the long drooping nose) fixed on the priest. The latter looked twice before he realized that the heavy dark moustache hid something like a grin or at least a grim smile.

‘I thought you were going away,’ said Father Brown a little sharply. ‘I thought you left by that train two hours ago.’

‘Well, you see I didn’t,’ said Boon.

‘Why have you come back?’ asked the priest almost sternly.

‘This is not the sort of little rural paradise for a journalist to leave in a hurry,’ replied the other. ‘Things happen too fast here to make it worth while to go back to a dull place like London. Besides, they can’t keep me out of the affair — I mean this second affair. It was I that found the body, or at any rate the clothes. Quite suspicious conduct on my part, wasn’t it? Perhaps you think I wanted to dress up in his clothes. Shouldn’t I make a lovely parson?’

And the lean and long-nosed mountebank suddenly made an extravagant gesture in the middle of the market-place, stretching out his arms and spreading out his dark-gloved hands in a sort of burlesque benediction and saying: ‘Oh, my dear brethren and sisters, for I would embrace you all....’

‘What on earth are you talking about?’ cried Father Brown, and rapped the stones slightly with his stumpy umbrella, for he was a little less patient than usual.

‘Oh, you’ll find out all about it if you ask that picnic party of yours at the inn,’ replied Boon scornfully. ‘That man Tarrant seems to suspect me merely because I found the clothes; though he only came up a minute too late to find them himself. But there are all sorts of mysteries in this business. The little man with the big moustaches may have more in him than meets the eye. For that matter I don’t see why you shouldn’t have killed the poor fellow yourself.’

Father Brown did not seem in the least annoyed at the suggestion, but he seemed exceedingly bothered and bewildered by the remark. ‘Do you mean,’ he asked with simplicity, ‘that it was I who tried to kill Professor Smaill?’

‘Not at all,’ said the other, waving his hand with the air of one making a handsome concession. ‘Plenty of dead people for you to choose among. Not limited to Professor Smaill. Why, didn’t you know somebody else had turned up, a good deal deader than Professor Smaill? And I don’t see why you shouldn’t have done him in, in a quiet way. Religious differences, you know... lamentable disunion of Christendom. ... I suppose you’ve always wanted to get the English parishes back.’

‘I’m going back to the inn,’ said the priest quietly; ‘you say the people there know what you mean, and perhaps they may be able to say it.’

In truth, just afterwards his private perplexities suffered a momentary dispersal at the news of a new calamity. The moment he entered the little parlour where the rest of the company were collected, something in their pale faces told him they were shaken by something yet more recent than the accident at the tomb. Even as he entered, Leonard Smyth was saying: ‘Where is all this going to end?’

‘It will never end, I tell you,’ repeated Lady Diana, gazing into vacancy with glassy eyes; ‘it will never end till we all end. One after another the curse will take us; perhaps slowly, as the poor vicar said; but it will take us all as it has taken him.’

‘What in the world has happened now?’ asked Father Brown.

There was a silence, and then Tarrant said in a voice that sounded a little hollow: ‘Mr Walters, the Vicar, has committed suicide. I suppose it was the shock unhinged him. But I fear there can be no doubt about it. We’ve just found his black hat and clothes on a rock jutting out from the shore. He seems to have jumped into the sea. I thought he looked as if it had knocked him half-witted, and perhaps we ought to have looked after him; but there was so much to look after.’

‘You could have done nothing,’ said the lady. ‘Don’t you see the thing is dealing doom in a sort of dreadful order? The Professor touched the cross, and he went first; the Vicar had opened the tomb, and he went second; we only entered the chapel, and we—’

‘Hold on,’ said Father Brown, in a sharp voice he very seldom used; ‘this has got to stop.’

He still wore a heavy though unconscious frown, but in his eyes was no longer the cloud of mystification, but a light of almost terrible understanding. ‘What a fool I am!’ he muttered. ‘I ought to have seen it long ago. The tale of the curse ought to have told me.’

‘Do you mean to say,’ demanded Tarrant, ‘that we can really be killed now by something that happened in the thirteenth century?’

Father Brown shook his head and answered with quiet emphasis: ‘I won’t discuss whether we can be killed by something that happened in the thirteenth century; but I’m jolly certain that we can’t be killed by something that never happened in the thirteenth century, something that never happened at all.’

‘Well,’ said Tarrant, ‘it’s refreshing to find a priest so sceptical of the supernatural as all that.’

‘Not at all,’ replied the priest calmly; ‘it’s not the supernatural part I doubt. It’s the natural part. I’m exactly in the position of the man who said, ‘I can believe the impossible, but not the improbable.’’

‘That’s what you call a paradox, isn’t it?’ asked the other.

‘It’s what I call common sense, properly understood,’ replied Father Brown. ‘It really is more natural to believe a preternatural story, that deals with things we don’t understand, than a natural story that contradicts things we do understand. Tell me that the great Mr Gladstone, in his last hours, was haunted by the ghost of Parnell, and I will be agnostic about it. But tell me that Mr Gladstone, when first presented to Queen Victoria, wore his hat in her drawing-room and slapped her on the back and offered her a cigar, and I am not agnostic at all. That is not impossible; it’s only incredible. But I’m much more certain it didn’t happen than that Parnell’s ghost didn’t appear; because it violates the laws of the world I do understand. So it is with that tale of the curse. It isn’t the legend that I disbelieve — it’s the history.’

Lady Diana had recovered a little from her trance of Cassandra, and her perennial curiosity about new things began to peer once more out of her bright and prominent eyes.

‘What a curious man you are!’ she said. ‘Why should you disbelieve the history?’

‘I disbelieve the history because it isn’t history,’ answered Father Brown. ‘To anybody who happens to know a little about the Middle Ages, the whole story was about as probable as Gladstone offering Queen Victoria a cigar. But does anybody know anything about the Middle Ages? Do you know what a Guild was? Have you ever heard of salvo managio suo? Do you know what sort of people were Servi Regis?

‘No, of course I don’t,’ said the lady, rather crossly. ‘What a lot of Latin words!’

‘No, of course,’ said Father Brown. ‘If it had been Tutankhamen and a set of dried-up Africans preserved, Heaven knows why, at the other end of the world; if it had been Babylonia or China; if it had been some race as remote and mysterious as the Man in the Moon, your newspapers would have told you all about it, down to the last discovery of a tooth-brush or a collar-stud. But the men who built your own parish churches, and gave the names to your own towns and trades, and the very roads you walk on — it has never occurred to you to know anything about them. I don’t claim to know a lot myself; but I know enough to see that story is stuff and nonsense from beginning to end. It was illegal for a money-lender to distrain on a man’s shop and tools. It’s exceedingly unlikely that the Guild would not have saved a man from such utter ruin, especially if he were ruined by a Jew. Those people had vices and tragedies of their own; they sometimes tortured and burned people. But that idea of a man, without God or hope in the world, crawling away to die because nobody cared whether he lived — that isn’t a medieval idea. That’s a product of our economic science and progress. The Jew wouldn’t have been a vassal of the feudal lord. The Jews normally had a special position as servants of the King. Above all, the Jew couldn’t possibly have been burned for his religion.’

‘The paradoxes are multiplying,’ observed Tarrant; ‘but surely, you won’t deny that Jews were persecuted in the Middle Ages?’

‘It would be nearer the truth,’ said Father Brown, ‘to say they were the only people who weren’t persecuted in the Middle Ages. If you want to satirize medievalism, you could make a good case by saying that some poor Christian might be burned alive for ‘making a mistake about the Homoousion, while a rich Jew might walk down the street openly sneering at Christ and the Mother of God. Well, that’s what the story is like. It was never a story of the Middle Ages; it was never even a legend about the Middle Ages. It was made up by somebody whose notions came from novels and newspapers, and probably made up on the spur of the moment.’

The others seemed a little dazed by the historical digression, and seemed to wonder vaguely why the priest emphasized it and made it so important a part of the puzzle. But Tarrant, whose trade it was to pick the practical detail out of many tangles of digression, had suddenly become alert. His bearded chin was thrust forward farther than ever, but his sullen eyes were wide awake. ‘Ah,’ he said; ‘made up on the spur of the moment!’

‘Perhaps that is an exaggeration,’ admitted Father Brown calmly. ‘I should rather say made up more casually and carelessly than the rest of an uncommonly careful plot. But the plotter did not think the details of medieval history would matter much to anybody. And his calculation in a general way was pretty nearly right, like most of his other calculations.’

‘Whose calculations? Who was right?’ demanded the lady with a sudden passion of impatience. ‘Who is this person you are talking about? Haven’t we gone through enough, without your making our flesh creep with your he’s and him’s?’

‘I am talking about the murderer,’ said Father Brown.

‘What murderer?’ she asked sharply. ‘Do you mean that the poor Professor was murdered?’

‘Well,’ said the staring Tarrant gruffly into his beard, ‘we can’t say ‘murdered’, for we don’t know he’s killed.’

‘The murderer killed somebody else, who was not Professor Smaill,’ said the priest gravely.

‘Why, whom else could he kill?’ asked the other. ‘He killed the Reverend John Walters, the Vicar of Dulham,’ replied Father Brown with precision. ‘He only wanted to kill those two, because they both had got hold of relics of one rare pattern. The murderer was a sort of monomaniac on the point.’

‘It all sounds very strange,’ muttered Tarrant. ‘Of course we can’t swear that the Vicar’s really dead either. We haven’t seen his body.’

‘Oh yes, you have,’ said Father Brown.

There was a silence as sudden as the stroke of a gong; a silence in which that sub-conscious guesswork that was so active and accurate in the woman moved her almost to a shriek.

‘That is exactly what you have seen,’ went on the priest. ‘You have seen his body. You haven’t seen him — the real living man; but you have seen his body all right. You have stared at it hard by the light of four great candles; and it was not tossing suicidally in the sea but lying in state like a Prince of the Church in a shrine built before the Crusade.’

‘In plain words,’ said Tarrant, ‘you actually ask us to believe that the embalmed body was really the corpse of a murdered man.’

Father Brown was silent for a moment; then he said almost with an air of irrelevance: ‘The first thing I noticed about it was the cross; or rather the string suspending the cross. Naturally, for most of you, it was only a string of beads and nothing else in particular; but, naturally also, it was rather more in my line than yours. You remember it lay close up to the chin, with only a few beads showing, as if the whole necklet were quite short. But the beads that showed were arranged in a special way, first one and then three, and so on; in fact, I knew at a glance that it was a rosary, an ordinary rosary with a cross at the end of it. But a rosary has at least five decades and additional beads as well; and I naturally wondered where all the rest of it was. It would go much more than once round the old man’s neck. I couldn’t understand it at the time; and it was only afterwards I guessed where the extra length had gone to. It was coiled round and round the foot of the wooden prop that was fixed in the corner of the coffin, holding up the lid. So that when poor Smaill merely plucked at the cross it jerked the prop out of its place and the lid fell on his skull like a club of stone.’

‘By George!’ said Tarrant; ‘I’m beginning to think there’s something in what you say. This is a queer story if it’s true.’

‘When I realized that,’ went on Father Brown, ‘I could manage more or less to guess the rest. Remember, first of all, that there never was any responsible archaeological authority for anything more than investigation. Poor old Walters was an honest antiquary, who was engaged in opening the tomb to find out if there was any truth in the legend about embalmed bodies. The rest was all rumour, of the sort that often anticipates or exaggerates such finds. As a fact, he found the body had not been embalmed, but had fallen into dust long ago. Only while he was working there by the light of his lonely candle in that sunken chapel, the candlelight threw another shadow that was not his own.’

‘Ah!’ cried Lady Diana with a catch in her breath; ‘and I know what you mean now. You mean to tell us we have met the murderer, talked and joked with the murderer, let him tell us a romantic tale, and let him depart untouched.’

‘Leaving his clerical disguise on a rock,’ assented Brown. ‘It is all dreadfully simple. This man got ahead of the Professor in the race to the churchyard and chapel, possibly while the Professor was talking to that lugubrious journalist. He came on the old clergyman beside the empty coffin and killed him. Then he dressed himself in the black clothes from the corpse, wrapped it in an old cope which had been among the real finds of the exploration, and put it in the coffin, arranging the rosary and the wooden support as I have described. Then, having thus set the trap for his second enemy, he went up into the daylight and greeted us all with the most amiable politeness of a country clergyman.’

‘He ran a considerable risk,’ objected Tarrant, ‘of somebody knowing Walters by sight.’

‘I admit he was half-mad,’ agreed Father Brown; ‘and I think you will admit that the risk was worth taking, for he has got off, after all.’

‘I’ll admit he was very lucky,’ growled Tarrant. ‘And who the devil was he?’

‘As you say, he was very lucky,’ answered Father Brown, ‘and not least in that respect. For that is the one thing we may never know.’ He frowned at the table for a moment and then went on: ‘This fellow has been hovering round and threatening for years, but the one thing he was careful of was to keep the secret of who he was; and he has kept it still. But if poor Smaill recovers, as I think he will, it is pretty safe to say that you will hear more of it.’

‘Why, what will Professor Smaill do, do you think?’ asked Lady Diana.

‘I should think the first thing he would do,’ said Tarrant, ‘would be to put the detectives on like dogs after this murdering devil. I should like to have a go at him myself.’

‘Well,’ said Father Brown, smiling suddenly after his long fit of frowning perplexity, ‘I think I know the very first thing he ought to do.’

‘And what is that?’ asked Lady Diana with graceful eagerness.

‘He ought to apologize to all of you,’ said Father Brown.

It was not upon this point, however, that Father Brown found himself talking to Professor Smaill as he sat by the bedside during the slow convalescence of that eminent archaeologist. Nor, indeed, was it chiefly Father Brown who did the talking; for though the Professor was limited to small doses of the stimulant of conversation, he concentrated most of it upon these interviews with his clerical friend. Father Brown had a talent for being silent in an encouraging way and Smaill was encouraged by it to talk about many strange things not always easy to talk about; such as the morbid phases of recovery and the monstrous dreams that often accompany delirium. It is often rather an unbalancing business to recover slowly from a bad knock on the head; and when the head is as interesting a head as that of Professor Smaill even its disturbances and distortions are apt to be original and curious. His dreams were like bold and big designs rather out of drawing, as they can be seen in the strong but stiff archaic arts that he had studied; they were full of strange saints with square and triangular haloes, of golden out-standing crowns and glories round dark and flattened faces, of eagles out of the east and the high headdresses of bearded men with their hair bound like women. Only, as he told his friend, there was one much simpler and less entangled type, that continually recurred to his imaginative memory. Again and again all these Byzantine patterns would fade away like the fading gold on which they were traced as upon fire; and nothing remained but the dark bare wall of rock on which the shining shape of the fish was traced as with a finger dipped in the phosphorescence of fishes. For that was the sign which he once looked up and saw, in the moment when he first heard round the corner of the dark passage the voice of his enemy.

'And at last,' he said, 'I think I have seen a meaning in the picture and the voice; and one that I never understood before. Why should I worry because one madman among a million of sane men, leagued in a great society against him, chooses to brag of persecuting me or pursuing me to death? The man who drew in the dark catacomb the secret symbol of Christ was persecuted in a very different fashion. He was the solitary madman; the whole sane society was leagued together not to save but to slay him. I have sometimes fussed and fidgeted and wondered whether this or that man was my persecutor; whether it was Tarrant; whether it was Leonard Smyth; whether it was any one of them. Suppose it had been all of them? Suppose it had been all the men on the boat and the men on the train and the men in the village. Suppose, so far as I was concerned, they were all murderers. I thought I had a right to be alarmed because I was creeping through the bowels of the earth in the dark and there was a man who would destroy me. What would it have been like, if the destroyer had been up in the daylight and had owned all the earth and commanded all the armies and the crowds? How if he had been able to stop all the earths or smoke me out of my hole, or kill me the moment I put my nose out in the daylight? What was it like to deal with murder on that scale? The world has forgotten these things, as until a little while ago it had forgotten war.'

'Yes,' said Father Brown, 'but the war came. The fish may be driven underground again, but it will come up into the daylight once more. As St Antony of Padua humorously remarked, 'It is only fishes who survive the Deluge.''

The Dagger with Wings

FATHER BROWN, at one period of his life, found it difficult to hang his hat on a hat-peg without repressing a slight shudder. The origin of this idiosyncrasy was indeed a mere detail in much more complicated events; but it was perhaps the only detail that remained to him in his busy life to remind him of the whole business. Its remote origin was to be found in the facts which led Dr Boyne, the medical officer attached to the police force, to send for the priest on a particular frosty morning in December.

Dr Boyne was a big dark Irishman, one of those rather baffling Irishmen to be found all over the world, who will talk scientific scepticism, materialism, and cynicism at length and at large, but who never dream of referring anything touching the ritual of religion to anything except the traditional religion of their native land. It would be hard to say whether their creed is a very superficial varnish or a very fundamental substratum; but most probably it is both, with a mass of materialism in between. Anyhow, when he thought that matters of that sort might be involved, he asked Father Brown to call, though he made no pretence of preference for that aspect of them.

'I'm not sure I want you, you know,' was his greeting. 'I'm not sure about anything yet. I'm hanged if I can make out whether it's a case for a doctor, or a policeman, or a priest.'

'Well,' said Father Brown with a smile, 'as I suppose you're both a policeman and a doctor, I seem to be rather in a minority.'

'I admit you're what politicians call an instructed minority,' replied the doctor. 'I mean, I know you've had to do a little in our line as well as your own. But it's precious hard to say whether this business is in your line or ours, or merely in the line of the Commissioners in Lunacy. We've just had a message from a man living near here, in that white house on the hill, asking for protection against a murderous persecution. We've gone into the facts as far as we could, and perhaps I'd better tell you the story as it is supposed to have happened, from the beginning.

'It seems that a man named Aylmer, who was a wealthy landowner in the West Country, married rather late in life and had three sons, Philip, Stephen, and Arnold. But in his bachelor days, when he thought he would have no heir, he had adopted a boy whom he thought very brilliant and promising, who went by the name of John Strake. His origin seems to be vague; they say he was a foundling; some say he was a gipsy. I think the last notion is mixed up with the fact that Aylmer in his old age dabbled in all sorts of dingy occultism, including palmistry and astrology, and his three sons say that Strake encouraged him in it. But they said a great many other things besides that. They said Strake was an amazing scoundrel, and especially an amazing liar; a genius in inventing lies on the spur of the moment, and telling them so as to deceive a detective. But that might very well be a natural prejudice, in the light of what happened.

Perhaps you can more or less imagine what happened. The old man left practically everything to the adopted son; and when he died the three real sons disputed the will. They said their father had been frightened into surrender and, not to put too fine a point on it, into gibbering idiocy. They said Strake had the strangest and most cunning ways of getting at him, in spite of the nurses and the family, and terrorizing him on his death-bed. Anyhow, they seemed to have proved something about the dead man's mental condition, for the courts set aside the will and the sons inherited. Strake is said to have broken out in the most dreadful fashion, and sworn he would kill all three of them, one after another, and that nothing could hide them from his vengeance. It is the third or last of the brothers, Arnold Aylmer, who is asking for police protection.'

'Third and last,' said the priest, looking at him gravely.

'Yes,' said Boyne. 'The other two are dead.' There was a silence before he continued. 'That is where the doubt comes in. There is no proof they were murdered, but they might possibly have been. The eldest, who took up his position as squire, was supposed to have committed suicide in his garden. The second, who went into trade as a manufacturer, was knocked on the head by the machinery in his factory; he might very well have taken a false step and fallen. But if Strake did kill them, he is certainly very cunning in his way of getting to work and getting away. On the other hand, it's more than likely that the whole thing is a mania of conspiracy founded on a coincidence. Look here, what I want is this. I want somebody of sense, who isn't an official, to go up and have a talk with this Mr Arnold Aylmer and form an impression of him. You know what a man with a delusion is like, and how a man looks when he is telling the truth. I want you to be the advance guard, before we take the matter up.'

‘It seems rather odd,’ said Father Brown, ‘that you haven’t had to take it up before. If there is anything in this business, it seems to have been going on for a good time. Is there any particular reason why he should send for you just now, any more than any other time?’

‘That had occurred to me, as you may imagine,’ answered Dr Boyne. ‘He does give a reason, but I confess it is one of the things that make me wonder whether the whole thing isn’t only the whim of some half-witted crank. He declared that all his servants have suddenly gone on strike and left him, so that he is obliged to call on the police to look after his house. And on making inquiries, I certainly do find that there has been a general exodus of servants from that house on the hill; and of course the town is full of tales, very one-sided tales I dare say. Their account of it seems to be that their employer had become quite impossible in his fidgets and fears and exactions; that he wanted them to guard the house like sentries, or sit up like night nurses in a hospital; that they could never be left alone because he must never be left alone. So they all announced in a loud voice that he was a lunatic, and left. Of course that does not prove he is a lunatic; but it seems rather rum nowadays for a man to expect his valet or his parlour-maid to act as an armed guard.’

‘And so,’ said the priest with a smile, ‘he wants a policeman to act as his parlour-maid because his parlour-maid won’t act as a policeman.’

‘I thought that rather thick, too,’ agreed the doctor; ‘but I can’t take the responsibility of a flat refusal till I’ve tried a compromise. You are the compromise.’

‘Very well,’ said Father Brown simply. ‘I’ll go and call on him now if you like.’

The rolling country round the little town was sealed and bound with frost, and the sky was as clear and cold as steel, except in the north-east where clouds with lurid haloes were beginning to climb up the sky. It was against these darker and more sinister colours that the house on the hill gleamed with a row of pale pillars, forming a short colonnade of the classical sort. A winding road led up to it across the curve of the down, and plunged into a mass of dark bushes. Just before it reached the bushes the air seemed to grow colder and colder, as if he were approaching an ice-house or the North Pole. But he was a highly practical person, never entertaining such fancies except as fancies. And he merely cocked his eye at the great livid cloud crawling up over the house, and remarked cheerfully: ‘It’s going to snow.’

Through a low ornamental iron gateway of the Italianate pattern he entered a garden having something of that desolation which only belongs to the disorder of orderly things. Deep-green growths were grey with the faint powder of the frost, large weeds — had fringed the fading pattern of the flower-beds as if in a ragged frame; and the house stood as if waist-high in a stunted forest of shrubs and bushes. The vegetation consisted largely of evergreens or very hardy plants; and though it was thus thick and heavy, it was too northern to be called luxuriant. It might be described as an Arctic jungle. So it was in some sense with the house itself, which had a row of columns and a classical facade, which might have looked out on the Mediterranean; but which seemed now to be withering in the wind of the North Sea. Classical ornament here and there accentuated the contrast; caryatides and carved masks of comedy or tragedy looked down from corners of the building upon the grey confusion of the garden paths; but the faces seemed to be frost-bitten. The very volutes of the capitals might have curled up with the cold.

Father Brown went up the grassy steps to a square porch flanked by big pillars and knocked at the door. About four minutes afterwards he knocked again. Then he stood still patiently waiting with his back to the door and looked out on the slowly darkening landscape. It was darkening under the shadow of that one great continent of cloud that had come flying out of the north; and even as he looked out beyond the pillars of the porch, which seemed huge and black above him in the twilight, he saw the opalescent crawling rim of the great cloud as it sailed over the roof and bowed over the porch like a canopy. The great canopy with its faintly coloured fringes seemed to sink lower and lower upon the garden beyond, until what had recently been a clear and pale-hued winter sky was left in a few silver ribbons and rags like a sickly sunset. Father Brown waited, and there was no sound within.

Then he betook himself briskly down the steps and round the house to look for another entrance. He eventually found one, a side door in the flat wall, and on this also he hammered and outside this also he waited. Then he tried the handle and found the door apparently bolted or fastened in some fashion; and then he moved along that side of the house, musing on the possibilities of the position, and wondering whether the eccentric Mr

Aylmer had barricaded himself too deep in the house to hear any kind of summons; or whether perhaps he would barricade himself all the more, on the assumption that any summons must be the challenge of the avenging Strake. It might be that the decamping servants had only unlocked one door when they left in the morning, and that their master had locked that; but whatever he might have done it was unlikely that they, in the mood of that moment, had looked so carefully to the defences. He continued his prowl round the place: it was not really a large place, though perhaps a little pretentious; and in a few moments he found he had made the complete circuit. A moment after he found what he suspected and sought. The french window of one room, curtained and shadowed with creeper, stood open by a crack, doubtless accidentally left ajar, and he found himself in a central room, comfortably upholstered in a rather old-fashioned way, with a staircase leading up from it on one side and a door leading out of it on the other. Immediately opposite him was another door with red glass let into it, a little gaudily for later tastes; something that looked like a red-robed figure in cheap stained glass. On a round table to the right stood a sort of aquarium — a great bowl full of greenish water, in which fishes and similar things moved about as in a tank; and just opposite it a plant of the palm variety with very large green leaves. All this looked so very dusty and Early Victorian that the telephone, visible in the curtained alcove, was almost a surprise.

‘Who is that?’ a voice called out sharply and rather suspiciously from behind the stained-glass door.

‘Could I see Mr Aylmer?’ asked the priest apologetically.

The door opened and a gentleman in a peacock-green dressing-gown came out with an inquiring look. His hair was rather rough and untidy, as if he had been in bed or lived in a state of slowly getting up, but his eyes were not only awake but alert, and some would have said alarmed. Father Brown knew that the contradiction was likely enough in a man who had rather run to seed under the shadow either of a delusion or a danger. He had a fine aquiline face when seen in profile, but when seen full face the first impression was that of the untidiness and even the wilderness of his loose brown beard.

‘I am Mr Aylmer,’ he said, ‘but I’ve got out of the way of expecting visitors.’

Something about Mr Aylmer’s unrestful eye prompted the priest to go straight to the point. If the man’s persecution was only a monomania, he would be the less likely to resent it.

‘I was wondering,’ said Father Brown softly, ‘whether it is quite true that you never expect visitors.’

‘You are right,’ replied his host steadily. ‘I always expect one visitor. And he may be the last.’

‘I hope not,’ said Father Brown, ‘but at least I am relieved to infer that I do not look very like him.’

Mr Aylmer shook himself with a sort of savage laugh. ‘You certainly do not,’ he said.

‘Mr Aylmer,’ said Father Brown frankly, ‘I apologize for the liberty, but some friends of mine have told me about your trouble, and asked me to see if I could do anything for you. The truth is, I have some little experience in affairs like this.’

‘There are no affairs like this,’ said Aylmer.

‘You mean,’ observed Father Brown, ‘that the tragedies in your unfortunate family were not normal deaths?’

‘I mean they were not even normal murders,’ answered the other. ‘The man who is hounding us all to death is a hell-hound, and his power is from hell.’

‘All evil has one origin,’ said the priest gravely. ‘But how do you know they were not normal murders?’

Aylmer answered with a gesture which offered his guest a chair; then he seated himself slowly in another, frowning, with his hands on his knees; but when he looked up his expression had grown milder and more thoughtful, and his voice was quite cordial and composed.

‘Sir,’ he said, ‘I don’t want you to imagine that I’m in the least an unreasonable person. I have come to these conclusions by reason, because unfortunately reason really leads there. I have read a great deal on these subjects; for I was the only one who inherited my father’s scholarship in somewhat obscure matters, and I have since inherited his library. But what I tell you does not rest on what I have read but on what I have seen.’

Father Brown nodded, and the other proceeded, as if picking his words: ‘In my elder brother’s case I was not certain at first. There were no marks or footprints where he was found shot, and the pistol was left beside him. But he had just received a threatening letter certainly from our enemy, for it was marked with a sign like a winged dagger, which was one of his infernal cabalistic tricks. And a servant said she had seen something moving along the garden wall in the twilight that was much too large to be a cat. I leave it there; all I can say is that if the murderer came, he managed to leave no traces of his coming. But when my brother Stephen died it was different; and since then I have known. A machine was working in an open scaffolding under the factory tower; I scaled the platform a moment after he had fallen under the iron hammer that struck him; I did not see anything else strike him, but I saw what I saw.

‘A great drift of factory smoke was rolling between me and the factory tower; but through a rift of it I saw on the top of it a dark human figure wrapped in what looked like a black cloak. Then the sulphurous smoke drove between us again; and when it cleared I looked up at the distant chimney — there was nobody there. I am a rational man, and I will ask all rational men how he had reached that dizzy unapproachable turret, and how he left it.’

He stared across at the priest with a sphinx-like challenge; then after a silence he said abruptly: ‘My brother’s brains were knocked out, but his body was not much damaged. And in his pocket we found one of those warning messages dated the day before and stamped with the flying dagger.

‘I am sure,’ he went on gravely, ‘that the symbol of the winged dagger is not merely arbitrary or accidental. Nothing about that abominable man is accidental. He is all design; though it is indeed a most dark and intricate design. His mind is woven not only out of elaborate schemes but out of all sorts of secret languages and signs, and dumb signals and wordless pictures which are the names of nameless things. He is the worst sort of man that the world knows: he is the wicked mystic. Now, I don’t pretend to penetrate all that is conveyed by this symbol; but it seems surely that it must have a relation to all that was most remarkable, or even incredible, in his movements as he had hovered round my unfortunate family. Is there no connexion between the idea of a winged weapon and the mystery by which Philip was struck dead on his own lawn without the lightest touch of any footprint having disturbed the dust or grass? Is there no connexion between the plumed poignard flying like a feathered arrow and that figure which hung on the far top of the toppling chimney, clad in a cloak for pinions?’

‘You mean,’ said Father Brown thoughtfully, ‘that he is in a perpetual state of levitation.’

‘Simon Magus did it,’ replied Aylmer, ‘and it was one of the commonest predictions of the Dark Ages that Antichrist would be able to fly. Anyhow, there was the flying dagger on the document; and whether or no it could fly, it could certainly strike.’

‘Did you notice what sort of paper it was on?’ asked Father Brown. ‘Common paper?’

The sphinx-like face broke abruptly into a harsh laugh.

‘You can see what they’re like,’ said Aylmer grimly, ‘for I got one myself this morning.’

He was leaning back in his chair now, with his long legs thrust out from under the green dressing-gown, which was a little short for him, and his bearded chin pillowed on his chest. Without moving otherwise, he thrust his hand deep in the dressing-gown pocket and held out a fluttering scrap of paper at the end of a rigid arm. His whole attitude was suggestive of a sort of paralysis, that was both rigidity and collapse. But the next remark of the priest had a curious effect of rousing him.

Father Brown was blinking in his short-sighted way at the paper presented to him. It was a singular sort of paper, rough without being common, as from an artist’s sketch-book; and on it was drawn boldly in red ink a dagger decorated with wings like the rod of Hermes, with the written words, ‘Death comes the day after this, as it came to your brothers.’

Father Brown tossed the paper on the floor and sat bolt upright in his chair.

‘You mustn’t let that sort of stuff stupefy you,’ he said sharply. ‘These devils always try to make us helpless by making us hopeless.’

Rather to his surprise, an awakening wave went over the prostrate figure, which sprang from its chair as if startled out of a dream.

‘You’re right, you’re right!’ cried Aylmer with a rather uncanny animation; ‘and the devils shall find that I’m not so hopeless after all, nor so helpless either. Perhaps I have more hope and better help than you fancy.’

He stood with his hands in his pockets, frowning down at the priest, who had a momentary doubt, during that strained silence, about whether the man’s long peril had not touched his brain. But when he spoke it was quite soberly.

‘I believe my unfortunate brothers failed because they used the wrong weapons. Philip carried a revolver, and that was how his death came to be called suicide. Stephen had police protection, but he also had a sense of what made him ridiculous; and he could not allow a policeman to climb up a ladder after him to a scaffolding where he stood only a moment. They were both scoffers, reacting into scepticism from the strange mysticism of my father's last days. But I always knew there was more in my father than they understood. It is true that by studying magic he fell at last under the blight of black magic; the black magic of this scoundrel Strake. But my brothers were wrong about the antidote. The antidote to black magic is not brute materialism or worldly wisdom. The antidote to black magic is white magic.'

'It rather depends,' said Father Brown, 'what you mean by white magic.'

'I mean silver magic,' said the other, in a low voice, like one speaking of a secret revelation. Then after a silence he said: 'Do you know what I mean by silver magic? Excuse me a moment.'

He turned and opened the central door with the red glass and went into a passage beyond it. The house had less depth than Brown had supposed; instead of the door opening into interior rooms, the corridor it revealed ended in another door on the garden. The door of one room was on one side of the passage; doubtless, the priest told himself, the proprietor's bedroom whence he had rushed out in his dressing-gown. There was nothing else on that side but an ordinary hat-stand with the ordinary dingy cluster of old hats and overcoats; but on the other side was something more interesting: a very dark old oak sideboard laid out with some old silver, and overhung by a trophy or ornament of old weapons. It was by that that Arnold Aylmer halted, looking up at a long antiquated pistol with a bell-shaped mouth.

The door at the end of the passage was barely open, and through the crack came a streak of white daylight. The priest had very quick instincts about natural things, and something in the unusual brilliancy of that white line told him what had happened outside. It was indeed what he had prophesied when he was approaching the house. He ran past his rather startled host and opened the door, to face something that was at once a blank and a blaze. What he had seen shining through the crack was not only the most negative whiteness of daylight but the positive whiteness of snow. All round, the sweeping fall of the country was covered with that shining pallor that seems at once hoary and innocent.

'Here is white magic anyhow,' said Father Brown in his cheerful voice. Then, as he turned back into the hall, he murmured, 'And silver magic too, I suppose,' for the white lustre touched the silver with splendour and lit up the old steel here and there in the darkling armoury. The shaggy head of the brooding Aylmer seemed to have a halo of silver fire, as he turned with his face in shadow and the outlandish pistol in his hand.

‘Do you know why I chose this sort of old blunderbuss?’ he asked. ‘Because I can load it with this sort of bullet.’

He had picked up a small apostle spoon from the sideboard and by sheer violence broke off the small figure at the top. ‘Let us go back into the other room,’ he added.

‘Did you ever read about the death of Dundee?’ he asked when they had reseated themselves. He had recovered from his momentary annoyance at the priest’s restlessness. ‘Graham of Claverhouse, you know, who persecuted the Covenanters and had a black horse that could ride straight up a precipice. Don’t you know he could only be shot with a silver bullet, because he had sold himself to the Devil? That’s one comfort about you; at least you know enough to believe in the Devil.’

‘Oh, yes,’ replied Father Brown, ‘I believe in the Devil. What I don’t believe in is the Dundee. I mean the Dundee of Covenanting legends, with his nightmare of a horse. John Graham was simply a seventeenth-century professional soldier, rather better than most. If he dragooned them it was because he was a dragoon, but not a dragon. Now my experience is that it’s not that sort of swaggering blade who sells himself to the Devil. The devil-worshippers I’ve known were quite different. Not to mention names, which might cause a social flutter, I’ll take a man in Dundee’s own day. Have you ever heard of Dalrymple of Stair?’

‘No,’ replied the other gruffly.

‘You’ve heard of what he did,’ said Father Brown, ‘and it was worse than anything Dundee ever did; yet he escapes the infamy by oblivion. He was the man who made the Massacre of Glencoe. He was a very learned man and lucid lawyer, a statesman with very serious and enlarged ideas of statesmanship, a quiet man with a very refined and intellectual face. That’s the sort of man who sells himself to the Devil.’

Aylmer half started from his chair with an enthusiasm of eager assent.

‘By God! you are right,’ he cried. ‘A refined intellectual face! That is the face of John Strake.’

Then he raised himself and stood looking at the priest with a curious concentration. ‘If you will wait here a little while,’ he said, ‘I will show you something.’

He went back through the central door, closing it after him; going, the priest presumed, to the old sideboard or possibly to his bedroom. Father Brown remained seated, gazing abstractedly at the carpet, where a faint red glimmer shone from the glass in the doorway. Once it seemed to brighten like a ruby and then darkened again, as if the sun of that stormy day had passed from cloud to cloud. Nothing moved except the aquatic creatures which floated to and fro in the dim green bowl. Father Brown was thinking hard.

A minute or two afterwards he got up and slipped quietly to the alcove of the telephone, where he rang up his friend Dr Boyne, at the official headquarters. ‘I wanted to tell you about Aylmer and his affairs,’ he said quietly. ‘It’s a queer story, but I rather think there’s something in it. If I were you I’d send some men up here straight away; four or five men, I think, and surround the house. If anything does happen there’ll probably be something startling in the way of an escape.’

Then he went back and sat down again, staring at the dark carpet, which again glowed blood-red with the light from the glass door. Something in the filtered light set his mind drifting on certain borderlands of thought, with the first white daybreak before the coming of colour, and all that mystery which is alternately veiled and revealed in the symbol of windows and of doors.

An inhuman howl in a human voice came from beyond the closed doors, almost simultaneously with the noise of firing. Before the echoes of the shot had died away the door was violently flung open and his host staggered into the room, the dressing-gown half torn from his shoulder and the long pistol smoking in his hand. He seemed to be shaking in every limb, yet he was shaken in part with an unnatural laughter.

‘Glory be to the White Magic!’ he cried. ‘Glory be to the silver bullet! The hell-hound had hunted once too often, and my brothers are avenged at last.’

He sank into a chair and the pistol slid from his hand and fell on the floor. Father Brown darted past him, slipped through the glass door and went down the passage. As he did so he put his hand on the handle of the bedroom door, as if half intending to enter; then he stooped a moment, as if examining something — and then he ran to the outer door and opened it.

On the field of snow, which had been so blank a little while before, lay one black object. At the first glance it looked a little like an enormous bat.

A second glance showed that it was, after all, a human figure; fallen on its face, the whole head covered by a broad black hat having something of a Latin-American look; while the appearance of black wings came from the two flaps or loose sleeves of a very vast black cloak spread out, perhaps by accident, to their utmost length on either side. Both the hands were hidden, though Father Brown thought he could detect the position of one of them, and saw close to it, under the edge of the cloak, the glimmer of some metallic weapon. The main effect, however, was curiously like that of the simple extravagances of heraldry; like a black eagle displayed on a white ground. But by walking round it and peering under the hat the priest got a glimpse of the face, which was indeed what his host had called refined and intellectual; even sceptical and austere: the face of John Strake.

‘Well, I’m jiggered,’ muttered Father Brown. ‘It really does look like some vast vampire that has swooped down like a bird.’

‘How else could he have come?’ came a voice from the doorway, and Father Brown looked up to see Aylmer once more standing there.

‘Couldn’t he have walked?’ replied Father Brown evasively.

Aylmer stretched out his arm and swept the white landscape with a gesture.

‘Look at the snow,’ he said in a deep voice that had a sort of roll and thrill in it. ‘Is not the snow unspotted — pure as the white magic you yourself called it? Is there a speck on it for miles, save that one foul black blot that has fallen there? There are no footprints, but a few of yours and mine; there are none approaching the house from anywhere.’

Then he looked at the little priest for a moment with a concentrated and curious expression, and said: ‘I will tell you something else. That cloak he flies with is too long to walk with. He was not a very tall man, and it would trail behind him like a royal train. Stretch it out over his body, if you like, and see.’

‘What happened to you both?’ asked Father Brown abruptly.

‘It was too swift to describe,’ answered Aylmer. ‘I had looked out of the door and was turning back when there came a kind of rushing of wind all around me, as if I were being buffeted by a wheel revolving in mid-air. I spun round somehow and fired blindly; and then I saw nothing but what you see now. But I am morally certain that you wouldn’t see it if I had not had a silver shot in my gun. It would have been a different body lying there in the snow.’

‘By the way,’ remarked Father Brown, ‘shall we leave it lying there in the snow? Or would you like it taken into your room — I suppose that’s your bedroom in the passage?’

‘No, no,’ replied Aylmer hastily, ‘we must leave it here till the police have seen it. Besides, I’ve had as much of such things as I can stand for the moment. Whatever else happens, I’m going to have a drink. After that, they can hang me if they like.’

Inside the central apartment, between the palm plant and the bowl of fishes, Aylmer tumbled into a chair. He had nearly knocked the bowl over as he lurched into the room, but he had managed to find the decanter of brandy after plunging his hand rather blindly into several cupboards and corners. He did not at any time look like a methodical person, but at this moment his distraction must have been extreme. He drank with a long gulp and began to talk rather feverishly, as if to fill up a silence.

‘I see you are still doubtful,’ he said, ‘though you have seen the thing with your own eyes. Believe me, there was something more behind the quarrel between the spirit of Strake and the spirit of the house of Aylmer. Besides, you have no business to be an unbeliever. You ought to stand for all the things these stupid people call superstitions. Come now, don’t you think there’s a lot in those old wives’ tales about luck and charms and so on, silver bullets included? What do you say about them as a Catholic?’

‘I say I’m an agnostic,’ replied Father Brown, smiling.

‘Nonsense,’ said Aylmer impatiently. ‘It’s your business to believe things.’

‘Well, I do believe some things, of course,’ conceded Father Brown; ‘and therefore, of course, I don’t believe other things.’

Aylmer was leaning forward, and looking at him with a strange intensity that was almost like that of a mesmerist.

‘You do believe it,’ he said. ‘You do believe everything. We all believe everything, even when we deny everything. The denyers believe. The unbelievers believe. Don’t you feel in your heart that these contradictions do not really contradict: that there is a cosmos that contains them all? The soul goes round upon a wheel of stars and all things return; perhaps Strake and I have striven in many shapes, beast against beast and bird against bird, and perhaps we shall strive for ever. But since we seek and need each other, even that eternal hatred is an eternal love. Good and evil go round in a wheel that is one thing and not many. Do you not realize in your heart, do you not believe behind all your beliefs, that there is but one reality and we are its shadows; and that all things are but aspects of one thing: a centre where men melt into Man and Man into God?'

'No,' said Father Brown.

Outside, twilight had begun to fall, in that phase of such a snow-laden evening when the land looks brighter than the sky. In the porch of the main entrance, visible through a half-curtained window, Father Brown could dimly see a bulky figure standing. He glanced casually at the french windows through which he had originally entered, and saw they were darkened with two equally motionless figures. The inner door with the coloured glass stood slightly ajar; and he could see in the short corridor beyond, the ends of two long shadows, exaggerated and distorted by the level light of evening, but still like grey caricatures of the figures of men. Dr Boyne had already obeyed the telephone message. The house was surrounded.

'What is the good of saying no?' insisted his host, still with the same hypnotic stare. 'You have seen part of that eternal drama with your own eyes. You have seen the threat of John Strake to slay Arnold Aylmer by black magic. You have seen Arnold Aylmer slay John Strake by white magic. You see Arnold Aylmer alive and talking to you now. And yet you don't believe it.'

'No, I do not believe it,' said Father Brown, and rose from his chair like one terminating a visit.

'Why not?' asked the other.

The priest only lifted his voice a little, but it sounded in every corner of the room like a bell. 'Because you are not Arnold Aylmer,' he said. 'I know who you are. Your name is John Strake; and you have murdered the last of the brothers, who is lying outside in the snow.'

A ring of white showed round the iris of the other man's eyes; he seemed to be making, with bursting eyeballs, a last effort to mesmerize and master his companion. Then he made a sudden movement sideways; and even as he did so the door behind him opened and a big detective in plain clothes put one hand quietly on his shoulder. The other hand hung down, but it held a revolver. The man looked wildly round, and saw plain-clothes men in all corners of the quiet room.

That evening Father Brown had another and longer conversation with Dr Boyne about the tragedy of the Aylmer family. By that time there was no longer any doubt of the central fact of the case, for John Strake had confessed his identity and even confessed his crimes; only it would be truer to say that he boasted of his victories. Compared to the fact that he had rounded off his life's work with the last Aylmer lying dead, everything else, including existence itself, seemed to be indifferent to him.

'The man is a sort of monomaniac,' said Father Brown. 'He is not interested in any other matter; not even in any other murder. I owe him something for that; for I had to comfort myself with the reflection a good many times this afternoon. As has doubtless occurred to you, instead of weaving all that wild but ingenious romance about winged vampires and silver bullets, he might have put an ordinary leaden bullet into me, and walked out of the house. I assure you it occurred quite frequently to me.'

'I wonder why he didn't,' observed Boyne. 'I don't understand it; but I don't understand anything yet. How on earth did you discover it, and what in the world did you discover?'

'Oh, you provided me with very valuable information,' replied Father Brown modestly, 'especially the one piece of information that really counted. I mean the statement that Strake was a very inventive and imaginative liar, with great presence of mind in producing his lies. This afternoon he needed it; but he rose to the occasion. Perhaps his only mistake was in choosing a preternatural story; he had the notion that because I am a clergyman I should believe anything. Many people have little notions of that kind.'

'But I can't make head or tail of it,' said the doctor. 'You must really begin at the beginning.'

'The beginning of it was a dressing-gown,' said Father Brown simply. 'It was the one really good disguise I've ever known. When you meet a man in a house with a dressing-gown on, you assume quite automatically that he's in his own house. I assumed it myself; but afterwards queer little things began to happen. When he took the pistol down he clicked it at arm's length, as a man does to make sure a strange weapon isn't loaded; of course he would know whether the pistols in his own hall were loaded or not. I didn't like the way he looked for the brandy, or the way he nearly barged into the bowl of fishes. For a man who has a fragile thing of that sort as a fixture in his rooms gets a quite mechanical habit of avoiding it. But these things might possibly have been fancies; the first real point was this. He came out from the little passage between the two doors; and in that passage there's only one other door leading to a room; so I assumed it was the bedroom he had just come from. I tried the handle; but it was locked. I thought this odd; and looked through the keyhole. It was an utterly bare room, obviously deserted; no bed, no anything. Therefore he had not come from inside any room, but from outside the house. And when I saw that, I think I saw the whole picture.

'Poor Arnold Aylmer doubtless slept and perhaps lived upstairs, and came down in his dressing-gown and passed through the red glass door. At the end of the passage, black against the winter daylight, he saw the enemy of his house. He saw a tall bearded man in a broad-brimmed black hat and a large flapping black cloak. He did not see much more in this world. Strake sprang at him, throttling or stabbing him; we cannot be sure till the inquest. Then Strake, standing in the narrow passage between the hat-stand and the old sideboard, and looking down in triumph on the last of his foes heard something he had not expected. He heard footsteps in the parlour beyond. It was myself entering by the french windows.

'His masquerade was a miracle of promptitude. It involved not only a disguise but a romance — an impromptu romance. He took off his big black hat and cloak and put on the dead man's dressing-gown. Then he did a rather grisly thing; at least a thing that affects my fancy as more grisly than the rest. He hung the corpse like a coat on one of the hat pegs. He draped it in his own long cloak, and found it hung well below the heels; he covered the head entirely with his own wide hat. It was the only possible way of hiding it in that little passage with the locked door; but it was really a very clever one. I myself walked past the hat-stand once without knowing it was anything but a hat-stand. I think that unconsciousness of mine will always give me a shiver.

'He might perhaps have left it at that; but I might have discovered the corpse at any minute; and, hung where it was, it was a corpse calling for what you might call an explanation. He adopted the bolder stroke of discovering it himself and explaining it himself.

'Then there dawned on this strange and frightfully fertile mind the conception of a story of substitution; the reversal of the parts. He had already assumed the part of Arnold Aylmer. Why should not his dead enemy assume the part of John Strake? There must have been something in that topsy-turvydom to take the fancy of that darkly fanciful man. It was like some frightful fancy-dress ball to which the two mortal enemies were to go dressed up as each other. Only, the fancy-dress ball was to be a dance of death: and one of the dancers would be dead. That is why I can imagine that man putting it in his own mind, and I can imagine him smiling.’

Father Brown was gazing into vacancy with his large grey eyes, which, when not blurred by his trick of blinking, were the one notable thing in his face. He went on speaking simply and seriously: ‘All things are from God; and above all, reason and imagination and the great gifts of the mind. They are good in themselves; and we must not altogether forget their origin even in their perversion. Now this man had in him a very noble power to be perverted; the power of telling stories. He was a great novelist; only he had twisted his fictive power to practical and to evil ends; to deceiving men with false fact instead of with true fiction. It began with his deceiving old Aylmer with elaborate excuses and ingeniously detailed lies; but even that may have been, at the beginning, little more than the tall stories and tarradiddles of the child who may say equally he has seen the King of England or the King of the Fairies. It grew strong in him through the vice that perpetuates all vices, pride; he grew more and more vain of his promptitude in producing stories of his originality, and subtlety in developing them. That is what the young Aylmers meant by saying that he could always cast a spell over their father; and it was true. It was the sort of spell that the storyteller cast over the tyrant in the Arabian Nights. And to the last he walked the world with the pride of a poet, and with the false yet unfathomable courage of a great liar. He could always produce more Arabian Nights if ever his neck was in danger. And today his neck was in danger.

‘But I am sure, as I say, that he enjoyed it as a fantasy as well as a conspiracy. He set about the task of telling the true story the wrong way round: of treating the dead man as living and the live man as dead. He had already got into Aylmer’s dressing-gown; he proceeded to get into Aylmer’s body and soul. He looked at the corpse as if it were his own corpse lying cold in the snow. Then he spread-eagled it in that strange fashion to suggest the sweeping descent of a bird of prey, and decked it out not only in his own dark and flying garments but in a whole dark fairy-tale about the black bird that could only fall by the silver bullet. I do not know whether it was the silver glittering on the sideboard or the snow shining beyond the door that suggested to his intensely artistic temperament the theme of white magic and the white metal used against magicians. But whatever its origin, he made it his own like a poet; and did it very promptly, like a practical man. He completed the exchange and reversal of parts by flinging the corpse out on to the snow as the corpse of Strake. He did his best to work up a creepy conception of Strake as something hovering in the air everywhere, a harpy with wings of speed and claws of death; to explain the absence of footprints and other things. For one piece of artistic impudence I hugely admire him. He actually turned one of the contradictions in his case into an argument for it; and said that the man's cloak being too long for him proved that he never walked on the ground like an ordinary mortal. But he looked at me very hard while he said that; and something told me that he was at that moment trying a very big bluff.'

Dr Boyne looked thoughtful. 'Had you discovered the truth by then?' he asked. 'There is something very queer and close to the nerves, I think, about notions affecting identity. I don't know whether it would be more weird to get a guess like that swiftly or slowly. I wonder when you suspected and when you were sure.'

'I think I really suspected when I telephoned to you,' replied his friend. 'And it was nothing more than the red light from the closed door brightening and darkening on the carpet. It looked like a splash of blood that grew vivid as it cried for vengeance. Why should it change like that? I knew the sun had not come out; it could only be because the second door behind it had been opened and shut on the garden. But if he had gone out and seen his enemy then, he would have raised the alarm then; and it was some time afterwards that the fracas occurred. I began to feel he had gone out to do something ... to prepare something ... but as to when I was certain, that is a different matter. I knew that right at the end he was trying to hypnotize me, to master me by the black art of eyes like talismans and a voice like an incantation. That's what he used to do with old Aylmer, no doubt. But it wasn't only the way he said it, it was what he said. It was the religion and philosophy of it.'

'I'm afraid I'm a practical man,' said the doctor with gruff humour, 'and I don't bother much about religion and philosophy.'

'You'll never be a practical man till you do,' said Father Brown. 'Look here, doctor; you know me pretty well; I think you know I'm not a bigot. You know I know there are all sorts in all religions; good men in bad ones and bad men in good ones. But there's just one little fact I've learned simply as a practical man, an entirely practical point, that I've picked up by experience, like the tricks of an animal or the trade-mark of a good wine. I’ve scarcely ever met a criminal who philosophized at all, who didn’t philosophize along those lines of orientalism and recurrence and reincarnation, and the wheel of destiny and the serpent biting its own tail. I have found merely in practice that there is a curse on the servants of that serpent; on their belly shall they go and the dust shall they eat; and there was never a blackguard or a profligate born who could not talk that sort of spirituality. It may not be like that in its real religious origins; but here in our working world it is the religion of rascals; and I knew it was a rascal who was speaking.’

‘Why,’ said Boyne, ‘I should have thought that a rascal could pretty well profess any religion he chose.’

‘Yes,’ assented the other; ‘he could profess any religion; that is he could pretend to any religion, if it was all a pretence. If it was mere mechanical hypocrisy and nothing else, no doubt it could be done by a mere mechanical hypocrite. Any sort of mask can be put on any sort of face. Anybody can learn certain phrases or state verbally that he holds certain views. I can go out into the street and state that I am a Wesleyan Methodist or a Sandemanian, though I fear in no very convincing accent. But we are talking about an artist; and for the enjoyment of the artist the mask must be to some extent moulded on the face. What he makes outside him must correspond to something inside him; he can only make his effects out of some of the materials of his soul. I suppose he could have said he was a Wesleyan Methodist; but he could never be an eloquent Methodist as he can be an eloquent mystic and fatalist. I am talking of the sort of ideal such a man thinks of if he really tries to be idealistic. It was his whole game with me to be as idealistic as possible; and whenever that is attempted by that sort of man, you will generally find it is that sort of ideal. That sort of man may be dripping with gore; but he will always be able to tell you quite sincerely that Buddhism is better than Christianity. Nay, he will tell you quite sincerely that Buddhism is more Christian than Christianity. That alone is enough to throw a hideous and ghastly ray of light on his notion of Christianity.’

‘Upon my soul,’ said the doctor, laughing, ‘I can’t make out whether you’re denouncing or defending him.’

‘It isn’t defending a man to say he is a genius,’ said Father Brown. ‘Far from it. And it is simply a psychological fact that an artist will betray himself by some sort of sincerity. Leonardo da Vinci cannot draw as if he couldn't draw. Even if he tried, it will always be a strong parody of a weak thing. This man would have made something much too fearful and wonderful out of the Wesleyan Methodist.'

When the priest went forth again and set his face homeward, the cold had grown more intense and yet was somehow intoxicating. The trees stood up like silver candelabra of some incredible cold candlemas of purification. It was a piercing cold, like that silver sword of pure pain that once pierced the very heart of purity. But it was not a killing cold, save in the sense of seeming to kill all the mortal obstructions to our immortal and immeasurable vitality. The pale green sky of twilight, with one star like the star of Bethlehem, seemed by some strange contradiction to be a cavern of clarity. It was as if there could be a green furnace of cold which wakened all things to life like warmth, and that the deeper they went into those cold crystalline colours the more were they light like winged creatures and clear like coloured glass! It tingled with truth and it divided truth from error with a blade like ice; but all that was left had never felt so much alive. It was as if all joy were a jewel in the heart of an iceberg. The priest hardly understood his own mood as he advanced deeper and deeper into the green gloaming, drinking deeper and deeper draughts of that virginal vivacity of the air. Some forgotten muddle and morbidity seemed to be left behind, or wiped out as the snow had painted out the footprints of the man of blood. As he shuffled homewards through the snow, he muttered to himself: 'And yet he is right enough about there being a white magic, if he only knows where to look for it.'

The Doom of the Darnaways

Two landscape-painters stood looking at one landscape, which was also a seascape, and both were curiously impressed by it, though their impressions were not exactly the same. To one of them, who was a rising artist from London, it was new as well as strange. To the other, who was a local artist but with something more than a local celebrity, it was better known; but perhaps all the more strange for what he knew of it.

In terms of tone and form, as these men saw it, it was a stretch of sands against a stretch of sunset, the whole scene lying in strips of sombre colour, dead green and bronze and brown and a drab that was not merely dull but in that gloaming in some way more mysterious than gold. All that broke these level lines was a long building which ran out from the fields into the sands of the sea, so that its fringe of dreary weeds and rushes seemed almost to meet the seaweed. But its most singular feature was that the upper part of it had the ragged outlines of a ruin, pierced by so many wide windows and large rents as to be a mere dark skeleton against the dying light; while the lower bulk of the building had hardly any windows at all, most of them being blind and bricked up and their outlines only faintly traceable in the twilight. But one window at least was still a window; and it seemed strangest of all that it showed a light.

‘Who on earth can live in that old shell?’ exclaimed the Londoner, who was a big, bohemian-looking man, young but with a shaggy red beard that made him look older; Chelsea knew him familiarly as Harry Payne.

‘Ghosts, you might suppose,’ replied his friend Martin Wood. ‘Well, the people who live there really are rather like ghosts.’

It was perhaps rather a paradox that the London artist seemed almost bucolic in his boisterous freshness and wonder, while the local artist seemed a more shrewd and experienced person, regarding him with mature and amiable amusement; indeed, the latter was altogether a quieter and more conventional figure, wearing darker clothes and with his square and stolid face clean shaven.

‘It is only a sign of the times, of course,’ he went on,’ or of the passing of old times and old families with them. The last of the great Darnaways live in that house, and not many of the new poor are as poor as they are. They can’t even afford to make their own top-storey habitable; but have to live in the lower rooms of a ruin, like bats and owls. Yet they have family portraits that go back to the Wars of the Roses and the first portrait-painting in England, and very fine some of them are; I happen to know, because they asked for my professional advice in overhauling them. There's one of them especially, and one of the earliest, but it's so good that it gives you the creeps.'

'The whole place gives you the creeps, I should think by the look of it,' replied Payne.

'Well,' said his friend, 'to tell you the truth, it does.'

The silence that followed was stirred by a faint rustle among the rushes by the moat; and it gave them, rationally enough, a slight nervous start when a dark figure brushed along the bank, moving rapidly and almost like a startled bird. But it was only a man walking briskly with a black bag in his hand: a man with a long sallow face and sharp eyes that glanced at the London stranger in a slightly darkling and suspicious manner.

'It's only Dr Barnet,' said Wood with a sort of relief. 'Good evening, Doctor. Are you going up to the house? I hope nobody's ill.'

'Everybody's always ill in a place like that,' growled the doctor; 'only sometimes they're too ill to know it. The very air of the place is a blight and a pestilence. I don't envy the young man from Australia.'

'And who,' asked Payne abruptly and rather absently, 'may the young man from Australia be?'

'Ah!' snorted the doctor; 'hasn't your friend told you about him? As a matter of fact I believe he is arriving today. Quite a romance in the old style of melodrama: the heir back from the colonies to his ruined castle, all complete even down to an old family compact for his marrying the lady watching in the ivied tower. Queer old stuff, isn't it? but it really happens sometimes. He's even got a little money, which is the only bright spot there ever was in this business.'

'What does Miss Darnaway herself, in her ivied tower, think of the business?' asked Martin Wood dryly.

'What she thinks of everything else by this time,' replied the doctor. 'They don't think in this weedy old den of superstitions, they only dream and drift. I think she accepts the family contract and the colonial husband as part of the Doom of the Darnaways, don't you know. I really think that if he turned out to be a humpbacked Negro with one eye and a homicidal mania, she would only think it added a finishing touch and fitted in with the twilight scenery.’

‘You’re not giving my friend from London a very lively picture of my friends in the country,’ said Wood, laughing. ‘I had intended taking him there to call; no artist ought to miss those Darnaway portraits if he gets the chance. But perhaps I’d better postpone it if they’re in the middle of the Australian invasion.’

‘Oh, do go in and see them, for the Lord’s sake,’ said Dr Barnet warmly. ‘Anything that will brighten their blighted lives will make my task easier. It will need a good many colonial cousins to cheer things up, I should think; and the more the merrier. Come, I’ll take you in myself.’

As they drew nearer to the house it was seen to be isolated like an island in a moat of brackish water which they crossed by a bridge. On the other side spread a fairly wide stony floor or embankment with great cracks across it, in which little tufts of weed and thorn sprouted here and there. This rock platform looked large and bare in the grey twilight, and Payne could hardly have believed that such a corner of space could have contained so much of the soul of a wilderness. This platform only jutted out on one side, like a giant door-step and beyond it was the door; a very low-browed Tudor archway standing open, but dark like a cave.

When the brisk doctor led them inside without ceremony, Payne had, as it were, another shock of depression. He could have expected to find himself mounting to a very ruinous tower, by very narrow winding staircases; but in this case the first steps into the house were actually steps downwards. They went down several short and broken stairways into large twilit rooms which but for their lines of dark pictures and dusty bookshelves, might have been the traditional dungeons beneath the castle moat. Here and there a candle in an old candlestick lit up some dusty accidental detail of a dead elegance; but the visitor was not so much impressed or depressed by this artificial light as by the one pale gleam of natural light. As he passed down the long room he saw the only window in that wall — a curious low oval window of a late-seventeenth-century fashion. But the strange thing about it was that it did not look out directly on any space of sky but only on a reflection of sky; a pale strip of daylight merely mirrored in the moat, under the hanging shadow of the bank. Payne had a memory of the Lady of Shallot who never saw the world outside except in a mirror. The lady of this Shallot not only in some sense saw the world in a mirror, but even saw the world upside-down.

‘It’s as if the house of Darnaway were falling literally as well as metaphorically,’ said Wood in a low voice; ‘as if it were sinking slowly into a swamp or a quicksand, until the sea goes over it like a green roof.’

Even the sturdy Dr Barnet started a little at the silent approach of the figure that came to receive them. Indeed, the room was so silent that they were all startled to realize that it was not empty. There were three people in it when they entered: three dim figures motionless in the dim room; all three dressed in black and looking like dark shadows. As the foremost figure drew nearer the grey light from the window, he showed a face that looked almost as grey as its frame of hair. This was old Vine, the steward, long left in loco parentis since the death of that eccentric parent, the last Lord Darnaway. He would have been a handsome old man if he had had no teeth. As it was, he had one which showed every now and then and gave him a rather sinister appearance. He received the doctor and his friends with a fine courtesy and escorted them to where the other two figures in black were seated. One of them seemed to Payne to give another appropriate touch of gloomy antiquity to the castle by the mere fact of being a Roman Catholic priest, who might have come out of a priest’s hole in the dark old days. Payne could imagine him muttering prayers or telling beads, or tolling bells or doing a number of indistinct and melancholy things in that melancholy place. Just then he might be supposed to have been giving religious consolation to the lady; but it could hardly be supposed that the consolation was very consoling, or at any rate that it was very cheering. For the rest, the priest was personally insignificant enough, with plain and rather expressionless features; but the lady was a very different matter. Her face was very far from being plain or insignificant; it stood out from the darkness of her dress and hair and background with a pallor that was almost awful, but a beauty that was almost awfully alive. Payne looked at it as long as he dared; and he was to look at it a good deal longer before he died.

Wood merely exchanged with his friends such pleasant and polite phrases as would lead up to his purpose of revisiting the portraits. He apologized for calling on the day which he heard was to be one of family welcome; but he was soon convinced that the family was rather mildly relieved to have visitors to distract them or break the shock. He did not hesitate, therefore, to lead Payne through the central reception-room into the library beyond, where hung the portrait, for there was one which he was especially bent on showing, not only as a picture but almost as a puzzle. The little priest trudged along with them; he seemed to know something about old pictures as well as about old prayers.

‘I’m rather proud of having spotted this,’ said Wood. ‘I believe it’s a Holbein. If it isn’t, there was somebody living in Holbein’s time who was as great as Holbein.’

It was a portrait in the hard but sincere and living fashion of the period, representing a man clad in black trimmed with gold and fur, with a heavy, full, rather pale face but watchful eyes.

‘What a pity art couldn’t have stopped for ever at just that transition stage,’ cried Wood, ‘and never transitioned any more. Don’t you see it’s just realistic enough to be real? Don’t you see the face speaks all the more because it stands out from a rather stiffer framework of less essential things? And the eyes are even more real than the face. On my soul, I think the eyes are too real for the face! It’s just as if those sly, quick eyeballs were protruding out of a great pale mask.’

‘The stiffness extends to the figure a little, I think,’ said Payne. ‘They hadn’t quite mastered anatomy when medievalism ended, at least in the north. That left leg looks to me a good deal out of drawing.’

‘I’m not so sure,’ replied Wood quietly. ‘Those fellows who painted just when realism began to be done, and before it began to be overdone, were often more realistic than we think. They put real details of portraiture into things that are thought merely conventional. You might say this fellow’s eyebrows or eye-sockets are a little lop-sided; but I bet if you knew him you’d find that one of his eyebrows did really stick up more than the other. And I shouldn’t wonder if he was lame or something, and that black leg was meant to be crooked.’

‘What an old devil he looks!’ burst out Payne suddenly. ‘I trust his reverence will excuse my language.’

‘I believe in the devil, thank you,’ said the priest with an inscrutable face. ‘Curiously enough there was a legend that the devil was lame.’

‘I say,’ protested Payne, ‘you can’t really mean that he was the devil; but who the devil was he?’

‘He was the Lord Darnaway under Henry VII and Henry VIII,’ replied his companion. ‘But there are curious legends about him, too; one of them is referred to in that inscription round the frame, and further developed in some notes left by somebody in a book I found here. They are both rather curious reading.'

Payne leaned forward, craning his head so as to follow the archaic inscription round the frame. Leaving out the antiquated lettering and spelling, it seemed to be a sort of rhyme running somewhat thus:

In the seventh hour I shall return:
In the seventh hour I shall depart:
None in that hour shall hold my hand:
And woe to her that holds my heart.

'It sounds creepy somehow,' said Payne, 'but that may be partly because I don't understand a word of it.'

'It's pretty creepy even when you do,' said Wood in a low voice. 'The record made at a later date, in the old book I found, is all about how this beauty deliberately killed himself in such a way that his wife was executed for his murder. Another note commemorates a later tragedy, seven successions later — under the Georges — in which another Darnaway committed suicide, having first thoughtfully left poison in his wife's wine. It's said that both suicides took place at seven in the evening. I suppose the inference is that he does really return with every seventh inheritor and makes things unpleasant, as the rhyme suggests, for any lady unwise enough to marry him.'

'On that argument,' replied Payne, 'it would be a trifle uncomfortable for the next seventh gentleman.'

Wood's voice was lower still as he said: 'The new heir will be the seventh.'

Harry Payne suddenly heaved up his great chest and shoulders like a man flinging off a burden.

'What crazy stuff are we all talking?' he cried. 'We're all educated men in an enlightened age, I suppose. Before I came into this damned dank atmosphere I'd never have believed I should be talking of such things, except to laugh at them.'

'You are right,' said Wood. 'If you lived long enough in this underground palace you'd begin to feel differently about things. I've begun to feel very curiously about that picture, having had so much to do with handling and hanging it. It sometimes seems to me that the painted face is more alive than the dead faces of the people living here; that it is a sort of talisman or magnet: that it commands the elements and draws out the destinies of men and things. I suppose you would call it very fanciful.'

'What is that noise?' cried Payne suddenly.

They all listened, and there seemed to be no noise except the dull boom of the distant sea; then they began to have the sense of something mingling with it; something like a voice calling through the sound of the surf, dulled by it at first, but coming nearer and nearer. The next moment they were certain: someone was shouting outside in the dusk.

Payne turned to the low window behind him and bent to look out. It was the window from which nothing could be seen except the moat with its reflection of bank and sky. But that inverted vision was not the same that he had seen before. From the hanging shadow of the bank in the water depended two dark shadows reflected from the feet and legs of a figure standing above upon the bank. Through that limited aperture they could see nothing but the two legs black against the reflection of a pale and livid sunset. But somehow that very fact of the head being invisible, as if in the clouds, gave something dreadful to the sound that followed; the voice of a man crying aloud what they could not properly hear or understand. Payne especially was peering out of the little window with an altered face, and he spoke with an altered voice:

'How queerly he's standing!'

'No, no,' said Wood, in a sort of soothing whisper. 'Things often look like that in reflection. It's the wavering of the water that makes you think that.'

'Think what?' asked the priest shortly.

'That his left leg is crooked,' said Wood.

Payne had thought of the oval window as a sort of mystical mirror; and it seemed to him that there were in it other inscrutable images of doom. There was something else beside the figure that he did not understand; three thinner legs showing in dark lines against the light, as if some monstrous three-legged spider or bird were standing beside the stranger. Then he had the less crazy thought of a tripod like that of the heathen oracles; and the next moment the thing had vanished and the legs of the human figure passed out of the picture.

He turned to meet the pale face of old Vine, the steward, with his mouth open, eager to speak, and his single tooth showing. 'He has come,' he said. 'The boat arrived from Australia this morning.'

Even as they went back out of the library into the central salon they heard the footsteps of the newcomer clattering down the entrance steps, with various items of light luggage trailed behind him. When Payne saw one of them, he laughed with a reaction of relief. His tripod was nothing but the telescopic legs of a portable camera, easily packed and unpacked; and the man who was carrying it seemed so far to take on equally solid and normal qualities. He was dressed in dark clothes, but of a careless and holiday sort; his shirt was of grey flannel, and his boots echoed uncompromisingly enough in those still chambers. As he strode forward to greet his new circle his stride had scarcely more than the suggestion of a limp. But Payne and his companions were looking at his face, and could scarcely take their eyes from it.

He evidently felt there was something curious and uncomfortable about his reception; but they could have sworn that he did not himself know the cause of it. The lady, supposed to be in some sense already betrothed to him, was certainly beautiful enough to attract him; but she evidently also frightened him. The old steward brought him a sort of feudal homage, yet treated him as if he were the family ghost. The priest still looked at him with a face which was quite indecipherable, and therefore perhaps all the more unnerving. A new sort of irony, more like the Greek irony, began to pass over Payne's mind. He had dreamed of the stranger as a devil, but it seemed almost worse that he was an unconscious destiny. He seemed to march towards crime with the monstrous innocence of Oedipus. He had approached the family mansion in so blindly buoyant a spirit as to have set up his camera to photograph his first sight of it; and even the camera had taken on the semblance of the tripod of a tragic pythoness.

Payne was surprised, when taking his leave a little while after, at something which showed that the Australian was already less unconscious of his surroundings. He said in a low voice:

'Don't go ... or come again soon. You look like a human being. This place fairly gives me the jumps.'

When Payne emerged out of those almost subterranean halls and came into the night air and the smell of the sea, he felt as if he had come out of that underworld of dreams in which events jumble on top of each other in a way at once unrestful and unreal.

The arrival of the strange relative had been somehow unsatisfying and, as it were, unconvincing. The doubling of the same face in the old portrait and the new arrival troubled him like a two headed monster. And yet it was not altogether a nightmare; nor was it that face, perhaps, that he saw most vividly.

‘Did you say?’ he asked of the doctor, as they strode together across the striped dark sands by the darkening sea; ‘did you say that young man was betrothed to Miss Darnaway by a family compact or something? Sounds rather like a novel.’

‘But an historical novel,’ answered Dr Barnet. ‘The Darnaways all went to sleep a few centuries ago, when things were really done that we only read of in romances. Yes; I believe there’s some family tradition by which second or third cousins always marry when they stand in a certain relation of age, in order to unite the property. A damned silly tradition, I should say; and if they often married in and in, in that fashion, it may account on principles of heredity for their having gone so rotten.’

‘I should hardly say,’ answered Payne a little stuffily, ‘that they had all gone rotten.’

‘Well,’ replied the doctor, ‘the young man doesn’t look rotten, of course, though he’s certainly lame.’

‘The young man!’ cried Payne, who was suddenly and unreasonably angry. ‘Well, if you think the young lady looks rotten, I think it’s you who have rotten taste.’

The doctor’s face grew dark and bitter. ‘I fancy I know more about it than you do,’ he snapped.

They completed the walk in silence, each feeling that he had been irrationally rude and had suffered equally irrational rudeness; and Payne was left to brood alone on the matter, for his friend Wood had remained behind to attend to some of his business in connexion with the pictures.

Payne took very full advantage of the invitation extended by the colonial cousin, who wanted somebody to cheer him up. During the next few weeks he saw a good deal of the dark interior of the Darnaway home; though it might be said that he did not confine himself entirely to cheering up the colonial cousin. The lady’s melancholy was of longer standing and perhaps needed more lifting; anyhow, he showed a laborious readiness to lift it. He was not without a conscience, however, and the situation made him doubtful and uncomfortable. Weeks went by and nobody could discover from the demeanour of the new Darnaway whether he considered himself engaged according to the old compact or no. He went mooning about the dark galleries and stood staring vacantly at the dark and sinister picture. The shades of that prison-house were certainly beginning to close on him, and there was little of his Australian assurance left. But Payne could discover nothing upon the point that concerned him most. Once he attempted to confide in his friend Martin Wood, as he was pottering about in his capacity of picture-hanger; but even out of him he got very little satisfaction.

‘It seems to me you can’t butt in,’ said Wood shortly, ‘because of the engagement.’

‘Of course I shan’t butt in if there is an engagement,’ retorted his friend; ‘but is there? I haven’t said a word to her of course; but I’ve seen enough of her to be pretty certain she doesn’t think there is, even if she thinks there may be. He doesn’t say there is, or even hint that there ought to be. It seems to me this shillyshallying is rather unfair on everybody.’

‘Especially on you, I suppose,’ said Wood a little harshly. ‘But if you ask me, I’ll tell you what I think — I think he’s afraid.’

‘Afraid of being refused?’ asked Payne.

‘No; afraid of being accepted,’ answered the other. ‘Don’t bite my head off — I don’t mean afraid of the lady. I mean afraid of the picture.’

‘Afraid of the picture!’ repeated Payne.

‘I mean afraid of the curse,’ said Wood. ‘Don’t you remember the rhyme about the Darnaway doom falling on him and her.’

‘Yes, but look here,’ cried Payne; ‘even the Darnaway doom can’t have it both ways. You tell me first that I mustn’t have my own way because of the compact, and then that the compact mustn’t have its own way because of the curse. But if the curse can destroy the compact, why should she be tied to the compact? If they’re frightened of marrying each other, they’re free to marry anybody else, and there’s an end of it. Why should I suffer for the observance of something they don’t propose to observe? It seems to me your position is very unreasonable.’

‘Of course it’s all a tangle,’ said Wood rather crossly, and went on hammering at the frame of a canvas.

Suddenly, one morning, the new heir broke his long and baffling silence. He did it in a curious fashion, a little crude, as was his way, but with an obvious anxiety to do the right thing. He asked frankly for advice, not of this or that individual as Payne had done, but collectively as of a crowd. When he did speak he threw himself on the whole company like a statesman going to the country. He called it ‘a show-down’. Fortunately the lady was not included in this large gesture; and Payne shuddered when he thought of her feelings. But the Australian was quite honest; he thought the natural thing was to ask for help and for information, calling a sort of family council at which he put his cards on the table. It might be said that he flung down his cards on the table, for he did it with a rather desperate air, like one who had been harassed for days and nights by the increasing pressure of a problem. In that short time the shadows of that place of low windows and sinking pavements had curiously changed him, and increased a certain resemblance that crept through all their memories.

The five men, including the doctor, were sitting round a table; and Payne was idly reflecting that his own light tweeds and red hair must be the only colours in the room, for the priest and the steward were in black, and Wood and Darnaway habitually wore dark grey suits that looked almost like black. Perhaps this incongruity had been what the young man had meant by calling him a human being. At that moment the young man himself turned abruptly in his chair and began to talk. A moment after the dazed artist knew that he was talking about the most tremendous thing in the world.

‘Is there anything in it?’ he was saying. ‘That is what I’ve come to asking myself till I’m nearly crazy. I’d never have believed I should come to thinking of such things; but I think of the portrait and the rhyme and the coincidences or whatever you call them, and I go cold. Is there anything in it? Is there any Doom of the Darnaways or only a damned queer accident? Have I got a right to marry, or shall I bring something big and black out of the sky, that I know nothing about, on myself and somebody else?’

His rolling eye had roamed round the table and rested on the plain face of the priest, to whom he now seemed to be speaking. Payne’s submerged practicality rose in protest against the problem of superstition being brought before that supremely superstitious tribunal. He was sitting next to Darnaway and struck in before the priest could answer.

‘Well, the coincidences are curious, I admit,’ he said, rather forcing a note of cheerfulness; ‘but surely we—’ and then he stopped as if he had been struck by lightning. For Darnaway had turned his head sharply over his shoulder at the interruption, and with the movement, his left eyebrow jerked up far above its fellow and for an instant the face of the portrait glared at him with a ghastly exaggeration of exactitude. The rest saw it; and all had the air of having been dazzled by an instant of light. The old steward gave a hollow groan.

‘It is no good,’ he said hoarsely;’ we are dealing with something too terrible.’

‘Yes,’ assented the priest in a low voice, ‘we are dealing with something terrible; with the most terrible thing I know, and the name of it is nonsense.’

‘What did you say?’ said Darnaway, still looking towards him.

‘I said nonsense,’ repeated the priest. ‘I have not said anything in particular up to now, for it was none of my business; I was only taking temporary duty in the neighbourhood and Miss Darnaway wanted to see me. But since you’re asking me personally and point-blank, why, it’s easy enough to answer. Of course there’s no Doom of the Darnaways to prevent your marrying anybody you have any decent reason for marrying. A man isn’t fated to fall into the smallest venial sin, let alone into crimes like suicide and murder. You can’t be made to do wicked things against your will because your name is Darnaway, any more than I can because my name is Brown. The Doom of the Browns,’ he added with relish— ‘the Weird of the Browns would sound even better.’

‘And you of all people,’ repeated the Australian, staring, ‘tell me to think like that about it.’

‘I tell you to think about something else,’ replied the priest cheerfully. ‘What has become of the rising art of photography? How is the camera getting on? I know it’s rather dark downstairs, but those hollow arches on the floor above could easily be turned into a first-rate photographic studio. A few workmen could fit it out with a glass roof in no time.’

‘Really,’ protested Martin Wood, ‘I do think you should be the last man in the world to tinker about with those beautiful Gothic arches, which are about the best work your own religion has ever done in the world. I should have thought you’d have had some feeling for that sort of art; but I can’t see why you should be so uncommonly keen on photography.’

‘I’m uncommonly keen on daylight,’ answered Father Brown, ‘especially in this dingy business; and photography has the virtue of depending on daylight. And if you don’t know that I would grind all the Gothic arches in the world to powder to save the sanity of a single human soul, you don’t know so much about my religion as you think you do.’

The young Australian had sprung to his feet like a man rejuvenated. ‘By George! that’s the talk,’ he cried; ‘though I never thought to hear it from that quarter. I’ll tell you what, reverend sir, I’ll do something that will show I haven’t lost my courage after all.’

The old steward was still looking at him with quaking watchfulness, as if he felt something fey about the young man’s defiance. ‘Oh,’ he cried, ‘what are you going to do now?’

‘I am going to photograph the portrait,’ replied Darnaway.

Yet it was barely a week afterwards that the storm of the catastrophe seemed to stoop out of the sky, darkening that sun of sanity to which the priest had appealed in vain, and plunging the mansion once more in the darkness of the Darnaway doom. It had been easy enough to fit up the new studio; and seen from inside it looked very like any other such studio, empty except for the fullness of the white light. A man coming from the gloomy rooms below had more than normally the sense of stepping into a more than modern brilliancy, as blank as the future. At the suggestion of Wood, who knew the castle well and had got over his first aesthetic grumblings, a small room remaining intact in the upper ruins was easily turned into a dark room, into which Darnaway went out of the white daylight to grope by the crimson gleams of a red lamp. Wood said, laughing, that the red lamp had reconciled him to the vandalism; as that bloodshot darkness was as romantic as an alchemist’s cave.

Darnaway had risen at daybreak on the day that he meant to photograph the mysterious portrait, and had it carried up from the library by the single corkscrew staircase that connected the two floors. There he had set it up in the wide white daylight on a sort of easel and planted his photographic tripod in front of it. He said he was anxious to send a reproduction of it to a great antiquary who had written on the antiquities of the house; but the others knew that this was an excuse covering much deeper things. It was, if not exactly a spiritual duel between Darnaway and the demoniac picture, at least a duel between Darnaway and his own doubts. He wanted to bring the daylight of photography face to face with that dark masterpiece of painting; and to see whether the sunshine of the new art would not drive out the shadows of the old.

Perhaps this was why he preferred to do it by himself, even if some of the details seemed to take longer and involve more than normal delay. Anyhow, he rather discouraged the few who visited his studio during the day of the experiment, and who found him focusing and fussing about in a very isolated and impenetrable fashion. The steward had left a meal for him, as he refused to come down; the old gentleman also returned some hours afterwards and found the meal more or less normally disposed of; but when he brought it he got no more gratitude than a grunt. Payne went up once to see how he was getting on, but finding the photographer disinclined for conversation came down again. Father Brown had wandered that way in an unobtrusive style to take Darnaway a letter from the expert to whom the photograph was to be sent. But he left the letter on a tray, and whatever he thought of that great glasshouse full of daylight and devotion to a hobby, a world he had himself in some sense created, he kept it to himself and came down. He had reason to remember very soon that he was the last to come down the solitary staircase connecting the floors, leaving a lonely man and an empty room behind him. The others were standing in the salon that led into the library, just under the great black ebony clock that looked like a titanic coffin.

‘How was Darnaway getting on,’ asked Payne, a little later, ‘when you last went up?’

The priest passed a hand over his forehead. ‘Don’t tell me I’m getting psychic,’ he said with a sad smile. ‘I believe I’m quite dazzled with daylight up in that room and couldn’t see things straight. Honestly, I felt for a flash as if there were something uncanny about Darnaway’s figure standing before that portrait.’

‘Oh, that’s the lame leg,’ said Barnet promptly. ‘We know all about that.’

‘Do you know,’ said Payne abruptly, but lowering his voice, ‘l don’t think we do know all about it or anything about it. What’s the matter with his leg? What was the matter with his ancestor’s leg?’

‘Oh, there’s something about that in the book I was reading in there, in the family archives,’ said Wood; ‘I’ll fetch it for you.’ And he stepped into the library just beyond.

‘I think,’ said Father Brown quietly, ‘Mr Payne must have some particular reason for asking that.’

‘I may as well blurt it out once and for all,’ said Payne, but in a yet lower voice. ‘After all, there is a rational explanation. A man from anywhere might have made up to look like the portrait. What do we know about Darnaway? He is behaving rather oddly—’

The others were staring at him in a rather startled fashion; but the priest seemed to take it very calmly.

‘I don’t think the old portrait’s ever been photographed,’ he said. ‘That’s why he wants to do it. I don’t think there’s anything odd about that.’

‘Quite an ordinary state of things, in fact,’ said Wood with a smile; he had just returned with the book in his hand. And even as he spoke there was a stir in the clockwork of the great dark clock behind him and successive strokes thrilled through the room up to the number of seven. With the last stroke there came a crash from the floor above that shook the house like a thunderbolt; and Father Brown was already two steps up the winding staircase before the sound had ceased.

‘My God!’ cried Payne involuntarily; ‘he is alone up there.’

‘Yes,’ said Father Brown without turning, as he vanished up the stairway. ‘We shall find him alone.’

When the rest recovered from their first paralysis and ran helter-skelter up the stone steps and found their way to the new studio, it was true in that sense that they found him alone. They found him lying in a wreck of his tall camera, with its long splintered legs standing out grotesquely at three different angles; and Darnaway had fallen on top of it with one black crooked leg lying at a fourth angle along the floor. For the moment the dark heap looked as if he were entangled with some huge and horrible spider. Little more than a glance and a touch were needed to tell them that he was dead. Only the portrait stood untouched upon the easel, and one could fancy the smiling eyes shone.

An hour afterwards Father Brown in helping to calm the confusion of the stricken household, came upon the old steward muttering almost as mechanically as the clock had ticked and struck the terrible hour. Almost without hearing them, he knew what the muttered words must be.

In the seventh heir I shall return
In the seventh hour I shall depart.

As he was about to say something soothing, the old man seemed suddenly to start awake and stiffen into anger; his mutterings changed to a fierce cry.

‘You!’ he cried; ‘you and your daylight! Even you won’t say now there is no Doom for the Darnaways.’

‘My opinion about that is unchanged,’ said Father Brown mildly. Then after a pause he added: ‘I hope you will observe poor Darnaway’s last wish, and see the photograph is sent off.’

‘The photograph!’ cried the doctor sharply. ‘What’s the good of that? As a matter of fact, it’s rather curious; but there isn’t any photograph. It seems he never took it after all, after pottering about all day.’

Father Brown swung round sharply. ‘Then take it yourselves,’ he said. ‘Poor Darnaway was perfectly right. It’s most important that the photograph should be taken.’

As all the visitors, the doctor, the priest, and the two artists trailed away in a black and dismal procession across the brown and yellow sands, they were at first more or less silent, rather as if they had been stunned. And certainly there had been something like a crack of thunder in a clear sky about the fulfilment of that forgotten superstition at the very time when they had most forgotten it; when the doctor and the priest had both filled their minds with rationalism as the photographer had filled his rooms with daylight. They might be as rationalistic as they liked; but in broad daylight the seventh heir had returned, and in broad daylight at the seventh hour he had perished.

‘I’m afraid everybody will always believe in the Darnaway superstition now,’ said Martin Wood.

‘I know one who won’t,’ said the doctor sharply. ‘Why should I indulge in superstition because somebody else indulges in suicide?’

‘You think poor Mr Darnaway committed suicide?’ asked the priest.

‘I’m sure he committed suicide,’ replied the doctor.

‘It is possible,’ agreed the other.

‘He was quite alone up there, and he had a whole drug-store of poisons in the dark room. Besides, it’s just the sort of thing that Darnaways do.’

‘You don’t think there’s anything in the fulfilment of the family curse?’

‘Yes,’ said the doctor; ‘I believe in one family curse, and that is the family constitution. I told you it was heredity, and they are all half mad. If you stagnate and breed in and brood in your own swamp like that, you’re bound to degenerate whether you like it or not. The laws of heredity can’t be dodged; the truths of science can’t be denied. The minds of the Darnaways are falling to pieces, as their blighted old sticks and stones are falling to pieces, eaten away by the sea and the salt air. Suicide — of course he committed suicide; I dare say all the rest will commit suicide. Perhaps the best thing they could do.’

As the man of science spoke there sprang suddenly and with startling clearness into Payne’s memory the face of the daughter of the Darnaways, a tragic mask pale against an unfathomable blackness, but itself of a blinding and more than mortal beauty. He opened his mouth to speak and found himself speechless.

‘I see,’ said Father Brown to the doctor; ‘so you do believe in the superstition after all?’

‘What do you mean — believe in the superstition? I believe in the suicide as a matter of scientific necessity.’

‘Well,’ replied the priest, ‘I don’t see a pin to choose between your scientific superstition and the other magical superstition. They both seem to end in turning people into paralytics, who can’t move their own legs or arms or save their own lives or souls. The rhyme said it was the Doom of the Darnaways to be killed, and the scientific textbook says it is the Doom of the Darnaways to kill themselves. Both ways they seem to be slaves.’

‘But I thought you said you believed in rational views of these things,’ said Dr Barnet. ‘Don’t you believe in heredity?’

‘I said I believed in daylight,’ replied the priest in a loud and clear voice, ‘and I won’t choose between two tunnels of subterranean superstition that both end in the dark. And the proof of it is this: that you are all entirely in the dark about what really happened in that house.’

‘Do you mean about the suicide?’ asked Payne.

‘I mean about the murder,’ said Father Brown; and his voice, though only slightly lifted to a louder note, seemed somehow to resound over the whole shore. ‘It was murder; but murder is of the will, which God made free.’

What the other said at the moment in answer to it Payne never knew. For the word had a rather curious effect on him; stirring him like the blast of a trumpet and yet bringing him to a halt. He stood still in the middle of the sandy waste and let the others go on in front of him; he felt the blood crawling through all his veins and the sensation that is called the hair standing on end; and yet he felt a new and unnatural happiness. A psychological process too quick and too complicated for himself to follow had already reached a conclusion that he could not analyse; but the conclusion was one of relief. After standing still for a moment he turned and went back slowly across the sands to the house of the Darnaways.

He crossed the moat with a stride that shook the bridge, descended the stairs and traversed the long rooms with a resounding tread, till he came to the place where Adelaide Darnaway sat haloed with the low light of the oval window, almost like some forgotten saint left behind in the land of death. She looked up, and an expression of wonder made her face yet more wonderful.

‘What is it?’ she said.’ Why have you come back?’

‘I have come for the Sleeping Beauty,’ he said in a tone that had the resonance of a laugh. ‘This old house went to sleep long ago, as the doctor said; but it is silly for you to pretend to be old. Come up into the daylight and hear the truth. I have brought you a word; it is a terrible word, but it breaks the spell of your captivity.’

She did not understand a word he said, but something made her rise and let him lead her down the long hall and up the stairs and out under the evening sky. The ruins of a dead garden stretched towards the sea, and an old fountain with the figure of a triton, green with rust, remained poised there, pouring nothing out of a dried horn into an empty basin. He had often seen that desolate outline against the evening sky as he passed, and it had seemed to him a type of fallen fortunes in more ways than one. Before long, doubtless, those hollow fonts would be filled, but it would be with the pale green bitter waters of the sea and the flowers would be drowned and strangled in seaweed. So, he had told himself, the daughter of the Darnaways might indeed be wedded; but she would be wedded to death and a doom as deaf and ruthless as the sea. But now he laid a hand on the bronze triton that was like the hand of a giant, and shook it as if he meant to hurl it over like an idol or an evil god of the garden.

‘What do you mean?’ she asked steadily. ‘What is this word that will set us free?’

‘The word is murder,’ he said, ‘and the freedom it brings is as fresh as the flowers of spring. No; I do not mean I have murdered anybody. But the fact that anybody can be murdered is itself good news, after the evil dreams you have been living in. Don’t you understand? In that dream of yours everything that happened to you came from inside you; the Doom of the Darnaways was stored up in the Darnaways; it unfolded itself like a horrible flower. There was no escape even by happy accident; it was all inevitable; whether it was Vine and his old wives’ tales, or Barnet and his new-fangled heredity. But this man who died was not the victim of a magic curse or an inherited madness. He was murdered; and for us that murder is simply an accident; yes, requiescat in pace: but a happy accident. It is a ray of daylight, because it comes from outside.’

She suddenly smiled. ‘Yes, I believe I understand. I suppose you are talking like a lunatic, but I understand. But who murdered him?’

‘I do not know,’ he answered calmly, ‘but Father Brown knows. And as Father Brown says, murder is at least done by the will, free as that wind from the sea.’

‘Father Brown is a wonderful person,’ she said after a pause; ‘he was the only person who ever brightened my existence in any way at all until—’

‘Until what?’ asked Payne, and made a movement almost impetuous, leaning towards her and thrusting away the bronze monster so that it seemed to rock on its pedestal.

‘Well, until you did,’ she said and smiled again.

So was the sleeping palace awakened, and it is no part of this story to describe the stages of its awakening, though much of it had come to pass before the dark of that evening had fallen upon the shore. As Harry Payne strode homewards once more, across those dark sands that he had crossed in so many moods, he was at the highest turn of happiness that is given in this mortal life, — and the whole red sea within him was at the top of its tide. He would have had no difficulty in picturing all that place again in flower, and the bronze triton bright as a golden god and the fountain flowing with water or with wine. But all this brightness and blossoming had been unfolded for him by the one word ‘murder’, and it was still a word that he did not understand. He had taken it on trust, and he was not unwise; for he was one of those who have a sense of the sound of truth.

It was more than a month later that Payne returned to his London house to keep an appointment with Father Brown, taking the required photograph with him. His personal romance had prospered as well as was fitting under the shadow of such a tragedy, and the shadow itself therefore lay rather more lightly on him; but it was hard to view it as anything but the shadow of a family fatality. In many ways he had been much occupied; and it was not until the Darnaway household had resumed its somewhat stern routine, and the portrait had long been restored to its place in the library, that he had managed to photograph it with a magnesium flare. Before sending it to the antiquary, as originally arranged, he brought it to the priest who had so pressingly demanded it.

‘I can’t understand your attitude about all this. Father Brown,’ he said.’ You act as if you had already solved the problem in some way of your own.’

The priest shook his head mournfully. ‘Not a bit of it,’ he answered. ‘I must be very stupid, but I’m quite stuck; stuck about the most practical point of all. It’s a queer business; so simple up to a point and then — Let me have a look at that photograph, will you?’

He held it close to his screwed, short-sighted eyes for a moment, and then said: ‘Have you got a magnifying glass?’

Payne produced one, and the priest looked through it intently for some time and then said: ‘Look at the title of that book at the edge of the bookshelf beside the frame; it’s ‘The History of Pope Joan’. Now, I wonder ... yes, by George; and the one above is something or other of Iceland. Lord! what a queer way to find it out! What a dolt and donkey I was not to notice it when I was there!’

‘But what have you found out?’ asked Payne impatiently.

‘The last link,’ said Father Brown, ‘and I’m not stuck any longer. Yes; I think I know how that unhappy story went from first to last now.’

‘But why?’ insisted the other.

‘Why, because,’ said the priest with a smile, ‘the Darnaway library contained books about Pope Joan and Iceland, not to mention another I see with the title beginning ‘The Religion of Frederick’, which is not so very hard to fill up.’ Then, seeing the other’s annoyance, his smile faded and he said more earnestly: ‘As a matter of fact, this last point, though it is the last link, is not the main business. There were much more curious things in the case than that. One of them is rather a curiosity of evidence. Let me begin by saying something that may surprise you. Darnaway did not die at seven o’clock that evening. He had been already dead for a whole day.’

‘Surprise is rather a mild word,’ said Payne grimly, ‘since you and I both saw him walking about afterwards.’

‘No, we did not,’ replied Father Brown quietly. ‘I think we both saw him, or thought we saw him, fussing about with the focusing of his camera. Wasn’t his head under that black cloak when you passed through the room? It was when I did. And that’s why I felt there was something queer about the room and the figure. It wasn’t that the leg was crooked, but rather that it wasn’t crooked. It was dressed in the same sort of dark clothes; but if you see what you believe to be one man standing in the way that another man stands, you will think he’s in a strange and strained attitude.’

‘Do you really mean,’ cried Payne with something like a shudder, ‘that it was some unknown man?’

‘It was the murderer,’ said Father Brown. ‘He had already killed Darnaway at daybreak and hid the corpse and himself in the dark room —

an excellent hiding-place, because nobody normally goes into it or can see much if he does. But he let it fall out on the floor at seven o’clock, of course, that the whole thing might be explained by the curse.’

‘But I don’t understand’ observed Payne. ‘Why didn’t he kill him at seven o’clock then, instead of loading himself with a corpse for fourteen hours?’

‘Let me ask you another question,’ said the priest. ‘Why was there no photograph taken? Because the murderer made sure of killing him when he first got up, and before he could take it. It was essential to the murderer to prevent that photograph reaching the expert on the Darnaway antiquities.’

There was a sudden silence for a moment, and then the priest went on in a lower tone: ‘Don’t you see how simple it is? Why, you yourself saw one side of the possibility; but it’s simpler even than you thought. You said a man might be faked to resemble an old picture. Surely it’s simpler that a picture should be faked to resemble a man. In plain words, it’s true in a rather special way that there was no Doom of the Darnaways. There was no old picture; there was no old rhyme; there was no legend of a man who caused his wife’s death. But there was a very wicked and a very clever man who was willing to cause another man’s death in order to rob him of his promised wife.’

The priest suddenly gave Payne a sad smile, as if in reassurance. ‘For the moment I believe you thought I meant you,’ he said,’ but you were not the only person who haunted that house for sentimental reasons. You know the man, or rather you think you do. But there were depths in the man called Martin Wood, artist and antiquary, which none of his mere artistic acquaintances were likely to guess. Remember that he was called in to criticize and catalogue the pictures; in an aristocratic dustbin of that sort that practically means simply to tell the Darnaways what art treasures they had got. They would not be surprised at things turning up they had never noticed before. It had to be done well, and it was; perhaps he was right when he said that if it wasn’t Holbein it was somebody of the same genius.’

‘I feel rather stunned,’ said Payne; ‘and there are twenty things I don’t see yet. How did he know what Darnaway looked like? How did he actually kill him? The doctors seem rather puzzled at present.’

‘I saw a photograph the lady had which the Australian sent on before him,’ said the priest, ‘and there are several ways in which he could have learned things when the new heir was once recognized. We may not know these details; but they are not difficulties. You remember he used to help in the dark room; it seems to me an ideal place, say, to prick a man with a poisoned pin, with the poison's all handy. No; I say these were not difficulties. The difficulty that stumped me was how Wood could be in two places at once. How could he take the corpse from the dark-room and prop it against the camera so that it would fall in a few seconds, without coming downstairs, when he was in the library looking out a book? And I was such a fool that I never looked at the books in the library; and it was only in this photograph, by very undeserved good luck, that I saw the simple fact of a book about Pope Joan.'

'You've kept your best riddle for the end,' said Payne grimly. 'What on earth can Pope Joan have to do with it?'

'Don't forget the book about the Something of Iceland,' advised the priest, 'or the religion of somebody called Frederick. It only remains to ask what sort of man was the late Lord Darnaway.'

'Oh, does it?' observed Payne heavily.

'He was a cultivated, humorous sort of eccentric, I believe,' went on Father Brown. 'Being cultivated, he knew there was no such person as Pope Joan. Being humorous, he was very likely to have thought of the title of 'The Snakes of Iceland' or something else that didn't exist. I venture to reconstruct the third title as 'The Religion of Frederick the Great' — which also doesn't exist. Now, doesn't it strike you that those would be just the titles to put on the backs of books that didn't exist; or in other words on a bookcase that wasn't a book-case?'

'Ah!' cried Payne; 'I see what you mean now. There was some hidden staircase—'

'Up to the room Wood himself selected as a dark room,' said the priest nodding. 'I'm sorry. It couldn't be helped. It's dreadfully banal and stupid, as stupid as I have been on this pretty banal case. But we were mixed up in a real musty old romance of decayed gentility and a fallen family mansion; and it was too much to hope that we could escape having a secret passage. It was a priest's hole; and I deserve to be put in it.'

The Ghost of Gideon Wise

FATHER BROWN always regarded the case as the queerest example of the theory of an alibi: the theory by which it is maintained, in defiance of the mythological Irish bird, that it is impossible for anybody to be in two places at once. To begin with, James Byrne, being an Irish journalist, was perhaps the nearest approximation to the Irish bird. He came as near as anybody could to being in two places at once: for he was in two places at the opposite extremes of the social and political world within the space of twenty minutes. The first was in the Babylonian halls of the big hotel, which was the meeting place of the three commercial magnates concerned with arranging for a coal lock-out and denouncing it as a coal-strike, the second was in a curious tavern, having the facade of a grocery store, where met the more subterranean triumvirate of those who would have been very glad to turn the lock-out into a strike — and the strike into a revolution. The reporter passed to and fro between the three millionaires and the three Bolshevist leaders with the immunity of the modern herald or the new ambassador.

He found the three mining magnates hidden in a jungle of flowering plants and a forest of fluted and florid columns of gilded plaster; gilded birdcages hung high under the painted domes amid the highest leaves of the palms; and in them were birds of motley colours and varied cries. No bird in the wilderness ever sang more unheeded, and no flower ever wasted its sweetness on the desert air more completely than the blossoms of those tall plants wasted theirs upon the brisk and breathless business men, mostly American, who talked and ran to and fro in that place. And there, amid a riot of rococo ornament that nobody ever looked at, and a chatter of expensive foreign birds that nobody ever heard, and a mass of gorgeous upholstery and a labyrinth of luxurious architecture, the three men sat and talked of how success was founded on thought and thrift and a vigilance of economy and self-control.

One of them indeed did not talk so much as the others; but he watched with very bright and motionless eyes, which seemed to be pinched together by his pince-nez, and the permanent smile under his small black moustache was rather like a permanent sneer. This was the famous Jacob P. Stein, and he did not speak till he had something to say. But his companion, old Gallup the Pennsylvanian, a huge fat fellow with reverend grey hair but a face like a pugilist, talked a great deal. He was in a jovial mood and was half rallying, half bullying the third millionaire, Gideon Wise — a hard, dried, angular old bird of the type that his countrymen compare to hickory, with a stiff grey chin-beard and the manners and clothes of any old farmer from the central plains. There was an old argument between Wise and Gallup about combination and competition. For old Wise still retained, with the manners of the old backwoodsman, something of his opinions of the old individualist; he belonged, as we should say in England, to the Manchester School; and Gallup was always trying to persuade him to cut out competition and pool the resources of the world.

‘You’ll have to come in, old fellow, sooner or later,’ Gallup was saying genially as Byrne entered. ‘It’s the way the world is going, and we can’t go back to the one-man-business now. We’ve all got to stand together.’

‘If I might say a word,’ said Stein, in his tranquil way, ‘I would say there is something a little more urgent even than standing together commercially. Anyhow, we must stand together politically; and that’s why I’ve asked Mr Byrne to meet us here today. On the political issue we must combine; for the simple reason that all our most dangerous enemies are already combined.’

‘Oh, I quite agree about political combination,’ grumbled Gideon Wise.

‘See here,’ said Stein to the journalist; ‘I know you have the run of these queer places, Mr Byrne, and I want you to do something for us unofficially. You know where these men meet; there are only two or three of them that count, John Elias and Jake Halket, who does all the spouting, and perhaps that poet fellow Home.’

‘Why Home used to be a friend of Gideon,’ said the jeering Mr Gallup; ‘used to be in his Sunday School class or something.’

‘He was a Christian, then,’ said old Gideon solemnly; ‘but when a man takes up with atheists you never know. I still meet him now and then. I was quite ready to back him against war and conscription and all that, of course, but when it comes to all the goddam bolshies in creation—’

‘Excuse me,’ interposed Stein, ‘the matter is rather urgent, so I hope you will excuse me putting it before Mr Byrne at once. Mr Byrne, I may tell you in confidence that I hold information, or rather evidence that would land at least two of those men in prison for long terms, in connexion with conspiracies during the late war. I don’t want to use that evidence. But I want you to go to them quietly and tell them that I shall use it, and use it tomorrow, unless they alter their attitude.’

‘Well,’ replied Byrne, ‘what you propose would certainly be called compounding a felony and might be called blackmail, Don’t you think it is rather dangerous?’

‘I think it is rather dangerous for them,’ said Stein with a snap; ‘and I want you to go and tell them so.’

‘Oh, very well,’ said Byrne standing up, with a half humorous sigh. ‘It’s all in the day’s work; but if I get into trouble, I warn you I shall try to drag you into it.’

‘You will try, boy,’ said old Gallup with a hearty laugh.

For so much still lingers of that great dream of Jefferson and, the thing that men have called Democracy that in his country, while the rich rule like tyrants, the poor do not talk like slaves; but there is candour between the oppressor and the oppressed.

The meeting-place of the revolutionists was a queer, bare, whitewashed place, on the walls of which were one or two distorted uncouth sketches in black and white, in the style of something that was supposed to be Proletarian Art, of which not one proletarian in a million could have made head or tail. Perhaps the one point in common to the two council chambers was that both violated the American Constitution by the display of strong drink. Cocktails of various colours had stood before the three millionaires. Halket, the most violent of the Bolshevists, thought it only appropriate to drink vodka. He was a long, hulking fellow with a menacing stoop, and his very profile was aggressive like a dog’s, the nose and lips thrust out together, the latter carrying a ragged red moustache and the whole curling outwards with perpetual scorn. John Elias was a dark watchful man in spectacles, with a black pointed beard; and he had learnt in many European cafes a taste for absinthe. The journalist’s first and last feeling was how very like each other, after all, were John Elias and Jacob P. Stein. They were so like in face and mind and manner, that the millionaire might have disappeared down a trap-door in the Babylon Hotel and come up again in the stronghold of the Bolshevists.

The third man also had a curious taste in drinks, and his drink was symbolic of him. For what stood in front of the poet Home was a glass of milk, and its very mildness seemed in that setting to have something sinister about it, as if its opaque and colourless colour were of some leprous paste more poisonous than the dead sick green of absinthe. Yet in truth the mildness was so far genuine enough; for Henry Home came to the camp of revolution along a very different road and from very different origins from those of Jake, the common tub-thumper, and Elias, the cosmopolitan wire-puller. He had had what is called a careful upbringing, had gone to chapel in his childhood, and carried through life a teetotalism which he could not shake off when he cast away such trifles as Christianity and marriage. He had fair hair and a fine face that might have looked like Shelley, if he had not weakened the chin with a little foreign fringe of beard. Somehow the beard made him look more like a woman; it was as if those few golden hairs were all he could do.

When the journalist entered, the notorious Jake was talking, as he generally was. Home had uttered some casual and conventional phrase about 'Heaven forbid' something or other, and this was quite enough to set Jake off with a torrent of profanity.

'Heaven forbid! and that's about all it bally well does do,' he said. 'Heaven never does anything but forbid this, that and the other; forbids us to strike, and forbids us to fight, and forbids us to shoot the damned usurers and blood-suckers where they sit. Why doesn't Heaven forbid them something for a bit? Why don't the damned priests and parsons stand up and tell the truth about those brutes for a change? Why doesn't their precious God—'

Elias allowed a gentle sigh, as of faint fatigue, to escape him.

'Priests,' he said, 'belonged, as Marx has shown, to the feudal stage of economic development and are therefore no longer really any part of the problem. The part once played by the priest is now played by the capitalist expert and—'

'Yes,' interrupted the journalist, with his grim and ironic implacability, 'and it's about time you knew that some of them are jolly expert in playing it.' And without moving his own eyes from the bright but dead eyes of Elias, he told him of the threat of Stein.

'I was prepared for something of that sort,' said the smiling Elias without moving; 'I may say quite prepared.'

'Dirty dogs!' exploded Jake. 'If a poor man said a thing like that he'd go to penal servitude. But I reckon they'll go somewhere worse before they guess. If they don't go to hell, I don't know where the hell they'll go to—'

Home made a movement of protest, perhaps not so much at what the man was saying as at what he was going to say, and Elias cut the speech short with cold exactitude.

‘It is quite unnecessary for us,’ he said, looking at Byrne steadily through his spectacles, ‘to bandy threats with the other side. It is quite sufficient that their threats are quite ineffective so far as we are concerned. We also have made all our own arrangements, and some of them will not appear until they appear in motion. So far as we are concerned, an immediate rupture and an extreme trial of strength will be quite according to plan.’

As he spoke in a quite quiet and dignified fashion, something in his motionless yellow face and his great goggles started a faint fear creeping up the journalist’s spine. Halket’s savage face might seem to have a snarl in its very silhouette when seen sideways; but when seen face to face, the smouldering rage in his eyes had also something of anxiety, as if the ethical and economic riddle were after all a little too much for him; and Home seemed even more hanging on wires of worry and self-criticism. But about this third man with the goggles, who spoke so sensibly and simply, there was something uncanny; it was like a dead man talking at the table.

As Byrne went out with his message of defiance, and passed along the very narrow passage beside the grocery store, he found the end of it blocked by a strange though strangely familiar figure: short and sturdy, and looking rather quaint when seen in dark outline with its round head and wide hat.

‘Father Brown!’ cried the astonished journalist. ‘I think you must have come into the wrong door. You’re not likely to be in this little conspiracy.’

‘Mine is a rather older conspiracy,’ replied Father Brown smiling,’ but it is quite a widespread conspiracy.’

‘Well,’ replied Byrne,’ you can’t imagine any of the people here being within a thousand miles of your concern.’

‘It is not always easy to tell,’ replied the priest equably; ‘but as a matter of fact, there is one person here who’s within an inch of it.’

He disappeared into the dark entrance and the journalist went on his way very much puzzled. He was still more puzzled by a small incident that happened to him as he turned into the hotel to make his report to his capitalist clients. The bower of blossoms and bird-cages in which those crabbed old gentlemen were embosomed was approached by a flight of marble steps, flanked by gilded nymphs and tritons. Down these steps ran an active young man with black hair, a snub nose, and a flower in his buttonhole, who seized him and drew him aside before he could ascend the stair.

‘I say,’ whispered the young man, ‘I’m Potter — old Gid’s secretary, you know: now, between ourselves, there is a sort of a thunderbolt being forged, isn’t there, now?’

‘I came to the conclusion,’ replied Byrne cautiously, ‘that the Cyclops had something on the anvil. But always remember that the Cyclops is a giant, but he has only one eye. I think Bolshevism is—’

While he was speaking the secretary listened with a face that had a certain almost Mongolian immobility, despite the liveliness of his legs and his attire. But when Byrne said the word ‘Bolshevism’, the young man’s sharp eyes shifted and he said quickly:

‘What has that — oh yes, that sort of thunderbolt; so sorry, my mistake. So easy to say anvil when you mean ice-box.’

With which the extraordinary young man disappeared down the steps and Byrne continued to mount them, more and more mystification clouding his mind.

He found the group of three augmented to four by the presence of a hatchet-faced person with very thin straw-coloured hair and a monocle, who appeared to be a sort of adviser to old Gallup, possibly his solicitor, though he was not definitely so called. His name was Nares, and the questions which he directed towards Byrne referred chiefly, for some reason or other, to the number of those probably enrolled in the revolutionary organization. Of this, as Byrne knew little, he said less; and the four men eventually rose from their seats, the last word being with the man who had been most silent.

‘Thank you, Mr Byrne,’ said Stein, folding up his eyeglasses. ‘It only remains to say that everything is ready; on that point I quite agree with Mr Elias. Tomorrow, before noon, the police will have arrested Mr Elias, on evidence I shall by then have put before them, and those three at least will be in jail before night. As you know, I attempted to avoid this course. I think that is all, gentlemen.’

But Mr Jacob P. Stein did not lay his formal information next day, for a reason that has often interrupted the activities of such industrious characters. He did not do it because he happened to be dead; and none of the rest of the programme was carried out, for a reason which Byrne found displayed in gigantic letters when he opened his morning paper: ‘Terrific

Triple Murder: Three Millionaires Slain in One Night.’ Other exclamatory phrases followed in smaller letters, only about four times the size of normal type, which insisted on the special feature of the mystery: the fact that the three men had been killed not only simultaneously but in three widely separated places — Stein in his artistic and luxurious country seat a hundred miles inland, Wise outside the little bungalow on the coast where he lived on sea breezes and the simple life, and old Gallup in a thicket just outside the lodge-gates of his great house at the other end of the county. In all three cases there could be no doubt about the scenes of violence that had preceded death, though the actual body of Gallup was not found till the second day, where it hung, huge and horrible, amid the broken forks and branches of the little wood into which its weight had crashed, like a bison rushing on the spears: while Wise had clearly been flung over the cliff into the sea, not without a struggle, for his scraping and slipping footprints could still be traced upon the very brink. But the first signal of the tragedy had been the sight of his large limp straw hat, floating far out upon the waves and conspicuous from the cliffs above. Stein’s body also had at first eluded search, till a faint trail of blood led the investigators to a bath on the ancient Roman model he had been constructing in his garden; for he had been a man of an experimental turn of mind with a taste for antiquities.

Whatever he might think, Byrne was bound to admit that there was no legal evidence against anybody as things stood. A motive for murder was not enough. Even a moral aptitude for murder was not enough. And he could not conceive that pale young pacifist, Henry Home, butchering another man by brutal violence, though he might imagine the blaspheming Jake and even the sneering Jew as capable of anything. The police, and the man who appeared to be assisting them (who was no other than the rather mysterious man with the monocle, who had been introduced as Mr Nares), realized the position quite as clearly as the journalist.

They knew that at the moment the Bolshevist conspirators could not be prosecuted and convicted, and that it would be a highly sensational failure if they were prosecuted and acquitted. Nares started with an artful candour by calling them in some sense to the council, inviting them to a private conclave and asking them to give their opinions freely in the interests of humanity. He had started his investigations at the nearest scene of tragedy, the bungalow by the sea; and Byrne was permitted to be present at a curious scene, which was at once a peaceful parley of diplomatists and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the incongruous company, seated round the table in the seaside bungalow, included the dumpy figure and owlish head of Father Brown, though his connexion with the affair did not appear until some time afterwards. The presence of young Potter, the dead man's secretary, was more natural; yet somehow his demeanour was not quite so natural. He alone was quite familiar with their meeting-place, and was even in some grim sense their host; yet he offered little assistance or information. His round snub-nosed face wore an expression more like sulks than sorrow.

Jake Halket as usual talked most; and a man of his type could not be expected to keep up the polite fiction that he and his friends were not accused. Young Home, in his more refined way, tried to restrain him when he began to abuse the men who had been murdered; but Jake was always quite as ready to roar down his friends as his foes. In a spout of blasphemies he relieved his soul of a very unofficial obituary notice of the late Gideon Wise. Elias sat quite still and apparently indifferent behind those spectacles that masked his eyes.

'It would be useless, I suppose,' said Nares coldly, 'to tell you that your remarks are indecent. It may affect you more if I tell you they are imprudent. You practically admit that you hated the dead man.'

'Going to put me in quod for that, are you?' jeered the demagogue. 'All right. Only you'll have to build a prison for a million men if you're going to jail all the poor people who had reason to hate Gid Wise. And you know it's God truth as well as I do.'

Nares was silent; and nobody spoke until Elias interposed with his clear though faintly lisping drawl.

'This appears to me to be a highly unprofitable discussion on both sides,' he said. 'You have summoned us here either to ask us for information or to subject us to cross-examination. If you trust us, we tell you we have no information. If you distrust us, you must tell us of what we are accused, or have the politeness to keep the fact to yourselves. Nobody has been able to suggest the faintest trace of evidence connecting any one of us with these tragedies any more than with the murder of Julius Caesar. You dare not arrest us, and you will not believe us. What is the good of our remaining here?'

And he rose, calmly buttoning his coat, his friends following his example. As they went towards the door, young Home turned back and faced the investigators for a moment with his pale fanatical face.

‘I wish to say,’ he said, ‘that I went to a filthy jail during the whole war because I would not consent to kill a man.’

With that they passed out, and the members of the group remaining looked grimly at each other.

‘I hardly think,’ said Father Brown, ‘that we remain entirely victorious, in spite of the retreat.’

‘I don’t mind anything,’ said Nares, ‘except being bullyragged by that blasphemous blackguard Halket. Home is a gentleman, anyhow. But whatever they say, I am dead certain they know; they are in it, or most of them are. They almost admitted it. They taunted us with not being able to prove we’re right, much more than with being wrong. What do you think, Father Brown?’

The person addressed looked across at Nares with a gaze almost disconcertingly mild and meditative.

‘It is quite true,’ he said, ‘that I have formed an idea that one particular person knows more than he has told us. But I think it would be well if I did not mention his name just yet.’

Nares’ eyeglass dropped from his eye, and he looked up sharply. ‘This is unofficial so far,’ he said. ‘I suppose you know that at a later stage if you withhold information, your position may be serious.’

‘My position is simple,’ replied the priest. ‘I am here to look after the legitimate interests of my friend Halket. I think it will be in his interest, under the circumstances, if I tell you I think he will before long sever his connexion with this organization, and cease to be a Socialist in that sense. I have every reason to believe he will probably end as a Catholic.’

‘Halket!’ exploded the other incredulously. ‘Why he curses priests from morning till night!’

‘I don’t think you quite understand that kind of man,’ said Father Brown mildly. ‘He curses priests for failing (in his opinion) to defy the whole world for justice. Why should he expect them to defy the whole world for justice, unless he had already begun to assume they were — what they are? But we haven’t met here to discuss the psychology of conversion. I only mention this because it may simplify your task — perhaps narrow your search.’

‘If it is true, it would jolly well narrow it to that narrow-faced rascal Elias — and I shouldn’t wonder, for a more creepy, coldblooded, sneering devil I never saw.’

Father Brown sighed. ‘He always reminded me of poor Stein,’ he said, ‘in fact I think he was some relation.’

‘Oh, I say,’ began Nares, when his protest was cut short by the door being flung open, revealing once more the long loose figure and pale face of young Home; but it seemed as if he had not merely his natural, but a new and unnatural pallor.

‘Hullo,’ cried Nares, putting up his single eyeglass, ‘why have you come back again?’

Home crossed the room rather shakily without a word and sat down heavily in a chair. Then he said, as in a sort of daze: ‘I missed the others ... I lost my way. I thought I’d better come back.’

The remains of evening refreshments were on the table, and Henry Home, that lifelong Prohibitionist, poured himself out a wine-glassful of liqueur brandy and drank it at a gulp. ‘You seem upset,’ said Father Brown.

Home had put his hands to his forehead and spoke as from under the shadow of it: he seemed to be speaking to the priest only, in a low voice.

‘I may as well tell you. I have seen a ghost.’

‘A ghost!’ repeated Nares in astonishment. ‘Whose ghost?’

‘The ghost of Gideon Wise, the master of this house,’ answered Home more firmly, ‘standing over the abyss into which he fell.’

‘Oh, nonsense!’ said Nares; ‘no sensible person believes in ghosts.’

‘That is hardly exact,’ said Father Brown, smiling a little. ‘There is really quite as good evidence for many ghosts as there is for most crimes.’

‘Well, it’s my business to run after the criminals,’ said Nares rather roughly, ‘and I will leave other people to run away from the ghosts. If anybody at this time of day chooses to be frightened of ghosts it’s his affair.’

‘I didn’t say I was frightened of them, though I dare say I might be,’ said Father Brown. ‘Nobody knows till he tries. I said I believed in them, at any rate, enough to want to hear more about this one. What, exactly, did you see, Mr Home?’

‘It was over there on the brink of those crumbling cliffs; you know there is a sort of gap or crevice just about the spot where he was thrown over. The others had gone on ahead, and I was crossing the moor towards the path along the cliff. I often went that way, for I liked seeing the high seas dash up against the crags. I thought little of it to-night, beyond wondering that the sea should be so rough on this sort of clear moonlight night. I could see the pale crests of spray appear and disappear as the great waves leapt up at the headland. Thrice I saw the momentary flash of foam in the moonlight and then I saw something inscrutable. The fourth flash of the silver foam seemed to be fixed in the sky. It did not fall; I waited with insane intensity for it to fall. I fancied I was mad, and that time had been for me mysteriously arrested or prolonged. Then I drew nearer, and then I think I screamed aloud. For that suspended spray, like unfallen snowflakes, had fitted together into a face and a figure, white as the shining leper in a legend, and terrible as the fixed lightning.'

'And it was Gideon Wise, you say?'

Home nodded without speech. There was a silence broken abruptly by Nares rising to his feet; so abruptly indeed that he knocked a chair over.

'Oh, this is all nonsense,' he said, 'but we'd better go out and see.'

'I won't go,' said Home with sudden violence. 'I'll never walk by that path again.'

'I think we must all walk by that path tonight,' said the priest gravely; 'though I will never deny it has been a perilous path ... to more people than one.'

'I will not... God, how you all goad me,' cried Home, and his eyes began to roll in a strange fashion. He had risen with the rest, but he made no motion towards the door.

'Mr Home,' said Nares firmly, 'I am a police-officer, and this house, though you may not know it, is surrounded by the police. I have tried to investigate in a friendly fashion, but I must investigate everything, even anything so silly as a ghost. I must ask you to take me to the spot you speak of.'

There was another silence while Home stood heaving and panting as with indescribable fears. Then he suddenly sat down on his chair again and said with an entirely new and much more composed voice:

'I can't do it. You may just as well know why. You will know it sooner or later. I killed him.'

For an instant there was the stillness of a house struck by a thunderbolt and full of corpses. Then the voice of Father Brown sounded in that enormous silence strangely small like the squeak of a mouse.

'Did you kill him deliberately?' he asked.

‘How can one answer such a question?’ answered the man in the chair, moodily gnawing his finger. ‘I was mad, I suppose. He was intolerable and insolent, I know. I was on his land and I believe he struck me; anyhow, we came to a grapple and he went over the cliff. When I was well away from the scene it burst upon me that I had done a crime that cut me off from men; the brand of Cain throbbed on my brow and my very brain; I realized for the first time that I had indeed killed a man. I knew I should have to confess it sooner or later.’ He sat suddenly erect in his chair. ‘But I will say nothing against anybody else. It is no use asking me about plots or accomplices — I will say nothing.’

‘In the light of the other murders,’ said Nares, ‘it is difficult to believe that the quarrel was quite so unpremeditated. Surely somebody sent you there?’

‘I will say nothing against anybody I worked with,’ said Home proudly. ‘I am a murderer, but I will not be a traitor.’

Nares stepped between the man and the door and called out in an official fashion to someone outside.

‘We will all go to the place, anyhow,’ he said in a low voice to the secretary; ‘but this man must go in custody.’

The company generally felt that to go spook-hunting on a seacliff was a very silly anti-climax after the confession of the murderer. But Nares, though the most sceptical and scornful of all, thought it his duty to leave no stone unturned; as one might say, no gravestone unturned. For, after all, that crumbling cliff was the only gravestone over the watery grave of poor Gideon Wise. Nares locked the door, being the last out of the house, and followed the rest across the moor to the cliff, when he was astonished to see young Potter, the secretary, coming back quickly towards them, his face in the moonlight looking white as a moon.

‘By God, sir,’ he said, speaking for the first time that night, ‘there really is something there. It — it’s just like him.’

‘Why, you’re raving,’ gasped the detective. ‘Everybody’s raving.’

‘Do you think I don’t know him when I see him?’ cried the secretary with singular bitterness. ‘I have reason to.’

‘Perhaps,’ said the detective sharply, ‘you are one of those who had reason to hate him, as Halket said.’

‘Perhaps,’ said the secretary; ‘anyhow, I know him, and I tell you I can see him standing there stark and staring under this hellish moon.’

And he pointed towards the crack in the cliffs, where they could already see something that might have been a moonbeam or a streak of foam, but which was already beginning to look a little more solid. They had crept a hundred yards nearer, and it was still motionless; but it looked like a statue in silver.

Nares himself looked a little pale and seemed to stand debating what to do. Potter was frankly as much frightened as Home himself; and even Byrne, who was a hardened reporter, was rather reluctant to go any nearer if he could help it. He could not help considering it a little quaint, therefore, that the only man who did not seem to be frightened of a ghost was the man who had said openly that he might be. For Father Brown was advancing as steadily, at his stumping pace, as if he were going to consult a notice-board.

‘It don’t seem to bother you much,’ said Byrne to the priest; ‘and yet I thought you were the only one who believed in spooks.’

‘If it comes to that,’ replied Father Brown, ‘I thought you were one who didn’t believe in them. But believing in ghosts is one thing, and believing in a ghost is quite another.’

Byrne looked rather ashamed of himself, and glanced almost covertly at the crumbling headlands in the cold moonlight which were the haunts of the vision or delusion. ‘I didn’t believe in it till I saw it,’ he said.

‘And I did believe in it till I saw it,’ said Father Brown. The journalist stared after him as he went stumping across the great waste ground that rose towards the cloven headland like the sloping side of a hill cut in two. Under the discolouring moon the grass looked like long grey hair all combed one way by the wind, and seeming to point towards the place where the breaking cliff showed pale gleams of chalk in the grey-green turf, and where stood the pale figure or shining shade that none could yet understand. As yet that pale figure dominated a desolate landscape that was empty except for the black square back and business-like figure of the priest advancing alone towards it. Then the prisoner Home broke suddenly from his captors with a piercing cry and ran ahead of the priest, falling on his knees before the spectre.

‘I have confessed,’ they heard him crying. ‘Why have you come to tell them I killed you?’

‘I have come to tell them you did not,’ said the ghost, and stretched forth a hand to him. Then the kneeling man sprang up with quite a new kind of scream; and they knew it was the hand of flesh.

It was the most remarkable escape from death in recent records, said the experienced detective and the no less experienced journalist. Yet, in a sense, it had been very simple after all. Flakes and shards of the cliff were continually falling away, and some had caught in the gigantic crevice, so as to form what was really a ledge or pocket in what was supposed to be a sheer drop through darkness to the sea. The old man, who was a very tough and wiry old man, had fallen on this lower shoulder of rock and had passed a pretty terrible twenty-four hours in trying to climb back by crags that constantly collapsed under him, but at length formed by their very ruins a sort of stairway of escape. This might be the explanation of Home's optical illusion about a white wave that appeared and disappeared, and finally came to stay. But anyhow there was Gideon Wise, solid in bone and sinew, with his white hair and white dusty country clothes and harsh country features, which were, however, a great deal less harsh than usual. Perhaps it is good for millionaires to spend twenty-four hours on a ledge of rock within a foot of eternity. Anyhow, he not only disclaimed all malice against the criminal, but gave an account of the matter which considerably modified the crime. He declared that Home had not thrown him over at all; that the continually breaking ground had given way under him, and that Home had even made some movement as of attempted rescue.

'On that providential bit of rock down there,' he said solemnly, 'I promised the Lord to forgive my enemies; and the Lord would think it mighty mean if I didn't forgive a little accident like that.'

Home had to depart under police supervision, of course, but the detective did not disguise from himself that the prisoner's detention would probably be short, and his punishment, if any, trifling. It is not every murderer who can put the murdered man in the witness-box to give him a testimonial.

'It's a strange case,' said Byrne, as the detective and the others hastened along the cliff path towards the town.

'It is,' said Father Brown. 'It's no business of ours; but I wish you'd stop with me and talk it over.'

There was a silence and then Byrne complied by saying suddenly: 'I suppose you were thinking of Home already, when you said somebody wasn't telling all he knew.'

'When I said that,' replied his friend, 'I was thinking of the exceedingly silent Mr Potter, the secretary of the no longer late or (shall we say) lamented Mr Gideon Wise.'

‘Well, the only time Potter ever spoke to me I thought he was a lunatic,’ said Byrne, staring, ‘but I never thought of his being a criminal. He said something about it all having to do with an icebox.’

‘Yes, I thought he knew something about it,’ said Father Brown reflectively. ‘I never said he had anything to do with it ... I suppose old Wise really is strong enough to have climbed out of that chasm.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked the astonished reporter. ‘Why, of course he got out of that chasm; for there he is.’

The priest did not answer the question but asked abruptly: ‘What do you think of Home?’

‘Well, one can’t call him a criminal exactly,’ answered Byrne. ‘He never was at all like any criminal I ever knew, and I’ve had some experience; and, of course, Nares has had much more. I don’t think we ever quite believed him a criminal.’

‘And I never believed in him in another capacity,’ said the priest quietly. ‘You may know more about criminals. But there’s one class of people I probably do know more about than you do, or even Nares for that matter. I’ve known quite a lot of them, and I know their little ways.’

‘Another class of people,’ repeated Byrne, mystified. ‘Why, what class do you know about?’

‘Penitents,’ said Father Brown.

‘I don’t quite understand,’ objected Byrne. ‘Do you mean you don’t believe in his crime?’

‘I don’t believe in his confession,’ said Father Brown. ‘I’ve heard a good many confessions, and there was never a genuine one like that. It was romantic; it was all out of books. Look how he talked about having the brand of Cain. That’s out of books. It’s not what anyone would feel who had in his own person done a thing hitherto horrible to him. Suppose you were an honest clerk or shop-boy shocked to feel that for the first time you’d stolen money. Would you immediately reflect that your action was the same as that of Barabbas? Suppose you’d killed a child in some ghastly anger. Would you go back through history, till you could identify your action with that of an Idumean potentate named Herod? Believe me, our own crimes are far too hideously private and prosaic to make our first thoughts turn towards historical parallels, however apt. And why did he go out of his way to say he would not give his colleagues away? Even in saying so, he was giving them away. Nobody had asked him so far to give away anything or anybody. No; I don't think he was genuine, and I wouldn't give him absolution. A nice state of things, if people started getting absolved for what they hadn't done.' And Father Brown, his head turned away, looked steadily out to sea.

'But I don't understand what you're driving at,' cried Byrne. 'What's the good of buzzing round him with suspicions when he's pardoned? He's out of it anyhow. He's quite safe.'

Father Brown spun round like a teetotum and caught his friend by the coat with unexpected and inexplicable excitement.

'That's it,' he cried emphatically.' Freeze on to that! He's quite safe. He's out of it. That's why he's the key of the whole puzzle.'

'Oh, help,' said Byrne feebly.

'I mean,' persisted the little priest, 'he's in it because he's out of it. That's the whole explanation.'

'And a very lucid explanation too,' said the journalist with feeling.

They stood looking out to sea for a time in silence, and then Father Brown said cheerfully: 'And so we come back to the ice-box. Where you have all gone wrong from the first in this business is where a good many of the papers and the public men do go wrong. It's because you assumed that there is nothing whatever in the modern world to fight about except Bolshevism. This story has nothing whatever to do with Bolshevism; except perhaps as a blind.'

'I don't see how that can be,' remonstrated Byrne. 'Here you have the three millionaires in that one business murdered—'

'No!' said the priest in a sharp ringing voice. 'You do not. That is just the point. You do not have three millionaires murdered. You have two millionaires murdered; and you have the third millionaire very much alive and kicking and quite ready to kick. And you have that third millionaire freed for ever from the threat that was thrown at his head before your very face, in playfully polite terms, and in that conversation you described as taking place in the hotel. Gallup and Stein threatened the more old-fashioned and independent old huckster that if he would not come into their combine they would freeze him out. Hence the ice-box, of course.'

After a pause he went on. 'There is undoubtedly a Bolshevist movement in the modern world, and it must undoubtedly be resisted, though I do not believe very much in your way of resisting it. But what nobody notices is that there is another movement equally modern and equally moving: the great movement towards monopoly or the turning of all trades into trusts. That also is a revolution. That also produces what all revolutions produce. Men will kill for that and against that, as they do for and against Bolshevism. It has its ultimatums and its invasions and its executions. These trust magnates have their courts like kings; they have their bodyguard and bravos; they have their spies in the enemy camp. Home was one of old Gideon's spies in one of the enemy camps; but he was used here against another enemy: the rivals who were ruining him for standing out.'

'I still don't quite see how he was used,' said Byrne, 'or what was the good of it.'

'Don't you see,' cried Father Brown sharply, 'that they gave each other an alibi?'

Byrne still looked at him a little doubtfully, though understanding was dawning on his face.

'That's what I mean,' continued the other, 'when I say they were in it because they were out of it. Most people would say they must be out of the other two crimes, because they were in this one. As a fact, they were in the other two because they were out of this one; because this one never happened at all. A very queer, improbable sort of alibi, of course; improbable and therefore impenetrable. Most people would say a man who confesses a murder must be sincere; a man who forgives his murderer must be sincere. Nobody would think of the notion that the thing never happened, so that one man had nothing to forgive and the other nothing to fear. They were fixed here for that night by a story against themselves. But they were not here that night; for Home was murdering old Gallup in the Wood, while Wise was strangling that little Jew in his Roman bath. That's why I ask whether Wise was really strong enough for the climbing adventure.'

'It was quite a good adventure,' said Byrne regretfully. 'It fitted into the landscape, and was really very convincing.'

'Too convincing to convince,' said Father Brown, shaking his head. 'How very vivid was that moonlit foam flung up and turning to a ghost. And how very literary! Home is a sneak and a skunk, but do not forget that, like many other sneaks and skunks in history, he is also a poet.'

THE SECRET OF FATHER BROWN

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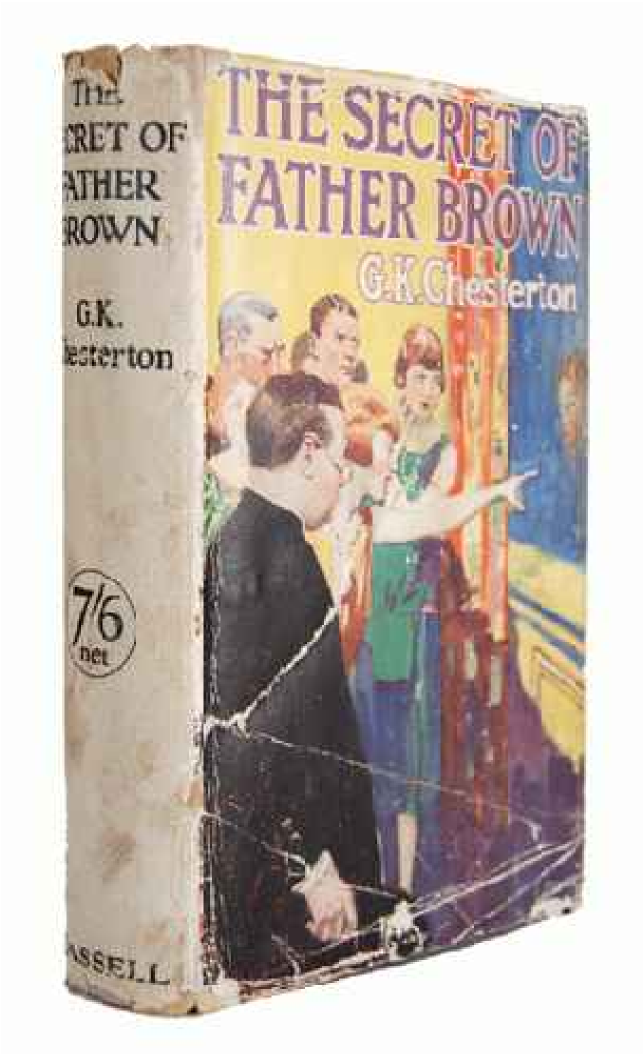
THE SECRET OF FATHER BROWN
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The first edition

To father John O’Connor, of St. Cuthbert’s Bradford, whose truth is stranger than fiction, with a gratitude greater than the world

The Secret of Father Brown

FLAMBEAU, once the most famous criminal in France and later a very private detective in England, had long retired from both professions. Some say a career of crime had left him with too many scruples for a career of detection. Anyhow, after a life of romantic escapes and tricks of evasion, he had ended at what some might consider an appropriate address: in a castle in Spain. The castle, however, was solid though relatively small; and the black vineyard and green stripes of kitchen garden covered a respectable square on the brown hillside. For Flambeau, after all his violent adventures, still possessed what is possessed by so many Latins, what is absent (for instance) in so many Americans, the energy to retire. It can be seen in many a large hotel-proprietor whose one ambition is to be a small peasant. It can be seen in many a French provincial shopkeeper, who pauses at the moment when he might develop into a detestable millionaire and buy a street of shops, to fall back quietly and comfortably on domesticity and dominoes. Flambeau had casually and almost abruptly fallen in love with a Spanish Lady, married and brought up a large family on a Spanish estate, without displaying any apparent desire to stray again beyond its borders. But on one particular morning he was observed by his family to be unusually restless and excited; and he outran the little boys and descended the greater part of the long mountain slope to meet the visitor who was coming across the valley; even when the visitor was still a black dot in the distance.

The black dot gradually increased in size without very much altering in the shape; for it continued, roughly speaking, to be both round and black. The black clothes of clerics were not unknown upon those hills; but these clothes, however clerical, had about them something at once commonplace and yet almost jaunty in comparison with the cassock or soutane, and marked the wearer as a man from the northwestern islands, as clearly as if he had been labelled Clapham Junction. He carried a short thick umbrella with a knob like a club, at the sight of which his Latin friend almost shed tears of sentiment; for it had figured in many adventures that they shared long ago. For this was the Frenchman’s English friend, Father Brown, paying a long-desired but long-delayed visit. They had corresponded constantly, but they had not met for years.

Father Brown was soon established in the family circle, which was quite large enough to give the general sense of company or a community. He was introduced to the big wooden images of the Three Kings, of painted and gilded wood, who bring the gifts to the children at Christmas; for Spain is a country where the affairs of the children bulk large in the life of the home. He was introduced to the dog and the cat and the live-stock on the farm. But he was also, as it happened, introduced to one neighbour who, like himself, had brought into that valley the garb and manners of distant lands.

It was on the third night of the priest's stay at the little chateau that he beheld a stately stranger who paid his respects to the Spanish household with bows that no Spanish grandee could emulate. He was a tall, thin grey-haired and very handsome gentleman, and his hands, cuffs and cuff-links had something overpowering in their polish. But his long face had nothing of that languor which is associated with long cuffs and manicuring in the caricatures of our own country. It was rather arrestingly alert and keen; and the eyes had an innocent intensity of inquiry that does not go often with grey hairs. That alone might have marked the man's nationality, as well the nasal note in his refined voice and his rather too ready assumption of the vast antiquity of all the European things around him. This was, indeed, no less a person than Mr. Grandison Chace, of Boston, an American traveller who had halted for a time in his American travels by taking a lease of the adjoining estate; a somewhat similar castle on a somewhat similar hill. He delighted in his old castle, and he regarded his friendly neighbour as a local antiquity of the same type. For Flambeau managed, as we have said, really to look retired in the sense of rooted. He might have grown there with his own vine and fig-tree for ages. He had resumed his real family name of Duroc; for the other title of "The Torch" had only been a title de guerre, like that under which such a man will often wage war on society. He was fond of his wife and family; he never went farther afield than was needed for a little shooting; and he seemed, to the American globe-trotter, the embodiment of that cult of a sunny respectability and a temperate luxury, which the American was wise enough to see and admire in the Mediterranean peoples. The rolling stone from the West was glad to rest for a moment on this rock in the South that had gathered so very much moss. But Mr. Chace had heard of Father Brown, and his tone faintly changed, as towards a celebrity. The interviewing instinct awoke, tactful but tense. If he did try to draw Father Brown, as if he were a tooth, it was done with the most dexterous and painless American dentistry.

They were sitting in a sort of partly unroofed outer court of the house, such as often forms the entrance to Spanish houses. It was dusk turning to dark; and as all that mountain air sharpens suddenly after sunset, a small stove stood on the flagstones, glowing with red eyes like a goblin, and painting a red pattern on the pavement; but scarcely a ray of it reached the lower bricks of the great bare, brown brick wall that went soaring up above them into the deep blue night. Flambeau's big broad-shouldered figure and great moustaches, like sabres, could be traced dimly in the twilight, as he moved about, drawing dark wine from a great cask and handing it round. In his shadow, the priest looked very shrunken and small, as if huddled over the stove; but the American visitor leaned forward elegantly with his elbow on his knee and his fine pointed features in the full light; his eyes shone with inquisitive intelligence.

"I can assure you, sir," he was saying, "we consider your achievement in the matter of the Moonshine Murder the most remarkable triumph in the history of detective science."

Father Brown murmured something; some might have imagined that the murmur was a little like a moan.

"We are well acquainted," went on the stranger firmly, "with the alleged achievements of Dupin and others; and with those of Lecoq, Sherlock Holmes, Nicholas Carter, and other imaginative incarnations of the craft. But we observe there is in many ways, a marked difference between your own method of approach and that of these other thinkers, whether fictitious or actual. Some have spec'lated, sir, as to whether the difference of method may perhaps involve rather the absence of method."

Father Brown was silent; then he started a little, almost as if he had been nodding over the stove, and said: "I beg your pardon. Yes. . .. Absence of method. . . . Absence of mind, too, I'm afraid."

"I should say of strictly tabulated scientific method," went on the inquirer. "Edgar Poe throws off several little essays in a conversational form, explaining Dupin's method, with its fine links of logic. Dr. Watson had to listen to some pretty exact expositions of Holmes's method with its observation of material details. But nobody seems to have got on to any full account of your method, Father Brown, and I was informed you declined the offer to give a series of lectures in the States on the matter."

“Yes,” said the priest, frowning at the stove; “I declined.”

“Your refusal gave rise to a remarkable lot of interesting talk,” remarked Chace. “I may say that some of our people are saying your science can’t be expounded, because it’s something more than just natural science. They say your secret’s not to be divulged, as being occult in its character.”

“Being what?” asked Father Brown, rather sharply.

“Why, kind of esoteric,” replied the other. “I can tell you, people got considerably worked up about Gallup’s murder, and Stein’s murder, and then old man Merton’s murder, and now Judge Gwynne’s murder, and a double murder by Dalmon, who was well known in the States. And there were you, on the spot every time, slap in the middle of it; telling everybody how it was done and never telling anybody how you knew. So some people got to think you knew without looking, so to speak. And Carlotta Brownson gave a lecture on Thought-Forms with illustrations from these cases of yours. The Second Sight Sisterhood of Indianapolis — —”

Father Brown, was still staring at the stove; then he said quite loud yet as if hardly aware that anyone heard him: “Oh, I say. This will never do.”

“I don’t exactly know how it’s to be helped,” said Mr. Chace humorously. “The Second Sight Sisterhood want a lot of holding down. The only way I can think of stopping it is for you to tell us the secret after all.”

Father Brown groaned. He put his head on his hands and remained a moment, as if full of a silent convulsion of thought. Then he lifted his head and said in a dull voice:

“Very well. I must tell the secret.”

His eyes rolled darkly over the whole darkling scene, from the red eyes of the little stove to the stark expanse of the ancient wall, over which were standing out, more and more brightly, the strong stars of the south.

“The secret is,” he said; and then stopped as if unable to go on. Then he began again and said:

“You see, it was I who killed all those people.”

“What?” repeated the other, in a small voice out of a vast silence.

“You see, I had murdered them all myself,” explained Father Brown patiently. “So, of course, I knew how it was done.”

Grandison Chace had risen to his great height like a man lifted to the ceiling by a sort of slow explosion. Staring down at the other he repeated his incredulous question.

“I had planned out each of the crimes very carefully,” went on Father Brown, “I had thought out exactly how a thing like that could be done, and in what style or state of mind a man could really do it. And when I was quite sure that I felt exactly like the murderer myself, of course I knew who he was.”

Chace gradually released a sort of broken sigh.

“You frightened me all right,” he said. “For the minute I really did think you meant you were the murderer. Just for the minute I kind of saw it splashed over all the papers in the States: ‘Saintly Sleuth Exposed as Killer: Hundred Crimes of Father Brown.’ Why, of course, if it’s just a figure of speech and means you tried to reconstruct the psychogy—”

Father Brown rapped sharply on the stove with the short pipe he was about to fill; one of his very rare spasms of annoyance contracted his face.

“No, no, no,” he said, almost angrily; “I don’t mean just a figure of speech. This is what comes of trying to talk about deep things. . . . What’s the good of words . . .? If you try to talk about a truth that’s merely moral, people always think it’s merely metaphorical. A real live man with two legs once said to me: ‘I only believe in the Holy Ghost in a spiritual sense.’ Naturally, I said: ‘In what other sense could you believe it?’ And then he thought I meant he needn’t believe in anything except evolution, or ethical fellowship, or some bilge. . . . I mean that I really did see myself, and my real self, committing the murders. I didn’t actually kill the men by material means; but that’s not the point. Any brick or bit of machinery might have killed them by material means. I mean that I thought and thought about how a man might come to be like that, until I realized that I really was like that, in everything except actual final consent to the action. It was once suggested to me by a friend of mine, as a sort of religious exercise. I believe he got it from Pope Leo XIII, who was always rather a hero of mine.”

“I’m afraid,” said the American, in tones that were still doubtful, and keeping his eye on the priest rather as if he were a wild animal, “that you’d have to explain a lot to me before I knew what you were talking about. The science of detection — —”

Father Brown snapped his fingers with the same animated annoyance. “That’s it,” he cried; “that’s just where we part company. Science is a grand thing when you can get it; in its real sense one of the grandest words in the world. But what do these men mean, nine times out of ten, when they use it nowadays? When they say detection is a science? When they say criminology is a science? They mean getting outside a man and studying him as if he were a gigantic insect: in what they would call a dry impartial light, in what I should call a dead and dehumanized light. They mean getting a long way off him, as if he were a distant prehistoric monster; staring at the shape of his 'criminal skull' as if it were a sort of eerie growth, like the horn on a rhinoceros's nose. When the scientist talks about a type, he never means himself, but always his neighbour; probably his poorer neighbour. I don't deny the dry light may sometimes do good; though in one sense it's the very reverse of science. So far from being knowledge, it's actually suppression of what we know. It's treating a friend as a stranger, and pretending that something familiar is really remote and mysterious. It's like saying that a man has a proboscis between the eyes, or that he falls down in a fit of insensibility once every twenty-four hours. Well, what you call 'the secret' is exactly the opposite. I don't try to get outside the man. I try to get inside the murderer. . . . Indeed it's much more than that, don't you see? I am inside a man. I am always inside a man, moving his arms and legs; but I wait till I know I am inside a murderer, thinking his thoughts, wrestling with his passions; till I have bent myself into the posture of his hunched and peering hatred; till I see the world with his bloodshot and squinting eyes, looking between the blinkers of his half-witted concentration; looking up the short and sharp perspective of a straight road to a pool of blood. Till I am really a murderer."

"Oh," said Mr. Chace, regarding him with a long, grim face, and added: "And that is what you call a religious exercise."

"Yes," said Father Brown; "that is what I call a religious exercise."

After an instant's silence he resumed: "It's so real a religious exercise that I'd rather not have said anything about it. But I simply couldn't have you going off and telling all your countrymen that I had a secret magic connected with Thought-Forms, could I? I've put it badly, but it's true. No man's really any good till he knows how bad he is, or might be; till he's realized exactly how much right he has to all this snobbery, and sneering, and talking about 'criminals,' as if they were apes in a forest ten thousand miles away; till he's got rid of all the dirty self-deception of talking about low types and deficient skulls; till he's squeezed out of his soul the last drop of the oil of the Pharisees; till his only hope is somehow or other to have captured one criminal, and kept him safe and sane under his own hat."

Flambeau came forward and filled a great goblet with Spanish wine and set it before his friend, as he had already set one before his fellow guest. Then he himself spoke for the first time:

"I believe Father Brown has had a new batch of mysteries. We were talking about them the other day, I fancy. He has been dealing with some queer people since we last met."

"Yes; I know the stories more or less — but not the application," said Chace, lifting his glass thoughtfully. "Can you give me any examples, I wonder. ... I mean, did you deal with this last batch in that introspective style?"

Father Brown also lifted his glass, and the glow of the fire turned the red wine transparent, like the glorious blood-red glass of a martyr's window. The red flame seemed to hold his eyes and absorb his gaze that sank deeper and deeper into it, as if that single cup held a red sea of the blood of all men, and his soul were a diver, ever plunging in dark humility and inverted imagination, lower than its lowest monsters and its most ancient slime. In that cup, as in a red mirror, he saw many things; the doings of his last days moved in crimson shadows; the examples that his companions demanded danced in symbolic shapes; and there passed before him all the stories that are told here. Now, the luminous wine was like a vast red sunset upon dark red sands, where stood dark figures of men; one was fallen and another running towards him. Then the sunset seemed to break up into patches: red lanterns swinging from garden trees and a pond gleaming red with reflection; and then all the colour seemed to cluster again into a great rose of red crystal, a jewel that irradiated the world like a red sun, save for the shadow of a tall figure with a high head-dress as of some prehistoric priest; and then faded again till nothing was left but a flame of wild red beard blowing in the wind upon a wild grey moor. All these things, which may be seen later from other angles and in other moods than his own, rose up in his memory at the challenge and began to form themselves into anecdotes and arguments.

"Yes," he said, as he raised the wine cup slowly to his lips, "I can remember pretty well — —"

The Mirror of the Magistrate

JAMES BAGSHAW and Wilfred Underhill were old friends, and were fond of rambling through the streets at night, talking interminably as they turned corner after corner in the silent and seemingly lifeless labyrinth of the large suburb in which they lived. The former, a big, dark, good-humoured man with a strip of black moustache, was a professional police detective; the latter, a sharp-faced, sensitive-looking gentleman with light hair, was an amateur interested in detection. It will come as a shock to the readers of the best scientific romance to learn that it was the policeman who was talking and the amateur who was listening, even with a certain respect.

"Ours is the only trade," said Bagshaw, "in which the professional is always supposed to be wrong. After all, people don't write stories in which hairdressers can't cut hair and have to be helped by a customer; or in which a cabman can't drive a cab until his fare explains to him the philosophy of cab-driving. For all that, I'd never deny that we often tend to get into a rut: or, in other words, have the disadvantages of going by a rule. Where the romancers are wrong is, that they don't allow us even the advantages of going by a rule."

"Surely," said Underhill, "Sherlock Holmes would say that he went by a logical rule."

"He may be right," answered the other; "but I mean a collective rule. It's like the staff work of an army. We pool our information."

"And you don't think detective stories allow for that?" asked his friend.

"Well, let's take any imaginary case of Sherlock Holmes, and Lestrade, the official detective. Sherlock Holmes, let us say, can guess that a total stranger crossing the street is a foreigner, merely because he seems to look for the traffic to go to the right instead of the left. I'm quite ready to admit Holmes might guess that. I'm quite sure Lestrade wouldn't guess anything of the kind. But what they leave out is the fact that the policeman, who couldn't guess, might very probably know. Lestrade might know the man was a foreigner merely because his department has to keep an eye on all foreigners; some would say on all natives, too. As a policeman I'm glad the police know so much; for every man wants to do his own job well. But as a citizen, I sometimes wonder whether they don't know too much."

"You don't seriously mean to say," cried Underhill incredulously, "that you know anything about strange people in a strange street. That if a man walked out of that house over there, you would know anything about him?"

"I should if he was the householder," answered Bagshaw. "That house is rented by a literary man of Anglo-Roumanian extraction, who generally lives in Paris, but is over here in connexion with some poetical play of his. His name's Osric Orm, one of the new poets, and pretty steep to read, I believe."

"But I mean all the people down the road," said his companion. "I was thinking how strange and new and nameless everything looks, with these high blank walls and these houses lost in large gardens. You can't know all of them."

"I know a few," answered Bagshaw. "This garden wall we're walking under is at the end of the grounds of Sir Humphrey Gwynne, better known as Mr. Justice Gwynne, the old judge who made such a row about spying during the war. The house next door to it belongs to a wealthy cigar merchant. He comes from Spanish-America and looks very swarthy and Spanish himself; but he bears the very English name of Buller. The house beyond that — did you hear that noise?"

"I heard something," said Underhill, "but I really don't know what it was."

"I know what it was," replied the detective, "it was a rather heavy revolver, fired twice, followed by a cry for help. And it came straight out of the back garden of Mr. Justice Gwynne, that paradise of peace and legality."

He looked up and down the street sharply and then added:

"And the only gate of the back garden is half a mile round on the other side. I wish this wall were a little lower, or I were a little lighter; but it's got to be tried."

"It is lower a little farther on," said Underhill, "and there seems to be a tree that looks helpful."

They moved hastily along and found a place where the wall seemed to stoop abruptly, almost as if it had half-sunk into the earth; and a garden tree, flamboyant with the gayest garden blossom, straggled out of the dark enclosure and was gilded by the gleam of a solitary street-lamp. Bagshaw caught the crooked branch and threw one leg over the low wall; and the next moment they stood knee-deep amid the snapping plants of a garden border.

The garden of Mr. Justice Gwynne by night was rather a singular spectacle. It was large and lay on the empty edge of the suburb, in the shadow of a tall, dark house that was the last in its line of houses. The house was literally dark, being shuttered and unlighted, at least on the side overlooking the garden. But the garden itself, which lay in its shadow, and should have been a tract of absolute darkness, showed a random glitter, like that of fading fireworks; as if a giant rocket had fallen in fire among the trees. As they advanced they were able to locate it as the light of several coloured lamps, entangled in the trees like the jewel fruits of Aladdin, and especially as the light from a small, round lake or pond, which gleamed, with pale colours as if a lamp were kindled under it.

"Is he having a party?" asked Underhill. "The garden seems to be illuminated."

"No," answered Bagshaw. "It's a hobby of his, and I believe he prefers to do it when he's alone. He likes playing with a little plant of electricity that he works from that bungalow or hut over there, where he does his work and keeps his papers. Buller, who knows him very well, says the coloured lamps are rather more often a sign he's not to be disturbed."

"Sort of red danger signals," suggested the other.

"Good Lord! I'm afraid they are danger signals!" and he began suddenly to run.

A moment after Underhill saw what he had seen. The opalescent ring of light, like the halo of the moon, round the sloping sides of the pond, was broken by two black stripes or streaks which soon proved themselves to be the long, black legs of a figure fallen head downwards into the hollow, with the head in the pond.

"Come on," cried the detective sharply, "that looks to me like — —"

His voice was lost, as he ran on across the wide lawn, faintly luminous in the artificial light, making a bee-line across the big garden for the pool and the fallen figure. Underhill was trotting steadily in that straight track, when something happened that startled him for the moment. Bagshaw, who was travelling as steadily as a bullet towards the black figure by the luminous pool, suddenly turned at a sharp angle and began to run even more rapidly towards the shadow of the house. Underhill could not imagine what he meant by the altered direction. The next moment, when the detective had vanished into the shadow of the house, there came out of that obscurity the sound of a scuffle and a curse; and Bagshaw returned lugging with him a little struggling man with red hair. The captive had evidently been escaping under the shelter of the building, when the quicker ears of the detective had heard him rustling like a bird among the bushes.

“Underhill,” said the detective, “I wish you’d run on and see what’s up by the pool. And now, who are you?” he asked, coming to a halt. “What’s your name?”

“Michael Flood,” said the stranger in a snappy fashion. He was an unnaturally lean little man, with a hooked nose too large for his face, which was colourless, like parchment, in contrast with the ginger colour of his hair. “I’ve got nothing to do with this. I found him lying dead and I was scared; but I only came to interview him for a paper.”

“When you interview celebrities for the Press,” said Bagshaw, “do you generally climb over the garden wall?”

And he pointed grimly to a trail of footprints coming and going along the path towards the flower bed.

The man calling himself Flood wore an expression equally grim.

“An interviewer might very well get over the wall,” he said, “for I couldn’t make anybody hear at the front door. The servant had gone out.”

“How do you know he’d gone out?” asked the detective suspiciously.

“Because,” said Flood, with an almost unnatural calm, “I’m not the only person who gets over garden walls. It seems just possible that you did it yourself. But, anyhow, the servant did; for I’ve just this moment seen him drop over the wall, away on the other side of the garden, just by the garden door.”

“Then why didn’t he use the garden door?” demanded the cross-examiner.

“How should I know?” retorted Flood. “Because it was shut, I suppose. But you’d better ask him, not me; he’s coming towards the house at this minute.”

There was, indeed, another shadowy figure beginning to be visible through the fire-shot gloaming, a squat, square-headed figure, wearing a red waistcoat as the most conspicuous part of a rather shabby livery. He appeared to be making with unobtrusive haste towards a side-door in the house, until Bagshaw halloed to him to halt. He drew nearer to them very reluctantly, revealing a heavy, yellow face, with a touch of something Asiatic which was consonant with his flat, blue-black hair.

Bagshaw turned abruptly to the man called Flood. “Is there anybody in this place,” he said, “who can testify to your identity?”

“Not many, even in this country,” growled Flood. “I’ve only just come from Ireland; the only man I know round here is the priest at St. Dominic’s Church — Father Brown.”

“Neither of you must leave this place,” said Bagshaw, and then added to the servant: “But you can go into the house and ring up St. Dominic’s Presbytery and ask Father Brown if he would mind coming round here at once. No tricks, mind.”

While the energetic detective was securing the potential fugitives, his companion, at his direction, had hastened on to the actual scene of the tragedy. It was a strange enough scene; and, indeed, if the tragedy had not been tragic it would have been highly fantastic. The dead man (for the briefest examination proved him to be dead) lay with his head in the pond, where the glow of the artificial illumination encircled the head with something of the appearance of an unholy halo. The face was gaunt and rather sinister, the brow bald, and the scanty curls dark grey, like iron rings; and, despite the damage done by the bullet wound in the temple, Underhill had no difficulty in recognizing the features he had seen in the many portraits of Sir Humphrey Gwynne. The dead man was in evening-dress, and his long, black legs, so thin as to be almost spidery, were sprawling at different angles up the steep bank from which he had fallen. As by some weird whim of diabolical arabesque, blood was eddying out, very slowly, into the luminous water in snaky rings, like the transparent crimson of sunset clouds.

Underhill did not know how long he stood staring down at this macabre figure, when he looked up and saw a group of four figures standing above him on the bank. He was prepared for Bagshaw and his Irish captive, and he had no difficulty in guessing the status of the servant in the red waistcoat. But the fourth figure had a sort of grotesque solemnity that seemed strangely congruous to that incongruity. It was a stumpy figure with a round face and a hat like a black halo. He realized that it was, in fact, a priest; but there was something about it that reminded him of some quaint old black woodcut at the end of a Dance of Death.

Then he heard Bagshaw saying to the priest:

“I’m glad you can identify this man; but you must realize that he’s to some extent under suspicion. Of course, he may be innocent; but he did enter the garden in an irregular fashion."

"Well, I think he's innocent myself," said the little priest in a colourless voice. "But, of course, I may be wrong."

"Why do you think he is innocent?"

"Because he entered the garden in an irregular fashion," answered the cleric. "You see, I entered it in a regular fashion myself. But I seem to be almost the only person who did. All the best people seem to get over garden walls nowadays."

"What do you mean by a regular fashion?" asked the detective.

"Well," said Father Brown, looking at him with limpid gravity, "I came in by the front door. I often come into houses that way."

"Excuse me," said Bagshaw, "but does it matter very much how you came in, unless you propose to confess to the murder?"

"Yes, I think it does," said the priest mildly. "The truth is, that when I came in at the front door I saw something I don't think any of the rest of you have seen. It seems to me it might have something to do with it."

"What did you see?"

"I saw a sort of general smash-up," said Father Brown in his mild voice. "A big looking-glass broken, and a small palm tree knocked over, and the pot smashed all over the floor. Somehow, it looked to me as if something had happened."

"You are right," said Bagshaw after a pause. "If you saw that, it certainly looks as if it had something to do with it."

"And if it had anything to do with it," said the priest very gently, "it looks as if there was one person who had nothing to do with it; and that is Mr. Michael Flood, who entered the garden over the wall in an irregular fashion, and then tried to leave it in the same irregular fashion. It is his irregularity that makes me believe in his innocence."

"Let us go into the house," said Bagshaw abruptly.

As they passed in at the side-door, the servant leading the way, Bagshaw fell back a pace or two and spoke to his friend.

"Something odd about that servant," he said. "Says his name is Green, though he doesn't look it; but there seems no doubt he's really Gwynne's servant, apparently the only regular servant he had. But the queer thing is, that he flatly denied that his master was in the garden at all, dead or alive. Said the old judge had gone out to a grand legal dinner and couldn't be home for hours, and gave that as his excuse for slipping out."

“Did he,” asked Underhill, “give any excuse for his curious way of slipping in?”

“No, none that I can make sense of,” answered the detective. “I can’t make him out. He seems to be scared of something.”

Entering by the side-door, they found themselves at the inner end of the entrance hall, which ran along the side of the house and ended with the front door, surmounted by a dreary fanlight of the old-fashioned pattern. A faint, grey light was beginning to outline its radiation upon the darkness, like some dismal and discoloured sunrise; but what light there was in the hall came from a single, shaded lamp, also of an antiquated sort, that stood on a bracket in a corner. By the light of this Bagshaw could distinguish the debris of which Brown had spoken. A tall palm, with long sweeping leaves, had fallen full length, and its dark red pot was shattered into shards. They lay littered on the carpet, along with pale and gleaming fragments of a broken mirror, of which the almost empty frame hung behind them on the wall at the end of the vestibule. At right angles to this entrance, and directly opposite the side-door as they entered, was another and similar passage leading into the rest of the house. At the other end of it could be seen the telephone which the servant had used to summon the priest; and a half-open door, showing, even through the crack, the serried ranks of great leather-bound books, marked the entrance to the judge’s study.

Bagshaw stood looking down at the fallen pot and the mingled fragments at his feet.

“You’re quite right,” he said to the priest; “there’s been a struggle here. And it must have been a struggle between Gwynne and his murderer.”

“It seemed to me,” said Father Brown modestly, “that something had happened here.”

“Yes; it’s pretty clear what happened,” assented the detective. “The murderer entered by the front door and found Gwynne; probably Gwynne let him in. There was a death grapple, possibly a chance shot, that hit the glass, though they might have broken it with a stray kick or anything. Gwynne managed to free himself and fled into the garden, where he was pursued and shot finally by the pond. I fancy that’s the whole story of the crime itself; but, of course, I must look round the other rooms.”

The other rooms, however, revealed very little, though Bagshaw pointed significantly to the loaded automatic pistol that he found in a drawer of the library desk.

"Looks as if he was expecting this," he said; "yet it seems queer he didn't take it with him when he went out into the hall."

Eventually they returned to the hall, making their way towards the front door. Father Brown letting his eye rove around in a rather absent-minded fashion. The two corridors, monotonously papered in the same grey and faded pattern, seemed to emphasize the dust and dingy floridity of the few early Victorian ornaments, the green rust that devoured the bronze of the lamp, the dull gold that glimmered in the frame of the broken mirror.

"They say it's bad luck to break a looking-glass," he said. "This looks like the very house of ill-luck. There's something about the very furniture —"

"That's rather odd," said Bagshaw sharply. "I thought the front door would be shut, but it's left on the latch."

There was no reply; and they passed out of the front door into the front garden, a narrower and more formal plot of flowers, having at one end a curiously clipped hedge with a hole in it, like a green cave, under the shadow of which some broken steps peeped out.

Father Brown strolled up to the hole and ducked his head under it. A few moments after he had disappeared they were astonished to hear his quiet voice in conversation above their heads, as if he were talking to somebody at the top of a tree. The detective followed, and found that the curious covered stairway led to what looked like a broken bridge, over-hanging the darker and emptier spaces of the garden. It just curled round the corner of the house, bringing in sight the field of coloured lights beyond and beneath. Probably it was the relic of some abandoned architectural fancy of building a sort of terrace on arches across the lawn. Bagshaw thought it a curious cul-de-sac in which to find anybody in the small hours between night and morning; but he was not looking at the details of it just then. He was looking at the man who was found.

As the man stood with his back turned — a small man in light grey clothes — the one outstanding feature about him was a wonderful head of hair, as yellow and radiant as the head of a huge dandelion. It was literally outstanding like a halo, and something in that association made the face, when it was slowly and sulkily turned on them, rather a shock of contrast. That halo should have enclosed an oval face of the mildly angelic sort; but the face was crabbed and elderly with a powerful jowl and a short nose that somehow suggested the broken nose of a pugilist.

“This is Mr. Orm, the celebrated poet, I understand,” said Father Brown, as calmly as if he were introducing two people in a drawing-room.

“Whoever he is,” said Bagshaw, “I must trouble him to come with me and answer a few questions.”

Mr. Osric Orm, the poet, was not a model of self-expression when it came to the answering of questions. There, in that corner of the old garden, as the grey twilight before dawn began to creep over the heavy hedges and the broken bridge, and afterwards in a succession of circumstances and stages of legal inquiry that grew more and more ominous, he refused to say anything except that he had intended to call on Sir Humphrey Gwynne, but had not done so because he could not get anyone to answer the bell. When it was pointed out that the door was practically open, he snorted. When it was hinted that the hour was somewhat late, he snarled. The little that he said was obscure, either because he really knew hardly any English, or because he knew better than to know any. His opinions seemed to be of a nihilistic and destructive sort, as was indeed the tendency of his poetry for those who could follow it; and it seemed possible that his business with the judge, and perhaps his quarrel with the judge, had been something in the anarchist line. Gwynne was known to have had something of a mania about Bolshevist spies, as he had about German spies. Anyhow, one coincidence, only a few moments after his capture, confirmed Bagshaw in the impression that the case must be taken seriously. As they went out of the front gate into the street, they so happened to encounter yet another neighbour, Duller, the cigar merchant from next door, conspicuous by his brown, shrewd face and the unique orchid in his buttonhole; for he had a name in that branch of horticulture. Rather to the surprise of the rest, he hailed his neighbour, the poet, in a matter-of-fact manner, almost as if he had expected to see him.

“Hallo, here we are again,” he said. “Had a long talk with old Gwynne, I suppose?”

“Sir Humphrey Gwynne is dead,” said Bagshaw. “I am investigating the case and I must ask you to explain.”

Buller stood as still as the lamp-post beside him, possibly stiffened with surprise. The red end of his cigar brightened and darkened rhythmically, but his brown face was in shadow; when he spoke it was with quite a new voice.

“I only mean,” he said, “that when I passed two hours ago Mr. Orm was going in at this gate to see Sir Humphrey.”

"He says he hasn't seen him yet," observed Bagshaw, "or even been into the house."

"It's a long time to stand on the door-step," observed Buller.

"Yes," said Father Brown; "it's rather a long time to stand in the street."

"I've been home since then," said the cigar merchant. "Been writing letters and came out again to post them."

"You'll have to tell all that later," said Bagshaw. "Good night — or good morning."

The trial of Osric Orm for the murder of Sir Humphrey Gwynne, which filled the newspapers for so many weeks, really turned entirely on the same crux as that little talk under the lamp-post, when the grey-green dawn was breaking about the dark streets and gardens. Everything came back to the enigma of those two empty hours between the time when Buller saw Orm going in at the garden gate, and the time when Father Brown found him apparently still lingering in the garden. He had certainly had the time to commit six murders, and might almost have committed them for want of something to do; for he could give no coherent account of what he was doing. It was argued by the prosecution that he had also the opportunity, as the front door was unlatched, and the side-door into the larger garden left standing open. The court followed, with considerable interest, Bagshaw's clear reconstruction of the struggle in the passage, of which the traces were so evident; indeed, the police had since found the shot that had shattered the glass. Finally, the hole in the hedge to which he had been tracked, had very much the appearance of a hiding-place. On the other hand. Sir Matthew Blake, the very able counsel for the defence, turned this last argument the other way: asking why any man should entrap himself in a place without possible exit, when it would obviously be much more sensible to slip out into the street. Sir Matthew Blake also made effective use of the mystery that still rested upon the motive for the murder. Indeed, upon this point, the passages between Sir Matthew Blake and Sir Arthur Travers, the equally brilliant advocate for the prosecution, turned rather to the advantage of the prisoner. Sir Arthur could only throw out suggestions about a Bolshevist conspiracy which sounded a little thin. But when it came to investigating the facts of Orm's mysterious behaviour that night he was considerably more effective.

The prisoner went into the witness-box, chiefly because his astute counsel calculated that it would create a bad impression if he did not. But he was almost as uncommunicative to his own counsel as to the prosecuting counsel. Sir Arthur Travers made all possible capital out of his stubborn silence, but did not succeed in breaking it. Sir Arthur was a long, gaunt man, with a long, cadaverous face, in striking contrast to the sturdy figure and bright, bird-like eye of Sir Matthew Blake. But if Sir Matthew suggested a very cocksure sort of cock-sparrow, Sir Arthur might more truly have been compared to a crane or stork; as he leaned forward, prodding the poet with questions, his long nose might have been a long beak.

"Do you mean to tell the jury," he asked, in tones of grating incredulity, "that you never went in to see the deceased gentleman at all?"

"No!" replied Orm shortly.

"You wanted to see him, I suppose. You must have been very anxious to see him. Didn't you wait two whole hours in front of his front door?"

"Yes," replied the other.

"And yet you never even noticed the door was open?"

"No," said Orm.

"What in the world were you doing for two hours in somebody's else's front garden?" insisted the barrister; "You were doing something, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Is it a secret?" asked Sir Arthur, with adamantine jocularity.

"It's a secret from you," answered the poet.

It was upon this suggestion of a secret that Sir Arthur seized in developing his line of accusation. With a boldness which some thought unscrupulous, he turned the very mystery of the motive, which was the strongest part of his opponent's case, into an argument for his own. He gave it as the first fragmentary hint of some far-flung and elaborate conspiracy, in which a patriot had perished like one caught in the coils of an octopus.

"Yes," he cried in a vibrating voice, "my learned friend is perfectly right! We do not know the exact reason why this honourable public servant was murdered. We shall not know the reason why the next public servant is murdered. If my learned friend himself falls a victim to his eminence, and the hatred which the hellish powers of destruction feel for the guardians of law, he will be murdered, and he will not know the reason. Half the decent people in this court will be butchered in their beds, and we shall not know the reason. And we shall never know the reason and never arrest the massacre, until it has depopulated our country, so long as the defence is permitted to stop all proceedings with this stale tag about ‘motive,’ when every other fact in the case, every glaring incongruity, every gaping silence, tells us that we stand in the presence of Cain.”

“I never knew Sir Arthur so excited,” said Bagshaw to his group of companions afterwards. “Some people are saying he went beyond the usual limit and that the prosecutor in a murder case oughtn’t to be so vindictive. But I must say there was something downright creepy about that little goblin with the yellow hair, that seemed to play up to the impression. I was vaguely recalling, all the time, something that De Quincey says about Mr. Williams, that ghastly criminal who slaughtered two whole families almost in silence. I think he says that Williams had hair of a vivid unnatural yellow; and that he thought it had been dyed by a trick learned in India, where they dye horses green or blue. Then there was his queer, stony silence, like a troglodyte’s; I’ll never deny that it all worked me up until I felt there was a sort of monster in the dock. If that was only Sir Arthur’s eloquence, then he certainly took a heavy responsibility in putting so much passion into it.”

“He was a friend of poor Gwynne’s, as a matter of fact,” said Underhill, more gently; “a man I know saw them hobnobbing together after a great legal dinner lately. I dare say that’s why he feels so strongly in this case. I suppose it’s doubtful whether a man ought to act in such a case on mere personal feeling.”

“He wouldn’t,” said Bagshaw. “I bet Sir Arthur Travers wouldn’t act only on feeling, however strongly he felt. He’s got a very stiff sense of his own professional position. He’s one of those men who are ambitious even when they’ve satisfied their ambition. I know nobody who’d take more trouble to keep his position in the world. No; you’ve got hold of the wrong moral to his rather thundering sermon. If he lets himself go like that, it’s because he thinks he can get a conviction, anyhow, and wants to put himself at the head of some political movement against the conspiracy he talks about. He must have some very good reason for wanting to convict Orm and some very good reason for thinking he can do it. That means that the facts will support him. His confidence doesn’t look well for the prisoner.” He became conscious of an insignificant figure in the group.

“Well, Father Brown,” he said with a smile; “what do you think of our judicial procedure?”

“Well,” replied the priest rather absently, “I think the thing that struck me most was how different men look in their wigs. You talk about the prosecuting barrister being so tremendous. But I happened to see him take his wig off for a minute, and he really looks quite a different man. He’s quite bald, for one thing.”

“I’m afraid that won’t prevent his being tremendous,” answered Bagshaw. “You don’t propose to found the defence on the fact that the prosecuting counsel is bald, do you?”

“Not exactly,” said Father Brown good-humouredly. “To tell the truth, I was thinking how little some kinds of people know about other kinds of people. Suppose I went among some remote people who had never even heard of England. Suppose I told them that there is a man in my country who won’t ask a question of life and death, until he has put an erection made of horse-hair on the top of his head, with little tails behind, and grey corkscrew curls at the side, like an Early Victorian old woman. They would think he must be rather eccentric; but he isn’t at all eccentric, he’s only conventional. They would think so, because they don’t know anything about English barristers; because they don’t know what a barrister is. Well, that barrister doesn’t know what a poet is. He doesn’t understand that a poet’s eccentricities wouldn’t seem eccentric to other poets. He thinks it odd that Orm should walk about in a beautiful garden for two hours, with nothing to do. God bless my soul! a poet would think nothing of walking about in the same backyard for ten hours if he had a poem to do. Orm’s own counsel was quite as stupid. It never occurred to him to ask Orm the obvious question.”

“What question do you mean?” asked the other.

“Why, what poem he was making up, of course,” said Father Brown rather impatiently. “What line he was stuck at, what epithet he was looking for, what climax he was trying to work up to. If there were any educated people in court, who know what literature is, they would have known well enough whether he had had anything genuine to do. You’d have asked a manufacturer about the conditions of his factory; but nobody seems to consider the conditions under which poetry is manufactured. It’s done by doing nothing.”

“That’s all very well,” replied the detective; “but why did he hide? Why did he climb up that crooked little stairway and stop there; it led nowhere.”

“Why, because it led nowhere, of course,” cried Father Brown explosively. “Anybody who clapped eyes on that blind alley ending in mid-air might have known an artist would want to go there, just as a child would.”

He stood blinking for a moment, and then said apologetically: “I beg your pardon; but it seems odd that none of them understand these things. And then there was another thing. Don’t you know that everything has, for an artist, one aspect or angle that is exactly right? A tree, a cow, and a cloud, in a certain relation only, mean something; as three letters, in one order only, mean a word. Well, the view of that illuminated garden from that unfinished bridge was the right view of it. It was as unique as the fourth dimension. It was a sort of fairy foreshortening; it was like looking down at heaven and seeing all the stars growing on trees and that luminous pond like a moon fallen flat on the fields in some happy nursery tale. He could have looked at it for ever. If you told him the path led nowhere, he would tell you it had led him to the country at the end of the world. But do you expect him to tell you that in the witness-box? What would you say to him if he did? You talk about a man having a jury of his peers. Why don’t you have a jury of poets?”

“You talk as if you were a poet yourself,” said Bagshaw.

“Thank your stars I’m not,” said Father Brown. “Thank your lucky stars a priest has to be more charitable than a poet. Lord have mercy on us, if you knew what a crushing, what a cruel contempt he feels for the lot of you, you’d feel as if you were under Niagara.”

“You may know more about the artistic temperament than I do,” said Bagshaw after a pause; “but, after all, the answer is simple. You can only show that he might have done what he did, without committing the crime. But it’s equally true that he might have committed the crime. And who else could have committed it?”

“Have you thought about the servant, Green?” asked Father Brown, reflectively. “He told a rather queer story.”

“Ah,” cried Bagshaw quickly, “you think Green did it, after all.”

“I’m quite sure he didn’t,” replied the other. “I only asked if you’d thought about his queer story. He only went out for some trifle, a drink or an assignation or what not. But he went out by the garden door and came back over the garden wall. In other words, he left the door open, but he came back to find it shut. Why? Because Somebody Else had already passed out that way."

"The murderer," muttered the detective doubtfully. "Do you know who he was?"

"I know what he looked like," answered Father Brown quietly. "That's the only thing I do know. I can almost see him as he came in at the front door, in the gleam of the hall lamp; his figure, his clothes, even his face!"

"What's all this?"

"He looked like Sir Humphrey Gwynne," said the priest.

"What the devil do you mean?" demanded Bagshaw. "Gwynne was lying dead with his head in the pond."

"Oh, yes," said Father Brown.

After a moment he went on: "Let's go back to that theory of yours, which was a very good one, though I don't quite agree with it. You suppose the murderer came in at the front door, met the Judge in the front hall, struggling with him and breaking the mirror; that the judge then retreated into the garden, where he was finally shot. Somehow, it doesn't sound natural to me. Granted he retreated down the hall, there are two exits at the end, one into the garden and one into the house. Surely, he would be more likely to retreat into the house? His gun was there; his telephone was there; his servant, so far as he knew, was there. Even the nearest neighbours were in that direction. Why should he stop to open the garden door and go out alone on the deserted side of the house?"

"But we know he did go out of the house," replied his companion, puzzled. "We know he went out of the house, because he was found in the garden."

"He never went out of the house, because he never was in the house," said Father Brown. "Not that evening, I mean. He was sitting in that bungalow. I read that lesson in the dark, at the beginning, in red and golden stars across the garden. They were worked from the hut; they wouldn't have been burning at all if he hadn't been in the hut. He was trying to run across to the house and the telephone, when the murderer shot him beside the pond."

"But what about the pot and the palm and the broken mirror?" cried Bagshaw. "Why, it was you who found them! It was you yourself who said there must have been a struggle in the hall."

The priest blinked rather painfully. “Did I?” he muttered. “Surely, I didn’t say that. I never thought that. What I think I said, was that something had happened in the hall. And something did happen; but it wasn’t a struggle.”

“Then what broke the mirror?” asked Bagshaw shortly.

“A bullet broke the mirror,” answered Father Brown gravely; “a bullet fired by the criminal. The big fragments of falling glass were quite enough to knock over the pot and the palm.”

“Well, what else could he have been firing at except Gwynne?” asked the detective.

“It’s rather a fine metaphysical point,” answered his clerical companion almost dreamily. “In one sense, of course, he was firing at Gwynne. But Gwynne wasn’t there to be fired at. The criminal was alone in the hall.”

He was silent for a moment, and then went on quietly. “Imagine the looking-glass at the end of the passage, before it was broken, and the tall palm arching over it. In the half-light, reflecting these monochrome walls, it would look like the end of the passage. A man reflected in it would look like a man coming from inside the house. It would look like the master of the house — if only the reflection were a little like him.”

“Stop a minute,” cried Bagshaw. “I believe I begin — —”

“You begin to see,” said Father Brown. “You begin to see why all the suspects in this case must be innocent. Not one of them could possibly have mistaken his own reflection for old Gwynne. Orm would have known at once that his bush of yellow hair was not a bald head. Flood would have seen his own red head, and Green his own red waistcoat. Besides, they’re all short and shabby; none of them could have thought his own image was a tall, thin, old gentleman in evening-dress. We want another, equally tall and thin, to match him. That’s what I meant by saying that I knew what the murderer looked like.”

“And what do you argue from that?” asked Bagshaw, looking at him steadily.

The priest uttered a sort of sharp, crisp laugh, oddly different from his ordinary mild manner of speech.

“I am going to argue,” he said, “the very thing that you said was so ludicrous and impossible.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m going to base the defence,” said Father Brown, “on the fact that the prosecuting counsel has a bald head.”

“Oh, my God!” said the detective quietly, and got to his feet, staring.

Father Brown had resumed his monologue in an unruffled manner.

“You’ve been following the movements of a good many people in this business; you policemen were prodigiously interested in the movements of the poet, and the servant, and the Irishman. The man whose movements seem to have been rather forgotten is the dead man himself. His servant was quite honestly astonished at finding his master had returned. His master had gone to a great dinner of all the leaders of the legal profession, but had left it abruptly and come home. He was not ill, for he summoned no assistance; he had almost certainly quarrelled with some leader of the legal profession. It’s among the leaders of that profession that we should have looked first for his enemy. He returned, and shut himself up in the bungalow, where he kept all his private documents about treasonable practices. But the leader of the legal profession, who knew there was something against him in those documents, was thoughtful enough to follow his accuser home; he also being in evening-dress, but with a pistol in his pocket. That is all; and nobody could ever have guessed it except for the mirror.”

He seemed to be gazing into vacancy for a moment, and then added:

“A queer thing is a mirror; a picture frame that holds hundreds of different pictures, all vivid and all vanished for ever. Yet, there was something specially strange about the glass that hung at the end of that grey corridor under that green palm. It is as if it was a magic glass and had a different fate from others, as if its picture could somehow survive it, hanging in the air of that twilight house like a spectre; or at least like an abstract diagram, the skeleton of an argument. We could, at least, conjure out of the void the thing that Sir Arthur Travers saw. And by the way, there was one very true thing that you said about him.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” said Bagshaw with grim good-nature. “what was it?”

“You said,” observed the priest, “that Sir Arthur must have some good reason for wanting to get Orm hanged.”

A week later the priest met the police detective once more, and learned that the authorities had already been moving on the new lines of inquiry when they were interrupted by a sensational event.

“Sir Arthur Travers,” began Father Brown.

“Sir Arthur Travers is dead,” said Bagshaw, briefly.

“Ah!” said the other, with a little catch in his voice; “you mean that he —”

“Yes,” said Bagshaw, “he shot at the same man again, but not in a mirror.”

The Man With Two Beards

THIS tale was told by Father Brown to Professor Crake, the celebrated criminologist, after dinner at a club, where the two were introduced to each other as sharing a harmless hobby of murder and robbery. But, as Father Brown's version rather minimized his own part in the matter, it is here re-told in a more impartial style. It arose out of a playful passage of arms, in which the professor was very scientific and the priest rather sceptical.

"My good sir," said the professor in remonstrance, "don't you believe that criminology is a science?"

"I'm not sure," replied Father Brown. "Do you believe that hagiology is a science?"

"What's that?" asked the specialist sharply.

"No; it's not the study of hags, and has nothing to do with burning witches," said the priest, smiling. "It's the study of holy things, saints and so on. You see, the Dark Ages tried to make a science about good people. But our own humane and enlightened age is only interested in a science about bad ones. Yet I think our general experience is that every conceivable sort of man has been a saint. And I suspect you will find, too, that every conceivable sort of man has been a murderer."

"Well, we believe murderers can be pretty well classified," observed Crake. "The list sounds rather long and dull; but I think it's exhaustive. First, all killing can be divided into rational and irrational, and we'll take the last first, because they are much fewer. There is such a thing as homicidal mania, or love of butchery in the abstract. There is such a thing as irrational antipathy, though it's very seldom homicidal. Then we come to the true motives: of these, some are less rational in the sense of being merely romantic and retrospective. Acts of pure revenge are acts of hopeless revenge. Thus a lover will sometimes kill a rival he could never supplant, or a rebel assassinate a tyrant after the conquest is complete. But, more often, even these acts have a rational explanation. They are hopeful murders. They fall into the larger section of the second division, of what we may call prudential crimes. These, again, fall chiefly under two descriptions. A man kills either in order to obtain what the other man possesses, either by theft or inheritance, or to stop the other man from acting in some way: as in the case of killing a blackmailer or a political opponent; or, in the case of a rather more passive obstacle, a husband or wife whose continued functioning, as such, interferes with other things. We believe that classification is pretty thoroughly thought out and, properly applied, covers the whole ground — But I'm afraid that it perhaps sounds rather dull; I hope I'm not boring you."

"Not at all," said Father Brown. "If I seemed a little absent-minded I must apologize; the truth is, I was thinking of a man I once knew. He was a murderer; but I can't see where he fits into your museum of murderers. He was not mad, nor did he like killing. He did not hate the man he killed; he hardly knew him, and certainly had nothing to avenge on him. The other man did not possess anything that he could possibly want. The other man was not behaving in any way which the murderer wanted to stop. The murdered man was not in a position to hurt, or hinder, or even affect the murderer in any way. There was no woman in the case. There were no politics in the case. This man killed a fellow-creature who was practically a stranger, and that for a very strange reason; which is possibly unique in human history."

And so, in his own more conversational fashion, he told the story. The story may well begin in a sufficiently respectable setting, at the breakfast table of a worthy though wealthy suburban family named Bankes, where the normal discussion of the newspaper had, for once, been silenced by the discussion about a mystery nearer home. Such people are sometimes accused of gossip about their neighbours, but they are in that matter almost inhumanly innocent. Rustic villagers tell tales about their neighbours, true and false; but the curious culture of the modern suburb will believe anything it is told in the papers about the wickedness of the Pope, or the martyrdom of the King of the Cannibal Islands, and, in the excitement of these topics, never knows what is happening next door. In this case, however, the two forms of interest actually coincided in a coincidence of thrilling intensity. Their own suburb had actually been mentioned in their favourite newspaper. It seemed to them like a new proof of their own existence when they saw the name in print. It was almost as if they had been unconscious and invisible before; and now they were as real as the King of the Cannibal Islands.

It was stated in the paper that a once famous criminal, known as Michael Moonshine, and many other names that were presumably not his own, had recently been released after a long term of imprisonment for his numerous burglaries; that his whereabouts was being kept quiet, but that he was believed to have settled down in the suburb in question, which we will call for convenience Chisham. A resume of some of his famous and daring exploits and escapes was given in the same issue. For it is a character of that kind of press, intended for that kind of public, that it assumes that its reader have no memories. While the peasant will remember an outlaw like Robin Hood or Rob Roy for centuries, the clerk will hardly remember the name of the criminal about whom he argued in trams and tubes two years before. Yet, Michael Moonshine had really shown some of the heroic rascality of Rob Roy or Robin Hood. He was worthy to be turned into legend and not merely into news. He was far too capable a burglar to be a murderer. But his terrific strength and the ease with which he knocked policemen over like ninepins, stunned people, and bound and gagged them, gave something almost like a final touch of fear or mystery to the fact that he never killed them. People almost felt that he would have been more human if he had.

Mr. Simon Bankes, the father of the family, was at once better read and more old-fashioned than the rest. He was a sturdy man, with a short grey beard and a brow barred with wrinkles. He had a turn for anecdotes and reminiscence, and he distinctly remembered the days when Londoners had lain awake listening for Mike Moonshine as they did for Spring-heeled Jack. Then there was his wife, a thin, dark lady. There was a sort of acid elegance about her, for her family had much more money than her husband’s, if rather less education; and she even possessed a very valuable emerald necklace upstairs, that gave her a right to prominence in a discussion about thieves. There was his daughter, Opal, who was also thin and dark and supposed to be psychic — at any rate, by herself; for she had little domestic encouragement. Spirits of an ardently astral turn will be well advised not to materialize as members of a large family. There was her brother John, a burly youth, particularly boisterous in his indifference to her spiritual development; and otherwise distinguishable only by his interest in motor-cars. He seemed to be always in the act of selling one car and buying another; and by some process, hard for the economic theorist to follow, it was always possible to buy a much better article by selling the one that was damaged or discredited. There was his brother Philip, a young man with dark curly hair, distinguished by his attention to dress; which is doubtless part of the duty of a stockbroker’s clerk, but, as the stockbroker was prone to hint, hardly the whole of it. Finally, there was present at this family scene his friend, Daniel Devine, who was also dark and exquisitely dressed, but bearded in a fashion that was somewhat foreign, and therefore, for many, slightly menacing.

It was Devine who had introduced the topic of the newspaper paragraph, tactfully insinuating so effective an instrument of distraction at what looked like the beginning of a small family quarrel; for the psychic lady had begun the description of a vision she had had of pale faces floating in empty night outside her window, and John Bankes was trying to roar down this revelation of a higher state with more than his usual heartiness.

But the newspaper reference to their new and possibly alarming neighbour soon put both controversialists out of court.

“How frightful,” cried Mrs. Bankes. “He must be quite a new-comer; but who can he possibly be?”

“I don’t know any particularly new-comers,” said her husband, “except Sir Leopold Pulman, at Beechwood House.”

“My dear,” said the lady, “how absurd you are — Sir Leopold!” Then, after a pause, she added: “If anybody suggested his secretary now — that man with the whiskers; I’ve always said, ever since he got the place Philip ought to have had — —”

“Nothing doing,” said Philip languidly, making his sole contribution to the conversation. “Not good enough.”

“The only one I know,” observed Devine, “is that man called Carver, who is stopping at Smith’s Farm. He lives a very quiet life, but he’s quite interesting to talk to. I think John has had some business with him.”

“Knows a bit about cars,” conceded the monomaniac John. “He’ll know a bit more when he’s been in my new car.”

Devine smiled slightly; everybody had been threatened with the hospitality of John’s new car. Then he added reflectively:

“That’s a little what I feel about him. He knows a lot about motoring and travelling, and the active ways of the world, and yet he always stays at home pottering about round old Smith’s beehives. Says he’s only interested in bee culture, and that’s why he’s staying with Smith. It seems a very quiet hobby for a man of his sort. However, I’ve no doubt John’s car will shake him up a bit.”

As Devine walked away from the house that evening his dark face wore an expression of concentrated thought. His thoughts would, perhaps, have been worthy of our attention, even at this stage; but it is enough to say that their practical upshot was a resolution to pay an immediate visit to Mr. Carver at the house of Mr. Smith. As he was making his way thither he encountered Barnard, the secretary at Beechwood House, conspicuous by his lanky figure and the large side whiskers which Mrs. Bankes counted among her private wrongs. Their acquaintance was slight, and their conversation brief and casual; but Devine seemed to find in it food for further cogitation.

"Look here," he said abruptly, "excuse my asking, but is it true that Lady Pulman has some very famous jewellery up at the House? I'm not a professional thief, but I've just heard there's one hanging about."

"I'll get her to give an eye to them," answered the secretary. "To tell the truth, I've ventured to warn her about them already myself. I hope she has attended to it."

As they spoke, there came the hideous cry of a motor-horn just behind, and John Bankes came to a stop beside them, radiant at his own steering-wheel. When he heard of Devine's destination he claimed it as his own, though his tone suggested rather an abstract relish for offering people a ride. The ride was consumed in continuous praises of the car, now mostly in the matter of its adaptability to weather.

"Shuts up as tight as a box," he said, "and opens as easy — as easy as opening your mouth."

Devine's mouth, at the moment, did not seem so easy to open, and they arrived at Smith's farm to the sound of a soliloquy. Passing the outer gate, Devine found the man he was looking for without going into the house. The man was walking about in the garden, with his hands in his pockets, wearing a large, limp straw hat; a man with a long face and a large chin. The wide brim cut off the upper part of his face with a shadow that looked a little like a mask. In the background was a row of sunny beehives, along which an elderly man, presumably Mr. Smith, was moving accompanied by a short, commonplace-looking companion in black clerical costume.

"I say," burst in the irrepressible John, before Devine could offer any polite greeting, "I've brought her round to give you a little run. You see if she isn't better than a 'Thunderbolt.'"

Mr Carver's mouth set into a smile that may have been meant to be gracious, but looked rather grim. "I'm afraid I shall be too busy for pleasure this evening," he said.

"How doth the little busy bee," observed Devine, equally enigmatically. "Your bees must be very busy if they keep you at it all night. I was wondering if — —"

"Well," demanded Carver, with a certain cool defiance.

"Well, they say we should make hay while the sun shines," said Devine. "Perhaps you make honey while the moon shines."

There came a flash from the shadow of the broad-brimmed hat, as the whites of the man's eyes shifted and shone.

"Perhaps there is a good deal of moonshine in the business," he said: "but I warn you my bees do not only make honey. They sting."

"Are you coming along in the car?" insisted the staring John. But Carver, though he threw off the momentary air of sinister significance with which he had been answering Devine, was still positive in his polite refusal.

"I can't possibly go," he said. "Got a lot of writing to do. Perhaps you'd be kind enough to give some of my friends a run, if you want a companion. This is my friend, Mr. Smith, Father Brown—"

"Of course," cried Bankes; "let 'em all come."

"Thank you very much," said Father Brown. "I'm afraid I shall have to decline; I've got to go on to Benediction in a few minutes."

"Mr. Smith is your man, then," said Carver, with something almost like impatience. "I'm sure Smith is longing for a motor ride."

Smith, who wore a broad grin, bore no appearance of longing for anything. He was an active little old man with a very honest wig; one of those wigs that look no more natural than a hat. Its tinge of yellow was out of keeping with his colourless complexion. He shook his head and answered with amiable obstinacy:

"I remember I went over this road ten years ago — in one of those contraptions. Came over in it from my sister's place at Holmgate, and never been over that road in a car since. It was rough going I can tell you,"

"Ten years ago!" scoffed John Bankes. "Two thousand years ago you went in an ox wagon. Do you think cars haven't changed in ten years — and roads, too, for that matter? In my little bus you don't know the wheels are going round. You think you're just flying."

"I'm sure Smith wants to go flying," urged Carver. "It's the dream of his life. Come, Smith, go over to Holmgate and see your sister. You know you ought to go and see your sister. Go over and stay the night if you like."

"Well, I generally walk over, so I generally do stay the night," said old Smith. "No need to trouble the gentleman to-day, particularly."

"But think what fun it will be for your sister to see you arrive in a car!" cried Carver. "You really ought to go. Don't be so selfish."

"That's it," assented Bankes, with buoyant benevolence. "Don't you be selfish. It won't hurt you. You aren't afraid of it, are you?"

"Well," said Mr. Smith, blinking thoughtfully, "I don't want to be selfish, and I don't think I'm afraid — I'll come with you if you put it that way."

The pair drove off, amid waving salutations that seemed somehow to give the little group the appearance of a cheering crowd. Yet Devine and the priest only joined in out of courtesy, and they both felt it was the dominating gesture of their host that gave it its final air of farewell. The detail gave them a curious sense of the pervasive force of his personality.

The moment the car was out of sight he turned to them with a sort of boisterous apology and said: "Well!"

He said it with that curious heartiness which is the reverse of hospitality. That extreme geniality is the same as a dismissal.

"I must be going," said Devine. "We must not interrupt the busy bee. I'm afraid I know very little about bees; sometimes I can hardly tell a bee from a wasp."

"I've kept wasps, too," answered the mysterious Mr. Carver. When his guests were a few yards down the street, Devine said rather impulsively to his companion: "Rather an odd scene that, don't you think?"

"Yes," replied Father Brown. "And what do you think about it?"

Devine looked at the little man in black, and something in the gaze of his great, grey eyes seemed to renew his impulse.

"I think," he said, "that Carver was very anxious to have the house to himself tonight. I don't know whether you had any such suspicions?"

"I may have my suspicions," replied the priest, "but I'm not sure whether they're the same as yours."

That evening, when the last dusk was turning into dark in the gardens round the family mansion, Opal Bankes was moving through some of the dim and empty rooms with even more than her usual abstraction; and anyone who had looked at her closely would have noted that her pale face had more than its usual pallor. Despite its bourgeois luxury, the house as a whole had a rather unique shade of melancholy. It was the sort of immediate sadness that belongs to things that are old rather than ancient. It was full of faded fashions, rather than historic customs; of the order and ornament that is just recent enough to be recognized as dead. Here and there, Early Victorian coloured glass tinted the twilight; the high ceilings made the long rooms look narrow; and at the end of the long room down which she was walking was one of those round windows, to be found in the buildings of its period. As she came to about the middle of the room, she stopped, and then suddenly swayed a little, as if some invisible hand had struck her on the face.

An instant after there was the noise or knocking on the front door, dulled by the closed doors between. She knew that the rest of the household were in the upper parts of the house, but she could not have analysed the motive that made her go to the front door herself. On the doorstep stood a dumpy and dingy figure in black, which she recognized as the Roman Catholic priest, whose name was Brown. She knew him only slightly; but she liked him. He did not encourage her psychic views; quite the contrary; but he discouraged them as if they mattered and not as if they did not matter. It was not so much that he did not sympathize with her opinions, as that he did sympathize but did not agree. All this was in some sort of chaos in her mind as she found herself saying, without greeting, or waiting to hear his business:

"I'm so glad you've come. I've seen a ghost."

"There's no need to be distressed about that," he said. "It often happens. Most of the ghosts aren't ghosts, and the few that may be won't do you any harm. Was it any ghost in particular?"

"No," she admitted, with a vague feeling of relief, "it wasn't so much the thing itself as an atmosphere of awful decay, a sort of luminous ruin. It was a face. A face at the window. But it was pale and goggling, and looked like the picture of Judas."

"Well, some people do look like that," reflected the priest, "and I dare say they look in at windows, sometimes. May I come in and see where it happened?"

When she returned to the room with the visitor, however, other members of the family had assembled, and those of a less psychic habit had thought it convenient to light the lamps. In the presence of Mrs. Bankes, Father Brown assumed a more conventional civility, and apologized for his intrusion.

"I'm afraid it is taking a liberty with your house, Mrs. Bankes," he said. "But I think I can explain how the business happens to concern you. I was up at the Pulmans' place just now, when I was rung up and asked to come round here to meet a man who is coming to communicate something that may be of some moment to you. I should not have added myself to the party, only I am wanted, apparently, because I am a witness to what has happened up at Beechwood. In fact, it was I who had to give the alarm."

"What has happened?" repeated the lady.

"There has been a robbery up, at Beechwood House," said Father Brown, gravely; "a robbery, and what I fear is worse, Lady Pulman's jewels have gone; and her unfortunate secretary, Mr. Barnard, was picked up in the garden, having evidently been shot by the escaping burglar."

"That man," ejaculated the lady of the house. "I believe he was — —"

She encountered the grave gaze of the priest, and her words suddenly went from her; she never knew why.

"I communicated with the police," he went on, "and with another authority interested in this case; and they say that even a superficial examination has revealed foot-prints and finger-prints and other indications of a well-known criminal."

At this point, the conference was for a moment disturbed, by the return of John Bankes, from what appeared to be an abortive expedition in the car. Old Smith seemed to have been a disappointing passenger, after all.

"Funked it, after all, at the last minute," he announced with noisy disgust. "Bolted off while I was looking at what I thought was a puncture. Last time I'll take one of these yokels — —"

But his complaints received small attention in the general excitement that gathered round Father Brown and his news.

"Somebody will arrive in a moment," went on the priest, with the same air of weighty reserve, "who will relieve me of this responsibility. When I have confronted you with him I shall have done my duty as a witness in a serious business. It only remains for me to say that a servant up at Beechwood House told me that she had seen a face at one of the windows — —"

"I saw a face," said Opal, "at one of our windows."

"Oh, you are always seeing faces," said her brother John roughly.

"It is as well to see facts even if they are faces," said Father Brown equably, "and I think the face you saw — —"

Another knock at the front door sounded through the house, and a minute afterwards the door of the room opened and another figure appeared. Devine half-rose from his chair at the sight of it.

It was a tall, erect figure, with a long, rather cadaverous face, ending in a formidable chin. The brow was rather bald, and the eyes bright and blue, which Devine had last seen obscured with a broad straw hat.

“Pray don’t let anybody move,” said the man called Carver, in clear and courteous tones. But to Devine’s disturbed mind the courtesy had an ominous resemblance to that of a brigand who holds a company motionless with a pistol.

“Please sit down, Mr. Devine,” said Carver; “and, with Mrs. Bankes’s permission, I will follow your example. My presence here necessitates an explanation. I rather fancy you suspected me of being an eminent and distinguished burglar.”

“I did,” said Devine grimly.

“As you remarked,” said Carver, “it is not always easy to know a wasp from a bee.”

After a pause, he continued: “I can claim to be one of the more useful, though equally annoying, insects. I am a detective, and I have come down to investigate an alleged renewal of the activities of the criminal calling himself Michael Moonshine. Jewel robberies were his speciality; and there has just been one of them at Beechwood House, which, by all the technical tests, is obviously his work. Not only do the prints correspond, but you may possibly know that when he was last arrested, and it is believed on other occasions also, he wore a simple but effective disguise of a red beard and a pair of large horn-rimmed spectacles.”

Opal Bankes leaned forward fiercely.

“That was it,” she cried in excitement, “that was the face I saw, with great goggles and a red, ragged beard like Judas. I thought it was a ghost.”

“That was also the ghost the servant at Beechwood saw,” said Carver dryly.

He laid some papers and packages on the table, and began carefully to unfold them. “As I say,” he continued, “I was sent down here to make inquiries about the criminal plans of this man, Moonshine. That is why I interested myself in bee-keeping and went to stay with Mr. Smith.”

There was a silence, and then Devine started and spoke: “You don’t seriously mean to say that nice old man — —”

"Come, Mr. Devine," said Carver, with a smile, "you believed a beehive was only a hiding-place for me. Why shouldn't it be a hiding-place for him?"

Devine nodded gloomily, and the detective turned back to his papers. "Suspecting Smith, I wanted to get him out of the way and go through his belongings; so I took advantage of Mr. Bankes's kindness in giving him a joy ride. Searching his house, I found some curious things to be owned by an innocent old rustic interested only in bees. This is one of them."

From the unfolded paper he lifted a long, hairy object almost scarlet in colour — the sort of sham beard that is worn in theatricals.

Beside it lay an old pair of heavy horn-rimmed spectacles.

"But I also found something," continued Carver, "that more directly concerns this house, and must be my excuse for intruding to-night. I found a memorandum, with notes of the names and conjectural value of various pieces of jewellery in the neighbourhood. Immediately after the note of Lady Pulman's tiara was the mention of an emerald necklace belonging to Mrs. Bankes."

Mrs. Bankes, who had hitherto regarded the invasion of her house with an air of supercilious bewilderment, suddenly grew attentive. Her face suddenly looked ten years older and much more intelligent. But before she could speak the impetuous John had risen to his full height like a trumpeting elephant.

"And the tiara's gone already," he roared; "and the necklace — I'm going to see about that necklace!"

"Not a bad idea," said Carver, as the young man rushed from the room; "though, of course, we've been keeping our eyes open since we've been here. Well, it took me a little time to make out the memorandum, which was in cipher, and Father Brown's telephone message from the House came as I was near the end. I asked him to run round here first with the news, and I would follow; and so — —"

His speech was sundered by a scream. Opal was standing up and pointing rigidly at the round window.

"There it is again!" she cried.

For a moment they all saw something — something that cleared the lady of the charges of lying and hysteria not uncommonly brought against her. Thrust out of the slate-blue darkness without, the face was pale, or, perhaps, blanched by pressure against the glass; and the great, glaring eyes, encircled as with rings, gave it rather the look of a great fish out of the dark-blue sea nosing at the port-hole of a ship. But the gills or fins of the fish were a coppery red; they were, in truth, fierce red whiskers and the upper part of a red beard. The next moment it had vanished.

Devine had taken a single stride towards the window when a shout resounded through the house, a shout that seemed to shake it. It seemed almost too deafening to be distinguishable as words; yet it was enough to stop Devine in his stride, and he knew what had happened.

“Necklace gone!” shouted John Bankes, appearing huge and heaving in the doorway, and almost instantly vanishing again with the plunge of a pursuing hound.

“Thief was at the window just now!” cried the detective, who had already darted to the door, following the headlong John, who was already in the garden.

“Be careful,” wailed the lady, “they have pistols and things.”

“So have I,” boomed the distant voice of the dauntless John out of the dark garden.

Devine had, indeed, noticed as the young man plunged past him that he was defiantly brandishing a revolver, and hoped there would be no need for him to so defend himself. But even as he had the thought, came the shock of two shots, as if one answered the other, and awakened a wild flock of echoes in that still suburban garden. They flapped into silence.

“Is John dead?” asked Opal in a low, shuddering voice.

Father Brown had already advanced deeper into the darkness, and stood with his back to them, looking down at something. It was he who answered her.

“No,” he said; “it is the other.”

Carver had joined him, and for a moment the two figures, the tall and the short, blocked out what view the fitful and stormy moonlight would allow. Then they moved to one side and, the others saw the small, wiry figure lying slightly twisted, as if with its last struggle. The false red beard was thrust upwards, as if scornfully at the sky, and the moon shone on the great sham spectacles of the man who had been called Moonshine.

“What an end,” muttered the detective, Carver. “After all his adventures, to be shot almost by accident by a stockbroker in a suburban garden.”

The stockbroker himself naturally regarded his own triumph with more solemnity, though not without nervousness.

"I had to do it," he gasped, still panting with exertion. "I'm sorry, he fired at me."

"There will have to be an inquest, of course," said Carver, gravely. "But I think there will be nothing for you to worry about. There's a revolver fallen from his hand with one shot discharged; and he certainly didn't fire after he'd got yours."

By this time they had assembled again in the room, and the detective was getting his papers together for departure. Father Brown was standing opposite to him, looking down at the table, as if in a brown study. Then he spoke abruptly:

"Mr. Carver, you have certainly worked out a very complete case in a very masterly way. I rather suspected your professional business; but I never guessed you would link everything up together so quickly — the bees and the beard and the spectacles and the cipher and the necklace and everything."

"Always satisfactory to get a case really rounded off." said Carver.

"Yes," said Father Brown, still looking at the table. "I admire it very much." Then he added with a modesty verging on nervousness: "It's only fair to you to say that I don't believe a word of it."

Devine leaned forward with sudden interest. "Do you mean you don't believe he is Moonshine, the burglar?"

"I know he is the burglar, but he didn't burgle," answered Father Brown. "I know he didn't come here, or to the great house, to steal jewels, or get shot getting away with them. Where are the jewels?"

"Where they generally are in such cases," said Carver. "He's either hidden them or passed them on to a confederate. This was not a one-man job. Of course, my people are searching the garden and warning the district."

"Perhaps," suggested Mrs. Bankes, "the confederate stole the necklace while Moonshine was looking in at the window."

"Why was Moonshine looking in at the window?" asked Father Brown quietly. "Why should he want to look in at the window?"

"Well, what do you think?" cried the cheery John.

"I think," said Father Brown, "that he never did want to look in at the window."

"Then why did he do it?" demanded Carver. "What's the good of talking in the air like that? We've seen the whole thing acted before our very eyes."

"I've seen a good many things acted before my eyes that I didn't believe in," replied the priest. "So have you, on the stage and off."

"Father Brown," said Devine, with a certain respect in his tones, "will you tell us why you can't believe your eyes?"

"Yes, I will try to tell you," answered the priest. Then he said gently:

"You know what I am and what we are. We don't bother you much. We try to be friends with all our neighbours. But you can't think we do nothing. You can't think we know nothing. We mind our own business; but we know our own people. I knew this dead man very well indeed; I was his confessor, and his friend. So far as a man can, I knew his mind when he left that garden to-day; and his mind was like a glass hive full of golden bees. It's an under-statement to say his reformation was sincere. He was one of those great penitents who manage to make more out of penitence than others can make out of virtue. I say I was his confessor; but, indeed, it was I who went to him for comfort. It did me good to be near so good a man. And when I saw him lying there dead in the garden, it seemed to me as if certain strange words that were said of old were spoken over him aloud in my ear. They might well be; for if ever a man went straight to heaven, it might be he."

"Hang it all," said John Bankes restlessly, "after all, he was a convicted thief."

"Yes," said Father Brown; "and only a convicted thief has ever in this world heard that assurance: 'This night shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.'"

Nobody seemed to know what to do with the silence that followed, until Devine said, abruptly, at last:

"Then how in the world would you explain it all?"

The priest shook his head. "I can't explain it at all, just yet," he said, simply. "I can see one or two odd things, but I don't understand them. As yet I've nothing to go on to prove the man's innocence, except the man. But I'm quite sure I'm right."

He sighed, and put out his hand for his big, black hat. As he removed it he remained gazing at the table with rather a new expression, his round, straight-haired head cocked at a new angle. It was rather as if some curious animal had come out of his hat, as out of the hat of a conjurer. But the others, looking at the table, could see nothing there but the detective's documents and the tawdry old property beard and spectacles.

“Lord bless us,” muttered Father Brown, “and he’s lying outside dead, in a beard and spectacles.” He swung round suddenly upon Devine. “Here’s something to follow up, if you want to know. Why did he have two beards?”

With that he bustled in his undignified way out of the room; but Devine was now devoured with curiosity, and pursued him into the front garden.

“I can’t tell you now,” — said Father Brown. “I’m not sure, and I’m bothered about what to do. Come round and see me to-morrow, and I may be able to tell you the whole thing. It may already be settled for me, and — did you hear that noise?”

“A motor-car starting,” remarked Devine.

“Mr. John Bankes’s motor-car,” said the priest. “I believe it goes very fast.”

“He certainly is of that opinion.” said Devine, with a smile.

“It will go far, as well as fast, to-night,” said Father Brown.

“And what do you mean by that?” demanded the other.

“I mean it will not return,” replied the priest. “John Bankes suspected something of what I knew from what I said. John Bankes has gone and the emeralds and all the other jewels with him.”

Next day, Devine found Father Brown moving to and fro in front of the row of beehives, sadly, but with a certain serenity.

“I’ve been telling the bees,” he said. “You know one has to tell the bees! ‘Those singing masons building roofs of gold.’ What a line!” Then more abruptly. “He would like the bees looked after.”

“I hope he doesn’t want the human beings neglected, when the whole swarm is buzzing with curiosity,” observed the young man. “You were quite right when you said that Bankes was gone with the jewels; but I don’t know how you knew, or even what there was to be known.”

Father Brown blinked benevolently at the bee-hives and said:

“One sort of stumbles on things, and there was one stumbling-block at the start. I was puzzled by poor Barnard being shot up at Beechwood House. Now, even when Michael was a master criminal, he made it a point of honour, even a point of vanity, to succeed without any killing. It seemed extraordinary that when he had become a sort of saint he should go out of his way to commit the sin he had despised when he was a sinner. The rest of the business puzzled me to the last; I could make nothing out of it, except that it wasn’t true. Then I had a belated gleam of sense when I saw the beard and goggles and remembered the thief had come in another beard with other goggles. Now, of course, it was just possible that he had duplicates; but it was at least a coincidence that he used neither the old glasses nor the old beard, both in good repair. Again, it was just possible that he went out without them and had to procure new ones; but it was unlikely. There was nothing to make him go motoring with Bankes at all; if he was really going burgling, he could have taken his outfit easily in his pocket. Besides, beards don't grow on bushes. He would have found it hard to get such things anywhere in the time.

"No, the more I thought of it the more I felt there was something funny about his having a completely new outfit. And then the truth began to dawn on me by reason, which I knew already by instinct. He never did go out with Bankes with any intention of putting on the disguise. He never did put on the disguise. Somebody else manufactured the disguise at leisure, and then put it on him."

"Put it on him!" repeated Devine. "How the devil could they?"

"Let us go back," said Father Brown, "and look at the thing through another window — the window through which the young lady saw the ghost."

"The ghost!" repeated the other, with a slight start.

"She called it the ghost," said the little man, with composure, "and perhaps she was not so far wrong. It's quite true that she is what they call psychic. Her only mistake is in thinking that being psychic is being spiritual. Some animals are psychic; anyhow, she is a sensitive, and she was right when she felt that the face at the window had a sort of horrible halo of deathly things."

"You mean — —" began Devine.

"I mean it was a dead man who looked in at the window," said Father Brown. "It was a dead man who crawled round more than one house, looking in at more than one window. Creepy, wasn't it? But in one way it was the reverse of a ghost; for it was not the antic of the soul freed from the body. It was the antic of the body freed from the soul."

He blinked again at the beehive and continued: "But, I suppose, the shortest explanation is to take it from the standpoint of the man who did it. You know the man who did it. John Bankes."

"The very last man I should have thought of," said Devine.

“The very first man I thought of,” said Father Brown; “in so far as I had any right to think of anybody. My friend, there are no good or bad social types or trades. Any man can be a murderer like poor John; any man, even the same man, can be a saint like poor Michael. But if there is one type that tends at times to be more utterly godless than another, it is that rather brutal sort of business man. He has no social ideal, let alone religion; he has neither the gentleman’s traditions nor the trade unionist’s class loyalty. All his boasts about getting good bargains were practically boasts of having cheated people. His snubbing of his sister’s poor little attempts at mysticism was detestable. Her mysticism was all nonsense; but he only hated spiritualism because it was spirituality. Anyhow, there’s no doubt he was the villain of the piece; the only interest is in a rather original piece of villainy. It was really a new and unique motive for murder. It was the motive of using the corpse as a stage property — a sort of hideous doll or dummy. At the start he conceived a plan of killing Michael in the motor, merely to take him home and pretend to have killed him in the garden. But all sorts of fantastic finishing touches followed quite naturally from the primary fact; that he had at his disposal in a closed car at night the dead body of a recognized and recognizable burglar. He could leave his finger-prints and foot-prints; he could lean the familiar face against windows and take it away. You will notice that Moonshine ostensibly appeared and vanished while Bankes was ostensibly out of the room looking for the emerald necklace.

“Finally, he had only to tumble the corpse on to the lawn, fire a shot from each pistol, and there he was. It might never have been found out but for a guess about the two beards.”

“Why had your friend Michael kept the old beard?” Devine said thoughtfully. “That seems to me questionable.”

“To me, who knew him, it seems quite inevitable,” replied Father Brown. “His whole attitude was like that wig that he wore. There was no disguise about his disguises. He didn’t want the old disguise any more, but he wasn’t frightened of it; he would have felt it false to destroy the false beard. It would have been like hiding; and he was not hiding. He was not hiding from God; he was not hiding from himself. He was in the broad daylight. If they’d taken him back to prison, he’d still have been quite happy. He was not whitewashed, but washed white. There was something very strange about him; almost as strange as the grotesque dance of death through which he was dragged after he was dead. When he moved to and fro smiling among these beehives, even then, in a most radiant and shining sense, he was dead. He was out of the judgment of this world.”

There was a short pause, and then Devine shrugged his shoulders and said: “It all comes back to bees and wasps looking very much alike in this world, doesn’t it?”

The Song of the Flying Fish

THE soul of Mr. Peregrine Smart hovered like a fly round one possession and one joke. It might be considered a mild joke, for it consisted merely of asking people if they had seen his goldfish. It might also be considered an expensive joke; but it is doubtful whether he was not secretly more attached to the joke than to the evidence of expenditure. In talking to his neighbours in the little group of new houses that had grown up round the old village green, he lost no time in turning the conversation in the direction of his hobby. To Dr. Burdock, a rising biologist with a resolute chin and hair brushed back like a German's, Mr. Smart made the easy transition. "You are interested in natural history; have you seen my goldfish?" To so orthodox an evolutionist as Dr. Burdock doubtless all nature was one; but at first sight the link was not close, as he was a specialist who had concentrated entirely upon the primitive ancestry of the giraffe. To Father Brown, from a church in the neighbouring provincial town, he traced a rapid train of thought which touched on the topics of "Rome — St. Peter — fisherman — fish — goldfish." In talking to Mr. Imlack Smith, the bank manager, a slim and sallow gentleman of dressy appearance but quiet demeanour, he violently wrenched the conversation to the subject of the gold standard, from which it was merely a step to goldfish. In talking to that brilliant Oriental traveller and scholar, Count Yvon de Lara (whose title was French and his face rather Russian, not to say Tartar), the versatile conversationalist showed an intense and intelligent interest in the Ganges and the Indian Ocean, leading naturally to the possible presence of goldfish in those waters.

From Mr. Harry Hartopp, the very rich but very shy and silent young gentleman who had recently come down from London, he had at last extorted the information that the embarrassed youth in question was not interested in fishing, and had then added: "Talking about fishing, have you seen my goldfish?"

The peculiar thing about the goldfish was that they were made of gold. They were part of an eccentric but expensive toy, said to have been made by the freak of some rich Eastern prince, and Mr. Smart had picked it up at some sale or in some curiosity shop, such as he frequented for the purpose of lumbering up his house with unique and useless things. From the other end of the room it looked like a rather unusually large bowl containing rather unusually large living fish; a closer inspection showed it to be a huge bubble of beautifully blown Venetian glass, very thin and delicately clouded with faintly iridescent colour, in the tinted twilight of which hung grotesque golden fishes with great rubies for eyes. The whole thing was undoubtedly worth a great deal in solid material; how much more would depend upon the waves of lunacy passing over the world of collectors. Mr. Smart's new secretary, a young man named Francis Boyle, though an Irishman and not credited with caution, was mildly surprised at his talking so freely of the gems of his collection to the group of comparative strangers who happened to have alighted in a rather nomadic fashion in the neighbourhood; for collectors are commonly vigilant and sometimes secretive. In the course of settling down to his new duties, Mr. Boyle found he was not alone in this sentiment, and that in others, it passed from a mild wonder to a grave disapproval.

"It's a wonder his throat isn't cut," said Mr. Smart's valet, Harris, not without a hypothetical relish, almost as if he had said, in a purely artistic sense: "It's a pity."

"It's extraordinary how he leaves things about," said Mr. Smart's head clerk, Jameson, who had come up from the office to assist the new secretary, "and he won't even put up those ramshackle old bars across his ramshackle old door."

"It's all very well with Father Brown and the doctor," said Mr. Smart's housekeeper, with a certain vigorous vagueness that marked her opinions, "but when it comes to foreigners, I call it tempting providence. It isn't only the Count, either; that man at the bank looks to me much too yellow to be English."

"Well, that young Hartopp is English enough," said Boyle good-humouredly, "to the extent of not having a word to say for himself."

"He thinks the more," said the housekeeper. "He may not be exactly a foreigner, but he is not such a fool as he looks. Foreign is as foreign does, I say," she added darkly.

Her disapproval would probably have deepened if she had heard the conversation, in her master's drawing-room that afternoon, a conversation of which the goldfish were the text, though the offensive foreigner tended more and more to be the central figure. It was not that he spoke so very much; but even his silences had something positive about them. He looked the more massive for sitting in a sort of heap on a heap of cushions, and in the deepening twilight his wide Mongolian face seemed faintly luminous, like a moon. Perhaps his background brought out something atmospherically Asiatic about his face and figure, for the room was a chaos of more or less costly curiosities, amid which could be seen the crooked curves and burning colours of countless Eastern weapons, Eastern pipes and vessels, Eastern musical instruments and illuminated manuscripts. Anyhow, as the conversation proceeded, Boyle felt more and more that the figure seated on the cushions and dark against the twilight had the exact outline of a huge image of Buddha.

The conversation was general enough, for all the little local group were present. They were, indeed, often in the habit of dropping in at each other's houses, and by this time constituted a sort of club, of people coming from the four or five houses standing round the green. Of these houses Peregrine Smart's was the oldest, largest, and most picturesque; it straggled down almost the whole of one side of the square, leaving only room for a small villa, inhabited by a retired colonel named Varney, who was reported to be an invalid, and certainly was never seen to go abroad. At right angles to these stood two or three shops that served the simpler needs of the hamlet, and at the corner the inn of the Blue Dragon, at which Mr. Hartopp, the stranger from London, was staying. On the opposite side were three houses, one rented by the Count de Lara, one by Dr. Burdock, and the third still standing empty. On the fourth side was the bank, with an adjoining house for the bank manager, and a line of fence enclosing some land that was let for building. It was thus a very self-contained group, and the comparative emptiness of the open ground for miles round it threw the members more and more on each other's society. That afternoon, one stranger had indeed broken into the magic circle: a hatchet-faced fellow with fierce tufts of eyebrows and moustache, and so shabbily dressed that he must have been a millionaire or a duke if he had really (as was alleged) come down to do business with the old collector. But he was known, at the Blue Dragon at least, as Mr. Harmer.

To him had been recounted anew the glories of the gilded fish and the criticisms regarding their custody.

"People are always telling me I ought to lock them up more carefully," observed Mr. Smart, cocking an eyebrow over his shoulder at the dependant who stood there holding some papers from the office. Smart was a round-faced, round-bodied little old man rather like a bald parrot. "Jameson and

Harris and the rest are always at me to bar the doors as if it were a mediaeval fortress, though really these rotten old rusty bars are too mediaeval to keep anybody out, I should think. I prefer to trust to luck and the local police."

"It is not always the best bars that keep people out," said the Count. "It all depends on who's trying to get in. There was an ancient Hindu hermit who lived naked in a cave and passed through the three armies that encircled the Mogul and took the great ruby out of the tyrant's turban, and went back unscathed like a shadow. For he wished to teach the great how small are the laws of space and time."

"When we really study the small laws of space and time," said Dr. Burdock dryly, "we generally find out how those tricks are done. Western science has let in daylight on a good deal of Eastern magic. Doubtless a great deal can be done with hypnotism and suggestion, to say nothing of sleight-of-hand."

"The ruby was not in the royal tent," observed the Count in his dream fashion; "but he found it among a hundred tents."

"Can't all that be explained by telepathy?" asked the doctor sharply. The question sounded the sharper because it was followed by a heavy silence, almost as if the distinguished Oriental traveller had, with imperfect politeness, gone to sleep.

"I beg your pardon," he said rousing himself with a sudden smile. "I had forgotten we were talking with words. In the east we talk with thoughts, and so we never misunderstand each other. It is strange how you people worship words and are satisfied with words. What difference does it make to a thing that you now call it telepathy, as you once called it tomfoolery? If a man climbs into the sky on a mango-tree, how is it altered by saying it is only levitation, instead of saying it is only lies. If a medieval witch waved a wand and turned me into a blue baboon, you would say it was only atavism."

The doctor looked for a moment as if he might say that it would not be so great a change after all. But before his irritation could find that or any other vent, the man called Harmer interrupted gruffly:

"It's true enough those Indian conjurers can do queer things, but I notice they generally do them in India. Confederates, perhaps, or merely mass psychology. I don't think those tricks have ever been played in an English village, and I should say our friend's goldfish were quite safe."

“I will tell you a story,” said de Lara, in his motionless way, “which happened not in India, but outside an English barrack in the most modernized part of Cairo. A sentinel was standing inside the grating of an iron gateway looking out between the bars on to the street. There appeared outside the gate a beggar, barefoot and in native rags, who asked him, in English that was startlingly distinct and refined, for a certain official document kept in the building for safety. The soldier told the man, of course, that he could not come inside; and the man answered, smiling: ‘What is inside and what is outside?’ The soldier was still staring scornfully through the iron grating when he gradually realized that, though neither he nor the gate had moved, he was actually standing in the street and looking in at the barrack yard, where the beggar stood still and smiling and equally motionless. Then, when the beggar turned towards the building, the sentry awoke to such sense as he had left, and shouted a warning to all the soldiers within the gated enclosure to hold the prisoner fast. ‘You won’t get out of there anyhow,’ he said vindictively. Then the beggar said in his silvery voice: ‘What is outside and what is inside?’ And the soldier, still glaring through the same bars, saw that they were once more between him and the street, where the beggar stood free and smiling with a paper in his hand.”

Mr. Imlack Smith, the bank manager, was looking at the carpet with his dark sleek head bowed, and he spoke for the first time.

“Did anything happen about the paper?” he asked.

“Your professional instincts are correct, sir,” said the Count with grim affability. “It was a paper of considerable financial importance. Its consequences were international.”

“I hope they don’t occur often,” said young Hartopp gloomily.

“I do not touch the political side,” said the Count serenely, “but only the philosophical. It illustrates how the wise man can get behind time and space and turn the levers of them, so to speak, so that the whole world turns round before our eyes. But is it so hard for you people to believe that spiritual powers are really more powerful than material ones.”

“Well,” said old Smart cheerfully, “I don’t profess to be an authority on spiritual powers. What do you say, Father Brown?”

“The only thing that strikes me,” answered the little priest, “is that all the supernatural acts we have yet heard of seem to be thefts. And stealing by spiritual methods seem to me much the same as stealing by material ones.”

“Father Brown is a Philistine,” said the smiling Smith.

"I have a sympathy with the tribe," said Father Brown. "A Philistine is only a man who is right without knowing why."

"All this is too clever for me," said Hartopp heartily.

"Perhaps," said Father Brown with a smile, "you would like to speak without words, as the Count suggests. He would begin by saying nothing in a pointed fashion, and you would retort with a burst of taciturnity."

"Something might be done with music," murmured the Count dreamily. "It would be better than all these words."

"Yes, I might understand that better," said the young man in a low voice.

Boyle had followed the conversation with curious attention, for there was something in the demeanour of more than one of the talkers that seemed to him significant or even odd. As the talk drifted to music, with an appeal to the dapper bank manager (who was an amateur musician of some merit), the young secretary awoke with a start to his secretarial duties, and reminded his employer that the head clerk was still standing patiently with the papers in his hand.

"Oh, never mind about those just now, Jameson," said Smart rather hurriedly. "Only something about my account; I'll see Mr. Smith about it later. You were saying that the 'cello, Mr. Smith — —"

But the cold breath of business had sufficed to disperse the fumes of transcendental talk, and the guests began one after another to say farewell. Only Mr. Imlack Smith, bank manager and musician, remained to the last; and when the rest were gone he and his host went into the inner room, where the goldfish were kept, and closed the door.

The house was long and narrow, with a covered balcony running along the first floor, which consisted mostly of a sort of suite of rooms used by the householder himself, his bedroom and dressing-room, and an inner room in which his very valuable treasures were sometimes stored for the night instead of being left in the rooms below. This balcony, like the insufficiently barred door below it, was a matter of concern to the housekeeper and the head clerk and the others who lamented the carelessness of the collector; but, in truth, that cunning old gentleman was more careful than he seemed. He professed no great belief in the antiquated fastenings of the old house, which the housekeeper lamented to see rusting in idleness, but he had an eye to the more important point of strategy. He always put his favourite goldfish in the room at the back of his bedroom for the night, and slept in front of it, as it were, with a pistol under his pillow. And when Boyle and

Jameson, awaiting his return from the tete-a-tete, at length saw the door open and their employer reappear, he was carrying the great glass bowl as reverently as if it had been the relic of a saint.

Outside, the last edges of the sunset still clung to the corners of the green square; but inside, a lamp had already been kindled; and in the mingling of the two lights the coloured globe glowed like some monstrous jewel, and the fantastic outlines of the fiery fishes seemed to give it, indeed, something of the mystery of a talisman, like strange shapes seen by a seer in the crystal of doom. Over the old man's shoulder the olive face of Imlack Smith stared like a sphinx.

"I am going up to London to-night, Mr. Boyle," said old Smart, with more gravity than he commonly showed. "Mr. Smith and I are catching the six-forty-five. I should prefer you, Jameson, to sleep upstairs in my room to-night; if you put the bowl in the back room as usual, it will be quite safe then. Not that I suppose anything could possibly happen."

"Anything may happen anywhere," said the smiling Mr. Smith. "I think you generally take a gun to bed with you. Perhaps you had better leave it behind in this case."

Peregrine Smart did not reply, and they passed out of the house on to the road round the village green.

The secretary and the head clerk slept that night as directed in their employer's bedroom. To speak more strictly, Jameson, the head clerk, slept in a bed in the dressing-room, but the door stood open between, and the two rooms running along the front were practically one. Only the bedroom had a long French window giving on the balcony, and an entrance at the back into the inner apartment where the goldfish bowl had been placed for safety. Boyle dragged his bed right across so as to bar this entrance, put the revolver under his pillow, and then undressed and went to bed, feeling that he had taken all possible precautions against an impossible or improbable event. He did not see why there should be any particular danger of normal burglary; and as for the spiritual burglary that figured in the traveller's tales of the Count de Lara, if his thoughts ran on them so near to sleep it was because they were such stuff as dreams are made of. They soon turned into dreams with intervals of dreamless slumber. The old clerk was a little more restless as usual; but after fussing about a little longer and repeating some of his favourite regrets and warnings, he also retired to his bed in the same manner and slept. The moon brightened and grew dim again above the green square and the grey blocks of houses in a solitude and silence that seemed to have no human witness; and it was when the white cracks of daybreak had already appeared in the corners of the grey sky that the thing happened.

Boyle, being young, was naturally both the healthier and the heavier sleeper of the two. Though active enough when he was once awake, he always had a load to lift in waking. Moreover, he had dreams of the sort that cling to the emerging minds like the dim tentacles of an octopus. They were a medley of many things, including his last look from the balcony across the four grey roads and the green square. But the pattern of them changed and shifted and turned dizzily, to the accompaniment of a low grinding noise, which sounded somehow like a subterranean river, and may have been no more than old Mr. Jameson snoring in the dressing-room. But in the dreamer's mind all that murmur and motion was vaguely connected with the words of the Count de Lara, about a wisdom that could hold the levers of time and space and turn the world. In the dream it seemed as if a vast murmuring machinery under the world were really moving whole landscapes hither and thither, so that the ends of the earth might appear in a man's front-garden, or his own front-garden be exiled beyond the sea.

The first complete impressions he had were the words of a song, with a rather thin metallic accompaniment; they were sung in a foreign accent and a voice that was still strange and yet faintly familiar. And yet he could hardly feel sure that he was not making up poetry in his sleep.

Over the land and over the sea
My flying fishes will come to me,
For the note is not of the world that wakes them,
But in ——

He struggled to his feet and saw that his fellow-guardian was already out of bed; Jameson was peering out of the long window on to the balcony and calling out sharply to someone in the street below.

"Who's that?" he called out sharply. "What do you want?"

He turned to Boyle in agitation, saying: "There's somebody prowling about just outside. I knew it wasn't safe. I'm going down to bar that front door, whatever they say."

He ran downstairs in a flutter and Boyle could hear the clattering of the bars upon the front door; but Boyle himself stepped out upon the balcony and looked out on the long grey road that led up to the house, and he thought he was still dreaming.

Upon that grey road leading across that empty moor and through that little English hamlet, there had appeared a figure that might have stepped straight out of the jungle or the bazaar — a figure out of one of the Count's fantastic stories; a figure out of the "Arabian Nights." The rather ghostly grey twilight which begins to define and yet to discolour everything when the light in the east has ceased to be localized, lifted slowly like a veil of grey gauze and showed him a figure wrapped in outlandish raiment. A scarf of a strange sea-blue, vast and voluminous, went round the head like a turban, and then again round the chin, giving rather the general character of a hood; so far as the face was concerned it had all the effects of a mask. For the raiment round the head was drawn close as a veil; and the head itself was bowed over a queer-looking musical instrument made of silver or steel, and shaped like a deformed or crooked violin. It was played with something like a silver comb, and the notes were curiously thin and keen. Before Boyle could open his mouth, the same haunting alien accent came from under the shadow of the burnous, singing-words of the same sort:

As the golden birds go back to the tree
My golden fishes return to me.
Return ——

"You've no right here," called out Boyle in exasperation, hardly knowing what he said.

"I have a right to the goldfish," said the stranger, speaking more like King Solomon than an unsandalled Bedouin in a ragged blue cloak. "And they will come to me. Come!"

He struck his strange fiddle as his voice rose sharply on the word. There was a pang of sound that seemed to pierce the mind, and then there came a fainter sound, like an answer: a vibrant whisper. It came from the dark room behind where the bowl of goldfish was standing.

Boyle turned towards it; and even as he turned the echo in the inner room changed to a long tingling sound like an electric bell, and then to a faint crash. It was still a matter of seconds since he had challenged the man from the balcony; but the old clerk had already regained the top of the stairs, panting a little, for he was an elderly gentleman.

"I've locked up the door, anyhow," he said.

"The stable door," said Boyle out of the darkness of the inner room.

Jameson followed him into that apartment and found him staring down at the floor, which was covered with a litter of coloured glass like the curved bits of a broken rainbow.

"What do you mean by the stable door?" began Jameson.

"I mean that the steed is stolen," answered Boyle. "The flying steeds. The flying fishes our Arab friend outside has just whistled to like so many performing puppies."

"But how could he?" exploded the old clerk, as if such events were hardly respectable.

"Well, they're gone," said Boyle shortly. "The broken bowl is here, which would have taken a long time to open properly, but only a second to smash. But the fish are gone, God knows how, though I think our friend ought to be asked."

"We are wasting time," said the distracted Jameson. "We ought to be after him at once."

"Much better be telephoning the police at once," answered Boyle. "They ought to outstrip him in a flash with motors and telephones that go a good deal farther than we should ever get, running through the village in our nightgowns. But it may be there are things even the police cars and wires won't outstrip."

While Jameson was talking to the police-station through the telephone in an agitated voice, Boyle went out again on to the balcony and hastily scanned that grey landscape of daybreak. There was no trace of the man in the turban, and no other sign of life, except some faint stirrings an expert might have recognized in the hotel of the Blue Dragon. Only Boyle, for the first time, noted consciously something that he had all along been noting unconsciously. It was like a fact struggling in the submerged mind and demanding its own meaning. It was simply the fact that the grey landscape had never been entirely grey; there was one gold spot amid its stripes of colourless colour, a lamp lighted in one of the houses on the other side of the green — Something, perhaps irrational, told him that it had been burning through all the hours of the darkness and was only fading with the dawn. He counted the houses, and his calculation brought out a result which seemed to fit in with something, he knew not what. Anyhow, it was apparently the house of the Count Yvon de Lara.

Inspector Pinner had arrived with several policemen, and done several things of a rapid and resolute sort, being conscious that the very absurdity of the costly trinkets might give the case considerable prominence in the newspapers. He had examined everything, measured everything, taken down everybody’s deposition, taken everybody’s finger-prints, put everybody’s back up, and found himself at the end left facing a fact which he could not believe. An Arab from the desert had walked up the public road and stopped in front of the house of Mr. Peregrine Smart, where a bowl of artificial goldfish was kept in an inner room; he had then sung or recited a little poem, and the bowl had exploded like a bomb and the fishes vanished into thin air. Nor did it soothe the inspector to be told by a foreign Count — in a soft, purring voice — that the bounds of experience were being enlarged.

Indeed, the attitude of each member of the little group was characteristic enough. Peregrine Smart himself had come back from London the next morning to hear the news of his loss. Naturally he admitted a shock; but it was typical of something sporting and spirited in the little old gentleman, something that always made his small strutting figure look like a cock-sparrow’s, that he showed more vivacity in the search than depression at the loss. The man named Harmer, who had come to the village on purpose to buy the goldfish, might be excused for being a little testy on learning they were not there to be bought. But, in truth, his rather aggressive moustache and eyebrows seemed to bristle with something more definite than disappointment, and the eyes that darted over the company were bright with a vigilance that might well be suspicion. The sallow face of the bank manager, who had also returned from London though by a later train, seemed again and again to attract those shining and shifting eyes like a magnet. Of the two remaining figures of the original circle, Father Brown was generally silent when he was not spoken to, and the dazed Hartopp was often silent even when he was.

But the Count was not a man to let anything pass that gave an apparent advantage to his views. He smiled at his rationalistic rival, the doctor, in the manner of one who knows how it is possible to be irritating by being ingratiating.

“You will admit, doctor,” he said, “that at least some of the stories you thought so improbable look a little more realistic to-day than they did yesterday. When a man as ragged as those I described is able, by speaking a word, to dissolve a solid vessel inside the four walls of the house he stands outside, it might perhaps be called an example of what I said about spiritual powers and material barriers."

"And it might be called an example of what I said," said the doctor sharply, "about a little scientific knowledge being enough to show how the tricks are done."

"Do you really mean, doctor," asked Smart in some excitement, "that you can throw any scientific light on this mystery?"

"I can throw light on what the Count calls a mystery," said the doctor, "because it is not a mystery at all. That part of it is plain enough. A sound is only a wave of vibration, and certain vibrations can break glass, if the sound is of a certain kind and the glass of a certain kind. The man did not stand in the road and think, which the Count tells us is the ideal method when Orientals want a little chat. He sang out what he wanted, quite loud, and struck a shrill note on an instrument. It is similar to many experiments by which glass of special composition has been cracked."

"Such as the experiment," said the Count lightly, "by which several lumps of solid gold have suddenly ceased to exist."

"Here comes Inspector Pinner," said Boyle. "Between ourselves, I think he would regard the doctor's natural explanation as quite as much of a fairy tale as the Count's preternatural one. A very sceptical intellect, Mr. Pinner's, especially about me. I rather think I am under suspicion."

"I think we are all under suspicion," said the Count.

It was the presence of this suspicion in his own case that led Boyle to seek the personal advice of Father Brown. They were walking round the village green together, some hours later in the day, when the priest, who was frowning thoughtfully at the ground as he listened, suddenly stopped.

"Do you see that?" he asked. "Somebody's been washing the pavement here — just this little strip of pavement outside Colonel Varney's house. I wonder whether that was done yesterday."

Father Brown looked rather earnestly at the house, which was high and narrow, and carried rows of striped sun-blinds of gay but already faded colours. The chinks or crannies that gave glimpses of the interior looked all the darker; indeed, they looked almost black in contrast with the facade thus golden in the morning light.

"That is Colonel Varney's house, isn't it?" he asked. "He comes from the East, too, I fancy. What sort of man is he?"

“I’ve never even seen him,” answered Boyle. “I don’t think anybody’s seen him, except Dr. Burdock, and I rather fancy the doctor doesn’t see him more than he need.”

“Well, I’m going to see him for a minute,” said Father Brown.

The big front door opened and swallowed the small priest, and his friend stood staring at it in a dazed and irrational manner, as if wondering whether it would ever open again. It opened in a few minutes, and Father Brown emerged, still smiling, and continued his slow and pottering progress round the square of roads. Sometimes he seemed to have forgotten the matter in hand altogether, for he would make passing remarks on historical and social questions, or on the prospects of development in the district. He remarked on the soil used for the beginning of a new road by the bank; he looked across the old village green with a vague expression.

“Common land. I suppose people ought to feed their pigs and geese on it, if they had any pigs or geese; as it is, it seems to feed nothing but nettles and thistles. What a pity that what was supposed to be a sort of large meadow has been turned into a small and petty wilderness. That’s Dr. Burdock’s house opposite, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” answered Boyle, almost jumping at this abrupt postscript.

“Very well,” answered Father Brown, “then I think we’ll go indoors again.”

As they opened the front door of Smart’s house and mounted the stairs, Boyle repeated to his companion many details of the drama enacted there at daybreak.

“I suppose you didn’t doze off again?” asked Father Brown, “giving time for somebody to scale the balcony while Jameson ran down to secure the door.”

“No,” answered Boyle; “I am sure of that. I woke up to hear Jameson challenging the stranger from the balcony; then I heard him running downstairs and putting up the bars, and then in two strides I was on the balcony myself.”

“Or could he have slipped in between you from another angle? Are there any other entrances besides the front entrance?”

“Apparently there are not,” said Boyle gravely.

“I had better make sure, don’t you think?” asked Father Brown apologetically, and scuttled softly downstairs again. Boyle remained in the front bedroom gazing rather doubtfully after him. After a comparatively brief interval the round and rather rustic visage appeared again at the head of the stairs, looking rather like a turnip ghost with a broad grin.

“No; I think that settles the matter of entrances,” said the turnip ghost, cheerfully. “And now, I think, having got everything in a tight box, so to speak, we can take stock of what we’ve got. It’s rather a curious business.”

“Do you think,” asked Boyle, ‘that the Count or the colonel, or any of these Eastern travellers have anything to do with it? Do you think it is — preternatural?”

“I will grant you this,” said the priest gravely, “if the Count, or the colonel, or any of your neighbours did dress up in Arab masquerade and creep up to this house in the dark — then it was preternatural.”

“What do you mean? Why?”

“Because the Arab left no footprints,” answered Father Brown. “The colonel on the one side and the banker on the other are the nearest of your neighbours. That loose red soil is between you and the bank, it would print off bare feet like a plaster cast and probably leave red marks everywhere. I braved the colonel’s curry-seasoned temper to verify the fact that the front pavement was washed yesterday and not to-day; it was wet enough to make wet footprints all along the road. Now, if the visitor were the Count or the doctor in the houses opposite, he might possibly, of course, have come across the common. But he must have found it exceedingly uncomfortable with bare feet, for it is, as I remarked, one mass of thorns and thistles and stinging nettles. He would surely have pricked himself and probably left traces of it. Unless, as you say, he was a preternatural being.”

Boyle looked steadily at the grave and indecipherable face of his clerical friend.

“Do you mean that he was?” he asked, at length.

“There is one general truth to remember,” said Father Brown, after a pause. “A thing can sometimes be too close to be seen, as, for instance, a man cannot see himself. There was a man who had a fly in his eye when he looked through the telescope, and he discovered that there was a most incredible dragon in the moon. And I am told that if a man hears the exact reproduction of his own voice it sounds like the voice of a stranger. In the same way, if anything is right in the foreground of our life we hardly see it, and if we did we might think it quite odd. If the thing in the foreground got into the middle distance, we should probably think it had come from the remote distance. Just come outside the house again for a moment. I want to show you how it looks from another standpoint."

He had already risen, and as they descended the stairs he continued his remarks in a rather groping fashion as if he were thinking aloud.

"The Count and the Asiatic atmosphere all come in, because, in a case like this, everything depends on the preparation of the mind. A man can reach a condition in which a brick, falling on his head, will seem to be a Babylonian brick carved with cuneiform, and dropped from the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, so that he will never even look at the brick and see it is of one pattern with the bricks of his own house. So in your case—"

"What does this mean?" interrupted Boyle, staring and pointing at the entrance. "What in the name of wonder does it mean? The door is barred again."

He was staring at the front door by which they had entered but a little while before, and across which stood, once more, the great dark bands of rusty iron which had once, as he had said, locked the stable door too late. There was something darkly and dumbly ironic in those old fastenings closing behind them and imprisoning them as if of their own motion.

"Oh those!" said Father Brown casually. "I put up those bars myself, just now. Didn't you hear me?"

"No," answered Boyle, staring. "I heard nothing."

"Well, I rather thought you wouldn't," said the other equably. "There's really no reason why anybody upstairs should hear those bars being put up. A sort of hook fits easily into a sort of hole. When you're quite close you hear a dull click; but that's all. The only thing that makes any noise a man could hear upstairs, is this."

And he lifted the bar out of its socket and let it fall with a clang at the side of the door,

"It does make a noise if you unbar the door," said Father Brown gravely, "even if you do it pretty carefully."

"You mean—"

"I mean," said Father Brown, "that what you heard upstairs was Jameson opening the door and not shutting it. And now let's open the door ourselves and go outside."

When they stood outside in the street, under the balcony, the little priest resumed his previous explanation as coolly as if it had been a chemical lecture.

“I was saying that a man may be in the mood to look for something very distant, and not realize that it is something very close, something very close to himself, perhaps something very like himself. It was a strange and outlandish thing that you saw when you looked down at this road. I suppose it never occurred to you to consider what he saw when he looked up at that balcony?”

Boyle was staring at the balcony and did not answer, and the other added:

“You thought it very wild and wonderful that an Arab should come through civilized England with bare feet. You did not remember that at the same moment you had bare feet yourself.”

Boyle at last found words, and it was to repeat words already spoken.

“Jameson opened the door,” he said mechanically.

“Yes,” assented, his friend. “Jameson opened the door and came out into the road in his nightclothes, just as you came out on the balcony. He caught up two things that you had seen a hundred times: the length of old blue curtain that he wrapped round his head, and the Oriental musical instrument you must have often seen in that heap of Oriental curiosities. The rest was atmosphere and acting, very fine acting, for he is a very fine artist in crime.”

“Jameson!” exclaimed Boyle incredulously. “He was such a dull old stick that I never even noticed him.”

“Precisely,” said the priest, “he was an artist. If he could act a wizard or a troubadour for six minutes, do you think he could not act a clerk for six weeks?”

“I am still not quite sure of his object,” said Boyle.

“His object has been achieved,” replied Father Brown, “or very nearly achieved. He had taken the goldfish already, of course, as he had twenty chances of doing. But if he had simply taken them, everybody would have realized that he had twenty chances of doing it. By creating a mysterious magician from the end of the earth, he set everybody’s thoughts wandering far afield to Arabia and India, so that you yourself can hardly believe that the whole thing was so near home. It was too close to you to be seen.”

“If this is true,” said Boyle, “it was an extraordinary risk to run, and he had to cut it very fine. It’s true I never heard the man in the street say anything while Jameson was talking from the balcony, so I suppose that was all a fake. And I suppose it's true that there was time for him to get outside before I had fully woken up and got out on to the balcony."

"Every crime depends on somebody not waking up too soon," replied Father Brown; "and in every sense most of us wake up too late. I, for one, have woken up much too late. For I imagine he's bolted long ago, just before or just after they took his finger-prints."

"You woke up before anybody else, anyhow," said Boyle, "and I should never have woken up in that sense. Jameson was so correct and colourless that I forgot all about him."

"Beware of the man you forget," replied his friend; "he is the one man who has you entirely at a disadvantage. But I did not suspect him, either, until you told me how you had heard him barring the door."

"Anyhow, we owe it all to you," said Boyle warmly.

"You owe it all to Mrs. Robinson," said Father Brown with a smile.

"Mrs. Robinson?" questioned the wondering secretary. "You don't mean the housekeeper?"

"Beware of the woman you forget, and even more," answered the other. "This man was a very high-class criminal; he had been an excellent actor, and therefore he was a good psychologist. A man like the Count never hears any voice but his own; but this man could listen, when you had all forgotten he was there, and gather exactly the right materials for his romance and know exactly the right note to strike to lead you all astray. But he made one bad mistake in the psychology of Mrs. Robinson, the housekeeper."

"I don't understand," answered Boyle, "what she can have to do with it."

"Jameson did not expect the doors to be barred," said Father Brown. "He knew that a lot of men, especially careless men like you and your employer, could go on saying for days that something ought to be done, or might as well be done. But if you convey to a woman that something ought to be done, there is always a dreadful danger that she will suddenly do it."

The Actor and the Alibi

MR. MUNDON MANDEVILLE, the theatrical manager, walked briskly through the passages behind the scenes, or rather below the scenes. His attire was smart and festive, perhaps a little too festive; the flower in his buttonhole was festive; the very varnish on his boots was festive; but his face was not at all festive. He was a big, bull-necked, black-browed man, and at the moment his brow was blacker than usual. He had in any case, of course, the hundred botherations that besiege a man in such a position; and they ranged from large to small and from new to old. It annoyed him to pass through the passages where the old pantomime scenery was stacked; because he had successfully begun his career at that theatre with very popular pantomimes, and had since been induced to gamble in more serious and classical drama over which he had dropped a good deal of money. Hence, to see the sapphire Gates of Bluebeard's Blue Palace, or portions of the Enchanted Grove of Golden Orange Trees, leaning up against the wall to be festooned with cobwebs or nibbled by mice, did not give him that soothing sense of a return to simplicity which we all ought to have when given a glimpse of that wonderland of our childhood. Nor had he any time to drop a tear where he had dropped the money, or to dream of this Paradise of Peter Pan; for he had been summoned hurriedly to settle a practical problem, not of the past but of the moment. It was the sort of thing that does sometimes happen in that strange world behind the scenes; but it was big enough to be serious. Miss Maroni, the talented young actress of Italian parentage, who had undertaken to act an important part in the play that was to be rehearsed that afternoon and performed that evening, had abruptly and even violently refused at the last moment to do anything of the kind. He had not even seen the exasperating lady yet; and as she had locked herself up in her dressing-room and defied the world through the door, it seemed unlikely, for the present, that he would. Mr. Mundon Mandeville was sufficiently British to explain it by murmuring that all foreigners were mad; but the thought of his good fortune in inhabiting the only sane island of the planet did not suffice to soothe him any more than the memory of the Enchanted Grove. All these things, and many more, were annoying; and yet a very intimate observer might have suspected that something was wrong with Mr. Mandeville that went beyond annoyance.

If it be possible for a heavy and healthy man to look haggard, he looked haggard. His face was full, but his eye-sockets were hollow; his mouth twitched as if it were always trying to bite the black strip of moustache that was just too short to be bitten. He might have been a man who had begun to take drugs; but even on that assumption there was something that suggested that he had a reason for doing it; that the drug was not the cause of the tragedy, but the tragedy the cause of the drug. Whatever was his deeper secret, it seemed to inhabit that dark end of the long passage where was the entrance to his own little study; and as he went along the empty corridor, he threw back a nervous glance now and then.

However, business is business; and he made his way to the opposite end of the passage where the blank green door of Miss Maroni defied the world. A group of actors and other people involved were already standing in front of it, conferring and considering, one might almost fancy, the advisability of a battering-ram. The group contained one figure, at least, who was already well enough known; whose photograph was on many mantelpieces and his autograph in many albums. For though Norman Knight was playing the hero in a theatre that was still a little provincial and old-fashioned and capable of calling him the first walking gentleman, he, at least, was certainly on the way to wider triumphs. He was a good-looking man with a long cleft chin and fair hair low on his forehead, giving him a rather Neronian look that did not altogether correspond to his impulsive and plunging movements. The group also contained Ralph Randall, who generally acted elderly character parts, and had a humorous hatchet face, blue with shaving, and discoloured with grease paint. It contained Mandeville’s second walking gentleman, carrying on the not yet wholly vanished tradition of Charles’s Friend, a dark, curly-haired youth of somewhat Semitic profile bearing the name of Aubrey Vernon.

It included Mr. Mundon Mandeville’s wife’s maid or dresser, a very powerful-looking person with tight red hair and a hard wooden face. It also, incidentally, included Mandeville’s wife, a quiet woman in the background, with a pale, patient face, the lines of which had not lost a classical symmetry and severity, but which looked all the paler because her very eyes were pale, and her pale yellow hair lay in two plain bands like some very archaic Madonna. Not everybody knew that she had once been a serious and successful actress in Ibsen and the intellectual drama. But her husband did not think much of problem plays; and certainly at the moment was more interested in the problem of getting a foreign actress out of a locked room; a new version of the conjuring trick of the Vanishing Lady.

"Hasn't she come out yet?" he demanded, speaking to his wife's business-like attendant rather than to his wife.

"No, sir," answered the woman — who was known as Mrs. Sands — in a sombre manner.

"We are beginning to get a little alarmed," said old Randall. "She seemed quite unbalanced, and we're afraid she might even do herself some mischief."

"Hell!" said Mandeville in his simple and artless way. "Advertisement's very good, but we don't want that sort of advertisement. Hasn't she any friends here? Has nobody any influence with her?"

"Jarvis thinks the only man who might manage her is her own priest round the corner," said Randall; "and in case she does start hanging herself on a hat peg, I really thought perhaps he'd better be here. Jarvis has gone to fetch him … and, as a matter of fact, here he comes."

Two more figures appeared in that subterranean passage under the stage: the first was Ashton Jarvis, a jolly fellow who generally acted villains, but who had surrendered that high vocation for the moment to the curly-headed youth with the nose. The other figure was short and square and clad all in black; it was Father Brown from the church round the corner.

Father Brown seemed to take it quite naturally and even casually, that he should be called in to consider the queer conduct of one of his flock, whether she was to be regarded as a black sheep or only as a lost lamb. But he did not seem to think much of the suggestion of suicide.

"I suppose there was some reason for her flying off the handle like that," he said. "Does anybody know what it was?"

"Dissatisfied with her part, I believe," said the older actor.

"They always are," growled Mr. Mundon Mandeville. "And I thought my wife would look after those arrangements."

"I can only say," said Mrs. Mundon Mandeville rather wearily, "that I gave her what ought to be the best part. It's supposed to be what stage-struck young women want, isn't it — to act the beautiful young heroine and marry the beautiful young hero in a shower of bouquets and cheers from the gallery? Women of my age naturally have to fall back on acting respectable matrons, and I was careful to confine myself to that."

"It would be devilish awkward to alter the parts now, anyhow," said Randall.

"It's not to be thought of," declared Norman Knight firmly. "Why, I could hardly act — but anyhow it's much too late."

Father Brown had slipped forward and was standing outside the locked door listening.

"Is there no sound?" asked the manager anxiously; and then added in a lower voice: "Do you think she can have done herself in?"

"There is a certain sound," replied Father Brown calmly. "I should be inclined to deduce from the sound that she is engaged in breaking windows or looking-glasses, probably with her feet. No; I do not think there is much danger of her going on to destroy herself. Breaking looking-glasses with your feet is a very unusual prelude to suicide. If she had been a German, gone away to think quietly about metaphysics and weltschmerz, I should be all for breaking the door down. These Italians don't really die so easily; and are not liable to kill themselves in a rage. Somebody else, perhaps — yes, possibly — it might be well to take ordinary precautions if she comes out with a leap."

"So you're not in favour of forcing the door?" asked Mandeville.

"Not if you want her to act in your play," replied Father Brown. "If you do that, she'll raise the roof and refuse to stay in the place; if you leave her alone — she'll probably come out from mere curiosity. If I were you, I should just leave somebody to guard the door, more or less, and trust to time for an hour or two."

"In that case," said Mandeville, "we can only get on with rehearsing the scenes where she doesn't appear. My wife will arrange all that is necessary for scenery just now. After all, the fourth act is the main business. You had better get on with that."

"Not a dress rehearsal," said Mandeville's wife to the others.

"Very well," said Knight, "not a dress rehearsal, of course. I wish the dresses of the infernal period weren't so elaborate."

"What is the play?" asked the priest with a touch of curiosity.

"The School for Scandal," said Mandeville. "It may be literature, but I want plays. My wife likes what she calls classical comedies. A long sight more classic than comic."

At this moment, the old doorkeeper known as Sam, and the solitary inhabitant of the theatre during off-hours, came waddling up to the manager with a card, to say that Lady Miriam Marden wished to see him. He turned away, but Father Brown continued to blink steadily for a few seconds in the direction of the manager’s wife, and saw that her wan face wore a faint smile; not altogether a cheerful smile.

Father Brown moved off in company with the man who had brought him in, who happened, indeed, to be a friend and person of a similar persuasion, which is not uncommon among actors. As he moved off, however, he heard Mrs. Mandeville give quiet directions to Mrs. Sands that she should take up the post of watcher beside the closed door.

“Mrs. Mandeville seems to be an intelligent woman,” said the priest to his companion, “though she keeps so much in the background.”

“She was once a highly intellectual woman,” said Jarvis sadly; “rather washed-out and wasted, some would say, by marrying a bounder like Mandeville. She has the very highest ideals of the drama, you know; but, of course, it isn’t often she can get her lord and master to look at anything in that light. Do you know, he actually wanted a woman like that to act as a pantomime boy? Admitted that she was a fine actress, but said pantomimes paid better. That will give you about a measure of his psychological insight and sensibility. But she never complained. As she said to me once: ‘Complaint always comes back in an echo from the ends of the world; but silence strengthens us.’ If only she were married to somebody who understood her ideas she might have been one of the great actresses of the age; indeed, the highbrow critics still think a lot of her. As it is, she is married to that.”

And he pointed to where the big black bulk of Mandeville stood with his back to them, talking to the ladies who had summoned him forth into the vestibule. Lady Miriam was a very long and languid and elegant lady, handsome in a recent fashion largely modelled on Egyptian mummies; her dark hair cut low and square, like a sort of helmet, and her lips very painted and prominent and giving her a permanent expression of contempt. Her companion was a very vivacious lady with an ugly attractive face and hair powdered with grey. She was a Miss Theresa Talbot and she talked a great deal, while her companion seemed too tired to talk at all. Only, just as the two men passed. Lady Miriam summoned up the energy to say:

“Plays are a bore; but I’ve never seen a rehearsal in ordinary clothes. Might be a bit funny. Somehow, nowadays, one can never find a thing one’s never seen.”

“Now, Mr. Mandeville,” said Miss Talbot, tapping him on the arm with animated persistence, “you simply must let us see that rehearsal. We can’t come to-night, and we don’t want to. We want to see all the funny people in the wrong clothes.”

“Of course I can give you a box if you wish it,” said Mandeville hastily. “Perhaps your ladyship would come this way.” And he led them off down another corridor.

“I wonder,” said Jarvis in a meditative manner, “whether even Mandeville prefers that sort of woman.”

“Well,” asked his clerical companion, “have you any reason to suppose that Mandeville does prefer her?”

Jarvis looked at him steadily for an instant before answering.

“Mandeville is a mystery,” he said gravely. “Oh, yes, I know that he looks about as commonplace a cad as ever walked down Piccadilly. But he really is a mystery for all that. There’s something on his conscience. There’s a shadow in his life. And I doubt whether it has anything more to do with a few fashionable flirtations than it has with his poor neglected wife. If it has, there’s something more in them than meets the eye. As a matter of fact, I happen to know rather more about it than anyone else does, merely by accident. But even I can’t make anything of what I know, except a mystery.”

He looked around him in the vestibule to see that they were alone and then added, lowering his voice:

“I don’t mind telling you, because I know you are a tower of silence where secrets are concerned. But I had a curious shock the other day; and it has been repeated several times since. You know that Mandeville always works in that little room at the end of the passage, just under the stage. Well, twice over I happened to pass by there when everyone thought he was alone; and what’s more, when I myself happened to be able to account for all the women in the company, and all the women likely to have to do with him, being absent or at their usual posts.”

“All the women?” remarked Father Brown inquiringly.

“There was a woman with him,” said Jarvis almost in a whisper. “There is some woman who is always visiting him; somebody that none of us knows. I don’t even know how she comes there, since it isn’t down the passage to the door; but I think I once saw a veiled or cloaked figure passing out into the twilight at the back of the theatre, like a ghost. But she can't be a ghost. And I don't believe she's even an ordinary 'affair'. I don't think it's love-making. I think it's blackmail."

"What makes you think that?" asked the other.

"Because," said Jarvis, his face turning from grave to grim, "I once heard sounds like a quarrel; and then the strange woman said in a metallic, menacing voice, four words: 'I am your wife.'"

"You think he's a bigamist," said Father Brown reflectively. "Well, bigamy and blackmail often go together, of course. But she may be bluffing as well as blackmailing. She may be mad. These theatrical people often have monomaniacs running after them. You may be right, but I shouldn't jump to conclusions. . . . And talking about theatrical people, isn't the rehearsal going to begin, and aren't you a theatrical person?"

"I'm not on in this scene," said Jarvis with a smile. "They're only doing one act, you know, until your Italian friend comes to her senses."

"Talking about my Italian friend," observed the priest, "I should rather like to know whether she has come to her senses."

"We can go back and see, if you like," said Jarvis; and they descended again to the basement and the long passage, at one end of which was Mandeville's study and at the other the closed door of Signora Maroni. The door seemed to be still closed; and Mrs. Sands sat grimly outside it, as motionless as a wooden idol.

Near the other end of the passage they caught a glimpse of some of the other actors in the scene mounting the stairs to the stage just above. Vernon and old Randall went ahead, running rapidly up the stairs; but Mrs. Mandeville went more slowly, in her quietly dignified fashion, and Norman Knight seemed to linger a little to speak to her. A few words fell on the ears of the unintentional eavesdroppers as they passed.

"I tell you a woman visits him," Knight was saying violently.

"Hush!" said the lady in her voice of silver that still had in it something of steel. "You must not talk like this. Remember, he is my husband."

"I wish to God I could forget it," said Knight, and rushed up the stairs to the stage.

The lady followed him, still pale and calm, to take up her own position there.

"Somebody else knows it," said the priest quietly; "but I doubt whether it is any business of ours."

“Yes,” muttered Jarvis; “it seems as if everybody knows it and nobody knows anything about it.”

They proceeded along the passage to the other end, where the rigid attendant sat outside the Italian’s door.

“No; she ain’t come out yet,” said the woman in her sullen way; “and she ain’t dead, for I heard her moving about now and then. I dunno what tricks she’s up to.”

“Do you happen to know, ma’am,” said Father Brown with abrupt politeness, “where Mr. Mandeville is just now?”

“Yes,” she replied promptly. “Saw him go into his little room at the end of the passage a minute or two ago; just before the prompter called and the curtain went up — Must be there still, for I ain’t seen him come out.”

“There’s no other door to his office, you mean,” said Father Brown in an off-hand way. “Well, I suppose the rehearsal’s going in full swing now, for all the Signora’s sulking.”

“Yes,” said Jarvis after a moment’s silence; “I can just hear the voices on the stage from here. Old Randall has a splendid carrying voice.”

They both remained for an instant in a listening attitude, so that the booming voice of the actor on the stage could indeed be heard rolling faintly down the stairs and along the passage. Before they had spoken again or resumed their normal poise, their ears were filled with another sound. It was a dull but heavy crash and it came from behind the closed door of Mundon Mandeville’s private room.

Father Brown went racing along the passage like an arrow from the bow and was struggling with the door-handle before Jarvis had wakened with a start and begun to follow him.

“The door is locked,” said the priest, turning a face that was a little pale. “And I am all in favour of breaking down this door.”

“Do you mean,” asked Jarvis with a rather ghastly look, “that the unknown visitor has got in here again? Do you think it’s anything serious?” After a moment he added: “I may be able to push back the bolt; I know the fastening on these doors.”

He knelt down and pulled out a pocket-knife with a long steel implement, manipulated it for a moment, and the door swung open on the manager’s study. Almost the first thing they noticed was that there was no other door and even no window, but a great electric lamp stood on the table. But it was not quite the first thing that they noticed; for even before that they had seen that Mandeville was lying flat on his face in the middle of the room and the blood was crawling out from under his fallen face like a pattern of scarlet snakes that glittered evilly in that unnatural subterranean light.

They did not know how long they had been staring at each other when Jarvis said, like one letting loose something that he had held back with his breath:

"If the stranger got in somehow, she has gone somehow."

"Perhaps we think too much about the stranger," said Father Brown. "There are so many strange things in this strange theatre that you rather tend to forget some of them."

"Why, which things do you mean?" asked his friend quickly.

"There are many," said the priest. "There is the other locked door, for instance."

"But the other door is locked," cried Jarvis staring.

"But you forgot it all the same," said Father Brown. A few moments afterwards he said thoughtfully: "That Mrs. Sands is a grumpy and gloomy sort of card."

"Do you mean," asked the other in a lowered voice, "that she's lying and the Italian did come out?"

"No," said the priest calmly; "I think I meant it more or less as a detached study of character."

"You can't mean," cried the actor, "that Mrs. Sands did it herself?"

"I didn't mean a study of her character," said Father Brown.

While they had been exchanging these abrupt reflections, Father Brown had knelt down by the body and ascertained that it was beyond any hope or question a dead body. Lying beside it, though not immediately visible from the doorway, was a dagger of the theatrical sort; lying as if it had fallen from the wound or from the hand of the assassin. According to Jarvis, who recognized the instrument, there was not very much to be learned from it, unless the experts could find some finger-prints. It was a property dagger; that is, it was nobody's property; it had been kicking about the theatre for a long time, and anybody might have picked it up. Then the priest rose and looked gravely round the room.

"We must send for the police," he said; "and for a doctor, though the doctor comes too late. Looking at this room, by the way, I don't see how our Italian friend could manage it."

“The Italian!” cried his friend; “I should think not. I should have thought she had an alibi, if anybody had. Two separate rooms, both locked, at opposite ends of a long passage, with a fixed witness watching it.”

“No,” said Father Brown. “Not quite. The difficulty is how she could have got in this end. I think she might have got out the other end.”

“And why?” asked the other.

“I told you,” said Father Brown, “that it sounded as if she was breaking glass — mirrors or windows. Stupidly enough I forgot something I knew quite well; that she is pretty superstitious. She wouldn’t be likely to break a mirror; so I suspect she broke a window. It’s true that all this is under the ground floor; but it might be a skylight or a window opening on an area. But there don’t seem to be any skylights or areas here.” And he stared at the ceiling very intently for a considerable time.

Suddenly he came back to conscious life again with a start. “We must go upstairs and telephone and tell everybody. It is pretty painful ... My God, can you hear those actors still shouting and ranting upstairs? The play is still going on. I suppose that’s what they mean by tragic irony.”

When it was fated that the theatre should be turned into a house of mourning, an opportunity was given to the actors to show many of the real virtues of their type and trade. They did, as the phrase goes, behave like gentlemen; and not only like first walking gentlemen. They had not all of them liked or trusted Mandeville, but they knew exactly the right things to say about him; they showed not only sympathy but delicacy in their attitude to his widow. She had become, in a new and very different sense, a tragedy queen — her lightest word was law and while she moved about slowly and sadly, they ran her many errands.

“She was always a strong character,” said old Randall rather huskily; “and had the best brains of any of us. Of course poor Mandeville was never on her level in education and so on; but she always did her duty splendidly. It was quite pathetic the way she would sometimes say she wished she had more intellectual life; but Mandeville — well, nil nisi bonum, as they say.” And the old gentleman went away wagging his head sadly.

“Nil nisi bonum indeed,” said Jarvis grimly. “I don’t think Randall at any rate has heard of the story of the strange lady visitor. By the way, don’t you think it probably was the strange woman?”

“It depends,” said the priest, “whom you mean by the strange woman.”

“Oh! I don’t mean the Italian woman,” said Jarvis hastily. “Though, as a matter of fact, you were quite right about her, too. When they went in the skylight was smashed and the room was empty; but so far as the police can discover, she simply went home in the most harmless fashion. No, I mean the woman who was heard threatening him at that secret meeting; the woman who said she was his wife. Do you think she really was his wife?”

“It is possible,” said Father Brown, staring blankly into the void, “that she really was his wife.”

“That would give us the motive of jealousy over his bigamous remarriage,” reflected Jarvis, “for the body was not robbed in any way. No need to poke about for thieving servants or even impecunious actors. But as for that, of course, you’ve noticed the outstanding and peculiar thing about the case?”

“I have noticed several peculiar things,” said Father Brown. “Which one do you mean?”

“I mean the corporate alibi,” said Jarvis gravely. “It’s not often that practically a whole company has a public alibi like that; an alibi on a lighted stage and all witnessing to each other. As it turns out it is jolly lucky for our friends here that poor Mandeville did put those two silly society women in the box to watch the rehearsal. They can bear witness that the whole act was performed without a hitch, with the characters on the stage all the time. They began long before Mandeville was last seen going into his room. They went on at least five or ten minutes after you and I found his dead body. And, by a lucky coincidence, the moment we actually heard him fall was during the time when all the characters were on the stage together.”

“Yes, that is certainly very important and simplifies everything,” agreed Father Brown. “Let us count the people covered by the alibi. There was Randall: I rather fancy Randall practically hated the manager, though he is very properly covering his feelings just now. But he is ruled out; it was his voice we heard thundering over our heads from the stage. There is our jeune premier, Mr. Knight: I have rather good reason to suppose he was in love with Mandeville’s wife and not concealing that sentiment so much as he might; but he is out of it, for he was on the stage at the same time, being thundered at. There was that amiable Jew who calls himself Aubrey Vernon, he’s out of it; and there’s Mrs. Mandeville, she’s out of it. Their corporate alibi, as you say, depends chiefly on Lady Miriam and her friend in the box; though there is the general common-sense corroboration that the act had to be gone through and the routine of the theatre seems to have suffered no interruption. The legal witnesses, however, are Lady Miriam and her friend, Miss Talbot. I suppose you feel sure they are all right?"

"Lady Miriam?" said Jarvis in surprise. "Oh, yes. ... I suppose you mean that she looks a queer sort of vamp. But you've no notion what even the ladies of the best families are looking like nowadays. Besides, is there any particular reason for doubting their evidence?"

"Only that it brings us up against a blank wall," said Father Brown. "Don't you see that this collective alibi practically covers everybody? Those four were the only performers in the theatre at the time; and there were scarcely any servants in the theatre; none indeed, except old Sam, who guards the only regular entrance, and the woman who guarded Miss Maroni's door. There is nobody else left available but you and me. We certainly might be accused of the crime, especially as we found the body. There seems nobody else who can be accused. You didn't happen to kill him when I wasn't looking, I suppose?"

Jarvis looked up with a slight start and stared a moment, then the broad grin returned to his swarthy face. He shook his head.

"You didn't do it," said Father Brown; "and we will assume for the moment, merely for the sake of argument, that I didn't do it. The people on the stage being out of it, it really leaves the Signora behind her locked door, the sentinel in front of her door, and old Sam. Or are you thinking of the two ladies in the box? Of course they might have slipped out of the box."

"No," said Jarvis; "I am thinking of the unknown woman who came and told Mandeville she was his wife."

"Perhaps she was," said the priest; and this time there was a note in his steady voice that made his companion start to his feet once more and lean across the table.

"We said," he observed in a low, eager voice, "that this first wife might have been jealous of the other wife."

"No," said Father Brown; "she might have been jealous of the Italian girl, perhaps, or of Lady Miriam Marden. But she was not jealous of the other wife."

"And why not?"

"Because there was no other wife," said Father Brown. "So far from being a bigamist, Mr. Mandeville seems to me to have been a highly monogamous person. His wife was almost too much with him; so much with him that you all charitably suppose that she must be somebody else. But I don’t see how she could have been with him when he was killed, for we agree that she was acting all the time in front of the footlights. Acting an important part, too. ...”

“Do you really mean,” cried Jarvis, “that the strange woman who haunted him like a ghost was only the Mrs. Mandeville we know?” But he received no answer; for Father Brown was staring into vacancy with a blank expression almost like an idiot’s. He always did look most idiotic at the instant when he was most intelligent.

The next moment he scrambled to his feet, looking very harassed and distressed. “This is awful,” he said. “I’m not sure it isn’t the worst business I ever had; but I’ve got to go through with it. Would you go and ask Mrs. Mandeville if I may speak to her in private?”

“Oh, certainly,” said Jarvis, as he turned towards the door. “But what’s the matter with you?”

“Only being a born fool,” said Father Brown; “a very common complaint in this vale of tears. I was fool enough to forget altogether that the play was The School For Scandal.”

He walked restlessly up and down the room until Jarvis re-appeared at the door with an altered and even alarmed face.

“I can’t find her anywhere,” he said. “Nobody seems to have seen her.”

“They haven’t seen Norman Knight either, have they?” asked Father Brown dryly. “Well, it saves me the most painful interview of my life. Saving the grace of God, I was very nearly frightened of that woman. But she was frightened of me, too; frightened of something I’d seen or said. Knight was always begging her to bolt with him. Now she’s done it; and I’m devilish sorry for him.”

“For him?” inquired Jarvis.

“Well, it can’t be very nice to elope with a murderess,” said the other dispassionately. “But as a matter of fact she was something very much worse than a murderess.”

“And what is that?”

“An egoist,” said Father Brown. “She was the sort of person who had looked in the mirror before looking out of the window, and it is the worst calamity of mortal life. The looking-glass was unlucky for her, all right; but rather because it wasn’t broken.”

"I can't understand what all this means," said Jarvis. "Everybody regarded her as a person of the most exalted ideals, almost moving on a higher spiritual plane than the rest of us. ..."

"She regarded herself in that light," said the other; "and she knew how to hypnotize everybody else into it. Perhaps I hadn't known her long enough to be wrong about her. But I knew the sort of person she was five minutes after I clapped eyes on her."

"Oh, come." cried Jarvis; "I'm sure her behaviour about the Italian was beautiful."

"Her behaviour always was beautiful," said the other. "I've heard from everybody here all about her refinements and subtleties and spiritual soarings above poor Mandeville's head. But all these spiritualities and subtleties seem to me to boil themselves down to the simple fact that she certainly was a lady and he most certainly was not a gentleman. But, do you know, I have never felt quite sure that St. Peter will make that the only test at the gate of heaven.

"As for the rest," he went on with increasing animation, "I knew from the very first words she said that she was not really being fair to the poor Italian, with all her fine airs of frigid magnanimity. And again, I realized it when I knew that the play was The School for Scandal.'

"You are going rather too fast for me," said Jarvis in some bewilderment. "What does it matter what the play was?"

"Well," said the priest, "she said she had given the girl the part of the beautiful heroine and had retired into the background herself with the older part of a matron. Now that might have applied to almost any play; but it falsifies the facts about that particular play. She can only have meant that she gave the other actress the part of Maria, which is hardly a part at all. And the part of the obscure and self-effacing married woman, if you please, must have been the part of Lady Teazle, which is the only part any actress wants to act. If the Italian was a first-rate actress who had been promised a first-rate part, there was really some excuse, or at least some cause, for her mad Italian rage. There generally is for mad Italian rages: Latins are logical and have a reason for going mad. But that one little thing let in daylight for me on the meaning of her magnanimity. And there was another thing, even then. You laughed when I said that the sulky look of Mrs. Sands was a study in character; but not in the character of Mrs. Sands. But it was true. If you want to know what a lady is really like, don't look at her; for she may be too clever for you. Don’t look at the men round her, for they may be too silly about her. But look at some other woman who is always near to her, and especially one who is under her. You will see in that mirror her real face, and the face mirrored in Mrs. Sands was very ugly.

“And as for all the other impressions, what were they? I heard a lot about the unworthiness of poor old Mandeville; but it was all about his being unworthy other, and I am pretty certain it came indirectly from her. And, even so, it betrayed itself. Obviously, from what every man said, she had confided in every man about her confounded intellectual loneliness. You yourself said she never complained; and then quoted her about how her uncomplaining silence strengthened her soul. And that is just the note; that’s the unmistakable style. People who complain are just jolly, human Christian nuisances; I don’t mind them. But people who complain that they never complain are the devil. They are really the devil; isn’t that swagger of stoicism the whole point of the Byronic cult of Satan? I heard all this; but for the life of me I couldn’t hear of anything tangible she had to complain of. Nobody pretended that her husband drank, or beat her, or left her without money, or even was unfaithful, until the rumour about the secret meetings, which were simply her own melodramatic habit of pestering him with curtain-lectures in his own business office. And when one looked at the facts, apart from the atmospheric impression of martyrdom she contrived to spread, the facts were really quite the other way. Mandeville left off making money on pantomimes to please her; he started losing money on classical drama to please her. She arranged the scenery and furniture as she liked. She wanted Sheridan’s play and she had it; she wanted the part of Lady Teazle and she had it; she wanted a rehearsal without costume at that particular hour and she had it. It may be worth remarking on the curious fact that she wanted that.”

“But what is the use of all this tirade?” asked the actor, who had hardly ever heard his clerical friend, make so long a speech before. “We seem to have got a long way from the murder in all this psychological business. She may have eloped with Knight; she may have bamboozled Randall; she may have bamboozled me. But she can’t have murdered her husband — for everyone agrees she was on the stage through the whole scene. She may be wicked; but she isn’t a witch.”

“Well, I wouldn’t be so sure,” said Father Brown, with a smile. “But she didn’t need to use any witchcraft in this case. I know now that she did it, and very simply indeed.”

“Why are you so sure of that?” asked Jarvis, looking at him in a puzzled way.

“Because the play was The School for Scandal,” replied Father Brown, “and that particular act of The School for Scandal. I should like to remind you, as I said just now, that she always arranged the furniture how she liked. I should also like to remind you that this stage was built and used for pantomimes; it would naturally have trap-doors and trick exits of that sort. And when you say that witnesses could attest to having seen all the performers on the stage, I should like to remind you that in the principal scene of The School for Scandal one of the principal performers remains for a considerable time on the stage, but is not seen. She is technically ‘on,’ but she might practically be very much ‘off.’ That is the Screen of Lady Teazle and the Alibi of Mrs. Mandeville.”

There was a silence and then the actor said: “You think she slipped through a trap-door behind a screen down to the floor below, where the manager’s room was?”

“She certainly slipped away in some fashion; and that is the most probable fashion,” said the other. “I think it all the more probable because she took the opportunity of an undress rehearsal, and even indeed arranged for one. It is a guess; but I fancy if it had been a dress rehearsal it might have been more difficult to get through a trap-door in the hoops of the eighteenth century. There are many little difficulties, of course, but I think they could all be met in time and in turn.”

“What I can’t meet is the big difficulty,” said Jarvis, putting his head on his hand with a sort of groan. “I simply can’t bring myself to believe that a radiant and serene creature like that could so lose, so to speak, her bodily balance, to say nothing of her moral balance. Was any motive strong enough? Was she very much in love with Knight?”

“I hope so,” replied his companion; “for really it would be the most human excuse. But I’m sorry to say that I have my doubts. She wanted to get rid of her husband, who was an old-fashioned, provincial hack, not even making much money. She wanted to have a career as the brilliant wife of a brilliant and rapidly-rising actor. But she didn’t want in that sense to act in The School for Scandal. She wouldn’t have run away with a man except in the last resort. It wasn’t a human passion with her, but a sort of hellish respectability. She was always dogging her husband in secret and badgering him to divorce himself or otherwise get out of the way; and as he refused he paid at last for his refusal. There's another thing you've got to remember. You talk about these highbrows having a higher art and a more philosophical drama. But remember what a lot of the philosophy is! Remember what sort of conduct those highbrows often present to the highest! All about the Will to Power and the Right to Live and the Right to Experience — damned nonsense and more than damned nonsense — nonsense that can damn."

Father Brown frowned, which he did very rarely; and there was still a cloud on his brow as he put on his hat and went out into the night.

The Vanishing of Vaudrey

SIR ARTHUR VAUDREY, in his light-grey summer suit, and wearing on his grey head the white hat which he so boldly affected, went walking briskly up the road by the river from his own house to the little group of houses that were almost like outhouses to his own, entered that little hamlet, and then vanished completely as if he had been carried away by the fairies.

The disappearance seemed the more absolute and abrupt because of the familiarity of the scene and the extreme simplicity of the conditions of the problem. The hamlet could not be called a village; indeed, it was little more than a small and strangely-isolated street. It stood in the middle of wide and open fields and plains, a mere string of the four or five shops absolutely needed by the neighbours; that is, by a few farmers and the family at the great house. There was a butcher’s at the corner, at which, it appeared, Sir Arthur had last been seen. He was seen by two young men staying at his house — Evan Smith, who was acting as his secretary, and John Dalmon, who was generally supposed to be engaged to his ward. There was next to the butcher’s a small shop combining a large number of functions, such as is found in villages, in which a little old woman sold sweets, walking-sticks, golf-balls, gum, balls of string and a very faded sort of stationery. Beyond this was the tobacconist, to which the two young men were betaking themselves when they last caught a glimpse of their host standing in front of the butcher’s shop; and beyond that was a dingy little dressmaker’s, kept by two ladies. A pale and shiny shop, offering to the passer-by great goblets of very wan, green lemonade, completed the block of buildings; for the only real and Christian inn in the neighbourhood stood by itself some way, down the main road. Between the inn and the hamlet was a cross-roads, at which stood a policeman and a uniformed official of a motoring club; and both agreed that Sir Arthur had never passed that point on the road.

It had been at an early hour of a very brilliant summer day that the old gentleman had gone gaily striding up the road, swinging his walking-stick and flapping his yellow gloves. He was a good deal of a dandy, but one of a vigorous and virile sort, especially for his age. His bodily strength and activity were still very remarkable, and his curly hair might have been a yellow so pale as to look white instead of a white that was a faded yellow. His clean-shaven face was handsome, with a high-bridged nose like the

Duke of Wellington’s; but the most outstanding features were his eyes. They were not merely metaphorically outstanding; something prominent and almost bulging about them was perhaps the only disproportion in his features; but his lips were sensitive and set a little tightly, as if by an act of will. He was the squire of all that country and the owner of the little hamlet. In that sort of place everybody not only knows everybody else, but generally knows where anybody is at any given moment. The normal course would have been for Sir Arthur to walk to the village, to say whatever he wanted to say to the butcher or anybody else, and then walk back to his house again, all in the course of about half an hour: as the two young men did when they had bought their cigarettes. But they saw nobody on the road returning; indeed, there was nobody in sight except the one other guest at the house, a certain Dr. Abbott, who was sitting with his broad back to them on the river bank, very patiently fishing.

When all the three guests returned to breakfast, they seemed to think little or nothing of the continued absence of the squire; but when the day wore on and he missed one meal after another, they naturally began to be puzzled, and Sybil Rye, the lady of the household, began to be seriously alarmed. Expeditions of discovery were dispatched to the village again and again without finding any trace; and eventually, when darkness fell, the house was full of a definite fear. Sybil had sent for Father Brown, who was a friend of hers and had helped her out of a difficulty in the past; and under the pressure of the apparent peril he had consented to remain at the house and see it through.

Thus it happened that when the new day’s dawn broke without news, Father Brown was early afoot and on the look-out for anything; his black, stumpy figure could be seen pacing the garden path where the garden was embanked along the river, as he scanned the landscape up and down with his short-sighted and rather misty gaze.

He realized that another figure was moving even more restlessly along the embankment, and saluted Evan Smith, the secretary, by name.

Evan Smith was a tall, fair-haired young man, looking rather harassed, as was perhaps natural in that hour of distraction. But something of the sort hung about him at all times. Perhaps it was more marked because he had the sort of athletic reach and poise and the sort of leonine yellow hair and moustache which accompany (always in fiction and sometimes in fact) a frank and cheerful demeanour of “English youth.” As in his case they accompanied deep and cavernous eyes and a rather haggard look, the contrast with the conventional tall figure and fair hair of romance may have had a touch of something sinister. But Father Brown smiled at him amiably enough and then said more seriously:

“This is a trying business.”

“It’s a very trying business for Miss Rye,” answered the young man gloomily; “and I don’t see why I should disguise what’s the worst part of it for me, even if she is engaged to Dalmon. Shocked, I suppose?”

Father Brown did not look very much shocked, but his face was often rather expressionless; he merely said, mildly:

“Naturally, we all sympathize with her anxiety. I suppose you haven’t any news or views in the matter?”

“I haven’t any news exactly.” answered Smith; “no news from outside at least. As for views. ...” And he relapsed into moody silence.

“I should be very glad to hear your views,” said the little priest pleasantly. “I hope you don’t mind my saying that you seem to have something on your mind.”

The young man stirred rather than started and looked at the priest steadily, with a frown that threw his hollow eyes into dense shadow.

“Well, you’re right enough,” he said at last. “I suppose I shall have to tell somebody. And you seem a safe sort of person to tell.”

“Do you know what has happened to Sir Arthur?” asked Father Brown calmly, as if it were the most casual matter in the world.

“Yes,” said the secretary harshly, “I think I know what has happened to Sir Arthur.”

“A beautiful morning,” said a bland voice in his ear; “a beautiful morning for a rather melancholy meeting.”

This time the secretary jumped as if he had been shot, as the large shadow of Dr. Abbott fell across his path in the already strong sunshine. Dr. Abbott was still in his dressing-gown — a sumptuous oriental dressing-gown covered with coloured flowers and dragons, looking rather like one of the most brilliant flower-beds that were growing under the glowing sun. He also wore large, flat slippers, which was doubtless why he had come so close to the others without being heard. He would normally have seemed the last person for such a light and airy approach, for he was a very big, broad and heavy man, with a powerful benevolent face very much sunburnt, in a frame of old-fashioned grey whiskers and chin beard, which hung about him luxuriantly, like the long, grey curls of his venerable head. His long slits of eyes were rather sleepy and, indeed, he was an elderly gentleman to be up so early; but he had a look at once robust and weatherbeaten, as of an old farmer or sea captain who had once been out in all weathers. He was the only old comrade and contemporary of the squire in the company that met at the house.

"It seems truly extraordinary," he said, shaking his head. "Those little houses are like dolls' houses, always open front and back, and there's hardly room to hide anybody, even if they wanted to hide him. And I'm sure they don't. Dalmon and I cross-examined them all yesterday; they're mostly little old women that couldn't hurt a fly. The men are nearly all away harvesting, except the butcher; and Arthur was seen coming out of the butcher's. And nothing could have happened along that stretch by the river, for I was fishing there all day."

Then he looked at Smith and the look in his long eyes seemed for the moment not only sleepy, but a little sly.

"I think you and Dalmon can testify," he said, "that you saw me sitting there through your whole journey there and back."

"Yes," said Evan Smith shortly, and seemed rather impatient at the long interruption.

"The only thing I can think of," went on Dr. Abbott slowly; and then the interruption was itself interrupted. A figure at once light and sturdy strode very rapidly across the green lawn between the gay flowerbeds, and John Dalmon appeared among them, holding a paper in his hand. He was neatly dressed and rather swarthy, with a very fine square Napoleonic face and very sad eyes — eyes so sad that they looked almost dead. He seemed to be still young, but his black hair had gone prematurely grey about the temples.

"I've just had this telegram from the police," he said "I wired to them last night and they say they're sending down a man at once. Do you know, Dr. Abbott, of anybody else we ought to send for? Relations, I mean, and that sort of thing."

"There is his nephew, Vernon Vaudrey, of course," said the old man. "If you will come with me, I think I can give you his address and — and tell you something rather special about him."

Dr. Abbott and Dalmon moved away in the direction of the house and, when they had gone a certain distance, Father Brown said simply, as if there had been no interruption:

"You were saying?"

"You're a cool hand," said the secretary. "I suppose it comes of hearing confessions. I feel rather as if I were going to make a confession. Some people would feel a bit jolted out of the mood of confidence by that queer old elephant creeping up like a snake. But I suppose I'd better stick to it, though it really isn't my confession, but somebody else's." He stopped a moment, frowning and pulling his moustache; then he said, abruptly:

"I believe Sir Arthur has bolted, and I believe I know why."

There was a silence and then he exploded again.

"I'm in a damnable position, and most people would say I was doing a damnable thing. I am now going to appear in the character of a sneak and a skunk and I believe I am doing my duty."

"You must be the judge," said Father Brown gravely. "What is the matter with your duty?"

"I'm in the perfectly foul position of telling tales against a rival, and a successful rival, too," said the young man bitterly; "and I don't know what else in the world I can do. You were asking what was the explanation of Vaudrey's disappearance. I am absolutely convinced that Dalmon is the explanation."

"You mean," said the priest, with composure, "that Dalmon has killed Sir Arthur?"

"No!" exploded Smith, with startling violence. "No, a hundred times! He hasn't done that, whatever else he's done. He isn't a murderer, whatever else he is. He has the best of all alibis; the evidence of a man who hates him. I'm not likely to perjure myself for love of Dalmon; and I could swear in any court he did nothing to the old man yesterday. Dalmon and I were together all day, or all that part of the day, and he did nothing in the village except buy cigarettes, and nothing here except smoke them and read in the library. No; I believe he is a criminal, but he did not kill Vaudrey. I might even say more; because he is a criminal he did not kill Vaudrey."

"Yes," said the other patiently, "and what does that mean?"

"It means," replied the secretary, "that he is a criminal committing another crime: and his crime depends on keeping Vaudrey alive."

"Oh, I see," said Father Brown.

"I know Sybil Rye pretty well, and her character is a great part of this story. It is a very fine character in both senses: that is, it is of a noble quality and only too delicate a texture. She is one of those people who are terribly conscientious, without any of that armour of habit and hard common sense that many conscientious people get. She is almost insanely sensitive and at the same time quite unselfish. Her history is curious: she was left literally penniless like a foundling and Sir Arthur took her into his house and treated her with consideration, which puzzled many; for, without being hard on the old man, it was not much in his line. But, when she was about seventeen, the explanation came to her with a shock; for her guardian asked her to marry him. Now I come to the curious part of the story. Somehow or other, Sybil had heard from somebody (I rather suspect from old Abbott) that Sir Arthur Vaudrey, in his wilder youth, had committed some crime or, at least, done some great wrong to somebody, which had got him into serious trouble. I don’t know what it was. But it was a sort of nightmare to the girl at her crude sentimental age, and made him seem like a monster, at least too much so for the close relation of marriage. What she did was incredibly typical of her. With helpless terror and with heroic courage she told him the truth with her own trembling lips. She admitted that her repulsion might be morbid; she confessed it like a secret madness. To her relief and surprise he took it quietly and courteously, and apparently said no more on the subject; and her sense of his generosity was greatly increased by the next stage of the story. There came into her lonely life the influence of an equally lonely man. He was camping-out like a sort of hermit on one of the islands in the river; and I suppose the mystery made him attractive, though I admit he is attractive enough; a gentleman, and quite witty, though very melancholy — which, I suppose, increased the romance. It was this man, Dalmon, of course; and to this day I’m not sure how far she really accepted him; but it got as far as his getting permission to see her guardian. I can fancy her awaiting that interview in an agony of terror and wondering how the old beau would take the appearance of a rival. But here, again, she found she had apparently done him an injustice. He received the younger man with hearty hospitality and seemed to be delighted with the prospects of the young couple. He and Dalmon went shooting and fishing together and were the best of friends, when one day she had another shock. Dalmon let slip in conversation some chance phrase that the old man ‘had not changed much in thirty years,’ and the truth about the odd intimacy burst upon her. All that introduction and hospitality had been a masquerade; the men had obviously known each other before. That was why the younger man had come down rather covertly to that district. That was why the elder man was lending himself so readily to promote the match. I wonder what you are thinking?”

“I know what you are thinking,” said Father Brown, with a smile, “and it seems entirely logical. Here we have Vaudrey, with some ugly story in his past — a mysterious stranger come to haunt him, and getting whatever he wants out of him. In plain words, you think Dalmon is a blackmailer.”

“I do,” said the other; “and a rotten thing to think, too.”

Father Brown reflected for a moment and then said: “I think I should like to go up to the house now and have a talk to Dr. Abbott.”

When he came out of the house again an hour or two afterwards, he may have been talking to Dr. Abbott, but he emerged in company with Sybil Rye, a pale girl with reddish hair and a profile delicate and almost tremulous; at the sight of her, one could instantly understand all the secretary’s story of her shuddering candour. It recalled Godiva and certain tales of virgin martyrs; only the shy can be so shameless for conscience’s sake. Smith came forward to meet them, and for a moment they stood talking on the lawn. The day which had been brilliant from daybreak was now glowing and even glaring; but Father Brown carried his black bundle of an umbrella as well as wearing his black umbrella of a hat; and seemed, in a general way, buttoned up to breast the storm. But perhaps it was only an unconscious effect of attitude; and perhaps the storm was not a material storm.

“What I hate about it all,” Sybil was saying in a low voice, “is the talk that’s beginning already; suspicions against everybody. John and Evan can answer for each other, I suppose; but Dr. Abbott has had an awful scene with the butcher, who thinks he is accused and is throwing accusations about in consequence.”

Evan Smith looked very uncomfortable; then blurted out: “Look here, Sybil, I can’t say much, but we don’t believe there’s any need for all that. It’s all very beastly, but we don’t think there’s been — any violence.”

“Have you got a theory, then?” said the girl, looking instantly at the priest.

“I have heard a theory,” he replied, “which seems to me very convincing.”

He stood looking rather dreamily towards the river; and Smith and Sybil began to talk to each other swiftly, in lowered tones. The priest drifted along the river bank, ruminating, and plunged into a plantation of thin trees on an almost overhanging bank. The strong sun beat on the thin veil of little dancing leaves like small green flames, and all the birds were singing as if the tree had a hundred tongues. A minute or two later, Evan Smith heard his own name called cautiously and yet clearly from the green depths of the thicket. He stepped rapidly in that direction and met Father Brown returning. The priest said to him, in a very low voice:

“Don’t let the lady come down here. Can’t you get rid of her? Ask her to telephone or something; and then come back here again.”

Evan Smith turned with a rather desperate appearance of carelessness and approached the girl; but she was not the sort of person whom it is hard to make busy with small jobs for others. In a very short time she had vanished into the house and Smith turned to find that Father Brown had once more vanished into the thicket. Just beyond the clump of trees was a sort of small chasm where the turf had subsided to the level of the sand by the river. Father Brown was standing on the brink of this cleft, looking down; but, either by accident or design, he was holding his hat in his hand, in spite of the strong sun pouring on his head.

“You had better see this yourself,” he said, heavily, “as a matter of evidence. But I warn you to be prepared.”

“Prepared for what?” asked the other

“Only for the most horrible thing I ever saw in my life,” said Father Brown.

Even Smith stepped to the brink of the bank of turf and with difficulty repressed a cry rather like a scream.

Sir Arthur Vaudrey was glaring and grinning up at him; the face was turned up so that he could have put his foot on it; the head was thrown back, with its wig of whitish yellow hair towards him, so that he saw the face upside down. This made it seem all the more like a part of a nightmare; as if a man were walking about with his head stuck on the wrong way. What was he doing? Was it possible that Vaudrey was really creeping about, hiding in the cracks of field and bank, and peering out at them in this unnatural posture? The rest of the figure seemed hunched and almost crooked, as if it had been crippled or deformed but on looking more closely, this seemed only the foreshortening of limbs fallen in a heap. Was he mad? Was he? The more Smith looked at him the stiffer the posture seemed.

“You can’t see it from here properly,” said Father Brown, “but his throat is cut.”

Smith shuddered suddenly. “I can well believe it’s the most horrible thing you’ve seen,” he said. “I think it’s seeing the face upside down. I’ve seen that face at breakfast, or dinner, every day for ten years; and it always looked quite pleasant and polite. You turn it upside down and it looks like the face of a fiend.”

“The face really is smiling,” said Father Brown, soberly; “which is perhaps not the least part of the riddle. Not many men smile while their throats are being cut, even if they do it themselves. That smile, combined with those gooseberry eyes of his that always seemed standing out of his head, is enough, no doubt, to explain the expression. But it’s true, things look different upside down. Artists often turn their drawings upside down to test their correctness. Sometimes, when it’s difficult to turn the object itself upside down (as in the case of the Matterhorn, let us say), they have been known to stand on their heads, or at least look between their legs.”

The priest, who was talking thus flippantly to steady the other man’s nerves, concluded by saying, in a more serious tone: “I quite understand how it must have upset you. Unfortunately, it also upset something else.”

“What do you mean?”

“It has upset the whole of our very complete theory,” replied the other; and he began clambering down the bank on to the little strip of sand by the river.

“Perhaps he did it himself,” said Smith abruptly. “After all, that’s the most obvious sort of escape, and fits in with our theory very well. He wanted a quiet place and he came here and cut his throat.”

“He didn’t come here at all,” said Father Brown. “At least, not alive, and not by land. He wasn’t killed here; there’s not enough blood. This sun has dried his hair and clothes pretty well by now; but there are the traces of two trickles of water in the sand. Just about here the tide comes up from the sea and makes an eddy that washed the body into the creek and left it when the tide retired. But the body must first have been washed down the river, presumably from the village, for the river runs just behind the row of little houses and shops. Poor Vaudrey died up in the hamlet, somehow; after all, I don’t think he committed suicide; but the trouble is who would, or could, have killed him up in that potty little place?”

He began to draw rough designs with the point of his stumpy umbrella on the strip of sand.

“Let’s see; how does the row of shops run? First, the butcher’s; well, of course, a butcher would be an ideal performer with a large carving-knife. But you saw Vaudrey come out, and it isn’t very probable that he stood in the outer shop while the butcher said: ‘Good morning. Allow me to cut your throat! Thank you. And the next article, please?’ Sir Arthur doesn’t strike me as the sort of man who’d have stood there with a pleasant smile while this happened. He was a very strong and vigorous man, with rather a violent temper. And who else, except the butcher, could have stood up to him? The next shop is kept by an old woman. Then comes the tobacconist, who is certainly a man, but I am told quite a small and timid one. Then there is the dressmaker’s, run by two maiden ladies, and then a refreshment shop run by a man who happens to be in hospital and who has left his wife in charge. There are two or three village lads, assistants and errand boys, but they were away on a special job. The refreshment shop ends the street; there is nothing beyond that but the inn, with the policeman between.”

He made a punch with the ferrule of his umbrella to represent the policeman, and remained moodily staring up the river. Then he made a slight movement with his hand and, stepping quickly across, stooped over the corpse.

“Ah,” he said, straightening himself and letting out a great breath. “The tobacconist! Why in the world didn’t I remember that about the tobacconist?”

“What is the matter with you?” demanded Smith in some exasperation; for Father Brown was rolling his eyes and muttering, and he had uttered the word “tobacconist” as if it were a terrible word of doom.

“Did you notice,” said the priest, after a pause, “something rather curious about his face?”

“Curious, my God!” said Evan, with a retrospective shudder. “Anyhow, his throat was cut. ...”

“I said his face,” said the cleric quietly. “Besides, don’t you notice he has hurt his hand and there’s a small bandage round it?”

“Oh, that has nothing to do with it,” said Evan hastily. “That happened before and was quite an accident. He cut his hand with a broken ink-bottle while we were working together.”

“It has something to do with it, for all that,” replied Father Brown.

There was a long silence, and the priest walked moodily along the sand, trailing his umbrella and sometimes muttering the word “tobacconist,” till the very word chilled his friend with fear. Then he suddenly lifted the umbrella and pointed to a boat-house among the rushes.

“Is that the family boat?” he asked. “I wish you’d just scull me up the river; I want to look at those houses from the back. There’s no time to lose. They may find the body; but we must risk that.”

Smith was already pulling the little boat upstream towards the hamlet before Father Brown spoke again. Then he said:

“By the way, I found out from old Abbott what was the real story about poor Vaudrey’s misdemeanour. It was a rather curious story about an Egyptian official who had insulted him by saying that a good Moslem would avoid swine and Englishmen, but preferred swine; or some such tactful remark. Whatever happened at the time, the quarrel was apparently renewed some years after, when the official visited England; and Vaudrey, in his violent passion, dragged the man to a pig-sty on the farm attached to the country house and threw him in, breaking his arm and leg and leaving him there till next morning. There was rather a row about it, of course, but many people thought Vaudrey had acted in a pardonable passion of patriotism. Anyhow, it seems not quite the thing that would have kept a man silent under deadly blackmail for decades.”

“Then you don’t think it had anything to do with the story we are considering?” asked the secretary, thoughtfully.

“I think it had a thundering lot to do with the story I am considering now,” said Father Brown.

They were now floating past the low wall and the steep strips of back garden running down from the back doors to the river. Father Brown counted them carefully, pointing with his umbrella, and when he came to the third he said again:

“Tobacconist! Is the tobacconist by any chance... .? But I think I’ll act on my guess till I know. Only, I’ll tell you what it was I thought odd about Sir Arthur’s face.”

“And what was that?” asked his companion, pausing and resting on his oars for an instant.

“He was a great dandy,” said Father Brown, “and the face was only half-shaved. . . . Could you stop here a moment? We could tie up the boat to that post.”

A minute or two afterwards they had clambered over the little wall and were mounting the steep cobbled paths of the little garden, with its rectangular beds of vegetables and flowers.

"You see, the tobacconist does grow potatoes," said Father Brown. "Associations with Sir Walter Raleigh, no doubt. Plenty of potatoes and plenty of potato sacks. These little country people have not lost all the habits of peasants; they still run two or three jobs at once. But country tobacconists very often do one odd job extra, that I never thought of till I saw Vaudrey's chin. Nine times out of ten you call the shop the tobacconist's, but it is also the barber's. He'd cut his hand and couldn't shave himself; so he came up here. Does that suggest anything else to you?"

"It suggests a good deal," replied Smith; "but I expect it will suggest a good deal more to you."

"Does it suggest, for instance," observed Father Brown, "the only conditions in which a vigorous and rather violent gentleman might be smiling pleasantly when his throat was cut?"

The next moment they had passed through a dark passage or two at the back of the house, and came into the back room of the shop, dimly lit by filtered light from beyond and a dingy and cracked looking-glass. It seemed, somehow, like the green twilight of a tank; but there was light enough to see the rough apparatus of a barber's shop and the pale and even panic-sticken face of a barber.

Father Brown's eye roamed round the room, which seemed to have been just recently cleaned and tidied, till his gaze found something in a dusty corner just behind the door. It was a hat hanging on a hat-peg. It was a white hat, and one very well known to all that village. And yet, conspicuous as it had always seemed in the street, it seemed only an example of the sort of little thing a certain sort of man often entirely forgets, when he has most carefully washed floors or destroyed stained rags.

"Sir Arthur Vaudrey was shaved here yesterday morning, I think," said Father Brown in a level voice.

To the barber, a small, bald-headed, spectacled man whose name was Wicks, the sudden appearance of these two figures out of his own back premises was like the appearance of two ghosts risen out of a grave under the floor. But it was at once apparent that he had more to frighten him than any fancy of superstition. He shrank, we might almost say that he shrivelled, into a corner of the dark room; and everything about him seemed to dwindle, except his great goblin spectacles.

“Tell me one thing,” continued the priest, quietly. “You had a reason for hating the squire?”

The man in the corner babbled something that Smith could not hear; but the priest nodded.

“I know you had,” he said. “You hated him; and that’s how I know you didn’t kill him. Will you tell us what happened, or shall I?”

There was a silence filled with the faint ticking of a clock in the back kitchen; and then Father Brown went on.

“What happened was this. When Mr. Dalmon stepped inside your outer shop, he asked for some cigarettes that were in the window. You stepped outside for a moment, as shopmen often do, to make sure of what he meant; and in that moment of time he perceived in the inner room the razor you had just laid down, and the yellow-white head of Sir Arthur in the barber’s chair; probably both glimmering in the light of that little window beyond. It took but an instant for him to pick up the razor and cut the throat and come back to the counter. The victim would not even be alarmed at the razor and the hand. He died smiling at his own thoughts. And what thoughts! Nor, I think, was Dalmon alarmed. He had done it so quickly and quietly that Mr. Smith here could have sworn in court that the two were together all the time. But there was somebody who was alarmed, very legitimately, and that was you. You had quarrelled with your landlord about arrears of rent and so on; you came back into your own shop and found your enemy murdered in your own chair, with your own razor. It was not altogether unnatural that you despaired of clearing yourself, and preferred to clear up the mess; to clean the floor and throw the corpse into the river at night, in a potato sack rather loosely tied. It was rather lucky that there were fixed hours after which your barber’s shop was shut; so you had plenty of time. You seem to have remembered everything but the hat. . . . Oh, don’t be frightened; I shall forget everything, including the hat.”

And he passed placidly through the outer shop into the street beyond, followed by the wondering Smith, and leaving behind the barber stunned and staring.

“You see,” said Father Brown to his companion, “it was one of those cases where a motive really is too weak to convict a man and yet strong enough to acquit him. A little nervous fellow like that would be the last man really to kill a big strong man for a tiff about money. But he would be the first man to fear that he would be accused of having done it. ... Ah, there was a thundering difference in the motive of the man who did do it.” And he relapsed into reflection, staring and almost glaring at vacancy.

“It is simply awful,” groaned Evan Smith. “I was abusing Dalmon as a blackmailer and a blackguard an hour or two ago, and yet it breaks me all up to hear he really did this, after all.”

The priest still seemed to be in a sort of trance, like a man staring down into an abyss. At last his lips moved and he murmured, more as if it were a prayer than an oath: “Merciful God, what a horrible revenge!”

His friend questioned him, but he continued as if talking to himself.

“What a horrible tale of hatred! What a vengeance for one mortal worm to take on another! Shall we ever get to the bottom of this bottomless human heart, where such abominable imaginations can abide? God save us all from pride; but I cannot yet make any picture in my mind of hate and vengeance like that.”

“Yes,” said Smith; “and I can’t quite picture why he should kill Vaudrey at all. If Dalmon was a blackmailer, it would seem more natural for Vaudrey to kill him. As you say, the throat-cutting was a horrid business, but — —”

Father Brown started, and blinked like a man awakened from sleep.

“Oh, that!” he corrected hastily. “I wasn’t thinking about that. I didn’t mean the murder in the barber’s shop, when — when I said a horrible tale of vengeance. I was thinking of a much more horrible tale than that; though, of course, that was horrible enough, in its way. But that was much more comprehensible; almost anybody might have done it. In fact, it was very nearly an act of self-defence.”

“What?” exclaimed the secretary incredulously. “A man creeps up behind another man and cuts his throat, while he is smiling pleasantly at the ceiling in a barber’s chair, and you say it was self-defence!”

“I do not say it was justifiable self-defence,” replied the other. “I only say that many a man would have been driven to it, to defend himself against an appalling calamity — which was also an appalling crime. It was that other crime that I was thinking about. To begin with, about that question you asked just now — why should the blackmailer be the murderer? Well, there are a good many conventional confusions and errors on a point like that.” He paused, as if collecting his thoughts after his recent trance of horror, and went on in ordinary tones.

“You observe that two men, an older and a younger, go about together and agree on a matrimonial project; but the origin of their intimacy is old and concealed. One is rich and the other poor; and you guess at blackmail. You are quite right, at least to that extent. Where you are quite wrong is in guessing which is which. You assume that the poor man was blackmailing the rich man. As a matter of fact, the rich man was blackmailing the poor man.”

“But that seems nonsense,” objected the secretary.

“It is much worse than nonsense; but it is not at all uncommon,” replied the other. “Half modern politics consists of rich men blackmailing people. Your notion that it’s nonsense rests on two illusions which are both nonsensical. One is, that rich men never want to be richer; the other is, that a man can only be blackmailed for money. It’s the last that is in question here. Sir Arthur Vaudrey was acting not for avarice, but for vengeance. And he planned the most hideous vengeance I ever heard of.”

“But why should he plan vengeance on John Dalmon?” inquired Smith.

“It wasn’t on John Dalmon that he planned vengeance,” replied the priest, gravely.

There was a silence; and he resumed, almost as if changing the subject. “When we found the body, you remember, we saw the face upside down; and you said it looked like the face of a fiend. Has it occurred to you that the murderer also saw the face upside down, coming behind the barber’s chair?”

“But that’s all morbid extravagance,” remonstrated his companion. “I was quite used to the face when it was the right way up.”

“Perhaps you have never seen it the right way up,” said Father Brown. “I told you that artists turn a picture the wrong way up when they want to see it the right way up. Perhaps, over all those breakfasts and tea-tables, you had got used to the face of a fiend.”

“What on earth are you driving at?” demanded Smith, impatiently.

“I speak in parables,” replied the other in a rather sombre tone. “Of course, Sir Arthur was not actually a fiend; he was a man with a character which he had made out of a temperament that might also have been turned to good. But those goggling, suspicious eyes; that tight, yet quivering mouth, might have told you something if you had not been so used to them. You know, there are physical bodies on which a wound will not heal. Sir Arthur had a mind of that sort. It was as if it lacked a skin; he had a feverish vigilance of vanity; those strained eyes were open with an insomnia of egoism. Sensibility need not be selfishness. Sybil Rye, for instance, has the same thin skin and manages to be a sort of saint. But Vaudrey had turned it all to poisonous pride; a pride that was not even secure and self-satisfied. Every scratch on the surface of his soul festered. And that is the meaning of that old story about throwing the man into the pig-sty. If he'd thrown him then and there, after being called a pig, it might have been a pardonable burst of passion. But there was no pig-sty; and that is just the point. Vaudrey remembered the silly insult for years and years, till he could get the Oriental into the improbable neighbourhood of a pig-sty; and then he took, what he considered the only appropriate and artistic revenge. . . . Oh, my God! he liked his revenges to be appropriate and artistic."

Smith looked at him curiously. "You are not thinking of the pig-sty story," he said.

"No," said Father Brown; "of the other story." He controlled the shudder in his voice, and went on:

"Remembering that story of a fantastic and yet patient plot to make the vengeance fit the crime, consider the other story before us. Had anybody else, to your knowledge, ever insulted Vaudrey, or offered him what he thought a mortal insult? Yes; a woman insulted him."

A sort of vague horror began to dawn in Evan's eyes; he was listening intently.

"A girl, little more than a child, refused to marry him, because he had once been a sort of criminal; had, indeed, been in prison for a short time for the outrage on the Egyptian. And that madman said, in the hell of his heart: 'She shall marry a murderer.'"

They took the road towards the great house and went along by the river for some time in silence, before he resumed: "Vaudrey was in a position to blackmail Dalmon, who had committed a murder long ago; probably he knew of several crimes among the wild comrades of his youth. Probably it was a wild crime with some redeeming features; for the wildest murders are never the worst. And Dalmon looks to me like a man who knows remorse, even for killing Vaudrey. But he was in Vaudrey's power and, between them, they entrapped the girl very cleverly into an engagement; letting the lover try his luck first, for instance, and the other only encouraging magnificently. But Dalmon himself did not know, nobody but the Devil himself did know, what was really in that old man's mind.

"Then, a few days ago, Dalmon made a dreadful discovery. He had obeyed, not altogether unwillingly; he had been a tool; and he suddenly found how the tool was to be broken and thrown away. He came upon certain notes of Vaudrey's in the library which, disguised as they were, told of preparations for giving information to the police. He understood the whole plot and stood stunned as I did when I first understood it. The moment the bride and bridegroom were married, the bridegroom would be arrested and hanged. The fastidious lady, who objected to a husband who had been in prison, should have no husband except a husband on the gallows. That is what Sir Arthur Vaudrey considered an artistic rounding off of the story."

Evan Smith, deadly pale, was silent; and, far away, down the perspective of the road, they saw the large figure and wide hat of Dr. Abbott advancing towards them; even in the outline there was a certain agitation. But they were still shaken with their own private apocalypse.

"As you say, hate is a hateful thing," said Evan at last; "and, do you know, one thing gives me a sort of relief. All my hatred of poor Dalmon is gone out of me — now I know how he was twice a murderer."

It was in silence that they covered the rest of the distance and met the big doctor coming towards them, with his large gloved hands thrown out in a sort of despairing gesture and his grey beard tossing in the wind.

"There is dreadful news," he said. "Arthur's body has been found. He seems to have died in his garden."

"Dear me," said Father Brown, rather mechanically. "How dreadful!"

"And there is more," cried the doctor breathlessly. "John Dalmon went off to see Vernon Vaudrey, the nephew; but Vernon Vaudrey hasn't heard of him and Dalmon seems to have disappeared entirely."

"Dear me," said Father Brown. "How strange!"

The Worst Crime in the World

FATHER BROWN was wandering through a picture gallery with an expression that suggested that he had not come there to look at the pictures. Indeed, he did not want to look at the pictures, though he liked pictures well enough. Not that there was anything immoral or improper about those highly modern pictorial designs. He would indeed be of an inflammable temperament who was stirred to any of the more pagan passions by the display of interrupted spirals, inverted cones and broken cylinders with which the art of the future inspired or menaced mankind. The truth is that Father Brown was looking for a young friend who had appointed that somewhat incongruous meeting-place, being herself of a more futuristic turn. The young friend was also a young relative; one of the few relatives that he had. Her name was Elizabeth Fane, simplified into Betty, and she was the child of a sister who had married into a race of refined but impoverished squires. As the squire was dead as well as impoverished, Father Brown stood in the relation of a protector as well as a priest, and in some sense a guardian as well as an uncle. At the moment, however, he was blinking about at the groups in the gallery without catching sight of the familiar brown hair and bright face of his niece. Nevertheless, he saw some people he knew and a number of people he did not know, including some that, as a mere matter of taste, he did not much want to know.

Among the people the priest did not know and who yet aroused his interest was a lithe and alert young man, very beautifully dressed and looking rather like a foreigner, because, while his beard was cut in a spade shape like an old Spaniard’s, his dark hair was cropped so close as to look like a tight black skull-cap. Among the people the priest did not particularly want to know was a very dominant-looking lady, sensationally clad in scarlet, with a mane of yellow hair too long to be called bobbed, but too loose to be called anything else. She had a powerful and rather heavy face of a pale and rather unwholesome complexion, and when she looked at anybody she cultivated the fascinations of a basilisk. She towed in attendance behind her a short man with a big beard and a very broad face, with long sleepy slits of eyes. The expression of his face was beaming and benevolent, if only partially awake; but his bull neck, when seen from behind, looked a little brutal.

Father Brown gazed at the lady, feeling that the appearance and approach of his niece would be an agreeable contrast. Yet he continued to gaze, for some reason, until he reached the point of feeling that the appearance of anybody would be an agreeable contrast. It was therefore with a certain relief, though with a slight start as of awakening, that he turned at the sound of his name and saw another face that he knew.

It was the sharp but not unfriendly face of a lawyer named Granby, whose patches of grey hair might almost have been the powder from a wig, so incongruous were they with his youthful energy of movement. He was one of those men in the City who run about like schoolboys in and out of their offices. He could not run round the fashionable picture gallery quite in that fashion; but he looked as if he wanted to, and fretted as he glanced to left and right, seeking somebody he knew.

“I didn’t know,” said Father Brown, smiling, “that you were a patron of the New Art.”

“I didn’t know that you were,” retorted the other. “I came here to catch a man.”

“I hope you will have good sport,” answered the priest. “I’m doing much the same.”

“Said he was passing through to the Continent,” snorted the solicitor, “and could I meet him in this cranky place.” He ruminated a moment, and said abruptly: “Look here, I know you can keep a secret. Do you know Sir John Musgrave?”

“No,” answered the priest; “but I should hardly have thought he was a secret, though they say he does hide himself in a castle. Isn’t he the old man they tell all those tales about — how he lives in a tower with a real portcullis and drawbridge, and generally refuses to emerge from the Dark Ages? Is he one of your clients?”

“No,” replied Granby shortly: “it’s his son, Captain Musgrave, who has come to us. But the old man counts for a good deal in the affair, and I don’t know him; that’s the point. Look here, this is confidential, as I say, but I can confide in you.” He dropped his voice and drew his friend apart into a side gallery containing representations of various real objects, which was comparatively empty.

“This young Musgrave,” he said, “wants to raise a big sum from us on a post obit on his old father in Northumberland. The old man’s long past seventy and presumably will obit some time or other; but what about the post, so to speak? What will happen afterwards to his cash and castles and portcullises and all the rest? It's a very fine old estate, and still worth a lot, but strangely enough it isn't entailed. So you see how we stand. The question is, as the man said in Dickens, is the old man friendly?"

"If he's friendly to his son you'll feel all the friendlier," observed Father Brown. "No, I'm afraid I can't help you. I never met Sir John Musgrave, and I understand very few people do meet him nowadays. But it seems obvious you have a right to an answer on that point before you lend the young gentleman your firm's money. Is he the sort that people cut off with a shilling?"

"Well, I'm doubtful," answered the other. "He's very popular and brilliant and a great figure in society; but he's a great deal abroad, and he's been a journalist."

"Well," said Father Brown, "that's not a crime. At least not always."

"Nonsense!" said Granby curtly. "You know what I mean — he's rather a rolling stone, who's been a journalist and a lecturer and an actor, and all sorts of things. I've got to know where I stand. . . . Why, there he is."

And the solicitor, who had been stamping impatiently about the emptier gallery, turned suddenly and darted into the more crowded room at a run. He was running towards the tall and well-dressed young man with the short hair and the foreign-looking beard.

The two walked away together talking, and for some moments afterwards Father Brown followed them with his screwed, short-sighted eyes. His gaze was shifted and recalled, however, by the breathless and even boisterous arrival of his niece, Betty. Rather to the surprise of her uncle, she led him back into the emptier room and planted him on a seat that was like an island in that sea of floor.

"I've got something I must tell you," she said. "It's so silly that nobody else will understand it."

"You overwhelm me," said Father Brown. "Is it about this business your mother started telling me about? Engagements and all that; not what the military historians call a general engagement."

"You know," she said, "that she wants me to be engaged to Captain Musgrave."

"I didn't," said Father Brown with resignation; "but Captain Musgrave seems to be quite a fashionable topic."

"Of course we're very poor," she said, "and it's no good saying it makes no difference."

"Do you want to marry him?" asked Father Brown, looking at her through his half-closed eyes.

She frowned at the floor, and answered in a lower tone:

"I thought I did. At least I think I thought I did. But I've just had rather a shock."

"Then tell us all about it."

"I heard him laugh," she said.

"It is an excellent social accomplishment," he replied.

"You don't understand," said the girl. "It wasn't social at all. That was just the point of it — that it wasn't social."

She paused a moment, and then went on firmly: "I came here quite early, and saw him sitting quite alone in the middle of that gallery with the new pictures, that was quite empty then. He had no idea I or anybody was near; he was sitting quite alone, and he laughed."

"Well, no wonder," said Father Brown. "I'm not an art critic myself, but as a general view of the pictures taken as a whole — —"

"Oh, you won't understand," she said almost angrily. "It wasn't a bit like that. He wasn't looking at the pictures. He was staring right up at the ceiling; but his eyes seemed to be turned inwards, and he laughed so that my blood ran cold."

The priest had risen and was pacing the room with his hands behind him. "You mustn't be hasty in a case of this sort," he began. "There are two kinds of men — but we can hardly discuss him just now, for here he is."

Captain Musgrave entered the room swiftly and swept it with a smile. Granby, the lawyer, was just behind him, and his legal face bore a new expression of relief and satisfaction.

"I must apologize for everything I said about the Captain," he said to the priest as they drifted together towards the door. "He's a thoroughly sensible fellow and quite sees my point. He asked me himself why I didn't go north and see his old father; I could hear from the old man's own lips how it stood about the inheritance. Well, he couldn't say fairer than that, could he? But he's so anxious to get the thing settled that he offered to take me up in his own car to Musgrave Moss. That's the name of the estate. I suggested that, if he was so kind, we might go together; and we're starting to-morrow morning."

As they spoke Betty and the Captain came through the doorway together, making in that framework at least a sort of picture that some would be sentimental enough to prefer to cones and cylinders. Whatever their other affinities, they were both very good-looking; and the lawyer was moved to a remark on the fact, when the picture abruptly altered.

Captain James Musgrave looked out into the main gallery, and his laughing and triumphant eyes were riveted on something that seemed to change him from head to foot. Father Brown looked round as under an advancing shadow of premonition; and he saw the lowering, almost livid face of the large woman in scarlet under its leonine yellow hair. She always stood with a slight stoop, like a bull lowering its horns, and the expression of her pale pasty face was so oppressive and hypnotic that they hardly saw the little man with the large beard standing beside her.

Musgrave advanced into the centre of the room towards her, almost like a beautifully dressed wax-work wound up to walk. He said a few words to her that could not be heard. She did not answer; but they turned away together, walking down the long gallery as if in debate, the short, bull-necked man with the beard bringing up the rear like some grotesque goblin page.

“Heaven help us!” muttered Father Brown, frowning after them. “Who in the world is that woman?”

“No pal of mine, I’m happy to say,” replied Granby with grim flippancy. “Looks as if a little flirtation with her might end fatally, doesn’t it?”

“I don’t think he’s flirting with her,” said Father Brown.

Even as he spoke the group in question turned at the end of the gallery and broke up, and Captain Musgrave came back to them in hasty strides.

“Look here,” he cried, speaking naturally enough, though they fancied his colour was changed. “I’m awfully sorry, Mr. Granby, but I find I can’t come north with you to-morrow. Of course, you will take the car all the same. Please do; I shan’t want it. I — I have to be in London for some days. Take a friend with you if you like.”

“My friend, Father Brown — —” began the lawyer.

“If Captain Musgrave is really so kind,” said Father Brown gravely. “I may explain that I have some status in Mr. Granby’s inquiry, and it would be a great relief to my mind if I could go.”

Which was how it came about that a very elegant car, with an equally elegant chauffeur, shot north the next day over the Yorkshire moors, bearing the incongruous burden of a priest who looked rather like a black bundle, and a lawyer who had the habit of running about on his feet instead of racing on somebody else’s wheels.

They broke their journey very agreeably in one of the great dales of the West Riding, dining and sleeping at a comfortable inn, and starting early next day, began to run along the Northumbrian coast till they reached a country that was a maze of sand dunes and rank sea meadows, somewhere in the heart of which lay the old Border castle which had remained so unique and yet so secretive a monument of the old Border wars. They found it at last, by following a path running beside a long arm of the sea that ran inland, and turned eventually into a sort of rude canal ending in the moat of the castle. The castle really was a castle, of the square, embattled plan that the Normans built everywhere from Galilee to the Grampians. It did really and truly have a portcullis and a drawbridge, and they were very realistically reminded of the fact by an accident that delayed their entrance.

They waded amid long coarse grass and thistle to the bank of the moat which ran in a ribbon of black with dead leaves and scum upon it, like ebony inlaid with a pattern of gold. Barely a yard or two beyond the black ribbon was the other green bank and the big stone pillars of the gateway. But so little, it would seem, had this lonely fastness been approached from outside that when the impatient Granby halloed across to the dim figures behind the portcullis, they seemed, to have considerable difficulty even in lowering the great rusty drawbridge. It started on its way, turning over like a great falling tower above them, and then stuck, sticking out in mid-air at a threatening angle.

The impatient Granby, dancing upon the bank, called out to his companion:

“Oh, I can’t stand these stick-in-the-mud ways! Why, it’d be less trouble to jump.”

And with characteristic impetuosity he did jump, landing with a slight stagger in safety on the inner shore. Father Brown’s short legs were not adapted to jumping. But his temper was more adapted than most people’s to falling with a splash into very muddy water. By the promptitude of his companion he escaped falling in very far. But as he was being hauled up the green, slimy bank, he stopped with bent head, peering at a particular point upon the grassy slope.

“Are you botanizing?” asked Granby irritably. “We’ve got no time for you to collect rare plants after your last attempt as a diver among the wonders of the deep. Come on, muddy or no, we’ve got to present ourselves before the baronet.”

When they had penetrated into the castle, they were received courteously enough by an old servant, the only one in sight, and after indicating their business were shown into a long oak-panelled room with latticed windows of antiquated pattern. Weapons of many different centuries hung in balanced patterns on the dark walls, and a complete suit of fourteenth-century armour stood like a sentinel beside the large fireplace. In another long room beyond could be seen, through the half-open door, the dark colours of the rows of family portraits.

“I feel as if I’d got into a novel instead of a house,” said the lawyer. “I’d no idea anybody did really keep up the ‘Mysteries of Udolpho’ in this fashion.”

“Yes; the old gentleman certainly carries out his historical craze consistently,” answered the priest; “and these things are not fakes, either. It’s not done by somebody who thinks all mediaeval people lived at the same time. Sometimes they make up suits of armour out of different bits; but that suit all covered one man, and covered him very completely. You, see it’s the late sort of tilting-armour.”

“I think he’s a late sort of host, if it comes to that,” grumbled Granby. “He’s keeping us waiting the devil of a time.”

“You must expect everything to go slowly in a place like this,” said Father Brown. “I think it’s very decent of him to see us at all: two total strangers come to ask him highly personal questions.”

And, indeed, when the master of the house appeared they had no reason to complain of their reception; but rather became conscious of something genuine in the traditions of breeding and behaviour that could retain their native dignity without difficulty in that barbarous solitude, and after those long years of rustication and moping. The baronet did not seem either surprised or embarrassed at the rare visitation; though they suspected that he had not had a stranger in his house for a quarter of a life-time, he behaved as if he had been bowing out duchesses a moment before. He showed neither shyness nor impatience when they touched on the very private matter of their errand; after a little leisurely reflection he seemed to recognize their curiosity as justified under the circumstances. He was a thin, keen-looking old gentleman, with black eyebrows and a long chin, and though the carefully-curled hair he wore was undoubtedly a wig, he had the wisdom to wear the grey wig of an elderly man.

“As regards the question that immediately concerns you,” he said, “the answer is very simple indeed. I do most certainly propose to hand on the whole of my property to my son, as my father handed it on to me; and nothing — I say advisedly, nothing — would induce me to take any other course.”

“I am most profoundly grateful for the information,” answered the lawyer. “But your kindness encourages me to say that you are putting it very strongly. I would not suggest that it is in the least likely that your son would do anything to make you doubt his fitness for the charge. Still, he might — —”

“Exactly,” said Sir John Musgrave dryly, “he might. It is rather an understatement to say that he might. Will you be good enough to step into the next room with me for a moment.”

He led them into the further gallery, of which they had already caught a glimpse, and gravely paused before a row of the blackened and lowering portraits.

“This is Sir Roger Musgrave,” he said, pointing to a long-faced person in a black periwig. “He was one of the lowest liars and rascals in the rascally time of William of Orange, a traitor to two kings and something like the murderer of two wives. That is his father, Sir Robert, a perfectly honest old cavalier. That is his son, Sir James, one of the noblest of the Jacobite martyrs and one of the first men to attempt some reparation to the Church and the poor. Does it matter that the House of Musgrave, the power, the honour, the authority, descended from one good man to another good man through the interval of a bad one? Edward I governed England well. Edward III covered England with glory. And yet the second glory came from the first glory through the infamy and imbecility of Edward II, who fawned upon Gaveston and ran away from Bruce. Believe me, Mr. Granby, the greatness of a great house and history is something more than these accidental individuals who carry it on, even though they do not grace it. From father to son our heritage has come down, and from father to son it shall continue. You may assure yourselves, gentlemen, and you may assure my son, that I shall not leave my money to a home for lost cats. Musgrave shall leave it to Musgrave till the heavens fall.”

"Yes," said Father Brown thoughtfully; "I see what you mean."

"And we shall be only too glad," said the solicitor, "to convey such a happy assurance to your son."

"You may convey the assurance," said their host gravely, "He is secure in any event of having the castle, the title, the land and the money. There is only a small and merely private addition to that arrangement. Under no circumstances whatever will I ever speak to him as long as I live."

The lawyer remained in the same respectful attitude, but he was now respectfully staring.

"Why, what on earth has he — —"

"I am a private gentleman," said Musgrave, "as well as the custodian of a great inheritance. And my son did something so horrible that he has ceased to be — I will not say a gentleman — but even a human being. It is the worst crime in the world. Do you remember what Douglas said when Marmion, his guest, offered to shake hands with him?"

"Yes," said Father Brown.

"'My castles are my king's alone, from turret to foundation stone,'" said Musgrave. "'The hand of Douglas is his own.'"

He turned towards the other room and showed his rather dazed visitors back into it.

"I hope you will take some refreshment," he said, in the same equable fashion. "If you have any doubt about your movements, I should be delighted to offer you the hospitality of the castle for the night."

"Thank you, Sir John," said the priest in a dull voice, "but I think we had better go."

"I will have the bridge lowered at once," said their host; and in a few moments the creaking of that huge and absurdly antiquated apparatus filled the castle like the grinding of a mill. Rusty as it was, however, it worked successfully this time, and they found themselves standing once more on the grassy bank beyond the moat.

Granby was suddenly shaken by a shudder.

"What in hell was it that his son did?" he cried.

Father Brown made no answer. But when they had driven off again in their car and pursued their journey to a village not far off, called Graystones, where they alighted at the inn of the Seven Stars, the lawyer learned with a little mild surprise that the priest did not propose to travel much farther; in other words, that he had apparently every intention of remaining in the neighbourhood.

"I cannot bring myself to leave it like this," he said gravely. "I will send back the car, and you, of course, may very naturally want to go with it. Your question is answered; it is simply whether your firm can afford to lend money on young Musgrave's prospects. But my question isn't answered; it is whether he is a fit husband for Betty. I must try to discover whether he's really done something dreadful, or whether it's the delusion of an old lunatic."

"But," objected the lawyer, "if you want to find out about him, why don't you go after him? Why should you hang about in this desolate hole where he hardly ever comes?"

"What would be the use of my going after him?" asked the other. There's no sense in going up to a fashionable young man in Bond Street and saying: 'Excuse me, but have you committed a crime too horrible for a human being?' If he's bad enough to do it, he's certainly bad enough to deny it. And we don't even know what it is. No, there's only one man that knows, and may tell, in some further outburst of dignified eccentricity. I'm going to keep near him for the present."

And in truth Father Brown did keep near the eccentric baronet, and did actually meet him on more than one occasion, with the utmost politeness on both sides. For the baronet, in spite of his years, was very vigorous and a great walker, and could often be seen stumping through the village, and along the country lanes. Only the day after their arrival, Father Brown, coming out of the inn on to the cobbled market-place, saw the dark and distinguished figure stride past in the direction of the post office. He was very quietly dressed in black, but his strong face was even more arresting in the strong sunlight; with his silvery hair, swarthy eyebrows and long chin, he had something of a reminiscence of Henry Irving, or some other famous actor. In spite of his hoary hair, his figure as well as his face suggested strength, and he carried his stick more like a cudgel than a crutch. He saluted the priest, and spoke with the same air of coming fearlessly to the point which had marked his revelations of yesterday.

"If you are still interested in my son," he said, using the term with an icy indifference, "you will not see very much of him. He has just left the country. Between ourselves, I might say fled the country."

"Indeed," said Father Brown with a grave stare.

"Some people I never heard of, called Grunov, have been pestering me, of all people, about his whereabouts," said Sir John; "and I've just come in to send off a wire to tell them that, so far as I know, he's living in the Poste Restante, Riga. Even that has been a nuisance. I came in yesterday to do it, but was five minutes too late for the post office. Are you staying long? I hope you will pay me another visit."

When the priest recounted to the lawyer his little interview with old Musgrave in the village, the lawyer was both puzzled and interested. "Why has the Captain bolted?" he asked. "Who are the other people who want him? Who on earth are the Grunovs?"

"For the first, I don't know," replied Father Brown. "Possibly his mysterious sin has come to light. I should rather guess that the other people are blackmailing him about it. For the third, I think I do know. That horrible fat woman with yellow hair is called Madame Grunov, and that little man passes as her husband."

The next day Father Brown came in rather wearily, and threw down his black bundle of an umbrella with the air of a pilgrim laying down his staff. He had an air of some depression. But it was as it was so often in his criminal investigations. It was not the depression of failure, but the depression of success.

"It's rather a shock," he said in a dull voice; "but I ought to have guessed it. I ought to have guessed it when I first went in and saw the thing standing there."

"When you saw what?" asked Granby impatiently.

"When I saw there was only one suit of armour," answered Father Brown. There was a silence during which the lawyer only stared at his friend, and then the friend resumed.

"Only the other day I was just going to tell my niece that there are two types of men who can laugh when they are alone. One might almost say the man who does it is either very good or very bad. You see, he is either confiding the joke to God or confiding it to the Devil. But anyhow he has an inner life. Well, there really is a kind of man who confides the joke to the Devil. He does not mind if nobody sees the joke; if nobody can safely be allowed even to know the joke. The joke is enough in itself, if it is sufficiently sinister and malignant."

"But what are you talking about?" demanded Granby. "Whom are you talking about? Which of them, I mean? Who is this person who is having a sinister joke with his Satanic Majesty?”

Father Brown looked across at him with a ghastly smile.

“Ah,” he said, “that’s the joke.”

There was another silence, but this time the silence seemed to be rather full and oppressive than merely empty; it seemed to settle down on them like the twilight that was gradually turning from dusk to dark. Father Brown went on speaking in a level voice, sitting stolidly with his elbows on the table.

“I’ve been looking up the Musgrave family,” he said. “They are vigorous and long-lived stock, and even in the ordinary way I should think you would wait a good time for your money.”

“We’re quite prepared for that,” answered the solicitor; “but anyhow it can’t last indefinitely. The old man is nearly eighty, though he still walks about, and the people at the inn here laugh and say they don’t believe he will ever die.”

Father Brown jumped up with one of his rare but rapid movements, but remained with his hands on the table, leaning forward and looking his friend in the face.

“That’s it,” he cried in a low but excited voice. “That’s the only problem. That’s the only real difficulty. How will he die? How on earth is he to die?”

“What on earth do you mean?” asked Granby.

“I mean,” came the voice of the priest out of the darkening room, “that I know the crime that James Musgrave committed.”

His tones had such a chill in them that Granby could hardly repress a shiver; he murmured a further question.

“It was really the worst crime in the world,” said Father Brown. “At least, many communities and civilizations have accounted it so. It was always from the earliest times marked out in tribe and village for tremendous punishment. But anyhow, I know now what young Musgrave really did and why he did it.”

“And what did he do?” asked the lawyer.

“He killed his father,” answered the priest.

The lawyer in his turn rose from his seat and gazed across the table with wrinkled brows.

“But his father is at the castle,” he cried in sharp tones.

“His father is in the moat,” said the priest, “and I was a fool not to have known it from the first when something bothered me about that suit of armour. Don’t you remember the look of that room? How very carefully it was arranged and decorated? There were two crossed battle-axes hung on one side of the fire-place, two crossed battle-axes on the other. There was a round Scottish shield on one wall, a round Scottish shield on the other. And there was a stand of armour guarding one side of the hearth, and an empty space on the other. Nothing will make me believe that a man who arranged all the rest of that room with that exaggerated symmetry left that one feature of it lopsided. There was almost certainly another man in armour. And what has become of him?”

He paused a moment, and then went on in a more matter-of-fact tone; “When you come to think of it, it’s a very good plan for a murder, and meets the permanent problem of the disposal of the body. The body could stand inside that complete tilting-armour for hours, or even days, while servants came and went, until the murderer could simply drag it out in the dead of night and lower it into the moat, without even crossing the bridge. And then what a good chance he ran! As soon as the body was at all decayed in the stagnant water there would sooner or later be nothing but a skeleton in fourteenth-century armour, a thing very likely to be found in the moat of an old Border castle. It was unlikely that anybody would look for anything there, but if they did, that would soon be all they would find. And I got some confirmation of that. That was when you said I was looking for a rare plant; it was a plant in a good many senses, if you’ll excuse the jest. I saw the marks of two feet sunk so deep into the solid bank I was sure that the man was either very heavy or was carrying something very heavy. Also, by the way, there’s another moral from that little incident when I made my celebrated graceful and cat-like leap.”

“My brain is rather reeling,” said Granby, “but I begin to have some notion of what all this nightmare is about. What about you and your cat-like leap?”

“At the post office to-day,” said Father Brown, “I casually confirmed the statement the baronet made to me yesterday, that he had been there just after closing-time on the day previous — that is, not only on the very day we arrived, but at the very time we arrived. Don’t you see what that means? It means that he was actually out when we called, and came back while we were waiting; and that was why we had to wait so long. And when I saw that, I suddenly saw a picture that told the whole story.”

“Well,” asked the other impatiently, “and what about it?”

“An old man of eighty can walk,” said Father Brown. “An old man can even walk a good deal, pottering about in country lanes. But an old man can’t jump. He would be an even less graceful jumper than I was. Yet, if the baronet came back while we were waiting, he must have come in as we came in — by jumping the moat — for the bridge wasn’t lowered till later. I rather guess he had hampered it himself to delay inconvenient visitors, to judge by the rapidity with which it was repaired. But that doesn’t matter. When I saw that fancy picture of the black figure with the grey hair taking a flying leap across the moat I knew instantly that it was a young man dressed up as an old man. And there you have the whole story.”

“You mean,” said Granby slowly, “that this pleasing youth killed his father, hid the corpse first in the armour and then in the moat, disguised himself and so on?”

“They happened to be almost exactly alike,” said the priest. “You could see from the family portraits how strong the likeness ran. And then you talk of his disguising himself. But in a sense everybody’s dress is a disguise. The old man disguised himself in a wig, and the young man in a foreign beard. When he shaved and put the wig on his cropped head he was exactly like his father, with a little make-up. Of course, you understand now why he was so very polite about getting you to come up next day here by car. It was because he himself was coming up that night by train. He got in front of you, committed his crime, assumed his disguise, and was ready for the legal negotiations.”

“Ah,” said Granby thoughtfully, “the legal negotiations! You mean, of course, that the real old baronet would have negotiated very differently.

“He would have told you plainly that the Captain would never get a penny,” said Father Brown. “The plot, queer as it sounds, was really the only way of preventing his telling you so. But I want you to appreciate the cunning of what the fellow did tell you. His plan answered several purposes at once. He was being blackmailed by these Russians for some villainy; I suspect for treason during the war. He escaped from them at a stroke, and probably sent them chasing off to Riga after him. But the most beautiful refinement of all was that theory he enunciated about recognizing his son as an heir, but not as a human being. Don’t you see that while it secured the post obit, it also provided some sort of answer to what would soon be the greatest difficulty of all?”

“I see several difficulties,” said Granby; “which one do you mean?”

"I mean that if the son was not even disinherited, it would look rather odd that the father and son never met. The theory of a private repudiation answered that. So there only remained one difficulty, as I say, which is probably perplexing the gentleman now. How on earth is the old man to die?"

"I know how he ought to die," said Granby.

Father Brown seemed to be a little bemused, and went on in a more abstracted fashion.

"And yet there is something more in it than that," he said. "There was something about that theory that he liked in a way that is more — well, more theoretical. It gave him an insane intellectual pleasure to tell you in one character that he had committed a crime in another character — when he really had. That is what I mean by the infernal irony; by the joke shared with the Devil. Shall I tell you something that sounds like what they call a paradox? Sometimes it is a joy in the very heart of hell to tell the truth. And above all, to tell it so that everybody misunderstands it. That is why he liked that antic of pretending to be somebody else, and then painting himself as black — as he was. And that was why my niece heard him laughing to himself all alone in the picture gallery."

Granby gave a slight start, like a person brought back to common things with a bump.

"Your niece," he cried. "Didn't her mother want her to marry Musgrave? A question of wealth and position, I suppose."

"Yes," said Father Brown dryly; "her mother was all in favour of a prudent marriage."

The Red Moon of Meru

EVERYONE agreed that the bazaar at Mallowood Abbey (by kind permission of Lady Mounteagle) was a great success; there were roundabouts and swings and side-shows, which the people greatly enjoyed; I would also mention the Charity, which was the excellent object of the proceedings, if any of them could tell me what it was. However, it is only with a few of them that we are here concerned; and especially with three of them, a lady and two gentlemen, who passed between two of the principal tents or pavilions, their voices high in argument. On their right was the tent of the Master of the Mountain, that world-famous fortune-teller by crystals and chiromancy; a rich purple tent, all over which were traced, in black and gold, the sprawling outlines of Asiatic gods waving any number of arms like octopods. Perhaps they symbolized the readiness of divine help to be had within; perhaps they merely implied that the ideal being of a pious palmist would have as many hands as possible. On the other side stood the plainer tent of Phroso the Phrenologist; more austerely decorated with diagrams of the heads of Socrates and Shakespeare, which were apparently of a lumpy sort. But these were presented merely in black and white, with numbers and notes, as became the rigid dignity of a purely rationalistic science. The purple tent had an opening like a black cavern, and all was fittingly silent within. But Phroso the Phrenologist, a lean, shabby, sunburnt person, with an almost improbably fierce black moustache and whiskers, was standing outside his own temple, and talking, at the top of his voice, to nobody in particular, explaining that the head of any passer-by would doubtless prove, on examination, to be every bit as knobbly as Shakespeare's. Indeed, the moment the lady appeared between the tents, the vigilant Phroso leapt on her and offered, with a pantomime of old-world courtesy, to feel her bumps.

She refused with civility that was rather like rudeness; but she must be excused, because she was in the middle of an argument. She also had to be excused, or at any rate was excused, because she was Lady Mounteagle. She was not a nonentity, however, in any sense; she was at once handsome and haggard, with a hungry look in her deep, dark eyes and something eager and almost fierce about her smile. Her dress was bizarre for the period; for it was before the Great War had left us in our present mood of gravity and recollection. Indeed, the dress was rather like the purple tent; being of a semi-oriental sort, covered with exotic and esoteric emblems. But everyone knew that the Mounteagles were mad; which was the popular way of saying that she and her husband were interested in the creeds and culture of the East.

The eccentricity of the lady was a great contrast to the conventionality of the two gentlemen, who were braced and buttoned up in all the stiffer fashion of that far-off day, from the tips of their gloves to their bright top hats. Yet even here there was a difference; for James Hardcastle managed at once to look correct and distinguished, while Tommy Hunter only looked correct and commonplace. Hardcastle was a promising politician; who seemed in society to be interested in everything except politics. It may be answered gloomily that every politician is emphatically a promising politician. But to do him justice, he had often exhibited himself as a performing politician. No purple tent in the bazaar, however, had been provided for him to perform in.

"For my part," he said, screwing in the monocle that was the only gleam in his hard, legal face, "I think we must exhaust the possibilities of mesmerism before we talk about magic. Remarkable psychological powers undoubtedly exist, even in apparently backward peoples. Marvellous things have been done by fakirs."

"Did you say done by fakers?" asked the other young man, with doubtful innocence.

"Tommy, you are simply silly," said the lady. "Why will you keep barging in on things you don't understand? You're like a schoolboy screaming out that he knows how a conjuring trick is done. It's all so Early Victorian — that schoolboy scepticism. As for mesmerism, I doubt whether you can stretch it to — —"

At this point Lady Mounteagle seemed to catch sight of somebody she wanted; a black stumpy figure standing at a booth where children were throwing hoops at hideous table ornaments. She darted across and cried:

"Father Brown, I've been looking for you. I want to ask you something: Do you believe in fortune-telling?"

The person addressed looked rather helplessly at the little hoop in his hand and said at last:

"I wonder in which sense you're using the word 'believe.' Of course, if it's all a fraud — —"

"Oh, but the Master of the Mountain isn't a bit of a fraud," she cried. "He isn't a common conjurer or a fortune-teller at all. It's really a great honour for him to condescend to tell fortunes at my parties; he's a great religious leader in his own country; a Prophet and a Seer. And even his fortune-telling isn't vulgar stuff about coming into a fortune. He tells you great spiritual truths about yourself, about your ideals."

"Quite so," said Father Brown. "That's what I object to. I was just going to say that if it's all a fraud, I don't mind it so much. It can't be much more of a fraud than most things at fancy bazaars; and there, in a way, it's a sort of practical joke. But if it's a religion and reveals spiritual truths — then it's all as false as hell and I wouldn't touch it with a bargepole."

"That is something of a paradox," said Hardcastle, with a smile.

"I wonder what a paradox is," remarked the priest in a ruminant manner. "It seems to me obvious enough. I suppose it wouldn't do very much harm if somebody dressed up as a German spy and pretended to have told all sorts of lies to the Germans. But if a man is trading in the truth with the Germans — well! So I think if a fortune-teller is trading in truth like that — —"

"You really think," began Hardcastle grimly.

"Yes," said the other; "I think he is trading with the enemy."

Tommy Hunter broke into a chuckle. "Well," he said, "if Father Brown thinks they're good so long as they're frauds, I should think he'd consider this copper-coloured prophet a sort of saint."

"My cousin Tom is incorrigible," said Lady Mounteagle. "He's always going about showing up adepts, as he calls it. He only came down here in a hurry when he heard the Master was to be here, I believe. He'd have tried to show up Buddha or Moses."

"Thought you wanted looking after a bit," said the young man, with a grin on his round face. "So I toddled down. Don't like this brown monkey crawling about."

"There you go again!" said Lady Mounteagle. "Years ago, when I was in India, I suppose we all had that sort of prejudice against brown people. But now I know something about their wonderful spiritual powers, I'm glad to say I know better."

"Our prejudices seem to cut opposite ways," said Father Brown. "You excuse his being brown because he is brahminical; and I excuse his being brahminical because he is brown. Frankly, I don't care for spiritual powers much myself. I’ve got much more sympathy with spiritual weaknesses. But I can’t see why anybody should dislike him merely because he is the same beautiful colour as copper, or coffee, or nut-brown ale, or those jolly peat-streams in the North. But then,” he added, looking across at the lady and screwing up his eyes, “I suppose I’m prejudiced in favour of anything that’s called brown.”

“There now!” cried Lady Mounteagle with a sort of triumph. “I knew you were only talking nonsense!”

“Well,” grumbled the aggrieved youth with the round face. “When anybody talks sense you call it schoolboy scepticism. When’s the crystal-gazing going to begin?”

“Any time you like, I believe,” replied the lady. “It isn’t crystal-gazing, as a matter of fact, but palmistry; I suppose you would say it was all the same sort of nonsense.”

“I think there is a via media between sense and nonsense,” said Hardcastle, smiling. “There are explanations that are natural and not at all nonsensical; and yet the results are very amazing. Are you coming in to be operated on? I confess I am full of curiosity.”

“Oh, I’ve no patience with such nonsense,” spluttered the sceptic, whose round face had become rather a red face with the heat of his contempt and incredulity. “I’ll let you waste your time on your mahogany mountebank; I’d rather go and throw at coco-nuts.”

The Phrenologist, still hovering near, darted at the opening.

“Heads, my dear sir,” he said, “human skulls are of a contour far more subtle than that of coco-nuts. No coco-nut can compare with your own most — —”

Hardcastle had already dived into the dark entry of the purple tent; and they heard a low murmur of voices within. As Tom Hunter turned on the Phrenologist with an impatient answer, in which he showed a regrettable indifference to the line between natural and preternatural sciences, the lady was just about to continue her little argument with the little priest, when she stopped in some surprise. James Hardcastle had come out of the tent again, and in his grim face and glaring monocle, surprise was even more vividly depicted. “He’s not there,” remarked the politician abruptly. “He’s gone. Some aged nigger, who seems to constitute his suite, jabbered something to me to the effect that the Master had gone forth rather than sell sacred secrets for gold.”

Lady Mounteagle turned radiantly to the rest. “There now,” she cried. “I told you he was a cut above anything you fancied! He hates being here in a crowd; he’s gone back to his solitude.”

“I am sorry,” said Father Brown gravely. “I may have done him an injustice. Do you know where he has gone?”

“I think so,” said his hostess equally gravely. “When he wants to be alone, he always goes to the cloisters, just at the end of the left wing, beyond my husband’s study and private museum, you know. Perhaps you know this house was once an abbey.”

“I have heard something about it,” answered the priest, with a faint smile.

“We’ll go there, if you like,” said the lady, briskly. “You really ought to see my husband’s collection; or the Red Moon at any rate. Haven’t you ever heard of the Red Moon of Meru? Yes, it’s a ruby.”

“I should be delighted to see the collection,” said Hardcastle quietly, “including the Master of the Mountain, if that prophet is one exhibit in the museum.” And they all turned towards the path leading to the house.

“All the same,” muttered the sceptical Thomas, as he brought up the rear, “I should very much like to know what the brown beast did come here for, if he didn’t come to tell fortunes.”

As he disappeared, the indomitable Phroso made one more dart after him, almost snatching at his coat-tails. “The bump — —” he began.

“No bump,” said the youth, “only a hump. Hump I always have when I come down to see Mounteagle.” And he took to his heels to escape the embrace of the man of science.

On their way to the cloisters the visitors had to pass through the long room that was devoted by Lord Mounteagle to his remarkable private museum of Asiatic charms and mascots. Through one open door, in the length of the wall opposite, they could see the Gothic arches and the glimmer of daylight between them, marking the square open space, round the roofed border of which the monks had walked in older days. But they had to pass something that seemed at first sight rather more extraordinary than the ghost of a monk.

It was an elderly gentleman, robed from head to foot in white, with a pale green turban, but a very pink and white English complexion and the smooth white moustaches of some amiable Anglo-Indian colonel. This was Lord Mounteagle, who had taken his Oriental pleasures more sadly, or at least more seriously than his wife. He could talk of nothing whatever, except Oriental religion and philosophy; and had thought it necessary even to dress in the manner of an Oriental hermit. While he was delighted to show his treasures, he seemed to treasure them much more for the truths supposed to be symbolized in them than for their value in collections, let alone cash. Even when he brought out the great ruby, perhaps the only thing of great value in the museum, in a merely monetary sense, he seemed to be much more interested in its name than in its size, let alone its price.

The others were all staring at what seemed a stupendously large red stone, burning like a bonfire seen through a rain of blood. But Lord Mounteagle rolled it loosely in his palm without looking at it; and staring at the ceiling, told them a long tale about the legendary character of Mount Meru, and how, in the Gnostic mythology, it had been the place of the wrestling of nameless primeval powers.

Towards the end of the lecture on the Demiurge of the Gnostics (not forgetting its connexion with the parallel concept of Manichaeus), even the tactful Mr. Hardcastle thought it time to create a diversion. He asked to be allowed to look at the stone; and as evening was closing in, and the long room with its single door was steadily darkening, he stepped out in the cloister beyond, to examine the jewel by a better light. It was then that they first became conscious, slowly and almost creepily conscious, of the living presence of the Master of the Mountain.

The cloister was on the usual plan, as regards its original structure; but the line of Gothic pillars and pointed arches that formed the inner square was linked together all along by a low wall, about waist high, turning the Gothic doors into Gothic windows and giving each a sort of flat window-sill of stone. This alteration was probably of ancient date; but there were other alterations of a quainter sort, which witnessed to the rather unusual individual ideas of Lord and Lady Mounteagle. Between the pillars hung thin curtains, or rather veils, made of beads or light canes, in a continental or southern manner; and on these again could be traced the lines and colours of Asiatic dragons or idols, that contrasted with the grey Gothic framework in which they were suspended. But this, while it further troubled the dying light of the place, was the least of the incongruities of which the company, with very varying feelings, became aware.

In the open space surrounded by the cloisters, there ran, like a circle in a square, a circular path paved with pale stones and edged with some sort of green enamel like an imitation lawn. Inside that, in the very centre, rose the basin of a dark-green fountain, or raised pond, in which water-lilies floated and goldfish flashed to and fro; and high above these, its outline dark against the dying light, was a great green image. Its back was turned to them and its face so completely invisible in the hunched posture that the statue might almost have been headless. But in that mere dark outline, in the dim twilight, some of them could see instantly that it was the shape of no Christian thing.

A few yards away, on the circular path, and looking towards the great green god, stood the man called the Master of the Mountain. His pointed and finely-finished features seemed moulded by some skilful craftsman as a mask of copper. In contrast with this, his dark-grey beard looked almost blue like indigo; it began in a narrow tuft on his chin, and then spread outwards like a great fan or the tail of a bird. He was robed in peacock green and wore on his bald head a high cap of uncommon outline: a head-dress none of them had ever seen before; but it looked rather Egyptian than Indian. The man was standing with staring eyes; wide open, fish-shaped eyes, so motionless that they looked like the eyes painted on a mummy-case. But though the figure of the Master of the Mountain was singular enough, some of the company, including Father Brown, did not look at him; they still looked at the dark-green idol at which he himself was looking.

“This seems a queer thing,” said Hardcastle, frowning a little, “to set up in the middle of an old abbey cloister.”

“Now, don’t tell me you’re going to be silly,” said Lady Mounteagle. “That’s just what we meant; to link up the great religions of East and West; Buddha and Christ. Surely you must understand that all religions are really the same.”

“If they are,” said Father Brown mildly, “it seems rather unnecessary to go into the middle of Asia to get one.”

“Lady Mounteagle means that they are different aspects or facets, as there are of this stone,” began Hardcastle; and becoming interested in the new topic, laid the great ruby down on the stone sill or ledge under the Gothic arch. “But it does not follow that we can mix the aspects in one artistic style. You may mix Christianity and Islam, but you can’t mix Gothic and Saracenic, let alone real Indian.”

As he spoke, the Master of the Mountain seemed to come to life like a cataleptic, and moved gravely round another quarter segment of the circle, and took up his position outside their own row of arches, standing with his back to them and looking now towards the idol's back. It was obvious that he was moving by stages round the whole circle, like a hand round a clock; but pausing for prayer or contemplation.

"What is his religion?" asked Hardcastle, with a faint touch of impatience.

"He says," replied Lord Mounteagle, reverently, "that it is older than Brahminism and purer than Buddhism."

"Oh," said Hardcastle, and continued to stare through his single eyeglass, standing with both his hands in his pockets.

"They say," observed the nobleman in his gentle but didactic voice, "that the deity called the God of Gods is carved in a colossal form in the cavern of Mount Meru — —"

Even his lordship's lecturing serenity was broken abruptly by the voice that came over his shoulder. It came out of the darkness of the museum they had just left, when they stepped out into the cloister. At the sound of it the two younger men looked first incredulous, then furious, and then almost collapsed into laughter.

"I hope I do not intrude," said the urbane and seductive voice of Professor Phroso, that unconquerable wrestler of the truth, "but it occurred to me that some of you might spare a little time for that much despised science of Bumps, which — —"

"Look here," cried the impetuous Tommy Hunter, "I haven't got any bumps; but you'll jolly well have some soon, you — —"

Hardcastle mildly restrained him as he plunged back through the door; and for the moment all the group had turned again and were looking back into the inner room.

It was at that moment that the thing happened. It was the impetuous Tommy, once more, who was the first to move, and this time to better effect. Before anyone else had seen anything, when Hardcastle had barely remembered with a jump that he had left the gem on the stone sill, Tommy was across the cloister with the leap of a cat and, leaning with his head and shoulders out of the aperture between two columns, had cried out in a voice that rang down all the arches: "I've got him!"

In that instant of time, just after they turned, and just before they heard his triumphant cry, they had all seen it happen. Round the corner of one of the two columns, there had darted in and out again a brown or rather bronze-coloured hand, the colour of dead gold; such as they had seen elsewhere. The hand had struck as straight as a striking snake; as instantaneous as the flick of the long tongue of an ant-eater. But it had licked up the jewel. The stone slab of the window-sill shone bare in the pale and fading light.

“I’ve got him,” gasped Tommy Hunter; “but he’s wriggling pretty hard. You fellows run round him in front — he can’t have got rid of it, anyhow.”

The others obeyed, some racing down the corridor and some leaping over the low wall, with the result that a little crowd, consisting of Hardcastle, Lord Mounteagle, Father Brown, and even the undetachable Mr. Phroso of the bumps, had soon surrounded the captive Master of the Mountain, whom Hunter was hanging on to desperately by the collar with one hand, and shaking every now and then in a manner highly insensible to the dignity of Prophets as a class.

“Now we’ve got him, anyhow,” said Hunter, letting go with a sigh. “We’ve only got to search him. The thing must be here.”

Three-quarters of an hour later. Hunter and Hardcastle, their top-hats, ties, gloves, slips and spats somewhat the worse for their recent activities, came face to face in the cloister and gazed at each other.

“Well,” asked Hardcastle with restraint, “have you any views on the mystery?”

“Hang it all,” replied Hunter; “you can’t call it a mystery. Why, we all saw him take it ourselves.”

“Yes,” replied the other, “but we didn’t all see him lose it ourselves. And the mystery is, where has he lost it so that we can’t find it?”

“It must be somewhere,” said Hunter. “Have you searched the fountain and all round that rotten old god there?”

“I haven’t dissected the little fishes,” said Hardcastle, lifting his eyeglass and surveying the other. “Are you thinking of the ring of Polycrates?”

Apparently the survey, through the eye-glass, of the round face before him, convinced him that it covered no such meditation on Greek legend.

“It’s not on him, I admit,” repeated Hunter, suddenly, “unless he’s swallowed it.”

“Are we to dissect the Prophet, too?” asked the other smiling. “But here comes our host.”

“This is a most distressing matter,” said Lord Mounteagle, twisting his white moustache with a nervous and even tremulous hand. “Horrible thing to have a theft in one’s house, let alone connecting it with a man like the Master. But, I confess, I can’t quite make head or tail of the way in which he is talking about it. I wish you’d come inside and see what you think.”

They went in together, Hunter falling behind and dropping into conversation with Father Brown, who was kicking his heels round the cloister.

“You must be very strong,” said the priest pleasantly. “You held him with one hand; and he seemed pretty vigorous, even when we had eight hands to hold him, like one of those Indian gods.”

They took a turn or two round the cloister, talking; and then they also went into the inner room, where the Master of the Mountain was seated on a bench, in the capacity of a captive, but with more of the air of a king.

It was true, as Lord Mounteagle said, that his air and tone were not very easy to understand. He spoke with a serene, and yet secretive sense of power. He seemed rather amused at their suggestions about trivial hiding-places for the gem; and certainly he showed no resentment whatever. He seemed to be laughing, in a still unfathomable fashion at their efforts to trace what they had all seen him take.

“You are learning a little,” he said, with insolent benevolence, “of the laws of time and space; about which your latest science is a thousand years behind our oldest religion. You do not even know what is really meant by hiding a thing. Nay, my poor little friends, you do not even know what is meant by seeing a thing; or perhaps you would see this as plainly as I do.”

“Do you mean it is here?” demanded Hardcastle harshly.

“Here is a word of many meanings, also,” replied the mystic. “But I did not say it was here. I only said I could see it.”

There was an irritated silence, and he went on sleepily.

“If you were to be utterly, unfathomably, silent, do you think you might hear a cry from the other end of the world? The cry of a worshipper alone in those mountains, where the original image sits, itself like a mountain. Some say that even Jews and Moslems might worship that image; because it was never made by man. Hark! Do you hear the cry with which he lifts his head and sees in that socket of stone, that has been hollow for ages, the one red and angry moon that is the eye of the mountain?”

“Do you really mean,” cried Lord Mounteagle, a little shaken, “that you could make it pass from here to Mount Meru? I used to believe you had great spiritual powers, but — —”

"Perhaps," said the Master, "I have more than you will ever believe."

Hardcastle rose impatiently and began to pace the room with his hands in his pockets.

"I never believed so much as you did; but I admit that powers of a — certain type may . . . Good God!"

His high, hard voice had been cut off in mid-air, and he stopped staring; the eye-glass fell out of his eye. They all turned their faces in the same direction; and on every face there seemed to be the same suspended animation.

The Red Moon of Meru lay on the stone window-sill, exactly as they had last seen it. It might have been a red spark blown there from a bonfire, or a red rose-petal tossed from a broken rose; but it had fallen in precisely the same spot where Hardcastle had thoughtlessly laid it down.

This time Hardcastle did not attempt to pick it up again; but his demeanour was somewhat notable. He turned slowly and began to stride about the room again; but there was in his movements something masterful, where before it had been only restless. Finally, he brought himself to a standstill in front of the seated Master, and bowed with a somewhat sardonic smile.

"Master," he said, "we all owe you an apology and, what is more important, you have taught us all a lesson. Believe me, it will serve as a lesson as well as a joke. I shall always remember the very remarkable powers you really possess, and how harmlessly you use them. Lady Mounteagle," he went on, turning towards her, "you will forgive me for having addressed the Master first; but it was to you I had the honour of offering this explanation some time ago. I may say that I explained it before it had happened. I told you that most of these things could be interpreted by some kind of hypnotism. Many believe that this is the explanation of all those Indian stories about the mango plant and the boy who climbs a rope thrown into the air. It does not really happen; but the spectators are mesmerized into imagining that it happened. So we were all mesmerized into imagining this theft had happened. That brown hand coming in at the window, and whisking away the gem, was a momentary delusion; a hand in a dream. Only, having seen the stone vanish, we never looked for it where it was before. We plunged into the pond and turned every leaf of the water lilies; we were almost giving emetics to the goldfish. But the ruby has been here all the time."

And he glanced across at the opalescent eyes and smiling bearded mouth of the Master, and saw that the smile was just a shade broader. There was something in it that made the others jump to their feet with an air of sudden relaxation and general, gasping relief.

“This is a very fortunate escape for us all,” said Lord Mounteagle, smiling rather nervously. “There cannot be the least doubt it is as you say. It has been a most painful episode and I really don’t know what apologies ——”

“I have no complaints,” said the Master or the Mountain, still smiling. “You have never touched Me at all.”

While the rest went off rejoicing, with Hardcastle for the hero of the hour, the little Phrenologist with the whiskers sauntered back towards his preposterous tent. Looking over his shoulder he was surprised to find Father Brown following him.

“Can I feel your bumps?” asked the expert, in his mildly sarcastic tone.

“I don’t think you want to feel any more, do you?” said the priest good-humouredly. “You’re a detective, aren’t you?”

“Yep,” replied the other. “Lady Mounteagle asked me to keep an eye on the Master, being no fool, for all her mysticism; and when he left his tent, I could only follow by behaving like a nuisance and a monomaniac. If anybody had come into my tent, I’d have had to look up Bumps in an encyclopaedia.”

“Bumps, What Ho She; see Folk-Lore,” observed Father Brown, dreamily. “Well, you were quite in the part in pestering people — at a bazaar.”

“Rum case, wasn’t it?” remarked the fallacious Phrenologist. “Queer to think the thing was there all the time.”

“Very queer,” said the priest.

Something in his voice made the other man stop and stare.

“Look here!” he cried; “what’s the matter with you? What are you looking like that for! Don’t you believe that it was there all the time?”

Father Brown blinked rather as if he had received a buffet; then he said slowly and with hesitation: “No, the fact is ... I can’t — I can’t quite bring myself to believe it.”

“You’re not the sort of chap,” said the other shrewdly, “who’d say that without reason. Why don’t you think the ruby had been there all the time?”

“Only because I put it back myself,” said Father Brown.

The other man stood rooted to the spot, like one whose hair was standing on end. He opened his mouth without speech.

“Or rather,” went on the priest, “I persuaded the thief to let me put it back. I told him what I’d guessed and showed him there was still time for repentance. I don’t mind telling you in professional confidence; besides, I don’t think the Mounteagles would prosecute, now they’ve got the thing back, especially considering who stole it.”

“Do you mean the Master?” asked the late Phroso.

“No,” said Father Brown, “the Master didn’t steal it.”

“But I don’t understand,” objected the other. “Nobody was outside the window except the Master; and a hand certainly came from outside.”

“The hand came from outside, but the thief came from the inside,” said Father Brown.

“We seem to be back among the mystics again. Look here, I’m a practical man; I only wanted to know if it is all right with the ruby — —”

“I knew it was all wrong,” said Father Brown, “before I even knew there was a ruby.”

After a pause he went on thoughtfully. “Right away back in that argument of theirs, by the tents, I knew things were going wrong. People will tell you that theories don’t matter and that logic and philosophy aren’t practical. Don’t you believe them. Reason is from God, and when things are unreasonable there is something the matter. Now, that quite abstract argument ended with something funny. Consider what the theories were. Hardcastle was a trifle superior and said that all things were perfectly possible; but they were mostly done merely by mesmerism, or clairvoyance; scientific names for philosophical puzzles, in the usual style. But Hunter thought it all sheer fraud and wanted to show it up. By Lady Mounteagle’s testimony, he not only went about showing up fortune-tellers and such like, but he had actually come down specially to confront this one. He didn’t often come; he didn’t get on with Mounteagle, from whom, being a spendthrift, he always tried to borrow; but when he heard the Master was coming, he came hurrying down. Very well. In spite of that, it was Hardcastle who went to consult the wizard and Hunter who refused. He said he’d waste no time on such nonsense; having apparently wasted a lot of his life on proving it to be nonsense. That seems inconsistent. He thought in this case it was crystal-gazing; but he found it was palmistry.”

“Do you mean he made that an excuse?” asked his companion, puzzled.

"I thought so at first," replied the priest; "but I know now it was not an excuse, but a reason. He really was put off by finding it was a palmist, because — —"

"Well," demanded the other impatiently.

"Because he didn't want to take his glove off," said Father Brown.

"Take his glove off?" repeated the inquirer.

"If he had," said Father Brown mildly, "we should all have seen that his hand was painted pale brown already. ... Oh, yes, he did come down specially because the Master was here. He came down very fully prepared."

"You mean," cried Phroso, "that it was Hunter's hand, painted brown, that came in at the window? Why, he was with us all the time!"

"Go and try it on the spot and you'll find it's quite possible," said the priest. "Hunter leapt forward and leaned out of the window; in a flash he could tear off his glove, tuck up his sleeve, and thrust his hand back round the other side of the pillar, while he gripped the Indian with the other hand and halloed out that he'd caught the thief. I remarked at the time that he held the thief with one hand, where any sane man would have used two. But the other hand was slipping the jewel into his trouser pocket."

There was a long pause and then the ex-Phrenologist said slowly. "Well, that's a staggerer. But the thing stumps me still. For one thing, it doesn't explain the queer behaviour of the old magician himself. If he was entirely innocent, why the devil didn't he say so? Why wasn't he indignant at being accused and searched? Why did he only sit smiling and hinting in a sly way what wild and wonderful things he could do?"

"Ah!" cried Father Brown, with a sharp note in his voice: "there you come up against it! Against everything these people don't and won't understand. All religions are the same, says Lady Mounteagle. Are they, by George! I tell you some of them are so different that the best man of one creed will be callous, where the worst man of another will be sensitive. I told you I didn't like spiritual power, because the accent is on the word power. I don't say the Master would steal a ruby, very likely he wouldn't; very likely he wouldn't think it worth stealing. It wouldn't be specially his temptation to take jewels; but it would be his temptation to take credit for miracles that didn't belong to him any more than the jewels. It was to that sort of temptation, to that sort of stealing that he yielded today. He liked us to think that he had marvellous mental powers that could make a material object fly through space; and even when he hadn't done it, he allowed us to think he had. The point about private property wouldn’t occur primarily to him at all. The question wouldn’t present itself in the form: ‘Shall I steal this pebble?’ but only in the form: ‘Could I make a pebble vanish and reappear on a distant mountain?’ The question of whose pebble would strike him as irrelevant. That is what I mean by religious being different. He is very proud of having what he calls spiritual powers. But what he calls spiritual doesn’t mean what we call moral. It means rather mental; the power of the mind over matter; the magician controlling the elements. Now we are not like that, even when we are no better; even when we are worse. We, whose fathers at least were Christians, who have grown up under those mediaeval arches even if we bedizen them with all the demons in Asia — we have the very opposite ambition and the very opposite shame. We should all be anxious that nobody should think we had done it. He was actually anxious that everybody should think he had — even when he hadn’t. He actually stole the credit of stealing. While we were all casting the crime from us like a snake, he was actually luring it to him like a snake-charmer. But snakes are not pets in this country! Here the traditions of Christendom tell at once under a test like this. Look at old Mounteagle himself, for instance! Ah, you may be as Eastern and esoteric as you like, and wear a turban and a long robe and live on messages from Mahatmas; but if a bit of stone is stolen in your house, and your friends are suspected, you will jolly soon find out that you’re an ordinary English gentleman in a fuss. The man who really did it would never want us to think he did it, for he also was an English gentleman. He was also something very much better; he was a Christian thief. I hope and believe he was a penitent thief.”

“By your account,” said his companion laughing, “the Christian thief and the heathen fraud went by contraries. One was sorry he’d done it and the other was sorry he hadn’t.”

“We mustn’t be too hard on either of them,” said Father Brown. “Other English gentlemen have stolen before now, and been covered by legal and political protection; and the West also has its own way of covering theft with sophistry. After all, the ruby is not the only kind of valuable stone in the world that has changed owners; it is true of other precious stones; often carved like cameos and coloured like flowers.” The other looked at him inquiringly; and the priest’s finger was pointed to the Gothic outline of the great Abbey. “A great graven stone,” he said, “and that was also stolen.”

The Chief Mourner of Marne

A BLAZE of lightning blanched the grey woods tracing all the wrinkled foliage down to the last curled leaf, as if every detail were drawn in silverpoint or graven in silver. The same strange trick of lightning by which it seems to record millions of minute things in an instant of time, picked out everything, from the elegant litter of the picnic spread under the spreading tree to the pale lengths of winding road, at the end of which a white car was waiting. In the distance a melancholy mansion with four towers like a castle, which in the grey evening had been but a dim and distant huddle of walls like a crumbling cloud, seemed to spring into the foreground, and stood up with all its embattled, roofs and blank and staring windows. And in this, at least, the light had something in it of revelation. For to some of those grouped under the tree that castle was, indeed, a thing faded and almost forgotten, which was to prove its power to spring up again in the foreground of their lives.

The light also clothed for an instant, in the same silver splendour, at least one human figure that stood up as motionless as one of the towers. It was that of a tall man standing on a rise of ground above the rest, who were mostly sitting on the grass or stooping to gather up the hamper and crockery. He wore a picturesque short cloak or cape clasped with a silver clasp and chain, which blazed like a star when the flash touched it; and something metallic in his motionless figure was emphasized by the fact that his closely-curled hair was of the burnished yellow that can be really called gold; and had the look of being younger than his face, which was handsome in a hard aquiline fashion, but looked, under the strong light, a little wrinkled and withered. Possibly it had suffered from wearing a mask of make-up, for Hugo Romaine was the greatest actor of his day. For that instant of illumination the golden curls and ivory mask and silver ornament made his figure gleam like that of a man in armour; the next instant his figure was a dark and even black silhouette against the sickly grey of the rainy evening sky.

But there was something about its stillness, like that of a statue, that distinguished it from the group at his feet. All the other figures around him had made the ordinary involuntary movement at the unexpected shock of light; for though the skies were rainy it was the first flash of the storm. The only lady present, whose air of carrying grey hair gracefully, as if she were really proud of it, marked her a matron of the United States, unaffectedly shut her eyes and uttered a sharp cry. Her English husband, General Outram, a very stolid Anglo-Indian, with a bald head and black moustache and whiskers of antiquated pattern, looked up with one stiff movement and then resumed his occupation of tidying up. A young man of the name of Mallow, very big and shy, with brown eyes like a dog's, dropped a cup and apologized awkwardly. A third man, much more dressy, with a resolute head, like an inquisitive terrier's, and grey hair brushed stiffly back, was no other than the great newspaper proprietor, Sir John Cockspur; he cursed freely, but not in an English idiom or accent, for he came from Toronto. But the tall man in the short cloak stood up literally like a statue in the twilight; his eagle face under the full glare had been like the bust of a Roman Emperor, and the carved eyelids had not moved.

A moment after, the dark dome cracked across with thunder, and the statue seemed to come to life. He turned his head over his shoulder and said casually;

"About a minute and half between the flash and the bang, but I think the storm's coming nearer. A tree is not supposed to be a good umbrella for the lightning, but we shall want it soon for the rain. I think it will be a deluge."

The young man glanced at the lady a little anxiously and said: "Can't we get shelter anywhere? There seems to be a house over there."

"There is a house over there," remarked the general, rather grimly; "but not quite what you'd call a hospitable hotel."

"It's curious," said his wife sadly, "that we should be caught in a storm with no house near but that one, of all others."

Something in her tone seemed to check the younger man, who was both sensitive and comprehending; but nothing of that sort daunted the man from Toronto.

"What's the matter with it?" he asked. "Looks rather like a ruin."

"That place," said the general dryly, "belongs to the Marquis of Marne."

"Gee!" said Sir John Cockspur. "I've heard all about that bird, anyhow; and a queer bird, too. Ran him as a front-page mystery in the Comet last year. 'The Nobleman Nobody Knows.'"

"Yes, I've heard of him, too," said young Mallow in a low voice. "There seem to be all sorts of weird stories about why he hides himself like that. I've heard that he wears a mask because he's a leper. But somebody else told me quite seriously that there’s a curse on the family; a child born with some frightful deformity that’s kept in a dark room.”

“The Marquis of Marne has three heads,” remarked Romaine quite gravely. “Once in every three hundred years a three-headed nobleman adorns the family tree. No human being dares approach the accursed house except a silent procession of hatters, sent to provide an abnormal number of hats. But,” — and his voice took one of those deep and terrible turns, that could cause such a thrill in the theatre— “my friends, those hats are of no human shape.”

The American lady looked at him with a frown and a slight air of distrust, as if that trick of voice had moved her in spite of herself.

“I don’t like your ghoulish jokes,” she said; “and I’d rather you didn’t joke about this, anyhow.”

“I hear and obey,” replied the actor; “but am I, like the Light Brigade, forbidden even to reason why?”

“The reason,” she replied, “is that he isn’t the Nobleman Nobody Knows. I know him myself, or, at least, I knew him very well when he was an attache at Washington thirty years ago, when we were all young. And he didn’t wear a mask, at least, he didn’t wear it with me. He wasn’t a leper, though he may be almost as lonely. And he had only one head and only one heart, and that was broken.”

“Unfortunate love affair, of course,” said Cockspur. “I should like that for the Comet.”

“I suppose it’s a compliment to us,” she replied thoughtfully, “that you always assume a man’s heart is broken by a woman. But there are other kinds of love and bereavement. Have you never read ‘In Memoriam’? Have you never heard of David and Jonathan? What broke poor Marne up was the death of his brother; at least, he was really a first cousin, but had been brought up with him like a brother, and was much nearer than most brothers. James Mair, as the marquis was called when I knew him, was the elder of the two, but he always played the part of worshipper, with Maurice Mair as a god. And, by his account, Maurice Mair was certainly a wonder. James was no fool, and very good at his own political job; but it seems that Maurice could do that and everything else; that he was a brilliant artist and amateur actor and musician, and all the rest of it. James was very good-looking himself, long and strong and strenuous, with a high-bridged nose; though I suppose the young people would think he looked very quaint with his beard divided into two bushy whiskers in the fashion of those Victorian times. But Maurice was clean-shaven, and, by the portraits shown to me, certainly quite beautiful; though he looked a little more like a tenor than a gentleman ought to look. James was always asking me again and again whether his friend was not a marvel, whether any woman wouldn’t fall in love with him, and so on, until it became rather a bore, except that it turned so suddenly into a tragedy. His whole life seemed to be in that idolatry, and one day the idol tumbled down, and was broken like any china doll. A chill caught at the seaside, and it was all over.”

“And after that,” asked the young man, “did he shut himself up like this?”

“He went abroad at first,” she answered; “away to Asia and the Cannibal Islands and Lord knows where. These deadly strokes take different people in different ways. It took him in the way of an utter sundering or severance from everything, even from tradition and as far as possible from memory. He could not bear a reference to the old tie; a portrait or an anecdote or even an association. He couldn’t bear the business of a great public funeral. He longed to get away. He stayed away for ten years. I heard some rumour that he had begun to revive a little at the end of the exile; but when he came back to his own home he relapsed completely. He settled down into religious melancholia, and that’s practically madness.”

“The priests got hold of him, they say,” grumbled the old general. “I know he gave thousands to found a monastery, and lives himself rather like a monk — or, at any rate, a hermit. Can’t understand what good they think that will do.”

“Goddarned superstition,” snorted Cockspur; “that sort of thing ought to be shown up. Here’s a man that might have been useful to the Empire and the world, and these vampires get hold of him and suck him dry. I bet with their unnatural notions they haven’t even let him marry.”

“No, he has never married,” said the lady. “He was engaged when I knew him, as a matter of fact, but I don’t think it ever came first with him, and I think it went with the rest when everything else went. Like Hamlet and Ophelia — he lost hold of love because he lost hold of life. But I knew the girl; indeed, I know her still. Between ourselves, it was Viola Grayson, daughter of the old admiral. She’s never married either.”

“It’s infamous! It’s infernal!” cried Sir John, bounding up. “It’s not only a tragedy, but a crime. I’ve got a duty to the public, and I mean to see all this nonsensical nightmare. In the twentieth century—”

He was almost choked with his own protest, and then, after a silence, the old soldier said:

“Well, I don’t profess to know much about those things, but I think these religious people need to study a text which says: ‘Let the dead bury their dead.’”

“Only, unfortunately, that’s just what it looks like,” said his wife with a sigh. “It’s just like some creepy story of a dead man burying another dead man, over and over again for ever.”

“The storm has passed over us,” said Romaine, with a rather inscrutable smile. “You will not have to visit the inhospitable house after all.”

She suddenly shuddered.

“Oh, I’ll never do that again!” she exclaimed.

Mallow was staring at her.

“Again! Have you tried it before?” he cried.

“Well, I did once,” she said, with a lightness not without a touch of pride; “but we needn’t go back on all that. It’s not raining now, but I think we’d better be moving back to the car.”

As they moved off in procession, Mallow and the general brought up the rear; and the latter said abruptly, lowering his voice:

“I don’t want that little cad Cockspur to hear but as you’ve asked you’d better know. It’s the one thing I can’t forgive Marne; but I suppose these monks have drilled him that way. My wife, who had been the best friend he ever had in America, actually came to that house when he was walking in the garden. He was looking at the ground like a monk, and hidden in a black hood that was really as ridiculous as any mask. She had sent her card in, and stood there in his very path. And he walked past her without a word or a glance, as if she had been a stone. He wasn’t human; he was like some horrible automaton. She may well call him a dead man.”

“It’s all very strange,” said the young man rather vaguely. “It isn’t like — like what I should have expected.”

Young Mr. Mallow, when he left that rather dismal picnic, took himself thoughtfully in search of a friend. He did not know any monks, but he knew one priest, whom he was very much concerned to confront with the curious revelations he had heard that afternoon. He felt he would very much like to know the truth about the cruel superstition that hung over the house of Marne, like the black thundercloud he had seen hovering over it.

After being referred from one place to another, he finally ran his friend Father Brown to earth in the house of another friend, a Roman Catholic friend, with a large family. He entered somewhat abruptly to find Father Brown sitting on the floor with a serious expression, and attempting to pin the somewhat florid hat belonging to a wax doll on to the head of a teddy bear.

Mallow felt a faint sense of incongruity; but he was far too full of his problem to put off the conversation if he could help it. He was staggering from a sort of set-back in a subconscious process that had been going on for some time. He poured out the whole tragedy of the house of Marne as he had heard it from the general's wife, along with most of the comments of the general and the newspaper proprietor. A new atmosphere of attention seemed to be created with the mention of the newspaper proprietor.

Father Brown neither knew nor cared that his attitudes were comic or commonplace. He continued to sit on the floor, where his large head and short legs made him look very like a baby playing with toys. But there came into his great grey eyes a certain expression that has been seen in the eyes of many men in many centuries through the story of nineteen hundred years; only the men were not generally sitting on floors, but at council tables, or on the seats of chapters, or the thrones of bishops and cardinals; a far-off, watchful look, heavy with the humility of a charge too great for men. Something of that anxious and far-reaching look is found in the eyes of sailors and of those who have steered through so many storms the ship of St. Peter.

"It's very good of you to tell me this," he said. "I'm really awfully grateful, for we may have to do something about it. If it were only people like you and the general, it might be only a private matter; but if Sir John Cockspur is going to spread some sort of scare in his papers — well, he's a Toronto Orangeman, and we can hardly keep out of it."

"But what will you say about it?" asked Mallow anxiously.

"The first thing I should say about it," said Father Brown, "is that, as you tell it, it doesn't sound like life. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that we are all pessimistic vampires blighting all human happiness. Suppose I'm a pessimistic vampire." He scratched his nose with the teddy bear, became faintly conscious of the incongruity, and put it down. "Suppose we do destroy all human and family ties. Why should we entangle a man again in an old family tie just when he showed signs of getting loose from it? Surely it’s a little unfair to charge us both with crushing such affection and encouraging such infatuation. I don’t see why even a religious maniac should be that particular sort of monomaniac, or how religion could increase that mania, except by brightening it with a little hope.”

Then he said, after a pause: “I should like to talk to that general of yours.”

“It was his wife who told me,” said Mallow.

“Yes,” replied the other; “but I’m more interested in what he didn’t tell you than in what she did.”

“You think he knows more than she does?”

“I think he knows more than she says,” answered Father Brown. “You tell me he used a phrase about forgiving everything except the rudeness to his wife. After all, what else was there to forgive?”

Father Brown had risen and shaken his shapeless clothes, and stood looking at the young man with screwed up eyes and slightly quizzical expression. The next moment he had turned, and picking up his equally shapeless umbrella and large shabby hat, went stumping down the street.

He plodded through a variety of wide streets and squares till he came to a handsome old-fashioned house in the West End, where he asked the servant if he could see General Outram. After some little palaver he was shown into a study, fitted out less with books than with maps and globes, where the bald-headed, black-whiskered Anglo-Indian sat smoking a long, thin, black cigar and playing with pins on a chart.

“I am sorry to intrude,” said the priest, “and all the more because I can’t help the intrusion looking like interference. I want to speak to you about a private matter, but only in the hope of keeping it private. Unfortunately, some people are likely to make it public. I think, general, that you know Sir John Cockspur.”

The mass of black moustache and whisker served as a sort of mask for the lower half of the old general’s face; it was always hard to see whether he smiled, but his brown eyes often had a certain twinkle.

“Everybody knows him, I suppose,” he said. “I don’t know him very well.”

“Well, you know everybody knows whatever he knows,” said Father Brown, smiling, “when he thinks it convenient to print it. And I understand from my friend Mr. Mallow, whom, I think, you know, that Sir John is going to print some scorching anti-clerical articles founded on what he would call the Marne Mystery. ‘Monks Drive Marquis Mad,’ etc.”

“If he is,” replied the general, “I don’t see why you should come to me about it. I ought to tell you I’m a strong Protestant.”

“I’m very fond of strong Protestants,” said Father Brown. “I came to you because I was sure you would tell the truth. I hope it is not uncharitable to feel less sure of Sir John Cockspur.”

The brown eyes twinkled again, but the general said nothing.

“General,” said Father Brown, “suppose Cockspur or his sort were going to make the world ring with tales against your country and your flag. Suppose he said your regiment ran away in battle, or your staff were in the pay of the enemy. Would you let anything stand between you and the facts that would refute him? Wouldn’t you get on the track of the truth at all costs to anybody? Well, I have a regiment, and I belong to an army. It is being discredited by what I am certain is a fictitious story; but I don’t know the true story. Can you blame me for trying to find it out?”

The soldier was silent, and the priest continued:

“I have heard the story Mallow was told yesterday, about Marne retiring with a broken heart through the death of his more than brother. I am sure there was more in it than that. I came to ask you if you know any more.”

“No,” said the general shortly; “I cannot tell you any more.”

“General,” said Father Brown with a broad grin, “you would have called me a Jesuit if I had used that equivocation.”

The soldier laughed gruffly, and then growled with much greater hostility.

“Well, I won’t tell you, then,” he said. “What do you say to that?”

“I only say,” said the priest mildly, “that in that case I shall have to tell you.”

The brown eyes stared at him; but there was no twinkle in them now. He went on:

“You compel me to state, less sympathetically perhaps than you could, why it is obvious that there is more behind. I am quite sure the marquis has better cause for his brooding and secretiveness than merely having lost an old friend. I doubt whether priests have anything to do with it; I don’t even know if he’s a convert or merely a man comforting his conscience with charities; but I’m sure he’s something more than a chief mourner. Since you insist, I will tell you one or two of the things that made me think so.

"First, it was stated that James Mair was engaged to be married, but somehow became unattached again after the death of Maurice Mair. Why should an honourable man break off his engagement merely because he was depressed by the death of a third party? He's much more likely to have turned for consolation to it; but, anyhow, he was bound in decency to go through with it."

The general was biting his black moustache, and his brown eyes had become very watchful and even anxious, but he did not answer.

"A second point," said Father Brown, frowning at the table. "James Mair was always asking his lady friend whether his cousin Maurice was not very fascinating, and whether women would not admire him. I don't know if it occurred to the lady that there might be another meaning to that inquiry."

The general got to his feet and began to walk or stamp about the room.

"Oh, damn it all," he said, but without any air of animosity.

"The third point," went on Father Brown, "is James Mair's curious manner of mourning — destroying all relics, veiling all portraits, and so on. It does sometimes happen, I admit; it might mean mere affectionate bereavement. But it might mean something else."

"Confound you," said the other. "How long are you going on piling this up?"

"The fourth and fifth points are pretty conclusive," said the priest calmly, "especially if you take them together. The first is that Maurice Mair seems to have had no funeral in particular, considering he was a cadet of a great family. He must have been buried hurriedly; perhaps secretly. And the last point is, that James Mair instantly disappeared to foreign parts; fled, in fact, to the ends of the earth.

"And so," he went on, still in the same soft voice, "when you would blacken my religion to brighten the story of the pure and perfect affection of two brothers, it seems — —"

"Stop!" cried Outram in a tone like a pistol shot. "I must tell you more, or you will fancy worse. Let me tell you one thing to start with. It was a fair fight."

"Ah," said Father Brown, and seemed to exhale a huge breath.

"It was a duel," said the other. "It was probably the last duel fought in England, and it is long ago now."

"That's better," said Father Brown. "Thank God; that's a great deal better."

“Better than the ugly things you thought of, I suppose?” said the general gruffly. “Well, it’s all very well for you to sneer at the pure and perfect affection; but it was true for all that. James Mair really was devoted to his cousin, who’d grown up with him like a younger brother. Elder brothers and sisters do sometimes devote themselves to a child like that, especially when he’s a sort of infant phenomenon. But James Mair was the sort of simple character in whom even hate is in a sense unselfish. I mean that even when his tenderness turns to rage it is still objective, directed outwards to its object; he isn’t conscious of himself. Now poor Maurice Mair was just the opposite. He was far more friendly and popular; but his success had made him live in a house of mirrors. He was first in every sort of sport and art and accomplishment; he nearly always won and took his winning amiably. But if ever, by any chance, he lost, there was just a glimpse of something not so amiable; he was a little jealous. I needn’t tell you the whole miserable story of how he was a little jealous of his cousin’s engagement; how he couldn’t keep his restless vanity from interfering. It’s enough to say that one of the few things in which James Mair was admittedly ahead of him was marksmanship with a pistol; and with that the tragedy ended.”

“You mean the tragedy began,” replied the priest. “The tragedy of the survivor. I thought he did not need any monkish vampires to make him miserable.”

“To my mind he’s more miserable than he need be,” said the general. “After all, as I say, it was a ghastly tragedy, but it was a fair fight. And Jim had great provocation.”

“How do you know all this?” asked the priest.

“I know it because I saw it,” answered Outram stolidly. “I was James Mair’s second, and I saw Maurice Mair shot dead on the sands before my very eyes.”

“I wish you would tell me more about it,” said Father Brown reflectively. “Who was Maurice Mair’s second?”

“He had a more distinguished backing,” replied the general grimly. “Hugo Romaine was his second; the great actor, you know. Maurice was mad on acting and had taken up Romaine (who was then a rising but still a struggling man), and financed the fellow and his ventures in return for taking lessons from the professional in his own hobby of amateur acting. But Romaine was then, I suppose, practically dependent on his rich friend; though he’s richer now than any aristocrat. So his serving as second proves very little about what he thought of the quarrel. They fought in the English fashion, with only one second apiece; I wanted at least to have a surgeon, but Maurice boisterously refused it, saying the fewer people who knew, the better; and at the worst we could immediately get help. ‘There’s a doctor in the village not half a mile away,’ he said; ‘I know him and he’s got the fastest horse in the country. He could be brought here in no time; but there’s no need to bring him here till we know.’ Well, we all knew that Maurice ran most risk, as the pistol was not his weapon; so when he refused aid nobody liked to ask for it. The duel was fought on a flat stretch of sand on the east coast of Scotland; and both the sight and sound of it were masked from the hamlets inland by a long rampart of sandhills patched with rank grass; probably part of the links, though in those days no Englishman had heard of golf. There was one deep, crooked cranny in the sandhills through which we came out on the sands. I can see them now; first a wide strip of dead yellow, and beyond, a narrower strip of dark red; a dark red that seemed already like the long shadow of a deed of blood.

“The thing itself seemed to happen with horrible speed; as if a whirlwind had struck the sand. With the very crack of sound Maurice Mair seemed to spin like a teetotum and pitch upon his face like a ninepin. And queerly enough, while I’d been worrying about him up to that moment, the instant he was dead all my pity was for the man who killed him; as it is to this day and hour. I knew that with that, the whole huge terrible pendulum of my friend’s life-long love would swing back; and that whatever cause others might find to pardon him, he would never pardon himself for ever and ever. And so, somehow, the really vivid thing, the picture that burns in my memory so that I can’t forget it, is not that of the catastrophe, the smoke and the flash and the falling figure. That seemed to be all over, like the noise that wakes a man up. What I saw, what I shall always see, is poor Jim hurrying across towards his fallen friend and foe; his brown beard looking black against the ghastly pallor of his face, with its high features cut out against the sea; and the frantic gestures with which he waved me to run for the surgeon in the hamlet behind the sandhills. He had dropped his pistol as he ran; he had a glove in one hand and the loose and fluttering fingers of it seemed to elongate and emphasize his wild pantomime of pointing or hailing for help. That is the picture that really remains with me; and there is nothing else in that picture, except the striped background of sands and sea and the dark, dead body lying still as a stone, and the dark figure of the dead man's second standing grim and motionless against the horizon."

"Did Romaine stand motionless?" asked the priest. "I should have thought he would have run even quicker towards the corpse."

"Perhaps he did when I had left," replied the general. "I took in that undying picture in an instant and the next instant I had dived among the sandhills, and was far out of sight of the others. Well, poor Maurice had made a good choice in the matter of doctors; though the doctor came too late, he came quicker than I should have thought possible. This village surgeon was a very remarkable man, redhaired, irascible, but extraordinarily strong in promptitude and presence of mind. I saw him but for a flash as he leapt on his horse and went thundering away to the scene of death, leaving me far behind. But in that flash I had so strong a sense of his personality that I wished to God he had really been called in before the duel began; for I believe on my soul he would have prevented it somehow. As it was, he cleaned up the mess with marvellous swiftness; long before I could trail back to the sea-shore on my two feet his impetuous practicality had managed everything; the corpse was temporarily buried in the sandhills and the unhappy homicide had been persuaded to do the only thing he could do — to flee for his life. He slipped along the coast till he came to a port and managed to get out of the country. You know the rest; poor Jim remained abroad for many years; later, when the whole thing had been hushed up or forgotten, he returned to his dismal castle and automatically inherited the title. I have never seen him from that day to this, and yet I know what is written in red letters in the inmost darkness of his brain."

"I understand," said Father Brown, "that some of you have made efforts to see him?"

"My wife never relaxed her efforts," said the general. "She refuses to admit that such a crime ought to cut a man off for ever; and I confess I am inclined to agree with her. Eighty years before it would have been thought quite normal; and really it was manslaughter rather than murder. My wife is a great friend of the unfortunate lady who was the occasion of the quarrel and she has an idea that if Jim would consent to see Viola Grayson once again, and receive her assurance that old quarrels are buried, it might restore his sanity. My wife is calling a sort of council of old friends to-morrow, I believe. She is very energetic."

Father Brown was playing with the pins that lay beside the general's map; he seemed to listen rather absent-mindedly. He had the sort of mind that sees things in pictures; and the picture which had coloured even the prosaic mind of the practical soldier took on tints yet more significant and sinister in the more mystical mind of the priest. He saw the dark-red desolation of sand, the very hue of Aceldama, and the dead man lying in a dark heap, and the slayer, stooping as he ran, gesticulating with a glove in demented remorse, and always his imagination came back to the third thing that he could not yet fit into any human picture: the second of the slain man standing motionless and mysterious, like a dark statue on the edge of the sea. It might seem to some a detail; but for him it was that stiff figure that stood up like a standing note of interrogation.

Why had not Romaine moved instantly? It was the natural thing for a second to do, in common humanity, let alone friendship. Even if there were some double-dealing or darker motive not yet understood, one would think it would be done for the sake of appearances. Anyhow, when the thing was all over, it would be natural for the second to stir long before the other second had vanished beyond the sandhills.

"Does this man Romanic move very slowly?" he asked.

"It's queer you should ask that," answered. Outram, with a sharp glance. "No, as a matter of fact he moves very quickly when he moves at all. But, curiously enough, I was just thinking that only this afternoon I saw him stand exactly like that, during the thunderstorm. He stood in that silver-clasped cape of his, and with one hand on his hip, exactly and in every line as he stood on those bloody sands long ago. The lightning blinded us all, but he did not blink. When it was dark again he was standing there still."

"I suppose he isn't standing there now?" inquired Father Brown. "I mean, I suppose he moved sometime?"

"No, he moved quite sharply when the thunder came," replied the other. "He seemed to have been waiting for it, for he told us the exact time of the interval. Is anything the matter?"

"I've pricked myself with one of your pins," said Father Brown. "I hope I haven't damaged it." But his eyes had snapped and his mouth abruptly shut.

"Are you ill?" inquired the general, staring at him.

"No," answered the priest; "I'm only not quite so stoical as your friend Romaine. I can't help blinking when I see light."

He turned to gather up his hat and umbrella; but when he had got to the door he seemed to remember something and turned back. Coming up close to Outram, he gazed up into his face with a rather helpless expression, as of a dying fish, and made a motion as if to hold him by the waistcoat.

“General,” he almost whispered, “for God’s sake don’t let your wife and that other woman insist on seeing Marne again. Let sleeping dogs lie, or you’ll unleash all the hounds of hell.”

The general was left alone with a look of bewilderment in his brown eyes, as he sat down again to play with his pins.

Even greater, however, was the bewilderment which attended the successive stages of the benevolent conspiracy of the general’s wife, who had assembled her little group of sympathizers to storm the castle of the misanthrope. The first surprise she encountered was the unexplained absence of one of the actors in the ancient tragedy. When they assembled by agreement at a quiet hotel quite near the castle, there was no sign of Hugo Romaine, until a belated telegram from a lawyer told them that the great actor had suddenly left the country. The second surprise, when they began the bombardment by sending up word to the castle with an urgent request for an interview, was the figure which came forth from those gloomy gates to receive the deputation in the name of the noble owner. It was no such figure as they would have conceived suitable to those sombre avenues or those almost feudal formalities. It was not some stately steward or major-domo, nor even a dignified butler or tall and ornamental footman. The only figure that came out of the cavernous castle doorway was the short and shabby figure of Father Brown.

“Look here,” he said, in his simple, bothered fashion. “I told you you’d much better leave him alone. He knows what he’s doing and it’ll only make everybody unhappy.”

Lady Outram, who was accompanied by a tall and quietly-dressed lady, still very handsome, presumably the original Miss Grayson, looked at the little priest with cold contempt.

“Really, sir,” she said; “this is a very private occasion, and I don’t understand what you have to do with it.’

“Trust a priest to have to do with a private occasion,” snarled Sir John Cockspur. “Don’t you know they live behind the scenes like rats behind a wainscot burrowing their way into everybody’s private rooms. See how he’s already in possession of poor Marne.” Sir John was slightly sulky, as his aristocratic friends had persuaded him to give up the great scoop of publicity in return for the privilege of being really inside a Society secret. It never occurred to him to ask himself whether he was at all like a rat in a wainscot.

"Oh, that's all right," said Father Brown, with the impatience of anxiety. "I've talked it over with the marquis and the only priest he's ever had anything to do with; his clerical tastes have been much exaggerated. I tell you he knows what he's about; and I do implore you all to leave him alone."

"You mean to leave him to this living death of moping and going mad in a ruin!" cried Lady Outram, in a voice that shook a little. "And all because he had the bad luck to shoot a man in a duel more than a quarter of a century ago. Is that what you call Christian charity?"

"Yes," answered the priest stolidly; "that is what I call Christian charity."

"It's about all the Christian charity you'll ever get out of these priests," cried Cockspur bitterly. "That's their only idea of pardoning a poor fellow for a piece of folly; to wall him up alive and starve him to death with fasts and penances and pictures of hell-fire. And all because a bullet went wrong."

"Really, Father Brown," said General Outram, "do you honestly think he deserves this? Is that your Christianity?"

"Surely the true Christianity," pleaded his wife more gently, "is that which knows all and pardons all; the love that can remember — and forget."

"Father Brown," said young Mallow, very earnestly, "I generally agree with what you say; but I'm hanged if I can follow you here. A shot in a duel, followed instantly by remorse, is not such an awful offence."

"I admit." said Father Brown dully, "that I take a more serious view of his offence."

"God soften your hard heart," said the strange lady speaking for the first time. "I am going to speak to my old friend."

Almost as if her voice had raised a ghost in that great grey house, something stirred within and a figure stood in the dark doorway at the top of the great stone flight of steps. It was clad in dead black, but there was something wild about the blanched hair and something in the pale features that was like the wreck of a marble statue.

Viola Grayson began calmly to move up the great flight of steps; and Outram muttered in his thick black moustache: "He won't cut her dead as he did my wife, I fancy."

Father Brown, who seemed in a collapse of resignation, looked up at him for a moment.

"Poor Marne has enough on his conscience," he said. "Let us acquit him of what we can. At least he never cut your wife."

"What do you mean by that?"

"He never knew her," said Father Brown.

As they spoke, the tall lady proudly mounted the last step and came face to face with the Marquis of Marne. His lips moved, but something happened before he could speak.

A scream rang across the open space and went wailing away in echoes along those hollow walls. By the abruptness and agony with which it broke from the woman's lips it might have been a mere inarticulate cry. But it was an articulated word; and they all heard it with a horrible distinctness.

"Maurice!"

"What is it, dear?" cried Lady Outram, and began to run up the steps; for the other woman was swaying as if she might fall down the whole stone flight. Then she faced about and began to descend, all bowed and shrunken and shuddering. "Oh, my God," she was saying. "Oh, my God, it isn't Jim at all. it's Maurice!"

"I think, Lady Outram," said the priest gravely, "you had better go with your friend."

As they turned, a voice fell on them like a stone from the top of the stone stair, a voice that might have come out of an open grave. It was hoarse and unnatural, like the voices of men who are left alone with wild birds on desert islands. It was the voice of the Marquis of Marne, and it said: "Stop!"

"Father Brown," he said, "before your friends disperse I authorize you to tell them all I have told you. Whatever follows, I will hide from it no longer."

"You are right," said the priest, "and it shall be counted to you."

"Yes," said Father Brown quietly to the questioning company afterwards. "He has given me the right to speak; but I will not tell it as he told me, but as I found it out for myself. Well, I knew from the first that the blighting monkish influence was all nonsense out of novels. Our people might possibly, in certain cases, encourage a man to go regularly into a monastery, but certainly not to hang about in a mediaeval castle. In the same way, they certainly wouldn't want him to dress up as a monk when he wasn't a monk.

But it struck me that he might himself want to wear a monk's hood or even a mask. I had heard of him as a mourner, and then as a murderer; but already I had hazy suspicions that his reason for hiding might not only be concerned with what he was, but with who he was.

"Then came the general's vivid description of the duel; and the most vivid thing in it to me was the figure of Mr. Romaine in the background; it was vivid because it was in the background. Why did the general leave behind him on the sand a dead man, whose friend stood yards away from him like a stock or a stone? Then I heard something, a mere trifle, about a trick habit that Romaine has of standing quite still when he is waiting for something to happen; as he waited for the thunder to follow the lightning. Well, that automatic trick in this case betrayed everything. Hugo Romaine on that old occasion, also, was waiting for something."

"But it was all over," said the general. "What could he have been waiting for?"

"He was waiting for the duel," said Father Brown.

"But I tell you I saw the duel!" cried the general.

"And I tell you you didn't see the duel," said the priest.

"Are you mad?" demanded the other. "Or why should you think I am blind?"

"Because you were blinded — that you might not see," said the priest. "Because you are a good man and God had mercy on your innocence, and he turned your face away from that unnatural strife. He set a wall of sand and silence between you and what really happened on that horrible red shore, abandoned to the raging spirits of Judas and of Cain."

"Tell us what happened!" gasped the lady impatiently.

"I will tell it as I found it," proceeded the priest. "The next thing I found was that Romaine the actor had been training Maurice Mair in all the tricks of the trade of acting. I once had a friend who went in for acting. He gave me a very amusing account of how his first week's training consisted entirely of falling down; of learning how to fall flat without a stagger, as if he were stone dead."

"God have mercy on us!" cried the general, and gripped the arms of his chair as if to rise.

"Amen," said Father Brown. "You told me how quickly it seemed to come; in fact, Maurice fell before the bullet flew, and lay perfectly still, waiting. And his wicked friend and teacher stood also in the background, waiting."

"We are waiting," said Cockspur, "and I feel as if I couldn't wait."

"James Mair, already broken with remorse, rushed across to the fallen man and bent over to lift him up. He had thrown away his pistol like an unclean thing; but Maurice's pistol still lay under his hand and it was undischarged. Then as the elder man bent over the younger, the younger lifted himself on his left arm and shot the elder through the body. He knew he was not so good a shot, but there was no question of missing the heart at that distance."

The rest of the company had risen and stood staring down at the narrator with pale faces. "Are you sure of this?" asked Sir John at last, in a thick voice.

"I am sure of it," said Father Brown, "and now I leave Maurice Mair, the present Marquis of Marne, to your Christian charity. You have told me something to-day about Christian charity. You seemed to me to give it almost too large a place; but how fortunate it is for poor sinners like this man that you err so much on the side of mercy, and are ready to be reconciled to all mankind."

"Hang it all," exploded the general; "if you think I'm going to be reconciled to a filthy viper like that, I tell you I wouldn't say a word to save him from hell. I said I could pardon a regular decent duel, but of all the treacherous assassins — —"

"He ought to be lynched," cried Cockspur excitedly. "He ought to burn alive like a nigger in the States. And if there is such a thing as burning for ever, he jolly well — —"

"I wouldn't touch him with a barge-pole myself," said Mallow.

"There is a limit to human charity," said Lady Outram, trembling all over.

"There is," said Father Brown dryly; "and that is the real difference between human charity and Christian charity. You must forgive me if I was not altogether crushed by your contempt for my uncharitableness to-day; or by the lectures you read me about pardon for every sinner. For it seems to me that you only pardon the sins that you don't really think sinful. You only forgive criminals when they commit what you don't regard as crimes, but rather as conventions. So you tolerate a conventional duel, just as you tolerate a conventional divorce. You forgive because there isn't anything to be forgiven."

"But, hang it all," cried Mallow, "you don't expect us to be able to pardon a vile thing like this?"

"No," said the priest; "but we have to be able to pardon it."

He stood up abruptly and looked round at them.

"We have to touch such men, not with a bargepole, but with a benediction," he said. "We have to say the word that will save them from hell. We alone are left to deliver them from despair when your human charity deserts them. Go on your own primrose path pardoning all your favourite vices and being generous to your fashionable crimes; and leave us in the darkness, vampires of the night, to console those who really need consolation; who do things really indefensible, things that neither the world nor they themselves can defend; and none but a priest will pardon. Leave us with the men who commit the mean and revolting and real crimes; mean as St. Peter when the cock crew, and yet the dawn came."

"The dawn," repeated Mallow doubtfully. "You mean hope — for him?"

"Yes," replied the other. "Let me ask you one question. You are great ladies and men of honour and secure of yourselves; you would never, you can tell yourselves, stoop to such squalid reason as that. But tell me this. If any of you had so stooped, which of you, years afterwards, when you were old and rich and safe, would have been driven by conscience or confessor to tell such a story of yourself? You say you could not commit so base a crime. Could you confess so base a crime?" The others gathered their possessions together and drifted by twos and threes out of the room in silence. And Father Brown, also in silence, went back to the melancholy castle of Marne.

The Secret of Flambeau

“ — the sort of murders in which I played the part of the murderer,” said Father Brown, putting down the wineglass. The row of red pictures of crime had passed before him in that moment.

“It is true,” he resumed, after a momentary pause, “that somebody else had played the part of the murderer before me and done me out of the actual experience. I was a sort of understudy; always in a state of being ready to act the assassin. I always made it my business, at least, to know the part thoroughly. What I mean is that, when I tried to imagine the state of mind in which such a thing would be done, I always realized that I might have done it myself under certain mental conditions, but not under others; and not generally under the obvious ones. And then, of course, I knew who really had done it; and he was not generally the obvious person.

“For instance, it seemed obvious to say that the revolutionary poet had killed the old judge who saw red about red revolutionaries. But that isn’t really a reason for the revolutionary poet killing him. It isn’t, if you think what it would really be like to be a revolutionary poet. Now I set myself conscientiously down to be a revolutionary poet. I mean that particular sort of pessimistic anarchial lover of revolt, not as reform, but rather as destruction. I tried to clear my mind of such elements of sanity and constructive common sense as I have had the luck to learn or inherit. I shut down and darkened all the skylights through which comes the good daylight out of heaven; I imagined a mind lit only by a red light from below; a fire rending rocks and cleaving abysses upwards. And even with the vision at its wildest and worst, I could not see why such a visionary should cut short his own career by colliding with a common policeman, for killing one out of a million conventional old fools, as he would have called them. He wouldn’t do it; however much he wrote songs of violence. He wouldn’t do it, because he wrote songs of violence. A man who can express himself in song need not express himself in suicide. A poem was an event to him; and he would want to have more of them. Then I thought of another sort of heathen; the sort that is not destroying the world but entirely depending on the world. I thought that, save for the grace of God, I might have been a man for whom the world was a blaze of electric lights, with nothing but utter darkness beyond and around it. The worldly man, who really lives only for this world and believes in no other, whose worldly success and pleasure are all he can ever snatch out of nothingness — that is the man who will really do anything, when he is in danger of losing the whole world and saving nothing. It is not the revolutionary man but the respectable man who would commit any crime — to save his respectability. Think what exposure would mean to a man like that fashionable barrister; and exposure of the one crime still really hated by his fashionable world — treason against patriotism. If I had been in his position, and had nothing better than his philosophy, heaven alone knows what I might have done. That is just where this little religious exercise is so wholesome."

"Some people would think it was rather morbid," said Grandison Chace dubiously.

"Some people," said Father Brown gravely, "undoubtedly do think that charity and humility are morbid. Our friend the poet probably would. But I'm not arguing those questions; I'm only trying to answer your question about how I generally go to work. Some of your countrymen have apparently done me the honour to ask how I managed to frustrate a few miscarriages of justice. Well, you can go back and tell them that I do it by morbidity. But I most certainly don't want them to think I do it by magic."

Chace continued to look at him with a reflective frown; he was too intelligent not to understand the idea; he would also have said that he was too healthy-minded to like it. He felt as if he were talking to one man and yet to a hundred murderers. There was something uncanny about that very small figure, perched like a goblin beside the goblin stove; and the sense that its round head had held such a universe of wild unreason and imaginative injustice. It was as if the vast void of dark behind it were a throng of dark gigantic figures, the ghosts of great criminals held at bay by the magic circle of the red stove, but ready to tear their master in pieces.

"Well, I'm afraid I do think it's morbid," he said frankly. "And I'm not sure it isn't almost as morbid as magic. But morbidity or no, there's one thing to be said; it must be an interesting experience." Then he added, after reflection: "I don't know whether you would make a really good criminal. But you ought to make a rattling good novelist."

"I only have to deal with real events," said Father Brown. "But it's sometimes harder to imagine real things than unreal ones."

"Especially," said the other, "when they are the great crimes of the world."

"It's not the great crimes but the small crimes that are really hard to imagine," replied the priest.

"I don't quite know what you mean by that," said Chace.

"I mean commonplace crimes like stealing jewels," said Father Brown; "like that affair of the emerald necklace or the Ruby of Meru or the artificial goldfish. The difficulty in those cases is that you've got to make your mind small. High and mighty humbugs, who deal in big ideas, don't do those obvious things. I was sure the Prophet hadn't taken the ruby; or the Count the goldfish; though a man like Bankes might easily take the emeralds. For them, a jewel is a piece of glass: and they can see through the glass. But the little, literal people take it at its market value.

"For that you've got to have a small mind. It's awfully hard to get; like focusing smaller and sharper in a wobbling camera. But some things helped; and they threw a lot of light on the mystery, too. For instance, the sort of man who brags about having 'shown up' sham magicians or poor quacks of any sort — he's always got a small mind. He is the sort of man who 'sees through' tramps and trips them up in telling lies. I dare say it might sometimes be a painful duty. It's an uncommonly base pleasure. The moment I realized what a small mind meant, I knew where to look for it — in the man who wanted to expose the Prophet — and it was he that sneaked the ruby; in the man who jeered at his sister's psychic fancies — and it was he who nabbed the emeralds. Men like that always have their eye on jewels; they never could rise, with the higher humbugs, to despising jewels. Those criminals with small minds are always quite conventional. They become criminals out of sheer conventionality.

"It takes you quite a long time to feel so crudely as that, though. It's quite a wild effort of imagination to be so conventional. To want one potty little object as seriously as all that. But you can do it. ... You can get nearer to it. Begin by thinking of being a greedy child; of how you might have stolen a sweet in a shop; of how there was one particular sweet you wanted … then you must subtract the childish poetry; shut off the fairy light that shone on the sweet-stuff shop; imagine you really think you know the world and the market value of sweets … you contract your mind like the camera focus … the thing shapes and then sharpens ... and then, suddenly, it comes!"

He spoke like a man who had once captured a divine vision. Grandison Chace was still looking at him with a frown of mingled mystification and interest. It must be confessed that there did flash once beneath his heavy frown a look of something almost like alarm. It was as if the shock of the first strange confession of the priest still thrilled faintly through him like the last vibration of a thunderclap in the room. Under the surface he was saying to himself that the mistake had only been a temporary madness; that, of course. Father Brown could not really be the monster and murderer he had beheld for that blinding and bewildering instant. But was there not something wrong with the man who talked in that calm way about being a murderer? Was it possible that the priest was a little mad?

"Don't you think," he said, abruptly; "that this notion of yours, of a man trying to feel like a criminal, might make him a little too tolerant of crime?"

Father Brown sat up and spoke in a more staccato style.

"I know it does just the opposite. It solves the whole problem of time and sin. It gives a man his remorse beforehand."

There was a silence; the American looked at the high and steep roof that stretched half across the enclosure; his host gazed into the fire without moving; and then the priest's voice came on a different note, as if from lower down.

"There are two ways of renouncing the devil," he said; "and the difference is perhaps the deepest chasm in modern religion. One is to have a horror of him because he is so far off; and the other to have it because he is so near. And no virtue and vice are so much divided as those two virtues."

They did not answer and he went on in the same heavy tone, as if he were dropping words like molten lead.

"You may think a crime horrible because you could never commit it. I think it horrible because I could commit it. You think of it as something like an eruption of Vesuvius; but that would not really be so terrible as this house catching fire. If a criminal suddenly appeared in this room — —"

"If a criminal appeared in this room," said Chace, smiling, "I think you would be a good deal too favourable to him. Apparently you would start by telling him that you were a criminal yourself and explaining how perfectly natural it was that he should have picked his father's pocket or cut his mother's throat. Frankly, I don't think it's practical. I think that the practical effect would be that no criminal would ever reform. It's easy enough to theorize and take hypothetical cases; but we all know we're only talking in the air. Sitting here in M. Duroc's nice, comfortable house, conscious of our respectability and all the rest of it, it just gives us a theatrical thrill to talk about thieves and murderers and the mysteries of their souls. But the people who really have to deal with thieves and murderers have to deal with them differently. We are safe by the fireside; and we know the house is not on fire. We know there is not a criminal in the room."

The M. Duroc to whom allusion had been made rose slowly from what had been called his fireside, and his huge shadow flung from the fire seemed to cover everything and darken even the very night above him.

"There is a criminal in this room," he said. "I am one. I am Flambeau, and the police of two hemispheres are still hunting for me."

The American remained gazing at him with eyes of a stony brightness; he seemed unable to speak or move.

"There is nothing mystical, or metaphorical, or vicarious about my confession," said Flambeau. "I stole for twenty years with these two hands; I fled from the police on these two feet. I hope you will admit that my activities were practical. I hope you will admit that my judges and pursuers really had to deal with crime. Do you think I do not know all about their way of reprehending it? Have I not heard the sermons of the righteous and seen the cold stare of the respectable; have I not been lectured in the lofty and distant style, asked how it was possible for anyone to fall so low, told that no decent person could ever have dreamed of such depravity? Do you think all that ever did anything but make me laugh? Only my friend told me that he knew exactly why I stole; and I have never stolen since."

Father Brown made a gesture as of deprecation; and Grandison Chace at last let out a long breath like a whistle.

"I have told you the exact truth," said Flambeau; "and it is open to you to hand me over to the police."

There was an instant of profound stillness, in which could be faintly heard the belated laughter of Flambeau's children in the high, dark house above them, and the crunching and snorting of the great, grey pigs in the twilight. And then it was cloven by a high voice, vibrant and with a touch of offence, almost surprising for those who do not understand the sensitive American spirit, and how near, in spite of commonplace contrasts, it can sometimes come to the chivalry of Spain.

"Monsieur Duroc," he said rather stiffly. "We have been friends, I hope, for some considerable period; and I should be pretty much pained to suppose you thought me capable of playing you such a trick while I was enjoying your hospitality and the society of your family, merely because you chose to tell me a little of your own autobiography of your own free will. And when you spoke merely in defence of your friend — no, sir, I can’t imagine any gentleman double-crossing another under such circumstances; it would be a damned sight better to be a dirty informer and sell men’s blood for money. But in a case like this —— ! Could you conceive any man being such a Judas?”

“I could try.” said Father Brown.

THE SCANDAL OF FATHER BROWN

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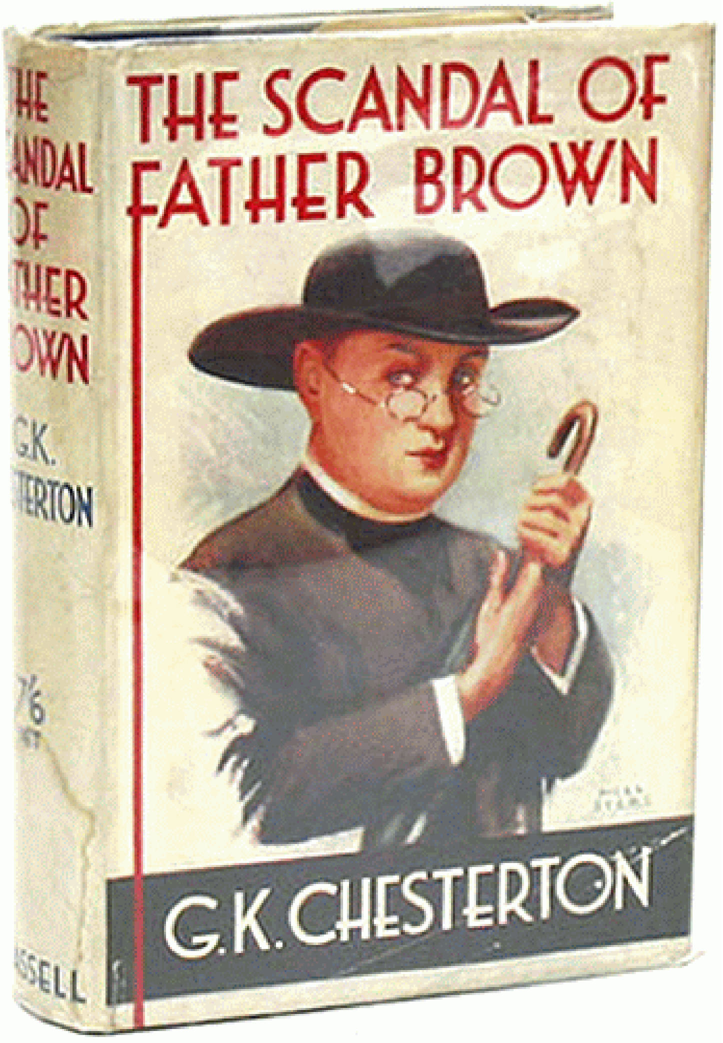
THE SCANDAL OF FATHER BROWN
G.K. CHESTERTON
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CASSELL

The first edition

The Scandal of Father Brown

It would not be fair to record the adventures of Father Brown, without admitting that he was once involved in a grave scandal. There still are persons, perhaps even of his own community, who would say that there was a sort of blot upon his name. It happened in a picturesque Mexican road-house of rather loose repute, as appeared later; and to some it seemed that for once the priest had allowed a romantic streak in him, and his sympathy for human weakness, to lead him into loose and unorthodox action. The story in itself was a simple one; and perhaps the whole surprise of it consisted in its simplicity.

Burning Troy began with Helen; this disgraceful story began with the beauty of Hypatia Potter. Americans have a great power, which Europeans do not always appreciate, of creating institutions from below; that is by popular initiative. Like every other good thing, it has its lighter aspects; one of which, as has been remarked by Mr Wells and others, is that a person may become a public institution without becoming an official institution. A girl of great beauty or brilliancy will be a sort of uncrowned queen, even if she is not a Film Star or the original of a Gibson Girl. Among those who had the fortune, or misfortune, to exist beautifully in public in this manner, was a certain Hypatia Hard, who had passed through the preliminary stage of receiving florid compliments in society paragraphs of the local press, to the position of one who is actually interviewed by real pressmen. On War and Peace and Patriotism and Prohibition and Evolution and the Bible she had made her pronouncements with a charming smile; and if none of them seemed very near to the real grounds of her own reputation, it was almost equally hard to say what the grounds of her reputation really were. Beauty, and being the daughter of a rich man, are things not rare in her country; but to these she added whatever it is that attracts the wandering eye of journalism. Next to none of her admirers had even seen her, or even hoped to do so; and none of them could possibly derive any sordid benefit from her father’s wealth. It was simply a sort of popular romance, the modern substitute for mythology; and it laid the first foundations of the more turgid and tempestuous sort of romance in which she was to figure later on; and in which many held that the reputation of Father Brown, as well as of others, had been blown to rags.

It was accepted, sometimes romantically, sometimes resignedly, by those whom American satire has named the Sob Sisters, that she had already married a very worthy and respectable business man of the name of Potter. It was even possible to regard her for a moment as Mrs Potter, on the universal understanding that her husband was only the husband of Mrs Potter.

Then came the Great Scandal, by which her friends and enemies were horrified beyond their wildest hopes. Her name was coupled (as the queer phrase goes) with a literary man living in Mexico; in status an American, but in spirit a very Spanish American. Unfortunately his vices resembled her virtues, in being good copy. He was no less a person than the famous or infamous Rudel Romanes; the poet whose works had been so universally popularized by being vetoed by libraries or prosecuted by the police. Anyhow, her pure and placid star was seen in conjunction with this comet. He was of the sort to be compared to a comet, being hairy and hot; the first in his portraits, the second in his poetry. He was also destructive; the comet's tail was a trail of divorces, which some called his success as a lover and some his prolonged failure as a husband. It was hard on Hypatia; there are disadvantages in conducting the perfect private life in public; like a domestic interior in a shop-window. Interviewers reported doubtful utterances about Love's Larger Law of Supreme Self-Realization. The Pagans applauded. The Sob Sisterhood permitted themselves a note of romantic regret; some having even the hardened audacity to quote from the poem of Maud Mueller, to the effect that of all the words of tongue or pen, the saddest are 'It might have been.' And Mr Agar P. Rock, who hated the Sob Sisterhood with a holy and righteous hatred, said that in this case he thoroughly agreed with Bret Harte's emendation of the poem:

'More sad are those we daily see; it is, but it hadn't ought to be.'

For Mr Rock was very firmly and rightly convinced that a very large number of things hadn't ought to be. He was a slashing and savage critic of national degeneration, on the Minneapolis Meteor, and a bold and honest man. He had perhaps come to specialize too much in the spirit of indignation, but it had had a healthy enough origin in his reaction against sloppy attempts to confuse right and wrong in modern journalism and gossip. He expressed it first in the form of a protest against an unholy halo of romance being thrown round the gunman and the gangster. Perhaps he was rather too much inclined to assume, in robust impatience, that all gangsters were Dagos and that all Dagos were gangsters. But his prejudices, even when they were a little provincial, were rather refreshing after a certain sort of maudlin and unmanly hero-worship, which was ready to regard a professional murderer as a leader of fashion, so long as the pressmen reported that his smile was irresistible or his tuxedo was all right. Anyhow, the prejudices did not boil the less in the bosom of Mr Rock, because he was actually in the land of the Dagos when this story opens; striding furiously up a hill beyond the Mexican border, to the white hotel, fringed with ornamental palms, in which it was supposed that the Potters were staying and that the mysterious Hypatia now held her court. Agar Rock was a good specimen of a Puritan, even to look at; he might even have been a virile Puritan of the seventeenth century, rather than the softer and more sophisticated Puritan of the twentieth. If you had told him that his antiquated black hat and habitual black frown, and fine flinty features, cast a gloom over the sunny land of palms and vines, he would have been very much gratified. He looked to right and left with eyes bright with universal suspicions. And, as he did so, he saw two figures on the ridge above him, outlined against the clear sub-tropical sunset; figures in a momentary posture which might have made even a less suspicious man suspect something.

One of the figures was rather remarkable in itself. It was poised at the exact angle of the turning road above the valley, as if by an instinct for the site as well as the attitude of statuary. It was wrapt in a great black cloak, in the Byronic manner, and the head that rose above it in swarthy beauty was remarkably like Byron’s. This man had the same curling hair and curling nostrils; and he seemed to be snorting something of the same scorn and indignation against the world. He grasped in his hand a rather long cane or walking-stick, which having a spike of the sort used for mountaineering, carried at the moment a fanciful suggestion of a spear. It was rendered all the more fanciful by something comically contradictory in the figure of the other man, who carried an umbrella. It was indeed a new and neatly-rolled umbrella, very different, for instance, from Father Brown’s umbrella: and he was neatly clad like a clerk in light holiday clothes; a stumpy stoutish bearded man; but the prosaic umbrella was raised and even brandished at an acute angle of attack. The taller man thrust back at him, but in a hasty defensive manner; and then the scene rather collapsed into comedy; for the umbrella opened of itself and its owner almost seemed to sink behind it, while the other man had the air of pushing his spear through a great grotesque shield. But the other man did not push it, or the quarrel, very far; he plucked out the point, turned away impatiently and strode down the road; while the other, rising and carefully refolding his umbrella, turned in the opposite direction towards the hotel. Rock had not heard any of the words of the quarrel, which must have immediately preceded this brief and rather absurd bodily conflict; but as he went up the road in the track of the short man with the beard, he revolved many things. And the romantic cloak and rather operatic good looks of the one man, combined with the sturdy self-assertion of the other, fitted in with the whole story which he had come to seek; and he knew that he could have fixed those two strange figures with their names: Romanes and Potter.

His view was in every way confirmed when he entered the pillared porch; and heard the voice of the bearded man raised high in altercation or command. He was evidently speaking to the manager or staff of the hotel, and Rock heard enough to know that he was warning them of a wild and dangerous character in the neighbourhood.

‘If he’s really been to the hotel already,’ the little man was saying, in answer to some murmur, ‘all I can say is that you’d better not let him in again. Your police ought to be looking after a fellow of that sort, but anyhow, I won’t have the lady pestered with him.’

Rock listened in grim silence and growing conviction; then he slid across the vestibule to an alcove where he saw the hotel register and turning to the last page, saw ‘the fellow’ had indeed been to the hotel already. There appeared the name of ‘Rudel Romanes,’ that romantic public character, in very large and florid foreign lettering; and after a space under it, rather close together, the names of Hypatia Potter and Ellis T. Potter, in a correct and quite American handwriting.

Agar Rock looked moodily about him, and saw in the surroundings and even the small decorations of the hotel everything that he hated most. It is perhaps unreasonable to complain of oranges growing on orange-trees, even in small tubs; still more of their only growing on threadbare curtains or faded wallpapers as a formal scheme of ornament. But to him those red and golden moons, decoratively alternated with silver moons, were in a queer way the quintessence of all moonshine. He saw in them all that sentimental deterioration which his principles deplored in modern manners, and which his prejudices vaguely connected with the warmth and softness of the

South. It annoyed him even to catch sight of a patch of dark canvas, half-showing a Watteau shepherd with a guitar, or a blue tile with a commonplace design of a Cupid on a dolphin. His common sense would have told him that he might have seen these things in a shop-window on Fifth Avenue; but where they were, they seemed like a taunting siren voice of the Paganism of the Mediterranean. And then suddenly, the look of all these things seemed to alter, as a still mirror will flicker when a figure has flashed past it for a moment; and he knew the whole room was full of a challenging presence. He turned almost stiffly, and with a sort of resistance, and knew that he was facing the famous Hypatia, of whom he had read and heard for so many years.

Hypatia Potter, nee Hard, was one of those people to whom the word ‘radiant’ really does apply definitely and derivatively. That is, she allowed what the papers called her Personality to go out from her in rays. She would have been equally beautiful, and to some tastes more attractive, if she had been self-contained; but she had always been taught to believe that self-containment was only selfishness. She would have said that she had lost Self in Service; it would perhaps be truer to say that she had asserted Self in Service; but she was quite in good faith about the service. Therefore her outstanding starry blue eyes really struck outwards, as in the old metaphor that made eyes like Cupid’s darts, killing at a distance; but with an abstract conception of conquest beyond any mere coquetry. Her pale fair hair, though arranged in a saintly halo, had a look of almost electric radiation. And when she understood that the stranger before her was Mr Agar Rock, of the Minneapolis Meteor, her eyes took on themselves the range of long searchlights, sweeping the horizon of the States.

But in this the lady was mistaken; as she sometimes was. For Agar Rock was not Agar Rock of the Minneapolis Meteor. He was at that moment merely Agar Rock; there had surged up in him a great and sincere moral impulsion, beyond the coarse courage of the interviewer. A feeling profoundly mixed of a chivalrous and national sensibility to beauty, with an instant itch for moral action of some definite sort, which was also national, nerved him to face a great scene; and to deliver a noble insult. He remembered the original Hypatia, the beautiful Neo-Platonist, and how he had been thrilled as a boy by Kingsley’s romance in which the young monk denounces her for harlotries and idolatries. He confronted her with an iron gravity and said:

‘If you’ll pardon me. Madam, I should like to have a word with you in private.’

‘Well,’ she said, sweeping the room with her splendid gaze, ‘I don’t know whether you consider this place private.’

Rock also gazed round the room and could see no sign of life less vegetable than the orange trees, except what looked like a large black mushroom, which he recognized as the hat of some native priest or other, stolidly smoking a black local cigar, and otherwise as stagnant as any vegetable. He looked for a moment at the heavy, expressionless features, noting the rudeness of that peasant type from which priests so often come, in Latin and especially Latin-American countries; and lowered his voice a little as he laughed.

‘I don’t imagine that Mexican padre knows our language,’ he said. ‘Catch those lumps of laziness learning any language but their own. Oh, I can’t swear he’s a Mexican; he might be anything; mongrel Indian or nigger, I suppose. But I’ll answer for it he’s not an American. Our ministries don’t produce that debased type.’

‘As a matter of fact,’ said the debased type, removing his black cigar, ‘I’m English and my name is Brown. But pray let me leave you if you wish to be private.’

‘If you’re English,’ said Rock warmly, ‘you ought to have some normal Nordic instinct for protesting against all this nonsense. Well, it’s enough to say now that I’m in a position to testify that there’s a pretty dangerous fellow hanging round this place; a tall fellow in a cloak, like those pictures of crazy poets.’

‘Well, you can’t go much by that,’ said the priest mildly; ‘a lot of people round here use those cloaks, because the chill strikes very suddenly after sunset.’

Rock darted a dark and doubtful glance at him; as if suspecting some evasion in the interests of all that was symbolized to him by mushroom hats and moonshine. ‘It wasn’t only the cloak,’ he growled, ‘though it was partly the way he wore it. The whole look of the fellow was theatrical, down to his damned theatrical good looks. And if you’ll forgive me, Madam, I strongly advise you to have nothing to do with him, if he comes bothering here. Your husband has already told the hotel people to keep him out—’

Hypatia sprang to her feet and, with a very unusual gesture, covered her face, thrusting her fingers into her hair. She seemed to be shaken, possibly with sobs, but by the time she had recovered they had turned into a sort of wild laughter.

‘Oh, you are all too funny,’ she said, and, in a way very unusual with her, ducked and darted to the door and disappeared.

‘Bit hysterical when they laugh like that,’ said Rock uncomfortably; then, rather at a loss, and turning to the little priest: ‘as I say, if you’re English, you ought really to be on my side against these Dagos, anyhow. Oh, I’m not one of those who talk tosh about Anglo-Saxons; but there is such a thing as history. You can always claim that America got her civilization from England.’

‘Also, to temper our pride,’ said Father Brown, ‘we must always admit that England got her civilization from Dagos.’

Again there glowed in the other’s mind the exasperated sense that his interlocutor was fencing with him, and fencing on the wrong side, in some secret and evasive way; and he curtly professed a failure to comprehend.

‘Well, there was a Dago, or possibly a Wop, called Julius Caesar,’ said Father Brown; ‘he was afterwards killed in a stabbing match; you know these Dagos always use knives. And there was another one called Augustine, who brought Christianity to our little island; and really, I don’t think we should have had much civilization without those two.’

‘Anyhow, that’s all ancient history,’ said the somewhat irritated journalist, ‘and I’m very much interested in modern history. What I see is that these scoundrels are bringing Paganism to our country, and destroying all the Christianity there is. Also destroying all the common sense there is. All settled habits, all solid social order, all the way in which the farmers who were our fathers and grandfathers did manage to live in the world, melted into a hot mush by sensations and sensualities about filmstars who divorced every month or so, and make every silly girl think that marriage is only a way of getting divorced.’

‘You are quite right,’ said Father Brown. ‘Of course I quite agree with you there. But you must make some allowances. Perhaps these Southern people are a little prone to that sort of fault. You must remember that Northern people have other kinds of faults. Perhaps these surroundings do encourage people to give too rich an importance to mere romance.’

The whole integral indignation of Agar Rock’s life rose up within him at the word.

‘I hate Romance,’ he said, hitting the little table before him. ‘I’ve fought the papers I worked for for forty years about the infernal trash. Every blackguard bolting with a barmaid is called a romantic elopement or something; and now our own Hypatia Hard, a daughter of a decent people, may get dragged into some rotten romantic divorce case, that will be trumpeted to the whole world as happily as a royal wedding. This mad poet Romanes is hanging round her; and you bet the spotlight will follow him, as if he were any rotten little Dago who is called the Great Lover on the films. I saw him outside; and he’s got the regular spotlight face. Now my sympathies are with decency and common sense. My sympathies are with poor Potter, a plain straightforward broker from Pittsburgh, who thinks he has a right to his own home. And he’s making a fight for it, too. I heard him hollering at the management, telling them to keep that rascal out; and quite right too. The people here seem a sly and slinky lot; but I rather fancy he’s put the fear of God into them already.’

‘As a matter of fact,’ said Father Brown, ‘I rather agree with you about the manager and the men in this hotel; but you mustn’t judge all Mexicans by them. Also I fancy the gentleman you speak of has not only hollered, but handed round dollars enough to get the whole staff on his side. I saw them locking doors and whispering most excitedly. By the way, your plain straightforward friend seems to have a lot of money.’

‘I’ve no doubt his business does well,’ said Rock. ‘He’s quite the best type of sound business man. What do you mean?’

‘I fancied it might suggest another thought to you,’ said Father Brown; and, rising with rather heavy civility, he left the room.

Rock watched the Potters very carefully that evening at dinner; and gained some new impressions, though none that disturbed his deep sense of the wrong that probably threatened the peace of the Potter home. Potter himself proved worthy of somewhat closer study; though the journalist had at first accepted him as prosaic and unpretentious, there was a pleasure in recognizing finer lines in what he considered the hero or victim of a tragedy. Potter had really rather a thoughtful and distinguished face, though worried and occasionally petulant. Rock got an impression that the man was recovering from an illness; his faded hair was thin but rather long, as if it had been lately neglected, and his rather unusual beard gave the onlooker the same notion. Certainly he spoke once or twice to his wife in a rather sharp and acid manner, fussing about tablets or some detail of digestive science; but his real worry was doubtless concerned with the danger from without. His wife played up to him in the splendid if somewhat condescending manner of a Patient Griselda; but her eyes also roamed continually to the doors and shutters, as if in half-hearted fear of an invasion. Rock had only too good reason to dread, after her curious outbreak, the fact that her fear might turn out to be only half-hearted.

It was in the middle of the night that the extraordinary event occurred. Rock, imagining himself to be the last to go up to bed, was surprised to find Father Brown still tucked obscurely under an orange-tree in the hall, and placidly reading a book. He returned the other's farewell without further words, and the journalist had his foot on the lowest step of the stair, when suddenly the outer door sprang on its hinges and shook and rattled under the shock of blows planted from without; and a great voice louder than the blows was heard violently demanding admission. Somehow the journalist was certain that the blows had been struck with a pointed stick like an alpenstock. He looked back at the darkened lower floor, and saw the servants of the hotel sliding here and there to see that the doors were locked; and not unlocking them. Then he slowly mounted to his room, and sat down furiously to write his report.

He described the siege of the hotel; the evil atmosphere; the shabby luxury of the place; the shifty evasions of the priest; above all, that terrible voice crying without, like a wolf prowling round the house. Then, as he wrote, he heard a new sound and sat up suddenly. It was a long repeated whistle, and in his mood he hated it doubly, because it was like the signal of a conspirator and like the love-call of a bird. There followed an utter silence, in which he sat rigid; then he rose abruptly; for he had heard yet another noise. It was a faint swish followed by a sharp rap or rattle; and he was almost certain that somebody was throwing something at the window. He walked stiffly downstairs, to the floor which was now dark and deserted; or nearly deserted. For the little priest was still sitting under the orange shrub, lit by a low lamp; and still reading his book.

'You seem to be sitting up late,' he said harshly.

'Quite a dissipated character,' said Father Brown, looking up with a broad smile, 'reading Economics of Usury at all wild hours of the night.'

'The place is locked up,' said Rock.

'Very thoroughly locked up,' replied the other. 'Your friend with the beard seems to have taken every precaution. By the way, your friend with the beard is a little rattled; I thought he was rather cross at dinner.'

'Natural enough,' growled the other, 'if he thinks savages in this savage place are out to wreck his home life.'

'Wouldn't it be better,' said Father Brown, 'if a man tried to make his home life nice inside, while he was protecting it from the things outside.'

'Oh, I know you will work up all the casuistical excuses,' said the other; 'perhaps he was rather snappy with his wife; but he's got the right on his side. Look here, you seem to me to be rather a deep dog. I believe you know more about this than you say. What the devil is going on in this infernal place? Why are you sitting up all night to see it through?'

'Well,' said Father Brown patiently, 'I rather thought my bedroom might be wanted.'

'Wanted by whom?'

'As a matter of fact, Mrs Potter wanted another room,' explained Father Brown with limpid clearness. 'I gave her mine, because I could open the window. Go and see, if you like.'

'I'll see to something else first,' said Rock grinding his teeth. 'You can play your monkey tricks in this Spanish monkey-house, but I'm still in touch with civilization.' He strode into the telephone-booth and rang up his paper; pouring out the whole tale of the wicked priest who helped the wicked poet. Then he ran upstairs into the priest's room, in which the priest had just lit a short candle, showing the windows beyond wide open.

He was just in time to see a sort of rude ladder unhooked from the window-sill and rolled up by a laughing gentleman on the lawn below. The laughing gentleman was a tall and swarthy gentleman, and was accompanied by a blonde but equally laughing lady. This time, Mr Rock could not even comfort himself by calling her laughter hysterical. It was too horribly genuine; and rang down the rambling garden-paths as she and her troubadour disappeared into the dark thickets.

Agar Rock turned on his companion a face of final and awful justice; like the Day of Judgement.

'Well, all America is going to hear of this,' he said. 'In plain words, you helped her to bolt with that curly-haired lover.'

'Yes,' said Father Brown, 'I helped her to bolt with that curly-haired lover.'

'You call yourself a minister of Jesus Christ,' cried Rock, 'and you boast of a crime.'

‘I have been mixed up with several crimes,’ said the priest gently. ‘Happily for once this is a story without a crime. This is a simple fire-side idyll; that ends with a glow of domesticity.’

‘And ends with a rope-ladder instead of a rope,’ said Rock. ‘Isn’t she a married woman?’

‘Oh, yes,’ said Father Brown.

‘Well, oughtn’t she to be with her husband?’ demanded Rock.

‘She is with her husband,’ said Father Brown.

The other was startled into anger. ‘You lie,’ he said. ‘The poor little man is still snoring in bed.’

‘You seem to know a lot about his private affairs,’ said Father Brown plaintively. ‘You could almost write a life of the Man with a Beard. The only thing you don’t seem ever to have found out about him is his name.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Rock. ‘His name is in the hotel book.’

‘I know it is,’ answered the priest, nodding gravely, ‘in very large letters; the name of Rudel Romanes. Hypatia Potter, who met him here, put her name boldly under his, when she meant to elope with him; and her husband put his name under that, when he pursued them to this place. He put it very close under hers, by way of protest. The Romanes (who has pots of money, as a popular misanthrope despising men) bribed the brutes in this hotel to bar and bolt it and keep the lawful husband out. And I, as you truly say, helped him to get in.’

When a man is told something that turns things upside-down; that the tail wags the dog; that the fish has caught the fisherman; that the earth goes round the moon; he takes some little time before he even asks seriously if it is true. He is still content with the consciousness that it is the opposite of the obvious truth. Rock said at last: ‘You don’t mean that little fellow is the romantic Rudel we’re always reading about; and that curly haired fellow is Mr Potter of Pittsburgh.’

‘Yes,’ said Father Brown. ‘I knew it the moment I clapped eyes on both of them. But I verified it afterwards.’

Rock ruminated for a time and said at last: ‘I suppose it’s barely possible you’re right. But how did you come to have such a notion, in the face of the facts?’

Father Brown looked rather abashed; subsided into a chair, and stared into vacancy, until a faint smile began to dawn on his round and rather foolish face.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘you see — the truth is, I’m not romantic.’

‘I don’t know what the devil you are,’ said Rock roughly.

‘Now you are romantic,’ said Father Brown helpfully. ‘For instance, you see somebody looking poetical, and you assume he is a poet. Do you know what the majority of poets look like? What a wild confusion was created by that coincidence of three good-looking aristocrats at the beginning of the nineteenth century: Byron and Goethe and Shelley! Believe me, in the common way, a man may write: “Beauty has laid her flaming lips on mine,” or whatever that chap wrote, without being himself particularly beautiful. Besides, do you realize how old a man generally is by the time his fame has filled the world? Watts painted Swinburne with a halo of hair; but Swinburne was bald before most of his last American or Australian admirers had heard of his hyacinthine locks. So was D’Annunzio. As a fact, Romanes still has rather a fine head, as you will see if you look at it closely; he looks like an intellectual man; and he is. Unfortunately, like a good many other intellectual men, he’s a fool. He’s let himself go to seed with selfishness and fussing about his digestion. So that the ambitious American lady, who thought it would be like soaring to Olympus with the Nine Muses to elope with a poet, found that a day or so of it was about enough for her. So that when her husband came after her, and stormed the place, she was delighted to go back to him.’

‘But her husband?’ queried Rock. ‘I am still rather puzzled about her husband.’

‘Ah, you’ve been reading too many of your erotic modern novels,’ said Father Brown; and partly closed his eyes in answer to the protesting glare of the other. ‘I know a lot of stories start with a wildly beautiful woman wedded to some elderly swine in the stock market. But why? In that, as in most things, modern novels are the very reverse of modern. I don’t say it never happens; but it hardly ever happens now except by her own fault. Girls nowadays marry whom they like; especially spoilt girls like Hypatia. And whom do they marry? A beautiful wealthy girl like that would have a ring of admirers; and whom would she choose? The chances are a hundred to one that she’d marry very young and choose the handsomest man she met at a dance or a tennis-party. Well, ordinary business men are sometimes handsome. A young god appeared (called Potter) and she wouldn’t care if he was a broker or a burglar. But, given the environment, you will admit it’s more likely he would be a broker; also, it’s quite likely that he’d be called

Potter. You see, you are so incurably romantic that your whole case was founded on the idea that a man looking like a young god couldn't be called Potter. Believe me, names are not so appropriately distributed.'

'Well,' said the other, after a short pause, 'and what do you suppose happened after that?'

Father Brown got up rather abruptly from the seat in which he had collapsed; the candlelight threw the shadow of his short figure across the wall and ceiling, giving an odd impression that the balance of the room had been altered.

'Ah,' he muttered, 'that's the devil of it. That's the real devil. Much worse than the old Indian demons in this jungle. You thought I was only making out a case for the loose ways of these Latin Americans — well, the queer thing about you' — and he blinked owlishly at the other through his spectacles— 'the queerest thing about you is that in a way you're right.

'You say down with romance. I say I'd take my chance in fighting the genuine romances — all the more because they are precious few, outside the first fiery days of youth. I say — take away the Intellectual Friendships; take away the Platonic Unions; take away the Higher Laws of Self-Fulfilment and the rest, and I'll risk the normal dangers of the job. Take away the love that isn't love, but only pride and vainglory and publicity and making a splash; and we'll take our chance of fighting the love that is love, when it has to be fought, as well as the love that is lust and lechery. Priests know young people will have passions, as doctors know they will have measles. But Hypatia Potter is forty if she is a day, and she cares no more for that little poet than if he were her publisher or her publicity man. That's just the point — he was her publicity man. It's your newspapers that have ruined her; it's living in the limelight; it's wanting to see herself in the headlines, even in a scandal if it were only sufficiently psychic and superior. It's wanting to be George Sand, her name immortally linked with Alfred de Musset. When her real romance of youth was over, it was the sin of middle age that got hold of her; the sin of intellectual ambition. She hasn't got any intellect to speak of; but you don't need any intellect to be an intellectual.'

'I should say she was pretty brainy in one sense,' observed Rock reflectively.

'Yes, in one sense,' said Father Brown. 'In only one sense. In a business sense. Not in any sense that has anything to do with these poor lounging Dagos down here. You curse the Film Stars and tell me you hate romance.

Do you suppose the Film Star, who is married for the fifth time, is misled by any romance? Such people are very practical; more practical than you are. You say you admire the simple solid Business Man. Do you suppose that Rudel Romanes isn't a Business Man? Can't you see he knew, quite as well as she did, the advertising advantages of this grand affair with a famous beauty. He also knew very well that his hold on it was pretty insecure; hence his fussing about and bribing servants to lock doors. But what I mean to say, first and last, is that there'd be a lot less scandal if people didn't idealize sin and pose as sinners. These poor Mexicans may seem sometimes to live like beasts, or rather sin like men; but they don't go in for Ideals. You must at least give them credit for that.'

He sat down again, as abruptly as he had risen, and laughed apologetically. 'Well, Mr Rock,' he said, 'that is my complete confession; the whole horrible story of how I helped a romantic elopement. You can do what you like with it.'

'In that case,' said Rock, rising, 'I will go to my room and make a few alterations in my report. But, first of all, I must ring up my paper and tell them I've been telling them a pack of lies.'

Not much more than half an hour had passed, between the time when Rock had telephoned to say the priest was helping the poet to run away with the lady, and the time when he telephoned to say that the priest had prevented the poet from doing precisely the same thing. But in that short interval of time was born and enlarged and scattered upon the winds the Scandal of Father Brown. The truth is still half an hour behind the slander; and nobody can be certain when or where it will catch up with it. The garrulity of pressmen and the eagerness of enemies had spread the first story through the city, even before it appeared in the first printed version. It was instantly corrected and contradicted by Rock himself, in a second message stating how the story had really ended; but it was by no means certain that the first story was killed. A positively incredible number of people seemed to have read the first issue of the paper and not the second. Again and again, in every corner of the world, like a flame bursting from blackened ashes, there would appear the old tale of the Brown Scandal, or Priest Ruins Potter Home. Tireless apologists of the priest's party watched for it, and patiently tagged after it with contradictions and exposures and letters of protest. Sometimes the letters were published in the papers; and sometimes they were not. But still nobody knew how many people had heard the story without hearing the contradiction. It was possible to find whole blocks of blameless and innocent people who thought the Mexican Scandal was an ordinary recorded historical incident like the Gunpowder Plot. Then somebody would enlighten these simple people, only to discover that the old story had started afresh among a few quite educated people, who would seem the last people on earth to be duped by it. And so the two Father Browns chase each other round the world for ever; the first a shameless criminal fleeing from justice; the second a martyr broken by slander, in a halo of rehabilitation. But neither of them is very like the real Father Brown, who is not broken at all; but goes stumping with his stout umbrella through life, liking most of the people in it; accepting the world as his companion, but never as his judge.

The Quick One

The strange story of the incongruous strangers is still remembered along that strip of the Sussex coast, where the large and quiet hotel called the Maypole and Garland looks across its own gardens to the sea. Two quaintly assorted figures did, indeed, enter that quiet hotel on that sunny afternoon; one being conspicuous in the sunlight, and visible over the whole shore, by the fact of wearing a lustrous green turban, surrounding a brown face and a black beard; the other would have seemed to some even more wild and weird, by reason of his wearing a soft black clergyman's hat with a yellow moustache and yellow hair of leonine length. He at least had often been seen preaching on the sands or conducting Band of Hope services with a little wooden spade; only he had certainly never been seen going into the bar of an hotel. The arrival of these quaint companions was the climax of the story, but not the beginning of it; and, in order to make a rather mysterious story as clear as possible, it is better to begin at the beginning.

Half an hour before those two conspicuous figures entered the hotel, and were noticed by everybody, two other very inconspicuous figures had also entered it, and been noticed by nobody. One was a large man, and handsome in a heavy style, but he had a knack of taking up very little room, like a background; only an almost morbidly suspicious examination of his boots would have told anybody that he was an Inspector of Police in plain clothes; in very plain clothes. The other was a drab and insignificant little man, also in plain clothes, only that they happened to be clerical clothes; but nobody had ever seen him preaching on the sands.

These travellers also found themselves in a sort of large smoking-room with a bar, for a reason which determined all the events of that tragic afternoon. The truth is that the respectable hotel called the Maypole and Garland was being 'done-up'. Those who had liked it in the past were moved to say that it was being done down; or possibly done in. This was the opinion of the local grumbler, Mr Raggley, the eccentric old gentleman who drank cherry brandy in a corner and cursed. Anyhow, it was being carefully stripped of all the stray indications that it had once been an English inn; and being busily turned, yard by yard and room by room, into something resembling the sham palace of a Levantine usurer in an American film. It was, in short, being 'decorated'; but the only part where the decoration was complete, and where customers could yet be made comfortable, was this large room leading out of the hall. It had once been honourably known as a Bar Parlour and was now mysteriously known as a Saloon Lounge, and was newly ‘decorated’, in the manner of an Asiatic Divan. For Oriental ornament pervaded the new scheme; and where there had once been a gun hung on hooks, and sporting prints and a stuffed fish in a glass case, there were now festoons of Eastern drapery and trophies of scimitars, tulwards and yataghans, as if in unconscious preparation for the coming of the gentleman with the turban. The practical point was, however, that the few guests who did arrive had to be shepherded into this lounge, now swept and garnished, because all the more regular and refined parts of the hotel were still in a state of transition. Perhaps that was also the reason why even those few guests were somewhat neglected, the manager and others being occupied with explanations or exhortations elsewhere. Anyhow, the first two travellers who arrived had to kick their heels for some time unattended. The bar was at the moment entirely empty, and the Inspector rang and rapped impatiently on the counter; but the little clergyman had already dropped into a lounge seat and seemed in no hurry for anything. Indeed his friend the policeman, turning his head, saw that the round face of the little cleric had gone quite blank, as it had a way of doing sometimes; he seemed to be staring through his moonlike spectacles at the newly decorated wall.

‘I may as well offer you a penny for your thoughts,’ said Inspector Greenwood, turning from the counter with a sigh, ‘as nobody seems to want my pennies for anything else. This seems to be the only room in the house that isn’t full of ladders and whitewash; and this is so empty that there isn’t even a potboy to give me a pot of beer.’

‘Oh . . . my thoughts are not worth a penny, let alone a pot of beer,’ answered the cleric, wiping his spectacles, ‘I don’t know why . . . but I was thinking how easy it would be to commit a murder here.’

‘It’s all very well for you, Father Brown,’ said the Inspector good-humouredly. ‘You’ve had a lot more murders than your fair share; and we poor policemen sit starving all our lives, even for a little one. But why should you say . . . Oh I see, you’re looking at all those Turkish daggers on the wall. There are plenty of things to commit a murder with, if that’s what you mean. But not more than there are in any ordinary kitchen: carving knives or pokers or what not. That isn’t where the snag of a murder comes in.’

Father Brown seemed to recall his rambling thoughts in some bewilderment; and said that he supposed so.

‘Murder is always easy,’ said Inspector Greenwood. ‘There can’t possibly be anything more easy than murder. I could murder you at this minute — more easily than I can get a drink in this damned bar. The only difficulty is committing a murder without committing oneself as a murderer. It’s this shyness about owning up to a murder; it’s this silly modesty of murderers about their own masterpieces, that makes the trouble. They will stick to this extraordinary fixed idea of killing people without being found out; and that’s what restrains them, even in a room full of daggers. Otherwise every cutler’s shop would be piled with corpses. And that, by the way, explains the one kind of murder that really can’t be prevented. Which is why, of course, we poor bobbies are always blamed for not preventing it. When a madman murders a King or a President, it can’t be prevented. You can’t make a King live in a coal-cellar, or carry about a President in a steel box. Anybody can murder him who does not mind being a murderer. That is where the madman is like the martyr — sort of beyond this world. A real fanatic can always kill anybody he likes.’

Before the priest could reply, a joyous band of bagmen rolled into the room like a shoal of porpoises; and the magnificent bellow of a big, beaming man, with an equally big and beaming tie-pin, brought the eager and obsequious manager running like a dog to the whistle, with a rapidity which the police in plain clothes had failed to inspire.

‘I’m sure I’m very sorry, Mr Jukes,’ said the manager, who wore a rather agitated smile and a wave or curl of very varnished hair across his forehead. ‘We’re rather understaffed at present; and I had to attend to something in the hotel, Mr Jukes.’

Mr Jukes was magnanimous, but in a noisy way; and ordered drinks all round, conceding one even to the almost cringing manager. Mr Jukes was a traveller for a very famous and fashionable wine and spirits firm; and may have conceived himself as lawfully the leader in such a place. Anyhow, he began a boisterous monologue, rather tending to tell the manager how to manage his hotel; and the others seemed to accept him as an authority. The policeman and the priest had retired to a low bench and small table in the background, from which they watched events, up to that rather remarkable moment when the policeman had very decisively to intervene.

For the next thing that happened, as already narrated, was the astonishing apparition of a brown Asiatic in a green turban, accompanied by the (if possible) more astonishing apparition of a Noncomformist minister; omens such as appear before a doom. In this case there was no doubt about evidence for the portent. A taciturn but observant boy cleaning the steps for the last hour (being a leisurely worker), the dark, fat, bulky bar-attendant, even the diplomatic but distracted manager, all bore witness to the miracle.

The apparitions, as the sceptics say, were due to perfectly natural causes. The man with the mane of yellow hair and the semi-clerical clothes was not only familiar as a preacher on the sands, but as a propagandist throughout the modern world. He was no less a person than the Rev. David Pryce-Jones, whose far-resounding slogan was Prohibition and Purification for Our Land and the Britains Overseas. He as an excellent public speaker and organizer; and an idea had occurred to him that ought to have occurred to Prohibitionists long ago. It was the simple idea that, if Prohibition is right, some honour is due to the Prophet who was perhaps the first Prohibitionist. He had corresponded with the leaders of Mahommedan religious thought, and had finally induced a distinguished Moslem (one of whose names was Akbar and the rest an untranslatable ululation of Allah with attributes) to come and lecture in England on the ancient Moslem veto on wine. Neither of them certainly had been in a public-house bar before; but they had come there by the process already described; driven from the genteel tea-rooms, shepherded into the newly-decorated saloon. Probably all would have been well, if the great Prohibitionist, in his innocence, had not advanced to the counter and asked for a glass of milk.

The commercial travellers, though a kindly race, emitted involuntary noises of pain; a murmur of suppressed jests was heard, as ‘Shun the bowl,’ or ‘Better bring out the cow’. But the magnificent Mr Jukes, feeling it due to his wealth and tie-pin to produce more refined humour, fanned himself as one about to faint, and said pathetically: ‘They know they can knock me down with a feather. They know a breath will blow me away. They know my doctor says I’m not to have these shocks. And they come and drink cold milk in cold blood, before my very eyes.’

The Rev. David Pryce-Jones, accustomed to deal with hecklers at public meetings, was so unwise as to venture on remonstrance and recrimination, in this very different and much more popular atmosphere. The Oriental total abstainer abstained from speech as well as spirits; and certainly gained in dignity by doing so. In fact, so far as he was concerned, the Moslem culture certainly scored a silent victory; he was obviously so much more of a gentleman than the commercial gentlemen, that a faint irritation began to arise against his aristocratic aloofness; and when Mr Pryce-Jones began to refer in argument to something of the kind, the tension became very acute indeed.

‘I ask you, friends,’ said Mr Pryce-Jones, with expansive platform gestures, ‘why does our friend here set an example to us Christians in truly Christian self-control and brotherhood? Why does he stand here as a model of true Christianity, of real refinement, of genuine gentlemanly behaviour, amid all the quarrels and riots of such places as these? Because, whatever the doctrinal differences between us, at least in his soil the evil plant, the accursed hop or vine, has never—’

At this crucial moment of the controversy it was that John Raggley, the stormy petrel of a hundred storms of controversy, red-faced, white-haired, his antiquated top-hat on the back of his head, his stick swinging like a club, entered the house like an invading army.

John Raggley was generally regarded as a crank. He was the sort of man who writes letters to the newspaper, which generally do not appear in the newspaper; but which do appear afterwards as pamphlets, printed (or misprinted) at his own expense; and circulated to a hundred waste-paper baskets. He had quarrelled alike with the Tory squires and the Radical County Councils; he hated Jews; and he distrusted nearly everything that is sold in shops, or even in hotels. But there was a backing of facts behind his fads; he knew the county in every corner and curious detail; and he was a sharp observer. Even the manager, a Mr Wills, had a shadowy respect for Mr Raggley, having a nose for the sort of lunacy allowed in the gentry; not indeed the prostrate reverence which he had for the jovial magnificence of Mr Jukes, who was really good for trade, but a least a disposition to avoid quarrelling with the old grumbler, partly perhaps out of fear of the old grumbler’s tongue.

‘And you will have your usual, Sir,’ said Mr Wills, leaning and leering across the counter.

‘It’s the only decent stuff you’ve still got,’ snorted Mr Raggley, slapping down his queer and antiquated hat. ‘Damn it, I sometimes think the only English thing left in England is cherry brandy. Cherry brandy does taste of cherries. Can you find me any beer that tastes of hops, or any cider that tastes of apples, or any wine that has the remotest indication of being made out of grapes? There’s an infernal swindle going on now in every inn in the country, that would have raised a revolution in any other country. I’ve found out a thing or two about it, I can tell you. You wait till I can get it printed, and people will sit up. If I could stop our people being poisoned with all this bad drink—’

Here again the Rev. David Pryce-Jones showed a certain failure in tact; though it was a virtue he almost worshipped. He was so unwise as to attempt to establish an alliance with Mr Raggley, by a fine confusion between the idea of bad drink and the idea that drink is bad. Once more he endeavoured to drag his stiff and stately Eastern friend into the argument, as a refined foreigner superior to our rough English ways. He was even so foolish as to talk of a broad theological outlook; and ultimately to mention the name of Mahomet, which was echoed in a sort of explosion.

‘God damn your soul!’ roared Mr Raggley, with a less broad theological outlook. ‘Do you mean that Englishmen mustn’t drink English beer, because wine was forbidden in a damned desert by that dirty old humbug Mahomet?’

In an instant the Inspector of Police had reached the middle of the room with a stride. For, the instant before that, a remarkable change had taken place in the demeanour of the Oriental gentleman, who had hitherto stood perfectly still, with steady and shining eyes. He now proceeded, as his friend had said, to set an example in truly Christian self-control and brotherhood by reaching the wall with the bound of a tiger, tearing down one of the heavy knives hanging there and sending it smack like a stone from a sling, so that it stuck quivering in the wall exactly half an inch above Mr Raggley’s ear. It would undoubtedly have stuck quivering in Mr Raggley, if Inspector Greenwood had not been just in time to jerk the arm and deflect the aim. Father Brown continued in his seat, watching the scene with screwed-up eyes and a screw of something almost like a smile at the corners of his mouth, as if he saw something beyond the mere momentary violence of the quarrel.

And then the quarrel took a curious turn; which may not be understood by everybody, until men like Mr John Raggley are better understood than they are. For the red-faced old fanatic was standing up and laughing uproariously as if it were the best joke he had ever heard. All his snapping vituperation and bitterness seemed to have gone out of him; and he regarded the other fanatic, who had just tried to murder him, with a sort of boisterous benevolence.

‘Blast your eyes,’ he said, ‘you’re the first man I’ve met in twenty years!’

‘Do you charge this man, Sir?’ said the Inspector, looking doubtful.

‘Charge him, of course not,’ said Raggley. ‘I’d stand him a drink if he were allowed any drinks. I hadn’t any business to insult his religion; and I wish to God all you skunks had the guts to kill a man, I won’t say for insulting your religion, because you haven’t got any, but for insulting anything — even your beer.’

‘Now he’s called us all skunks,’ said Father Brown to Greenwood, ‘peace and harmony seem to be restored. I wish that teetotal lecturer could get himself impaled on his friend’s knife; it was he who made all the mischief.’

As he spoke, the odd groups in the room were already beginning to break up; it had been found possible to clear the commercial room for the commercial travellers, and they adjourned to it, the potboy carrying a new round of drinks after them on a tray. Father Brown stood for a moment gazing at the glasses left on the counter; recognizing at once the ill-omened glass of milk, and another which smelt of whisky; and then turned just in time to see the parting between those two quaint figures, fanatics of the East and West. Raggley was still ferociously genial; there was still something a little darkling and sinister about the Moslem, which was perhaps natural; but he bowed himself out with grave gestures of dignified reconciliation; and there was every indication that the trouble was really over.

Some importance, however, continued attached, in the mind of Father Brown at least, to the memory and interpretation of those last courteous salutes between the combatants. Because curiously enough, when Father Brown came down very early next morning, to perform his religious duties in the neighbourhood, he found the long saloon bar, with its fantastic Asiatic decoration, filled with a dead white light of daybreak in which every detail was distinct; and one of the details was the dead body of John Raggley bent and crushed into a corner of the room, with the heavy-hilted crooked dagger rammed through his heart.

Father Brown went very softly upstairs again and summoned his friend the Inspector; and the two stood beside the corpse, in a house in which no one else was as yet stirring. ‘We mustn’t either assume or avoid the obvious,’ said Greenwood after a silence, ‘but it is well to remember, I think, what I was saying to you yesterday afternoon. It’s rather odd, by the way, that I should have said it — yesterday afternoon.’

‘I know,’ said the priest, nodding with an owlish stare.

‘I said,’ observed Greenwood, ‘that the one sort of murder we can’t stop is murder by somebody like a religious fanatic. That brown fellow probably thinks that if he’s hanged, he’ll go straight to Paradise for defending the honour of the Prophet.’

‘There is that, of course,’ said Father Brown. ‘It would be very reasonable, so to speak, of our Moslem friend to have stabbed him. And you may say we don’t know of anybody else yet, who could at all reasonably have stabbed him. But . . . but I was thinking . . . ‘ And his round face suddenly went blank again and all speech died on his lips.

‘What’s the matter now?’ asked the other.

‘Well, I know it sounds funny,’ said Father Brown in a forlorn voice. ‘But I was thinking ... I was thinking, in a way, it doesn’t much matter who stabbed him.’

‘Is this the New Morality?’ asked his friend. ‘Or the old Casuistry, perhaps. Are the Jesuits really going in for murder?’

‘I didn’t say it didn’t matter who murdered him,’ said Father Brown. ‘Of course the man who stabbed him might possibly be the man who murdered him. But it might be quite a different man. Anyhow, it was done at quite a different time. I suppose you’ll want to work on the hilt for finger-prints; but don’t take too much notice of them. I can imagine other reasons for other people sticking this knife in the poor old boy. Not very edifying reasons, of course, but quite distinct from the murder. You’ll have to put some more knives into him, before you find out about that.’

‘You mean—’ began the other, watching him keenly.

‘I mean the autopsy,’ said the priest, ‘to find the real cause of death.’

‘You’re quite right, I believe,’ said the Inspector, ‘about the stabbing, anyhow. We must wait for the doctor; but I’m pretty sure he’ll say you’re right. There isn’t blood enough. This knife was stuck in the corpse when it had been cold for hours. But why?’

‘Possibly to put the blame on the Mahommedan,’ answered Father Brown. ‘Pretty mean, I admit, but not necessarily murder. I fancy there are people in this place trying to keep secrets, who are not necessarily murderers.’

‘I haven’t speculated on that line yet,’ said Greenwood. ‘What makes you think so?’

‘What I said yesterday, when we first came into this horrible room. I said it would be easy to commit a murder here. But I wasn’t thinking about all those stupid weapons, though you thought I was. About something quite different.’

For the next few hours the Inspector and his friend conducted a close and thorough investigation into the goings and comings of everybody for the last twenty-four hours, the way the drinks had been distributed, the glasses that were washed or unwashed, and every detail about every individual involved, or apparently not involved. One might have supposed they thought that thirty people had been poisoned, as well as one.

It seemed certain that nobody had entered the building except by the big entrance that adjoined the bar; all the others were blocked in one way or another by the repairs. A boy had been cleaning the steps outside this entrance; but he had nothing very clear to report. Until the amazing entry of the Turk in the Turban, with his teetotal lecturer, there did not seem to have been much custom of any kind, except for the commercial travellers who came in to take what they called ‘quick ones’; and they seemed to have moved together, like Wordsworth’s Cloud; there was a slight difference of opinion between the boy outside and the men inside about whether one of them had not been abnormally quick in obtaining a quick one, and come out on the doorstep by himself; but the manager and the barman had no memory of any such independent individual. The manager and the barman knew all the travellers quite well, and there was no doubt about their movements as a whole. They had stood at the bar chaffing and drinking; they had been involved, through their lordly leader, Mr Jukes, in a not very serious altercation with Mr Pryce-Jones; and they had witnessed the sudden and very serious altercation between Mr Akbar and Mr Raggley. Then they were told they could adjourn to the Commercial Room and did so, their drinks being borne after them like a trophy.

‘There’s precious little to go on,’ said Inspector Greenwood. ‘Of course a lot of officious servants must do their duty as usual, and wash out all the glasses; including old Raggley’s glass. If it weren’t for everybody else’s efficiency, we detectives might be quite efficient.’

‘I know,’ said Father Brown, and his mouth took on again the twisted smile. ‘I sometimes think criminals invented hygiene. Or perhaps hygienic reformers invented crime; they look like it, some of them. Everybody talks about foul dens and filthy slums in which crime can run riot; but it's just the other way. They are called foul, not because crimes are committed, but because crimes are discovered. It's in the neat, spotless, clean and tidy places that crime can run riot; no mud to make footprints; no dregs to contain poison; kind servants washing out all traces of the murder; and the murderer killing and cremating six wives and all for want of a little Christian dirt. Perhaps I express myself with too much warmth — but look here. As it happens, I do remember one glass, which has doubtless been cleaned since, but I should like to know more about it.'

'Do you mean Raggley's glass?' asked Greenwood.

'No; I mean Nobody's glass,' replied the priest. 'It stood near that glass of milk and it still held an inch or two of whisky. Well, you and I had no whisky. I happen to remember that the manager, when treated by the jovial Jukes, had "a drop of gin". I hope you don't suggest that our Moslem was a whisky-drinker disguised in a green turban; or that the Rev. David Pryce-Jones managed to drink whisky and milk together, without noticing it.'

'Most of the commercial travellers took whisky,' said the Inspector. 'They generally do.'

'Yes; and they generally see they get it too,' answered Father Brown. 'In this case, they had it all carefully carted after them to their own room. But this glass was left behind.'

'An accident, I suppose,' said Greenwood doubtfully. 'The man could easily get another in the Commercial Room afterwards.'

Father Brown shook his head. 'You've got to see people as they are. Now these sort of men — well, some call them vulgar and some common; but that's all likes and dislikes. I'd be content to say that they are mostly simple men. Lots of them very good men, very glad to go back to the missus and the kids; some of them might be blackguards; might have had several missuses; or even murdered several missuses. But most of them are simple men; and, mark you, just the least tiny bit drunk. Not much; there's many a duke or don at Oxford drunker; but when that sort of man is at that stage of conviviality, he simply can't help noticing things, and noticing them very loud. Don't you observe that the least little incident jerks them into speech; if the beer froths over, they froth over with it, and have to say, "Whoa, Emma," or "Doing me proud, aren't you?" Now I should say it's flatly impossible for five of these festive beings to sit round a table in the

Commercial Room, and have only four glasses set before them, the fifth man being left out, without making a shout about it. Probably they would make a shout about it. Certainly he would make a shout about it. He wouldn't wait, like an Englishman of another class, till he could get a drink quietly later. The air would resound with things like, "And what about little me?" or, "Here, George, have I joined the Band of Hope?" or, "Do you see any green in my turban, George?" But the barman heard no such complaints. I take it as certain that the glass of whisky left behind had been nearly emptied by somebody else; somebody we haven't thought about yet.'

'But can you think of any such person?' ask the other.

'It's because the manager and the barman won't hear of any such person, that you dismiss the one really independent piece of evidence; the evidence of that boy outside cleaning the steps. He says that a man, who well may have been a bagman, but who did not, in fact, stick to the other bagmen, went in and came out again almost immediately. The manager and the barman never saw him; or say they never saw him. But he got a glass of whisky from the bar somehow. Let us call him, for the sake of argument, The Quick One. Now you know I don't often interfere with your business, which I know you do better than I should do it, or should want to do it. I've never had anything to do with setting police machinery at work, or running down criminals, or anything like that. But, for the first time in my life, I want to do it now. I want you to find The Quick One; to follow The Quick One to the ends of the earth; to set the whole infernal official machinery at work like a drag-net across the nations, and jolly well recapture The Quick One. Because he is the man we want.'

Greenwood made a despairing gesture. 'Has he face or form or any visible quality except quickness?' he inquired.

'He was wearing a sort of Inverness cape,' said Father Brown, 'and he told the boy outside he must reach Edinburgh by next morning. That's all the boy outside remembers. But I know your organization has got on to people with less clue than that.'

'You seem very keen on this,' said the Inspector, a little puzzled.

The priest looked puzzled also, as if at his own thoughts; he sat with knotted brow and then said abruptly: 'You see, it's so easy to be misunderstood. All men matter. You matter. I matter. It's the hardest thing in theology to believe.'

The Inspector stared at him without comprehension; but he proceeded.

‘We matter to God — God only knows why. But that’s the only possible justification of the existence of policemen.’ The policeman did not seem enlightened as to his own cosmic justification. ‘Don’t you see, the law really is right in a way, after all. If all men matter, all murders matter. That which He has so mysteriously created, we must not suffer to be mysteriously destroyed. But—’

He said the last word sharply, like one taking a new step in decision.

‘But, when once I step off that mystical level of equality, I don’t see that most of your important murders are particularly important. You are always telling me that this case and that is important. As a plain, practical man of the world, I must realize that it is the Prime Minister who has been murdered. As a plain, practical man of the world, I don’t think that the Prime Minister matters at all. As a mere matter of human importance, I should say he hardly exists at all. Do you suppose if he and the other public men were shot dead tomorrow, there wouldn’t be other people to stand up and say that every avenue was being explored, or that the Government had the matter under the gravest consideration? The masters of the modern world don’t matter. Even the real masters don’t matter much. Hardly anybody you ever read about in a newspaper matters at all.’

He stood up, giving the table a small rap: one of his rare gestures; and his voice changed again. ‘But Raggley did matter. He was one of a great line of some half a dozen men who might have saved England. They stand up stark and dark like disregarded sign-posts, down all that smooth descending road which has ended in this swamp of merely commercial collapse. Dean Swift and Dr Johnson and old William Cobbett; they had all without exception the name of being surly or savage, and they were all loved by their friends, and they all deserved to be. Didn’t you see how that old man, with the heart of a lion, stood up and forgave his enemy as only fighters can forgive? He jolly well did do what that temperance lecturer talked about; he set an example to us Christians and was a model of Christianity. And when there is foul and secret murder of a man like that — then I do think it matters, matters so much that even the modern machinery of police will be a thing that any respectable person may make use of ... Oh, don’t mention it. And so, for once in a way, I really do want to make use of you.’

And so, for some stretch of those strange days and nights, we might almost say that the little figure of Father Brown drove before him into action all the armies and engines of the police forces of the Crown, as the little figure of Napoleon drove the batteries and the battle-lines of the vast strategy that covered Europe. Police stations and post offices worked all night; traffic was stopped, correspondence was intercepted, inquiries were made in a hundred places, in order to track the flying trail of that ghostly figure, without face or name, with an Inverness cape and an Edinburgh ticket.

Meanwhile, of course, the other lines of investigation were not neglected. The full report of the post-mortem had not yet come in; but everybody seemed certain that it was a case of poisoning. This naturally threw the primary suspicion upon the cherry brandy; and this again naturally threw the primary suspicion on the hotel.

‘Most probably on the manager of the hotel,’ said Greenwood gruffly. ‘He looks a nasty little worm to me. Of course it might be something to do with some servant, like the barman; he seems rather a sulky specimen, and Raggley might have cursed him a bit, having a flaming temper, though he was generally generous enough afterwards. But, after all, as I say, the primary responsibility, and therefore the primary suspicion, rests on the manager.’

‘Oh, I knew the primary suspicion would rest on the manager,’ said Father Brown. ‘That was why I didn’t suspect him. You see, I rather fancied somebody else must have known that the primary suspicion would rest on the manager; or the servants of the hotel. That is why I said it would be easy to kill anybody in the hotel . . . But you’d better go and have it out with him, I suppose.’

The Inspector went; but came back again after a surprisingly short interview, and found his clerical friend turning over some papers that seemed to be a sort of dossier of the stormy career of John Raggley.

‘This is a rum go,’ said the Inspector. ‘I thought I should spend hours cross-examining that slippery little toad there, for we haven’t legally got a thing against him. And instead of that, he went to pieces all at once, and I really think he’s told me all he knows in sheer funk.’

‘I know,’ said Father Brown. ‘That’s the way he went to pieces when he found Raggley’s corpse apparently poisoned in his hotel. That’s why he lost his head enough to do such a clumsy thing as decorate the corpse with a Turkish knife, to put the blame on the nigger, as he would say. There never is anything the matter with him but funk; he’s the very last man that ever would really stick a knife into a live person. I bet he had to nerve himself to stick it into a dead one. But he's the very first person to be frightened of being charged with what he didn't do; and to make a fool of himself, as he did.'

'I suppose I must see the barman too,' observed Greenwood.

'I suppose so,' answered the other. 'I don't believe myself it was any of the hotel people — well, because it was made to look as if it must be the hotel people . . . But look here, have you seen any of this stuff they've got together about Raggley? He had a jolly interesting life; I wonder whether anyone will write his biography.'

'I took a note of everything likely to affect an affair like this,' answered the official. 'He was a widower; but he did once have a row with a man about his wife; a Scotch land-agent then in these parts; and Raggley seems to have been pretty violent. They say he hated Scotchmen; perhaps that's the reason . . . Oh, I know what you are smiling grimly about. A Scotchman . . . Perhaps an Edinburgh man.'

'Perhaps,' said Father Brown. 'It's quite likely, though, that he did dislike Scotchmen, apart from private reasons. It's an odd thing, but all that tribe of Tory Radicals, or whatever you call them, who resisted the Whig mercantile movement, all of them did dislike Scotchmen. Cobbett did; Dr Johnson did; Swift described their accent in one of his deadliest passages; even Shakespeare has been accused of the prejudice. But the prejudices of great men generally have something to do with principles. And there was a reason, I fancy. The Scot came from a poor agricultural land, that became a rich industrial land. He was able and active; he thought he was bringing industrial civilization from the north; he simply didn't know that there had been for centuries a rural civilization in the south. His own grandfather's land was highly rural but not civilized . . . Well, well, I suppose we can only wait for more news.'

'I hardly think you'll get the latest news out of Shakespeare and Dr Johnson,' grinned the police officer. 'What Shakespeare thought of Scotchmen isn't exactly evidence.'

Father Brown cocked an eyebrow, as if a new thought had surprised him. 'Why, now I come to think of it,' he said, 'there might be better evidence, even out of Shakespeare. He doesn't often mention Scotchmen. But he was rather fond of making fun of Welshmen.'

The Inspector was searching his friend's face; for he fancied he recognized an alertness behind its demure expression. 'By Jove,' he said. 'Nobody thought of turning the suspicions that way, anyhow.'

'Well,' said Father Brown, with broad-minded calm, 'you started by talking about fanatics; and how a fanatic could do anything. Well, I suppose we had the honour of entertaining in this bar-parlour yesterday, about the biggest and loudest and most fat-headed fanatic in the modern world. If being a pig-headed idiot with one idea is the way to murder, I put in a claim for my reverend brother Pryce-Jones, the Prohibitionist, in preference to all the fakirs in Asia, and it's perfectly true, as I told you, that his horrible glass of milk was standing side by side on the counter with the mysterious glass of whisky.'

'Which you think was mixed up with the murder,' said Greenwood, staring. 'Look here, I don't know whether you're really serious or not.'

Even as he was looking steadily in his friend's face, finding something still inscrutable in its expression, the telephone rang stridently behind the bar. Lifting the flap in the counter Inspector Greenwood passed rapidly inside, unhooked the receiver, listened for an instant, and then uttered a shout; not addressed to his interlocutor, but to the universe in general. Then he listened still more attentively and said explosively at intervals, 'Yes, yes . . . Come round at once; bring him round if possible . . . Good piece of work . . . Congratulate you.'

Then Inspector Greenwood came back into the outer lounge, like a man who has renewed his youth, sat down squarely on his seat, with his hands planted on his knees, stared at his friend, and said:

'Father Brown, I don't know how you do it. You seem to have known he was a murderer before anybody else knew he was a man. He was nobody; he was nothing; he was a slight confusion in the evidence; nobody in the hotel saw him; the boy on the steps could hardly swear to him; he was just a fine shade of doubt founded on an extra dirty glass. But we've got him, and he's the man we want.'

Father Brown had risen with the sense of the crisis, mechanically clutching the papers destined to be so valuable to the biographer of Mr Raggley; and stood staring at his friend. Perhaps this gesture jerked his friend's mind to fresh confirmations.

'Yes, we've got The Quick One. And very quick he was, like quicksilver, in making his get-away; we only just stopped him — off on a fishing trip to

Orkney, he said. But he's the man, all right; he's the Scotch land-agent who made love to Raggley's wife; he's the man who drank Scotch whisky in this bar and then took a train to Edinburgh. And nobody would have known it but for you.'

'Well, what I meant,' began Father Brown, in a rather dazed tone; and at that instant there was a rattle and rumble of heavy vehicles outside the hotel; and two or three other and subordinate policemen blocked the bar with their presence. One of them, invited by his superior to sit down, did so in an expansive manner, like one at once happy and fatigued; and he also regarded Father Brown with admiring eyes.

'Got the murderer. Sir, oh yes,' he said: 'I know he's a murderer, 'cause he bally nearly murdered me. I've captured some tough characters before now; but never one like this — hit me in the stomach like the kick of a horse and nearly got away from five men. Oh, you've got a real killer this time. Inspector.'

'Where is he?' asked Father Brown, staring.

'Outside in the van, in handcuffs,' replied the policeman, 'and, if you're wise, you'll leave him there — for the present.'

Father Brown sank into a chair in a sort of soft collapse; and the papers he had been nervously clutching were shed around him, shooting and sliding about the floor like sheets of breaking snow. Not only his face, but his whole body, conveyed the impression of a punctured balloon.

'Oh . . . Oh,' he repeated, as if any further oath would be inadequate. 'Oh . . .I've done it again.'

'If you mean you've caught the criminal again,' began Greenwood. But his friend stopped him with a feeble explosion, like that of expiring soda-water.

'I mean,' said Father Brown, 'that it's always happening; and really, I don't know why. I always try to say what I mean. But everybody else means such a lot by what I say.'

'What in the world is the matter now?' cried Greenwood, suddenly exasperated.

'Well, I say things,' said Father Brown in a weak voice, which could alone convey the weakness of the words. 'I say things, but everybody seems to know they mean more than they say. Once I saw a broken mirror and said "Something has happened" and they all answered, "Yes, yes, as you truly say, two men wrestled and one ran into the garden," and so on. I don't understand it, “Something happened,” and “Two men wrestled,” don’t seem to me at all the same; but I dare say I read old books of logic. Well, it’s like that here. You seem to be all certain this man is a murderer. But I never said he was a murderer. I said he was the man we wanted. He is. I want him very much. I want him frightfully. I want him as the one thing we haven’t got in the whole of this horrible case — a witness!’

They all stared at him, but in a frowning fashion, like men trying to follow a sharp new turn of the argument; and it was he who resumed the argument.

‘From the first minute I entered that big empty bar or saloon, I knew what was the matter with all this business was emptiness; solitude; too many chances for anybody to be alone. In a word, the absence of witnesses. All we knew was that when we came in, the manager and the barman were not in the bar. But when were they in the bar? What chance was there of making any sort of time-table of when anybody was anywhere? The whole thing was blank for want of witnesses. I rather fancy the barman or somebody was in the bar just before we came; and that’s how the Scotchman got his Scotch whisky. He certainly didn’t get it after we came. But we can’t begin to inquire whether anybody in the hotel poisoned poor Raggley’s cherry brandy, till we really know who was in the bar and when. Now I want you to do me another favour, in spite of this stupid muddle, which is probably all my fault. I want you to collect all the people involved in this room — I think they’re all still available, unless the Asiatic has gone back to Asia — and then take the poor Scotchman out of his handcuffs, and bring him in here, and let him tell us who did serve him with whisky, and who was in the bar, and who else was in the room, and all the rest. He’s the only man whose evidence can cover just that period when the crime was done. I don’t see the slightest reason for doubting his word.’

‘But look here,’ said Greenwood. ‘This brings it all back to the hotel authorities; and I thought you agreed that the manager isn’t the murderer. Is it the barman, or what?’

‘I don’t know,’ said the priest blankly. ‘I don’t know for certain even about the manager. I don’t know anything about the barman. I fancy the manager might be a bit of a conspirator, even if he wasn’t a murderer. But I do know there’s one solitary witness on earth who may have seen something; and that’s why I set all your police dogs on his trail to the ends of the earth.’

The mysterious Scotchman, when he finally appeared before the company thus assembled, was certainly a formidable figure; tall, with a hulking stride and a long sardonic hatchet face, with tufts of red hair; and wearing not only an Inverness cape but a Glengarry bonnet, he might well be excused for a somewhat acrid attitude; but anybody could see he was of the sort to resist arrest, even with violence. It was not surprising that he had come to blows with a fighting fellow like Raggley. It was not even surprising that the police had been convinced, by the mere details of capture, that he was a tough and a typical killer. But he claimed to be a perfectly respectable farmer, in Aberdeenshire, his name being James Grant; and somehow not only Father Brown, but Inspector Greenwood, a shrewd man with a great deal of experience, was pretty soon convinced that the Scot's ferocity was the fury of innocence rather than guilt.

'Now what we want from you, Mr Grant,' said the Inspector gravely, dropping without further parley into tones of courtesy, 'is simply your evidence on one very important fact. I am greatly grieved at the misunderstanding by which you have suffered, but I am sure you wish to serve the ends of justice. I believe you came into this bar just after it opened, at half-past five, and were served with a glass of whisky. We are not certain what servant of the hotel, whether the barman or the manager or some subordinate, was in the bar at the time. Will you look round the room, and tell me whether the bar-attendant who served you is present here.'

'Aye, he's present,' said Mr Grant, grimly smiling, having swept the group with a shrewd glance. 'I'd know him anywhere; and ye'll agree he's big enough to be seen. Do ye have all your inn-servants as grand as yon?'

The Inspector's eye remained hard and steady, and his voice colourless and continuous; the face of Father Brown was a blank; but on many other faces there was a cloud; the barman was not particularly big and not at all grand; and the manager was decidedly small.

'We only want the barman identified,' said the Inspector calmly. 'Of course we know him; but we should like you to verify it independently. You mean . . .?' And he stopped suddenly.

'Weel, there he is plain enough,' said the Scotchman wearily; and made a gesture, and with that gesture the gigantic Jukes, the prince of commercial travellers, rose like a trumpeting elephant; and in a flash had three policemen fastened on him like hounds on a wild beast.

‘Well, all that was simple enough,’ said Father Brown to his friend afterwards. ‘As I told you, the instant I entered the empty bar-room, my first thought was that, if the barman left the bar unguarded like that, there was nothing in the world to stop you or me or anybody else lifting the flap and walking in, and putting poison in any of the bottles standing waiting for customers. Of course, a practical poisoner would probably do it as Jukes did, by substituting a poisoned bottle for the ordinary bottle; that could be done in a flash. It was easy enough for him, as he travelled in bottles, to carry a flask of cherry brandy prepared and of the same pattern. Of course, it requires one condition; but it’s a fairly common condition. It would hardly do to start poisoning the beer or whisky that scores of people drink; it would cause a massacre. But when a man is well known as drinking only one special thing, like cherry brandy, that isn’t very widely drunk, it’s just like poisoning him in his own home. Only it’s a jolly sight safer. For practically the whole suspicion instantly falls on the hotel, or somebody to do with the hotel; and there’s no earthly argument to show that it was done by anyone out of a hundred customers that might come into the bar: even if people realized that a customer could do it. It was about as absolutely anonymous and irresponsible a murder as a man could commit.’

‘And why exactly did the murderer commit it?’ asked his friend.

Father Brown rose and gravely gathered the papers which he had previously scattered in a moment of distraction.

‘May I recall your attention,’ he said smiling, ‘to the materials of the forthcoming Life and Letters of the Late John Raggley? Or, for that matter, his own spoken words? He said in this very bar that he was going to expose a scandal about the management of hotels; and the scandal was the pretty common one of a corrupt agreement between hotel proprietors and a salesman who took and gave secret commissions, so that his business had a monopoly of all the drink sold in the place. It wasn’t even an open slavery like an ordinary tied house; it was a swindle at the expense of everybody the manager was supposed to serve. It was a legal offence. So the ingenious Jukes, taking the first moment when the bar was empty, as it often was, stepped inside and made the exchange of bottles; unfortunately at that very moment a Scotchman in an Inverness cape came in harshly demanding whisky. Jukes saw his only chance was to pretend to be the barman and serve the customer. He was very much relieved that the customer was a Quick One.’

‘I think you’re rather a Quick One yourself,’ observed Greenwood; ‘if you say you smelt something at the start, in the mere air of an empty room. Did you suspect Jukes at all at the start?’

‘Well, he sounded rather rich somehow,’ answered Father Brown vaguely. ‘You know when a man has a rich voice. And I did sort of ask myself why he should have such a disgustingly rich voice, when all those honest fellows were fairly poor. But I think I knew he was a sham when I saw that big shining breast-pin.’

‘You mean because it was sham?’ asked Greenwood doubtfully.

‘Oh, no; because it was genuine,’ said Father Brown.

The Blast of the Book

Professor Openshaw always lost his temper, with a loud bang, if anybody called him a Spiritualist; or a believer in Spiritualism. This, however, did not exhaust his explosive elements; for he also lost his temper if anybody called him a disbeliever in Spiritualism. It was his pride to have given his whole life to investigating Psychic Phenomena; it was also his pride never to have given a hint of whether he thought they were really psychic or merely phenomenal. He enjoyed nothing so much as to sit in a circle of devout Spiritualists and give devastating descriptions of how he had exposed medium after medium and detected fraud after fraud; for indeed he was a man of much detective talent and insight, when once he had fixed his eye on an object, and he always fixed his eye on a medium, as a highly suspicious object. There was a story of his having spotted the same Spiritualist mountebank under three different disguises: dressed as a woman, a white-bearded old man, and a Brahmin of a rich chocolate brown. These recitals made the true believers rather restless, as indeed they were intended to do; but they could hardly complain, for no Spiritualist denies the existence of fraudulent mediums; only the Professor's flowing narrative might well seem to indicate that all mediums were fraudulent.

But woe to the simple-minded and innocent Materialist (and Materialists as a race are rather innocent and simple-minded) who, presuming on this narrative tendency, should advance the thesis that ghosts were against the laws of nature, or that such things were only old superstitions; or that it was all tosh, or, alternatively, bunk. Him would the Professor, suddenly reversing all his scientific batteries, sweep from the field with a cannonade of unquestionable cases and unexplained phenomena, of which the wretched rationalist had never heard in his life, giving all the dates and details, stating all the attempted and abandoned natural explanations; stating everything, indeed, except whether he, John Oliver Openshaw, did or did not believe in Spirits, and that neither Spiritualist nor Materialist could ever boast of finding out.

Professor Openshaw, a lean figure with pale leonine hair and hypnotic blue eyes, stood exchanging a few words with Father Brown, who was a friend of his, on the steps outside the hotel where both had been breakfasting that morning and sleeping the night before. The Professor had come back rather late from one of this grand experiments, in general exasperation, and was still tingling with the fight that he always waged alone and against both sides.

‘Oh, I don’t mind you,’ he said laughing. ‘You don’t believe in it even if it’s true. But all these people are perpetually asking me what I’m trying to prove. They don’t seem to understand that I’m a man of science. A man of science isn’t trying to prove anything. He’s trying to find out what will prove itself.’

‘But he hasn’t found out yet,’ said Father Brown.

‘Well, I have some little notions of my own, that are not quite so negative as most people think,’ answered the Professor, after an instant of frowning silence; ‘anyhow, I’ve begun to fancy that if there is something to be found, they’re looking for it along the wrong line. It’s all too theatrical; it’s showing off, all their shiny ectoplasm and trumpets and voices and the rest; all on the model of old melodramas and mouldy historical novels about the Family Ghost. If they’d go to history instead of historical novels, I’m beginning to think they’d really find something. But not Apparitions.’

‘After all,’ said Father Brown, ‘Apparitions are only Appearances. I suppose you’d say the Family Ghost is only keeping up appearances.’

The Professor’s gaze, which had commonly a fine abstracted character, suddenly fixed and focused itself as it did on a dubious medium. It had rather the air of a man screwing a strong magnifying-glass into his eye. Not that he thought the priest was in the least like a dubious medium; but he was startled into attention by his friend’s thought following so closely on his own.

‘Appearances!’ he muttered, ‘crikey, but it’s odd you should say that just now. The more I learn, the more I fancy they lose by merely looking for appearances. Now if they’d look a little into Disappearances—’

‘Yes,’ said Father Brown, ‘after all, the real fairy legends weren’t so very much about the appearance of famous fairies; calling up Titania or exhibiting Oberon by moonlight. But there were no end of legends about people disappearing, because they were stolen by the fairies. Are you on the track of Kilmeny or Thomas the Rhymer?’

‘I’m on the track of ordinary modern people you’ve read of in the newspapers,’ answered Openshaw. ‘You may well stare; but that’s my game just now; and I’ve been on it for a long time. Frankly, I think a lot of psychic appearances could be explained away. It’s the disappearances I can’t explain, unless they’re psychic. These people in the newspaper who vanish and are never found — if you knew the details as I do ... and now only this morning I got confirmation; an extraordinary letter from an old missionary, quite a respectable old boy. He’s coming to see me at my office this morning. Perhaps you’d lunch with me or something; and I’d tell the results — in confidence.’

‘Thanks; I will — unless,’ said Father Brown modestly, ‘the fairies have stolen me by then.’

With that they parted and Openshaw walked round the corner to a small office he rented in the neighbourhood; chiefly for the publication of a small periodical, of psychical and psychological notes of the driest and most agnostic sort. He had only one clerk, who sat at a desk in the outer office, totting up figures and facts for the purposes of the printed report; and the Professor paused to ask if Mr Pringle had called. The clerk answered mechanically in the negative and went on mechanically adding up figures; and the Professor turned towards the inner room that was his study. ‘Oh, by the way, Berridge,’ he added, without turning round, ‘if Mr Pringle comes, send him straight in to me. You needn’t interrupt your work; I rather want those notes finished tonight if possible. You might leave them on my desk tomorrow, if I am late.’

And he went into his private office, still brooding on the problem which the name of Pringle had raised; or rather, perhaps, had ratified and confirmed in his mind. Even the most perfectly balanced of agnostics is partially human; and it is possible that the missionary’s letter seemed to have greater weight as promising to support his private and still tentative hypothesis. He sat down in his large and comfortable chair, opposite the engraving of Montaigne; and read once more the short letter from the Rev. Luke Pringle, making the appointment for that morning. No man knew better than Professor Openshaw the marks of the letter of the crank; the crowded details; the spidery handwriting; the unnecessary length and repetition. There were none of these things in this case; but a brief and businesslike typewritten statement that the writer had encountered some curious cases of Disappearance, which seemed to fall within the province of the Professor as a student of psychic problems. The Professor was favourably impressed; nor had he any unfavourable impression, in spite of a slight movement of surprise, when he looked up and saw that the Rev. Luke Pringle was already in the room.

‘Your clerk told me to come straight in,’ said Mr Pringle apologetically, but with a broad and rather agreeable grin. The grin was partly masked by masses of reddish-grey beard and whiskers; a perfect jungle of a beard, such as is sometimes grown by white men living in the jungles; but the eyes above the snub nose had nothing about them in the least wild or outlandish. Openshaw had instantly turned on them that concentrated spotlight or burning-glass of sceptical scrutiny which he turned on many men to see if they were mountebanks or maniacs; and, in this case, he had a rather unusual sense of reassurance. The wild beard might have belonged to a crank, but the eyes completely contradicted the beard; they were full of that quite frank and friendly laughter which is never found in the faces of those who are serious frauds or serious lunatics. He would have expected a man with those eyes to be a Philistine, a jolly sceptic, a man who shouted out shallow but hearty contempt of ghosts and spirits; but anyhow, no professional humbug could afford to look as frivolous as that. The man was buttoned up to the throat in a shabby old cape, and only his broad limp hat suggested the cleric; but missionaries from wild places do not always bother to dress like clerics.

‘You probably think all this another hoax. Professor,’ said Mr Pringle, with a sort of abstract enjoyment, ‘and I hope you will forgive my laughing at your very natural air of disapproval. All the same, I’ve got to tell my story to somebody who knows, because it’s true. And, all joking apart, it’s tragic as well as true. Well, to cut it short, I was missionary in Nya-Nya, a station in West Africa, in the thick of the forests, where almost the only other white man was the officer in command of the district, Captain Wales; and he and I grew rather thick. Not that he liked missions; he was, if I may say so, thick in many ways; one of those square-headed, square-shouldered men of action who hardly need to think, let alone believe.

That’s what makes it all the queerer. One day he came back to his tent in the forest, after a short leave, and said he had gone through a jolly rum experience, and didn’t know what to do about it. He was holding a rusty old book in a leather binding, and he put it down on a table beside his revolver and an old Arab sword he kept, probably as a curiosity. He said this book had belonged to a man on the boat he had just come off; and the man swore that nobody must open the book, or look inside it; or else they would be carried off by the devil, or disappear, or something. Wales said this was all nonsense, of course; and they had a quarrel; and the upshot seems to have been that this man, taunted with cowardice or superstition, actually did look into the book; and instantly dropped it; walked to the side of the boat—'

'One moment,' said the Professor, who had made one or two notes. 'Before you tell me anything else. Did this man tell Wales where he had got the book, or who it originally belonged to?'

'Yes,' replied Pringle, now entirely grave. 'It seems he said he was bringing it back to Dr Hankey, the Oriental traveller now in England, to whom it originally belonged, and who had warned him of its strange properties. Well, Hankey is an able man and a rather crabbed and sneering sort of man; which makes it queerer still. But the point of Wales's story is much simpler. It is that the man who had looked into the book walked straight over the side of the ship, and was never seen again.'

'Do you believe it yourself?' asked Openshaw after a pause.

'Well, I do,' replied Pringle. 'I believe it for two reasons. First, that Wales was an entirely unimaginative man; and he added one touch that only an imaginative man could have added. He said that the man walked straight over the side on a still and calm day; but there was no splash.'

The Professor looked at his notes for some seconds in silence; and then said: 'And your other reason for believing it?'

'My other reason,' answered the Rev. Luke Pringle, 'is what I saw myself.'

There was another silence; until he continued in the same matter-of-fact way. Whatever he had, he had nothing of the eagerness with which the crank, or even the believer, tried to convince others.

'I told you that Wales put down the book on the table beside the sword. There was only one entrance to the tent; and it happened that I was standing in it, looking out into the forest, with my back to my companion. He was standing by the table grumbling and growling about the whole business; saying it was tomfoolery in the twentieth century to be frightened of opening a book; asking why the devil he shouldn't open it himself. Then some instinct stirred in me and I said he had better not do that, it had better be returned to Dr Hankey. "What harm could it do?" he said restlessly. "What harm did it do?" I answered obstinately. "What happened to your friend on the boat?" He didn't answer, indeed I didn't know what he could answer; but I pressed my logical advantage in mere vanity. "If it comes to that," I said, "what is your version of what really happened on the boat?" Still he didn't answer; and I looked round and saw that he wasn't there.

‘The tent was empty. The book was lying on the table; open, but on its face, as if he had turned it downwards. But the sword was lying on the ground near the other side of the tent; and the canvas of the tent showed a great slash, as if somebody had hacked his way out with the sword. The gash in the tent gaped at me; but showed only the dark glimmer of the forest outside. And when I went across and looked through the rent I could not be certain whether the tangle of the tall plants and the undergrowth had been bent or broken; at least not farther than a few feet. I have never seen or heard of Captain Wales from that day.

‘I wrapped the book up in brown paper, taking good care not to look at it; and I brought it back to England, intending at first to return it to Dr Hankey. Then I saw some notes in your paper suggesting a hypothesis about such things; and I decided to stop on the way and put the matter before you; as you have a name for being balanced and having an open mind.’

Professor Openshaw laid down his pen and looked steadily at the man on the other side of the table; concentrating in that single stare all his long experience of many entirely different types of humbug, and even some eccentric and extraordinary types of honest men. In the ordinary way, he would have begun with the healthy hypothesis that the story was a pack of lies. On the whole he did incline to assume that it was a pack of lies. And yet he could not fit the man into his story; if it were only that he could not see that sort of liar telling that sort of lie. The man was not trying to look honest on the surface, as most quacks and impostors do; somehow, it seemed all the other way; as if the man was honest, in spite of something else that was merely on the surface. He thought of a good man with one innocent delusion; but again the symptoms were not the same; there was even a sort of virile indifference; as if the man did not care much about his delusion, if it was a delusion.

‘Mr Pringle,’ he said sharply, like a barrister making a witness jump, ‘where is this book of yours now?’

The grin reappeared on the bearded face which had grown grave during the recital. ‘I left it outside,’ said Mr Pringle. ‘I mean in the outer office. It was a risk, perhaps; but the less risk of the two.’

‘What do you mean?’ demanded the Professor. ‘Why didn’t you bring it straight in here?’

‘Because,’ answered the missionary, ‘I knew that as soon as you saw it, you’d open it — before you had heard the story. I thought it possible you might think twice about opening it — after you'd heard the story.'

Then after a silence he added: 'There was nobody out there but your clerk; and he looked a stolid steady-going specimen, immersed in business calculations.'

Openshaw laughed unaffectedly. 'Oh, Babbage,' he cried, 'your magic tomes are safe enough with him, I assure you. His name's Berridge — but I often call him Babbage; because he's so exactly like a Calculating Machine. No human being, if you can call him a human being, would be less likely to open other people's brown paper parcels. Well, we may as well go and bring it in now; though I assure you I will consider seriously the course to be taken with it. Indeed, I tell you frankly,' and he stared at the man again, 'that I'm not quite sure whether we ought to open it here and now, or send it to this Dr Hankey.'

The two had passed together out of the inner into the outer office; and even as they did so, Mr Pringle gave a cry and ran forward towards the clerk's desk. For the clerk's desk was there; but not the clerk. On the clerk's desk lay a faded old leather book, torn out of its brown-paper wrappings, and lying closed, but as if it had just been opened. The clerk's desk stood against the wide window that looked out into the street; and the window was shattered with a huge ragged hole in the glass; as if a human body had been shot through it into the world without. There was no other trace of Mr Berridge.

Both the two men left in the office stood as still as statues; and then it was the Professor who slowly came to life. He looked even more judicial than he had ever looked in his life, as he slowly turned and held out his hand to the missionary.

'Mr Pringle,' he said, 'I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon only for thoughts that I have had; and half-thoughts at that. But nobody could call himself a scientific man and not face a fact like this.'

'I suppose,' said Pringle doubtfully, 'that we ought to make some inquiries. Can you ring up his house and find out if he has gone home?'

'I don't know that he's on the telephone,' answered Openshaw, rather absently; 'he lives somewhere up Hampstead way, I think. But I suppose somebody will inquire here, if his friends or family miss him.'

'Could we furnish a description,' asked the other, 'if the police want it?'

'The police!' said the Professor, starting from his reverie. 'A description . . . Well, he looked awfully like everybody else, I'm afraid, except for goggles. One of those clean-shaven chaps. But the police . . . look here, what are we to do about this mad business?'

'I know what I ought to do,' said the Rev. Mr Pringle firmly, 'I am going to take this book straight to the only original Dr Hankey, and ask him what the devil it's all about. He lives not very far from here, and I'll come straight back and tell you what he says.'

'Oh, very well,' said the Professor at last, as he sat down rather wearily; perhaps relieved for the moment to be rid of the responsibility. But long after the brisk and ringing footsteps of the little missionary had died away down the street, the Professor sat in the same posture, staring into vacancy like a man in a trance.

He was still in the same seat and almost in the same attitude, when the same brisk footsteps were heard on the pavement without and the missionary entered, this time, as a glance assured him, with empty hands.

'Dr Hankey,' said Pringle gravely, 'wants to keep the book for an hour and consider the point. Then he asks us both to call, and he will give us his decision. He specially desired, Professor, that you should accompany me on the second visit.'

Openshaw continued to stare in silence; then he said, suddenly: 'Who the devil is Dr Hankey?'

'You sound rather as if you meant he was the devil,' said Pringle smiling, 'and I fancy some people have thought so. He had quite a reputation in your own line; but he gained it mostly in India, studying local magic and so on, so perhaps he's not so well known here. He is a yellow skinny little devil with a lame leg, and a doubtful temper; but he seems to have set up in an ordinary respectable practice in these parts, and I don't know anything definitely wrong about him — unless it's wrong to be the only person who can possibly know anything about all this crazy affair.'

Professor Openshaw rose heavily and went to the telephone; he rang up Father Brown, changing the luncheon engagement to a dinner, that he might hold himself free for the expedition to the house of the Anglo-Indian doctor; after that he sat down again, lit a cigar and sank once more into his own unfathomable thoughts.

Father Brown went round to the restaurant appointed for dinner, and kicked his heels for some time in a vestibule full of mirrors and palms in pots; he had been informed of Openshaw's afternoon engagement, and, as the evening closed-in dark and stormy round the glass and the green plants, guessed that it had produced something unexpected and unduly prolonged. He even wondered for a moment whether the Professor would turn up at all; but when the Professor eventually did, it was clear that his own more general guesses had been justified. For it was a very wild-eyed and even wild-haired Professor who eventually drove back with Mr Pringle from the expedition to the North of London, where suburbs are still fringed with heathy wastes and scraps of common, looking more sombre under the rather thunderstorm sunset. Nevertheless, they had apparently found the house, standing a little apart though within hail of other houses; they had verified the brass-plate duly engraved: ‘J. I. Hankey, MD, MRCS.’ Only they did not find J. I. Hankey, MD, MRCS. They found only what a nightmare whisper had already subconsciously prepared them to find: a commonplace parlour with the accursed volume lying on the table, as if it had just been read; and beyond, a back door burst open and a faint trail of footsteps that ran a little way up so steep a garden-path that it seemed that no lame man could have run up so lightly. But it was a lame man who had run; for in those few steps there was the misshapen unequal mark of some sort of surgical boot; then two marks of that boot alone (as if the creature had hopped) and then nothing. There was nothing further to be learnt from Dr J. I. Hankey, except that he had made his decision. He had read the oracle and received the doom.

When the two came into the entrance under the palms, Pringle put the book down suddenly on a small table, as if it burned his fingers. The priest glanced at it curiously; there was only some rude lettering on the front with a couplet:

They that looked into this book
Them the Flying Terror took;

and underneath, as he afterwards discovered, similar warnings in Greek, Latin and French. The other two had turned away with a natural impulsion towards drinks, after their exhaustion and bewilderment; and Openshaw had called to the waiter, who brought cocktails on a tray.

‘You will dine with us, I hope,’ said the Professor to the missionary; but Mr Pringle amiably shook his head.

‘If you’ll forgive me,’ he said, ‘I’m going off to wrestle with this book and this business by myself somewhere. I suppose I couldn’t use your office for an hour or so?’

‘I suppose — I’m afraid it’s locked,’ said Openshaw in some surprise.

‘You forget there’s a hole in the window.’ The Rev. Luke Pringle gave the very broadest of all broad grins and vanished into the darkness without.

‘A rather odd fellow, that, after all,’ said the Professor, frowning.

He was rather surprised to find Father Brown talking to the waiter who had brought the cocktails, apparently about the waiter’s most private affairs; for there was some mention of a baby who was now out of danger. He commented on the fact with some surprise, wondering how the priest came to know the man; but the former only said, ‘Oh, I dine here every two or three months, and I’ve talked to him now and then.’

The Professor, who himself dined there about five times a week, was conscious that he had never thought of talking to the man; but his thoughts were interrupted by a strident ringing and a summons to the telephone. The voice on the telephone said it was Pringle, it was rather a muffled voice, but it might well be muffled in all those bushes of beard and whisker. Its message was enough to establish identity.

‘Professor,’ said the voice, ‘I can’t stand it any longer. I’m going to look for myself. I’m speaking from your office and the book is in front of me. If anything happens to me, this is to say good-bye. No — it’s no good trying to stop me. You wouldn’t be in time anyhow. I’m opening the book now. I . . .’

Openshaw thought he heard something like a sort of thrilling or shivering yet almost soundless crash; then he shouted the name of Pringle again and again; but he heard no more. He hung up the receiver, and, restored to a superb academic calm, rather like the calm of despair, went back and quietly took his seat at the dinner-table. Then, as coolly as if he were describing the failure of some small silly trick at a seance, he told the priest every detail of this monstrous mystery.

‘Five men have now vanished in this impossible way,’ he said. ‘Every one is extraordinary; and yet the one case I simply can’t get over is my clerk, Berridge. It’s just because he was the quietest creature that he’s the queerest case.’

‘Yes,’ replied Father Brown, ‘it was a queer thing for Berridge to do, anyway. He was awfully conscientious. He was also so jolly careful to keep all the office business separate from any fun of his own. Why, hardly anybody knew he was quite a humorist at home and—’

‘Berridge!’ cried the Professor. ‘What on earth are you talking about? Did you know him?’

‘Oh no,’ said Father Brown carelessly, ‘only as you say I know the waiter. I’ve often had to wait in your office, till you turned up; and of course I passed the time of day with poor Berridge. He was rather a card. I remember he once said he would like to collect valueless things, as collectors did the silly things they thought valuable. You know the old story about the woman who collected valueless things.’

‘I’m not sure I know what you’re talking about,’ said Openshaw. ‘But even if my clerk was eccentric (and I never knew a man I should have thought less so), it wouldn’t explain what happened to him; and it certainly wouldn’t explain the others.’

‘What others?’ asked the priest.

The Professor stared at him and spoke distinctly, as if to a child: ‘My dear Father Brown, Five Men have disappeared.’

‘My dear Professor Openshaw, no men have disappeared.’

Father Brown gazed back at his host with equal steadiness and spoke with equal distinctness. Nevertheless, the Professor required the words repeated, and they were repeated as distinctly. ‘I say that no men have disappeared.’

After a moment’s silence, he added, ‘I suppose the hardest thing is to convince anybody that 0+0+0=0. Men believe the oddest things if they are in a series; that is why Macbeth believed the three words of the three witches; though the first was something he knew himself; and the last something he could only bring about himself. But in your case the middle term is the weakest of all.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘You saw nobody vanish. You did not see the man vanish from the boat. You did not see the man vanish from the tent. All that rests on the word of Mr Pringle, which I will not discuss just now. But you’ll admit this; you would never have taken his word yourself, unless you had seen it confirmed by your clerk’s disappearance; just as Macbeth would never have believed he would be king, if he had not been confirmed in believing he would be Cawdor.’

‘That may be true,’ said the Professor, nodding slowly. ‘But when it was confirmed, I knew it was the truth. You say I saw nothing myself. But I did; I saw my own clerk disappear. Berridge did disappear.’

‘Berridge did not disappear,’ said Father Brown. ‘On the contrary.’

‘What the devil do you mean by “on the contrary”?’

‘I mean,’ said Father Brown, ‘that he never disappeared. He appeared.’

Openshaw stared across at his friend, but the eyes had already altered in his head, as they did when they concentrated on a new presentation of a problem. The priest went on: ‘He appeared in your study, disguised in a bushy red beard and buttoned up in a clumsy cape, and announced himself as the Rev. Luke Pringle. And you had never noticed your own clerk enough to know him again, when he was in so rough-and-ready a disguise.’

‘But surely,’ began the Professor.

‘Could you describe him for the police?’ asked Father Brown. ‘Not you. You probably knew he was clean-shaven and wore tinted glasses; and merely taking off those glasses was a better disguise than putting on anything else. You had never seen his eyes any more than his soul; jolly laughing eyes. He had planted his absurd book and all the properties; then he calmly smashed the window, put on the beard and cape and walked into your study; knowing that you had never looked at him in your life.’

‘But why should he play me such an insane trick?’ demanded Openshaw.

‘Why, because you had never looked at him in your life,’ said Father Brown; and his hand slightly curled and clinched, as if he might have struck the table, if he had been given to gesture. ‘You called him the Calculating Machine, because that was all you ever used him for. You never found out even what a stranger strolling into your office could find out, in five minutes’ chat: that he was a character; that he was full of antics; that he had all sorts of views on you and your theories and your reputation for “spotting” people. Can’t you understand his itching to prove that you couldn’t spot your own clerk? He has nonsense notions of all sorts. About collecting useless things, for instance. Don’t you know the story of the woman who bought the two most useless things: an old doctor’s brass-plate and a wooden leg? With those your ingenious clerk created the character of the remarkable Dr Hankey; as easily as the visionary Captain Wales. Planting them in his own house—’

‘Do you mean that place we visited beyond Hampstead was Berridge’s own house?’ asked Openshaw.

‘Did you know his house — or even his address?’ retorted the priest. ‘Look here, don’t think I’m speaking disrespectfully of you or your work. You are a great servant of truth and you know I could never be disrespectful to that. You’ve seen through a lot of liars, when you put your mind to it. But don’t only look at liars. Do, just occasionally, look at honest men — like the waiter.’

‘Where is Berridge now?’ asked the Professor, after a long silence.

‘I haven’t the least doubt,’ said Father Brown, ‘that he is back in your office. In fact, he came back into your office at the exact moment when the Rev. Luke Pringle read the awful volume and faded into the void.’

There was another long silence and then Professor Openshaw laughed; with the laugh of a great man who is great enough to look small. Then he said abruptly:

‘I suppose I do deserve it; for not noticing the nearest helpers I have. But you must admit the accumulation of incidents was rather formidable. Did you never feel just a momentary awe of the awful volume?’

‘Oh, that,’ said Father Brown. ‘I opened it as soon as I saw it lying there. It’s all blank pages. You see, I am not superstitious.’

The Green Man

A young man in knickerbockers, with an eager sanguine profile, was playing golf against himself on the links that lay parallel to the sand and sea, which were all growing grey with twilight. He was not carelessly knocking a ball about, but rather practising particular strokes with a sort of microscopic fury; like a neat and tidy whirlwind. He had learned many games quickly, but he had a disposition to learn them a little more quickly than they can be learnt. He was rather prone to be a victim of those remarkable invitations by which a man may learn the Violin in Six Lessons — or acquire a perfect French accent by a Correspondence Course. He lived in the breezy atmosphere of such hopeful advertisement and adventure. He was at present the private secretary of Admiral Sir Michael Craven, who owned the big house behind the park abutting on the links. He was ambitious, and had no intention of continuing indefinitely to be private secretary to anybody. But he was also reasonable; and he knew that the best way of ceasing to be a secretary was to be a good secretary. Consequently he was a very good secretary; dealing with the ever-accumulating arrears of the Admiral's correspondence with the same swift centripetal concentration with which he addressed the golf-ball. He had to struggle with the correspondence alone and at his own discretion at present; for the Admiral had been with his ship for the last six months, and, though now returning, was not expected for hours, or possibly days.

With an athletic stride, the young man, whose name was Harold Harker, crested the rise of turf that was the rampart of the links and, looking out across the sands to the sea, saw a strange sight. He did not see it very clearly; for the dusk was darkening every minute under stormy clouds; but it seemed to him, by a sort of momentary illusion, like a dream of days long past or a drama played by ghosts, out of another age in history.

The last of the sunset lay in long bars of copper and gold above the last dark strip of sea that seemed rather black than blue. But blacker still against this gleam in the west, there passed in sharp outline, like figures in a shadow pantomime, two men with three-cornered cocked hats and swords; as if they had just landed from one of the wooden ships of Nelson. It was not at all the sort of hallucination that would have come natural to Mr Harker, had he been prone to hallucinations. He was of the type that is at once sanguine and scientific; and would be more likely to fancy the flying-ships of the future than the fighting ships of the past. He therefore very sensibly came to the conclusion that even a futurist can believe his eyes.

His illusion did not last more than a moment. On the second glance, what he saw was unusual but not incredible. The two men who were striding in single file across the sands, one some fifteen yards behind the other, were ordinary modern naval officers; but naval officers wearing that almost extravagant full-dress uniform which naval officers never do wear if they can possibly help it; only on great ceremonial occasions such as the visits of Royalty. In the man walking in front, who seemed more or less unconscious of the man walking behind, Harker recognized at once the high-bridged nose and spike-shaped beard of his own employer the Admiral. The other man following in his tracks he did not know. But he did know something about the circumstances connected with the ceremonial occasion. He knew that when the Admiral's ship put in at the adjacent port, it was to be formally visited by a Great Personage; which was enough, in that sense, to explain the officers being in full dress. But he did also know the officers; or at any rate the Admiral. And what could have possessed the Admiral to come on shore in that rig-out, when one could swear he would seize five minutes to change into mufti or at least into undress uniform, was more than his secretary could conceive. It seemed somehow to be the very last thing he would do. It was indeed to remain for many weeks one of the chief mysteries of this mysterious business. As it was, the outline of these fantastic court uniforms against the empty scenery, striped with dark sea and sand, had something suggestive of comic opera; and reminded the spectator of Pinafore.

The second figure was much more singular; somewhat singular in appearance, despite his correct lieutenant's uniform, and still more extraordinary in behaviour. He walked in a strangely irregular and uneasy manner; sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly; as if he could not make up his mind whether to overtake the Admiral or not. The Admiral was rather deaf and certainly heard no footsteps behind him on the yielding sand; but the footsteps behind him, if traced in the detective manner, would have given rise to twenty conjectures from a limp to a dance. The man's face was swarthy as well as darkened with shadow, and every now and then the eyes in it shifted and shone, as if to accent his agitation. Once he began to run and then abruptly relapsed into a swaggering slowness and carelessness. Then he did something which Mr Harker could never have conceived any normal naval officer in His Britannic Majesty's Service doing, even in a lunatic asylum. He drew his sword.

It was at this bursting-point of the prodigy that the two passing figures disappeared behind a headland on the shore. The staring secretary had just time to notice the swarthy stranger, with a resumption of carelessness, knock off a head of sea-holly with his glittering blade. He seemed then to have abandoned all idea of catching the other man up. But Mr Harold Harker's face became very thoughtful indeed; and he stood there ruminating for some time before he gravely took himself inland, towards the road that ran past the gates of the great house and so by a long curve down to the sea.

It was up this curving road from the coast that the Admiral might be expected to come, considering the direction in which he had been walking, and making the natural assumption that he was bound for his own door. The path along the sands, under the links, turned inland just beyond the headland and solidifying itself into a road, returned towards Craven House. It was down this road, therefore, that the secretary darted, with characteristic impetuosity, to meet his patron returning home. But the patron was apparently not returning home. What was still more peculiar, the secretary was not returning home either; at least until many hours later; a delay quite long enough to arouse alarm and mystification at Craven House.

Behind the pillars and palms of that rather too palatial country house, indeed, there was expectancy gradually changing to uneasiness. Gryce the butler, a big bilious man abnormally silent below as well as above stairs, showed a certain restlessness as he moved about the main front-hall and occasionally looked out of the side windows of the porch, on the white road that swept towards the sea. The Admiral's sister Marion, who kept house for him, had her brother's high nose with a more sniffy expression; she was voluble, rather rambling, not without humour, and capable of sudden emphasis as shrill as a cockatoo. The Admiral's daughter Olive was dark, dreamy, and as a rule abstractedly silent, perhaps melancholy; so that her aunt generally conducted most of the conversation, and that without reluctance. But the girl also had a gift of sudden laughter that was very engaging.

'I can't think why they're not here already,' said the elder lady. 'The postman distinctly told me he'd seen the Admiral coming along the beach;

along with that dreadful creature Rook. Why in the world they call him Lieutenant Rook—'

'Perhaps,' suggested the melancholy young lady, with a momentary brightness, 'perhaps they call him Lieutenant because he is a Lieutenant.'

'I can't think why the Admiral keeps him,' snorted her aunt, as if she were talking of a housemaid. She was very proud of her brother and always called him the Admiral; but her notions of a commission in the Senior Service were inexact.

'Well, Roger Rook is sulky and unsociable and all that,' replied Olive, 'but of course that wouldn't prevent him being a capable sailor.'

'Sailor!' cried her aunt with one of her rather startling cockatoo notes, 'he isn't my notion of a sailor. The Lass that Loved a Sailor, as they used to sing when I was young . . . Just think of it! He's not gay and free and whats-its-name. He doesn't sing chanties or dance a hornpipe.'

'Well,' observed her niece with gravity. 'The Admiral doesn't very often dance a hornpipe.'

'Oh, you know what I mean — he isn't bright or breezy or anything,' replied the old lady. 'Why, that secretary fellow could do better than that.'

Olive's rather tragic face was transfigured by one of her good and rejuvenating waves of laughter.

'I'm sure Mr Harker would dance a hornpipe for you,' she said, 'and say he had learnt it in half an hour from the book of instructions. He's always learning things of that sort.'

She stopped laughing suddenly and looked at her aunt's rather strained face.

'I can't think why Mr Harker doesn't come,' she added.

'I don't care about Mr Harker,' replied the aunt, and rose and looked out of the window.

The evening light had long turned from yellow to grey and was now turning almost to white under the widening moonlight, over the large flat landscape by the coast; unbroken by any features save a clump of sea-twisted trees round a pool and beyond, rather gaunt and dark against the horizon, the shabby fishermen's tavern on the shore that bore the name of the Green Man. And all that road and landscape was empty of any living thing. Nobody had seen the figure in the cocked hat that had been observed, earlier in the evening, walking by the sea; or the other and stranger figure that had been seen trailing after him. Nobody had even seen the secretary who saw them.

It was after midnight when the secretary at last burst in and aroused the household; and his face, white as a ghost, looked all the paler against the background of the stolid face and figure of a big Inspector of Police. Somehow that red, heavy, indifferent face looked, even more than the white and harassed one, like a mask of doom. The news was broken to the two women with such consideration or concealments as were possible. But the news was that the body of Admiral Craven had been eventually fished out of the foul weeds and scum of the pool under the trees; and that he was drowned and dead.

Anybody acquainted with Mr Harold Harker, secretary, will realize that, whatever his agitation, he was by morning in a mood to be tremendously on the spot. He hustled the Inspector, whom he had met the night before on the road down by the Green Man, into another room for private and practical consultation. He questioned the Inspector rather as the Inspector might have questioned a yokel. But Inspector Burns was a stolid character; and was either too stupid or too clever to resent such trifles. It soon began to look as if he were by no means so stupid as he looked; for he disposed of Harker's eager questions in a manner that was slow but methodical and rational.

'Well,' said Harker (his head full of many manuals with titles like 'Be a Detective in Ten Days'). 'Well, it's the old triangle, I suppose. Accident, Suicide or Murder.'

'I don't see how it could be accident,' answered the policeman. 'It wasn't even dark yet and the pool's fifty yards from the straight road that he knew like his own doorstep. He'd no more have got into that pond than he'd go and carefully lie down in a puddle in the street. As for suicide, it's rather a responsibility to suggest it, and rather improbable too. The Admiral was a pretty spry and successful man and frightfully rich, nearly a millionaire in fact; though of course that doesn't prove anything. He seemed to be pretty normal and comfortable in his private life too; he's the last man I should suspect of drowning himself.'

'So that we come,' said the secretary, lowering his voice with the thrill, 'I suppose we come to the third possibility.'

'We won't be in too much of a hurry about that,' said the Inspector to the annoyance of Harker, who was in a hurry about everything. 'But naturally there are one or two things one would like to know. One would like to know

— about his property, for instance. Do you know who's likely to come in for it? You're his private secretary; do you know anything about his will?'

'I'm not so private a secretary as all that,' answered the young man. 'His solicitors are Messrs Willis, Hardman and Dyke, over in Suttford High Street; and I believe the will is in their custody.'

'Well, I'd better get round and see them pretty soon,' said the Inspector.

'Let's get round and see them at once,' said the impatient secretary.

He took a turn or two restlessly up and down the room and then exploded in a fresh place.

'What have you done about the body, Inspector?' he asked.

'Dr Straker is examining it now at the Police Station. His report ought to be ready in an hour or so.'

'It can't be ready too soon,' said Harker. 'It would save time if we could meet him at the lawyer's.' Then he stopped and his impetuous tone changed abruptly to one of some embarrassment.

'Look here,' he said, 'I want ... we want to consider the young lady, the poor Admiral's daughter, as much as possible just now. She's got a notion that may be all nonsense; but I wouldn't like to disappoint her. There's some friend of hers she wants to consult, staying in the town at present. Man of the name of Brown; priest or parson of some sort — she's given me his address. I don't take much stock in priests or parsons, but—'

The Inspector nodded. 'I don't take any stock in priests or parsons; but I take a lot of stock in Father Brown,' he said. 'I happened to have to do with him in a queer sort of society jewel case. He ought to have been a policeman instead of parson.'

'Oh, all right,' said the breathless secretary as he vanished from the room. 'Let him come to the lawyer's too.'

Thus it happened that, when they hurried across to the neighbouring town to meet Dr Straker at the solicitor's office, they found Father Brown already seated there, with his hands folded on his heavy umbrella, chatting pleasantly to the only available member of the firm. Dr Straker also had arrived, but apparently only at that moment, as he was carefully placing his gloves in his top-hat and his top-hat on a side-table. And the mild and beaming expression of the priest's moonlike face and spectacles, together with the silent chuckles of the jolly old grizzled lawyer, to whom he was talking, were enough to show that the doctor had not yet opened his mouth to bring the news of death.

‘A beautiful morning after all,’ Father Brown was saying. ‘That storm seems to have passed over us. There were some big black clouds, but I notice that not a drop of rain fell.’

‘Not a drop,’ agreed the solicitor toying with a pen; he was the third partner, Mr. Dyke; ‘there’s not a cloud in the sky now. It’s the sort of day for a holiday.’ Then he realized the newcomers and looked up, laying down the pen and rising. ‘Ah, Mr. Harker, how are you? I hear the Admiral is expected home soon.’ Then Harker spoke, and his voice rang hollow in the room.

‘I am sorry to say we are the bearers of bad news. Admiral Craven was drowned before reaching home.’

There was a change in the very air of the still office, though not in the attitudes of the motionless figures; both were staring at the speaker as if a joke had been frozen on their lips. Both repeated the word ‘drowned’ and looked at each other, and then again at their informant. Then there was a small hubbub of questions.

‘When did this happen?’ asked the priest.

‘Where was he found?’ asked the lawyer.

‘He was found,’ said the Inspector, ‘in that pool by the coast, not far from the Green Man, and dragged out all covered with green scum and weeds so as to be almost unrecognizable. But Dr Straker here has — What is the matter. Father Brown? Are you ill?’

‘The Green Man,’ said Father Brown with a shudder. ‘I’m so sorry ... I beg your pardon for being upset.’

‘Upset by what?’ asked the staring officer.

‘By his being covered with green scum, I suppose,’ said the priest, with a rather shaky laugh. Then he added rather more firmly, ‘I thought it might have been seaweed.’

By this time everybody was looking at the priest, with a not unnatural suspicion that he was mad; and yet the next crucial surprise was not to come from him. After a dead silence, it was the doctor who spoke.

Dr Straker was a remarkable man, even to look at. He was very tall and angular, formal and professional in his dress; yet retaining a fashion that has hardly been known since Mid-Victorian times. Though comparatively young, he wore his brown beard, very long and spreading over his waistcoat; in contrast with it, his features, which were both harsh and handsome, looked singularly pale. His good looks were also diminished by something in his deep eyes that was not squinting, but like the shadow of a squint. Everybody noticed these things about him, because the moment he spoke, he gave forth an indescribable air of authority. But all he said was:

‘There is one more thing to be said, if you come to details, about Admiral Craven being drowned.’ Then he added reflectively, ‘Admiral Craven was not drowned.’

The Inspector turned with quite a new promptitude and shot a question at him.

‘I have just examined the body,’ said Dr Straker, ‘the cause of death was a stab through the heart with some pointed blade like a stiletto. It was after death, and even some little time after, that the body was hidden in the pool.’

Father Brown was regarding Dr Straker with a very lively eye, such as he seldom turned upon anybody; and when the group in the office began to break up, he managed to attach himself to the medical man for a little further conversation, as they went back down the street. There had not been very much else to detain them except the rather formal question of the will. The impatience of the young secretary had been somewhat tried by the professional etiquette of the old lawyer. But the latter was ultimately induced, rather by the tact of the priest than the authority of the policeman, to refrain from making a mystery where there was no mystery at all. Mr Dyke admitted, with a smile, that the Admiral’s will was a very normal and ordinary document, leaving everything to his only child Olive; and that there really was no particular reason for concealing the fact.

The doctor and the priest walked slowly down the street that struck out of the town in the direction of Craven House. Harker had plunged on ahead of him with all his native eagerness to get somewhere; but the two behind seemed more interested in their discussion than their direction. It was in rather an enigmatic tone that the tall doctor said to the short cleric beside him:

‘Well, Father Brown, what do you think of a thing like this?’

Father Brown looked at him rather intently for an instant, and then said:

‘Well, I’ve begun to think of one or two things; but my chief difficulty is that I only knew the Admiral slightly; though I’ve seen something of his daughter.’

‘The Admiral,’ said the doctor with a grim immobility of feature, ‘was the sort of man of whom it is said that he had not an enemy in the world.’

‘I suppose you mean,’ answered the priest, ‘that there’s something else that will not be said.’

‘Oh, it’s no affair of mine,’ said Straker hastily but rather harshly. ‘He had his moods, I suppose. He once threatened me with a legal action about an operation; but I think he thought better of it. I can imagine his being rather rough with a subordinate.’

Father Brown’s eyes were fixed on the figure of the secretary striding far ahead; and as he gazed he realized the special cause of his hurry. Some fifty yards farther ahead the Admiral’s daughter was dawdling along the road towards the Admiral’s house. The secretary soon came abreast of her; and for the remainder of the time Father Brown watched the silent drama of two human backs as they diminished into the distance. The secretary was evidently very much excited about something; but if the priest guessed what it was, he kept it to himself. When he came to the corner leading to the doctor’s house, he only said briefly: ‘I don’t know if you have anything more to tell us.’

‘Why should I?’ answered the doctor very abruptly; and striding off, left it uncertain whether he was asking why he should have anything to tell, or why he should tell it.

Father Brown went stumping on alone, in the track of the two young people; but when he came to the entrance and avenues of the Admiral’s park, he was arrested by the action of the girl, who turned suddenly and came straight towards him; her face unusually pale and her eyes bright with some new and as yet nameless emotion.

‘Father Brown,’ she said in a low voice, ‘I must talk to you as soon as possible. You must listen to me, I can’t see any other way out.’

‘Why certainly,’ he replied, as coolly as if a gutter-boy had asked him the time. ‘Where shall we go and talk?’

The girl led him at random to one of the rather tumbledown arbours in the grounds; and they sat down behind a screen of large ragged leaves. She began instantly, as if she must relieve her feelings or faint.

‘Harold Harker,’ she said, ‘has been talking to me about things. Terrible things.’

The priest nodded and the girl went on hastily. ‘About Roger Rook. Do you know about Roger?’

‘I’ve been told,’ he answered, ‘that his fellow-seamen call him The Jolly Roger, because he is never jolly; and looks like the pirate’s skull and crossbones.'

'He was not always like that,' said Olive in a low voice. 'Something very queer must have happened to him. I knew him well when we were children; we used to play over there on the sands. He was harum-scarum and always talking about being a pirate; I dare say he was the sort they say might take to crime through reading shockers; but there was something poetical in his way of being piratical. He really was a Jolly Roger then. I suppose he was the last boy who kept up the old legend of really running away to sea; and at last his family had to agree to his joining the Navy. Well . . .'

'Yes,' said Father Brown patiently.

'Well,' she admitted, caught in one of her rare moments of mirth, 'I suppose poor Roger found it disappointing. Naval officers so seldom carry knives in their teeth or wave bloody cutlasses and black flags. But that doesn't explain the change in him. He just stiffened; grew dull and dumb, like a dead man walking about. He always avoids me; but that doesn't matter. I supposed some great grief that's no business of mine had broken him up. And now — well, if what Harold says is true, the grief is neither more nor less than going mad; or being possessed of a devil.'

'And what does Harold say?' asked the priest.

'It's so awful I can hardly say it,' she answered. 'He swears he saw Roger creeping behind my father that night; hesitating and then drawing his sword . . . and the doctor says father was stabbed with a steel point ... I can't believe Roger Rook had anything to do with it. His sulks and my father's temper sometimes led to quarrels; but what are quarrels? I can't exactly say I'm standing up for an old friend; because he isn't even friendly. But you can't help feeling sure of some things, even about an old acquaintance. And yet Harold swears that he—'

'Harold seems to swear a great deal,' said Father Brown.

There was a sudden silence; after which she said in a different tone: 'Well, he does swear other things too. Harold Harker proposed to me just now.'

'Am I to congratulate you, or rather him?' inquired her companion.

'I told him he must wait. He isn't good at waiting.' She was caught again in a ripple of her incongruous sense of the comic: 'He said I was his ideal and his ambition and so on. He has lived in the States; but somehow I never remember it when he is talking about dollars; only when he is talking about ideals.'

‘And I suppose,’ said Father Brown very softy, ‘that it is because you have to decide about Harold that you want to know the truth about Roger.’

She stiffened and frowned, and then equally abruptly smiled, saying: ‘Oh, you know too much.’

‘I know very little, especially in this affair,’ said the priest gravely. ‘I only know who murdered your father.’ She started up and stood staring down at him stricken white. Father Brown made a wry face as he went on: ‘I made a fool of myself when I first realized it; when they’d just been asking where he was found, and went on talking about green scum and the Green Man.’

Then he also rose; clutching his clumsy umbrella with a new resolution, he addressed the girl with a new gravity.

‘There is something else that I know, which is the key to all these riddles of yours; but I won’t tell you yet. I suppose it’s bad news; but it’s nothing like so bad as the things you have been fancying.’ He buttoned up his coat and turned towards the gate. ‘I’m going to see this Mr Rook of yours. In a shed by the shore, near where Mr Harker saw him walking. I rather think he lives there.’ And he went bustling off in the direction of the beach.

Olive was an imaginative person; perhaps too imaginative to be safely left to brood over such hints as her friend had thrown out; but he was in rather a hurry to find the best relief for her broodings. The mysterious connection between Father Brown’s first shock of enlightenment and the chance language about the pool and the inn, hag-rode her fancy in a hundred forms of ugly symbolism. The Green Man became a ghost trailing loathsome weeds and walking the countryside under the moon; the sign of the Green Man became a human figure hanging as from a gibbet; and the tarn itself became a tavern, a dark subaqueous tavern for the dead sailors. And yet he had taken the most rapid method to overthrow all such nightmares, with a burst of blinding daylight which seemed more mysterious than the night.

For before the sun had set, something had come back into her life that turned her whole world topsy-turvy once more; something she had hardly known that she desired until it was abruptly granted; something that was, like a dream, old and familiar, and yet remained incomprehensible and incredible. For Roger Rook had come striding across the sands, and even when he was a dot in the distance, she knew he was transfigured; and as he came nearer and nearer, she saw that his dark face was alive with laughter and exultation. He came straight toward her, as if they had never parted, and seized her shoulders saying: ‘Now I can look after you, thank God.’

She hardly knew what she answered; but she heard herself questioning rather wildly why he seemed so changed and so happy.

‘Because I am happy,’ he answered. ‘I have heard the bad news.’

All parties concerned, including some who seemed rather unconcerned, found themselves assembled on the garden-path leading to Craven House, to hear the formality, now truly formal, of the lawyer’s reading of the will; and the probable, and more practical sequel of the lawyer’s advice upon the crisis. Besides the grey-haired solicitor himself, armed with the testamentary document, there was the Inspector armed with more direct authority touching the crime, and Lieutenant Rook in undisguised attendance on the lady; some were rather mystified on seeing the tall figure of the doctor, some smiled a little on seeing the dumpy figure of the priest. Mr Harker, that Flying Mercury, had shot down to the lodge-gates to meet them, led them back on to the lawn, and then dashed ahead of them again to prepare their reception. He said he would be back in a jiffy; and anyone observing his piston-rod of energy could well believe it; but, for the moment, they were left rather stranded on the lawn outside the house.

‘Reminds me of somebody making runs at cricket,’ said the Lieutenant.

‘That young man,’ said the lawyer, ‘is rather annoyed that the law cannot move quite so quickly as he does. Fortunately Miss Craven understands our professional difficulties and delays. She has kindly assured me that she still has confidence in my slowness.’

‘I wish,’ said the doctor, suddenly, ‘that I had as much confidence in his quickness.’

‘Why, what do you mean?’ asked Rook, knitting his brows; ‘do you mean that Harker is too quick?’

‘Too quick and too slow,’ said Dr Straker, in his rather cryptic fashion. ‘I know one occasion at least when he was not so very quick. Why was he hanging about half the night by the pond and the Green Man, before the Inspector came down and found the body? Why did he meet the Inspector? Why should he expect to meet the Inspector outside the Green Man?’

‘I don’t understand you,’ said Rook. ‘Do you mean that Harker wasn’t telling the truth?’

Dr Straker was silent. The grizzled lawyer laughed with grim good humour. ‘I have nothing more serious to say against the young man,’ he said, ‘than that he made a prompt and praiseworthy attempt to teach me my own business.’

‘For that matter, he made an attempt to teach me mine,’ said the Inspector, who had just joined the group in front. ‘But that doesn’t matter. If Dr Straker means anything by his hints, they do matter. I must ask you to speak plainly, doctor. It may be my duty to question him at once.’

‘Well, here he comes,’ said Rook, as the alert figure of the secretary appeared once more in the doorway.

At this point Father Brown, who had remained silent and inconspicuous at the tail of the procession, astonished everybody very much; perhaps especially those who knew him. He not only walked rapidly to the front, but turned facing the whole group with an arresting and almost threatening expression, like a sergeant bringing soldiers to the halt.

‘Stop!’ he said almost sternly. ‘I apologize to everybody; but it’s absolutely necessary that I should see Mr Harker first. I’ve got to tell him something I know; and I don’t think anybody else knows; something he’s got to hear. It may save a very tragic misunderstanding with somebody later on.’

‘What on earth do you mean?’ asked old Dyke the lawyer.

‘I mean the bad news,’ said Father Brown.

‘Here, I say,’ began the Inspector indignantly; and then suddenly caught the priest’s eye and remembered strange things he had seen in other days. ‘Well, if it were anyone in the world but you I should say of all the infernal cheek—’

But Father Brown was already out of hearing, and a moment afterwards was plunged in talk with Harker in the porch. They walked to and fro together for a few paces and then disappeared into the dark interior. It was about twelve minutes afterwards that Father Brown came out alone.

To their surprise he showed no dispostion to re-enter the house, now that the whole company were at last about to enter it. He threw himself down on the rather rickety seat in the leafy arbour, and as the procession disappeared through the doorway, lit a pipe and proceeded to stare vacantly at the long ragged leaves about his head and to listen to the birds. There was no man who had a more hearty and enduring appetite for doing nothing.

He was, apparently, in a cloud of smoke and a dream of abstraction, when the front doors were once more flung open and two or three figures came out helter-skelter, running towards him, the daughter of the house and her young admirer Mr Rook being easily winners in the race. Their faces were alight with astonishment; and the face of Inspector Burns, who advanced more heavily behind them, like an elephant shaking the garden, was inflamed with some indignation as well.

‘What can all this mean?’ cried Olive, as she came panting to a halt. ‘He’s gone!’

‘Bolted!’ said the Lieutenant explosively. ‘Harker’s just managed to pack a suitcase and bolted! Gone clean out of the back door and over the garden-wall to God knows where. What did you say to him?’

‘Don’t be silly!’ said Olive, with a more worried expression. ‘Of course you told him you’d found him out, and now he’s gone. I never could have believed he was wicked like that!’

‘Well!’ gasped the Inspector, bursting into their midst. ‘What have you done now? What have you let me down like this for?’

‘Well,’ repeated Father Brown, ‘what have I done?’

‘You have let a murderer escape,’ cried Burns, with a decision that was like a thunderclap in the quiet garden; ‘you have helped a murderer to escape. Like a fool I let you warn him; and now he is miles away.’

‘I have helped a few murderers in my time, it is true,’ said Father Brown; then he added, in careful distinction, ‘not, you will understand, helped them to commit the murder.’

‘But you knew all the time,’ insisted Olive. ‘You guessed from the first that it must be he. That’s what you meant about being upset by the business of finding the body. That’s what the doctor meant by saying my father might be disliked by a subordinate.’

‘That’s what I complain of,’ said the official indignantly. ‘You knew even then that he was the—’

‘You knew even then,’ insisted Olive, ‘that the murderer was—’

Father Brown nodded gravely. ‘Yes,’ he said. ‘I knew even then that the murderer was old Dyke.’

‘Was who?’ repeated the Inspector and stopped amid, a dead silence; punctuated only by the occasional pipe of birds.

‘I mean Mr Dyke, the solicitor,’ explained Father Brown, like one explaining something elementary to an infant class. ‘That gentleman with grey hair who’s supposed to be going to read the will.’

They all stood like statues staring at him, as he carefully filled his pipe again and struck a match. At last Burns rallied his vocal powers to break the strangling silence with an effort resembling violence.

‘But, in the name of heaven, why?’

‘Ah, why?’ said the priest and rose thoughtfully, puffing at his pipe. ‘As to why he did it ... Well, I suppose the time has come to tell you, or those of you who don’t know, the fact that is the key of all this business. It’s a great calamity; and it’s a great crime; but it’s not the murder of Admiral Craven.’

He looked Olive full in the face and said very seriously: ‘I tell you the bad news bluntly and in few words; because I think you are brave enough, and perhaps happy enough, to take it well. You have the chance, and I think the power, to be something like a great woman. You are not a great heiress.’

Amid the silence that followed it was he who resumed his explanation.

‘Most of your father’s money, I am sorry to say, has gone. It went by the financial dexterity of the grey-haired gentleman named Dyke, who is (I grieve to say) a swindler. Admiral Craven was murdered to silence him about the way in which he was swindled. The fact that he was ruined and you were disinherited is the single simple clue, not only to the murder, but to all the other mysteries in this business.’ He took a puff or two and then continued.

‘I told Mr Rook you were disinherited and he rushed back to help you. Mr Rook is a rather remarkable person.’

‘Oh, chuck it,’ said Mr Rook with a hostile air.

‘Mr Rook is a monster,’ said Father Brown with scientific calm. ‘He is an anachronism, an atavism, a brute survival of the Stone Age. If there was one barbarous superstition we all supposed to be utterly extinct and dead in these days, it was that notion about honour and independence. But then I get mixed up with so many dead superstitions. Mr Rook is an extinct animal. He is a plesiosaurus. He did not want to live on his wife or have a wife who could call him a fortune-hunter. Therefore he sulked in a grotesque manner and only came to life again when I brought him the good news that you were ruined. He wanted to work for his wife and not be kept by her. Disgusting, isn’t it? Let us turn to the brighter topic of Mr Harker.

‘I told Mr Harker you were disinherited and he rushed away in a sort of panic. Do not be too hard on Mr Harker. He really had better as well as worse enthusiasms; but he had them all mixed up. There is no harm in having ambitions; but he had ambitions and called them ideals. The old sense of honour taught men to suspect success; to say, “This is a benefit; it may be a bribe.” The new nine-times-accursed nonsense about Making

Good teaches men to identify being good with making money. That was all that was the matter with him; in every other way he was a thoroughly good fellow, and there are thousands like him. Gazing at the stars and rising in the world were all Uplift. Marrying a good wife and marrying a rich wife were all Making Good. But he was not a cynical scoundrel; or he would simply have come back and jilted or cut you as the case might be. He could not face you; while you were there, half of his broken ideal was left.

'I did not tell the Admiral; but somebody did. Word came to him somehow, during the last grand parade on board, that his friend the family lawyer had betrayed him. He was in such a towering passion that he did what he could never have done in his sense; came straight on shore in his cocked hat and gold lace to catch the criminal; he wired to the police station, and that was why the Inspector was wandering round the Green Man. Lieutenant Rook followed him on shore because he suspected some family trouble and had half a hope he might help and put himself right. Hence his hesitating behaviour. As for his drawing his sword when he dropped behind and thought he was alone, well that's a matter of imagination. He was a romantic person who had dreamed of swords and run away to sea; and found himself in a service where he wasn't even allowed to wear a sword except about once in three years. He thought he was quite alone on the sands where he played as a boy. If you don't understand what he did, I can only say, like Stevenson, "you will never be a pirate." Also you will never be a poet; and you have never been a boy.'

'I never have,' answered Olive gravely, 'and yet I think I understand.'

'Almost every man,' continued the priest musing, 'will play with anything shaped like a sword or dagger, even if it is a paper knife. That is why I thought it so odd when the lawyer didn't.'

'What do you mean?' asked Burns, 'didn't what?'

'Why, didn't you notice,' answered Brown, 'at that first meeting in the office, the lawyer played with a pen and not with a paper-knife; though he had a beautiful bright steel paper-knife in the pattern of a stiletto? The pens were dusty and splashed with ink; but the knife had just been cleaned. But he did not play with it. There are limits to the irony of assassins.'

After a silence the Inspector said, like one waking from a dream: 'Look here ... I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels; I don't know whether you think you've got to the end; but I haven't got to the beginning.

Where do you get all this lawyer stuff from? What started you out on that trail?’

Father Brown laughed curtly and without mirth.

‘The murderer made a slip at the start,’ he said, ‘and I can’t think why nobody else noticed it. When you brought the first news of the death to the solicitor’s office, nobody was supposed to know anything there, except that the Admiral was expected home. When you said he was drowned, I asked when it happened and Mr Dyke asked where the corpse was found.’

He paused a moment to knock out his pipe and resumed reflectively: ‘Now when you are simply told of a seaman, returning from the sea, that he had drowned, it is natural to assume that he had been drowned at sea. At any rate, to allow that he may have been drowned at sea. If he had been washed overboard, or gone down with his ship, or had his body “committed to the deep”, there would be no reason to expect his body to be found at all. The moment that man asked where it was found, I was sure he knew where it was found. Because he had put it there. Nobody but the murderer need have thought of anything so unlikely as a seaman being drowned in a landlocked pool a few hundred yards from the sea. That is why I suddenly felt sick and turned green, I dare say; as green as the Green Man. I never can get used to finding myself suddenly sitting beside a murderer. So I had to turn it off by talking in parables; but the parable meant something, after all. I said that the body was covered with green scum, but it might just as well have been seaweed.’

It is fortunate that tragedy can never kill comedy and that the two can run side by side; and that while the only acting partner of the business of Messrs Willis, Hardman and Dyke blew his brains out when the Inspector entered the house to arrest him, Olive and Roger were calling to each other across the sands at evening, as they did when they were children together.

The Pursuit of Mr Blue

Along a seaside parade on a sunny afternoon, a person with the depressing name of Muggleton was moving with suitable gloom. There was a horseshoe of worry in his forehead, and the numerous groups and strings of entertainers stretched along the beach below looked up to him in vain for applause. Pierrots turned up their pale moon faces, like the white bellies of dead fish, without improving his spirits; niggers with faces entirely grey with a sort of grimy soot were equally unsuccessful in filling his fancy with brighter things. He was a sad and disappointed man. His other features, besides the bald brow with its furrow, were retiring and almost sunken; and a certain dingy refinement about them made more incongruous the one aggressive ornament of his face. It was an outstanding and bristling military moustache; and it looked suspiciously like a false moustache. It is possible, indeed, that it was a false moustache. It is possible, on the other hand, that even if it was not false it was forced. He might almost have grown it in a hurry, by a mere act of will; so much was it a part of his job rather than his personality.

For the truth is that Mr Muggleton was a private detective in a small way, and the cloud on his brow was due to a big blunder in his professional career; anyhow it was connected with something darker than the mere possession of such a surname. He might almost, in an obscure sort of way, have been proud of his surname; for he came of poor but decent Nonconformist people who claimed some connection with the founder of the Muggletonians; the only man who had hitherto had the courage to appear with that name in human history.

The more legitimate cause of his annoyance (at least as he himself explained it) was that he had just been present at the bloody murder of a world-famous millionaire, and had failed to prevent it, though he had been engaged at a salary of five pounds a week to do so. Thus we may explain the fact that even the languorous singing of the song entitled, ‘Won’t You Be My Loodah Doodah Day?’ failed to fill him with the joy of life.

For that matter, there were others on the beach, who might have had more sympathy with his murderous theme and Muggletonian tradition. Seaside resorts are the chosen pitches, not only of pierrots appealing to the amorous emotions, but also of preachers who often seem to specialize in a correspondingly sombre and sulphurous style of preaching. There was one aged ranter whom he could hardly help noticing, so piercing were the cries, not to say shrieks of religious prophecy that rang above all the banjos and castanets. This was a long, loose, shambling old man, dressed in something like a fisherman’s jersey; but inappropriately equipped with a pair of those very long and drooping whiskers which have never been seen since the disappearance of certain sportive Mid-Victorian dandies. As it was the custom for all mountebanks on the beach to display something, as if they were selling it, the old man displayed a rather rotten-looking fisherman’s net, which he generally spread out invitingly on the sands, as if it were a carpet for queens; but occasionally whirled wildly round his head with a gesture almost as terrific as that of the Roman Retiarius, ready to impale people on a trident. Indeed, he might really have impaled people, if he had had a trident. His words were always pointed towards punishment; his hearers heard nothing except threats to the body or the soul; he was so far in the same mood as Mr. Muggleton, that he might almost have been a mad hangman addressing a crowd of murderers. The boys called him Old Brimstone; but he had other eccentricities besides the purely theological. One of his eccentricities was to climb up into the nest of iron girders under the pier and trail his net in the water, declaring that he got his living by fishing; though it is doubtful whether anybody had ever seen him catching fish. Worldly trippers, however, would sometimes start at a voice in their ear, threatening judgement as from a thundercloud, but really coming from the perch under the iron roof where the old monomaniac sat glaring, his fantastic whiskers hanging like grey seaweed.

The detective, however, could have put up with Old Brimstone much better than with the other parson he was destined to meet. To explain this second and more momentous meeting, it must be pointed out that Muggleton, after his remarkable experience in the matter of the murder, had very properly put all his cards on the table. He told his story to the police and to the only available representative of Braham Bruce, the dead millionaire; that is, to his very dapper secretary, a Mr Anthony Taylor. The Inspector was more sympathetic than the secretary; but the sequel of his sympathy was the last thing Muggleton would normally have associated with police advice. The Inspector, after some reflection, very much surprised Mr Muggleton by advising him to consult an able amateur whom he knew to be staying in the town. Mr Muggleton had read reports and romances about the Great Criminologist, who sits in his library like an intellectual spider, and throws out theoretical filaments of a web as large as the world. He was prepared to be led to the lonely chateau where the expert wore a purple dressing-gown, to the attic where he lived on opium and acrostics, to the vast laboratory or the lonely tower. To his astonishment he was led to the very edge of the crowded beach by the pier to meet a dumpy little clergyman, with a broad hat and a broad grin, who was at that moment hopping about on the sands with a crowd of poor children; and excitedly waving a very little wooden spade.

When the criminologist clergyman, whose name appeared to be Brown, had at last been detached from the children, though not from the spade, he seemed to Muggleton to grow more and more unsatisfactory. He hung about helplessly among the idiotic side-shows of the seashore, talking about random topics and particularly attaching himself to those rows of automatic machines which are set up in such places; solemnly spending penny after penny in order to play vicarious games of golf, football, cricket, conducted by clockwork figures; and finally contenting himself with the miniature exhibition of a race, in which one metal doll appeared merely to run and jump after the other. And yet all the time he was listening very carefully to the story which the defeated detective poured out to him. Only his way of not letting his right hand know what his left hand was doing, with pennies, got very much on the detective's nerves.

'Can't we go and sit down somewhere,' said Muggleton impatiently. 'I've got a letter you ought to see, if you're to know anything at all of this business.'

Father Brown turned away with a sigh from the jumping dolls, and went and sat down with his companion on an iron seat on the shore; his companion had already unfolded the letter and handed it silently to him.

It was an abrupt and queer sort of letter, Father Brown thought. He knew that millionaires did not always specialize in manners, especially in dealing with dependants like detectives; but there seemed to be something more in the letter than mere brusquerie.

DEAR MUGGLETON,

I never thought I should come down to wanting help of this sort; but I'm about through with things. It's been getting more and more intolerable for the last two years. I guess all you need to know about the story is this. There is a dirty rascal who is a cousin of mine, I'm ashamed to say. He's been a tout, a tramp, a quack doctor, an actor, and all that; even has the brass to act under our name and call himself Bertrand Bruce. I believe he's either got some potty job at the theatre here, or is looking for one. But you may take it from me that the job isn't his real job. His real job is running me down and knocking me out for good, if he can. It's an old story and no business of anybody's; there was a time when we started neck and neck and ran a race of ambition — and what they call love as well. Was it my fault that he was a rotter and I was a man who succeeds in things? But the dirty devil swears he'll succeed yet; shoot me and run off with my — never mind. I suppose he's a sort of madman, but he'll jolly soon try to be some sort of murderer. I'll give you £5 a week if you'll meet me at the lodge at the end of the pier, just after the pier closes tonight — and take on my job. It's the only safe place to meet — if anything is safe by this time.

J. BRAHAM BRUCE

'Dear me,' said Father Brown mildly. 'Dear me. A rather hurried letter.'

Muggleton nodded; and after a pause began his own story; in an oddly refined voice contrasting with his clumsy appearance. The priest knew well the hobbies of concealed culture hidden in many dingy lower and middle class men; but even he was startled by the excellent choice of words only a shade too pedantic; the man talked like a book.

'I arrived at the little round-house at the end of the pier before there was any sign of my distinguished client. I opened the door and went inside, feeling that he might prefer me, as well as himself, to be as inconspicuous as possible. Not that it mattered very much; for the pier was too long for anybody to have seen us from the beach or the parade, and, on glancing at my watch, I saw by the time that the pier entrance must have already closed. It was flattering, after a fashion, that he should thus ensure that we should be alone together at the rendezvous, as showing that he did really rely on my assistance or protection. Anyhow, it was his idea that we should meet on the pier after closing time, so I fell in with it readily enough. There were two chairs inside the little round pavilion, or whatever you call it; so I simply took one of them and waited. I did not have to wait long. He was famous for his punctuality, and sure enough, as I looked up at the one little round window opposite me I saw him pass slowly, as if making a preliminary circuit of the place.

'I had only seen portraits of him, and that was a long time ago; and naturally he was rather older than the portraits, but there was no mistaking the likeness. The profile that passed the window was of the sort called aquiline, after the beak of the eagle; but he rather suggested a grey and venerable eagle; an eagle in repose; an eagle that has long folded its wings. There was no mistaking, however, that look of authority, or silent pride in the habit of command, that has always marked men who, like him, have organized great systems and been obeyed. He was quietly dressed, what I could see of him; especially as compared with the crowd of seaside trippers which had filled so much of my day; but I fancied his overcoat was of that extra elegant sort that is cut to follow the line of the figure, and it had a strip of astrakhan lining showing on the lapels. All this, of course, I took in at a glance, for I had already got to my feet and gone to the door. I put out my hand and received the first shock of that terrible evening. The door was locked. Somebody had locked me in.

'For a moment I stood stunned, and still staring at the round window, from which, of course, the moving profile had already passed; and then I suddenly saw the explanation. Another profile, pointed like that of a pursuing hound, flashed into the circle of vision, as into a round mirror. The moment I saw it, I knew who it was. It was the Avenger; the murderer or would-be murderer, who had trailed the old millionaire for so long across land and sea, and had now tracked him to this blind-alley of an iron pier that hung between sea and land. And I knew, of course, that it was the murderer who had locked the door.

'The man I saw first had been tall, but his pursuer was even taller; an effect that was only lessened by his carrying his shoulders hunched very high and his neck and head thrust forward like a true beast of the chase. The effect of the combination gave him rather the look of a gigantic hunchback. But something of the blood relationship that connected this ruffian with his famous kinsman showed in the two profiles as they passed across the circle of glass. The pursuer also had a nose rather like the beak of a bird; though his general air of ragged degradation suggested the vulture rather than the eagle. He was unshaven to the point of being bearded, and the humped look of his shoulders was increased by the coils of a coarse woollen scarf. All these are trivialities, and can give no impression of the ugly energy of that outline, or the sense of avenging doom in that stooping and striding figure. Have you ever seen William Blake's design, sometimes called with some levity, "The Ghost of a Flea," but also called, with somewhat greater lucidity, "A Vision of Blood Guilt," or something of that kind? That is just such a nightmare of a stealthy giant, with high shoulders, carrying a knife and bowl. This man carried neither, but as he passed the window the second time, I saw with my own eyes that he loosened a revolver from the folds of the scarf and held it gripped and poised in his hand. The eyes in his head shifted and shone in the moonlight, and that in a very creepy way; they shot forward and back with lightning leaps; almost as if he could shoot them out like luminous horns, as do certain reptiles.

'Three times the pursued and the pursuer passed in succession outside the window, treading their narrow circle, before I fully awoke to the need of some action, however desperate. I shook the door with rattling violence; when next I saw the face of the unconscious victim I beat furiously on the window; then I tried to break the window. But it was a double window of exceptionally thick glass, and so deep was the embrasure that I doubted if I could properly reach the outer window at all. Anyhow, my dignified client took no notice of my noise or signals; and the revolving shadow-pantomime of those two masks of doom continued to turn round and round me, till I felt almost dizzy as well as sick. Then they suddenly ceased to reappear. I waited; and I knew that they would not come again. I knew that the crisis had come.

'I need not tell you more. You can almost imagine the rest, even as I sat there helpless, trying to imagine it; or trying not to imagine it. It is enough to say that in that awful silence, in which all sounds of footsteps had died away, there were only two other noises besides the rumbling undertones of the sea. The first was the loud noise of a shot and the second the duller noise of a splash.

'My client had been murdered within a few yards of me, and I could make no sign. I will not trouble you with what I felt about that. But even if I could recover from the murder, I am still confronted with the mystery.'

'Yes,' said Father Brown very gently, 'which mystery?'

'The mystery of how the murderer got away,' answered the other. 'The instant people were admitted to the pier next morning, I was released from my prison and went racing back to the entrance gates, to inquire who had left the pier since they were opened. Without bothering you with details, I may explain that they were, by a rather unusual arrangement, real full-size iron doors that would keep anybody out (or in) until they were opened. The officials there had seen nobody in the least resembling the assassin returning that way. And he was a rather unmistakable person. Even if he had disguised himself somehow, he could hardly have disguised his extraordinary height or got rid of the family nose. It is extraordinarily unlikely that he tried to swim ashore, for the sea was very rough; and there are certainly no traces of any landing. And, somehow, having seen the face of that fiend even once, let alone about six times, something gives me an overwhelming conviction that he did not simply drown himself in the hour of triumph.'

'I quite understand what you mean by that,' replied Father Brown. 'Besides, it would be very inconsistent with the tone of his original threatening letter, in which he promised himself all sorts of benefits after the crime . . . there's another point it might be well to verify. What about the structure of the pier underneath? Piers are very often made with a whole network of iron supports, which a man might climb through as a monkey climbs through a forest.'

'Yes, I thought of that,' replied the private investigator; 'but unfortunately this pier is oddly constructed in more ways than one. It's quite unusually long, and there are iron columns with all that tangle of iron girders; only they're very far apart and I can't see any way a man could climb from one to the other.'

'I only mentioned it,' said Father Brown thoughtfully, 'because that queer fish with the long whiskers, the old man who preaches on the sand, often climbs up on to the nearest girder. I believe he sits there fishing when the tide comes up. And he's a very queer fish to go fishing.'

'Why, what do you mean?'

'Well,' said Father Brown very slowly, twiddling with a button and gazing abstractedly out to the great green waters glittering in the last evening light after the sunset. 'Well ... I tried to talk to him in a friendly sort of way — friendly and not too funny, if you understand, about his combining the ancient trades of fishing and preaching; I think I made the obvious reference; the text that refers to fishing for living souls. And he said quite queerly and harshly, as he jumped back on to his iron perch, 'Well, at least I fish for dead bodies."'

'Good God!' exclaimed the detective, staring at him.

'Yes,' said the priest. 'It seemed to me an odd remark to make in a chatty way, to a stranger playing with children on the sands.'

After another staring silence his companion eventually ejaculated: 'You don't mean you think he had anything to do with the death.'

'I think,' answered Father Brown, 'that he might throw some light on it.'

'Well, it's beyond me now,' said the detective. 'It's beyond me to believe that anybody can throw any light on it. It's like a welter of wild waters in the pitch dark; the sort of waters that he ... that he fell into. It's simply stark staring unreason; a big man vanishing like a bubble; nobody could possibly ... Look here!' He stopped suddenly, staring at the priest, who had not moved, but was still twiddling with the button and staring at the breakers. 'What do you mean? What are you looking like that for? You don't mean to say that you . . . that you can make any sense of it?'

'It would be much better if it remained nonsense,' said Father Brown in a low voice. 'Well, if you ask me right out — yes, I think I can make some sense of it.'

There was a long silence, and then the inquiry agent said with a rather singular abruptness: 'Oh, here comes the old man's secretary from the hotel. I must be off. I think I'll go and talk to that mad fisherman of yours.'

'Post hoc propter hoc?' asked the priest with a smile.

'Well,' said the other, with jerky candour, 'the secretary don't like me and I don't think I like him. He's been poking around with a lot of questions that didn't seem to me to get us any further, except towards a quarrel. Perhaps he's jealous because the old man called in somebody else, and wasn't content with his elegant secretary's advice. See you later.'

And he turned away, ploughing through the sand to the place where the eccentric preacher had already mounted his marine nest; and looked in the green gloaming rather like some huge polyp or stinging jelly-fish trailing his poisonous filaments in the phosphorescent sea.

Meanwhile the priest was serenely watching the serene approach of the secretary; conspicuous even from afar, in that popular crowd, by the clerical neatness and sobriety of his top-hat and tail-coat. Without feeling disposed to take part in any feuds between the secretary and the inquiry agent, Father Brown had a faint feeling of irrational sympathy with the prejudices of the latter. Mr Anthony Taylor, the secretary, was an extremely presentable young man, in countenance, as well as costume; and the countenance was firm and intellectual as well as merely good-looking. He was pale, with dark hair coming down on the sides of his head, as if pointing towards possible whiskers; he kept his lips compressed more tightly than most people. The only thing that Father Brown's fancy could tell itself in justification sounded queerer than it really looked. He had a notion that the man talked with his nostrils. Anyhow, the strong compression of his mouth brought out something abnormally sensitive and flexible in these movements at the sides of his nose, so that he seemed to be communicating and conducting life by snuffling and smelling, with his head up, as does a dog. It somehow fitted in with the other features that, when he did speak, it was with a sudden rattling rapidity like a gatling-gun, which sounded almost ugly from so smooth and polished a figure.

For once he opened the conversation, by saying: ‘No bodies washed ashore, I imagine.’

‘None have been announced, certainly,’ said Father Brown.

‘No gigantic body of the murderer with the woollen scarf,’ said Mr Taylor.

‘No,’ said Father Brown.

Mr Taylor’s mouth did not move any more for the moment; but his nostrils spoke for him with such quick and quivering scorn, that they might almost have been called talkative.

When he did speak again, after some polite commonplaces from the priest, it was to say curtly: ‘Here comes the Inspector; I suppose they’ve been scouring England for the scarf.’

Inspector Grinstead, a brown-faced man with a grey pointed beard, addressed Father Brown rather more respectfully than the secretary had done.

‘I thought you would like to know, sir,’ he said, ‘that there is absolutely no trace of the man described as having escaped from the pier.’

‘Or rather not described as having escaped from the pier,’ said Taylor. ‘The pier officials, the only people who could have described him, have never seen anybody to describe.’

‘Well,’ said the Inspector, ‘we’ve telephoned all the stations and watched all the roads, and it will be almost impossible for him to escape from England. It really seems to me as if he couldn’t have got out that way. He doesn’t seem to be anywhere.’

‘He never was anywhere,’ said the secretary, with an abrupt grating voice, that sounded like a gun going off on that lonely shore.

The Inspector looked blank; but a light dawned gradually on the face of the priest, who said at last with almost ostentatious unconcern:

‘Do you mean that the man was a myth? Or possibly a lie?’

‘Ah,’ said the secretary, inhaling through his haughty nostrils, ‘you’ve thought of that at last.’

‘I thought of that at first,’ said Father Brown. ‘It’s the first thing anybody would think of, isn’t it, hearing an unsupported story from a stranger about a strange murderer on a lonely pier. In plain words, you mean that little Muggleton never heard anybody murdering the millionaire. Possibly you mean that little Muggleton murdered him himself.’

‘Well,’ said the secretary, ‘Muggleton looks a dingy down-and-out sort of cove to me. There’s no story but his about what happened on the pier, and his story consists of a giant who vanished; quite a fairy-tale. It isn’t a very creditable tale, even as he tells it. By his own account, he bungled his case and let his patron be killed a few yards away. He’s a pretty rotten fool and failure, on his own confession.’

‘Yes,’ said Father Brown. ‘I’m rather fond of people who are fools and failures on their own confession.’

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ snapped the other.

‘Perhaps,’ said Father Brown, wistfully, ‘it’s because so many people are fools and failures without any confession.’

Then, after a pause, he went on: ‘But even if he is a fool and a failure, that doesn’t prove he is a liar and a murderer. And you’ve forgotten that there is one piece of external evidence that does really support history. I mean the letter from the millionaire, telling the whole tale of his cousin and his vendetta. Unless you can prove that the document itself is actually a forgery, you have to admit there was some probability of Bruce being pursued by somebody who had a real motive. Or rather, I should say, the one actually admitted and recorded motive.’

‘I’m not quite sure that I understand you,’ said the Inspector, ‘about the motive.’

‘My dear fellow,’ said Father Brown, for the first time stung by impatience into familiarity, ‘everybody’s got a motive in a way. Considering the way that Bruce made his money, considering the way that most millionaires make their money, almost anybody in the world might have done such a perfectly natural thing as throw him into the sea. In many, one might almost fancy, it would be almost automatic. To almost all it must have occurred at some time or other. Mr Taylor might have done it.’

‘What’s that?’ snapped Mr Taylor, and his nostrils swelled visibly.

‘I might have done it,’ went on Father Brown, ‘nisi me constringeret ecclesiae auctoritas. Anybody, but for the one true morality, might be tempted to accept so obvious, so simple a social solution. I might have done it; you might have done it; the Mayor or the muffin-man might have done it. The only person on this earth I can think of, who probably would not have done it, is the private inquiry agent whom Bruce had just engaged at five pounds a week, and who hadn’t yet had any of his money.’

The secretary was silent for a moment; then he snorted and said: ‘If that’s the offer in the letter, we’d certainly better see whether it’s a forgery. For really, we don’t know that the whole tale isn’t as false as a forgery. The fellow admits himself that the disappearance of his hunch-backed giant is utterly incredible and inexplicable.’

‘Yes,’ said Father Brown; ‘that’s what I like about Muggleton. He admits things.’

‘All the same,’ insisted Taylor, his nostrils vibrant with excitement. ‘All the same, the long and the short of it is that he can’t prove that his tall man in the scarf ever existed or does exist; and every single fact found by the police and the witnesses proves that he does not exist. No, Father Brown. There is only one way in which you can justify this little scallywag you seem to be so fond of. And that is by producing his Imaginary Man. And that is exactly what you can’t do.’

‘By the way,’ said the priest, absent-mindedly, ‘I suppose you come from the hotel where Bruce has rooms, Mr Taylor?’

Taylor looked a little taken aback, and seemed almost to stammer. ‘Well, he always did have those rooms; and they’re practically his. I haven’t actually seen him there this time.’

‘I suppose you motored down with him,’ observed Brown; ‘or did you both come by train?’

‘I came by train and brought the luggage,’ said the secretary impatiently. ‘Something kept him, I suppose. I haven’t actually seen him since he left Yorkshire on his own a week or two ago.’

‘So it seems,’ said the priest very softly, ‘that if Muggleton wasn’t the last to see Bruce by the wild sea-waves, you were the last to see him, on the equally wild Yorkshire moors.’

Taylor had turned quite white, but he forced his grating voice to composure: ‘I never said Muggleton didn’t see Bruce on the pier.’

‘No; and why didn’t you?’ asked Father Brown. ‘If he made up one man on the pier, why shouldn’t he make up two men on the pier? Of course we do know that Bruce did exist; but we don’t seem to know what has happened to him for several weeks. Perhaps he was left behind in Yorkshire.’

The rather strident voice of the secretary rose almost to a scream. All his veneer of society suavity seemed to have vanished.

‘You’re simply shuffling! You’re simply shirking! You’re trying to drag in mad insinuations about me, simply because you can’t answer my question.’

‘Let me see,’ said Father Brown reminiscently. ‘What was your question?’

‘You know well enough what it was; and you know you’re damned well stumped by it. Where is the man with the scarf? Who has seen him? Whoever heard of him or spoke of him, except that little liar of yours? If you want to convince us, you must produce him. If he ever existed, he may be hiding in the Hebrides or off to Callao. But you’ve got to produce him, though I know he doesn’t exist. Well then! Where is he?’

‘I rather think he is over there,’ said Father Brown, peering and blinking towards the nearer waves that washed round the iron pillars of the pier; where the two figures of the agent and the old fisher and preacher were still dark against the green glow of the water. ‘I mean in that sort of net thing that’s tossing about in the sea.’

With whatever bewilderment, Inspector Grinstead took the upper hand again with a flash, and strode down the beach.

‘Do you mean to say,’ he cried, ‘that the murderer’s body is in the old boy’s net?’

Father Brown nodded as he followed down the shingly slope; and, even as they moved, little Muggleton the agent turned and began to climb the same shore, his mere dark outline a pantomime of amazement and discovery.

‘It’s true, for all we said,’ he gasped. ‘The murderer did try to swim ashore and was drowned, of course, in that weather. Or else he did really commit suicide. Anyhow, he drifted dead into Old Brimstone’s fishing-net, and that’s what the old maniac meant when he said he fished for dead men.’

The Inspector ran down the shore with an agility that outstripped them all, and was heard shouting out orders. In a few moments the fishermen and a few bystanders, assisted by the policemen, had hauled the net into shore, and rolled it with its burden on to the wet sands that still reflected the sunset. The secretary looked at what lay on the sands and the words died on his lips. For what lay on the sands was indeed the body of a gigantic man in rags, with the huge shoulders somewhat humped and bony eagle face; and a great red ragged woollen scarf or comforter, sprawled along the sunset sands like a great stain of blood. But Taylor was staring not at the gory scarf or the fabulous stature, but at the face; and his own face was a conflict of incredulity and suspicion.

The Inspector instantly turned to Muggleton with a new air of civility.

‘This certainly confirms your story,’ he said. And until he heard the tone of those words, Muggleton had never guessed how almost universally his story had been disbelieved. Nobody had believed him. Nobody but Father Brown.

Therefore, seeing Father Brown edging away from the group, he made a movement to depart in his company; but even then he was brought up rather short by the discovery that the priest was once more being drawn away by the deadly attractions of the funny little automatic machines. He even saw the reverend gentleman fumbling for a penny. He stopped, however, with the penny poised in his finger and thumb, as the secretary spoke for the last time in his loud discordant voice.

‘And I suppose we may add,’ he said, ‘that the monstrous and imbecile charges against me are also at an end.’

‘My dear sir,’ said the priest, ‘I never made any charges against you. I’m not such a fool as to suppose you were likely to murder your master in Yorkshire and then come down here to fool about with his luggage. All I said was that I could make out a better case against you than you were making out so vigorously against poor Mr Muggleton. All the same, if you really want to learn the truth about his business (and I assure you the truth isn’t generally grasped yet), I can give you a hint even from your own affairs. It is rather a rum and significant thing that Mr Bruce the millionaire had been unknown to all his usual haunts and habits for weeks before he was really killed. As you seem to be a promising amateur detective, I advise you to work on that line.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Taylor sharply.

But he got no answer out of Father Brown, who was once more completely concentrated on jiggling the little handle of the machine, that made one doll jump out and then another doll jump after it.

‘Father Brown,’ said Muggleton, his old annoyance faintly reviving: ‘Will you tell me why you like that fool thing so much?’

‘For one reason,’ replied the priest, peering closely into the glass puppet-show. ‘Because it contains the secret of this tragedy.’

Then he suddenly straightened himself; and looked quite seriously at his companion.

‘I knew all along,’ he said, ‘that you were telling the truth and the opposite of the truth.’

Muggleton could only stare at a return of all the riddles.

‘It’s quite simple,’ added the priest, lowering his voice. ‘That corpse with the scarlet scarf over there is the corpse of Braham Bruce the millionaire. There won’t be any other.’

‘But the two men—’ began Muggleton, and his mouth fell open.

‘Your description of the two men was quite admirably vivid,’ said Father Brown. ‘I assure you I’m not at all likely to forget it. If I may say so, you have a literary talent; perhaps journalism would give you more scope than detection. I believe I remember practically each point about each person. Only, you see, queerly enough, each point affected you in one way and me in exactly the opposite way. Let’s begin with the first you mentioned. You said that the first man you saw had an indescribable air of authority and dignity. And you said to yourself, “That’s the Trust Magnate, the great merchant prince, the ruler of markets.” But when I heard about the air of dignity and authority, I said to myself, “That’s the actor; everything about this is the actor, “ You don’t get that look by being President of the Chain Store Amalgamation Company. You get that look by being Hamlet’s Father’s Ghost, or Julius Caesar, or King Lear, and you never altogether lose it. You couldn’t see enough of his clothes to tell whether they were really seedy, but you saw a strip of fur and a sort of faintly fashionable cut; and I said to myself again, “The actor.”

‘Next, before we go into details about the other man, notice one thing about him evidently absent from the first man. You said the second man was not only ragged but unshaven to the point of being bearded. Now we have all seen shabby actors, dirty actors, drunken actors, utterly disreputable actors. But such a thing as a scrub-bearded actor, in a job or even looking round for a job, has scarcely been seen in this world. On the other hand, shaving is often almost the first thing to go, with a gentleman or a wealthy eccentric who is really letting himself go to pieces. Now we have every reason to believe that your friend the millionaire was letting himself go to pieces. His letter was the letter of a man who had already gone to pieces. But it wasn't only negligence that made him look poor and shabby. Don't you understand that the man was practically in hiding? That was why he didn't go to his hotel; and his own secretary hadn't seen him for weeks. He was a millionaire; but his whole object was to be a completely disguised millionaire. Have you ever read "The Woman in White"? Don't you remember that the fashionable and luxurious Count Fosco, fleeing for his life before a secret society, was found stabbed in the blue blouse of a common French workman? Then let us go back for a moment to the demeanour of these men. You saw the first man calm and collected and you said to yourself, "That's the innocent victim"; though the innocent victim's own letter wasn't at all calm and collected. I heard he was calm and collected; and I said to myself, "That's the murderer." Why should he be anything else but calm and collected? He knew what he was going to do. He had made up his mind to do it for a long time; if he had ever had any hesitation or remorse he had hardened himself against them before he came on the scene — in his case, we might say, on the stage. He wasn't likely to have any particular stage-fright. He didn't pull out his pistol and wave it about; why should he? He kept it in his pocket till he wanted it; very likely he fired from his pocket. The other man fidgeted with his pistol because he was nervous as a cat, and very probably had never had a pistol before. He did it for the same reason that he rolled his eyes; and I remember that, even in your own unconscious evidence, it is particularly stated that he rolled them backwards. In fact, he was looking behind him. In fact, he was not the pursuer but the pursued. But because you happened to see the first man first, you couldn't help thinking of the other man as coming up behind him. In mere mathematics and mechanics, each of them was running after the other — just like the others.'

'What others?' inquired the dazed detective.

'Why, these,' cried Father Brown, striking the automatic machine with the little wooden spade, which had incongruously remained in his hand throughout these murderous mysteries. 'These little clockwork dolls that chase each other round and round for ever. Let us call them Mr Blue and Mr Red, after the colour of their coats. I happened to start off with Mr Blue, and so the children said that Mr Red was running after him; but it would have looked exactly the contrary if I had started with Mr Red.'

'Yes, I begin to see,' said Muggleton; 'and I suppose all the rest fits in. The family likeness, of course, cuts both ways, and they never saw the murderer leaving the pier—'

'They never looked for the murderer leaving the pier,' said the other. 'Nobody told them to look for a quiet clean-shaven gentleman in an astrakhan coat. All the mystery of his vanishing revolved on your description of a hulking fellow in a red neckcloth. But the simple truth was that the actor in the astrakhan coat murdered the millionaire with the red rag, and there is the poor fellow's body. It's just like the red and blue dolls; only, because you saw one first, you guessed wrong about which was red with vengeance and which was blue with funk.'

At this point two or three children began to straggle across the sands, and the priest waved them to him with the wooden spade, theatrically tapping the automatic machine. Muggleton guessed that it was mainly to prevent their straying towards the horrible heap on the shore.

'One more penny left in the world,' said Father Brown, 'and then we must go home to tea. Do you know, Doris, I rather like those revolving games, that just go round and round like the Mulberry-Bush. After all, God made all the suns and stars to play Mulberry-Bush. But those other games, where one must catch up with another, where runners are rivals and run neck and neck and outstrip each other; well — much nastier things seem to happen. I like to think of Mr Red and Mr Blue always jumping with undiminished spirits; all free and equal; and never hurting each other. "Fond lover, never, never, wilt thou kiss — or kill." Happy, happy Mr Red!

He cannot change; though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever will thou jump; and he be Blue.

Reciting this remarkable quotation from Keats, with some emotion, Father Brown tucked the little spade under one arm, and giving a hand to two of the children, stumped solemnly up the beach to tea.

The Crime of the Communist

Three men came out from under the lowbrowed Tudor arch in the mellow facade of Mandeville College, into the strong evening sunlight of a summer day which seemed as if it would never end; and in that sunlight they saw something that blasted like lightning; well-fitted to be the shock of their lives.

Even before they had realized anything in the way of a catastrophe, they were conscious of a contrast. They themselves, in a curious quiet way, were quite harmonious with their surroundings. Though the Tudor arches that ran like a cloister round the College gardens had been built four hundred years ago, at that moment when the Gothic fell from heaven and bowed, or almost crouched, over the cosier chambers of Humanism and the Revival of Learning — though they themselves were in modern clothes (that is in clothes whose ugliness would have amazed any of the four centuries) yet something in the spirit of the place made them all at one. The gardens had been tended so carefully as to achieve the final triumph of looking careless; the very flowers seemed beautiful by accident, like elegant weeds; and the modern costumes had at least any picturesqueness that can be produced by being untidy. The first of the three, a tall, bald, bearded maypole of a man, was a familiar figure in the Quad in cap and gown; the gown slipped off one of his sloping shoulders. The second was very square-shouldered, short and compact, with a rather jolly grin, commonly clad in a jacket, with his gown over his arm. The third was even shorter and much shabbier, in black clerical clothes. But they all seemed suitable to Mandeville College; and the indescribable atmosphere of the two ancient and unique Universities of England. They fitted into it and they faded into it; which is there regarded as most fitting.

The two men seated on garden chairs by a little table were a sort of brilliant blot on this grey-green landscape. They were clad mostly in black and yet they glittered from head to heel, from their burnished top-hats to their perfectly polished boots. It was dimly felt as an outrage that anybody should be so well-dressed in the well-bred freedom of Mandeville College. The only excuse was that they were foreigners. One was an American, a millionaire named Hake, dressed in the spotlessly and sparklingly gentlemanly manner known only to the rich of New York. The other, who added to all these things the outrage of an astrakhan overcoat (to say nothing of a pair of florid whiskers), was a German Count of great wealth, the shortest part of whose name was Von Zimmern. The mystery of this story, however, is not the mystery of why they were there. They were there for the reason that commonly explains the meeting of incongruous things; they proposed to give the College some money. They had come in support of a plan supported by several financiers and magnates of many countries, for founding a new Chair of Economics at Mandeville College. They had inspected the College with that tireless conscientious sightseeing of which no sons of Eve are capable except the American and the German. And now they were resting from their labours and looking solemnly at the College gardens. So far so good.

The three other men, who had already met them, passed with a vague salutation; but one of them stopped; the smallest of the three, in the black clerical clothes.

‘I say,’ he said, with rather the air of a frightened rabbit, ‘I don’t like the look of those men.’

‘Good God! Who could?’ ejaculated the tall man, who happened to be the Master of Mandeville. ‘At least we have some rich men who don’t go about dressed up like tailors’ dummies.’

‘Yes,’ hissed the little cleric, ‘that’s what I mean. Like tailors’ dummies.’

‘Why, what do you mean?’ asked the shorter of the other men, sharply.

‘I mean they’re like horrible waxworks,’ said the cleric in a faint voice. ‘I mean they don’t move. Why don’t they move?’

Suddenly starting out of his dim retirement, he darted across the garden and touched the German Baron on the elbow. The German Baron fell over, chair and all, and the trousered legs that stuck up in the air were as stiff as the legs of the chair.

Mr Gideon P. Hake continued to gaze at the College gardens with glassy eyes; but the parallel of a waxwork confirmed the impression that they were like eyes made of glass. Somehow the rich sunlight and the coloured garden increased the creepy impression of a stiffly dressed doll; a marionette on an Italian stage. The small man in black, who was a priest named Brown, tentatively touched the millionaire on the shoulder, and the millionaire fell sideways, but horribly all of a piece, like something carved in wood.

‘Rigor mortis,’ said Father Brown, ‘and so soon. But it does vary a good deal.’

The reason the first three men had joined the other two men so late (not to say too late) will best be understood by noting what had happened just inside the building, behind the Tudor archway, but a short time before they came out. They had all dined together in Hall, at the High Table; but the two foreign philanthropists, slaves of duty in the matter of seeing everything, had solemnly gone back to the chapel, of which one cloister and a staircase remained unexamined; promising to rejoin the rest in the garden, to examine as earnestly the College cigars. The rest, in a more reverent and right-minded spirit, had adjourned as usual to the long narrow oak table, round which the after-dinner wine had circulated, for all anybody knew, ever since the College had been founded in the Middle Ages by Sir John Mandeville, for the encouragement of telling stories. The Master, with the big fair beard and bald brow, took the head of the table, and the squat man in the square jacket sat on his left; for he was the Bursar or business man of the College. Next to him, on that side of the table, sat a queer-looking man with what could only be called a crooked face; for its dark tufts of moustache and eyebrow, slanting at contrary angles, made a sort of zig-zag, as if half his face were puckered or paralysed. His name was Byles; he was the lecturer in Roman History, and his political opinions were founded on those of Coriolanus, not to mention Tarquinius Superbus. This tart Toryism, and rabidly reactionary view of all current problems, was not altogether unknown among the more old-fashioned sort of dons; but in the case of Byles there was a suggestion that it was a result rather than a cause of his acerbity. More than one sharp observer had received the impression that there was something really wrong with Byles; that some secret or some great misfortune had embittered him; as if that half-withered face had really been blasted like a storm-stricken tree. Beyond him again sat Father Brown and at the end of the table a Professor of Chemistry, large and blond and bland, with eyes that were sleepy and perhaps a little sly. It was well known that this natural philosopher regarded the other philosophers, of a more classical tradition, very much as old logics. On the other side of the table, opposite Father Brown, was a very swarthy and silent young man, with a black pointed beard, introduced because somebody had insisted on having a Chair of Persian; opposite the sinister Byles was a very mild-looking little Chaplain, with a head like an egg. Opposite the Bursar and at the right hand of the Master, was an empty chair; and there were many there who were glad to see it empty.

‘I don’t know whether Craken is coming,’ said the Master, not without a nervous glance at the chair, which contrasted with the usual languid freedom of his demeanour. ‘I believe in giving people a lot of rope myself; but I confess I’ve reached the point of being glad when he is here, merely because he isn’t anywhere else.’

‘Never know what he’ll be up to next,’ said the Bursar, cheerfully, ‘especially when he’s instructing the young.’

‘A brilliant fellow, but fiery of course,’ said the Master, with a rather abrupt relapse into reserve.

‘Fireworks are fiery, and also brilliant,’ growled old Byles, ‘but I don’t want to be burned in my bed so that Craken can figure as a real Guy Fawkes.’

‘Do you really think he would join a physical force revolution, if there were one,’ asked the Bursar smiling.

‘Well, he thinks he would,’ said Byles sharply. ‘Told a whole hall full of undergraduates the other day that nothing now could avert the Class War turning into a real war, with killing in the streets of the town; and it didn’t matter, so long as it ended in Communism and the victory of the working-class.’

‘The Class War,’ mused the Master, with a sort of distaste mellowed by distance; for he had known William Morris long ago and been familiar enough with the more artistic and leisurely Socialists. ‘I never can understand all this about the Class War. When I was young, Socialism was supposed to mean saying that there are no classes.’

‘Nother way of saying that Socialists are no class,’ said Byles with sour relish.

‘Of course, you’d be more against them than I should,’ said the Master thoughtfully, ‘but I suppose my Socialism is almost as old-fashioned as your Toryism. Wonder what our young friends really think. What do you think, Baker?’ he said abruptly to the Bursar on his left.

‘Oh, I don’t think, as the vulgar saying is,’ said the Bursar laughing. ‘You must remember I’m a very vulgar person. I’m not a thinker. I’m only a business man; and as a business man I think it’s all bosh. You can’t make men equal and it’s damned bad business to pay them equal; especially a lot of them not worth paying for at all. Whatever it is, you’ve got to take the practical way out, because it’s the only way out. It’s not our fault if nature made everything a scramble.’

‘I agree with you there,’ said the Professor of Chemistry, speaking with a lisp that seemed childish in so large a man. ‘Communism pretends to be oh so modern; but it is not. Throwback to the superstitions of monks and primitive tribes. A scientific government, with a really ethical responsibility to posterity, would be always looking for the line of promise and progress; not levelling and flattening it all back into the mud again. Socialism is sentimentalism; and more dangerous than a pestilence, for in that at least the fittest would survive.’

The Master smiled a little sadly. ‘You know you and I will never feel quite the same about differences of opinion. Didn’t somebody say up here, about walking with a friend by the river, “Not differing much, except in opinion.” Isn’t that the motto of a university? To have hundreds of opinions and not be opinionated. If people fall here, it’s by what they are, not what they think. Perhaps I’m a relic of the eighteenth century; but I incline to the old sentimental heresy, “For forms of faith let graceless zealots fight; he can’t be wrong whose life is in the right.” What do you think about that, Father Brown?’

He glanced a little mischievously across at the priest and was mildly startled. For he had always found the priest very cheerful and amiable and easy to get on with; and his round face was mostly solid with good humour. But for some reason the priest’s face at this moment was knotted with a frown much more sombre than any the company had ever seen on it; so that for an instant that commonplace countenance actually looked darker and more ominous than the haggard face of Byles. An instant later the cloud seemed to have passed; but Father Brown still spoke with a certain sobriety and firmness.

‘I don’t believe in that, anyhow,’ he said shortly. ‘How can his life be in the right, if his whole view of life is wrong? That’s a modern muddle that arose because people didn’t know how much views of life can differ. Baptists and Methodists knew they didn’t differ very much in morality; but then they didn’t differ very much in religion or philosophy. It’s quite different when you pass from the Baptists to the Anabaptists; or from the Theosophists to the Thugs. Heresy always does affect morality, if it’s heretical enough. I suppose a man may honestly believe that thieving isn’t wrong. But what’s the good of saying that he honestly believes in dishonesty?’

‘Damned good,’ said Byles with a ferocious contortion of feature, believed by many to be meant for a friendly smile. ‘And that’s why I object to having a Chair of Theoretical Thieving in this College.’

‘Well, you’re all very down on Communism, of course,’ said the Master, with a sigh. ‘But do you really think there’s so much of it to be down on? Are any of your heresies really big enough to be dangerous?’

‘I think they have grown so big,’ said Father Brown gravely, ‘that in some circles they are already taken for granted. They are actually unconscious. That is, without conscience.’

‘And the end of it,’ said Byles, ‘will be the ruin of this country.’

‘The end will be something worse,’ said Father Brown.

A shadow shot or slid rapidly along the panelled wall opposite, as swiftly followed by the figure that had flung it; a tall but stooping figure with a vague outline like a bird of prey; accentuated by the fact that its sudden appearance and swift passage were like those of a bird startled and flying from a bush. It was only the figure of a long-limbed, high-shouldered man with long drooping moustaches, in fact, familiar enough to them all; but something in the twilight and candlelight and the flying and streaking shadow connected it strangely with the priest’s unconscious words of omen; for all the world, as if those words had indeed been an augury, in the old Roman sense; and the sign of it the flight of a bird. Perhaps Mr Byles might have given a lecture on such Roman augury; and especially on that bird of ill-omen.

The tall man shot along the wall like his own shadow until he sank into the empty chair on the Master’s right, and looked across at the Bursar and the rest with hollow and cavernous eyes. His hanging hair and moustache were quite fair, but his eyes were so deep-set that they might have been black. Everyone knew, or could guess, who the newcomer was; but an incident instantly followed that sufficiently illuminated the situation. The Professor of Roman History rose stiffly to his feet and stalked out of the room, indicating with little finesse his feelings about sitting at the same table with the Professor of Theoretical Thieving, otherwise the Communist, Mr Craken.

The Master of Mandeville covered the awkward situation with nervous grace. ‘I was defending you, or some aspects of you, my dear Craken,’ he said smiling, ‘though I am sure you would find me quite indefensible. After all, I can’t forget that the old Socialist friends of my youth had a very fine ideal of fraternity and comradeship. William Morris put it all in a sentence, "Fellowship is heaven; and lack of fellowship is hell."

'Dons as Democrats; see headline,' said Mr Craken rather disagreeably. 'And is Hard-Case Hake going to dedicate the new Commercial Chair to the memory of William Morris?'

'Well,' said the Master, still maintaining a desperate geniality, 'I hope we may say, in a sense, that all our Chairs are Chairs of good-fellowship.'

'Yes; that's the academic version of the Morris maxim,' growled Craken. '"A Fellowship is heaven; and lack of a Fellowship is hell."'

'Don't be so cross, Craken,' interposed the Bursar briskly. 'Take some port. Tenby, pass the port to Mr Craken.'

'Oh well, I'll have a glass,' said the Communist Professor a little less ungraciously. 'I really came down here to have a smoke in the garden. Then I looked out of the window and saw your two precious millionaires were actually blooming in the garden; fresh, innocent buds. After all, it might be worth while to give them a bit of my mind.'

The Master had risen under cover of his last conventional cordiality, and was only too glad to leave the Bursar to do his best with the Wild Man. Others had risen, and the groups at the table had begun to break up; and the Bursar and Mr Craken were left more or less alone at the end of the long table. Only Father Brown continued to sit staring into vacancy with a rather cloudy expression.

'Oh, as to that,' said the Bursar. 'I'm pretty tired of them myself, to tell the truth; I've been with them the best part of a day going into facts and figures and all the business of this new Professorship. But look here, Craken,' and he leaned across the table and spoke with a sort of soft emphasis, 'you really needn't cut up so rough about this new Professorship. It doesn't really interfere with your subject. You're the only Professor of Political Economy at Mandeville and, though I don't pretend to agree with your notions, everybody knows you've got a European reputation. This is a special subject they call Applied Economics. Well, even today, as I told you, I've had a hell of a lot of Applied Economics. In other words, I've had to talk business with two business men. Would you particularly want to do that? Would you envy it? Would you stand it? Isn't that evidence enough that there is a separate subject and may well be a separate Chair?'

'Good God,' cried Craken with the intense invocation of the atheist. 'Do you think I don't want to apply Economics? Only, when we apply it, you call it red ruin and anarchy; and when you apply it, I take the liberty of calling it exploitation. If only you fellows would apply Economics, it's just possible that people might get something to eat. We are the practical people; and that's why you're afraid of us. That's why you have to get two greasy Capitalists to start another Lectureship; just because I've let the cat out of the bag.'

'Rather a wild cat, wasn't it?' said the Bursar smiling, 'that you let out of the bag?'

'And rather a gold-bag, wasn't it,' said Craken, 'that you are tying the cat up in again?'

'Well, I don't suppose we shall ever agree about all that,' said the other. 'But those fellows have come out of their chapel into the garden; and if you want to have your smoke there, you'd better come.' He watched with some amusement his companion fumbling in all his pockets till he produced a pipe, and then, gazing at it with an abstracted air, Craken rose to his feet, but even in doing so, seemed to be feeling all over himself again. Mr Baker the Bursar ended the controversy with a happy laugh of reconciliation. 'You are the practical people, and you will blow up the town with dynamite. Only you'll probably forget the dynamite, as I bet you've forgotten the tobacco. Never mind, take a fill of mine. Matches?' He threw a tobacco-pouch and its accessories across the table; to be caught by Mr Craken with that dexterity never forgotten by a cricketer, even when he adopts opinions generally regarded as not cricket. The two men rose together; but Baker could not forbear remarking, 'Are you really the only practical people? Isn't there anything to be said for the Applied Economics, that remembers to carry a tobacco-pouch as well as a pipe?'

Craken looked at him with smouldering eyes; and said at last, after slowly draining the last of his wine: 'Let's say there's another sort of practicality. I dare say I do forget details and so on. What I want you to understand is this' — he automatically returned the pouch; but his eyes were far away and jet-burning, almost terrible— 'because the inside of our intellect has changed, because we really have a new idea of right, we shall do things you think really wrong. And they will be very practical.'

'Yes,' said Father Brown, suddenly coming out of his trance. 'That's exactly what I said.'

He looked across at Craken with a glassy and rather ghastly smile, saying: 'Mr Craken and I are in complete agreement.'

‘Well,’ said Baker, ‘Craken is going out to smoke a pipe with the plutocrats; but I doubt whether it will be a pipe of peace.’

He turned rather abruptly and called to an aged attendant in the background. Mandeville was one of the last of the very old-fashioned Colleges; and even Craken was one of the first of the Communists; before the Bolshevism of today. ‘That reminds me,’ the Bursar was saying, ‘as you won’t hand round your peace pipe, we must send out the cigars to our distinguished guests. If they’re smokers they must be longing for a smoke; for they’ve been nosing about in the chapel since feeding-time.’

Craken exploded with a savage and jarring laugh. ‘Oh, I’ll take them their cigars,’ he said. ‘I’m only a proletarian.’

Baker and Brown and the attendant were all witnesses to the fact that the Communist strode furiously into the garden to confront the millionaires; but nothing more was seen or heard of them until, as is already recorded, Father Brown found them dead in their chairs.

It was agreed that the Master and the priest should remain to guard the scene of tragedy, while the Bursar, younger and more rapid in his movements, ran off to fetch doctors and policemen. Father Brown approached the table on which one of the cigars had burned itself away all but an inch or two; the other had dropped from the hand and been dashed out into dying sparks on the crazy-pavement. The Master of Mandeville sat down rather shakily on a sufficiently distant seat and buried his bald brow in his hands. Then he looked up at first rather wearily; and then he looked very startled indeed and broke the stillness of the garden with a word like a small explosion of horror.

There was a certain quality about Father Brown which might sometimes be called blood-curdling. He always thought about what he was doing and never about whether it was done; he would do the most ugly or horrible or undignified or dirty things as calmly as a surgeon. There was a certain blank, in his simple mind, of all those things commonly associated with being superstitious or sentimental. He sat down on the chair from which the corpse had fallen, picked up the cigar the corpse had partially smoked, carefully detached the ash, examined the butt-end and then stuck it in his mouth and lit it. It looked like some obscene and grotesque antic in derision of the dead; and it seemed to him to be the most ordinary common sense. A cloud floated upwards like the smoke of some savage sacrifice and idolatry; but to Father Brown it appeared a perfectly self-evident fact that the only way to find out what a cigar is like is to smoke it. Nor did it lessen the horror for his old friend, the Master of Mandeville, to have a dim but shrewd guess that Father Brown was, upon the possibilities of the case, risking his own life.

‘No; I think that’s all right,’ said the priest, putting the stump down again. ‘Jolly good cigars. Your cigars. Not American or German. I don’t think there’s anything odd about the cigar itself; but they’d better take care of the ashes. These men were poisoned somehow with the sort of stuff that stiffens the body quickly ... By the way, there goes somebody who knows more about it than we do.’

The Master sat up with a curiously uncomfortable jolt; for indeed the large shadow which had fallen across the pathway preceded a figure which, however heavy, was almost as soft-footed as a shadow. Professor Wadham, eminent occupant of the Chair of Chemistry, always moved very quietly in spite of his size, and there was nothing odd about his strolling in the garden; yet there seemed something unnaturally neat in his appearing at the exact moment when chemistry was mentioned.

Professor Wadham prided himself on his quietude; some would say his insensibility. He did not turn a hair on his flattened flaxen head, but stood looking down at the dead men with a shade of something like indifference on his large froglike face. Only when he looked at the cigar-ash, which the priest had preserved, he touched it with one finger; then he seemed to stand even stiller than before; but in the shadow of his face his eyes for an instant seemed to shoot out telescopically like one of his own microscopes. He had certainly realized or recognized something; but he said nothing.

‘I don’t know where anyone is to begin in this business,’ said the Master.

‘I should begin,’ said Father Brown, ‘by asking where these unfortunate men had been most of the time today.’

‘They were messing about in my laboratory for a good time,’ said Wadham, speaking for the first time. ‘Baker often comes up to have a chat, and this time he brought his two patrons to inspect my department. But I think they went everywhere; real tourists. I know they went to the chapel and even into the tunnel under the crypt, where you have to light candles; instead of digesting their food like sane men. Baker seems to have taken them everywhere.’

‘Were they interested in anything particular in your department?’ asked the priest. ‘What were you doing there just then?’

The Professor of Chemistry murmured a chemical formula beginning with ‘sulphate’, and ending with something that sounded like ‘silenium’; unintelligible to both his hearers. He then wandered wearily away and sat on a remote bench in the sun, closing his eyes, but turning up his large face with heavy forbearance.

At his point, by a sharp contrast, the lawns were crossed by a brisk figure travelling as rapidly and as straight as a bullet; and Father Brown recognized the neat black clothes and shrewd doglike face of a police-surgeon whom he had met in the poorer parts of town. He was the first to arrive of the official contingent.

‘Look here,’ said the Master to the priest, before the doctor was within earshot. ‘I must know something. Did you mean what you said about Communism being a real danger and leading to crime?’

‘Yes,’ said Father Brown smiling rather grimly, ‘I have really noticed the spread of some Communist ways and influences; and, in one sense, this is a Communist crime.’

‘Thank you,’ said the Master. ‘Then I must go off and see to something at once. Tell the authorities I’ll be back in ten minutes.’

The Master had vanished into one of the Tudor archways at just about the moment when the police-doctor had reached the table and cheerfully recognized Father Brown. On the latter’s suggestion that they should sit down at the tragic table, Dr Blake threw one sharp and doubtful glance at the big, bland and seemingly somnolent chemist, who occupied a more remote seat. He was duly informed of the Professor’s identity, and what had so far been gathered of the Professor’s evidence; and listened to it silently while conducting a preliminary examination of the dead bodies. Naturally, he seemed more concentrated on the actual corpses than on the hearsay evidence, until one detail suddenly distracted him entirely from the science of anatomy.

‘What did the Professor say he was working at?’ he inquired.

Father Brown patiently repeated the chemical formula he did not understand.

‘What?’ snapped Dr Blake, like a pistol-shot. ‘Gosh! This is pretty frightful!’

‘Because it’s poison?’ inquired Father Brown.

‘Because it’s piffle,’ replied Dr Blake. ‘It’s simply nonsense. The Professor is quite a famous chemist. Why is a famous chemist deliberately talking nonsense?’

‘Well, I think I know that one,’ answered Father Brown mildly. ‘He is talking nonsense, because he is telling lies. He is concealing something; and he wanted specially to conceal it from these two men and their representatives.’

The doctor lifted his eyes from the two men and looked across at the almost unnaturally immobile figure of the great chemist. He might almost have been asleep; a garden butterfly had settled upon him and seemed to turn his stillness into that of a stone idol. The large folds of his froglike face reminded the doctor of the hanging skins of a rhinoceros.

‘Yes,’ said Father Brown, in a very low voice. ‘He is a wicked man.’

‘God damn it all!’ cried the doctor, suddenly moved to his very depths. ‘Do you mean that a great scientific man like that deals in murder?’

‘Fastidious critics would have complained of his dealing in murder,’ said the priest dispassionately. ‘I don’t say I’m very fond of people dealing in murder in that way myself. But what’s much more to the point — I’m sure that these poor fellows were among his fastidious critics.’

‘You mean they found his secret and he silenced them?’ said Blake frowning. ‘But what in hell was his secret? How could a man murder on a large scale in a place like this?’

‘I have told you his secret,’ said the priest. ‘It is a secret of the soul. He is a bad man. For heaven’s sake don’t fancy I say that because he and I are of opposite schools or traditions. I have a crowd of scientific friends; and most of them are heroically disinterested. Even of the most sceptical, I would only say they are rather irrationally disinterested. But now and then you do get a man who is a materialist, in the sense of a beast. I repeat he’s a bad man. Much worse than—’ And Father Brown seemed to hesitate for a word.

‘You mean much worse than the Communist?’ suggested the other.

‘No; I mean much worse than the murderer,’ said Father Brown.

He got to his feet in an abstracted manner; and hardly realized that his companion was staring at him.

‘But didn’t you mean,’ asked Blake at last, ‘that this Wadham is the murderer?’

‘Oh, no,’ said Father Brown more cheerfully. ‘The murderer is a much more sympathetic and understandable person. He at least was desperate; and had the excuses of sudden rage and despair.’

‘Why,’ cried the doctor, ‘do you mean it was the Communist after all?’

It was at this very moment, appropriately enough, that the police officials appeared with an announcement that seemed to conclude the case in a most decisive and satisfactory manner. They had been somewhat delayed in reaching the scene of the crime, by the simple fact that they had already captured the criminal. Indeed, they had captured him almost at the gates of their own official residence. They had already had reason to suspect the activities of Craken the Communist during various disorders in the town; when they heard of the outrage they felt it safe to arrest him; and found the arrest thoroughly justified. For, as Inspector Cook radiantly explained to dons and doctors on the lawn of Mandeville garden, no sooner was the notorious Communist searched, than it was found that he was actually carrying a box of poisoned matches.

The moment Father Brown heard the word ‘matches’, he jumped from his seat as if a match had been lighted under him.

‘Ah,’ he cried, with a sort of universal radiance, ‘and now it’s all clear.’

‘What do you mean by all clear?’ demanded the Master of Mandeville, who had returned in all the pomp of his own officialism to match the pomp of the police officials now occupying the College like a victorious army. ‘Do you mean you are convinced now that the case against Craken is clear?’

‘I mean that Craken is cleared,’ said Father Brown firmly, ‘and the case against Craken is cleared away. Do you really believe Craken is the kind of man who would go about poisoning people with matches?’

‘That’s all very well,’ replied the Master, with the troubled expression he had never lost since the first sensation occurred. ‘But it was you yourself who said that fanatics with false principles may do wicked things. For that matter, it was you yourself who said that Communism is creeping up everywhere and Communistic habits spreading.’

Father Brown laughed in a rather shamefaced manner.

‘As to the last point,’ he said, ‘I suppose I owe you all an apology. I seem to be always making a mess of things with my silly little jokes.’

‘Jokes!’ repeated the Master, staring rather indignantly.

‘Well,’ explained the priest, rubbing his head. ‘When I talked about a Communist habit spreading, I only meant a habit I happen to have noticed about two or three times even today. It is a Communist habit by no means confined to Communists. It is the extraordinary habit of so many men, especially Englishmen, of putting other people's matchboxes in their pockets without remembering to return them. Of course, it seems an awfully silly little trifle to talk about. But it does happen to be the way the crime was committed.'

'It sounds to me quite crazy,' said the doctor.

'Well, if almost any man may forget to return matches, you can bet your boots that Craken would forget to return them. So the poisoner who had prepared the matches got rid of them on to Craken, by the simple process of lending them and not getting them back. A really admirable way of shedding responsibility; because Craken himself would be perfectly unable to imagine where he had got them from. But when he used them quite innocently to light the cigars he offered to our two visitors, he was caught in an obvious trap; one of those too obvious traps. He was the bold bad Revolutionist murdering two millionaires.'

'Well, who else would want to murder them?' growled the doctor.

'Ah, who indeed?' replied the priest; and his voice changed to much greater gravity. 'There we come to the other thing I told you; and that, let me tell you, was not a joke. I told you that heresies and false doctrines had become common and conversational; that everybody was used to them; that nobody really noticed them. Did you think I meant Communism when I said that? Why, it was just the other way. You were all as nervous as cats about Communism; and you watched Craken like a wolf. Of course. Communism is a heresy; but it isn't a heresy that you people take for granted. It is Capitalism you take for granted; or rather the vices of Capitalism disguised as a dead Darwinism. Do you recall what you were all saying in the Common Room, about life being only a scramble, and nature demanding the survival of the fittest, and how it doesn't matter whether the poor are paid justly or not? Why, that is the heresy that you have grown accustomed to, my friends; and it's every bit as much a heresy as Communism. That's the anti-Christian morality or immorality that you take quite naturally. And that's the immorality that has made a man a murderer today.'

'What man?' cried the Master, and his voice cracked with a sudden weakness.

'Let me approach it another way,' said the priest placidly. 'You all talk as if Craken ran away; but he didn't. When the two men toppled over, he ran down the street, summoned the doctor merely by shouting through the window, and shortly afterwards was trying to summon the police. That was how he was arrested. But doesn't it strike you, now one comes to think of it, that Mr Baker the Bursar is rather a long time looking for the police?'

'What is he doing then?' asked the Master sharply.

'I fancy he's destroying papers; or perhaps ransacking these men's rooms to see they haven't left us a letter. Or it may have something to do with our friend Wadham. Where does he come in? That is really very simple and a sort of joke too. Mr Wadham is experimenting in poisons for the next war; and has something of which a whiff of flame will stiffen a man dead. Of course, he had nothing to do with killing these men; but he did conceal his chemical secret for a very simple reason. One of them was a Puritan Yankee and the other a cosmopolitan Jew; and those two types are often fanatical Pacifists. They would have called it planning murder and probably refused to help the College. But Baker was a friend of Wadham and it was easy for him to dip matches in the new material.'

Another peculiarity of the little priest was that his mind was all of a piece, and he was unconscious of many incongruities; he would change the note of his talk from something quite public to something quite private, without any particular embarrassment. On this occasion, he made most of the company stare with mystification, by beginning to talk to one person when he had just been talking to ten; quite indifferent to the fact that only the one could have any notion of what he was talking about.

'I'm sorry if I misled you, doctor, by that maundering metaphysical digression on the man of sin,' he said apologetically. 'Of course it had nothing to do with the murder; but the truth is I'd forgotten all about the murder for the moment. I'd forgotten everything, you see, but a sort of vision of that fellow, with his vast unhuman face, squatting among the flowers like some blind monster of the Stone Age. And I was thinking that some men are pretty monstrous, like men of stone; but it was all irrelevant. Being bad inside has very little to do with committing crimes outside. The worst criminals have committed no crimes. The practical point is why did the practical criminal commit this crime. Why did Baker the Bursar want to kill these men? That's all that concerns us now. The answer is the answer to the question I've asked twice. Where were these men most of the time, apart from nosing in chapels or laboratories? By the Bursar's own account, they were talking business with the Bursar.

‘Now, with all respect to the dead, I do not exactly grovel before the intellect of these two financiers. Their views on economics and ethics were heathen and heartless. Their views on Peace were tosh. Their views on Port were even more deplorable. But one thing they did understand; and that was business. And it took them a remarkably short time to discover that the business man in charge of the funds of this College was a swindler. Or shall I say, a true follower of the doctrine of the unlimited struggle for life and the survival of the fittest.’

‘You mean they were going to expose him and he killed them before they could speak,’ said the doctor frowning. ‘There are a lot of details I don’t understand.’

‘There are some details I’m not sure of myself,’ said the priest frankly. ‘I suspect all that business of candles underground had something to do with abstracting the millionaires’ own matches, or perhaps making sure they had no matches. But I’m sure of the main gesture, the gay and careless gesture of Baker tossing his matches to the careless Craken. That gesture was the murderous blow.’

‘There’s one thing I don’t understand,’ said the Inspector. ‘How did Baker know that Craken wouldn’t light up himself then and there at the table and become an unwanted corpse?’

The face of Father Brown became almost heavy with reproach; and his voice had a sort of mournful yet generous warmth in it.

‘Well, hang it all,’ he said, ‘he was only an atheist.’

‘I’m afraid I don’t know what you mean,’ said the Inspector, politely.

‘He only wanted to abolish God,’ explained Father Brown in a temperate and reasonable tone. ‘He only wanted to destroy the Ten Commandments and root up all the religion and civilization that had made him, and wash out all the common sense of ownership and honesty; and let his culture and his country be flattened out by savages from the ends of the earth. That’s all he wanted. You have no right to accuse him of anything beyond that. Hang it all, everybody draws the line somewhere! And you come here and calmly suggest that a Mandeville Man of the old generation (for Craken was of the old generation, whatever his views) would have begun to smoke, or even strike a match, while he was still drinking the College Port, of the vintage of ‘08 — no, no; men are not so utterly without laws and limits as all that! I was there; I saw him; he had not finished his wine, and you ask me why he did not smoke! No such anarchic question has ever shaken the arches of

Mandeville College Funny place, Mandeville College. Funny place, Oxford. Funny place, England.’

‘But you haven’t anything particular to do with Oxford?’ asked the doctor curiously.

‘I have to do with England,’ said Father Brown. ‘I come from there. And the funniest thing of all is that even if you love it and belong to it, you still can’t make head or tail of it.’

The Point of a Pin

Father Brown always declared that he solved this problem in his sleep. And this was true, though in rather an odd fashion; because it occurred at a time when his sleep was rather disturbed. It was disturbed very early in the morning by the hammering that began in the huge building, or half-building, that was in process of erection opposite to his rooms; a colossal pile of flats still mostly covered with scaffolding and with boards announcing Messrs Swindon & Sand as the builders and owners. The hammering was renewed at regular intervals and was easily recognizable: because Messrs Swindon & Sand specialized in some new American system of cement flooring which, in spite of its subsequent smoothness, solidity, impenetrability and permanent comfort (as described in the advertisements), had to be clamped down at certain points with heavy tools. Father Brown endeavoured, however, to extract exiguous comfort from it; saying that it always woke him up in time for the very earliest Mass, and was therefore something almost in the nature of a carillon. After all, he said, it was almost as poetic that Christians should be awakened by hammers as by bells. As a fact, however, the building operations were a little on his nerves, for another reason. For there was hanging like a cloud over the half-built skyscraper the possibility of a Labour crisis, which the newspapers doggedly insisted on describing as a Strike. As a matter of fact, if it ever happened, it would be a Lock-out. But he worried a good deal about whether it would happen. And it might be questioned whether hammering is more of a strain on the attention because it may go on for ever, or because it may stop at any minute.

‘As a mere matter of taste and fancy,’ said Father Brown, staring up at the edifice with his owlish spectacles, ‘I rather wish it would stop. I wish all houses would stop while they still have the scaffolding up. It seems almost a pity that houses are ever finished. They look so fresh and hopeful with all that fairy filigree of white wood, all light and bright in the sun; and a man so often only finishes a house by turning it into a tomb.’

As he turned away from the object of his scrutiny, he nearly ran into a man who had just darted across the road towards him. It was a man whom he knew slightly, but sufficiently to regard him (in the circumstances) as something of a bird of ill-omen. Mr Mastyk was a squat man with a square head that looked hardly European, dressed with a heavy dandyism that seemed rather too consciously Europeanized. But Brown had seen him lately talking to young Sand of the building firm; and he did not like it. This man Mastyk was the head of an organization rather new in English industrial politics; produced by extremes at both ends; a definite army of non-Union and largely alien labour hired out in gangs to various firms; and he was obviously hovering about in the hope of hiring it out to this one. In short, he might negotiate some way of out-manoeuvring the Trade Union and flooding the works with blacklegs. Father Brown had been drawn into some of the debates, being in some sense called in on both sides. And as the Capitalists all reported that, to their positive knowledge, he was a Bolshevist; and as the Bolshevists all testified that he was a reactionary rigidly attached to bourgeois ideologies, it may be inferred that he talked a certain amount of sense without any appreciable effect on anybody. The news brought by Mr Mastyk, however, was calculated to jerk everybody out of the ordinary rut of the dispute.

‘They want you to go over there at once,’ said Mr Mastyk, in awkwardly accented English. ‘There is a threat to murder.’

Father Brown followed his guide in silence up several stairways and ladders to a platform of the unfinished building, on which were grouped the more or less familiar figures of the heads of the building business. They included even what had once been the head of it; though the head had been for some time rather a head in the clouds. It was at least a head in a coronet, that hid it from human sight like a cloud. Lord Stanes, in other words, had not only retired from the business but been caught up into the House of Lords and disappeared. His rare reappearances were languid and somewhat dreary; but this one, in conjunction with that of Mastyk, seemed none the less menacing. Lord Stanes was a lean, long-headed, hollow-eyed man with very faint fair hair fading into baldness; and he was the most evasive person the priest had ever met. He was unrivalled in the true Oxford talent of saying, ‘No doubt you’re right,’ so as to sound like, ‘No doubt you think you’re right,’ or of merely remarking, ‘You think so?’ so as to imply the acid addition, ‘You would.’ But Father Brown fancied that the man was not merely bored but faintly embittered, though whether at being called down from Olympus to control such trade squabbles, or merely at not being really any longer in control of them, it was difficult to guess.

On the whole, Father Brown rather preferred the more bourgeois group of partners. Sir Hubert Sand and his nephew Henry; though he doubted privately whether they really had very many ideologies. True, Sir Hubert Sand had obtained considerable celebrity in the newspapers; both as a patron of sport and as a patriot in many crises during and after the Great War. He had won notable distinction in France, for a man of his years, and had afterwards been featured as a triumphant captain of industry overcoming difficulties among the munition-workers. He had been called a Strong Man; but that was not his fault. He was in fact a heavy, hearty Englishman; a great swimmer; a good squire; an admirable amateur colonel. Indeed, something that can only be called a military makeup pervaded his appearance. He was growing stout, but he kept his shoulders set back; his curly hair and moustache were still brown while the colours of his face were already somewhat withered and faded. His nephew was a burly youth of the pushing, or rather shouldering, sort with a relatively small head thrust out on a thick neck, as if he went at things with his head down; a gesture somehow rendered rather quaint and boyish by the pince-nez that were balanced on his pugnacious pug-nose.

Father Brown had looked at all these things before; and at that moment everybody was looking at something entirely new. In the centre of the wood-work there was nailed up a large loose flapping piece of paper on which something was scrawled in crude and almost crazy capital letters, as if the writer were either almost illiterate or were affecting or parodying illiteracy. The words actually ran: ‘The Council of the Workers warns Hubert Sand that he will lower wages and lock out workmen at his peril. If the notices go out tomorrow, he will be dead by the justice of the people.’

Lord Stanes was just stepping back from his examination of the paper, and, looking across at his partner, he said with rather a curious intonation: ‘Well, it’s you they want to murder. Evidently I’m not considered worth murdering.’

One of those still electric shocks of fancy that sometimes thrilled Father Brown’s mind in an almost meaningless way shot through him at that particular instant. He had a queer notion that the man who was speaking could not now be murdered, because he was already dead. It was, he cheerfully admitted, a perfectly senseless idea. But there was something that always gave him the creeps about the cold disenchanted detachment of the noble senior partner; about his cadaverous colour and inhospitable eyes.

‘The fellow,’ he thought in the same perverse mood, ‘has green eyes and looks as if he had green blood.’

Anyhow, it was certain that Sir Hubert Sand had not got green blood. His blood, which was red enough in every sense, was creeping up into his withered or weather-beaten cheeks with all the warm fullness of life that belongs to the natural and innocent indignation of the good-natured.

‘In all my life,’ he said, in a strong voice and yet shakily, ‘I have never had such a thing said or done about me. I may have differed—’

‘We can none of us differ about this,’ struck in his nephew impetuously. ‘I’ve tried to get on with them, but this is a bit too thick.’

‘You don’t really think,’ began Father Brown, ‘that your workmen—’

‘I say we may have differed,’ said old Sand, still a little tremulously, ‘God knows I never like the idea of threatening English workmen with cheaper labour—’

‘We none of us liked it,’ said the young man, ‘but if I know you, uncle, this has about settled it.’

Then after a pause he added, ‘I suppose, as you say, we did disagree about details; but as to real policy—’

‘My dear fellow,’ said his uncle, comfortably. ‘I hoped there would never be any real disagreement.’ From which anybody who understands the English nation may rightly infer that there had been very considerable disagreement. Indeed the uncle and nephew differed almost as much as an Englishman and an American. The uncle had the English ideal of getting outside the business, and setting up a sort of an alibi as a country gentleman. The nephew had the American ideal of getting inside the business; of getting inside the very mechanism like a mechanic. And, indeed, he had worked with most of the mechanics and was familiar with most of the processes and tricks of the trade. And he was American again, in the fact that he did this partly as an employer to keep his men up to the mark, but in some vague way also as an equal, or at least with a pride in showing himself also as a worker. For this reason he had often appeared almost as a representative of the workers, on technical points which were a hundred miles away from his uncle’s popular eminence in politics or sport. The memory of those many occasions, when young Henry had practically come out of the workshop in his shirt-sleeves, to demand some concession about the conditions of the work, lent a peculiar force and even violence to his present reaction the other way.

‘Well, they’ve damned-well locked themselves out this time,’ he cried. ‘After a threat like that there’s simply nothing left but to defy them. There’s nothing left but to sack them all now; instanter; on the spot. Otherwise we’ll be the laughing-stock of the world.’

Old Sand frowned with equal indignation, but began slowly: ‘I shall be very much criticized—’

‘Criticized!’ cried the young man shrilly. ‘Criticized if you defy a threat of murder! Have you any notion how you’ll be criticized if you don’t defy it? Won’t you enjoy the headlines? “Great Capitalist Terrorized”—“Employer Yields to Murder Threat.”

‘Particularly,’ said Lord Stanes, with something faintly unpleasant in his tone. ‘Particularly when he has been in so many headlines already as “The Strong Man of Steel-Building.”‘

Sand had gone very red again and his voice came thickly from under his thick moustache. ‘Of course you’re right there. If these brutes think I’m afraid—’

At this point there was an interruption in the conversation of the group; and a slim young man came towards them swiftly. The first notable thing about him was that he was one of those whom men, and women too, think are just a little too nice-looking to look nice. He had beautiful dark curly hair and a silken moustache and he spoke like a gentleman, but with almost too refined and exactly modulated an accent. Father Brown knew him at once as Rupert Rae, the secretary of Sir Hubert, whom he had often seen pottering about in Sir Hubert’s house; but never with such impatience in his movements or such a wrinkle on his brow.

‘I’m sorry, sir,’ he said to his employer, ‘but there’s a man been hanging about over there. I’ve done my best to get rid of him. He’s only got a letter, but he swears he must give it to you personally.’

‘You mean he went first to my house?’ said Sand, glancing swiftly at his secretary. ‘I suppose you’ve been there all the morning.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Mr Rupert Rae.

There was a short silence; and then Sir Hubert Sand curtly intimated that the man had better be brought along; and the man duly appeared.

Nobody, not even the least fastidious lady, would have said that the newcomer was too nice-looking. He had very large ears and a face like a frog, and he stared before him with an almost ghastly fixity, which Father Brown attributed to his having a glass eye. In fact, his fancy was tempted to equip the man with two glass eyes; with so glassy a stare did he contemplate the company. But the priest’s experience, as distinct from his fancy, was able to suggest several natural causes for that unnatural waxwork glare; one of them being an abuse of the divine gift of fermented liquor. The man was short and shabby and carried a large bowler hat in one hand and a large sealed letter in the other.

Sir Hubert Sand looked at him; and then said quietly enough, but in a voice that somehow seemed curiously small, coming out of the fullness of his bodily presence: ‘Oh — it’s you.’

He held out his hand for the letter; and then looked around apologetically, with poised finger, before ripping it open and reading it. When he had read it, he stuffed it into his inside pocket and said hastily and a little harshly: ‘Well, I suppose all this business is over, as you say. No more negotiations possible now; we couldn’t pay the wages they want anyhow. But I shall want to see you again, Henry, about — about winding things up generally.’

‘All right,’ said Henry, a little sulkily perhaps, as if he would have preferred to wind them up by himself. ‘I shall be up in number 188 after lunch; got to know how far they’ve got up there.’

The man with the glass eye, if it was a glass eye, stumped stiffly away; and the eye of Father Brown (which was by no means a glass eye) followed him thoughtfully as he threaded his way through the ladders and disappeared into the street.

It was on the following morning that Father Brown had the unusual experience of over-sleeping himself; or at least of starting from sleep with a subjective conviction that he must be late. This was partly due to his remembering, as a man may remember a dream, the fact of having been half-awakened at a more regular hour and fallen asleep again; a common enough occurrence with most of us, but a very uncommon occurrence with Father Brown. And he was afterwards oddly convinced, with that mystic side of him which was normally turned away from the world, that in that detached dark islet of dreamland, between the two wakings, there lay like buried treasure the truth of this tale.

As it was, he jumped up with great promptitude, plunged into his clothes, seized his big knobby umbrella and bustled out into the street, where the bleak white morning was breaking like splintered ice about the huge black building facing him. He was surprised to find that the streets shone almost empty in the cold crystalline light; the very look of it told him it could hardly be so late as he had feared. Then suddenly the stillness was cloven by the arrowlike swiftness of a long grey car which halted before the big deserted flats. Lord Stanes unfolded himself from within and approached the door, carrying (rather languidly) two large suitcases. At the same moment the door opened, and somebody seemed to step back instead of stepping out into the street. Stanes called twice to the man within, before that person seemed to complete his original gesture by coming out on to the doorstep; then the two held a brief colloquy, ending in the nobleman carrying his suitcases upstairs, and the other coming out into full daylight and revealing the heavy shoulders and peering head of young Henry Sand.

Father Brown made no more of this rather odd meeting, until two days later the young man drove up in his own car, and implored the priest to enter it. ‘Something awful has happened,’ he said, ‘and I’d rather talk to you than Stanes. You know Stanes arrived the other day with some mad idea of camping in one of the flats that’s just finished. That’s why I had to go there early and open the door to him. But all that will keep. I want you to come up to my uncle’s place at once.’

‘Is he ill?’ inquired the priest quickly.

‘I think he’s dead,’ answered the nephew.

‘What do you mean by saying you think he’s dead?’ asked Father Brown a little briskly. ‘Have you got a doctor?’

‘No,’ answered the other. ‘I haven’t got a doctor or a patient either . . .It’s no good calling in doctors to examine the body; because the body has run away. But I’m afraid I know where it has run to ... the truth is — we kept it dark for two days; but he’s disappeared.’

‘Wouldn’t it be better,’ said Father Brown mildly, ‘if you told me what has really happened from the beginning?’

‘I know,’ answered Henry Sand; ‘it’s an infernal shame to talk flippantly like this about the poor old boy; but people get like that when they’re rattled. I’m not much good at hiding things; the long and the short of it is — well, I won’t tell you the long of it now. It’s what some people would call rather a long shot; shooting suspicions at random and so on. But the short of it is that my unfortunate uncle has committed suicide.’

They were by this time skimming along in the car through the last fringes of the town and the first fringes of the forest and park beyond it; the lodge gates of Sir Hubert Sand’s small estate were about a half mile farther on amid the thickening throng of the beeches. The estate consisted chiefly of a small park and a large ornamental garden, which descended in terraces of a certain classical pomp to the very edge of the chief river of the district. As soon as they arrived at the house, Henry took the priest somewhat hastily through the old Georgian rooms and out upon the other side; where they silently descended the slope, a rather steep slope embanked with flowers, from which they could see the pale river spread out before them almost as flat as in a bird’s-eye view. They were just turning the corner of the path under an enormous classical urn crowned with a somewhat incongruous garland of geraniums, when Father Brown saw a movement in the bushes and thin trees just below him, that seemed as swift as a movement of startled birds.

In the tangle of thin trees by the river two figures seemed to divide or scatter; one of them glided swiftly into the shadows and the other came forward to face them; bringing them to a halt and an abrupt and rather unaccountable silence. Then Henry Sand said in his heavy way: ‘I think you know Father Brown . . . Lady Sand.’

Father Brown did know her; but at that moment he might almost have said that he did not know her. The pallor and constriction of her face was like a mask of tragedy; she was much younger than her husband, but at that moment she looked somehow older than everything in that old house and garden. And the priest remembered, with a subconscious thrill, that she was indeed older in type and lineage and was the true possessor of the place. For her own family had owned it as impoverished aristocrats, before she had restored its fortunes by marrying a successful business man. As she stood there, she might have been a family picture, or even a family ghost. Her pale face was of that pointed yet oval type seen in some old pictures of Mary Queen of Scots; and its expression seemed almost to go beyond the natural unnaturalness of a situation, in which her husband had vanished under suspicion of suicide. Father Brown, with the same subconscious movement of the mind, wondered who it was with whom she had been talking among the trees.

‘I suppose you know all this dreadful news,’ she said, with a comfortless composure. ‘Poor Hubert must have broken down under all this revolutionary persecution, and been just maddened into taking his own life. I don’t know whether you can do anything; or whether these horrible Bolsheviks can be made responsible for hounding him to death.’

‘I am terribly distressed, Lady Sand,’ said Father Brown. ‘And still, I must own, a little bewildered. You speak of persecution; do you think that anybody could hound him to death merely by pinning up that paper on the wall?’

‘I fancy,’ answered the lady, with a darkening brow, ‘that there were other persecutions besides the paper.’

‘It shows what mistakes one may make,’ said the priest sadly. ‘I never should have thought he would be so illogical as to die in order to avoid death.’

‘I know,’ she answered, gazing at him gravely. ‘I should never have believed it, if it hadn’t been written with his own hand.’

‘What?’ cried Father Brown, with a little jump like a rabbit that has been shot at.

‘Yes,’ said Lady Sand calmly. ‘He left a confession of suicide; so I fear there is no doubt about it.’ And she passed on up the slope alone, with all the inviolable isolation of the family ghost.

The spectacles of Father Brown were turned in mute inquiry to the eyeglasses of Mr Henry Sand. And the latter gentleman, after an instant’s hesitation, spoke again in his rather blind and plunging fashion: ‘Yes, you see, it seems pretty clear now what he did. He was always a great swimmer and used to come down in his dressing-gown every morning for a dip in the river. Well, he came down as usual, and left his dressing-gown on the bank; it’s lying there still. But he also left a message saying he was going for his last swim and then death, or something like that.’

‘Where did he leave the message?’ asked Father Brown.

‘He scrawled it on that tree there, overhanging the water, I suppose the last thing he took hold of; just below where the dressing-gown’s lying. Come and see for yourself.’

Father Brown ran down the last short slope to the shore and peered under the hanging tree, whose plumes were almost dipping in the stream. Sure enough, he saw on the smooth bark the words scratched conspicuously and unmistakably: ‘One more swim and then drowning. Good-bye. Hubert Sand.’ Father Brown’s gaze travelled slowly up the bank till it rested on a gorgeous rag of raiment, all red and yellow with gilded tassels. It was the dressing-gown and the priest picked it up and began to turn it over. Almost as he did so he was conscious that a figure had flashed across his field of vision; a tall dark figure that slipped from one clump of trees to another, as if following the trail of the vanishing lady. He had little doubt that it was the companion from whom she had lately parted. He had still less doubt that it was the dead man's secretary, Mr Rupert Rae.

'Of course, it might be a final afterthought to leave the message,' said Father Brown, without looking up, his eye riveted on the red and gold garment. 'We've all heard of love-messages written on trees; and I suppose there might be death-messages written on trees too.'

'Well, he wouldn't have anything in the pockets of his dressing-gown, I suppose,' said young Sand. 'And a man might naturally scratch his message on a tree if he had no pens, ink or paper.'

'Sounds like French exercises,' said the priest dismally. 'But I wasn't thinking of that.' Then, after a silence, he said in a rather altered voice:

'To tell the truth, I was thinking whether a man might not naturally scratch his message on a tree, even if he had stacks of pens, and quarts of ink, and reams of paper.'

Henry was looking at him with a rather startled air, his eyeglasses crooked on his pug-nose. 'And what do you mean by that?' he asked sharply.

'Well,' said Father Brown slowly, 'I don't exactly mean that postmen will carry letters in the form of logs, or that you will ever drop a line to a friend by putting a postage stamp on a pinetree. It would have to be a particular sort of position — in fact, it would have to be a particular sort of person, who really preferred this sort of arboreal correspondence. But, given the position and the person, I repeat what I said. He would still write on a tree, as the song says, if all the world were paper and all the sea were ink; if that river flowed with everlasting ink or all these woods were a forest of quills and fountain-pens.'

It was evident that Sand felt something creepy about the priest's fanciful imagery; whether because he found it incomprehensible or because he was beginning to comprehend.

'You see,' said Father Brown, turning the dressing-gown over slowly as he spoke, 'a man isn't expected to write his very best handwriting when he chips it on a tree. And if the man were not the man, if I make myself clear — Hullo!'

He was looking down at the red dressing-gown, and it seemed for the moment as if some of the red had come off on his finger; but both the faces turned towards it were already a shade paler.

'Blood!' said Father Brown; and for the instant there was a deadly stillness save for the melodious noises of the river.

Henry Sand cleared his throat and nose with noises that were by no means melodious. Then he said rather hoarsely: 'Whose blood?'

'Oh, mine,' said Father Brown; but he did not smile.

A moment after he said: 'There was a pin in this thing and I pricked myself. But I don't think you quite appreciate the point . . . the point of the pin. I do'; and he sucked his finger like a child.

'You see,' he said after another silence, 'the gown was folded up and pinned together; nobody could have unfolded it — at least without scratching himself. In plain words, Hubert Sand never wore this dressing-gown. Any more than Hubert Sand ever wrote on that tree. Or drowned himself in that river.'

The pince-nez tilted on Henry's inquiring nose fell off with a click; but he was otherwise motionless, as if rigid with surprise.

'Which brings us back,' went on Father Brown cheerfully, 'to somebody's taste for writing his private correspondence on trees, like Hiawatha and his picture-writing. Sand had all the time there was, before drowning himself. Why didn't he leave a note for his wife like a sane man? Or, shall we say . . . Why didn't the Other Man leave a note for the wife like a sane man? Because he would have had to forge the husband's handwriting; always a tricky thing now that experts are so nosey about it. But nobody can be expected to imitate even his own handwriting, let alone somebody else's when he carves capital letters in the bark of a tree. This is not a suicide, Mr Sand. If it's anything at all, it's a murder.'

The bracken and bushes of the undergrowth snapped and crackled as the big young man rose out of them like a leviathan, and stood lowering, with his thick neck thrust forward.

'I'm no good at hiding things,' he said, 'and I half-suspected something like this — expected it, you might say, for a long time. To tell the truth, I could hardly be civil to the fellow — to either of them, for that matter.'

'What exactly do you mean?' asked the priest, looking him gravely full in the face.

'I mean,' said Henry Sand, 'that you have shown me the murder and I think I could show you the murderers.'

Father Brown was silent and the other went on rather jerkily.

‘You said people sometimes wrote love-messages on trees. Well, as a fact, there are some of them on that tree; there are two sort of monograms twisted together up there under the leaves — I suppose you know that Lady Sand was the heiress of this place long before she married; and she knew that damned dandy of a secretary even in those days. I guess they used to meet here and write their vows upon the trysting-tree. They seem to have used the trysting-tree for another purpose later on. Sentiment, no doubt, or economy.’

‘They must be very horrible people,’ said Father Brown.

‘Haven’t there been any horrible people in history or the police-news?’ demanded Sand with some excitement. ‘Haven’t there been lovers who made love seem more horrible than hate? Don’t you know about Bothwell and all the bloody legends of such lovers?’

‘I know the legend of Bothwell,’ answered the priest. ‘I also know it to be quite legendary. But of course it’s true that husbands have been sometimes put away like that. By the way, where was he put away? I mean, where did they hide the body?’

‘I suppose they drowned him, or threw him in the water when he was dead,’ snorted the young man impatiently.

Father Brown blinked thoughtfully and then said: ‘A river is a good place to hide an imaginary body. It’s a rotten bad place to hide a real one. I mean, it’s easy to say you’ve thrown it in, because it might be washed away to sea. But if you really did throw it in, it’s about a hundred to one it wouldn’t; the chances of it going ashore somewhere are enormous. I think they must have had a better scheme for hiding the body than that — or the body would have been found by now. And if there were any marks of violence—’

‘Oh, bother hiding the body,’ said Henry, with some irritation; ‘haven’t we witness enough in the writing on their own devilish tree?’

‘The body is the chief witness in every murder,’ answered the other. ‘The hiding of the body, nine times out of ten, is the practical problem to be solved.’

There was a silence; and Father Brown continued to turn over the red dressing-gown and spread it out on the shining grass of the sunny shore; he did not look up. But, for some time past he had been conscious that the whole landscape had been changed for him by the presence of a third party; standing as still as a statue in the garden.

‘By the way,’ he said, lowering his voice, ‘how do you explain that little guy with the glass eye, who brought your poor uncle a letter yesterday? It seemed to me he was entirely altered by reading it; that’s why I wasn’t surprised at the suicide, when I thought it was a suicide. That chap was a rather low-down private detective, or I’m much mistaken.’

‘Why,’ said Henry in a hesitating manner, ‘why, he might have been — husbands do sometimes put on detectives in domestic tragedies like this, don’t they? I suppose he’d got the proofs of their intrigue; and so they—’

‘I shouldn’t talk too loud,’ said Father Brown, ‘because your detective is detecting us at this moment, from about a yard beyond those bushes.’

They looked up, and sure enough the goblin with the glass eye was fixing them with that disagreeable optic, looking all the more grotesque for standing among the white and waxen blooms of the classical garden.

Henry Sand scrambled to his feet again with a rapidity that seemed breathless for one of his bulk, and asked the man very angrily and abruptly what he was doing, at the same time telling him to clear out at once.

‘Lord Stanes,’ said the goblin of the garden, ‘would be much obliged if Father Brown would come up to the house and speak to him.’

Henry Sand turned away furiously; but the priest put down his fury to the dislike that was known to exist between him and the nobleman in question. As they mounted the slope, Father Brown paused a moment as if tracing patterns on the smooth tree-trunk, glanced upwards once at the darker and more hidden hieroglyph said to be a record of romance; and then stared at the wider and more sprawling letters of the confession, or supposed confession of suicide.

‘Do those letters remind you of anything?’ he asked. And when his sulky companion shook his head, he added: ‘They remind me of the writing on that placard that threatened him with the vengeance of the strikers.’

‘This is the hardest riddle and the queerest tale I have ever tackled,’ said Father Brown, a month later, as he sat opposite Lord Stanes in the recently furnished apartment of No. 188, the end flat which was the last to be finished before the interregnum of the industrial dispute and the transfer of work from the Trade Union. It was comfortably furnished; and Lord Stanes was presiding over grog and cigars, when the priest made his confession with a grimace. Lord Stanes had become rather surprisingly friendly, in a cool and casual way.

‘I know that is saying a good deal, with your record,’ said Stanes, ‘but certainly the detectives, including our seductive friend with the glass eye, don’t seem at all able to see the solution.’

Father Brown laid down his cigar and said carefully: ‘It isn’t that they can’t see the solution. It is that they can’t see the problem.’

‘Indeed,’ said the other, ‘perhaps I can’t see the problem either.’

‘The problem is unlike all other problems, for this reason,’ said Father Brown. ‘It seems as if the criminal deliberately did two different things, either of which might have been successful; but which, when done together, could only defeat each other. I am assuming, what I firmly believe, that the same murderer pinned up the proclamation threatening a sort of Bolshevik murder, and also wrote on the tree confessing to an ordinary suicide. Now you may say it is after all possible that the proclamation was a proletarian proclamation; that some extremist workmen wanted to kill their employer, and killed him. Even if that were true, it would still stick at the mystery of why they left, or why anybody left, a contrary trail of private self-destruction. But it certainly isn’t true. None of these workmen, however, bitter, would have done a thing like that. I know them pretty well; I know their leaders quite well. To suppose that people like Tom Bruce or Hogan would assassinate somebody they could go for in the newspapers, and damage in all sorts of different ways, is the sort of psychology that sensible people call lunacy. No; there was somebody, who was not an indignant workman, who first played the part of an indignant workman, and then played the part of a suicidal employer. But, in the name of wonder, why? If he thought he could pass it off smoothly as a suicide, why did he first spoil it all by publishing a threat of murder? You might say it was an afterthought to fix up the suicide story, as less provocative than the murder story. But it wasn’t less provocative after the murder story. He must have known he had already turned our thoughts towards murder, when it should have been his whole object to keep our thoughts away from it. If it was an after-thought, it was the after-thought of a very thoughtless person. And I have a notion that this assassin is a very thoughtful person. Can you make anything of it?’

‘No; but I see what you mean,’ said Stanes, ‘by saying that I didn’t even see the problem. It isn’t merely who killed Sand; it’s why anybody should accuse somebody else of killing Sand and then accuse Sand of killing himself.’

Father Brown’s face was knotted and the cigar was clenched in his teeth; the end of it plowed and darkened rhythmically like the signal of some burning pulse of the brain. Then he spoke as if to himself:

‘We’ve got to follow very closely and very clearly. It’s like separating threads of thought from each other; something like this. Because the murder charge really rather spoilt the suicide charge, he wouldn’t normally have made the murder charge. But he did make it; so he had some other reason for making it. It was so strong a reason that perhaps it reconciled him even to weakening his other line of defence; that it was a suicide. In other words, the murder charge wasn’t really a murder charge. I mean he wasn’t using it as a murder charge; he wasn’t doing it so as to shift to somebody else the guilt of murder; he was doing it for some other extraordinary reason of his own. His plan had to contain a proclamation that Sand would be murdered; whether it threw suspicion on other people or not. Somehow or other the mere proclamation itself was necessary. But why?’

He smoked and smouldered away with the same volcanic concentration for five minutes before he spoke again. ‘What could a murderous proclamation do, besides suggesting that the strikers were the murderers? What did it do? One thing is obvious; it inevitably did the opposite of what it said. It told Sand not to lock out his men; and it was perhaps the only thing in the world that would really have made him do it. You’ve got to think of the sort of man and the sort of reputation. When a man has been called a Strong Man in our silly sensational newspapers, when he is fondly regarded as a Sportsman by all the most distinguished asses in England, he simply can’t back down because he is threatened with a pistol. It would be like walking about at Ascot with a white feather stuck in his absurd white hat. It would break that inner idol or ideal of oneself, which every man not a downright dastard does really prefer to life. And Sand wasn’t a dastard; he was courageous; he was also impulsive. It acted instantly like a charm: his nephew, who had been more or less mixed up with the workmen, cried out instantly that the threat must be absolutely and instantly defied.’

‘Yes,’ said Lord Stanes, ‘I noticed that.’ They looked at each other for an instant, and then Stanes added carelessly: ‘So you think the thing the criminal wanted was…’

‘The Lock-out!’ cried the priest energetically. ‘The Strike or whatever you call it; the cessation of work, anyhow. He wanted the work to stop at once; perhaps the blacklegs to come in at once; certainly the Trade

Unionists to go out at once. That is what he really wanted; God knows why. And he brought that off, I think, really without bothering much about its other implication of the existence of Bolshevist assassins. But then . . . then I think something went wrong. I'm only guessing and groping very slowly here; but the only explanation I can think of is that something began to draw attention to the real seat of the trouble; to the reason, whatever it was, of his wanting to bring the building to a halt. And then belatedly, desperately, and rather inconsistently, he tried to lay the other trail that led to the river, simply and solely because it led away from the flats.'

He looked up through his moonlike spectacles, absorbing all the quality of the background and furniture; the restrained luxury of a quiet man of the world; and contrasting it with the two suitcases with which its occupant had arrived so recently in a newly-finished and unfurnished flat. Then he said rather abruptly: 'In short, the murderer was frightened of something or somebody in the flats. By the way, why did you come to live in the flats? . . . Also by the way, young Henry told me you made an early appointment with him when you moved in. Is that true?'

'Not in the least,' said Stanes. 'I got the key from his uncle the night before. I've no notion why Henry came here that morning.'

'Ah,' said Father Brown, 'then I think I have some notion of why he came . . . I thought you startled him by coming in just when he was coming out.'

'And yet,' said Stanes, looking across with a glitter in his grey-green eyes, 'you do rather think that I also am a mystery.'

'I think you are two mysteries,' said Father Brown. 'The first is why you originally retired from Sand's business. The second is why you have since come back to live in Sand's buildings.'

Stanes smoked reflectively, knocked out his ash, and rang a bell on the table before him. 'If you'll excuse me,' he said, 'I will summon two more to the council. Jackson, the little detective you know of, will answer the bell; and I've asked Henry Sand to come in a little later.'

Father Brown rose from his seat, walked across the room and looked down frowning into the fire-place.

'Meanwhile,' continued Stanes, 'I don't mind answering both your questions. I left the Sand business because I was sure there was some hanky-panky in it and somebody was pinching all the money. I came back to it, and took this flat, because I wanted to watch for the real truth about old Sand’s death — on the spot.’

Father Brown faced round as the detective entered the room; he stood staring at the hearthrug and repeated: ‘On the spot.’

‘Mr Jackson will tell you,’ said Stanes, ‘that Sir Hubert commissioned him to find out who was the thief robbing the firm; and he brought a note of his discoveries the day before old Hubert disappeared.’

‘Yes,’ said Father Brown, ‘and I know now where he disappeared to. I know where the body is.’

‘Do you mean — ?’ began his host hastily.

‘It is here,’ said Father Brown, and stamped on the hearthrug. ‘Here, under the elegant Persian rug in this cosy and comfortable room.’

‘Where in the world did you find that?’

‘I’ve just remembered,’ said Father Brown, ‘that I found it in my sleep.’

He closed his eyes as if trying to picture a dream, and went on dreamily:

‘This is a murder story turning on the problem of How to Hide the Body; and I found it in my sleep. I was always woken up every morning by hammering from this building. On that morning I half-woke up, went to sleep again and woke once more, expecting to find it late; but it wasn’t. Why? Because there had been hammering that morning, though all the usual work had stopped; short, hurried hammering in the small hours before dawn. Automatically a man sleeping stirs at such a familiar sound. But he goes to sleep again, because the usual sound is not at the usual hour. Now why did a certain secret criminal want all the work to cease suddenly; and only new workers come in? Because, if the old workers had come in next day, they would have found a new piece of work done in the night. The old workers would have known where they left off; and they would have found the whole flooring of this room already nailed down. Nailed down by a man who knew how to do it; having mixed a good deal with the workmen and learned their ways.’

As he spoke, the door was pushed open and a head poked in with a thrusting motion; a small head at the end of a thick neck and a face that blinked at them through glasses.

‘Henry Sand said,’ observed Father Brown, staring at the ceiling, ‘that he was no good at hiding things. But I think he did himself an injustice.’

Henry Sand turned and moved swiftly away down the corridor.

‘He not only hid his thefts from the firm quite successfully for years,’ went on the priest with an air of abstraction, ‘but when his uncle discovered them, he hid his uncle’s corpse in an entirely new and original manner.’

At the same instant Stanes again rang a bell, with a long strident steady ringing; and the little man with the glass eye was propelled or shot along the corridor after the fugitive, with something of the rotatory motion of a mechanical figure in a zoetrope. At the same moment, Father Brown looked out of the window, leaning over a small balcony, and saw five or six men start from behind bushes and railings in the street below and spread out equally mechanically like a fan or net; opening out after the fugitive who had shot like a bullet out of the front door. Father Brown saw only the pattern of the story; which had never strayed from that room; where Henry had strangled Hubert and hid his body under impenetrable flooring, stopping the whole work on the building to do it. A pin-prick had started his own suspicions; but only to tell him he had been led down the long loop of a lie. The point of the pin was that it was pointless.

He fancied he understood Stanes at last, and he liked to collect queer people who were difficult to understand. He realized that this tired gentleman, whom he had once accused of having green blood, had indeed a sort of cold green flame of conscientiousness or conventional honour, that had made him first shift out of a shady business, and then feel ashamed of having shifted it on to others; and come back as a bored laborious detective; pitching his camp on the very spot where the corpse had been buried; so that the murderer, finding him sniffing so near the corpse, had wildly staged the alternative drama of the dressing-gown and the drowned man. All that was plain enough, but, before he withdrew his head from the night air and the stars, Father Brown threw one glance upwards at the vast black bulk of the cyclopean building heaved far up into the night, and remembered Egypt and Babylon, and all that is at once eternal and ephemeral in the work of man.

‘I was right in what I said first of all,’ he said. ‘It reminds one of Coppee’s poem about the Pharaoh and the Pyramid. This house is supposed to be a hundred houses; and yet the whole mountain of building is only one man’s tomb.’

The Insoluble Problem

This queer incident, in some ways perhaps the queerest of the many that came his way, happened to Father Brown at the time when his French friend Flambeau had retired from the profession of crime and had entered with great energy and success on the profession of crime investigator. It happened that both as a thief and a thief-taker, Flambeau had rather specialized in the matter of jewel thefts, on which he was admitted to be an expert, both in the matter of identifying jewels and the equally practical matter of identifying jewel-thieves. And it was in connection with his special knowledge of this subject, and a special commission which it had won for him, that he rang up his friend the priest on the particular morning on which this story begins.

Father Brown was delighted to hear the voice of his old friend, even on the telephone; but in a general way, and especially at that particular moment, Father Brown was not very fond of the telephone. He was one who preferred to watch people's faces and feel social atmospheres, and he knew well that without these things, verbal messages are apt to be very misleading, especially from total strangers. And it seemed as if, on that particular morning, a swarm of total strangers had been buzzing in his ear with more or less unenlightening verbal messages; the telephone seemed to be possessed of a demon of triviality. Perhaps the most distinctive voice was one which asked him whether he did not issue regular permits for murder and theft upon the payment of a regular tariff hung up in his church; and as the stranger, on being informed that this was not the case, concluded the colloquy with a hollow laugh, it may be presumed that he remained unconvinced. Then an agitated, rather inconsequent female voice rang up requesting him to come round at once to a certain hotel he had heard of some forty-five miles on the road to a neighbouring cathedral town; the request being immediately followed by a contradiction in the same voice, more agitated and yet more inconsequent, telling him that it did not matter and that he was not wanted after all. Then came an interlude of a Press agency asking him if he had anything to say on what a Film Actress had said about Moustaches for Men; and finally yet a third return of the agitated and inconsequent lady at the hotel, saying that he was wanted, after all. He vaguely supposed that this marked some of the hesitations and panics not unknown among those who are vaguely veering in the direction of Instruction, but he confessed to a considerable relief when the voice of Flambeau wound up the series with a hearty threat of immediately turning up for breakfast.

Father Brown very much preferred to talk to a friend sitting comfortably over a pipe, but it soon appeared that his visitor was on the warpath and full of energy, having every intention of carrying off the little priest captive on some important expedition of his own. It was true that there was a special circumstance involved which might be supposed to claim the priest’s attention. Flambeau had figured several times of late as successfully thwarting a theft of famous precious stones; he had torn the tiara of the Duchess of Dulwich out of the very hand of the bandit as he bolted through the garden. He laid so ingenious a trap for the criminal who planned to carry off the celebrated Sapphire Necklace that the artist in question actually carried off the copy which he had himself planned to leave as a substitute.

Such were doubtless the reasons that had led to his being specially summoned to guard the delivery of a rather different sort of treasure; perhaps even more valuable in its mere materials, but possessing also another sort of value. A world-famous reliquary, supposed to contain a relic of St. Dorothy the martyr, was to be delivered at the Catholic monastery in a cathedral town; and one of the most famous of international jewel-thieves was supposed to have an eye on it; or rather presumably on the gold and rubies of its setting, rather than its purely hagiological importance. Perhaps there was something in this association of ideas which made Flambeau feel that the priest would be a particularly appropriate companion in his adventure; but anyhow, he descended on him, breathing fire and ambition and very voluble about his plans for preventing the theft.

Flambeau indeed bestrode the priest’s hearth gigantically and in the old swaggering musketeer attitude, twirling his great moustaches.

‘You can’t,’ he cried, referring to the sixty-mile road to Casterbury. ‘You can’t allow a profane robbery like that to happen under your very nose.’

The relic was not to reach the monastery till the evening; and there was no need for its defenders to arrive earlier; for indeed a motor-journey would take them the greater part of the day. Moreover, Father Brown casually remarked that there was an inn on the road, at which he would prefer to lunch, as he had been already asked to look in there as soon as was convenient.

As they drove along through a densely wooded but sparsely inhabited landscape, in which inns and all other buildings seemed to grow rarer and rarer, the daylight began to take on the character of a stormy twilight even in the heat of noon; and dark purple clouds gathered over dark grey forests. As is common under the lurid quietude of that kind of light, what colour there was in the landscape gained a sort of secretive glow which is not found in objects under the full sunlight; and ragged red leaves or golden or orange fungi seemed to burn with a dark fire of their own. Under such a half-light they came to a break in the woods like a great rent in a grey wall, and saw beyond, standing above the gap, the tall and rather outlandish-looking inn that bore the name of the Green Dragon.

The two old companions had often arrived together at inns and other human habitations, and found a somewhat singular state of things there; but the signs of singularity had seldom manifested themselves so early. For while their car was still some hundreds of yards from the dark green door, which matched the dark green shutters of the high and narrow building, the door was thrown open with violence and a woman with a wild mop of red hair rushed to meet them, as if she were ready to board the car in full career. Flambeau brought the car to a standstill but almost before he had done so, she thrust her white and tragic face into the window, crying:

‘Are you Father Brown?’ and then almost in the same breath; ‘who is this man?’

‘This gentleman’s name is Flambeau,’ said Father Brown in a tranquil manner, ‘and what can I do for you?’

‘Come into the inn,’ she said, with extraordinary abruptness even under the circumstances. ‘There’s been a murder done.’

They got out of the car in silence and followed her to the dark green door which opened inwards on a sort of dark green alley, formed of stakes and wooden pillars, wreathed with vine and ivy, showing square leaves of black and red and many sombre colours. This again led through an inner door into a sort of large parlour hung with rusty trophies of Cavalier arms, of which the furniture seemed to be antiquated and also in great confusion, like the inside of a lumber-room. They were quite startled for the moment; for it seemed as if one large piece of lumber rose and moved towards them; so dusty and shabby and ungainly was the man who thus abandoned what seemed like a state of permanent immobility.

Strangely enough, the man seemed to have a certain agility of politeness, when once he did move; even if it suggested the wooden joints of a courtly step-ladder or an obsequious towel-horse. Both Flambeau and Father Brown felt that they had hardly ever clapped eyes on a man who was so difficult to place. He was not what is called a gentleman; yet he had something of the dusty refinement of a scholar; there was something faintly disreputable or declasse about him; and yet the smell of him was rather bookish than Bohemian. He was thin and pale, with a pointed nose and a dark pointed beard; his brow was bald, but his hair behind long and lank and stringy; and the expression of his eyes was almost entirely masked by a pair of blue spectacles. Father Brown felt that he had met something of the sort somewhere, and a long time ago; but he could no longer put a name to it. The lumber he sat among was largely literary lumber; especially bundles of seventeenth-century pamphlets.

‘Do I understand the lady to say,’ asked Flambeau gravely, ‘that there is a murder here?’

The lady nodded her red ragged head rather impatiently; except for those flaming elf-locks she had lost some of her look of wildness; her dark dress was of a certain dignity and neatness; her features were strong and handsome; and there was something about her suggesting that double strength of body and mind which makes women powerful, particularly in contrast with men like the man in blue spectacles. Nevertheless, it was he who gave the only articulate answer, intervening with a certain antic gallantry.

‘It is true that my unfortunate sister-in-law,’ he explained, ‘has almost this moment suffered a most appalling shock which we should all have desired to spare her. I only wish that I myself had made the discovery and suffered only the further distress of bringing the terrible news. Unfortunately it was Mrs Flood herself who found her aged grandfather, long sick and bedridden in this hotel, actually dead in the garden; in circumstances which point only too plainly to violence and assault. Curious circumstances, I may say, very curious circumstances indeed.’ And he coughed slightly, as if apologizing for them.

Flambeau bowed to the lady and expressed his sincere sympathies; then he said to the man: ‘I think you said, sir, that you are Mrs Flood’s brother-in-law.’

‘I am Dr Oscar Flood,’ replied the other. ‘My brother, this lady’s husband, is at present away on the Continent on business, and she is running the hotel. Her grandfather was partially paralysed and very far advanced in years. He was never known to leave his bedroom; so that really these extraordinary circumstances . . .’

‘Have you sent for a doctor or the police?’ asked Flambeau.

‘Yes,’ replied Dr Flood, ‘we rang up after making the dreadful discovery; but they can hardly be here for some hours. This roadhouse stands so very remote. It is only used by people going to Casterbury or even beyond. So we thought we might ask for your valuable assistance until—’

‘If we are to be of any assistance,’ said Father Brown, interrupting in too abstracted a manner to seem uncivil, ‘I should say we had better go and look at the circumstances at once.’

He stepped almost mechanically towards the door; and almost ran into a man who was shouldering his way in; a big, heavy young man with dark hair unbrushed and untidy, who would nevertheless have been rather handsome save for a slight disfigurement of one eye, which gave him rather a sinister appearance.

‘What the devil are you doing?’ he blurted out, ‘telling every Tom, Dick and Harry — at least you ought to wait for the police.’

‘I will be answerable to the police,’ said Flambeau with a certain magnificence, and a sudden air of having taken command of everything. He advanced to the doorway, and as he was much bigger than the big young man, and his moustaches were as formidable as the horns of a Spanish bull, the big young man backed before him and had an inconsequent air of being thrown out and left behind, as the group swept out into the garden and up the flagged path towards the mulberry plantation. Only Flambeau heard the little priest say to the doctor: ‘He doesn’t seem to love us really, does he? By the way, who is he?’

‘His name is Dunn,’ said the doctor, with a certain restraint of manner. ‘My sister-in-law gave him the job of managing the garden, because he lost an eye in the War.’

As they went through the mulberry bushes, the landscape of the garden presented that rich yet ominous effect which is found when the land is actually brighter than the sky. In the broken sunlight from behind, the tree-tops in front of them stood up like pale green flames against a sky steadily blackening with storm, through every shade of purple and violet. The same light struck strips of the lawn and garden beds; and whatever it illuminated seemed more mysteriously sombre and secret for the light. The garden bed was dotted with tulips that looked like drops of dark blood, and some of which one might have sworn were truly black; and the line ended appropriately with a tulip tree; which Father Brown was disposed, if partly by some confused memory, to identify with what is commonly called the Judas tree. What assisted the association was the fact that there was hanging from one of the branches, like a dried fruit, the dry, thin body of an old man, with a long beard that wagged grotesquely in the wind.

There lay on it something more than the horror of darkness, the horror of sunlight; for the fitful sun painted tree and man in gay colours like a stage property; the tree was in flower and the corpse was hung with a faded peacock-green dressing-gown, and wore on its wagging head a scarlet smoking-cap. Also it had red bedroom-slippers, one of which had fallen off and lay on the grass like a blot of blood.

But neither Flambeau or Father Brown was looking at these things as yet. They were both staring at a strange object that seemed to stick out of the middle of the dead man’s shrunken figure; and which they gradually perceived to be the black but rather rusty iron hilt of a seventeenth-century sword, which had completely transfixed the body. They both remained almost motionless as they gazed at it; until the restless Dr Flood seemed to grow quite impatient with their stolidity.

‘What puzzles me most,’ he said, nervously snapping his fingers, ‘is the actual state of the body. And yet it has given me an idea already.’

Flambeau had stepped up to the tree and was studying the sword-hilt through an eye-glass. But for some odd reason, it was at that very instant that the priest in sheer perversity spun round like a teetotum, turned his back on the corpse, and looked peeringly in the very opposite direction. He was just in time to see the red head of Mrs Flood at the remote end of the garden, turned towards a dark young man, too dim with distance to be identified, who was at that moment mounting a motor-bicycle; who vanished, leaving behind him only the dying din of that vehicle. Then the woman turned and began to walk towards them across the garden, just as Father Brown turned also and began a careful inspection of the sword-hilt and the hanging corpse.

‘I understand you only found him about half an hour ago,’ said Flambeau. ‘Was there anybody about here just before that? I mean anybody in his bedroom, or that part of the house, or this part of the garden — say for an hour beforehand?’

‘No,’ said the doctor with precision. ‘That is the very tragic accident. My sister-in-law was in the pantry, which is a sort of out-house on the other side; this man Dunn was in the kitchen garden, which is also in that direction; and I myself was poking about among the books, in a room just behind the one you found me in. There are two female servants, but one had gone to the post and the other was in the attic.’

‘And were any of these people,’ asked Flambeau, very quietly, ‘I say any of these people, at all on bad terms with the poor old gentleman?’

‘He was the object of almost universal affection,’ replied the doctor solemnly. ‘If there were any misunderstandings, they were mild and of a sort common in modern times. The old man was attached to the old religious habits; and perhaps his daughter and son-in-law had rather wider views. All that can have had nothing to do with a ghastly and fantastic assassination like this.’

‘It depends on how wide the modern views were,’ said Father Brown, ‘or how narrow.’

At this moment they heard Mrs Flood hallooing across the garden as she came, and calling her brother-in-law to her with a certain impatience. He hurried towards her and was soon out of earshot; but as he went he waved his hand apologetically and then pointed with a long finger to the ground.

‘You will find the footprints very intriguing,’ he said; with the same strange air, as of a funereal showman.

The two amateur detectives looked across at each other. ‘I find several other things intriguing,’ said Flambeau.

‘Oh, yes,’ said the priest, staring rather foolishly at the grass.

‘I was wondering,’ said Flambeau, ‘why they should hang a man by the neck till he was dead, and then take the trouble to stick him with a sword.’

‘And I was wondering,’ said Father Brown, ‘why they should kill a man with a sword thrust through his heart, and then take the trouble to hang him by the neck.’

‘Oh, you are simply being contrary,’ protested his friend. ‘I can see at a glance that they didn’t stab him alive. The body would have bled more and the wound wouldn’t have closed like that.’

‘And I could see at a glance,’ said Father Brown, peering up very awkwardly, with his short stature and short sight, ‘that they didn’t hang him alive. If you’ll look at the knot in the noose, you will see it’s tied so clumsily that a twist of rope holds it away from the neck, so that it couldn’t throttle a man at all. He was dead before they put the rope on him; and he was dead before they put the sword in him. And how was he really killed?’

‘I think,’ remarked the other, ‘that we’d better go back to the house and have a look at his bedroom — and other things.’

‘So we will,’ said Father Brown. ‘But among other things perhaps we had better have a look at these footprints. Better begin at the other end, I think, by his window. Well, there are no footprints on the paved path, as there might be; but then again there mightn’t be. Well, here is the lawn just under his bedroom window. And here are his footprints plain enough.’

He blinked ominously at the footprints; and then began carefully retracing his path towards the tree, every now and then ducking in an undignified manner to look at something on the ground. Eventually he returned to Flambeau and said in a chatty manner:

‘Well, do you know the story that is written there very plainly? Though it’s not exactly a plain story.’

‘I wouldn’t be content to call it plain,’ said Flambeau. ‘I should call it quite ugly—’

‘Well,’ said Father Brown, ‘the story that is stamped quite plainly on the earth, with exact moulds of the old man’s slippers, is this. The aged paralytic leapt from the window and ran down the beds parallel to the path, quite eager for all the fun of being strangled and stabbed; so eager that he hopped on one leg out of sheer lightheartedness; and even occasionally turned cartwheels—’

‘Stop!’ cried Flambeau, angrily. ‘What the hell is all this hellish pantomime?’

Father Brown merely raised his eyebrows and gestured mildly towards the hieroglyphs in the dust. ‘About half the way there’s only the mark of one slipper; and in some places the mark of a hand planted all by itself.’

‘Couldn’t he have limped and then fallen?’ asked Flambeau.

Father Brown shook his head. ‘At least he’d have tried to use his hands and feet, or knees and elbows, in getting up. There are no other marks there of any kind. Of course the flagged path is quite near, and there are no marks on that; though there might be on the soil between the cracks; it's a crazy pavement.'

'By God, it's a crazy pavement; and a crazy garden; and a crazy story!' And Flambeau looked gloomily across the gloomy and storm-stricken garden, across which the crooked patchwork paths did indeed give a queer aptness to the quaint old English adjective.

'And now,' said Father Brown, 'let us go up and look at his room.' They went in by a door not far from the bedroom window; and the priest paused a moment to look at an ordinary garden broomstick, for sweeping up leaves, that was leaning against the wall. 'Do you see that?'

'It's a broomstick,' said Flambeau, with solid irony.

'It's a blunder,' said Father Brown; 'the first blunder that I've seen in this curious plot.'

They mounted the stairs and entered the old man's bedroom; and a glance at it made fairly clear the main facts, both about the foundation and disunion of the family. Father Brown had felt from the first that he was in what was, or had been, a Catholic household; but was, at least partly, inhabited by lapsed or very loose Catholics. The pictures and images in the grandfather's room made it clear that what positive piety remained had been practically confined to him; and that his kindred had, for some reason or other, gone Pagan. But he agreed that this was a hopelessly inadequate explanation even of an ordinary murder; let alone such a very extraordinary murder as this. 'Hang it all,' he muttered, 'the murder is really the least extra-ordinary part of it.' And even as he used the chance phrase, a slow light began to dawn upon his face.

Flambeau had seated himself on a chair by the little table which stood beside the dead man's bed. He was frowning thoughtfully at three or four white pills or pellets that lay in a small tray beside a bottle of water.

'The murderer or murderess,' said Flambeau, 'had some incomprehensible reason or other for wanting us to think the dead man was strangled or stabbed or both. He was not strangled or stabbed or anything of the kind. Why did they want to suggest it? The most logical explanation is that he died in some particular way which would, in itself, suggest a connection with some particular person. Suppose, for instance, he was poisoned. And suppose somebody is involved who would naturally look more like a poisoner than anybody else.'

‘After all,’ said Father Brown softly, ‘our friend in the blue spectacles is a doctor.’

‘I’m going to examine these pills pretty carefully,’ went on Flambeau. ‘I don’t want to lose them, though. They look as if they were soluble in water.’

‘It may take you some time to do anything scientific with them,’ said the priest, ‘and the police doctor may be here before that. So I should certainly advise you not to lose them. That is, if you are going to wait for the police doctor.’

‘I am going to stay here till I have solved this problem,’ said Flambeau.

‘Then you will stay here for ever,’ said Father Brown, looking calmly out of the window. ‘I don’t think I shall stay in this room, anyhow.’

‘Do you mean that I shan’t solve the problem?’ asked his friend. ‘Why shouldn’t I solve the problem?’

‘Because it isn’t soluble in water. No, nor in blood,’ said the priest; and he went down the dark stairs into the darkening garden. There he saw again what he had already seen from the window.

The heat and weight and obscurity of the thunderous sky seemed to be pressing yet more closely on the landscape; the clouds had conquered the sun which, above, in a narrowing clearance, stood up paler than the moon. There was a thrill of thunder in the air, but now no more stirring of wind or breeze; and even the colours of the garden seemed only like richer shades of darkness. But one colour still glowed with a certain dusky vividness; and that was the red hair of the woman of that house, who was standing with a sort of rigidity, staring, with her hands thrust up into her hair. That scene of eclipse, with something deeper in his own doubts about its significance, brought to the surface the memory of haunting and mystical lines; and he found himself murmuring: ‘A secret spot, as savage and enchanted as e’er beneath a waning moon was haunted by woman wailing for her demon lover.’ His muttering became more agitated. ‘Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners . . . that’s what it is; that’s terribly like what it is; woman wailing for her demon lover.’

He was hesitant and almost shaky as he approached the woman; but he spoke with his common composure. He was gazing at her very steadily, as he told her earnestly that she must not be morbid because of the mere accidental accessories of the tragedy, with all their mad ugliness. ‘The pictures in your grandfather’s room were truer to him than that ugly picture that we saw,’ he said gravely. ‘Something tells me he was a good man; and it does not matter what his murderers did with his body.’

‘Oh, I am sick of his holy pictures and statues!’ she said, turning her head away. ‘Why don’t they defend themselves, if they are what you say they are? But rioters can knock off the Blessed Virgin’s head and nothing happens to them. Oh, what’s the good? You can’t blame us, you daren’t blame us, if we’ve found out that Man is stronger than God.’

‘Surely,’ said Father Brown very gently, ‘it is not generous to make even God’s patience with us a point against Him.’

‘God may be patient and Man impatient,’ she answered, ‘and suppose we like the impatience better. You call it sacrilege; but you can’t stop it.’

Father Brown gave a curious little jump. ‘Sacrilege!’ he said; and suddenly turned back to the doorway with a new brisk air of decision. At the same moment Flambeau appeared in the doorway, pale with excitement, with a screw of paper in his hands. Father Brown had already opened his mouth to speak, but his impetuous friend spoke before him.

‘I’m on the track at last!’ cried Flambeau. ‘These pills look the same, but they’re really different. And do you know that, at the very moment I spotted them, that one-eyed brute of a gardener thrust his white face into the room; and he was carrying a horse-pistol. I knocked it out of his hand and threw him down the stairs, but I begin to understand everything. If I stay here another hour or two, I shall finish my job.’

‘Then you will not finish it,’ said the priest, with a ring in his voice very rare in him indeed. ‘We shall not stay here another hour. We shall not stay here another minute. We must leave this place at once!’

‘What!’ cried the astounded Flambeau. ‘Just when we are getting near the truth! Why, you can tell that we’re getting near the truth because they are afraid of us.’

Father Brown looked at him with a stony and inscrutable face, and said: ‘They are not afraid of us when we are here. They will only be afraid of us when we are not here.’

They had both become conscious that the rather fidgety figure of Dr Flood was hovering in the lurid haze; now it precipitated itself forward with the wildest gestures.

‘Stop! Listen!’ cried the agitated doctor. ‘I have discovered the truth!’

‘Then you can explain it to your own police,’ said Father Brown, briefly. ‘They ought to be coming soon. But we must be going.’

The doctor seemed thrown into a whirlpool of emotions, eventually rising to the surface again with a despairing cry. He spread out his arms like a cross, barring their way.

‘Be it so!’ he cried. ‘I will not deceive you now, by saying I have discovered the truth. I will only confess the truth.’

‘Then you can confess it to your own priest,’ said Father Brown, and strode towards the garden gate, followed by his staring friend. Before he reached the gate, another figure had rushed athwart him like the wind; and Dunn the gardener was shouting at him some unintelligible derision at detectives who were running away from their job. Then the priest ducked just in time to dodge a blow from the horse-pistol, wielded like a club. But Dunn was just not in time to dodge a blow from the fist of Flambeau, which was like the club of Hercules. The two left Mr Dunn spread flat behind them on the path, and, passing out of the gate, went out and got into their car in silence. Flambeau only asked one brief question and Father Brown only answered: ‘Casterbury.’

At last, after a long silence, the priest observed: ‘I could almost believe the storm belonged only to that garden, and came out of a storm in the soul.’

‘My friend,’ said Flambeau. ‘I have known you a long time, and when you show certain signs of certainty, I follow your lead. But I hope you are not going to tell me that you took me away from that fascinating job, because you did not like the atmosphere.’

‘Well, it was certainly a terrible atmosphere,’ replied Father Brown, calmly. ‘Dreadful and passionate and oppressive. And the most dreadful thing about it was this — that there was no hate in it at all.’

‘Somebody,’ suggested Flambeau, ‘seems to have had a slight dislike of grandpapa.’

‘Nobody had any dislike of anybody,’ said Father Brown with a groan. ‘That was the dreadful thing in that darkness. It was love.’

‘Curious way of expressing love — to strangle somebody and stick him with a sword,’ observed the other.

‘It was love,’ repeated the priest, ‘and it filled the house with terror.’

‘Don’t tell me,’ protested Flambeau, ‘that that beautiful woman is in love with that spider in spectacles.’

‘No,’ said Father Brown and groaned again. ‘She is in love with her husband. It is ghastly.’

‘It is a state of things that I have often heard you recommend,’ replied Flambeau. ‘You cannot call that lawless love.’

‘Not lawless in that sense,’ answered Father Brown; then he turned sharply on his elbow and spoke with a new warmth: ‘Do you think I don’t know that the love of a man and a woman was the first command of God and is glorious for ever? Are you one of those idiots who think we don’t admire love and marriage? Do I need to be told of the Garden of Eden or the wine of Cana? It is just because the strength in the thing was the strength of God, that it rages with that awful energy even when it breaks loose from God. When the Garden becomes a jungle, but still a glorious jungle; when the second fermentation turns the wine of Cana into the vinegar of Calvary. Do you think I don’t know all that?’

‘I’m sure you do,’ said Flambeau, ‘but I don’t yet know much about my problem of the murder.’

‘The murder cannot be solved,’ said Father Brown.

‘And why not?’ demanded his friend.

‘Because there is no murder to solve,’ said Father Brown.

Flambeau was silent with sheer surprise; and it was his friend who resumed in a quiet tone:

‘I’ll tell you a curious thing. I talked with that woman when she was wild with grief; but she never said anything about the murder. She never mentioned murder, or even alluded to murder. What she did mention repeatedly was sacrilege.’ Then, with another jerk of verbal disconnection, he added: ‘Have you ever heard of Tiger Tyrone?’

‘Haven’t I!’ cried Flambeau. ‘Why, that’s the very man who’s supposed to be after the reliquary, and whom I’ve been commissioned specially to circumvent. He’s the most violent and daring gangster who ever visited this country; Irish, of course, but the sort that goes quite crazily anti-clerical. Perhaps he’s dabbled in a little diabolism in these secret societies; anyhow, he has a macabre taste for playing all sorts of wild tricks that look wickeder than they are. Otherwise he’s not the wickedest; he seldom kills, and never for cruelty; but he loves doing anything to shock people, especially his own people; robbing churches or digging up skeletons or what not.’

‘Yes,’ said Father Brown, ‘it all fits in. I ought to have seen it all long before.’

‘I don’t see how we could have seen anything, after only an hour’s investigation,’ said the detective defensively.

‘I ought to have seen it before there was anything to investigate,’ said the priest. ‘I ought to have known it before you arrived this morning.’

‘What on earth do you mean?’

‘It only shows how wrong voices sound on the telephone,’ said Father Brown reflectively. ‘I heard all three stages of the thing this morning; and I thought they were trifles. First, a woman rang me up and asked me to go to that inn as soon as possible. What did that mean? Of course it meant that the old grandfather was dying. Then she rang up to say that I needn’t go, after all. What did that mean? Of course it meant that the old grandfather was dead. He had died quite peaceably in his bed; probably heart failure from sheer old age. And then she rang up a third time and said I was to go, after all. What did that mean? Ah, that is rather more interesting!’

He went on after a moment’s pause: ‘Tiger Tyrone, whose wife worships him, took hold of one of his mad ideas, and yet it was a crafty idea, too. He had just heard that you were tracking him down, that you knew him and his methods and were coming to save the reliquary; he may have heard that I have sometimes been of some assistance. He wanted to stop us on the road; and his trick for doing it was to stage a murder. It was a pretty horrible thing to do; but it wasn’t a murder. Probably he bullied his wife with an air of brutal common sense, saying he could only escape penal servitude by using a dead body that couldn’t suffer anything from such use. Anyhow, his wife would do anything for him; but she felt all the unnatural hideousness of that hanging masquerade; and that’s why she talked about sacrilege. She was thinking of the desecration of the relic; but also of the desecration of the death-bed. The brother’s one of those shoddy “scientific” rebels who tinker with dud bombs; an idealist run to seed. But he’s devoted to Tiger; and so is the gardener. Perhaps it’s a point in his favour that so many people seem devoted to him.

‘There was one little point that set me guessing very early. Among the old books the doctor was turning over, was a bundle of seventeeth-century pamphlets; and I caught one title: True Declaration of the Trial and Execution of My Lord Stafford. Now Stafford was executed in the Popish Plot business, which began with one of history’s detective stories; the death of Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey. Godfrey was found dead in a ditch, and part of the mystery was that he had marks of strangulation, but was also transfixed with his own sword. I thought at once that somebody in the house might have got the idea from here. But he couldn’t have wanted it as a way of committing a murder. He can only have wanted it as a way of creating a mystery. Then I saw that this applied to all the other outrageous details. They were devilish enough; but it wasn't mere devilry; there was a rag of excuse; because they had to make the mystery as contradictory and complicated as possible, to make sure that we should be a long time solving it — or rather seeing through it. So they dragged the poor old man off his deathbed and made the corpse hop and turn cartwheels and do everything that it couldn't have done. They had to give us an Insoluble Problem. They swept their own tracks off the path, leaving the broom. Fortunately we did see through it in time.'

'You saw through it in time,' said Flambeau. 'I might have lingered a little longer over the second trail they left, sprinkled with assorted pills.'

'Well, anyhow, we got away,' said Father Brown, comfortably.

'And that, I presume,' said Flambeau, 'is the reason I am driving at this rate along the road to Casterbury.'

That night in the monastery and church at Casterbury there were events calculated to stagger monastic seclusion. The reliquary of St Dorothy, in a casket gorgeous with gold and rubies, was temporarily placed in a side room near the chapel of the monastery, to be brought in with a procession for a special service at the end of Benediction. It was guarded for the moment by one monk, who watched it in a tense and vigilant manner; for he and his brethren knew all about the shadow of peril from the prowling of Tiger Tyrone. Thus it was that the monk was on his feet in a flash, when he saw one of the low-latticed windows beginning to open and a dark object crawling like a black serpent through the crack. Rushing across, he gripped it and found it was the arm and sleeve of a man, terminating with a handsome cuff and a smart dark-grey glove. Laying hold of it, he shouted for help, and even as he did so, a man darted into the room through the door behind his back and snatched the casket he had left behind him on the table. Almost at the same instant, the arm wedged in the window came away in his hand, and he stood holding the stuffed limb of a dummy.

Tiger Tyrone had played that trick before, but to the monk it was a novelty. Fortunately, there was at least one person to whom the Tiger's tricks were not a novelty; and that person appeared with militant moustaches, gigantically framed in the doorway, at the very moment when the Tiger turned to escape by it. Flambeau and Tiger Tyrone looked at each other with steady eyes and exchanged something that was almost like a military salute.

Meanwhile Father Brown had slipped into the chapel, to say a prayer for several persons involved in these unseemly events. But he was rather smiling than otherwise, and, to tell the truth, he was not by any means hopeless about Mr Tyrone and his deplorable family; but rather more hopeful than he was for many more respectable people. Then his thoughts widened with the grander perspectives of the place and the occasion. Against black and green marbles at the end of the rather rococo chapel, the dark-red vestments of the festival of a martyr were in their turn a background for a fierier red; a red like red-hot coals; the rubies of the reliquary; the roses of St Dorothy. And he had again a thought to throw back to the strange events of that day, and the woman who had shuddered at the sacrilege she had helped. After all, he thought, St Dorothy also had a Pagan lover; but he had not dominated her or destroyed her faith. She had died free and for the truth; and then had sent him roses from Paradise.

He raised his eyes and saw through the veil of incense smoke and of twinkling lights that Benediction was drawing to its end while the procession waited. The sense of accumulated riches of time and tradition pressed past him like a crowd moving in rank after rank, through unending centuries; and high above them all, like a garland of unfading flames, like the sun of our mortal midnight, the great monstrance blazed against the darkness of the vaulted shadows, as it blazed against the black enigma of the universe. For some are convinced that this enigma also is an Insoluble Problem. And others have equal certitude that it has but one solution.

The Vampire of the Village

At the twist of a path in the hills, where two poplars stood up like pyramids dwarfing the tiny village of Potter’s Pond, a mere huddle of houses, there once walked a man in a costume of a very conspicuous cut and colour, wearing a vivid magenta coat and a white hat tilted upon black ambrosial curls, which ended with a sort of Byronic flourish of whisker.

The riddle of why he was wearing clothes of such fantastic antiquity, yet wearing them with an air of fashion and even swagger, was but one of the many riddles that were eventually solved in solving the mystery of his fate. The point here is that when he had passed the poplars he seemed to have vanished; as if he had faded into the wan and widening dawn or been blown away upon the wind of morning.

It was only about a week afterwards that his body was found a quarter of a mile away, broken upon the steep rockeries of a terraced garden leading up to a gaunt and shuttered house called The Grange. Just before he had vanished, he had been accidentally overheard apparently quarrelling with some bystanders, and especially abusing their village as ‘a wretched little hamlet’; and it was supposed that he had aroused some extreme passions of local patriotism and eventually been their victim. At least the local doctor testified that the skull had suffered a crushing blow that might have caused death, though probably only inflicted with some sort of club or cudgel. This fitted in well enough with the notion of an attack by rather savage yokels. But nobody ever found any means of tracing any particular yokel; and the inquest returned a verdict of murder by some persons unknown.

A year or two afterwards the question was re-opened in a curious way; a series of events which led a certain Dr Mulborough, called by his intimates Mulberry in apt allusion to something rich and fruity about his dark rotundity and rather empurpled visage, travelling by train down to Potter’s Pond, with a friend whom he had often consulted upon problems of the kind. In spite of the somewhat port-winy and ponderous exterior of the doctor, he had a shrewd eye and was really a man of very remarkable sense; which he considered that he showed in consulting a little priest named Brown, whose acquaintance he had made over a poisoning case long ago. The little priest was sitting opposite to him, with the air of a patient baby absorbing instruction; and the doctor was explaining at length the real reasons for the journey.

‘I cannot agree with the gentleman in the magenta coat that Potter’s Pond is only a wretched little hamlet. But it is certainly a very remote and secluded village; so that it seems quite outlandish, like a village of a hundred years ago. The spinsters are really spinsters — damn it, you could almost imagine you saw them spin. The ladies are not just ladies. They are gentlewomen; and their chemist is not a chemist, but an apothecary; pronounced potecary. They do just admit the existence of an ordinary doctor like myself to assist the apothecary. But I am considered rather a juvenile innovation, because I am only fifty-seven years old and have only been in the county for twenty-eight years. The solicitor looks as if he had known it for twenty-eight thousand years. Then there is the old Admiral, who is just like a Dickens illustration; with a house full of cutlasses and cuttle-fish and equipped with a telescope.’

‘I suppose,’ said Father Brown, ‘there are always a certain number of Admirals washed up on the shore. But I never understood why they get stranded so far inland.’

‘Certainly no dead-alive place in the depths of the country is complete without one of these little creatures,’ said the doctor. ‘And then, of course, there is the proper sort of clergyman; Tory and High Church in a dusty fashion dating from Archbishop Laud; more of an old woman than any of the old women. He’s a white-haired studious old bird, more easily shocked than the spinsters. Indeed, the gentlewomen, though Puritan in their principles, are sometimes pretty plain in their speech; as the real Puritans were. Once or twice I have known old Miss Carstairs-Carew use expressions as lively as anything in the Bible. The dear old clergyman is assiduous in reading the Bible; but I almost fancy he shuts his eyes when he comes to those words. Well, you know I’m not particularly modern. I don’t enjoy this jazzing and joy-riding of the Bright Young Things—’

‘The Bright Young Things don’t enjoy it,’ said Father Brown. ‘That is the real tragedy.’

‘But I am naturally rather more in touch with the world than the people in this prehistoric village,’ pursued the doctor. ‘And I had reached a point when I almost welcomed the Great Scandal.’

‘Don’t say the Bright Young Things have found Potter’s Pond after all,’ observed the priest, smiling.

‘Oh, even our scandal is on old-established melodramatic lines. Need I say that the clergyman’s son promises to be our problem? It would be almost irregular, if the clergyman’s son were quite regular. So far as I can see, he is very mildly and almost feebly irregular. He was first seen drinking ale outside the Blue Lion. Only it seems he is a poet, which in those parts is next door to being a poacher.’

‘Surely,’ said Father Brown, ‘even in Potter’s Pond that cannot be the Great Scandal.’

‘No,’ replied the doctor gravely. ‘The Great Scandal began thus. In the house called The Grange, situated at the extreme end of The Grove, there lives a lady. A Lonely Lady. She calls herself Mrs Maltravers (that is how we put it); but she only came a year or two ago and nobody knows anything about her. “I can’t think why she wants to live here,” said Miss Carstairs-Carew; “we do not visit her.”’

‘Perhaps that’s why she wants to live there,’ said Father Brown.

‘Well, her seclusion is considered suspicious. She annoys them by being good-looking and even what is called good style. And all the young men are warned against her as a vamp.’

‘People who lose all their charity generally lose all their logic,’ remarked Father Brown. ‘It’s rather ridiculous to complain that she keeps to herself; and then accuse her of vamping the whole male population.’

‘That is true,’ said the doctor. ‘And yet she is really rather a puzzling person. I saw her and found her intriguing; one of those brown women, long and elegant and beautifully ugly, if you know what I mean. She is rather witty, and though young enough certainly gives me an impression of what they call — well, experience. What the old ladies call a Past.’

‘All the old ladies having been born this very minute,’ observed Father Brown. ‘I think I can assume she is supposed to have vamped the parson’s son.’

‘Yes, and it seems to be a very awful problem to the poor old parson. She is supposed to be a widow.’

Father Brown’s face had a flash and spasm of his rare irritation. ‘She is supposed to be a widow, as the parson’s son is supposed to be the parson’s son, and the solicitor is supposed to be a solicitor and you are supposed to be a doctor. Why in thunder shouldn’t she be a widow? Have they one speck of prima facie evidence for doubting that she is what she says she is?’

Dr Mulborough abruptly squared his broad shoulders and sat up. ‘Of course you’re right again,’ he said. ‘But we haven’t come to the scandal yet. Well, the scandal is that she is a widow.’

‘Oh,’ said Father Brown; and his face altered and he said something soft and faint, that might almost have been ‘My God!’

‘First of all,’ said the doctor, ‘they have made one discovery about Mrs Maltravers. She is an actress.’

‘I fancied so,’ said Father Brown. ‘Never mind why. I had another fancy about her, that would seem even more irrelevant.’

‘Well, at that instant it was scandal enough that she was an actress. The dear old clergyman of course is heartbroken, to think that his white hairs should be brought in sorrow to the grave by an actress and adventuress. The spinsters shriek in chorus. The Admiral admits he has sometimes been to a theatre in town; but objects to such things in what he calls “our midst”. Well, of course I’ve no particular objections of that kind. This actress is certainly a lady, if a bit of a Dark Lady, in the manner of the Sonnets; the young man is very much in love with her; and I am no doubt a sentimental old fool in having a sneaking sympathy with the misguided youth who is sneaking round the Moated Grange; and I was getting into quite a pastoral frame of mind about this idyll, when suddenly the thunderbolt fell. And I, who am the only person who ever had any sympathy with these people, am sent down to be the messenger of doom.’

‘Yes,’ said Father Brown, ‘and why were you sent down?’

The doctor answered with a sort of groan:

‘Mrs Maltravers is not only a widow, but she is the widow of Mr Maltravers.’

‘It sounds like a shocking revelation, as you state it,’ acknowledged the priest seriously.

‘And Mr Maltravers,’ continued his medical friend, ‘was the man who was apparently murdered in this very village a year or two ago; supposed to have been bashed on the head by one of the simple villagers.’

‘I remember you told me,’ said Father Brown. ‘The doctor, or some doctor, said he had probably died of being clubbed on the head with a cudgel.’

Dr Mulborough was silent for a moment in frowning embarrassment, and then said curtly:

‘Dog doesn’t eat dog, and doctors don’t bite doctors, not even when they are mad doctors. I shouldn’t care to cast any reflection on my eminent predecessor in Potter’s Pond, if I could avoid it; but I know you are really safe for secrets. And, speaking in confidence, my eminent predecessor at Potter’s Pond was a blasted fool; a drunken old humbug and absolutely incompetent. I was asked, originally by the Chief Constable of the County (for I’ve lived a long time in the county, though only recently in the village), to look into the whole business; the depositions and reports of the inquest and so on. And there simply isn’t any question about it. Maltravers may have been hit on the head; he was a strolling actor passing through the place; and Potter’s Pond probably thinks it is all in the natural order that such people should be hit on the head. But whoever hit him on the head did not kill him; it is simply impossible for the injury, as described, to do more than knock him out for a few hours. But lately I have managed to turn up some other facts bearing on the matter; and the result of it is pretty grim.’

He sat louring at the landscape as it slid past the window, and then said more curtly: ‘I am coming down here, and asking your help, because there’s going to be an exhumation. There is very strong suspicion of poison.’

‘And here we are at the station,’ said Father Brown cheerfully. ‘I suppose your idea is that poisoning the poor man would naturally fall among the household duties of his wife.’

‘Well, there never seems to have been anyone else here who had any particular connection with him,’ replied Mulborough, as they alighted from the train. ‘At least there is one queer old crony of his, a broken-down actor, hanging around; but the police and the local solicitor seem convinced he is an unbalanced busybody; with some idee fixe about a quarrel with an actor who was his enemy; but who certainly wasn’t Maltravers. A wandering accident, I should say, and certainly nothing to do with the problem of the poison.’

Father Brown had heard the story. But he knew that he never knew a story until he knew the characters in the story. He spent the next two or three days in going the rounds, on one polite excuse or another, to visit the chief actors of the drama. His first interview with the mysterious widow was brief but bright. He brought away from it at least two facts; one that Mrs Maltravers sometimes talked in a way which the Victorian village would call cynical; and, second, that like not a few actresses, she happened to belong to his own religious communion.

He was not so illogical (nor so unorthodox) as to infer from this alone that she was innocent of the alleged crime. He was well aware that his old religious communion could boast of several distinguished poisoners. But he had no difficulty in understanding its connection, in this sort of case, with a certain intellectual liberty which these Puritans would call laxity; and which would certainly seem to this parochial patch of an older England to be almost cosmopolitan. Anyhow, he was sure she could count for a great deal, whether for good or evil. Her brown eyes were brave to the point of battle, and her enigmatic mouth, humorous and rather large, suggested that her purposes touching the parson's poetical son, whatever they might be, were planted pretty deep.

The parson's poetical son himself, interviewed amid vast village scandal on a bench outside the Blue Lion, gave an impression of pure sulks. Hurrel Horner, a son of the Rev. Samuel Horner, was a square-built young man in a pale grey suit with a touch of something arty in a pale green tie, otherwise mainly notable for a mane of auburn hair and a permanent scowl. But Father Brown had a way with him in getting people to explain at considerable length why they refused to say a single word. About the general scandalmongering in the village, the young man began to curse freely. He even added a little scandalmongering of his own. He referred bitterly to alleged past flirtations between the Puritan Miss Carstairs-Carew and Mr Carver the solicitor. He even accused that legal character of having attempted to force himself upon the acquaintance of Mrs Maltravers. But when he came to speak of his own father, whether out of an acid decency or piety, or because his anger was too deep for speech, he snapped out only a few words.

'Well, there it is. He denounces her day and night as a painted adventuress; a sort of barmaid with gilt hair. I tell him she's not; you've met her yourself, and you know she's not. But he won't even meet her. He won't even see her in the street or look at her out of a window. An actress would pollute his house and even his holy presence. If he is called a Puritan he says he's proud to be a Puritan.'

'Your father,' said Father Brown, 'is entitled to have his views respected, whatever they are; they are not views I understand very well myself. But I agree he is not entitled to lay down the law about a lady he has never seen and then refuse even to look at her, to see if he is right. That is illogical.'

‘That’s his very stiffest point,’ replied the youth. ‘Not even one momentary meeting. Of course, he thunders against my other theatrical tastes as well.’

Father Brown swiftly followed up the new opening, and learnt much that he wanted to know. The alleged poetry, which was such a blot on the young man’s character, was almost entirely dramatic poetry. He had written tragedies in verse which had been admired by good judges. He was no mere stage-struck fool; indeed he was no fool of any kind. He had some really original ideas about acting Shakespeare; it was easy to understand his having been dazzled and delighted by finding the brilliant lady at the Grange. And even the priest’s intellectual sympathy so far mellowed the rebel of Potter’s Pond that at their parting he actually smiled.

It was that smile which suddenly revealed to Father Brown that the young man was really miserable. So long as he frowned, it might well have been only sulks; but when he smiled it was somehow a more real revelation of sorrow.

Something continued to haunt the priest about that interview with the poet. An inner instinct certified that the sturdy young man was eaten from within, by some grief greater even than the conventional story of conventional parents being obstacles to the course of true love. It was all the more so, because there were not any obvious alternative causes. The boy was already rather a literary and dramatic success; his books might be said to be booming. Nor did he drink or dissipate his well-earned wealth. His notorious revels at the Blue Lion reduced themselves to one glass of light ale; and he seemed to be rather careful with his money. Father Brown thought of another possible complication in connection with Hurrel’s large resources and small expenditure; and his brow darkened.

The conversation of Miss Carstairs-Carew, on whom he called next, was certainly calculated to paint the parson’s son in the darkest colours. But as it was devoted to blasting him with all the special vices which Father Brown was quite certain the young man did not exhibit, he put it down to a common combination of Puritanism and gossip. The lady, though lofty, was quite gracious, however, and offered the visitor a small glass of port-wine and a slice of seed-cake, in the manner of everybody’s most ancient great-aunts, before he managed to escape from a sermon on the general decay of morals and manners.

His next port of call was very much of a contrast; for he disappeared down a dark and dirty alley, where Miss Carstairs-Carew would have refused to follow him even in thought; and then into a narrow tenement made noisier by a high and declamatory voice in an attic . . . From this he re-emerged, with a rather dazed expression, pursued on to the pavement by a very excited man with a blue chin and a black frock-coat faded to bottle-green, who was shouting argumentatively: 'He did not disappear! Maltravers never disappeared! He appeared: he appeared dead and I've appeared alive. But where's all the rest of the company? Where's that man, that monster, who deliberately stole my lines, crabbed my best scenes and ruined my career? I was the finest Tubal that ever trod the boards. He acted Shylock — he didn't need to act much for that! And so with the greatest opportunity of my whole career. I could show you press-cuttings on my renderings of Fortinbras—'

'I'm quite sure they were splendid and very well-deserved,' gasped the little priest. 'I understood the company had left the village before Maltravers died. But it's all right. It's quite all right.' And he began to hurry down the street again.

'He was to act Polonius,' continued the unquenchable orator behind him. Father Brown suddenly stopped dead.

'Oh,' he said very slowly, 'he was to act Polonius.'

'That villain Hankin!' shrieked the actor. 'Follow his trail. Follow him to the ends of the earth! Of course he'd left the village; trust him for that. Follow him — find him; and may the curses—' But the priest was again hurrying away down the street.

Two much more prosaic and perhaps more practical interviews followed this melodramatic scene. First the priest went into the bank, where he was closeted for ten minutes with the manager; and then paid a very proper call on the aged and amiable clergyman. Here again all seemed very much as described, unaltered and seemingly unalterable; a touch or two of devotion from more austere traditions, in the narrow crucifix on the wall, the big Bible on the bookstand and the old gentleman's opening lament over the increasing disregard of Sunday; but all with a flavour of gentility that was not without its little refinements and faded luxuries.

The clergyman also gave his guest a glass of port; but accompanied by an ancient British biscuit instead of seedcake. The priest had again the weird feeling that everything was almost too perfect, and that he was living a century before his time. Only on one point the amiable old parson refused to melt into any further amiability; he meekly but firmly maintained that his conscience would not allow him to meet a stage player. However, Father Brown put down his glass of port with expressions of appreciation and thanks; and went off to meet his friend the doctor by appointment at the corner of the street; whence they were to go together to the offices of Mr Carver, the solicitor.

‘I suppose you’ve gone the dreary round,’ began the doctor, ‘and found it a very dull village.’

Father Brown’s reply was sharp and almost shrill. ‘Don’t call your village dull. I assure you it’s a very extraordinary village indeed.’

‘I’ve been dealing with the only extraordinary thing that ever happened here, I should think,’ observed Dr Mulborough. ‘And even that happened to somebody from outside. I may tell you they managed the exhumation quietly last night; and I did the autopsy this morning. In plain words we’ve been digging up a corpse that’s simply stuffed with poison.’

‘A corpse stuffed with poison,’ repeated Father Brown rather absently. ‘Believe me, your village contains something much more extraordinary than that.’

There was abrupt silence, followed by the equally abrupt pulling of the antiquated bell-pull in the porch of the solicitor’s house; and they were soon brought into the presence of that legal gentleman, who presented them in turn to a white-haired, yellow-faced gentleman with a scar, who appeared to be the Admiral.

By this time the atmosphere of the village had sunk almost into the subconsciousness of the little priest; but he was conscious that the lawyer was indeed the sort of lawyer to be the adviser of people like Miss Carstairs-Carew. But though he was an archaic old bird, he seemed something more than a fossil. Perhaps it was the uniformity of the background; but the priest had again the curious feeling that he himself was transplanted back into the early nineteenth century, rather than that the solicitor had survived into the early twentieth. His collar and cravat contrived to look almost like a stock as he settled his long chin into them; but they were clean as well as clean-cut; and there was even something about him of a very dry old dandy. In short, he was what is called well preserved, even if partly by being petrified.

The lawyer and the Admiral, and even the doctor, showed some surprise on finding that Father Brown was rather disposed to defend the parson's son against the local lamentations on behalf of the parson.

'I thought our young friend rather attractive, myself,' he said. 'He's a good talker and I should guess a good poet; and Mrs Maltravers, who is serious about that at least, says he's quite a good actor.'

'Indeed,' said the lawyer. 'Potter's Pond, outside Mrs Maltravers, is rather more inclined to ask if he is a good son.'

'He is a good son,' said Father Brown. 'That's the extraordinary thing.'

'Damn it all,' said the Admiral. 'Do you mean he's really fond of his father?'

The priest hesitated. Then he said, 'I'm not quite so sure about that. That's the other extraordinary thing.'

'What the devil do you mean?' demanded the sailor with nautical profanity.

'I mean,' said Father Brown, 'that the son still speaks of his father in a hard unforgiving way; but he seems after all to have done more than his duty by him. I had a talk with the bank manager, and as we were inquiring in confidence into a serious crime, under authority from the police, he told me the facts. The old clergyman has retired from parish work; indeed, this was never actually his parish. Such of the populace, which is pretty pagan, as goes to church at all, goes to Dutton-Abbot, not a mile away. The old man has no private means, but his son is earning good money; and the old man is well looked after. He gave me some port of absolutely first-class vintage; I saw rows of dusty old bottles of it; and I left him sitting down to a little lunch quite recherche in an old-fashioned style. It must be done on the young man's money.'

'Quite a model son,' said Carver with a slight sneer.

Father Brown nodded, frowning, as if revolving a riddle of his own; and then said: 'A model son. But rather a mechanical model.'

At this moment a clerk brought in an unstamped letter for the lawyer; a letter which the lawyer tore impatiently across after a single glance. As it fell apart, the priest saw a spidery, crazy crowded sort of handwriting and the signature of 'Phoenix Fitzgerald'; and made a guess which the other curtly confirmed.

'It's that melodramatic actor that's always pestering us,' he said. 'He's got some fixed feud with some dead and gone fellow mummer of his, which can’t have anything to do with the case. We all refuse to see him, except the doctor, who did see him; and the doctor says he’s mad.’

‘Yes,’ said Father Brown, pursing his lips thoughtfully. ‘I should say he’s mad. But of course there can’t be any doubt that he’s right.’

‘Right?’ cried Carver sharply. ‘Right about what?’

‘About this being connected with the old theatrical company,’ said Father Brown. ‘Do you know the first thing that stumped me about this story? It was that notion that Maltravers was killed by villagers because he insulted their village. It’s extraordinary what coroners can get jurymen to believe; and journalists, of course, are quite incredibly credulous. They can’t know much about English rustics. I’m an English rustic myself; at least I was grown, with other turnips, in Essex. Can you imagine an English agricultural labourer idealizing and personifying his village, like the citizen of an old Greek city state; drawing the sword for its sacred banner, like a man in the tiny medieval republic of an Italian town? Can you hear a jolly old gaffer saying, “Blood alone can wipe out one spot on the escutcheon of Potter’s Pond”? By St George and the Dragon, I only wish they would! But, as a matter of fact, I have a more practical argument for the other notion.’

He paused for a moment, as if collecting his thoughts, and then went on: ‘They misunderstood the meaning of those few last words poor Maltravers was heard to say. He wasn’t telling the villagers that the village was only a hamlet. He was talking to an actor; they were going to put on a performance in which Fitzgerald was to be Fortinbras, the unknown Hankin to be Polonius, and Maltravers, no doubt, the Prince of Denmark. Perhaps somebody else wanted the part or had views on the part; and Maltravers said angrily, “You’d be a miserable little Hamlet”; that’s all.’

Dr Mulborough was staring; he seemed to be digesting the suggestion slowly but without difficulty. At last he said, before the others could speak: ‘And what do you suggest that we should do now?’

Father Brown arose rather abruptly; but he spoke civilly enough. ‘If these gentlemen will excuse us for a moment, I propose that you and I, doctor, should go round at once to the Horners. I know the parson and his son will both be there just now. And what I want to do, doctor, is this. Nobody in the village knows yet, I think, about your autopsy and its result. I want you simply to tell both the clergyman and his son, while they are there together, the exact fact of the case; that Maltravers died by poison and not by a blow.’

Dr Mulborough had reason to reconsider his incredulity when told that it was an extraordinary village. The scene which ensued, when he actually carried out the priest's programme, was certainly of the sort in which a man, as the saying is, can hardly believe his eyes.

The Rev. Samuel Horner was standing in his black cassock, which threw up the silver of his venerable head; his hand rested at the moment on the lectern at which he often stood to study the Scripture, now possibly by accident only; but it gave him a greater look of authority. And opposite to him his mutinous son was sitting asprawl in a chair, smoking a cheap cigarette with an exceptionally heavy scowl; a lively picture of youthful impiety.

The old man courteously waved Father Brown to a seat, which he took and sat there silent, staring blandly at the ceiling. But something made Mulborough feel that he could deliver his important news more impressively standing up.

'I feel,' he said, 'that you ought to be informed, as in some sense the spiritual father of this community, that one terrible tragedy in its record has taken on a new significance; possibly even more terrible. You will recall the sad business of the death of Maltravers; who was adjudged to have been killed with the blow of a stick, probably wielded by some rustic enemy.'

The clergyman made a gesture with a wavering hand. 'God forbid,' he said, 'that I should say anything that might seem to palliate murderous violence in any case. But when an actor brings his wickedness into this innocent village, he is challenging the judgement of God.'

'Perhaps,' said the doctor gravely. 'But anyhow it was not so that the judgement fell. I have just been commissioned to conduct a post-mortem on the body; and I can assure you, first, that the blow on the head could not conceivably have caused the death; and, second, that the body was full of poison, which undoubtedly caused death.'

Young Hurrel Horner sent his cigarette flying and was on his feet with the lightness and swiftness of a cat. His leap landed him within a yard of the reading-desk.

'Are you certain of this?' he gasped. 'Are you absolutely certain that that blow could not cause death?'

'Absolutely certain,' said the doctor.

'Well,' said Hurrel, 'I almost wish this one could.'

In a flash, before anyone could move a finger, he had struck the parson a stunning crack on the mouth, dashing him backwards like a disjointed black doll against the door.

‘What are you doing?’ cried Mulborough, shaken from head to foot with the shock and mere sound of the blow. ‘Father Brown, what is this madman doing?’

But Father Brown had not stirred; he was still staring serenely at the ceiling.

‘I was waiting for him to do that,’ said the priest placidly. ‘I rather wonder he hasn’t done it before.’

‘Good God,’ cried the doctor. ‘I know we thought he was wronged in some ways; but to strike his father; to strike a clergyman and a non-combatant—’

‘He has not struck his father; and he has not struck a clergyman,’ said Father Brown. ‘He has struck a blackmailing blackguard of an actor dressed up as a clergyman, who has lived on him like a leech for years. Now he knows he is free of the blackmail, he lets fly; and I can’t say I blame him much. More especially as I have very strong suspicions that the blackmailer is a poisoner as well. I think, Mulborough, you had better ring up the police.’

They passed out of the room uninterrupted by the two others, the one dazed and staggered, the other still blind and snorting and panting with passions of relief and rage. But as they passed, Father Brown once turned his face to the young man; and the young man was one of the very few human beings who have seen that face implacable.

‘He was right there,’ said Father Brown. ‘When an actor brings his wickedness into this innocent village, he challenges the judgement of God.’

‘Well,’ said Father Brown, as he and the doctor again settled themselves in a railway carriage standing in the station of Potter’s Pond. ‘As you say, it’s a strange story; but I don’t think it’s any longer a mystery story. Anyhow, the story seems to me to have been roughly this. Maltravers came here, with part of his touring company; some of them went straight to Dutton-Abbot, where they were all presenting some melodrama about the early nineteenth century; he himself happened to be hanging about in his stage dress, the very distinctive dress of a dandy of that time. Another character was an old-fashioned parson, whose dark dress was less distinctive and might pass as being merely old-fashioned. This part was taken by a man who mostly acted old men; had acted Shylock and was afterwards going to act Polonius.

‘A third figure in the drama was our dramatic poet, who was also a dramatic performer, and quarrelled with Maltravers about how to present Hamlet, but more about personal things, too. I think it likely that he was in love with Mrs Maltravers even then; I don’t believe there was anything wrong with them; and I hope it may now be all right with them. But he may very well have resented Maltravers in his conjugal capacity; for Maltravers was a bully and likely to raise rows. In some such row they fought with sticks, and the poet hit Maltravers very hard on the head, and, in the light of the inquest, had every reason to suppose he had killed him.

‘A third person was present or privy to the incident, the man acting the old parson; and he proceeded to blackmail the alleged murderer, forcing from him the cost of his upkeep in some luxury as a retired clergyman. It was the obvious masquerade for such a man in such a place, simply to go on wearing his stage clothes as a retired clergyman. But he had his own reason for being a very retired clergyman. For the true story of Maltravers’ death was that he rolled into a deep undergrowth of bracken, gradually recovered, tried to walk towards a house, and was eventually overcome, not by the blow, but by the fact that the benevolent clergyman had given him poison an hour before, probably in a glass of port. I was beginning to think so, when I drank a glass of the parson’s port. It made me a little nervous. The police are working on that theory now; but whether they will be able to prove that part of the story, I don’t know. They will have to find the exact motive; but it’s obvious that this bunch of actors was buzzing with quarrels and Maltravers was very much hated.’

‘The police may prove something now they have got the suspicion,’ said Dr Mulborough. ‘What I don’t understand is why you ever began to suspect. Why in the world should you suspect that very blameless black-coated gentleman?’

Father Brown smiled faintly. ‘I suppose in one sense,’ he said, ‘it was a matter of special knowledge; almost a professional matter, but in a peculiar sense. You know our controversialists often complain that there is a great deal of ignorance about what our religion is really like. But it is really more curious than that. It is true, and it is not at all unnatural, that England does not know much about the Church of Rome. But England does not know much about the Church of England. Not even as much as I do. You would be astonished at how little the average public grasps about the Anglican controversies; lots of them don’t really know what is meant by a High Churchman or a Low Churchman, even on the particular points of practice, let alone the two theories of history and philosophy behind them. You can see this ignorance in any newspaper; in any merely popular novel or play.

‘Now the first thing that struck me was that this venerable cleric had got the whole thing incredibly mixed up. No Anglican parson could be so wrong about every Anglican problem. He was supposed to be an old Tory High Churchman; and then he boasted of being a Puritan. A man like that might personally be rather Puritanical; but he would never call it being a Puritan. He professed a horror of the stage; he didn’t know that High Churchmen generally don’t have that special horror, though Low Churchmen do. He talked like a Puritan about the Sabbath; and then he had a crucifix in his room. He evidently had no notion of what a very pious parson ought to be, except that he ought to be very solemn and venerable and frown upon the pleasures of the world.

‘All this time there was a subconscious notion running in my head; something I couldn’t fix in my memory; and then it came to me suddenly. This is a Stage Parson. That is exactly the vague venerable old fool who would be the nearest notion a popular playwright or play-actor of the old school had of anything so odd as a religious man.’

‘To say nothing of a physician of the old school,’ said Mulborough good-humouredly, ‘who does not set up to know much about being a religious man.’

‘As a matter of fact,’ went on Father Brown, ‘there was a plainer and more glaring cause for suspicion. It concerned the Dark Lady of the Grange, who was supposed to be the Vampire of the Village.

I very early formed the impression that this black blot was rather the bright spot of the village. She was treated as a mystery; but there was really nothing mysterious about her. She had come down here quite recently, quite openly, under her own name, to help the new inquiries to be made about her own husband. He hadn’t treated her too well; but she had principles, suggesting that something was due to her married name and to common justice. For the same reason, she went to live in the house outside which her husband had been found dead. The other innocent and straightforward case, besides the Vampire of the Village, was the Scandal of the Village, the parson’s profligate son. He also made no disguise of his profession or past connection with the acting world. That’s why I didn’t suspect him as I did the parson. But you’ll already have guessed a real and relevant reason for suspecting the parson.’

‘Yes, I think I see,’ said the doctor, ‘that’s why you bring in the name of the actress.’

‘Yes, I mean his fanatical fixity about not seeing the actress,’ remarked the priest. ‘But he didn’t really object to seeing her. He objected to her seeing him.’

‘Yes, I see that,’ assented the other. ‘If she had seen the Rev. Samuel Horner, she would instantly have recognized the very unreverend actor Hankin, disguised as a sham parson with a pretty bad character behind the disguise. Well, that is the whole of this simple village idyll, I think. But you will admit I kept my promise; I have shown you something in the village considerably more creepy than a corpse; even a corpse stuffed with poison. The black coat of a parson stuffed with a blackmailer is at least worth noticing and my live man is much deadlier than your dead one.’

‘Yes,’ said the doctor, settling himself back comfortably in the cushions. ‘If it comes to a little cosy company on a railway journey, I should prefer the corpse.’

UNCOLLECTED FATHER BROWN STORIES

These two Father Brown stories were not originally released in compilations. *The Donnington Affair* was first published in 1914, while *The Mask of Midas appeared in* 1936, following Chesterton’s death.

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The Donnington Affair

In 1914 Sir Max Pemberton proposed challenges to several leading mystery writers of the day, including Chesterton. The following chapter was printed in the October issue of the *Premier* magazine. *Father Brown's Solution* was published in the following month's magazine.

PEMBERTON'S CHALLENGE

The following statement of the Donnington affair has been written from the original notes by the Priest-in-charge of the Parish of Borrow-in-the-Vale.

John Barrington Cope came to Sussex from King's College, Cambridge, at a time when the aged vicar could no longer undertake single-handed even the pleasant duties of that rural charge.

He had been nearly two years at Borrow when the tragedy occurred. A man of considerable scholastic attainment, he appears immediately to have realised the magnitude of the mystery and to have set down, without loss of time, an orderly statement of the facts as they presented themselves to him.

The accepted lover of Evelyn Donnington's sister Harriet, he enjoyed the liberties of Borrow Close, and was almost daily at the house. It was at his suggestion that "another" was summoned from London to investigate a case which promised at an early moment to baffle alike the vigilance of the police and the curiosity of the public.

Mr. Cope's notes were written primarily for Father Brown's perusal. An amplification of them seems to be the swiftest method of putting the reading public in possession of the salient features of this amazing occurrence.

I

My name is John Barrington Cope, and I had been priest-in-charge of the parish of Borrow-in-the-Vale for twenty-one months.

I last saw Evelyn Donnington alive on Sunday evening at a quarter past ten o'clock. I had supped at Borrow Close as it has been my privilege to do almost every Sunday evening since I came to the parish. The fact that my fiancée, Harriet Donnington, was and is at Bath made no difference.

Sir Borrow Donnington has few friends. He is not a man who loves the society of other men, nor, for that matter, of women. It may be that I understand him a little better than his fellows. I am welcome at Borrow Close, and there is no other house which has a prior claim upon me.

I saw Evelyn Donnington alive and well at a quarter past ten on the evening of Sunday last, the 24th day of July. She came to the porch with me to tell me of a letter she had received from Harriet on the previous day, and there I said "good-night" to her.

The rectory stands perhaps a third part of a mile across the park, and is best reached by a bridle-path through what is known as Adam's Thicket. The way is dark and shut in by the magnificent beeches for which Borrow is famous. I saw no living thing as I returned to the rectory, nor heard any sound that was ominous.

Two hours later a footman from the Close awakened me to say that Evelyn was dead. "Murdered, sir!" he gasped, and without another word he ran on headlong towards the doctor's house.

I had fallen into a light sleep when this man's ring awakened me. There had been much trouble at Borrow Close since I came to the parish. The world is well acquainted with the nature of this, and knows much of the shame which has overtaken the Donnington family. Whatever sympathy it may have withheld from Sir Borrow Donnington himself, it has lavished freely upon his daughters.

To me Evelyn was already as a sister. I was to have married Harriet in September, though God knows what may be in store for us now.

Men deride omens, though often they are but the mind's logic waging a war upon our optimism. Though the affair of Southby Donnington would appear to have been settled by his conviction and imprisonment, I dreaded from the first that such could not be the end of it; and it was of Southby Donnington, Sir Borrow's only son, that I had been dreaming in my sleep when the footman awakened me.

What a sardonic chapter in the history of human nature! An only son — a wealthy father! Upon the one side a profligacy almost without parallel, upon the other side a parsimony stupendous in its ironic selfishness.

Southby Donnington was sent to Eton and to Trinity (Cambridge) as an Army candidate. A disgraceful affair at a gambling den in London, with a subsequent appearance at a police-court, finished his university career in his first term. He could not even pass the trivial examination now demanded for

Sandhurst. He would suggest no other vocation. The man became a derelict in the dangerous seas of London’s underworld. In vain his sisters pleaded with Sir Borrow. The baronet had finished with his son. A man of iron resolution which nothing could bend, he swore that Southby should never enter his house again. There followed the cataclysm.

We heard of the boy’s arrest in London upon a charge of forgery. He was committed for trial, defended with what money his sisters could supply him, sent to the Old Bailey, convicted. The sentence was one of three years’ penal servitude. We learned that he had been taken to Wormwood Scrubs, and nine months later that he was at Parkhurst.

It is no place here to dwell upon the secrets of the stricken house or of the aftermath of this terrible downfall.

Borrow Close is an old mansion lying between Ashdown Forest and Crowborough. It has always been remote from men and affairs, and there is no domain in the south of England so wonderful in its solitudes.

All about it is the forest. The very park is primeval woodland; here abounding in undergrowth so thick that the foot of man might never have been set therein; there characterised by marshy pools and groves where noonday is but a shimmer of reluctant light. Few were admitted to the house even in the days when Lady Donnington was its mistress. Since her death it has become mediaeval in its isolation. The old baronet had nothing in common with his neighbours; his daughters were always afraid of him, and they go through life as it were on tiptoe, fearing that if they speak above a whisper they will awake the curiosity of the world beyond their gates.

It is true that Southby flouted the sanctities of this retreat, despite the baronet’s displeasure. Parties of wild undergraduates made the “welkin ring” during the vacations; the story of Evelyn and Harriet’s beauty was not unknown in the courts at Cambridge. Few of the boys, however, had the courage to persist, and I think that even Southby himself was astonished when Captain Willy Kennington appeared suddenly upon the scene as a suitor for Evelyn’s hand, and was not to be repulsed even by Sir Borrow’s savage discouragement.

Captain Kennington had met Evelyn at her aunt’s house in Kensington some three months before the downfall. Her womanly gifts should have made an appeal to any man who became well acquainted with them, and I do not wonder that the young soldier surrendered to the spell.

Very simple in all her ideas, not a little afraid of the world, yet gifted with an imagination which years of solitary reading had stimulated, she seemed to be at once the woman and the child; wise above her years, yet afflicted by those ideals for which woman often pays so dearly. Fear of her father forbade that immediate acceptance of the soldier's advances which her heart dictated. She returned to Borrow Close, and was followed there shortly by the captain himself.

What was my astonishment to hear a few days later that Sir Borrow had refused all discussion of the matter, and in one of those violent paroxysms of temper, with which neither God nor man could reason, had ordered the captain from his house.

To give him his due, Southby played a man's part in this affair. He interceded warmly for his sister, returning from South Africa for that purpose. The scene between father and son is remembered at the Close as the culminating episode of an estrangement as discreditable to one as to the other. Passion dominated it, and set finality upon it. No word was spoken between these two men until the end.

Three months later Southby was a convict, and I remained the one man who visited the baronet in the days of his shame.

II

These are the events of sixteen months ago. I have already disclaimed any intention of dwelling upon the intimate days of sorrow which followed after. "The evil that men do lives after them," and while for the world the tragedy was but a nine days' wonder, it lay heavy upon the house of Borrow. No longer did the old baronet receive the visits of the few friends hitherto admitted to the Close. He shut the doors alike upon the old world and the new. His daughters saw no one but the servants and myself. In their turn, his neighbours shrank from him. Men had come to say that lust of gold drove Southby to the crime, and to believe that the boy was less guilty than the father.

The one man who stood by the stricken family was Captain Kennington, who owed so little to the baronet. Now, in the darkest hour, he came forward to demand Evelyn's hand anew. It went without saying that she would not accept him. A rare type of womanhood, the very fact that she loved was the barrier between them. Nothing, she felt, could ever blot out the shame of this happening, or minimise its consequences. The harvest of sin was not gathered in Parkhurst Prison, but here in the ancient house, where women reaped with sickles of tears.

My own relations to Harriet were, God be praised, but superficially affected by Southby's downfall. We had learned to know each other so well before the trouble came that it but set a seal upon our mutual sense of help and sacrifice, and although I knew that she would not marry me immediately, I left the future to lead us as it might. Sir Donnington himself now seemed to find in my society the sole consolation of his declining years. He did not go to church, but I visited them for worship early every Sunday morning, and was always at the Close to supper when in residence at the rectory.

So the months rolled on, and time, the healer, came to our aid. The bitterness of fear and doubt had passed down and given place to a brave attempt to face the future. We made many plans for Southby upon his release, and were determined to start him in a farm in South Africa if we could. Kennington went so far as to visit the prison and see the convict. His own father was one of the visiting inspectors, as it chanced, and so an advantage was permitted him.

He told us that he found Southby quite resigned to his fate, and he spoke of him as a man who was convinced that he had not committed a crime, but had been the victim of those who had betrayed him when they discovered that nothing was to be extorted from the baronet.

Parkhurst, it seems, is the gentleman's prison, and Southby was in aristocratic company there. I confess that the intimation was not without its saving humour, and permitted some reflection upon the permanence of those social aspirations which could afflict men even in a prison. Better, it appeared, to pick oakum with a lord than to earn an honest living among plebeians.

Kennington spoke of cheerfulness and of content, but I remembered afterwards one phrase in his letter which should have struck me as significant. Prison makes strange bedfellows, and so far as man may have a confidant in captivity, Southby had found one in a man by the name of Mester.

"This fellow," said Kennington, "is the cheeriest soul possible. He has been well educated in France, where he fell upon evil times. Then he became chauffeur to an Austrian baron, entered a motor-car factory at

Suresnes, turned his attention to flying at Issy, and finally was accused of a savage assault and an attempt to rob an old lady at Dover who was about to establish him in a motor-car business there.”

Mester declared to the end that the crime was the work of others. He protested that he was the victim of circumstances, and that the clues upon which the police convicted him were false. Nevertheless, he was found guilty and sentenced to four years’ penal servitude upon the day following Southby’s conviction.

Between these men a strange friendship took root. Each believed himself wrongfully convicted; each could sympathise with the other. And just as Mester declared that he would bring the old baronet to his senses when he got out, so could Southby interest himself in Mester’s story, and implore certain old colleagues on the Press to investigate it.

As we know, one great novelist has already busied himself with the affair, and is convinced of the man’s innocence. Admittedly a person of no stable character and unquestionably the associate of thieves, there would yet seem to be a doubt whether the graver crime were committed, and quite a reasonable supposition that the police may have been in error.

Mester himself did not hesitate to affirm that if he were free for a month he would establish his innocence beyond all question. So convinced was he of this that he appears to have told Southby quite plainly that he would escape from Parkhurst if the opportunity presented itself.

I thought nothing of the matter at the time, and, indeed, the threat must be one often made by prisoners to whom crime has not become a habit and the cell a refuge. But I confess that astonishment was no word for it when, a few weeks later, upon opening my morning paper, I read that two men had escaped from Parkhurst, and, despite the efforts of the police, were still at large.

“Southby and Mester,” I said to myself. I was not wrong, as you shall presently hear.

III

Here was an upset if you will, and one to send me running to the Close with the tidings. Sir Borrow himself I would not tell, dreading the effect of the news upon a mind so deranged; but Evelyn and Harriet heard me eagerly, and the former I began to suspect was already in possession of the story.

This fact did not in the beginning impress me as it should have done. Some letter, I thought, must have come from Southby himself, and yet had I reflected upon it I would have perceived that such a thing was hardly possible under the circumstances.

The man had escaped but yesterday, and even had a letter been posted from the Isle of Wight or the mainland on the previous evening, it would not have reached Borrow Close at nine o'clock. Later on I discovered, quite accidentally, that Captain Kennington hinted at some such possibility in a letter received on the previous day, and whatever thoughts the discovery suggested, I kept them strictly to myself. The immediate thing was the excitement the news occasioned at the Close, and the momentous events which must follow upon it.

For my own part, I was early of the opinion that the fugitives would swiftly be overtaken, and that that would be the end of the matter. Their escape, briefly narrated in the newspapers, had been admirably contrived. It appears that they scaled a high wall at a moment when a heavy mist drifted across the island from the mainland, that they then crossed an enclosure in which other prisoners were at work, climbed a second wall by the aid of a silk ladder, which they left behind them, and so made their way to the sea.

Authority believed that their flight was there cut short, and that they had not succeeded in reaching the mainland; but another account spoke of a mysterious motor boat which had been seen recently off St. Catherine's Point, and, remembering Mester's acquaintance with the motor fraternity and its less desirable characters, the writer of the report seemed to be of the opinion that this might have some connection with the matter. The latter, I must confess, occurred to me as a plausible deduction. These flying people are unusually clever. They possess a daring which is proved, and their resources are many. I detected now the meaning of Southby's friendship for this undesirable mechanic, and I saw that the men were pledged to make the attempt together. For the moment it looked as though they had succeeded.

It was a little before nine o'clock when I arrived at the Close, and not until after lunch that I left. As usual, Sir Borrow spent the morning about his gardens, and kept me some while with him speaking of this plant or that with which I was always familiar, but never naming the son who would succeed to this splendid inheritance. When he retired to his study at twelve o'clock, I took the girls aside and resumed a conversation so full of meaning for us all. Naturally, we asked each other many questions which we were unable to answer. Where would Southby go if he reached the mainland? Could he get money? Would he return to Borrow?

“If he comes here,” said I, “he is lost! It will be the first place the police will watch!”

Harriet agreed with me in this. Yet where else could he go with any prospect of getting money, by which alone ultimate success could be assured?

We thought of many places, but of one with conviction. Sir Borrow’s sister, the aged Lady Rosmar, then lived at Bath. She had been staunch to the boy as far as her means permitted, and might be still a friend to him in such an emergency as this. We decided that Harriet should go to Bath without loss of time, in case she could be of any assistance there. Evelyn and I, meanwhile, would watch and wait at Borrow. God knows what we hoped to do if the boy came there, yet I think we both prayed for his coming.

It seemed such an impossible thing that he could evade the hue and cry which must attend this flight. Yet if he did evade it, might not we take up his burden and start him in that new life wherein so much might be achieved if the lesson had been truly learned? Foolish the hope may have been, yet it came natural to those who had suffered so much, and over whom the prison gate was ever the emblem of a terrible sorrow. We believed that Southby would come, and in ten days’ time our faith was justified. He was there at Borrow Close, the police upon his heels, his own father ignorant that the house harboured him. Of such dire things have I now to tell in the story that comes after.

IV

I have said that we supposed the house would be watched by the police, and in this we were not mistaken.

Frequently, in the few days immediately prior to Southby’s return, I had seen strange men in the park, and more than once I had been stopped upon an idle pretence and questioned concerning Sir Borrow and his affairs. Such a subterfuge would have deceived no one, and, fortunately, I was able to deal with the men quite frankly.

“You are a police-officer,” I said to one of them.

And he did not deny it.

“The lad’s sure to come here, sir,” was his answer, “and, if he does, we shall take him. There isn’t a road within ten miles we are not watching.”

We fell to other talk, and chiefly of the escape. Officially the police thought there had been some connivance on the part of the warders, but of this I naturally knew nothing.

“The young men had a lot of friends between them,” the detective said, “and as for Lionel Mester, he knows half the crooks in Europe!”

I replied that in such a case the friends in question might be expected to shelter their comrades.

“And,” said I, “it is idle to look for your men here. Surely you know of the relations between Sir Borrow and his son?”

He was much interested in this, and questioned me closely — a proceeding I did not resent under the circumstances. A few days later I was stopped in the park by an American lady and her daughter, who pretended to be much interested in the old place, and asked me if it were not possible to get permission to visit it. In these I recognised also the agents of the police, and I put them off with what excuses I could; not that it would have mattered at such a time, for Southby had not then returned. He was to come three days afterwards, at dead of night, and the two who were to know of his coming would have stood at nothing for his sake. They were his sister Evelyn and Wellman, the butler, who had loved Southby as his own son.

It was from Wellman himself that I had the news at nine o’clock on the following morning. He came carrying a pretended letter from Sir Borrow, and not until we were alone in my study, and the door shut behind us, did he dare to speak freely.

“Mr. Southby’s home, sir,” he said in a whisper. “He’s in the priest’s room.”

I feared to speak for a moment. Instantly I had visions of the hunted lad, fleeing from thicket to thicket of the forest he knew so well, and finally gaining that deep glen wherein is the subterranean entrance to the Close. That he had thought of it when none of us remembered! Of course, the police would know nothing of that. The very servants, save Wellman alone, are in ignorance of the existence of the passage, and locally it is believed that it perished long ago. Sir Borrow let them think so.

It was one of his humours to have the place opened up by the engineers who came from London to sink his artesian well. He liked to go to and fro as he pleased, to catch his servants when they least expected him. And so he used the priest’s room for the purpose, or did use it until the tragedy happened. Nothing afterwards interested him. The secret chamber remained unopened after Southby was convicted. The rest of us, I think, had almost forgotten its existence.

The chamber lies at the western end of the long gallery. There is an octagon tower there, with an ancient stone staircase cunningly built within its walls. To this you gain access from the gallery by opening a panel upon the right-hand side of the smaller chimney. The room lies at the foot of one flight of stairs, and is lighted from two narrow windows giving upon the battlements. These are filled by stained glass of the fourteenth century, and show former abbots of Borrow in alb and chasuble. The room itself is large and commodious, and has a fireplace and an alcove for the bed. Those who desire to go from it to the forest descend the staircase until they find themselves in the old crypt which dates from Saxon times. The subterranean passage leads from that to Adam’s Thicket, where it enters an ancient well, long dried up, and now but a pit of grass and bramble. I did not doubt that Southby had gained the forest by a devious route and had made his way by one of those paths which no stranger would discover. And so he had gone straight to the priest’s chamber, and thence to Evelyn’s bedroom.

“He waked her about one this morning,” said Wellman, who still appeared to be trembling with the excitement of the news. “They wouldn’t let you know sooner, sir, for fear of the police. Miss Evelyn is dreadfully afraid that the squire will find out, and so I came to you at once. Lucky for us, it was only yesterday afternoon that Superintendent Matthews searched the Close from garret to cellar. He must have had wind that Mr. Southby was on the road.”

I was astonished to hear this.

“Superintendent Matthews — yesterday!” I exclaimed. “Is it really possible, and Miss Evelyn told me nothing of it? But, of course, it may have been difficult to send. Does he know anything of the priest’s hole, Wellman? Surely you don’t fear that?”

He shook his head, being a man of uncommon caution.

“They know a great deal too much nowadays, sir — more’s the pity. The question is, what are we to do with the young master, since Miss Evelyn is at her wits’ end? She would be pleased to see you at the Close, indeed and she would. It’s a hard task for a young lady, as you can well imagine, sir.”

I agreed, and, putting on my hat, went over with him immediately. Our way lay through Adam’s Thicket, and I confess that I suffered some alarm when a stranger appeared upon our path not a hundred paces from the ancient basin by which the passage is reached. He was a short, thick-set man, wearing a serge suit with black leather leggings and a peaked cap, and when he saw us he stopped abruptly for a moment, then turned his back upon us and pretended to light a cigarette while we passed.

“He is no policeman,” I said to Wellman, when the stranger was out of hearing. The old servant agreed with me.

“But he might be an inquiry agent, sir. I’ve heard tell in London of the tricks they play with their clothes. Don’t trust him too far.”

“I am not going to trust him at all,” said I. “The fellow looked to me as though he were a chauffeur.”

“A bad lot, believe me, sir. There’s been few honest men upon wheels since they robbed us of our horses. A man wants the nose of a setter to keep track of such as him. I wouldn’t trust one of them with a silver-plated soup-ladle, upon my word I wouldn’t.”

I told him he was a laudator temporis acti, but as that conveyed nothing to him we pushed on, and found Evelyn in the boudoir.

She was dreadfully agitated, but Sir Borrow being there, no word of the affair might pass between us. The baronet plainly thought that his daughter had become hysterical, and when I was alone with him he hinted that she must have had some news from that d — d scoundrel.

“Whatever it is,” he added, “I don’t want to hear of it or of him. It would be a great day for me if the fellow were six feet underground, and I hope to God he soon will be. That’s the truth, Cope, and none of your philosophy can change it. I have no longer a son; I am trying to forget that I ever had one.”

I shrank from his anger, knowing well how little such a man would suffer a rebuke. Happily, he set out to drive into the town almost immediately, and Evelyn and I went at once to the priest’s hole and interviewed Southby. He was in a sorry plight, I must say, his face and hands torn by the brambles of the thickets, his clothes splashed with mud, his beard unshaved, and his eyes bloodshot. I thought also a little delirious from want of food and exposure, and he talked incoherently of ships and the sea, of men who had betrayed him, and of others who were his friends. By-and-by, when he became calmer, he told me that the ignominy of prison affected him to such an extent that he would have gone mad if he had remained at Parkhurst.

“I couldn’t have done it, Cope, by God I couldn’t,” he said. “You don’t know what it means to a man who has lived as I have. I had to go or it would have been all up with me. If they take me I will shoot myself. That’s an oath and I’ll keep it.”

“But,” cried I, “whatever will you do, Southby? You must know that we cannot long protect you here.”

He laughed defiantly, pushing the black hair from his forehead quite in the old way.

“Lionel will do it,” he said. “I trust Lionel. He got me out; he’ll see I don’t get in again. You must know Lionel. He’s a white man all through, and the prison that can hold him has got to be made. Why, it was his idea about the motor-boat — who else would have thought of it? — he and his friend at Hendon. They picked us up in the cove at high tide, and we were landed at Hayling Island before morning. I knew we should get through when Lionel undertook it.”

“Then,” exclaimed I, quite at hazard, “Captain Kennington knew nothing of it?”

His brow darkened at this. He looked at Evelyn curiously, and appeared afraid to speak out.

“No, I don’t trust Kennington — not much. Mind what you’re doing in that quarter, Evelyn. Kennington isn’t thirty cents — you remember it.”

She flashed out at this, a girl of spirit and a good heart.

“Do not say a word against Captain Kennington!” she cried. “He is the only friend you ever had who remained staunch to you. You should be grateful to him.”

He still persisted, though with a weakening resolution.

“That may or may not be. It’s my opinion he tried to give us away, and I shall stick to it. Now, get me a drink for heaven’s sake. I am as dry as a camel.”

She fetched him a brandy-and-soda, and he drank it eagerly. It was already a danger to pass to and from the long gallery, and I began to perceive the peril of the situation. Let the servants know and sooner or later the news would go to the village, and thence to the police. When we discussed it frankly between ourselves there seemed but one solution. Evelyn must be ill, and Harriet must be recalled from Bath to wait upon her.

Meanwhile, Wellman must have a confidant, and none seemed better suited to the purpose than Turner, the head housemaid. Sooner or later this woman would discover us. We determined that it should be sooner, and, calling her to the conference, we put our fortunes into her hands. Good woman, she had a brother of her own, and Evelyn was beloved by them all.

We made our plans, and for the moment they were successful. Harriet, unfortunately, could not return from Bath, her aunt being taken seriously ill and really requiring her assistance. Evelyn, however, feigned an indisposition very cleverly, and although it put me to some conscientious difficulty, I suffered myself to think of the greater good of that unhappy family and to acquiesce. Nevertheless, I understood that it was but a brief respite. The perils of the situation were manifest. Any day, any hour might discover us, and we began to go as those who feared their own shadows.

Perhaps my fears may have been responsible for a delusion, but there were moments when I thought that Sir Borrow suspected us. His manner became suddenly aggressive, and he questioned me more closely than he had done for a long time. Had I heard from that “d — d” son of his? Was Evelyn worrying about “the worthless scoundrel”? To all of which I responded with what wit I could, though God knows my position was difficult. Later on I discovered him in Evelyn’s bedroom, and that very night, after dinner, he spoke of Kennington. oddly enough, his opinion of that gallant soldier was exactly that of his son. He did not trust him, doubted his record, and stigmatised him most unjustly as a penniless adventurer. As to my knowledge the captain is in possession of an income of eight hundred pounds a year, I resented the slander, and did not fear to speak my mind. The result was a sharp quarrel, and the expression upon his part of a shabby apology, with which in any other circumstances I would have been far from satisfied. As it was, I had to bear with him, and to listen while he told me that, whatever happened, he would not have Kennington in the house again. Then he went off to his study, I to the priest’s room to tell them of my suspicions.

Southby had always been afraid of his father. My news alarmed him, and he did not hesitate to affirm that the old man would deliver him up to the police should he be discovered at the close. Evelyn herself appeared to be of the same opinion, and when we were alone she confessed the terror of her situation.

“Captain Kennington is coming here at the week-end,” she said.

I told her what sir Borrow had said, and it did but alarm her the more.

“Sometimes I wish I were dead,” she declared.

And I, who knew how much that gentle soul had suffered, prayed to God that strength might be granted her.

The following night I was to meet Lionel Mester in the thicket, and to experience an apprehension more acute than any I had yet suffered in this woeful affair.

It was the Sabbath eve, and I was returning from the Close to the choir practice in our beautiful old parish church. A hundred yards from the well’s head, where the secret entrance lies, I met again the short, thick-set man whom Wellman had declared to be a detective. This time he stopped, and begging me to step aside into the thicket, he introduced himself immediately.

“You’ll have heard of me, sir — Lionel Mester, Mr. Southby’s pal.”

“Yes,” I said, “I have heard of you. Why do you come to this dangerous place?”

“Because there’s something Southby must know, and it can’t come any other way. You see him every day, and can take this letter to him. I’ve been hanging about nearly a week trying to get it delivered. Usually I don’t trust devil dodgers — not much. But you’ve got a decent mug on you, and I’m going to trust you. Take him this letter, and tell him, if he acts on it, it’s all right and the wheels go round. Otherwise I do a double watch, and be d — d to it! Lord, I’ve been sleeping on stinging nettles for a week, and that’s about enough of it! Tell Southby so, and you’ll see no more of me.”

He thrust a bulky letter into my hand, and was about to say more when we heard a sound of footsteps, and instantly he plunged into the undergrowth with the agility of a wild-cat. He was shod, I saw, in rubber-soled shoes, and carried a formidable stick; but the quickness of his movements was the surprising thing, and uttering but one word “police,” he disappeared from my view. For my part, I thrust the letter into the inner pocket of my coat and at once regained the path. Fifty paces further on I passed Superintendent Matthews, and exchanged a good-night with him. He appeared to be in a hurry, and was going towards the Hall. But he did not stop to gossip with me, as he usually does, and for that I was grateful.

It will be understood that this unexpected turn perplexed me very much. I had expected that Lionel Mester would come to Borrow sooner or later, but now that he had come I perceived how considerable a danger he must be to us all. It was not to be hidden from me that I myself might be the victim of this unhappy family, and must answer to the law for the part that I had played. So much I was willing to do for a woman's sake, but now that discovery trod upon our heels, and all the shame and suffering of exposure hovered in the shadows about that ancient house, I confess that my courage almost failed me. The letter seemed a damning document which would convict me in any court. Yet I determined to deliver it, and that very night, about ten o'clock, I went up to the Hall and put it into Evelyn's hands. Upon my return an unknown man followed me through the thicket, and watched me enter the rectory. I believe that he was a police officer, though whether he were so or not mattered little since the letter was delivered.

That night I slept but ill, fearing so many things, dreading the peril of a situation which had become almost intolerable. The next day was the Sabbath, given almost entirely to the schools and the church, and it was not until we sat down to supper at the Close that I got the news of Evelyn. She had given out that she was a little better, and would sit down with us. The few words we exchanged in the porch when I said "Good night" to her were of some moment, though not unexpected.

"Southby is going to-night," she said.

I answered, "Thank God," for I knew that none of us could stand the strain of it much longer.

And so we parted, and I was never to see her alive again. So brave, so gentle she was, blessed among women truly, an offering to man's sin, a martyr for whom men's tears should fall. They heard a loud cry in the house a little before midnight. Sir Borrow was awake, and first upon the scene. They found her lying at the foot of the circular staircase which leads down from the long gallery to the secret room. Evidently there had been a struggle. A jagged bar of iron lay upon the stairs at her feet. The lamp she had carried was shattered; the very window in the angle of the octagon was broken, and the glass littered about. What was not a little remarkable was the discovery of nine pounds in gold wrapped in a yellow kid glove, the very shape and colour of the gloves always worn by Captain Kennington.

She was dressed in a long bedgown, I should tell you, and wore a dressing gown over it. The door of the secret chamber stood open, but no one was to be discerned within. Southby had fled the house. Sir Borrow and Wellman alone stooped to the assistance of the stricken woman.

She was quite dead, a terrible wound in the throat having deprived her of life almost instantaneously. Naturally the police were called upon the instant, and not a moment was lost by them. Beaters began to search every thicket of the forest round about; there were motors abroad upon every road. Yet nothing was discovered, not a shadow of a clue to be found. Even Captain Kennington could offer no suggestion. I discovered to my surprise that he had come to Borrow on Saturday evening as he promised, but hearing Evelyn's story had gone to the town to sleep. The hue and cry waked him — to such a morn as few men are called upon to live.

And so here is this terrible crime committed, and no man to be brought to justice for it. God send us enlightenment that the guilty may be punished!

Proofs of the above mystery story have been sent to
Mr. G. K. CHESTERTON,
the creator of that famous detective of fiction,
"FATHER BROWN."

This is quite a new idea of story-telling, and Mr. Chesterton has entered into the spirit of the scheme with characteristic enthusiasm. His, or, rather, "Father Brown's," solution of 'The Donnington Affair' will be embodied in a complete story which will appear in next month's PREMIER.

I am now in negotiation with other famous fiction detectives, and for the present I will merely mention that the next pair of stories in this series are in the capable hands of

SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH
and
BARONESS ORCZY

Max Pemberton

FATHER BROWN’S SOLUTION

Mr. Chesterton has carefully weighed the evidence in Mr. Pemberton’s story, and his deductions constitute a remarkable structure of criminal detection.

It was natural, of course, that we should think of calling in expert opinion on the tragedy; or, at least, something subtler than the passing policeman. But I could think of few people or none whom it would be useful to consult thus privately. I remembered an investigator who had taken some interest in Southby’s original trouble; merely because I remembered the curious surname of Shrike; but report told me that he had since grown rich and retired, and was now yachting inaccessibly among the Pacific Islands.

My old friend Brown, the Roman priest at Cobhole, who had often given me good advice in small problems, had wired that he feared he could not come down, even for an hour. He merely added — what, I confess, I thought inconsequent — that the key might be found in the sentence that “Mester was the cheeriest soul possible.” Superintendent Matthews still carries weight with any considering person who has actually talked to him; but he is naturally in most cases officially reticent, and in some cases officially slow.

Sir Borrow seemed stricken rigid by this final tragedy; a thing pardonable enough in a very old man who, whatever his faults, had never had anything but tragedy upon tragedy out of his own blood and name.

Wellman can be trusted with anything up to the Crown jewels; but not with an idea. Harriet is far too good a woman to be a good detective. So I was left with my unsatisfied appetite for expert advice. I think the others shared it to some extent; I think we wished a man different from all of us would walk into the room, a man of the world outside us, a man of wider experience, a man of experience so wide — if it were possible — that he should know even one case that was like our own. Certainly none of us had the wildest suspicion of who the man would be.

I have explained that when poor Evelyn’s body was found it was clad in a dressing gown, as if she had been suddenly summoned from her room, and the door of the Priest’s Room stood open. Acting on I know not what impulse, I had closed it to; and, so far as I know, it was not opened again till it was opened from within. I confess that for me that opening was terrible.

Sir Borrow, Wellman, and I were alone in the chamber of slaughter. At least we were alone till a total stranger strolled into the room, without even pulling the peaked cap off his head. He was a sturdy man, stained with travel, especially as regards his leggings, which were loaded with clay and slime of innumerable ditches. But he was entirely unconcerned, which is more than I was. For, despite his extra dirt and his extra impudence, I recognised him as the fugitive convict, Mester, whose letter I had so foolishly passed on to his fellow convict. He entered the room with his hands in his pockets, and whistling. Then the whistling ceased, and he said:

"You seem to have shut the door again. I suppose you know it's not easy to open again on this side."

Through the broken window which gave upon the garden I could see Superintendent Matthews standing passively among the shrubs, with his broad back to the house. I walked to the window, and also whistled, but in a far more practical spirit. And yet, I know not why I should call it practical, for the superintendent, who must have heard me, did not turn his head, nor so much as shift a shoulder.

"I shouldn't worry poor old Matthews," said the man in the peaked cap in a friendly tone, "he is one of the best men in the service, and he must be awfully tired. I expect I can answer nearly all the questions that he could." And he relighted a cigarette.

"Mr. Mester," I replied with some heat, "I was sending for the superintendent to arrest you!"

"Quite so," he answered, throwing his wax match out of the window. "Well, he won't!"

He was gazing at me with a grave stolidity. And yet I fancy that the gravity of his full face had less effect on me than the large, indifferent back of the policeman.

The man called Mester resumed.

"I mean that my position here may not be quite what you suppose. It's true enough I assisted the young fellow to escape; but I don't imagine you know why I did it. It is an old rule in our profession—"

Before he could finish I had uttered a cry.

"Stop!" I cried out. "Who is that behind the door?"

I could see, by the very movement of Mester's mouth, that he was just about to answer, "What door?" But before the lips could move he also was answered. And from behind the sealed door of the secret chamber came the noise of something that was alive, if it were not human, or was moving, if it were not alive.

"What is in the Priest's Room?" I cried, and looked round for something with which to break down the door. I had half lifted the piece of jagged iron bar for the purpose. And then the horrid part it had played in that night overwhelmed me, and I fell against the door and beat on it with feeble hands, only repeating, "What is in the Priest's Room?" It was the awful fact that a voice, obscure but human, answered from behind the closed door, "The Priest!"

The heavy door was opened very slowly, apparently pushed by a hand no stronger than my own. The same voice which had said "The Priest," said in rather simpler tones, "Whom else did you expect?" The door swung out slowly to the full compass of its hinges, and revealed the black silhouette of a stumpy, apologetic person, with a big hat and a bad umbrella. He was in every way a very unromantic and inappropriate person to be in the Priest's Room, save in the accidental detail of being a priest.

He walked straight up to me before I could cry: "You have come, after all!"

He shook my hand, and, before he dropped it, looked at me with a steady and singular expression, sad, and yet rather serious than sad. I can only say it was the face we wear at the funeral of one dear as a friend, not that we wear by the deathbed of any directly dear to us.

"I can at least congratulate you," said Father Brown. I think I put my hand wildly through my hair. I am sure I answered:

"And what is there in this nightmare on which I can be congratulated?"

He answered me with the same solid face:

"On the innocence of the woman who will be your wife."

"No one," I cried indignantly, "has attempted to connect her with the matter."

He nodded gravely, as if in assent.

"That was the danger, doubtless," he said with a slight sigh, "but she's all right now, thank God. Isn't she?" And as if to give the last touch to the topsyturvydom, he turned to ask his question of the man in the peaked cap.

"Oh, she's safe enough!" said the man called Mester.

I cannot deny that there was suddenly lifted off my heart a load of doubt, which I had never known was there. But I was bound to pursue the problem.

“Do you mean, Father Brown,” I asked, “that you know who was the guilty person?”

“In a sense, yes,” he answered. “But you must remember that in a murder case the guiltiest person is not always the murderer.”

“Well, the guiltiest person, then,” I cried impatiently. “How are we to bring the guiltiest person to punishment?”

“The guiltiest person is punished,” said Father Brown.

“In a sense, yes,” he answered. “But you must remember that in a murder case the guiltiest person is not always the murderer.”

“Well, the guiltiest person, then,” I cried impatiently. “How are we to bring the guiltiest person to punishment?”

“The guiltiest person is punished,” said Father Brown.

There was a long silence in the twilight turret, and my mind laboured with doubts that were too large for it. At last Mester said gruffly, but not without a kind of good- nature:

“I think you two reverend gentlemen had better go and have a talk somewhere. About Hades, say, or hassocks, or whatever you do talk about. I shall have to look into this by myself. My name is Stephen Shrike; you may have heard of me.”

Even before such fancies had been swallowed up in my sudden fear at the movements in the secret room, I had faced the startling possibility that this escaped convict was really a detective. But I had not dreamed of his being so famous a one. The man who had been concerned for Southby, and since gained colossal prestige, had some claim in the case; and I followed Brown, who had already strolled down towards the entrance of the garden.

“The distinction between Hades and hassocks—” began Father Brown.

“Don’t play the fool!” I said, roughly enough.

“Was not without some philosophical value,” continued the little priest, with unruffled good temper. “Human troubles are mostly of two kinds. There is an accidental kind, that you can’t see because they are so close you fall over as you do over a hassock. And there is the other kind of evil, the real kind. And that a man will go to seek however far off it is — down, down, into the lost abyss.” And he unconsciously pointed his stumpy finger downward towards the grass, which was sprinkled with daisies.

“It was good of you to come, after all,” I said; “but I wish I could make more sense of the things you say.”

“Well,” he replied patiently, “have you made sense of the one thing I did say before I came down?”

“Why, you made some wild statement,” I replied, “that the key of the story was in Mester’s being cheerful, but — why, bless my soul, and so it is the key, in a way!”

“Only the key, so far,” said my companion, “but my first guess seems to have been right. It is not very common to find such sparkling gaiety in people undergoing penal servitude, especially when ruined on a false charge. And it seemed to me that Mester’s optimism was a little overdone. I also suspected that his aviation, and all the rest of it, true or false, were simply meant to make Southby think the escape feasible. But if Mester was such a demon for escaping, why didn’t he escape by himself? Why was he so anxious to lug along a young gentleman who does not seem to have been much use to him? As I was wondering, my eye fell on another sentence in your manuscript.”

“What was that?” I asked.

He took out a scrap of paper on which there were some scribbles in pencil, and read out:

“ ‘They then crossed an enclosure in which other prisoners were at work.’ “

After another pause, he resumed:

“That, of course, was plain enough. What kind of convict prison is it where prisoners work without any warders overseeing or walking about? What sort of warders are they to allow two convicts to climb two walls and go off as if for a picnic? All that is plain. And the conclusion is plainer from many other sentences. ‘It seemed such an impossible thing that he could evade the hue and cry that must attend this flight.’ It would have been impossible if there had been any hue and cry. ‘Evelyn and Harriet heard me eagerly, and the former, I began to suspect, was already in possession of the story.’ How could she be in possession of it so early as that, unless the police cars and telephones helped to send word from Southby? Could the convicts catch a camel or an ostrich? And look at the motor-boat. Do motor-boats grow on trees? No, that’s all simple. Not only was the companion in the escape a police detective, but the whole scheme of the escape was a police scheme, engineered by the highest authorities of the prison.”

But why?” I asked, staring. “And what has Southby to do with it?”

“Southby had nothing to do with it,” he answered. “I believe he is now hiding in some ditch or wood in the sincere belief that he is a hunted fugitive. But they won’t trouble him any more. He has done their work for them. He is innocent. It was essential that he should be innocent.”

“Oh, I don’t understand all this!” I cried impatiently.

“I don’t understand half of this,” said Father Brown. “There are al sorts of difficulties I will ask you about later. You knew the family. I only say that the sentence about cheerfulness did turn out to be a key-sentence, after all. Now, I want you to concentrate your attention on another key-sentence. ‘We decided that Harriet should go to Bath without loss of time, in case she should be of any assistance there.’ Note that this comes soon after your expression of surprise that someone should have communicated with Evelyn so early. Well, I suppose we none of us think the governor of the prison wired to her: ‘Have connived at escape of your brother, Convict 99.’ The message must have come in Southby’s name, at any rate.”

I ruminated, looking at the roll of the downs as it rose and repeated itself through every gap in the garden trees; then I said, “Kennington?”

My old friend looked at me for a moment with a look which, this time, I could not analyse.

“Captain Kennington’s part in the business is unique in my experience,” he said, “and I think we had better return to him later. It is enough that, by your own account, Southby did not give him his confidence.”

I looked again at the glimpses of the downs, and they looked grander but greyer, as my companion went on, like one who can only put things in their proper order.

“I mean the argument here is close, but clear. If she had any secret message from her brother about his escaping, why shouldn’t she have a message about where he was escaping to? Why should she send off her sister to Bath, when she might just as well have been told that her brother wasn’t going there? Surely a young gentleman might more safely say, in a private letter, that he was going to Bath than that he was escaping from prison? Somebody or something must have influenced Southby to leave his destination uncertain. And who could influence Southby except the companion of his flight?”

“Who was acting for the police, on your theory.”

"No. On his confession." After a sort of snorting silence, Brown said, with an emphasis I have never seen in him, throwing himself on a garden-seat: "I tell you this whole business of the two cities of refuge — this whole business of Harriet Donnington going to Bath — was a suggestion that came through Southby, but from Mester, or Shrike, or whatever his name is, and is the key of the police plot."

He had settled himself on a seat facing me, clasping his hands over the huge head of his umbrella in a more truculent manner than was typical of him. But an evening moon was brightening above the little plantation under which he sat, and when I saw his plain face again, I saw it was as mild as the moon.

"But why," I asked, "should they want such a plot?"

"To separate the sisters," he said. "That is the key."

I answered quickly: "The sisters could not really be separated."

"Yes, they could," said Father Brown, "quite simply, and that is why—" Here his simplicity failed, and he hesitated.

"That is why?" I insisted.

"That is why I can congratulate you," he said at last.

Silence sank again for a little, and I could not define the irritation with which I answered:

"Oh, I suppose you know all about it?"

"No, no, really!" he said, leaning forward as if to deny an accusation of injustice. "I am puzzled about the whole business. Why didn't the warders find it sooner? Why did they find it at all? Was it slipped in the lining? Or is the handwriting so bad as that? I know about the thing being gentlemanly; but surely they took his clothes! How could the message come? It must be the lining."

His face was turned up as honestly as a flat and floating fish, and I could say with corresponding mildness:

"I really do not know what you are talking about, you and your linings. But if you mean how could Southby get his message safely to his sister without the risks of interception, I should say there were no people more likely to do it successfully. The boy and girl were always great friends from childhood, and had, to my knowledge, one of those secret languages that children often have, which may easily have been turned afterwards into some sort of cypher. And now I come to think of it—"

The heavy-knobbed umbrella slipped from the seat and slammed on the gravel, and the priest stood upright.

“What an idiot I am!” he said. “Why, anybody might have thought of a cypher! That was a score for you, my friend. I suppose you know all about it now?”

I am certain he did not realise that he was repeating in sincerity what I had said in irony.

“No,” I answered, with real seriousness; “I do not know all about it, but I think it quite possible that you do. Tell me the story.”

“It is not a good story,” he said, in a rather stony way— “at least, the good thing about it is that it is over. But first let me say what I least like saying — that you must be prepared for a different view of a character that you knew well. I have thought a good deal about a certain kind of intellectual English lady, especially when she is at once aristocratic and provincial. I think she is judged much too easily. Or, perhaps, I should say, judged much too hardly; since she is supposed to be incapable of mortal passions and temptations. Let her decline champagne at dinner, let her be beautiful and know what is meant by dignity in dress, let her read a great many books and talk about high ideals, and you all assume that she alone of her kind cannot covet or lie; that her ideas are always simple, and her ideals always fulfilled. But, really and truly, my friend, by your account of it, the character was more mixed than that. Evelyn feigned an indisposition very cleverly. Assuming her to be blameless, I cannot see why she needed to feign anything. But, anyhow, it is scarcely one of the powers given to the saints. You ‘began to suspect’ that Evelyn already knew about the escape. Why didn’t she tell you she already knew about it? You were astonished that Superintendent Matthews had called, and she had been silent about it; but you supposed it was difficult to send. Why should it be difficult to send? You seem to have been sent for whenever you were really wanted. No; I will try to speak of this woman as of one for whose soul I will pray, and whose true defence I shall never hear. But while there are living people whose honour is in cruel danger undeservedly, I simply refuse to start with the assumption that Evelyn Donnington could do no wrong.”

The noble hills of Sussex looked as dreary as Yorkshire moors as he went on heavily, prodding the earth with his umbrella.

“The first facts in her defence, if she needed one, are that her father is a miser, that he has a violent temper combined with a rather Puritanic sort of family pride; and, above all, that she was afraid of him. Now, suppose she really wanted money, perhaps for a good purpose; or, again, perhaps not. She and her brother, you told me, had always had secret languages and plots; they are common among cowed and terrorised children. I firmly believe myself that she went a step further in some desperate strait, and that she was really and criminally responsible for the false document with which her brother seemed to be seeking financial help. We know there is often a family resemblance in handwritings almost amounting to facsimile. I cannot see, therefore, why there should not be a similar family resemblance in the flaws by which experts detect a forgery. Anyhow, the brother had a bad record, which goes for a great deal more than it ought with the police; and he was sent to gaol. I think you will agree that he has a very good record now."

"You mean," I said, curiously thrilled by the very restraint of his expression, "that Southby suffered all that time rather than speak?"

"Rejoice not against me, Satan, mine enemy," said Father Brown, "for when I fall I shall arise. This part of the story really is good."

After a silence he continued:

"When he was arrested, I am now almost certain, he had on him some letter or message from his sister. I hope and believe that it was some sort of penitent message. But whatever it was, it must have contained two things — some admission or allusion that made her own guilt clear, and some urgent request that her brother should come straight to her as soon as he was free to do so. Most important of all, it was not signed with a Christian name, but only 'Your unhappy sister.' "

"But, my good man," I cried, "you talk as if you had seen the letter!"

"I see it in its consequences," he answered. "The friendship with Mester, the quarrel with Kennington, the sister in Bath and the brother in the Priest's Room, came from that letter, and no other letter."

"The letter, however, was in cypher; and one very hard to follow, having been invented by children. Does that strike you as paradoxical? Don't you know that the hardest signs to read are arbitrary ones? And if two children agree that 'grunk' means bedtime and 'splosh' means Uncle William, it would take an expert much longer to learn this than to expose any system of substituted letters or numbers. Consequently, though the police found the paper, of course, it took them half-way through Southby's term to make head or tail of it. Then they knew that one of Southby's sisters was guilty, that he was innocent; and by this time they had the sense to see that he would never betray the truth. The rest, as I said, was simple and logical. The only other thing they could do was to take advantage of Southby being asked to go straight to his guilty correspondent. He was given every facility for escaping and communicating as quickly as possible, so long as the police could secure the separation of the sisters, by Mester getting the other one to Bath. Given that, the sister Southby went for must be the guilty one. And when, through those awful nights, the police gathered round you thick as wolves and still as ghosts — it was not for Southby they were waiting.”

“But why did they wait for anyone?” I asked suddenly, after a silence. “If they were sure, why didn’t they arrest?”

He nodded and sighed:

“Perhaps you’re right. Perhaps it’s best to take the Kennington case here. Well, of course, he knew all about it from the inside. You yourself noticed that he had privileges in that prison. It will grieve you, as a law-abiding person, to learn that he used his power to intercept what had been decided. A good deal can be done by missing appointments. A good deal more can be done by not missing people — vulgarly known as hitting them. He used every chance, right or wrong, to delay the arrest. One of the thousand small, desperate delays was ‘feigning illness.’ “

“Why did Southby call him a traitor?” I said suspiciously.

“On exceedingly good grounds,” said my friend. “Suppose you had broken prison in all innocence, and your friend sent his car for you and it took you back there? Suppose your friend offered to get you away in his yacht, and it took the wrong course, till overtaken by a motor-boat? Suppose Southby was trying to get to Sussex, and Kennington always headed him off towards Cornwall or Ireland or Normandy, what would you expect Southby to call him?”

“Well,” I said, “what would you call him?”

“Oh,” said Father Brown, “I call him a hero.”

I peered at his rather featureless face through the moony twilight; and then he suddenly rose and paced the path with the impatience of a schoolboy.

“If I could put pen to paper, I would write the best adventure story ever written about this. Was there ever such a situation? Southby was kicked backwards and forwards, as unconscious as a football, between two very able and vigorous men, one of whom wanted to make the footprints point towards the guilty sister, while the other wanted to twist the feet away at every turn. And Southby thought the friend of his house was his enemy, and the destroyer of his house his friend. The two that knew must fight in silence, for Mester could not speak without warning Southby, and Kennington could not speak without denouncing Evelyn. It is clear from Southby's words, about false friends and the sea, that Kennington eventually kidnapped Southby in a yacht, but lord knows in how many tangled woods, or river islands, or lanes leading nowhere, the same fight was fought; the fugitive and detective trying to keep the trail, the traitor and true lover trying to confuse it. When Mester won, and his men gathered round this house, the captain could do no more than come here and offer his help, but Evelyn would not open the door to him."

"But why not?"

"Because she had the fine side of fear as well as the bad side," said Father Brown. " 'Not a little afraid of life,' you said, with great penetration. She was afraid to go to prison; but, to her honour, she was afraid to get married, too. It is a type produced by all this refinement. My friend, I want to tell you and all your modern world a secret. You will never get to the good in people till you have been through the bad in them."

After a moment he added that we ought to be returning to the house, and walked yet more briskly in that direction.

"Of course," he remarked, as he did so, "the packet of banknotes you took through to Southby was only to help him away and spare him Evelyn's arrest. Mester's not a bad fellow for a 'tec. But she realised her danger, and was trying to get into the Priest's Room."

I was still brooding on the queer case of Kennington.

"Was not the glove found?" I asked.

"Was not the window broken?" he asked in return. "A man's glove twisted properly and loaded with nine pounds in gold, and probably a letter as well, will break most windows if it is slung by a man who has been a bowler. Of course, there was a note. And, of course, the note was imprudent. It left money for escape, and left the proofs of what she was escaping from."

"And then what happened to her?" I asked dully.

"Something of what happened to you," he said. "You also found the secret door difficult to open from outside. You also caught up that crooked curtain-rod or window bar to beat on it. You also saw the door opening slowly from within. But you did not see what she saw."

"And what did she see?" I said at last.

"She saw the man she had wronged most," said Father Brown.

"Do you mean Southby?"

"No," he said, "Southby has shown heroic virtue, and he is happy. The man she wronged most was a man who had never had, or tried to have, more than one virtue — a kind of acrid justice. And she had made him unjust all his life — made him pamper the wicked woman and ruin the righteous man. You told me in your notes that he often hid in the Priest's Room, to discover who was faithful or unfaithful. This time he came out holding a sword left in that room in the days when men hunted my religion. He found the letter, but, of course, he destroyed it after he had done — what he did. Yes, old friend, I can feel the horror on your face without seeing it. But, indeed, you modern people do not know how many kinds of men there are in the world. I am not talking of approval, but of sympathy — the sort of sympathy I give to Evelyn Donnington. Have you no sympathy with cold, barbaric justice, or with the awful appeasements of such an intellectual appetite? Have you no sympathy with the Brutus who killed his friend? Have you no sympathy with the monarch who killed his son? Have you no sympathy with Virginius, who killed — . But I think we must go in now."

We mounted the stairs in silence, but my surging soul expected some scene surpassing all the scenes of that tower. And in a sense I had it. The room was empty, save for Wellman, who stood behind an empty chair as impassively as if there had been a thousand guests.

"They have sent for Dr. Browning, sir," he said in colourless tones.

"What do you mean?" I cried. "There was no question about the death?"

"No, sir," he said, with a slight cough; "Dr. Browning required another doctor to be sent from Chichester, and they took Sir Borrow away."

The Mask of Midas

A man was standing outside a small shop, as rigidly as a wooden Highlander outside an old-fashioned tobacconist's. It was hard to believe that anyone would stand so steadily outside the shop unless he were the shopkeeper; but there was an almost grotesque incongruity between the shopkeeper and the shop. For the shop was one of those delightful dens of rubbish which children and the very wise explore with their eyes like a fairyland; but which many of a tidier and tamer taste are unable to distinguish from a dustbin. In short, it called itself in its prouder moments a curiosity shop; but was more generally called a junk shop; especially by the hard-headed and hustling commercial population of the industrial seaport in one of whose meaner streets it stood. Those who have a taste for such things will not need to have unrolled the tale of its treasures, of which the most precious were difficult to connect with any purpose whatever. Tiny models of fully-rigged ships sealed in bubbles of glass or glue or some queer Oriental gum; crystal balls in which snowstorms descended on very stolid human figures; enormous eggs that might have been laid by prehistoric birds; misshapen gourds that might have been swollen with poison rather than wine; queer weapons; queer musical instruments, and all the rest; and all sinking deeper and deeper in dust and disorder. The guardian standing outside such a shop might well be some decrepit Jew, with something of the dignity and long dress of the Arab; or some gypsy of a brazen and tropical beauty, hung with hoops of gold or brass. But the sentinel was something quite startlingly different. He was a lean, alert young man, in neat clothes of American cut, with the long, rather hard face so often seen in the Irish-American. He had a Stetson cocked over one eye and a stinking Pittsburgh cigar sticking out at a sharp angle from one corner of his mouth. If he had also had an automatic in his hip-pocket, those then gazing at him would not have been very much surprised. The name dimly printed above his shop was “Denis Hara”.

Those thus gazing at him happened to be persons of some importance; and even perhaps of some importance to him. But nobody could have guessed it from his flinty features and his angular repose. The most prominent of these was Colonel Grimes, the Chief Constable of that county. A loose-built man with long legs and a long head; trusted by those who knew him well, but not very popular even with his own class, because he showed distinct signs of wanting to be a policeman rather than a country gentleman. In short, the Constable had committed the subtle sin of preferring the Constabulary to the County. This eccentricity had encouraged his natural taciturnity; and he was, even for a capable detective, unusually silent and secretive about his plans and discoveries. His two companions, who knew him well, were all the more surprised when he stopped in front of the man with the cigar and spoke in a loud clear voice, very seldom heard from him in public.

"It is only fair to tell you, Mr. Hara, that my men have received information which justifies my obtaining a search-warrant to examine your premises. It may turn out, as I hope, that it will be unnecessary to incommode you further. But I must warn you that a watch is being kept on any movements of departure from this place."

"Are you all out to get one of my nice little toy ships done up in gum?" enquired Mr. Hara with calm. "Well, Colonel, I wouldn't like to set any limits to your free and glorious British Constitution; or I would rather doubt whether you can burgle my little grey home like that."

"You will find I am right," replied the Colonel; "in fact I am going straight to two of the magistrates, whose signatures are needed for the search-warrant."

The two men standing behind the Chief Constable exhibited fine though different shades of a faint mystification. Inspector Beltane, a big dark heavy man, reliable in his work if not very rapid in it, looked a little dazed as his superior turned sharply away. The third man was stumpy and sturdy, with a round black clerical hat and a round black clerical figure, as well as a round face which had looked up to that moment a little sleepy; but a sharper gleam shone between his screwed eyelids; and he also was looking at the Chief Constable; but with something a little more than mere bewilderment; rather as if a new notion had suddenly come into his head.

"Look here," said Colonel Grimes, "you fellows will be wanting your lunch; it's a shame to trail you about like this after three o'clock. Fortunately, the first man I want to see is in the bank we are just passing; and there's quite a decent restaurant next door. I'll dash round to the other man who is only in the next street, when I've settled you down to some grub. They are the only two J.P.s in this part of the town; and it's lucky they live so near together. The banker will do what I want straight away; so we'll just go in and settle that first."

An array of doors decorated with glass and gilding led them through a labyrinth of passages in the Casterville and County Bank; and the Chief Constable went straight to the inner sanctum, with which he seemed to be fairly familiar. There he found Sir Archer Anderson, the famous financial writer and organiser, and the head of this and many other highly respectable banking enterprises; a grave and graceful old gentleman with grey curly hair and a grey pointed beard of a rather old-fashioned cut; but dressed otherwise in a sober but exact version of the current fashion. A glance at him would suggest that he was quite at home with the County as well as the Constable; but he seemed to share something of the Constable's preference for work rather than play. He pushed a formidable block of documents on one side; and said a word of welcome, pointing to a chair and suggesting a readiness to do banking business at any moment.

"I'm afraid this isn't banking business," said Grimes, "but anyhow, my business won't interrupt yours for more than a minute or two. You're a magistrate, aren't you; well, the law requires me to have the signatures of two magistrates, for a search-warrant on premises I have reason to believe are very suspicious."

"Indeed," said Sir Archer politely. "What sort of suspicion?"

"Well," said Grimes, "it's rather a queer case, and quite new, I should say, in these parts. Of course we have our own little criminal population, you may say; and, what is quite different and much more natural, the ordinary disposition of down-and-outs to hang together, even a little outside the law. But it looks to me as if that man Hara, who's certainly an American, is also an American gangster. A gangster on a large scale and with a whole machinery of crime practically unknown in this country. To begin with, I don't know whether you know the very latest news of this neighbourhood?"

"Very possibly not," replied the banker, with a rather frosty smile. "I am not very well instructed in the police news; and I only came here recently to look over the affairs of the branch. Till then I was in London."

"A convict escaped yesterday," said the Colonel gravely. "You know there is a large penal settlement on the moors, a mile or two from this town. There are a good many men doing time there; but there is one less than there was the day before yesterday."

“Surely that is not so very unheard of,” said the other. “Prisoners do sometimes break prison, don’t they?”

“True,” assented the Chief Constable. “Perhaps that would not be so extraordinary in itself. What is extraordinary is that he has not only escaped but disappeared. Prisoners break prison; but they almost always go back to prison; or at least we get some notion of how they managed to get away. This man seems to have simply and suddenly vanished, like a ghost or a fairy, a few hundred yards from the prison gates. Now as I have sceptical doubts myself about whether he really is a ghost or a fairy, I must fall back on the only possible natural explanation. And that is that he was spirited away instantly in a car, almost certainly part of a whole organization of cars, to say nothing of spies and conspirators working out a completed plan. Now I take it as certain that his own friends and neighbours, however much they might sympathise, could not possibly organize anything like that. He is quite a poor man, accused of being a poacher; all his friends are poor and probably most of them poachers; and there is no doubt that he killed a game keeper. It’s only fair to say that some thought it ought to have been called manslaughter and not murder; indeed they had to commute the sentence to a long imprisonment; and since then, perhaps on a fairer reconsideration, they have reduced it to a comparatively short sentence. But somebody has shortened it very much more than that. And in a way which means money and petrol and practical experience in such raids; he certainly could not have done it for himself and none of his companions in the common way could have done it for him. Now I won’t bother you with the details of our discoveries; but I’m quite certain that the headquarters of the organization is in that little junk-shop round the corner; and our best chance is to get a warrant to search it at once. You will understand, Sir Archer, that this does not commit you to anything beyond the preliminary search; if the man in the shop is innocent, we are all quite free to testify to it; but I’m certain a preliminary search ought to be made, and for that I must have the signatures of two magistrates. That is why I am wasting your time with the police news; when it is so valuable in the financial news. If you feel you can sign such a document, I have it here ready for you; and there will be no excuse for my interrupting your own financial duties any further.”

He laid a paper in front of Sir Archer Anderson; and, after reading it rapidly, but with a frown of habitual responsibility, the banker picked up his pen and signed it.

The Chief Constable rose with rapid but warm expressions of obligation, and passed towards the door, merely remarking at random, as a man might talk about the weather, “I don’t suppose a business of your standing is affected by slumps or modern complications. But I’m told these are anxious days, sometimes, even for the most solid of the smaller corporations.”

Sir Archer Anderson rose at once swiftly and stiffly, with a certain air of indignation at being even momentarily associated with small corporations.

“If you know anything of the Casterville and County Bank,” he said, not without a faint touch of fire, “you will know it is not likely to be affected by anything or anybody.”

Colonel Grimes shepherded his friends out of the Bank and, with a certain benevolent despotism, deposited them in the restaurant next door; while he himself darted on to complete his task by pouncing on the other local magistrate; an old lawyer who was also an old friend, one Wicks by name, who had sometimes assisted him in details of legal theory. Inspector Beltane and Father Brown were left facing each other somewhat solemnly in the restaurant, to await his return.

“Am I wrong,” asked Father Brown with a friendly smile, “if I suspect that you are a little puzzled by something?”

“I wouldn’t say puzzled,” said the Inspector. “All that business with the banker was simple enough; but when you know a man very well, there is always a funny feeling when he doesn’t act quite like himself. Now the Colonel is the most silent and secret worker I’ve ever known in the police. Often he never tells the colleagues nearest to him what’s in his mind at the moment. Why did he stand talking at the top of his voice in a public street to a public enemy: to tell him he was going to raid his shop? Other people, let alone ourselves, were beginning to gather and listen. Why the devil should he tell this godforsaken gunman that he was going to raid his shop? Why didn’t he simply raid it?”

“The answer is,” said Father Brown, “that he wasn’t going to raid his shop.”

“Then why did he shout to the whole town that he was going to?”

“Well, I think,” said Father Brown, “so that the whole town might talk about his visit to the gangster and not notice his visit to the banker. The only words he really wanted to say were those last few words he said to the banker; watching for the reaction. But if there are any rumours about the bank, the town would have been all up in the air about his going straight to the bank. He had to have a good ordinary reason for going there; and he could hardly have had a better one than asking two ordinary magistrates to sign an ordinary document. Quite a flight of imagination."

Inspector Beltane was gaping at him across the table.

"What on earth do you mean?" he demanded at last.

"I mean," replied the priest, "that perhaps Colonel Grimes was not so far out in talking of the poacher as a fairy. Or shall we say a ghost?"

"You can't possibly mean," said the Inspector incredulously, "that Grimes invented the murdered gamekeeper and the escaped convict out of his own head? Why, he told me about them himself beforehand, as a bit of ordinary police-business."

"I wouldn't go quite so far as that," said Father Brown indifferently. "There may be some such local story; but it's got nothing to do with the story Grimes is after just now. I wish it had."

"Why do you say that?" asked the other.

Father Brown looked him full in the face with grey eyes of unmistakable gravity and candour.

"Because I am out of my depth," he said. "Oh, I know well enough when I'm out of my depth; and I knew I should be, when I found we were hunting a fraudulent financier instead of an ordinary human murderer. You see, I don't quite know how I came to take a hand originally in this sort of detective business; but almost all my experience was with ordinary human murderers. Now murder's almost always human and personal; but modern theft has been allowed to become quite impersonal. It isn't only secret; it's anonymous; almost avowedly anonymous. Even if you die, you may catch a glimpse of the face of the man who stabbed you. But however long you live, you may never get even a glimpse of the name of the man who robbed you. My first case was just a small private affair about a man's head being cut off and another head put on instead; I wish I were back among quiet homely little idylls like that. I wasn't out of my depth with them."

"A very idyllic incident indeed," said the Inspector.

"A very individual incident, anyhow," replied the priest. "Not like all this irresponsible officialism in finance. They can't cut off heads as they cut off hot water, by the decision of a Board or a Committee; but they can cut off dues or dividends in that way. Or again, although two heads could be put on one man, we all know that one man hasn't really got two heads. But one firm can have two heads; or two faces, or half-a hundred faces. No, I wish you could lead me back to my murderous poacher and my murdered gamekeeper. I should understand all about them; but for the unfortunate fact that they possibly never existed.”

“Oh this is all nonsense,” cried the Inspector, trying to throw off an atmosphere. “I tell you Grimes did talk about it before. I rather fancy the poacher would have been released soon anyhow, though he did kill the other man pretty savagely, bashing him again and again with the butt of his gun. But he’d found the gamekeeper pretty indefensibly occupied on his own premises. In fact, the gamekeeper was poaching this time. He hadn’t a good character in the neighbourhood; and there was certainly what’s called provocation. Sort of Unwritten Law business.”

“That’s just what I mean,” said Father Brown. “Modern murder still, very often, has some remote and perverted connection with an unwritten law. But modern robbery takes the form of littering the world with paper and parchment, covered merely with written lawlessness.”

“Well, I can’t make head or tail of all this,” said the Inspector. “There is the poacher who is a prisoner, or an escaped prisoner; there is, or was the gamekeeper; and there is, to all mortal appearance, the gangster. What you mean by starting all this wild stuff about the bank next door is more than I can imagine.”

“That’s what troubles me,” said Father Brown in a sobered and humbled tone. “The Bank next door is beyond my imagination.”

At this moment, the restaurant door swung open and the Colonel returned with a swing of triumph; trailing behind him a little lively figure with white hair and a face wrinkled with smiles. It was the other magistrate, whose signature was so essential to the required document.

“Mr. ‘Wicks,” said the Colonel, with an introductory gesture, “is the best modern expert in all matters of financial fraud. It is sheer luck that he happens to be a J.P. in this district.”

Inspector Beltane gave a gulp and then gasped. “You don’t mean to say Father Brown was right.”

“I have known it happen,” said Colonel Grimes, with moderation.

“If Father Brown said that Sir Archer Anderson is a colossal swindler, he was most certainly right,” said Mr. Wicks. “I needn’t give you all the steps of the proof here; in fact it will be wiser to give only the earlier stages of it even to the police — and the swindler. We must watch him carefully; and see that he takes no advantage of any mistake of ours. But I think we’d better go round and have a rather more candid interview with him than you seem to have had; an interview in which the poacher and the junk-shop will not perhaps be so exclusively prominent. I think I can let him know enough of what we know to wake him up, without running any risk of libel or damages. And there is always the chance he will let something out, in the very attempt to keep it in. Come, we have heard very disquieting rumours about the business, and want this or that explained on the spot. That is our official position at present.” And he sprang up, as if with the mere alertness or restlessness of youth.

The second interview with Sir Archer Anderson was certainly very different in its tone, and especially in its termination. They had gone there without any final determination to challenge the great banker; but they soon found that it was he who was already determined to challenge them. His white moustaches were curled like silver sabres; his white pointed beard was thrust forward like a spike of steel. Before any of them had said more than a few sentences, he stood up and struck the table.

“This is the first time that the Casterville and County Bank has been referred to in this fashion; and I promise you it shall be the last. If my own reputation did not already stand too high for such grotesque calumnies, the credit of the institution itself would alone have made them ludicrous. Leave this place, gentlemen, and go away and amuse yourselves with exposing the High Court of Chancery or inventing naughty stories about the Archbishop of Canterbury.”

“That is all very well,” said Wicks, with his head at an angle of pertinacity and pugnacity like a bulldog, “but I have a few facts here, Sir Archer, which you will be bound sooner or later to explain.”

“To say the least of it,” said the Colonel in a milder tone, “there are a good many things that we want to know rather more about.”

The voice of Father Brown came in like something curiously cool and distant, as if it came from another room, or from the street outside, or at least from a long way off.

“Don’t you think, Colonel, that we know now all that we want to know?”

“No,” said the Colonel shortly, “I am a policeman. I may think a great deal and think I am right. But I don’t know it.”

“Oh,” said Father Brown, opening his eyes wide for a moment. “I don’t mean what you think you know.”

“Well, I suppose it’s the same as what you think you know,” said Grimes rather gruffly.

“I’m awfully sorry,” said Father Brown penitently, “but what I know is quite different.”

The air of doubt and difference, in which the small group moved off, leaving the haughty financier apparently master of the field after all, led them to drift once more to the restaurant, for an early tea, a smoke and some attempt at an explanation all round.

“I always knew you were an exasperating person,” said the policeman to the priest, “but I have generally had some sort of wild guess about what you meant. My impression at this moment is that you have gone mad.”

“It’s odd you should say that,” said Father Brown; “because I’ve tried to discover my own deficiencies in a good many directions, and the only thing I think I really know about myself is that I am not mad. I pay the penalty, of course, in being dull. But I have never to my knowledge lost touch with reality; and it seems queer to me that men so brilliant as you are can lose it so quickly.”

“What do you mean — reality?” demanded Grimes after a bristling silence.

“I mean common sense,” said Father Brown, with one of the explosions so rare in him that it sounded like a gun. “I’ve said already that I’m out of my depth, about all this financial complexity and corruption. But, hang it all, there is a way of testing things by human beings. I don’t know anything about finance; but I have known financiers. In a general way, I’ve known fraudulent financiers. But you must know much more about them than I do. And yet you can swallow an impossibility like that.”

“An impossibility like what?” enquired the staring Colonel.

Father Brown had suddenly leaned across the table, with piercing eyes fixed on Wicks, with an intensity he rarely showed.

“Mr. Wicks, you ought to know better. I’m only a poor parson, and of course I know no better. After all, our friends the police do not often meet bankers; except when a casual cashier cuts his throat. But you must have been perpetually interviewing bankers; and especially bankrupt bankers. Haven’t you been in this precise position twenty times before? Haven’t you again and again had the pluck to throw the first suspicions on very solid persons, as you did this afternoon? Haven’t you talked to twenty or thirty financiers who were crashing, just about a month or two before they crashed?"

"Well, yes," said Mr. Wicks slowly and carefully, "I suppose I have."

"Well," asked Father Brown, "did any single one of the others ever talk like that?"

The little figure of the lawyer gave the faintest imperceptible start; so that one could say no more than that he was sitting up a shade straighter than before.

"Did you ever in your born days," asked the priest with all his new thrusting emphasis, "know a handler of hanky-panky finance who got on the high horse at the first flash of suspicion; and told the police not to dare to meddle with the secrets of his sacred bank? Why, it was like asking the Chief Constable to raid his bank and arrest him on the spot. Well, you know about these things and I don't. But I'd risk a long bet that every single dubious financier you have ever known has done exactly the opposite. Your first queries would have been received not with anger but amusement; if it ever went so far, it would have ended in a bland and complete answer to every one of the nine hundred and ninety-nine questions you had to ask. Explanations! They swim in explanations! Do you suppose a slippery financier has never been asked questions before?"

"But hang it all, you generalise too much," said Grimes. "You seem to be quite captivated with your vision of the perfect swindler. But after all even swindlers are not perfect. It doesn't prove much that one bankrupt banker broke down and lost his nerve."

"Father Brown is right," said Wicks, interceding suddenly after a period of digestive silence. "It's quite true that all that swagger and flamboyant defiance couldn't be the very first line of defence for a swindle. But what else could it be? Respectable bankers don't throw out the banner and blow the trumpet and draw the sword, at a moment's notice, any more than disreputable bankers."

"Besides," said Grimes, "why should he get on the high horse at all? Why should he order us all out of the bank, if he has nothing to hide?"

"Well," said Father Brown very slowly, "I never said he had nothing to hide."

The meeting broke up in a silent, dazed disorder, in which the pertinacious Beltane hooked the priest by the arm for an instant and held him.

"Do you or do you not mean," he asked harshly, "that the banker is not a suspect?"

"No," said Father Brown, "I mean that the suspect is not a banker."

As they filed out of the restaurant, with movements much more vague and groping than were normal to any of them, they were brought up short by a shock and noise in the street outside. It first gave the impression of people breaking windows all along the street; but an instant of nervous recovery enabled them to localise it. It was the gilt glass-doors and windows of the pompous building they had entered that morning; the sacred enclosure of the Casterville and County Bank, that was shaken from within by a din like a dynamite explosion, but proving to be in fact only the direct dynamic destructiveness of man. The Chief Constable and the Inspector darted through the shattered glass-doorways to the dark interior, and returned with faces fixed in astonishment; even more assured and stolid for being astonished.

"There's no doubt about it now," said the Inspector, "he's clubbed the man we left to watch to the ground with a poker; and hurled a cash-box so as to catch in the waistcoat the first man who came in to find out the trouble. He must be a wild beast."

Amid all the grotesque bewilderment, Mr. Wicks the lawyer turned with a gesture of apology and compliment and said to Father Brown, "Well, Sir, you have completely convinced me. He is certainly an entirely new rendering of the absconding banker."

"Well, you must send our men in to hold him at once," said the Constable to the Inspector; "or he'll break up the whole town."

"Yes," said Father Brown, "he's a pretty violent fellow; it's his great temptation. Think how he used his gun blindly as a club on the game-keeper, bringing it down again and again; but never having even the sense to fire. Of course, that is the sort of man who mismanages most things, even murders. But he does generally manage to break prison."

His companions gazed on him with faces that seemed to grow rounder and rounder with wonder; but they got no enlightenment out of his own round and commonplace countenance, before he turned away and went slowly down the street.

"And so," said Father Brown, beaming round at the company over a very mild lager in the restaurant, and looking rather like Mr. Pickwick in a village club; "and so we come back again to our dear old rustic tale of the poacher and the gamekeeper after all. It does so inexpressibly raise my spirits dealing with a cosy fireside crime instead of all this blank bewildering fog of finance; a fog really full of ghosts and shadows. Well, of course you all know the old, old story. At your mothers' knees you have heard it; but it is so important, my friends, to keep those old stories clear in our minds as they were told to us. This little rural tale has been told often enough. A man is imprisoned for a crime of passion, shows a similar violence in captivity, knocks down a warder and escapes in a mist on the moor. He has a stroke of luck; for he meets a gentleman who is well-dressed and presentable, and he forces him to change clothes."

"Yes, I've heard that story often," said Grimes frowning. "You say it is important to remember the storyâ€¦"

"It is important to remember the story," said Father Brown, "because it is a very clear and correct account of what did not happen."

"And what did happen?" demanded the Inspector.

"Only the flat contrary," said Father Brown. "A small but neat emendation. It was not the convict who set out looking for a well-dressed gentleman, that he might disguise himself in his clothes. It was the gentleman who set out on the moor looking for a convict; that he might enjoy the ecstasy of wearing a convict's clothes. He knew there was a convict loose on the moor; and he ardently wanted his clothes. He probably knew also that there was a well-organised scheme for picking up the convict and rushing him rapidly off the moor. It is not quite certain what part Denis Hara and his gang played in this business; or whether they were cognisant only of the first plot or of the second. But I think it probable they were working for the poacher's friends, and merely in the interest of the poacher, who had very wide public sympathy among the poorer population. I prefer to think that our friend the well-dressed gentleman effected his own little transformation scene by his own native talents. He was a very well-dressed gentleman, being clad in very fashionable gents' suitings, as the tailors say; also with beautiful white hair and moustaches etc. which he owed rather to the barber than the tailor. He had found this very complete costume useful at many times of his life; and you must remember he had only appeared for a very short time as yet, in this particular town and bank. On hailing at last the figure of the convict whose clothes he coveted, he verified his information that he was a man of much the same general figure as himself; and the rest consisted merely of covering the convict with the hat, the wig, the whiskers, the splendid raiment, until the warder he knocked on the head would hardly have known him. Then our brilliant financier put on the convict's clothes; and felt, for the first time for months and perhaps years, that he had escaped and was free.

"For he had no band of poor sympathisers who would help or hide him if they knew the truth. He had no movement in his favour, among the more decent lawyers and governors, suggesting that he had suffered enough or that his liberation might soon be allowable. He had no friends even in the underworld; for he had always been an ornament of the upper world; the world of our conquerors and our masters, whom we allow so easily to have the upper hand. He was one of the modern magicians; he had a genius for finance; and his thefts were thefts from thousands of the poor. When he did cross a line (a pretty faint line, in modern law), when the world did find him out, then the whole world would be against him. I fancy he did subconsciously look towards the prison as a home. We don't know exactly what his plans were; even if the prison authorities captured him and took the trouble to prove by prints and so on that he was not the escaped convict, it's not easy to see what else they could prove against him, at this stage. But I think it more likely that he knew Hara's organisation would help him, and hurry him out of the country without a moment's delay. He may have had dealings with Hara, neither perhaps telling the whole truth; such compromises are common in America between the big business man and the racketeer; because they are both really in the same business.

"Nor was there much trouble in persuading the convict, I imagine. It would seem to him at sight a scheme very hopeful for himself; perhaps he thought it was part of Hara's scheme. Anyhow, the convict got rid of the clothes of conviction, and stepped in first class clothes into a first class position where he might be socially acceptable and at least consider his next move in peace. But, heavens, what an irony! What a trap; what a trick of inverted doom! A man breaking jail nearly at the end of his sentence, for an obscure half-forgiven crime, delighting to dress himself up like a dandy in the costume of the world's greatest criminal, to be hunted tomorrow by searchlights round the whole earth. Sir Archer Anderson has entrapped a good many people in his time; but he never entrapped a man in such a tragedy as the man he benevolently clothed with his best clothes on the moor."

“Well,” said Grimes goodhumouredly, “now you have given us the tip, we can probably prove it all right; because the convict anyhow will have had his finger-prints taken.”

Father Brown bowed his head with a vague gesture as of awe and reverence. “Of course,” he said, “Sir Archer Anderson has never had his prints taken. My dear Sir! A man in that position.”

“The truth is,” said Wicks, “that nobody seems to know very much about him; prints or anything else. When I started studying his ways, I had to start with a blank map that only afterwards turned into a labyrinth. I do happen to know something about such labyrinths; but this was more labyrinthine than the others.”

“It’s all a labyrinth to me,” said the priest with a sigh. “I said I was out of my depth in all this financial business. The one and only thing I was quite sure of was the sort of man who sat opposite me. And I was certain he was much too jumpy and nervy to be a swindler.”

Index of Father Brown Stories

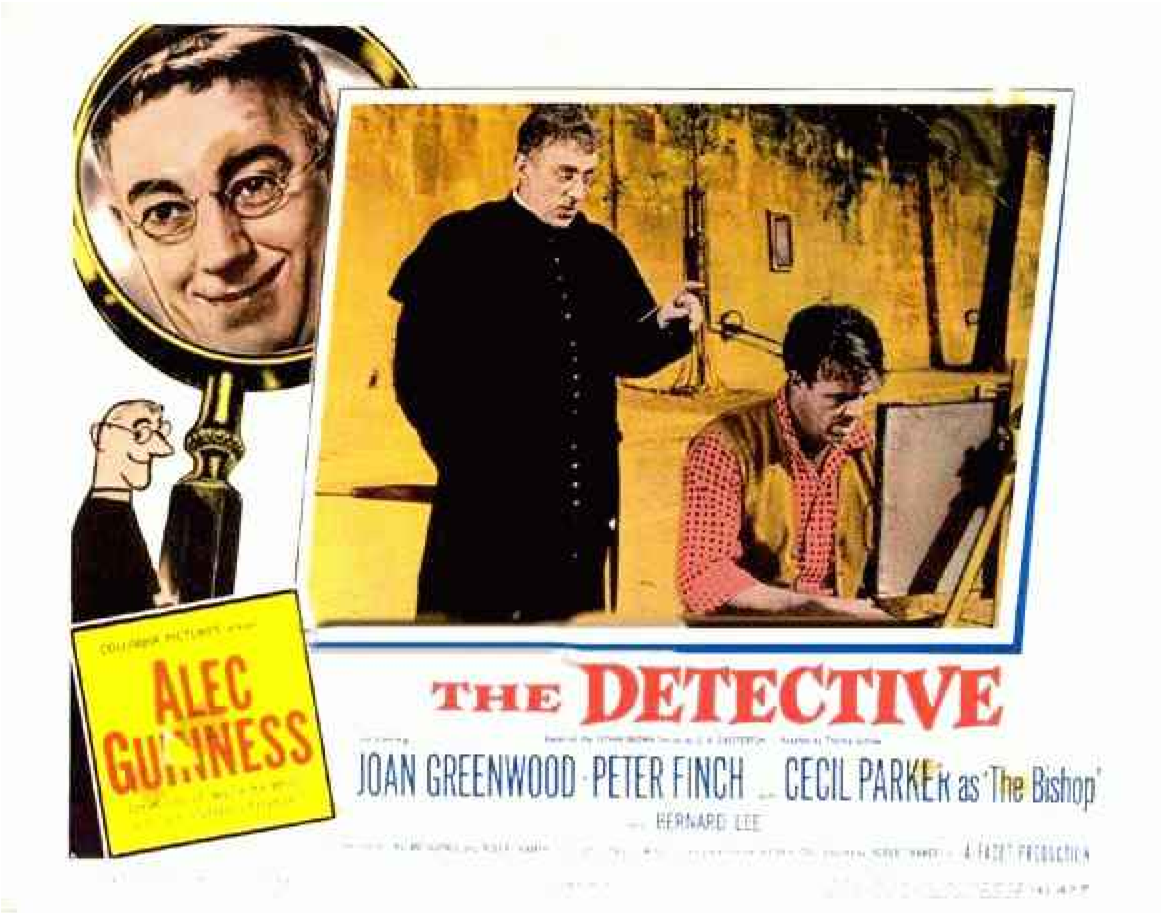
ALEC GUINNESS
THE DETECTIVE
JOAN GREENWOOD · PETER FINCH
CECIL PARKER as 'The Bishop'
BERNARD LEE
A FACET PRODUCTION

The 1954 film adaptation with Alec Guinness starring as Father Brown

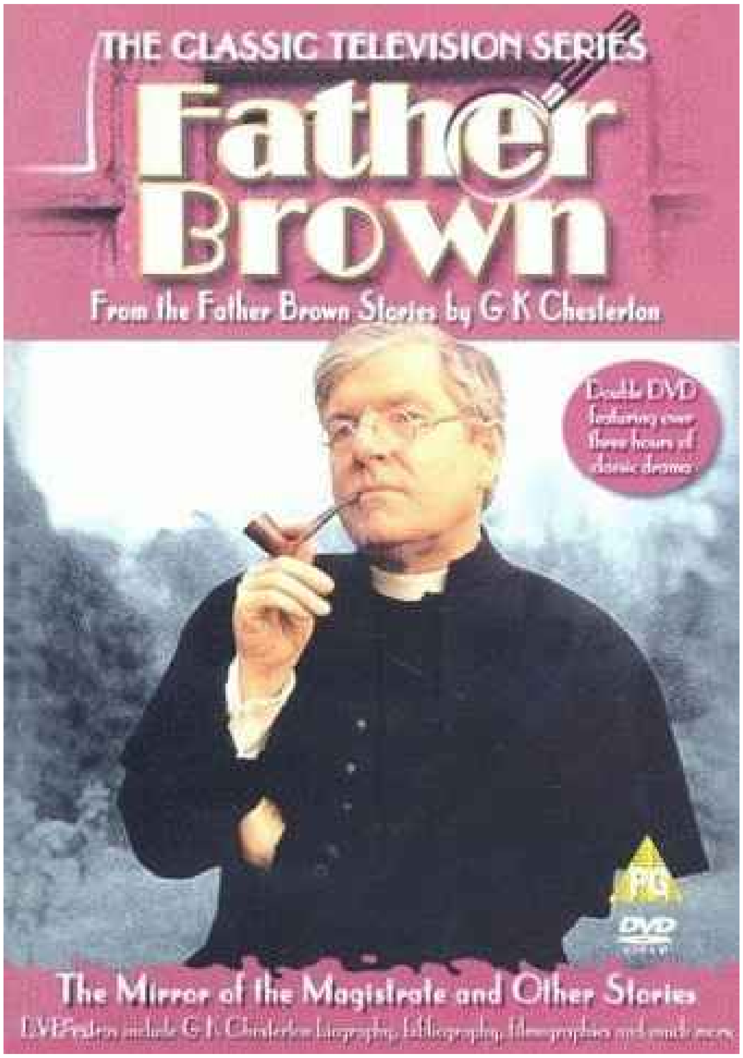
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Kenneth Moore as Father Brown in the 1974 TV series

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The Oracle of the Dog
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The Curse of the Golden Cross
The Dagger with Wings
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The Ghost of Gideon Wise
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The Quick One
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The Green Man
The Pursuit of Mr Blue
The Crime of the Communist
The Point of a Pin
The Insoluble Problem
The Vampire of the Village
The Donnington Affair
The Mask of Midas

The Novels

Chesterton, aged 24

THE NAPOLEON OF NOTTING HILL

Chesterton's first novel was published in 1904 and is set in London in 1984. Although based in the future, the novel portrays an alternative reality of the time when the novel was published, with no advances in technology or changes in the class system. However, Chesterton introduces the concept of an impersonal government, which elects a randomly chosen king.

The dreary succession of randomly selected Kings is disrupted when Auberon Quin, who cares for nothing but 'a good joke', is chosen. To amuse himself, he institutes elaborate costumes for the provosts of the districts of London. All are bored by the King's antics except for one earnest young man who takes the cry for regional pride

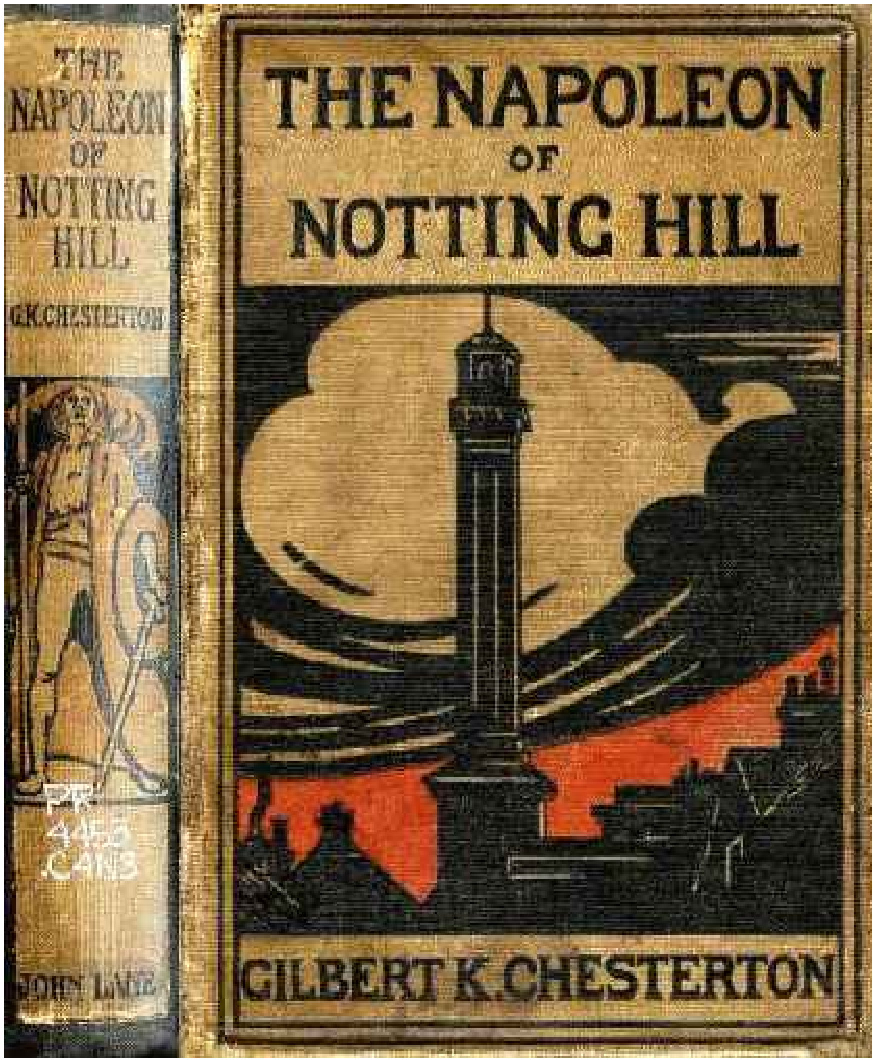
THE NAPOLEON OF NOTTING HILL
G.K. CHESTERTON
PR 4453 .C4N3
JOHN LANE
THE NAPOLEON OF NOTTING HILL
GILBERT K. CHESTERTON

The first edition

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Chesterton, close to the time of publication

TO HILAIRE BELLOC

For every tiny town or place
God made the stars especially;
Babies look up with owlish face
And see them tangled in a tree:
You saw a moon from Sussex Downs,
A Sussex moon, untravelled still,
I saw a moon that was the town's,
The largest lamp on Campden Hill.

Yea; Heaven is everywhere at home
The big blue cap that always fits,
And so it is (be calm; they come
To goal at last, my wandering wits),
So is it with the heroic thing;
This shall not end for the world's end,
And though the sullen engines swing,
Be you not much afraid, my friend.

This did not end by Nelson's urn
Where an immortal England sits —
Nor where your tall young men in turn
Drank death like wine at Austerlitz.
And when the pedants bade us mark
What cold mechanic happenings
Must come; our souls said in the dark,
"Belike; but there are likelier things."

Likelier across these flats afar
These sulky levels smooth and free
The drums shall crash a waltz of war
And Death shall dance with Liberty;
Likelier the barricades shall blare
Slaughter below and smoke above,
And death and hate and hell declare
That men have found a thing to love.

Far from your sunny uplands set
I saw the dream; the streets I trod
The lit straight streets shot out and met
The starry streets that point to God.
This legend of an epic hour
A child I dreamed, and dream it still,
Under the great grey water-tower
That strikes the stars on Campden Hill.
G. K. C.

BOOK I

Chapter I — Introductory Remarks on the Art of Prophecy

The human race, to which so many of my readers belong, has been playing at children’s games from the beginning, and will probably do it till the end, which is a nuisance for the few people who grow up. And one of the games to which it is most attached is called “Keep to-morrow dark,” and which is also named (by the rustics in Shropshire, I have no doubt) “Cheat the Prophet.” The players listen very carefully and respectfully to all that the clever men have to say about what is to happen in the next generation. The players then wait until all the clever men are dead, and bury them nicely. They then go and do something else. That is all. For a race of simple tastes, however, it is great fun.

For human beings, being children, have the childish wilfulness and the childish secrecy. And they never have from the beginning of the world done what the wise men have seen to be inevitable. They stoned the false prophets, it is said; but they could have stoned true prophets with a greater and juster enjoyment. Individually, men may present a more or less rational appearance, eating, sleeping, and scheming. But humanity as a whole is changeful, mystical, fickle, delightful. Men are men, but Man is a woman.

But in the beginning of the twentieth century the game of Cheat the Prophet was made far more difficult than it had ever been before. The reason was, that there were so many prophets and so many prophecies, that it was difficult to elude all their ingenuities. When a man did something free and frantic and entirely his own, a horrible thought struck him afterwards; it might have been predicted. Whenever a duke climbed a lamp-post, when a dean got drunk, he could not be really happy, he could not be certain that he was not fulfilling some prophecy. In the beginning of the twentieth century you could not see the ground for clever men. They were so common that a stupid man was quite exceptional, and when they found him, they followed him in crowds down the street and treasured him up and gave him some high post in the State. And all these clever men were at work giving accounts of what would happen in the next age, all quite clear, all quite keen-sighted and ruthless, and all quite different. And it seemed that the good old game of hoodwinking your ancestors could not really be managed this time, because the ancestors neglected meat and sleep and practical politics, so that they might meditate day and night on what their descendants would be likely to do.

But the way the prophets of the twentieth century went to work was this. They took something or other that was certainly going on in their time, and then said that it would go on more and more until something extraordinary happened. And very often they added that in some odd place that extraordinary thing had happened, and that it showed the signs of the times.

Thus, for instance, there were Mr. H. G. Wells and others, who thought that science would take charge of the future; and just as the motor-car was quicker than the coach, so some lovely thing would be quicker than the motor-car; and so on for ever. And there arose from their ashes Dr. Quilp, who said that a man could be sent on his machine so fast round the world that he could keep up a long, chatty conversation in some old-world village by saying a word of a sentence each time he came round. And it was said that the experiment had been tried on an apoplectic old major, who was sent round the world so fast that there seemed to be (to the inhabitants of some other star) a continuous band round the earth of white whiskers, red complexion and tweeds — a thing like the ring of Saturn.

Then there was the opposite school. There was Mr. Edward Carpenter, who thought we should in a very short time return to Nature, and live simply and slowly as the animals do. And Edward Carpenter was followed by James Pickie, D.D. (of Pocohontas College), who said that men were immensely improved by grazing, or taking their food slowly and continuously, after the manner of cows. And he said that he had, with the most encouraging results, turned city men out on all fours in a field covered with veal cutlets. Then Tolstoy and the Humanitarians said that the world was growing more merciful, and therefore no one would ever desire to kill. And Mr. Mick not only became a vegetarian, but at length declared vegetarianism doomed (“shedding,” as he called it finely, “the green blood of the silent animals”), and predicted that men in a better age would live on nothing but salt. And then came the pamphlet from Oregon (where the thing was tried), the pamphlet called “Why should Salt suffer?” and there was more trouble.

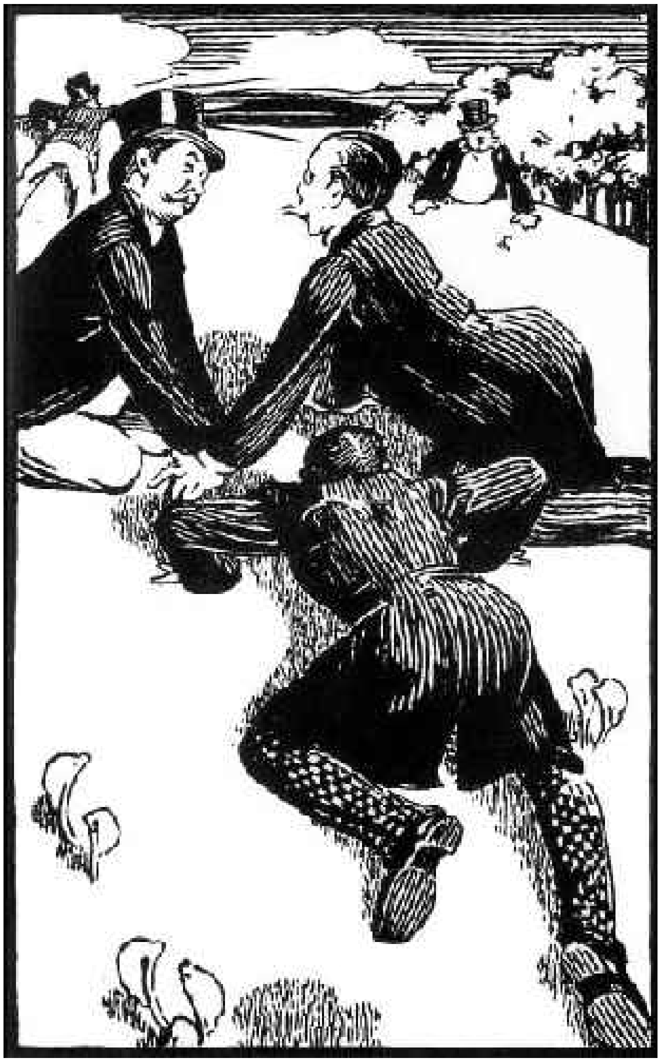

CITY MEN OUT ON ALL FOURS IN A FIELD COVERED WITH VEAL CUTLETS.

And on the other hand, some people were predicting that the lines of kinship would become narrower and sterner. There was Mr. Cecil Rhodes, who thought that the one thing of the future was the British Empire, and that there would be a gulf between those who were of the Empire and those who were not, between the Chinaman in Hong Kong and the Chinaman outside, between the Spaniard on the Rock of Gibraltar and the Spaniard off it, similar to the gulf between man and the lower animals. And in the same way his impetuous friend, Dr. Zoppi ("the Paul of Anglo-Saxonism"), carried it yet further, and held that, as a result of this view, cannibalism should be held to mean eating a member of the Empire, not eating one of the subject peoples, who should, he said, be killed without needless pain. His horror at the idea of eating a man in British Guiana showed how they misunderstood his stoicism who thought him devoid of feeling. He was, however, in a hard position; as it was said that he had attempted the experiment, and, living in London, had to subsist entirely on Italian organ-grinders. And his end was terrible, for just when he had begun, Sir Paul Swiller read his great paper at the Royal Society, proving that the savages were not only quite right in eating their enemies, but right on moral and hygienic grounds, since it was true that the qualities of the enemy, when eaten, passed into the eater. The notion that the nature of an Italian organ-man was irrevocably growing and burgeoning inside him was almost more than the kindly old professor could bear.

There was Mr. Benjamin Kidd, who said that the growing note of our race would be the care for and knowledge of the future. His idea was developed more powerfully by William Borker, who wrote that passage which every schoolboy knows by heart, about men in future ages weeping by the graves of their descendants, and tourists being shown over the scene of the historic battle which was to take place some centuries afterwards.

And Mr. Stead, too, was prominent, who thought that England would in the twentieth century be united to America; and his young lieutenant, Graham Podge, who included the states of France, Germany, and Russia in the American Union, the State of Russia being abbreviated to Ra.

There was Mr. Sidney Webb, also, who said that the future would see a continuously increasing order and neatness in the life of the people, and his poor friend Fipps, who went mad and ran about the country with an axe, hacking branches off the trees whenever there were not the same number on both sides.

All these clever men were prophesying with every variety of ingenuity what would happen soon, and they all did it in the same way, by taking something they saw “going strong,” as the saying is, and carrying it as far as ever their imagination could stretch. This, they said, was the true and simple way of anticipating the future. “Just as,” said Dr. Pellkins, in a fine passage, — “just as when we see a pig in a litter larger than the other pigs, we know that by an unalterable law of the Inscrutable it will some day be larger than an elephant, — just as we know, when we see weeds and dandelions growing more and more thickly in a garden, that they must, in spite of all our efforts, grow taller than the chimney-pots and swallow the house from sight, so we know and reverently acknowledge, that when any power in human politics has shown for any period of time any considerable activity, it will go on until it reaches to the sky.”

And it did certainly appear that the prophets had put the people (engaged in the old game of Cheat the Prophet) in a quite unprecedented difficulty. It seemed really hard to do anything without fulfilling some of their prophecies.

But there was, nevertheless, in the eyes of labourers in the streets, of peasants in the fields, of sailors and children, and especially women, a strange look that kept the wise men in a perfect fever of doubt. They could not fathom the motionless mirth in their eyes. They still had something up their sleeve; they were still playing the game of Cheat the Prophet.

Then the wise men grew like wild things, and swayed hither and thither, crying, “What can it be? What can it be? What will London be like a century hence? Is there anything we have not thought of? Houses upside down — more hygienic, perhaps? Men walking on hands — make feet flexible, don’t you know? Moon ... motor-cars ... no heads....” And so they swayed and wondered until they died and were buried nicely.

Then the people went and did what they liked. Let me no longer conceal the painful truth. The people had cheated the prophets of the twentieth century. When the curtain goes up on this story, eighty years after the present date, London is almost exactly like what it is now.

Chapter II — The Man in Green

Very few words are needed to explain why London, a hundred years hence, will be very like it is now, or rather, since I must slip into a prophetic past, why London, when my story opens, was very like it was in those enviable days when I was still alive.

The reason can be stated in one sentence. The people had absolutely lost faith in revolutions. All revolutions are doctrinal — such as the French one, or the one that introduced Christianity. For it stands to common sense that you cannot upset all existing things, customs, and compromises, unless you believe in something outside them, something positive and divine. Now, England, during this century, lost all belief in this. It believed in a thing called Evolution. And it said, “All theoretic changes have ended in blood and ennui. If we change, we must change slowly and safely, as the animals do. Nature’s revolutions are the only successful ones. There has been no conservative reaction in favour of tails.”

And some things did change. Things that were not much thought of dropped out of sight. Things that had not often happened did not happen at all. Thus, for instance, the actual physical force ruling the country, the soldiers and police, grew smaller and smaller, and at last vanished almost to a point. The people combined could have swept the few policemen away in ten minutes: they did not, because they did not believe it would do them the least good. They had lost faith in revolutions.

Democracy was dead; for no one minded the governing class governing. England was now practically a despotism, but not an hereditary one. Some one in the official class was made King. No one cared how: no one cared who. He was merely an universal secretary.

In this manner it happened that everything in London was very quiet. That vague and somewhat depressed reliance upon things happening as they have always happened, which is with all Londoners a mood, had become an assumed condition. There was really no reason for any man doing anything but the thing he had done the day before.

There was therefore no reason whatever why the three young men who had always walked up to their Government office together should not walk up to it together on this particular wintry and cloudy morning. Everything in that age had become mechanical, and Government clerks especially. All those clerks assembled regularly at their posts. Three of those clerks always walked into town together. All the neighbourhood knew them: two of them were tall and one short. And on this particular morning the short clerk was only a few seconds late to join the other two as they passed his gate: he could have overtaken them in three strides; he could have called after them easily. But he did not.

For some reason that will never be understood until all souls are judged (if they are ever judged; the idea was at this time classed with fetish worship) he did not join his two companions, but walked steadily behind them. The day was dull, their dress was dull, everything was dull; but in some odd impulse he walked through street after street, through district after district, looking at the backs of the two men, who would have swung round at the sound of his voice. Now, there is a law written in the darkest of the Books of Life, and it is this: If you look at a thing nine hundred and ninety-nine times, you are perfectly safe; if you look at it the thousandth time, you are in frightful danger of seeing it for the first time.

So the short Government official looked at the coat-tails of the tall Government officials, and through street after street, and round corner after corner, saw only coat-tails, coat-tails, and again coat-tails — when, he did not in the least know why, something happened to his eyes.

Two black dragons were walking backwards in front of him. Two black dragons were looking at him with evil eyes. The dragons were walking backwards it was true, but they kept their eyes fixed on him none the less. The eyes which he saw were, in truth, only the two buttons at the back of a frock-coat: perhaps some traditional memory of their meaningless character gave this half-witted prominence to their gaze. The slit between the tails was the nose-line of the monster: whenever the tails flapped in the winter wind the dragons licked their lips. It was only a momentary fancy, but the small clerk found it imbedded in his soul ever afterwards. He never could again think of men in frock-coats except as dragons walking backwards. He explained afterwards, quite tactfully and nicely, to his two official friends, that (while feeling an inexpressible regard for each of them) he could not seriously regard the face of either of them as anything but a kind of tail. It was, he admitted, a handsome tail — a tail elevated in the air. But if, he said, any true friend of theirs wished to see their faces, to look into the eyes of their soul, that friend must be allowed to walk reverently round behind them, so as to see them from the rear. There he would see the two black dragons with the blind eyes.

But when first the two black dragons sprang out of the fog upon the small clerk, they had merely the effect of all miracles — they changed the universe. He discovered the fact that all romantics know — that adventures happen on dull days, and not on sunny ones. When the chord of monotony is stretched most tight, then it breaks with a sound like song. He had scarcely noticed the weather before, but with the four dead eyes glaring at him he looked round and realised the strange dead day.

The morning was wintry and dim, not misty, but darkened with that shadow of cloud or snow which steeps everything in a green or copper twilight. The light there is on such a day seems not so much to come from the clear heavens as to be a phosphorescence clinging to the shapes themselves. The load of heaven and the clouds is like a load of waters, and the men move like fishes, feeling that they are on the floor of a sea. Everything in a London street completes the fantasy; the carriages and cabs themselves resemble deep-sea creatures with eyes of flame. He had been startled at first to meet two dragons. Now he found he was among deep-sea dragons possessing the deep sea.

The two young men in front were like the small young man himself, well-dressed. The lines of their frock-coats and silk hats had that luxuriant severity which makes the modern fop, hideous as he is, a favourite exercise of the modern draughtsman; that element which Mr. Max Beerbohm has admirably expressed in speaking of “certain congruities of dark cloth and the rigid perfection of linen.”

They walked with the gait of an affected snail, and they spoke at the longest intervals, dropping a sentence at about every sixth lamp-post.

They crawled on past the lamp-posts; their mien was so immovable that a fanciful description might almost say, that the lamp-posts crawled past the men, as in a dream. Then the small man suddenly ran after them and said —

“I want to get my hair cut. I say, do you know a little shop anywhere where they cut your hair properly? I keep on having my hair cut, but it keeps on growing again.”

One of the tall men looked at him with the air of a pained naturalist.

“Why, here is a little place,” cried the small man, with a sort of imbecile cheerfulness, as the bright bulging window of a fashionable toilet-saloon glowed abruptly out of the foggy twilight. “Do you know, I often find hairdressers when I walk about London. I’ll lunch with you at Cicconani’s. You know, I’m awfully fond of hair-dressers’ shops. They’re miles better than those nasty butchers’.” And he disappeared into the doorway.

The man called James continued to gaze after him, a monocle screwed into his eye.

“What the devil do you make of that fellow?” he asked his companion, a pale young man with a high nose.

The pale young man reflected conscientiously for some minutes, and then said —

“Had a knock on his head when he was a kid, I should think.”

“No, I don’t think it’s that,” replied the Honourable James Barker. “I’ve sometimes fancied he was a sort of artist, Lambert.”

“Bosh!” cried Mr. Lambert, briefly.

“I admit I can’t make him out,” resumed Barker, abstractedly; “he never opens his mouth without saying something so indescribably half-witted that to call him a fool seems the very feeblest attempt at characterisation. But there’s another thing about him that’s rather funny. Do you know that he has the one collection of Japanese lacquer in Europe? Have you ever seen his books? All Greek poets and mediæval French and that sort of thing. Have you ever been in his rooms? It’s like being inside an amethyst. And he moves about in all that and talks like — like a turnip.”

“Well, damn all books. Your blue books as well,” said the ingenuous Mr. Lambert, with a friendly simplicity. “You ought to understand such things. What do you make of him?”

“He’s beyond me,” returned Barker. “But if you asked me for my opinion, I should say he was a man with a taste for nonsense, as they call it — artistic fooling, and all that kind of thing. And I seriously believe that he has talked nonsense so much that he has half bewildered his own mind and doesn’t know the difference between sanity and insanity. He has gone round the mental world, so to speak, and found the place where the East and the West are one, and extreme idiocy is as good as sense. But I can’t explain these psychological games.”

“You can’t explain them to me,” replied Mr. Wilfrid Lambert, with candour.

As they passed up the long streets towards their restaurant the copper twilight cleared slowly to a pale yellow, and by the time they reached it they stood discernible in a tolerable winter daylight. The Honourable James

Barker, one of the most powerful officials in the English Government (by this time a rigidly official one), was a lean and elegant young man, with a blank handsome face and bleak blue eyes. He had a great amount of intellectual capacity, of that peculiar kind which raises a man from throne to throne and lets him die loaded with honours without having either amused or enlightened the mind of a single man. Wilfrid Lambert, the youth with the nose which appeared to impoverish the rest of his face, had also contributed little to the enlargement of the human spirit, but he had the honourable excuse of being a fool.

Lambert would have been called a silly man; Barker, with all his cleverness, might have been called a stupid man. But mere silliness and stupidity sank into insignificance in the presence of the awful and mysterious treasures of foolishness apparently stored up in the small figure that stood waiting for them outside Cicconani’s. The little man, whose name was Auberon Quin, had an appearance compounded of a baby and an owl. His round head, round eyes, seemed to have been designed by nature playfully with a pair of compasses. His flat dark hair and preposterously long frock-coat gave him something of the look of a child’s “Noah.” When he entered a room of strangers, they mistook him for a small boy, and wanted to take him on their knees, until he spoke, when they perceived that a boy would have been more intelligent.

“I have been waiting quite a long time,” said Quin, mildly. “It’s awfully funny I should see you coming up the street at last.”

“Why?” asked Lambert, staring. “You told us to come here yourself.”

“My mother used to tell people to come to places,” said the sage.

They were about to turn into the restaurant with a resigned air, when their eyes were caught by something in the street. The weather, though cold and blank, was now quite clear, and across the dull brown of the wood pavement and between the dull grey terraces was moving something not to be seen for miles round — not to be seen perhaps at that time in England — a man dressed in bright colours. A small crowd hung on the man’s heels.

He was a tall stately man, clad in a military uniform of brilliant green, splashed with great silver facings. From the shoulder swung a short green furred cloak, somewhat like that of a Hussar, the lining of which gleamed every now and then with a kind of tawny crimson. His breast glittered with medals; round his neck was the red ribbon and star of some foreign order; and a long straight sword, with a blazing hilt, trailed and clattered along the pavement. At this time the pacific and utilitarian development of Europe had relegated all such customs to the Museums. The only remaining force, the small but well-organised police, were attired in a sombre and hygienic manner. But even those who remembered the last Life Guards and Lancers who disappeared in 1912 must have known at a glance that this was not, and never had been, an English uniform; and this conviction would have been heightened by the yellow aquiline face, like Dante carved in bronze, which rose, crowned with white hair, out of the green military collar, a keen and distinguished, but not an English face.

The magnificence with which the green-clad gentleman walked down the centre of the road would be something difficult to express in human language. For it was an ingrained simplicity and arrogance, something in the mere carriage of the head and body, which made ordinary moderns in the street stare after him; but it had comparatively little to do with actual conscious gestures or expression. In the matter of these merely temporary movements, the man appeared to be rather worried and inquisitive, but he was inquisitive with the inquisitiveness of a despot and worried as with the responsibilities of a god. The men who lounged and wondered behind him followed partly with an astonishment at his brilliant uniform, that is to say, partly because of that instinct which makes us all follow one who looks like a madman, but far more because of that instinct which makes all men follow (and worship) any one who chooses to behave like a king. He had to so sublime an extent that great quality of royalty — an almost imbecile unconsciousness of everybody, that people went after him as they do after kings — to see what would be the first thing or person he would take notice of. And all the time, as we have said, in spite of his quiet splendour, there was an air about him as if he were looking for somebody; an expression of inquiry.

Suddenly that expression of inquiry vanished, none could tell why, and was replaced by an expression of contentment. Amid the rapt attention of the mob of idlers, the magnificent green gentleman deflected himself from his direct course down the centre of the road and walked to one side of it. He came to a halt opposite to a large poster of Colman’s Mustard erected on a wooden hoarding. His spectators almost held their breath.

He took from a small pocket in his uniform a little penknife; with this he made a slash at the stretched paper. Completing the rest of the operation with his fingers, he tore off a strip or rag of paper, yellow in colour and wholly irregular in outline. Then for the first time the great being addressed his adoring onlookers —

“Can any one,” he said, with a pleasing foreign accent, “lend me a pin?”

Mr. Lambert, who happened to be nearest, and who carried innumerable pins for the purpose of attaching innumerable buttonholes, lent him one, which was received with extravagant but dignified bows, and hyperboles of thanks.

The gentleman in green, then, with every appearance of being gratified, and even puffed up, pinned the piece of yellow paper to the green silk and silver-lace adornments of his breast. Then he turned his eyes round again, searching and unsatisfied.

“Anything else I can do, sir?” asked Lambert, with the absurd politeness of the Englishman when once embarrassed.

“Red,” said the stranger, vaguely, “red.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I beg yours also, Señor,” said the stranger, bowing. “I was wondering whether any of you had any red about you.”

“Any red about us? — well really — no, I don’t think I have — I used to carry a red bandanna once, but—”

“Barker,” asked Auberon Quin, suddenly, “where’s your red cockatoo? Where’s your red cockatoo?”

“What do you mean?” asked Barker, desperately. “What cockatoo? You’ve never seen me with any cockatoo!”

“I know,” said Auberon, vaguely mollified. “Where’s it been all the time?”

Barker swung round, not without resentment.

“I am sorry, sir,” he said, shortly but civilly, “none of us seem to have anything red to lend you. But why, if one may ask—”

“I thank you, Señor, it is nothing. I can, since there is nothing else, fulfil my own requirements.”

And standing for a second of thought with the penknife in his hand, he stabbed his left palm. The blood fell with so full a stream that it struck the stones without dripping. The foreigner pulled out his handkerchief and tore a piece from it with his teeth. The rag was immediately soaked in scarlet.

“Since you are so generous, Señor,” he said, “another pin, perhaps.”

Lambert held one out, with eyes protruding like a frog’s.

The red linen was pinned beside the yellow paper, and the foreigner took off his hat.

“I have to thank you all, gentlemen,” he said; and wrapping the remainder of the handkerchief round his bleeding hand, he resumed his walk with an overwhelming stateliness.

While all the rest paused, in some disorder, little Mr. Auberon Quin ran after the stranger and stopped him, with hat in hand. Considerably to everybody’s astonishment, he addressed him in the purest Spanish —

“Señor,” he said in that language, “pardon a hospitality, perhaps indiscreet, towards one who appears to be a distinguished, but a solitary guest in London. Will you do me and my friends, with whom you have held some conversation, the honour of lunching with us at the adjoining restaurant?”

The man in the green uniform had turned a fiery colour of pleasure at the mere sound of his own language, and he accepted the invitation with that profusion of bows which so often shows, in the case of the Southern races, the falsehood of the notion that ceremony has nothing to do with feeling.

“Señor,” he said, “your language is my own; but all my love for my people shall not lead me to deny to yours the possession of so chivalrous an entertainer. Let me say that the tongue is Spanish but the heart English.” And he passed with the rest into Cicconani’s.

“Now, perhaps,” said Barker, over the fish and sherry, intensely polite, but burning with curiosity, “perhaps it would be rude of me to ask why you did that?”

“Did what, Señor?” asked the guest, who spoke English quite well, though in a manner indefinably American.

“Well,” said the Englishman, in some confusion, “I mean tore a strip off a hoarding and ... er ... cut yourself ... and....”

“To tell you that, Señor,” answered the other, with a certain sad pride, “involves merely telling you who I am. I am Juan del Fuego, President of Nicaragua.”

The manner with which the President of Nicaragua leant back and drank his sherry showed that to him this explanation covered all the facts observed and a great deal more. Barker’s brow, however, was still a little clouded.

“And the yellow paper,” he began, with anxious friendliness, “and the red rag....”

“The yellow paper and the red rag,” said Fuego, with indescribable grandeur, “are the colours of Nicaragua.”

“But Nicaragua ...” began Barker, with great hesitation, “Nicaragua is no longer a....”

“Nicaragua has been conquered like Athens. Nicaragua has been annexed like Jerusalem,” cried the old man, with amazing fire. “The Yankee and the German and the brute powers of modernity have trampled it with the hoofs of oxen. But Nicaragua is not dead. Nicaragua is an idea.”

Auberon Quin suggested timidly, “A brilliant idea.”

“Yes,” said the foreigner, snatching at the word. “You are right, generous Englishman. An idea *brillant*, a burning thought. Señor, you asked me why, in my desire to see the colours of my country, I snatched at paper and blood. Can you not understand the ancient sanctity of colours? The Church has her symbolic colours. And think of what colours mean to us — think of the position of one like myself, who can see nothing but those two colours, nothing but the red and the yellow. To me all shapes are equal, all common and noble things are in a democracy of combination. Wherever there is a field of marigolds and the red cloak of an old woman, there is Nicaragua. Wherever there is a field of poppies and a yellow patch of sand, there is Nicaragua. Wherever there is a lemon and a red sunset, there is my country. Wherever I see a red pillar-box and a yellow sunset, there my heart beats. Blood and a splash of mustard can be my heraldry. If there be yellow mud and red mud in the same ditch, it is better to me than white stars.”

“And if,” said Quin, with equal enthusiasm, “there should happen to be yellow wine and red wine at the same lunch, you could not confine yourself to sherry. Let me order some Burgundy, and complete, as it were, a sort of Nicaraguan heraldry in your inside.”

Barker was fiddling with his knife, and was evidently making up his mind to say something, with the intense nervousness of the amiable Englishman.

“I am to understand, then,” he said at last, with a cough, “that you, ahem, were the President of Nicaragua when it made its — er — one must, of course, agree — its quite heroic resistance to — er—”

The ex-President of Nicaragua waved his hand.

“You need not hesitate in speaking to me,” he said. “I’m quite fully aware that the whole tendency of the world of to-day is against Nicaragua and against me. I shall not consider it any diminution of your evident courtesy if you say what you think of the misfortunes that have laid my republic in ruins.”

Barker looked immeasurably relieved and gratified.

“You are most generous, President,” he said, with some hesitation over the title, “and I will take advantage of your generosity to express the doubts which, I must confess, we moderns have about such things as — er — the Nicaraguan independence.”

“So your sympathies are,” said Del Fuego, quite calmly, “with the big nation which—”

“Pardon me, pardon me, President,” said Barker, warmly; “my sympathies are with no nation. You misunderstand, I think, the modern intellect. We do not disapprove of the fire and extravagance of such commonwealths as yours only to become more extravagant on a larger scale. We do not condemn Nicaragua because we think Britain ought to be more Nicaraguan. We do not discourage small nationalities because we wish large nationalities to have all their smallness, all their uniformity of outlook, all their exaggeration of spirit. If I differ with the greatest respect from your Nicaraguan enthusiasm, it is not because a nation or ten nations were against you; it is because civilisation was against you. We moderns believe in a great cosmopolitan civilisation, one which shall include all the talents of all the absorbed peoples—”

“The Señor will forgive me,” said the President. “May I ask the Señor how, under ordinary circumstances, he catches a wild horse?”

“I never catch a wild horse,” replied Barker, with dignity.

“Precisely,” said the other; “and there ends your absorption of the talents. That is what I complain of your cosmopolitanism. When you say you want all peoples to unite, you really mean that you want all peoples to unite to learn the tricks of your people. If the Bedouin Arab does not know how to read, some English missionary or schoolmaster must be sent to teach him to read, but no one ever says, ‘This schoolmaster does not know how to ride on a camel; let us pay a Bedouin to teach him.’ You say your civilisation will include all talents. Will it? Do you really mean to say that at the moment when the Esquimaux has learnt to vote for a County Council, you will have learnt to spear a walrus? I recur to the example I gave. In Nicaragua we had a way of catching wild horses — by lassooing the fore feet — which was supposed to be the best in South America. If you are going to include all the talents, go and do it. If not, permit me to say what I have always said, that something went from the world when Nicaragua was civilised.”

“Something, perhaps,” replied Barker, “but that something a mere barbarian dexterity. I do not know that I could chip flints as well as a primeval man, but I know that civilisation can make these knives which are better, and I trust to civilisation.”

“You have good authority,” answered the Nicaraguan. “Many clever men like you have trusted to civilisation. Many clever Babylonians, many clever Egyptians, many clever men at the end of Rome. Can you tell me, in a world that is flagrant with the failures of civilisation, what there is particularly immortal about yours?”

“I think you do not quite understand, President, what ours is,” answered Barker. “You judge it rather as if England was still a poor and pugnacious island; you have been long out of Europe. Many things have happened.”

“And what,” asked the other, “would you call the summary of those things?”

“The summary of those things,” answered Barker, with great animation, “is that we are rid of the superstitions, and in becoming so we have not merely become rid of the superstitions which have been most frequently and most enthusiastically so described. The superstition of big nationalities is bad, but the superstition of small nationalities is worse. The superstition of reverencing our own country is bad, but the superstition of reverencing other people’s countries is worse. It is so everywhere, and in a hundred ways. The superstition of monarchy is bad, and the superstition of aristocracy is bad, but the superstition of democracy is the worst of all.”

The old gentleman opened his eyes with some surprise.

“Are you, then,” he said, “no longer a democracy in England?”

Barker laughed.

“The situation invites paradox,” he said. “We are, in a sense, the purest democracy. We have become a despotism. Have you not noticed how continually in history democracy becomes despotism? People call it the decay of democracy. It is simply its fulfilment. Why take the trouble to number and register and enfranchise all the innumerable John Robinsons, when you can take one John Robinson with the same intellect or lack of intellect as all the rest, and have done with it? The old idealistic republicans used to found democracy on the idea that all men were equally intelligent. Believe me, the sane and enduring democracy is founded on the fact that all men are equally idiotic. Why should we not choose out of them one as much as another. All that we want for Government is a man not criminal and insane, who can rapidly look over some petitions and sign some proclamations. To think what time was wasted in arguing about the House of Lords, Tories saying it ought to be preserved because it was clever, and Radicals saying it ought to be destroyed because it was stupid, and all the time no one saw that it was right because it was stupid, because that chance mob of ordinary men thrown there by accident of blood, were a great democratic protest against the Lower House, against the eternal insolence of the aristocracy of talents. We have established now in England, the thing towards which all systems have dimly groped, the dull popular despotism without illusions. We want one man at the head of our State, not because he is brilliant or virtuous, but because he is one man and not a chattering crowd. To avoid the possible chance of hereditary diseases or such things, we have abandoned hereditary monarchy. The King of England is chosen like a juryman upon an official rotation list. Beyond that the whole system is quietly despotic, and we have not found it raise a murmur.”

“Do you really mean,” asked the President, incredulously, “that you choose any ordinary man that comes to hand and make him despot — that you trust to the chance of some alphabetical list....”

“And why not?” cried Barker. “Did not half the historical nations trust to the chance of the eldest sons of eldest sons, and did not half of them get on tolerably well? To have a perfect system is impossible; to have a system is indispensable. All hereditary monarchies were a matter of luck: so are alphabetical monarchies. Can you find a deep philosophical meaning in the difference between the Stuarts and the Hanoverians? Believe me, I will undertake to find a deep philosophical meaning in the contrast between the dark tragedy of the A’s, and the solid success of the B’s.”

“And you risk it?” asked the other. “Though the man may be a tyrant or a cynic or a criminal.”

“We risk it,” answered Barker, with a perfect placidity. “Suppose he is a tyrant — he is still a check on a hundred tyrants. Suppose he is a cynic, it is to his interest to govern well. Suppose he is a criminal — by removing poverty and substituting power, we put a check on his criminality. In short, by substituting despotism we have put a total check on one criminal and a partial check on all the rest.”

The Nicaraguan old gentleman leaned over with a queer expression in his eyes.

“My church, sir,” he said, “has taught me to respect faith. I do not wish to speak with any disrespect of yours, however fantastic. But do you really mean that you will trust to the ordinary man, the man who may happen to come next, as a good despot?”

“I do,” said Barker, simply. “He may not be a good man. But he will be a good despot. For when he comes to a mere business routine of government he will endeavour to do ordinary justice. Do we not assume the same thing in a jury?”

The old President smiled.

“I don’t know,” he said, “that I have any particular objection in detail to your excellent scheme of Government. My only objection is a quite personal one. It is, that if I were asked whether I would belong to it, I should ask first of all, if I was not permitted, as an alternative, to be a toad in a ditch. That is all. You cannot argue with the choice of the soul.”

“Of the soul,” said Barker, knitting his brows, “I cannot pretend to say anything, but speaking in the interests of the public—”

Mr. Auberon Quin rose suddenly to his feet.

“If you’ll excuse me, gentlemen,” he said, “I will step out for a moment into the air.”

“I’m so sorry, Auberon,” said Lambert, good-naturedly; “do you feel bad?”

“Not bad exactly,” said Auberon, with self-restraint; “rather good, if anything. Strangely and richly good. The fact is, I want to reflect a little on those beautiful words that have just been uttered. ‘Speaking,’ yes, that was the phrase, ‘speaking in the interests of the public.’ One cannot get the honey from such things without being alone for a little.”

“Is he really off his chump, do you think?” asked Lambert.

The old President looked after him with queerly vigilant eyes.

“He is a man, I think,” he said, “who cares for nothing but a joke. He is a dangerous man.”

Lambert laughed in the act of lifting some maccaroni to his mouth.

“Dangerous!” he said. “You don’t know little Quin, sir!”

“Every man is dangerous,” said the old man without moving, “who cares only for one thing. I was once dangerous myself.”

And with a pleasant smile he finished his coffee and rose, bowing profoundly, passed out into the fog, which had again grown dense and sombre. Three days afterwards they heard that he had died quietly in lodgings in Soho.

Drowned somewhere else in the dark sea of fog was a little figure shaking and quaking, with what might at first sight have seemed terror or ague: but which was really that strange malady, a lonely laughter. He was repeating over and over to himself with a rich accent— “But speaking in the interests of the public....”

Chapter III — The Hill of Humour

“In a little square garden of yellow roses, beside the sea,” said Auberon Quin, “there was a Nonconformist minister who had never been to Wimbledon. His family did not understand his sorrow or the strange look in his eyes. But one day they repented their neglect, for they heard that a body had been found on the shore, battered, but wearing patent leather boots. As it happened, it turned out not to be the minister at all. But in the dead man’s pocket there was a return ticket to Maidstone.”

There was a short pause as Quin and his friends Barker and Lambert went swinging on through the slushy grass of Kensington Gardens. Then Auberon resumed.

“That story,” he said reverently, “is the test of humour.”

They walked on further and faster, wading through higher grass as they began to climb a slope.

“I perceive,” continued Auberon, “that you have passed the test, and consider the anecdote excruciatingly funny; since you say nothing. Only coarse humour is received with pot-house applause. The great anecdote is received in silence, like a benediction. You felt pretty benedicted, didn’t you, Barker?”

“I saw the point,” said Barker, somewhat loftily.

“Do you know,” said Quin, with a sort of idiot gaiety, “I have lots of stories as good as that. Listen to this one.”

And he slightly cleared his throat.

“Dr. Polycarp was, as you all know, an unusually sallow bimetallist. ‘There,’ people of wide experience would say, ‘There goes the sallowest bimetallist in Cheshire.’ Once this was said so that he overheard it: it was said by an actuary, under a sunset of mauve and grey. Polycarp turned upon him. ‘Sallow!’ he cried fiercely, ‘sallow! *Quis tulerit Gracchos de seditione querentes.*’ It was said that no actuary ever made game of Dr. Polycarp again.”

Barker nodded with a simple sagacity. Lambert only grunted.

“Here is another,” continued the insatiable Quin. “In a hollow of the grey-green hills of rainy Ireland, lived an old, old woman, whose uncle was always Cambridge at the Boat Race. But in her grey-green hollows, she knew nothing of this: she didn’t know that there was a Boat Race. Also she did not know that she had an uncle. She had heard of nobody at all, except of George the First, of whom she had heard (I know not why), and in whose historical memory she put her simple trust. And by and by in God's good time, it was discovered that this uncle of hers was not really her uncle, and they came and told her so. She smiled through her tears, and said only, 'Virtue is its own reward.'"

Again there was a silence, and then Lambert said —

"It seems a bit mysterious."

"Mysterious!" cried the other. "The true humour is mysterious. Do you not realise the chief incident of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?"

"And what's that?" asked Lambert, shortly.

"It is very simple," replied the other. "Hitherto it was the ruin of a joke that people did not see it. Now it is the sublime victory of a joke that people do not see it. Humour, my friends, is the one sanctity remaining to mankind. It is the one thing you are thoroughly afraid of. Look at that tree."

His interlocutors looked vaguely towards a beech that leant out towards them from the ridge of the hill.

"If," said Mr. Quin, "I were to say that you did not see the great truths of science exhibited by that tree, though they stared any man of intellect in the face, what would you think or say? You would merely regard me as a pedant with some unimportant theory about vegetable cells. If I were to say that you did not see in that tree the vile mismanagement of local politics, you would dismiss me as a Socialist crank with some particular fad about public parks. If I were to say that you were guilty of the supreme blasphemy of looking at that tree and not seeing in it a new religion, a special revelation of God, you would simply say I was a mystic, and think no more about me. But if" — and he lifted a pontifical hand— "if I say that you cannot see the humour of that tree, and that I see the humour of it — my God! you will roll about at my feet."

He paused a moment, and then resumed.

"Yes; a sense of humour, a weird and delicate sense of humour, is the new religion of mankind! It is towards that men will strain themselves with the asceticism of saints. Exercises, spiritual exercises, will be set in it. It will be asked, 'Can you see the humour of this iron railing?' or 'Can you see the humour of this field of corn? Can you see the humour of the stars? Can you see the humour of the sunsets?' How often I have laughed myself to sleep over a violet sunset."

"Quite so," said Mr. Barker, with an intelligent embarrassment.

"Let me tell you another story. How often it happens that the M.P.'s for Essex are less punctual than one would suppose. The least punctual Essex M.P., perhaps, was James Wilson, who said, in the very act of plucking a poppy—"

Lambert suddenly faced round and struck his stick into the ground in a defiant attitude.

"Auberon," he said, "chuck it. I won't stand it. It's all bosh."

Both men stared at him, for there was something very explosive about the words, as if they had been corked up painfully for a long time.

"You have," began Quin, "no—"

"I don't care a curse," said Lambert, violently, "whether I have 'a delicate sense of humour' or not. I won't stand it. It's all a confounded fraud. There's no joke in those infernal tales at all. You know there isn't as well as I do."

"Well," replied Quin, slowly, "it is true that I, with my rather gradual mental processes, did not see any joke in them. But the finer sense of Barker perceived it."

Barker turned a fierce red, but continued to stare at the horizon.

"You ass," said Lambert; "why can't you be like other people? Why can't you say something really funny, or hold your tongue? The man who sits on his hat in a pantomime is a long sight funnier than you are."

Quin regarded him steadily. They had reached the top of the ridge and the wind struck their faces.

"Lambert," said Auberon, "you are a great and good man, though I'm hanged if you look it. You are more. You are a great revolutionist or deliverer of the world, and I look forward to seeing you carved in marble between Luther and Danton, if possible in your present attitude, the hat slightly on one side. I said as I came up the hill that the new humour was the last of the religions. You have made it the last of the superstitions. But let me give you a very serious warning. Be careful how you ask me to do anything *outré*, to imitate the man in the pantomime, and to sit on my hat. Because I am a man whose soul has been emptied of all pleasures but folly. And for twopence I'd do it."

"Do it, then," said Lambert, swinging his stick impatiently. "It would be funnier than the bosh you and Barker talk."

Quin, standing on the top of the hill, stretched his hand out towards the main avenue of Kensington Gardens.

“Two hundred yards away,” he said, “are all your fashionable acquaintances with nothing on earth to do but to stare at each other and at us. We are standing upon an elevation under the open sky, a peak as it were of fantasy, a Sinai of humour. We are in a great pulpit or platform, lit up with sunlight, and half London can see us. Be careful how you suggest things to me. For there is in me a madness which goes beyond martyrdom, the madness of an utterly idle man.”

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” said Lambert, contemptuously. “I only know I’d rather you stood on your silly head, than talked so much.”

“Auberon! for goodness’ sake....” cried Barker, springing forward; but he was too late. Faces from all the benches and avenues were turned in their direction. Groups stopped and small crowds collected; and the sharp sunlight picked out the whole scene in blue, green and black, like a picture in a child’s toy-book. And on the top of the small hill Mr. Auberon Quin stood with considerable athletic neatness upon his head, and waved his patent-leather boots in the air.

“For God’s sake, Quin, get up, and don’t be an idiot,” cried Barker, wringing his hands; “we shall have the whole town here.”

“Yes, get up, get up, man,” said Lambert, amused and annoyed. “I was only fooling; get up.”

Auberon did so with a bound, and flinging his hat higher than the trees, proceeded to hop about on one leg with a serious expression. Barker stamped wildly.

“Oh, let’s get home, Barker, and leave him,” said Lambert; “some of your proper and correct police will look after him. Here they come!”

Two grave-looking men in quiet uniforms came up the hill towards them. One held a paper in his hand.

“There he is, officer,” said Lambert, cheerfully; “we ain’t responsible for him.”

The officer looked at the capering Mr. Quin with a quiet eye.

“We have not come, gentlemen,” he said, “about what I think you are alluding to. We have come from head-quarters to announce the selection of His Majesty the King. It is the rule, inherited from the old *régime*, that the news should be brought to the new Sovereign immediately, wherever he is; so we have followed you across Kensington Gardens."

Barker's eyes were blazing in his pale face. He was consumed with ambition throughout his life. With a certain dull magnanimity of the intellect he had really believed in the chance method of selecting despots. But this sudden suggestion, that the selection might have fallen upon him, unnerved him with pleasure.

"Which of us," he began, and the respectful official interrupted him.

"Not you, sir, I am sorry to say. If I may be permitted to say so, we know your services to the Government, and should be very thankful if it were. The choice has fallen...."

"God bless my soul!" said Lambert, jumping back two paces. "Not me. Don't say I'm autocrat of all the Russias."

"No, sir," said the officer, with a slight cough and a glance towards Auberon, who was at that moment putting his head between his legs and making a noise like a cow; "the gentleman whom we have to congratulate seems at the moment — er — er — occupied."

"Not Quin!" shrieked Barker, rushing up to him; "it can't be. Auberon, for God's sake pull yourself together. You've been made King!"

With his head still upside down between his legs, Mr. Quin answered modestly —

"I am not worthy. I cannot reasonably claim to equal the great men who have previously swayed the sceptre of Britain. Perhaps the only peculiarity that I can claim is that I am probably the first monarch that ever spoke out his soul to the people of England with his head and body in this position. This may in some sense give me, to quote a poem that I wrote in my youth —

A nobler office on the earth Than valour, power of brain, or birth Could give the warrior kings of old.

The intellect clarified by this posture—"

Lambert and Barker made a kind of rush at him.

"Don't you understand?" cried Lambert. "It's not a joke. They've really made you King. By gosh! they must have rum taste."

"The great Bishops of the Middle Ages," said Quin, kicking his legs in the air, as he was dragged up more or less upside down, "were in the habit of refusing the honour of election three times and then accepting it. A mere matter of detail separates me from those great men. I will accept the post three times and refuse it afterwards. Oh! I will toil for you, my faithful people! You shall have a banquet of humour."

By this time he had been landed the right way up, and the two men were still trying in vain to impress him with the gravity of the situation.

"Did you not tell me, Wilfrid Lambert," he said, "that I should be of more public value if I adopted a more popular form of humour? And when should a popular form of humour be more firmly riveted upon me than now, when I have become the darling of a whole people? Officer," he continued, addressing the startled messenger, "are there no ceremonies to celebrate my entry into the city?"

"Ceremonies," began the official, with embarrassment, "have been more or less neglected for some little time, and—"

Auberon Quin began gradually to take off his coat.

"All ceremony," he said, "consists in the reversal of the obvious. Thus men, when they wish to be priests or judges, dress up like women. Kindly help me on with this coat." And he held it out.

"But, your Majesty," said the officer, after a moment's bewilderment and manipulation, "you're putting it on with the tails in front."

"The reversal of the obvious," said the King, calmly, "is as near as we can come to ritual with our imperfect apparatus. Lead on."

The rest of that afternoon and evening was to Barker and Lambert a nightmare, which they could not properly realise or recall. The King, with his coat on the wrong way, went towards the streets that were awaiting him, and the old Kensington Palace which was the Royal residence. As he passed small groups of men, the groups turned into crowds, and gave forth sounds which seemed strange in welcoming an autocrat. Barker walked behind, his brain reeling, and, as the crowds grew thicker and thicker, the sounds became more and more unusual. And when he had reached the great market-place opposite the church, Barker knew that he had reached it, though he was roods behind, because a cry went up such as had never before greeted any of the kings of the earth.

BOOK II

Chapter I — The Charter of the Cities

Lambert was standing bewildered outside the door of the King's apartments amid the scurry of astonishment and ridicule. He was just passing out into the street, in a dazed manner, when James Barker dashed by him.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To stop all this foolery, of course," replied Barker; and he disappeared into the room.

He entered it headlong, slamming the door, and slapping his incomparable silk hat on the table. His mouth opened, but before he could speak, the King said —

"Your hat, if you please."

Fidgetting with his fingers, and scarcely knowing what he was doing, the young politician held it out.

The King placed it on his own chair, and sat on it.

"A quaint old custom," he explained, smiling above the ruins. "When the King receives the representatives of the House of Barker, the hat of the latter is immediately destroyed in this manner. It represents the absolute finality of the act of homage expressed in the removal of it. It declares that never until that hat shall once more appear upon your head (a contingency which I firmly believe to be remote) shall the House of Barker rebel against the Crown of England."

Barker stood with clenched fist, and shaking lip.

"Your jokes," he began, "and my property—" and then exploded with an oath, and stopped again.

"Continue, continue," said the King, waving his hands.

"What does it all mean?" cried the other, with a gesture of passionate rationality. "Are you mad?"

"Not in the least," replied the King, pleasantly. "Madmen are always serious; they go mad from lack of humour. You are looking serious yourself, James."

"Why can't you keep it to your own private life?" expostulated the other. "You've got plenty of money, and plenty of houses now to play the fool in, but in the interests of the public—"

"Epigrammatic," said the King, shaking his finger sadly at him. "None of your daring scintillations here. As to why I don't do it in private, I rather fail to understand your question. The answer is of comparative limpidity. I don't do it in private, because it is funnier to do it in public. You appear to think that it would be amusing to be dignified in the banquet hall and in the street, and at my own fireside (I could procure a fireside) to keep the company in a roar. But that is what every one does. Every one is grave in public, and funny in private. My sense of humour suggests the reversal of this; it suggests that one should be funny in public, and solemn in private. I desire to make the State functions, parliaments, coronations, and so on, one roaring old-fashioned pantomime. But, on the other hand, I shut myself up alone in a small store-room for two hours a day, where I am so dignified that I come out quite ill."

By this time Barker was walking up and down the room, his frock coat flapping like the black wings of a bird.

"Well, you will ruin the country, that's all," he said shortly.

"It seems to me," said Auberon, "that the tradition of ten centuries is being broken, and the House of Barker is rebelling against the Crown of England. It would be with regret (for I admire your appearance) that I should be obliged forcibly to decorate your head with the remains of this hat, but—"

"What I can't understand," said Barker flinging up his fingers with a feverish American movement, "is why you don't care about anything else but your games."

The King stopped sharply in the act of lifting the silken remnants, dropped them, and walked up to Barker, looking at him steadily.

"I made a kind of vow," he said, "that I would not talk seriously, which always means answering silly questions. But the strong man will always be gentle with politicians.

'The shape my scornful looks deride Required a God to form;'

if I may so theologically express myself. And for some reason I cannot in the least understand, I feel impelled to answer that question of yours, and to answer it as if there were really such a thing in the world as a serious subject. You ask me why I don't care for anything else. Can you tell me, in the name of all the gods you don't believe in, why I should care for anything else?"

"Don't you realise common public necessities?" cried Barker. "Is it possible that a man of your intelligence does not know that it is every one's interest—"

"Don't you believe in Zoroaster? Is it possible that you neglect Mumbo-Jumbo?" returned the King, with startling animation. "Does a man of your intelligence come to me with these damned early Victorian ethics? If, on studying my features and manner, you detect any particular resemblance to the Prince Consort, I assure you you are mistaken. Did Herbert Spencer ever convince you — did he ever convince anybody — did he ever for one mad moment convince himself — that it must be to the interest of the individual to feel a public spirit? Do you believe that, if you rule your department badly, you stand any more chance, or one half of the chance, of being guillotined, that an angler stands of being pulled into the river by a strong pike? Herbert Spencer refrained from theft for the same reason that he refrained from wearing feathers in his hair, because he was an English gentleman with different tastes. I am an English gentleman with different tastes. He liked philosophy. I like art. He liked writing ten books on the nature of human society. I like to see the Lord Chamberlain walking in front of me with a piece of paper pinned to his coat-tails. It is my humour. Are you answered? At any rate, I have said my last serious word to-day, and my last serious word I trust for the remainder of my life in this Paradise of Fools. The remainder of my conversation with you to-day, which I trust will be long and stimulating, I propose to conduct in a new language of my own by means of rapid and symbolic movements of the left leg." And he began to pirouette slowly round the room with a preoccupied expression.

Barker ran round the room after him, bombarding him with demands and entreaties. But he received no response except in the new language. He came out banging the door again, and sick like a man coming on shore. As he strode along the streets he found himself suddenly opposite Cicconani's restaurant, and for some reason there rose up before him the green fantastic figure of the Spanish General, standing, as he had seen him last, at the door, with the words on his lips, "You cannot argue with the choice of the soul."

The King came out from his dancing with the air of a man of business legitimately tired. He put on an overcoat, lit a cigar, and went out into the purple night.

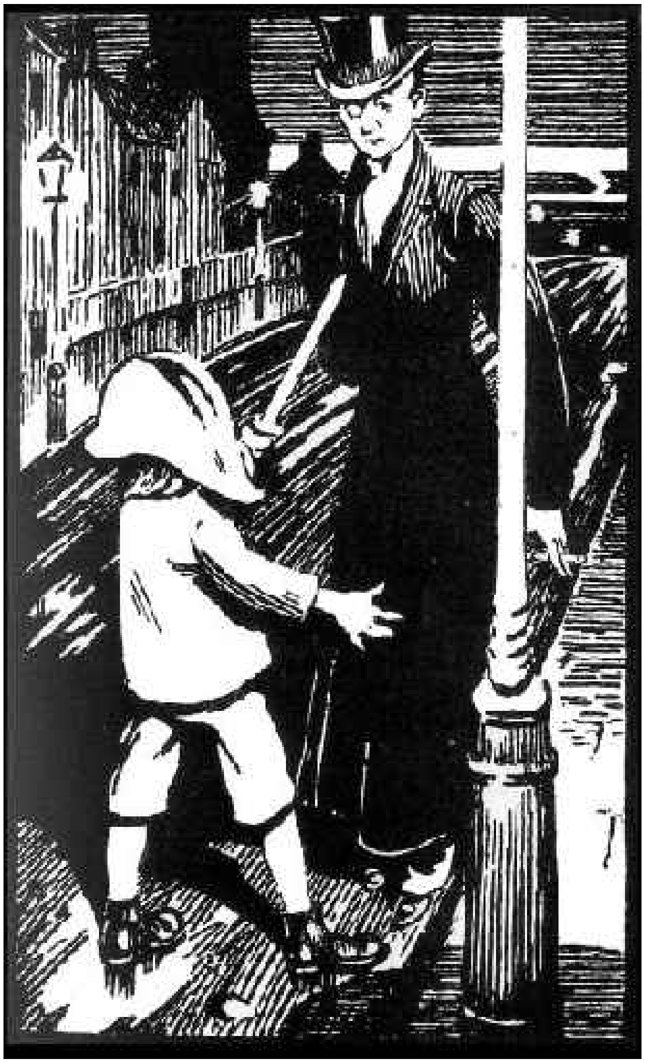

“I’M KING OF THE CASTLE.”

“I will go,” he said, “and mingle with the people.”

He passed swiftly up a street in the neighbourhood of Notting Hill, when suddenly he felt a hard object driven into his waistcoat. He paused, put up his single eye-glass, and beheld a boy with a wooden sword and a paper cocked hat, wearing that expression of awed satisfaction with which a child contemplates his work when he has hit some one very hard. The King gazed thoughtfully for some time at his assailant, and slowly took a note-book from his breast-pocket.

“I have a few notes,” he said, “for my dying speech;” and he turned over the leaves. “Dying speech for political assassination; ditto, if by former friend — h’m, h’m. Dying speech for death at hands of injured husband (repentant). Dying speech for same (cynical). I am not quite sure which meets the present....”

“I’m the King of the Castle,” said the boy, truculently, and very pleased with nothing in particular.

The King was a kind-hearted man, and very fond of children, like all people who are fond of the ridiculous.

“Infant,” he said, “I’m glad you are so stalwart a defender of your old inviolate Notting Hill. Look up nightly to that peak, my child, where it lifts itself among the stars so ancient, so lonely, so unutterably Notting. So long as you are ready to die for the sacred mountain, even if it were ringed with all the armies of Bayswater—”

The King stopped suddenly, and his eyes shone.

“Perhaps,” he said, “perhaps the noblest of all my conceptions. A revival of the arrogance of the old mediæval cities applied to our glorious suburbs. Clapham with a city guard. Wimbledon with a city wall. Surbiton tolling a bell to raise its citizens. West Hampstead going into battle with its own banner. It shall be done. I, the King, have said it.” And, hastily presenting the boy with half a crown, remarking, “For the war-chest of Notting Hill,” he ran violently home at such a rate of speed that crowds followed him for miles. On reaching his study, he ordered a cup of coffee, and plunged into profound meditation upon the project. At length he called his favourite Equerry, Captain Bowler, for whom he had a deep affection, founded principally upon the shape of his whiskers.

“Bowler,” he said, “isn’t there some society of historical research, or something of which I am an honorary member?”

“Yes, sir,” said Captain Bowler, rubbing his nose, “you are a member of ‘The Encouragers of Egyptian Renaissance,’ and ‘The Teutonic Tombs Club,’ and ‘The Society for the Recovery of London Antiquities,’ and—”

“That is admirable,” said the King. “The London Antiquities does my trick. Go to the Society for the Recovery of London Antiquities and speak to their secretary, and their sub-secretary, and their president, and their vice-president, saying, ‘The King of England is proud, but the honorary member of the Society for the Recovery of London Antiquities is prouder than kings. I should like to tell you of certain discoveries I have made touching the neglected traditions of the London boroughs. The revelations may cause some excitement, stirring burning memories and touching old wounds in Shepherd’s Bush and Bayswater, in Pimlico and South Kensington. The King hesitates, but the honorary member is firm. I approach you invoking the vows of my initiation, the Sacred Seven Cats, the Poker of Perfection, and the Ordeal of the Indescribable Instant (forgive me if I mix you up with the Clan-na-Gael or some other club I belong to), and ask you to permit me to read a paper at your next meeting on the "Wars of the London Boroughs."' Say all this to the Society, Bowler. Remember it very carefully, for it is most important, and I have forgotten it altogether, and send me another cup of coffee and some of the cigars that we keep for vulgar and successful people. I am going to write my paper."

The Society for the Recovery of London Antiquities met a month after in a corrugated iron hall on the outskirts of one of the southern suburbs of London. A large number of people had collected there under the coarse and flaring gas-jets when the King arrived, perspiring and genial. On taking off his great-coat, he was perceived to be in evening dress, wearing the Garter. His appearance at the small table, adorned only with a glass of water, was received with respectful cheering.

The chairman (Mr. Huggins) said that he was sure that they had all been pleased to listen to such distinguished lecturers as they had heard for some time past (hear, hear). Mr. Burton (hear, hear), Mr. Cambridge, Professor King (loud and continued cheers), our old friend Peter Jessop, Sir William White (loud laughter), and other eminent men, had done honour to their little venture (cheers). But there were other circumstances which lent a certain unique quality to the present occasion (hear, hear). So far as his recollection went, and in connection with the Society for the Recovery of London Antiquities it went very far (loud cheers), he did not remember that any of their lecturers had borne the title of King. He would therefore call upon King Auberon briefly to address the meeting.

The King began by saying that this speech might be regarded as the first declaration of his new policy for the nation. "At this supreme hour of my life I feel that to no one but the members of the Society for the Recovery of London Antiquities can I open my heart (cheers). If the world turns upon my policy, and the storms of popular hostility begin to rise (no, no), I feel that it is here, with my brave Recoverers around me, that I can best meet them, sword in hand" (loud cheers).

His Majesty then went on to explain that, now old age was creeping upon him, he proposed to devote his remaining strength to bringing about a keener sense of local patriotism in the various municipalities of London. How few of them knew the legends of their own boroughs! How many there were who had never heard of the true origin of the Wink of

Wandsworth! What a large proportion of the younger generation in Chelsea neglected to perform the old Chelsea Chuff! Pimlico no longer pumped the Pimlies. Battersea had forgotten the name of Blick.

There was a short silence, and then a voice said “Shame!”

The King continued: “Being called, however unworthily, to this high estate, I have resolved that, so far as possible, this neglect shall cease. I desire no military glory. I lay claim to no constitutional equality with Justinian or Alfred. If I can go down to history as the man who saved from extinction a few old English customs, if our descendants can say it was through this man, humble as he was, that the Ten Turnips are still eaten in Fulham, and the Putney parish councillor still shaves one half of his head, I shall look my great fathers reverently but not fearfully in the face when I go down to the last house of Kings.”

The King paused, visibly affected, but collecting himself, resumed once more.

“I trust that to very few of you, at least, I need dwell on the sublime origins of these legends. The very names of your boroughs bear witness to them. So long as Hammersmith is called Hammersmith, its people will live in the shadow of that primal hero, the Blacksmith, who led the democracy of the Broadway into battle till he drove the chivalry of Kensington before him and overthrew them at that place which in honour of the best blood of the defeated aristocracy is still called Kensington Gore. Men of Hammersmith will not fail to remember that the very name of Kensington originated from the lips of their hero. For at the great banquet of reconciliation held after the war, when the disdainful oligarchs declined to join in the songs of the men of the Broadway (which are to this day of a rude and popular character), the great Republican leader, with his rough humour, said the words which are written in gold upon his monument, ‘Little birds that can sing and won’t sing, must be made to sing.’ So that the Eastern Knights were called Cansings or Kensings ever afterwards. But you also have great memories, O men of Kensington! You showed that you could sing, and sing great war-songs. Even after the dark day of Kensington Gore, history will not forget those three Knights who guarded your disordered retreat from Hyde Park (so called from your hiding there), those three Knights after whom Knightsbridge is named. Nor will it forget the day of your re-emergence, purged in the fire of calamity, cleansed of your oligarchic corruptions, when, sword in hand, you drove the Empire of

Hammersmith back mile by mile, swept it past its own Broadway, and broke it at last in a battle so long and bloody that the birds of prey have left their name upon it. Men have called it, with austere irony, the Ravenscourt. I shall not, I trust, wound the patriotism of Bayswater, or the lonelier pride of Brompton, or that of any other historic township, by taking these two special examples. I select them, not because they are more glorious than the rest, but partly from personal association (I am myself descended from one of the three heroes of Knightsbridge), and partly from the consciousness that I am an amateur antiquarian, and cannot presume to deal with times and places more remote and more mysterious. It is not for me to settle the question between two such men as Professor Hugg and Sir William Whisky as to whether Notting Hill means Nutting Hill (in allusion to the rich woods which no longer cover it), or whether it is a corruption of Nothing-ill, referring to its reputation among the ancients as an Earthly Paradise. When a Podkins and a Jossy confess themselves doubtful about the boundaries of West Kensington (said to have been traced in the blood of Oxen), I need not be ashamed to confess a similar doubt. I will ask you to excuse me from further history, and to assist me with your encouragement in dealing with the problem which faces us to-day. Is this ancient spirit of the London townships to die out? Are our omnibus conductors and policemen to lose altogether that light which we see so often in their eyes, the dreamy light of

‘Old unhappy far-off things And battles long ago’

— to quote the words of a little-known poet who was a friend of my youth? I have resolved, as I have said, so far as possible, to preserve the eyes of policemen and omnibus conductors in their present dreamy state. For what is a state without dreams? And the remedy I propose is as follows: —

“To-morrow morning at twenty-five minutes past ten, if Heaven spares my life, I purpose to issue a Proclamation. It has been the work of my life, and is about half finished. With the assistance of a whisky and soda, I shall conclude the other half to-night, and my people will receive it to-morrow. All these boroughs where you were born, and hope to lay your bones, shall be reinstated in their ancient magnificence, — Hammersmith, Kensington, Bayswater, Chelsea, Battersea, Clapham, Balham, and a hundred others. Each shall immediately build a city wall with gates to be closed at sunset. Each shall have a city guard, armed to the teeth. Each shall have a banner, a coat-of-arms, and, if convenient, a gathering cry. I will not enter into the details now, my heart is too full. They will be found in the proclamation itself. You will all, however, be subject to enrolment in the local city guards, to be summoned together by a thing called the Tocsin, the meaning of which I am studying in my researches into history. Personally, I believe a tocsin to be some kind of highly paid official. If, therefore, any of you happen to have such a thing as a halberd in the house, I should advise you to practise with it in the garden."

Here the King buried his face in his handkerchief and hurriedly left the platform, overcome by emotions.

The members of the Society for the Recovery of London Antiquities rose in an indescribable state of vagueness. Some were purple with indignation; an intellectual few were purple with laughter; the great majority found their minds a blank. There remains a tradition that one pale face with burning blue eyes remained fixed upon the lecturer, and after the lecture a red-haired boy ran out of the room.

Chapter II — The Council of the Provosts

The King got up early next morning and came down three steps at a time like a schoolboy. Having eaten his breakfast hurriedly, but with an appetite, he summoned one of the highest officials of the Palace, and presented him with a shilling. “Go and buy me,” he said, “a shilling paint-box, which you will get, unless the mists of time mislead me, in a shop at the corner of the second and dirtier street that leads out of Rochester Row. I have already requested the Master of the Buckhounds to provide me with cardboard. It seemed to me (I know not why) that it fell within his department.”

The King was happy all that morning with his cardboard and his paint-box. He was engaged in designing the uniforms and coats-of-arms for the various municipalities of London. They gave him deep and no inconsiderable thought. He felt the responsibility.

“I cannot think,” he said, “why people should think the names of places in the country more poetical than those in London. Shallow romanticists go away in trains and stop in places called Hugmy-in-the-Hole, or Bumps-on-the-Puddle. And all the time they could, if they liked, go and live at a place with the dim, divine name of St. John’s Wood. I have never been to St. John’s Wood. I dare not. I should be afraid of the innumerable night of fir trees, afraid to come upon a blood-red cup and the beating of the wings of the Eagle. But all these things can be imagined by remaining reverently in the Harrow train.”

And he thoughtfully retouched his design for the head-dress of the halberdier of St. John’s Wood, a design in black and red, compounded of a pine tree and the plumage of an eagle. Then he turned to another card. “Let us think of milder matters,” he said. “Lavender Hill! Could any of your glebes and combes and all the rest of it produce so fragrant an idea? Think of a mountain of lavender lifting itself in purple poignancy into the silver skies and filling men’s nostrils with a new breath of life — a purple hill of incense. It is true that upon my few excursions of discovery on a halfpenny tram I have failed to hit the precise spot. But it must be there; some poet called it by its name. There is at least warrant enough for the solemn purple plumes (following the botanical formation of lavender) which I have required people to wear in the neighbourhood of Clapham Junction. It is so everywhere, after all. I have never been actually to Southfields, but I suppose a scheme of lemons and olives represent their austral instincts. I have never visited Parson's Green, or seen either the Green or the Parson, but surely the pale-green shovel-hats I have designed must be more or less in the spirit. I must work in the dark and let my instincts guide me. The great love I bear to my people will certainly save me from distressing their noble spirit or violating their great traditions."

As he was reflecting in this vein, the door was flung open, and an official announced Mr. Barker and Mr. Lambert.

Mr. Barker and Mr. Lambert were not particularly surprised to find the King sitting on the floor amid a litter of water-colour sketches. They were not particularly surprised because the last time they had called on him they had found him sitting on the floor, surrounded by a litter of children's bricks, and the time before surrounded by a litter of wholly unsuccessful attempts to make paper darts. But the trend of the royal infant's remarks, uttered from amid this infantile chaos, was not quite the same affair.

For some time they let him babble on, conscious that his remarks meant nothing. And then a horrible thought began to steal over the mind of James Barker. He began to think that the King's remarks did not mean nothing.

"In God's name, Auberon," he suddenly volleyed out, startling the quiet hall, "you don't mean that you are really going to have these city guards and city walls and things?"

"I am, indeed," said the infant, in a quiet voice. "Why shouldn't I have them? I have modelled them precisely on your political principles. Do you know what I've done, Barker? I've behaved like a true Barkerian. I've ... but perhaps it won't interest you, the account of my Barkerian conduct."

"Oh, go on, go on," cried Barker.

"The account of my Barkerian conduct," said Auberon, calmly, "seems not only to interest, but to alarm you. Yet it is very simple. It merely consists in choosing all the provosts under any new scheme by the same principle by which you have caused the central despot to be appointed. Each provost, of each city, under my charter, is to be appointed by rotation. Sleep, therefore, my Barker, a rosy sleep."

Barker's wild eyes flared.

"But, in God's name, don't you see, Quin, that the thing is quite different? In the centre it doesn't matter so much, just because the whole object of despotism is to get some sort of unity. But if any damned parish can go to any damned man—"

“I see your difficulty,” said King Auberon, calmly. “You feel that your talents may be neglected. Listen!” And he rose with immense magnificence. “I solemnly give to my liege subject, James Barker, my special and splendid favour, the right to override the obvious text of the Charter of the Cities, and to be, in his own right, Lord High Provost of South Kensington. And now, my dear James, you are all right. Good day.”

“But—” began Barker.

“The audience is at an end, Provost,” said the King, smiling.

How far his confidence was justified, it would require a somewhat complicated description to explain. “The Great Proclamation of the Charter of the Free Cities” appeared in due course that morning, and was posted by bill-stickers all over the front of the Palace, the King assisting them with animated directions, and standing in the middle of the road, with his head on one side, contemplating the result. It was also carried up and down the main thoroughfares by sandwichmen, and the King was, with difficulty, restrained from going out in that capacity himself, being, in fact, found by the Groom of the Stole and Captain Bowler, struggling between two boards. His excitement had positively to be quieted like that of a child.

The reception which the Charter of the Cities met at the hands of the public may mildly be described as mixed. In one sense it was popular enough. In many happy homes that remarkable legal document was read aloud on winter evenings amid uproarious appreciation, when everything had been learnt by heart from that quaint but immortal old classic, Mr. W. W. Jacobs. But when it was discovered that the King had every intention of seriously requiring the provisions to be carried out, of insisting that the grotesque cities, with their tocsins and city guards, should really come into existence, things were thrown into a far angrier confusion. Londoners had no particular objection to the King making a fool of himself, but they became indignant when it became evident that he wished to make fools of them; and protests began to come in.

The Lord High Provost of the Good and Valiant City of West Kensington wrote a respectful letter to the King, explaining that upon State occasions it would, of course, be his duty to observe what formalities the King thought proper, but that it was really awkward for a decent householder not to be allowed to go out and put a post-card in a pillar-box without being escorted by five heralds, who announced, with formal cries and blasts of a trumpet, that the Lord High Provost desired to catch the post.

The Lord High Provost of North Kensington, who was a prosperous draper, wrote a curt business note, like a man complaining of a railway company, stating that definite inconvenience had been caused him by the presence of the halberdiers, whom he had to take with him everywhere. When attempting to catch an omnibus to the City, he had found that while room could have been found for himself, the halberdiers had a difficulty in getting in to the vehicle — believe him, theirs faithfully.

The Lord High Provost of Shepherd’s Bush said his wife did not like men hanging round the kitchen.

The King was always delighted to listen to these grievances, delivering lenient and kingly answers, but as he always insisted, as the absolute *sine qua non*, that verbal complaints should be presented to him with the fullest pomp of trumpets, plumes, and halberds, only a few resolute spirits were prepared to run the gauntlet of the little boys in the street.

Among these, however, was prominent the abrupt and business-like gentleman who ruled North Kensington. And he had before long, occasion to interview the King about a matter wider and even more urgent than the problem of the halberdiers and the omnibus. This was the great question which then and for long afterwards brought a stir to the blood and a flush to the cheek of all the speculative builders and house agents from Shepherd’s Bush to the Marble Arch, and from Westbourne Grove to High Street, Kensington. I refer to the great affair of the improvements in Notting Hill. The scheme was conducted chiefly by Mr. Buck, the abrupt North Kensington magnate, and by Mr. Wilson, the Provost of Bayswater. A great thoroughfare was to be driven through three boroughs, through West Kensington, North Kensington and Notting Hill, opening at one end into Hammersmith Broadway, and at the other into Westbourne Grove. The negotiations, buyings, sellings, bullying and bribing took ten years, and by the end of it Buck, who had conducted them almost single-handed, had proved himself a man of the strongest type of material energy and material diplomacy. And just as his splendid patience and more splendid impatience had finally brought him victory, when workmen were already demolishing houses and walls along the great line from Hammersmith, a sudden obstacle appeared that had neither been reckoned with nor dreamed of, a small and strange obstacle, which, like a speck of grit in a great machine, jarred the whole vast scheme and brought it to a stand-still, and Mr. Buck, the draper, getting with great impatience into his robes of office and summoning with indescribable disgust his halberdiers, hurried over to speak to the King.

Ten years had not tired the King of his joke. There were still new faces to be seen looking out from the symbolic head-gears he had designed, gazing at him from amid the pastoral ribbons of Shepherd’s Bush or from under the sombre hoods of the Blackfriars Road. And the interview which was promised him with the Provost of North Kensington he anticipated with a particular pleasure, for “he never really enjoyed,” he said, “the full richness of the mediæval garments unless the people compelled to wear them were very angry and business-like.”

Mr. Buck was both. At the King’s command the door of the audience-chamber was thrown open and a herald appeared in the purple colours of Mr. Buck’s commonwealth emblazoned with the Great Eagle which the King had attributed to North Kensington, in vague reminiscence of Russia, for he always insisted on regarding North Kensington as some kind of semi-arctic neighbourhood. The herald announced that the Provost of that city desired audience of the King.

“From North Kensington?” said the King, rising graciously. “What news does he bring from that land of high hills and fair women? He is welcome.”

The herald advanced into the room, and was immediately followed by twelve guards clad in purple, who were followed by an attendant bearing the banner of the Eagle, who was followed by another attendant bearing the keys of the city upon a cushion, who was followed by Mr. Buck in a great hurry. When the King saw his strong animal face and steady eyes, he knew that he was in the presence of a great man of business, and consciously braced himself.

“Well, well,” he said, cheerily coming down two or three steps from a daïs, and striking his hands lightly together, “I am glad to see you. Never mind, never mind. Ceremony is not everything.”

“I don’t understand your Majesty,” said the Provost, stolidly.

“Never mind, never mind,” said the King, gaily. “A knowledge of Courts is by no means an unmixed merit; you will do it next time, no doubt.”

The man of business looked at him sulkily from under his black brows and said again without show of civility —

“I don’t follow you.”

“Well, well,” replied the King, good-naturedly, “if you ask me I don’t mind telling you, not because I myself attach any importance to these forms in comparison with the Honest Heart. But it is usual — it is usual — that is all, for a man when entering the presence of Royalty to lie down on his back on the floor and elevating his feet towards heaven (as the source of Royal power) to say three times ‘Monarchical institutions improve the manners.’ But there, there — such pomp is far less truly dignified than your simple kindliness.”

The Provost’s face was red with anger, and he maintained silence.

“And now,” said the King, lightly, and with the exasperating air of a man softening a snub; “what delightful weather we are having! You must find your official robes warm, my Lord. I designed them for your own snow-bound land.”

“They’re as hot as hell,” said Buck, briefly. “I came here on business.”

“Right,” said the King, nodding a great number of times with quite unmeaning solemnity; “right, right, right. Business, as the sad glad old Persian said, is business. Be punctual. Rise early. Point the pen to the shoulder. Point the pen to the shoulder, for you know not whence you come nor why. Point the pen to the shoulder, for you know not when you go nor where.”

The Provost pulled a number of papers from his pocket and savagely flapped them open.

“Your Majesty may have heard,” he began, sarcastically, “of Hammersmith and a thing called a road. We have been at work ten years buying property and getting compulsory powers and fixing compensation and squaring vested interests, and now at the very end, the thing is stopped by a fool. Old Prout, who was Provost of Notting Hill, was a business man, and we dealt with him quite satisfactorily. But he’s dead, and the cursed lot has fallen on a young man named Wayne, who’s up to some game that’s perfectly incomprehensible to me. We offer him a better price than any one ever dreamt of, but he won’t let the road go through. And his Council seems to be backing him up. It’s midsummer madness.”

The King, who was rather inattentively engaged in drawing the Provost’s nose with his finger on the window-pane, heard the last two words.

“What a perfect phrase that is!” he said. “‘Midsummer madness’!”

“The chief point is,” continued Buck, doggedly, “that the only part that is really in question is one dirty little street — Pump Street — a street with nothing in it but a public-house and a penny toy-shop, and that sort of thing.

All the respectable people of Notting Hill have accepted our compensation. But the ineffable Wayne sticks out over Pump Street. Says he's Provost of Notting Hill. He's only Provost of Pump Street."

"A good thought," replied Auberon. "I like the idea of a Provost of Pump Street. Why not let him alone?"

"And drop the whole scheme!" cried out Buck, with a burst of brutal spirit. "I'll be damned if we do. No. I'm for sending in workmen to pull down without more ado."

"Strike for the purple Eagle!" cried the King, hot with historical associations.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Buck, losing his temper altogether. "If your Majesty would spend less time in insulting respectable people with your silly coats-of-arms, and more time over the business of the nation—"

The King's brow wrinkled thoughtfully.

"The situation is not bad," he said; "the haughty burgher defying the King in his own Palace. The burgher's head should be thrown back and the right arm extended; the left may be lifted towards Heaven, but that I leave to your private religious sentiment. I have sunk back in this chair, stricken with baffled fury. Now again, please."

Buck's mouth opened like a dog's, but before he could speak another herald appeared at the door.

"The Lord High Provost of Bayswater," he said, "desires an audience."

"Admit him," said Auberon. "This *is* a jolly day."

The halberdiers of Bayswater wore a prevailing uniform of green, and the banner which was borne after them was emblazoned with a green bay-wreath on a silver ground, which the King, in the course of his researches into a bottle of champagne, had discovered to be the quaint old punning cognisance of the city of Bayswater.

"It is a fit symbol," said the King, "your immortal bay-wreath. Fulham may seek for wealth, and Kensington for art, but when did the men of Bayswater care for anything but glory?"

Immediately behind the banner, and almost completely hidden by it, came the Provost of the city, clad in splendid robes of green and silver with white fur and crowned with bay. He was an anxious little man with red whiskers, originally the owner of a small sweet-stuff shop.

“Our cousin of Bayswater,” said the King, with delight; “what can we get for you?” The King was heard also distinctly to mutter, “Cold beef, cold ‘am, cold chicken,” his voice dying into silence.

“I came to see your Majesty,” said the Provost of Bayswater, whose name was Wilson, “about that Pump Street affair.”

“I have just been explaining the situation to his Majesty,” said Buck, curtly, but recovering his civility. “I am not sure, however, whether his Majesty knows how much the matter affects you also.”

“It affects both of us, yer see, yer Majesty, as this scheme was started for the benefit of the ‘ole neighbourhood. So Mr. Buck and me we put our ‘eads together—”

The King clasped his hands.

“Perfect!” he cried in ecstacy. “Your heads together! I can see it! Can’t you do it now? Oh, do do it now!”

A smothered sound of amusement appeared to come from the halberdiers, but Mr. Wilson looked merely bewildered, and Mr. Buck merely diabolical.

“I suppose,” he began bitterly, but the King stopped him with a gesture of listening.

“Hush,” he said, “I think I hear some one else coming. I seem to hear another herald, a herald whose boots creak.”

As he spoke another voice cried from the doorway —

“The Lord High Provost of South Kensington desires an audience.”

“The Lord High Provost of South Kensington!” cried the King. “Why, that is my old friend James Barker! What does he want, I wonder? If the tender memories of friendship have not grown misty, I fancy he wants something for himself, probably money. How are you, James?”

Mr. James Barker, whose guard was attired in a splendid blue, and whose blue banner bore three gold birds singing, rushed, in his blue and gold robes, into the room. Despite the absurdity of all the dresses, it was worth noticing that he carried his better than the rest, though he loathed it as much as any of them. He was a gentleman, and a very handsome man, and could not help unconsciously wearing even his preposterous robe as it should be worn. He spoke quickly, but with the slight initial hesitation he always showed in addressing the King, due to suppressing an impulse to address his old acquaintance in the old way.

"Your Majesty — pray forgive my intrusion. It is about this man in Pump Street. I see you have Buck here, so you have probably heard what is necessary. I—"

The King swept his eyes anxiously round the room, which now blazed with the trappings of three cities.

"There is one thing necessary," he said.

"Yes, your Majesty," said Mr. Wilson of Bayswater, a little eagerly. "What does yer Majesty think necessary?"

"A little yellow," said the King, firmly. "Send for the Provost of West Kensington."

Amid some materialistic protests he was sent for, and arrived with his yellow halberdiers in his saffron robes, wiping his forehead with a handkerchief. After all, placed as he was, he had a good deal to say on the matter.

"Welcome, West Kensington," said the King. "I have long wished to see you touching that matter of the Hammersmith land to the south of the Rowton House. Will you hold it feudally from the Provost of Hammersmith? You have only to do him homage by putting his left arm in his overcoat and then marching home in state."

"No, your Majesty; I'd rather not," said the Provost of West Kensington, who was a pale young man with a fair moustache and whiskers, who kept a successful dairy.

The King struck him heartily on the shoulder.

"The fierce old West Kensington blood," he said; "they are not wise who ask it to do homage."

Then he glanced again round the room. It was full of a roaring sunset of colour, and he enjoyed the sight, possible to so few artists — the sight of his own dreams moving and blazing before him. In the foreground the yellow of the West Kensington liveries outlined itself against the dark blue draperies of South Kensington. The crests of these again brightened suddenly into green as the almost woodland colours of Bayswater rose behind them. And over and behind all, the great purple plumes of North Kensington showed almost funereal and black.

"There is something lacking," said the King— "something lacking. What can — Ah, there it is! there it is!"

In the doorway had appeared a new figure, a herald in flaming red. He cried in a loud but unemotional voice —

“The Lord High Provost of Notting Hill desires an audience.”

Chapter III — Enter a Lunatic

The King of the Fairies, who was, it is to be presumed, the godfather of King Auberon, must have been very favourable on this particular day to his fantastic godchild, for with the entrance of the guard of the Provost of Notting Hill there was a certain more or less inexplicable addition to his delight. The wretched navvies and sandwich-men who carried the colours of Bayswater or South Kensington, engaged merely for the day to satisfy the Royal hobby, slouched into the room with a comparatively hang-dog air, and a great part of the King's intellectual pleasure consisted in the contrast between the arrogance of their swords and feathers and the meek misery of their faces. But these Notting Hill halberdiers in their red tunics belted with gold had the air rather of an absurd gravity. They seemed, so to speak, to be taking part in the joke. They marched and wheeled into position with an almost startling dignity and discipline.

They carried a yellow banner with a great red lion, named by the King as the Notting Hill emblem, after a small public-house in the neighbourhood, which he once frequented.

Between the two lines of his followers there advanced towards the King a tall, red-haired young man, with high features and bold blue eyes. He would have been called handsome, but that a certain indefinable air of his nose being too big for his face, and his feet for his legs, gave him a look of awkwardness and extreme youth. His robes were red, according to the King's heraldry, and, alone among the Provosts, he was girt with a great sword. This was Adam Wayne, the intractable Provost of Notting Hill.

The King flung himself back in his chair, and rubbed his hands.

"What a day, what a day!" he said to himself. "Now there'll be a row. I'd no idea it would be such fun as it is. These Provosts are so very indignant, so very reasonable, so very right. This fellow, by the look in his eyes, is even more indignant than the rest. No sign in those large blue eyes, at any rate, of ever having heard of a joke. He'll remonstrate with the others, and they'll remonstrate with him, and they'll all make themselves sumptuously happy remonstrating with me."

"Welcome, my Lord," he said aloud. "What news from the Hill of a Hundred Legends? What have you for the ear of your King? I know that troubles have arisen between you and these others, our cousins, but these troubles it shall be our pride to compose. And I doubt not, and cannot doubt, that your love for me is not less tender, no less ardent, than theirs."

Mr. Buck made a bitter face, and James Barker's nostrils curled; Wilson began to giggle faintly, and the Provost of West Kensington followed in a smothered way. But the big blue eyes of Adam Wayne never changed, and he called out in an odd, boyish voice down the hall —

"I bring homage to my King. I bring him the only thing I have — my sword."

And with a great gesture he flung it down on the ground, and knelt on one knee behind it.

There was a dead silence.

"I beg your pardon," said the King, blankly.

"You speak well, sire," said Adam Wayne, "as you ever speak, when you say that my love is not less than the love of these. Small would it be if it were not more. For I am the heir of your scheme — the child of the great Charter. I stand here for the rights the Charter gave me, and I swear, by your sacred crown, that where I stand, I stand fast."

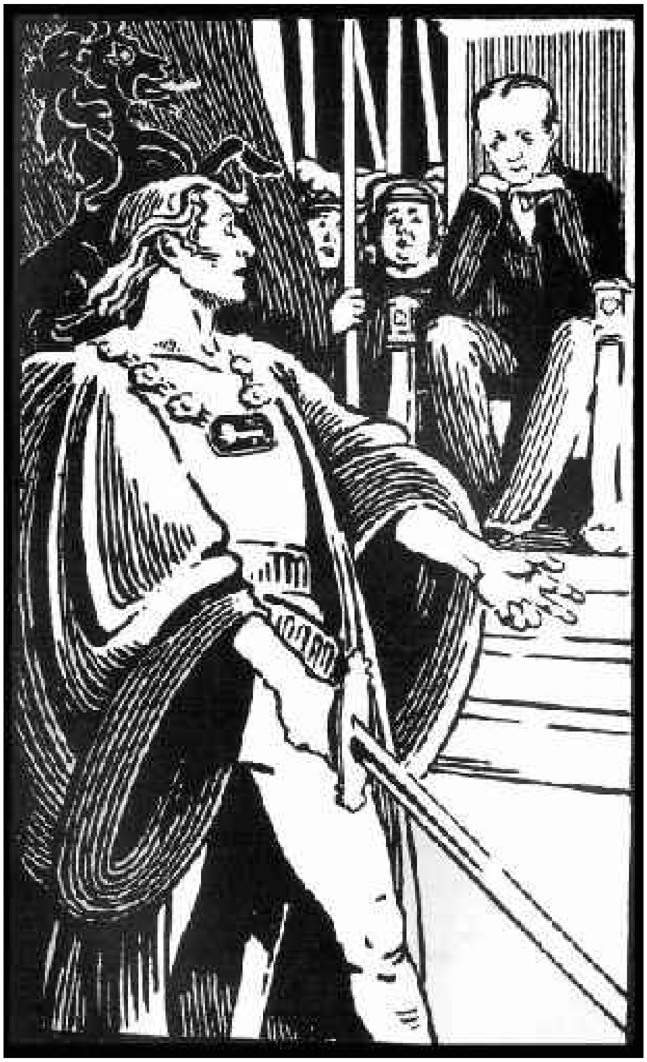

“I BRING HOMAGE TO MY KING.”

The eyes of all five men stood out of their heads.

Then Buck said, in his jolly, jarring voice: “Is the whole world mad?”

The King sprang to his feet, and his eyes blazed.

“Yes,” he cried, in a voice of exultation, “the whole world is mad, but Adam Wayne and me. It is true as death what I told you long ago, James Barker, seriousness sends men mad. You are mad, because you care for politics, as mad as a man who collects tram tickets. Buck is mad, because he cares for money, as mad as a man who lives on opium. Wilson is mad, because he thinks himself right, as mad as a man who thinks himself God Almighty. The Provost of West Kensington is mad, because he thinks he is respectable, as mad as a man who thinks he is a chicken. All men are mad but the humorist, who cares for nothing and possesses everything. I thought that there was only one humorist in England. Fools! — dolts! — open your cows' eyes; there are two! In Notting Hill — in that unpromising elevation — there has been born an artist! You thought to spoil my joke, and bully me out of it, by becoming more and more modern, more and more practical, more and more bustling and rational. Oh, what a feast it was to answer you by becoming more and more august, more and more gracious, more and more ancient and mellow! But this lad has seen how to bowl me out. He has answered me back, vaunt for vaunt, rhetoric for rhetoric. He has lifted the only shield I cannot break, the shield of an impenetrable pomposity. Listen to him. You have come, my Lord, about Pump Street?"

"About the city of Notting Hill," answered Wayne, proudly, "of which Pump Street is a living and rejoicing part."

"Not a very large part," said Barker, contemptuously.

"That which is large enough for the rich to covet," said Wayne, drawing up his head, "is large enough for the poor to defend."

The King slapped both his legs, and waved his feet for a second in the air.

"Every respectable person in Notting Hill," cut in Buck, with his cold, coarse voice, "is for us and against you. I have plenty of friends in Notting Hill."

"Your friends are those who have taken your gold for other men's hearthstones, my Lord Buck," said Provost Wayne. "I can well believe they are your friends."

"They've never sold dirty toys, anyhow," said Buck, laughing shortly.

"They've sold dirtier things," said Wayne, calmly: "they have sold themselves."

"It's no good, my Buckling," said the King, rolling about on his chair. "You can't cope with this chivalrous eloquence. You can't cope with an artist. You can't cope with the humorist of Notting Hill. Oh, *Nunc dimittis* — that I have lived to see this day! Provost Wayne, you stand firm?"

"Let them wait and see," said Wayne. "If I stood firm before, do you think I shall weaken now that I have seen the face of the King? For I fight for something greater, if greater there can be, than the hearthstones of my people and the Lordship of the Lion. I fight for your royal vision, for the great dream you dreamt of the League of the Free Cities. You have given me this liberty. If I had been a beggar and you had flung me a coin, if I had been a peasant in a dance and you had flung me a favour, do you think I would have let it be taken by any ruffians on the road? This leadership and liberty of Notting Hill is a gift from your Majesty, and if it is taken from me, by God! it shall be taken in battle, and the noise of that battle shall be heard in the flats of Chelsea and in the studios of St. John's Wood."

"It is too much — it is too much," said the King. "Nature is weak. I must speak to you, brother artist, without further disguise. Let me ask you a solemn question. Adam Wayne, Lord High Provost of Notting Hill, don't you think it splendid?"

"Splendid!" cried Adam Wayne. "It has the splendour of God."

"Bowled out again," said the King. "You will keep up the pose. Funnily, of course, it is serious. But seriously, isn't it funny?"

"What?" asked Wayne, with the eyes of a baby.

"Hang it all, don't play any more. The whole business — the Charter of the Cities. Isn't it immense?"

"Immense is no unworthy word for that glorious design."

"Oh, hang you! But, of course, I see. You want me to clear the room of these reasonable sows. You want the two humorists alone together. Leave us, gentlemen."

Buck threw a sour look at Barker, and at a sullen signal the whole pageant of blue and green, of red, gold, and purple, rolled out of the room, leaving only two in the great hall, the King sitting in his seat on the daïs, and the red-clad figure still kneeling on the floor before his fallen sword.

The King bounded down the steps and smacked Provost Wayne on the back.

"Before the stars were made," he cried, "we were made for each other. It is too beautiful. Think of the valiant independence of Pump Street. That is the real thing. It is the deification of the ludicrous."

The kneeling figure sprang to his feet with a fierce stagger.

"Ludicrous!" he cried, with a fiery face.

"Oh, come, come," said the King, impatiently, "you needn't keep it up with me. The augurs must wink sometimes from sheer fatigue of the eyelids. Let us enjoy this for half an hour, not as actors, but as dramatic critics. Isn't it a joke?"

Adam Wayne looked down like a boy, and answered in a constrained voice —

"I do not understand your Majesty. I cannot believe that while I fight for your royal charter your Majesty deserts me for these dogs of the gold hunt."

"Oh, damn your — But what's this? What the devil's this?"

The King stared into the young Provost's face, and in the twilight of the room began to see that his face was quite white and his lip shaking.

"What in God's name is the matter?" cried Auberon, holding his wrist.

Wayne flung back his face, and the tears were shining on it.

"I am only a boy," he said, "but it's true. I would paint the Red Lion on my shield if I had only my blood."

King Auberon dropped the hand and stood without stirring, thunderstruck.

"My God in Heaven!" he said; "is it possible that there is within the four seas of Britain a man who takes Notting Hill seriously?"

"And my God in Heaven!" said Wayne passionately; "is it possible that there is within the four seas of Britain a man who does not take it seriously?"

The King said nothing, but merely went back up the steps of the daïs, like a man dazed. He fell back in his chair again and kicked his heels.

"If this sort of thing is to go on," he said weakly, "I shall begin to doubt the superiority of art to life. In Heaven's name, do not play with me. Do you really mean that you are — God help me! — a Notting Hill patriot; that you are — ?"

Wayne made a violent gesture, and the King soothed him wildly.

"All right — all right — I see you are; but let me take it in. You do really propose to fight these modern improvers with their boards and inspectors and surveyors and all the rest of it?"

"Are they so terrible?" asked Wayne, scornfully.

The King continued to stare at him as if he were a human curiosity.

"And I suppose," he said, "that you think that the dentists and small tradesmen and maiden ladies who inhabit Notting Hill, will rally with war-hymns to your standard?"

"If they have blood they will," said the Provost.

"And I suppose," said the King, with his head back among the cushions, "that it never crossed your mind that" — his voice seemed to lose itself luxuriantly— "never crossed your mind that any one ever thought that the idea of a Notting Hill idealism was — er — slightly — slightly ridiculous?"

"Of course they think so," said Wayne. "What was the meaning of mocking the prophets?"

“Where,” asked the King, leaning forward— “where in Heaven’s name did you get this miraculously inane idea?”

“You have been my tutor, Sire,” said the Provost, “in all that is high and honourable.”

“Eh?” said the King.

“It was your Majesty who first stirred my dim patriotism into flame. Ten years ago, when I was a boy (I am only nineteen), I was playing on the slope of Pump Street, with a wooden sword and a paper helmet, dreaming of great wars. In an angry trance I struck out with my sword, and stood petrified, for I saw that I had struck you, Sire, my King, as you wandered in a noble secrecy, watching over your people’s welfare. But I need have had no fear. Then was I taught to understand Kingliness. You neither shrank nor frowned. You summoned no guards. You invoked no punishments. But in august and burning words, which are written in my soul, never to be erased, you told me ever to turn my sword against the enemies of my inviolate city. Like a priest pointing to the altar, you pointed to the hill of Notting. ‘So long,’ you said, ‘as you are ready to die for the sacred mountain, even if it were ringed with all the armies of Bayswater.’ I have not forgotten the words, and I have reason now to remember them, for the hour is come and the crown of your prophecy. The sacred hill is ringed with the armies of Bayswater, and I am ready to die.”

The King was lying back in his chair, a kind of wreck.

“Oh, Lord, Lord, Lord,” he murmured, “what a life! what a life! All my work! I seem to have done it all. So you’re the red-haired boy that hit me in the waistcoat. What have I done? God, what have I done? I thought I would have a joke, and I have created a passion. I tried to compose a burlesque, and it seems to be turning halfway through into an epic. What is to be done with such a world? In the Lord’s name, wasn’t the joke broad and bold enough? I abandoned my subtle humour to amuse you, and I seem to have brought tears to your eyes. What’s to be done with people when you write a pantomime for them — call the sausages classic festoons, and the policeman cut in two a tragedy of public duty? But why am I talking? Why am I asking questions of a nice young gentleman who is totally mad? What is the good of it? What is the good of anything? Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!”

Suddenly he pulled himself upright.

“Don’t you really think the sacred Notting Hill at all absurd?”

“Absurd?” asked Wayne, blankly. “Why should I?”

The King stared back equally blankly.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

"Notting Hill," said the Provost, simply, "is a rise or high ground of the common earth, on which men have built houses to live, in which they are born, fall in love, pray, marry, and die. Why should I think it absurd?"

The King smiled.

"Because, my Leonidas—" he began, then suddenly, he knew not how, found his mind was a total blank. After all, why was it absurd? Why was it absurd? He felt as if the floor of his mind had given way. He felt as all men feel when their first principles are hit hard with a question. Barker always felt so when the King said, "Why trouble about politics?"

The King's thoughts were in a kind of rout; he could not collect them.

"It is generally felt to be a little funny," he said vaguely.

"I suppose," said Adam, turning on him with a fierce suddenness— "I suppose you fancy crucifixion was a serious affair?"

"Well, I—" began Auberon— "I admit I have generally thought it had its graver side."

"Then you are wrong," said Wayne, with incredible violence. "Crucifixion is comic. It is exquisitely diverting. It was an absurd and obscene kind of impaling reserved for people who were made to be laughed at — for slaves and provincials, for dentists and small tradesmen, as you would say. I have seen the grotesque gallows-shape, which the little Roman gutter-boys scribbled on walls as a vulgar joke, blazing on the pinnacles of the temples of the world. And shall I turn back?"

The King made no answer.

Adam went on, his voice ringing in the roof.

"This laughter with which men tyrannise is not the great power you think it. Peter was crucified, and crucified head downwards. What could be funnier than the idea of a respectable old Apostle upside down? What could be more in the style of your modern humour? But what was the good of it? Upside down or right side up, Peter was Peter to mankind. Upside down he stills hangs over Europe, and millions move and breathe only in the life of his Church."

King Auberon got up absently.

"There is something in what you say," he said. "You seem to have been thinking, young man."

“Only feeling, sire,” answered the Provost. “I was born, like other men, in a spot of the earth which I loved because I had played boys’ games there, and fallen in love, and talked with my friends through nights that were nights of the gods. And I feel the riddle. These little gardens where we told our loves. These streets where we brought out our dead. Why should they be commonplace? Why should they be absurd? Why should it be grotesque to say that a pillar-box is poetic when for a year I could not see a red pillar-box against the yellow evening in a certain street without being wracked with something of which God keeps the secret, but which is stronger than sorrow or joy? Why should any one be able to raise a laugh by saying ‘the Cause of Notting Hill’? — Notting Hill where thousands of immortal spirits blaze with alternate hope and fear.”

Auberon was flicking dust off his sleeve with quite a new seriousness on his face, distinct from the owlish solemnity which was the pose of his humour.

“It is very difficult,” he said at last. “It is a damned difficult thing. I see what you mean; I agree with you even up to a point — or I should like to agree with you, if I were young enough to be a prophet and poet. I feel a truth in everything you say until you come to the words ‘Notting Hill.’ And then I regret to say that the old Adam awakes roaring with laughter and makes short work of the new Adam, whose name is Wayne.”

For the first time Provost Wayne was silent, and stood gazing dreamily at the floor. Evening was closing in, and the room had grown darker.

“I know,” he said, in a strange, almost sleepy voice, “there is truth in what you say, too. It is hard not to laugh at the common names — I only say we should not. I have thought of a remedy; but such thoughts are rather terrible.”

“What thoughts?” asked Auberon.

The Provost of Notting Hill seemed to have fallen into a kind of trance; in his eyes was an elvish light.

“I know of a magic wand, but it is a wand that only one or two may rightly use, and only seldom. It is a fairy wand of great fear, stronger than those who use it — often frightful, often wicked to use. But whatever is touched with it is never again wholly common; whatever is touched with it takes a magic from outside the world. If I touch, with this fairy wand, the railways and the roads of Notting Hill, men will love them, and be afraid of them for ever.”

“What the devil are you talking about?” asked the King.

“It has made mean landscapes magnificent, and hovels outlast cathedrals,” went on the madman. “Why should it not make lamp-posts fairer than Greek lamps; and an omnibus-ride like a painted ship? The touch of it is the finger of a strange perfection.”

“What is your wand?” cried the King, impatiently.

“There it is,” said Wayne; and pointed to the floor, where his sword lay flat and shining.

“The sword!” cried the King; and sprang up straight on the daïs.

“Yes, yes,” cried Wayne, hoarsely. “The things touched by that are not vulgar; the things touched by that—”

King Auberon made a gesture of horror.

“You will shed blood for that!” he cried. “For a cursed point of view—”

“Oh, you kings, you kings!” cried out Adam, in a burst of scorn. “How humane you are, how tender, how considerate! You will make war for a frontier, or the imports of a foreign harbour; you will shed blood for the precise duty on lace, or the salute to an admiral. But for the things that make life itself worthy or miserable — how humane you are! I say here, and I know well what I speak of, there were never any necessary wars but the religious wars. There were never any just wars but the religious wars. There were never any humane wars but the religious wars. For these men were fighting for something that claimed, at least, to be the happiness of a man, the virtue of a man. A Crusader thought, at least, that Islam hurt the soul of every man, king or tinker, that it could really capture. I think Buck and Barker and these rich vultures hurt the soul of every man, hurt every inch of the ground, hurt every brick of the houses, that they can really capture. Do you think I have no right to fight for Notting Hill, you whose English Government has so often fought for tomfooleries? If, as your rich friends say, there are no gods, and the skies are dark above us, what should a man fight for, but the place where he had the Eden of childhood and the short heaven of first love? If no temples and no scriptures are sacred, what is sacred if a man’s own youth is not sacred?”

The King walked a little restlessly up and down the daïs.

“It is hard,” he said, biting his lips, “to assent to a view so desperate — so responsible....”

As he spoke, the door of the audience chamber fell ajar, and through the aperture came, like the sudden chatter of a bird, the high, nasal, but well-bred voice of Barker.

“I said to him quite plainly — the public interests—”

Auberon turned on Wayne with violence.

“What the devil is all this? What am I saying? What are you saying? Have you hypnotised me? Curse your uncanny blue eyes! Let me go. Give me back my sense of humour. Give it me back — give it me back, I say!”

“I solemnly assure you,” said Wayne, uneasily, with a gesture, as if feeling all over himself, “that I haven’t got it.”

The King fell back in his chair, and went into a roar of Rabelaisian laughter.

“I don’t think you have,” he cried.

Book III

Chapter I — The Mental Condition of Adam Wayne

A little while after the King's accession a small book of poems appeared, called "Hymns on the Hill." They were not good poems, nor was the book successful, but it attracted a certain amount of attention from one particular school of critics. The King himself, who was a member of the school, reviewed it in his capacity of literary critic to "Straight from the Stables," a sporting journal. They were known as the Hammock School, because it had been calculated malignantly by an enemy that no less than thirteen of their delicate criticisms had begun with the words, "I read this book in a hammock: half asleep in the sleepy sunlight, I ..."; after that there were important differences. Under these conditions they liked everything, but especially everything silly. "Next to authentic goodness in a book," they said— "next to authentic goodness in a book (and that, alas! we never find) we desire a rich badness." Thus it happened that their praise (as indicating the presence of a rich badness) was not universally sought after, and authors became a little disquieted when they found the eye of the Hammock School fixed upon them with peculiar favour.

The peculiarity of "Hymns on the Hill" was the celebration of the poetry of London as distinct from the poetry of the country. This sentiment or affectation was, of course, not uncommon in the twentieth century, nor was it, although sometimes exaggerated, and sometimes artificial, by any means without a great truth at its root, for there is one respect in which a town must be more poetical than the country, since it is closer to the spirit of man; for London, if it be not one of the masterpieces of man, is at least one of his sins. A street is really more poetical than a meadow, because a street has a secret. A street is going somewhere, and a meadow nowhere. But, in the case of the book called "Hymns on the Hill," there was another peculiarity, which the King pointed out with great acumen in his review. He was naturally interested in the matter, for he had himself published a volume of lyrics about London under his pseudonym of "Daisy Daydream."

This difference, as the King pointed out, consisted in the fact that, while mere artificers like "Daisy Daydream" (on whose elaborate style the King, over his signature of "Thunderbolt," was perhaps somewhat too severe) thought to praise London by comparing it to the country — using nature, that is, as a background from which all poetical images had to be drawn —

the more robust author of “Hymns on the Hill” praised the country, or nature, by comparing it to the town, and used the town itself as a background. “Take,” said the critic, “the typically feminine lines, ‘To the Inventor of The Hansom Cab’ —

‘Poet, whose cunning carved this amorous shell, Where twain may dwell.’”

“Surely,” wrote the King, “no one but a woman could have written those lines. A woman has always a weakness for nature; with her art is only beautiful as an echo or shadow of it. She is praising the hansom cab by theme and theory, but her soul is still a child by the sea, picking up shells. She can never be utterly of the town, as a man can; indeed, do we not speak (with sacred propriety) of ‘a man about town’? Who ever spoke of a woman about town? However much, physically, ‘about town’ a woman may be, she still models herself on nature; she tries to carry nature with her; she bids grasses to grow on her head, and furry beasts to bite her about the throat. In the heart of a dim city, she models her hat on a flaring cottage garden of flowers. We, with our nobler civic sentiment, model ours on a chimney pot; the ensign of civilisation. And rather than be without birds, she will commit massacre, that she may turn her head into a tree, with dead birds to sing on it.”

This kind of thing went on for several pages, and then the critic remembered his subject, and returned to it.

“Poet, whose cunning carved this amorous shell, Where twain may dwell.”

“The peculiarity of these fine though feminine lines,” continued “Thunderbolt,” “is, as we have said, that they praise the hansom cab by comparing it to the shell, to a natural thing. Now, hear the author of ‘Hymns on the Hill,’ and how he deals with the same subject. In his fine nocturne, entitled ‘The Last Omnibus’ he relieves the rich and poignant melancholy of the theme by a sudden sense of rushing at the end —

‘The wind round the old street corner Swung sudden and quick as a cab.’

“Here the distinction is obvious. ‘Daisy Daydream’ thinks it a great compliment to a hansom cab to be compared to one of the spiral chambers of the sea. And the author of ‘Hymns on the Hill’ thinks it a great compliment to the immortal whirlwind to be compared to a hackney coach. He surely is the real admirer of London. We have no space to speak of all his perfect applications of the idea; of the poem in which, for instance, a lady’s eyes are compared, not to stars, but to two perfect street-lamps guiding the wanderer. We have no space to speak of the fine lyric, recalling the Elizabethan spirit, in which the poet, instead of saying that the rose and the lily contend in her complexion, says, with a purer modernism, that the red omnibus of Hammersmith and the white omnibus of Fulham fight there for the mastery. How perfect the image of two contending omnibuses!”

Here, somewhat abruptly, the review concluded, probably because the King had to send off his copy at that moment, as he was in some want of money. But the King was a very good critic, whatever he may have been as King, and he had, to a considerable extent, hit the right nail on the head. “Hymns on the Hill” was not at all like the poems originally published in praise of the poetry of London. And the reason was that it was really written by a man who had seen nothing else but London, and who regarded it, therefore, as the universe. It was written by a raw, red-headed lad of seventeen, named Adam Wayne, who had been born in Notting Hill. An accident in his seventh year prevented his being taken away to the seaside, and thus his whole life had been passed in his own Pump Street, and in its neighbourhood. And the consequence was, that he saw the street-lamps as things quite as eternal as the stars; the two fires were mingled. He saw the houses as things enduring, like the mountains, and so he wrote about them as one would write about mountains. Nature puts on a disguise when she speaks to every man; to this man she put on the disguise of Notting Hill. Nature would mean to a poet born in the Cumberland hills, a stormy sky-line and sudden rocks. Nature would mean to a poet born in the Essex flats, a waste of splendid waters and splendid sunsets. So nature meant to this man Wayne a line of violet roofs and lemon lamps, the chiaroscuro of the town. He did not think it clever or funny to praise the shadows and colours of the town; he had seen no other shadows or colours, and so he praised them — because they were shadows and colours. He saw all this because he was a poet, though in practice a bad poet. It is too often forgotten that just as a bad man is nevertheless a man, so a bad poet is nevertheless a poet.

Mr. Wayne’s little volume of verse was a complete failure; and he submitted to the decision of fate with a quite rational humility, went back to his work, which was that of a draper’s assistant, and wrote no more. He still retained his feeling about the town of Notting Hill, because he could not possibly have any other feeling, because it was the back and base of his brain. But he does not seem to have made any particular attempt to express it or insist upon it.

He was a genuine natural mystic, one of those who live on the border of fairyland. But he was perhaps the first to realise how often the boundary of fairyland runs through a crowded city. Twenty feet from him (for he was very short-sighted) the red and white and yellow suns of the gas-lights thronged and melted into each other like an orchard of fiery trees, the beginning of the woods of elf-land.

But, oddly enough, it was because he was a small poet that he came to his strange and isolated triumph. It was because he was a failure in literature that he became a portent in English history. He was one of those to whom nature has given the desire without the power of artistic expression. He had been a dumb poet from his cradle. He might have been so to his grave, and carried unuttered into the darkness a treasure of new and sensational song. But he was born under the lucky star of a single coincidence. He happened to be at the head of his dingy municipality at the time of the King's jest, at the time when all municipalities were suddenly commanded to break out into banners and flowers. Out of the long procession of the silent poets, who have been passing since the beginning of the world, this one man found himself in the midst of an heraldic vision, in which he could act and speak and live lyrically. While the author and the victims alike treated the whole matter as a silly public charade, this one man, by taking it seriously, sprang suddenly into a throne of artistic omnipotence. Armour, music, standards, watch-fires, the noise of drums, all the theatrical properties were thrown before him. This one poor rhymster, having burnt his own rhymes, began to live that life of open air and acted poetry of which all the poets of the earth have dreamed in vain; the life for which the Iliad is only a cheap substitute.

Upwards from his abstracted childhood, Adam Wayne had grown strongly and silently in a certain quality or capacity which is in modern cities almost entirely artificial, but which can be natural, and was primarily almost brutally natural in him, the quality or capacity of patriotism. It exists, like other virtues and vices, in a certain undiluted reality. It is not confused with all kinds of other things. A child speaking of his country or his village may make every mistake in Mandeville or tell every lie in Munchausen, but in his statement there will be no psychological lies any more than there can be in a good song. Adam Wayne, as a boy, had for his dull streets in Notting Hill the ultimate and ancient sentiment that went out to Athens or Jerusalem. He knew the secret of the passion, those secrets which make real old national songs sound so strange to our civilisation. He knew that real patriotism tends to sing about sorrows and forlorn hopes much more than about victory. He knew that in proper names themselves is half the poetry of all national poems. Above all, he knew the supreme psychological fact about patriotism, as certain in connection with it as that a fine shame comes to all lovers, the fact that the patriot never under any circumstances boasts of the largeness of his country, but always, and of necessity, boasts of the smallness of it.

All this he knew, not because he was a philosopher or a genius, but because he was a child. Any one who cares to walk up a side slum like Pump Street, can see a little Adam claiming to be king of a paving-stone. And he will always be proudest if the stone is almost too narrow for him to keep his feet inside it.

It was while he was in such a dream of defensive battle, marking out some strip of street or fortress of steps as the limit of his haughty claim, that the King had met him, and, with a few words flung in mockery, ratified for ever the strange boundaries of his soul. Thenceforward the fanciful idea of the defence of Notting Hill in war became to him a thing as solid as eating or drinking or lighting a pipe. He disposed his meals for it, altered his plans for it, lay awake in the night and went over it again. Two or three shops were to him an arsenal; an area was to him a moat; corners of balconies and turns of stone steps were points for the location of a culverin or an archer. It is almost impossible to convey to any ordinary imagination the degree to which he had transmitted the leaden London landscape to a romantic gold. The process began almost in babyhood, and became habitual like a literal madness. It was felt most keenly at night, when London is really herself, when her lights shine in the dark like the eyes of innumerable cats, and the outline of the dark houses has the bold simplicity of blue hills. But for him the night revealed instead of concealing, and he read all the blank hours of morning and afternoon, by a contradictory phrase, in the light of that darkness. To this man, at any rate, the inconceivable had happened. The artificial city had become to him nature, and he felt the curbstones and gas-lamps as things as ancient as the sky.

One instance may suffice. Walking along Pump Street with a friend, he said, as he gazed dreamily at the iron fence of a little front garden, “How those railings stir one’s blood!”

His friend, who was also a great intellectual admirer, looked at them painfully, but without any particular emotion. He was so troubled about it that he went back quite a large number of times on quiet evenings and stared at the railings, waiting for something to happen to his blood, but without success. At last he took refuge in asking Wayne himself. He discovered that the ecstacy lay in the one point he had never noticed about the railings even after his six visits — the fact that they were, like the great majority of others — in London, shaped at the top after the manner of a spear. As a child, Wayne had half unconsciously compared them with the spears in pictures of Lancelot and St. George, and had grown up under the shadow of the graphic association. Now, whenever he looked at them, they were simply the serried weapons that made a hedge of steel round the sacred homes of Notting Hill. He could not have cleansed his mind of that meaning even if he tried. It was not a fanciful comparison, or anything like it. It would not have been true to say that the familiar railings reminded him of spears; it would have been far truer to say that the familiar spears occasionally reminded him of railings.

A couple of days after his interview with the King, Adam Wayne was pacing like a caged lion in front of five shops that occupied the upper end of the disputed street. They were a grocer’s, a chemist’s, a barber’s, an old curiosity shop and a toy-shop that sold also newspapers. It was these five shops which his childish fastidiousness had first selected as the essentials of the Notting Hill campaign, the citadel of the city. If Notting Hill was the heart of the universe, and Pump Street was the heart of Notting Hill, this was the heart of Pump Street. The fact that they were all small and side by side realised that feeling for a formidable comfort and compactness which, as we have said, was the heart of his patriotism, and of all patriotism. The grocer (who had a wine and spirit licence) was included because he could provision the garrison; the old curiosity shop because it contained enough swords, pistols, partisans, cross-bows, and blunderbusses to arm a whole irregular regiment; the toy and paper shop because Wayne thought a free press an essential centre for the soul of Pump Street; the chemist’s to cope with outbreaks of disease among the besieged; and the barber’s because it was in the middle of all the rest, and the barber’s son was an intimate friend and spiritual affinity.

It was a cloudless October evening settling down through purple into pure silver around the roofs and chimneys of the steep little street, which looked black and sharp and dramatic. In the deep shadows the gas-lit shop fronts gleamed like five fires in a row, and before them, darkly outlined like a ghost against some purgatorial furnaces, passed to and fro the tall bird-like figure and eagle nose of Adam Wayne.

He swung his stick restlessly, and seemed fitfully talking to himself.

“There are, after all, enigmas,” he said “even to the man who has faith. There are doubts that remain even after the true philosophy is completed in every rung and rivet. And here is one of them. Is the normal human need, the normal human condition, higher or lower than those special states of the soul which call out a doubtful and dangerous glory? those special powers of knowledge or sacrifice which are made possible only by the existence of evil? Which should come first to our affections, the enduring sanities of peace or the half-maniacal virtues of battle? Which should come first, the man great in the daily round or the man great in emergency? Which should come first, to return to the enigma before me, the grocer or the chemist? Which is more certainly the stay of the city, the swift chivalrous chemist or the benignant all-providing grocer? In such ultimate spiritual doubts it is only possible to choose a side by the higher instincts, and to abide the issue. In any case, I have made my choice. May I be pardoned if I choose wrongly, but I choose the grocer.”

“Good morning, sir,” said the grocer, who was a middle-aged man, partially bald, with harsh red whiskers and beard, and forehead lined with all the cares of the small tradesman. “What can I do for you, sir?”

Wayne removed his hat on entering the shop, with a ceremonious gesture, which, slight as it was, made the tradesman eye him with the beginnings of wonder.

“I come, sir,” he said soberly, “to appeal to your patriotism.”

“Why, sir,” said the grocer, “that sounds like the times when I was a boy and we used to have elections.”

“You will have them again,” said Wayne, firmly, “and far greater things. Listen, Mr. Mead. I know the temptations which a grocer has to a too cosmopolitan philosophy. I can imagine what it must be to sit all day as you do surrounded with wares from all the ends of the earth, from strange seas that we have never sailed and strange forests that we could not even picture. No Eastern king ever had such argosies or such cargoes coming from the sunrise and the sunset, and Solomon in all his glory was not enriched like one of you. India is at your elbow,” he cried, lifting his voice and pointing his stick at a drawer of rice, the grocer making a movement of some alarm, "China is before you, Demerara is behind you, America is above your head, and at this very moment, like some old Spanish admiral, you hold Tunis in your hands."

Mr. Mead dropped the box of dates which he was just lifting, and then picked it up again vaguely.

Wayne went on with a heightened colour, but a lowered voice,

"I know, I say, the temptations of so international, so universal a vision of wealth. I know that it must be your danger not to fall like many tradesmen into too dusty and mechanical a narrowness, but rather to be too broad, to be too general, too liberal. If a narrow nationalism be the danger of the pastry-cook, who makes his own wares under his own heavens, no less is cosmopolitanism the danger of the grocer. But I come to you in the name of that patriotism which no wanderings or enlightenments should ever wholly extinguish, and I ask you to remember Notting Hill. For, after all, in this cosmopolitan magnificence, she has played no small part. Your dates may come from the tall palms of Barbary, your sugar from the strange islands of the tropics, your tea from the secret villages of the Empire of the Dragon. That this room might be furnished, forests may have been spoiled under the Southern Cross, and leviathans speared under the Polar Star. But you yourself — surely no inconsiderable treasure — you yourself, the brain that wields these vast interests — you yourself, at least, have grown to strength and wisdom between these grey houses and under this rainy sky. This city which made you, and thus made your fortunes, is threatened with war. Come forth and tell to the ends of the earth this lesson. Oil is from the North and fruits from the South; rices are from India and spices from Ceylon; sheep are from New Zealand and men from Notting Hill."

The grocer sat for some little while, with dim eyes and his mouth open, looking rather like a fish. Then he scratched the back of his head, and said nothing. Then he said —

"Anything out of the shop, sir?"

Wayne looked round in a dazed way. Seeing a pile of tins of pine-apple chunks, he waved his stick generally towards them.

"Yes," he said; "I'll take those."

"All those, sir?" said the grocer, with greatly increased interest.

“Yes, yes; all those,” replied Wayne, still a little bewildered, like a man splashed with cold water.

“Very good, sir; thank you, sir,” said the grocer with animation. “You may count upon my patriotism, sir.”

“I count upon it already,” said Wayne, and passed out into the gathering night.

The grocer put the box of dates back in its place.

“What a nice fellow he is!” he said. “It’s odd how often they are nice. Much nicer than those as are all right.”

Meanwhile Adam Wayne stood outside the glowing chemist’s shop, unmistakably wavering.

“What a weakness it is!” he muttered. “I have never got rid of it from childhood — the fear of this magic shop. The grocer is rich, he is romantic, he is poetical in the truest sense, but he is not — no, he is not supernatural. But the chemist! All the other shops stand in Notting Hill, but this stands in Elf-land. Look at those great burning bowls of colour. It must be from them that God paints the sunsets. It is superhuman, and the superhuman is all the more uncanny when it is beneficent. That is the root of the fear of God. I am afraid. But I must be a man and enter.”

He was a man, and entered. A short, dark young man was behind the counter with spectacles, and greeted him with a bright but entirely business-like smile.

“A fine evening, sir,” he said.

“Fine indeed, strange Father,” said Adam, stretching his hands somewhat forward. “It is on such clear and mellow nights that your shop is most itself. Then they appear most perfect, those moons of green and gold and crimson, which from afar oft guide the pilgrim of pain and sickness to this house of merciful witchcraft.”

“Can I get you anything?” asked the chemist.

“Let me see,” said Wayne, in a friendly but vague manner. “Let me have some sal volatile.”

“Eightpence, tenpence, or one and sixpence a bottle?” said the young man, genially.

“One and six — one and six,” replied Wayne, with a wild submissiveness. “I come to ask you, Mr. Bowles, a terrible question.”

He paused and collected himself.

“It is necessary,” he muttered— “it is necessary to be tactful, and to suit the appeal to each profession in turn.”

“I come,” he resumed aloud, “to ask you a question which goes to the roots of your miraculous toils. Mr. Bowles, shall all this witchery cease?” And he waved his stick around the shop.

Meeting with no answer, he continued with animation —

“In Notting Hill we have felt to its core the elfish mystery of your profession. And now Notting Hill itself is threatened.”

“Anything more, sir?” asked the chemist.

“Oh,” said Wayne, somewhat disturbed— “oh, what is it chemists sell? Quinine, I think. Thank you. Shall it be destroyed? I have met these men of Bayswater and North Kensington — Mr. Bowles, they are materialists. They see no witchery in your work, even when it is wrought within their own borders. They think the chemist is commonplace. They think him human.”

The chemist appeared to pause, only a moment, to take in the insult, and immediately said —

“And the next article, please?”

“Alum,” said the Provost, wildly. “I resume. It is in this sacred town alone that your priesthood is reverenced. Therefore, when you fight for us you fight not only for yourself, but for everything you typify. You fight not only for Notting Hill, but for Fairyland, for as surely as Buck and Barker and such men hold sway, the sense of Fairyland in some strange manner diminishes.”

“Anything more, sir?” asked Mr. Bowles, with unbroken cheerfulness.

“Oh yes, jujubes — Gregory powder — magnesia. The danger is imminent. In all this matter I have felt that I fought not merely for my own city (though to that I owe all my blood), but for all places in which these great ideas could prevail. I am fighting not merely for Notting Hill, but for Bayswater itself; for North Kensington itself. For if the gold-hunters prevail, these also will lose all their ancient sentiments and all the mystery of their national soul. I know I can count upon you.”

“Oh yes, sir,” said the chemist, with great animation; “we are always glad to oblige a good customer.”

Adam Wayne went out of the shop with a deep sense of fulfilment of soul.

“It is so fortunate,” he said, “to have tact, to be able to play upon the peculiar talents and specialities, the cosmopolitanism of the grocer and the world-old necromancy of the chemist. Where should I be without tact?”

Chapter II — The Remarkable Mr. Turnbull

After two more interviews with shopmen, however, the patriot’s confidence in his own psychological diplomacy began vaguely to wane. Despite the care with which he considered the peculiar rationale and the peculiar glory of each separate shop, there seemed to be something unresponsive about the shopmen. Whether it was a dark resentment against the uninitiate for peeping into their masonic magnificence, he could not quite conjecture.

His conversation with the man who kept the shop of curiosities had begun encouragingly. The man who kept the shop of curiosities had, indeed, enchanted him with a phrase. He was standing drearily at the door of his shop, a wrinkled man with a grey pointed beard, evidently a gentleman who had come down in the world.

“And how does your commerce go, you strange guardian of the past?” said Wayne, affably.

“Well, sir, not very well,” replied the man, with that patient voice of his class which is one of the most heart-breaking things in the world. “Things are terribly quiet.”

Wayne’s eyes shone suddenly.

“A great saying,” he said, “worthy of a man whose merchandise is human history. Terribly quiet; that is in two words the spirit of this age, as I have felt it from my cradle. I sometimes wondered how many other people felt the oppression of this union between quietude and terror. I see blank well-ordered streets and men in black moving about inoffensively, sullenly. It goes on day after day, day after day, and nothing happens; but to me it is like a dream from which I might wake screaming. To me the straightness of our life is the straightness of a thin cord stretched tight. Its stillness is terrible. It might snap with a noise like thunder. And you who sit, amid the *débris* of the great wars, you who sit, as it were, upon a battlefield, you know that war was less terrible than this evil peace; you know that the idle lads who carried those swords under Francis or Elizabeth, the rude Squire or Baron who swung that mace about in Picardy or Northumberland battles, may have been terribly noisy, but were not like us, terribly quiet.”

Whether it was a faint embarrassment of conscience as to the original source and date of the weapons referred to, or merely an engrained depression, the guardian of the past looked, if anything, a little more worried.

“But I do not think,” continued Wayne, “that this horrible silence of modernity will last, though I think for the present it will increase. What a farce is this modern liberality! Freedom of speech means practically, in our modern civilisation, that we must only talk about unimportant things. We must not talk about religion, for that is illiberal; we must not talk about bread and cheese, for that is talking shop; we must not talk about death, for that is depressing; we must not talk about birth, for that is indelicate. It cannot last. Something must break this strange indifference, this strange dreamy egoism, this strange loneliness of millions in a crowd. Something must break it. Why should it not be you and I? Can you do nothing else but guard relics?”

The shopman wore a gradually clearing expression, which would have led those unsympathetic with the cause of the Red Lion to think that the last sentence was the only one to which he had attached any meaning.

“I am rather old to go into a new business,” he said, “and I don’t quite know what to be, either.”

“Why not,” said Wayne, gently having reached the crisis of his delicate persuasion— “why not be a colonel?”

It was at this point, in all probability, that the interview began to yield more disappointing results. The man appeared inclined at first to regard the suggestion of becoming a colonel as outside the sphere of immediate and relevant discussion. A long exposition of the inevitable war of independence, coupled with the purchase of a doubtful sixteenth-century sword for an exaggerated price, seemed to resettle matters. Wayne left the shop, however, somewhat infected with the melancholy of its owner.

That melancholy was completed at the barber’s.

“Shaving, sir?” inquired that artist from inside his shop.

“War!” replied Wayne, standing on the threshold.

“I beg your pardon,” said the other, sharply.

“War!” said Wayne, warmly. “But not for anything inconsistent with the beautiful and the civilised arts. War for beauty. War for society. War for peace. A great chance is offered you of repelling that slander which, in defiance of the lives of so many artists, attributes poltroonery to those who beautify and polish the surface of our lives. Why should not hairdressers be heroes? Why should not—”

“Now, you get out,” said the barber, irascibly. “We don’t want any of your sort here. You get out.”

And he came forward with the desperate annoyance of a mild person when enraged.

Adam Wayne laid his hand for a moment on the sword, then dropped it.

“Notting Hill,” he said, “will need her bolder sons;” and he turned gloomily to the toy-shop.

It was one of those queer little shops so constantly seen in the side streets of London, which must be called toy-shops only because toys upon the whole predominate; for the remainder of goods seem to consist of almost everything else in the world — tobacco, exercise-books, sweet-stuff, novelettes, halfpenny paper clips, halfpenny pencil sharpeners, bootlaces, and cheap fireworks. It also sold newspapers, and a row of dirty-looking posters hung along the front of it.

“I am afraid,” said Wayne, as he entered, “that I am not getting on with these tradesmen as I should. Is it that I have neglected to rise to the full meaning of their work? Is there some secret buried in each of these shops which no mere poet can discover?”

He stepped to the counter with a depression which he rapidly conquered as he addressed the man on the other side of it, — a man of short stature, and hair prematurely white, and the look of a large baby.

“Sir,” said Wayne, “I am going from house to house in this street of ours, seeking to stir up some sense of the danger which now threatens our city. Nowhere have I felt my duty so difficult as here. For the toy-shop keeper has to do with all that remains to us of Eden before the first wars began. You sit here meditating continually upon the wants of that wonderful time when every staircase leads to the stars, and every garden-path to the other end of nowhere. Is it thoughtlessly, do you think, that I strike the dark old drum of peril in the paradise of children? But consider a moment; do not condemn me hastily. Even that paradise itself contains the rumour or beginning of that danger, just as the Eden that was made for perfection contained the terrible tree. For judge childhood, even by your own arsenal of its pleasures. You keep bricks; you make yourself thus, doubtless, the witness of the constructive instinct older than the destructive. You keep dolls; you make yourself the priest of that divine idolatry. You keep Noah’s Arks; you perpetuate the memory of the salvation of all life as a precious, an irreplaceable thing. But do you keep only, sir, the symbols of this prehistoric sanity, this childish rationality of the earth? Do you not keep more terrible things? What are those boxes, seemingly of lead soldiers, that I see in that glass case? Are they not witnesses to that terror and beauty, that desire for a lovely death, which could not be excluded even from the immortality of Eden? Do not despise the lead soldiers, Mr. Turnbull."

"I don't," said Mr. Turnbull, of the toy-shop, shortly, but with great emphasis.

"I am glad to hear it," replied Wayne. "I confess that I feared for my military schemes the awful innocence of your profession. How, I thought to myself, will this man, used only to the wooden swords that give pleasure, think of the steel swords that give pain? But I am at least partly reassured. Your tone suggests to me that I have at least the entry of a gate of your fairyland — the gate through which the soldiers enter, for it cannot be denied — I ought, sir, no longer to deny, that it is of soldiers that I come to speak. Let your gentle employment make you merciful towards the troubles of the world. Let your own silvery experience tone down our sanguine sorrows. For there is war in Notting Hill."

The little toy-shop keeper sprang up suddenly, slapping his fat hands like two fans on the counter.

"War?" he cried. "Not really, sir? Is it true? Oh, what a joke! Oh, what a sight for sore eyes!"

Wayne was almost taken aback by this outburst.

"I am delighted," he stammered. "I had no notion—"

He sprang out of the way just in time to avoid Mr. Turnbull, who took a flying leap over the counter and dashed to the front of the shop.

"You look here, sir," he said; "you just look here."

He came back with two of the torn posters in his hand which were flapping outside his shop.

"Look at those, sir," he said, and flung them down on the counter.

Wayne bent over them, and read on one —

"LAST FIGHTING.
REDUCTION OF THE CENTRAL DERVISH CITY.
REMARKABLE, ETC."

On the other he read —

"LAST SMALL REPUBLIC ANNEXED.

NICARAGUAN CAPITAL SURRENDERS AFTER A MONTH’S FIGHTING.

GREAT SLAUGHTER.”

Wayne bent over them again, evidently puzzled; then he looked at the dates. They were both dated in August fifteen years before.

“Why do you keep these old things?” he said, startled entirely out of his absurd tact of mysticism. “Why do you hang them outside your shop?”

“Because,” said the other, simply, “they are the records of the last war. You mentioned war just now. It happens to be my hobby.”

Wayne lifted his large blue eyes with an infantile wonder.

“Come with me,” said Turnbull, shortly, and led him into a parlour at the back of the shop.

In the centre of the parlour stood a large deal table. On it were set rows and rows of the tin and lead soldiers which were part of the shopkeeper’s stock. The visitor would have thought nothing of it if it had not been for a certain odd grouping of them, which did not seem either entirely commercial or entirely haphazard.

“You are acquainted, no doubt,” said Turnbull, turning his big eyes upon Wayne— “you are acquainted, no doubt, with the arrangement of the American and Nicaraguan troops in the last battle;” and he waved his hand towards the table.

“I am afraid not,” said Wayne. “I—”

“Ah! you were at that time occupied too much, perhaps, with the Dervish affair. You will find it in this corner.” And he pointed to a part of the floor where there was another arrangement of children’s soldiers grouped here and there.

“You seem,” said Wayne, “to be interested in military matters.”

“I am interested in nothing else,” answered the toy-shop keeper, simply.

Wayne appeared convulsed with a singular, suppressed excitement.

“In that case,” he said, “I may approach you with an unusual degree of confidence. Touching the matter of the defence of Notting Hill, I—”

“Defence of Notting Hill? Yes, sir. This way, sir,” said Turnbull, with great perturbation. “Just step into this side room;” and he led Wayne into another apartment, in which the table was entirely covered with an arrangement of children’s bricks. A second glance at it told Wayne that the bricks were arranged in the form of a precise and perfect plan of Notting

Hill. “Sir,” said Turnbull, impressively, “you have, by a kind of accident, hit upon the whole secret of my life. As a boy, I grew up among the last wars of the world, when Nicaragua was taken and the dervishes wiped out. And I adopted it as a hobby, sir, as you might adopt astronomy or bird-stuffing. I had no ill-will to any one, but I was interested in war as a science, as a game. And suddenly I was bowled out. The big Powers of the world, having swallowed up all the small ones, came to that confounded agreement, and there was no more war. There was nothing more for me to do but to do what I do now — to read the old campaigns in dirty old newspapers, and to work them out with tin soldiers. One other thing had occurred to me. I thought it an amusing fancy to make a plan of how this district or ours ought to be defended if it were ever attacked. It seems to interest you too.”

“If it were ever attacked,” repeated Wayne, awed into an almost mechanical enunciation. “Mr. Turnbull, it is attacked. Thank Heaven, I am bringing to at least one human being the news that is at bottom the only good news to any son of Adam. Your life has not been useless. Your work has not been play. Now, when the hair is already grey on your head, Turnbull, you shall have your youth. God has not destroyed, He has only deferred it. Let us sit down here, and you shall explain to me this military map of Notting Hill. For you and I have to defend Notting Hill together.”

Mr. Turnbull looked at the other for a moment, then hesitated, and then sat down beside the bricks and the stranger. He did not rise again for seven hours, when the dawn broke.

The headquarters of Provost Adam Wayne and his Commander-in-Chief consisted of a small and somewhat unsuccessful milk-shop at the corner of Pump Street. The blank white morning had only just begun to break over the blank London buildings when Wayne and Turnbull were to be found seated in the cheerless and unswept shop. Wayne had something feminine in his character; he belonged to that class of persons who forget their meals when anything interesting is in hand. He had had nothing for sixteen hours but hurried glasses of milk, and, with a glass standing empty beside him, he was writing and sketching and dotting and crossing out with inconceivable rapidity with a pencil and a piece of paper. Turnbull was of that more masculine type in which a sense of responsibility increases the appetite, and with his sketch-map beside him he was dealing strenuously with a pile of sandwiches in a paper packet, and a tankard of ale from the tavern opposite, whose shutters had just been taken down. Neither of them spoke, and there was no sound in the living stillness except the scratching of Wayne's pencil and the squealing of an aimless-looking cat. At length Wayne broke the silence by saying —

"Seventeen pounds eight shillings and ninepence."

Turnbull nodded and put his head in the tankard.

"That," said Wayne, "is not counting the five pounds you took yesterday. What did you do with it?"

"Ah, that is rather interesting!" replied Turnbull, with his mouth full. "I used that five pounds in a kindly and philanthropic act."

Wayne was gazing with mystification in his queer and innocent eyes.

"I used that five pounds," continued the other, "in giving no less than forty little London boys rides in hansom cabs."

"Are you insane?" asked the Provost.

"It is only my light touch," returned Turnbull. "These hansom-cab rides will raise the tone — raise the tone, my dear fellow — of our London youths, widen their horizon, brace their nervous system, make them acquainted with the various public monuments of our great city. Education, Wayne, education. How many excellent thinkers have pointed out that political reform is useless until we produce a cultured populace. So that twenty years hence, when these boys are grown up—"

"Mad!" said Wayne, laying down his pencil; "and five pounds gone!"

"You are in error," explained Turnbull. "You grave creatures can never be brought to understand how much quicker work really goes with the assistance of nonsense and good meals. Stripped of its decorative beauties, my statement was strictly accurate. Last night I gave forty half-crowns to forty little boys, and sent them all over London to take hansom cabs. I told them in every case to tell the cabman to bring them to this spot. In half an hour from now the declaration of war will be posted up. At the same time the cabs will have begun to come in, you will have ordered out the guard, the little boys will drive up in state, we shall commandeer the horses for cavalry, use the cabs for barricade, and give the men the choice between serving in our ranks and detention in our basements and cellars. The little boys we can use as scouts. The main thing is that we start the war with an advantage unknown in all the other armies — horses. And now," he said, finishing his beer, "I will go and drill the troops."

And he walked out of the milk-shop, leaving the Provost staring.

A minute or two afterwards, the Provost laughed. He only laughed once or twice in his life, and then he did it in a queer way as if it were an art he had not mastered. Even he saw something funny in the preposterous coup of the half-crowns and the little boys. He did not see the monstrous absurdity of the whole policy and the whole war. He enjoyed it seriously as a crusade, that is, he enjoyed it far more than any joke can be enjoyed. Turnbull enjoyed it partly as a joke, even more perhaps as a reversion from the things he hated — modernity and monotony and civilisation. To break up the vast machinery of modern life and use the fragments as engines of war, to make the barricade of omnibuses and points of vantage of chimney-pots, was to him a game worth infinite risk and trouble. He had that rational and deliberate preference which will always to the end trouble the peace of the world, the rational and deliberate preference for a short life and a merry one.

Chapter III — The Experiment of Mr. Buck

An earnest and eloquent petition was sent up to the King signed with the names of Wilson, Barker, Buck, Swindon, and others. It urged that at the forthcoming conference to be held in his Majesty's presence touching the final disposition of the property in Pump Street, it might be held not inconsistent with political decorum and with the unutterable respect they entertained for his Majesty if they appeared in ordinary morning dress, without the costume decreed for them as Provosts. So it happened that the company appeared at that council in frock-coats and that the King himself limited his love of ceremony to appearing (after his not unusual manner), in evening dress with one order — in this case not the Garter, but the button of the Club of Old Clipper's Best Pals, a decoration obtained (with difficulty) from a halfpenny boy's paper. Thus also it happened that the only spot of colour in the room was Adam Wayne, who entered in great dignity with the great red robes and the great sword.

"We have met," said Auberon, "to decide the most arduous of modern problems. May we be successful." And he sat down gravely.

Buck turned his chair a little, and flung one leg over the other.

"Your Majesty," he said, quite good-humouredly, "there is only one thing I can't understand, and that is why this affair is not settled in five minutes. Here's a small property which is worth a thousand to us and is not worth a hundred to any one else. We offer the thousand. It's not business-like, I know, for we ought to get it for less, and it's not reasonable and it's not fair on us, but I'm damned if I can see why it's difficult."

"The difficulty may be very simply stated," said Wayne. "You may offer a million and it will be very difficult for you to get Pump Street."

"But look here, Mr. Wayne," cried Barker, striking in with a kind of cold excitement. "Just look here. You've no right to take up a position like that. You've a right to stand out for a bigger price, but you aren't doing that. You're refusing what you and every sane man knows to be a splendid offer simply from malice or spite — it must be malice or spite. And that kind of thing is really criminal; it's against the public good. The King's Government would be justified in forcing you."

With his lean fingers spread on the table, he stared anxiously at Wayne's face, which did not move.

"In forcing you ... it would," he repeated.

"It shall," said Buck, shortly, turning to the table with a jerk. "We have done our best to be decent."

Wayne lifted his large eyes slowly.

"Was it my Lord Buck," he inquired, "who said that the King of England 'shall' do something?"

Buck flushed and said testily —

"I mean it must — it ought to. As I say, we've done our best to be generous; I defy any one to deny it. As it is, Mr. Wayne, I don't want to say a word that's uncivil. I hope it's not uncivil to say that you can be, and ought to be, in gaol. It is criminal to stop public works for a whim. A man might as well burn ten thousand onions in his front garden or bring up his children to run naked in the street, as do what you say you have a right to do. People have been compelled to sell before now. The King could compel you, and I hope he will."

"Until he does," said Wayne, calmly, "the power and government of this great nation is on my side and not yours, and I defy you to defy it."

"In what sense," cried Barker, with his feverish eyes and hands, "is the Government on your side?"

With one ringing movement Wayne unrolled a great parchment on the table. It was decorated down the sides with wild water-colour sketches of vestrymen in crowns and wreaths.

"The Charter of the Cities," he began.

Buck exploded in a brutal oath and laughed.

"That tomfool's joke. Haven't we had enough—"

"And there you sit," cried Wayne, springing erect and with a voice like a trumpet, "with no argument but to insult the King before his face."

Buck rose also with blazing eyes.

"I am hard to bully," he began — and the slow tones of the King struck in with incomparable gravity —

"My Lord Buck, I must ask you to remember that your King is present. It is not often that he needs to protect himself among his subjects."

Barker turned to him with frantic gestures.

"For God's sake don't back up the madman now," he implored. "Have your joke another time. Oh, for Heaven's sake—"

"My Lord Provost of South Kensington," said King Auberon, steadily, "I do not follow your remarks, which are uttered with a rapidity unusual at Court. Nor do your well-meant efforts to convey the rest with your fingers materially assist me. I say that my Lord Provost of North Kensington, to whom I spoke, ought not in the presence of his Sovereign to speak disrespectfully of his Sovereign's ordinances. Do you disagree?"

Barker turned restlessly in his chair, and Buck cursed without speaking. The King went on in a comfortable voice —

"My Lord Provost of Notting Hill, proceed."

Wayne turned his blue eyes on the King, and to every one's surprise there was a look in them not of triumph, but of a certain childish distress.

"I am sorry, your Majesty," he said; "I fear I was more than equally to blame with the Lord Provost of North Kensington. We were debating somewhat eagerly, and we both rose to our feet. I did so first, I am ashamed to say. The Provost of North Kensington is, therefore, comparatively innocent. I beseech your Majesty to address your rebuke chiefly, at least, to me. Mr. Buck is not innocent, for he did no doubt, in the heat of the moment, speak disrespectfully. But the rest of the discussion he seems to me to have conducted with great good temper."

Buck looked genuinely pleased, for business men are all simple-minded, and have therefore that degree of communion with fanatics. The King, for some reason, looked, for the first time in his life, ashamed.

"This very kind speech of the Provost of Notting Hill," began Buck, pleasantly, "seems to me to show that we have at least got on to a friendly footing. Now come, Mr. Wayne. Five hundred pounds have been offered to you for a property you admit not to be worth a hundred. Well, I am a rich man and I won't be outdone in generosity. Let us say fifteen hundred pounds, and have done with it. And let us shake hands;" and he rose, glowing and laughing.

"Fifteen hundred pounds," whispered Mr. Wilson of Bayswater; "can we do fifteen hundred pounds?"

"I'll stand the racket," said Buck, heartily. "Mr. Wayne is a gentleman and has spoken up for me. So I suppose the negotiations are at an end."

Wayne bowed.

"They are indeed at an end. I am sorry I cannot sell you the property."

"What?" cried Mr. Barker, starting to his feet.

“Mr. Buck has spoken correctly,” said the King.

“I have, I have,” cried Buck, springing up also; “I said—”

“Mr. Buck has spoken correctly,” said the King; “the negotiations are at an end.”

All the men at the table rose to their feet; Wayne alone rose without excitement.

“Have I, then,” he said, “your Majesty’s permission to depart? I have given my last answer.”

“You have it,” said Auberon, smiling, but not lifting his eyes from the table. And amid a dead silence the Provost of Notting Hill passed out of the room.

“Well?” said Wilson, turning round to Barker— “well?”

Barker shook his head desperately.

“The man ought to be in an asylum,” he said. “But one thing is clear — we need not bother further about him. The man can be treated as mad.”

“Of course,” said Buck, turning to him with sombre decisiveness. “You’re perfectly right, Barker. He is a good enough fellow, but he can be treated as mad. Let’s put it in simple form. Go and tell any twelve men in any town, go and tell any doctor in any town, that there is a man offered fifteen hundred pounds for a thing he could sell commonly for four hundred, and that when asked for a reason for not accepting it he pleads the inviolate sanctity of Notting Hill and calls it the Holy Mountain. What would they say? What more can we have on our side than the common sense of everybody? On what else do all laws rest? I’ll tell you, Barker, what’s better than any further discussion. Let’s send in workmen on the spot to pull down Pump Street. And if old Wayne says a word, arrest him as a lunatic. That’s all.”

Barker’s eyes kindled.

“I always regarded you, Buck, if you don’t mind my saying so, as a very strong man. I’ll follow you.”

“So, of course, will I,” said Wilson.

Buck rose again impulsively.

“Your Majesty,” he said, glowing with popularity, “I beseech your Majesty to consider favourably the proposal to which we have committed ourselves. Your Majesty’s leniency, our own offers, have fallen in vain on that extraordinary man. He may be right. He may be God. He may be the devil. But we think it, for practical purposes, more probable that he is off his head. Unless that assumption were acted on, all human affairs would go to pieces. We act on it, and we propose to start operations in Notting Hill at once."

The King leaned back in his chair.

"The Charter of the Cities ...," he said with a rich intonation.

But Buck, being finally serious, was also cautious, and did not again make the mistake of disrespect.

"Your Majesty," he said, bowing, "I am not here to say a word against anything your Majesty has said or done. You are a far better educated man than I, and no doubt there were reasons, upon intellectual grounds, for those proceedings. But may I ask you and appeal to your common good-nature for a sincere answer? When you drew up the Charter of the Cities, did you contemplate the rise of a man like Adam Wayne? Did you expect that the Charter — whether it was an experiment, or a scheme of decoration, or a joke — could ever really come to this — to stopping a vast scheme of ordinary business, to shutting up a road, to spoiling the chances of cabs, omnibuses, railway stations, to disorganising half a city, to risking a kind of civil war? Whatever were your objects, were they that?"

Barker and Wilson looked at him admiringly; the King more admiringly still.

"Provost Buck," said Auberon, "you speak in public uncommonly well. I give you your point with the magnanimity of an artist. My scheme did not include the appearance of Mr. Wayne. Alas! would that my poetic power had been great enough."

"I thank your Majesty," said Buck, courteously, but quickly. "Your Majesty's statements are always clear and studied; therefore I may draw a deduction. As the scheme, whatever it was, on which you set your heart did not include the appearance of Mr. Wayne, it will survive his removal. Why not let us clear away this particular Pump Street, which does interfere with our plans, and which does not, by your Majesty's own statement, interfere with yours."

"Caught out!" said the King, enthusiastically and quite impersonally, as if he were watching a cricket match.

"This man Wayne," continued Buck, "would be shut up by any doctors in England. But we only ask to have it put before them. Meanwhile no one's interests, not even in all probability his own, can be really damaged by going on with the improvements in Notting Hill. Not our interests, of course, for it has been the hard and quiet work of ten years. Not the interests of Notting Hill, for nearly all its educated inhabitants desire the change. Not the interests of your Majesty, for you say, with characteristic sense, that you never contemplated the rise of the lunatic at all. Not, as I say, his own interests, for the man has a kind heart and many talents, and a couple of good doctors would probably put him righter than all the free cities and sacred mountains in creation. I therefore assume, if I may use so bold a word, that your Majesty will not offer any obstacle to our proceeding with the improvements."

And Mr. Buck sat down amid subdued but excited applause among the allies.

"Mr. Buck," said the King, "I beg your pardon, for a number of beautiful and sacred thoughts, in which you were generally classified as a fool. But there is another thing to be considered. Suppose you send in your workmen, and Mr. Wayne does a thing regrettable indeed, but of which, I am sorry to say, I think him quite capable — knocks their teeth out?"

"I have thought of that, your Majesty," said Mr. Buck, easily, "and I think it can simply be guarded against. Let us send in a strong guard of, say, a hundred men — a hundred of the North Kensington Halberdiers" (he smiled grimly), "of whom your Majesty is so fond. Or say a hundred and fifty. The whole population of Pump Street, I fancy, is only about a hundred."

"Still they might stand together and lick you," said the King, dubiously.

"Then say two hundred," said Buck, gaily.

"It might happen," said the King, restlessly, "that one Notting Hiller fought better than two North Kensingtons."

"It might," said Buck, coolly; "then say two hundred and fifty."

The King bit his lip.

"And if they are beaten too?" he said viciously.

"Your Majesty," said Buck, and leaned back easily in his chair, "suppose they are. If anything be clear, it is clear that all fighting matters are mere matters of arithmetic. Here we have a hundred and fifty, say, of Notting Hill soldiers. Or say two hundred. If one of them can fight two of us — we can send in, not four hundred, but six hundred, and smash him. That is all. It is out of all immediate probability that one of them could fight four of us. So what I say is this. Run no risks. Finish it at once. Send in eight hundred men and smash him — smash him almost without seeing him. And go on with the improvements.”

And Mr. Buck pulled out a bandanna and blew his nose.

“Do you know, Mr. Buck,” said the King, staring gloomily at the table, “the admirable clearness of your reason produces in my mind a sentiment which I trust I shall not offend you by describing as an aspiration to punch your head. You irritate me sublimely. What can it be in me? Is it the relic of a moral sense?”

“But your Majesty,” said Barker, eagerly and suavely, “does not refuse our proposals?”

“My dear Barker, your proposals are as damnable as your manners. I want to have nothing to do with them. Suppose I stopped them altogether. What would happen?”

Barker answered in a very low voice —

“Revolution.”

The King glanced quickly at the men round the table. They were all looking down silently: their brows were red.

He rose with a startling suddenness, and an unusual pallor.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “you have overruled me. Therefore I can speak plainly. I think Adam Wayne, who is as mad as a hatter, worth more than a million of you. But you have the force, and, I admit, the common sense, and he is lost. Take your eight hundred halberdiers and smash him. It would be more sportsmanlike to take two hundred.”

“More sportsmanlike,” said Buck, grimly, “but a great deal less humane. We are not artists, and streets purple with gore do not catch our eye in the right way.”

“It is pitiful,” said Auberon. “With five or six times their number, there will be no fight at all.”

“I hope not,” said Buck, rising and adjusting his gloves. “We desire no fight, your Majesty. We are peaceable business men.”

“Well,” said the King, wearily, “the conference is at an end at last.”

And he went out of the room before any one else could stir.

Forty workmen, a hundred Bayswater Halberdiers, two hundred from South, and three from North Kensington, assembled at the foot of Holland Walk and marched up it, under the general direction of Barker, who looked flushed and happy in full dress. At the end of the procession a small and sulky figure lingered like an urchin. It was the King.

"Barker," he said at length, appealingly, "you are an old friend of mine — you understand my hobbies as I understand yours. Why can't you let it alone? I hoped that such fun might come out of this Wayne business. Why can't you let it alone? It doesn't really so much matter to you — what's a road or so? For me it's the one joke that may save me from pessimism. Take fewer men and give me an hour's fun. Really and truly, James, if you collected coins or humming-birds, and I could buy one with the price of your road, I would buy it. I collect incidents — those rare, those precious things. Let me have one. Pay a few pounds for it. Give these Notting Hillers a chance. Let them alone."

"Auberon," said Barker, kindly, forgetting all royal titles in a rare moment of sincerity, "I do feel what you mean. I have had moments when these hobbies have hit me. I have had moments when I have sympathised with your humours. I have had moments, though you may not easily believe it, when I have sympathised with the madness of Adam Wayne. But the world, Auberon, the real world, is not run on these hobbies. It goes on great brutal wheels of facts — wheels on which you are the butterfly; and Wayne is the fly on the wheel."

Auberon's eyes looked frankly at the other's.

"Thank you, James; what you say is true. It is only a parenthetical consolation to me to compare the intelligence of flies somewhat favourably with the intelligence of wheels. But it is the nature of flies to die soon, and the nature of wheels to go on for ever. Go on with the wheel. Good-bye, old man."

And James Barker went on, laughing, with a high colour, slapping his bamboo on his leg.

The King watched the tail of the retreating regiment with a look of genuine depression, which made him seem more like a baby than ever. Then he swung round and struck his hands together.

"In a world without humour," he said, "the only thing to do is to eat. And how perfect an exception! How can these people strike dignified attitudes, and pretend that things matter, when the total ludicrousness of life is proved by the very method by which it is supported? A man strikes the lyre, and says, 'Life is real, life is earnest,' and then goes into a room and stuffs alien substances into a hole in his head. I think Nature was indeed a little broad in her humour in these matters. But we all fall back on the pantomime, as I have in this municipal affair. Nature has her farces, like the act of eating or the shape of the kangaroo, for the more brutal appetite. She keeps her stars and mountains for those who can appreciate something more subtly ridiculous.” He turned to his equerry. “But, as I said ‘eating,’ let us have a picnic like two nice little children. Just run and bring me a table and a dozen courses or so, and plenty of champagne, and under these swinging boughs, Bowler, we will return to Nature.”

It took about an hour to erect in Holland Lane the monarch’s simple repast, during which time he walked up and down and whistled, but still with an unaffected air of gloom. He had really been done out of a pleasure he had promised himself, and had that empty and sickened feeling which a child has when disappointed of a pantomime. When he and the equerry had sat down, however, and consumed a fair amount of dry champagne, his spirits began mildly to revive.

“Things take too long in this world,” he said. “I detest all this Barkerian business about evolution and the gradual modification of things. I wish the world had been made in six days, and knocked to pieces again in six more. And I wish I had done it. The joke’s good enough in a broad way, sun and moon and the image of God, and all that, but they keep it up so damnably long. Did you ever long for a miracle, Bowler?”

“No, sir,” said Bowler, who was an evolutionist, and had been carefully brought up.

“Then I have,” answered the King. “I have walked along a street with the best cigar in the cosmos in my mouth, and more Burgundy inside me than you ever saw in your life, and longed that the lamp-post would turn into an elephant to save me from the hell of blank existence. Take my word for it, my evolutionary Bowler, don’t you believe people when they tell you that people sought for a sign, and believed in miracles because they were ignorant. They did it because they were wise, filthily, vilely wise — too wise to eat or sleep or put on their boots with patience. This seems delightfully like a new theory of the origin of Christianity, which would itself be a thing of no mean absurdity. Take some more wine.”

The wind blew round them as they sat at their little table, with its white cloth and bright wine-cups, and flung the tree-tops of Holland Park against each other, but the sun was in that strong temper which turns green into gold. The King pushed away his plate, lit a cigar slowly, and went on —

“Yesterday I thought that something next door to a really entertaining miracle might happen to me before I went to amuse the worms. To see that red-haired maniac waving a great sword, and making speeches to his incomparable followers, would have been a glimpse of that Land of Youth from which the Fates shut us out. I had planned some quite delightful things. A Congress of Knightsbridge with a treaty, and myself in the chair, and perhaps a Roman triumph, with jolly old Barker led in chains. And now these wretched prigs have gone and stamped out the exquisite Mr. Wayne altogether, and I suppose they will put him in a private asylum somewhere in their damned humane way. Think of the treasures daily poured out to his unappreciative keeper! I wonder whether they would let me be his keeper. But life is a vale. Never forget at any moment of your existence to regard it in the light of a vale. This graceful habit, if not acquired in youth—”

The King stopped, with his cigar lifted, for there had slid into his eyes the startled look of a man listening. He did not move for a few moments; then he turned his head sharply towards the high, thin, and lath-like paling which fenced certain long gardens and similar spaces from the lane. From behind it there was coming a curious scrambling and scraping noise, as of a desperate thing imprisoned in this box of thin wood. The King threw away his cigar, and jumped on to the table. From this position he saw a pair of hands hanging with a hungry clutch on the top of the fence. Then the hands quivered with a convulsive effort, and a head shot up between them — the head of one of the Bayswater Town Council, his eyes and whiskers wild with fear. He swung himself over, and fell on the other side on his face, and groaned openly and without ceasing. The next moment the thin, taut wood of the fence was struck as by a bullet, so that it reverberated like a drum, and over it came tearing and cursing, with torn clothes and broken nails and bleeding faces, twenty men at one rush. The King sprang five feet clear off the table on to the ground. The moment after the table was flung over, sending bottles and glasses flying, and the *débris* was literally swept along the ground by that stream of men pouring past, and Bowler was borne along with them, as the King said in his famous newspaper article, “like a captured bride.” The great fence swung and split under the load of climbers that still scaled and cleared it. Tremendous gaps were torn in it by this living artillery; and through them the King could see more and more frantic faces, as in a dream, and more and more men running. They were as miscellaneous as if some one had taken the lid off a human dustbin. Some were untouched, some were slashed and battered and bloody, some were splendidly dressed, some tattered and half naked, some were in the fantastic garb of the burlesque cities, some in the dullest modern dress. The King stared at all of them, but none of them looked at the King. Suddenly he stepped forward.

“Barker,” he said, “what is all this?”

“Beaten,” said the politician— “beaten all to hell!” And he plunged past with nostrils shaking like a horse’s, and more and more men plunged after him.

Almost as he spoke, the last standing strip of fence bowed and snapped, flinging, as from a catapult, a new figure upon the road. He wore the flaming red of the halberdiers of Notting Hill, and on his weapon there was blood, and in his face victory. In another moment masses of red glowed through the gaps of the fence, and the pursuers, with their halberds, came pouring down the lane. Pursued and pursuers alike swept by the little figure with the owlish eyes, who had not taken his hands out of his pockets.

The King had still little beyond the confused sense of a man caught in a torrent — the feeling of men eddying by. Then something happened which he was never able afterwards to describe, and which we cannot describe for him. Suddenly in the dark entrance, between the broken gates of a garden, there appeared framed a flaming figure.

Adam Wayne, the conqueror, with his face flung back, and his mane like a lion’s, stood with his great sword point upwards, the red raiment of his office flapping round him like the red wings of an archangel. And the King saw, he knew not how, something new and overwhelming. The great green trees and the great red robes swung together in the wind. The sword seemed made for the sunlight. The preposterous masquerade, born of his own mockery, towered over him and embraced the world. This was the normal, this was sanity, this was nature; and he himself, with his rationality and his detachment and his black frock-coat, he was the exception and the accident — a blot of black upon a world of crimson and gold.

Book IV

Chapter I — The Battle of the Lamps

Mr. Buck, who, though retired, frequently went down to his big drapery stores in Kensington High Street, was locking up those premises, being the last to leave. It was a wonderful evening of green and gold, but that did not trouble him very much. If you had pointed it out, he would have agreed seriously, for the rich always desire to be artistic.

He stepped out into the cool air, buttoning up his light yellow coat, and blowing great clouds from his cigar, when a figure dashed up to him in another yellow overcoat, but unbuttoned and flying behind him.

"Hullo, Barker!" said the draper. "Any of our summer articles? You're too late. Factory Acts, Barker. Humanity and progress, my boy."

"Oh, don't chatter," cried Barker, stamping. "We've been beaten."

"Beaten — by what?" asked Buck, mystified.

"By Wayne."

Buck looked at Barker's fierce white face for the first time, as it gleamed in the lamplight.

"Come and have a drink," he said.

They adjourned to a cushioned and glaring buffet, and Buck established himself slowly and lazily in a seat, and pulled out his cigar-case.

"Have a smoke," he said.

Barker was still standing, and on the fret, but after a moment's hesitation, he sat down as if he might spring up again the next minute. They ordered drinks in silence.

"How did it happen?" asked Buck, turning his big bold eyes on him.

"How the devil do I know?" cried Barker. "It happened like — like a dream. How can two hundred men beat six hundred? How can they?"

"Well," said Buck, coolly, "how did they? You ought to know."

"I don't know; I can't describe," said the other, drumming on the table. "It seemed like this. We were six hundred, and marched with those damned poleaxes of Auberon's — the only weapons we've got. We marched two abreast. We went up Holland Walk, between the high palings which seemed to me to go straight as an arrow for Pump Street. I was near the tail of the line, and it was a long one. When the end of it was still between the high palings, the head of the line was already crossing Holland Park Avenue.

Then the head plunged into the network of narrow streets on the other side, and the tail and myself came out on the great crossing. When we also had reached the northern side and turned up a small street that points, crookedly as it were, towards Pump Street, the whole thing felt different. The streets dodged and bent so much that the head of our line seemed lost altogether: it might as well have been in North America. And all this time we hadn't seen a soul."

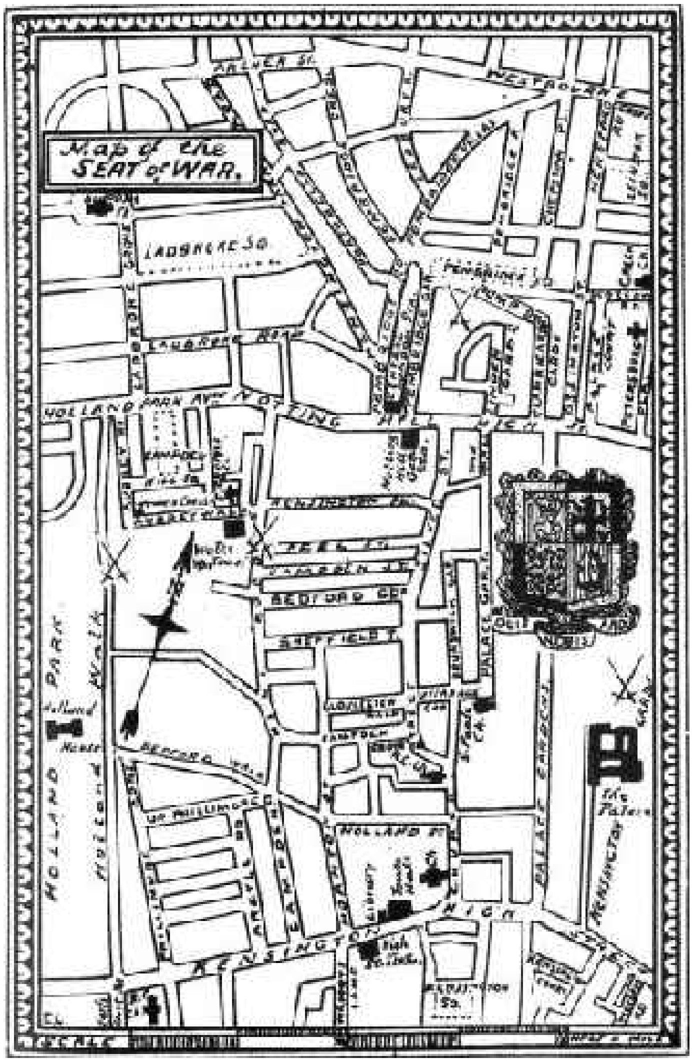
Map of the SEAT of WAR.
ARCHER ST.
WESTBOURNE
LADBROKE SQ.
LADBROKE ROAD
PEMBRIDGE SQ.
HOLLAND PARK AVE
NOTTING HILL HIGH ST.
KENSINGTON PL.
PEEL ST.
CAMPDEN ST.
BEDFORD GDS.
SHEFFIELD T.
BEDFORD WALK
HOLLAND PARK
HOLLAND WALK
Holland House
UP. PHILLIMORE
HOLLAND ST.
KENSINGTON HIGH ST.
PALACE GARDENS
The Palace
KENSINGTON

Map of the SEAT of WAR.
(click image to enlarge)

Buck, who was idly dabbing the ash of his cigar on the ash-tray, began to move it deliberately over the table, making feathery grey lines, a kind of map.

"But though the little streets were all deserted (which got a trifle on my nerves), as we got deeper and deeper into them, a thing began to happen that I couldn't understand. Sometimes a long way ahead — three turns or corners ahead, as it were — there broke suddenly a sort of noise, clattering, and confused cries, and then stopped. Then, when it happened, something, I can't describe it — a kind of shake or stagger went down the line, as if the line were a live thing, whose head had been struck, or had been an electric cord. None of us knew why we were moving, but we moved and jostled. Then we recovered, and went on through the little dirty streets, round corners, and up twisted ways. The little crooked streets began to give me a feeling I can't explain — as if it were a dream. I felt as if things had lost their reason, and we should never get out of the maze. Odd to hear me talk like that, isn't it? The streets were quite well-known streets, all down on the map. But the fact remains. I wasn't afraid of something happening. I was afraid of nothing ever happening — nothing ever happening for all God's eternity."

He drained his glass and called for more whisky. He drank it, and went on.

"And then something did happen. Buck, it's the solemn truth, that nothing has ever happened to you in your life. Nothing had ever happened to me in my life."

"Nothing ever happened!" said Buck, staring. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing has ever happened," repeated Barker, with a morbid obstinacy. "You don't know what a thing happening means? You sit in your office expecting customers, and customers come; you walk in the street expecting friends, and friends meet you; you want a drink, and get it; you feel inclined for a bet, and make it. You expect either to win or lose, and you do either one or the other. But things happening!" and he shuddered ungovernably.

"Go on," said Buck, shortly. "Get on."

"As we walked wearily round the corners, something happened. When something happens, it happens first, and you see it afterwards. It happens of itself, and you have nothing to do with it. It proves a dreadful thing — that there are other things besides one's self. I can only put it in this way. We went round one turning, two turnings, three turnings, four turnings, five. Then I lifted myself slowly up from the gutter where I had been shot half senseless, and was beaten down again by living men crashing on top of me, and the world was full of roaring, and big men rolling about like nine-pins."

Buck looked at his map with knitted brows.

"Was that Portobello Road?" he asked.

“Yes,” said Barker— “yes; Portobello Road. I saw it afterwards; but, my God, what a place it was! Buck, have you ever stood and let a six foot of man lash and lash at your head with six feet of pole with six pounds of steel at the end? Because, when you have had that experience, as Walt Whitman says, ‘you re-examine philosophies and religions.’”

“I have no doubt,” said Buck. “If that was Portobello Road, don’t you see what happened?”

“I know what happened exceedingly well. I was knocked down four times; an experience which, as I say, has an effect on the mental attitude. And another thing happened, too. I knocked down two men. After the fourth fall (there was not much bloodshed — more brutal rushing and throwing — for nobody could use their weapons), after the fourth fall, I say, I got up like a devil, and I tore a poleaxe out of a man’s hand and struck where I saw the scarlet of Wayne’s fellows, struck again and again. Two of them went over, bleeding on the stones, thank God; and I laughed and found myself sprawling in the gutter again, and got up again, and struck again, and broke my halberd to pieces. I hurt a man’s head, though.”

Buck set down his glass with a bang, and spat out curses through his thick moustache.

“What is the matter?” asked Barker, stopping, for the man had been calm up to now, and now his agitation was far more violent than his own.

“The matter?” said Buck, bitterly; “don’t you see how these maniacs have got us? Why should two idiots, one a clown and the other a screaming lunatic, make sane men so different from themselves? Look here, Barker; I will give you a picture. A very well-bred young man of this century is dancing about in a frock-coat. He has in his hands a nonsensical seventeenth-century halberd, with which he is trying to kill men in a street in Notting Hill. Damn it! don’t you see how they’ve got us? Never mind how you felt — that is how you looked. The King would put his cursed head on one side and call it exquisite. The Provost of Notting Hill would put his cursed nose in the air and call it heroic. But in Heaven’s name what would you have called it — two days before?”

Barker bit his lip.

“You haven’t been through it, Buck,” he said. “You don’t understand fighting — the atmosphere.”

“I don’t deny the atmosphere,” said Buck, striking the table. “I only say it’s their atmosphere. It’s Adam Wayne’s atmosphere. It’s the atmosphere which you and I thought had vanished from an educated world for ever.”

“Well, it hasn’t,” said Barker; “and if you have any lingering doubts, lend me a poleaxe, and I’ll show you.”

There was a long silence, and then Buck turned to his neighbour and spoke in that good-tempered tone that comes of a power of looking facts in the face — the tone in which he concluded great bargains.

“Barker,” he said, “you are right. This old thing — this fighting, has come back. It has come back suddenly and taken us by surprise. So it is first blood to Adam Wayne. But, unless reason and arithmetic and everything else have gone crazy, it must be next and last blood to us. But when an issue has really arisen, there is only one thing to do — to study that issue as such and win in it. Barker, since it is fighting, we must understand fighting. I must understand fighting as coolly and completely as I understand drapery; you must understand fighting as coolly and completely as you understand politics. Now, look at the facts. I stick without hesitation to my original formula. Fighting, when we have the stronger force, is only a matter of arithmetic. It must be. You asked me just now how two hundred men could defeat six hundred. I can tell you. Two hundred men can defeat six hundred when the six hundred behave like fools. When they forget the very conditions they are fighting in; when they fight in a swamp as if it were a mountain; when they fight in a forest as if it were a plain; when they fight in streets without remembering the object of streets.”

“What is the object of streets?” asked Barker.

“What is the object of supper?” cried Buck, furiously. “Isn’t it obvious? This military science is mere common sense. The object of a street is to lead from one place to another; therefore all streets join; therefore street fighting is quite a peculiar thing. You advanced into that hive of streets as if you were advancing into an open plain where you could see everything. Instead of that, you were advancing into the bowels of a fortress, with streets pointing at you, streets turning on you, streets jumping out at you, and all in the hands of the enemy. Do you know what Portobello Road is? It is the only point on your journey where two side streets run up opposite each other. Wayne massed his men on the two sides, and when he had let enough of your line go past, cut it in two like a worm. Don't you see what would have saved you?"

Barker shook his head.

"Can't your 'atmosphere' help you?" asked Buck, bitterly. "Must I attempt explanations in the romantic manner? Suppose that, as you were fighting blindly with the red Notting Hillers who imprisoned you on both sides, you had heard a shout from behind them. Suppose, oh, romantic Barker! that behind the red tunics you had seen the blue and gold of South Kensington taking them in the rear, surrounding them in their turn and hurling them on to your halberds."

"If the thing had been possible," began Barker, cursing.

"The thing would have been as possible," said Buck, simply, "as simple as arithmetic. There are a certain number of street entries that lead to Pump Street. There are not nine hundred; there are not nine million. They do not grow in the night. They do not increase like mushrooms. It must be possible, with such an overwhelming force as we have, to advance by all of them at once. In every one of the arteries, or approaches, we can put almost as many men as Wayne can put into the field altogether. Once do that, and we have him to demonstration. It is like a proposition of Euclid."

"You think that is certain?" said Barker, anxious, but dominated delightfully.

"I'll tell you what I think," said Buck, getting up jovially. "I think Adam Wayne made an uncommonly spirited little fight; and I think I am confoundedly sorry for him."

"Buck, you are a great man!" cried Barker, rising also. "You've knocked me sensible again. I am ashamed to say it, but I was getting romantic. Of course, what you say is adamantine sense. Fighting, being physical, must be mathematical. We were beaten because we were neither mathematical nor physical nor anything else — because we deserved to be beaten. Hold all the approaches, and with our force we must have him. When shall we open the next campaign?"

"Now," said Buck, and walked out of the bar.

"Now!" cried Barker, following him eagerly. "Do you mean now? It is so late."

Buck turned on him, stamping.

"Do you think fighting is under the Factory Acts?" he said; and he called a cab. "Notting Hill Gate Station," he said; and the two drove off.

A genuine reputation can sometimes be made in an hour. Buck, in the next sixty or eighty minutes, showed himself a really great man of action. His cab carried him like a thunderbolt from the King to Wilson, from Wilson to Swindon, from Swindon to Barker again; if his course was jagged, it had the jaggedness of the lightning. Only two things he carried with him — his inevitable cigar and the map of North Kensington and Notting Hill. There were, as he again and again pointed out, with every variety of persuasion and violence, only nine possible ways of approaching Pump Street within a quarter of a mile round it; three out of Westbourne Grove, two out of Ladbroke Grove, and four out of Notting Hill High Street. And he had detachments of two hundred each, stationed at every one of the entrances before the last green of that strange sunset had sunk out of the black sky.

The sky was particularly black, and on this alone was one false protest raised against the triumphant optimism of the Provost of North Kensington. He overruled it with his infectious common sense.

“There is no such thing,” he said, “as night in London. You have only to follow the line of street lamps. Look, here is the map. Two hundred purple North Kensington soldiers under myself march up Ossington Street, two hundred more under Captain Bruce, of the North Kensington Guard, up Clanricarde Gardens. Two hundred yellow West Kensingtons under Provost Swindon attack from Pembridge Road. Two hundred more of my men from the eastern streets, leading away from Queen’s Road. Two detachments of yellows enter by two roads from Westbourne Grove. Lastly, two hundred green Bayswaters come down from the North through Chepstow Place, and two hundred more under Provost Wilson himself, through the upper part of Pembridge Road. Gentlemen, it is mate in two moves. The enemy must either mass in Pump Street and be cut to pieces; or they must retreat past the Gaslight & Coke Co., and rush on my four hundred; or they must retreat past St. Luke’s Church, and rush on the six hundred from the West. Unless we are all mad, it’s plain. Come on. To your quarters and await Captain Brace’s signal to advance. Then you have only to walk up a line of gas-lamps and smash this nonsense by pure mathematics. To-morrow we shall all be civilians again.”

Clanricarde Gardens at this time was no longer a *cul-de-sac*, but was connected by Pump Street to Pembridge Square. See map.

His optimism glowed like a great fire in the night, and ran round the terrible ring in which Wayne was now held helpless. The fight was already over. One man’s energy for one hour had saved the city from war.

For the next ten minutes Buck walked up and down silently beside the motionless clump of his two hundred. He had not changed his appearance in any way, except to sling across his yellow overcoat a case with a revolver in it. So that his light-clad modern figure showed up oddly beside the pompous purple uniforms of his halberdiers, which darkly but richly coloured the black night.

At length a shrill trumpet rang from some way up the street; it was the signal of advance. Buck briefly gave the word, and the whole purple line, with its dimly shining steel, moved up the side alley. Before it was a slope of street, long, straight, and shining in the dark. It was a sword pointed at Pump Street, the heart at which nine other swords were pointed that night.

A quarter of an hour’s silent marching brought them almost within earshot of any tumult in the doomed citadel. But still there was no sound and no sign of the enemy. This time, at any rate, they knew that they were closing in on it mechanically, and they marched on under the lamplight and the dark without any of that eerie sense of ignorance which Barker had felt when entering the hostile country by one avenue alone.

“Halt — point arms!” cried Buck, suddenly, and as he spoke there came a clatter of feet tumbling along the stones. But the halberds were levelled in vain. The figure that rushed up was a messenger from the contingent of the North.

“Victory, Mr. Buck!” he cried, panting; “they are ousted. Provost Wilson of Bayswater has taken Pump Street.”

Buck ran forward in his excitement.

“Then, which way are they retreating? It must be either by St. Luke’s to meet Swindon, or by the Gas Company to meet us. Run like mad to Swindon, and see that the yellows are holding the St. Luke’s Road. We will hold this, never fear. We have them in an iron trap. Run!”

As the messenger dashed away into the darkness, the great guard of North Kensington swung on with the certainty of a machine. Yet scarcely a hundred yards further their halberd-points again fell in line gleaming in the gaslight; for again a clatter of feet was heard on the stones, and again it proved to be only the messenger.

"Mr. Provost," he said, "the yellow West Kensingtons have been holding the road by St. Luke's for twenty minutes since the capture of Pump Street. Pump Street is not two hundred yards away; they cannot be retreating down that road."

"Then they are retreating down this," said Provost Buck, with a final cheerfulness, "and by good fortune down a well-lighted road, though it twists about. Forward!"

As they moved along the last three hundred yards of their journey, Buck fell, for the first time in his life, perhaps, into a kind of philosophical reverie, for men of his type are always made kindly, and as it were melancholy, by success.

"I am sorry for poor old Wayne, I really am," he thought. "He spoke up splendidly for me at that Council. And he blacked old Barker's eye with considerable spirit. But I don't see what a man can expect when he fights against arithmetic, to say nothing of civilisation. And what a wonderful hoax all this military genius is! I suspect I've just discovered what Cromwell discovered, that a sensible tradesman is the best general, and that a man who can buy men and sell men can lead and kill them. The thing's simply like adding up a column in a ledger. If Wayne has two hundred men, he can't put two hundred men in nine places at once. If they're ousted from Pump Street they're flying somewhere. If they're not flying past the church they're flying past the Works. And so we have them. We business men should have no chance at all except that cleverer people than we get bees in their bonnets that prevent them from reasoning properly — so we reason alone. And so I, who am comparatively stupid, see things as God sees them, as a vast machine. My God, what's this?" and he clapped his hands to his eyes and staggered back.

Then through the darkness he cried in a dreadful voice —

"Did I blaspheme God? I am struck blind."

"What?" wailed another voice behind him, the voice of a certain Wilfred Jarvis of North Kensington.

"Blind!" cried Buck; "blind!"

"I'm blind too!" cried Jarvis, in an agony.

"Fools, all of you," said a gross voice behind them; "we're all blind. The lamps have gone out."

"The lamps! But why? where?" cried Buck, turning furiously in the darkness. "How are we to get on? How are we to chase the enemy? Where have they gone?”

“The enemy went—” said the rough voice behind, and then stopped doubtfully.

“Where?” shouted Buck, stamping like a madman.

“They went,” said the gruff voice, “past the Gas Works, and they’ve used their chance.”

“Great God!” thundered Buck, and snatched at his revolver; “do you mean they’ve turned out—”

But almost before he had spoken the words, he was hurled like a stone from catapult into the midst of his own men.

“Notting Hill! Notting Hill!” cried frightful voices out of the darkness, and they seemed to come from all sides, for the men of North Kensington, unacquainted with the road, had lost all their bearings in the black world of blindness.

“Notting Hill! Notting Hill!” cried the invisible people, and the invaders were hewn down horribly with black steel, with steel that gave no glint against any light.

Buck, though badly maimed with the blow of a halberd, kept an angry but splendid sanity. He groped madly for the wall and found it. Struggling with crawling fingers along it, he found a side opening and retreated into it with the remnants of his men. Their adventures during that prodigious night are not to be described. They did not know whether they were going towards or away from the enemy. Not knowing where they themselves were, or where their opponents were, it was mere irony to ask where was the rest of their army. For a thing had descended upon them which London does not know — darkness, which was before the stars were made, and they were as much lost in it as if they had been made before the stars. Every now and then, as those frightful hours wore on, they buffeted in the darkness against living men, who struck at them and at whom they struck, with an idiot fury. When at last the grey dawn came, they found they had wandered back to the edge of the Uxbridge Road. They found that in those horrible eyeless encounters, the North Kensingtons and the Bayswaters and the West Kensingtons had again and again met and butchered each other, and they heard that Adam Wayne was barricaded in Pump Street.

Chapter II — The Correspondent of the Court Journal

Journalism had become, like most other such things in England under the cautious government and philosophy represented by James Barker, somewhat sleepy and much diminished in importance. This was partly due to the disappearance of party government and public speaking, partly to the compromise or dead-lock which had made foreign wars impossible, but mostly, of course, to the temper of the whole nation which was that of a people in a kind of back-water. Perhaps the most well known of the remaining newspapers was the *Court Journal*, which was published in a dusty but genteel-looking office just out of Kensington High Street. For when all the papers of a people have been for years growing more and more dim and decorous and optimistic, the dimmest and most decorous and most optimistic is very likely to win. In the journalistic competition which was still going on at the beginning of the twentieth century, the final victor was the *Court Journal*.

For some mysterious reason the King had a great affection for hanging about in the *Court Journal* office, smoking a morning cigarette and looking over files. Like all ingrainedly idle men, he was very fond of lounging and chatting in places where other people were doing work. But one would have thought that, even in the prosaic England of his day, he might have found a more bustling centre.

On this particular morning, however, he came out of Kensington Palace with a more alert step and a busier air than usual. He wore an extravagantly long frock-coat, a pale-green waistcoat, a very full and *dégagé* black tie, and curious yellow gloves. This was his uniform as Colonel of a regiment of his own creation, the 1st Decadents Green. It was a beautiful sight to see him drilling them. He walked quickly across the Park and the High Street, lighting his cigarette as he went, and flung open the door of the *Court Journal* office.

“You’ve heard the news, Pally — you’ve heard the news?” he said.

The Editor’s name was Hoskins, but the King called him Pally, which was an abbreviation of Paladium of our Liberties.

“Well, your Majesty,” said Hoskins, slowly (he was a worried, gentlemanly looking person, with a wandering brown beard)— “well, your Majesty, I have heard rather curious things, but I—”

"You'll hear more of them," said the King, dancing a few steps of a kind of negro shuffle. "You'll hear more of them, my blood-and-thunder tribune. Do you know what I am going to do for you?"

"No, your Majesty," replied the Paladium, vaguely.

"I'm going to put your paper on strong, dashing, enterprising lines," said the King. "Now, where are your posters of last night's defeat?"

"I did not propose, your Majesty," said the Editor, "to have any posters exactly—"

"Paper, paper!" cried the King, wildly; "bring me paper as big as a house. I'll do you posters. Stop, I must take my coat off." He began removing that garment with an air of set intensity, flung it playfully at Mr. Hoskins' head, entirely enveloping him, and looked at himself in the glass. "The coat off," he said, "and the hat on. That looks like a sub-editor. It is indeed the very essence of sub-editing. Well," he continued, turning round abruptly, "come along with that paper."

The Paladium had only just extricated himself reverently from the folds of the King's frock-coat, and said bewildered —

"I am afraid, your Majesty—"

"Oh, you've got no enterprise," said Auberon. "What's that roll in the corner? Wall-paper? Decorations for your private residence? Art in the home, Pally? Fling it over here, and I'll paint such posters on the back of it that when you put it up in your drawing-room you'll paste the original pattern against the wall." And the King unrolled the wall-paper, spreading it over the whole floor. "Now give me the scissors," he cried, and took them himself before the other could stir.

He slit the paper into about five pieces, each nearly as big as a door. Then he took a big blue pencil, and went down on his knees on the dusty oil-cloth and began to write on them, in huge letters —

"FROM THE FRONT.

GENERAL BUCK DEFEATED.

DARKNESS, DANGER, AND DEATH.

WAYNE SAID TO BE IN PUMP STREET.

FEELING IN THE CITY."

He contemplated it for some time, with his head on one side, and got up, with a sigh.

“Not quite intense enough,” he said— “not alarming. I want the *Court Journal* to be feared as well as loved. Let’s try something more hard-hitting.” And he went down on his knees again. After sucking the blue pencil for some time, he began writing again busily. “How will this do?” he said —

WAYNE’S WONDERFUL VICTORY.”

“I suppose,” he said, looking up appealingly, and sucking the pencil— “I suppose we couldn’t say ‘wictory’— ‘Wayne’s wonderful wictory’? No, no. Refinement, Pally, refinement. I have it.”

“WAYNE WINS.

ASTOUNDING FIGHT IN THE DARK.

The gas-lamps in their courses fought against Buck.”

“(Nothing like our fine old English translation.) What else can we say? Well, anything to annoy old Buck;” and he added, thoughtfully, in smaller letters —

“Rumoured Court-martial on General Buck.”

“Those will do for the present,” he said, and turned them both face downwards. “Paste, please.”

The Paladium, with an air of great terror, brought the paste out of an inner room.

The King slabbed it on with the enjoyment of a child messing with treacle. Then taking one of his huge compositions fluttering in each hand, he ran outside, and began pasting them up in prominent positions over the front of the office.

“And now,” said Auberon, entering again with undiminished vivacity— “now for the leading article.”

He picked up another of the large strips of wall-paper, and, laying it across a desk, pulled out a fountain-pen and began writing with feverish intensity, reading clauses and fragments aloud to himself, and rolling them on his tongue like wine, to see if they had the pure journalistic flavour.

“The news of the disaster to our forces in Notting Hill, awful as it is — awful as it is — (no, distressing as it is), may do some good if it draws attention to the what’s-his-name inefficiency (scandalous inefficiency, of course) of the Government’s preparations. In our present state of information, it would be premature (what a jolly word!) — it would be premature to cast any reflections upon the conduct of General Buck, whose services upon so many stricken fields (ha, ha!), and whose honourable scars and laurels, give him a right to have judgment upon him at least suspended. But there is one matter on which we must speak plainly. We have been silent on it too long, from feelings, perhaps of mistaken caution, perhaps of mistaken loyalty. This situation would never have arisen but for what we can only call the indefensible conduct of the King. It pains us to say such things, but, speaking as we do in the public interests (I plagiarise from Barker's famous epigram), we shall not shrink because of the distress we may cause to any individual, even the most exalted. At this crucial moment of our country, the voice of the People demands with a single tongue, 'Where is the King?' What is he doing while his subjects tear each other in pieces in the streets of a great city? Are his amusements and his dissipations (of which we cannot pretend to be ignorant) so engrossing that he can spare no thought for a perishing nation? It is with a deep sense of our responsibility that we warn that exalted person that neither his great position nor his incomparable talents will save him in the hour of delirium from the fate of all those who, in the madness of luxury or tyranny, have met the English people in the rare day of its wrath."

"I am now," said the King, "going to write an account of the battle by an eye-witness." And he picked up a fourth sheet of wall-paper. Almost at the same moment Buck strode quickly into the office. He had a bandage round his head.

"I was told," he said, with his usual gruff civility, "that your Majesty was here."

"And of all things on earth," cried the King, with delight, "here is an eye-witness! An eye-witness who, I regret to observe, has at present only one eye to witness with. Can you write us the special article, Buck? Have you a rich style?"

Buck, with a self-restraint which almost approached politeness, took no notice whatever of the King's maddening geniality.

"I took the liberty, your Majesty," he said shortly, "of asking Mr. Barker to come here also."

As he spoke, indeed, Barker came swinging into the office, with his usual air of hurry.

"What is happening now?" asked Buck, turning to him with a kind of relief.

“Fighting still going on,” said Barker. “The four hundred from West Kensington were hardly touched last night. They hardly got near the place. Poor Wilson’s Bayswater men got cut about, though. They fought confoundedly well. They took Pump Street once. What mad things do happen in the world. To think that of all of us it should be little Wilson with the red whiskers who came out best.”

The King made a note on his paper —

“*Romantic Conduct of Mr. Wilson*.”

“Yes,” said Buck; “it makes one a bit less proud of one’s *h’s*.”

The King suddenly folded or crumpled up the paper, and put it in his pocket.

“I have an idea,” he said. “I will be an eye-witness. I will write you such letters from the Front as will be more gorgeous than the real thing. Give me my coat, Paladium. I entered this room a mere King of England. I leave it, Special War Correspondent of the *Court Journal*. It is useless to stop me, Pally; it is vain to cling to my knees, Buck; it is hopeless, Barker, to weep upon my neck. ‘When duty calls’ — the remainder of the sentiment escapes me. You will receive my first article this evening by the eight-o’clock post.”

And, running out of the office, he jumped upon a blue Bayswater omnibus that went swinging by.

“Well,” said Barker, gloomily, “well.”

“Barker,” said Buck, “business may be lower than politics, but war is, as I discovered last night, a long sight more like business. You politicians are such ingrained demagogues that even when you have a despotism you think of nothing but public opinion. So you learn to tack and run, and are afraid of the first breeze. Now we stick to a thing and get it. And our mistakes help us. Look here! at this moment we’ve beaten Wayne.”

“Beaten Wayne,” repeated Barker.

“Why the dickens not?” cried the other, flinging out his hands. “Look here. I said last night that we had them by holding the nine entrances. Well, I was wrong. We should have had them but for a singular event — the lamps went out. But for that it was certain. Has it occurred to you, my brilliant Barker, that another singular event has happened since that singular event of the lamps going out?”

“What event?” asked Barker.

"By an astounding coincidence, the sun has risen," cried out Buck, with a savage air of patience. "Why the hell aren't we holding all those approaches now, and passing in on them again? It should have been done at sunrise. The confounded doctor wouldn't let me go out. You were in command."

Barker smiled grimly.

"It is a gratification to me, my dear Buck, to be able to say that we anticipated your suggestions precisely. We went as early as possible to reconnoitre the nine entrances. Unfortunately, while we were fighting each other in the dark, like a lot of drunken navvies, Mr. Wayne's friends were working very hard indeed. Three hundred yards from Pump Street, at every one of those entrances, there is a barricade nearly as high as the houses. They were finishing the last, in Pembridge Road, when we arrived. Our mistakes," he cried bitterly, and flung his cigarette on the ground. "It is not we who learn from them."

There was a silence for a few moments, and Barker lay back wearily in a chair. The office clock ticked exactly in the stillness.

At length Barker said suddenly —

"Buck, does it ever cross your mind what this is all about? The Hammersmith to Maida Vale thoroughfare was an uncommonly good speculation. You and I hoped a great deal from it. But is it worth it? It will cost us thousands to crush this ridiculous riot. Suppose we let it alone?"

"And be thrashed in public by a red-haired madman whom any two doctors would lock up?" cried out Buck, starting to his feet. "What do you propose to do, Mr. Barker? To apologise to the admirable Mr. Wayne? To kneel to the Charter of the Cities? To clasp to your bosom the flag of the Red Lion? To kiss in succession every sacred lamp-post that saved Notting Hill? No, by God! My men fought jolly well — they were beaten by a trick. And they'll fight again."

"Buck," said Barker, "I always admired you. And you were quite right in what you said the other day."

"In what?"

"In saying," said Barker, rising quietly, "that we had all got into Adam Wayne's atmosphere and out of our own. My friend, the whole territorial kingdom of Adam Wayne extends to about nine streets, with barricades at the end of them. But the spiritual kingdom of Adam Wayne extends, God knows where — it extends to this office, at any rate. The red-haired madman whom any two doctors would lock up is filling this room with his roaring, unreasonable soul. And it was the red-haired madman who said the last word you spoke.”

Buck walked to the window without replying. “You understand, of course,” he said at last, “I do not dream of giving in.”

The King, meanwhile, was rattling along on the top of his blue omnibus. The traffic of London as a whole had not, of course, been greatly disturbed by these events, for the affair was treated as a Notting Hill riot, and that area was marked off as if it had been in the hands of a gang of recognised rioters. The blue omnibuses simply went round as they would have done if a road were being mended, and the omnibus on which the correspondent of the *Court Journal* was sitting swept round the corner of Queen’s Road, Bayswater.

The King was alone on the top of the vehicle, and was enjoying the speed at which it was going.

“Forward, my beauty, my Arab,” he said, patting the omnibus encouragingly, “fleetest of all thy bounding tribe. Are thy relations with thy driver, I wonder, those of the Bedouin and his steed? Does he sleep side by side with thee—”

His meditations were broken by a sudden and jarring stoppage. Looking over the edge, he saw that the heads of the horses were being held by men in the uniform of Wayne’s army, and heard the voice of an officer calling out orders.

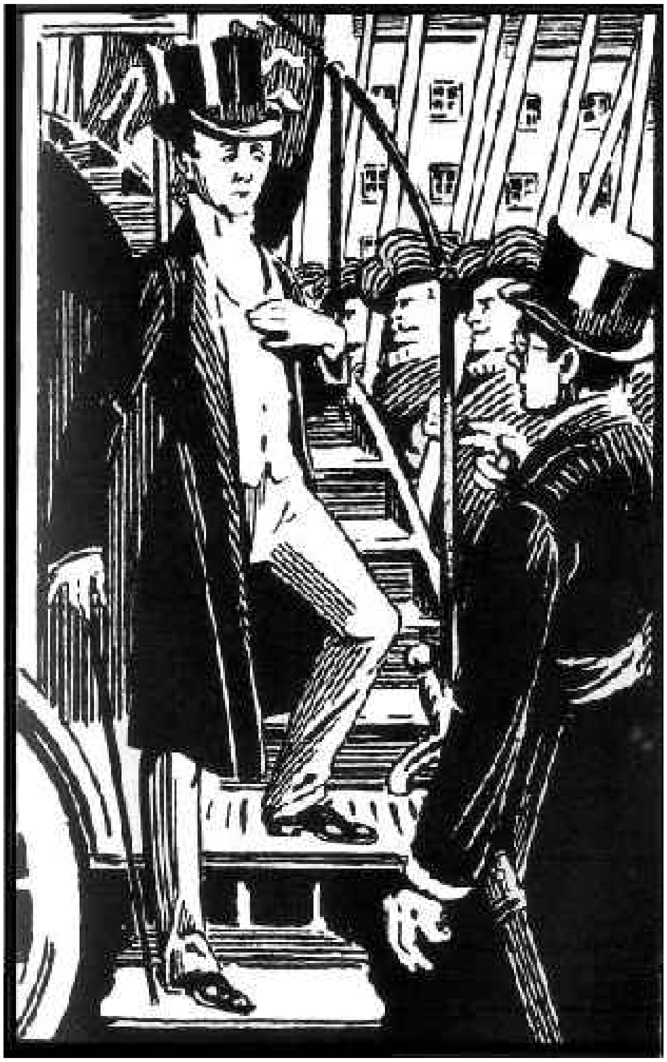

KING AUBERON DESCENDED FROM THE OMNIBUS WITH DIGNITY.

King Auberon descended from the omnibus with dignity. The guard or picket of red halberdiers who had stopped the vehicle did not number more than twenty, and they were under the command of a short, dark, clever-looking young man, conspicuous among the rest as being clad in an ordinary frock-coat, but girt round the waist with a red sash and a long seventeenth-century sword. A shiny silk hat and spectacles completed the outfit in a pleasing manner.

“To whom have I the honour of speaking?” said the King, endeavouring to look like Charles I., in spite of personal difficulties.

The dark man in spectacles lifted his hat with equal gravity.

“My name is Bowles,” he said. “I am a chemist. I am also a captain of O company of the army of Notting Hill. I am distressed at having to incommode you by stopping the omnibus, but this area is covered by our proclamation, and we intercept all traffic. May I ask to whom I have the honour — Why, good gracious, I beg your Majesty's pardon. I am quite overwhelmed at finding myself concerned with the King."

Auberon put up his hand with indescribable grandeur.

"Not with the King," he said; "with the special war correspondent of the *Court Journal*."

"I beg your Majesty's pardon," began Mr. Bowles, doubtfully.

"Do you call me Majesty? I repeat," said Auberon, firmly, "I am a representative of the press. I have chosen, with a deep sense of responsibility, the name of Pinker. I should desire a veil to be drawn over the past."

"Very well, sir," said Mr. Bowles, with an air of submission, "in our eyes the sanctity of the press is at least as great as that of the throne. We desire nothing better than that our wrongs and our glories should be widely known. May I ask, Mr. Pinker, if you have any objection to being presented to the Provost and to General Turnbull?"

"The Provost I have had the honour of meeting," said Auberon, easily. "We old journalists, you know, meet everybody. I should be most delighted to have the same honour again. General Turnbull, also, it would be a gratification to know. The younger men are so interesting. We of the old Fleet Street gang lose touch with them."

"Will you be so good as to step this way?" said the leader of O company.

"I am always good," said Mr. Pinker. "Lead on."

Chapter III — The Great Army of South Kensington

The article from the special correspondent of the *Court Journal* arrived in due course, written on very coarse copy-paper in the King's arabesque of handwriting, in which three words filled a page, and yet were illegible. Moreover, the contribution was the more perplexing at first, as it opened with a succession of erased paragraphs. The writer appeared to have attempted the article once or twice in several journalistic styles. At the side of one experiment was written, "Try American style," and the fragment began —

"The King must go. We want gritty men. Flapdoodle is all very ...;" and then broke off, followed by the note, "Good sound journalism safer. Try it."

The experiment in good sound journalism appeared to begin —

"The greatest of English poets has said that a rose by any ..."

This also stopped abruptly. The next annotation at the side was almost undecipherable, but seemed to be something like —

"How about old Steevens and the *mot juste*? E.g...."

"Morning winked a little wearily at me over the curt edge of Campden Hill and its houses with their sharp shadows. Under the abrupt black cardboard of the outline, it took some little time to detect colours; but at length I saw a brownish yellow shifting in the obscurity, and I knew that it was the guard of Swindon's West Kensington army. They are being held as a reserve, and lining the whole ridge above the Bayswater Road. Their camp and their main force is under the great Waterworks Tower on Campden Hill. I forgot to say that the Waterworks Tower looked swart.

"As I passed them and came over the curve of Silver Street, I saw the blue cloudy masses of Barker's men blocking the entrance to the high-road like a sapphire smoke (good). The disposition of the allied troops, under the general management of Mr. Wilson, appears to be as follows: The Yellow army (if I may so describe the West Kensingtonians) lies, as I have said, in a strip along the ridge, its furthest point westward being the west side of Campden Hill Road, its furthest point eastward the beginning of Kensington Gardens. The Green army of Wilson lines the Notting Hill High Road itself from Queen's Road to the corner of Pembridge Road, curving round the latter, and extending some three hundred yards up towards Westbourne

Grove. Westbourne Grove itself is occupied by Barker of South Kensington. The fourth side of this rough square, the Queen’s Road side, is held by some of Buck’s Purple warriors.

“The whole resembles some ancient and dainty Dutch flower-bed. Along the crest of Campden Hill lie the golden crocuses of West Kensington. They are, as it were, the first fiery fringe of the whole. Northward lies our hyacinth Barker, with all his blue hyacinths. Round to the south-west run the green rushes of Wilson of Bayswater, and a line of violet irises (aptly symbolised by Mr. Buck) complete the whole. The argent exterior ... (I am losing the style. I should have said ‘Curving with a whisk’ instead of merely ‘Curving.’ Also I should have called the hyacinths ‘sudden.’ I cannot keep this up. War is too rapid for this style of writing. Please ask office-boy to insert *mots justes*.)

“The truth is that there is nothing to report. That commonplace element which is always ready to devour all beautiful things (as the Black Pig in the Irish Mythology will finally devour the stars and gods); that commonplace element, as I say, has in its Black Piggish way devoured finally the chances of any romance in this affair; that which once consisted of absurd but thrilling combats in the streets, has degenerated into something which is the very prose of warfare — it has degenerated into a siege. A siege may be defined as a peace plus the inconvenience of war. Of course Wayne cannot hold out. There is no more chance of help from anywhere else than of ships from the moon. And if old Wayne had stocked his street with tinned meats till all his garrison had to sit on them, he couldn’t hold out for more than a month or two. As a matter of melancholy fact, he has done something rather like this. He has stocked his street with food until there must be uncommonly little room to turn round. But what is the good? To hold out for all that time and then to give in of necessity, what does it mean? It means waiting until your victories are forgotten, and then taking the trouble to be defeated. I cannot understand how Wayne can be so inartistic.

“And how odd it is that one views a thing quite differently when one knows it is defeated! I always thought Wayne was rather fine. But now, when I know that he is done for, there seem to be nothing else but Wayne. All the streets seem to point at him, all the chimneys seem to lean towards him. I suppose it is a morbid feeling; but Pump Street seems to be the only part of London that I feel physically. I suppose, I say, that it is morbid. I suppose it is exactly how a man feels about his heart when his heart is weak. ‘Pump Street’ — the heart is a pump. And I am drivelling.

“Our finest leader at the front is, beyond all question, General Wilson. He has adopted alone among the other Provosts the uniform of his own halberdiers, although that fine old sixteenth-century garb was not originally intended to go with red side-whiskers. It was he who, against a most admirable and desperate defence, broke last night into Pump Street and held it for at least half an hour. He was afterwards expelled from it by General Turnbull, of Notting Hill, but only after desperate fighting and the sudden descent of that terrible darkness which proved so much more fatal to the forces of General Buck and General Swindon.

“Provost Wayne himself, with whom I had, with great good fortune, a most interesting interview, bore the most eloquent testimony to the conduct of General Wilson and his men. His precise words are as follows: ‘I have bought sweets at his funny little shop when I was four years old, and ever since. I never noticed anything, I am ashamed to say, except that he talked through his nose, and didn’t wash himself particularly. And he came over our barricade like a devil from hell.’ I repeated this speech to General Wilson himself, with some delicate improvements, and he seemed pleased with it. He does not, however, seem pleased with anything so much just now as he is with the wearing of a sword. I have it from the front on the best authority that General Wilson was not completely shaved yesterday. It is believed in military circles that he is growing a moustache....

“As I have said, there is nothing to report. I walk wearily to the pillar-box at the corner of Pembridge Road to post my copy. Nothing whatever has happened, except the preparations for a particularly long and feeble siege, during which I trust I shall not be required to be at the Front. As I glance up Pembridge Road in the growing dusk, the aspect of that road reminds me that there is one note worth adding. General Buck has suggested, with characteristic acumen, to General Wilson that, in order to obviate the possibility of such a catastrophe as overwhelmed the allied forces in the last advance on Notting Hill (the catastrophe, I mean, of the extinguished lamps), each soldier should have a lighted lantern round his neck. This is one of the things which I really admire about General Buck. He possesses what people used to mean by ‘the humility of the man of science,’ that is, he learns steadily from his mistakes. Wayne may score off him in some other way, but not in that way. The lanterns look like fairy lights as they curve round the end of Pembridge Road.

“*Later*. — I write with some difficulty, because the blood will run down my face and make patterns on the paper. Blood is a very beautiful thing; that is why it is concealed. If you ask why blood runs down my face, I can only reply that I was kicked by a horse. If you ask me what horse, I can reply with some pride that it was a war-horse. If you ask me how a war-horse came on the scene in our simple pedestrian warfare, I am reduced to the necessity, so painful to a special correspondent, of recounting my experiences.

“I was, as I have said, in the very act of posting my copy at the pillar-box, and of glancing as I did so up the glittering curve of Pembridge Road, studded with the lights of Wilson’s men. I don’t know what made me pause to examine the matter, but I had a fancy that the line of lights, where it melted into the indistinct brown twilight, was more indistinct than usual. I was almost certain that in a certain stretch of the road where there had been five lights there were now only four. I strained my eyes; I counted them again, and there were only three. A moment after there were only two; an instant after only one; and an instant after that the lanterns near to me swung like jangled bells, as if struck suddenly. They flared and fell; and for the moment the fall of them was like the fall of the sun and stars out of heaven. It left everything in a primal blindness. As a matter of fact, the road was not yet legitimately dark. There were still red rays of a sunset in the sky, and the brown gloaming was still warmed, as it were, with a feeling as of firelight. But for three seconds after the lanterns swung and sank, I saw in front of me a blackness blocking the sky. And with the fourth second I knew that this blackness which blocked the sky was a man on a great horse; and I was trampled and tossed aside as a swirl of horsemen swept round the corner. As they turned I saw that they were not black, but scarlet; they were a sortie of the besieged, Wayne riding ahead.

“I lifted myself from the gutter, blinded with blood from a very slight skin-wound, and, queerly enough, not caring either for the blindness or for the slightness of the wound. For one mortal minute after that amazing cavalcade had spun past, there was dead stillness on the empty road. And then came Barker and all his halberdiers running like devils in the track of them. It had been their business to guard the gate by which the sortie had broken out; but they had not reckoned, and small blame to them, on cavalry. As it was, Barker and his men made a perfectly splendid run after them, almost catching Wayne's horses by the tails.

"Nobody can understand the sortie. It consists only of a small number of Wayne's garrison. Turnbull himself, with the vast mass of it, is undoubtedly still barricaded in Pump Street. Sorties of this kind are natural enough in the majority of historical sieges, such as the siege of Paris in 1870, because in such cases the besieged are certain of some support outside. But what can be the object of it in this case? Wayne knows (or if he is too mad to know anything, at least Turnbull knows) that there is not, and never has been, the smallest chance of support for him outside; that the mass of the sane modern inhabitants of London regard his farcical patriotism with as much contempt as they do the original idiotcy that gave it birth — the folly of our miserable King. What Wayne and his horsemen are doing nobody can even conjecture. The general theory round here is that he is simply a traitor, and has abandoned the besieged. But all such larger but yet more soluble riddles are as nothing compared to the one small but unanswerable riddle: Where did they get the horses?

"*Later*. — I have heard a most extraordinary account of the origin of the appearance of the horses. It appears that that amazing person, General Turnbull, who is now ruling Pump Street in the absence of Wayne, sent out, on the morning of the declaration of war, a vast number of little boys (or cherubs of the gutter, as we pressmen say), with half-crowns in their pockets, to take cabs all over London. No less than a hundred and sixty cabs met at Pump Street; were commandeered by the garrison. The men were set free, the cabs used to make barricades, and the horses kept in Pump Street, where they were fed and exercised for several days, until they were sufficiently rapid and efficient to be used for this wild ride out of the town. If this is so, and I have it on the best possible authority, the method of the sortie is explained. But we have no explanation of its object. Just as Barker's Blues were swinging round the corner after them, they were stopped, but not by an enemy; only by the voice of one man, and he a friend. Red Wilson of Bayswater ran alone along the main road like a madman, waving them back with a halberd snatched from a sentinel. He was in supreme command, and Barker stopped at the corner, staring and bewildered. We could hear Wilson's voice loud and distinct out of the dusk, so that it seemed strange that the great voice should come out of the little body. ‘Halt, South Kensington! Guard this entry, and prevent them returning. I will pursue. Forward, the Green Guards!’

“A wall of dark blue uniforms and a wood of pole-axes was between me and Wilson, for Barker’s men blocked the mouth of the road in two rigid lines. But through them and through the dusk I could hear the clear orders and the clank of arms, and see the green army of Wilson marching by towards the west. They were our great fighting-men. Wilson had filled them with his own fire; in a few days they had become veterans. Each of them wore a silver medal of a pump, to boast that they alone of all the allied armies had stood victorious in Pump Street.

“I managed to slip past the detachment of Barker’s Blues, who are guarding the end of Pembridge Road, and a sharp spell of running brought me to the tail of Wilson’s green army as it swung down the road in pursuit of the flying Wayne. The dusk had deepened into almost total darkness; for some time I only heard the throb of the marching pace. Then suddenly there was a cry, and the tall fighting men were flung back on me, almost crushing me, and again the lanterns swung and jingled, and the cold nozzles of great horses pushed into the press of us. They had turned and charged us.

“‘You fools!’ came the voice of Wilson, cleaving our panic with a splendid cold anger. ‘Don’t you see? the horses have no riders!’

“It was true. We were being plunged at by a stampede of horses with empty saddles. What could it mean? Had Wayne met some of our men and been defeated? Or had he flung these horses at us as some kind of ruse or mad new mode of warfare, such as he seemed bent on inventing? Or did he and his men want to get away in disguise? Or did they want to hide in houses somewhere?

“Never did I admire any man’s intellect (even my own) so much as I did Wilson’s at that moment. Without a word, he simply pointed the halberd (which he still grasped) to the southern side of the road. As you know, the streets running up to the ridge of Campden Hill from the main road are peculiarly steep, they are more like sudden flights of stairs. We were just opposite Aubrey Road, the steepest of all; up that it would have been far more difficult to urge half-trained horses than to run up on one’s feet.

“‘Left wheel!’ hallooed Wilson. ‘They have gone up here,’ he added to me, who happened to be at his elbow.

“‘Why?’ I ventured to ask.

"'Can't say for certain,' replied the Bayswater General. 'They've gone up here in a great hurry, anyhow. They've simply turned their horses loose, because they couldn't take them up. I fancy I know. I fancy they're trying to get over the ridge to Kensingston or Hammersmith, or somewhere, and are striking up here because it's just beyond the end of our line. Damned fools, not to have gone further along the road, though. They've only just shaved our last outpost. Lambert is hardly four hundred yards from here. And I've sent him word.'

"'Lambert!' I said. 'Not young Wilfrid Lambert — my old friend.'

"'Wilfrid Lambert's his name,' said the General; 'used to be a "man about town;" silly fellow with a big nose. That kind of man always volunteers for some war or other; and what's funnier, he generally isn't half bad at it. Lambert is distinctly good. The yellow West Kensingtons I always reckoned the weakest part of the army; but he has pulled them together uncommonly well, though he's subordinate to Swindon, who's a donkey. In the attack from Pembridge Road the other night he showed great pluck.'

"'He has shown greater pluck than that,' I said. 'He has criticised my sense of humour. That was his first engagement.'

"This remark was, I am sorry to say, lost on the admirable commander of the allied forces. We were in the act of climbing the last half of Aubrey Road, which is so abrupt a slope that it looks like an old-fashioned map leaning up against the wall. There are lines of little trees, one above the other, as in the old-fashioned map.

"We reached the top of it, panting somewhat, and were just about to turn the corner by a place called (in chivalrous anticipation of our wars of sword and axe) Tower Creçy, when we were suddenly knocked in the stomach (I can use no other term) by a horde of men hurled back upon us. They wore the red uniform of Wayne; their halberds were broken; their foreheads bleeding; but the mere impetus of their retreat staggered us as we stood at the last ridge of the slope.

"'Good old Lambert!' yelled out suddenly the stolid Mr. Wilson of Bayswater, in an uncontrollable excitement. 'Damned jolly old Lambert! He's got there already! He's driving them back on us! Hurrah! hurrah! Forward, the Green Guards!'

"We swung round the corner eastwards, Wilson running first, brandishing the halberd —

“Will you pardon a little egotism? Every one likes a little egotism, when it takes the form, as mine does in this case, of a disgraceful confession. The thing is really a little interesting, because it shows how the merely artistic habit has bitten into men like me. It was the most intensely exciting occurrence that had ever come to me in my life; and I was really intensely excited about it. And yet, as we turned that corner, the first impression I had was of something that had nothing to do with the fight at all. I was stricken from the sky as by a thunderbolt, by the height of the Waterworks Tower on Campden Hill. I don’t know whether Londoners generally realise how high it looks when one comes out, in this way, almost immediately under it. For the second it seemed to me that at the foot of it even human war was a triviality. For the second I felt as if I had been drunk with some trivial orgie, and that I had been sobered by the shock of that shadow. A moment afterwards, I realised that under it was going on something more enduring than stone, and something wilder than the dizziest height — the agony of man. And I knew that, compared to that, this overwhelming tower was itself a triviality; it was a mere stalk of stone which humanity could snap like a stick.

“I don’t know why I have talked so much about this silly old Waterworks Tower, which at the very best was only a tremendous background. It was that, certainly, a sombre and awful landscape, against which our figures were relieved. But I think the real reason was, that there was in my own mind so sharp a transition from the tower of stone to the man of flesh. For what I saw first when I had shaken off, as it were, the shadow of the tower, was a man, and a man I knew.

“Lambert stood at the further corner of the street that curved round the tower, his figure outlined in some degree by the beginning of moonrise. He looked magnificent, a hero; but he looked something much more interesting than that. He was, as it happened, in almost precisely the same swaggering attitude in which he had stood nearly fifteen years ago, when he swung his walking-stick and struck it into the ground, and told me that all my subtlety was drivel. And, upon my soul, I think he required more courage to say that than to fight as he does now. For then he was fighting against something that was in the ascendant, fashionable, and victorious. And now he is fighting (at the risk of his life, no doubt) merely against something which is already dead, which is impossible, futile; of which nothing has been more impossible and futile than this very sortie which has brought him into contact with it. People nowadays allow infinitely too little for the psychological sense of victory as a factor in affairs. Then he was attacking the degraded but undoubtedly victorious Quin; now he is attacking the interesting but totally extinguished Wayne.

“His name recalls me to the details of the scene. The facts were these. A line of red halberdiers, headed by Wayne, were marching up the street, close under the northern wall, which is, in fact, the bottom of a sort of dyke or fortification of the Waterworks. Lambert and his yellow West Kensingtons had that instant swept round the corner and had shaken the Waynites heavily, hurling back a few of the more timid, as I have just described, into our very arms. When our force struck the tail of Wayne’s, every one knew that all was up with him. His favourite military barber was struck down. His grocer was stunned. He himself was hurt in the thigh, and reeled back against the wall. We had him in a trap with two jaws. ‘Is that you?’ shouted Lambert, genially, to Wilson, across the hemmed-in host of Notting Hill. ‘That’s about the ticket,’ replied General Wilson; ‘keep them under the wall.’

“The men of Notting Hill were falling fast. Adam Wayne threw up his long arms to the wall above him, and with a spring stood upon it; a gigantic figure against the moon. He tore the banner out of the hands of the standard-bearer below him, and shook it out suddenly above our heads, so that it was like thunder in the heavens.

“‘Round the Red Lion!’ he cried. ‘Swords round the Red Lion! Halberds round the Red Lion! They are the thorns round rose.’

“His voice and the crack of the banner made a momentary rally, and Lambert, whose idiotic face was almost beautiful with battle, felt it as by an instinct, and cried —

“‘Drop your public-house flag, you footler! Drop it!’

“‘The banner of the Red Lion seldom stoops,’ said Wayne, proudly, letting it out luxuriantly on the night wind.

“The next moment I knew that poor Adam’s sentimental theatricality had cost him much. Lambert was on the wall at a bound, his sword in his teeth, and had slashed at Wayne’s head before he had time to draw his sword, his hands being busy with the enormous flag. He stepped back only just in time to avoid the first cut, and let the flag-staff fall, so that the spear-blade at the end of it pointed to Lambert.

"'The banner stoops,' cried Wayne, in a voice that must have startled streets. 'The banner of Notting Hill stoops to a hero.' And with the words he drove the spear-point and half the flag-staff through Lambert's body and dropped him dead upon the road below, a stone upon the stones of the street.

"'Notting Hill! Notting Hill!' cried Wayne, in a sort of divine rage. 'Her banner is all the holier for the blood of a brave enemy! Up on the wall, patriots! Up on the wall! Notting Hill!'

"With his long strong arm he actually dragged a man up on to the wall to be silhouetted against the moon, and more and more men climbed up there, pulled themselves and were pulled, till clusters and crowds of the half-massacred men of Pump Street massed upon the wall above us.

"'Notting Hill! Notting Hill!' cried Wayne, unceasingly.

"'Well, what about Bayswater?' said a worthy working-man in Wilson's army, irritably. 'Bayswater for ever!'

"'We have won!' cried Wayne, striking his flag-staff in the ground. 'Bayswater for ever! We have taught our enemies patriotism!'

"'Oh, cut these fellows up and have done with it!' cried one of Lambert's lieutenants, who was reduced to something bordering on madness by the responsibility of succeeding to the command.

"'Let us by all means try,' said Wilson, grimly; and the two armies closed round the third.

"I simply cannot describe what followed. I am sorry, but there is such a thing as physical fatigue, as physical nausea, and, I may add, as physical terror. Suffice it to say that the above paragraph was written about 11 p.m., and that it is now about 2 a.m., and that the battle is not finished, and is not likely to be. Suffice it further to say that down the steep streets which lead from the Waterworks Tower to the Notting Hill High Road, blood has been running, and is running, in great red serpents, that curl out into the main thoroughfare and shine in the moon.

"*Later.* — The final touch has been given to all this terrible futility. Hours have passed; morning has broken; men are still swaying and fighting at the foot of the tower and round the corner of Aubrey Road; the fight has not finished. But I know it is a farce.

“News has just come to show that Wayne’s amazing sortie, followed by the amazing resistance through a whole night on the wall of the Waterworks, is as if it had not been. What was the object of that strange exodus we shall probably never know, for the simple reason that every one who knew will probably be cut to pieces in the course of the next two or three hours.

“I have heard, about three minutes ago, that Buck and Buck’s methods have won after all. He was perfectly right, of course, when one comes to think of it, in holding that it was physically impossible for a street to defeat a city. While we thought he was patrolling the eastern gates with his Purple army; while we were rushing about the streets and waving halberds and lanterns; while poor old Wilson was scheming like Moltke and fighting like Achilles to entrap the wild Provost of Notting Hill — Mr. Buck, retired draper, has simply driven down in a hansom cab and done something about as plain as butter and about as useful and nasty. He has gone down to South Kensington, Brompton, and Fulham, and by spending about four thousand pounds of his private means, has raised an army of nearly as many men; that is to say, an army big enough to beat, not only Wayne, but Wayne and all his present enemies put together. The army, I understand, is encamped along High Street, Kensington, and fills it from the Church to Addison Road Bridge. It is to advance by ten different roads uphill to the north.

“I cannot endure to remain here. Everything makes it worse than it need be. The dawn, for instance, has broken round Campden Hill; splendid spaces of silver, edged with gold, are torn out of the sky. Worse still, Wayne and his men feel the dawn; their faces, though bloody and pale, are strangely hopeful ... insupportably pathetic. Worst of all, for the moment they are winning. If it were not for Buck and the new army they might just, and only just, win.

“I repeat, I cannot stand it. It is like watching that wonderful play of old Maeterlinck’s (you know my partiality for the healthy, jolly old authors of the nineteenth century), in which one has to watch the quiet conduct of people inside a parlour, while knowing that the very men are outside the door whose word can blast it all with tragedy. And this is worse, for the men are not talking, but writhing and bleeding and dropping dead for a thing that is already settled — and settled against them. The great grey masses of men still toil and tug and sway hither and thither around the great grey tower; and the tower is still motionless, as it will always be motionless.

These men will be crushed before the sun is set; and new men will arise and be crushed, and new wrongs done, and tyranny will always rise again like the sun, and injustice will always be as fresh as the flowers of spring. And the stone tower will always look down on it. Matter, in its brutal beauty, will always look down on those who are mad enough to consent to die, and yet more mad, since they consent to live."

Thus ended abruptly the first and last contribution of the Special Correspondent of the *Court Journal* to that valued periodical.

The Correspondent himself, as has been said, was simply sick and gloomy at the last news of the triumph of Buck. He slouched sadly down the steep Aubrey Road, up which he had the night before run in so unusual an excitement, and strolled out into the empty dawn-lit main road, looking vaguely for a cab. He saw nothing in the vacant space except a blue-and-gold glittering thing, running very fast, which looked at first like a very tall beetle, but turned out, to his great astonishment, to be Barker.

"Have you heard the good news?" asked that gentleman.

"Yes," said Quin, with a measured voice. "I have heard the glad tidings of great joy. Shall we take a hansom down to Kensington? I see one over there."

They took the cab, and were, in four minutes, fronting the ranks of the multitudinous and invincible army. Quin had not spoken a word all the way, and something about him had prevented the essentially impressionable Barker from speaking either.

The great army, as it moved up Kensington High Street, calling many heads to the numberless windows, for it was long indeed — longer than the lives of most of the tolerably young — since such an army had been seen in London. Compared with the vast organisation which was now swallowing up the miles, with Buck at its head as leader, and the King hanging at its tail as journalist, the whole story of our problem was insignificant. In the presence of that army the red Notting Hills and the green Bayswaters were alike tiny and straggling groups. In its presence the whole struggle round Pump Street was like an ant-hill under the hoof of an ox. Every man who felt or looked at that infinity of men knew that it was the triumph of Buck's brutal arithmetic. Whether Wayne was right or wrong, wise or foolish, was quite a fair matter for discussion. But it was a matter of history. At the foot of Church Street, opposite Kensington Church, they paused in their glowing good humour.

“Let us send some kind of messenger or herald up to them,” said Buck, turning to Barker and the King. “Let us send and ask them to cave in without more muddle.”

“What shall we say to them?” said Barker, doubtfully.

“The facts of the case are quite sufficient,” rejoined Buck. “It is the facts of the case that make an army surrender. Let us simply say that our army that is fighting their army, and their army that is fighting our army, amount altogether to about a thousand men. Say that we have four thousand. It is very simple. Of the thousand fighting, they have at the very most, three hundred, so that, with those three hundred, they have now to fight four thousand seven hundred men. Let them do it if it amuses them.”

And the Provost of North Kensington laughed.

The herald who was despatched up Church Street in all the pomp of the South Kensington blue and gold, with the Three Birds on his tabard, was attended by two trumpeters.

“What will they do when they consent?” asked Barker, for the sake of saying something in the sudden stillness of that immense army.

“I know my Wayne very well,” said Buck, laughing. “When he submits he will send a red herald flaming with the Lion of Notting Hill. Even defeat will be delightful to him, since it is formal and romantic.”

The King, who had strolled up to the head of the line, broke silence for the first time.

“I shouldn’t wonder,” he said, “if he defied you, and didn’t send the herald after all. I don’t think you do know your Wayne quite so well as you think.”

“All right, your Majesty,” said Buck, easily; “if it isn’t disrespectful, I’ll put my political calculations in a very simple form. I’ll lay you ten pounds to a shilling the herald comes with the surrender.”

“All right,” said Auberon. “I may be wrong, but it’s my notion of Adam Wayne that he’ll die in his city, and that, till he is dead, it will not be a safe property.”

“The bet’s made, your Majesty,” said Buck.

Another long silence ensued, in the course of which Barker alone, amid the motionless army, strolled and stamped in his restless way.

Then Buck suddenly leant forward.

“It’s taking your money, your Majesty,” he said. “I knew it was. There comes the herald from Adam Wayne.”

“It’s not,” cried the King, peering forward also. “You brute, it’s a red omnibus.”

“It’s not,” said Buck, calmly; and the King did not answer, for down the centre of the spacious and silent Church Street was walking, beyond question, the herald of the Red Lion, with two trumpeters.

Buck had something in him which taught him how to be magnanimous. In his hour of success he felt magnanimous towards Wayne, whom he really admired; magnanimous towards the King, off whom he had scored so publicly; and, above all, magnanimous towards Barker, who was the titular leader of this vast South Kensington army, which his own talent had evoked.

“General Barker,” he said, bowing, “do you propose now to receive the message from the besieged?”

Barker bowed also, and advanced towards the herald.

“Has your master, Mr. Adam Wayne, received our request for surrender?” he asked.

The herald conveyed a solemn and respectful affirmative.

Barker resumed, coughing slightly, but encouraged.

“What answer does your master send?”

The herald again inclined himself submissively, and answered in a kind of monotone.

“My message is this. Adam Wayne, Lord High Provost of Notting Hill, under the charter of King Auberon and the laws of God and all mankind, free and of a free city, greets James Barker, Lord High Provost of South Kensington, by the same rights free and honourable, leader of the army of the South. With all friendly reverence, and with all constitutional consideration, he desires James Barker to lay down his arms, and the whole army under his command to lay down their arms also.”

Before the words were ended the King had run forward into the open space with shining eyes. The rest of the staff and the forefront of the army were literally struck breathless. When they recovered they began to laugh beyond restraint; the revulsion was too sudden.

"The Lord High Provost of Notting Hill," continued the herald, "does not propose, in the event of your surrender, to use his victory for any of those repressive purposes which others have entertained against him. He will leave you your free laws and your free cities, your flags and your governments. He will not destroy the religion of South Kensington, or crush the old customs of Bayswater."

An irrepressible explosion of laughter went up from the forefront of the great army.

"The King must have had something to do with this humour," said Buck, slapping his thigh. "It's too deliciously insolent. Barker, have a glass of wine."

And in his conviviality he actually sent a soldier across to the restaurant opposite the church and brought out two glasses for a toast.

When the laughter had died down, the herald continued quite monotonously —

"In the event of your surrendering your arms and dispersing under the superintendence of our forces, these local rights of yours shall be carefully observed. In the event of your not doing so, the Lord High Provost of Notting Hill desires to announce that he has just captured the Waterworks Tower, just above you, on Campden Hill, and that within ten minutes from now, that is, on the reception through me of your refusal, he will open the great reservoir and flood the whole valley where you stand in thirty feet of water. God save King Auberon!"

Buck had dropped his glass and sent a great splash of wine over the road.

"But — but—" he said; and then by a last and splendid effort of his great sanity, looked the facts in the face.

"We must surrender," he said. "You could do nothing against fifty thousand tons of water coming down a steep hill, ten minutes hence. We must surrender. Our four thousand men might as well be four. *Vicisti Galilæe!* Perkins, you may as well get me another glass of wine."

In this way the vast army of South Kensington surrendered and the Empire of Notting Hill began. One further fact in this connection is perhaps worth mentioning — the fact that, after his victory, Adam Wayne caused the great tower on Campden Hill to be plated with gold and inscribed with a great epitaph, saying that it was the monument of Wilfrid Lambert, the heroic defender of the place, and surmounted with a statue, in which his large nose was done something less than justice to.

Book V

Chapter I — The Empire of Notting Hill

On the evening of the third of October, twenty years after the great victory of Notting Hill, which gave it the dominion of London, King Auberon came, as of old, out of Kensington Palace.

He had changed little, save for a streak or two of grey in his hair, for his face had always been old, and his step slow, and, as it were, decrepit.

If he looked old, it was not because of anything physical or mental. It was because he still wore, with a quaint conservatism, the frock-coat and high hat of the days before the great war. “I have survived the Deluge,” he said. “I am a pyramid, and must behave as such.”

As he passed up the street the Kensingtonians, in their picturesque blue smocks, saluted him as a King, and then looked after him as a curiosity. It seemed odd to them that men had once worn so elvish an attire.

The King, cultivating the walk attributed to the oldest inhabitant (“Gaffer Auberon” his friends were now confidentially desired to call him), went toddling northward. He paused, with reminiscence in his eye, at the Southern Gate of Notting Hill, one of those nine great gates of bronze and steel, wrought with reliefs of the old battles, by the hand of Chiffy himself.

“Ah!” he said, shaking his head and assuming an unnecessary air of age, and a provincialism of accent— “Ah! I mind when there warn’t none of this here.”

He passed through the Ossington Gate, surmounted by a great lion, wrought in red copper on yellow brass, with the motto, “Nothing Ill.” The guard in red and gold saluted him with his halberd.

It was about sunset, and the lamps were being lit. Auberon paused to look at them, for they were Chiffy’s finest work, and his artistic eye never failed to feast on them. In memory of the Great Battle of the Lamps, each great iron lamp was surmounted by a veiled figure, sword in hand, holding over the flame an iron hood or extinguisher, as if ready to let it fall if the armies of the South and West should again show their flags in the city. Thus no child in Notting Hill could play about the streets without the very lamp-posts reminding him of the salvation of his country in the dreadful year.

“Old Wayne was right in a way,” commented the King. “The sword does make things beautiful. It has made the whole world romantic by now. And to think people once thought me a buffoon for suggesting a romantic

Notting Hill. Deary me, deary me! (I think that is the expression) — it seems like a previous existence.”

Turning a corner, he found himself in Pump Street, opposite the four shops which Adam Wayne had studied twenty years before. He entered idly the shop of Mr. Mead, the grocer. Mr. Mead was somewhat older, like the rest of the world, and his red beard, which he now wore with a moustache, and long and full, was partly blanched and discoloured. He was dressed in a long and richly embroidered robe of blue, brown, and crimson, interwoven with an Eastern complexity of pattern, and covered with obscure symbols and pictures, representing his wares passing from hand to hand and from nation to nation. Round his neck was the chain with the Blue Argosy cut in turquoise, which he wore as Grand Master of the Grocers. The whole shop had the sombre and sumptuous look of its owner. The wares were displayed as prominently as in the old days, but they were now blended and arranged with a sense of tint and grouping, too often neglected by the dim grocers of those forgotten days. The wares were shown plainly, but shown not so much as an old grocer would have shown his stock, but rather as an educated virtuoso would have shown his treasures. The tea was stored in great blue and green vases, inscribed with the nine indispensable sayings of the wise men of China. Other vases of a confused orange and purple, less rigid and dominant, more humble and dreamy, stored symbolically the tea of India. A row of caskets of a simple silvery metal contained tinned meats. Each was wrought with some rude but rhythmic form, as a shell, a horn, a fish, or an apple, to indicate what material had been canned in it.

“Your Majesty,” said Mr. Mead, sweeping an Oriental reverence. “This is an honour to me, but yet more an honour to the city.”

Auberon took off his hat.

“Mr. Mead,” he said, “Notting Hill, whether in giving or taking, can deal in nothing but honour. Do you happen to sell liquorice?”

“Liquorice, sire,” said Mr. Mead, “is not the least important of our benefits out of the dark heart of Arabia.”

And going reverently towards a green and silver canister, made in the form of an Arabian mosque, he proceeded to serve his customer.

“I was just thinking, Mr. Mead,” said the King, reflectively, “I don’t know why I should think about it just now, but I was just thinking of twenty years ago. Do you remember the times before the war?”

The grocer, having wrapped up the liquorice sticks in a piece of paper (inscribed with some appropriate sentiment), lifted his large grey eyes dreamily, and looked at the darkening sky outside.

"Oh yes, your Majesty," he said. "I remember these streets before the Lord Provost began to rule us. I can't remember how we felt very well. All the great songs and the fighting change one so; and I don't think we can really estimate all we owe to the Provost; but I can remember his coming into this very shop twenty-two years ago, and I remember the things he said. The singular thing is that, as far as I remember, I thought the things he said odd at that time. Now it's the things that I said, as far as I can recall them, that seem to me odd — as odd as a madman's antics."

"Ah!" said the King; and looked at him with an unfathomable quietness.

"I thought nothing of being a grocer then," he said. "Isn't that odd enough for anybody? I thought nothing of all the wonderful places that my goods come from, and wonderful ways that they are made. I did not know that I was for all practical purposes a king with slaves spearing fishes near the secret pool, and gathering fruits in the islands under the world. My mind was a blank on the thing. I was as mad as a hatter."

The King turned also, and stared out into the dark, where the great lamps that commemorated the battle were already flaming.

"And is this the end of poor old Wayne?" he said, half to himself. "To inflame every one so much that he is lost himself in the blaze. Is this his victory that he, my incomparable Wayne, is now only one in a world of Waynes? Has he conquered and become by conquest commonplace? Must Mr. Mead, the grocer, talk as high as he? Lord! what a strange world in which a man cannot remain unique even by taking the trouble to go mad!"

And he went dreamily out of the shop.

He paused outside the next one almost precisely as the Provost had done two decades before.

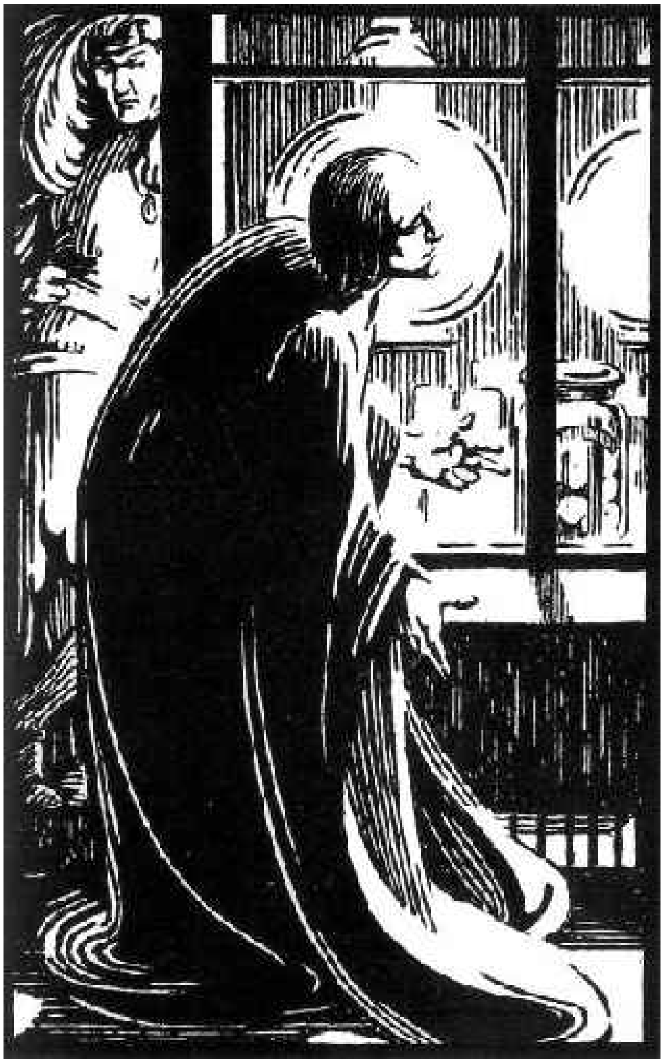

“A FINE EVENING, SIR,” SAID THE CHEMIST.

“How uncommonly creepy this shop looks!” he said. “But yet somehow encouragingly creepy, invitingly creepy. It looks like something in a jolly old nursery story in which you are frightened out of your skin, and yet know that things always end well. The way those low sharp gables are carved like great black bat’s wings folded down, and the way those queer-coloured bowls underneath are made to shine like giants eye-balls. It looks like a benevolent warlock’s hut. It is apparently a chemist’s.”

Almost as he spoke, Mr. Bowles, the chemist, came to his shop door in a long black velvet gown and hood, monastic as it were, but yet with a touch of the diabolic. His hair was still quite black, and his face even paler than of old. The only spot of colour he carried was a red star cut in some precious stone of strong tint, hung on his breast. He belonged to the Society of the

Red Star of Charity, founded on the lamps displayed by doctors and chemists.

"A fine evening, sir," said the chemist. "Why, I can scarcely be mistaken in supposing it to be your Majesty. Pray step inside and share a bottle of sal-volatile, or anything that may take your fancy. As it happens, there is an old acquaintance of your Majesty's in my shop carousing (if I may be permitted the term) upon that beverage at this moment."

The King entered the shop, which was an Aladdin's garden of shades and hues, for as the chemist's scheme of colour was more brilliant than the grocer's scheme, so it was arranged with even more delicacy and fancy. Never, if the phrase may be employed, had such a nosegay of medicines been presented to the artistic eye.

But even the solemn rainbow of that evening interior was rivalled or even eclipsed by the figure standing in the centre of the shop. His form, which was a large and stately one, was clad in a brilliant blue velvet, cut in the richest Renaissance fashion, and slashed so as to show gleams and gaps of a wonderful lemon or pale yellow. He had several chains round his neck, and his plumes, which were of several tints of bronze and gold, hung down to the great gold hilt of his long sword. He was drinking a dose of sal-volatile, and admiring its opal tint. The King advanced with a slight mystification towards the tall figure, whose face was in shadow; then he said —

"By the Great Lord of Luck, Barker!"

The figure removed his plumed cap, showing the same dark head and long, almost equine face which the King had so often seen rising out of the high collar of Bond Street. Except for a grey patch on each temple, it was totally unchanged.

"Your Majesty," said Barker, "this is a meeting nobly retrospective, a meeting that has about it a certain October gold. I drink to old days;" and he finished his sal-volatile with simple feeling.

"I am delighted to see you again, Barker," said the King. "It is indeed long since we met. What with my travels in Asia Minor, and my book having to be written (you have read my 'Life of Prince Albert for Children,' of course?), we have scarcely met twice since the Great War. That is twenty years ago."

"I wonder," said Barker, thoughtfully, "if I might speak freely to your Majesty?"

“Well,” said Auberon, “it’s rather late in the day to start speaking respectfully. Flap away, my bird of freedom.”

“Well, your Majesty,” replied Barker, lowering his voice, “I don’t think it will be so long to the next war.”

“What do you mean?” asked Auberon.

“We will stand this insolence no longer,” burst out Barker, fiercely. “We are not slaves because Adam Wayne twenty years ago cheated us with a water-pipe. Notting Hill is Notting Hill; it is not the world. We in South Kensington, we also have memories — ay, and hopes. If they fought for these trumpery shops and a few lamp-posts, shall we not fight for the great High Street and the sacred Natural History Museum?”

“Great Heavens!” said the astounded Auberon. “Will wonders never cease? Have the two greatest marvels been achieved? Have you turned altruistic, and has Wayne turned selfish? Are you the patriot, and he the tyrant?”

“It is not from Wayne himself altogether that the evil comes,” answered Barker. “He, indeed, is now mostly wrapped in dreams, and sits with his old sword beside the fire. But Notting Hill is the tyrant, your Majesty. Its Council and its crowds have been so intoxicated by the spreading over the whole city of Wayne’s old ways and visions, that they try to meddle with every one, and rule every one, and civilise every one, and tell every one what is good for him. I do not deny the great impulse which his old war, wild as it seemed, gave to the civic life of our time. It came when I was still a young man, and I admit it enlarged my career. But we are not going to see our own cities flouted and thwarted from day to day because of something Wayne did for us all nearly a quarter of a century ago. I am just waiting here for news upon this very matter. It is rumoured that Notting Hill has vetoed the statue of General Wilson they are putting up opposite Chepstow Place. If that is so, it is a black and white shameless breach of the terms on which we surrendered to Turnbull after the battle of the Tower. We were to keep our own customs and self-government. If that is so—”

“It is so,” said a deep voice; and both men turned round.

A burly figure in purple robes, with a silver eagle hung round his neck and moustaches almost as florid as his plumes, stood in the doorway.

“Yes,” he said, acknowledging the King’s start, “I am Provost Buck, and the news is true. These men of the Hill have forgotten that we fought round the Tower as well as they, and that it is sometimes foolish, as well as base, to despise the conquered."

"Let us step outside," said Barker, with a grim composure.

Buck did so, and stood rolling his eyes up and down the lamp-lit street.

"I would like to have a go at smashing all this," he muttered, "though I am over sixty. I would like—"

His voice ended in a cry, and he reeled back a step, with his hands to his eyes, as he had done in those streets twenty years before.

"Darkness!" he cried— "darkness again! What does it mean?"

For in truth every lamp in the street had gone out, so that they could not see even each other's outline, except faintly. The voice of the chemist came with startling cheerfulness out of the density.

"Oh, don't you know?" he said. "Did they never tell you this is the Feast of the Lamps, the anniversary of the great battle that almost lost and just saved Notting Hill? Don't you know, your Majesty, that on this night twenty-one years ago we saw Wilson's green uniforms charging down this street, and driving Wayne and Turnbull back upon the gas-works, fighting with their handful like fiends from hell? And that then, in that great hour, Wayne sprang through a window of the gas-works, with one blow of his hand brought darkness on the whole city, and then with a cry like a lion's, that was heard through four streets, flew at Wilson's men, sword in hand, and swept them, bewildered as they were, and ignorant of the map, clear out of the sacred street again? And don't you know that upon that night every year all lights are turned out for half an hour while we sing the Notting Hill anthem in the darkness? Hark! there it begins."

Through the night came a crash of drums, and then a strong swell of human voices —

"When the world was in the balance, there was night on Notting Hill, (There was night on Notting Hill): it was nobler than the day; On the cities where the lights are and the firesides glow, From the seas and from the deserts came the thing we did not know, Came the darkness, came the darkness, came the darkness on the foe, And the old guard of God turned to bay. For the old guard of God turns to bay, turns to bay, And the stars fall down before it ere its banners fall to-day: For when armies were around us as a howling and a horde, When falling was the citadel and broken was the sword, The darkness came upon them like the Dragon of the Lord, When the old guard of God turned to bay."

The voices were just uplifting themselves in a second verse when they were stopped by a scurry and a yell. Barker had bounded into the street with a cry of “South Kensington!” and a drawn dagger. In less time than a man could blink, the whole packed street was full of curses and struggling. Barker was flung back against the shop-front, but used the second only to draw his sword as well as his dagger, and calling out, “This is not the first time I’ve come through the thick of you,” flung himself again into the press. It was evident that he had drawn blood at last, for a more violent outcry arose, and many other knives and swords were discernible in the faint light. Barker, after having wounded more than one man, seemed on the point of being flung back again, when Buck suddenly stepped out into the street. He had no weapon, for he affected rather the peaceful magnificence of the great burgher, than the pugnacious dandyism which had replaced the old sombre dandyism in Barker. But with a blow of his clenched fist he broke the pane of the next shop, which was the old curiosity shop, and, plunging in his hand, snatched a kind of Japanese scimitar, and calling out, “Kensington! Kensington!” rushed to Barker’s assistance.

Barker’s sword was broken, but he was laying about him with his dagger. Just as Buck ran up, a man of Notting Hill struck Barker down, but Buck struck the man down on top of him, and Barker sprang up again, the blood running down his face.

Suddenly all these cries were cloven by a great voice, that seemed to fall out of heaven. It was terrible to Buck and Barker and the King, from its seeming to come out the empty skies; but it was more terrible because it was a familiar voice, and one which at the same time they had not heard for so long.

“Turn up the lights,” said the voice from above them, and for a moment there was no reply, but only a tumult.

“In the name of Notting Hill and of the great Council of the City, turn up the lights.”

There was again a tumult and a vagueness for a moment, then the whole street and every object in it sprang suddenly out of the darkness, as every lamp sprang into life. And looking up they saw, standing upon a balcony near the roof of one of the highest houses, the figure and the face of Adam Wayne, his red hair blowing behind him, a little streaked with grey.

“What is this, my people?” he said. “Is it altogether impossible to make a thing good without it immediately insisting on being wicked? The glory of

Notting Hill in having achieved its independence, has been enough for me to dream of for many years, as I sat beside the fire. Is it really not enough for you, who have had so many other affairs to excite and distract you? Notting Hill is a nation. Why should it condescend to be a mere Empire? You wish to pull down the statue of General Wilson, which the men of Bayswater have so rightly erected in Westbourne Grove. Fools! Who erected that statue? Did Bayswater erect it? No. Notting Hill erected it. Do you not see that it is the glory of our achievement that we have infected the other cities with the idealism of Notting Hill? It is we who have created not only our own side, but both sides of this controversy. O too humble fools, why should you wish to destroy your enemies? You have done something more to them. You have created your enemies. You wish to pull down that gigantic silver hammer, which stands, like an obelisk, in the centre of the Broadway of Hammersmith. Fools! Before Notting Hill arose, did any person passing through Hammersmith Broadway expect to see there a gigantic silver hammer? You wish to abolish the great bronze figure of a knight standing upon the artificial bridge at Knightsbridge. Fools! Who would have thought of it before Notting Hill arose? I have even heard, and with deep pain I have heard it, that the evil eye of our imperial envy has been cast towards the remote horizon of the west, and that we have objected to the great black monument of a crowned raven, which commemorates the skirmish of Ravenscourt Park. Who created all these things? Were they there before we came? Cannot you be content with that destiny which was enough for Athens, which was enough for Nazareth? the destiny, the humble purpose, of creating a new world. Is Athens angry because Romans and Florentines have adopted her phraseology for expressing their own patriotism? Is Nazareth angry because as a little village it has become the type of all little villages out of which, as the Snobs say, no good can come? Has Athens asked every one to wear the chlamys? Are all followers of the Nazarene compelled to wear turbans. No! but the soul of Athens went forth and made men drink hemlock, and the soul of Nazareth went forth and made men consent to be crucified. So has the soul of Notting Hill gone forth and made men realise what it is to live in a city. Just as we inaugurated our symbols and ceremonies, so they have inaugurated theirs; and are you so mad as to contend against them? Notting Hill is right; it has always been right. It has moulded itself on its own necessities, its own *sine quâ non*; it has accepted its own ultimatum. Because it is a nation it has created itself;

and because it is a nation it can destroy itself. Notting Hill shall always be the judge. If it is your will because of this matter of General Wilson's statue to make war upon Bayswater—"

A roar of cheers broke in upon his words, and further speech was impossible. Pale to the lips, the great patriot tried again and again to speak; but even his authority could not keep down the dark and roaring masses in the street below him. He said something further, but it was not audible. He descended at last sadly from the garret in which he lived, and mingled with the crowd at the foot of the houses. Finding General Turnbull, he put his hand on his shoulder with a queer affection and gravity, and said —

"To-morrow, old man, we shall have a new experience, as fresh as the flowers of spring. We shall be defeated. You and I have been through three battles together, and have somehow or other missed this peculiar delight. It is unfortunate that we shall not probably be able to exchange our experiences, because, as it most annoyingly happens, we shall probably both be dead."

Turnbull looked dimly surprised.

"I don't mind so much about being dead," he said, "but why should you say that we shall be defeated?"

"The answer is very simple," replied Wayne, calmly. "It is because we ought to be defeated. We have been in the most horrible holes before now; but in all those I was perfectly certain that the stars were on our side, and that we ought to get out. Now I know that we ought not to get out; and that takes away from me everything with which I won."

As Wayne spoke he started a little, for both men became aware that a third figure was listening to them — a small figure with wondering eyes.

"Is it really true, my dear Wayne," said the King, interrupting, "that you think you will be beaten to-morrow?"

"There can be no doubt about it whatever," replied Adam Wayne; "the real reason is the one of which I have just spoken. But as a concession to your materialism, I will add that they have an organised army of a hundred allied cities against our one. That in itself, however, would be unimportant."

Quin, with his round eyes, seemed strangely insistent.

"You are quite sure," he said, "that you must be beaten?"

"I am afraid," said Turnbull, gloomily, "that there can be no doubt about it."

“Then,” cried the King, flinging out his arms, “give me a halberd! Give me a halberd, somebody! I desire all men to witness that I, Auberon, King of England, do here and now abdicate, and implore the Provost of Notting Hill to permit me to enlist in his army. Give me a halberd!”

He seized one from some passing guard, and, shouldering it, stamped solemnly after the shouting columns of halberdiers which were, by this time, parading the streets. He had, however, nothing to do with the wrecking of the statue of General Wilson, which took place before morning.

Chapter II — The Last Battle

The day was cloudy when Wayne went down to die with all his army in Kensington Gardens; it was cloudy again when that army had been swallowed up by the vast armies of a new world. There had been an almost uncanny interval of sunshine, in which the Provost of Notting Hill, with all the placidity of an onlooker, had gazed across to the hostile armies on the great spaces of verdure opposite; the long strips of green and blue and gold lay across the park in squares and oblongs like a proposition in Euclid wrought in a rich embroidery. But the sunlight was a weak and, as it were, a wet sunlight, and was soon swallowed up. Wayne spoke to the King, with a queer sort of coldness and languor, as to the military operations. It was as he had said the night before — that being deprived of his sense of an impracticable rectitude, he was, in effect, being deprived of everything. He was out of date, and at sea in a mere world of compromise and competition, of Empire against Empire, of the tolerably right and the tolerably wrong. When his eye fell on the King, however, who was marching very gravely with a top hat and a halberd, it brightened slightly.

“Well, your Majesty,” he said, “you at least ought to be proud to-day. If your children are fighting each other, at least those who win are your children. Other kings have distributed justice, you have distributed life. Other kings have ruled a nation, you have created nations. Others have made kingdoms, you have begotten them. Look at your children, father!” and he stretched his hand out towards the enemy.

Auberon did not raise his eyes.

“See how splendidly,” cried Wayne, “the new cities come on — the new cities from across the river. See where Battersea advances over there — under the flag of the Lost Dog; and Putney — don’t you see the Man on the White Boar shining on their standard as the sun catches it? It is the coming of a new age, your Majesty. Notting Hill is not a common empire; it is a thing like Athens, the mother of a mode of life, of a manner of living, which shall renew the youth of the world — a thing like Nazareth. When I was young I remember, in the old dreary days, wiseacres used to write books about how trains would get faster, and all the world be one empire, and tram-cars go to the moon. And even as a child I used to say to myself, ‘Far more likely that we shall go on the crusades again, or worship the gods of the city.’ And so it has been. And I am glad, though this is my last battle.”

Even as he spoke there came a crash of steel from the left, and he turned his head.

“Wilson!” he cried, with a kind of joy. “Red Wilson has charged our left. No one can hold him in; he eats swords. He is as keen a soldier as Turnbull, but less patient — less really great. Ha! and Barker is moving. How Barker has improved; how handsome he looks! It is not all having plumes; it is also having a soul in one’s daily life. Ha!”

And another crash of steel on the right showed that Barker had closed with Notting Hill on the other side.

“Turnbull is there!” cried Wayne. “See him hurl them back! Barker is checked! Turnbull charges — wins! But our left is broken. Wilson has smashed Bowles and Mead, and may turn our flank. Forward, the Provost’s Guard!”

And the whole centre moved forward, Wayne’s face and hair and sword flaming in the van.

The King ran suddenly forward.

The next instant a great jar that went through it told that it had met the enemy. And right over against them through the wood of their own weapons Auberon saw the Purple Eagle of Buck of North Kensington.

On the left Red Wilson was storming the broken ranks, his little green figure conspicuous even in the tangle of men and weapons, with the flaming red moustaches and the crown of laurel. Bowles slashed at his head and tore away some of the wreath, leaving the rest bloody, and, with a roar like a bull’s, Wilson sprang at him, and, after a rattle of fencing, plunged his point into the chemist, who fell, crying, “Notting Hill!” Then the Notting Hillers wavered, and Bayswater swept them back in confusion. Wilson had carried everything before him.

On the right, however, Turnbull had carried the Red Lion banner with a rush against Barker’s men, and the banner of the Golden Birds bore up with difficulty against it. Barker’s men fell fast. In the centre Wayne and Buck were engaged, stubborn and confused. So far as the fighting went, it was precisely equal. But the fighting was a farce. For behind the three small armies with which Wayne’s small army was engaged lay the great sea of the allied armies, which looked on as yet as scornful spectators, but could have broken all four armies by moving a finger.

Suddenly they did move. Some of the front contingents, the pastoral chiefs from Shepherd's Bush, with their spears and fleeces, were seen advancing, and the rude clans from Paddington Green. They were advancing for a very good reason. Buck, of North Kensington, was signalling wildly; he was surrounded, and totally cut off. His regiments were a struggling mass of people, islanded in a red sea of Notting Hill.

The allies had been too careless and confident. They had allowed Barker's force to be broken to pieces by Turnbull, and the moment that was done, the astute old leader of Notting Hill swung his men round and attacked Buck behind and on both sides. At the same moment Wayne cried, "Charge!" and struck him in front like a thunderbolt.

Two-thirds of Buck's men were cut to pieces before their allies could reach them. Then the sea of cities came on with their banners like breakers, and swallowed Notting Hill for ever. The battle was not over, for not one of Wayne's men would surrender, and it lasted till sundown, and long after. But it was decided; the story of Notting Hill was ended.

When Turnbull saw it, he ceased a moment from fighting, and looked round him. The evening sunlight struck his face; it looked like a child's.

"I have had my youth," he said. Then, snatching an axe from a man, he dashed into the thick of the spears of Shepherd's Bush, and died somewhere far in the depths of their reeling ranks. Then the battle roared on; every man of Notting Hill was slain before night.

Wayne was standing by a tree alone after the battle. Several men approached him with axes. One struck at him. His foot seemed partly to slip; but he flung his hand out, and steadied himself against the tree.

Barker sprang after him, sword in hand, and shaking with excitement.

"How large now, my lord," he cried, "is the Empire of Notting Hill?"

Wayne smiled in the gathering dark.

"Always as large as this," he said, and swept his sword round in a semicircle of silver.

Barker dropped, wounded in the neck; and Wilson sprang over his body like a tiger-cat, rushing at Wayne. At the same moment there came behind the Lord of the Red Lion a cry and a flare of yellow, and a mass of the West Kensington halberdiers ploughed up the slope, knee-deep in grass, bearing the yellow banner of the city before them, and shouting aloud.

At the same second Wilson went down under Wayne’s sword, seemingly smashed like a fly. The great sword rose again like a bird, but Wilson seemed to rise with it, and, his sword being broken, sprang at Wayne’s throat like a dog. The foremost of the yellow halberdiers had reached the tree and swung his axe above the struggling Wayne. With a curse the King whirled up his own halberd, and dashed the blade in the man’s face. He reeled and rolled down the slope, just as the furious Wilson was flung on his back again. And again he was on his feet, and again at Wayne’s throat. Then he was flung again, but this time laughing triumphantly. Grasped in his hand was the red and yellow favour that Wayne wore as Provost of Notting Hill. He had torn it from the place where it had been carried for twenty-five years.

With a shout the West Kensington men closed round Wayne, the great yellow banner flapping over his head.

“Where is your favour now, Provost?” cried the West Kensington leader.

And a laugh went up.

Adam struck at the standard-bearer and brought him reeling forward. As the banner stooped, he grasped the yellow folds and tore off a shred. A halberdier struck him on the shoulder, wounding bloodily.

“Here is one colour!” he cried, pushing the yellow into his belt; “and here!” he cried, pointing to his own blood— “here is the other.”

At the same instant the shock of a sudden and heavy halberd laid the King stunned or dead. In the wild visions of vanishing consciousness, he saw again something that belonged to an utterly forgotten time, something that he had seen somewhere long ago in a restaurant. He saw, with his swimming eyes, red and yellow, the colours of Nicaragua.

Quin did not see the end. Wilson, wild with joy, sprang again at Adam Wayne, and the great sword of Notting Hill was whirled above once more. Then men ducked instinctively at the rushing noise of the sword coming down out of the sky, and Wilson of Bayswater was smashed and wiped down upon the floor like a fly. Nothing was left of him but a wreck; but the blade that had broken him was broken. In dying he had snapped the great sword and the spell of it; the sword of Wayne was broken at the hilt. One rush of the enemy carried Wayne by force against the tree. They were too close to use halberd or even sword; they were breast to breast, even nostrils to nostrils. But Buck got his dagger free.

“Kill him!” he cried, in a strange stifled voice. “Kill him! Good or bad, he is none of us! Do not be blinded by the face!... God! have we not been blinded all along!” and he drew his arm back for a stab, and seemed to close his eyes.

Wayne did not drop the hand that hung on to the tree-branch. But a mighty heave went over his breast and his whole huge figure, like an earthquake over great hills. And with that convulsion of effort he rent the branch out of the tree, with tongues of torn wood; and, swaying it once only, he let the splintered club fall on Buck, breaking his neck. The planner of the Great Road fell face foremost dead, with his dagger in a grip of steel.

“For you and me, and for all brave men, my brother,” said Wayne, in his strange chant, “there is good wine poured in the inn at the end of the world.”

The packed men made another lurch or heave towards him; it was almost too dark to fight clearly. He caught hold of the oak again, this time getting his hand into a wide crevice and grasping, as it were, the bowels of the tree. The whole crowd, numbering some thirty men, made a rush to tear him away from it; they hung on with all their weight and numbers, and nothing stirred. A solitude could not have been stiller than that group of straining men. Then there was a faint sound.

“His hand is slipping,” cried two men in exultation.

“You don’t know much of him,” said another, grimly (a man of the old war). “More likely his bone cracks.”

“It is neither — by God, it is neither!” said one of the first two.

“What is it, then?” asked the second.

“The tree is falling,” he replied.

“As the tree falleth, so shall it lie,” said Wayne’s voice out of the darkness, and it had the same sweet and yet horrible air that it had had throughout, of coming from a great distance, from before or after the event. Even when he was struggling like an eel or battering like a madman, he spoke like a spectator. “As the tree falleth, so shall it lie,” he said. “Men have called that a gloomy text. It is the essence of all exultation. I am doing now what I have done all my life, what is the only happiness, what is the only universality. I am clinging to something. Let it fall, and there let it lie. Fools, you go about and see the kingdoms of the earth, and are liberal and wise and cosmopolitan, which is all that the devil can give you — all that he could offer to Christ, only to be spurned away. I am doing what the truly wise do. When a child goes out into the garden and takes hold of a tree, saying, ‘Let this tree be all I have,’ that moment its roots take hold on hell and its branches on the stars. The joy I have is what the lover knows when a woman is everything. It is what a savage knows when his idol is everything. It is what I know when Notting Hill is everything. I have a city. Let it stand or fall.”

As he spoke, the turf lifted itself like a living thing, and out of it rose slowly, like crested serpents, the roots of the oak. Then the great head of the tree, that seemed a green cloud among grey ones, swept the sky suddenly like a broom, and the whole tree heeled over like a ship, smashing every one in its fall.

Chapter III — Two Voices

In a place in which there was total darkness for hours, there was also for hours total silence. Then a voice spoke out of the darkness, no one could have told from where, and said aloud —

“So ends the Empire of Notting Hill. As it began in blood, so it ended in blood, and all things are always the same.”

And there was silence again, and then again there was a voice, but it had not the same tone; it seemed that it was not the same voice.

“If all things are always the same, it is because they are always heroic. If all things are always the same, it is because they are always new. To each man one soul only is given; to each soul only is given a little power — the power at some moments to outgrow and swallow up the stars. If age after age that power comes upon men, whatever gives it to them is great. Whatever makes men feel old is mean — an empire or a skin-flint shop. Whatever makes men feel young is great — a great war or a love-story. And in the darkest of the books of God there is written a truth that is also a riddle. It is of the new things that men tire — of fashions and proposals and improvements and change. It is the old things that startle and intoxicate. It is the old things that are young. There is no sceptic who does not feel that many have doubted before. There is no rich and fickle man who does not feel that all his novelties are ancient. There is no worshipper of change who does not feel upon his neck the vast weight of the weariness of the universe. But we who do the old things are fed by nature with a perpetual infancy. No man who is in love thinks that any one has been in love before. No woman who has a child thinks that there have been such things as children. No people that fight for their own city are haunted with the burden of the broken empires. Yes, O dark voice, the world is always the same, for it is always unexpected.”

A little gust of wind blew through the night, and then the first voice answered —

“But in this world there are some, be they wise or foolish, whom nothing intoxicates. There are some who see all your disturbances like a cloud of flies. They know that while men will laugh at your Notting Hill, and will study and rehearse and sing of Athens and Jerusalem, Athens and Jerusalem were silly suburbs like your Notting Hill. They know that the earth itself is a suburb, and can feel only drearily and respectably amused as they move upon it."

"They are philosophers or they are fools," said the other voice. "They are not men. Men live, as I say, rejoicing from age to age in something fresher than progress — in the fact that with every baby a new sun and a new moon are made. If our ancient humanity were a single man, it might perhaps be that he would break down under the memory of so many loyalties, under the burden of so many diverse heroisms, under the load and terror of all the goodness of men. But it has pleased God so to isolate the individual soul that it can only learn of all other souls by hearsay, and to each one goodness and happiness come with the youth and violence of lightning, as momentary and as pure. And the doom of failure that lies on all human systems does not in real fact affect them any more than the worms of the inevitable grave affect a children's game in a meadow. Notting Hill has fallen; Notting Hill has died. But that is not the tremendous issue. Notting Hill has lived."

"But if," answered the other voice, "if what is achieved by all these efforts be only the common contentment of humanity, why do men so extravagantly toil and die in them? Has nothing been done by Notting Hill than any chance clump of farmers or clan of savages would not have done without it? What might have been done to Notting Hill if the world had been different may be a deep question; but there is a deeper. What could have happened to the world if Notting Hill had never been?"

The other voice replied —

"The same that would have happened to the world and all the starry systems if an apple-tree grew six apples instead of seven; something would have been eternally lost. There has never been anything in the world absolutely like Notting Hill. There will never be anything quite like it to the crack of doom. I cannot believe anything but that God loved it as He must surely love anything that is itself and unreplaceable. But even for that I do not care. If God, with all His thunders, hated it, I loved it."

And with the voice a tall, strange figure lifted itself out of the *débris* in the half-darkness.

The other voice came after a long pause, and as it were hoarsely.

"But suppose the whole matter were really a hocus-pocus. Suppose that whatever meaning you may choose in your fancy to give to it, the real meaning of the whole was mockery. Suppose it was all folly. Suppose—"

"I have been in it," answered the voice from the tall and strange figure, "and I know it was not."

A smaller figure seemed half to rise in the dark.

"Suppose I am God," said the voice, "and suppose I made the world in idleness. Suppose the stars, that you think eternal, are only the idiot fireworks of an everlasting schoolboy. Suppose the sun and the moon, to which you sing alternately, are only the two eyes of one vast and sneering giant, opened alternately in a never-ending wink. Suppose the trees, in my eyes, are as foolish as enormous toad-stools. Suppose Socrates and Charlemagne are to me only beasts, made funnier by walking on their hind legs. Suppose I am God, and having made things, laugh at them."

"And suppose I am man," answered the other. "And suppose that I give the answer that shatters even a laugh. Suppose I do not laugh back at you, do not blaspheme you, do not curse you. But suppose, standing up straight under the sky, with every power of my being, I thank you for the fools' paradise you have made. Suppose I praise you, with a literal pain of ecstasy, for the jest that has brought me so terrible a joy. If we have taken the child's games, and given them the seriousness of a Crusade, if we have drenched your grotesque Dutch garden with the blood of martyrs, we have turned a nursery into a temple. I ask you, in the name of Heaven, who wins?"

The sky close about the crests of the hills and trees was beginning to turn from black to grey, with a random suggestion of the morning. The slight figure seemed to crawl towards the larger one, and the voice was more human.

"But suppose, friend," it said, "suppose that, in a bitterer and more real sense, it was all a mockery. Suppose that there had been, from the beginning of these great wars, one who watched them with a sense that is beyond expression, a sense of detachment, of responsibility, of irony, of agony. Suppose that there were one who knew it was all a joke."

The tall figure answered —

"He could not know it. For it was not all a joke."

And a gust of wind blew away some clouds that sealed the sky-line, and showed a strip of silver behind his great dark legs. Then the other voice came, having crept nearer still.

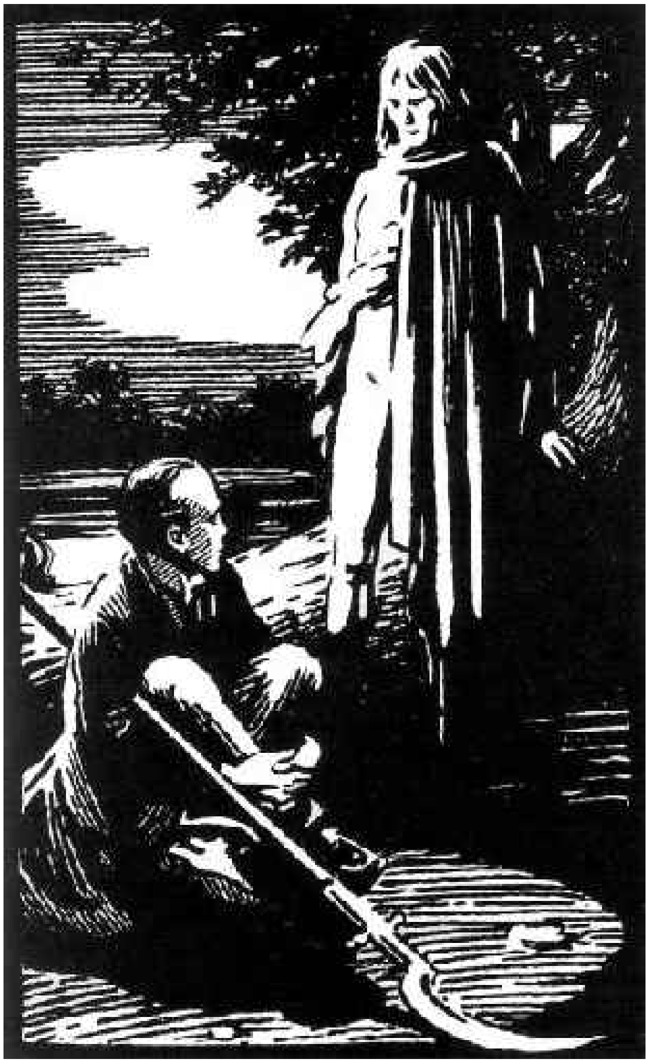

“WAYNE, IT WAS ALL A JOKE.”

“Adam Wayne,” it said, “there are men who confess only in *articulo mortis*; there are people who blame themselves only when they can no longer help others. I am one of them. Here, upon the field of the bloody end of it all, I come to tell you plainly what you would never understand before. Do you know who I am?”

“I know you, Auberon Quin,” answered the tall figure, “and I shall be glad to unburden your spirit of anything that lies upon it.”

“Adam Wayne,” said the other voice, “of what I have to say you cannot in common reason be glad to unburden me. Wayne, it was all a joke. When I made these cities, I cared no more for them than I care for a centaur, or a merman, or a fish with legs, or a pig with feathers, or any other absurdity. When I spoke to you solemnly and encouragingly about the flag of your freedom and the peace of your city, I was playing a vulgar practical joke on an honest gentleman, a vulgar practical joke that has lasted for twenty years. Though no one could believe it of me, perhaps, it is the truth that I am a man both timid and tender-hearted. I never dared in the early days of your hope, or the central days of your supremacy, to tell you this; I never dared to break the colossal calm of your face. God knows why I should do it now, when my farce has ended in tragedy and the ruin of all your people! But I say it now. Wayne, it was done as a joke."

There was silence, and the freshening breeze blew the sky clearer and clearer, leaving great spaces of the white dawn.

At last Wayne said, very slowly —

"You did it all only as a joke?"

"Yes," said Quin, briefly.

"When you conceived the idea," went on Wayne, dreamily, "of an army for Bayswater and a flag for Notting Hill, there was no gleam, no suggestion in your mind that such things might be real and passionate?"

"No," answered Auberon, turning his round white face to the morning with a dull and splendid sincerity; "I had none at all."

Wayne sprang down from the height above him and held out his hand.

"I will not stop to thank you," he said, with a curious joy in his voice, "for the great good for the world you have actually wrought. All that I think of that I have said to you a moment ago, even when I thought that your voice was the voice of a derisive omnipotence, its laughter older than the winds of heaven. But let me say what is immediate and true. You and I, Auberon Quin, have both of us throughout our lives been again and again called mad. And we are mad. We are mad, because we are not two men, but one man. We are mad, because we are two lobes of the same brain, and that brain has been cloven in two. And if you ask for the proof of it, it is not hard to find. It is not merely that you, the humorist, have been in these dark days stripped of the joy of gravity. It is not merely that I, the fanatic, have had to grope without humour. It is that, though we seem to be opposite in everything, we have been opposite like man and woman, aiming at the same moment at the same practical thing. We are the father and the mother of the Charter of the Cities."

Quin looked down at the *débris* of leaves and timber, the relics of the battle and stampede, now glistening in the growing daylight, and finally said —

“Yet nothing can alter the antagonism — the fact that I laughed at these things and you adored them.”

Wayne’s wild face flamed with something god-like, as he turned it to be struck by the sunrise.

“I know of something that will alter that antagonism, something that is outside us, something that you and I have all our lives perhaps taken too little account of. The equal and eternal human being will alter that antagonism, for the human being sees no real antagonism between laughter and respect, the human being, the common man, whom mere geniuses like you and me can only worship like a god. When dark and dreary days come, you and I are necessary, the pure fanatic, the pure satirist. We have between us remedied a great wrong. We have lifted the modern cities into that poetry which every one who knows mankind knows to be immeasurably more common than the commonplace. But in healthy people there is no war between us. We are but the two lobes of the brain of a ploughman. Laughter and love are everywhere. The cathedrals, built in the ages that loved God, are full of blasphemous grotesques. The mother laughs continually at the child, the lover laughs continually at the lover, the wife at the husband, the friend at the friend. Auberon Quin, we have been too long separated; let us go out together. You have a halberd and I a sword, let us start our wanderings over the world. For we are its two essentials. Come, it is already day.”

In the blank white light Auberon hesitated a moment. Then he made the formal salute with his halberd, and they went away together into the unknown world.

THE END

THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY

First published in 1908, Chesterton’s second novel is a thriller set in Edwardian London. It tells the story of Gabriel Syme, who is recruited at Scotland Yard to a secret anti-anarchist police corps. Lucian Gregory, an anarchistic poet, lives in the suburb of Saffron Park. Syme meets him at a party and they debate the meaning of poetry. Gregory argues that revolt is the basis of poetry. Syme demurs, insisting that the essence of poetry is not revolution, but rather law.

Like most of Chesterton’s fictional works, the story contains Christian allegory. Chesterton, a Protestant by this time (he became a Catholic 15 years later), suffered a brief bout of depression and claimed afterwards that he wrote this novel as an unusual affirmation that goodness and right were at the heart of every aspect of the world.

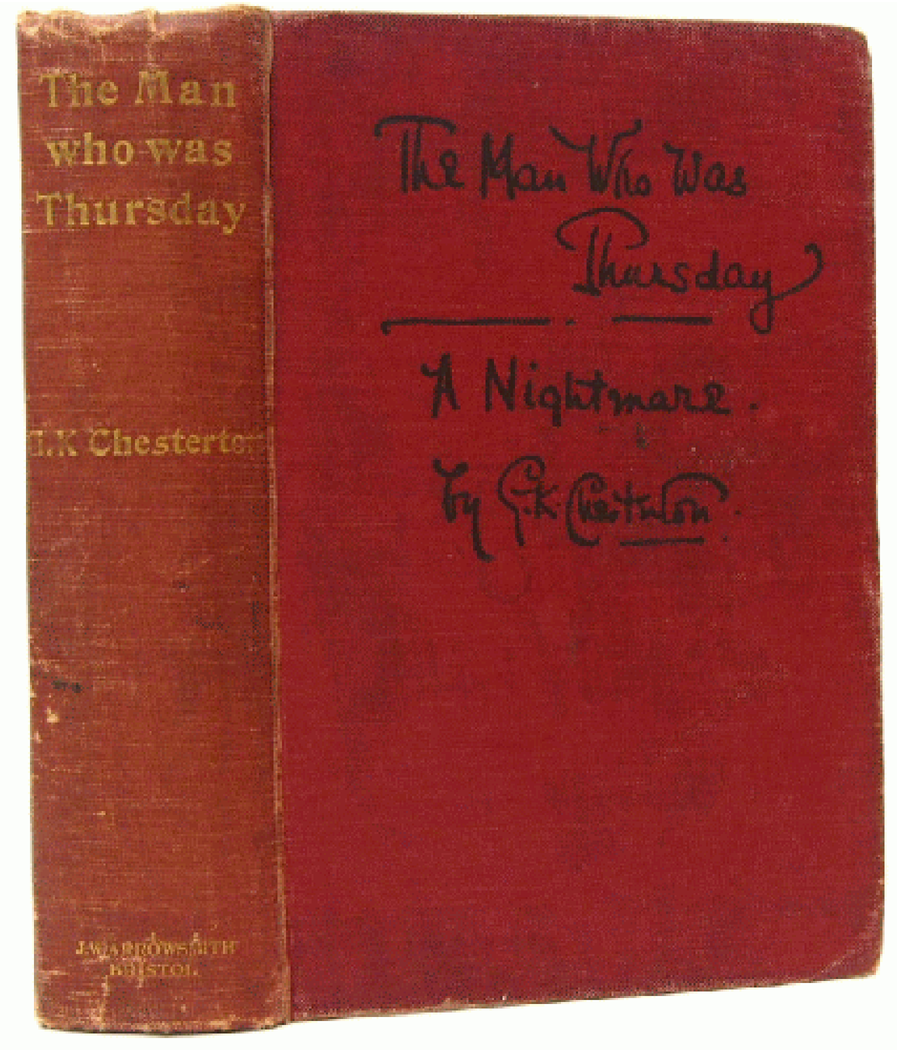
The Man who was Thursday
G.K Chesterton
J.W.ARROWSMITH BRISTOL
The Man Who Was Thursday
A Nightmare.
by G.K. Chesterton.

The first edition

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THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY

A NIGHTMARE

To Edmund Clerihew Bentley

A cloud was on the mind of men, and wailing went the weather,
Yea, a sick cloud upon the soul when we were boys together.
Science announced nonentity and art admired decay;
The world was old and ended: but you and I were gay;
Round us in antic order their crippled vices came —
Lust that had lost its laughter, fear that had lost its shame.
Like the white lock of Whistler, that lit our aimless gloom,
Men showed their own white feather as proudly as a plume.
Life was a fly that faded, and death a drone that stung;
The world was very old indeed when you and I were young.
They twisted even decent sin to shapes not to be named:
Men were ashamed of honour; but we were not ashamed.
Weak if we were and foolish, not thus we failed, not thus;
When that black Baal blocked the heavens he had no hymns from us
Children we were — our forts of sand were even as weak as we,
High as they went we piled them up to break that bitter sea.
Fools as we were in motley, all jangling and absurd,
When all church bells were silent our cap and bells were heard.

Not all unhelped we held the fort, our tiny flags unfurled;
Some giants laboured in that cloud to lift it from the world.
I find again the book we found, I feel the hour that flings
Far out of fish-shaped Paumanok some cry of cleaner things;
And the Green Carnation withered, as in forest fires that pass,
Roared in the wind of all the world ten million leaves of grass;
Or sane and sweet and sudden as a bird sings in the rain —
Truth out of Tusitala spoke and pleasure out of pain.
Yea, cool and clear and sudden as a bird sings in the grey,
Dunedin to Samoa spoke, and darkness unto day.
But we were young; we lived to see God break their bitter charms.
God and the good Republic come riding back in arms:
We have seen the City of Mansoul, even as it rocked, relieved —
Blessed are they who did not see, but being blind, believed.

This is a tale of those old fears, even of those emptied hells,
And none but you shall understand the true thing that it tells —
Of what colossal gods of shame could cow men and yet crash,
Of what huge devils hid the stars, yet fell at a pistol flash.
The doubts that were so plain to chase, so dreadful to withstand —

Oh, who shall understand but you; yea, who shall understand?
The doubts that drove us through the night as we two talked amain,
And day had broken on the streets e’er it broke upon the brain.
Between us, by the peace of God, such truth can now be told;
Yea, there is strength in striking root and good in growing old.
We have found common things at last and marriage and a creed,
And I may safely write it now, and you may safely read.

G. K. C.

CHAPTER I. THE TWO POETS OF SAFFRON PARK

THE suburb of Saffron Park lay on the sunset side of London, as red and ragged as a cloud of sunset. It was built of a bright brick throughout; its sky-line was fantastic, and even its ground plan was wild. It had been the outburst of a speculative builder, faintly tinged with art, who called its architecture sometimes Elizabethan and sometimes Queen Anne, apparently under the impression that the two sovereigns were identical. It was described with some justice as an artistic colony, though it never in any definable way produced any art. But although its pretensions to be an intellectual centre were a little vague, its pretensions to be a pleasant place were quite indisputable. The stranger who looked for the first time at the quaint red houses could only think how very oddly shaped the people must be who could fit in to them. Nor when he met the people was he disappointed in this respect. The place was not only pleasant, but perfect, if once he could regard it not as a deception but rather as a dream. Even if the people were not “artists,” the whole was nevertheless artistic. That young man with the long, auburn hair and the impudent face — that young man was not really a poet; but surely he was a poem. That old gentleman with the wild, white beard and the wild, white hat — that venerable humbug was not really a philosopher; but at least he was the cause of philosophy in others. That scientific gentleman with the bald, egg-like head and the bare, bird-like neck had no real right to the airs of science that he assumed. He had not discovered anything new in biology; but what biological creature could he have discovered more singular than himself? Thus, and thus only, the whole place had properly to be regarded; it had to be considered not so much as a workshop for artists, but as a frail but finished work of art. A man who stepped into its social atmosphere felt as if he had stepped into a written comedy.

More especially this attractive unreality fell upon it about nightfall, when the extravagant roofs were dark against the afterglow and the whole insane village seemed as separate as a drifting cloud. This again was more strongly true of the many nights of local festivity, when the little gardens were often illuminated, and the big Chinese lanterns glowed in the dwarfish trees like some fierce and monstrous fruit. And this was strongest of all on one particular evening, still vaguely remembered in the locality, of which the auburn-haired poet was the hero. It was not by any means the only evening of which he was the hero. On many nights those passing by his little back garden might hear his high, didactic voice laying down the law to men and particularly to women. The attitude of women in such cases was indeed one of the paradoxes of the place. Most of the women were of the kind vaguely called emancipated, and professed some protest against male supremacy. Yet these new women would always pay to a man the extravagant compliment which no ordinary woman ever pays to him, that of listening while he is talking. And Mr. Lucian Gregory, the red-haired poet, was really (in some sense) a man worth listening to, even if one only laughed at the end of it. He put the old cant of the lawlessness of art and the art of lawlessness with a certain impudent freshness which gave at least a momentary pleasure. He was helped in some degree by the arresting oddity of his appearance, which he worked, as the phrase goes, for all it was worth. His dark red hair parted in the middle was literally like a woman’s, and curved into the slow curls of a virgin in a pre-Raphaelite picture. From within this almost saintly oval, however, his face projected suddenly broad and brutal, the chin carried forward with a look of cockney contempt. This combination at once tickled and terrified the nerves of a neurotic population. He seemed like a walking blasphemy, a blend of the angel and the ape.

This particular evening, if it is remembered for nothing else, will be remembered in that place for its strange sunset. It looked like the end of the world. All the heaven seemed covered with a quite vivid and palpable plumage; you could only say that the sky was full of feathers, and of feathers that almost brushed the face. Across the great part of the dome they were grey, with the strangest tints of violet and mauve and an unnatural pink or pale green; but towards the west the whole grew past description, transparent and passionate, and the last red-hot plumes of it covered up the sun like something too good to be seen. The whole was so close about the earth, as to express nothing but a violent secrecy. The very empyrean seemed to be a secret. It expressed that splendid smallness which is the soul of local patriotism. The very sky seemed small.

I say that there are some inhabitants who may remember the evening if only by that oppressive sky. There are others who may remember it because it marked the first appearance in the place of the second poet of Saffron Park. For a long time the red-haired revolutionary had reigned without a rival; it was upon the night of the sunset that his solitude suddenly ended. The new poet, who introduced himself by the name of Gabriel Syme was a very mild-looking mortal, with a fair, pointed beard and faint, yellow hair. But an impression grew that he was less meek than he looked. He signalised his entrance by differing with the established poet, Gregory, upon the whole nature of poetry. He said that he (Syme) was poet of law, a poet of order; nay, he said he was a poet of respectability. So all the Saffron Parkers looked at him as if he had that moment fallen out of that impossible sky.

In fact, Mr. Lucian Gregory, the anarchic poet, connected the two events.

“It may well be,” he said, in his sudden lyrical manner, “it may well be on such a night of clouds and cruel colours that there is brought forth upon the earth such a portent as a respectable poet. You say you are a poet of law; I say you are a contradiction in terms. I only wonder there were not comets and earthquakes on the night you appeared in this garden.”

The man with the meek blue eyes and the pale, pointed beard endured these thunders with a certain submissive solemnity. The third party of the group, Gregory’s sister Rosamond, who had her brother’s braids of red hair, but a kindlier face underneath them, laughed with such mixture of admiration and disapproval as she gave commonly to the family oracle.

Gregory resumed in high oratorical good humour.

“An artist is identical with an anarchist,” he cried. “You might transpose the words anywhere. An anarchist is an artist. The man who throws a bomb is an artist, because he prefers a great moment to everything. He sees how much more valuable is one burst of blazing light, one peal of perfect thunder, than the mere common bodies of a few shapeless policemen. An artist disregards all governments, abolishes all conventions. The poet delights in disorder only. If it were not so, the most poetical thing in the world would be the Underground Railway.”

“So it is,” said Mr. Syme.

“Nonsense!” said Gregory, who was very rational when anyone else attempted paradox. “Why do all the clerks and navvies in the railway trains look so sad and tired, so very sad and tired? I will tell you. It is because they know that the train is going right. It is because they know that whatever place they have taken a ticket for that place they will reach. It is because after they have passed Sloane Square they know that the next station must be Victoria, and nothing but Victoria. Oh, their wild rapture!

oh, their eyes like stars and their souls again in Eden, if the next station were unaccountably Baker Street!”

“It is you who are unpoetical,” replied the poet Syme. “If what you say of clerks is true, they can only be as prosaic as your poetry. The rare, strange thing is to hit the mark; the gross, obvious thing is to miss it. We feel it is epical when man with one wild arrow strikes a distant bird. Is it not also epical when man with one wild engine strikes a distant station? Chaos is dull; because in chaos the train might indeed go anywhere, to Baker Street or to Bagdad. But man is a magician, and his whole magic is in this, that he does say Victoria, and lo! it is Victoria. No, take your books of mere poetry and prose; let me read a time table, with tears of pride. Take your Byron, who commemorates the defeats of man; give me Bradshaw, who commemorates his victories. Give me Bradshaw, I say!”

“Must you go?” inquired Gregory sarcastically.

“I tell you,” went on Syme with passion, “that every time a train comes in I feel that it has broken past batteries of besiegers, and that man has won a battle against chaos. You say contemptuously that when one has left Sloane Square one must come to Victoria. I say that one might do a thousand things instead, and that whenever I really come there I have the sense of hairbreadth escape. And when I hear the guard shout out the word ‘Victoria,’ it is not an unmeaning word. It is to me the cry of a herald announcing conquest. It is to me indeed ‘Victoria’; it is the victory of Adam.”

Gregory wagged his heavy, red head with a slow and sad smile.

“And even then,” he said, “we poets always ask the question, ‘And what is Victoria now that you have got there?’ You think Victoria is like the New Jerusalem. We know that the New Jerusalem will only be like Victoria. Yes, the poet will be discontented even in the streets of heaven. The poet is always in revolt.”

“There again,” said Syme irritably, “what is there poetical about being in revolt? You might as well say that it is poetical to be sea-sick. Being sick is a revolt. Both being sick and being rebellious may be the wholesome thing on certain desperate occasions; but I’m hanged if I can see why they are poetical. Revolt in the abstract is — revolting. It’s mere vomiting.”

The girl winced for a flash at the unpleasant word, but Syme was too hot to heed her.

“It is things going right,” he cried, “that is poetical! Our digestions, for instance, going sacredly and silently right, that is the foundation of all poetry. Yes, the most poetical thing, more poetical than the flowers, more poetical than the stars — the most poetical thing in the world is not being sick.”

“Really,” said Gregory superciliously, “the examples you choose—”

“I beg your pardon,” said Syme grimly, “I forgot we had abolished all conventions.”

For the first time a red patch appeared on Gregory’s forehead.

“You don’t expect me,” he said, “to revolutionise society on this lawn?”

Syme looked straight into his eyes and smiled sweetly.

“No, I don’t,” he said; “but I suppose that if you were serious about your anarchism, that is exactly what you would do.”

Gregory’s big bull’s eyes blinked suddenly like those of an angry lion, and one could almost fancy that his red mane rose.

“Don’t you think, then,” he said in a dangerous voice, “that I am serious about my anarchism?”

“I beg your pardon?” said Syme.

“Am I not serious about my anarchism?” cried Gregory, with knotted fists.

“My dear fellow!” said Syme, and strolled away.

With surprise, but with a curious pleasure, he found Rosamond Gregory still in his company.

“Mr. Syme,” she said, “do the people who talk like you and my brother often mean what they say? Do you mean what you say now?”

Syme smiled.

“Do you?” he asked.

“What do you mean?” asked the girl, with grave eyes.

“My dear Miss Gregory,” said Syme gently, “there are many kinds of sincerity and insincerity. When you say ‘thank you’ for the salt, do you mean what you say? No. When you say ‘the world is round,’ do you mean what you say? No. It is true, but you don’t mean it. Now, sometimes a man like your brother really finds a thing he does mean. It may be only a half-truth, quarter-truth, tenth-truth; but then he says more than he means — from sheer force of meaning it.”

She was looking at him from under level brows; her face was grave and open, and there had fallen upon it the shadow of that unreasoning responsibility which is at the bottom of the most frivolous woman, the maternal watch which is as old as the world.

“Is he really an anarchist, then?” she asked.

“Only in that sense I speak of,” replied Syme; “or if you prefer it, in that nonsense.”

She drew her broad brows together and said abruptly —

“He wouldn’t really use — bombs or that sort of thing?”

Syme broke into a great laugh, that seemed too large for his slight and somewhat dandified figure.

“Good Lord, no!” he said, “that has to be done anonymously.”

And at that the corners of her own mouth broke into a smile, and she thought with a simultaneous pleasure of Gregory’s absurdity and of his safety.

Syme strolled with her to a seat in the corner of the garden, and continued to pour out his opinions. For he was a sincere man, and in spite of his superficial airs and graces, at root a humble one. And it is always the humble man who talks too much; the proud man watches himself too closely. He defended respectability with violence and exaggeration. He grew passionate in his praise of tidiness and propriety. All the time there was a smell of lilac all round him. Once he heard very faintly in some distant street a barrel-organ begin to play, and it seemed to him that his heroic words were moving to a tiny tune from under or beyond the world.

He stared and talked at the girl’s red hair and amused face for what seemed to be a few minutes; and then, feeling that the groups in such a place should mix, rose to his feet. To his astonishment, he discovered the whole garden empty. Everyone had gone long ago, and he went himself with a rather hurried apology. He left with a sense of champagne in his head, which he could not afterwards explain. In the wild events which were to follow this girl had no part at all; he never saw her again until all his tale was over. And yet, in some indescribable way, she kept recurring like a motive in music through all his mad adventures afterwards, and the glory of her strange hair ran like a red thread through those dark and ill-drawn tapestries of the night. For what followed was so improbable, that it might well have been a dream.

When Syme went out into the starlit street, he found it for the moment empty. Then he realised (in some odd way) that the silence was rather a living silence than a dead one. Directly outside the door stood a street lamp, whose gleam gilded the leaves of the tree that bent out over the fence behind him. About a foot from the lamp-post stood a figure almost as rigid and motionless as the lamp-post itself. The tall hat and long frock coat were black; the face, in an abrupt shadow, was almost as dark. Only a fringe of fiery hair against the light, and also something aggressive in the attitude, proclaimed that it was the poet Gregory. He had something of the look of a masked bravo waiting sword in hand for his foe.

He made a sort of doubtful salute, which Syme somewhat more formally returned.

"I was waiting for you," said Gregory. "Might I have a moment's conversation?"

"Certainly. About what?" asked Syme in a sort of weak wonder.

Gregory struck out with his stick at the lamp-post, and then at the tree. "About this and this," he cried; "about order and anarchy. There is your precious order, that lean, iron lamp, ugly and barren; and there is anarchy, rich, living, reproducing itself — there is anarchy, splendid in green and gold."

"All the same," replied Syme patiently, "just at present you only see the tree by the light of the lamp. I wonder when you would ever see the lamp by the light of the tree." Then after a pause he said, "But may I ask if you have been standing out here in the dark only to resume our little argument?"

"No," cried out Gregory, in a voice that rang down the street, "I did not stand here to resume our argument, but to end it for ever."

The silence fell again, and Syme, though he understood nothing, listened instinctively for something serious. Gregory began in a smooth voice and with a rather bewildering smile.

"Mr. Syme," he said, "this evening you succeeded in doing something rather remarkable. You did something to me that no man born of woman has ever succeeded in doing before."

"Indeed!"

"Now I remember," resumed Gregory reflectively, "one other person succeeded in doing it. The captain of a penny steamer (if I remember correctly) at Southend. You have irritated me."

"I am very sorry," replied Syme with gravity.

"I am afraid my fury and your insult are too shocking to be wiped out even with an apology," said Gregory very calmly. "No duel could wipe it out. If I struck you dead I could not wipe it out. There is only one way by which that insult can be erased, and that way I choose. I am going, at the possible sacrifice of my life and honour, to prove to you that you were wrong in what you said."

"In what I said?"

"You said I was not serious about being an anarchist."

"There are degrees of seriousness," replied Syme. "I have never doubted that you were perfectly sincere in this sense, that you thought what you said well worth saying, that you thought a paradox might wake men up to a neglected truth."

Gregory stared at him steadily and painfully.

"And in no other sense," he asked, "you think me serious? You think me a flaneur who lets fall occasional truths. You do not think that in a deeper, a more deadly sense, I am serious."

Syme struck his stick violently on the stones of the road.

"Serious!" he cried. "Good Lord! is this street serious? Are these damned Chinese lanterns serious? Is the whole caboodle serious? One comes here and talks a pack of bosh, and perhaps some sense as well, but I should think very little of a man who didn't keep something in the background of his life that was more serious than all this talking — something more serious, whether it was religion or only drink."

"Very well," said Gregory, his face darkening, "you shall see something more serious than either drink or religion."

Syme stood waiting with his usual air of mildness until Gregory again opened his lips.

"You spoke just now of having a religion. Is it really true that you have one?"

"Oh," said Syme with a beaming smile, "we are all Catholics now."

"Then may I ask you to swear by whatever gods or saints your religion involves that you will not reveal what I am now going to tell you to any son of Adam, and especially not to the police? Will you swear that! If you will take upon yourself this awful abnegation if you will consent to burden your soul with a vow that you should never make and a knowledge you should never dream about, I will promise you in return—"

"You will promise me in return?" inquired Syme, as the other paused.

"I will promise you a very entertaining evening." Syme suddenly took off his hat.

“Your offer,” he said, “is far too idiotic to be declined. You say that a poet is always an anarchist. I disagree; but I hope at least that he is always a sportsman. Permit me, here and now, to swear as a Christian, and promise as a good comrade and a fellow-artist, that I will not report anything of this, whatever it is, to the police. And now, in the name of Colney Hatch, what is it?”

“I think,” said Gregory, with placid irrelevancy, “that we will call a cab.”

He gave two long whistles, and a hansom came rattling down the road. The two got into it in silence. Gregory gave through the trap the address of an obscure public-house on the Chiswick bank of the river. The cab whisked itself away again, and in it these two fantastics quitted their fantastic town.

CHAPTER II. THE SECRET OF GABRIEL SYME

THE cab pulled up before a particularly dreary and greasy beershop, into which Gregory rapidly conducted his companion. They seated themselves in a close and dim sort of bar-parlour, at a stained wooden table with one wooden leg. The room was so small and dark, that very little could be seen of the attendant who was summoned, beyond a vague and dark impression of something bulky and bearded.

“Will you take a little supper?” asked Gregory politely. “The pate de foie gras is not good here, but I can recommend the game.”

Syme received the remark with stolidity, imagining it to be a joke. Accepting the vein of humour, he said, with a well-bred indifference —

“Oh, bring me some lobster mayonnaise.”

To his indescribable astonishment, the man only said “Certainly, sir!” and went away apparently to get it.

“What will you drink?” resumed Gregory, with the same careless yet apologetic air. “I shall only have a crepe de menthe myself; I have dined. But the champagne can really be trusted. Do let me start you with a half-bottle of Pommery at least?”

“Thank you!” said the motionless Syme. “You are very good.”

His further attempts at conversation, somewhat disorganised in themselves, were cut short finally as by a thunderbolt by the actual appearance of the lobster. Syme tasted it, and found it particularly good. Then he suddenly began to eat with great rapidity and appetite.

“Excuse me if I enjoy myself rather obviously!” he said to Gregory, smiling. “I don’t often have the luck to have a dream like this. It is new to me for a nightmare to lead to a lobster. It is commonly the other way.”

“You are not asleep, I assure you,” said Gregory. “You are, on the contrary, close to the most actual and rousing moment of your existence. Ah, here comes your champagne! I admit that there may be a slight disproportion, let us say, between the inner arrangements of this excellent hotel and its simple and unpretentious exterior. But that is all our modesty. We are the most modest men that ever lived on earth.”

“And who are we?” asked Syme, emptying his champagne glass.

“It is quite simple,” replied Gregory. “We are the serious anarchists, in whom you do not believe.”

“Oh!” said Syme shortly. “You do yourselves well in drinks.”

“Yes, we are serious about everything,” answered Gregory.

Then after a pause he added —

“If in a few moments this table begins to turn round a little, don’t put it down to your inroads into the champagne. I don’t wish you to do yourself an injustice.”

“Well, if I am not drunk, I am mad,” replied Syme with perfect calm; “but I trust I can behave like a gentleman in either condition. May I smoke?”

“Certainly!” said Gregory, producing a cigar-case. “Try one of mine.”

Syme took the cigar, clipped the end off with a cigar-cutter out of his waistcoat pocket, put it in his mouth, lit it slowly, and let out a long cloud of smoke. It is not a little to his credit that he performed these rites with so much composure, for almost before he had begun them the table at which he sat had begun to revolve, first slowly, and then rapidly, as if at an insane seance.

“You must not mind it,” said Gregory; “it’s a kind of screw.”

“Quite so,” said Syme placidly, “a kind of screw. How simple that is!”

The next moment the smoke of his cigar, which had been wavering across the room in snaky twists, went straight up as if from a factory chimney, and the two, with their chairs and table, shot down through the floor as if the earth had swallowed them. They went rattling down a kind of roaring chimney as rapidly as a lift cut loose, and they came with an abrupt bump to the bottom. But when Gregory threw open a pair of doors and let in a red subterranean light, Syme was still smoking with one leg thrown over the other, and had not turned a yellow hair.

Gregory led him down a low, vaulted passage, at the end of which was the red light. It was an enormous crimson lantern, nearly as big as a fireplace, fixed over a small but heavy iron door. In the door there was a sort of hatchway or grating, and on this Gregory struck five times. A heavy voice with a foreign accent asked him who he was. To this he gave the more or less unexpected reply, “Mr. Joseph Chamberlain.” The heavy hinges began to move; it was obviously some kind of password.

Inside the doorway the passage gleamed as if it were lined with a network of steel. On a second glance, Syme saw that the glittering pattern was really made up of ranks and ranks of rifles and revolvers, closely packed or interlocked.

"I must ask you to forgive me all these formalities," said Gregory; "we have to be very strict here."

"Oh, don't apologise," said Syme. "I know your passion for law and order," and he stepped into the passage lined with the steel weapons. With his long, fair hair and rather foppish frock-coat, he looked a singularly frail and fanciful figure as he walked down that shining avenue of death.

They passed through several such passages, and came out at last into a queer steel chamber with curved walls, almost spherical in shape, but presenting, with its tiers of benches, something of the appearance of a scientific lecture-theatre. There were no rifles or pistols in this apartment, but round the walls of it were hung more dubious and dreadful shapes, things that looked like the bulbs of iron plants, or the eggs of iron birds. They were bombs, and the very room itself seemed like the inside of a bomb. Syme knocked his cigar ash off against the wall, and went in.

"And now, my dear Mr. Syme," said Gregory, throwing himself in an expansive manner on the bench under the largest bomb, "now we are quite cosy, so let us talk properly. Now no human words can give you any notion of why I brought you here. It was one of those quite arbitrary emotions, like jumping off a cliff or falling in love. Suffice it to say that you were an inexpressibly irritating fellow, and, to do you justice, you are still. I would break twenty oaths of secrecy for the pleasure of taking you down a peg. That way you have of lighting a cigar would make a priest break the seal of confession. Well, you said that you were quite certain I was not a serious anarchist. Does this place strike you as being serious?"

"It does seem to have a moral under all its gaiety," assented Syme; "but may I ask you two questions? You need not fear to give me information, because, as you remember, you very wisely extorted from me a promise not to tell the police, a promise I shall certainly keep. So it is in mere curiosity that I make my queries. First of all, what is it really all about? What is it you object to? You want to abolish Government?"

"To abolish God!" said Gregory, opening the eyes of a fanatic. "We do not only want to upset a few despotisms and police regulations; that sort of anarchism does exist, but it is a mere branch of the Nonconformists. We dig deeper and we blow you higher. We wish to deny all those arbitrary distinctions of vice and virtue, honour and treachery, upon which mere rebels base themselves. The silly sentimentalists of the French Revolution talked of the Rights of Man! We hate Rights as we hate Wrongs. We have abolished Right and Wrong.”

“And Right and Left,” said Syme with a simple eagerness, “I hope you will abolish them too. They are much more troublesome to me.”

“You spoke of a second question,” snapped Gregory.

“With pleasure,” resumed Syme. “In all your present acts and surroundings there is a scientific attempt at secrecy. I have an aunt who lived over a shop, but this is the first time I have found people living from preference under a public-house. You have a heavy iron door. You cannot pass it without submitting to the humiliation of calling yourself Mr. Chamberlain. You surround yourself with steel instruments which make the place, if I may say so, more impressive than homelike. May I ask why, after taking all this trouble to barricade yourselves in the bowels of the earth, you then parade your whole secret by talking about anarchism to every silly woman in Saffron Park?”

Gregory smiled.

“The answer is simple,” he said. “I told you I was a serious anarchist, and you did not believe me. Nor do they believe me. Unless I took them into this infernal room they would not believe me.”

Syme smoked thoughtfully, and looked at him with interest. Gregory went on.

“The history of the thing might amuse you,” he said. “When first I became one of the New Anarchists I tried all kinds of respectable disguises. I dressed up as a bishop. I read up all about bishops in our anarchist pamphlets, in Superstition the Vampire and Priests of Prey. I certainly understood from them that bishops are strange and terrible old men keeping a cruel secret from mankind. I was misinformed. When on my first appearing in episcopal gaiters in a drawing-room I cried out in a voice of thunder, ‘Down! down! presumptuous human reason!’ they found out in some way that I was not a bishop at all. I was nabbed at once. Then I made up as a millionaire; but I defended Capital with so much intelligence that a fool could see that I was quite poor. Then I tried being a major. Now I am a humanitarian myself, but I have, I hope, enough intellectual breadth to understand the position of those who, like Nietzsche, admire violence — the proud, mad war of Nature and all that, you know. I threw myself into the major. I drew my sword and waved it constantly. I called out ‘Blood!’ abstractedly, like a man calling for wine. I often said, ‘Let the weak perish;

it is the Law.' Well, well, it seems majors don't do this. I was nabbed again. At last I went in despair to the President of the Central Anarchist Council, who is the greatest man in Europe."

"What is his name?" asked Syme.

"You would not know it," answered Gregory. "That is his greatness. Caesar and Napoleon put all their genius into being heard of, and they were heard of. He puts all his genius into not being heard of, and he is not heard of. But you cannot be for five minutes in the room with him without feeling that Caesar and Napoleon would have been children in his hands."

He was silent and even pale for a moment, and then resumed —

"But whenever he gives advice it is always something as startling as an epigram, and yet as practical as the Bank of England. I said to him, 'What disguise will hide me from the world? What can I find more respectable than bishops and majors?' He looked at me with his large but indecipherable face. 'You want a safe disguise, do you? You want a dress which will guarantee you harmless; a dress in which no one would ever look for a bomb?' I nodded. He suddenly lifted his lion's voice. 'Why, then, dress up as an anarchist, you fool!' he roared so that the room shook. 'Nobody will ever expect you to do anything dangerous then.' And he turned his broad back on me without another word. I took his advice, and have never regretted it. I preached blood and murder to those women day and night, and — by God! — they would let me wheel their perambulators."

Syme sat watching him with some respect in his large, blue eyes.

"You took me in," he said. "It is really a smart dodge."

Then after a pause he added —

"What do you call this tremendous President of yours?"

"We generally call him Sunday," replied Gregory with simplicity. "You see, there are seven members of the Central Anarchist Council, and they are named after days of the week. He is called Sunday, by some of his admirers Bloody Sunday. It is curious you should mention the matter, because the very night you have dropped in (if I may so express it) is the night on which our London branch, which assembles in this room, has to elect its own deputy to fill a vacancy in the Council. The gentleman who has for some time past played, with propriety and general applause, the difficult part of Thursday, has died quite suddenly. Consequently, we have called a meeting this very evening to elect a successor."

He got to his feet and strolled across the room with a sort of smiling embarrassment.

“I feel somehow as if you were my mother, Syme,” he continued casually. “I feel that I can confide anything to you, as you have promised to tell nobody. In fact, I will confide to you something that I would not say in so many words to the anarchists who will be coming to the room in about ten minutes. We shall, of course, go through a form of election; but I don’t mind telling you that it is practically certain what the result will be.” He looked down for a moment modestly. “It is almost a settled thing that I am to be Thursday.”

“My dear fellow.” said Syme heartily, “I congratulate you. A great career!”

Gregory smiled in deprecation, and walked across the room, talking rapidly.

“As a matter of fact, everything is ready for me on this table,” he said, “and the ceremony will probably be the shortest possible.”

Syme also strolled across to the table, and found lying across it a walking-stick, which turned out on examination to be a sword-stick, a large Colt’s revolver, a sandwich case, and a formidable flask of brandy. Over the chair, beside the table, was thrown a heavy-looking cape or cloak.

“I have only to get the form of election finished,” continued Gregory with animation, “then I snatch up this cloak and stick, stuff these other things into my pocket, step out of a door in this cavern, which opens on the river, where there is a steam-tug already waiting for me, and then — then — oh, the wild joy of being Thursday!” And he clasped his hands.

Syme, who had sat down once more with his usual insolent languor, got to his feet with an unusual air of hesitation.

“Why is it,” he asked vaguely, “that I think you are quite a decent fellow? Why do I positively like you, Gregory?” He paused a moment, and then added with a sort of fresh curiosity, “Is it because you are such an ass?”

There was a thoughtful silence again, and then he cried out —

“Well, damn it all! this is the funniest situation I have ever been in in my life, and I am going to act accordingly. Gregory, I gave you a promise before I came into this place. That promise I would keep under red-hot pincers. Would you give me, for my own safety, a little promise of the same kind?”

“A promise?” asked Gregory, wondering.

“Yes,” said Syme very seriously, “a promise. I swore before God that I would not tell your secret to the police. Will you swear by Humanity, or whatever beastly thing you believe in, that you will not tell my secret to the anarchists?”

“Your secret?” asked the staring Gregory. “Have you got a secret?”

“Yes,” said Syme, “I have a secret.” Then after a pause, “Will you swear?”

Gregory glared at him gravely for a few moments, and then said abruptly—

“You must have bewitched me, but I feel a furious curiosity about you. Yes, I will swear not to tell the anarchists anything you tell me. But look sharp, for they will be here in a couple of minutes.”

Syme rose slowly to his feet and thrust his long, white hands into his long, grey trousers’ pockets. Almost as he did so there came five knocks on the outer grating, proclaiming the arrival of the first of the conspirators.

“Well,” said Syme slowly, “I don’t know how to tell you the truth more shortly than by saying that your expedient of dressing up as an aimless poet is not confined to you or your President. We have known the dodge for some time at Scotland Yard.”

Gregory tried to spring up straight, but he swayed thrice.

“What do you say?” he asked in an inhuman voice.

“Yes,” said Syme simply, “I am a police detective. But I think I hear your friends coming.”

From the doorway there came a murmur of “Mr. Joseph Chamberlain.” It was repeated twice and thrice, and then thirty times, and the crowd of Joseph Chamberlains (a solemn thought) could be heard trampling down the corridor.

CHAPTER III. THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY

BEFORE one of the fresh faces could appear at the doorway, Gregory's stunned surprise had fallen from him. He was beside the table with a bound, and a noise in his throat like a wild beast. He caught up the Colt's revolver and took aim at Syme. Syme did not flinch, but he put up a pale and polite hand.

"Don't be such a silly man," he said, with the effeminate dignity of a curate. "Don't you see it's not necessary? Don't you see that we're both in the same boat? Yes, and jolly sea-sick."

Gregory could not speak, but he could not fire either, and he looked his question.

"Don't you see we've checkmated each other?" cried Syme. "I can't tell the police you are an anarchist. You can't tell the anarchists I'm a policeman. I can only watch you, knowing what you are; you can only watch me, knowing what I am. In short, it's a lonely, intellectual duel, my head against yours. I'm a policeman deprived of the help of the police. You, my poor fellow, are an anarchist deprived of the help of that law and organisation which is so essential to anarchy. The one solitary difference is in your favour. You are not surrounded by inquisitive policemen; I am surrounded by inquisitive anarchists. I cannot betray you, but I might betray myself. Come, come! wait and see me betray myself. I shall do it so nicely."

Gregory put the pistol slowly down, still staring at Syme as if he were a sea-monster.

"I don't believe in immortality," he said at last, "but if, after all this, you were to break your word, God would make a hell only for you, to howl in for ever."

"I shall not break my word," said Syme sternly, "nor will you break yours. Here are your friends."

The mass of the anarchists entered the room heavily, with a slouching and somewhat weary gait; but one little man, with a black beard and glasses — a man somewhat of the type of Mr. Tim Healy — detached himself, and bustled forward with some papers in his hand.

"Comrade Gregory," he said, "I suppose this man is a delegate?"

Gregory, taken by surprise, looked down and muttered the name of Syme; but Syme replied almost pertly —

"I am glad to see that your gate is well enough guarded to make it hard for anyone to be here who was not a delegate."

The brow of the little man with the black beard was, however, still contracted with something like suspicion.

"What branch do you represent?" he asked sharply.

"I should hardly call it a branch," said Syme, laughing; "I should call it at the very least a root."

"What do you mean?"

"The fact is," said Syme serenely, "the truth is I am a Sabbatarian. I have been specially sent here to see that you show a due observance of Sunday."

The little man dropped one of his papers, and a flicker of fear went over all the faces of the group. Evidently the awful President, whose name was Sunday, did sometimes send down such irregular ambassadors to such branch meetings.

"Well, comrade," said the man with the papers after a pause, "I suppose we'd better give you a seat in the meeting?"

"If you ask my advice as a friend," said Syme with severe benevolence, "I think you'd better."

When Gregory heard the dangerous dialogue end, with a sudden safety for his rival, he rose abruptly and paced the floor in painful thought. He was, indeed, in an agony of diplomacy. It was clear that Syme's inspired impudence was likely to bring him out of all merely accidental dilemmas. Little was to be hoped from them. He could not himself betray Syme, partly from honour, but partly also because, if he betrayed him and for some reason failed to destroy him, the Syme who escaped would be a Syme freed from all obligation of secrecy, a Syme who would simply walk to the nearest police station. After all, it was only one night's discussion, and only one detective who would know of it. He would let out as little as possible of their plans that night, and then let Syme go, and chance it.

He strode across to the group of anarchists, which was already distributing itself along the benches.

"I think it is time we began," he said; "the steam-tug is waiting on the river already. I move that Comrade Buttons takes the chair."

This being approved by a show of hands, the little man with the papers slipped into the presidential seat.

"Comrades," he began, as sharp as a pistol-shot, "our meeting tonight is important, though it need not be long. This branch has always had the honour of electing Thursdays for the Central European Council. We have elected many and splendid Thursdays. We all lament the sad decease of the heroic worker who occupied the post until last week. As you know, his services to the cause were considerable. He organised the great dynamite coup of Brighton which, under happier circumstances, ought to have killed everybody on the pier. As you also know, his death was as self-denying as his life, for he died through his faith in a hygienic mixture of chalk and water as a substitute for milk, which beverage he regarded as barbaric, and as involving cruelty to the cow. Cruelty, or anything approaching to cruelty, revolted him always. But it is not to acclaim his virtues that we are met, but for a harder task. It is difficult properly to praise his qualities, but it is more difficult to replace them. Upon you, comrades, it devolves this evening to choose out of the company present the man who shall be Thursday. If any comrade suggests a name I will put it to the vote. If no comrade suggests a name, I can only tell myself that that dear dynamiter, who is gone from us, has carried into the unknowable abysses the last secret of his virtue and his innocence."

There was a stir of almost inaudible applause, such as is sometimes heard in church. Then a large old man, with a long and venerable white beard, perhaps the only real working-man present, rose lumberingly and said —

"I move that Comrade Gregory be elected Thursday," and sat lumberingly down again.

"Does anyone second?" asked the chairman.

A little man with a velvet coat and pointed beard seconded.

"Before I put the matter to the vote," said the chairman, "I will call on Comrade Gregory to make a statement."

Gregory rose amid a great rumble of applause. His face was deadly pale, so that by contrast his queer red hair looked almost scarlet. But he was smiling and altogether at ease. He had made up his mind, and he saw his best policy quite plain in front of him like a white road. His best chance was to make a softened and ambiguous speech, such as would leave on the detective's mind the impression that the anarchist brotherhood was a very mild affair after all. He believed in his own literary power, his capacity for suggesting fine shades and picking perfect words. He thought that with care he could succeed, in spite of all the people around him, in conveying an impression of the institution, subtly and delicately false. Syme had once thought that anarchists, under all their bravado, were only playing the fool. Could he not now, in the hour of peril, make Syme think so again?

“Comrades,” began Gregory, in a low but penetrating voice, “it is not necessary for me to tell you what is my policy, for it is your policy also. Our belief has been slandered, it has been disfigured, it has been utterly confused and concealed, but it has never been altered. Those who talk about anarchism and its dangers go everywhere and anywhere to get their information, except to us, except to the fountain head. They learn about anarchists from sixpenny novels; they learn about anarchists from tradesmen’s newspapers; they learn about anarchists from Ally Sloper’s Half-Holiday and the Sporting Times. They never learn about anarchists from anarchists. We have no chance of denying the mountainous slanders which are heaped upon our heads from one end of Europe to another. The man who has always heard that we are walking plagues has never heard our reply. I know that he will not hear it tonight, though my passion were to rend the roof. For it is deep, deep under the earth that the persecuted are permitted to assemble, as the Christians assembled in the Catacombs. But if, by some incredible accident, there were here tonight a man who all his life had thus immensely misunderstood us, I would put this question to him: ‘When those Christians met in those Catacombs, what sort of moral reputation had they in the streets above? What tales were told of their atrocities by one educated Roman to another? Suppose’ (I would say to him), ‘suppose that we are only repeating that still mysterious paradox of history. Suppose we seem as shocking as the Christians because we are really as harmless as the Christians. Suppose we seem as mad as the Christians because we are really as meek.”’

The applause that had greeted the opening sentences had been gradually growing fainter, and at the last word it stopped suddenly. In the abrupt silence, the man with the velvet jacket said, in a high, squeaky voice —

“I’m not meek!”

“Comrade Witherspoon tells us,” resumed Gregory, “that he is not meek. Ah, how little he knows himself! His words are, indeed, extravagant; his appearance is ferocious, and even (to an ordinary taste) unattractive. But only the eye of a friendship as deep and delicate as mine can perceive the deep foundation of solid meekness which lies at the base of him, too deep even for himself to see. I repeat, we are the true early Christians, only that we come too late. We are simple, as they revere simple — look at Comrade

Witherspoon. We are modest, as they were modest — look at me. We are merciful—”

“No, no!” called out Mr. Witherspoon with the velvet jacket.

“I say we are merciful,” repeated Gregory furiously, “as the early Christians were merciful. Yet this did not prevent their being accused of eating human flesh. We do not eat human flesh—”

“Shame!” cried Witherspoon. “Why not?”

“Comrade Witherspoon,” said Gregory, with a feverish gaiety, “is anxious to know why nobody eats him (laughter). In our society, at any rate, which loves him sincerely, which is founded upon love—”

“No, no!” said Witherspoon, “down with love.”

“Which is founded upon love,” repeated Gregory, grinding his teeth, “there will be no difficulty about the aims which we shall pursue as a body, or which I should pursue were I chosen as the representative of that body. Superbly careless of the slanders that represent us as assassins and enemies of human society, we shall pursue with moral courage and quiet intellectual pressure, the permanent ideals of brotherhood and simplicity.”

Gregory resumed his seat and passed his hand across his forehead. The silence was sudden and awkward, but the chairman rose like an automaton, and said in a colourless voice —

“Does anyone oppose the election of Comrade Gregory?”

The assembly seemed vague and sub-consciously disappointed, and Comrade Witherspoon moved restlessly on his seat and muttered in his thick beard. By the sheer rush of routine, however, the motion would have been put and carried. But as the chairman was opening his mouth to put it, Syme sprang to his feet and said in a small and quiet voice —

“Yes, Mr. Chairman, I oppose.”

The most effective fact in oratory is an unexpected change in the voice. Mr. Gabriel Syme evidently understood oratory. Having said these first formal words in a moderated tone and with a brief simplicity, he made his next word ring and volley in the vault as if one of the guns had gone off.

“Comrades!” he cried, in a voice that made every man jump out of his boots, “have we come here for this? Do we live underground like rats in order to listen to talk like this? This is talk we might listen to while eating buns at a Sunday School treat. Do we line these walls with weapons and bar that door with death lest anyone should come and hear Comrade Gregory saying to us, ‘Be good, and you will be happy,’ ‘Honesty is the best policy,’ and ‘Virtue is its own reward’? There was not a word in Comrade Gregory’s address to which a curate could not have listened with pleasure (hear, hear). But I am not a curate (loud cheers), and I did not listen to it with pleasure (renewed cheers). The man who is fitted to make a good curate is not fitted to make a resolute, forcible, and efficient Thursday (hear, hear).”

“Comrade Gregory has told us, in only too apologetic a tone, that we are not the enemies of society. But I say that we are the enemies of society, and so much the worse for society. We are the enemies of society, for society is the enemy of humanity, its oldest and its most pitiless enemy (hear, hear). Comrade Gregory has told us (apologetically again) that we are not murderers. There I agree. We are not murderers, we are executioners (cheers).”

Ever since Syme had risen Gregory had sat staring at him, his face idiotic with astonishment. Now in the pause his lips of clay parted, and he said, with an automatic and lifeless distinctness —

“You damnable hypocrite!”

Syme looked straight into those frightful eyes with his own pale blue ones, and said with dignity —

“Comrade Gregory accuses me of hypocrisy. He knows as well as I do that I am keeping all my engagements and doing nothing but my duty. I do not mince words. I do not pretend to. I say that Comrade Gregory is unfit to be Thursday for all his amiable qualities. He is unfit to be Thursday because of his amiable qualities. We do not want the Supreme Council of Anarchy infected with a maudlin mercy (hear, hear). This is no time for ceremonial politeness, neither is it a time for ceremonial modesty. I set myself against Comrade Gregory as I would set myself against all the Governments of Europe, because the anarchist who has given himself to anarchy has forgotten modesty as much as he has forgotten pride (cheers). I am not a man at all. I am a cause (renewed cheers). I set myself against Comrade Gregory as impersonally and as calmly as I should choose one pistol rather than another out of that rack upon the wall; and I say that rather than have Gregory and his milk-and-water methods on the Supreme Council, I would offer myself for election—”

His sentence was drowned in a deafening cataract of applause. The faces, that had grown fiercer and fiercer with approval as his tirade grew more and more uncompromising, were now distorted with grins of anticipation or cloven with delighted cries. At the moment when he announced himself as ready to stand for the post of Thursday, a roar of excitement and assent broke forth, and became uncontrollable, and at the same moment Gregory sprang to his feet, with foam upon his mouth, and shouted against the shouting.

"Stop, you blasted madmen!" he cried, at the top of a voice that tore his throat. "Stop, you—"

But louder than Gregory's shouting and louder than the roar of the room came the voice of Syme, still speaking in a peal of pitiless thunder —

"I do not go to the Council to rebut that slander that calls us murderers; I go to earn it (loud and prolonged cheering). To the priest who says these men are the enemies of religion, to the judge who says these men are the enemies of law, to the fat parliamentarian who says these men are the enemies of order and public decency, to all these I will reply, 'You are false kings, but you are true prophets. I am come to destroy you, and to fulfil your prophecies.'"

The heavy clamour gradually died away, but before it had ceased Witherspoon had jumped to his feet, his hair and beard all on end, and had said —

"I move, as an amendment, that Comrade Syme be appointed to the post."

"Stop all this, I tell you!" cried Gregory, with frantic face and hands. "Stop it, it is all—"

The voice of the chairman clove his speech with a cold accent.

"Does anyone second this amendment?" he said. A tall, tired man, with melancholy eyes and an American chin beard, was observed on the back bench to be slowly rising to his feet. Gregory had been screaming for some time past; now there was a change in his accent, more shocking than any scream. "I end all this!" he said, in a voice as heavy as stone.

"This man cannot be elected. He is a—"

"Yes," said Syme, quite motionless, "what is he?" Gregory's mouth worked twice without sound; then slowly the blood began to crawl back into his dead face. "He is a man quite inexperienced in our work," he said, and sat down abruptly.

Before he had done so, the long, lean man with the American beard was again upon his feet, and was repeating in a high American monotone —

"I beg to second the election of Comrade Syme."

"The amendment will, as usual, be put first," said Mr. Buttons, the chairman, with mechanical rapidity.

"The question is that Comrade Syme—"

Gregory had again sprung to his feet, panting and passionate.

"Comrades," he cried out, "I am not a madman."

"Oh, oh!" said Mr. Witherspoon.

"I am not a madman," reiterated Gregory, with a frightful sincerity which for a moment staggered the room, "but I give you a counsel which you can call mad if you like. No, I will not call it a counsel, for I can give you no reason for it. I will call it a command. Call it a mad command, but act upon it. Strike, but hear me! Kill me, but obey me! Do not elect this man." Truth is so terrible, even in fetters, that for a moment Syme's slender and insane victory swayed like a reed. But you could not have guessed it from Syme's bleak blue eyes. He merely began —

"Comrade Gregory commands—"

Then the spell was snapped, and one anarchist called out to Gregory —

"Who are you? You are not Sunday;" and another anarchist added in a heavier voice, "And you are not Thursday."

"Comrades," cried Gregory, in a voice like that of a martyr who in an ecstacy of pain has passed beyond pain, "it is nothing to me whether you detest me as a tyrant or detest me as a slave. If you will not take my command, accept my degradation. I kneel to you. I throw myself at your feet. I implore you. Do not elect this man."

"Comrade Gregory," said the chairman after a painful pause, "this is really not quite dignified."

For the first time in the proceedings there was for a few seconds a real silence. Then Gregory fell back in his seat, a pale wreck of a man, and the chairman repeated, like a piece of clock-work suddenly started again —

"The question is that Comrade Syme be elected to the post of Thursday on the General Council."

The roar rose like the sea, the hands rose like a forest, and three minutes afterwards Mr. Gabriel Syme, of the Secret Police Service, was elected to the post of Thursday on the General Council of the Anarchists of Europe.

Everyone in the room seemed to feel the tug waiting on the river, the sword-stick and the revolver, waiting on the table. The instant the election was ended and irrevocable, and Syme had received the paper proving his election, they all sprang to their feet, and the fiery groups moved and mixed in the room. Syme found himself, somehow or other, face to face with Gregory, who still regarded him with a stare of stunned hatred. They were silent for many minutes.

“You are a devil!” said Gregory at last.

“And you are a gentleman,” said Syme with gravity.

“It was you that entrapped me,” began Gregory, shaking from head to foot, “entrapped me into—”

“Talk sense,” said Syme shortly. “Into what sort of devils’ parliament have you entrapped me, if it comes to that? You made me swear before I made you. Perhaps we are both doing what we think right. But what we think right is so damned different that there can be nothing between us in the way of concession. There is nothing possible between us but honour and death,” and he pulled the great cloak about his shoulders and picked up the flask from the table.

“The boat is quite ready,” said Mr. Buttons, bustling up. “Be good enough to step this way.”

With a gesture that revealed the shop-walker, he led Syme down a short, iron-bound passage, the still agonised Gregory following feverishly at their heels. At the end of the passage was a door, which Buttons opened sharply, showing a sudden blue and silver picture of the moonlit river, that looked like a scene in a theatre. Close to the opening lay a dark, dwarfish steam-launch, like a baby dragon with one red eye.

Almost in the act of stepping on board, Gabriel Syme turned to the gaping Gregory.

“You have kept your word,” he said gently, with his face in shadow. “You are a man of honour, and I thank you. You have kept it even down to a small particular. There was one special thing you promised me at the beginning of the affair, and which you have certainly given me by the end of it.”

“What do you mean?” cried the chaotic Gregory. “What did I promise you?”

“A very entertaining evening,” said Syme, and he made a military salute with the sword-stick as the steamboat slid away.

CHAPTER IV. THE TALE OF A DETECTIVE

GABRIEL SYME was not merely a detective who pretended to be a poet; he was really a poet who had become a detective. Nor was his hatred of anarchy hypocritical. He was one of those who are driven early in life into too conservative an attitude by the bewildering folly of most revolutionists. He had not attained it by any tame tradition. His respectability was spontaneous and sudden, a rebellion against rebellion. He came of a family of cranks, in which all the oldest people had all the newest notions. One of his uncles always walked about without a hat, and another had made an unsuccessful attempt to walk about with a hat and nothing else. His father cultivated art and self-realisation; his mother went in for simplicity and hygiene. Hence the child, during his tenderer years, was wholly unacquainted with any drink between the extremes of absinth and cocoa, of both of which he had a healthy dislike. The more his mother preached a more than Puritan abstinence the more did his father expand into a more than pagan latitude; and by the time the former had come to enforcing vegetarianism, the latter had pretty well reached the point of defending cannibalism.

Being surrounded with every conceivable kind of revolt from infancy, Gabriel had to revolt into something, so he revolted into the only thing left — sanity. But there was just enough in him of the blood of these fanatics to make even his protest for common sense a little too fierce to be sensible. His hatred of modern lawlessness had been crowned also by an accident. It happened that he was walking in a side street at the instant of a dynamite outrage. He had been blind and deaf for a moment, and then seen, the smoke clearing, the broken windows and the bleeding faces. After that he went about as usual — quiet, courteous, rather gentle; but there was a spot on his mind that was not sane. He did not regard anarchists, as most of us do, as a handful of morbid men, combining ignorance with intellectualism. He regarded them as a huge and pitiless peril, like a Chinese invasion.

He poured perpetually into newspapers and their waste-paper baskets a torrent of tales, verses and violent articles, warning men of this deluge of barbaric denial. But he seemed to be getting no nearer his enemy, and, what was worse, no nearer a living. As he paced the Thames embankment, bitterly biting a cheap cigar and brooding on the advance of Anarchy, there was no anarchist with a bomb in his pocket so savage or so solitary as he. Indeed, he always felt that Government stood alone and desperate, with its back to the wall. He was too quixotic to have cared for it otherwise.

He walked on the Embankment once under a dark red sunset. The red river reflected the red sky, and they both reflected his anger. The sky, indeed, was so swarthy, and the light on the river relatively so lurid, that the water almost seemed of fiercer flame than the sunset it mirrored. It looked like a stream of literal fire winding under the vast caverns of a subterranean country.

Syme was shabby in those days. He wore an old-fashioned black chimney-pot hat; he was wrapped in a yet more old-fashioned cloak, black and ragged; and the combination gave him the look of the early villains in Dickens and Bulwer Lytton. Also his yellow beard and hair were more unkempt and leonine than when they appeared long afterwards, cut and pointed, on the lawns of Saffron Park. A long, lean, black cigar, bought in Soho for twopence, stood out from between his tightened teeth, and altogether he looked a very satisfactory specimen of the anarchists upon whom he had vowed a holy war. Perhaps this was why a policeman on the Embankment spoke to him, and said “Good evening.”

Syme, at a crisis of his morbid fears for humanity, seemed stung by the mere stolidity of the automatic official, a mere bulk of blue in the twilight.

“A good evening is it?” he said sharply. “You fellows would call the end of the world a good evening. Look at that bloody red sun and that bloody river! I tell you that if that were literally human blood, spilt and shining, you would still be standing here as solid as ever, looking out for some poor harmless tramp whom you could move on. You policemen are cruel to the poor, but I could forgive you even your cruelty if it were not for your calm.”

“If we are calm,” replied the policeman, “it is the calm of organised resistance.”

“Eh?” said Syme, staring.

“The soldier must be calm in the thick of the battle,” pursued the policeman. “The composure of an army is the anger of a nation.”

“Good God, the Board Schools!” said Syme. “Is this undenominational education?”

“No,” said the policeman sadly, “I never had any of those advantages. The Board Schools came after my time. What education I had was very rough and old-fashioned, I am afraid.”

“Where did you have it?” asked Syme, wondering.

“Oh, at Harrow,” said the policeman

The class sympathies which, false as they are, are the truest things in so many men, broke out of Syme before he could control them.

“But, good Lord, man,” he said, “you oughtn’t to be a policeman!”

The policeman sighed and shook his head.

“I know,” he said solemnly, “I know I am not worthy.”

“But why did you join the police?” asked Syme with rude curiosity.

“For much the same reason that you abused the police,” replied the other. “I found that there was a special opening in the service for those whose fears for humanity were concerned rather with the aberrations of the scientific intellect than with the normal and excusable, though excessive, outbreaks of the human will. I trust I make myself clear.”

“If you mean that you make your opinion clear,” said Syme, “I suppose you do. But as for making yourself clear, it is the last thing you do. How comes a man like you to be talking philosophy in a blue helmet on the Thames embankment?”

“You have evidently not heard of the latest development in our police system,” replied the other. “I am not surprised at it. We are keeping it rather dark from the educated class, because that class contains most of our enemies. But you seem to be exactly in the right frame of mind. I think you might almost join us.”

“Join you in what?” asked Syme.

“I will tell you,” said the policeman slowly. “This is the situation: The head of one of our departments, one of the most celebrated detectives in Europe, has long been of opinion that a purely intellectual conspiracy would soon threaten the very existence of civilisation. He is certain that the scientific and artistic worlds are silently bound in a crusade against the Family and the State. He has, therefore, formed a special corps of policemen, policemen who are also philosophers. It is their business to watch the beginnings of this conspiracy, not merely in a criminal but in a controversial sense. I am a democrat myself, and I am fully aware of the value of the ordinary man in matters of ordinary valour or virtue. But it would obviously be undesirable to employ the common policeman in an investigation which is also a heresy hunt.”

Syme’s eyes were bright with a sympathetic curiosity.

“What do you do, then?” he said.

“The work of the philosophical policeman,” replied the man in blue, “is at once bolder and more subtle than that of the ordinary detective. The ordinary detective goes to pot-houses to arrest thieves; we go to artistic tea-parties to detect pessimists. The ordinary detective discovers from a ledger or a diary that a crime has been committed. We discover from a book of sonnets that a crime will be committed. We have to trace the origin of those dreadful thoughts that drive men on at last to intellectual fanaticism and intellectual crime. We were only just in time to prevent the assassination at Hartlepool, and that was entirely due to the fact that our Mr. Wilks (a smart young fellow) thoroughly understood a triolet.”

“Do you mean,” asked Syme, “that there is really as much connection between crime and the modern intellect as all that?”

“You are not sufficiently democratic,” answered the policeman, “but you were right when you said just now that our ordinary treatment of the poor criminal was a pretty brutal business. I tell you I am sometimes sick of my trade when I see how perpetually it means merely a war upon the ignorant and the desperate. But this new movement of ours is a very different affair. We deny the snobbish English assumption that the uneducated are the dangerous criminals. We remember the Roman Emperors. We remember the great poisoning princes of the Renaissance. We say that the dangerous criminal is the educated criminal. We say that the most dangerous criminal now is the entirely lawless modern philosopher. Compared to him, burglars and bigamists are essentially moral men; my heart goes out to them. They accept the essential ideal of man; they merely seek it wrongly. Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property that they may more perfectly respect it. But philosophers dislike property as property; they wish to destroy the very idea of personal possession. Bigamists respect marriage, or they would not go through the highly ceremonial and even ritualistic formality of bigamy. But philosophers despise marriage as marriage. Murderers respect human life; they merely wish to attain a greater fulness of human life in themselves by the sacrifice of what seems to them to be lesser lives. But philosophers hate life itself, their own as much as other people’s.”

Syme struck his hands together.

“How true that is,” he cried. “I have felt it from my boyhood, but never could state the verbal antithesis. The common criminal is a bad man, but at least he is, as it were, a conditional good man. He says that if only a certain obstacle be removed — say a wealthy uncle — he is then prepared to accept the universe and to praise God. He is a reformer, but not an anarchist. He wishes to cleanse the edifice, but not to destroy it. But the evil philosopher is not trying to alter things, but to annihilate them. Yes, the modern world has retained all those parts of police work which are really oppressive and ignominious, the harrying of the poor, the spying upon the unfortunate. It has given up its more dignified work, the punishment of powerful traitors in the State and powerful heresiarchs in the Church. The moderns say we must not punish heretics. My only doubt is whether we have a right to punish anybody else."

"But this is absurd!" cried the policeman, clasping his hands with an excitement uncommon in persons of his figure and costume, "but it is intolerable! I don't know what you're doing, but you're wasting your life. You must, you shall, join our special army against anarchy. Their armies are on our frontiers. Their bolt is ready to fall. A moment more, and you may lose the glory of working with us, perhaps the glory of dying with the last heroes of the world."

"It is a chance not to be missed, certainly," assented Syme, "but still I do not quite understand. I know as well as anybody that the modern world is full of lawless little men and mad little movements. But, beastly as they are, they generally have the one merit of disagreeing with each other. How can you talk of their leading one army or hurling one bolt. What is this anarchy?"

"Do not confuse it," replied the constable, "with those chance dynamite outbreaks from Russia or from Ireland, which are really the outbreaks of oppressed, if mistaken, men. This is a vast philosophic movement, consisting of an outer and an inner ring. You might even call the outer ring the laity and the inner ring the priesthood. I prefer to call the outer ring the innocent section, the inner ring the supremely guilty section. The outer ring — the main mass of their supporters — are merely anarchists; that is, men who believe that rules and formulas have destroyed human happiness. They believe that all the evil results of human crime are the results of the system that has called it crime. They do not believe that the crime creates the punishment. They believe that the punishment has created the crime. They believe that if a man seduced seven women he would naturally walk away as blameless as the flowers of spring. They believe that if a man picked a pocket he would naturally feel exquisitely good. These I call the innocent section.”

“Oh!” said Syme.

“Naturally, therefore, these people talk about ‘a happy time coming’; ‘the paradise of the future’; ‘mankind freed from the bondage of vice and the bondage of virtue,’ and so on. And so also the men of the inner circle speak — the sacred priesthood. They also speak to applauding crowds of the happiness of the future, and of mankind freed at last. But in their mouths” — and the policeman lowered his voice— “in their mouths these happy phrases have a horrible meaning. They are under no illusions; they are too intellectual to think that man upon this earth can ever be quite free of original sin and the struggle. And they mean death. When they say that mankind shall be free at last, they mean that mankind shall commit suicide. When they talk of a paradise without right or wrong, they mean the grave.

“They have but two objects, to destroy first humanity and then themselves. That is why they throw bombs instead of firing pistols. The innocent rank and file are disappointed because the bomb has not killed the king; but the high-priesthood are happy because it has killed somebody.”

“How can I join you?” asked Syme, with a sort of passion.

“I know for a fact that there is a vacancy at the moment,” said the policeman, “as I have the honour to be somewhat in the confidence of the chief of whom I have spoken. You should really come and see him. Or rather, I should not say see him, nobody ever sees him; but you can talk to him if you like.”

“Telephone?” inquired Syme, with interest.

“No,” said the policeman placidly, “he has a fancy for always sitting in a pitch-dark room. He says it makes his thoughts brighter. Do come along.”

Somewhat dazed and considerably excited, Syme allowed himself to be led to a side-door in the long row of buildings of Scotland Yard. Almost before he knew what he was doing, he had been passed through the hands of about four intermediate officials, and was suddenly shown into a room, the abrupt blackness of which startled him like a blaze of light. It was not the ordinary darkness, in which forms can be faintly traced; it was like going suddenly stone-blind.

“Are you the new recruit?” asked a heavy voice.

And in some strange way, though there was not the shadow of a shape in the gloom, Syme knew two things: first, that it came from a man of massive stature; and second, that the man had his back to him.

“Are you the new recruit?” said the invisible chief, who seemed to have heard all about it. “All right. You are engaged.”

Syme, quite swept off his feet, made a feeble fight against this irrevocable phrase.

“I really have no experience,” he began.

“No one has any experience,” said the other, “of the Battle of Armageddon.”

“But I am really unfit—”

“You are willing, that is enough,” said the unknown.

“Well, really,” said Syme, “I don’t know any profession of which mere willingness is the final test.”

“I do,” said the other— “martyrs. I am condemning you to death. Good day.”

Thus it was that when Gabriel Syme came out again into the crimson light of evening, in his shabby black hat and shabby, lawless cloak, he came out a member of the New Detective Corps for the frustration of the great conspiracy. Acting under the advice of his friend the policeman (who was professionally inclined to neatness), he trimmed his hair and beard, bought a good hat, clad himself in an exquisite summer suit of light blue-grey, with a pale yellow flower in the button-hole, and, in short, became that elegant and rather insupportable person whom Gregory had first encountered in the little garden of Saffron Park. Before he finally left the police premises his friend provided him with a small blue card, on which was written, “The Last Crusade,” and a number, the sign of his official authority. He put this carefully in his upper waistcoat pocket, lit a cigarette, and went forth to track and fight the enemy in all the drawing-rooms of London. Where his adventure ultimately led him we have already seen. At about half-past one on a February night he found himself steaming in a small tug up the silent Thames, armed with swordstick and revolver, the duly elected Thursday of the Central Council of Anarchists.

When Syme stepped out on to the steam-tug he had a singular sensation of stepping out into something entirely new; not merely into the landscape of a new land, but even into the landscape of a new planet. This was mainly due to the insane yet solid decision of that evening, though partly also to an entire change in the weather and the sky since he entered the little tavern some two hours before. Every trace of the passionate plumage of the cloudy sunset had been swept away, and a naked moon stood in a naked sky. The moon was so strong and full that (by a paradox often to be noticed) it seemed like a weaker sun. It gave, not the sense of bright moonshine, but rather of a dead daylight.

Over the whole landscape lay a luminous and unnatural discoloration, as of that disastrous twilight which Milton spoke of as shed by the sun in eclipse; so that Syme fell easily into his first thought, that he was actually on some other and emptier planet, which circled round some sadder star. But the more he felt this glittering desolation in the moonlit land, the more his own chivalric folly glowed in the night like a great fire. Even the common things he carried with him — the food and the brandy and the loaded pistol — took on exactly that concrete and material poetry which a child feels when he takes a gun upon a journey or a bun with him to bed. The sword-stick and the brandy-flask, though in themselves only the tools of morbid conspirators, became the expressions of his own more healthy romance. The sword-stick became almost the sword of chivalry, and the brandy the wine of the stirrup-cup. For even the most dehumanised modern fantasies depend on some older and simpler figure; the adventures may be mad, but the adventurer must be sane. The dragon without St. George would not even be grotesque. So this inhuman landscape was only imaginative by the presence of a man really human. To Syme's exaggerative mind the bright, bleak houses and terraces by the Thames looked as empty as the mountains of the moon. But even the moon is only poetical because there is a man in the moon.

The tug was worked by two men, and with much toil went comparatively slowly. The clear moon that had lit up Chiswick had gone down by the time that they passed Battersea, and when they came under the enormous bulk of Westminster day had already begun to break. It broke like the splitting of great bars of lead, showing bars of silver; and these had brightened like white fire when the tug, changing its onward course, turned inward to a large landing stage rather beyond Charing Cross.

The great stones of the Embankment seemed equally dark and gigantic as Syme looked up at them. They were big and black against the huge white dawn. They made him feel that he was landing on the colossal steps of some Egyptian palace; and, indeed, the thing suited his mood, for he was, in his own mind, mounting to attack the solid thrones of horrible and heathen kings. He leapt out of the boat on to one slimy step, and stood, a dark and slender figure, amid the enormous masonry. The two men in the tug put her off again and turned up stream. They had never spoken a word.

CHAPTER V. THE FEAST OF FEAR

AT first the large stone stair seemed to Syme as deserted as a pyramid; but before he reached the top he had realised that there was a man leaning over the parapet of the Embankment and looking out across the river. As a figure he was quite conventional, clad in a silk hat and frock-coat of the more formal type of fashion; he had a red flower in his buttonhole. As Syme drew nearer to him step by step, he did not even move a hair; and Syme could come close enough to notice even in the dim, pale morning light that his face was long, pale and intellectual, and ended in a small triangular tuft of dark beard at the very point of the chin, all else being clean-shaven. This scrap of hair almost seemed a mere oversight; the rest of the face was of the type that is best shaven — clear-cut, ascetic, and in its way noble. Syme drew closer and closer, noting all this, and still the figure did not stir.

At first an instinct had told Syme that this was the man whom he was meant to meet. Then, seeing that the man made no sign, he had concluded that he was not. And now again he had come back to a certainty that the man had something to do with his mad adventure. For the man remained more still than would have been natural if a stranger had come so close. He was as motionless as a wax-work, and got on the nerves somewhat in the same way. Syme looked again and again at the pale, dignified and delicate face, and the face still looked blankly across the river. Then he took out of his pocket the note from Buttons proving his election, and put it before that sad and beautiful face. Then the man smiled, and his smile was a shock, for it was all on one side, going up in the right cheek and down in the left.

There was nothing, rationally speaking, to scare anyone about this. Many people have this nervous trick of a crooked smile, and in many it is even attractive. But in all Syme’s circumstances, with the dark dawn and the deadly errand and the loneliness on the great dripping stones, there was something unnerving in it.

There was the silent river and the silent man, a man of even classic face. And there was the last nightmare touch that his smile suddenly went wrong.

The spasm of smile was instantaneous, and the man’s face dropped at once into its harmonious melancholy. He spoke without further explanation or inquiry, like a man speaking to an old colleague.

“If we walk up towards Leicester Square,” he said, “we shall just be in time for breakfast. Sunday always insists on an early breakfast. Have you had any sleep?”

“No,” said Syme.

“Nor have I,” answered the man in an ordinary tone. “I shall try to get to bed after breakfast.”

He spoke with casual civility, but in an utterly dead voice that contradicted the fanaticism of his face. It seemed almost as if all friendly words were to him lifeless conveniences, and that his only life was hate. After a pause the man spoke again.

“Of course, the Secretary of the branch told you everything that can be told. But the one thing that can never be told is the last notion of the President, for his notions grow like a tropical forest. So in case you don’t know, I’d better tell you that he is carrying out his notion of concealing ourselves by not concealing ourselves to the most extraordinary lengths just now. Originally, of course, we met in a cell underground, just as your branch does. Then Sunday made us take a private room at an ordinary restaurant. He said that if you didn’t seem to be hiding nobody hunted you out. Well, he is the only man on earth, I know; but sometimes I really think that his huge brain is going a little mad in its old age. For now we flaunt ourselves before the public. We have our breakfast on a balcony — on a balcony, if you please — overlooking Leicester Square.”

“And what do the people say?” asked Syme.

“It’s quite simple what they say,” answered his guide.

“They say we are a lot of jolly gentlemen who pretend they are anarchists.”

“It seems to me a very clever idea,” said Syme.

“Clever! God blast your impudence! Clever!” cried out the other in a sudden, shrill voice which was as startling and discordant as his crooked smile. “When you’ve seen Sunday for a split second you’ll leave off calling him clever.”

With this they emerged out of a narrow street, and saw the early sunlight filling Leicester Square. It will never be known, I suppose, why this square itself should look so alien and in some ways so continental. It will never be known whether it was the foreign look that attracted the foreigners or the foreigners who gave it the foreign look. But on this particular morning the effect seemed singularly bright and clear. Between the open square and the sunlit leaves and the statue and the Saracenic outlines of the Alhambra, it looked the replica of some French or even Spanish public place. And this effect increased in Syme the sensation, which in many shapes he had had through the whole adventure, the eerie sensation of having strayed into a new world. As a fact, he had bought bad cigars round Leicester Square ever since he was a boy. But as he turned that corner, and saw the trees and the Moorish cupolas, he could have sworn that he was turning into an unknown Place de something or other in some foreign town.

At one corner of the square there projected a kind of angle of a prosperous but quiet hotel, the bulk of which belonged to a street behind. In the wall there was one large French window, probably the window of a large coffee-room; and outside this window, almost literally overhanging the square, was a formidably buttressed balcony, big enough to contain a dining-table. In fact, it did contain a dining-table, or more strictly a breakfast-table; and round the breakfast-table, glowing in the sunlight and evident to the street, were a group of noisy and talkative men, all dressed in the insolence of fashion, with white waistcoats and expensive button-holes. Some of their jokes could almost be heard across the square. Then the grave Secretary gave his unnatural smile, and Syme knew that this boisterous breakfast party was the secret conclave of the European Dynamiters.

Then, as Syme continued to stare at them, he saw something that he had not seen before. He had not seen it literally because it was too large to see. At the nearest end of the balcony, blocking up a great part of the perspective, was the back of a great mountain of a man. When Syme had seen him, his first thought was that the weight of him must break down the balcony of stone. His vastness did not lie only in the fact that he was abnormally tall and quite incredibly fat. This man was planned enormously in his original proportions, like a statue carved deliberately as colossal. His head, crowned with white hair, as seen from behind looked bigger than a head ought to be. The ears that stood out from it looked larger than human ears. He was enlarged terribly to scale; and this sense of size was so staggering, that when Syme saw him all the other figures seemed quite suddenly to dwindle and become dwarfish. They were still sitting there as before with their flowers and frock-coats, but now it looked as if the big man was entertaining five children to tea.

As Syme and the guide approached the side door of the hotel, a waiter came out smiling with every tooth in his head.

“The gentlemen are up there, sare,” he said. “They do talk and they do laugh at what they talk. They do say they will throw bombs at ze king.”

And the waiter hurried away with a napkin over his arm, much pleased with the singular frivolity of the gentlemen upstairs.

The two men mounted the stairs in silence.

Syme had never thought of asking whether the monstrous man who almost filled and broke the balcony was the great President of whom the others stood in awe. He knew it was so, with an unaccountable but instantaneous certainty. Syme, indeed, was one of those men who are open to all the more nameless psychological influences in a degree a little dangerous to mental health. Utterly devoid of fear in physical dangers, he was a great deal too sensitive to the smell of spiritual evil. Twice already that night little unmeaning things had peeped out at him almost pruriently, and given him a sense of drawing nearer and nearer to the head-quarters of hell. And this sense became overpowering as he drew nearer to the great President.

The form it took was a childish and yet hateful fancy. As he walked across the inner room towards the balcony, the large face of Sunday grew larger and larger; and Syme was gripped with a fear that when he was quite close the face would be too big to be possible, and that he would scream aloud. He remembered that as a child he would not look at the mask of Memnon in the British Museum, because it was a face, and so large.

By an effort, braver than that of leaping over a cliff, he went to an empty seat at the breakfast-table and sat down. The men greeted him with good-humoured raillery as if they had always known him. He sobered himself a little by looking at their conventional coats and solid, shining coffee-pot; then he looked again at Sunday. His face was very large, but it was still possible to humanity.

In the presence of the President the whole company looked sufficiently commonplace; nothing about them caught the eye at first, except that by the President’s caprice they had been dressed up with a festive respectability, which gave the meal the look of a wedding breakfast. One man indeed stood out at even a superficial glance. He at least was the common or garden Dynamiter. He wore, indeed, the high white collar and satin tie that were the uniform of the occasion; but out of this collar there sprang a head quite unmanageable and quite unmistakable, a bewildering bush of brown hair and beard that almost obscured the eyes like those of a Skye terrier. But the eyes did look out of the tangle, and they were the sad eyes of some Russian serf. The effect of this figure was not terrible like that of the President, but it had every diablerie that can come from the utterly grotesque. If out of that stiff tie and collar there had come abruptly the head of a cat or a dog, it could not have been a more idiotic contrast.

The man's name, it seemed, was Gogol; he was a Pole, and in this circle of days he was called Tuesday. His soul and speech were incurably tragic; he could not force himself to play the prosperous and frivolous part demanded of him by President Sunday. And, indeed, when Syme came in the President, with that daring disregard of public suspicion which was his policy, was actually chaffing Gogol upon his inability to assume conventional graces.

"Our friend Tuesday," said the President in a deep voice at once of quietude and volume, "our friend Tuesday doesn't seem to grasp the idea. He dresses up like a gentleman, but he seems to be too great a soul to behave like one. He insists on the ways of the stage conspirator. Now if a gentleman goes about London in a top hat and a frock-coat, no one need know that he is an anarchist. But if a gentleman puts on a top hat and a frock-coat, and then goes about on his hands and knees — well, he may attract attention. That's what Brother Gogol does. He goes about on his hands and knees with such inexhaustible diplomacy, that by this time he finds it quite difficult to walk upright."

"I am not good at goncealment," said Gogol sulkily, with a thick foreign accent; "I am not ashamed of the cause."

"Yes you are, my boy, and so is the cause of you," said the President good-naturedly. "You hide as much as anybody; but you can't do it, you see, you're such an ass! You try to combine two inconsistent methods. When a householder finds a man under his bed, he will probably pause to note the circumstance. But if he finds a man under his bed in a top hat, you will agree with me, my dear Tuesday, that he is not likely even to forget it. Now when you were found under Admiral Biffin's bed—"

"I am not good at deception," said Tuesday gloomily, flushing.

"Right, my boy, right," said the President with a ponderous heartiness, "you aren't good at anything."

While this stream of conversation continued, Syme was looking more steadily at the men around him. As he did so, he gradually felt all his sense of something spiritually queer return.

He had thought at first that they were all of common stature and costume, with the evident exception of the hairy Gogol. But as he looked at the others, he began to see in each of them exactly what he had seen in the man by the river, a demoniac detail somewhere. That lop-sided laugh, which would suddenly disfigure the fine face of his original guide, was typical of all these types. Each man had something about him, perceived perhaps at the tenth or twentieth glance, which was not normal, and which seemed hardly human. The only metaphor he could think of was this, that they all looked as men of fashion and presence would look, with the additional twist given in a false and curved mirror.

Only the individual examples will express this half-concealed eccentricity. Syme's original cicerone bore the title of Monday; he was the Secretary of the Council, and his twisted smile was regarded with more terror than anything, except the President's horrible, happy laughter. But now that Syme had more space and light to observe him, there were other touches. His fine face was so emaciated, that Syme thought it must be wasted with some disease; yet somehow the very distress of his dark eyes denied this. It was no physical ill that troubled him. His eyes were alive with intellectual torture, as if pure thought was pain.

He was typical of each of the tribe; each man was subtly and differently wrong. Next to him sat Tuesday, the tousle-headed Gogol, a man more obviously mad. Next was Wednesday, a certain Marquis de St. Eustache, a sufficiently characteristic figure. The first few glances found nothing unusual about him, except that he was the only man at table who wore the fashionable clothes as if they were really his own. He had a black French beard cut square and a black English frock-coat cut even squarer. But Syme, sensitive to such things, felt somehow that the man carried a rich atmosphere with him, a rich atmosphere that suffocated. It reminded one irrationally of drowsy odours and of dying lamps in the darker poems of Byron and Poe. With this went a sense of his being clad, not in lighter colours, but in softer materials; his black seemed richer and warmer than the black shades about him, as if it were compounded of profound colour. His black coat looked as if it were only black by being too dense a purple. His black beard looked as if it were only black by being too deep a blue. And in the gloom and thickness of the beard his dark red mouth showed sensual and scornful. Whatever he was he was not a Frenchman; he might be a Jew; he might be something deeper yet in the dark heart of the East. In the bright coloured Persian tiles and pictures showing tyrants hunting, you may see just those almond eyes, those blue-black beards, those cruel, crimson lips.

Then came Syme, and next a very old man, Professor de Worms, who still kept the chair of Friday, though every day it was expected that his death would leave it empty. Save for his intellect, he was in the last dissolution of senile decay. His face was as grey as his long grey beard, his forehead was lifted and fixed finally in a furrow of mild despair. In no other case, not even that of Gogol, did the bridegroom brilliancy of the morning dress express a more painful contrast. For the red flower in his button-hole showed up against a face that was literally discoloured like lead; the whole hideous effect was as if some drunken dandies had put their clothes upon a corpse. When he rose or sat down, which was with long labour and peril, something worse was expressed than mere weakness, something indefinably connected with the horror of the whole scene. It did not express decrepitude merely, but corruption. Another hateful fancy crossed Syme's quivering mind. He could not help thinking that whenever the man moved a leg or arm might fall off.

Right at the end sat the man called Saturday, the simplest and the most baffling of all. He was a short, square man with a dark, square face clean-shaven, a medical practitioner going by the name of Bull. He had that combination of savoir-faire with a sort of well-groomed coarseness which is not uncommon in young doctors. He carried his fine clothes with confidence rather than ease, and he mostly wore a set smile. There was nothing whatever odd about him, except that he wore a pair of dark, almost opaque spectacles. It may have been merely a crescendo of nervous fancy that had gone before, but those black discs were dreadful to Syme; they reminded him of half-remembered ugly tales, of some story about pennies being put on the eyes of the dead. Syme's eye always caught the black glasses and the blind grin. Had the dying Professor worn them, or even the pale Secretary, they would have been appropriate. But on the younger and grosser man they seemed only an enigma. They took away the key of the face. You could not tell what his smile or his gravity meant. Partly from this, and partly because he had a vulgar virility wanting in most of the others it seemed to Syme that he might be the wickedest of all those wicked men. Syme even had the thought that his eyes might be covered up because they were too frightful to see.

CHAPTER VI. THE EXPOSURE

SUCH were the six men who had sworn to destroy the world. Again and again Syme strove to pull together his common sense in their presence. Sometimes he saw for an instant that these notions were subjective, that he was only looking at ordinary men, one of whom was old, another nervous, another short-sighted. The sense of an unnatural symbolism always settled back on him again. Each figure seemed to be, somehow, on the borderland of things, just as their theory was on the borderland of thought. He knew that each one of these men stood at the extreme end, so to speak, of some wild road of reasoning. He could only fancy, as in some old-world fable, that if a man went westward to the end of the world he would find something — say a tree — that was more or less than a tree, a tree possessed by a spirit; and that if he went east to the end of the world he would find something else that was not wholly itself — a tower, perhaps, of which the very shape was wicked. So these figures seemed to stand up, violent and unaccountable, against an ultimate horizon, visions from the verge. The ends of the earth were closing in.

Talk had been going on steadily as he took in the scene; and not the least of the contrasts of that bewildering breakfast-table was the contrast between the easy and unobtrusive tone of talk and its terrible purport. They were deep in the discussion of an actual and immediate plot. The waiter downstairs had spoken quite correctly when he said that they were talking about bombs and kings. Only three days afterwards the Czar was to meet the President of the French Republic in Paris, and over their bacon and eggs upon their sunny balcony these beaming gentlemen had decided how both should die. Even the instrument was chosen; the black-bearded Marquis, it appeared, was to carry the bomb.

Ordinarily speaking, the proximity of this positive and objective crime would have sobered Syme, and cured him of all his merely mystical tremors. He would have thought of nothing but the need of saving at least two human bodies from being ripped in pieces with iron and roaring gas. But the truth was that by this time he had begun to feel a third kind of fear, more piercing and practical than either his moral revulsion or his social responsibility. Very simply, he had no fear to spare for the French President or the Czar; he had begun to fear for himself. Most of the talkers took little heed of him, debating now with their faces closer together, and almost uniformly grave, save when for an instant the smile of the Secretary ran aslant across his face as the jagged lightning runs aslant across the sky. But there was one persistent thing which first troubled Syme and at last terrified him. The President was always looking at him, steadily, and with a great and baffling interest. The enormous man was quite quiet, but his blue eyes stood out of his head. And they were always fixed on Syme.

Syme felt moved to spring up and leap over the balcony. When the President's eyes were on him he felt as if he were made of glass. He had hardly the shred of a doubt that in some silent and extraordinary way Sunday had found out that he was a spy. He looked over the edge of the balcony, and saw a policeman, standing abstractedly just beneath, staring at the bright railings and the sunlit trees.

Then there fell upon him the great temptation that was to torment him for many days. In the presence of these powerful and repulsive men, who were the princes of anarchy, he had almost forgotten the frail and fanciful figure of the poet Gregory, the mere aesthete of anarchism. He even thought of him now with an old kindness, as if they had played together when children. But he remembered that he was still tied to Gregory by a great promise. He had promised never to do the very thing that he now felt himself almost in the act of doing. He had promised not to jump over that balcony and speak to that policeman. He took his cold hand off the cold stone balustrade. His soul swayed in a vertigo of moral indecision. He had only to snap the thread of a rash vow made to a villainous society, and all his life could be as open and sunny as the square beneath him. He had, on the other hand, only to keep his antiquated honour, and be delivered inch by inch into the power of this great enemy of mankind, whose very intellect was a torture-chamber. Whenever he looked down into the square he saw the comfortable policeman, a pillar of common sense and common order. Whenever he looked back at the breakfast-table he saw the President still quietly studying him with big, unbearable eyes.

In all the torrent of his thought there were two thoughts that never crossed his mind. First, it never occurred to him to doubt that the President and his Council could crush him if he continued to stand alone. The place might be public, the project might seem impossible. But Sunday was not the man who would carry himself thus easily without having, somehow or somewhere, set open his iron trap. Either by anonymous poison or sudden street accident, by hypnotism or by fire from hell, Sunday could certainly strike him. If he defied the man he was probably dead, either struck stiff there in his chair or long afterwards as by an innocent ailment. If he called in the police promptly, arrested everyone, told all, and set against them the whole energy of England, he would probably escape; certainly not otherwise. They were a balconyful of gentlemen overlooking a bright and busy square; but he felt no more safe with them than if they had been a boatful of armed pirates overlooking an empty sea.

There was a second thought that never came to him. It never occurred to him to be spiritually won over to the enemy. Many moderns, inured to a weak worship of intellect and force, might have wavered in their allegiance under this oppression of a great personality. They might have called Sunday the super-man. If any such creature be conceivable, he looked, indeed, somewhat like it, with his earth-shaking abstraction, as of a stone statue walking. He might have been called something above man, with his large plans, which were too obvious to be detected, with his large face, which was too frank to be understood. But this was a kind of modern meanness to which Syme could not sink even in his extreme morbidity. Like any man, he was coward enough to fear great force; but he was not quite coward enough to admire it.

The men were eating as they talked, and even in this they were typical. Dr. Bull and the Marquis ate casually and conventionally of the best things on the table — cold pheasant or Strasbourg pie. But the Secretary was a vegetarian, and he spoke earnestly of the projected murder over half a raw tomato and three quarters of a glass of tepid water. The old Professor had such slops as suggested a sickening second childhood. And even in this President Sunday preserved his curious predominance of mere mass. For he ate like twenty men; he ate incredibly, with a frightful freshness of appetite, so that it was like watching a sausage factory. Yet continually, when he had swallowed a dozen crumpets or drunk a quart of coffee, he would be found with his great head on one side staring at Syme.

“I have often wondered,” said the Marquis, taking a great bite out of a slice of bread and jam, “whether it wouldn’t be better for me to do it with a knife. Most of the best things have been brought off with a knife. And it would be a new emotion to get a knife into a French President and wriggle it round.”

“You are wrong,” said the Secretary, drawing his black brows together. “The knife was merely the expression of the old personal quarrel with a personal tyrant. Dynamite is not only our best tool, but our best symbol. It is as perfect a symbol of us as is incense of the prayers of the Christians. It expands; it only destroys because it broadens; even so, thought only destroys because it broadens. A man’s brain is a bomb,” he cried out, loosening suddenly his strange passion and striking his own skull with violence. “My brain feels like a bomb, night and day. It must expand! It must expand! A man’s brain must expand, if it breaks up the universe.”

“I don’t want the universe broken up just yet,” drawled the Marquis. “I want to do a lot of beastly things before I die. I thought of one yesterday in bed.”

“No, if the only end of the thing is nothing,” said Dr. Bull with his sphinx-like smile, “it hardly seems worth doing.”

The old Professor was staring at the ceiling with dull eyes.

“Every man knows in his heart,” he said, “that nothing is worth doing.”

There was a singular silence, and then the Secretary said —

“We are wandering, however, from the point. The only question is how Wednesday is to strike the blow. I take it we should all agree with the original notion of a bomb. As to the actual arrangements, I should suggest that tomorrow morning he should go first of all to—”

The speech was broken off short under a vast shadow. President Sunday had risen to his feet, seeming to fill the sky above them.

“Before we discuss that,” he said in a small, quiet voice, “let us go into a private room. I have something very particular to say.”

Syme stood up before any of the others. The instant of choice had come at last, the pistol was at his head. On the pavement before he could hear the policeman idly stir and stamp, for the morning, though bright, was cold.

A barrel-organ in the street suddenly sprang with a jerk into a jovial tune. Syme stood up taut, as if it had been a bugle before the battle. He found himself filled with a supernatural courage that came from nowhere. That jingling music seemed full of the vivacity, the vulgarity, and the irrational valour of the poor, who in all those unclean streets were all clinging to the decencies and the charities of Christendom. His youthful prank of being a policeman had faded from his mind; he did not think of himself as the representative of the corps of gentlemen turned into fancy constables, or of the old eccentric who lived in the dark room. But he did feel himself as the ambassador of all these common and kindly people in the street, who every day marched into battle to the music of the barrel-organ. And this high pride in being human had lifted him unaccountably to an infinite height above the monstrous men around him. For an instant, at least, he looked down upon all their sprawling eccentricities from the starry pinnacle of the commonplace. He felt towards them all that unconscious and elementary superiority that a brave man feels over powerful beasts or a wise man over powerful errors. He knew that he had neither the intellectual nor the physical strength of President Sunday; but in that moment he minded it no more than the fact that he had not the muscles of a tiger or a horn on his nose like a rhinoceros. All was swallowed up in an ultimate certainty that the President was wrong and that the barrel-organ was right. There clanged in his mind that unanswerable and terrible truism in the song of Roland —

“Pagens ont tort et Chretiens ont droit.”

which in the old nasal French has the clang and groan of great iron. This liberation of his spirit from the load of his weakness went with a quite clear decision to embrace death. If the people of the barrel-organ could keep their old-world obligations, so could he. This very pride in keeping his word was that he was keeping it to miscreants. It was his last triumph over these lunatics to go down into their dark room and die for something that they could not even understand. The barrel-organ seemed to give the marching tune with the energy and the mingled noises of a whole orchestra; and he could hear deep and rolling, under all the trumpets of the pride of life, the drums of the pride of death.

The conspirators were already filing through the open window and into the rooms behind. Syme went last, outwardly calm, but with all his brain and body throbbing with romantic rhythm. The President led them down an irregular side stair, such as might be used by servants, and into a dim, cold, empty room, with a table and benches, like an abandoned boardroom. When they were all in, he closed and locked the door.

The first to speak was Gogol, the irreconcilable, who seemed bursting with inarticulate grievance.

“Zso! Zso!” he cried, with an obscure excitement, his heavy Polish accent becoming almost impenetrable. “You zay you nod ‘ide. You zay you show himselves. It is all nuzzinks. Ven you vant talk importance you run yourselves in a dark box!”

The President seemed to take the foreigner’s incoherent satire with entire good humour.

“You can’t get hold of it yet, Gogol,” he said in a fatherly way. “When once they have heard us talking nonsense on that balcony they will not care where we go afterwards. If we had come here first, we should have had the whole staff at the keyhole. You don’t seem to know anything about mankind.”

“I die for zem,” cried the Pole in thick excitement, “and I slay zare oppressors. I care not for these games of gonzealment. I would zmite ze tyrant in ze open square.”

“I see, I see,” said the President, nodding kindly as he seated himself at the top of a long table. “You die for mankind first, and then you get up and smite their oppressors. So that’s all right. And now may I ask you to control your beautiful sentiments, and sit down with the other gentlemen at this table. For the first time this morning something intelligent is going to be said.”

Syme, with the perturbed promptitude he had shown since the original summons, sat down first. Gogol sat down last, grumbling in his brown beard about gombromise. No one except Syme seemed to have any notion of the blow that was about to fall. As for him, he had merely the feeling of a man mounting the scaffold with the intention, at any rate, of making a good speech.

“Comrades,” said the President, suddenly rising, “we have spun out this farce long enough. I have called you down here to tell you something so simple and shocking that even the waiters upstairs (long inured to our levities) might hear some new seriousness in my voice. Comrades, we were discussing plans and naming places. I propose, before saying anything else, that those plans and places should not be voted by this meeting, but should be left wholly in the control of some one reliable member. I suggest Comrade Saturday, Dr. Bull.”

They all stared at him; then they all started in their seats, for the next words, though not loud, had a living and sensational emphasis. Sunday struck the table.

“Not one word more about the plans and places must be said at this meeting. Not one tiny detail more about what we mean to do must be mentioned in this company.”

Sunday had spent his life in astonishing his followers; but it seemed as if he had never really astonished them until now. They all moved feverishly in their seats, except Syme. He sat stiff in his, with his hand in his pocket, and on the handle of his loaded revolver. When the attack on him came he would sell his life dear. He would find out at least if the President was mortal.

Sunday went on smoothly —

“You will probably understand that there is only one possible motive for forbidding free speech at this festival of freedom. Strangers overhearing us matters nothing. They assume that we are joking. But what would matter, even unto death, is this, that there should be one actually among us who is not of us, who knows our grave purpose, but does not share it, who—”

The Secretary screamed out suddenly like a woman.

“It can’t be!” he cried, leaping. “There can’t—”

The President flapped his large flat hand on the table like the fin of some huge fish.

“Yes,” he said slowly, “there is a spy in this room. There is a traitor at this table. I will waste no more words. His name—”

Syme half rose from his seat, his finger firm on the trigger.

“His name is Gogol,” said the President. “He is that hairy humbug over there who pretends to be a Pole.”

Gogol sprang to his feet, a pistol in each hand. With the same flash three men sprang at his throat. Even the Professor made an effort to rise. But Syme saw little of the scene, for he was blinded with a beneficent darkness; he had sunk down into his seat shuddering, in a palsy of passionate relief.

CHAPTER VII. THE UNACCOUNTABLE CONDUCT OF PROFESSOR DE WORMS

“SIT down!” said Sunday in a voice that he used once or twice in his life, a voice that made men drop drawn swords.

The three who had risen fell away from Gogol, and that equivocal person himself resumed his seat.

“Well, my man,” said the President briskly, addressing him as one addresses a total stranger, “will you oblige me by putting your hand in your upper waistcoat pocket and showing me what you have there?”

The alleged Pole was a little pale under his tangle of dark hair, but he put two fingers into the pocket with apparent coolness and pulled out a blue strip of card. When Syme saw it lying on the table, he woke up again to the world outside him. For although the card lay at the other extreme of the table, and he could read nothing of the inscription on it, it bore a startling resemblance to the blue card in his own pocket, the card which had been given to him when he joined the anti-anarchist constabulary.

“Pathetic Slav,” said the President, “tragic child of Poland, are you prepared in the presence of that card to deny that you are in this company — shall we say de trop?”

“Right oh!” said the late Gogol. It made everyone jump to hear a clear, commercial and somewhat cockney voice coming out of that forest of foreign hair. It was irrational, as if a Chinaman had suddenly spoken with a Scotch accent.

“I gather that you fully understand your position,” said Sunday.

“You bet,” answered the Pole. “I see it’s a fair cop. All I say is, I don’t believe any Pole could have imitated my accent like I did his.”

“I concede the point,” said Sunday. “I believe your own accent to be inimitable, though I shall practise it in my bath. Do you mind leaving your beard with your card?”

“Not a bit,” answered Gogol; and with one finger he ripped off the whole of his shaggy head-covering, emerging with thin red hair and a pale, pert face. “It was hot,” he added.

“I will do you the justice to say,” said Sunday, not without a sort of brutal admiration, “that you seem to have kept pretty cool under it. Now listen to me. I like you. The consequence is that it would annoy me for just about two and a half minutes if I heard that you had died in torments. Well, if you ever tell the police or any human soul about us, I shall have that two and a half minutes of discomfort. On your discomfort I will not dwell. Good day. Mind the step."

The red-haired detective who had masqueraded as Gogol rose to his feet without a word, and walked out of the room with an air of perfect nonchalance. Yet the astonished Syme was able to realise that this ease was suddenly assumed; for there was a slight stumble outside the door, which showed that the departing detective had not minded the step.

"Time is flying," said the President in his gayest manner, after glancing at his watch, which like everything about him seemed bigger than it ought to be. "I must go off at once; I have to take the chair at a Humanitarian meeting."

The Secretary turned to him with working eyebrows.

"Would it not be better," he said a little sharply, "to discuss further the details of our project, now that the spy has left us?"

"No, I think not," said the President with a yawn like an unobtrusive earthquake. "Leave it as it is. Let Saturday settle it. I must be off. Breakfast here next Sunday."

But the late loud scenes had whipped up the almost naked nerves of the Secretary. He was one of those men who are conscientious even in crime.

"I must protest, President, that the thing is irregular," he said. "It is a fundamental rule of our society that all plans shall be debated in full council. Of course, I fully appreciate your forethought when in the actual presence of a traitor—"

"Secretary," said the President seriously, "if you'd take your head home and boil it for a turnip it might be useful. I can't say. But it might."

The Secretary reared back in a kind of equine anger.

"I really fail to understand—" he began in high offense.

"That's it, that's it," said the President, nodding a great many times. "That's where you fail right enough. You fail to understand. Why, you dancing donkey," he roared, rising, "you didn't want to be overheard by a spy, didn't you? How do you know you aren't overheard now?"

And with these words he shouldered his way out of the room, shaking with incomprehensible scorn.

Four of the men left behind gaped after him without any apparent glimmering of his meaning. Syme alone had even a glimmering, and such as it was it froze him to the bone. If the last words of the President meant anything, they meant that he had not after all passed unsuspected. They meant that while Sunday could not denounce him like Gogol, he still could not trust him like the others.

The other four got to their feet grumbling more or less, and betook themselves elsewhere to find lunch, for it was already well past midday. The Professor went last, very slowly and painfully. Syme sat long after the rest had gone, revolving his strange position. He had escaped a thunderbolt, but he was still under a cloud. At last he rose and made his way out of the hotel into Leicester Square. The bright, cold day had grown increasingly colder, and when he came out into the street he was surprised by a few flakes of snow. While he still carried the sword-stick and the rest of Gregory's portable luggage, he had thrown the cloak down and left it somewhere, perhaps on the steam-tug, perhaps on the balcony. Hoping, therefore, that the snow-shower might be slight, he stepped back out of the street for a moment and stood up under the doorway of a small and greasy hair-dresser's shop, the front window of which was empty, except for a sickly wax lady in evening dress.

Snow, however, began to thicken and fall fast; and Syme, having found one glance at the wax lady quite sufficient to depress his spirits, stared out instead into the white and empty street. He was considerably astonished to see, standing quite still outside the shop and staring into the window, a man. His top hat was loaded with snow like the hat of Father Christmas, the white drift was rising round his boots and ankles; but it seemed as if nothing could tear him away from the contemplation of the colourless wax doll in dirty evening dress. That any human being should stand in such weather looking into such a shop was a matter of sufficient wonder to Syme; but his idle wonder turned suddenly into a personal shock; for he realised that the man standing there was the paralytic old Professor de Worms. It scarcely seemed the place for a person of his years and infirmities.

Syme was ready to believe anything about the perversions of this dehumanized brotherhood; but even he could not believe that the Professor had fallen in love with that particular wax lady. He could only suppose that the man's malady (whatever it was) involved some momentary fits of rigidity or trance. He was not inclined, however, to feel in this case any very compassionate concern. On the contrary, he rather congratulated himself that the Professor's stroke and his elaborate and limping walk would make it easy to escape from him and leave him miles behind. For Syme thirsted first and last to get clear of the whole poisonous atmosphere, if only for an hour. Then he could collect his thoughts, formulate his policy, and decide finally whether he should or should not keep faith with Gregory.

He strolled away through the dancing snow, turned up two or three streets, down through two or three others, and entered a small Soho restaurant for lunch. He partook reflectively of four small and quaint courses, drank half a bottle of red wine, and ended up over black coffee and a black cigar, still thinking. He had taken his seat in the upper room of the restaurant, which was full of the chink of knives and the chatter of foreigners. He remembered that in old days he had imagined that all these harmless and kindly aliens were anarchists. He shuddered, remembering the real thing. But even the shudder had the delightful shame of escape. The wine, the common food, the familiar place, the faces of natural and talkative men, made him almost feel as if the Council of the Seven Days had been a bad dream; and although he knew it was nevertheless an objective reality, it was at least a distant one. Tall houses and populous streets lay between him and his last sight of the shameful seven; he was free in free London, and drinking wine among the free. With a somewhat easier action, he took his hat and stick and strolled down the stair into the shop below.

When he entered that lower room he stood stricken and rooted to the spot. At a small table, close up to the blank window and the white street of snow, sat the old anarchist Professor over a glass of milk, with his lifted livid face and pendent eyelids. For an instant Syme stood as rigid as the stick he leant upon. Then with a gesture as of blind hurry, he brushed past the Professor, dashing open the door and slamming it behind him, and stood outside in the snow.

“Can that old corpse be following me?” he asked himself, biting his yellow moustache. “I stopped too long up in that room, so that even such leaden feet could catch me up. One comfort is, with a little brisk walking I can put a man like that as far away as Timbuctoo. Or am I too fanciful? Was he really following me? Surely Sunday would not be such a fool as to send a lame man?”

He set off at a smart pace, twisting and whirling his stick, in the direction of Covent Garden. As he crossed the great market the snow increased, growing blinding and bewildering as the afternoon began to darken. The snow-flakes tormented him like a swarm of silver bees. Getting into his eyes and beard, they added their unremitting futility to his already irritated nerves; and by the time that he had come at a swinging pace to the beginning of Fleet Street, he lost patience, and finding a Sunday teashop, turned into it to take shelter. He ordered another cup of black coffee as an excuse. Scarcely had he done so, when Professor de Worms hobbled heavily into the shop, sat down with difficulty and ordered a glass of milk.

Syme's walking-stick had fallen from his hand with a great clang, which confessed the concealed steel. But the Professor did not look round. Syme, who was commonly a cool character, was literally gaping as a rustic gapes at a conjuring trick. He had seen no cab following; he had heard no wheels outside the shop; to all mortal appearances the man had come on foot. But the old man could only walk like a snail, and Syme had walked like the wind. He started up and snatched his stick, half crazy with the contradiction in mere arithmetic, and swung out of the swinging doors, leaving his coffee untasted. An omnibus going to the Bank went rattling by with an unusual rapidity. He had a violent run of a hundred yards to reach it; but he managed to spring, swaying upon the splash-board and, pausing for an instant to pant, he climbed on to the top. When he had been seated for about half a minute, he heard behind him a sort of heavy and asthmatic breathing.

Turning sharply, he saw rising gradually higher and higher up the omnibus steps a top hat soiled and dripping with snow, and under the shadow of its brim the short-sighted face and shaky shoulders of Professor de Worms. He let himself into a seat with characteristic care, and wrapped himself up to the chin in the mackintosh rug.

Every movement of the old man's tottering figure and vague hands, every uncertain gesture and panic-stricken pause, seemed to put it beyond question that he was helpless, that he was in the last imbecility of the body. He moved by inches, he let himself down with little gasps of caution. And yet, unless the philosophical entities called time and space have no vestige even of a practical existence, it appeared quite unquestionable that he had run after the omnibus.

Syme sprang erect upon the rocking car, and after staring wildly at the wintry sky, that grew gloomier every moment, he ran down the steps. He had repressed an elemental impulse to leap over the side.

Too bewildered to look back or to reason, he rushed into one of the little courts at the side of Fleet Street as a rabbit rushes into a hole. He had a vague idea, if this incomprehensible old Jack-in-the-box was really pursuing him, that in that labyrinth of little streets he could soon throw him off the scent. He dived in and out of those crooked lanes, which were more like cracks than thoroughfares; and by the time that he had completed about twenty alternate angles and described an unthinkable polygon, he paused to listen for any sound of pursuit. There was none; there could not in any case have been much, for the little streets were thick with the soundless snow. Somewhere behind Red Lion Court, however, he noticed a place where some energetic citizen had cleared away the snow for a space of about twenty yards, leaving the wet, glistening cobble-stones. He thought little of this as he passed it, only plunging into yet another arm of the maze. But when a few hundred yards farther on he stood still again to listen, his heart stood still also, for he heard from that space of rugged stones the clinking crutch and labouring feet of the infernal cripple.

The sky above was loaded with the clouds of snow, leaving London in a darkness and oppression premature for that hour of the evening. On each side of Syme the walls of the alley were blind and featureless; there was no little window or any kind of eve. He felt a new impulse to break out of this hive of houses, and to get once more into the open and lamp-lit street. Yet he rambled and dodged for a long time before he struck the main thoroughfare. When he did so, he struck it much farther up than he had fancied. He came out into what seemed the vast and void of Ludgate Circus, and saw St. Paul’s Cathedral sitting in the sky.

At first he was startled to find these great roads so empty, as if a pestilence had swept through the city. Then he told himself that some degree of emptiness was natural; first because the snow-storm was even dangerously deep, and secondly because it was Sunday. And at the very word Sunday he bit his lip; the word was henceforth for hire like some indecent pun. Under the white fog of snow high up in the heaven the whole atmosphere of the city was turned to a very queer kind of green twilight, as of men under the sea. The sealed and sullen sunset behind the dark dome of St. Paul’s had in it smoky and sinister colours — colours of sickly green, dead red or decaying bronze, that were just bright enough to emphasise the solid whiteness of the snow. But right up against these dreary colours rose the black bulk of the cathedral; and upon the top of the cathedral was a random splash and great stain of snow, still clinging as to an Alpine peak. It had fallen accidentally, but just so fallen as to half drape the dome from its very topmost point, and to pick out in perfect silver the great orb and the cross. When Syme saw it he suddenly straightened himself, and made with his sword-stick an involuntary salute.

He knew that that evil figure, his shadow, was creeping quickly or slowly behind him, and he did not care.

It seemed a symbol of human faith and valour that while the skies were darkening that high place of the earth was bright. The devils might have captured heaven, but they had not yet captured the cross. He had a new impulse to tear out the secret of this dancing, jumping and pursuing paralytic; and at the entrance of the court as it opened upon the Circus he turned, stick in hand, to face his pursuer.

Professor de Worms came slowly round the corner of the irregular alley behind him, his unnatural form outlined against a lonely gas-lamp, irresistibly recalling that very imaginative figure in the nursery rhymes, “the crooked man who went a crooked mile.” He really looked as if he had been twisted out of shape by the tortuous streets he had been threading. He came nearer and nearer, the lamplight shining on his lifted spectacles, his lifted, patient face. Syme waited for him as St. George waited for the dragon, as a man waits for a final explanation or for death. And the old Professor came right up to him and passed him like a total stranger, without even a blink of his mournful eyelids.

There was something in this silent and unexpected innocence that left Syme in a final fury. The man’s colourless face and manner seemed to assert that the whole following had been an accident. Syme was galvanised with an energy that was something between bitterness and a burst of boyish derision. He made a wild gesture as if to knock the old man’s hat off, called out something like “Catch me if you can,” and went racing away across the white, open Circus. Concealment was impossible now; and looking back over his shoulder, he could see the black figure of the old gentleman coming after him with long, swinging strides like a man winning a mile race. But the head upon that bounding body was still pale, grave and professional, like the head of a lecturer upon the body of a harlequin.

This outrageous chase sped across Ludgate Circus, up Ludgate Hill, round St. Paul’s Cathedral, along Cheapside, Syme remembering all the nightmares he had ever known. Then Syme broke away towards the river, and ended almost down by the docks. He saw the yellow panes of a low, lighted public-house, flung himself into it and ordered beer. It was a foul tavern, sprinkled with foreign sailors, a place where opium might be smoked or knives drawn.

A moment later Professor de Worms entered the place, sat down carefully, and asked for a glass of milk.

CHAPTER VIII. THE PROFESSOR EXPLAINS

WHEN Gabriel Syme found himself finally established in a chair, and opposite to him, fixed and final also, the lifted eyebrows and leaden eyelids of the Professor, his fears fully returned. This incomprehensible man from the fierce council, after all, had certainly pursued him. If the man had one character as a paralytic and another character as a pursuer, the antithesis might make him more interesting, but scarcely more soothing. It would be a very small comfort that he could not find the Professor out, if by some serious accident the Professor should find him out. He emptied a whole pewter pot of ale before the professor had touched his milk.

One possibility, however, kept him hopeful and yet helpless. It was just possible that this escapade signified something other than even a slight suspicion of him. Perhaps it was some regular form or sign. Perhaps the foolish scamper was some sort of friendly signal that he ought to have understood. Perhaps it was a ritual. Perhaps the new Thursday was always chased along Cheapside, as the new Lord Mayor is always escorted along it. He was just selecting a tentative inquiry, when the old Professor opposite suddenly and simply cut him short. Before Syme could ask the first diplomatic question, the old anarchist had asked suddenly, without any sort of preparation —

“Are you a policeman?”

Whatever else Syme had expected, he had never expected anything so brutal and actual as this. Even his great presence of mind could only manage a reply with an air of rather blundering jocularity.

“A policeman?” he said, laughing vaguely. “Whatever made you think of a policeman in connection with me?”

“The process was simple enough,” answered the Professor patiently. “I thought you looked like a policeman. I think so now.”

“Did I take a policeman’s hat by mistake out of the restaurant?” asked Syme, smiling wildly. “Have I by any chance got a number stuck on to me somewhere? Have my boots got that watchful look? Why must I be a policeman? Do, do let me be a postman.”

The old Professor shook his head with a gravity that gave no hope, but Syme ran on with a feverish irony.

“But perhaps I misunderstood the delicacies of your German philosophy. Perhaps policeman is a relative term. In an evolutionary sense, sir, the ape fades so gradually into the policeman, that I myself can never detect the shade. The monkey is only the policeman that may be. Perhaps a maiden lady on Clapham Common is only the policeman that might have been. I don’t mind being the policeman that might have been. I don’t mind being anything in German thought.”

“Are you in the police service?” said the old man, ignoring all Syme’s improvised and desperate raillery. “Are you a detective?”

Syme’s heart turned to stone, but his face never changed.

“Your suggestion is ridiculous,” he began. “Why on earth—”

The old man struck his palsied hand passionately on the rickety table, nearly breaking it.

“Did you hear me ask a plain question, you pattering spy?” he shrieked in a high, crazy voice. “Are you, or are you not, a police detective?”

“No!” answered Syme, like a man standing on the hangman’s drop.

“You swear it,” said the old man, leaning across to him, his dead face becoming as it were loathsomely alive. “You swear it! You swear it! If you swear falsely, will you be damned? Will you be sure that the devil dances at your funeral? Will you see that the nightmare sits on your grave? Will there really be no mistake? You are an anarchist, you are a dynamiter! Above all, you are not in any sense a detective? You are not in the British police?”

He leant his angular elbow far across the table, and put up his large loose hand like a flap to his ear.

“I am not in the British police,” said Syme with insane calm.

Professor de Worms fell back in his chair with a curious air of kindly collapse.

“That’s a pity,” he said, “because I am.”

Syme sprang up straight, sending back the bench behind him with a crash.

“Because you are what?” he said thickly. “You are what?”

“I am a policeman,” said the Professor with his first broad smile, and beaming through his spectacles. “But as you think policeman only a relative term, of course I have nothing to do with you. I am in the British police force; but as you tell me you are not in the British police force, I can only say that I met you in a dynamiters’ club. I suppose I ought to arrest you.” And with these words he laid on the table before Syme an exact facsimile of the blue card which Syme had in his own waistcoat pocket, the symbol of his power from the police.

Syme had for a flash the sensation that the cosmos had turned exactly upside down, that all trees were growing downwards and that all stars were under his feet. Then came slowly the opposite conviction. For the last twenty-four hours the cosmos had really been upside down, but now the capsized universe had come right side up again. This devil from whom he had been fleeing all day was only an elder brother of his own house, who on the other side of the table lay back and laughed at him. He did not for the moment ask any questions of detail; he only knew the happy and silly fact that this shadow, which had pursued him with an intolerable oppression of peril, was only the shadow of a friend trying to catch him up. He knew simultaneously that he was a fool and a free man. For with any recovery from morbidity there must go a certain healthy humiliation. There comes a certain point in such conditions when only three things are possible: first a perpetuation of Satanic pride, secondly tears, and third laughter. Syme's egotism held hard to the first course for a few seconds, and then suddenly adopted the third. Taking his own blue police ticket from his own waist coat pocket, he tossed it on to the table; then he flung his head back until his spike of yellow beard almost pointed at the ceiling, and shouted with a barbaric laughter.

Even in that close den, perpetually filled with the din of knives, plates, cans, clamorous voices, sudden struggles and stampedes, there was something Homeric in Syme's mirth which made many half-drunken men look round.

“What yer laughing at, guv'nor?” asked one wondering labourer from the docks.

“At myself,” answered Syme, and went off again into the agony of his ecstatic reaction.

“Pull yourself together,” said the Professor, “or you'll get hysterical. Have some more beer. I'll join you.”

“You haven't drunk your milk,” said Syme.

“My milk!” said the other, in tones of withering and unfathomable contempt, “my milk! Do you think I'd look at the beastly stuff when I'm out of sight of the bloody anarchists? We're all Christians in this room, though perhaps,” he added, glancing around at the reeling crowd, “not strict ones. Finish my milk? Great blazes! yes, I'll finish it right enough!” and he knocked the tumbler off the table, making a crash of glass and a splash of silver fluid.

Syme was staring at him with a happy curiosity.

"I understand now," he cried; "of course, you're not an old man at all."

"I can't take my face off here," replied Professor de Worms. "It's rather an elaborate make-up. As to whether I'm an old man, that's not for me to say. I was thirty-eight last birthday."

"Yes, but I mean," said Syme impatiently, "there's nothing the matter with you."

"Yes," answered the other dispassionately. "I am subject to colds."

Syme's laughter at all this had about it a wild weakness of relief. He laughed at the idea of the paralytic Professor being really a young actor dressed up as if for the foot-lights. But he felt that he would have laughed as loudly if a pepperpot had fallen over.

The false Professor drank and wiped his false beard.

"Did you know," he asked, "that that man Gogol was one of us?"

"I? No, I didn't know it," answered Syme in some surprise. "But didn't you?"

"I knew no more than the dead," replied the man who called himself de Worms. "I thought the President was talking about me, and I rattled in my boots."

"And I thought he was talking about me," said Syme, with his rather reckless laughter. "I had my hand on my revolver all the time."

"So had I," said the Professor grimly; "so had Gogol evidently."

Syme struck the table with an exclamation.

"Why, there were three of us there!" he cried. "Three out of seven is a fighting number. If we had only known that we were three!"

The face of Professor de Worms darkened, and he did not look up.

"We were three," he said. "If we had been three hundred we could still have done nothing."

"Not if we were three hundred against four?" asked Syme, jeering rather boisterously.

"No," said the Professor with sobriety, "not if we were three hundred against Sunday."

And the mere name struck Syme cold and serious; his laughter had died in his heart before it could die on his lips. The face of the unforgettable President sprang into his mind as startling as a coloured photograph, and he remarked this difference between Sunday and all his satellites, that their faces, however fierce or sinister, became gradually blurred by memory like other human faces, whereas Sunday's seemed almost to grow more actual during absence, as if a man's painted portrait should slowly come alive.

They were both silent for a measure of moments, and then Syme's speech came with a rush, like the sudden foaming of champagne.

"Professor," he cried, "it is intolerable. Are you afraid of this man?"

The Professor lifted his heavy lids, and gazed at Syme with large, wide-open, blue eyes of an almost ethereal honesty.

"Yes, I am," he said mildly. "So are you."

Syme was dumb for an instant. Then he rose to his feet erect, like an insulted man, and thrust the chair away from him.

"Yes," he said in a voice indescribable, "you are right. I am afraid of him. Therefore I swear by God that I will seek out this man whom I fear until I find him, and strike him on the mouth. If heaven were his throne and the earth his footstool, I swear that I would pull him down."

"How?" asked the staring Professor. "Why?"

"Because I am afraid of him," said Syme; "and no man should leave in the universe anything of which he is afraid."

De Worms blinked at him with a sort of blind wonder. He made an effort to speak, but Syme went on in a low voice, but with an undercurrent of inhuman exaltation —

"Who would condescend to strike down the mere things that he does not fear? Who would debase himself to be merely brave, like any common prizefighter? Who would stoop to be fearless — like a tree? Fight the thing that you fear. You remember the old tale of the English clergyman who gave the last rites to the brigand of Sicily, and how on his death-bed the great robber said, 'I can give you no money, but I can give you advice for a lifetime: your thumb on the blade, and strike upwards.' So I say to you, strike upwards, if you strike at the stars."

The other looked at the ceiling, one of the tricks of his pose.

"Sunday is a fixed star," he said.

"You shall see him a falling star," said Syme, and put on his hat.

The decision of his gesture drew the Professor vaguely to his feet.

"Have you any idea," he asked, with a sort of benevolent bewilderment, "exactly where you are going?"

"Yes," replied Syme shortly, "I am going to prevent this bomb being thrown in Paris."

"Have you any conception how?" inquired the other.

"No," said Syme with equal decision.

"You remember, of course," resumed the soi-disant de Worms, pulling his beard and looking out of the window, "that when we broke up rather hurriedly the whole arrangements for the atrocity were left in the private hands of the Marquis and Dr. Bull. The Marquis is by this time probably crossing the Channel. But where he will go and what he will do it is doubtful whether even the President knows; certainly we don't know. The only man who does know is Dr. Bull."

"Confound it!" cried Syme. "And we don't know where he is."

"Yes," said the other in his curious, absent-minded way, "I know where he is myself."

"Will you tell me?" asked Syme with eager eyes.

"I will take you there," said the Professor, and took down his own hat from a peg.

Syme stood looking at him with a sort of rigid excitement.

"What do you mean?" he asked sharply. "Will you join me? Will you take the risk?"

"Young man," said the Professor pleasantly, "I am amused to observe that you think I am a coward. As to that I will say only one word, and that shall be entirely in the manner of your own philosophical rhetoric. You think that it is possible to pull down the President. I know that it is impossible, and I am going to try it," and opening the tavern door, which let in a blast of bitter air, they went out together into the dark streets by the docks.

Most of the snow was melted or trampled to mud, but here and there a clot of it still showed grey rather than white in the gloom. The small streets were sloppy and full of pools, which reflected the flaming lamps irregularly, and by accident, like fragments of some other and fallen world. Syme felt almost dazed as he stepped through this growing confusion of lights and shadows; but his companion walked on with a certain briskness, towards where, at the end of the street, an inch or two of the lamplit river looked like a bar of flame.

"Where are you going?" Syme inquired.

“Just now,” answered the Professor, “I am going just round the corner to see whether Dr. Bull has gone to bed. He is hygienic, and retires early.”

“Dr. Bull!” exclaimed Syme. “Does he live round the corner?”

“No,” answered his friend. “As a matter of fact he lives some way off, on the other side of the river, but we can tell from here whether he has gone to bed.”

Turning the corner as he spoke, and facing the dim river, flecked with flame, he pointed with his stick to the other bank. On the Surrey side at this point there ran out into the Thames, seeming almost to overhang it, a bulk and cluster of those tall tenements, dotted with lighted windows, and rising like factory chimneys to an almost insane height. Their special poise and position made one block of buildings especially look like a Tower of Babel with a hundred eyes. Syme had never seen any of the sky-scraping buildings in America, so he could only think of the buildings in a dream.

Even as he stared, the highest light in this innumerably lighted turret abruptly went out, as if this black Argus had winked at him with one of his innumerable eyes.

Professor de Worms swung round on his heel, and struck his stick against his boot.

“We are too late,” he said, “the hygienic Doctor has gone to bed.”

“What do you mean?” asked Syme. “Does he live over there, then?”

“Yes,” said de Worms, “behind that particular window which you can’t see. Come along and get some dinner. We must call on him tomorrow morning.”

Without further parley, he led the way through several by-ways until they came out into the flare and clamour of the East India Dock Road. The Professor, who seemed to know his way about the neighbourhood, proceeded to a place where the line of lighted shops fell back into a sort of abrupt twilight and quiet, in which an old white inn, all out of repair, stood back some twenty feet from the road.

“You can find good English inns left by accident everywhere, like fossils,” explained the Professor. “I once found a decent place in the West End.”

“I suppose,” said Syme, smiling, “that this is the corresponding decent place in the East End?”

“It is,” said the Professor reverently, and went in.

In that place they dined and slept, both very thoroughly. The beans and bacon, which these unaccountable people cooked well, the astonishing emergence of Burgundy from their cellars, crowned Syme's sense of a new comradeship and comfort. Through all this ordeal his root horror had been isolation, and there are no words to express the abyss between isolation and having one ally. It may be conceded to the mathematicians that four is twice two. But two is not twice one; two is two thousand times one. That is why, in spite of a hundred disadvantages, the world will always return to monogamy.

Syme was able to pour out for the first time the whole of his outrageous tale, from the time when Gregory had taken him to the little tavern by the river. He did it idly and amply, in a luxuriant monologue, as a man speaks with very old friends. On his side, also, the man who had impersonated Professor de Worms was not less communicative. His own story was almost as silly as Syme's.

"That's a good get-up of yours," said Syme, draining a glass of Macon; "a lot better than old Gogol's. Even at the start I thought he was a bit too hairy."

"A difference of artistic theory," replied the Professor pensively. "Gogol was an idealist. He made up as the abstract or platonic ideal of an anarchist. But I am a realist. I am a portrait painter. But, indeed, to say that I am a portrait painter is an inadequate expression. I am a portrait."

"I don't understand you," said Syme.

"I am a portrait," repeated the Professor. "I am a portrait of the celebrated Professor de Worms, who is, I believe, in Naples."

"You mean you are made up like him," said Syme. "But doesn't he know that you are taking his nose in vain?"

"He knows it right enough," replied his friend cheerfully.

"Then why doesn't he denounce you?"

"I have denounced him," answered the Professor.

"Do explain yourself," said Syme.

"With pleasure, if you don't mind hearing my story," replied the eminent foreign philosopher. "I am by profession an actor, and my name is Wilks. When I was on the stage I mixed with all sorts of Bohemian and blackguard company. Sometimes I touched the edge of the turf, sometimes the riff-raff of the arts, and occasionally the political refugee. In some den of exiled dreamers I was introduced to the great German Nihilist philosopher, Professor de Worms. I did not gather much about him beyond his appearance, which was very disgusting, and which I studied carefully. I understood that he had proved that the destructive principle in the universe was God; hence he insisted on the need for a furious and incessant energy, rending all things in pieces. Energy, he said, was the All. He was lame, shortsighted, and partially paralytic. When I met him I was in a frivolous mood, and I disliked him so much that I resolved to imitate him. If I had been a draughtsman I would have drawn a caricature. I was only an actor, I could only act a caricature. I made myself up into what was meant for a wild exaggeration of the old Professor's dirty old self. When I went into the room full of his supporters I expected to be received with a roar of laughter, or (if they were too far gone) with a roar of indignation at the insult. I cannot describe the surprise I felt when my entrance was received with a respectful silence, followed (when I had first opened my lips) with a murmur of admiration. The curse of the perfect artist had fallen upon me. I had been too subtle, I had been too true. They thought I really was the great Nihilist Professor. I was a healthy-minded young man at the time, and I confess that it was a blow. Before I could fully recover, however, two or three of these admirers ran up to me radiating indignation, and told me that a public insult had been put upon me in the next room. I inquired its nature. It seemed that an impertinent fellow had dressed himself up as a preposterous parody of myself. I had drunk more champagne than was good for me, and in a flash of folly I decided to see the situation through. Consequently it was to meet the glare of the company and my own lifted eyebrows and freezing eyes that the real Professor came into the room.

"I need hardly say there was a collision. The pessimists all round me looked anxiously from one Professor to the other Professor to see which was really the more feeble. But I won. An old man in poor health, like my rival, could not be expected to be so impressively feeble as a young actor in the prime of life. You see, he really had paralysis, and working within this definite limitation, he couldn't be so jolly paralytic as I was. Then he tried to blast my claims intellectually. I countered that by a very simple dodge. Whenever he said something that nobody but he could understand, I replied with something which I could not even understand myself. 'I don't fancy,' he said, 'that you could have worked out the principle that evolution is only negation, since there inheres in it the introduction of lacuna, which are an essential of differentiation.' I replied quite scornfully, 'You read all that up in Pinckwerts; the notion that involution functioned eugenically was exposed long ago by Glumpe.’ It is unnecessary for me to say that there never were such people as Pinckwerts and Glumpe. But the people all round (rather to my surprise) seemed to remember them quite well, and the Professor, finding that the learned and mysterious method left him rather at the mercy of an enemy slightly deficient in scruples, fell back upon a more popular form of wit. ‘I see,’ he sneered, ‘you prevail like the false pig in Aesop.’ ‘And you fail,’ I answered, smiling, ‘like the hedgehog in Montaigne.’ Need I say that there is no hedgehog in Montaigne? ‘Your claptrap comes off,’ he said; ‘so would your beard.’ I had no intelligent answer to this, which was quite true and rather witty. But I laughed heartily, answered, ‘Like the Pantheist’s boots,’ at random, and turned on my heel with all the honours of victory. The real Professor was thrown out, but not with violence, though one man tried very patiently to pull off his nose. He is now, I believe, received everywhere in Europe as a delightful impostor. His apparent earnestness and anger, you see, make him all the more entertaining.”

“Well,” said Syme, “I can understand your putting on his dirty old beard for a night’s practical joke, but I don’t understand your never taking it off again.”

“That is the rest of the story,” said the impersonator. “When I myself left the company, followed by reverent applause, I went limping down the dark street, hoping that I should soon be far enough away to be able to walk like a human being. To my astonishment, as I was turning the corner, I felt a touch on the shoulder, and turning, found myself under the shadow of an enormous policeman. He told me I was wanted. I struck a sort of paralytic attitude, and cried in a high German accent, ‘Yes, I am wanted — by the oppressed of the world. You are arresting me on the charge of being the great anarchist, Professor de Worms.’ The policeman impassively consulted a paper in his hand, ‘No, sir,’ he said civilly, ‘at least, not exactly, sir. I am arresting you on the charge of not being the celebrated anarchist, Professor de Worms.’ This charge, if it was criminal at all, was certainly the lighter of the two, and I went along with the man, doubtful, but not greatly dismayed. I was shown into a number of rooms, and eventually into the presence of a police officer, who explained that a serious campaign had been opened against the centres of anarchy, and that this, my successful masquerade, might be of considerable value to the public safety. He offered me a good salary and this little blue card. Though our conversation was short, he struck me as a man of very massive common sense and humour; but I cannot tell you much about him personally, because—"

Syme laid down his knife and fork.

"I know," he said, "because you talked to him in a dark room."

Professor de Worms nodded and drained his glass.

CHAPTER IX. THE MAN IN SPECTACLES

“BURGUNDY is a jolly thing,” said the Professor sadly, as he set his glass down.

“You don’t look as if it were,” said Syme; “you drink it as if it were medicine.”

“You must excuse my manner,” said the Professor dismally, “my position is rather a curious one. Inside I am really bursting with boyish merriment; but I acted the paralytic Professor so well, that now I can’t leave off. So that when I am among friends, and have no need at all to disguise myself, I still can’t help speaking slow and wrinkling my forehead — just as if it were my forehead. I can be quite happy, you understand, but only in a paralytic sort of way. The most buoyant exclamations leap up in my heart, but they come out of my mouth quite different. You should hear me say, ‘Buck up, old cock!’ It would bring tears to your eyes.”

“It does,” said Syme; “but I cannot help thinking that apart from all that you are really a bit worried.”

The Professor started a little and looked at him steadily.

“You are a very clever fellow,” he said, “it is a pleasure to work with you. Yes, I have rather a heavy cloud in my head. There is a great problem to face,” and he sank his bald brow in his two hands.

Then he said in a low voice —

“Can you play the piano?”

“Yes,” said Syme in simple wonder, “I’m supposed to have a good touch.”

Then, as the other did not speak, he added —

“I trust the great cloud is lifted.”

After a long silence, the Professor said out of the cavernous shadow of his hands —

“It would have done just as well if you could work a typewriter.”

“Thank you,” said Syme, “you flatter me.”

“Listen to me,” said the other, “and remember whom we have to see tomorrow. You and I are going tomorrow to attempt something which is very much more dangerous than trying to steal the Crown Jewels out of the Tower. We are trying to steal a secret from a very sharp, very strong, and very wicked man. I believe there is no man, except the President, of course, who is so seriously startling and formidable as that little grinning fellow in goggles. He has not perhaps the white-hot enthusiasm unto death, the mad martyrdom for anarchy, which marks the Secretary. But then that very fanaticism in the Secretary has a human pathos, and is almost a redeeming trait. But the little Doctor has a brutal sanity that is more shocking than the Secretary's disease. Don't you notice his detestable virility and vitality. He bounces like an india-rubber ball. Depend on it, Sunday was not asleep (I wonder if he ever sleeps?) when he locked up all the plans of this outrage in the round, black head of Dr. Bull."

"And you think," said Syme, "that this unique monster will be soothed if I play the piano to him?"

"Don't be an ass," said his mentor. "I mentioned the piano because it gives one quick and independent fingers. Syme, if we are to go through this interview and come out sane or alive, we must have some code of signals between us that this brute will not see. I have made a rough alphabetical cypher corresponding to the five fingers — like this, see," and he rippled with his fingers on the wooden table— "B A D, bad, a word we may frequently require."

Syme poured himself out another glass of wine, and began to study the scheme. He was abnormally quick with his brains at puzzles, and with his hands at conjuring, and it did not take him long to learn how he might convey simple messages by what would seem to be idle taps upon a table or knee. But wine and companionship had always the effect of inspiring him to a farcical ingenuity, and the Professor soon found himself struggling with the too vast energy of the new language, as it passed through the heated brain of Syme.

"We must have several word-signs," said Syme seriously— "words that we are likely to want, fine shades of meaning. My favourite word is 'coeval'. What's yours?"

"Do stop playing the goat," said the Professor plaintively. "You don't know how serious this is."

"'Lush' too," said Syme, shaking his head sagaciously, "we must have 'lush' — word applied to grass, don't you know?"

"Do you imagine," asked the Professor furiously, "that we are going to talk to Dr. Bull about grass?"

"There are several ways in which the subject could be approached," said Syme reflectively, "and the word introduced without appearing forced. We might say, ‘Dr. Bull, as a revolutionist, you remember that a tyrant once advised us to eat grass; and indeed many of us, looking on the fresh lush grass of summer...’”

“Do you understand,” said the other, “that this is a tragedy?”

“Perfectly,” replied Syme; “always be comic in a tragedy. What the deuce else can you do? I wish this language of yours had a wider scope. I suppose we could not extend it from the fingers to the toes? That would involve pulling off our boots and socks during the conversation, which however unobtrusively performed—”

“Syme,” said his friend with a stern simplicity, “go to bed!”

Syme, however, sat up in bed for a considerable time mastering the new code. He was awakened next morning while the east was still sealed with darkness, and found his grey-bearded ally standing like a ghost beside his bed.

Syme sat up in bed blinking; then slowly collected his thoughts, threw off the bed-clothes, and stood up. It seemed to him in some curious way that all the safety and sociability of the night before fell with the bedclothes off him, and he stood up in an air of cold danger. He still felt an entire trust and loyalty towards his companion; but it was the trust between two men going to the scaffold.

“Well,” said Syme with a forced cheerfulness as he pulled on his trousers, “I dreamt of that alphabet of yours. Did it take you long to make it up?”

The Professor made no answer, but gazed in front of him with eyes the colour of a wintry sea; so Syme repeated his question.

“I say, did it take you long to invent all this? I’m considered good at these things, and it was a good hour’s grind. Did you learn it all on the spot?”

The Professor was silent; his eyes were wide open, and he wore a fixed but very small smile.

“How long did it take you?”

The Professor did not move.

“Confound you, can’t you answer?” called out Syme, in a sudden anger that had something like fear underneath. Whether or no the Professor could answer, he did not.

Syme stood staring back at the stiff face like parchment and the blank, blue eyes. His first thought was that the Professor had gone mad, but his second thought was more frightful. After all, what did he know about this queer creature whom he had heedlessly accepted as a friend? What did he know, except that the man had been at the anarchist breakfast and had told him a ridiculous tale? How improbable it was that there should be another friend there beside Gogol! Was this man's silence a sensational way of declaring war? Was this adamantine stare after all only the awful sneer of some threefold traitor, who had turned for the last time? He stood and strained his ears in this heartless silence. He almost fancied he could hear dynamiters come to capture him shifting softly in the corridor outside.

Then his eye strayed downwards, and he burst out laughing. Though the Professor himself stood there as voiceless as a statue, his five dumb fingers were dancing alive upon the dead table. Syme watched the twinkling movements of the talking hand, and read clearly the message —

"I will only talk like this. We must get used to it."

He rapped out the answer with the impatience of relief —

"All right. Let's get out to breakfast."

They took their hats and sticks in silence; but as Syme took his sword-stick, he held it hard.

They paused for a few minutes only to stuff down coffee and coarse thick sandwiches at a coffee stall, and then made their way across the river, which under the grey and growing light looked as desolate as Acheron. They reached the bottom of the huge block of buildings which they had seen from across the river, and began in silence to mount the naked and numberless stone steps, only pausing now and then to make short remarks on the rail of the banisters. At about every other flight they passed a window; each window showed them a pale and tragic dawn lifting itself laboriously over London. From each the innumerable roofs of slate looked like the leaden surges of a grey, troubled sea after rain. Syme was increasingly conscious that his new adventure had somehow a quality of cold sanity worse than the wild adventures of the past. Last night, for instance, the tall tenements had seemed to him like a tower in a dream. As he now went up the weary and perpetual steps, he was daunted and bewildered by their almost infinite series. But it was not the hot horror of a dream or of anything that might be exaggeration or delusion. Their infinity was more like the empty infinity of arithmetic, something unthinkable, yet necessary to thought. Or it was like the stunning statements of astronomy about the distance of the fixed stars. He was ascending the house of reason, a thing more hideous than unreason itself.

By the time they reached Dr. Bull's landing, a last window showed them a harsh, white dawn edged with banks of a kind of coarse red, more like red clay than red cloud. And when they entered Dr. Bull's bare garret it was full of light.

Syme had been haunted by a half historic memory in connection with these empty rooms and that austere daybreak. The moment he saw the garret and Dr. Bull sitting writing at a table, he remembered what the memory was — the French Revolution. There should have been the black outline of a guillotine against that heavy red and white of the morning. Dr. Bull was in his white shirt and black breeches only; his cropped, dark head might well have just come out of its wig; he might have been Marat or a more slipshod Robespierre.

Yet when he was seen properly, the French fancy fell away. The Jacobins were idealists; there was about this man a murderous materialism. His position gave him a somewhat new appearance. The strong, white light of morning coming from one side creating sharp shadows, made him seem both more pale and more angular than he had looked at the breakfast on the balcony. Thus the two black glasses that encased his eyes might really have been black cavities in his skull, making him look like a death's-head. And, indeed, if ever Death himself sat writing at a wooden table, it might have been he.

He looked up and smiled brightly enough as the men came in, and rose with the resilient rapidity of which the Professor had spoken. He set chairs for both of them, and going to a peg behind the door, proceeded to put on a coat and waistcoat of rough, dark tweed; he buttoned it up neatly, and came back to sit down at his table.

The quiet good humour of his manner left his two opponents helpless. It was with some momentary difficulty that the Professor broke silence and began, "I'm sorry to disturb you so early, comrade," said he, with a careful resumption of the slow de Worms manner. "You have no doubt made all the arrangements for the Paris affair?" Then he added with infinite slowness, "We have information which renders intolerable anything in the nature of a moment's delay."

Dr. Bull smiled again, but continued to gaze on them without speaking. The Professor resumed, a pause before each weary word —

"Please do not think me excessively abrupt; but I advise you to alter those plans, or if it is too late for that, to follow your agent with all the support you can get for him. Comrade Syme and I have had an experience which it would take more time to recount than we can afford, if we are to act on it. I will, however, relate the occurrence in detail, even at the risk of losing time, if you really feel that it is essential to the understanding of the problem we have to discuss."

He was spinning out his sentences, making them intolerably long and lingering, in the hope of maddening the practical little Doctor into an explosion of impatience which might show his hand. But the little Doctor continued only to stare and smile, and the monologue was uphill work. Syme began to feel a new sickness and despair. The Doctor's smile and silence were not at all like the cataleptic stare and horrible silence which he had confronted in the Professor half an hour before. About the Professor's makeup and all his antics there was always something merely grotesque, like a gollywog. Syme remembered those wild woes of yesterday as one remembers being afraid of Bogy in childhood. But here was daylight; here was a healthy, square-shouldered man in tweeds, not odd save for the accident of his ugly spectacles, not glaring or grinning at all, but smiling steadily and not saying a word. The whole had a sense of unbearable reality. Under the increasing sunlight the colours of the Doctor's complexion, the pattern of his tweeds, grew and expanded outrageously, as such things grow too important in a realistic novel. But his smile was quite slight, the pose of his head polite; the only uncanny thing was his silence.

"As I say," resumed the Professor, like a man toiling through heavy sand, "the incident that has occurred to us and has led us to ask for information about the Marquis, is one which you may think it better to have narrated; but as it came in the way of Comrade Syme rather than me—"

His words he seemed to be dragging out like words in an anthem; but Syme, who was watching, saw his long fingers rattle quickly on the edge of the crazy table. He read the message, "You must go on. This devil has sucked me dry!"

Syme plunged into the breach with that bravado of improvisation which always came to him when he was alarmed.

"Yes, the thing really happened to me," he said hastily. "I had the good fortune to fall into conversation with a detective who took me, thanks to my hat, for a respectable person. Wishing to clinch my reputation for respectability, I took him and made him very drunk at the Savoy. Under this influence he became friendly, and told me in so many words that within a day or two they hope to arrest the Marquis in France.

"So unless you or I can get on his track—"

The Doctor was still smiling in the most friendly way, and his protected eyes were still impenetrable. The Professor signalled to Syme that he would resume his explanation, and he began again with the same elaborate calm.

"Syme immediately brought this information to me, and we came here together to see what use you would be inclined to make of it. It seems to me unquestionably urgent that—"

All this time Syme had been staring at the Doctor almost as steadily as the Doctor stared at the Professor, but quite without the smile. The nerves of both comrades-in-arms were near snapping under that strain of motionless amiability, when Syme suddenly leant forward and idly tapped the edge of the table. His message to his ally ran, "I have an intuition."

The Professor, with scarcely a pause in his monologue, signalled back, "Then sit on it."

Syme telegraphed, "It is quite extraordinary."

The other answered, "Extraordinary rot!"

Syme said, "I am a poet."

The other retorted, "You are a dead man."

Syme had gone quite red up to his yellow hair, and his eyes were burning feverishly. As he said he had an intuition, and it had risen to a sort of lightheaded certainty. Resuming his symbolic taps, he signalled to his friend, "You scarcely realise how poetic my intuition is. It has that sudden quality we sometimes feel in the coming of spring."

He then studied the answer on his friend's fingers. The answer was, "Go to hell!"

The Professor then resumed his merely verbal monologue addressed to the Doctor.

"Perhaps I should rather say," said Syme on his fingers, "that it resembles that sudden smell of the sea which may be found in the heart of lush woods."

His companion disdained to reply.

"Or yet again," tapped Syme, "it is positive, as is the passionate red hair of a beautiful woman."

The Professor was continuing his speech, but in the middle of it Syme decided to act. He leant across the table, and said in a voice that could not be neglected —

“Dr. Bull!”

The Doctor’s sleek and smiling head did not move, but they could have sworn that under his dark glasses his eyes darted towards Syme.

“Dr. Bull,” said Syme, in a voice peculiarly precise and courteous, “would you do me a small favour? Would you be so kind as to take off your spectacles?”

The Professor swung round on his seat, and stared at Syme with a sort of frozen fury of astonishment. Syme, like a man who has thrown his life and fortune on the table, leaned forward with a fiery face. The Doctor did not move.

For a few seconds there was a silence in which one could hear a pin drop, split once by the single hoot of a distant steamer on the Thames. Then Dr. Bull rose slowly, still smiling, and took off his spectacles.

Syme sprang to his feet, stepping backwards a little, like a chemical lecturer from a successful explosion. His eyes were like stars, and for an instant he could only point without speaking.

The Professor had also started to his feet, forgetful of his supposed paralysis. He leant on the back of the chair and stared doubtfully at Dr. Bull, as if the Doctor had been turned into a toad before his eyes. And indeed it was almost as great a transformation scene.

The two detectives saw sitting in the chair before them a very boyish-looking young man, with very frank and happy hazel eyes, an open expression, cockney clothes like those of a city clerk, and an unquestionable breath about him of being very good and rather commonplace. The smile was still there, but it might have been the first smile of a baby.

“I knew I was a poet,” cried Syme in a sort of ecstasy. “I knew my intuition was as infallible as the Pope. It was the spectacles that did it! It was all the spectacles. Given those beastly black eyes, and all the rest of him his health and his jolly looks, made him a live devil among dead ones.”

“It certainly does make a queer difference,” said the Professor shakily. “But as regards the project of Dr. Bull—”

“Project be damned!” roared Syme, beside himself. “Look at him! Look at his face, look at his collar, look at his blessed boots! You don’t suppose, do you, that that thing’s an anarchist?”

"Syme!" cried the other in an apprehensive agony.

"Why, by God," said Syme, "I'll take the risk of that myself! Dr. Bull, I am a police officer. There's my card," and he flung down the blue card upon the table.

The Professor still feared that all was lost; but he was loyal. He pulled out his own official card and put it beside his friend's. Then the third man burst out laughing, and for the first time that morning they heard his voice.

"I'm awfully glad you chaps have come so early," he said, with a sort of schoolboy flippancy, "for we can all start for France together. Yes, I'm in the force right enough," and he flicked a blue card towards them lightly as a matter of form.

Clapping a brisk bowler on his head and resuming his goblin glasses, the Doctor moved so quickly towards the door, that the others instinctively followed him. Syme seemed a little distrait, and as he passed under the doorway he suddenly struck his stick on the stone passage so that it rang.

"But Lord God Almighty," he cried out, "if this is all right, there were more damned detectives than there were damned dynamiters at the damned Council!"

"We might have fought easily," said Bull; "we were four against three."

The Professor was descending the stairs, but his voice came up from below.

"No," said the voice, "we were not four against three — we were not so lucky. We were four against One."

The others went down the stairs in silence.

The young man called Bull, with an innocent courtesy characteristic of him, insisted on going last until they reached the street; but there his own robust rapidity asserted itself unconsciously, and he walked quickly on ahead towards a railway inquiry office, talking to the others over his shoulder.

"It is jolly to get some pals," he said. "I've been half dead with the jumps, being quite alone. I nearly flung my arms round Gogol and embraced him, which would have been imprudent. I hope you won't despise me for having been in a blue funk."

"All the blue devils in blue hell," said Syme, "contributed to my blue funk! But the worst devil was you and your infernal goggles."

The young man laughed delightedly.

“Wasn’t it a rag?” he said. “Such a simple idea — not my own. I haven’t got the brains. You see, I wanted to go into the detective service, especially the anti-dynamite business. But for that purpose they wanted someone to dress up as a dynamiter; and they all swore by blazes that I could never look like a dynamiter. They said my very walk was respectable, and that seen from behind I looked like the British Constitution. They said I looked too healthy and too optimistic, and too reliable and benevolent; they called me all sorts of names at Scotland Yard. They said that if I had been a criminal, I might have made my fortune by looking so like an honest man; but as I had the misfortune to be an honest man, there was not even the remotest chance of my assisting them by ever looking like a criminal. But at last I was brought before some old josser who was high up in the force, and who seemed to have no end of a head on his shoulders. And there the others all talked hopelessly. One asked whether a bushy beard would hide my nice smile; another said that if they blacked my face I might look like a negro anarchist; but this old chap chipped in with a most extraordinary remark. ‘A pair of smoked spectacles will do it,’ he said positively. ‘Look at him now; he looks like an angelic office boy. Put him on a pair of smoked spectacles, and children will scream at the sight of him.’ And so it was, by George! When once my eyes were covered, all the rest, smile and big shoulders and short hair, made me look a perfect little devil. As I say, it was simple enough when it was done, like miracles; but that wasn’t the really miraculous part of it. There was one really staggering thing about the business, and my head still turns at it.”

“What was that?” asked Syme.

“I’ll tell you,” answered the man in spectacles. “This big pot in the police who sized me up so that he knew how the goggles would go with my hair and socks — by God, he never saw me at all!”

Syme’s eyes suddenly flashed on him.

“How was that?” he asked. “I thought you talked to him.”

“So I did,” said Bull brightly; “but we talked in a pitch-dark room like a coalcellar. There, you would never have guessed that.”

“I could not have conceived it,” said Syme gravely.

“It is indeed a new idea,” said the Professor.

Their new ally was in practical matters a whirlwind. At the inquiry office he asked with businesslike brevity about the trains for Dover. Having got his information, he bundled the company into a cab, and put them and himself inside a railway carriage before they had properly realised the breathless process. They were already on the Calais boat before conversation flowed freely.

“I had already arranged,” he explained, “to go to France for my lunch; but I am delighted to have someone to lunch with me. You see, I had to send that beast, the Marquis, over with his bomb, because the President had his eye on me, though God knows how. I’ll tell you the story some day. It was perfectly choking. Whenever I tried to slip out of it I saw the President somewhere, smiling out of the bow-window of a club, or taking off his hat to me from the top of an omnibus. I tell you, you can say what you like, that fellow sold himself to the devil; he can be in six places at once.”

“So you sent the Marquis off, I understand,” asked the Professor. “Was it long ago? Shall we be in time to catch him?”

“Yes,” answered the new guide, “I’ve timed it all. He’ll still be at Calais when we arrive.”

“But when we do catch him at Calais,” said the Professor, “what are we going to do?”

At this question the countenance of Dr. Bull fell for the first time. He reflected a little, and then said —

“Theoretically, I suppose, we ought to call the police.”

“Not I,” said Syme. “Theoretically I ought to drown myself first. I promised a poor fellow, who was a real modern pessimist, on my word of honour not to tell the police. I’m no hand at casuistry, but I can’t break my word to a modern pessimist. It’s like breaking one’s word to a child.”

“I’m in the same boat,” said the Professor. “I tried to tell the police and I couldn’t, because of some silly oath I took. You see, when I was an actor I was a sort of all-round beast. Perjury or treason is the only crime I haven’t committed. If I did that I shouldn’t know the difference between right and wrong.”

“I’ve been through all that,” said Dr. Bull, “and I’ve made up my mind. I gave my promise to the Secretary — you know him, man who smiles upside down. My friends, that man is the most utterly unhappy man that was ever human. It may be his digestion, or his conscience, or his nerves, or his philosophy of the universe, but he’s damned, he’s in hell! Well, I can’t turn on a man like that, and hunt him down. It’s like whipping a leper. I may be mad, but that’s how I feel; and there’s jolly well the end of it.”

“I don’t think you’re mad,” said Syme. “I knew you would decide like that when first you—”

“Eh?” said Dr. Bull.

“When first you took off your spectacles.”

Dr. Bull smiled a little, and strolled across the deck to look at the sunlit sea. Then he strolled back again, kicking his heels carelessly, and a companionable silence fell between the three men.

“Well,” said Syme, “it seems that we have all the same kind of morality or immorality, so we had better face the fact that comes of it.”

“Yes,” assented the Professor, “you’re quite right; and we must hurry up, for I can see the Grey Nose standing out from France.”

“The fact that comes of it,” said Syme seriously, “is this, that we three are alone on this planet. Gogol has gone, God knows where; perhaps the President has smashed him like a fly. On the Council we are three men against three, like the Romans who held the bridge. But we are worse off than that, first because they can appeal to their organization and we cannot appeal to ours, and second because—”

“Because one of those other three men,” said the Professor, “is not a man.”

Syme nodded and was silent for a second or two, then he said —

“My idea is this. We must do something to keep the Marquis in Calais till tomorrow midday. I have turned over twenty schemes in my head. We cannot denounce him as a dynamiter; that is agreed. We cannot get him detained on some trivial charge, for we should have to appear; he knows us, and he would smell a rat. We cannot pretend to keep him on anarchist business; he might swallow much in that way, but not the notion of stopping in Calais while the Czar went safely through Paris. We might try to kidnap him, and lock him up ourselves; but he is a well-known man here. He has a whole bodyguard of friends; he is very strong and brave, and the event is doubtful. The only thing I can see to do is actually to take advantage of the very things that are in the Marquis’s favour. I am going to profit by the fact that he is a highly respected nobleman. I am going to profit by the fact that he has many friends and moves in the best society.”

“What the devil are you talking about?” asked the Professor.

“The Symes are first mentioned in the fourteenth century,” said Syme; “but there is a tradition that one of them rode behind Bruce at Bannockburn. Since 1350 the tree is quite clear.”

"He's gone off his head," said the little Doctor, staring.

"Our bearings," continued Syme calmly, "are 'argent a chevron gules charged with three cross crosslets of the field.' The motto varies."

The Professor seized Syme roughly by the waistcoat.

"We are just inshore," he said. "Are you seasick or joking in the wrong place?"

"My remarks are almost painfully practical," answered Syme, in an unhurried manner. "The house of St. Eustache also is very ancient. The Marquis cannot deny that he is a gentleman. He cannot deny that I am a gentleman. And in order to put the matter of my social position quite beyond a doubt, I propose at the earliest opportunity to knock his hat off. But here we are in the harbour."

They went on shore under the strong sun in a sort of daze. Syme, who had now taken the lead as Bull had taken it in London, led them along a kind of marine parade until he came to some cafes, embowered in a bulk of greenery and overlooking the sea. As he went before them his step was slightly swaggering, and he swung his stick like a sword. He was making apparently for the extreme end of the line of cafes, but he stopped abruptly. With a sharp gesture he motioned them to silence, but he pointed with one gloved finger to a cafe table under a bank of flowering foliage at which sat the Marquis de St. Eustache, his teeth shining in his thick, black beard, and his bold, brown face shadowed by a light yellow straw hat and outlined against the violet sea.

CHAPTER X. THE DUEL

SYME sat down at a cafe table with his companions, his blue eyes sparkling like the bright sea below, and ordered a bottle of Saumur with a pleased impatience. He was for some reason in a condition of curious hilarity. His spirits were already unnaturally high; they rose as the Saumur sank, and in half an hour his talk was a torrent of nonsense. He professed to be making out a plan of the conversation which was going to ensue between himself and the deadly Marquis. He jotted it down wildly with a pencil. It was arranged like a printed catechism, with questions and answers, and was delivered with an extraordinary rapidity of utterance.

“I shall approach. Before taking off his hat, I shall take off my own. I shall say, ‘The Marquis de Saint Eustache, I believe.’ He will say, ‘The celebrated Mr. Syme, I presume.’ He will say in the most exquisite French, ‘How are you?’ I shall reply in the most exquisite Cockney, ‘Oh, just the Syme—’”

“Oh, shut it,” said the man in spectacles. “Pull yourself together, and chuck away that bit of paper. What are you really going to do?”

“But it was a lovely catechism,” said Syme pathetically. “Do let me read it you. It has only forty-three questions and answers, and some of the Marquis’s answers are wonderfully witty. I like to be just to my enemy.”

“But what’s the good of it all?” asked Dr. Bull in exasperation.

“It leads up to my challenge, don’t you see,” said Syme, beaming. “When the Marquis has given the thirty-ninth reply, which runs—”

“Has it by any chance occurred to you,” asked the Professor, with a ponderous simplicity, “that the Marquis may not say all the forty-three things you have put down for him? In that case, I understand, your own epigrams may appear somewhat more forced.”

Syme struck the table with a radiant face.

“Why, how true that is,” he said, “and I never thought of it. Sir, you have an intellect beyond the common. You will make a name.”

“Oh, you’re as drunk as an owl!” said the Doctor.

“It only remains,” continued Syme quite unperturbed, “to adopt some other method of breaking the ice (if I may so express it) between myself and the man I wish to kill. And since the course of a dialogue cannot be predicted by one of its parties alone (as you have pointed out with such recondite acumen), the only thing to be done, I suppose, is for the one party, as far as possible, to do all the dialogue by himself. And so I will, by George!" And he stood up suddenly, his yellow hair blowing in the slight sea breeze.

A band was playing in a cafe chantant hidden somewhere among the trees, and a woman had just stopped singing. On Syme's heated head the bray of the brass band seemed like the jar and jingle of that barrel-organ in Leicester Square, to the tune of which he had once stood up to die. He looked across to the little table where the Marquis sat. The man had two companions now, solemn Frenchmen in frock-coats and silk hats, one of them with the red rosette of the Legion of Honour, evidently people of a solid social position. Besides these black, cylindrical costumes, the Marquis, in his loose straw hat and light spring clothes, looked Bohemian and even barbaric; but he looked the Marquis. Indeed, one might say that he looked the king, with his animal elegance, his scornful eyes, and his proud head lifted against the purple sea. But he was no Christian king, at any rate; he was, rather, some swarthy despot, half Greek, half Asiatic, who in the days when slavery seemed natural looked down on the Mediterranean, on his galley and his groaning slaves. Just so, Syme thought, would the brown-gold face of such a tyrant have shown against the dark green olives and the burning blue.

"Are you going to address the meeting?" asked the Professor peevishly, seeing that Syme still stood up without moving.

Syme drained his last glass of sparkling wine.

"I am," he said, pointing across to the Marquis and his companions, "that meeting. That meeting displeases me. I am going to pull that meeting's great ugly, mahogany-coloured nose."

He stepped across swiftly, if not quite steadily. The Marquis, seeing him, arched his black Assyrian eyebrows in surprise, but smiled politely.

"You are Mr. Syme, I think," he said.

Syme bowed.

"And you are the Marquis de Saint Eustache," he said gracefully. "Permit me to pull your nose."

He leant over to do so, but the Marquis started backwards, upsetting his chair, and the two men in top hats held Syme back by the shoulders.

"This man has insulted me!" said Syme, with gestures of explanation.

"Insulted you?" cried the gentleman with the red rosette, "when?"

“Oh, just now,” said Syme recklessly. “He insulted my mother.”

“Insulted your mother!” exclaimed the gentleman incredulously.

“Well, anyhow,” said Syme, conceding a point, “my aunt.”

“But how can the Marquis have insulted your aunt just now?” said the second gentleman with some legitimate wonder. “He has been sitting here all the time.”

“Ah, it was what he said!” said Syme darkly.

“I said nothing at all,” said the Marquis, “except something about the band. I only said that I liked Wagner played well.”

“It was an allusion to my family,” said Syme firmly. “My aunt played Wagner badly. It was a painful subject. We are always being insulted about it.”

“This seems most extraordinary,” said the gentleman who was decore, looking doubtfully at the Marquis.

“Oh, I assure you,” said Syme earnestly, “the whole of your conversation was simply packed with sinister allusions to my aunt’s weaknesses.”

“This is nonsense!” said the second gentleman. “I for one have said nothing for half an hour except that I liked the singing of that girl with black hair.”

“Well, there you are again!” said Syme indignantly. “My aunt’s was red.”

“It seems to me,” said the other, “that you are simply seeking a pretext to insult the Marquis.”

“By George!” said Syme, facing round and looking at him, “what a clever chap you are!”

The Marquis started up with eyes flaming like a tiger’s.

“Seeking a quarrel with me!” he cried. “Seeking a fight with me! By God! there was never a man who had to seek long. These gentlemen will perhaps act for me. There are still four hours of daylight. Let us fight this evening.”

Syme bowed with a quite beautiful graciousness.

“Marquis,” he said, “your action is worthy of your fame and blood. Permit me to consult for a moment with the gentlemen in whose hands I shall place myself.”

In three long strides he rejoined his companions, and they, who had seen his champagne-inspired attack and listened to his idiotic explanations, were quite startled at the look of him. For now that he came back to them he was quite sober, a little pale, and he spoke in a low voice of passionate practicality.

“I have done it,” he said hoarsely. “I have fixed a fight on the beast. But look here, and listen carefully. There is no time for talk. You are my seconds, and everything must come from you. Now you must insist, and insist absolutely, on the duel coming off after seven tomorrow, so as to give me the chance of preventing him from catching the 7.45 for Paris. If he misses that he misses his crime. He can’t refuse to meet you on such a small point of time and place. But this is what he will do. He will choose a field somewhere near a wayside station, where he can pick up the train. He is a very good swordsman, and he will trust to killing me in time to catch it. But I can fence well too, and I think I can keep him in play, at any rate, until the train is lost. Then perhaps he may kill me to console his feelings. You understand? Very well then, let me introduce you to some charming friends of mine,” and leading them quickly across the parade, he presented them to the Marquis’s seconds by two very aristocratic names of which they had not previously heard.

Syme was subject to spasms of singular common sense, not otherwise a part of his character. They were (as he said of his impulse about the spectacles) poetic intuitions, and they sometimes rose to the exaltation of prophecy.

He had correctly calculated in this case the policy of his opponent. When the Marquis was informed by his seconds that Syme could only fight in the morning, he must fully have realised that an obstacle had suddenly arisen between him and his bomb-throwing business in the capital. Naturally he could not explain this objection to his friends, so he chose the course which Syme had predicted. He induced his seconds to settle on a small meadow not far from the railway, and he trusted to the fatality of the first engagement.

When he came down very coolly to the field of honour, no one could have guessed that he had any anxiety about a journey; his hands were in his pockets, his straw hat on the back of his head, his handsome face brazen in the sun. But it might have struck a stranger as odd that there appeared in his train, not only his seconds carrying the sword-case, but two of his servants carrying a portmanteau and a luncheon basket.

Early as was the hour, the sun soaked everything in warmth, and Syme was vaguely surprised to see so many spring flowers burning gold and silver in the tall grass in which the whole company stood almost knee-deep.

With the exception of the Marquis, all the men were in sombre and solemn morning-dress, with hats like black chimney-pots; the little Doctor especially, with the addition of his black spectacles, looked like an undertaker in a farce. Syme could not help feeling a comic contrast between this funereal church parade of apparel and the rich and glistening meadow, growing wild flowers everywhere. But, indeed, this comic contrast between the yellow blossoms and the black hats was but a symbol of the tragic contrast between the yellow blossoms and the black business. On his right was a little wood; far away to his left lay the long curve of the railway line, which he was, so to speak, guarding from the Marquis, whose goal and escape it was. In front of him, behind the black group of his opponents, he could see, like a tinted cloud, a small almond bush in flower against the faint line of the sea.

The member of the Legion of Honour, whose name it seemed was Colonel Ducroix, approached the Professor and Dr. Bull with great politeness, and suggested that the play should terminate with the first considerable hurt.

Dr. Bull, however, having been carefully coached by Syme upon this point of policy, insisted, with great dignity and in very bad French, that it should continue until one of the combatants was disabled. Syme had made up his mind that he could avoid disabling the Marquis and prevent the Marquis from disabling him for at least twenty minutes. In twenty minutes the Paris train would have gone by.

“To a man of the well-known skill and valour of Monsieur de St. Eustache,” said the Professor solemnly, “it must be a matter of indifference which method is adopted, and our principal has strong reasons for demanding the longer encounter, reasons the delicacy of which prevent me from being explicit, but for the just and honourable nature of which I can —”

“Peste!” broke from the Marquis behind, whose face had suddenly darkened, “let us stop talking and begin,” and he slashed off the head of a tall flower with his stick.

Syme understood his rude impatience and instinctively looked over his shoulder to see whether the train was coming in sight. But there was no smoke on the horizon.

Colonel Ducroix knelt down and unlocked the case, taking out a pair of twin swords, which took the sunlight and turned to two streaks of white fire. He offered one to the Marquis, who snatched it without ceremony, and another to Syme, who took it, bent it, and poised it with as much delay as was consistent with dignity.

Then the Colonel took out another pair of blades, and taking one himself and giving another to Dr. Bull, proceeded to place the men.

Both combatants had thrown off their coats and waistcoats, and stood sword in hand. The seconds stood on each side of the line of fight with drawn swords also, but still sombre in their dark frock-coats and hats. The principals saluted. The Colonel said quietly, “Engage!” and the two blades touched and tingled.

When the jar of the joined iron ran up Syme’s arm, all the fantastic fears that have been the subject of this story fell from him like dreams from a man waking up in bed. He remembered them clearly and in order as mere delusions of the nerves — how the fear of the Professor had been the fear of the tyrannic accidents of nightmare, and how the fear of the Doctor had been the fear of the airless vacuum of science. The first was the old fear that any miracle might happen, the second the more hopeless modern fear that no miracle can ever happen. But he saw that these fears were fancies, for he found himself in the presence of the great fact of the fear of death, with its coarse and pitiless common sense. He felt like a man who had dreamed all night of falling over precipices, and had woke up on the morning when he was to be hanged. For as soon as he had seen the sunlight run down the channel of his foe’s foreshortened blade, and as soon as he had felt the two tongues of steel touch, vibrating like two living things, he knew that his enemy was a terrible fighter, and that probably his last hour had come.

He felt a strange and vivid value in all the earth around him, in the grass under his feet; he felt the love of life in all living things. He could almost fancy that he heard the grass growing; he could almost fancy that even as he stood fresh flowers were springing up and breaking into blossom in the meadow — flowers blood red and burning gold and blue, fulfilling the whole pageant of the spring. And whenever his eyes strayed for a flash from the calm, staring, hypnotic eyes of the Marquis, they saw the little tuft of almond tree against the sky-line. He had the feeling that if by some miracle he escaped he would be ready to sit for ever before that almond tree, desiring nothing else in the world.

But while earth and sky and everything had the living beauty of a thing lost, the other half of his head was as clear as glass, and he was parrying his enemy’s point with a kind of clockwork skill of which he had hardly supposed himself capable. Once his enemy’s point ran along his wrist, leaving a slight streak of blood, but it either was not noticed or was tacitly ignored. Every now and then he riposted, and once or twice he could almost fancy that he felt his point go home, but as there was no blood on blade or shirt he supposed he was mistaken. Then came an interruption and a change.

At the risk of losing all, the Marquis, interrupting his quiet stare, flashed one glance over his shoulder at the line of railway on his right. Then he turned on Syme a face transfigured to that of a fiend, and began to fight as if with twenty weapons. The attack came so fast and furious, that the one shining sword seemed a shower of shining arrows. Syme had no chance to look at the railway; but also he had no need. He could guess the reason of the Marquis’s sudden madness of battle — the Paris train was in sight.

But the Marquis’s morbid energy over-reached itself. Twice Syme, parrying, knocked his opponent’s point far out of the fighting circle; and the third time his riposte was so rapid, that there was no doubt about the hit this time. Syme’s sword actually bent under the weight of the Marquis’s body, which it had pierced.

Syme was as certain that he had stuck his blade into his enemy as a gardener that he has stuck his spade into the ground. Yet the Marquis sprang back from the stroke without a stagger, and Syme stood staring at his own sword-point like an idiot. There was no blood on it at all.

There was an instant of rigid silence, and then Syme in his turn fell furiously on the other, filled with a flaming curiosity. The Marquis was probably, in a general sense, a better fencer than he, as he had surmised at the beginning, but at the moment the Marquis seemed distraught and at a disadvantage. He fought wildly and even weakly, and he constantly looked away at the railway line, almost as if he feared the train more than the pointed steel. Syme, on the other hand, fought fiercely but still carefully, in an intellectual fury, eager to solve the riddle of his own bloodless sword. For this purpose, he aimed less at the Marquis’s body, and more at his throat and head. A minute and a half afterwards he felt his point enter the man’s neck below the jaw. It came out clean. Half mad, he thrust again, and made what should have been a bloody scar on the Marquis's cheek. But there was no scar.

For one moment the heaven of Syme again grew black with supernatural terrors. Surely the man had a charmed life. But this new spiritual dread was a more awful thing than had been the mere spiritual topsy-turvydom symbolised by the paralytic who pursued him. The Professor was only a goblin; this man was a devil — perhaps he was the Devil! Anyhow, this was certain, that three times had a human sword been driven into him and made no mark. When Syme had that thought he drew himself up, and all that was good in him sang high up in the air as a high wind sings in the trees. He thought of all the human things in his story — of the Chinese lanterns in Saffron Park, of the girl's red hair in the garden, of the honest, beer-swilling sailors down by the dock, of his loyal companions standing by. Perhaps he had been chosen as a champion of all these fresh and kindly things to cross swords with the enemy of all creation. "After all," he said to himself, "I am more than a devil; I am a man. I can do the one thing which Satan himself cannot do — I can die," and as the word went through his head, he heard a faint and far-off hoot, which would soon be the roar of the Paris train.

He fell to fighting again with a supernatural levity, like a Mohammedan panting for Paradise. As the train came nearer and nearer he fancied he could see people putting up the floral arches in Paris; he joined in the growing noise and the glory of the great Republic whose gate he was guarding against Hell. His thoughts rose higher and higher with the rising roar of the train, which ended, as if proudly, in a long and piercing whistle. The train stopped.

Suddenly, to the astonishment of everyone the Marquis sprang back quite out of sword reach and threw down his sword. The leap was wonderful, and not the less wonderful because Syme had plunged his sword a moment before into the man's thigh.

"Stop!" said the Marquis in a voice that compelled a momentary obedience. "I want to say something."

"What is the matter?" asked Colonel Ducroix, staring. "Has there been foul play?"

"There has been foul play somewhere," said Dr. Bull, who was a little pale. "Our principal has wounded the Marquis four times at least, and he is none the worse."

The Marquis put up his hand with a curious air of ghastly patience.

“Please let me speak,” he said. “It is rather important. Mr. Syme,” he continued, turning to his opponent, “we are fighting today, if I remember right, because you expressed a wish (which I thought irrational) to pull my nose. Would you oblige me by pulling my nose now as quickly as possible? I have to catch a train.”

“I protest that this is most irregular,” said Dr. Bull indignantly.

“It is certainly somewhat opposed to precedent,” said Colonel Ducroix, looking wistfully at his principal. “There is, I think, one case on record (Captain Bellegarde and the Baron Zumpt) in which the weapons were changed in the middle of the encounter at the request of one of the combatants. But one can hardly call one’s nose a weapon.”

“Will you or will you not pull my nose?” said the Marquis in exasperation. “Come, come, Mr. Syme! You wanted to do it, do it! You can have no conception of how important it is to me. Don’t be so selfish! Pull my nose at once, when I ask you!” and he bent slightly forward with a fascinating smile. The Paris train, panting and groaning, had grated into a little station behind the neighbouring hill.

Syme had the feeling he had more than once had in these adventures — the sense that a horrible and sublime wave lifted to heaven was just toppling over. Walking in a world he half understood, he took two paces forward and seized the Roman nose of this remarkable nobleman. He pulled it hard, and it came off in his hand.

He stood for some seconds with a foolish solemnity, with the pasteboard proboscis still between his fingers, looking at it, while the sun and the clouds and the wooded hills looked down upon this imbecile scene.

The Marquis broke the silence in a loud and cheerful voice.

“If anyone has any use for my left eyebrow,” he said, “he can have it. Colonel Ducroix, do accept my left eyebrow! It’s the kind of thing that might come in useful any day,” and he gravely tore off one of his swarthy Assyrian brows, bringing about half his brown forehead with it, and politely offered it to the Colonel, who stood crimson and speechless with rage.

“If I had known,” he spluttered, “that I was acting for a poltroon who pads himself to fight—”

“Oh, I know, I know!” said the Marquis, recklessly throwing various parts of himself right and left about the field. “You are making a mistake; but it can’t be explained just now. I tell you the train has come into the station!”

“Yes,” said Dr. Bull fiercely, “and the train shall go out of the station. It shall go out without you. We know well enough for what devil’s work—”

The mysterious Marquis lifted his hands with a desperate gesture. He was a strange scarecrow standing there in the sun with half his old face peeled off, and half another face glaring and grinning from underneath.

“Will you drive me mad?” he cried. “The train—”

“You shall not go by the train,” said Syme firmly, and grasped his sword.

The wild figure turned towards Syme, and seemed to be gathering itself for a sublime effort before speaking.

“You great fat, blasted, blear-eyed, blundering, thundering, brainless, Godforsaken, doddering, damned fool!” he said without taking breath. “You great silly, pink-faced, towheaded turnip! You—”

“You shall not go by this train,” repeated Syme.

“And why the infernal blazes,” roared the other, “should I want to go by the train?”

“We know all,” said the Professor sternly. “You are going to Paris to throw a bomb!”

“Going to Jericho to throw a Jabberwock!” cried the other, tearing his hair, which came off easily.

“Have you all got softening of the brain, that you don’t realise what I am? Did you really think I wanted to catch that train? Twenty Paris trains might go by for me. Damn Paris trains!”

“Then what did you care about?” began the Professor.

“What did I care about? I didn’t care about catching the train; I cared about whether the train caught me, and now, by God! it has caught me.”

“I regret to inform you,” said Syme with restraint, “that your remarks convey no impression to my mind. Perhaps if you were to remove the remains of your original forehead and some portion of what was once your chin, your meaning would become clearer. Mental lucidity fulfils itself in many ways. What do you mean by saying that the train has caught you? It may be my literary fancy, but somehow I feel that it ought to mean something.”

“It means everything,” said the other, “and the end of everything. Sunday has us now in the hollow of his hand.”

“Us!” repeated the Professor, as if stupefied. “What do you mean by ‘us’?”

"The police, of course!" said the Marquis, and tore off his scalp and half his face.

The head which emerged was the blonde, well brushed, smooth-haired head which is common in the English constabulary, but the face was terribly pale.

"I am Inspector Ratcliffe," he said, with a sort of haste that verged on harshness. "My name is pretty well known to the police, and I can see well enough that you belong to them. But if there is any doubt about my position, I have a card," and he began to pull a blue card from his pocket.

The Professor gave a tired gesture.

"Oh, don't show it us," he said wearily; "we've got enough of them to equip a paper-chase."

The little man named Bull, had, like many men who seem to be of a mere vivacious vulgarity, sudden movements of good taste. Here he certainly saved the situation. In the midst of this staggering transformation scene he stepped forward with all the gravity and responsibility of a second, and addressed the two seconds of the Marquis.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we all owe you a serious apology; but I assure you that you have not been made the victims of such a low joke as you imagine, or indeed of anything undignified in a man of honour. You have not wasted your time; you have helped to save the world. We are not buffoons, but very desperate men at war with a vast conspiracy. A secret society of anarchists is hunting us like hares; not such unfortunate madmen as may here or there throw a bomb through starvation or German philosophy, but a rich and powerful and fanatical church, a church of eastern pessimism, which holds it holy to destroy mankind like vermin. How hard they hunt us you can gather from the fact that we are driven to such disguises as those for which I apologise, and to such pranks as this one by which you suffer."

The younger second of the Marquis, a short man with a black moustache, bowed politely, and said —

"Of course, I accept the apology; but you will in your turn forgive me if I decline to follow you further into your difficulties, and permit myself to say good morning! The sight of an acquaintance and distinguished fellow-townsman coming to pieces in the open air is unusual, and, upon the whole, sufficient for one day. Colonel Ducroix, I would in no way influence your actions, but if you feel with me that our present society is a little abnormal, I am now going to walk back to the town."

Colonel Ducroix moved mechanically, but then tugged abruptly at his white moustache and broke out —

"No, by George! I won't. If these gentlemen are really in a mess with a lot of low wreckers like that, I'll see them through it. I have fought for France, and it is hard if I can't fight for civilization."

Dr. Bull took off his hat and waved it, cheering as at a public meeting.

"Don't make too much noise," said Inspector Ratcliffe, "Sunday may hear you."

"Sunday!" cried Bull, and dropped his hat.

"Yes," retorted Ratcliffe, "he may be with them."

"With whom?" asked Syme.

"With the people out of that train," said the other.

"What you say seems utterly wild," began Syme. "Why, as a matter of fact — But, my God," he cried out suddenly, like a man who sees an explosion a long way off, "by God! if this is true the whole bally lot of us on the Anarchist Council were against anarchy! Every born man was a detective except the President and his personal secretary. What can it mean?"

"Mean!" said the new policeman with incredible violence. "It means that we are struck dead! Don't you know Sunday? Don't you know that his jokes are always so big and simple that one has never thought of them? Can you think of anything more like Sunday than this, that he should put all his powerful enemies on the Supreme Council, and then take care that it was not supreme? I tell you he has bought every trust, he has captured every cable, he has control of every railway line — especially of that railway line!" and he pointed a shaking finger towards the small wayside station. "The whole movement was controlled by him; half the world was ready to rise for him. But there were just five people, perhaps, who would have resisted him... and the old devil put them on the Supreme Council, to waste their time in watching each other. Idiots that we are, he planned the whole of our idiocies! Sunday knew that the Professor would chase Syme through London, and that Syme would fight me in France. And he was combining great masses of capital, and seizing great lines of telegraphy, while we five idiots were running after each other like a lot of confounded babies playing blind man's buff."

“Well?” asked Syme with a sort of steadiness.

“Well,” replied the other with sudden serenity, “he has found us playing blind man’s buff today in a field of great rustic beauty and extreme solitude. He has probably captured the world; it only remains to him to capture this field and all the fools in it. And since you really want to know what was my objection to the arrival of that train, I will tell you. My objection was that Sunday or his Secretary has just this moment got out of it.”

Syme uttered an involuntary cry, and they all turned their eyes towards the far-off station. It was quite true that a considerable bulk of people seemed to be moving in their direction. But they were too distant to be distinguished in any way.

“It was a habit of the late Marquis de St. Eustache,” said the new policeman, producing a leather case, “always to carry a pair of opera glasses. Either the President or the Secretary is coming after us with that mob. They have caught us in a nice quiet place where we are under no temptations to break our oaths by calling the police. Dr. Bull, I have a suspicion that you will see better through these than through your own highly decorative spectacles.”

He handed the field-glasses to the Doctor, who immediately took off his spectacles and put the apparatus to his eyes.

“It cannot be as bad as you say,” said the Professor, somewhat shaken. “There are a good number of them certainly, but they may easily be ordinary tourists.”

“Do ordinary tourists,” asked Bull, with the fieldglasses to his eyes, “wear black masks half-way down the face?”

Syme almost tore the glasses out of his hand, and looked through them. Most men in the advancing mob really looked ordinary enough; but it was quite true that two or three of the leaders in front wore black half-masks almost down to their mouths. This disguise is very complete, especially at such a distance, and Syme found it impossible to conclude anything from the clean-shaven jaws and chins of the men talking in the front. But presently as they talked they all smiled and one of them smiled on one side.

CHAPTER XI. THE CRIMINALS CHASE THE POLICE

SYME put the field-glasses from his eyes with an almost ghastly relief.

“The President is not with them, anyhow,” he said, and wiped his forehead.

“But surely they are right away on the horizon,” said the bewildered Colonel, blinking and but half recovered from Bull’s hasty though polite explanation. “Could you possibly know your President among all those people?”

“Could I know a white elephant among all those people!” answered Syme somewhat irritably. “As you very truly say, they are on the horizon; but if he were walking with them... by God! I believe this ground would shake.”

After an instant’s pause the new man called Ratcliffe said with gloomy decision —

“Of course the President isn’t with them. I wish to Gemini he were. Much more likely the President is riding in triumph through Paris, or sitting on the ruins of St. Paul’s Cathedral.”

“This is absurd!” said Syme. “Something may have happened in our absence; but he cannot have carried the world with a rush like that. It is quite true,” he added, frowning dubiously at the distant fields that lay towards the little station, “it is certainly true that there seems to be a crowd coming this way; but they are not all the army that you make out.”

“Oh, they,” said the new detective contemptuously; “no they are not a very valuable force. But let me tell you frankly that they are precisely calculated to our value — we are not much, my boy, in Sunday’s universe. He has got hold of all the cables and telegraphs himself. But to kill the Supreme Council he regards as a trivial matter, like a post card; it may be left to his private secretary,” and he spat on the grass.

Then he turned to the others and said somewhat austerely —

“There is a great deal to be said for death; but if anyone has any preference for the other alternative, I strongly advise him to walk after me.”

With these words, he turned his broad back and strode with silent energy towards the wood. The others gave one glance over their shoulders, and saw that the dark cloud of men had detached itself from the station and was moving with a mysterious discipline across the plain. They saw already, even with the naked eye, black blots on the foremost faces, which marked the masks they wore. They turned and followed their leader, who had already struck the wood, and disappeared among the twinkling trees.

The sun on the grass was dry and hot. So in plunging into the wood they had a cool shock of shadow, as of divers who plunge into a dim pool. The inside of the wood was full of shattered sunlight and shaken shadows. They made a sort of shuddering veil, almost recalling the dizziness of a cinematograph. Even the solid figures walking with him Syme could hardly see for the patterns of sun and shade that danced upon them. Now a man's head was lit as with a light of Rembrandt, leaving all else obliterated; now again he had strong and staring white hands with the face of a negro. The ex-Marquis had pulled the old straw hat over his eyes, and the black shade of the brim cut his face so squarely in two that it seemed to be wearing one of the black half-masks of their pursuers. The fancy tinted Syme's overwhelming sense of wonder. Was he wearing a mask? Was anyone wearing a mask? Was anyone anything? This wood of witchery, in which men's faces turned black and white by turns, in which their figures first swelled into sunlight and then faded into formless night, this mere chaos of chiaroscuro (after the clear daylight outside), seemed to Syme a perfect symbol of the world in which he had been moving for three days, this world where men took off their beards and their spectacles and their noses, and turned into other people. That tragic self-confidence which he had felt when he believed that the Marquis was a devil had strangely disappeared now that he knew that the Marquis was a friend. He felt almost inclined to ask after all these bewilderments what was a friend and what an enemy. Was there anything that was apart from what it seemed? The Marquis had taken off his nose and turned out to be a detective. Might he not just as well take off his head and turn out to be a hobgoblin? Was not everything, after all, like this bewildering woodland, this dance of dark and light? Everything only a glimpse, the glimpse always unforeseen, and always forgotten. For Gabriel Syme had found in the heart of that sun-splashed wood what many modern painters had found there. He had found the thing which the modern people call Impressionism, which is another name for that final scepticism which can find no floor to the universe.

As a man in an evil dream strains himself to scream and wake, Syme strove with a sudden effort to fling off this last and worst of his fancies. With two impatient strides he overtook the man in the Marquis's straw hat, the man whom he had come to address as Ratcliffe. In a voice exaggeratively loud and cheerful, he broke the bottomless silence and made conversation.

“May I ask,” he said, “where on earth we are all going to?”

So genuine had been the doubts of his soul, that he was quite glad to hear his companion speak in an easy, human voice.

“We must get down through the town of Lancy to the sea,” he said. “I think that part of the country is least likely to be with them.”

“What can you mean by all this?” cried Syme. “They can’t be running the real world in that way. Surely not many working men are anarchists, and surely if they were, mere mobs could not beat modern armies and police.”

“Mere mobs!” repeated his new friend with a snort of scorn. “So you talk about mobs and the working classes as if they were the question. You’ve got that eternal idiotic idea that if anarchy came it would come from the poor. Why should it? The poor have been rebels, but they have never been anarchists; they have more interest than anyone else in there being some decent government. The poor man really has a stake in the country. The rich man hasn’t; he can go away to New Guinea in a yacht. The poor have sometimes objected to being governed badly; the rich have always objected to being governed at all. Aristocrats were always anarchists, as you can see from the barons’ wars.”

“As a lecture on English history for the little ones,” said Syme, “this is all very nice; but I have not yet grasped its application.”

“Its application is,” said his informant, “that most of old Sunday’s right-hand men are South African and American millionaires. That is why he has got hold of all the communications; and that is why the last four champions of the anti-anarchist police force are running through a wood like rabbits.”

“Millionaires I can understand,” said Syme thoughtfully, “they are nearly all mad. But getting hold of a few wicked old gentlemen with hobbies is one thing; getting hold of great Christian nations is another. I would bet the nose off my face (forgive the allusion) that Sunday would stand perfectly helpless before the task of converting any ordinary healthy person anywhere.”

“Well,” said the other, “it rather depends what sort of person you mean.”

“Well, for instance,” said Syme, “he could never convert that person,” and he pointed straight in front of him.

They had come to an open space of sunlight, which seemed to express to Syme the final return of his own good sense; and in the middle of this forest clearing was a figure that might well stand for that common sense in an almost awful actuality. Burnt by the sun and stained with perspiration, and grave with the bottomless gravity of small necessary toils, a heavy French peasant was cutting wood with a hatchet. His cart stood a few yards off, already half full of timber; and the horse that cropped the grass was, like his master, valorous but not desperate; like his master, he was even prosperous, but yet was almost sad. The man was a Norman, taller than the average of the French and very angular; and his swarthy figure stood dark against a square of sunlight, almost like some allegoric figure of labour frescoed on a ground of gold.

"Mr. Syme is saying," called out Ratcliffe to the French Colonel, "that this man, at least, will never be an anarchist."

"Mr. Syme is right enough there," answered Colonel Ducroix, laughing, "if only for the reason that he has plenty of property to defend. But I forgot that in your country you are not used to peasants being wealthy."

"He looks poor," said Dr. Bull doubtfully.

"Quite so," said the Colonel; "that is why he is rich."

"I have an idea," called out Dr. Bull suddenly; "how much would he take to give us a lift in his cart? Those dogs are all on foot, and we could soon leave them behind."

"Oh, give him anything!" said Syme eagerly. "I have piles of money on me."

"That will never do," said the Colonel; "he will never have any respect for you unless you drive a bargain."

"Oh, if he haggles!" began Bull impatiently.

"He haggles because he is a free man," said the other. "You do not understand; he would not see the meaning of generosity. He is not being tipped."

And even while they seemed to hear the heavy feet of their strange pursuers behind them, they had to stand and stamp while the French Colonel talked to the French wood-cutter with all the leisurely badinage and bickering of market-day. At the end of the four minutes, however, they saw that the Colonel was right, for the wood-cutter entered into their plans, not with the vague servility of a tout too-well paid, but with the seriousness of a solicitor who had been paid the proper fee. He told them that the best thing they could do was to make their way down to the little inn on the hills above Lancy, where the innkeeper, an old soldier who had become devout in his latter years, would be certain to sympathise with them, and even to take risks in their support. The whole company, therefore, piled themselves on top of the stacks of wood, and went rocking in the rude cart down the other and steeper side of the woodland. Heavy and ramshackle as was the vehicle, it was driven quickly enough, and they soon had the exhilarating impression of distancing altogether those, whoever they were, who were hunting them. For, after all, the riddle as to where the anarchists had got all these followers was still unsolved. One man’s presence had sufficed for them; they had fled at the first sight of the deformed smile of the Secretary. Syme every now and then looked back over his shoulder at the army on their track.

As the wood grew first thinner and then smaller with distance, he could see the sunlit slopes beyond it and above it; and across these was still moving the square black mob like one monstrous beetle. In the very strong sunlight and with his own very strong eyes, which were almost telescopic, Syme could see this mass of men quite plainly. He could see them as separate human figures; but he was increasingly surprised by the way in which they moved as one man. They seemed to be dressed in dark clothes and plain hats, like any common crowd out of the streets; but they did not spread and sprawl and trail by various lines to the attack, as would be natural in an ordinary mob. They moved with a sort of dreadful and wicked woodenness, like a staring army of automatons.

Syme pointed this out to Ratcliffe.

“Yes,” replied the policeman, “that’s discipline. That’s Sunday. He is perhaps five hundred miles off, but the fear of him is on all of them, like the finger of God. Yes, they are walking regularly; and you bet your boots that they are talking regularly, yes, and thinking regularly. But the one important thing for us is that they are disappearing regularly.”

Syme nodded. It was true that the black patch of the pursuing men was growing smaller and smaller as the peasant belaboured his horse.

The level of the sunlit landscape, though flat as a whole, fell away on the farther side of the wood in billows of heavy slope towards the sea, in a way not unlike the lower slopes of the Sussex downs. The only difference was that in Sussex the road would have been broken and angular like a little brook, but here the white French road fell sheer in front of them like a waterfall. Down this direct descent the cart clattered at a considerable angle, and in a few minutes, the road growing yet steeper, they saw below them the little harbour of Lancy and a great blue arc of the sea. The travelling cloud of their enemies had wholly disappeared from the horizon.

The horse and cart took a sharp turn round a clump of elms, and the horse's nose nearly struck the face of an old gentleman who was sitting on the benches outside the little cafe of "Le Soleil d'Or." The peasant grunted an apology, and got down from his seat. The others also descended one by one, and spoke to the old gentleman with fragmentary phrases of courtesy, for it was quite evident from his expansive manner that he was the owner of the little tavern.

He was a white-haired, apple-faced old boy, with sleepy eyes and a grey moustache; stout, sedentary, and very innocent, of a type that may often be found in France, but is still commoner in Catholic Germany. Everything about him, his pipe, his pot of beer, his flowers, and his beehive, suggested an ancestral peace; only when his visitors looked up as they entered the inn-parlour, they saw the sword upon the wall.

The Colonel, who greeted the innkeeper as an old friend, passed rapidly into the inn-parlour, and sat down ordering some ritual refreshment. The military decision of his action interested Syme, who sat next to him, and he took the opportunity when the old innkeeper had gone out of satisfying his curiosity.

"May I ask you, Colonel," he said in a low voice, "why we have come here?"

Colonel Ducroix smiled behind his bristly white moustache.

"For two reasons, sir," he said; "and I will give first, not the most important, but the most utilitarian. We came here because this is the only place within twenty miles in which we can get horses."

"Horses!" repeated Syme, looking up quickly.

"Yes," replied the other; "if you people are really to distance your enemies it is horses or nothing for you, unless of course you have bicycles and motor-cars in your pocket."

"And where do you advise us to make for?" asked Syme doubtfully.

"Beyond question," replied the Colonel, "you had better make all haste to the police station beyond the town. My friend, whom I seconded under somewhat deceptive circumstances, seems to me to exaggerate very much the possibilities of a general rising; but even he would hardly maintain, I suppose, that you were not safe with the gendarmes."

Syme nodded gravely; then he said abruptly —

"And your other reason for coming here?"

"My other reason for coming here," said Ducroix soberly, "is that it is just as well to see a good man or two when one is possibly near to death."

Syme looked up at the wall, and saw a crudely-painted and pathetic religious picture. Then he said —

"You are right," and then almost immediately afterwards, "Has anyone seen about the horses?"

"Yes," answered Ducroix, "you may be quite certain that I gave orders the moment I came in. Those enemies of yours gave no impression of hurry, but they were really moving wonderfully fast, like a well-trained army. I had no idea that the anarchists had so much discipline. You have not a moment to waste."

Almost as he spoke, the old innkeeper with the blue eyes and white hair came ambling into the room, and announced that six horses were saddled outside.

By Ducroix's advice the five others equipped themselves with some portable form of food and wine, and keeping their duelling swords as the only weapons available, they clattered away down the steep, white road. The two servants, who had carried the Marquis's luggage when he was a marquis, were left behind to drink at the cafe by common consent, and not at all against their own inclination.

By this time the afternoon sun was slanting westward, and by its rays Syme could see the sturdy figure of the old innkeeper growing smaller and smaller, but still standing and looking after them quite silently, the sunshine in his silver hair. Syme had a fixed, superstitious fancy, left in his mind by the chance phrase of the Colonel, that this was indeed, perhaps, the last honest stranger whom he should ever see upon the earth.

He was still looking at this dwindling figure, which stood as a mere grey blot touched with a white flame against the great green wall of the steep down behind him. And as he stared over the top of the down behind the innkeeper, there appeared an army of black-clad and marching men. They seemed to hang above the good man and his house like a black cloud of locusts. The horses had been saddled none too soon.

CHAPTER XII. THE EARTH IN ANARCHY

URGING the horses to a gallop, without respect to the rather rugged descent of the road, the horsemen soon regained their advantage over the men on the march, and at last the bulk of the first buildings of Lancy cut off the sight of their pursuers. Nevertheless, the ride had been a long one, and by the time they reached the real town the west was warming with the colour and quality of sunset. The Colonel suggested that, before making finally for the police station, they should make the effort, in passing, to attach to themselves one more individual who might be useful.

"Four out of the five rich men in this town," he said, "are common swindlers. I suppose the proportion is pretty equal all over the world. The fifth is a friend of mine, and a very fine fellow; and what is even more important from our point of view, he owns a motor-car."

"I am afraid," said the Professor in his mirthful way, looking back along the white road on which the black, crawling patch might appear at any moment, "I am afraid we have hardly time for afternoon calls."

"Doctor Renard's house is only three minutes off," said the Colonel.

"Our danger," said Dr. Bull, "is not two minutes off."

"Yes," said Syme, "if we ride on fast we must leave them behind, for they are on foot."

"He has a motor-car," said the Colonel.

"But we may not get it," said Bull.

"Yes, he is quite on your side."

"But he might be out."

"Hold your tongue," said Syme suddenly. "What is that noise?"

For a second they all sat as still as equestrian statues, and for a second — for two or three or four seconds — heaven and earth seemed equally still. Then all their ears, in an agony of attention, heard along the road that indescribable thrill and throb that means only one thing — horses!

The Colonel's face had an instantaneous change, as if lightning had struck it, and yet left it scatheless.

"They have done us," he said, with brief military irony. "Prepare to receive cavalry!"

"Where can they have got the horses?" asked Syme, as he mechanically urged his steed to a canter.

The Colonel was silent for a little, then he said in a strained voice —

“I was speaking with strict accuracy when I said that the ‘Soleil d’Or’ was the only place where one can get horses within twenty miles.”

“No!” said Syme violently, “I don’t believe he’d do it. Not with all that white hair.”

“He may have been forced,” said the Colonel gently. “They must be at least a hundred strong, for which reason we are all going to see my friend Renard, who has a motor-car.”

With these words he swung his horse suddenly round a street corner, and went down the street with such thundering speed, that the others, though already well at the gallop, had difficulty in following the flying tail of his horse.

Dr. Renard inhabited a high and comfortable house at the top of a steep street, so that when the riders alighted at his door they could once more see the solid green ridge of the hill, with the white road across it, standing up above all the roofs of the town. They breathed again to see that the road as yet was clear, and they rang the bell.

Dr. Renard was a beaming, brown-bearded man, a good example of that silent but very busy professional class which France has preserved even more perfectly than England. When the matter was explained to him he pooh-poohed the panic of the ex-Marquis altogether; he said, with the solid French scepticism, that there was no conceivable probability of a general anarchist rising. “Anarchy,” he said, shrugging his shoulders, “it is childishness!”

“Et ca,” cried out the Colonel suddenly, pointing over the other’s shoulder, “and that is childishness, isn’t it?”

They all looked round, and saw a curve of black cavalry come sweeping over the top of the hill with all the energy of Attila. Swiftly as they rode, however, the whole rank still kept well together, and they could see the black vizards of the first line as level as a line of uniforms. But although the main black square was the same, though travelling faster, there was now one sensational difference which they could see clearly upon the slope of the hill, as if upon a slanted map. The bulk of the riders were in one block; but one rider flew far ahead of the column, and with frantic movements of hand and heel urged his horse faster and faster, so that one might have fancied that he was not the pursuer but the pursued. But even at that great distance they could see something so fanatical, so unquestionable in his figure, that they knew it was the Secretary himself. “I am sorry to cut short a cultured discussion,” said the Colonel, “but can you lend me your motor-car now, in two minutes?”

“I have a suspicion that you are all mad,” said Dr. Renard, smiling sociably; “but God forbid that madness should in any way interrupt friendship. Let us go round to the garage.”

Dr. Renard was a mild man with monstrous wealth; his rooms were like the Musee de Cluny, and he had three motor-cars. These, however, he seemed to use very sparingly, having the simple tastes of the French middle class, and when his impatient friends came to examine them, it took them some time to assure themselves that one of them even could be made to work. This with some difficulty they brought round into the street before the Doctor’s house. When they came out of the dim garage they were startled to find that twilight had already fallen with the abruptness of night in the tropics. Either they had been longer in the place than they imagined, or some unusual canopy of cloud had gathered over the town. They looked down the steep streets, and seemed to see a slight mist coming up from the sea.

“It is now or never,” said Dr. Bull. “I hear horses.”

“No,” corrected the Professor, “a horse.”

And as they listened, it was evident that the noise, rapidly coming nearer on the rattling stones, was not the noise of the whole cavalcade but that of the one horseman, who had left it far behind — the insane Secretary.

Syme’s family, like most of those who end in the simple life, had once owned a motor, and he knew all about them. He had leapt at once into the chauffeur’s seat, and with flushed face was wrenching and tugging at the disused machinery. He bent his strength upon one handle, and then said quite quietly —

“I am afraid it’s no go.”

As he spoke, there swept round the corner a man rigid on his rushing horse, with the rush and rigidity of an arrow. He had a smile that thrust out his chin as if it were dislocated. He swept alongside of the stationary car, into which its company had crowded, and laid his hand on the front. It was the Secretary, and his mouth went quite straight in the solemnity of triumph.

Syme was leaning hard upon the steering wheel, and there was no sound but the rumble of the other pursuers riding into the town. Then there came quite suddenly a scream of scraping iron, and the car leapt forward. It plucked the Secretary clean out of his saddle, as a knife is whipped out of its sheath, trailed him kicking terribly for twenty yards, and left him flung flat upon the road far in front of his frightened horse. As the car took the corner of the street with a splendid curve, they could just see the other anarchists filling the street and raising their fallen leader.

"I can't understand why it has grown so dark," said the Professor at last in a low voice.

"Going to be a storm, I think," said Dr. Bull. "I say, it's a pity we haven't got a light on this car, if only to see by."

"We have," said the Colonel, and from the floor of the car he fished up a heavy, old-fashioned, carved iron lantern with a light inside it. It was obviously an antique, and it would seem as if its original use had been in some way semi-religious, for there was a rude moulding of a cross upon one of its sides.

"Where on earth did you get that?" asked the Professor.

"I got it where I got the car," answered the Colonel, chuckling, "from my best friend. While our friend here was fighting with the steering wheel, I ran up the front steps of the house and spoke to Renard, who was standing in his own porch, you will remember. 'I suppose,' I said, 'there's no time to get a lamp.' He looked up, blinking amiably at the beautiful arched ceiling of his own front hall. From this was suspended, by chains of exquisite ironwork, this lantern, one of the hundred treasures of his treasure house. By sheer force he tore the lamp out of his own ceiling, shattering the painted panels, and bringing down two blue vases with his violence. Then he handed me the iron lantern, and I put it in the car. Was I not right when I said that Dr. Renard was worth knowing?"

"You were," said Syme seriously, and hung the heavy lantern over the front. There was a certain allegory of their whole position in the contrast between the modern automobile and its strange ecclesiastical lamp. Hitherto they had passed through the quietest part of the town, meeting at most one or two pedestrians, who could give them no hint of the peace or the hostility of the place. Now, however, the windows in the houses began one by one to be lit up, giving a greater sense of habitation and humanity. Dr. Bull turned to the new detective who had led their flight, and permitted himself one of his natural and friendly smiles.

"These lights make one feel more cheerful."

Inspector Ratcliffe drew his brows together.

“There is only one set of lights that make me more cheerful,” he said, “and they are those lights of the police station which I can see beyond the town. Please God we may be there in ten minutes.”

Then all Bull’s boiling good sense and optimism broke suddenly out of him.

“Oh, this is all raving nonsense!” he cried. “If you really think that ordinary people in ordinary houses are anarchists, you must be madder than an anarchist yourself. If we turned and fought these fellows, the whole town would fight for us.”

“No,” said the other with an immovable simplicity, “the whole town would fight for them. We shall see.”

While they were speaking the Professor had leant forward with sudden excitement.

“What is that noise?” he said.

“Oh, the horses behind us, I suppose,” said the Colonel. “I thought we had got clear of them.”

“The horses behind us! No,” said the Professor, “it is not horses, and it is not behind us.”

Almost as he spoke, across the end of the street before them two shining and rattling shapes shot past. They were gone almost in a flash, but everyone could see that they were motor-cars, and the Professor stood up with a pale face and swore that they were the other two motor-cars from Dr. Renard’s garage.

“I tell you they were his,” he repeated, with wild eyes, “and they were full of men in masks!”

“Absurd!” said the Colonel angrily. “Dr. Renard would never give them his cars.”

“He may have been forced,” said Ratcliffe quietly. “The whole town is on their side.”

“You still believe that,” asked the Colonel incredulously.

“You will all believe it soon,” said the other with a hopeless calm.

There was a puzzled pause for some little time, and then the Colonel began again abruptly —

“No, I can’t believe it. The thing is nonsense. The plain people of a peaceable French town—”

He was cut short by a bang and a blaze of light, which seemed close to his eyes. As the car sped on it left a floating patch of white smoke behind it, and Syme had heard a shot shriek past his ear.

“My God!” said the Colonel, “someone has shot at us.”

“It need not interrupt conversation,” said the gloomy Ratcliffe. “Pray resume your remarks, Colonel. You were talking, I think, about the plain people of a peaceable French town.”

The staring Colonel was long past minding satire. He rolled his eyes all round the street.

“It is extraordinary,” he said, “most extraordinary.”

“A fastidious person,” said Syme, “might even call it unpleasant. However, I suppose those lights out in the field beyond this street are the Gendarmerie. We shall soon get there.”

“No,” said Inspector Ratcliffe, “we shall never get there.”

He had been standing up and looking keenly ahead of him. Now he sat down and smoothed his sleek hair with a weary gesture.

“What do you mean?” asked Bull sharply.

“I mean that we shall never get there,” said the pessimist placidly. “They have two rows of armed men across the road already; I can see them from here. The town is in arms, as I said it was. I can only wallow in the exquisite comfort of my own exactitude.”

And Ratcliffe sat down comfortably in the car and lit a cigarette, but the others rose excitedly and stared down the road. Syme had slowed down the car as their plans became doubtful, and he brought it finally to a standstill just at the corner of a side street that ran down very steeply to the sea.

The town was mostly in shadow, but the sun had not sunk; wherever its level light could break through, it painted everything a burning gold. Up this side street the last sunset light shone as sharp and narrow as the shaft of artificial light at the theatre. It struck the car of the five friends, and lit it like a burning chariot. But the rest of the street, especially the two ends of it, was in the deepest twilight, and for some seconds they could see nothing. Then Syme, whose eyes were the keenest, broke into a little bitter whistle, and said,

“It is quite true. There is a crowd or an army or some such thing across the end of that street.”

“Well, if there is,” said Bull impatiently, “it must be something else — a sham fight or the mayor’s birthday or something. I cannot and will not believe that plain, jolly people in a place like this walk about with dynamite in their pockets. Get on a bit, Syme, and let us look at them.”

The car crawled about a hundred yards farther, and then they were all startled by Dr. Bull breaking into a high crow of laughter.

“Why, you silly mugs!” he cried, “what did I tell you. That crowd’s as law-abiding as a cow, and if it weren’t, it’s on our side.”

“How do you know?” asked the professor, staring.

“You blind bat,” cried Bull, “don’t you see who is leading them?”

They peered again, and then the Colonel, with a catch in his voice, cried out —

“Why, it’s Renard!”

There was, indeed, a rank of dim figures running across the road, and they could not be clearly seen; but far enough in front to catch the accident of the evening light was stalking up and down the unmistakable Dr. Renard, in a white hat, stroking his long brown beard, and holding a revolver in his left hand.

“What a fool I’ve been!” exclaimed the Colonel. “Of course, the dear old boy has turned out to help us.”

Dr. Bull was bubbling over with laughter, swinging the sword in his hand as carelessly as a cane. He jumped out of the car and ran across the intervening space, calling out —

“Dr. Renard! Dr. Renard!”

An instant after Syme thought his own eyes had gone mad in his head. For the philanthropic Dr. Renard had deliberately raised his revolver and fired twice at Bull, so that the shots rang down the road.

Almost at the same second as the puff of white cloud went up from this atrocious explosion a long puff of white cloud went up also from the cigarette of the cynical Ratcliffe. Like all the rest he turned a little pale, but he smiled. Dr. Bull, at whom the bullets had been fired, just missing his scalp, stood quite still in the middle of the road without a sign of fear, and then turned very slowly and crawled back to the car, and climbed in with two holes through his hat.

“Well,” said the cigarette smoker slowly, “what do you think now?”

“I think,” said Dr. Bull with precision, “that I am lying in bed at No. 217 Peabody Buildings, and that I shall soon wake up with a jump; or, if that’s not it, I think that I am sitting in a small cushioned cell in Hanwell, and that the doctor can’t make much of my case. But if you want to know what I don’t think, I’ll tell you. I don’t think what you think. I don’t think, and I never shall think, that the mass of ordinary men are a pack of dirty modern thinkers. No, sir, I’m a democrat, and I still don’t believe that Sunday could convert one average navvy or counter-jumper. No, I may be mad, but humanity isn’t.”

Syme turned his bright blue eyes on Bull with an earnestness which he did not commonly make clear.

“You are a very fine fellow,” he said. “You can believe in a sanity which is not merely your sanity. And you’re right enough about humanity, about peasants and people like that jolly old innkeeper. But you’re not right about Renard. I suspected him from the first. He’s rationalistic, and, what’s worse, he’s rich. When duty and religion are really destroyed, it will be by the rich.”

“They are really destroyed now,” said the man with a cigarette, and rose with his hands in his pockets. “The devils are coming on!”

The men in the motor-car looked anxiously in the direction of his dreamy gaze, and they saw that the whole regiment at the end of the road was advancing upon them, Dr. Renard marching furiously in front, his beard flying in the breeze.

The Colonel sprang out of the car with an intolerant exclamation.

“Gentlemen,” he cried, “the thing is incredible. It must be a practical joke. If you knew Renard as I do — it’s like calling Queen Victoria a dynamiter. If you had got the man’s character into your head—”

“Dr. Bull,” said Syme sardonically, “has at least got it into his hat.”

“I tell you it can’t be!” cried the Colonel, stamping.

“Renard shall explain it. He shall explain it to me,” and he strode forward.

“Don’t be in such a hurry,” drawled the smoker. “He will very soon explain it to all of us.”

But the impatient Colonel was already out of earshot, advancing towards the advancing enemy. The excited Dr. Renard lifted his pistol again, but perceiving his opponent, hesitated, and the Colonel came face to face with him with frantic gestures of remonstrance.

“It is no good,” said Syme. “He will never get anything out of that old heathen. I vote we drive bang through the thick of them, bang as the bullets went through Bull’s hat. We may all be killed, but we must kill a tidy number of them.”

“I won’t ‘ave it,” said Dr. Bull, growing more vulgar in the sincerity of his virtue. “The poor chaps may be making a mistake. Give the Colonel a chance."

"Shall we go back, then?" asked the Professor.

"No," said Ratcliffe in a cold voice, "the street behind us is held too. In fact, I seem to see there another friend of yours, Syme."

Syme spun round smartly, and stared backwards at the track which they had travelled. He saw an irregular body of horsemen gathering and galloping towards them in the gloom. He saw above the foremost saddle the silver gleam of a sword, and then as it grew nearer the silver gleam of an old man's hair. The next moment, with shattering violence, he had swung the motor round and sent it dashing down the steep side street to the sea, like a man that desired only to die.

"What the devil is up?" cried the Professor, seizing his arm.

"The morning star has fallen!" said Syme, as his own car went down the darkness like a falling star.

The others did not understand his words, but when they looked back at the street above they saw the hostile cavalry coming round the corner and down the slopes after them; and foremost of all rode the good innkeeper, flushed with the fiery innocence of the evening light.

"The world is insane!" said the Professor, and buried his face in his hands.

"No," said Dr. Bull in adamantine humility, "it is I."

"What are we going to do?" asked the Professor.

"At this moment," said Syme, with a scientific detachment, "I think we are going to smash into a lamppost."

The next instant the automobile had come with a catastrophic jar against an iron object. The instant after that four men had crawled out from under a chaos of metal, and a tall lean lamp-post that had stood up straight on the edge of the marine parade stood out, bent and twisted, like the branch of a broken tree.

"Well, we smashed something," said the Professor, with a faint smile. "That's some comfort."

"You're becoming an anarchist," said Syme, dusting his clothes with his instinct of daintiness.

"Everyone is," said Ratcliffe.

As they spoke, the white-haired horseman and his followers came thundering from above, and almost at the same moment a dark string of men ran shouting along the sea-front. Syme snatched a sword, and took it in his teeth; he stuck two others under his arm-pits, took a fourth in his left hand and the lantern in his right, and leapt off the high parade on to the beach below.

The others leapt after him, with a common acceptance of such decisive action, leaving the debris and the gathering mob above them.

“We have one more chance,” said Syme, taking the steel out of his mouth. “Whatever all this pandemonium means, I suppose the police station will help us. We can’t get there, for they hold the way. But there’s a pier or breakwater runs out into the sea just here, which we could defend longer than anything else, like Horatius and his bridge. We must defend it till the Gendarmerie turn out. Keep after me.”

They followed him as he went crunching down the beach, and in a second or two their boots broke not on the sea gravel, but on broad, flat stones. They marched down a long, low jetty, running out in one arm into the dim, boiling sea, and when they came to the end of it they felt that they had come to the end of their story. They turned and faced the town.

That town was transfigured with uproar. All along the high parade from which they had just descended was a dark and roaring stream of humanity, with tossing arms and fiery faces, groping and glaring towards them. The long dark line was dotted with torches and lanterns; but even where no flame lit up a furious face, they could see in the farthest figure, in the most shadowy gesture, an organised hate. It was clear that they were the accursed of all men, and they knew not why.

Two or three men, looking little and black like monkeys, leapt over the edge as they had done and dropped on to the beach. These came ploughing down the deep sand, shouting horribly, and strove to wade into the sea at random. The example was followed, and the whole black mass of men began to run and drip over the edge like black treacle.

Foremost among the men on the beach Syme saw the peasant who had driven their cart. He splashed into the surf on a huge cart-horse, and shook his axe at them.

“The peasant!” cried Syme. “They have not risen since the Middle Ages.”

“Even if the police do come now,” said the Professor mournfully, “they can do nothing with this mob.”

“Nonsense!” said Bull desperately; “there must be some people left in the town who are human.”

“No,” said the hopeless Inspector, “the human being will soon be extinct. We are the last of mankind.”

“It may be,” said the Professor absently. Then he added in his dreamy voice, “What is all that at the end of the ‘Dunciad’?

‘Nor public flame; nor private, dares to shine;
Nor human light is left, nor glimpse divine!
Lo! thy dread Empire, Chaos, is restored;
Light dies before thine uncreating word:
Thy hand, great Anarch, lets the curtain fall;
And universal darkness buries all.’”

“Stop!” cried Bull suddenly, “the gendarmes are out.”

The low lights of the police station were indeed blotted and broken with hurrying figures, and they heard through the darkness the clash and jingle of a disciplined cavalry.

“They are charging the mob!” cried Bull in ecstacy or alarm.

“No,” said Syme, “they are formed along the parade.”

“They have unslung their carbines,” cried Bull dancing with excitement.

“Yes,” said Ratcliffe, “and they are going to fire on us.”

As he spoke there came a long crackle of musketry, and bullets seemed to hop like hailstones on the stones in front of them.

“The gendarmes have joined them!” cried the Professor, and struck his forehead.

“I am in the padded cell,” said Bull solidly.

There was a long silence, and then Ratcliffe said, looking out over the swollen sea, all a sort of grey purple —

“What does it matter who is mad or who is sane? We shall all be dead soon.”

Syme turned to him and said —

“You are quite hopeless, then?”

Mr. Ratcliffe kept a stony silence; then at last he said quietly —

“No; oddly enough I am not quite hopeless. There is one insane little hope that I cannot get out of my mind. The power of this whole planet is against us, yet I cannot help wondering whether this one silly little hope is hopeless yet.”

“In what or whom is your hope?” asked Syme with curiosity.

“In a man I never saw,” said the other, looking at the leaden sea.

"I know what you mean," said Syme in a low voice, "the man in the dark room. But Sunday must have killed him by now."

"Perhaps," said the other steadily; "but if so, he was the only man whom Sunday found it hard to kill."

"I heard what you said," said the Professor, with his back turned. "I also am holding hard on to the thing I never saw."

All of a sudden Syme, who was standing as if blind with introspective thought, swung round and cried out, like a man waking from sleep —

"Where is the Colonel? I thought he was with us!"

"The Colonel! Yes," cried Bull, "where on earth is the Colonel?"

"He went to speak to Renard," said the Professor.

"We cannot leave him among all those beasts," cried Syme. "Let us die like gentlemen if—"

"Do not pity the Colonel," said Ratcliffe, with a pale sneer. "He is extremely comfortable. He is—"

"No! no! no!" cried Syme in a kind of frenzy, "not the Colonel too! I will never believe it!"

"Will you believe your eyes?" asked the other, and pointed to the beach.

Many of their pursuers had waded into the water shaking their fists, but the sea was rough, and they could not reach the pier. Two or three figures, however, stood on the beginning of the stone footway, and seemed to be cautiously advancing down it. The glare of a chance lantern lit up the faces of the two foremost. One face wore a black half-mask, and under it the mouth was twisting about in such a madness of nerves that the black tuft of beard wriggled round and round like a restless, living thing. The other was the red face and white moustache of Colonel Ducroix. They were in earnest consultation.

"Yes, he is gone too," said the Professor, and sat down on a stone. "Everything's gone. I'm gone! I can't trust my own bodily machinery. I feel as if my own hand might fly up and strike me."

"When my hand flies up," said Syme, "it will strike somebody else," and he strode along the pier towards the Colonel, the sword in one hand and the lantern in the other.

As if to destroy the last hope or doubt, the Colonel, who saw him coming, pointed his revolver at him and fired. The shot missed Syme, but struck his sword, breaking it short at the hilt. Syme rushed on, and swung the iron lantern above his head.

"Judas before Herod!" he said, and struck the Colonel down upon the stones. Then he turned to the Secretary, whose frightful mouth was almost foaming now, and held the lamp high with so rigid and arresting a gesture, that the man was, as it were, frozen for a moment, and forced to hear.

"Do you see this lantern?" cried Syme in a terrible voice. "Do you see the cross carved on it, and the flame inside? You did not make it. You did not light it. Better men than you, men who could believe and obey, twisted the entrails of iron and preserved the legend of fire. There is not a street you walk on, there is not a thread you wear, that was not made as this lantern was, by denying your philosophy of dirt and rats. You can make nothing. You can only destroy. You will destroy mankind; you will destroy the world. Let that suffice you. Yet this one old Christian lantern you shall not destroy. It shall go where your empire of apes will never have the wit to find it."

He struck the Secretary once with the lantern so that he staggered; and then, whirling it twice round his head, sent it flying far out to sea, where it flared like a roaring rocket and fell.

"Swords!" shouted Syme, turning his flaming face to the three behind him. "Let us charge these dogs, for our time has come to die."

His three companions came after him sword in hand. Syme's sword was broken, but he rent a bludgeon from the fist of a fisherman, flinging him down. In a moment they would have flung themselves upon the face of the mob and perished, when an interruption came. The Secretary, ever since Syme's speech, had stood with his hand to his stricken head as if dazed; now he suddenly pulled off his black mask.

The pale face thus peeled in the lamplight revealed not so much rage as astonishment. He put up his hand with an anxious authority.

"There is some mistake," he said. "Mr. Syme, I hardly think you understand your position. I arrest you in the name of the law."

"Of the law?" said Syme, and dropped his stick.

"Certainly!" said the Secretary. "I am a detective from Scotland Yard," and he took a small blue card from his pocket.

"And what do you suppose we are?" asked the Professor, and threw up his arms.

"You," said the Secretary stiffly, "are, as I know for a fact, members of the Supreme Anarchist Council. Disguised as one of you, I—"

Dr. Bull tossed his sword into the sea.

“There never was any Supreme Anarchist Council,” he said. “We were all a lot of silly policemen looking at each other. And all these nice people who have been peppering us with shot thought we were the dynamiters. I knew I couldn’t be wrong about the mob,” he said, beaming over the enormous multitude, which stretched away to the distance on both sides. “Vulgar people are never mad. I’m vulgar myself, and I know. I am now going on shore to stand a drink to everybody here.”

CHAPTER XIII. THE PURSUIT OF THE PRESIDENT

NEXT morning five bewildered but hilarious people took the boat for Dover. The poor old Colonel might have had some cause to complain, having been first forced to fight for two factions that didn't exist, and then knocked down with an iron lantern. But he was a magnanimous old gentleman, and being much relieved that neither party had anything to do with dynamite, he saw them off on the pier with great geniality.

The five reconciled detectives had a hundred details to explain to each other. The Secretary had to tell Syme how they had come to wear masks originally in order to approach the supposed enemy as fellow-conspirators.

Syme had to explain how they had fled with such swiftness through a civilised country. But above all these matters of detail which could be explained, rose the central mountain of the matter that they could not explain. What did it all mean? If they were all harmless officers, what was Sunday? If he had not seized the world, what on earth had he been up to? Inspector Ratcliffe was still gloomy about this.

"I can't make head or tail of old Sunday's little game any more than you can," he said. "But whatever else Sunday is, he isn't a blameless citizen. Damn it! do you remember his face?"

"I grant you," answered Syme, "that I have never been able to forget it."

"Well," said the Secretary, "I suppose we can find out soon, for tomorrow we have our next general meeting. You will excuse me," he said, with a rather ghastly smile, "for being well acquainted with my secretarial duties."

"I suppose you are right," said the Professor reflectively. "I suppose we might find it out from him; but I confess that I should feel a bit afraid of asking Sunday who he really is."

"Why," asked the Secretary, "for fear of bombs?"

"No," said the Professor, "for fear he might tell me."

"Let us have some drinks," said Dr. Bull, after a silence.

Throughout their whole journey by boat and train they were highly convivial, but they instinctively kept together. Dr. Bull, who had always been the optimist of the party, endeavoured to persuade the other four that the whole company could take the same hansom cab from Victoria; but this was over-ruled, and they went in a four-wheeler, with Dr. Bull on the box, singing. They finished their journey at an hotel in Piccadilly Circus, so as to be close to the early breakfast next morning in Leicester Square. Yet even then the adventures of the day were not entirely over. Dr. Bull, discontented with the general proposal to go to bed, had strolled out of the hotel at about eleven to see and taste some of the beauties of London. Twenty minutes afterwards, however, he came back and made quite a clamour in the hall. Syme, who tried at first to soothe him, was forced at last to listen to his communication with quite new attention.

"I tell you I've seen him!" said Dr. Bull, with thick emphasis.

"Whom?" asked Syme quickly. "Not the President?"

"Not so bad as that," said Dr. Bull, with unnecessary laughter, "not so bad as that. I've got him here."

"Got whom here?" asked Syme impatiently.

"Hairy man," said the other lucidly, "man that used to be hairy man — Gogol. Here he is," and he pulled forward by a reluctant elbow the identical young man who five days before had marched out of the Council with thin red hair and a pale face, the first of all the sham anarchists who had been exposed.

"Why do you worry with me?" he cried. "You have expelled me as a spy."

"We are all spies!" whispered Syme.

"We're all spies!" shouted Dr. Bull. "Come and have a drink."

Next morning the battalion of the reunited six marched stolidly towards the hotel in Leicester Square.

"This is more cheerful," said Dr. Bull; "we are six men going to ask one man what he means."

"I think it is a bit queerer than that," said Syme. "I think it is six men going to ask one man what they mean."

They turned in silence into the Square, and though the hotel was in the opposite corner, they saw at once the little balcony and a figure that looked too big for it. He was sitting alone with bent head, poring over a newspaper. But all his councillors, who had come to vote him down, crossed that Square as if they were watched out of heaven by a hundred eyes.

They had disputed much upon their policy, about whether they should leave the unmasked Gogol without and begin diplomatically, or whether they should bring him in and blow up the gunpowder at once. The influence of Syme and Bull prevailed for the latter course, though the Secretary to the last asked them why they attacked Sunday so rashly.

"My reason is quite simple," said Syme. "I attack him rashly because I am afraid of him."

They followed Syme up the dark stair in silence, and they all came out simultaneously into the broad sunlight of the morning and the broad sunlight of Sunday's smile.

"Delightful!" he said. "So pleased to see you all. What an exquisite day it is. Is the Czar dead?"

The Secretary, who happened to be foremost, drew himself together for a dignified outburst.

"No, sir," he said sternly "there has been no massacre. I bring you news of no such disgusting spectacles."

"Disgusting spectacles?" repeated the President, with a bright, inquiring smile. "You mean Dr. Bull's spectacles?"

The Secretary choked for a moment, and the President went on with a sort of smooth appeal —

"Of course, we all have our opinions and even our eyes, but really to call them disgusting before the man himself—"

Dr. Bull tore off his spectacles and broke them on the table.

"My spectacles are blackguardly," he said, "but I'm not. Look at my face."

"I dare say it's the sort of face that grows on one," said the President, "in fact, it grows on you; and who am I to quarrel with the wild fruits upon the Tree of Life? I dare say it will grow on me some day."

"We have no time for tomfoolery," said the Secretary, breaking in savagely. "We have come to know what all this means. Who are you? What are you? Why did you get us all here? Do you know who and what we are? Are you a half-witted man playing the conspirator, or are you a clever man playing the fool? Answer me, I tell you."

"Candidates," murmured Sunday, "are only required to answer eight out of the seventeen questions on the paper. As far as I can make out, you want me to tell you what I am, and what you are, and what this table is, and what this Council is, and what this world is for all I know. Well, I will go so far as to rend the veil of one mystery. If you want to know what you are, you are a set of highly well-intentioned young jackasses."

"And you," said Syme, leaning forward, "what are you?"

“I? What am I?” roared the President, and he rose slowly to an incredible height, like some enormous wave about to arch above them and break. “You want to know what I am, do you? Bull, you are a man of science. Grub in the roots of those trees and find out the truth about them. Syme, you are a poet. Stare at those morning clouds. But I tell you this, that you will have found out the truth of the last tree and the top-most cloud before the truth about me. You will understand the sea, and I shall be still a riddle; you shall know what the stars are, and not know what I am. Since the beginning of the world all men have hunted me like a wolf — kings and sages, and poets and lawgivers, all the churches, and all the philosophies. But I have never been caught yet, and the skies will fall in the time I turn to bay. I have given them a good run for their money, and I will now.”

Before one of them could move, the monstrous man had swung himself like some huge ourang-outang over the balustrade of the balcony. Yet before he dropped he pulled himself up again as on a horizontal bar, and thrusting his great chin over the edge of the balcony, said solemnly —

“There’s one thing I’ll tell you though about who I am. I am the man in the dark room, who made you all policemen.”

With that he fell from the balcony, bouncing on the stones below like a great ball of india-rubber, and went bounding off towards the corner of the Alhambra, where he hailed a hansom-cab and sprang inside it. The six detectives had been standing thunderstruck and livid in the light of his last assertion; but when he disappeared into the cab, Syme’s practical senses returned to him, and leaping over the balcony so recklessly as almost to break his legs, he called another cab.

He and Bull sprang into the cab together, the Professor and the Inspector into another, while the Secretary and the late Gogol scrambled into a third just in time to pursue the flying Syme, who was pursuing the flying President. Sunday led them a wild chase towards the north-west, his cabman, evidently under the influence of more than common inducements, urging the horse at breakneck speed. But Syme was in no mood for delicacies, and he stood up in his own cab shouting, “Stop thief!” until crowds ran along beside his cab, and policemen began to stop and ask questions. All this had its influence upon the President’s cabman, who began to look dubious, and to slow down to a trot. He opened the trap to talk reasonably to his fare, and in so doing let the long whip droop over the front of the cab. Sunday leant forward, seized it, and jerked it violently out of the man’s hand. Then standing up in front of the cab himself, he lashed the horse and roared aloud, so that they went down the streets like a flying storm. Through street after street and square after square went whirling this preposterous vehicle, in which the fare was urging the horse and the driver trying desperately to stop it. The other three cabs came after it (if the phrase be permissible of a cab) like panting hounds. Shops and streets shot by like rattling arrows.

At the highest ecstacy of speed, Sunday turned round on the splashboard where he stood, and sticking his great grinning head out of the cab, with white hair whistling in the wind, he made a horrible face at his pursuers, like some colossal urchin. Then raising his right hand swiftly, he flung a ball of paper in Syme’s face and vanished. Syme caught the thing while instinctively warding it off, and discovered that it consisted of two crumpled papers. One was addressed to himself, and the other to Dr. Bull, with a very long, and it is to be feared partly ironical, string of letters after his name. Dr. Bull’s address was, at any rate, considerably longer than his communication, for the communication consisted entirely of the words: —

“What about Martin Tupper now?”

“What does the old maniac mean?” asked Bull, staring at the words. “What does yours say, Syme?”

Syme’s message was, at any rate, longer, and ran as follows: —

“No one would regret anything in the nature of an interference by the Archdeacon more than I. I trust it will not come to that. But, for the last time, where are your goloshes? The thing is too bad, especially after what uncle said.”

The President’s cabman seemed to be regaining some control over his horse, and the pursuers gained a little as they swept round into the Edgware Road. And here there occurred what seemed to the allies a providential stoppage. Traffic of every kind was swerving to right or left or stopping, for down the long road was coming the unmistakable roar announcing the fire-engine, which in a few seconds went by like a brazen thunderbolt. But quick as it went by, Sunday had bounded out of his cab, sprung at the fire-engine, caught it, slung himself on to it, and was seen as he disappeared in the noisy distance talking to the astonished fireman with explanatory gestures.

“After him!” howled Syme. “He can’t go astray now. There’s no mistaking a fire-engine.”

The three cabmen, who had been stunned for a moment, whipped up their horses and slightly decreased the distance between themselves and their disappearing prey. The President acknowledged this proximity by coming to the back of the car, bowing repeatedly, kissing his hand, and finally flinging a neatly-folded note into the bosom of Inspector Ratcliffe. When that gentleman opened it, not without impatience, he found it contained the words: —

“Fly at once. The truth about your trouser-stretchers is known.

— A FRIEND.”

The fire-engine had struck still farther to the north, into a region that they did not recognise; and as it ran by a line of high railings shadowed with trees, the six friends were startled, but somewhat relieved, to see the President leap from the fire-engine, though whether through another whim or the increasing protest of his entertainers they could not see. Before the three cabs, however, could reach up to the spot, he had gone up the high railings like a huge grey cat, tossed himself over, and vanished in a darkness of leaves.

Syme with a furious gesture stopped his cab, jumped out, and sprang also to the escalade. When he had one leg over the fence and his friends were following, he turned a face on them which shone quite pale in the shadow.

“What place can this be?” he asked. “Can it be the old devil’s house? I’ve heard he has a house in North London.”

“All the better,” said the Secretary grimly, planting a foot in a foothold, “we shall find him at home.”

“No, but it isn’t that,” said Syme, knitting his brows. “I hear the most horrible noises, like devils laughing and sneezing and blowing their devilish noses!”

“His dogs barking, of course,” said the Secretary.

“Why not say his black-beetles barking!” said Syme furiously, “snails barking! geraniums barking! Did you ever hear a dog bark like that?”

He held up his hand, and there came out of the thicket a long growling roar that seemed to get under the skin and freeze the flesh — a low thrilling roar that made a throbbing in the air all about them.

“The dogs of Sunday would be no ordinary dogs,” said Gogol, and shuddered.

Syme had jumped down on the other side, but he still stood listening impatiently.

“Well, listen to that,” he said, “is that a dog — anybody’s dog?”

There broke upon their ear a hoarse screaming as of things protesting and clamouring in sudden pain; and then, far off like an echo, what sounded like a long nasal trumpet.

“Well, his house ought to be hell!” said the Secretary; “and if it is hell, I’m going in!” and he sprang over the tall railings almost with one swing.

The others followed. They broke through a tangle of plants and shrubs, and came out on an open path. Nothing was in sight, but Dr. Bull suddenly struck his hands together.

“Why, you asses,” he cried, “it’s the Zoo!”

As they were looking round wildly for any trace of their wild quarry, a keeper in uniform came running along the path with a man in plain clothes.

“Has it come this way?” gasped the keeper.

“Has what?” asked Syme.

“The elephant!” cried the keeper. “An elephant has gone mad and run away!”

“He has run away with an old gentleman,” said the other stranger breathlessly, “a poor old gentleman with white hair!”

“What sort of old gentleman?” asked Syme, with great curiosity.

“A very large and fat old gentleman in light grey clothes,” said the keeper eagerly.

“Well,” said Syme, “if he’s that particular kind of old gentleman, if you’re quite sure that he’s a large and fat old gentleman in grey clothes, you may take my word for it that the elephant has not run away with him. He has run away with the elephant. The elephant is not made by God that could run away with him if he did not consent to the elopement. And, by thunder, there he is!”

There was no doubt about it this time. Clean across the space of grass, about two hundred yards away, with a crowd screaming and scampering vainly at his heels, went a huge grey elephant at an awful stride, with his trunk thrown out as rigid as a ship’s bowsprit, and trumpeting like the trumpet of doom. On the back of the bellowing and plunging animal sat President Sunday with all the placidity of a sultan, but goading the animal to a furious speed with some sharp object in his hand.

“Stop him!” screamed the populace. “He’ll be out of the gate!”

“Stop a landslide!” said the keeper. “He is out of the gate!”

And even as he spoke, a final crash and roar of terror announced that the great grey elephant had broken out of the gates of the Zoological Gardens, and was careening down Albany Street like a new and swift sort of omnibus.

“Great Lord!” cried Bull, “I never knew an elephant could go so fast. Well, it must be hansom-cabs again if we are to keep him in sight.”

As they raced along to the gate out of which the elephant had vanished, Syme felt a glaring panorama of the strange animals in the cages which they passed. Afterwards he thought it queer that he should have seen them so clearly. He remembered especially seeing pelicans, with their preposterous, pendant throats. He wondered why the pelican was the symbol of charity, except it was that it wanted a good deal of charity to admire a pelican. He remembered a hornbill, which was simply a huge yellow beak with a small bird tied on behind it. The whole gave him a sensation, the vividness of which he could not explain, that Nature was always making quite mysterious jokes. Sunday had told them that they would understand him when they had understood the stars. He wondered whether even the archangels understood the hornbill.

The six unhappy detectives flung themselves into cabs and followed the elephant sharing the terror which he spread through the long stretch of the streets. This time Sunday did not turn round, but offered them the solid stretch of his unconscious back, which maddened them, if possible, more than his previous mockeries. Just before they came to Baker Street, however, he was seen to throw something far up into the air, as a boy does a ball meaning to catch it again. But at their rate of racing it fell far behind, just by the cab containing Gogol; and in faint hope of a clue or for some impulse unexplainable, he stopped his cab so as to pick it up. It was addressed to himself, and was quite a bulky parcel. On examination, however, its bulk was found to consist of thirty-three pieces of paper of no value wrapped one round the other. When the last covering was torn away it reduced itself to a small slip of paper, on which was written: —

“The word, I fancy, should be ‘pink’.”

The man once known as Gogol said nothing, but the movements of his hands and feet were like those of a man urging a horse to renewed efforts.

Through street after street, through district after district, went the prodigy of the flying elephant, calling crowds to every window, and driving the traffic left and right. And still through all this insane publicity the three cabs toiled after it, until they came to be regarded as part of a procession, and perhaps the advertisement of a circus. They went at such a rate that distances were shortened beyond belief, and Syme saw the Albert Hall in Kensington when he thought that he was still in Paddington. The animal's pace was even more fast and free through the empty, aristocratic streets of South Kensington, and he finally headed towards that part of the sky-line where the enormous Wheel of Earl's Court stood up in the sky. The wheel grew larger and larger, till it filled heaven like the wheel of stars.

The beast outstripped the cabs. They lost him round several corners, and when they came to one of the gates of the Earl's Court Exhibition they found themselves finally blocked. In front of them was an enormous crowd; in the midst of it was an enormous elephant, heaving and shuddering as such shapeless creatures do. But the President had disappeared.

"Where has he gone to?" asked Syme, slipping to the ground.

"Gentleman rushed into the Exhibition, sir!" said an official in a dazed manner. Then he added in an injured voice: "Funny gentleman, sir. Asked me to hold his horse, and gave me this."

He held out with distaste a piece of folded paper, addressed: "To the Secretary of the Central Anarchist Council."

The Secretary, raging, rent it open, and found written inside it: —

"When the herring runs a mile,
Let the Secretary smile;
When the herring tries to fly,
Let the Secretary die.
Rustic Proverb."

"Why the eternal crikey," began the Secretary, "did you let the man in? Do people commonly come to your Exhibition riding on mad elephants? Do —"

"Look!" shouted Syme suddenly. "Look over there!"

"Look at what?" asked the Secretary savagely.

"Look at the captive balloon!" said Syme, and pointed in a frenzy.

"Why the blazes should I look at a captive balloon?" demanded the Secretary. "What is there queer about a captive balloon?"

"Nothing," said Syme, "except that it isn't captive!"

They all turned their eyes to where the balloon swung and swelled above the Exhibition on a string, like a child's balloon. A second afterwards the string came in two just under the car, and the balloon, broken loose, floated away with the freedom of a soap bubble.

“Ten thousand devils!” shrieked the Secretary. “He’s got into it!” and he shook his fists at the sky.

The balloon, borne by some chance wind, came right above them, and they could see the great white head of the President peering over the side and looking benevolently down on them.

“God bless my soul!” said the Professor with the elderly manner that he could never disconnect from his bleached beard and parchment face. “God bless my soul! I seemed to fancy that something fell on the top of my hat!”

He put up a trembling hand and took from that shelf a piece of twisted paper, which he opened absently only to find it inscribed with a true lover’s knot and, the words: —

“Your beauty has not left me indifferent. — From LITTLE SNOWDROP.”

There was a short silence, and then Syme said, biting his beard —

“I’m not beaten yet. The blasted thing must come down somewhere. Let’s follow it!”

CHAPTER XIV. THE SIX PHILOSOPHERS

ACROSS green fields, and breaking through blooming hedges, toiled six draggled detectives, about five miles out of London. The optimist of the party had at first proposed that they should follow the balloon across South England in hansom-cabs. But he was ultimately convinced of the persistent refusal of the balloon to follow the roads, and the still more persistent refusal of the cabmen to follow the balloon. Consequently the tireless though exasperated travellers broke through black thickets and ploughed through ploughed fields till each was turned into a figure too outrageous to be mistaken for a tramp. Those green hills of Surrey saw the final collapse and tragedy of the admirable light grey suit in which Syme had set out from Saffron Park. His silk hat was broken over his nose by a swinging bough, his coat-tails were torn to the shoulder by arresting thorns, the clay of England was splashed up to his collar; but he still carried his yellow beard forward with a silent and furious determination, and his eyes were still fixed on that floating ball of gas, which in the full flush of sunset seemed coloured like a sunset cloud.

“After all,” he said, “it is very beautiful!”

“It is singularly and strangely beautiful!” said the Professor. “I wish the beastly gas-bag would burst!”

“No,” said Dr. Bull, “I hope it won’t. It might hurt the old boy.”

“Hurt him!” said the vindictive Professor, “hurt him! Not as much as I’d hurt him if I could get up with him. Little Snowdrop!”

“I don’t want him hurt, somehow,” said Dr. Bull.

“What!” cried the Secretary bitterly. “Do you believe all that tale about his being our man in the dark room? Sunday would say he was anybody.”

“I don’t know whether I believe it or not,” said Dr. Bull. “But it isn’t that that I mean. I can’t wish old Sunday’s balloon to burst because—”

“Well,” said Syme impatiently, “because?”

“Well, because he’s so jolly like a balloon himself,” said Dr. Bull desperately. “I don’t understand a word of all that idea of his being the same man who gave us all our blue cards. It seems to make everything nonsense. But I don’t care who knows it, I always had a sympathy for old Sunday himself, wicked as he was. Just as if he was a great bouncing baby. How can I explain what my queer sympathy was? It didn’t prevent my fighting him like hell! Shall I make it clear if I say that I liked him because he was so fat?"

"You will not," said the Secretary.

"I've got it now," cried Bull, "it was because he was so fat and so light. Just like a balloon. We always think of fat people as heavy, but he could have danced against a sylph. I see now what I mean. Moderate strength is shown in violence, supreme strength is shown in levity. It was like the old speculations — what would happen if an elephant could leap up in the sky like a grasshopper?"

"Our elephant," said Syme, looking upwards, "has leapt into the sky like a grasshopper."

"And somehow," concluded Bull, "that's why I can't help liking old Sunday. No, it's not an admiration of force, or any silly thing like that. There is a kind of gaiety in the thing, as if he were bursting with some good news. Haven't you sometimes felt it on a spring day? You know Nature plays tricks, but somehow that day proves they are good-natured tricks. I never read the Bible myself, but that part they laugh at is literal truth, 'Why leap ye, ye high hills?' The hills do leap — at least, they try to.... Why do I like Sunday?... how can I tell you?... because he's such a Bounder."

There was a long silence, and then the Secretary said in a curious, strained voice —

"You do not know Sunday at all. Perhaps it is because you are better than I, and do not know hell. I was a fierce fellow, and a trifle morbid from the first. The man who sits in darkness, and who chose us all, chose me because I had all the crazy look of a conspirator — because my smile went crooked, and my eyes were gloomy, even when I smiled. But there must have been something in me that answered to the nerves in all these anarchic men. For when I first saw Sunday he expressed to me, not your airy vitality, but something both gross and sad in the Nature of Things. I found him smoking in a twilight room, a room with brown blind down, infinitely more depressing than the genial darkness in which our master lives. He sat there on a bench, a huge heap of a man, dark and out of shape. He listened to all my words without speaking or even stirring. I poured out my most passionate appeals, and asked my most eloquent questions. Then, after a long silence, the Thing began to shake, and I thought it was shaken by some secret malady. It shook like a loathsome and living jelly. It reminded me of everything I had ever read about the base bodies that are the origin of life

— the deep sea lumps and protoplasm. It seemed like the final form of matter, the most shapeless and the most shameful. I could only tell myself, from its shudderings, that it was something at least that such a monster could be miserable. And then it broke upon me that the bestial mountain was shaking with a lonely laughter, and the laughter was at me. Do you ask me to forgive him that? It is no small thing to be laughed at by something at once lower and stronger than oneself."

"Surely you fellows are exaggerating wildly," cut in the clear voice of Inspector Ratcliffe. "President Sunday is a terrible fellow for one's intellect, but he is not such a Barnum's freak physically as you make out. He received me in an ordinary office, in a grey check coat, in broad daylight. He talked to me in an ordinary way. But I'll tell you what is a trifle creepy about Sunday. His room is neat, his clothes are neat, everything seems in order; but he's absent-minded. Sometimes his great bright eyes go quite blind. For hours he forgets that you are there. Now absent-mindedness is just a bit too awful in a bad man. We think of a wicked man as vigilant. We can't think of a wicked man who is honestly and sincerely dreamy, because we daren't think of a wicked man alone with himself. An absentminded man means a good-natured man. It means a man who, if he happens to see you, will apologise. But how will you bear an absentminded man who, if he happens to see you, will kill you? That is what tries the nerves, abstraction combined with cruelty. Men have felt it sometimes when they went through wild forests, and felt that the animals there were at once innocent and pitiless. They might ignore or slay. How would you like to pass ten mortal hours in a parlour with an absent-minded tiger?"

"And what do you think of Sunday, Gogol?" asked Syme.

"I don't think of Sunday on principle," said Gogol simply, "any more than I stare at the sun at noonday."

"Well, that is a point of view," said Syme thoughtfully. "What do you say, Professor?"

The Professor was walking with bent head and trailing stick, and he did not answer at all.

"Wake up, Professor!" said Syme genially. "Tell us what you think of Sunday."

The Professor spoke at last very slowly.

"I think something," he said, "that I cannot say clearly. Or, rather, I think something that I cannot even think clearly. But it is something like this. My early life, as you know, was a bit too large and loose.

"Well, when I saw Sunday's face I thought it was too large — everybody does, but I also thought it was too loose. The face was so big, that one couldn't focus it or make it a face at all. The eye was so far away from the nose, that it wasn't an eye. The mouth was so much by itself, that one had to think of it by itself. The whole thing is too hard to explain."

He paused for a little, still trailing his stick, and then went on —

"But put it this way. Walking up a road at night, I have seen a lamp and a lighted window and a cloud make together a most complete and unmistakable face. If anyone in heaven has that face I shall know him again. Yet when I walked a little farther I found that there was no face, that the window was ten yards away, the lamp ten hundred yards, the cloud beyond the world. Well, Sunday's face escaped me; it ran away to right and left, as such chance pictures run away. And so his face has made me, somehow, doubt whether there are any faces. I don't know whether your face, Bull, is a face or a combination in perspective. Perhaps one black disc of your beastly glasses is quite close and another fifty miles away. Oh, the doubts of a materialist are not worth a dump. Sunday has taught me the last and the worst doubts, the doubts of a spiritualist. I am a Buddhist, I suppose; and Buddhism is not a creed, it is a doubt. My poor dear Bull, I do not believe that you really have a face. I have not faith enough to believe in matter."

Syme's eyes were still fixed upon the errant orb, which, reddened in the evening light, looked like some rosier and more innocent world.

"Have you noticed an odd thing," he said, "about all your descriptions? Each man of you finds Sunday quite different, yet each man of you can only find one thing to compare him to — the universe itself. Bull finds him like the earth in spring, Gogol like the sun at noonday. The Secretary is reminded of the shapeless protoplasm, and the Inspector of the carelessness of virgin forests. The Professor says he is like a changing landscape. This is queer, but it is queerer still that I also have had my odd notion about the President, and I also find that I think of Sunday as I think of the whole world."

"Get on a little faster, Syme," said Bull; "never mind the balloon."

"When I first saw Sunday," said Syme slowly, "I only saw his back; and when I saw his back, I knew he was the worst man in the world. His neck and shoulders were brutal, like those of some apish god. His head had a stoop that was hardly human, like the stoop of an ox. In fact, I had at once the revolting fancy that this was not a man at all, but a beast dressed up in men’s clothes.”

“Get on,” said Dr. Bull.

“And then the queer thing happened. I had seen his back from the street, as he sat in the balcony. Then I entered the hotel, and coming round the other side of him, saw his face in the sunlight. His face frightened me, as it did everyone; but not because it was brutal, not because it was evil. On the contrary, it frightened me because it was so beautiful, because it was so good.”

“Syme,” exclaimed the Secretary, “are you ill?”

“It was like the face of some ancient archangel, judging justly after heroic wars. There was laughter in the eyes, and in the mouth honour and sorrow. There was the same white hair, the same great, grey-clad shoulders that I had seen from behind. But when I saw him from behind I was certain he was an animal, and when I saw him in front I knew he was a god.”

“Pan,” said the Professor dreamily, “was a god and an animal.”

“Then, and again and always,” went on Syme like a man talking to himself, “that has been for me the mystery of Sunday, and it is also the mystery of the world. When I see the horrible back, I am sure the noble face is but a mask. When I see the face but for an instant, I know the back is only a jest. Bad is so bad, that we cannot but think good an accident; good is so good, that we feel certain that evil could be explained. But the whole came to a kind of crest yesterday when I raced Sunday for the cab, and was just behind him all the way.”

“Had you time for thinking then?” asked Ratcliffe.

“Time,” replied Syme, “for one outrageous thought. I was suddenly possessed with the idea that the blind, blank back of his head really was his face — an awful, eyeless face staring at me! And I fancied that the figure running in front of me was really a figure running backwards, and dancing as he ran.”

“Horrible!” said Dr. Bull, and shuddered.

“Horrible is not the word,” said Syme. “It was exactly the worst instant of my life. And yet ten minutes afterwards, when he put his head out of the cab and made a grimace like a gargoyle, I knew that he was only like a father playing hide-and-seek with his children.”

“It is a long game,” said the Secretary, and frowned at his broken boots.

"Listen to me," cried Syme with extraordinary emphasis. "Shall I tell you the secret of the whole world? It is that we have only known the back of the world. We see everything from behind, and it looks brutal. That is not a tree, but the back of a tree. That is not a cloud, but the back of a cloud. Cannot you see that everything is stooping and hiding a face? If we could only get round in front—"

"Look!" cried out Bull clamorously, "the balloon is coming down!"

There was no need to cry out to Syme, who had never taken his eyes off it. He saw the great luminous globe suddenly stagger in the sky, right itself, and then sink slowly behind the trees like a setting sun.

The man called Gogol, who had hardly spoken through all their weary travels, suddenly threw up his hands like a lost spirit.

"He is dead!" he cried. "And now I know he was my friend — my friend in the dark!"

"Dead!" snorted the Secretary. "You will not find him dead easily. If he has been tipped out of the car, we shall find him rolling as a colt rolls in a field, kicking his legs for fun."

"Clashing his hoofs," said the Professor. "The colts do, and so did Pan."

"Pan again!" said Dr. Bull irritably. "You seem to think Pan is everything."

"So he is," said the Professor, "in Greek. He means everything."

"Don't forget," said the Secretary, looking down, "that he also means Panic."

Syme had stood without hearing any of the exclamations.

"It fell over there," he said shortly. "Let us follow it!"

Then he added with an indescribable gesture —

"Oh, if he has cheated us all by getting killed! It would be like one of his larks."

He strode off towards the distant trees with a new energy, his rags and ribbons fluttering in the wind. The others followed him in a more footsore and dubious manner. And almost at the same moment all six men realised that they were not alone in the little field.

Across the square of turf a tall man was advancing towards them, leaning on a strange long staff like a sceptre. He was clad in a fine but old-fashioned suit with knee-breeches; its colour was that shade between blue, violet and grey which can be seen in certain shadows of the woodland. His hair was whitish grey, and at the first glance, taken along with his knee-breeches, looked as if it was powdered. His advance was very quiet; but for the silver frost upon his head, he might have been one to the shadows of the wood.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “my master has a carriage waiting for you in the road just by.”

“Who is your master?” asked Syme, standing quite still.

“I was told you knew his name,” said the man respectfully.

There was a silence, and then the Secretary said —

“Where is this carriage?”

“It has been waiting only a few moments,” said the stranger. “My master has only just come home.”

Syme looked left and right upon the patch of green field in which he found himself. The hedges were ordinary hedges, the trees seemed ordinary trees; yet he felt like a man entrapped in fairyland.

He looked the mysterious ambassador up and down, but he could discover nothing except that the man’s coat was the exact colour of the purple shadows, and that the man’s face was the exact colour of the red and brown and golden sky.

“Show us the place,” Syme said briefly, and without a word the man in the violet coat turned his back and walked towards a gap in the hedge, which let in suddenly the light of a white road.

As the six wanderers broke out upon this thoroughfare, they saw the white road blocked by what looked like a long row of carriages, such a row of carriages as might close the approach to some house in Park Lane. Along the side of these carriages stood a rank of splendid servants, all dressed in the grey-blue uniform, and all having a certain quality of stateliness and freedom which would not commonly belong to the servants of a gentleman, but rather to the officials and ambassadors of a great king. There were no less than six carriages waiting, one for each of the tattered and miserable band. All the attendants (as if in court-dress) wore swords, and as each man crawled into his carriage they drew them, and saluted with a sudden blaze of steel.

“What can it all mean?” asked Bull of Syme as they separated. “Is this another joke of Sunday’s?”

“I don’t know,” said Syme as he sank wearily back in the cushions of his carriage; “but if it is, it’s one of the jokes you talk about. It’s a good-natured one.”

The six adventurers had passed through many adventures, but not one had carried them so utterly off their feet as this last adventure of comfort. They had all become inured to things going roughly; but things suddenly going smoothly swamped them. They could not even feebly imagine what the carriages were; it was enough for them to know that they were carriages, and carriages with cushions. They could not conceive who the old man was who had led them; but it was quite enough that he had certainly led them to the carriages.

Syme drove through a drifting darkness of trees in utter abandonment. It was typical of him that while he had carried his bearded chin forward fiercely so long as anything could be done, when the whole business was taken out of his hands he fell back on the cushions in a frank collapse.

Very gradually and very vaguely he realised into what rich roads the carriage was carrying him. He saw that they passed the stone gates of what might have been a park, that they began gradually to climb a hill which, while wooded on both sides, was somewhat more orderly than a forest. Then there began to grow upon him, as upon a man slowly waking from a healthy sleep, a pleasure in everything. He felt that the hedges were what hedges should be, living walls; that a hedge is like a human army, disciplined, but all the more alive. He saw high elms behind the hedges, and vaguely thought how happy boys would be climbing there. Then his carriage took a turn of the path, and he saw suddenly and quietly, like a long, low, sunset cloud, a long, low house, mellow in the mild light of sunset. All the six friends compared notes afterwards and quarrelled; but they all agreed that in some unaccountable way the place reminded them of their boyhood. It was either this elm-top or that crooked path, it was either this scrap of orchard or that shape of a window; but each man of them declared that he could remember this place before he could remember his mother.

When the carriages eventually rolled up to a large, low, cavernous gateway, another man in the same uniform, but wearing a silver star on the grey breast of his coat, came out to meet them. This impressive person said to the bewildered Syme —

“Refreshments are provided for you in your room.”

Syme, under the influence of the same mesmeric sleep of amazement, went up the large oaken stairs after the respectful attendant. He entered a splendid suite of apartments that seemed to be designed specially for him.

He walked up to a long mirror with the ordinary instinct of his class, to pull his tie straight or to smooth his hair; and there he saw the frightful figure that he was — blood running down his face from where the bough had struck him, his hair standing out like yellow rags of rank grass, his clothes torn into long, wavering tatters. At once the whole enigma sprang up, simply as the question of how he had got there, and how he was to get out again. Exactly at the same moment a man in blue, who had been appointed as his valet, said very solemnly —

“I have put out your clothes, sir.”

“Clothes!” said Syme sardonically. “I have no clothes except these,” and he lifted two long strips of his frock-coat in fascinating festoons, and made a movement as if to twirl like a ballet girl.

“My master asks me to say,” said the attendant, “that there is a fancy dress ball tonight, and that he desires you to put on the costume that I have laid out. Meanwhile, sir, there is a bottle of Burgundy and some cold pheasant, which he hopes you will not refuse, as it is some hours before supper.”

“Cold pheasant is a good thing,” said Syme reflectively, “and Burgundy is a spanking good thing. But really I do not want either of them so much as I want to know what the devil all this means, and what sort of costume you have got laid out for me. Where is it?”

The servant lifted off a kind of ottoman a long peacock-blue drapery, rather of the nature of a domino, on the front of which was emblazoned a large golden sun, and which was splashed here and there with flaming stars and crescents.

“You’re to be dressed as Thursday, sir,” said the valet somewhat affably.

“Dressed as Thursday!” said Syme in meditation. “It doesn’t sound a warm costume.”

“Oh, yes, sir,” said the other eagerly, “the Thursday costume is quite warm, sir. It fastens up to the chin.”

“Well, I don’t understand anything,” said Syme, sighing. “I have been used so long to uncomfortable adventures that comfortable adventures knock me out. Still, I may be allowed to ask why I should be particularly like Thursday in a green frock spotted all over with the sun and moon. Those orbs, I think, shine on other days. I once saw the moon on Tuesday, I remember.”

“Beg pardon, sir,” said the valet, “Bible also provided for you,” and with a respectful and rigid finger he pointed out a passage in the first chapter of Genesis. Syme read it wondering. It was that in which the fourth day of the week is associated with the creation of the sun and moon. Here, however, they reckoned from a Christian Sunday.

“This is getting wilder and wilder,” said Syme, as he sat down in a chair. “Who are these people who provide cold pheasant and Burgundy, and green clothes and Bibles? Do they provide everything?”

“Yes, sir, everything,” said the attendant gravely. “Shall I help you on with your costume?”

“Oh, hitch the bally thing on!” said Syme impatiently.

But though he affected to despise the mummery, he felt a curious freedom and naturalness in his movements as the blue and gold garment fell about him; and when he found that he had to wear a sword, it stirred a boyish dream. As he passed out of the room he flung the folds across his shoulder with a gesture, his sword stood out at an angle, and he had all the swagger of a troubadour. For these disguises did not disguise, but reveal.

CHAPTER XV. THE ACCUSER

AS Syme strode along the corridor he saw the Secretary standing at the top of a great flight of stairs. The man had never looked so noble. He was draped in a long robe of starless black, down the centre of which fell a band or broad stripe of pure white, like a single shaft of light. The whole looked like some very severe ecclesiastical vestment. There was no need for Syme to search his memory or the Bible in order to remember that the first day of creation marked the mere creation of light out of darkness. The vestment itself would alone have suggested the symbol; and Syme felt also how perfectly this pattern of pure white and black expressed the soul of the pale and austere Secretary, with his inhuman veracity and his cold frenzy, which made him so easily make war on the anarchists, and yet so easily pass for one of them. Syme was scarcely surprised to notice that, amid all the ease and hospitality of their new surroundings, this man's eyes were still stern. No smell of ale or orchards could make the Secretary cease to ask a reasonable question.

If Syme had been able to see himself, he would have realised that he, too, seemed to be for the first time himself and no one else. For if the Secretary stood for that philosopher who loves the original and formless light, Syme was a type of the poet who seeks always to make the light in special shapes, to split it up into sun and star. The philosopher may sometimes love the infinite; the poet always loves the finite. For him the great moment is not the creation of light, but the creation of the sun and moon.

As they descended the broad stairs together they overtook Ratcliffe, who was clad in spring green like a huntsman, and the pattern upon whose garment was a green tangle of trees. For he stood for that third day on which the earth and green things were made, and his square, sensible face, with its not unfriendly cynicism, seemed appropriate enough to it.

They were led out of another broad and low gateway into a very large old English garden, full of torches and bonfires, by the broken light of which a vast carnival of people were dancing in motley dress. Syme seemed to see every shape in Nature imitated in some crazy costume. There was a man dressed as a windmill with enormous sails, a man dressed as an elephant, a man dressed as a balloon; the two last, together, seemed to keep the thread of their farcical adventures. Syme even saw, with a queer thrill, one dancer dressed like an enormous hornbill, with a beak twice as big as himself — the queer bird which had fixed itself on his fancy like a living question while he was rushing down the long road at the Zoological Gardens. There were a thousand other such objects, however. There was a dancing lamp-post, a dancing apple tree, a dancing ship. One would have thought that the untamable tune of some mad musician had set all the common objects of field and street dancing an eternal jig. And long afterwards, when Syme was middle-aged and at rest, he could never see one of those particular objects — a lamppost, or an apple tree, or a windmill — without thinking that it was a strayed reveller from that revel of masquerade.

On one side of this lawn, alive with dancers, was a sort of green bank, like the terrace in such old-fashioned gardens.

Along this, in a kind of crescent, stood seven great chairs, the thrones of the seven days. Gogol and Dr. Bull were already in their seats; the Professor was just mounting to his. Gogol, or Tuesday, had his simplicity well symbolised by a dress designed upon the division of the waters, a dress that separated upon his forehead and fell to his feet, grey and silver, like a sheet of rain. The Professor, whose day was that on which the birds and fishes — the ruder forms of life — were created, had a dress of dim purple, over which sprawled goggle-eyed fishes and outrageous tropical birds, the union in him of unfathomable fancy and of doubt. Dr. Bull, the last day of Creation, wore a coat covered with heraldic animals in red and gold, and on his crest a man rampant. He lay back in his chair with a broad smile, the picture of an optimist in his element.

One by one the wanderers ascended the bank and sat in their strange seats. As each of them sat down a roar of enthusiasm rose from the carnival, such as that with which crowds receive kings. Cups were clashed and torches shaken, and feathered hats flung in the air. The men for whom these thrones were reserved were men crowned with some extraordinary laurels. But the central chair was empty.

Syme was on the left hand of it and the Secretary on the right. The Secretary looked across the empty throne at Syme, and said, compressing his lips —

“We do not know yet that he is not dead in a field.”

Almost as Syme heard the words, he saw on the sea of human faces in front of him a frightful and beautiful alteration, as if heaven had opened behind his head. But Sunday had only passed silently along the front like a shadow, and had sat in the central seat. He was draped plainly, in a pure and terrible white, and his hair was like a silver flame on his forehead.

For a long time — it seemed for hours — that huge masquerade of mankind swayed and stamped in front of them to marching and exultant music. Every couple dancing seemed a separate romance; it might be a fairy dancing with a pillar-box, or a peasant girl dancing with the moon; but in each case it was, somehow, as absurd as Alice in Wonderland, yet as grave and kind as a love story. At last, however, the thick crowd began to thin itself. Couples strolled away into the garden-walks, or began to drift towards that end of the building where stood smoking, in huge pots like fish-kettles, some hot and scented mixtures of old ale or wine. Above all these, upon a sort of black framework on the roof of the house, roared in its iron basket a gigantic bonfire, which lit up the land for miles. It flung the homely effect of firelight over the face of vast forests of grey or brown, and it seemed to fill with warmth even the emptiness of upper night. Yet this also, after a time, was allowed to grow fainter; the dim groups gathered more and more round the great cauldrons, or passed, laughing and clattering, into the inner passages of that ancient house. Soon there were only some ten loiterers in the garden; soon only four. Finally the last stray merry-maker ran into the house whooping to his companions. The fire faded, and the slow, strong stars came out. And the seven strange men were left alone, like seven stone statues on their chairs of stone. Not one of them had spoken a word.

They seemed in no haste to do so, but heard in silence the hum of insects and the distant song of one bird. Then Sunday spoke, but so dreamily that he might have been continuing a conversation rather than beginning one.

“We will eat and drink later,” he said. “Let us remain together a little, we who have loved each other so sadly, and have fought so long. I seem to remember only centuries of heroic war, in which you were always heroes — epic on epic, iliad on iliad, and you always brothers in arms. Whether it was but recently (for time is nothing), or at the beginning of the world, I sent you out to war. I sat in the darkness, where there is not any created thing, and to you I was only a voice commanding valour and an unnatural virtue. You heard the voice in the dark, and you never heard it again. The sun in heaven denied it, the earth and sky denied it, all human wisdom denied it. And when I met you in the daylight I denied it myself."

Syme stirred sharply in his seat, but otherwise there was silence, and the incomprehensible went on.

"But you were men. You did not forget your secret honour, though the whole cosmos turned an engine of torture to tear it out of you. I knew how near you were to hell. I know how you, Thursday, crossed swords with King Satan, and how you, Wednesday, named me in the hour without hope."

There was complete silence in the starlit garden, and then the black-browed Secretary, implacable, turned in his chair towards Sunday, and said in a harsh voice —

"Who and what are you?"

"I am the Sabbath," said the other without moving. "I am the peace of God."

The Secretary started up, and stood crushing his costly robe in his hand.

"I know what you mean," he cried, "and it is exactly that that I cannot forgive you. I know you are contentment, optimism, what do they call the thing, an ultimate reconciliation. Well, I am not reconciled. If you were the man in the dark room, why were you also Sunday, an offense to the sunlight? If you were from the first our father and our friend, why were you also our greatest enemy? We wept, we fled in terror; the iron entered into our souls — and you are the peace of God! Oh, I can forgive God His anger, though it destroyed nations; but I cannot forgive Him His peace."

Sunday answered not a word, but very slowly he turned his face of stone upon Syme as if asking a question.

"No," said Syme, "I do not feel fierce like that. I am grateful to you, not only for wine and hospitality here, but for many a fine scamper and free fight. But I should like to know. My soul and heart are as happy and quiet here as this old garden, but my reason is still crying out. I should like to know."

Sunday looked at Ratcliffe, whose clear voice said —

"It seems so silly that you should have been on both sides and fought yourself."

Bull said —

"I understand nothing, but I am happy. In fact, I am going to sleep."

"I am not happy," said the Professor with his head in his hands, "because I do not understand. You let me stray a little too near to hell."

And then Gogol said, with the absolute simplicity of a child —

“I wish I knew why I was hurt so much.”

Still Sunday said nothing, but only sat with his mighty chin upon his hand, and gazed at the distance. Then at last he said —

“I have heard your complaints in order. And here, I think, comes another to complain, and we will hear him also.”

The falling fire in the great cresset threw a last long gleam, like a bar of burning gold, across the dim grass. Against this fiery band was outlined in utter black the advancing legs of a black-clad figure. He seemed to have a fine close suit with knee-breeches such as that which was worn by the servants of the house, only that it was not blue, but of this absolute sable. He had, like the servants, a kind of sword by his side. It was only when he had come quite close to the crescent of the seven and flung up his face to look at them, that Syme saw, with thunder-struck clearness, that the face was the broad, almost ape-like face of his old friend Gregory, with its rank red hair and its insulting smile.

“Gregory!” gasped Syme, half-rising from his seat. “Why, this is the real anarchist!”

“Yes,” said Gregory, with a great and dangerous restraint, “I am the real anarchist.”

“‘Now there was a day,’” murmured Bull, who seemed really to have fallen asleep, “‘when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.’”

“You are right,” said Gregory, and gazed all round. “I am a destroyer. I would destroy the world if I could.”

A sense of a pathos far under the earth stirred up in Syme, and he spoke brokenly and without sequence.

“Oh, most unhappy man,” he cried, “try to be happy! You have red hair like your sister.”

“My red hair, like red flames, shall burn up the world,” said Gregory. “I thought I hated everything more than common men can hate anything; but I find that I do not hate everything so much as I hate you!”

“I never hated you,” said Syme very sadly.

Then out of this unintelligible creature the last thunders broke.

“You!” he cried. “You never hated because you never lived. I know what you are all of you, from first to last — you are the people in power! You are the police — the great fat, smiling men in blue and buttons! You are the

Law, and you have never been broken. But is there a free soul alive that does not long to break you, only because you have never been broken? We in revolt talk all kind of nonsense doubtless about this crime or that crime of the Government. It is all folly! The only crime of the Government is that it governs. The unpardonable sin of the supreme power is that it is supreme. I do not curse you for being cruel. I do not curse you (though I might) for being kind. I curse you for being safe! You sit in your chairs of stone, and have never come down from them. You are the seven angels of heaven, and you have had no troubles. Oh, I could forgive you everything, you that rule all mankind, if I could feel for once that you had suffered for one hour a real agony such as I—"

Syme sprang to his feet, shaking from head to foot.

"I see everything," he cried, "everything that there is. Why does each thing on the earth war against each other thing? Why does each small thing in the world have to fight against the world itself? Why does a fly have to fight the whole universe? Why does a dandelion have to fight the whole universe? For the same reason that I had to be alone in the dreadful Council of the Days. So that each thing that obeys law may have the glory and isolation of the anarchist. So that each man fighting for order may be as brave and good a man as the dynamiter. So that the real lie of Satan may be flung back in the face of this blasphemer, so that by tears and torture we may earn the right to say to this man, 'You lie!' No agonies can be too great to buy the right to say to this accuser, 'We also have suffered.'

"It is not true that we have never been broken. We have been broken upon the wheel. It is not true that we have never descended from these thrones. We have descended into hell. We were complaining of unforgettable miseries even at the very moment when this man entered insolently to accuse us of happiness. I repel the slander; we have not been happy. I can answer for every one of the great guards of Law whom he has accused. At least—"

He had turned his eyes so as to see suddenly the great face of Sunday, which wore a strange smile.

"Have you," he cried in a dreadful voice, "have you ever suffered?"

As he gazed, the great face grew to an awful size, grew larger than the colossal mask of Memnon, which had made him scream as a child. It grew larger and larger, filling the whole sky; then everything went black. Only in the blackness before it entirely destroyed his brain he seemed to hear a distant voice saying a commonplace text that he had heard somewhere, “Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?”

* * *

When men in books awake from a vision, they commonly find themselves in some place in which they might have fallen asleep; they yawn in a chair, or lift themselves with bruised limbs from a field. Syme’s experience was something much more psychologically strange if there was indeed anything unreal, in the earthly sense, about the things he had gone through. For while he could always remember afterwards that he had swooned before the face of Sunday, he could not remember having ever come to at all. He could only remember that gradually and naturally he knew that he was and had been walking along a country lane with an easy and conversational companion. That companion had been a part of his recent drama; it was the red-haired poet Gregory. They were walking like old friends, and were in the middle of a conversation about some triviality. But Syme could only feel an unnatural buoyancy in his body and a crystal simplicity in his mind that seemed to be superior to everything that he said or did. He felt he was in possession of some impossible good news, which made every other thing a triviality, but an adorable triviality.

Dawn was breaking over everything in colours at once clear and timid; as if Nature made a first attempt at yellow and a first attempt at rose. A breeze blew so clean and sweet, that one could not think that it blew from the sky; it blew rather through some hole in the sky. Syme felt a simple surprise when he saw rising all round him on both sides of the road the red, irregular buildings of Saffron Park. He had no idea that he had walked so near London. He walked by instinct along one white road, on which early birds hopped and sang, and found himself outside a fenced garden. There he saw the sister of Gregory, the girl with the gold-red hair, cutting lilac before breakfast, with the great unconscious gravity of a girl.

THE BALL AND THE CROSS

First published in 1909, this novel is an allegorical tale, concerning the comic adventures of two Scotsmen caught in the grip of a profound argument. One character is a devout Roman Catholic, while the other is an atheist, and their opposing opinions almost bring them to blows. The novel is an exploration of the differences and values of faith and scepticism, often returned to in Chesterton’s works. In the age of materialism in which the author wrote, he attempted to write about the conflict between rationalism and religion — between the Ball and the Cross — and to make that ancient quarrel important again.

Chesterton, close to the time of publication

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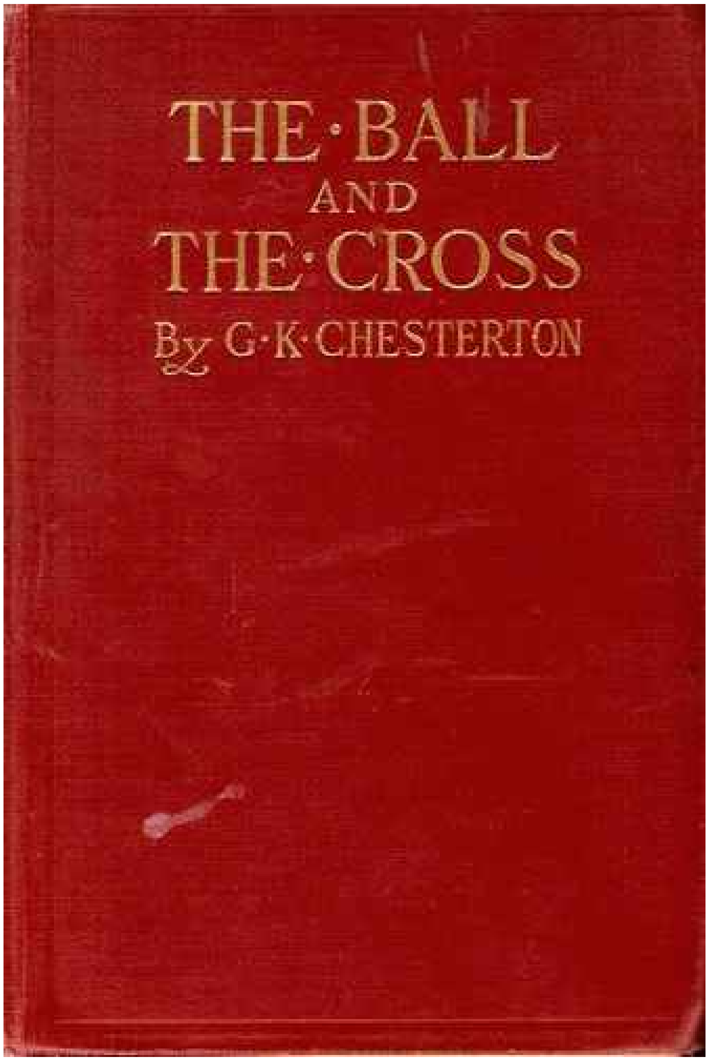
THE · BALL
AND
THE · CROSS
By G · K · CHESTERTON

The first edition

I. A DISCUSSION SOMEWHAT IN THE AIR

The flying ship of Professor Lucifer sang through the skies like a silver arrow; the bleak white steel of it, gleaming in the bleak blue emptiness of the evening. That it was far above the earth was no expression for it; to the two men in it, it seemed to be far above the stars. The professor had himself invented the flying machine, and had also invented nearly everything in it. Every sort of tool or apparatus had, in consequence, to the full, that fantastic and distorted look which belongs to the miracles of science. For the world of science and evolution is far more nameless and elusive and like a dream than the world of poetry and religion; since in the latter images and ideas remain themselves eternally, while it is the whole idea of evolution that identities melt into each other as they do in a nightmare.

All the tools of Professor Lucifer were the ancient human tools gone mad, grown into unrecognizable shapes, forgetful of their origin, forgetful of their names. That thing which looked like an enormous key with three wheels was really a patent and very deadly revolver. That object which seemed to be created by the entanglement of two corkscrews was really the key. The thing which might have been mistaken for a tricycle turned upside-down was the inexpressibly important instrument to which the corkscrew was the key. All these things, as I say, the professor had invented; he had invented everything in the flying ship, with the exception, perhaps, of himself. This he had been born too late actually to inaugurate, but he believed at least, that he had considerably improved it.

There was, however, another man on board, so to speak, at the time. Him, also, by a curious coincidence, the professor had not invented, and him he had not even very greatly improved, though he had fished him up with a lasso out of his own back garden, in Western Bulgaria, with the pure object of improving him. He was an exceedingly holy man, almost entirely covered with white hair. You could see nothing but his eyes, and he seemed to talk with them. A monk of immense learning and acute intellect he had made himself happy in a little stone hut and a little stony garden in the Balkans, chiefly by writing the most crushing refutations of exposures of certain heresies, the last professors of which had been burnt (generally by each other) precisely 1,119 years previously. They were really very plausible and thoughtful heresies, and it was really a creditable or even glorious circumstance, that the old monk had been intellectual enough to detect their fallacy; the only misfortune was that nobody in the modern world was intellectual enough even to understand their argument. The old monk, one of whose names was Michael, and the other a name quite impossible to remember or repeat in our Western civilization, had, however, as I have said, made himself quite happy while he was in a mountain hermitage in the society of wild animals. And now that his luck had lifted him above all the mountains in the society of a wild physicist, he made himself happy still.

"I have no intention, my good Michael," said Professor Lucifer, "of endeavouring to convert you by argument. The imbecility of your traditions can be quite finally exhibited to anybody with mere ordinary knowledge of the world, the same kind of knowledge which teaches us not to sit in draughts or not to encourage friendliness in impecunious people. It is folly to talk of this or that demonstrating the rationalist philosophy. Everything demonstrates it. Rubbing shoulders with men of all kinds — —"

"You will forgive me," said the monk, meekly from under loads of white beard, "but I fear I do not understand; was it in order that I might rub my shoulder against men of all kinds that you put me inside this thing?"

"An entertaining retort, in the narrow and deductive manner of the Middle Ages," replied the Professor, calmly, "but even upon your own basis I will illustrate my point. We are up in the sky. In your religion and all the religions, as far as I know (and I know everything), the sky is made the symbol of everything that is sacred and merciful. Well, now you are in the sky, you know better. Phrase it how you like, twist it how you like, you know that you know better. You know what are a man's real feelings about the heavens, when he finds himself alone in the heavens, surrounded by the heavens. You know the truth, and the truth is this. The heavens are evil, the sky is evil, the stars are evil. This mere space, this mere quantity, terrifies a man more than tigers or the terrible plague. You know that since our science has spoken, the bottom has fallen out of the Universe. Now, heaven is the hopeless thing, more hopeless than any hell. Now, if there be any comfort for all your miserable progeny of morbid apes, it must be in the earth, underneath you, under the roots of the grass, in the place where hell was of old. The fiery crypts, the lurid cellars of the underworld, to which you once condemned the wicked, are hideous enough, but at least they are more homely than the heaven in which we ride. And the time will come when you will all hide in them, to escape the horror of the stars."

"I hope you will excuse my interrupting you," said Michael, with a slight cough, "but I have always noticed — —"

"Go on, pray go on," said Professor Lucifer, radiantly, "I really like to draw out your simple ideas."

"Well, the fact is," said the other, "that much as I admire your rhetoric and the rhetoric of your school, from a purely verbal point of view, such little study of you and your school in human history as I have been enabled to make has led me to — er — rather singular conclusion, which I find great difficulty in expressing, especially in a foreign language."

"Come, come," said the Professor, encouragingly, "I'll help you out. How did my view strike you?"

"Well, the truth is, I know I don't express it properly, but somehow it seemed to me that you always convey ideas of that kind with most eloquence, when — er — when — —"

"Oh! get on," cried Lucifer, boisterously.

"Well, in point of fact when your flying ship is just going to run into something. I thought you wouldn't mind my mentioning it, but it's running into something now."

Lucifer exploded with an oath and leapt erect, leaning hard upon the handle that acted as a helm to the vessel. For the last ten minutes they had been shooting downwards into great cracks and caverns of cloud. Now, through a sort of purple haze, could be seen comparatively near to them what seemed to be the upper part of a huge, dark orb or sphere, islanded in a sea of cloud. The Professor's eyes were blazing like a maniac's.

"It is a new world," he cried, with a dreadful mirth. "It is a new planet and it shall bear my name. This star and not that other vulgar one shall be 'Lucifer, sun of the morning.' Here we will have no chartered lunacies, here we will have no gods. Here man shall be as innocent as the daisies, as innocent and as cruel — here the intellect — —"

"There seems," said Michael, timidly, "to be something sticking up in the middle of it."

"So there is," said the Professor, leaning over the side of the ship, his spectacles shining with intellectual excitement. "What can it be? It might of course be merely a — —"

Then a shriek indescribable broke out of him of a sudden, and he flung up his arms like a lost spirit. The monk took the helm in a tired way; he did not seem much astonished for he came from an ignorant part of the world in which it is not uncommon for lost spirits to shriek when they see the curious shape which the Professor had just seen on the top of the mysterious ball, but he took the helm only just in time, and by driving it hard to the left he prevented the flying ship from smashing into St. Paul’s Cathedral.

A plain of sad-coloured cloud lay along the level of the top of the Cathedral dome, so that the ball and the cross looked like a buoy riding on a leaden sea. As the flying ship swept towards it, this plain of cloud looked as dry and definite and rocky as any grey desert. Hence it gave to the mind and body a sharp and unearthly sensation when the ship cut and sank into the cloud as into any common mist, a thing without resistance. There was, as it were, a deadly shock in the fact that there was no shock. It was as if they had cloven into ancient cliffs like so much butter. But sensations awaited them which were much stranger than those of sinking through the solid earth. For a moment their eyes and nostrils were stopped with darkness and opaque cloud; then the darkness warmed into a kind of brown fog. And far, far below them the brown fog fell until it warmed into fire. Through the dense London atmosphere they could see below them the flaming London lights; lights which lay beneath them in squares and oblongs of fire. The fog and fire were mixed in a passionate vapour; you might say that the fog was drowning the flames; or you might say that the flames had set the fog on fire. Beside the ship and beneath it (for it swung just under the ball), the immeasurable dome itself shot out and down into the dark like a combination of voiceless cataracts. Or it was like some cyclopean sea-beast sitting above London and letting down its tentacles bewilderingly on every side, a monstrosity in that starless heaven. For the clouds that belonged to London had closed over the heads of the voyagers sealing up the entrance of the upper air. They had broken through a roof and come into a temple of twilight.

They were so near to the ball that Lucifer leaned his hand against it, holding the vessel away, as men push a boat off from a bank. Above it the cross already draped in the dark mists of the borderland was shadowy and more awful in shape and size.

Professor Lucifer slapped his hand twice upon the surface of the great orb as if he were caressing some enormous animal. “This is the fellow,” he said, “this is the one for my money.”

“May I with all respect inquire,” asked the old monk, “what on earth you are talking about?”

“Why this,” cried Lucifer, smiting the ball again, “here is the only symbol, my boy. So fat. So satisfied. Not like that scraggy individual, stretching his arms in stark weariness.” And he pointed up to the cross, his face dark with a grin. “I was telling you just now, Michael, that I can prove the best part of the rationalist case and the Christian humbug from any symbol you liked to give me, from any instance I came across. Here is an instance with a vengeance. What could possibly express your philosophy and my philosophy better than the shape of that cross and the shape of this ball? This globe is reasonable; that cross is unreasonable. It is a four-legged animal, with one leg longer than the others. The globe is inevitable. The cross is arbitrary. Above all the globe is at unity with itself; the cross is primarily and above all things at enmity with itself. The cross is the conflict of two hostile lines, of irreconcilable direction. That silent thing up there is essentially a collision, a crash, a struggle in stone. Pah! that sacred symbol of yours has actually given its name to a description of desperation and muddle. When we speak of men at once ignorant of each other and frustrated by each other, we say they are at cross-purposes. Away with the thing! The very shape of it is a contradiction in terms.”

“What you say is perfectly true,” said Michael, with serenity. “But we like contradictions in terms. Man is a contradiction in terms; he is a beast whose superiority to other beasts consists in having fallen. That cross is, as you say, an eternal collision; so am I. That is a struggle in stone. Every form of life is a struggle in flesh. The shape of the cross is irrational, just as the shape of the human animal is irrational. You say the cross is a quadruped with one limb longer than the rest. I say man is a quadruped who only uses two of his legs.”

The Professor frowned thoughtfully for an instant, and said: “Of course everything is relative, and I would not deny that the element of struggle and self-contradiction, represented by that cross, has a necessary place at a certain evolutionary stage. But surely the cross is the lower development and the sphere the higher. After all it is easy enough to see what is really wrong with Wren’s architectural arrangement.”

“And what is that, pray?” inquired Michael, meekly.

“The cross is on top of the ball,” said Professor Lucifer, simply. “That is surely wrong. The ball should be on top of the cross. The cross is a mere barbaric prop; the ball is perfection. The cross at its best is but the bitter tree of man’s history; the ball is the rounded, the ripe and final fruit. And the fruit should be at the top of the tree, not at the bottom of it.”

“Oh!” said the monk, a wrinkle coming into his forehead, “so you think that in a rationalistic scheme of symbolism the ball should be on top of the cross?”

“It sums up my whole allegory,” said the professor.

“Well, that is really very interesting,” resumed Michael slowly, “because I think in that case you would see a most singular effect, an effect that has generally been achieved by all those able and powerful systems which rationalism, or the religion of the ball, has produced to lead or teach mankind. You would see, I think, that thing happen which is always the ultimate embodiment and logical outcome of your logical scheme.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Lucifer. “What would happen?”

“I mean it would fall down,” said the monk, looking wistfully into the void.

Lucifer made an angry movement and opened his mouth to speak, but Michael, with all his air of deliberation, was proceeding before he could bring out a word.

“I once knew a man like you, Lucifer,” he said, with a maddening monotony and slowness of articulation. “He took this — —”

“There is no man like me,” cried Lucifer, with a violence that shook the ship.

“As I was observing,” continued Michael, “this man also took the view that the symbol of Christianity was a symbol of savagery and all unreason. His history is rather amusing. It is also a perfect allegory of what happens to rationalists like yourself. He began, of course, by refusing to allow a crucifix in his house, or round his wife’s neck, or even in a picture. He said, as you say, that it was an arbitrary and fantastic shape, that it was a monstrosity, loved because it was paradoxical. Then he began to grow fiercer and more eccentric; he would batter the crosses by the roadside; for he lived in a Roman Catholic country. Finally in a height of frenzy he climbed the steeple of the Parish Church and tore down the cross, waving it in the air, and uttering wild soliloquies up there under the stars. Then one still summer evening as he was wending his way homewards, along a lane, the devil of his madness came upon him with a violence and transfiguration which changes the world. He was standing smoking, for a moment, in the front of an interminable line of palings, when his eyes were opened. Not a light shifted, not a leaf stirred, but he saw as if by a sudden change in the eyesight that this paling was an army of innumerable crosses linked together over hill and dale. And he whirled up his heavy stick and went at it as if at an army. Mile after mile along his homeward path he broke it down and tore it up. For he hated the cross and every paling is a wall of crosses. When he returned to his house he was a literal madman. He sat upon a chair and then started up from it for the cross-bars of the carpentry repeated the intolerable image. He flung himself upon a bed only to remember that this, too, like all workmanlike things, was constructed on the accursed plan. He broke his furniture because it was made of crosses. He burnt his house because it was made of crosses. He was found in the river."

Lucifer was looking at him with a bitten lip.

"Is that story really true?" he asked.

"Oh, no," said Michael, airily. "It is a parable. It is a parable of you and all your rationalists. You begin by breaking up the Cross; but you end by breaking up the habitable world. We leave you saying that nobody ought to join the Church against his will. When we meet you again you are saying that no one has any will to join it with. We leave you saying that there is no such place as Eden. We find you saying that there is no such place as Ireland. You start by hating the irrational and you come to hate everything, for everything is irrational and so — —"

Lucifer leapt upon him with a cry like a wild beast's. "Ah," he screamed, "to every man his madness. You are mad on the cross. Let it save you."

And with a herculean energy he forced the monk backwards out of the reeling car on to the upper part of the stone ball. Michael, with as abrupt an agility, caught one of the beams of the cross and saved himself from falling. At the same instant Lucifer drove down a lever and the ship shot up with him in it alone.

"Ha! ha!" he yelled, "what sort of a support do you find it, old fellow?"

"For practical purposes of support," replied Michael grimly, "it is at any rate a great deal better than the ball. May I ask if you are going to leave me here?"

"Yes, yes. I mount! I mount!" cried the professor in ungovernable excitement. "*Altiora peto*. My path is upward."

“How often have you told me, Professor, that there is really no up or down in space?” said the monk. “I shall mount up as much as you will.”

“Indeed,” said Lucifer, leering over the side of the flying ship. “May I ask what you are going to do?”

The monk pointed downward at Ludgate Hill. “I am going,” he said, “to climb up into a star.”

Those who look at the matter most superficially regard paradox as something which belongs to jesting and light journalism. Paradox of this kind is to be found in the saying of the dandy, in the decadent comedy, “Life is much too important to be taken seriously.” Those who look at the matter a little more deeply or delicately see that paradox is a thing which especially belongs to all religions. Paradox of this kind is to be found in such a saying as “The meek shall inherit the earth.” But those who see and feel the fundamental fact of the matter know that paradox is a thing which belongs not to religion only, but to all vivid and violent practical crises of human living. This kind of paradox may be clearly perceived by anybody who happens to be hanging in mid-space, clinging to one arm of the Cross of St. Paul’s.

Father Michael in spite of his years, and in spite of his asceticism (or because of it, for all I know), was a very healthy and happy old gentleman. And as he swung on a bar above the sickening emptiness of air, he realized, with that sort of dead detachment which belongs to the brains of those in peril, the deathless and hopeless contradiction which is involved in the mere idea of courage. He was a happy and healthy old gentleman and therefore he was quite careless about it. And he felt as every man feels in the taut moment of such terror that his chief danger was terror itself; his only possible strength would be a coolness amounting to carelessness, a carelessness amounting almost to a suicidal swagger. His one wild chance of coming out safely would be in not too desperately desiring to be safe. There might be footholds down that awful facade, if only he could not care whether they were footholds or no. If he were foolhardy he might escape; if he were wise he would stop where he was till he dropped from the cross like a stone. And this antinomy kept on repeating itself in his mind, a contradiction as large and staring as the immense contradiction of the Cross; he remembered having often heard the words, “Whosoever shall lose his life the same shall save it.” He remembered with a sort of strange pity that this had always been made to mean that whoever lost his physical life should save his spiritual life. Now he knew the truth that is known to all fighters, and hunters, and climbers of cliffs. He knew that even his animal life could only be saved by a considerable readiness to lose it.

Some will think it improbable that a human soul swinging desperately in mid-air should think about philosophical inconsistencies. But such extreme states are dangerous things to dogmatize about. Frequently they produce a certain useless and joyless activity of the mere intellect, thought not only divorced from hope but even from desire. And if it is impossible to dogmatize about such states, it is still more impossible to describe them. To this spasm of sanity and clarity in Michael's mind succeeded a spasm of the elemental terror; the terror of the animal in us which regards the whole universe as its enemy; which, when it is victorious, has no pity, and so, when it is defeated has no imaginable hope. Of that ten minutes of terror it is not possible to speak in human words. But then again in that damnable darkness there began to grow a strange dawn as of grey and pale silver. And of this ultimate resignation or certainty it is even less possible to write; it is something stranger than hell itself; it is perhaps the last of the secrets of God. At the highest crisis of some incurable anguish there will suddenly fall upon the man the stillness of an insane contentment. It is not hope, for hope is broken and romantic and concerned with the future; this is complete and of the present. It is not faith, for faith by its very nature is fierce, and as it were at once doubtful and defiant; but this is simply a satisfaction. It is not knowledge, for the intellect seems to have no particular part in it. Nor is it (as the modern idiots would certainly say it is) a mere numbness or negative paralysis of the powers of grief. It is not negative in the least; it is as positive as good news. In some sense, indeed, it is good news. It seems almost as if there were some equality among things, some balance in all possible contingencies which we are not permitted to know lest we should learn indifference to good and evil, but which is sometimes shown to us for an instant as a last aid in our last agony.

Michael certainly could not have given any sort of rational account of this vast unmeaning satisfaction which soaked through him and filled him to the brim. He felt with a sort of half-witted lucidity that the cross was there, and the ball was there, and the dome was there, that he was going to climb down from them, and that he did not mind in the least whether he was killed or not. This mysterious mood lasted long enough to start him on his dreadful descent and to force him to continue it. But six times before he reached the highest of the outer galleries terror had returned on him like a flying storm of darkness and thunder. By the time he had reached that place of safety he almost felt (as in some impossible fit of drunkenness) that he had two heads; one was calm, careless, and efficient; the other saw the danger like a deadly map, was wise, careful, and useless. He had fancied that he would have to let himself vertically down the face of the whole building. When he dropped into the upper gallery he still felt as far from the terrestrial globe as if he had only dropped from the sun to the moon. He paused a little, panting in the gallery under the ball, and idly kicked his heels, moving a few yards along it. And as he did so a thunderbolt struck his soul. A man, a heavy, ordinary man, with a composed indifferent face, and a prosaic sort of uniform, with a row of buttons, blocked his way. Michael had no mind to wonder whether this solid astonished man, with the brown moustache and the nickel buttons, had also come on a flying ship. He merely let his mind float in an endless felicity about the man. He thought how nice it would be if he had to live up in that gallery with that one man for ever. He thought how he would luxuriate in the nameless shades of this man’s soul and then hear with an endless excitement about the nameless shades of the souls of all his aunts and uncles. A moment before he had been dying alone. Now he was living in the same world with a man; an inexhaustible ecstasy. In the gallery below the ball Father Michael had found that man who is the noblest and most divine and most lovable of all men, better than all the saints, greater than all the heroes — man Friday.

In the confused colour and music of his new paradise, Michael heard only in a faint and distant fashion some remarks that this beautiful solid man seemed to be making to him; remarks about something or other being after hours and against orders. He also seemed to be asking how Michael “got up” there. This beautiful man evidently felt as Michael did that the earth was a star and was set in heaven.

At length Michael sated himself with the mere sensual music of the voice of the man in buttons. He began to listen to what he said, and even to make some attempt at answering a question which appeared to have been put several times and was now put with some excess of emphasis. Michael realized that the image of God in nickel buttons was asking him how he had come there. He said that he had come in Lucifer’s ship. On his giving this answer the demeanour of the image of God underwent a remarkable change. From addressing Michael gruffly, as if he were a malefactor, he began suddenly to speak to him with a sort of eager and feverish amiability as if he were a child. He seemed particularly anxious to coax him away from the balustrade. He led him by the arm towards a door leading into the building itself, soothing him all the time. He gave what even Michael (slight as was his knowledge of the world) felt to be an improbable account of the sumptuous pleasures and varied advantages awaiting him downstairs. Michael followed him, however, if only out of politeness, down an apparently interminable spiral of staircase. At one point a door opened. Michael stepped through it, and the unaccountable man in buttons leapt after him and pinioned him where he stood. But he only wished to stand; to stand and stare. He had stepped as it were into another infinity, out under the dome of another heaven. But this was a dome of heaven made by man. The gold and green and crimson of its sunset were not in the shapeless clouds but in shapes of cherubim and seraphim, awful human shapes with a passionate plumage. Its stars were not above but far below, like fallen stars still in unbroken constellations; the dome itself was full of darkness. And far below, lower even than the lights, could be seen creeping or motionless, great black masses of men. The tongue of a terrible organ seemed to shake the very air in the whole void; and through it there came up to Michael the sound of a tongue more terrible; the dreadful everlasting voice of man, calling to his gods from the beginning to the end of the world. Michael felt almost as if he were a god, and all the voices were hurled at him.

“No, the pretty things aren’t here,” said the demi-god in buttons, caressingly. “The pretty things are downstairs. You come along with me. There’s something that will surprise you downstairs; something you want very much to see.”

Evidently the man in buttons did not feel like a god, so Michael made no attempt to explain his feelings to him, but followed him meekly enough down the trail of the serpentine staircase. He had no notion where or at what level he was. He was still full of the cold splendour of space, and of what a French writer has brilliantly named the “vertigo of the infinite,” when another door opened, and with a shock indescribable he found himself on the familiar level, in a street full of faces, with the houses and even the lamp-posts above his head. He felt suddenly happy and suddenly indescribably small. He fancied he had been changed into a child again; his eyes sought the pavement seriously as children’s do, as if it were a thing with which something satisfactory could be done. He felt the full warmth of that pleasure from which the proud shut themselves out; the pleasure which not only goes with humiliation, but which almost is humiliation. Men who have escaped death by a hair have it, and men whose love is returned by a woman unexpectedly, and men whose sins are forgiven them. Everything his eye fell on it feasted on, not aesthetically, but with a plain, jolly appetite as of a boy eating buns. He relished the squareness of the houses; he liked their clean angles as if he had just cut them with a knife. The lit squares of the shop windows excited him as the young are excited by the lit stage of some promising pantomime. He happened to see in one shop which projected with a bulging bravery on to the pavement some square tins of potted meat, and it seemed like a hint of a hundred hilarious high teas in a hundred streets of the world. He was, perhaps, the happiest of all the children of men. For in that unendurable instant when he hung, half slipping, to the ball of St. Paul's, the whole universe had been destroyed and re-created.

Suddenly through all the din of the dark streets came a crash of glass. With that mysterious suddenness of the Cockney mob, a rush was made in the right direction, a dingy office, next to the shop of the potted meat. The pane of glass was lying in splinters about the pavement. And the police already had their hands on a very tall young man, with dark, lank hair and dark, dazed eyes, with a grey plaid over his shoulder, who had just smashed the shop window with a single blow of his stick.

"I'd do it again," said the young man, with a furious white face. "Anybody would have done it. Did you see what it said? I swear I'd do it again." Then his eyes encountered the monkish habit of Michael, and he pulled off his grey tam-o'-shanter with the gesture of a Catholic.

"Father, did you see what they said?" he cried, trembling. "Did you see what they dared to say? I didn't understand it at first. I read it half through before I broke the window."

Michael felt he knew not how. The whole peace of the world was pent up painfully in his heart. The new and childlike world which he had seen so suddenly, men had not seen at all. Here they were still at their old bewildering, pardonable, useless quarrels, with so much to be said on both sides, and so little that need be said at all. A fierce inspiration fell on him suddenly; he would strike them where they stood with the love of God. They should not move till they saw their own sweet and startling existence. They should not go from that place till they went home embracing like brothers and shouting like men delivered. From the Cross from which he had fallen fell the shadow of its fantastic mercy; and the first three words he spoke in a voice like a silver trumpet, held men as still as stones. Perhaps if he had spoken there for an hour in his illumination he might have founded a religion on Ludgate Hill. But the heavy hand of his guide fell suddenly on his shoulder.

“This poor fellow is dotty,” he said good-humouredly to the crowd. “I found him wandering in the Cathedral. Says he came in a flying ship. Is there a constable to spare to take care of him?”

There was a constable to spare. Two other constables attended to the tall young man in grey; a fourth concerned himself with the owner of the shop, who showed some tendency to be turbulent. They took the tall young man away to a magistrate, whither we shall follow him in an ensuing chapter. And they took the happiest man in the world away to an asylum.

II. THE RELIGION OF THE STIPENDIARY MAGISTRATE

The editorial office of *The Atheist* had for some years past become less and less prominently interesting as a feature of Ludgate Hill. The paper was unsuited to the atmosphere. It showed an interest in the Bible unknown in the district, and a knowledge of that volume to which nobody else on Ludgate Hill could make any conspicuous claim. It was in vain that the editor of *The Atheist* filled his front window with fierce and final demands as to what Noah in the Ark did with the neck of the giraffe. It was in vain that he asked violently, as for the last time, how the statement "God is Spirit" could be reconciled with the statement "The earth is His footstool." It was in vain that he cried with an accusing energy that the Bishop of London was paid L12,000 a year for pretending to believe that the whale swallowed Jonah. It was in vain that he hung in conspicuous places the most thrilling scientific calculations about the width of the throat of a whale. Was it nothing to them all they that passed by? Did his sudden and splendid and truly sincere indignation never stir any of the people pouring down Ludgate Hill? Never. The little man who edited *The Atheist* would rush from his shop on starlit evenings and shake his fist at St. Paul's in the passion of his holy war upon the holy place. He might have spared his emotion. The cross at the top of St. Paul's and *The Atheist* shop at the foot of it were alike remote from the world. The shop and the Cross were equally uplifted and alone in the empty heavens.

To the little man who edited *The Atheist*, a fiery little Scotchman, with fiery, red hair and beard, going by the name of Turnbull, all this decline in public importance seemed not so much sad or even mad, but merely bewildering and unaccountable. He had said the worst thing that could be said; and it seemed accepted and ignored like the ordinary second best of the politicians. Every day his blasphemies looked more glaring, and every day the dust lay thicker upon them. It made him feel as if he were moving in a world of idiots. He seemed among a race of men who smiled when told of their own death, or looked vacantly at the Day of Judgement. Year after year went by, and year after year the death of God in a shop in Ludgate became a less and less important occurrence. All the forward men of his age discouraged Turnbull. The socialists said he was cursing priests when he should be cursing capitalists. The artists said that the soul was most spiritual, not when freed from religion, but when freed from morality. Year after year went by, and at least a man came by who treated Mr. Turnbull's secularist shop with a real respect and seriousness. He was a young man in a grey plaid, and he smashed the window.

He was a young man, born in the Bay of Arisaig, opposite Rum and the Isle of Skye. His high, hawklike features and snaky black hair bore the mark of that unknown historic thing which is crudely called Celtic, but which is probably far older than the Celts, whoever they were. He was in name and stock a Highlander of the Macdonalds; but his family took, as was common in such cases, the name of a subordinate sept as a surname, and for all the purposes which could be answered in London, he called himself Evan MacIan. He had been brought up in some loneliness and seclusion as a strict Roman Catholic, in the midst of that little wedge of Roman Catholics which is driven into the Western Highlands. And he had found his way as far as Fleet Street, seeking some half-promised employment, without having properly realized that there were in the world any people who were not Roman Catholics. He had uncovered himself for a few moments before the statue of Queen Anne, in front of St. Paul's Cathedral, under the firm impression that it was a figure of the Virgin Mary. He was somewhat surprised at the lack of deference shown to the figure by the people bustling by. He did not understand that their one essential historical principle, the one law truly graven on their hearts, was the great and comforting statement that Queen Anne is dead. This faith was as fundamental as his faith, that Our Lady was alive. Any persons he had talked to since he had touched the fringe of our fashion or civilization had been by a coincidence, sympathetic or hypocritical. Or if they had spoken some established blasphemies, he had been unable to understand them merely owing to the preoccupied satisfaction of his mind.

On that fantastic fringe of the Gaelic land where he walked as a boy, the cliffs were as fantastic as the clouds. Heaven seemed to humble itself and come closer to the earth. The common paths of his little village began to climb quite suddenly and seemed resolved to go to heaven. The sky seemed to fall down towards the hills; the hills took hold upon the sky. In the sumptuous sunset of gold and purple and peacock green cloudlets and islets were the same. Evan lived like a man walking on a borderland, the borderland between this world and another. Like so many men and nations who grow up with nature and the common things, he understood the supernatural before he understood the natural. He had looked at dim angels standing knee-deep in the grass before he had looked at the grass. He knew that Our Lady’s robes were blue before he knew the wild roses round her feet were red. The deeper his memory plunged into the dark house of childhood the nearer and nearer he came to the things that cannot be named. All through his life he thought of the daylight world as a sort of divine debris, the broken remainder of his first vision. The skies and mountains were the splendid off-scourings of another place. The stars were lost jewels of the Queen. Our Lady had gone and left the stars by accident.

His private tradition was equally wild and unworldly. His great-grandfather had been cut down at Culloden, certain in his last instant that God would restore the King. His grandfather, then a boy of ten, had taken the terrible claymore from the hand of the dead and hung it up in his house, burnishing it and sharpening it for sixty years, to be ready for the next rebellion. His father, the youngest son and the last left alive, had refused to attend on Queen Victoria in Scotland. And Evan himself had been of one piece with his progenitors; and was not dead with them, but alive in the twentieth century. He was not in the least the pathetic Jacobite of whom we read, left behind by a final advance of all things. He was, in his own fancy, a conspirator, fierce and up to date. In the long, dark afternoons of the Highland winter, he plotted and fumed in the dark. He drew plans of the capture of London on the desolate sand of Arisaig.

When he came up to capture London, it was not with an army of white cockades, but with a stick and a satchel. London overawed him a little, not because he thought it grand or even terrible, but because it bewildered him; it was not the Golden City or even hell; it was Limbo. He had one shock of sentiment, when he turned that wonderful corner of Fleet Street and saw St. Paul’s sitting in the sky.

“Ah,” he said, after a long pause, “that sort of thing was built under the Stuarts!” Then with a sour grin he asked himself what was the corresponding monument of the Brunswicks and the Protestant Constitution. After some warning, he selected a sky-sign of some pill.

Half an hour afterwards his emotions left him with an emptied mind on the same spot. And it was in a mood of mere idle investigation that he happened to come to a standstill opposite the office of *The Atheist*. He did not see the word “atheist”, or if he did, it is quite possible that he did not know the meaning of the word. Even as it was, the document would not have shocked even the innocent Highlander, but for the troublesome and quite unforeseen fact that the innocent Highlander read it stolidly to the end; a thing unknown among the most enthusiastic subscribers to the paper, and calculated in any case to create a new situation.

With a smart journalistic instinct characteristic of all his school, the editor of *The Atheist* had put first in his paper and most prominently in his window an article called “The Mesopotamian Mythology and its Effects on Syriac Folk Lore.” Mr. Evan MacIan began to read this quite idly, as he would have read a public statement beginning with a young girl dying in Brighton and ending with Bile Beans. He received the very considerable amount of information accumulated by the author with that tired clearness of the mind which children have on heavy summer afternoons — that tired clearness which leads them to go on asking questions long after they have lost interest in the subject and are as bored as their nurse. The streets were full of people and empty of adventures. He might as well know about the gods of Mesopotamia as not; so he flattened his long, lean face against the dim bleak pane of the window and read all there was to read about Mesopotamian gods. He read how the Mesopotamians had a god named Sho (sometimes pronounced Ji), and that he was described as being very powerful, a striking similarity to some expressions about Jahveh, who is also described as having power. Evan had never heard of Jahveh in his life, and imagining him to be some other Mesopotamian idol, read on with a dull curiosity. He learnt that the name Sho, under its third form of Psa, occurs in an early legend which describes how the deity, after the manner of Jupiter on so many occasions, seduced a Virgin and begat a hero. This hero, whose name is not essential to our existence, was, it was said, the chief hero and Saviour of the Mesopotamian ethical scheme. Then followed a paragraph giving other examples of such heroes and Saviours being born of some profligate intercourse between God and mortal. Then followed a paragraph — but Evan did not understand it. He read it again and then again. Then he did understand it. The glass fell in ringing fragments on to the pavement, and Evan sprang over the barrier into the shop, brandishing his stick.

“What is this?” cried little Mr. Turnbull, starting up with hair aflame. “How dare you break my window?”

“Because it was the quickest cut to you,” cried Evan, stamping. “Stand up and fight, you crapulous coward. You dirty lunatic, stand up, will you? Have you any weapons here?”

“Are you mad?” asked Turnbull, glaring.

“Are you?” cried Evan. “Can you be anything else when you plaster your own house with that God-defying filth? Stand up and fight, I say.”

A great light like dawn came into Mr. Turnbull’s face. Behind his red hair and beard he turned deadly pale with pleasure. Here, after twenty lone years of useless toil, he had his reward. Someone was angry with the paper. He bounded to his feet like a boy; he saw a new youth opening before him. And as not unfrequently happens to middle-aged gentlemen when they see a new youth opening before them, he found himself in the presence of the police.

The policemen, after some ponderous questionings, collared both the two enthusiasts. They were more respectful, however, to the young man who had smashed the window, than to the miscreant who had had his window smashed. There was an air of refined mystery about Evan MacIan, which did not exist in the irate little shopkeeper, an air of refined mystery which appealed to the policemen, for policemen, like most other English types, are at once snobs and poets. MacIan might possibly be a gentleman, they felt; the editor manifestly was not. And the editor’s fine rational republican appeals to his respect for law, and his ardour to be tried by his fellow citizens, seemed to the police quite as much gibberish as Evan’s mysticism could have done. The police were not used to hearing principles, even the principles of their own existence.

The police magistrate, before whom they were hurried and tried, was a Mr. Cumberland Vane, a cheerful, middle-aged gentleman, honourably celebrated for the lightness of his sentences and the lightness of his conversation. He occasionally worked himself up into a sort of theoretic rage about certain particular offenders, such as the men who took pokers to their wives, talked in a loose, sentimental way about the desirability of flogging them, and was hopelessly bewildered by the fact that the wives seemed even more angry with him than with their husbands. He was a tall, spruce man, with a twist of black moustache and incomparable morning dress. He looked like a gentleman, and yet, somehow, like a stage gentleman.

He had often treated serious crimes against mere order or property with a humane flippancy. Hence, about the mere breaking of an editor’s window, he was almost uproarious.

“Come, Mr. MacIan, come,” he said, leaning back in his chair, “do you generally enter you friends’ houses by walking through the glass?” (Laughter.)

“He is not my friend,” said Evan, with the stolidity of a dull child.

“Not your friend, eh?” said the magistrate, sparkling. “Is he your brother-in-law?” (Loud and prolonged laughter.)

“He is my enemy,” said Evan, simply; “he is the enemy of God.”

Mr. Vane shifted sharply in his seat, dropping the eye-glass out of his eye in a momentary and not unmanly embarrassment.

“You mustn’t talk like that here,” he said, roughly, and in a kind of hurry, “that has nothing to do with us.”

Evan opened his great, blue eyes; “God,” he began.

“Be quiet,” said the magistrate, angrily, “it is most undesirable that things of that sort should be spoken about — a — in public, and in an ordinary Court of Justice. Religion is — a — too personal a matter to be mentioned in such a place.”

“Is it?” answered the Highlander, “then what did those policemen swear by just now?”

“That is no parallel,” answered Vane, rather irritably; “of course there is a form of oath — to be taken reverently — reverently, and there’s an end of it. But to talk in a public place about one’s most sacred and private sentiments — well, I call it bad taste. (Slight applause.) I call it irreverent. I call it irreverent, and I’m not specially orthodox either.”

“I see you are not,” said Evan, “but I am.”

“We are wondering from the point,” said the police magistrate, pulling himself together.

“May I ask why you smashed this worthy citizen’s window?”

Evan turned a little pale at the mere memory, but he answered with the same cold and deadly literalism that he showed throughout.

“Because he blasphemed Our Lady.”

“I tell you once and for all,” cried Mr. Cumberland Vane, rapping his knuckles angrily on the table, “I tell you, once and for all, my man, that I will not have you turning on any religious rant or cant here. Don’t imagine that it will impress me. The most religious people are not those who talk about it. (Applause.) You answer the questions and do nothing else.”

“I did nothing else,” said Evan, with a slight smile.

“Eh,” cried Vane, glaring through his eye-glass.

“You asked me why I broke his window,” said MacIan, with a face of wood. “I answered, ‘Because he blasphemed Our Lady.’ I had no other reason. So I have no other answer.” Vane continued to gaze at him with a sternness not habitual to him.

“You are not going the right way to work, Sir,” he said, with severity. “You are not going the right way to work to — a — have your case treated with special consideration. If you had simply expressed regret for what you had done, I should have been strongly inclined to dismiss the matter as an outbreak of temper. Even now, if you say that you are sorry I shall only — —”

“But I am not in the least sorry,” said Evan, “I am very pleased.”

“I really believe you are insane,” said the stipendiary, indignantly, for he had really been doing his best as a good-natured man, to compose the dispute. “What conceivable right have you to break other people’s windows because their opinions do not agree with yours? This man only gave expression to his sincere belief.”

“So did I,” said the Highlander.

“And who are you?” exploded Vane. “Are your views necessarily the right ones? Are you necessarily in possession of the truth?”

“Yes,” said MacIan.

The magistrate broke into a contemptuous laugh.

“Oh, you want a nurse to look after you,” he said. “You must pay L10.”

Evan MacIan plunged his hands into his loose grey garment and drew out a queer looking leather purse. It contained exactly twelve sovereigns. He paid down the ten, coin by coin, in silence, and equally silently returned the remaining two to the receptacle. Then he said, “May I say a word, your worship?”

Cumberland Vane seemed half hypnotized with the silence and automatic movements of the stranger; he made a movement with his head which might have been either “yes” or “no”. “I only wished to say, your worship,” said MacIan, putting back the purse in his trouser pocket, “that smashing that shop window was, I confess, a useless and rather irregular business. It may be excused, however, as a mere preliminary to further proceedings, a sort of preface. Wherever and whenever I meet that man,” and he pointed to the editor of *The Atheist*, “whether it be outside this door in ten minutes from now, or twenty years hence in some distant country, wherever and whenever I meet that man, I will fight him. Do not be afraid. I will not rush at him like a bully, or bear him down with any brute superiority. I will fight him like a gentleman; I will fight him as our fathers fought. He shall choose how, sword or pistol, horse or foot. But if he refuses, I will write his cowardice on every wall in the world. If he had said of my mother what he said of the Mother of God, there is not a club of clean men in Europe that would deny my right to call him out. If he had said it of my wife, you English would yourselves have pardoned me for beating him like a dog in the market place. Your worship, I have no mother; I have no wife. I have only that which the poor have equally with the rich; which the lonely have equally with the man of many friends. To me this whole strange world is homely, because in the heart of it there is a home; to me this cruel world is kindly, because higher than the heavens there is something more human than humanity. If a man must not fight for this, may he fight for anything? I would fight for my friend, but if I lost my friend, I should still be there. I would fight for my country, but if I lost my country, I should still exist. But if what that devil dreams were true, I should not be — I should burst like a bubble and be gone. I could not live in that imbecile universe. Shall I not fight for my own existence?"

The magistrate recovered his voice and his presence of mind. The first part of the speech, the bombastic and brutally practical challenge, stunned him with surprise; but the rest of Evan's remarks, branching off as they did into theoretic phrases, gave his vague and very English mind (full of memories of the hedging and compromise in English public speaking) an indistinct sensation of relief, as if the man, though mad, were not so dangerous as he had thought. He went into a sort of weary laughter.

"For Heaven's sake, man," he said, "don't talk so much. Let other people have a chance (laughter). I trust all that you said about asking Mr. Turnbull to fight, may be regarded as rubbish. In case of accidents, however, I must bind you over to keep the peace."

"To keep the peace," repeated Evan, "with whom?"

"With Mr. Turnbull," said Vane.

"Certainly not," answered MacIan. "What has he to do with peace?"

"Do you mean to say," began the magistrate, "that you refuse to..." The voice of Turnbull himself clove in for the first time.

"Might I suggest," he said, "That I, your worship, can settle to some extent this absurd matter myself. This rather wild gentleman promises that he will not attack me with any ordinary assault — and if he does, you may be sure the police shall hear of it. But he says he will not. He says he will challenge me to a duel; and I cannot say anything stronger about his mental state than to say that I think that it is highly probable that he will. (Laughter.) But it takes two to make a duel, your worship (renewed laughter). I do not in the least mind being described on every wall in the world as the coward who would not fight a man in Fleet Street, about whether the Virgin Mary had a parallel in Mesopotamian mythology. No, your worship. You need not trouble to bind him over to keep the peace. I bind myself over to keep the peace, and you may rest quite satisfied that there will be no duel with me in it."

Mr. Cumberland Vane rolled about, laughing in a sort of relief.

"You're like a breath of April, sir," he cried. "You're ozone after that fellow. You're perfectly right. Perhaps I have taken the thing too seriously. I should love to see him sending you challenges and to see you smiling. Well, well."

Evan went out of the Court of Justice free, but strangely shaken, like a sick man. Any punishment of suppression he would have felt as natural; but the sudden juncture between the laughter of his judge and the laughter of the man he had wronged, made him feel suddenly small, or at least, defeated. It was really true that the whole modern world regarded his world as a bubble. No cruelty could have shown it, but their kindness showed it with a ghastly clearness. As he was brooding, he suddenly became conscious of a small, stern figure, fronting him in silence. Its eyes were grey and awful, and its beard red. It was Turnbull.

"Well, sir," said the editor of *The Atheist*, "where is the fight to be? Name the field, sir."

Evan stood thunderstruck. He stammered out something, he knew not what; he only guessed it by the answer of the other.

"Do I want to fight? Do I want to fight?" cried the furious Free-thinker. "Why, you moonstruck scarecrow of superstition, do you think your dirty saints are the only people who can die? Haven't you hung atheists, and burned them, and boiled them, and did they ever deny their faith? Do you think we don't want to fight? Night and day I have prayed — I have longed — for an atheist revolution — I have longed to see your blood and ours on the streets. Let it be yours or mine?"

"But you said..." began MacIan.

“I know,” said Turnbull scornfully. “And what did you say? You damned fool, you said things that might have got us locked up for a year, and shadowed by the coppers for half a decade. If you wanted to fight, why did you tell that ass you wanted to? I got you out, to fight if you want to. Now, fight if you dare.”

“I swear to you, then,” said MacIan, after a pause. “I swear to you that nothing shall come between us. I swear to you that nothing shall be in my heart or in my head till our swords clash together. I swear it by the God you have denied, by the Blessed Lady you have blasphemed; I swear it by the seven swords in her heart. I swear it by the Holy Island where my fathers are, by the honour of my mother, by the secret of my people, and by the chalice of the Blood of God.”

The atheist drew up his head. “And I,” he said, “give my word.”

III. SOME OLD CURIOSITIES

The evening sky, a dome of solid gold, unflaked even by a single sunset cloud, steeped the meanest sights of London in a strange and mellow light. It made a little greasy street of St. Martin's Lane look as if it were paved with gold. It made the pawnbroker's half-way down it shine as if it were really that Mountain of Piety that the French poetic instinct has named it; it made the mean pseudo-French bookshop, next but one to it, a shop packed with dreary indecency, show for a moment a kind of Parisian colour. And the shop that stood between the pawnshop and the shop of dreary indecency, showed with quite a blaze of old world beauty, for it was, by accident, a shop not unbeautiful in itself. The front window had a glimmer of bronze and blue steel, lit, as by a few stars, by the sparks of what were alleged to be jewels; for it was in brief, a shop of bric-a-brac and old curiosities. A row of half-burnished seventeenth-century swords ran like an ornate railing along the front of the window; behind was a darker glimmer of old oak and old armour; and higher up hung the most extraordinary looking South Sea tools or utensils, whether designed for killing enemies or merely for cooking them, no mere white man could possibly conjecture. But the romance of the eye, which really on this rich evening, clung about the shop, had its main source in the accident of two doors standing open, the front door that opened on the street and a back door that opened on an odd green square of garden, that the sun turned to a square of gold. There is nothing more beautiful than thus to look as it were through the archway of a house; as if the open sky were an interior chamber, and the sun a secret lamp of the place.

I have suggested that the sunset light made everything lovely. To say that it made the keeper of the curiosity shop lovely would be a tribute to it perhaps too extreme. It would easily have made him beautiful if he had been merely squalid; if he had been a Jew of the Fagin type. But he was a Jew of another and much less admirable type; a Jew with a very well-sounding name. For though there are no hard tests for separating the tares and the wheat of any people, one rude but efficient guide is that the nice Jew is called Moses Solomon, and the nasty Jew is called Thornton Percy. The keeper of the curiosity shop was of the Thornton Percy branch of the chosen people; he belonged to those Lost Ten Tribes whose industrious object is to lose themselves. He was a man still young, but already corpulent, with sleek dark hair, heavy handsome clothes, and a full, fat, permanent smile, which looked at the first glance kindly, and at the second cowardly. The name over his shop was Henry Gordon, but two Scotchmen who were in his shop that evening could come upon no trace of a Scotch accent.

These two Scotchmen in this shop were careful purchasers, but free-handed payers. One of them who seemed to be the principal and the authority (whom, indeed, Mr. Henry Gordon fancied he had seen somewhere before), was a small, sturdy fellow, with fine grey eyes, a square red tie and a square red beard, that he carried aggressively forward as if he defied anyone to pull it. The other kept so much in the background in comparison that he looked almost ghostly in his grey cloak or plaid, a tall, sallow, silent young man.

The two Scotchmen were interested in seventeenth-century swords. They were fastidious about them. They had a whole armoury of these weapons brought out and rolled clattering about the counter, until they found two of precisely the same length. Presumably they desired the exact symmetry for some decorative trophy. Even then they felt the points, poised the swords for balance and bent them in a circle to see that they sprang straight again; which, for decorative purposes, seems carrying realism rather far.

“These will do,” said the strange person with the red beard. “And perhaps I had better pay for them at once. And as you are the challenger, Mr. MacIan, perhaps you had better explain the situation.”

The tall Scotchman in grey took a step forward and spoke in a voice quite clear and bold, and yet somehow lifeless, like a man going through an ancient formality.

“The fact is, Mr. Gordon, we have to place our honour in your hands. Words have passed between Mr. Turnbull and myself on a grave and invaluable matter, which can only be atoned for by fighting. Unfortunately, as the police are in some sense pursuing us, we are hurried, and must fight now and without seconds. But if you will be so kind as to take us into your little garden and see far play, we shall feel how — —”

The shopman recovered himself from a stunning surprise and burst out:

“Gentlemen, are you drunk? A duel! A duel in my garden. Go home, gentlemen, go home. Why, what did you quarrel about?”

“We quarrelled,” said Evan, in the same dead voice, “about religion.” The fat shopkeeper rolled about in his chair with enjoyment.

“Well, this is a funny game,” he said. “So you want to commit murder on behalf of religion. Well, well my religion is a little respect for humanity, and — —”

“Excuse me,” cut in Turnbull, suddenly and fiercely, pointing towards the pawnbroker’s next door. “Don’t you own that shop?”

“Why — er — yes,” said Gordon.

“And don’t you own that shop?” repeated the secularist, pointing backward to the pornographic bookseller.

“What if I do?”

“Why, then,” cried Turnbull, with grating contempt. “I will leave the religion of humanity confidently in your hands; but I am sorry I troubled you about such a thing as honour. Look here, my man. I do believe in humanity. I do believe in liberty. My father died for it under the swords of the Yeomanry. I am going to die for it, if need be, under that sword on your counter. But if there is one sight that makes me doubt it it is your foul fat face. It is hard to believe you were not meant to be ruled like a dog or killed like a cockroach. Don’t try your slave’s philosophy on me. We are going to fight, and we are going to fight in your garden, with your swords. Be still! Raise your voice above a whisper, and I run you through the body.”

Turnbull put the bright point of the sword against the gay waistcoat of the dealer, who stood choking with rage and fear, and an astonishment so crushing as to be greater than either.

“MacIan,” said Turnbull, falling almost into the familiar tone of a business partner, “MacIan, tie up this fellow and put a gag in his mouth. Be still, I say, or I kill you where you stand.”

The man was too frightened to scream, but he struggled wildly, while Evan MacIan, whose long, lean hands were unusually powerful, tightened some old curtain cords round him, strapped a rope gag in his mouth and rolled him on his back on the floor.

“There’s nothing very strong here,” said Evan, looking about him. “I’m afraid he’ll work through that gag in half an hour or so.”

“Yes,” said Turnbull, “but one of us will be killed by that time.”

“Well, let’s hope so,” said the Highlander, glancing doubtfully at the squirming thing on the floor.

“And now,” said Turnbull, twirling his fiery moustache and fingering his sword, “let us go into the garden. What an exquisite summer evening!”

MacIan said nothing, but lifting his sword from the counter went out into the sun.

The brilliant light ran along the blades, filling the channels of them with white fire; the combatants stuck their swords in the turf and took off their hats, coats, waistcoats, and boots. Evan said a short Latin prayer to himself, during which Turnbull made something of a parade of lighting a cigarette which he flung away the instant after, when he saw MacIan apparently standing ready. Yet MacIan was not exactly ready. He stood staring like a man stricken with a trance.

“What are you staring at?” asked Turnbull. “Do you see the bobbies?”

“I see Jerusalem,” said Evan, “all covered with the shields and standards of the Saracens.”

“Jerusalem!” said Turnbull, laughing. “Well, we’ve taken the only inhabitant into captivity.”

And he picked up his sword and made it whistle like a boy’s wand.

“I beg your pardon,” said MacIan, dryly. “Let us begin.”

MacIan made a military salute with his weapon, which Turnbull copied or parodied with an impatient contempt; and in the stillness of the garden the swords came together with a clear sound like a bell. The instant the blades touched, each felt them tingle to their very points with a personal vitality, as if they were two naked nerves of steel. Evan had worn throughout an air of apathy, which might have been the stale apathy of one who wants nothing. But it was indeed the more dreadful apathy of one who wants something and will care for nothing else. And this was seen suddenly; for the instant Evan engaged he disengaged and lunged with an infernal violence. His opponent with a desperate promptitude parried and riposted; the parry only just succeeded, the riposte failed. Something big and unbearable seemed to have broken finally out of Evan in that first murderous lunge, leaving him lighter and cooler and quicker upon his feet. He fell to again, fiercely still, but now with a fierce caution. The next moment Turnbull lunged; MacIan seemed to catch the point and throw it away from him, and was thrusting back like a thunderbolt, when a sound paralysed him; another sound beside their ringing weapons. Turnbull, perhaps from an equal astonishment, perhaps from chivalry, stopped also and forebore to send his sword through his exposed enemy.

“What’s that?” asked Evan, hoarsely.

A heavy scraping sound, as of a trunk being dragged along a littered floor, came from the dark shop behind them.

“The old Jew has broken one of his strings, and he’s crawling about,” said Turnbull. “Be quick! We must finish before he gets his gag out.”

“Yes, yes, quick! On guard!” cried the Highlander. The blades crossed again with the same sound like song, and the men went to work again with the same white and watchful faces. Evan, in his impatience, went back a little to his wildness. He made windmills, as the French duellists say, and though he was probably a shade the better fencer of the two, he found the other’s point pass his face twice so close as almost to graze his cheek. The second time he realized the actual possibility of defeat and pulled himself together under a shock of the sanity of anger. He narrowed, and, so to speak, tightened his operations: he fenced (as the swordsman’s boast goes), in a wedding ring; he turned Turnbull’s thrusts with a maddening and almost mechanical click, like that of a machine. Whenever Turnbull’s sword sought to go over that other mere white streak it seemed to be caught in a complex network of steel. He turned one thrust, turned another, turned another. Then suddenly he went forward at the lunge with his whole living weight. Turnbull leaped back, but Evan lunged and lunged and lunged again like a devilish piston rod or battering ram. And high above all the sound of the struggle there broke into the silent evening a bellowing human voice, nasal, raucous, at the highest pitch of pain. “Help! Help! Police! Murder! Murder!” The gag was broken; and the tongue of terror was loose.

“Keep on!” gasped Turnbull. “One may be killed before they come.”

The voice of the screaming shopkeeper was loud enough to drown not only the noise of the swords but all other noises around it, but even through its rending din there seemed to be some other stir or scurry. And Evan, in the very act of thrusting at Turnbull, saw something in his eyes that made him drop his sword. The atheist, with his grey eyes at their widest and wildest, was staring straight over his shoulder at the little archway of shop that opened on the street beyond. And he saw the archway blocked and blackened with strange figures.

“We must bolt, MacIan,” he said abruptly. “And there isn’t a damned second to lose either. Do as I do.”

With a bound he was beside the little cluster of his clothes and boots that lay on the lawn; he snatched them up, without waiting to put any of them on; and tucking his sword under his other arm, went wildly at the wall at the bottom of the garden and swung himself over it. Three seconds after he had alighted in his socks on the other side, MacIan alighted beside him, also in his socks and also carrying clothes and sword in a desperate bundle.

They were in a by-street, very lean and lonely itself, but so close to a crowded thoroughfare that they could see the vague masses of vehicles going by, and could even see an individual hansom cab passing the corner at the instant. Turnbull put his fingers to his mouth like a gutter-snipe and whistled twice. Even as he did so he could hear the loud voices of the neighbours and the police coming down the garden.

The hansom swung sharply and came tearing down the little lane at his call. When the cabman saw his fares, however, two wild-haired men in their shirts and socks with naked swords under their arms, he not unnaturally brought his readiness to a rigid stop and stared suspiciously.

“You talk to him a minute,” whispered Turnbull, and stepped back into the shadow of the wall.

“We want you,” said MacIan to the cabman, with a superb Scotch drawl of indifference and assurance, “to drive us to St. Pancras Station — verra quick.”

“Very sorry, sir,” said the cabman, “but I’d like to know it was all right. Might I arst where you come from, sir?”

A second after he spoke MacIan heard a heavy voice on the other side of the wall, saying: “I suppose I’d better get over and look for them. Give me a back.”

“Cabby,” said MacIan, again assuming the most deliberate and lingering lowland Scotch intonation, “if ye’re really verra anxious to ken whar a’ come fra’, I’ll tell ye as a verra great secret. A’ come from Scotland. And a’m gaein’ to St. Pancras Station. Open the doors, cabby.”

The cabman stared, but laughed. The heavy voice behind the wall said: “Now then, a better back this time, Mr. Price.” And from the shadow of the wall Turnbull crept out. He had struggled wildly into his coat (leaving his waistcoat on the pavement), and he was with a fierce pale face climbing up the cab behind the cabman. MacIan had no glimmering notion of what he was up to, but an instinct of discipline, inherited from a hundred men of war, made him stick to his own part and trust the other man’s.

“Open the doors, cabby,” he repeated, with something of the obstinate solemnity of a drunkard, “open the doors. Did ye no hear me say St.

Pancras Station?”

The top of a policeman’s helmet appeared above the garden wall. The cabman did not see it, but he was still suspicious and began:

“Very sorry, sir, but...” and with that the catlike Turnbull tore him out of his seat and hurled him into the street below, where he lay suddenly stunned.

“Give me his hat,” said Turnbull in a silver voice, that the other obeyed like a bugle. “And get inside with the swords.”

And just as the red and raging face of a policeman appeared above the wall, Turnbull struck the horse with a terrible cut of the whip and the two went whirling away like a boomerang.

They had spun through seven streets and three or four squares before anything further happened. Then, in the neighbourhood of Maida Vale, the driver opened the trap and talked through it in a manner not wholly common in conversations through that aperture.

“Mr. MacIan,” he said shortly and civilly.

“Mr. Turnbull,” replied his motionless fare.

“Under circumstances such as those in which we were both recently placed there was no time for anything but very abrupt action. I trust therefore that you have no cause to complain of me if I have deferred until this moment a consultation with you on our present position or future action. Our present position, Mr. MacIan, I imagine that I am under no special necessity of describing. We have broken the law and we are fleeing from its officers. Our future action is a thing about which I myself entertain sufficiently strong views; but I have no right to assume or to anticipate yours, though I may have formed a decided conception of your character and a decided notion of what they will probably be. Still, by every principle of intellectual justice, I am bound to ask you now and seriously whether you wish to continue our interrupted relations.”

MacIan leant his white and rather weary face back upon the cushions in order to speak up through the open door.

“Mr. Turnbull,” he said, “I have nothing to add to what I have said before. It is strongly borne in upon me that you and I, the sole occupants of this runaway cab, are at this moment the two most important people in London, possibly in Europe. I have been looking at all the streets as we went past, I have been looking at all the shops as we went past, I have been looking at all the churches as we went past. At first, I felt a little dazed with the vastness of it all. I could not understand what it all meant. But now I know exactly what it all means. It means us. This whole civilization is only a dream. You and I are the realities."

"Religious symbolism," said Mr. Turnbull, through the trap, "does not, as you are probably aware, appeal ordinarily to thinkers of the school to which I belong. But in symbolism as you use it in this instance, I must, I think, concede a certain truth. We *must* fight this thing out somewhere; because, as you truly say, we have found each other's reality. We *must* kill each other — or convert each other. I used to think all Christians were hypocrites, and I felt quite mildly towards them really. But I know you are sincere — and my soul is mad against you. In the same way you used, I suppose, to think that all atheists thought atheism would leave them free for immorality — and yet in your heart you tolerated them entirely. Now you *know* that I am an honest man, and you are mad against me, as I am against you. Yes, that's it. You can't be angry with bad men. But a good man in the wrong — why one thirsts for his blood. Yes, you open for me a vista of thought."

"Don't run into anything," said Evan, immovably.

"There's something in that view of yours, too," said Turnbull, and shut down the trap.

They sped on through shining streets that shot by them like arrows. Mr. Turnbull had evidently a great deal of unused practical talent which was unrolling itself in this ridiculous adventure. They had got away with such stunning promptitude that the police chase had in all probability not even properly begun. But in case it had, the amateur cabman chose his dizzy course through London with a strange dexterity. He did not do what would have first occurred to any ordinary outsider desiring to destroy his tracks. He did not cut into by-ways or twist his way through mean streets. His amateur common sense told him that it was precisely the poor street, the side street, that would be likely to remember and report the passing of a hansom cab, like the passing of a royal procession. He kept chiefly to the great roads, so full of hansoms that a wilder pair than they might easily have passed in the press. In one of the quieter streets Evan put on his boots.

Towards the top of Albany Street the singular cabman again opened the trap.

"Mr. MacIan," he said, "I understand that we have now definitely settled that in the conventional language honour is not satisfied. Our action must at least go further than it has gone under recent interrupted conditions. That, I believe, is understood."

"Perfectly," replied the other with his bootlace in his teeth.

"Under those conditions," continued Turnbull, his voice coming through the hole with a slight note of trepidation very unusual with him, "I have a suggestion to make, if that can be called a suggestion, which has probably occurred to you as readily as to me. Until the actual event comes off we are practically in the position if not of comrades, at least of business partners. Until the event comes off, therefore I should suggest that quarrelling would be inconvenient and rather inartistic; while the ordinary exchange of politeness between man and man would be not only elegant but uncommonly practical."

"You are perfectly right," answered MacIan, with his melancholy voice, "in saying that all this has occurred to me. All duellists should behave like gentlemen to each other. But we, by the queerness of our position, are something much more than either duellists or gentlemen. We are, in the oddest and most exact sense of the term, brothers — in arms."

"Mr. MacIan," replied Turnbull, calmly, "no more need be said." And he closed the trap once more.

They had reached Finchley Road before he opened it again.

Then he said, "Mr. MacIan, may I offer you a cigar. It will be a touch of realism."

"Thank you," answered Evan. "You are very kind." And he began to smoke in the cab.

IV. A DISCUSSION AT DAWN

The duellists had from their own point of view escaped or conquered the chief powers of the modern world. They had satisfied the magistrate, they had tied the tradesman neck and heels, and they had left the police behind. As far as their own feelings went they had melted into a monstrous sea; they were but the fare and driver of one of the million hansoms that fill London streets. But they had forgotten something; they had forgotten journalism. They had forgotten that there exists in the modern world, perhaps for the first time in history, a class of people whose interest is not that things should happen well or happen badly, should happen successfully or happen unsuccessfully, should happen to the advantage of this party or the advantage of that part, but whose interest simply is that things should happen.

It is the one great weakness of journalism as a picture of our modern existence, that it must be a picture made up entirely of exceptions. We announce on flaring posters that a man has fallen off a scaffolding. We do not announce on flaring posters that a man has not fallen off a scaffolding. Yet this latter fact is fundamentally more exciting, as indicating that that moving tower of terror and mystery, a man, is still abroad upon the earth. That the man has not fallen off a scaffolding is really more sensational; and it is also some thousand times more common. But journalism cannot reasonably be expected thus to insist upon the permanent miracles. Busy editors cannot be expected to put on their posters, “Mr. Wilkinson Still Safe,” or “Mr. Jones, of Worthing, Not Dead Yet.” They cannot announce the happiness of mankind at all. They cannot describe all the forks that are not stolen, or all the marriages that are not judiciously dissolved. Hence the complete picture they give of life is of necessity fallacious; they can only represent what is unusual. However democratic they may be, they are only concerned with the minority.

The incident of the religious fanatic who broke a window on Ludgate Hill was alone enough to set them up in good copy for the night. But when the same man was brought before a magistrate and defied his enemy to mortal combat in the open court, then the columns would hardly hold the excruciating information, and the headlines were so large that there was hardly room for any of the text. The *Daily Telegraph* headed a column, “A

Duel on Divinity," and there was a correspondence afterwards which lasted for months, about whether police magistrates ought to mention religion. The *Daily Mail* in its dull, sensible way, headed the events, "Wanted to fight for the Virgin." Mr. James Douglas, in *The Star*, presuming on his knowledge of philosophical and theological terms, described the Christian's outbreak under the title of "Dualist and Duellist." The *Daily News* inserted a colourless account of the matter, but was pursued and eaten up for some weeks, with letters from outlying ministers, headed "Murder and Mariolatry." But the journalistic temperature was steadily and consistently heated by all these influences; the journalists had tasted blood, prospectively, and were in the mood for more; everything in the matter prepared them for further outbursts of moral indignation. And when a gasping reporter rushed in in the last hours of the evening with the announcement that the two heroes of the Police Court had literally been found fighting in a London back garden, with a shopkeeper bound and gagged in the front of the house, the editors and sub-editors were stricken still as men are by great beatitudes.

The next morning, five or six of the great London dailies burst out simultaneously into great blossoms of eloquent leader-writing. Towards the end all the leaders tended to be the same, but they all began differently. The *Daily Telegraph*, for instance began, "There will be little difference among our readers or among all truly English and law-abiding men touching the, etc. etc." The *Daily Mail* said, "People must learn, in the modern world, to keep their theological differences to themselves. The fracas, etc. etc." The *Daily News* started, "Nothing could be more inimical to the cause of true religion than, etc. etc." The *Times* began with something about Celtic disturbances of the equilibrium of Empire, and the *Daily Express* distinguished itself splendidly by omitting altogether so controversial a matter and substituting a leader about goloshes.

And the morning after that, the editors and the newspapers were in such a state, that, as the phrase is, there was no holding them. Whatever secret and elvish thing it is that broods over editors and suddenly turns their brains, that thing had seized on the story of the broken glass and the duel in the garden. It became monstrous and omnipresent, as do in our time the unimportant doings of the sect of the Agapemonites, or as did at an earlier time the dreary dishonesties of the Rhodesian financiers. Questions were asked about it, and even answered, in the House of Commons. The

Government was solemnly denounced in the papers for not having done something, nobody knew what, to prevent the window being broken. An enormous subscription was started to reimburse Mr. Gordon, the man who had been gagged in the shop. Mr. MacIan, one of the combatants, became for some mysterious reason, singly and hugely popular as a comic figure in the comic papers and on the stage of the music hall. He was always represented (in defiance of fact), with red whiskers, and a very red nose, and in full Highland costume. And a song, consisting of an unimaginable number of verses, in which his name was rhymed with flat iron, the British Lion, sly ‘un, dandelion, Spion (With Kop in the next line), was sung to crowded houses every night. The papers developed a devouring thirst for the capture of the fugitives; and when they had not been caught for forty-eight hours, they suddenly turned the whole matter into a detective mystery. Letters under the heading, “Where are They,” poured in to every paper, with every conceivable kind of explanation, running them to earth in the Monument, the Twopenny Tube, Epping Forest, Westminster Abbey, rolled up in carpets at Shoolbreds, locked up in safes in Chancery Lane. Yes, the papers were very interesting, and Mr. Turnbull unrolled a whole bundle of them for the amusement of Mr. MacIan as they sat on a high common to the north of London, in the coming of the white dawn.

The darkness in the east had been broken with a bar of grey; the bar of grey was split with a sword of silver and morning lifted itself laboriously over London. From the spot where Turnbull and MacIan were sitting on one of the barren steeps behind Hampstead, they could see the whole of London shaping itself vaguely and largely in the grey and growing light, until the white sun stood over it and it lay at their feet, the splendid monstrosity that it is. Its bewildering squares and parallelograms were compact and perfect as a Chinese puzzle; an enormous hieroglyphic which man must decipher or die. There fell upon both of them, but upon Turnbull more than the other, because he know more what the scene signified, that quite indescribable sense as of a sublime and passionate and heart-moving futility, which is never evoked by deserts or dead men or men neglected and barbarous, which can only be invoked by the sight of the enormous genius of man applied to anything other than the best. Turnbull, the old idealistic democrat, had so often reviled the democracy and reviled them justly for their supineness, their snobbishness, their evil reverence for idle things. He was right enough; for our democracy has only one great fault; it is not democratic. And after denouncing so justly average modern men for so many years as sophists and as slaves, he looked down from an empty slope in Hampstead and saw what gods they are. Their achievement seemed all the more heroic and divine, because it seemed doubtful whether it was worth doing at all. There seemed to be something greater than mere accuracy in making such a mistake as London. And what was to be the end of it all? what was to be the ultimate transformation of this common and incredible London man, this workman on a tram in Battersea, his clerk on an omnibus in Cheapside? Turnbull, as he stared drearily, murmured to himself the words of the old atheistic and revolutionary Swinburne who had intoxicated his youth:

“And still we ask if God or man
Can loosen thee Lazarus;
Bid thee rise up republican,
And save thyself and all of us.
But no disciple’s tongue can say
If thou can’st take our sins away.”

Turnbull shivered slightly as if behind the earthly morning he felt the evening of the world, the sunset of so many hopes. Those words were from “Songs before Sunrise”. But Turnbull’s songs at their best were songs after sunrise, and sunrise had been no such great thing after all. Turnbull shivered again in the sharp morning air. MacIan was also gazing with his face towards the city, but there was that about his blind and mystical stare that told one, so to speak, that his eyes were turned inwards. When Turnbull said something to him about London, they seemed to move as at a summons and come out like two householders coming out into their doorways.

“Yes,” he said, with a sort of stupidity. “It’s a very big place.”

There was a somewhat unmeaning silence, and then MacIan said again:

“It’s a very big place. When I first came into it I was frightened of it. Frightened exactly as one would be frightened at the sight of a man forty feet high. I am used to big things where I come from, big mountains that seem to fill God’s infinity, and the big sea that goes to the end of the world. But then these things are all shapeless and confused things, not made in any familiar form. But to see the plain, square, human things as large as that, houses so large and streets so large, and the town itself so large, was like having screwed some devil’s magnifying glass into one’s eye. It was like seeing a porridge bowl as big as a house, or a mouse-trap made to catch elephants."

"Like the land of the Brobdingnagians," said Turnbull, smiling.

"Oh! Where is that?" said MacIan.

Turnbull said bitterly, "In a book," and the silence fell suddenly between them again.

They were sitting in a sort of litter on the hillside; all the things they had hurriedly collected, in various places, for their flight, were strewn indiscriminately round them. The two swords with which they had lately sought each other's lives were flung down on the grass at random, like two idle walking-sticks. Some provisions they had bought last night, at a low public house, in case of undefined contingencies, were tossed about like the materials of an ordinary picnic, here a basket of chocolate, and there a bottle of wine. And to add to the disorder finally, there were strewn on top of everything, the most disorderly of modern things, newspapers, and more newspapers, and yet again newspapers, the ministers of the modern anarchy. Turnbull picked up one of them drearily, and took out a pipe.

"There's a lot about us," he said. "Do you mind if I light up?"

"Why should I mind?" asked MacIan.

Turnbull eyed with a certain studious interest, the man who did not understand any of the verbal courtesies; he lit his pipe and blew great clouds out of it.

"Yes," he resumed. "The matter on which you and I are engaged is at this moment really the best copy in England. I am a journalist, and I know. For the first time, perhaps, for many generations, the English are really more angry about a wrong thing done in England than they are about a wrong thing done in France."

"It is not a wrong thing," said MacIan.

Turnbull laughed. "You seem unable to understand the ordinary use of the human language. If I did not suspect that you were a genius, I should certainly know you were a blockhead. I fancy we had better be getting along and collecting our baggage."

And he jumped up and began shoving the luggage into his pockets, or strapping it on to his back. As he thrust a tin of canned meat, anyhow, into his bursting side pocket, he said casually:

"I only meant that you and I are the most prominent people in the English papers."

"Well, what did you expect?" asked MacIan, opening his great grave blue eyes.

"The papers are full of us," said Turnbull, stooping to pick up one of the swords.

MacIan stooped and picked up the other.

"Yes," he said, in his simple way. "I have read what they have to say. But they don't seem to understand the point."

"The point of what?" asked Turnbull.

"The point of the sword," said MacIan, violently, and planted the steel point in the soil like a man planting a tree.

"That is a point," said Turnbull, grimly, "that we will discuss later. Come along."

Turnbull tied the last tin of biscuits desperately to himself with string; and then spoke, like a diver girt for plunging, short and sharp.

"Now, Mr. MacIan, you must listen to me. You must listen to me, not merely because I know the country, which you might learn by looking at a map, but because I know the people of the country, whom you could not know by living here thirty years. That infernal city down there is awake; and it is awake against us. All those endless rows of windows and windows are all eyes staring at us. All those forests of chimneys are fingers pointing at us, as we stand here on the hillside. This thing has caught on. For the next six mortal months they will think of nothing but us, as for six mortal months they thought of nothing but the Dreyfus case. Oh, I know it's funny. They let starving children, who don't want to die, drop by the score without looking round. But because two gentlemen, from private feelings of delicacy, do want to die, they will mobilize the army and navy to prevent them. For half a year or more, you and I, Mr. MacIan, will be an obstacle to every reform in the British Empire. We shall prevent the Chinese being sent out of the Transvaal and the blocks being stopped in the Strand. We shall be the conversational substitute when anyone recommends Home Rule, or complains of sky signs. Therefore, do not imagine, in your innocence, that we have only to melt away among those English hills as a Highland cateran might into your god-forsaken Highland mountains. We must be eternally on our guard; we must live the hunted life of two distinguished criminals. We must expect to be recognized as much as if we were Napoleon escaping from Elba. We must be prepared for our descriptions being sent to every tiny village, and for our faces being recognized by every ambitious policeman. We must often sleep under the stars as if we were in Africa. Last and most important we must not dream of effecting our — our final settlement, which will be a thing as famous as the Phoenix Park murders, unless we have made real and precise arrangements for our isolation — I will not say our safety. We must not, in short, fight until we have thrown them off our scent, if only for a moment. For, take my word for it, Mr. MacIan, if the British Public once catches us up, the British Public will prevent the duel, if it is only by locking us both up in asylums for the rest of our days."

MacIan was looking at the horizon with a rather misty look.

"I am not at all surprised," he said, "at the world being against us. It makes me feel I was right to — —"

"Yes?" said Turnbull.

"To smash your window," said MacIan. "I have woken up the world."

"Very well, then," said Turnbull, stolidly. "Let us look at a few final facts. Beyond that hill there is comparatively clear country. Fortunately, I know the part well, and if you will follow me exactly, and, when necessary, on your stomach, we may be able to get ten miles out of London, literally without meeting anyone at all, which will be the best possible beginning, at any rate. We have provisions for at least two days and two nights, three days if we do it carefully. We may be able to get fifty or sixty miles away without even walking into an inn door. I have the biscuits and the tinned meat, and the milk. You have the chocolate, I think? And the brandy?"

"Yes," said MacIan, like a soldier taking orders.

"Very well, then, come on. March. We turn under that third bush and so down into the valley." And he set off ahead at a swinging walk.

Then he stopped suddenly; for he realized that the other was not following. Evan MacIan was leaning on his sword with a lowering face, like a man suddenly smitten still with doubt.

"What on earth is the matter?" asked Turnbull, staring in some anger.

Evan made no reply.

"What the deuce is the matter with you?" demanded the leader, again, his face slowly growing as red as his beard; then he said, suddenly, and in a more human voice, "Are you in pain, MacIan?"

"Yes," replied the Highlander, without lifting his face.

"Take some brandy," cried Turnbull, walking forward hurriedly towards him. "You've got it."

"It's not in the body," said MacIan, in his dull, strange way. "The pain has come into my mind. A very dreadful thing has just come into my thoughts."

"What the devil are you talking about?" asked Turnbull.

MacIan broke out with a queer and living voice.

"We must fight now, Turnbull. We must fight now. A frightful thing has come upon me, and I know it must be now and here. I must kill you here," he cried, with a sort of tearful rage impossible to describe. "Here, here, upon this blessed grass."

"Why, you idiot," began Turnbull.

"The hour has come — the black hour God meant for it. Quick, it will soon be gone. Quick!"

And he flung the scabbard from him furiously, and stood with the sunlight sparkling along his sword.

"You confounded fool," repeated Turnbull. "Put that thing up again, you ass; people will come out of that house at the first clash of the steel."

"One of us will be dead before they come," said the other, hoarsely, "for this is the hour God meant."

"Well, I never thought much of God," said the editor of *The Atheist*, losing all patience. "And I think less now. Never mind what God meant. Kindly enlighten my pagan darkness as to what the devil *you* mean."

"The hour will soon be gone. In a moment it will be gone," said the madman. "It is now, now, now that I must nail your blaspheming body to the earth — now, now that I must avenge Our Lady on her vile slanderer. Now or never. For the dreadful thought is in my mind."

"And what thought," asked Turnbull, with frantic composure, "occupies what you call your mind?"

"I must kill you now," said the fanatic, "because — —"

"Well, because," said Turnbull, patiently.

"Because I have begun to like you."

Turnbull's face had a sudden spasm in the sunlight, a change so instantaneous that it left no trace behind it; and his features seemed still carved into a cold stare. But when he spoke again he seemed like a man who was placidly pretending to misunderstand something that he understood perfectly well.

"Your affection expresses itself in an abrupt form," he began, but MacIan broke the brittle and frivolous speech to pieces with a violent voice. "Do not trouble to talk like that," he said. "You know what I mean as well as I know it. Come on and fight, I say. Perhaps you are feeling just as I do."

Turnbull's face flinched again in the fierce sunlight, but his attitude kept its contemptuous ease.

"Your Celtic mind really goes too fast for me," he said; "let me be permitted in my heavy Lowland way to understand this new development. My dear Mr. MacIan, what do you really mean?"

MacIan still kept the shining sword-point towards the other's breast.

"You know what I mean. You mean the same yourself. We must fight now or else — —"

"Or else?" repeated Turnbull, staring at him with an almost blinding gravity.

"Or else we may not want to fight at all," answered Evan, and the end of his speech was like a despairing cry.

Turnbull took out his own sword suddenly as if to engage; then planting it point downwards for a moment, he said, "Before we begin, may I ask you a question?"

MacIan bowed patiently, but with burning eyes.

"You said, just now," continued Turnbull, presently, "that if we did not fight now, we might not want to fight at all. How would you feel about the matter if we came not to want to fight at all?"

"I should feel," answered the other, "just as I should feel if you had drawn your sword, and I had run away from it. I should feel that because I had been weak, justice had not been done."

"Justice," answered Turnbull, with a thoughtful smile, "but we are talking about your feelings. And what do you mean by justice, apart from your feelings?"

MacIan made a gesture of weary recognition! "Oh, Nominalism," he said, with a sort of sigh, "we had all that out in the twelfth century."

"I wish we could have it out now," replied the other, firmly. "Do you really mean that if you came to think me right, you would be certainly wrong?"

"If I had a blow on the back of my head, I might come to think you a green elephant," answered MacIan, "but have I not the right to say now, that if I thought that I should think wrong?"

"Then you are quite certain that it would be wrong to like me?" asked Turnbull, with a slight smile.

"No," said Evan, thoughtfully, "I do not say that. It may not be the devil, it may be some part of God I am not meant to know. But I had a work to do, and it is making the work difficult."

"And I suppose," said the atheist, quite gently, "that you and I know all about which part of God we ought to know."

MacIan burst out like a man driven back and explaining everything.

"The Church is not a thing like the Athenaeum Club," he cried. "If the Athenaeum Club lost all its members, the Athenaeum Club would dissolve and cease to exist. But when we belong to the Church we belong to something which is outside all of us; which is outside everything you talk about, outside the Cardinals and the Pope. They belong to it, but it does not belong to them. If we all fell dead suddenly, the Church would still somehow exist in God. Confound it all, don't you see that I am more sure of its existence than I am of my own existence? And yet you ask me to trust my temperament, my own temperament, which can be turned upside down by two bottles of claret or an attack of the jaundice. You ask me to trust that when it softens towards you and not to trust the thing which I believe to be outside myself and more real than the blood in my body."

"Stop a moment," said Turnbull, in the same easy tone, "Even in the very act of saying that you believe this or that, you imply that there is a part of yourself that you trust even if there are many parts which you mistrust. If it is only you that like me, surely, also, it is only you that believe in the Catholic Church."

Evan remained in an unmoved and grave attitude. "There is a part of me which is divine," he answered, "a part that can be trusted, but there are also affections which are entirely animal and idle."

"And you are quite certain, I suppose," continued Turnbull, "that if even you esteem me the esteem would be wholly animal and idle?" For the first time MacIan started as if he had not expected the thing that was said to him. At last he said:

"Whatever in earth or heaven it is that has joined us two together, it seems to be something which makes it impossible to lie. No, I do not think that the movement in me towards you was...was that surface sort of thing. It may have been something deeper...something strange. I cannot understand the thing at all. But understand this and understand it thoroughly, if I loved you my love might be divine. No, it is not some trifle that we are fighting about. It is not some superstition or some symbol. When you wrote those words about Our Lady, you were in that act a wicked man doing a wicked thing. If I hate you it is because you have hated goodness. And if I like you...it is because you are good."

Turnbull's face wore an indecipherable expression.

"Well, shall we fight now?" he said.

"Yes," said MacIan, with a sudden contraction of his black brows, "yes, it must be now."

The bright swords crossed, and the first touch of them, travelling down blade and arm, told each combatant that the heart of the other was awakened. It was not in that way that the swords rang together when they had rushed on each other in the little garden behind the dealer's shop.

There was a pause, and then MacIan made a movement as if to thrust, and almost at the same moment Turnbull suddenly and calmly dropped his sword. Evan stared round in an unusual bewilderment, and then realized that a large man in pale clothes and a Panama hat was strolling serenely towards them.

V. THE PEACEMAKER

When the combatants, with crossed swords, became suddenly conscious of a third party, they each made the same movement. It was as quick as the snap of a pistol, and they altered it instantaneously and recovered their original pose, but they had both made it, they had both seen it, and they both knew what it was. It was not a movement of anger at being interrupted. Say or think what they would, it was a movement of relief. A force within them, and yet quite beyond them, seemed slowly and pitilessly washing away the adamant of their oath. As mistaken lovers might watch the inevitable sunset of first love, these men watched the sunset of their first hatred.

Their hearts were growing weaker and weaker against each other. When their weapons rang and riposted in the little London garden, they could have been very certain that if a third party had interrupted them something at least would have happened. They would have killed each other or they would have killed him. But now nothing could undo or deny that flash of fact, that for a second they had been glad to be interrupted. Some new and strange thing was rising higher and higher in their hearts like a high sea at night. It was something that seemed all the more merciless, because it might turn out an enormous mercy. Was there, perhaps, some such fatalism in friendship as all lovers talk about in love? Did God make men love each other against their will?

“I’m sure you’ll excuse my speaking to you,” said the stranger, in a voice at once eager and deprecating.

The voice was too polite for good manners. It was incongruous with the eccentric spectacle of the duellists which ought to have startled a sane and free man. It was also incongruous with the full and healthy, though rather loose physique of the man who spoke. At the first glance he looked a fine animal, with curling gold beard and hair, and blue eyes, unusually bright. It was only at the second glance that the mind felt a sudden and perhaps unmeaning irritation at the way in which the gold beard retreated backwards into the waistcoat, and the way in which the finely shaped nose went forward as if smelling its way. And it was only, perhaps, at the hundredth glance that the bright blue eyes, which normally before and after the instant seemed brilliant with intelligence, seemed as it were to be brilliant with idiocy. He was a heavy, healthy-looking man, who looked all the larger because of the loose, light coloured clothes that he wore, and that had in their extreme lightness and looseness, almost a touch of the tropics. But a closer examination of his attire would have shown that even in the tropics it would have been unique; but it was all woven according to some hygienic texture which no human being had ever heard of before, and which was absolutely necessary even for a day's health. He wore a huge broad-brimmed hat, equally hygienic, very much at the back of his head, and his voice coming out of so heavy and hearty a type of man was, as I have said, startlingly shrill and deferential.

"I'm sure you'll excuse my speaking to you," he said. "Now, I wonder if you are in some little difficulty which, after all, we could settle very comfortably together? Now, you don't mind my saying this, do you?"

The face of both combatants remained somewhat solid under this appeal. But the stranger, probably taking their silence for a gathering shame, continued with a kind of gaiety:

"So you are the young men I have read about in the papers. Well, of course, when one is young, one is rather romantic. Do you know what I always say to young people?"

A blank silence followed this gay inquiry. Then Turnbull said in a colourless voice:

"As I was forty-seven last birthday, I probably came into the world too soon for the experience."

"Very good, very good," said the friendly person. "Dry Scotch humour. Dry Scotch humour. Well now. I understand that you two people want to fight a duel. I suppose you aren't much up in the modern world. We've quite outgrown duelling, you know. In fact, Tolstoy tells us that we shall soon outgrow war, which he says is simply a duel between nations. A duel between nations. But there is no doubt about our having outgrown duelling."

Waiting for some effect upon his wooden auditors, the stranger stood beaming for a moment and then resumed:

"Now, they tell me in the newspapers that you are really wanting to fight about something connected with Roman Catholicism. Now, do you know what I always say to Roman Catholics?"

"No," said Turnbull, heavily. "Do *they*?" It seemed to be a characteristic of the hearty, hygienic gentleman that he always forgot the speech he had made the moment before. Without enlarging further on the fixed form of his appeal to the Church of Rome, he laughed cordially at Turnbull's answer; then his wandering blue eyes caught the sunlight on the swords, and he assumed a good-humoured gravity.

"But you know this is a serious matter," he said, eyeing Turnbull and MacIan, as if they had just been keeping the table in a roar with their frivolities. "I am sure that if I appealed to your higher natures...your higher natures. Every man has a higher nature and a lower nature. Now, let us put the matter very plainly, and without any romantic nonsense about honour or anything of that sort. Is not bloodshed a great sin?"

"No," said MacIan, speaking for the first time.

"Well, really, really!" said the peacemaker.

"Murder is a sin," said the immovable Highlander. "There is no sin of bloodshed."

"Well, we won't quarrel about a word," said the other, pleasantly.

"Why on earth not?" said MacIan, with a sudden asperity. "Why shouldn't we quarrel about a word? What is the good of words if they aren't important enough to quarrel over? Why do we choose one word more than another if there isn't any difference between them? If you called a woman a chimpanzee instead of an angel, wouldn't there be a quarrel about a word? If you're not going to argue about words, what are you going to argue about? Are you going to convey your meaning to me by moving your ears? The Church and the heresies always used to fight about words, because they are the only things worth fighting about. I say that murder is a sin, and bloodshed is not, and that there is as much difference between those words as there is between the word 'yes' and the word 'no'; or rather more difference, for 'yes' and 'no', at least, belong to the same category. Murder is a spiritual incident. Bloodshed is a physical incident. A surgeon commits bloodshed.

"Ah, you're a casuist!" said the large man, wagging his head. "Now, do you know what I always say to casuists...?"

MacIan made a violent gesture; and Turnbull broke into open laughter. The peacemaker did not seem to be in the least annoyed, but continued in unabated enjoyment.

"Well, well," he said, "let us get back to the point. Now Tolstoy has shown that force is no remedy; so you see the position in which I am placed. I am doing my best to stop what I'm sure you won't mind my calling this really useless violence, this really quite wrong violence of yours. But it’s against my principles to call in the police against you, because the police are still on a lower moral plane, so to speak, because, in short, the police undoubtedly sometimes employ force. Tolstoy has shown that violence merely breeds violence in the person towards whom it is used, whereas Love, on the other hand, breeds Love. So you see how I am placed. I am reduced to use Love in order to stop you. I am obliged to use Love.”

He gave to the word an indescribable sound of something hard and heavy, as if he were saying “boots”. Turnbull suddenly gripped his sword and said, shortly, “I see how you are placed quite well, sir. You will not call the police. Mr. MacIan, shall we engage?” MacIan plucked his sword out of the grass.

“I must and will stop this shocking crime,” cried the Tolstoian, crimson in the face. “It is against all modern ideas. It is against the principle of love. How you, sir, who pretend to be a Christian...”

MacIan turned upon him with a white face and bitter lip. “Sir,” he said, “talk about the principle of love as much as you like. You seem to me colder than a lump of stone; but I am willing to believe that you may at some time have loved a cat, or a dog, or a child. When you were a baby, I suppose you loved your mother. Talk about love, then, till the world is sick of the word. But don’t you talk about Christianity. Don’t you dare to say one word, white or black, about it. Christianity is, as far as you are concerned, a horrible mystery. Keep clear of it, keep silent upon it, as you would upon an abomination. It is a thing that has made men slay and torture each other; and you will never know why. It is a thing that has made men do evil that good might come; and you will never understand the evil, let alone the good. Christianity is a thing that could only make you vomit, till you are other than you are. I would not justify it to you even if I could. Hate it, in God’s name, as Turnbull does, who is a man. It is a monstrous thing, for which men die. And if you will stand here and talk about love for another ten minutes it is very probable that you will see a man die for it.”

And he fell on guard. Turnbull was busy settling something loose in his elaborate hilt, and the pause was broken by the stranger.

“Suppose I call the police?” he said, with a heated face.

“And deny your most sacred dogma,” said MacIan.

“Dogma!” cried the man, in a sort of dismay. “Oh, we have no *dogmas*, you know!”

There was another silence, and he said again, airily:

"You know, I think, there's something in what Shaw teaches about no moral principles being quite fixed. Have you ever read *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*? Of course he went very wrong over the war."

Turnbull, with a bent, flushed face, was tying up the loose piece of the pommel with string. With the string in his teeth, he said, "Oh, make up your damned mind and clear out!"

"It's a serious thing," said the philosopher, shaking his head. "I must be alone and consider which is the higher point of view. I rather feel that in a case so extreme as this..." and he went slowly away. As he disappeared among the trees, they heard him murmuring in a sing-song voice, "New occasions teach new duties," out of a poem by James Russell Lowell.

"Ah," said MacIan, drawing a deep breath. "Don't you believe in prayer now? I prayed for an angel."

"An hour ago," said the Highlander, in his heavy meditative voice, "I felt the devil weakening my heart and my oath against you, and I prayed that God would send an angel to my aid."

"Well?" inquired the other, finishing his mending and wrapping the rest of the string round his hand to get a firmer grip.

"Well?"

"Well, that man was an angel," said MacIan.

"I didn't know they were as bad as that," answered Turnbull.

"We know that devils sometimes quote Scripture and counterfeit good," replied the mystic. "Why should not angels sometimes come to show us the black abyss of evil on whose brink we stand. If that man had not tried to stop us...I might...I might have stopped."

"I know what you mean," said Turnbull, grimly.

"But then he came," broke out MacIan, "and my soul said to me: 'Give up fighting, and you will become like That. Give up vows and dogmas, and fixed things, and you may grow like That. You may learn, also, that fog of false philosophy. You may grow fond of that mire of crawling, cowardly morals, and you may come to think a blow bad, because it hurts, and not because it humiliates. You may come to think murder wrong, because it is violent, and not because it is unjust. Oh, you blasphemer of the good, an hour ago I almost loved you! But do not fear for me now. I have heard the word Love pronounced in *his* intonation; and I know exactly what it means. On guard!'"

The swords caught on each other with a dreadful clang and jar, full of the old energy and hate; and at once plunged and replunged. Once more each man's heart had become the magnet of a mad sword. Suddenly, furious as they were, they were frozen for a moment motionless.

"What noise is that?" asked the Highlander, hoarsely.

"I think I know," replied Turnbull.

"What?... What?" cried the other.

"The student of Shaw and Tolstoy has made up his remarkable mind," said Turnbull, quietly. "The police are coming up the hill."

VI. THE OTHER PHILOSOPHER

Between high hedges in Hertfordshire, hedges so high as to create a kind of grove, two men were running. They did not run in a scampering or feverish manner, but in the steady swing of the pendulum. Across the great plains and uplands to the right and left of the lane, a long tide of sunset light rolled like a sea of ruby, lighting up the long terraces of the hills and picking out the few windows of the scattered hamlets in startling blood-red sparks. But the lane was cut deep in the hill and remained in an abrupt shadow. The two men running in it had an impression not uncommonly experienced between those wild green English walls; a sense of being led between the walls of a maze.

Though their pace was steady it was vigorous; their faces were heated and their eyes fixed and bright. There was, indeed, something a little mad in the contrast between the evening’s stillness over the empty country-side, and these two figures fleeing wildly from nothing. They had the look of two lunatics, possibly they were.

“Are you all right?” said Turnbull, with civility. “Can you keep this up?”

“Quite easily, thank you,” replied MacIan. “I run very well.”

“Is that a qualification in a family of warriors?” asked Turnbull.

“Undoubtedly. Rapid movement is essential,” answered MacIan, who never saw a joke in his life.

Turnbull broke out into a short laugh, and silence fell between them, the panting silence of runners.

Then MacIan said: “We run better than any of those policemen. They are too fat. Why do you make your policemen so fat?”

“I didn’t do much towards making them fat myself,” replied Turnbull, genially, “but I flatter myself that I am now doing something towards making them thin. You’ll see they will be as lean as rakes by the time they catch us. They will look like your friend, Cardinal Manning.”

“But they won’t catch us,” said MacIan, in his literal way.

“No, we beat them in the great military art of running away,” returned the other. “They won’t catch us unless — —”

MacIan turned his long equine face inquiringly. “Unless what?” he said, for Turnbull had gone silent suddenly, and seemed to be listening intently as he ran as a horse does with his ears turned back.

"Unless what?" repeated the Highlander.

"Unless they do — what they have done. Listen." MacIan slackened his trot, and turned his head to the trail they had left behind them. Across two or three billows of the up and down lane came along the ground the unmistakable throbbing of horses' hoofs.

"They have put the mounted police on us," said Turnbull, shortly. "Good Lord, one would think we were a Revolution."

"So we are," said MacIan calmly. "What shall we do? Shall we turn on them with our points?"

"It may come to that," answered Turnbull, "though if it does, I reckon that will be the last act. We must put it off if we can." And he stared and peered about him between the bushes. "If we could hide somewhere the beasts might go by us," he said. "The police have their faults, but thank God they're inefficient. Why, here's the very thing. Be quick and quiet. Follow me."

He suddenly swung himself up the high bank on one side of the lane. It was almost as high and smooth as a wall, and on the top of it the black hedge stood out over them as an angle, almost like a thatched roof of the lane. And the burning evening sky looked down at them through the tangle with red eyes as of an army of goblins.

Turnbull hoisted himself up and broke the hedge with his body. As his head and shoulders rose above it they turned to flame in the full glow as if lit up by an immense firelight. His red hair and beard looked almost scarlet, and his pale face as bright as a boy's. Something violent, something that was at once love and hatred, surged in the strange heart of the Gael below him. He had an unutterable sense of epic importance, as if he were somehow lifting all humanity into a prouder and more passionate region of the air. As he swung himself up also into the evening light he felt as if he were rising on enormous wings.

Legends of the morning of the world which he had heard in childhood or read in youth came back upon him in a cloudy splendour, purple tales of wrath and friendship, like Roland and Oliver, or Balin and Balan, reminding him of emotional entanglements. Men who had loved each other and then fought each other; men who had fought each other and then loved each other, together made a mixed but monstrous sense of momentousness. The crimson seas of the sunset seemed to him like a bursting out of some sacred blood, as if the heart of the world had broken.

Turnbull was wholly unaffected by any written or spoken poetry; his was a powerful and prosaic mind. But even upon him there came for the moment something out of the earth and the passionate ends of the sky. The only evidence was in his voice, which was still practical but a shade more quiet.

"Do you see that summer-house-looking thing over there?" he asked shortly. "That will do for us very well."

Keeping himself free from the tangle of the hedge he strolled across a triangle of obscure kitchen garden, and approached a dismal shed or lodge a yard or two beyond it. It was a weather-stained hut of grey wood, which with all its desolation retained a tag or two of trivial ornament, which suggested that the thing had once been a sort of summer-house, and the place probably a sort of garden.

"That is quite invisible from the road," said Turnbull, as he entered it, "and it will cover us up for the night."

MacIan looked at him gravely for a few moments. "Sir," he said, "I ought to say something to you. I ought to say — —"

"Hush," said Turnbull, suddenly lifting his hand; "be still, man."

In the sudden silence, the drumming of the distant horses grew louder and louder with inconceivable rapidity, and the cavalcade of police rushed by below them in the lane, almost with the roar and rattle of an express train.

"I ought to tell you," continued MacIan, still staring stolidly at the other, "that you are a great chief, and it is good to go to war behind you."

Turnbull said nothing, but turned and looked out of the foolish lattice of the little windows, then he said, "We must have food and sleep first."

When the last echo of their eluded pursuers had died in the distant uplands, Turnbull began to unpack the provisions with the easy air of a man at a picnic. He had just laid out the last items, put a bottle of wine on the floor, and a tin of salmon on the window-ledge, when the bottomless silence of that forgotten place was broken. And it was broken by three heavy blows of a stick delivered upon the door.

Turnbull looked up in the act of opening a tin and stared silently at his companion. MacIan's long, lean mouth had shut hard.

"Who the devil can that be?" said Turnbull.

"God knows," said the other. "It might be God."

Again the sound of the wooden stick reverberated on the wooden door. It was a curious sound and on consideration did not resemble the ordinary effects of knocking on a door for admittance. It was rather as if the point of a stick were plunged again and again at the panels in an absurd attempt to make a hole in them.

A wild look sprang into MacIan’s eyes and he got up half stupidly, with a kind of stagger, put his hand out and caught one of the swords. “Let us fight at once,” he cried, “it is the end of the world.”

“You’re overdone, MacIan,” said Turnbull, putting him on one side. “It’s only someone playing the goat. Let me open the door.”

But he also picked up a sword as he stepped to open it.

He paused one moment with his hand on the handle and then flung the door open. Almost as he did so the ferrule of an ordinary bamboo cane came at his eyes, so that he had actually to parry it with the naked weapon in his hands. As the two touched, the point of the stick was dropped very abruptly, and the man with the stick stepped hurriedly back.

Against the heraldic background of sprawling crimson and gold offered him by the expiring sunset, the figure of the man with the stick showed at first merely black and fantastic. He was a small man with two wisps of long hair that curled up on each side, and seen in silhouette, looked like horns. He had a bow tie so big that the two ends showed on each side of his neck like unnatural stunted wings. He had his long black cane still tilted in his hand like a fencing foil and half presented at the open door. His large straw hat had fallen behind him as he leapt backwards.

“With reference to your suggestion, MacIan,” said Turnbull, placidly, “I think it looks more like the Devil.”

“Who on earth are you?” cried the stranger in a high shrill voice, brandishing his cane defensively.

“Let me see,” said Turnbull, looking round to MacIan with the same blandness. “Who are we?”

“Come out,” screamed the little man with the stick.

“Certainly,” said Turnbull, and went outside with the sword, MacIan following.

Seen more fully, with the evening light on his face, the strange man looked a little less like a goblin. He wore a square pale-grey jacket suit, on which the grey butterfly tie was the only indisputable touch of affectation. Against the great sunset his figure had looked merely small: seen in a more equal light it looked tolerably compact and shapely. His reddish-brown hair, combed into two great curls, looked like the long, slow curling hair of the women in some pre-Raphaelite pictures. But within this feminine frame of hair his face was unexpectedly impudent, like a monkey's.

"What are you doing here?" he said, in a sharp small voice.

"Well," said MacIan, in his grave childish way, "what are *you* doing here?"

"I," said the man, indignantly, "I'm in my own garden."

"Oh," said MacIan, simply, "I apologize."

Turnbull was coolly curling his red moustache, and the stranger stared from one to the other, temporarily stunned by their innocent assurance.

"But, may I ask," he said at last, "what the devil you are doing in my summer-house?"

"Certainly," said MacIan. "We were just going to fight."

"To fight!" repeated the man.

"We had better tell this gentleman the whole business," broke in Turnbull. Then turning to the stranger he said firmly, "I am sorry, sir, but we have something to do that must be done. And I may as well tell you at the beginning and to avoid waste of time or language, that we cannot admit any interference."

"We were just going to take some slight refreshment when you interrupted us..."

The little man had a dawning expression of understanding and stooped and picked up the unused bottle of wine, eyeing it curiously.

Turnbull continued:

"But that refreshment was preparatory to something which I fear you will find less comprehensible, but on which our minds are entirely fixed, sir. We are forced to fight a duel. We are forced by honour and an internal intellectual need. Do not, for your own sake, attempt to stop us. I know all the excellent and ethical things that you will want to say to us. I know all about the essential requirements of civil order: I have written leading articles about them all my life. I know all about the sacredness of human life; I have bored all my friends with it. Try and understand our position. This man and I are alone in the modern world in that we think that God is essentially important. I think He does not exist; that is where the importance comes in for me. But this man thinks that He does exist, and thinking that very properly thinks Him more important than anything else. Now we wish to make a great demonstration and assertion — something that will set the world on fire like the first Christian persecutions. If you like, we are attempting a mutual martyrdom. The papers have posted up every town against us. Scotland Yard has fortified every police station with our enemies; we are driven therefore to the edge of a lonely lane, and indirectly to taking liberties with your summer-house in order to arrange our...”

“Stop!” roared the little man in the butterfly necktie. “Put me out of my intellectual misery. Are you really the two tomfools I have read of in all the papers? Are you the two people who wanted to spit each other in the Police Court? Are you? Are you?”

“Yes,” said MacIan, “it began in a Police Court.”

The little man slung the bottle of wine twenty yards away like a stone.

“Come up to my place,” he said. “I’ve got better stuff than that. I’ve got the best Beaune within fifty miles of here. Come up. You’re the very men I wanted to see.”

Even Turnbull, with his typical invulnerability, was a little taken aback by this boisterous and almost brutal hospitality.

“Why...sir...” he began.

“Come up! Come in!” howled the little man, dancing with delight. “I’ll give you a dinner. I’ll give you a bed! I’ll give you a green smooth lawn and your choice of swords and pistols. Why, you fools, I adore fighting! It’s the only good thing in God’s world! I’ve walked about these damned fields and longed to see somebody cut up and killed and the blood running. Ha! Ha!”

And he made sudden lunges with his stick at the trunk of a neighbouring tree so that the ferrule made fierce prints and punctures in the bark.

“Excuse me,” said MacIan suddenly with the wide-eyed curiosity of a child, “excuse me, but...”

“Well?” said the small fighter, brandishing his wooden weapon.

“Excuse me,” repeated MacIan, “but was that what you were doing at the door?”

The little man stared an instant and then said: “Yes,” and Turnbull broke into a guffaw.

“Come on!” cried the little man, tucking his stick under his arm and taking quite suddenly to his heels. “Come on! Confound me, I’ll see both of you eat and then I’ll see one of you die. Lord bless me, the gods must exist after all — they have sent me one of my day-dreams! Lord! A duel!”

He had gone flying along a winding path between the borders of the kitchen garden, and in the increasing twilight he was as hard to follow as a flying hare. But at length the path after many twists betrayed its purpose and led abruptly up two or three steps to the door of a tiny but very clean cottage. There was nothing about the outside to distinguish it from other cottages, except indeed its ominous cleanliness and one thing that was out of all the custom and tradition of all cottages under the sun. In the middle of the little garden among the stocks and marigolds there surged up in shapeless stone a South Sea Island idol. There was something gross and even evil in that eyeless and alien god among the most innocent of the English flowers.

"Come in!" cried the creature again. "Come in! it's better inside!"

Whether or no it was better inside it was at least a surprise. The moment the two duellists had pushed open the door of that inoffensive, whitewashed cottage they found that its interior was lined with fiery gold. It was like stepping into a chamber in the Arabian Nights. The door that closed behind them shut out England and all the energies of the West. The ornaments that shone and shimmered on every side of them were subtly mixed from many periods and lands, but were all oriental. Cruel Assyrian bas-reliefs ran along the sides of the passage; cruel Turkish swords and daggers glinted above and below them; the two were separated by ages and fallen civilizations. Yet they seemed to sympathize since they were both harmonious and both merciless. The house seemed to consist of chamber within chamber and created that impression as of a dream which belongs also to the Arabian Nights themselves. The innermost room of all was like the inside of a jewel. The little man who owned it all threw himself on a heap of scarlet and golden cushions and struck his hands together. A negro in a white robe and turban appeared suddenly and silently behind them.

"Selim," said the host, "these two gentlemen are staying with me tonight. Send up the very best wine and dinner at once. And Selim, one of these gentlemen will probably die tomorrow. Make arrangements, please."

The negro bowed and withdrew.

Evan MacIan came out the next morning into the little garden to a fresh silver day, his long face looking more austere than ever in that cold light, his eyelids a little heavy. He carried one of the swords. Turnbull was in the little house behind him, demolishing the end of an early breakfast and humming a tune to himself, which could be heard through the open window.

A moment or two later he leapt to his feet and came out into the sunlight, still munching toast, his own sword stuck under his arm like a walking-stick.

Their eccentric host had vanished from sight, with a polite gesture, some twenty minutes before. They imagined him to be occupied on some concerns in the interior of the house, and they waited for his emergence, stamping the garden in silence — the garden of tall, fresh country flowers, in the midst of which the monstrous South Sea idol lifted itself as abruptly as the prow of a ship riding on a sea of red and white and gold.

It was with a start, therefore, that they came upon the man himself already in the garden. They were all the more startled because of the still posture in which they found him. He was on his knees in front of the stone idol, rigid and motionless, like a saint in a trance or ecstasy. Yet when Turnbull's tread broke a twig, he was on his feet in a flash.

"Excuse me," he said with an irradiation of smiles, but yet with a kind of bewilderment. "So sorry...family prayers...old fashioned...mother's knee. Let us go on to the lawn behind."

And he ducked rapidly round the statue to an open space of grass on the other side of it.

"This will do us best, Mr. MacIan," said he. Then he made a gesture towards the heavy stone figure on the pedestal which had now its blank and shapeless back turned towards them. "Don't you be afraid," he added, "he can still see us."

MacIan turned his blue, blinking eyes, which seemed still misty with sleep (or sleeplessness) towards the idol, but his brows drew together.

The little man with the long hair also had his eyes on the back view of the god. His eyes were at once liquid and burning, and he rubbed his hands slowly against each other.

"Do you know," he said, "I think he can see us better this way. I often think that this blank thing is his real face, watching, though it cannot be watched. He! he! Yes, I think he looks nice from behind. He looks more cruel from behind, don't you think?"

"What the devil is the thing?" asked Turnbull gruffly.

"It is the only Thing there is," answered the other. "It is Force."

"Oh!" said Turnbull shortly.

"Yes, my friends," said the little man, with an animated countenance, fluttering his fingers in the air, "it was no chance that led you to this garden;

surely it was the caprice of some old god, some happy, pitiless god. Perhaps it was his will, for he loves blood; and on that stone in front of him men have been butchered by hundreds in the fierce, feasting islands of the South. In this cursed, craven place I have not been permitted to kill men on his altar. Only rabbits and cats, sometimes."

In the stillness MacIan made a sudden movement, unmeaning apparently, and then remained rigid.

"But today, today," continued the small man in a shrill voice. "Today his hour is come. Today his will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Men, men, men will bleed before him today." And he bit his forefinger in a kind of fever.

Still, the two duellists stood with their swords as heavily as statues, and the silence seemed to cool the eccentric and call him back to more rational speech.

"Perhaps I express myself a little too lyrically," he said with an amicable abruptness. "My philosophy has its higher ecstasies, but perhaps you are hardly worked up to them yet. Let us confine ourselves to the unquestioned. You have found your way, gentlemen, by a beautiful accident, to the house of the only man in England (probably) who will favour and encourage your most reasonable project. From Cornwall to Cape Wrath this county is one horrible, solid block of humanitarianism. You will find men who will defend this or that war in a distant continent. They will defend it on the contemptible ground of commerce or the more contemptible ground of social good. But do not fancy that you will find one other person who will comprehend a strong man taking the sword in his hand and wiping out his enemy. My name is Wimpey, Morrice Wimpey. I had a Fellowship at Magdalen. But I assure you I had to drop it, owing to my having said something in a public lecture infringing the popular prejudice against those great gentlemen, the assassins of the Italian Renaissance. They let me say it at dinner and so on, and seemed to like it. But in a public lecture...so inconsistent. Well, as I say, here is your only refuge and temple of honour. Here you can fall back on that naked and awful arbitration which is the only thing that balances the stars — a still, continuous violence. *Vae Victis!* Down, down, down with the defeated! Victory is the only ultimate fact. Carthage *was* destroyed, the Red Indians are being exterminated: that is the single certainty. In an hour from now that sun will still be shining and that grass growing, and one of you will be conquered; one of you will be the conqueror. When it has been done, nothing will alter it. Heroes, I give you the hospitality fit for heroes. And I salute the survivor. Fall on!”

The two men took their swords. Then MacIan said steadily: “Mr. Turnbull, lend me your sword a moment.”

Turnbull, with a questioning glance, handed him the weapon. MacIan took the second sword in his left hand and, with a violent gesture, hurled it at the feet of little Mr. Wimpey.

“Fight!” he said in a loud, harsh voice. “Fight me now!”

Wimpey took a step backward, and bewildered words bubbled on his lips.

“Pick up that sword and fight me,” repeated MacIan, with brows as black as thunder.

The little man turned to Turnbull with a gesture, demanding judgement or protection.

“Really, sir,” he began, “this gentleman confuses...”

“You stinking little coward,” roared Turnbull, suddenly releasing his wrath. “Fight, if you’re so fond of fighting! Fight, if you’re so fond of all that filthy philosophy! If winning is everything, go in and win! If the weak must go to the wall, go to the wall! Fight, you rat! Fight, or if you won’t fight — run!”

And he ran at Wimpey, with blazing eyes.

Wimpey staggered back a few paces like a man struggling with his own limbs. Then he felt the furious Scotchman coming at him like an express train, doubling his size every second, with eyes as big as windows and a sword as bright as the sun. Something broke inside him, and he found himself running away, tumbling over his own feet in terror, and crying out as he ran.

“Chase him!” shouted Turnbull as MacIan snatched up the sword and joined in the scamper. “Chase him over a county! Chase him into the sea! Shoo! Shoo! Shoo!”

The little man plunged like a rabbit among the tall flowers, the two duellists after him. Turnbull kept at his tail with savage ecstasy, still shooing him like a cat. But MacIan, as he ran past the South Sea idol, paused an instant to spring upon its pedestal. For five seconds he strained against the inert mass. Then it stirred; and he sent it over with a great crash among the flowers, that engulfed it altogether. Then he went bounding after the runaway.

In the energy of his alarm the ex-Fellow of Magdalen managed to leap the paling of his garden. The two pursuers went over it after him like flying birds. He fled frantically down a long lane with his two terrors on his trail till he came to a gap in the hedge and went across a steep meadow like the wind. The two Scotchmen, as they ran, kept up a cheery bellowing and waved their swords. Up three slanting meadows, down four slanting meadows on the other side, across another road, across a heath of snapping bracken, through a wood, across another road, and to the brink of a big pool, they pursued the flying philosopher. But when he came to the pool his pace was so precipitate that he could not stop it, and with a kind of lurching stagger, he fell splash into the greasy water. Getting dripping to his feet, with the water up to his knees, the worshipper of force and victory waded disconsolately to the other side and drew himself on to the bank. And Turnbull sat down on the grass and went off into reverberations of laughter. A second afterwards the most extraordinary grimaces were seen to distort the stiff face of MacIan, and unholy sounds came from within. He had never practised laughing, and it hurt him very much.

VII. THE VILLAGE OF GRASSLEY-IN-THE-HOLE

At about half past one, under a strong blue sky, Turnbull got up out of the grass and fern in which he had been lying, and his still intermittent laughter ended in a kind of yawn.

“I’m hungry,” he said shortly. “Are you?”

“I have not noticed,” answered MacIan. “What are you going to do?”

“There’s a village down the road, past the pool,” answered Turnbull. “I can see it from here. I can see the whitewashed walls of some cottages and a kind of corner of the church. How jolly it all looks. It looks so — I don’t know what the word is — so sensible. Don’t fancy I’m under any illusions about Arcadian virtue and the innocent villagers. Men make beasts of themselves there with drink, but they don’t deliberately make devils of themselves with mere talking. They kill wild animals in the wild woods, but they don’t kill cats to the God of Victory. They don’t — —” He broke off and suddenly spat on the ground.

“Excuse me,” he said; “it was ceremonial. One has to get the taste out of one’s mouth.”

“The taste of what?” asked MacIan.

“I don’t know the exact name for it,” replied Turnbull. “Perhaps it is the South Sea Islands, or it may be Magdalen College.”

There was a long pause, and MacIan also lifted his large limbs off the ground — his eyes particularly dreamy.

“I know what you mean, Turnbull,” he said, “but... I always thought you people agreed with all that.”

“With all that about doing as one likes, and the individual, and Nature loving the strongest, and all the things which that cockroach talked about.”

Turnbull’s big blue-grey eyes stood open with a grave astonishment.

“Do you really mean to say, MacIan,” he said, “that you fancied that we, the Free-thinkers, that Bradlaugh, or Holyoake, or Ingersoll, believe all that dirty, immoral mysticism about Nature? Damn Nature!”

“I supposed you did,” said MacIan calmly. “It seems to me your most conclusive position.”

“And you mean to tell me,” rejoined the other, “that you broke my window, and challenged me to mortal combat, and tied a tradesman up with ropes, and chased an Oxford Fellow across five meadows — all under the impression that I am such an illiterate idiot as to believe in Nature!"

"I supposed you did," repeated MacIan with his usual mildness; "but I admit that I know little of the details of your belief — or disbelief."

Turnbull swung round quite suddenly, and set off towards the village.

"Come along," he cried. "Come down to the village. Come down to the nearest decent inhabitable pub. This is a case for beer."

"I do not quite follow you," said the Highlander.

"Yes, you do," answered Turnbull. "You follow me slap into the inn-parlour. I repeat, this is a case for beer. We must have the whole of this matter out thoroughly before we go a step farther. Do you know that an idea has just struck me of great simplicity and of some cogency. Do not by any means let us drop our intentions of settling our differences with two steel swords. But do you not think that with two pewter pots we might do what we really have never thought of doing yet — discover what our difference is?"

"It never occurred to me before," answered MacIan with tranquillity. "It is a good suggestion."

And they set out at an easy swing down the steep road to the village of Grassley-in-the-Hole.

Grassley-in-the-Hole was a rude parallelogram of buildings, with two thoroughfares which might have been called two high streets if it had been possible to call them streets. One of these ways was higher on the slope than the other, the whole parallelogram lying aslant, so to speak, on the side of the hill. The upper of these two roads was decorated with a big public house, a butcher's shop, a small public house, a sweetstuff shop, a very small public house, and an illegible signpost. The lower of the two roads boasted a horse-pond, a post office, a gentleman's garden with very high hedges, a microscopically small public house, and two cottages. Where all the people lived who supported all the public houses was in this, as in many other English villages, a silent and smiling mystery. The church lay a little above and beyond the village, with a square grey tower dominating it decisively.

But even the church was scarcely so central and solemn an institution as the large public house, the Valencourt Arms. It was named after some splendid family that had long gone bankrupt, and whose seat was occupied by a man who had invented a hygienic bootjack; but the unfathomable sentimentalism of the English people insisted in regarding the Inn, the seat and the sitter in it, as alike parts of a pure and marmoreal antiquity. And in the Valencourt Arms festivity itself had some solemnity and decorum; and beer was drunk with reverence, as it ought to be. Into the principal parlour of this place entered two strangers, who found themselves, as is always the case in such hostels, the object, not of fluttered curiosity or pert inquiry, but of steady, ceaseless, devouring ocular study. They had long coats down to their heels, and carried under each coat something that looked like a stick. One was tall and dark, the other short and red-haired. They ordered a pot of ale each.

“MacIan,” said Turnbull, lifting his tankard, “the fool who wanted us to be friends made us want to go on fighting. It is only natural that the fool who wanted us to fight should make us friendly. MacIan, your health!”

Dusk was already dropping, the rustics in the tavern were already lurching and lumbering out of it by twos and threes, crying clamorous good nights to a solitary old toper that remained, before MacIan and Turnbull had reached the really important part of their discussion.

MacIan wore an expression of sad bewilderment not uncommon with him. “I am to understand, then,” he said, “that you don’t believe in nature.”

“You may say so in a very special and emphatic sense,” said Turnbull. “I do not believe in nature, just as I do not believe in Odin. She is a myth. It is not merely that I do not believe that nature can guide us. It is that I do not believe that nature exists.”

“Exists?” said MacIan in his monotonous way, settling his pewter pot on the table.

“Yes, in a real sense nature does not exist. I mean that nobody can discover what the original nature of things would have been if things had not interfered with it. The first blade of grass began to tear up the earth and eat it; it was interfering with nature, if there is any nature. The first wild ox began to tear up the grass and eat it; he was interfering with nature, if there is any nature. In the same way,” continued Turnbull, “the human when it asserts its dominance over nature is just as natural as the thing which it destroys.”

“And in the same way,” said MacIan almost dreamily, “the superhuman, the supernatural is just as natural as the nature which it destroys.”

Turnbull took his head out of his pewter pot in some anger.

“The supernatural, of course,” he said, “is quite another thing; the case of the supernatural is simple. The supernatural does not exist.”

“Quite so,” said MacIan in a rather dull voice; “you said the same about the natural. If the natural does not exist the supernatural obviously can’t.” And he yawned a little over his ale.

Turnbull turned for some reason a little red and remarked quickly, “That may be jolly clever, for all I know. But everyone does know that there is a division between the things that as a matter of fact do commonly happen and the things that don’t. Things that break the evident laws of nature — —”

“Which does not exist,” put in MacIan sleepily. Turnbull struck the table with a sudden hand.

“Good Lord in heaven!” he cried ——

“Who does not exist,” murmured MacIan.

“Good Lord in heaven!” thundered Turnbull, without regarding the interruption. “Do you really mean to sit there and say that you, like anybody else, would not recognize the difference between a natural occurrence and a supernatural one — if there could be such a thing? If I flew up to the ceiling — —”

“You would bump your head badly,” cried MacIan, suddenly starting up. “One can’t talk of this kind of thing under a ceiling at all. Come outside! Come outside and ascend into heaven!”

He burst the door open on a blue abyss of evening and they stepped out into it: it was suddenly and strangely cool.

“Turnbull,” said MacIan, “you have said some things so true and some so false that I want to talk; and I will try to talk so that you understand. For at present you do not understand at all. We don’t seem to mean the same things by the same words.”

He stood silent for a second or two and then resumed.

“A minute or two ago I caught you out in a real contradiction. At that moment logically I was right. And at that moment I knew I was wrong. Yes, there is a real difference between the natural and the supernatural: if you flew up into that blue sky this instant, I should think that you were moved by God — or the devil. But if you want to know what I really think...I must explain.”

He stopped again, abstractedly boring the point of his sword into the earth, and went on:

"I was born and bred and taught in a complete universe. The supernatural was not natural, but it was perfectly reasonable. Nay, the supernatural to me is more reasonable than the natural; for the supernatural is a direct message from God, who is reason. I was taught that some things are natural and some things divine. I mean that some things are mechanical and some things divine. But there is the great difficulty, Turnbull. The great difficulty is that, according to my teaching, you are divine."

"Me! Divine?" said Turnbull truculently. "What do you mean?"

"That is just the difficulty," continued MacIan thoughtfully. "I was told that there was a difference between the grass and a man's will; and the difference was that a man's will was special and divine. A man's free will, I heard, was supernatural."

"Rubbish!" said Turnbull.

"Oh," said MacIan patiently, "then if a man's free will isn't supernatural, why do your materialists deny that it exists?"

Turnbull was silent for a moment. Then he began to speak, but MacIan continued with the same steady voice and sad eyes:

"So what I feel is this: Here is the great divine creation I was taught to believe in. I can understand your disbelieving in it, but why disbelieve in a part of it? It was all one thing to me. God had authority because he was God. Man had authority because he was man. You cannot prove that God is better than a man; nor can you prove that a man is better than a horse. Why permit any ordinary thing? Why do you let a horse be saddled?"

"Some modern thinkers disapprove of it," said Turnbull a little doubtfully.

"I know," said MacIan grimly; "that man who talked about love, for instance."

Turnbull made a humorous grimace; then he said: "We seem to be talking in a kind of shorthand; but I won't pretend not to understand you. What you mean is this: that you learnt about all your saints and angels at the same time as you learnt about common morality, from the same people, in the same way. And you mean to say that if one may be disputed, so may the other. Well, let that pass for the moment. But let me ask you a question in turn. Did not this system of yours, which you swallowed whole, contain all sorts of things that were merely local, the respect for the chief of your clan, or such things; the village ghost, the family feud, or what not? Did you not take in those things, too, along with your theology?"

MacIan stared along the dim village road, down which the last straggler from the inn was trailing his way.

"What you say is not unreasonable," he said. "But it is not quite true. The distinction between the chief and us did exist; but it was never anything like the distinction between the human and the divine, or the human and the animal. It was more like the distinction between one animal and another. But — —"

"Well?" said Turnbull.

MacIan was silent.

"Go on," repeated Turnbull; "what's the matter with you? What are you staring at?"

"I am staring," said MacIan at last, "at that which shall judge us both."

"Oh, yes," said Turnbull in a tired way, "I suppose you mean God."

"No, I don't," said MacIan, shaking his head. "I mean him."

And he pointed to the half-tipsy yokel who was ploughing down the road.

"What do you mean?" asked the atheist.

"I mean him," repeated MacIan with emphasis. "He goes out in the early dawn; he digs or he ploughs a field. Then he comes back and drinks ale, and then he sings a song. All your philosophies and political systems are young compared to him. All your hoary cathedrals, yes, even the Eternal Church on earth is new compared to him. The most mouldering gods in the British Museum are new facts beside him. It is he who in the end shall judge us all."

And MacIan rose to his feet with a vague excitement.

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to ask him," cried MacIan, "which of us is right."

Turnbull broke into a kind of laugh. "Ask that intoxicated turnip-eater — —" he began.

"Yes — which of us is right," cried MacIan violently. "Oh, you have long words and I have long words; and I talk of every man being the image of God; and you talk of every man being a citizen and enlightened enough to govern. But if every man typifies God, there is God. If every man is an enlightened citizen, there is your enlightened citizen. The first man one meets is always man. Let us catch him up."

And in gigantic strides the long, lean Highlander whirled away into the grey twilight, Turnbull following with a good-humoured oath.

The track of the rustic was easy to follow, even in the faltering dark; for he was enlivening his wavering walk with song. It was an interminable poem, beginning with some unspecified King William, who (it appeared) lived in London town and who after the second rise vanished rather abruptly from the train of thought. The rest was almost entirely about beer and was thick with local topography of a quite unrecognizable kind. The singer's step was neither very rapid, nor, indeed, exceptionally secure; so the song grew louder and louder and the two soon overtook him.

He was a man elderly or rather of any age, with lean grey hair and a lean red face, but with that remarkable rustic physiognomy in which it seems that all the features stand out independently from the face; the rugged red nose going out like a limb; the bleared blue eyes standing out like signals.

He gave them greeting with the elaborate urbanity of the slightly intoxicated. MacIan, who was vibrating with one of his silent, violent decisions, opened the question without delay. He explained the philosophic position in words as short and simple as possible. But the singular old man with the lank red face seemed to think uncommonly little of the short words. He fixed with a fierce affection upon one or two of the long ones.

"Atheists!" he repeated with luxurious scorn. "Atheists! I know their sort, master. Atheists! Don't talk to me about 'un. Atheists!"

The grounds of his disdain seemed a little dark and confused; but they were evidently sufficient. MacIan resumed in some encouragement:

"You think as I do, I hope; you think that a man should be connected with the Church; with the common Christian — —"

The old man extended a quivering stick in the direction of a distant hill.

"There's the church," he said thickly. "Grassley old church that is. Pulled down it was, in the old squire's time, and — —"

"I mean," explained MacIan elaborately, "that you think that there should be someone typifying religion, a priest — —"

"Priests!" said the old man with sudden passion. "Priests! I know 'un. What they want in England? That's what I say. What they want in England?"

"They want you," said MacIan.

"Quite so," said Turnbull, "and me; but they won't get us. MacIan, your attempt on the primitive innocence does not seem very successful. Let me try. What you want, my friend, is your rights. You don't want any priests or churches. A vote, a right to speak is what you — —"

“Who says I a’n’t got a right to speak?” said the old man, facing round in an irrational frenzy. “I got a right to speak. I’m a man, I am. I don’t want no votin’ nor priests. I say a man’s a man; that’s what I say. If a man a’n’t a man, what is he? That’s what I say, if a man a’n’t a man, what is he? When I sees a man, I sez ‘e’s a man.”

“Quite so,” said Turnbull, “a citizen.”

“I say he’s a man,” said the rustic furiously, stopping and striking his stick on the ground. “Not a city or owt else. He’s a man.”

“You’re perfectly right,” said the sudden voice of MacIan, falling like a sword. “And you have kept close to something the whole world of today tries to forget.”

“Good night.”

And the old man went on wildly singing into the night.

“A jolly old creature,” said Turnbull; “he didn’t seem able to get much beyond that fact that a man is a man.”

“Has anybody got beyond it?” asked MacIan.

Turnbull looked at him curiously. “Are you turning an agnostic?” he asked.

“Oh, you do not understand!” cried out MacIan. “We Catholics are all agnostics. We Catholics have only in that sense got as far as realizing that man is a man. But your Ibsens and your Zolas and your Shaws and your Tolstoys have not even got so far.”

VIII. AN INTERLUDE OF ARGUMENT

Morning broke in bitter silver along the grey and level plain; and almost as it did so Turnbull and MacIan came out of a low, scrubby wood on to the empty and desolate flats. They had walked all night.

They had walked all night and talked all night also, and if the subject had been capable of being exhausted they would have exhausted it. Their long and changing argument had taken them through districts and landscapes equally changing. They had discussed Haeckel upon hills so high and steep that in spite of the coldness of the night it seemed as if the stars might burn them. They had explained and re-explained the Massacre of St. Bartholomew in little white lanes walled in with standing corn as with walls of gold. They had talked about Mr. Kensit in dim and twinkling pine woods, amid the bewildering monotony of the pines. And it was with the end of a long speech from MacIan, passionately defending the practical achievements and the solid prosperity of the Catholic tradition, that they came out upon the open land.

MacIan had learnt much and thought more since he came out of the cloudy hills of Arisaig. He had met many typical modern figures under circumstances which were sharply symbolic; and, moreover, he had absorbed the main modern atmosphere from the mere presence and chance phrases of Turnbull, as such atmospheres can always be absorbed from the presence and the phrases of any man of great mental vitality. He had at last begun thoroughly to understand what are the grounds upon which the mass of the modern world solidly disapprove of her creed; and he threw himself into replying to them with a hot intellectual enjoyment.

“I begin to understand one or two of your dogmas, Mr. Turnbull,” he had said emphatically as they ploughed heavily up a wooded hill. “And every one that I understand I deny. Take any one of them you like. You hold that your heretics and sceptics have helped the world forward and handed on a lamp of progress. I deny it. Nothing is plainer from real history than that each of your heretics invented a complete cosmos of his own which the next heretic smashed entirely to pieces. Who knows now exactly what Nestorius taught? Who cares? There are only two things that we know for certain about it. The first is that Nestorius, as a heretic, taught something quite opposite to the teaching of Arius, the heretic who came before him, and something quite useless to James Turnbull, the heretic who comes after. I defy you to go back to the Free-thinkers of the past and find any habitation for yourself at all. I defy you to read Godwin or Shelley or the deists of the eighteenth century of the nature-worshipping humanists of the Renaissance, without discovering that you differ from them twice as much as you differ from the Pope. You are a nineteenth-century sceptic, and you are always telling me that I ignore the cruelty of nature. If you had been an eighteenth-century sceptic you would have told me that I ignore the kindness and benevolence of nature. You are an atheist, and you praise the deists of the eighteenth century. Read them instead of praising them, and you will find that their whole universe stands or falls with the deity. You are a materialist, and you think Bruno a scientific hero. See what he said and you will think him an insane mystic. No, the great Free-thinker, with his genuine ability and honesty, does not in practice destroy Christianity. What he does destroy is the Free-thinker who went before. Free-thought may be suggestive, it may be inspiriting, it may have as much as you please of the merits that come from vivacity and variety. But there is one thing Free-thought can never be by any possibility — Free-thought can never be progressive. It can never be progressive because it will accept nothing from the past; it begins every time again from the beginning; and it goes every time in a different direction. All the rational philosophers have gone along different roads, so it is impossible to say which has gone farthest. Who can discuss whether Emerson was a better optimist than Schopenhauer was pessimist? It is like asking if this corn is as yellow as that hill is steep. No; there are only two things that really progress; and they both accept accumulations of authority. They may be progressing uphill and down; they may be growing steadily better or steadily worse; but they have steadily increased in certain definable matters; they have steadily advanced in a certain definable direction; they are the only two things, it seems, that ever *can* progress. The first is strictly physical science. The second is the Catholic Church."

"Physical science and the Catholic Church!" said Turnbull sarcastically; "and no doubt the first owes a great deal to the second."

"If you pressed that point I might reply that it was very probable," answered MacIan calmly. "I often fancy that your historical generalizations rest frequently on random instances; I should not be surprised if your vague notions of the Church as the persecutor of science was a generalization from Galileo. I should not be at all surprised if, when you counted the scientific investigations and discoveries since the fall of Rome, you found that a great mass of them had been made by monks. But the matter is irrelevant to my meaning. I say that if you want an example of anything which has progressed in the moral world by the same method as science in the material world, by continually adding to without unsettling what was there before, then I say that there *is* only one example of it. And that is Us."

"With this enormous difference," said Turnbull, "that however elaborate be the calculations of physical science, their net result can be tested. Granted that it took millions of books I never read and millions of men I never heard of to discover the electric light. Still I can see the electric light. But I cannot see the supreme virtue which is the result of all your theologies and sacraments."

"Catholic virtue is often invisible because it is the normal," answered MacIan. "Christianity is always out of fashion because it is always sane; and all fashions are mild insanities. When Italy is mad on art the Church seems too Puritanical; when England is mad on Puritanism the Church seems too artistic. When you quarrel with us now you class us with kingship and despotism; but when you quarrelled with us first it was because we would not accept the divine despotism of Henry VIII. The Church always seems to be behind the times, when it is really beyond the times; it is waiting till the last fad shall have seen its last summer. It keeps the key of a permanent virtue."

"Oh, I have heard all that!" said Turnbull with genial contempt. "I have heard that Christianity keeps the key of virtue, and that if you read Tom Paine you will cut your throat at Monte Carlo. It is such rubbish that I am not even angry at it. You say that Christianity is the prop of morals; but what more do you do? When a doctor attends you and could poison you with a pinch of salt, do you ask whether he is a Christian? You ask whether he is a gentleman, whether he is an M.D. — anything but that. When a soldier enlists to die for his country or disgrace it, do you ask whether he is a Christian? You are more likely to ask whether he is Oxford or Cambridge at the boat race. If you think your creed essential to morals why do you not make it a test for these things?"

"We once did make it a test for these things," said MacIan smiling, "and then you told us that we were imposing by force a faith unsupported by argument. It seems rather hard that having first been told that our creed must be false because we did use tests, we should now be told that it must be false because we don't. But I notice that most anti-Christian arguments are in the same inconsistent style."

"That is all very well as a debating-club answer," replied Turnbull good-humouredly, "but the question still remains: Why don't you confine yourself more to Christians if Christians are the only really good men?"

"Who talked of such folly?" asked MacIan disdainfully. "Do you suppose that the Catholic Church ever held that Christians were the only good men? Why, the Catholics of the Catholic Middle Ages talked about the virtues of all the virtuous Pagans until humanity was sick of the subject. No, if you really want to know what we mean when we say that Christianity has a special power of virtue, I will tell you. The Church is the only thing on earth that can perpetuate a type of virtue and make it something more than a fashion. The thing is so plain and historical that I hardly think you will ever deny it. You cannot deny that it is perfectly possible that tomorrow morning, in Ireland or in Italy, there might appear a man not only as good but good in exactly the same way as St. Francis of Assisi. Very well, now take the other types of human virtue; many of them splendid. The English gentleman of Elizabeth was chivalrous and idealistic. But can you stand still here in this meadow and *be* an English gentleman of Elizabeth? The austere republican of the eighteenth century, with his stern patriotism and his simple life, was a fine fellow. But have you ever seen him? have you ever seen an austere republican? Only a hundred years have passed and that volcano of revolutionary truth and valour is as cold as the mountains of the moon. And so it is and so it will be with the ethics which are buzzing down Fleet Street at this instant as I speak. What phrase would inspire the London clerk or workman just now? Perhaps that he is a son of the British Empire on which the sun never sets; perhaps that he is a prop of his Trades Union, or a class-conscious proletarian something or other; perhaps merely that he is a gentleman when he obviously is not. Those names and notions are all honourable; but how long will they last? Empires break; industrial conditions change; the suburbs will not last for ever. What will remain? I will tell you. The Catholic Saint will remain."

"And suppose I don't like him?" said Turnbull.

"On my theory the question is rather whether he will like you: or more probably whether he will ever have heard of you. But I grant the reasonableness of your query. You have a right, if you speak as the ordinary man, to ask if you will like the saint. But as the ordinary man you do like him. You revel in him. If you dislike him it is not because you are a nice ordinary man, but because you are (if you will excuse me) a sophisticated prig of a Fleet Street editor. That is just the funny part of it. The human race has always admired the Catholic virtues, however little it can practise them; and oddly enough it has admired most those of them that the modern world most sharply disputes. You complain of Catholicism for setting up an ideal of virginity; it did nothing of the kind. The whole human race set up an ideal of virginity; the Greeks in Athene, the Romans in the Vestal fire, set up an ideal of virginity. What then is your real quarrel with Catholicism? Your quarrel can only be, your quarrel really only is, that Catholicism has *achieved* an ideal of virginity; that it is no longer a mere piece of floating poetry. But if you, and a few feverish men, in top hats, running about in a street in London, choose to differ as to the ideal itself, not only from the Church, but from the Parthenon whose name means virginity, from the Roman Empire which went outwards from the virgin flame, from the whole legend and tradition of Europe, from the lion who will not touch virgins, from the unicorn who respects them, and who make up together the bearers of your own national shield, from the most living and lawless of your own poets, from Massinger, who wrote the *Virgin Martyr*, from Shakespeare, who wrote *Measure for Measure* — if you in Fleet Street differ from all this human experience, does it never strike you that it may be Fleet Street that is wrong?"

"No," answered Turnbull; "I trust that I am sufficiently fair-minded to canvass and consider the idea; but having considered it, I think Fleet Street is right, yes — even if the Parthenon is wrong. I think that as the world goes on new psychological atmospheres are generated, and in these atmospheres it is possible to find delicacies and combinations which in other times would have to be represented by some ruder symbol. Every man feels the need of some element of purity in sex; perhaps they can only typify purity as the absence of sex. You will laugh if I suggest that we may have made in Fleet Street an atmosphere in which a man can be so passionate as Sir Lancelot and as pure as Sir Galahad. But, after all, we have in the modern world erected many such atmospheres. We have, for instance, a new and imaginative appreciation of children."

"Quite so," replied MacIan with a singular smile. "It has been very well put by one of the brightest of your young authors, who said: 'Unless you become as little children ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.'

But you are quite right; there is a modern worship of children. And what, I ask you, is this modern worship of children? What, in the name of all the angels and devils, is it except a worship of virginity? Why should anyone worship a thing merely because it is small or immature? No; you have tried to escape from this thing, and the very thing you point to as the goal of your escape is only the thing again. Am I wrong in saying that these things seem to be eternal?"

And it was with these words that they came in sight of the great plains. They went a little way in silence, and then James Turnbull said suddenly, "But I *cannot* believe in the thing." MacIan answered nothing to the speech; perhaps it is unanswerable. And indeed they scarcely spoke another word to each other all that day.

IX. THE STRANGE LADY

Moonrise with a great and growing moon opened over all those flats, making them seem flatter and larger than they were, turning them to a lake of blue light. The two companions trudged across the moonlit plain for half an hour in full silence. Then MacIan stopped suddenly and planted his sword-point in the ground like one who plants his tent-pole for the night. Leaving it standing there, he clutched his black-haired skull with his great claws of hands, as was his custom when forcing the pace of his brain. Then his hands dropped again and he spoke.

"I'm sure you're thinking the same as I am," he said; "how long are we to be on this damned seesaw?"

The other did not answer, but his silence seemed somehow solid as assent; and MacIan went on conversationally. Neither noticed that both had instinctively stood still before the sign of the fixed and standing sword.

"It is hard to guess what God means in this business. But he means something — or the other thing, or both. Whenever we have tried to fight each other something has stopped us. Whenever we have tried to be reconciled to each other, something has stopped us again. By the run of our luck we have never had time to be either friends or enemies. Something always jumped out of the bushes."

Turnbull nodded gravely and glanced round at the huge and hedgeless meadow which fell away towards the horizon into a glimmering high road.

"Nothing will jump out of bushes here anyhow," he said.

"That is what I meant," said MacIan, and stared steadily at the heavy hilt of his standing sword, which in the slight wind swayed on its tempered steel like some huge thistle on its stalk.

"That is what I meant; we are quite alone here. I have not heard a horse-hoof or a footstep or the hoot of a train for miles. So I think we might stop here and ask for a miracle."

"Oh! might we?" said the atheistic editor with a sort of gusto of disgust.

"I beg your pardon," said MacIan, meekly. "I forgot your prejudices." He eyed the wind-swung sword-hilt in sad meditation and resumed: "What I mean is, we might find out in this quiet place whether there really is any fate or any commandment against our enterprise. I will engage on my side, like Elijah, to accept a test from heaven. Turnbull, let us draw swords here in this moonlight and this monstrous solitude. And if here in this moonlight and solitude there happens anything to interrupt us — if it be lightning striking our sword-blades or a rabbit running under our legs — I will take it as a sign from God and we will shake hands for ever."

Turnbull's mouth twitched in angry humour under his red moustache. He said: "I will wait for signs from God until I have any signs of His existence; but God — or Fate — forbid that a man of scientific culture should refuse any kind of experiment."

"Very well, then," said MacIan, shortly. "We are more quiet here than anywhere else; let us engage." And he plucked his sword-point out of the turf.

Turnbull regarded him for a second and a half with a baffling visage almost black against the moonrise; then his hand made a sharp movement to his hip and his sword shone in the moon.

As old chess-players open every game with established gambits, they opened with a thrust and parry, orthodox and even frankly ineffectual. But in MacIan's soul more formless storms were gathering, and he made a lunge or two so savage as first to surprise and then to enrage his opponent. Turnbull ground his teeth, kept his temper, and waiting for the third lunge, and the worst, had almost spitted the lunger when a shrill, small cry came from behind him, a cry such as is not made by any of the beasts that perish.

Turnbull must have been more superstitious than he knew, for he stopped in the act of going forward. MacIan was brazenly superstitious, and he dropped his sword. After all, he had challenged the universe to send an interruption; and this was an interruption, whatever else it was. An instant afterwards the sharp, weak cry was repeated. This time it was certain that it was human and that it was female.

MacIan stood rolling those great blue Gaelic eyes that contrasted with his dark hair. "It is the voice of God," he said again and again.

"God hasn't got much of a voice," said Turnbull, who snatched at every chance of cheap profanity. "As a matter of fact, MacIan, it isn't the voice of God, but it's something a jolly sight more important — it is the voice of man — or rather of woman. So I think we'd better scoot in its direction."

MacIan snatched up his fallen weapon without a word, and the two raced away towards that part of the distant road from which the cry was now constantly renewed.

They had to run over a curve of country that looked smooth but was very rough; a neglected field which they soon found to be full of the tallest grasses and the deepest rabbit-holes. Moreover, that great curve of the countryside which looked so slow and gentle when you glanced over it, proved to be highly precipitous when you scampered over it; and Turnbull was twice nearly flung on his face. MacIan, though much heavier, avoided such an overthrow only by having the quick and incalculable feet of the mountaineer; but both of them may be said to have leapt off a low cliff when they leapt into the road.

The moonlight lay on the white road with a more naked and electric glare than on the grey-green upland, and though the scene which it revealed was complicated, it was not difficult to get its first features at a glance.

A small but very neat black-and-yellow motor-car was standing stolidly, slightly to the left of the road. A somewhat larger light-green motor-car was tipped half-way into a ditch on the same side, and four flushed and staggering men in evening dress were tipped out of it. Three of them were standing about the road, giving their opinions to the moon with vague but echoing violence. The fourth, however, had already advanced on the chauffeur of the black-and-yellow car, and was threatening him with a stick. The chauffeur had risen to defend himself. By his side sat a young lady.

She was sitting bolt upright, a slender and rigid figure gripping the sides of her seat, and her first few cries had ceased. She was clad in close-fitting dark costume, a mass of warm brown hair went out in two wings or waves on each side of her forehead; and even at that distance it could be seen that her profile was of the aquiline and eager sort, like a young falcon hardly free of the nest.

Turnbull had concealed in him somewhere a fund of common sense and knowledge of the world of which he himself and his best friends were hardly aware. He was one of those who take in much of the shows of things absent-mindedly, and in an irrelevant reverie. As he stood at the door of his editorial shop on Ludgate Hill and meditated on the non-existence of God, he silently absorbed a good deal of varied knowledge about the existence of men. He had come to know types by instinct and dilemmas with a glance; he saw the crux of the situation in the road, and what he saw made him redouble his pace.

He knew that the men were rich; he knew that they were drunk; and he knew, what was worst of all, that they were fundamentally frightened. And he knew this also, that no common ruffian (such as attacks ladies in novels) is ever so savage and ruthless as a coarse kind of gentleman when he is really alarmed. The reason is not recondite; it is simply because the police-court is not such a menacing novelty to the poor ruffian as it is to the rich. When they came within hail and heard the voices, they confirmed all Turnbull's anticipations. The man in the middle of the road was shouting in a hoarse and groggy voice that the chauffeur had smashed their car on purpose; that they must get to the Cri that evening, and that he would jolly well have to take them there. The chauffeur had mildly objected that he was driving a lady. "Oh! we'll take care of the lady," said the red-faced young man, and went off into gurgling and almost senile laughter.

By the time the two champions came up, things had grown more serious. The intoxication of the man talking to the chauffeur had taken one of its perverse and catlike jumps into mere screaming spite and rage. He lifted his stick and struck at the chauffeur, who caught hold of it, and the drunkard fell backwards, dragging him out of his seat on the car. Another of the rowdies rushed forward booing in idiot excitement, fell over the chauffeur, and, either by accident or design, kicked him as he lay. The drunkard got to his feet again; but the chauffeur did not.

The man who had kicked kept a kind of half-witted conscience or cowardice, for he stood staring at the senseless body and murmuring words of inconsequent self-justification, making gestures with his hands as if he were arguing with somebody. But the other three, with a mere whoop and howl of victory, were boarding the car on three sides at once. It was exactly at this moment that Turnbull fell among them like one fallen from the sky. He tore one of the climbers backward by the collar, and with a hearty push sent him staggering over into the ditch upon his nose. One of the remaining two, who was too far gone to notice anything, continued to clamber ineffectually over the high back of the car, kicking and pouring forth a rivulet of soliloquy. But the other dropped at the interruption, turned upon Turnbull and began a battering bout of fisticuffs. At the same moment the man crawled out of the ditch in a masquerade of mud and rushed at his old enemy from behind. The whole had not taken a second; and an instant after MacIan was in the midst of them.

Turnbull had tossed away his sheathed sword, greatly preferring his hands, except in the avowed etiquette of the duel; for he had learnt to use his hands in the old street-battles of Bradlaugh. But to MacIan the sword even sheathed was a more natural weapon, and he laid about him on all sides with it as with a stick. The man who had the walking-stick found his blows parried with promptitude; and a second after, to his great astonishment, found his own stick fly up in the air as by a conjuring trick, with a turn of the swordsman's wrist. Another of the revellers picked the stick out of the ditch and ran in upon MacIan, calling to his companion to assist him.

"I haven't got a stick," grumbled the disarmed man, and looked vaguely about the ditch.

"Perhaps," said MacIan, politely, "you would like this one." With the word the drunkard found his hand that had grasped the stick suddenly twisted and empty; and the stick lay at the feet of his companion on the other side of the road. MacIan felt a faint stir behind him; the girl had risen to her feet and was leaning forward to stare at the fighters. Turnbull was still engaged in countering and pommelling with the third young man. The fourth young man was still engaged with himself, kicking his legs in helpless rotation on the back of the car and talking with melodious rationality.

At length Turnbull's opponent began to back before the battery of his heavy hands, still fighting, for he was the soberest and boldest of the four. If these are annals of military glory, it is due to him to say that he need not have abandoned the conflict; only that as he backed to the edge of the ditch his foot caught in a loop of grass and he went over in a flat and comfortable position from which it took him a considerable time to rise. By the time he had risen, Turnbull had come to the rescue of MacIan, who was at bay but belabouring his two enemies handsomely. The sight of the liberated reserve was to them like that of Blucher at Waterloo; the two set off at a sullen trot down the road, leaving even the walking-stick lying behind them in the moonlight. MacIan plucked the struggling and aspiring idiot off the back of the car like a stray cat, and left him swaying unsteadily in the moon. Then he approached the front part of the car in a somewhat embarrassed manner and pulled off his cap.

For some solid seconds the lady and he merely looked at each other, and MacIan had an irrational feeling of being in a picture hung on a wall. That is, he was motionless, even lifeless, and yet staringly significant, like a picture. The white moonlight on the road, when he was not looking at it, gave him a vision of the road being white with snow. The motor-car, when he was not looking at it, gave him a rude impression of a captured coach in the old days of highwaymen. And he whose whole soul was with the swords and stately manners of the eighteenth century, he who was a Jacobite risen from the dead, had an overwhelming sense of being once more in the picture, when he had so long been out of the picture.

In that short and strong silence he absorbed the lady from head to foot. He had never really looked at a human being before in his life. He saw her face and hair first, then that she had long suede gloves; then that there was a fur cap at the back of her brown hair. He might, perhaps, be excused for this hungry attention. He had prayed that some sign might come from heaven; and after an almost savage scrutiny he came to the conclusion that his one did. The lady's instantaneous arrest of speech might need more explaining; but she may well have been stunned with the squalid attack and the abrupt rescue. Yet it was she who remembered herself first and suddenly called out with self-accusing horror:

"Oh, that poor, poor man!"

They both swung round abruptly and saw that Turnbull, with his recovered sword under his arm-pit, was already lifting the fallen chauffeur into the car. He was only stunned and was slowly awakening, feebly waving his left arm.

The lady in long gloves and the fur cap leapt out and ran rapidly towards them, only to be reassured by Turnbull, who (unlike many of his school) really knew a little science when he invoked it to redeem the world. "He's all right," said he; "he's quite safe. But I'm afraid he won't be able to drive the car for half an hour or so."

"I can drive the car," said the young woman in the fur cap with stony practicability.

"Oh, in that case," began MacIan, uneasily; and that paralysing shyness which is a part of romance induced him to make a backward movement as if leaving her to herself. But Turnbull was more rational than he, being more indifferent.

"I don't think you ought to drive home alone, ma'am," he said, gruffly. "There seem to be a lot of rowdy parties along this road, and the man will be no use for an hour. If you will tell us where you are going, we will see you safely there and say good night."

The young lady exhibited all the abrupt disturbance of a person who is not commonly disturbed. She said almost sharply and yet with evident sincerity: “Of course I am awfully grateful to you for all you’ve done — and there’s plenty of room if you’ll come in.”

Turnbull, with the complete innocence of an absolutely sound motive, immediately jumped into the car; but the girl cast an eye at MacIan, who stood in the road for an instant as if rooted like a tree. Then he also tumbled his long legs into the tonneau, having that sense of degradedly diving into heaven which so many have known in so many human houses when they consented to stop to tea or were allowed to stop to supper. The slowly reviving chauffeur was set in the back seat; Turnbull and MacIan had fallen into the middle one; the lady with a steely coolness had taken the driver’s seat and all the handles of that headlong machine. A moment afterwards the engine started, with a throb and leap unfamiliar to Turnbull, who had only once been in a motor during a general election, and utterly unknown to MacIan, who in his present mood thought it was the end of the world. Almost at the same instant that the car plucked itself out of the mud and whipped away up the road, the man who had been flung into the ditch rose waveringly to his feet. When he saw the car escaping he ran after it and shouted something which, owing to the increasing distance, could not be heard. It is awful to reflect that, if his remark was valuable, it is quite lost to the world.

The car shot on up and down the shining moonlit lanes, and there was no sound in it except the occasional click or catch of its machinery; for through some cause or other no soul inside it could think of a word to say. The lady symbolized her feelings, whatever they were, by urging the machine faster and faster until scattered woodlands went by them in one black blotch and heavy hills and valleys seemed to ripple under the wheels like mere waves. A little while afterwards this mood seemed to slacken and she fell into a more ordinary pace; but still she did not speak. Turnbull, who kept a more common and sensible view of the case than anyone else, made some remark about the moonlight; but something indescribable made him also relapse into silence.

All this time MacIan had been in a sort of monstrous delirium, like some fabulous hero snatched up into the moon. The difference between this experience and common experiences was analogous to that between waking life and a dream. Yet he did not feel in the least as if he were dreaming; rather the other way; as waking was more actual than dreaming, so this seemed by another degree more actual than waking itself. But it was another life altogether, like a cosmos with a new dimension.

He felt he had been hurled into some new incarnation: into the midst of new relations, wrongs and rights, with towering responsibilities and almost tragic joys which he had as yet had no time to examine. Heaven had not merely sent him a message; Heaven itself had opened around him and given him an hour of its own ancient and star-shattering energy. He had never felt so much alive before; and yet he was like a man in a trance. And if you had asked him on what his throbbing happiness hung, he could only have told you that it hung on four or five visible facts, as a curtain hangs on four of five fixed nails. The fact that the lady had a little fur at her throat; the fact that the curve of her cheek was a low and lean curve and that the moonlight caught the height of her cheek-bone; the fact that her hands were small but heavily gloved as they gripped the steering-wheel; the fact that a white witch light was on the road; the fact that the brisk breeze of their passage stirred and fluttered a little not only the brown hair of her head but the black fur on her cap. All these facts were to him certain and incredible, like sacraments.

When they had driven half a mile farther, a big shadow was flung across the path, followed by its bulky owner, who eyed the car critically but let it pass. The silver moonlight picked out a piece or two of pewter ornament on his blue uniform; and as they went by they knew it was a sergeant of police. Three hundred yards farther on another policeman stepped out into the road as if to stop them, then seemed to doubt his own authority and stepped back again. The girl was a daughter of the rich; and this police suspicion (under which all the poor live day and night) stung her for the first time into speech.

“What can they mean?” she cried out in a kind of temper; “this car’s going like a snail.”

There was a short silence, and then Turnbull said: “It is certainly very odd, you are driving quietly enough.”

“You are driving nobly,” said MacIan, and his words (which had no meaning whatever) sounded hoarse and ungainly even in his own ears.

They passed the next mile and a half swiftly and smoothly; yet among the many things which they passed in the course of it was a clump of eager policemen standing at a cross-road. As they passed, one of the policemen shouted something to the others; but nothing else happened. Eight hundred yards farther on, Turnbull stood up suddenly in the swaying car.

“My God, MacIan!” he called out, showing his first emotion of that night. “I don’t believe it’s the pace; it couldn’t be the pace. I believe it’s us.”

MacIan sat motionless for a few moments and then turned up at his companion a face that was as white as the moon above it.

“You may be right,” he said at last; “if you are, I must tell her.”

“I will tell the lady if you like,” said Turnbull, with his unconquered good temper.

“You!” said MacIan, with a sort of sincere and instinctive astonishment. “Why should you — no, I must tell her, of course — —”

And he leant forward and spoke to the lady in the fur cap.

“I am afraid, madam, that we may have got you into some trouble,” he said, and even as he said it it sounded wrong, like everything he said to this particular person in the long gloves. “The fact is,” he resumed, desperately, “the fact is, we are being chased by the police.” Then the last flattening hammer fell upon poor Evan’s embarrassment; for the fluffy brown head with the furry black cap did not turn by a section of the compass.

“We are chased by the police,” repeated MacIan, vigorously; then he added, as if beginning an explanation, “You see, I am a Catholic.”

The wind whipped back a curl of the brown hair so as to necessitate a new theory of aesthetics touching the line of the cheek-bone; but the head did not turn.

“You see,” began MacIan, again blunderingly, “this gentleman wrote in his newspaper that Our Lady was a common woman, a bad woman, and so we agreed to fight; and we were fighting quite a little time ago — but that was before we saw you.”

The young lady driving her car had half turned her face to listen; and it was not a reverent or a patient face that she showed him. Her Norman nose was tilted a trifle too high upon the slim stalk of her neck and body.

When MacIan saw that arrogant and uplifted profile pencilled plainly against the moonshine, he accepted an ultimate defeat. He had expected the angels to despise him if he were wrong, but not to despise him so much as this.

“You see,” said the stumbling spokesman, “I was angry with him when he insulted the Mother of God, and I asked him to fight a duel with me; but the police are all trying to stop it.”

Nothing seemed to waver or flicker in the fair young falcon profile; and it only opened its lips to say, after a silence: “I thought people in our time were supposed to respect each other’s religion.”

Under the shadow of that arrogant face MacIan could only fall back on the obvious answer: “But what about a man’s irreligion?” The face only answered: “Well, you ought to be more broadminded.”

If anyone else in the world had said the words, MacIan would have snorted with his equine neigh of scorn. But in this case he seemed knocked down by a superior simplicity, as if his eccentric attitude were rebuked by the innocence of a child. He could not dissociate anything that this woman said or did or wore from an idea of spiritual rarity and virtue. Like most others under the same elemental passion, his soul was at present soaked in ethics. He could have applied moral terms to the material objects of her environment. If someone had spoken of “her generous ribbon” or “her chivalrous gloves” or “her merciful shoe-buckle,” it would not have seemed to him nonsense.

He was silent, and the girl went on in a lower key as if she were momentarily softened and a little saddened also. “It won’t do, you know,” she said; “you can’t find out the truth in that way. There are such heaps of churches and people thinking different things nowadays, and they all think they are right. My uncle was a Swedenborgian.”

MacIan sat with bowed head, listening hungrily to her voice but hardly to her words, and seeing his great world drama grow smaller and smaller before his eyes till it was no bigger than a child’s toy theatre.

“The time’s gone by for all that,” she went on; “you can’t find out the real thing like that — if there is really anything to find — —” and she sighed rather drearily; for, like many of the women of our wealthy class, she was old and broken in thought, though young and clean enough in her emotions.

“Our object,” said Turnbull, shortly, “is to make an effective demonstration”; and after that word, MacIan looked at his vision again and found it smaller than ever.

“It would be in the newspapers, of course,” said the girl. “People read the newspapers, but they don’t believe them, or anything else, I think.” And she sighed again.

She drove in silence a third of a mile before she added, as if completing the sentence: “Anyhow, the whole thing’s quite absurd.”

“I don’t think,” began Turnbull, “that you quite realize —— Hullo! hullo — hullo — what’s this?”

The amateur chauffeur had been forced to bring the car to a staggering stoppage, for a file of fat, blue policemen made a wall across the way. A sergeant came to the side and touched his peaked cap to the lady.

“Beg your pardon, miss,” he said with some embarrassment, for he knew her for a daughter of a dominant house, “but we have reason to believe that the gentlemen in your car are — —” and he hesitated for a polite phrase.

“I am Evan MacIan,” said that gentleman, and stood up in a sort of gloomy pomp, not wholly without a touch of the sulks of a schoolboy.

“Yes, we will get out, sergeant,” said Turnbull, more easily; “my name is James Turnbull. We must not incommode the lady.”

“What are you taking them up for?” asked the young woman, looking straight in front of her along the road.

“It’s under the new act,” said the sergeant, almost apologetically. “Incurable disturbers of the peace.”

“What will happen to them?” she asked, with the same frigid clearness.

“Westgate Adult Reformatory,” he replied, briefly.

“Until when?”

“Until they are cured,” said the official.

“Very well, sergeant,” said the young lady, with a sort of tired common sense. “I am sure I don’t want to protect criminals or go against the law; but I must tell you that these gentlemen have done me a considerable service; you won’t mind drawing your men a little farther off while I say good night to them. Men like that always misunderstand.”

The sergeant was profoundly disquieted from the beginning at the mere idea of arresting anyone in the company of a great lady; to refuse one of her minor requests was quite beyond his courage. The police fell back to a few yards behind the car. Turnbull took up the two swords that were their only luggage; the swords that, after so many half duels, they were now to surrender at last. MacIan, the blood thundering in his brain at the thought of that instant of farewell, bent over, fumbled at the handle and flung open the door to get out.

But he did not get out. He did not get out, because it is dangerous to jump out of a car when it is going at full speed. And the car was going at full speed, because the young lady, without turning her head or so much as saying a syllable, had driven down a handle that made the machine plunge forward like a buffalo and then fly over the landscape like a greyhound. The police made one rush to follow, and then dropped so grotesque and hopeless a chase. Away in the vanishing distance they could see the sergeant furiously making notes.

The open door, still left loose on its hinges, swung and banged quite crazily as they went whizzing up one road and down another. Nor did MacIan sit down; he stood up stunned and yet staring, as he would have stood up at the trumpet of the Last Day. A black dot in the distance sprang up a tall black forest, swallowed them and spat them out again at the other end. A railway bridge grew larger and larger till it leapt upon their backs bellowing, and was in its turn left behind. Avenues of poplars on both sides of the road chased each other like the figures in a zoetrope. Now and then with a shock and rattle they went through sleeping moonlit villages, which must have stirred an instant in their sleep as at the passing of a fugitive earthquake. Sometimes in an outlying house a light in one erratic, unexpected window would give them a nameless hint of the hundred human secrets which they left behind them with their dust. Sometimes even a slouching rustic would be afoot on the road and would look after them, as after a flying phantom. But still MacIan stood up staring at earth and heaven; and still the door he had flung open flapped loose like a flag. Turnbull, after a few minutes of dumb amazement, had yielded to the healthiest element in his nature and gone off into uncontrollable fits of laughter. The girl had not stirred an inch.

After another half mile that seemed a mere flash, Turnbull leant over and locked the door. Evan staggered at last into his seat and hid his throbbing head in his hands; and still the car flew on and its driver sat inflexible and silent. The moon had already gone down, and the whole darkness was faintly troubled with twilight and the first movement of beasts and fowls. It was that mysterious moment when light is coming as if it were something unknown whose nature one could not guess — a mere alteration in everything. They looked at the sky and it seemed as dark as ever; then they saw the black shape of a tower or tree against it and knew that it was already grey. Save that they were driving southward and had certainly passed the longitude of London, they knew nothing of their direction; but Turnbull, who had spent a year on the Hampshire coast in his youth, began to recognize the unmistakable but quite indescribable villages of the English south. Then a white witch fire began to burn between the black stems of the fir-trees; and, like so many things in nature, though not in books on evolution, the daybreak, when it did come, came much quicker than one would think. The gloomy heavens were ripped up and rolled away like a scroll, revealing splendours, as the car went roaring up the curve of a great hill; and above them and black against the broadening light, there stood one of those crouching and fantastic trees that are first signals of the sea.

X. THE SWORDS REJOINED

As they came over the hill and down on the other side of it, it is not too much to say that the whole universe of God opened over them and under them, like a thing unfolding to five times its size. Almost under their feet opened the enormous sea, at the bottom of a steep valley which fell down into a bay; and the sea under their feet blazed at them almost as lustrous and almost as empty as the sky. The sunrise opened above them like some cosmic explosion, shining and shattering and yet silent; as if the world were blown to pieces without a sound. Round the rays of the victorious sun swept a sort of rainbow of confused and conquered colours — brown and blue and green and flaming rose-colour; as though gold were driving before it all the colours of the world. The lines of the landscape down which they sped, were the simple, strict, yet swerving, lines of a rushing river; so that it was almost as if they were being sucked down in a huge still whirlpool. Turnbull had some such feeling, for he spoke for the first time for many hours.

“If we go down at this rate we shall be over the sea cliff,” he said.

“How glorious!” said MacIan.

When, however, they had come into the wide hollow at the bottom of that landslide, the car took a calm and graceful curve along the side of the sea, melted into the fringe of a few trees, and quietly, yet astonishingly, stopped. A belated light was burning in the broad morning in the window of a sort of lodge- or gate-keepers’ cottage; and the girl stood up in the car and turned her splendid face to the sun.

Evan seemed startled by the stillness, like one who had been born amid sound and speed. He wavered on his long legs as he stood up; he pulled himself together, and the only consequence was that he trembled from head to foot. Turnbull had already opened the door on his side and jumped out.

The moment he had done so the strange young woman had one more mad movement, and deliberately drove the car a few yards farther. Then she got out with an almost cruel coolness and began pulling off her long gloves and almost whistling.

“You can leave me here,” she said, quite casually, as if they had met five minutes before. “That is the lodge of my father’s place. Please come in, if you like — but I understood that you had some business.”

Evan looked at that lifted face and found it merely lovely; he was far too much of a fool to see that it was working with a final fatigue and that its austerity was agony. He was even fool enough to ask it a question. “Why did you save us?” he said, quite humbly.

The girl tore off one of her gloves, as if she were tearing off her hand. “Oh, I don’t know,” she said, bitterly. “Now I come to think of it, I can’t imagine.”

Evan’s thoughts, that had been piled up to the morning star, abruptly let him down with a crash into the very cellars of the emotional universe. He remained in a stunned silence for a long time; and that, if he had only known, was the wisest thing that he could possibly do at the moment.

Indeed, the silence and the sunrise had their healing effect, for when the extraordinary lady spoke again, her tone was more friendly and apologetic. “I’m not really ungrateful,” she said; “it was very good of you to save me from those men.”

“But why?” repeated the obstinate and dazed MacIan, “why did you save us from the other men? I mean the policemen?”

The girl’s great brown eyes were lit up with a flash that was at once final desperation and the loosening of some private and passionate reserve.

“Oh, God knows!” she cried. “God knows that if there is a God He has turned His big back on everything. God knows I have had no pleasure in my life, though I am pretty and young and father has plenty of money. And then people come and tell me that I ought to do things and I do them and it’s all drivel. They want you to do work among the poor; which means reading Ruskin and feeling self-righteous in the best room in a poor tenement. Or to help some cause or other, which always means bundling people out of crooked houses, in which they’ve always lived, into straight houses, in which they often die. And all the time you have inside only the horrid irony of your own empty head and empty heart. I am to give to the unfortunate, when my whole misfortune is that I have nothing to give. I am to teach, when I believe nothing at all that I was taught. I am to save the children from death, and I am not even certain that I should not be better dead. I suppose if I actually saw a child drowning I should save it. But that would be from the same motive from which I have saved you, or destroyed you, whichever it is that I have done.”

“What was the motive?” asked Evan, in a low voice.

“My motive is too big for my mind,” answered the girl.

Then, after a pause, as she stared with a rising colour at the glittering sea, she said: “It can’t be described, and yet I am trying to describe it. It seems to me not only that I am unhappy, but that there is no way of being happy. Father is not happy, though he is a Member of Parliament — —” She paused a moment and added with a ghost of a smile: “Nor Aunt Mabel, though a man from India has told her the secret of all creeds. But I may be wrong; there may be a way out. And for one stark, insane second, I felt that, after all, you had got the way out and that was why the world hated you. You see, if there were a way out, it would be sure to be something that looked very queer.”

Evan put his hand to his forehead and began stumblingly: “Yes, I suppose we do seem — —”

“Oh, yes, you look queer enough,” she said, with ringing sincerity. “You’ll be all the better for a wash and brush up.”

“You forget our business, madam,” said Evan, in a shaking voice; “we have no concern but to kill each other.”

“Well, I shouldn’t be killed looking like that if I were you,” she replied, with inhuman honesty.

Evan stood and rolled his eyes in masculine bewilderment. Then came the final change in this Proteus, and she put out both her hands for an instant and said in a low tone on which he lived for days and nights:

“Don’t you understand that I did not dare to stop you? What you are doing is so mad that it may be quite true. Somehow one can never really manage to be an atheist.”

Turnbull stood staring at the sea; but his shoulders showed that he heard, and after one minute he turned his head. But the girl had only brushed Evan’s hand with hers and had fled up the dark alley by the lodge gate.

Evan stood rooted upon the road, literally like some heavy statue hewn there in the age of the Druids. It seemed impossible that he should ever move. Turnbull grew restless with this rigidity, and at last, after calling his companion twice or thrice, went up and clapped him impatiently on one of his big shoulders. Evan winced and leapt away from him with a repulsion which was not the hate of an unclean thing nor the dread of a dangerous one, but was a spasm of awe and separation from something from which he was now sundered as by the sword of God. He did not hate the atheist; it is possible that he loved him. But Turnbull was now something more dreadful than an enemy: he was a thing sealed and devoted — a thing now hopelessly doomed to be either a corpse or an executioner.

“What is the matter with you?” asked Turnbull, with his hearty hand still in the air; and yet he knew more about it than his innocent action would allow.

“James,” said Evan, speaking like one under strong bodily pain, “I asked for God’s answer and I have got it — got it in my vitals. He knows how weak I am, and that I might forget the peril of the faith, forget the face of Our Lady — yes, even with your blow upon her cheek. But the honour of this earth has just this about it, that it can make a man’s heart like iron. I am from the Lords of the Isles and I dare not be a mere deserter. Therefore, God has tied me by the chain of my worldly place and word, and there is nothing but fighting now.”

“I think I understand you,” said Turnbull, “but you say everything tail foremost.”

“She wants us to do it,” said Evan, in a voice crushed with passion. “She has hurt herself so that we might do it. She has left her good name and her good sleep and all her habits and dignity flung away on the other side of England in the hope that she may hear of us and that we have broken some hole into heaven.”

“I thought I knew what you mean,” said Turnbull, biting his beard; “it does seem as if we ought to do something after all she has done this night.”

“I never liked you so much before,” said MacIan, in bitter sorrow.

As he spoke, three solemn footmen came out of the lodge gate and assembled to assist the chauffeur to his room. The mere sight of them made the two wanderers flee as from a too frightful incongruity, and before they knew where they were, they were well upon the grassy ledge of England that overlooks the Channel. Evan said suddenly: “Will they let me see her in heaven once in a thousand ages?” and addressed the remark to the editor of *The Atheist*, as on which he would be likely or qualified to answer. But no answer came; a silence sank between the two.

Turnbull strode sturdily to the edge of the cliff and looked out, his companion following, somewhat more shaken by his recent agitation.

“If that’s the view you take,” said Turnbull, “and I don’t say you are wrong, I think I know where we shall be best off for the business. As it happens, I know this part of the south coast pretty well. And unless I am mistaken there’s a way down the cliff just here which will land us on a stretch of firm sand where no one is likely to follow us.”

The Highlander made a gesture of assent and came also almost to the edge of the precipice. The sunrise, which was broadening over sea and shore, was one of those rare and splendid ones in which there seems to be no mist or doubt, and nothing but a universal clarification more and more complete. All the colours were transparent. It seemed like a triumphant prophecy of some perfect world where everything being innocent will be intelligible; a world where even our bodies, so to speak, may be as of burning glass. Such a world is faintly though fiercely figured in the coloured windows of Christian architecture. The sea that lay before them was like a pavement of emerald, bright and almost brittle; the sky against which its strict horizon hung was almost absolutely white, except that close to the sky line, like scarlet braids on the hem of a garment, lay strings of flaky cloud of so gleaming and gorgeous a red that they seemed cut out of some strange blood-red celestial metal, of which the mere gold of this earth is but a drab yellow imitation.

“The hand of Heaven is still pointing,” muttered the man of superstition to himself. “And now it is a blood-red hand.”

The cool voice of his companion cut in upon his monologue, calling to him from a little farther along the cliff, to tell him that he had found the ladder of descent. It began as a steep and somewhat greasy path, which then tumbled down twenty or thirty feet in the form of a fall of rough stone steps. After that, there was a rather awkward drop on to a ledge of stone and then the journey was undertaken easily and even elegantly by the remains of an ornamental staircase, such as might have belonged to some long-disused watering-place. All the time that the two travellers sank from stage to stage of this downward journey, there closed over their heads living bridges and caverns of the most varied foliage, all of which grew greener, redder, or more golden, in the growing sunlight of the morning. Life, too, of the more moving sort rose at the sun on every side of them. Birds whirred and fluttered in the undergrowth, as if imprisoned in green cages. Other birds were shaken up in great clouds from the tree-tops, as if they were blossoms detached and scattered up to heaven. Animals which Turnbull was too much of a Londoner and MacIan too much of a Northerner to know, slipped by among the tangle or ran pattering up the tree-trunks. Both the men, according to their several creeds, felt the full thunder of the psalm of life as they had never heard it before; MacIan felt God the Father, benignant in all His energies, and Turnbull that ultimate anonymous energy, that *Natura Naturans*, which is the whole theme of Lucretius. It was down this clamorous ladder of life that they went down to die.

They broke out upon a brown semicircle of sand, so free from human imprint as to justify Turnbull's profession. They strode out upon it, stuck their swords in the sand, and had a pause too important for speech. Turnbull eyed the coast curiously for a moment, like one awakening memories of childhood; then he said abruptly, like a man remembering somebody's name: "But, of course, we shall be better off still round the corner of Cragness Point; nobody ever comes there at all." And picking up his sword again, he began striding towards a big bluff of the rocks which stood out upon their left. MacIan followed him round the corner and found himself in what was certainly an even finer fencing court, of flat, firm sand, enclosed on three sides by white walls of rock, and on the fourth by the green wall of the advancing sea.

"We are quite safe here," said Turnbull, and, to the other's surprise, flung himself down, sitting on the brown beach.

"You see, I was brought up near here," he explained. "I was sent from Scotland to stop with my aunt. It is highly probable that I may die here. Do you mind if I light a pipe?"

"Of course, do whatever you like," said MacIan, with a choking voice, and he went and walked alone by himself along the wet, glistening sands.

Ten minutes afterwards he came back again, white with his own whirlwind of emotions; Turnbull was quite cheerful and was knocking out the end of his pipe.

"You see, we have to do it," said MacIan. "She tied us to it."

"Of course, my dear fellow," said the other, and leapt up as lightly as a monkey.

They took their places gravely in the very centre of the great square of sand, as if they had thousands of spectators. Before saluting, MacIan, who, being a mystic, was one inch nearer to Nature, cast his eye round the huge framework of their heroic folly. The three walls of rock all leant a little outward, though at various angles; but this impression was exaggerated in the direction of the incredible by the heavy load of living trees and thickets which each wall wore on its top like a huge shock of hair. On all that luxurious crest of life the risen and victorious sun was beating, burnishing it all like gold, and every bird that rose with that sunrise caught a light like a star upon it like the dove of the Holy Spirit. Imaginative life had never so much crowded upon MacIan. He felt that he could write whole books about the feelings of a single bird. He felt that for two centuries he would not tire of being a rabbit. He was in the Palace of Life, of which the very tapestries and curtains were alive. Then he recovered himself, and remembered his affairs. Both men saluted, and iron rang upon iron. It was exactly at the same moment that he realized that his enemy's left ankle was encircled with a ring of salt water that had crept up to his feet.

"What is the matter?" said Turnbull, stopping an instant, for he had grown used to every movement of his extraordinary fellow-traveller's face.

MacIan glanced again at that silver anklet of sea-water and then looked beyond at the next promontory round which a deep sea was boiling and leaping. Then he turned and looked back and saw heavy foam being shaken up to heaven about the base of Cragness Point.

"The sea has cut us off," he said, curtly.

"I have noticed it," said Turnbull with equal sobriety. "What view do you take of the development?"

Evan threw away his weapon, and, as his custom was, imprisoned his big head in his hands. Then he let them fall and said: "Yes, I know what it means; and I think it is the fairest thing. It is the finger of God — red as blood — still pointing. But now it points to two graves."

There was a space filled with the sound of the sea, and then MacIan spoke again in a voice pathetically reasonable: "You see, we both saved her — and she told us both to fight — and it would not be just that either should fail and fall alone, while the other — —"

"You mean," said Turnbull, in a voice surprisingly soft and gentle, "that there is something fine about fighting in a place where even the conqueror must die?"

"Oh, you have got it right, you have got it right!" cried out Evan, in an extraordinary childish ecstasy. "Oh, I'm sure that you really believe in God!"

Turnbull answered not a word, but only took up his fallen sword.

For the third time Evan MacIan looked at those three sides of English cliff hung with their noisy load of life. He had been at a loss to understand the almost ironical magnificence of all those teeming creatures and tropical colours and smells that smoked happily to heaven. But now he knew that he was in the closed court of death and that all the gates were sealed.

He drank in the last green and the last red and the last gold, those unique and indescribable things of God, as a man drains good wine at the bottom of his glass. Then he turned and saluted his enemy once more, and the two stood up and fought till the foam flowed over their knees.

Then MacIan stepped backward suddenly with a splash and held up his hand. “Turnbull!” he cried; “I can’t help it — fair fighting is more even than promises. And this is not fair fighting.”

“What the deuce do you mean?” asked the other, staring.

“I’ve only just thought of it,” cried Evan, brokenly. “We’re very well matched — it may go on a good time — the tide is coming up fast — and I’m a foot and a half taller. You’ll be washed away like seaweed before it’s above my breeches. I’ll not fight foul for all the girls and angels in the universe.”

“Will you oblige me,” said Turnbull, with staring grey eyes and a voice of distinct and violent politeness; “will you oblige me by jolly well minding your own business? Just you stand up and fight, and we’ll see who will be washed away like seaweed. You wanted to finish this fight and you shall finish it, or I’ll denounce you as a coward to the whole of that assembled company.”

Evan looked very doubtful and offered a somewhat wavering weapon; but he was quickly brought back to his senses by his opponent’s sword-point, which shot past him, shaving his shoulder by a hair. By this time the waves were well up Turnbull’s thigh, and what was worse, they were beginning to roll and break heavily around them.

MacIan parried this first lunge perfectly, the next less perfectly; the third in all human probability he would not have parried at all; the Christian champion would have been pinned like a butterfly, and the atheistic champion left to drown like a rat, with such consolation as his view of the cosmos afforded him. But just as Turnbull launched his heaviest stroke, the sea, in which he stood up to his hips, launched a yet heavier one. A wave breaking beyond the others smote him heavily like a hammer of water. One leg gave way, he was swung round and sucked into the retreating sea, still gripping his sword.

MacIan put his sword between his teeth and plunged after his disappearing enemy. He had the sense of having the whole universe on top of him as crest after crest struck him down. It seemed to him quite a cosmic collapse, as if all the seven heavens were falling on him one after the other. But he got hold of the atheist's left leg and he did not let it go.

After some ten minutes of foam and frenzy, in which all the senses at once seemed blasted by the sea, Evan found himself laboriously swimming on a low, green swell, with the sword still in his teeth and the editor of *The Atheist* still under his arm. What he was going to do he had not even the most glimmering idea; so he merely kept his grip and swam somehow with one hand.

He ducked instinctively as there bulked above him a big, black wave, much higher than any that he had seen. Then he saw that it was hardly the shape of any possible wave. Then he saw that it was a fisherman's boat, and, leaping upward, caught hold of the bow. The boat pitched forward with its stern in the air for just as much time as was needed to see that there was nobody in it. After a moment or two of desperate clambering, however, there were two people in it, Mr. Evan MacIan, panting and sweating, and Mr. James Turnbull, uncommonly close to being drowned. After ten minutes' aimless tossing in the empty fishing-boat he recovered, however, stirred, stretched himself, and looked round on the rolling waters. Then, while taking no notice of the streams of salt water that were pouring from his hair, beard, coat, boots, and trousers, he carefully wiped the wet off his sword-blade to preserve it from the possibilities of rust.

MacIan found two oars in the bottom of the deserted boat and began somewhat drearily to row.

* * *

A rainy twilight was clearing to cold silver over the moaning sea, when the battered boat that had rolled and drifted almost aimlessly all night, came within sight of land, though of land which looked almost as lost and savage as the waves. All night there had been but little lifting in the leaden sea, only now and then the boat had been heaved up, as on a huge shoulder which slipped from under it; such occasional sea-quakes came probably from the swell of some steamer that had passed it in the dark; otherwise the waves were harmless though restless. But it was piercingly cold, and there was, from time to time, a splutter of rain like the splutter of the spray, which seemed almost to freeze as it fell. MacIan, more at home than his companion in this quite barbarous and elemental sort of adventure, had rowed toilsomely with the heavy oars whenever he saw anything that looked like land; but for the most part had trusted with grim transcendentalism to wind and tide. Among the implements of their first outfit the brandy alone had remained to him, and he gave it to his freezing companion in quantities which greatly alarmed that temperate Londoner; but MacIan came from the cold seas and mists where a man can drink a tumbler of raw whisky in a boat without it making him wink.

When the Highlander began to pull really hard upon the oars, Turnbull craned his dripping red head out of the boat to see the goal of his exertions. It was a sufficiently uninviting one; nothing so far as could be seen but a steep and shelving bank of shingle, made of loose little pebbles such as children like, but slanting up higher than a house. On the top of the mound, against the sky line, stood up the brown skeleton of some broken fence or breakwater. With the grey and watery dawn crawling up behind it, the fence really seemed to say to our philosophic adventurers that they had come at last to the other end of nowhere.

Bent by necessity to his labour, MacIan managed the heavy boat with real power and skill, and when at length he ran it up on a smoother part of the slope it caught and held so that they could clamber out, not sinking farther than their knees into the water and the shingle. A foot or two farther up their feet found the beach firmer, and a few moments afterwards they were leaning on the ragged breakwater and looking back at the sea they had escaped.

They had a dreary walk across wastes of grey shingle in the grey dawn before they began to come within hail of human fields or roads; nor had they any notion of what fields or roads they would be. Their boots were beginning to break up and the confusion of stones tried them severely, so that they were glad to lean on their swords, as if they were the staves of pilgrims. MacIan thought vaguely of a weird ballad of his own country which describes the soul in Purgatory as walking on a plain full of sharp stones, and only saved by its own charities upon earth.

If ever thou gavest hosen and shoon
   Every night and all,
Sit thee down and put them on,
   And Christ receive thy soul.

Turnbull had no such lyrical meditations, but he was in an even worse temper.

At length they came to a pale ribbon of road, edged by a shelf of rough and almost colourless turf; and a few feet up the slope there stood grey and weather-stained, one of those big wayside crucifixes which are seldom seen except in Catholic countries.

MacIan put his hand to his head and found that his bonnet was not there. Turnbull gave one glance at the crucifix — a glance at once sympathetic and bitter, in which was concentrated the whole of Swinburne's poem on the same occasion.

O hidden face of man, whereover
   The years have woven a viewless veil,
If thou wert verily man's lover
   What did thy love or blood avail?
Thy blood the priests mix poison of,
And in gold shekels coin thy love.

Then, leaving MacIan in his attitude of prayer, Turnbull began to look right and left very sharply, like one looking for something. Suddenly, with a little cry, he saw it and ran forward. A few yards from them along the road a lean and starved sort of hedge came pitifully to an end. Caught upon its prickly angle, however, there was a very small and very dirty scrap of paper that might have hung there for months, since it escaped from someone tearing up a letter or making a spill out of a newspaper. Turnbull snatched at it and found it was the corner of a printed page, very coarsely printed, like a cheap novelette, and just large enough to contain the words: "*et c'est elle qui* — —"

"Hurrah!" cried Turnbull, waving his fragment; "we are safe at last. We are free at last. We are somewhere better than England or Eden or Paradise. MacIan, we are in the Land of the Duel!"

"Where do you say?" said the other, looking at him heavily and with knitted brows, like one almost dazed with the grey doubts of desolate twilight and drifting sea.

"We are in France!" cried Turnbull, with a voice like a trumpet, "in the land where things really happen — *Tout arrive en France*. We arrive in France. Look at this little message," and he held out the scrap of paper. "There's an omen for you superstitious hill folk. *C'est elle qui — Mais oui, mais oui, c'est elle qui sauvera encore le monde*."

"France!" repeated MacIan, and his eyes awoke again in his head like large lamps lighted.

“Yes, France!” said Turnbull, and all the rhetorical part of him came to the top, his face growing as red as his hair. “France, that has always been in rebellion for liberty and reason. France, that has always assailed superstition with the club of Rabelais or the rapier of Voltaire. France, at whose first council table sits the sublime figure of Julian the Apostate. France, where a man said only the other day those splendid unanswerable words” — with a superb gesture—”’we have extinguished in heaven those lights that men shall never light again.’”

“No,” said MacIan, in a voice that shook with a controlled passion. “But France, which was taught by St. Bernard and led to war by Joan of Arc. France that made the crusades. France that saved the Church and scattered the heresies by the mouths of Bossuet and Massillon. France, which shows today the conquering march of Catholicism, as brain after brain surrenders to it, Brunetière, Coppée, Hauptmann, Barrès, Bourget, Lemaître.”

“France!” asserted Turnbull with a sort of rollicking self-exaggeration, very unusual with him, “France, which is one torrent of splendid scepticism from Abelard to Anatole France.”

“France,” said MacIan, “which is one cataract of clear faith from St. Louis to Our Lady of Lourdes.”

“France at least,” cried Turnbull, throwing up his sword in schoolboy triumph, “in which these things are thought about and fought about. France, where reason and religion clash in one continual tournament. France, above all, where men understand the pride and passion which have plucked our blades from their scabbards. Here, at least, we shall not be chased and spied on by sickly parsons and greasy policemen, because we wish to put our lives on the game. Courage, my friend, we have come to the country of honour.”

MacIan did not even notice the incongruous phrase “my friend”, but nodding again and again, drew his sword and flung the scabbard far behind him in the road.

“Yes,” he cried, in a voice of thunder, “we will fight here and *He* shall look on at it.”

Turnbull glanced at the crucifix with a sort of scowling good-humour and then said: “He may look and see His cross defeated.”

“The cross cannot be defeated,” said MacIan, “for it is Defeat.”

A second afterwards the two bright, blood-thirsty weapons made the sign of the cross in horrible parody upon each other.

They had not touched each other twice, however, when upon the hill, above the crucifix, there appeared another horrible parody of its shape; the figure of a man who appeared for an instant waving his outspread arms. He had vanished in an instant; but MacIan, whose fighting face was set that way, had seen the shape momentarily but quite photographically. And while it was like a comic repetition of the cross, it was also, in that place and hour, something more incredible. It had been only instantaneously on the retina of his eye; but unless his eye and mind were going mad together, the figure was that of an ordinary London policeman.

He tried to concentrate his senses on the sword-play; but one half of his brain was wrestling with the puzzle; the apocalyptic and almost seraphic apparition of a stout constable out of Clapham on top of a dreary and deserted hill in France. He did not, however, have to puzzle long. Before the duellists had exchanged half a dozen passes, the big, blue policeman appeared once more on the top of the hill, a palpable monstrosity in the eye of heaven. He was waving only one arm now and seemed to be shouting directions. At the same moment a mass of blue blocked the corner of the road behind the small, smart figure of Turnbull, and a small company of policemen in the English uniform came up at a kind of half-military double.

Turnbull saw the stare of consternation in his enemy's face and swung round to share its cause. When he saw it, cool as he was, he staggered back.

"What the devil are you doing here?" he called out in a high, shrill voice of authority, like one who finds a tramp in his own larder.

"Well, sir," said the sergeant in command, with that sort of heavy civility shown only to the evidently guilty, "seems to me we might ask what are you doing here?"

"We are having an affair of honour," said Turnbull, as if it were the most rational thing in the world. "If the French police like to interfere, let them interfere. But why the blue blazes should you interfere, you great blue blundering sausages?"

"I'm afraid, sir," said the sergeant with restraint, "I'm afraid I don't quite follow you."

"I mean, why don't the French police take this up if it's got to be taken up? I always heard that they were spry enough in their own way."

"Well, sir," said the sergeant reflectively, "you see, sir, the French police don't take this up — well, because you see, sir, this ain't France. This is His Majesty's dominions, same as 'Ampstead 'eath."

“Not France?” repeated Turnbull, with a sort of dull incredulity.

“No, sir,” said the sergeant; “though most of the people talk French. This is the island called St. Loup, sir, an island in the Channel. We’ve been sent down specially from London, as you were such specially distinguished criminals, if you’ll allow me to say so. Which reminds me to warn you that anything you say may be used against you at your trial.”

“Quite so,” said Turnbull, and lurched suddenly against the sergeant, so as to tip him over the edge of the road with a crash into the shingle below. Then leaving MacIan and the policemen equally and instantaneously nailed to the road, he ran a little way along it, leapt off on to a part of the beach, which he had found in his journey to be firmer, and went across it with a clatter of pebbles. His sudden calculation was successful; the police, unacquainted with the various levels of the loose beach, tried to overtake him by the shorter cut and found themselves, being heavy men, almost up to their knees in shoals of slippery shingle. Two who had been slower with their bodies were quicker with their minds, and seeing Turnbull’s trick, ran along the edge of the road after him. Then MacIan finally awoke, and leaving half his sleeve in the grip of the only man who tried to hold him, took the two policemen in the small of their backs with the impetus of a cannon-ball and, sending them also flat among the stones, went tearing after his twin defier of the law.

As they were both good runners, the start they had gained was decisive. They dropped over a high breakwater farther on upon the beach, turned sharply, and scrambled up a line of ribbed rocks, crowned with a thicket, crawled through it, scratching their hands and faces, and dropped into another road; and there found that they could slacken their speed into a steady trot. In all this desperate dart and scramble, they still kept hold of their drawn swords, which now, indeed, in the vigorous phrase of Bunyan, seemed almost to grow out of their hands.

They had run another half mile or so when it became apparent that they were entering a sort of scattered village. One or two whitewashed cottages and even a shop had appeared along the side of the road. Then, for the first time, Turnbull twisted round his red bear to get a glimpse of his companion, who was a foot or two behind, and remarked abruptly: “Mr. MacIan, we’ve been going the wrong way to work all along. We’re traced everywhere, because everybody knows about us. It’s as if one went about with Kruger’s beard on Mafeking Night.”

“What do you mean?” said MacIan, innocently.

“I mean,” said Turnbull, with steady conviction, “that what we want is a little diplomacy, and I am going to buy some in a shop.”

XI. A SCANDAL IN THE VILLAGE

In the little hamlet of Haroc, in the Isle of St. Loup, there lived a man who — though living under the English flag — was absolutely untypical of the French tradition. He was quite unnoticeable, but that was exactly where he was quite himself. He was not even extraordinarily French; but then it is against the French tradition to be extraordinarily French. Ordinary Englishmen would only have thought him a little old-fashioned; imperialistic Englishmen would really have mistaken him for the old John Bull of the caricatures. He was stout; he was quite undistinguished; and he had side-whiskers, worn just a little longer than John Bull's. He was by name Pierre Durand; he was by trade a wine merchant; he was by politics a conservative republican; he had been brought up a Catholic, had always thought and acted as an agnostic, and was very mildly returning to the Church in his later years. He had a genius (if one can even use so wild a word in connexion with so tame a person) a genius for saying the conventional thing on every conceivable subject; or rather what we in England would call the conventional thing. For it was not convention with him, but solid and manly conviction. Convention implies cant or affectation, and he had not the faintest smell of either. He was simply an ordinary citizen with ordinary views; and if you had told him so he would have taken it as an ordinary compliment. If you had asked him about women, he would have said that one must preserve their domesticity and decorum; he would have used the stalest words, but he would have in reserve the strongest arguments. If you had asked him about government, he would have said that all citizens were free and equal, but he would have meant what he said. If you had asked him about education, he would have said that the young must be trained up in habits of industry and of respect for their parents. Still he would have set them the example of industry, and he would have been one of the parents whom they could respect. A state of mind so hopelessly central is depressing to the English instinct. But then in England a man announcing these platitudes is generally a fool and a frightened fool, announcing them out of mere social servility. But Durand was anything but a fool; he had read all the eighteenth century, and could have defended his platitudes round every angle of eighteenth-century argument. And certainly he was anything but a coward: swollen and sedentary as he was, he could have hit any man back who touched him with the instant violence of an automatic machine; and dying in a uniform would have seemed to him only the sort of thing that sometimes happens. I am afraid it is impossible to explain this monster amid the exaggerative sects and the eccentric clubs of my country. He was merely a man.

He lived in a little villa which was furnished well with comfortable chairs and tables and highly uncomfortable classical pictures and medallions. The art in his home contained nothing between the two extremes of hard, meagre designs of Greek heads and Roman togas, and on the other side a few very vulgar Catholic images in the crudest colours; these were mostly in his daughter’s room. He had recently lost his wife, whom he had loved heartily and rather heavily in complete silence, and upon whose grave he was constantly in the habit of placing hideous little wreaths, made out of a sort of black-and-white beads. To his only daughter he was equally devoted, though he restricted her a good deal under a sort of theoretic alarm about her innocence; an alarm which was peculiarly unnecessary, first, because she was an exceptionally reticent and religious girl, and secondly, because there was hardly anybody else in the place.

Madeleine Durand was physically a sleepy young woman, and might easily have been supposed to be morally a lazy one. It is, however, certain that the work of her house was done somehow, and it is even more rapidly ascertainable that nobody else did it. The logician is, therefore, driven back upon the assumption that she did it; and that lends a sort of mysterious interest to her personality at the beginning. She had very broad, low, and level brows, which seemed even lower because her warm yellow hair clustered down to her eyebrows; and she had a face just plump enough not to look as powerful as it was. Anything that was heavy in all this was abruptly lightened by two large, light china-blue eyes, lightened all of a sudden as if it had been lifted into the air by two big blue butterflies. The rest of her was less than middle-sized, and was of a casual and comfortable sort; and she had this difference from such girls as the girl in the motor-car, that one did not incline to take in her figure at all, but only her broad and leonine and innocent head.

Both the father and the daughter were of the sort that would normally have avoided all observation; that is, all observation in that extraordinary modern world which calls out everything except strength. Both of them had strength below the surface; they were like quiet peasants owning enormous and unquarried mines. The father with his square face and grey side whiskers, the daughter with her square face and golden fringe of hair, were both stronger than they know; stronger than anyone knew. The father believed in civilization, in the storied tower we have erected to affront nature; that is, the father believed in Man. The daughter believed in God; and was even stronger. They neither of them believed in themselves; for that is a decadent weakness.

The daughter was called a devotee. She left upon ordinary people the impression — the somewhat irritating impression — produced by such a person; it can only be described as the sense of strong water being perpetually poured into some abyss. She did her housework easily; she achieved her social relations sweetly; she was never neglectful and never unkind. This accounted for all that was soft in her, but not for all that was hard. She trod firmly as if going somewhere; she flung her face back as if defying something; she hardly spoke a cross word, yet there was often battle in her eyes. The modern man asked doubtfully where all this silent energy went to. He would have stared still more doubtfully if he had been told that it all went into her prayers.

The conventions of the Isle of St. Loup were necessarily a compromise or confusion between those of France and England; and it was vaguely possible for a respectable young lady to have half-attached lovers, in a way that would be impossible to the *bourgeoisie* of France. One man in particular had made himself an unmistakable figure in the track of this girl as she went to church. He was a short, prosperous-looking man, whose long, bushy black beard and clumsy black umbrella made him seem both shorter and older than he really was; but whose big, bold eyes, and step that spurned the ground, gave him an instant character of youth.

His name was Camille Bert, and he was a commercial traveller who had only been in the island an idle week before he began to hover in the tracks of Madeleine Durand. Since everyone knows everyone in so small a place, Madeleine certainly knew him to speak to; but it is not very evident that she ever spoke. He haunted her, however; especially at church, which was, indeed, one of the few certain places for finding her. In her home she had a habit of being invisible, sometimes through insatiable domesticity, sometimes through an equally insatiable solitude. M. Bert did not give the impression of a pious man, though he did give, especially with his eyes, the impression of an honest one. But he went to Mass with a simple exactitude that could not be mistaken for a pose, or even for a vulgar fascination. It was perhaps this religious regularity which eventually drew Madeleine into recognition of him. At least it is certain that she twice spoke to him with her square and open smile in the porch of the church; and there was human nature enough in the hamlet to turn even that into gossip.

But the real interest arose suddenly as a squall arises with the extraordinary affair that occurred about five days after. There was about a third of a mile beyond the village of Haroc a large but lonely hotel upon the London or Paris model, but commonly almost entirely empty. Among the accidental group of guests who had come to it at this season was a man whose nationality no one could fix and who bore the non-committal name of Count Gregory. He treated everybody with complete civility and almost in complete silence. On the few occasions when he spoke, he spoke either French, English, or once (to the priest) Latin; and the general opinion was that he spoke them all wrong. He was a large, lean man, with the stoop of an aged eagle, and even the eagle's nose to complete it; he had old-fashioned military whiskers and moustache dyed with a garish and highly incredible yellow. He had the dress of a showy gentleman and the manners of a decayed gentleman; he seemed (as with a sort of simplicity) to be trying to be a dandy when he was too old even to know that he was old. Ye he was decidedly a handsome figure with his curled yellow hair and lean fastidious face; and he wore a peculiar frock-coat of bright turquoise blue, with an unknown order pinned to it, and he carried a huge and heavy cane. Despite his silence and his dandified dress and whiskers, the island might never have heard of him but for the extraordinary event of which I have spoken, which fell about in the following way:

In such casual atmospheres only the enthusiastic go to Benediction; and as the warm blue twilight closed over the little candle-lit church and village, the line of worshippers who went home from the former to the latter thinned out until it broke. On one such evening at least no one was in church except the quiet, unconquerable Madeleine, four old women, one fisherman, and, of course, the irrepressible M. Camille Bert. The others seemed to melt away afterwards into the peacock colours of the dim green grass and the dark blue sky. Even Durand was invisible instead of being merely reverentially remote; and Madeleine set forth through the patch of black forest alone. She was not in the least afraid of loneliness, because she was not afraid of devils. I think they were afraid of her.

In a clearing of the wood, however, which was lit up with a last patch of the perishing sunlight, there advanced upon her suddenly one who was more startling than a devil. The incomprehensible Count Gregory, with his yellow hair like flame and his face like the white ashes of the flame, was advancing bareheaded towards her, flinging out his arms and his long fingers with a frantic gesture.

“We are alone here,” he cried, “and you would be at my mercy, only that I am at yours.”

Then his frantic hands fell by his sides and he looked up under his brows with an expression that went well with his hard breathing. Madeleine Durand had come to a halt at first in childish wonder, and now, with more than masculine self-control, “I fancy I know your face, sir,” she said, as if to gain time.

“I know I shall not forget yours,” said the other, and extended once more his ungainly arms in an unnatural gesture. Then of a sudden there came out of him a spout of wild and yet pompous phrases. “It is as well that you should know the worst and the best. I am a man who knows no limit; I am the most callous of criminals, the most unrepentant of sinners. There is no man in my dominions so vile as I. But my dominions stretch from the olives of Italy to the fir-woods of Denmark, and there is no nook of all of them in which I have not done a sin. But when I bear you away I shall be doing my first sacrilege, and also my first act of virtue.” He seized her suddenly by the elbow; and she did not scream but only pulled and tugged. Yet though she had not screamed, someone astray in the woods seemed to have heard the struggle. A short but nimble figure came along the woodland path like a humming bullet and had caught Count Gregory a crack across the face before his own could be recognized. When it was recognized it was that of Camille, with the black elderly beard and the young ardent eyes.

Up to the moment when Camille had hit the Count, Madeleine had entertained no doubt that the Count was merely a madman. Now she was startled with a new sanity; for the tall man in the yellow whiskers and yellow moustache first returned the blow of Bert, as if it were a sort of duty, and then stepped back with a slight bow and an easy smile.

“This need go no further here, M. Bert,” he said. “I need not remind you how far it should go elsewhere.”

“Certainly, you need remind me of nothing,” answered Camille, stolidly. “I am glad that you are just not too much of a scoundrel for a gentleman to fight.”

“We are detaining the lady,” said Count Gregory, with politeness; and, making a gesture suggesting that he would have taken off his hat if he had had one, he strode away up the avenue of trees and eventually disappeared. He was so complete an aristocrat that he could offer his back to them all the way up that avenue; and his back never once looked uncomfortable.

“You must allow me to see you home,” said Bert to the girl, in a gruff and almost stifled voice; “I think we have only a little way to go.”

“Only a little way,” she said, and smiled once more that night, in spite of fatigue and fear and the world and the flesh and the devil. The glowing and transparent blue of twilight had long been covered by the opaque and slatelike blue of night, when he handed her into the lamp-lit interior of her home. He went out himself into the darkness, walking sturdily, but tearing at his black beard.

All the French or semi-French gentry of the district considered this a case in which a duel was natural and inevitable, and neither party had any difficulty in finding seconds, strangers as they were in the place. Two small landowners, who were careful, practising Catholics, willingly undertook to represent that strict church-goer Camille Burt; while the profligate but apparently powerful Count Gregory found friends in an energetic local doctor who was ready for social promotion and an accidental Californian tourist who was ready for anything. As no particular purpose could be served by delay, it was arranged that the affair should fall out three days afterwards. And when this was settled the whole community, as it were, turned over again in bed and thought no more about the matter. At least there was only one member of it who seemed to be restless, and that was she who was commonly most restful. On the next night Madeleine Durand went to church as usual; and as usual the stricken Camille was there also. What was not so usual was that when they were a bow-shot from the church Madeleine turned round and walked back to him. “Sir,” she began, “it is not wrong of me to speak to you,” and the very words gave him a jar of unexpected truth; for in all the novels he had ever read she would have begun: “It is wrong of me to speak to you.” She went on with wide and serious eyes like an animal’s: “It is not wrong of me to speak to you, because your soul, or anybody’s soul, matters so much more than what the world says about anybody. I want to talk to you about what you are going to do.”

Bert saw in front of him the inevitable heroine of the novels trying to prevent bloodshed; and his pale firm face became implacable.

“I would do anything but that for you,” he said; “but no man can be called less than a man.”

She looked at him for a moment with a face openly puzzled, and then broke into an odd and beautiful half-smile.

“Oh, I don’t mean that,” she said; “I don’t talk about what I don’t understand. No one has ever hit me; and if they had I should not feel as a man may. I am sure it is not the best thing to fight. It would be better to forgive — if one could really forgive. But when people dine with my father and say that fighting a duel is mere murder — of course I can see that is not just. It’s all so different — having a reason — and letting the other man know — and using the same guns and things — and doing it in front of your friends. I’m awfully stupid, but I know that men like you aren’t murderers. But it wasn’t that that I meant.”

“What did you mean?” asked the other, looking broodingly at the earth.

“Don’t you know,” she said, “there is only one more celebration? I thought that as you always go to church — I thought you would communicate this morning.”

Bert stepped backward with a sort of action she had never seen in him before. It seemed to alter his whole body.

“You may be right or wrong to risk dying,” said the girl, simply; “the poor women in our village risk it whenever they have a baby. You men are the other half of the world. I know nothing about when you ought to die. But surely if you are daring to try and find God beyond the grave and appeal to Him — you ought to let Him find you when He comes and stands there every morning in our little church.”

And placid as she was, she made a little gesture of argument, of which the pathos wrung the heart.

M. Camille Bert was by no means placid. Before that incomplete gesture and frankly pleading face he retreated as if from the jaws of a dragon. His dark black hair and beard looked utterly unnatural against the startling pallor of his face. When at last he said something it was: “O God! I can’t stand this!” He did not say it in French. Nor did he, strictly speaking, say it in English. The truth (interesting only to anthropologists) is that he said it in Scotch.

“There will be another mass in a matter of eight hours,” said Madeleine, with a sort of business eagerness and energy, “and you can do it then before the fighting. You must forgive me, but I was so frightened that you would not do it at all.”

Bert seemed to crush his teeth together until they broke, and managed to say between them: “And why should you suppose that I shouldn’t do as you say — I mean not to do it at all?”

“You always go to Mass,” answered the girl, opening her wide blue eyes, “and the Mass is very long and tiresome unless one loves God.”

Then it was that Bert exploded with a brutality which might have come from Count Gregory, his criminal opponent. He advanced upon Madeleine with flaming eyes, and almost took her by the two shoulders. “I do not love God,” he cried, speaking French with the broadest Scotch accent; “I do not want to find Him; I do not think He is there to be found. I must burst up the show; I must and will say everything. You are the happiest and honestest thing I ever saw in this godless universe. And I am the dirtiest and most dishonest.”

Madeleine looked at him doubtfully for an instant, and then said with a sudden simplicity and cheerfulness: “Oh, but if you are really sorry it is all right. If you are horribly sorry it is all the better. You have only to go and tell the priest so and he will give you God out of his own hands.”

“I hate your priest and I deny your God!” cried the man, “and I tell you God is a lie and a fable and a mask. And for the first time in my life I do not feel superior to God.”

“What can it all mean?” said Madeleine, in massive wonder.

“Because I am a fable also and a mask,” said the man. He had been plucking fiercely at his black beard and hair all the time; now he suddenly plucked them off and flung them like moulted feathers in the mire. This extraordinary spoliation left in the sunlight the same face, but a much younger head — a head with close chestnut curls and a short chestnut beard.

“Now you know the truth,” he answered, with hard eyes. “I am a cad who has played a crooked trick on a quiet village and a decent woman for a private reason of his own. I might have played it successfully on any other woman; I have hit the one woman on whom it cannot be played. It’s just like my damned luck. The plain truth is,” and here when he came to the plain truth he boggled and blundered as Evan had done in telling it to the girl in the motor-car.

“The plain truth is,” he said at last, “that I am James Turnbull the atheist. The police are after me; not for atheism but for being ready to fight for it.”

“I saw something about you in a newspaper,” said the girl, with a simplicity which even surprise could never throw off its balance.

“Evan MacIan said there was a God,” went on the other, stubbornly, “and I say there isn’t. And I have come to fight for the fact that there is no God; it is for that that I have seen this cursed island and your blessed face.”

“You want me really to believe,” said Madeleine, with parted lips, “that you think — —”

“I want you to hate me!” cried Turnbull, in agony. “I want you to be sick when you think of my name. I am sure there is no God.”

“But there is,” said Madeleine, quite quietly, and rather with the air of one telling children about an elephant. “Why, I touched His body only this morning.”

“You touched a bit of bread,” said Turnbull, biting his knuckles. “Oh, I will say anything that can madden you!”

“You think it is only a bit of bread,” said the girl, and her lips tightened ever so little.

“I know it is only a bit of bread,” said Turnbull, with violence.

She flung back her open face and smiled. “Then why did you refuse to eat it?” she said.

James Turnbull made a little step backward, and for the first time in his life there seemed to break out and blaze in his head thoughts that were not his own.

“Why, how silly of them,” cried out Madeleine, with quite a schoolgirl gaiety, “why, how silly of them to call *you* a blasphemer! Why, you have wrecked your whole business because you would not commit blasphemy.”

The man stood, a somewhat comic figure in his tragic bewilderment, with the honest red head of James Turnbull sticking out of the rich and fictitious garments of Camille Bert. But the startled pain of his face was strong enough to obliterate the oddity.

“You come down here,” continued the lady, with that female emphasis which is so pulverizing in conversation and so feeble at a public meeting, “you and your MacIan come down here and put on false beards or noses in order to fight. You pretend to be a Catholic commercial traveller from France. Poor Mr. MacIan has to pretend to be a dissolute nobleman from nowhere. Your scheme succeeds; you pick a quite convincing quarrel; you arrange a quite respectable duel; the duel you have planned so long will come off tomorrow with absolute certainty and safety. And then you throw off your wig and throw up your scheme and throw over your colleague, because I ask you to go into a building and eat a bit of bread. And *then* you dare to tell me that you are sure there is nothing watching us. Then you say you know there is nothing on the very altar you run away from. You know — —"

"I only know," said Turnbull, "that I must run away from you. This has got beyond any talking." And he plunged along into the village, leaving his black wig and beard lying behind him on the road.

As the market-place opened before him he saw Count Gregory, that distinguished foreigner, standing and smoking in elegant meditation at the corner of the local café. He immediately made his way rapidly towards him, considering that a consultation was urgent. But he had hardly crossed half of that stony quadrangle when a window burst open above him and a head was thrust out, shouting. The man was in his woollen undershirt, but Turnbull knew the energetic, apologetic head of the sergeant of police. He pointed furiously at Turnbull and shouted his name. A policeman ran excitedly from under an archway and tried to collar him. Two men selling vegetables dropped their baskets and joined in the chase. Turnbull dodged the constable, upset one of the men into his own basket, and bounding towards the distinguished foreign Count, called to him clamorously: "Come on, MacIan, the hunt is up again."

The prompt reply of Count Gregory was to pull off his large yellow whiskers and scatter them on the breeze with an air of considerable relief. Then he joined the flight of Turnbull, and even as he did so, with one wrench of his powerful hands rent and split the strange, thick stick that he carried. Inside it was a naked old-fashioned rapier. The two got a good start up the road before the whole town was awakened behind them; and half-way up it a similar transformation was seen to take place in Mr. Turnbull's singular umbrella.

The two had a long race for the harbour; but the English police were heavy and the French inhabitants were indifferent. In any case, they got used to the notion of the road being clear; and just as they had come to the cliffs MacIan banged into another gentleman with unmistakable surprise. How he knew he was another gentleman merely by banging into him, must remain a mystery. MacIan was a very poor and very sober Scotch gentleman. The other was a very drunk and very wealthy English gentleman. But there was something in the staggered and openly embarrassed apologies that made them understand each other as readily and as quickly and as much as two men talking French in the middle of China. The nearest expression of the type is that it either hits or apologizes; and in this case both apologized.

"You seem to be in a hurry," said the unknown Englishman, falling back a step or two in order to laugh with an unnatural heartiness. "What's it all about, eh?" Then before MacIan could get past his sprawling and staggering figure he ran forward again and said with a sort of shouting and ear-shattering whisper: "I say, my name is Wilkinson. *You* know — Wilkinson's Entire was my grandfather. Can't drink beer myself. Liver." And he shook his head with extraordinary sagacity.

"We really are in a hurry, as you say," said MacIan, summoning a sufficiently pleasant smile, "so if you will let us pass — —"

"I'll tell you what, you fellows," said the sprawling gentleman, confidentially, while Evan's agonized ears heard behind him the first paces of the pursuit, "if you really are, as you say, in a hurry, I know what it is to be in a hurry — Lord, what a hurry I was in when we all came out of Cartwright's rooms — if you really are in a hurry" — and he seemed to steady his voice into a sort of solemnity— "if you are in a hurry, there's nothing like a good yacht for a man in a hurry."

"No doubt you're right," said MacIan, and dashed past him in despair. The head of the pursuing host was just showing over the top of the hill behind him. Turnbull had already ducked under the intoxicated gentleman's elbow and fled far in front.

"No, but look here," said Mr. Wilkinson, enthusiastically running after MacIan and catching him by the sleeve of his coat. "If you want to hurry you should take a yacht, and if" — he said, with a burst of rationality, like one leaping to a further point in logic— "if you want a yacht — you can have mine."

Evan pulled up abruptly and looked back at him. "We are really in the devil of a hurry," he said, "and if you really have a yacht, the truth is that we would give our ears for it."

"You'll find it in harbour," said Wilkinson, struggling with his speech. "Left side of harbour — called *Gibson Girl* — can't think why, old fellow, I never lent it you before."

With these words the benevolent Mr. Wilkinson fell flat on his face in the road, but continued to laugh softly, and turned towards his flying companion a face of peculiar peace and benignity. Evan’s mind went through a crisis of instantaneous casuistry, in which it may be that he decided wrongly; but about how he decided his biographer can profess no doubt. Two minutes afterwards he had overtaken Turnbull and told the tale; ten minutes afterwards he and Turnbull had somehow tumbled into the yacht called the *Gibson Girl* and had somehow pushed off from the Isle of St. Loup.

XII. THE DESERT ISLAND

Those who happen to hold the view (and Mr. Evan MacIan, now alive and comfortable, is among the number) that something supernatural, some eccentric kindness from god or fairy had guided our adventurers through all their absurd perils, might have found his strongest argument perhaps in their management or mismanagement of Mr. Wilkinson’s yacht. Neither of them had the smallest qualification for managing such a vessel; but MacIan had a practical knowledge of the sea in much smaller and quite different boats, while Turnbull had an abstract knowledge of science and some of its applications to navigation, which was worse. The presence of the god or fairy can only be deduced from the fact that they never definitely ran into anything, either a boat, a rock, a quicksand, or a man-of-war. Apart from this negative description, their voyage would be difficult to describe. It took at least a fortnight, and MacIan, who was certainly the shrewder sailor of the two, realized that they were sailing west into the Atlantic and were probably by this time past the Scilly Isles. How much farther they stood out into the western sea it was impossible to conjecture. But they felt certain, at least, that they were far enough into that awful gulf between us and America to make it unlikely that they would soon see land again. It was therefore with legitimate excitement that one rainy morning after daybreak they saw that distinct shape of a solitary island standing up against the encircling strip of silver which ran round the skyline and separated the grey and green of the billows from the grey and mauve of the morning clouds.

“What can it be?” cried MacIan, in a dry-throated excitement. “I didn’t know there were any Atlantic islands so far beyond the Scillies — Good Lord, it can’t be Madeira, yet?”

“I thought you were fond of legends and lies and fables,” said Turnbull, grimly. “Perhaps it’s Atlantis.”

“Of course, it might be,” answered the other, quite innocently and gravely; “but I never thought the story about Atlantis was very solidly established.”

“Whatever it is, we are running on to it,” said Turnbull, equably, “and we shall be shipwrecked twice, at any rate.”

The naked-looking nose of land projecting from the unknown island was, indeed, growing larger and larger, like the trunk of some terrible and advancing elephant. There seemed to be nothing in particular, at least on this side of the island, except shoals of shellfish lying so thick as almost to make it look like one of those toy grottos that the children make. In one place, however, the coast offered a soft, smooth bay of sand, and even the rudimentary ingenuity of the two amateur mariners managed to run up the little ship with her prow well on shore and her bowsprit pointing upward, as in a sort of idiotic triumph.

They tumbled on shore and began to unload the vessel, setting the stores out in rows upon the sand with something of the solemnity of boys playing at pirates. There were Mr. Wilkinson's cigar-boxes and Mr. Wilkinson's dozen of champagne and Mr. Wilkinson's tinned salmon and Mr. Wilkinson's tinned tongue and Mr. Wilkinson's tinned sardines, and every sort of preserved thing that could be seen at the Army and Navy stores. Then MacIan stopped with a jar of pickles in his hand and said abruptly:

"I don't know why we're doing all this; I suppose we ought really to fall to and get it over."

Then he added more thoughtfully: "Of course this island seems rather bare and the survivor — —"

"The question is," said Turnbull, with cheerful speculation, "whether the survivor will be in a proper frame of mind for potted prawns."

MacIan looked down at the rows of tins and bottles, and the cloud of doubt still lowered upon his face.

"You will permit me two liberties, my dear sir," said Turnbull at last: "The first is to break open this box and light one of Mr. Wilkinson's excellent cigars, which will, I am sure, assist my meditations; the second is to offer a penny for your thoughts; or rather to convulse the already complex finances of this island by betting a penny that I know them."

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked MacIan, listlessly, in the manner of an inattentive child.

"I know what you are really thinking, MacIan," repeated Turnbull, laughing. "I know what I am thinking, anyhow. And I rather fancy it's the same."

"What are you thinking?" asked Evan.

"I am thinking and you are thinking," said Turnbull, "that it is damned silly to waste all that champagne."

Something like the spectre of a smile appeared on the unsmiling visage of the Gael; and he made at least no movement of dissent.

“We could drink all the wine and smoke all the cigars easily in a week,” said Turnbull; “and that would be to die feasting like heroes.”

“Yes, and there is something else,” said MacIan, with slight hesitation. “You see, we are on an almost unknown rock, lost in the Atlantic. The police will never catch us; but then neither may the public ever hear of us; and that was one of the things we wanted.” Then, after a pause, he said, drawing in the sand with his sword-point: “She may never hear of it at all.”

“Well?” inquired the other, puffing at his cigar.

“Well,” said MacIan, “we might occupy a day or two in drawing up a thorough and complete statement of what we did and why we did it, and all about both our points of view. Then we could leave one copy on the island whatever happens to us and put another in an empty bottle and send it out to sea, as they do in the books.”

“A good idea,” said Turnbull, “and now let us finish unpacking.”

As MacIan, a tall, almost ghostly figure, paced along the edge of sand that ran round the islet, the purple but cloudy poetry which was his native element was piled up at its thickest upon his soul. The unique island and the endless sea emphasized the thing solely as an epic. There were no ladies or policemen here to give him a hint either of its farce or its tragedy.

“Perhaps when the morning stars were made,” he said to himself, “God built this island up from the bottom of the world to be a tower and a theatre for the fight between yea and nay.”

Then he wandered up to the highest level of the rock, where there was a roof or plateau of level stone. Half an hour afterwards, Turnbull found him clearing away the loose sand from this table-land and making it smooth and even.

“We will fight up here, Turnbull,” said MacIan, “when the time comes. And till the time comes this place shall be sacred.”

“I thought of having lunch up here,” said Turnbull, who had a bottle of champagne in his hand.

“No, no — not up here,” said MacIan, and came down from the height quite hastily. Before he descended, however, he fixed the two swords upright, one at each end of the platform, as if they were human sentinels to guard it under the stars.

Then they came down and lunched plentifully in a nest of loose rocks. In the same place that night they supped more plentifully still. The smoke of Mr. Wilkinson’s cigars went up ceaseless and strong smelling, like a pagan sacrifice; the golden glories of Mr. Wilkinson’s champagne rose to their heads and poured out of them in fancies and philosophies. And occasionally they would look up at the starlight and the rock and see the space guarded by the two cross-hilted swords, which looked like two black crosses at either end of a grave.

In this primitive and Homeric truce the week passed by; it consisted almost entirely of eating, drinking, smoking, talking, and occasionally singing. They wrote their records and cast loose their bottle. They never ascended to the ominous plateau; they had never stood there save for that single embarrassed minute when they had had no time to take stock of the seascape or the shape of the land. They did not even explore the island; for MacIan was partly concerned in prayer and Turnbull entirely concerned with tobacco; and both these forms of inspiration can be enjoyed by the secluded and even the sedentary. It was on a golden afternoon, the sun sinking over the sea, rayed like the very head of Apollo, when Turnbull tossed off the last half-pint from the emptied Wilkinsonian bottle, hurled the bottle into the sea with objectless energy, and went up to where his sword stood waiting for him on the hill. MacIan was already standing heavily by his with bent head and eyes reading the ground. He had not even troubled to throw a glance round the island or the horizon. But Turnbull being of a more active and birdlike type of mind did throw a glance round the scene. The consequence of which was that he nearly fell off the rock.

On three sides of this shelly and sandy islet the sea stretched blue and infinite without a speck of land or sail; the same as Turnbull had first seen it, except that the tide being out it showed a few yards more of slanting sand under the roots of the rocks. But on the fourth side the island exhibited a more extraordinary feature. In fact, it exhibited the extraordinary feature of not being an island at all. A long, curving neck of sand, as smooth and wet as the neck of the sea serpent, ran out into the sea and joined their rock to a line of low, billowing, and glistening sand-hills, which the sinking sea had just bared to the sun. Whether they were firm sand or quicksand it was difficult to guess; but there was at least no doubt that they lay on the edge of some larger land; for colourless hills appeared faintly behind them and no sea could be seen beyond.

“Sakes alive!” cried Turnbull, with rolling eyes; “this ain’t an island in the Atlantic. We’ve butted the bally continent of America.”

MacIan turned his head, and his face, already pale, grew a shade paler. He was by this time walking in a world of omens and hieroglyphics, and he could not read anything but what was baffling or menacing in this brown gigantic arm of the earth stretched out into the sea to seize him.

“MacIan,” said Turnbull, in his temperate way, “whatever our eternal interrupted tete-a-tetes have taught us or not taught us, at least we need not fear the charge of fear. If it is essential to your emotions, I will cheerfully finish the fight here and now; but I must confess that if you kill me here I shall die with my curiosity highly excited and unsatisfied upon a minor point of geography.”

“I do not want to stop now,” said the other, in his elephantine simplicity, “but we must stop for a moment, because it is a sign — perhaps it is a miracle. We must see what is at the end of the road of sand; it may be a bridge built across the gulf by God.”

“So long as you gratify my query,” said Turnbull, laughing and letting back his blade into the sheath, “I do not care for what reason you choose to stop.”

They clambered down the rocky peninsula and trudged along the sandy isthmus with the plodding resolution of men who seemed almost to have made up their minds to be wanderers on the face of the earth. Despite Turnbull’s air of scientific eagerness, he was really the less impatient of the two; and the Highlander went on well ahead of him with passionate strides. By the time they had walked for about half an hour in the ups and downs of those dreary sands, the distance between the two had lengthened and MacIan was only a tall figure silhouetted for an instant upon the crest of some sand-dune and then disappearing behind it. This rather increased the Robinson Crusoe feeling in Mr. Turnbull, and he looked about almost disconsolately for some sign of life. What sort of life he expected it to be if it appeared, he did not very clearly know. He has since confessed that he thinks that in his subconsciousness he expected an alligator.

The first sign of life that he did see, however, was something more extraordinary than the largest alligator. It was nothing less than the notorious Mr. Evan MacIan coming bounding back across the sand-heaps breathless, without his cap and keeping the sword in his hand only by a habit now quite hardened.

“Take care, Turnbull,” he cried out from a good distance as he ran, “I’ve seen a native.”

"A native?" repeated his companion, whose scenery had of late been chiefly of shellfish, "what the deuce! Do you mean an oyster?"

"No," said MacIan, stopping and breathing hard, "I mean a savage. A black man."

"Why, where did you see him?" asked the staring editor.

"Over there — behind that hill," said the gasping MacIan. "He put up his black head and grinned at me."

Turnbull thrust his hands through his red hair like one who gives up the world as a bad riddle. "Lord love a duck," said he, "can it be Jamaica?"

Then glancing at his companion with a small frown, as of one slightly suspicious, he said: "I say, don't think me rude — but you're a visionary kind of fellow — and then we drank a great deal. Do you mind waiting here while I go and see for myself?"

"Shout if you get into trouble," said the Celt, with composure; "you will find it as I say."

Turnbull ran off ahead with a rapidity now far greater than his rival's, and soon vanished over the disputed sand-hill. Then five minutes passed, and then seven minutes; and MacIan bit his lip and swung his sword, and the other did not reappear. Finally, with a Gaelic oath, Evan started forward to the rescue, and almost at the same moment the small figure of the missing man appeared on the ridge against the sky.

Even at that distance, however, there was something odd about his attitude; so odd that MacIan continued to make his way in that direction. It looked as if he were wounded; or, still more, as if he were ill. He wavered as he came down the slope and seemed flinging himself into peculiar postures. But it was only when he came within three feet of MacIan's face, that that observer of mankind fully realized that Mr. James Turnbull was roaring with laughter.

"You are quit right," sobbed that wholly demoralized journalist. "He's black, oh, there's no doubt the black's all right — as far as it goes." And he went off again into convulsions of his humorous ailment.

"What ever is the matter with you?" asked MacIan, with stern impatience. "Did you see the nigger — —"

"I saw the nigger," gasped Turnbull. "I saw the splendid barbarian Chief. I saw the Emperor of Ethiopia — oh, I saw him all right. The nigger's hands and face are a lovely colour — and the nigger — —" And he was overtaken once more.

“Well, well, well,” said Evan, stamping each monosyllable on the sand, “what about the nigger?”

“Well, the truth is,” said Turnbull, suddenly and startlingly, becoming quite grave and precise, “the truth is, the nigger is a Margate nigger, and we are now on the edge of the Isle of Thanet, a few miles from Margate.”

Then he had a momentary return of his hysteria and said: “I say, old boy, I should like to see a chart of our fortnight’s cruise in Wilkinson’s yacht.”

MacIan had no smile in answer, but his eager lips opened as if parched for the truth. “You mean to say,” he began ——

“Yes, I mean to say,” said Turnbull, “and I mean to say something funnier still. I have learnt everything I wanted to know from the partially black musician over there, who has taken a run in his war-paint to meet a friend in a quiet pub along the coast — the noble savage has told me all about it. The bottle containing our declaration, doctrines, and dying sentiments was washed up on Margate beach yesterday in the presence of one alderman, two bathing-machine men, three policemen, seven doctors, and a hundred and thirteen London clerks on a holiday, to all of whom, whether directly or indirectly, our composition gave enormous literary pleasure. Buck up, old man, this story of ours is a switchback. I have begun to understand the pulse and the time of it; now we are up in a cathedral and then we are down in a theatre, where they only play farces. Come, I am quite reconciled — let us enjoy the farce.”

But MacIan said nothing, and an instant afterwards Turnbull himself called out in an entirely changed voice: “Oh, this is damnable! This is not to be borne!”

MacIan followed his eye along the sand-hills. He saw what looked like the momentary and waving figure of the nigger minstrel, and then he saw a heavy running policeman take the turn of the sand-hill with the smooth solemnity of a railway train.

XIII. THE GARDEN OF PEACE

Up to this instant Evan MacIan had really understood nothing; but when he saw the policeman he saw everything. He saw his enemies, all the powers and princes of the earth. He suddenly altered from a staring statue to a leaping man of the mountains.

“We must break away from him here,” he cried, briefly, and went like a whirlwind over the sand ridge in a straight line and at a particular angle. When the policeman had finished his admirable railway curve, he found a wall of failing sand between him and the pursued. By the time he had scaled it thrice, slid down twice, and crested it in the third effort, the two flying figures were far in front. They found the sand harder farther on; it began to be crusted with scraps of turf and in a few moments they were flying easily over an open common of rank sea-grass. They had no easy business, however; for the bottle which they had so innocently sent into the chief gate of Thanet had called to life the police of half a county on their trail. From every side across the grey-green common figures could be seen running and closing in; and it was only when MacIan with his big body broke down the tangled barrier of a little wood, as men break down a door with the shoulder; it was only when they vanished crashing into the underworld of the black wood, that their hunters were even instantaneously thrown off the scent.

At the risk of struggling a little longer like flies in that black web of twigs and trunks, Evan (who had an instinct of the hunter or the hunted) took an incalculable course through the forest, which let them out at last by a forest opening — quite forgotten by the leaders of the chase. They ran a mile or two farther along the edge of the wood until they reached another and somewhat similar opening. Then MacIan stood utterly still and listened, as animals listen, for every sound in the universe. Then he said: “We are quit of them.” And Turnbull said: “Where shall we go now?”

MacIan looked at the silver sunset that was closing in, barred by plumy lines of purple cloud; he looked at the high tree-tops that caught the last light and at the birds going heavily homeward, just as if all these things were bits of written advice that he could read.

Then he said: “The best place we can go to is to bed. If we can get some sleep in this wood, now everyone has cleared out of it, it will be worth a handicap of two hundred yards tomorrow."

Turnbull, who was exceptionally lively and laughing in his demeanour, kicked his legs about like a schoolboy and said he did not want to go to sleep. He walked incessantly and talked very brilliantly. And when at last he lay down on the hard earth, sleep struck him senseless like a hammer.

Indeed, he needed the strongest sleep he could get; for the earth was still full of darkness and a kind of morning fog when his fellow-fugitive shook him awake.

"No more sleep, I'm afraid," said Evan, in a heavy, almost submissive, voice of apology. "They've gone on past us right enough for a good thirty miles; but now they've found out their mistake, and they're coming back."

"Are you sure?" said Turnbull, sitting up and rubbing his red eyebrows with his hand.

The next moment, however, he had jumped up alive and leaping like a man struck with a shock of cold water, and he was plunging after MacIan along the woodland path. The shape of their old friend the constable had appeared against the pearl and pink of the sunrise. Somehow, it always looked a very funny shape when seen against the sunrise.

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A wash of weary daylight was breaking over the country-side, and the fields and roads were full of white mist — the kind of white mist that clings in corners like cotton wool. The empty road, along which the chase had taken its turn, was overshadowed on one side by a very high discoloured wall, stained, and streaked green, as with seaweed — evidently the high-shouldered sentinel of some great gentleman's estate. A yard or two from the wall ran parallel to it a linked and tangled line of lime-trees, forming a kind of cloister along the side of the road. It was under this branching colonnade that the two fugitives fled, almost concealed from their pursuers by the twilight, the mist and the leaping zoetrope of shadows. Their feet, though beating the ground furiously, made but a faint noise; for they had kicked away their boots in the wood; their long, antiquated weapons made no jingle or clatter, for they had strapped them across their backs like guitars. They had all the advantages that invisibility and silence can add to speed.

A hundred and fifty yards behind them down the centre of the empty road the first of their pursuers came pounding and panting — a fat but powerful policeman who had distanced all the rest. He came on at a splendid pace for so portly a figure; but, like all heavy bodies in motion, he gave the impression that it would be easier for him to increase his pace than to slacken it suddenly. Nothing short of a brick wall could have abruptly brought him up. Turnbull turned his head slightly and found breath to say something to MacIan. MacIan nodded.

Pursuer and pursued were fixed in their distance as they fled, for some quarter of a mile, when they came to a place where two or three of the trees grew twistedly together, making a special obscurity. Past this place the pursuing policeman went thundering without thought or hesitation. But he was pursuing his shadow or the wind; for Turnbull had put one foot in a crack of the tree and gone up it as quickly and softly as a cat. Somewhat more laboriously but in equal silence the long legs of the Highlander had followed; and crouching in crucial silence in the cloud of leaves, they saw the whole posse of their pursuers go by and die into the dust and mists of the distance.

The white vapour lay, as it often does, in lean and palpable layers; and even the head of the tree was above it in the half-daylight, like a green ship swinging on a sea of foam. But higher yet behind them, and readier to catch the first coming of the sun, ran the rampart of the top of the wall, which in their excitement of escape looked at once indispensable and unattainable, like the wall of heaven. Here, however, it was MacIan’s turn to have the advantage; for, though less light-limbed and feline, he was longer and stronger in the arms. In two seconds he had tugged up his chin over the wall like a horizontal bar; the next he sat astride of it, like a horse of stone. With his assistance Turnbull vaulted to the same perch, and the two began cautiously to shift along the wall in the direction by which they had come, doubling on their tracks to throw off the last pursuit. MacIan could not rid himself of the fancy of bestriding a steed; the long, grey coping of the wall shot out in front of him, like the long, grey neck of some nightmare Rosinante. He had the quaint thought that he and Turnbull were two knights on one steed on the old shield of the Templars.

The nightmare of the stone horse was increased by the white fog, which seemed thicker inside the wall than outside. They could make nothing of the enclosure upon which they were partial trespassers, except that the green and crooked branches of a big apple-tree came crawling at them out of the mist, like the tentacles of some green cuttlefish. Anything would serve, however, that was likely to confuse their trail, so they both decided without need of words to use this tree also as a ladder — a ladder of descent. When they dropped from the lowest branch to the ground their stockinged feet felt hard gravel beneath them.

They had alighted in the middle of a very broad garden path, and the clearing mist permitted them to see the edge of a well-clipped lawn. Though the white vapour was still a veil, it was like the gauzy veil of a transformation scene in a pantomime; for through it there glowed shapeless masses of colour, masses which might be clouds of sunrise or mosaics of gold and crimson, or ladies robed in ruby and emerald draperies. As it thinned yet farther they saw that it was only flowers; but flowers in such insolent mass and magnificence as can seldom be seen out of the tropics. Purple and crimson rhododendrons rose arrogantly, like rampant heraldic animals against their burning background of laburnum gold. The roses were red hot; the clematis was, so to speak, blue hot. And yet the mere whiteness of the syringa seemed the most violent colour of all. As the golden sunlight gradually conquered the mists, it had really something of the sensational sweetness of the slow opening of the gates of Eden. MacIan, whose mind was always haunted with such seraphic or titanic parallels, made some such remark to his companion. But Turnbull only cursed and said that it was the back garden of some damnable rich man.

When the last haze had faded from the ordered paths, the open lawns, and the flaming flower-beds, the two realized, not without an abrupt re-examination of their position, that they were not alone in the garden.

Down the centre of the central garden path, preceded by a blue cloud from a cigarette, was walking a gentleman who evidently understood all the relish of a garden in the very early morning. He was a slim yet satisfied figure, clad in a suit of pale-grey tweed, so subdued that the pattern was imperceptible — a costume that was casual but not by any means careless. His face, which was reflective and somewhat over-refined, was the face of a quite elderly man, though his stringy hair and moustache were still quite yellow. A double eye-glass, with a broad, black ribbon, drooped from his aquiline nose, and he smiled, as he communed with himself, with a self-content which was rare and almost irritating. The straw panama on his head was many shades shabbier than his clothes, as if he had caught it up by accident.

It needed the full shock of the huge shadow of MacIan, falling across his sunlit path, to rouse him from his smiling reverie. When this had fallen on him he lifted his head a little and blinked at the intruders with short-sighted benevolence, but with far less surprise than might have been expected. He was a gentleman; that is, he had social presence of mind, whether for kindness or for insolence.

“Can I do anything for you?” he said, at last.

MacIan bowed. “You can extend to us your pardon,” he said, for he also came of a whole race of gentlemen — of gentlemen without shirts to their backs. “I am afraid we are trespassing. We have just come over the wall.”

“Over the wall?” repeated the smiling old gentleman, still without letting his surprise come uppermost.

“I suppose I am not wrong, sir,” continued MacIan, “in supposing that these grounds inside the wall belong to you?”

The man in the panama looked at the ground and smoked thoughtfully for a few moments, after which he said, with a sort of matured conviction:

“Yes, certainly; the grounds inside the wall really belong to me, and the grounds outside the wall, too.”

“A large proprietor, I imagine,” said Turnbull, with a truculent eye.

“Yes,” answered the old gentleman, looking at him with a steady smile. “A large proprietor.”

Turnbull’s eye grew even more offensive, and he began biting his red beard; but MacIan seemed to recognize a type with which he could deal and continued quite easily:

“I am sure that a man like you will not need to be told that one sees and does a good many things that do not get into the newspapers. Things which, on the whole, had better not get into the newspapers.”

The smile of the large proprietor broadened for a moment under his loose, light moustache, and the other continued with increased confidence:

“One sometimes wants to have it out with another man. The police won’t allow it in the streets — and then there’s the County Council — and in the fields even nothing’s allowed but posters of pills. But in a gentleman’s garden, now — —”

The strange gentleman smiled again and said, easily enough: “Do you want to fight? What do you want to fight about?”

MacIan had understood his man pretty well up to that point; an instinct common to all men with the aristocratic tradition of Europe had guided him. He knew that the kind of man who in his own back garden wears good clothes and spoils them with a bad hat is not the kind of man who has an abstract horror of illegal actions of violence or the evasion of the police. But a man may understand ragging and yet be very far from understanding religious ragging. This seeming host of theirs might comprehend a quarrel of husband and lover or a difficulty at cards or even escape from a pursuing tailor; but it still remained doubtful whether he would feel the earth fail under him in that earthquake instant when the Virgin is compared to a goddess of Mesopotamia. Even MacIan, therefore (whose tact was far from being his strong point), felt the necessity for some compromise in the mode of approach. At last he said, and even then with hesitation:

"We are fighting about God; there can be nothing so important as that."

The tilted eye-glasses of the old gentleman fell abruptly from his nose, and he thrust his aristocratic chin so far forward that his lean neck seemed to shoot out longer like a telescope.

"About God?" he queried, in a key completely new.

"Look here!" cried Turnbull, taking his turn roughly, "I'll tell you what it's all about. I think that there's no God. I take it that it's nobody's business but mine — or God's, if there is one. This young gentleman from the Highlands happens to think that it's his business. In consequence, he first takes a walking-stick and smashes my shop; then he takes the same walking-stick and tries to smash me. To this I naturally object. I suggest that if it comes to that we should both have sticks. He improves on the suggestion and proposes that we should both have steel-pointed sticks. The police (with characteristic unreasonableness) will not accept either of our proposals; the result is that we run about dodging the police and have jumped over our garden wall into your magnificent garden to throw ourselves on your magnificent hospitality."

The face of the old gentleman had grown redder and redder during this address, but it was still smiling; and when he broke out it was with a kind of guffaw.

"So you really want to fight with drawn swords in my garden," he asked, "about whether there is really a God?"

"Why not?" said MacIan, with his simple monstrosity of speech; "all man's worship began when the Garden of Eden was founded."

"Yes, by —— !" said Turnbull, with an oath, "and ended when the Zoological Gardens were founded."

"In this garden! In my presence!" cried the stranger, stamping up and down the gravel and choking with laughter, "whether there is a God!" And he went stamping up and down the garden, making it echo with his unintelligible laughter. Then he came back to them more composed and wiping his eyes.

“Why, how small the world is!” he cried at last. “I can settle the whole matter. Why, I am God!”

And he suddenly began to kick and wave his well-clad legs about the lawn.

“You are what?” repeated Turnbull, in a tone which is beyond description.

“Why, God, of course!” answered the other, thoroughly amused. “How funny it is to think that you have tumbled over a garden wall and fallen exactly on the right person! You might have gone floundering about in all sorts of churches and chapels and colleges and schools of philosophy looking for some evidence of the existence of God. Why, there is no evidence, except seeing him. And now you’ve seen him. You’ve seen him dance!”

And the obliging old gentleman instantly stood on one leg without relaxing at all the grave and cultured benignity of his expression.

“I understood that this garden — —” began the bewildered MacIan.

“Quite so! Quite so!” said the man on one leg, nodding gravely. “I said this garden belonged to me and the land outside it. So they do. So does the country beyond that and the sea beyond that and all the rest of the earth. So does the moon. So do the sun and stars.” And he added, with a smile of apology: “You see, I’m God.”

Turnbull and MacIan looked at him for one moment with a sort of notion that perhaps he was not too old to be merely playing the fool. But after staring steadily for an instant Turnbull saw the hard and horrible earnestness in the man’s eyes behind all his empty animation. Then Turnbull looked very gravely at the strict gravel walls and the gay flower-beds and the long rectangular red-brick building, which the mist had left evident beyond them. Then he looked at MacIan.

Almost at the same moment another man came walking quickly round the regal clump of rhododendrons. He had the look of a prosperous banker, wore a good tall silk hat, was almost stout enough to burst the buttons of a fine frock-coat; but he was talking to himself, and one of his elbows had a singular outward jerk as he went by.

XIV. A MUSEUM OF SOULS

The man with the good hat and the jumping elbow went by very quickly; yet the man with the bad hat, who thought he was God, overtook him. He ran after him and jumped over a bed of geraniums to catch him.

"I beg your Majesty's pardon," he said, with mock humility, "but here is a quarrel which you ought really to judge."

Then as he led the heavy, silk-hatted man back towards the group, he caught MacIan's ear in order to whisper: "This poor gentleman is mad; he thinks he is Edward VII." At this the self-appointed Creator slightly winked. "Of course you won't trust him much; come to me for everything. But in my position one has to meet so many people. One has to be broadminded."

The big banker in the black frock-coat and hat was standing quite grave and dignified on the lawn, save for his slight twitch of one limb, and he did not seem by any means unworthy of the part which the other promptly forced upon him.

"My dear fellow," said the man in the straw hat, "these two gentlemen are going to fight a duel of the utmost importance. Your own royal position and my much humbler one surely indicate us as the proper seconds. Seconds — yes, seconds — —" and here the speaker was once more shaken with his old malady of laughter.

"Yes, you and I are both seconds — and these two gentlemen can obviously fight in front of us. You, he-he, are the king. I am God; really, they could hardly have better supporters. They have come to the right place."

Then Turnbull, who had been staring with a frown at the fresh turf, burst out with a rather bitter laugh and cried, throwing his red head in the air:

"Yes, by God, MacIan, I think we have come to the right place!" And MacIan answered, with an adamantine stupidity:

"Any place is the right place where they will let us do it."

There was a long stillness, and their eyes involuntarily took in the landscape, as they had taken in all the landscapes of their everlasting combat; the bright, square garden behind the shop; the whole lift and leaning of the side of Hampstead Heath; the little garden of the decadent choked with flowers; the square of sand beside the sea at sunrise. They both felt at the same moment all the breadth and blossoming beauty of that paradise, the coloured trees, the natural and restful nooks and also the great wall of stone — more awful than the wall of China — from which no flesh could flee.

Turnbull was moodily balancing his sword in his hand as the other spoke; then he started, for a mouth whispered quite close to his ear. With a softness incredible in any cat, the huge, heavy man in the black hat and frock-coat had crept across the lawn from his own side and was saying in his ear: “Don’t trust that second of yours. He’s mad and not so mad, either; for he frightfully cunning and sharp. Don’t believe the story he tells you about why I hate him. I know the story he’ll tell; I overheard it when the housekeeper was talking to the postman. It’s too long to talk about now, and I expect we’re watched, but — —”

Something in Turnbull made him want suddenly to be sick on the grass; the mere healthy and heathen horror of the unclean; the mere inhumane hatred of the inhuman state of madness. He seemed to hear all round him the hateful whispers of that place, innumerable as leaves whispering in the wind, and each of them telling eagerly some evil that had not happened or some terrific secret which was not true. All the rationalist and plain man revolted within him against bowing down for a moment in that forest of deception and egotistical darkness. He wanted to blow up that palace of delusions with dynamite; and in some wild way, which I will not defend, he tried to do it.

He looked across at MacIan and said: “Oh, I can’t stand this!”

“Can’t stand what?” asked his opponent, eyeing him doubtfully.

“Shall we say the atmosphere?” replied Turnbull; “one can’t use uncivil expressions even to a — deity. The fact is, I don’t like having God for my second.”

“Sir!” said that being in a state of great offence, “in my position I am not used to having my favours refused. Do you know who I am?”

The editor of *The Atheist* turned upon him like one who has lost all patience, and exploded: “Yes, you are God, aren’t you?” he said, abruptly, “why do we have two sets of teeth?”

“Teeth?” spluttered the genteel lunatic; “teeth?”

“Yes,” cried Turnbull, advancing on him swiftly and with animated gestures, “why does teething hurt? Why do growing pains hurt? Why are measles catching? Why does a rose have thorns? Why do rhinoceroses have horns? Why is the horn on the top of the nose? Why haven’t I a horn on the top of my nose, eh?” And he struck the bridge of his nose smartly with his forefinger to indicate the place of the omission and then wagged the finger menacingly at the Creator.

“I’ve often wanted to meet you,” he resumed, sternly, after a pause, “to hold you accountable for all the idiocy and cruelty of this muddled and meaningless world of yours. You make a hundred seeds and only one bears fruit. You make a million worlds and only one seems inhabited. What do you mean by it, eh? What do you mean by it?”

The unhappy lunatic had fallen back before this quite novel form of attack, and lifted his burnt-out cigarette almost like one warding off a blow. Turnbull went on like a torrent.

“A man died yesterday in Ealing. You murdered him. A girl had the toothache in Croydon. You gave it her. Fifty sailors were drowned off Selsey Bill. You scuttled their ship. What have you got to say for yourself, eh?”

The representative of omnipotence looked as if he had left most of these things to his subordinates; he passed a hand over his wrinkling brow and said in a voice much saner than any he had yet used:

“Well, if you dislike my assistance, of course — perhaps the other gentleman — —”

“The other gentleman,” cried Turnbull, scornfully, “is a submissive and loyal and obedient gentleman. He likes the people who wear crowns, whether of diamonds or of stars. He believes in the divine right of kings, and it is appropriate enough that he should have the king for his second. But it is not appropriate to me that I should have God for my second. God is not good enough. I dislike and I deny the divine right of kings. But I dislike more and I deny more the divine right of divinity.”

Then after a pause in which he swallowed his passion, he said to MacIan: “You have got the right second, anyhow.”

The Highlander did not answer, but stood as if thunderstruck with one long and heavy thought. Then at last he turned abruptly to his second in the silk hat and said: “Who are you?”

The man in the silk hat blinked and bridled in affected surprise, like one who was in truth accustomed to be doubted.

“I am King Edward VII,” he said, with shaky arrogance. “Do you doubt my word?”

"I do not doubt it in the least," answered MacIan.

"Then, why," said the large man in the silk hat, trembling from head to foot, "why do you wear your hat before the king?"

"Why should I take it off," retorted MacIan, with equal heat, "before a usurper?"

Turnbull swung round on his heel. "Well, really," he said, "I thought at least you were a loyal subject."

"I am the only loyal subject," answered the Gael. "For nearly thirty years I have walked these islands and have not found another."

"You are always hard to follow," remarked Turnbull, genially, "and sometimes so much so as to be hardly worth following."

"I alone am loyal," insisted MacIan; "for I alone am in rebellion. I am ready at any instant to restore the Stuarts. I am ready at any instant to defy the Hanoverian brood — and I defy it now even when face to face with the actual ruler of the enormous British Empire!"

And folding his arms and throwing back his lean, hawklike face, he haughtily confronted the man with the formal frock-coat and the eccentric elbow.

"What right had you stunted German squires," he cried, "to interfere in a quarrel between Scotch and English and Irish gentlemen? Who made you, whose fathers could not splutter English while they walked in Whitehall, who made you the judge between the republic of Sidney and the monarchy of Montrose? What had your sires to do with England that they should have the foul offering of the blood of Derwentwater and the heart of Jimmy Dawson? Where are the corpses of Culloden? Where is the blood of Lochiel?" MacIan advanced upon his opponent with a bony and pointed finger, as if indicating the exact pocket in which the blood of that Cameron was probably kept; and Edward VII fell back a few paces in considerable confusion.

"What good have you ever done to us?" he continued in harsher and harsher accents, forcing the other back towards the flower-beds. "What good have you ever done, you race of German sausages? Yards of barbarian etiquette, to throttle the freedom of aristocracy! Gas of northern metaphysics to blow up Broad Church bishops like balloons. Bad pictures and bad manners and pantheism and the Albert Memorial. Go back to Hanover, you humbug? Go to — —"

Before the end of this tirade the arrogance of the monarch had entirely given way; he had fairly turned tail and was trundling away down the path. MacIan strode after him still preaching and flourishing his large, lean hands. The other two remained in the centre of the lawn — Turnbull in convulsions of laughter, the lunatic in convulsions of disgust. Almost at the same moment a third figure came stepping swiftly across the lawn.

The advancing figure walked with a stoop, and yet somehow flung his forked and narrow beard forward. That carefully cut and pointed yellow beard was, indeed, the most emphatic thing about him. When he clasped his hands behind him, under the tails of his coat, he would wag his beard at a man like a big forefinger. It performed almost all his gestures; it was more important than the glittering eye-glasses through which he looked or the beautiful bleating voice in which he spoke. His face and neck were of a lusty red, but lean and stringy; he always wore his expensive gold-rim eye-glasses slightly askew upon his aquiline nose; and he always showed two gleaming foreteeth under his moustache, in a smile so perpetual as to earn the reputation of a sneer. But for the crooked glasses his dress was always exquisite; and but for the smile he was perfectly and perennially depressed.

“Don’t you think,” said the new-comer, with a sort of supercilious entreaty, “that we had better all come into breakfast? It is such a mistake to wait for breakfast. It spoils one’s temper so much.”

“Quite so,” replied Turnbull, seriously.

“There seems almost to have been a little quarrelling here,” said the man with the goatish beard.

“It is rather a long story,” said Turnbull, smiling. “Originally, it might be called a phase in the quarrel between science and religion.”

The new-comer started slightly, and Turnbull replied to the question on his face.

“Oh, yes,” he said, “I am science!”

“I congratulate you heartily,” answered the other, “I am Doctor Quayle.”

Turnbull’s eyes did not move, but he realized that the man in the panama hat had lost all his ease of a landed proprietor and had withdrawn to a distance of thirty yards, where he stood glaring with all the contraction of fear and hatred that can stiffen a cat.

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MacIan was sitting somewhat disconsolately on a stump of tree, his large black head half buried in his large brown hands, when Turnbull strode up to him chewing a cigarette. He did not look up, but his comrade and enemy addressed him like one who must free himself of his feelings.

"Well, I hope, at any rate," he said, "that you like your precious religion now. I hope you like the society of this poor devil whom your damned tracts and hymns and priests have driven out of his wits. Five men in this place, they tell me, five men in this place who might have been fathers of families, and every one of them thinks he is God the Father. Oh! you may talk about the ugliness of science, but there is no one here who thinks he is Protoplasm."

"They naturally prefer a bright part," said MacIan, wearily. "Protoplasm is not worth going mad about."

"At least," said Turnbull, savagely, "it was your Jesus Christ who started all this bosh about being God."

For one instant MacIan opened the eyes of battle; then his tightened lips took a crooked smile and he said, quite calmly:

"No, the idea is older; it was Satan who first said that he was God."

"Then, what," asked Turnbull, very slowly, as he softly picked a flower, "what is the difference between Christ and Satan?"

"It is quite simple," replied the Highlander. "Christ descended into hell; Satan fell into it."

"Does it make much odds?" asked the free-thinker.

"It makes all the odds," said the other. "One of them wanted to go up and went down; the other wanted to go down and went up. A god can be humble, a devil can only be humbled."

"Why are you always wanting to humble a man?" asked Turnbull, knitting his brows. "It affects me as ungenerous."

"Why were you wanting to humble a god when you found him in this garden?" asked MacIan.

"That was an extreme case of impudence," said Turnbull.

"Granting the man his almighty pretensions, I think he was very modest," said MacIan. "It is we who are arrogant, who know we are only men. The ordinary man in the street is more of a monster than that poor fellow; for the man in the street treats himself as God Almighty when he knows he isn't. He expects the universe to turn round him, though he knows he isn't the centre."

"Well," said Turnbull, sitting down on the grass, "this is a digression, anyhow. What I want to point out is, that your faith does end in asylums and my science doesn’t.”

“Doesn’t it, by George!” cried MacIan, scornfully. “There are a few men here who are mad on God and a few who are mad on the Bible. But I bet there are many more who are simply mad on madness.”

“Do you really believe it?” asked the other.

“Scores of them, I should say,” answered MacIan. “Fellows who have read medical books or fellows whose fathers and uncles had something hereditary in their heads — the whole air they breathe is mad.”

“All the same,” said Turnbull, shrewdly, “I bet you haven’t found a madman of that sort.”

“I bet I have!” cried Evan, with unusual animation. “I’ve been walking about the garden talking to a poor chap all the morning. He’s simply been broken down and driven raving by your damned science. Talk about believing one is God — why, it’s quite an old, comfortable, fireside fancy compared with the sort of things this fellow believes. He believes that there is a God, but that he is better than God. He says God will be afraid to face him. He says one is always progressing beyond the best. He put his arm in mine and whispered in my ear, as if it were the apocalypse: ‘Never trust a God that you can’t improve on.’”

“What can he have meant?” said the atheist, with all his logic awake. “Obviously one should not trust any God that one can improve on.”

“It is the way he talks,” said MacIan, almost indifferently; “but he says rummier things than that. He says that a man’s doctor ought to decide what woman he marries; and he says that children ought not to be brought up by their parents, because a physical partiality will then distort the judgement of the educator.”

“Oh, dear!” said Turnbull, laughing, “you have certainly come across a pretty bad case, and incidentally proved your own. I suppose some men do lose their wits through science as through love and other good things.”

“And he says,” went on MacIan, monotonously, “that he cannot see why anyone should suppose that a triangle is a three-sided figure. He says that on some higher plane — —”

Turnbull leapt to his feet as by an electric shock. “I never could have believed,” he cried, “that you had humour enough to tell a lie. You’ve gone a bit too far, old man, with your little joke. Even in a lunatic asylum there can’t be anybody who, having thought about the matter, thinks that a triangle has not got three sides. If he exists he must be a new era in human psychology. But he doesn't exist."

"I will go and fetch him," said MacIan, calmly; "I left the poor fellow wandering about by the nasturtium bed."

MacIan vanished, and in a few moments returned, trailing with him his own discovery among lunatics, who was a slender man with a fixed smile and an unfixed and rolling head. He had a goatlike beard just long enough to be shaken in a strong wind. Turnbull sprang to his feet and was like one who is speechless through choking a sudden shout of laughter.

"Why, you great donkey," he shouted, in an ear-shattering whisper, "that's not one of the patients at all. That's one of the doctors."

Evan looked back at the leering head with the long-pointed beard and repeated the word inquiringly: "One of the doctors?"

"Oh, you know what I mean," said Turnbull, impatiently. "The medical authorities of the place."

Evan was still staring back curiously at the beaming and bearded creature behind him.

"The mad doctors," said Turnbull, shortly.

"Quite so," said MacIan.

After a rather restless silence Turnbull plucked MacIan by the elbow and pulled him aside.

"For goodness sake," he said, "don't offend this fellow; he may be as mad as ten hatters, if you like, but he has us between his finger and thumb. This is the very time he appointed to talk with us about our — well, our exeat."

"But what can it matter?" asked the wondering MacIan. "He can't keep us in the asylum. We're not mad."

"Jackass!" said Turnbull, heartily, "of course we're not mad. Of course, if we are medically examined and the thing is thrashed out, they will find we are not mad. But don't you see that if the thing is thrashed out it will mean letters to this reference and telegrams to that; and at the first word of who we are, we shall be taken out of a madhouse, where we may smoke, to a jail, where we mayn't. No, if we manage this very quietly, he may merely let us out at the front door as stray revellers. If there's half an hour of inquiry, we are cooked."

MacIan looked at the grass frowningly for a few seconds, and then said in a new, small and childish voice: "I am awfully stupid, Mr. Turnbull; you must be patient with me."

Turnbull caught Evan's elbow again with quite another gesture. "Come," he cried, with the harsh voice of one who hides emotion, "come and let us be tactful in chorus."

The doctor with the pointed beard was already slanting it forward at a more than usually acute angle, with the smile that expressed expectancy.

"I hope I do not hurry you, gentlemen," he said, with the faintest suggestion of a sneer at their hurried consultation, "but I believe you wanted to see me at half past eleven."

"I am most awfully sorry, Doctor," said Turnbull, with ready amiability; "I never meant to keep you waiting; but the silly accident that has landed us in your garden may have some rather serious consequences to our friends elsewhere, and my friend here was just drawing my attention to some of them."

"Quite so! Quite so!" said the doctor, hurriedly. "If you really want to put anything before me, I can give you a few moments in my consulting-room."

He led them rapidly into a small but imposing apartment, which seemed to be built and furnished entirely in red-varnished wood. There was one desk occupied with carefully docketed papers; and there were several chairs of the red-varnished wood — though of different shape. All along the wall ran something that might have been a bookcase, only that it was not filled with books, but with flat, oblong slabs or cases of the same polished dark-red consistency. What those flat wooden cases were they could form no conception.

The doctor sat down with a polite impatience on his professional perch; MacIan remained standing, but Turnbull threw himself almost with luxury into a hard wooden arm-chair.

"This is a most absurd business, Doctor," he said, "and I am ashamed to take up the time of busy professional men with such pranks from outside. The plain fact is, that he and I and a pack of silly men and girls have organized a game across this part of the country — a sort of combination of hare and hounds and hide and seek — I dare say you've heard of it. We are the hares, and, seeing your high wall look so inviting, we tumbled over it, and naturally were a little startled with what we found on the other side."

"Quite so!" said the doctor, mildly. "I can understand that you were startled."

Turnbull had expected him to ask what place was the headquarters of the new exhilarating game, and who were the male and female enthusiasts who had brought it to such perfection; in fact, Turnbull was busy making up these personal and topographical particulars. As the doctor did not ask the question, he grew slightly uneasy, and risked the question: "I hope you will accept my assurance that the thing was an accident and that no intrusion was meant."

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the doctor, smiling, "I accept everything that you say."

"In that case," said Turnbull, rising genially, "we must not further interrupt your important duties. I suppose there will be someone to let us out?"

"No," said the doctor, still smiling steadily and pleasantly, "there will be no one to let you out."

"Can we let ourselves out, then?" asked Turnbull, in some surprise.

"Why, of course not," said the beaming scientist; "think how dangerous that would be in a place like this."

"Then, how the devil are we to get out?" cried Turnbull, losing his manners for the first time.

"It is a question of time, of receptivity, and treatment," said the doctor, arching his eyebrows indifferently. "I do not regard either of your cases as incurable."

And with that the man of the world was struck dumb, and, as in all intolerable moments, the word was with the unworldly.

MacIan took one stride to the table, leant across it, and said: "We can't stop here, we're not mad people!"

"We don't use the crude phrase," said the doctor, smiling at his patent-leather boots.

"But you *can't* think us mad," thundered MacIan. "You never saw us before. You know nothing about us. You haven't even examined us."

The doctor threw back his head and beard. "Oh, yes," he said, "very thoroughly."

"But you can't shut a man up on your mere impressions without documents or certificates or anything?"

The doctor got languidly to his feet. "Quite so," he said. "You certainly ought to see the documents."

He went across to the curious mock book-shelves and took down one of the flat mahogany cases. This he opened with a curious key at his watch-chain, and laying back a flap revealed a quire of foolscap covered with close but quite clear writing. The first three words were in such large copy-book hand that they caught the eye even at a distance. They were: “MacIan, Evan Stuart.”

Evan bent his angry eagle face over it; yet something blurred it and he could never swear he saw it distinctly. He saw something that began: “Prenatal influences predisposing to mania. Grandfather believed in return of the Stuarts. Mother carried bone of St. Eulalia with which she touched children in sickness. Marked religious mania at early age — —”

Evan fell back and fought for his speech. “Oh!” he burst out at last. “Oh! if all this world I have walked in had been as sane as my mother was.”

Then he compressed his temples with his hands, as if to crush them. And then lifted suddenly a face that looked fresh and young, as if he had dipped and washed it in some holy well.

“Very well,” he cried; “I will take the sour with the sweet. I will pay the penalty of having enjoyed God in this monstrous modern earth that cannot enjoy man or beast. I will die happy in your madhouse, only because I know what I know. Let it be granted, then — MacIan is a mystic; MacIan is a maniac. But this honest shopkeeper and editor whom I have dragged on my inhuman escapades, you cannot keep him. He will go free, thank God, he is not down in any damned document. His ancestor, I am certain, did not die at Culloden. His mother, I swear, had no relics. Let my friend out of your front door, and as for me — —”

The doctor had already gone across to the laden shelves, and after a few minutes’ short-sighted peering, had pulled down another parallelogram of dark-red wood.

This also he unlocked on the table, and with the same unerring egotistic eye on of the company saw the words, written in large letters: “Turnbull, James.”

Hitherto Turnbull himself had somewhat scornfully surrendered his part in the whole business; but he was too honest and unaffected not to start at his own name. After the name, the inscription appeared to run: “Unique case of Eleutheromania. Parentage, as so often in such cases, prosaic and healthy. Eleutheromaniac signs occurred early, however, leading him to attach himself to the individualist Bradlaugh. Recent outbreak of pure anarchy — —”

Turnbull slammed the case to, almost smashing it, and said with a burst of savage laughter: “Oh! come along, MacIan; I don’t care so much, even about getting out of the madhouse, if only we get out of this room. You were right enough, MacIan, when you spoke about — about mad doctors.”

Somehow they found themselves outside in the cool, green garden, and then, after a stunned silence, Turnbull said: “There is one thing that was puzzling me all the time, and I understand it now.”

“What do you mean?” asked Evan.

“No man by will or wit,” answered Turnbull, “can get out of this garden; and yet we got into it merely by jumping over a garden wall. The whole thing explains itself easily enough. That undefended wall was an open trap. It was a trap laid for two celebrated lunatics. They saw us get in right enough. And they will see that we do not get out.”

Evan gazed at the garden wall, gravely for more than a minute, and then he nodded without a word.

XV. THE DREAM OF MACIAN

The system of espionage in the asylum was so effective and complete that in practice the patients could often enjoy a sense of almost complete solitude. They could stray up so near to the wall in an apparently unwatched garden as to find it easy to jump over it. They would only have found the error of their calculations if they had tried to jump.

Under this insulting liberty, in this artificial loneliness, Evan MacIan was in the habit of creeping out into the garden after dark — especially upon moonlight nights. The moon, indeed, was for him always a positive magnet in a manner somewhat hard to explain to those of a robuster attitude. Evidently, Apollo is to the full as poetical as Diana; but it is not a question of poetry in the matured and intellectual sense of the word. It is a question of a certain solid and childish fancy. The sun is in the strict and literal sense invisible; that is to say, that by our bodily eyes it cannot properly be seen. But the moon is a much simpler thing; a naked and nursery sort of thing. It hangs in the sky quite solid and quite silver and quite useless; it is one huge celestial snowball. It was at least some such infantile facts and fancies which led Evan again and again during his dehumanized imprisonment to go out as if to shoot the moon.

He was out in the garden on one such luminous and ghostly night, when the steady moonshine toned down all the colours of the garden until almost the strongest tints to be seen were the strong soft blue of the sky and the large lemon moon. He was walking with his face turned up to it in that rather half-witted fashion which might have excused the error of his keepers; and as he gazed he became aware of something little and lustrous flying close to the lustrous orb, like a bright chip knocked off the moon. At first he thought it was a mere sparkle or refraction in his own eyesight; he blinked and cleared his eyes. Then he thought it was a falling star; only it did not fall. It jerked awkwardly up and down in a way unknown among meteors and strangely reminiscent of the works of man. The next moment the thing drove right across the moon, and from being silver upon blue, suddenly became black upon silver; then although it passed the field of light in a flash its outline was unmistakable though eccentric. It was a flying ship.

The vessel took one long and sweeping curve across the sky and came nearer and nearer to MacIan, like a steam-engine coming round a bend. It was of pure white steel, and in the moon it gleamed like the armour of Sir Galahad. The simile of such virginity is not inappropriate; for, as it grew larger and larger and lower and lower, Evan saw that the only figure in it was robed in white from head to foot and crowned with snow-white hair, on which the moonshine lay like a benediction. The figure stood so still that he could easily have supposed it to be a statue. Indeed, he thought it was until it spoke.

"Evan," said the voice, and it spoke with the simple authority of some forgotten father revisiting his children, "you have remained here long enough, and your sword is wanted elsewhere."

"Wanted for what?" asked the young man, accepting the monstrous event with a queer and clumsy naturalness; "what is my sword wanted for?"

"For all that you hold dear," said the man standing in the moonlight; "for the thrones of authority and for all ancient loyalty to law."

Evan looked up at the lunar orb again as if in irrational appeal — a moon calf bleating to his mother the moon. But the face of Luna seemed as witless as his own; there is no help in nature against the supernatural; and he looked again at the tall marble figure that might have been made out of solid moonlight.

Then he said in a loud voice: "Who are you?" and the next moment was seized by a sort of choking terror lest his question should be answered. But the unknown preserved an impenetrable silence for a long space and then only answered: "I must not say who I am until the end of the world; but I may say what I am. I am the law."

And he lifted his head so that the moon smote full upon his beautiful and ancient face.

The face was the face of a Greek god grown old, but not grown either weak or ugly; there was nothing to break its regularity except a rather long chin with a cleft in it, and this rather added distinction than lessened beauty. His strong, well-opened eyes were very brilliant but quite colourless like steel.

MacIan was one of those to whom a reverence and self-submission in ritual come quite easy, and are ordinary things. It was not artificial in him to bend slightly to this solemn apparition or to lower his voice when he said: "Do you bring me some message?"

“I do bring you a message,” answered the man of moon and marble. “The king has returned.”

Evan did not ask for or require any explanation. “I suppose you can take me to the war,” he said, and the silent silver figure only bowed its head again. MacIan clambered into the silver boat, and it rose upward to the stars.

To say that it rose to the stars is no mere metaphor, for the sky had cleared to that occasional and astonishing transparency in which one can see plainly both stars and moon.

As the white-robed figure went upward in his white chariot, he said quite quietly to Evan: “There is an answer to all the folly talked about equality. Some stars are big and some small; some stand still and some circle around them as they stand. They can be orderly, but they cannot be equal.”

“They are all very beautiful,” said Evan, as if in doubt.

“They are all beautiful,” answered the other, “because each is in his place and owns his superior. And now England will be beautiful after the same fashion. The earth will be as beautiful as the heavens, because our kings have come back to us.”

“The Stuart — —” began Evan, earnestly.

“Yes,” answered the old man, “that which has returned is Stuart and yet older than Stuart. It is Capet and Plantagenet and Pendragon. It is all that good old time of which proverbs tell, that golden reign of Saturn against which gods and men were rebels. It is all that was ever lost by insolence and overwhelmed in rebellion. It is your own forefather, MacIan with the broken sword, bleeding without hope at Culloden. It is Charles refusing to answer the questions of the rebel court. It is Mary of the magic face confronting the gloomy and grasping peers and the boorish moralities of Knox. It is Richard, the last Plantagenet, giving his crown to Bolingbroke as to a common brigand. It is Arthur, overwhelmed in Lyonesse by heathen armies and dying in the mist, doubtful if ever he shall return.”

“But now — —” said Evan, in a low voice.

“But now!” said the old man; “he has returned.”

“Is the war still raging?” asked MacIan.

“It rages like the pit itself beyond the sea whither I am taking you,” answered the other. “But in England the king enjoys his own again. The people are once more taught and ruled as is best; they are happy knights, happy squires, happy servants, happy serfs, if you will; but free at last of that load of vexation and lonely vanity which was called being a citizen.”

“Is England, indeed, so secure?” asked Evan.

“Look out and see,” said the guide. “I fancy you have seen this place before.”

They were driving through the air towards one region of the sky where the hollow of night seemed darkest and which was quite without stars. But against this black background there sprang up, picked out in glittering silver, a dome and a cross. It seemed that it was really newly covered with silver, which in the strong moonlight was like white flame. But, however, covered or painted, Evan had no difficult in knowing the place again. He saw the great thoroughfare that sloped upward to the base of its huge pedestal of steps. And he wondered whether the little shop was still by the side of it and whether its window had been mended.

As the flying ship swept round the dome he observed other alterations. The dome had been redecorated so as to give it a more solemn and somewhat more ecclesiastical note; the ball was draped or destroyed, and round the gallery, under the cross, ran what looked like a ring of silver statues, like the little leaden images that stood round the hat of Louis XI. Round the second gallery, at the base of the dome, ran a second rank of such images, and Evan thought there was another round the steps below. When they came closer he saw that they were figures in complete armour of steel or silver, each with a naked sword, point upward; and then he saw one of the swords move. These were not statues but an armed order of chivalry thrown in three circles round the cross. MacIan drew in his breath, as children do at anything they think utterly beautiful. For he could imagine nothing that so echoed his own visions of pontifical or chivalric art as this white dome sitting like a vast silver tiara over London, ringed with a triple crown of swords.

As they went sailing down Ludgate Hill, Evan saw that the state of the streets fully answered his companion’s claim about the reintroduction of order. All the old blackcoated bustle with its cockney vivacity and vulgarity had disappeared. Groups of labourers, quietly but picturesquely clad, were passing up and down in sufficiently large numbers; but it required but a few mounted men to keep the streets in order. The mounted men were not common policemen, but knights with spurs and plume whose smooth and splendid armour glittered like diamond rather than steel. Only in one place

— at the corner of Bouverie Street — did there appear to be a moment’s confusion, and that was due to hurry rather than resistance. But one old grumbling man did not get out of the way quick enough, and the man on horseback struck him, not severely, across the shoulders with the flat of his sword.

“The soldier had no business to do that,” said MacIan, sharply. “The old man was moving as quickly as he could.”

“We attach great importance to discipline in the streets,” said the man in white, with a slight smile.

“Discipline is not so important as justice,” said MacIan.

The other did not answer.

Then after a swift silence that took them out across St. James’s Park, he said: “The people must be taught to obey; they must learn their own ignorance. And I am not sure,” he continued, turning his back on Evan and looking out of the prow of the ship into the darkness, “I am not sure that I agree with your little maxim about justice. Discipline for the whole society is surely more important than justice to an individual.”

Evan, who was also leaning over the edge, swung round with startling suddenness and stared at the other’s back.

“Discipline for society — —” he repeated, very staccato, “more important — justice to individual?”

Then after a long silence he called out: “Who and what are you?”

“I am an angel,” said the white-robed figure, without turning round.

“You are not a Catholic,” said MacIan.

The other seemed to take no notice, but reverted to the main topic.

“In our armies up in heaven we learn to put a wholesome fear into subordinates.”

MacIan sat craning his neck forward with an extraordinary and unaccountable eagerness.

“Go on!” he cried, twisting and untwisting his long, bony fingers, “go on!”

“Besides,” continued he, in the prow, “you must allow for a certain high spirit and haughtiness in the superior type.”

“Go on!” said Evan, with burning eyes.

“Just as the sight of sin offends God,” said the unknown, “so does the sight of ugliness offend Apollo. The beautiful and princely must, of necessity, be impatient with the squalid and — —”

"Why, you great fool!" cried MacIan, rising to the top of his tremendous stature, "did you think I would have doubted only for that rap with a sword? I know that noble orders have bad knights, that good knights have bad tempers, that the Church has rough priests and coarse cardinals; I have known it ever since I was born. You fool! you had only to say, 'Yes, it is rather a shame,' and I should have forgotten the affair. But I saw on your mouth the twitch of your infernal sophistry; I knew that something was wrong with you and your cathedrals. Something is wrong; everything is wrong. You are not an angel. That is not a church. It is not the rightful king who has come home."

"That is unfortunate," said the other, in a quiet but hard voice, "because you are going to see his Majesty."

"No," said MacIan, "I am going to jump over the side."

"Do you desire death?"

"No," said Evan, quite composedly, "I desire a miracle."

"From whom do you ask it? To whom do you appeal?" said his companion, sternly. "You have betrayed the king, renounced his cross on the cathedral, and insulted an archangel."

"I appeal to God," said Evan, and sprang up and stood upon the edge of the swaying ship.

The being in the prow turned slowly round; he looked at Evan with eyes which were like two suns, and put his hand to his mouth just too late to hide an awful smile.

"And how do you know," he said, "how do you know that I am not God?"

MacIan screamed. "Ah!" he cried. "Now I know who you really are. You are not God. You are not one of God's angels. But you were once."

The being's hand dropped from his mouth and Evan dropped out of the car.

XVI. THE DREAM OF TURNBULL

Turnbull was walking rather rampantly up and down the garden on a gusty evening chewing his cigar and in that mood when every man suppresses an instinct to spit. He was not, as a rule, a man much acquainted with moods; and the storms and sunbursts of MacIan’s soul passed before him as an impressive but unmeaning panorama, like the anarchy of Highland scenery. Turnbull was one of those men in whom a continuous appetite and industry of the intellect leave the emotions very simple and steady. His heart was in the right place; but he was quite content to leave it there. It was his head that was his hobby. His mornings and evenings were marked not by impulses or thirsty desires, not by hope or by heart-break; they were filled with the fallacies he had detected, the problems he had made plain, the adverse theories he had wrestled with and thrown, the grand generalizations he had justified. But even the cheerful inner life of a logician may be upset by a lunatic asylum, to say nothing of whiffs of memory from a lady in Jersey, and the little red-bearded man on this windy evening was in a dangerous frame of mind.

Plain and positive as he was, the influence of earth and sky may have been greater on him than he imagined; and the weather that walked the world at that moment was as red and angry as Turnbull. Long strips and swirls of tattered and tawny cloud were dragged downward to the west exactly as torn red raiment would be dragged. And so strong and pitiless was the wind that it whipped away fragments of red-flowering bushes or of copper beech, and drove them also across the garden, a drift of red leaves, like the leaves of autumn, as in parody of the red and driven rags of cloud.

There was a sense in earth and heaven as of everything breaking up, and all the revolutionist in Turnbull rejoiced that it was breaking up. The trees were breaking up under the wind, even in the tall strength of their bloom: the clouds were breaking up and losing even their large heraldic shapes. Shards and shreds of copper cloud split off continually and floated by themselves, and for some reason the truculent eye of Turnbull was attracted to one of these careering cloudlets, which seemed to him to career in an exaggerated manner. Also it kept its shape, which is unusual with clouds shaken off; also its shape was of an odd sort.

Turnbull continued to stare at it, and in a little time occurred that crucial instant when a thing, however incredible, is accepted as a fact. The copper cloud was tumbling down towards the earth, like some gigantic leaf from the copper beeches. And as it came nearer it was evident, first, that it was not a cloud, and, second, that it was not itself of the colour of copper; only, being burnished like a mirror, it had reflected the red-brown colours of the burning clouds. As the thing whirled like a windswept leaf down towards the wall of the garden it was clear that it was some sort of air-ship made of metal, and slapping the air with big broad fins of steel. When it came about a hundred feet above the garden, a shaggy, lean figure leapt up in it, almost black against the bronze and scarlet of the west, and, flinging out a kind of hook or anchor, caught on to the green apple-tree just under the wall; and from that fixed holding ground the ship swung in the red tempest like a captive balloon.

While our friend stood frozen for an instant by his astonishment, the queer figure in the airy car tipped the vehicle almost upside down by leaping over the side of it, seemed to slide or drop down the rope like a monkey, and alighted (with impossible precision and placidity) seated on the edge of the wall, over which he kicked and dangled his legs as he grinned at Turnbull. The wind roared in the trees yet more ruinous and desolate, the red tails of the sunset were dragged downward like red dragons sucked down to death, and still on the top of the asylum wall sat the sinister figure with the grimace, swinging his feet in tune with the tempest; while above him, at the end of its tossing or tightened cord, the enormous iron air-ship floated as light and as little noticed as a baby’s balloon upon its string.

Turnbull’s first movement after sixty motionless seconds was to turn round and look at the large, luxuriant parallelogram of the garden and the long, low rectangular building beyond. There was not a soul or a stir of life within sight. And he had a quite meaningless sensation, as if there never really had been any one else there except he since the foundation of the world.

Stiffening in himself the masculine but mirthless courage of the atheist, he drew a little nearer to the wall and, catching the man at a slightly different angle of the evening light, could see his face and figure quite plain. Two facts about him stood out in the picked colours of some piratical schoolboy’s story. The first was that his lean brown body was bare to the belt of his loose white trousers; the other that through hygiene, affectation, or whatever other cause, he had a scarlet handkerchief tied tightly but somewhat aslant across his brow. After these two facts had become emphatic, others appeared sufficiently important. One was that under the scarlet rag the hair was plentiful, but white as with the last snows of mortality. Another was that under the mop of white and senile hair the face was strong, handsome, and smiling, with a well-cut profile and a long cloven chin. The length of this lower part of the face and the strange cleft in it (which gave the man, in quite another sense from the common one, a double chin) faintly spoilt the claim of the face to absolute regularity, but it greatly assisted it in wearing the expression of half-smiling and half-sneering arrogance with which it was staring at all the stones, all the flowers, but especially at the solitary man.

"What do you want?" shouted Turnbull.

"I want you, Jimmy," said the eccentric man on the wall, and with the very word he had let himself down with a leap on to the centre of the lawn, where he bounded once literally like an India-rubber ball and then stood grinning with his legs astride. The only three facts that Turnbull could now add to his inventory were that the man had an ugly-looking knife swinging at his trousers belt, that his brown feet were as bare as his bronzed trunk and arms, and that his eyes had a singular bleak brilliancy which was of no particular colour.

"Excuse my not being in evening dress," said the newcomer with an urbane smile. "We scientific men, you know — I have to work my own engines — electrical engineer — very hot work."

"Look here," said Turnbull, sturdily clenching his fists in his trousers pockets, "I am bound to expect lunatics inside these four walls; but I do bar their coming from outside, bang out of the sunset clouds."

"And yet you came from the outside, too, Jim," said the stranger in a voice almost affectionate.

"What do you want?" asked Turnbull, with an explosion of temper as sudden as a pistol shot.

"I have already told you," said the man, lowering his voice and speaking with evident sincerity; "I want you."

"What do you want with me?"

"I want exactly what you want," said the new-comer with a new gravity. "I want the Revolution."

Turnbull looked at the fire-swept sky and the wind-stricken woodlands, and kept on repeating the word voicelessly to himself — the word that did indeed so thoroughly express his mood of rage as it had been among those red clouds and rocking tree-tops. “Revolution!” he said to himself. “The Revolution — yes, that is what I want right enough — anything, so long as it is a Revolution.”

To some cause he could never explain he found himself completing the sentence on the top of the wall, having automatically followed the stranger so far. But when the stranger silently indicated the rope that led to the machine, he found himself pausing and saying: “I can’t leave MacIan behind in this den.”

“We are going to destroy the Pope and all the kings,” said the new-comer. “Would it be wiser to take him with us?”

Somehow the muttering Turnbull found himself in the flying ship also, and it swung up into the sunset.

“All the great rebels have been very little rebels,” said the man with the red scarf. “They have been like fourth-form boys who sometimes venture to hit a fifth-form boy. That was all the worth of their French Revolution and regicide. The boys never really dared to defy the schoolmaster.”

“Whom do you mean by the schoolmaster?” asked Turnbull.

“You know whom I mean,” answered the strange man, as he lay back on cushions and looked up into the angry sky.

They seemed rising into stronger and stronger sunlight, as if it were sunrise rather than sunset. But when they looked down at the earth they saw it growing darker and darker. The lunatic asylum in its large rectangular grounds spread below them in a foreshortened and infantile plan, and looked for the first time the grotesque thing that it was. But the clear colours of the plan were growing darker every moment. The masses of rose or rhododendron deepened from crimson to violet. The maze of gravel pathways faded from gold to brown. By the time they had risen a few hundred feet higher nothing could be seen of that darkening landscape except the lines of lighted windows, each one of which, at least, was the light of one lost intelligence. But on them as they swept upward better and braver winds seemed to blow, and on them the ruby light of evening seemed struck, and splashed like red spurts from the grapes of Dionysus. Below them the fallen lights were literally the fallen stars of servitude. And above them all the red and raging clouds were like the leaping flags of liberty.

The man with the cloven chin seemed to have a singular power of understanding thoughts; for, as Turnbull felt the whole universe tilt and turn over his head, the stranger said exactly the right thing.

"Doesn't it seem as if everything were being upset?" said he; "and if once everything is upset, He will be upset on top of it."

Then, as Turnbull made no answer, his host continued:

"That is the really fine thing about space. It is topsy-turvy. You have only to climb far enough towards the morning star to feel that you are coming down to it. You have only to dive deep enough into the abyss to feel that you are rising. That is the only glory of this universe — it is a giddy universe."

Then, as Turnbull was still silent, he added:

"The heavens are full of revolution — of the real sort of revolution. All the high things are sinking low and all the big things looking small. All the people who think they are aspiring find they are falling head foremost. And all the people who think they are condescending find they are climbing up a precipice. That is the intoxication of space. That is the only joy of eternity — doubt. There is only one pleasure the angels can possibly have in flying, and that is, that they do not know whether they are on their head or their heels."

Then, finding his companion still mute, he fell himself into a smiling and motionless meditation, at the end of which he said suddenly:

"So MacIan converted you?"

Turnbull sprang up as if spurning the steel car from under his feet. "Converted me!" he cried. "What the devil do you mean? I have known him for a month, and I have not retracted a single — —"

"This Catholicism is a curious thing," said the man of the cloven chin in uninterrupted reflectiveness, leaning his elegant elbows over the edge of the vessel; "it soaks and weakens men without their knowing it, just as I fear it has soaked and weakened you."

Turnbull stood in an attitude which might well have meant pitching the other man out of the flying ship.

"I am an atheist," he said, in a stifled voice. "I have always been an atheist. I am still an atheist." Then, addressing the other's indolent and indifferent back, he cried: "In God's name what do you mean?"

And the other answered without turning round:

"I mean nothing in God's name."

Turnbull spat over the edge of the car and fell back furiously into his seat.

The other continued still unruffled, and staring over the edge idly as an angler stares down at a stream.

“The truth is that we never thought that you could have been caught,” he said; “we counted on you as the one red-hot revolutionary left in the world. But, of course, these men like MacIan are awfully clever, especially when they pretend to be stupid.”

Turnbull leapt up again in a living fury and cried: “What have I got to do with MacIan? I believe all I ever believed, and disbelieve all I ever disbelieved. What does all this mean, and what do you want with me here?”

Then for the first time the other lifted himself from the edge of the car and faced him.

“I have brought you here,” he answered, “to take part in the last war of the world.”

“The last war!” repeated Turnbull, even in his dazed state a little touchy about such a dogma; “how do you know it will be the last?”

The man laid himself back in his reposeful attitude, and said:

“It is the last war, because if it does not cure the world for ever, it will destroy it.”

“What do you mean?”

“I only mean what you mean,” answered the unknown in a temperate voice. “What was it that you always meant on those million and one nights when you walked outside your Ludgate Hill shop and shook your hand in the air?”

“Still I do not see,” said Turnbull, stubbornly.

“You will soon,” said the other, and abruptly bent downward one iron handle of his huge machine. The engine stopped, stooped, and dived almost as deliberately as a man bathing; in their downward rush they swept within fifty yards of a big bulk of stone that Turnbull knew only too well. The last red anger of the sunset was ended; the dome of heaven was dark; the lanes of flaring light in the streets below hardly lit up the base of the building. But he saw that it was St. Paul’s Cathedral, and he saw that on the top of it the ball was still standing erect, but the cross was stricken and had fallen sideways. Then only he cared to look down into the streets, and saw that they were inflamed with uproar and tossing passions.

“We arrive at a happy moment,” said the man steering the ship. “The insurgents are bombarding the city, and a cannon-ball has just hit the cross. Many of the insurgents are simple people, and they naturally regard it as a happy omen.”

“Quite so,” said Turnbull, in a rather colourless voice.

“Yes,” replied the other. “I thought you would be glad to see your prayer answered. Of course I apologize for the word prayer.”

“Don’t mention it,” said Turnbull.

The flying ship had come down upon a sort of curve, and was now rising again. The higher and higher it rose the broader and broader became the scenes of flame and desolation underneath.

Ludgate Hill indeed had been an uncaptured and comparatively quiet height, altered only by the startling coincidence of the cross fallen awry. All the other thoroughfares on all sides of that hill were full of the pulsation and the pain of battle, full of shaking torches and shouting faces. When at length they had risen high enough to have a bird’s-eye view of the whole campaign, Turnbull was already intoxicated. He had smelt gunpowder, which was the incense of his own revolutionary religion.

“Have the people really risen?” he asked, breathlessly. “What are they fighting about?”

“The programme is rather elaborate,” said his entertainer with some indifference. “I think Dr. Hertz drew it up.”

Turnbull wrinkled his forehead. “Are all the poor people with the Revolution?” he asked.

The other shrugged his shoulders. “All the instructed and class-conscious part of them without exception,” he replied. “There were certainly a few districts; in fact, we are passing over them just now — —”

Turnbull looked down and saw that the polished car was literally lit up from underneath by the far-flung fires from below. Underneath whole squares and solid districts were in flames, like prairies or forests on fire.

“Dr. Hertz has convinced everybody,” said Turnbull’s cicerone in a smooth voice, “that nothing can really be done with the real slums. His celebrated maxim has been quite adopted. I mean the three celebrated sentences: ‘No man should be unemployed. Employ the employables. Destroy the unemployables.’”

There was a silence, and then Turnbull said in a rather strained voice: “And do I understand that this good work is going on under here?”

“Going on splendidly,” replied his companion in the heartiest voice. “You see, these people were much too tired and weak even to join the social war. They were a definite hindrance to it.”

“And so you are simply burning them out?”

“It *does* seem absurdly simple,” said the man, with a beaming smile, “when one thinks of all the worry and talk about helping a hopeless slave population, when the future obviously was only crying to be rid of them. There are happy babes unborn ready to burst the doors when these drivellers are swept away.”

“Will you permit me to say,” said Turnbull, after reflection, “that I don’t like all this?”

“And will you permit me to say,” said the other, with a snap, “that I don’t like Mr. Evan MacIan?”

Somewhat to the speaker’s surprise this did not inflame the sensitive sceptic; he had the air of thinking thoroughly, and then he said: “No, I don’t think it’s my friend MacIan that taught me that. I think I should always have said that I don’t like this. These people have rights.”

“Rights!” repeated the unknown in a tone quite indescribable. Then he added with a more open sneer: “Perhaps they also have souls.”

“They have lives!” said Turnbull, sternly; “that is quite enough for me. I understood you to say that you thought life sacred.”

“Yes, indeed!” cried his mentor with a sort of idealistic animation. “Yes, indeed! Life is sacred — but lives are not sacred. We are improving Life by removing lives. Can you, as a free-thinker, find any fault in that?”

“Yes,” said Turnbull with brevity.

“Yet you applaud tyrannicide,” said the stranger with rationalistic gaiety. “How inconsistent! It really comes to this: You approve of taking away life from those to whom it is a triumph and a pleasure. But you will not take away life from those to whom it is a burden and a toil.”

Turnbull rose to his feet in the car with considerable deliberation, but his face seemed oddly pale. The other went on with enthusiasm.

“Life, yes, Life is indeed sacred!” he cried; “but new lives for old! Good lives for bad! On that very place where now there sprawls one drunken wastrel of a pavement artist more or less wishing he were dead — on that very spot there shall in the future be living pictures; there shall be golden girls and boys leaping in the sun.”

Turnbull, still standing up, opened his lips. “Will you put me down, please?” he said, quite calmly, like on stopping an omnibus.

“Put you down — what do you mean?” cried his leader. “I am taking you to the front of the revolutionary war, where you will be one of the first of the revolutionary leaders.”

“Thank you,” replied Turnbull with the same painful constraint. “I have heard about your revolutionary war, and I think on the whole that I would rather be anywhere else.”

“Do you want to be taken to a monastery,” snarled the other, “with MacIan and his winking Madonnas.”

“I want to be taken to a madhouse,” said Turnbull distinctly, giving the direction with a sort of precision. “I want to go back to exactly the same lunatic asylum from which I came.”

“Why?” asked the unknown.

“Because I want a little sane and wholesome society,” answered Turnbull.

There was a long and peculiar silence, and then the man driving the flying machine said quite coolly: “I won’t take you back.”

And then Turnbull said equally coolly: “Then I’ll jump out of the car.”

The unknown rose to his full height, and the expression in his eyes seemed to be made of ironies behind ironies, as two mirrors infinitely reflect each other. At last he said, very gravely: “Do you think I am the devil?”

“Yes,” said Turnbull, violently. “For I think the devil is a dream, and so are you. I don’t believe in you or your flying ship or your last fight of the world. It is all a nightmare. I say as a fact of dogma and faith that it is all a nightmare. And I will be a martyr for my faith as much as St. Catherine, for I will jump out of this ship and risk waking up safe in bed.”

After swaying twice with the swaying vessel he dived over the side as one dives into the sea. For some incredible moments stars and space and planets seemed to shoot up past him as the sparks fly upward; and yet in that sickening descent he was full of some unnatural happiness. He could connect it with no idea except one that half escaped him — what Evan had said of the difference between Christ and Satan; that it was by Christ’s own choice that He descended into hell.

When he again realized anything, he was lying on his elbow on the lawn of the lunatic asylum, and the last red of the sunset had not yet disappeared.

XVII. THE IDIOT

Evan MacIan was standing a few yards off looking at him in absolute silence.

He had not the moral courage to ask MacIan if there had been anything astounding in the manner of his coming there, nor did MacIan seem to have any question to ask, or perhaps any need to ask it. The two men came slowly towards each other, and found the same expression on each other's faces. Then, for the first time in all their acquaintance, they shook hands.

Almost as if this were a kind of unconscious signal, it brought Dr. Quayle bounding out of a door and running across the lawn.

"Oh, there you are!" he exclaimed with a relieved giggle. "Will you come inside, please? I want to speak to you both."

They followed him into his shiny wooden office where their damning record was kept. Dr. Quayle sat down on a swivel chair and swung round to face them. His carved smile had suddenly disappeared.

"I will be plain with you gentlemen," he said, abruptly; "you know quite well we do our best for everybody here. Your cases have been under special consideration, and the Master himself has decided that you ought to be treated specially and — er — under somewhat simpler conditions."

"You mean treated worse, I suppose," said Turnbull, gruffly.

The doctor did not reply, and MacIan said: "I expected this." His eyes had begun to glow.

The doctor answered, looking at his desk and playing with a key: "Well, in certain cases that give anxiety — it is often better — —"

"Give anxiety," said Turnbull, fiercely. "Confound your impudence! What do you mean? You imprison two perfectly sane men in a madhouse because you have made up a long word. They take it in good temper, walk and talk in your garden like monks who have found a vocation, are civil even to you, you damned druggists' hack! Behave not only more sanely than any of your patients, but more sanely than half the sane men outside, and you have the soul-stifling cheek to say that they give anxiety."

"The head of the asylum has settled it all," said Dr. Quayle, still looking down.

MacIan took one of his immense strides forward and stood over the doctor with flaming eyes.

"If the head has settled it let the head announce it," he said. "I won't take it from you. I believe you to be a low, gibbering degenerate. Let us see the head of the asylum."

"See the head of the asylum," repeated Dr. Quayle. "Certainly not."

The tall Highlander, bending over him, put one hand on his shoulder with fatherly interest.

"You don't seem to appreciate the peculiar advantages of my position as a lunatic," he said. "I could kill you with my left hand before such a rat as you could so much as squeak. And I wouldn't be hanged for it."

"I certainly agree with Mr. MacIan," said Turnbull with sobriety and perfect respectfulness, "that you had better let us see the head of the institution."

Dr. Quayle got to his feet in a mixture of sudden hysteria and clumsy presence of mind.

"Oh, certainly," he said with a weak laugh. "You can see the head of the asylum if you particularly want to." He almost ran out of the room, and the two followed swiftly on his flying coat tails. He knocked at an ordinary varnished door in the corridor. When a voice said, "Come in," MacIan's breath went hissing back through his teeth into his chest. Turnbull was more impetuous, and opened the door.

It was a neat and well-appointed room entirely lined with a medical library. At the other end of it was a ponderous and polished desk with an incandescent lamp on it, the light of which was just sufficient to show a slender, well-bred figure in an ordinary medical black frock-coat, whose head, quite silvered with age, was bent over neat piles of notes. This gentleman looked up for an instant as they entered, and the lamplight fell on his glittering spectacles and long, clean-shaven face — a face which would have been simply like an aristocrat's but that a certain lion poise of the head and long cleft in the chin made it look more like a very handsome actor's. It was only for a flash that his face was thus lifted. Then he bent his silver head over his notes once more, and said, without looking up again:

"I told you, Dr. Quayle, that these men were to go to cells B and C."

Turnbull and MacIan looked at each other, and said more than they could ever say with tongues or swords. Among other things they said that to that particular Head of the institution it was a waste of time to appeal, and they followed Dr. Quayle out of the room.

The instant they stepped out into the corridor four sturdy figures stepped from four sides, pinioned them, and ran them along the galleries. They might very likely have thrown their captors right and left had they been inclined to resist, but for some nameless reason they were more inclined to laugh. A mixture of mad irony with childish curiosity made them feel quite inclined to see what next twist would be taken by their imbecile luck. They were dragged down countless cold avenues lined with glazed tiles, different only in being of different lengths and set at different angles. They were so many and so monotonous that to escape back by them would have been far harder than fleeing from the Hampton Court maze. Only the fact that windows grew fewer, coming at longer intervals, and the fact that when the windows did come they seemed shadowed and let in less light, showed that they were winding into the core or belly of some enormous building. After a little time the glazed corridors began to be lit by electricity.

At last, when they had walked nearly a mile in those white and polished tunnels, they came with quite a shock to the futile finality of a cul-de-sac. All that white and weary journey ended suddenly in an oblong space and a blank white wall. But in the white wall there were two iron doors painted white on which were written, respectively, in neat black capitals B and C.

“You go in here, sir,” said the leader of the officials, quite respectfully, “and you in here.”

But before the doors had clanged upon their dazed victims, MacIan had been able to say to Turnbull with a strange drawl of significance: “I wonder who A is.”

Turnbull made an automatic struggle before he allowed himself to be thrown into the cell. Hence it happened that he was the last to enter, and was still full of the exhilaration of the adventures for at least five minutes after the echo of the clanging door had died away.

Then, when silence had sunk deep and nothing happened for two and a half hours, it suddenly occurred to him that this was the end of his life. He was hidden and sealed up in this little crack of stone until the flesh should fall off his bones. He was dead, and the world had won.

His cell was of an oblong shape, but very long in comparison with its width. It was just wide enough to permit the arms to be fully extended with the dumb-bells, which were hung up on the left wall, very dusty. It was, however, long enough for a man to walk one thirty-fifth part of a mile if he traversed it entirely. On the same principle a row of fixed holes, quite close together, let in to the cells by pipes what was alleged to be the freshest air. For these great scientific organizers insisted that a man should be healthy even if he was miserable. They provided a walk long enough to give him exercise and holes large enough to give him oxygen. There their interest in human nature suddenly ceased. It seemed never to have occurred to them that the benefit of exercise belongs partly to the benefit of liberty. They had not entertained the suggestion that the open air is only one of the advantages of the open sky. They administered air in secret, but in sufficient doses, as if it were a medicine. They suggested walking, as if no man had ever felt inclined to walk. Above all, the asylum authorities insisted on their own extraordinary cleanliness. Every morning, while Turnbull was still half asleep on his iron bedstead which was lifted half-way up the wall and clamped to it with iron, four sluices or metal mouths opened above him at the four corners of the chamber and washed it white of any defilement. Turnbull’s solitary soul surged up against this sickening daily solemnity.

“I am buried alive!” he cried, bitterly; “they have hidden me under mountains. I shall be here till I rot. Why the blazes should it matter to them whether I am dirty or clean.”

Every morning and evening an iron hatchway opened in his oblong cell, and a brown hairy hand or two thrust in a plate of perfectly cooked lentils and a big bowl of cocoa. He was not underfed any more than he was underexercised or asphyxiated. He had ample walking space, ample air, ample and even filling food. The only objection was that he had nothing to walk towards, nothing to feast about, and no reason whatever for drawing the breath of life.

Even the shape of his cell especially irritated him. It was a long, narrow parallelogram, which had a flat wall at one end and ought to have had a flat wall at the other; but that end was broken by a wedge or angle of space, like the prow of a ship. After three days of silence and cocoa, this angle at the end began to infuriate Turnbull. It maddened him to think that two lines came together and pointed at nothing. After the fifth day he was reckless, and poked his head into the corner. After twenty-five days he almost broke his head against it. Then he became quite cool and stupid again, and began to examine it like a sort of Robinson Crusoe.

Almost unconsciously it was his instinct to examine outlets, and he found himself paying particular attention to the row of holes which let in the air into his last house of life. He soon discovered that these air-holes were all the ends and mouths of long leaden tubes which doubtless carried air from some remote watering-place near Margate. One evening while he was engaged in the fifth investigation he noticed something like twilight in one of these dumb mouths, as compared with the darkness of the others. Thrusting his finger in as far as it would go, he found a hole and flapping edge in the tube. This he rent open and instantly saw a light behind; it was at least certain that he had struck some other cell.

It is a characteristic of all things now called “efficient”, which means mechanical and calculated, that if they go wrong at all they go entirely wrong. There is no power of retrieving a defeat, as in simpler and more living organisms. A strong gun can conquer a strong elephant, but a wounded elephant can easily conquer a broken gun. Thus the Prussian monarchy in the eighteenth century, or now, can make a strong army merely by making the men afraid. But it does it with the permanent possibility that the men may some day be more afraid of their enemies than of their officers. Thus the drainage in our cities so long as it is quite solid means a general safety, but if there is one leak it means concentrated poison — an explosion of deathly germs like dynamite, a spirit of stink. Thus, indeed, all that excellent machinery which is the swiftest thing on earth in saving human labour is also the slowest thing on earth in resisting human interference. It may be easier to get chocolate for nothing out of a shopkeeper than out of an automatic machine. But if you did manage to steal the chocolate, the automatic machine would be much less likely to run after you.

Turnbull was not long in discovering this truth in connexion with the cold and colossal machinery of this great asylum. He had been shaken by many spiritual states since the instant when he was pitched head foremost into that private cell which was to be his private room till death. He had felt a high fit of pride and poetry, which had ebbed away and left him deadly cold. He had known a period of mere scientific curiosity, in the course of which he examined all the tiles of his cell, with the gratifying conclusion that they were all the same shape and size; but was greatly puzzled about the angle in the wall at the end, and also about an iron peg or spike that stood out from the wall, the object of which he does not know to this day. Then he had a period of mere madness not to be written of by decent men, but only by those few dirty novelists hallooed on by the infernal huntsman to hunt down and humiliate human nature. This also passed, but left behind it a feverish distaste for many of the mere objects around him. Long after he had returned to sanity and such hopeless cheerfulness as a man might have on a desert island, he disliked the regular squares of the pattern of wall and floor and the triangle that terminated his corridor. Above all, he had a hatred, deep as the hell he did not believe in, for the objectless iron peg in the wall.

But in all his moods, sane or insane, intolerant or stoical, he never really doubted this: that the machine held him as light and as hopelessly as he had from his birth been held by the hopeless cosmos of his own creed. He knew well the ruthless and inexhaustible resources of our scientific civilization. He no more expected rescue from a medical certificate than rescue from the solar system. In many of his Robinson Crusoe moods he thought kindly of MacIan as of some quarrelsome school-fellow who had long been dead. He thought of leaving in the cell when he died a rigid record of his opinions, and when he began to write them down on scraps of envelope in his pocket, he was startled to discover how much they had changed. Then he remembered the Beauchamp Tower, and tried to write his blazing scepticism on the wall, and discovered that it was all shiny tiles on which nothing could be either drawn or carved. Then for an instant there hung and broke above him like a high wave the whole horror of scientific imprisonment, which manages to deny a man not only liberty, but every accidental comfort of bondage. In the old filthy dungeons men could carve their prayers or protests in the rock. Here the white and slippery walls escaped even from bearing witness. The old prisoners could make a pet of a mouse or a beetle strayed out of a hole. Here the unpierceable walls were washed every morning by an automatic sluice. There was no natural corruption and no merciful decay by which a living thing could enter in. Then James Turnbull looked up and saw the high invincible hatefulness of the society in which he lived, and saw the hatefulness of something else also, which he told himself again and again was not the cosmos in which he believed. But all the time he had never once doubted that the five sides of his cell were for him the wall of the world henceforward, and it gave him a shock of surprise even to discover the faint light through the aperture in the ventilation tube. But he had forgotten how close efficiency has to pack everything together and how easily, therefore, a pipe here or there may leak.

Turnbull thrust his first finger down the aperture, and at last managed to make a slight further fissure in the piping. The light that came up from beyond was very faint, and apparently indirect; it seemed to fall from some hole or window higher up. As he was screwing his eye to peer at this grey and greasy twilight he was astonished to see another human finger very long and lean come down from above towards the broken pipe and hook it up to something higher. The lighted aperture was abruptly blackened and blocked, presumably by a face and mouth, for something human spoke down the tube, though the words were not clear.

"Who is that?" asked Turnbull, trembling with excitement, yet wary and quite resolved not to spoil any chance.

After a few indistinct sounds the voice came down with a strong Argyllshire accent:

"I say, Turnbull, we couldn't fight through this tube, could we?"

Sentiments beyond speech surged up in Turnbull and silenced him for a space just long enough to be painful. Then he said with his old gaiety: "I vote we talk a little first; I don't want to murder the first man I have met for ten million years."

"I know what you mean," answered the other. "It has been awful. For a mortal month I have been alone with God."

Turnbull started, and it was on the tip of his tongue to answer: "Alone with God! Then you do not know what loneliness is."

But he answered, after all, in his old defiant style: "Alone with God, were you? And I suppose you found his Majesty's society rather monotonous?"

"Oh, no," said MacIan, and his voice shuddered; "it was a great deal too exciting."

After a very long silence the voice of MacIan said: "What do you really hate most in your place?"

"You'd think I was really mad if I told you," answered Turnbull, bitterly.

"Then I expect it's the same as mine," said the other voice.

"I am sure it's not the same as anybody's," said Turnbull, "for it has no rhyme or reason. Perhaps my brain really has gone, but I detest that iron spike in the left wall more than the damned desolation or the damned cocoa. Have you got one in your cell?"

"Not now," replied MacIan with serenity. "I've pulled it out."

His fellow-prisoner could only repeat the words.

"I pulled it out the other day when I was off my head," continued the tranquil Highland voice. "It looked so unnecessary."

“You must be ghastly strong,” said Turnbull.

“One is, when one is mad,” was the careless reply, “and it had worn a little loose in the socket. Even now I’ve got it out I can’t discover what it was for. But I’ve found out something a long sight funnier.”

“What do you mean?” asked Turnbull.

“I have found out where A is,” said the other.

Three weeks afterwards MacIan had managed to open up communications which made his meaning plain. By that time the two captives had fully discovered and demonstrated that weakness in the very nature of modern machinery to which we have already referred. The very fact that they were isolated from all companions meant that they were free from all spies, and as there were no gaolers to be bribed, so there were none to be baffled. Machinery brought them their cocoa and cleaned their cells; that machinery was as helpless as it was pitiless. A little patient violence, conducted day after day amid constant mutual suggestion, opened an irregular hole in the wall, large enough to let in a small man, in the exact place where there had been before the tiny ventilation holes. Turnbull tumbled somehow into MacIan’s apartment, and his first glance found out that the iron spike was indeed plucked from its socket, and left, moreover, another ragged hole into some hollow place behind. But for this MacIan’s cell was the duplicate of Turnbull’s — a long oblong ending in a wedge and lined with cold and lustrous tiles. The small hole from which the peg had been displaced was in that short oblique wall at the end nearest to Turnbull’s. That individual looked at it with a puzzled face.

“What is in there?” he asked.

MacIan answered briefly: “Another cell.”

“But where can the door of it be?” said his companion, even more puzzled; “the doors of our cells are at the other end.”

“It has no door,” said Evan.

In the pause of perplexity that followed, an eerie and sinister feeling crept over Turnbull’s stubborn soul in spite of himself. The notion of the doorless room chilled him with that sense of half-witted curiosity which one has when something horrible is half understood.

“James Turnbull,” said MacIan, in a low and shaken voice, “these people hate us more than Nero hated Christians, and fear us more than any man feared Nero. They have filled England with frenzy and galloping in order to capture us and wipe us out — in order to kill us. And they have killed us, for you and I have only made a hole in our coffins. But though this hatred that they felt for us is bigger than they felt for Bonaparte, and more plain and practical than they would feel for Jack the Ripper, yet it is not we whom the people of this place hate most."

A cold and quivering impatience continued to crawl up Turnbull's spine; he had never felt so near to superstition and supernaturalism, and it was not a pretty sort of superstition either.

"There is another man more fearful and hateful," went on MacIan, in his low monotone voice, "and they have buried him even deeper. God knows how they did it, for he was let in by neither door nor window, nor lowered through any opening above. I expect these iron handles that we both hate have been part of some damned machinery for walling him up. He is there. I have looked through the hole at him; but I cannot stand looking at him long, because his face is turned away from me and he does not move."

Al Turnbull's unnatural and uncompleted feelings found their outlet in rushing to the aperture and looking into the unknown room.

It was a third oblong cell exactly like the other two except that it was doorless, and except that on one of the walls was painted a large black A like the B and C outside their own doors. The letter in this case was not painted outside, because this prison had no outside.

On the same kind of tiled floor, of which the monotonous squares had maddened Turnbull's eye and brain, was sitting a figure which was startlingly short even for a child, only that the enormous head was ringed with hair of a frosty grey. The figure was draped, both insecurely and insufficiently, in what looked like the remains of a brown flannel dressing-gown; an emptied cup of cocoa stood on the floor beside it, and the creature had his big grey head cocked at a particular angle of inquiry or attention which amid all that gathering gloom and mystery struck one as comic if not cocksure.

After six still seconds Turnbull could stand it no longer, but called out to the dwarfish thing — in what words heaven knows. The thing got up with the promptitude of an animal, and turning round offered the spectacle of two owlish eyes and a huge grey-and-white beard not unlike the plumage of an owl. This extraordinary beard covered him literally to his feet (not that that was very far), and perhaps it was as well that it did, for portions of his remaining clothing seemed to fall off whenever he moved. One talks trivially of a face like parchment, but this old man's face was so wrinkled that it was like a parchment loaded with hieroglyphics. The lines of his face were so deep and complex that one could see five or ten different faces besides the real one, as one can see them in an elaborate wall-paper. And yet while his face seemed like a scripture older than the gods, his eyes were quite bright, blue, and startled like those of a baby. They looked as if they had only an instant before been fitted into his head.

Everything depended so obviously upon whether this buried monster spoke that Turnbull did not know or care whether he himself had spoken. He said something or nothing. And then he waited for this dwarfish voice that had been hidden under the mountains of the world. At last it did speak, and spoke in English, with a foreign accent that was neither Latin nor Teutonic. He suddenly stretched out a long and very dirty forefinger, and cried in a voice of clear recognition, like a child's: "That's a hole."

He digested the discovery for some seconds, sucking his finger, and then he cried, with a crow of laughter: "And that's a head come through it."

The hilarious energy in this idiot attitude gave Turnbull another sick turn. He had grown to tolerate those dreary and mumbling madmen who trailed themselves about the beautiful asylum gardens. But there was something new and subversive of the universe in the combination of so much cheerful decision with a body without a brain.

"Why did they put you in such a place?" he asked at last with embarrassment.

"Good place. Yes," said the old man, nodding a great many times and beaming like a flattered landlord. "Good shape. Long and narrow, with a point. Like this," and he made lovingly with his hands a map of the room in the air.

"But that's not the best," he added, confidentially. "Squares very good; I have a nice long holiday, and can count them. But that's not the best."

"What is the best?" asked Turnbull in great distress.

"Spike is the best," said the old man, opening his blue eyes blazing; "it sticks out."

The words Turnbull spoke broke out of him in pure pity. "Can't we do anything for you?" he said.

"I am very happy," said the other, alphabetically. "You are a good man. Can I help you?"

"No, I don't think you can, sir," said Turnbull with rough pathos; "I am glad you are contented at least."

The weird old person opened his broad blue eyes and fixed Turnbull with a stare extraordinarily severe. “You are quite sure,” he said, “I cannot help you?”

“Quite sure, thank you,” said Turnbull with broken brevity. “Good day.”

Then he turned to MacIan who was standing close behind him, and whose face, now familiar in all its moods, told him easily that Evan had heard the whole of the strange dialogue.

“Curse those cruel beasts!” cried Turnbull. “They’ve turned him to an imbecile just by burying him alive. His brain’s like a pin-point now.”

“You are sure he is a lunatic?” said Evan, slowly.

“Not a lunatic,” said Turnbull, “an idiot. He just points to things and says that they stick out.”

“He had a notion that he could help us,” said MacIan moodily, and began to pace towards the other end of his cell.

“Yes, it was a bit pathetic,” assented Turnbull; “such a Thing offering help, and besides —— Hallo! Hallo! What’s the matter?”

“God Almighty guide us all!” said MacIan.

He was standing heavy and still at the other end of the room and staring quietly at the door which for thirty days had sealed them up from the sun. Turnbull, following the other’s eye, stared at the door likewise, and then he also uttered an exclamation. The iron door was standing about an inch and a half open.

“He said — —” began Evan, in a trembling voice— “he offered — —”

“Come along, you fool!” shouted Turnbull with a sudden and furious energy. “I see it all now, and it’s the best stroke of luck in the world. You pulled out that iron handle that had screwed up his cell, and it somehow altered the machinery and opened all the doors.”

Seizing MacIan by the elbow he bundled him bodily out into the open corridor and ran him on till they saw daylight through a half-darkened window.

“All the same,” said Evan, like one answering in an ordinary conversation, “he did ask you whether he could help you.”

All this wilderness of windowless passages was so built into the heart of that fortress of fear that it seemed more than an hour before the fugitives had any good glimpse of the outer world. They did not even know what hour of the day it was; and when, turning a corner, they saw the bare tunnel of the corridor end abruptly in a shining square of garden, the grass burning in that strong evening sunshine which makes it burnished gold rather than green, the abrupt opening on to the earth seemed like a hole knocked in the wall of heaven. Only once or twice in life is it permitted to a man thus to see the very universe from outside, and feel existence itself as an adorable adventure not yet begun. As they found this shining escape out of that hellish labyrinth they both had simultaneously the sensation of being babes unborn, of being asked by God if they would like to live upon the earth. They were looking in at one of the seven gates of Eden.

Turnbull was the first to leap into the garden, with an earth-spurning leap like that of one who could really spread his wings and fly. MacIan, who came an instant after, was less full of mere animal gusto and fuller of a more fearful and quivering pleasure in the clear and innocent flower colours and the high and holy trees. With one bound they were in that cool and cleared landscape, and they found just outside the door the black-clad gentleman with the cloven chin smilingly regarding them; and his chin seemed to grow longer and longer as he smiled.

XVIII. A RIDDLE OF FACES

Just behind him stood two other doctors: one, the familiar Dr. Quayle, of the blinking eyes and bleating voice; the other, a more commonplace but much more forcible figure, a stout young doctor with short, well-brushed hair and a round but resolute face. At the sight of the escape these two subordinates uttered a cry and sprang forward, but their superior remained motionless and smiling, and somehow the lack of his support seemed to arrest and freeze them in the very gesture of pursuit.

“Let them be,” he cried in a voice that cut like a blade of ice; and not only of ice, but of some awful primordial ice that had never been water.

“I want no devoted champions,” said the cutting voice; “even the folly of one’s friends bores one at last. You don’t suppose I should have let these lunatics out of their cells without good reason. I have the best and fullest reason. They can be let out of their cell today, because today the whole world has become their cell. I will have no more medieval mummery of chains and doors. Let them wander about the earth as they wandered about this garden, and I shall still be their easy master. Let them take the wings of the morning and abide in the uttermost parts of the sea — I am there. Whither shall they go from my presence and whither shall they flee from my spirit? Courage, Dr. Quayle, and do not be downhearted; the real days of tyranny are only beginning on this earth.”

And with that the Master laughed and swung away from them, almost as if his laugh was a bad thing for people to see.

“Might I speak to you a moment?” said Turnbull, stepping forward with a respectful resolution. But the shoulders of the Master only seemed to take on a new and unexpected angle of mockery as he strode away.

Turnbull swung round with great abruptness to the other two doctors, and said, harshly: “What in snakes does he mean — and who are you?”

“My name is Hutton,” said the short, stout man, “and I am — well, one of those whose business it is to uphold this establishment.”

“My name is Turnbull,” said the other; “I am one of those whose business it is to tear it to the ground.”

The small doctor smiled, and Turnbull’s anger seemed suddenly to steady him.

“But I don’t want to talk about that,” he said, calmly; “I only want to know what the Master of this asylum really means.”

Dr. Hutton’s smile broke into a laugh which, short as it was, had the suspicion of a shake in it. “I suppose you think that quite a simple question,” he said.

“I think it a plain question,” said Turnbull, “and one that deserves a plain answer. Why did the Master lock us up in a couple of cupboards like jars of pickles for a mortal month, and why does he now let us walk free in the garden again?”

“I understand,” said Hutton, with arched eyebrows, “that your complaint is that you are now free to walk in the garden.”

“My complaint is,” said Turnbull, stubbornly, “that if I am fit to walk freely now, I have been as fit for the last month. No one has examined me, no one has come near me. Your chief says that I am only free because he has made other arrangements. What are those arrangements?”

The young man with the round face looked down for a little while and smoked reflectively. The other and elder doctor had gone pacing nervously by himself upon the lawn. At length the round face was lifted again, and showed two round blue eyes with a certain frankness in them.

“Well, I don’t see that it can do any harm to tell you know,” he said. “You were shut up just then because it was just during that month that the Master was bringing off his big scheme. He was getting his bill through Parliament, and organizing the new medical police. But of course you haven’t heard of all that; in fact, you weren’t meant to.”

“Heard of all what?” asked the impatient inquirer.

“There’s a new law now, and the asylum powers are greatly extended. Even if you did escape now, any policeman would take you up in the next town if you couldn’t show a certificate of sanity from us.”

“Well,” continued Dr. Hutton, “the Master described before both Houses of Parliament the real scientific objection to all existing legislation about lunacy. As he very truly said, the mistake was in supposing insanity to be merely an exception or an extreme. Insanity, like forgetfulness, is simply a quality which enters more or less into all human beings; and for practical purposes it is more necessary to know whose mind is really trustworthy than whose has some accidental taint. We have therefore reversed the existing method, and people now have to prove that they are sane. In the first village you entered, the village constable would notice that you were not wearing on the left lapel of your coat the small pewter S which is now necessary to any one who walks about beyond asylum bounds or outside asylum hours.”

“You mean to say,” said Turnbull, “that this was what the Master of the asylum urged before the House of Commons?”

Dr. Hutton nodded with gravity.

“And you mean to say,” cried Turnbull, with a vibrant snort, “that that proposal was passed in an assembly that calls itself democratic?”

The doctor showed his whole row of teeth in a smile. “Oh, the assembly calls itself Socialist now,” he said, “But we explained to them that this was a question for men of science.”

Turnbull gave one stamp upon the gravel, then pulled himself together, and resumed: “But why should your infernal head medicine-man lock us up in separate cells while he was turning England into a madhouse? I’m not the Prime Minister; we’re not the House of Lords.”

“He wasn’t afraid of the Prime Minister,” replied Dr. Hutton; “he isn’t afraid of the House of Lords. But — —”

“Well?” inquired Turnbull, stamping again.

“He is afraid of you,” said Hutton, simply. “Why, didn’t you know?”

MacIan, who had not spoken yet, made one stride forward and stood with shaking limbs and shining eyes.

“He was afraid!” began Evan, thickly. “You mean to say that we — —”

“I mean to say the plain truth now that the danger is over,” said Hutton, calmly; “most certainly you two were the only people he ever was afraid of.” Then he added in a low but not inaudible voice: “Except one — whom he feared worse, and has buried deeper.”

“Come away,” cried MacIan, “this has to be thought about.”

Turnbull followed him in silence as he strode away, but just before he vanished, turned and spoke again to the doctors.

“But what has got hold of people?” he asked, abruptly. “Why should all England have gone dotty on the mere subject of dottiness?”

Dr. Hutton smiled his open smile once more and bowed slightly. “As to that also,” he replied, “I don’t want to make you vain.”

Turnbull swung round without a word, and he and his companion were lost in the lustrous leafage of the garden. They noticed nothing special about the scene, except that the garden seemed more exquisite than ever in the deepening sunset, and that there seemed to be many more people, whether patients or attendants, walking about in it.

From behind the two black-coated doctors as they stood on the lawn another figure somewhat similarly dressed strode hurriedly past them, having also grizzled hair and an open flapping frock-coat. Both his decisive step and dapper black array marked him out as another medical man, or at least a man in authority, and as he passed Turnbull the latter was aroused by a strong impression of having seen the man somewhere before. It was no one that he knew well, yet he was certain that it was someone at whom he had at sometime or other looked steadily. It was neither the face of a friend nor of an enemy; it aroused neither irritation nor tenderness, yet it was a face which had for some reason been of great importance in his life. Turning and returning, and making detours about the garden, he managed to study the man's face again and again — a moustached, somewhat military face with a monocle, the sort of face that is aristocratic without being distinguished. Turnbull could not remember any particular doctors in his decidedly healthy existence. Was the man a long-lost uncle, or was he only somebody who had sat opposite him regularly in a railway train? At that moment the man knocked down his own eye-glass with a gesture of annoyance; Turnbull remembered the gesture, and the truth sprang up solid in front of him. The man with the moustaches was Cumberland Vane, the London police magistrate before whom he and MacIan had once stood on their trial. The magistrate must have been transferred to some other official duties — to something connected with the inspection of asylums.

Turnbull's heart gave a leap of excitement which was half hope. As a magistrate Mr. Cumberland Vane had been somewhat careless and shallow, but certainly kindly, and not inaccessible to common sense so long as it was put to him in strictly conventional language. He was at least an authority of a more human and refreshing sort than the crank with the wagging beard or the fiend with the forked chin.

He went straight up to the magistrate, and said: “Good evening, Mr. Vane; I doubt if you remember me.”

Cumberland Vane screwed the eye-glass into his scowling face for an instant, and then said curtly but not uncivilly: “Yes, I remember you, sir; assault or battery, wasn't it? — a fellow broke your window. A tall fellow — McSomething — case made rather a noise afterwards.”

“MacIan is the name, sir,” said Turnbull, respectfully; “I have him here with me.”

“Eh!” said Vane very sharply. “Confound him! Has he got anything to do with this game?”

“Mr. Vane,” said Turnbull, pacifically, “I will not pretend that either he or I acted quite decorously on that occasion. You were very lenient with us, and did not treat us as criminals when you very well might. So I am sure you will give us your testimony that, even if we were criminals, we are not lunatics in any legal or medical sense whatever. I am sure you will use your influence for us.”

“My influence!” repeated the magistrate, with a slight start. “I don’t quite understand you.”

“I don’t know in what capacity you are here,” continued Turnbull, gravely, “but a legal authority of your distinction must certainly be here in an important one. Whether you are visiting and inspecting the place, or attached to it as some kind of permanent legal adviser, your opinion must still — —”

Cumberland Vane exploded with a detonation of oaths; his face was transfigured with fury and contempt, and yet in some odd way he did not seem specially angry with Turnbull.

“But Lord bless us and save us!” he gasped, at length; “I’m not here as an official at all. I’m here as a patient. The cursed pack of rat-catching chemists all say that I’ve lost my wits.”

“You!” cried Turnbull with terrible emphasis. “You! Lost your wits!”

In the rush of his real astonishment at this towering unreality Turnbull almost added: “Why, you haven’t got any to lose.” But he fortunately remembered the remains of his desperate diplomacy.

“This can’t go on,” he said, positively. “Men like MacIan and I may suffer unjustly all our lives, but a man like you must have influence.”

“There is only one man who has any influence in England now,” said Vane, and his high voice fell to a sudden and convincing quietude.

“Whom do you mean?” asked Turnbull.

“I mean that cursed fellow with the long split chin,” said the other.

“Is it really true,” asked Turnbull, “that he has been allowed to buy up and control such a lot? What put the country into such a state?”

Mr. Cumberland Vane laughed outright. “What put the country into such a state?” he asked. “Why, you did. When you were fool enough to agree to fight MacIan, after all, everybody was ready to believe that the Bank of England might paint itself pink with white spots."

"I don't understand," answered Turnbull. "Why should you be surprised at my fighting? I hope I have always fought."

"Well," said Cumberland Vane, airily, "you didn't believe in religion, you see — so we thought you were safe at any rate. You went further in your language than most of us wanted to go; no good in just hurting one's mother's feelings, I think. But of course we all knew you were right, and, really, we relied on you."

"Did you?" said the editor of *The Atheist* with a bursting heart. "I am sorry you did not tell me so at the time."

He walked away very rapidly and flung himself on a garden seat, and for some six minutes his own wrongs hid from him the huge and hilarious fact that Cumberland Vane had been locked up as a lunatic.

The garden of the madhouse was so perfectly planned, and answered so exquisitely to every hour of daylight, that one could almost fancy that the sunlight was caught there tangled in its tinted trees, as the wise men of Gotham tried to chain the spring to a bush. Or it seemed as if this ironic paradise still kept its unique dawn or its special sunset while the rest of the earthly globe rolled through its ordinary hours. There was one evening, or late afternoon, in particular, which Evan MacIan will remember in the last moments of death. It was what artists call a daffodil sky, but it is coarsened even by reference to a daffodil. It was of that innocent lonely yellow which has never heard of orange, though it might turn quite unconsciously into green. Against it the tops, one might say the turrets, of the clipt and ordered trees were outlined in that shade of veiled violet which tints the tops of lavender. A white early moon was hardly traceable upon that delicate yellow. MacIan, I say, will remember this tender and transparent evening, partly because of its virgin gold and silver, and partly because he passed beneath it through the most horrible instant of his life.

Turnbull was sitting on his seat on the lawn, and the golden evening impressed even his positive nature, as indeed it might have impressed the oxen in a field. He was shocked out of his idle mood of awe by seeing MacIan break from behind the bushes and run across the lawn with an action he had never seen in the man before, with all his experience of the eccentric humours of this Celt. MacIan fell on the bench, shaking it so that it rattled, and gripped it with his knees like one in dreadful pain of body.

That particular run and tumble is typical only of a man who has been hit by some sudden and incurable evil, who is bitten by a viper or condemned to be hanged. Turnbull looked up in the white face of his friend and enemy, and almost turned cold at what he saw there. He had seen the blue but gloomy eyes of the western Highlander troubled by as many tempests as his own west Highland seas, but there had always been a fixed star of faith behind the storms. Now the star had gone out, and there was only misery.

Yet MacIan had the strength to answer the question where Turnbull, taken by surprise, had not the strength to ask it.

"They are right, they are right!" he cried. "O my God! they are right, Turnbull. I ought to be here!"

He went on with shapeless fluency as if he no longer had the heart to choose or check his speech. "I suppose I ought to have guessed long ago — all my big dreams and schemes — and everyone being against us — but I was stuck up, you know."

"Do tell me about it, really," cried the atheist, and, faced with the furnace of the other's pain, he did not notice that he spoke with the affection of a father.

"I am mad, Turnbull," said Evan, with a dead clearness of speech, and leant back against the garden seat.

"Nonsense," said the other, clutching at the obvious cue of benevolent brutality, "this is one of your silly moods."

MacIan shook his head. "I know enough about myself," he said, "to allow for any mood, though it opened heaven or hell. But to see things — to see them walking solid in the sun — things that can't be there — real mystics never do that, Turnbull."

"What things?" asked the other, incredulously.

MacIan lowered his voice. "I saw *her*," he said, "three minutes ago — walking here in this hell yard."

Between trying to look scornful and really looking startled, Turnbull's face was confused enough to emit no speech, and Evan went on in monotonous sincerity:

"I saw her walk behind those blessed trees against that holy sky of gold as plain as I can see her whenever I shut my eyes. I did shut them, and opened them again, and she was still there — that is, of course, she wasn't —— She still had a little fur round her neck, but her dress was a shade brighter than when I really saw her."

“My dear fellow,” cried Turnbull, rallying a hearty laugh, “the fancies have really got hold of you. You mistook some other poor girl here for her.”

“Mistook some other — —” said MacIan, and words failed him altogether.

They sat for some moments in the mellow silence of the evening garden, a silence that was stifling for the sceptic, but utterly empty and final for the man of faith. At last he broke out again with the words: “Well, anyhow, if I’m mad, I’m glad I’m mad on that.”

Turnbull murmured some clumsy deprecation, and sat stolidly smoking to collect his thoughts; the next instant he had all his nerves engaged in the mere effort to sit still.

Across the clear space of cold silver and a pale lemon sky which was left by the gap in the ilex-trees there passed a slim, dark figure, a profile and the poise of a dark head like a bird’s, which really pinned him to his seat with the point of coincidence. With an effort he got to his feet, and said with a voice of affected insouciance: “By George! MacIan, she is uncommonly like — —”

“What!” cried MacIan, with a leap of eagerness that was heart-breaking, “do you see her, too?” And the blaze came back into the centre of his eyes.

Turnbull’s tawny eyebrows were pulled together with a peculiar frown of curiosity, and all at once he walked quickly across the lawn. MacIan sat rigid, but peered after him with open and parched lips. He saw the sight which either proved him sane or proved the whole universe half-witted; he saw the man of flesh approach that beautiful phantom, saw their gestures of recognition, and saw them against the sunset joining hands.

He could stand it no longer, but ran across to the path, turned the corner and saw standing quite palpable in the evening sunlight, talking with a casual grace to Turnbull, the face and figure which had filled his midnights with frightfully vivid or desperately half-forgotten features. She advanced quite pleasantly and coolly, and put out her hand. The moment that he touched it he knew that he was sane even if the solar system was crazy.

She was entirely elegant and unembarrassed. That is the awful thing about women — they refuse to be emotional at emotional moments, upon some such ludicrous pretext as there being someone else there. But MacIan was in a condition of criticism much less than the average masculine one, being in fact merely overturned by the rushing riddle of the events.

Evan does not know to this day what particular question he asked, but he vividly remembers that she answered, and every line or fluctuation of her face as she said it.

“Oh, don’t you know?” she said, smiling, and suddenly lifting her level brown eyebrows. “Haven’t you heard the news? I’m a lunatic.”

Then she added after a short pause, and with a sort of pride: “I’ve got a certificate.”

Her manner, by the matchless social stoicism of her sex, was entirely suited to a drawing-room, but Evan’s reply fell somewhat far short of such a standard, as he only said: “What the devil in hell does all this nonsense mean?”

“Really,” said the young lady, and laughed.

“I beg your pardon,” said the unhappy young man, rather wildly, “but what I mean is, why are you here in an asylum?”

The young woman broke again into one of the maddening and mysterious laughs of femininity. Then she composed her features, and replied with equal dignity: “Well, if it comes to that, why are you?”

The fact that Turnbull had strolled away and was investigating rhododendrons may have been due to Evan’s successful prayers to the other world, or possibly to his own pretty successful experience of this one. But though they two were as isolated as a new Adam and Eve in a pretty ornamental Eden, the lady did not relax by an inch the rigour of her badinage.

“I am locked up in the madhouse,” said Evan, with a sort of stiff pride, “because I tried to keep my promise to you.”

“Quite so,” answered the inexplicable lady, nodding with a perfectly blazing smile, “and I am locked up because it was to me you promised.”

“It is outrageous!” cried Evan; “it is impossible!”

“Oh, you can see my certificate if you like,” she replied with some hauteur.

MacIan stared at her and then at his boots, and then at the sky and then at her again. He was quite sure now that he himself was not mad, and the fact rather added to his perplexity.

Then he drew nearer to her, and said in a dry and dreadful voice: “Oh, don’t condescend to play the fool with such a fool as me. Are you really locked up here as a patient — because you helped us to escape?”

“Yes,” she said, still smiling, but her steady voice had a shake in it.

Evan flung his big elbow across his forehead and burst into tears.

The pure lemon of the sky faded into purer white as the great sunset silently collapsed. The birds settled back into the trees; the moon began to glow with its own light. Mr. James Turnbull continued his botanical researches into the structure of the rhododendron. But the lady did not move an inch until Evan had flung up his face again; and when he did he saw by the last gleam of sunlight that it was not only his face that was wet.

Mr. James Turnbull had all his life professed a profound interest in physical science, and the phenomena of a good garden were really a pleasure to him; but after three-quarters of an hour or so even the apostle of science began to find rhododendrus a bore, and was somewhat relieved when an unexpected development of events obliged him to transfer his researches to the equally interesting subject of hollyhocks, which grew some fifty feet farther along the path. The ostensible cause of his removal was the unexpected reappearance of his two other acquaintances walking and talking laboriously along the way, with the black head bent close to the brown one. Even hollyhocks detained Turnbull but a short time. Having rapidly absorbed all the important principles affecting the growth of those vegetables, he jumped over a flower-bed and walked back into the building. The other two came up along the slow course of the path talking and talking. No one but God knows what they said (for they certainly have forgotten), and if I remembered it I would not repeat it. When they parted at the head of the walk she put out her hand again in the same well-bred way, although it trembled; he seemed to restrain a gesture as he let it fall.

“If it is really always to be like this,” he said, thickly, “it would not matter if we were here for ever.”

“You tried to kill yourself four times for me,” she said, unsteadily, “and I have been chained up as a madwoman for you. I really think that after that — —”

“Yes, I know,” said Evan in a low voice, looking down. “After that we belong to each other. We are sort of sold to each other — until the stars fall.” Then he looked up suddenly, and said: “By the way, what is your name?”

“My name is Beatrice Drake,” she replied with complete gravity. “You can see it on my certificate of lunacy.”

XIX. THE LAST PARLEY

Turnbull walked away, wildly trying to explain to himself the presence of two personal acquaintances so different as Vane and the girl. As he skirted a low hedge of laurel, an enormously tall young man leapt over it, stood in front of him, and almost fell on his neck as if seeking to embrace him.

“Don’t you know me?” almost sobbed the young man, who was in the highest spirits. “Ain’t I written on your heart, old boy? I say, what did you do with my yacht?”

“Take your arms off my neck,” said Turnbull, irritably. “Are you mad?”

The young man sat down on the gravel path and went into ecstasies of laughter. “No, that’s just the fun of it — I’m not mad,” he replied. “They’ve shut me up in this place, and I’m not mad.” And he went off again into mirth as innocent as wedding-bells.

Turnbull, whose powers of surprise were exhausted, rolled his round grey eyes and said, “Mr. Wilkinson, I think,” because he could not think of anything else to say.

The tall man sitting on the gravel bowed with urbanity, and said: “Quite at your service. Not to be confused with the Wilkinsons of Cumberland; and as I say, old boy, what have you done with my yacht? You see, they’ve locked me up here — in this garden — and a yacht would be a sort of occupation for an unmarried man.”

“I am really horribly sorry,” began Turnbull, in the last stage of bated bewilderment and exasperation, “but really — —”

“Oh, I can see you can’t have it on you at the moment,” said Mr. Wilkinson with much intellectual magnanimity.

“Well, the fact is — —” began Turnbull again, and then the phrase was frozen on his mouth, for round the corner came the goatlike face and gleaming eye-glasses of Dr. Quayle.

“Ah, my dear Mr. Wilkinson,” said the doctor, as if delighted at a coincidence; “and Mr. Turnbull, too. Why, I want to speak to Mr. Turnbull.”

Mr. Turnbull made some movement rather of surrender than assent, and the doctor caught it up exquisitely, showing even more of his two front teeth. “I am sure Mr. Wilkinson will excuse us a moment.” And with flying frock-coat he led Turnbull rapidly round the corner of a path.

"My dear sir," he said, in a quite affectionate manner, "I do not mind telling you — you are such a very hopeful case — you understand so well the scientific point of view; and I don't like to see you bothered by the really hopeless cases. They are monotonous and maddening. The man you have just been talking to, poor fellow, is one of the strongest cases of pure *idee fixe* that we have. It's very sad, and I'm afraid utterly incurable. He keeps on telling everybody" — and the doctor lowered his voice confidentially— "he tells everybody that two people have taken is yacht. His account of how he lost it is quite incoherent."

Turnbull stamped his foot on the gravel path, and called out: "Oh, I can't stand this. Really — —"

"I know, I know," said the psychologist, mournfully; "it is a most melancholy case, and also fortunately a very rare one. It is so rare, in fact, that in one classification of these maladies it is entered under a heading by itself — Perdinavititis, mental inflammation creating the impression that one has lost a ship. Really," he added, with a kind of half-embarrassed guilt, "it's rather a feather in my cap. I discovered the only existing case of perdinavititis."

"But this won't do, doctor," said Turnbull, almost tearing his hair, "this really won't do. The man really did lose a ship. Indeed, not to put too fine a point on it, I took his ship."

Dr. Quayle swung round for an instant so that his silk-lined overcoat rustled, and stared singularly at Turnbull. Then he said with hurried amiability: "Why, of course you did. Quite so, quite so," and with courteous gestures went striding up the garden path. Under the first laburnum-tree he stopped, however, and pulling out his pencil and notebook wrote down feverishly: "Singular development in the Elenthero-maniac, Turnbull. Sudden manifestation of Rapinavititis — the delusion that one has stolen a ship. First case ever recorded."

Turnbull stood for an instant staggered into stillness. Then he ran raging round the garden to find MacIan, just as a husband, even a bad husband, will run raging to find his wife if he is full of a furious query. He found MacIan stalking moodily about the half-lit garden, after his extraordinary meeting with Beatrice. No one who saw his slouching stride and sunken head could have known that his soul was in the seventh heaven of ecstasy. He did not think; he did not even very definitely desire. He merely wallowed in memories, chiefly in material memories; words said with a certain cadence or trivial turns of the neck or wrist. Into the middle of his stationary and senseless enjoyment were thrust abruptly the projecting elbow and the projecting red beard of Turnbull. MacIan stepped back a little, and the soul in his eyes came very slowly to its windows. When James Turnbull had the glittering sword-point planted upon his breast he was in far less danger. For three pulsating seconds after the interruption MacIan was in a mood to have murdered his father.

And yet his whole emotional anger fell from him when he saw Turnbull's face, in which the eyes seemed to be bursting from the head like bullets. All the fire and fragrance even of young and honourable love faded for a moment before that stiff agony of interrogation.

"Are you hurt, Turnbull?" he asked, anxiously.

"I am dying," answered the other quite calmly. "I am in the quite literal sense of the words dying to know something. I want to know what all this can possibly mean."

MacIan did not answer, and he continued with asperity: "You are still thinking about that girl, but I tell you the whole thing is incredible. She's not the only person here. I've met the fellow Wilkinson, whose yacht we lost. I've met the very magistrate you were hauled up to when you broke my window. What can it mean — meeting all these old people again? One never meets such old friends again except in a dream."

Then after a silence he cried with a rending sincerity: "Are you really there, Evan? Have you ever been really there? Am I simply dreaming?"

MacIan had been listening with a living silence to every word, and now his face flamed with one of his rare revelations of life.

"No, you good atheist," he cried; "no, you clean, courteous, reverent, pious old blasphemer. No, you are not dreaming — you are waking up."

"What do you mean?"

"There are two states where one meets so many old friends," said MacIan; "one is a dream, the other is the end of the world."

"And you say — —"

"I say this is not a dream," said Evan in a ringing voice.

"You really mean to suggest — —" began Turnbull.

"Be silent! or I shall say it all wrong," said MacIan, breathing hard. "It's hard to explain, anyhow. An apocalypse is the opposite of a dream. A dream is falser than the outer life. But the end of the world is more actual than the world it ends. I don't say this is really the end of the world, but it's something like that — it’s the end of something. All the people are crowding into one corner. Everything is coming to a point.”

“What is the point?” asked Turnbull.

“I can’t see it,” said Evan; “it is too large and plain.”

Then after a silence he said: “I can’t see it — and yet I will try to describe it. Turnbull, three days ago I saw quite suddenly that our duel was not right after all.”

“Three days ago!” repeated Turnbull. “When and why did this illumination occur?”

“I knew I was not quite right,” answered Evan, “the moment I saw the round eyes of that old man in the cell.”

“Old man in the cell!” repeated his wondering companion. “Do you mean the poor old idiot who likes spikes to stick out?”

“Yes,” said MacIan, after a slight pause, “I mean the poor old idiot who likes spikes to stick out. When I saw his eyes and heard his old croaking accent, I knew that it would not really have been right to kill you. It would have been a venial sin.”

“I am much obliged,” said Turnbull, gruffly.

“You must give me time,” said MacIan, quite patiently, “for I am trying to tell the whole truth. I am trying to tell more of it than I know.”

“So you see I confess” — he went on with laborious distinctness— “I confess that all the people who called our duel mad were right in a way. I would confess it to old Cumberland Vane and his eye-glass. I would confess it even to that old ass in brown flannel who talked to us about Love. Yes, they are right in a way. I am a little mad.”

He stopped and wiped his brow as if he were literally doing heavy labour. Then he went on:

“I am a little mad; but, after all, it is only a little madness. When hundreds of high-minded men had fought duels about a jostle with the elbow or the ace of spades, the whole world need not have gone wild over my one little wildness. Plenty of other people have killed themselves between then and now. But all England has gone into captivity in order to take us captive. All England has turned into a lunatic asylum in order to prove us lunatics. Compared with the general public, I might positively be called sane.”

He stopped again, and went on with the same air of travailing with the truth:

“When I saw that, I saw everything; I saw the Church and the world. The Church in its earthly action has really touched morbid things — tortures and bleeding visions and blasts of extermination. The Church has had her madnesses, and I am one of them. I am the massacre of St. Bartholomew. I am the Inquisition of Spain. I do not say that we have never gone mad, but I say that we are fit to act as keepers to our enemies. Massacre is wicked even with a provocation, as in the Bartholomew. But your modern Nietzsche will tell you that massacre would be glorious without a provocation. Torture should be violently stopped, though the Church is doing it. But your modern Tolstoy will tell you that it ought not to be violently stopped whoever is doing it. In the long run, which is most mad — the Church or the world? Which is madder, the Spanish priest who permitted tyranny, or the Prussian sophist who admired it? Which is madder, the Russian priest who discourages righteous rebellion, or the Russian novelist who forbids it? That is the final and blasting test. The world left to itself grows wilder than any creed. A few days ago you and I were the maddest people in England. Now, by God! I believe we are the sanest. That is the only real question — whether the Church is really madder than the world. Let the rationalists run their own race, and let us see where *they* end. If the world has some healthy balance other than God, let the world find it. Does the world find it? Cut the world loose,” he cried with a savage gesture. “Does the world stand on its own end? Does it stand, or does it stagger?”

Turnbull remained silent, and MacIan said to him, looking once more at the earth: “It staggers, Turnbull. It cannot stand by itself; you know it cannot. It has been the sorrow of your life. Turnbull, this garden is not a dream, but an apocalyptic fulfilment. This garden is the world gone mad.”

Turnbull did not move his head, and he had been listening all the time; yet, somehow, the other knew that for the first time he was listening seriously.

“The world has gone mad,” said MacIan, “and it has gone mad about Us. The world takes the trouble to make a big mistake about every little mistake made by the Church. That is why they have turned ten counties to a madhouse; that is why crowds of kindly people are poured into this filthy melting-pot. Now is the judgement of this world. The Prince of this World is judged, and he is judged exactly because he is judging. There is at last one simple solution to the quarrel between the ball and the cross — —”

Turnbull for the first time started.

“The ball and — —” he repeated.

“What is the matter with you?” asked MacIan.

“I had a dream,” said Turnbull, thickly and obscurely, “in which I saw the cross struck crooked and the ball secure — —”

“I had a dream,” said MacIan, “in which I saw the cross erect and the ball invisible. They were both dreams from hell. There must be some round earth to plant the cross upon. But here is the awful difference — that the round world will not consent even to continue round. The astronomers are always telling us that it is shaped like an orange, or like an egg, or like a German sausage. They beat the old world about like a bladder and thump it into a thousand shapeless shapes. Turnbull, we cannot trust the ball to be always a ball; we cannot trust reason to be reasonable. In the end the great terrestrial globe will go quite lop-sided, and only the cross will stand upright.”

There was a long silence, and then Turnbull said, hesitatingly: “Has it occurred to you that since — since those two dreams, or whatever they were — —”

“Well?” murmured MacIan.

“Since then,” went on Turnbull, in the same low voice, “since then we have never even looked for our swords.”

“You are right,” answered Evan almost inaudibly. “We have found something which we both hate more than we ever hated each other, and I think I know its name.”

Turnbull seemed to frown and flinch for a moment. “It does not much matter what you call it,” he said, “so long as you keep out of its way.”

The bushes broke and snapped abruptly behind them, and a very tall figure towered above Turnbull with an arrogant stoop and a projecting chin, a chin of which the shape showed queerly even in its shadow upon the path.

“You see that is not so easy,” said MacIan between his teeth.

They looked up into the eyes of the Master, but looked only for a moment. The eyes were full of a frozen and icy wrath, a kind of utterly heartless hatred. His voice was for the first time devoid of irony. There was no more sarcasm in it than there is in an iron club.

“You will be inside the building in three minutes,” he said, with pulverizing precision, “or you will be fired on by the artillery at all the windows. There is too much talking in this garden; we intend to close it. You will be accommodated indoors.”

“Ah!” said MacIan, with a long and satisfied sigh, “then I was right.”

And he turned his back and walked obediently towards the building. Turnbull seemed to canvass for a few minutes the notion of knocking the Master down, and then fell under the same almost fairy fatalism as his companion. In some strange way it did seem that the more smoothly they yielded, the more swiftly would events sweep on to some great collision.

XX. DIES IRAE

As they advanced towards the asylum they looked up at its rows on rows of windows, and understood the Master’s material threat. By means of that complex but concealed machinery which ran like a network of nerves over the whole fabric, there had been shot out under every window-ledge rows and rows of polished-steel cylinders, the cold miracles of modern gunnery. They commanded the whole garden and the whole country-side, and could have blown to pieces an army corps.

This silent declaration of war had evidently had its complete effect. As MacIan and Turnbull walked steadily but slowly towards the entrance hall of the institution, they could see that most, or at least many, of the patients had already gathered there as well as the staff of doctors and the whole regiment of keepers and assistants. But when they entered the lamp-lit hall, and the high iron door was clashed to and locked behind them, yet a new amazement leapt into their eyes, and the stalwart Turnbull almost fell. For he saw a sight which was indeed, as MacIan had said — either the Day of Judgement or a dream.

Within a few feet of him at one corner of the square of standing people stood the girl he had known in Jersey, Madeleine Durand. She looked straight at him with a steady smile which lit up the scene of darkness and unreason like the light of some honest fireside. Her square face and throat were thrown back, as her habit was, and there was something almost sleepy in the geniality of her eyes. He saw her first, and for a few seconds saw her only; then the outer edge of his eyesight took in all the other staring faces, and he saw all the faces he had ever seen for weeks and months past. There was the Tolstoyan in Jaeger flannel, with the yellow beard that went backward and the foolish nose and eyes that went forward, with the curiosity of a crank. He was talking eagerly to Mr. Gordon, the corpulent Jew shopkeeper whom they had once gagged in his own shop. There was the tipsy old Hertfordshire rustic; he was talking energetically to himself. There was not only Mr. Vane the magistrate, but the clerk of Mr. Vane, the magistrate. There was not only Miss Drake of the motor-car, but also Miss Drake’s chauffeur. Nothing wild or unfamiliar could have produced upon Turnbull such a nightmare impression as that ring of familiar faces. Yet he had one intellectual shock which was greater than all the others. He stepped impulsively forward towards Madeleine, and then wavered with a kind of wild humility. As he did so he caught sight of another square face behind Madeleine's, a face with long grey whiskers and an austere stare. It was old Durand, the girls' father; and when Turnbull saw him he saw the last and worst marvel of that monstrous night. He remembered Durand; he remembered his monotonous, everlasting lucidity, his stupefyingly sensible views of everything, his colossal contentment with truisms merely because they were true. "Confound it all!" cried Turnbull to himself, "if *he* is in the asylum, there can't be anyone outside." He drew nearer to Madeleine, but still doubtfully and all the more so because she still smiled at him. MacIan had already gone across to Beatrice with an air of fright.

Then all these bewildered but partly amicable recognitions were cloven by a cruel voice which always made all human blood turn bitter. The Master was standing in the middle of the room surveying the scene like a great artist looking at a completed picture. Handsome as he looked, they had never seen so clearly what was really hateful in his face; and even then they could only express it by saying that the arched brows and the long emphatic chin gave it always a look of being lit from below, like the face of some infernal actor.

"This is indeed a cosy party," he said, with glittering eyes.

The Master evidently meant to say more, but before he could say anything M. Durand had stepped right up to him and was speaking.

He was speaking exactly as a French bourgeois speaks to the manager of a restaurant. That is, he spoke with rattling and breathless rapidity, but with no incoherence, and therefore with no emotion. It was a steady, monotonous vivacity, which came not seemingly from passion, but merely from the reason having been sent off at a gallop. He was saying something like this:

"You refuse me my half-bottle of Medoc, the drink the most wholesome and the most customary. You refuse me the company and obedience of my daughter, which Nature herself indicates. You refuse me the beef and mutton, without pretence that it is a fast of the Church. You now forbid me the promenade, a thing necessary to a person of my age. It is useless to tell me that you do all this by law. Law rests upon the social contract. If the citizen finds himself despoiled of such pleasures and powers as he would have had even in the savage state, the social contract is annulled."

"It's no good chattering away, Monsieur," said Hutton, for the Master was silent. "The place is covered with machine-guns. We've got to obey our orders, and so have you."

"The machinery is of the most perfect," assented Durand, somewhat irrelevantly; "worked by petroleum, I believe. I only ask you to admit that if such things fall below the comfort of barbarism, the social contract is annulled. It is a pretty little point of theory."

"Oh! I dare say," said Hutton.

Durand bowed quite civilly and withdrew.

"A cosy party," resumed the Master, scornfully, "and yet I believe some of you are in doubt about how we all came together. I will explain it, ladies and gentlemen; I will explain everything. To whom shall I specially address myself? To Mr. James Turnbull. He has a scientific mind."

Turnbull seemed to choke with sudden protest. The Master seemed only to cough out of pure politeness and proceeded: "Mr. Turnbull will agree with me," he said, "when I say that we long felt in scientific circles that great harm was done by such a legend as that of the Crucifixion."

Turnbull growled something which was presumably assent.

The Master went on smoothly: "It was in vain for us to urge that the incident was irrelevant; that there were many such fanatics, many such executions. We were forced to take the thing thoroughly in hand, to investigate it in the spirit of scientific history, and with the assistance of Mr. Turnbull and others we were happy in being able to announce that this alleged Crucifixion never occurred at all."

MacIan lifted his head and looked at the Master steadily, but Turnbull did not look up.

"This, we found, was the only way with all superstitions," continued the speaker; "it was necessary to deny them historically, and we have done it with great success in the case of miracles and such things. Now within our own time there arose an unfortunate fuss which threatened (as Mr. Turnbull would say) to galvanize the corpse of Christianity into a fictitious life — the alleged case of a Highland eccentric who wanted to fight for the Virgin."

MacIan, quite white, made a step forward, but the speaker did not alter his easy attitude or his flow of words. "Again we urged that this duel was not to be admired, that it was a mere brawl, but the people were ignorant and romantic. There were signs of treating this alleged Highlander and his alleged opponent as heroes. We tried all other means of arresting this reactionary hero worship. Working men who betted on the duel were imprisoned for gambling. Working men who drank the health of a duellist were imprisoned for drunkenness. But the popular excitement about the alleged duel continued, and we had to fall back on our old historical method. We investigated, on scientific principles, the story of MacIan's challenge, and we are happy to be able to inform you that the whole story of the attempted duel is a fable. There never was any challenge. There never was any man named MacIan. It is a melodramatic myth, like Calvary."

Not a soul moved save Turnbull, who lifted his head; yet there was the sense of a silent explosion.

"The whole story of the MacIan challenge," went on the Master, beaming at them all with a sinister benignity, "has been found to originate in the obsessions of a few pathological types, who are now all fortunately in our care. There is, for instance, a person here of the name of Gordon, formerly the keeper of a curiosity shop. He is a victim of the disease called Vinculomania — the impression that one has been bound or tied up. We have also a case of Fugacity (Mr. Whimpey), who imagines that he was chased by two men."

The indignant faces of the Jew shopkeeper and the Magdalen Don started out of the crowd in their indignation, but the speaker continued:

"One poor woman we have with us," he said, in a compassionate voice, "believes she was in a motor-car with two such men; this is the well-known illusion of speed on which I need not dwell. Another wretched woman has the simple egotistic mania that she has caused the duel. Madeleine Durand actually professes to have been the subject of the fight between MacIan and his enemy, a fight which, if it occurred at all, certainly began long before. But it never occurred at all. We have taken in hand every person who professed to have seen such a thing, and proved them all to be unbalanced. That is why they are here."

The Master looked round the room, just showing his perfect teeth with the perfection of artistic cruelty, exalted for a moment in the enormous simplicity of his success, and then walked across the hall and vanished through an inner door. His two lieutenants, Quayle and Hutton, were left standing at the head of the great army of servants and keepers.

"I hope we shall have no more trouble," said Dr. Quayle pleasantly enough, and addressing Turnbull, who was leaning heavily upon the back of a chair.

Still looking down, Turnbull lifted the chair an inch or two from the ground. Then he suddenly swung it above his head and sent it at the inquiring doctor with an awful crash which sent one of its wooden legs loose along the floor and crammed the doctor gasping into a corner. MacIan gave a great shout, snatched up the loose chair-leg, and, rushing on the other doctor, felled him with a blow. Twenty attendants rushed to capture the rebels; MacIan flung back three of them and Turnbull went over on top of one, when from behind them all came a shriek as of something quite fresh and frightful.

Two of the three passages leading out of the hall were choked with blue smoke. Another instant and the hall was full of the fog of it, and red sparks began to swarm like scarlet bees.

“The place is on fire!” cried Quayle with a scream of indecent terror. “Oh, who can have done it? How can it have happened?”

A light had come into Turnbull’s eyes. “How did the French Revolution happen?” he asked.

“Oh, how should I know!” wailed the other.

“Then I will tell you,” said Turnbull; “it happened because some people fancied that a French grocer was as respectable as he looked.”

Even as he spoke, as if by confirmation, old Mr. Durand re-entered the smoky room quite placidly, wiping the petroleum from his hands with a handkerchief. He had set fire to the building in accordance with the strict principles of the social contract.

But MacIan had taken a stride forward and stood there shaken and terrible. “Now,” he cried, panting, “now is the judgement of the world. The doctors will leave this place; the keepers will leave this place. They will leave us in charge of the machinery and the machine-guns at the windows. But we, the lunatics, will wait to be burned alive if only we may see them go.”

“How do you know we shall go?” asked Hutton, fiercely.

“You believe nothing,” said MacIan, simply, “and you are insupportably afraid of death.”

“So this is suicide,” sneered the doctor; “a somewhat doubtful sign of sanity.”

“Not at all — this is vengeance,” answered Turnbull, quite calmly; “a thing which is completely healthy.”

“You think the doctors will go,” said Hutton, savagely.

“The keepers have gone already,” said Turnbull.

Even as they spoke the main doors were burst open in mere brutal panic, and all the officers and subordinates of the asylum rushed away across the garden pursued by the smoke. But among the ticketed maniacs not a man or woman moved.

"We hate dying," said Turnbull, with composure, "but we hate you even more. This is a successful revolution."

In the roof above their heads a panel shot back, showing a strip of star-lit sky and a huge thing made of white metal, with the shape and fins of a fish, swinging as if at anchor. At the same moment a steel ladder slid down from the opening and struck the floor, and the cleft chin of the mysterious Master was thrust into the opening. "Quayle, Hutton," he said, "you will escape with me." And they went up the ladder like automata of lead.

Long after they had clambered into the car, the creature with the cloven face continued to leer down upon the smoke-stung crowd below. Then at last he said in a silken voice and with a smile of final satisfaction:

"By the way, I fear I am very absent minded. There is one man specially whom, somehow, I always forget. I always leave him lying about. Once I mislaid him on the Cross of St. Paul's. So silly of me; and now I've forgotten him in one of those little cells where your fire is burning. Very unfortunate — especially for him." And nodding genially, he climbed into his flying ship.

MacIan stood motionless for two minutes, and then rushed down one of the suffocating corridors till he found the flames. Turnbull looked once at Madeleine, and followed.

* * *

MacIan, with singed hair, smoking garments, and smarting hands and face, had already broken far enough through the first barriers of burning timber to come within cry of the cells he had once known. It was impossible, however, to see the spot where the old man lay dead or alive; not now through darkness, but through scorching and aching light. The site of the old half-wit's cell was now the heart of a standing forest of fire — the flames as thick and yellow as a cornfield. Their incessant shrieking and crackling was like a mob shouting against an orator. Yet through all that deafening density MacIan thought he heard a small and separate sound. When he heard it he rushed forward as if to plunge into that furnace, but Turnbull arrested him by an elbow.

“Let me go!” cried Evan, in agony; “it’s the poor old beggar’s voice — he’s still alive, and shouting for help.”

“Listen!” said Turnbull, and lifted one finger from his clenched hand.

“Or else he is shrieking with pain,” protested MacIan. “I will not endure it.”

“Listen!” repeated Turnbull, grimly. “Did you ever hear anyone shout for help or shriek with pain in that voice?”

The small shrill sounds which came through the crash of the conflagration were indeed of an odd sort, and MacIan turned a face of puzzled inquiry to his companion.

“He is singing,” said Turnbull, simply.

A remaining rampart fell, crushing the fire, and through the diminished din of it the voice of the little old lunatic came clearer. In the heart of that white-hot hell he was singing like a bird. What he was singing it was not very easy to follow, but it seemed to be something about playing in the golden hay.

“Good Lord!” cried Turnbull, bitterly, “there seem to be some advantages in really being an idiot.” Then advancing to the fringe of the fire he called out on chance to the invisible singer: “Can you come out? Are you cut off?”

“God help us all!” said MacIan, with a shudder; “he’s laughing now.”

At whatever stage of being burned alive the invisible now found himself, he was now shaking out peals of silvery and hilarious laughter. As he listened, MacIan’s two eyes began to glow, as if a strange thought had come into his head.

“Fool, come out and save yourself!” shouted Turnbull.

“No, by Heaven! that is not the way,” cried Evan, suddenly. “Father,” he shouted, “come out and save us all!”

The fire, though it had dropped in one or two places, was, upon the whole, higher and more unconquerable than ever. Separate tall flames shot up and spread out above them like the fiery cloisters of some infernal cathedral, or like a grove of red tropical trees in the garden of the devil. Higher yet in the purple hollow of the night the topmost flames leapt again and again fruitlessly at the stars, like golden dragons chained but struggling. The towers and domes of the oppressive smoke seemed high and far enough to drown distant planets in a London fog. But if we exhausted all frantic similes for that frantic scene, the main impression about the fire would still be its ranked upstanding rigidity and a sort of roaring stillness. It was literally a wall of fire.

“Father,” cried MacIan, once more, “come out of it and save us all!” Turnbull was staring at him as he cried.

The tall and steady forest of fire must have been already a portent visible to the whole circle of land and sea. The red flush of it lit up the long sides of white ships far out in the German Ocean, and picked out like piercing rubies the windows in the villages on the distant heights. If any villagers or sailors were looking towards it they must have seen a strange sight as MacIan cried out for the third time.

That forest of fire wavered, and was cloven in the centre; and then the whole of one half of it leaned one way as a cornfield leans all one way under the load of the wind. Indeed, it looked as if a great wind had sprung up and driven the great fire aslant. Its smoke was no longer sent up to choke the stars, but was trailed and dragged across county after county like one dreadful banner of defeat.

But it was not the wind; or, if it was the wind, it was two winds blowing in opposite directions. For while one half of the huge fire sloped one way towards the inland heights, the other half, at exactly the same angle, sloped out eastward towards the sea. So that earth and ocean could behold, where there had been a mere fiery mass, a thing divided like a V — a cloven tongue of flame. But if it were a prodigy for those distant, it was something beyond speech for those quite near. As the echoes of Evan’s last appeal rang and died in the universal uproar, the fiery vault over his head opened down the middle, and, reeling back in two great golden billows, hung on each side as huge and harmless as two sloping hills lie on each side of a valley. Down the centre of this trough, or chasm, a little path ran, cleared of all but ashes, and down this little path was walking a little old man singing as if he were alone in a wood in spring.

When James Turnbull saw this he suddenly put out a hand and seemed to support himself on the strong shoulder of Madeleine Durand. Then after a moment’s hesitation he put his other hand on the shoulder of MacIan. His blue eyes looked extraordinarily brilliant and beautiful. In many sceptical papers and magazines afterwards he was sadly or sternly rebuked for having abandoned the certainties of materialism. All his life up to that moment he had been most honestly certain that materialism was a fact. But he was unlike the writers in the magazines precisely in this — that he preferred a fact even to materialism.

As the little singing figure came nearer and nearer, Evan fell on his knees, and after an instant Beatrice followed; then Madeleine fell on her knees, and after a longer instant Turnbull followed. Then the little old man went past them singing down that corridor of flames. They had not looked at his face.

When he had passed they looked up. While the first light of the fire had shot east and west, painting the sides of ships with fire-light or striking red sparks out of windowed houses, it had not hitherto struck upward, for there was above it the ponderous and rococo cavern of its own monstrous coloured smoke. But now the fire was turned to left and right like a woman's hair parted in the middle, and now the shafts of its light could shoot up into empty heavens and strike anything, either bird or cloud. But it struck something that was neither cloud nor bird. Far, far away up in those huge hollows of space something was flying swiftly and shining brightly, something that shone too bright and flew too fast to be any of the fowls of the air, though the red light lit it from underneath like the breast of a bird. Everyone knew it was a flying ship, and everyone knew whose.

As they stared upward the little speck of light seemed slightly tilted, and two black dots dropped from the edge of it. All the eager, upturned faces watched the two dots as they grew bigger and bigger in their downward rush. Then someone screamed, and no one looked up any more. For the two bodies, larger every second flying, spread out and sprawling in the fire-light, were the dead bodies of the two doctors whom Professor Lucifer had carried with him — the weak and sneering Quayle, the cold and clumsy Hutton. They went with a crash into the thick of the fire.

"They are gone!" screamed Beatrice, hiding her head. "O God! The are lost!"

Evan put his arm about her, and remembered his own vision.

"No, they are not lost," he said. "They are saved. He has taken away no souls with him, after all."

He looked vaguely about at the fire that was already fading, and there among the ashes lay two shining things that had survived the fire, his sword and Turnbull's, fallen haphazard in the pattern of a cross.

MANALIVE

This 1912 novel portrays the Christian theme of the ‘holy fool’, used in other works by Chesterton, as well in famous novels such as Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot* and Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*.

The novel forms two parts, with the first concerning the arrival of a new tenant at Beacon House, a London boarding establishment. The mysterious newcomer is tentatively identified by lodger Arthur Inglewood as an ex-schoolmate, named Innocent Smith, whose arrival breathes new life into the household with his unusual antics.

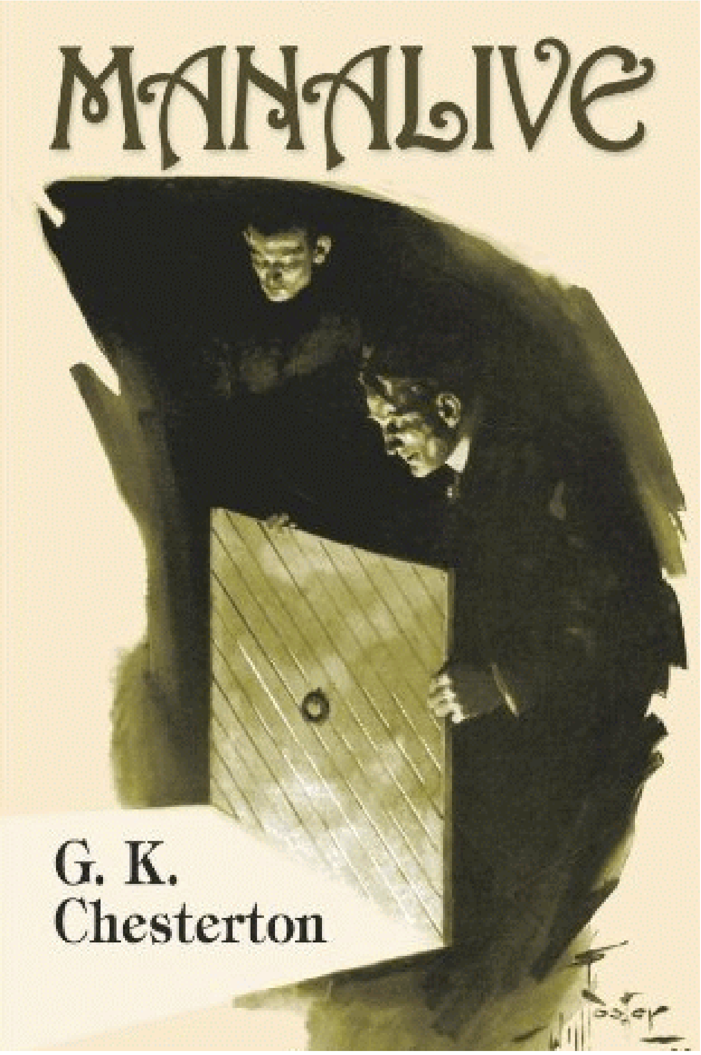
MANALIVE
G. K.
Chesterton

The first edition

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Part II: The Explanations of Innocent Smith

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Part I: The Enigmas of Innocent Smith

Chapter I

How the Great Wind Came to Beacon House

A wind sprang high in the west, like a wave of unreasonable happiness, and tore eastward across England, trailing with it the frosty scent of forests and the cold intoxication of the sea. In a million holes and corners it refreshed a man like a flagon, and astonished him like a blow. In the inmost chambers of intricate and embowered houses it woke like a domestic explosion, littering the floor with some professor's papers till they seemed as precious as fugitive, or blowing out the candle by which a boy read "Treasure Island" and wrapping him in roaring dark. But everywhere it bore drama into undramatic lives, and carried the trump of crisis across the world. Many a harassed mother in a mean backyard had looked at five dwarfish shirts on the clothes-line as at some small, sick tragedy; it was as if she had hanged her five children. The wind came, and they were full and kicking as if five fat imps had sprung into them; and far down in her oppressed subconscious she half-remembered those coarse comedies of her fathers when the elves still dwelt in the homes of men. Many an unnoticed girl in a dank walled garden had tossed herself into the hammock with the same intolerant gesture with which she might have tossed herself into the Thames; and that wind rent the waving wall of woods and lifted the hammock like a balloon, and showed her shapes of quaint clouds far beyond, and pictures of bright villages far below, as if she rode heaven in a fairy boat. Many a dusty clerk or cleric, plodding a telescopic road of poplars, thought for the hundredth time that they were like the plumes of a hearse; when this invisible energy caught and swung and clashed them round his head like a wreath or salutation of seraphic wings. There was in it something more inspired and authoritative even than the old wind of the proverb; for this was the good wind that blows nobody harm.

The flying blast struck London just where it scales the northern heights, terrace above terrace, as precipitous as Edinburgh. It was round about this place that some poet, probably drunk, looked up astonished at all those streets gone skywards, and (thinking vaguely of glaciers and roped mountaineers) gave it the name of Swiss Cottage, which it has never been able to shake off. At some stage of those heights a terrace of tall gray houses, mostly empty and almost as desolate as the Grampians, curved round at the western end, so that the last building, a boarding establishment called “Beacon House,” offered abruptly to the sunset its high, narrow and towering termination, like the prow of some deserted ship.

The ship, however, was not wholly deserted. The proprietor of the boarding-house, a Mrs. Duke, was one of those helpless persons against whom fate wars in vain; she smiled vaguely both before and after all her calamities; she was too soft to be hurt. But by the aid (or rather under the orders) of a strenuous niece she always kept the remains of a clientele, mostly of young but listless folks. And there were actually five inmates standing disconsolately about the garden when the great gale broke at the base of the terminal tower behind them, as the sea bursts against the base of an outstanding cliff.

All day that hill of houses over London had been domed and sealed up with cold cloud. Yet three men and two girls had at last found even the gray and chilly garden more tolerable than the black and cheerless interior. When the wind came it split the sky and shouldered the cloudland left and right, unbarring great clear furnaces of evening gold. The burst of light released and the burst of air blowing seemed to come almost simultaneously; and the wind especially caught everything in a throttling violence. The bright short grass lay all one way like brushed hair. Every shrub in the garden tugged at its roots like a dog at the collar, and strained every leaping leaf after the hunting and exterminating element. Now and again a twig would snap and fly like a bolt from an arbalist. The three men stood stiffly and aslant against the wind, as if leaning against a wall. The two ladies disappeared into the house; rather, to speak truly, they were blown into the house. Their two frocks, blue and white, looked like two big broken flowers, driving and drifting upon the gale. Nor is such a poetic fancy inappropriate, for there was something oddly romantic about this inrush of air and light after a long, leaden and unlifting day. Grass and garden trees seemed glittering with something at once good and unnatural, like a fire from fairyland. It seemed like a strange sunrise at the wrong end of the day.

The girl in white dived in quickly enough, for she wore a white hat of the proportions of a parachute, which might have wafted her away into the coloured clouds of evening. She was their one splash of splendour, and irradiated wealth in that impecunious place (staying there temporarily with a friend), an heiress in a small way, by name Rosamund Hunt, brown-eyed, round-faced, but resolute and rather boisterous. On top of her wealth she was good-humoured and rather good-looking; but she had not married, perhaps because there was always a crowd of men around her. She was not fast (though some might have called her vulgar), but she gave irresolute youths an impression of being at once popular and inaccessible. A man felt as if he had fallen in love with Cleopatra, or as if he were asking for a great actress at the stage door. Indeed, some theatrical spangles seemed to cling about Miss Hunt; she played the guitar and the mandoline; she always wanted charades; and with that great rending of the sky by sun and storm, she felt a girlish melodrama swell again within her. To the crashing orchestration of the air the clouds rose like the curtain of some long-expected pantomime.

Nor, oddly, was the girl in blue entirely unimpressed by this apocalypse in a private garden; though she was one of most prosaic and practical creatures alive. She was, indeed, no other than the strenuous niece whose strength alone upheld that mansion of decay. But as the gale swung and swelled the blue and white skirts till they took on the monstrous contours of Victorian crinolines, a sunken memory stirred in her that was almost romance — a memory of a dusty volume of *Punch* in an aunt’s house in infancy: pictures of crinoline hoops and croquet hoops and some pretty story, of which perhaps they were a part. This half-perceptible fragrance in her thoughts faded almost instantly, and Diana Duke entered the house even more promptly than her companion. Tall, slim, aquiline, and dark, she seemed made for such swiftness. In body she was of the breed of those birds and beasts that are at once long and alert, like greyhounds or herons or even like an innocent snake. The whole house revolved on her as on a rod of steel. It would be wrong to say that she commanded; for her own efficiency was so impatient that she obeyed herself before any one else obeyed her. Before electricians could mend a bell or locksmiths open a door, before dentists could pluck a tooth or butlers draw a tight cork, it was done already with the silent violence of her slim hands. She was light; but there was nothing leaping about her lightness. She spurned the ground, and she meant to spurn it. People talk of the pathos and failure of plain women; but it is a more terrible thing that a beautiful woman may succeed in everything but womanhood.

“It’s enough to blow your head off,” said the young woman in white, going to the looking-glass.

The young woman in blue made no reply, but put away her gardening gloves, and then went to the sideboard and began to spread out an afternoon cloth for tea.

"Enough to blow your head off, I say," said Miss Rosamund Hunt, with the unruffled cheeriness of one whose songs and speeches had always been safe for an encore.

"Only your hat, I think," said Diana Duke, "but I dare say that is sometimes more important."

Rosamund's face showed for an instant the offence of a spoilt child, and then the humour of a very healthy person. She broke into a laugh and said, "Well, it would have to be a big wind to blow your head off."

There was another silence; and the sunset breaking more and more from the sundering clouds, filled the room with soft fire and painted the dull walls with ruby and gold.

"Somebody once told me," said Rosamund Hunt, "that it's easier to keep one's head when one has lost one's heart."

"Oh, don't talk such rubbish," said Diana with savage sharpness.

Outside, the garden was clad in a golden splendour; but the wind was still stiffly blowing, and the three men who stood their ground might also have considered the problem of hats and heads. And, indeed, their position, touching hats, was somewhat typical of them. The tallest of the three abode the blast in a high silk hat, which the wind seemed to charge as vainly as that other sullen tower, the house behind him. The second man tried to hold on a stiff straw hat at all angles, and ultimately held it in his hand. The third had no hat, and, by his attitude, seemed never to have had one in his life. Perhaps this wind was a kind of fairy wand to test men and women, for there was much of the three men in this difference.

The man in the solid silk hat was the embodiment of silkiness and solidity. He was a big, bland, bored and (as some said) boring man, with flat fair hair and handsome heavy features; a prosperous young doctor by the name of Warner. But if his blondness and blandness seemed at first a little fatuous, it is certain that he was no fool. If Rosamund Hunt was the only person there with much money, he was the only person who had as yet found any kind of fame. His treatise on "The Probable Existence of Pain in the Lowest Organisms" had been universally hailed by the scientific world as at once solid and daring. In short, he undoubtedly had brains; and perhaps it was not his fault if they were the kind of brains that most men desire to analyze with a poker.

The young man who put his hat off and on was a scientific amateur in a small way, and worshipped the great Warner with a solemn freshness. It was, in fact, at his invitation that the distinguished doctor was present; for Warner lived in no such ramshackle lodging-house, but in a professional palace in Harley Street. This young man was really the youngest and best-looking of the three. But he was one of those persons, both male and female, who seem doomed to be good-looking and insignificant. Brown-haired, high-coloured, and shy, he seemed to lose the delicacy of his features in a sort of blur of brown and red as he stood blushing and blinking against the wind. He was one of those obvious unnoticeable people: every one knew that he was Arthur Inglewood, unmarried, moral, decidedly intelligent, living on a little money of his own, and hiding himself in the two hobbies of photography and cycling. Everybody knew him and forgot him; even as he stood there in the glare of golden sunset there was something about him indistinct, like one of his own red-brown amateur photographs.

The third man had no hat; he was lean, in light, vaguely sporting clothes, and the large pipe in his mouth made him look all the leaner. He had a long ironical face, blue-black hair, the blue eyes of an Irishman, and the blue chin of an actor. An Irishman he was, an actor he was not, except in the old days of Miss Hunt’s charades, being, as a matter of fact, an obscure and flippant journalist named Michael Moon. He had once been hazily supposed to be reading for the Bar; but (as Warner would say with his rather elephantine wit) it was mostly at another kind of bar that his friends found him. Moon, however, did not drink, nor even frequently get drunk; he simply was a gentleman who liked low company. This was partly because company is quieter than society: and if he enjoyed talking to a barmaid (as apparently he did), it was chiefly because the barmaid did the talking. Moreover he would often bring other talent to assist her. He shared that strange trick of all men of his type, intellectual and without ambition — the trick of going about with his mental inferiors. There was a small resilient Jew named Moses Gould in the same boarding-house, a man whose negro vitality and vulgarity amused Michael so much that he went round with him from bar to bar, like the owner of a performing monkey.

The colossal clearance which the wind had made of that cloudy sky grew clearer and clearer; chamber within chamber seemed to open in heaven. One felt one might at last find something lighter than light. In the fullness of this silent effulgence all things collected their colours again: the gray trunks turned silver, and the drab gravel gold. One bird fluttered like a loosened leaf from one tree to another, and his brown feathers were brushed with fire.

“Inglewood,” said Michael Moon, with his blue eye on the bird, “have you any friends?”

Dr. Warner mistook the person addressed, and turning a broad beaming face, said, —

“Oh yes, I go out a great deal.”

Michael Moon gave a tragic grin, and waited for his real informant, who spoke a moment after in a voice curiously cool, fresh and young, as coming out of that brown and even dusty interior.

“Really,” answered Inglewood, “I’m afraid I’ve lost touch with my old friends. The greatest friend I ever had was at school, a fellow named Smith. It’s odd you should mention it, because I was thinking of him to-day, though I haven’t seen him for seven or eight years. He was on the science side with me at school — a clever fellow though queer; and he went up to Oxford when I went to Germany. The fact is, it’s rather a sad story. I often asked him to come and see me, and when I heard nothing I made inquiries, you know. I was shocked to learn that poor Smith had gone off his head. The accounts were a bit cloudy, of course, some saying that he had recovered again; but they always say that. About a year ago I got a telegram from him myself. The telegram, I’m sorry to say, put the matter beyond a doubt.”

“Quite so,” assented Dr. Warner stolidly; “insanity is generally incurable.”

“So is sanity,” said the Irishman, and studied him with a dreary eye.

“Symptoms?” asked the doctor. “What was this telegram?”

“It’s a shame to joke about such things,” said Inglewood, in his honest, embarrassed way; “the telegram was Smith’s illness, not Smith. The actual words were, `Man found alive with two legs.’”

“Alive with two legs,” repeated Michael, frowning. “Perhaps a version of alive and kicking? I don’t know much about people out of their senses; but I suppose they ought to be kicking.”

“And people in their senses?” asked Warner, smiling.

“Oh, they ought to be kicked,” said Michael with sudden heartiness.

“The message is clearly insane,” continued the impenetrable Warner.

“The best test is a reference to the undeveloped normal type.

Even a baby does not expect to find a man with three legs.”

“Three legs,” said Michael Moon, “would be very convenient in this wind.”

A fresh eruption of the atmosphere had indeed almost thrown them off their balance and broken the blackened trees in the garden. Beyond, all sorts of accidental objects could be seen scouring the wind-scoured sky — straws, sticks, rags, papers, and, in the distance, a disappearing hat. Its disappearance, however, was not final; after an interval of minutes they saw it again, much larger and closer, like a white panama, towering up into the heavens like a balloon, staggering to and fro for an instant like a stricken kite, and then settling in the centre of their own lawn as falteringly as a fallen leaf.

“Somebody’s lost a good hat,” said Dr. Warner shortly.

Almost as he spoke, another object came over the garden wall, flying after the fluttering panama. It was a big green umbrella. After that came hurtling a huge yellow Gladstone bag, and after that came a figure like a flying wheel of legs, as in the shield of the Isle of Man.

But though for a flash it seemed to have five or six legs, it alighted upon two, like the man in the queer telegram. It took the form of a large light-haired man in gay green holiday clothes. He had bright blonde hair that the wind brushed back like a German’s, a flushed eager face like a cherub’s, and a prominent pointing nose, a little like a dog’s. His head, however, was by no means cherubic in the sense of being without a body. On the contrary, on his vast shoulders and shape generally gigantesque, his head looked oddly and unnaturally small. This gave rise to a scientific theory (which his conduct fully supported) that he was an idiot.

Inglewood had a politeness instinctive and yet awkward. His life was full of arrested half gestures of assistance. And even this prodigy of a big man in green, leaping the wall like a bright green grasshopper, did not paralyze that small altruism of his habits in such a matter as a lost hat. He was stepping forward to recover the green gentleman’s head-gear, when he was struck rigid with a roar like a bull’s.

“Unsportsmanlike!” bellowed the big man. “Give it fair play, give it fair play!” And he came after his own hat quickly but cautiously, with burning eyes. The hat had seemed at first to droop and dawdle as in ostentatious langour on the sunny lawn; but the wind again freshening and rising, it went dancing down the garden with the devilry of a ~pas de quatre~. The eccentric went bounding after it with kangaroo leaps and bursts of breathless speech, of which it was not always easy to pick up the thread: “Fair play, fair play… sport of kings… chase their crowns… quite humane… tramontana… cardinals chase red hats… old English hunting… started a hat in Bramber Combe… hat at bay… mangled hounds… Got him!”

As the wind rose out of a roar into a shriek, he leapt into the sky on his strong, fantastic legs, snatched at the vanishing hat, missed it, and pitched sprawling face foremost on the grass. The hat rose over him like a bird in triumph. But its triumph was premature; for the lunatic, flung forward on his hands, threw up his boots behind, waved his two legs in the air like symbolic ensigns (so that they actually thought again of the telegram), and actually caught the hat with his feet. A prolonged and piercing yell of wind split the welkin from end to end. The eyes of all the men were blinded by the invisible blast, as by a strange, clear cataract of transparency rushing between them and all objects about them. But as the large man fell back in a sitting posture and solemnly crowned himself with the hat, Michael found, to his incredulous surprise, that he had been holding his breath, like a man watching a duel.

While that tall wind was at the top of its sky-scraping energy, another short cry was heard, beginning very querulous, but ending very quick, swallowed in abrupt silence. The shiny black cylinder of Dr. Warner’s official hat sailed off his head in the long, smooth parabola of an airship, and in almost cresting a garden tree was caught in the topmost branches. Another hat was gone. Those in that garden felt themselves caught in an unaccustomed eddy of things happening; no one seemed to know what would blow away next. Before they could speculate, the cheering and hallooing hat-hunter was already halfway up the tree, swinging himself from fork to fork with his strong, bent, grasshopper legs, and still giving forth his gasping, mysterious comments.

“Tree of life… Ygdrasil… climb for centuries perhaps… owls nesting in the hat… remotest generations of owls… still usurpers… gone to heaven…

man in the moon wears it… brigand… not yours… belongs to depressed medical man… in garden… give it up… give it up!”

The tree swung and swept and thrashed to and fro in the thundering wind like a thistle, and flamed in the full sunshine like a bonfire. The green, fantastic human figure, vivid against its autumn red and gold, was already among its highest and craziest branches, which by bare luck did not break with the weight of his big body. He was up there among the last tossing leaves and the first twinkling stars of evening, still talking to himself cheerfully, reasoningly, half apologetically, in little gasps. He might well be out of breath, for his whole preposterous raid had gone with one rush; he had bounded the wall once like a football, swept down the garden like a slide, and shot up the tree like a rocket. The other three men seemed buried under incident piled on incident — a wild world where one thing began before another thing left off. All three had the first thought. The tree had been there for the five years they had known the boarding-house. Each one of them was active and strong. No one of them had even thought of climbing it. Beyond that, Inglewood felt first the mere fact of colour. The bright brisk leaves, the bleak blue sky, the wild green arms and legs, reminded him irrationally of something glowing in his infancy, something akin to a gaudy man on a golden tree; perhaps it was only painted monkey on a stick. Oddly enough, Michael Moon, though more of a humourist, was touched on a tenderer nerve, half remembered the old, young theatricals with Rosamund, and was amused to find himself almost quoting Shakespeare —

”For valour. Is not love a Hercules,
Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?”

Even the immovable man of science had a bright, bewildered sensation that the Time Machine had given a great jerk, and gone forward with rather rattling rapidity.

He was not, however, wholly prepared for what happened next. The man in green, riding the frail topmost bough like a witch on a very risky broomstick, reached up and rent the black hat from its airy nest of twigs. It had been broken across a heavy bough in the first burst of its passage, a tangle of branches in torn and scored and scratched it in every direction, a clap of wind and foliage had flattened it like a concertina; nor can it be said that the obliging gentleman with the sharp nose showed any adequate tenderness for its structure when he finally unhooked it from its place.

When he had found it, however, his proceedings were by some counted singular. He waved it with a loud whoop of triumph, and then immediately appeared to fall backwards off the tree, to which, however, he remained attached by his long strong legs, like a monkey swung by his tail. Hanging thus head downwards above the unhelmed Warner, he gravely proceeded to drop the battered silk cylinder upon his brows. “Every man a king,” explained the inverted philosopher, “every hat (consequently) a crown. But this is a crown out of heaven.”

And he again attempted the coronation of Warner, who, however, moved away with great abruptness from the hovering diadem; not seeming, strangely enough, to wish for his former decoration in its present state.

“Wrong, wrong!” cried the obliging person hilariously. “Always wear uniform, even if it’s shabby uniform! Ritualists may always be untidy. Go to a dance with soot on your shirt-front; but go with a shirt-front. Huntsman wears old coat, but old pink coat. Wear a topper, even if it’s got no top. It’s the symbol that counts, old cock. Take your hat, because it is your hat after all; its nap rubbed all off by the bark, dears, and its brim not the least bit curled; but for old sakes’ sake it is still, dears, the nobbiest tile in the world.”

Speaking thus, with a wild comfortableness, he settled or smashed the shapeless silk hat over the face of the disturbed physician, and fell on his feet among the other men, still talking, beaming and breathless.

“Why don’t they make more games out of wind?” he asked in some excitement.

“Kites are all right, but why should it only be kites? Why, I thought
of three other games for a windy day while I was climbing that tree.
Here’s one of them: you take a lot of pepper—”

“I think,” interposed Moon, with a sardonic mildness, “that your games are already sufficiently interesting. Are you, may I ask, a professional acrobat on a tour, or a travelling advertisement of Sunny Jim? How and why do you display all this energy for clearing walls and climbing trees in our melancholy, but at least rational, suburbs?”

The stranger, so far as so loud a person was capable of it, appeared to grow confidential.

“Well, it’s a trick of my own,” he confessed candidly.

“I do it by having two legs.”

Arthur Inglewood, who had sunk into the background of this scene of folly, started and stared at the newcomer with his short-sighted eyes screwed up and his high colour slightly heightened.

“Why, I believe you’re Smith,” he cried with his fresh, almost boyish voice; and then after an instant’s stare, “and yet I’m not sure.”

“I have a card, I think,” said the unknown, with baffling solemnity— “a card with my real name, my titles, offices, and true purpose on this earth.”

He drew out slowly from an upper waistcoat pocket a scarlet card-case, and as slowly produced a very large card. Even in the instant of its production, they fancied it was of a queer shape, unlike the cards of ordinary gentlemen. But it was there only for an instant; for as it passed from his fingers to Arthur’s, one or another slipped his hold. The strident, tearing gale in that garden carried away the stranger’s card to join the wild waste paper of the universe; and that great western wind shook the whole house and passed.

Chapter II

The Luggage of an Optimist

We all remember the fairy tales of science in our infancy, which played with the supposition that large animals could jump in the proportion of small ones. If an elephant were as strong as a grasshopper, he could (I suppose) spring clean out of the Zoological Gardens and alight trumpeting upon Primrose Hill. If a whale could leap from the sea like a trout, perhaps men might look up and see one soaring above Yarmouth like the winged island of Laputa. Such natural energy, though sublime, might certainly be inconvenient, and much of this inconvenience attended the gaiety and good intentions of the man in green. He was too large for everything, because he was lively as well as large. By a fortunate physical provision, most very substantial creatures are also reposeful; and middle-class boarding-houses in the lesser parts of London are not built for a man as big as a bull and excitable as a kitten.

When Inglewood followed the stranger into the boarding-house, he found him talking earnestly (and in his own opinion privately) to the helpless Mrs. Duke. That fat, faint lady could only goggle up like a dying fish at the enormous new gentleman, who politely offered himself as a lodger, with vast gestures of the wide white hat in one hand, and the yellow Gladstone bag in the other. Fortunately, Mrs. Duke’s more efficient niece and partner was there to complete the contract; for, indeed, all the people of the house had somehow collected in the room. This fact, in truth, was typical of the whole episode. The visitor created an atmosphere of comic crisis; and from the time he came into the house to the time he left it, he somehow got the company to gather and even follow (though in derision) as children gather and follow a Punch and Judy. An hour ago, and for four years previously, these people had avoided each other, even when they had really liked each other. They had slid in and out of dismal and deserted rooms in search of particular newspapers or private needlework. Even now they all came casually, as with varying interests; but they all came. There was the embarrassed Inglewood, still a sort of red shadow; there was the unembarrassed Warner, a pallid but solid substance. There was Michael Moon offering like a riddle the contrast of the horsy crudeness of his clothes and the sombre sagacity of his visage. He was now joined by his yet more comic crony, Moses Gould. Swaggering on short legs with a prosperous purple tie, he was the gayest of godless little dogs; but like a dog also in this, that however he danced and wagged with delight, the two dark eyes on each side of his protuberant nose glistened gloomily like black buttons. There was Miss Rosamund Hunt, still with the fine white hat framing her square, good-looking face, and still with her native air of being dressed for some party that never came off. She also, like Mr. Moon, had a new companion, new so far as this narrative goes, but in reality an old friend and a protegee. This was a slight young woman in dark gray, and in no way notable but for a load of dull red hair, of which the shape somehow gave her pale face that triangular, almost peaked, appearance which was given by the lowering headdress and deep rich ruff of the Elizabethan beauties. Her surname seemed to be Gray, and Miss Hunt called her Mary, in that indescribable tone applied to a dependent who has practically become a friend. She wore a small silver cross on her very business-like gray clothes, and was the only member of the party who went to church. Last, but the reverse of least, there was Diana Duke, studying the newcomer with eyes of steel, and listening carefully to every idiotic word he said. As for Mrs. Duke, she smiled up at him, but never dreamed of listening to him. She had never really listened to any one in her life; which, some said, was why she had survived.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Duke was pleased with her new guest’s concentration of courtesy upon herself; for no one ever spoke seriously to her any more than she listened seriously to any one. And she almost beamed as the stranger, with yet wider and almost whirling gestures of explanation with his huge hat and bag, apologized for having entered by the wall instead of the front door. He was understood to put it down to an unfortunate family tradition of neatness and care of his clothes.

“My mother was rather strict about it, to tell the truth,” he said, lowering his voice, to Mrs. Duke. “She never liked me to lose my cap at school. And when a man’s been taught to be tidy and neat it sticks to him.”

Mrs. Duke weakly gasped that she was sure he must have had a good mother; but her niece seemed inclined to probe the matter further.

“You’ve got a funny idea of neatness,” she said, “if it’s jumping garden walls and clambering up garden trees. A man can’t very well climb a tree tidily.”

“He can clear a wall neatly,” said Michael Moon; “I saw him do it.”

Smith seemed to be regarding the girl with genuine astonishment.

"My dear young lady," he said, "I was tidying the tree. You don't want last year's hats there, do you, any more than last year's leaves?

The wind takes off the leaves, but it couldn't manage the hat; that wind, I suppose, has tidied whole forests to-day. Rum idea this is, that tidiness is a timid, quiet sort of thing; why, tidiness is a toil for giants.

You can't tidy anything without untidying yourself; just look at my trousers.

Don't you know that? Haven't you ever had a spring cleaning?"

"Oh yes, sir," said Mrs. Duke, almost eagerly. "You will find everything of that sort quite nice." For the first time she had heard two words that she could understand.

Miss Diana Duke seemed to be studying the stranger with a sort of spasm of calculation; then her black eyes snapped with decision, and she said that he could have a particular bedroom on the top floor if he liked: and the silent and sensitive Inglewood, who had been on the rack through these cross-purposes, eagerly offered to show him up to the room. Smith went up the stairs four at a time, and when he bumped his head against the ultimate ceiling, Inglewood had an odd sensation that the tall house was much shorter than it used to be.

Arthur Inglewood followed his old friend — or his new friend, for he did not very clearly know which he was. The face looked very like his old schoolfellow's at one second and very unlike at another. And when Inglewood broke through his native politeness so far as to say suddenly, "Is your name Smith?" he received only the unenlightening reply, "Quite right; quite right. Very good. Excellent!" Which appeared to Inglewood, on reflection, rather the speech of a new-born babe accepting a name than of a grown-up man admitting one.

Despite these doubts about identity, the hapless Inglewood watched the other unpack, and stood about his bedroom in all the impotent attitudes of the male friend. Mr. Smith unpacked with the same kind of whirling accuracy with which he climbed a tree — throwing things out of his bag as if they were rubbish, yet managing to distribute quite a regular pattern all round him on the floor.

As he did so he continued to talk in the same somewhat gasping manner (he had come upstairs four steps at a time, but even without this his style of speech was breathless and fragmentary), and his remarks were still a string of more or less significant but often separate pictures.

“Like the day of judgement,” he said, throwing a bottle so that it somehow settled, rocking on its right end. “People say vast universe… infinity and astronomy; not sure… I think things are too close together… packed up; for travelling… stars too close, really… why, the sun’s a star, too close to be seen properly; the earth’s a star, too close to be seen at all… too many pebbles on the beach; ought all to be put in rings; too many blades of grass to study… feathers on a bird make the brain reel; wait till the big bag is unpacked… may all be put in our right places then.”

Here he stopped, literally for breath — throwing a shirt to the other end of the room, and then a bottle of ink so that it fell quite neatly beyond it. Inglewood looked round on this strange, half-symmetrical disorder with an increasing doubt.

In fact, the more one explored Mr. Smith’s holiday luggage, the less one could make anything of it. One peculiarity of it was that almost everything seemed to be there for the wrong reason; what is secondary with every one else was primary with him. He would wrap up a pot or pan in brown paper; and the unthinking assistant would discover that the pot was valueless or even unnecessary, and that it was the brown paper that was truly precious. He produced two or three boxes of cigars, and explained with plain and perplexing sincerity that he was no smoker, but that cigar-box wood was by far the best for fretwork. He also exhibited about six small bottles of wine, white and red, and Inglewood, happening to note a Volnay which he knew to be excellent, supposed at first that the stranger was an epicure in vintages. He was therefore surprised to find that the next bottle was a vile sham claret from the colonies, which even colonials (to do them justice) do not drink. It was only then that he observed that all six bottles had those bright metallic seals of various tints, and seemed to have been chosen solely because they have the three primary and three secondary colours: red, blue, and yellow; green, violet and orange. There grew upon Inglewood an almost creepy sense of the real childishness of this creature. For Smith was really, so far as human psychology can be, innocent. He had the sensualities of innocence: he loved the stickiness of gum, and he cut white wood greedily as if he were cutting a cake. To this man wine was not a doubtful thing to be defended or denounced; it was a quaintly coloured syrup, such as a child sees in a shop window. He talked dominantly and rushed the social situation; but he was not asserting himself, like a superman in a modern play. He was simply forgetting himself, like a little boy at a party. He had somehow made the giant stride from babyhood to manhood, and missed that crisis in youth when most of us grow old.

As he shunted his big bag, Arthur observed the initials I. S. printed on one side of it, and remembered that Smith had been called Innocent Smith at school, though whether as a formal Christian name or a moral description he could not remember. He was just about to venture another question, when there was a knock at the door, and the short figure of Mr. Gould offered itself, with the melancholy Moon, standing like his tall crooked shadow, behind him. They had drifted up the stairs after the other two men with the wandering gregariousness of the male.

"Hope there's no intrusion," said the beaming Moses with a glow of good nature, but not the airiest tinge of apology.

"The truth is," said Michael Moon with comparative courtesy, "we thought we might see if they had made you comfortable. Miss Duke is rather—"

"I know," cried the stranger, looking up radiantly from his bag; "magnificent, isn't she? Go close to her — hear military music going by, like Joan of Arc."

Inglewood stared and stared at the speaker like one who has just heard a wild fairy tale, which nevertheless contains one small and forgotten fact. For he remembered how he had himself thought of Jeanne d'Arc years ago, when, hardly more than a schoolboy, he had first come to the boarding-house. Long since the pulverizing rationalism of his friend Dr. Warner had crushed such youthful ignorances and disproportionate dreams. Under the Warnerian scepticism and science of hopeless human types, Inglewood had long come to regard himself as a timid, insufficient, and "weak" type, who would never marry; to regard Diana Duke as a materialistic maidservant; and to regard his first fancy for her as the small, dull farce of a collegian kissing his landlady's daughter. And yet the phrase about military music moved him queerly, as if he had heard those distant drums.

"She has to keep things pretty tight, as is only natural," said Moon, glancing round the rather dwarfish room, with its wedge of slanted ceiling, like the conical hood of a dwarf.

"Rather a small box for you, sir," said the waggish Mr. Gould.

“Splendid room, though,” answered Mr. Smith enthusiastically, with his head inside his Gladstone bag. “I love these pointed sorts of rooms, like Gothic. By the way,” he cried out, pointing in quite a startling way, “where does that door lead to?”

“To certain death, I should say,” answered Michael Moon, staring up at a dust-stained and disused trapdoor in the sloping roof of the attic. “I don’t think there’s a loft there; and I don’t know what else it could lead to.” Long before he had finished his sentence the man with the strong green legs had leapt at the door in the ceiling, swung himself somehow on to the ledge beneath it, wrenched it open after a struggle, and clambered through it. For a moment they saw the two symbolic legs standing like a truncated statue; then they vanished. Through the hole thus burst in the roof appeared the empty and lucid sky of evening, with one great many-coloured cloud sailing across it like a whole county upside down.

“Hullo, you fellows!” came the far cry of Innocent Smith, apparently from some remote pinnacle. “Come up here; and bring some of my things to eat and drink. It’s just the spot for a picnic.”

With a sudden impulse Michael snatched two of the small bottles of wine, one in each solid fist; and Arthur Inglewood, as if mesmerized, groped for a biscuit tin and a big jar of ginger. The enormous hand of Innocent Smith appearing through the aperture, like a giant’s in a fairy tale, received these tributes and bore them off to the eyrie; then they both hoisted themselves out of the window. They were both athletic, and even gymnastic; Inglewood through his concern for hygiene, and Moon through his concern for sport, which was not quite so idle and inactive as that of the average sportsman. Also they both had a light-headed burst of celestial sensation when the door was burst in the roof, as if a door had been burst in the sky, and they could climb out on to the very roof of the universe. They were both men who had long been unconsciously imprisoned in the commonplace, though one took it comically, and the other seriously. They were both men, nevertheless, in whom sentiment had never died. But Mr. Moses Gould had an equal contempt for their suicidal athletics and their subconscious transcendentalism, and he stood and laughed at the thing with the shameless rationality of another race.

When the singular Smith, astride of a chimney-pot, learnt that Gould was not following, his infantile officiousness and good nature forced him to dive back into the attic to comfort or persuade; and Inglewood and Moon were left alone on the long gray-green ridge of the slate roof, with their feet against gutters and their backs against chimney-pots, looking agnostically at each other. Their first feeling was that they had come out into eternity, and that eternity was very like topsy-turvydom. One definition occurred to both of them — that he had come out into the light of that lucid and radiant ignorance in which all beliefs had begun. The sky above them was full of mythology. Heaven seemed deep enough to hold all the gods. The round of the ether turned from green to yellow gradually like a great unripe fruit. All around the sunken sun it was like a lemon; round all the east it was a sort of golden green, more suggestive of a greengage; but the whole had still the emptiness of daylight and none of the secrecy of dusk. Tumbled here and there across this gold and pale green were shards and shattered masses of inky purple cloud, which seemed falling towards the earth in every kind of colossal perspective. One of them really had the character of some many-mitred, many-bearded, many-winged Assyrian image, huge head downwards, hurled out of heaven — a sort of false Jehovah, who was perhaps Satan. All the other clouds had preposterous pinnacled shapes, as if the god's palaces had been flung after him.

And yet, while the empty heaven was full of silent catastrophe, the height of human buildings above which they sat held here and there a tiny trivial noise that was the exact antithesis; and they heard some six streets below a newsboy calling, and a bell bidding to chapel. They could also hear talk out of the garden below; and realized that the irrepressible Smith must have followed Gould downstairs, for his eager and pleading accents could be heard, followed by the half-humourous protests of Miss Duke and the full and very youthful laughter of Rosamund Hunt. The air had that cold kindness that comes after a storm. Michael Moon drank it in with as serious a relish as he had drunk the little bottle of cheap claret, which he had emptied almost at a draught. Inglewood went on eating ginger very slowly and with a solemnity unfathomable as the sky above him. There was still enough stir in the freshness of the atmosphere to make them almost fancy they could smell the garden soil and the last roses of autumn. Suddenly there came from the darkening room a silvery ping and pong which told them that Rosamund had brought out the long-neglected mandoline. After the first few notes there was more of the distant bell-like laughter.

"Inglewood," said Michael Moon, "have you ever heard that I am a blackguard?"

"I haven't heard it, and I don't believe it," answered Inglewood, after an odd pause. "But I have heard you were — what they call rather wild."

"If you have heard that I am wild, you can contradict the rumour," said Moon, with an extraordinary calm; "I am tame. I am quite tame; I am about the tamest beast that crawls. I drink too much of the same kind of whisky at the same time every night. I even drink about the same amount too much. I go to the same number of public-houses. I meet the same damned women with mauve faces. I hear the same number of dirty stories — generally the same dirty stories. You may assure my friends, Inglewood, that you see before you a person whom civilization has thoroughly tamed."

Arthur Inglewood was staring with feelings that made him nearly fall off the roof, for indeed the Irishman's face, always sinister, was now almost demoniacal.

"Christ confound it!" cried out Moon, suddenly clutching the empty claret bottle, "this is about the thinnest and filthiest wine I ever uncorked, and it's the only drink I have really enjoyed for nine years. I was never wild until just ten minutes ago." And he sent the bottle whizzing, a wheel of glass, far away beyond the garden into the road, where, in the profound evening silence, they could even hear it break and part upon the stones.

"Moon," said Arthur Inglewood, rather huskily, "you mustn't be so bitter about it. Everyone has to take the world as he finds it; of course one often finds it a bit dull—"

"That fellow doesn't," said Michael decisively; "I mean that fellow Smith. I have a fancy there's some method in his madness. It looks as if he could turn into a sort of wonderland any minute by taking one step out of the plain road. Who would have thought of that trapdoor? Who would have thought that this cursed colonial claret could taste quite nice among the chimney-pots? Perhaps that is the real key of fairyland. Perhaps Nosey Gould's beastly little Empire Cigarettes ought only to be smoked on stilts, or something of that sort. Perhaps Mrs. Duke's cold leg of mutton would seem quite appetizing at the top of a tree. Perhaps even my damned, dirty, monotonous drizzle of Old Bill Whisky—"

"Don't be so rough on yourself," said Inglewood, in serious distress. "The dullness isn't your fault or the whisky's. Fellows who don't — fellows like me I mean — have just the same feeling that it's all rather flat and a failure. But the world's made like that; it's all survival. Some people are made to get on, like Warner; and some people are made to stick quiet, like me. You can’t help your temperament. I know you’re much cleverer than I am; but you can’t help having all the loose ways of a poor literary chap, and I can’t help having all the doubts and helplessness of a small scientific chap, any more than a fish can help floating or a fern can help curling up. Humanity, as Warner said so well in that lecture, really consists of quite different tribes of animals all disguised as men.”

In the dim garden below the buzz of talk was suddenly broken by Miss Hunt’s musical instrument banging with the abruptness of artillery into a vulgar but spirited tune.

Rosamund’s voice came up rich and strong in the words of some fatuous, fashionable coon song:-

”Darkies sing a song on the old plantation,
Sing it as we sang it in days long since gone by.”

Inglewood’s brown eyes softened and saddened still more as he continued his monologue of resignation to such a rollicking and romantic tune. But the blue eyes of Michael Moon brightened and hardened with a light that Inglewood did not understand. Many centuries, and many villages and valleys, would have been happier if Inglewood or Inglewood’s countrymen had ever understood that light, or guessed at the first blink that it was the battle star of Ireland.

“Nothing can ever alter it; it’s in the wheels of the universe,” went on Inglewood, in a low voice: “some men are weak and some strong, and the only thing we can do is to know that we are weak. I have been in love lots of times, but I could not do anything, for I remembered my own fickleness. I have formed opinions, but I haven’t the cheek to push them, because I’ve so often changed them. That’s the upshot, old fellow. We can’t trust ourselves — and we can’t help it.”

Michael had risen to his feet, and stood poised in a perilous position at the end of the roof, like some dark statue hung above its gable. Behind him, huge clouds of an almost impossible purple turned slowly topsy-turvy in the silent anarchy of heaven. Their gyration made the dark figure seem yet dizzier.

“Let us…” he said, and was suddenly silent.

“Let us what?” asked Arthur Inglewood, rising equally quick though somewhat more cautiously, for his friend seemed to find some difficulty in speech.

“Let us go and do some of these things we can’t do,” said Michael.

At the same moment there burst out of the trapdoor below them the cockatoo hair and flushed face of Innocent Smith, calling to them that they must come down as the "concert" was in full swing, and Mr. Moses Gould was about to recite "Young Lochinvar."

As they dropped into Innocent's attic they nearly tumbled over its entertaining impedimenta again. Inglewood, staring at the littered floor, thought instinctively of the littered floor of a nursery. He was therefore the more moved, and even shocked, when his eye fell on a large well-polished American revolver.

"Hullo!" he cried, stepping back from the steely glitter as men step back from a serpent; "are you afraid of burglars? or when and why do you deal death out of that machine gun?"

"Oh, that!" said Smith, throwing it a single glance; "I deal life out of that," and he went bounding down the stairs.

Chapter III

The Banner of Beacon

All next day at Beacon House there was a crazy sense that it was everybody's birthday. It is the fashion to talk of institutions as cold and cramping things. The truth is that when people are in exceptionally high spirits, really wild with freedom and invention, they always must, and they always do, create institutions. When men are weary they fall into anarchy; but while they are gay and vigorous they invariably make rules. This, which is true of all the churches and republics of history, is also true of the most trivial parlour game or the most unsophisticated meadow romp. We are never free until some institution frees us; and liberty cannot exist till it is declared by authority. Even the wild authority of the harlequin Smith was still authority, because it produced everywhere a crop of crazy regulations and conditions. He filled every one with his own half-lunatic life; but it was not expressed in destruction, but rather in a dizzy and toppling construction. Each person with a hobby found it turning into an institution. Rosamund's songs seemed to coalesce into a kind of opera; Michael's jests and paragraphs into a magazine. His pipe and her mandoline seemed between them to make a sort of smoking concert. The bashful and bewildered Arthur Inglewood almost struggled against his own growing importance. He felt as if, in spite of him, his photographs were turning into a picture gallery, and his bicycle into a gymkhana. But no one had any time to criticize these impromptu estates and offices, for they followed each other in wild succession like the topics of a rambling talker.

Existence with such a man was an obstacle race made out of pleasant obstacles. Out of any homely and trivial object he could drag reels of exaggeration, like a conjurer. Nothing could be more shy and impersonal than poor Arthur's photography. Yet the preposterous Smith was seen assisting him eagerly through sunny morning hours, and an indefensible sequence described as "Moral Photography" began to unroll about the boarding-house. It was only a version of the old photographer's joke which produces the same figure twice on one plate, making a man play chess with himself, dine with himself, and so on. But these plates were more hysterical and ambitious — as, "Miss Hunt forgets Herself," showing that lady answering her own too rapturous recognition with a most appalling stare of ignorance; or “Mr. Moon questions Himself,” in which Mr. Moon appeared as one driven to madness under his own legal cross-examination, which was conducted with a long forefinger and an air of ferocious waggery. One highly successful trilogy — representing Inglewood recognizing Inglewood, Inglewood prostrating himself before Inglewood, and Inglewood severely beating Inglewood with an umbrella — Innocent Smith wanted to have enlarged and put up in the hall, like a sort of fresco, with the inscription, —

”Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control —
These three alone will make a man a prig.”
— Tennyson.

Nothing, again, could be more prosaic and impenetrable than the domestic energies of Miss Diana Duke. But Innocent had somehow blundered on the discovery that her thrifty dressmaking went with a considerable feminine care for dress — the one feminine thing that had never failed her solitary self-respect. In consequence Smith pestered her with a theory (which he really seemed to take seriously) that ladies might combine economy with magnificence if they would draw light chalk patterns on a plain dress and then dust them off again. He set up “Smith’s Lightning Dressmaking Company,” with two screens, a cardboard placard, and box of bright soft crayons; and Miss Diana actually threw him an abandoned black overall or working dress on which to exercise the talents of a modiste. He promptly produced for her a garment aflame with red and gold sunflowers; she held it up an instant to her shoulders, and looked like an empress. And Arthur Inglewood, some hours afterwards cleaning his bicycle (with his usual air of being inextricably hidden in it), glanced up; and his hot face grew hotter, for Diana stood laughing for one flash in the doorway, and her dark robe was rich with the green and purple of great decorative peacocks, like a secret garden in the “Arabian Nights.” A pang too swift to be named pain or pleasure went through his heart like an old-world rapier. He remembered how pretty he thought her years ago, when he was ready to fall in love with anybody; but it was like remembering a worship of some Babylonian princess in some previous existence. At his next glimpse of her (and he caught himself awaiting it) the purple and green chalk was dusted off, and she went by quickly in her working clothes.

As for Mrs. Duke, none who knew that matron could conceive her as actively resisting this invasion that had turned her house upside down. But among the most exact observers it was seriously believed that she liked it.

For she was one of those women who at bottom regard all men as equally mad, wild animals of some utterly separate species. And it is doubtful if she really saw anything more eccentric or inexplicable in Smith's chimney-pot picnics or crimson sunflowers than she had in the chemicals of Inglewood or the sardonic speeches of Moon. Courtesy, on the other hand, is a thing that anybody can understand, and Smith's manners were as courteous as they were unconventional. She said he was "a real gentleman," by which she simply meant a kind-hearted man, which is a very different thing. She would sit at the head of the table with fat, folded hands and a fat, folded smile for hours and hours, while every one else was talking at once. At least, the only other exception was Rosamund's companion, Mary Gray, whose silence was of a much more eager sort. Though she never spoke she always looked as if she might speak any minute. Perhaps this is the very definition of a companion. Innocent Smith seemed to throw himself, as into other adventures, into the adventure of making her talk. He never succeeded, yet he was never snubbed; if he achieved anything, it was only to draw attention to this quiet figure, and to turn her, by ever so little, from a modesty to a mystery. But if she was a riddle, every one recognized that she was a fresh and unspoilt riddle, like the riddle of the sky and the woods in spring. Indeed, though she was rather older than the other two girls, she had an early morning ardour, a fresh earnestness of youth, which Rosamund seemed to have lost in the mere spending of money, and Diana in the mere guarding of it. Smith looked at her again and again. Her eyes and mouth were set in her face the wrong way — which was really the right way. She had the knack of saying everything with her face: her silence was a sort of steady applause.

But among the hilarious experiments of that holiday (which seemed more like a week's holiday than a day's) one experiment towers supreme, not because it was any sillier or more successful than the others, but because out of this particular folly flowed all of the odd events that were to follow. All the other practical jokes exploded of themselves, and left vacancy; all the other fictions returned upon themselves, and were finished like a song. But the string of solid and startling events — which were to include a hansom cab, a detective, a pistol, and a marriage licence — were all made primarily possible by the joke about the High Court of Beacon.

It had originated, not with Innocent Smith, but with Michael Moon. He was in a strange glow and pressure of spirits, and talked incessantly; yet he had never been more sarcastic, and even inhuman. He used his old useless knowledge as a barrister to talk entertainingly of a tribunal that was a parody on the pompous anomalies of English law. The High Court of Beacon, he declared, was a splendid example of our free and sensible constitution. It had been founded by King John in defiance of the Magna Carta, and now held absolute power over windmills, wine and spirit licences, ladies traveling in Turkey, revision of sentences for dog-stealing and parricide, as well as anything whatever that happened in the town of Market Bosworth. The whole hundred and nine seneschals of the High Court of Beacon met once in every four centuries; but in the intervals (as Mr. Moon explained) the whole powers of the institution were vested in Mrs. Duke. Tossed about among the rest of the company, however, the High Court did not retain its historical and legal seriousness, but was used somewhat unscrupulously in a riot of domestic detail. If somebody spilt the Worcester Sauce on the tablecloth, he was quite sure it was a rite without which the sittings and findings of the Court would be invalid; or if somebody wanted a window to remain shut, he would suddenly remember that none but the third son of the lord of the manor of Penge had the right to open it. They even went to the length of making arrests and conducting criminal inquiries. The proposed trial of Moses Gould for patriotism was rather above the heads of the company, especially of the criminal; but the trial of Inglewood on a charge of photographic libel, and his triumphant acquittal upon a plea of insanity, were admitted to be in the best tradition of the Court.

But when Smith was in wild spirits he grew more and more serious, not more and more flippant like Michael Moon. This proposal of a private court of justice, which Moon had thrown off with the detachment of a political humourist, Smith really caught hold of with the eagerness of an abstract philosopher. It was by far the best thing they could do, he declared, to claim sovereign powers even for the individual household.

“You believe in Home Rule for Ireland; I believe in Home Rule for homes,” he cried eagerly to Michael. “It would be better if every father COULD kill his son, as with the old Romans; it would be better, because nobody would be killed. Let’s issue a Declaration of Independence from Beacon House. We could grow enough greens in that garden to support us, and when the tax-collector comes let’s tell him we’re self-supporting, and play on him with the hose…. Well, perhaps, as you say, we couldn’t very well have a hose, as that comes from the main; but we could sink a well in this chalk, and a lot could be done with water-jugs…. Let this really be Beacon House. Let's light a bonfire of independence on the roof, and see house after house answering it across the valley of the Thames! Let us begin the League of the Free Families! Away with Local Government! A fig for Local Patriotism! Let every house be a sovereign state as this is, and judge its own children by its own law, as we do by the Court of Beacon. Let us cut the painter, and begin to be happy together, as if we were on a desert island."

"I know that desert island," said Michael Moon; "it only exists in the `Swiss Family Robinson.' A man feels a strange desire for some sort of vegetable milk, and crash comes down some unexpected cocoa-nut from some undiscovered monkey. A literary man feels inclined to pen a sonnet, and at once an officious porcupine rushes out of a thicket and shoots out one of his quills."

"Don't you say a word against the `Swiss Family Robinson,'" cried Innocent with great warmth. "It mayn't be exact science, but it's dead accurate philosophy. When you're really shipwrecked, you do really find what you want. When you're really on a desert island, you never find it a desert. If we were really besieged in this garden, we'd find a hundred English birds and English berries that we never knew were here. If we were snowed up in this room, we'd be the better for reading scores of books in that bookcase that we don't even know are there; we'd have talks with each other, good, terrible talks, that we shall go to the grave without guessing; we'd find materials for everything — christening, marriage, or funeral; yes, even for a coronation — if we didn't decide to be a republic."

"A coronation on `Swiss Family' lines, I suppose," said Michael, laughing. "Oh, I know you would find everything in that atmosphere. If we wanted such a simple thing, for instance, as a Coronation Canopy, we should walk down beyond the geraniums and find the Canopy Tree in full bloom. If we wanted such a trifle as a crown of gold, why, we should be digging up dandelions, and we should find a gold mine under the lawn. And when we wanted oil for the ceremony, why I suppose a great storm would wash everything on shore, and we should find there was a Whale on the premises."

"And so there IS a whale on the premises for all you know," asseverated Smith, striking the table with passion. "I bet you've never examined the premises! I bet you've never been round at the back as I was this morning — for I found the very thing you say could only grow on a tree. There's an old sort of square tent up against the dustbin; it's got three holes in the canvas, and a pole's broken, so it's not much good as a tent, but as a Canopy—" And his voice quite failed him to express its shining adequacy; then he went on with controversial eagerness: "You see I take every challenge as you make it. I believe every blessed thing you say couldn't be here has been here all the time. You say you want a whale washed up for oil. Why, there's oil in that cruet-stand at your elbow; and I don't believe anybody has touched it or thought of it for years. And as for your gold crown, we're none of us wealthy here, but we could collect enough ten-shilling bits from our own pockets to string round a man's head for half an hour; or one of Miss Hunt's gold bangles is nearly big enough to—"

The good-humoured Rosamund was almost choking with laughter.

"All is not gold that glitters," she said, "and besides—"

"What a mistake that is!" cried Innocent Smith, leaping up in great excitement. "All is gold that glitters — especially now we are a Sovereign State. What's the good of a Sovereign State if you can't define a sovereign? We can make anything a precious metal, as men could in the morning of the world. They didn't choose gold because it was rare; your scientists can tell you twenty sorts of slime much rarer. They chose gold because it was bright — because it was a hard thing to find, but pretty when you've found it. You can't fight with golden swords or eat golden biscuits; you can only look at it — and you can look at it out here."

With one of his incalculable motions he sprang back and burst open the doors into the garden. At the same time also, with one of his gestures that never seemed at the instant so unconventional as they were, he stretched out his hand to Mary Gray, and led her out on to the lawn as if for a dance.

The French windows, thus flung open, let in an evening even lovelier than that of the day before. The west was swimming with sanguine colours, and a sort of sleepy flame lay along the lawn. The twisted shadows of the one or two garden trees showed upon this sheen, not gray or black, as in common daylight, but like arabesques written in vivid violet ink on some page of Eastern gold. The sunset was one of those festive and yet mysterious conflagrations in which common things by their colours remind us of costly or curious things. The slates upon the sloping roof burned like the plumes of a vast peacock, in every mysterious blend of blue and green.

The red-brown bricks of the wall glowed with all the October tints of strong ruby and tawny wines. The sun seemed to set each object alight with a different coloured flame, like a man lighting fireworks; and even Innocent's hair, which was of a rather colourless fairness, seemed to have a flame of pagan gold on it as he strode across the lawn towards the one tall ridge of rockery.

"What would be the good of gold," he was saying, "if it did not glitter? Why should we care for a black sovereign any more than for a black sun at noon? A black button would do just as well. Don't you see that everything in this garden looks like a jewel? And will you kindly tell me what the deuce is the good of a jewel except that it looks like a jewel? Leave off buying and selling, and start looking! Open your eyes, and you'll wake up in the New Jerusalem.

”All is gold that glitters —
  Tree and tower of brass;
Rolls the golden evening air
  Down the golden grass.
Kick the cry to Jericho,
  How yellow mud is sold;
All is gold that glitters,
  For the glitter is the gold."

"And who wrote that?" asked Rosamund, amused.

"No one will ever write it," answered Smith, and cleared the rockery with a flying leap.

"Really," said Rosamund to Michael Moon, "he ought to be sent to an asylum.

Don't you think so?"

"I beg your pardon," inquired Michael, rather sombrely; his long, swarthy head was dark against the sunset, and, either by accident or mood, he had the look of something isolated and even hostile amid the social extravagance of the garden.

"I only said Mr. Smith ought to go to an asylum," repeated the lady.

The lean face seemed to grow longer and longer, for Moon was unmistakably sneering. "No," he said; "I don't think it's at all necessary."

"What do you mean?" asked Rosamund quickly. "Why not?"

"Because he is in one now," answered Michael Moon, in a quiet but ugly voice.

“Why, didn’t you know?”

“What?” cried the girl, and there was a break in her voice; for the Irishman’s face and voice were really almost creepy. With his dark figure and dark sayings in all that sunshine he looked like the devil in paradise.

“I’m sorry,” he continued, with a sort of harsh humility. “Of course we don’t talk about it much… but I thought we all really knew.”

“Knew what?”

“Well,” answered Moon, “that Beacon House is a certain rather singular sort of house — a house with the tiles loose, shall we say? Innocent Smith is only the doctor that visits us; hadn’t you come when he called before? As most of our maladies are melancholic, of course he has to be extra cheery. Sanity, of course, seems a very bumptious eccentric thing to us. Jumping over a wall, climbing a tree — that’s his bedside manner.”

“You daren’t say such a thing!” cried Rosamund in a rage.

“You daren’t suggest that I—”

“Not more than I am,” said Michael soothingly; “not more than the rest of us.

Haven’t you ever noticed that Miss Duke never sits still — a notorious sign?

Haven’t you ever observed that Inglewood is always washing his hands —

a known mark of mental disease? I, of course, am a dipsomaniac.”

“I don’t believe you,” broke out his companion, not without agitation.

“I’ve heard you had some bad habits—”

“All habits are bad habits,” said Michael, with deadly calm.

“Madness does not come by breaking out, but by giving in; by settling down

in some dirty, little, self-repeating circle of ideas; by being tamed.

YOU went mad about money, because you’re an heiress.”

“It’s a lie,” cried Rosamund furiously. “I never was mean about money.”

“You were worse,” said Michael, in a low voice and yet violently. “You thought that other people were. You thought every man who came near you must be a fortune-hunter; you would not let yourself go and be sane; and now you’re mad and I’m mad, and serve us right.”

“You brute!” said Rosamund, quite white. “And is this true?”

With the intellectual cruelty of which the Celt is capable when his abysses are in revolt, Michael was silent for some seconds, and then stepped back with an ironical bow. “Not literally true, of course,” he said; “only really true. An allegory, shall we say? a social satire.”

“And I hate and despise your satires,” cried Rosamund Hunt, letting loose her whole forcible female personality like a cyclone, and speaking every word to wound. “I despise it as I despise your rank tobacco, and your nasty, loungy ways, and your snarling, and your Radicalism, and your old clothes, and your potty little newspaper, and your rotten failure at everything. I don’t care whether you call it snobbishness or not, I like life and success, and jolly things to look at, and action. You won’t frighten me with Diogenes; I prefer Alexander.”

“Victrix causa deae—” said Michael gloomily; and this angered her more, as, not knowing what it meant, she imagined it to be witty.

“Oh, I dare say you know Greek,” she said, with cheerful inaccuracy; “you haven’t done much with that either.” And she crossed the garden, pursuing the vanished Innocent and Mary.

In doing so she passed Inglewood, who was returning to the house slowly, and with a thought-clouded brow. He was one of those men who are quite clever, but quite the reverse of quick. As he came back out of the sunset garden into the twilight parlour, Diana Duke slipped swiftly to her feet and began putting away the tea things. But it was not before Inglewood had seen an instantaneous picture so unique that he might well have snapshotted it with his everlasting camera. For Diana had been sitting in front of her unfinished work with her chin on her hand, looking straight out of the window in pure thoughtless thought.

“You are busy,” said Arthur, oddly embarrassed with what he had seen, and wishing to ignore it.

“There’s no time for dreaming in this world,” answered the young lady with her back to him.

“I have been thinking lately,” said Inglewood in a low voice, “that there’s no time for waking up.”

She did not reply, and he walked to the window and looked out on the garden.

“I don’t smoke or drink, you know,” he said irrelevantly, “because I think they’re drugs. And yet I fancy all hobbies, like my camera and bicycle, are drugs too. Getting under a black hood, getting into a dark room — getting into a hole anyhow. Drugging myself with speed, and sunshine, and fatigue, and fresh air. Pedalling the machine so fast that I turn into a machine myself. That’s the matter with all of us. We’re too busy to wake up.”

“Well,” said the girl solidly, “what is there to wake up to?”

“There must be!” cried Inglewood, turning round in a singular excitement— “there must be something to wake up to! All we do is preparations — your cleanliness, and my healthiness, and Warner’s scientific appliances. We’re always preparing for something — something that never comes off. I ventilate the house, and you sweep the house; but what is going to HAPPEN in the house?”

She was looking at him quietly, but with very bright eyes, and seemed to be searching for some form of words which she could not find.

Before she could speak the door burst open, and the boisterous Rosamund Hunt, in her flamboyant white hat, boa, and parasol, stood framed in the doorway. She was in a breathing heat, and on her open face was an expression of the most infantile astonishment.

“Well, here’s a fine game!” she said, panting. “What am I to do now,

I wonder? I’ve wired for Dr. Warner; that’s all I can think of doing.”

“What is the matter?” asked Diana, rather sharply, but moving forward like one used to be called upon for assistance.

“It’s Mary,” said the heiress, “my companion Mary Gray: that cracked friend of yours called Smith has proposed to her in the garden, after ten hours’ acquaintance, and he wants to go off with her now for a special licence.”

Arthur Inglewood walked to the open French windows and looked out on the garden, still golden with evening light. Nothing moved there but a bird or two hopping and twittering; but beyond the hedge and railings, in the road outside the garden gate, a hansom cab was waiting, with the yellow Gladstone bag on top of it.

Chapter IV

The Garden of the God

Diana Duke seemed inexplicably irritated at the abrupt entrance and utterance of the other girl.

“Well,” she said shortly, “I suppose Miss Gray can decline him if she doesn’t want to marry him.”

“But she DOES want to marry him!” cried Rosamund in exasperation.

“She’s a wild, wicked fool, and I won’t be parted from her.”

“Perhaps,” said Diana icily, “but I really don’t see what we can do.”

“But the man’s balmy, Diana,” reasoned her friend angrily.

“I can’t let my nice governess marry a man that’s balmy!

You or somebody MUST stop it! — Mr. Inglewood, you’re a man;

go and tell them they simply can’t.”

“Unfortunately, it seems to me they simply can,” said Inglewood, with a depressed air. “I have far less right of intervention than Miss Duke, besides having, of course, far less moral force than she.”

“You haven’t either of you got much,” cried Rosamund, the last stays of her formidable temper giving way; “I think I’ll go somewhere else for a little sense and pluck. I think I know some one who will help me more than you do, at any rate… he’s a cantankerous beast, but he’s a man, and has a mind, and knows it…” And she flung out into the garden, with cheeks aflame, and the parasol whirling like a Catherine wheel.

She found Michael Moon standing under the garden tree, looking over the hedge; hunched like a bird of prey, with his large pipe hanging down his long blue chin. The very hardness of his expression pleased her, after the nonsense of the new engagement and the shilly-shallying of her other friends.

“I am sorry I was cross, Mr. Moon,” she said frankly. “I hated you for being a cynic; but I’ve been well punished, for I want a cynic just now. I’ve had my fill of sentiment — I’m fed up with it. The world’s gone mad, Mr. Moon — all except the cynics, I think. That maniac Smith wants to marry my old friend Mary, and she — and she — doesn’t seem to mind.”

Seeing his attentive face still undisturbedly smoking, she added smartly,

“I’m not joking; that’s Mr. Smith’s cab outside. He swears he’ll

take her off now to his aunt’s, and go for a special licence.

Do give me some practical advice, Mr. Moon.”

Mr. Moon took his pipe out of his mouth, held it in his hand for an instant reflectively, and then tossed it to the other side of the garden. “My practical advice to you is this,” he said: “Let him go for his special licence, and ask him to get another one for you and me.”

“Is that one of your jokes?” asked the young lady.

“Do say what you really mean.”

“I mean that Innocent Smith is a man of business,” said Moon with ponderous precision— “a plain, practical man: a man of affairs; a man of facts and the daylight. He has let down twenty ton of good building bricks suddenly on my head, and I am glad to say they have woken me up. We went to sleep a little while ago on this very lawn, in this very sunlight. We have had a little nap for five years or so, but now we’re going to be married, Rosamund, and I can’t see why that cab…”

“Really,” said Rosamund stoutly, “I don’t know what you mean.”

“What a lie!” cried Michael, advancing on her with brightening eyes. “I’m all for lies in an ordinary way; but don’t you see that to-night they won’t do? We’ve wandered into a world of facts, old girl. That grass growing, and that sun going down, and that cab at the door, are facts. You used to torment and excuse yourself by saying I was after your money, and didn’t really love you. But if I stood here now and told you I didn’t love you — you wouldn’t believe me: for truth is in this garden to-night.”

“Really, Mr. Moon…” said Rosamund, rather more faintly.

He kept two big blue magnetic eyes fixed on her face. “Is my name Moon?” he asked. “Is your name Hunt? On my honour, they sound to me as quaint and as distant as Red Indian names. It’s as if your name was `Swim’ and my name was `Sunrise.’ But our real names are Husband and Wife, as they were when we fell asleep.”

“It is no good,” said Rosamund, with real tears in her eyes; “one can never go back.”

“I can go where I damn please,” said Michael, “and I can carry you on my shoulder.”

“But really, Michael, really, you must stop and think!” cried the girl earnestly. “You could carry me off my feet, I dare say, soul and body, but it may be bitter bad business for all that. These things done in that romantic rush, like Mr. Smith’s, they — they do attract women, I don’t deny it. As you say, we’re all telling the truth to-night. They’ve attracted poor Mary, for one. They attract me, Michael. But the cold fact remains: imprudent marriages do lead to long unhappiness and disappointment — you've got used to your drinks and things — I shan't be pretty much longer—"

"Imprudent marriages!" roared Michael. "And pray where in earth or heaven are there any prudent marriages? Might as well talk about prudent suicides. You and I have dawdled round each other long enough, and are we any safer than Smith and Mary Gray, who met last night? You never know a husband till you marry him. Unhappy! of course you'll be unhappy. Who the devil are you that you shouldn't be unhappy, like the mother that bore you? Disappointed! of course we'll be disappointed. I, for one, don't expect till I die to be so good a man as I am at this minute — a tower with all the trumpets shouting."

"You see all this," said Rosamund, with a grand sincerity in her solid face, "and do you really want to marry me?"

"My darling, what else is there to do?" reasoned the Irishman. "What other occupation is there for an active man on this earth, except to marry you? What's the alternative to marriage, barring sleep? It's not liberty, Rosamund. Unless you marry God, as our nuns do in Ireland, you must marry Man — that is Me. The only third thing is to marry yourself — yourself, yourself, yourself — the only companion that is never satisfied — and never satisfactory."

"Michael," said Miss Hunt, in a very soft voice, "if you won't talk so much,

I'll marry you."

"It's no time for talking," cried Michael Moon; "singing is the only thing.

Can't you find that mandoline of yours, Rosamund?"

"Go and fetch it for me," said Rosamund, with crisp and sharp authority.

The lounging Mr. Moon stood for one split second astonished; then he shot away across the lawn, as if shod with the feathered shoes out of the Greek fairy tale. He cleared three yards and fifteen daisies at a leap, out of mere bodily levity; but when he came within a yard or two of the open parlour windows, his flying feet fell in their old manner like lead; he twisted round and came back slowly, whistling. The events of that enchanted evening were not at an end.

Inside the dark sitting-room of which Moon had caught a glimpse a curious thing had happened, almost an instant after the intemperate exit of

Rosamund. It was something which, occurring in that obscure parlour, seemed to Arthur Inglewood like heaven and earth turning head over heels, the sea being the ceiling and the stars the floor. No words can express how it astonished him, as it astonishes all simple men when it happens. Yet the stiffest female stoicism seems separated from it only by a sheet of paper or a sheet of steel. It indicates no surrender, far less any sympathy. The most rigid and ruthless woman can begin to cry, just as the most effeminate man can grow a beard. It is a separate sexual power, and proves nothing one way or the other about force of character. But to young men ignorant of women, like Arthur Inglewood, to see Diana Duke crying was like seeing a motor-car shedding tears of petrol.

He could never have given (even if his really manly modesty had permitted it) any vaguest vision of what he did when he saw that portent. He acted as men do when a theatre catches fire — very differently from how they would have conceived themselves as acting, whether for better or worse. He had a faint memory of certain half-stifled explanations, that the heiress was the one really paying guest, and she would go, and the bailiffs (in consequence) would come; but after that he knew nothing of his own conduct except by the protests it evoked.

“Leave me alone, Mr. Inglewood — leave me alone; that’s not the way to help.”

“But I can help you,” said Arthur, with grinding certainty;

“I can, I can, I can…”

“Why, you said,” cried the girl, “that you were much weaker than me.”

“So I am weaker than you,” said Arthur, in a voice that went vibrating through everything, “but not just now.”

“Let go my hands!” cried Diana. “I won’t be bullied.”

In one element he was much stronger than she — the matter of humour.

This leapt up in him suddenly, and he laughed, saying: “Well, you are mean.

You know quite well you’ll bully me all the rest of my life.

You might allow a man the one minute of his life when he’s allowed to bully.”

It was as extraordinary for him to laugh as for her to cry, and for the first time since her childhood Diana was entirely off her guard.

“Do you mean you want to marry me?” she said.

“Why, there’s a cab at the door!” cried Inglewood, springing up with an unconscious energy and bursting open the glass doors that led into the garden.

As he led her out by the hand they realized somehow for the first time that the house and garden were on a steep height over London. And yet, though they felt the place to be uplifted, they felt it also to be secret: it was like some round walled garden on the top of one of the turrets of heaven.

Inglewood looked around dreamily, his brown eyes devouring all sorts of details with a senseless delight. He noticed for the first time that the railings of the gate beyond the garden bushes were moulded like little spearheads and painted blue. He noticed that one of the blue spears was loosened in its place, and hung sideways; and this almost made him laugh. He thought it somehow exquisitely harmless and funny that the railing should be crooked; he thought he should like to know how it happened, who did it, and how the man was getting on.

When they were gone a few feet across that fiery grass they realized that they were not alone. Rosamund Hunt and the eccentric Mr. Moon, both of whom they had last seen in the blackest temper of detachment, were standing together on the lawn. They were standing in quite an ordinary manner, and yet they looked somehow like people in a book.

“Oh,” said Diana, “what lovely air!”

“I know,” called out Rosamund, with a pleasure so positive that it rang out like a complaint. “It’s just like that horrid, beastly fizzy stuff they gave me that made me feel happy.”

“Oh, it isn’t like anything but itself!” answered Diana, breathing deeply.

“Why, it’s all cold, and yet it feels like fire.”

“Balmy is the word we use in Fleet Street,” said Mr. Moon. “Balmy — especially on the crumpet.” And he fanned himself quite unnecessarily with his straw hat. They were all full of little leaps and pulsations of objectless and airy energy. Diana stirred and stretched her long arms rigidly, as if crucified, in a sort of excruciating restfulness; Michael stood still for long intervals, with gathered muscles, then spun round like a teetotum, and stood still again; Rosamund did not trip, for women never trip, except when they fall on their noses, but she struck the ground with her foot as she moved, as if to some inaudible dance tune; and Inglewood, leaning quite quietly against a tree, had unconsciously clutched a branch and shaken it with a creative violence. Those giant gestures of Man, that made the high statues and the strokes of war, tossed and tormented all their limbs. Silently as they strolled and stood they were bursting like batteries with an animal magnetism.

"And now," cried Moon quite suddenly, stretching out a hand on each side, "let's dance round that bush!"

"Why, what bush do you mean?" asked Rosamund, looking round with a sort of radiant rudeness.

"The bush that isn't there," said Michael— "the Mulberry Bush."

They had taken each other's hands, half laughing and quite ritually; and before they could disconnect again Michael spun them all round, like a demon spinning the world for a top. Diana felt, as the circle of the horizon flew instantaneously around her, a far aerial sense of the ring of heights beyond London and corners where she had climbed as a child; she seemed almost to hear the rooks cawing about the old pines on Highgate, or to see the glowworms gathering and kindling in the woods of Box Hill.

The circle broke — as all such perfect circles of levity must break — and sent its author, Michael, flying, as by centrifugal force, far away against the blue rails of the gate. When reeling there he suddenly raised shout after shout of a new and quite dramatic character.

"Why, it's Warner!" he shouted, waving his arms. "It's jolly old Warner — with a new silk hat and the old silk moustache!"

"Is that Dr. Warner?" cried Rosamund, bounding forward in a burst of memory, amusement, and distress. "Oh, I'm so sorry! Oh, do tell him it's all right!"

"Let's take hands and tell him," said Michael Moon. For indeed, while they were talking, another hansom cab had dashed up behind the one already waiting, and Dr. Herbert Warner, leaving a companion in the cab, had carefully deposited himself on the pavement.

Now, when you are an eminent physician and are wired for by an heiress to come to a case of dangerous mania, and when, as you come in through the garden to the house, the heiress and her landlady and two of the gentlemen boarders join hands and dance round you in a ring, calling out, "It's all right! it's all right!" you are apt to be flustered and even displeased. Dr. Warner was a placid but hardly a placable person. The two things are by no means the same; and even when Moon explained to him that he, Warner, with his high hat and tall, solid figure, was just such a classic figure as OUGHT to be danced round by a ring of laughing maidens on some old golden Greek seashore — even then he seemed to miss the point of the general rejoicing.

“Inglewood!” cried Dr. Warner, fixing his former disciple with a stare, “are you mad?”

Arthur flushed to the roots of his brown hair, but he answered, easily and quietly enough, “Not now. The truth is, Warner, I’ve just made a rather important medical discovery — quite in your line.”

“What do you mean?” asked the great doctor stiffly— “what discovery?”

“I’ve discovered that health really is catching, like disease,” answered Arthur.

“Yes; sanity has broken out, and is spreading,” said Michael, performing a ~pas seul~ with a thoughtful expression. “Twenty thousand more cases taken to the hospitals; nurses employed night and day.”

Dr. Warner studied Michael’s grave face and lightly moving legs with an unfathomed wonder. “And is THIS, may I ask,” he said, “the sanity that is spreading?”

“You must forgive me, Dr. Warner,” cried Rosamund Hunt heartily. “I know I’ve treated you badly; but indeed it was all a mistake. I was in a frightfully bad temper when I sent for you, but now it all seems like a dream — and and Mr. Smith is the sweetest, most sensible, most delightful old thing that ever existed, and he may marry any one he likes — except me.”

“I should suggest Mrs. Duke,” said Michael.

The gravity of Dr. Warner’s face increased. He took a slip of pink paper from his waistcoat pocket, with his pale blue eyes quietly fixed on Rosamund’s face all the time. He spoke with a not inexcusable frigidity.

“Really, Miss Hunt,” he said, “you are not yet very reassuring. You sent me this wire only half an hour ago: `Come at once, if possible, with another doctor. Man — Innocent Smith — gone mad on premises, and doing dreadful things. Do you know anything of him?’ I went round at once to a distinguished colleague of mine, a doctor who is also a private detective and an authority on criminal lunacy; he has come round with me, and is waiting in the cab. Now you calmly tell me that this criminal madman is a highly sweet and sane old thing, with accompaniments that set me speculating on your own definition of sanity. I hardly comprehend the change.”

“Oh, how can one explain a change in sun and moon and everybody’s soul?” cried Rosamund, in despair. “Must I confess we had got so morbid as to think him mad merely because he wanted to get married; and that we didn’t even know it was only because we wanted to get married ourselves? We’ll humiliate ourselves, if you like, doctor; we’re happy enough.”

“Where is Mr. Smith?” asked Warner of Inglewood very sharply.

Arthur started; he had forgotten all about the central figure of their farce, who had not been visible for an hour or more.

“I — I think he’s on the other side of the house, by the dustbin,” he said.

“He may be on the road to Russia,” said Warner, “but he must be found.” And he strode away and disappeared round a corner of the house by the sunflowers.

“I hope,” said Rosamund, “he won’t really interfere with Mr. Smith.”

“Interfere with the daisies!” said Michael with a snort.

“A man can’t be locked up for falling in love — at least
I hope not.”

“No; I think even a doctor couldn’t make a disease out of him.
He’d throw off the doctor like the disease, don’t you know?
I believe it’s a case of a sort of holy well. I believe Innocent Smith
is simply innocent, and that is why he is so extraordinary.”

It was Rosamund who spoke, restlessly tracing circles in the grass with the point of her white shoe.

“I think,” said Inglewood, “that Smith is not extraordinary at all. He’s comic just because he’s so startlingly commonplace. Don’t you know what it is to be all one family circle, with aunts and uncles, when a schoolboy comes home for the holidays? That bag there on the cab is only a schoolboy’s hamper. This tree here in the garden is only the sort of tree that any schoolboy would have climbed. Yes, that’s the thing that has haunted us all about him, the thing we could never fit a word to. Whether he is my old schoolfellow or no, at least he is all my old schoolfellows. He is the endless bun-eating, ball-throwing animal that we have all been.”

“That is only you absurd boys,” said Diana. “I don’t believe any girl was ever so silly, and I’m sure no girl was ever so happy, except—” and she stopped.

“I will tell you the truth about Innocent Smith,” said Michael Moon in a low voice. “Dr. Warner has gone to look for him in vain. He is not there. Haven’t you noticed that we never saw him since we found ourselves? He was an astral baby born on all four of us; he was only our own youth returned. Long before poor old Warner had clambered out of his cab, the thing we called Smith had dissolved into dew and light on this lawn. Once or twice more, by the mercy of God, we may feel the thing, but the man we shall never see. In a spring garden before breakfast we shall smell the smell called Smith. In the snapping of brisk twigs in tiny fires we shall hear a noise named Smith. Everything insatiable and innocent in the grasses that gobble up the earth like babies at a bun feast, in the white mornings that split the sky as a boy splits up white firwood, we may feel for one instant the presence of an impetuous purity; but his innocence was too close to the unconsciousness of inanimate things not to melt back at a mere touch into the mild hedges and heavens; he—"

He was interrupted from behind the house by a bang like that of a bomb. Almost at the same instant the stranger in the cab sprang out of it, leaving it rocking upon the stones of the road. He clutched the blue railings of the garden, and peered eagerly over them in the direction of the noise. He was a small, loose, yet alert man, very thin, with a face that seemed made out of fish bones, and a silk hat quite as rigid and resplendent as Warner's, but thrust back recklessly on the hinder part of his head.

"Murder!" he shrieked, in a high and feminine but very penetrating voice.

"Stop that murderer there!"

Even as he shrieked a second shot shook the lower windows of the house, and with the noise of it Dr. Herbert Warner came flying round the corner like a leaping rabbit. Yet before he had reached the group a third discharge had deafened them, and they saw with their own eyes two spots of white sky drilled through the second of the unhappy Herbert's high hats. The next moment the fugitive physician fell over a flowerpot, and came down on all fours, staring like a cow. The hat with the two shot-holes in it rolled upon the gravel path before him, and Innocent Smith came round the corner like a railway train. He was looking twice his proper size — a giant clad in green, the big revolver still smoking in his hand, his face sanguine and in shadow, his eyes blazing like all stars, and his yellow hair standing out all ways like Struwelpeter's.

Though this startling scene hung but an instant in stillness, Inglewood had time to feel once more what he had felt when he saw the other lovers standing on the lawn — the sensation of a certain cut and coloured clearness that belongs rather to the things of art than to the things of experience. The broken flowerpot with its red-hot geraniums, the green bulk of Smith and the black bulk of Warner, the blue-spiked railings behind, clutched by the stranger’s yellow vulture claws and peered over by his long vulture neck, the silk hat on the gravel, and the little cloudlet of smoke floating across the garden as innocently as the puff of a cigarette — all these seemed unnaturally distinct and definite. They existed, like symbols, in an ecstasy of separation. Indeed, every object grew more and more particular and precious because the whole picture was breaking up. Things look so bright just before they burst.

Long before his fancies had begun, let alone ceased, Arthur had stepped across and taken one of Smith’s arms. Simultaneously the little stranger had run up the steps and taken the other. Smith went into peals of laughter, and surrendered his pistol with perfect willingness. Moon raised the doctor to his feet, and then went and leaned sullenly on the garden gate. The girls were quiet and vigilant, as good women mostly are in instants of catastrophe, but their faces showed that, somehow or other, a light had been dashed out of the sky. The doctor himself, when he had risen, collected his hat and wits, and dusting himself down with an air of great disgust, turned to them in brief apology. He was very white with his recent panic, but he spoke with perfect self-control.

“You will excuse us, ladies,” he said; “my friend and Mr. Inglewood are both scientists in their several ways. I think we had better all take Mr. Smith indoors, and communicate with you later.”

And under the guard of the three natural philosophers the disarmed Smith was led tactfully into the house, still roaring with laughter.

From time to time during the next twenty minutes his distant boom of mirth could again be heard through the half-open window; but there came no echo of the quiet voices of the physicians. The girls walked about the garden together, rubbing up each other’s spirits as best they might; Michael Moon still hung heavily against the gate. Somewhere about the expiration of that time Dr. Warner came out of the house with a face less pale but even more stern, and the little man with the fish-bone face advanced gravely in his rear. And if the face of Warner in the sunlight was that of a hanging judge, the face of the little man behind was more like a death’s head.

“Miss Hunt,” said Dr. Herbert Warner, “I only wish to offer you my warm thanks and admiration. By your prompt courage and wisdom in sending for us by wire this evening, you have enabled us to capture and put out of mischief one of the most cruel and terrible of the enemies of humanity — a criminal whose plausibility and pitilessness have never been before combined in flesh.”

Rosamund looked across at him with a white, blank face and blinking eyes.

“What do you mean?” she asked. “You can’t mean Mr. Smith?”

“He has gone by many other names,” said the doctor gravely, “and not one he did not leave to be cursed behind him. That man, Miss Hunt, has left a track of blood and tears across the world. Whether he is mad as well as wicked, we are trying, in the interests of science, to discover. In any case, we shall have to take him to a magistrate first, even if only on the road to a lunatic asylum. But the lunatic asylum in which he is confined will have to be sealed with wall within wall, and ringed with guns like a fortress, or he will break out again to bring forth carnage and darkness on the earth.”

Rosamund looked at the two doctors, her face growing paler and paler. Then her eyes strayed to Michael, who was leaning on the gate; but he continued to lean on it without moving, with his face turned away towards the darkening road.

Chapter V

The Allegorical Practical Joker

The criminal specialist who had come with Dr. Warner was a somewhat more urbane and even dapper figure than he had appeared when clutching the railings and craning his neck into the garden. He even looked comparatively young when he took his hat off, having fair hair parted in the middle and carefully curled on each side, and lively movements, especially of the hands. He had a dandified monocle slung round his neck by a broad black ribbon, and a big bow tie, as if a big American moth had alighted on him. His dress and gestures were bright enough for a boy's; it was only when you looked at the fish-bone face that you beheld something acrid and old. His manners were excellent, though hardly English, and he had two half-conscious tricks by which people who only met him once remembered him. One was a trick of closing his eyes when he wished to be particularly polite; the other was one of lifting his joined thumb and forefinger in the air as if holding a pinch of snuff, when he was hesitating or hovering over a word. But those who were longer in his company tended to forget these oddities in the stream of his quaint and solemn conversation and really singular views.

"Miss Hunt," said Dr. Warner, "this is Dr. Cyrus Pym."

Dr. Cyrus Pym shut his eyes during the introduction, rather as if he were "playing fair" in some child's game, and gave a prompt little bow, which somehow suddenly revealed him as a citizen of the United States.

"Dr. Cyrus Pym," continued Warner (Dr. Pym shut his eyes again), "is perhaps the first criminological expert of America. We are very fortunate to be able to consult with him in this extraordinary case—"

"I can't make head or tail of anything," said Rosamund. "How can poor Mr. Smith be so dreadful as he is by your account?"

"Or by your telegram," said Herbert Warner, smiling.

"Oh, you don't understand," cried the girl impatiently.

"Why, he's done us all more good than going to church."

"I think I can explain to the young lady," said Dr. Cyrus Pym. "This criminal or maniac Smith is a very genius of evil, and has a method of his own, a method of the most daring ingenuity. He is popular wherever he goes, for he invades every house as an uproarious child. People are getting suspicious of all the respectable disguises for a scoundrel; so he always uses the disguise of — what shall I say — the Bohemian, the blameless Bohemian. He always carries people off their feet. People are used to the mask of conventional good conduct. He goes in for eccentric good-nature. You expect a Don Juan to dress up as a solemn and solid Spanish merchant; but you're not prepared when he dresses up as Don Quixote. You expect a humbug to behave like Sir Charles Grandison; because (with all respect, Miss Hunt, for the deep, tear-moving tenderness of Samuel Richardson) Sir Charles Grandison so often behaved like a humbug. But no real red-blooded citizen is quite ready for a humbug that models himself not on Sir Charles Grandison but on Sir Roger de Coverly. Setting up to be a good man a little cracked is a new criminal incognito, Miss Hunt. It's been a great notion, and uncommonly successful; but its success just makes it mighty cruel. I can forgive Dick Turpin if he impersonates Dr. Busby; I can't forgive him when he impersonates Dr. Johnson. The saint with a tile loose is a bit too sacred, I guess, to be parodied."

"But how do you know," cried Rosamund desperately, "that Mr. Smith is a known criminal?"

"I collated all the documents," said the American, "when my friend Warner knocked me up on receipt of your cable. It is my professional affair to know these facts, Miss Hunt; and there's no more doubt about them than about the Bradshaw down at the depot. This man has hitherto escaped the law, through his admirable affectations of infancy or insanity. But I myself, as a specialist, have privately authenticated notes of some eighteen or twenty crimes attempted or achieved in this manner. He comes to houses as he has to this, and gets a grand popularity. He makes things go. They do go; when he's gone the things are gone. Gone, Miss Hunt, gone, a man's life or a man's spoons, or more often a woman. I assure you I have all the memoranda."

"I have seen them," said Warner solidly, "I can assure you that all this is correct."

"The most unmanly aspect, according to my feelings," went on the American doctor, "is this perpetual deception of innocent women by a wild simulation of innocence. From almost every house where this great imaginative devil has been, he has taken some poor girl away with him; some say he's got a hypnotic eye with his other queer features, and that they go like automata. What's become of all those poor girls nobody knows.

Murdered, I dare say; for we've lots of instances, besides this one, of his turning his hand to murder, though none ever brought him under the law. Anyhow, our most modern methods of research can't find any trace of the wretched women. It's when I think of them that I am really moved, Miss Hunt. And I've really nothing else to say just now except what Dr. Warner has said."

"Quite so," said Warner, with a smile that seemed moulded in marble— "that we all have to thank you very much for that telegram."

The little Yankee scientist had been speaking with such evident sincerity that one forgot the tricks of his voice and manner — the falling eyelids, the rising intonation, and the poised finger and thumb — which were at other times a little comic. It was not so much that he was cleverer than Warner; perhaps he was not so clever, though he was more celebrated. But he had what Warner never had, a fresh and unaffected seriousness — the great American virtue of simplicity. Rosamund knitted her brows and looked gloomily toward the darkening house that contained the dark prodigy.

Broad daylight still endured; but it had already changed from gold to silver, and was changing from silver to gray. The long plumy shadows of the one or two trees in the garden faded more and more upon a dead background of dusk. In the sharpest and deepest shadow, which was the entrance to the house by the big French windows, Rosamund could watch a hurried consultation between Inglewood (who was still left in charge of the mysterious captive) and Diana, who had moved to his assistance from without. After a few minutes and gestures they went inside, shutting the glass doors upon the garden; and the garden seemed to grow grayer still.

The American gentleman named Pym seemed to be turning and on the move in the same direction; but before he started he spoke to Rosamund with a flash of that guileless tact which redeemed much of his childish vanity, and with something of that spontaneous poetry which made it difficult, pedantic as he was, to call him a pedant.

"I'm vurry sorry, Miss Hunt," he said; "but Dr. Warner and I, as two quali-FIED practitioners, had better take Mr. Smith away in that cab, and the less said about it the better. Don't you agitate yourself, Miss Hunt. You've just got to think that we're taking away a monstrosity, something that oughtn't to be at all — something like one of those gods in your Britannic Museum, all wings, and beards, and legs, and eyes, and no shape. That's what Smith is, and you shall soon be quit of him."

He had already taken a step towards the house, and Warner was about to follow him, when the glass doors were opened again and Diana Duke came out with more than her usual quickness across the lawn. Her face was aquiver with worry and excitement, and her dark earnest eyes fixed only on the other girl.

"Rosamund," she cried in despair, "what shall I do with her?"

"With her?" cried Miss Hunt, with a violent jump. "O lord, he isn't a woman too, is he?"

"No, no, no," said Dr. Pym soothingly, as if in common fairness.

"A woman? no, really, he is not so bad as that."

"I mean your friend Mary Gray," retorted Diana with equal tartness.

"What on earth am I to do with her?"

"How can we tell her about Smith, you mean," answered Rosamund, her face at once clouded and softening. "Yes, it will be pretty painful."

"But I HAVE told her," exploded Diana, with more than her congenital exasperation. "I have told her, and she doesn't seem to mind. She still says she's going away with Smith in that cab."

"But it's impossible!" ejaculated Rosamund. "Why, Mary is really religious. She—"

She stopped in time to realize that Mary Gray was comparatively close to her on the lawn. Her quiet companion had come down very quietly into the garden, but dressed very decisively for travel. She had a neat but very ancient blue tam-o'-shanter on her head, and was pulling some rather threadbare gray gloves on to her hands. Yet the two tints fitted excellently with her heavy copper-coloured hair; the more excellently for the touch of shabbiness: for a woman's clothes never suit her so well as when they seem to suit her by accident.

But in this case the woman had a quality yet more unique and attractive. In such gray hours, when the sun is sunk and the skies are already sad, it will often happen that one reflection at some occasional angle will cause to linger the last of the light. A scrap of window, a scrap of water, a scrap of looking-glass, will be full of the fire that is lost to all the rest of the earth. The quaint, almost triangular face of Mary Gray was like some triangular piece of mirror that could still repeat the splendour of hours before. Mary, though she was always graceful, could never before have properly been called beautiful; and yet her happiness amid all that misery was so beautiful as to make a man catch his breath.

“O Diana,” cried Rosamund in a lower voice and altering her phrase; “but how did you tell her?”

“It is quite easy to tell her,” answered Diana sombrely; “it makes no impression at all.”

“I’m afraid I’ve kept everything waiting,” said Mary Gray apologetically, “and now we must really say good-bye. Innocent is taking me to his aunt’s over at Hampstead, and I’m afraid she goes to bed early.”

Her words were quite casual and practical, but there was a sort of sleepy light in her eyes that was more baffling than darkness; she was like one speaking absently with her eye on some very distant object.

“Mary, Mary,” cried Rosamund, almost breaking down, “I’m so sorry about it, but the thing can’t be at all. We — we have found out all about Mr. Smith.”

“All?” repeated Mary, with a low and curious intonation; “why, that must be awfully exciting.”

There was no noise for an instant and no motion except that the silent Michael Moon, leaning on the gate, lifted his head, as it might be to listen. Then Rosamund remaining speechless, Dr. Pym came to her rescue in a definite way.

“To begin with,” he said, “this man Smith is constantly attempting murder.

The Warden of Brakespeare College—”

“I know,” said Mary, with a vague but radiant smile.

“Innocent told me.”

“I can’t say what he told you,” replied Pym quickly, “but I’m very much afraid it wasn’t true. The plain truth is that the man’s stained with every known human crime. I assure you I have all the documents. I have evidence of his committing burglary, signed by a most eminent English curate. I have —”

“Oh, but there were two curates,” cried Mary, with a certain gentle eagerness; “that was what made it so much funnier.”

The darkened glass doors of the house opened once more, and Inglewood appeared for an instant, making a sort of signal. The American doctor bowed, the English doctor did not, but they both set out stolidly towards the house. No one else moved, not even Michael hanging on the gate; but the back of his head and shoulders had still an indescribable indication that he was listening to every word.

“But don’t you understand, Mary,” cried Rosamund in despair; “don’t you know that awful things have happened even before our very eyes. I should have thought you would have heard the revolver shots upstairs.”

“Yes, I heard the shots,” said Mary almost brightly; “but I was busy packing just then. And Innocent had told me he was going to shoot at Dr. Warner; so it wasn’t worth while to come down.”

“Oh, I don’t understand what you mean,” cried Rosamund Hunt, stamping, “but you must and shall understand what I mean. I don’t care how cruelly I put it, if only I can save you. I mean that your Innocent Smith is the most awfully wicked man in the world. He has sent bullets at lots of other men and gone off in cabs with lots of other women. And he seems to have killed the women too, for nobody can find them.”

“He is really rather naughty sometimes,” said Mary Gray, laughing softly as she buttoned her old gray gloves.

“Oh, this is really mesmerism, or something,” said Rosamund, and burst into tears.

At the same moment the two black-clad doctors appeared out of the house with their great green-clad captive between them. He made no resistance, but was still laughing in a groggy and half-witted style. Arthur Inglewood followed in the rear, a dark and red study in the last shades of distress and shame. In this black, funereal, and painfully realistic style the exit from Beacon House was made by a man whose entrance a day before had been effected by the happy leaping of a wall and the hilarious climbing of a tree. No one moved of the groups in the garden except Mary Gray, who stepped forward quite naturally, calling out, “Are you ready, Innocent? Our cab’s been waiting such a long time.”

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said Dr. Warner firmly, “I must insist on asking this lady to stand aside. We shall have trouble enough as it is, with the three of us in a cab.”

“But it IS our cab,” persisted Mary. “Why, there’s Innocent’s yellow bag on the top of it.”

“Stand aside,” repeated Warner roughly. “And you, Mr. Moon, please be so obliging as to move a moment. Come, come! the sooner this ugly business is over the better — and how can we open the gate if you will keep leaning on it?”

Michael Moon looked at his long lean forefinger, and seemed to consider and reconsider this argument. “Yes,” he said at last; “but how can I lean on this gate if you keep on opening it?”

“Oh, get out of the way!” cried Warner, almost good-humouredly.

“You can lean on the gate any time.”

“No,” said Moon reflectively. “Seldom the time and the place and the blue gate altogether; and it all depends whether you come of an old country family. My ancestors leaned on gates before any one had discovered how to open them.”

“Michael!” cried Arthur Inglewood in a kind of agony, “are you going to get out of the way?”

“Why, no; I think not,” said Michael, after some meditation, and swung himself slowly round, so that he confronted the company, while still, in a lounging attitude, occupying the path.

“Hullo!” he called out suddenly; “what are you doing to Mr. Smith?”

“Taking him away,” answered Warner shortly, “to be examined.”

“Matriculation?” asked Moon brightly.

“By a magistrate,” said the other curtly.

“And what other magistrate,” cried Michael, raising his voice, “dares to try what befell on this free soil, save only the ancient and independent Dukes of Beacon? What other court dares to try one of our company, save only the High Court of Beacon? Have you forgotten that only this afternoon we flew the flag of independence and severed ourselves from all the nations of the earth?”

“Michael,” cried Rosamund, wringing her hands, “how can you stand there talking nonsense? Why, you saw the dreadful thing yourself. You were there when he went mad. It was you that helped the doctor up when he fell over the flower-pot.”

“And the High Court of Beacon,” replied Moon with hauteur, “has special powers in all cases concerning lunatics, flower-pots, and doctors who fall down in gardens. It’s in our very first charter from Edward I: `Si medicus quisquam in horto prostratus—’”

“Out of the way!” cried Warner with sudden fury, “or we will force you out of it.”

“What!” cried Michael Moon, with a cry of hilarious fierceness. “Shall I die in defence of this sacred pale? Will you paint these blue railings red with my gore?” and he laid hold of one of the blue spikes behind him. As Inglewood had noticed earlier in the evening, the railing was loose and crooked at this place, and the painted iron staff and spearhead came away in Michael’s hand as he shook it.

“See!” he cried, brandishing this broken javelin in the air,

“the very lances round Beacon Tower leap from their places to defend it.

Ah, in such a place and hour it is a fine thing to die alone!”

And in a voice like a drum he rolled the noble lines of Ronsard —

“Ou pour l’honneur de Dieu, ou pour le droit de mon prince, Navre, poitrine ouverte, au bord de mon province.”

“Sakes alive!” said the American gentleman, almost in an awed tone.

Then he added, “Are there two maniacs here?”

“No; there are five,” thundered Moon. “Smith and I are the only sane people left.”

“Michael!” cried Rosamund; “Michael, what does it mean?”

“It means bosh!” roared Michael, and slung his painted spear hurtling to the other end of the garden. “It means that doctors are bosh, and criminology is bosh, and Americans are bosh — much more bosh than our Court of Beacon. It means, you fatheads, that Innocent Smith is no more mad or bad than the bird on that tree.”

“But, my dear Moon,” began Inglewood in his modest manner, “these gentlemen—”

“On the word of two doctors,” exploded Moon again, without listening to anybody else, “shut up in a private hell on the word of two doctors! And such doctors! Oh, my hat! Look at ‘em! — do just look at ‘em! Would you read a book, or buy a dog, or go to a hotel on the advice of twenty such? My people came from Ireland, and were Catholics. What would you say if I called a man wicked on the word of two priests?”

“But it isn’t only their word, Michael,” reasoned Rosamund; “they’ve got evidence too.”

“Have you looked at it?” asked Moon.

“No,” said Rosamund, with a sort of faint surprise; “these gentlemen are in charge of it.”

“And of everything else, it seems to me,” said Michael. “Why, you haven’t even had the decency to consult Mrs. Duke.”

“Oh, that’s no use,” said Diana in an undertone to Rosamund; “Auntie can’t say `Bo!’ to a goose.”

“I am glad to hear it,” answered Michael, “for with such a flock of geese to say it to, the horrid expletive might be constantly on her lips. For my part, I simply refuse to let things be done in this light and airy style. I appeal to Mrs. Duke — it’s her house.”

“Mrs. Duke?” repeated Inglewood doubtfully.

“Yes, Mrs. Duke,” said Michael firmly, “commonly called the Iron Duke.”

“If you ask Auntie,” said Diana quietly, “she’ll only be for doing nothing at all. Her only idea is to hush things up or to let things slide. That just suits her.”

“Yes,” replied Michael Moon; “and, as it happens, it just suits all of us. You are impatient with your elders, Miss Duke; but when you are as old yourself you will know what Napoleon knew — that half one’s letters answer themselves if you can only refrain from the fleshly appetite of answering them.”

He was still lounging in the same absurd attitude, with his elbow on the grate, but his voice had altered abruptly for the third time; just as it had changed from the mock heroic to the humanly indignant, it now changed to the airy incisiveness of a lawyer giving good legal advice.

“It isn’t only your aunt who wants to keep this quiet if she can,” he said; “we all want to keep it quiet if we can. Look at the large facts — the big bones of the case. I believe those scientific gentlemen have made a highly scientific mistake. I believe Smith is as blameless as a buttercup. I admit buttercups don’t often let off loaded pistols in private houses; I admit there is something demanding explanation. But I am morally certain there’s some blunder, or some joke, or some allegory, or some accident behind all this. Well, suppose I’m wrong. We’ve disarmed him; we’re five men to hold him; he may as well go to a lock-up later on as now. But suppose there’s even a chance of my being right. Is it anybody’s interest here to wash this linen in public?

“Come, I’ll take each of you in order. Once take Smith outside that gate, and you take him into the front page of the evening papers. I know; I’ve written the front page myself. Miss Duke, do you or your aunt want a sort of notice stuck up over your boarding-house — `Doctors shot here.’? No, no — doctors are rubbish, as I said; but you don’t want the rubbish shot here. Arthur, suppose I am right, or suppose I am wrong. Smith has appeared as an old schoolfellow of yours. Mark my words, if he’s proved guilty, the Organs of Public Opinion will say you introduced him. If he’s proved innocent, they will say you helped to collar him. Rosamund, my dear, suppose I am right or wrong. If he's proved guilty, they'll say you engaged your companion to him. If he's proved innocent, they'll print that telegram. I know the Organs, damn them."

He stopped an instant; for this rapid rationalism left him more breathless than had either his theatrical or his real denunciation. But he was plainly in earnest, as well as positive and lucid; as was proved by his proceeding quickly the moment he had found his breath.

"It is just the same," he cried, "with our medical friends. You will say that Dr. Warner has a grievance. I agree. But does he want specially to be snapshotted by all the journalists ~prostratus in horto~? It was no fault of his, but the scene was not very dignified even for him. He must have justice; but does he want to ask for justice, not only on his knees, but on his hands and knees? Does he want to enter the court of justice on all fours? Doctors are not allowed to advertise; and I'm sure no doctor wants to advertise himself as looking like that. And even for our American guest the interest is the same. Let us suppose that he has conclusive documents. Let us assume that he has revelations really worth reading. Well, in a legal inquiry (or a medical inquiry, for that matter) ten to one he won't be allowed to read them. He'll be tripped up every two or three minutes with some tangle of old rules. A man can't tell the truth in public nowadays. But he can still tell it in private; he can tell it inside that house."

"It is quite true," said Dr. Cyrus Pym, who had listened throughout the speech with a seriousness which only an American could have retained through such a scene. "It is true that I have been per-ceptibly less hampered in private inquiries."

"Dr. Pym!" cried Warner in a sort of sudden anger.

"Dr. Pym! you aren't really going to admit—"

"Smith may be mad," went on the melancholy Moon in a monologue that seemed as heavy as a hatchet, "but there was something after all in what he said about Home Rule for every home. Yes, there is something, when all's said and done, in the High Court of Beacon. It is really true that human beings might often get some sort of domestic justice where just now they can only get legal injustice — oh, I am a lawyer too, and I know that as well. It is true that there's too much official and indirect power. Often and often the thing a whole nation can't settle is just the thing a family could settle. Scores of young criminals have been fined and sent to jail when they ought to have been thrashed and sent to bed. Scores of men, I am sure, have had a lifetime at Hanwell when they only wanted a week at Brighton. There IS something in Smith's notion of domestic self-government; and I propose that we put it into practice. You have the prisoner; you have the documents. Come, we are a company of free, white, Christian people, such as might be besieged in a town or cast up on a desert island. Let us do this thing ourselves. Let us go into that house there and sit down and find out with our own eyes and ears whether this thing is true or not; whether this Smith is a man or a monster. If we can't do a little thing like that, what right have we to put crosses on ballot papers?"

Inglewood and Pym exchanged a glance; and Warner, who was no fool, saw in that glance that Moon was gaining ground. The motives that led Arthur to think of surrender were indeed very different from those which affected Dr. Cyrus Pym. All Arthur's instincts were on the side of privacy and polite settlement; he was very English and would often endure wrongs rather than right them by scenes and serious rhetoric. To play at once the buffoon and the knight-errant, like his Irish friend, would have been absolute torture to him; but even the semi-official part he had played that afternoon was very painful. He was not likely to be reluctant if any one could convince him that his duty was to let sleeping dogs lie.

On the other hand, Cyrus Pym belonged to a country in which things are possible that seem crazy to the English. Regulations and authorities exactly like one of Innocent's pranks or one of Michael's satires really exist, propped by placid policemen and imposed on bustling business men. Pym knew whole States which are vast and yet secret and fanciful; each is as big as a nation yet as private as a lost village, and as unexpected as an apple-pie bed. States where no man may have a cigarette, States where any man may have ten wives, very strict prohibition States, very lax divorce States — all these large local vagaries had prepared Cyrus Pym's mind for small local vagaries in a smaller country. Infinitely more remote from England than any Russian or Italian, utterly incapable of even conceiving what English conventions are, he could not see the social impossibility of the Court of Beacon. It is firmly believed by those who shared the experiment, that to the very end Pym believed in that phantasmal court and supposed it to be some Britannic institution.

Towards the synod thus somewhat at a standstill there approached through the growing haze and gloaming a short dark figure with a walk apparently founded on the imperfect repression of a negro breakdown.

Something at once in the familiarity and the incongruity of this being moved Michael to even heartier outbursts of a healthy and humane flippancy.

“Why, here’s little Nosey Gould,” he exclaimed. “Isn’t the mere sight of him enough to banish all your morbid reflections?”

“Really,” replied Dr. Warner, “I really fail to see how Mr. Gould affects the question; and I once more demand—”

“Hello! what’s the funeral, gents?” inquired the newcomer with the air of an uproarious umpire. “Doctor demandin’ something? Always the way at a boarding-house, you know. Always lots of demand. No supply.”

As delicately and impartially as he could, Michael restated his position, and indicated generally that Smith had been guilty of certain dangerous and dubious acts, and that there had even arisen an allegation that he was insane.

“Well, of course he is,” said Moses Gould equably; “it don’t need old ‘Olmes to see that. The ‘awk-like face of ‘Olmes,” he added with abstract relish, “showed a shide of disappointment, the sleuth-like Gould ‘avin’ got there before ‘im.”

“If he is mad,” began Inglewood.

“Well,” said Moses, “when a cove gets out on the tile the first night there’s generally a tile loose.”

“You never objected before,” said Diana Duke rather stiffly, “and you’re generally pretty free with your complaints.”

“I don’t compline of him,” said Moses magnanimously, “the poor chap’s ‘armless enough; you might tie ‘im up in the garden here and ‘e’d make noises at the burglars.”

“Moses,” said Moon with solemn fervour, “you are the incarnation of Common Sense. You think Mr. Innocent is mad. Let me introduce you to the incarnation of Scientific Theory. He also thinks Mr. Innocent is mad. — Doctor, this is my friend Mr. Gould. — Moses, this is the celebrated Dr. Pym.” The celebrated Dr. Cyrus Pym closed his eyes and bowed. He also murmured his national war-cry in a low voice, which sounded like “Pleased to meet you.”

“Now you two people,” said Michael cheerfully, “who both think our poor friend mad, shall jolly well go into that house over there and prove him mad. What could be more powerful than the combination of Scientific Theory with Common Sense? United you stand; divided you fall. I will not be so uncivil as to suggest that Dr. Pym has no common sense; I confine myself to recording the chronological accident that he has not shown us any so far. I take the freedom of an old friend in staking my shirt that Moses has no scientific theory. Yet against this strong coalition I am ready to appear, armed with nothing but an intuition — which is American for a guess."

"Distinguished by Mr. Gould's assistance," said Pym, opening his eyes suddenly. "I gather that though he and I are identical in primary di-agnosis there is yet between us something that cannot be called a disagreement, something which we may perhaps call a—" He put the points of thumb and forefinger together, spreading the other fingers exquisitely in the air, and seemed to be waiting for somebody else to tell him what to say.

"Catchin' flies?" inquired the affable Moses.

"A divergence," said Dr. Pym, with a refined sigh of relief; "a divergence. Granted that the man in question is deranged, he would not necessarily be all that science requires in a homicidal maniac—"

"Has it occurred to you," observed Moon, who was leaning on the gate again, and did not turn round, "that if he were a homicidal maniac he might have killed us all here while we were talking."

Something exploded silently underneath all their minds, like sealed dynamite in some forgotten cellars. They all remembered for the first time for some hour or two that the monster of whom they were talking was standing quietly among them. They had left him in the garden like a garden statue; there might have been a dolphin coiling round his legs, or a fountain pouring out of his mouth, for all the notice they had taken of Innocent Smith. He stood with his crest of blonde, blown hair thrust somewhat forward, his fresh-coloured, rather short-sighted face looking patiently downwards at nothing in particular, his huge shoulders humped, and his hands in his trousers pockets. So far as they could guess he had not moved at all. His green coat might have been cut out of the green turf on which he stood. In his shadow Pym had expounded and Rosamund expostulated, Michael had ranted and Moses had ragged. He had remained like a thing graven; the god of the garden. A sparrow had perched on one of his heavy shoulders; and then, after correcting its costume of feathers, had flown away.

"Why," cried Michael, with a shout of laughter, "the Court of Beacon has opened — and shut up again too. You all know now I am right. Your buried common sense has told you what my buried common sense has told me.

Smith might have fired off a hundred cannons instead of a pistol, and you would still know he was harmless as I know he is harmless. Back we all go to the house and clear a room for discussion. For the High Court of Beacon, which has already arrived at its decision, is just about to begin its inquiry.”

“Just a goin’ to begin!” cried little Mr. Moses in an extraordinary sort of disinterested excitement, like that of an animal during music or a thunderstorm. “Follow on to the ‘Igh Court of Eggs and Bacon; ‘ave a kipper from the old firm! ‘Is Lordship complimented Mr. Gould on the ‘igh professional delicacy ‘e had shown, and which was worthy of the best traditions of the Saloon Bar — and three of Scotch hot, miss! Oh, chase me, girls!”

The girls betraying no temptation to chase him, he went away in a sort of waddling dance of pure excitement; and had made a circuit of the garden before he reappeared, breathless but still beaming. Moon had known his man when he realized that no people presented to Moses Gould could be quite serious, even if they were quite furious. The glass doors stood open on the side nearest to Mr. Moses Gould; and as the feet of that festive idiot were evidently turned in the same direction, everybody else went that way with the unanimity of some uproarious procession. Only Diana Duke retained enough rigidity to say the thing that had been boiling at her fierce feminine lips for the last few hours. Under the shadow of tragedy she had kept it back as unsympathetic. “In that case,” she said sharply, “these cabs can be sent away.”

“Well, Innocent must have his bag, you know,” said Mary with a smile.

“I dare say the cabman would get it down for us.”

“I’ll get the bag,” said Smith, speaking for the first time in hours; his voice sounded remote and rude, like the voice of a statue.

Those who had so long danced and disputed round his immobility were left breathless by his precipitance. With a run and spring he was out of the garden into the street; with a spring and one quivering kick he was actually on the roof of the cab. The cabman happened to be standing by the horse’s head, having just removed its emptied nose-bag. Smith seemed for an instant to be rolling about on the cab’s back in the embraces of his Gladstone bag. The next instant, however, he had rolled, as if by a royal luck, into the high seat behind, and with a shriek of piercing and appalling suddenness had sent the horse flying and scampering down the street.

His evanescence was so violent and swift, that this time it was all the other people who were turned into garden statues. Mr. Moses Gould, however, being ill-adapted both physically and morally for the purposes of permanent sculpture, came to life some time before the rest, and, turning to Moon, remarked, like a man starting chattily with a stranger on an omnibus, "Tile loose, eh? Cab loose anyhow." There followed a fatal silence; and then Dr. Warner said, with a sneer like a club of stone, —

"This is what comes of the Court of Beacon, Mr. Moon. You have let loose a maniac on the whole metropolis."

Beacon House stood, as has been said, at the end of a long crescent of continuous houses. The little garden that shut it in ran out into a sharp point like a green cape pushed out into the sea of two streets. Smith and his cab shot up one side of the triangle, and certainly most of those standing inside of it never expected to see him again. At the apex, however, he turned the horse sharply round and drove with equal violence up the other side of the garden, visible to all those in the group. With a common impulse the little crowd ran across the lawn as if to stop him, but they soon had reason to duck and recoil. Even as he vanished up street for the second time, he let the big yellow bag fly from his hand, so that it fell in the centre of the garden, scattering the company like a bomb, and nearly damaging Dr. Warner's hat for the third time. Long before they had collected themselves, the cab had shot away with a shriek that went into a whisper.

"Well," said Michael Moon, with a queer note in his voice; "you may as well all go inside anyhow. We've got two relics of Mr. Smith at least; his fiancee and his trunk."

"Why do you want us to go inside?" asked Arthur Inglewood, in whose red brow and rough brown hair botheration seemed to have reached its limit.

"I want the rest to go in," said Michael in a clear voice, "because I want the whole of this garden in which to talk to you."

There was an atmosphere of irrational doubt; it was really getting colder, and a night wind had begun to wave the one or two trees in the twilight. Dr. Warner, however, spoke in a voice devoid of indecision.

"I refuse to listen to any such proposal," he said; "you have lost this ruffian, and I must find him."

"I don't ask you to listen to any proposal," answered Moon quietly;

"I only ask you to listen."

He made a silencing movement with his hand, and immediately the whistling noise that had been lost in the dark streets on one side of the house could be heard from quite a new quarter on the other side. Through the night-maze of streets the noise increased with incredible rapidity, and the next moment the flying hoofs and flashing wheels had swept up to the blue-railed gate at which they had originally stood. Mr. Smith got down from his perch with an air of absent-mindedness, and coming back into the garden stood in the same elephantine attitude as before.

"Get inside! get inside!" cried Moon hilariously, with the air of one shooing a company of cats. "Come, come, be quick about it! Didn't I tell you I wanted to talk to Inglewood?"

How they were all really driven into the house again it would have been difficult afterwards to say. They had reached the point of being exhausted with incongruities, as people at a farce are ill with laughing, and the brisk growth of the storm among the trees seemed like a final gesture of things in general. Inglewood lingered behind them, saying with a certain amicable exasperation, "I say, do you really want to speak to me?"

"I do," said Michael, "very much."

Night had come as it generally does, quicker than the twilight had seemed to promise. While the human eye still felt the sky as light gray, a very large and lustrous moon appearing abruptly above a bulk of roofs and trees, proved by contrast that the sky was already a very dark gray indeed. A drift of barren leaves across the lawn, a drift of riven clouds across the sky, seemed to be lifted on the same strong and yet laborious wind.

"Arthur," said Michael, "I began with an intuition; but now I am sure. You and I are going to defend this friend of yours before the blessed Court of Beacon, and to clear him too — clear him of both crime and lunacy. Just listen to me while I preach to you for a bit." They walked up and down the darkening garden together as Michael Moon went on.

"Can you," asked Michael, "shut your eyes and see some of those queer old hieroglyphics they stuck up on white walls in the old hot countries. How stiff they were in shape and yet how gaudy in colour. Think of some alphabet of arbitrary figures picked out in black and red, or white and green, with some old Semitic crowd of Nosey Gould's ancestors staring at it, and try to think why the people put it up at all."

Inglewood's first instinct was to think that his perplexing friend had really gone off his head at last; there seemed so reckless a flight of irrelevancy from the tropic-pictured walls he was asked to imagine to the gray, wind-swept, and somewhat chilly suburban garden in which he was actually kicking his heels. How he could be more happy in one by imagining the other he could not conceive. Both (in themselves) were unpleasant.

“Why does everybody repeat riddles,” went on Moon abruptly, “even if they’ve forgotten the answers? Riddles are easy to remember because they are hard to guess. So were those stiff old symbols in black, red, or green easy to remember because they had been hard to guess. Their colours were plain. Their shapes were plain. Everything was plain except the meaning.”

Inglewood was about to open his mouth in an amiable protest, but Moon went on, plunging quicker and quicker up and down the garden and smoking faster and faster. “Dances, too,” he said; “dances were not frivolous. Dances were harder to understand than inscriptions and texts. The old dances were stiff, ceremonial, highly coloured but silent. Have you noticed anything odd about Smith?”

“Well, really,” cried Inglewood, left behind in a collapse of humour, “have I noticed anything else?”

“Have you noticed this about him,” asked Moon, with unshaken persistency, “that he has done so much and said so little? When first he came he talked, but in a gasping, irregular sort of way, as if he wasn’t used to it. All he really did was actions — painting red flowers on black gowns or throwing yellow bags on to the grass. I tell you that big green figure is figurative — like any green figure capering on some white Eastern wall.”

“My dear Michael,” cried Inglewood, in a rising irritation which increased with the rising wind, “you are getting absurdly fanciful.”

“I think of what has just happened,” said Michael steadily. “The man has not spoken for hours; and yet he has been speaking all the time. He fired three shots from a six-shooter and then gave it up to us, when he might have shot us dead in our boots. How could he express his trust in us better than that? He wanted to be tried by us. How could he have shown it better than by standing quite still and letting us discuss it? He wanted to show that he stood there willingly, and could escape if he liked. How could he have shown it better than by escaping in the cab and coming back again? Innocent Smith is not a madman — he is a ritualist. He wants to express himself, not with his tongue, but with his arms and legs — with my body I thee worship, as it says in the marriage service. I begin to understand the old plays and pageants. I see why the mutes at a funeral were mute. I see why the mummers were mum. They MEANT something; and Smith means something too. All other jokes have to be noisy — like little Nosey Gould's jokes, for instance. The only silent jokes are the practical jokes. Poor Smith, properly considered, is an allegorical practical joker. What he has really done in this house has been as frantic as a war-dance, but as silent as a picture."

"I suppose you mean," said the other dubiously, "that we have got to find out what all these crimes meant, as if they were so many coloured picture-puzzles. But even supposing that they do mean something — why, Lord bless my soul!—"

Taking the turn of the garden quite naturally, he had lifted his eyes to the moon, by this time risen big and luminous, and had seen a huge, half-human figure sitting on the garden wall. It was outlined so sharply against the moon that for the first flash it was hard to be certain even that it was human: the hunched shoulders and outstanding hair had rather the air of a colossal cat. It resembled a cat also in the fact that when first startled it sprang up and ran with easy activity along the top of the wall. As it ran, however, its heavy shoulders and small stooping head rather suggested a baboon. The instant it came within reach of a tree it made an ape-like leap and was lost in the branches. The gale, which by this time was shaking every shrub in the garden, made the identification yet more difficult, since it melted the moving limbs of the fugitive in the multitudinous moving limbs of the tree.

"Who is there?" shouted Arthur. "Who are you? Are you Innocent?"

"Not quite," answered an obscure voice among the leaves.

"I cheated you once about a penknife."

The wind in the garden had gathered strength, and was throwing the tree backwards and forwards with the man in the thick of it, just as it had on the gay and golden afternoon when he had first arrived.

"But are you Smith?" asked Inglewood as in an agony.

"Very nearly," said the voice out of the tossing tree.

"But you must have some real names," shrieked Inglewood in despair.

"You must call yourself something."

"Call myself something," thundered the obscure voice, shaking the tree so that all its ten thousand leaves seemed to be talking at once.

"I call myself Roland Oliver Isaiah Charlemagne Arthur Hildebrand Homer Danton Michaelangelo Shakespeare Brakespeare—"

“But, manalive!” began Inglewood in exasperation.

“That’s right! that’s right!” came with a roar out of the rocking tree; “that’s my real name.” And he broke a branch, and one or two autumn leaves fluttered away across the moon.

Part II: The Explanations of Innocent Smith

Chapter I

The Eye of Death; or, the Murder Charge

The dining-room of the Dukes had been set out for the Court of Beacon with a certain impromptu pomposity that seemed somehow to increase its cosiness. The big room was, as it were, cut up into small rooms, with walls only waist high — the sort of separation that children make when they are playing at shops. This had been done by Moses Gould and Michael Moon (the two most active members of this remarkable inquiry) with the ordinary furniture of the place. At one end of the long mahogany table was set the one enormous garden chair, which was surmounted by the old torn tent or umbrella which Smith himself had suggested as a coronation canopy. Inside this erection could be perceived the dumpy form of Mrs. Duke, with cushions and a form of countenance that already threatened slumber. At the other end sat the accused Smith, in a kind of dock; for he was carefully fenced in with a quadrilateral of light bedroom chairs, any of which he could have tossed out the window with his big toe. He had been provided with pens and paper, out of the latter of which he made paper boats, paper darts, and paper dolls contentedly throughout the whole proceedings. He never spoke or even looked up, but seemed as unconscious as a child on the floor of an empty nursery.

On a row of chairs raised high on the top of a long settee sat the three young ladies with their backs up against the window, and Mary Gray in the middle; it was something between a jury box and the stall of the Queen of Beauty at a tournament. Down the centre of the long table Moon had built a low barrier out of eight bound volumes of “Good Words” to express the moral wall that divided the conflicting parties. On the right side sat the two advocates of the prosecution, Dr. Pym and Mr. Gould; behind a barricade of books and documents, chiefly (in the case of Dr. Pym) solid volumes of criminology. On the other side, Moon and Inglewood, for the defence, were also fortified with books and papers; but as these included several old yellow volumes by Ouida and Wilkie Collins, the hand of Mr. Moon seemed to have been somewhat careless and comprehensive. As for the victim and prosecutor, Dr. Warner, Moon wanted at first to have him kept entirely behind a high screen in the corner, urging the indelicacy of his appearance in court, but privately assuring him of an unofficial permission to peep over the top now and then. Dr. Warner, however, failed to rise to the chivalry of such a course, and after some little disturbance and discussion he was accommodated with a seat on the right side of the table in a line with his legal advisers.

It was before this solidly-established tribunal that Dr. Cyrus Pym, after passing a hand through the honey-coloured hair over each ear, rose to open the case. His statement was clear and even restrained, and such flights of imagery as occurred in it only attracted attention by a certain indescribable abruptness, not uncommon in the flowers of American speech.

He planted the points of his ten frail fingers on the mahogany, closed his eyes, and opened his mouth. “The time has gone by,” he said, “when murder could be regarded as a moral and individual act, important perhaps to the murderer, perhaps to the murdered. Science has profoundly…” here he paused, poising his compressed finger and thumb in the air as if he were holding an elusive idea very tight by its tail, then he screwed up his eyes and said “modified,” and let it go— “has profoundly Modified our view of death. In superstitious ages it was regarded as the termination of life, catastrophic, and even tragic, and was often surrounded by solemnity. Brighter days, however, have dawned, and we now see death as universal and inevitable, as part of that great soul-stirring and heart-upholding average which we call for convenience the order of nature. In the same way we have come to consider murder SOCIALLY. Rising above the mere private feelings of a man while being forcibly deprived of life, we are privileged to behold murder as a mighty whole, to see the rich rotation of the cosmos, bringing, as it brings the golden harvests and the golden-bearded harvesters, the return for ever of the slayers and the slain.”

He looked down, somewhat affected with his own eloquence, coughed slightly, putting up four of his pointed fingers with the excellent manners of Boston, and continued: “There is but one result of this happier and humaner outlook which concerns the wretched man before us. It is that thoroughly elucidated by a Milwaukee doctor, our great secret-guessing Sonnenschein, in his great work, `The Destructive Type.’ We do not denounce Smith as a murderer, but rather as a murderous man. The type is such that its very life — I might say its very health — is in killing. Some hold that it is not properly an aberration, but a newer and even a higher creature. My dear old friend Dr. Bulger, who kept ferrets—” (here Moon suddenly ejaculated a loud “hurrah!” but so instantaneously resumed his tragic expression that

Mrs. Duke looked everywhere else for the sound); Dr. Pym continued somewhat sternly— "who, in the interests of knowledge, kept ferrets, felt that the creature's ferocity is not utilitarian, but absolutely an end in itself. However this may be with ferrets, it is certainly so with the prisoner. In his other iniquities you may find the cunning of the maniac; but his acts of blood have almost the simplicity of sanity. But it is the awful sanity of the sun and the elements — a cruel, an evil sanity. As soon stay the iris-leapt cataracts of our virgin West as stay the natural force that sends him forth to slay. No environment, however scientific, could have softened him. Place that man in the silver-silent purity of the palest cloister, and there will be some deed of violence done with the crozier or the alb. Rear him in a happy nursery, amid our brave-browed Anglo-Saxon infancy, and he will find some way to strangle with the skipping-rope or brain with the brick. Circumstances may be favourable, training may be admirable, hopes may be high, but the huge elemental hunger of Innocent Smith for blood will in its appointed season burst like a well-timed bomb."

Arthur Inglewood glanced curiously for an instant at the huge creature at the foot of the table, who was fitting a paper figure with a cocked hat, and then looked back at Dr. Pym, who was concluding in a quieter tone.

"It only remains for us," he said, "to bring forward actual evidence of his previous attempts. By an agreement already made with the Court and the leaders of the defence, we are permitted to put in evidence authentic letters from witnesses to these scenes, which the defence is free to examine. Out of several cases of such outrages we have decided to select one — the clearest and most scandalous. I will therefore, without further delay, call on my junior, Mr. Gould, to read two letters — one from the Sub-Warden and the other from the porter of Brakespeare College, in Cambridge University."

Gould jumped up with a jerk like a jack-in-the-box, an academic-looking paper in his hand and a fever of importance on his face. He began in a loud, high, cockney voice that was as abrupt as a cock-crow: —

"Sir, — Hi am the Sub-Warden of Brikespeare College, Cambridge—"

"Lord have mercy on us," muttered Moon, making a backward movement as men do when a gun goes off.

"Hi am the Sub-Warden of Brikespeare College, Cambridge," proclaimed the uncompromising Moses, "and I can endorse the description you gave of the un'appy Smith. It was not alone my unfortunate duty to rebuke many of the lesser violences of his undergraduate period, but I was actually a witness to the last iniquity which terminated that period. Hi happened to passing under the house of my friend the Warden of Brikespeare, which is semi-detached from the College and connected with it by two or three very ancient arches or props, like bridges, across a small strip of water connected with the river. To my grive astonishment I be'eld my eminent friend suspended in mid-air and clinging to one of these pieces of masonry, his appearance and attitude indicatin' that he suffered from the grivest apprehensions. After a short time I heard two very loud shots, and distinctly perceived the unfortunate undergraduate Smith leaning far out of the Warden's window and aiming at the Warden repeatedly with a revolver. Upon seeing me, Smith burst into a loud laugh (in which impertinence was mingled with insanity), and appeared to desist. I sent the college porter for a ladder, and he succeeded in detaching the Warden from his painful position. Smith was sent down. The photograph I enclose is from the group of the University Rifle Club prizemen, and represents him as he was when at the College. — Hi am, your obedient servant, Amos Boulter.

"The other letter," continued Gould in a glow of triumph, "is from the porter, and won't take long to read.

"Dear Sir, — It is quite true that I am the porter of Brikespeare College, and that I 'elped the Warden down when the young man was shooting at him, as Mr. Boulter has said in his letter. The young man who was shooting at him was Mr. Smith, the same that is in the photograph Mr. Boulter sends. — Yours respectfully, Samuel Barker."

Gould handed the two letters across to Moon, who examined them. But for the vocal divergences in the matter of h's and a's, the Sub-Warden's letter was exactly as Gould had rendered it; and both that and the porter's letter were plainly genuine. Moon handed them to Inglewood, who handed them back in silence to Moses Gould.

"So far as this first charge of continual attempted murder is concerned," said Dr. Pym, standing up for the last time, "that is my case."

Michael Moon rose for the defence with an air of depression which gave little hope at the outset to the sympathizers with the prisoner. He did not, he said, propose to follow the doctor into the abstract questions. "I do not know enough to be an agnostic," he said, rather wearily, "and I can only master the known and admitted elements in such controversies. As for science and religion, the known and admitted facts are plain enough. All that the parsons say is unproved. All that the doctors say is disproved.

That’s the only difference between science and religion there’s ever been, or will be. Yet these new discoveries touch me, somehow,” he said, looking down sorrowfully at his boots. “They remind me of a dear old great-aunt of mine who used to enjoy them in her youth. It brings tears to my eyes. I can see the old bucket by the garden fence and the line of shimmering poplars behind—”

“Hi! here, stop the ‘bus a bit,” cried Mr. Moses Gould, rising in a sort of perspiration. “We want to give the defence a fair run — like gents, you know; but any gent would draw the line at shimmering poplars.”

“Well, hang it all,” said Moon, in an injured manner, “if Dr. Pym may have an old friend with ferrets, why mayn’t I have an old aunt with poplars?”

“I am sure,” said Mrs. Duke, bridling, with something almost like a shaky authority, “Mr. Moon may have what aunts he likes.”

“Why, as to liking her,” began Moon, “I — but perhaps, as you say, she is scarcely the core of the question. I repeat that I do not mean to follow the abstract speculations. For, indeed, my answer to Dr. Pym is simple and severely concrete. Dr. Pym has only treated one side of the psychology of murder. If it is true that there is a kind of man who has a natural tendency to murder, is it not equally true” — here he lowered his voice and spoke with a crushing quietude and earnestness— “is it not equally true that there is a kind of man who has a natural tendency to get murdered? Is it not at least a hypothesis holding the field that Dr. Warner is such a man? I do not speak without the book, any more than my learned friend. The whole matter is expounded in Dr. Moonenschein’s monumental work, `The Destructible Doctor,’ with diagrams, showing the various ways in which such a person as Dr. Warner may be resolved into his elements. In the light of these facts —”

“Hi, stop the ‘bus! stop the ‘bus!” cried Moses, jumping up and down and gesticulating in great excitement. “My principal’s got something to say! My principal wants to do a bit of talkin’.”

Dr. Pym was indeed on his feet, looking pallid and rather vicious. “I have strictly CON-fined myself,” he said nasally, “to books to which immediate reference can be made. I have Sonnenschein’s `Destructive Type’ here on the table, if the defence wish to see it. Where is this wonderful work on Destructability Mr. Moon is talking about? Does it exist? Can he produce it?”

“Produce it!” cried the Irishman with a rich scorn.

“I’ll produce it in a week if you’ll pay for the ink and paper.”

“Would it have much authority?” asked Pym, sitting down.

“Oh, authority!” said Moon lightly; “that depends on a fellow’s religion.”

Dr. Pym jumped up again. “Our authority is based on masses of accurate detail,” he said. “It deals with a region in which things can be handled and tested. My opponent will at least admit that death is a fact of experience.”

“Not of mine,” said Moon mournfully, shaking his head.

“I’ve never experienced such a thing in all my life.”

“Well, really,” said Dr. Pym, and sat down sharply amid a crackle of papers.

“So we see,” resumed Moon, in the same melancholy voice, “that a man like Dr. Warner is, in the mysterious workings of evolution, doomed to such attacks. My client’s onslaught, even if it occurred, was not unique. I have in my hand letters from more than one acquaintance of Dr. Warner whom that remarkable man has affected in the same way. Following the example of my learned friends I will read only two of them. The first is from an honest and laborious matron living off the Harrow Road.

“Mr. Moon, Sir, — Yes, I did throw a sorsepan at him. Wot then? It was all I had to throw, all the soft things being porned, and if your Docter Warner doesn’t like having sorsepans thrown at him, don’t let him wear his hat in a respectable woman’s parler, and tell him to leave orf smiling or tell us the joke. — Yours respectfully, Hannah Miles.

“The other letter is from a physician of some note in Dublin, with whom Dr. Warner was once engaged in consultation. He writes as follows: —

“Dear Sir, — The incident to which you refer is one which I regret, and which, moreover, I have never been able to explain. My own branch of medicine is not mental; and I should be glad to have the view of a mental specialist on my singular momentary and indeed almost automatic action. To say that I `pulled Dr. Warner’s nose,’ is, however, inaccurate in a respect that strikes me as important. That I punched his nose I must cheerfully admit (I need not say with what regret); but pulling seems to me to imply a precision of objective with which I cannot reproach myself. In comparison with this, the act of punching was an outward, instantaneous, and even natural gesture. — Believe me, yours faithfully, Burton Lestrange.

“I have numberless other letters,” continued Moon, “all bearing witness to this widespread feeling about my eminent friend; and I therefore think that Dr. Pym should have admitted this side of the question in his survey. We are in the presence, as Dr. Pym so truly says, of a natural force. As soon stay the cataract of the London water-works as stay the great tendency of Dr. Warner to be assassinated by somebody. Place that man in a Quakers’ meeting, among the most peaceful of Christians, and he will immediately be beaten to death with sticks of chocolate. Place him among the angels of the New Jerusalem, and he will be stoned to death with precious stones. Circumstances may be beautiful and wonderful, the average may be heart-upholding, the harvester may be golden-bearded, the doctor may be secret-guessing, the cataract may be iris-leapt, the Anglo-Saxon infant may be brave-browed, but against and above all these prodigies the grand simple tendency of Dr. Warner to get murdered will still pursue its way until it happily and triumphantly succeeds at last.”

He pronounced this peroration with an appearance of strong emotion. But even stronger emotions were manifesting themselves on the other side of the table. Dr. Warner had leaned his large body quite across the little figure of Moses Gould and was talking in excited whispers to Dr. Pym. That expert nodded a great many times and finally started to his feet with a sincere expression of sternness.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he cried indignantly, “as my colleague has said, we should be delighted to give any latitude to the defence — if there were a defence. But Mr. Moon seems to think he is there to make jokes — very good jokes I dare say, but not at all adapted to assist his client. He picks holes in science. He picks holes in my client’s social popularity. He picks holes in my literary style, which doesn’t seem to suit his high-toned European taste. But how does this picking of holes affect the issue? This Smith has picked two holes in my client’s hat, and with an inch better aim would have picked two holes in his head. All the jokes in the world won’t unpick those holes or be any use for the defence.”

Inglewood looked down in some embarrassment, as if shaken by the evident fairness of this, but Moon still gazed at his opponent in a dreamy way. “The defence?” he said vaguely— “oh, I haven’t begun that yet.”

“You certainly have not,” said Pym warmly, amid a murmur of applause from his side, which the other side found it impossible to answer. “Perhaps, if you have any defence, which has been doubtful from the very beginning—”

“While you’re standing up,” said Moon, in the same almost sleepy style, “perhaps I might ask you a question.”

“A question? Certainly,” said Pym stiffly. “It was distinctly arranged between us that as we could not cross-examine the witnesses, we might vicariously cross-examine each other. We are in a position to invite all such inquiry.”

“I think you said,” observed Moon absently, “that none of the prisoner’s shots really hit the doctor.”

“For the cause of science,” cried the complacent Pym, “fortunately not.”

“Yet they were fired from a few feet away.”

“Yes; about four feet.”

“And no shots hit the Warden, though they were fired quite close to him too?” asked Moon.

“That is so,” said the witness gravely.

“I think,” said Moon, suppressing a slight yawn, “that your Sub-Warden mentioned that Smith was one of the University’s record men for shooting.”

“Why, as to that—” began Pym, after an instant of stillness.

“A second question,” continued Moon, comparatively curtly.

“You said there were other cases of the accused trying to kill people.

Why have you not got evidence of them?”

The American planted the points of his fingers on the table again. “In those cases,” he said precisely, “there was no evidence from outsiders, as in the Cambridge case, but only the evidence of the actual victims.”

“Why didn’t you get their evidence?”

“In the case of the actual victims,” said Pym, “there was some difficulty and reluctance, and—”

“Do you mean,” asked Moon, “that none of the actual victims would appear against the prisoner?”

“That would be exaggerative,” began the other.

“A third question,” said Moon, so sharply that every one jumped.

“You’ve got the evidence of the Sub-Warden who heard some shots;

where’s the evidence of the Warden himself who was shot at?

The Warden of Brakespeare lives, a prosperous gentleman.”

“We did ask for a statement from him,” said Pym a little nervously; “but it was so eccentrically expressed that we suppressed it out of deference to an old gentleman whose past services to science have been great."

Moon leaned forward. "You mean, I suppose," he said, "that his statement was favourable to the prisoner."

"It might be understood so," replied the American doctor; "but, really, it was difficult to understand at all. In fact, we sent it back to him."

"You have no longer, then, any statement signed by the Warden of Brakespeare."

"No."

"I only ask," said Michael quietly, "because we have. To conclude my case I will ask my junior, Mr. Inglewood, to read a statement of the true story — a statement attested as true by the signature of the Warden himself."

Arthur Inglewood rose with several papers in his hand, and though he looked somewhat refined and self-effacing, as he always did, the spectators were surprised to feel that his presence was, upon the whole, more efficient and sufficing than his leader's. He was, in truth, one of those modest men who cannot speak until they are told to speak; and then can speak well. Moon was entirely the opposite. His own impudences amused him in private, but they slightly embarrassed him in public; he felt a fool while he was speaking, whereas Inglewood felt a fool only because he could not speak. The moment he had anything to say he could speak; and the moment he could speak, speaking seemed quite natural. Nothing in this universe seemed quite natural to Michael Moon.

"As my colleague has just explained," said Inglewood, "there are two enigmas or inconsistencies on which we base the defence. The first is a plain physical fact. By the admission of everybody, by the very evidence adduced by the prosecution, it is clear that the accused was celebrated as a specially good shot. Yet on both the occasions complained of he shot from a distance of four or five feet, and shot at him four or five times, and never hit him once. That is the first startling circumstance on which we base our argument. The second, as my colleague has urged, is the curious fact that we cannot find a single victim of these alleged outrages to speak for himself. Subordinates speak for him. Porters climb up ladders to him. But he himself is silent. Ladies and gentlemen, I propose to explain on the spot both the riddle of the shots and the riddle of the silence. I will first of all read the covering letter in which the true account of the Cambridge incident is contained, and then that document itself. When you have heard both, there will be no doubt about your decision. The covering letter runs as follows: —

“Dear Sir, — The following is a very exact and even vivid account of the incident as it really happened at Brakespeare College. We, the undersigned, do not see any particular reason why we should refer it to any isolated authorship. The truth is, it has been a composite production; and we have even had some difference of opinion about the adjectives. But every word of it is true. — We are, yours faithfully,

”Wilfred Emerson Eames,
”Warden of Brakespeare College, Cambridge.

“Innocent Smith.

“The enclosed statement,” continued Inglewood, “runs as follows: —

“A celebrated English university backs so abruptly on the river, that it has, so to speak, to be propped up and patched with all sorts of bridges and semi-detached buildings. The river splits itself into several small streams and canals, so that in one or two corners the place has almost the look of Venice. It was so especially in the case with which we are concerned, in which a few flying buttresses or airy ribs of stone sprang across a strip of water to connect Brakespeare College with the house of the Warden of Brakespeare.

“The country around these colleges is flat; but it does not seem flat when one is thus in the midst of the colleges. For in these flat fens there are always wandering lakes and lingering rivers of water. And these always change what might have been a scheme of horizontal lines into a scheme of vertical lines. Wherever there is water the height of high buildings is doubled, and a British brick house becomes a Babylonian tower. In that shining unshaken surface the houses hang head downwards exactly to their highest or lowest chimney. The coral-coloured cloud seen in that abyss is as far below the world as its original appears above it. Every scrap of water is not only a window but a skylight. Earth splits under men’s feet into precipitous aerial perspectives, into which a bird could as easily wing its way as—”

Dr. Cyrus Pym rose in protest. The documents he had put in evidence had been confined to cold affirmation of fact. The defence, in a general way, had an indubitable right to put their case in their own way, but all this landscape gardening seemed to him (Dr. Cyrus Pym) to be not up to the business. “Will the leader of the defence tell me,” he asked, “how it can possibly affect this case, that a cloud was cor’l-coloured, or that a bird could have winged itself anywhere?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Michael, lifting himself lazily; “you see, you don’t know yet what our defence is. Till you know that, don’t you see, anything may be relevant. Why, suppose,” he said suddenly, as if an idea had struck him, “suppose we wanted to prove the old Warden colour-blind. Suppose he was shot by a black man with white hair, when he thought he was being shot by a white man with yellow hair! To ascertain if that cloud was really and truly coral-coloured might be of the most massive importance.”

He paused with a seriousness which was hardly generally shared, and continued with the same fluency: “Or suppose we wanted to maintain that the Warden committed suicide — that he just got Smith to hold the pistol as Brutus’s slave held the sword. Why, it would make all the difference whether the Warden could see himself plain in still water. Still water has made hundreds of suicides: one sees oneself so very — well, so very plain.”

“Do you, perhaps,” inquired Pym with austere irony, “maintain that your client was a bird of some sort — say, a flamingo?”

“In the matter of his being a flamingo,” said Moon with sudden severity, “my client reserves his defence.”

No one quite knowing what to make of this, Mr. Moon resumed his seat and Inglewood resumed the reading of his document: —

“There is something pleasing to a mystic in such a land of mirrors.

For a mystic is one who holds that two worlds are better than one.

In the highest sense, indeed, all thought is reflection.

“This is the real truth, in the saying that second thoughts are best. Animals have no second thoughts; man alone is able to see his own thought double, as a drunkard sees a lamp-post; man alone is able to see his own thought upside down as one sees a house in a puddle. This duplication of mentality, as in a mirror, is (we repeat) the inmost thing of human philosophy. There is a mystical, even a monstrous truth, in the statement that two heads are better than one. But they ought both to grow on the same body.”

“I know it’s a little transcendental at first,” interposed Inglewood, beaming round with a broad apology, “but you see this document was written in collaboration by a don and a—”

“Drunkard, eh?” suggested Moses Gould, beginning to enjoy himself.

“I rather think,” proceeded Inglewood with an unruffled and critical air, “that this part was written by the don. I merely warn the Court that the statement, though indubitably accurate, bears here and there the trace of coming from two authors.”

“In that case,” said Dr. Pym, leaning back and sniffing,

“I cannot agree with them that two heads are better than one.”

“The undersigned persons think it needless to touch on a kindred problem so often discussed at committees for University Reform: the question of whether dons see double because they are drunk, or get drunk because they see double. It is enough for them (the undersigned persons) if they are able to pursue their own peculiar and profitable theme — which is puddles. What (the undersigned persons ask themselves) is a puddle? A puddle repeats infinity, and is full of light; nevertheless, if analyzed objectively, a puddle is a piece of dirty water spread very thin on mud. The two great historic universities of England have all this large and level and reflective brilliance. Nevertheless, or, rather, on the other hand, they are puddles — puddles, puddles, puddles, puddles. The undersigned persons ask you to excuse an emphasis inseparable from strong conviction.”

Inglewood ignored a somewhat wild expression on the faces of some present, and continued with eminent cheerfulness: —

“Such were the thoughts that failed to cross the mind of the undergraduate Smith as he picked his way among the stripes of canal and the glittering rainy gutters into which the water broke up round the back of Brakespeare College. Had these thoughts crossed his mind he would have been much happier than he was. Unfortunately he did not know that his puzzles were puddles. He did not know that the academic mind reflects infinity and is full of light by the simple process of being shallow and standing still. In his case, therefore, there was something solemn, and even evil about the infinity implied. It was half-way through a starry night of bewildering brilliancy; stars were both above and below. To young Smith’s sullen fancy the skies below seemed even hollower than the skies above; he had a horrible idea that if he counted the stars he would find one too many in the pool.

“In crossing the little paths and bridges he felt like one stepping on the black and slender ribs of some cosmic Eiffel Tower. For to him, and nearly all the educated youth of that epoch, the stars were cruel things. Though they glowed in the great dome every night, they were an enormous and ugly secret; they uncovered the nakedness of nature; they were a glimpse of the iron wheels and pulleys behind the scenes. For the young men of that sad time thought that the god always comes from the machine. They did not know that in reality the machine only comes from the god. In short, they were all pessimists, and starlight was atrocious to them — atrocious because it was true. All their universe was black with white spots.

"Smith looked up with relief from the glittering pools below to the glittering skies and the great black bulk of the college. The only light other than stars glowed through one peacock-green curtain in the upper part of the building, marking where Dr. Emerson Eames always worked till morning and received his friends and favourite pupils at any hour of the night. Indeed, it was to his rooms that the melancholy Smith was bound. Smith had been at Dr. Eames's lecture for the first half of the morning, and at pistol practice and fencing in a saloon for the second half. He had been sculling madly for the first half of the afternoon and thinking idly (and still more madly) for the second half. He had gone to a supper where he was uproarious, and on to a debating club where he was perfectly insufferable, and the melancholy Smith was melancholy still. Then, as he was going home to his diggings he remembered the eccentricity of his friend and master, the Warden of Brakespeare, and resolved desperately to turn in to that gentleman's private house.

"Emerson Eames was an eccentric in many ways, but his throne in philosophy and metaphysics was of international eminence; the university could hardly have afforded to lose him, and, moreover, a don has only to continue any of his bad habits long enough to make them a part of the British Constitution. The bad habits of Emerson Eames were to sit up all night and to be a student of Schopenhauer. Personally, he was a lean, lounging sort of man, with a blond pointed beard, not so very much older than his pupil Smith in the matter of mere years, but older by centuries in the two essential respects of having a European reputation and a bald head.

"`I came, against the rules, at this unearthly hour,' said Smith, who was nothing to the eye except a very big man trying to make himself small, `because I am coming to the conclusion that existence is really too rotten. I know all the arguments of the thinkers that think otherwise — bishops, and agnostics, and those sort of people. And knowing you were the greatest living authority on the pessimist thinkers—'

"`All thinkers,' said Eames, `are pessimist thinkers.'

“After a patch of pause, not the first — for this depressing conversation had gone on for some hours with alternations of cynicism and silence — the Warden continued with his air of weary brilliancy: `It’s all a question of wrong calculation. The moth flies into the candle because he doesn’t happen to know that the game is not worth the candle. The wasp gets into the jam in hearty and hopeful efforts to get the jam into him. IN the same way the vulgar people want to enjoy life just as they want to enjoy gin — because they are too stupid to see that they are paying too big a price for it. That they never find happiness — that they don’t even know how to look for it — is proved by the paralyzing clumsiness and ugliness of everything they do. Their discordant colours are cries of pain. Look at the brick villas beyond the college on this side of the river. There’s one with spotted blinds; look at it! just go and look at it!’

“`Of course,’ he went on dreamily, `one or two men see the sober fact a long way off — they go mad. Do you notice that maniacs mostly try either to destroy other things, or (if they are thoughtful) to destroy themselves? The madman is the man behind the scenes, like the man that wanders about the coulisse of a theater. He has only opened the wrong door and come into the right place. He sees things at the right angle. But the common world—’

“`Oh, hang the common world!’ said the sullen Smith, letting his fist fall on the table in an idle despair.

“`Let’s give it a bad name first,’ said the Professor calmly, `and then hang it. A puppy with hydrophobia would probably struggle for life while we killed it; but if we were kind we should kill it. So an omniscient god would put us out of our pain. He would strike us dead.’

“`Why doesn’t he strike us dead?’ asked the undergraduate abstractedly, plunging his hands into his pockets.

“`He is dead himself,’ said the philosopher; `that is where he is really enviable.’

“`To any one who thinks,’ proceeded Eames, `the pleasures of life, trivial and soon tasteless, are bribes to bring us into a torture chamber. We all see that for any thinking man mere extinction is the… What are you doing?… Are you mad?… Put that thing down.’

“Dr. Eames had turned his tired but still talkative head over his shoulder, and had found himself looking into a small round black hole, rimmed by a six-sided circlet of steel, with a sort of spike standing up on the top. It fixed him like an iron eye. Through those eternal instants during which the reason is stunned he did not even know what it was. Then he saw behind it the chambered barrel and cocked hammer of a revolver, and behind that the flushed and rather heavy face of Smith, apparently quite unchanged, or even more mild than before.

"`I'll help you out of your hole, old man,' said Smith, with rough tenderness. `I'll put the puppy out of his pain.'

"Emerson Eames retreated towards the window. `Do you mean to kill me?' he cried.

"`It's not a thing I'd do for every one,' said Smith with emotion; `but you and I seem to have got so intimate to-night, somehow. I know all your troubles now, and the only cure, old chap.'

"`Put that thing down,' shouted the Warden.

"`It'll soon be over, you know,' said Smith with the air of a sympathetic dentist. And as the Warden made a run for the window and balcony, his benefactor followed him with a firm step and a compassionate expression.

"Both men were perhaps surprised to see that the gray and white of early daybreak had already come. One of them, however, had emotions calculated to swallow up surprise. Brakespeare College was one of the few that retained real traces of Gothic ornament, and just beneath Dr. Eames's balcony there ran out what had perhaps been a flying buttress, still shapelessly shaped into gray beasts and devils, but blinded with mosses and washed out with rains. With an ungainly and most courageous leap, Eames sprang out on this antique bridge, as the only possible mode of escape from the maniac. He sat astride of it, still in his academic gown, dangling his long thin legs, and considering further chances of flight. The whitening daylight opened under as well as over him that impression of vertical infinity already remarked about the little lakes round Brakespeare. Looking down and seeing the spires and chimneys pendent in the pools, they felt alone in space. They felt as if they were looking over the edge from the North Pole and seeing the South Pole below.

"`Hang the world, we said,' observed Smith, `and the world is hanged. "He has hanged the world upon nothing," says the Bible. Do you like being hanged upon nothing? I'm going to be hanged upon something myself. I'm going to swing for you… Dear, tender old phrase,' he murmured; `never true till this moment. I am going to swing for you. For you, dear friend. For your sake. At your express desire.'

"`Help!' cried the Warden of Brakespeare College; `help!'

“`The puppy struggles,’ said the undergraduate, with an eye of pity, `the poor puppy struggles. How fortunate it is that I am wiser and kinder than he,’ and he sighted his weapon so as exactly to cover the upper part of Eames’s bald head.

“`Smith,’ said the philosopher with a sudden change to a sort of ghastly lucidity, `I shall go mad.’

“`And so look at things from the right angle,’ observed Smith, sighing gently. `Ah, but madness is only a palliative at best, a drug. The only cure is an operation — an operation that is always successful: death.’

“As he spoke the sun rose. It seemed to put colour into everything, with the rapidity of a lightning artist. A fleet of little clouds sailing across the sky changed from pigeon-gray to pink. All over the little academic town the tops of different buildings took on different tints: here the sun would pick out the green enameled on a pinnacle, there the scarlet tiles of a villa; here the copper ornament on some artistic shop, and there the sea-blue slates of some old and steep church roof. All these coloured crests seemed to have something oddly individual and significant about them, like crests of famous knights pointed out in a pageant or a battlefield: they each arrested the eye, especially the rolling eye of Emerson Eames as he looked round on the morning and accepted it as his last. Through a narrow chink between a black timber tavern and a big gray college he could see a clock with gilt hands which the sunshine set on fire. He stared at it as though hypnotized; and suddenly the clock began to strike, as if in personal reply. As if at a signal, clock after clock took up the cry: all the churches awoke like chickens at cockcrow. The birds were already noisy in the trees behind the college. The sun rose, gathering glory that seemed too full for the deep skies to hold, and the shallow waters beneath them seemed golden and brimming and deep enough for the thirst of the gods. Just round the corner of the College, and visible from his crazy perch, were the brightest specks on that bright landscape, the villa with the spotted blinds which he had made his text that night. He wondered for the first time what people lived in them.

“Suddenly he called out with mere querulous authority, as he might have called to a student to shut a door.

“`Let me come off this place,’ he cried; `I can’t bear it.’

“`I rather doubt if it will bear you,’ said Smith critically; `but before you break your neck, or I blow out your brains, or let you back into this room (on which complex points I am undecided) I want the metaphysical point cleared up. Do I understand that you want to get back to life?'

"`I'd give anything to get back,' replied the unhappy professor.

"`Give anything!' cried Smith; `then, blast your impudence, give us a song!'

"`What song do you mean?' demanded the exasperated Eames; `what song?'

"`A hymn, I think, would be most appropriate,' answered the other gravely.

`I'll let you off if you'll repeat after me the words —

"`I thank the goodness and the grace
That on my birth have smiled.
And perched me on this curious place,
A happy English child.'

"Dr. Emerson Eames having briefly complied, his persecutor abruptly told him to hold his hands up in the air. Vaguely connecting this proceeding with the usual conduct of brigands and bushrangers, Mr. Eames held them up, very stiffly, but without marked surprise. A bird alighting on his stone seat took no more notice of him than of a comic statue.

"`You are now engaged in public worship,' remarked Smith severely, `and before I have done with you, you shall thank God for the very ducks on the pond.'

"The celebrated pessimist half articulately expressed his perfect readiness to thank God for the ducks on the pond.

"`Not forgetting the drakes,' said Smith sternly. (Eames weakly conceded the drakes.) `Not forgetting anything, please. You shall thank heaven for churches and chapels and villas and vulgar people and puddles and pots and pans and sticks and rags and bones and spotted blinds.'

"`All right, all right,' repeated the victim in despair; `sticks and rags and bones and blinds.'

"`Spotted blinds, I think we said,' remarked Smith with a rogueish ruthlessness, and wagging the pistol-barrel at him like a long metallic finger.

"`Spotted blinds,' said Emerson Eames faintly.

"`You can't say fairer than that,' admitted the younger man, `and now I'll just tell you this to wind up with. If you really were what you profess to be, I don't see that it would matter to snail or seraph if you broke your impious stiff neck and dashed out all your drivelling devil-worshipping brains. But in strict biographical fact you are a very nice fellow, addicted to talking putrid nonsense, and I love you like a brother. I shall therefore fire off all my cartridges round your head so as not to hit you (I am a good shot, you may be glad to hear), and then we will go in and have some breakfast.'

"He then let off two barrels in the air, which the Professor endured with singular firmness, and then said, `But don't fire them all off.'

"`Why not' asked the other buoyantly.

"`Keep them,' asked his companion, `for the next man you meet who talks as we were talking.'

"It was at this moment that Smith, looking down, perceived apoplectic terror upon the face of the Sub-Warden, and heard the refined shriek with which he summoned the porter and the ladder.

"It took Dr. Eames some little time to disentangle himself from the ladder, and some little time longer to disentangle himself from the Sub-Warden. But as soon as he could do so unobtrusively, he rejoined his companion in the late extraordinary scene. He was astonished to find the gigantic Smith heavily shaken, and sitting with his shaggy head on his hands. When addressed, he lifted a very pale face.

"`Why, what is the matter?' asked Eames, whose own nerves had by this time twittered themselves quiet, like the morning birds.

"`I must ask your indulgence,' said Smith, rather brokenly.

`I must ask you to realize that I have just had an escape from death.'

"`YOU have had an escape from death?' repeated the Professor in not unpardonable irritation. `Well, of all the cheek—'

"`Oh, don't you understand, don't you understand?' cried the pale young man impatiently. `I had to do it, Eames; I had to prove you wrong or die. When a man's young, he nearly always has some one whom he thinks the top-water mark of the mind of man — some one who knows all about it, if anybody knows.

"`Well, you were that to me; you spoke with authority, and not as the scribes. Nobody could comfort me if YOU said there was no comfort. If you really thought there was nothing anywhere, it was because you had been there to see. Don't you see that I HAD to prove you didn't really mean it? — or else drown myself in the canal.'

"`Well,' said Eames hesitatingly, `I think perhaps you confuse—'

“`Oh, don’t tell me that!’ cried Smith with the sudden clairvoyance of mental pain; `don’t tell me I confuse enjoyment of existence with the Will to Live! That’s German, and German is High Dutch, and High Dutch is Double Dutch. The thing I saw shining in your eyes when you dangled on that bridge was enjoyment of life and not “the Will to Live.” What you knew when you sat on that damned gargoyle was that the world, when all is said and done, is a wonderful and beautiful place; I know it, because I knew it at the same minute. I saw the gray clouds turn pink, and the little gilt clock in the crack between the houses. It was THOSE things you hated leaving, not Life, whatever that is. Eames, we’ve been to the brink of death together; won’t you admit I’m right?’

“`Yes,’ said Eames very slowly, `I think you are right.

You shall have a First!’

“`Right!’ cried Smith, springing up reanimated. `I’ve passed with honours, and now let me go and see about being sent down.’

“`You needn’t be sent down,’ said Eames with the quiet confidence of twelve years of intrigue. `Everything with us comes from the man on top to the people just round him: I am the man on top, and I shall tell the people round me the truth.’

“The massive Mr. Smith rose and went firmly to the window, but he spoke with equal firmness. `I must be sent down,’ he said, `and the people must not be told the truth.’

“`And why not’ asked the other.

“`Because I mean to follow your advice,’ answered the massive youth, `I mean to keep the remaining shots for people in the shameful state you and I were in last night — I wish we could even plead drunkenness. I mean to keep those bullets for pessimists — pills for pale people. And in this way I want to walk the world like a wonderful surprise — to float as idly as the thistledown, and come as silently as the sunrise; not to be expected any more than the thunderbolt, not to be recalled any more than the dying breeze. I don’t want people to anticipate me as a well-known practical joke. I want both my gifts to come virgin and violent, the death and the life after death. I am going to hold a pistol to the head of the Modern Man. But I shall not use it to kill him — only to bring him to life. I begin to see a new meaning in being the skeleton at the feast.’

“`You can scarcely be called a skeleton,’ said Dr. Eames, smiling.

“`That comes of being so much at the feast,’ answered the massive youth. `No skeleton can keep his figure if he is always dining out. But that is not quite what I meant: what I mean is that I caught a kind of glimpse of the meaning of death and all that — the skull and cross-bones, the ~memento mori~. It isn’t only meant to remind us of a future life, but to remind us of a present life too. With our weak spirits we should grow old in eternity if we were not kept young by death. Providence has to cut immortality into lengths for us, as nurses cut the bread and butter into fingers.’

“Then he added suddenly in a voice of unnatural actuality, `But I know something now, Eames. I knew it when I saw the clouds turn pink.’

“`What do you mean?’ asked Eames. `What did you know?’

“`I knew for the first time that murder is really wrong.’

“He gripped Dr. Eames’s hand and groped his way somewhat unsteadily to the door. Before he had vanished through it he had added, `It’s very dangerous, though, when a man thinks for a split second that he understands death.’

“Dr. Eames remained in repose and rumination some hours after his late assailant had left. Then he rose, took his hat and umbrella, and went for a brisk if rotatory walk. Several times, however, he stood outside the villa with the spotted blinds, studying them intently with his head slightly on one side. Some took him for a lunatic and some for an intending purchaser. He is not yet sure that the two characters would be widely different.

“The above narrative has been constructed on a principle which is, in the opinion of the undersigned persons, new in the art of letters. Each of the two actors is described as he appeared to the other. But the undersigned persons absolutely guarantee the exactitude of the story; and if their version of the thing be questioned, they, the undersigned persons, would deucedly well like to know who does know about it if they don’t.

“The undersigned persons will now adjourn to `The Spotted Dog’ for beer. Farewell.

”(Signed) James Emerson Eames,
”Warden of Brakespeare College, Cambridge.

“Innocent Smith.”

Chapter II

The Two Curates; or, the Burglary Charge

Arthur Inglewood handed the document he had just read to the leaders of the prosecution, who examined it with their heads together. Both the Jew and the American were of sensitive and excitable stocks, and they revealed by the jumpings and bumpings of the black head and the yellow that nothing could be done in the way of denial of the document. The letter from the Warden was as authentic as the letter from the Sub-Warden, however regrettably different in dignity and social tone.

“Very few words,” said Inglewood, “are required to conclude our case in this matter. Surely it is now plain that our client carried his pistol about with the eccentric but innocent purpose of giving a wholesome scare to those whom he regarded as blasphemers. In each case the scare was so wholesome that the victim himself has dated from it as from a new birth. Smith, so far from being a madman, is rather a mad doctor — he walks the world curing frenzies and not distributing them. That is the answer to the two unanswerable questions which I put to the prosecutors. That is why they dared not produce a line by any one who had actually confronted the pistol. All who had actually confronted the pistol confessed that they had profited by it. That was why Smith, though a good shot, never hit anybody. He never hit anybody because he was a good shot. His mind was as clear of murder as his hands are of blood. This, I say, is the only possible explanation of these facts and of all the other facts. No one can possibly explain the Warden’s conduct except by believing the Warden’s story. Even Dr. Pym, who is a very factory of ingenious theories, could find no other theory to cover the case.”

“There are promising per-spectives in hypnotism and dual personality,” said Dr. Cyrus Pym dreamily; “the science of criminology is in its infancy, and—”

“Infancy!” cried Moon, jerking his red pencil in the air with a gesture of enlightenment; “why, that explains it!”

“I repeat,” proceeded Inglewood, “that neither Dr. Pym nor any one else can account on any other theory but ours for the Warden’s signature, for the shots missed and the witnesses missing.”

The little Yankee had slipped to his feet with some return of a cock-fighting coolness. “The defence,” he said, “omits a coldly colossal fact. They say we produce none of the actual victims. Wal, here is one victim — England’s celebrated and stricken Warner. I reckon he is pretty well produced. And they suggest that all the outrages were followed by reconciliation. Wal, there’s no flies on England’s Warner; and he isn’t reconciliated much.”

“My learned friend,” said Moon, getting elaborately to his feet, “must remember that the science of shooting Dr. Warner is in its infancy. Dr. Warner would strike the idlest eye as one specially difficult to startle into any recognition of the glory of God. We admit that our client, in this one instance, failed, and that the operation was not successful. But I am empowered to offer, on behalf of my client, a proposal for operating on Dr. Warner again, at his earliest convenience, and without further fees.”

“‘Ang it all, Michael,” cried Gould, quite serious for the first time in his life, “you might give us a bit of bally sense for a chinge.”

“What was Dr. Warner talking about just before the first shot?” asked Moon sharply.

“The creature,” said Dr. Warner superciliously, “asked me, with characteristic rationality, whether it was my birthday.”

“And you answered, with characteristic swank,” cried Moon, shooting out a long lean finger, as rigid and arresting as the pistol of Smith, “that you didn’t keep your birthday.”

“Something like that,” assented the doctor.

“Then,” continued Moon, “he asked you why not, and you said it was because you didn’t see that birth was anything to rejoice over. Agreed? Now is there any one who doubts that our tale is true?”

There was a cold crash of stillness in the room; and Moon said, “Pax populi

vox Dei; it is the silence of the people that is the voice of God. Or in

Dr. Pym’s more civilized language, it is up to him to open the next charge.

On this we claim an acquittal.”

It was about an hour later. Dr. Cyrus Pym had remained for an unprecedented time with his eyes closed and his thumb and finger in the air. It almost seemed as if he had been “struck so,” as the nurses say; and in the deathly silence Michael Moon felt forced to relieve the strain with some remark. For the last half-hour or so the eminent criminologist had been explaining that science took the same view of offences against property as it did of offences against life. “Most murder,” he had said, “is a variation of homicidal mania, and in the same way most theft is a version of kleptomania. I cannot entertain any doubt that my learned friends opposite adequately con-ceive how this must involve a scheme of punishment more tol’rant and humane than the cruel methods of ancient codes. They will doubtless exhibit consciousness of a chasm so eminently yawning, so thought-arresting, so—” It was here that he paused and indulged in the delicate gesture to which allusion has been made; and Michael could bear it no longer.

“Yes, yes,” he said impatiently, “we admit the chasm. The old cruel codes accuse a man of theft and send him to prison for ten years. The tolerant and humane ticket accuses him of nothing and sends him to prison for ever. We pass the chasm.”

It was characteristic of the eminent Pym, in one of his trances of verbal fastidiousness, that he went on, unconscious not only of his opponent’s interruption, but even of his own pause.

“So stock-improving,” continued Dr. Cyrus Pym, “so fraught with real high hopes of the future. Science therefore regards thieves, in the abstract, just as it regards murderers. It regards them not as sinners to be punished for an arbitrary period, but as patients to be detained and cared for,” (his first two digits closed again as he hesitated)— “in short, for the required period. But there is something special in the case we investigate here. Kleptomania commonly con-joins itself—”

“I beg pardon,” said Michael; “I did not ask just now because, to tell the truth, I really thought Dr. Pym, though seemingly vertical, was enjoying well-earned slumber, with a pinch in his fingers of scentless and delicate dust. But now that things are moving a little more, there is something I should really like to know. I have hung on Dr. Pym’s lips, of course, with an interest that it were weak to call rapture, but I have so far been unable to form any conjecture about what the accused, in the present instance, is supposed to have been and gone and done.”

“If Mr. Moon will have patience,” said Pym with dignity, “he will find that this was the very point to which my exposition was di-rected. Kleptomania, I say, exhibits itself as a kind of physical attraction to certain defined materials; and it has been held (by no less a man than Harris) that this is the ultimate explanation of the strict specialism and vurry narrow professional outlook of most criminals. One will have an irresistible physical impulsion towards pearl sleeve-links, while he passes over the most elegant and celebrated diamond sleeve-links, placed about in the most conspicuous locations. Another will impede his flight with no less than forty-seven buttoned boots, while elastic-sided boots leave him cold, and even sarcastic. The specialism of the criminal, I repeat, is a mark rather of insanity than of any brightness of business habits; but there is one kind of depredator to whom this principle is at first sight hard to apply. I allude to our fellow-citizen the housebreaker.

"It has been maintained by some of our boldest young truth-seekers, that the eye of a burglar beyond the back-garden wall could hardly be caught and hypnotized by a fork that is insulated in a locked box under the butler's bed. They have thrown down the gauntlet to American science on this point. They declare that diamond links are not left about in conspicuous locations in the haunts of the lower classes, as they were in the great test experiment of Calypso College. We hope this experiment here will be an answer to that young ringing challenge, and will bring the burglar once more into line and union with his fellow criminals."

Moon, whose face had gone through every phase of black bewilderment for five minutes past, suddenly lifted his hand and struck the table in explosive enlightenment.

"Oh, I see!" he cried; "you mean that Smith is a burglar."

"I thought I made it quite ad'quately lucid," said Mr. Pym, folding up his eyelids. It was typical of this topsy-turvy private trial that all the eloquent extras, all the rhetoric or digression on either side, was exasperating and unintelligible to the other. Moon could not make head or tail of the solemnity of a new civilization. Pym could not make head or tail of the gaiety of an old one.

"All the cases in which Smith has figured as an expropriator," continued the American doctor, "are cases of burglary. Pursuing the same course as in the previous case, we select the indubitable instance from the rest, and we take the most correct cast-iron evidence. I will now call on my colleague, Mr. Gould, to read a letter we have received from the earnest, unspotted Canon of Durham, Canon Hawkins."

Mr. Moses Gould leapt up with his usual alacrity to read the letter from the earnest and unspotted Hawkins. Moses Gould could imitate a farmyard well, Sir Henry Irving not so well, Marie Lloyd to a point of excellence, and the new motor horns in a manner that put him upon the platform of great artists. But his imitation of a Canon of Durham was not convincing; indeed, the sense of the letter was so much obscured by the extraordinary leaps and gasps of his pronunciation that it is perhaps better to print it here as Moon read it when, a little later, it was handed across the table.

“Dear Sir, — I can scarcely feel surprise that the incident you mention, private as it was, should have filtered through our omnivorous journals to the mere populace; for the position I have since attained makes me, I conceive, a public character, and this was certainly the most extraordinary incident in a not uneventful and perhaps not an unimportant career. I am by no means without experience in scenes of civil tumult. I have faced many a political crisis in the old Primrose League days at Herne Bay, and, before I broke with the wilder set, have spent many a night at the Christian Social Union. But this other experience was quite inconceivable. I can only describe it as the letting loose of a place which it is not for me, as a clergyman, to mention.

“It occurred in the days when I was, for a short period, a curate at Hoxton; and the other curate, then my colleague, induced me to attend a meeting which he described, I must say profanely described, as calculated to promote the kingdom of God. I found, on the contrary, that it consisted entirely of men in corduroys and greasy clothes whose manners were coarse and their opinions extreme.

“Of my colleague in question I wish to speak with the fullest respect and friendliness, and I will therefore say little. No one can be more convinced than I of the evil of politics in the pulpit; and I never offer my congregation any advice about voting except in cases in which I feel strongly that they are likely to make an erroneous selection. But, while I do not mean to touch at all upon political or social problems, I must say that for a clergyman to countenance, even in jest, such discredited nostrums of dissipated demagogues as Socialism or Radicalism partakes of the character of the betrayal of a sacred trust. Far be it from me to say a word against the Reverend Raymond Percy, the colleague in question. He was brilliant, I suppose, and to some apparently fascinating; but a clergyman who talks like a Socialist, wears his hair like a pianist, and behaves like an intoxicated person, will never rise in his profession, or even obtain the admiration of the good and wise. Nor is it for me to utter my personal judgements of the appearance of the people in the hall. Yet a glance round the room, revealing ranks of debased and envious faces—”

“Adopting,” said Moon explosively, for he was getting restive—“adopting the reverend gentleman’s favourite figure of logic, may I say that while tortures would not tear from me a whisper about his intellect, he is a blasted old jackass.”

“Really!” said Dr. Pym; “I protest.”

“You must keep quiet, Michael,” said Inglewood; “they have a right to read their story.”

“Chair! Chair! Chair!” cried Gould, rolling about exuberantly in his own; and Pym glanced for a moment towards the canopy which covered all the authority of the Court of Beacon.

“Oh, don’t wake the old lady,” said Moon, lowering his voice in a moody good-humour. “I apologize. I won’t interrupt again.”

Before the little eddy of interruption was ended the reading of the clergyman’s letter was already continuing.

“The proceedings opened with a speech from my colleague, of which I will say nothing. It was deplorable. Many of the audience were Irish, and showed the weakness of that impetuous people. When gathered together into gangs and conspiracies they seem to lose altogether that lovable good-nature and readiness to accept anything one tells them which distinguishes them as individuals.”

With a slight start, Michael rose to his feet, bowed solemnly, and sat down again.

“These persons, if not silent, were at least applausive during the speech of Mr. Percy. He descended to their level with witticisms about rent and a reserve of labour. Confiscation, expropriation, arbitration, and such words with which I cannot soil my lips, recurred constantly. Some hours afterward the storm broke. I had been addressing the meeting for some time, pointing out the lack of thrift in the working classes, their insufficient attendance at evening service, their neglect of the Harvest Festival, and of many other things that might materially help them to improve their lot. It was, I think, about this time that an extraordinary interruption occurred. An enormous, powerful man, partly concealed with white plaster, arose in the middle of the hall, and offered (in a loud, roaring voice, like a bull’s) some observations which seemed to be in a foreign language. Mr. Raymond Percy, my colleague, descended to his level by entering into a duel of repartee, in which he appeared to be the victor. The meeting began to behave more respectfully for a little; yet before I had said twelve sentences more the rush was made for the platform. The enormous plasterer, in particular, plunged towards us, shaking the earth like an elephant; and I really do not know what would have happened if a man equally large, but not quite so ill-dressed, had not jumped up also and held him away. This other big man shouted a sort of speech to the mob as he was shoving them back. I don’t know what he said, but, what with shouting and shoving and such horseplay, he got us out at a back door, while the wretched people went roaring down another passage.

“Then follows the truly extraordinary part of my story. When he had got us outside, in a mean backyard of blistered grass leading into a lane with a very lonely-looking lamp-post, this giant addressed me as follows: `You’re well out of that, sir; now you’d better come along with me. I want you to help me in an act of social justice, such as we’ve all been talking about. Come along!’ And turning his big back abruptly, he led us down the lean old lane with the one lean old lamp-post, we scarcely knowing what to do but to follow him. He had certainly helped us in a most difficult situation, and, as a gentleman, I could not treat such a benefactor with suspicion without grave grounds. Such also was the view of my Socialistic colleague, who (with all his dreadful talk of arbitration) is a gentleman also. In fact, he comes of the Staffordshire Percys, a branch of the old house and has the black hair and pale, clear-cut face of the whole family. I cannot but refer it to vanity that he should heighten his personal advantages with black velvet or a red cross of considerable ostentation, and certainly — but I digress.

“A fog was coming up the street, and that last lost lamp-post
faded behind us in a way that certainly depressed the mind.
The large man in front of us looked larger and larger in the haze.
He did not turn round, but he said with his huge back to us,
`All that talking’s no good; we want a little practical Socialism.’

“`I quite agree,’ said Percy; `but I always like to understand things in theory before I put them into practice.’

“`Oh, you just leave that to me,’ said the practical Socialist, or whatever he was, with the most terrifying vagueness. `I have a way with me. I’m a Permeator.’

“I could not imagine what he meant, but my companion laughed, so I was sufficiently reassured to continue the unaccountable journey for the present. It led us through most singular ways; out of the lane, where we were already rather cramped, into a paved passage, at the end of which we passed through a wooden gate left open. We then found ourselves, in the increasing darkness and vapour, crossing what appeared to be a beaten path across a kitchen garden. I called out to the enormous person going on in front, but he answered obscurely that it was a short cut.

"I was just repeating my very natural doubt to my clerical companion when I was brought up against a short ladder, apparently leading to a higher level of road. My thoughtless colleague ran up it so quickly that I could not do otherwise than follow as best I could. The path on which I then planted my feet was quite unprecedentedly narrow. I had never had to walk along a thoroughfare so exiguous. Along one side of it grew what, in the dark and density of air, I first took to be some short, strong thicket of shrubs. Then I saw that they were not short shrubs; they were the tops of tall trees. I, an English gentleman and clergyman of the Church of England — I was walking along the top of a garden wall like a tom cat.

"I am glad to say that I stopped within my first five steps, and let loose my just reprobation, balancing myself as best I could all the time.

"`It's a right-of-way,' declared my indefensible informant.

`It's closed to traffic once in a hundred years.'

"`Mr. Percy, Mr. Percy!' I called out; `you are not going on with this blackguard?'

"`Why, I think so,' answered my unhappy colleague flippantly. `I think you and I are bigger blackguards than he is, whatever he is.'

"`I am a burglar,' explained the big creature quite calmly. `I am a member of the Fabian Society. I take back the wealth stolen by the capitalist, not by sweeping civil war and revolution, but by reform fitted to the special occasion — here a little and there a little. Do you see that fifth house along the terrace with the flat roof? I'm permeating that one to-night.'

"`Whether this is a crime or a joke,' I cried, `I desire to be quit of it.'

"`The ladder is just behind you,' answered the creature with horrible courtesy; `and, before you go, do let me give you my card.'

"If I had had the presence of mind to show any proper spirit I should have flung it away, though any adequate gesture of the kind would have gravely affected my equilibrium upon the wall. As it was, in the wildness of the moment, I put it in my waistcoat pocket, and, picking my way back by wall and ladder, landed in the respectable streets once more. Not before, however, I had seen with my own eyes the two awful and lamentable facts — that the burglar was climbing up a slanting roof towards the chimneys, and that Raymond Percy (a priest of God and, what was worse, a gentleman) was crawling up after him. I have never seen either of them since that day.

"In consequence of this soul-searching experience I severed my connection with the wild set. I am far from saying that every member of the Christian Social Union must necessarily be a burglar. I have no right to bring any such charge. But it gave me a hint of what such courses may lead to in many cases; and I saw them no more.

"I have only to add that the photograph you enclose, taken by a
Mr. Inglewood, is undoubtedly that of the burglar in question.
When I got home that night I looked at his card, and he was inscribed
there under the name of Innocent Smith. — Yours faithfully,
"John Clement Hawkins."

Moon merely went through the form of glancing at the paper. He knew that the prosecutors could not have invented so heavy a document; that Moses Gould (for one) could no more write like a canon than he could read like one. After handing it back he rose to open the defence on the burglary charge.

"We wish," said Michael, "to give all reasonable facilities to the prosecution; especially as it will save the time of the whole court. The latter object I shall once again pursue by passing over all those points of theory which are so dear to Dr. Pym. I know how they are made. Perjury is a variety of aphasia, leading a man to say one thing instead of another. Forgery is a kind of writer's cramp, forcing a man to write his uncle's name instead of his own. Piracy on the high seas is probably a form of sea-sickness. But it is unnecessary for us to inquire into the causes of a fact which we deny. Innocent Smith never did commit burglary at all.

"I should like to claim the power permitted by our previous arrangement, and ask the prosecution two or three questions."

Dr. Cyrus Pym closed his eyes to indicate a courteous assent.

"In the first place," continued Moon, "have you the date of Canon Hawkins's last glimpse of Smith and Percy climbing up the walls and roofs?"

“Ho, yus!” called out Gould smartly. “November thirteen, eighteen ninety-one.”

“Have you,” continued Moon, “identified the houses in Hoxton up which they climbed?”

“Must have been Ladysmith Terrace out of the highroad,” answered Gould with the same clockwork readiness.

“Well,” said Michael, cocking an eyebrow at him, “was there any burglary in that terrace that night? Surely you could find that out.”

“There may well have been,” said the doctor primly, after a pause, “an unsuccessful one that led to no legalities.”

“Another question,” proceeded Michael. “Canon Hawkins, in his blood-and-thunder boyish way, left off at the exciting moment. Why don’t you produce the evidence of the other clergyman, who actually followed the burglar and presumably was present at the crime?”

Dr. Pym rose and planted the points of his fingers on the table, as he did when he was specially confident of the clearness of his reply.

“We have entirely failed,” he said, “to track the other clergyman, who seems to have melted into the ether after Canon Hawkins had seen him ascending the gutters and the leads. I am fully aware that this may strike many as sing’lar; yet, upon reflection, I think it will appear pretty natural to a bright thinker. This Mr. Raymond Percy is admittedly, by the canon’s evidence, a minister of eccentric ways. His con-nection with England’s proudest and fairest does not seemingly prevent a taste for the society of the real low-down. On the other hand, the prisoner Smith is, by general agreement, a man of irr’sistible fascination. I entertain no doubt that Smith led the Revered Percy into the crime and forced him to hide his head in the real crim’nal class. That would fully account for his non-appearance, and the failure of all attempts to trace him.”

“It is impossible, then, to trace him?” asked Moon.

“Impossible,” repeated the specialist, shutting his eyes.

“You are sure it’s impossible?”

“Oh dry up, Michael,” cried Gould, irritably. “We’d ‘ave found ‘im if we could, for you bet ‘e saw the burglary. Don’t YOU start looking for ‘im. Look for your own ‘ead in the dustbin. You’ll find that — after a bit,” and his voice died away in grumbling.

“Arthur,” directed Michael Moon, sitting down, “kindly read

Mr. Raymond Percy’s letter to the court.”

“Wishing, as Mr. Moon has said, to shorten the proceedings as much as possible,” began Inglewood, “I will not read the first part of the letter sent to us. It is only fair to the prosecution to admit the account given by the second clergyman fully ratifies, as far as facts are concerned, that given by the first clergyman. We concede, then, the canon’s story so far as it goes. This must necessarily be valuable to the prosecutor and also convenient to the court. I begin Mr. Percy’s letter, then, at the point when all three men were standing on the garden wall: —

“As I watched Hawkins wavering on the wall, I made up my own mind not to waver. A cloud of wrath was on my brain, like the cloud of copper fog on the houses and gardens round. My decision was violent and simple; yet the thoughts that led up to it were so complicated and contradictory that I could not retrace them now. I knew Hawkins was a kind, innocent gentleman; and I would have given ten pounds for the pleasure of kicking him down the road. That God should allow good people to be as bestially stupid as that — rose against me like a towering blasphemy.

“At Oxford, I fear, I had the artistic temperament rather badly; and artists love to be limited. I liked the church as a pretty pattern; discipline was mere decoration. I delighted in mere divisions of time; I liked eating fish on Friday. But then I like fish; and the fast was made for men who like meat. Then I came to Hoxton and found men who had fasted for five hundred years; men who had to gnaw fish because they could not get meat — and fish-bones when they could not get fish. As too many British officers treat the army as a review, so I had treated the Church Militant as if it were the Church Pageant. Hoxton cures that. Then I realized that for eighteen hundred years the Church Militant had not been a pageant, but a riot — and a suppressed riot. There, still living patiently in Hoxton, were the people to whom the tremendous promises had been made. In the face of that I had to become a revolutionary if I was to continue to be religious. In Hoxton one cannot be a conservative without being also an atheist — and a pessimist. Nobody but the devil could want to conserve Hoxton.

“On the top of all this comes Hawkins. If he had cursed all the Hoxton men, excommunicated them, and told them they were going to hell, I should have rather admired him. If he had ordered them all to be burned in the market-place, I should still have had that patience that all good Christians have with the wrongs inflicted on other people. But there is no priestcraft about Hawkins — nor any other kind of craft. He is as perfectly incapable of being a priest as he is of being a carpenter or a cabman or a gardener or a plasterer. He is a perfect gentleman; that is his complaint. He does not impose his creed, but simply his class. He never said a word of religion in the whole of his damnable address. He simply said all the things his brother, the major, would have said. A voice from heaven assures me that he has a brother, and that this brother is a major.

“When this helpless aristocrat had praised cleanliness in the body and convention in the soul to people who could hardly keep body and soul together, the stampede against our platform began. I took part in his undeserved rescue, I followed his obscure deliverer, until (as I have said) we stood together on the wall above the dim gardens, already clouding with fog. Then I looked at the curate and at the burglar, and decided, in a spasm of inspiration, that the burglar was the better man of the two. The burglar seemed quite as kind and human as the curate was — and he was also brave and self-reliant, which the curate was not. I knew there was no virtue in the upper class, for I belong to it myself; I knew there was not so very much in the lower class, for I had lived with it a long time. Many old texts about the despised and persecuted came back to my mind, and I thought that the saints might well be hidden in the criminal class. About the time Hawkins let himself down the ladder I was crawling up a low, sloping, blue-slate roof after the large man, who went leaping in front of me like a gorilla.

“This upward scramble was short, and we soon found ourselves tramping along a broad road of flat roofs, broader than many big thoroughfares, with chimney-pots here and there that seemed in the haze as bulky as small forts. The asphyxiation of the fog seemed to increase the somewhat swollen and morbid anger under which my brain and body laboured. The sky and all those things that are commonly clear seemed overpowered by sinister spirits. Tall spectres with turbans of vapour seemed to stand higher than the sun or moon, eclipsing both. I thought dimly of illustrations to the `Arabian Nights’ on brown paper with rich but sombre tints, showing genii gathering round the Seal of Solomon. By the way, what was the Seal of Solomon? Nothing to do with sealing-wax really, I suppose; but my muddled fancy felt the thick clouds as being of that heavy and clinging substance, of strong opaque colour, poured out of boiling pots and stamped into monstrous emblems.

“The first effect of the tall turbaned vapours was that discoloured look of pea-soup or coffee brown of which Londoners commonly speak. But the scene grew subtler with familiarity. We stood above the average of the housetops and saw something of that thing called smoke, which in great cities creates the strange thing called fog. Beneath us rose a forest of chimney-pots. And there stood in every chimney-pot, as if it were a flower-pot, a brief shrub or a tall tree of coloured vapour. The colours of the smoke were various; for some chimneys were from firesides and some from factories, and some again from mere rubbish heaps. And yet, though the tints were all varied, they all seemed unnatural, like fumes from a witch's pot. It was as if the shameful and ugly shapes growing shapeless in the cauldron sent up each its separate spurt of steam, coloured according to the fish or flesh consumed. Here, aglow from underneath, were dark red clouds, such as might drift from dark jars of sacrificial blood; there the vapour was dark indigo gray, like the long hair of witches steeped in the hell-broth. In another place the smoke was of an awful opaque ivory yellow, such as might be the disembodiment of one of their old, leprous waxen images. But right across it ran a line of bright, sinister, sulphurous green, as clear and crooked as Arabic—"

Mr. Moses Gould once more attempted the arrest of the 'bus. He was understood to suggest that the reader should shorten the proceedings by leaving out all the adjectives. Mrs. Duke, who had woken up, observed that she was sure it was all very nice, and the decision was duly noted down by Moses with a blue, and by Michael with a red pencil. Inglewood then resumed the reading of the document.

"Then I read the writing of the smoke. Smoke was like the modern city that makes it; it is not always dull or ugly, but it is always wicked and vain.

"Modern England was like a cloud of smoke; it could carry all colours, but it could leave nothing but a stain. It was our weakness and not our strength that put a rich refuse in the sky. These were the rivers of our vanity pouring into the void. We had taken the sacred circle of the whirlwind, and looked down on it, and seen it as a whirlpool. And then we had used it as a sink. It was a good symbol of the mutiny in my own mind. Only our worst things were going to heaven. Only our criminals could still ascend like angels.

"As my brain was blinded with such emotions, my guide stopped by one of the big chimney-pots that stood at the regular intervals like lamp-posts along that uplifted and aerial highway. He put his heavy hand upon it, and for the moment I thought he was merely leaning on it, tired with his steep scramble along the terrace. So far as I could guess from the abysses, full of fog on either side, and the veiled lights of red brown and old gold glowing through them now and again, we were on the top of one of those long, consecutive, and genteel rows of houses which are still to be found lifting their heads above poorer districts, the remains of some rage of optimism in earlier speculative builders. Probably enough, they were entirely untenanted, or tenanted only by such small clans of the poor as gather also in the old emptied palaces of Italy. Indeed, some little time later, when the fog had lifted a little, I discovered that we were walking round a semi-circle of crescent which fell away below us into one flat square or wide street below another, like a giant stairway, in a manner not unknown in the eccentric building of London, and looking like the last ledges of the land. But a cloud sealed the giant stairway as yet.

"My speculations about the sullen skyscape, however, were interrupted by something as unexpected as the moon falling from the sky. Instead of my burglar lifting his hand from the chimney he leaned on, he leaned on it a little more heavily, and the whole chimney-pot turned over like the opening top of an inkstand. I remembered the short ladder leaning against the low wall and felt sure he had arranged his criminal approach long before.

"The collapse of the big chimney-pot ought to have been the culmination of my chaotic feelings; but, to tell the truth, it produced a sudden sense of comedy and even of comfort. I could not recall what connected this abrupt bit of housebreaking with some quaint but still kindly fancies. Then I remembered the delightful and uproarious scenes of roofs and chimneys in the harlequinades of my childhood, and was darkly and quite irrationally comforted by a sense of unsubstantiality in the scene, as if the houses were of lath and paint and pasteboard, and were only meant to be tumbled in and out of by policemen and pantaloons. The law-breaking of my companion seemed not only seriously excusable, but even comically excusable. Who were all these pompous preposterous people with their footmen and their foot-scrapers, their chimney-pots and their chimney-pot hats, that they should prevent a poor clown from getting sausages if he wanted them? One would suppose that property was a serious thing. I had reached, as it were, a higher level of that mountainous and vapourous visions, the heaven of a higher levity.

"My guide had jumped down into the dark cavity revealed by the displaced chimney-pot. He must have landed at a level considerably lower, for, tall as he was, nothing but his weirdly tousled head remained visible. Something again far off, and yet familiar, pleased me about this way of invading the houses of men. I thought of little chimney-sweeps, and `The Water Babies;' but I decided that it was not that. Then I remembered what it was that made me connect such topsy-turvy trespass with ideas quite opposite to the idea of crime. Christmas Eve, of course, and Santa Claus coming down the chimney.

"Almost at the same instant the hairy head disappeared into the black hole; but I heard a voice calling to me from below. A second or two afterwards, the hairy head reappeared; it was dark against the more fiery part of the fog, and nothing could be spelt of its expression, but its voice called on me to follow with that enthusiastic impatience proper only among old friends. I jumped into the gulf, and as blindly as Curtius, for I was still thinking of Santa Claus and the traditional virtue of such vertical entrance.

"In every well-appointed gentleman's house, I reflected, there was the front door for the gentlemen, and the side door for the tradesmen; but there was also the top door for the gods. The chimney is, so to speak, the underground passage between earth and heaven. By this starry tunnel Santa Claus manages — like the skylark — to be true to the kindred points of heaven and home. Nay, owing to certain conventions, and a widely distributed lack of courage for climbing, this door was, perhaps, little used. But Santa Claus's door was really the front door: it was the door fronting the universe.

"I thought this as I groped my way across the black garret, or loft below the roof, and scrambled down the squat ladder that let us down into a yet larger loft below. Yet it was not till I was half-way down the ladder that I suddenly stood still, and thought for an instant of retracing all my steps, as my companion had retraced them from the beginning of the garden wall. The name of Santa Claus had suddenly brought me back to my senses. I remembered why Santa Clause came, and why he was welcome.

"I was brought up in the propertied classes, and with all their horror of offences against property. I had heard all the regular denunciations of robbery, both right and wrong; I had read the Ten Commandments in church a thousand times. And then and there, at the age of thirty-four, half-way down a ladder in a dark room in the bodily act of burglar, I saw suddenly for the first time that theft, after all, is really wrong.

“It was too late to turn back, however, and I followed the strangely soft footsteps of my huge companion across the lower and larger loft, till he knelt down on a part of the bare flooring and, after a few fumbling efforts, lifted a sort of trapdoor. This released a light from below, and we found ourselves looking down into a lamp-lit sitting room, of the sort that in large houses often leads out of a bedroom, and is an adjunct to it. Light thus breaking from beneath our feet like a soundless explosion, showed that the trapdoor just lifted was clogged with dust and rust, and had doubtless been long disused until the advent of my enterprising friend. But I did not look at this long, for the sight of the shining room underneath us had an almost unnatural attractiveness. To enter a modern interior at so strange an angle, by so forgotten a door, was an epoch in one’s psychology. It was like having found a fourth dimension.

“My companion dropped from the aperture into the room so suddenly and soundlessly, that I could do nothing but follow him; though, for lack of practice in crime, I was by no means soundless. Before the echo of my boots had died away, the big burglar had gone quickly to the door, half opened it, and stood looking down the staircase and listening. Then, leaving the door still half open, he came back into the middle of the room, and ran his roving blue eye round its furniture and ornament. The room was comfortably lined with books in that rich and human way that makes the walls seem alive; it was a deep and full, but slovenly, bookcase, of the sort that is constantly ransacked for the purposes of reading in bed. One of those stunted German stoves that look like red goblins stood in a corner, and a sideboard of walnut wood with closed doors in its lower part. There were three windows, high but narrow. After another glance round, my housebreaker plucked the walnut doors open and rummaged inside. He found nothing there, apparently, except an extremely handsome cut-glass decanter, containing what looked like port. Somehow the sight of the thief returning with this ridiculous little luxury in his hand woke within me once more all the revelation and revulsion I had felt above.

“`Don’t do it!’ I cried quite incoherently, `Santa Claus—’

“`Ah,’ said the burglar, as he put the decanter on the table and stood looking at me, `you’ve thought about that, too.’

“`I can’t express a millionth part of what I’ve thought of,’ I cried, `but it’s something like this… oh, can’t you see it? Why are children not afraid of Santa Claus, though he comes like a thief in the night? He is permitted secrecy, trespass, almost treachery — because there are more toys where he has been. What should we feel if there were less? Down what chimney from hell would come the goblin that should take away the children's balls and dolls while they slept? Could a Greek tragedy be more gray and cruel than that daybreak and awakening? Dog-stealer, horse-stealer, man-stealer — can you think of anything so base as a toy-stealer?'

"The burglar, as if absently, took a large revolver from his pocket and laid it on the table beside the decanter, but still kept his blue reflective eyes fixed on my face.

"`Man!' I said, `all stealing is toy-stealing. That's why it's really wrong. The goods of the unhappy children of men should be really respected because of their worthlessness. I know Naboth's vineyard is as painted as Noah's Ark. I know Nathan's ewe-lamb is really a woolly baa-lamb on a wooden stand. That is why I could not take them away. I did not mind so much, as long as I thought of men's things as their valuables; but I dare not put a hand upon their vanities.'

"After a moment I added abruptly, `Only saints and sages ought to be robbed. They may be stripped and pillaged; but not the poor little worldly people of the things that are their poor little pride.'

"He set out two wineglasses from the cupboard, filled them both, and lifted one of them with a salutation towards his lips.

"`Don't do it!' I cried. `It might be the last bottle of some rotten vintage or other. The master of this house may be quite proud of it. Don't you see there's something sacred in the silliness of such things?'

"`It's not the last bottle,' answered my criminal calmly; `there's plenty more in the cellar.'

"`You know the house, then?' I said.

"`Too well,' he answered, with a sadness so strange as to have something eerie about it. `I am always trying to forget what I know — and to find what I don't know.' He drained his glass. `Besides,' he added, `it will do him good.'

"`What will do him good?'

"`The wine I'm drinking,' said the strange person.

"`Does he drink too much, then?' I inquired.

"`No,' he answered, `not unless I do.'

"`Do you mean,' I demanded, `that the owner of this house approves of all you do?'

“`God forbid,’ he answered; `but he has to do the same.’

“The dead face of the fog looking in at all three windows unreasonable increased a sense of riddle, and even terror, about this tall, narrow house we had entered out of the sky. I had once more the notion about the gigantic genii — I fancied that enormous Egyptian faces, of the dead reds and yellows of Egypt, were staring in at each window of our little lamp-lit room as at a lighted stage of marionettes. My companion went on playing with the pistol in front of him, and talking with the same rather creepy confidentialness.

“`I am always trying to find him — to catch him unawares. I come in through skylights and trapdoors to find him; but whenever I find him — he is doing what I am doing.’

“I sprang to my feet with a thrill of fear. `There is some one coming,’ I cried, and my cry had something of a shriek in it. Not from the stairs below, but along the passage from the inner bedchamber (which seemed somehow to make it more alarming), footsteps were coming nearer. I am quite unable to say what mystery, or monster, or double, I expected to see when the door was pushed open from within. I am only quite certain that I did not expect to see what I did see.

“Framed in the open doorway stood, with an air of great serenity, a rather tall young woman, definitely though indefinably artistic — her dress the colour of spring and her hair of autumn leaves, with a face which, though still comparatively young, conveyed experience as well as intelligence. All she said was, `I didn’t hear you come in.’

“`I came in another way,’ said the Permeator, somewhat vaguely.

`I’d left my latchkey at home.’

“I got to my feet in a mixture of politeness and mania.

`I’m really very sorry,’ I cried. `I know my position is irregular.

Would you be so obliging as to tell me whose house this is?’

“`Mine,’ said the burglar, `May I present you to my wife?’

“I doubtfully, and somewhat slowly, resumed my seat; and I did not get out of it till nearly morning. Mrs. Smith (such was the prosaic name of this far from prosaic household) lingered a little, talking slightly and pleasantly. She left on my mind the impression of a certain odd mixture of shyness and sharpness; as if she knew the world well, but was still a little harmlessly afraid of it. Perhaps the possession of so jumpy and incalculable a husband had left her a little nervous. Anyhow, when she had retired to the inner chamber once more, that extraordinary man poured forth his apologia and autobiography over the dwindling wine.

“He had been sent to Cambridge with a view to a mathematical and scientific, rather than a classical or literary, career. A starless nihilism was then the philosophy of the schools; and it bred in him a war between the members and the spirit, but one in which the members were right. While his brain accepted the black creed, his very body rebelled against it. As he put it, his right hand taught him terrible things. As the authorities of Cambridge University put it, unfortunately, it had taken the form of his right hand flourishing a loaded firearm in the very face of a distinguished don, and driving him to climb out of the window and cling to a waterspout. He had done it solely because the poor don had professed in theory a preference for non-existence. For this very unacademic type of argument he had been sent down. Vomiting as he was with revulsion, from the pessimism that had quailed under his pistol, he made himself a kind of fanatic of the joy of life. He cut across all the associations of serious-minded men. He was gay, but by no means careless. His practical jokes were more in earnest than verbal ones. Though not an optimist in the absurd sense of maintaining that life is all beer and skittles, he did really seem to maintain that beer and skittles are the most serious part of it. `What is more immortal,’ he would cry, `than love and war? Type of all desire and joy — beer. Type of all battle and conquest — skittles.’

“There was something in him of what the old world called the solemnity of revels — when they spoke of `solemnizing’ a mere masquerade or wedding banquet. Nevertheless he was not a mere pagan any more than he was a mere practical joker. His eccentricities sprang from a static fact of faith, in itself mystical, and even childlike and Christian.

“`I don’t deny,’ he said, `that there should be priests to remind men that they will one day die. I only say that at certain strange epochs it is necessary to have another kind of priests, called poets, actually to remind men that they are not dead yet. The intellectuals among whom I moved were not even alive enough to fear death. They hadn’t enough blood in them to be cowards. Until a pistol barrel was poked under their very noses they never even knew they had been born. For ages looking up an eternal perspective it might be true that life is a learning to die. But for these little white rats it was just as true that death was their only chance of learning to live.’

“His creed of wonder was Christian by this absolute test; that he felt it continually slipping from himself as much as from others. He had the same pistol for himself, as Brutus said of the dagger. He continually ran preposterous risks of high precipice or headlong speed to keep alive the mere conviction that he was alive. He treasured up trivial and yet insane details that had once reminded him of the awful subconscious reality. When the don had hung on the stone gutter, the sight of his long dangling legs, vibrating in the void like wings, somehow awoke the naked satire of the old definition of man as a two-legged animal without feathers. The wretched professor had been brought into peril by his head, which he had so elaborately cultivated, and only saved by his legs, which he had treated with coldness and neglect. Smith could think of no other way of announcing or recording this, except to send a telegram to an old friend (by this time a total stranger) to say that he had just seen a man with two legs; and that the man was alive.

“The uprush of his released optimism burst into stars like a rocket when he suddenly fell in love. He happened to be shooting a high and very headlong weir in a canoe, by way of proving to himself that he was alive; and he soon found himself involved in some doubt about the continuance of the fact. What was worse, he found he had equally jeopardized a harmless lady alone in a rowing-boat, and one who had provoked death by no professions of philosophic negation. He apologized in wild gasps through all his wild wet labours to bring her to the shore, and when he had done so at last, he seems to have proposed to her on the bank. Anyhow, with the same impetuosity with which he had nearly murdered her, he completely married her; and she was the lady in green to whom I had recently said `good-night.’

“They had settled down in these high narrow houses near Highbury. Perhaps, indeed, that is hardly the word. One could strictly say that Smith was married, that he was very happily married, that he not only did not care for any woman but his wife, but did not seem to care for any place but his home; but perhaps one could hardly say that he had settled down. `I am a very domestic fellow,’ he explained with gravity, `and have often come in through a broken window rather than be late for tea.’

“He lashed his soul with laughter to prevent it falling asleep. He lost his wife a series of excellent servants by knocking at the door as a total stranger, and asking if Mr. Smith lived there and what kind of a man he was. The London general servant is not used to the master indulging in such transcendental ironies. And it was found impossible to explain to her that he did it in order to feel the same interest in his own affairs that he always felt in other people's.

"`I know there's a fellow called Smith,' he said in his rather weird way, `living in one of the tall houses in this terrace. I know he is really happy, and yet I can never catch him at it.'

"Sometimes he would, of a sudden, treat his wife with a kind of paralyzed politeness, like a young stranger struck with love at first sight. Sometimes he would extend this poetic fear to the very furniture; would seem to apologize to the chair he sat on, and climb the staircase as cautiously as a cragsman, to renew in himself the sense of their skeleton of reality. Every stair is a ladder and every stool a leg, he said. And at other times he would play the stranger exactly in the opposite sense, and would enter by another way, so as to feel like a thief and a robber. He would break and violate his own home, as he had done with me that night. It was near morning before I could tear myself from this queer confidence of the Man Who Would Not Die, and as I shook hands with him on the doorstep the last load of fog was lifting, and rifts of daylight revealed the stairway of irregular street levels that looked like the end of the world.

"It will be enough for many to say that I had passed a night with a maniac. What other term, it will be said, could be applied to such a being? A man who reminds himself that he is married by pretending not to be married! A man who tries to covet his own goods instead of his neighbor's! On this I have but one word to say, and I feel it of my honour to say it, though no one understands. I believe the maniac was one of those who do not merely come, but are sent; sent like a great gale upon ships by Him who made His angels winds and His messengers a flaming fire. This, at least, I know for certain. Whether such men have laughed or wept, we have laughed at their laughter as much as at their weeping. Whether they cursed or blessed the world, they have never fitted it. It is true that men have shrunk from the sting of a great satirist as if from the sting of an adder. But it is equally true that men flee from the embrace of a great optimist as from the embrace of a bear. Nothing brings down more curses than a real benediction. For the goodness of good things, like the badness of bad things, is a prodigy past speech; it is to be pictured rather than spoken. We shall have gone deeper than the deeps of heaven and grown older than the oldest angels before we feel, even in its first faint vibrations, the everlasting violence of that double passion with which God hates and loves the world. — I am, yours faithfully, “Raymond Percy.”

“Oh, ‘oly, ‘oly, ‘oly!” said Mr. Moses Gould.

The instant he had spoken all the rest knew they had been in an almost religious state of submission and assent. Something had bound them together; something in the sacred tradition of the last two words of the letter; something also in the touching and boyish embarrassment with which Inglewood had read them — for he had all the thin-skinned reverence of the agnostic. Moses Gould was as good a fellow in his way as ever lived; far kinder to his family than more refined men of pleasure, simple and steadfast in his admiration, a thoroughly wholesome animal and a thoroughly genuine character. But wherever there is conflict, crises come in which any soul, personal or racial, unconsciously turns on the world the most hateful of its hundred faces. English reverence, Irish mysticism, American idealism, looked up and saw on the face of Moses a certain smile. It was that smile of the Cynic Triumphant, which has been the tocsin for many a cruel riot in Russian villages or mediaeval towns.

“Oh, ‘oly, ‘oly, ‘oly!” said Moses Gould.

Finding that this was not well received, he explained further, exuberance deepening on his dark exuberant features.

“Always fun to see a bloke swallow a wasp when ‘e’s corfin’ up a fly,” he said pleasantly. “Don’t you see you’ve bunged up old Smith anyhow. If this parson’s tale’s O.K. — why, Smith is ‘ot. ‘E’s pretty ‘ot. We find him elopin’ with Miss Gray (best respects!) in a cab. Well, what abart this Mrs. Smith the curate talks of, with her blarsted shyness — transmigogrified into a blighted sharpness? Miss Gray ain’t been very sharp, but I reckon she’ll be pretty shy.”

“Don’t be a brute,” growled Michael Moon.

None could lift their eyes to look at Mary; but Inglewood sent a glance along the table at Innocent Smith. He was still bowed above his paper toys, and a wrinkle was on his forehead that might have been worry or shame. He carefully plucked out one corner of a complicated paper and tucked it in elsewhere; then the wrinkle vanished and he looked relieved.

Chapter III

The Round Road; or, the Desertion Charge

Pym rose with sincere embarrassment; for he was an American, and his respect for ladies was real, and not at all scientific.

“Ignoring,” he said, “the delicate and considerable knightly protests that have been called forth by my colleague’s native sense of oration, and apologizing to all for whom our wild search for truth seems unsuitable to the grand ruins of a feudal land, I still think my colleague’s question by no means devoid of rel’vancy. The last charge against the accused was one of burglary; the next charge on the paper is of bigamy and desertion. It does without question appear that the defence, in aspiring to rebut this last charge, have really admitted the next. Either Innocent Smith is still under a charge of attempted burglary, or else that is exploded; but he is pretty well fixed for attempted bigamy. It all depends on what view we take of the alleged letter from Curate Percy. Under these conditions I feel justified in claiming my right to questions. May I ask how the defence got hold of the letter from Curate Percy? Did it come direct from the prisoner?”

“We have had nothing direct from the prisoner,” said Moon quietly. “The few documents which the defence guarantees came to us from another quarter.”

“From what quarter?” asked Dr. Pym.

“If you insist,” answered Moon, “we had them from Miss Gray.

“Dr. Cyrus Pym quite forgot to close his eyes, and, instead, opened them very wide.

“Do you really mean to say,” he said, “that Miss Gray was in possession of this document testifying to a previous Mrs. Smith?”

“Quite so,” said Inglewood, and sat down.

The doctor said something about infatuation in a low and painful voice, and then with visible difficulty continued his opening remarks.

“Unfortunately the tragic truth revealed by Curate Percy’s narrative is only too crushingly confirmed by other and shocking documents in our own possession. Of these the principal and most certain is the testimony of Innocent Smith’s gardener, who was present at the most dramatic and eye-opening of his many acts of marital infidelity. Mr. Gould, the gardener, please.”

Mr. Gould, with his tireless cheerfulness, arose to present the gardener. That functionary explained that he had served Mr. and Mrs. Innocent Smith when they had a little house on the edge of Croydon. From the gardener's tale, with its many small allusions, Inglewood grew certain he had seen the place. It was one of those corners of town or country that one does not forget, for it looked like a frontier. The garden hung very high above the lane, and its end was steep and sharp, like a fortress. Beyond was a roll of real country, with a white path sprawling across it, and the roots, boles, and branches of great gray trees writhing and twisting against the sky. But as if to assert that the lane itself was suburban, were sharply relieved against that gray and tossing upland a lamp-post painted a peculiar yellow-green and a red pillar-box that stood exactly at the corner. Inglewood was sure of the place; he had passed it twenty times in his constitutionals on the bicycle; he had always dimly felt it was a place where something might occur. But it gave him quite a shiver to feel that the face of his frightful friend or enemy Smith might at any time have appeared over the garden bushes above. The gardener's account, unlike the curate's, was quite free from decorative adjectives, however many he may have uttered privately when writing it. He simply said that on a particular morning Mr. Smith came out and began to play about with a rake, as he often did. Sometimes he would tickle the nose of his eldest child (he had two children); sometimes he would hook the rake on to the branch of a tree, and hoist himself up with horrible gymnastic jerks, like those of a giant frog in its final agony. Never, apparently, did he think of putting the rake to any of its proper uses, and the gardener, in consequence, treated his actions with coldness and brevity. But the gardener was certain that on one particular morning in October he (the gardener) had come round the corner of the house carrying the hose, had seen Mr. Smith standing on the lawn in a striped red and white jacket (which might have been his smoking-jacket, but was quite as like a part of his pyjamas), and had heard him then and there call out to his wife, who was looking out of the bedroom window on to the garden, these decisive and very loud expressions —

"I won't stay here any longer. I've got another wife and much better children a long way from here. My other wife's got redder hair than yours, and my other garden's got a much finer situation; and I'm going off to them."

With these words, apparently, he sent the rake flying far up into the sky, higher than many could have shot an arrow, and caught it again. Then he cleared the hedge at a leap and alighted on his feet down in the lane below, and set off up the road without even a hat. Much of the picture was doubtless supplied by Inglewood's accidental memory of the place. He could see with his mind's eye that big bare-headed figure with the ragged rake swaggering up the crooked woodland road, and leaving lamp-post and pillar-box behind. But the gardener, on his own account, was quite prepared to swear to the public confession of bigamy, to the temporary disappearance of the rake in the sky, and the final disappearance of the man up the road. Moreover, being a local man, he could swear that, beyond some local rumours that Smith had embarked on the south-eastern coast, nothing was known of him again.

This impression was somewhat curiously clinched by Michael Moon in the few but clear phrases in which he opened the defence upon the third charge. So far from denying that Smith had fled from Croydon and disappeared on the Continent, he seemed prepared to prove all this on his own account. "I hope you are not so insular," he said, "that you will not respect the word of a French innkeeper as much as that of an English gardener. By Mr. Inglewood's favour we will hear the French innkeeper."

Before the company had decided the delicate point Inglewood was already reading the account in question. It was in French. It seemed to them to run something like this: —

"Sir, — Yes; I am Durobin of Durobin's Cafe on the sea-front at Gras, rather north of Dunquerque. I am willing to write all I know of the stranger out of the sea.

"I have no sympathy with eccentrics or poets. A man of sense looks for beauty in things deliberately intended to be beautiful, such as a trim flower-bed or an ivory statuette. One does not permit beauty to pervade one's whole life, just as one does not pave all the roads with ivory or cover all the fields with geraniums. My faith, but we should miss the onions!

"But whether I read things backwards through my memory, or whether there are indeed atmospheres of psychology which the eye of science cannot as yet pierce, it is the humiliating fact that on that particular evening I felt like a poet — like any little rascal of a poet who drinks absinthe in the mad Montmartre.

“Positively the sea itself looked like absinthe, green and bitter and poisonous. I had never known it look so unfamiliar before. In the sky was that early and stormy darkness that is so depressing to the mind, and the wind blew shrilly round the little lonely coloured kiosk where they sell the newspapers, and along the sand-hills by the shore. There I saw a fishing-boat with a brown sail standing in silently from the sea. It was already quite close, and out of it clambered a man of monstrous stature, who came wading to shore with the water not up to his knees, though it would have reached the hips of many men. He leaned on a long rake or pole, which looked like a trident, and made him look like a Triton. Wet as he was, and with strips of seaweed clinging to him, he walked across to my cafe, and, sitting down at a table outside, asked for cherry brandy, a liqueur which I keep, but is seldom demanded. Then the monster, with great politeness, invited me to partake of a vermouth before my dinner, and we fell into conversation. He had apparently crossed from Kent by a small boat got at a private bargain because of some odd fancy he had for passing promptly in an easterly direction, and not waiting for any of the official boats. He was, he somewhat vaguely explained, looking for a house. When I naturally asked him where the house was, he answered that he did not know; it was on an island; it was somewhere to the east; or, as he expressed it with a hazy and yet impatient gesture, `over there.’

“I asked him how, if he did not know the place, he would know it when he saw it. Here he suddenly ceased to be hazy, and became alarmingly minute. He gave a description of the house detailed enough for an auctioneer. I have forgotten nearly all the details except the last two, which were that the lamp-post was painted green, and that there was a red pillar-box at the corner.

“`A red pillar-box!’ I cried in astonishment. `Why, the place must be in England!’

“`I had forgotten,’ he said, nodding heavily. `That is the island’s name.’

“`But, ~nom du nom~,’ I cried testily, `you’ve just come from England, my boy.’

“`They SAID it was England,’ said my imbecile, conspiratorially. `They said it was Kent. But Kentish men are such liars one can’t believe anything they say.’

“`Monsieur,’ I said, `you must pardon me. I am elderly, and the ~fumisteries~ of the young men are beyond me. I go by common sense, or, at the largest, by that extension of applied common sense called science.’

“`Science!’ cried the stranger. `There is only one good thing science ever discovered — a good thing, good tidings of great joy — that the world is round.’

“I told him with civility that his words conveyed no impression to my intelligence. `I mean,’ he said, `that going right round the world is the shortest way to where you are already.’

“`Is it not even shorter,’ I asked, `to stop where you are?’

“`No, no, no!’ he cried emphatically. `That way is long and very weary. At the end of the world, at the back of the dawn, I shall find the wife I really married and the house that is really mine. And that house will have a greener lamp-post and a redder pillar-box. Do you,’ he asked with a sudden intensity, `do you never want to rush out of your house in order to find it?’

“`No, I think not,’ I replied; `reason tells a man from

the first to adapt his desires to the probable supply of life.

I remain here, content to fulfil the life of man.

All my interests are here, and most of my friends, and—’

“`And yet,’ he cried, starting to his almost terrific height, `you made the French Revolution!’

“`Pardon me,’ I said, `I am not quite so elderly.

A relative perhaps.’

“`I mean your sort did!’ exclaimed this personage. `Yes, your damned smug, settled, sensible sort made the French Revolution. Oh! I know some say it was no good, and you’re just back where you were before. Why, blast it all, that’s just where we all want to be — back where we were before! That is revolution — going right round! Every revolution, like a repentance, is a return.’

“He was so excited that I waited till he had taken his seat again, and then said something indifferent and soothing; but he struck the tiny table with his colossal fist and went on.

“`I am going to have a revolution, not a French Revolution, but an English Revolution. God has given to each tribe its own type of mutiny. The Frenchmen march against the citadel of the city together; the Englishman marches to the outskirts of the city, and alone. But I am going to turn the world upside down, too. I’m going to turn myself upside down. I’m going to walk upside down in the cursed upsidedownland of the Antipodes, where trees and men hang head downward in the sky. But my revolution, like yours, like the earth’s, will end up in the holy, happy place — the celestial, incredible place — the place where we were before.’

“With these remarks, which can scarcely be reconciled with reason, he leapt from the seat and strode away into the twilight, swinging his pole and leaving behind him an excessive payment, which also pointed to some loss of mental balance. This is all I know of the episode of the man landed from the fishing-boat, and I hope it may serve the interests of justice. — Accept, Sir, the assurances of the very high consideration, with which I have the honour to be your obedient servant, “Jules Durobin.”

“The next document in our dossier,” continued Inglewood, “comes from the town of Crazok, in the central plains of Russia, and runs as follows: —

“Sir, — My name is Paul Nickolaiovitch: I am the stationmaster at the station near Crazok. The great trains go by across the plains taking people to China, but very few people get down at the platform where I have to watch. This makes my life rather lonely, and I am thrown back much upon the books I have. But I cannot discuss these very much with my neighbours, for enlightened ideas have not spread in this part of Russia so much as in other parts. Many of the peasants round here have never heard of Bernard Shaw.

“I am a Liberal, and do my best to spread Liberal ideas; but since the failure of the revolution this has been even more difficult. The revolutionists committed many acts contrary to the pure principles of humanitarianism, with which indeed, owing to the scarcity of books, they were ill acquainted. I did not approve of these cruel acts, though provoked by the tyranny of the government; but now there is a tendency to reproach all Intelligents with the memory of them. This is very unfortunate for Intelligents.

“It was when the railway strike was almost over, and a few trains came through at long intervals, that I stood one day watching a train that had come in. Only one person got out of the train, far away up at the other end of it, for it was a very long train. It was evening, with a cold, greenish sky. A little snow had fallen, but not enough to whiten the plain, which stretched away a sort of sad purple in all directions, save where the flat tops of some distant tablelands caught the evening light like lakes. As the solitary man came stamping along on the thin snow by the train he grew larger and larger; I thought I had never seen so large a man. But he looked even taller than he was, I think, because his shoulders were very big and his head comparatively little. From the big shoulders hung a tattered old jacket, striped dull red and dirty white, very thin for the winter, and one hand rested on a huge pole such as peasants rake in weeds with to burn them.

“Before he had traversed the full length of the train he was entangled in one of those knots of rowdies that were the embers of the extinct revolution, though they mostly disgraced themselves upon the government side. I was just moving to his assistance, when he whirled up his rake and laid out right and left with such energy that he came through them without scathe and strode right up to me, leaving them staggered and really astonished.

“Yet when he reached me, after so abrupt an assertion of his aim, he could only say rather dubiously in French that he wanted a house.

“`There are not many houses to be had round here,’ I answered

in the same language, `the district has been very disturbed.

A revolution, as you know, has recently been suppressed.

Any further building—’

“`Oh! I don’t mean that,’ he cried; `I mean a real house — a live house.

It really is a live house, for it runs away from me.’

“`I am ashamed to say that something in his phrase or gesture moved me profoundly. We Russians are brought up in an atmosphere of folk-lore, and its unfortunate effects can still be seen in the bright colours of the children’s dolls and of the ikons. For an instant the idea of a house running away from a man gave me pleasure, for the enlightenment of man moves slowly.

“`Have you no other house of your own?’ I asked.

“`I have left it,’ he said very sadly. `It was not the house that grew dull, but I that grew dull in it. My wife was better than all women, and yet I could not feel it.’

“`And so,’ I said with sympathy, `you walked straight out of the front door, like a masculine Nora.’

“`Nora?’ he inquired politely, apparently supposing it to be a Russian word.

“`I mean Nora in “The Doll’s House,”’ I replied.

“At this he looked very much astonished, and I knew he was an Englishman; for Englishmen always think that Russians study nothing but `ukases.’

“`”The Doll’s House”?’ he cried vehemently; `why, that is just where Ibsen was so wrong! Why, the whole aim of a house is to be a doll’s house. Don’t you remember, when you were a child, how those little windows

WERE windows, while the big windows weren't. A child has a doll's house, and shrieks when a front door opens inwards. A banker has a real house, yet how numerous are the bankers who fail to emit the faintest shriek when their real front doors open inwards.'

"Something from the folk-lore of my infancy still kept me foolishly silent; and before I could speak, the Englishman had leaned over and was saying in a sort of loud whisper, `I have found out how to make a big thing small. I have found out how to turn a house into a doll's house. Get a long way off it: God lets us turn all things into toys by his great gift of distance. Once let me see my old brick house standing up quite little against the horizon, and I shall want to go back to it again. I shall see the funny little toy lamp-post painted green against the gate, and all the dear little people like dolls looking out of the window. For the windows really open in my doll's house.'

"`But why?' I asked, `should you wish to return to that particular doll's house? Having taken, like Nora, the bold step against convention, having made yourself in the conventional sense disreputable, having dared to be free, why should you not take advantage of your freedom? As the greatest modern writers have pointed out, what you called your marriage was only your mood. You have a right to leave it all behind, like the clippings of your hair or the parings of your nails. Having once escaped, you have the world before you. Though the words may seem strange to you, you are free in Russia.'

"He sat with his dreamy eyes on the dark circles of the plains, where the only moving thing was the long and labouring trail of smoke out of the railway engine, violet in tint, volcanic in outline, the one hot and heavy cloud of that cold clear evening of pale green.

"`Yes,' he said with a huge sigh, `I am free in Russia. You are right. I could really walk into that town over there and have love all over again, and perhaps marry some beautiful woman and begin again, and nobody could ever find me. Yes, you have certainly convinced me of something.'

"His tone was so queer and mystical that I felt impelled to ask him what he meant, and of what exactly I had convinced him.

"`You have convinced me,' he said with the same dreamy eye, `why it is really wicked and dangerous for a man to run away from his wife.'

"`And why is it dangerous?' I inquired.

“`Why, because nobody can find him,’ answered this odd person, `and we all want to be found.’

“`The most original modern thinkers,’ I remarked, `Ibsen, Gorki, Nietzsche, Shaw, would all rather say that what we want most is to be lost: to find ourselves in untrodden paths, and to do unprecedented things: to break with the past and belong to the future.’

“He rose to his whole height somewhat sleepily, and looked round on what was, I confess, a somewhat desolate scene — the dark purple plains, the neglected railroad, the few ragged knots of malcontents. `I shall not find the house here,’ he said. `It is still eastward — further and further eastward.’

“Then he turned upon me with something like fury, and struck the foot of his pole upon the frozen earth.

“`And if I do go back to my country,’ he cried, `I may be locked up in a madhouse before I reach my own house. I have been a bit unconventional in my time! Why, Nietzsche stood in a row of ramrods in the silly old Prussian army, and Shaw takes temperance beverages in the suburbs; but the things I do are unprecedented things. This round road I am treading is an untrodden path. I do believe in breaking out; I am a revolutionist. But don’t you see that all these real leaps and destructions and escapes are only attempts to get back to Eden — to something we have had, to something we at least have heard of? Don’t you see one only breaks the fence or shoots the moon in order to get HOME?’

“`No,’ I answered after due reflection, `I don’t think I should accept that.’

“`Ah,’ he said with a sort of a sigh, `then you have explained a second thing to me.’

“`What do you mean?’ I asked; `what thing?’

“`Why your revolution has failed,’ he said; and walking across quite suddenly to the train he got into it just as it was steaming away at last. And as I saw the long snaky tail of it disappear along the darkening flats.

“I saw no more of him. But though his views were adverse to the best advanced thought, he struck me as an interesting person: I should like to find out if he has produced any literary works. — Yours, etc., “Paul Nickolaiovitch.”

There was something in this odd set of glimpses into foreign lives which kept the absurd tribunal quieter than it had hitherto been, and it was again without interruption that Inglewood opened another paper upon his pile. “The Court will be indulgent,” he said, “if the next note lacks the special ceremonies of our letter-writing. It is ceremonious enough in its own way: —

“The Celestial Principles are permanent: Greeting. — I am Wong-Hi, and I tend the temple of all the ancestors of my family in the forest of Fu. The man that broke through the sky and came to me said that it must be very dull, but I showed him the wrongness of his thought. I am indeed in one place, for my uncle took me to this temple when I was a boy, and in this I shall doubtless die. But if a man remain in one place he shall see that the place changes. The pagoda of my temple stands up silently out of all the trees, like a yellow pagoda above many green pagodas. But the skies are sometimes blue like porcelain, and sometimes green like jade, and sometimes red like garnet. But the night is always ebony and always returns, said the Emperor Ho.

“The sky-breaker came at evening very suddenly, for I had hardly seen any stirring in the tops of the green trees over which I look as over a sea, when I go to the top of the temple at morning. And yet when he came, it was as if an elephant had strayed from the armies of the great kings of India. For palms snapped, and bamboos broke, and there came forth in the sunshine before the temple one taller than the sons of men.

“Strips of red and white hung about him like ribbons of a carnival, and he carried a pole with a row of teeth on it like the teeth of a dragon. His face was white and discomposed, after the fashion of the foreigners, so that they look like dead men filled with devils; and he spoke our speech brokenly.

“He said to me, `This is only a temple; I am trying to find a house.’ And then he told me with indelicate haste that the lamp outside his house was green, and that there was a red post at the corner of it.

“`I have not seen your house nor any houses,’ I answered.

`I dwell in this temple and serve the gods.’

“`Do you believe in the gods?’ he asked with hunger in his eyes, like the hunger of dogs. And this seemed to me a strange question to ask, for what should a man do except what men have done?

“`My Lord,’ I said, `it must be good for men to hold up their hands even if the skies are empty. For if there are gods, they will be pleased, and if there are none, then there are none to be displeased. Sometimes the skies are gold and sometimes porphyry and sometimes ebony, but the trees and the temple stand still under it all. So the great Confucius taught us that if we do always the same things with our hands and our feet as do the wise beasts and birds, with our heads we may think many things: yes, my Lord, and doubt many things. So long as men offer rice at the right season, and kindle lanterns at the right hour, it matters little whether there be gods or no. For these things are not to appease gods, but to appease men.'

"He came yet closer to me, so that he seemed enormous; yet his look was very gentle.

"`Break your temple,' he said, `and your gods will be freed.'

"And I, smiling at his simplicity, answered: `And so, if there be no gods,
I shall have nothing but a broken temple.'

"And at this, that giant from whom the light of reason was
withheld threw out his mighty arms and asked me to forgive him.
And when I asked him for what he should be forgiven he answered:
`For being right.'

"`Your idols and emperors are so old and wise and satisfying,' he cried, `it is a shame that they should be wrong. We are so vulgar and violent, we have done you so many iniquities — it is a shame we should be right after all.'

"And I, still enduring his harmlessness, asked him why he thought that he and his people were right.

"And he answered: `We are right because we are bound where men should be bound, and free where men should be free. We are right because we doubt and destroy laws and customs — but we do not doubt our own right to destroy them. For you live by customs, but we live by creeds. Behold me! In my country I am called Smip. My country is abandoned, my name is defiled, because I pursue around the world what really belongs to me. You are steadfast as the trees because you do not believe. I am as fickle as the tempest because I do believe. I do believe in my own house, which I shall find again. And at the last remaineth the green lantern and the red post.'

"I said to him: `At the last remaineth only wisdom.'

"But even as I said the word he uttered a horrible shout,
and rushing forward disappeared among the trees.
I have not seen this man again nor any other man.
The virtues of the wise are of fine brass.

"Wong-Hi."

“The next letter I have to read,” proceeded Arthur Inglewood, “will probably make clear the nature of our client’s curious but innocent experiment. It is dated from a mountain village in California, and runs as follows: —

“Sir, — A person answering to the rather extraordinary description required certainly went, some time ago, over the high pass of the Sierras on which I live and of which I am probably the sole stationary inhabitant. I keep a rudimentary tavern, rather ruder than a hut, on the very top of this specially steep and threatening pass. My name is Louis Hara, and the very name may puzzle you about my nationality. Well, it puzzles me a great deal. When one has been for fifteen years without society it is hard to have patriotism; and where there is not even a hamlet it is difficult to invent a nation. My father was an Irishman of the fiercest and most free-shooting of the old Californian kind. My mother was a Spaniard, proud of descent from the old Spanish families round San Francisco, yet accused for all that of some admixture of Red Indian blood. I was well educated and fond of music and books. But, like many other hybrids, I was too good or too bad for the world; and after attempting many things I was glad enough to get a sufficient though a lonely living in this little cabaret in the mountains. In my solitude I fell into many of the ways of a savage. Like an Eskimo, I was shapeless in winter; like a Red Indian, I wore in hot summers nothing but a pair of leather trousers, with a great straw hat as big as a parasol to defend me from the sun. I had a bowie knife at my belt and a long gun under my arm; and I dare say I produced a pretty wild impression on the few peaceable travellers that could climb up to my place. But I promise you I never looked as mad as that man did. Compared with him I was Fifth Avenue.

“I dare say that living under the very top of the Sierras has an odd effect on the mind; one tends to think of those lonely rocks not as peaks coming to a point, but rather as pillars holding up heaven itself. Straight cliffs sail up and away beyond the hope of the eagles; cliffs so tall that they seem to attract the stars and collect them as sea-crags collect a mere glitter of phosphorous. These terraces and towers of rock do not, like smaller crests, seem to be the end of the world. Rather they seem to be its awful beginning: its huge foundations. We could almost fancy the mountain branching out above us like a tree of stone, and carrying all those cosmic lights like a candelabrum. For just as the peaks failed us, soaring impossibly far, so the stars crowded us (as it seemed), coming impossibly near. The spheres burst about us more like thunderbolts hurled at the earth than planets circling placidly about it.

“All this may have driven me mad; I am not sure. I know there is one angle of the road down the pass where the rock leans out a little, and on windy nights I seem to hear it clashing overhead with other rocks — yes, city against city and citadel against citadel, far up into the night. It was on such an evening that the strange man struggled up the pass. Broadly speaking, only strange men did struggle up the pass. But I had never seen one like this one before.

“He carried (I cannot conceive why) a long, dilapidated garden rake, all bearded and bedraggled with grasses, so that it looked like the ensign of some old barbarian tribe. His hair, which was as long and rank as the grass, hung down below his huge shoulders; and such clothes as clung about him were rags and tongues of red and yellow, so that he had the air of being dressed like an Indian in feathers or autumn leaves. The rake or pitchfork, or whatever it was, he used sometimes as an alpenstock, sometimes (I was told) as a weapon. I do not know why he should have used it as a weapon, for he had, and afterwards showed me, an excellent six-shooter in his pocket. `But THAT,’ he said, `I use only for peaceful purposes.’ I have no notion what he meant.

“He sat down on the rough bench outside my inn and drank some wine from the vineyards below, sighing with ecstasy over it like one who had travelled long among alien, cruel things and found at last something that he knew. Then he sat staring rather foolishly at the rude lantern of lead and coloured glass that hangs over my door. It is old, but of no value; my grandmother gave it to me long ago: she was devout, and it happens that the glass is painted with a crude picture of Bethlehem and the Wise Men and the Star. He seemed so mesmerized with the transparent glow of Our Lady’s blue gown and the big gold star behind, that he led me also to look at the thing, which I had not done for fourteen years.

“Then he slowly withdrew his eyes from this and looked out eastward where the road fell away below us. The sunset sky was a vault of rich velvet, fading away into mauve and silver round the edges of the dark mountain amphitheatre; and between us and the ravine below rose up out of the deeps and went up into the heights the straight solitary rock we call Green Finger. Of a queer volcanic colour, and wrinkled all over with what looks undecipherable writing, it hung there like a Babylonian pillar or needle.

“The man silently stretched out his rake in that direction, and before he spoke I knew what he meant. Beyond the great green rock in the purple sky hung a single star.

“`A star in the east,’ he said in a strange hoarse voice like one of our ancient eagles’. `The wise men followed the star and found the house. But if I followed the star, should I find the house?’

“`It depends perhaps,’ I said, smiling, `on whether you are a wise man.’

I refrained from adding that he certainly didn’t look it.

“`You may judge for yourself,’ he answered. `I am a man who left his own house because he could no longer bear to be away from it.’

“`It certainly sounds paradoxical,’ I said.

“`I heard my wife and children talking and saw them moving about the room,’ he continued, `and all the time I knew they were walking and talking in another house thousands of miles away, under the light of different skies, and beyond the series of the seas. I loved them with a devouring love, because they seemed not only distant but unattainable. Never did human creatures seem so dear and so desirable: but I seemed like a cold ghost; therefore I cast off their dust from my feet for a testimony. Nay, I did more. I spurned the world under my feet so that it swung full circle like a treadmill.’

“`Do you really mean,’ I cried, `that you have come right round the world?

Your speech is English, yet you are coming from the west.’

“`My pilgrimage is not yet accomplished,’ he replied sadly.

`I have become a pilgrim to cure myself of being an exile.’

“Something in the word `pilgrim’ awoke down in the roots of my ruinous experience memories of what my fathers had felt about the world, and of something from whence I came. I looked again at the little pictured lantern at which I had not looked for fourteen years.

“`My grandmother,’ I said in a low tone, `would have said that we were all in exile, and that no earthly house could cure the holy home-sickness that forbids us rest.’

“He was silent a long while, and watched a single eagle drift out beyond the Green Finger into the darkening void.

“Then he said, `I think your grandmother was right,’ and stood up leaning on his grassy pole. `I think that must be the reason,’ he said — `the secret of this life of man, so ecstatic and so unappeased. But I think there is more to be said. I think God has given us the love of special places, of a hearth and of a native land, for a good reason.’

“`I dare say,’ I said. `What reason?’

“`Because otherwise,’ he said, pointing his pole out at the sky and the abyss, `we might worship that.’

“`What do you mean?’ I demanded.

“`Eternity,’ he said in his harsh voice, `the largest of the idols — the mightiest of the rivals of God.’

“`You mean pantheism and infinity and all that,’ I suggested.

“`I mean,’ he said with increasing vehemence, `that if there be a house for me in heaven it will either have a green lamp-post and a hedge, or something quite as positive and personal as a green lamp-post and a hedge. I mean that God bade me love one spot and serve it, and do all things however wild in praise of it, so that this one spot might be a witness against all the infinities and the sophistries, that Paradise is somewhere and not anywhere, is something and not anything. And I would not be so very much surprised if the house in heaven had a real green lamp-post after all.’

“With which he shouldered his pole and went striding down the perilous paths below, and left me alone with the eagles. But since he went a fever of homelessness will often shake me. I am troubled by rainy meadows and mud cabins that I have never seen; and I wonder whether America will endure. — Yours faithfully, Louis Hara.”

After a short silence Inglewood said: “And, finally, we desire to put in as evidence the following document: —

“This is to say that I am Ruth Davis, and have been housemaid to Mrs. I. Smith at `The Laurels’ in Croydon for the last six months. When I came the lady was alone, with two children; she was not a widow, but her husband was away. She was left with plenty of money and did not seem disturbed about him, though she often hoped he would be back soon. She said he was rather eccentric and a little change did him good. One evening last week I was bringing the tea-things out on to the lawn when I nearly dropped them. The end of a long rake was suddenly stuck over the hedge, and planted like a jumping-pole; and over the hedge, just like a monkey on a stick, came a huge, horrible man, all hairy and ragged like Robinson Crusoe. I screamed out, but my mistress didn’t even get out of her chair, but smiled and said he wanted shaving. Then he sat down quite calmly at the garden table and took a cup of tea, and then I realized that this must be Mr. Smith himself. He has stopped here ever since and does not really give much trouble, though I sometimes fancy he is a little weak in his head. “Ruth Davis.

“P.S. — I forgot to say that he looked round at the garden and said, very loud and strong: `Oh, what a lovely place you’ve got;’ just as if he’d never seen it before.”

The room had been growing dark and drowsy; the afternoon sun sent one heavy shaft of powdered gold across it, which fell with an intangible solemnity upon the empty seat of Mary Gray, for the younger women had left the court before the more recent of the investigations. Mrs. Duke was still asleep, and Innocent Smith, looking like a large hunchback in the twilight, was bending closer and closer to his paper toys. But the five men really engaged in the controversy, and concerned not to convince the tribunal but to convince each other, still sat round the table like the Committee of Public Safety.

Suddenly Moses Gould banged one big scientific book on top of another, cocked his little legs up against the table, tipped his chair backwards so far as to be in direct danger of falling over, emitted a startling and prolonged whistle like a steam engine, and asserted that it was all his eye.

When asked by Moon what was all his eye, he banged down behind the books again and answered with considerable excitement, throwing his papers about. “All those fairy-tales you’ve been reading out,” he said. “Oh! don’t talk to me! I ain’t littery and that, but I know fairy-tales when I hear ‘em. I got a bit stumped in some of the philosophical bits and felt inclined to go out for a B. and S. But we’re living in West ‘Ampstead and not in ‘Ell; and the long and the short of it is that some things ‘appen and some things don’t ‘appen. Those are the things that don’t ‘appen.”

“I thought,” said Moon gravely, “that we quite clearly explained—”

“Oh yes, old chap, you quite clearly explained,” assented Mr. Gould with extraordinary volubility. “You’d explain an elephant off the doorstep, you would. I ain’t a clever chap like you; but I ain’t a born natural, Michael Moon, and when there’s an elephant on my doorstep I don’t listen to no explanations. `It’s got a trunk,’ I says. — `My trunk,’ you says: `I’m fond of travellin’, and a change does me good.’ — `But the blasted thing’s got tusks,’ I says. — `Don’t look a gift ‘orse in the mouth,’ you says, `but thank the goodness and the graice that on your birth 'as smiled.' — `But it's nearly as big as the 'ouse,' I says. — `That's the bloomin' perspective,' you says, `and the sacred magic of distance.' — `Why, the elephant's trumpetin' like the Day of Judgement,' I says. — `That's your own conscience a-talking to you, Moses Gould,' you says in a grive and tender voice. Well, I 'ave got a conscience as much as you. I don't believe most of the things they tell you in church on Sundays; and I don't believe these 'ere things any more because you goes on about 'em as if you was in church. I believe an elephant's a great big ugly dingerous beast — and I believe Smith's another."

"Do you mean to say," asked Inglewood, "that you still doubt the evidence of exculpation we have brought forward?"

"Yes, I do still doubt it," said Gould warmly. "It's all a bit too far-fetched, and some of it a bit too far off. 'Ow can we test all those tales? 'Ow can we drop in and buy the `Pink 'Un' at the railway station at Kosky Wosky or whatever it was? 'Ow can we go and do a gargle at the saloon-bar on top of the Sierra Mountains? But anybody can go and see Bunting's boarding-house at Worthing."

Moon regarded him with an expression of real or assumed surprise.

"Any one," continued Gould, "can call on Mr. Trip."

"It is a comforting thought," replied Michael with restraint; "but why should any one call on Mr. Trip?"

"For just exactly the sime reason," cried the excited Moses, hammering on the table with both hands, "for just exactly the sime reason that he should communicate with Messrs. 'Anbury and Bootle of Paternoster Row and with Miss Gridley's 'igh class Academy at 'Endon, and with old Lady Bullingdon who lives at Penge."

"Again, to go at once to the moral roots of life," said Michael, "why is it among the duties of man to communicate with old Lady Bullingdon who lives at Penge?"

"It ain't one of the duties of man," said Gould, "nor one of his pleasures, either, I can tell you. She takes the crumpet, does Lady Bullingdon at Penge. But it's one of the duties of a prosecutor pursuin' the innocent, blameless butterfly career of your friend Smith, and it's the sime with all the others I mentioned."

"But why do you bring in these people here?" asked Inglewood.

“Why! Because we’ve got proof enough to sink a steamboat,” roared Moses; “because I’ve got the papers in my very ‘and; because your precious Innocent is a blackguard and ‘ome smasher, and these are the ‘omes he’s smashed. I don’t set up for a ‘oly man; but I wouldn’t ‘ave all those poor girls on my conscience for something. And I think a chap that’s capable of deserting and perhaps killing ’em all is about capable of cracking a crib or shootin’ an old schoolmaster — so I don’t care much about the other yarns one way or another.”

“I think,” said Dr. Cyrus Pym with a refined cough, “that we are approaching this matter rather irregularly. This is really the fourth charge on the charge sheet, and perhaps I had better put it before you in an ordered and scientific manner.”

Nothing but a faint groan from Michael broke the silence of the darkening room.

Chapter IV

The Wild Weddings; or, the Polygamy Charge

"A modern man," said Dr. Cyrus Pym, "must, if he be thoughtful, approach the problem of marriage with some caution. Marriage is a stage — doubtless a suitable stage — in the long advance of mankind towards a goal which we cannot as yet conceive; which we are not, perhaps, as yet fitted even to desire. What, gentlemen, is the ethical position of marriage? Have we outlived it?"

"Outlived it?" broke out Moon; "why, nobody's ever survived it! Look at all the people married since Adam and Eve — and all as dead as mutton."

"This is no doubt an inter-pellation joc'lar in its character," said Dr. Pym frigidly. "I cannot tell what may be Mr. Moon's matured and ethical view of marriage—"

"I can tell," said Michael savagely, out of the gloom. "Marriage is a duel to the death, which no man of honour should decline."

"Michael," said Arthur Inglewood in a low voice, "you MUST keep quiet."

"Mr. Moon," said Pym with exquisite good temper, "probably regards the institution in a more antiquated manner. Probably he would make it stringent and uniform. He would treat divorce in some great soul of steel — the divorce of a Julius Caesar or of a Salt Ring Robinson — exactly as he would treat some no-account tramp or labourer who scoots from his wife. Science has views broader and more humane. Just as murder for the scientist is a thirst for absolute destruction, just as theft for the scientist is a hunger for monotonous acquisition, so polygamy for the scientist is an extreme development of the instinct for variety. A man thus afflicted is incapable of constancy. Doubtless there is a physical cause for this flitting from flower to flower — as there is, doubtless, for the intermittent groaning which appears to afflict Mr. Moon at the present moment. Our own world-scorning Winterbottom has even dared to say, `For a certain rare and fine physical type polygamy is but the realization of the variety of females, as comradeship is the realization of the variety of males.' In any case, the type that tends to variety is recognized by all authoritative inquirers. Such a type, if the widower of a negress, does in many ascertained cases espouse ~en seconde noces~ an albino; such a type, when freed from the gigantic embraces of a female Patagonian, will often evolve from its own imaginative instinct the consoling figure of an Eskimo. To such a type there can be no doubt that the prisoner belongs. If blind doom and unbearable temptation constitute any slight excuse for a man, there is no doubt that he has these excuses.

"Earlier in the inquiry the defence showed real chivalric ideality in admitting half of our story without further dispute. We should like to acknowledge and imitate so eminently large-hearted a style by conceding also that the story told by Curate Percy about the canoe, the weir, and the young wife seems to be substantially true. Apparently Smith did marry a young woman he had nearly run down in a boat; it only remains to be considered whether it would not have been kinder of him to have murdered her instead of marrying her. In confirmation of this fact I can now con-cede to the defence an unquestionable record of such a marriage."

So saying, he handed across to Michael a cutting from the "Maidenhead Gazette" which distinctly recorded the marriage of the daughter of a "coach," a tutor well known in the place, to Mr. Innocent Smith, late of Brakespeare College, Cambridge.

When Dr. Pym resumed it was realized that his face had grown at once both tragic and triumphant.

"I pause upon this pre-liminary fact," he said seriously, "because this fact alone would give us the victory, were we aspiring after victory and not after truth. As far as the personal and domestic problem holds us, that problem is solved. Dr. Warner and I entered this house at an instant of highly emotional diff'culty. England's Warner has entered many houses to save human kind from sickness; this time he entered to save an innocent lady from a walking pestilence. Smith was just about to carry away a young girl from this house; his cab and bag were at the very door. He had told her she was going to await the marriage license at the house of his aunt. That aunt," continued Cyrus Pym, his face darkening grandly— "that visionary aunt had been the dancing will-o'-the-wisp who had led many a high-souled maiden to her doom. Into how many virginal ears has he whispered that holy word? When he said `aunt' there glowed about her all the merriment and high morality of the Anglo-Saxon home. Kettles began to hum, pussy cats to purr, in that very wild cab that was being driven to destruction."

Inglewood looked up, to find, to his astonishment (as many another denizen of the eastern hemisphere has found), that the American was not only perfectly serious, but was really eloquent and affecting — when the difference of the hemispheres was adjusted.

"It is therefore atrociously evident that the man Smith has at least represented himself to one innocent female of this house as an eligible bachelor, being, in fact, a married man. I agree with my colleague, Mr. Gould, that no other crime could approximate to this. As to whether what our ancestors called purity has any ultimate ethical value indeed, science hesitates with a high, proud hesitation. But what hesitation can there be about the baseness of a citizen who ventures, by brutal experiments upon living females, to anticipate the verdict of science on such a point?

"The woman mentioned by Curate Percy as living with Smith in Highbury may or may not be the same as the lady he married in Maidenhead. If one short sweet spell of constancy and heart repose interrupted the plunging torrent of his profligate life, we will not deprive him of that long past possibility. After that conjectural date, alas, he seems to have plunged deeper and deeper into the shaking quagmires of infidelity and shame."

Dr. Pym closed his eyes, but the unfortunate fact that there was no more light left this familiar signal without its full and proper moral effect. After a pause, which almost partook of the character of prayer, he continued.

"The first instance of the accused's repeated and irregular nuptials," he exclaimed, "comes from Lady Bullingdon, who expresses herself with the high haughtiness which must be excused in those who look out upon all mankind from the turrets of a Norman and ancestral keep. The communication she has sent to us runs as follows: —

"Lady Bullingdon recalls the painful incident to which reference is made, and has no desire to deal with it in detail. The girl Polly Green was a perfectly adequate dressmaker, and lived in the village for about two years. Her unattached condition was bad for her as well as for the general morality of the village. Lady Bullingdon, therefore, allowed it to be understood that she favoured the marriage of the young woman. The villagers, naturally wishing to oblige Lady Bullingdon, came forward in several cases; and all would have been well had it not been for the deplorable eccentricity or depravity of the girl Green herself. Lady Bullingdon supposes that where there is a village there must be a village idiot, and in her village, it seems, there was one of these wretched creatures. Lady Bullingdon only saw him once, and she is quite aware that it is really difficult to distinguish between actual idiots and the ordinary heavy type of the rural lower classes. She noticed, however, the startling smallness of his head in comparison to the rest of his body; and, indeed, the fact of his having appeared upon election day wearing the rosette of both the two opposing parties appears to Lady Bullingdon to put the matter quite beyond doubt. Lady Bullingdon was astounded to learn that this afflicted being had put himself forward as one of the suitors of the girl in question. Lady Bullingdon's nephew interviewed the wretch upon the point, telling him that he was a `donkey' to dream of such a thing, and actually received, along with an imbecile grin, the answer that donkeys generally go after carrots. But Lady Bullingdon was yet further amazed to find the unhappy girl inclined to accept this monstrous proposal, though she was actually asked in marriage by Garth, the undertaker, a man in a far superior position to her own. Lady Bullingdon could not, of course, countenance such an arrangement for a moment, and the two unhappy persons escaped for a clandestine marriage. Lady Bullingdon cannot exactly recall the man's name, but thinks it was Smith. He was always called in the village the Innocent. Later, Lady Bullingdon believes he murdered Green in a mental outbreak."

"The next communication," proceeded Pym, "is more conspicuous for brevity, but I am of the opinion that it will adequately convey the upshot. It is dated from the offices of Messrs. Hanbury and Bootle, publishers, and is as follows: —

"Sir, — Yrs. rcd. and conts. noted. Rumour re typewriter possibly refers to a Miss Blake or similar name, left here nine years ago to marry an organ-grinder. Case was undoubtedly curious, and attracted police attention. Girl worked excellently till about Oct. 1907, when apparently went mad. Record was written at the time, part of which I enclose. — Yrs., etc., W. Trip.

"The fuller statement runs as follows: —

"On October 12 a letter was sent from this office to Messrs. Bernard and Juke, bookbinders. Opened by Mr. Juke, it was found to contain the following: `Sir, our Mr. Trip will call at 3, as we wish to know whether it is really decided 00000073bb!!!!!xy.' To this Mr. Juke, a person of a playful mind, returned the answer: `Sir, I am in a position to give it as my most decided opinion that it is not really decided that 00000073bb!!!!!xy. Yrs., etc., `J. Juke.'

"On receiving this extraordinary reply, our Mr. Trip asked for the original letter sent from him, and found that the typewriter had indeed substituted these demented hieroglyphics for the sentences really dictated to her. Our Mr. Trip interviewed the girl, fearing that she was in an unbalanced state, and was not much reassured when she merely remarked that she always went like that when she heard the barrel organ. Becoming yet more hysterical and extravagant, she made a series of most improbable statements — as, that she was engaged to the barrel-organ man, that he was in the habit of serenading her on that instrument, that she was in the habit of playing back to him upon the typewriter (in the style of King Richard and Blondel), and that the organ man's musical ear was so exquisite and his adoration of herself so ardent that he could detect the note of the different letters on the machine, and was enraptured by them as by a melody. To all these statements of course our Mr. Trip and the rest of us only paid that sort of assent that is paid to persons who must as quickly as possible be put in the charge of their relations. But on our conducting the lady downstairs, her story received the most startling and even exasperating confirmation; for the organ-grinder, an enormous man with a small head and manifestly a fellow-lunatic, had pushed his barrel organ in at the office doors like a battering-ram, and was boisterously demanding his alleged fiancee. When I myself came on the scene he was flinging his great, ape-like arms about and reciting a poem to her. But we were used to lunatics coming and reciting poems in our office, and we were not quite prepared for what followed. The actual verse he uttered began, I think,

`O vivid, inviolate head,
Ringed—'

but he never got any further. Mr. Trip made a sharp movement towards him, and the next moment the giant picked up the poor lady typewriter like a doll, sat her on top of the organ, ran it with a crash out of the office doors, and raced away down the street like a flying wheelbarrow. I put the police upon the matter; but no trace of the amazing pair could be found. I was sorry myself; for the lady was not only pleasant but unusually cultivated for her position. As I am leaving the service of Messrs. Hanbury and Bootle, I put these things in a record and leave it with them. (Signed) Aubrey Clarke, Publishers' Reader.

"And the last document," said Dr. Pym complacently, "is from one of those high-souled women who have in this age introduced your English girlhood to hockey, the higher mathematics, and every form of ideality.

“Dear Sir (she writes), — I have no objection to telling you the facts about the absurd incident you mention; though I would ask you to communicate them with some caution, for such things, however entertaining in the abstract, are not always auxiliary to the success of a girls’ school. The truth is this: I wanted some one to deliver a lecture on a philological or historical question — a lecture which, while containing solid educational matter, should be a little more popular and entertaining than usual, as it was the last lecture of the term. I remembered that a Mr. Smith of Cambridge had written somewhere or other an amusing essay about his own somewhat ubiquitous name — an essay which showed considerable knowledge of genealogy and topography. I wrote to him, asking if he would come and give us a bright address upon English surnames; and he did. It was very bright, almost too bright. To put the matter otherwise, by the time that he was halfway through it became apparent to the other mistresses and myself that the man was totally and entirely off his head. He began rationally enough by dealing with the two departments of place names and trade names, and he said (quite rightly, I dare say) that the loss of all significance in names was an instance of the deadening of civilization. But then he went on calmly to maintain that every man who had a place name ought to go to live in that place, and that every man who had a trade name ought instantly to adopt that trade; that people named after colours should always dress in those colours, and that people named after trees or plants (such as Beech or Rose) ought to surround and decorate themselves with these vegetables. In a slight discussion that arose afterwards among the elder girls the difficulties of the proposal were clearly, and even eagerly, pointed out. It was urged, for instance, by Miss Younghusband that it was substantially impossible for her to play the part assigned to her; Miss Mann was in a similar dilemma, from which no modern views on the sexes could apparently extricate her; and some young ladies, whose surnames happened to be Low, Coward, and Craven, were quite enthusiastic against the idea. But all this happened afterwards. What happened at the crucial moment was that the lecturer produced several horseshoes and a large iron hammer from his bag, announced his immediate intention of setting up a smithy in the neighbourhood, and called on every one to rise in the same cause as for a heroic revolution. The other mistresses and I attempted to stop the wretched man, but I must confess that by an accident this very intercession produced the worst explosion of his insanity. He was waving the hammer, and wildly demanding the names of everybody; and it so happened that Miss Brown, one of the younger teachers, was wearing a brown dress — a reddish-brown dress that went quietly enough with the warmer colour of her hair, as well she knew. She was a nice girl, and nice girls do know about those things. But when our maniac discovered that we really had a Miss Brown who WAS brown, his ~idee fixe~ blew up like a powder magazine, and there, in the presence of all the mistresses and girls, he publicly proposed to the lady in the red-brown dress. You can imagine the effect of such a scene at a girls' school. At least, if you fail to imagine it, I certainly fail to describe it.

"Of course, the anarchy died down in a week or two, and I can think of it now as a joke. There was only one curious detail, which I will tell you, as you say your inquiry is vital; but I should desire you to consider it a little more confidential than the rest. Miss Brown, who was an excellent girl in every way, did quite suddenly and surreptitiously leave us only a day or two afterwards. I should never have thought that her head would be the one to be really turned by so absurd an excitement. — Believe me, yours faithfully, Ada Gridley.

"I think," said Pym, with a really convincing simplicity and seriousness, "that these letters speak for themselves."

Mr. Moon rose for the last time in a darkness that gave no hint of whether his native gravity was mixed with his native irony.

"Throughout this inquiry," he said, "but especially in this its closing phase, the prosecution has perpetually relied upon one argument; I mean the fact that no one knows what has become of all the unhappy women apparently seduced by Smith. There is no sort of proof that they were murdered, but that implication is perpetually made when the question is asked as to how they died. Now I am not interested in how they died, or when they died, or whether they died. But I am interested in another analogous question — that of how they were born, and when they were born, and whether they were born. Do not misunderstand me. I do not dispute the existence of these women, or the veracity of those who have witnessed to them. I merely remark on the notable fact that only one of these victims, the Maidenhead girl, is described as having any home or parents. All the rest are boarders or birds of passage — a guest, a solitary dressmaker, a bachelor-girl doing typewriting. Lady Bullingdon, looking from her turrets, which she bought from the Whartons with the old soap-boiler's money when she jumped at marrying an unsuccessful gentleman from Ulster — Lady Bullingdon, looking out from those turrets, did really see an object which she describes as Green. Mr. Trip, of Hanbury and Bootle, really did have a typewriter betrothed to Smith. Miss Gridley, though idealistic, is absolutely honest. She did house, feed, and teach a young woman whom Smith succeeded in decoying away. We admit that all these women really lived. But we still ask whether they were ever born?"

"Oh, crikey!" said Moses Gould, stifled with amusement.

"There could hardly," interposed Pym with a quiet smile, "be a better instance of the neglect of true scientific process. The scientist, when once convinced of the fact of vitality and consciousness, would infer from these the previous process of generation."

"If these gals," said Gould impatiently— "if these gals were all alive (all alive O!) I'd chance a fiver they were all born."

"You'd lose your fiver," said Michael, speaking gravely out of the gloom. "All those admirable ladies were alive. They were more alive for having come into contact with Smith. They were all quite definitely alive, but only one of them was ever born."

"Are you asking us to believe—" began Dr. Pym.

"I am asking you a second question," said Moon sternly. "Can the court now sitting throw any light on a truly singular circumstance? Dr. Pym, in his interesting lecture on what are called, I believe, the relations of the sexes, said that Smith was the slave of a lust for variety which would lead a man first to a negress and then to an albino, first to a Patagonian giantess and then to a tiny Eskimo. But is there any evidence of such variety here? Is there any trace of a gigantic Patagonian in the story? Was the typewriter an Eskimo? So picturesque a circumstance would not surely have escaped remark. Was Lady Bullingdon's dressmaker a negress? A voice in my bosom answers, `No!' Lady Bullingdon, I am sure, would think a negress so conspicuous as to be almost Socialistic, and would feel something a little rakish even about an albino.

"But was there in Smith's taste any such variety as the learned doctor describes? So far as our slight materials go, the very opposite seems to be the case. We have only one actual description of any of the prisoner's wives — the short but highly poetic account by the aesthetic curate. `Her dress was the colour of spring, and her hair of autumn leaves.' Autumn leaves, of course, are of various colours, some of which would be rather startling in hair (green, for instance); but I think such an expression would be most naturally used of the shades from red-brown to red, especially as ladies with their coppery-coloured hair do frequently wear light artistic greens. Now when we come to the next wife, we find the eccentric lover, when told he is a donkey, answering that donkeys always go after carrots; a remark which Lady Bullingdon evidently regarded as pointless and part of the natural table-talk of a village idiot, but which has an obvious meaning if we suppose that Polly's hair was red. Passing to the next wife, the one he took from the girls' school, we find Miss Gridley noticing that the schoolgirl in question wore `a reddish-brown dress, that went quietly enough with the warmer colour of her hair.' In other words, the colour of the girl's hair was something redder than red-brown. Lastly, the romantic organ-grinder declaimed in the office some poetry that only got as far as the words, —

`O vivid, inviolate head,
Ringed—'

But I think that a wide study of the worst modern poets will enable us to guess that `ringed with a glory of red,' or `ringed with its passionate red,' was the line that rhymed to `head.' In this case once more, therefore, there is good reason to suppose that Smith fell in love with a girl with some sort of auburn or darkish-red hair — rather," he said, looking down at the table, "rather like Miss Gray's hair."

Cyrus Pym was leaning forward with lowered eyelids, ready with one of his more pedantic interpellations; but Moses Gould suddenly struck his forefinger on his nose, with an expression of extreme astonishment and intelligence in his brilliant eyes.

"Mr. Moon's contention at present," interposed Pym, "is not, even if veracious, inconsistent with the lunatico-criminal view of I. Smith, which we have nailed to the mast. Science has long anticipated such a complication. An incurable attraction to a particular type of physical woman is one of the commonest of criminal per-versities, and when not considered narrowly, but in the light of induction and evolution—"

"At this late stage," said Michael Moon very quietly, "I may perhaps relieve myself of a simple emotion that has been pressing me throughout the proceedings, by saying that induction and evolution may go and boil themselves. The Missing Link and all that is well enough for kids, but I'm talking about things we know here. All we know of the Missing Link is that he is missing — and he won't be missed either. I know all about his human head and his horrid tail; they belong to a very old game called `Heads I win, tails you lose.’ If you do find a fellow’s bones, it proves he lived a long while ago; if you don’t find his bones, it proves how long ago he lived. That is the game you’ve been playing with this Smith affair. Because Smith’s head is small for his shoulders you call him microcephalous; if it had been large, you’d have called it water-on-the-brain. As long as poor old Smith’s seraglio seemed pretty various, variety was the sign of madness: now, because it’s turning out to be a bit monochrome — now monotony is the sign of madness. I suffer from all the disadvantages of being a grown-up person, and I’m jolly well going to get some of the advantages too; and with all politeness I propose not to be bullied with long words instead of short reasons, or consider your business a triumphant progress merely because you’re always finding out that you were wrong. Having relieved myself of these feelings, I have merely to add that I regard Dr. Pym as an ornament to the world far more beautiful than the Parthenon, or the monument on Bunker’s Hill, and that I propose to resume and conclude my remarks on the many marriages of Mr. Innocent Smith.

“Besides this red hair, there is another unifying thread that runs through these scattered incidents. There is something very peculiar and suggestive about the names of these women. Mr. Trip, you will remember, said he thought the typewriter’s name was Blake, but could not remember exactly. I suggest that it might have been Black, and in that case we have a curious series: Miss Green in Lady Bullingdon’s village; Miss Brown at the Hendon School; Miss Black at the publishers. A chord of colours, as it were, which ends up with Miss Gray at Beacon House, West Hampstead.”

Amid a dead silence Moon continued his exposition. “What is the meaning of this queer coincidence about colours? Personally I cannot doubt for a moment that these names are purely arbitrary names, assumed as part of some general scheme or joke. I think it very probable that they were taken from a series of costumes — that Polly Green only meant Polly (or Mary) when in green, and that Mary Gray only means Mary (or Polly) when in gray. This would explain—”

Cyrus Pym was standing up rigid and almost pallid.

“Do you actually mean to suggest—” he cried.

“Yes,” said Michael; “I do mean to suggest that. Innocent Smith has had many wooings, and many weddings for all I know; but he has had only one wife. She was sitting on that chair an hour ago, and is now talking to Miss Duke in the garden.

“Yes, Innocent Smith has behaved here, as he has on hundreds of other occasions, upon a plain and perfectly blameless principle. It is odd and extravagant in the modern world, but not more than any other principle plainly applied in the modern world would be. His principle can be quite simply stated: he refuses to die while he is still alive. He seeks to remind himself, by every electric shock to the intellect, that he is still a man alive, walking on two legs about the world. For this reason he fires bullets at his best friends; for this reason he arranges ladders and collapsible chimneys to steal his own property; for this reason he goes plodding around a whole planet to get back to his own home; and for this reason he has been in the habit of taking the woman whom he loved with a permanent loyalty, and leaving her about (so to speak) at schools, boarding-houses, and places of business, so that he might recover her again and again with a raid and a romantic elopement. He seriously sought by a perpetual recapture of his bride to keep alive the sense of her perpetual value, and the perils that should be run for her sake.

“So far his motives are clear enough; but perhaps his convictions are not quite so clear. I think Innocent Smith has an idea at the bottom of all this. I am by no means sure that I believe it myself, but I am quite sure that it is worth a man’s uttering and defending.

“The idea that Smith is attacking is this. Living in an entangled civilization, we have come to think certain things wrong which are not wrong at all. We have come to think outbreak and exuberance, banging and barging, rotting and wrecking, wrong. In themselves they are not merely pardonable; they are unimpeachable. There is nothing wicked about firing a pistol off even at a friend, so long as you do not mean to hit him and know you won’t. It is no more wrong than throwing a pebble at the sea — less, for you do occasionally hit the sea. There is nothing wrong in bashing down a chimney-pot and breaking through a roof, so long as you are not injuring the life or property of other men. It is no more wrong to choose to enter a house from the top than to choose to open a packing-case from the bottom. There is nothing wicked about walking round the world and coming back to your own house; it is no more wicked than walking round the garden and coming back to your own house. And there is nothing wicked about picking up your wife here, there, and everywhere, if, forsaking all others, you keep only to her so long as you both shall live. It is as innocent as playing a game of hide-and-seek in the garden. You associate such acts with blackguardism by a mere snobbish association, as you think there is something vaguely vile about going (or being seen going) into a pawnbroker's or a public-house. You think there is something squalid and commonplace about such a connection. You are mistaken.

"This man's spiritual power has been precisely this, that he has distinguished between custom and creed. He has broken the conventions, but he has kept the commandments. It is as if a man were found gambling wildly in a gambling hell, and you found that he only played for trouser buttons. It is as if you found a man making a clandestine appointment with a lady at a Covent Garden ball, and then you found it was his grandmother. Everything is ugly and discreditable, except the facts; everything is wrong about him, except that he has done no wrong.

"It will then be asked, `Why does Innocent Smith continue far into his middle age a farcical existence, that exposes him to so many false charges?' To this I merely answer that he does it because he really is happy, because he really is hilarious, because he really is a man and alive. He is so young that climbing garden trees and playing silly practical jokes are still to him what they once were to us all. And if you ask me yet again why he alone among men should be fed with such inexhaustible follies, I have a very simple answer to that, though it is one that will not be approved.

"There is but one answer, and I am sorry if you don't like it. If Innocent is happy, it is because he IS innocent. If he can defy the conventions, it is just because he can keep the commandments. It is just because he does not want to kill but to excite to life that a pistol is still as exciting to him as it is to a schoolboy. It is just because he does not want to steal, because he does not covet his neighbour's goods, that he has captured the trick (oh, how we all long for it!), the trick of coveting his own goods. It is just because he does not want to commit adultery that he achieves the romance of sex; it is just because he loves one wife that he has a hundred honeymoons. If he had really murdered a man, if he had really deserted a woman, he would not be able to feel that a pistol or a love-letter was like a song — at least, not a comic song."

"Do not imagine, please, that any such attitude is easy to me or appeals in any particular way to my sympathies. I am an Irishman, and a certain sorrow is in my bones, bred either of the persecutions of my creed, or of my creed itself. Speaking singly, I feel as if man was tied to tragedy, and there was no way out of the trap of old age and doubt. But if there is a way out, then, by Christ and St. Patrick, this is the way out. If one could keep as happy as a child or a dog, it would be by being as innocent as a child, or as sinless as a dog. Barely and brutally to be good — that may be the road, and he may have found it. Well, well, well, I see a look of skepticism on the face of my old friend Moses. Mr. Gould does not believe that being perfectly good in all respects would make a man merry."

"No," said Gould, with an unusual and convincing gravity; "I do not believe that being perfectly good in all respects would make a man merry."

"Well," said Michael quietly, "will you tell me one thing?

Which of us has ever tried it?"

A silence ensued, rather like the silence of some long geological epoch which awaits the emergence of some unexpected type; for there rose at last in the stillness a massive figure that the other men had almost completely forgotten.

"Well, gentlemen," said Dr. Warner cheerfully, "I've been pretty well entertained with all this pointless and incompetent tomfoolery for a couple of days; but it seems to be wearing rather thin, and I'm engaged for a city dinner. Among the hundred flowers of futility on both sides I was unable to detect any sort of reason why a lunatic should be allowed to shoot me in the back garden."

He had settled his silk hat on his head and gone out sailing placidly to

the garden gate, while the almost wailing voice of Pym still followed him:

"But really the bullet missed you by several feet." And another voice added:

"The bullet missed him by several years."

There was a long and mainly unmeaning silence, and then

Moon said suddenly, "We have been sitting with a ghost.

Dr. Herbert Warner died years ago."

Chapter V

How the Great Wind Went from Beacon House

Mary was walking between Diana and Rosamund slowly up and down the garden; they were silent, and the sun had set. Such spaces of daylight as remained open in the west were of a warm-tinted white, which can be compared to nothing but a cream cheese; and the lines of plumy cloud that ran across them had a soft but vivid violet bloom, like a violet smoke. All the rest of the scene swept and faded away into a dove-like gray, and seemed to melt and mount into Mary’s dark-gray figure until she seemed clothed with the garden and the skies. There was something in these last quiet colours that gave her a setting and a supremacy; and the twilight, which concealed Diana’s statelier figure and Rosamund’s braver array, exhibited and emphasized her, leaving her the lady of the garden, and alone.

When they spoke at last it was evident that a conversation long fallen silent was being revived.

“But where is your husband taking you?” asked Diana in her practical voice.

“To an aunt,” said Mary; “that’s just the joke. There really is an aunt, and we left the children with her when I arranged to be turned out of the other boarding-house down the road. We never take more than a week of this kind of holiday, but sometimes we take two of them together.”

“Does the aunt mind much?” asked Rosamund innocently. “Of course, I dare say it’s very narrow-minded and — what’s that other word? — you know, what Goliath was — but I’ve known many aunts who would think it — well, silly.”

“Silly?” cried Mary with great heartiness. “Oh, my Sunday hat!

I should think it was silly! But what do you expect?

He really is a good man, and it might have been snakes or something.”

“Snakes?” inquired Rosamund, with a slightly puzzled interest.

“Uncle Harry kept snakes, and said they loved him,” replied Mary with perfect simplicity. “Auntie let him have them in his pockets, but not in the bedroom.”

“And you—” began Diana, knitting her dark brows a little.

“Oh, I do as auntie did,” said Mary; “as long as we’re not away from the children more than a fortnight together I play the game. He calls me

`Manalive;’ and you must write it all one word, or he’s quite flustered.”

“But if men want things like that,” began Diana.

“Oh, what’s the good of talking about men?” cried Mary impatiently; “why, one might as well be a lady novelist or some horrid thing. There aren’t any men. There are no such people. There’s a man; and whoever he is he’s quite different.”

“So there is no safety,” said Diana in a low voice.

“Oh, I don’t know,” answered Mary, lightly enough; “there’s only two things generally true of them. At certain curious times they’re just fit to take care of us, and they’re never fit to take care of themselves.”

“There is a gale getting up,” said Rosamund suddenly. “Look at those trees over there, a long way off, and the clouds going quicker.”

“I know what you’re thinking about,” said Mary; “and don’t you be silly fools. Don’t you listen to the lady novelists. You go down the king’s highway; for God’s truth, it is God’s. Yes, my dear Michael will often be extremely untidy. Arthur Inglewood will be worse — he’ll be untidy. But what else are all the trees and clouds for, you silly kittens?”

“The clouds and trees are all waving about,” said Rosamund. “There is a storm coming, and it makes me feel quite excited, somehow. Michael is really rather like a storm: he frightens me and makes me happy.”

“Don’t you be frightened,” said Mary. “All over, these men have one advantage; they are the sort that go out.”

A sudden thrust of wind through the trees drifted the dying leaves along the path, and they could hear the far-off trees roaring faintly.

“I mean,” said Mary, “they are the kind that look outwards and get interested in the world. It doesn’t matter a bit whether it’s arguing, or bicycling, or breaking down the ends of the earth as poor old Innocent does. Stick to the man who looks out of the window and tries to understand the world. Keep clear of the man who looks in at the window and tries to understand you. When poor old Adam had gone out gardening (Arthur will go out gardening), the other sort came along and wormed himself in, nasty old snake.”

“You agree with your aunt,” said Rosamund, smiling: “no snakes in the bedroom.”

“I didn’t agree with my aunt very much,” replied Mary simply, “but I think she was right to let Uncle Harry collect dragons and griffins, so long as it got him out of the house.”

Almost at the same moment lights sprang up inside the darkened house, turning the two glass doors into the garden into gates of beaten gold. The golden gates were burst open, and the enormous Smith, who had sat like a clumsy statue for so many hours, came flying and turning cart-wheels down the lawn and shouting, “Acquitted! acquitted!” Echoing the cry, Michael scampered across the lawn to Rosamund and wildly swung her into a few steps of what was supposed to be a waltz. But the company knew Innocent and Michael by this time, and their extravagances were gaily taken for granted; it was far more extraordinary that Arthur Inglewood walked straight up to Diana and kissed her as if it had been his sister’s birthday. Even Dr. Pym, though he refrained from dancing, looked on with real benevolence; for indeed the whole of the absurd revelation had disturbed him less than the others; he half supposed that such irresponsible tribunals and insane discussions were part of the mediaeval mummeries of the Old Land.

While the tempest tore the sky as with trumpets, window after window was lighted up in the house within; and before the company, broken with laughter and the buffeting of the wind, had groped their way to the house again, they saw that the great apish figure of Innocent Smith had clambered out of his own attic window, and roaring again and again, “Beacon House!” whirled round his head a huge log or trunk from the wood fire below, of which the river of crimson flame and purple smoke drove out on the deafening air.

He was evident enough to have been seen from three counties; but when the wind died down, and the party, at the top of their evening’s merriment, looked again for Mary and for him, they were not to be found.

THE END

THE FLYING INN

First published in 1914, Chesterton’s fifth novel is set in a future England, controlled by a Temperance movement and a bizarre form of Islam, which dominate the political and social life of the country. Because of this, alcohol sales are effectively prohibited. The plot concerns the adventures of Humphrey Pump and Captain Patrick Dalroy, who roam the country in their cart with a barrel of rum in an attempt to evade Prohibition, exploiting loopholes in the law to temporarily prevent the police taking action against them.

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Chapter I: A Sermon on Inns

THE sea was a pale elfin green and the afternoon had already felt the fairy touch of evening as a young woman with dark hair, dressed in a crinkly copper-coloured sort of dress of the artistic order, was walking rather listlessly along the parade of Pebblewick-on-Sea, trailing a parasol and looking out upon the sea's horizon. She had a reason for looking instinctively out at the sea-line; a reason that many young women have had in the history of the world. But there was no sail in sight.

On the beach below the parade were a succession of small crowds, surrounding the usual orators of the seaside; whether niggers or socialists, whether clowns or clergymen. Here would stand a man doing something or other with paper boxes; and the holiday makers would watch him for hours in the hope of some time knowing what it was that he was doing with them. Next to him would be a man in a top hat with a very big Bible and a very small wife, who stood silently beside him, while he fought with his clenched fist against the heresy of Milnian Sublapsarianism so wide-spread in fashionable watering-places. It was not easy to follow him, he was so very much excited; but every now and then the words "our Sublapsarian friends" would recur with a kind of wailing sneer. Next was a young man talking of nobody knew what (least of all himself), but apparently relying for public favour mainly on having a ring of carrots round his hat. He had more money lying in front of him than the others. Next were niggers. Next was a children's service conducted by a man with a long neck who beat time with a little wooden spade. Farther along there was an atheist, in a towering rage, who pointed every now and then at the children's service and spoke of Nature's fairest things being corrupted with the secrets of the Spanish Inquisition — by the man with the little spade, of course. The atheist (who wore a red rosette) was very withering to his own audience as well. "Hypocrites!" he would say; and then they would throw him money. "Dupes and dastards!" and then they would throw him more money. But between the atheist and the children's service was a little owlish man in a red fez, weakly waving a green gamp umbrella. His face was brown and wrinkled like a walnut, his nose was of the sort we associate with Judaea, his beard was the sort of black wedge we associate rather with Persia. The young woman had never seen him before; he was a new exhibit in the now familiar museum of cranks and quacks. The young woman was one of those people in whom a real sense of humour is always at issue with a certain temperamental tendency to boredom or melancholia; and she lingered a moment, and leaned on the rail to listen.

It was fully four minutes before she could understand a word the man was saying; he spoke English with so extraordinary an accent that she supposed at first that he was talking in his own oriental tongue. All the noises of that articulation were odd; the most marked was an extreme prolongation of the short “u” into “oo”; as in “poo-oot” for “put.” Gradually the girl got used to the dialect, and began to understand the words; though some time elapsed even then before she could form any conjecture of their subject matter. Eventually it appeared to her that he had some fad about English civilisation having been founded by the Turks; or, perhaps by the Saracens after their victory in the Crusades. He also seemed to think that Englishmen would soon return to this way of thinking; and seemed to be urging the spread of teetotalism as an evidence of it. The girl was the only person listening to him.

“Loo-ook,” he said, wagging a curled brown finger, “loo-ook at your own inns” (which he pronounced as “ince”). “Your inns of which you write in your boo-ooks! Those inns were not poo-oot up in the beginning to sell ze alcoholic Christian drink. They were put up to sell ze non-alcoholic Islamic drinks. You can see this in the names of your inns. They are eastern names, Asiatic names. You have a famous public house to which your omnibuses go on the pilgrimage. It is called the Elephant and Castle. That is not an English name. It is an Asiatic name. You will say there are castles in England, and I will agree with you. There is the Windsor Castle. But where,” he cried sternly, shaking his green umbrella at the girl in an angry oratorical triumph, “where is the Windsor Elephant? I have searched all Windsor Park. No elephants.”

The girl with the dark hair smiled, and began to think that this man was better than any of the others. In accordance with the strange system of concurrent religious endowment which prevails at watering-places, she dropped a two shilling piece into the round copper tray beside him. With honourable and disinterested eagerness, the old gentleman in the red fez took no notice of this, but went on warmly, if obscurely, with his argument.

“Then you have a place of drink in this town which you call The Bool!”

"We generally call it The Bull," said the interested young lady, with a very melodious voice.

"You have a place of drink, which you call The Bool," he reiterated in a sort of abstract fury, "and surely you see that this is all vary ridiculous!"

"No, no!" said the girl, softly, and in deprecation.

"Why should there be a Bull?" he cried, prolonging the word in his own way. "Why should there be a Bull in connection with a festive locality? Who thinks about a Bull in gardens of delight? What need is there of a Bull when we watch the tulip-tinted maidens dance or pour the sparkling sherbert? You yourselves, my friends?" And he looked around radiantly, as if addressing an enormous mob. "You yourselves have a proverb, 'It is not calculated to promote prosperity to have a Bull in a china shop.' Equally, my friends, it would not be calculated to promote prosperity to have a Bull in a wine shop. All this is clear."

He stuck his umbrella upright in the sand and struck one finger against another, like a man getting to business at last.

"It iss as clear as the sun at noon," he said solemnly. "It iss as clear as the sun at noon that this word Bull, which is devoid of restful and pleasurable associations, is but the corruption of another word, which possesses restful and pleasurable associations. The word is not Bull; it is the Bul-Bul!" His voice rose suddenly like a trumpet and he spread abroad his hands like the fans of a tropic palm-tree.

After this great effect he was a little more subdued and leaned gravely on his umbrella. "You will find the same trace of Asiatic nomenclature in the names of all your English inns," he went on. "Nay, you will find it, I am almost certain, in all your terms in any way connected with your revelries and your reposes. Why, my good friends, the very name of that insidious spirit by which you make strong your drinks is an Arabic word: alcohol. It is obvious, is it not, that this is the Arabic article 'Al,' as in Alhambra, as in Algebra; and we need not pause here to pursue its many appearances in connection with your festive institutions, as in your Alsop's beer, your Ally Sloper, and your partly joyous institution of the Albert Memorial. Above all, in your greatest feasting day — your Christmas day — which you so erroneously suppose to be connected with your religion, what do you say then? Do you say the names of the Christian Nations? Do you say, 'I will have a little France. I will have a little Ireland. I will have a little Scotland. I will have a little Spain?' No — o." And the noise of the negative seemed to waggle as does the bleating of a sheep. “You say, ‘I will have a little Turkey,’ which is your name for the Country of the Servant of the Prophet!”

And once more he stretched out his arms sublimely to the east and west and appealed to earth and heaven. The young lady, looking at the sea-green horizon with a smile, clapped her grey gloved hands softly together as if at a peroration. But the little old man with the fez was far from exhausted yet.

“In reply to this you will object—” he began.

“O no, no,” breathed the young lady in a sort of dreamy rapture. “I don’t object. I don’t object the littlest bit!”

“In reply to this you will object—” proceeded her preceptor, “that some inns are actually named after the symbols of your national superstitions. You will hasten to point out to me that the Golden Cross is situated opposite Charing Cross, and you will expatiate at length on King’s Cross, Gerrard’s Cross and the many crosses that are to be found in or near London. But you must not forget,” and here he wagged his green umbrella roguishly at the girl, as if he was going to poke her with it, “none of you, my friends, must forget what a large number of Crescents there are in London! Denmark Crescent; Mornington Crescent! St. Mark’s Crescent! St. George’s Crescent! Grosvenor Crescent! Regent’s Park Crescent! Nay, Royal Crescent! And why should we forget Pelham Crescent? Why, indeed? Everywhere, I say, homage paid to the holy symbol of the religion of the Prophet! Compare with this network and pattern of crescents, this city almost consisting of crescents, the meagre array of crosses, which remain to attest the ephemeral superstition to which you were, for one weak moment, inclined.”

The crowds on the beach were rapidly thinning as tea-time drew nearer. The west grew clearer and clearer with the evening, till the sunshine seemed to have got behind the pale green sea and be shining through, as through a wall of thin green glass. The very transparency of sky and sea might have to this girl, for whom the sea was the romance and the tragedy, the hint of a sort of radiant hopelessness. The flood made of a million emeralds was ebbing as slowly as the sun was sinking: but the river of human nonsense flowed on for ever.

“I will not for one moment maintain,” said the old gentleman, “that there are no difficulties in my case; or that all the examples are as obviously true as those that I have just demonstrated. No-o. It is obvious, let us say, that the ‘Saracen’s Head’ is a corruption of the historic truth ‘The Saracen is

Ahead' — I am far from saying it is equally obvious that the 'Green Dragon' was originally 'the Agreeing Dragoman'; though I hope to prove in my book that it is so. I will only say here that it is su-urely more probable that one poo-ooting himself forward to attract the wayfarer in the desert, would compare himself to a friendly and persuadable guide or courier, rather than to a voracious monster. Sometimes the true origin is very hard to trace; as in the inn that commemorates our great Moslem Warrior, Amir Ali Ben Bhoze, whom you have so quaintly abbreviated into Admiral Benbow. Sometimes it is even more difficult for the seeker after truth. There is a place of drink near to here called 'The Old Ship'—"

The eyes of the girl remained on the ring of the horizon as rigid as the ring itself; but her whole face had coloured and altered. The sands were almost emptied by now: the atheist was as non-existent as his God; and those who had hoped to know what was being done to the paper boxes had gone away to their tea without knowing it. But the young woman still leaned on the railing. Her face was suddenly alive; and it looked as if her body could not move.

"It shood be admitted—" bleated the old man with the green umbrella, "that there is no literally self-evident trace of the Asiatic nomenclature in the words 'the old ship.' But even here the see-eeker after Truth can poot himself in touch with facts. I questioned the proprietor of 'The Old Ship' who is, according to such notes as I have kept, a Mr. Pumph."

The girl's lip trembled.

"Poor old Hump!" she said. "Why, I'd forgotten about him. He must be very nearly as worried as I am! I hope this man won't be too silly about this! I'd rather it weren't about this!"

"And Mr. Pumph to-old me the inn was named by a vary intimate friend of his, an Irishman who had been a Captain in the Britannic Royal Navy, but had resigned his po-ost in anger at the treatment of Ireland. Though quitting the service, he retained joost enough of the superstition of your western sailors, to wish his friend's inn to be named after his old ship. But as the name of the ship was 'The United Kingdom—'"

His female pupil, if she could not exactly be said to be sitting at his feet, was undoubtedly leaning out very eagerly above his head. Amid the solitude of the sands she called out in a loud and clear voice, "Can you tell me the Captain's name?"

The old gentleman jumped, blinked and stared like a startled owl. Having been talking for hours as if he had an audience of thousands, he seemed suddenly very much embarrassed to find that he had even an audience of one. By this time they seemed to be almost the only human creatures along the shore; almost the only living creatures, except the seagulls. The sun, in dropping finally, seemed to have broken as a blood orange might break; and lines of blood-red light were spilt along the split, low, level skies. This abrupt and belated brilliance took all the colour out of the man's red cap and green umbrella; but his dark figure, distinct against the sea and the sunset, remained the same, save that it was more agitated than before.

"The name," he said, "the Captain's name. I — I understood it was Dalroy. But what I wish to indicate, what I wish to expound, is that here again the seeker after truth can find the connection of his ideas. It was explained to me by Mr. Pumph that he was rearranging the place of festivity, in no inconsiderable proportion because of the anticipated return of the Captain in question, who had, as it appeared, taken service in some not very large Navy, but had left it and was coming home. Now, mark all of you, my friends," he said to the seagulls "that even here the chain of logic holds."

He said it to the seagulls because the young lady, after staring at him with starry eyes for a moment and leaning heavily on the railing, had turned her back and disappeared rapidly into the twilight. After her hasty steps had fallen silent there was no other noise than the faint but powerful purring of the now distant sea, the occasional shriek of a sea-bird, and the continuous sound of a soliloquy.

"Mark, all of you," continued the man flourishing his green umbrella so furiously that it almost flew open like a green flag unfurled, and then striking it deep in the sand, in the sand in which his fighting fathers had so often struck their tents, "mark all of you this marvellous fact! That when, being for a time, for a time, astonished-embarrassed — brought up as you would say short — by the absence of any absolute evidence of Eastern influence in the phrase 'the old ship,' I inquired from what country the Captain was returning, Mr. Pumph said to me in solemnity, 'From Turkey.' From Turkey! From the nearest country of the Religion! I know men say it is not our country; that no man knows where we come from, of what is our country. What does it matter where we come from if we carry a message from Paradise? With a great galloping of horses we carry it, and have no time to stop in places. But what we bring is the only creed that has regarded what you will call in your great words the virginity of a man's reason, that has put no man higher than a prophet, and has respected the solitude of God."

And again he spread his arms out, as if addressing a mass meeting of millions, all alone on the dark seashore.

Chapter II: The End of Olive Island

THE great sea-dragon of the changing colours that wriggles round the world like a chameleon, was pale green as it washed on Pebblewick, but strong blue where it broke on the Ionian Isles. One of the innumerable islets, hardly more than a flat white rock in the azure expanse, was celebrated as the Isle of Olives; not because it was rich in such vegetation, but because, by some freak of soil or climate, two or three little olives grew there to an unparalleled height. Even in the full heat of the South it is very unusual for an olive tree to grow any taller than a small pear tree; but the three olives that stood up as signals on this sterile place might well be mistaken, except for the shape, for moderate sized pines or larches of the north. It was also connected with some ancient Greek legend about Pallas the patroness of the olive; for all that sea was alive with the first fairyland of Hellas; and from the platform of marble under the olive trees could be seen the grey outline of Ithaca.

On the island and under the trees was a table set in the open air and covered with papers and inkstands. At the table were sitting four men, two in uniform and two in plain black clothes. Aides-de-camps, equerries and such persons stood in a group in the background; and behind them a string of two or three silent battle-ships lay along the sea. For peace was being given to Europe.

There had just come to an end the long agony of one of the many unsuccessful efforts to break the strength of Turkey and save the small Christian tribes. There had been many other such meetings in the later phases of the matter as, one after another, the smaller nations gave up the struggle, or the greater nations came in to coerce them. But the interested parties had now dwindled to these four. For the Powers of Europe being entirely agreed on the necessity for peace on a Turkish basis, were content to leave the last negotiations to England and Germany, who could be trusted to enforce it; there was a representative of the Sultan, of course; and there was a representative of the only enemy of the Sultan who had not hitherto come to terms.

For one tiny power had alone carried on the war month after month, and with a tenacity and temporary success that was a new nine-days marvel every morning. An obscure and scarcely recognized prince calling himself the King of Ithaca had filled the Eastern Mediterranean with exploits that were not unworthy of the audacious parallel that the name of his island suggested. Poets could not help asking if it were Odysseus come again; patriotic Greeks, even if they themselves had been forced to lay down their arms, could not help feeling curious as to what Greek race or name was boasted by the new and heroic royal house. It was, therefore, with some amusement that the world at last discovered that the descendant of Ulysses was a cheeky Irish adventurer named Patrick Dalroy; who had once been in the English Navy, had got into a quarrel through his Fenian sympathies and resigned his commission. Since then he had seen many adventures in many uniforms; and always got himself or some one else into hot water with an extraordinary mixture of cynicism and quixotry. In his fantastic little kingdom, of course, he had been his own General, his own Admiral, his own Foreign Secretary and his own Ambassador; but he was always careful to follow the wishes of his people in the essentials of peace and war; and it was at their direction that he had come to lay down his sword at last. Besides his professional skill, he was chiefly famous for his enormous bodily strength and stature. It is the custom in newspapers nowadays to say that mere barbaric muscular power is valueless in modern military actions, but this view may be as much exaggerated as its opposite. In such wars as these of the Near East, where whole populations are slightly armed and personal assault is common, a leader who can defend his head often has a real advantage; and it is not true, even in a general way, that strength is of no use. This was admitted by Lord Ivywood, the English Minister, who was pointing out in detail to King Patrick the hopeless superiority of the light pattern of Turkish field gun; and the King of Ithaca, remarking that he was quite convinced, said he would take it with him, and ran away with it under his arm. It would be conceded by the greatest of the Turkish warriors, the terrifying Oman Pasha, equally famous for his courage in war and his cruelty in peace; but who carried on his brow a scar from Patrick’s sword, taken after three hours mortal combat — and taken without spite or shame, be it said, for the Turk is always at his best in that game. Nor would the quality be doubted by Mr. Hart, a financial friend of the German Minister, whom Patrick Dalroy, after asking him which of his front windows he would prefer to be thrown into, threw into his bedroom window on the first floor with so considerate an exactitude that he alighted on the bed, where he was in a position to receive any medical attention. But, when all is said, one muscular Irish gentleman on an island cannot fight all Europe for ever, and he came, with a kind of gloomy good humour, to offer the terms now dictated to him by his adopted country. He could not even knock all the diplomatists down (for which he possessed both the power and the inclination), for he realised, with the juster part of his mind, that they were only obeying orders, as he was. So he sat heavily and sleepily at the little table, in the green and white uniform of the Navy of Ithaca (invented by himself); a big bull of a man, monstrously young for his size, with a bull neck and two blue bull's eyes for eyes, and red hair rising so steadily off his scalp that it looked as if his head had caught fire: as some said it had.

The most dominant person present was the great Oman Pasha himself, with his strong face starved by the asceticism of war, his hair and mustache seeming rather blasted with lightning than blanched with age; a red fez on his head, and between the red fez and mustache, a scar at which the King of Ithaca did not look. His eyes had an awful lack of expression.

Lord Ivywood, the English Minister, was probably the handsomest man in England, save that he was almost colourless both in hair and complexion. Against that blue marble sea he might almost have been one of its old marble statues that are faultless in line but show nothing but shades of grey or white. It seemed a mere matter of the luck of lighting whether his hair looked dull silver or pale brown; and his splendid mask never changed in colour or expression. He was one of the last of the old Parliamentary orators; and yet he was probably a comparatively young man; he could make anything he had to mention blossom into verbal beauty; yet his face remained dead while his lips were alive. He had little old-fashioned ways, as out of old Parliaments; for instance, he would always stand up, as in a Senate, to speak to those three other men, alone on a rock in the ocean.

In all this he perhaps appeared more personal in contrast to the man sitting next to him, who never spoke at all but whose face seemed to speak for him. He was Dr. Gluck, the German Minister, whose face had nothing German about it; neither the German vision nor the German sleep. His face was as vivid as a highly coloured photograph and altered like a cinema: but his scarlet lips never moved in speech. His almond eyes seemed to shine with all the shifting fires of the opal; his small, curled black mustache seemed sometimes almost to hoist itself afresh, like a live, black snake; but there came from him no sound. He put a paper in front of Lord Ivywood.

Lord Ivywood took a pair of eyeglasses to read it, and looked ten years older by the act.

It was merely a statement of agenda; of the few last things to be settled at this last conference. The first item ran:

"The Ithacan Ambassador asks that the girls taken to harems after the capture of Pylos be restored to their families. This cannot be granted." Lord Ivywood rose. The mere beauty of his voice startled everyone who had not heard it before.

"Your Excellencies and gentlemen," he said, "a statement to whose policy I by no means assent, but to whose historic status I could not conceivably aspire, has familiarised you with a phrase about peace with honour. But when we have to celebrate a peace between such historic soldiers as Oman Pasha and His Majesty the King of Ithaca, I think we may say that it is peace with glory."

He paused for half an instant; yet even the silence of sea and rock seemed full of multitudinous applause, so perfectly had the words been spoken.

"I think there is but one thought among us, whatever our many just objections through these long and harassing months of negotiations — I think there is but one thought now. That the peace may be as full as the war — that the peace may be as fearless as the war."

Once more he paused an instant; and felt a phantom clapping, as it were, not from the hands but the heads of the men. He went on.

"If we are to leave off fighting, we may surely leave off haggling. A statute of limitations or, if you will, an amnesty, is surely proper when so sublime a peace seals so sublime a struggle. And if there be anything in which an old diplomatist may advise you, I would most strongly say this: that there should be no new disturbance of whatever amicable or domestic ties have been formed during this disturbed time. I will admit I am sufficiently old-fashioned to think any interference with the interior life of the family a precedent of no little peril. Nor will I be so illiberal as not to extend to the ancient customs of Islam what I would extend to the ancient customs of Christianity. A suggestion has been brought before us that we should enter into a renewed war of recrimination as to whether certain women have left their homes with or without their own consent. I can conceive no controversy more perilous to begin or more impossible to conclude. I will venture to say that I express all your thoughts, when I say that, whatever wrongs may have been wrought on either side, the homes, the marriages, the family arrangements of this great Ottoman Empire, shall remain as they are today."

No one moved except Patrick Dalroy, who put his hand on his sword-hilt for a moment and looked at them all with bursting eyes; then his hand fell and he laughed out loud and sudden.

Lord Ivywood took no notice, but picked up the agenda paper again, and again fitted on the glasses that made him look older. He read the second item — needless to say, not aloud. The German Minister with the far from German face, had written this note for him:

"Both Coote and the Bernsteins insist there must be Chinese for the marble. Greeks cannot be trusted in the quarries just now."

"But while," continued Lord Ivywood, "we desire these fundamental institutions, such as the Moslem family, to remain as they are even at this moment, we do not assent to social stagnation. Nor do we say for one moment that the great tradition of Islam is capable alone of sustaining the necessities of the Near East. But I would seriously ask your Excellencies, why should we be so vain as to suppose that the only cure for the Near East is of necessity the Near West? If new ideas are needed, if new blood is needed, would it not be more natural to appeal to those most living, those most laborious civilisations which form the vast reserve of the Orient? Asia in Europe, if my friend Oman Pasha will allow me the criticism, has hitherto been Asia in arms. May we not yet see Asia in Europe and yet Asia in peace? These at least are the reasons which lead me to consent to a scheme of colonisation."

Patrick Dalroy sprang erect, pulling himself out of his seat by clutching at an olive-branch above his head. He steadied himself by putting one hand on the trunk of the tree, and simply stared at them all. There fell on him the huge helplessness of mere physical power. He could throw them into the sea; but what good would that do? More men on the wrong side would be accredited to the diplomatic campaign; and the only man on the right side would be discredited for anything. He shook the branching olive tree above him in his fury. But he did not for one moment disturb Lord Ivywood, who had just read the third item on his private agenda ("Oman Pasha insists on the destruction of the vineyards") and was by this time engaged in a peroration which afterwards became famous and may be found in many rhetorical text books and primers. He was well into the middle of it before Dalroy's rage and wonder allowed him to follow the words.

". . . do we indeed owe nothing," the diplomatist was saying "to that gesture of high refusal in which so many centuries ago the great Arabian mystic put the wine-cup from his lips? Do we owe nothing to the long vigil of a valiant race, the long fast by which they have testified against the venomous beauty of the Vine? Ours is an age when men come more and more to see that the creeds hold treasures for each other, that each religion has a secret for its neighbour, that faith unto faith uttereth speech, and church unto church showeth knowledge. If it be true, and I claim again the indulgence of Oman Pasha when I say I think it is true, that we of the West have brought some light to Islam in the matter of the preciousness of peace and of civil order, may we not say that Islam in answer shall give us peace in a thousand homes, and encourage us to cut down that curse that has done so much to thwart and madden the virtues of Western Christendom. Already in my own country the orgies that made horrible the nights of the noblest families are no more. Already the legislature takes more and more sweeping action to deliver the populace from the bondage of the all-destroying drug. Surely the prophet of Mecca is reaping his harvest; the cession of the disputed vineyards to the greatest of his champions is of all acts the most appropriate to this day; to this happy day that may yet deliver the East from the curse of war and the West from the curse of wine. The gallant prince who meets us here at last, to offer an olive branch even more glorious than his sword, may well have our sympathy if he himself views the cession with some sentimental regret; but I have little doubt that he also will live to rejoice in it at last. And I would remind you that it is not the vine alone that has been the sign of the glory of the South. There is another sacred tree unstained by loose and violent memories, guiltless of the blood of Pentheus or of Orpheus and the broken lyre. We shall pass from this place in a little while as all things pass and perish:

"Far called, our navies melt away.
On dune and headland sinks the fire,
And all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre.

"But so long as sun can shine and soil can nourish, happier men and women after us shall look on this lovely islet and it shall tell its own story; for they shall see these three holy olive trees lifted in everlasting benediction, over the humble spot out of which came the peace of the world."

The other two men were staring at Patrick Dalroy; his hand had tightened on the tree, and a giant billow of effort went over his broad breast. A small stone jerked itself out of the ground at the foot of the tree as if it were a grasshopper jumping; and then the coiled roots of the olive tree rose very slowly out of the earth like the limbs of a dragon lifting itself from sleep.

"I offer an olive branch," said the King of Ithaca, totteringly leaning the loose tree so that its vast shadow, much larger than itself, fell across the whole council. "An olive branch," he gasped, "more glorious than my sword. Also heavier."

Then he made another effort and tossed it into the sea below.

The German, who was no German, had put up his arm in apprehension when the shadow fell across him. Now he got up and edged away from the table; seeing that the wild Irishman was tearing up the second tree. This one came out more easily; and before he flung it after the first, he stood with it a moment; looking like a man juggling with a tower.

Lord Ivywood showed more firmness; but he rose in tremendous remonstrance. Only the Turkish Pasha still sat with blank eyes, immovable. Dalroy rent out the last tree and hurled it, leaving the island bare.

"There!" said Dalroy, when the third and last olive had splashed in the tide. "Now I will go. I have seen something today that is worse than death: and the name of it is Peace."

Oman Pasha rose and held out his hand.

"You are right," he said in French, "and I hope we meet again in the only life that is a good life. Where are you going now?"

"I am going," said Dalroy, dreamily, "to 'The Old Ship.'"

"Do you mean?" asked the Turk, "that you are going back to the warships of the English King?"

"No," answered the other, "I am going back to 'The Old Ship' that is behind the apple trees by Pebblewick; where the Ule flows among the trees. I fear I shall never see you there."

After an instant's hesitation he wrung the red hand of the great tyrant and walked to his boat without a glance at the diplomatists.

Chapter III: The Sign of “The Old Ship”

UPON few of the children of men has the surname of Pump fallen, and of these few have been maddened into naming a child Humphrey in addition to it. To such extremity, however, had the parents of the innkeeper at “The Old Ship” proceeded, that their son might come at last to be called “Hump” by his dearest friends, and “Pumph” by an aged Turk with a green umbrella. All this, or all he knew of it, he endured with a sour smile; for he was of a stoical temper.

Mr. Humphrey Pump stood outside his inn, which stood almost on the seashore, screened only by one line of apple trees, dwarfed, twisted and salted by the sea air; but in front of it was a highly banked bowling green, and behind it the land sank abruptly; so that one very steep sweeping road vanished into the depth and mystery of taller trees. Mr. Pump was standing immediately under his trim sign, which stood erect in the turf; a wooden pole painted white and suspending a square white board, also painted white but further decorated with a highly grotesque blue ship, such as a child might draw, but into which Mr. Pump’s patriotism had insinuated a disproportionately large red St. George’s cross.

Mr. Humphrey Pump was a man of middle size, with very broad shoulders, wearing a sort of shooting suit with gaiters. Indeed, he was engaged at the moment in cleaning and reloading a double-barrelled gun, a short but powerful weapon which he had invented, or at least improved, himself; and which, though eccentric enough as compared with latest scientific arms, was neither clumsy nor necessarily out of date. For Pump was one of those handy men who seem to have a hundred hands like Briareus; he made nearly everything for himself and everything in his house was slightly different from the same thing in anyone else’s house. He was also as cunning as Pan or a poacher in everything affecting every bird or dish, every leaf or berry in the woods. His mind was a rich soil of subconscious memories and traditions; and he had a curious kind of gossip so allusive as to almost amount to reticence; for he always took it for granted that everyone knew his county and its tales as intimately as he did; so he would mention the most mysterious and amazing things without relaxing a muscle on his face, which seemed to be made of knotted wood. His dark brown hair ended in two rudimentary side whiskers, giving him a slightly horsy look, but in the old-fashioned sportsman’s style. His smile was rather wry and crabbed; but his brown eyes were kindly and soft. He was very English.

As a rule his movements, though quick, were cool; but on this occasion he put down the gun on the table outside the inn in a rather hurried manner and came forward dusting his hands in an unusual degree of animation and even defiance. Beyond the goblin green apple trees and against the sea had appeared the tall, slight figure of a girl, in a dress about the colour of copper and a large shady hat. Under the hat her face was grave and beautiful though rather swarthy. She shook hands with Mr. Pump; then he very ceremoniously put a chair for her and called her “Lady Joan.”

“I thought I would like a look at the old place,” she said. “We have had some happy times here when we were boys and girls. I suppose you hardly see any of your old friends now.”

“Very little,” answered Pump, rubbing his short whisker reflectively. “Lord Ivywood’s become quite a Methody parson, you know, since he took the place; he’s pulling down beer-shops right and left. And Mr. Charles was sent to Australia for lying down flat at the funeral. Pretty stiff I call it; but the old lady was a terror.”

“Do you ever hear,” asked Lady Joan Brett, carelessly, “of that Irishman, Captain Dalroy?”

“Yes, more often than from the rest,” answered the innkeeper. “He seems to have done wonders in this Greek business. Ah! He was a sad loss to the Navy!”

“They insulted his country,” said the girl, looking at the sea with a heightened colour. “After all, Ireland was his country; and he had a right to resent it being spoken of like that.”

“And when they found he’d painted him green,” went on Mr. Pump.

“Painted him what?” asked Lady Joan.

“Painted Captain Dawson green,” continued Mr. Pump in colourless tones. “Captain Dawson said green was the colour of Irish traitors, so Dalroy painted him green. It was a great temptation, no doubt, with this fence being painted at the time and the pail of stuff there; but, of course, it had a very prejudicial effect on his professional career.”

“What an extraordinary story!” said the staring Lady Joan, breaking into a rather joyless laugh. “It must go down among your county legends. I never heard that version before. Why, it might be the origin of the ‘Green Man’ over there by the town.”

“Oh, no,” said Pump, simply, “that’s been there since before Waterloo times. Poor old Noyle had it until they put him away. You remember old Noyle, Lady Joan. Still alive, I hear, and still writing love-letters to Queen Victoria. Only of course they aren’t posted now.”

“Have you heard from your Irish friend lately?” asked the girl, keeping a steady eye on the sky-line.

“Yes, I had a letter last week,” answered the innkeeper. “It seems not impossible that he may return to England. He’s been acting for one of these Greek places, and the negotiations seem to be concluded. It’s a queer thing that his lordship himself was the English minister in charge of them.”

“You mean Lord Ivywood,” said Lady Joan, rather coldly. “Yes, he has a great career before him, evidently.”

“I wish he hadn’t got his knife into us so much,” chuckled Pump. “I don’t believe there’ll be an inn left in England. But the Ivywoods were always cranky. It’s only fair to him to remember his grandfather.”

“I think it’s very ungallant on your part,” said Lady Joan, with a mournful smile, “to ask a lady to remember his grandfather.”

“You know what I mean, Lady Joan,” said her host, good humouredly. “And I never was hard on the case myself; we all have our little ways. I shouldn’t like it done to my pig; but I don’t see why a man shouldn’t have his own pig in his own pew with him if he likes it. It wasn’t a free seat. It was the family pew.”

Lady Joan broke out laughing again. “What horrible things you do seem to have heard of,” she said. “Well, I must be going, Mr. Hump — I mean Mr. Pump — I used to call you Hump . . . oh, Hump, do you think any of us will ever be happy again?”

“I suppose it rests with Providence,” he said, looking at the sea.

“Oh, do say Providence again!” cried the girl. “It’s as good as ‘Masterman Ready.’”

With which inconsequent words she betook herself again to the path by the apple trees and walked back by the sea front to Pebblewick.

The inn of “The Old Ship” lay a little beyond the old fishing village of Pebblewick; and that again was separated by an empty half-mile or so from the new watering-place of Pebblewick-on-Sea. But the dark-haired lady walked steadily along the sea-front, on a sort of parade which had been stretched out to east and west in the insane optimism of watering-places, and, as she approached the more crowded part, looked more and more carefully at the groups on the beach. Most of them were much the same as she had seen them more than a month before. The seekers after truth (as the man in the fez would say) who assembled daily to find out what the man was doing with the paper-boxes, had not found out yet; neither had they wearied of their intellectual pilgrimage. Pennies were still thrown to the thundering atheist in acknowledgment of his incessant abuse; and this was all the more mysterious because the crowd was obviously indifferent, and the atheist was obviously sincere. The man with the long neck who led Low Church hymns with a little wooden spade had indeed disappeared; for children's services of this kind are generally a moving feast; but the man whose only claim consisted of carrots round his hat was still there; and seemed to have even more money than before. But Lady Joan could see no sign of the little old man in the fez. She could only suppose that he had failed entirely; and, being in a bitter mood, she told herself bitterly that he had sunk out of sight precisely because there was in his rubbish a touch of unearthly and insane clearheadedness of which all these vulgar idiots were incapable. She did not confess to herself consciously that what had made both the man in the fez and the man at the inn interesting was the subject of which they had spoken.

As she walked on rather wearily along the parade she caught sight of a girl in black with faint fair hair and a tremulous, intelligent face which she was sure she had seen before. Pulling together all her aristocratic training for the remembering of middle class people, she managed to remember that this was a Miss Browning who had done typewriting work for her a year or two before; and immediately went forward to greet her, partly out of genuine good nature and partly as a relief from her own rather dreary thoughts. Her tone was so seriously frank and friendly that the lady in black summoned the social courage to say:

"I've so often wanted to introduce you to my sister who's much cleverer than I am, though she does live at home; which I suppose is very old-fashioned. She knows all sorts of intellectual people. She is talking to one of them now; this Prophet of the Moon that everyone's talking about. Do let me introduce you."

Lady Joan Brett had met many prophets of the moon and of other things. But she had the spontaneous courtesy which redeems the vices of her class, and she followed Miss Browning to a seat on the parade. She greeted Miss Browning's sister with glowing politeness; and this may really be counted to her credit; for she had great difficulty in looking at Miss Browning's sister at all. For on the seat beside her, still in a red fez but in a brilliantly new black frock coat and every appearance of prosperity, sat the old gentleman who had lectured on the sands about the inns of England.

"He lectured at our Ethical Society," whispered Miss Browning, "on the word Alcohol. Just on the word Alcohol. He was perfectly thrilling. All about Arabia and Algebra, you know, and how everything comes from the East. You really would be interested."

"I am interested," said Lady Joan.

"Poot it to yourselfs," the man in the fez was saying to Miss Browning's sister, "joost what sort of meaning the names of your ince can have if they do not commemorate the unlimitable influence of Islam. There is a vary populous Inn in London, one of the most distinguished, one of the most of the Centre, and it is called the Horseshoe? Now, my friendss, why should anyone commemorate a horse-shoe? It iss but an appendage to a creature more interesting than itself. I have already demonstrated to you that the very fact that you have in your town a place of drink called the Bool—"

"I should like to ask—" began Lady Joan, suddenly.

"A place of drink called the Bool," went on the man in the fez, deaf to all distractions, "and I have urged that the Bool is a disturbing thought, while the Bul-Bul is a reassuring thought. But even you my friends, would not name a place after a ring in a Bool's nose and not after the Bool? Why then name an equivalent place after the shoo, the mere shoo, upon a horse's hoof, and not after the noble horse? Surely it is clear, surely it is evident that the term 'horse-shoe' is a cryptic term, an esoteric term, a term made during the days when the ancient Moslem faith of this English country was oppressed by the passing superstition of the Galileans. That bent shape, that duplex curving shape, which you call horse-shoe, is it not clearly the Crescent?" and he cast his arms wide as he had done on the sands, "the Crescent of the Prophet of the only God?"

"I should like to ask," began Lady Joan, again, "how you would explain the name of the inn called 'The Green Man,' just behind that row of houses."

"Exactly! exactly!" cried the Prophet of the Moon, in almost insane excitement. "The seeker after truth could not at all probably find a more perfect example of these principles. My friendss, how could there be a green man? You are acquainted with green grass, with green leaves, with green cheese, with green chartreuse. I ask if any one of you, however wide her social circle, has ever been acquainted with a green man. Surely, surely, it is evident, my friendss, that this is an imperfect version, an abbreviated version, of the original words. What can be clearer than that the original expression, was ‘the green-turban’d man,’ in allusion to the well-known uniform of the descendants of the Prophet? ‘Turban’d’ surely is just the sort of word, exactly the sort of foreign and unfamiliar word, that might easily be slurred over and ultimately suppressed.”

“There is a legend in these parts,” said Lady Joan, steadily, “that a great hero, hearing the colour that was sacred to his holy island insulted, really poured it over his enemy for a reply.”

“A legend! a fable!” cried the man in the fez, with another radiant and rational expansion of the hands. “Is it not evident that no such thing can have really happened?”

“Oh, yes — it really happened,” said the young lady, softly. “There is not much to comfort one in this world; but there are some things. Oh, it really happened.”

And taking a graceful farewell of the group, she resumed her rather listless walk along the parade.

Chapter IV: The Inn Finds Wings

MR. HUMPHREY PUMP stood in front of his inn once more, the cleaned and loaded gun still lay on the table, and the white sign of The Ship still swung in the slight sea breeze over his head; but his leatherish features were knotted over a new problem. He held two letters in his hand, letters of a very different sort, but letters that pointed to the same difficult problem. The first ran:

"DEAR HUMP —

"I'm so bothered that I simply must call you by the old name again. You understand I've got to keep in with my people. Lord Ivywood is a sort of cousin of mine, and for that and some other reasons, my poor old mother would just die if I offended him. You know her heart is weak; you know everything there is to know in this county. Well, I only write to warn you that something is going to be done against your dear old inn. I don't know what this Country's coming to. Only a month or two ago I saw a shabby old pantaloon on the beach with a green gamp, talking the craziest stuff you ever heard in your life. Three weeks ago I heard he was lecturing at Ethical Societies — whatever they are — for a handsome salary. Well, when I was last at Ivywood — I must go because Mamma likes it — there was the living lunatic again, in evening dress, and talked about by people who really *know*. I mean who know better.

"Lord Ivywood is entirely under his influence and thinks him the greatest prophet the world has ever seen. And Lord Ivywood is not a fool; one can't help admiring him. Mamma, I think, wants me to do more than admire him. I am telling you everything, Hump, because I think perhaps this is the last honest letter I shall ever write in the world. And I warn you seriously that Lord Ivywood is *sincere*, which is perfectly terrible. He will be the biggest English statesman, and he does really mean to ruin — the old ships. If ever you see me here again taking part in such work, I hope you may forgive me.

"Somebody we mentioned, whom I shall never see again, I leave to your friendship. It is the second best thing I can give, and I am not sure it may not be better than the first would have been. Goodbye.

J. B."

This letter seemed to distress Mr. Pump rather than puzzle him. It ran as follows:

“SIR —

“The Committee of the Imperial Commission of Liquor Control is directed to draw your attention to the fact you have disregarded the Committee’s communications under section 5A of the Act for the Regulation of Places of Public Entertainment; and that you are now under Section 47C of the Act amending the Act for the Regulation of Places of Public Entertainment aforesaid. The charges on which prosecution will be founded are as follows:

“(1) Violation of sub-section 23*f* of the Act, which enacts that no pictorial signs shall be exhibited before premises of less than the ratable value of £2000 per annum.

“(2) Violation of sub-section 113*d* of the Act, which enacts that no liquor containing alcohol shall be sold in any inn, hotel, tavern or public-house, except when demanded under a medical certificate from one of the doctors licensed by the State Medical Council, or in the specially excepted cases of Claridge’s Hotel and the Criterion Bar, where urgency has already been proved.

“As you have failed to acknowledge previous communications on this subject, this is to warn you that legal steps will be taken immediately,

“We are yours truly,
“IVYWOOD, President.
J. LEVESON, Secretary.”

Mr. Humphrey Pump sat down at the table outside his inn and whistled in a way which, combined with his little whiskers made him for the moment seem literally like an ostler. Then, the very real wit and learning he had returned slowly into his face and with his warm, brown eyes he considered the cold, grey sea. There was not much to be got out of the sea. Humphrey Pump might drown himself in the sea; which would be better for Humphrey Pump than being finally separated from “The Old Ship.” England might be sunk under the sea; which would be better for England than never again having such places as “The Old Ship.” But these were not serious remedies nor rationally attainable; and Pump could only feel that the sea had simply warped him as it had warped his apple trees. The sea was a dreary business altogether. There was only one figure walking on the sands. It was only when the figure drew nearer and nearer and grew to more than human size, that he sprang to his feet with a cry. Also the level light of morning lit the man’s hair, and it was red.

The late King of Ithaca came casually and slowly up the slope of the beach that led to “The Old Ship.” He had landed in a boat from a battleship that could still be seen near the horizon, and he still wore the astounding uniform of apple-green and silver which he had himself invented as that of a navy that had never existed very much, and which now did not exist at all. He had a straight naval sword at his side; for the terms of his capitulation had never required him to surrender it; and inside the uniform and beside the sword there was what there always had been, a big and rather bewildered man with rough red hair, whose misfortune was that he had good brains, but that his bodily strength and bodily passions were a little too strong for his brains.

He had flung his crashing weight on the chair outside the inn before the innkeeper could find words to express his astounded pleasure in seeing him. His first words were “have you got any rum?”

Then, as if feeling that his attitude needed explanation, he added, “I suppose I shall never be a sailor again after tonight. So I must have rum.”

Humphrey Pump had a talent for friendship, and understood his old friend. He went into the inn without a word; and came back idly pushing or rolling with an alternate foot (as if he were playing football with two footballs at once) two objects that rolled very easily. One was a big keg or barrel of rum and the other a great solid drum of a cheese. Among his thousand other technical tricks he had a way of tapping a cask without a tap, or anything that could impair its revolutionary or revolving qualities. He was feeling in his pocket for the instrument with which he solved such questions, when his Irish friend suddenly sat bolt upright, as one startled out of sleep, and spoke with his strongest and most unusual brogue.

“Oh thank ye, Hump, a thousand times; and I don’t think I really want something to drink at arl. Now I know I can have it, I don’t seem to want it at arl. But hwhat I do want—” and he suddenly dashed his big fist on the little table so that one of its legs leapt and nearly snapped— “hwhat I do want is some sort of account of what’s happening in this England of yours that shan’t be just obviously rubbish.”

“Ah,” said Pump, fingering the two letters thoughtfully. “And what do you mean by rubbish?”

“I carl it rubbish” cried Patrick Dalroy, “when ye put the Koran into the Bible and not the Apocrypha; and I carl it rubbish when a mad parson’s allowed to propose to put a crescent on St. Paul’s Cathedral. I know the

Turks are our allies now, but they often were before, and I never heard that Palmerston or Colin Campbell had any truck with such trash."

"Lord Ivywood is very enthusiastic, I know," said Pump, with a restrained amusement. "He was saying only the other day at the Flower Show here that the time had come for a full unity between Christianity and Islam."

"Something called Chrislam perhaps," said the Irishman, with a moody eye. He was gazing across the grey and purple woodlands that stretched below them at the back of the inn; and into which the steep, white road swept downwards and disappeared. The steep road looked like the beginning of an adventure; and he was an adventurer.

"But you exaggerate, you know," went on Pump, polishing his gun, "about the crescent on St. Paul's. It wasn't exactly that. What Dr. Moole suggested, I think, was some sort of double emblem, you know, combining cross and crescent."

"And carled the Crescent," muttered Dalroy.

"And you can't call Dr. Moole a parson either," went on Mr. Humphrey Pump, polishing industriously. "Why, they say he's a sort of atheist, or what they call an agnostic, like Squire Brunton who used to bite elm trees by Marley. The grand folks have these fashions, Captain, but they've never lasted long that I know of."

"I think it's serious this time," said his friend, shaking his big red head. "This is the last inn on this coast, and will soon be the last inn in England. Do you remember the 'Saracen's Head' in Plumsea, along the shore there?"

"I know," assented the innkeeper. "My aunt was there when he hanged his mother; but it's a charming place."

"I passed there just now; and it has been destroyed," said Dalroy.

"Destroyed by fire?" asked Pump, pausing in his gun-scrubbing.

"No," said Dalroy, "destroyed by lemonade. They've taken away its license or whatever you call it. I made a song about it, which I'll sing to you now!" And with an astounding air of suddenly revived spirits, he roared in a voice like thunder the following verses, to a simple but spirited tune of his own invention:

"The Saracen's Head looks down the lane,
Where we shall never drink wine again;
For the wicked old Women who feel well-bred
Have turned to a tea-shop the Saracen's Head.
"The Saracen's Head out of Araby came,
King Richard riding in arms like flame,

And where he established his folk to be fed
He set up his spear — and the Saracen's Head.
"But the Saracen's Head outlived the Kings,
It thought and it thought of most horrible things;
Of Health and of Soap and of Standard Bread,
And of Saracen drinks at the Saracen's Head."

"Hullo!" cried Pump, with another low whistle. "Why here comes his lordship. And I suppose that young man in the goggles is a Committee or something."

"Let him come," said Dalroy, and continued in a yet more earthquake bellow:

"So the Saracen's Head fulfils its name,
They drink no wine — a ridiculous game — And I shall wonder until I'm dead,
How it ever came into the Saracen's Head."

As the last echo of this lyrical roar rolled away among the apple-trees, and down the steep, white road into the woods, Captain Dalroy leaned back in his chair and nodded good humouredly to Lord Ivywood, who was standing on the lawn with his usual cold air, but with slightly compressed lips. Behind him was a dark young man with double eyeglasses and a number of printed papers in his hand; presumably J. Leveson, Secretary. In the road outside stood a group of three which struck Pump as strangely incongruous, like a group in a three act farce. The first was a police inspector in uniform; the second was a workman in a leather apron, more or less like a carpenter, and the third was an old man in a scarlet Turkish fez, but otherwise dressed in very fashionable English clothes in which he did not seem very comfortable. He was explaining something about the inn to the policeman and the carpenter, who appeared to be restraining their amusement.

"Fine song that, my lord," said Dalroy, with cheerful egotism. "I'll sing you another," and he cleared his throat.

"Mr. Pump," said Lord Ivywood, in his bell-like and beautiful voice, "I thought I would come in person, if only to make it clear that every indulgence has been shown you. The mere date of this inn brings it within the statute of 1909; it was erected when my great grandfather was Lord of the Manor here, though I believe it then bore a different name, and—"

"Ah, my lord," broke in Pump with a sigh, "I'd rather deal with your great grandfather, I would, though he married a hundred negresses instead of one, than see a gentleman of your family taking away a poor man's livelihood."

"The act is specially designed in the interests of the relief of poverty," proceeded Lord Ivywood, in an unruffled manner, "and its final advantages will accrue to all citizens alike." He turned for an instant to the dark secretary, saying, "You have that second report?" and received a folded paper in answer.

"It is here fully explained," said Lord Ivywood, putting on his elderly eyeglasses, "that the purpose of the Act is largely to protect the savings of the more humble and necessitous classes. I find in paragraph three, 'we strongly advise that the deleterious element of alcohol be made illegal save in such few places as the Government may specially exempt for Parliamentary or other public reasons, and that the provocative and demoralising display on inn signs be strictly forbidden except in the cases thus specially exempted: the absence of such temptations will, in our opinion, do much to improve the precarious financial conditions of the working class.' That disposes, I think, of any such suggestion as Mr. Pump's, that our inevitable acts of social reform are in any sense oppressive. To Mr. Pump's prejudice it may appear for the moment to bear hardly upon him; but" (and here Lord Ivywood's voice took one of its moving oratorical turns), "what better proof could we desire of the insidiousness of the sleepy poison we denounce, what better evidence could we offer of the civic corruption that we seek to cure, than the very fact that good and worthy men of established repute in the county can, by living in such places as these, become so stagnant and sodden and unsocial, whether through the fumes of wine or through meditations as maudlin about the past, that they consider the case solely as their own case, and laugh at the long agony of the poor."

Captain Dalroy had been studying Ivywood with a very bright blue eye; and he spoke now much more quietly than he generally did.

"Excuse me one moment, my lord," he said. "But there was one point in your important explanation which I am not sure I have got right. Do I understand you to say that, though sign-boards are to be generally abolished, yet where, if anywhere, they are retained, the right to sell fermented liquor will be retained also? In other words, though an Englishman may at last find only one inn-sign left in England, yet if the place has an inn-sign, it will also have your gracious permission to be really an inn?"

Lord Ivywood had an admirable command of temper, which had helped him much in his career as a statesman. He did not waste time in wrangling about the Captain’s *locus standi* in the matter. He replied quite simply,

“Yes, Your statement of the facts is correct.”

“Whenever I find an inn-sign permitted by the police, I may go in and ask for a glass of beer — also permitted by the police.”

“If you find any such, yes,” answered Ivywood, quite temperately. “But we hope soon to have removed them altogether.”

Captain Patrick Dalroy rose enormously from his seat with a sort of stretch and yawn.

“Well, Hump,” he said to his friend, “the best thing, it seems to me, is to take the important things with us.”

With two sight-staggering kicks he sent the keg of rum and the round cheese flying over the fence, in such a direction that they bounded on the descending road and rolled more and more rapidly down toward the dark woods into which the path disappeared. Then he gripped the pole of the inn-sign, shook it twice and plucked it out of the turf like a tuft of grass.

It had all happened before anyone could move, but as he strode out into the road the policeman ran forward. Dalroy smote him flat across face and chest with the wooden sign-board, so as to send him flying into the ditch on the other side of the road. Then turning on the man in the fez he poked him with the end of the pole so sharply in his new white waistcoat and watch-chain as to cause him to sit down suddenly in the road, looking very serious and thoughtful.

The dark secretary made a movement of rescue, but Humphrey Pump, with a cry, caught up his gun from the table and pointed it at him, which so alarmed J. Leveson, Secretary, as to cause him almost to double up with his emotions. The next moment Pump, with his gun under his arm, was scampering down the hill after the Captain, who was scampering after the barrel and the cheese.

Before the policeman had struggled out of the ditch, they had all disappeared into the darkness of the forest. Lord Ivywood who had remained firm through the scene, without a sign of fear or impatience (or, I will add, amusement), held up his hand and stopped the policeman in his pursuit.

“We should only make ourselves and the law ridiculous,” he said, “by pursuing those ludicrous rowdies now. They can’t escape or do any real harm in the state of modern communications. What is far more important, gentlemen, is to destroy their stores and their base. Under the Act of 1911 we have a right to confiscate and destroy any property in an inn where the law has been violated.”

And he stood for hours on the lawn, watching the smashing of bottles and the breaking up of casks and feeding on fanatical pleasure: the pleasure his strange, cold, courageous nature could not get from food or wine or woman.

Chapter V: The Astonishment of the Agent

LORD IVYWOOD shared the mental weakness of most men who have fed on books; he ignored, not the value but the very existence of other forms of information. Thus Humphrey Pump was perfectly aware that Lord Ivywood considered him an ignorant man who carried a volume of Pickwick and could not be got to read any other book. But Lord Ivywood was quite unaware that Humphrey never looked at him without thinking that he could be most successfully hidden in a wood of small beeches, as his grey-brown hair and sallow, ashen face exactly reproduced the three predominant tints of such a sylvan twilight. Mr. Pump, I fear, had sometimes partaken of partridge or pheasant, in his early youth, under circumstances in which Lord Ivywood was not only unconscious of the hospitality he was dispensing, but would have sworn that it was physically impossible for anyone to elude the vigilance of his efficient system of game-keeping. But it is very unwise in one who counts himself superior to physical things to talk about physical impossibility.

Lord Ivywood was in error, therefore, when he said that the fugitives could not possibly escape in modern England. You can do a great many things in modern England if you have noticed; some things, in fact, which others know by pictures or current speech; if you know, for instance, that most roadside hedges are taller and denser than they look, and that even the largest man lying just behind them, takes up far less room than you would suppose; if you know that many natural sounds are much more like each other than the enlightened ear can believe, as in the case of wind in leaves and of the sea; if you know that it is easier to walk in socks than in boots, if you know how to take hold of the ground; if you know that the proportion of dogs who will bite a man under any circumstances is rather less than the proportion of men who will murder you in a railway carriage; if you know that you need not be drowned even in a river, unless the tide is very strong, and unless you practise putting yourself into the special attitudes of a suicide; if you know that country stations have objectless, extra waiting rooms that nobody ever goes into; and if you know that county folk will forget you if you speak to them, but talk about you all day if you don’t.

By the exercise of these and other arts and sciences Humphrey Pump was able to guide his friend across country, mostly in the character of trespasser and occasionally in that of something like housebreaker, and eventually, with sign, keg, cheese and all to step out of a black pinewood onto a white road in a part of the county where they would not be sought for the present.

Opposite them was a cornfield and on their right, in the shades of the pine trees, a cottage, a very tumbledown cottage that seemed to have collapsed under its own thatch. The red-haired Irishman’s face wore a curious smile. He stuck the inn-sign erect in the road and went and hammered on the door.

It was opened tremulously by an old man with a face so wrinkled that the wrinkles seemed more distinctly graven than the features themselves, which seemed lost in the labyrinth of them. He might have crawled out of the hole in a gnarled tree and he might have been a thousand years old.

He did not seem to notice the sign-board, which stood rather to the left of the door; and what life remained in his eyes seemed to awake in wonder at Dalroy’s stature and strange uniform and the sword at his side. “I beg your pardon,” said the Captain, courteously. “I fear my uniform startles you. It is Lord Ivywood’s livery. All his servants are to dress like this. In fact, I understand the tenants also and even yourself, perhaps . . . excuse my sword. Lord Ivywood is very particular that every man should have a sword. You know his beautiful, eloquent way of putting his views. ‘How can we profess,’ he was saying to me yesterday, while I was brushing his trousers. ‘How can we profess that all men are brothers while we refuse to them the symbol of manhood; or with what assurance can we claim it as a movement of modern emancipation to deny the citizen that which has in all ages marked the difference between the free man and the slave. Nor need we anticipate any such barbaric abuses as my honourable friend who is cleaning the knives has prophesied, for this gift is a sublime act of confidence in your universal passion for the severe splendours of Peace; and he that has the right to strike is he who has learnt to spare.’”

Talking all this nonsense with extreme rapidity and vast oratorical flourishes of the hand, Captain Dalroy proceeded to trundle both the big cheese and the cask of rum into the house of the astonished cottager: Mr. Pump following with a grim placidity and his gun under his arm.

“Lord Ivywood,” said Dalroy, setting the rum cask with a bump on the plain deal table, “wishes to take wine with you. Or, more strictly speaking, rum. Don’t you run away, my friend, with any of these stories about Lord

Ivywood being opposed to drink. Three-bottle Ivywood, we call him in the kitchen. But it must be rum; nothing but rum for the Ivywoods. ‘Wine may be a mocker,’ he was saying the other day (and I particularly noted the phrasing, which seemed to be very happy even for his lordship; he was standing at the top of the steps, and I stopped cleaning them to make a note of it), ‘wine may be a mocker; strong drink may be raging, but nowhere in the sacred pages will you find one word of censure of the sweeter spirit sacred to them that go down to the sea in ships; no tongue of priest and prophet was ever lifted to break the sacred silence of Holy Writ about Rum.’ He then explained to me,” went on Dalroy, signing to Pump to tap the cask according to his own technical secret, “that the great tip for avoiding any bad results that a bottle or two of rum might have on young and inexperienced people was to eat cheese with it, particularly this kind of cheese that I have here. I’ve forgotten its name.”

“Cheddar,” said Pump, quite gravely.

“But mind you!” continued the Captain almost ferociously, shaking his big finger in warning at the aged man. “Mind you ‘no *bread* with the cheese. All the devastating ruin wrought by cheese and the once happy homes of this country, has been due to the reckless and insane experiment of eating bread with it.’ You’ll get no bread from me, my friend. Indeed, Lord Ivywood has given directions that the allusion to this ignorant and depraved habit shall be eliminated from the Lord’s Prayer. Have a drink.”

He had already poured out a little of the spirit into two thick tumblers and a broken teacup, which he had induced the aged man to produce; and now solemnly pledged him.

“Thank ye kindly, sir,” said the old man, using his cracked voice for the first time. Then he drank; and his old face changed as if it were an old horn lantern in which the flame began to rise.

“Ar,” he said. “My son he be a sailor.”

“I wish him a happy voyage,” said the Captain. “And I’ll sing you a song about the first sailor there ever was in the world; and who (as Lord Ivywood acutely observes) lived before the time of rum.”

He sat down on a wooden chair and lifted his loud voice once more, beating on the table with the broken tea-cup.

“Old Noah, he had an ostrich farm, and fowls on the *greatest scale;*
He ate his egg with a ladle in an egg-cup big as a pail,

And the soup he took was Elephant Soup and the fish he *took was Whale;*
But they all were small to the cellar he took when he set *out to sail;*
And Noah, he often said to his wife when he sat down to *dine,*
'I don't care where the water goes if it doesn't get into the *wine.'*
"The cataract of the cliff of heaven fell blinding off the *brink,*
As if it would wash the stars away as suds go down a sink,
The seven heavens came roaring down for the throats of *hell to drink,*
And Noah, he cocked his eye and said, 'It looks like rain, *I think,*
The water has drowned the Matterhorn as deep as a *Mendip mine,*
But I don't care where the water goes if it doesn't get into *the wine.'*
"But Noah he sinned, and we have sinned; on tipsy feet we *trod,*
Till a great big black teetotaller was sent to us for a rod,
And you can't get wine at a P. S. A. or chapel or *Eisteddfod;*
For the Curse of Water has come again because of the *wrath of God,*
And water is on the Bishop's board and the Higher Thinker's *shrine,*
But I don't care where the water goes if it doesn't get into *the wine."*

"Lord Ivywood's favourite song," concluded Mr. Patrick Dalroy, drinking. "Sing us a song yourself."

Rather to the surprise of the two humourists, the old gentleman actually began in a quavering voice to chant,

"King George that lives in London Town,
I hope they will defend his crown,
And Bonyparte be quite put down
On Christmas Day in the morning.
"Old Squire is gone to the Meet today
All in his—"

It is perhaps fortunate for the rapidity of this narrative that the old gentleman's favourite song, which consists of forty-seven verses, was interrupted by a curious incident. The door of the cottage opened and a sheepish-looking man in corduroys stood silently in the room for a few seconds and then said, without preface or further explanation,

“Four ale.”

“I beg your pardon?” inquired the polite Captain.

“Four ale,” said the man with solidity; then catching sight of Humphrey seemed to find a few more words in his vocabulary.

“Morning, Mr. Pump. Didn’t know as how you’d moved ‘The Old Ship.’”

Mr. Pump, with a twist of a smile, pointed to the old man whose song had been interrupted.

“Mr. Marne’s seeing after it now, Mr. Gowl,” said Pump with the strict etiquette of the country side. “But he’s got nothing but this rum in stock as yet.”

“Better’nowt,” said the laconic Mr. Gowl; and put down some money in front of the aged Marne, who eyed it wonderingly. As he was turning with a farewell and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, the door once more moved, letting in white sunlight and a man in a red neckerchief.

“Morning, Mr. Marne; Morning, Mr. Pump; Morning, Mr. Gowl,” said the man in the red neckerchief.

“Morning, Mr. Coote,” said the other three, one after another.

“Have some rum, Mr. Coote?” asked Humphrey Pump, genially. “That’s all Mr. Marne’s got just now.”

Mr. Coote also had a little rum; and also laid a little money under the rather vague gaze of the venerable cottager. Mr. Coote was just proceeding to explain that these were bad times, but if you saw a sign you were all right still; a lawyer up at Grunton Abbot had told him so; when the company was increased and greatly excited by the arrival of a boisterous and popular tinker, who ordered glasses all round and said he had his donkey and cart outside. A prolonged, rich and confused conversation about the donkey and cart then ensued, in which the most varied views were taken of their merits; and it gradually began to dawn on Dalroy that the tinker was trying to sell them.

An idea, suited to the romantic opportunism of his present absurd career, suddenly swept over his mind, and he rushed out to look at the cart and donkey. The next moment he was back again, asking the tinker what his price was, and almost in the same breath offering a much bigger price than the tinker would have dreamed of asking. This was considered, however, as a lunacy specially allowed to gentlemen; the tinker had some more rum on the strength of the payment, and then Dalroy, offering his excuses, sealed up the cask and took it and the cheese to be stowed in the bottom of the cart. The money, however, he still left lying in shining silver and copper before the silver beard of old Marne.

No one acquainted with the quaint and often wordless camaraderie of the English poor will require to be told that they all went out and stared at him as he loaded the cart and saw to the harness of the donkey — all except the old cottager, who sat as if hypnotised by the sight of the money. While they were standing there they saw coming down the white, hot road, where it curled over the hill, a figure that gave them no pleasure, even when it was a mere marching black spot in the distance. It was a Mr. Bullrose, the agent of Lord Ivywood's estates.

Mr. Bullrose was a short, square man with a broad, square head with ridges of close, black curls on it, with a heavy, froglike face and starting, suspicious eyes; a man with a good silk hat but a square business jacket. Mr. Bullrose was not a nice man. The agent on that sort of estate hardly ever is a nice man. The landlord often is; and even Lord Ivywood had an arctic magnanimity of his own, which made most people want, if possible, to see him personally. But Mr. Bullrose was petty. Every really practical tyrant must be petty.

He evidently failed to understand the commotion in front of Mr. Marne's partly collapsed cottage, but he felt there must be something wrong about it. He wanted to get rid of the cottage altogether, and had not, of course, the faintest intention of giving the cottager any compensation for it. He hoped the old man would die; but in any case he could easily clear him out if it became suddenly necessary, for he could not possibly pay the rent for this week. The rent was not very much; but it was immeasurably too much for the old man who had no conceivable way of borrowing or earning it. That is where the chivalry of our aristocratic land system comes in.

"Good-bye, my friends," the enormous man in the fantastic uniform was saying, "all roads lead to rum, as Lord Ivywood said in one of his gayer moments, and we hope to be back soon, establishing a first class hotel here, of which prospectuses will soon be sent out."

The heavy froglike face of Mr. Bullrose, the agent, grew uglier with astonishment; and the eyes stood out more like a snail's than a frog's. The indefensible allusion to Lord Ivywood would in any case have caused a choleric intervention, if it had not been swallowed up in the earthquake suggestion of an unlicensed hotel on the estate. This again would have effected the explosion, if that and everything else had not been struck still and rigid by the sight of a solid, wooden sign-post already erected outside old Marne's miserable cottage.

"I've got him now," muttered Mr. Bullrose. "He can't possibly pay; and out he shall go." And he walked swiftly towards the door of the cottage, almost at the same moment that Dalroy went to the donkey's head, as if to lead it off along the road.

"Look here, my man," burst out Bullrose, the instant he was inside the cottage. "You've cooked yourself this time. His lordship has been a great deal too indulgent with you; but this is going to be the end of it. The insolence of what you've done outside, especially when you know his lordship's wishes in such things, has just put the lid on." He stopped a moment and sneered. "So unless you happen to have the exact rent down to a farthing or two about you, out you go. We're sick of your sort."

In a very awkward and fumbling manner, the old man pushed a heap of coins across the table. Mr. Bullrose sat down suddenly on the wooden chair with his silk hat on, and began counting them furiously. He counted them once; he counted them twice; and he counted them again. Then he stared at them more steadily than the cottager had done.

"Where did you get this money?" he asked in a thick, gross voice. "Did you steal it?"

"I ain't very spry for stealin'," said the old man in quavering comedy.

Bullrose looked at him and then at the money; and remembered with fury that Ivywood was a just though cold magistrate on the bench.

"Well, anyhow," he cried, in a hot, heady way, "we've got enough against you to turn you out of this. Haven't you broken the law, my man, to say nothing of the regulations for tenants, in sticking up that fancy sign of yours outside the cottage? Eh?"

The tenant was silent.

"Eh?" reiterated the agent.

"Ar," replied the tenant.

"Have you or have you not a sign-board outside this house?" shouted Bullrose, hammering the table.

The tenant looked at him for a long time with a patient and venerable face, and then said: “Mubbe, yes. Mubbe, no.”

“I’ll mubbe you,” cried Mr. Bullrose, springing up and sticking his silk hat on the back of his head. “I don’t know whether you people are too drunk to see anything, but I saw the thing with my own eyes out in the road. Come out, and deny it if you dare!”

“Ar,” said Mr. Marne, dubiously.

He tottered after the agent, who flung open the door with a businesslike fury and stood outside on the threshold. He stood there quite a long time, and he did not speak. Deep in the hardened mud of his materialistic mind there had stirred two things that were its ancient enemies; the old fairy tale in which every thing can be believed; the new scepticism in which nothing can be believed — not even one’s own eyes. There was no sign, nor sign of a sign, in the landscape.

On the withered face of the old man Marne there was a faint renewal of that laughter that has slept since the Middle Ages.

Chapter VI: The Hole in Heaven

THAT delicate ruby light which is one of the rarest but one of the most exquisite of evening effects warmed the land, sky and seas as if the whole world were washed in wine; and dyed almost scarlet the strong red head of Patrick Dalroy as he stood on the waste of furze and bracken, where he and his friends had halted. One of his friends was re-examining a short gun, rather like a double-barrelled carbine, the other was eating thistles.

Dalroy himself was idle and ruminant, with his hands in his pockets and his eye on the horizon. Land-wards the hills, plains and woods lay bathed in the rose-red light; but it changed somewhat to purple, to cloud and something like storm over the distant violet strip of sea. It was towards the sea that he was staring.

Suddenly he woke up; and seemed almost to rub his eyes, or at any rate, to rub his red eyebrow.

“Why, we’re on the road back of Pebblewick,” he said. “That’s the damned little tin chapel by the beach.”

“I know,” answered his friend and guide. “We’ve done the old hare trick; doubled, you know. Nine times out of ten it’s the best. Parson Whitelady used to do it when they were after him for dog-stealing. I’ve pretty much followed his trail; you can’t do better than stick to the best examples. They tell you in London that Dick Turpin rode to York. Well, I know he didn’t; for my old grandfather up at Cobble’s End knew the Turpins intimately — threw one of them into the river on a Christmas day; but I think I can guess what he did do and how the tale got about. If Dick was wise, he went flying up the old North Road, shouting ‘York! York!’ or what not, before people recognised him; then if he did the thing properly, he might half an hour afterwards walk down the Strand with a pipe in his mouth. They say old Boney said, ‘Go where you aren’t expected,’ and I suppose as a soldier he was right. But for a gentleman dodging the police like yourself, it isn’t exactly the right way of putting it. I should say, ‘Go where you ought to be expected’ — and you’ll generally find your fellow creatures don’t do what they ought about expecting any more than about anything else.”

“Well, this bit between here and the sea,” said the Captain, in a brown study, “I know it so well — so well that — that I rather wish I’d never seen it again. Do you know,” he asked, suddenly pointing to a patch and pit of sand that showed white in the dusky heath a hundred yards away, “do you know what makes that spot so famous in history?”

“Yes,” answered Mr. Pump, “that’s where old Mother Grouch shot the Methodist.”

“You are in error,” said the Captain. “Such an incident as you describe would in no case call for special comment or regret. No, that spot is famous because a very badly brought up girl once lost a ribbon off a plait of black hair and somebody helped her to find it.”

“Has the other person been well brought up?” asked Pump, with a faint smile.

“No,” said Dalroy, staring at the sea. “He has been brought down.” Then, rousing himself again, he made a gesture toward a further part of the heath. “Do you know the remarkable history of that old wall, the one beyond the last gorge over there?”

“No,” replied the other, “unless you mean Dead Man’s Circus, and that happened further along.”

“I do not mean Dead Man’s Circus,” said the Captain. “The remarkable history of that wall is that somebody’s shadow once fell on it; and that shadow was more desirable than the substance of all other living things. It is *this*,” he cried, almost violently, resuming his flippant tone, “it is this circumstance, Hump, and not the trivial and everyday incident of a dead man going to a circus to which you have presumed to compare it, it is *this* historical event which Lord Ivywood is about to commemorate by rebuilding the wall with solid gold and Greek marbles stolen by the Turks from the grave of Socrates, enclosing a column of solid gold four hundred feet high and surmounted by a colossal equestrian statue of a bankrupt Irishman riding backwards on a donkey.”

He lifted one of his long legs over the animal, as if about to pose for the group; then swung back on both feet again, and again looked at the purple limit of the sea.

“Do you know, Hump,” he said, “I think modern people have somehow got their minds all wrong about human life. They seem to expect what Nature has never promised; and then try to ruin all that Nature has really given. At all those atheist chapels of Ivywood’s they’re always talking of Peace, Perfect Peace, and Utter Peace, and Universal Joy and souls that beat as one. But they don’t look any more cheerful than anyone else; and the next thing they do is to start smashing a thousand good jokes and good stories and good songs and good friendships by pulling down 'The Old Ship.'" He gave a glance at the loose sign-post lying on the heath beside him, almost as if to reassure himself that it was not stolen. "Now it seems to me," he went on, "that this is asking for too much and getting too little. I don't know whether God means a man to have happiness in that All in All and Utterly Utter sense of happiness. But God does mean a man to have a little Fun; and I mean to go on having it. If I mustn't satisfy my heart, I can gratify my humour. The cynical fellows who think themselves so damned clever have a sort of saying, 'Be good and you will be happy; but you will not have a jolly time.' The cynical fellows are quite wrong, as they generally are. They have got hold of the exact opposite of the truth. God knows I don't set up to be good; but even a rascal sometimes has to fight the world in the same way as a saint. I think I have fought the world; *et militavi non sine* — what's the Latin for having a lark? I can't pretend to Peace and Joy, and all the rest of it, particularly in this original briar-patch. I haven't been happy, Hump, but I have had a jolly time."

The sunset stillness settled down again, save for the cropping of the donkey in the undergrowth; and Pump said nothing sympathetically; and it was Dalroy once more who took up his parable.

"So I think there's too much of this playing on our emotions, Hump; as this place is certainly playing the cat and banjo with mine. Damn it all, there are other things to do with the rest of one's life! I don't like all this fuss about feeling things — it only makes people miserable. In my present frame of mind I'm in favour of doing things. All of which, Hump," he said with a sudden lift of the voice that always went in him with a rushing, irrational return of merely animal spirits— "All of which I have put into a Song Against Songs, that I will now sing you."

"I shouldn't sing it here," said Humphrey Pump, picking up his gun and putting it under his arm. "You look large in this open place; and you sound large. But I'll take you to the Hole in Heaven you've been talking about so much, and hide you as I used to hide you from that tutor — I couldn't catch his name — man who could only get drunk on Greek wine at Squire Wimpole's."

"Hump!" cried the Captain, "I abdicate the throne of Ithaca. You are far wiser than Ulysses. Here I have had my heart torn with temptations to ten thousand things between suicide and abduction, and all by the mere sight of that hole in the heath, where we used to have picnics. And all that time I'd forgotten we used to call it the Hole in Heaven. And, by God, what a good name — in both senses.”

“I thought you’d have remembered it, Captain,” said the innkeeper, “from the joke young Mr. Matthews made.”

“In the heat of some savage hand to hand struggle in Albania,” said Mr. Dalroy, sadly, passing his palm across his brow, “I must have forgotten for one fatal instant the joke young Mr. Matthews made.”

“It wasn’t very good,” said Mr. Pump, simply. “Ah, his aunt was the one for things like that. She went too far with old Gudgeon, though.”

With these words he jumped and seemed to be swallowed up by the earth. But they had merely strolled the few yards needed to bring them to the edge of the sand-pit on the heath of which they had been speaking. And it is one of the truths concealed by Heaven from Lord Ivywood, and revealed by Heaven to Mr. Pump, that a hiding-place can be covered when you are close to it; and yet be open and visible from some spot of vantage far off. From the side by which they approached it, the sudden hollow of sand, a kind of collapsed chamber in the heath, seemed covered with a natural curve of fern and furze, and flashed out of sight like a fairy.

“It’s all right,” he called out from under a floor or roof of leaves. “You’ll remember it all when you get here. This is the place to sing your song, Captain. Lord bless me, Captain, don’t I remember your singing that Irish song you made up at college — bellowing it like a bull of Bashan — all about hearts and sleeves or some such things — and her ladyship and the tutor never heard a breath, because that bank of sand breaks everything. It’s worth knowing all this, you know. It’s a pity it’s not part of a young gentleman’s education. Now you shall sing me the song in favour of having no feelings, or whatever you call it.”

Dalroy was staring about him at the cavern of his old picnics, so forgotten and so startlingly familiar. He seemed to have lost all thought of singing anything, and simply to be groping in the dark house of his own boyhood. There was a slight trickle from a natural spring in sandstone just under the ferns, and he remembered they used to try to boil the water in a kettle. He remembered a quarrel about who had upset the kettle which, in the morbidity of first love, had given him for days the tortures of the damned. When the energetic Pump broke once more through the rather thorny roof, on an impulse to accumulate their other eccentric possessions, Patrick remembered about a thorn in a finger, that made his heart stop with something that was pain and perfect music. When Pump returned with the rum-keg and the cheese and rolled them with a kick down the shelving sandy side of the hole, he remembered, with almost wrathful laughter, that in the old days he had rolled down that slope himself, and thought it a rather fine thing to do. He felt then as if he were rolling down a smooth side of the Matterhorn. He observed now that the height was rather less than that of the second storey of one of the stunted cottages he had noted on his return. He suddenly understood he had grown bigger; bigger in a bodily sense. He had doubts about any other.

"The Hole in Heaven!" he said. "What a good name! What a good poet I was in those days! The Hole in Heaven. But does it let one in, or let one out?"

In the last level shafts of the fallen sun the fantastic shadow of the long-eared quadruped, whom Pump had now tethered to a new and nearer pasture, fell across the last sunlit scrap of sand. Dalroy looked at the long exaggerated shadow of the ass; and laughed that short explosive laugh he had uttered when the doors of the harems had been closed after the Turkish war. He was normally a man much too loquacious; but he never explained those laughs.

Humphrey Pump plunged down again into the sunken nest, and began to broach the cask of rum in his own secret style, saying— "We can get something else somehow tomorrow. For tonight we can eat cheese and drink rum, especially as there's water on tap, so to speak. And now, Captain, sing us the Song Against Songs."

Patrick Dalroy drank a little rum out of a small medicine glass which the generally unaccountable Mr. Pump unaccountably produced from his waistcoat pocket; but Patrick's colour had risen, his brow was almost as red as his hair; and he was evidently reluctant.

"I don't see why I should sing all the songs," he said. "Why the divil don't you sing a song yourself? And now I come to think of it," he cried, with an accumulating brogue, not, perhaps, wholly unaffected by the rum, which he had not, in fact, drunk for years, "and now I come to think of it, what about that song of yours? All me youth's coming back in this blest and cursed place; and I remember that song of yours, that never existed nor ever will. Don't ye remember now, Humphrey Pump, that night when I sang ye no less than seventeen songs of me own composition?"

"I remember it very well," answered the Englishman, with restraint.

"And don't ye remember," went on the exhilarated Irishman, with solemnity, "that unless ye could produce a poetic lyric of your own, written and sung by yourself, I threatened to . . ."

"To sing again," said the impenetrable Pump. "Yes, I know."

He calmly proceeded to take out of his pockets, which were, alas, more like those of a poacher than an innkeeper, a folded and faded piece of paper.

"I wrote it when you asked me," he said simply. "I have never tried to sing it. But I'll sing it myself, when you've sung your song, against anybody singing at all."

"All right," cried the somewhat excited Captain, "to hear a song from you — why, I'll sing anything. This is the Song Against Songs, Hump."

And again he let his voice out like a bellow against the evening silence.

"The song of the sorrow of Melisande is a weary song and
a dreary song,
The glory of Mariana's grange had got into great decay,
The song of the Raven Never More has never been called
a cheery song,
And the brightest things in Baudelaire are anything else
but gay.
But who will write us a riding song,
Or a hunting song or a drinking song,
Fit for them that arose and rode,
When day and the wine were red?
But bring me a quart of claret out,
And I will write you a clinking song,
A song of war and a song of wine,
And a song to wake the dead.
"The song of the fury of Fragolette is a florid song and a
torrid song,
The song of the sorrow of Tara is sung to a harp
unstrung,
The song of the cheerful Shropshire Kid I consider a
perfectly horrid song,
And the song of the happy Futurist is a song that can't
be sung.
But who will write us a riding song,
Or a fighting song or a drinking song,
Fit for the fathers of you and me,
That knew how to think and thrive?

But the song of Beauty and Art and Love
Is simply an utterly stinking song,
To double you up and drag you down,
And damn your soul alive.

"Take some more rum," concluded the Irish officer, affably, "and let's hear your song at last."

With the gravity inseparable from the deep conventionality of country people, Mr. Pump unfolded the paper on which he had recorded the only antagonistic emotion that was strong enough in him to screw his infinite English tolerance to the pitch of song. He read out the title very carefully and in full.

"Song Against Grocers, by Humphrey Pump, sole proprietor of 'The Old Ship,' Pebblewick. Good Accommodation for Man and Beast. Celebrated as the House at which both Queen Charlotte and Jonathan Wilde put up on different occasions; and where the Ice-cream man was mistaken for Bonaparte. This song is written against Grocers."

"God made the wicked Grocer,
For a mystery and a sign,
That men might shun the awful shops,
And go to inns to dine;
Where the bacon's on the rafter
And the wine is in the wood,
And God that made good laughter
Has seen that they are good.
"The evil-hearted Grocer
Would call his mother 'Ma'am,'
And bow at her and bob at her,
Her aged soul to damn;
And rub his horrid hands and ask,
What article was next;
Though *mortis in articulo*,
Should be her proper text.
"His props are not his children
But pert lads underpaid,
Who call out 'Cash!' and bang about,
To work his wicked trade;
He keeps a lady in a cage,

Most cruelly all day,
And makes her count and calls her ‘Miss,’
Until she fades away.
“The righteous minds of inn-keepers
Induce them now and then
To crack a bottle with a friend,
Or treat unmoneyed men;
But who hath seen the Grocer
Treat housemaids to his teas,
Or crack a bottle of fish-sauce,
Or stand a man a cheese?
“He sells us sands of Araby
As sugar for cash down,
He sweeps his shop and sells the dust,
The purest salt in town;
He crams with cans of poisoned meat
Poor subjects of the King,
And when they die by thousands
Why, he laughs like anything.
“The Wicked Grocer groces
In spirits and in wine,
Not frankly and in fellowship,
As men in inns do dine;
But packed with soap and sardines
And carried off by grooms,
For to be snatched by Duchesses,
And drunk in dressing-rooms.
“The hell-instructed Grocer
Has a temple made of tin,
And the ruin of good inn-keepers
Is loudly urged therein;
But now the sands are running out
From sugar of a sort,
The Grocer trembles; for his time
Just like his weight is short.”

Captain Dalroy was getting considerably heated with his nautical liquor, and his appreciation of Pump’s song was not merely noisy but active. He leapt to his feet and waved his glass. “Ye ought to be Poet Laureate, Hump — ye’re right, ye’re right; we’ll stand all this no longer!”

He dashed wildly up the sand slope and pointed with the sign-post towards the darkening shore, where the low shed of corrugated iron stood almost isolated.

“There’s your tin temple!” he said. “Let’s burn it!”

They were some way along the coast from the large watering-place of Pebblewick and between the gathering twilight and the rolling country it could not be clearly seen. Nothing was now in sight but the corrugated iron hall by the beach and three half-built red brick villas.

Dalroy appeared to regard the hall and the empty houses with great malevolence.

“Look at it!” he said. “Babylon!”

He brandished the inn-sign in the air like a banner, and began to stride towards the place, showering curses.

“In forty days,” he cried, “shall Pebblewick be destroyed. Dogs shall lap the blood of J. Leveson, Secretary, and Unicorns—”

“Come back Pat,” cried Humphrey, “you’ve had too much rum.”

“Lions shall howl in its high places,” vociferated the Captain.

“Donkeys will howl, anyhow,” said Pump. “But I suppose the other donkey must follow.”

And loading and untethering the quadruped, he began to lead him along.

Chapter VII: The Society of Simple Souls

UNDER sunset, at once softer and more sombre, under which the leaden sea took on a Lenten purple, a tint appropriate to tragedy, Lady Joan Brett was once more drifting moodily along the sea-front. The evening had been rainy and lowering; the watering-place season was nearly over; and she was almost alone on the shore; but she had fallen into the habit of restlessly pacing the place, and it seemed to satisfy some subconscious hunger in her rather mixed psychology. Through all her brooding her animal senses always remained abnormally active: she could *smell* the sea when it had ebbed almost to the horizon, and in the same way she heard, through every whisper of waves or wind, the swish or flutter of another woman's skirt behind her. There is, she felt, something unmistakable about the movements of a lady who is generally very dignified and rather slow, and who happens to be in a hurry.

She turned to look at the lady who was thus hastening to overtake her; lifted her eyebrows a little and held out her hand. The interruption was known to her as Lady Enid Wimpole, cousin of Lord Ivywood; a tall and graceful lady who unbalanced her own elegance by a fashionable costume that was at once funereal and fantastic; her fair hair was pale but plentiful; her face was not only handsome and fastidious in the aquiline style, but when considered seriously was sensitive, modest, and even pathetic, but her wan blue eyes seemed slightly prominent, with that expression of cold eagerness that is seen in the eyes of ladies who ask questions at public meetings.

Joan Brett was herself, as she had said, a connection of the Ivywood family; but Lady Enid was Ivywood's first cousin, and for all practical purposes his sister. For she kept house for him and his mother, who was now so incredibly old that she only survived to satisfy conventional opinion in the character of a speechless and useless *chaperon*. And Ivywood was not the sort who would be likely to call out any activity in an old lady exercising that office. Nor, for that matter, was Lady Enid Wimpole; there seemed to shine on her face the same kind of inhuman, absent-minded common sense that shone on her cousin's.

"Oh, I'm so glad I've caught you up," she said to Joan. "Lady Ivywood wants you *so* much to come to us for the week-end or so, while Philip is still there. He always admired your sonnet on Cyprus so much, and he wants to talk to you about this policy of his in Turkey. Of course he's awfully busy, but I shall be seeing him tonight after the meeting."

"No living creature," said Lady Joan, with a smile, "ever saw him except before or after a meeting."

"Are you a Simple Soul?" asked Lady Enid, carelessly.

"Am I a simple soul?" asked Joan, drawing her black brows together. "Merciful Heavens, no! What can you mean?"

"Their meeting's on tonight at the small Universal Hall, and Philip's taking the chair," explained the other lady. "He's very annoyed that he has to leave early to get up to the House, but Mr. Leveson can take the chair for the last bit. They've got Misysra Ammon."

"Got Mrs. Who?" asked Joan, in honest doubt.

"You make game of everything," said Lady Enid, in cheerless amiability. "It's the man everyone's talking about — *you* know as well as I do. It's really his influence that has *made* the Simple Souls."

"Oh!" said Lady Joan Brett.

Then after a long silence, she added: "Who are the Simple Souls? I should be interested in them, if I could meet any." And she turned her dark, brooding face on the darkening purple sea.

"Do you mean to say, my dear," asked Lady Enid Wimpole, "that you haven't met any of them yet?"

"No," said Joan, looking at the last dark line of sea. "I never met but one simple soul in my life."

"But you must come to the meeting!" cried Lady Enid, with frosty and sparkling gaiety. "You must come at once! Philip is certain to be eloquent on a subject like this, and of course Misysra Ammon is *always* so wonderful."

Without any very distinct idea of where she was going or why she was going there, Joan allowed herself to be piloted to a low lead or tin shed, beyond the last straggling hotels, out of the echoing shell of which she could prematurely hear a voice that she thought she recognised. When she came in Lord Ivywood was on his feet, in exquisite evening dress, but with a light overcoat thrown over the seat behind him. Beside him, in less tasteful but more obvious evening dress, was the little old man she had heard on the beach.

No one else was on the platform, but just under it, rather to Joan's surprise, sat Miss Browning, her old typewriting friend in her old black dress, industriously taking down Lord Ivywood's words in shorthand. A yard or two off, even more to her surprise, sat Miss Browning's more domestic sister, also taking down the same words in shorthand.

"That is Misysra Ammon," whispered Lady Enid, earnestly, pointing a delicate finger at the little old man beside the chairman.

"I know him," said Joan. "Where's the umbrella?"

". . . at least evident," Lord Ivywood was saying, "that one of those ancestral impossibilities is no longer impossible. The East and the West are one. The East is no longer East nor the West West; for a small isthmus has been broken, and the Atlantic and Pacific are a single sea. No man assuredly has done more of this mighty work of unity than the brilliant and distinguished philosopher to whom you will have the pleasure of listening tonight; and I profoundly wish that affairs more practical, for I will not call them more important, did not prevent my remaining to enjoy his eloquence, as I have so often enjoyed it before. Mr. Leveson has kindly consented to take my place, and I can do no more than express my deep sympathy with the aims and ideals which will be developed before you tonight. I have long been increasingly convinced that underneath a certain mask of stiffness which the Mahommedan religion has worn through certain centuries, as a somewhat similar mask has been worn by the religion of the Jews, Islam has in it the potentialities of being the most progressive of all religions; so that a century or two to come we may see the cause of peace, of science and of reform everywhere supported by Islam as it is everywhere supported by Israel. Not in vain, I think, is the symbol of that faith the Crescent, the growing thing. While other creeds carry emblems implying more or less of finality, for this great creed of hope its very imperfection is its pride, and men shall walk fearlessly in new and wonderful paths, following the increasing curve which contains and holds up before them the eternal promises of the orb."

It was characteristic of Lord Ivywood that, though he was really in a hurry, he sat down slowly and gravely amid the outburst of applause. The quiet resumption of the speaker's seat, like the applause itself, was an artistic part of the peroration. When the last clap or stamp had subsided, he sprang up alertly, his light great-coat over his arm, shook hands with the lecturer, bowed to the audience and slid quickly out of the hall. Mr.

Leveson, the swarthy young man with the drooping double-eyeglass rather bashfully to the front, took the empty seat on the platform, and in a few words presented the eminent Turkish mystic Misysra Ammon, sometimes called the Prophet of the Moon.

Lady Joan found the Prophet's English accent somewhat improved by good society, but he still elongated the letter "u" in the same bleating manner, and his remarks had exactly the same rabidly wrong-headed ingenuity as his lecture upon English inns. It appeared that he was speaking on the higher Polygamy; but he began with a sort of general defence of the Moslem civilisation, especially against the charge of sterility and worldly ineffectiveness.

"It iss joost in the practical tings," he was saying, "it iss joost in the practical tings, if you could come to consider them in a manner quite equal, that our methods are better than your methods. My ancestors invented the curved swords, because one cuts better with a curved sword. Your ancestors possessed the straight swords out of some romantic fancy of being what you call straight; or, I will take a more plain example, of which I have myself experience. When I first had the honour of meeting Lord Ivywood, I was unused to your various ceremonies and had a little difficulty, joost a little difficulty, in entering Mr. Claridge's hotel, where his lordship had invited me. A servant of the hotel was standing joost beside me on the doorstep. I stoo-ooped down to take off my boo-oots, and he asked me what I was dooing. I said to him: 'My friend, I am taking off my boo-oots.'"

A smothered sound came from Lady Joan Brett, but the lecturer did not notice it and went on with a beautiful simplicity.

"I told him that in my country, when showing respect for any spot, we do not take off our hats; we take off our boo-oots. And because I would keep on my hat and take off my boo-oots, he suggested to me that I had been afflicted by Allah, in the head. Now was not that foony?"

"Very," said Lady Joan, inside her handkerchief, for she was choking with laughter. Something like a faint smile passed over the earnest faces of the two or three most intelligent of the Simple Souls, but for the most part the Souls seemed very simple indeed, helpless looking people with limp hair and gowns like green curtains, and their dry faces were as dry as ever.

"But I explained to him. I explained to him for a long time, for a carefully occupied time, that it was more practical, more business-like, more altogether for utility, to take off the boo-oots than to remove the hat.

‘Let us,’ I said to him, ‘consider what many complaints are made against the footwear, what few complaints against the headwear. You complain if in your drawing-rooms is the marching about of muddy boo-oots. Are any of your drawing-rooms marked thus with the marching about of muddy hats? How very many of your husbands kick you with the boo-oot! Yet how few of your husbands on any occasion butt you with the hat?’”

He looked round with a radiant seriousness, which made Lady Joan almost as speechless for sympathy as she was for amusement. With all that was most sound in his too complicated soul she realised the presence of a man really convinced.

“The man on the doorstep, he would not listen to me,” went on Misysra Ammon, pathetically. “He said there would be a crowd if I stood on the doorstep, holding in my hand my boo-oots. Well, I do not know why, in your country you always send the young males to be the first of your crowds. They certainly were making a number of noises, the young males.”

Lady Joan Brett stood up suddenly and displayed enormous interest in the rest of the audience in the back parts of the hall. She felt that if she looked for one moment more at the serious face with the Jewish nose and the Persian beard, she would publicly disgrace herself; or, what was quite as bad (for she was the generous sort of aristocrat) publicly insult the lecturer. She had a feeling that the sight of all the Simple Souls in bulk might have a soothing effect. It had. It had what might have been mistaken for a depressing effect. Lady Joan resumed her seat with a controlled countenance.

“Now, why,” asked the Eastern philosopher, “do I tell so simple a little story of your London streets — a thing happening any day? The little mistake had no preju-udicial effect. Lord Ivywood came out, at the end. He made no attempt to explain the true view of so important matters to Mr. Claridge’s servant, though Mr. Claridge’s servant remained on the doorstep. But he commanded Mr. Claridge’s servant to restore to me one of my boo-oots, which had fallen down the front steps, while I was explaining this harmlessness of the hat in the home. So all was, for me, very well. But why do I tell such little tales?”

He spread out his hands again, in his fanlike eastern style. Then he clapped them together, so suddenly that Joan jumped, and looked instinctively for the entrance of five hundred negro slaves, laden with jewels. But it was only his emphatic gesture of eloquence. He went on with an excited thickening of the accent.

“Because, my friends, this is the best example I could give of the wrong and slanderous character of the charge that we fail in our domesticities. That we fail especially in our treatment of the womankind. I appeal to any lady, to any Christian lady. Is not the boo-oot more devastating, more dreaded in the home than the hat? The boot jumps, he bound, he run about, he break things, he leave on the carpet the earths of the garden. The hat, he remain quiet on his hat-peg. Look at him on his hat-peg; how quiet and good he remain! Why not let him remain quiet also on his head?”

Lady Joan applauded warmly, as did several other ladies, and the sage went on, encouraged.

“Can you not therefore trust, dear ladies, this great religion to understand you concerning other things, as it understands you regarding boo-oots? What is the common objection our worthy enemies make against our polygamy? That it is disdainful of the womanhood. But how can this be so, my friends, when it allows the womanhood to be present in so large numbers? When in your House of Commons you put a hundred English members and joost one little Welsh member, you do not say ‘The Welshman is on top; he is our Sultan; may he live for ever!’ If your jury contained eleven great large ladies and one leetle man you would not say ‘this is unfair to the great large ladies.’ Why should you shrink, then, ladies, from this great polygamical experiment which Lord Ivywood himself—”

Joan’s dark eyes were still fixed on the wrinkled, patient face of the lecturer, but every word of the rest of the lecture was lost to her. Under her glowing Spanish tint she had turned pale with extraordinary emotions, but she did not stir a hair.

The door of the hall stood open, and occasional sounds came even from that deserted end of the town. Two men seemed to be passing along the distant parade; one of them was singing. It was common enough for workmen to sing going home at night, and the voice, though a loud one, would have been too far off for Joan to hear the words. Only Joan happened to know the words. She could almost see them before her, written in a round swaggering hand on the pink page of an old school-girl album at home. She knew the words and the voice.

“I come from Castlepatrick and my heart is on my sleeve,
And any sword or pistol boy can hit ut with me leave,

It shines there for an epaulette, as golden as a flame,
As naked as me ancestors, as noble as me name.
For I come from Castlepatrick and my heart is on my
  sleeve,
But a lady stole it from me on St. Gallowglass's Eve."

Startlingly and with strong pain there sprang up before Joan's eyes a patch of broken heath with a very deep hollow of white sand, blinding in the sun. No words, no name, only the place.

"The folks that live in Liverpool, their heart is in their boots;
They go to Hell like lambs, they do, because the hooter hoots.
Where men may not be dancin', though the wheels may
  dance all day;
And men may not be smokin', but only chimneys may.
But I come from Castlepatrick and my heart is on my
  sleeve,
But a lady stole it from me on St. Poleyander's Eve.
"The folks that live in black Belfast, their heart is in their
  mouth;
They see us making murders in the meadows of the South;
They think a plough's a rack they do, and cattle-calls are
  creeds,
And they think we're burnin' witches when we're only
  burnin' weeds.
But I come from Castlepatrick, and me heart is on me
  sleeve;
But a lady stole it from me on St. Barnabas's Eve."

The voice had stopped suddenly, but the last lines were so much more distinct that it was certain the singer had come nearer, and was not marching away.

It was only after all this, and through a sort of cloud, that Lady Joan heard the indomitable Oriental bringing his whole eloquent address to a conclusion.

". . . And if you do not refu-use the sun that returns and rises in the East with every morning, you will not refu-use either this great social experiment, this great polygamical method which also arose out of the East, and always returns. For this is that Higher Polygamy which always comes, like the sun itself, out of the orient, but is only at its noontide splendour when the sun is high in heaven.”

She was but vaguely conscious of Mr. Leveson, the man with the dark face and the eyeglasses, acknowledging the entrancing lecture in suitable terms, and calling on any of the Simple Souls who might have questions to ask, to ask them. It was only when the Simple Souls had displayed their simplicity with the usual parade of well-bred reluctance and fussy self-effacement, that anyone addressed the chair. And it was only after somebody had been addressing the chair for some time that Joan gradually awoke to the fact that the address was somewhat unusual.

Chapter VIII: Vox Populi Vox Dei

"I AM sure," Mr. Leveson, the Secretary, had said, with a somewhat constrained smile, "that after the eloquent and epoch-making speech to which we have listened there will be some questions asked, and we hope to have a debate afterwards. I am sure somebody will ask a question." Then he looked interrogatively at one weary looking gentleman in the fourth row and said, "Mr. Hinch?"

Mr. Hinch shook his head with a pallid passion of refusal, wonderful to watch, and said, "I couldn't! I really couldn't!"

"We should be very pleased," said Mr. Leveson, "if any lady would ask a question."

In the silence that followed it was somehow psychologically borne in on the whole audience that one particular great large lady (as the lecturer would say) sitting at the end of the second row was expected to ask a question. Her own wax-work immobility was witness both to the expectation and its disappointment. "Are there any other questions?" asked Mr. Leveson — as if there had been any yet. He seemed to speak with a slight air of relief.

There was a sort of stir at the back of the hall and half way down one side of it. Choked whispers could be heard of "Now then, Garge!"— "Go it Garge! Is there any questions! Gor!"

Mr. Leveson looked up with an alertness somewhat akin to alarm. He realised for the first time that a few quite common men in coarse, unclean clothes, had somehow strolled in through the open door. They were not true rustics, but the semi-rustic labourers that linger about the limits of the large watering-places. There was no "Mr." among them. There was a general tendency to call everybody George.

Mr. Leveson saw the situation and yielded to it. He modelled himself on Lord Ivywood and did much what he would have done in all cases, but with a timidity Lord Ivywood would not have shown. And the same social training that made him ashamed to be with such men, made him ashamed to own his shame. The same modern spirit that taught him to loathe such rags, also taught him to lie about his loathing.

"I am sure we should be very glad," he said, nervously, "if any friends from outside care to join in our inquiry. Of course, we're all Democrats," and he looked round at the grand ladies with a ghastly smile, “and believe in the Voice of the People and so on. If our friend at the back of the hall will put his question briefly, we need not insist, I think, on his putting it in writing?”

There were renewed hoarse encouragements to George (that rightly christened champion) and he wavered forward on legs tied in the middle with string. He did not appear to have had any seat since his arrival, and made his remarks standing half way down what we may call the central aisle.

“Well, I want to ask the proprietor,” he began.

“Questions,” said Mr. Leveson, swiftly seizing a chance for that construction of debate which is the main business of a modern chairman, “must be asked of the chair, if they are points of order. If they concern the address, they should be asked of the lecturer.”

“Well, I ask the lecturer,” said the patient Garge, “whether it ain’t right that when you ‘ave the thing outside you should ‘ave the thing inside.” (Hoarse applause at the back.)

Mr. Leveson was evidently puzzled and already suspicious that something was quite wrong. But the enthusiasm of the Prophet of the Moon sprang up instantly at any sort of question and swept the Chairman along with it.

“But it iss the essence of our who-ole message,” he cried, spreading out his arms to embrace the world, “that the outer manifestation should be one with the inner manifestation. My friendss, it iss this very tru-uth our friend has stated, that iss responsible for our apparent lack of symbolism in Islam! We appear to neglect the symbol because we insist on the satisfactory symbol. My friend in the middle will walk round all our mosques and say loudly, ‘Where is the statue of Allah?’ But can my friend in the middle really execute a complete and generally approved statue of Allah?”

Misysra Ammon sat down greatly satisfied with his answer, but it was doubted by many whether, he had conveyed the satisfaction to his friend in the middle. That seeker after truth wiped his mouth with the back of his hand with an unsatisfied air and said:

“No offence, sir. But ain’t it the Law, sir, that if you ‘ave that outside we’re all right? I came in ‘ere as natural as could be. But Gorlumme, I never see a place like this afore.” (Hoarse laughter behind.)

“No apology is needed, my friend,” cried the Eastern sage, eagerly, “I can conceive you are not perhaps du-uly conversant with such schools of truth. But the Law is All. The Law is Allah. The inmost u-unity of—”

“Well, ain’t it the Law?” repeated the dogged George, and every time he mentioned the Law the poor men who are its chief victims applauded loudly. “I’m not one to make a fuss. I never was one to make a fuss. I’m a law-abidin’ man, I am. (More applause.) Ain’t it the Law that if so be such is your sign and such is your profession, you ought to serve us?”

“I fear I not quite follow,” cried the eager Turk. “I ought?”

“To serve us,” shouted a throng of thick voices from the back of the hall, which was already much more crowded than before.

“Serve you!” cried Misysra, leaping up like a spring released, “The Holy Prophet came from Heaven to serve you! The virtue and valour of a thousand years, my friends, has had no hunger but to serve you! We are of all faiths, the most the faith of service. Our highest prophet is no more than the servant of God, as I am, as you all are. Even for our symbol we choose a satellite, and honour the Moon because it only serves the Earth, and does not pretend to be the Sun.”

“I’m sure,” cried Mr. Leveson, jumping up with a tactful grin, “that the lecturer has answered this last point in a most eloquent and effective way, and the motor cars are waiting for some of the ladies who have come from some distance, and I really think the proceedings—”

All the artistic ladies were already getting on their wraps, with faces varying from bewilderment to blank terror. Only Lady Joan lingered, trembling with unexplained excitement. The hitherto speechless Hinch had slid up to the Chairman’s seat and whispered to him:

“You must get all the ladies away. I can’t imagine what’s up, but something’s up.”

“Well?” repeated the patient George. “So be it’s the Law, where is it?”

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” said Mr. Leveson, in his most ingratiating manner, “I think we have had a most delightful evening, and—”

“No, we ain’t,” cried a new and nastier voice from a corner of the room. “Where is it?”

“That’s what we got a right to know,” said the law-abiding George. “Where is it?”

“Where is what?” cried the nearly demented secretary in the chair. “What do you want?”

The law-abiding Mr. George made a half turn and a gesture towards the man in the corner and said:

"What's yours, Jim?"

"I'll 'ave a drop of Scotch," said the man in the corner.

Lady Enid Wimpole, who had lingered a little in loyalty to Joan, the only other lady still left, caught both her wrists and cried in a thrilling whisper,

"Oh, we must go to the car, dear! They're using the most awful language!"

Away on the wettest edge of the sands by the sea the prints of two wheels and four hoofs were being slowly washed away by a slowly rising tide; which was, indeed, the only motive of the man Humphrey Pump, leading the donkey cart, in leading it almost ankle deep in water.

"I hope you're sober again now," he said with some seriousness to his companion, a huge man walking heavily and even humbly with a straight sword swinging to and fro at his hip— "for honestly it was a mug's game to go and stick up the old sign before that tin place. I haven't often spoken to you like this, Captain, but I don't believe any other man in the county could get you out of the hole as I can. But to go down there and frighten the ladies — why there's been nothing so silly here since Bishop's Folly. You could hear the ladies screaming before we left."

"I heard worse than that long before we left," said the large man, without lifting his head. "I heard one of them laugh. . . . Christ, do you think I shouldn't hear her laugh?"

There was a silence. "I didn't mean to speak sharp," said Humphrey Pump with that incorruptible kindliness which was the root of his Englishry, and may yet save the soul of the English. "But it's the truth I was pretty well bothered about how to get out of this business. You're braver than I am, you see, and I own I was frightened about both of us. If I hadn't known my way to the lost tunnel, I should be fairly frightened still."

"Known your way to what?" asked the Captain, lifting his red head for the first time.

"Oh, you know all about No More Ivywood's lost tunnel," said Pump, carelessly. "Why, we all used to look for it when we were boys. Only I happened to find it."

"Have mercy on an exile," said Dalroy, humbly. "I don't know which hurt him most, the things he forgets or the things he remembers."

Mr. Pump was silent for a little while and then said, more seriously than usual, “Well, the people from London say you must put up placards and statues and subscriptions and epitaphs and the Lord knows what, to the people who’ve found some new trick and made it come off. But only a man that knows his own land for forty miles round, knows what a lot of people, and clever people too, there were who found new tricks, and had to hide them because they didn’t come off. There was Dr. Boone, up by Gill-in-Hugby, who held out against Dr. Collison and the vaccination. His treatment saved sixty patients who had got small-pox; and Dr. Collison’s killed ninety-two patients who hadn’t got anything. But Boone had to keep it dark; naturally, because all his lady patients grew mustaches. It was a result of the treatment. But it wasn’t a result he wishes to dwell on. Then there was old Dean Arthur, who discovered balloons if ever a man did. He discovered them long before they were discovered. But people were suspicious about such things just then — there was a revival of the witch business in spite of all the parsons — and he had to sign a paper saying where he’d got the notion. Well, it stands to reason, you wouldn’t like to sign a paper saying you’d got it from the village idiot when you were both blowing soap-bubbles; and that’s all he could have signed, for he was an honest gentleman, the poor old Dean. Then there was Jack Arlingham and the diving bell — but you remember all about that. Well, it was just the same with the man that made this tunnel — one of the mad Ivywoods. There’s many a man, Captain, that has a statue in the great London squares for helping to make the railway trains. There’s many a man has his name in Westminster Abbey for doing something in discovering steamboats. Poor old Ivywood discovered both at once; and had to be put under control. He had a notion that a railway train might be made to rush right into the sea and turn into a steamboat; and it seemed all right, according as he worked it out. But his family were so ashamed of the thing, that they didn’t like the tunnel even mentioned. I don’t think anybody knows where it is but me and Bunchy Robinson. We shall be there in a minute or two. They’ve thrown the rocks about at this end; and let the thick plantation grow at the other, but I’ve got a race horse through before now, to save it from Colonel Chepstow’s little games, and I think I can manage this donkey. Honestly, I think it’s the only place we’ll be safe in after what we’ve left behind us at Pebblewick. But it’s the best place in the world, there’s no doubt, for lying low and starting afresh. Here we are. You think you can’t get behind that rock, but you can. In fact, you have.”

Dalroy found himself, with some bewilderment, round the corner of a rock and in a long bore or barrel of blackness that ended in a very dim spot of green. Hearing the hoofs of the ass and the feet of his friend behind him, he turned his head, but could see nothing but the pitch darkness of a closed coal cellar. He turned again to the dim green speck, and marching forward was glad to see it grow larger and brighter, like a big emerald, till he came out on a throng of trees, mostly thin, but growing so thickly and so close to the cavernous entrance of the tunnel that it was quite clear the place was meant to be choked up by forests and forgotten. The light that came glimmering through the trees was so broken and tremulous that it was hard to tell whether it was daybreak or moonrise.

“I know there’s water here,” said Pump. “They couldn’t keep it out of the stone-work when they made the tunnel, and old Ivywood hit the hydraulic engineer with a spirit level. With the bit of covert here and the sea behind us we ought to be able to get food of one kind or another, when the cheese has given out, and donkeys can eat anything. By the way,” he added with some embarrassment, “you don’t mind my saying it, Captain, but I think we’d better keep that rum for rare occasions. It’s the best rum in England, and may be the last, if these mad games are going on. It’ll do us good to feel it’s there, so we can have it when we want it. The cask’s still nearly full.”

Dalroy put out his hand and shook the other’s. “Hump,” he said, seriously, “you’re right. It’s a sacred trust for Humanity; and we’ll only drink it ourselves to celebrate great victories. In token of which I will take a glass now, to celebrate our glorious victory over Leveson and his tin tabernacle.”

He drained one glass and then sat down on the cask, as if to put temptation behind him. His blue ruminant bull’s eye seemed to plunge deeper and deeper into the emerald twilight of the trees in front of him, and it was long before he spoke again.

At last he observed, “I think you said, Hump, that a friend of yours — a gentleman named Bunchy Robinson, I think — was also a *habitué* here.”

“Yes, he knew the way,” answered Pump, leading the donkey to the most suitable patch of pasturage.

“May we, do you think, have the pleasure of a visit from Mr. Robinson?” inquired the Captain.

“Not unless they’re jolly careless up in Blackstone Gaol,” replied Pump. And he moved the cheese well into the arch of the tunnel. Dalroy still sat with his square chin on his hand, staring at the mystery of the little wood.

“You seem absent-minded, Captain,” remarked Humphrey.

“The deepest thoughts are all commonplaces,” said Dalroy. “That is why I believe in Democracy, which is more than you do, you foul blood-stained old British Tory. And the deepest commonplace of all is that Vanitas Vanitatem, which is not pessimism but is really the opposite of pessimism. It is man’s futility that makes us feel he must be a god. And I think of this tunnel, and how the poor old lunatic walked about on this grass, watching it being built, the soul in him on fire with the future. And he saw the whole world changed and the seas thronged with his new shipping; and now,” and Dalroy’s voice changed and broke, “now there is good pasture for the donkey and it is very quiet here.”

“Yes,” said Pump, in some way that conveyed his knowledge that the Captain was thinking of other things also. The Captain went on dreamily:

“And I think about another Lord Ivywood recorded in history who also had a great vision. For it is a great vision after all, and though the man is a prig, he is brave. He also wants to drive a tunnel — between East and West — to make the Indian Empire more British; to effect what he calls the orientation of England, and I call the ruin of Christendom. And I am wondering just now whether the clear intellect and courageous will of a madman will be strong enough to burst and drive that tunnel, as everything seems to show at this moment that it will. Or whether there be indeed enough life and growth in your England to leave it at last as this is left, buried in English forests and wasted by an English sea.”

The silence fell between them again, and again there was only the slight sound the animal made in eating. As Dalroy had said, it was very quiet there.

But it was not quiet in Pebblewick that night; when the Riot Act was read, and all the people who had seen the sign-board outside fought all the people who hadn’t seen the sign-board outside; or when babies and scientists next morning, seeking for shells and other common objects of the sea-shore, found that their study included fragments of the outer clothing of Leveson and scraps of corrugated iron.

Chapter IX: The Higher Criticism and Mr. Hibbs

PEBBLEWICK boasted an enterprising evening paper of its own, called "The Pebblewick Globe," and it was the great vaunt of the editor's life that he had got out an edition announcing the mystery of the vanishing sign-board, almost simultaneously with its vanishing. In the rows that followed sandwich men found no little protection from the blows indiscriminately given them behind and before, in the large wooden boards they carried inscribed:

THE VANISHING PUB
PEBBLEWICK'S FAIRY TALE
SPECIAL

And the paper contained a categorical and mainly correct account of what had happened, or what seemed to have happened, to the eyes of the amazed Garge and his crowd of sympathisers. "George Burn, carpenter of this town, with Samuel Gripes, drayman in the service of Messrs. Jay and Gubbins, brewers, together with a number of other well-known residents, passed by the new building erected on the West Beach for various forms of entertainment and popularly called the small Universal Hall. Seeing outside it one of the old inn-signs now so rare, they drew the quite proper inference that the place retained the license to sell alcoholic liquors, which so many other places in this neighbourhood have recently lost. The persons inside, however, appear to have denied all knowledge of the fact, and when the party (after some regrettable scenes in which no life was lost) came out on the beach again, it was found that the inn-sign had been destroyed or stolen. All parties were quite sober, and had indeed obtained no opportunity to be anything else. The mystery is underlying inquiry."

But this comparatively realistic record was local and spontaneous, and owed not a little to the accidental honesty of the editor. Moreover, evening papers are often more honest than morning papers, because they are written by ill-paid and hardworked underlings in a great hurry, and there is no time for more timid people to correct them. By the time the morning papers came out next day a faint but perceptible change had passed over the story of the vanishing sign-board. In the daily paper which had the largest circulation and the most influence in that part of the world, the problem was committed to a gentleman known by what seemed to the non-journalistic world the singular name of Hibbs However. It had been affixed to him in jest in connection with the almost complicated caution with which all his public criticisms were qualified at every turn; so that everything came to depend upon the conjunctions; upon "but" and "yet" and "though" and similar words. As his salary grew larger (for editors and proprietors like that sort of thing) and his old friends fewer (for the most generous of friends cannot but feel faintly acid at a success which has in it nothing of the infectious flavour of glory) he grew more and more to value himself as a diplomatist; a man who always said the right thing. But he was not without his intellectual nemesis; for at last he became so very diplomatic as to be darkly and densely unintelligible. People who knew him had no difficulty in believing that what he had said was the right thing, the tactful thing, the thing that should save the situation; but they had great difficulty in discovering what it was. In his early days he had had a great talent for one of the worst tricks of modern journalism, the trick of dismissing the important part of a question as if it could wait, and appearing to get to business on the unimportant part of it. Thus, he would say, "Whatever we may think of the rights and wrongs of the vivisection of pauper children, we shall all agree that it should only be done, in any event, by fully qualified practitioners." But in the later and darker days of his diplomacy, he seemed rather to dismiss the important part of a subject, and get to grips with some totally different subject, following some timid and elusive train of associations of his own. In his late bad manner, as they say of painters, he was just as likely to say, "Whatever we may think of the rights and wrongs of the vivisection of pauper children, no progressive mind can doubt that the influence of the Vatican is on the decline." His nickname had stuck to him in honour of a paragraph he was alleged to have written when the American President was wounded by a bullet fired by a lunatic in New Orleans, and which was said to have run, "The President passed a good night and his condition is greatly improved. The assassin is not, however, a German, as was at first supposed." Men stared at that mysterious conjunction till they wanted to go mad and to shoot somebody themselves.

Hibbs However was a long, lank man, with straight, yellowish hair and a manner that was externally soft and mild but secretly supercilious. He had been, when at Cambridge, a friend of Leveson, and they had both prided themselves on being moderate politicians. But if you have had your hat smashed over your nose by one who has very recently described himself as a "law-abidin' man," and if you have had to run for your life with one coat-tail, and encouraged to further bodily activity by having irregular pieces of a corrugated iron roof thrown after you by men more energetic than yourself, you will find you emerge with emotions which are not solely those of a moderate politician. Hibbs However had already composed a leaderette on the Pebblewick incident, which rather pointed to the truth of the story, so far as his articles ever pointed to anything. His motives for veering vaguely in this direction were, as usual, complex. He knew the millionaire who owned the paper had a hobby of Spiritualism, and something might always come out of not suppressing a marvellous story. He knew that two at least of the prosperous artisans or small tradesmen who had attested the tale were staunch supporters of The Party. He knew that Lord Ivywood must be mildly but not effectually checked; for Lord Ivywood was of The Other Party. And there could be no milder or less effectual way of checking him than by allowing the paper to lend at least a temporary credit to a well-supported story that came from outside, and certainly had not been (like so many stories) created in the office. Amid all these considerations had Hibbs However steered his way to a more or less confirmatory article, when the sudden apparition of J. Leveson, Secretary, in the sub-editor’s room with a burst collar and broken eyeglasses, led Mr. Hibbs into a long, private conversation with him and a comparative reversal of his plans. But of course he did not write a new article; he was not of that divine order who make all things new. He chopped and changed his original article in such a way that it was something quite beyond the most bewildering article he had written in the past; and is still prized by those highly cultured persons who collect the worst literature of the world.

It began, indeed, with the comparatively familiar formula, “Whether we take the more lax or the more advanced view of the old disputed problem of the morality or immorality of the wooden sign-board as such, we shall all agree that the scenes enacted at Pebblewick were very discreditable, to most, though not all, concerned.” After that, tact degenerated into a riot of irrelevance. It was a wonderful article. The reader could get from it a faint glimpse of Mr. Hibbs’s opinion on almost every other subject except the subject of the article. The first half of the next sentence made it quite clear that Mr. Hibbs (had he been present) would not have lent his active assistance to the Massacre of St. Bartholomew or the Massacres of September. But the second half of the sentence suggested with equal clearness that, since these two acts were no longer, as it were, in contemplation, and all attempts to prevent them would probably arrive a little late, he felt the warmest friendship for the French nation. He merely insisted that his friendship should never be mentioned except in the French language. It must be called an "entente" in the language taught to tourists by waiters. It must on no account be called an "understanding," in a language understanded of the people. From the first half of the sentence following it might safely be inferred that Mr. Hibbs had read Milton, or at least the passage about sons of Belial; from the second half that he knew nothing about bad wine, let alone good. The next sentence began with the corruption of the Roman Empire and contrived to end with Dr. Clifford. Then there was a weak plea for Eugenics; and a warm plea against Conscription, which was not True Eugenics. That was all; and it was headed "The Riot at Pebblewick."

Yet some injustice would be done to Hibbs However if we concealed the fact that this chaotic leader was followed by quite a considerable mass of public correspondence. The people who write to newspapers are, it may be supposed, a small, eccentric body, like most of those that sway a modern state. But at least, unlike the lawyers, or the financiers, or the members of Parliament, or the men of science, they are people of all kinds scattered all over the country, of all classes, counties, ages, sects, sexes, and stages of insanity. The letters that followed Hibbs's article are still worth looking up in the dusty old files of his paper.

A dear old lady in the densest part of the Midlands wrote to suggest that there might really have been an old ship wrecked on the shore, during the proceedings. "Mr. Leveson may have omitted to notice it, or, at that late hour of the evening, it may have been mistaken for a sign-board, especially by a person of defective sight. My own sight has been failing for some time; but I am still a diligent reader of your paper." If Mr. Hibbs's diplomacy had left one nerve in his soul undrugged, he would have laughed, or burst into tears, or got drunk, or gone into a monastery over a letter like that. As it was, he measured it with a pencil, and decided that it was just too long to get into the column.

Then there was a letter from a theorist, and a theorist of the worst sort. There is no great harm in the theorist who makes up a new theory to fit a new event. But the theorist who starts with a false theory and then sees everything as making it come true is the most dangerous enemy of human reason. The letter began like a bullet let loose by the trigger. "Is not the whole question met by Ex. iv. 3? I enclose pamphlets in which I have proved the point quite plainly, and which none of the Bishops or the so-called Free Church Ministers have attempted to answer. The connection between the rod or pole and the snake so clearly indicated in Scripture is no less clear in this case. It is well known that those who follow after strong drink often announce themselves as having seen a snake. Is it not clear that those unhappy revellers beheld it in its transformed state as a pole; see also Deut. xviii. 2. If our so-called religious leaders," etc. The letter went on for thirty-three pages and Hibbs was perhaps justified in this case in thinking the letter rather too long.

Then there was the scientific correspondent who said — Might it not be due to the acoustic qualities of the hall? He had never believed in the corrugated iron hall. The very word "hall" itself (he added playfully) was often so sharpened and shortened by the abrupt echoes of those repeated metallic curves, that it had every appearance of being the word "hell," and had caused many theological entanglements, and some police prosecutions. In the light of these facts, he wished to draw the editor's attention to some very curious details about this supposed presence or absence of an inn-sign. It would be noted that many of the witnesses, and especially the most respectable of them, constantly refer to something that is supposed to be outside. The word "outside" occurs at least five times in the depositions of the complaining persons. Surely by all scientific analogy we may infer that the unusual phrase "inn-sign" is an acoustic error for "inside." The word "inside" would so naturally occur in any discussion either about the building or the individual, when the debate was of a hygienic character. This letter was signed "Medical Student," and the less intelligent parts of it were selected for publication in the paper.

Then there was a really humorous man, who wrote and said there was nothing at all inexplicable or unusual about the case. He himself (he said) had often seen a sign-board outside a pub when he went into it, and been quite unable to see it when he came out. This letter (the only one that had any quality of literature) was sternly set aside by Mr. Hibbs.

Then came a cultured gentleman with a light touch, who merely made a suggestion. Had anyone read H. G. Wells's story about the kink in space? He contrived, indescribably, to suggest that no one had even heard of it except himself; or, perhaps, of Mr. Wells either. The story indicated that men's feet might be in one part of the world and their eyes in another. He offered the suggestion for what it was worth. The particular pile of letters on which Hibbs However threw it, showed only too clearly what it was worth.

Then there was a man, of course, who called it all a plot of frenzied foreigners against Britain's shore. But as he did not make it quite clear whether the chief wickedness of these aliens had lain in sticking the sign up or in pulling it down, his remarks (the remainder of which referred exclusively to the conversational misconduct of an Italian ice-cream man, whose side of the case seemed insufficiently represented) carried the less weight.

And then, last but the reverse of least, there plunged in all the people who think they can solve a problem they cannot understand by abolishing everything that has contributed to it. We all know these people. If a barber has cut his customer's throat because the girl has changed her partner for a dance or donkey ride on Hampstead Heath, there are always people to protest against the mere institutions that led up to it. This would not have happened if barbers were abolished, or if cutlery were abolished, or if the objection felt by girls to imperfectly grown beards were abolished, or if the girls were abolished, or if heaths and open spaces were abolished, or if dancing were abolished, or if donkeys were abolished. But donkeys, I fear, will never be abolished.

There were plenty of such donkeys in the common land of this particular controversy. Some made it an argument against democracy, because poor Garge was a carpenter. Some made it an argument against Alien Immigration, because Misysra Ammon was a Turk. Some proposed that ladies should no longer be admitted to any lectures anywhere, because they had constituted a slight and temporary difficulty at this one, without the faintest fault of their own. Some urged that all holiday resorts should be abolished; some urged that all holidays should be abolished. Some vaguely denounced the sea-side; some, still more vaguely, proposed to remove the sea. All said that if this or that, stones or sea-weed or strange visitors or bad weather or bathing machines were swept away with a strong hand, this which had happened would not have happened. They only had one slight weakness, all of them; that they did not seem to have the faintest notion of what *had* happened. And in this they were not inexcusable. Nobody did know what had happened; nobody knows it to this day, of course, or it would be unnecessary to write this story. No one can suppose this story is written from any motive save that of telling the plain, humdrum truth.

That queer confused cunning which was the only definable quality possessed by Hibbs However had certainly scored a victory so far, for the tone of the weekly papers followed him, with more intelligence and less trepidation; but they followed him. It seemed more and more clear that some kind of light and sceptical explanation was to be given of the whole business, and that the whole business was to be dropped.

The story of the sign-board and the ethical chapel of corrugated iron was discussed and somewhat disparaged in all the more serious and especially in the religious weeklies, though the Low Church papers seemed to reserve their distaste chiefly for the sign-board; and the High Church papers chiefly for the Chapel. All agreed that the combination was incongruous, and most treated it as fabulous. The only intellectual organs which seemed to think it might have happened were the Spiritualist papers, and their interpretation had not that solidity which would have satisfied Mr. George.

It was not until almost a year after that it was felt in philosophical circles that the last word had been said on the matter. An estimate of the incident and of its bearing on natural and supernatural history occurred in Professor Widge's celebrated "Historicity of the Petro-Piscatorial Phenomena"; which so profoundly affected modern thought when it came out in parts in the *Hibbert Journal*. Everyone remembers Professor Widge's main contention, that the modern critic must apply to the thaumaturgics of the Lake of Tiberias the same principle of criticism which Dr. Bunk and others have so successfully applied to the thaumaturgics of the Cana narrative: "Authorities as final as Pink and Toscher," wrote the Professor, "have now shown with an emphasis that no emancipated mind is entitled to question, that the Aqua-Vinic thaumaturgy at Cana is wholly inconsistent with the psychology of the 'master of the feast,' as modern research has analysed it; and indeed with the whole Judaeo-Aramaic psychology at that stage of its development, as well as being painfully incongruous with the elevated ideals of the ethical teacher in question. But as we rise to higher levels of moral achievement, it will probably be found necessary to apply the Canaic principle to other and later events in the narrative. This principle has, of course, been mainly expounded by Huscher in the sense that the whole episode is unhistorical, while the alternative theory, that the wine was non-alcoholic and was naturally infused into the water, can claim on its side the impressive name of Minns. It is clear that if we apply the same alternative to the so-called Miraculous Draught of Fishes we must either hold with Gilp, that the fishes were stuffed representations of fishes artificially placed in the lake (see the Rev. Y. Wyse's "Christo-Vegetarianism as a World-System," where this position is forcibly set forth), or we must, on the Huscherian hypothesis, deprive the Piscatorial narrative of all claim to historicity whatever.

"The difficulty felt by the most daring critics (even Pooke) in adopting this entirely destructive attitude, is the alleged improbability of so detailed a narrative being founded on so slight a phrase as the anti-historical critics refer it to. It is urged by Pooke, with characteristic relentless reasoning, that according to Huscher's theory a metaphorical but at least noticeable remark, such as, 'I will make you fishers of men,' was expanded into a realistic chronicle of events which contains no mention, even in the passages evidently interpolated, of any men actually found in the nets when they were hauled up out of the sea; or, more properly, lagoon.

"It must appear presumptuous or even bad taste for anyone in the modern world to differ on any subject from Pooke; but I would venture to suggest that the very academic splendour and unique standing of the venerable professor (whose ninety-seventh birthday was so beautifully celebrated in Chicago last year), may have forbidden him all but intuitive knowledge of how errors arise among the vulgar. I crave pardon for mentioning a modern case known to myself (not indeed by personal presence, but by careful study of all the reports) which presents a curious parallel to such ancient expansions of a text into an incident, in accordance with Huscher's law.

"It occurred at Pebblewick, in the south of England. The town had long been in a state of dangerous religious excitement. The great religious genius who has since so much altered our whole attitude to the religions of the world, Misysra Ammon, had been lecturing on the sands to thousands of enthusiastic hearers. Their meetings were often interrupted, both by children's services run on the most ruthless lines of orthodoxy and by the League of the Red Rosette, the formidable atheist and anarchist organization. As if this were not enough to swell the whirlpool of fanaticism, the old popular controversy between the Milnian and the Complete Sublapsarians broke out again on the fated beach. It is natural to conjecture that in the thickening atmosphere of theology in Pebblewick, some controversialist quoted the text ‘An evil and adulterous generation *seek for a sign*. But no sign shall be given it save the sign of the prophet Jonas.’

“A mind like that of Pooke will find it hard to credit, but it seems certain that the effect of this text on the ignorant peasantry of southern England was actually to make them go about looking for a sign, in the sense of those old tavern signs now so happily disappearing. The ‘sign of the Prophet Jonas,’ they somehow translated in their stunted minds into a sign-board of the ship out of which Jonah was thrown. They went about literally looking for ‘The Sign of the Ship,’ and there are some cases of their suffering Smail’s Hallucination and actually seeing it. The whole incident is a curious parallel to the Gospel narrative and a triumphant vindication of Huscher’s law.”

Lord Ivywood paid a public compliment to Professor Widge, saying that he had rolled back from his country what might have been an ocean of superstitions. But, indeed, poor Hibbs had struck the first and stunning blow that scattered the brains of all men.

Chapter X: The Character of Quoodle

THERE lay about in Lord Ivywood's numerous gardens, terraces, outhouses, stable yards and similar places, a dog that came to be called by the name of Quoodle. Lord Ivywood did not call him Quoodle. Lord Ivywood was almost physically incapable of articulating such sounds. Lord Ivywood did not care for dogs. He cared for the Cause of dogs, of course; and he cared still more for his own intellectual self-respect and consistency. He would never have permitted a dog in his house to be physically ill-treated; nor, for that matter, a rat; nor, for that matter, even a man. But if Quoodle was not physically ill-treated, he was at least socially neglected, and Quoodle did not like it. For dogs care for companionship more than for kindness itself.

Lord Ivywood would probably have sold the dog, but he consulted experts (as he did on everything he didn't understand and many things that he did), and the impression he gathered from them was that the dog, technically considered, would fetch very little; mostly, it seemed, because of the mixture of qualities that it possessed. It was a sort of mongrel bull-terrier, but with rather too much of the bull-dog; and this fact seemed to weaken its price as much as it strengthened its jaw. His Lordship also gained a hazy impression that the dog might have been valuable as a watch-dog if it had not been able to follow game like a pointer; and that even in the latter walk of life it would always be discredited by an unfortunate talent for swimming as well as a retriever. But Lord Ivywood's impressions may very well have been slightly confused, as he was probably thinking about the Black stone of Mecca, or some such subject at the moment. The victim of this entanglement of virtues, therefore, still lay about in the sunlight of Ivywood, exhibiting no general result of that entanglement except the most appalling ugliness.

Now Lady Joan Brett did appreciate dogs. It was the whole of her type and a great deal of her tragedy that all that was natural in her was still alive under all that was artificial; and she could smell hawthorn or the sea as far off as a dog can smell his dinner. Like most aristocrats she would carry cynicism almost to the suburbs of the city of Satan; she was quite as irreligious as Lord Ivywood, or rather more. She could be quite equally frigid or supercilious when she felt inclined. And in the great social talent of being tired, she could beat him any day of the week. But the difference remained in spite of her sophistries and ambitions; that her elemental communications were not cut, and his were. For her the sunrise was still the rising of a sun, and not the turning on of a light by a convenient cosmic servant. For her the Spring was really the Season in the country, and not merely the Season in town. For her cocks and hens were natural appendages to an English house; and not (as Lord Ivywood had proved to her from an encyclopaedia) animals of Indian origin, recently imported by Alexander the Great. And so for her a dog was a dog, and not one of the higher animals, nor one of the lower animals, nor something that had the sacredness of life, nor something that ought to be muzzled, nor something that ought not to be vivisected. She knew that in every practical sense proper provision would be made for the dog; as, indeed, provision was made for the yellow dogs in Constantinople by Abdul Hamid, whose life Lord Ivywood was writing for the *Progressive Potentates* series. Nor was she in the least sentimental about the dog or anxious to turn him into a pet. It simply came natural to her in passing to rub all his hair the wrong way and call him something which she instantly forgot.

The man who was mowing the garden lawn looked up for a moment, for he had never seen the dog behave in exactly that way before. Quoodle arose, shook himself, and trotted on in front of the lady, leading her up an iron side staircase, of which, as it happened, she had never made use before. It was then, most probably, that she first took any special notice of him; and her pleasure, like that which she took in the sublime prophet from Turkey, was of a humorous character. For the complex quadruped had retained the bow legs of the bull-dog; and, seen from behind, reminded her ridiculously of a swaggering little Major waddling down to his Club.

The dog and the iron stairway between them led her into a series of long rooms, one opening into the other. They formed part of what she had known in earlier days as the disused Wing of Ivywood House, which had been neglected or shut up, probably because it bore some defacements from the fancies of the mad ancestor, the memory of whom the present Lord Ivywood did not think helpful to his own political career. But it seemed to Joan that there were indications of a recent attempt to rehabilitate the place. There was a pail of whitewash in one of the empty rooms, a step-ladder in another, here and there a curtain rod, and at last, in the fourth room a curtain. It hung all alone on the old woodwork, but it was a very gorgeous curtain, being a kind of orange-gold relieved with wavy bars of crimson, which somehow seemed to suggest the very spirit and presence of serpents, though they had neither eyes nor mouths among them.

In the next of the endless series of rooms she came upon a kind of ottoman, striped with green and silver standing alone on the bare floor. She sat down on it from a mixed motive of fatigue and of impudence, for she dimly remembered a story which she had always thought one of the funniest in the world, about a lady only partly initiated in Theosophy who had been in the habit of resting on a similar object, only to discover afterward that it was a Mahatma, covered with his eastern garment and prostrate and rigid in ecstasy. She had no hopes of sitting on a Mahatma herself, but the very thought of it made her laugh, because it would make Lord Ivywood look such a fool. She was not sure whether she liked or disliked Lord Ivywood, but she felt quite certain that it would gratify her to make him look a fool. The moment she had sat down on the ottoman, the dog, who had been trotting beside her, sat down also, and on the edge of her skirt.

After a minute or two she rose (and the dog rose), and she looked yet farther down that long perspective of large rooms, in which men like Philip Ivywood forget that they are only men. The next was more ornate and the next yet more so; it was plain that the scheme of decoration that was in progress had been started at the other end. She could now see that the long lane ended in rooms that from afar off looked like the end of a kaleidoscope, rooms like nests made only from humming birds or palaces built of fixed fireworks. Out of this furnace of fragmentary colours she saw Ivywood advancing toward her, with his black suit and his white face accented by the contrast. His lips were moving, for he was talking to himself, as many orators do. He did not seem to see her, and she had to strangle a subconscious and utterly senseless cry, “He is blind!”

The next moment he was welcoming her intrusion with the well-bred surprise and rather worldly simplicity suitable to such a case, and Joan fancied she understood why his face had seemed a little bleaker and blinder than usual. It was by contrast. He was carrying clutched to his forefinger, as his ancestors might have carried a falcon clutched to the wrist, a small bright coloured semi-tropical bird, the expression of whose head, neck and eye was the very opposite of his own. Joan thought she had never seen a living creature with a head so lively and insulting. Its provocative eye and pointed crest seemed to be offering to fight fifty game-cocks. It was no wonder (she told herself) that by the side of this gaudy gutter-snipe with feathers Ivywood's faint-coloured hair and frigid face looked like the hair and face of a corpse walking.

"You'll never know what this is," said Ivywood, in his most charming manner. "You've heard of him a hundred times and never had a notion of what he was. This is the Bulbul."

"I never knew," replied Joan. "I am afraid I never cared. I always thought it was something like a nightingale."

"Ah, yes," answered Ivywood, "but this is the real Bulbul peculiar to the East, *Pycnonotus Haemorrhous*. You are thinking of *Daulias Golzii*."

"I suppose I am," replied Lady Joan with a faint smile. "It is an obsession. When shall I not be thinking of Daulias Galsworthy? Was it Galsworthy?" Then feeling quite touched by the soft austerity of her companion's face, she caressed the gaudy and pugnacious bird with one finger and said, "It's a dear little thing."

The quadruped intimately called Quoodle did not approve of all this at all. Like most dogs, he liked to be with human beings when they were silent, and he extended a magnificent toleration to them as long as they were talking to each other. But conversational attention paid to any other animal at all remote from a mongrel bull-terrier wounded Mr. Quoodle in his most sensitive and gentlemanly feelings. He emitted a faint growl. Joan, with all the instincts that were in her, bent down and pulled his hair about once more, and felt the instant necessity of diverting the general admiration from *Pycnonotus Haemorrhous*. She turned it to the decoration at the end of the refurnished wing; for they had already come to the last of the long suite of rooms, which ended in some unfinished but exquisite panelling in white and coloured woods, inlaid in the oriental manner. At one corner the whole corridor ended by curving into a round turret chamber overlooking the landscape; and which Joan, who had known the house in childhood, was sure was an innovation. On the other hand a black gap, still left in the lower left-hand corner of the oriental woodwork, suddenly reminded her of something she had forgotten.

"Surely," she said (after much mere aesthetic ecstasy), "there used to be a staircase there, leading to the old kitchen garden, or the old chapel or something."

Ivywood nodded gravely. "Yes," he said, "it did lead to the ruins of a Mediaeval Chapel, as you say. The truth is it led to several things that I cannot altogether consider a credit to the family in these days. All that scandal and joking about the unsuccessful tunnel (your mother may have told you of it), well, it did us no good in the County, I'm afraid; so as it's a mere scrap of land bordering on the sea, I've fenced it off and let it grow wild. But I'm boarding up the end of the room here for quite another reason. I want you to come and see it."

He led her into the round corner turret in which the new architecture ended, and Joan, with her thirst for the beautiful, could not stifle a certain thrill of beatitude at the prospect. Five open windows of a light and exquisite Saracenic outline looked out over the bronze and copper and purple of the Autumn parks and forests to the peacock colours of the sea. There was neither house nor living thing in sight, and, familiar as she had been with that coast, she knew she was looking out from a new angle of vision on a new landscape of Ivywood.

"You can write sonnets?" said Ivywood with something more like emotion in his voice than she had ever heard in it. "What comes first into your mind with these open windows?"

"I know what you mean," said Joan after a silence. "The same hath oft . . ."

"Yes," he said. "That is how I felt . . . of perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn."

There was another silence and the dog sniffed round and round the circular turret chamber.

"I want it to be like that," said Ivywood in a low and singularly moved intonation. "I want this to be the end of the house. I want this to be the end of the world. Don't you feel that is the real beauty of all this eastern art; that it is coloured like the edges of things, like the little clouds of morning and the islands of the blest? Do you know," and he lowered his voice yet more, "it has the power over me of making me feel as if I were myself absent and distant; some oriental traveller who was lost and for whom men were looking. When I see that greenish lemon yellow enamel there let into the white, I feel that I am standing thousands of leagues from where I stand."

"You are right," said Joan, looking at him with some wonder, "I have felt like that myself."

"This art," went on Ivywood as in a dream, "does indeed take the wings of the morning and abide in the uttermost parts of the sea. They say it contains no form of life, but surely we can read its alphabet as easily as the red hieroglyphics of sunrise and sunset which are on the fringes of the robe of God."

"I never heard you talk like that before," said the lady, and again stroked the vivid violet feathers of the small eastern bird.

Mr. Quoodle could stand it no longer. He had evidently formed a very low opinion of the turret chamber and of oriental art generally, but seeing Joan's attention once more transferred to his rival, he trotted out into the longer room, and finding the gap in the woodwork which was soon to be boarded up, but which still opened on an old dark staircase, he went "galumphing" down the stairs.

Lord Ivywood gently placed the bird on the girl's own finger, and went to one of the open windows, leaning out a little.

"Look here," he said, "doesn't this express what we both feel? Isn't this the sort of fairy-tale house that ought to hang on the last wall of the world?"

And he motioned her to the window-sill, just outside which hung the bird's empty cage, beautifully wrought in brass or some of the yellow metals.

"Why that is the best of all!" cried Lady Joan. "It makes one feel as if it really were the Arabian Nights. As if this were a tower of the gigantic Genii with turrets up to the moon; and this were an enchanted Prince caged in a golden palace suspended by the evening star."

Something stirred in her dim but teeming subconsciousness, something like a chill or change like that by which we half know that weather has altered, or distant and unnoticed music suddenly ceased.

"Where is the dog?" she asked suddenly.

Ivywood turned with a mild, grey eye.

"Was there a dog here?" he asked.

"Yes," said Lady Joan Brett, and gave him back the bird, which he restored carefully to its cage.

The dog after whom she inquired had in truth trundled down a dark, winding staircase and turned into the daylight, into a part of the garden he had never seen before; nor, indeed, had anybody else for some time past. It was altogether tangled and overgrown with weeds, and the only trace of human handiwork, the wreck of an old Gothic Chapel, stood waist high in numberless nettles and soiled with crawling fungoids. Most of these merely discoloured the grey crumbling stone with shades of bronze or brown; but some of them, particularly on the side farthest from the house, were of orange or purple tints almost bright enough for Lord Ivywood's oriental decoration. Some fanciful eyes that fell on the place afterward found something like an allegory in those graven and broken saints or archangels feeding such fiery and ephemeral parasites as those toadstools like blood or gold. But Mr. Quoodle had never set himself up as an allegorist, and he merely trotted deeper and deeper into the grey-green English jungle. He grumbled very much at the thistles and nettles, much as a city man will grumble at the jostling of a crowd. But he continued to press forward, with his nose near the ground, as if he had already smelt something that interested him. And, indeed, he had smelt something in which a dog, except on special occasions, is much more interested than he is in dogs. Breaking through a last barrier of high and hoary purple thistles he came out on a semicircle of somewhat clearer ground, dotted with slender trees, and having, by way of back scene, the brown brick arch of an old tunnel. The tunnel was boarded up with a very irregular fence or mask made of motley wooden lathes, and looked, somehow, rather like a pantomime cottage. In front of this a sturdy man in very shabby shooting clothes was standing attending to a battered old frying-pan which he held over a rather irregular flame which, small as it was, smelt strongly of burnt rum. In the frying-pan, and also on the top of a cask or barrel that served for a table hard by, were a number of the grey, brown, and even orange fungi which were plastered over the stone angels and dragons of the fallen chapel.

"Hullo, old man," said the person in the shooting jacket with tranquillity and without looking up from his cooking. "Come to pay us a visit? Come along then." He flashed one glance at the dog and returned to the frying pan. "If your tail were two inches shorter, you'd be worth a hundred pounds. Had any breakfast?"

The dog trotted across to him and began nosing and sniffing round his dilapidated leather gaiters. The man did not interrupt his cookery, on which his eyes were fixed and both his hands were busy; but he crooked his knee and foot so as to caress the quadruped in a nerve under the angle of the jaw, the stimulation of which (as some men of science have held) is for a dog what a good cigar is for a man. At the same moment a huge voice like on ogre's came from within the masked tunnel, calling out, "And who are ye talking to?"

A very crooked kind of window in the upper part of the pantomime cottage burst open and an enormous head, with erect, startling, and almost scarlet hair and blue eyes as big as a bullfrog’s, was thrust out above the scene.

“Hump,” cried the ogre. “Me moral counsels have been thrown away. In the last week I’ve sung you fourteen and a half songs of me own composition; instead of which you go about stealing dogs. You’re following in the path of Parson Whats-his-name in every way, I’m afraid.”

“No,” said the man with the frying pan, impartially, “Parson Whitelady struck a very good path for doubling on Pebblewick, that I was glad to follow. But I think he was quite silly to steal dogs. He was young and brought up pious. I know too much about dogs to steal one.”

“Well,” asked the large red-haired man, “and how do you get a dog like that?”

“I let him steal me,” said the person stirring the pan. And indeed the dog was sitting erect and even arrogant at his feet, as if he was a watch-dog at a high salary, and had been there before the building of the tunnel.

Chapter XI: Vegetarianism in the Drawing-Room

THE Company that assembled to listen to the Prophet of the Moon, on the next occasion of his delivering any formal address, was much more select than the comparatively mixed and middle-class society of the Simple Souls. Miss Browning and her sister, Mrs. Mackintosh, were indeed present; for Lord Ivywood had practically engaged them both as private secretaries, and kept them pretty busy, too. There was also Mr. Leveson, because Lord Ivywood believed in his organizing power; and also Mr. Hibbs, because Mr. Leveson believed in his political judgment, whenever he could discover what it was. Mr. Leveson had straight, dark hair, and looked nervous. Mr. Hibbs had straight, fair hair, and also looked nervous. But the rest of the company were more of Ivywood's own world, or the world of high finance with which it mixes both here and on the continent. Lord Ivywood welcomed, with something approaching to warmth, a distinguished foreign diplomatist, who was, indeed, none other than that silent German representative who had sat beside him in that last conference on the Island of the Olives. Dr. Gluck was no longer in his quiet, black suit, but wore an ornate, diplomatic uniform with a sword and Prussian, Austrian or Turkish Orders; for he was going on from Ivywood to a function at Court. But his curl of red lips, his screw of black mustache, and his unanswering almond eyes had no more changed than the face of a wax figure in a barber's shop window.

The Prophet had also effected an improvement in his dress. When he had orated on the sands his costume, except for the fez, was the shabby but respectable costume of any rather unsuccessful English clerk. But now that he had come among aristocrats who petted their souls as they did their senses, there must be no such incongruity. He must be a proper, fresh-picked oriental tulip or lotus. So — he wore long, flowing robes of white, relieved here and there by flame-coloured threads of tracery, and round his head was a turban of a kind of pale golden green. He had to look as if he had come flying across Europe on the magic carpet, or fallen a moment before from his paradise in the moon.

The ladies of Lord Ivywood's world were much as we have already found them. Lady Enid Wimpole still overwhelmed her earnest and timid face with a tremendous costume, that was more like a procession than a dress. It looked rather like the funeral procession of Aubrey Beardsley. Lady Joan Brett still looked like a very beautiful Spaniard with no illusions left about her castle in Spain. The large and resolute lady who had refused to ask any questions at Misysra's earlier lecture, and who was known as Lady Crump, the distinguished Feminist, still had the air of being so full and bursting with questions fatal to Man as to have passed the speaking and reached the speechless stage of hostility. Throughout the proceedings she contributed nothing but bursting silence and a malevolent eye. And old Lady Ivywood, under the oldest and finest lace and the oldest and finest manners, had a look like death on her, which can often be seen in the parents of pure intellectuals. She had that face of a lost mother that is more pathetic than the face of a lost child.

"And what are you going to delight us with today?" Lady Enid was asking of the Prophet.

"My lecture," answered Misysra, gravely, "is on the Pig."

It was part of a simplicity really respectable in him that he never saw any incongruity in the arbitrary and isolated texts or symbols out of which he spun his thousand insane theories. Lady Enid endured the impact of this singular subject for debate without losing that expression of wistful sweetness which she wore on principle when talking to such people.

"The Pig, he is a large subject," continued the Prophet, making curves in the air, as if embracing some particularly prize specimen. "He includes many subjects. It is to me very strange that the Christians should so laugh and be surprised because we hold ourselves to be defiled by pork; we and also another of the Peoples of the Book. But, surely, you Christians yourselves consider the pig as a manner of pollution; since it is your most usual expression of your despising, of your very great dislike. You say 'swine,' my dear lady; you do not say animals far more unpopular, such as the alligator."

"I see," said the lady, "how wonderful!"

"If you are annoyed," went on the encouraged and excited gentleman, "if you are annoyed with anyone, with a — what you say? — a lady's maid, you do not say to her 'Horse.' You do not say to her 'Camel.'"

"Ah, no," said Lady Enid, earnestly.

"'Pig of a lady's maid,' you say in your colloquial English," continued the Prophet, triumphantly. "And yet this great and awful Pig, this monster whose very name, when whispered, you think will wither all your enemies, you allow, my dear lady, to approach yet closer to you. You incorporate this great Pig in the substance of your own person."

Lady Enid Wimpole was looking a little dazed at last, at this description of her habits, and Joan gave Lord Ivywood a hint that the lecturer had better be transferred to his legitimate sphere of lecturing. Ivywood led the way into a larger room that was full of ranked chairs, with a sort of lectern at the other end, and flanked on all four sides with tables laden with all kinds of refreshments. It was typical of the strange, half-fictitious enthusiasm and curiosity of that world, that one long table was set out entirely with vegetarian foods, especially of an eastern sort (like a table spread in the desert for a rather fastidious Indian hermit); but that tables covered with game patties, lobster and champagne were equally provided, and very much more frequented. Even Mr. Hibbs, who would honestly have thought entering a public-house more disgraceful than entering a brothel, could not connect any conception of disgrace with Lord Ivywood's champagne.

For the purpose of the lecture was not wholly devoted to the great and awful Pig, and the purpose of the meeting even less. Lord Ivywood, the white furnace of whose mind was always full of new fancies hardening into ambitions, wanted to have a debate on the diet of East and West, and felt that Misysra might very appropriately open with an account of the Moslem veto on pork or other coarse forms of flesh food. He reserved it to himself to speak second.

The Prophet began, indeed, with some of his dizziest flights. He informed the Company that they, the English, had always gone in hidden terror and loathing of the Pig, as a sacred symbol of evil. He proved it by the common English custom of drawing a pig with one's eyes shut. Lady Joan smiled, and yet she asked herself (in a doubt that had been darkening round her about many modern things lately) whether it was really much more fanciful than many things the scientists told her: as, the traces of Marriage by Capture which they found in that ornamental and even frivolous being, the Best Man.

He said that the dawn of greater enlightenment is shown in the use of the word "gammon," which still expresses disgust at "the porcine image," but no longer fear of it, but rather a rational disdain and disbelief. "Rowley," said the Prophet, solemnly, and then after a long pause, "Powley, *Gammon* and Spinach."

Lady Joan smiled again, but again asked herself if it was much more farfetched than a history book she had read, which proved the unpopularity of Catholicism in Tudor times from the word "hocus pocus."

He got into a most amazing labyrinth of philology between the red primeval sins of the first pages of Genesis and the Common English word "ham." But, again, Joan wondered whether it was much wilder than the other things she had heard said about Primitive Man by people who had never seen him.

He suggested that the Irish were set to keep pigs because they were a low and defiled caste, and the serfs of the pig-scorning Saxon; and Joan thought it was about as sensible as what the dear old Archdeacon had said about Ireland years ago; which had caused an Irishman of her acquaintance to play "the Shan Van Voght" and then smash the piano.

Joan Brett had been thoughtful for the last few days. It was partly due to the scene in the turret, where she had struck a sensitive and artistic side of Philip Ivywood she had never seen before, and partly to disturbing news of her mother's health, which, though not menacing, made her feel hypothetically how isolated she was in the world. On all previous occasions she had merely enjoyed the mad lecturer now at the reading-desk. Today she felt a strange desire to analyse him, and imagine how a man could be so connected and so convinced and yet so wildly wide of the mark. As she listened carefully, looking at the hands in her lap, she began to think she understood.

The lecturer did really try to prove that the "porcine image" had never been used in English history or literature, except in contempt. And the lecturer really did know a very great deal about English history and literature: much more than she did; much more than the aristocrats round her did. But she noted that in every case what he knew was a fragmentary fact. In every case what he did not know was the truth behind the fact. What he did not know was the atmosphere. What he did not know was the tradition. She found herself ticking off the cases like counts in an indictment.

Misysra Ammon knew, what next to none of the English present knew, that Richard III was called a "boar" by an eighteenth century poet and a "hog" by a fifteenth century poet. What he did not know was the habit of sport and of heraldry. He did not know (what Joan knew instantly, though she had never thought of it before in her life) that beasts courageous and hard to kill are noble beasts, by the law of chivalry. Therefore, the boar was a noble beast, and a common crest for great captains. Misysra tried to show that Richard had only been called a pig after he was cold pork at Bosworth.

Misysra Ammon knew, what next to none of the English present knew, that there never was such a person as Lord Bacon. The phrase is a falsification of what should be Lord Verulam or Lord St. Albans. What he did not know was exactly what Joan did know (though it had never crossed her mind till that moment) that when all is said and done, a title is a sort of joke, while a surname is a serious thing. Bacon was a gentleman, and his name was Bacon; whatever titles he took. But Misysra seriously tried to prove that "Bacon" was a term of abuse applied to him during his unpopularity or after his fall.

Misysra Ammon knew, what next to none of the English present knew, that the poet Shelley had a friend called Hogg, who treated him on one occasion with grave treachery. He instantly tried to prove that the man was only called "Hogg" because he had treated Shelley with grave treachery. And he actually adduced the fact that another poet, practically contemporary, was called "Hogg" as completing the connection with Shelley. What he did not know was just what Joan had always known without knowing it: the kind of people concerned, the traditions of aristocrats like the Shelleys or of Borderers like the Ettrick Shepherd.

The lecturer concluded with a passage of impenetrable darkness about pig-iron and pigs of lead, which Joan did not even venture to understand. She could only say that if it did not mean that some day our diet might become so refined that we ate lead and iron, she could form no fancy of what it did mean.

"Can Philip Ivywood believe this kind of thing?" she asked herself; and even as she did so, Philip Ivywood rose.

He had, as Pitt and Gladstone had, an impromptu classicism of diction, his words wheeling and deploying into their proper places like a well-disciplined army in its swiftest advance. And it was not long before Joan perceived that the last phase of the picture, obscure and monstrous as it seemed, gave Ivywood exactly the opening he wanted. Indeed, she felt, no doubt, that he had arranged for it beforehand.

"It is within my memory," said Lord Ivywood, "though it need in no case have encumbered yours, that when it was my duty to precede the admired lecturer whom I now feel it a privilege even to follow, I submitted a suggestion which, however simple, would appear to many paradoxical. I affirmed or implied the view that the religion of Mahomet was, in a peculiar sense, a religion of progress. This is so contrary, not only to historical convention but to common platitude, that I shall find no ground either of surprise or censure if it takes a perceptible time before it sinks into the mind of the English public. But I think, ladies and gentlemen, that this period is notably abbreviated by the remarkable exposition which we have heard today. For this question of the attitude of Islam toward food affords as excellent an example of its special mode of progressive purification as the more popular example of its attitude toward drink. For it illustrates that principle which I have ventured to call the principle of the Crescent: the principle of perpetual growth toward an implied and infinite perfection.

"The great religion of Islam does not of itself forbid the eating of flesh foods. But, in accordance with that principle of growth which is its life, it has pointed the way to a perfection not yet perhaps fully attainable by our nature; it has taken a plain and strong example of the dangers of meat-eating; and hung up the repellent carcass as a warning and a sign. In the gradual emergence of mankind from a gross and sanguinary mode of sustenance, the Semite has led the way. He has laid, as it were, a symbolic embargo upon the beast typical, the beast of beasts. With the instinct of the true mystic, he selected for exemption from such cannibal feasts the creature which appeals to both sides of the higher vegetarian ethic. The pig is at once the creature whose helplessness most moves our pity and whose ugliness most repels our taste.

"It would be foolish to affirm that no difficulty arises out of the different stages of moral evolution in which the different races find themselves. Thus it is constantly said, and such things are not said without some excuse in document or incident, that followers of the Prophet have specialised in the arts of war and have come into a contact, not invariably friendly, with those Hindoos of India who have specialised in the arts of Peace. In the same way the Hindoos, it must be confessed, have been almost as much in advance of Islam in the question of meat as Islam is in advance of Christianity in the matter of drink. It must be remembered again and again, ladies and gentlemen, that every allegation we have of any difference between Hindoo and Moslem comes through a Christian channel, and is therefore tainted evidence. But in this matter, even, can we not see the perils of disregarding such plain danger signals as the veto on pork? Did not an Empire nearly slip out of our hands because our hands were greased with cow-fat? And did not the well of Cawnpore brim with blood instead of water because we would not listen to the instinct of the Oriental about the shedding of sacred blood?

"But if it be proposed, with whatever graduation, to approach that repudiation of flesh food which Buddhism mainly and Islam partly recommends, it will always be asked by those who hate the very vision of Progress— 'Where do you draw the line? May I eat oysters? May I eat eggs? May I drink milk?' You may. You may eat or drink anything essential to your stage of evolution, so long as you are evolving toward a clearer and cleaner ideal of bodily life. If," he said gravely, "I may employ a phrase of flippancy, I would say that you may eat six dozen oysters today, but I should strongly advise five dozen oysters tomorrow. For how else has all progress in public or private manners been achieved? Would not the primitive cannibals be surprised at the strange distinction we draw between men and beasts? All historians pay high honour to the Huguenots, and the great Huguenot Prince, Henri Quatre. None need deny that his aspiration that every Frenchman should have a chicken in his pot was, for his period, a high aspiration. It is no disrespect to him that we, mounting to higher levels, and looking down longer perspectives, consider the chicken. And this august march of discovery passes figures higher than that of Henry of Navarre. I shall always give a high place, as Islam has always given a high place, to that figure, mythical or no, which we find presiding over the foundations of Christianity. I cannot doubt that the fable, incredible and revolting otherwise, which records the rush of swine into the sea, was an allegory of his early realisation that a spirit, evil indeed, does reside in all animals in so far as they tempt us to devour them. I cannot doubt that the Prodigal leaving his sins among the swine is another illustration of the great thesis of the Prophet of the Moon. But here, also, progress and relativity are relentless in their advance; and not a few of us may have risen today to the point of regretting that the joyful sounds around the return of the Prodigal should be marred by the moaning of a calf.

"For the rest, he who asks us whither we go knows not the meaning of Progress. If we come at last to live on light, as men said of the chameleon, if some cosmic magic closed to us now, as radium was but recently closed, allows us to transmute the very metals into flesh without breaking into the bloody house of life, we shall know these things when we have achieved them. It is enough for us now if we have reached a spiritual station, in which at least the living head we lop has not eyes to reproach us; and the herbs we gather cannot cry against our cruelty like the mandrake.”

Lord Ivywood resumed his seat, his colourless lips still moving. By some previous arrangement, probably, Mr. Leveson rose to move a motion about Vegetarianism. Mr. Leveson was of opinion that the Jewish and Moslem veto on pork had been the origin of Vegetarianism. He thought it was a great step, and showed how progressive the creed could be. He thought the persecution of the Hindoos by Moslems had probably been much exaggerated; he thought our experience in the Indian Mutiny showed we considered the feeling of Easterners too little in such matters. He thought Vegetarianism in some ways an advance on orthodox Christianity. He thought we must be ready for yet further advances; and he sat down. And as he had said precisely, clause by clause, everything that Lord Ivywood had said, it is needless to say that that nobleman afterward congratulated him on the boldness and originality of his brilliant speech.

At a similar sort of preconcerted signal, Hibbs However rose rather vaguely to his feet to second the motion. He rather prided himself on being a man of few words, in the vocal sense; he was no orator, as Brutus was. It was only with pen in hand, in an office lined with works of reference, that he could feel that sense of confused responsibility that was the one pleasure of his life. But on this occasion he was brighter than usual; partly because he liked being in a lord’s house; partly because he had never tasted champagne before, and he felt as if it agreed with him; partly because he saw in the subject of Progress an infinite opportunity of splitting hairs.

“Whatever,” said Hibbs, with a solemn cough, “whatever we may think of the old belief that Moslems have differed from Buddhism in a regrettable way, there can be no doubt the responsibility lay with the Christian Churches. Had the Free Churches put their foot down and met Messrs. Opalstein’s demand, we should have heard nothing of these old differences between one belief and another.” As it was, it reminded him of Napoleon. He gave his own opinion for what it was worth, but he was not afraid to say at any cost, even there and in that company, that this business of Asiatic vegetation had occupied less of the time of the Wesleyan Conference than it should have done. He would be the last to say, of course, that anyone was in any sense to blame. They all knew Dr. Coon’s qualifications. They all knew as well as he did, that a more strenuous social worker than Charles Chadder had never rallied the forces of progress. But that which was not really an indiscretion might be represented as an indiscretion, and perhaps we had had enough of that just lately. It was all very well to talk about Coffe but it should be remembered, with no disrespect to those in Canada to whom we owe so much, that all that happened before 1891. No one had less desire to offend our Ritualistic friends than he did, but he had no hesitation in saying that the question was a question that could be asked, and though no doubt, from one point of view the goat's — .

Lady Joan moved sharply in her chair, as if gripped by sudden pain. And, indeed, she had suddenly felt the chronic and recurrent pain of her life. She was brave about bodily pain, as are most women, even luxurious women: but the torment that from time to time returned and tore her was one to which many philosophical names have been given, but no name so philosophical as Boredom.

She felt she could not stand a minute more of Mr. Hibbs. She felt she would die if she heard about the goats — from one or any point of view. She slipped from her chair and somehow slid round the corner, in pretence of seeking one of the tables of refreshment in the new wing. She was soon among the new oriental apartments, now almost completed; but she took no refreshments, though attenuated tables could still be found here and there. She threw herself on an ottoman and stared toward the empty and elfin turret chambers in which Ivywood had made her understand that he, also, could thirst for beauty and desire to be at peace. He certainly had a poetry of his own, after all; a poetry that never touched earth; the poetry of Shelley rather than Shakespeare. His phrase about the fairy turret was true: it did look like the end of the world. It did seem to teach her that there is always some serene limit at last.

She started and half rose on her elbow with a small laugh. A dog of ludicrous but familiar appearance came shuffling toward her and she lifted herself in the act of lifting him. She also lifted her head, and saw something that seemed to her, in a sense more Christian and catastrophic, very like the end of the world.

Chapter XII: Vegetarianism in the Forest

HUMPHREY PUMP'S cooking of a fungus in an old frying-pan (which he had found on the beach) was extremely typical of him. He was, indeed, without any pretence of book-learning, a certain kind of scientific man that science has really been unfortunate in losing. He was the old-fashioned English Naturalist like Gilbert White or even Isaac Walton, who learned things not academically like an American Professor, but actually, like an American Indian. And every truth a man has found out as a man of science is always subtly different from any truth he has found out as a man, because a man's family, friends, habits and social type have always got well under way before he has thoroughly learned the theory of anything. For instance, any eminent botanist at a *Soirée* of the Royal Society could tell you, of course, that other edible fungi exist, as well as mushrooms and truffles. But long before he was a botanist, still less an eminent botanist, he had begun, so to speak, on a basis of mushrooms and truffles. He felt, in a vague way, that these were really edible, that mushrooms were a moderate luxury, proper to the middle classes, while truffles were a much more expensive luxury, more suitable to the Smart Set. But the old English Naturalists, of whom Isaac Walton was perhaps the first, and Humphrey Pump perhaps the last, had in many cases really begun at the other end, and found by experience (often most disastrous experience) that some fungi are wholesome and some are not; but the wholesome ones are, on a whole, the majority. So a man like Pump was no more afraid of a fungus as such than he was of an animal as such. He no more started with the supposition that a grey or purple growth on a stone must be a poisonous growth than he started with the supposition that the dog who came to him out of the wood must be a mad dog. Most of them he knew; those he did not know he treated with rational caution, but to him, as a whole race, these weird-hued and one-legged goblins of the forests were creatures friendly to man.

"You see," he said to his friend the Captain, "eating vegetables isn't half bad, so long as you know what vegetables there are and eat all of them that you can. But there are two ways where it goes wrong among the gentry. First, they've never had to eat a carrot or a potato because it was all there was in the house; so they've never learnt how to be really hungry for carrots, as that donkey might be. They only know the vegetables that are meant to help the meat. They know you take duck and peas; and when they turn vegetarian they can only think of the peas without the duck. They know you take lobster in a salad; and when they turn vegetarian they can only think of the salad without the lobster. But the other reason is worse. There’s plenty of good people even round here, and still more in the north, who get meat very seldom. But then, when they do get it, they gobble it up like good ‘uns. But the trouble with the gentry is different. The trouble is, the same sort of gentry that don’t want to eat meat don’t really want to eat anything. The man called a Vegetarian who goes to Ivywood House is generally like a cow trying to live on a blade of grass a day. You and I, Captain, have pretty well been vegetarians for some time, so as not to break into the cheese, and we haven’t found it so difficult, because we eat as much as we can.”

“It’s not so difficult as being teetotallers,” answered Dalroy, “so as not to break into the cask. But I’ll never deny that I feel the better for that, too, on the whole. But only because I could leave off being one whenever I chose. And, now I come to think of it,” he cried, with one of his odd returns of animal energy, “if I’m to be a vegetarian why shouldn’t I drink? Why shouldn’t I have a purely vegetarian drink? Why shouldn’t I take vegetables in their highest form, so to speak? The modest vegetarians ought obviously to stick to wine or beer, plain vegetarian drinks, instead of filling their goblets with the blood of bulls and elephants, as all conventional meat-eaters do, I suppose. What is the matter?”

“Nothing,” answered Pump. “I was looking out for somebody who generally turns up about this time. But I think I’m fast.”

“I should never have thought so from the look of you,” answered the Captain, “but what I’m saying is that the drinking of decent fermented liquor is just simply the triumph of vegetarianism. Why, it’s an inspiring idea! I could write a sort of song about it. As, for instance —

“You will find me drinking rum
Like a sailor in a slum,
You will find me drinking beer like a Bavarian;
You will find me drinking gin
In the lowest kind of inn,
Because I am a rigid Vegetarian.”

Why, it’s a vista of verbal felicity and spiritual edification! It has I don’t know how many hundred aspects! Let’s see; how could the second verse go? Something like —

“So I cleared the inn of wine,
And I tried to climb the Sign;

And I tried to hail the constable as 'Marion';
But he said I couldn't speak,
And he bowled me to the Beak,
Because I was a Happy Vegetarian."

"I really think something instructive to the human race may come out of all this . . . Hullo! Is that what you were looking for?"

The quadruped Quoodle came in out of the woods a whole minute later than the usual time and took his seat beside Humphrey's left foot with a preoccupied air.

"Good old boy," said the Captain. "You seem to have taken quite a fancy to us. I doubt, Hump, if he's properly looked after up at the house. I particularly don't want to talk against Ivywood, Hump. I don't want his soul to be able in all eternity to accuse my soul of a mean detraction. I want to be fair to him, because I hate him like hell, and he has taken from me all for which I lived. But I don't think, with all this in my mind, I don't think I say anything beyond what he would own himself (for his brain is clear) when I say that he could never understand an animal. And so he could never understand the animal side of a man. He doesn't know to this day, Hump, that your sight and hearing are sixty times quicker than his. He doesn't know that I have a better circulation. That explains the extraordinary people he picks up and acts with; he never looks at them as you and I look at that dog. There was a fellow calling himself Gluck who was (mainly by Ivywood's influence, I believe) his colleague on the Turkish Conferences, being supposed to represent Germany. My dear Hump, he was a man that a great gentleman like Ivywood ought not to have touched with a barge-pole. It's not the race he was — if it was one race — it's the Sort he was. A coarse, common, Levantine nark and eaves-dropper — but you mustn't lose your temper, Hump. I implore you, Hump, to control this tendency to lose your temper when talking at any length about such people. Have recourse, Hump, to that consoling system of versification which I have already explained to you.

"Oh I knew a Doctor Gluck,
And his nose it had a hook,
And his attitudes were anything but Aryan;
So I gave him all the pork
That I had, upon a fork;
Because I am myself a Vegetarian."

"If you are," said Humphrey Pump, "You'd better come and eat some vegetables. The White Hat can be eaten cold — or raw, for that matter. But Bloodspots wants some cooking."

"You are right, Hump," said Dalroy, seating himself with every appearance of speechless greed. "I will be silent. As the poet says —

"I am silent in the Club,
I am silent in the pub,
I am silent on a bally peak in Darien;
For I stuff away for life,
Shoving peas in with a knife,
Because I am at heart a Vegetarian."

He fell to his food with great gusto, dispatched a good deal of it in a very short time, threw a glance of gloomy envy at the cask, and then sprang to his feet again. He caught up the inn-sign from where it leant against the Pantomime Cottage, and planted it like a pike in the ground beside him. Then he began to sing again, in an even louder voice than before.

"O, Lord Ivywood may lop,
And his privilege is sylvan and riparian;
And is also free to top,
But — ."

"Do you know," said Hump, also finishing his lunch, "that I'm rather tired of that particular tune?"

"Tired, is it?" said the indignant Irishman, "then I'll sing you a longer song, to an even worse tune, about more and more vegetarians, and you shall see me dance as well; and I will dance till you burst into tears and offer me the half of your kingdom; and I shall ask for Mr. Leveson's head on the frying-pan. For this, let me tell you, is a song of oriental origin, celebrating the caprices of an ancient Babylonian Sultan and should be performed in palaces of ivory with palm trees and a bulbul accompaniment."

And he began to bellow another and older lyric of his own on vegetarianism.

"Nebuchadnezzar, the King of the Jews,
Suffered from new and original views,
He crawled on his hands and knees it's said,
With grass in his mouth and a crown on his head,
With a wowtyiddly, etc.
"Those in traditional paths that trod,
Thought the thing was a curse from God;
But a Pioneer men always abuse,
Like Nebuchadnezzar the King of the Jews."

Dalroy, as he sang this, actually began to dance about like a ballet girl, an enormous and ridiculous figure in the sunlight, waving the wooden sign around his head. Quoodle opened his eyes and pricked up his ears and seemed much interested in these extraordinary evolutions. Suddenly, with one of those startling changes that will transfigure the most sedentary dogs, Quoodle decided that the dance was a game, and began to bark and bound round the performer, sometimes leaping so far into the air as almost to threaten the man's throat. But, though the sailor naturally knew less about dogs than the countryman, he knew enough about them (as about many other things) not to be afraid, and the voice he sang with might have drowned the baying of a pack.

"Black Lord Foulon the Frenchmen slew,
Thought it a Futurist thing to do;
He offered them grass instead of bread,
So they stuffed him with grass when they cut off his head.
With a wowtyiddly, etc.
"For the pride of his soul he perished then,
But of course it is always of Pride that men
A Man in Advance of his Age accuse
Like Nebuchadnezzar the King of the Jews.
"Simeon Scudder of Styx, in Maine,
Thought of the thing and was at it again;
He gave good grass and water in pails
To a thousand Irishmen hammering rails,
With a wowtyiddly, etc.
"Appetites differ, and tied to a stake,
He was tarred and feathered for Conscience Sake;
But stoning the prophets is ancient news,
Like Nebuchadnezzar the King of the Jews."

In an abandon, unusual even for him, he had danced his way down through the thistles into the jungle of weeds risen round the sunken Chapel. And the dog, now fully convinced that it was not only a game but an expedition, perhaps a hunting expedition, ran barking in front of him, along the path that his own dog's paws had already burst through the tangle. Before Patrick Dalroy well knew what he was doing, or even remembered that he still carried the ridiculous sign-board in his hand, he found himself outside the open porch of a sort of narrow tower at the angle of a building which, to the best of his recollection, he had never seen before. Quoodle instantly ran up four or five steps in the dark staircase inside, and then, lifting his ears again, looked back for his companion.

There is, perhaps, such a thing as asking too much of a man. If there is, it was asking too much of Patrick Dalroy to ask him not to accept so eccentric an invitation. Hurriedly plunging his unwieldy wooden ensign upright in the thick of thistles and grass, he bent his gigantic neck and shoulders to enter the porch, and proceeded to climb the stairs. It was quite dark, and it was only after at least two twists of the stone spiral that he saw light ahead of him, and then it was a sort of rent in the wall that seemed to him as ragged as the mouth of a Cornish cave. It was also so low that he had some difficulty in squeezing his bulk through it, but the dog had jumped through with an air of familiarity, and once more looked back to see him follow.

If he had found himself inside any ordinary domestic interior, he would instantly have repented his escapade and gone back. But he found himself in surroundings which he had never seen before, or even, in one sense, believed possible.

His first feeling was that he was walking in the most sealed and secret suite of apartments in the castle of a dream. All the chambers had that air of perpetually opening inwards which is the soul of the Arabian Nights. And the ornament was of the same tradition; gorgeous and flamboyant, yet featureless and stiff. A purple mansion seemed to be built inside a green mansion and a golden mansion inside that. And the quaintly cut doorways or fretted lattices all had wavy lines like a dancing sea, and for some reason (sea-sickness for all he knew) this gave him a feeling as if the place were beautiful but faintly evil: as if it were bored and twisted for the fallen palace of the Worm.

But he had also another sensation which he could not analyze; for it reminded him of being a fly on the ceiling or the wall. Was it the Hanging Gardens of Babylon coming back to his imagination; or the Castle East of the Sun and West of the Moon? Then he remembered that in some boyish illness he had stared at a rather Moorish sort of wall paper, which was like rows and rows of brightly coloured corridors, empty and going on forever. And he remembered that a fly was walking along one of the parallel lines; and it seemed to his childish fancy that the corridors were all dead in front of the fly, but all came to life as he passed.

“By George!” he cried, “I wonder whether that’s the real truth about East and West! That the gorgeous East offers everything needed for adventures except the man to enjoy them. It would explain the tradition of the Crusades uncommonly well. Perhaps that’s what God meant by Europe and Asia. We dress the characters and they paint the scenery. Well, anyhow, three of the least Asiatic things in the world are lost in this endless Asiatic palace — a good dog, a straight sword, and an Irishman.”

But as he went down this telescope of tropical colours he really felt something of that hard fatalistic freedom of the heroes (or should we say villains?) in the Arabian Nights. He was prepared for any impossibility. He would hardly have been surprised if from under the lid of one of the porcelain pots standing in a corner had come a serpentine string of blue or yellow smoke, as if some wizard’s oil were within. He would hardly have been surprised if from under the curtains or closed doors had crawled out a snaky track of blood, or if a dumb negro dressed in white had come out with a bow string, having done his work. He would not have been surprised if he had walked suddenly into the still chamber of some Sultan asleep, whom to wake was a death in torments. And yet he was very much more surprised by what he did see, and when he saw it, he was certain at last that he was only wandering in the labyrinth of his own brain. For what he saw was what was really in the core of all his dreams.

What he saw, indeed, was more appropriate to that inmost eastern chamber than anything he had imagined. On a divan of blood-red and orange cushions lay a startlingly beautiful woman, with a skin almost swarthy enough for an Arab’s, and who might well have been the Princess proper to such an Arabian tale. But in truth it was not her appropriateness to the scene, but rather her inappropriateness, that made his heart bound. It was not her strangeness but her familiarity that made his big feet suddenly stop.

The dog ran on yet more rapidly, and the princess on the sofa welcomed him warmly, lifting him on his short hind legs. Then she looked up, and seemed turned to stone.

“Bismillah,” said the oriental traveller, affably, “may your shadow never grow less — or more, as the ladies would say. The Commander of the Faithful has deputed his least competent slave to bring you back a dog. Owing to temporary delay in collecting the fifteen largest diamonds in the moon, he has been compelled to send the animal without any collar. Those responsible for the delay will instantly be beaten to death, with the tails of dragons—”

The frightful shock, which had not yet left the lady’s face, brought him back to responsible speech.

“In short,” he said, “in the name of the Prophet, dog. I say, Joan, I wish this wasn’t a dream.”

“It isn’t,” said the girl, speaking for the first time, “and I don’t know yet whether I wish it was.”

“Well,” argued the dreamer, rationally, “what are you, anytime, if you’re not a dream — or a vision? And what are all these rooms, if they aren’t a dream — or rather a nightmare?”

“This is the new wing of Ivywood House,” said the lady addressed as Joan, speaking with great difficulty. “Lord Ivywood has fitted them up in the eastern style; he is inside conducting a most interesting debate in defence of Eastern Vegetarianism. I only came out because the room was rather hot.”

“Vegetarian!” cried Dalroy, with abrupt and rather unreasonable exasperation. “That table seems to fall a bit short of Vegetarianism.” And he pointed to one of the long, narrow tables, laid somewhere in almost all the central rooms, and loaded with elaborate cold meats and expensive wines.

“He must be liberal-minded,” cried Joan, who seemed to be on the verge of something, possibly temper. “He can’t expect people suddenly to begin being Vegetarians when they’ve never been before.”

“It has been done,” said Dalroy, tranquilly, walking across to look at the table. “I say, your ascetical friends seem to have made a pretty good hole in the champagne. You may not believe it, Joan, but I haven’t touched what you call alcohol for a month.”

With which words he filled with champagne a large tumbler intended for claret cup and swallowed it at a draught.

Lady Joan Brett stood up straight but trembling.

“Now that’s really wrong, Pat,” she cried. “Oh, don’t be silly — you know I don’t care about the alcohol or all that. But you’re in the man’s house, uninvited, and he doesn’t know. That wasn’t like you.”

“He shall know, all right,” said the large man, quietly. “I know the exact price of a tumbler of that champagne.”

And he scribbled some words in pencil on the back of a bill of fare on the table, and then carefully laid three shillings on top of it.

“And there you do Philip the worst wrong of all,” cried Lady Joan, flaming white. “You know as well as I do, anyhow, that he would not take your money.” Patrick Dalroy stood looking at her for some seconds with an expression on his broad and unusually open face which she found utterly puzzling.

“Curiously enough,” he observed, at last, and with absolutely even temper, “curiously enough, it is you who are doing Philip Ivywood a wrong. I think him quite capable of breaking England or Creation. But I do honestly think he would never break his word. And what is more, I think the more arbitrary and literal his word had been, the more he would keep it.

You will never understand a man like that, till you understand that he can have devotion to a definition; even a new definition. He can really feel about an amendment to an Act of Parliament, inserted at the last moment, as you feel about England or your mother."

"Oh, don't philosophise," cried Joan suddenly. "Can't you see this has been a shock?"

"I only want you to see the point," he replied. "Lord Ivywood clearly told me, with his own careful lips, that I might go in and pay for fermented liquor in any place displaying a public sign outside. And he won't go back on that definition or on any definition. If he finds me here, he may quite possibly put me in prison on some other charge, as a thief or a vagabond, or what not. But he will not grudge the champagne. And he will accept the three shillings. And I shall honour him for his glorious consistency."

"I don't understand," said Joan, "one word of what you are talking about. Which way did you come? How can I get you away? You don't seem to grasp that you're in Ivywood House."

"You see there's a new name outside the gate," observed Patrick, conversationally, and led the lady to the end of the corridor by which he had entered and into its ultimate turret chamber.

Following his indications, Lady Joan peered a little over the edge of the window where hung the brilliant purple bird in its brilliant golden cage. Almost immediately below, outside the entrance to the half-closed stairway, stood a wooden tavern sign, as solid and still as if it had been there for centuries.

"All back at the sign of 'The Old Ship,' you see," said the Captain. "Can I offer you anything in a lady-like way?"

There was a vast impudence in the slight, hospitable movement of his hand, that disturbed Lady Joan's features with an emotion other than any that she desired to show.

"Well!" cried Patrick, with a wild geniality, "I've made you laugh again, my dear."

He caught her to him as in a whirlwind, and then vanished from the fairy turret like a blast, leaving her standing with her hand up to her wild black hair.

Chapter XIII: The Battle of the Tunnel

WHAT Joan Brett really felt, as she went back from the second tête-à-tête she had experienced in the turret, it is doubtful if anyone will ever know. But she was full of the pungent feminine instinct to “drive at practice,” and what she did clearly realise was the pencil writing Dalroy had left on the back of Lord Ivywood’s *menu*. Heaven alone knew what it was, and (as it pleased her profane temper to tell herself) she was not satisfied with Heaven alone knowing. She went swiftly back, with swishing skirts, to the table where it had been left. But her skirts fell more softly and her feet trailed slower and more in her usual manner as she came near the table. For standing at it was Lord Ivywood, reading the card with tranquil lowered eyelids, that set off perfectly the long and perfect oval of his face. He put down the card with a quite natural action; and, seeing Joan, smiled at her in his most sympathetic way.

“So you’ve come out too,” he said. “So have I; it’s really too hot for anything. Dr. Gluck is making an uncommonly good speech, but I couldn’t stop even for that. Don’t you think my eastern decorations are rather a success after all? A sort of Vegetarianism in design, isn’t it?”

He led her up and down the corridors, pointing out lemon-coloured crescents or crimson pomegranates in the scheme of ornament, with such utter detachment that they twice passed the open mouth of the hall of debate, and Joan could distinctly hear the voice of the diplomatic Gluck saying:

“Indeed, we owe our knowledge of the pollution of the pork primarily to the Jewth and not the Mothlemth. I do not thare that prejudithe against the Jewth, which ith too common in my family and all the arithtocratic and military Prutthian familieth. I think we Prutthian arithtocrats owe everything to the Jewth. The Jewth have given to our old Teutonic rugged virtueth, jutht that touch of refinement, jutht that intellectual thuperiority which — .”

And then the voice would die away behind, as Lord Ivywood lectured luxuriantly, and very well, on the peacock tail in decoration, or some more extravagant eastern version of the Greek Key. But the third time they turned, they heard the noise of subdued applause and the breaking up the meeting; and people came pouring forth.

With stillness and swiftness, Ivywood pitched on the people he wanted and held them. He button-holed Leveson and was evidently asking him to do something which neither of the two liked doing.

"If your lordship insists," she heard Leveson whispering, "of course I will go myself; but there is a great deal to be done here with your lordship's immediate matters. And if there were anyone else — ."

If Philip, Lord Ivywood, had ever looked at a human being in his life, he would have seen that J. Leveson, Secretary, was suffering from a very ancient human malady, excusable in all men and rather more excusable in one who has had his top-hat smashed over his eyes and has run for his life. As it was, he saw nothing, but merely said, "Oh, well, get someone else. What about your friend Hibbs?"

Leveson ran across to Hibbs, who was drinking another glass of champagne at one of the innumerable buffets.

"Hibbs," said Leveson, rather nervously, "will you do Lord Ivywood a favour? He says you have so much tact. It seems possible that a man may be hanging about the grounds just below that turret there. He is a man it would certainly be Lord Ivywood's public duty to put into the hands of the police, if he is there. But then, again, he is quite capable of not being there at all — I mean of having sent his message from somewhere else and in some other way. Naturally, Lord Ivywood doesn't want to alarm the ladies and perhaps turn the laugh against himself, by getting up a sort of police raid about nothing. He wants some sensible, tactful friend of his to go down and look round the place — it's a sort of disused garden — and report if there's anyone about. I'd go myself, but I'm wanted here."

Hibbs nodded, and filled another glass.

"But there's a further difficulty," went on Leveson. "He's a clever brute, it seems, a 'remarkable and a dangerous man,' were his lordship's words; and it looks as if he'd spotted a very good hiding-place, a disused tunnel leading to the sands, just beyond the disused garden and chapel. It's a smart choice, you see, for he can bolt into the woods if anyone comes from the shore, or on to the shore if anyone comes from the woods. But it would take a good time even to get the police here, and it would take ten times longer to get 'em round to the sea end of the tunnel, especially as the sea comes up to the cliffs once or twice between here and Pebblewick. So we mustn't frighten him away, or he'll get a start. If you meet anyone down there talk to him quite naturally, and come back with the news. We won't send for the police till you come. Talk as if you were just wandering like himself. His lordship wishes your presence to appear quite accidental."

"Wishes my presence to appear quite accidental," repeated Hibbs, gravely.

When the feverish Leveson had flashed off satisfied, Hibbs took a glass or two more of wine; feeling that he was going on a great diplomatic mission to please a lord. Then he went through the opening, picked his way down the stair, and somehow found his way out into the neglected garden and shrubbery.

It was already evening, and an early moon was brightening over the sunken chapel with its dragon-coloured scales of fungus. The night breeze was very fresh and had a marked effect on Mr. Hibbs. He found himself taking a meaningless pleasure in the scene; especially in one fungus that was white with brown spots. He laughed shortly, to think that it should be white with brown spots. Then he said, with carefully accurate articulation, "His lordship wishes my presence to appear quite accidental." Then he tried to remember something else that Leveson had said.

He began to wade through the waves of weed and thorn past the Chapel, but he found the soil much more uneven and obstructive than he had supposed.

He slipped, and sought to save himself by throwing one arm round a broken stone angel at a corner of the heap of Gothic fragments; but it was loose and rocked in its socket.

Mr. Hibbs presented for a moment the appearance of waltzing with the Angel in the moonlight, in a very amorous and irreverent manner. Then the statue rolled over one way and he rolled over the other, and lay on his face in the grass, making inaudible remarks. He might have lain there for some time, or at least found some difficulty in rising, but for another circumstance. The dog Quoodle, with characteristic officiousness, had followed him down the dark stairs and out of the doorway, and, finding him in this unusual posture, began to bark as if the house were on fire.

This brought a heavy human footstep from the more hidden parts of the copse; and in a minute or two the large man with the red hair was looking down at him in undisguised wonder. Hibbs said, in a muffled voice which came obscurely from under his hidden face, "Wish my presence to appear quite accidental."

"It does," said the Captain, "can I help you up? Are you hurt?"

He gently set the prostrate gentleman on his feet, and looked genuinely concerned. The fall had somewhat sobered Lord Ivywood's representative; and he really had a red graze on the left cheek that looked more ugly than it was.

"I am so sorry," said Patrick Dalroy, cordially, "come and sit down in our camp. My friend Pump will be back presently, and he's a capital doctor."

His friend Pump may or may not have been a capital doctor, but the Captain himself was certainly a most inefficient one. So small was his talent for diagnosing the nature of a disease at sight, that having given Mr. Hibbs a seat on a fallen tree by the tunnel, he proceeded to give him (in mere automatic hospitality) a glass of rum.

Mr. Hibbs's eyes awoke again, when he had sipped it, but they awoke to a new world.

"Wharever may be our invidual pinions," he said, and looked into space with an expression of humorous sagacity.

He then put his hand hazily in his pocket, as if to find some letter he had to deliver. He found nothing but his old journalistic note book, which he often carried when there was a chance of interviewing anybody. The feel of it under his fingers changed the whole attitude of his mind. He took it out and said:

"And wha' would you say of Vegetarianism, Colonel Pump?"

"I think it palls," replied the recipient of this complex title, staring.

"Sha' we say," asked Hibbs brightly, turning a leaf in his note book, "sha' we say long been strong vegetarian by conviction?"

"No; I have only once been convicted," answered Dalroy, with restraint, "and I hope to lead a better life when I come out."

"Hopes lead better life," murmured Hibbs, writing eagerly, with the wrong end of his pencil. "And wha' would you shay was best vegable food for really strong vegetarian by conviction?"

"Thistles," said the Captain, wearily. "But I don't know much about it, you know."

"Lord Ivywoo' strong veg'tarian by conviction," said Mr. Hibbs, shaking his head with unction. "Lord Ivywoo' says tact. Talk to him naturally. And so I do. That's what I do. Talk to him naturally."

Humphrey Pump came through the clearer part of the wood, leading the donkey, who had just partaken of the diet recommended to a vegetarian by conviction; the dog sprang up and ran to them. Pump was, perhaps, the most naturally polite man in the world, and said nothing. But his eyes had accepted, with one snap of surprise, the other fact, also not unconnected with diet, which had escaped Dalroy's notice when he administered rum as a restorative.

"Lord Ivywoo' says," murmured the journalistic diplomatist. "Lord Ivywoo' says, 'talk as if you were just wandering.' That's it. That's tact. That's what I've got to do — talk as if I was just wandering. Long way round to other end tunnel; sea and cliffs. Don' sphose they can swim." He seized his note book again and looked in vain for his pencil. "Good subjec' correspondence. Can policem'n swim?"

"Policemen?" said Dalroy, in a dead silence. The dog looked up, and the innkeeper did not.

"Get to Ivywoo' one thing," reasoned the diplomatist. "Get policemen beach other end other thing. No good do one thing no' do other thing, 'no goo' do other thing no' do other thing. Wish my presence appear quite accidental. Haw!"

"I'll harness the donkey," said Pump.

"Will he go through that door?" asked Dalroy, with a gesture toward the entrance of the rough boarding with which they had faced the tunnel, "or shall I smash it all at once?"

"He'll go through all right," answered Pump. "I saw to that when I made it. And I think I'll get him to the safe end of the tunnel before I load him up. The best thing you can do is to pull up one of those saplings to bar the door with. That'll delay them a minute or two; though I think we've got warning in pretty easy time."

He led his donkey to the cart, and carefully harnessed the donkey; like all men cunning in the old healthy sense he knew that the last chance of leisure ought to be leisurely, in order that it may be lucid. Then he led the whole equipment through the temporary wooden door of the tunnel, the inquisitive Quoodle, of course, following at his heels.

"Excuse me if I take a tree," said Dalroy, politely, to his guest, like a man reaching across another man for a match. And with that he rent up a young tree by its roots, as he had done in the Island of the Olives, and carried it on his shoulder, like the club of Hercules.

Up in Ivywood House Lord Ivywood had telephoned twice to Pebblewick. It was a delay he seldom suffered; and, though he never expressed impatience in unnecessary words he expressed it in unnecessary walking. He would not yet send for the police without news from his Ambassador, but he thought a preliminary conversation with some police authorities he knew well, might advance matters. Seeing Leveson rather shrunk in a corner, he wheeled round in his walk and said abruptly:

"You must go and see what has happened to Hibbs. If you have any other duties here, I authorize you to neglect them. Otherwise, I can only say—"

At this moment the telephone rang, and the impatient nobleman rushed for his delayed call with a rapidity he seldom showed. There was simply nothing for Leveson to do except to do as he was told, or be sacked. He walked swiftly toward the staircase, and only stopped once at the table where Hibbs had stood and gulped down two goblets of the same wine. But let no man attribute to Mr. Leveson the loose and luxurious social motives of Mr. Hibbs. Mr. Leveson did not drink for pleasure; in fact, he hardly knew what he was drinking. His motive was something far more simple and sincere; a sentiment forcibly described in legal phraseology as going in bodily fear.

He was partly nerved, but by no means reconciled to his adventure, when he crept carefully down the stairs and peered about the thicket for any signs of his diplomatic friend. He could find neither sight nor sound to guide him, except a sort of distant singing, which greatly increased in volume of sound as he pursued it. The first words he heard seemed to run something like —

"No more the milk of cows
Shall pollute my private house,
Than the milk of the wild mares of the Barbarian;
I will stick to port and sherry,
For they are so very, very,
So very, very, very Vegetarian."

Leveson did not know the huge and horrible voice in which these words were shouted, but he had a most strange and even sickening suspicion that he did know the voice, however altered, the quavering and rather refined voice that joined in the chorus and sang,

"Because they are so vegy,
So vegy, vegy, vegy Vegetarian."

Terror lit up his wits, and he made a wild guess at what had happened. With a gasp of relief he realised that he had now good excuse for returning to the house with the warning. He ran there like a hare, still hearing the great voice from the woods like the roaring of a lion in his ear.

He found Lord Ivywood in consultation with Dr. Gluck, and also with Mr. Bullrose the Agent, whose froglike eyes hardly seemed to have recovered yet from the fairy-tale of the flying sign-board in the English lane; but who, to do him justice, was more plucky and practical than most of Lord Ivywood's present advisers.

"I'm afraid Mr. Hibbs has inadvertently," stammered Leveson. "I'm afraid he has — I'm afraid the man is making his escape, my lord. You had better send for the police."

Ivywood turned to the agent. "You go and see what's happening," he said simply. "I will come myself when I've rung them up. And get some of the servants up with sticks and things. Fortunately the ladies have gone to bed. Hullo! Is that the Police Station?"

Bullrose went down into the shrubbery and had, for many reasons, less difficulty in crossing it than the hilarious Hibbs. The moon had increased to an almost unnatural brilliancy, so that the whole scene was like a rather silver daylight; and in this clear medium he beheld a very tall man with erect, red hair and a colossal cylinder of cheese carried under one arm, while he employed the other to wag a big forefinger at a dog with whom he was conversing.

It was the Agent's duty and desire to hold the man, whom he recognised from the sign-board mystery, in play and conversation, and prevent his final escape. But there are some people who really cannot be courteous, even when they want to be, and Mr. Bullrose was one of them.

"Lord Ivywood," he said abruptly, "wants to know what you want."

"Do not, however, fall into the common error, Quoodle," Dalroy was saying to the dog, whose unfathomable eyes were fixed on his face, "of supposing that the phrase 'good dog' is used in its absolute sense. A dog is good or bad negatively to a limited scheme of duties created by human civilization—"

"What are you doing here?" asked Mr. Bullrose.

"A dog, my dear Quoodle," continued the Captain, "cannot be either so good or bad as a man. Nay, I should go farther. I would almost say a dog cannot be so stupid as a man. He cannot be utterly wanting as a dog — as some men are as men."

"Answer me, you there!" roared the Agent.

"It is all the more pathetic," continued the Captain, to whose monologue Quoodle seemed to listen with magnetized attention. "It is all the more pathetic because this mental insufficiency is sometimes found in the good; though there are, I should imagine, at least an equal number of opposite examples. The person standing a few feet off us, for example, is both stupid and wicked. But be very careful, Quoodle, to remember that any disadvantage under which we place him should be based on the *moral* and not his *mental* defects. Should I say to you at any time, 'Go for him, Quoodle,' or 'Hold him, Quoodle,' be certain in your own mind, please, that it is solely because he is *wicked* and not because he is *stupid*, that I am entitled to do so. The fact that he is *stupid* would not justify me in saying 'hold him, Quoodle,' with the realistic intonation I now employ—"

"Curse you, call him off!" cried Mr. Bullrose, retreating, for Quoodle was coming toward him with the bulldog part of his pedigree very prominently displayed, like a pennon. "Should Mr. Bullrose find it expedient to climb a tree, or even a sign-post," proceeded Dalroy, for indeed the Agent had already clasped the pole of "The Old Ship," which was stouter than the slender trees standing just around it, "you will keep an eye on him, Quoodle, and, I doubt not, constantly remind him that it is his *wickedness*, and not, as he might hastily be inclined to suppose, *stupidity* that has placed him on so conspicuous an elevation—"

"Some of you'll wish yourself dead for this," said the Agent; who was by this time clinging to the wooden sign like a monkey on a stick, while Quoodle watched him from below with an unsated interest. "Some of you'll see something. Here comes his lordship and the police, I reckon."

"Good morning, my lord," said Dalroy, as Ivywood, paler than ever in the strong moonshine, came through the thicket toward them. It seemed to be his fate that his faultless and hueless face should always be contrasted with richer colours; and even now it was thrown up by the gorgeous diplomatic uniform of Dr. Gluck, who walked just behind him.

"I am glad to see you, my lord," said Dalroy, in a stately manner, "it is always so awkward doing business with an Agent. Especially for the Agent."

"Captain Dalroy," said Lord Ivywood, with a more serious dignity, "I am sorry we meet again like this, and such things are not of my seeking. It is only right to tell you that the police will be here in a moment."

"Quite time, too!" said Dalroy, shaking his head. "I never saw anything so disgraceful in my life. Of course, I am sorry it's a friend of yours; and I hope the police will keep Ivywood House out of the papers. But I won't be a party to one law for the rich and another for the poor, and it would be a great shame if a man in that state got off altogether merely because he had got the stuff at your house."

"I do not understand you," said Ivywood. "What are you talking of?"

"Why of him," replied the Captain, with a genial gesture toward a fallen tree trunk that lay a yard or two from the tunnel wall, "the poor chap the police are coming for."

Lord Ivywood looked at the forest log by the tunnel which he had not glanced at before, and in his pale eyes, perhaps for the first time, stood a simple astonishment.

Above the log appeared two duplicate objects, which, after a prolonged stare, he identified as the soles of a pair of patent leather shoes, offered to his gaze, as if demanding his opinion in the matter of resoling. They were all that was visible of Mr. Hibbs who had fallen backward off his woodland seat and seemed contented with his new situation.

His lordship put up the pince-nez that made him look ten years older, and said with a sharp, steely accent, "What is all this?"

The only effect of his voice upon the faithful Hibbs was to cause him to feebly wave his legs in the air in recognition of a feudal superior. He clearly considered it hopeless to attempt to get up, so Dalroy, striding across to him, lugged him up by his shirt collar and exhibited him, limp and wild-eyed to the company.

"You won't want many policemen to take him to the station," said the Captain. "I'm sorry, Lord Ivywood, I'm afraid it's no use your asking me to overlook it again. We can't afford it," and he shook his head implacably. "We've always kept a respectable house, Mr. Pump and I. 'The Old Ship' has a reputation all over the country — in quite a lot of different parts, in fact. People in the oddest places have found it a quiet, family house. Nothing gadabout in 'The Old Ship.' And if you think you can send all your staggering revellers—"

"Captain Dalroy," said Ivywood, simply, "you seem to be under a misapprehension, which I think it would be hardly honourable to leave undisturbed. Whatever these extraordinary events may mean and whatever be fitting in the case of this gentleman, when I spoke of the police coming, I meant they were coming for you and your confederate."

"For me!" cried the Captain, with a stupendous air of surprise. "Why, I have never done anything naughty in my life."

"You have been selling alcohol contrary to Clause V. of the Act of—"

“But I’ve got a sign,” cried Dalroy, excitedly, “you told me yourself it was all right if I’d got a sign. Oh, do look at our new sign! The ‘Sign of the Agile Agent.’”

Mr. Bullrose had remained silent, feeling his position none of the most dignified, and hoping his employer would go away. But Lord Ivywood looked up at him, and thought he had wandered into a planet of monsters.

As he slowly recovered himself Patrick Dalroy said briskly, “All quite correct and conventional, you see. You can’t run us in for not having a sign; we’ve rather an extra life-like one. And you can’t run us in as rogues and vagabonds either. Visible means of subsistence,” and he slapped the huge cheese under his arm with his great flat hand, so that it reverberated like a drum. “Quite visible. Perceptible,” he added, holding it out suddenly almost under Lord Ivywood’s nose. “Perceptible to the naked eye through your lordship’s eyeglasses.”

He turned abruptly, burst open the pantomime door behind him and bowled the big cheese down the tunnel with a noise like thunder, which ended in a cry of acceptation in the distant voice of Mr. Humphrey Pump. It was the last of their belongings left at this end of the tunnel, and Dalroy turned again, a man totally transfigured.

“And now, Ivywood,” he said, “what can I be charged with? Well, I have a suggestion to make. I will surrender to the police quite quietly when they come, if you will do me one favour. Let me choose my crime.”

“I don’t understand you,” answered the other coolly, “what crime? What favour?”

Captain Dalroy unsheathed the straight sword that still hung on his now shabby uniform. The slender blade sparkled splendidly in the moonlight as he pointed it straight at Dr. Gluck.

“Take away his sword from the little pawnbroker,” he said. “It’s about the length of mine; or we’ll change if you like. Give me ten minutes on that strip of turf. And then it may be, Ivywood, that I shall be removed from your public path in a way a little worthier of enemies who have once been friends, than if you tripped me up with Bow Street runners, of whose help every ancestor you have would have been ashamed. Or, on the other hand, it may be — that when the police come there will be something to arrest me for.”

There was a long silence, and the elf of irresponsibility peeped out again for an instant in Dalroy’s mind.

"Mr. Bullrose will see fair play for you, from a throne above the lists," he said. "I have already put my honour in the hands of Mr. Hibbs."

"I must decline Captain Dalroy's invitation," said Ivywood at last, in a curious tone. "Not so much because—"

Before he could proceed, Leveson came racing across the copse, hallooing, "The police are here!"

Dalroy, who loved leaving everything to the last instant, tore up the sign, with Bullrose literally hanging to it, shook him off like a ripe fruit, and then plunged into the tunnel, the clamorous Quoodle at his heels. Before even Ivywood (the promptest of his party) could reach the spot, he had clashed to the wood door and bolted it across with his wooden staple. He had not had time even to sheath his sword.

"Break down this door," said Lord Ivywood, calmly. "I noticed they haven't finished loading their cart."

Under his directions, and vastly against their will, Bullrose and Leveson lifted the tree-trunk vacated by Hibbs, and swinging it thrice as a battering-ram, burst in the door. Lord Ivywood instantly sprang into the entrance.

A voice called out to him quietly from the other end of the tunnel. There was something touching and yet terrible about a voice so human coming out of that inhuman darkness. If Philip Ivywood had been really a poet, and not rather its opposite, an aesthete, he would have known that all the past and people of England were uttering their oracle out of the cavern. As it was, he only heard a publican wanted by the police. — Yet even he paused, and indeed seemed spellbound.

"My lord, I would like a word. I learned my catechism and never was with the Radicals. I want you to look at what you've done to me. You've stolen a house that was mine as that one's yours. You've made me a dirty tramp, that was a man respected in church and market. Now you send me where I might have cells or the Cat. If I might make so bold, what do you suppose I think of you? Do you think because you go up to London and settle it with lords in Parliament and bring back a lot of papers and long words, that makes any difference to the man you do it to? By what I can see, you're just a bad and cruel master, like those God punished in the old days; like Squire Varney the weasels killed in Holy Wood. Well, parson always said one might shoot at robbers, and I want to tell your lordship," he ended respectfully, "that I have a gun."

Ivywood instantly stepped into the darkness, and spoke in a voice shaken with some emotion, the nature of which was never certainly known.

“The police are here,” he said, “but I’ll arrest you myself.”

A shot shrieked and rattled through the thousand echoes of the tunnel. Lord Ivywood’s legs doubled and twisted under him, and he collapsed on the earth with a bullet above his knee.

Almost at the same instant a shout and a bark announced that the cart had started as a complete equipage. It was even more than complete, for the instant before it moved Mr. Quoodle had sprung into it, and, as it was driven off, sat erect in it, looking solemn.

Chapter XIV: The Creature That Man Forgets

DESPITE the natural hubbub round the wound of Lord Ivywood and the difficulties of the police in finding their way to the shore, the fugitives of the Flying Inn must almost certainly have been captured but for a curious accident, which also flowed, as it happened, from the great Ivywood debate on Vegetarianism.

The comparatively late hour at which Lord Ivywood had made his discovery had been largely due to a very long speech which Joan had not heard, and which was delivered immediately before the few concluding observations she had heard from Dr. Gluck. The speech was made by an eccentric, of course. Most of those who attended, and nearly all of those who talked, were eccentric in one way or another. But he was an eccentric of great wealth and good family, an M.P., a J.P., a relation of Lady Enid, a man well known in art and letters; in short, a personality who could not be prevented from being anything he chose, from a revolutionist to a bore. Dorian Wimpole had first become famous outside his own class under the fanciful title of the Poet of the Birds. A volume of verse, expanding the several notes or cries of separate song-birds into fantastic soliloquies of these feathered philosophers, had really contained a great deal of ingenuity and elegance. Unfortunately, he was one of those who always tend to take their own fancies seriously, and in whose otherwise legitimate extravagance there is too little of the juice of jest. Hence, in his later works, when he explained “The Fable of the Angel,” by trying to prove that the fowls of the air were creatures higher than man or the anthropoids, his manner was felt to be too austere; and when he moved an amendment to Lord Ivywood’s scheme for the model village called Peaceways, urging that its houses should all follow the more hygienic architecture of nests hung in trees, many regretted that he had lost his light touch. But, when he went beyond birds and filled his poems with conjectural psychology about all the Zoological Gardens, his meaning became obscure; and Lady Susan had even described it as his bad period. It was all the more uncomfortable reading because he poured forth the imaginary hymns, love-songs and war-songs of the lower animals, without a word of previous explanation. Thus, if someone seeking for an ordinary drawing-room song came on lines that were headed “A Desert Love Song,” and which began —

“Her head is high against the stars,
Her hump is heaved in pride,”

the compliment to the lady would at first seem startling, until the reader realised that all the characters in the idyll were camels. Or, if he began a poem simply entitled, “The March of Democracy,” and found in the first lines —

“Comrades, marching evermore,
Fix your teeth in floor and door,”

he might be doubtful about such a policy for the masses; until he discovered that it was supposed to be addressed by an eloquent and aspiring rat to the social solidarity of his race. Lord Ivywood had nearly quarrelled with his poetic relative over the uproarious realism of the verses called “A Drinking Song,” until it was carefully explained to him that the drink was water, and that the festive company consisted of bisons. His vision of the perfect husband, as it exists in the feelings of the young female walrus, is thoughtful and suggestive; but would doubtless receive many emendations from anyone who had experienced those feelings. And in his sonnet called “Motherhood” he has made the young scorpion consistent and convincing, yet somehow not wholly lovable. In justice to him, however, it should be remembered that he attacked the most difficult cases on principle, declaring that there was no earthly creature that a poet should forget.

He was of the blond type of his cousin, with flowing fair hair and mustache, and a bright blue, absent-minded eye; he was very well dressed in the carefully careless manner, with a brown velvet jacket and the image on his ring of one of those beasts men worshipped in Egypt.

His speech was graceful and well worded and enormously long, and it was all about an oyster. He passionately protested against the suggestion of some humanitarians who were vegetarians in other respects, but maintained that organisms so simple might fairly be counted as exceptions. Man, he said, even at his miserable best, was always trying to excommunicate some one citizen of the cosmos, to forget some one creature that he should remember. Now, it seemed that creature was the oyster. He gave a long account of the tragedy of the oyster, a really imaginative and picturesque account; full of fantastic fishes, and coral crags crawling and climbing, and bearded creatures streaking the seashore and the green darkness in the cellars of the sea.

“What a horrid irony it is,” he cried, “that this is the only one of the lower creatures whom we call a Native! We speak of him, and of him alone as if he were a native of the country. Whereas, indeed, he is an exile in the universe. What can be conceived more pitiful than the eternal frenzy of the impotent amphibian? What is more terrible than the tear of an oyster? Nature herself has sealed it with the hard seal of eternity. The creature man forgets bears against him a testimony that cannot be forgotten. For the tears of widows and of captives are wiped away at last like the tears of children. They vanish like the mists of morning or the small pools after a flood. But the tear of the oyster is a pearl."

The Poet of the Birds was so excited with his own speech that, after the meeting, he walked out with a wild eye to the motor car, which had been long awaiting him, the chauffeur giving some faint signs of relief.

"Toward home, for the present," said the poet, and stared at the moon with an inspired face.

He was very fond of motoring, finding it fed him with inspirations; and he had been doing it from an early hour that morning, having enjoyed a slightly lessened sleep. He had scarcely spoken to anybody until he spoke to the cultured crowd at Ivywood. He did not wish to speak to anyone for many hours yet. His ideas were racing. He had thrown on a fur coat over his velvet jacket, but he let it fly open, having long forgotten the coldness in the splendour of the moonstruck night. He realised only two things: the swiftness of his car and the swiftness of his thoughts. He felt, as it were, a fury of omniscience; he seemed flying with every bird that sped or spun above the woods, with every squirrel that had leapt and tumbled within them, with every tree that had swung under and sustained the blast.

Yet in a few moments he leaned forward and tapped the glass frontage of the car, and the chauffeur suddenly squaring his shoulders, jarringly stopped the wheels. Dorian Wimpole had just seen something in the clear moonlight by the roadside, which appealed both to this and to the other side of his tradition; something that appealed to Wimpole as well as to Dorian.

Two shabby looking men, one in tattered gaiters and the other in what looked like the remains of fancy dress with the addition of hair, of so wild a red that it looked like a wig, were halted under the hedge, apparently loading a donkey cart. At least two rounded, rudely cylindrical objects, looking more or less like tubs, stood out in the road beside the wheels, along with a sort of loose wooden post that lay along the road beside them. As a matter of fact, the man in the old gaiters had just been feeding and watering the donkey, and was now adjusting its harness more easily. But

Dorian Wimpole naturally did not expect that sort of thing from that sort of man. There swelled up in him the sense that his omnipotence went beyond the poetical; that he was a gentleman, a magistrate, an M.P. and J.P., and so on. This callousness or ignorance about animals should not go on while he was a J.P.; especially since Ivywood's last Act. He simply strode across to the stationary cart and said:

"You are overloading that animal, and it is forfeited. And you must come with me to the police station."

Humphrey Pump, who was very considerate to animals, and had always tried to be considerate to gentlemen, in spite of having put a bullet into one of their legs, was simply too astounded and distressed to make any answer at all. He moved a step or two backward and stared with brown, blinking eyes at the poet, the donkey, the cask, the cheese, and the sign-board lying in the road.

But Captain Dalroy, with the quicker recovery of his national temperament, swept the poet and magistrate a vast fantastic bow and said with agreeable impudence, "interested in donkeys, no doubt?"

"I am interested in all things men forget," answered the poet, with a fine touch of pride, "but mostly in those like this, that are most easily forgotten."

Somehow from those two first sentences Pump realised that these two eccentric aristocrats had unconsciously recognised each other. The fact that it was unconscious seemed, somehow, to exclude him all the more. He stirred a little the moonlit dust of the road with his rather dilapidated boots and eventually strolled across to speak to the chauffeur.

"Is the next police station far from here?" he asked.

The chauffeur answered with one syllable of which the nearest literal rendering is "dno." Other spellings have been attempted, but the sentiment expressed is that of agnosticism.

But something of special brutality of abbreviation made the shrewd, and therefore sensitive, Mr. Pump look at the man's face. And he saw it was not only the moonlight that made it white.

With that dumb delicacy that was so English in him, Pump looked at the man again, and saw he was leaning heavily on the car with one arm, and saw that the arm was shaking. He understood his countrymen enough to know that whatever he said he must say in a careless manner.

"I hope it's nearer to your place. You must be a bit done up."

"Oh hell!" said the driver and spat on the road.

Pump was sympathetically silent, and Mr. Wimpole’s chauffeur broke out incoherently, as if in another place.

“Blarsted beauties o’ dibrike and no breakfast. Blarsted lunch Hivywood and no lunch. Blarsted black everlastin’ hours artside while ‘e ‘as ‘is cike an’ champine. And then it’s a dornkey.”

“You don’t mean to say,” said Pump in a very serious voice, “that you’ve had no food today?”

“Ow no!” replied the cockney, with the irony of the deathbed. “Ow, of course not.”

Pump strolled back into the road again, picked up the cheese in his left hand, and landed it on the seat beside the driver. Then his right hand went to one of his large loose equivocal pockets, and the blade of a big jack-knife caught and recaught the steady splendours of the moon.

The driver stared for several instants at the cheese, with the knife shaking in his hand. Then he began to hack it, and in that white witchlike light the happiness of his face was almost horrible.

Pump was wise in all such things, and knew that just as a little food will sometimes prevent sheer intoxication, so a little stimulant will sometimes prevent sudden and dangerous indigestion. It was practically impossible to make the man stop eating cheese. It was far better to give him a very little of the rum, especially as it was very good rum, and better than anything he could find in any of the public-houses that were still permitted. He walked across the road again and picked up the small cask, which he put on the other side of the cheese and from which he filled, in his own manner, the little cup he carried in his pocket.

But at the sight of this the cockney’s eyes lit at once with terror and desire.

“But yer cawnt do it,” he whispered hoarsely, “its the pleece. It’s gile for that, with no doctor’s letter nor sign-board nor nothink.”

Mr. Humphrey Pump made yet another march back into the road. When he got there he hesitated for the first time, but it was quite clear from the attitude of the two insane aristocrats who were arguing and posturing in the road that they would notice nothing except each other. He picked the loose post off the road and brought it to the car, humorously propping it erect in the aperture between keg and cheese.

The little glass of rum was wavering in the poor chauffeur’s hand exactly as the big knife had done, but when he looked up and actually saw the wooden sign above him, he seemed not so much to pluck up his courage, but rather to drag up some forgotten courage from the foundations of some unfathomable sea. It was indeed the forgotten courage of the people.

He looked once at the bleak, black pinewoods around him and took the mouthful of golden liquid at a gulp, as if it were a fairy potion. He sat silent; and then, very slowly, a sort of stony glitter began to come into his eyes. The brown and vigilant eyes of Humphrey Pump were studying him with some anxiety or even fear. He did look rather like a man enchanted or turned to stone. But he spoke very suddenly.

“The blighter!” he said. “I’ll give ‘im ‘ell. I’ll give ‘im bleeding ‘ell. I’ll give ‘im somethink wot ‘e don’t expect.”

“What do you mean?” asked the inn-keeper.

“Why,” answered the chauffeur, with abrupt composure, “I’ll give ‘im a little dornkey.”

Mr. Pump looked troubled. “Do you think,” he observed, affecting to speak lightly, “that he’s fit to be trusted even with a little donkey?”

“Ow, yes,” said the man. “He’s very amiable with donkeys, and donkeys we is to be amiable with ‘im.”

Pump still looked at him doubtfully, appearing or affecting not to follow his meaning. Then he looked equally anxiously across at the other two men; but they were still talking. Different as they were in every other way, they were of the sort who forget everything, class, quarrel, time, place and physical facts in front of them, in the lust of lucid explanation and equal argument.

Thus, when the Captain began by lightly alluding to the fact that after all it was his donkey, since he had bought it from a tinker for a just price, the police station practically vanished from Wimpole’s mind — and I fear the donkey-cart also. Nothing remained but the necessity of dissipating the superstition of personal property.

“I own nothing,” said the poet, waving his hands outward, “I own nothing save in the sense that I own everything. All depends whether wealth or power be used for or against the higher purposes of the cosmos.”

“Indeed,” replied Dalroy, “and how does your motor car serve the higher purposes of the cosmos?”

“It helps me,” said Mr. Wimpole, with honourable simplicity, “to produce my poems.”

"And if it could be used for some higher purpose (if such a thing could be), if some new purpose had come into the cosmos's head by accident," inquired the other, "I suppose it would cease to be your property."

"Certainly," replied the dignified Dorian. "I should not complain. Nor have you any title to complain when the donkey ceases to be yours when you depress it in the cosmic scale."

"What makes you think," asked Dalroy, "that I wanted to depress it?"

"It is my firm belief," replied Dorian Wimpole, sternly, "that you wanted to ride on it" (for indeed the Captain had once repeated his playful gesture of putting his large leg across). "Is not that so?"

"No," answered the Captain, innocently, "I never ride on a donkey. I'm afraid of it."

"Afraid of a donkey!" cried Wimpole, incredulously.

"Afraid of an historical comparison," said Dalroy.

There was a short pause, and Wimpole said coolly enough, "Oh, well, we've outlived those comparisons."

"Easily," answered the Irish Captain. "It is wonderful how easily one outlives someone else's crucifixion."

"In this case," said the other grimly, "I think it is the donkey's crucifixion."

"Why, you must have drawn that old Roman caricature of the crucified donkey," said Patrick Dalroy, with an air of some wonder. "How well you have worn; why, you look quite young! Well, of course, if this donkey is crucified, he must be uncrucified. But are you quite sure," he added, very gravely, "that you know how to uncrucify a donkey? I assure you it's one of the rarest of human arts. All a matter of knack. It's like the doctors with the rare diseases, you know; the necessity so seldom arises. Granted that, by the higher purposes of the cosmos, I am unfit to look after this donkey, I must still feel a faint shiver of responsibility in passing him on to you. Will you understand this donkey? He is a delicate-minded donkey. He is a complex donkey. How can I be certain that, on so short an acquaintance, you will understand every shade of his little likes and dislikes?"

The dog Quoodle, who had been sitting as still as the sphinx under the shadow of the pine trees, waddled out for an instant into the middle of the road and then returned. He ran out when a slight noise as of rotatory grinding was heard; and ran back when it had ceased. But Dorian Wimpole was much too keen on his philosophical discovery to notice either dog or wheel.

"I shall not sit on its back, anyhow," he said proudly, "but if that were all it would be a small matter. It is enough for you that you have left it in the hands of the only person who could really understand it; one who searches the skies and seas so as not to neglect the smallest creature."

"This is a very curious creature," said the Captain, anxiously, "he has all sorts of odd antipathies. He can't stand a motor car, for instance, especially one that throbs like that while it's standing still. He doesn't mind a fur coat so much, but if you wear a brown velvet jacket under it, he bites you. And you must keep him out of the way of a certain kind of people. I don't suppose you've met them; but they always think that anybody with less than two hundred a year is drunk and very cruel, and that anybody with more than two thousand a year is conducting the Day of Judgment. If you will keep our dear donkey from the society of such persons — Hullo! Hullo! Hullo!"

He turned in genuine disturbance, and dashed after the dog, who had dashed after the motor car and jumped inside. The Captain jumped in after the dog, to pull him out again. But before he could do so, he found the car was flying along too fast for any such leap. He looked up and saw the sign of "The Old Ship" erect in the front like a rigid banner; and Pump, with his cask and cheese, sitting solidly beside the driver.

The thing was more of an earthquake and transformation to him even than to any of the others; but he rose waveringly to his feet and shouted out to Wimpole.

"You've left it in the right hands. I've never been cruel to a motor."

In the moonlight of the magic pine-wood far behind, Dorian and the donkey were left looking at each other.

To the mystical mind, when it is a mind at all (which is by no means always the case), there are no two things more impressive and symbolical than a poet and a donkey. And the donkey was a very genuine donkey, and the poet was a very genuine poet; however lawfully he might be mistaken for the other animal at times. The interest of the donkey in the poet will never be known. The interest of the poet in the donkey was perfectly genuine; and survived even that appalling private interview in the owlish secrecy of the woods.

But I think even the poet would have been enlightened if he had seen the white, set, frantic face of the man on the driver’s seat of his vanishing motor. If he had seen it he might have remembered the name, or, perhaps, even begun to understand the nature of a certain animal which is neither the donkey nor the oyster; but the creature whom man has always found it easiest to forget, since the hour he forgot God in a Garden.

Chapter XV: The Songs of the Car Club

MORE than once as the car flew through black and silver fairylands of fir wood and pine wood, Dalroy put his head out of the side window and remonstrated with the chauffeur without effect. He was reduced at last to asking him where he was going.

"I'm goin' 'ome," said the driver in an undecipherable voice. "I'm a goin' 'ome to my mar."

"And where does she live?" asked Dalroy, with something more like diffidence than he had ever shown before in his life.

"Wiles," said the man, "but I ain't seen 'er since I was born. But she'll do."

"You must realise," said Dalroy, with difficulty, "that you may be arrested — it's the man's own car; and he's left behind with nothing to eat, so to speak."

"'E's got 'is dornkey," grunted the man. "Let the stinker eat 'is dornkey, with thistle sauce. 'E would if 'e was as 'ollow as I was."

Humphrey Pump opened the glass window that separated him from the rear part of the car, and turned to speak to his friend over his square elbow and shoulder.

"I'm afraid," he said, "he won't stop for anything just yet. He's as mad as Moody's aunt, as they say."

"Do they say it?" asked the Captain, with a sort of anxiety. "They never said it in Ithaca."

"Honestly, I think you'd better leave him alone," answered Pump, with his sagacious face. "He'd just run us into a Scotch Express like Dandy Mutton did, when they said he was driving carelessly. We can send the car back to Ivywood somehow later on, and really, I don't think it'll do the gentleman any harm to spend a night with a donkey. The donkey might teach him something, I tell you."

"It's true he denied the Principle of Private Property," said Dalroy, reflectively, "but I fancy he was thinking of a plain house fixed on the ground. A house on wheels, such as this, he might perhaps think a more permanent possession. But I never understand it;" and again he passed a weary palm across his open forehead. "Have you ever noticed, Hump, what is really odd about those people?"

The car shot on amid the comfortable silence of Pump, and then the Irishman said again:

"That poet in the pussy-cat clothes wasn't half bad. Lord Ivywood isn't cruel; but he's inhuman. But that man wasn't inhuman. He was ignorant, like most cultured fellows. But what's odd about them is that they try to be simple and never clear away a single thing that's complicated. If they have to choose between beef and pickles, they always abolish the beef. If they have to choose between a meadow and a motor, they forbid the meadow. Shall I tell you the secret? These men only surrender the things that bind them to other men. Go and dine with a temperance millionaire and you won't find he's abolished the hors d'oeuvres or the five courses or even the coffee. What he's abolished is the port and sherry, because poor men like that as well as rich. Go a step farther, and you won't find he's abolished the fine silver forks and spoons, but he's abolished the meat, because poor men like meat — when they can get it. Go a step farther, and you won't find he goes without gardens or gorgeous rooms, which poor men can't enjoy at all. But you will find he boasts of early rising, because sleep is a thing poor men can still enjoy. About the only thing they can still enjoy. Nobody ever heard of a modern philanthropist giving up petrol or typewriting or troops of servants. No, no! What he gives up must be some simple and universal thing. He will give up beef or beer or sleep — because these pleasures remind him that he is only a man."

Humphrey Pump nodded, but still answered nothing; and the voice of the sprawling Dalroy took one of its upward turns of a sort of soaring flippancy; which commonly embodied itself in remembering some song he had composed.

"Such," he said, "was the case of the late Mr. Mandragon, so long popular in English aristocratic society as a bluff and simple democrat from the West, until he was unfortunately sand-bagged by six men whose wives he had had shot by private detectives, on his incautiously landing on American soil.

"Mr. Mandragon the Millionaire, he wouldn't have wine or wife,
He couldn't endure complexity; he lived the simple life;
He ordered his lunch by megaphone in manly, simple tones,
And used all his motors for canvassing voters, and twenty telephones;
Besides a dandy little machine,

Cunning and neat as ever was seen,
With a hundred pulleys and cranks between,
Made of iron and kept quite clean,
To hoist him out of his healthful bed on every day of his *life,*
And wash him and brush him and shave him and dress him *to live the Simple Life.*
"Mr. Mandragon was most refined and quietly, neatly dressed,
Say all the American newspapers that know refinement *best;*
Quiet and neat the hair and hat, and the coat quiet and neat,
A trouser worn upon either leg, while boots adorned the feet;
And not, as anyone might expect,
A Tiger Skin, all striped and specked,
And a Peacock Hat with the tail erect,
A scarlet tunic with sunflowers decked — That might have had a more marked effect,
And pleased the pride of a weaker man that yearned for *wine or wife;*
But fame and the flagon for Mr. Mandragon obscured the *Simple Life.*
"Mr. Mandragon the Millionaire, I am happy to say, is dead.
He enjoyed a quiet funeral in a crematorium shed,
And he lies there fluffy and soft and grey and certainly *quite refined,*
When he might have rotted to flowers and fruit with Adam *and all mankind.*
Or been eaten by bears that fancy blood,
Or burnt on a big tall tower of wood,
In a towering flame as a heathen should,
Or even sat with us here at food,
Merrily taking twopenny rum and cheese with a pocket *knife,*
But these were luxuries lost for him that lived for the *Simple Life."*

Mr. Pump had made many attempts to arrest this song, but they were as vain as all attempts to arrest the car. The angry chauffeur seemed, indeed, rather inspired to further energy by the violent vocal noises behind; and Pump again found it best to fall back on conversation.

"Well, Captain," he said, amicably. "I can't quite agree with you about those things. Of course, you can trust foreigners too much as poor Thompson did; but then you can go too far the other way. Aunt Sarah lost a thousand pounds that way. I told her again and again he wasn't a nigger, but she wouldn't believe me. And, of course, that was just the kind of thing to offend an ambassador if he was an Austrian. It seems to me, Captain, you aren't quite fair to these foreign chaps. Take these Americans, now! There were many Americans went by Pebblewick, you may suppose. But in all the lot there was never a bad lot; never a nasty American, nor a stupid American — nor, well, never an American that I didn't rather like."

"I know," said Dalroy, "you mean there was never an American who did not appreciate 'The Old Ship.'"

"I suppose I do mean that," answered the inn-keeper, "and somehow, I feel 'The Old Ship' might appreciate the American too."

"You English are an extraordinary lot," said the Irishman, with a sudden and sombre quietude. "I sometimes feel you may pull through after all."

After another silence he said, "You're always right, Hump, and one oughtn't to think of Yankees like that. The rich are the scum of the earth in every country. And a vast proportion of the real Americans are among the most courteous, intelligent, self-respecting people in the world. Some attribute this to the fact that a vast proportion of the real Americans are Irishmen."

Pump was still silent, and the Captain resumed in a moment.

"All the same," he said, "it's very hard for a man, especially a man of a small country like me, to understand how it must feel to be an American; especially in the matter of nationality. I shouldn't like to have to write the American National Anthem, but fortunately there is no great probability of the commission being given. The shameful secret of my inability to write an American patriotic song is one that will die with me."

"Well, what about an English one," said Pump, sturdily. "You might do worse, Captain."

"English, you bloody tyrant," said Patrick, indignantly. "I could no more fancy a song by an Englishman than you could one by that dog."

Mr. Humphrey Pump gravely took the paper from his pocket, on which he had previously inscribed the sin and desolation of grocers, and felt in another of his innumerable pockets for a pencil.

“Hullo,” cried Dalroy. “Are you going to have a shy at the Ballad of Quoodle?”

Quoodle lifted his ears at his name. Mr. Pump smiled a slight and embarrassed smile. He was secretly proud of Dalroy’s admiration for his previous literary attempts and he had some natural knack for verse as a game, as he had for all games; and his reading, though desultory, had not been merely rustic or low.

“On condition,” he said, deprecatingly, “that you write a song for the English.”

“Oh, very well,” said Patrick, with a huge sigh that really indicated the very opposite of reluctance. “We must do something till the thing stops, I suppose, and this seems a blameless parlour game. ‘Songs of the Car Club.’ Sounds quite aristocratic.”

And he began to make marks with a pencil on the fly-leaf of a little book he had in his pocket — Wilson’s *Noctes Ambrosianae*. Every now and then, however, he looked up and delayed his own composition by watching Pump and the dog, whose proceedings amused him very much. For the owner of “The Old Ship” sat sucking his pencil and looking at Mr. Quoodle with eyes of fathomless attention. Every now and then he slightly scratched his brown hair with the pencil, and wrote down a word. And the dog Quoodle, with that curious canine power of either understanding or most brazenly pretending to understand what is going on, sat erect with his head at an angle, as if he were sitting for his portrait.

Hence it happened that though Pump’s poem was a little long, as are often the poems of inexperienced poets, and though Dalroy’s poem was very short (being much hurried toward the end) the long poem was finished some time before the short one.

Therefore it was that there was first produced for the world the song more familiarly known as “No Noses,” or more correctly called “The Song of Quoodle.” Part of it ran eventually thus: —

“They haven’t got no noses
The fallen sons of Eve,
Even the smell of roses
Is not what they supposes,
But more than mind discloses,
And more than men believe.
“They haven’t got no noses,
They cannot even tell
When door and darkness closes
The park a Jew encloses,

Where even the Law of Moses
Will let you steal a smell;
“The brilliant smell of water,
The brave smell of a stone,
The smell of dew and thunder
And old bones buried under,
Are things in which they blunder
And err, if left alone.
“The wind from winter forests,
The scent of scentless flowers,
The breath of bride’s adorning,
The smell of snare and warning,
The smell of Sunday morning,
God gave to us for ours.”

* * * * * *

“And Quoodle here discloses
All things that Quoodle can;
They haven’t got no noses,
They haven’t got no noses,
And goodness only knowses
The Noselessness of Man.”

This poem also shows traces of haste in its termination, and the present editor (who has no aim save truth) is bound to confess that parts of it were supplied in the criticisms of the Captain, and even enriched (in later and livelier circumstances) by the Poet of the Birds himself. At the actual moment the chief features of this realistic song about dogs was a crashing chorus of “Bow-wow, wow,” begun by Mr. Patrick Dalroy; but immediately imitated (much more successfully) by Mr. Quoodle. In the face of all this Dalroy suffered some real difficulty in fulfilling the bargain by reading out his much shorter poem about what he imagined an Englishman might feel. Indeed there was something very rough and vague in his very voice as he read it out; as of one who had not found the key to his problem. The present compiler (who has no aim save truth) must confess that the verses ran as follows: —

“St. George he was for England,
And before he killed the dragon
He drank a pint of English ale
Out of an English flagon.
For though he fast right readily
In hair-shirt or in mail,
It isn’t safe to give him cakes
Unless you give him ale.
“St. George he was for England,
And right gallantly set free
The lady left for dragon’s meat
And tied up to a tree;

But since he stood for England
And knew what England means,
Unless you give him bacon,
You mustn't give him beans.
"St. George he was for England,
And shall wear the shield he wore
When we go out in armour,
With the battle-cross before;
But though he is jolly company
And very pleased to dine,
It isn't safe to give him nuts
Unless you give him wine.

"Very philosophical song that," said Dalroy, shaking his head solemnly, "full of deep thought. I really think that is about the truth of the matter, in the case of the Englishman. Your enemies say you're stupid, and you boast of being illogical — which is about the only thing you do that really is stupid. As if anybody ever made an Empire or anything else by saying that two and two make five. Or as if anyone was ever the stronger for *not* understanding anything — if it were only tip-cat or chemistry. But this *is* true about you Hump. You English are supremely an artistic people, and therefore you go by associations, as I said in my song. You won't have one thing without the other thing that goes with it. And as you can't imagine a village without a squire and parson, or a college without port and old oak, you get the reputation of a Conservative people. But it's because you're sensitive, Hump, not because you're stupid, that you won't part with things. It's lies, lies and flattery they tell you, Hump, when they tell you you're fond of compromise. I tell ye, Hump, every real revolution is a compromise. D'ye think Wolfe Tone or Charles Stuart Parnell never compromised? But it's just because you're afraid of a compromise that you won't have a revolution. If you really overhauled 'The Old Ship' — or Oxford — you'd have to make up your mind what to take and what to leave, and it would break your heart, Humphrey Pump."

He stared in front of him with a red and ruminant face, and at length added, somewhat more gloomily,

"This aesthetic way we have, Hump, has only two little disadvantages which I will now explain to you. The first is exactly what has sent us flying in this contraption. When the beautiful, smooth, harmonious thing you've made is worked by a new type, in a new spirit, then I tell you it would be better for you a thousand times to be living under the thousand paper constitutions of Condorcet and Sieyès. When the English oligarchy is run by an Englishman who hasn’t got an English mind — then you have Lord Ivywood and all this nightmare, of which God could only guess the end.”

The car had beaten some roods of dust behind it, and he ended still more darkly:

“And the other disadvantage, my amiable aesthete, is this. If ever, in blundering about the planet, you come on an island in the Atlantic — Atlantis, let us say — which won’t accept *all* your pretty picture — to which you can’t give everything — *why* you will probably decide to give nothing. You will say in your hearts: ‘Perhaps they will starve soon’; and you will become, for that island, the deafest and the most evil of all the princes of the earth.”

It was already daybreak, and Pump, who knew the English boundaries almost by intuition, could tell even through the twilight that the tail of the little town they were leaving behind was of a new sort, the sort to be seen in the western border. The chauffeur’s phrase about his mother might merely have been a music-hall joke; but certainly he had driven darkly in that direction.

White morning lay about the grey stony streets like spilt milk. A few proletarian early risers, wearier at morning than most men at night, seemed merely of opinion that it was no use crying over it. The two or three last houses, which looked almost too tired to stand upright, seemed to have moved the Captain into another sleepy explosion.

“There are two kinds of idealists, as everybody knows — or must have thought of. There are those who idealize the real and those who (precious seldom) realise the ideal. Artistic and poetical people like the English generally idealize the real. This I have expressed in a song, which—”

“No, really,” protested the innkeeper, “really now, Captain—”

“This I have expressed in a song,” repeated Dalroy, in an adamantine manner, “which I will now sing with every circumstance of leisure, loudness, or any other—”

He stopped because the flying universe seemed to stop. Charging hedgerows came to a halt, as if challenged by the bugle. The racing forests stood rigid. The last few tottering houses stood suddenly at attention. For a noise like a pistol-shot from the car itself had stopped all that race, as a pistol-shot might start any other.

The driver clambered out very slowly, and stood about in various tragic attitudes round the car. He opened an unsuspected number of doors and windows in the car, and touched things and twisted things and felt things.

“I must back as best I can to that there garrige, sir,” he said, in a heavy and husky tone they had not heard from him before.

Then he looked round on the long woods and the last houses, and seemed to gnaw his lip, like a great general who has made a great mistake. His brow seemed as black as ever, yet his voice, when he spoke again, had fallen many further degrees toward its dull and daily tone.

“Yer see, this is a bit bad,” he said. “It’ll be a beastly job even at the best plices, if I’m gettin’ back at all.”

“Getting back,” repeated Dalroy, opening the blue eyes of a bull. “Back where?”

“Well, yer see,” said the chauffeur, reasonably, “I was bloody keen to show ‘im it was me drove the car and not ‘im. By a bit o’ bad luck, I done damage to ‘is car. Well — if *you* can stick in ‘is car—”

Captain Patrick Dalroy sprang out of the car so rapidly that he almost reeled and slipped upon the road. The dog sprang after him, barking furiously.

“Hump,” said Patrick, quietly. “I’ve found out everything about you. I know what always bothered me about the Englishman.”

Then, after an instant’s silence, he said, “That Frenchman was right who said (I forget how he put it) that you march to Trafalgar Square to rid yourself of your temper; not to rid yourself of your tyrant. Our friend was quite ready to rebel, rushing away. To rebel sitting still was too much for him. Do you read *Punch*? I am sure you do. Pump and *Punch* must be almost the only survivors of the Victorian Age. Do you remember an old joke in an excellent picture, representing two ragged Irishmen with guns, waiting behind a stone wall to shoot a landlord? One of the Irishmen says the landlord is late, and adds, ‘I hope no accident’s happened to the poor gentleman.’ Well, it’s all perfectly true; I knew that Irishman intimately, but I want to tell you a secret about him. He was an Englishman.”

The chauffeur had backed with breathless care to the entrance of the garage, which was next door to a milkman’s or merely separated from it by a black and lean lane, looking no larger than the crack of a door. It must, however, have been larger than it looked, because Captain Dalroy disappeared down it.

He seemed to have beckoned the driver after him; at any rate that functionary instantly followed. The functionary came out again in an almost guilty haste, touching his cap and stuffing loose papers into his pocket. Then the functionary returned yet again from what he called the “garrige,” carrying larger and looser things over his arm.

All this did Mr. Humphrey Pump observe, not without interest. The place, remote as it was, was evidently a rendez-vous for motorists. Otherwise a very tall motorist, throttled and masked in the most impenetrable degree, would hardly have strolled up to speak to him. Still less would the tall motorist have handed him a similar horrid disguise of wraps and goggles, in a bundle over his arm. Least of all would any motorist, however tall, have said to him from behind the cap and goggles, “Put on these things, Hump, and then we’ll go into the milk shop. I’m waiting for the car. Which car, my seeker after truth? Why the car I’m going to buy for you to drive.”

The remorseful chauffeur, after many adventures, did actually find his way back to the little moonlit wood where he had left his master and the donkey. But his master and the donkey had vanished.

Chapter XVI: The Seven Moods of Dorian

THAT timeless clock of all lunatics, which was so bright in the sky that night, may really have had some elfin luck about it, like a silver penny. Not only had it initiated Mr. Hibbs into the mysteries of Dionysius, and Mr. Bullrose into the arboreal habits of his ancestors, but one night of it made a very considerable and rather valuable change in Mr. Dorian Wimpole, the Poet of the Birds. He was a man neither foolish nor evil, any more than Shelley; only a man made sterile by living in a world of indirectness and insincerity, with words rather than with things. He had not had the smallest intention of starving his chauffeur; he did not realise that there was worse spiritual murder in merely forgetting him. But as hour after hour passed over him, alone with the donkey and the moon, he went through a raging and shifting series of frames of mind, such as his cultured friends would have described as moods.

The First Mood, I regret to say, was one of black and grinding hatred. He had no notion of the chauffeur's grievance, and could only suppose he had been bribed or intimidated by the demonic donkey-torturers. But Mr. Wimpole was much more capable at that moment of torturing a chauffeur than Mr. Pump had ever been of torturing a donkey; for no sane man can hate an animal. He kicked the stones in the road, sending them flying into the forest, and wished that each one of them was a chauffeur. The bracken by the roadside he tore up by the roots, as representing the hair of the chauffeur, to which it bore no resemblance. He hit with his fist such trees, as, I suppose, seemed in form and expression most reminiscent of the chauffeur; but desisted from this, finding that in this apparently one-sided contest the tree had rather the best of it. But the whole wood and the whole world had become a kind of omnipresent and pantheistic chauffeur, and he hit at him everywhere.

The thoughtful reader will realise that Mr. Wimpole had already taken a considerable upward stride in what he would have called the cosmic scale. The next best thing to really loving a fellow creature is really hating him: especially when he is a poorer man separated from you otherwise by mere social stiffness. The desire to murder him is at least an acknowledgment that he is alive. Many a man has owed the first white gleams of the dawn of Democracy in his soul to a desire to find a stick and beat the butler. And we have it on the unimpeachable local authority of Mr. Humphrey Pump that Squire Merriman chased his librarian through three villages with a horse-pistol; and was a Radical ever after.

His rage also did him good merely as a relief, and he soon passed into a second and more positive mood of meditation.

“The damnable monkeys go on like this,” he muttered, “and then they call a donkey one of the Lower Animals. Ride on a donkey would he? I’d like to see the donkey riding on him for a bit. Good old man.”

The patient ass turned mild eyes on him when he patted it, and Dorian Wimpole discovered, with a sort of subconscious surprise, that he really was fond of the donkey. Deeper still in his subliminal self he knew that he had never been fond of an animal before. His poems about fantastic creatures had been quite sincere, and quite cold. When he said he loved a shark, he meant he saw no reason for hating a shark, which was right enough. There is no reason for hating a shark, however much reason there may be for avoiding one. There is no harm in a craken if you keep it in a tank — or in a sonnet.

But he also realised that his love of creatures had been turned round and was working from the other end. The donkey was a companion, and not a monstrosity. It was dear because it was near, not because it was distant. The oyster had attracted him because it was utterly unlike a man; unless it be counted a touch of masculine vanity to grow a beard. The fancy is no idler than that he had himself used, in suggesting a sort of feminine vanity in the permanence of a pearl. But in that maddening vigil among the mystic pines, he found himself more and more drawn toward the donkey, because it was more like a man than anything else around him; because it had eyes to see, and ears to hear — and the latter even unduly developed.

“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,” he said, scratching those grey hairy flappers with affection. “Haven’t you lifted your ears toward Heaven? And will you be the first to hear the Last Trumpet?”

The ass rubbed his nose against him with what seemed almost like a human caress. And Dorian caught himself wondering how a caress from an oyster could be managed. Everything else around him was beautiful, but inhuman. Only in the first glory of anger could he really trace in a tall pine-tree the features of an ex-taxi-cabman from Kennington. Trees and ferns had no living ears that they could wag nor mild eyes that they could move. He patted the donkey again.

But the donkey had reconciled him to the landscape, and in his third mood he began to realise how beautiful it was. On a second study, he was not sure it was so inhuman. Rather he felt that its beauty at least was half human; that the aureole of the sinking moon behind the woods was chiefly lovely because it was like the tender-coloured aureole of an early saint; and that the young trees were, after all, noble because they held up their heads like virgins. Cloudily there crowded into his mind ideas with which it was imperfectly familiar, especially an idea which he had heard called "The Image of God." It seemed to him more and more that all these things, from the donkey to the very docks and ferns by the roadside, were dignified and sanctified by their partial resemblance to something else. It was as if they were baby drawings: the wild, crude sketches of Nature in her first sketch-books of stone.

He had flung himself on a pile of pine-needles to enjoy the gathering darkness of the pinewoods as the moon sank behind them. There is nothing more deep and wonderful than really impenetrable pinewoods where the nearer trees show against the more shadowy; a tracery of silver upon grey and of grey upon black.

It was by this time, in pure pleasure and idleness that he picked up a pine-needle to philosophise about it.

"Think of sitting on needles!" he said. "Yet, I suppose this is the sort of needle that Eve, in the old legend, used in Eden. Aye, and the old legend was right, too! Think of sitting on all the needles in London! Think of sitting on all the needles in Sheffield! Think of sitting on any needles, except on all the needles of Paradise! Oh, yes, the old legend was right enough. The very needles of God are softer than the carpets of men."

He took a pleasure in watching the weird little forest animals creeping out from under the green curtains of the wood. He reminded himself that in the old legend they had been as tame as the ass, as well as being as comic. He thought of Adam naming the animals, and said to a beetle, "I should call *you* Budger."

The slugs gave him great entertainment, and so did the worms. He felt a new and realistic interest in them which he had not known before; it was, indeed, the interest that a man feels in a mouse in a dungeon; the interest of any man tied by the leg and forced to see the fascination of small things. Creatures of the wormy kind, especially, crept out at very long intervals; yet he found himself waiting patiently for hours for the pleasure of their acquaintance. One of them rather specially arrested his eye, because it was a little longer than most worms and seemed to be turning its head in the direction of the donkey’s left foreleg. Also, it had a head to turn, which most worms have not.

Dorian Wimpole did not know much about exact Natural History, except what he had once got up very thoroughly from an encyclopaedia for the purposes of a sympathetic *vilanelle*. But as this information was entirely concerned with the conjectural causes of laughter in the Hyena, it was not directly helpful in this case. But though he did not know much Natural History, he knew some. He knew enough to know that a worm ought not to have a head, and especially not a squared and flattened head, shaped like a spade or a chisel. He knew enough to know that a creeping thing with a head of that pattern survives in the English country sides, though it is not common. In short, he knew enough to step across the road and set a sharp and savage boot-heel on the neck and spine of the creature, breaking it into three black bits that writhed once more before they stiffened.

Then he gave out a great explosive sigh. The donkey, whose leg had been in such danger, looked at the dead adder with eyes that had never lost their moony mildness. Even Dorian, himself, looked at it for a long time, and with feelings he could neither arrest nor understand, before he remembered that he had been comparing the little wood to Eden.

“And even in Eden,” he said at last; and then the words of Fitzgerald failed upon his lips.

And while he was warring with such words and thoughts, something happened about him and behind him; something he had written about a hundred times and read about a thousand; something he had never seen in his life. It flung faintly across the broad foliage a wan and pearly light far more mysterious than the lost moonshine. It seemed to enter through all the doors and windows of the woodland, pale and silent but confident, like men that keep a tryst; soon its white robes had threads of gold and scarlet: and the name of it was morning.

For some time past, loud and in vain, all the birds had been singing to the Poet of the Birds. But when that minstrel actually saw broad daylight breaking over wood and road, the effect on him was somewhat curious. He stood staring at it in gaping astonishment, until it had fulfilled the fulness of its shining fate; and the pine-cones and the curling ferns and the live donkey and the dead viper were almost as distinct as they could be at noon, or in a

Preraphaelite picture. And then the Fourth Mood fell upon him like a bolt from the blue, and he strode across and took the donkey’s bridle, as if to lead it along.

“Damn it all,” he cried, in a voice as cheerful as the cockcrow that rang recently from the remote village, “it’s not everybody who’s killed a snake.” Then he added, reflectively, “I bet Dr. Gluck never did. Come along, donkey, let’s have some adventures.”

The finding and fighting of positive evil is the beginning of all fun — and even of all farce. All the wild woodland looked jolly now the snake was killed. It was one of the fallacies of his literary clique to refer all natural emotions to literary names, but it might not untruly be said that he had passed out of the mood of Maeterlinck into the mood of Whitman, and out of the mood of Whitman into the mood of Stevenson. He had not been a hypocrite when he asked for gilded birds of Asia or purple polypi out of the Southern Seas; he was not a hypocrite now, when he asked for mere comic adventures along a common English road. It was his misfortune and not his fault if his first adventure was his last; and was much too comic to laugh at.

Already the wan morning had warmed into a pale blue and was spotted with those little plump pink clouds which must surely have been the origin of the story that pigs might fly. The insects of the grass chattered so cheerfully that every green tongue seemed to be talking. The skyline on every side was broken only by objects that encouraged such swashbucklering comedy. There was a windmill that Chaucer’s Miller might have inhabited or Cervantes’s champion charged. There was an old leaden church spire that might have been climbed by Robert Clive. Away toward Pebblewick and the sea, there were the two broken stumps of wood which Humphrey Pump declares to this day to have been the stands for an unsuccessful children’s swing; but which tourists always accept as the remains of the antique gallows. In the gaiety of such surroundings, it is small wonder if Dorian and the donkey stepped briskly along the road. The very donkey reminded him of Sancho Panza.

He did not wake out of this boisterous reverie of the white road and the wind till a motor horn had first hooted and then howled, till the ground had shaken with the shock of a stoppage, and till a human hand fell heavily and tightly on his shoulder. He looked up and saw the complete costume of a Police Inspector. He did not worry about the face. And there fell on him the Fifth, or Unexpected Mood, which is called by the vulgar Astonishment.

In despair he looked at the motor car itself that had anchored so abruptly under the opposite hedge. The man at the steering wheel was so erect and unresponsive that Dorian felt sure he was feasting his eyes on yet another policeman. But on the seat behind was a very different figure, a figure that baffled him all the more because he felt certain he had seen it somewhere. The figure was long and slim, with sloping shoulders, and the costume, which was untidy, yet contrived to give the impression that it was tidy on other occasions. The individual had bright yellow hair, one lock of which stuck straight up and was exalted, like the little horn in his favourite scriptures. Another tuft of it, in a bright but blinding manner, fell across and obscured the left optic, as in literal fulfilment of the parable of a beam in the eye. The eyes, with or without beams in them, looked a little bewildered, and the individual was always nervously resettling his necktie. For the individual went by the name of Hibbs, and had only recently recovered from experiences wholly new to him.

“What on earth do you want?” asked Wimpole of the policeman.

His innocent and startled face, and perhaps other things about his appearance, evidently caused the Inspector to waver.

“Well, it’s about this ‘ere donkey, sir,” he said.

“Do you think I stole it?” cried the indignant aristocrat. “Well, of all the mad worlds! A pack of thieves steal my Limousine, I save their damned donkey’s life at the risk of my own — and I’m run in for stealing.”

The clothes of the indignant aristocrat probably spoke louder than his tongue; the officer dropped his hand, and after consulting some papers in his hand, walked across to consult with the unkempt gentleman in the car.

“That seems to be a similar cart and donkey,” Dorian heard him saying, “but the clothes don’t seem to fit your description of the men you saw.”

Now, Mr. Hibbs had extremely vague and wild recollections of the men he saw; he could not even tell what he had done and what he had merely dreamed. If he had spoken sincerely, he would have described a sort of green nightmare of forests, in which he found himself in the power of an ogre about twelve feet high, with scarlet flames for hair and dressed rather like Robin Hood. But a long course of what is known as “keeping the party together” had made it as unnatural to him to tell anyone (even himself) what he really thought about anything, as it would have been to spit — or to sing. He had at present only three motives and strong resolves: (1) not to admit that he had been drunk; (2) not to let anyone escape whom Lord Ivywood might possibly want to question; and (3) not to lose his reputation for sagacity and tact.

"This party has a brown velvet suit, you see, and a fur overcoat," the Inspector continued, "and in the notes I have from you, you say the man wore a uniform."

"When we say uniform," said Mr. Hibbs, frowning intellectually, "when we say *uniform*, of course — we must distinguish some of our friends who don't quite see eye to eye with us, you know," and he smiled with tender leniency, "some of our friends wouldn't like it called a *uniform* perhaps. But — of course — well, it wasn't a police uniform, for instance. Ha! Ha!"

"I should hope not," said the official, shortly.

"So — in a way — however," said Hibbs, clutching his verbal talisman at last, "it might be brown velvet in the dark."

The Inspector replied to this helpful suggestion with some wonder. "But it was a moon, like limelight," he protested.

"Yars, yars," cried Hibbs, in a high tone that can only be described as a hasty drawl. "Yars — discolours everything of course. The flowers and things—"

"But look here," said the Inspector, "you said the principal man's hair was red."

"A blond type! A blond type!" said Hibbs, waving his hand with a solemn lightness. "Reddish, yellowish, brownish sort of hair, you know." Then he shook his head and said with the heaviest solemnity the word was capable of carrying, "Teutonic, purely Teutonic."

The Inspector began to feel some wonder that, even in the confusion following on Lord Ivywood's fall, he had been put under the guidance of this particular guide. The truth was that Leveson, once more masking his own fears under his usual parade of hurry, had found Hibbs at a table by an open window, with wild hair and sleepy eyes, picking himself up with some sort of medicine. Finding him already fairly clear-headed in a dreary way, he had not scrupled to use the remains of his bewilderment to despatch him with the police in the first pursuit. Even the mind of a semi-recovered drunkard, he thought, could be trusted to recognise anyone so unmistakable as the Captain.

But, though the diplomatist's debauch was barely over, his strange, soft fear and cunning were awake. He felt fairly certain the man in the fur coat had something to do with the mystery, as men with fur coats do not commonly wander about with donkeys. He was afraid of offending Lord Ivywood, and at the same time, afraid of exposing himself to a policeman.

“You have large discretion,” he said, gravely. “Very right you should have large discretion in the interests of the public. I think you would be quite authorised, for the present, in preventing the man’s escape.”

“And the other man?” inquired the officer, with knitted brow. “Do you suppose he has escaped?”

“The *other* man,” repeated Hibbs However, regarding the distant windmill through half-closed lids, as if this were a new fine shade introduced into an already delicate question.

“Well, hang it all,” said the police officer, “you must know whether there were two men or one.”

Gradually it dawned, in a grey dawn of horror, over the brain of Hibbs that this was what he specially couldn’t know. He had always heard, and read in comic papers, that a drunken man “sees double” and beholds two lamp-posts, one of which is (as the Higher Critic would have said) purely subjective. For all he knew (being a mere novice) inebriation might produce the impression of the two men of his dream-like adventure, when in truth there had only been one.

“Two men, you know — one man,” he said with a sort of moody carelessness. “Well we can go into their numbers later; they can’t have a very large following.” Here he shook his head very firmly. “Quite impossible. And as the late Lord Goschen used to say, ‘You can prove anything by statistics.’”

And here came an interruption from the other side of the road.

“And how long am I to wait here for you and your Goschens, you silly goat,” were the intemperate wood-notes issuing from the Poet of the Birds. “I’m shot if I’ll stand this! Come along, donkey, and let’s pray for a better adventure next time. These are very inferior specimens of your own race.”

And seizing the bridle of the ass again, he strode past them swiftly, and almost as if urging the animal to a gallop.

Unfortunately this disdainful dash for liberty was precisely what was wanting to weigh down the rocking intelligence of the Inspector on the wrong side. If Wimpole had stood still a minute or two longer, the official, who was no fool, might have ended in disbelieving Hibbs’s story altogether. As it was, there was a scuffle, not without blows on both sides, and eventually the Honourable Dorian Wimpole, donkey and all, was marched off to the village, in which there was a Police Station; in which was a temporary cell; in which a Sixth Mood was experienced.

His complaints, however, were at once so clamorous and so convincing, and his coat was so unquestionably covered with fur, that after some questioning and cross purposes they agreed to take him in the afternoon to Ivywood House, where there was a magistrate incapacitated by a shot only recently extracted from his leg.

They found Lord Ivywood lying on a purple ottoman, in the midst of his Chinese puzzle of oriental apartments. He continued to look away as they entered, as if expecting, with Roman calm, the entrance of a recognised enemy. But Lady Enid Wimpole, who was attending to the wants of the invalid, gave a sharp cry of astonishment; and the next moment the three cousins were looking at each other. One could almost have guessed they were cousins, all being (as Mr. Hibbs subtly put it) a blond type. But two of the blond types expressed amazement, and one blond type merely rage.

“I am sorry, Dorian,” said Ivywood, when he had heard the whole story. “These fanatics are capable of anything, I fear, and you very rightly resent their stealing your car—”

“You are wrong, Philip,” answered the poet, emphatically. “I do not even faintly resent their stealing my car. What I do resent is the continued existence on God’s earth of this Fool” (pointing to the serious Hibbs) “and of that Fool” (pointing to the Inspector) “and — yes, by thunder, of *that* Fool, too” (and he pointed straight at Lord Ivywood). “And I tell you frankly, Philip, if there really are, as you say, two men who are bent on smashing your schemes and making your life a hell — I am very happy to put my car at their disposal. And now I’m off.”

“You’ll stop to dinner?” inquired Ivywood, with frigid forgiveness.

“No, thanks,” said the disappearing bard, “I’m going up to town.”

The Seventh Mood of Dorian Wimpole had a grand finale at the Café Royal, and consisted largely of oysters.

Chapter XVII: The Poet in Parliament

DURING the singular entrance and exit of Dorian Wimpole, M.P., J.P., etc., Lady Joan was looking out of the magic casements of that turret room which was now literally, and not only poetically, the last limit of Ivywood House. The old broken hole and black staircase up which the lost dog Quoodle used to come and go, had long ago been sealed up and cemented with a wall of exquisite Eastern workmanship. All through the patterns Lord Ivywood had preserved and repeated the principle that no animal shape must appear. But, like all lucid dogmatists, he perceived all the liberties his dogma allowed him. And he had irradiated this remote end of Ivywood with sun and moon and solar and starry systems, with the Milky Way for a dado and a few comets for comic relief. The thing was well done of its kind (as were all the things that Philip Ivywood got done for him); and if all the windows of the turret were closed with their peacock curtains, a poet with anything like a Hibbsian appreciation of the family champagne might almost fancy he was looking out across the sea on a night crowded with stars. And (what was yet more important) even Misysra (that exact thinker) could not call the moon a live animal without falling into idolatry.

But Joan, looking out of real windows on a real sky and sea, thought no more about the astronomical wall-paper than about any other wall-paper. She was asking herself in sullen emotionalism, and for the thousandth time, a question she had never been able to decide. It was the final choice between an ambition and a memory. And there was this heavy weight in the scale: that the ambition would probably materialise, and the memory probably wouldn't. It has been the same weight in the same scale a million times since Satan became the prince of this world. But the evening stars were strengthening over the old sea-shore, and they also wanted weighing like diamonds.

As once before at the same stage of brooding, she heard behind her the swish of Lady Enid's skirts, that never came so fast save for serious cause.

"Joan! Please do come! Nobody but you, I do believe, could move him." Joan looked at Lady Enid and realised that the lady was close on crying. She turned a trifle pale and asked quietly for the question. "Philip says he's going to London now, with that leg and all," cried Enid, "and he won't let us say a word."

“But how did it all happen?” asked Joan.

Lady Enid Wimpole was quite incapable of explaining how it all happened, so the task must for the moment devolve on the author. The simple fact was that Ivywood in the course of turning over magazines on his sofa, happened to look at a paper from the Midlands.

“The Turkish news,” said Mr. Leveson, rather nervously, “is on the other side of the page.”

But Lord Ivywood continued to look at the side of the paper that did not contain the Turkish news, with the same dignity of lowered eyelids and unconscious brow with which he had looked at the Captain’s message when Joan found him by the turret.

On the page covered merely with casual, provincial happenings was a paragraph, “Echo of Pebblewick Mystery. Reported Reappearance of the Vanishing Inn.” Underneath was printed, in smaller letters:

“An almost incredible report from Wyddington announces that the mysterious ‘Sign of the Old Ship’ has once more been seen in this country; though it has long been relegated by scientific investigators to the limbo of old rustic superstitions. According to the local version, Mr. Simmons, a dairyman of Wyddington, was serving in his shop when two motorists entered, one of them asking for a glass of milk. They were in the most impenetrable motoring panoply, with darkened goggles and waterproof collars turned up, so that nothing can be recalled of them personally, except that one was a person of unusual stature. In a few moments, this latter individual went out of the shop again and returned with a miserable specimen out of the street, one of the tattered loafers that linger about our most prosperous towns, tramping the streets all night and even begging in defiance of the police. The filth and disease of the creature were so squalid that Mr. Simmons at first refused to serve him with the glass of milk which the taller motorist wished to provide for him. At length, however, Mr. Simmons consented, and was immediately astonished by an incident against which he certainly had a more assured right to protest.

“The taller motorist, saying to the loafer, ‘but, man, you’re blue in the face,’ made a species of signs to the smaller motorist, who thereupon appears to have pierced a sort of cylindrical trunk or chest that seemed to be his only luggage, and drawn from it a few drops of a yellow liquid which he deliberately dropped into the ragged creature’s milk. It was afterward discovered to be rum, and the protests of Mr. Simmons may be imagined.

The tall motorist, however, warmly defended his action, having apparently some wild idea that he was doing an act of kindness. ‘Why, I found the man nearly fainting,’ he said. ‘If you’d picked him off a raft, he couldn’t be more collapsed with cold and sickness; and if you’d picked him off a raft you’d have given him rum — yes, by St. Patrick, if you were a bloody pirate and made him walk the plank afterward.’ Mr. Simmons replied with dignity, that he did not know how it was with rafts, and could not permit such language in his shop. He added that he would lay himself open to a police prosecution if he permitted the consumption of alcohol in his shop; since he did not display a sign. The motorist then made the amazing reply, ‘But you *do* display a sign, you jolly old man. Did you think I couldn’t find my way to the sign of The Old Ship, you sly boots?’ Mr. Simmons was now fully convinced of the intoxication of his visitors, and refusing a glass of rum rather boisterously offered him, went outside his shop to look round for a policeman. To his surprise he found the officer engaged in dispersing a considerable crowd, which was staring up at some object behind him. On looking round (he states in his deposition) he ‘saw what was undoubtedly one of the low tavern signs at one time common in England.’ He was wholly unable to explain its presence outside his premises, and as it undoubtedly legalised the motorist’s action, the police declined to move in the matter.

“Later. The two motorists have apparently left the town, unmolested, in a small second-hand two-seater. There is no clue to their destination, except it be indicated by a single incident. It appears that when they were waiting for the second glass of milk, one of them drew attention to a milk can of a shape seemingly unfamiliar to him, which was, of course, the Mountain Milk now so much recommended by doctors. The taller motorist (who seemed in every way strangely ignorant of modern science and social life) asked his companion where it came from, receiving, of course, the reply that it is manufactured in the model village of Peaceways, under the personal superintendence of its distinguished and philanthropic inventor, Dr. Meadows. Upon this the taller person, who appeared highly irresponsible, actually bought the whole can; observing, as he tucked it under his arm, that it would help him to remember the address.

“Later. Our readers will be glad to hear that the legend of ‘The Old Ship’ sign has once more yielded to the wholesome scepticism of science. Our representative reached Wyddington after the practical jokers, or whatever they were, had left; but he searched the whole frontage of Mr. Simmons's shop, and we are in a position to assure the public that there is no trace of the alleged sign."

Lord Ivywood laid down the newspaper and looked at the rich and serpentine embroideries on the wall with the expression that a great general might have if he saw a chance of really ruining his enemy, if he would also ruin all his previous plan of campaign. His pallid and classic profile was as immovable as a cameo; but anyone who had known him at all would have known that his brain was going like a motor car that has broken the speed limit long ago.

Then he turned his head and said, "Please tell Hicks to bring round the long blue car in half an hour; it can be fitted up for a sofa. And ask the gardener to cut a pole of about four feet nine inches, and put a cross-piece for a crutch. I'm going up to London to-night."

Mr. Leveson's lower jaw literally fell with astonishment.

"The Doctor said three weeks," he said. "If I may ask it, where are you going?"

"St. Stephens, Westminster," answered Ivywood.

"Surely," said Mr. Leveson, "I could take a message."

"You could take a message," assented Ivywood, "I'm afraid they would not allow you to make a speech."

It was a moment or two afterward that Enid Wimpole had come into the room, and striven in vain to shake his decision. Then it was that Joan had been brought out of the turret and saw Philip standing, sustained upon a crutch of garden timber; and admired him as she had never admired him before. While he was being helped downstairs, while he was being propped in the car with such limited comfort as was possible, she did really feel in him something worthy of his ancient roots, worthy of such hills and of such a sea. For she felt God's wind from nowhere which is called the Will; and is man's only excuse upon this earth. In the small toot of the starting motor she could hear a hundred trumpets, such as might have called her ancestors and his to the glories of the Third Crusade.

Such imaginary military honours were not, at least in the strategic sense, undeserved. Lord Ivywood really had seen the whole map of the situation in front of him, and swiftly formed a plan to meet it, in a manner not unworthy of Napoleon. The realities of the situation unrolled themselves before him, and his mind was marking them one by one as with a pencil.

First, he knew that Dalroy would probably go to the Model Village. It was just the sort of place he would go to. He knew Dalroy was almost constitutionally incapable of not kicking up some kind of row in a place of that kind.

Second, he knew that if he missed Dalroy at this address, it was very likely to be his last address; he and Mr. Pump were quite clever enough to leave no more hints behind.

Third, he guessed, by careful consideration of map and clock, that they could not get to so remote a region in so cheap a car under something like two days, nor do anything very conclusive in less than three. Thus, he had just time to turn round in.

Fourth, he realised that ever since that day when Dalroy swung round the sign-board and smote the policeman into the ditch, Dalroy had swung round the Ivywood Act on Lord Ivywood. He (Lord Ivywood) had thought, and might well have thought rightly, that by restricting the old sign-posts to a few places so select that they can afford to be eccentric, and forbidding such artistic symbols to all other places, he could sweep fermented liquor for all practical purposes out of the land. The arrangement was exactly that at which all such legislation is consciously or unconsciously aiming. A sign-board could be a favour granted by the governing class to itself. If a gentleman wished to claim the liberties of a Bohemian, the path would be open. If a Bohemian wished to claim the liberties of a gentleman, the path would be shut. So, gradually, Lord Ivywood had thought, the old signs which can alone sell alcohol, will dwindle down to mere curiosities, like Audit Ale or the Mead that may still be found in the New Forest. The calculation was by no means unstatesmanlike. But, like many other statesmanlike calculations, it did not take into account the idea of dead wood walking about. So long as his flying foes might set up their sign anywhere, it mattered little whether the result was enjoyment or disappointment for the populace. In either case it must mean constant scandal or riot. If there was one thing worse than the appearance of “The Old Ship” it was its disappearance.

He realised that his own law was letting them loose every time; for the local authorities hesitated to act on the spot, in defiance of a symbol now so exclusive and therefore impressive. He realised that the law must be altered. Must be altered at once. Must be altered, if possible, before the fugitives broke away from the Model Village of Peaceways.

He realised that it was Thursday. This was the day on which any private member of Parliament could introduce any private bill of the kind called “non-contentious,” and pass it without a division, so long as no particular member made any particular fuss. He realised that it was improbable that any particular member would make any particular fuss about Lord Ivywood’s own improvement on Lord Ivywood’s own Act.

Finally, he realised that the whole case could be met by so slight an improvement as this. Change the words of the Act (which he knew by heart, as happier men might know a song): “If such sign be present liquids containing alcohol can be sold on the premises,” to these other words: “Liquids containing alcohol can be sold, if previously preserved for three days on the premises”; it was mate in a few moves. Parliament could never reject or even examine so slight an emendation. And the revolution of “The Old Ship” and the late King of Ithaca would be crushed for ever.

It does undoubtedly show, as we have said, something Napoleonic in the man’s mind that the whole of this excellent and even successful plan was complete long before he saw the great glowing clock on the towers of Westminster; and knew he was in time.

It was unfortunate, perhaps, that about the same time, or not long after, another gentleman of the same rank, and indirectly of the same family, having left the restaurant in Regent Street and the tangle of Piccadilly, had drifted serenely down Whitehall, and had seen the same great golden goblin’s eye on the tall tower of St. Stephen.

The Poet of the Birds, like most aesthetes, had known as little of the real town as he had of the real country. But he had remembered a good place for supper; and as he passed certain great cold clubs, built of stone and looking like Assyrian Sarcophagi, he remembered that he belonged to many of them. And so when he saw afar off, sitting above the river, what has been very erroneously described as the best club in London, he suddenly remembered that he belonged to that too. He could not at the moment recall what constituency in South England it was that he sat for; but he knew he could walk into the place if he wanted to. He might not so have expressed the matter, but he knew that in an oligarchy things go by respect for persons and not for claims; by visiting cards and not by voting cards. He had not been near the place for years, being permanently paired against a famous Patriot who had accepted an important government appointment in a private madhouse. Even in his silliest days, he had never pretended to feel any respect for modern politics, and made all haste to put his "leaders" and the mad patriot's "leaders" on the well selected list of the creatures whom man forgets. He had made one really eloquent speech in the House (on the subject of gorillas), and then found he was speaking against his party. It was an indescribable sort of place, anyhow. Even Lord Ivywood did not go to it except to do some business that could be done nowhere else; as was the case that night.

Ivywood was what is called a peer by courtesy; his place was in the Commons, and for the time being on the Opposition side. But, though he visited the House but seldom, he knew far too much about it to go into the Chamber itself. He limped into the Smoking Room (though he did not smoke), procured a needless cigarette and a much-needed sheet of note-paper, and composed a curt but careful note to the one member of the government whom he knew must be in the House. Having sent it up to him, he waited.

Outside, Mr. Dorian Wimpole also waited, leaning on the parapet of Westminster Bridge and looking down the river. He was becoming one with the oysters in a more solemn and solid sense than he had hitherto conceived possible, and also with a strictly Vegetarian beverage which bears the noble and starry name of Nuits. He felt at peace with all things, even in a manner with politics. It was one of those magic hours of evening when the red and golden lights of men are already lit along the river, and look like the lights of goblins, but daylight still lingers in a cold and delicate green. He felt about the river something of that smiling and glorious sadness which two Englishmen have expressed under the figure of the white wood of an old ship fading like a phantom; Turner, in painting, and Henry Newbolt, in poetry. He had come back to earth like a man fallen from the moon; he was at bottom not only a poet but a patriot, and a patriot is always a little sad. Yet his melancholy was mixed up with that immutable yet meaningless faith which few Englishmen, even in modern times, fail to feel at the unexpected sight either of Westminster or of that height on which stands the temple of St. Paul.

"While flows the sacred river,
While stands the sacred hill,"

he murmured in some schoolboy echo of the ballad of Lake Regillus,

"While flows the sacred river,
While stands the sacred hill,
The proud old pantaloons and nincompoops,
Who yawn at the very length of their own lies

in that accursed sanhedrim where
people put each other's hats on in a poisonous
room with no more windows than hell
Shall have such honour still."

Relieved by this rendering of Macaulay in the style known among his cultured friends as *vers libre,* or poesy set free from the shackles of formal metre, he strolled toward the members' entrance and went in.

Lacking Lord Ivywood's experience, he strolled into the Common's Chamber itself and sat down on a green bench, under the impression that the House was not sitting. He was, however, gradually able to distinguish some six or eight drowsy human forms from the seats on which they sat; and to hear a senile voice with an Essex accent, saying, all on one note, and without beginning or end, in a manner which it is quite impossible to punctuate,

". . . no wish at all that this proposal should be regarded except in the right way and have tried to put it in the right way and cannot think the honourable member was altogether adding to his reputation in putting it in what those who think with me must of course consider the wrong way and I for one am free to say that if in his desire to settle this great question he takes this hasty course and this revolutionary course about slate pencils he may not be able to prevent the extremists behind him from applying it to lead pencils and while I should be the last to increase the heat and the excitement and the personalities of this debate if I could possibly help it I must confess that in my opinion the honourable gentleman has himself encouraged that heat and personality in a manner that he now doubtless regrets I have no desire to use abusive terms indeed you Mr. Speaker would not allow me of course to use abusive terms but I must tell the honourable member face to face that the perambulators with which he has twitted me cannot be germane to this discussion I should be the last person. . . ."

Dorian Wimpole had softly risen to go, when he was arrested by the sight of someone sliding into the House and handing a note to the solitary young man with heavy eyelids who was at that moment governing all England from the Treasury Bench. Seeing him go out, Dorian had a sickening sweetness of hope (as he might have said in his earlier poems), that something intelligible might happen after all, and followed him out almost with alacrity.

The solitary and sleepy governor of Great Britain went down into the lower crypts of its temple of freedom and turned into an apartment where

Wimpole was astonished to see his cousin Ivywood sitting at a little table with a large crutch leaning beside him, as serene as Long John Silver. The young man with the heavy eyelids sat down opposite him and they had a conversation which Wimpole, of course, did not hear. He withdrew into an adjoining room where he managed to procure coffee and a liqueur; an excellent liqueur which he had forgotten and of which he had more than one glass.

But he had so posted himself that Ivywood could not come out without passing him, and he waited for what might happen with exquisite patience. The only thing that seemed to him queer was that every now and then a bell rang in several rooms at once. And whenever the bell rang, Lord Ivywood nodded, as if he were part of the electrical machinery. And whenever Lord Ivywood nodded the young man turned and sped upstairs like a mountaineer, returning in a short time to resume the conversation. On the third occasion the poet began to observe that many others from the other rooms could be heard running upstairs at the sound of this bell, and returning with the slightly less rapid step which expresses relief after a duty done. Yet did he not know that this duty was Representative Government; and that it is thus that the cry of Cumberland or Cornwall can come to the ears of an English King.

Suddenly the sleepy young man sprang erect, uninspired by any bell, and strode out once more. The poet could not help hearing him say as he left the table, jotting down something with a pencil: “Alcohol can be sold if previously preserved for three days on the premises. I think we can do it, but you can’t come on for half an hour.”

Saying this, he darted upstairs again, and when Dorian saw Ivywood come out laboriously, afterward, on his large country crutch, he had exactly the same revulsion in his favour that Joan had had. Jumping up from his table, which was in one of the private dining-rooms, he touched the other on the elbow and said:

“I want to apologise to you, Philip, for my rudeness this afternoon. Honestly, I am sorry. Pinewoods and prison-cells try a man’s temper, but I had no rag of excuse for not seeing that for neither of them were you to blame. I’d no notion you were coming up to town tonight; with your leg and all. You mustn’t knock yourself up like this. Do sit down a minute.”

It seemed to him that the bleak face of Philip softened a little; how far he really softened will never be known until such men as he are understood by their fellows. It is certain that he carefully unhooked himself from his crutch and sat down opposite his cousin. Whereupon his cousin struck the table so that it rang like a dinner-bell and called out, “Waiter!” as if he were in a crowded restaurant. Then, before Lord Ivywood could protest, he said:

“It’s awfully jolly that we’ve met. I suppose you’ve come up to make a speech. I *should* like to hear it. We haven’t always agreed; but, by God, if there’s anything good left in literature it’s your speeches reported in a newspaper. That thing of yours that ended, ‘death and the last shutting of the iron doors of defeat’ — Why you must go back to Strafford’s last speech for such English. Do let me hear your speech! I’ve got a seat upstairs, you know.”

“If you wish it,” said Ivywood hurriedly, “but I shan’t make much of a speech to-night.” And he looked at the wall behind Wimpole’s head with thunderous wrinkles thickening on his brow. It was essential to his brilliant and rapid scheme, of course, that the Commons should make no comment at all on his little alteration in the law.

An attendant hovered near in response to the demand for a waiter, and was much impressed by the presence and condition of Lord Ivywood. But as that exalted cripple resolutely refused anything in the way of liquor, his cousin was so kind as to have a little more himself, and resumed his remarks.

“It’s about this public-house affair of yours, I suppose. I’d like to hear you speak on that. P’raps I’ll speak myself. I’ve been thinking about it a good deal all day, and a good deal of last night, too. Now, here’s what I should say to the House, if I were you. To begin with, can you abolish the public-house? Are you *important* enough now to abolish the public-house? Whether it’s right or wrong, can you in the long run prevent haymakers having ale any more than you can prevent me having this glass of Chartreuse?”

The attendant, hearing the word, once more drew near; but heard no further order; or, rather, the orders he heard were such as he was less able to cope with.

“Remember the curate!” said Dorian, abstractedly shaking his head at the functionary, “remember the sensible little High-Church curate, who when asked for a Temperance Sermon preached on the text ‘Suffer us not to be overwhelmed in the water-floods.’ Indeed, indeed, Philip, you are in deeper waters than you know. *You* will abolish ale! *You* will make Kent forget hop-poles, and Devonshire forget cider! The fate of the Inn is to be settled in that hot little room upstairs! Take care its fate and yours are not settled in the Inn. Take care Englishmen don't sit in judgment on you as they do on many another corpse at an inquest — at a common public-house! Take care that the one tavern that is really neglected and shut up and passed like a house of pestilence is not the tavern in which I drink to-night, and that merely because it is the worst tavern on the King's highway. Take care this place where we sit does not get a name like any pub where sailors are hocussed or girls debauched. That is what I shall say to them," said he, rising cheerfully, "that's what I shall say. See you to it," he cried with sudden passion and apparently to the waiter, "see you to it if the sign that is destroyed is not the sign of 'The Old Ship' but the sign of the Mace and Bauble, and, in the words of a highly historical brewer, if we see a dog bark at your going."

Lord Ivywood was observing him with a deathly quietude; another idea had come into his fertile mind. He knew his cousin, though excited, was not in the least intoxicated; he knew he was quite capable of making a speech and even a good one. He knew that any speech, good or bad, would wreck his whole plan and send the wild inn flying again. But the orator had resumed his seat and drained his glass, passing a hand across his brow. And he remembered that a man who keeps a vigil in a wood all night and drinks wine on the following evening is liable to an accident that is not drunkenness, but something much healthier.

"I suppose your speech will come on pretty soon," said Dorian, looking at the table. "You'll let me know when it does, of course. Really and truly, I don't want to miss it. And I've forgotten all the ways here, and feel pretty tired. You'll let me know?"

"Yes," said Lord Ivywood.

Stillness fell along all the rooms until Lord Ivywood broke it by saying:

"Debate is a most necessary thing; but there are times when it rather impedes than assists parliamentary government."

He received no reply. Dorian still sat as if looking at the table, but his eyelids had lightly fallen; he was asleep. Almost at the same moment the Member of Government, who was nearly asleep, appeared at the entrance of the long room and made some sort of weary signal.

Philip Ivywood raised himself on his crutch and stood for a moment looking at the sleeping man. Then he and his crutch trailed out of the long room, leaving the sleeping man behind. Nor was that the only thing that he left behind. He also left behind an unlighted cigarette and his honour and all the England of his father's; everything that could really distinguish that high house beside the river from any tavern for the hocussing of sailors. He went upstairs and did his business in twenty minutes in the only speech he had ever delivered without any trace of eloquence. And from that hour forth he was the naked fanatic; and could feed on nothing but the future.

Chapter XVIII: The Republic of Peaceways

IN a hamlet round about Windermere, let us say, or somewhere in Wordsworth’s country, there could be found a cottage, in which could be found a cottager. So far all is as it should be; and the visitor would first be conscious of a hearty and even noisy elderly man, with an apple face and a short white beard. This person would then loudly proffer to the visitor the opportunity of seeing his father, a somewhat more elderly man, with a somewhat longer white beard, but still “up and about.” And these two together would then initiate the neophyte into the joys of the society of a grandfather, who was more than a hundred years old, and still very proud of the fact.

This miracle, it seemed, had been worked entirely on milk. The subject of this diet the oldest of the three men continued to discuss in enormous detail. For the rest, it might be said that his pleasures were purely arithmetical. Some men count their years with dismay, and he counted his with a juvenile vanity. Some men collect stamps or coins, and he collected days. Newspaper men interviewed him about the historic times through which he had lived, without eliciting anything whatever; except that he had apparently taken to an exclusive milk diet at about the age when most of us leave it off. Asked if he was alive in 1815, he said that was the very year he found it wasn’t any milk, but must be Mountain Milk, like Dr. Meadows says. Nor would his calculating creed of life have allowed him to understand you if you had said that in a meadowland oversea that lies before the city of Brussels, boys of his old school in that year gained the love of the gods and died young.

It was the philanthropic Dr. Meadows, of course, who discovered this deathless tribe, and erected on it the whole of his great dietetic philosophy, to say nothing of the houses and dairies of Peaceways. He attracted many pupils and backers among the wealthy and influential; young men who were, so to speak, training for extreme old age, infant old men, embryo nonagenarians. It would be an exaggeration to say that they watched joyfully for the first white hair as Fascination Fledgeby watched for his first whisker; but it is quite true to say that they seemed to have scorned the beauty of woman and the feasting of friends and, above all, the old idea of death with glory; in comparison with this vision of the sports of second childhood.

Peaceways was in its essential plan much like what we call a Garden City; a ring of buildings where the work people did their work, with a pretty ornamental town in the centre, where they lived in the open country outside. This was no doubt much healthier than the factory system in the great towns and may have partly accounted for the serene expression of Dr. Meadows and his friends, if any part of the credit can be spared from the splendours of Mountain Milk. The place lay far from the common highways of England, and its inhabitants were enabled to enjoy their quiet skies and level woods almost undisturbed, and fully absorb whatever may be valuable in the Meadows method and view; until one day a small and very dirty motor drove into the middle of their town. It stopped beside one of those triangular islets of grass that are common at forked roads, and two men in goggles, one tall and the other short, got out and stood on the central space of grass, as if they were buffoons about to do tricks. As, indeed, they were.

Before entering the town they had stopped by a splendid mountain stream quickening and thickening rapidly into a river; unhelmed and otherwise eased themselves, eaten a little bread bought at Wyddington and drank the water of the widening current which opened on the valley of Peaceways.

“I’m beginning quite to like water,” said the taller of the two knights. “I used to think it a most dangerous drink. In theory, of course, it ought only to be given to people who are fainting. It’s really good for them, much better than brandy. Besides, think of wasting good brandy on people who are fainting! But I don’t go so far as I did; I shouldn’t insist on a doctor’s prescription before I allow people water. That was the too severe morality of youth; that was my innocence and goodness. I thought that if I fell once, water-drinking might become a habit. But I do see the good side of water now. How good it is when you’re really thirsty, how it glitters and gurgles! How alive it is! After all, it’s the best of drinks, after the other. As it says in the song:

“Feast on wine or fast on water,
And your honour shall stand sure;
God Almighty’s son and daughter,
He the valiant, she the pure.
If an angel out of heaven
Brings you other things to drink,
Thank him for his kind intentions,

Go and pour them down the sink.
"Tea is like the East he grows in,
A great yellow Mandarin,
With urbanity of manner,
And unconsciousness of sin;
All the women, like a harem,
At his pig-tail troop along,
And, like all the East he grows in,
He is Poison when he's strong.
"Tea, although an Oriental,
Is a gentleman at least;
Cocoa is a cad and coward,
Cocoa is a vulgar beast;
Cocoa is a dull, disloyal,
Lying, crawling cad and clown,
And may very well be grateful
To the fool that takes him down.
"As for all the windy waters,
They were rained like trumpets down,
When good drink had been dishonoured
By the tipplers of the town.
When red wine had brought red ruin,
And the death-dance of our times,
Heaven sent us Soda Water
As a torment for our crimes."

"Upon my soul, this water tastes quite nice. I wonder what vintage now?" and he smacked his lips with solemnity. "It tastes just like the year 1881 tasted."

"You can fancy anything in the tasting way," returned his shorter companion. "Mr. Jack, who was always up to his tricks, did serve plain water in those little glasses they drink liqueurs out of, and everyone swore it was a delicious liqueur, and wanted to know where they could get it — all except old Admiral Guffin, who said it tasted too strong of olives. But water's much the best for our game, certainly."

Patrick nodded, and then said:

"I doubt if I could do it, if it weren't for the comfort of looking at that," and he kicked the rum-keg, "and feeling we shall have a good swig at it some day. It feels like a fairy-tale, carrying that about — as if rum were a pirate's treasure, as if it were molten gold. Besides, we can have such fun with it with other people — what was that joke I thought of this morning? Oh, I remember! Where's that milk can of mine?"

For the next twenty minutes he was industriously occupied with his milk can and the cask; Pump watching him with an interest amounting to anxiety.

Lifting his head, however, at the end of that time, he knotted his red brows and said, “What’s that?”

“What’s what?” asked the other traveller.

“That!” said Captain Patrick Dalroy, and pointed to a figure approaching on the road parallel to the river, “I mean, what’s it for?”

The figure had a longish beard and very long hair falling far below its shoulders. It had a serious and steadfast expression. It was dressed in what the inexperienced Mr. Pump at first took to be its nightgown; but afterward learned to be its complete goats’ hair tunic, unmixed even with a thread of the destructive and deadly wool of the sheep. It had no boots on its feet. It walked very swiftly to a particular turn of the stream and then turned very sharply (since it had accomplished its constitutional), and walked back toward the perfect town of Peaceways.

“I suppose it’s somebody from that milk place,” said Humphrey Pump, indulgently. “They seem to be pretty mad.”

“I don’t mind that so much,” said Dalroy, “I’m mad myself sometimes. But a madman has only one merit and last link with God. A madman is always logical. Now what is the logical connection between living on milk and wearing your hair long? Most of us lived on milk when we had no hair at all. How do they connect it up? Are there any heads even for a synopsis? Is it, say, ‘milk — water — shaving-water — shaving — hair?’ Is it ‘milk — kindness — unkindness — convicts — hair?’ What is the logical connection between having too much hair and having far too few boots? What *can* it be? Is it ‘hair — hair-trunk — leather-trunk — leather-boots?’ Is it ‘hair — beard — oysters — seaside — paddling — no boots?’ Man is liable to err — especially when every mistake he makes is called a movement — but why should all the lunacies live together?”

“Because all the lunatics should live together,” said, Humphrey, “and if you’d seen what happened up at Crampton, with the farming-out idea, you’d know. It’s all very well, Captain; but if people can prevent a guest of great importance being buried up to the neck in farm manure, they will. They will, really.” He coughed almost apologetically. He was about to attempt a resumption of the conversation, when he saw his companion slap the milk can and keg back into the car, and get into it himself. “You drive,” he said, “drive me where those things live; you know, Hump.”

They did not, however, arrive in the civic centre of such things without yet another delay. They left the river and followed the man with the long hair and the goatskin frock; and he stopped as it happened at a house on the outskirts of the village. The adventurers stopped also, out of curiosity, and were at first relieved to see the man almost instantly reappear, having transacted his business with a quickness that seemed incredible. A second glance showed them it was not the man, but another man dressed exactly like him. A few minutes more of inquisitive delay, showed them many of the kilty and goatish sect going in and out of this particular place, each clad in his innocent uniform.

"This must be the temple and chapel," muttered Patrick, "it must be here they sacrifice a glass of milk to a cow, or whatever it is they do. Well, the joke is pretty obvious, but we must wait for a lull in the crowding of the congregation."

When the last long-haired phantom had faded up the road, Dalroy sprang from the car and drove the sign-board deep into the earth with savage violence, and then very quietly knocked at the door.

The apparent owner of the place, of whom the two last of the long-haired and bare-footed idealists were taking a rather hurried farewell, was a man curiously ill-fitted for the part he seemed cast for in the only possible plot.

Both Pump and Dalroy thought they had never seen a man look so sullen. His face was of the rubicund sort that does not suggest jollity, but merely a stagnant indigestion in the head. His mustache hung heavy and dark, his brows yet heavier and darker. Dalroy had seen something of the sort on the faces of defeated people disgracefully forced into submission, but he could not make head or tail of it in connection with the priggish perfections of Peaceways. It was all the odder because he was manifestly prosperous; his clothes were smartly cut in something of the sporting manner, and the inside of his house was at least four times grander than the outside.

But what mystified them most was this, that he did not so much exhibit the natural curiosity of a gentleman whose private house is entered by strangers, but rather an embarrassed and restless expectation. During Dalroy's eager apologies and courteous inquiries about the direction and accommodations of Peaceways, his eye (which was of the boiled gooseberry order) perpetually wandered from them to the cupboard and then again to the window, and at last he got up and went to look out into the road.

“Oh, yes, sir; very healthy place, Peaceways,” he said, peering through the lattice. “Very . . . dash it, what do they mean? . . . Very healthy place. Of course they have their little ways.”

“Only drink pure milk, don’t they?” asked Dalroy.

The householder looked at him with a rather wild eye and grunted.

“Yes; so they say,” and he went again to the window.

“I’ve bought some of it,” said Patrick, patting his pet milk can, which he carried under his arm, as if unable to be separated from Dr. Meadows’s discovery. “Have a glass of milk, sir.”

The man’s boiled eye began to bulge in anger — or some other emotion.

“What do you want?” he muttered, “are you ‘tecs or what?”

“Agents and Distributors of the Meadows’s Mountain Milk,” said the Captain, with simple pride, “taste it?”

The dazed householder took a glass of the blameless liquid and sipped it; and the change on his face was extraordinary.

“Well, I’m jiggered,” he said, with a broad and rather coarse grin. “That’s a queer dodge. You’re in the joke, I see.” Then he went again restlessly to the window; and added, “but if we’re all friends, why the blazes don’t the others come in? I’ve never known trade so slow before.”

“Who are the others?” asked Mr. Pump.

“Oh, the usual Peaceways people,” said the other. “They generally come here before work. Dr. Meadows don’t work them for very long hours, that wouldn’t be healthy or whatever he calls it; but he’s particular about their being punctual. I’ve seen ’em running, with all their pure-minded togs on, when the hooter gave the last call.”

Then he abruptly opened the front door and called out impatiently, but not loudly:

“Come along in if you’re coming. You’ll give the show away if you play the fool out there.”

Patrick looked out also and the view of the road outside was certainly rather singular. He was used to crowds, large and small, collecting outside houses which he had honoured with the sign of “The Old Ship,” but they generally stared up at it in unaffected wonder and amusement. But outside this open door, some twenty or thirty persons in what Pump had called their night-gowns were moving to and fro like somnambulists, apparently blind to the presence of the sign; looking at the other side of the road, looking at the horizon, looking at the clouds of morning; and only occasionally stopping to whisper to each other. But when the owner of the house called to one of these ostentatiously abstracted beings and asked him hoarsely what the devil was the matter, it was natural for the milk-fed one to turn his feeble eye toward the sign. The gooseberry eyes followed his, and the face to which they belonged was a study in apoplectic astonishment.

“What the hell have you done to my house?” he demanded. “Of course they can’t come in if this thing’s here.”

“I’ll take it down, if you like,” said Dalroy, stepping out and picking it up like a flower from the front garden (to the amazement of the men in the road, who thought they had strayed into a nursery fairy-tale), “but I wish, in return, you’d give me some idea of what the blazes all this means.”

“Wait till I’ve served these men,” replied his host.

The goat-garbed persons went very sheepishly (or goatishly) into the now signless building, and were rapidly served with raw spirits, which Mr. Pump suspected to be of no very superior quality. When the last goat was gone, Captain Dalroy said:

“I mean that all this seems to me topsy-turvy. I understood that as the law stands now, if there’s a sign they are allowed to drink and if there isn’t they aren’t.”

“The Law!” said the man, in a voice thick with scorn. “Do you think these poor brutes are afraid of the Law as they are of the Doctor?”

“Why should they be afraid of the Doctor?” asked Dalroy, innocently. “I always heard that Peaceways was a self-governing republic.”

“Self-governing be damned,” was the illiberal reply. “Don’t he own all the houses and could turn ’em out in a snow storm? Don’t ‘e pay all the wages and could starve ’em stiff in a month? The Law!” And he snorted. A moment after he squared his elbows on the table and began to explain more fully.

“I was a brewer about here and had the biggest brewery in these parts. There were only two houses which didn’t belong to me, and the magistrates took away their licenses after a time. Ten years ago you could see Hugby’s Ales written beside every sign in the county. Then came these cursed Radicals, and our leader, Lord Ivywood, must go over to their side about it, and let this Doctor buy all the land under some new law that there shan’t be any pubs at all. And so my business is ruined so that he can sell his milk. Luckily I’d done pretty well before and had some compensation, of course; and I still do a fair trade on the Q.T., as you see. But of course that don’t amount to half the old one, for they’re afraid of old Meadows finding out. Snuffling old blighter!”

And the gentleman with the good clothes spat on the carpet.

“I am a Radical myself,” said the Irishman, rather coldly, “for all information on the Conservative party I must refer you to my friend, Mr. Pump, who is, of course, in the inmost secrets of his leaders. But it seems to me very rum sort of Radicalism to eat and drink at the orders of a master who is a madman, merely because he’s also a millionaire. 0 Liberty, what very complicated and even unsatisfactory social developments are committed in thy name! Why don’t they kick the old ass round the town a bit? No boots? Is that why they’re allowed no boots? Oh, roll him down hill in a milk can: he can’t object to that.”

“I don’t know,” said Pump, in his ruminant way, “Master Christian’s aunt did, but ladies are more particular, of course.”

“Look here!” cried Dalroy, in some excitement, “if I stick up that sign outside, and stay here to help, will you defy them? You’d be strictly within the law, and any private coercion I can promise you they shall repent. Plant the sign and sell the stuff openly like a man, and you may stand in English history like a deliverer.”

Mr. Hugby, of Hugby’s Ales, only looked gloomily at the table. His was not the sort of drinking nor the sort of drink-selling on which the revolutionary sentiment flourishes.

“Well,” said the Captain, “will you come with me and say ‘Hear, hear!’ and ‘How true!’— ‘What matchless eloquence!’ if I make a speech in the market-place? Come along! There’s room in our car.”

“Well, I’ll come with you, if you like,” replied Mr. Hugby, heavily. “It’s true if yours is allowed we might get our trade back, too.” And putting on a silk hat he followed the Captain and the innkeeper out to their little car. The model village was not an appropriate background for Mr. Hugby’s silk hat. Indeed, the hat somehow seemed to bring out by contrast all that was fantastic in the place.

It was a superb morning, some hours after sunrise. The edges of the sky touching the ring of dim woods and distant hills were still jewelled with the tiny transparent clouds of daybreak, delicate red and green or yellow. But above the vault of Heaven rose through turquoise into a torrid and solid blue in which the other clouds, the colossal cumuli, tumbled about like a celestial pillow-fight. The bulk of the houses were as white as the clouds, so that it looked (to use another simile) as if some of the whitewashed cottages were flying and falling about the sky. But most of the white houses were picked out here and there with bright colours, here an ornament in orange or there a stripe of lemon yellow, as if by the brush of a baby giant. The houses had no thatching (thatching is not hygienic) but were mostly covered with a sort of peacock green tiles bought cheap at a Preraphaelite Bazaar; or, less frequently, by some still more esoteric sort of terra cotta bricks. The houses were not English, nor homelike, nor suited to the landscape; for the houses had not been built by free men for themselves, but at the fancy of a whimsical lord. But considered as a sort of elfin city in a pantomime it was a really picturesque background for pantomimic proceedings.

I fear Mr. Dalroy's proceedings from the first rather deserved that name. To begin with, he left the sign, the cask, and the keg all wrapped and concealed in the car, but removed all the wraps of his own disguise, and stood on the central patch of grass in that green uniform that looked all the more insolent for being as ragged as the grass. Even that was less ragged than his red hair, which no red jungle of the East could imitate. Then he took out, almost tenderly, the large milk can, and deposited it, almost reverently, on the island of turf. Then he stood beside it, like Napoleon beside a gun, with an expression of tremendous seriousness and even severity. Then he drew his sword, and with that flashing weapon, as with a flail, lashed and thrashed the echoing metal can till the din was deafening, and Mr. Hugby hastily got out of the car and withdrew to a slight distance, stopping his ears. Mr. Pump sat solidly at the steering wheel, well knowing it might be necessary to start in some haste.

"Gather, gather, gather, Peaceways," shouted Patrick, still banging on the can and lamenting the difficulties of adapting "Macgregor's Gathering" to the name and occasion, "We're landless, *landless*, landless, Peaceways!"

Two or three of the goat-clad, recognising Mr. Hugby with a guilty look, drew near with great caution, and the Captain shouted at them as if they were an army covering Salisbury Plain.

"Citizens," he roared, saying anything that came into his head, "try the only original unadulterated Mountain Milk, for which alone Mahomet came to the mountain. The original milk of the land flowing with milk and honey; the high quality of which could alone have popularised so unappetising a combination. Try our milk! None others are genuine! Who can do without milk. Even whales can't do without milk. If any lady or gentleman keeps a favourite whale at home, now’s their chance! The early whale catches the milk. Just look at our milk! If you say you can’t look at the milk, because it’s in the can — well, look at the can! You must look at the can! You simply must! When Duty whispers low ‘Thou Must!’” he bellowed at the top of his voice in a highly impromptu peroration, “When Duty whispers low ‘Thou Must,’ the Youth replies, ‘I can!’” And with the word “Can” he hit the can with a shocking and shattering noise, like a peal of demoniac bells of steel.

This introductory speech is open to criticism from those who regard it as intended for the study rather than the stage. The present chronicler (who has no aim save truth) is bound to record that for its own unscrupulous purpose it was extremely successful: a great mass of the citizens of Peaceways having been attracted by the noise of one man shouting like a crowd. There are crowds who do not care to revolt; but there are no crowds who do not like someone else to do it for them; a fact which the safest oligarchs may be wise to learn.

But Dalroy’s ultimate triumph (I regret to say) consisted in actually handing to a few of the foremost of his audience some samples of his blameless beverage. The fact was certainly striking. Some were paralysed with surprise. Some were abruptly broken double with laughter. Many chuckled. Some cheered. All looked radiantly toward the eccentric orator.

And yet the radiance died quietly and suddenly from their faces. And only because one little old man had joined the group; a little old man in white linen with a white pointed beard and a white powder-puff of hair like thistledown: a man whom almost every man present could have killed with the left arm.

Chapter XIX: The Hospitality of the Captain

DR. MOSES MEADOWS, whether that was his name or an Anglicised version of it, had certainly come in the first instance from a little town in Germany and his first two books were written in German. His first two books were his best, for he began with a genuine enthusiasm for physical science, and this was adulterated with nothing worse than a hatred of what he thought was superstition, and what many of us think is the soul of the state. The first enthusiasm was most notable in the first book, which was concerned to show that “in the female not upsprouting of the whiskers was from the therewith increasing arrested mentality derived.” In his second book he came more to grips with delusions, and for some time he was held to have proved (to everyone who agreed with him already) that the Time Ghost had been walking particularly “rapidly, lately; and that the Christus Mythus was by the alcoholic mind’s trouble explained.” Then, unfortunately, he came across the institution called Death, and began to argue with it. Not seeing any rational explanation of this custom of dying, so prevalent among his fellow-citizens, he concluded that it was merely traditional (which he thought meant “effete”), and began to think of nothing but ways of evading or delaying it. This had a rather narrowing effect on him, and he lost much of that acrid ardour which had humanised the atheism of his youth, when he would almost have committed suicide for the pleasure of taunting God with not being there. His later idealism grew more and more into materialism and consisted of his changing hypotheses and discoveries about the healthiest foods. There is no need to detain the reader over what has been called his Oil Period; his Sea-weed Period has been authoritatively expounded in Professor Nym’s valuable little work; and on the events of his Glue Period it is, perhaps, not very generous to dwell. It was during his prolonged stay in England that he chanced on the instance of the longevity of milk consumers, and built on it a theory which was, at the beginning at least, sincere. Unfortunately it was also successful: wealth flowed in to the inventor and proprietor of Mountain Milk, and he began to feel a fourth and last enthusiasm, which, also, can come late in life and have a narrowing effect on the mind.

In the altercation which naturally followed on his discovery of the antics of Mr. Patrick Dalroy, he was very dignified, but naturally not very tolerant;

for he was quite unused to anything happening in spite of him, or anything important even happening without him, in the land that lay around. At first he hinted severely that the Captain had stolen the milk can from the milk-producing premises, and sent several workmen to count the cans in each shed; but Dalroy soon put him right about that.

"I bought it in a shop at Wyddington," he said, "and since then I have used no other. You'll hardly believe me" he said, with some truth, "but when I went into that shop I was quite a little man. I had one glass of your Mountain Milk; and look at me now."

"You have no right to sell the milk here," said Dr. Meadows, with the faintest trace of a German accent. "You are not in my employment; I am not responsible for your methods. You are not a representative of the business."

"I'm an Advertisement," said the Captain. "We advertise you all over England. You see that lean, skimpy, little man over there," pointing to the indignant Mr. Pump, "He's Before Taking Meadows's Mountain Milk. I'm After," added Mr. Dalroy, with satisfaction.

"You shall laugh at the magistrate," said the other, with a thickening accent.

"I shall," agreed Patrick. "Well, I'll make a clean breast of it, sir. The truth is it isn't your milk at all. It has quite a different taste. These gentlemen will tell you so."

A smothered giggle sent all the blood to the eminent capitalist's face.

"Then, either you have stolen my can and are a thief," he said, stamping, "or you have introduced inferior substances into my discovery and are an adulterer — er—"

"Try adulteratist," said Dalroy, kindly. "Prince Albert always said 'adulteratarian.' Dear old Albert! It seems like yesterday! But it is, of course, today. And it's as true as daylight that this stuff tastes different. I can't tell you what the taste is" (subdued guffaws from the outskirts of the crowd). "It's something between the taste of your first sugar-stick and the fag-end of your father's cigar. It's as innocent as Heaven and as hot as hell. It tastes like a paradox. It tastes like a prehistoric inconsistency — I trust I make myself clear. The men who taste it most are the simplest men that God has made, and it always reminds them of the salt, because it is made out of sugar. Have some!"

And with a gesture of staggering hospitality, he shot out his long arm with the little glass at the end of it. The despotic curiosity in the Prussian overcame even his despotic dignity. He took a sip of the liquid, and his eyes stood out from his face.

“You’ve been mixing something with the milk,” were the first words that came to him.

“Yes,” answered Dalroy, “and so have you, unless you’re a swindler. Why is your milk advertised as different from everyone else’s milk, if you haven’t made the difference? Why does a glass of your milk cost threepence, and a glass of ordinary milk, a penny, if you haven’t put twopennorth of something into it? Now, look here, Dr. Meadows. The Public Analyst who would judge this, happens to be an honest man. I have a list of the twenty-one and a half honest men still employed in such posts. I make you a fair offer. He shall decide what it is I add to the milk, if you let him decide what it is you add to the milk. You must add something to the milk, or what can all these wheels and pumps and pulleys be for? Will you tell me, here and now, what you add to the milk which makes it so exceedingly Mountain?”

There was a long silence, full of the same sense of submerged mirth in the mob. But the philanthropist had fallen into a naked frenzy in the sunlight, and shaking his fists aloft in a way unknown to all the English around him, he cried out:

“Ach! but I know what you add! I know what you add! It is the Alcohol! And you have no sign and you shall laugh at a magistrate.”

Dalroy, with a bow, retired to the car, removed a number of wrappings and produced the prodigious wooden sign-post of “The Old Ship,” with its blue three-decker and red St. George’s cross conspicuously displayed. This he planted on his narrow territory of turf and looked round serenely.

“In this old oak-panelled inn of mine,” he said, “I will laugh at a million magistrates. Not that there’s anything unhygienic about this inn. No low ceilings or stuffiness here. Windows open everywhere, except in the floor. And as I hear some are saying there ought always to be food sold with fermented liquor, why, my dear Dr. Meadows, I’ve got a cheese here that will make another man of you. At least, we’ll hope so. We can but try.”

But Dr. Meadows was long past being merely angry. The exhibition of the sign had put him into a serious difficulty. Like most sceptics, like even the most genuine sceptics such as Bradlaugh, he was as legal as he was sceptical. He had a profound fear, which also had in it something better than fear, of being ultimately found in the wrong in a police court or a public inquiry. And he also suffered the tragedy of all such men living in modern England; that he must always be certain to respect the law, while never being certain of what it was. He could only remember generally that Lord Ivywood, when introducing or defending the great Ivywood Act on this matter, had dwelt very strongly on the unique and significant nature of the sign. And he could not be certain that if he disregarded it altogether, he might not eventually be cast in heavy damages — or even go to prison, in spite of his success in business. Of course he knew quite well that he had a thousand answers to such nonsense: that a patch of grass in the road couldn't be an inn; that the sign wasn't even produced when the Captain began to hand round the rum. But he also knew quite well that in the black peril we call British law that is not the point. He had heard points quite as obvious urged to a judge and urged in vain. At the bottom of his mind he found this fact: rich as he was, Lord Ivywood had made him — and on which side would Lord Ivywood be?

"Captain," said Humphrey Pump, speaking for the first time, "we'd better be getting away. I feel it in my bones."

"Inhospitable innkeeper!" cried the Captain, indignantly. "And after I have gone out of the way to license your premises! Why, this is the dawn of peace in the great city of Peaceways. I don't despair of Dr. Meadows tossing off another bumper before we've done. For the moment, Brother Hugby will engage."

As he spoke, he served out milk and rum at random; and still the Doctor had too much terror of our legal technicalities to make a final interference. But when Mr. Hugby, of Hugby's Ales, heard his name called, he first of all jumped so as almost to dislodge the silk hat, then he stood quite still. Then he accepted a glass of the new Mountain Milk; and then his very face became full of speech, before he had spoken a word.

"There's a motor coming along the road from the far hills," said Humphrey, quietly. "It'll be across the last bridge down stream in ten minutes and come up on this side."

"Well," said the Captain, impatiently, "I suppose you've seen a motor before."

"Not in this valley all this morning," answered Pump.

"Mr. Chairman," said Mr. Hugby, feeling a dim disposition to say "Mr. Vice," in memory of old commercial banquets, "I'm sure we're all law-abiding people here, and wish to remain friends, especially with our good friend the Doctor; may he never want a friend or a bottle — that is in short, anything he wants, as we go up the hill of prosperity, and so on. But, as our friend here with the sign-board seems to be within his rights, well, I think the time's come when we can look at these things more broadly, so to speak. Now I know it's quite true those dirty little pubs do a lot of harm to a property, and you get a lot of ignorant people there who are just like pigs; and I don't say our friend the Doctor hasn't done good by clearing 'em away. But a big, well-managed business with plenty of capital behind it is quite another thing. Well, friends, you all know that I was originally in the Trade; though I have, of course, left off selling under the new regulations." Here the goats looked rather guiltily at their cloven hoofs. "But I've got my little bit and I wouldn't mind putting it into this 'Old Ship' here, if our friend would allow it to be run on business lines. And especially if he'd enlarge the premises a bit. Ha! ha! And if our good friend, the Doctor—"

"You rascal fellow!" spluttered Meadows, "your goot friend the doctor will make you dance before a magistrate."

"Now, don't be unbusinesslike," reasoned the brewer. "It won't hurt your sales. It's quite a different public, don't you see? Do talk like a business man."

"I am not a business man," said the scientist, with fiery eyes, "I am a servant of humanity."

"Then," said Dalroy, "why do you never do what your master tells you?"

"The motor has crossed the river," said Humphrey Pump.

"You would undo all my works," cried the Doctor, with sincere passion. "When I have built this town myself, when I have made it sober and healthful myself, when I am awake and about before anyone in the town myself, watching over its interests — you would ruin all to sell your barbaric and fundamentally beastly beer. And then you call me a goot friend. I am not a goot friend!"

"That I can't say," growled Hugby, "but if it comes to that — aren't you trying to sell—"

A motor car drove up with a white explosion of dust, and about six very dusty people got out of it. Even through the densest disguise of the swift motorist, Pump perceived in many of them the peculiar style and bodily carriage of the police. The most evident exception was a long and more slender figure, which, on removing its cap and goggles, disclosed the dark and drooping features of J. Leveson, Secretary. He walked across to the little, old millionaire, who instantly recognized him and shook hands. They confabulated for some little time, turning over some official documents. Dr. Meadows cleared his throat and said to the whole crowd.

"I am very glad to be able to announce to you all that this extraordinary outrage has been too late attempted. Lord Ivywood, with the promptitude he so invariably shows, has immediately communicated to places of importance such as this a most just and right alteration of the law, which exactly meets the present case.

"We shall sleep in jail tonight," said Humphrey, Pump. "I know it in my bones."

"It is enough to say," proceeded the millionaire, "that by the law as it now stands, any innkeeper, even if he display a sign, is subject to imprisonment if he sells alcohol on premises where it has not been previously kept for three days."

"I thought it would be something like that," muttered Pump. "Shall we give up, Captain, or shall we try a bolt for it?"

Even the impudence of Dalroy appeared for the instant dazed and stilled. He was staring forlornly up into the abyss of sky above him, as if, like Shelley, he could get inspiration from the last and purest clouds and the perfect hues of the ends of Heaven.

At last he said, in a soft and meditative voice, the single syllable,

"Sells!"

Pump looked at him sharply with a remarkable expression growing on his grim face. But the Doctor was far too rabidly rejoicing in his triumph to understand the Captain's meaning.

"Sells alcohol, are the exact words," he insisted, brandishing the blue oblong of the new Act of Parliament.

"So far as I am concerned they are inexact words," said Captain Dalroy, with polite indifference. "I have not been selling alcohol, I have been giving it away. Has anybody here paid me money? Has anybody here seen anybody else pay me money? I'm a philanthropist just like Dr. Meadows. I'm his living image!"

Mr. Leveson and Dr. Meadows looked across at each other, and on the face of the first was consternation, and on the second a full return of all his terrors of the complicated law.

"I shall remain here for several weeks," continued the Captain, leaning elegantly on the can, "and shall give away, gratis, such supplies of this excellent drink as may be demanded by the citizens. It appears that there is no such supply at present in this district, and I feel sure that no person present can object to so strictly legal and highly charitable an arrangement."

In this he was apparently in error; for several persons present seemed to object to it. But curiously enough it was not the withered and fanatical face of the philanthropist Meadows, nor the dark and equine face of the official Leveson, which stood out most vividly as a picture of protest. The face most strangely unsympathetic with this form of charity was that of the ex-proprietor of Hugby's Ales. His gooseberry eyes were almost dropping from his head and his words sprang from his lips before he could stop them.

"And you blooming well think you can come here like a big buffoon, you beast, and take away all my trade—"

Old Meadows turned on him with the swiftness of an adder.

"And what is your trade, Mr. Hugby?" he asked.

The brewer bubbled with a sort of bursting anger. The goats all looked at the ground as is, according to a Roman poet, the habit of the lower animals. Man (in the character of Mr. Patrick Dalroy) taking advantage of a free but fine translation of the Latin passage, "looked aloft, and with uplifted eyes beheld his own hereditary skies."

"Well, all I can say is," roared Mr. Hugby, "if the police come all this way and can't lock up a dirty loafer whose coat's all in rags, there's an end of me paying these fat infernal taxes and—"

"Yes," said Dalroy, in a voice that fell like an axe, "there is an end of you, please God. It's brewers like you that have made the inns stink with poison, till even good men asked for no inns at all. And you are worse than the teetotallers, for you prevented what they never knew. And as for you, eminent man of science, great philanthropist, idealist and destroyer of inns, let me give one cold fact for your information. You are not respected. You are obeyed. Why should I or anyone respect you particularly? You say you built this town and get up at daybreak to watch this town. You built it for money and you watch it for more money. Why should I respect you because you are fastidious about food, that your poor old digestion may outlive the hearts of better men? Why should you be the god of this valley, whose god is your belly, merely because you do not even love your god, but only fear him? Go home to your prayers, old man; for all men shall die. Read the Bible, if you like, as they do in your German home; and I suppose you once read it to pick texts as you now read it to pick holes. I don't read it myself, I’m afraid, but I remember some words in old Mulligan’s translation; and I leave them with you. ‘Unless God,’” and he made a movement with his arm, so natural and yet so vast that for an instant the town really looked like a toy of bright coloured cardboard at the feet of the giant; “‘unless God build the city, their labour is but lost that build it; unless God keep the city, the watchman watcheth in vain. It is lost labour that you rise up early in the morning and eat the bread of carefulness; while He giveth His beloved sleep.’ Try and understand what that means, and never mind whether it’s Elohistic. And now, Hump, we’ll away and away. I’m tired of the green tiles over there. Come, fill up my cup,” and he banged down the cask in the car, “come saddle my horses and call out my men. And tremble, gay goats, in the midst of your glee; for you’ve no’ seen the last of my milk can and me.”

This song was joyously borne away with Mr. Dalroy in the disappearing car; and the motorists were miles beyond pursuit from Peaceways before they thought of halting again. But they were still beside the bank of that noble and enlarging river; and in a place of deep fern and fairy-ribboned birches with the glowing and gleaming water behind them, Patrick asked his friend to stop the car.

“By the way,” said Humphrey, suddenly, “there was one thing I didn’t understand. Why was he so afraid of the Public Analyst? What poison and chemicals does he put in the milk?”

“H20,” answered the Captain, “I take it without milk myself.”

And he bent over as if to drink of the stream, as he had done at daybreak.

Chapter XX: The Turk and the Futurists

MR. ADRIAN CROOKE was a successful chemist whose shop was in the neighbourhood of Victoria, but his face expressed more than is generally required in a successful chemist. It was a curious face, prematurely old and like parchment, but acute and decisive, with real headwork in every line of it. Nor was his conversation, when he did converse, out of keeping with this: he had lived in many countries, and had a rich store of anecdote about the more quaint and sometimes the more sinister side of his work, visions of the vapour of eastern drugs or guesses at the ingredients of Renascence poisons. He himself, it need hardly be said, was a most respectable and reliable apothecary, or he would not have had the custom of families, especially among the upper classes; but he enjoyed as a hobby, the study of the dark days and lands where his science had lain sometimes on the borders of magic and sometimes upon the borders of murder. Hence it often happened that persons, who in their serious senses were well aware of his harmless and useful habits, would leave his shop on some murky and foggy night, with their heads so full of wild tales of the eating of hemp or the poisoning of roses, they could hardly help fancying that the shop, with its glowing moon of crimson or saffron, like bowls of blood and sulphur, was really a house of the Black Art.

It was doubtless for such conversational pleasures, in part, that Hibbs However entered the shop; as well as for a small glass of the same restorative medicine which he had been taking when Leveson found him by the open window. But this did not prevent Hibbs from expressing considerable surprise and some embarrassment when Leveson entered the same chemist’s and asked for the same chemical. Indeed, Leveson looked harassed and weary enough to want it.

“You’ve been out of town, haven’t you?” said Leveson. “No luck. They got away again on some quibble. The police wouldn’t make the arrest; and even old Meadows thought it might be illegal. I’m sick of it. Where are you going?”

“I thought,” said Mr. Hibbs, “of dropping in at this Post-Futurist exhibition. I believe Lord Ivywood will be there; he is showing it to the Prophet. I don’t pretend to know much about art, but I hear it’s very fine.”

There was a long silence and Mr. Leveson said, “People always prejudiced against new ideas.”

Then there was another long silence and Mr. Hibbs said, “After all, they said the same of Whistler.”

Refreshed by this ritual, Mr. Leveson became conscious of the existence of Crooke, and said to him, cheerfully, “That’s so in your department, too, isn’t it? I suppose the greatest pioneers in chemistry were unpopular in their own time.”

“Look at the Borgias,” said Mr. Crooke. “They got themselves quite disliked.”

“You’re very flippant, you know,” said Leveson, in a fatigued way. “Well, so long. Are you coming, Hibbs?”

And the two gentlemen, who were both attired in high hats and afternoon callers’ coats, betook themselves down the street. It was a fine, sunny day, the twin of the day before that had shone so brightly on the white town of Peaceways; and their walk was a pleasant one, along a handsome street with high houses and small trees that overlooked the river all the way. For the pictures were exhibited in a small but famous gallery, a rather rococo building of which the entrance steps almost descended upon the Thames. The building was girt on both sides and behind with gaudy flower-beds, and on the top of the steps, in front of the Byzantine doorway, stood their old friend, Misysra Ammon, smiling broadly, and in an unusually sumptuous costume. But even the sight of that fragrant eastern flower did not seem to revive altogether the spirits of the drooping Secretary.

“You have coome,” said the beaming Prophet, “to see the decoration? It is approo-ooved. I haf approo-ooved it.”

“We came to see the Post-Futurist pictures,” began Hibbs; but Leveson was silent.

“There are no pictures,” said the Turk, simply, “if there had been I could not haf approo-ooved. For those of our Religion pictures are not goo-ood; they are Idols, my friendss. Loo-ook in there,” and he turned and darted a solemn forefinger just under his nose toward the gates of the gallery; “Loo-ook in there and you will find no Idols. No Idols at all. I have most carefully loo-ooked into every one of the frames. Every one I have approo-ooved. No trace of ze Man form. No trace of ze Animal form. All decoration as goo-ood as the goo-oodest of carpets; it harms not. Lord Ivywood smile of happiness; for I tell him Islam indeed progresses. Ze old Moslems allow to draw the picture of the vegetable. Here I hunt even for the vegetable. And there is no vegetable."

Hibbs, whose trade was tact, naturally did not think it wise that the eminent Misysra should go on lecturing from a tall flight of steps to the whole street and river, so he had slipped past with a general proposal to go in and see. The Prophet and the Secretary followed; and all entered the outer hall where Lord Ivywood stood with the white face of a statue. He was the only statue the New Moslems were allowed to worship.

On a sofa like a purple island in the middle of the sea of floor sat Enid Wimpole, talking eagerly to her cousin, Dorian; doing, in fact, her best to prevent the family quarrel, which threatened to follow hard on the incident at Westminster. In the deeper perspective of the rooms Lady Joan Brett was floating about. And if her attitude before the Post-Futurist pictures could not be called humble, or even inquiring, it is but just to that school to say that she seemed to be quite as bored with the floor that she walked on, and the parasol she held. Bit by bit other figures or groups of that world drifted through the Exhibition of the Post-Futurists. It is a very small world, but it is just big enough and just small enough to govern a country — that is, a country with no religion. And it has all the vanity of a mob; and all the reticence of a secret society.

Leveson instantly went up to Lord Ivywood, pulled papers from his pocket and was plainly telling him of the escape from Peaceways. Ivywood's face hardly changed; he was, or felt, above some things; and one of them was blaming a servant before the servant's social superiors. But no one could say he looked less like cold marble than before.

"I made all possible inquiries about their subsequent route," the Secretary was heard saying, "and the most serious feature is that they seem to have taken the road for London."

"Quite so," replied the statue, "they will be easier to capture here."

Lady Enid, by a series of assurances (most of which were, I regret to say, lies) had succeeded in preventing the scandal of her cousin, Dorian, actually cutting her cousin, Philip. But she knew very little of the masculine temper if she really thought she had prevented the profound intellectual revolt of the poet against the politician. Ever since he heard Mr. Hibbs say, "Yars! Yars!", and order his arrest by a common policeman, the feelings of Dorian Wimpole had flowed for some four days and nights in a direction highly contrary to the ideals of Mr. Hibbs, and the sudden appearance of that blameless diplomatist quickened the mental current to a cataract. But as he could not insult Hibbs, whom socially he did not even know; and could not insult Ivywood, with whom he had just had a formal reconciliation, it was absolutely necessary that he should insult something else instead. All watchers for the Dawn will be deeply distressed to know that the Post-Futurist School of Painting received the full effects of this perverted wrath. In vain did Mr. Leveson affirm from time to time, “People always prejudiced against new ideas.” Vainly did Mr. Hibbs say at the proper intervals, “After all, they said the same of Whistler.” Not by such decent formalities was the frenzy of Dorian to be appeased.

“That little Turk has more sense than you have,” he said, “he passes it as a good wall-paper. I should say it was a bad wall-paper; the sort of wall-paper that gives a sick man fever when he hasn’t got it. But to call it pictures — you might as well call it seats for the Lord Mayor’s Show. A seat isn’t a seat if you can’t see the Lord Mayor’s Show. A picture isn’t a picture if you can’t see any picture. You can sit down at home more comfortably than you can at a procession. And you can walk about at home more comfortably than you can at a picture gallery. There’s only one thing to be said for a street show or a picture show — and that is whether there is anything to be shown. Now, then! Show me something!”

“Well,” said Lord Ivywood, good humouredly, motioning toward the wall in front of him, “let me show you the ‘Portrait of an Old Lady.’”

“Well,” said Dorian, stolidly, “which is it?”

Mr. Hibbs made a hasty gesture of identification, but was so unfortunate as to point to the picture of “Rain in the Apennines,” instead of the “Portrait of an Old Lady,” and his intervention increased the irritation of Dorian Wimpole. Most probably, as Mr. Hibbs afterward explained, it was because a vivacious movement of the elbow of Mr. Wimpole interfered with the exact pointing of the forefinger of Mr. Hibbs. In any case, Mr. Hibbs was sharply and horridly fixed by embarrassment; so that he had to go away to the refreshment bar and eat three lobster-patties, and even drink a glass of that champagne that had once been his ruin. But on this occasion he stopped at one glass, and returned with a full diplomatic responsibility.

He returned to find that Dorian Wimpole had forgotten all the facts of time, place, and personal pride, in an argument with Lord Ivywood, exactly as he had forgotten such facts in an argument with Patrick Dalroy, in a dark wood with a donkey-cart. And Philip Ivywood was interested also; his cold eyes even shone; for though his pleasure was almost purely intellectual, it was utterly sincere.

"And I do trust the untried; I do follow the inexperienced," he was saying quietly, with his fine inflections of voice. "You say this is changing the very nature of Art. I want to change the very nature of Art. Everything lives by turning into something else. Exaggeration is growth."

"But exaggeration of what?" demanded Dorian. "I cannot see a trace of exaggeration in these pictures; because I cannot find a hint of what it is they want to exaggerate. You can't exaggerate the feathers of a cow or the legs of a whale. You can draw a cow with feathers or a whale with legs for a joke — though I hardly think such jokes are in your line. But don't you see, my good Philip, that even then the joke depends on its looking like a cow and not only like a thing with feathers. Even then the joke depends on the whale as well as the legs. You can combine up to a certain point; you can distort up to a certain point; after that you lose the identity; and with that you lose everything. A Centaur is so much of a man with so much of a horse. The Centaur must not be hastily identified with the Horsy Man. And the Mermaid must be maidenly; even if there is something fishy about her social conduct."

"No," said Lord Ivywood, in the same quiet way, "I understand what you mean, and I don't agree. I should like the Centaur to turn into something else, that is neither man nor horse."

"But not something that has nothing of either?" asked the poet.

"Yes," answered Ivywood, with the same queer, quiet gleam in his colourless eyes, "something that has nothing of either."

"But what's the good?" argued Dorian. "A thing that has changed entirely has not changed at all. It has no bridge of crisis. It can remember no change. If you wake up tomorrow and you simply *are* Mrs. Dope, an old woman who lets lodgings at Broadstairs — well, I don't doubt Mrs. Dope is a saner and happier person than you are. But in what way have *you* progressed? What part of *you* is better? Don't you see this prime fact of identity is the limit set on all living things?"

"No," said Philip, with suppressed but sudden violence, "I deny that any limit is set upon living things."

"Why, then I understand," said Dorian, "why, though you make such good speeches, you have never written any poetry."

Lady Joan, who was looking with tedium at a rich pattern of purple and green in which Misysra attempted to interest her (imploring her to disregard the mere title, which idolatrously stated it as “First Communion in the Snow”), abruptly turned her full face to Dorian. It was a face to which few men could feel indifferent, especially when thus suddenly shown them.

“Why can’t he write poetry?” she asked. “Do you mean he would resent the limits of metre and rhyme and so on?”

The poet reflected for a moment and then said, “Well, partly; but I mean more than that too. As one can be candid in the family, I may say that what everyone says about him is that he has no humour. But that’s not my complaint at all. I think my complaint is that he has no pathos. That is, he does not feel human limitations. That is, he will not write poetry.”

Lord Ivywood was looking with his cold, unconscious profile into a little black and yellow picture called “Enthusiasm”; but Joan Brett leaned across to him with swarthy eagerness and cried quite provocatively,

“Dorian says you’ve no pathos. Have you any pathos? He says it’s a sense of human limitations.”

Ivywood did not remove his gaze from the picture of “Enthusiasm,” but simply said “No; I have no sense of human limitations.” Then he put up his elderly eyeglass to examine the picture better. Then he dropped it again and confronted Joan with a face paler than usual.

“Joan,” he said, “I would walk where no man has walked; and find something beyond tears and laughter. My road shall be my road indeed; for I will make it, like the Romans. And my adventures shall not be in the hedges and the gutters, but in the borders of the ever advancing brain. I will think what was unthinkable until I thought it; I will love what never lived until I loved it — I will be as lonely as the First Man.”

“They say,” she said, after a silence, “that the first man fell.”

“You mean the priests?” he answered. “Yes, but even they admit that he discovered good and evil. So are these artists trying to discover some distinction that is still dark to us.”

“Oh,” said Joan, looking at him with a real and unusual interest, “then you don’t *see* anything in the pictures, yourself?”

“I see the breaking of the barriers,” he answered, “beyond that I see nothing.”

She looked at the floor for a little time and traced patterns with her parasol, like one who has really received food for thought. Then she said, suddenly,

“But perhaps the breaking of barriers might be the breaking of everything.”

The clear and colourless eyes looked at her quite steadily.

“Perhaps,” said Lord Ivywood.

Dorian Wimpole made a sudden movement a few yards off, where he was looking at a picture, and said, “Hullo! What’s this?” Mr. Hibbs was literally gaping in the direction of the entrance.

Framed in that fine Byzantine archway stood a great big, bony man in threadbare but careful clothes, with a harsh, high-featured, intelligent face, to which a dark beard under the chin gave something of the Puritanic cast. Somehow his whole personality seemed to be pulled together and explained when he spoke with a North Country accent.

“Weel, lards,” he said, genially, “t’hoose be main great on t’pictures. But I coom for suthin’ in a moog. Haw! Haw!”

Leveson and Hibbs looked at each other. Then Leveson rushed from the room. Lord Ivywood did not move a finger; but Mr. Wimpole, with a sort of poetic curiosity, drew nearer to the stranger, and studied him.

“It’s perfectly awful,” cried Enid Wimpole, in a loud whisper, “the man must be drunk.”

“Na, lass,” said the man with gallantry, “a’ve not been droonk, nobbut at Hurley Fair, these years and all; a’m a decent lad and workin’ ma way back t’Wharfdale. No harm in a moog of ale, lass.”

“Are you quite sure,” asked Dorian Wimpole, with a singular sort of delicate curiosity, “are you quite *sure* you’re not drunk.”

“A’m not droonk,” said the man, jovially.

“Even if these were licensed premises,” began Dorian, in the same diplomatic manner.

“There’s t’sign on t’hoose,” said the stranger.

The black, bewildered look on the face of Joan Brett suddenly altered. She took four steps toward the doorway, and then went back and sat on the purple ottoman. But Dorian seemed fascinated with his inquiry into the alleged decency of the lad who was working his way to Wharfdale.

“Even if these were licensed premises,” he repeated, “drink could be refused you if you were drunk. Now, are you *really* sure you’re not drunk. Would you know if it was raining, say?”

“Aye,” said the man, with conviction.

“Would you know any common object of your countryside,” inquired Dorian, scientifically, “a woman — let us say an old woman.”

“Aye,” said the man, with good humour.

“What on earth are you doing with the creature?” whispered Enid, feverishly.

“I am trying,” answered the poet, “to prevent a very sensible man from smashing a very silly shop. I beg your pardon, sir. As I was saying, would you know these things in a picture, now? Do you know what a landscape is and what a portrait is? Forgive my asking; you see we are responsible while we keep the place going.”

There soared up into the sky like a cloud of rooks the eager vanity of the North.

“We collier lads are none so badly educated, lad,” he said. “In the town a’ was born in there was a gallery of pictures as fine as Lunnon. Aye, and a’ knew ‘em, too.”

“Thank you,” said Wimpole, pointing suddenly at the wall. “Would you be so kind, for instance, as to look at those two pictures. One represents an old woman and the other rain in the hills. It’s a mere formality. You shall have your drink when you’ve said which is which.”

The northerner bowed his huge body before the two frames and peered into them patiently. The long stillness that followed seemed to be something of a strain on Joan, who rose in a restless manner, first went to look out of a window and then went out of the front door.

At length the art-critic lifted a large, puzzled but still philosophical face.

“Soomehow or other,” he said, “a’ mun be droonk after all.”

“You have testified,” cried Dorian with animation. “You have all but saved civilization. And by God, you shall have your drink.”

And he brought from the refreshment table a huge bumper of the Hibbsian champagne, and declined payment by the rapid method of running out of the gallery on to the steps outside.

Joan was already standing there. Out the little side window she had seen the incredible thing she expected to see; which explained the ludicrous scene inside. She saw the red and blue wooden flag of Mr. Pump standing up in the flower-beds in the sun, as serenely as if it were a tall and tropical flower; and yet, in the brief interval between the window and the door it had vanished, as if to remind her it was a flying dream. But two men were in a little motor outside, which was in the very act of starting. They were in motoring disguise, but she knew who they were. All that was deep in her, all that was sceptical, all that was stoical, all that was noble, made her stand as still as one of the pillars of the porch; but a dog, bearing the name of Quoodle, sprang up in the moving car, and barked with joy at the mere sight of her, and though she had borne all else, something in that bestial innocence of an animal suddenly blinded her with tears.

It could not, however, blind her to the extraordinary fact that followed. Mr. Dorian Wimpole, attired in anything but motoring costume, dressed in that compromise between fashion and art which seems proper to the visiting of picture-galleries, did not by any means stand as still as one of the pillars of the porch. He rushed down the steps, ran after the car and actually sprang into it, without disarranging his Whistlerian silk hat.

“Good afternoon,” he said to Dalroy, pleasantly. “You owe me a motor-ride, you know.”

Chapter XXI: The Road to Roundabout

PATRICK DALROY looked at the invader with a heavy and yet humorous expression, and merely said, “I didn’t steal your car; really, I didn’t.”

“Oh, no,” answered Dorian, “I’ve heard all about it since, and as you’re rather the persecuted party, so to speak, it wouldn’t be fair not to tell you that I don’t agree much with Ivywood about all this. I disagree with him; or rather, to speak medically, he disagrees with me. He has, ever since I woke up after an oyster supper and found myself in the House of Commons with policemen calling out, ‘Who goes home?’”

“Indeed,” inquired Dalroy, drawing his red bushy eyebrows together. “Do the officials in Parliament say, ‘Who goes home?’”

“Yes,” answered Wimpole, indifferently, “it’s a part of some old custom in the days when Members of Parliament might be attacked in the street.”

“Well,” inquired Patrick, in a rational tone, “why aren’t they attacked in the street?”

There was a silence. “It is a holy mystery,” said the Captain at last. “But, ‘Who goes home?’ — that is uncommonly good.”

The Captain had received the poet into the car with all possible expressions of affability and satisfaction, but the poet, who was keen-sighted enough about people of his own sort, could not help thinking that the Captain was a little absent-minded. As they flew thundering through the mazes of South London (for Pump had crossed Westminster Bridge and was making for the Surrey hills), the big blue eyes of the big red-haired man rolled perpetually up and down the streets; and, after longer and longer silences, he found expression for his thoughts.

“Doesn’t it strike you that there are a very large number of chemists in London nowadays?”

“Are there?” asked Wimpole, carelessly. “Well, there certainly are two very close to each other just over there.”

“Yes, and both the same name,” replied Dalroy, “Crooke. And I saw the same Mr. Crooke chemicalizing round the corner. He seems to be a highly omnipresent deity.”

“A large business, I suppose,” observed Dorian Wimpole.

“Too large for its profits, I should say,” said Dalroy. “What can people want with two chemists of the same sort within a few yards of each other?

Do they put one leg into one shop and one into the other and have their corns done in both at once? Or, do they take an acid in one shop and an alkali in the next, and wait for the fizz? Or, do they take the poison in the first shop and the emetic in the second shop? It seems like carrying delicacy too far. It almost amounts to living a double life."

"But, perhaps," said Dorian, "he is an uproariously popular chemist, this Mr. Crooke. Perhaps there's a rush on some specialty of his."

"It seems to me," said the Captain, "that there are certain limitations to such popularity in the case of a chemist. If a man sells very good tobacco, people may smoke more and more of it from sheer self-indulgence. But I never heard of anybody exceeding in cod-liver oil. Even castor-oil, I should say, is regarded with respect rather than true affection."

After a few minutes of silence, he said, "Is it safe to stop here for an instant, Pump?"

"I think so," replied Humphrey, "if you'll promise me not to have any adventures in the shop."

The motor car stopped before yet a fourth arsenal of Mr. Crooke and his pharmacy, and Dalroy went in. Before Pump and his companion could exchange a word, the Captain came out again, with a curious expression on his countenance, especially round the mouth.

"Mr. Wimpole," said Dalroy, "will you give us the pleasure of dining with us this evening? Many would consider it an unceremonious invitation to an unconventional meal; and it may be necessary to eat it under a hedge or even up a tree; but you are a man of taste, and one does not apologise for Hump's rum or Hump's cheese to persons of taste. We will eat and drink of our best tonight. It is a banquet. I am not very certain whether you and I are friends or enemies, but at least there shall be peace tonight."

"Friends, I hope," said the poet, smiling, "but why peace especially tonight?"

"Because there will be war tomorrow," answered Patrick Dalroy, "whichever side of it you may be on. I have just made a singular discovery."

And he relapsed into his silence as they flew out of the fringe of London into the woods and hills beyond Croydon. Dalroy remained in the same mood of brooding, Dorian was brushed by the butterfly wing of that fleeting slumber that will come on a man hurried, through the air, after long lounging in hot drawing rooms; even the dog Quoodle was asleep at the bottom of the car. As for Humphrey Pump, he very seldom talked when he had anything else to do. Thus it happened that long landscapes and perspectives were shot past them like suddenly shifted slides, and long stretches of time elapsed before any of them spoke again. The sky was changing from the pale golds and greens of evening to the burning blue of a strong summer night, a night of strong stars. The walls of woodland that flew past them like long assegais, were mostly, at first, of the fenced and park-like sort; endless oblong blocks of black pinewood shut in by boxes of thin grey wood. But soon fences began to sink, and pinewoods to straggle, and roads to split and even to sprawl. Half an hour later Dalroy had begun to realise something romantic and even faintly reminiscent in the roll of the country, and Humphrey Pump had long known he was on the marches of his native land.

So far as the difference could be defined by a detail, it seemed to consist not so much in the road rising as in the road perpetually winding. It was more like a path; and even where it was abrupt or aimless, it seemed the more alive. They appeared to be ascending a big, dim hill that was built of a crowd of little hills with rounded tops; it was like a cluster of domes. Among these domes the road climbed and curled in multitudinous curves and angles. It was almost impossible to believe that it could turn itself and round on itself so often without tying itself in a knot and choking.

“I say,” said Dalroy, breaking the silence suddenly, “this car will get giddy and fall down.”

“Perhaps,” said Dorian, beaming at him, “my car, as you may have noticed, was much steadier.”

Patrick laughed, but not without a shade of confusion. “I hope you got back your car all right,” he said. “This is really nothing for speed; but it’s an uncommonly good little climber, and it seems to have some climbing to do just now. And even more wandering.”

“The roads certainly seem to be very irregular,” said Dorian, reflectively.

“Well,” cried Patrick, with a queer kind of impatience, “you’re English and I’m not. You ought to know why the road winds about like this. Why, the Saints deliver us!” he cried, “it’s one of the wrongs of Ireland that she can’t understand England. England won’t understand herself, England won’t tell us why these roads go wriggling about. Englishmen won’t tell us! You won’t tell us!”

“Don’t be too sure,” said Dorian, with a quiet irony.

Dalroy, with an irony far from quiet emitted a loud yell of victory.

“Right,” he shouted. “More songs of the car club! We’re all poets here, I hope. Each shall write something about why the road jerks about so much. So much as this, for example,” he added, as the whole vehicle nearly rolled over in a ditch.

For, indeed, Pump appeared to be attacking such inclines as are more suitable for a goat than a small motor car. This may have been exaggerated in the emotions of his companions, who had both, for different reasons, seen much of mere flat country lately. The sensation was like a combination of trying to get into the middle of the maze at Hampton Court, and climbing the spiral staircase to the Belfry at Bruges.

“This is the right way to Roundabout,” said Dalroy, cheerfully, “charming place; salubrious spot. You can’t miss it. First to the left and right and straight on round the corner and back again. That’ll do for my poem. Get on, you slackers; why aren’t you writing your poems?”

“I’ll try one if you like,” said Dorian, treating his flattered egotism lightly. “But it’s too dark to write; and getting darker.”

Indeed they had come under a shadow between them and the stars, like the brim of a giant’s hat; only through the holes and rents in which the summer stars could now look down on them. The hill, like a cluster of domes, though smooth and even bare in its lower contours was topped with a tangle of spanning trees that sat above them like a bird brooding over its nest. The wood was larger and vaguer than the clump that is the crown of the hill at Chanctonbury, but was rather like it and held much the same high and romantic position. The next moment they were in the wood itself, and winding in and out among the trees by a ribbon of paths. The emerald twilight between the stems, combined with the dragon-like contortions of the great grey roots of the beeches, had a suggestion of monsters and the deep sea; especially as a long litter of crimson and copper-coloured fungi, which might well have been the more gorgeous types of anemone or jelly-fish, reddened the ground like a sunset dropped from the sky. And yet, contradictorily enough, they had also a strong sense of being high up; and even near to heaven; and the brilliant summer stars that stared through the chinks of the leafy roof might almost have been white starry blossoms on the trees of the wood.

But though they had entered the wood as if it were a house, their strongest sensation still was the rotatory; it seemed as if that high green house went round and round like a revolving lighthouse or the whiz-gig temple in the old pantomimes. The stars seemed, to circle over their heads; and Dorian felt almost certain he had seen the same beech-tree twice.

At length they came to a central place where the hill rose in a sort of cone in the thick of its trees, lifting its trees with it. Here Pump stopped the car, and clambering up the slope, came to the crawling colossal roots of a very large but very low beech-tree. It spread out to the four quarters of heaven more in the manner of an octopus than a tree, and within its low crown of branches there was a kind of hollow, like a cup, into which Mr. Humphrey Pump, of “The Old Ship,” Pebblewick, suddenly and entirely disappeared.

When he appeared it was with a kind of rope ladder, which he politely hung over the side for his companions to ascend by, but the Captain preferred to swing himself onto one of the octopine branches with a whirl of large wild legs worthy of a chimpanzee. When they were established there, each propped in the hollow against a branch, almost as comfortably as in an arm chair, Humphrey himself descended once more and began to take out their simple stores. The dog was still asleep in the car.

“An old haunt of yours, Hump, I suppose,” said the Captain. “You seem quite at home.”

“I am at home,” answered Pump, with gravity, “at the sign of ‘The Old Ship.’” And he stuck the old blue and red sign-board erect among the toadstools, as if inviting the passer-by to climb the trees for a drink.

The tree just topped the mound or clump of trees, and from it they could see the whole champaign of the country they had passed, with the silver roads roaming about in it like rivers. They were so exalted they could almost fancy the stars would burn them.

“Those roads remind me of the songs you’ve all promised,” said Dalroy at last. “Let’s have some supper, Hump, and then recite.”

Humphrey had hung one of the motor lanterns onto a branch above him, and proceeded by the light of it to tap the keg of rum and hand round the cheese.

“What an extraordinary thing,” exclaimed Dorian Wimpole, suddenly. “Why, I’m quite comfortable! Such a thing has never happened before, I should imagine. And how holy this cheese tastes.”

“It has gone on a pilgrimage,” answered Dalroy, “or rather a Crusade. It’s a heroic, a fighting cheese. ‘Cheese of all Cheeses, Cheeses of all the world,’ as my compatriot, Mr. Yeats, says to the Something-or-other of

Battle. It’s almost impossible that this cheese can have come out of such a coward as a cow. I suppose,” he added, wistfully, “I suppose it wouldn’t do to explain that in this case Hump had milked the bull. That would be classed by scientists among Irish legends — those that have the Celtic glamour and all that. No, I think this cheese must have come from that Dun Cow of Dunsmore Heath, who had horns bigger than elephant’s tusks, and who was so ferocious that one of the greatest of the old heroes of chivalry was required to do battle with it. The rum’s good, too. I’ve earned this glass of rum — earned it by Christian humility. For nearly a month I’ve lowered myself to the beasts of the field, and gone about on all fours like a teetotaller. Hump, circulate the bottle — I mean the cask — and let us have some of this poetry you’re so keen about. Each poem must have the same title, you know; it’s a rattling good title. It’s called ‘An Inquiry into the Causes geological, historical, agricultural, psychological, psychical, moral, spiritual and theological of the alleged cases of double, treble, quadruple and other curvature in the English Road, conducted by a specially appointed secret commission in a hole in a tree, by admittedly judicious and academic authorities specially appointed by themselves to report to the Dog Quoodle, having power to add to their number and also to take away the number they first thought of; God save the King.” Having delivered this formula with blinding rapidity, he added rather breathlessly, “that’s the note to strike, the lyric note.”

For all his rather formless hilarity, Dalroy still impressed the poet as being more *distrait* than the others, as if his mind were labouring with some bigger thing in the background. He was in a sort of creative trance; and Humphrey Pump, who knew him like his own soul, knew well that it was not mere literary creation. Rather it was a kind of creation which many modern moralists would call destruction. For Patrick Dalroy was, not a little to his misfortune, what is called a man of action; as Captain Dawson realised when he found his entire person a bright pea-green. Fond as he was of jokes and rhymes, nothing he could write or even sing ever satisfied him like something he could do.

Thus it happened that his contribution to the metrical inquiry into the crooked roads was avowedly hasty and flippant. While Dorian who was of the opposite temper, the temper that receives impressions instead of pushing out to make them, found his artist’s love of beauty fulfilled as it had never been before in that noble nest; and was far more serious and human than usual. Patrick's verses ran:

"Some say that Guy of Warwick,
The man that killed the Cow,
And brake the mighty Boar alive,
Beyond the Bridge at Slough,
Went up against a Loathly Worm
That wasted all the Downs,
And so the roads they twist and squirm
(If I may be allowed the term)
From the writhing of the stricken Worm
That died in seven towns.
I see no scientific proof
That this idea is sound,
And I should say they wound about
To find the town of Roundabout,
The merry town of Roundabout
That makes the world go round.
"Some say that Robin Goodfellow,
Whose lantern lights the meads,
(To steal a phrase Sir Walter Scott
In heaven no longer needs)
Such dance around the trysting-place
The moonstruck lover leads;
Which superstition I should scout;
There is more faith in honest doubt,
(As Tennyson has pointed out)
Than in those nasty creeds.
But peace and righteousness (St. John)
In Roundabout can kiss,
And since that's all that's found about
The pleasant town of Roundabout,
The roads they simply bound about
To find out where it is.
"Some say that when Sir Lancelot
Went forth to find the Grail,
Grey Merlin wrinkled up the roads
For hope that he should fail;
All roads led back to Lyonesse
And Camelot in the Vale;
I cannot yield assent to this
Extravagant hypothesis,
The plain, shrewd Briton will dismiss
Such rumours (Daily Mail).
But in the streets of Roundabout
Are no such factions found,
Or theories to expound about
Or roll upon the ground about,
In the happy town of Roundabout
That makes the world go round."

Patrick Dalroy relieved his feelings by finishing with a shout, draining a stiff glass of his sailor’s wine, turning restlessly on his elbow and looking across the landscape toward London.

Dorian Wimpole had been drinking golden rum and strong starlight and the fragrance of forests; and, though his verses, too, were burlesque, he read them more emotionally than was his wont.

“Before the Roman came to Rye or out to Severn strode,
The rolling English drunkard made the rolling English road.
A reeling road, a rolling road, that rambles round the shire,
And after him the parson ran, the sexton and the squire.
A merry road, a mazy road, and such as we did tread
That night we went to Birmingham by way of Beachy Head.
“I knew no harm of Bonaparte and plenty of the Squire,
And for to fight the Frenchmen I did not much desire;
But I did bash their baggonets because they came arrayed
To straighten out the crooked road an English drunkard made,
Where you and I went down the lane with ale-mugs in our hands
The night we went to Glastonbury by way of Goodwin Sands.
“His sins they were forgiven him; or why do flowers run
Behind him; and the hedges all strengthening in the sun?
The wild thing went from left to right and knew not which was which,
But the wild rose was above him when they found him in the ditch.
God pardon us, nor harden us; we did not see so clear
The night we went to Bannockburn by way of Brighton Pier.
“My friends, we will not go again or ape an ancient rage,
Or stretch the folly of our youth to be the shame of age,
But walk with clearer eyes and ears this path that wandereth,
And see undrugged in evening light the decent inn of death;
For there is good news yet to hear and fine things to be seen
Before we go to Paradise by way of Kensal Green.”

"Have you written one, Hump?" asked Dalroy. Humphrey, who had been scribbling hard under the lamp, looked up with a dismal face.

"Yes," he said. "But I write under a great disadvantage. You see, I know why the road curves about." And he read very rapidly, all on one note:

"The road turned first toward the left
Where Pinker's quarry made the cleft;
The path turned next toward the right
Because the mastiff used to bite;
Then left, because of Slippery Height,
And then again toward the right.
We could not take the left because
It would have been against the laws;
Squire closed it in King William's day
Because it was a Right of Way.
Still right; to dodge the ridge of chalk
Where Parson's Ghost it used to walk,
Till someone Parson used to know
Met him blind drunk in Callao.
Then left, a long way round, to skirt
The good land where old Doggy Burt
Was owner of the Crown and Cup,
And would not give his freehold up;
Right, missing the old river-bed,
They tried to make him take instead
Right, since they say Sir Gregory
Went mad and let the Gypsies be,
And so they have their camp secure.
And, though not honest, they are poor,
And that is something; then along
And first to right — no, I am wrong!
Second to right, of course; the first
Is what the holy sisters cursed,
And none defy their awful oaths
Since the policeman lost his clothes
Because of fairies; right again,
What used to be High Toby Lane,
Left by the double larch and right
Until the milestone is in sight,
Because the road is firm and good
From past the milestone to the wood;
And I was told by Dr. Lowe
Whom Mr. Wimpole's aunt would know,
Who lives at Oxford writing books,
And ain't so silly as he looks;
The Romans did that little bit
And we've done all the rest of it;
By which we hardly seem to score;
Left, and then forward as before
To where they nearly hanged Miss Browne,

Who told them not to cut her down,
But loose the rope or let her swing,
Because it was a waste of string;
Left once again by Hunker's Cleft,
And right beyond the elm, and left,
By Pill's right by Nineteen Nicks
And left—"

"No! No! No'! Hump! Hump! Hump!" cried Dalroy in a sort of terror. "Don't be exhaustive! Don't be a scientist, Hump, and lay waste fairyland! How long does it go on? Is there a lot more of it?"

"Yes," said Pump, in a stony manner. "There is a lot more of it."

"And it's all true?" inquired Dorian Wimpole, with interest.

"Yes," replied Pump with a smile, "it's all true."

"My complaint, exactly," said the Captain. "What you want is legends. What you want is lies, especially at this time of night, and on rum like this, and on our first and our last holiday. What do you think about rum?" he asked Wimpole.

"About this particular rum, in this particular tree, at this particular moment," answered Wimpole, "I think it is the nectar of the younger gods. If you ask me in a general, synthetic sense what I think of rum — well, I think it's rather rum."

"You find it a trifle sweet, I suppose," said Dalroy, with some bitterness. "Sybarite! By the way," he said abruptly, "what a silly word that word 'Hedonist' is! The really self-indulgent people generally like sour things and not sweet; bitter things like caviar and curries or what not. It's the Saints who like the sweets. At least I've known at least five women who were practically saints, and they all preferred sweet champagne. Look here, Wimpole! Shall I tell you the ancient oral legend about the origin of rum? I told you what you wanted was legends. Be careful to preserve this one, and hand it on to your children; for, unfortunately, my parents carelessly neglected the duty of handing it on to me. After the words 'A Farmer had three sons . . .' all that I owe to tradition ceases. But when the three boys last met in the village market-place, they were all sucking sugar-sticks. Nevertheless, they were all discontented, and, on that day parted for ever. One remained on his father's farm, hungering for his inheritance. One went up to London to seek his fortune, as fortunes are found today in that town forgotten of God. The third ran away to sea. And the first two flung away their sugar-sticks in shame; and he on the farm was always drinking smaller and sourer beer for the love of money; and he that was in town was always drinking richer and richer wines, that men might see that he was rich. But he who ran away to sea actually ran on board with the sugar-stick in his mouth; and St. Peter or St. Andrew, or whoever is the patron of men in boats, touched it and turned it into a fountain for the comfort of men upon the sea. That is the sailor's theory of the origin of rum. Inquiry addressed to any busy Captain with a new crew in the act of shipping an unprecedented cargo, will elicit a sympathetic agreement."

"Your rum at least," said Dorian, good-humouredly, "may well produce a fairy-tale. But, indeed, I think all this would have been a fairy-tale without it."

Patrick raised himself from his arboreal throne, and leaned against his branch with a curious and sincere sense of being rebuked.

"Yours was a good poem," he said, with seeming irrelevance, "and mine was a bad one. Mine was bad, partly because I'm not a poet as you are; but almost as much because I was trying to make up another song at the same time. And it went to another tune, you see."

He looked out over the rolling roads and said almost to himself:

"In the city set upon slime and loam
They cry in their parliament 'Who goes home?'
And there is no answer in arch or dome,
For none in the city of graves goes home.
Yet these shall perish and understand,
For God has pity on this great land.
Men that are men again; who goes home?
Tocsin and trumpeter! Who goes home?
For there's blood on the field and blood on the foam,
And blood on the body when man goes home.
And a voice valedictory — Who is for Victory?
Who is for Liberty? Who goes home?"

Softly and idly as he had said this second rhyme, there were circumstances about his attitude that must have troubled or interested anyone who did not know him well.

"May I ask," asked Dorian, laughing, "why it is necessary to draw your sword at this stage of the affair?"

"Because we have left the place called Roundabout," answered Patrick, "and we have come to a place called Rightabout."

And he lifted his sword toward London, and the grey glint upon it came from a low, grey light in the east.

Chapter XXII: The Chemistry of Mr. Crooke

WHEN the celebrated Hibbs next visited the shop of Crooke, that mystic and criminologist chemist, he found the premises were impressively and even amazingly enlarged with decorations in the eastern style. Indeed, it would not have been too much to say that Mr. Crooke's shop occupied the whole of one side of a showy street in the West End; the other side being a blank façade of public buildings. It would be no exaggeration to say that Mr. Crooke was the only shopkeeper for some distance round. Mr. Crooke still served in his shop, however; and politely hastened to serve his customer with the medicine that was customary. Unfortunately, for some reason or other, history was, in connection with this shop, only too prone to repeat itself. And after a vague but soothing conversation with the chemist (on the subject of vitriol and its effects on human happiness), Mr. Hibbs experienced the acute annoyance of once more beholding his most intimate friend, Mr. Joseph Leveson, enter the same fashionable emporium. But, indeed, Leveson's own annoyance was much too acute for him to notice any on the part of Hibbs.

"Well," he said, stopping dead in the middle of the shop, "here is a fine confounded kettle of fish!"

It is one of the tragedies of the diplomatic that they are not allowed to admit either knowledge or ignorance; so Hibbs looked gloomily wise; and said, pursing his lips, "you mean the *general* situation."

"I mean the situation about this everlasting business of the inn-signs," said Leveson, impatiently. "Lord Ivywood went up specially, when his leg was really bad, to get it settled in the House in a small non-contentious bill, providing that the sign shouldn't be enough if the liquor hadn't been on the spot three days."

"Oh, but," said Hibbs, sinking his voice to a soft solemnity, as being one of the initiate, "a thing like *that* can be managed, don't you know."

"Of course it can," said the other, still with the same slightly irritable air. "It was. But it doesn't seem to occur to you, any more than it did to his lordship, that there is rather a weak point after all in this business of passing acts quietly because they're unpopular. Has it ever occurred to you that if a law is really kept too quiet to be opposed, it may also be kept too quiet to be obeyed. It’s not so easy to hush it up from a big politician without running the risk of hushing it up even from a common policeman.”

“But surely that can’t happen, by the nature of things?”

“Can’t it, by God,” said J. Leveson, appealing to a less pantheistic authority.

He unfolded a number of papers from his pocket, chiefly cheap local newspapers, but some of them letters and telegrams.

“Listen to this!” he said. “A curious incident occurred in the village of Poltwell in Surrey yesterday morning. The baker’s shop of Mr. Whiteman was suddenly besieged by a knot of the looser types of the locality, who appear to have demanded beer instead of bread; basing their claim on some ornamental object erected outside the shop; which object they asserted to be a sign-board within the meaning of the act. There, you see, they haven’t even heard of the new act! What do you think of this, from the *Clapton Conservator*. ‘The contempt of Socialists for the law was well illustrated yesterday, when a crowd, collected round some wooden ensign of Socialism set up before Mr. Dugdale’s Drapery Stores, refused to disperse, though told that their action was contrary to the law. Eventually the malcontents joined the procession following the wooden emblem.’ And what do you say to this? ‘Stop-press news. A chemist in Pimlico has been invaded by a huge crowd, demanding beer; and asserting the provision of it to be among his duties. The chemist is, of course, well acquainted with his immunities in the matter, especially under the new act; but the old notion of the importance of the sign seems still to possess the populace and even, to a certain extent, to paralyze the police.’ What do you say to that? Isn’t it as plain as Monday morning that this Flying Inn has flown a day in front of us, as all such lies do?” There was a diplomatic silence.

“Well,” asked the still angry Leveson of the still dubious Hibbs, “what do you make of all that?”

One ill-acquainted with that relativity essential to all modern minds, might possibly have fancied that Mr. Hibbs could not make much of it. However that may be, his explanations or incapacity for explanations, were soon tested with a fairly positive test. For Lord Ivywood actually walked into the shop of Mr. Crooke.

“Good day, gentlemen,” he said, looking at them with an expression which they both thought baffling and even a little disconcerting. “Good morning, Mr. Crooke. I have a celebrated visitor for you.” And he introduced the smiling Misysra. The Prophet had fallen back on a comparatively quiet costume this morning, a mere matter of purple and orange or what not; but his aged face was now perennially festive.

"The Cause progresses," he said. "Everywhere the Cause progresses. You heard his lordship's beau-uti-ful speech?"

"I have heard many," said Hibbs, gracefully, "that can be so described."

"The Prophet means what I was saying about the Ballot Paper Amendment Act," said Ivywood, casually. "It seems to be the alphabet of statesmanship to recognise now that the great oriental British Empire has become one corporate whole with the occidental one. Look at our universities, with their Mohammedan students; soon they may be a majority. Now are we," he went on, still more quietly, "are we to rule this country under the forms of representative government? I do not pretend to believe in democracy, as you know, but I think it would be extremely unsettling and incalculable to destroy representative government. If we are to give Moslem Britain representative government, we must not make the mistake we made about the Hindoos and military organization — which led to the Mutiny. We must not ask them to make a cross on their ballot papers; for though it seems a small thing, it may offend them. So I brought in a little bill to make it optional between the old-fashioned cross and an upward curved mark that might stand for a crescent — and as it's rather easier to make, I believe it will be generally adopted."

"And so," said the radiant old Turk, "the little, light, easily made, curly mark is substituted for the hard, difficult, double-made, cutting both ways mark. It is the more good for hygi-e-ene. For you must know, and indeed our good and wise Chemist will tell you, that the Saracenic and the Arabian and the Turkish physicians were the first of all physicians; and taught all medicals to the barbarians of the Frankish territories. And many of the moost modern, the moost fashionable remedies, are thus of the oriental origin."

"Yes, that is quite true," said Crooke, in his rather cryptic and unsympathetic way, "the powder called Arenine, lately popularised by Mr. Boze, now Lord Helvellyn, who tried it first on birds, is made of plain desert sand. And what you see in prescriptions as *Cannabis Indiensis* is what our lively neighbours of Asia describe more energetically as bhang."

"And so-o — in the sa-ame way," said Misysra, making soothing passes with his brown hand like a mesmerist, "in the sa-ame way the making of the crescent is hy-gienic; the making of the cross is non-hy-gienic. The crescent was a little wave, as a leaf, as a little curling feather," and he waved his hand with real artistic enthusiasm toward the capering curves of the new Turkish decoration which Ivywood had made fashionable in many of the fashionable shops. "But when you make the cross you must make the one line so-o," and he swept the horizon with the brown hand, "and then you must go back and make the other line so-o," and he made an upward gesture suggestive of one constrained to lift a pine-tree. "And then you become very ill."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Crooke," said Ivywood, in his polite manner, "I brought the Prophet here to consult you as the best authority on the very point you have just mentioned — the use of hashish or the hemp-plant. I have it on my conscience to decide whether these oriental stimulants or sedatives shall come under the general veto we are attempting to impose on the vulgar intoxicants. Of course one has heard of the horrible and voluptuous visions, and a kind of insanity attributed to the Assassins and the Old Man of the Mountain. But, on the one hand, we must clearly discount much for the illimitable pro-Christian bias with which the history of these eastern tribes is told in this country. Would you say the effect of hashish was extremely bad?" And he turned first to the Prophet.

"You will see mosques," said that seer with candour, "many mosques — more mosques — taller and taller mosques till they reach the moon and you bear a dreadful voice in the very high mosque calling the muezzin; and you will think it is Allah. Then you will see wives — many, many wives — more wives than you yet have. Then you will be rolled over and over in a great pink and purple sea — which is still wives. Then you will go to sleep. I have only done it once," he concluded mildly.

"And what do you think about hashish, Mr. Crooke?" asked Ivywood, thoughtfully.

"I think it's hemp at both ends," said the Chemist.

"I fear," said Lord Ivywood, "I don't quite understand you."

"A hempen drink, a murder, and a hempen rope. That's my experience in India," said Mr. Crooke.

"It is true," said Ivywood, yet more reflectively, "that the thing is not Moslem in any sense in its origin. There is that against the Assassins always. And, of course," he added, with a simplicity that had something noble about it, "their connection with St. Louis discredits them rather."

After a space of silence, he said suddenly, looking at Crooke, “So it isn’t the sort of thing you chiefly sell?”

“No, my lord, it isn’t what I chiefly sell,” said the Chemist. He also looked steadily, and the wrinkles of his young-old face were like hieroglyphics.

“The Cause progress! Everywhere it progress!” cried Misysra, spreading his arms and relieving a momentary tension of which he was totally unaware. “The hygienic curve of the crescent will soon superimpose himself for your plus sign. You already use him for the short syllables in your dactyl; which is doubtless of oriental origin. You see the new game?”

He said this so suddenly that everyone turned round, to see him produce from his purple clothing a brightly coloured and highly polished apparatus from one of the grand toy-shops; which, on examination, seemed to consist of a kind of blue slate in a red and yellow frame; a number of divisions being already marked on the slate, about seventeen slate pencils with covers of different colours, and a vast number of printed instructions, stating that it was but recently introduced from the remote East, and was called Naughts and Crescents.

Strangely enough, Lord Ivywood, with all his enthusiasm, seemed almost annoyed at the emergence of this Asiatic discovery; more especially as he really wanted to look at Mr. Crooke, as hard as Mr. Crooke was looking at him.

Hibbs coughed considerately and said, “Of course all our things came from the East, and” — and he paused, being suddenly unable to remember anything but curry; to which he was very rightly attached. He then remembered Christianity, and mentioned that too. “Everything from the East is good, of course,” he ended, with an air of light omniscience.

Those who in later ages and other fashions failed to understand how Misysra had ever got a mental hold on men like Lord Ivywood, left out two elements in the man, which are very attractive, especially to other men. One was that there was *no* subject on which the little Turk could not instantly produce a theory. The other was that though the theories were crowded, they were consistent. He was never known to accept an illogical compliment.

“You are in error,” he said, solemnly, to Hibbs, “because you say all things from the East are good. There is the east wind. I do not like him. He is not good. And I think very much that all the warmth and all the wealthiness and the colours and the poems and the religiousness that the East was meant to give you have been much poisoned by this accident, this east wind. When you see the green flag of the Prophet, you do not think of a green field in Summer, you think of a green wave in your seas of Winter; for you think it blown by the east wind. When you read of the moon-faced houris you think not of our moons like oranges but of your moons like snowballs—"

Here a new voice contributed to the conversation. Its contribution, though imperfectly understood, appeared to be "Nar! Why sh'd I wite for a little Jew in 'is dressin' gown? Little Jews in their dressin' gowns 'as their drinks, and we 'as our drinks. Bitter, miss."

The speaker, who appeared to be a powerful person of the plastering occupation, looked round for the unmarried female he had ceremonially addressed; and seemed honestly abashed that she was not present.

Ivywood looked at the man with that expression of one turned to stone, which his physique made so effective in him. But J. Leveson, Secretary, could summon no such powers of self-petrification. Upon his soul the slaughter red of that unhallowed eve arose when first the Ship and he were foes; when he discovered that the poor are human beings, and therefore are polite and brutal within a comparatively short space of time. He saw that two other men were standing behind the plastering person, one of them apparently urging him to counsels of moderation; which was an ominous sign. And then he lifted his eyes and saw something worse than any omen.

All the glass frontage of the shop was a cloud of crowding faces. They could not be clearly seen, since night was closing in on the street; and the dazzling fires of ruby and amethyst which the lighted shop gave to its great globes of liquid, rather veiled than revealed them. But the foremost actually flattened and whitened their noses on the glass, and the most distant were nearer than Mr. Leveson wanted them. Also he saw a shape erect outside the shop; the shape of an upright staff and a square board. He could not see what was on the board. He did not need to see.

Those who saw Lord Ivywood at such moments understood why he stood out so strongly in the history of his time, in spite of his frozen face and his fanciful dogmas. He had all the negative nobility that is possible to man. Unlike Nelson and most of the great heroes, he knew not fear. Thus he was never conquered by a surprise, but was cold and collected when other men had lost their heads even if they had not lost their nerve.

"I will not conceal from you, gentlemen," said Lord Ivywood, "that I have been expecting this. I will not even conceal from you that I have been occupying Mr. Crooke's time until it occurred. So far from excluding the crowd, I suggest it would be an excellent thing if Mr. Crooke could accommodate them all in this shop. I want to tell, as soon as possible, as large a crowd as possible that the law is altered and this folly about the Flying Inn has ceased. Come in, all of you! Come in and listen!"

"Thank yer," said a man connected in some way with motor buses, who lurched in behind the plasterer.

"Thanky, sir," said a bright little clock-mender from Croydon, who immediately followed him.

"Thanks," said a rather bewildered clerk from Camberwell, who came next in the rather bewildered procession.

"Thank you," said Mr. Dorian Wimpole, who entered, carrying a large round cheese.

"Thank you," said Captain Dalroy, who entered carrying a large cask of rum.

"Thank you very much," said Mr. Humphrey Pump, who entered the shop carrying the sign of "The Old Ship."

I fear it must be recorded that the crowd which followed them dispensed with all expressions of gratitude. But though the crowd filled the shop so that there was no standing room to spare, Leveson still lifted his gloomy eyes and beheld his gloomy omen. For, though there were very many more people standing in the shop, there seemed to be no less people looking in at the window.

"Gentlemen," said Ivywood, "all jokes come to an end. This one has gone so far as to be serious; and it might have become impossible to correct public opinion, and expound to law-abiding citizens the true state of the law, had I not been able to meet so representative an assembly in so central a place. It is not pertinent to my purpose to indicate what I think of the jest which Captain Dalroy and his friends have been playing upon you for the last few weeks. But I think Captain Dalroy will himself concede that I am not jesting."

"With all my heart," said Dalroy, in a manner that was unusually serious and even sad. Then he added with a sigh, "And as you truly say, my jest has come to an end."

“That wooden sign,” said Ivywood, pointing at the queer blue ship, “can be cut up for firewood. It shall lead decent citizens a devil’s dance no more. Understand it once and for all, before you learn it from policemen or prison warders. You are under a new law. That sign is the sign of nothing. You can no more buy and sell alcohol by having that outside your house, than if it were a lamp-post.”

“D’you meanter say, guv’ner,” said the plasterer, with a dawn of intelligence on his large face which was almost awful to watch, “that I ain’t to ‘ave a glass o’ bitter?”

“Try a glass of rum,” said Patrick.

“Captain Dalroy,” said Lord Ivywood, “if you give one drop from that cask to that man, you are breaking the law and you shall sleep in jail.”

“Are you quite sure?” asked Dalroy, with a strange sort of anxiety. “I might escape.”

“I am quite sure,” said Ivywood. “I have posted the police with full powers for the purpose, as you will find. I mean that this business shall end here tonight.”

“If I find that pleeceman what told me I could ‘ave a drink just now, I’ll knock ‘is ‘elmet into a fancy necktie, I will,” said the plasterer. “Why ain’t people allowed to know the law?”

“They ain’t got no right to alter the law in the dark like that,” said the clock-mender. “Damn the new law.”

“What is the new law?” asked the clerk.

“The words inserted by the recent Act,” said Lord Ivywood, with the cold courtesy of the Conqueror, “are to the effect that alcohol cannot be sold, even under a lawful sign, unless alcoholic liquors have been kept for three days on the premises. Captain Dalroy, that cask of yours has not, I think, been three days on these premises. I command you to seal it up and take it away.”

“Surely,” said Patrick, with an innocent air, “the best remedy would be to wait till it *has been three days* on the premises. We might all get to know each other better.” And he looked round at the ever-increasing multitude with hazy benevolence.

“You shall do nothing of the kind,” said his lordship, with sudden fierceness.

“Well,” answered Patrick, wearily, “now I come to think of it, perhaps I won’t. I’ll have one drink here and go home to bed like a good little boy.”

"And the constables shall arrest you," thundered Ivywood.

"Why, nothing seems to suit you," said the surprised Dalroy. "Thank you, however, for explaining the new law so clearly— 'unless alcoholic liquors have been three days on the premises' I shall remember it now. You always explain such things so clearly. You only made one legal slip. The constables will not arrest me."

"And why not?" demanded the nobleman, white with passion.

"Because," cried Patrick Dalroy; and his voice lifted itself like a lonely trumpet before the charge, "because I shall not have broken the law. Because alcoholic liquors *have* been three days on these premises. Three months more likely. Because this is a common grog-shop, Philip Ivywood. Because that man behind the counter lives by selling spirits to all the cowards and hypocrites who are rich enough to bribe a bad doctor."

And he pointed suddenly at the small medicine glass on the counter by Hibbs and Leveson.

"What is that man drinking?" he demanded.

Hibbs put out his hand hastily for his glass, but the indignant clock-mender had snatched it first and drained it at a gulp.

"Scortch," he said, and dashed the glass to atoms on the floor. "Right you are too," roared the plasterer, seizing a big medicine bottle in each hand. "We're goin' to 'ave a little of the fun now, we are. What's in that big red bowl up there — I reckon it's port. Fetch it down, Bill."

Ivywood turned to Crooke and said, scarcely moving his lips of marble, "This is a lie."

"It is the truth," answered Crooke, looking back at him with equal steadiness. "Do you think you made the world, that you should make it over again so easily?"

"The world was made badly," said Philip, with a terrible note in his voice, "and *I will make it over again*."

Almost as he spoke the glass front of the shop fell inward, shattered, and there was wreckage among the moonlike, coloured bowls; almost as if spheres of celestial crystal cracked at his blasphemy. Through the broken windows came the roar of that confused tongue that is more terrible than the elements; the cry that the deaf kings have heard at last; the terrible voice of mankind. All the way down the long, fashionable street, lined with the Crooke plate-glass, that glass was crashing amid the cries of a crowd. Rivers of gold and purple wines sprawled about the pavement.

“Out in the open!” shouted Dalroy, rushing out of the shop, sign-board in hand, the dog Quoodle barking furiously at his heels, while Dorian with the cheese and Humphrey with the keg followed as rapidly as they could. “Goodnight, my lord.

“Perhaps our meeting next may fall,
At Tomworth in your castle hall.

“Come along, friends, and form up. Don’t waste time destroying property. We’re all to start now.”

“Where are we all going to?” asked the plasterer.

“We’re all going into Parliament,” answered the Captain, as he went to the head of the crowd.

The marching crowd turned two or three corners, and at the end of the next long street, Dorian Wimpole, who was toward the tail of the procession, saw again the grey Cyclops tower of St. Stephens, with its one great golden eye, as he had seen it against that pale green sunset that was at once quiet and volcanic on the night he was betrayed by sleep and by a friend. Almost as far off, at the head of the procession, he could see the sign with the ship and the cross going before them like an ensign, and hear a great voice singing —

“Men that are men again, Who goes home?
Tocsin and trumpeter! Who goes home?
The voice valedictory — who is for Victory?
Who is for Liberty? Who goes home?”

Chapter XXIII: The March on Ivywood

THAT storm-spirit, or eagle of liberty, which is the sudden soul in a crowd, had descended upon London after a foreign tour of some centuries in which it had commonly alighted upon other capitals. It is always impossible to define the instant and the turn of mood which makes the whole difference between danger being worse than endurance and endurance being worse than danger. The actual outbreak generally has a symbolic or artistic, or, what some would call whimsical cause. Somebody fires off a pistol or appears in an unpopular uniform, or refers in a loud voice to a scandal that is never mentioned in the newspapers; somebody takes off his hat, or somebody doesn't take off his hat; and a city is sacked before midnight. When the ever-swelling army of revolt smashed a whole street full of the shops of Mr. Crooke, the chemist, and then went on to Parliament, the Tower of London and the road to the sea, the sociologists hiding in their coal-cellars could think (in that clarifying darkness) of many material and spiritual explanations of such a storm in human souls; but of none that explained it quite enough. Doubtless there was a great deal of sheer drunkenness when the urns and goblets of Aesculapius were reclaimed as belonging to Bacchus: and many who went roaring down that road were merely stored with rich wines and liqueurs which are more comfortably and quietly digested at a City banquet or a West End restaurant. But many of these had been blind drunk twenty times without a thought of rebellion; you could not stretch the material explanation to cover a corner of the case. Much more general was a savage sense of the meanness of Crooke's wealthy patrons, in keeping a door open for themselves which they had wantonly shut on less happy people. But no explanation can explain it; and no man can say when it will come.

Dorian Wimpole was at the tail of the procession, which grew more and more crowded every moment. For one space of the march he even had the misfortune to lose it altogether; owing to the startling activity which the rotund cheese when it escaped from his hands showed, in descending a somewhat steep road toward the river. But in recent days he had gained a pleasure in practical events which was like a second youth. He managed to find a stray taxi-cab; and had little difficulty in picking up again the trail of the extraordinary cortège. Inquiries addressed to a policeman with a black eye outside the House of Commons informed him sufficiently of the rebels' line of retreat or advance, or whatever it was; and in a very short time he beheld the unmistakable legion once more. It was unmistakable, because in front of it there walked a red-headed giant, apparently carrying with him a wooden portion of some public building; and also because so big a crowd had never followed any man in England for a long time past. But except for such things the unmistakable crowd might well have been mistaken for another one. Its aspect had been altered almost as much as if it had grown horns or tusks; for many of the company walked with outlandish weapons like iron teeth or horns, bills and pole axes, and spears with strangely shaped heads. What was stranger still, whole rows and rows of them had rifles, and even marched with a certain discipline; and yet again, others seemed to have snatched up household or work-shop tools, meat axes, pick axes, hammers and even carving knives. Such things need be none the less deadly because they are domestic. They have figured in millions of private murders before they appeared in any public war.

Dorian was so fortunate as to meet the flame-haired Captain almost face to face, and easily fell into step with him at the head of the march. Humphrey Pump walked on the other side, with the celebrated cask suspended round his neck by something resembling braces, as if it were a drum. Mr. Wimpole had himself taken the opportunity of his brief estrangement to carry the cheese somewhat more easily in a very large, loose, waterproof knapsack on his shoulders. The effect in both cases was to suggest dreadful deformities in two persons who happened to be exceptionally cleanly built. The Captain, who seemed to be in tearing and towering spirits, gained great pleasure from this. But Dorian had his sources of amusement too.

"What have you been doing with yourselves since you lost my judicious guidance?" he asked, laughing, "and why are parts of you a dull review and parts of you a fancy dress ball? What have you been up to?"

"We've been shopping," said Mr. Patrick Dalroy, with some pride. "We are country cousins. I know all about shopping; let us see, what are the phrases about it? Look at those rifles now! We got them quite at a bargain. We went to all the best gunsmiths in London, and we didn't pay much. In fact, we didn't pay anything. That's what is called a bargain, isn't it? Surely, I've seen in those things they send to ladies something about 'giving them away.' Then we went to a remnant sale. At least, it was a remnant sale when we left. And we bought that piece of stuff we've tied round the sign. Surely, it must be what ladies called chiffon?"

Dorian lifted his eyes and perceived that a very coarse strip of red rag, possibly collected from a dust bin, had been tied round the wooden sign-post by way of a red flag of revolution.

"Not what ladies call chiffon?" inquired the Captain with anxiety. "Well, anyhow, it is what *chiffoniers* call it. But as I'm going to call on a lady shortly, I'll try to remember the distinction."

"Is your shopping over, may I ask?" asked Mr. Wimpole.

"All but one thing," answered the other. "I must find a music shop — you know what I mean. Place where they sell pianos and things of that sort."

"Look here," said Dorian, "this cheese is pretty heavy as it is. Have I got to carry a piano, too?"

"You misunderstand me," said the Captain, calmly. And as he had never thought of music shops until his eye had caught one an instant before, he darted into the doorway. Returning almost immediately with a long parcel under his arm, he resumed the conversation.

"Did you go anywhere else," asked Dorian, "except to shops?"

"Anywhere else!" cried Patrick, indignantly, "haven't you got any country cousins? Of course we went to all the right places. We went to the Houses of Parliament. But Parliament isn't sitting; so there are no eggs of the quality suitable for elections. We went to the Tower of London — you can't tire country cousins like us. We took away some curiosities of steel and iron. We even took away the halberds from the Beef-eaters. We pointed out that for the purpose of eating beef (their only avowed public object) knives and forks had always been found more convenient. To tell the truth, they seemed rather relieved to be relieved of them."

"And may I ask," said the other with a smile, "where you are off to now?"

"Another beauty spot!" cried the Captain, boisterously, "no tiring the country cousin! I am going to show my young friends from the provinces what is perhaps the finest old country house in England. We are going to Ivywood, not far from that big watering place they call Pebblewick."

"I see," said Dorian; and for the first time looked back with intelligent trouble on his face, on the marching ranks behind him.

“Captain Dalroy,” said Dorian Wimpole, in a slightly altered tone, “there is one thing that puzzles me. Ivywood talked about having set the police to catch us; and though this is a pretty big crowd, I simply cannot believe that the police, as I knew them in my youth, could not catch us. But where are the police? You seem to have marched through half London with much (if you’ll excuse me) of the appearance of carrying murderous weapons. Lord Ivywood threatened that the police would stop us. Well, why didn’t they stop us?”

“Your subject,” said Patrick, cheerfully, “divides itself into three heads.”

“I hope not,” said Dorian.

“There really are three reasons why the police should not be prominent in this business; as their worst enemy cannot say that they were.”

He began ticking off the three on his own huge fingers; and seemed to be quite serious about it.

“First,” he said, “you have been a long time away from town. Probably you do not know a policeman when you see him. They do not wear helmets, as our line regiments did after the Prussians had won. They wear fezzes, because the Turks have won. Shortly, I have little doubt, they will wear pigtails, because the Chinese have won. It is a very interesting branch of moral science. It is called Efficiency.

“Second,” explained the Captain, “you have, perhaps, omitted to notice that a very considerable number of those wearing such fezzes are walking just behind us. Oh, yes, it’s quite true. Don’t you remember that the whole French Revolution really began because a sort of City Militia refused to fire on their own fathers and wives; and even showed some slight traces of a taste for firing on the other side? You’ll see lots of them behind; and you can tell them by their revolver belts and their walking in step; but don’t look back on them too much. It makes them nervous.”

“And the third reason?” asked Dorian.

“For the real reason,” answered Patrick, “I am not fighting a hopeless fight. People who have fought in real fights don’t, as a rule. But I noticed something singular about the very point you mention. Why are there no more police? Why are there no more soldiers? I will tell you. There really are very few policemen or soldiers left in England today.”

“Surely, that,” said Wimpole, “is an unusual complaint.”

“But very clear,” said the Captain, gravely, “to anyone who has ever seen sailors or soldiers. I will tell you the truth. Our rulers have come to count on the bare bodily cowardice of a mass of Englishmen, as a sheep dog counts on the cowardice of a flock of sheep. Now, look here, Mr. Wimpole, wouldn’t a shepherd be wise to limit the number of his dogs if he could make his sheep pay by it? At the end you might find millions of sheep managed by a solitary dog. But that is because they are sheep. Suppose the sheep were turned by a miracle into wolves. There are very few dogs they could not tear in pieces. But, what is my practical point, there are really very few dogs to tear.”

“You don’t mean,” said Dorian, “that the British Army is practically disbanded?”

“There are the sentinels outside Whitehall,” replied Patrick, in a low voice. “But, indeed, your question puts me in a difficulty. No; the army is not entirely disbanded, of course. But the *British* army — . Did you ever hear, Wimpole, of the great destiny of the Empire?”

“I seem to have heard the phrase,” replied his companion.

“It is in four acts,” said Dalroy. “Victory over barbarians. Employment of barbarians. Alliance with barbarians. Conquest by barbarians. That is the great destiny of Empire.”

“I think I begin to see what you mean,” returned Dorian Wimpole. “Of course Ivywood and the authorities do seem very prone to rely on the sepoy troops.”

“And other troops as well,” said Patrick. “I think you will be surprised when you see them.”

He tramped on for a while in silence and then said, with some air of abruptness, which yet did not seem to be entirely a changing of the subject,

“Do you know the man who lives now on the estate next to Ivywood?”

“No,” replied Dorian, “I am told he keeps himself very much to himself.”

“And his estate, too,” said Patrick, rather gloomily. “If you would climb his garden-wall, Wimpole, I think you would find an answer to a good many of your questions. Oh, yes, the right honourable gentlemen are making full provision for public order and national defence — in a way.”

He fell into an almost sullen silence again; and several villages had been passed before he spoke again.

They tramped through the darkness; and dawn surprised them somewhere in the wilder and more wooded parts where the roads began to rise and roam. Dalroy gave an exclamation of pleasure and pointed ahead, drawing the attention of Dorian to the distance. Against the silver and scarlet bars of the daybreak could be seen afar a dark purple dome, with a crown of dark green leaves; the place they had called Roundabout.

Dalroy’s spirit seemed to revive at the sight, with the customary accompaniment of the threat of vocalism.

“Been making any poems lately?” he asked of Wimpole.

“Nothing particular,” replied the poet.

“Then,” said the Captain, portentously, clearing his throat, “you shall listen to one of mine, whether you like it or not — nay, the more you dislike it the longer and longer it will be. I begin to understand why soldiers want to sing when on the march; and also why they put up with such rotten songs.

“The Druids waved their golden knives
And danced around the Oak,
When they had sacrificed a man;
But though the learnèd search and scan
No single modern person can
Entirely see the joke;
But though they cut the throats of men
They cut not down the tree,
And from the blood the saplings sprang
Of oak-woods yet to be.
  But Ivywood, Lord Ivywood,
  He rots the tree as ivy would,
  He clings and crawls as ivy would
  About the sacred tree.
“King Charles he fled from Worcester fight
And hid him in an Oak;
In convent schools no man of tact
Would trace and praise his every act,
Or argue that he was in fact
A strict and sainted bloke;
But not by him the sacred woods
Have lost their fancies free,
And though he was extremely big,
He did not break the tree.
  But Ivywood, Lord Ivywood,
  He breaks the tree as ivy would
  And eats the woods as ivy would
  Between us and the sea.
“Great Collingwood walked down the glade
And flung the acorns free,
That oaks might still be in the grove
As oaken as the beams above
When the great Lover sailors love
Was kissed by Death at sea.

But though for him the oak-trees fell
To build the oaken ships,
The woodman worshipped what he smote
And honoured even the chips.
  But Ivywood, Lord Ivywood,
  He hates the tree as ivy would,
  As the dragon of the ivy would,
  That has us in his grips.”

They were ascending a sloping road, walled in on both sides by solemn woods, which somehow seemed as watchful as owls awake. Though daybreak was going over them with banners, scrolls of scarlet and gold, and with a wind like trumpets of triumph, the dark woods seemed to hold their secret like dark, cool cellars; nor was the strong sunlight seen in them, save in one or two brilliant shafts, that looked like splintered emeralds.

“I should not wonder,” said Dorian, “if the ivy does not find the tree knows a thing or two also.”

“The tree does,” assented the Captain. “The trouble was that until a little while ago the tree did not know that it knew.”

There was a silence; and as they went up the incline grew steeper and steeper, and the tall trees seemed more and more to be guarding something from sight, as with the grey shields of giants.

“Do you remember this road, Hump?” asked Dalroy of the innkeeper.

“Yes,” answered Humphrey Pump, and said no more; but few have ever heard such fulness in an affirmative.

They marched on in silence and about two hours afterward, toward eleven o’clock, Dalroy called a halt in the forest, and said that everybody had better have a few hours’ sleep. The impenetrable quality in the woods and the comparative softness of the carpet of beech-mast, made the spot as appropriate as the time was inappropriate. And if anyone thinks that common people, casually picked up in a street, could not follow a random leader on such a journey or sleep at his command in such a spot, given the state of the soul, then someone knows no history.

“I’m afraid,” said Dalroy, “you’ll have to have your supper for breakfast. I know an excellent place for having breakfast, but it’s too exposed for sleep. And sleep you must have; so we won’t unpack the stores just now. We’ll lie down like Babes in the Wood, and any bird of an industrious disposition is free to start covering me with leaves. Really, there are things coming, before which you will want sleep.”

When they resumed the march it was nearly the middle of the afternoon; and the meal which Dalroy insisted buoyantly on describing as breakfast was taken about that mysterious hour when ladies die without tea. The steep road had consistently grown steeper and steeper; and steeper; and at last, Dalroy said to Dorian Wimpole,

“Don’t drop that cheese again just here, or it will roll right away down into the woods. I know it will. No scientific calculations of grades and angles are necessary; because I have seen it do so myself. In fact, I have run after it.”

Wimpole realised they were mounting to the sharp edge of a ridge, and in a few moments he knew by the oddness in the shape of the trees what it had been that the trees were hiding.

They had been walking along a swelling, woodland path beside the sea. On a particular high plateau, projecting above the shore, stood some dwarfed and crippled apple-trees, of whose apples no man alive would have eaten, so sour and salt they must be. All the rest of the plateau was bald and featureless, but Pump looked at every inch of it, as if at an inhabited place.

“This is where we’ll have breakfast,” he said, pointing to the naked grassy waste. “It’s the best inn in England.”

Some of his audience began to laugh, but somehow suddenly ceased doing so, as Dalroy strode forward and planted the sign of “The Old Ship” on the desolate sea-shore.

“And now,” he said, “you have charge of the stores we brought, Hump, and we will picnic. As it said in a song I once sang,

“The Saracen’s Head out of Araby came,
King Richard riding in arms like flame,
And where he established his folk to be fed
He set up his spear, and the Saracen’s Head.”

It was nearly dusk before the mob, much swelled by the many discontented on the Ivywood estates, reached the gates of Ivywood House. Strategically, and for the purposes of a night surprise, this might have done credit to the Captain’s military capacity. But the use to which he put it actually was what some might call eccentric. When he had disposed his forces, with strict injunctions of silence for the first few minutes, he turned to Pump, and said,

“And now, before we do anything else, I’m going to make a noise.”

And he produced from under brown paper what appeared to be a musical instrument.

“A summons to parley?” inquired Dorian, with interest, “a trumpet of defiance, or something of that kind?”

“No,” said Patrick, “a serenade.”

Chapter XXIV: The Enigmas of Lady Joan

ON an evening when the sky was clear and only its fringes embroidered with the purple arabesques of the sunset, Joan Brett was walking on the upper lawn of the terraced garden at Ivywood, where the peacocks trail themselves about. She was not unlike one of the peacocks herself in beauty, and some might have said, in inutility; she had the proud head and the sweeping train; nor was she, in these days, devoid of the occasional disposition to scream. For, indeed, for some time past she had felt her existence closing round her with an incomprehensible quietude; and that is harder for the patience than an incomprehensible noise. Whenever she looked at the old yew hedges of the garden they seemed to be higher than when she saw them last; as if those living walls could still grow to shut her in. Whenever from the turret windows she had a sight of the sea, it seemed to be farther away. Indeed, the whole closing of the end of the turret wing with the new wall of eastern woodwork seemed to symbolise all her shapeless sensations. In her childhood the wing had ended with a broken-down door and a disused staircase. They led to an uncultivated copse and an abandoned railway tunnel, to which neither she nor anyone else ever wanted to go. Still, she knew what they led to. Now it seemed that this scrap of land had been sold and added to the adjoining estate; and about the adjoining estate nobody seemed to know anything in particular. The sense of things closing in increased upon her. All sorts of silly little details magnified the sensation. She could discover nothing about this new landlord next door, so to speak, since he was, it seemed, an elderly man who preferred to live in the greatest privacy. Miss Browning, Lord Ivywood's secretary, could give her no further information than that he was a gentleman from the Mediterranean coast; which singular form of words seemed to have been put into her mouth. As a Mediterranean gentleman might mean anything from an American gentleman living in Venice to a black African on the edge of the Atlas, the description did not illuminate; and probably was not intended to do so. She occasionally saw his liveried servants going about; and their liveries were not like English liveries. She was also, in her somewhat morbid state, annoyed by the fact that the uniforms of the old Pebblewick militia had been changed, under the influence of the Turkish *prestige* in the recent war. They wore fezzes like the French Zouaves, which were certainly much more practical than the heavy helmets they used to wear. It was a small matter, but it annoyed Lady Joan, who was, like so many clever women, at once subtle and conservative. It made her feel as if the whole world was being altered outside, and she was not allowed to know about it.

But she had deeper spiritual troubles also, while, under the pathetic entreaties of old, Lady Ivywood and her own sick mother, she stayed on week after week at Ivywood House. If the matter be stated cynically (as she herself was quite capable of stating it) she was engaged in the established feminine occupation of trying to like a man. But the cynicism would have been false; as cynicism nearly always is; for during the most crucial days of that period, she had really liked the man.

She had liked him when he was brought in with Pump’s bullet in his leg; and was still the strongest and calmest man in the room. She had liked him when the hurt took a dangerous turn, and when he bore pain to admiration. She had liked him when he showed no malice against the angry Dorian; she had liked him with something like enthusiasm on the night he rose rigid on his rude crutch, and, crushing all remonstrance, made his rash and swift rush to London. But, despite the queer closing-in-sensations of which we have spoken, she never liked him better than that evening when he lifted himself laboriously on his crutch up the terraces of the old garden and came to speak to her as she stood among the peacocks. He even tried to pat a peacock in a hazy way, as if it were a dog. He told her that these beautiful birds were, of course, imported from the East — by the semi-eastern empire of Macedonia. But, all the same, Joan had a dim suspicion that he had never noticed before that there were any peacocks at Ivywood. His greatest fault was a pride in the faultlessness of his mental and moral strength; but, if he had only known, something faintly comic in the unconscious side of him did him more good with the woman than all the rest.

“They were said to be the birds of Juno,” he said, “but I have little doubt that Juno, like so much else of the Homeric mythology, has also an Asiatic origin.”

“I always thought,” said Joan, “that Juno was rather too stately for the seraglio.”

“You ought to know,” replied Ivywood, with a courteous gesture, “for I *never* saw anyone who looked so like Juno as you do. But, indeed, there is a great deal of misunderstanding about the Arabian or Indian view of women.

It is, somehow, too simple and solid for our paradoxical Christendom to comprehend. Even the vulgar joke against the Turks, that they like their brides fat, has in it a sort of distorted shadow of what I mean. They do not look so much at the individual, as at Womanhood and the power of Nature.”

“I sometimes think,” said Joan, “that these fascinating theories are a little strained. Your friend Misysra told me the other day that women had the highest freedom in Turkey; as they were allowed to wear trousers.”

Ivywood smiled his rare and dry smile. “The Prophet has something of a simplicity often found with genius,” he answered. “I will not deny that some of the arguments he has employed have seemed to me crude and even fanciful. But he is right at the root. There is a kind of freedom that consists in never rebelling against Nature; and I think they understand it in the Orient better than we do in the West. You see, Joan, it is all very well to talk about love in our narrow, personal, romantic way; but there is something higher than the love of a lover or the love of love.”

“What is that?” asked Joan, looking down.

“The love of Fate,” said Lord Ivywood, with something like spiritual passion in his eyes. “Doesn’t Nietzsche say somewhere that the delight in destiny is the mark of the hero? We are mistaken if we think that the heroes and saints of Islam say ‘Kismet’ with bowed heads and in sorrow. They say ‘Kismet’ with a shout of joy. That which is fitting — that is what they really mean. In the Arabian tales, the most perfect prince is wedded to the most perfect princess — because it is fitting. The spiritual giants, the Genii, achieve it — that is, the purposes of Nature. In the selfish, sentimental European novels, the loveliest princess on earth might have run away with her middle-aged drawing-master. These things are not in the Path. The Turk rides out to wed the fairest queen of the earth; he conquers empires to do it; and he is not ashamed of his laurels.”

The crumpled violet clouds around the edge of the silver evening looked to Lady Joan more and more like vivid violet embroideries hemming some silver curtain in the closed corridor at Ivywood. The peacocks looked more lustrous and beautiful than they ever had before; but for the first time she really felt they came out of the land of the Arabian Nights.

“Joan,” said Philip Ivywood, very softly, in the twilight, “I am not ashamed of my laurels, I see no meaning in what these Christians call humility. I will be the greatest man in the world if I can; and I think I can. Therefore, something that is higher than love itself, Fate and what is fitting, make it right that I should wed the most beautiful woman in the world. And she stands among the peacocks and is more beautiful and more proud than they.”

Joan’s troubled eyes were on the violet horizon and her troubled lips could utter nothing but something like “don’t.”

“Joan,” said Philip, again, “I have told you, you are the woman one of the great heroes could have desired. Let me now tell you something I could have told no one to whom I had not thus spoken of love and betrothal. When I was twenty years old in a town in Germany, pursuing my education, I did what the West calls falling in love. She was a fisher-girl from the coast; for this town was near the sea. My story might have ended there. I could not have entered diplomacy with such a wife, but I should not have minded then. But a little while after, I wandered into the edges of Flanders, and found myself standing above some of the last grand reaches of the Rhine. And things came over me but for which I might be crying stinking fish to this day. I thought how many holy or lovely nooks that river had left behind, and gone on. It might anywhere in Switzerland have spent its weak youth in a spirit over a high crag, or anywhere in the Rhinelands lost itself in a marsh covered with flowers. But it went on to the perfect sea, which is the fulfilment of a river.”

Again, Joan could not speak; and again it was Philip who went on.

“Here is yet another thing that could not be said, till the hand of the prince had been offered to the princess. It may be that in the East they carry too far this matter of infant marriages. But look round on the mad young marriages that go to pieces everywhere! And ask yourself whether you don’t wish they had been infant marriages! People talk in the newspapers of the heartlessness of royal marriages. But you and I do not believe the newspapers, I suppose. We know there is no King in England; nor has been since his head fell before Whitehall. You know that you and I and the families are the Kings of England; and our marriages are royal marriages. Let the suburbs call them heartless. Let us say they need the brave heart that is the only badge of aristocracy. Joan,” he said, very gently, “perhaps you have been near a crag in Switzerland, or a marsh covered with flowers. Perhaps you have known — a fisher-girl. But there is something greater and simpler than all that; something you find in the great epics of the East — the beautiful woman, and the great man, and Fate.”

“My lord,” said Joan, using the formal phrase by an unfathomable instinct, “will you allow me a little more time to think of this? And let there be no notion of disloyalty, if my decision is one way or the other?”

“Why, of course,” said Ivywood, bowing over his crutch; and he limped off, picking his way among the peacocks.

For days afterward Joan tried to build the foundations of her earthly destiny. She was still quite young, but she felt as if she had lived thousands of years, worrying over the same question. She told herself again and again, and truly, that many a better woman than she had taken a second-best which was not so first-class a second-best. But there was something complicated in the very atmosphere. She liked listening to Philip Ivywood at his best, as anyone likes listening to a man who can really play the violin; but the great trouble always is that at certain awful moments you cannot be certain whether it is the violin or the man.

Moreover, there was a curious tone and spirit in the Ivywood household, especially after the wound and convalescence of Ivywood, about which she could say nothing except that it annoyed her somehow. There was something in it glorious — but also languorous. By an impulse by no means uncommon among intelligent, fashionable people, she felt a desire to talk to a sensible woman of the middle or lower classes; and almost threw herself on the bosom of Miss Browning for sympathy.

But Miss Browning, with her curling, reddish hair and white, very clever face, struck the same indescribable note. Lord Ivywood was assumed as a first principle; as if he were Father Time, or the Clerk of the Weather. He was called “He.” The fifth time he was called “He,” Joan could not understand why she seemed to smell the plants in the hot conservatory.

“You see,” said Miss Browning, “we mustn’t interfere with his career; that is the important thing. And, really, I think the quieter we keep about everything the better. I am sure he is maturing very big plans. You heard what the Prophet said the other night?”

“The last thing the Prophet said to me,” said the darker lady, in a dogged manner, “was that when we English see the English youth, we cry out ‘He is crescent!’ But when we see the English aged man, we cry out ‘He is cross!’”

A lady with so clever a face could not but laugh faintly; but she continued on a determined theme, “The Prophet said, you know, that all real love had in it an element of fate. And I am sure that is his view, too. People cluster round a centre as little stars do round a star; because a star is a magnet. You are never wrong when destiny blows behind you like a great big wind; and I think many things have been judged unfairly that way. It's all very well to talk about the infant marriages in India."

"Miss Browning," said Joan, "are you interested in the infant marriages in India?"

"Well—" said Miss Browning.

"Is your sister interested in them? I'll run and ask her," cried Joan, plunging across the room to where Mrs. Mackintosh was sitting at a table scribbling secretarial notes.

"Well," said Mrs. Mackintosh, turning up a rich-haired, resolute head, more handsome than her sister's, "I believe the Indian way is the best. When people are left to themselves in early youth, any of them might marry anything. We might have married a nigger or a fish-wife or — a criminal."

"Now, Mrs. Mackintosh," said Joan, with black-browed severity, "you well know you would never have married a fish-wife. Where is Enid?" she ended suddenly.

"Lady Enid," said Miss Browning, "is looking out music in the music room, I think."

Joan walked swiftly through several long salons, and found her fair-haired and pallid relative actually at the piano.

"Enid," cried Joan, "you know I've always been fond of you. For God's sake tell me what is the matter with this house? I admire Philip as everybody does. But what is the matter with the house? Why do all these rooms and gardens seem to be shutting me in and in and in? Why does everything look more and more the same? Why does everybody say the same thing? Oh, I don't often talk metaphysics; but there is a purpose in this. That's the only way of putting it; there is a purpose. And I don't know what it is."

Lady Enid Wimpole played a preliminary bar or two on the piano. Then she said,

"Nor do I, Joan. I don't indeed. I know exactly what you mean. But it's just because there is a purpose that I have faith in him and trust him." She began softly to play a ballad tune of the Rhineland; and perhaps the music suggested her next remark. "Suppose you were looking at some of the last reaches of the Rhine, where it flows—"

"Enid!" cried Joan, "if you say 'into the North Sea,' I shall scream. Scream, do you hear, louder than all the peacocks together."

"Well," expostulated Lady Enid, looking up rather wildly, "The Rhine *does* flow into the North Sea, doesn't it?"

"I dare say," said Joan, recklessly, "but the Rhine might have flowed into the Round Pond, before you would have known or cared, until—"

"Until what?" asked Enid; and her music suddenly ceased. "Until something happened that I cannot understand," said Joan, moving away.

"*You* are something I cannot understand," said Enid Wimpole. "But I will play something else, if this annoys you." And she fingered the music again with an eye to choice.

Joan walked back through the corridor of the music room, and restlessly resumed her seat in the room with the two lady secretaries.

"Well," asked the red-haired and good-humoured Mrs. Mackintosh, without looking up from her work of scribbling, "have you discovered anything?"

For some moments Joan appeared to be in a blacker state of brooding than usual; then she said, in a candid and friendly tone, which somehow contrasted with her knit and swarthy brows— "No, really. At least I think I've only found out two things; and they are only things about myself. I've discovered that I do like heroism, but I don't like hero worship."

"Surely," said Miss Browning, in the Girton manner, "the one always flows from the other."

"I hope not," said Joan.

"But what else can you do with the hero?" asked Mrs. Mackintosh, still without looking up from her writing, "except worship him?"

"You might crucify him," said Joan, with a sudden return of savage restlessness, as she rose from her chair. "Things seem to happen then."

"Aren't you tired?" asked the Miss Browning who had the clever face.

"Yes," said Joan, "and the worst sort of tiredness; when you don't even know what you're tired of. To tell the honest truth, I think I'm tired of this house."

"It's very old, of course, and parts of it are still dismal," said Miss Browning, "but he has enormously improved it. The decoration, with the moon and stars, down in the wing with the turret is really—"

Away in the distant music room, Lady Enid, having found the music she preferred, was fingering its prelude on the piano. At the first few notes of it, Joan Brett stood up, like a tigress.

“Thanks—” she said, with a hoarse softness, “that’s it, of course! and that’s just what we all are! She’s found the right tune now.”

“What tune is it?” asked the wondering secretary.

“The tune of harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer and all kinds of music,” said Joan, softly and fiercely, “when we shall bow down and worship the Golden Image that Nebuchadnezzar the King has set up. Girls! Women! Do you know what this place is? Do you know why it is all doors within doors and lattice behind lattice; and everything is curtained and cushioned; and why the flowers that are so fragrant here are not the flowers of our hills?”

From the distant and slowly darkening music room, Enid Wimpole’s song came thin and clear:

“Less than the dust beneath thy chariot wheel,
Less than the rust that never stained thy sword—”

“Do you know what we are?” demanded Joan Brett, again. “We are a Harem.”

“Why, what can you mean?” cried the younger girl, in great agitation. “Why, Lord Ivywood has never—”

“I know he has never. I am not sure,” said Joan, “even whether he would ever. I shall never understand that man, nor will anybody else. But I tell you that is the spirit. That is what we *are*. And this room stinks of polygamy as certainly as it smells of tube-roses.”

“Why, Joan,” cried Lady Enid, entering the room like a well-bred ghost, “what on earth is the matter with you. You all look as white as sheets.”

Joan took no heed of her but went on with her own obstinate argument.

“And, besides,” she said, “if there’s one thing we do know about him it is that he believes on principle in doing things slowly. He calls it evolution and relativity and the expanding of an idea into larger ideas. How do we know he isn’t doing that slowly; getting us accustomed to living like this, so that it may be the less shock when he goes further — steeping us in the atmosphere before he actually introduces,” and she shuddered, “the institution. Is it any more calmly outrageous a scheme than any other of Ivywood’s schemes; than a sepoy commander-in-chief, or Misysra preaching in Westminster Abbey, or the destruction of all the inns in England? I will not wait and expand. I will not be evolved. I will not develop into something that is not me. My feet shall be outside these walls if I walk the roads for it afterward; or I will scream as I would scream trapped in any den by the Docks.”

She swept down the rooms toward the turret, with a sudden passion for solitude; but as she passed the astronomical wood-carving that had closed up the end of the old wing, Enid saw her strike it with her clinched hand.

It was in the turret that she had a strange experience. She was again, later on, using its isolation to worry out the best way of having it out with Philip, when he should return from his visit to London; for to tell old Lady Ivywood what was on her mind would be about as kind and useful as describing Chinese tortures to a baby. The evening was very quiet, of the pale grey sort, and all that side of Ivywood lay before her eyes, undisturbed. She was the more surprised when her dreaming took note of a sort of stirring in the grey-purple dusk of the bushes; of whisperings; and of many footsteps. Then the silence settled down again; and then it was startlingly broken by a big voice singing in the dark distance. It was accompanied by faint sounds that might have been from the fingering of some lute or viol:

“Lady, the light is dying in the skies,
Lady, and let us die when honour dies,
Your dear, dropped glove was like a gauntlet flung,
When you and I were young.
For something more than splendour stood; and ease was not the only good
About the woods in Ivywood when you and I were young.
“Lady, the stars are falling pale and small,
Lady, we will not live if life be all
Forgetting those good stars in heaven hung
When all the world was young,
For more than gold was in a ring, and love was not a little thing
Between the trees in Ivywood when all the world was young.”

The singing ceased; and the bustle in the bushes could hardly be called more than a whisper. But sounds of the same sort and somewhat louder seemed wafted round corners from other sides of the house; and the whole night seemed full of something that was alive, but was more than a single man.

She heard a cry behind her, and Enid rushed into the room as white as one of the lilies.

“What awful thing is happening?” she cried. “The courtyard is full of men shouting, and there are torches everywhere and—”

Joan heard a tramp of men marching and heard, afar off, another song, sung on a more derisive note, something like —

“But Ivywood, Lord Ivywood,
He rots the tree as ivy would.”

“I think,” said Joan, thoughtfully, “it is the End of the World.”

“But where are the police?” wailed her cousin. “They don’t seem to be anywhere about since they wore those fezzes. We shall be murdered or—”

Three thundering and measured blows shook the decorative wood panelling at the end of the wing; as if admittance were demanded with the club of a giant. Enid remembered that she had thought Joan’s little blow energetic, and shuddered. Both the girls stared at the stars and moons and suns blazoned on that sacred wall that leapt and shuddered under the strokes of the doom.

Then the sun fell from Heaven, and the moon and stars dropped down and were scattered about the Persian carpet; and by the opening of the end of the world, Patrick Dalroy came in, carrying a mandolin.

Chapter XXV: The Finding of the Superman

"I'VE brought you a little dog," said Mr. Dalroy, introducing the rampant Quoodle. "I had him brought down here in a large hamper labelled 'Explosives,' a title which appears to have been well selected."

He had bowed to Lady Enid on entering and taken Joan's hand with the least suggestion that he wanted to do something else with it; but he resolutely resumed his conversation, which was on the subject of dogs.

"People who bring back dogs," he said, "are always under a cloud of suspicion. Sometimes it is hideously hinted that the citizen who brings the dog back with him is identical with the citizen who took the dog away with him. In my case, of course, such conduct is inconceivable. But the returners of dogs, that prosperous and increasing class, are also accused," he went on, looking straight at Joan, with blank blue eyes, "of coming back for a Reward. There is more truth in this charge."

Then, with a change of manner more extraordinary than any revolution, even the revolution that was roaring round the house, he took her hand again and kissed it, saying, with a confounding seriousness,

"I know at least that you will pray for my soul."

"You had better pray for mine, if I have one," answered Joan, "but why now?"

"Because," said Patrick, "you will hear from outside, you may even see from that turret window something which in brute fact has never been seen in England since Poor Monmouth's army went down. In spirit and in truth it has not happened since Saladin and Coeur de Lion crashed together. I only add one thing, and that you know already. I have lived loving you and I shall die loving you. It is the only dimension of the Universe in which I have not wandered and gone astray. I leave the dog to guard you;" and he disappeared down the old broken staircase.

Lady Enid was much mystified that no popular pursuit assailed this stair or invaded the house. But Lady Joan knew better. She had gone, on the suggestion she most cared about, into the turret room and looked out of its many windows on to the abandoned copse and tunnel, which were now fenced off with high walls, the boundary of the mysterious property next door. Across that high barrier she could not even see the tunnel, and barely the tops of the tallest trees which hid its entrance from sight. But in an instant she knew that Dalroy was not hurling his forces on Ivywood at all, but on the house and estate beyond it.

And then followed a sight that was not an experience but rather a revolving vision. She could never describe it afterward, nor could any of those involved in so violent and mystical a wheel. She had seen a huge wall of a breaker wash all over the parade at Pebblewick; and wondered that so huge a hammer could be made merely of water. She had never had a notion of what it is like when it is made of men.

The palisade, put up by the new landlord in front of the old tangled ground by the tunnel, she had long regarded as something as settled and ordinary as one of the walls of the drawing room. It swung and split and sprang into a thousand pieces under the mere blow of human bodies bursting with rage; and the great wave crested the obstacle more clearly than she had ever seen any great wave crest the parade. Only, when the fence was broken, she saw behind it something that robbed her of reason; so that she seemed to be living in all ages and all lands at once. She never could describe the vision afterward; but she always denied it was a dream. She said it was worse; it was something more real than reality. It was a line of real soldiers, which is always a magnificent sight. But they might have been the soldiers of Hannibal or of Attila, they might have been dug up from the cemeteries of Sidon and Babylon, for all Joan had to do with them. There, encamped in English meadows, with a hawthorn-tree in front of them and three beeches behind, was something that has never been in camp nearer than some leagues south of Paris, since that Carolus called The Hammer broke it backward at Tours.

There flew the green standard of that great faith and strong civilization which has so often almost entered the great cities of the West; which long encircled Vienna, which was barely barred from Paris; but which had never before been seen in arms on the soil of England. At one end of the line stood Philip Ivywood, in a uniform of his own special creation, a compromise between the Sepoy and the Turkish uniform. The compromise worked more and more wildly in Joan’s mind. If any impression remained it was merely that England had conquered India and Turkey had conquered England. Then she saw that Ivywood, for all his uniform, was not the Commander of these forces, for an old man, with a great scar on his face, which was not a European face, set himself in the front of the battle, as if it had been a battle in the old epics, and crossed swords with Patrick Dalroy.

He had come to return the scar upon his forehead; and he returned it with many wounds, though at last it was he who sank under the sword thrust. He fell on his face; and Dalroy looked at him with something that is much more great than pity. Blood was flowing from Patrick's wrist and forehead, but he made a salute with his sword. As he was doing so, the corpse, as it appeared, laboriously lifted a face, with feeble eyelids. And, seeming to understand the quarters of the sky by instinct, Oman Pasha dragged himself a foot or so to the left; and fell with his face toward Mecca.

After that the turret turned round and round about Joan and she knew not whether the things she saw were history or prophecy. Something in that last fact of being crushed by the weapons of brown men and yellow, secretly entrenched in English meadows, had made the English what they had not been for centuries. The hawthorn-tree was twisted and broken, as it was at the Battle of Ashdown, when Alfred led his first charge against the Danes. The beech-trees were splashed up to their lowest branches with the mingling of brave heathen and brave Christian blood. She knew no more than that when a column of the Christian rebels, led by Humphrey of the Sign of the Ship, burst through the choked and forgotten tunnel and took the Turkish regiment in the rear, it was the end.

That violent and revolving vision became something beyond the human voice or human ear. She could not intelligently hear even the shots and shouts round the last magnificent rally of the Turks. It was natural, therefore, that she should not hear the words Lord Ivywood addressed to his next-door neighbour, a Turkish officer, or rather to himself. But his words were:

"I have gone where God has never dared to go. I am above the silly supermen as they are above mere men. Where I walk in the Heavens, no man has walked before me; and I am alone in a garden. All this passing about me is like the lonely plucking of garden flowers. I will have this blossom, I will have that."

The sentence ended so suddenly that the officer looked at him, as if expecting him to speak. But he did not speak.

But Patrick and Joan, wandering together in a world made warm and fresh again, as it can be for few in a world that calls courage frenzy and love superstition, feeling every branching tree as a friend with arms open for the man, or every sweeping slope as a great train trailing behind the woman, did one day climb up to the little white cottage that was now the home of the Superman.

He sat playing with a pale, reposeful face, with scraps of flower and weed put before him on a wooden table. He did not notice them, nor anything else around him; scarcely even Enid Wimpole, who attended to all his wants.

"He is perfectly happy," she said quietly.

Joan, with the glow on her dark face, could not prevent herself from replying, "And we are so happy."

"Yes," said Enid, "but his happiness will last," and she wept.

"I understand," said Joan, and kissed her cousin, not without tears of her own.

THE RETURN OF DON QUIXOTE

First published in 1927, Chesterton’s last novel concerns the adventures of Michael Herne, a gentle and modest librarian. When asked to play a king in a medieval play, Michael reluctantly agrees. Nevertheless, after the play is over, strange things begin to happen. Michael refuses to change back into his everyday clothes and other actors find it impossible to return to their real character. Set in the early 20th Century, this is the intriguing story of the rise of a new Don Quixote who introduces a medieval government into the world of modern business.

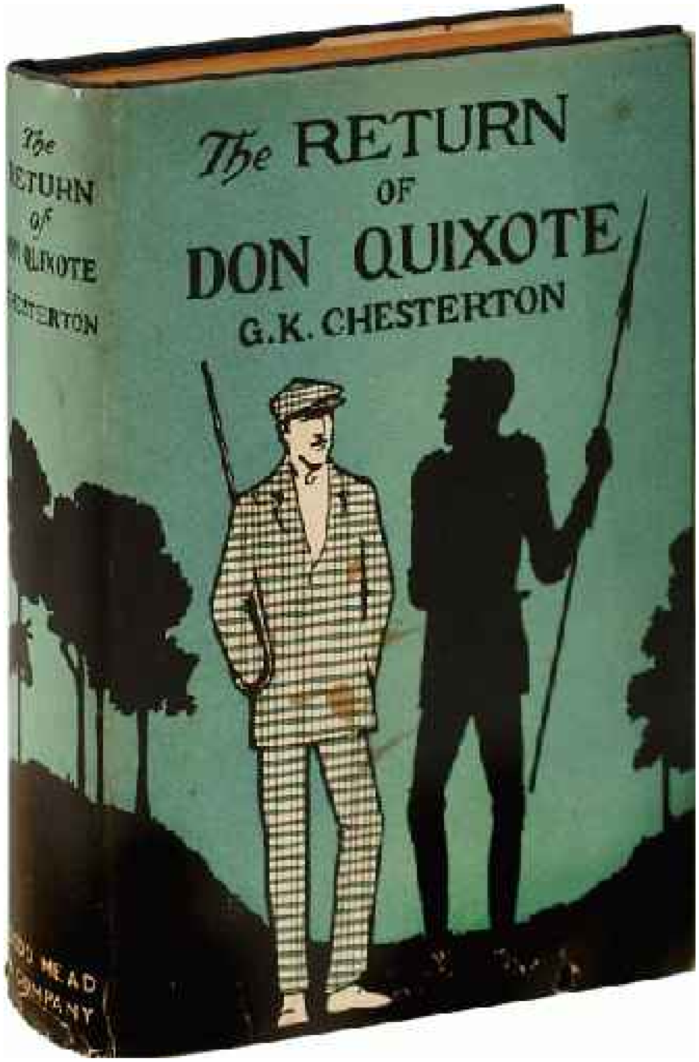
The RETURN
OF
DON QUIXOTE
G.K. CHESTERTON
The
of
CHESTERTON
MEAD
COMPANY

The first edition

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Chesterton, close to the time of publication

TO

W. R. TITTERTON

MY DEAR TITTERTON,

This parable for social reformers, as you know, was planned and partly written long before the War; so that touching some things, from Fascism to nigger dances, it was a quite unintentional prophecy. It was your too generous confidence that dragged it from its dusty drawer; whether the world has any reason to thank you I doubt; but I have so many reasons for thanking you, and recognising all you have done for our cause, that I dedicate this book to you.

Yours always,
G. K. CHESTERTON

CHAPTER I

A HOLE IN THE CASTE

The end of the longest room at Seawood Abbey was full of light; for the walls were almost made of windows and it projected upon a terraced part of the garden above the park on an almost cloudless morning. Murrel, called Monkey for some reason that everybody had forgotten, and Olive Ashley were taking advantage of the light to occupy themselves with painting; though she was painting on a very small scale and he on a very large one. She was laying out peculiar pigments very carefully, in imitation of the flat jewellery of medieval illumination, for which she had a great enthusiasm, as part of a rather vague notion of a historic past. He, on the other hand, was highly modern, and was occupied with several pails full of very crude colours and with brushes which reached the stature of brooms. With these he was laying about him on large sheets of lath and canvas, which were to act as scenery in some private theatricals then in preparation. They could not paint, either of them; nor did they imagine that they could. But she was in some sense trying to do so; and he was not.

"It's all very well for you to talk about discords," he was saying somewhat defensively, for she was a critical lady, "but your style of painting narrows the mind. After all, scene-painting is only illumination seen through a microscope."

"I hate microscopes," she observed briefly.

"Well, you look as if you wanted one, poring over that stuff," replied her companion, "in fact I fancy I have seen people screwing a great thing in their eye while they did it. I hope you won't go so far as that: it wouldn't suit your style at all."

This was true enough, no doubt, for she was a small, slight girl, with dark delicate features of the kind called regular; and her dark green dress, which was aesthetic but the reverse of Bohemian, had something akin to the small severities of her task. There was something a shade old maidish about her gestures, although she was very young. It was noticeable that though the room was strewn with papers and dusters and the flamboyant failures of Mr. Murrel's art, her own flat colour-box, with its case and minor accessories, were placed about her with protective neatness. She was not one of those for whom is written the paper of warnings sometimes sold with paint-boxes; and it had never been necessary to adjure her not to put the brush in the mouth.

“What I mean,” she said, resuming the subject of microscopes, “is that all your science and modern stuff has only made things ugly, and people ugly as well. I don’t want to look down a microscope any more than down a drain. You only see a lot of horrid little things crawling about. I don’t want to look down at all. That’s why I like all this old Gothic painting and building; in Gothic all the lines go upwards, right up to the very spire that points to heaven.”

“It’s rude to the point,” said Murrel, “and I think they might have given us credit for noticing the sky.”

“You know perfectly well what I mean,” replied the lady, painting placidly, “all the originality of those medieval people was in the way they built their churches. The whole point of them was the pointed arches.”

“And the pointed spears,” he assented. “When you didn’t do what they liked, they just prodded you. Too pointed, I think. Almost amounting to a hint.”

“Anyhow the gentlemen then prodded each other with their spears,” answered Olive, “they didn’t go and sit on plush seats to see an Irishman pummelling a black man. I wouldn’t see a modern prize-fight for the world; but I shouldn’t mind a bit being a lady at one of the old tournaments.”

“You might be a lady, but I shouldn’t be a lord,” said the scene-painter gloomily. “Not my luck. Even if I were a king, I should only be drowned in a butt of sack and never smile again. But it’s more my luck to be born a serf or something. A leper, or some such medieval institution. Yes, that’s how it would be — the minute I’d poked my nose into the thirteenth century I’d be appointed Chief Leper to the king or somebody; and have to squint into church through that little window.”

“You don’t squint into church through any window at present,” observed the lady, “nor has it occurred to you even to do so through the door.”

“Oh, I leave all that to you,” he said, and proceeded to splash away in silence. He was engaged on a modest interior of “The Throne Room of Richard Coeur de Lion,” which he treated in a scheme of scarlet, crimson and purple which Miss Ashley strove in vain to arrest; though she really had some rights of protest in the matter, having both selected the medieval subject and even written the play, so far as her more sportive collaborators would allow her. It was all about Blondel, the Troubadour, who serenaded Coeur de Lion and many other people; including the daughter of the house; who was addicted to theatricals and kept him at it. The Hon. Douglas Murrel, or Monkey, cheerfully confronted his ill-success in scene-painting, having succeeded equally ill in many other things. He was a man of wide culture, and had failed in all subjects. He had especially failed in politics; having once been called the future leader of his party, whichever it was. But he had failed at the supreme moment to seize the logical connection between the principle of taxing deer-forests and that of retaining an old pattern of rifle for the Indian Army: and the nephew of an Alsatian pawnbroker, to whose clear brain the connection was more apparent, had slipped into his place. Since then he had shown that taste for low company which has kept so many aristocrats out of mischief and their country out of peril, and shown it incongruously (as they sometimes do) by having something vaguely slangy and horsey about his very dress and appearance, as of an objectless ostler. His hair was very fair and beginning to blanch quite prematurely; for he also was young, though many years older than his companion. His face, which was plain but not common-place, habitually wore a dolorous expression which was almost comic; especially in connection with the sporting colours of his neckties and waistcoats, which were almost as lively as the colours on his brush.

“I’ve a negro taste,” he explained, laying on a giant streak of sanguine colour, “these mongrel greys of the mystics make me as tired as they are. They talk about a Celtic Renaissance; but I’m for an Ethiopian Renaissance. The banjo to be more truly what’s-its-name than old Dolmetch’s lute. No dances but the deep, heart-weary Break-Down — there’s tears in the very name — no historical characters except Toussaint L’Ouverture and Booker Washington, no fictitious characters except Uncle Remus and Uncle Tom. I bet it wouldn’t take much to make the Smart Set black their faces as they used to whiten their hair. For my part, I begin to feel a meaning in all my mis-spent life. Something tells me I was intended for a Margate nigger. I *do* think vulgarity is so nice, don’t you?”

She did not reply; indeed she seemed a little absent-minded. Her humour had been faintly shrewdish; but when her face fell into seriousness it was entirely young. Her fine profile with parted lips suddenly suggested not only a child, but a lost child.

“I remember an old illumination that had a negro in it,” she said at last. “It was one of the Three Kings at Bethlehem, with gold crowns. One of them was quite black; but he had a red dress like flames. So you see, even about a nigger and his bright clothes — there is a way of doing it. But we can’t get the exact red they used now; I know people who have really tried. It’s one of the lost arts, like the stained glass.”

“This red will do very well for our modern purpose,” said Murrel equably.

She still looked out abstractedly at the circle of the woods under the morning sky. “I rather wonder sometimes,” she said, “what are our modern purposes.

“Painting the town red, I suppose,” he answered.

“The old gold they used has gone too,” she proceeded. “I was looking at an old missal in the library yesterday. You know they always gilt the name of God? I think if they gilt any word now it would be Gold.”

The industrious silence which ensued was at length broken by a distant voice down the corridors calling out: “Monkey!” in a boisterous and imperative manner. Murrel did not in the least object to being called a monkey, yet he always felt a slight distaste when Julian Archer called him one. It had nothing to do with jealousy; though Archer had the same vague universality of success as Murrel had of failure. It had to do with a fine shade between familiarity and intimacy, which men like Murrel are never ready to disregard, however ready they may be to black their faces. When he was at Oxford he had often carried ragging to something within measurable distance of murder. But he never threw people out of top windows unless they were his personal friends.

Julian Archer was one of those men who seem to be in a great many places at once; and to be very important for some reason which is difficult to specify. He was not a fool or a fraud: he acquitted himself with credit and moderation in the various examinations or responsibilities which appeared to be forced upon him. But spectators of the subtler sort could never quite understand why these things always were forced upon him, and not upon the man next door. Some magazine would have a symposium, let us say, on “Shall We Eat Meat?” in which answers would be obtained from Bernard Shaw, Dr. Saleeby, Lord Dawson of Penn and Mr. Julian Archer. A committee would be formed for a National Theatre or a Shakespeare Memorial: and speeches would be delivered from the platform by Miss

Viola Tree, Sir Arthur Pinero, Mr. Comyns Carr and Mr. Julian Archer. A composite book of essays would be published called “The Hope of a Hereafter,” with contributions by Sir Oliver Lodge, Miss Marie Corelli, Mr. Joseph McCabe and Mr. Julian Archer. He was a Member of Parliament and of many other clubs. He had written a historical novel; he was an admirable amateur actor: so that his claims to take the leading part in the play of “Blondel the Troubadour” could not be disputed. In all this there was nothing objectionable or even eccentric. His historical novel about Agincourt was quite good considered as a modern historical novel; that is, considered as the adventures of a modern public schoolboy at a fancy dress ball. He was in favour of moderate indulgence in meat; and moderate indulgence in personal immortality. But his temperate opinions were loudly and positively uttered, as in the deep and resonant voice which was now booming down the passages. He was one of those who can endure that silence which comes after a platitude. His voice went before him everywhere; as did his reputation and his photograph in the society papers; with its dark curls and bold handsome face. Miss Ashley remarked that he looked like a tenor. Mr. Murrel was content to reply that he did not sound like one.

He entered the room in the complete costume of a Troubadour, except for a telegram which he held in his hand. The complete costume of a troubadour compared favourably with that worn by Mr. Snodgrass, in being more becoming and equally historical. He had been rehearsing his part and was flushed with triumph and exertion; but the telegram, apparently, had rather put him out.

“I say,” he said, “Braintree won’t act.”

“Well,” said Murrel, painting stolidly, “I never thought he would.”

“Rather rot, I know, having to ask a fellow like that: but there was simply nobody else. I told Lord Seawood it was rot to have it at this time of the year when all his friends are away. Braintree’s only an acquaintance, of course, and I can’t imagine how he even came to be that.”

“It was a mistake, I believe,” said Murrel, “Seawood called on him because he heard he was standing for Parliament as a Unionist. When he found it meant a Trade Unionist he was a bit put off, of course; but he couldn’t make a scene. I fancy it would puzzle him to say what either of the terms mean.”

“Don’t you know what the term Unionist means?” asked Olive.

"Nobody knows that," replied the scene-painter, "why, I've been one myself."

"Oh, I wouldn't cut a fellow just because he was a Socialist," cried the broad-minded Mr. Archer, "why there was—" and he was silent, lost in social reminiscences.

"He isn't a Socialist," observed Murrel impassively, "He breaks things if you call him a Socialist. He is a Syndicalist."

"But that's worse, isn't it?" said the young lady, innocently.

"Of course we're all for social questions and making things better," said Archer in a general manner, "but nobody can defend a man who sets one class against another as he does; talking about manual labour and all sorts of impossible Utopias. I've always said that Capital has its duties as well as its — ."

"Well," interposed Murrel hastily, "I'm prejudiced in the present case. Look at me; you couldn't have anybody more manual than I am."

"Well, he won't act, anyhow," repeated Archer, "and we must find somebody. It's only the Second Troubadour, of course, and anybody can do it. But it must be somebody fairly young; that's the only reason I thought of Braintree."

"Yes, he is quite a young man yet," assented Murrel, "and no end of the young men seem to be with him."

"I detest him and his young men," said Olive, with sudden energy. "In the old days people complained of young people breaking out because they were romantic. But these young men break out because they are sordid; just prosaic and low, and wrangling about machinery and money — materialists. They just want a world of atheists, that would soon be a world of apes."

After a silence, Murrel crossed to the other end of the long room and could be heard calling a number into the telephone. There ensued one of those half conversations that make the hearer feel as if he were literally half-witted: but in this case the subject matter was fairly clear from the context.

"Is that you, Jack? — Yes, I know you did; but I want to talk to you about it — . At Seawood; but I can't get away, because I'm painting myself red like an Indian. Nonsense, it can't matter; you'll only be coming on business — . Yes, of course it's quite understood: what a pragmatical beast you are — there's no question of principle at all, I tell you. I won't eat you. I won't even paint you — all right."

He rang off and returned to his creative labours, whistling.

"Do you know Mr. Braintree?" asked Olive, with some wonder.

"You know I have a taste for low company," answered Murrel.

"Does it extend to Communists?" asked Archer, with some heat. "Jolly close to thieves."

"A taste for low company doesn't make people thieves," said Murrel, "it's generally a taste for high company that does that." And he proceeded to decorate a vivid violet pillar with very large orange stars, in accordance with the well-known style of the ornamentation of throne-rooms in the reign of Richard the First.

CHAPTER II

A DANGEROUS MAN

John Braintree was a long, lean, alert young man with a black beard and a black frown, which he seemed to some extent to wear on principle, like his red tie. For when he smiled, as he did for an instant at the sight of Murrel's scenery, he looked pleasant enough. On being introduced to the lady, he bowed with a politeness that was formal and almost stiff; the style once found in aristocrats but now most common in well-educated artisans; for Braintree had begun life as an engineer.

"I came up here because you asked me, Douglas," he said, "but I tell you it's no good."

"Don't you like my scheme of colour?" asked Murrel. "It is much admired."

"Well," replied the other, "I don't know that I do particularly like your plastering romantic purple over all that old feudal tyranny and superstition; but that isn't my difficulty. Look here, Douglas; I came here on the strict understanding that I might say what I liked; but for all that I don't particularly want to talk against the man in his own house if I can help it. So perhaps the shortest way of putting the difficulty will be to say that the Miners' Union here has declared a strike; and that I am the secretary of the Miners' Union. And as I'm trying to spoil his work by staying out, I think it would be a little low down to spoil his play by coming in."

"What are you striking about?" asked Archer.

"Well, we want more money," replied Braintree coolly. "When two pennies will only buy one penny loaf we want two pennies to buy it with. It is called the complexity of the Industrial System. But what counts for even more with the Union is the demand for recognition."

"Recognition of what?"

"Well, you see, the Trades Union doesn't exist. It is a grinding tyranny, and it threatens to destroy all British trade; but it doesn't exist. The one thing that Lord Seawood and all its most indignant critics are certain about, is that it doesn't exist. So, by way of suggesting that there might possibly be such an entity, we reserve the right to strike."

“And leave the whole wretched public without coal, I suppose,” cried Archer heatedly, “if you do, I fancy you’ll find public opinion is a bit too strong for you. If you won’t get the coal and the Government won’t make you, we’ll find people who will get it. I, for one, would answer for a hundred fellows from Oxford and Cambridge or the City, who wouldn’t mind working in the mine to spoil your conspiracy.”

“While you’re about it,” replied Braintree contemptuously, “you might as well get a hundred coal-miners to finish Miss Ashley’s illumination for her. Mining is a very skilled trade, my good sir. A coal-miner isn’t a coal-heaver. You might do very well as a coal-heaver.”

“I suppose you mean that as an insult,” said Archer.

“Oh, no,” answered Braintree, “a compliment.”

Murrel interposed pacifically. “Why you’re all coming round to my idea; first a coal-heaver, I suppose, and then a chimney-sweep and so on to perfect blackness.”

“But aren’t you a Syndicalist?” asked Olive with extreme severity. Then, after a pause, she added, “What is a Syndicalist?”

“The shortest way of putting it, I should say,” said Braintree, with more consideration, “would be to say that, in our view, the mine ought to belong to the miner.”

“Mine’s mine, in fact,” said Murrel, “fine feudal medieval motto.”

“I think that motto is very modern,” observed Olive a little acidly, “but how would you manage with the miner owning the mine?”

“Ridiculous idea, isn’t it?” said the Syndicalist, “One might as well talk about the painter owning the paint-box.”

Olive rose and walked to the French windows that stood open on the garden; and looked out, frowning. The frown was partly at the Syndicalist, but partly also at some thoughts of her own. After a few minutes’ silence, she stepped out on to the gravel path and walked slowly away. There was a certain restrained rebuke about the action; but Braintree was too hot in his intellectualism to heed it.

“I don’t suppose,” he went on, “that anybody has ever realised how wild and Utopian it is for a fiddler to own his fiddle.”

“Oh, fiddlesticks, you and your fiddle,” cried the impetuous Mr. Archer, “how can a lot of low fellows—”

Murrel once more changed the subject to his original frivolities.

“Well, well,” he said, “these social problems will never be settled till we fall back on my expedient. All the nobility and culture of France assembled to see Louis XVI put on the red cap. How impressive it will be when all our artists and leaders of thought assemble to see me reverently blacking Lord Seawood’s face.”

Braintree was still looking at Julian Archer with a darkened face.

“At present,” he said, “our artists and leaders have only got so far as blacking his boots.”

Archer sprang up as if he had been named as well as looked at.

“When a gentleman is accused of blacking boots,” he said, “there is danger of his blacking eyes instead.”

Braintree took one bony fist out of his pocket.

“Oh I told you,” he said, “that we reserve the right to strike.”

“Don’t play the goat, either of you,” insisted the peace-maker, interposing his large red paint-brush, “don’t rampage, Jack. You’ll put your foot in it — in King Richard’s red curtains.”

Archer retired slowly to his seat again; and his antagonist, after an instant’s hesitation, turned to go out through the open windows.

“Don’t worry,” he growled, “I won’t make a hole in your canvas. I’m quite content to have made a hole in your caste. What do you want with me? I know you’re really a gentleman; but I like you for all that. But what good has your being a real gentleman or sham gentleman ever done to us? You know as well as I do that men like me are asked to houses like this, and they go there to say a word for their mates; and you are decent to them, and all sorts of beautiful women are decent to them, and everybody’s decent to them; and the time comes when they become just — well, what do you call a man who has a letter to deliver from his friend and is afraid to deliver it?”

“Yes, but look here,” remonstrated Murrel, “you’ve not only made a hole, but you’ve put me in it. I really can’t get hold of anybody else now. It isn’t to come on for a month; but there’ll be fewer people still then; and we shall probably want that time to rehearse. Why can’t you just do it as a favour? What does it matter what your opinions are? I haven’t got any opinions myself; I used them all up at the Union when I was a boy. But I hate disappointing the ladies; and there really aren’t any other men in the place.”

Braintree looked at him steadily.

“Aren’t any other men,” he repeated.

"Well there's old Seawood, of course," said Murrel. "He's not a bad old chap in his way; and you mustn't expect me to take as severe a view of him as you do. But I own I can hardly fancy him as a Troubadour. There really and truly aren't any other men at all."

Braintree still looked at him.

"There is a man in the next room," he said, "there is a man in the passage; there is a man in the garden; there is a man at the front door; there is a man in the stables; there is a man in the kitchen; there is a man in the cellar. What sort of palace of lies have you built for yourselves, when you see all these round you every day and do not even know that they are men? Why do we strike? Because you forget our very existence when we do not strike. Tell your servants to serve you; but why should I?"

And he went out into the garden and walked furiously away.

"Well," said Archer at last, "I must confess I can't stand your friend at any price."

Murrel stepped back from his canvas and put his head on one side, contemplating it like a connoisseur.

"I think his idea about the servants is first-rate," he observed placidly. "Can't you fancy old Perkins as a Troubadour? You know the butler here, don't you? Or one of those footmen would Troub like anything."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Archer, irritably, "it's a small part, but he has to do all sorts of things. Why, he has to kiss the princess's hand."

"The butler would do it like a Zephyr," replied Murrel, "but perhaps we ought to look lower in the hierarchy. If he won't do it I will ask the footmen, and if they won't I will ask the groom, and if he won't I will ask the stable-boy, and if he won't I will ask the knife-boy, and if he won't I will ask whatever is lower and viler than a knife-boy. And if that fails I will go lower still, and ask the librarian. Why, of course! The very thing! The librarian!"

And with sudden impetuosity he slung his heavy paint-brush to the other side of the room and ran out into the garden, followed by the wondering Mr. Archer.

It was quite early in the morning; for the amateurs had risen some time before breakfast to act or paint; and Braintree always rose early, to write and send off a rigorous, not to say rabid, leading article for a Labour evening paper. The white light still had that pale pink tinge in corners and edges which must have caused the poet, somewhat fantastically, to equip the daybreak with fingers. The house stood high upon a lift of land that sank on two sides towards the Severn. The terraced garden, fringed with knots of tapering trees carrying white clouds of the spring blossom, with large flower-beds flung out in a scheme like heraldry, at once strict and gay, scarcely veiled, and did not confuse, the colossal curve of the landscape. Along its lines the clouds rolled up and lifted like cannon smoke, as if the sun were silently storming the high places of the earth. Wind and sun burnished the slanting grass; and they seemed to stand on the shining shoulder of the world. At a high angle, but as if by accident, stood a pedestal'd grey fragment from the ruins of the old abbey which had once stood on that site. Beyond was the corner of an older wing of the house towards which Murrel was making his way. Archer had the theatrical sort of good looks, as well as the theatrical sort of fine clothes, which is effective in such natural pageantry; and the picturesque illusion was clinched by a figure as quaintly clad which came out into the sunshine a few moments after. It was a young lady with a royal crown and red hair that looked almost as royal, for she habitually carried her head with something of haughtiness as well as health; and seemed to snuff up the breeze like the war-horse in scripture; to rejoice in her robes as they swept with the sweeping wind and land. Julian Archer in his close-fitting suit of three colours made up an excellent picture; beside which the modern colours of Murrel's tweeds and tie looked as common as those of the stablemen among whom he was in the habit of lounging.

Rosamund Severne, Lord Seawood's only daughter, was of the type that throws itself into things; and makes a splash. Her great beauty was of the exuberant sort, like her good-nature and good spirits; and she thoroughly enjoyed being a medieval princess — in a play. But she had none of the reactionary dreaminess of her friend and guest Miss Ashley. On the contrary, she was very up-to-date and exceedingly practical. Though finally frustrated by the conservatism of her father, she had early made an attempt to become a lady doctor; but had settled down into being a lady bountiful, of a boisterous kind. She had once also been very prominent on platforms and in political work; but whether to get women votes, or prevent their getting them, her friends could never remember.

Seeing Archer afar off, she called out in her ringing and resolute fashion: "I was looking for you; don't you think we ought to go through that scene again?"

“And I was looking for you,” interrupted Murrel, “still more dramatic developments in the dramatic world. I say, do you know your own librarian by sight, by any chance?”

“What on earth have librarians got to do with it?” asked Rosamund in her matter-of-fact way. “Yes, of course, I know him. I don’t think anybody knows him very well.”

“Sort of book-worm, I suppose,” observed Archer.

“Well, we’re all worms,” remarked Murrel cheerfully, “I suppose a book-worm shows a rather refined and superior taste in diet. But, look here, I rather want to catch that worm, like the early bird. I say, Rosamund, do be an early bird and catch him for me.”

“Well, I am rather an early bird this morning,” she replied, “quite a skylark.”

“And quite ready for skylarking, I suppose,” said Murrel. “But really, I’m quite serious; I mean dost thou despise the earth where cares abound; that is do you know the library where books abound, and can you bring me a real live librarian?”

“I believe he’s in there now,” said Rosamund with some wonder. “You’ve only got to go in and speak to him; though I can’t imagine what you want.”

“You always go to the point,” said Murrel, “straight from the shoulder; true to the kindred points of heaven and home; you’re the right sort of bird, you are.”

“A bird of paradise,” said Mr. Archer gracefully.

“I’m afraid you’re a mocking bird,” she answered laughing, “and we all know that Monkey is a goose.”

“I am a worm and a goose and a monkey,” assented Murrel. “My evolution never stops; but before I turn into something else let me explain. Archer, with his infernal aristocratic pride, won’t allow the knife-boy to act as Troubadour, so I’m falling back on the librarian. I don’t know his name, but we simply must get somebody.”

“His name is Herne,” answered the young lady a little doubtfully. “Don’t go and — I mean he’s a gentleman and all that; I believe he’s quite a learned man.”

But Murrel had already darted on in his impetuous fashion and disappeared round a corner of the house towards the glass doors leading into the library. But even as he turned the corner he stopped suddenly and stared at something in the middle distance. On the ridge of the high garden, where it fell away into the lower grounds, dark against the morning sky, stood two figures; the very last he would ever have expected to see standing together. One was John Braintree, that deplorable demagogue. The other was Olive Ashley. Even as he looked, it is true, Olive turned away with what looked like a gesture of anger or repudiation. But it seemed to Murrel much more extraordinary that they should have met than that they should have parted. A rather puzzled look appeared on his melancholy monkey face for a moment; then he turned and stepped lightly into the library.

CHAPTER III

THE LADDER IN THE LIBRARY

The librarian at Seawood had once had his name in the papers; though he was probably unaware of the fact. It was during the great Camel Controversy of 1906, when Professor Otto Elk, that devastating Hebrew scholar, was conducting his great and gallant campaign against the Book of Deuteronomy; and had availed himself of the obscure librarian's peculiar intimacy with the Palaeo-Hittites. The learned reader is warned that these were no vulgar Hittites; but a yet more remote race covered by the same name. He really knew a prodigious amount about these Hittites, but only, as he would carefully explain, from the unification of the kingdom by Pan-El-Zaga (popularly and foolishly called Pan-Ul-Zaga) to the disastrous battle of Uli-Zamul, after which the true Palaeo-Hittite civilisation, of course, can hardly be said to have continued. In his case it can be said seriously that nobody knew how much he knew. He had never written a book upon his Hittites; if he had it would have been a library. But nobody could have reviewed it but himself.

In the public controversy his appearance and disappearance were equally isolated and odd. It seems that there existed a system or alphabet of Hittite hieroglyphics, which were different from all other hieroglyphics, which, indeed, to the careless eye of the cold world, did not appear to be hieroglyphics at all, but irregular surfaces of partially decayed stone. But as the Bible said somewhere that somebody drove away forty-seven camels, Professor Elk was able to spread the great and glad news that in the Hittite account of what was evidently the same incident, the researches of the learned Herne had already deciphered a distinct allusion to only forty camels; a discovery which gravely affected the foundations of Christian cosmology and seemed to many to open alarming and promising vistas in the matter of the institution of marriage. The librarian's name became quite current in journalism for a time, and insistence on the persecution or neglect suffered at the hands of the orthodox by Galileo, Bruno, and Herne, became an agreeable variation on the recognised triad of Galileo, Bruno, and Darwin. Neglect, indeed, there may in a manner have been; for the librarian of Seawood continued laboriously to spell out his hieroglyphics without assistance; and had already discovered the words “forty camels” to be followed by the words “and seven.” But there was nothing in such a detail to lead an advancing world to turn aside or meddle with the musty occupations of a solitary student.

The librarian was certainly of the sort that is remote from the daylight, and suited to be a shade among the shades of a great library. His figure was long and lithe, but he held one shoulder habitually a little higher than the other; his hair was of a dusty lightness. His face was lean and his lineaments long and straight; but his wan blue eyes were a shade wider apart than other men’s; increasing an effect of having one eye off. It was indeed rather a weird effect, as if his eye were somewhere else; not in the mere sense of looking elsewhere, but almost as if it were in some other head than his own. And indeed, in a manner, it was; it was in the head of a Hittite ten thousand years ago.

For there was something in Michael Herne which is perhaps in every specialist, buried under his mountains of material and alone enabling him to support them; something of what, when it gains vent in an upper air, is called poetry. He instinctively made pictures of the things he studied. Even discerning men, appreciative of many corners of history, would have seen in him only a dusty antiquarian, fumbling with pre-historic pots and pans or the everlasting stone hatchet; a hatchet that most of us are very willing to bury. But they would have done him an injustice. Shapeless as they were, these things to him were not idols, but instruments. When he looked at the Hittite hatchet he did imagine it as killing something for the Hittite pot; when he looked at the pot he did see it boiling, to cook something killed with the hatchet. He would not have called it “something,” of course; but given the name of some sufficiently edible bird or beast; he was quite capable of making out a Hittite menu. From such faint fragments he had indeed erected a visionary and archaic city and state, eclipsing Assyria in its elephantine and unshapely enormity. His soul was afar off, walking under strange skies of turquoise and gold; amid head-dresses like high sepulchres and sepulchres higher than citadels; and beards braided as if into figured tapestries. When he looked out of the open library window at the gardener sweeping the trim garden walks of Seawood, it was not these things that he saw. He saw those huge enthroned brutes and birds that seemed to be hewn out of mountains. He saw those vast, overpowering faces, that seemed to have been planned like cities. There were even hints that he had allowed the

Hittites to prey upon his mind to its slight unsettlement. A story was current of an incautious professor who had repeated idle gossip against the moral character of the Hittite princess, Pal-Ul-Gazil, and whom the librarian had belaboured with the long broom used for dusting the books and driven to take refuge on the top of the library steps. But opinion was divided as to whether this story was founded on fact or on Mr. Douglas Murrel.

Anyhow, the anecdote was at least an allegory. Few realise how much of controversial war and tumult can be covered by an obscure hobby. The fighting spirit has almost taken refuge in hobbies as in holes and corners of the earth; and left the larger public fields singularly dull and flat and free from real debate. It might be imagined that the *Daily Wire* was a slashing paper and the *Review of Assyrian Excavation* was a mild and peaceful one. But in truth it is the other way. It is the popular paper that has become cold and conventional, and full of clichés used without any conviction. It is the scholarly paper that is full of fire and fanaticism and rivalry. Mr. Herne could not contain himself when he thought of Professor Poole and his preposterous and monstrous suggestion about the Pre-Hittite sandal. He pursued the Professor, if not with a broom at least with a pen brandished like a weapon; and expended on these unheard-of questions energies of real eloquence, logic and living enthusiasm which the world will never hear of either. And when he discovered fresh facts, exposed accepted fallacies or concentrated on contradictions which he exposed with glaring lucidity, he was not an inch nearer to any public recognition but he was something which public men cannot invariably claim to be. He was happy.

For the rest, he was the son of a poor parson; he was one of the few who have succeeded in being unsociable at Oxford, not from positive dislike of society but from an equally positive love of solitude; and his few but persistent bodily exercises were either solitary like walking and swimming, or rather rare and eccentric, like fencing. He had a very good general knowledge of books and, having to earn his own living, was very glad to earn a salary by looking after the fine old library collected by the previous owners of Seawood Abbey. But the one holiday of his life had been full of hard work, when he went as a minor assistant in the excavations of Hittite cities in Arabia; and all his day-dreams were but repetitions of that holiday.

He was standing at the open French windows by which the library looked on to the lawn, with his hands in his trousers' pockets, and the rather blind look of introspection in his eyes when the green line of the garden was broken by the apparition of three figures, two of whom at least might have been considered striking, not to say startling. They might have been gaily coloured ghosts, come out of the past. Their costume was far from being Hittite, as even a humbler grade of specialism might well have perceived; but it was almost as outlandish. Only the third figure, in a light tweed jacket and trousers was of a reassuring modernity.

"Oh, Mr. Herne," a young lady was saying to him in courteous but rather confident tones; a young lady framed in a marvellous horned head-dress and a tight blue robe with hanging pointed sleeves. "We want to ask you a great favour. We are in no end of a difficulty."

Mr. Herne's eyes seemed to alter their focus, as if fitted with a new lens, to lose the distance and take in the foreground; a foreground that was filled with the magnificent young lady. It seemed to have a curious effect on him, for he was dumb for a moment, and then said with more warmth than might have been expected from the look of him.

"Anything whatever that I can do . . ."

"It's only to take a tiny little part in our play," she pleaded, "it's a shame to give you such a small one, but everybody has fallen through and we don't want to give up the whole thing."

"What play is it?" he asked.

"Oh, it's all nonsense, of course," she said easily, "it's called 'Blondel the Troubadour,' about Richard Coeur de Lion and serenades and princesses and castles and the usual sort of thing. But we want somebody for the Second Troubadour, who has to go about with Blondel and talk to him. Or rather be talked to, for, of course, Blondel does all the talking. It wouldn't take you long to learn your part." "Just twanging the light guitar," said Murrel encouragingly, "sort of medieval variant of playing on the old banjo."

"What we really want," said Archer more seriously, "is a rich romantic background, so to speak. That's what the Second Troubadour stands for; like 'The Forest Lovers,' boyhood's dreams of the past, full of knights errant and hermits and all the rest of it."

"Rather rough to ask anybody to be a rich romantic background at such short notice," admitted Murrel, "but you know the sort of thing. Do be a back-ground, Mr. Herne."

Mr. Herne's long face had assumed an expression of the greatest grief.

"I'm terribly sorry," he said, "I should have loved to help you in any way. But it's not my period."

While the others looked at him in a puzzled way he went on like a man thinking aloud.

"Garton Rogers is the man you want. Floyd is very good; but he's best on the Fourth Crusade. I'm sure the best advice I could give you is to go to Rogers of Balliol."

"I know him a bit," said Murrel, looking at the other with a rather twisted smile. "He was my tutor."

"Excellent!" said the librarian, "You couldn't do better."

"Yes, I know him," said Murrel gravely, "he's not quite seventy-three and entirely bald; and so fat he can hardly walk."

The girl exploded with something not much more dignified than a giggle; "Goodness!" she said. "Think of bringing him all the way from Oxford and dressing him up like that," and she pointed with irrepressible mirth at Mr. Archer's legs, which were of somewhat dubious date.

"He's the one man who could interpret the period," said the librarian, shaking his head, "As to bringing him from Oxford, the only other man I can think of you'd have to bring from Paris. There are one or two Frenchmen and a German. But there's no other historian in England to touch him."

"Oh, come," remonstrated Archer, "Bancock's the most famous historical writer since Macaulay; famous all over the world."

"He writes books, doesn't he?" remarked the librarian with a fine shade of distaste. "Garton Rogers is your only man."

The lady in the horned head-dress exploded again. "But Lord bless my soul," she cried, "it only takes about two hours!"

"Long enough for little mistakes to be noticed," said the librarian gloomily. "To reconstruct a past period for two solid hours wants more work than you might fancy. If it were only my own period now . . ."

"Well, if we do want a learned man, who could be better than you?" asked the lady, with bright but illogical triumph.

Herne was looking at her with a sort of sad eagerness; then he looked away at the horizon and sighed.

"You don't understand," he said in a low voice, "a man's period is his life in a way. A man wants to live in medieval pictures and carvings and things before he can walk across a room as a medieval man would do it. I know that in my own period; people tell me the old carvings of the Hittite priests and gods look stiff to them. But I feel as if I knew from those stiff attitudes what sort of dances they had. I sometimes feel as if I could hear the music."

For the first time in that clatter of cross-purposes there was a suspension of speech and an instantaneous silence; and the eyes of the learned librarian, like the eyes of a fool, were in the ends of the earth. Then he went on as with a sort of soliloquy.

"If I tried to act a period I hadn't put my mind into, I should be caught out. I should mix things up. If I had to play the guitar you talk about, it wouldn't be the right sort of guitar. I should play it as if it were the *shenaum* or at least the partly Hellenic hinopis. Anybody could see my movement wasn't a late twelfth century movement. Anybody would say at once, 'That's a Hittite gesture.'"

"The very phrase," said Murrel staring at him "that would leap to a hundred lips."

But though he continued to stare at the librarian in frank and admiring mystification, he was gradually convinced of the seriousness of the whole strange situation. For he saw on Herne's face that expression of shrewdness that is the final proof of simplicity.

"But hang it all," burst out Archer, like one throwing off a nightmare of hypnotism, "I tell you it's only a play! I know my part already; and it's a lot longer than yours."

"Anyhow, you've had the start in studying it," insisted Herne, "and in studying the whole thing; you've been thinking about Troubadours; living in the period. Anybody could see I hadn't. There'd always be some tiny little thing," he explained almost with cunning, "some little trick I'd missed, some mistake, something that couldn't be medieval. I don't believe in interfering with people who know their own subject; and you've been studying the period."

He was gazing at the somewhat blank if beautiful countenance of the young woman in front of him; while Archer, in the shadow behind her, seemed finally overcome with a sort of hopeless amusement. Suddenly the librarian lost his meditative immobility and seemed to awaken to life.

"Of course, I might look you up something in the library," he said, turning towards the shelves. "There's a very good French series on all aspects of the period on the top shelf, I think."

The library was a quite unusually high room, with a sloping roof pitched as high as the roof of a church. Indeed it is not impossible that it had been the roof of a church or at least of a chapel for it was part of the old wing that had represented Seawood Abbey when it really was an abbey. Therefore, the top shelf meant something more like the top of a precipice than the top of an ordinary bookcase. It could only be scaled by a very long library ladder, which was at that moment leaning against the library shelves. The librarian, in his new impulse of movement, was at the top of the tall ladder before anybody could stop him; rummaging in a row of dusty volumes diminished by distance and quite indistinguishable. He pulled a big volume from the rank of volumes; and finding it rather awkward to examine while balancing on the top of a ladder, he hoisted himself on to the shelf, in the gap left by the book, and sat there as if he were a new and valuable folio presented to the library. It was rather dark up there under the roof; but an electric light hung there and he calmly turned it on. A silence followed and he continued to sit there on his remote perch, with his long legs dangling in mid-air and his head entirely invisible behind the leather wall of the large volume. “Mad,” said Archer in a low voice. “A bit touched, don’t you think? He’s forgotten all about us already. If we took away the ladder, I don’t believe he’d know it. Here’s a chance for one of your practical jokes, Monkey.”

“No thanks,” replied Murrel briefly. “No ragging about this, if you don’t mind.”

“Why not?” demanded Archer. “Why you yourself took away the ladder when the Prime Minister was unveiling a statue on the top of a column and left him there for three hours.”

“That was different,” said Murrel gruffly; but he did not say why it was different. Perhaps he did not clearly know why it was different, except that the Prime Minister was his first cousin and had deliberately set himself up to be ragged by being a politician. Anyhow, he felt the difference acutely and when the playful Archer laid hands on the ladder to lift it away, told him to chuck it in a tone verging on ferocity.

At that moment, however, it happened that a well-known voice called to him by name from the doorway opening on the garden. He turned and saw the dark figure of Olive Ashley framed in the doorway, with something about her attitude that was expectant and imperative.

“You jolly well leave that ladder alone,” he said hastily over his shoulder as he turned away, “or by George . . .”

“Well?” demanded the defiant Archer.

“Or I’ll indulge in what we would call a Hittite gesture,” said Murrel and walked hastily across to where Olive was standing. The other girl had already stepped out into the garden to speak to her, as she was obviously excited about something; and Archer was left alone with the unconscious librarian and the alluring ladder.

Archer felt like a schoolboy who had been dared to do something. He was no coward; and he was very vain. He unhooked the ladder from the high book-shelf very carefully without disturbing a grain of dust on the dusty shelves or a hair on the head of the unconscious scholar who was reading the large book. He quietly carried the ladder out into the garden and leaned it up against a shed. Then he looked round for the rest of the company; and eventually saw them as a distant group on the lawn, so deep in conversation as to be as unconscious of the crime as the victim himself. They were talking about something else; something that was to be the first step leading to strange consequences; to a strange tale turning on the absence of several persons from their accustomed places, and not least on the absence of a ladder from the library.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST TRIAL OF JOHN BRAINTREE

The gentleman called Monkey made his way rapidly across the wide and windy sweep of lawn towards the solitary monument (if it can so be called), or curiosity, or relic, which stood in the middle of that open space. It was, in fact, a large fragment fallen from the Gothic gateways of the old Abbey, and here incongruously poised upon a more modern pedestal, probably by the rather hazy romanticism of some gentleman a hundred years ago, who thought that a subsequent accumulation of moss and moonlight might turn it into a suitable subject for the ingenious author of “Marmion.” On close inspection (which nobody in particular ever accorded to it) the broken lines of it could be dimly traced in the shape of a rather repulsive monster, goggle-eyed and glaring upwards, possibly a dying dragon, above which something stood up in vertical lines like broken shafts or columns, possibly the lower part of a human figure. But it was not out of any antiquarian ardour to note these details that Mr. Douglas Murrel hastened towards the spot; but because the very impatient lady who had summoned him out of the house on urgent business had named this place for the appointment. From across the garden he could see Olive Ashley standing by the stone, and see that she was by no means standing equally still. Even at that distance there seemed to be something restless and even nervous about her gesture and carriage. She was the only person, perhaps, who ever did look at that lump of laboriously graven rock; and even she admitted that it was ugly and that she did not know what it meant. In any case she was not looking at it now.

“I want you to do me a favour,” she said, abruptly, and before he could speak. Then she added, rather inconsequently, “I don’t know why it should be any favour to me. I don’t care. It’s for everybody’s sake — society and all that!”

“I see,” said Murrel, with gravity, and possibly a little irony.

“Besides, he’s your friend; I mean that man Braintree.” Then her tone changed again, and she said explosively, “It’s all your fault! You would introduce him.”

“Well, what’s the matter?” asked her companion, patiently.

“Only that I simply detest him,” she said. “He was abominably rude and —”

“I say—” cried Murrel, sharply, with a new and unusual note in his voice.

“Oh, no,” said Olive, crossly, “I don’t mean like that. I don’t want somebody to fight him; he wasn’t rude in a conventional sense. Simply horribly stuck-up and opinionated, and laying down the law in long words out of his horrid foreign pamphlets — shouting all sorts of nonsense about coordinated syndicalism and proletarian something—”

“Such words are not fit for a lady’s lips,” said Murrel, shaking his head, “but I’m afraid I don’t yet quite understand what it’s all about. As I’m not to fight him for saying coordinated syndicalism (which seems to me a jolly good reason for fighting a man), what in the world is it that you want?”

“I want him taken down a peg,” observed the young woman, with vindictive gloom. “I want somebody to hammer into his head that he’s really quite ignorant. Why, he’s never mixed with educated people at all. You can see that from the way he walks and dresses. I feel somehow as if I could stand anything if he wouldn’t thrust out that great bristly black beard. He might look quite all right without his beard.”

“Do I understand,” asked Murrel, “that you wish me to go and forcibly shave the gentleman?”

“Nonsense,” she replied, impatiently, “I only mean I want him, just for one little moment, to wish he was shaved. What I want is to show him what educated people are really like. It’s all for his own good. He could be — he could be ever so much improved.”

“Is he to go to a continuation class or a night school?” inquired Murrel innocently, “or possibly to a Sunday school.”

“Nobody ever learns anything at school,” she replied, “I mean the only place where anybody ever does learn anything — the world; the great world. I want him to see there are things much greater than his grumbling little fads — I want him to hear people talking about music and architecture and history, and all the things that really scholarly people know about. Of course, he’s got stuck-up by spouting in the streets and laying down the law in low public-houses — bullying people even more ignorant than himself. But if once he gets among really cultivated people, he is quite clever enough to feel stupid.”

“And so, wanting a stately scholar, cultured to his finger-tips, you naturally thought of me,” remarked Monkey, approvingly. “You want me to tie him to a drawing-room chair and administer tea and Tolstoy, or Tupper, or whoever is the modern favourite. My dear Olive, he wouldn’t come.”

“I’ve thought of all that,” she said, rather hurriedly, “that’s what I meant by calling it a favour — a favour to him and all my fellow creatures, of course. Look here, I want you to persuade Lord Seawood to ask him to some business interview about the strike. That’s the only thing he’d come for; and after that we’ll introduce him to some people who’ll talk right above his head, so that he’ll sort of grow — grow up. It’s really serious, Douglas. He’s got the most terrible power over these workmen. Unless we can make him see the truth they will all — he’s an orator in his way.”

“I knew you were a bloated aristocrat,” he said, contemplating the tense and tenuous little lady, “but I never knew you were such a diplomatist. Well, I suppose I must help in your horrid plot, if you really assure me that it’s all for his own good.”

“Of course it’s for his own good,” she replied, confidently. “I should never have thought of it but for that.”

“Quite so,” replied Murrel, and went back towards the house, walking rather more slowly than when coming away from it. But he did not see the ladder leaning up against the outhouse, or the development of this story might have been disastrously foiled.

Olive’s theory about educating the uneducated man by association with educated men seemed to give him considerable food for thought as he went across the grassy plot kicking his heels, with his hands thrust deep in his trousers’ pockets. Of course, there was something in it; fellows did find their level sometimes by going to Oxford. They find out in what way their education has been neglected, even if they continue to neglect it. But he had never seen the experiment tried on so dark a social stratum as the black and buried coal-seam for which the Syndicalist stood. He could not imagine anyone quite so rugged and dogged in his demagogy as his friend Jack Braintree gradually learning how to balance a cigarette and a tea-cup and talk about the Roumanian Shakespeare. There was to be a reception of that sort that afternoon, he knew — but Braintree in it! Of course, there was a whole world of things that the sulky tub-thumper out of the slums did not know. He was not so sure whether they could ever be things that he wanted to know.

Having once made up his mind, however, to come to the rescue of Society and Olive Ashley, by thus exhibiting the unlettered coal-miner like a drunken helot, he set gravely about it; and it was highly characteristic of him that his gravity covered his deep and simple joy in a practical joke. Perhaps the question of who was, on whom the joke was being played, was not quite so simple. He made his way towards the wing of the building that contained the study, not often penetrated, of the great Lord Seawood himself. He remained there an hour, and came out smiling.

Thus it came about that through these manoeuvres, of which he was quite unconscious, the bewildered Braintree, his dark beard and hair seeming to bristle in every direction as he looked about him for enlightenment, found himself that afternoon (after a solemn and mysteriously futile interview with the great capitalist) turned loose by another door into the salon of the aristocracy of intellect which was to complete his education. He certainly looked rather incomplete; standing in that room with a stoop and a scowl, which were none the less sullen if they were unconsciously sullen. He was not ugly; but he looked ungainly. Above all, he looked unfriendly; and felt it. It was the other people, to do them justice, who showed the friendliness; sometimes, perhaps, a little heavy with heartiness. There was a large, bland, bald-headed gentleman who was particularly hearty; and never more hearty, one might say never more noisy, than when he was confidential. There was a touch in him of that potentate in the Bab Ballads whose whisper was a horrible yell.

“What we want,” he said, softly pulverising something in his hollow palm with his clenched fist, “what we want for industrial peace is industrial instruction. Never listen to the reactionaries. Never you believe the fellows who say popular education is a mistake. Of course, the masses must have education. But above all, economic education. If once we can get into the people’s heads some notion of the laws of political economy, we shall hear no more of these disputes that drive trade out of the country and threaten to put a pistol to the head of the public. Whatever our opinions may be, we all want to prevent that. Whatever our party may be, we don’t want that. I don’t say it in the interests of any party; I say it’s something quite above party.”

“But if I say,” answered Braintree, “that we also want the extension of effective demand, isn’t that above party?”

The large man glanced at him quickly and almost covertly. Then he said, “Quite — Oh, quite.”

There was a silence and then a few gay remarks about the weather; and then Braintree found that the large man had somehow smoothly and inoffensively passed from him, swimming like some silent leviathan into other seas. The large man’s bald head and rather pompously perched pince-nez had somehow given the impression that he was a professor of political economy. His conversation had somehow given the impression that he was not. The first stage of Mr. Braintree’s course in culture was, perhaps, unfortunate. For it left that gloomy character with a growing inward impression, right or wrong, to the effect that the partisan of Economic Education for the Masses had not himself the very vaguest idea of what “effective demand” means.

This first fiasco, however, cannot be counted fairly; as the big bald man (who was, in fact, a certain Sir Howard Pryce, the head of a very big soap business) had perhaps put his foot by an accident inside the Syndicalist’s own rather narrow province. The salon contained any number of people who were not in the least likely to discuss industrial instruction or economic demand. Among them, it is needless to say, there was Mr. Almeric Wister. It is needless to say it, for there always is Mr. Almeric Wister wherever twenty or thirty are gathered together in that particular sort of social afternoon.

Mr. Almeric Wister was, and is, the one fixed point round which countless slightly differentiated forms of social futility have clustered. He managed to be so omnipresent about teatime in Mayfair that some have held that he was not a man but a syndicate; and a number of Wisters scattered to the different drawing-rooms, all tall and lank and hollow-eyed and carefully dressed, and all with deep voices and hair and beard thin but rather long, with a suggestion of aesthete. But even in the similar parties in country houses there were always a certain number of him; so it would seem that the syndicate sent out provincial touring companies. He had a hazy reputation as an art expert and was great on the duration of pigments. He was the sort of man who remembers Rossetti and has unpublished anecdotes about Whistler. When he was first introduced to Braintree, his eye encountered that demagogue’s red tie, from which he correctly deduced that Braintree was not an art expert. The expert therefore felt free to be even more expert than usual. His hollow eyes rolled reproachfully from the tie to a picture on the wall, by Lippi or some Italian primitive; for Seawood Abbey possessed fine pictures as well as fine books. Some association of ideas led Wister to echo unconsciously the complaint of Olive Ashley and remark that the red used for the wings of one of the angels was something of a lost technical secret. When one considered how the Last Supper had faded —

Braintree assented civilly, having no very special knowledge of pictures and no knowledge at all of Pigments. This ignorance, or indifference completed the case founded on the crude necktie. The expert, now fully realising that he was talking to an utter outsider, expanded with radiant condescension. He delivered a sort of lecture.

"Ruskin is very sound upon that point," said Mr. Almeric Wister. "You would be quite safe in reading Ruskin, if only as a sort of introduction to the subject. With the exception of Pater, of course, there has been no critic since having that atmosphere of authority. Democracy, of course, is not favourable to authority. And I very much fear, Mr. Braintree, that democracy is not favourable to art."

"Well, if ever we have any democracy, I suppose we shall find out," said Braintree.

"I fear," said Wister, shaking his head, "that we have quite enough to lead us to neglect all artistic authorities."

At this moment, Rosamund of the red hair and the square, sensible face, came up, steering through the crowd a sturdy young man, who also had a sensible face; but the resemblance ended there, for he was stodgy and even plain, with short bristly hair and a tooth-brush moustache. But he had the clear eyes of a man of courage and his manners were very pleasant and unpretending. He was a squire of the neighbourhood, named Hanbury, with some reputation as a traveller in the tropics. After introducing him and exchanging a few words with the group, she said to Wister, "I'm afraid we interrupted you"; which was indeed the case.

"I was saying," said Wister, airily, but also a little loftily, "that I fear we have descended to democracy and an age of little men. The great Victorians are gone."

"Yes, of course," answered the girl, a little mechanically.

"We have no giants left," he resumed.

"That must have been quite a common complaint in Cornwall," reflected Braintree, "when Jack the Giant-killer had gone his professional rounds."

"When you have read the works of the Victorian giants," said Wister, rather contemptuously, "you will perhaps understand what I mean by a giant."

"You can't really mean, Mr. Braintree," remonstrated the lady, "that you want great men to be killed."

"Well, I think there's something in the idea," said Braintree. "Tennyson deserved to be killed for writing the May-Queen, and Browning deserved to be killed for rhyming 'promise' and 'from mice,' and Carlyle deserved to be killed for being Carlyle; and Herbert Spencer deserved to be killed for writing 'The Man versus the State'; and Dickens deserved to be killed for not killing Little Nell quick enough; and Ruskin deserved to be killed for saying that Man ought to have no more freedom than the sun; and Gladstone deserved to be killed for deserting Parnell; and Disraeli deserved to be killed for talking about a 'shrinking sire,' and Thackeray—"

"Mercy on us!" interrupted the lady, laughing, "you really must stop somewhere. What a lot you seem to have read!"

Wister appeared, for some reason or other, to be very much annoyed; almost waspish. "If you ask me," he said, "it's all part of the mob and its hatred of superiority. Always wants to drag merit down. That's why your infernal trade unions won't have a good workman paid better than a bad one."

"That has been defended economically," said Braintree, with restraint. "One authority has pointed out that the best trades are paid equally already."

"Karl Marx, I suppose," said the expert, testily.

"No, John Ruskin," replied the other. "One of your Victorian giants." Then he added, "But the text and title of the book were not by John Ruskin, but by Jesus Christ; who had not, alas, the privilege of being a Victorian."

The stodgy little man named Hanbury possibly felt that the conversation was becoming too religious to be respectable; anyhow, he interposed pacifically, saying, "You come from the mining area, Mr. Braintree?"

The other assented, rather gloomily.

"I suppose," said Braintree's new interlocutor, "I suppose there will be a good deal of unrest among the miners?"

"On the contrary," replied Braintree, "there will be a good deal of rest among the miners."

The other frowned in momentary doubt, and said very quickly, "You don't mean the strike is off?"

"The strike is very much on," said Braintree, grimly, "so there will be no more unrest."

"Now, what *do* you mean?" cried the very practical young lady, shortly destined to be the Princess of the Troubadours.

"I mean what I say," he replied, shortly. "I say there will be a great deal of rest among the miners. You always talk as if striking meant throwing a bomb or blowing up a house. Striking simply means resting."

"Why, it's quite a paradox," cried his hostess, with a sort of joy, as if it were a new parlour game and her party was now really going to be a success.

"I should have thought it was a platitude, otherwise a plain truth," replied Braintree. "During a strike the workers are resting; and a jolly new experience for some of them, I can tell you."

"May we not say," said Wister, in a deep voice, "that the truest rest is in labour?"

"You may," said Braintree, dryly. "It's a free country — for you anyhow. And while you're about it, you may also say that the truest labour is in rest. And then you will be quite delighted with the notion of a strike."

His hostess was looking at him with a new expression, steady and yet gradually changing; the expression with which people of slow but sincere mental processes recognise something that has to be reckoned with, and possibly even respected. For although, or perhaps because, she had grown up smothered with wealth and luxury, she was quite innocent, and had never felt any shame in looking on the faces of her fellows.

"Don't you think," she said at last, "we are just quarrelling about a word?"

"No, I don't, since you ask me," he said, gruffly. "I think we are arguing on two sides of an abyss, and that one little word is a chasm between two halves of humanity. If you really care to know, may I give you a little piece of advice? When you want to make us think you understand the situation, and still disapprove of the strike, say anything in the world except that. Say there is the devil among the miners; say there is treason and anarchy among the miners; say there is blasphemy and madness among the miners. But don't say there is unrest among the miners. For that one little word betrays the whole thing that is at the back of your mind; it is very old and its name is Slavery."

"This is very extraordinary," said Mr. Wister.

"Isn't it?" said the lady. "Thrilling!"

"No, quite simple," said the Syndicalist. "Suppose there is a man in your coal-cellar instead of your coal-mine. Suppose it is his business to break up coal all day, and you can hear him hammering. We will suppose he is paid for it; we will suppose you honestly think he is paid enough. Still, you can hear him chopping away all day while you are smoking or playing the piano — until a moment when the noise in the coal-cellar stops suddenly. It may be wrong for it to stop — it may be right — it may be all sorts of things. But don't you see — can nothing make you see — what you really mean if you only say, like Hamlet to his old mole, 'Rest, perturbed spirit.'"

"Ha," said Mr. Wister, graciously, "glad to see you have read Shakespeare."

But Braintree went on without noticing the remark.

"The hammering in your coal-hole that always goes on stops for an instant. And what do you say to the man down there in the darkness? You do not say, 'Thank you for doing it well.' You do not even say, 'Damn you for doing it badly.' What you do say is, 'Rest; sleep on. Resume your normal state of repose. Continue in that state of complete quiescence which is normal to you and which nothing should ever have disturbed. Continue that rhythmic and lulling motion that must be to you the same as slumber; which is for you second nature and part of the nature of things. *Continuez,* as God said in Belloc's story. Let there be no unrest.'"

As he talked vehemently, but not violently, he became faintly conscious that many more faces were turned towards him and his group, not staring rudely, but giving a general sense of a crowd heading in that direction. He saw Murrel looking at him with melancholy amusement over a limp cigarette, and Archer glancing at him every now and then over his shoulder as if fearing he would set fire to the house. He saw the eager and half-serious faces of several ladies of a sort always hungry for anything to happen. All those close to him were cloudy and bewildering; but amid them all he could see away in the corner of the room, distant but distinct and even unreasonably distinct, the pale but vivid face of little Miss Ashley of the paint-box, watching — .

"But the man in the coal-cellar is only a stranger out of the street," he went on, "who has gone into your black hole to attack a rock as he might attack a wild beast or any other brute force of nature. To break coal in a coal-cellar is an action. To break it in a coal-mine is an adventure. The wild beast can kill in its own cavern. And fighting with that wild beast is eternal unrest; a war with chaos, as much as that of a man hacking his own way through an African forest."

"Mr. Hanbury," said Rosamund, smiling, "has just come back from an expedition of that sort."

"Yes," said Braintree, "but when he doesn't happen to go on an expedition, you don't say there is Unrest at the Travellers' Club."

"Had me there. Very good," said Hanbury, in his easy-going way.

"Don't you see," went on Braintree, "that when you say that of us, you imply that we are all so much clockwork, and you never even notice the ticking till the clock stops."

"Yes," said Rosamund, "I think I see what you mean and I shan't forget it." And, indeed, though she was not particularly clever, she was one of those rare and rather valuable people who never forget anything they have once learnt.

CHAPTER V

THE SECOND TRIAL OF JOHN BRAINTREE

Douglas Murrel knew the world; he knew his own world, though that lucky love of low company had saved him from supposing it was the whole world. And he knew well enough what had happened. Braintree, brought there to be abashed into silence, was being encouraged to talk. There was in it perhaps some element of the interest in a monstrosity or performing animal; some touch of that longing of all luxurious people for something fresh; but the monstrosity was making a good impression. He talked a good deal; but he did not have the air of being conceited; only of being convinced. Murrel knew the world; and he knew that men who talk a great deal are often not conceited, because not conscious.

And now he knew what would follow. The silly people had had their say; the people who cannot help asking an Arctic explorer whether he enjoyed the North Pole; the people who would almost ask a nigger what it felt like to be black. It was inevitable that the old merchant should talk about political economy to anybody he supposed to be political. It did not matter if that old ass Wister lectured him about the great Victorians. The self-educated man had no difficulty in showing he was better educated than those people were. But now the next stage was reached; and the other sort of people began to take notice. The intelligent people in the Smart Set, the people who do not talk shop, the people who would talk to the nigger about the weather, began to talk to the Syndicalist about Syndicalism. In the lull after his more stormy retort, men with quieter voices began to ask him more sensible questions; often conceding many of his claims, often falling back on more fundamental objections. Murrel almost started as he heard the low and guttural drawl of old Eden, in whom so many diplomatic and parliamentary secrets were buttoned up, and who hardly ever talked at all, saying to Braintree: “Don’t you think there’s something to be said for the Ancients — Aristotle and all that, don’t you know? Perhaps there really must be a class of people always working for us in the cellar.”

Braintree’s black eyes flashed; not with rage, but with joy; because he knew now that he was understood.

“Ah, now you’re talking sense,” he said. There were some present to whom it seemed almost as much of a liberty to tell Lord Eden he was talking sense as to tell him he was talking nonsense. But he himself was quite subtle enough to understand that he had really been paid a compliment.

“But if you take that line,” went on Braintree, “you can’t complain of the people you separate in that way, treating themselves as something separate. If there is a class like that, you can hardly wonder at its being class-conscious.”

“And the other people, I suppose, have a right to be class-conscious, too,” said Eden with a smile.

“Quite so,” observed Wister in his more spacious manner. “The aristocrat, the magnanimous man as Aristotle says—”

“Look here,” said Braintree rather irritably, “I’ve only read Aristotle in cheap translations; but I have read them. It seems to me gentlemen like you first learn elaborately how to read things in Greek; and then never do it. Aristotle, so far as I can understand, makes out the magnanimous man to be a pretty conceited fellow. But he never says he must be what you call an aristocrat.”

“Quite so,” said Eden, “but the most democratic of the Greeks believed in slavery. In my opinion, there’s a lot more to be said for slavery than there is for aristocracy.”

The Syndicalist assented almost eagerly; and Mr. Almeric Wister looked rather bewildered.

“I say,” repeated Braintree, “that if you think there ought to be slaves, you can’t prevent the slaves hanging together and having their own notions about things. You can’t appeal to their citizenship if they are not citizens. Well, I’m one of the slaves. I come out of the coal-cellar. I represent all those grimy and grubby and unpresentable people; I am one of them. Aristotle himself couldn’t complain of my speaking for them.”

“You speak for them very well,” said Eden.

Murrel smiled grimly. The fashion was in full blast now. He recognised all the signs of that change in the social weather; that altered atmosphere around the Syndicalist. He even heard the familiar sound that put the final touch to it; the murmuring voice of Lady Boole, “. . . any Thursday. We shall be *so* pleased.”

Murrel, still smiling grimly, turned on his heel and crossed over to the corner where Olive Ashley was sitting. He noted that she sat watching with compressed lips and that her dark eyes were dangerously bright. He addressed her upon a note of delicate condolence.

"Afraid our practical joke has rather turned bottom up," he said. "We meant him to be a bear and he's going to be a lion."

She looked up and suddenly smiled in a dazzling and highly baffling manner.

"He did knock them about like ninepins, didn't he?" she cried, "and he wasn't a bit afraid of old Eden."

Murrel stared down at her with an entirely new perplexity on his dolorous visage.

"This is very odd," he said. "Why, you seem to be quite proud of your protégé."

He continued to stare at her undecipherable smile and at last he said: "Well, I don't understand women; nobody ever will, and it is obviously dangerous to try. But if I may make a mere guess on the subject, my dear Olive, I have a growing suspicion that you are a little humbug."

He departed with his usual gloomy good humour; and the party was already breaking up. As the last of the visitors left, he stood once more for a moment in the gateway leading into the garden and sent a Parthian arrow.

"I don't understand women," he said, "but I do know a little about men. And now I'm going to take charge of your performing bear."

The country seat of Seawood, beautiful as it was and remote as it seemed, was really only five or six miles from one of those black and smoky provincial towns that have sprung up amid beautiful hills and valleys since the map of England presented itself mainly as a patchwork of coal. This particular town, which bore its old name of Milldyke, was already very smoky but still comparatively small. It was not so much directly connected with the coal trade as with the treatment of various by-products such as coal-tar; and contained a number of factories manufacturing various things out of that rich and valuable refuse. John Braintree lived in one of the poorer streets of the town; and found it uncomfortable but not inconvenient. For a great part of his political life was spent in trying to link up the labour organisations directly connected with the coal-field to these other and smaller unisons of men employed on the derivative substances. It was towards his home that he now turned his face, when he turned his back on the great country house to which he had just paid so curious and apparently aimless a visit. As Eden and Wister and the various nobs of the neighbourhood, (as he would put it) slid away in their sumptuous cars, he took a great pride in walking stiffly through the crowd in the direction of the queer and rustic little omnibus that ran in and out between the great house and the town. When he climbed up the omnibus, however, he was rather surprised to find Mr. Douglas Murrel climbing up after him.

"Mind if I share your omnibus?" asked Murrel, sinking on a bench beside the solitary outside passenger; for nobody else seemed to be travelling by the vehicle; they were sitting well forward in the front seats and the full blast of the night air came in their faces as the vehicle began to move. It seemed to wake Braintree out of a trance of abstraction and he assented rather curtly.

"The truth is," said Murrel, "that I feel inclined to go and look at your coal-cellar."

"You wouldn't like to be locked up in the coal-cellar," said the other, still a little gruffly.

"Of course, I should prefer to be locked up in the wine-cellar," admitted Murrel. "A new version of your parable of Labour. The vain and idle revelling above, while the dull persistent sound of popping corks told them that I was still below, toiling, labouring, never at rest. . . . But really, old man, there was a lot in what you said about yourself and your grimy haunts, and I thought I'd have a squint at them."

To Mr. Almeric Wister and others it might have seemed tactless to talk to the poorer man about his grimy environment. But Murrel was not tactless; and he was not wrong when he said he knew something about men. He knew the morbid sensitiveness of the most masculine sort of men. He knew his friend's almost maniacal dread of snobbery; and knew better than to say anything about the successes of the salon. To talk about Braintree as a slave in a coal-cellar was to steady his self-respect.

"Mostly dye-works and that sort of thing, aren't they?" asked Murrel, gazing at the forest of factory-chimneys, that began to show through the haze of the horizon.

"By-products of coal of various kinds," replied his friend, "used for chemical colours, dyes and enamels, and all sorts of things. It seems to me, in capitalist society, the by-product is getting bigger than the big product. They say your friend Seawood's millions come much more from the coal-tar products than from the coal — I've heard that something of the sort was used for the red coat of the soldier."

"And what about the red tie of the Socialist?" asked Murrel reproachfully. "Jack, I cannot believe that red tie of yours is freshly dipped in the blood of aristocrats. Anxious as I am to think well of you, I cannot think you come reeking from the massacre of our old nobility. Besides, I always understood that the blood would be blue. Can it be that you yourself are now a walking advertisement of old What's-his-name's dye-works? Buy Our Red Ties. Syndicalist Gents Suited. Mr. John Braintree, the Well-Known Revolutionist, Writes 'Since Using Your—'"

"Nobody knows where anything comes from nowadays, Douglas," said Braintree quietly. "That's what's called publicity and popular journalism in a capitalist state. My tie may be made by capitalists; so may yours be made by cannibal islanders for all you know."

"Woven out of the whiskers of missionaries," replied Murrel. "A pleasant thought. And I suppose your work is going on the stump for all these workers.

"Their conditions are infamous," said Braintree, "especially the poor chaps working on some of the dyes and paints and things, which are simple damned poisons and pestilences. They've scarcely got any unions worth talking about and their hours are much too long."

"It's long hours that knock a man out most," agreed Murrel. "Nobody gets enough leisure or fun in this world, do they, Bill?"

Braintree was perhaps secretly a little flattered by his friend always calling him Jack; but he was wholly unable to understand why, in an excess of intimacy, he should address him as Bill. He was about to ask a question, when a grunt out of the darkness in front of him suddenly reminded him of somebody whose very existence he was bound to admit he had completely forgotten. It would appear that William was the Christian name of the driver of the omnibus; and that Douglas Murrel was in the habit of addressing him by it. The answering grunt of the person called Bill was sufficient to indicate that he entirely agreed that the hours of proletarian employment were much too long.

"Well, you're all right, Bill," said Murrel. "You're one of the lucky ones, especially to-night. Old Charley comes on at the Dragon, don't he?"

"Why, yes," said the driver in slow and luxuriantly scornful tones. "'E comes on at the Dragon, but . . ." Leaving the matter there, rather as if coming on at the Dragon were something which even the limited faculties of old Charley might be expected to manage, but that beyond that there was very little ground for consolation.

“He comes on at the Dragon and we come off at the Dragon,” continued Murrel, “so you can come and have one on me. Show you bear no malice for Golliwog. But I swear I only told you to back him for a place.”

“Never mind, Sir. Never you mind about that,” observed the benevolent Bill, in a glow of Christian forgiveness. “Never mind having a bit on; and if you lose your bit — why, there you are.”

“You are indeed,” said Murrel. “And here we are at the Dragon; I suppose somebody’s got to go in and fetch old Charley out.”

With the worthy object of thus accelerating the service of public vehicles, Murrel appeared suddenly to fall off the top of the omnibus. He fell on his feet, however, having in fact descended by turning a sort of cartwheel in the air on the pivot of a single foothold. He then shouldered his way into the lighted and noisy bar of the Green Dragon, with so resolute a movement that the other two men naturally followed him. The omnibus driver, whose full name was William Pond, followed indeed with no pretence of reluctance. The democratic John Braintree followed with a faint reluctance and some affectation of carelessness. He was neither a prohibitionist nor a prig; and would have drunk beer at any wayside inn on a walking tour naturally enough. But the Green Dragon stood on the outskirts of an industrial town; and the place they entered was not a bar-parlour or a lounge or any of the despicable little cubicles called Private Bars. It was the Public Bar or open and honest place of drinking for the poor. And the moment Braintree stepped across its threshold, he knew he was confronted with something new; with something that he had never touched or tasted or seen or smelt before in all his fifteen years of tub-thumping. There was a good deal to be smelt as well as seen; and much that he did not feel inclined to touch, far less to taste. The place was very hot and densely crowded and full of a deafening clatter of people all talking at once. Many of them did not seem to mind much whether the others were listening or talking at the same time. A great part of the talk was totally unintelligible to him, though evidently full of emphatic expressions; as if a crowd were swearing in Dutch or Portuguese. Every now and then in the stream of rather ugly and unintelligible words one word would occur and an authoritative voice from behind the counter would say: “Now then — now then," and the expression would be tacitly withdrawn. Murrel had gone up to the counter, nodding to various people and rapped on it with a few coppers asking for four of something.

So far as the eddying hubbub had any centre, there seemed to be something like a social circle round one small man who was right up against the counter; and that not so much because he was a talker as because he seemed to be a topic. Everybody was making jokes about him, as if he were the weather or the War Office or any recognised theme for the satiric artist. Much of it was direct, as in the form "Goin' to get married soon, George?" or "What you done with all your money, George?" Other remarks were in the third person, as "Old George 'e's been going out with the girls too much," or "I reckon old George got lost in London," and so on. It was noticeable that this concentrated fire of satire was entirely genial and friendly. It was still more notable that old George himself seemed to feel no sort of annoyance or even surprise at his own mysteriously isolated position as a human target. He was a short, stolid, rather sleepy little man, who stood the whole time with half-closed eyes and a beatific smile, as if this peculiar form of popularity were a never failing pleasure. His name was George Carter, and he was a small green-grocer in those parts. Why he, more than another, should be supposed at any given moment to be in love or lost in London, the visitor could not guess from the talk of two hours, and would probably never have discovered if he had listened to the talk for ten years. The man was simply a magnet; he had some mystical power of attracting to himself all the chaff that might be flying about the room. It was said that he was rather sulky if by any chance he did not get it. Braintree could make nothing of the mystery; but he sometimes thought of it long afterwards, when he heard people talking in Socialistic salons about brutal yokels and savage mobs jeering at anybody defective or eccentric. He wondered whether, perhaps, he had been present at one of these hideous and barbaric scenes.

Meanwhile, Murrel continued to rap at intervals on the counter and exchange badinage with a large young woman who had apparently tried to make her own hair look like a wig. Then he fell into an interminable dispute with the man next him about whether some horse or other could win by some particular number of sections of lengths; the difference being apparently one of degree and not of fundamental principle. The debate did not advance very rapidly to any final conclusion, as it consisted mostly of the repetition of the premises over and over again with ever-increasing firmness. These two disputants were polite as well as firm; but their conversation was somewhat embarrassed by the conduct of an immensely tall and lank and shabby man with drooping moustaches, who leaned across them, talking all the time, in a well-meant effort to refer the point in dispute to the gloomy Braintree.

"I know a gentleman when I see him," repeated the long man at intervals, "and I arsk 'im . . . I jest arsk 'im, as a gentleman; I know a gentleman when I—"

"I'm not a gentleman," said the Syndicalist, with some bitterness.

The long man tried to lean over him with vast fatherly gestures, like one soothing a fretful child.

"Now, don't you say that, sir," said the fatherly person. "Don't say that . . . I know a real toff when I see 'im, and I put it to you—"

Braintree turned away with a jerk and collided with a large navvy covered with white dust, who apologised with admirable amiability and then spat on the sawdust floor.

That night was like a nightmare. To John Braintree it seemed to be as endless as it was meaningless, and yet wildly monotonous. For Murrel took his festive bus-driver on a holiday to bar after bar, not really drinking very much, not drinking half so much as a solitary duke or don might drink out of a decanter of port, but drinking it to the accompaniment of endless gas and noise and smell and incessant interminable argument; argument that might truly be called interminable, in the literal sense that it did not seem even capable of being terminated. When the sixth public house resounded to booming shouts of "Time," and the crowds were shuffled and shunted out of it and the shutters put up, the indefatigable Murrel began a corresponding tour of coffee-stalls, with the laudable object of ensuring sobriety. Here he ate thick sandwiches and drank pale-brown coffee, still arguing with his fellow-creatures about the points of horses and the prospects of sporting events. Dawn was breaking over the hills and the fringe of factory chimneys, when John Braintree suddenly turned to his friend and spoke in a tone which compelled his attention.

"Douglas," he said, "you needn't act your allegory any more. I always knew you were a clever fellow, and I begin to have some notion of how your sort have continued to manage a whole nation for so long; but I'm not quite a fool myself. I know what you mean. You haven't said it with your own tongue, but you’ve said it with ten thousand other tongues to-night. You’ve said, ‘Yes, John Braintree, you can get on all right with the nobs. It’s the mobs you can’t get on with. You’ve spent an hour in the drawing-room and told them all about Shakespeare and the musical glasses. Now that you’ve spent a night in the poor streets, tell me — which of us know the people best?’”

Murrel was silent. After a moment the other went on.

“It is the best answer you could make, and I won’t trouble you now with answers to it. I might tell you something about why we shrink from these things more than you; about how you can play with them and we have had to fight them. But I’d rather just now show you that I understand and that I don’t bear malice.”

“I know you don’t,” answered Murrel. “Our friend in the pub didn’t select his terms very tactfully; but there was something in what he said about your being a gentleman. Well, this is, let us hope, the last of my practical jokes.”

But he had not done with practical jokes that day; for as he came back through the garden of Seawood he saw something which startled him; the ladder from the library leaning against a tool-shed. He stopped, and his good-humoured face grew almost grim.

CHAPTER VI

A COMMISSION AS COLOURMAN

As Murrel gazed there gradually grew upon his mind (which was perhaps clearing itself rather slowly of many festive fumes) the sense of one result of his nonsensical nocturnal expedition or experiment in the education of revolutionists. He had been out all night and had seen nothing of what had lately been happening to his friends and their theatricals. But he remembered that it was almost exactly at this moment of the morning, with its long, fine tapering shadows and faint, far-flung flush of dawn, that he had abandoned his painting of the scenery and plunged into the library in pursuit of the librarian. He had left the librarian at the top of the ladder a little more than twenty-four hours ago. And here was the ladder thrown away like lumber in the garden, spotted with mildew, a skeleton on which spiders flung their silvery morning webs. What had happened, and why was that particular piece of furniture thus thrown out into the garden? He remembered Julian Archer's jokes, and his face contracted with a spasm of annoyance as he walked hastily towards the library and looked in.

His first impression was that the long and lofty room, entirely lined with books, was empty. The next moment he saw that high up in the dark corner, where the librarian had found his French text-books of medieval history, there hung a queer sort of luminous blue cloud or mist. Then he saw that the electric light was still burning, and that the veil of vapour through which it shone was the result of somebody having been smoking on that remote perch, and smoking for a considerable stretch of hours, possibly (as it began to dawn on the mind of the strayed reveller) all night and a great part of the day before. Then for the first time he clearly visualised the two long legs of Mr. Michael Herne still hanging from his lofty ledge; where it seemed that he had been reading steadily from sunrise to sunrise. Luckily, it would appear that he had something to smoke. But he could not possibly have had anything to eat. "Lord bless us," muttered Murrel, to himself, "the man must be famished! And what about sleep? If he'd slept on that ledge I suppose he'd have fallen off."

He called out cautiously to the man above, rather as one does to a child playing on the edge of a precipice. He said to him, almost reassuringly, "It's all right; I’ve got the ladder.”

The librarian looked up mildly over the top of his large book. “Do you want me to come down?” he asked.

And then Murrel saw the last of the prodigies of his preposterous twenty-four hours. For without waiting for the ladder at all the librarian let himself swiftly down the face of the bookcase, finding footholds in the shelves, with a little difficulty and some danger, falling at last on his feet. It is true that when he reached the ground he gave a stagger.

“Have you asked Garton Rogers?” he asked. “What an interesting period!”

Murrel was not easily startled but for the moment he also almost staggered. He could only reply with a blank stare and the repetition of the word “Period! What period?”

“Well,” replied Mr. Herne, the librarian, half closing his eyes. “I suppose we might put the most interesting period say from 1080 to 1260. What do you think?”

“I think it’s a long time to wait for a meal,” answered Murrel. “Man alive, you must be starving. Have you really been perched up there for — for two hundred years, so to speak?”

“I do feel a little funny,” replied, Herne.

“I don’t approve of your taste in fun,” answered the other. “Look here, I’m going to get you some food. The servants aren’t up yet; but a knife-boy who was a friend of mine once showed me the way to the pantry.”

He hurried out of the room and returned in about five minutes bearing a tray loaded with incongruous things, among which beer bottles seemed to predominate.

“Ancient British cheese,” he said, setting down the several objects on the top of a revolving bookcase. “Cold chicken, probably not earlier than 1390. Beer, as drunk by Richard Coeur de Lion; or all of it that he left. Jambon froid à la mode Troubadour. Do start it at once. I assure you that eating and drinking were practised in the best period.”

“I really can’t drink all that beer,” said the librarian. “It’s very early.”

“On the contrary, it’s very late,” said Murrel. “I don’t mind joining you, for I’m just finishing off a sort of a feast myself. Another little drink won’t do us any harm, as it says in the old Troubadour song of Provence.”

“Really,” said Herne, “I don’t quite understand what all this means.”

“Nor do I,” replied Murrel, “but the truth is I’ve been out of bed all night too. Engaged on researches. Not exactly researches into your period, but another period; a systematic, organised sort of period, full of sociology and all that. You will forgive me if I am a little dazed myself. I’m wondering whether there was really such a damned lot of difference between one period and another.”

“Why, you see,” cried Herne eagerly, “in a way that’s just how I feel. It’s extraordinary the parallels you find between this medieval period and my own subject. How interesting all that change is, that turning of the old imperial official into a hereditary noble! Wouldn’t you think you were reading about the transformation of the Nal after the Zamul invasion?”

“Wouldn’t I just!” said Murrel with feeble fervour. “Well, I hope you’ll be able to let us know all about Troubadours.”

“Well, of course you and your friends know what you’re about,” said the librarian. “You looked it all up long before; but I rather wonder you concentrated so much on the Troubadours. I should have thought the Trouvères would have fitted into your plan better.”

“It’s a matter of convention, I suppose,” answered Murrel. “It’s quite a regular thing to be serenaded by a Troubadour; but if they found a Trouvère hanging about the garden, it would not be very respectable and he might be pinched by the police for loitering with intent to commit a felony.”

The librarian looked a little puzzled. Then he said: “At first I thought the Trouvère was something like the Zel or lute player; but I have come to the conclusion that he was only a sort of Pani.”

“I always suspected it,” said Murrel, darkly, “but I should very much like to have Julian Archer’s opinion on the matter.”

“Yes,” replied the librarian humbly, “I suppose Mr. Archer is a great authority on the subject.”

“I’ve always found him a great authority on all subjects,” said Murrel in a controlled manner. “But then you see I’m ignorant of all subjects — with the exception perhaps of beer, of which I seem to be taking more than my fair share. Come, Mr. Herne, troll the brown bowl in a more festive manner, do. Perhaps you would oblige the company with a song — an ancient Hittite drinking song.”

“No, really,” said the librarian earnestly, “I couldn’t possibly sing it; singing is not among my accomplishments.”

“Falling off the tops of bookcases seems to be among your accomplishments,” returned the companion. “I often fall off omnibuses and things; but I couldn’t have done it better myself. It seems to me, my dear sir, that you are something of a mystery. Now that you are perhaps a little restored by food and drink, especially drink, perhaps you will explain. If you could have got down at any time during the last twenty-four hours, may I ask why it never occurred to you that there is something to be said for going to bed and even getting up for breakfast?”

“I confess I should have preferred the latter,” said Mr. Herne, modestly. “Perhaps I was a little dizzy and nervous of the drop, till you startled me into making it. I don’t usually climb up walls in that way.”

“What I want to know is, if you are such an Alpine climber, why did you remain on that ledge of the precipice all night, waiting for the dawn. I had no idea librarians were such light-footed mountaineers. But why? Why not come down? Come down, for love is of the valley; and it is quite useless to await the coming of love perched on the top of a bookcase? Why did you do it?”

“I ought to be ashamed of myself, I know,” replied the scholar sadly. “You talk about love, and really it’s a kind of unfaithfulness. I feel just as if I’d fallen in love with somebody else’s wife. A man ought to stick to his own subject.”

“You think the Princess Pal-Ul — what’s-her-name? — will be jealous of Berengaria of Navarre?” suggested Murrel. “Devilish good magazine story — you being haunted by her mummy, trailing and bumping about all the passages at night. No wonder you were afraid to come down. But I suppose you mean you were interested in the books up there.”

“I was enthralled,” said the librarian, with a sort of groan. “I had no idea that the rebuilding of civilisation after the barbarian wars and the Dark Ages was so fascinating and many-sided a matter. That question of the Serf Regardant alone. . . . I’m afraid if I’d come on it all when I was younger . . .”

“You’d have done something desperate about it, I suppose,” said Murrel. “Hurled yourself madly into the study of Perpendicular Gothic or wasted your substance on riotous old brasses and stained glass. Well, it isn’t too late, I suppose.”

A minute or two later Murrel looked up sharply in answer to a silence, as men look up in answer to a speech. There was something arresting in the way in which the Librarian had stopped talking; something still more arresting in the way in which he was looking out between the open glass doors across the spaces of the garden which were gradually warmed with the growing sunlight. He looked down the long avenue, with strips of flat but glowing flower-beds on either side, a little like the borders of a medieval illumination, and at the end of that long perspective stood the fragment of medieval masonry poised upon its eighteenth century pedestal above the great sweep of the garden, and the fall of the whole countryside.

"I wonder," he said, "how much there is in that term we hear so often 'Too late.' Sometimes it seems to me as if it were either quite true or quite false. Either everything is too late or nothing is too late. It seems somehow to be right on the border of illusion and reality. Every man makes mistakes; they say a man who never makes mistakes never makes anything else. But do you think a man might make a mistake and not make anything else? Do you think he could die having missed the chance to live?"

"Well, as I told you," said Murrel, "I'm inclined to think one subject is pretty much like another. They'd all be interesting to a man like you and very bewildering to a man like me."

"Yes," replied Herne with an unexpected note of decision. "But suppose one of the subjects really is the subject of men like you and me. Suppose we had forgotten the face of our own father in order to dig up the bones of somebody else's great-great-grandfather? Suppose I should be haunted by somebody who is not a mummy, or by a mummy who is not dead?"

Murrel continued to gaze curiously at Herne and Herne continued to gaze fixedly at the distant monument on the lawn.

Olive Ashley was in some ways a singular person; being described by her friends in their various dialects as an odd girl, a strange bird and a queer fish; and in nothing more queer, when they came to think of it, than in that simple action with which her story starts; the fact that she was still "illuminating" when everyone felt that the play was the thing. She was bent, we might almost say crouched, over her microscopic medieval hobby in the very heart or hollow centre of the whirlwind of the absurd theatricals. It seemed like somebody picking daisies on Epsom Downs with his back to the Derby. And yet she had been the author of the play and the original enthusiast for the subject.

"And then," as Rosamund Severne observed with a large gesture as of despair, "when Olive had got what she wanted, she didn't seem to want it.

Gave her her old medieval play and then it was she that got sick of it! Went back to pottering about with her potty little gold paints, and let us do the rest of the work."

"Well, well," Murrel had said, for he was a universal peace-maker, "perhaps it's as well the work is left to you. You are so practical. You are a Man of Action."

And Rosamund was somewhat soothed and admitted she had often wished she were a man.

Her friend Olive's wishes remained something of a mystery; but it may be conjectured that this was not one of them. Indeed it was not quite true to say, as Rosamund said, that they had given her her old medieval play. It would be truer to say that they had taken it away from her. They had improved it immensely; they seemed to be quite confident of that, and no doubt they ought to know. They paid every possible tribute to it, as a thing that could be worked up most successfully for the stage. A little adapted, it afforded some admirable entrances and exits for Mr. Julian Archer. Only she began to have a deep and deplorable feeling, touching that gentleman, that she preferred the exits to the entrances. She did not say anything about it, least of all to him. She was a certain sort of lady; who can quarrel with those she loves, but cannot quarrel with those she despises. So she curled up in her shell; in that shell in which gold paint was quaintly preserved in the old paint-boxes.

If she chose to colour a conventional tree silver, she would not hear over her shoulder the loud voice of Mr. Archer saying it would look shabby not to have gold. If she painted a quaint decorative fish a bright red, she would not be confronted with the exasperated stare of her best friend, saying, "My dear, you *know* I can't wear red." Douglas could not play practical jokes with the little towers and pavilions in her pictures, even if they looked as queer and top-heavy as pantomime palaces. If those houses were jokes, they were her own jokes; and they were not at all practical. The camel could not pass through the eye of the needle; and the pantomime elephant could not pass through the key-hole of the door that guarded her chamber of imagery. That divine dolls'-house in which she played with pigmy saints and pigmy angels was too small for these people, like big clumsy brothers and sisters, to come blundering into it. So she fell back on her own old amusement, amid general wonder. Nevertheless on this particular morning she was a little less mildly monomaniac than usual. After working for about ten minutes, she rose to her feet, staring out on to the garden. Then she passed out almost like an automaton, the paint-brush still in her hand. She stood looking for a little time at the great Gothic fragment on the pedestal, in the shadow of which she and Murrel had debated the terrible problem of John Braintree. Then she looked across at the doors and windows in the opposite wing of the house; and saw that in the doorway of the library the librarian was standing, with Douglas Murrel beside him.

The sight of these two early birds seemed to awaken the third early bird to a more practical contact with the waking world. It seemed as if she suddenly took a resolution, or became aware of a resolution she had already taken. She walked a little more quickly and in an altered direction, towards the library; and when she reached it, almost disregarding the breezy surprise of Murrel's greeting, she said to the librarian with a curious seriousness: "Mr. Herne, I wish you would let me look at a book in the library."

Herne started as from a trance and said, "I beg your pardon."

"I wanted to speak to you about it," said Olive Ashley, "I was looking at a book in the library the other day, an illuminated book about St. Louis, I think; and there was a wonderful red used; a red vivid as if it were red-hot, and yet as delicate in its tint as a clear space in the sunset. Now I can't get a colour like that anywhere."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Murrel in his easy-going way. "I reckon you can get pretty well anything nowadays if you know where to go."

"You mean," said Olive somewhat bitterly, "that you can get anything nowadays if you know how to pay for it."

"I wonder," said the librarian musing, "if I were to offer to pay for a Palaeo-Hittite *palumon*, now, I wonder whether it would be easy to obtain."

"I don't say that Selfridge actually puts it in the shop-window," said Murrel, "but you'd probably find some other American millionaire somewhere, willing to do what he would call a trade with it."

"Now look here, Douglas," cried Olive with a certain fire, "I know you're fond of bets and wagers and that sort of thing. I'll show you the red colour I mean in the book, and you shall compare it yourself with the colours in my paint-box. And then you shall go out yourself and see whether you can buy me a cake of it."

CHAPTER VII

“BLONDEL THE TROUBADOUR”

“Oh,” said Murrel rather blankly. “Oh, yes. . . . Anything to oblige.”

In her eagerness Olive Ashley had darted past him into the library, without waiting for the assistance of the librarian, who continued to stare into the depths of the distance with blind but shining eyes. She lugged down a lumbering volume from one of the lower shelves and laid it open at a blazoned page on which the letters seemed to have come to life and to be crawling about like gilded dragons. In one corner was the image of the many-headed monster of the Apocalypse; and even to the careless eye of her companion, its tint glowed across the ages with a red that had the purity of flame.

“Do you mean,” he asked, “that I am to go hunting that particular animal through the streets of London?”

“I mean you are to go hunting that particular paint,” she said, “and as you say you can get anything in the streets of London, you oughtn’t to hunt far, I suppose. There was a man called Hendry, in the Haymarket, who used to sell it when I was a child; but I can’t get that sort of fine fourteenth century red at any artist’s colourmen’s round here.”

“Well, I’ve been painting the town red myself in a quiet way, for the last few hours,” said Murrel modestly, “but I suppose it wasn’t a fine fourteenth century red. It was only a twentieth century red, like Braintree’s tie. I told him at the time that the tie might begin to ignite the town.”

“Braintree!” said Olive rather sharply. “Was Mr. Braintree with you when you — when you painted it red?”

“I can’t say he was what you call an uproariously festive boon companion,” said Murrel apologetically. “These red revolutionists seem to have had awfully little practice in looking on the wine when it is red. By the way, couldn’t I go hunting for that, don’t you think? Suppose I brought you back a dozen of port, a few dozens of burgundy, some of claret, flasks of Chianti, casks of curious Spanish wines, and so on — don’t you think you could get the right colour? Mixing your drinks, like mixing your paints, might perhaps—”

“But what was Mr. Braintree doing there?” asked Olive with some severity.

“He was being educated,” replied Murrel virtuously. “He was taking a course; following out that course of instruction which your own educational enthusiasm marked out for him. You said he wanted to be introduced to a larger world and hear discussions about things he had never heard of. I’m sure that discussion we had at the Pig and Whistle was one that he’d never heard before in his life.”

“You know perfectly well,” she retorted a little crossly, “that I never wanted him to go to those horrid places. I meant him to have real discussions with intellectual people about important things.”

“My dear girl,” replied Murrel quietly, “don’t you see yet what that means? Braintree can knock all your heads off at *that* sort of discussion. He’s got ten times more idea of why he thinks what he does think than most of what you call cultured people. He’s read quite as much and remembers much more of what he’s read. And he has got some tests of whether it’s true or not, which he can instantly apply. The tests may be quite wrong, but he can apply them and produce the result at once. Don’t you ever feel how vague we all are?”

“Yes,” she replied in a less tart accent, “he does know his own mind.”

“It’s true he doesn’t know enough about some sorts of people’s minds,” went on Murrel, “but he knows our sort better than some; and did you really expect him to be prostrated before the mind of old Wister? No, no, my dear Olive, if you really want to see him prostrated, or anybody prostrated, you must come with me this evening to the Pig and Whistle—”

“I don’t want to see anybody prostrated,” she replied, “and I think it was very wrong of you to take him to such low places.”

“And what about me?” asked the gentleman plaintively, “What about my morals? Is my moral training of no importance? Is my immortal soul of no value? Why this levity and indifference to my spiritual prospects at the Pig and Whistle?”

“Oh,” she replied with elaborate indifference “everybody knows you don’t mind that sort of thing.”

“I raise against the Red Tie the more truly democratic blazon of the Red Nose; and appeal from the Marseillaise to the Music Hall,” he said, smiling. “Don’t you think now that if I went hunting for the Red Nose through London, rejecting the pink, the purple, the merely russet, the too dusky crimson, and so on, I might find at last a nose of that delicate fourteenth century tint which—"

"If you can find the paint," retorted Olive, "I don't care whose nose you paint with it. But I'd prefer Mr. Archer's."

It is necessary that the long-suffering reader should know something of the central incident in the play called "Blondel the Troubadour," as that alone could have rendered possible or credible the central incident in the story called, "The Return of Don Quixote." In this drama, Blondel leaves his lady-love in a somewhat unnecessary state of mystification and jealousy, supposing that he is touring the Continent serenading ladies of all nationalities and types of beauty; whereas in fact he is only serenading a large and muscular gentleman for purely political reasons. The large and muscular gentleman, otherwise Richard Coeur de Lion, was to be acted on this occasion by a modern gentleman answering to that description as far as externals went; a certain Major Trelawney, a distant cousin of Miss Ashley. He was one of those men, sometimes to be found in the fashionable world, who seem in some mysterious way to be able to act, when they are hardly able to read, and apparently quite unable to think. But though he was a good-natured fellow and excellent in theatricals, he was also an exceedingly casual fellow and had hitherto been very remiss in the matter of rehearsals. Anyhow, the political motives which were supposed to move Blondel to search everywhere for this large and muscular gentleman were of course of the loftiest kind. His motives throughout the play were of an almost irritating disinterestedness; a purity that amounted to perversity. Murrel could never conceal his amusement at hearing these suicidally unselfish sentiments breathed from the lips of Mr. Julian Archer. Blondel, in short, overflowed with loyalty to his king and love of his country and a desire to restore the former to the latter. He wished to bring the king back to restore order to his kingdom and defeat the intrigues of John, that universal and useful, not to say overworked, villain of many crusading tales.

The climax was not a bad piece of amateur drama. When Blondel the Troubadour has at last discovered the castle that contains his master, and has collected (somewhat improbably) a company of courtiers, court ladies, heralds and the like in the depths of the Austrian forest outside the doors of that dungeon, to receive the royal captive with loyal acclamations, King Richard comes out with a flourish of trumpets, takes the centre of the stage, and there before all his peripatetic court, with exceedingly royal gestures, abdicates his royal throne. He declares that he will be a king no longer, but only a knight errant. He had indeed been sufficiently errant in every sense, when his misfortune fell upon him; but it has not cured him of his own version of the view that it is human to err. He had been wandering in those Central European forests, falling into various adventures by the way, when he finally fell into the misadventure of the Austrian captivity. He now declared that these nameless meanderings, despite their conclusion, had been the happiest hours of his life. He delivers a withering denunciation of the wickedness of the other kings and princes of his time and the disgusting condition of political affairs generally. Miss Olive Ashley had quite a pretty talent for imitating the more turgid Elizabethan blank verse. He expresses a preference for the personal society of snakes to that of Phillip Augustus, the King of France; compares the wild boar of the forests favourably with statesmen managing public affairs at the moment; and makes a speech of a hearty and hospitable sort, addressed chiefly to the wolves and winter winds, begging them to make themselves comfortable at his expense, so long as he is not required to meet any of his relatives or recent political advisers. With a peroration ending with a rhymed couplet, in the Shakespearean manner, he renounces his crown, draws his sword, and is proceeding to Exit R., to the not unnatural annoyance of Blondel, who has sacrificed his private romance to his public duty, only to find his public duty doing a bolt off the stage in pursuit of a private romance. The opportune and exceedingly improbable arrival of Berengaria of Navarre, in the depths of the same forests, at length induces him to return to his allegiance to himself. And the reader must be indeed ill acquainted with the laws of romantic drama if he needs to be told that the appearance of the queen, and her reconciliation to the king, are the signal for an exceedingly hasty but equally satisfactory reconciliation between Blondel and his own young lady. Already an atmosphere fills the Austrian forest, accompanied by faint music and evening light, which corresponds to the grouping of figures near the foot-lights and the hasty diving for hats and umbrellas in the pit.

Such was the play of “Blondel the Troubadour,” not altogether a bad specimen of the sentimental and old-fashioned romance, popular before the war, but now only remembered because of the romantic results which it afterwards produced in real life. While the rest were occupied in their respective ways with acting or scenery, two other figures in that human drama remained loyal to other enthusiasms, not without effect on their future. Olive Ashley continued to potter about impenitently with paints and pictured missals from the library. And Michael Herne continued to devour volume after volume about the history, philosophy, theology, ethics and economics of the four medieval centuries, in the hope of fitting himself to deliver the fifteen lines of blank verse allotted by Miss Ashley to the Second Troubadour.

It is only fair to say, however, that Archer was quite as industrious in his way as Herne in another. As they were the Two Troubadours they often found themselves studying side by side.

“It seems to me,” said Julian Archer one day, flinging down the manuscript with which he had refreshed his memory, “that this fellow Blondel as a lover is a bit of a fraud. I like to put a bit more passion into it myself.”

“Certainly there was something curiously abstract, and at first sight artificial, about all that Provençal etiquette,” assented the Second Troubadour, otherwise Mr. Herne. “The Courts of Love seem to have been pedantic, almost pettifogging. Sometimes it did not seem to matter whether the lover had seen the lady at all; as with Rudel and the Princess of Tripoli. Sometimes it was a courtly bow to the wife of your liege lord, a worship open and tolerated. But I suppose there was often real passion as well.”

“There seems damned little of it in Miss Ashley and her Troubadour,” said the disappointed amateur. “All spiritual notions and nonsense. I don’t believe he wanted to get married at all.”

“You think he was affected by the Albigensian doctrines?” inquired the librarian, earnestly and almost eagerly. “It is true, of course, that the seat of the heresy was in the south and a great many of the troubadours seemed to have been in that or similar philosophical movements.”

“His movements are philosophical all right,” said Archer. “I like my movements to be a little less philosophical when I’m making love to a girl on the stage. It’s almost as if she really meant him to be shilly-shallying instead of popping the question.”

“The question of avoiding marriage seems to have been essential in the heresy,” said Herne. “I notice that in the records of men returning to orthodoxy after the Crusade of Montford and Dominic, there is the repeated entry iit in matrimonium. It would certainly be interesting to play the part as that of some such semi-oriental pessimist and idealist; a man who feels the flesh to be dishonour to the spirit, even in its most lovable and lawful form.

Nothing of that comes out very clearly in the lines Miss Ashley has given me to say; but perhaps your part makes the point a little clearer."

"I think he's a long time coming to the point," replied Archer. "Gives a romantic actor no scope at all."

"I'm afraid I don't know anything about any sort of acting," said the librarian, sadly. "It's lucky you've only given me a few lines in the play."

He paused a moment, and Julian Archer looked at him with an almost absent-minded pity, as he murmured that it would be all right on the night. For Archer, with all his highly practical *savoir faire,* was not the man to feel the most subtle changes in the social climate; and he still regarded the librarian more or less as a sort of odd footman or stable-boy brought in by sheer necessity, merely to say, "My lord, the carriage waits." Preoccupied always by his own practical energies, he took no notice of the man's maunderings about his own hobby of old books, and was only faintly conscious that the man was maundering still.

"But I can't help thinking," the librarian was continuing, in his low meditative voice, "that it might give rather an interesting scope for a romantic actor to act exactly that sort of high and yet hollow romance. There is a kind of dance that expresses contempt for the body. You can see it running like a pattern through any number of Asiatic traceries and arabesques. That dance was the dance of the Albigensian troubadours; and it was a dance of death. For that spirit can scorn the body in either of two ways; mutilating it like a fakir or pampering it like a sultan; but never doing it honour. Surely it will be rather interesting for you to interpret bitter hedonism, the high and wild cries, the horns and hootings of the old heathen revel, along with the underlying pessimism."

"I feel the underlying pessimism all right," answered Archer, "when Trelawney won't come to rehearsals and Olive Ashley will only fidget about with her potty little paints."

He lowered his voice a little hastily with the last words, for he realised for the first time that the lady in question was sitting at the other end of the library, with her back to him, bent over books and fidgeting away as described. She had not apparently heard him; in any case she did not turn round, and Julian Archer continued in the same tone of cheerful grumbling.

"I don't suppose you have much experience of what really grips an audience," he said. "Of course, nobody supposes it won't go off all right in one sense. Nobody's likely to give us the bird—"

“Give us what bird?” asked Mr. Herne, with mild interest.

“Nobody’s likely to howl at us and hiss us, or throw rotten eggs at us in Lord Seawood’s drawing-room, of course,” continued Archer, “but you can always tell whether an audience is gripped or not. At least, you can always tell when you’ve had as much experience as I have. Now unless she can put a little more pep into the dialogue, I’m not sure I can grip my audience.”

Herne was trying to listen politely with one half of his mind, but for the other half the garden beyond was taking on, as it so often did, the vague quality of a pageant in a vision. Far away at the end of an avenue of shining grass, among delicate trees, twinkling in the sunlight, he saw the figure of the Princess of the play. Rosamund was clad in her magnificent blue robes with her almost fantastic blue head-dress, and as she came round the curve of the path she made an outward gesture at once of freedom and fatigue, thrusting out her arms or throwing out her hands as if stretching herself. The long pointed sleeves she wore gave it somewhat the appearance of a bird flapping its wings; a bird of paradise, as the actor had said.

A half-thought formed itself in the librarian’s mind as to whether it was that sort of bird that nobody would ever give him in Lord Seawood’s drawing-room.

As the figure in blue drew nearer down the green avenues, however, even the dreamy librarian began to think that there might be another reason for that outward gesture. Something in her face suggested that the movement had been one of impatience or even of dismay since it cannot help looking like a mask of tragedy over quite trivial irritations. It might be questioned whether she regarded her present irritation as trivial. But she unconsciously carried about with her such a glow of good health and such a confidence of manner, that there was a second incongruity even in the fullness and firmness of her voice. There was something boisterous about it, that made even bad news sound as if it were good.

“And here’s a nice state of things,” she said indignantly, flapping open a telegram and staring round her in impersonal anger. “Hugh Trelawney says he can’t act the King after all.”

On some matters Julian Archer’s mind worked very swiftly indeed. He was as much annoyed in a sense as she was; but before she had spoken again he had considered the possibility of taking a new part himself, and finding time to learn the lines appropriated to the King. It would be a fag; but he had never minded hard work when it was worth his while. The great difficulty he saw was the difficulty of imagining anybody in his part as the Troubadour.

The rest had not yet begun to look ahead, and the lady was still reeling, so to speak, under the blow of the treacherous Trelawney. "I suppose we must chuck the whole thing," she said.

"Oh, come now," said Archer more tolerantly, "I shouldn't do that if I were you. It seems rather rotten, when we've all taken such a lot of trouble." His eye wandered inconsequently to the other end of the room, where the dark head and rigid back of Miss Ashley were obstinately fixed in concentrated interest on the illuminations. It was a long time since she had been apparently concentrated on anything else; save for long disappearances, supposed to be country walks, which had remained something of a mystery.

"Why, I've sometimes got up at six three days running," said Mr. Archer, merely in illustration of the industry of the company.

"But how can we go on with it?" asked Rosamund in exasperation. "Who else is there who could take the King? We had trouble enough in getting hold of an assistant Troubadour, till Mr. Herne was kind enough to help us."

"The trouble is," said Archer, "that if I took the King, you'd have nobody who could take Blondel."

"Well then," said Rosamund rather crossly, "in that case it ought to be dropped."

There was a silence and they stood looking at each other. Then they all simultaneously turned their heads and looked towards the other end of the long room, from which a new voice had spoken.

For Olive Ashley had risen suddenly from her occupation and faced round to speak. They were a little startled, for they had no idea she had even been listening.

"It ought to be dropped," she said, "unless you can get Mr. Herne to act the King himself. He is the only person who knows or cares what it's all about."

"God bless my soul," was the helpful comment of Mr. Herne.

"I don't know what you people imagine it's all about," went on Olive with some bitterness. "You seem to have turned it all into a sort of opera — a comic opera. Well, I don't know anything about it, in the way he does; but I did mean something by it, for all that. Oh, I don't imagine I can express it properly — not half so well as any old song like the one that says ‘Will ye no come back again?’ or ‘When the King enjoys his own again.’”

“That’s Jacobite,” Archer explained kindly. “Mixing up the periods a bit, eh?”

“I don’t know what King it is who ought to come back, any more than anybody else does,” answered Olive steadily. “King Arthur or King Richard or King Charles or somebody. But Mr. Herne does know something about what those men meant by a king. I rather wish Mr. Herne really were King of England.”

Julian Archer threw back his head and hooted with delighted laughter. There was something exaggerated and almost unnatural about his laughter; like the shrill mockery with which men have received prophecies.

“But look here,” protested the more practical Rosamund, “even supposing Mr. Herne could act the King, then who is going to take his own part, that we had such a bother about before?”

Olive Ashley turned her back once more and appeared to resume tidying up her paints.

“Oh,” she said, rather abruptly, “I could arrange that. A friend of mine will take it on if you like.”

The others stared at her in some wonder; and then Rosamund said: “Hadn’t we better consult Monkey about this? He knows such a lot of people.”

“I’m sorry,” returned Olive, still tidying up, “I’m afraid I’ve sent him off on a job of my own. He very kindly offered to get one of my paints for me.”

And indeed it was true that, while the social circle was settling down (to the bewilderment of Mr. Archer) into a sort of acceptance of the idea of Mr. Herne’s coronation, their friend Douglas Murrel was in the very act of setting out upon an expedition which was to have a curious effect upon all their fortunes. Olive Ashley had asked him to discover whether a particular pigment was still procurable at the artist’s colourmen’s. But he had all the cheerful bachelor’s exaggerated love of adventure, and especially of preparations for adventure. Just as he had started on his nocturnal round with Mr. Braintree with a general sense that the night would last for ever, so he set out on his little commission for Miss Ashley with a general assumption that it would lead him to the end of the world. And indeed it did perhaps in some sense lead him to the end of the world; or perhaps to the beginning of another one. He took out a considerable sum of money from the bank; he stuffed his pockets with tobacco and flasks and pocket-knives as if he were going to the North Pole. Most intelligent men play this childish game with themselves in one form or another; but he was certainly carrying it rather far and acting as if he expected to meet ogres and dragons when he walked up the street.

And, sure enough, no sooner had he stepped outside the old Gothic gateway of Seawood than he came face to face with a prodigy. He might almost have said a monster. A figure was entering the house as he was leaving it; a figure at once fearfully unfamiliar. He struggled with some confusion of identity; as in a nightmare. Then he sank into a stupefied certainty; for the figure was that of Mr. John Braintree; and he had shaved off his beard.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MISADVENTURES OF MONKEY

Murrel stood staring in the porch at the figure which appeared dark against the outer landscape; and all the fanciful part of him, which was largely subconscious, was stirred by half serious fancies. No black cat or white crow or piebald horse or any such proverbial prodigy could have been so inscrutable an omen at the beginning of his journey as this strange appearance of the Shaven Syndicalist. Meanwhile Braintree stared back at him with a hardihood almost amounting to hostility, despite their mutual affection; he could no longer thrust out his beard, but he thrust out his chin so as to make it seem equally big and aggressive.

But Murrel only said genially, “You are coming to help us, I hope.” He was a tactful person and he did not say, “You are coming to help us, after all.” But he understood in a flash all that had happened; he understood Olive Ashley’s country walks and her abstraction and the way in which her curious social experiment had come to a crisis. Poor Braintree had been caught on the rebound, in the reaction after his depressing experiment as a drunken reveller. He might have easily gone on bullying her along with all the other nobs, so long as he had the sensation of marching into their palace with the populace behind him. But since the night when Murrel himself had sown the seed of doubt about his friend’s democratic status, the latter had become merely an intensely sensitive and rather introspective individual; and one on whom graciousness and a delicate sympathy were certainly not altogether thrown away. Murrel understood all about it, except perhaps the end of it, which remained rather cloudy; but he did not allow the faintest trace of intelligence to appear in his tone of voice.

“Yes,” replied Braintree stolidly, “Miss Ashley told me somebody had to come in and help. I wonder you don’t do it yourself.”

“Not much,” replied Murrel. “I said at the beginning that if they would insult me by calling me a stage-manager, at least I wasn’t wicked enough to be an actor-manager. Since then Julian Archer has taken over all the managing there is lying about. Besides, Miss Ashley has another sort of commission in my case.”

“Indeed?” inquired Braintree. “Now I come to look at you, you look as if you were going out to seek your fortunes in the goldfields or somewhere.” And he eyed with some wonder the equipment of his friend, who carried a knapsack, a resolute looking walking-stick and a leather belt apparently supporting a sheath-knife.

“Yes,” said Murrel, “I am armed to the teeth. I am going on active service — going to the Front.” Then after a pause he added, “The truth is I’m going shopping.”

“Oh,” said the wondering Braintree.

“Say good-bye to my friends, old fellow,” said Murrel with some emotion. “If I fall in the first charge at the Bargain Counter, say that my last thought was fixed firmly on Julian Archer. Put up a little stone on the spot where I fell, and when the Spring Sales come back with all their birds and flowers, remember me. Farewell. I wish you luck.”

And waving his resolute walking-stick in the air with gestures of benediction, he betook himself briskly along the path through the park, leaving the dark figure in the porch looking rather doubtfully after him.

The birds of spring, which he had just invoked so pathetically, were indeed singing in the bright plantation of little trees through which he went; the light green tufts of leafage had themselves something of the look of sprouting feathers. It was one of those moments in the year when the world seems to be growing wings. The trees seemed to stand on tiptoe as if ready to soar into the air, in the wake of the great pink and white cloud that went before him overhead like a cherubic herald in the sky. Something childish in his memories awoke; and he could almost have fancied that he was a fairy prince and his clumsy walking-stick was a sword. Then he remembered that his enterprise was not to take him into forests and valleys but into the labyrinth of commonplace and cockney towns; and his plain and pleasant and shrewd face was wrinkled with a laugh of irony.

By various stages he made his way first to the big industrial town in which he had gone on his celebrated round of revelry with John Braintree. But now he was in no mood of nocturnal festivity; but in an almost sternly statistical and commercial attitude of the cold white light of morning. “Business is business,” he said severely. “Now I am a business man I must look at things in a hard practical way. I believe all business men say to themselves sharply before breakfast, ‘Business is business.’ I suppose it’s all that can be said for it. Seems a bit tautological.”

He approached first the long line of Babylonian buildings that bore the title of "The Imperial Stores" in gold letters rather larger than the windows. He approached it deliberately; but it would have been rather difficult to approach anything else, for it occupied the whole of one side of the High Street and some part of the other. There were crowds of people inside trying to get out and crowds of people outside trying to get in, reinforced by more crowds of people not trying to get in, but standing and staring in at the windows without the least ambition to get anywhere.

At intervals in the crawling crush he came on big bland men who waved him on with beautifully curved motions of the hand; so that he felt a boiling impulse to hit these highly courteous bounders a furious blow on the head with his heavy walking-stick; but he felt that such a prelude to adventure might bring matters to a premature end. With raging restraint he repeated the name of the department he desired to each of these polished persons; and then the polished one also repeated the name of the department and waved him onwards; and he passed on, grinding his teeth. It seemed to be generally believed that somewhere or other in these endless gilded galleries and subterranean halls there was a department devoted to Artists' Materials; but there was no indication of how far away it was or how long it would take, at the present rate of progress, to get there. Every now and then they came on the huge shaft or well of a lift; and the congestion was slightly relieved by some people being swallowed up by the earth and others vanishing into the ceiling. Eventually he himself found he was one of those fated, like Aeneas, to descend into the lower world. Here a new and equally interminable pilgrimage began, with the added exhilaration of knowing that it was sunken far below the street, like an interminable coal-cellar.

"How much more convenient it is," he said to himself cheerfully, "to go to one shop for everything, instead of having to walk nearly seventy yards in the open air from one shop to another!"

The gentleman called Monkey had not come to the encounter (or to the counter) altogether unequipped with instruments more appropriate to the occasion than a cudgel and a large sheath-knife. Indeed, the whole thing was not so much out of his way as his demeanour might indicate. He had gone round before now trying to match ribbons or obtain for somebody an exact shade in neckties. He was one of those people who are always being trusted by other people in small and practical matters; and it was not the first errand he had run for Miss Olive Ashley. He was the sort of man who is discovered taking care of a dog, which is not his dog; in whose rooms are to be found trunks and suit-cases which Bill or Charlie will pick up on the way from Mesopotamia to New York; who is often left to mind the baggage and might quite conceivably be left to mind the baby. Yet it is not enough to say that he did not lose his dignity (which, such as it was, was very deep down in him indeed and very indestructible), but, what is perhaps more interesting, he did not lose his liberty. He did not lose his lounging air of doing the thing because he chose; possibly (the more subtle have suspected) because that was really why he did it. He had the knack of turning any of these things into a sort of absurd adventure; just as he had already turned Miss Ashley's earnest little errand into an absurd adventure. This attitude of the all-round assistant sat easily on him because it suited him; something unassuming in his ugly and pleasant face, in his unattached sociability and very variegated friend-ships, made it come quite natural to anybody to ask him a favour. He gravely took out of his pocket-book a piece of old, stiff paper, rather like parchment and embrowned with age or dust, on which was traced in a faint but finely drawn outline the plumage of one part of the wing of a bird, probably intended as a study for the wings of an angel. For a few of the plumes were picked out in strokes like flames of a rather curious flaming red, which seemed still to glow like something unquenchable even upon that faded design and dusty page.

Nobody could really know how much Murrel was trusted in such matters, who did not know what were Olive Ashley's feelings about that old scrap of paper scratched with that unfinished sketch. For it had been made long ago when she was a child by her father; who was a remarkable man in more ways than anybody ever knew, but especially remarkable as a father. To him was due the fact that all her first thoughts about things had been coloured. All those things that for so many people are called culture and come at the end of education had been there for her before the beginning. Certain pointed shapes, certain shining colours, were things that existed first and set a standard for all this fallen world and it was that which she was clumsily trying to express when she set her thoughts against all the notions of progress and reform. Her nearest and dearest friend would have been amazed to know that she caught her breath at the mere memory of certain wavy bars of silver or escalloped edges of peacock green, as others do at the reminder of a lost love.

Murrel, as he took this precious fragment from his pocket-book, took with it a newer and shinier piece of paper, on which a note was written in the words: "Hendry's Old Illumination Colours; shop in Haymarket fifteen years ago. *Not* Hendry and Watson. Used to be sold in small round glass pots. J. A. thinks more likely in country town than London now."

Armed with these weapons of attack, he was borne up against the counter stacked with artists' materials, he himself being wedged between a large mild buffer and an eager and even very ferocious lady. The old buffer was very slow and the lady was very rapid, and between them the young woman attempting to sell at the counter seemed to be somewhat distraught. She looked wildly over her shoulder at one person while her hands shot out in all directions to deal with others; and the remarks shot sideways out of her mouth, which were of an irritated sort, seemed to be addressed to somebody quite different; apparently to somebody behind.

"Never the time and the place and the loved one all together," murmured Murrel with an air of resignation. "It does not seem perhaps the perfect moment, the perfect combination of conditions, in which to open one's heart about Olive's early childhood and her fireside dreams about the flaming cherubim, or even to go very deep into the influence of her father on her growing mind. And I don't know how else one is exactly to convey how important this is, or why any of us should take any particular trouble about it. It all comes of having an open mind and sympathising with so many different sorts of people. When I talk to Olive I know that the right and wrong colour are just as real to her as the right and wrong of anything else; and a dull shade in the red is like a shadow on honour or somebody not quite telling the truth. But when I look at this girl, I feel she has every reason to congratulate herself, when she says her evening prayers, if she hasn't sold six easels instead of five sketch books, or thrown all the Indian ink over the people who asked for turpentine."

He resolved to reduce his original explanation to the simplest possible terms to start with and expand it afterwards, if he survived. Gripping his piece of paper firmly in his hand, he confronted the shop girl with the eye of a lion-tamer, and said: "Have you got Hendry's Old Illumination Colours?"

The young woman gazed at him for a few seconds; and there was on her face exactly the same expression as if he had spoken to her in Russian or Chinese. She forgot for a moment all that mechanical and merciless civility which accompanied the rapid and recognised exchanges. She did not beg his pardon or go through any such form. She simply said, “Eh?” and her voice rose sharply with that deep, incurable, querulous complaint and protest which is the very soul of the accent that we call Cockney.

The way of the conscientious modern novelist is hard; or rather it is much worse, it is soft. It is like plodding heavily through loose and soft sand, when he himself would be only too delighted to leap from crag to crag or from crisis to crisis. When he would fain take the wings of a dove and fly away and be at rest in some reposeful murder, shipwreck, revolution or universal conflagration, he is condemned for a time to toil along the dusty road which is the way such things happen; and must pass through a purgatory of law and order before entering his paradise of blood and ruin. Realism is dull; that is what is meant by saying that realism alone tells the truth about our intense and intelligent civilisation. Thus, for instance, nothing but a mass of most monotonous detail could convey to the reader any impression of the real conversation between Mr. Douglas Murrel and the young woman selling him, or not selling him, paints. To be true to the psychological effect of that cumulative conversation it would be necessary, to start with, to print Mr. Murrel’s question ten times over in exactly the same words, till the page looked like a pattern. Still less can any brief and picturesque selection give any notion of the phases through which the wondering face of the saleswoman passed, or the variation in her artless comments. How should rapid narrative describe how big business dealt with the problem? How she said they had got illumination colours and produced water colours in a shilling box. How she then said they had not got illumination colours and implied that there were no such things in the world; that they were a fevered dream of the customer’s fancy. How she pressed pastels upon him, assuring him that they were just the same. How she said, in a disinterested manner, that certain brands of green and purple ink were being sold very much just now. How she asked abruptly if it was for children, and made a faint effort to pass him on to the Toy Department. How she finally relapsed into an acid agnosticism, even assuming a certain dignity, which had the curious effect of appearing to give her a cold in her head, and causing her to answer all further remarks by saying: “Dote know, I’be sure.”

All this would have to occupy as much space as it did time, before the effect on the customer could be found excusable, especially to himself. A wild protest against the preposterousness of things in general surged up inside him; a sort of melodrama that found its energy in mockery. He leaned over the counter in a lowering and almost bullying fashion, and said: "Where is Hendry? What have you done with Hendry, that household word? Why all these dark evasions when Hendry is mentioned; this sinister and significant silence on this one subject; this still more sinister and significant changing of the subject? Why do you tear the conversation away towards pastels? Why do you erect a screen or barricade of cheap chalks and tin paint-boxes? Why do you use red ink as a red herring? What happened to Hendry? Where have you hidden him?"

He was about to add, in a low and hissing voice, "*or all that remains of him,*" when he had a revulsion, and his better feelings returned with a rush. A sudden sense of the pathos of this bewildered automaton overwhelmed his good-natured spirit with shame; he stopped in the middle of a sentence, hesitated, and then adopted another method for pursuing his purpose. Putting his hand hastily into his pocket, he pulled out some envelopes and a card-case, and presenting his name, asked with courtesy, and almost humility, if he could see the manager of the department. He gave the girl his card, and the next moment regretted that also.

There was one weak side of the many-sided Mr. Murrel on which he could be abashed and thrown off his balance; perhaps it was the only kind of attack he really feared. It was anything like a gross and obvious appeal to the accident of privilege that belonged to his social position. It would be cant to say that he was always unconscious of his rank. Somewhere deep inside him, perhaps, he was even too conscious of it. But it was deeply embedded in him that the only way to defend it was to ignore it. Moreover, there was a certain complexity and conflict; and some pride in the accident of being born with a few others "in the know" wrestled with the real and deep desire of all masculine men for equality. The one thing that embarrassed him was any such reminder, and he remembered too late that his card and address carried certain indications of such things; a club and a formal title. Worst of all, it was working; it was obviously working like a charm. The girl referred back to the mysterious being behind her, to whom so many of her peevish excuses were addressed; that being in turn studied the card, probably with an eye wiser in the wickedness of this world; and after a good deal more fuss, which only a realistic novelist would bother to describe, Douglas Murrel did really find himself bowed into the private apartment of one evidently in authority.

“Wonderful place you have here,” he said cheerfully. “All done by organisation, I suppose. I expect you could pretty well get into touch with all the trade conditions in the world if you put your machinery to work.”

The manager, however shrewd, had a vanity in such things, and before the conversation had gone much further had committed himself to very vast and universal claims to knowledge.

“This man Hendry whom I was inquiring about,” said Murrel, “was really a rather remarkable man. I never knew him myself, but I understand from my friend, Miss Ashley, that he was a friend of her father and of the old group that worked with William Morris.

“He was a man who understood his subject very thoroughly, on the scientific as well as the artistic side. Indeed, I believe he had originally been a doctor and a chemical expert of some note, when he took up this particular business of producing the right pigments for the reproduction of medieval work.

“He kept a little shop in the Haymarket but I believe that it was always full of his artistic friends, like Miss Ashley’s father. He knew nearly all the eminent men of his day, and some of them quite well. Now you would think a shopkeeper of that sort could hardly disappear entirely without leaving any trace at all. Wouldn’t you expect to be able to find a man of that sort and his wares turning up somewhere?”

“Yes,” said the other slowly, “I should expect to find him employed somewhere, certainly; I should expect to find he’d got a job in our works or in some of the big firms.”

“Ah,” said Murrel, and relapsed into reflective silence.

Then he said, suddenly: “If you come to that, a lot of our little squires and country gentlemen are pretty hard hit nowadays. But I suppose you could find them all acting as butlers and footmen to some of the dukes.”

“Oh, well . . . I suppose that would be a bit different,” said the manager awkwardly; not being quite sure whether he ought to laugh. He went into a back office to consult business records and books of reference. He left his visitor under the impression that he was looking up the letter “H” to find the name of Hendry. As a matter of fact, he was looking up the letter “M” to find the name of Murrel. But what he found out in the latter inquiry disposed him more favourably to the former. He plunged into a much more elaborate examination of the books, rang up and questioned all the older heads of various departments and after a great deal of this gratuitous labour actually came on a trace of the forgotten affair in question; which, to do him justice, he pursued when he had got it with something of the disinterested energy of a detective in a sensational novel. After some considerable time, he came back to Murrel, wearing a broad smile and rubbing his hands in triumph.

"Very good of you to have paid a compliment to our little attempts at organisation, Mr. Murrel," said the manager in quite a gay and radiant manner. "There is really something to be said for organisation, you know."

"I hope I haven't caused a lot of disorganisation," said Murrel. "I'm afraid my request was rather an unusual one. I suppose very few of your customers come to order dead pre-Raphaelites over the counter. Somehow it doesn't seem to be the sort of place where one would drop in for a chat, merely to say you had a friend who was a friend of William Morris. It's awfully good of you to bother."

"Only too pleased," replied the affable official, "only too pleased to give you a good impression of our system, I assure you. Well, I think I can give you a little information about this man Hendry. It appears that there was a man of that name at one time employed temporarily in this department. He seems to have applied for work, and appeared to have some knowledge of the business. The end of the experiment was very unsatisfactory. I believe the poor fellow was a little cracked; complained of pains in the head and so on. Anyhow he broke out one day and threw the manager of the department slap through a great picture on an easel. I can't find anything about his being sent to prison or to an asylum, as one would naturally expect. As a matter of fact, I may tell you that we keep a pretty careful record of our employees' mode of life, prosecutions by the police and so on; so I imagine that he simply ran away. Of course, he will never work for us again; no good trying to help people of that sort."

"Do you know where he lives?" asked Murrel gloomily.

"No; I think that was part of the trouble," replied the other. "Most of our people were living in at that time. They say he always lunched round at the Spotted Dog; and that alone looked bad, of course; We much prefer our people to use the regular restaurants provided for the purpose. It was probably drink that was really the matter with him; and that sort of man never comes up again."

"I wonder," said Murrel, "what became of his Illuminating Paints."

"Oh methods have been very much improved, of course, since his time," said the other. "Only too glad to be of any service to you, Mr. Murrel, and I hope you won't think I'm trying to force a card. But as a matter of fact, you couldn't do better than the Empire Illuminator that we always sell. It's practically replaced all the others by now; you must have seen it everywhere. The whole apparatus compact and complete and everything much more convenient than the old process."

He went across to one of the desks and took some printed and coloured leaflets which he handed to Murrel in an almost careless fashion. Murrel looked at them and his eyebrows went up in a mild and momentary surprise. On the prospectus he saw the name of the large and pompous manufacturer with whom Braintree had debated in the drawing-room; but the chief feature of the leaflet was a large photograph of Mr. Almeric Wister, the art expert, with his signature appended to a testimonial declaring that these colours alone could please the true instinct for beauty.

"Why, I know him," said Murrel, "He's the man who talks about the great Victorians. I wonder if he knows what happened to the friends of the great Victorians?"

"We can supply you immediately if you wish," said Mr. Harker.

"Thank you," said Murrel, in a rather dreamy fashion, "but I think I will only have a box of those children's chalks that kind young lady offered me."

And he did indeed go back in a grave and apologetic manner to the original counter and solemnly make his purchase.

"Is there nothing else I can do?" anxiously inquired the manager.

"Nothing," said Murrel in an unusually sombre manner. "I quite recognise that there is nothing you can do. Damn it all, perhaps there is nothing to be done."

"Is anything the matter?" asked Harker.

"I am beginning to have pains in my head," said Murrel. "They are probably hereditary. They come on at intervals and produce frightful results. I shouldn't like any repetition of unfortunate scenes . . . with all these easels standing about . . . thank you. Good-bye."

And he betook himself, not for the first time, to the Spotted Dog. At this ancient house he had a stroke of unusual luck. He had led the talk to the attractive topic of broken glass, vaguely feeling that if a man like Hendry went to a public house often enough he would be sure sooner or later to break something. He was well received.

His commonplace and cheerful appearance soon created a social atmosphere in which memories were encouraged to bloom. The young lady in the bar did remember the gentleman who broke a glass; the publican remembered him in greater detail, having disputed about the payment for the glass. Between them they did shadow forth a hazy portrait; of fuzzy hair and shabby clothes and long, agitated fingers.

"Do you remember," asked Murrel casually, "whether Mr. Hendry talked about where he was going next?"

"Dr. Hendry, he always called himself," said the innkeeper, slowly. "I don't know why, except that there was some chemistry mixed up with his paints and things. But he was no end proud of being a real doctor from the hospitals, though I'm damned if I'd like him to attend on me. Might poison you with his paints, I should think."

"You mean by accident?" asked Murrel, mildly.

"By accident, yes," conceded the publican very slowly, and added in a reasonable voice, "but you don't want to be poisoned by accident any more than on purpose, do you?"

"No; I will frankly admit that I don't," said Murrel. "Wonder where he took all his paints or poisons to."

It was at this point that the barmaid became suddenly communicative and conciliatory, and declared that she had distinctly heard Dr. Hendry mention the name of an extinct watering place on the coast. She had even a notion of the name of the street; and with this the hardy adventurer felt himself ready to act without further delay. He had permitted the conversation to trail away with all the traditional badinage and had then betaken himself to the road running to the coast. Before doing so, however, he paid two or three other visits, one to a bank, another to a business friend and a third to his solicitor; and came out on each occasion looking rather grim.

CHAPTER IX

THE MYSTERY OF A HANSOM CAB

A day later he stood in a seaside town where a steep street shot down to the sea; ridge below ridge of grey slate roofs looking like rings of a whirlpool as if that dreary town were being sucked into the sea. It was the dream of a suicide so a broken man might feel the wave of the world wash him away.

Looking down the descending curve of the dreary street Murrel could only see three distinct or detachable objects that could be said to suggest life. One was quite close to him; it was a milk can left outside the low door in an area. But it looked as if it had been left there for a hundred years. The second was a stray cat; the cat did not look sad so much as simply indifferent; it might have been a wild dog or any such wanderer prowling about a city of the dead. The third was more curious; it was a hansom cab standing outside one of the houses; but a hansom cab that partook of the same almost sinister antiquity. All this happened before the hansom cab had become an extinct creature to be reserved only in museums; but this hansom cab might well have been in a museum side by side with a Sedan chair. In fact it was rather like a Sedan chair. Being of a pattern still to be found here and there in provincial towns; made of brown polished wood and inlaid with other ornamental woods or woods once meant to be ornamental; tilted backwards at an unfamiliar angle and having two folding doors that gave the occupant the sensation of being locked up in an ancient eighteenth century cabinet. Still, with all its oddity, it was unmistakably a hansom cab; that unique vehicle which the alien eyes of a clever Jew saw as the gondola of London. Most of us know by this time that when we are told that the pattern of something has been much improved, it means that all its distinctive characters have disappeared. Everybody has motor cabs; but nobody ever thought of having such a thing as a motor hansom cab. With the old pattern vanished the particular romance of the gondola (to which Disraeli was perhaps referring), the fact that there is only room for two. Worse still there vanished something supremely special and striking and peculiar to England; the dizzy and almost divine elevation of the driver above his fare. Whatever we may say of Capitalism in England, there was at least one wild chariot or equestrian group in which the poor man sat above the rich as upon a throne. No more, and in no other vehicle, will the employer desperately lift a little door in the roof, as if he were imprisoned in a cell, and talk to the invisible proletarian as to an unknown god. In no other combination shall we ever feel again so symbolically and so truly our own dependence upon what we call the lower classes. Nobody could think of the men on those Olympian seats as a lower class. They were the manifest masters of our destiny, driving us from above, like the deities of the sky. There was always something distinctive about any man sitting on such a perch; and there was something quite distinctive even about the very back of the man sitting on the quaint old cab as Murrel approached it. He was a broad-shouldered person with side-whiskers of a sort that seemed to match the provincial remoteness of the whole scene.

Even as Murrel approached, the man, as if weary with waiting for his fare, laboriously descended from his lofty place and stood for a moment staring down the street at the scene. Murrel had by this time pretty well perfected his detective art of pumping the great democracy and he soon fell into a conversation with the cabman. It was the sort of conversation which he considered most suited to his purposes; that is it was a conversation of which the first three quarters had nothing whatever to do with anything that he wanted to know. That, he had long discovered, was so much the quickest way to his end as almost to deserve to be called a short cut.

At last, however, he began to discover things that were not without interest. He had found out that the cab was quite a historical antiquity in another way, and eminently worthy of a museum; for the cab belonged to the cabman. His thoughts went back vaguely to that first conversation, with Braintree and Olive Ashley, about the paint-box belonging to the painter and, by inference, the mine to the miner. He wondered whether the vague pleasure he felt in the present preposterous vehicle was not a tribute to some truth. But he also discovered other things. He found that the cabman was very much bored with his fare; but was also in a hazy way afraid of him. He was bored with that unknown gentleman because he kept him waiting outside one house after another in a tedious and interminable pilgrimage round the whole town. But he was also slightly in awe of him because he seemed to have some sort of official right to visit all these places and talked like somebody connected with the police. Though his progression was so slow it seemed that his manner was very hasty; or what is now called hustling. One felt that he had commandeered rather than called the cab. He was somebody who was in a frightful hurry and yet had a great deal of time to spare for each of his visits. It was therefore evident that he was either an American or a person connected with the Government.

Bit by bit, it came out that he was a doctor, a medical man having some sort of official claim to visit a variety of persons. The cabman, of course, did not know his name; but his name was the least important part of him. What was much more important was another name; a name that the cabman did happen to know. It seemed that the next stoppage of the crawling cab would be a little further down the street, outside the lodgings where lived a man whom the cabman had sometimes met in the neighbouring public house; a curious card by the name of Hendry.

Murrel having, by this circuitous route, at last reached his desire, almost leapt like an unleashed hound. He inquired the number in the street which was honoured by Mr. Hendry's residence; and almost immediately after went striding down the steep street towards it.

Having knocked at the door, he waited; and after a considerable interval he heard the sounds of it being very slowly unlocked behind him.

He faced round and fortunately spoke at once. The door had opened by little more than a crack; and the first fact it revealed was that the chain was still up across it. Within, much more dimly, he began to discern inside that high and dark house the glimmering features and figure of a human being. The figure was slim and the features were both pointed and pallid. But something almost atmospheric told him that the figure was feminine and even young; and when he heard the voice, a moment later, it told him something else that was more of a surprise to him.

At first, however, there was no word but only a very swift and silent action. The young woman within having seen nothing but the shape and outline of Murrel's hat and perceived that it was reasonably respectable, proceeded to shut the door again. She had relations already with people who appeared respectable, and even responsible. And that was, at the period in question, her answer to them. But Murrel had something of the promptitude of a fencer leaping and lunging at the only loophole in what seemed like a labyrinth of parry and defence. He thrust into the aperture the wedge of a word.

It was probably the only word that would have arrested the movement. The young woman, alas, was not acquainted with persons who had occasion in such cases to plant a foot in the doorway. She was not unacquainted with the art of slamming the door on it so as to pinch it or procure its prompt removal. But Murrel remembered things he had heard said in the public house and in the shop at the beginning of his journey; and he used the phrase that had never been heard in that street and had almost been forgotten by that woman. An instinct made him take off his hat and say: “Is Dr. Hendry in?”

Man does not live by bread alone, but mostly by etiquette and above all by consideration. It is by consideration that even the hungry live and by the lack of it that they die. It was a very determining detail that Hendry had once been proud of his doctor’s degree; and a yet more determining detail that none of his new neighbours were now in the least likely to give it him. And this was his daughter, who was just old enough to remember when it had been freely given. Her hair was in her eyes in an almost slatternly fashion and her apron was as stained and threadbare as any of the other rags in that street; but when she spoke, the stranger knew at once that she remembered; and that the things she remembered were things of tradition and of the mind.

Douglas Murrel found himself inside a tiny hall with nothing but an ugly umbrella stand devoid even of umbrellas. Soon after he found himself mounting a very steep and narrow flight of stairs in almost total darkness; and soon after that abruptly allowed to fall into a frowsy little room, littered with such articles as were just too worthless to sell or even to pawn; where sat the man for whom he had gone on his erratic journey to search, as Stanley went to search for Livingstone.

Dr. Hendry had a head of hair rather like the grey top of a withering thistle; one almost expected it to wither visibly before one’s eyes and the parts of the puff-ball to part and drift away drearily on the wind. But otherwise he was rather neater than might have been expected; though the effect may have been produced by his being very tightly and tidily buttoned up to the throat; as is said to be sometimes the habit of the hungry. After years of abstraction amid squalid surroundings, he was still rather perched than seated on his dusty chair, as if something dainty and disdainful even in his subconsciousness made him sit down on it gingerly. He was one of those men who can be so completely unconscious as to be outrageously rude; but who, the moment they are conscious, become almost painfully polite. The moment he became conscious of Murrel his politeness made him jump up with a jerk, like a very thin marionette hung on wires.

If he was staggered with the compliment of being called a doctor, he was still more intoxicated by the topic which his visitor put before him. Like all old men, and most fallen men, he lived in the past; and it seemed to him for one incredible moment that the past was again present. For that dark room, in which he was sealed up and forgotten like a dead man in a tomb, had heard once more a human voice asking for Hendry's Illumination Colours.

He rose on his thin and wavering legs and went without a word to a shelf on which stood a number of highly incompatible objects, and took down an old tin box which he brought to the table and began rather tremulously to open. It contained two or three round and squat glass bottles covered with dust; and when he saw them it seemed as if his tongue was loosened.

"They should be used with the vehicle in the box," he said. "Many people try to use them with oil or water, or all sorts of things"; though indeed it was at least thirty years since anybody had ever tried to use them with anything.

"I will tell my friend to be careful," said Murrel, with a smile. "I know she wants to work on the old lines."

"Ah, quite so," said the old man, suddenly lifting his head with quite a consequential air. "I shall always be ready to give any advice . . . any advice that can be of any use, I'm sure." He cleared his throat with quite a formidable return of fullness in his voice. "The thing to remember, first of all, of course, is that this type of colouring is in its nature opaque. So many people confuse the fact that it is brilliant with some notion of its being transparent. I myself have always seen that the confusion arose through the parallel of stained glass. Both, of course, were typically medieval crafts, and Morris was very keen on both of them. But I remember how wild he used to be if anybody forgot that glass is transparent. 'If anybody paints a single thing in a window that looks really solid,' he used to say, 'he ought to be made to sit on it.'"

Murrel resumed his enquiry.

"I suppose, Dr. Hendry," he said, "that your old chemical studies helped you a great deal in making these colours?"

The old gentleman shook his head thoughtfully.

"Chemistry alone would hardly have taught me all I know," he said. "It is a question of optics. It is a question of physiology." He suddenly thrust his beard across the table and said rapidly in a hissing voice, "It is even more a question of pathological psychology."

"Oh," said the visitor, and waited for what would happen next.

"Do you know," said Hendry with a sudden sobriety of tone, "do you know why I lost all of my customers? Do you know why I have come down to this?"

"As far as I can make out," said Murrel with a certain surly energy that was a surprise to himself, "You seem to have been damnably badly treated by a lot of people who wanted to sell their own goods."

The expert gently smiled and shook his head.

"It is a matter of science," he said. "It is not very easy for a doctor to explain it all to a layman. This friend of yours, now, I think you said she was the daughter of my old friend Ashley. Now there you have an exceptionally sound stock still surviving. Probably with no trace of the affliction at all."

While these remarks, which were totally unintelligible to him, were being uttered with the same donnish and disdainful benevolence, the attention of the visitor was fixed on something else. He was studying with much more attention the girl in the background.

The face itself was much more interesting than he had supposed from the glimpse in the gloom of the doorway. She had tossed back the black elf-locks that had hung over her eyes like plumes on a hearse. Her profile was what is called aquiline and its thinness made it a little too literally like an eagle. But she did not cease to seem young even when she might almost be said to seem dead or dying. There was a taut and alert quality about her and her eyes were very watchful; especially at that moment. For it seemed clear that she did not like the direction that the talk was taking.

"There are two plain principles of physiology," her father went on in his easy explanatory style, "which I never could get my colleagues to understand. One is that a malady may affect a majority. It may affect a whole generation, as a pestilence affects a whole countryside. The second is that maladies affecting the chief senses are akin to maladies of the mind. Why should colour-blindness be any exception?"

"Oh," said Murrel, sitting up suddenly with a jump, and a half-light breaking on his bewilderment. "Oh. Yes. Colour-blindness. You mean that all this has arisen because nearly everybody is colour-blind."

"Nearly everybody subjected to the peculiar conditions of this period of the earth's history," corrected the doctor in a kindly manner. "As to the duration of the epidemic, or its possible periodicity, that is another matter. If you would care to see a number of notes I have compiled—"

"You mean to say," said Murrel, "that that big shop all the way down the street was built in a sort of passion of colour-blindness; and poor old Wister had his portrait put on ten thousand leaflets to celebrate the occasion of his becoming colour-blind."

"It is obvious that the matter has some traceable scientific origin," said Dr. Hendry, "and it seems to me that my hypothesis holds the field."

"It seems to me that the big shop holds the field," said Murrel, "and I wonder whether that shop girl who offered me chalks and red ink knows about her scientific origin."

"I remember my old friend Potter used to say," observed the other, gazing at the ceiling, "that when you had found the scientific origin, it was always quite a simple origin. In this case, for instance, anybody looking at the surface of the situation would naturally say that the whole of humanity had gone mad. Anybody who says the paints they advertise in that leaflet are better than my paints obviously must be mad. And so, in a sense, most of these people really are mad. What the scientific men of the age have failed altogether to investigate adequately is *why* they are mad. Now by my theory the unmistakable symptom of colour-blindness is connected with—"

"I'm afraid you must excuse my father talking any more," said the young woman in a voice that was at once harsh and refined. "I think he is a little tired."

"Oh, certainly," said Murrel, and got up in a rather dazed fashion. He was moving towards the door, when he was suddenly stopped by an almost startling transformation in the young lady. She still stood in a rather rigid fashion behind her father's chair. But her eyes, which were both dark and bright, shifted and shot, as it were, in a shining obliquity towards the window; and every line in her not ungraceful figure turned into a straight line like a steel rod. In the dead silence a sound could be heard through the half-open window. It was the sound of the large and lumbering wheels of the antiquated hansom cab drawing up at the door.

Murrel, still full of embarrassment, opened the door of the room and went out on to the dark landing. When he turned he found, with a certain surprise, that the girl had followed him.

"Do you know what that means?" she asked. "That brute there has come for father."

A dim premonition of the probable state of affairs began to pass across his mind. He knew that a number of new and rather sweeping laws, which in practice only swept over the poor streets, had given medical and other officials very abrupt and arbitrary powers over people supposed to fall short of the full efficiency of the manager of the stores. He thought it only too likely that the discoverer of the remarkable scientific theory of colour-blindness as a cause of social decay might appear to fall short of that efficiency. Indeed, it would even seem that his own daughter thought so, from her desperate efforts to steer the poor old gentleman away from the topic. In plain words, somebody was going to treat the eccentric as a lunatic. And as he was not an eccentric millionaire or an eccentric squire, or even in these days regarded as an eccentric gentleman, it was probable enough that the new classification could be effected rapidly and without a hitch. Murrel felt what he had never felt fully since he was a boy, a sudden and boiling rage. He opened his mouth to speak, but the girl had already struck in with her voice of steel.

“It’s been like that all along,” she said. “First they kick him into the gutter and then they blame him for being there. It’s as if you hammered a child on the head till he was stunned and stupid and then abused him for being a dunce.”

“Your father,” observed the visitor doubtfully, “does not strike me as at all stupid.”

“Oh, no,” she answered, “he’s too clever, and that proves he’s cracked. If he wasn’t cracked, it would prove that he was half-witted. If it isn’t one way it’s the other. They always know how to have you.”

“Who are they?” asked Murrel, in a low and (for anyone who knew him) rather menacing voice.

The question was in some sense answered, not by the person to whom it was addressed, but by a deep and rather guttural voice coming up the black well of the staircase, from somebody who was mounting the stairs. The crazy stairs creaked and even shook under him as he mounted, for he was a heavy man, and as he emerged into the half-light from the little window on the landing he seemed to fill up the whole entrance with a bulk of big overcoat and broad shoulders. The face that was thus turned up to the light reminded Murrel for the first moment of something between a walrus and a whale; it was as if some deep-sea monster was rising out of the deeps and turning up its round and pale and fishy face like a moon. When he looked at the man more carefully and less fancifully he saw that the effect came from very fair hair being very closely cropped in contrast with a moustache like a pair of pale tusks, and from the light of the window on the round spectacles.

This was Dr. Gambrel, who spoke perfectly good English, but stumbled on the steep stairs and swore softly in some other speech. Monkey listened intently a moment, and then silently slipped back into the room.

“Why don’t you have a light?” asked the doctor sharply.

“I suppose I’m a lunatic, too?” Miss Hendry replied, “I’m quite ready to be anything my father is supposed to be.”

“Well, well, it’s all very painful,” said the doctor recovering his composure and with it something more like a callous benevolence. “But there’s nothing to be gained by shilly-shallying over it. You’d much better let me see your father at once.”

“Oh, very well,” she replied. “I suppose I shall have to.”

She turned abruptly and opened the door which let them both into the little dingy room where Dr. Hendry was sitting. There was nothing very notable about it except its dinginess; the doctor had been in it before, and the young woman had hardly been out of it for the last five years. It is therefore perhaps a rather remarkable fact that even the doctor looked at it with a vague surprise, the cause of which he was at the moment too fiercely flustered to define especially. As for the young woman, she looked at the room with a stare of stony astonishment.

There was no other door to the room; Dr. Hendry was sitting alone at his table, and Mr. Douglas Murrel had totally disappeared.

Before Dr. Gambrel could remark on the fact or even become fully conscious of it, the unfortunate Hendry had hopped up from his seat and seemed thrown into a flutter of mingled surrender and expostulation which stopped any other line of conversation.

“You will understand,” he said, “that I protest formally against your interpretation of my case. If I could put the facts fully before the scientific world, I should not have the smallest difficulty in showing that the argument is entirely the other way. I admit that, at this moment, the average of our society has, owing to certain optical diseases which—”

Dr. Gambrel had the power of the modern state, which is perhaps greater than that of any state, at least, so far as the departments over which it ranges are concerned. He had the power to invade this house and break up this family and do what he liked with this member of it; but even he had not the power to stop him talking. In spite of all official efforts, Dr. Hendry's lecture on Colour-Blindness went on for a considerable time. It continued while the more responsible doctor edged him gradually towards the door, while he led him down the stairs, and at least until he managed to drag him out on to the doorstep. But meanwhile other things had been happening, which were not noticed by those who were listening (however unwillingly) to the lecture which had begun in the room upstairs.

. . . .

The cabman perched upon the ancient cab was a patient character and had need to be. He had been waiting outside the house of the Hendrys for some time, when something happened which was certainly more calculated to entertain his leisure than anything that had happened yet.

It consisted of a gentleman apparently falling out of the sky on to the top of the cab, and righting himself with some difficulty in the act of nearly rolling off it. This unexpected visitor, when eventually he came the right way up, revealed to the astonished cabman the face and form of the gentleman with whom he had had a chat recently a little further down the road. A prolonged stare at the newcomer, followed by a prolonged stare at the window just above revealed to the driver that the former had not actually dropped from heaven, but only from the window-sill. But though the incident was not by definition a miracle, it was certainly something of a marvel. Those privileged to see Murrel fall off the window-sill on to the top of the hansom cab might have formed a theory about why he had originally been called Monkey.

The cabman was still more surprised when his new companion smiled across at him in an agreeable manner and said, like one resuming a conversation: "As I was saying—"

It is unnecessary to go back after all these years, and the adventurous consequences they brought forth, to record what he was saying. But it is of some direct importance to the story to record what he said. After a few friendly flourishes he sat himself down firmly with his legs astraddle on the top of the cab, and took out his pocket book. He leaned across at the considerable peril of pitching over, and said, confidentially: "Look here, old fellow, I want to buy your cab."

Murrel was not entirely unacquainted with the scientific regulation, under which was being enacted the last act of the tragedy of Hendry's Illumination Colours. He remembered having had an argument a long time ago with Julian Archer who was great on the subject. It was a part of that quality in Julian Archer which fitted him so specially and supremely to be a public man. He could become suddenly and quite sincerely hot on any subject, so long as it was the subject filling the newspapers at the moment. If the King of Albania (whose private life, alas, leaves so much to be desired) were at that moment on bad terms with the sixth German princess who had married into his family, Mr. Julian Archer was instantly transformed into a knight-errant ready to cross Europe on her behalf, without any reference to the other five princesses who were not for the moment in the public eye. The type and the individual will be completely misunderstood, however, if we suppose that there was anything obviously unctuous or pharisaical in his way of urging these mutable enthusiasms. In each case in turn, Archer's handsome and heated face had always been thrust across the table with the same air of uncontrollable protest and gushing indignation. And Murrel would sit up opposite him and reflect that this was what made a public man; the power of being excited at the same moment as the public press. He would also reflect that he himself was a hopelessly private man. He always felt like a private man, though his family and friends had considerable power in the state; but he never felt so hopelessly and almost pitiably private as when he thus remained like one small frozen object, still moist and chilly in the blast of a furnace.

"You can't be against it; nobody can be against it," Archer had cried. "It's simply a Bill to introduce a little more humanity into asylums."

"I know it is," his friend had replied, with some gloom. "It introduces a lot more humanity into asylums. That's exactly what it does do. You'll hardly believe it, but there's quite a lot of humanity still that doesn't want to be introduced into asylums." But he recalled the story chiefly because Archer and the newspapers had congratulated each other on another new feature rather relevant to the present case. This was the greater privacy of the proceedings. A special sort of magistrate would settle all such cases in an interview as private as a visit to a physician.

"We're getting more civilized about these things," said Archer. "It's just like public executions. Why we used to hang a man before a huge crowd of people; but now the thing is done more decently."

"All the same," grumbled Murrel. "We should be rather annoyed if our friends and relatives began disappearing quietly; and whenever we'd mislaid a mother or couldn't put our hands on a favourite niece, we heard that our poor relation had been taken away and hanged with perfect delicacy.”

Murrel knew that Hendry was being taken to such an interview; and listened grimly to his medical monologue in the cab. Hendry was a hopelessly English lunatic, he reflected, in having thus taken refuge in a hobby and a theory instead of a grievance and a vendetta. He had been ruined as Hendry of the secret of medieval pigments. Yet he was almost happy in being Hendry of the secret of diseased eyesight. Dr. Gambrel, curiously enough, also had a theory. It was called Spinal Repulsion and traced brain trouble in all those who sat on the edges of chairs, as Hendry did. Dr. Gambrel had collected quite a large number of poor people off the edges of chairs; fit symbol of the insecure ledge of their lives. He was quite prepared to explain this theory in the court, but he had no opportunity of explaining it in the cab.

There was something macabre about the progress of the cab crawling up the steep streets of that grey seaside town. From infancy he had felt the phrase “a crawling cab” had a touch of nightmare; as if the cab crept after its fares and swallowed them with its yawning jaws. The horse had an angular outline: the dark woods inlaying the cab the hint of a coffin. The road grew steeper, the street rearing against the cabhorse or the cabhorse against the cab. But they came to a standstill before a porch with two pillars between which they saw the grey-green sea.

CHAPTER X

WHEN DOCTORS DISAGREE

The house with the pillared porch to which the crawling cab eventually crawled, had little to distinguish it from a prosperous private house. For the policy of all recent legislations and customs had been in the direction of conducting public affairs in private. The official was all the more omnipotent because he was always in plain clothes. It was possible to take people to and from such a place without any particular show of violence; merely because everybody knew that violence would be useless. The doctor had grown quite accustomed to taking his mad patients casually in a cab; and they seldom made any difficulty about it. They were not so mad as that.

This particular branch of the new Lunacy Commission had been only recently established in the town; for the distribution of such bureaus through the smaller places had been an after-thought. The attendants who lurked quietly in the vestibule or opened the gates and doors were new, if not to their job, at least to their neighbourhood. And the magistrate who sat in an inner room, to consider the cases as they came, was the newest of all. Unfortunately, while he was new he was also old. He had done the same work in many other places; and so formed into the habit of doing it smoothly and rapidly and dangerously well. But he was beginning to be a little old to do anything. His sight was not what it was; his hearing was not what he thought it was. He was a retired army surgeon of the name of Wotton. He had a carefully trimmed grey moustache, and a rather sleepy expression; he had reached a rather sleepy stage both of that day's work and of his life's work also.

He had a number of papers on his desk, among which was a note of certain appointments that afternoon in connection with the Commission in Lunacy. In his deep and comfortably padded room he naturally did not hear the crazy cab crawl up to the door; still less the rapid and quiet movement by which a gentlemanly person assisted the two occupants to alight and, with many polite phrases, managed to hustle them into the outer room of the building. The person was so very gentlemanly that nobody thought for the moment of questioning his right to act as intermediary; the official attendants accepted him as being obviously a highly polished part of machinery, and even the official doctor permitted himself to be courteously waved into a side room to the left of the magistrate's sanctum. Perhaps if they had looked out of the window a moment before, and seen the gentlemanly person fall off the top of the cab, they might have been more disturbed. As it was, the official doctor began to be very decidedly disturbed when the gentlemanly person (whom he had seen only dimly on a dark staircase and hardly begun vaguely to recognise) not only closed the door behind him with a courtly bow, but suddenly locked it.

Of all this the magistrate heard nothing; since it was carried out with quiet swiftness amid that momentum of routine that sleeps like a spinning top. The first notification he had was a knock at the door and a voice saying "This way doctor." It was the regular practice in such cases for the medical man responsible for the segregation to interview the magistrate first; who then had an interview (generally much briefer) with the victim. On that particular afternoon Mr. Wotton hoped that both interviews would be very brief indeed. He did not look up from his papers, but merely said:— "It is Case No. 9,871, isn't it; a case of conspiracy mania, I think."

Dr. Hendry inclined his head in his most graceful manner. "Conspiracy is, of course, a symptom rather than a cause," he said. "The cause is purely physical . . . purely physical," he coughed in a refined manner. "We don't need to be told at this time of day that the distortion of the sense reacts upon the brain, eh? In this case I have the strongest reason for supposing that the trouble arose originally from a very common malady of the optic nerve. The process by which I reached this conclusion is rather interesting in itself."

At the end of about ten minutes, it became apparent that Mr. Wotton did not think so. His head was still bowed over his papers and consequently did not study directly the figure before him. If he had he might have been moved to some suspicion by Dr. Hendry's remarkably shabby clothes. As it was, he only heard Dr. Hendry's remarkably cultivated voice.

"I don't think we need go into all that," he said at last, after his visitor had gone into a good deal of it, and seemed alarmingly capable of going into a good deal more. "If you're sure it's a case of that sort, a case of really dangerous mania, I suppose it's all right."

"In all my experience," said Dr. Hendry solemnly, and with a full sense of responsibility, "I have never known a clearer one. This optical question is becoming grave, sir. It is becoming menacing. Even at this moment, while I speak, persons unquestionably mad are wandering about the world, and even delivering authoritative opinions on scientific subjects. Only the other day — ."

At this moment his melodious and persuasive voice was drowned for an instant in very remarkable sounds from the next room. The noise resembled that of some huge and heavy body being hurled against the door; and in the silence that followed something like guttural imprecations, as if hoarse and faint with fury, could be heard through the thick partition.

"Good heavens!" cried Mr. Wotton, awakening with a start and looking up for the first time. "What on earth was that?"

Dr. Hendry wagged his head with a beautiful sadness, but he continued to smile.

"Ours is a melancholy occupation," he said. "Dealing with the weaker and the wilder aspects of our fallen nature . . . the body of our humiliation, I think it is in the Greek Testament . . . the body of our humiliation. It sounds only too like the struggle of some unfortunate whom society finds it a sad necessity to restrain."

At this moment the body of our humiliation was again thrown crashing against the door; and it seemed to be a body of some weight and momentum and even nobility. The magistrate was not altogether satisfied. Patients or prisoners (or whatever the new social victims ought to be called) were indeed frequently taken into the adjoining room to await examination; but generally under the guardianship of attendants who would prevent them indicating their impatience in so lively a style. The only other hypothesis was that the lunatic next door was so exceedingly lively as to have killed his keeper.

Whatever else the old army surgeon was, he was a man of courage. He got up from his desk and went across to the door that was still shaking and vibrating with the shocks from within. He looked at it for a moment with his head on one side; and then deliberately unlocked it. Though he showed no fear, he had to show a good deal of agility, in leaping back and not being flung flat on the floor by the thing that came out of the room. At that moment he would have called it a thing rather than a man. It had goggle eyes that stood out of its head like horns; and Mr. Wotton had a confused feeling confirming the doctor's theory that the unfortunate creature must have something the matter with its eyes. It had long tawny tufts of moustache and hair standing out in all directions; for it had been ineffectually brushing its hair against the wall for some time past. It was only when it had fallen into the full daylight of the room that the magistrate saw that it was wearing a white waistcoat and a grey pair of trousers, such as are seldom worn by a walrus or even a wild man of the woods.

“Well, anyhow,” he muttered, “he is clothed, if not exactly in his right mind.”

The huge man who had fallen through the doorway straightened himself and stood up with a rather wild stare; his tawny tusks more aggressive than ever. But it soon became apparent at least that he possessed the power of speech. His first remarks, being curses in a Continental language, might indeed have been mistaken for inarticulate cries; but the two scientific characters who were listening to him were soon able to recognise the sound of scientific language disentangling itself from other foreign languages. In fact, the official doctor was making his official report; but it did not sound like that.

The situation was rather hard on him; and the trick from which he had suffered will not be seriously defended, but only silently enjoyed, by the wise and good. He also had a very complete theory of the causes of mental breakdown among his fellow citizens. He also could trace to physiological and organic causes the mental condition of his captive. He could explain the nature of Spinal Repulsion quite as sanely and serenely as Hendry could that of Colour-Blindness. But somehow he had not had the stage set for him so satisfactorily for its exposition. At the very moment when he should have sailed into the magistrate’s room to make his report, and Hendry should have been locked up in the waiting room to wait for the result of it, the unscrupulous Mr. Murrel had rapidly reversed the positions of the two men of science, with the deplorable results that we have already seen. The official, finding himself trapped, had behaved as very full-blooded and confident people often behave when something happens to them which they never believe to be possible. For it is the man whose life goes with a smooth and swift motion, who is normally self-satisfied and smiling, who has never been made to turn aside for anything, who comes with a crash into a real obstacle. On the other hand, the history of poor Hendry had been exactly the opposite. He had clung pathetically to his polite manners, as the only relic of his social status, through a hundred humiliations; and he was used to explaining things elegantly to creditors and assuming a cultivated and slightly pedantic tone in talking to policemen. The consequence was that while the official doctor gasped and snorted and swore in unintelligible manner, the certified lunatic stood with his head gracefully on one side, making a soft clucking noise in his throat to indicate sorrow over the downfall of the human mind. The Army surgeon looked from one to the other for a moment, and then fixed his eyes upon the cursing foreigner; as he had fixed them on many homicidal maniacs before. So did these three distinguished medical men meet at last; in a rather informal consultation.

Outside, in the street that struggled crazily to the sea-cliff, Douglas Murrel sat on the top of his cab, with his face upturned to heaven like one whose work has been well and worthily done. He was wearing an exceedingly battered and shabby black top hat, which was not his own; for he had bought the hat along with the cab; though it was the sort of hat which a man might well have been paid to wear, rather than pay for wearing it. It served his particular purpose, however, with great simplicity and success. The hat dominates and defines a figure in inconspicuous and colourless clothes; and so long as he wore it he passed well enough for the driver of such an ancient vehicle. When he took it off and slipped among the officials, with his well-brushed hair and gentlemanly manner, they had no reason to doubt his claims to a different position. On the top of the cab, however, he had resumed the hat; not without pomp, as a conqueror might crown himself with laurel.

He thought he knew what would probably happen and he decided to wait for it. The end of the immediate drama of the captured government expert he did not expect to see at that stage; he promised himself that if it went too far, he would be able to communicate with the authorities later. As it was, he left it almost reverently as a rounded and perfected thing, a poem. But if all went well, one consequence was likely enough to follow; and when he had waited for about ten minutes, he was gratified to find his calculation correct.

Dr. Hendry, once famous in the artistic world, walked out between the dark pillars of the porch that stood out against the sea; as free as the sea-gull that was swerving along the line of the cliff. He had an air of almost aggressive good taste; as if informing the whole street that he would refuse to inform anybody about the delicate professional secrets just confided to him. He made a movement as if pulling on a pair of invisible gloves, and he quite naturally stepped into the hansom cab, before he had thought of it. The conscientious cabman pulled down his top hat over his brows and rapidly drove him away up the steep and stony streets.

For the present at least, the chronicler may well maintain an awful silence about what happened between the magistrate and the doctor. And indeed Murrel’s own mind showed a curious and rather indescribable disposition to drop the whole topic and to leave it behind him. He had a reputation for playing practical jokes. But this moment of his life will be somewhat misunderstood if it be supposed that he thought of it first and foremost as a practical joke upon the foreign doctor. A hazier and yet happier feeling was in his mind, as if the real story lay rather in front of him than behind him; as if the unexpected liberation of the poor old crank, with the colour-blind monomania, were but a symbol of the liberation of many things and the opening of a brighter world. Something had snapped; if it was only a bit of red tape; and he did not know yet how much had been set free. As he turned the corner a shaft of sun shot down the steep street, seeming as solid as that from solid clouds in the old Bible pictures, and looking up at the window of the high narrow house he saw Hendry’s daughter.

The woman who looked out of the window appeared, after a fashion, for the first time in this story. Hitherto she had been cloaked in shadows, in the shades of the steep stairways and the high dark house. She had been disguised in destitution; and it is necessary to have lived in such a house to know how much destitution can disguise. She had turned pale like a plant in a narrow and shuttered house; a house in which there were no mirrors; least of all those human mirrors that we call faces. She had long ceased to think of her appearance; and she would have been more surprised than anyone else if she could have stood in the street and seen her appearance at the window. And yet, as she looked down into the street, she was something more than surprised. The beauty that unfolded from within, like some magic flower upon the balcony, was not due altogether to the burst of sun that had struck the street. It was the most beautiful thing in the world; perhaps the only really beautiful thing in the world. It was astonishment which was lost in Eden and will return with the Beatific Vision, in astonishment so strong that it will last for ever.

It was indeed only amazement at what she saw in the street; but there was in it the joy that only hails the reversal of all things in the world; what is too good to be true. To understand her astonishment it would be necessary to tell her story; and her story would be of a very different sort from this story, and more like those long scientific and realistic novels which are not stories at all. Since the day when her father had been ruined by a gang of rascals who happened to be too rich to be punished, her life had descended step after step into that world where all the people are assumed to be rascals and punished in a sort of rotation; the police regarding themselves rather as the warders of a large loose prison with the roof off. She had long given up having any sharp reaction to the tendency; it seemed perfectly natural so long as it was a downward tendency. If her father had been taken away and hanged, she would have been miserable and bitter and indignant; but she would not have been surprised.

But when she saw him coming back smiling in a hansom cab, she was completely surprised. Never had she known any living thing escape from the trap into which she thought he had fallen; never had she seen footprints coming out from that dark den of efficiency. It was as if she had seen the sun turn backwards towards the East, or the Thames stop suddenly at Greenwich and begin to go back to Oxford. But there was no doubt that it was her father, leaning back and smiling in the cab. As he had come out with the gesture of pulling on invisible gloves, so he leaned back with the gesture of smoking an invisible cigar. As she stared at him, she became conscious that the cabman had taken off his hat to her, with a remarkably fine flourish for so very deplorable a hat. The removal of the hat gave the last shock to her senses; for it revealed the colourless but carefully brushed hair of Mr. Murrel, the eccentric gentleman who had called at the house a few hours before.

Dr. Hendry leapt from the cab with quite youthful grace, and his hand went with another automatic gesture towards a totally empty pocket. He was living in the brave days of old.

“Don’t mention it,” said Murrel hastily, replacing the atrocious hat. “This is my own cab and I do it for amusement. Art for art’s sake, as your old friends used to say. I am an arrangement, as Whistler said; an arrangement in black and brown. Your friend the mad doctor is, I trust, by this time an arrangement in black and blue.”

Hendry recognised the educated voice, for there are some things a man never forgets. He recognised the voice in spite of the hat, even when it was rather obviously talking through the hat.

“My dear sir,” he said, “I owe you a great debt of gratitude. Pray come inside.”

“Oh, thank you,” said Murrel, getting down from his perch. “My Arab steed, who has slept in my tent so often in the desert, will probably keep a faithful watch outside. He does not seem to suffer from any mad impulse to gallop.”

He ascended for the second time the dark and steep stair-case, up which he had seen the worthy mental specialist mounting like some monster out of the deeps. His thoughts went back to that unfortunate expert in a momentary remorse; but he told himself that there would be little difficulty in putting the matter straight.

“But won’t that mean,” she said, “that he will come back again for my father?”

Murrel smiled and shook his head. “Not if I know anything about him,” he said, “or about old Wotton either. Wotton is a perfectly honest old gentleman; and will see at once that there couldn’t be much the matter with your father, not half so much as with the other man. And even the other man won’t be exactly anxious to proclaim to the world that he gave such a good imitation of a raving maniac that they locked him up.”

“Then you have really saved us,” she said. “It is a very wonderful thing.”

“Not so wonderful as your requiring to be saved, I should say,” said Murrell. “I really don’t know what the world is coming to. I suppose they set a lunatic to catch a lunatic on the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief.”

“I have known some thieves,” said Dr. Hendry, twirling his moustache with a sudden fierceness, “but they are not caught yet.”

Murrel looked across at him for a moment, and knew that his spirit had returned to him.

“Perhaps we shall try to catch the thieves after all,” he said; and did not know that he was uttering a sort of prophecy of the fate of his home and his friends and many things he knew. For far away in Seawood Abbey things that he would have thought utterly fantastic were taking colour and form and marching towards the climax of this history. Of these things he knew nothing; but, curiously enough, his own imagination was already clouded with new colours more glowing and romantic than Hendry’s Illumination Paints. He had a vague sensation of victory; but it had culminated when he looked up and saw the girl’s face at the window; he leaned impulsively across and said: “Do you often look out of the window like that. . . . if I should be passing some time . . . ?”

“Yes.” She said, “I often look out of the window.”

CHAPTER XI

THE LUNACY OF THE LIBRARIAN

Far away in Seawood Abbey the great performance of “Blondel the Troubadour” was over. It had been not only a success but a sensation. After it had been performed twice on successive afternoons, a sort of special encore performance had been given comparatively early on the following morning, for the gratification of the school-children and others; and Julian Archer was finally putting off his armour with an air of some weariness and relief. Some of the more malicious said his fatigue was partly due to the fact that he himself had not been the sensation.

“So that’s over,” he said to Michael Herne who was standing beside him, still in the romantic green rags of the Outlaw King. “I’m off to get into some comfortable togs. Thank the Lord we shan’t have to wear these again.”

“I suppose not,” said Herne and looked down at his own long green legs in a sort of daze, rather as if he had never seen his legs before. “I suppose we shall never wear them again.”

He remained standing thus for a moment; then as Archer darted back to his own dressing room, the librarian slowly followed him and betook himself to his own apartments adjoining the library.

One other person remained as if stunned with thought, though the performance had long been over. And that was the writer of the play; who did not feel in the least as if she had written it. Olive Ashley felt as if she had merely struck a match at midnight and it had burst and broadened into the unearthly splendours of the midnight sun. She felt as if she had painted one of her gold and crimson angels and the painted face had spoken, and spoken terrible things. For the eccentric librarian, turned for an hour into a pantomime king, might have been possessed of a devil. Only the devil had been a little like the gold and crimson angel. Something seemed to come pouring out of him that nobody had ever thought was in him; and which the poet could not claim to have put in him. He seemed to her to span and take in his stride all the abysses and the heights known to the secret humility of the artist. She did not seem to be hearing the verses she had written. They sounded like the verses she would have liked to have written. She had not only excitement but expectation. For he had the power of making each line seem greater than the last; and yet they were only her own pretty tolerable verses. The moment which glowed in her memory, and in that of many much less sensitive, was that in which the King, who had been captured as an outlaw, refused the offer of his own crown and declared that in a world of wicked princes he preferred the wandering life of the woods.

Shall I who sing with the high tree-tops at morning   Sink to be Austria; even as is that brute   And brigand that entrapped me, or be made   A slave, a spy, a cheat, a King of France?   And what crowns other shadow this the earth?   The evil kings sit easy on their thrones   Shame healed with habit; but what panic aloft   What wild white terror if a king were good!   What staggering of the stars; what prodigy.   Men easily endure an unjust master   But a just master no man will endure   His nobles shall rise up, his knights betray him   And he go forth, as I go forth, alone.

A shadow fell across her upon the grass; and preoccupied as she was she seemed to know even the shape of the shadow. Braintree reclothed and in his right mind (which some considered a very wrong mind) had joined her in the garden.

Before he could speak, she had said impulsively: “I’ve discovered something. It’s more natural to talk poetry than to talk prose. Just as there’s more spontaneity in singing than in stammering. Only, you see, most of us stammer.”

“Your librarian certainly didn’t stammer,” said Braintree. “You might almost say he sang. I’m a pretty prosaic person; but I feel somehow as if I’d been listening to good music. It all seems very mysterious. When a librarian can act a King like that, there seems to be only one possible inference; that he has only been acting a librarian. And excellent as he was as the King, I consider his creation of the part of an embarrassed bookworm in the library was an even more finished performance. Do theatrical stars often come and conceal themselves behind bookcases in this way?”

“You think he was always acting,” said Olive, “and I know he was never acting. That is the explanation.”

“I fancy you are right,” he answered. “But couldn’t you have sworn you were in the presence of a great actor?”

“No, no; that is just the point,” she cried sharply. “I could have sworn I was in the presence of a great man.”

After a pause she went on: “I don’t mean a great acting man like Garrick or Irving or somebody. I mean a great *dead* man — most awfully alive. I mean a medieval man: a man risen out of the grave.”

“I know what you mean,” assented the other, “and of course you are quite right. You mean that he couldn’t have taken any other part. Your friend Mr. Archer could have taken any other part; but he is only a good actor.”

“It all seems so strange,” said Olive. “Why should Mr. Herne out of the library be — like that?”

“I think I know why,” said Braintree, and his voice deepened to something like a growl. “In a sense that nobody understands he really does take it seriously. And so do I; I take it damned seriously.”

“Do you mean my play?” she asked with a smile.

“I consented to put on those troubadour togs and act,” he said, “I couldn’t give a greater proof of devotion than that.”

“I mean,” she said a little hastily, “what do you mean about taking the King’s part seriously?

“I don’t like Kings,” replied Braintree rather roughly. “I don’t like Knights and nobles and all that parade of armed aristocracy. But that man likes them. He doesn’t only pretend to like them. *He* is not a snob or a silly flunkey of old Seawood. He is the only man I have ever seen who might really defy democracy and the revolution, I know it simply from the way he strode about that silly stage and spoke—”

“And spoke those silly verses, you were going to say,” said the poetess, pointing at him with a finger and laughing with a curious indifference rather rare among poetesses. It almost seemed as if she had found something that interested her more than poetry.

But it was one of Braintree’s more virile qualities that he was never easily forced into flippancy; and he went on in his quiet pulverising fashion, a man always meditating with a clenched fist.

“I tell you when he was right on top, and seemed to tower over everything, when he said he would chuck away his sceptre and go wandering in the woods again with a spear, I knew—”

“Why here he is,” cried Olive hastily and lowering her voice, “and the joke of it is that he is still wandering in the woods with a spear.”

For indeed Mr. Herne was still in the theatrical costume of an Outlaw, having apparently forgotten to change his clothes when he drifted to his dressing-room; and the long hunting-spear on which he leaned in his blank verse soliloquies was still grasped unconsciously in his hand.

"I say," exclaimed Braintree, "aren't you going to get into any other clothes before lunch?"

The librarian looked at his legs again and said in a dull voice, "What other clothes?"

"I mean your ordinary clothes," replied Braintree.

"Oh never mind now," said the lady, "you'd better change after lunch now, I should think."

"Yes," replied the abstracted automaton, in the same wooden voice, and took his long green legs and spear away with him.

The lunch was pretty informal anyhow; and though all the others had managed to get out of their theatrical costumes, they had not all thoroughly got back into their conventional ones. Some of them, especially the ladies, were in a transitional state before the full splendours of the afternoon. For there was that afternoon at Seawood Abbey a grand political and social reception eclipsing even that which had attempted the education of Mr. Braintree. Needless to say it contained most of the same unmistakable figures with many more in addition. Sir Howard Pryce was there, wearing if not the white flower of a blameless life at least the white waistcoat of a Victorian merchant, whose life was always assumed to be blameless. He had lately passed equally blamelessly from Soap to Dyes, of which he was a financial pillar and a partner in certain commercial interests of Lord Seawood. Mr. Aubrey Wister was there, wearing his exquisite blend of artistic and fashionable raiment; wearing also his long moustache and melancholy smile. Mr. Hanbury, squire and traveller, was there, wearing nothing that could be noticed in particular and wearing it very well. Lord Eden was there, wearing his single eyeglass and the hair that looked like a yellow wig. Mr. Julian Archer was there, wearing clothes so good that they are hardly ever seen on a living man but only on the ideal beings in tailors' shops. And Mr. Michael Herne was there, still wearing a suit of green rags suitable to a royal outlaw in exile and quite unsuitable to the present occasion.

Braintree was not a conventional person but he was brought up against this walking mystery with an involuntary stare.

"You do seem to be dawdling about," he said. "I thought you'd gone off to dress long ago."

Herne appeared to be rather sulky in his last phase.

“Dress as what,” he asked.

“Well, dress as yourself, I suppose,” answered the other. “Give your celebrated imitation of Mr. Michael Herne.”

Michael Herne lifted his rather hang-dog head with a jerk and stared at the other for a moment with almost blinding concentration; and then moved away towards the house, presumably to perform the belated toilet. And Mr. John Braintree did the only thing he ever did do in these rather uncongenial assemblies; went in search of Miss Olive Ashley.

Their conversation was lengthy and largely theoretical; and it is a remarkable fact that even after the afternoon guests had gone and dinner loomed in the distance, when Olive had retired to dress and then reappeared in a violet and silver vesture of rather unusual richness, they encountered each other again in the garden, by the broken monument where they had their first dispute. But they encountered something else as well.

Mr. Herne, the librarian, was standing beside that scrap of grey sculpture like a green statue; it might have been a bronze statue green with rust, but it was in fact a familiar figure still clad in the forester’s fancy dress.

Olive Ashley said almost automatically, with a sort of jerk: “Are you *never* going to change?”

He swung his head slowly round and looked at her with blank blue eyes; then he seemed to recall his voice from the ends of the earth and said rather huskily.

“Am I ever going to change? . . . Or never change?”

She seemed to see something suddenly pictured in his staring eyes that started her trembling a little and she half shrank into the shadow of the man beside her, who struck in with something like a defensive authority: “Are you going to get into ordinary clothes, I mean?”

“What do you mean by ordinary clothes?” asked Herne.

“Well,” replied Braintree, with a short laugh, “I suppose I mean the sort of clothes I wear; though I’ve never been considered exactly a leader of fashion.” He smiled a moment in his grim fashion and added, “Nobody here will insist on your wearing a red tie.”

Herne suddenly bent his brows upon the other man with a fixed and concentrated but rather puzzling expression and then said, in a soft voice: “And you think yourself revolutionary because you wear a red tie?”

"I have given other indications," answered Braintree, "but the tie has certainly become rather a symbol of them. I assure you some people whom I admire very much regarded it rather as a scarf dipped in gore. In fact, if you go back to the beginning, I think that was the reason why I wore it."

"I dare say," said the librarian thoughtfully, "that was why you wore a red tie. But I want to know why you wore a tie. I want to know why anybody, of all the sacred race of man, ever wore a tie."

Braintree, who was always sincere, was suddenly silent and the other man went on, still gazing at him earnestly, as if he were a specimen or a stranger from a foreign clime: "What do you do?" he said in the same soft accent. "You get up; you wash. . ."

"So far," said Braintree', "I will confess to conventionality."

"You put on a shirt. Then you take a separate strip of some linen or something and hook it round your neck with a complicated set of knobs or hooks. Then, not content with that, you take another and longer strip of some sort of cloth or something, of some particular colour that you fancy. You wreathe that strip round the other strip in most complicated convolutions of a particular kind of knot. You do this every morning; you do it all your life; you never think of doing anything else; you never are for one moment moved to cry aloud on God and rend your garments, like the prophets of old. You do precisely this or pretty much like it, because a vast number of other people are so mysteriously employed at the same hour of the day; you never think it too much trouble; you never complain because it is always the same. And then you call yourself a revolutionist — and boast because your tie is red!"

"There is something in what you say," said Braintree, "but am I to understand that this is your reason for putting off the evil hour when you must abandon your fantastic attire?"

"Why do you call my attire fantastic?" asked Herne. "It's very much simpler than yours. It just goes over your head and there you are. Besides, it has all sorts of sensible elements you don't discover till you've worn it for a day or so. For instance," he looked up at the sky with a sort of frown, "it may be going to rain or something; it may turn very cold or the wind be very strong. What will you all do then? You will make a bolt for the house and come back with a paraphernalia of things for the lady; perhaps a huge horrible umbrella that will force you to walk about like a Chinese Emperor under a canopy; perhaps a lot of wraps and waterproofs and things. But nine times out of ten a man only wants something to pull over his head in this climate; he simply does this," and he plucked forward the hood that hung between his shoulders, "and for the rest of the time he can belong to the Hatless Brigade. . . . Do you know," he added abruptly and in a lowered voice, "there's something very satisfying about wearing a hood . . . something symbolical; I don't wonder they corrupted the name of the great medieval hero into Robin Hood."

Olive Ashley had been looking away across the undulating slopes of the valley, to where they vanished into a shining haze of evening, as if she were somewhat distrait and detached from the conversation, but she looked round, as if at the sound of a word which could penetrate her dreams.

"What do you mean," she said, "by saying a hood is symbolical?"

"Have you never looked through an archway?" asked Herne, "and seen the landscape beyond as bright as a lost paradise? That is because there is a frame to the picture. . . . You are cut off from something and allowed to look at something. When will people understand that the world is a window and not a blank infinity; a window in a wall of infinite nothing? When I wear this hood I carry my window with me. I say to myself — this is the world that Francis of Assisi saw and loved because it was limited. The hood has the very shape of a Gothic window."

Olive looked over her shoulder at John Braintree and said: "Do you remember what poor Monkey said? . . . No, it was just before you came."

"Before I came?" asked Braintree in a momentary doubt.

"Before you first came here," she answered colouring and looking again at the landscape. "He said he would have to look through a leper's window."

"A very typical medieval window, I should think," said Braintree rather sourly.

The face of the man in medieval masquerade suddenly flamed as at a challenge to battle.

"Will you show me a King," he cried, "a modern reigning King, by the grace of God, who will go and handle lepers in a hospital as St. Louis did?"

"I am not very likely," said Braintree grimly, "to pay such a tribute to reigning Kings."

"Or a popular leader either," insisted the other. "St. Francis was a popular leader. If you saw a leper walking across this lawn, would you rush at him and embrace him?"

“He is as likely to do it as any of the rest of us,” said Olive, “Perhaps more.”

“You are right,” said Herne, with abrupt sobriety “Perhaps none of us would do it. . . . But what if the world needs such despots and such demagogues?”

Braintree slowly raised his head and looked steadily at the other man. “Such despots . . .” he said, and frowned heavily.

CHAPTER XII

THE STATESMAN AND THE SUMMER-HOUSE

At this point of the conversation that particular corner of the garden was filled with the broad and breezy presence of Julian Archer in resplendent evening dress; he entered with a swing and then stopped dead, staring at Michael Herne.

“I say,” he cried, “are you *never* going to change.”

Perhaps the sixth repetition of this single sentence was what drove the librarian of Seawood mad.

Anyhow he swung round, staring also, and suddenly cried out in a voice that rang down the garden path.

“No. I am never going to change.”

After glaring for a moment he went on “You all love change and live by change; but I shall never change. It was by change you fell; it is by this madness of change you go on falling. You had your happy moment, when men were simple and sane and formal and as native to this earth as they can ever be. You lost it; and even when you get it back for a moment, you have not the sense to keep it. I shall never change.”

“I don’t know what he means,” said Archer, rather as if he had been speaking of an animal or at least an infant.

“I know what he means,” said Braintree grimly, “and it’s not true. Do you really believe yourself, Mr. Herne that all that mysticism is true? What do you mean exactly by saying that this old society of yours was sane?”

“I mean that the old society was truthful and that you are in a tangle of lies,” answered Herne. “I don’t mean that it was perfect or painless. I mean that it called pain and imperfection by their names. You talk about despots and vassals and all the rest; well, you also have coercion and inequality; but you dare not call anything by its own Christian name. You defend every single thing by saying it is something else. You have a King and then explain that he is not allowed to be a King. You have a House of Lords and say it is the same as a House of Commons. When you do want to flatter a workman or a peasant you say he is a true gentleman; which is like saying he is a veritable Viscount. When you want to flatter the gentleman you say he does not use his own title. You leave a millionaire his millions and then praise him because he is ‘simple,’ otherwise mean and not magnificent; as if there were any good in gold except to glitter! You excuse priests by saying they are not priestly and assure us eagerly that clergymen can play cricket. You have teachers who refuse doctrine, which only means teaching; and doctors of divinity disavowing anything divine. It is all false and cowardly and shamefully full of shame. Everything is prolonging its existence by denying that it exists.”

“What you say may be true of such things or some of them,” answered Braintree. “But I do not want to prolong their existence at all. And if it comes to cursing and prophesying, by God, you will see some of them dead before you die.”

“Perhaps,” said Herne looking at him with his large pale eyes, “you may see them die and then live; which is a very different thing from existing. I am not sure that the King may not be a King once more.”

The Syndicalist seemed to see something in the staring eyes of the librarian that changed and almost chilled his mood.

“Do you think this is an age,” he asked, “for anybody to play King Richard?”

“I think this is an age,” replied the other, “when somebody ought to play . . . Coeur-de-Lion.”

“Ah,” said Olive, as if she began to see something for the first time. “You mean we lack the only virtue of King Richard.”

“The only virtue of King Richard,” said Braintree, “was staying out of the country.”

“Perhaps,” she answered. “He and his virtue might come back.”

“When he comes back he will find the country a good deal changed,” said the Syndicalist grimly. “No serfs; no vassals; and even the labourers daring to look him in the face. He will find something has broken its chain; something has opened, expanded, been lifted up; something wild and terrible and gigantic that strikes terror even into the heart of a lion.”

“Something?” repeated Olive.

“The heart of a man,” he replied.

Olive stood looking in a sort of daze or dazzle from one to the other. For on one side stood all the things she had dreamed of, clothed in their right century. And on the other something more deeply thrilling, of which she had never dreamed. Her tangled emotions broke out of her with a rather curious cry.

"Oh I wish Monkey were back again!"

Braintree glanced sharply at her and asked rather gruffly: "Why?"

"Because you are all changing," she said. "Because you are all talking as you did in the play. Because you are both of you fierce and splendid and magnificent and magnanimous and have neither of you a grain of common sense."

"I didn't know you specialised in having common sense," said Braintree.

"I never had any," she replied. "Rosamund always told me I hadn't got any. But any woman would have more than you have."

"Here comes the lady in question," said Braintree rather gloomily. "I hope she will meet your requirements."

"She will say what I say," said Olive calmly. "The madness is infectious. The infection is spreading. None of you can get out . . . of my poor little play."

And indeed when Rosamund Severne came sweeping across the lawn in her resolute way, like a wind, the wind struck something and turned to a storm. The storm raged for an hour or two and we need only record its end; which was that Rosamund did what was very rarely done by her or anyone else; what had not been done since Murrel had presented the petition for the admission of Braintree. She burst into her father's study and faced her father.

Lord Seawood looked up from a pile of letters and said: "What is it?" His tone might have been called apologetic or even nervous; but it was of the sort that makes others feel nervous and apologise.

But Rosamund never felt nervous and did not think of apologising; or indeed even of explaining. She said explosively: "Things out there are getting perfectly awful. The librarian won't take off his clothes."

"Well, I should hope not," said Lord Seawood, and waited patiently.

"I mean," she added hastily, "I mean it's getting past a joke. Don't you understand? He's still dressed in all his green."

"I suppose, strictly speaking, our livery is blue," said Lord Seawood thoughtfully. "That doesn't matter much nowadays; but heraldry was always a hobby of mine. . . . Well, I don't think it's possible now to insist on the correct colours. And nobody ever sees much of the librarian. Libraries are not very popular resorts. And the fellow himself . . . very quiet fellow, if I remember right. Nobody likely to notice him."

“Oh,” said Rosamund, with almost ominous quiet and restraint. “You think nobody will ever notice him?”

“Shouldn’t think so,” said Lord Seawood. “I never noticed him myself.”

. . . .

If Lord Seawood has hitherto remained behind the scenes of the drama of “Blondel the Troubadour,” if he has remained behind the curtains and tapestries of Seawood Abbey, it is only because he did so remain during all such superficial social proceedings, and was, in the true sense of the word, conspicuous by his absence. This fact arose from many causes but chiefly from two: first that he had the misfortune to be an invalid and second that he had the misfortune to be a statesman. He was one of those who withdraw into a narrower and narrower world on the pretence of acting in a wider and wider sphere. He lived in a small world out of a love of large questions. He had, as he had suggested, a sort of hobby of heraldry and the tracing out of the history of his own and other noble families, but he had felt all the more at ease because there were only two or three other experts in England who troubled about such things at all. And as he dealt with heraldry, so he dealt with society; with politics and many other things. He never talked to any people except experts; that is, in trusting the expert, he always trusted the exception. Exceptional people gave him information of exceptional value; but he never knew what was going on in his own house. Now and then he was conscious that the details of his domestic arrangements were not what they had always been; and this was about the extent of his consciousness of the whole business of the Troubadour play and its strange sequel. But if he had noticed the librarian on the top of the ladder, it is doubtful whether he would have asked him why he was there. It is more probable he would have opened communications with a scientific specialist on the use of ladders; but only after he was honestly convinced that he had the very best specialist of the time. He would defend the aristocratic principle by an appeal to the Greek derivation, saying that he insisted on having the best of everything. And, to do him justice, though he was too much of an invalid and perhaps too much of a faddist to drink or smoke, he never had any wine or cigars in his house except the very best. He was, in his personal capacity, a bony and brittle little man, with a high-bridged nose and angles all over him, and a capacity for staring at people suddenly with a look of startled attention, which had an almost stunning effect on those who made the mistake of supposing that he was merely a fool. The whole of his somewhat secretive personality, with its concentration and its bewilderment, its attention and its inattention, must be understood with a sympathy bordering upon subtlety, before the conditions of this drama can be conceived. Probably he was the only man in the world who could have had these things happening in his own house without realizing how far they had gone.

But there comes a point when even the hermit in a cave on the mountains looks forth and sees that the city in the valley is flaming with flags. There comes a point when even the most drugged and dreamy scholar in an attic looks out of the window and sees that the town is illuminated. And at last Lord Seawood began to realize that a revolution had taken place outside the door of his own study, although he had received no official report in connection with it. If it had been a revolution in Guatemala, he would have known all about it as soon as he could have communicated with the Guatemalan Minister in London. If it had been a revolution in Northern Thibet, of course he would have sent for Biggle, who is the only fellow who has ever really *been* to Northern Thibet. But as it was only ramping and roaring all over his own garden and drawing-room, he was cautious about receiving what might be exaggerated accounts. Thus it happened that about a fortnight later he was seated in the summer-house that stood at the end of the garden path opposite the library, engaged in grave consultation with the Prime Minister. He did not notice anything in the whole landscape except the Prime Minister. This was not in the least an indication of snobbishness, for he considered himself, in the social and genealogical sense, more important than any Prime Minister; though the one in question was the Earl of Eden. But he did attach importance to being closetted only with people of importance. He listened with solemn receptivity to all the news that so important a messenger could bring him from the outer world; but he cared for nothing except the outer world. He lived, if not at the end of the earth, at any rate at the end of the telephone. The views of the Prime Minister himself, about this concentrated complacency in his host, might have been worth hearing, for Lord Eden was a man of some humour, of the sort that is counted rather crabbed and cynical, because it faces facts and does not deal very much in catch-words. Lord Eden was a man with a lean and wrinkled face so much in contrast with his yellow hair as to make it look like a yellow wig. He was doing most of the talking, but his host never lost the air of one listening gravely to a report brought to headquarters.

"The trouble is," said the Prime Minister, "that their side has suddenly developed somebody who believes in something. It's not fair, in a way. We knew all about Labour members, of course, and they were damned like all other members. You couldn't insult them; you got at them by degrees; you told them they were admirable parliamentarians and foemen worthy of your steel, and then, of course, you found some sort of a job for them sooner or later; and there you were. But this business of the Coal-Tar people is different. The Unions wouldn't have been much different by themselves, of course. People at a Trade Union meeting don't know what they're voting about—"

"Of course not," said Seawood nodding gravely and graciously, "quite ignorant, I suppose?"

" — any more than we do," went on Lord Eden, "any more than the House of Commons or the House of Lords. Did you ever know a party meeting that knew what it was voting about? They called themselves Socialists or something and we called ourselves Imperialists or something. But, as a matter of fact, things had got quieter and quieter on both sides. But now that this man Braintree has turned up, talking all their nonsense in a new sort of way, we don't seem to have any of our nonsense to call up against him. It used to be the Empire. But something has gone wrong with all that; the damn Colonials would come over and people saw them, and there you are. They won't talk as if they wanted to die for us, and nobody seems to want very much to live with them. But whatever it was, all that sort of picture and poetry of the thing seems to have given out on our side; just at the moment when something picturesque turns up on the other side."

"Is this Mr. Braintree picturesque?" asked Lord Seawood, being entirely unaware that Mr. Braintree had been his guest for a considerable time.

"These fellows seem to think so," replied the Prime Minister. "It's not so much the Coal people themselves; it's much more the affiliated Unions connected with the by-products; all the people he seems to have worked up just round here. That's why I came to ask you about it. We are both interested in Coal-Tar as well as Coal, and I'd be very glad to have your opinion. There seems to be such a devil of a lot of these small Unions mixed up with the business. You must know more about 'em than anybody else — except Braintree himself, of course. And it's no good asking him. I wish to God it were."

“It is quite true that I have considerable interest in this neighbourhood,” said Lord Seawood, inclining his head, “as you know, most of us have nowadays to go into trade a little. Would have horrified our ancestors, I suppose, but it’s better than losing the estates and so on. Yes, I may tell you in confidence that my interests are even more committed to the by-products than to the original material, so to speak. It is all the more unfortunate that this Mr. Braintree should have chosen that for a field of battle.”

“It jolly well looks like a field of battle,” replied the politician gloomily. “I don’t suppose they’d actually come and kill people but they’re pretty well ready for anything short of that. And that’s just the worst of it. If they’d only actually rebel, they could be put down easily enough. But what the devil are you to do with rebels who don’t rebel? I don’t believe Machiavelli ever gave any advice on the problem.”

Lord Seawood put his long thin fingers together and cleared his throat.

“I do not profess to be Machiavelli,” he said with marked modesty, “but I hope I am not wrong in supposing that, in a certain sense, you are asking my advice. Well, the conditions are such, I admit, as to call for rather special knowledge, and I have given some attention to this problem, and especially to parallel problems in Australia and Alaska. To begin with, the conditions of the production of all the derivatives of coal involves considerations that are commonly understood — .”

“My God!” cried Lord Eden and ducked suddenly as if a blow had been aimed at his head. His exclamation was natural enough; though, such was the incredible self-absorption of the other man that he saw the cause at least a second later.

What Lord Seawood saw was a long feathered arrow that stood still quivering in the timber of the summer-house, immediately above Lord Eden’s head. But what Lord Eden had seen was the same singular missile come singing through the air out of some remote part of the garden and passing above him with a noise like that of some gigantic insect. Both the noblemen rose to their feet and regarded this object for a moment in silence; before the more practical politician observed that the shaft had fastened to it a flapping fragment of paper, on which something seemed to be written.

CHAPTER XIII

THE VICTORIAN AND THE ARROW

The arrow that had entered the summer-house with a sound like song awakened the worthy proprietor of the place to a world without which had been entirely transformed. Why it had been transformed, and what was the nature of the transformation, he found it sufficiently bewildering to discover; but it is almost equally bewildering to describe. It began, in a sense, with the isolated insanity of one man; yet it was almost equally due, by a not uncommon paradox, to the equally isolated sanity of one woman.

Mr. Herne, the librarian, had positively and finally refused to change his clothes.

“Well I can’t,” he cried in despair. “I simply can’t. I should feel like a fool, just as if — .”

“Well,” asked Rosamund regarding him with round eyes.

“I should feel as if I were in fancy dress,” he said. Rosamund was less impatient than might have been expected.

“Do you mean,” she asked very slowly, as if she were thinking things out, “that you find you feel more natural in those things?”

“Why, of course,” he cried with a sort of delight. “Why, they are more natural. Lots of things are really more natural, though I’ve never had them in my life. It’s natural to hold your head up, but I never did it before. I used to put my hands in my trousers’ pockets and somehow that seems to mean standing always with a sort of a stoop. Now I put my hands in my belt and it makes me feel ten inches taller. Why, look at this spear.”

He had a habit of walking about with the boar-spear which King Richard had carried in his capacity of forester; and he now planted the staff in the grass to bring it to her attention, though it was very literally as plain as a pike-staff.

“The minute you begin to carry a thing of this sort,” he cried, “you realise at once why men generally used to carry long poles of one sort or another; spears or pikes or pilgrims’ staffs, or pastoral staffs. You can hold them at arm’s length and then throw your head back as if it wore a crest. You have to lean down to the little modern walking-sticks in order to lean on them; as if you were leaning on a crutch, and so you are. The whole of this world of ours is leaning on a crutch, because it is a cripple."

Then he stopped abruptly and looked at her with a sort of sudden timidity.

"But you . . . I was just thinking you ought to walk about with a sceptre like a spear . . . but, of course . . . if you really disapprove of it all — ."

"I'm not sure," she answered in her slow and slightly perplexed manner, which contrasted occasionally with her usual voluble efficiency, "I'm not perfectly sure I do disapprove of it."

He seemed to experience a silent shock of relief, not perhaps very easy to explain. But indeed this was the element in his demeanour which is least easily explained. For all his lifted head and leonine demeanour in moments of abstraction, for all the fixity of his attitude or antic, he had not any air of impudence or even, in the ordinary sense, of defiance. He was simply embarrassed, or rather paralysed, in the presence of his own old clothes. In short he had precisely the same attitude about getting out of his green costume that he had once had about getting into it.

When Rosamund had swept in her swift way across the lawn to the little group where Herne was arguing with Braintree, everyone in the world, including the two distracted disputants, would have expected her to dash into nothing the whole nonsensical dispute. She might have been expected to tell the librarian to run and change his clothes at once, like a naughty little boy who had fallen in a pond. But the quaint and almost fabulous creatures called human souls do not always, or perhaps even often, do what is expected of them. If any sensible person can be supposed to have foreseen all this crazy tale, he would have had no doubt about which of the two women involved would have been more impatient with its craziness. The sensible man would have said that Olive Ashley, with her hobby of medievalism, would have understood even a rather mad medievalist; whereas anyone so modern as her red-haired friend would not even have stopped to ask whether it was medievalism, in face of the obvious fact that it was madness. But then no sensible man would ever have believed that it would happen at all.

In any case the sensible man would have been wrong, as he often is. Olive always had her own dreams: but Rosamund's heart hungered after two things, simplification and action. Her thinking was slow; so she liked simplicity. Her impulses were swift; so she liked action.

Rosamund Severne in a bodily sense was born worthy of a crown; and even in a biographical sense under the shadow of a coronet. It was her fate to move against a magnificent background of river and terraced hills and the ruins of a historic place, and the medieval masquerade she had assumed seemed altogether fitted to her presence. To the visionary eyes of the librarian, she appeared to be equally a princess in that costume or in a more conventional one. But these accidents of birth and even of beauty are very misleading in psychology. If Mr. Herne had possessed more knowledge of the world, he would have recognised a type to be seen in very different surroundings. The great green valley and the great grey abbey house would have faded from his sight and he would have seen in their place desks and typewriters and rows of very dull works of reference. He would have seen in that square face and those grave and honest eyes a type that is very modern and very variously distributed in the modern world. That young woman is to be found in many places where she is wanted to support the wavering unworldliness of men like Mr. Herne. As Secretary to the Submarine Colonisation Company, she explains firmly to a long procession of inquirers that there is room in the sea for more men that ever went into it. As Lady Manager of the Elastic Pavements Society, she knows the whole case for this essential reform, and can show how it eliminates the necessity for better boots or a country life. The movement for proving that "Paradise Lost" was written by Charles II owes its wide popularity entirely to her energy and efficiency. The arrangement by which the tops of top-hats can be lifted with a string, for purposes of ventilation, would never have reached its present universal success, if there had not been one sane person in the office. In all these positions she has the same powerful simplicity and the same sincerity in following out one idea at a time. In all these positions she is very conscientious and very unscrupulous.

It was characteristic of Rosamund that she had always been not only bewildered but wearied by the broadmindedness, or rather the indiscriminate intellectual hospitality of a man like Douglas Murrel. To her it appeared mere vagueness and emptiness and absence of object. She could never comprehend how he could be at once an intimate friend of Olive and her medievalism and of Braintree and his Bolshevism. She wanted somebody who would do something; and Murrel absolutely refused to do anything. But when somebody was really ready to do something, she was so pleased that she rather neglected to criticise what it was that he was going to do.

Quite suddenly, and perhaps accidentally, there had become clear to her very single eye something like a ray of light that she could follow; something that she could understand. Doubtless she understood it better because it was linked up in a loose fashion with the traditions that she had been taught from childhood to preserve. She had never bothered about her father's taste in heraldry; she had not even seen very much of her father. But just as she was glad that her father was there, she was glad the heraldry was there. People who have that sort of historical support always remember it, if only in their subconsciousness. Anyhow, the obvious inference was incorrect, and people soon began to say that she was actually encouraging the librarian in his capacity of lunatic.

It is almost needless to say that the daughter of Lord Seawood moved about trailing clouds of glory in the form of crowds of young men. She had indeed a threefold claim to that sort of popularity. She was an heiress; but it is due to them to say that many of the more chivalrous admired her not because she was an heiress but because she was beautiful. She was beautiful, but it is due to her to say that many of the more rational admired her not because she was a beauty but because she was a good sort; and more especially what they called a good sport. It followed, therefore that where she led many would follow, even if she led them a dance quite different from the dances then in fashion. Thus there grew up, half in jest and yet more and more in earnest, a new fashionable "medievalism"; a chase in which all the young men followed the lady who followed the librarian. And because there was a certain candour of calf-love about it, of the moon-calf who is not ashamed to cry for the moon, it had something in it of the sincerity of youth and springtime. It was a romance as well as a rag. The young men became in a manner poets, if very minor poets. With the help of Herne as a scholar and Rosamund as a vigorous stage-manager, they filled their lines with emblems and ensigns and processions, even more defiant of modernity than the theatrical dress which they had dropped and Herne had retained. The young men were especially fascinated by the notion of reviving the use of the bow; possibly with a subconscious memory of the arrows of the god of love. Perhaps it was some foolish association of Valentine's that started the game of sending arrows as messengers of welcome or of war.

Archery was a fashion in the Victorian time; and many Victorian ladies and gentlemen may have hovered about the lawns of Seawood Abbey, engaged in that graceful sport; many may even have revisited the scene as mildly astonished ghosts in long whiskers and peg-top trousers or in cloudy crinolines swaying and floating like balloons. Many distinguished Victorian characters had doubtless honoured the amusement; but they did it within certain visible Victorian limitations. They shot their arrows correctly at targets and not (unaccountably) at top-hats. They used but few of those giant gestures that have belonged in the past to the great bows of the heroes. Sir Robert Peel, if prudent as Ulysses, did not turn, saying, “Now I will shoot at another mark,” and transfix with his shaft the highly decorated waistcoat of Mr. Disraeli. It is nowhere recorded that Lord Derby balanced an apple on the top of the top-hat of Lord Stanley, and then grimly informed the Prime Minister (let us say Lord Aberdeen) that he was keeping another arrow for higher political uses. Lord Palmerston, though actually known by the nick-name of Cupid, did not attract the attention of such ladies as he favoured by transfixing their Victorian bonnets in this airy fashion. Lord Shaftesbury seldom appeared in the character and costume of the archer on the Shaftesbury Fountain; and it is an error to suppose that he is there represented. Above all, it certainly never occurred to the celebrated Rowland Hill that shooting arrows about in all directions might be made a substitute for the Penny Post. There was, therefore, no real historical precedent for the state of affairs that began to develop rapidly at Seawood Abbey, under the influence of the escaped librarian.

This last idea, of conveying casual communications to persons at some little distance, by sending a winged missile singing past their heads or crashing into their windows, seemed especially to have taken Mr. Herne’s fancy; and it was by this means that he and his misguided group of sympathisers (who were beginning to enter into the fun of the thing) delivered to a large number of persons their proclamation of the New Régime. To describe at length all the details involved in the New Régime would involve the transcription of a considerable number of scrolls or strips of paper, which were conveyed to the neighbours in this rapid if not efficient manner. They all bore the title of The League of the Lion; and were apparently an appeal to all persons to imitate the better qualities of King Richard the First and the Crusaders, under conditions that could not be considered favourable to the enterprise. The astonished citizen was informed that England had now reached a crisis in which moral courage alone could save her; if it were only the moral courage required to aim a bow at a venture when engaged in dropping a line to a friend. But there was a great deal more of a more sincere sort, not without a certain juvenile eloquence, protesting against that suicidal pessimism of the great reactionary who declared that the age of chivalry was past.

Needless to say, most of the people who received these missives were amused; some were annoyed; and some, strangely enough perhaps, were rather relieved and revived, as if they had seen some game of their childhood or ideal of their boyhood rise suddenly from the dead. But it cannot be said that the appeal as it stood was adapted to the typical visitors to Lord Seawood's country seat. Noblemen and gentlemen who had come down to shoot were often quite vexed to be told by an ardent and enthusiastic person, dressed entirely in bright green, that this was the real definition of good shooting at a little place in the country. Venerable sportsmen, who considered themselves crack shots, were not soothed when the librarian patiently and kindly explained to them how cramped, how hunchbacked, how ungainly, was the crouching attitude of one holding a gun, compared with the god-like lift and leap in the figure that has just discharged an arrow, frozen as it is forever in the stillness of the Apollo Belvedere. In short, the further afield the arrows fared, the less likely it seemed that they would really have the softening effects of the arrows of the God of Love. And this seemed to reach to a remote extreme of improbability in the very last extent or extremity of their travels; when the flying herald of chivalry had actually reached so distant and impenetrable a mark as to arouse the attention of the master of the house.

As already noted, it is rather more than a metaphor to say that the news reached Lord Seawood as a bolt from the blue. The bolt came in a flash out of the blue sky of the summer into the black shadows of the summer-house. It fixed itself in the wall above the Prime Minister's head; and before Lord Seawood had taken it in, Lord Eden had taken it out. He found attached to it a curled-up document; which the two noblemen proceeded to stare at with somewhat differing degrees of patience. It explained the necessity of a new order of voluntary nobility; and the two involuntary nobles found its exalted aristocratic tone almost terrifying. It stated the tests and trials by which a sterner conception of chivalry could be introduced into the world; though it is only justice to all concerned to say that it did not contain the word

Samurai. It explained that an appeal to the ancient virtue of loyalty could alone rally mankind to the restoration of a worthy social order, such as was envisaged by the old orders of knighthood. It explained a great many other things; but from the point of view of the two elderly gentlemen in the summer-house, it did not altogether explain the arrow in the wall.

Lord Eden remained silent; indeed he seemed to be studying the document with more gravity or grim attention than might be expected. But Lord Seawood, after some abrupt ejaculations, turned by a sort of blind instinct to the doorway and the garden from which the thunderbolt had come. And there he saw, away in the middle distance, at the end of the long lawn, something that amazed him as much as a company of angels with haloes and golden wings.

They were a company of people fantastically clad in the garments of five centuries earlier; many of them were holding bows; but what hit Lord Seawood harder than any arrow was the fact that his daughter stood in the front of the whole group, in an outrageous form of attire terminating in two horns like a buffalo; and she wore a broad smile.

He had never even thought that things so close to him could go wrong — or rather go mad. He felt as if his own boots had kicked him, or as if his cravat had come to life and throttled him like a garotter.

“Good God!” he cried, “What has been happening here?”

His feelings were simply those of a connoisseur with a collection of precious china, who finds that a pack of school-boys have been letting off catapults within an inch of an incomparable blue Chinese vase. But prodigious porcelain vases of the Ming dynasty might have crashed on every side of him without arousing his attention as it was aroused now. The hobbies of men are many and strange and mysterious. And he did most deeply resent anyone damaging his collection of Prime Ministers. That summer-house in the garden was to him as sacred as any Chinese temple full of ancestors; for in it were the thin ghosts of many politicians. Many of these quiet conferences affecting the destinies of the Empire had been held in that toy hut. It was characteristic of Lord Seawood that what pleased him most was meeting public men in a private way; even a secret way. He was far too fine a gentleman himself to desire the Sunday papers to say that the Prime Minister had visited Seawood Abbey. But he went cold as death as he thought of the papers saying that the Prime Minister had visited Seawood Abbey and lost an eye.

The glance he gave at the gang of school-boys was, therefore, very cursory and, of course, entirely contemptuous. He did vaguely apprehend that one face stood out from its confused background, with a gravity that was almost ghastly. It was the high-featured and financial face of the librarian; and in comparison with it the rest were of a mixed and almost mocking sort. Some were smiling; a few were laughing; but that merely added a touch to the nobleman's natural annoyance and disdain. It was some silly rag, of course, among Rosamund's friends; she must have pretty rotten friends.

"I hope you are aware," he said coldly but in a clear and loud voice, "that you have just nearly killed the Prime Minister. Under these circumstances, I think you will see the propriety of choosing some other game."

He turned and walked back to the summer-house, having so far controlled himself with a conventional consideration for his unwelcome guests. But when he returned under the small thatched roof and saw in the shadow the pale and angular profile of the Prime Minister still poring over the scrap of paper with cold concentration, Lord Seawood's fury suddenly broke out again. He felt in that frozen face the unfathomable scorn which the great mind of the great statesman must be feeling for this dirty and yet deadly practical joke. The man's silence opened like an abyss of ice; an abyss into which apology after apology might be dropped without plumbing its depths, or awakening any answer.

"I simply don't know what to say," he said desperately. "I've half a mind to kick them all out of the house, the girl and all. . . . Anything whatever I can do. . . ."

Still the Prime Minister did not look up, but continued in a frigid manner to peruse the paper in his hand. Now and then he bent his brows a little; now and then he lifted them a little; but his tight lips never moved.

His host was suddenly struck with a sort of terror, the scope of which he could not himself follow. He thought he had offered an insult blood could not wipe out. The silence snapped his nerve and he said sharply: "For God's sake don't go on reading that rubbish! I know it's damned funny; but it's not so damned funny for me — happening in my own house. You can't imagine I like having a guest insulted, let alone you. Tell me what you want and I'll do it."

"Well," said the Prime Minister, and laid down the paper slowly on the little round table. "Well, we've got it at last."

"Got what?" demanded his distracted friend.

"Our last chance," said the Prime Minister.

There was a silence in the dark summer-house so sudden and complete that they could hear the buzzing of a fly and the distant murmur of the talk of the mutineers. The silence was merely accidental; yet something rose up in Seawood's soul to protest against it; as if silence were making destiny and must be stopped from doing it.

"What do you mean?" he demanded sharply. "What last chance?"

"The last chance we were talking about not ten minutes ago," replied the politician with a grim smile. "Wasn't I talking about this very thing before it flew in at the window, like the dove with the olive branch? Wasn't I actually saying that we must have something new because the poor old Empire has gone stale? Wasn't I saying we wanted a new positive thing to back up against Braintree and the New Democracy? Well, then."

"What on earth do you mean?" demanded Lord Seawood.

"I mean this thing has got to be backed up," cried the Prime Minister, slapping the little table with a vivacity almost shocking in one of his dry and dreary demeanour. "It's got to be backed up with horse, foot and artillery; or what's a damn sight more important, pounds, shillings, and pence. It's got to be backed up as we never backed anything in our lives. Lord, that a man of my age should live to see the break in the enemy's line and the chance for a cavalry charge! It's got to be rammed home for all it's worth and a lot more; and the sooner we begin the better. Where are these people?"

"But do you really mean," cried the staring Seawood, "that there's anything to be done with fools like—"

"Suppose they are," snapped Eden. "Am I a fool that I should fancy that anything could be done without fools?"

Lord Seawood pulled himself together; but he was still staring.

"I suppose you mean that a new policy — I can hardly say a popular policy — perhaps rather a successful anti-popular policy—"

"Both, if you like," said the other. "Why not?"

"I should hardly have thought," said Lord Seawood, "that the populace would be particularly interested in all this elaborate antiquarian theory about chivalry."

"Have you ever considered," asked the Prime Minister, looking over his shoulder, "the meaning of the word chivalry?"

“Do you mean in the derivative sense?” asked the other nobleman.

“I mean in the horse sense,” replied Eden. “What people really like is a man on a horse — and they don’t mind much if it’s a high horse. Give the people plenty of sports — tournaments, horse races — *panem et circenses*, my boy — that will do for a popular side to the policy. If we could mobilise all that goes to make the Derby we could fight the Deluge.”

“I begin,” said Seawood, “to have some sort of wild notion of what you mean.”

“I mean,” answered his friend, “that the Democracy cares a damn sight more about the inequality of horses than about the equality of men.”

And stepping across the threshold he strode across the garden with a step almost startlingly rejuvenated; and before his host had even moved he heard the Prime Minister’s voice in the distance lifted like a trumpet, like the voice of the great orators of fifty years ago.

Thus did the librarian who refused to change his clothes contrive to change his country. For out of this small and grotesque incident came all that famous revolution, or reaction, which transformed the face of English society, and checked and changed the course of its history. Like all revolutions effected by Englishmen, and especially revolutions effected by Conservatives, it was very careful to preserve those powers that were already powerless. Some Conservatives of a rather senile sort were even heard still talking about the Constitutional characters of the complete subversal of the Constitution. It was allowed to retain, indeed it was supposed to support, the old monarchical pattern of this country. But in practice the new power was divided between three or four subordinate monarchs ruling over large provinces of England, like magnified Lords-Lieutenant; and called according to the romance or affectation of the movement Kings-at-Arms. They held indeed a position with something of the sanctity and symbolic immunity of a herald; but they also possessed not a few of the powers of a king. They were in command of the bands of young men called Orders of Chivalry, which served as a sort of yeomanry or militia. They held courts and administered high and low justice in accordance with Mr. Herne’s researches into medieval law. It was something more than a pageant; yet there passed into it much of that popular passion which at one time filled half the towns and villages in England with pageants; the hunger of a populace which Puritanism and Industrialism had so long starved for the feast of the eyes and the fancy.

As it was more than a pageant, it was more than a fashion; but it had its stages and turning points like a fashion. Perhaps the chief turning point was the moment when Mr. Julian Archer (now Sir Julian Archer under the accolade of one of the new orders of knighthood) had seriously discovered that he must lead the fashion or be left behind it. All of us who have observed changes passing over a society know that indeterminate and yet determining instant. It applies to everything from women being allowed votes to women not being allowed hair. It was marked in the Suffragette movement, which many middle-class women had long supported, when great ladies began to take it up. It marks the transition from the time when it is the new fashion to the time when it is the fashion. Up to that moment examples may be numerous, but they are still notable; after that moment it is the neglect that is notable. That is the sort of moment, in every movement, at which Sir Julian Archer appears as he appeared now; a knight in shining armour, ready for every perilous emprise.

Yet Sir Julian Archer was too vain not to be in a sense simple, and too simple not to be in a sense sincere. Social changes of this sort are made possible among considerable masses of people, by two ironies of human nature. The first is that almost everyman's life has been sufficiently patchy and full of possibilities for him to remember *some* movement of his own mind towards what has become the movement of the time. The second is that he almost always makes a false picture of his past, and fosters a fictitious memory, whereby that detail seems in retrospect to dominate his career.

Julian Archer (as has already been faithfully recorded) had written a long time ago a very boyish sort of a boy's adventure story about the Battle of Agincourt. It was only one of the multifarious and highly modern activities of his successful career: and had not been even one of the most successful. But with the new talk all around him, Archer began to insist more and more on his initiative in the matter.

"They wouldn't listen to me," he said moodily shaking his head. "Doesn't do to be a bit too early in the field. . . . Of course, Herne's a well-read man; it's his business. . . . I suppose he sees practically every book that comes out. Seems as if he had sense enough to take a hint, eh, what?"

"Oh, I see," said Olive Ashley, raising her dark eyebrows in mild surprise. "I never thought of that."

And she reflected at once ruefully and whimsically upon her own concentrated passion of medieval things, which everybody had first derided and then imitated and then forgotten.

The case was the same with Sir Aubrey Wister, that gallant though somewhat elderly knight; for thus also had been transformed the figure of the old aesthete who pottered about drawing-rooms and praised the great Victorians who had praised the great Primitives. He talked rather more about the great Primitives and less about the great Victorians. But as he had so often in the past patronised Cimabue and said an encouraging word to Giotto and Botticelli, it was not difficult for him to persuade himself that he had been a prophet lifting up his voice in vain, and predicting the coming of Mr. Herne as the Medieval Messiah.

"My dear, sir," he would say confidentially, "the period was one of inconceivable vandalism and vulgarity. I really don't know how I lived through it. But I pegged away; and, as you see, my work has not been altogether fruitless . . . ahem . . . not altogether fruitless. The very patterns of their costumes would have perished; hardly a single picture from which they are taking their designs would have survived — but for my little protest. It shows what a word in time will do."

Lord Seawood himself was affected in much the same way. Insensibly, he shifted the centre of gravity between his two hobbies. He talked a little more about his private hobby of heraldry. He talked a little less about his public hobby of Parliament. He insisted less on the greatness of Lord Palmerston and more on the greatness of the Black Prince, from whom the Seawood family claimed descent. And in him also this touching belief grew silently in the shade; the sense that he had himself had a lot to do with the founding of the League of the Lion and the resurrection of Richard Coeur-de-Lion. He felt this all the more vividly because of the institution of the Shield of Honour, which was one of the latest and proudest additions to the scheme and had been inaugurated in his own park.

In all this change of climate, Herne was himself unchanged. Like many idealists, he was of a type that would have been content in complete obscurity, but could not measure or realise the scope of complete fame. If he could take one stride to the end of the park, he might as well take another stride to the end of the world. He did not see the world to scale. He had forced all his commonplace companions back into their masquerade clothes and compelled them to play the masque until they died. By hanging on himself to his Robin Hood bow and boar spear, he had come to find himself not left behind by the company but marching in front of it. The change from that loneliness to that leadership did seem to him a thrilling and triumphal thing. But the change from the leadership of that house-party to the leadership of all England hardly seemed to him a change at all. For indeed there was in that house-party one face that had fallen into the habit of watching for all changes, like the changes of sunset and dawn.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RETURN OF THE KNIGHT-ERRANT

In the great General Election, which had been produced by the big menace of Braintree and his new Syndicalism, and which had led up to the launching of the movement in opposition to it, it was reported that Mr. Michael Herne had gone into a polling-booth to record his vote; and had remained there for three-quarters of an hour, mysteriously occupied or possibly engaged in prayer. He had apparently never given a vote before; it not being a Palaeo-Hittite habit; but when it had been elaborately explained to him that he had only to make a cross on the piece of paper opposite the name of his favourite candidate, he seemed quite charmed and enchanted with the idea. By this time, of course, his Palaeo-Hittite period had long become prehistoric and stratified in the past; and his later medieval enthusiasm devoured his days and nights. Nevertheless he could apparently spare a somewhat abnormal time for the modern and rather mechanical process of voting; when he might have been engaged in drawing the long bow or tilting at a Saracen’s head. Archer and his other colleagues became a little impatient, and not a little mystified, by his mysterious immersion in the ballot box; they kicked their legs restlessly outside and eventually went inside, to see his tall and motionless back still immovable in its separate cell, as of a modern confessional. They were at last goaded to the gross indelicacy of disturbing the Citizen when alone with his Duty, by going up behind him and pulling his coat-tails. As this had no particular effect, they committed the anarchical and anti-democratic outrage of actually looking over his shoulder. They found that he had set out on the little shelf, as on a table, all the illumination paints (presumably borrowed from Miss Ashley), paints of gold and silver and all the colours of the rainbow. With these he was engaged in doing his democratic duty with almost a painful care and patience. He had been told to make a cross and he was making a cross. He was doing it as it would have been done by a monk in the Dark Ages; that is in very gay and glorified colours. The cross was of gold, in one corner of it were three blue birds, in another corner were three red fishes, in another plants, in another planets and so on; it seemed to be planned upon the scheme of the Canticle of the Creature of St. Francis of Assisi. He was very much surprised to be told that this was not required by the provisions of the Ballot Act; but he controlled himself and only gave a faint sigh, when informed by the officials of the polling station that his vote was cancelled, because he had “spoilt” a ballot paper.

Outside in the street, however, there were a good many people who thought that even the usual hasty scratch on the ballot paper was almost as much of a waste of time as Mr. Herne’s elaborate ritual. It was the paradox of that particular General Election that it was a great crisis because another thing was much greater; and it was intensely exciting because people were excited about something else. It was rather like one of the elections that take place during a great war. Indeed it might be said that it took place during a revolution.

The Great Strike that gathered all the workers in the dye and colour making trades, with sympathetic strikes among various bodies connected with Coal-Tar and Coal, had its headquarters in Milldyke and its leader in John Braintree. But it was much more than a strike of the local and limited sort that its description might imply. It was not the sort of strike at which men of the more comfortable classes had grown accustomed to grumble; being used to their discomforts as to their comforts. It was something entirely new, at which such men, not unnaturally and perhaps not unreasonably, ejaculated sharp and even shrill protests.

At the very moment when Herne was medievally occupied in the monastic cell of the polling-station, Braintree was filling the market-place of Milldyke with his thunderous voice in the most sensational speech of his career. It was sensational in substance as well as in style. He no longer, as in the first stages of this history, demanded what he called Recognition. He demanded Control.

“Your masters tell you,” he said, “that you are greedy materialists grown accustomed to clamour for more wages. They are right. Your masters tell you that you lack ideals and do not understand ambition and the instinct to govern. They are right. They imply that you are slaves and beasts of burden, in so far as you would only eat up stores and escape responsibility. They are right. They are right so long as you are content to ask only for wages, only for food, only for well-paid service. But let us show our masters that we have profited by the moral lessons they are so good as to give us. Let us return to them penitent; let us tell them we mean to amend our faults of petty stipulation and merely materialistic demand. Let us tell them that we have an ambition; and it is to rule. That we have an ideal; and it is to rule equally. That we have a hunger and a high thirst for responsibility; for the glorious and joyous responsibility of ruling what they misrule, of managing what they have mismanaged, of sharing among ourselves as workers and comrades that direct and democratic government of our own industry which was hitherto served to keep a few parasites in luxury in their palaces and parks."

After that speech at Milldyke all communications were cut and a chasm yawned between Braintree and the parks and palaces to which he referred. The demand that the manual workers should become the managers of the works consolidated against him, indeed, a large mass of people who did not by any means live in palaces or parks. It was so manifestly and madly revolutionary that hardly anyone did agree with it who was not already prepared to call himself a revolutionist. And real revolutionists are rare. Rosamund's friend Harry Hanbury, a very kindly and reasonable squire, spoke for the rest. "Hang it all, I'm all for paying people good wages, as I try to pay my chauffeur and valet good wages. But Control means that the chauffeur can drive me to Margate when I want to go to Manchester. My valet brushes my clothes and has something to say about them. But Control means that I must wear yellow trousers and a pink waistcoat if he chooses to lay them out for me."

The next week brought the news of two great elections: the one a defiant answer to the other. On the Tuesday the news was brought to Herne that Braintree had been elected by a huge and howling Labour majority.

And on the Thursday was received by that abstracted mind, blind with inner light, the shout and scurry and acclamation which announced that he himself had been chosen by the Orders and Electoral Colleges, as King-at-Arms over the whole world of the West Country. It was in a sort of waking dream that he was escorted to a high throne set upon that green plateau of Seawood Park. On one side of the new King stood Rosamund Severne, Dame of some new degree and holding the Shield of Honour, shaped like a heart and blazoned with the lion, which was to be given to the best knight who had achieved the boldest adventure. She looked very statuesque; and few could have guessed how energetically she flew round in preparing the ceremony; or how very like it was to her way of preparing the theatricals. On the left stood her friend, the young squire and explorer, whom she had once introduced to Braintree, looking very serious indeed; for he had passed the point of self-consciousness and felt his heraldic uniform as natural as that of the Scots Grey. He held what was called the Sword of St. George, with the cross-hilt upwards; for Michael had said, in one of his mystical fragments, “A man never deserves a sword until he can hold it by the blade. His hand may bleed; but it is then that he sees the Cross.” But Herne sat on his high throne above all the coloured crowd, and his eyes seemed to inhabit the horizons and the high places. So have many fanatics ridden high on clouds over scenes as preposterous; so Robespierre walked in his blue coat at the Feast of the Supreme Being. Lord Eden caught sight of those clear eyes, like still and shining pools, and muttered: “The man is mad. It is dangerous for unbalanced men when their dreams come true. But the madness of a man may be the sanity of a society.”

“Well!” cried Julian Archer, slapping his sword-hilt with that air of answering for everybody that was so hearty and refreshing. “It’s been a great day and the world will hear of it. The people round here will find we’ve really got to work. This is the sort of thing that will hunt out Braintree and all his rabble of ragamuffins and make them run like rats.”

Rosamund was still rather like a smiling statue; but Olive standing behind her had seemed as dark as her shadow. Now Olive suddenly spoke and her clear voice rang like steel.

“He is not a ragamuffin,” she said. “He is an engineer; and knows a lot more than you do. What are most of you, if it comes to that? An engineer is as good as a librarian. I should think.”

There was a deathly silence; and Archer, with a helpless gesture, looked upwards, as if the sky would crack at the blasphemy; but most of the ladies and gentlemen looked downwards, at their pointed medieval shoes; for they realised that it was worse than blasphemy; it was certainly, under the circumstances, exceedingly bad taste.

But though the groups had begun to break up and mingle, the King-at-Arms had not yet left his throne; as they were soon to find, in more ways than one. He took no more notice of the woman who had just insulted him than if she had not been there; but he suddenly bent his brows upon Julian Archer; and a sort of subconscious thrill told everybody that in one mind at least the royalty was a reality.

“Sir Julian,” said the King-at-Arms sternly, “I think you have read your books of venery very wrongly. You do not seem to know that we are back in braver and better days and have left behind the time when gentlemen could swagger about hunting vermin. Ours is the spirit of the ages when royal beasts could turn to bay and slay the hunters; the great boar and the noble stag. We are of the world that could respect its enemies; yes, even when they were beasts. I know John Braintree; and there never was a braver man walking this world. Shall we fight for our faith and sneer at him because he fights for his? Go and kill him if you dare; but if he should kill you, you will be as much honoured in your death as you are now dishonoured by your tongue."

For one instant the impression, or illusion, was stunning and complete. He had spoken spontaneously and simply out of himself; but it might have been a reincarnation. So exactly might Richard the Lion Heart have spoken to a courtier who imputed cowardice to Saladin.

But in that still crowd there was a change that might have been even more surprising if many had noticed it; for the pale face of Olive Ashley had turned to a red flame; and a sort of cry, that was half a gasp, was rent out of her.

"Ah, now I know it has really begun!"

And from that moment she moved lightly in the coloured procession, as if a load had been lifted off her. She seemed to wake up for the first time to all that decorative dance, that was so near to her old dreams and take her part in it without further doubt or distress. Her dark eyes were shining, as at a memory. A little later in the proceedings she found herself talking to Rosamund. She lowered her voice and said almost like one telling a secret: — "He really means it! He really understands. He isn't a snob or a swaggering bully or anything of the sort. He really believes in the good old days — and the good new days, too."

"Of course he means it!" cried Rosamund very indignantly. "Of course he really believes it and behaves like it too! If you only knew what it was for me to see anything *done,* after the eternal talking at large of Monkey and Julian and the rest. Besides, he's quite right to believe in it. What business has anybody to laugh at it? Beautiful dresses are not half so laughable as ugly dresses. We ought to have been doubled up with laughter day and night in the days when men wore trousers." And she continued to pour out her defence, with all the passion with which a practical young woman, repeats the opinions of somebody else.

But Olive was looking from the high lawn up the long white road that wandered away to the sunset and seemed to melt its silver in that copper and gold.

"They asked me once," she said, "whether I thought King Arthur would return. On an evening like this . . . can't you imagine the culmination coming, and our seeing some knight of the Round Table pricking along the road, ever so far away, bringing us a message from the King."

"Well, it's jolly queer you should say that," said the more practical Rosamund, "because there really is somebody coming along; and I believe he's on a horse, too."

"He seems to be behind a horse," said Olive in a low voice. "That low sun dazzles my eyes. . . . Can it be a Roman chariot? I suppose Arthur would *really* be a Roman?"

"It's a very queer shape," said Rosamund; and her voice also had altered.

The knight-errant from King Arthur's Court certainly was a very queer shape; for as the equipage came nearer and nearer, it took on to the amazed eyes of the medieval crowd the appearance of a dilapidated hansom cab, surmounted by a cabman in a dilapidated top-hat. He removed his battered headgear with a polite salutation and revealed the unpretentious features of Douglas Murrel.

Mr. Douglas Murrel, after thus saluting the company, replaced his remarkable hat, perhaps a little on one side, and proceeded to fall off the hansom cab. It is not easy to fall off a hansom cab with gravity and social ease; but Mr. Murrel accomplished it with the acrobatic accuracy of old. The hat fell off, but he caught it with great dexterity; and immediately walked across to Olive Ashley, observing without any embarrassment.

"I say; I've got that stuff you wanted."

The company looking at his collar and tie and trousers (which were specially conspicuous when he turned a cartwheel from the top of the cab), had the curious sensation of seeing somebody dressed in the quaint costume of a by-gone age. In fact, they had very much the same feelings which he himself had had when he first saw the hansom cab; though hansom cabs had only recently begun to dwindle and disappear in London. So rapidly does human fashion harden and people become accustomed to a new environment.

"Monkey!" gasped Olive. "Where on earth have you been all this time? Haven't you heard anything about anything?"

"I had to poke about a little bit to find the paints," said Murrel modestly, "and since I bought the cab I've been giving people rides on the road. But

I’ve got it anyhow.”

Then for the first time he seemed to think it necessary to notice the singular scene that surrounded him; though the contrast was as great as if he had fallen out of another world and appeared in the ancient setting like the Yankee at the Court of King Arthur; if anybody so very English as he was could ever be compared with a Yankee.

“I’ve got it in the cab,” he explained. “I’m pretty sure it’s what you wanted. . . . I say, Olive, is your play *still* going on? Back to Methuselah, eh? I know you have a fertile pen; but really a play that lasts a month—”

“It isn’t a play,” she answered, staring at him in a stony fashion. “It began as a play; but we aren’t playing any longer.”

“Sorry to hear that,” he said. “I’ve had a good deal of fun myself; but there was a serious side to that, too. Is the Prime Minister here? They told me he was coming — and I’d rather like to see him.”

“Oh, I can’t tell it all in a minute,” she exclaimed, almost impatiently. “Don’t you know there isn’t a Prime Minister now; not of that sort? The King-at-Arms is managing everything round here.”

And she gestured rather desperately towards that potentate, who was still sitting on his high seat; probably because he had forgotten to come down. The same reason had once detained him on the top of the library shelf.

Douglas Murrel seemed to take it all in with more composure than might have been expected; perhaps he remembered the incident in the library. But his demeanour towards the medieval monarch was scrupulously correct. He bowed slightly, and then dived into the interior of the hansom cab; and re-emerged, holding a shapeless parcel in one hand and his hat in the other. He seemed to have a difficulty in unwrapping the parcel with one hand, and he turned towards the throne with a very proper air of apology.

“Pardon me, Your Majesty,” he said. “May my family have the ancient and ancestral privilege of wearing its hat at Court? I feel sure something of that sort must have been given to us after we tried unsuccessfully to rescue the Princes in the Tower. You see, it’s so awkward holding a hat; but I have a great affection for this hat.”

If he expected to see any gleam of answering humour in the face of the fanatic above him, he was disappointed; but the King-at-Arms said with perfect gravity: “Most certainly be covered. It is only the intention in courtesy that counts. I doubt whether those who had such privileges really insisted on them; I seem to remember a King who said, very rightly, to such a privileged lord, ‘You have the right to wear your hat before me, but not before the ladies.’ In the same spirit, where (as in this case) the purpose is actually to oblige a lady, the form is obviously dispensed with.”

And he looked round in a reasonable manner, as if his logic had surely satisfied everybody as it satisfied him, and Douglas Murrel solemnly put on his hat and proceeded to take a prodigious number of wrappings off the parcel.

When it eventually emerged, it was a cylindrical glass jar or bottle, extremely dirty, with indistinguishable inscriptions and ornaments; but when he handed it to Olive, he saw that his search had not been a futile one. There is no explaining how the mere shape and detail of things lost in childhood can startle and stab the emotions; but when she saw the shape of that obsolete pot of paint, with its large stopper and the faded trade mark of decorative fishes upon it, her eyes were stung with tears so that she herself was startled by them. It was as if she had suddenly heard the voice of her father.

“How on earth did you find this?” she cried, in a very contradictory fashion; since she had only intended him to look for it, at the most, in the nearest shop in the nearest town. But that cry alone revealed the subconscious pessimism that had underlain all her archeological affections; she had not believed that any of the dead things that she desired could return. When she saw this one, it crowned and completed that restoration of confidence which she had felt when Herne had rebuked Archer. Both these things somehow rang with reality. All the costumes and ceremonials that had been restored might after all be, as Murrel had suggested, a mere continuation of the play-acting. But Hendry’s Illumination Paints were a real thing; as real as a wooden doll loved in the nursery or lost in the garden. After that moment she never had a doubt about her side in the great debate.

Few indeed, however, in that coloured crowd were likely to share Miss Ashley’s emotions about the parcel. Nobody else could feel the contrast between Monkey being sent out rather like an errand-boy and his coming back like a knight-errant. To the others, now in the full swing of the statelier new fashions, poor Monkey did not look at all like a knight-errant. However much they might vary in the intellectual appreciation of the change, their limbs had grown used to the fall of freer draperies and their eyes to the colours of gayer crowds. They no longer thought so much that their own dress was picturesque; they merely thought that his dress was out of the picture. He was not only a blot on the landscape but a block in the traffic. He patted his horse in an affectionate manner, and that queer prehistoric monster seemed even to make uncouth movements as if returning his affection.

“Odd thing is,” said Archer in his confidential, emphatic style to the young squire who carried the sword, “Odd thing is he can’t *see* he’s out of it. Always so difficult to manage fellows who can’t *see* when they’re out of it.”

He relapsed into gloomy silence, and in company with all his associates, settled down to listen rather nervously to a dialogue that had already begun between the newcomer and the potentate on the throne. They had some cause for feeling nervous; sensible as they were of how this preposterous procession out of a three-act farce must have sprawled across the vision of the visionary king. It was all the more alarming when the incongruous Murrel insisted on addressing the throne with a somewhat burlesque civility, but with an apparent pertinacity of intention. He seemed to be appealing to the King-at-Arms, since that person now discharged the functions both of Prime Minister and Lord of the Manor, about the details of his own recent adventures; those wanderings on the borderland of things where he had come upon the ruins of a hansom cab. Archer heard his polite impertinencies gradually linking themselves up into a long soliloquy. He might really have been a traveller telling his travels at the court of some fabled king. But when Archer began to listen a little wearily to what the experiences were, he lost all such romantic illusions about them. Monkey was certainly telling a story; a long story; and a damned silly story, Archer thought.

At first he had gone to a shop. Then he had gone to another shop; or another part of the same shop. Then he had gone to a public-house. So like Monkey to turn up sooner or later at a public-house, and you bet sooner rather than later; as if a gentleman couldn’t have anything he wanted sent quietly to his rooms. Then followed long confusing conversations at the public-house, including an imitation of a superior barmaid; most unsuitable on such an occasion. Then he seemed to have gone for a walk, lord knows where, and talked to a cabman, lord knows why. Then he went to some slum or other in a seaside town and got into trouble with the police. Everybody knew of course that Monkey was fond of practical jokes; but to do him justice, he hadn’t generally bored you with them afterwards, let alone at this length. He seemed to have played a trick on some doctor in charge of some lunatic, so that they didn’t lock up the lunatic but only the doctor. Pity they hadn’t split the difference and locked up Monkey. But what in the world all this had to do with The Movement and the chances of beating Braintree and the Bolshies, Archer would very much like to know. . . . Oh lord, the story was still going on. There seemed to be a girl in it now; and of course that might explain it all, even with a chap like Monkey, who always played at being the wild bachelor. But why in the devil was he pouring it all out *now*, when they were just going to begin the regular formalities of the Shield and Sword? And why was the King-at-Arms listening in that style, so steady and almost stony? Perhaps he was frozen with rage. Perhaps he had gone to sleep.

Most of the company indeed, including the young man with the sword, were not quite so sensitive as Mr. Archer about the tone, the really right and very best tone, suitable to social occasions. They were not so vexed as was that artist in life at the discord or the Monkey monologue. But they were no more favourably, or at least no more seriously impressed. Some of them began to smile, a few to laugh; though they had a certain air of doing it decorously, as if they were laughing in church. Nobody had the least notion of what Murrel was talking about, or at any rate why he was talking about it. But those who knew him best were a little puzzled by the eager exactitude with which he was telling his long-winded story. And all the time the King-at-Arms sat as motionless as a statue and nobody knew whether he was mortally offended or merely stone deaf.

“You see,” Murrel was concluding in an easy and confidential style, thought by some to lack certain elements of the noble prose of Malory, “you may say they were all a blasted lot of blighters; but there’s blighters and blighters; some are born blighters, some achieve blightering and some have blightering thrust upon them, as the poet says. And it seemed to me that poor old Hendry had blightering thrust upon him pretty bad, by a run of the most putrid luck you ever heard of, and a lot of dirty scallywags doing him down. But the other doctor was a natural born blighter, and loved blightering for its own sake; so I really didn’t give a damn whether they stuffed the stinker into a padded cell or not; but I don’t believe they did, because I tipped them the wink afterwards. And then I did a bunk before the bobby could get a move on; and came away on the cab, which runs faster than a bobby does anyhow. And there you are. There, so to speak, you bally well are."

This peroration also fell into an abyss of silence; but after the silence had lasted for a few moments that seemed eternal, some of the more anxious and watchful of the crowd perceived that the statue upon the throne had moved. It was already almost as if a real statue had moved. But when the man spoke, it was not with any of the thunders of a god, but with a casual but decisive action like that of an ordinary magistrate making a decision.

"That is all right," he said, "give him the Shield."

It was at this moment that The Movement escaped from the imaginative grasp of Sir Julian Archer. Afterwards, when the great catastrophe had occurred, he was in the habit of saying, with moody sagacity, to his friends at the club that he had always realised that the whole thing was beginning to go wrong. But at the moment, in point of fact, his trouble was that he did not realise anything; the thing seemed to slip out of his hands like the smooth but enormous swelling of some small toy balloon growing big and breaking its string. He had adapted himself with agile grace to the change from fashionable morning dress to fantastic medieval dress. But there he had been supported by a movement in the whole social world around him; not to mention the daughter of a nobleman. He found considerably more difficulty in adapting his medieval dress yet more abruptly to the atmosphere of the hat and the hansom cab. But when Michael Herne suddenly stood up in his high place and began to talk, in a sort of stern and breathless style, he could not take the last leap of logical or illogical connection at all. He seemed to have come into a nonsense world in which events occurred without any sequence. It was impossible to understand anything, except that Herne was in a towering passion about something. Any fellow might be justified, of course, in being in a towering passion when confronted with a hat like that. But the hat had been blighting the landscape for quite a long time without the King-at-Arms taking any official notice of it; and now they seemed to have got on to something quite different. He could not in the least understand what Herne was talking about. He seemed to be telling a story. He was telling it in a strange sort of way; stiff and yet straightforward; somehow as if it were out of the Bible and all that sort of thing. Nobody could possibly have supposed that it was the same story that Douglas Murrel had told. Anyhow, it was not the same story that Julian Archer had heard.

Herne had lost something of the normal slowness of his gesture and diction, and his words seemed to come quicker and quicker; his breathlessness was like that of a man who has received a blow. But Archer could make nothing out of it, except that it was a story about an old man who had a daughter; and how she followed him faithfully in his wanderings, when he had been robbed by thieves and fallen on evil days. Archer saw as in a vision the hard illustrations of an Early Victorian Sunday School story, with a very dowdy daughter and an old man with a long grey beard. They had nothing but each other; they were forgotten by the world: they stood in no man's way; they threatened nothing and provoked nobody. And even in their hole they were hunted out by strange men, with a cold and causeless malignity that had not the human decency of hate. They examined the man as if he were an animal and dragged him away as if he were already a corpse. They cared nothing for the tragic virtues on which they trampled; or that unbroken lily of loyalty which they stamped into the mire.

"You," cried the King-at-Arms indignantly to all his enemies who were not there, "You who talk of our rebuilding the ruins of tyranny or bringing back the barbarian crowns of gold! Is it written of kings that they did these things? Is it written even of tyrants? Was a tale like this told of King Richard? Was it told even of King John? You know the worst that can be said of the wildest that the feudal world could do; it is you who say it. You know what John Lackland is in all your popular history taken from Ivanhoe and penny dreadfuls. John is the traitor; John is the tyrant; John is the universal criminal; and what are the crimes of John? That he murdered a royal prince. That he broke faith with an aristocracy of nobles. That he took away a tooth from one wealthy Jewish banker; possibly it was stopped with gold, hence the outcry! That he attacked the King his father or supplanted the King his brother. Ah, it was dangerous to stand high in those days! It was dangerous to be a prince, to be a noble, to be near to the walking whirlwind of the wrath of the King. He that went into the palace often carried his life in his hands; he was entering the cave of the lion, if it was the cave of the Lion Heart. It was unfortunate to be rich and rouse royal envy. It was unfortunate to be powerful. It was unfortunate to be fortunate.

"But when was it spoken of the tyrant, of the mighty hunter before the Lord or the Devil, that he stayed his hunting to turn over a stone to steal the eggs of insects or poked in a pool to separate the tadpole from the frog? When did he have that minute and microscopic malice that could leave nothing untormented, that could hate the helpless more than the proud, that could cover the land with spies to spoil the love-stories of serfs or mobilise an army to carry off an old beggar from his child? The kings rode by and hurled such beggars a curse or a coin; they did not stop laboriously to dismember their little families limb by limb; that the human heart that feeds on its sad affections might suffer the last and longest agony. There were good kings who waited upon the beggars like servants; yes, even when the beggars were lepers. There were bad kings who would have spurned the beggars and ridden on, and then probably remembered it with terror in the hour of death and left money for masses and charities. But they did not chain up a medieval old man merely for his blindness, as they chained up the modern old man merely for his theory about colour-blindness. And this is the sort of spider's web of worry and misery you have spread over all the unfortunate mass of mankind, because, heaven help us, you are too humane, you are too liberal, you are too philanthropic to endure human government and the name of a king.

"Do you blame us if we have dreamed of a return to simpler things? Do you blame us if we sometimes fancy that a man might not do what all this machinery is doing, if once he were a man and no longer a machine? And what is marching against us to-day except machinery? What has Braintree to tell us to-day except that we are sentimentalists ignorant of science, of social science, of economic science of hard and objective and logical science — of such science as dragged that old man like a leper from all he loved? Let us tell John Braintree that we are not ignorant of science. Let us tell John Braintree that we know too much about science already. Let us tell John Braintree to his teeth that we have had enough of science, enough of enlightenment, enough of education, enough of all his social order with its mantrap of machinery and its death-ray of knowledge. Take this message to John Braintree; all things come to an end and these things are ended. For us there can be no end but the beginning. In the morning of the world, in the Assembly of the Knights, in the house, among the greenwoods of Merry England, in Camelot of the Western Shires, I give the shield to the one man who has done the one deed of all our days worth doing; who has avenged one wrong upon at least one ruffian and saved a woman in distress."

He stooped from his throne with a swift movement and took the great sword from the man below; lifted and shook it so that it seemed to flame like the sword of St. Michael. And then there sounded over all that staring crowd the ancient words that accompany the Accollade and dedicate a man to God and the cause of the widow and orphan.

CHAPTER XV

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

Olive Ashley came away from the scene of the indignant oration looking even paler than usual; nor was she only pale with excitement, but also with a sort of self-inflicted pain. She seemed to have come suddenly to the end and edge of something; to a challenge and a choice. She was one of those women who cannot be stopped from hurting themselves, when once their moral sense is strongly moved. She needed a religion; and chiefly an altar on which to be a sacrifice. She also had in her own way a singular intellectual intensity; and ideas to her were not merely notions. And it seemed to her, with an abrupt and awful clearness, that she could not any longer maintain her merely romantic parley with the enemy, unless she was prepared honestly to go over to him. If she went over, she would go over for ever; and she had to consider what exactly she would leave behind. If it had been merely the whole world, or in other words society, she would not have hesitated; but it was England; it was patriotism; it was plain morals. If the new national cause had really been only an antiquarian antic, or a heraldic show, or even a sentimental reaction such as she might once have dreamed of, she could have brought herself easily to leave it. But now with her whole brain and conscience she was convinced that it would be like deserting the flag in a great war. Her conviction had been finally clinched by the denunciation of Hendry’s oppressors in human and moving terms; the cause was the cause of her father’s old friend and of her father. But it is an ironical fact that what had most convinced her of the justice of Braintree’s great enemy had been the truth of his tribute to Braintree. Without a word to anyone, she went out of the main gateway and took the road to the town.

As Olive walked slowly through the dreary suburbs to the even darker central places of the town of the factories, she became conscious that she had crossed a frontier and was walking in a world she did not know. Of course she had been in such towns a thousand times, and even in that particular town often enough; as it was the nearest town to Seawood Abbey and the house of her friend. But the frontier she had passed was not so much of space as of time; or perhaps not of space but of spirit. Like somebody discovering a new dimension, she realised that there was, and had been all the time, another world beside her own world, a world of which she had heard nothing; nothing from the newspapers; nothing from the politicians, even when they were talking after dinner. The paradox was that the papers and politicians were never so silent about it as when they were supposed to be talking about it.

The great Strike that had begun far away in the mines had been going on for nearly a month. Olive and her friends regarded it as a Revolution; in which they agreed with the very small but determined group of Communists among the strikers. But it was not its being a revolution that surprised or puzzled her. It was rather that it was unlike anything she had ever associated with the word. She had seen silly films and melodramas about the French Revolution and imagined that a popular rising must be a mob, and that a mob must be a mob of half-naked and howling demons. She had known this thing in front of her described as much fiercer than it was and much milder than it was; described by one sort of party hack as a conspiracy of gory brigands against God and the Primrose League; and by another sort of party hack as a trivial though regrettable misunderstanding, which would soon be smoothed out by the sympathetic statesmanship of the Under Secretary to the Ministry of Capital. She had heard about politics all her life; thought she had never been interested in them. But she had never doubted that these were modern politics; and that being interested in modern politics meant being interested in them. The Prime Minister and Parliament and the Foreign Office and the Board of Trade and tiresome things of that sort — there were those things and everything else was Revolution. But as she passed first through the groups in the groups in the street, and then through the groups in the outer offices of official buildings, there dawned on her a truth quite different.

There was a Prime Minister she had never heard of; and he was a man she knew. There was a Parliament she had never heard of; and he had just swayed it with an historic speech that would never go down to history. There was a Board of Trade she had never heard of; a Board that really met and had a great deal more to say about Trade. There were Government Departments quite outside the Government; Government Departments quite against the Government. There was a bureaucracy; there was a hierarchy; there was an army. It had the qualities and defects of such systems; but it was not in the least like the frightful French mob on the film. She heard the people talking round her and mentioning names as her own class mentioned the names of politicians; and she found she knew none of them, except Braintree, and that of one other who had been capriciously picked out by the papers from all the rest and caricatured as a sort of raging buffoon. But the statesmen of this buried state were spoken of with an air of calm familiarity, that made her feel as if she had fallen from the moon. Jimson was right after all and though Hutchins had done good work in his time, he was wrong now. They mustn't always let Ned Bruce talk them round. Now and then Braintree was mentioned as the chief leader, and not unfrequently criticised, which annoyed her a good deal; she was a little thrilled when he was praised. Hatton, the man who had been caricatured so often in the papers as the fire-brand of Red Revolution, was a good deal blamed for his extreme caution and consideration for the employers. Some even said he was in the pay of the capitalists.

For never in any newspaper or book or magazine of modern England had anything remotely resembling a History of the Trade Union Movement come the way of an intelligent and educated English lady like Olive Ashley. The whole of that huge historical change had happened, so far as she was concerned behind a curtain; and the curtain was literally a sheet of paper; a sheet of newspaper. She knew nothing of the differences between Trade Unionists; nothing of the real faults of Trade Unions; not even the very names of men who were directing masses as large as the army of Napoleon. The street seemed full of strange faces or faces all the stranger for being familiar. She caught a glimpse of the large lumbering form of the omnibus-driver that Monkey used to make such a friend of. He was talking, or rather listening, with the others; and his large, shiny, good-humoured face seemed to assent to all that was said. Had Miss Ashley accompanied Monkey on his disgraceful tour round the public-houses, she would even have recognised the celebrated Old George, who now received the challenge of political dispute as he had received the chaff of the tavern. Had she known more of popular life, she would have understood the menacing meaning of the presence of these very sleepy and amiable poor Englishmen amid those sullen groups in the streets. But the next moment she had forgotten all about them. She had only succeeded in penetrating into an outer court of the temple of officialism (it was very like waiting in a Government office) when she heard Braintree's voice outside in the corridor and he came rapidly into the room.

When John Braintree came into the room, Olive instantly and in a flash saw every detail about him; all that she liked in his appearance and all that she disliked in his clothes. He had not grown a beard again, whatever his reaction into revolution; he was always thin and it was partly an effect of energy that he looked haggard; he seemed as vigorous as ever. But when he saw her, he seemed to be simply stunned and stupefied by the mere fact of her presence. All the worries went out of his eyes; and showered beneath them rather a sort of shining sorrow. For worries are never anything but worries, however we turn them round. But a sorrow is always a joy reversed. Something in the situation made her stand up and speak with an unnatural simplicity.

“What can I say?” she said. “I believe now that we must part.”

So, for the first time, it was really admitted between them that they had come together.

There is a great deal of fallacy and folly about the ordinary talk of confidential conversation; to say nothing of the loathsome American notion of a heart to heart talk. People are often very misleading when they talk about themselves; even when they are perfectly honest, and even modest, in talking about themselves. But people tell a great deal so long as they talk about everything except themselves. These two had talked so often and so long about all the things that they cared for so much less than for each other, that they had come to an almost uncanny omniscience, and could sometimes have deduced what one or the other thought about cookery from remarks about Confucius. And, therefore, at this unprepared and apparently pointless crisis, they talked in what would be called parables; and neither for one moment misunderstood the other.

“My God,” said Braintree, out of his full understanding.

“You say it,” she said, “but I mean it.”

“I am not an atheist, if that is what you mean,” he said with a somewhat sour smile. “But perhaps it is true that I only have the noun and you have the possessive adjective. I suppose God does belong to you, like so many other good things?”

“Do you think I would not give them all to you?” she said. “And yet I suppose there is something in one’s mind one cannot give up to anybody.”

“If I did not love you I could lie,” he said; and again neither of them noticed that a word had been said for the first time. “God, what a gorgeous feast of lying I could have just now, explaining how much you mystified me by your incomprehensible attitude; and what had I done to forfeit our beautiful intellectual friendship; and had I not at least a right to an explanation; and all the rest. Lord, if I were only a real politician! It takes a real politician to say that politics do not matter. How lovely it would be to say all the ordinary and natural and newspaper things — widely as we differ upon many points — opposed as we are in politics. I for one am free to say that never — it is the proud boast of political life in this country that the wildest party differences do not necessarily destroy that essential good feeling — oh, hell and the devil and all the dung-heaps of the world! I know what we mean. You and I are people who cannot help caring about right and wrong."

Then after a long silence he said: "I suppose you believe in Herne and all his revival of chivalry? I suppose you really believe it is chivalrous; and even know what you mean by it?"

"I never believed in his chivalry," she said, "till he said he believed in yours."

"That was very good of him," said Braintree quite seriously. "He is a good man. But I am afraid his compliments would do me a good deal of harm in my own camp. Some of those words have already come to be symbols of something else with our people."

"I might answer your people," she said, "rather as you have answered me. I know I am called old-fashioned; and your people have all the new fashions. I feel cross with them; I feel inclined to insult them by calling them fashionable. But they really are. Don't they take up all this business about a woman living for herself and sex making no difference and all the rest of it; just like the intellectual duchesses? They would all say that I was behind the times, and talk of me as if I were a slave in a harem. And yet I will challenge them on that, out of the tragic and hateful tangle in which I am standing to-day. They talk about a woman thinking for herself! They talk about a woman standing alone! How many of the wives of your Socialists are out attacking Socialism? How many women engaged to Labour Members are voting against them at the polls or speaking against them on the platform? Nine-tenths of your revolutionary women are only going along with revolutionary men. But I *am* independent. I am thinking for myself. I am living my own life, as they call it; and a most miserable life it is. I am not going along with a revolutionary man."

There was again a long silence; the sort of silence which endures because it is unnecessary, or rather impossible, to ask questions; and then Braintree took a step nearer and said: "Well, I am miserable enough, if that is part of the logic of the case; and yet again it is just part of this infernal furnace of reality that I cannot attack logic. How easy it is to attack logic! How impossible to find anything else except lying! And then they say that women are not logical; because they never waste logic on things that do not matter. My God, is there any way *out* of logic?"

To anyone who had not known their knowledge of each other, this conversation would have seemed a series of riddles; but Braintree knew the answers before the riddles were asked. He knew that this woman had got hold of a religion and that a religion is often a renunciation. She would not go with him without helping him to the death. And she would not help him; she would resist him to the death. That antagonism between them, as it had arisen in silly remarks and random *repartees* in their first interview in the long room at Seawood, that antagonism, transfigured, enlightened, deepened but all the more defined by knowing all the best of each other, was risen again to a noble height of reason, which he was the last man in the world to despise. People laugh at these things when they find them in the old stories of Roman virtue. They are people who have never loved at the same time a truth and a friend.

"There are some things," she said at last, "that I do know more about than you. You used to make fun of my old stories about knights and ladies; I don't think you will stoop to laugh at them now you are fighting them; but you would laugh again if we were back in the old idle days. And yet those things are not altogether idle or laughable. Poetry sometimes talks plainer than prose, I think; and somebody said our souls are love and a perpetual farewell. Did you ever read that part in Malory — about the parting of Lancelot and Guinevere?"

"I can see it in your face," he said and kissed once, and they parted like the lovers of Camelot.

. . . .

Outside in the dark streets the crowds had grown thicker and thicker; and there were murmurs about mystifications and delays. Like all men in the unnatural posture of revolt, they needed to be perpetually stimulated by something happening; whether it were favourable or hostile. A defiance on the other side would do; but a defiance on their own side was the best; and there had been promises of a great demagogic display that evening. There had been as yet no positive unpunctuality; but something told them that there was somewhere a little hitch. And it was five minutes later that Braintree amid a roar of cheers, appeared on the balcony.

He had hardly said a dozen words before it became apparent that he was talking in a tone that had been unusual in English politics. He had something to say that was of the final sort. He refused a tribunal; and in that there is something of the sort that always moves the deep element of epic poetry in a mob. For nothing can really be approved or applauded except finality. That is why all the ethics of evolution and expansive ideas of indefinite progress have never taken hold upon any human crowd.

The new seat of government had set up a seat of judgment, or chamber of inquiry, for the settlement of the strike which Braintree led. It was a strike now largely confined to the Trade Unions of his own district; which were engaged in the manufacturing of dyes and paints, originally derived from Coal-Tar. The very genuine energy that supported the new government had grappled immediately with the industrial problem in question. It was probable that it would be settled on somewhat saner and simpler lines than those of the complicated compromises of the old professional politician. But it would be settled. That was what the new rulers very legitimately claimed. And that was what Braintree and the strikers very legitimately objected to.

“For nearly a hundred, years,” he said, “they have thundered at us about our duty to respect the Constitution: the King and the House of Lords — and even the House of Commons. We had to respect that too. (Laughter.) We were to be perfect Constitutionalists. Yes, my friends, we were to be the only Constitutionalists. We were the quiet people, the loyal subjects, the people who took the King and the lords seriously. But they were to be free enough. Whenever the fancy took them to upset the Constitution, they were to be indulged in all the pleasures of revolution. They could in twenty-four hours turn the government of England upside down; and tell us that we were all not to be ruled by a Constitutional monarchy but by a fancy dress ball. Where is the King? Who is the King? I have heard he is a librarian interested in the Hittites. (Laughter.) And we are summoned before this revolutionary tribunal — (cheers) — to explain why we have for forty years, under intolerable provocation, failed to resort to revolution. (Loud cheers.) We do not mind their listening to their lunatic librarian if they like.

We will leave this ancient traditional order of chivalry that is ten weeks old; we will respect the profound Conservative principles of continuity that never existed until the other day. But we will not listen to its judgment. We would not submit to lawful Toryism. We will not now submit to lawless Toryism. And if this Wardour Street curiosity shop sends us a message that we must attend its Court — our answer is in four words, ‘We will not come.’”

Braintree had described Herne as a librarian interested in Hittites but he never failed, in public or private to recognise him as a leader of men much more interested in the resurrection of the Middle Ages. And yet it would have surprised Braintree very much to know how Herne was actually occupied at the moment the words were spoken. There was between them indeed that eternal cross purposes which arises between the two opposite types of truthful man. There was all the contrast between the man who knows from the start exactly what he stands for, whose circle of vision whether narrow or no, is intensely clear, who sees all external things as agreeing or disagreeing with it — and that other type which is conscious of everything before it is conscious of itself, which can devour libraries before realising into what mind they have been absorbed, which can create fairy lands in which its own figure is invisible or at least transparent. Braintree had known from the first, almost from the first quarrel in the long room at Seawood, the irony of his own irritated admiration. He had felt the paradox of his impossible romance. The pale and vivid face of Olive Ashley with its lift and poise and pointed chin had entered his world like a wedge, like the spear of something external and antagonistic. He had hated all her world all the more for not hating her.

But with a man like Michael Herne the whole of this process worked backwards. He had hardly realised what personal romance was inspiring the impersonal romance of his historical revolution. He had had nothing but a sense of growing glory within; of a world that grew larger and loftier like an expanding sunrise or a rising tide; and which was yet of the same unconscious stuff as the day-dreams of his youth. He had had at first the feeling that a hobby had become a holiday. He had then had more and more feeling that the holiday had become a festival, in the sense of the solemn festival of a god. Only at the back of his mind did he assume that the god was a goddess. He was a man whose life had been almost wholly without personal relations. Therefore even when he was in fact growing from head to foot with a personal relation, he hardly knew that it was personal. He would have said in a sort of rapture that he was supported in his work by the most glorious friends that God had given to man. He would have spoken of them radiantly and collectively as if of a cloud of angels. And yet at any moment, even from the first, if Rosamund Severne had quarrelled with him and left that company, he would instantly have discovered his disease.

And yet it happened, as such coincidences do happen, hardly half an hour after those two that had met as enemies, and continued as friends, and had parted as lovers. So soon after they had said their farewell amid the incongruous clatter of industrial politics, the man who had in some sense divided them, if only symbolically, discovered that a man is meant in this world to be something more than a symbol. He saw Rosamund standing on the high terrace of the lawn, and the whole earth changed around her.

The news of Braintree's defiance brought a certain doubt and depression to the more romantic group at Seawood but nothing but rage and fury to Rosamund Severne. She was the sort of woman inevitably irritated by strikes if only because they are delays. Waste of time was more vivid to her than loss of principle. Many have imagined that feminine politics would be merely pacifist or humanitarian or sentimental. The real danger of feminine politics is too much love of a masculine policy. There are a good many Rosamund Severnes in the world.

She could get no relief from her impatience from the tone of the men around her, though most of them were in principle far more prejudiced against Braintree than she was. But they did not seem to react as one should react to a challenge. Her father told her at some length the real essentials of the situation, which he would have no difficulty in placing before the malcontents in due course. But as his remarks affected even his own daughter with a sensation of faint fatigue, she could hardly persuade herself that they would affect his mortal enemies to an emotional repentance. Lord Eden was more brief but not much more brisk in his comments. He said that time would show; and expressed doubt about the ultimate economic resources of the revolt. Whether designedly or no, he said nothing about the new organisation of society which he himself had helped to establish. For all of them it seemed as if a shadow had fallen across all that shining array. Beyond the park, beyond the gates of their chivalric paradise, the modern monster, the great black factory town, lay snorting up its smoke in defiance and derision.

"They're all so slack about it," Rosamund confided to Monkey, that universal confidant. "Can't you do something to get a move on? And after all our flag-waving and blowing of trumpets."

"Well," said Murrel dubiously, "all that has what they call a moral effect; only some people call it bluff. If it goes swinging along and everybody falls in with it, the thing works; and it often does. You can try your luck in rallying everybody to a flag. But you don't fight with a flag."

"Do you realise what this man Braintree has done," she cried indignantly. "He has dared us all. He has dared the King-at-Arms and the King."

"Well," replied Murrel in a detached manner, "I don't quite see what the devil else he could do. If I were in his place—"

"But you're not in his place," she cried vehemently, "you're not in the place of any rebel or rioter. Don't you ever think, Douglas, that it is time you were in your own place."

Murrel smiled rather wearily. "I admit," he said, "that I happen to be able to see two sides of a question. And I suppose you'd say its done by walking round and round it."

"I say," she said rising in wrath, "that I never met a man who saw both sides of a question without wanting to clout him on both sides of the head."

Presumably lest she should yield to this impulse, she departed in a storm, and swept up the long lawns and terraces towards the old raised garden in which the play of Blondel the Troubadour had once been performed. And the coincidence came back to her with something of a pang of memory; for in that green deserted theatre stood one green deserted figure in forester's costume, with a mane of light hair and a lifted leonine head, looking across the valley towards the smoking town.

For a moment she stood as if caught in a mesh of memories merely elfin and fantastic; as if she had loved and lost something unreal; the music and emotion of the theatricals revisited her and lulled her lust for action; but in a moment she had brushed it away like a cobweb and spoke in her own firm voice.

"You know your revolutionists have sent their reply. I hear they will not come to the Court."

He looked round slowly in his rather short-sighted fashion; only the pause before he spoke expressed the change in his feelings on hearing the voice that hailed him.

“Yes, I have received their message,” he said mildly. “It was addressed to me. They certainly state their position clearly; but they will come to the Court all right.”

“They will come!” she repeated in some excitement. “Do you mean that Braintree has yielded?”

“They will come, yes,” he repeated, nodding. “Braintree has not yielded; indeed I did not expect him to do so. To tell the truth, I rather respect him for not doing so. He is a very courageous and consistent man; and it is always so much pleasanter to have an opponent of that kind.”

“But I don’t understand,” she cried. “What do you mean by saying they won’t yield but they will come?”

“The new constitution,” he explained, “provides for the situation, as I suppose most constitutions do. It’s rather like what we used to call a subpoena. I don’t know how many men I shall want with me; but I suppose some of the Hundreds may have to turn out.”

“What!” she cried. “You don’t mean that you are going to *fetch* them to the Court!”

“Oh yes, the law is quite clear on that point”, he answered. “And as the law makes me the executive officer, I have really no will in the matter.”

“You seem to have more will than anybody else I’ve come across yet,” she said. “You should hear Monkey!”

“Of course,” he said in his pedantic way, “what I state is a purpose and not a prediction. I cannot answer for what anyone else will do or will succeed in doing. But they will come here or I shall not come.”

His meticulous phraseology suddenly thrilled through her thoughts as she understood what he meant.

“You mean there will be fighting,” she said.

“There certainly will be on our side if there is on theirs,” he answered.

“You are the only man in this house,” cried Rosamund and found herself suddenly trembling from head to foot.

It seemed as if his stiff attitude was staggered so that he lost control of himself quite unexpectedly. He uttered a sort of cry.

“You must not say that to me; I am weak; and weakest of all now, when I should try to be strong.”

“You are not weak at all,” she said, recovering her firm voice.

“I am mad,” he said. “I love you.”

She was dumb. He caught both her hands and his arms thrilled up to the shoulders as with an electric shock.

"What am I doing and saying?" he cried harshly. "I — to you to whom so many men must have said it. What will you say?"

She remained leaning forward and looking steadily into his face.

"I say what I said," she answered. "You are the only man."

"Your eyes blind me," he said.

They spoke no more; but the great land about them and above spoke for them as it rose in the mighty terraces towards the colossal corner-stones of the mountains; and the great wind of West England that rocked the tops of its royal trees; and all that vast valley of Avalon that has seen the muster of heroes and the meeting of immortal lovers, was full of a movement as of the trampling horses and the trumpets, when the kings go forth to battle and queens rule in their stead.

So they stood for a moment on the top of the world and in the highest place of our human fortune, almost at the moment when Olive and John Braintree in the dark and smoky town were taking their sad farewell. And no man could have guessed that the sad farewell was soon to be followed with fuller reconciliation and understanding; but that over the two coloured and shining figures, on the shoulder of the golden down, hung a dark cloud of sundering and division and doom.

CHAPTER XVI

THE JUDGMENT OF THE KING

Lord Seawood and Lord Eden were seated in their favourite summer-house on the lawn, the same into which the arrow had once entered like the first shaft of a new sunrise; and to judge by their faces they were doubtful whether the sun were not in eclipse. Lord Eden's rigidity of expression might indeed have many meanings; but old Seawood was shaking his head in an openly disconsolate manner.

"If they had availed themselves of my intervention," he said. "I could I think have made clear the impossibility of their position; a position quite unparalleled in the whole of my public life. The restoration of our fine old historical forms must have the profound sympathy of every cultivated man; but it is against all precedent that they should use these forms for the practical suppression of material menace. What would Peel have said, had it been proposed to use only the antiquated halberds of a few Beefeaters in the Tower instead of the excellent and effective Constabulary which he had the genius and imagination to conceive? What would Palmerston have said, had anyone suggested to him that the Mace lying on the table of Parliament could be used as a club with which to quell a riot in Parliament Square? Impossible as it is for us to project upon the future the actions of the mighty dead of the past, I conceive it as likely that he would have made it the subject of a jest. But men in the present generation are devoid of humour."

"Our friend the King-at-Arms is devoid of humour all right," drawled Eden. "I sometimes wonder whether he is not the happier for it."

"There," said the other nobleman with firmness. "I cannot agree. Our English humour, such as that to be found in the best pages of *Punch* is — ."

At this moment a footman appeared silently and abruptly in the entrance of the hut, murmured some ritual words and handed a note to his master. The reading of it changed his master's dolorous expression to one of unaffected astonishment.

"God bless my soul," said Lord Seawood; and remained gazing at the paper in his hand.

For upon that paper was scrawled in a large and bold hand a message destined in the next few days to change the whole face of England; as nothing for centuries had ever been changed by a battle upon English soil.

"Either our young friend is really suffering from delusions," he said at last, "or else—"

"Or else," said Lord Eden gazing at the roof of the summer-house, "he has surrounded and taken the town of Milldyke, captured the Bolshevist headquarters and is bringing the leaders here to the trial."

"This is most remarkable," said the other nobleman. "Were you informed of this before?"

"I was not informed of it at all," answered Eden, "but in any case I thought it highly probable."

"Curious," repeated Seawood, "and I thought it so highly improbable; so highly improbable as to merge itself in what we call the impossible. That a mere stage army of that description — why I thought all educated and enlightened people were aware that such weapons are quite obsolete."

"That," answered Eden, "is because educated and enlightened people never think. Your enlightened man is always taking away the number he first thought of. It seems to be a sign of education first to take a thing for granted and then to forget to see if it is still there. Weapons are a very good working example. The man says he won't go on wearing a sword because it is no longer any good against a gun. Then he throws away all the guns as relics of barbarism; and then he is surprised when a barbarian sticks him through with a sword. You say that pikes and halberds are not weapons against modern conditions. I say pikes are excellent weapons against no pikes. You say it is all antiquated medieval armament. But I put my money on men who make medieval armament against men who only disapprove of modern armament. And what have any of these political parties ever done about armament except profess to disapprove of it? They renounce it and neglect it and never think of the part it played in political history; and yet they go about with a vague security as if they were girt about with invisible guns that would go off at the first hint of danger. They're doing what they always do; mixing up their Utopia that never comes with their old Victorian security that's already gone. I for one am not at all surprised that a pack of pantomime halberdiers can poke them off the stage. I've always thought a coup d'état could be effected with very small forces against people who won't learn to use the force they've got. But I never had the moral courage to do it myself; it needs somebody very different from our sort."

“Perhaps,” remarked the other aristocrat, “it was due to our being, to quite a very recent political formula, too proud to fight.”

“Yes,” replied the old statesman. “It is the humble who fight.”

“I am not sure that I quite follow your meaning,” said Lord Seawood.

“I mean I am too wicked to fight,” said Lord Eden. “It is the innocent who kill and burn and break the peace. It is children who rush and smash and knock each other about and of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

It is not certain that even then his venerable Victorian companion was wholly and lucidly of one mind with him; but there was no more to be got out of him on the subject; and he remained with a face of flint looking up the long path towards the gates of the park. And indeed that road and that entrance were already shaken with the tumult and triumph of which he spoke; and the songs of young men who come back from battle.

“I apologise to Herne,” said Julian Archer with hearty generosity. “He is a strong man. I’ve always said that what we wanted to see was a Strong Man in England.”

“I once saw a Strong Man at Olympia,” said Murrel reminiscently. “I believe people often apologised to him.”

“You know what I mean,” answered the other good-humouredly. “A statesman. A man who knows his own mind.”

“Well, I suppose a madman knows his own mind,” answered Murrel. “I rather fancy a statesman ought to know a little about other people’s minds.”

“My dear Monkey, what’s the matter with you,” demanded Archer. “You seem to be quite sulky when everybody else is pleased.”

“It’s not so offensive as being pleased when everybody else is sulky,” answered Murrel. “But if you mean am I satisfied, I will admit your penetration in perceiving that I’m not. You said just now that we wanted a strong man in England. Now I should say that the one place where we never have wanted a strong man is England. I can only remember one person who went into the profession, poor old Cromwell; and the consequence was that we dug him up to hang him after he was dead and went mad with joy for a month because the throne was going back to a weak man — or one we thought was a weak man. These high-handed ways don’t suit us a bit, either revolutionary or reactionary. The French and the Italians have frontiers and they all feel like soldiers. So the word of command doesn’t seem humiliating to them; the man is only a man but he commands because he is the commander. But we are not democratic enough to have a dictator. Our people like to be ruled by gentlemen, in a general sort of way. But nobody could stand being ruled by one gentleman. The idea is too horrible."

"I don't know what you mean exactly," said Archer discontentedly, "but I am glad to say that I think Herne knows what he means all right. And he'll jolly well make these fellows understand what he means as well."

"My dear fellow," said Murrel, "it takes all sorts to make a world. I don't gush about gentlemen, as you know; they're a stuffy lot, often enough. But gentlemen have managed to rule this island pretty successfully for about three hundred years; and they've done it because nobody ever did understand what they meant. They could make a mistake to-day and undo it to-morrow, without anybody knowing anything about it. But they never went too far in any direction to make it quite impossible to go back. They were always yielding here and modifying there; and patching things up somehow. Now it may be a jolly fine sight to see old Herne charging with all his chivalry. But if he will charge, he can't retreat. If he figures as a hero to you, he will figure as a tyrant to the other fellows. Now it was the very soul of our old aristocratic policy that even a tyrant must never figure as a tyrant. He may break down everybody's fences and steal everybody's land, but he must do it by Act of Parliament and not with a great two-handed sword. And if he meets the people he's disposed, he must be very polite to them and enquire after their rheumatism. That's what kept the British Constitution going — enquiring after the rheumatism. If he begins giving people black eyes or bloody scars, those things will be remembered in quite another way, whether he was right or wrong in the quarrel. And Herne isn't by a hell of a long way so right in this quarrel as he thinks he is; being a simple-minded sort."

"Well," remarked Archer, "You're not a very enthusiastic comrade-in-arms."

"As to that," said Murrel gloomily, "I don't know whether I'm a comrade-in-arms; but I'm not an infant in arms. And Herne is."

"There you go again," remarked the aggravated Archer. "You were always defending him so long as he was futile."

"And you were always abusing him so long as he was harmless," replied Murrel. "You were always calling him a lunatic. Well, that may be; personally I rather like lunatics. What I complain of is that you have swung clean round to his side, merely because he is a dangerous lunatic."

"Pretty successful for a lunatic," said the other.

"That is the only dangerous sort," said Murrel. "That's what I mean by his being an infant; and an infant that shouldn't be allowed to bear arms. Everything is too simple to him. Even his success is too simple. He sees everything in black and white; with the need of restoring holy order and a hierarchy of chivalry on the one side and nothing but howling barbarians and blind anarchy on the other. He will succeed; he has already succeeded. He will hold his court and impose his judgment and bring the mutiny to an end; and you will not see that a new sort of history will have begun. Our party leaders have always been reconciled by history; and Pitt and Fox had statues side by side. But you are starting two histories, one told by the conquerors and the other by the conquered. Herne will deliver his judgment, which will be praised by all organs of the State like a judgment of Mansfield; but Braintree will make a defence or defiance that will be remembered by all rebels like the dying speech of Emmett. You are making something new; at once a sword that divides and a shield with two sides to it. It is not England; it is not ourselves. It is Alva a hero for Catholics and a hobgoblin for Protestants; it is Frederick the father of Prussia and the murderer of Poland. When you see Braintree condemned by this tribunal, you won't understand how much is being condemned with him; how much that you like as much as I do."

"Are you a Bolshevist?" enquired his friend, staring at him in a puzzled fashion.

"I am the last Liberal," said Murrel. "In fact I've escaped from Madame Tussand's."

. . . .

Michael Herne took all his duties seriously, but it was soon apparent to some that he took one of them sadly. It was apparent at least to Rosamund Severne, and she guessed quickly at the cause. She was a woman of the sort that is very much of a mother; that sort of lady is often found attached to that sort of lunatic. She knew that he took the other and more external functions seriously, and strangely without a smile. She knew that he could lead his men as Commander of the Hundreds and then give judgment as President of the Court of Arbitrament, without ever once thinking of Pooh-Bah. She knew that he could lay aside the red cape and crest he wore as a Commander and put on over his green suit dark purple robes and a high cap of strange shape, like that of Doge before ascending the judgment seat, and never for a moment remember the hundred uniforms of the German

Emperor. But in this later case of the Court of Arbitrament she could see there was something a little graver than gravity. To begin with, there seemed to be an immense load of labour. Herne worked all day and sat up nearly all night over mountains of books and bales of papers; and grew pale with wakefulness and concentration. She knew in a general way that it was his business to lay down the law, the old feudal law or whatever it was that was now being reconstituted, and apply it to the crushing of all this industrial anarchy and delay. She heartily approved of that; indeed it had been almost the basis of her approval. But she had not realised that it would mean so much research and codification out of the queer old codes and charters. Nor indeed were the queer old codes alone involved; there were things she thought queerer still. New documents on what seemed the most irrelevant subjects, chiefly scientific subjects, were handed in to swell the pile; one was endorsed on the back with the signature of Douglas Murrel. What in the world Monkey could have to do with it she could not conceive. But though there were all these things to weary and even worry the Arbiter, she knew well enough that something else made his duty somewhat distressing to him.

"I know what you are feeling like, Michael," she said. "It is hateful to have to triumph over people we like. And I know you like John Braintree."

He looked at her for a moment over his shoulder and she was quite startled by the expression of his face.

"I didn't know you liked him so much as that," she said.

He turned his head away abruptly; indeed there was something strangely abrupt in his whole manner.

"But I know the other part of you as well," she said. "You will do justice."

"Yes," he answered. "I shall do justice." And he put his head on his hands.

She felt a fine reverence for his broken friendship and silently left the library.

A minute or two after he picked up his pen again and continued to annotate documents and turn over reports; but before doing so he looked for a moment at the vast roof of the library where he had laboured so long; and especially at that high corner of the bookcase to which he had climbed in the beginning of this story.

John Braintree, who had never preferred any particular reverence for the romantic pageantry of the hour, even when it was praised by the person for whom he cared most, was not likely to admire it when it came arrayed with all the terrors of judgment against him, and adorned with the purple robes and golden sword-hilts of all the people he cared about least. His demeanour was openly contemptuous; but contempt is never contemptible in those who are defeated and defiant. When asked whether he wished to add any preliminary statement to the documents placed before the Court, he had appeared as defiantly detached as Charles the First.

"I see no Court," he said. "I only see a lot of people who seem to be dressed up as court cards. I know of no reason why I should recognise the brute force of the brigands, merely because they are stage brigands. I suppose I shall have to listen while the mummery proceeds; but I do not propose to say anything until you bring out the racks and the thumb-screws and the faggots to burn us alive. For I presume you have revived these also with all the vanished beauties of the Middle Ages. You are a scholar of admitted learning and I suppose you will give us a complete historical reconstruction of medievalism."

"Yes," replied Herne with complete gravity. "Not in detail perhaps, for no one would defend every detail of any system, but in general plan we do desire to reconstruct the medieval scheme. You are not, however, charged with any conduct which could in any case involve the punishment of burning; and that question therefore does not arise."

"Oh thank you," said Braintree agreeably. "But is not this favouritism?"

"Order, order," cried Julian Archer indignantly. "How can we proceed if the Court is not respected?"

"But for these things," continued the Arbiter, "for which you can be shown to be responsible, in relation to any public peril, for these you and any other persons will be judged by this Court and this Court alone. It is not I who speak: it is the Law."

Michael Herne cut short in midair, with a gesture sharp as the slash of a sword, the cry of acclaim and applause that greeted his words. The men who applauded him, anticipating his words with radiant faces, had always hitherto found those words like the words of a leader ringing and rousing and militant and even flamboyant. But he had too serious a sense of all the new parts he played to be flamboyant on the seat of judgment. Whatever condemnations he had to deliver against the enemies of his new realm, must be weighted with the composure and even coldness of impersonal justice. The applause simmered down into silence; but it was still an eager and even an enthusiastic silence. He proceeded in a voice singularly level and even monotonous.

"It has been our task," he said, "to recover an ancient order. We would remake an old law, but in this we cannot wholly escape the duty of making a new one. The great ages from which we draw our life were rich in variety and even in exception; and we must abstract from them general principles apart from contradictory details. In the case before us of the quarrels arising out of what are called the products of Coal, especially the work necessary for the production of dyes and colours from Coal-Tar, we must begin by recurring to certain general principles that once governed the necessary labour of the world. Those principles were very different from those of which we hear most in the more modern times, and in the movements of a restless and often lawless epoch. They were marked by order and, I will add, by obedience."

A murmur of approval broke out among his followers; and Braintree, on the other side, uttered a harsh laugh.

"In the old guild organisation," continued Herne, "this obedience was expected from apprentices and from journeymen towards a class that may broadly be called, as in our modern system, the Masters. A Master was one who produced a Masterpiece. That is, he had passed an examination by the guild in a complete piece of work of the craft; and the guild insisted on a serious standard of craftsmanship. It was normally with this Master's tools and shop and private capital that the work was done; the apprentice was one to whom this craft was being taught and the journeyman one who had not completely learnt it, but was finishing his education by hiring himself out to different masters, often in the course of a journey through different places. Men could eventually become Masters by producing Masterpieces in due course. That is, in general outline, the ancient organization of Labour. Applying it to the present case, we find the following situation. There are, in the large field covered by this work, practically three Masters; in the sense of men with whose tools and capital the craft is conducted. I have ascertained their names and I find that between them they practically share that ownership. 0ne is Sir Howard Pryce, formerly a Master in the manufacture of soap, but having in some rapid fashion become in turn a Master in the matter of Paints and Dyes. The second is Hubert Arthur

Severne, now Baron Seawood. The third is John Henry Heriot Eames, now known as the Earl of Eden. But I have no note of the date or occasion of their presenting Masterpieces in the manufacture of dyes or pigments. And I have been unable to obtain any evidence of their labouring personally in the craft, or of their educating their apprentices to do so."

The face of Douglas Murrel had worn for some time a lively and alert expression; but by this time an expression of an entirely new kind began to flicker upon some of the faces around him. Indeed the look of blank mystification, which had been fixed for a moment on the fine features of Julian Archer, had already given place to that smouldering protest which always lay so near the surface of his social self-expression; and he had already reached the point of ejaculating, "Oh! I say — ."

"In this matter," went on the Arbiter, "we must be careful to distinguish the intellectual principle involved from any emotional differences about the tone and terms of discussion. I will not refer to the language used here by the Leader of the Labour organisation, especially in its reference to myself. But if he states that the Craft should be controlled by those who completely and competently practise it, I have no hesitation in saying that he states the ancient medieval ideal and states it correctly."

For the first time in the proceedings Braintree himself seemed to be brought to a standstill; staring and having nothing to say. If it was a compliment to be called a correct medievalist, it was one that he seemed to have a difficulty in receiving with proper grace. But among the changed and restless groups on the other side murmurs had already grown louder and more articulate; and Julian Archer, not yet prepared to interrupt the speaker, was conducting an indignant conversation with Murrel in very resounding whispers.

"Of course," continued Herne, "it is open to Lord Eden and Lord Seawood to take advantage of this system and present a Masterpiece of this form of manual labour. I do not know whether they would be resuming a craft, with which they were occupied at some time of which I have no record; or whether it would be necessary for them to be entered under articles; and act as two apprentices to some existing labourer. . . ."

"Pardon me," said the sturdy and sensible Mr. Hanbury suddenly standing up, "but are we all having a joke? I only ask for information; because I like jokes."

Herne looked at him and he sat down; and the former went on as steadily as ever.

“In the third case, that of the gentleman once interested in the making of Soap, I confess I can see my way less clearly. I do not quite understand by what process he passed from one Craft and Mystery to another; a proceeding by no means easy under the old order and organisation we are trying to restore. But that in its turn brings me to another matter; also immediately connected with the cause we are trying; about which I am compelled to speak more severely. Upon this first point, however, let the decision be clear. It is the judgment of the Arbiter and the Court of Arbitrament that the contention of John Braintree, that the Craft should be governed solely by Master Craftsmen, is in accordance with our tradition, is just and is approved.”

“I’m damned if it is,” said Hanbury, continuing to look quite stolid after uttering the remark.

“Hang it all, it’s the whole question,” cried Archer, in a highly reasonable voice that rose to something like a shriek. “Why, a decision like that—”

“The decision is given,” said the Arbiter steadily.

“No, but—” began Sir Julian Archer not at all steadily, “you simply can’t—”

“Order, order,” said Braintree sardonically. “How can we get on if the Court is not respected?”

The Court appeared to take no notice of the interruption or the rebuke; but anyone looking closely at the man delivering its decision would have seen that his gravity grew more and more severe, like a strain, and that he was pale with the effort to be thus concentrated and cold.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DEPARTURE OF DON QUIXOTE

And all this first hubbub, the two noblemen who had been named sat as still and stiff as mummies; though the reason of the rigidity might differ. Lord Seawood was simply gaping; he wore such an expression as the human head might wear if the body were suddenly blown away from under it and it were left hanging in midair. The judge might be joking; but it was not so that a judge should joke. And if he was not joking . . . where was earth and air and sky? But Lord Eden, curiously enough, sat quite unmoved and his archaic smile if anything deepened. He seemed, in his grim way, quite gratified. It was almost as if he had guessed what was coming. For the next moment the Arbiter went on.

"The principle is approved, that is, so far as that statement of it goes. Here again it is essential to understand such statements with a certain logical precision. If we are defining or describing a Craft or Trade, as it originally was and as it reasonably should be, that is the statement and we ask no other. The government of such a craft or trade rests of right with the master craftsmen and master traders. But the old order recognised other rights as well; and among them the right of private property. The craftsman worked and the trader traded with his own private property. In a case like the present, we must admit that even if the abstract right of management ought to belong to the workers, the materials do still in fact belong to the three men I have named."

"That's better," came the Archerian aside like a sort of explosive sigh; and old Seawood's head began to nod tremulously and doubtfully like that of a Chinese doll. But the hard head of Eden remained motionless, with its hard and confident smile.

"Broadly speaking," continued the expositor, "medieval ethics and jurisprudence affirmed the principle of private property with rather more elaboration and modification than most modern systems, till we come to the system called Socialism. It was generally admitted, for example, that a man might be actually or apparently in possession of property to which he had no right, because it had been acquired by methods condemned by Christian morals; as, for example, by usury. There were also laws against what was called forestalling and other methods for securing the whole of any particular material in the market. Outside such crimes, however, which were often severely punished by the pillory and even by the gallows, the personal possession of wealth was accepted as normal; and I cannot see any reasonable doubt that the personal wealth of these three persons is what is actually being employed in this industry. It is, I may remark, the greater part of their personal wealth. Two of them are the titular owners of large landed estates; but these have grown less and less profitable and are partly mortgaged. The wealth which makes them all wealthy men comes from the successful operations of the Coal-Tar Colour and Dye Company, in which they own most of the shares. Those operations are so successful that over the whole of this country, and practically over the whole of the industrialised world, the only type of artists' colours, crayons, pastels and so on that are sold and used come from the chemical works where these by-products are used. It only remains to ask by what form of commercial enterprise such a superiority has been achieved."

A curious change had come over the audience by this time. Most of them, lulled by the familiar phrases of the magnificent prospectus or commercial report, had nodded themselves almost into a slumber of agreement. But, what was much more remarkable, for the first time Lord Seawood was smiling; and Lord Eden was not.

"It so happens that an accident, or rather an adventure (one of the most honourable adventures of the new Comrades of this Realm) has revealed the facts about a typical test case. We actually have before us the history of a master Craftsman of the older sort; one who undoubtedly compounded his own pigments with his own hands and in accordance with his own taste and judgment; and who produced thereby a particular article which the best artists of his time regarded as unique and which later artists have tried in vain to replace. The article is not sold by the Coal-Tar Colour and Dye Company. The man is not in any way profited, or even employed, by the Coal-Tar Colour and Dye Company. What has happened to that Masterpiece? What has happened to that Master?

"From information laid before me by the gallant gentlemen I have mentioned, I am in a position to say what happened to them. The man was beaten down to a condition of beggary, was so much broken by despair as to be accused of insanity; and it is perfectly clear that the methods employed to drive him from his shop and his livelihood were the methods of which I have spoken; the buying up of materials before they could reach him, the cutting off of his supplies, the cutting down of his prices by a conspiracy to undersell and all the rest. I need not describe them more generally than I have done already; by saying that among our fathers the men who did these things could be pilloried or hanged. The men who have done these things to-day are the three shareholders of this Company; the three Masters of this Trade."

Then he named the three again formally and at length in a hard voice; but upon the name of Lord Seawood his voice seemed for an instant to break. He did not look at any face in the crowd.

"On this second point, therefore, the Court of Arbitrament decides that the private property employed in this business is not lawfully acquired; and cannot plead, as it normally would, the privilege of just possession. To sum up, it is decreed, first that the craft should be ruled by its fully enfranchised members, subject to any just claim of property; and second, that the claim of property made in this case is not just. We shall adjudge to the Guild — ."

Old Seawood sprang up as if galvanised; and a simple sort of vainglory deeper than all Victorian vanities came gasping to the surface like a drowning thing. He forgot even the snobbish fear of snobbishness.

"I had imagined," he said, stammering with emphasis, "that this movement was to restore a true respect for Nobility. I am not aware that any of these workshop regulations applied to Nobility."

"Ah," said Herne in a low voice like an aside; "it has come at last."

It seemed as if he spoke for the first time in a human voice, and the effect was all the stranger because of the strange words in which he spoke again. "I am not a man," he said. "I am here only a mouthpiece to make clear the law; the law that knows nothing of men or women. But I ask you this before it is too late. Do not appeal to rank and title; do not make your claim as nobles and peers."

"Why not?" cried the boisterous Archer.

"Because about that also," replied Herne, who was deadly pale, "you have been fools enough to bid me find out the truth."

"Oh what the devil does all this mean," cried Archer in his agony.

"Damned if I know," replied the stolid Mr. Hanbury.

"Ah yes, I had forgotten," said the Arbiter in a vibrating voice, "you are not common craftsmen; you have not learnt to make paints; you have not dipped your hands in dyes. You have passed through loftier ordeals; you have watched your armour; you have won your spurs. But your crests and titles come to you from remote antiquity; and you have not forgotten the names you bear."

"Naturally we haven't forgotten our own names," said Eden testily.

"Strangely enough," said the Arbiter, "that is exactly what you have done."

There was another enigmatic silence, that seemed to be filled with the staring eyes of Archer and Hanbury; and then the voice of the Arbiter was heard once more; but it gave them a new sort of start, for it had taken on again the leaden weight of legal exposition.

"In the course of applying serious historical methods to these questions of heraldry and heredity, to which my attention had been directed, I have discovered a singular state of things. It would appear to be precisely the opposite state of things to that which prevails in the general popular impression. To put it briefly, I have found very few people possessing any pedigrees that would be recognised in the heraldic or feudal sense of medieval aristocracy. But those there are are quite poor and obscure persons, not even of the rank which we should call middle class. But in all the three counties coming under my consideration, the men who seem to have no claim whatever to noble birth are the noblemen."

He said it in a lifeless and impersonal tone, as if he were lecturing to students on the Hittites. But perhaps it was a little overdone; the words with which he went on were rather too dead and distinct. "Their estates have generally been obtained quite recently and often by methods of doubtful morality, let alone chivalry; by small solicitors and speculators employing various forms of mortgage, of foreclosing and the rest. In assuming the estates, these ingenious persons generally assumed not only the titles but the names of older families. The name of the Eden family is not Eames but Evans. The name of the Seawood family is not Severne but Smith."

And with that Murrel, who had been painfully watching the pale face and rigid attitude of the speaker, suddenly muttered an exclamation and understood.

All around there was a hubbub now altogether broken up and uncontrolled; but it was still not a concerted cry but a noise as of everybody talking at once; and high above it all the hard voice of the Arbiter could still be heard.

"The only two men in this section of the county who can claim the nobility, to which appeal has been made, are a man now driving an omnibus between here and the town of Milldyke and a small green-grocer in the same town. No other person can call himself *Armiger Generosus* except William Pond and George Carter."

"O Lor lumme, Old George!" cried Murrel, startled into throwing back his head with a shout of laughter. The laughter was infectious; it broke the strain and received them all into a roaring gulf; the true refuge of the English. Even Braintree, suddenly remembering the solid smile of Old George in the Green Dragon, could not control his amusement.

But, as Lord Seawood had accurately remarked, the Arbiter of the Court of Arbitrament was deficient in a sense of humour. He had never properly studied the back volumes of Punch.

"I do not know," he said, "why this man's lineage should be ridiculous. He has not, so far as I know, done anything to stain his coat of arms. He has not plotted with thieves and forestallers to ruin honest men. He has not taken money at usury and laid field to field by chicane, served the ruling families like a dog and then fed on the dying families like a vulture. But you — you who come here to grind the faces of the poor with your pomposities of property and gentility, and your grand final flourish of chivalry — what about you? You sit in another man's house; you bear another man's name; the blazon of another is on your shield; the crest of another is on your gate-posts; your whole story is the story of new men in old clothes, and you come here to me to plead against justice in the name of your noble ancestry."

The laughter had died down but the noise was even louder; there was now no disguise or hesitation about its nature; all the broken cries had come together; there was a new noise of the mob when it changes to the pack in cry. Archer and Hanbury and ten or twelve other men were standing up and shouting; and yet high above all the other noises the one voice still managed to soar unsilenced; the voice of the fanatic on the judgment seat.

"Let it be enrolled therefore for the third judgment and the answer to the third plea. These three men have claimed the mastery of a craft and the obedience of all their workmen; and their cause is judged. They make the claim of mastery and they are not masters. They make the claim of property and they are not the proprietors. They make the claim of nobility and they are not nobles. The three pleas are disallowed."

"Well," gasped Archer, "and how long is this to be allowed."

The noise had somewhat subsided as in weariness; and each man looked at the other as if really wondering what would come next.

Lord Eden had risen slowly and lazily to his feet, with his hands thrust in his trousers' pockets.

"Mention has been made," he said, "of somebody being charged with insanity. I am sorry that a painful scene of the sort should have occurred in this place; but isn't it time some humane person interfered?"

"Somebody send for a doctor," cried Archer in a crowing and excited voice.

"You appointed him yourself, Eden," said Murrel, looking sharply over his shoulder.

"We all make mistakes," said Eden soberly. "I'll never deny that the lunatic has the laugh of me. But it's a rather unpleasant scene for the ladies."

"Yes," said Braintree. "The ladies have an opportunity of admiring the grand finale of all your loyalty and your vows."

"If," said the Arbiter calmly, "it be an end of your loyalty to me, it is not an end of my loyalty to you; or to the law that I have sworn to expound. It is nothing for me to stand down from this seat; but it is everything to speak the truth while I stand here; and it is less than nothing whether you hate the truth or no."

"You were always a play-actor," called out Julian Archer angrily.

A strange smile passed over the pale face of the judge.

"There," he said, "you are singularly wrong. I was not always a play-actor; I was a very humble and humdrum person until you wanted me and made me a play-actor. But I found the play you acted was something much more real than the life you led. The rhymes we spoke in mummery on that lawn were so much more like life than any life that you were living then. And how very like what we are living now." His voice did not change but seemed to roll on more rapidly, as if verse were more natural than prose.

"The evil kings sit easy on their thrones Shame healed with habit; but what panic aloft What wild white terror if a king were good What staggering of the stars; what prodigy! Men easily endure an unjust master But a just master no men will endure His nobles shall rise up, his knights betray him, And he go forth, as I go forth, alone."

He stood down suddenly from the dais; and seemed to look taller for the fall.

"If I cease to be king or judge," he cried, "I shall still be a knight; though it be, as in the play, a knight-errant. But you will all be play-actors. Rogues and vagabonds, where did you steal your spurs?"

A spasm of something indescribable, like a twitch of involuntary humiliation, crossed the crabbed face of old Eden and he said testily, "I wish this scene would end."

It could only have one ending. Braintree was glowing with a dark exultation; but the men about him understood almost as little of the decision in their favour as the men in front; and in any case the latter were long past letting them intervene. And all that chivalric company answered with murmurs or sombre silence the appeal of their late leader for support. In answer to that call only two of them moved. From the outer skirts of the crowd Olive Ashley came slowly forward with the movement of a princess and, casting one darkly radiant look at the leader of the labourers, took her station by the judgment-seat. She did not dare to look at the white and stony face of the woman who was her friend. A moment after Douglas Murrel lounged to his feet with a singular grimace and went to stand on the opposite side of the Arbiter. They seemed like strange repetitions, and even parodies, of the lady and the squire who had held the shield and sword on either side of him, on the day when he was crowned.

Standing before his judgment-seat, the judge made one last ritual gesture like the rending of the robes of old. He rent from him the long dark robe of black and purple which was his judicial vestment, and letting it fall stood up in the complete suit of close fitting green which he had always worn since the dramatic day after the drama.

"I will go forth as a real outlaw," he said, "and as men do robbery on the highway I will do right on the highway; and it will be counted a wilder crime."

He turned his back on them and for a moment his wild glance seemed to stray hither and thither round the empty throne.

"Have you lost anything?" asked Murrel.

"I have lost everything," replied Herne and Murrel looked for a moment into his ghastly eyes.

Then he saw what he was seeking and picked up the great spear that had gone with his forester's garb and strode away towards the gateways of the park.

Murrel remained staring after him for a moment and then, as if propelled by a new impulse, ran after him down the path, hailing him by name. The man in green turned and looked at him with a pale and patient face.

"I say," said Murrel, "may I come with you?"

"Why should you come with me?" asked Herne, not rudely but rather as if he were addressing a stranger.

"Don't you know me?" asked Murrel. "Don't you know my name? Well, perhaps you don't know my real name."

"What do you mean?" asked Herne.

"My name," said the other, "is Sancho Panza."

Twenty minutes later there passed from the lands of Lord Seawood a *cortege* eminently calculated to show how the grotesque dogs the footprints of the fantastic. For Mr. Douglas Murrel had by no means the intention of losing his faculty of enjoying the absurd with a complete gravity. The last stage of that exit was worth seeing, though only a few of the strayed revellers or rioters were there to see it. As soon as Murrel had obtained the post of squire for which he petitioned, he vanished behind an adjoining outhouse and reappeared perched on the top of his celebrated hansom cab and driving its crazy cab-horse. Bowing from his perch with the deference of a polished servant, he appeared to be inviting his new master to get into the cab. But there was to be one more crescendo or bathos and medley of the sublime and the ridiculous; for with one last impulse of outrageous solemnity, the knight-errant in green sprang astride of the cab-horse and signalled with his lifted spear.

Like a revelation of lightning, in the instant before annihilating laughter came down like night, those who saw it saw a vision and a memory, bright and brittle as an instant's resurrection of the dead. The bones of the gaunt, high-featured face, the flame-like fork of the beard, the hollow and almost frantic eyes, were in a setting that startled with recognition; rigid above the saddle of Rosinante, tall and in tattered arms he lifted that vain lance that for three hundred years has taught us nothing but to laugh at the shaking of the spear. And behind him rose a vast yawning shadow like the very vision of that leviathan of laughter; the grotesque cab like the jaws of a derisive dragon pursuing him for ever, as the vast shadow of caricature pursues our desperate dignity and beauty, hanging above him for ever threatening like the wave of the world; and over all, the lesser and lighter human spirit, not unkindly, looking down on all that is most high.

And yet, though that towering and toppling appendage of absurdity was dragged behind him like an overwhelming load, for that instant of time it was erased and forgotten, in the force and appalling passion of his face.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SECRET OF SEAWOOD

It had been a day of amazement for many, in which their prophet who had come to bless had remained to curse and had at last gone away cursing. But of all those who were shocked at the judgment which had condemned them, perhaps not one had been more amazed than the man whom the judgment had justified. John Braintree stood staring throughout the whole process by which what seemed to him like laws of the Stone Age were dug up like stone hatchets and offered to him as weapons. Whatever else he had expected, whether feudal vindictiveness or chivalrous magnanimity, he had never dreamed of hearing his own cause supported as a piece of pure medievalism. So far as he could make out, he himself was much the most medieval person present. It made him feel very uncomfortable.

Then, as he stood rolling his eyes round the dissolution of that queer transformation scene, they alit on a special object; he stiffened, pulled himself together, gave a short laugh and strode across to where Olive was standing beside the empty throne. He put his hands on her shoulders and said: “It seems dear we are reconciled after all.”

She looked at him without moving and with a slow smile. “It is dreadful,” she said, “to think I should be glad of the quarrel that makes the — the reconciliation.”

“You will forgive me for feeling only the gladness and not the dreadfulness,” he answered. “People must be on my side if they are on his side — I mean if they are really on his side, like you.”

“I shall not find it so very difficult to be on your side,” she said. “I found it very difficult not to be. Especially when it was the losing side.”

“We shall jolly well see now,” he said, “whether it won’t be the winning side. This has put heart into all my people, I can tell you. I feel as if I’d renewed my youth like the eagle’s; only it isn’t Mr. Herne that has done that.”

She looked slightly embarrassed and then said doubtfully, “I suppose somebody else will inherit the organisation.

“Organisation be blowed,” said Braintree. “You don’t suppose we were beaten by an organisation, do you? We were beaten by a man and by men who were ready to follow him. Do you think I care anything about the men who were ready to desert him? I said I wasn't afraid of fourteenth century bows and battle-axes; I wasn't; and I'm certainly not afraid of a fourteenth century battle-axe brandished by old Seawood. Oh yes, I suppose they'll go on with the theatricals. We shall have the pleasure of hearing all about Sir Julian Archer, the brilliant Lord High Arbiter and universally popular King-at-Arms. But don't you give us credit for being able to go smash through all that sort of thing like coloured paper? The soul is gone out of it; the soul is riding down the road a mile away."

"Yes, I think you are right," she said after a pause, "and not only because Michael Herne has been something like a great man. It's more than that. Their pride has gone out of them; their youth and their innocence have gone out of them. They have heard the truth and they know it is true. And there's one of them about whom I am very unhappy."

He looked at her earnestly and said, "Well, of course I'm sorry for a lot of them in a way; but do you mean—"

"I mean Rosamund," she answered lowering her voice. "I think it's the most grim and grand and dreadful thing that ever happened to anybody; much worse than anything that ever happened to us."

"I'm not sure I understand," he said.

"Of course you don't," she replied.

He looked at her in a puzzled way; and she broke out with a kind of passion.

"Of course you don't understand! I know it has been hard for you; and it has been hard enough for me. But we haven't gone through what they have gone through — what *she* is going through. We parted because each of us believed the other was attacking something good; but we didn't, thank God, ever have to attack each other. You didn't have to stand up and abuse my father; and I didn't have to sit silent and hear it. It wasn't *you* who were directly individually cursing me and mine; it wasn't you, of all men, whom I had to hear saying hateful things about my own home. I don't know what I should have done. I think I should have simply died. What do you suppose she is doing?"

"I'm awfully sorry," he answered, "but I really do not know exactly what you are talking about. Who is she? Do you mean Rosamund Severne?"

"Of course I mean Rosamund Severne," she cried angrily, "and he would not even leave her name. How do you suppose I should have liked that?

What are you staring at? Do you really mean that you don't know that Rosamund and Michael Herne are in love with each other?"

"I don't seem to know much," he said, "but if that's true of course I see what you mean."

"I must go to see her," said Olive, "and yet I hardly know even how to do that."

She crossed the now deserted garden towards the house; and as she did so, something made her stand and gaze for a moment at the monument that stood on the lawn; the broken image standing on the dragon. And as she looked at it strange and new things came into her soul and her eyes. In the clear exalted intensity of her happiness and unhappiness, she seemed to be seeing it for the first time.

Then she looked about her, as if almost scared of the stillness, the abrupt and utter stillness that had succeeded to all the hubbub of that horrible afternoon. The great lawn, enclosed on three sides by the front and two wings of the Abbey buildings, had been not an hour ago tossing with angry crowds and now it was as empty as the Courts of a city of the dead. Evening was wheeling towards darkness and the round moon rose and brightened steadily until the faint shadows of the new wan light began to change on the gargoyles and Gothic ornaments as they lost the last shadow of the sun. And as the face of all that ancient building flickered and changed under the changing light, it seemed to come more fully into the foreground of her mind and take on a meaning she had never understood before; though she should have been the first, she might have fancied, to understand it from the beginning. That pointed and tapering tracery, of which she had talked lightly to Monkey long ago, the dark glass of the windows, dense with colours that could only be discovered from within — suddenly told her something; a paradox. Inside there was light and outside there was only lead. But who was really inside? . . . Those three walls with all their hooded windows, seemed to be watching; seemed to have watched from the beginning of all their follies and to be still watching — and waiting.

Suddenly and silently, as with a sort of soft shock, she came upon Rosamund herself standing in the great gateway. She did not need to look at that perfect mask of tragedy; she avoided looking at it; but she caught her friend by the arm and said incoherently: "Oh I do not know what to say to you . . . and I have so much to say."

There was no answer and she broke forth again, “It’s a shame that it should happen to you, who have never been anything but good to all the world. It’s a shame that anybody should tell such tales.”

Then Rosamund Severne said in a dreadful dead voice; “He always tells the truth.”

“I think you are the noblest woman in the world,” said Olive.

“Only the most unlucky,” said the other. “It is nobody’s fault. It’s as if there were a curse on this place.”

And in that instant of time Olive received a revelation like a blinding light; and understood her own trembling in the shadow of those watching walls.

“Rosamund, there is a curse on the place,” she said. “There’s a curse because there is a blessing. But it’s nothing to do with anything we have ever talked about. It has nothing to do with anything that man said. It’s not a curse on your name or anybody else’s name, whatever your name is or whether it’s old or new. The curse is in the name of this house.”

“The name of this house,” repeated the other in a dull voice.

“You’ve seen it at the top of your note-paper a thousand times and taken it for granted; and you have never seen that *that* is the falsehood. It doesn’t matter whether your father’s position is false or not: it doesn’t matter whether it’s old or new. This place doesn’t belong to the old families any more than the new families. It belongs to God.”

Rosamund seemed to stiffen suddenly like a literal statue and yet one could swear the statue had ears to hear.

Olive burst out again with her broken soliloquy; “Why have all our toppling fancies about kings and knights come with a crash; why is all our Round Table ruined? Because we never began at the beginning. Because we never went back to the Thing itself. The Thing that produced everything else; the love of the Thing where it really lives. On this spot long ago two hundred men lived and loved It.”

She stopped and seemed to realise that her words were tumbling out in a tail foremost fashion; and that she was herself, hardly setting a good example of beginning at the beginning. She made a desperate effort at clarity.

“Don’t you see — the modern people may be right to be modern; there may be people who ask for nothing better than banks and brokers; there may be people who think Milldyke a nice place. Your father and his friends may have been right in their way; I'm sure they weren't so wrong as they looked when he was abusing them . . . it was hateful, and anyhow he had no business to spring it on you like that, without telling you beforehand."

The statue spoke again; it seemed as if it never spoke except to utter one sort of stony defence.

"He did tell me beforehand. And I think that was more terrible."

"Let me say what I am trying to say," said Olive pathetically. "I feel as if it didn't belong to me, and I must give it away. There may be people to whom it's senseless to talk about a flower of chivalry; it sounds like a blossom of butchery. But *if* we want the flower of chivalry, we must go right away back to the root of chivalry. We must go back if we find it in a thorny place people call theology. We must think differently about death and free will and loneliness and the last appeal. It's just the same with the popular things we can turn into fashionable things; folk-dances and pageants and calling everything a Guild. Our fathers did these things by the thousand; quite common people; not cranks. We are always asking how they did it. What we've got to ask is why they did it. . . . Rosamund, *this* is why they did it. Something lived here. Something they loved. Some of them loved it so much. . . . Oh don't you and I know what is the only test? They wanted to be alone with it."

The statue moved ever so faintly as if turning away; and Olive clutched the arm again in a sort of remorse.

"You must think me mad to be talking so when you suffer; but it's as if I were bursting with news — with something bigger than all the universe of sorrow. Rosamund, there really is joy. Not rejoicing but joy; not rejoicing at this or that; but the thing itself, we only see reflected in mirrors — which sometimes break. And it lived here. That's why they didn't want anything else; not even what we want; not even the best we know. . . . And that's what's gone — the good itself. Now we have only evils to hate, and thank God we hate them."

She pointed suddenly at the monument in the middle of which the wrinkles and convolutions were traced elaborately by the silver-point of the moon-light, like the phosphorescence that outlines some goggling sea-monster.

"We have only the dragon left. A hundred times I've looked at that dragon and hated it and never understood it. Upright and high above that horror stood St. Michael or St. Margaret, subduing and conquering it; but it is the conqueror that has vanished. We have no notion of what it would be really like; we haven't tried to imagine what image really stood there. We danced round it and thought of everything else except that. There burned in this court a great bonfire of visionary passion which in the spirit could be seen for miles and men lived in the warmth of it; the positive passion and possession, the thing worth having in itself. But now the very best of them are negative; attacking the absence of it in the world. They fight for truth where it isn't. They fight for honour where it isn't. They are a thousand times right; but it ends in truth and honour fighting each other, as poor Jack and Michael fought. We haven't any sense or any place where these virtues are happy, where these virtues are simply themselves. I love Jack and Jack loves justice; but he loves justice where it isn't. There ought to be a way of loving it where it is."

"And where is that, I wonder?" said Rosamund in a low voice.

"How should we know," cried Olive, "who have driven away the men who knew?"

A deep chasm of silence opened between them; and at last Rosamund said in her simple way; "I am very stupid. I shall have to try to think about what you mean. I'm sure you won't mind if we don't talk any more now."

Olive went back slowly across the green courts and out of the shadow of the grey walls and found John Braintree waiting for her. They went away together, but were rather silent for the first part of the walk; then Olive said suddenly; "What a strange story all this is . . . I mean ever since I started poor Monkey running after red paint. What a rage I was in with you and your red tie; and yet in a queer sort of way it turns out to have been the same sort of red. I didn't know it and you didn't know it; and yet it was you who were working back blindly for the colour that I was after, like a child after a sunset cloud. It was you who were really trying to avenge my father's friend."

"I should have tried to get him his rights, I hope," replied Braintree.

"Oh you are always so rabid about rights," she said laughing with a faint impatience. "And poor Rosamund . . . you must admit you do talk a terrible lot about rights. Are you quite sure about them?"

"I hope to do a terrible lot about them before I've done," replied the implacable politician.

"But do you," she asked, "think anybody has really a right to be so happy?"

He laughed shortly and they went out along the grey road toward Milldyke.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RETURN OF DON QUIXOTE

Someday perhaps the story will be told of the adventures of the new Don Quixote and the new Sancho Panza, as they wandered about the winding roads of England. From the standpoint of the cold and satiric populace the story was rather that of the progress of the hansom cab, through scenes where hansom cabs very rarely figure. It was perhaps an unprecedented progress through forest glades and across desolate uplands; and as a method of travel chosen by a knight and his squire new even in the annals of chivalry. But some riotously romantic chronicler may yet give some account of how they attempted in various ways to use the vehicle for the defence and consolation of the oppressed. Of how they gave lifts to tramps and rides to children; of how they turned the cab into a coffee stall at Reading and into a tent on Salisbury Plain. Of how the cab figured as a bathing-machine in the dreadful affair at Worthing. Of how it was regarded by simple Calvinists of the Border as a perambulating pulpit, with a place below for the Precentor to sing and a place above for the minister to preach, which Mr. Douglas Murrel proceeded to do with great unction and edification. Of how Mr. Douglas Murrel organised a series of historical lectures by Mr. Herne from the top of the cab, and seconded them with comments and explanations, making the lecturing tour quite a financial success by methods perhaps not invariably respectful to the lecturer. But though there may have been moments when the squire fell short of a complete seriousness, it is probable on the whole that they did a great deal of good. They got into trouble with the police, in itself almost a sign of sanctity; they fought a number of people in private life, but mostly people who badly wanted fighting. And Herne at least was completely convinced of the serious social utility of this line of attack. A sadder and conceivably even a wiser man, he had many long talks with his friend, in which he never ceased to elaborate the Defence of Don Quixote and the necessity of his real return. One was especially memorable: which took place as they sat under a hedge in the high lanes of Sussex.

“They say I am behind the times,” said Herne, “and living in the days that Don Quixote dreamed of. They seemed to forget that they themselves are at least three hundred years behind the times and living in the days when Cervantes dreamed of Don Quixote. They are still living in the Renaissance; in what Cervantes naturally regarded as the New Birth. But I say that a baby that is three hundred years old is already getting on in life. It is time he was born again."

"Is he to be born again," asked Murrel, "as a medieval knight-errant?"

"Why not?" asked the other, "if the Renaissance man was born again as an Ancient Greek? Cervantes thought that Romance was dying and that Reason might reasonably take its place. But I say that in our time Reason is dying, in that sense; and it is old age is really less respectable than the old romance. We want to recur to the more simple and direct attack. What we want now is somebody who does believe in tilting at giants."

"And who succeeds in tilting at windmills," answered Murrel.

"Have you ever reflected," said his friend, "what a good thing it would have been if he had smashed the windmills? From what I know now of medieval history, I should say his only mistake was in tilting at the mills instead of the millers. The miller was the middleman of the middle ages. He was the beginning of all the middlemen of the modern ages. His mills were the beginning of all the mills and manufactures that have darkened and degraded modern life. So that even Cervantes, in a way, chose an example against himself. And it's more so with the other examples. Don Quixote set free a lot of captives who were only convicts. Nowadays it's mostly those who have been beggared who are jailed and those who have robbed them who are free. I'm not sure the mistake would be quite so mistaken."

"Don't you think," asked Murrel, "that modern things are too complicated to be dealt with in such a simple way?"

"I think," replied Herne, "that modern things are too complicated to be dealt with except in a simple way."

He rose from his feet and strode to and fro on the road with all the dreamy energy of his prototype. He seemed trying to tear his real meaning out of himself.

"Don't you see," he cried, "that is the moral of the whole thing. All your machinery has become so inhuman that it has become natural. In becoming a second nature, it has become as remote and indifferent and cruel as nature. The Knight is once more riding in the forest. Only he is lost in the wheels instead of in the woods. You have made your dead system on so large a scale that you do not yourselves know how or where it will hit.

That's the paradox! Things have grown incalculable by being calculated. You have tied men to tools so gigantic that they do not know on whom the strokes descend. You have justified the nightmare of Don Quixote. The mills really *are* giants."

"Is there any method in that case," demanded the other.

"Yes; and you found it," replied Herne. "You did not bother about systems, when you saw a mad doctor was madder than the madman. It is you who lead and I who follow. You are not Sancho Panza. You are the other."

He stretched out his hand with something of the old gesture.

"What I said on the judgment-seat I say again by the roadside. You are the only one of them born again. You are the knight that has returned."

Douglas Murrel was abruptly and horribly abashed.

That compliment was perhaps the only thing that could have stung him into speech upon certain matters; for under all this tomfoolery he had something more than the reticence of his breed. As it was, he looked uncomfortable and said: "Look here, you mustn't give me credit like that. I'm not on as Galahad in this scene. I hope I'd have done my best for the old Honkey; but I did like that girl; I liked her rather a lot."

"Did you tell her so?" asked Herne in his obvious manner.

"I couldn't very well," replied the other, "just when she was under sort of an obligation to me."

"My dear Murrel," cried Herne with impulsive simplicity, "this is quite quixotic!"

Murrel sprang to his feet and sent up a single shout of laughter.

"You have made the best joke in three hundred years," he said.

"I don't see it," said Herne thoughtfully. "Is it generally considered possible to make a joke and not to see it? But in the matter of what you said, don't you think there might be a statute of limitations allowing you a fresh start? Would you like to go down — down to the west again?"

Murrel's brow seemed knotted with a new embarrassment. "The truth is I rather avoided the neighbourhood — and the subject. I thought that you—"

"I know what you mean," said Herne. "For a long time I could hardly look out of a window facing that way. I wanted to turn my back on the west wind; and the sunsets burned me like red-hot irons. But a man gets calmer as the years go by, even if he doesn't get more cheerful. I don't think I could go to the house itself; but I would really be glad to hear the news about — anybody.”

“Oh if we go there,” said Murrel cheerfully, “I’ll undertake to go in and enquire.”

“Do you mean,” asked Herne almost timidly, “go into — Seawood Abbey?”

“Yes,” answered Murrel shortly. “I daresay we’re in the same boat. I might find the other house a little harder.”

They completed the rest of their programme by a tacit, not to say taciturn agreement; and so it fell out that, before they had exchanged many more words, they had actually come within sight of all that for so long they had not seen and had avoided seeing; the evening sun on the high lawns of Seawood and the steep Gothic roofs among the trees.

Certainly they needed no words of explanation when Michael Herne halted and looked across at his friend, as if bidding him go on. Murrel nodded and went quickly with his light and agile step up the steep woodland path and over the stile and dropped into the avenue leading up to the main gateway. The gardens seemed much as they were of old, but rather neater and in some nameless fashion quieter; but the great gate, that had always stood open, was shut.

Monkey was no mystic; but this fact affected him with a mournful thrill that had in it something of mysticism. That incongruous element increased upon him in some indescribable subconscious way as he approached the great doors and, for the first time in his life, knocked on them and rang a great iron bell. He felt rather as if he were in a dream; and yet as if he were near to some more strange awakening. But queer as were his unformed anticipations, they were not so queer as what he found.

About half an hour afterwards he came out of the great doorway, which was closed after him, climbed the stile and came quietly down the lane to his friend; but even while he was still approaching, his friend felt that there was something odd about his quietude. He sat down on the bank and ruminated for a moment; then he said: “An extraordinary thing has happened to Seawood Abbey. It has not been exactly burned to the ground, because somehow it seems to be still there, and looking rather more well-preserved than before. It has not been, in any material or meteorological sense struck by lightning from heaven. And yet I am not sure . . . anyhow a most stunning and crashing catastrophe has fallen on that Abbey.”

“What do you mean? What has happened to the Abbey?”

“It has become an Abbey,” said Murrel gravely.

“What do you mean?” cried the other, leaning forward with sudden eagerness.

“I mean what I say. It has become an Abbey. I have just been talking to the Abbot. He told me a good deal of the news, in spite of his monastic seclusion; for he knows a number of our old friends.”

“You mean it is a monastery. What news did he give you?”

“He was full of Society Snippets,” said Murrel in his melancholy voice. “It all began with Lord Seawood dying about a year ago. The property went to his — his heiress, who it seems has ‘gone over’ as the saying is. She’s become a Catholic; and a very extraordinary sort of Catholic too. She has given up all this vast property to my friend the Abbot and his merry men; and gone down to work as a nurse in some Catholic settlement or other down in the Docks; Limehouse, I think, where Chinamen strangle their daughters according to the Twelve Immortal Principles.”

The pale librarian had sprung up with all the energy of knight-errantry; but his look was turned away from the towers of Seawood.

“I hardly understand it yet,” he said, “but it is all different. It is difficult but it is different. It is difficult because it seems strange to . . .”

“It seems strange,” asserted Murrel, “to go down to Limehouse and ask a Chinese strangler for The Honourable Rosamund Severne. But I ought to tell you on the authority of the Abbot, that she declares that her name is not Rosamund Severne. I understand you may find her if you enquire for Miss Smith.”

And at that once more did lunacy strike the librarian of Seawood like lightning out of heaven; and leaping over a hedge he went racing eastwards towards a pinewood that lay across his path, which might be presumed to be on the outskirts of Limehouse and offer opportunities for enquiring after Miss Smith.

It was rather more than three months later that the lunatics’ progress came to its appointed end, and this story with it. Its pace had changed from capering to something more like plodding and to threading the labyrinths of the lowest quarters of Limehouse. But it ended one night when a sort of green fog of dusk hung like the fumes of some drug of witchcraft, as he turned down a crack of narrow street, at the corner of which hung a painted paper lantern. A little further down the dim defile glowed another lantern;

which looked less Chinese; and when he came close to it he saw it was a leaden cage fitted with large fragments of coloured glass, the rude outline showing a figure of St. Francis with a burning red angel behind him. Somehow this childish transparency seemed like a password and a signal of all that he had once sought to do on a great scale or Olive Ashley on a small one; and yet with some secret and vivid difference; that the lamp was lit from within.

So much was that great thirst for colour, which had filled his life, fed as from a goblet of flame, by that trivial sign and in this sordid place, that it scarcely surprised him to find himself in her presence, who stood crowned in his dreams as in the melodrama and the tragedy of other days. A straight dark dress hung on her from neck to heel, but it was of a normal pattern; and her red hair still looked like a crown.

With that queer awkward promptitude, that belonged to him alone, he said his simplest thought in plain words, "You are a nurse and not a nun."

She smiled. "You don't know much about nuns if you think that is the natural ending of a story — a story like ours. Believe me, there's nothing in that sentimental notion that being a nun is a second best."

"Do you really mean," he said and then stopped.

"I mean," she said, "that I never quite left off thinking that I might have the luck to be the second best. I suppose it's the sort of thing that has been said a good many times. . . . I think I have always thought you would find me."

After a momentary pause she went on: "We need not remember about that old quarrel; I think it was always something much better and much worse than a quarrel. My father was less to blame than you thought him; more to blame than I thought him; but it is neither you nor I that are to judge. But it was not he who did the real wrong of which all these wrongs have sprung."

"I know what you mean," he replied. "I had rather begun to think so myself, the more I read of history. But in all that history there is nothing so noble as you and what you have done. You are the greatest of historical characters; and the learned may come to call you a legend."

"It was Olive who understood it first," she said gravely. "She is so much quicker than I am and saw it all in a flash; a flash of moonlight, as she said. I could only go away and think things out slowly and stupidly by myself; but I got there at last."

“Do you mean,” asked Michael slowly, “that Olive Ashley also has — got there?”

“Yes,” she replied, “and the odd thing is that John Braintree doesn’t seem to mind a bit. At least a good many people would think it odd; they are married now and they seem to agree about almost everything. I wonder how much there really was for good people to disagree about in those quarrelsome old times.”

“I know,” he answered. “Everybody seems to be married. And it has made me feel pretty lost and lonely in the last month or so.”

“Even Monkey is married, I hear,” she said. “It seems like the end of the world. But perhaps its the beginning of the world. One thing you may be sure of, though lots of people would laugh at it. Whenever Monks come back, marriages will come back.”

“He went back to that seaside town and married Dr. Hendry’s daughter,” explained Michael Herne rather vaguely. “We parted by a sort of silent consent at Seawood Abbey and he went west and I east. I had to go and look for you alone: and I was very much alone.”

“You say ‘was,’” she said with a smile; and they suddenly moved towards each other and met as they had met in the garden long ago — in a silence full of many things; a silence which he broke by saying suddenly, in his abrupt and awkward way: “I suppose I am a heretic.”

“We will see about all that,” she said with a serene magnificence.

Herne’s thoughts abruptly and absently went back to the old tangled talk between himself and Archer about the Albigensian heresy and what need to follow conversion from it; he stood a moment with his wits wool gathering. Then in that narrow street of the coloured lantern a new and astonishing thing happened; something that never had happened in all the topsy turvey happenings of his historical career. Michael Herne laughed. For the first time in his life he seriously saw a joke and deliberately made it. It is typical of him that his one joke was one which nobody else could see, or would probably ever understand.

“I say . . . *iit in matrimonium.*”

Short Story Collections

St Paul's School, Barnes, London, where Chesterton was educated

THE CLUB OF QUEER TRADES

This collection of short stories was first published in 1905. Each of the stories concerns a character that is making his living by some unusual means (i.e. a ‘queer trade’). To gain admittance to the titular club, a person must have invented a unique means of earning a living. The framing narrative by ‘Cherub’ Swinburne describes his quest for The Club of Queer Trades with his friend Basil Grant, a retired judge, and Rupert Grant, a private detective. Each story describes their encounter with one of the ‘queer trades’.

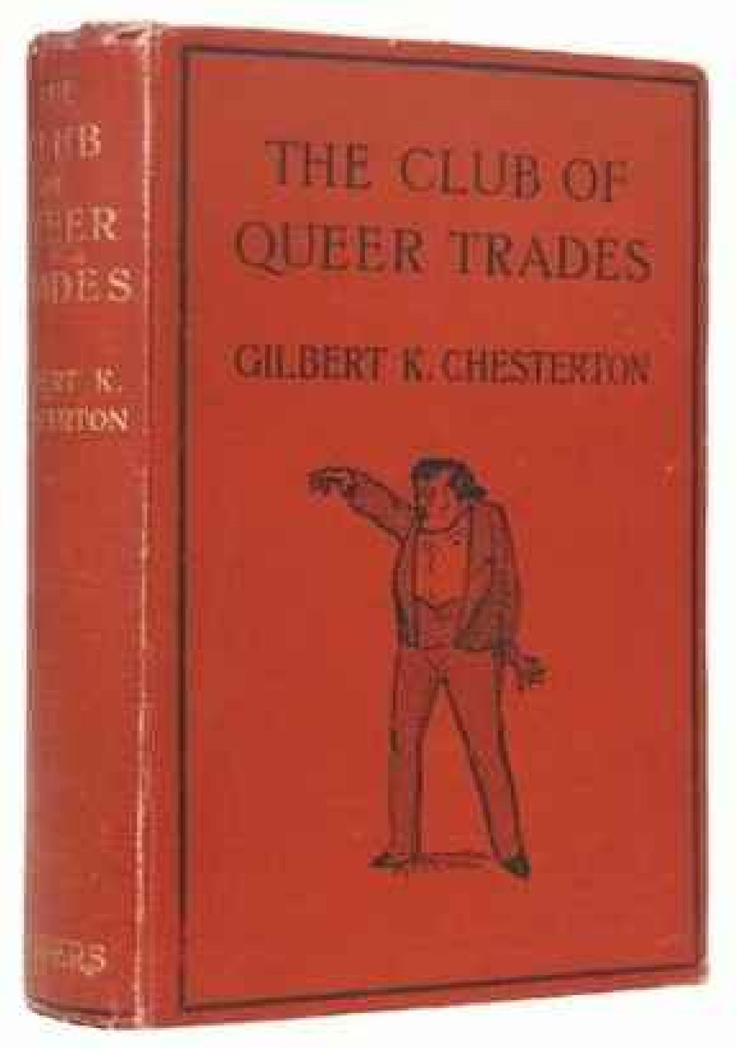
THE CLUB OF
QUEER TRADES
GILBERT K. CHESTERTON

The first edition

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The Eccentric Seclusion of the Old Lady

Chesterton, close to the time of publication

The Tremendous Adventures of Major Brown

Rabelais, or his wild illustrator Gustave Dore, must have had something to do with the designing of the things called flats in England and America. There is something entirely Gargantuan in the idea of economising space by piling houses on top of each other, front doors and all. And in the chaos and complexity of those perpendicular streets anything may dwell or happen, and it is in one of them, I believe, that the inquirer may find the offices of the Club of Queer Trades. It may be thought at the first glance that the name would attract and startle the passer-by, but nothing attracts or startles in these dim immense hives. The passer-by is only looking for his own melancholy destination, the Montenegro Shipping Agency or the London office of the Rutland Sentinel, and passes through the twilight passages as one passes through the twilight corridors of a dream. If the Thugs set up a Strangers' Assassination Company in one of the great buildings in Norfolk Street, and sent in a mild man in spectacles to answer inquiries, no inquiries would be made. And the Club of Queer Trades reigns in a great edifice hidden like a fossil in a mighty cliff of fossils.

The nature of this society, such as we afterwards discovered it to be, is soon and simply told. It is an eccentric and Bohemian Club, of which the absolute condition of membership lies in this, that the candidate must have invented the method by which he earns his living. It must be an entirely new trade. The exact definition of this requirement is given in the two principal rules. First, it must not be a mere application or variation of an existing trade. Thus, for instance, the Club would not admit an insurance agent simply because instead of insuring men's furniture against being burnt in a fire, he insured, let us say, their trousers against being torn by a mad dog. The principle (as Sir Bradcock Burnaby-Bradcock, in the extraordinarily eloquent and soaring speech to the club on the occasion of the question being raised in the Stormby Smith affair, said wittily and keenly) is the same. Secondly, the trade must be a genuine commercial source of income, the support of its inventor. Thus the Club would not receive a man simply because he chose to pass his days collecting broken sardine tins, unless he could drive a roaring trade in them. Professor Chick made that quite clear. And when one remembers what Professor Chick's own new trade was, one doesn't know whether to laugh or cry.

The discovery of this strange society was a curiously refreshing thing; to realize that there were ten new trades in the world was like looking at the first ship or the first plough. It made a man feel what he should feel, that he was still in the childhood of the world. That I should have come at last upon so singular a body was, I may say without vanity, not altogether singular, for I have a mania for belonging to as many societies as possible: I may be said to collect clubs, and I have accumulated a vast and fantastic variety of specimens ever since, in my audacious youth, I collected the Athenaeum. At some future day, perhaps, I may tell tales of some of the other bodies to which I have belonged. I will recount the doings of the Dead Man's Shoes Society (that superficially immoral, but darkly justifiable communion); I will explain the curious origin of the Cat and Christian, the name of which has been so shamefully misinterpreted; and the world shall know at last why the Institute of Typewriters coalesced with the Red Tulip League. Of the Ten Teacups, of course I dare not say a word. The first of my revelations, at any rate, shall be concerned with the Club of Queer Trades, which, as I have said, was one of this class, one which I was almost bound to come across sooner or later, because of my singular hobby. The wild youth of the metropolis call me facetiously 'The King of Clubs'. They also call me 'The Cherub', in allusion to the roseate and youthful appearance I have presented in my declining years. I only hope the spirits in the better world have as good dinners as I have. But the finding of the Club of Queer Trades has one very curious thing about it. The most curious thing about it is that it was not discovered by me; it was discovered by my friend Basil Grant, a star-gazer, a mystic, and a man who scarcely stirred out of his attic.

Very few people knew anything of Basil; not because he was in the least unsociable, for if a man out of the street had walked into his rooms he would have kept him talking till morning. Few people knew him, because, like all poets, he could do without them; he welcomed a human face as he might welcome a sudden blend of colour in a sunset; but he no more felt the need of going out to parties than he felt the need of altering the sunset clouds. He lived in a queer and comfortable garret in the roofs of Lambeth. He was surrounded by a chaos of things that were in odd contrast to the slums around him; old fantastic books, swords, armour — the whole dust-hole of romanticism. But his face, amid all these quixotic relics, appeared curiously keen and modern — a powerful, legal face. And no one but I knew who he was.

Long ago as it is, everyone remembers the terrible and grotesque scene that occurred in — , when one of the most acute and forcible of the English judges suddenly went mad on the bench. I had my own view of that occurrence; but about the facts themselves there is no question at all. For some months, indeed for some years, people had detected something curious in the judge's conduct. He seemed to have lost interest in the law, in which he had been beyond expression brilliant and terrible as a K.C., and to be occupied in giving personal and moral advice to the people concerned. He talked more like a priest or a doctor, and a very outspoken one at that. The first thrill was probably given when he said to a man who had attempted a crime of passion: "I sentence you to three years imprisonment, under the firm, and solemn, and God-given conviction, that what you require is three months at the seaside." He accused criminals from the bench, not so much of their obvious legal crimes, but of things that had never been heard of in a court of justice, monstrous egoism, lack of humour, and morbidity deliberately encouraged. Things came to a head in that celebrated diamond case in which the Prime Minister himself, that brilliant patrician, had to come forward, gracefully and reluctantly, to give evidence against his valet. After the detailed life of the household had been thoroughly exhibited, the judge requested the Premier again to step forward, which he did with quiet dignity. The judge then said, in a sudden, grating voice: "Get a new soul. That thing's not fit for a dog. Get a new soul." All this, of course, in the eyes of the sagacious, was premonitory of that melancholy and farcical day when his wits actually deserted him in open court. It was a libel case between two very eminent and powerful financiers, against both of whom charges of considerable defalcation were brought. The case was long and complex; the advocates were long and eloquent; but at last, after weeks of work and rhetoric, the time came for the great judge to give a summing-up; and one of his celebrated masterpieces of lucidity and pulverizing logic was eagerly looked for. He had spoken very little during the prolonged affair, and he looked sad and lowering at the end of it. He was silent for a few moments, and then burst into a stentorian song. His remarks (as reported) were as follows:

"O Rowty-owty tiddly-owty Tiddly-owty tiddly-owty Highty-ighty tiddly-ighty Tiddly-ighty ow."

He then retired from public life and took the garret in Lambeth.

I was sitting there one evening, about six o'clock, over a glass of that gorgeous Burgundy which he kept behind a pile of black-letter folios; he was striding about the room, fingering, after a habit of his, one of the great swords in his collection; the red glare of the strong fire struck his square features and his fierce grey hair; his blue eyes were even unusually full of dreams, and he had opened his mouth to speak dreamily, when the door was flung open, and a pale, fiery man, with red hair and a huge furred overcoat, swung himself panting into the room.

"Sorry to bother you, Basil," he gasped. "I took a liberty — made an appointment here with a man — a client — in five minutes — I beg your pardon, sir," and he gave me a bow of apology.

Basil smiled at me. "You didn't know," he said, "that I had a practical brother. This is Rupert Grant, Esquire, who can and does all there is to be done. Just as I was a failure at one thing, he is a success at everything. I remember him as a journalist, a house-agent, a naturalist, an inventor, a publisher, a schoolmaster, a — what are you now, Rupert?"

"I am and have been for some time," said Rupert, with some dignity, "a private detective, and there's my client."

A loud rap at the door had cut him short, and, on permission being given, the door was thrown sharply open and a stout, dapper man walked swiftly into the room, set his silk hat with a clap on the table, and said, "Good evening, gentlemen," with a stress on the last syllable that somehow marked him out as a martinet, military, literary and social. He had a large head streaked with black and grey, and an abrupt black moustache, which gave him a look of fierceness which was contradicted by his sad sea-blue eyes.

Basil immediately said to me, "Let us come into the next room, Gully," and was moving towards the door, but the stranger said:

"Not at all. Friends remain. Assistance possibly."

The moment I heard him speak I remembered who he was, a certain Major Brown I had met years before in Basil's society. I had forgotten altogether the black dandified figure and the large solemn head, but I remembered the peculiar speech, which consisted of only saying about a quarter of each sentence, and that sharply, like the crack of a gun. I do not know, it may have come from giving orders to troops.

Major Brown was a V.C., and an able and distinguished soldier, but he was anything but a warlike person. Like many among the iron men who recovered British India, he was a man with the natural beliefs and tastes of an old maid. In his dress he was dapper and yet demure; in his habits he was precise to the point of the exact adjustment of a tea-cup. One enthusiasm he had, which was of the nature of a religion — the cultivation of pansies. And when he talked about his collection, his blue eyes glittered like a child's at a new toy, the eyes that had remained untroubled when the troops were roaring victory round Roberts at Candahar.

"Well, Major," said Rupert Grant, with a lordly heartiness, flinging himself into a chair, "what is the matter with you?"

"Yellow pansies. Coal-cellar. P. G. Northover," said the Major, with righteous indignation.

We glanced at each other with inquisitiveness. Basil, who had his eyes shut in his abstracted way, said simply:

"I beg your pardon."

"Fact is. Street, you know, man, pansies. On wall. Death to me. Something. Preposterous."

We shook our heads gently. Bit by bit, and mainly by the seemingly sleepy assistance of Basil Grant, we pieced together the Major's fragmentary, but excited narration. It would be infamous to submit the reader to what we endured; therefore I will tell the story of Major Brown in my own words. But the reader must imagine the scene. The eyes of Basil closed as in a trance, after his habit, and the eyes of Rupert and myself getting rounder and rounder as we listened to one of the most astounding stories in the world, from the lips of the little man in black, sitting bolt upright in his chair and talking like a telegram.

Major Brown was, I have said, a successful soldier, but by no means an enthusiastic one. So far from regretting his retirement on half-pay, it was with delight that he took a small neat villa, very like a doll's house, and devoted the rest of his life to pansies and weak tea. The thought that battles were over when he had once hung up his sword in the little front hall (along with two patent stew-pots and a bad water-colour), and betaken himself instead to wielding the rake in his little sunlit garden, was to him like having come into a harbour in heaven. He was Dutch-like and precise in his taste in gardening, and had, perhaps, some tendency to drill his flowers like soldiers. He was one of those men who are capable of putting four umbrellas in the stand rather than three, so that two may lean one way and two another; he saw life like a pattern in a freehand drawing-book. And assuredly he would not have believed, or even understood, any one who had told him that within a few yards of his brick paradise he was destined to be caught in a whirlpool of incredible adventure, such as he had never seen or dreamed of in the horrible jungle, or the heat of battle.

One certain bright and windy afternoon, the Major, attired in his usual faultless manner, had set out for his usual constitutional. In crossing from one great residential thoroughfare to another, he happened to pass along one of those aimless-looking lanes which lie along the back-garden walls of a row of mansions, and which in their empty and discoloured appearance give one an odd sensation as of being behind the scenes of a theatre. But mean and sulky as the scene might be in the eyes of most of us, it was not altogether so in the Major's, for along the coarse gravel footway was coming a thing which was to him what the passing of a religious procession is to a devout person. A large, heavy man, with fish-blue eyes and a ring of irradiating red beard, was pushing before him a barrow, which was ablaze with incomparable flowers. There were splendid specimens of almost every order, but the Major's own favourite pansies predominated. The Major stopped and fell into conversation, and then into bargaining. He treated the man after the manner of collectors and other mad men, that is to say, he carefully and with a sort of anguish selected the best roots from the less excellent, praised some, disparaged others, made a subtle scale ranging from a thrilling worth and rarity to a degraded insignificance, and then bought them all. The man was just pushing off his barrow when he stopped and came close to the Major.

"I'll tell you what, sir," he said. "If you're interested in them things, you just get on to that wall."

"On the wall!" cried the scandalised Major, whose conventional soul quailed within him at the thought of such fantastic trespass.

"Finest show of yellow pansies in England in that there garden, sir," hissed the tempter. "I'll help you up, sir."

How it happened no one will ever know but that positive enthusiasm of the Major's life triumphed over all its negative traditions, and with an easy leap and swing that showed that he was in no need of physical assistance, he stood on the wall at the end of the strange garden. The second after, the flapping of the frock-coat at his knees made him feel inexpressibly a fool. But the next instant all such trifling sentiments were swallowed up by the most appalling shock of surprise the old soldier had ever felt in all his bold and wandering existence. His eyes fell upon the garden, and there across a large bed in the centre of the lawn was a vast pattern of pansies; they were splendid flowers, but for once it was not their horticultural aspects that Major Brown beheld, for the pansies were arranged in gigantic capital letters so as to form the sentence:

DEATH TO MAJOR BROWN

A kindly looking old man, with white whiskers, was watering them. Brown looked sharply back at the road behind him; the man with the barrow had suddenly vanished. Then he looked again at the lawn with its incredible inscription. Another man might have thought he had gone mad, but Brown did not. When romantic ladies gushed over his V.C. and his military exploits, he sometimes felt himself to be a painfully prosaic person, but by the same token he knew he was incurably sane. Another man, again, might have thought himself a victim of a passing practical joke, but Brown could not easily believe this. He knew from his own quaint learning that the garden arrangement was an elaborate and expensive one; he thought it extravagantly improbable that any one would pour out money like water for a joke against him. Having no explanation whatever to offer, he admitted the fact to himself, like a clear-headed man, and waited as he would have done in the presence of a man with six legs.

At this moment the stout old man with white whiskers looked up, and the watering can fell from his hand, shooting a swirl of water down the gravel path.

“Who on earth are you?” he gasped, trembling violently.

“I am Major Brown,” said that individual, who was always cool in the hour of action.

The old man gaped helplessly like some monstrous fish. At last he stammered wildly, “Come down — come down here!”

“At your service,” said the Major, and alighted at a bound on the grass beside him, without disarranging his silk hat.

The old man turned his broad back and set off at a sort of waddling run towards the house, followed with swift steps by the Major. His guide led him through the back passages of a gloomy, but gorgeously appointed house, until they reached the door of the front room. Then the old man turned with a face of apoplectic terror dimly showing in the twilight.

“For heaven’s sake,” he said, “don’t mention jackals.”

Then he threw open the door, releasing a burst of red lamplight, and ran downstairs with a clatter.

The Major stepped into a rich, glowing room, full of red copper, and peacock and purple hangings, hat in hand. He had the finest manners in the world, and, though mystified, was not in the least embarrassed to see that the only occupant was a lady, sitting by the window, looking out.

“Madam,” he said, bowing simply, “I am Major Brown.”

“Sit down,” said the lady; but she did not turn her head.

She was a graceful, green-clad figure, with fiery red hair and a flavour of Bedford Park. “You have come, I suppose,” she said mournfully, “to tax me about the hateful title-deeds.”

“I have come, madam,” he said, “to know what is the matter. To know why my name is written across your garden. Not amicably either.”

He spoke grimly, for the thing had hit him. It is impossible to describe the effect produced on the mind by that quiet and sunny garden scene, the frame for a stunning and brutal personality. The evening air was still, and the grass was golden in the place where the little flowers he studied cried to heaven for his blood.

“You know I must not turn round,” said the lady; “every afternoon till the stroke of six I must keep my face turned to the street.”

Some queer and unusual inspiration made the prosaic soldier resolute to accept these outrageous riddles without surprise.

“It is almost six,” he said; and even as he spoke the barbaric copper clock upon the wall clanged the first stroke of the hour. At the sixth the lady sprang up and turned on the Major one of the queerest and yet most attractive faces he had ever seen in his life; open, and yet tantalising, the face of an elf.

“That makes the third year I have waited,” she cried. “This is an anniversary. The waiting almost makes one wish the frightful thing would happen once and for all.”

And even as she spoke, a sudden rending cry broke the stillness. From low down on the pavement of the dim street (it was already twilight) a voice cried out with a raucous and merciless distinctness:

“Major Brown, Major Brown, where does the jackal dwell?”

Brown was decisive and silent in action. He strode to the front door and looked out. There was no sign of life in the blue gloaming of the street, where one or two lamps were beginning to light their lemon sparks. On returning, he found the lady in green trembling.

"It is the end," she cried, with shaking lips; "it may be death for both of us. Whenever—"

But even as she spoke her speech was cloven by another hoarse proclamation from the dark street, again horribly articulate.

"Major Brown, Major Brown, how did the jackal die?"

Brown dashed out of the door and down the steps, but again he was frustrated; there was no figure in sight, and the street was far too long and empty for the shouter to have run away. Even the rational Major was a little shaken as he returned in a certain time to the drawing-room. Scarcely had he done so than the terrific voice came:

"Major Brown, Major Brown, where did—"

Brown was in the street almost at a bound, and he was in time — in time to see something which at first glance froze the blood. The cries appeared to come from a decapitated head resting on the pavement.

The next moment the pale Major understood. It was the head of a man thrust through the coal-hole in the street. The next moment, again, it had vanished, and Major Brown turned to the lady. "Where's your coal-cellar?" he said, and stepped out into the passage.

She looked at him with wild grey eyes. "You will not go down," she cried, "alone, into the dark hole, with that beast?"

"Is this the way?" replied Brown, and descended the kitchen stairs three at a time. He flung open the door of a black cavity and stepped in, feeling in his pocket for matches. As his right hand was thus occupied, a pair of great slimy hands came out of the darkness, hands clearly belonging to a man of gigantic stature, and seized him by the back of the head. They forced him down, down in the suffocating darkness, a brutal image of destiny. But the Major's head, though upside down, was perfectly clear and intellectual. He gave quietly under the pressure until he had slid down almost to his hands and knees. Then finding the knees of the invisible monster within a foot of him, he simply put out one of his long, bony, and skilful hands, and gripping the leg by a muscle pulled it off the ground and laid the huge living man, with a crash, along the floor. He strove to rise, but Brown was on top like a cat. They rolled over and over. Big as the man was, he had evidently now no desire but to escape; he made sprawls hither and thither to get past the Major to the door, but that tenacious person had him hard by the coat collar and hung with the other hand to a beam. At length there came a strain in holding back this human bull, a strain under which Brown expected his hand to rend and part from the arm. But something else rent and parted; and the dim fat figure of the giant vanished out of the cellar, leaving the torn coat in the Major's hand; the only fruit of his adventure and the only clue to the mystery. For when he went up and out at the front door, the lady, the rich hangings, and the whole equipment of the house had disappeared. It had only bare boards and whitewashed walls.

"The lady was in the conspiracy, of course," said Rupert, nodding. Major Brown turned brick red. "I beg your pardon," he said, "I think not."

Rupert raised his eyebrows and looked at him for a moment, but said nothing. When next he spoke he asked:

"Was there anything in the pockets of the coat?"

"There was sevenpence halfpenny in coppers and a threepenny-bit," said the Major carefully; "there was a cigarette-holder, a piece of string, and this letter," and he laid it on the table. It ran as follows:

Dear Mr Plover,

I am annoyed to hear that some delay has occurred in the arrangements re Major Brown. Please see that he is attacked as per arrangement tomorrow The coal-cellar, of course.

Yours faithfully, P. G. Northover.

Rupert Grant was leaning forward listening with hawk-like eyes. He cut in:

"Is it dated from anywhere?"

"No — oh, yes!" replied Brown, glancing upon the paper; "14 Tanner's Court, North—"

Rupert sprang up and struck his hands together.

"Then why are we hanging here? Let's get along. Basil, lend me your revolver."

Basil was staring into the embers like a man in a trance; and it was some time before he answered:

"I don't think you'll need it."

"Perhaps not," said Rupert, getting into his fur coat. "One never knows. But going down a dark court to see criminals—"

"Do you think they are criminals?" asked his brother.

Rupert laughed stoutly. "Giving orders to a subordinate to strangle a harmless stranger in a coal-cellar may strike you as a very blameless experiment, but—"

“Do you think they wanted to strangle the Major?” asked Basil, in the same distant and monotonous voice.

“My dear fellow, you’ve been asleep. Look at the letter.”

“I am looking at the letter,” said the mad judge calmly; though, as a matter of fact, he was looking at the fire. “I don’t think it’s the sort of letter one criminal would write to another.”

“My dear boy, you are glorious,” cried Rupert, turning round, with laughter in his blue bright eyes. “Your methods amaze me. Why, there is the letter. It is written, and it does give orders for a crime. You might as well say that the Nelson Column was not at all the sort of thing that was likely to be set up in Trafalgar Square.”

Basil Grant shook all over with a sort of silent laughter, but did not otherwise move.

“That’s rather good,” he said; “but, of course, logic like that’s not what is really wanted. It’s a question of spiritual atmosphere. It’s not a criminal letter.”

“It is. It’s a matter of fact,” cried the other in an agony of reasonableness.

“Facts,” murmured Basil, like one mentioning some strange, far-off animals, “how facts obscure the truth. I may be silly — in fact, I’m off my head — but I never could believe in that man — what’s his name, in those capital stories? — Sherlock Holmes. Every detail points to something, certainly; but generally to the wrong thing. Facts point in all directions, it seems to me, like the thousands of twigs on a tree. It’s only the life of the tree that has unity and goes up — only the green blood that springs, like a fountain, at the stars.”

“But what the deuce else can the letter be but criminal?”

“We have eternity to stretch our legs in,” replied the mystic. “It can be an infinity of things. I haven’t seen any of them — I’ve only seen the letter. I look at that, and say it’s not criminal.”

“Then what’s the origin of it?”

“I haven’t the vaguest idea.”

“Then why don’t you accept the ordinary explanation?”

Basil continued for a little to glare at the coals, and seemed collecting his thoughts in a humble and even painful way. Then he said:

“Suppose you went out into the moonlight. Suppose you passed through silent, silvery streets and squares until you came into an open and deserted space, set with a few monuments, and you beheld one dressed as a ballet girl dancing in the argent glimmer. And suppose you looked, and saw it was a man disguised. And suppose you looked again, and saw it was Lord Kitchener. What would you think?"

He paused a moment, and went on:

"You could not adopt the ordinary explanation. The ordinary explanation of putting on singular clothes is that you look nice in them; you would not think that Lord Kitchener dressed up like a ballet girl out of ordinary personal vanity. You would think it much more likely that he inherited a dancing madness from a great grandmother; or had been hypnotised at a seance; or threatened by a secret society with death if he refused the ordeal. With Baden-Powell, say, it might be a bet — but not with Kitchener. I should know all that, because in my public days I knew him quite well. So I know that letter quite well, and criminals quite well. It's not a criminal's letter. It's all atmospheres." And he closed his eyes and passed his hand over his forehead.

Rupert and the Major were regarding him with a mixture of respect and pity. The former said,

"Well, I'm going, anyhow, and shall continue to think — until your spiritual mystery turns up — that a man who sends a note recommending a crime, that is, actually a crime that is actually carried out, at least tentatively, is, in all probability, a little casual in his moral tastes. Can I have that revolver?"

"Certainly," said Basil, getting up. "But I am coming with you." And he flung an old cape or cloak round him, and took a sword-stick from the corner.

"You!" said Rupert, with some surprise, "you scarcely ever leave your hole to look at anything on the face of the earth."

Basil fitted on a formidable old white hat.

"I scarcely ever," he said, with an unconscious and colossal arrogance, "hear of anything on the face of the earth that I do not understand at once, without going to see it."

And he led the way out into the purple night.

We four swung along the flaring Lambeth streets, across Westminster Bridge, and along the Embankment in the direction of that part of Fleet Street which contained Tanner's Court. The erect, black figure of Major Brown, seen from behind, was a quaint contrast to the hound-like stoop and flapping mantle of young Rupert Grant, who adopted, with childlike delight, all the dramatic poses of the detective of fiction. The finest among his many fine qualities was his boyish appetite for the colour and poetry of London. Basil, who walked behind, with his face turned blindly to the stars, had the look of a somnambulist.

Rupert paused at the corner of Tanner's Court, with a quiver of delight at danger, and gripped Basil's revolver in his great-coat pocket.

"Shall we go in now?" he asked.

"Not get police?" asked Major Brown, glancing sharply up and down the street.

"I am not sure," answered Rupert, knitting his brows. "Of course, it's quite clear, the thing's all crooked. But there are three of us, and—"

"I shouldn't get the police," said Basil in a queer voice. Rupert glanced at him and stared hard.

"Basil," he cried, "you're trembling. What's the matter — are you afraid?"

"Cold, perhaps," said the Major, eyeing him. There was no doubt that he was shaking.

At last, after a few moments' scrutiny, Rupert broke into a curse.

"You're laughing," he cried. "I know that confounded, silent, shaky laugh of yours. What the deuce is the amusement, Basil? Here we are, all three of us, within a yard of a den of ruffians—"

"But I shouldn't call the police," said Basil. "We four heroes are quite equal to a host," and he continued to quake with his mysterious mirth.

Rupert turned with impatience and strode swiftly down the court, the rest of us following. When he reached the door of No. 14 he turned abruptly, the revolver glittering in his hand.

"Stand close," he said in the voice of a commander. "The scoundrel may be attempting an escape at this moment. We must fling open the door and rush in."

The four of us cowered instantly under the archway, rigid, except for the old judge and his convulsion of merriment.

"Now," hissed Rupert Grant, turning his pale face and burning eyes suddenly over his shoulder, "when I say 'Four', follow me with a rush. If I say 'Hold him', pin the fellows down, whoever they are. If I say 'Stop', stop. I shall say that if there are more than three. If they attack us I shall empty my revolver on them. Basil, have your sword-stick ready. Now — one, two three, four!"

With the sound of the word the door burst open, and we fell into the room like an invasion, only to stop dead.

The room, which was an ordinary and neatly appointed office, appeared, at the first glance, to be empty. But on a second and more careful glance, we saw seated behind a very large desk with pigeonholes and drawers of bewildering multiplicity, a small man with a black waxed moustache, and the air of a very average clerk, writing hard. He looked up as we came to a standstill.

“Did you knock?” he asked pleasantly. “I am sorry if I did not hear. What can I do for you?”

There was a doubtful pause, and then, by general consent, the Major himself, the victim of the outrage, stepped forward.

The letter was in his hand, and he looked unusually grim.

“Is your name P. G. Northover?” he asked.

“That is my name,” replied the other, smiling.

“I think,” said Major Brown, with an increase in the dark glow of his face, “that this letter was written by you.” And with a loud clap he struck open the letter on the desk with his clenched fist. The man called Northover looked at it with unaffected interest and merely nodded.

“Well, sir,” said the Major, breathing hard, “what about that?”

“What about it, precisely,” said the man with the moustache.

“I am Major Brown,” said that gentleman sternly.

Northover bowed. “Pleased to meet you, sir. What have you to say to me?”

“Say!” cried the Major, loosing a sudden tempest; “why, I want this confounded thing settled. I want—”

“Certainly, sir,” said Northover, jumping up with a slight elevation of the eyebrows. “Will you take a chair for a moment.” And he pressed an electric bell just above him, which thrilled and tinkled in a room beyond. The Major put his hand on the back of the chair offered him, but stood chafing and beating the floor with his polished boot.

The next moment an inner glass door was opened, and a fair, weedy, young man, in a frock-coat, entered from within.

“Mr Hopson,” said Northover, “this is Major Brown. Will you please finish that thing for him I gave you this morning and bring it in?”

“Yes, sir,” said Mr Hopson, and vanished like lightning.

"You will excuse me, gentlemen," said the egregious Northover, with his radiant smile, "if I continue to work until Mr Hopson is ready. I have some books that must be cleared up before I get away on my holiday tomorrow. And we all like a whiff of the country, don't we? Ha! ha!"

The criminal took up his pen with a childlike laugh, and a silence ensued; a placid and busy silence on the part of Mr P. G. Northover; a raging silence on the part of everybody else.

At length the scratching of Northover's pen in the stillness was mingled with a knock at the door, almost simultaneous with the turning of the handle, and Mr Hopson came in again with the same silent rapidity, placed a paper before his principal, and disappeared again.

The man at the desk pulled and twisted his spiky moustache for a few moments as he ran his eye up and down the paper presented to him. He took up his pen, with a slight, instantaneous frown, and altered something, muttering— "Careless." Then he read it again with the same impenetrable reflectiveness, and finally handed it to the frantic Brown, whose hand was beating the devil's tattoo on the back of the chair.

"I think you will find that all right, Major," he said briefly.

The Major looked at it; whether he found it all right or not will appear later, but he found it like this:

Major Brown to P. G. Northover.	L s. d.
January 1, to account rendered	5 6 0
May 9, to potting and embedding of zoo pansies	2 0 0
To cost of trolley with flowers	0 15 0
To hiring of man with trolley	0 5 0
To hire of house and garden for one day	1 0 0
To furnishing of room in peacock curtains, copper ornaments, etc.	3 0 0
To salary of Miss Jameson	1 0 0
To salary of Mr Plover	1 0 0
Total	L14 6 0

A Remittance will oblige.

"What," said Brown, after a dead pause, and with eyes that seemed slowly rising out of his head, "What in heaven's name is this?"

"What is it?" repeated Northover, cocking his eyebrow with amusement. "It's your account, of course."

"My account!" The Major's ideas appeared to be in a vague stampede. "My account! And what have I got to do with it?"

"Well," said Northover, laughing outright, "naturally I prefer you to pay it."

The Major's hand was still resting on the back of the chair as the words came. He scarcely stirred otherwise, but he lifted the chair bodily into the air with one hand and hurled it at Northover's head.

The legs crashed against the desk, so that Northover only got a blow on the elbow as he sprang up with clenched fists, only to be seized by the united rush of the rest of us. The chair had fallen clattering on the empty floor.

"Let me go, you scamps," he shouted. "Let me—"

"Stand still," cried Rupert authoritatively. "Major Brown's action is excusable. The abominable crime you have attempted—"

"A customer has a perfect right," said Northover hotly, "to question an alleged overcharge, but, confound it all, not to throw furniture."

"What, in God's name, do you mean by your customers and overcharges?" shrieked Major Brown, whose keen feminine nature, steady in pain or danger, became almost hysterical in the presence of a long and exasperating mystery. "Who are you? I've never seen you or your insolent tomfool bills. I know one of your cursed brutes tried to choke me—"

"Mad," said Northover, gazing blankly round; "all of them mad. I didn't know they travelled in quartettes."

"Enough of this prevarication," said Rupert; "your crimes are discovered. A policeman is stationed at the corner of the court. Though only a private detective myself, I will take the responsibility of telling you that anything you say—"

"Mad," repeated Northover, with a weary air.

And at this moment, for the first time, there struck in among them the strange, sleepy voice of Basil Grant.

"Major Brown," he said, "may I ask you a question?"

The Major turned his head with an increased bewilderment.

"You?" he cried; "certainly, Mr Grant."

"Can you tell me," said the mystic, with sunken head and lowering brow, as he traced a pattern in the dust with his sword-stick, "can you tell me what was the name of the man who lived in your house before you?"

The unhappy Major was only faintly more disturbed by this last and futile irrelevancy, and he answered vaguely:

"Yes, I think so; a man named Gurney something — a name with a hyphen — Gurney-Brown; that was it."

"And when did the house change hands?" said Basil, looking up sharply. His strange eyes were burning brilliantly.

"I came in last month," said the Major.

And at the mere word the criminal Northover suddenly fell into his great office chair and shouted with a volleying laughter.

"Oh! it's too perfect — it's too exquisite," he gasped, beating the arms with his fists. He was laughing deafeningly; Basil Grant was laughing voicelessly; and the rest of us only felt that our heads were like weathercocks in a whirlwind.

"Confound it, Basil," said Rupert, stamping. "If you don't want me to go mad and blow your metaphysical brains out, tell me what all this means."

Northover rose.

"Permit me, sir, to explain," he said. "And, first of all, permit me to apologize to you, Major Brown, for a most abominable and unpardonable blunder, which has caused you menace and inconvenience, in which, if you will allow me to say so, you have behaved with astonishing courage and dignity. Of course you need not trouble about the bill. We will stand the loss." And, tearing the paper across, he flung the halves into the waste-paper basket and bowed.

Poor Brown's face was still a picture of distraction. "But I don't even begin to understand," he cried. "What bill? what blunder? what loss?"

Mr P. G. Northover advanced in the centre of the room, thoughtfully, and with a great deal of unconscious dignity. On closer consideration, there were apparent about him other things beside a screwed moustache, especially a lean, sallow face, hawk-like, and not without a careworn intelligence. Then he looked up abruptly.

"Do you know where you are, Major?" he said.

"God knows I don't," said the warrior, with fervour.

"You are standing," replied Northover, "in the office of the Adventure and Romance Agency, Limited."

"And what's that?" blankly inquired Brown.

The man of business leaned over the back of the chair, and fixed his dark eyes on the other's face.

“Major,” said he, “did you ever, as you walked along the empty street upon some idle afternoon, feel the utter hunger for something to happen — something, in the splendid words of Walt Whitman: ‘Something pernicious and dread; something far removed from a puny and pious life; something unproved; something in a trance; something loosed from its anchorage, and driving free.’ Did you ever feel that?”

“Certainly not,” said the Major shortly.

“Then I must explain with more elaboration,” said Mr Northover, with a sigh. “The Adventure and Romance Agency has been started to meet a great modern desire. On every side, in conversation and in literature, we hear of the desire for a larger theatre of events for something to waylay us and lead us splendidly astray. Now the man who feels this desire for a varied life pays a yearly or a quarterly sum to the Adventure and Romance Agency; in return, the Adventure and Romance Agency undertakes to surround him with startling and weird events. As a man is leaving his front door, an excited sweep approaches him and assures him of a plot against his life; he gets into a cab, and is driven to an opium den; he receives a mysterious telegram or a dramatic visit, and is immediately in a vortex of incidents. A very picturesque and moving story is first written by one of the staff of distinguished novelists who are at present hard at work in the adjoining room. Yours, Major Brown (designed by our Mr Grigsby), I consider peculiarly forcible and pointed; it is almost a pity you did not see the end of it. I need scarcely explain further the monstrous mistake. Your predecessor in your present house, Mr Gurney-Brown, was a subscriber to our agency, and our foolish clerks, ignoring alike the dignity of the hyphen and the glory of military rank, positively imagined that Major Brown and Mr Gurney-Brown were the same person. Thus you were suddenly hurled into the middle of another man’s story.”

“How on earth does the thing work?” asked Rupert Grant, with bright and fascinated eyes.

“We believe that we are doing a noble work,” said Northover warmly. “It has continually struck us that there is no element in modern life that is more lamentable than the fact that the modern man has to seek all artistic existence in a sedentary state. If he wishes to float into fairyland, he reads a book; if he wishes to dash into the thick of battle, he reads a book; if he wishes to soar into heaven, he reads a book; if he wishes to slide down the banisters, he reads a book. We give him these visions, but we give him exercise at the same time, the necessity of leaping from wall to wall, of fighting strange gentlemen, of running down long streets from pursuers — all healthy and pleasant exercises. We give him a glimpse of that great morning world of Robin Hood or the Knights Errant, when one great game was played under the splendid sky. We give him back his childhood, that godlike time when we can act stories, be our own heroes, and at the same instant dance and dream."

Basil gazed at him curiously. The most singular psychological discovery had been reserved to the end, for as the little business man ceased speaking he had the blazing eyes of a fanatic.

Major Brown received the explanation with complete simplicity and good humour.

"Of course; awfully dense, sir," he said. "No doubt at all, the scheme excellent. But I don't think—" He paused a moment, and looked dreamily out of the window. "I don't think you will find me in it. Somehow, when one's seen — seen the thing itself, you know — blood and men screaming, one feels about having a little house and a little hobby; in the Bible, you know, 'There remaineth a rest'."

Northover bowed. Then after a pause he said:

"Gentlemen, may I offer you my card. If any of the rest of you desire, at any time, to communicate with me, despite Major Brown's view of the matter—"

"I should be obliged for your card, sir," said the Major, in his abrupt but courteous voice. "Pay for chair."

The agent of Romance and Adventure handed his card, laughing.

It ran, "P. G. Northover, B.A., C.Q.T., Adventure and Romance Agency, 14 Tanner's Court, Fleet Street."

"What on earth is 'C.QT.'?" asked Rupert Grant, looking over the Major's shoulder.

"Don't you know?" returned Northover. "Haven't you ever heard of the Club of Queer Trades?"

"There seems to be a confounded lot of funny things we haven't heard of," said the little Major reflectively. "What's this one?"

"The Club of Queer Trades is a society consisting exclusively of people who have invented some new and curious way of making money. I was one of the earliest members."

“You deserve to be,” said Basil, taking up his great white hat, with a smile, and speaking for the last time that evening.

When they had passed out the Adventure and Romance agent wore a queer smile, as he trod down the fire and locked up his desk. “A fine chap, that Major; when one hasn’t a touch of the poet one stands some chance of being a poem. But to think of such a clockwork little creature of all people getting into the nets of one of Grigsby’s tales,” and he laughed out aloud in the silence.

Just as the laugh echoed away, there came a sharp knock at the door. An owlish head, with dark moustaches, was thrust in, with deprecating and somewhat absurd inquiry.

“What! back again, Major?” cried Northover in surprise. “What can I do for you?”

The Major shuffled feverishly into the room.

“It’s horribly absurd,” he said. “Something must have got started in me that I never knew before. But upon my soul I feel the most desperate desire to know the end of it all.”

“The end of it all?”

“Yes,” said the Major. “‘Jackals’, and the title-deeds, and ‘Death to Major Brown’.”

The agent’s face grew grave, but his eyes were amused.

“I am terribly sorry, Major,” said he, “but what you ask is impossible. I don’t know any one I would sooner oblige than you; but the rules of the agency are strict. The Adventures are confidential; you are an outsider; I am not allowed to let you know an inch more than I can help. I do hope you understand—”

“There is no one,” said Brown, “who understands discipline better than I do. Thank you very much. Good night.”

And the little man withdrew for the last time.

He married Miss Jameson, the lady with the red hair and the green garments. She was an actress, employed (with many others) by the Romance Agency; and her marriage with the prim old veteran caused some stir in her languid and intellectualized set. She always replied very quietly that she had met scores of men who acted splendidly in the charades provided for them by Northover, but that she had only met one man who went down into a coal-cellar when he really thought it contained a murderer.

The Major and she are living as happily as birds, in an absurd villa, and the former has taken to smoking. Otherwise he is unchanged — except, perhaps, there are moments when, alert and full of feminine unselfishness as the Major is by nature, he falls into a trance of abstraction. Then his wife recognizes with a concealed smile, by the blind look in his blue eyes, that he is wondering what were the title-deeds, and why he was not allowed to mention jackals. But, like so many old soldiers, Brown is religious, and believes that he will realize the rest of those purple adventures in a better world.

The Painful Fall of a Great Reputation

Basil Grant and I were talking one day in what is perhaps the most perfect place for talking on earth — the top of a tolerably deserted tramcar. To talk on the top of a hill is superb, but to talk on the top of a flying hill is a fairy tale.

The vast blank space of North London was flying by; the very pace gave us a sense of its immensity and its meanness. It was, as it were, a base infinitude, a squalid eternity, and we felt the real horror of the poor parts of London, the horror that is so totally missed and misrepresented by the sensational novelists who depict it as being a matter of narrow streets, filthy houses, criminals and maniacs, and dens of vice. In a narrow street, in a den of vice, you do not expect civilization, you do not expect order. But the horror of this was the fact that there was civilization, that there was order, but that civilisation only showed its morbidity, and order only its monotony. No one would say, in going through a criminal slum, “I see no statues. I notice no cathedrals.” But here there were public buildings; only they were mostly lunatic asylums. Here there were statues; only they were mostly statues of railway engineers and philanthropists — two dingy classes of men united by their common contempt for the people. Here there were churches; only they were the churches of dim and erratic sects, Agapemonites or Irvingites. Here, above all, there were broad roads and vast crossings and tramway lines and hospitals and all the real marks of civilization. But though one never knew, in one sense, what one would see next, there was one thing we knew we should not see — anything really great, central, of the first class, anything that humanity had adored. And with revulsion indescribable our emotions returned, I think, to those really close and crooked entries, to those really mean streets, to those genuine slums which lie round the Thames and the City, in which nevertheless a real possibility remains that at any chance corner the great cross of the great cathedral of Wren may strike down the street like a thunderbolt.

“But you must always remember also,” said Grant to me, in his heavy abstracted way, when I had urged this view, “that the very vileness of the life of these ordered plebeian places bears witness to the victory of the human soul. I agree with you. I agree that they have to live in something worse than barbarism. They have to live in a fourth-rate civilization. But yet

I am practically certain that the majority of people here are good people. And being good is an adventure far more violent and daring than sailing round the world. Besides—”

“Go on,” I said.

No answer came.

“Go on,” I said, looking up.

The big blue eyes of Basil Grant were standing out of his head and he was paying no attention to me. He was staring over the side of the tram.

“What is the matter?” I asked, peering over also.

“It is very odd,” said Grant at last, grimly, “that I should have been caught out like this at the very moment of my optimism. I said all these people were good, and there is the wickedest man in England.”

“Where?” I asked, leaning over further, “where?”

“Oh, I was right enough,” he went on, in that strange continuous and sleepy tone which always angered his hearers at acute moments, “I was right enough when I said all these people were good. They are heroes; they are saints. Now and then they may perhaps steal a spoon or two; they may beat a wife or two with the poker. But they are saints all the same; they are angels; they are robed in white; they are clad with wings and haloes — at any rate compared to that man.”

“Which man?” I cried again, and then my eye caught the figure at which Basil’s bull’s eyes were glaring.

He was a slim, smooth person, passing very quickly among the quickly passing crowd, but though there was nothing about him sufficient to attract a startled notice, there was quite enough to demand a curious consideration when once that notice was attracted. He wore a black top-hat, but there was enough in it of those strange curves whereby the decadent artist of the eighties tried to turn the top-hat into something as rhythmic as an Etruscan vase. His hair, which was largely grey, was curled with the instinct of one who appreciated the gradual beauty of grey and silver. The rest of his face was oval and, I thought, rather Oriental; he had two black tufts of moustache.

“What has he done?” I asked.

“I am not sure of the details,” said Grant, “but his besetting sin is a desire to intrigue to the disadvantage of others. Probably he has adopted some imposture or other to effect his plan.”

"What plan?" I asked. "If you know all about him, why don't you tell me why he is the wickedest man in England? What is his name?"

Basil Grant stared at me for some moments.

"I think you've made a mistake in my meaning," he said. "I don't know his name. I never saw him before in my life."

"Never saw him before!" I cried, with a kind of anger; "then what in heaven's name do you mean by saying that he is the wickedest man in England?"

"I meant what I said," said Basil Grant calmly. "The moment I saw that man, I saw all these people stricken with a sudden and splendid innocence. I saw that while all ordinary poor men in the streets were being themselves, he was not being himself. I saw that all the men in these slums, cadgers, pickpockets, hooligans, are all, in the deepest sense, trying to be good. And I saw that that man was trying to be evil."

"But if you never saw him before—" I began.

"In God's name, look at his face," cried out Basil in a voice that startled the driver. "Look at the eyebrows. They mean that infernal pride which made Satan so proud that he sneered even at heaven when he was one of the first angels in it. Look at his moustaches, they are so grown as to insult humanity. In the name of the sacred heavens look at his hair. In the name of God and the stars, look at his hat."

I stirred uncomfortably.

"But, after all," I said, "this is very fanciful — perfectly absurd. Look at the mere facts. You have never seen the man before, you—"

"Oh, the mere facts," he cried out in a kind of despair. "The mere facts! Do you really admit — are you still so sunk in superstitions, so clinging to dim and prehistoric altars, that you believe in facts? Do you not trust an immediate impression?"

"Well, an immediate impression may be," I said, "a little less practical than facts."

"Bosh," he said. "On what else is the whole world run but immediate impressions? What is more practical? My friend, the philosophy of this world may be founded on facts, its business is run on spiritual impressions and atmospheres. Why do you refuse or accept a clerk? Do you measure his skull? Do you read up his physiological state in a handbook? Do you go upon facts at all? Not a scrap. You accept a clerk who may save your business — you refuse a clerk that may rob your till, entirely upon those immediate mystical impressions under the pressure of which I pronounce, with a perfect sense of certainty and sincerity, that that man walking in that street beside us is a humbug and a villain of some kind.”

“You always put things well,” I said, “but, of course, such things cannot immediately be put to the test.”

Basil sprang up straight and swayed with the swaying car.

“Let us get off and follow him,” he said. “I bet you five pounds it will turn out as I say.”

And with a scuttle, a jump, and a run, we were off the car.

The man with the curved silver hair and the curved Eastern face walked along for some time, his long splendid frock-coat flying behind him. Then he swung sharply out of the great glaring road and disappeared down an ill-lit alley. We swung silently after him.

“This is an odd turning for a man of that kind to take,” I said.

“A man of what kind?” asked my friend.

“Well,” I said, “a man with that kind of expression and those boots. I thought it rather odd, to tell the truth, that he should be in this part of the world at all.”

“Ah, yes,” said Basil, and said no more.

We tramped on, looking steadily in front of us. The elegant figure, like the figure of a black swan, was silhouetted suddenly against the glare of intermittent gaslight and then swallowed again in night. The intervals between the lights were long, and a fog was thickening the whole city. Our pace, therefore, had become swift and mechanical between the lamp-posts; but Basil came to a standstill suddenly like a reined horse; I stopped also. We had almost run into the man. A great part of the solid darkness in front of us was the darkness of his body.

At first I thought he had turned to face us. But though we were hardly a yard off he did not realize that we were there. He tapped four times on a very low and dirty door in the dark, crabbed street. A gleam of gas cut the darkness as it opened slowly. We listened intently, but the interview was short and simple and inexplicable as an interview could be. Our exquisite friend handed in what looked like a paper or a card and said:

“At once. Take a cab.”

A heavy, deep voice from inside said:

“Right you are.”

And with a click we were in the blackness again, and striding after the striding stranger through a labyrinth of London lanes, the lights just helping us. It was only five o'clock, but winter and the fog had made it like midnight.

"This is really an extraordinary walk for the patent-leather boots," I repeated.

"I don't know," said Basil humbly. "It leads to Berkeley Square."

As I tramped on I strained my eyes through the dusky atmosphere and tried to make out the direction described. For some ten minutes I wondered and doubted; at the end of that I saw that my friend was right. We were coming to the great dreary spaces of fashionable London — more dreary, one must admit, even than the dreary plebeian spaces.

"This is very extraordinary!" said Basil Grant, as we turned into Berkeley Square.

"What is extraordinary?" I asked. "I thought you said it was quite natural."

"I do not wonder," answered Basil, "at his walking through nasty streets; I do not wonder at his going to Berkeley Square. But I do wonder at his going to the house of a very good man."

"What very good man?" I asked with exasperation.

"The operation of time is a singular one," he said with his imperturbable irrelevancy. "It is not a true statement of the case to say that I have forgotten my career when I was a judge and a public man. I remember it all vividly, but it is like remembering some novel. But fifteen years ago I knew this square as well as Lord Rosebery does, and a confounded long sight better than that man who is going up the steps of old Beaumont's house."

"Who is old Beaumont?" I asked irritably.

"A perfectly good fellow. Lord Beaumont of Foxwood — don't you know his name? He is a man of transparent sincerity, a nobleman who does more work than a navvy, a socialist, an anarchist, I don't know what; anyhow, he's a philosopher and philanthropist. I admit he has the slight disadvantage of being, beyond all question, off his head. He has that real disadvantage which has arisen out of the modern worship of progress and novelty; and he thinks anything odd and new must be an advance. If you went to him and proposed to eat your grandmother, he would agree with you, so long as you put it on hygienic and public grounds, as a cheap alternative to cremation. So long as you progress fast enough it seems a matter of indifference to him whether you are progressing to the stars or the devil. So his house is filled with an endless succession of literary and political fashions; men who wear long hair because it is romantic; men who wear short hair because it is medical; men who walk on their feet only to exercise their hands; and men who walk on their hands for fear of tiring their feet. But though the inhabitants of his salons are generally fools, like himself, they are almost always, like himself, good men. I am really surprised to see a criminal enter there."

"My good fellow," I said firmly, striking my foot on the pavement, "the truth of this affair is very simple. To use your own eloquent language, you have the 'slight disadvantage' of being off your head. You see a total stranger in a public street; you choose to start certain theories about his eyebrows. You then treat him as a burglar because he enters an honest man's door. The thing is too monstrous. Admit that it is, Basil, and come home with me. Though these people are still having tea, yet with the distance we have to go, we shall be late for dinner."

Basil's eyes were shining in the twilight like lamps.

"I thought," he said, "that I had outlived vanity."

"What do you want now?" I cried.

"I want," he cried out, "what a girl wants when she wears her new frock; I want what a boy wants when he goes in for a clanging match with a monitor — I want to show somebody what a fine fellow I am. I am as right about that man as I am about your having a hat on your head. You say it cannot be tested. I say it can. I will take you to see my old friend Beaumont. He is a delightful man to know."

"Do you really mean — ?" I began.

"I will apologize," he said calmly, "for our not being dressed for a call," and walking across the vast misty square, he walked up the dark stone steps and rang at the bell.

A severe servant in black and white opened the door to us: on receiving my friend's name his manner passed in a flash from astonishment to respect. We were ushered into the house very quickly, but not so quickly but that our host, a white-haired man with a fiery face, came out quickly to meet us.

"My dear fellow," he cried, shaking Basil's hand again and again, "I have not seen you for years. Have you been — er—" he said, rather wildly, "have you been in the country?"

“Not for all that time,” answered Basil, smiling. “I have long given up my official position, my dear Philip, and have been living in a deliberate retirement. I hope I do not come at an inopportune moment.”

“An inopportune moment,” cried the ardent gentleman. “You come at the most opportune moment I could imagine. Do you know who is here?”

“I do not,” answered Grant, with gravity. Even as he spoke a roar of laughter came from the inner room.

“Basil,” said Lord Beaumont solemnly, “I have Wimpole here.”

“And who is Wimpole?”

“Basil,” cried the other, “you must have been in the country. You must have been in the antipodes. You must have been in the moon. Who is Wimpole? Who was Shakespeare?”

“As to who Shakespeare was,” answered my friend placidly, “my views go no further than thinking that he was not Bacon. More probably he was Mary Queen of Scots. But as to who Wimpole is—” and his speech also was cloven with a roar of laughter from within.

“Wimpole!” cried Lord Beaumont, in a sort of ecstasy. “Haven’t you heard of the great modern wit? My dear fellow, he has turned conversation, I do not say into an art — for that, perhaps, it always was but into a great art, like the statuary of Michael Angelo — an art of masterpieces. His repartees, my good friend, startle one like a man shot dead. They are final; they are—”

Again there came the hilarious roar from the room, and almost with the very noise of it, a big, panting apoplectic old gentleman came out of the inner house into the hall where we were standing.

“Now, my dear chap,” began Lord Beaumont hastily.

“I tell you, Beaumont, I won’t stand it,” exploded the large old gentleman. “I won’t be made game of by a twopenny literary adventurer like that. I won’t be made a guy. I won’t—”

“Come, come,” said Beaumont feverishly. “Let me introduce you. This is Mr Justice Grant — that is, Mr Grant. Basil, I am sure you have heard of Sir Walter Cholmondeliegh.”

“Who has not?” asked Grant, and bowed to the worthy old baronet, eyeing him with some curiosity. He was hot and heavy in his momentary anger, but even that could not conceal the noble though opulent outline of his face and body, the florid white hair, the Roman nose, the body stalwart though corpulent, the chin aristocratic though double. He was a magnificent courtly gentleman; so much of a gentleman that he could show an unquestionable weakness of anger without altogether losing dignity; so much of a gentleman that even his faux pas were well-bred.

“I am distressed beyond expression, Beaumont,” he said gruffly, “to fail in respect to these gentlemen, and even more especially to fail in it in your house. But it is not you or they that are in any way concerned, but that flashy half-caste jackanapes—”

At this moment a young man with a twist of red moustache and a sombre air came out of the inner room. He also did not seem to be greatly enjoying the intellectual banquet within.

“I think you remember my friend and secretary, Mr Drummond,” said Lord Beaumont, turning to Grant, “even if you only remember him as a schoolboy.”

“Perfectly,” said the other. Mr Drummond shook hands pleasantly and respectfully, but the cloud was still on his brow. Turning to Sir Walter Cholmondeliegh, he said:

“I was sent by Lady Beaumont to express her hope that you were not going yet, Sir Walter. She says she has scarcely seen anything of you.”

The old gentleman, still red in the face, had a temporary internal struggle; then his good manners triumphed, and with a gesture of obeisance and a vague utterance of, “If Lady Beaumont... a lady, of course,” he followed the young man back into the salon. He had scarcely been deposited there half a minute before another peal of laughter told that he had (in all probability) been scored off again.

“Of course, I can excuse dear old Cholmondeliegh,” said Beaumont, as he helped us off with our coats. “He has not the modern mind.”

“What is the modern mind?” asked Grant.

“Oh, it’s enlightened, you know, and progressive — and faces the facts of life seriously.” At this moment another roar of laughter came from within.

“I only ask,” said Basil, “because of the last two friends of yours who had the modern mind; one thought it wrong to eat fishes and the other thought it right to eat men. I beg your pardon — this way, if I remember right.”

“Do you know,” said Lord Beaumont, with a sort of feverish entertainment, as he trotted after us towards the interior, “I can never quite make out which side you are on. Sometimes you seem so liberal and sometimes so reactionary. Are you a modern, Basil?"

"No," said Basil, loudly and cheerfully, as he entered the crowded drawing-room.

This caused a slight diversion, and some eyes were turned away from our slim friend with the Oriental face for the first time that afternoon. Two people, however, still looked at him. One was the daughter of the house, Muriel Beaumont, who gazed at him with great violet eyes and with the intense and awful thirst of the female upper class for verbal amusement and stimulus. The other was Sir Walter Cholmondeliegh, who looked at him with a still and sullen but unmistakable desire to throw him out of the window.

He sat there, coiled rather than seated on the easy chair; everything from the curves of his smooth limbs to the coils of his silvered hair suggesting the circles of a serpent more than the straight limbs of a man — the unmistakable, splendid serpentine gentleman we had seen walking in North London, his eyes shining with repeated victory.

"What I can't understand, Mr Wimpole," said Muriel Beaumont eagerly, "is how you contrive to treat all this so easily. You say things quite philosophical and yet so wildly funny. If I thought of such things, I'm sure I should laugh outright when the thought first came."

"I agree with Miss Beaumont," said Sir Walter, suddenly exploding with indignation. "If I had thought of anything so futile, I should find it difficult to keep my countenance."

"Difficult to keep your countenance," cried Mr Wimpole, with an air of alarm; "oh, do keep your countenance! Keep it in the British Museum."

Every one laughed uproariously, as they always do at an already admitted readiness, and Sir Walter, turning suddenly purple, shouted out:

"Do you know who you are talking to, with your confounded tomfooleries?"

"I never talk tomfooleries," said the other, "without first knowing my audience."

Grant walked across the room and tapped the red-moustached secretary on the shoulder. That gentleman was leaning against the wall regarding the whole scene with a great deal of gloom; but, I fancied, with very particular gloom when his eyes fell on the young lady of the house rapturously listening to Wimpole.

"May I have a word with you outside, Drummond?" asked Grant. "It is about business. Lady Beaumont will excuse us."

I followed my friend, at his own request, greatly wondering, to this strange external interview. We passed abruptly into a kind of side room out of the hall.

"Drummond," said Basil sharply, "there are a great many good people, and a great many sane people here this afternoon. Unfortunately, by a kind of coincidence, all the good people are mad, and all the sane people are wicked. You are the only person I know of here who is honest and has also some common sense. What do you make of Wimpole?"

Mr Secretary Drummond had a pale face and red hair; but at this his face became suddenly as red as his moustache.

"I am not a fair judge of him," he said.

"Why not?" asked Grant.

"Because I hate him like hell," said the other, after a long pause and violently.

Neither Grant nor I needed to ask the reason; his glances towards Miss Beaumont and the stranger were sufficiently illuminating. Grant said quietly:

"But before — before you came to hate him, what did you really think of him?"

"I am in a terrible difficulty," said the young man, and his voice told us, like a clear bell, that he was an honest man. "If I spoke about him as I feel about him now, I could not trust myself. And I should like to be able to say that when I first saw him I thought he was charming. But again, the fact is I didn't. I hate him, that is my private affair. But I also disapprove of him — really I do believe I disapprove of him quite apart from my private feelings. When first he came, I admit he was much quieter, but I did not like, so to speak, the moral swell of him. Then that jolly old Sir Walter Cholmondeliegh got introduced to us, and this fellow, with his cheap-jack wit, began to score off the old man in the way he does now. Then I felt that he must be a bad lot; it must be bad to fight the old and the kindly. And he fights the poor old chap savagely, unceasingly, as if he hated old age and kindliness. Take, if you want it, the evidence of a prejudiced witness. I admit that I hate the man because a certain person admires him. But I believe that apart from that I should hate the man because old Sir Walter hates him."

This speech affected me with a genuine sense of esteem and pity for the young man; that is, of pity for him because of his obviously hopeless worship of Miss Beaumont, and of esteem for him because of the direct realistic account of the history of Wimpole which he had given. Still, I was sorry that he seemed so steadily set against the man, and could not help referring it to an instinct of his personal relations, however nobly disguised from himself.

In the middle of these meditations, Grant whispered in my ear what was perhaps the most startling of all interruptions.

“In the name of God, let’s get away.”

I have never known exactly in how odd a way this odd old man affected me. I only know that for some reason or other he so affected me that I was, within a few minutes, in the street outside.

“This,” he said, “is a beastly but amusing affair.”

“What is?” I asked, baldly enough.

“This affair. Listen to me, my old friend. Lord and Lady Beaumont have just invited you and me to a grand dinner-party this very night, at which Mr Wimpole will be in all his glory. Well, there is nothing very extraordinary about that. The extraordinary thing is that we are not going.”

“Well, really,” I said, “it is already six o’clock and I doubt if we could get home and dress. I see nothing extraordinary in the fact that we are not going.”

“Don’t you?” said Grant. “I’ll bet you’ll see something extraordinary in what we’re doing instead.”

I looked at him blankly.

“Doing instead?” I asked. “What are we doing instead?”

“Why,” said he, “we are waiting for one or two hours outside this house on a winter evening. You must forgive me; it is all my vanity. It is only to show you that I am right. Can you, with the assistance of this cigar, wait until both Sir Walter Cholmondeliegh and the mystic Wimpole have left this house?”

“Certainly,” I said. “But I do not know which is likely to leave first. Have you any notion?”

“No,” he said. “Sir Walter may leave first in a glow of rage. Or again, Mr Wimpole may leave first, feeling that his last epigram is a thing to be flung behind him like a firework. And Sir Walter may remain some time to analyse Mr Wimpole’s character. But they will both have to leave within reasonable time, for they will both have to get dressed and come back to dinner here tonight.”

As he spoke the shrill double whistle from the porch of the great house drew a dark cab to the dark portal. And then a thing happened that we really had not expected. Mr Wimpole and Sir Walter Cholmondeliegh came out at the same moment.

They paused for a second or two opposite each other in a natural doubt; then a certain geniality, fundamental perhaps in both of them, made Sir Walter smile and say: “The night is foggy. Pray take my cab.”

Before I could count twenty the cab had gone rattling up the street with both of them. And before I could count twenty-three Grant had hissed in my ear:

“Run after the cab; run as if you were running from a mad dog — run.”

We pelted on steadily, keeping the cab in sight, through dark mazy streets. God only, I thought, knows why we are running at all, but we are running hard. Fortunately we did not run far. The cab pulled up at the fork of two streets and Sir Walter paid the cabman, who drove away rejoicing, having just come in contact with the more generous among the rich. Then the two men talked together as men do talk together after giving and receiving great insults, the talk which leads either to forgiveness or a duel — at least so it seemed as we watched it from ten yards off. Then the two men shook hands heartily, and one went down one fork of the road and one down another.

Basil, with one of his rare gestures, flung his arms forward.

“Run after that scoundrel,” he cried; “let us catch him now.”

We dashed across the open space and reached the juncture of two paths.

“Stop!” I shouted wildly to Grant. “That’s the wrong turning.”

He ran on.

“Idiot!” I howled. “Sir Walter’s gone down there. Wimpole has slipped us. He’s half a mile down the other road. You’re wrong... Are you deaf? You’re wrong!”

“I don’t think I am,” he panted, and ran on.

“But I saw him!” I cried. “Look in front of you. Is that Wimpole? It’s the old man... What are you doing? What are we to do?”

“Keep running,” said Grant.

Running soon brought us up to the broad back of the pompous old baronet, whose white whiskers shone silver in the fitful lamplight. My brain was utterly bewildered. I grasped nothing.

“Charlie,” said Basil hoarsely, “can you believe in my common sense for four minutes?”

“Of course,” I said, panting.

“Then help me to catch that man in front and hold him down. Do it at once when I say ‘Now’. Now!”

We sprang on Sir Walter Cholmondeliegh, and rolled that portly old gentleman on his back. He fought with a commendable valour, but we got him tight. I had not the remotest notion why. He had a splendid and full-blooded vigour; when he could not box he kicked, and we bound him; when he could not kick he shouted, and we gagged him. Then, by Basil’s arrangement, we dragged him into a small court by the street side and waited. As I say, I had no notion why.

“I am sorry to incommode you,” said Basil calmly out of the darkness; “but I have made an appointment here.”

“An appointment!” I said blankly.

“Yes,” he said, glancing calmly at the apoplectic old aristocrat gagged on the ground, whose eyes were starting impotently from his head. “I have made an appointment here with a thoroughly nice young fellow. An old friend. Jasper Drummond his name is — you may have met him this afternoon at the Beaumonts. He can scarcely come though till the Beaumonts’ dinner is over.”

For I do not know how many hours we stood there calmly in the darkness. By the time those hours were over I had thoroughly made up my mind that the same thing had happened which had happened long ago on the bench of a British Court of Justice. Basil Grant had gone mad. I could imagine no other explanation of the facts, with the portly, purple-faced old country gentleman flung there strangled on the floor like a bundle of wood.

After about four hours a lean figure in evening dress rushed into the court. A glimpse of gaslight showed the red moustache and white face of Jasper Drummond.

“Mr Grant,” he said blankly, “the thing is incredible. You were right; but what did you mean? All through this dinner-party, where dukes and duchesses and editors of Quarterlies had come especially to hear him, that extraordinary Wimpole kept perfectly silent. He didn’t say a funny thing. He didn’t say anything at all. What does it mean?”

Grant pointed to the portly old gentleman on the ground.

“That is what it means,” he said.

Drummond, on observing a fat gentleman lying so calmly about the place, jumped back, as from a mouse.

“What?” he said weakly, “... what?”

Basil bent suddenly down and tore a paper out of Sir Walter’s breastpocket, a paper which the baronet, even in his hampered state, seemed to make some effort to retain.

It was a large loose piece of white wrapping paper, which Mr Jasper Drummond read with a vacant eye and undisguised astonishment. As far as he could make out, it consisted of a series of questions and answers, or at least of remarks and replies, arranged in the manner of a catechism. The greater part of the document had been torn and obliterated in the struggle, but the termination remained. It ran as follows:

C. Says... Keep countenance.

W. Keep... British Museum.

C. Know whom talk... absurdities.

W. Never talk absurdities without

“What is it?” cried Drummond, flinging the paper down in a sort of final fury.

“What is it?” replied Grant, his voice rising into a kind of splendid chant. “What is it? It is a great new profession. A great new trade. A trifle immoral, I admit, but still great, like piracy.”

“A new profession!” said the young man with the red moustache vaguely; “a new trade!”

“A new trade,” repeated Grant, with a strange exultation, “a new profession! What a pity it is immoral.”

“But what the deuce is it?” cried Drummond and I in a breath of blasphemy.

“It is,” said Grant calmly, “the great new trade of the Organizer of Repartee. This fat old gentleman lying on the ground strikes you, as I have no doubt, as very stupid and very rich. Let me clear his character. He is, like ourselves, very clever and very poor. He is also not really at all fat; all that is stuffing. He is not particularly old, and his name is not Cholmondeliegh. He is a swindler, and a swindler of a perfectly delightful and novel kind. He hires himself out at dinner-parties to lead up to other people’s repartees. According to a preconcerted scheme (which you may find on that piece of paper), he says the stupid things he has arranged for himself, and his client says the clever things arranged for him. In short, he allows himself to be scored off for a guinea a night."

"And this fellow Wimpole—" began Drummond with indignation.

"This fellow Wimpole," said Basil Grant, smiling, "will not be an intellectual rival in the future. He had some fine things, elegance and silvered hair, and so on. But the intellect is with our friend on the floor."

"That fellow," cried Drummond furiously, "that fellow ought to be in gaol."

"Not at all," said Basil indulgently; "he ought to be in the Club of Queer Trades."

The Awful Reason of the Vicar’s Visit

The revolt of Matter against Man (which I believe to exist) has now been reduced to a singular condition. It is the small things rather than the large things which make war against us and, I may add, beat us. The bones of the last mammoth have long ago decayed, a mighty wreck; the tempests no longer devour our navies, nor the mountains with hearts of fire heap hell over our cities. But we are engaged in a bitter and eternal war with small things; chiefly with microbes and with collar studs. The stud with which I was engaged (on fierce and equal terms) as I made the above reflections, was one which I was trying to introduce into my shirt collar when a loud knock came at the door.

My first thought was as to whether Basil Grant had called to fetch me. He and I were to turn up at the same dinner-party (for which I was in the act of dressing), and it might be that he had taken it into his head to come my way, though we had arranged to go separately. It was a small and confidential affair at the table of a good but unconventional political lady, an old friend of his. She had asked us both to meet a third guest, a Captain Fraser, who had made something of a name and was an authority on chimpanzees. As Basil was an old friend of the hostess and I had never seen her, I felt that it was quite possible that he (with his usual social sagacity) might have decided to take me along in order to break the ice. The theory, like all my theories, was complete; but as a fact it was not Basil.

I was handed a visiting card inscribed: “Rev. Ellis Shorter”, and underneath was written in pencil, but in a hand in which even hurry could not conceal a depressing and gentlemanly excellence, “Asking the favour of a few moments’ conversation on a most urgent matter.”!

I had already subdued the stud, thereby proclaiming that the image of God has supremacy over all matters (a valuable truth), and throwing on my dress-coat and waistcoat, hurried into the drawing-room. He rose at my entrance, flapping like a seal; I can use no other description. He flapped a plaid shawl over his right arm; he flapped a pair of pathetic black gloves; he flapped his clothes; I may say, without exaggeration, that he flapped his eyelids, as he rose. He was a bald-browed, white-haired, white-whiskered old clergyman, of a flappy and floppy type. He said:

"I am so sorry. I am so very sorry. I am so extremely sorry. I come — I can only say — I can only say in my defence, that I come — upon an important matter. Pray forgive me."

I told him I forgave perfectly and waited.

"What I have to say," he said brokenly, "is so dreadful — it is so dreadful — I have lived a quiet life."

I was burning to get away, for it was already doubtful if I should be in time for dinner. But there was something about the old man's honest air of bitterness that seemed to open to me the possibilities of life larger and more tragic than my own.

I said gently: "Pray go on."

Nevertheless the old gentleman, being a gentleman as well as old, noticed my secret impatience and seemed still more unmanned.

"I'm so sorry," he said meekly; "I wouldn't have come — but for — your friend Major Brown recommended me to come here."

"Major Brown!" I said, with some interest.

"Yes," said the Reverend Mr Shorter, feverishly flapping his plaid shawl about. "He told me you helped him in a great difficulty — and my difficulty! Oh, my dear sir, it's a matter of life and death."

I rose abruptly, in an acute perplexity. "Will it take long, Mr Shorter?" I asked. "I have to go out to dinner almost at once."

He rose also, trembling from head to foot, and yet somehow, with all his moral palsy, he rose to the dignity of his age and his office.

"I have no right, Mr Swinburne — I have no right at all," he said. "If you have to go out to dinner, you have of course — a perfect right — of course a perfect right. But when you come back — a man will be dead."

And he sat down, quaking like a jelly.

The triviality of the dinner had been in those two minutes dwarfed and drowned in my mind. I did not want to go and see a political widow, and a captain who collected apes; I wanted to hear what had brought this dear, doddering old vicar into relation with immediate perils.

"Will you have a cigar?" I said.

"No, thank you," he said, with indescribable embarrassment, as if not smoking cigars was a social disgrace.

"A glass of wine?" I said.

"No, thank you, no, thank you; not just now," he repeated with that hysterical eagerness with which people who do not drink at all often try to convey that on any other night of the week they would sit up all night drinking rum-punch. “Not just now, thank you.”

“Nothing else I can get for you?” I said, feeling genuinely sorry for the well-mannered old donkey. “A cup of tea?”

I saw a struggle in his eye and I conquered. When the cup of tea came he drank it like a dipsomaniac gulping brandy. Then he fell back and said:

“I have had such a time, Mr Swinburne. I am not used to these excitements. As Vicar of Chuntsey, in Essex’ — he threw this in with an indescribable airiness of vanity— ‘I have never known such things happen.”

“What things happen?” I asked.

He straightened himself with sudden dignity.

“As Vicar of Chuntsey, in Essex,” he said, “I have never been forcibly dressed up as an old woman and made to take part in a crime in the character of an old woman. Never once. My experience may be small. It may be insufficient. But it has never occurred to me before.”

“I have never heard of it,” I said, “as among the duties of a clergyman. But I am not well up in church matters. Excuse me if perhaps I failed to follow you correctly. Dressed up — as what?”

“As an old woman,” said the vicar solemnly, “as an old woman.”

I thought in my heart that it required no great transformation to make an old woman of him, but the thing was evidently more tragic than comic, and I said respectfully:

“May I ask how it occurred?”

“I will begin at the beginning,” said Mr Shorter, “and I will tell my story with the utmost possible precision. At seventeen minutes past eleven this morning I left the vicarage to keep certain appointments and pay certain visits in the village. My first visit was to Mr Jervis, the treasurer of our League of Christian Amusements, with whom I concluded some business touching the claim made by Parkes the gardener in the matter of the rolling of our tennis lawn. I then visited Mrs Arnett, a very earnest churchwoman, but permanently bedridden. She is the author of several small works of devotion, and of a book of verse, entitled (unless my memory misleads me) Eglantine.”

He uttered all this not only with deliberation, but with something that can only be called, by a contradictory phrase, eager deliberation. He had, I think, a vague memory in his head of the detectives in the detective stories, who always sternly require that nothing should be kept back.

“I then proceeded,” he went on, with the same maddening conscientiousness of manner, “to Mr Carr (not Mr James Carr, of course; Mr Robert Carr) who is temporarily assisting our organist, and having consulted with him (on the subject of a choir boy who is accused, I cannot as yet say whether justly or not, of cutting holes in the organ pipes), I finally dropped in upon a Dorcas meeting at the house of Miss Brett. The Dorcas meetings are usually held at the vicarage, but my wife being unwell, Miss Brett, a newcomer in our village, but very active in church work, had very kindly consented to hold them. The Dorcas society is entirely under my wife’s management as a rule, and except for Miss Brett, who, as I say, is very active, I scarcely know any members of it. I had, however, promised to drop in on them, and I did so.

“When I arrived there were only four other maiden ladies with Miss Brett, but they were sewing very busily. It is very difficult, of course, for any person, however strongly impressed with the necessity in these matters of full and exact exposition of the facts, to remember and repeat the actual details of a conversation, particularly a conversation which (though inspired with a most worthy and admirable zeal for good work) was one which did not greatly impress the hearer’s mind at the time and was in fact — er — mostly about socks. I can, however, remember distinctly that one of the spinster ladies (she was a thin person with a woollen shawl, who appeared to feel the cold, and I am almost sure she was introduced to me as Miss James) remarked that the weather was very changeable. Miss Brett then offered me a cup of tea, which I accepted, I cannot recall in what words. Miss Brett is a short and stout lady with white hair. The only other figure in the group that caught my attention was a Miss Mowbray, a small and neat lady of aristocratic manners, silver hair, and a high voice and colour. She was the most emphatic member of the party; and her views on the subject of pinafores, though expressed with a natural deference to myself, were in themselves strong and advanced. Beside her (although all five ladies were dressed simply in black) it could not be denied that the others looked in some way what you men of the world would call dowdy.

“After about ten minutes’ conversation I rose to go, and as I did so I heard something which — I cannot describe it — something which seemed to — but I really cannot describe it.”

“What did you hear?” I asked, with some impatience.

“I heard,” said the vicar solemnly, “I heard Miss Mowbray (the lady with the silver hair) say to Miss James (the lady with the woollen shawl), the following extraordinary words. I committed them to memory on the spot, and as soon as circumstances set me free to do so, I noted them down on a piece of paper. I believe I have it here.” He fumbled in his breast-pocket, bringing out mild things, note-books, circulars and programmes of village concerts. “I heard Miss Mowbray say to Miss James, the following words: ‘Now’s your time, Bill.’”

He gazed at me for a few moments after making this announcement, gravely and unflinchingly, as if conscious that here he was unshaken about his facts. Then he resumed, turning his bald head more towards the fire.

“This appeared to me remarkable. I could not by any means understand it. It seemed to me first of all peculiar that one maiden lady should address another maiden lady as ‘Bill’. My experience, as I have said, may be incomplete; maiden ladies may have among themselves and in exclusively spinster circles wilder customs than I am aware of. But it seemed to me odd, and I could almost have sworn (if you will not misunderstand the phrase), I should have been strongly impelled to maintain at the time that the words, ‘Now’s your time, Bill’, were by no means pronounced with that upper-class intonation which, as I have already said, had up to now characterized Miss Mowbray’s conversation. In fact, the words, ‘Now’s your time, Bill’, would have been, I fancy, unsuitable if pronounced with that upper-class intonation.

“I was surprised, I repeat, then, at the remark. But I was still more surprised when, looking round me in bewilderment, my hat and umbrella in hand, I saw the lean lady with the woollen shawl leaning upright against the door out of which I was just about to make my exit. She was still knitting, and I supposed that this erect posture against the door was only an eccentricity of spinsterhood and an oblivion of my intended departure.

“I said genially, ‘I am so sorry to disturb you, Miss James, but I must really be going. I have — er—’ I stopped here, for the words she had uttered in reply, though singularly brief and in tone extremely business-like, were such as to render that arrest of my remarks, I think, natural and excusable. I have these words also noted down. I have not the least idea of their meaning; so I have only been able to render them phonetically. But she said,” and Mr Shorter peered short-sightedly at his papers, “she said:

‘Chuck it, fat ‘ead,’ and she added something that sounded like ‘It’s a kop’, or (possibly) ‘a kopt’. And then the last cord, either of my sanity or the sanity of the universe, snapped suddenly. My esteemed friend and helper, Miss Brett, standing by the mantelpiece, said: ‘Put ‘is old ‘ead in a bag, Sam, and tie ‘im up before you start jawin’. You’ll be kopt yourselves some o’ these days with this way of coin’ things, har lar theater.’

“My head went round and round. Was it really true, as I had suddenly fancied a moment before, that unmarried ladies had some dreadful riotous society of their own from which all others were excluded? I remembered dimly in my classical days (I was a scholar in a small way once, but now, alas! rusty), I remembered the mysteries of the Bona Dea and their strange female freemasonry. I remembered the witches’ Sabbaths. I was just, in my absurd lightheadedness, trying to remember a line of verse about Diana’s nymphs, when Miss Mowbray threw her arm round me from behind. The moment it held me I knew it was not a woman’s arm.

“Miss Brett — or what I had called Miss Brett — was standing in front of me with a big revolver in her hand and a broad grin on her face. Miss James was still leaning against the door, but had fallen into an attitude so totally new, and so totally unfeminine, that it gave one a shock. She was kicking her heels, with her hands in her pockets and her cap on one side. She was a man. I mean he was a wo — no, that is I saw that instead of being a woman she — he, I mean — that is, it was a man.”

Mr Shorter became indescribably flurried and flapping in endeavouring to arrange these genders and his plaid shawl at the same time. He resumed with a higher fever of nervousness:

“As for Miss Mowbray, she — he, held me in a ring of iron. He had her arm — that is she had his arm — round her neck — my neck I mean — and I could not cry out. Miss Brett — that is, Mr Brett, at least Mr something who was not Miss Brett — had the revolver pointed at me. The other two ladies — or er — gentlemen, were rummaging in some bag in the background. It was all clear at last: they were criminals dressed up as women, to kidnap me! To kidnap the Vicar of Chuntsey, in Essex. But why? Was it to be Nonconformists?

“The brute leaning against the door called out carelessly, ‘‘Urry up, ‘Arry. Show the old bloke what the game is, and let’s get off.’

“‘Curse ‘is eyes,’ said Miss Brett — I mean the man with the revolver— ‘why should we show ‘im the game?’

"'If you take my advice you bloomin' well will,' said the man at the door, whom they called Bill. 'A man wot knows wet 'e's doin' is worth ten wot don't, even if 'e's a potty old parson.'

"'Bill's right enough,' said the coarse voice of the man who held me (it had been Miss Mowbray's). 'Bring out the picture, 'Arry.'

"The man with the revolver walked across the room to where the other two women — I mean men — were turning over baggage, and asked them for something which they gave him. He came back with it across the room and held it out in front of me. And compared to the surprise of that display, all the previous surprises of this awful day shrank suddenly.

"It was a portrait of myself. That such a picture should be in the hands of these scoundrels might in any case have caused a mild surprise; but no more. It was no mild surprise that I felt. The likeness was an extremely good one, worked up with all the accessories of the conventional photographic studio. I was leaning my head on my hand and was relieved against a painted landscape of woodland. It was obvious that it was no snapshot; it was clear that I had sat for this photograph. And the truth was that I had never sat for such a photograph. It was a photograph that I had never had taken.

"I stared at it again and again. It seemed to me to be touched up a good deal; it was glazed as well as framed, and the glass blurred some of the details. But there unmistakably was my face, my eyes, my nose and mouth, my head and hand, posed for a professional photographer. And I had never posed so for any photographer.

"'Be'old the bloomin' miracle,' said the man with the revolver, with ill-timed facetiousness. 'Parson, prepare to meet your God.' And with this he slid the glass out of the frame. As the glass moved, I saw that part of the picture was painted on it in Chinese white, notably a pair of white whiskers and a clerical collar. And underneath was a portrait of an old lady in a quiet black dress, leaning her head on her hand against the woodland landscape. The old lady was as like me as one pin is like another. It had required only the whiskers and the collar to make it me in every hair.

"'Entertainin', ain't it?' said the man described as 'Arry, as he shot the glass back again. 'Remarkable resemblance, parson. Gratifyin' to the lady. Gratifyin' to you. And hi may hadd, particlery gratifyin' to us, as bein' the probable source of a very tolerable haul. You know Colonel Hawker, the man who's come to live in these parts, don't you?'

“I nodded.

“‘Well,’ said the man ‘Arry, pointing to the picture, ‘that’s ‘is mother. ‘Oo ran to catch ‘im when ‘e fell? She did,’ and he flung his fingers in a general gesture towards the photograph of the old lady who was exactly like me.

“‘Tell the old gent wot ‘e’s got to do and be done with it,’ broke out Bill from the door. ‘Look ‘ere, Reverend Shorter, we ain’t goin’ to do you no ‘arm. We’ll give you a sov. for your trouble if you like. And as for the old woman’s clothes — why, you’ll look lovely in ‘em.’

“‘You ain’t much of a ‘and at a description, Bill,’ said the man behind me. ‘Mr Shorter, it’s like this. We’ve got to see this man Hawker tonight. Maybe ‘e’ll kiss us all and ‘ave up the champagne when ‘e sees us. Maybe on the other ‘and— ‘e won’t. Maybe ‘e’ll be dead when we goes away. Maybe not. But we’ve got to see ‘im. Now as you know, ‘e shuts ‘isself up and never opens the door to a soul; only you don’t know why and we does. The only one as can ever get at ‘im is ‘is mother. Well, it’s a confounded funny coincidence,’ he said, accenting the penultimate, ‘it’s a very unusual piece of good luck, but you’re ‘is mother.’

“‘When first I saw ‘er picture,’ said the man Bill, shaking his head in a ruminant manner, ‘when I first saw it I said — old Shorter. Those were my exact words — old Shorter.’

“‘What do you mean, you wild creatures?’ I gasped. ‘What am I to do?’

“‘That’s easy said, your ‘oldness,’ said the man with the revolver, good-humouredly; ‘you’ve got to put on those clothes,’ and he pointed to a poke-bonnet and a heap of female clothes in the corner of the room.

“I will not dwell, Mr Swinburne, upon the details of what followed. I had no choice. I could not fight five men, to say nothing of a loaded pistol. In five minutes, sir, the Vicar of Chuntsey was dressed as an old woman — as somebody else’s mother, if you please — and was dragged out of the house to take part in a crime.

“It was already late in the afternoon, and the nights of winter were closing in fast. On a dark road, in a blowing wind, we set out towards the lonely house of Colonel Hawker, perhaps the queerest cortege that ever straggled up that or any other road. To every human eye, in every external, we were six very respectable old ladies of small means, in black dresses and refined but antiquated bonnets; and we were really five criminals and a clergyman.

“I will cut a long story short. My brain was whirling like a windmill as I walked, trying to think of some manner of escape. To cry out, so long as we were far from houses, would be suicidal, for it would be easy for the ruffians to knife me or to gag me and fling me into a ditch. On the other hand, to attempt to stop strangers and explain the situation was impossible, because of the frantic folly of the situation itself. Long before I had persuaded the chance postman or carrier of so absurd a story, my companions would certainly have got off themselves, and in all probability would have carried me off, as a friend of theirs who had the misfortune to be mad or drunk. The last thought, however, was an inspiration; though a very terrible one. Had it come to this, that the Vicar of Chuntsey must pretend to be mad or drunk? It had come to this.

“I walked along with the rest up the deserted road, imitating and keeping pace, as far as I could, with their rapid and yet lady-like step, until at length I saw a lamp-post and a policeman standing under it. I had made up my mind. Until we reached them we were all equally demure and silent and swift. When we reached them I suddenly flung myself against the railings and roared out: ‘Hooray! Hooray! Hooray! Rule Britannia! Get your ‘air cut. Hoop-la! Boo!’ It was a condition of no little novelty for a man in my position.

“The constable instantly flashed his lantern on me, or the draggled, drunken old woman that was my travesty. ‘Now then, mum,’ he began gruffly.

“‘Come along quiet, or I’ll eat your heart,’ cried Sam in my ear hoarsely. ‘Stop, or I’ll flay you.’ It was frightful to hear the words and see the neatly shawled old spinster who whispered them.

“I yelled, and yelled — I was in for it now. I screamed comic refrains that vulgar young men had sung, to my regret, at our village concerts; I rolled to and fro like a ninepin about to fall.

“‘If you can’t get your friend on quiet, ladies,’ said the policeman, ‘I shall have to take ‘er up. Drunk and disorderly she is right enough.’

“I redoubled my efforts. I had not been brought up to this sort of thing; but I believe I eclipsed myself. Words that I did not know I had ever heard of seemed to come pouring out of my open mouth.

“‘When we get you past,’ whispered Bill, ‘you’ll howl louder; you’ll howl louder when we’re burning your feet off.’

“I screamed in my terror those awful songs of joy. In all the nightmares that men have ever dreamed, there has never been anything so blighting and horrible as the faces of those five men, looking out of their poke-bonnets; the figures of district visitors with the faces of devils. I cannot think there is anything so heart-breaking in hell.

“For a sickening instant I thought that the bustle of my companions and the perfect respectability of all our dresses would overcome the policeman and induce him to let us pass. He wavered, so far as one can describe anything so solid as a policeman as wavering. I lurched suddenly forward and ran my head into his chest, calling out (if I remember correctly), ‘Oh, crikey, blimey, Bill.’ It was at that moment that I remembered most dearly that I was the Vicar of Chuntsey, in Essex.

“My desperate coup saved me. The policeman had me hard by the back of the neck.

“‘You come along with me,’ he began, but Bill cut in with his perfect imitation of a lady’s finnicking voice.

“‘Oh, pray, constable, don’t make a disturbance with our poor friend. We will get her quietly home. She does drink too much, but she is quite a lady — only eccentric.’

“‘She butted me in the stomach,’ said the policeman briefly.

“‘Eccentricities of genius,’ said Sam earnestly.

“‘Pray let me take her home,’ reiterated Bill, in the resumed character of Miss James, ‘she wants looking after.’ ‘She does,’ said the policeman, ‘but I’ll look after her.’

“‘That’s no good,’ cried Bill feverishly. ‘She wants her friends. She wants a particular medicine we’ve got.’

“‘Yes,’ assented Miss Mowbray, with excitement, ‘no other medicine any good, constable. Complaint quite unique.’

“‘I’m all righ’. Cutchy, cutchy, coo!’ remarked, to his eternal shame, the Vicar of Chuntsey.

“‘Look here, ladies,’ said the constable sternly, ‘I don’t like the eccentricity of your friend, and I don’t like ‘er songs, or ‘er ‘ead in my stomach. And now I come to think of it, I don’t like the looks of you I’ve seen many as quiet dressed as you as was wrong ‘uns. Who are you?’

“‘We’ve not our cards with us,’ said Miss Mowbray, with indescribable dignity. ‘Nor do we see why we should be insulted by any Jack-in-office who chooses to be rude to ladies, when he is paid to protect them. If you choose to take advantage of the weakness of our unfortunate friend, no doubt you are legally entitled to take her. But if you fancy you have any legal right to bully us, you will find yourself in the wrong box.’

“The truth and dignity of this staggered the policeman for a moment. Under cover of their advantage my five persecutors turned for an instant on me faces like faces of the damned and then swished off into the darkness. When the constable first turned his lantern and his suspicions on to them, I had seen the telegraphic look flash from face to face saying that only retreat was possible now.

“By this time I was sinking slowly to the pavement, in a state of acute reflection. So long as the ruffians were with me, I dared not quit the role of drunkard. For if I had begun to talk reasonably and explain the real case, the officer would merely have thought that I was slightly recovered and would have put me in charge of my friends. Now, however, if I liked I might safely undeceive him.

“But I confess I did not like. The chances of life are many, and it may doubtless sometimes lie in the narrow path of duty for a clergyman of the Church of England to pretend to be a drunken old woman; but such necessities are, I imagine, sufficiently rare to appear to many improbable. Suppose the story got about that I had pretended to be drunk. Suppose people did not all think it was pretence!

“I lurched up, the policeman half-lifting me. I went along weakly and quietly for about a hundred yards. The officer evidently thought that I was too sleepy and feeble to effect an escape, and so held me lightly and easily enough. Past one turning, two turnings, three turnings, four turnings, he trailed me with him, a limp and slow and reluctant figure. At the fourth turning, I suddenly broke from his hand and tore down the street like a maddened stag. He was unprepared, he was heavy, and it was dark. I ran and ran and ran, and in five minutes’ running, found I was gaining. In half an hour I was out in the fields under the holy and blessed stars, where I tore off my accursed shawl and bonnet and buried them in clean earth.”

The old gentleman had finished his story and leant back in his chair. Both the matter and the manner of his narration had, as time went on, impressed me favourably. He was an old duffer and pedant, but behind these things he was a country-bred man and gentleman, and had showed courage and a sporting instinct in the hour of desperation. He had told his story with many quaint formalities of diction, but also with a very convincing realism.

“And now—” I began.

“And now,” said Shorter, leaning forward again with something like servile energy, “and now, Mr Swinburne, what about that unhappy man Hawker. I cannot tell what those men meant, or how far what they said was real. But surely there is danger. I cannot go to the police, for reasons that you perceive. Among other things, they wouldn’t believe me. What is to be done?”

I took out my watch. It was already half past twelve.

“My friend Basil Grant,” I said, “is the best man we can go to. He and I were to have gone to the same dinner tonight; but he will just have come back by now. Have you any objection to taking a cab?”

“Not at all,” he replied, rising politely, and gathering up his absurd plaid shawl.

A rattle in a hansom brought us underneath the sombre pile of workmen’s flats in Lambeth which Grant inhabited; a climb up a wearisome wooden staircase brought us to his garret. When I entered that wooden and scrappy interior, the white gleam of Basil’s shirt-front and the lustre of his fur coat flung on the wooden settle, struck me as a contrast. He was drinking a glass of wine before retiring. I was right; he had come back from the dinner-party.

He listened to the repetition of the story of the Rev. Ellis Shorter with the genuine simplicity and respect which he never failed to exhibit in dealing with any human being. When it was over he said simply:

“Do you know a man named Captain Fraser?”

I was so startled at this totally irrelevant reference to the worthy collector of chimpanzees with whom I ought to have dined that evening, that I glanced sharply at Grant. The result was that I did not look at Mr Shorter. I only heard him answer, in his most nervous tone, “No.”

Basil, however, seemed to find something very curious about his answer or his demeanour generally, for he kept his big blue eyes fixed on the old clergyman, and though the eyes were quite quiet they stood out more and more from his head.

“You are quite sure, Mr Shorter,” he repeated, “that you don’t know Captain Fraser?”

“Quite,” answered the vicar, and I was certainly puzzled to find him returning so much to the timidity, not to say the demoralization, of his tone when he first entered my presence.

Basil sprang smartly to his feet.

“Then our course is clear,” he said. “You have not even begun your investigation, my dear Mr Shorter; the first thing for us to do is to go together to see Captain Fraser.”

“When?” asked the clergyman, stammering.

“Now,” said Basil, putting one arm in his fur coat.

The old clergyman rose to his feet, quaking all over.

“I really do not think that it is necessary,” he said.

Basil took his arm out of the fur coat, threw it over the chair again, and put his hands in his pockets.

“Oh,” he said, with emphasis. “Oh — you don’t think it necessary; then,” and he added the words with great clearness and deliberation, “then, Mr Ellis Shorter, I can only say that I would like to see you without your whiskers.”

And at these words I also rose to my feet, for the great tragedy of my life had come. Splendid and exciting as life was in continual contact with an intellect like Basil’s, I had always the feeling that that splendour and excitement were on the borderland of sanity. He lived perpetually near the vision of the reason of things which makes men lose their reason. And I felt of his insanity as men feel of the death of friends with heart disease. It might come anywhere, in a field, in a hansom cab, looking at a sunset, smoking a cigarette. It had come now. At the very moment of delivering a judgement for the salvation of a fellow creature, Basil Grant had gone mad.

“Your whiskers,” he cried, advancing with blazing eyes. “Give me your whiskers. And your bald head.”

The old vicar naturally retreated a step or two. I stepped between.

“Sit down, Basil,” I implored, “you’re a little excited. Finish your wine.”

“Whiskers,” he answered sternly, “whiskers.”

And with that he made a dash at the old gentleman, who made a dash for the door, but was intercepted. And then, before I knew where I was the quiet room was turned into something between a pantomime and a pandemonium by those two. Chairs were flung over with a crash, tables were vaulted with a noise like thunder, screens were smashed, crockery scattered in smithereens, and still Basil Grant bounded and bellowed after the Rev. Ellis Shorter.

And now I began to perceive something else, which added the last half-witted touch to my mystification. The Rev. Ellis Shorter, of Chuntsey, in Essex, was by no means behaving as I had previously noticed him to behave, or as, considering his age and station, I should have expected him to behave. His power of dodging, leaping, and fighting would have been amazing in a lad of seventeen, and in this doddering old vicar looked like a sort of farcical fairy-tale. Moreover, he did not seem to be so much astonished as I had thought. There was even a look of something like enjoyment in his eyes; so there was in the eye of Basil. In fact, the unintelligible truth must be told. They were both laughing.

At length Shorter was cornered.

“Come, come, Mr Grant,” he panted, “you can’t do anything to me. It’s quite legal. And it doesn’t do any one the least harm. It’s only a social fiction. A result of our complex society, Mr Grant.”

“I don’t blame you, my man,” said Basil coolly. “But I want your whiskers. And your bald head. Do they belong to Captain Fraser?”

“No, no,” said Mr Shorter, laughing, “we provide them ourselves. They don’t belong to Captain Fraser.”

“What the deuce does all this mean?” I almost screamed. “Are you all in an infernal nightmare? Why should Mr Shorter’s bald head belong to Captain Fraser? How could it? What the deuce has Captain Fraser to do with the affair? What is the matter with him? You dined with him, Basil.”

“No,” said Grant, “I didn’t.”

“Didn’t you go to Mrs Thornton’s dinner-party?” I asked, staring. “Why not?”

“Well,” said Basil, with a slow and singular smile, “the fact is I was detained by a visitor. I have him, as a point of fact, in my bedroom.”

“In your bedroom?” I repeated; but my imagination had reached that point when he might have said in his coal scuttle or his waistcoat pocket.

Grant stepped to the door of an inner room, flung it open and walked in. Then he came out again with the last of the bodily wonders of that wild night. He introduced into the sitting-room, in an apologetic manner, and by the nape of the neck, a limp clergyman with a bald head, white whiskers and a plaid shawl.

“Sit down, gentlemen,” cried Grant, striking his hands heartily. “Sit down all of you and have a glass of wine. As you say, there is no harm in it, and if Captain Fraser had simply dropped me a hint I could have saved him from dropping a good sum of money. Not that you would have liked that, eh?”

The two duplicate clergymen, who were sipping their Burgundy with two duplicate grins, laughed heartily at this, and one of them carelessly pulled off his whiskers and laid them on the table.

“Basil,” I said, “if you are my friend, save me. What is all this?”

He laughed again.

“Only another addition, Cherub, to your collection of Queer Trades. These two gentlemen (whose health I have now the pleasure of drinking) are Professional Detainers.”

“And what on earth’s that?” I asked.

“It’s really very simple, Mr Swinburne,” began he who had once been the Rev. Ellis Shorter, of Chuntsey, in Essex; and it gave me a shock indescribable to hear out of that pompous and familiar form come no longer its own pompous and familiar voice, but the brisk sharp tones of a young city man. “It is really nothing very important. We are paid by our clients to detain in conversation, on some harmless pretext, people whom they want out of the way for a few hours. And Captain Fraser—” and with that he hesitated and smiled.

Basil smiled also. He intervened.

“The fact is that Captain Fraser, who is one of my best friends, wanted us both out of the way very much. He is sailing tonight for East Africa, and the lady with whom we were all to have dined is — er — what is I believe described as ‘the romance of his life’. He wanted that two hours with her, and employed these two reverend gentlemen to detain us at our houses so as to let him have the field to himself.”

“And of course,” said the late Mr Shorter apologetically to me, “as I had to keep a gentleman at home from keeping an appointment with a lady, I had to come with something rather hot and strong — rather urgent. It wouldn’t have done to be tame.”

“Oh,” I said, “I acquit you of tameness.”

“Thank you, sir,” said the man respectfully, “always very grateful for any recommendation, sir.”

The other man idly pushed back his artificial bald head, revealing close red hair, and spoke dreamily, perhaps under the influence of Basil’s admirable Burgundy.

“It’s wonderful how common it’s getting, gentlemen. Our office is busy from morning till night. I’ve no doubt you’ve often knocked up against us before. You just take notice. When an old bachelor goes on boring you with hunting stories, when you’re burning to be introduced to somebody, he’s from our bureau. When a lady calls on parish work and stops hours, just when you wanted to go to the Robinsons’, she’s from our bureau. The Robinson hand, sir, may be darkly seen.”

“There is one thing I don’t understand,” I said. “Why you are both vicars.”

A shade crossed the brow of the temporary incumbent of Chuntsey, in Essex.

“That may have been a mistake, sir,” he said. “But it was not our fault. It was all the munificence of Captain Fraser. He requested that the highest price and talent on our tariff should be employed to detain you gentlemen. Now the highest payment in our office goes to those who impersonate vicars, as being the most respectable and more of a strain. We are paid five guineas a visit. We have had the good fortune to satisfy the firm with our work; and we are now permanently vicars. Before that we had two years as colonels, the next in our scale. Colonels are four guineas.”

The Singular Speculation of the House-Agent

Lieutenant Drummond Keith was a man about whom conversation always burst like a thunderstorm the moment he left the room. This arose from many separate touches about him. He was a light, loose person, who wore light, loose clothes, generally white, as if he were in the tropics; he was lean and graceful, like a panther, and he had restless black eyes.

He was very impecunious. He had one of the habits of the poor, in a degree so exaggerated as immeasurably to eclipse the most miserable of the unemployed; I mean the habit of continual change of lodgings. There are inland tracts of London where, in the very heart of artificial civilization, humanity has almost become nomadic once more. But in that restless interior there was no ragged tramp so restless as the elegant officer in the loose white clothes. He had shot a great many things in his time, to judge from his conversation, from partridges to elephants, but his slangier acquaintances were of opinion that “the moon” had been not unfrequently amid the victims of his victorious rifle. The phrase is a fine one, and suggests a mystic, elvish, nocturnal hunting.

He carried from house to house and from parish to parish a kit which consisted practically of five articles. Two odd-looking, large-bladed spears, tied together, the weapons, I suppose, of some savage tribe, a green umbrella, a huge and tattered copy of the Pickwick Papers, a big game rifle, and a large sealed jar of some unholy Oriental wine. These always went into every new lodging, even for one night; and they went in quite undisguised, tied up in wisps of string or straw, to the delight of the poetic gutter boys in the little grey streets.

I had forgotten to mention that he always carried also his old regimental sword. But this raised another odd question about him. Slim and active as he was, he was no longer very young. His hair, indeed, was quite grey, though his rather wild almost Italian moustache retained its blackness, and his face was careworn under its almost Italian gaiety. To find a middle-aged man who has left the Army at the primitive rank of lieutenant is unusual and not necessarily encouraging. With the more cautious and solid this fact, like his endless flitting, did the mysterious gentleman no good.

Lastly, he was a man who told the kind of adventures which win a man admiration, but not respect. They came out of queer places, where a good man would scarcely find himself, out of opium dens and gambling hells; they had the heat of the thieves' kitchens or smelled of a strange smoke from cannibal incantations. These are the kind of stories which discredit a person almost equally whether they are believed or no. If Keith's tales were false he was a liar; if they were true he had had, at any rate, every opportunity of being a scamp.

He had just left the room in which I sat with Basil Grant and his brother Rupert, the voluble amateur detective. And as I say was invariably the case, we were all talking about him. Rupert Grant was a clever young fellow, but he had that tendency which youth and cleverness, when sharply combined, so often produce, a somewhat extravagant scepticism. He saw doubt and guilt everywhere, and it was meat and drink to him. I had often got irritated with this boyish incredulity of his, but on this particular occasion I am bound to say that I thought him so obviously right that I was astounded at Basil's opposing him, however banteringly.

I could swallow a good deal, being naturally of a simple turn, but I could not swallow Lieutenant Keith's autobiography.

"You don't seriously mean, Basil," I said, "that you think that that fellow really did go as a stowaway with Nansen and pretend to be the Mad Mullah and—"

"He has one fault," said Basil thoughtfully, "or virtue, as you may happen to regard it. He tells the truth in too exact and bald a style; he is too veracious."

"Oh! if you are going to be paradoxical," said Rupert contemptuously, "be a bit funnier than that. Say, for instance, that he has lived all his life in one ancestral manor."

"No, he's extremely fond of change of scene," replied Basil dispassionately, "and of living in odd places. That doesn't prevent his chief trait being verbal exactitude. What you people don't understand is that telling a thing crudely and coarsely as it happened makes it sound frightfully strange. The sort of things Keith recounts are not the sort of things that a man would make up to cover himself with honour; they are too absurd. But they are the sort of things that a man would do if he were sufficiently filled with the soul of skylarking."

"So far from paradox," said his brother, with something rather like a sneer, "you seem to be going in for journalese proverbs. Do you believe that truth is stranger than fiction?"

“Truth must of necessity be stranger than fiction,” said Basil placidly. “For fiction is the creation of the human mind, and therefore is congenial to it.”

“Well, your lieutenant’s truth is stranger, if it is truth, than anything I ever heard of,” said Rupert, relapsing into flippancy. “Do you, on your soul, believe in all that about the shark and the camera?”

“I believe Keith’s words,” answered the other. “He is an honest man.”

“I should like to question a regiment of his landladies,” said Rupert cynically.

“I must say, I think you can hardly regard him as unimpeachable merely in himself,” I said mildly; “his mode of life—”

Before I could complete the sentence the door was flung open and Drummond Keith appeared again on the threshold, his white Panama on his head.

“I say, Grant,” he said, knocking off his cigarette ash against the door, “I’ve got no money in the world till next April. Could you lend me a hundred pounds? There’s a good chap.”

Rupert and I looked at each other in an ironical silence. Basil, who was sitting by his desk, swung the chair round idly on its screw and picked up a quill-pen.

“Shall I cross it?” he asked, opening a cheque-book.

“Really,” began Rupert, with a rather nervous loudness, “since Lieutenant Keith has seen fit to make this suggestion to Basil before his family, I—”

“Here you are, Ugly,” said Basil, fluttering a cheque in the direction of the quite nonchalant officer. “Are you in a hurry?”

“Yes,” replied Keith, in a rather abrupt way. “As a matter of fact I want it now. I want to see my — er — business man.”

Rupert was eyeing him sarcastically, and I could see that it was on the tip of his tongue to say, inquiringly, “Receiver of stolen goods, perhaps.” What he did say was:

“A business man? That’s rather a general description, Lieutenant Keith.”

Keith looked at him sharply, and then said, with something rather like ill-temper:

“He’s a thingum-my-bob, a house-agent, say. I’m going to see him.”

“Oh, you’re going to see a house-agent, are you?” said Rupert Grant grimly. “Do you know, Mr Keith, I think I should very much like to go with you?”

Basil shook with his soundless laughter. Lieutenant Keith started a little; his brow blackened sharply.

“I beg your pardon,” he said. “What did you say?”

Rupert’s face had been growing from stage to stage of ferocious irony, and he answered:

“I was saying that I wondered whether you would mind our strolling along with you to this house-agent’s.”

The visitor swung his stick with a sudden whirling violence.

“Oh, in God’s name, come to my house-agent’s! Come to my bedroom. Look under my bed. Examine my dust-bin. Come along!” And with a furious energy which took away our breath he banged his way out of the room.

Rupert Grant, his restless blue eyes dancing with his detective excitement, soon shouldered alongside him, talking to him with that transparent camaraderie which he imagined to be appropriate from the disguised policeman to the disguised criminal. His interpretation was certainly corroborated by one particular detail, the unmistakable unrest, annoyance, and nervousness of the man with whom he walked. Basil and I tramped behind, and it was not necessary for us to tell each other that we had both noticed this.

Lieutenant Drummond Keith led us through very extraordinary and unpromising neighbourhoods in the search for his remarkable house-agent. Neither of the brothers Grant failed to notice this fact. As the streets grew closer and more crooked and the roofs lower and the gutters grosser with mud, a darker curiosity deepened on the brows of Basil, and the figure of Rupert seen from behind seemed to fill the street with a gigantic swagger of success. At length, at the end of the fourth or fifth lean grey street in that sterile district, we came suddenly to a halt, the mysterious lieutenant looking once more about him with a sort of sulky desperation. Above a row of shutters and a door, all indescribably dingy in appearance and in size scarce sufficient even for a penny toyshop, ran the inscription: “P. Montmorency, House-Agent.”

“This is the office of which I spoke,” said Keith, in a cutting voice. “Will you wait here a moment, or does your astonishing tenderness about my welfare lead you to wish to overhear everything I have to say to my business adviser?”

Rupert’s face was white and shaking with excitement; nothing on earth would have induced him now to have abandoned his prey.

“If you will excuse me,” he said, clenching his hands behind his back, “I think I should feel myself justified in—”

“Oh! Come along in,” exploded the lieutenant. He made the same gesture of savage surrender. And he slammed into the office, the rest of us at his heels.

P. Montmorency, House-Agent, was a solitary old gentleman sitting behind a bare brown counter. He had an egglike head, froglike jaws, and a grey hairy fringe of aureole round the lower part of his face; the whole combined with a reddish, aquiline nose. He wore a shabby black frock-coat, a sort of semi-clerical tie worn at a very unclerical angle, and looked, generally speaking, about as unlike a house-agent as anything could look, short of something like a sandwich man or a Scotch Highlander.

We stood inside the room for fully forty seconds, and the odd old gentleman did not look at us. Neither, to tell the truth, odd as he was, did we look at him. Our eyes were fixed, where his were fixed, upon something that was crawling about on the counter in front of him. It was a ferret.

The silence was broken by Rupert Grant. He spoke in that sweet and steely voice which he reserved for great occasions and practised for hours together in his bedroom. He said:

“Mr Montmorency, I think?”

The old gentleman started, lifted his eyes with a bland bewilderment, picked up the ferret by the neck, stuffed it alive into his trousers pocket, smiled apologetically, and said:

“Sir.”

“You are a house-agent, are you not?” asked Rupert.

To the delight of that criminal investigator, Mr Montmorency’s eyes wandered unquietly towards Lieutenant Keith, the only man present that he knew.

“A house-agent,” cried Rupert again, bringing out the word as if it were “burglar’.

“Yes... oh, yes,” said the man, with a quavering and almost coquettish smile. “I am a house-agent... oh, yes.”

“Well, I think,” said Rupert, with a sardonic sleekness, “that Lieutenant Keith wants to speak to you. We have come in by his request.”

Lieutenant Keith was lowering gloomily, and now he spoke.

“I have come, Mr Montmorency, about that house of mine.”

“Yes, sir,” said Montmorency, spreading his fingers on the flat counter. “It’s all ready, sir. I’ve attended to all your suggestions er — about the br —”

“Right,” cried Keith, cutting the word short with the startling neatness of a gunshot. “We needn’t bother about all that. If you’ve done what I told you, all right.”

And he turned sharply towards the door.

Mr Montmorency, House-Agent, presented a picture of pathos. After stammering a moment he said: “Excuse me... Mr Keith... there was another matter... about which I wasn’t quite sure. I tried to get all the heating apparatus possible under the circumstances ... but in winter... at that elevation...”

“Can’t expect much, eh?” said the lieutenant, cutting in with the same sudden skill. “No, of course not. That’s all right, Montmorency. There can’t be any more difficulties,” and he put his hand on the handle of the door.

“I think,” said Rupert Grant, with a satanic suavity, “that Mr Montmorency has something further to say to you, lieutenant.”

“Only,” said the house-agent, in desperation, “what about the birds?”

“I beg your pardon,” said Rupert, in a general blank.

“What about the birds?” said the house-agent doggedly.

Basil, who had remained throughout the proceedings in a state of Napoleonic calm, which might be more accurately described as a state of Napoleonic stupidity, suddenly lifted his leonine head.

“Before you go, Lieutenant Keith,” he said. “Come now. Really, what about the birds?”

“I’ll take care of them,” said Lieutenant Keith, still with his long back turned to us; “they shan’t suffer.”

“Thank you, sir, thank you,” cried the incomprehensible house-agent, with an air of ecstasy. “You’ll excuse my concern, sir. You know I’m wild on wild animals. I’m as wild as any of them on that. Thank you, sir. But there’s another thing...”

The lieutenant, with his back turned to us, exploded with an indescribable laugh and swung round to face us. It was a laugh, the purport of which was direct and essential, and yet which one cannot exactly express. As near as it said anything, verbally speaking, it said: “Well, if you must spoil it, you must. But you don’t know what you’re spoiling.”

"There is another thing," continued Mr Montmorency weakly. "Of course, if you don't want to be visited you'll paint the house green, but—"

"Green!" shouted Keith. "Green! Let it be green or nothing. I won't have a house of another colour. Green!" and before we could realize anything the door had banged between us and the street.

Rupert Grant seemed to take a little time to collect himself; but he spoke before the echoes of the door died away.

"Your client, Lieutenant Keith, appears somewhat excited," he said. "What is the matter with him? Is he unwell?"

"Oh, I should think not," said Mr Montmorency, in some confusion. "The negotiations have been somewhat difficult — the house is rather—"

"Green," said Rupert calmly. "That appears to be a very important point. It must be rather green. May I ask you, Mr Montmorency, before I rejoin my companion outside, whether, in your business, it is usual to ask for houses by their colour? Do clients write to a house-agent asking for a pink house or a blue house? Or, to take another instance, for a green house?"

"Only," said Montmorency, trembling, "only to be inconspicuous."

Rupert had his ruthless smile. "Can you tell me any place on earth in which a green house would be inconspicuous?"

The house-agent was fidgeting nervously in his pocket. Slowly drawing out a couple of lizards and leaving them to run on the counter, he said:

"No; I can't."

"You can't suggest an explanation?"

"No," said Mr Montmorency, rising slowly and yet in such a way as to suggest a sudden situation, "I can't. And may I, as a busy man, be excused if I ask you, gentlemen, if you have any demand to make of me in connection with my business. What kind of house would you desire me to get for you, sir?"

He opened his blank blue eyes on Rupert, who seemed for the second staggered. Then he recovered himself with perfect common sense and answered:

"I am sorry, Mr Montmorency. The fascination of your remarks has unduly delayed us from joining our friend outside. Pray excuse my apparent impertinence."

"Not at all, sir," said the house-agent, taking a South American spider idly from his waistcoat pocket and letting it climb up the slope of his desk. "Not at all, sir. I hope you will favour me again."

Rupert Grant dashed out of the office in a gust of anger, anxious to face Lieutenant Keith. He was gone. The dull, starlit street was deserted.

“What do you say now?” cried Rupert to his brother. His brother said nothing now.

We all three strode down the street in silence, Rupert feverish, myself dazed, Basil, to all appearance, merely dull. We walked through grey street after grey street, turning corners, traversing squares, scarcely meeting anyone, except occasional drunken knots of two or three.

In one small street, however, the knots of two or three began abruptly to thicken into knots of five or six and then into great groups and then into a crowd. The crowd was stirring very slightly. But anyone with a knowledge of the eternal populace knows that if the outside rim of a crowd stirs ever so slightly it means that there is madness in the heart and core of the mob. It soon became evident that something really important had happened in the centre of this excitement. We wormed our way to the front, with the cunning which is known only to cockneys, and once there we soon learned the nature of the difficulty. There had been a brawl concerned with some six men, and one of them lay almost dead on the stones of the street. Of the other four, all interesting matters were, as far as we were concerned, swallowed up in one stupendous fact. One of the four survivors of the brutal and perhaps fatal scuffle was the immaculate Lieutenant Keith, his clothes torn to ribbons, his eyes blazing, blood on his knuckles. One other thing, however, pointed at him in a worse manner. A short sword, or very long knife, had been drawn out of his elegant walking-stick, and lay in front of him upon the stones. It did not, however, appear to be bloody.

The police had already pushed into the centre with their ponderous omnipotence, and even as they did so, Rupert Grant sprang forward with his incontrollable and intolerable secret.

“That is the man, constable,” he shouted, pointing at the battered lieutenant. “He is a suspicious character. He did the murder.”

“There’s been no murder done, sir,” said the policeman, with his automatic civility. “The poor man’s only hurt. I shall only be able to take the names and addresses of the men in the scuffle and have a good eye kept on them.”

“Have a good eye kept on that one,” said Rupert, pale to the lips, and pointing to the ragged Keith.

"All right, sir," said the policeman unemotionally, and went the round of the people present, collecting the addresses. When he had completed his task the dusk had fallen and most of the people not immediately connected with the examination had gone away. He still found, however, one eager-faced stranger lingering on the outskirts of the affair. It was Rupert Grant.

"Constable," he said, "I have a very particular reason for asking you a question. Would you mind telling me whether that military fellow who dropped his sword-stick in the row gave you an address or not?"

"Yes, sir," said the policeman, after a reflective pause; "yes, he gave me his address."

"My name is Rupert Grant," said that individual, with some pomp. "I have assisted the police on more than one occasion. I wonder whether you would tell me, as a special favour, what address?"

The constable looked at him.

"Yes," he said slowly, "if you like. His address is: The Elms, Buxton Common, near Purley, Surrey."

"Thank you," said Rupert, and ran home through the gathering night as fast as his legs could carry him, repeating the address to himself.

Rupert Grant generally came down late in a rather lordly way to breakfast; he contrived, I don't know how, to achieve always the attitude of the indulged younger brother. Next morning, however, when Basil and I came down we found him ready and restless.

"Well," he said sharply to his brother almost before we sat down to the meal. "What do you think of your Drummond Keith now?"

"What do I think of him?" inquired Basil slowly. "I don't think anything of him."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Rupert, buttering his toast with an energy that was somewhat exultant. "I thought you'd come round to my view, but I own I was startled at your not seeing it from the beginning. The man is a translucent liar and knave."

"I think," said Basil, in the same heavy monotone as before, "that I did not make myself clear. When I said that I thought nothing of him I meant grammatically what I said. I meant that I did not think about him; that he did not occupy my mind. You, however, seem to me to think a lot of him, since you think him a knave. I should say he was glaringly good myself."

"I sometimes think you talk paradox for its own sake," said Rupert, breaking an egg with unnecessary sharpness. "What the deuce is the sense of it? Here's a man whose original position was, by our common agreement, dubious. He's a wanderer, a teller of tall tales, a man who doesn't conceal his acquaintance with all the blackest and bloodiest scenes on earth. We take the trouble to follow him to one of his appointments, and if ever two human beings were plotting together and lying to every one else, he and that impossible house-agent were doing it. We followed him home, and the very same night he is in the thick of a fatal, or nearly fatal, brawl, in which he is the only man armed. Really, if this is being glaringly good, I must confess that the glare does not dazzle me."

Basil was quite unmoved. "I admit his moral goodness is of a certain kind, a quaint, perhaps a casual kind. He is very fond of change and experiment. But all the points you so ingeniously make against him are mere coincidence or special pleading. It's true he didn't want to talk about his house business in front of us. No man would. It's true that he carries a sword-stick. Any man might. It's true he drew it in the shock of a street fight. Any man would. But there's nothing really dubious in all this. There's nothing to confirm—"

As he spoke a knock came at the door.

"If you please, sir," said the landlady, with an alarmed air, "there's a policeman wants to see you."

"Show him in," said Basil, amid the blank silence.

The heavy, handsome constable who appeared at the door spoke almost as soon as he appeared there.

"I think one of you gentlemen," he said, curtly but respectfully, "was present at the affair in Copper Street last night, and drew my attention very strongly to a particular man."

Rupert half rose from his chair, with eyes like diamonds, but the constable went on calmly, referring to a paper.

"A young man with grey hair. Had light grey clothes, very good, but torn in the struggle. Gave his name as Drummond Keith."

"This is amusing," said Basil, laughing. "I was in the very act of clearing that poor officer's character of rather fanciful aspersions. What about him?"

"Well, sir," said the constable, "I took all the men's addresses and had them all watched. It wasn't serious enough to do more than that. All the other addresses are all right. But this man Keith gave a false address. The place doesn't exist."

The breakfast table was nearly flung over as Rupert sprang up, slapping both his thighs.

“Well, by all that’s good,” he cried. “This is a sign from heaven.”

“It’s certainly very extraordinary,” said Basil quietly, with knitted brows. “It’s odd the fellow should have given a false address, considering he was perfectly innocent in the—”

“Oh, you jolly old early Christian duffer,” cried Rupert, in a sort of rapture, “I don’t wonder you couldn’t be a judge. You think every one as good as yourself. Isn’t the thing plain enough now? A doubtful acquaintance; rowdy stories, a most suspicious conversation, mean streets, a concealed knife, a man nearly killed, and, finally, a false address. That’s what we call glaring goodness.”

“It’s certainly very extraordinary,” repeated Basil. And he strolled moodily about the room. Then he said: “You are quite sure, constable, that there’s no mistake? You got the address right, and the police have really gone to it and found it was a fraud?”

“It was very simple, sir,” said the policeman, chuckling. “The place he named was a well-known common quite near London, and our people were down there this morning before any of you were awake. And there’s no such house. In fact, there are hardly any houses at all. Though it is so near London, it’s a blank moor with hardly five trees on it, to say nothing of Christians. Oh, no, sir, the address was a fraud right enough. He was a clever rascal, and chose one of those scraps of lost England that people know nothing about. Nobody could say off-hand that there was not a particular house dropped somewhere about the heath. But as a fact, there isn’t.”

Basil’s face during this sensible speech had been growing darker and darker with a sort of desperate sagacity. He was cornered almost for the first time since I had known him; and to tell the truth I rather wondered at the almost childish obstinacy which kept him so close to his original prejudice in favour of the wildly questionable lieutenant. At length he said:

“You really searched the common? And the address was really not known in the district — by the way, what was the address?”

The constable selected one of his slips of paper and consulted it, but before he could speak Rupert Grant, who was leaning in the window in a perfect posture of the quiet and triumphant detective, struck in with the sharp and suave voice he loved so much to use.

"Why, I can tell you that, Basil," he said graciously as he idly plucked leaves from a plant in the window. "I took the precaution to get this man's address from the constable last night."

"And what was it?" asked his brother gruffly.

"The constable will correct me if I am wrong," said Rupert, looking sweetly at the ceiling. "It was: The Elms, Buxton Common, near Purley, Surrey."

"Right, sir," said the policeman, laughing and folding up his papers.

There was a silence, and the blue eyes of Basil looked blindly for a few seconds into the void. Then his head fell back in his chair so suddenly that I started up, thinking him ill. But before I could move further his lips had flown apart (I can use no other phrase) and a peal of gigantic laughter struck and shook the ceiling — laughter that shook the laughter, laughter redoubled, laughter incurable, laughter that could not stop.

Two whole minutes afterwards it was still unended; Basil was ill with laughter; but still he laughed. The rest of us were by this time ill almost with terror.

"Excuse me," said the insane creature, getting at last to his feet. "I am awfully sorry. It is horribly rude. And stupid, too. And also unpractical, because we have not much time to lose if we're to get down to that place. The train service is confoundedly bad, as I happen to know. It's quite out of proportion to the comparatively small distance."

"Get down to that place?" I repeated blankly. "Get down to what place?"

"I have forgotten its name," said Basil vaguely, putting his hands in his pockets as he rose. "Something Common near Purley. Has any one got a timetable?"

"You don't seriously mean," cried Rupert, who had been staring in a sort of confusion of emotions. "You don't mean that you want to go to Buxton Common, do you? You can't mean that!"

"Why shouldn't I go to Buxton Common?" asked Basil, smiling.

"Why should you?" said his brother, catching hold again restlessly of the plant in the window and staring at the speaker.

"To find our friend, the lieutenant, of course," said Basil Grant. "I thought you wanted to find him?"

Rupert broke a branch brutally from the plant and flung it impatiently on the floor. "And in order to find him," he said, "you suggest the admirable expedient of going to the only place on the habitable earth where we know he can't be."

The constable and I could not avoid breaking into a kind of assenting laugh, and Rupert, who had family eloquence, was encouraged to go on with a reiterated gesture:

"He may be in Buckingham Palace; he may be sitting astride the cross of St Paul's; he may be in jail (which I think most likely); he may be in the Great Wheel; he may be in my pantry; he may be in your store cupboard; but out of all the innumerable points of space, there is only one where he has just been systematically looked for and where we know that he is not to be found — and that, if I understand you rightly, is where you want us to go."

"Exactly," said Basil calmly, getting into his great-coat; "I thought you might care to accompany me. If not, of course, make yourselves jolly here till I come back."

It is our nature always to follow vanishing things and value them if they really show a resolution to depart. We all followed Basil, and I cannot say why, except that he was a vanishing thing, that he vanished decisively with his great-coat and his stick. Rupert ran after him with a considerable flurry of rationality.

"My dear chap," he cried, "do you really mean that you see any good in going down to this ridiculous scrub, where there is nothing but beaten tracks and a few twisted trees, simply because it was the first place that came into a rowdy lieutenant's head when he wanted to give a lying reference in a scrape?"

"Yes," said Basil, taking out his watch, "and, what's worse, we've lost the train."

He paused a moment and then added: "As a matter of fact, I think we may just as well go down later in the day. I have some writing to do, and I think you told me, Rupert, that you thought of going to the Dulwich Gallery. I was rather too impetuous. Very likely he wouldn't be in. But if we get down by the 5.15, which gets to Purley about 6, I expect we shall just catch him."

"Catch him!" cried his brother, in a kind of final anger. "I wish we could. Where the deuce shall we catch him now?"

"I keep forgetting the name of the common," said Basil, as he buttoned up his coat. "The Elms — what is it? Buxton Common, near Purley. That's where we shall find him."

"But there is no such place," groaned Rupert; but he followed his brother downstairs.

We all followed him. We snatched our hats from the hat-stand and our sticks from the umbrella-stand; and why we followed him we did not and do not know. But we always followed him, whatever was the meaning of the fact, whatever was the nature of his mastery. And the strange thing was that we followed him the more completely the more nonsensical appeared the thing which he said. At bottom, I believe, if he had risen from our breakfast table and said: "I am going to find the Holy Pig with Ten Tails," we should have followed him to the end of the world.

I don't know whether this mystical feeling of mine about Basil on this occasion has got any of the dark and cloudy colour, so to speak, of the strange journey that we made the same evening. It was already very dense twilight when we struck southward from Purley. Suburbs and things on the London border may be, in most cases, commonplace and comfortable. But if ever by any chance they really are empty solitudes they are to the human spirit more desolate and dehumanized than any Yorkshire moors or Highland hills, because the suddenness with which the traveller drops into that silence has something about it as of evil elf-land. It seems to be one of the ragged suburbs of the cosmos half-forgotten by God — such a place was Buxton Common, near Purley.

There was certainly a sort of grey futility in the landscape itself. But it was enormously increased by the sense of grey futility in our expedition. The tracts of grey turf looked useless, the occasional wind-stricken trees looked useless, but we, the human beings, more useless than the hopeless turf or the idle trees. We were maniacs akin to the foolish landscape, for we were come to chase the wild goose which has led men and left men in bogs from the beginning. We were three dazed men under the captaincy of a madman going to look for a man whom we knew was not there in a house that had no existence. A livid sunset seemed to look at us with a sort of sickly smile before it died.

Basil went on in front with his coat collar turned up, looking in the gloom rather like a grotesque Napoleon. We crossed swell after swell of the windy common in increasing darkness and entire silence. Suddenly Basil stopped and turned to us, his hands in his pockets. Through the dusk I could just detect that he wore a broad grin as of comfortable success.

“Well,” he cried, taking his heavily gloved hands out of his pockets and slapping them together, “here we are at last.”

The wind swirled sadly over the homeless heath; two desolate elms rocked above us in the sky like shapeless clouds of grey. There was not a sign of man or beast to the sullen circle of the horizon, and in the midst of that wilderness Basil Grant stood rubbing his hands with the air of an innkeeper standing at an open door.

“How jolly it is,” he cried, “to get back to civilization. That notion that civilization isn’t poetical is a civilised delusion. Wait till you’ve really lost yourself in nature, among the devilish woodlands and the cruel flowers. Then you’ll know that there’s no star like the red star of man that he lights on his hearthstone; no river like the red river of man, the good red wine, which you, Mr Rupert Grant, if I have any knowledge of you, will be drinking in two or three minutes in enormous quantities.”

Rupert and I exchanged glances of fear. Basil went on heartily, as the wind died in the dreary trees.

“You’ll find our host a much more simple kind of fellow in his own house. I did when I visited him when he lived in the cabin at Yarmouth, and again in the loft at the city warehouse. He’s really a very good fellow. But his greatest virtue remains what I said originally.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, finding his speech straying towards a sort of sanity. “What is his greatest virtue?”

“His greatest virtue,” replied Basil, “is that he always tells the literal truth.”

“Well, really,” cried Rupert, stamping about between cold and anger, and slapping himself like a cabman, “he doesn’t seem to have been very literal or truthful in this case, nor you either. Why the deuce, may I ask, have you brought us out to this infernal place?”

“He was too truthful, I confess,” said Basil, leaning against the tree; “too hardly veracious, too severely accurate. He should have indulged in a little more suggestiveness and legitimate romance. But come, it’s time we went in. We shall be late for dinner.”

Rupert whispered to me with a white face:

“Is it a hallucination, do you think? Does he really fancy he sees a house?”

“I suppose so,” I said. Then I added aloud, in what was meant to be a cheery and sensible voice, but which sounded in my ears almost as strange as the wind:

“Come, come, Basil, my dear fellow. Where do you want us to go?”

“Why, up here,” cried Basil, and with a bound and a swing he was above our heads, swarming up the grey column of the colossal tree.

“Come up, all of you,” he shouted out of the darkness, with the voice of a schoolboy. “Come up. You’ll be late for dinner.”

The two great elms stood so close together that there was scarcely a yard anywhere, and in some places not more than a foot, between them. Thus occasional branches and even bosses and boles formed a series of footholds that almost amounted to a rude natural ladder. They must, I supposed, have been some sport of growth, Siamese twins of vegetation.

Why we did it I cannot think; perhaps, as I have said, the mystery of the waste and dark had brought out and made primary something wholly mystical in Basil’s supremacy. But we only felt that there was a giant’s staircase going somewhere, perhaps to the stars; and the victorious voice above called to us out of heaven. We hoisted ourselves up after him.

Half-way up some cold tongue of the night air struck and sobered me suddenly. The hypnotism of the madman above fell from me, and I saw the whole map of our silly actions as clearly as if it were printed. I saw three modern men in black coats who had begun with a perfectly sensible suspicion of a doubtful adventurer and who had ended, God knows how, half-way up a naked tree on a naked moorland, far from that adventurer and all his works, that adventurer who was at that moment, in all probability, laughing at us in some dirty Soho restaurant. He had plenty to laugh at us about, and no doubt he was laughing his loudest; but when I thought what his laughter would be if he knew where we were at that moment, I nearly let go of the tree and fell.

“Swinburne,” said Rupert suddenly, from above, “what are we doing? Let’s get down again,” and by the mere sound of his voice I knew that he too felt the shock of wakening to reality.

“We can’t leave poor Basil,” I said. “Can’t you call to him or get hold of him by the leg?”

“He’s too far ahead,” answered Rupert; “he’s nearly at the top of the beastly thing. Looking for Lieutenant Keith in the rooks’ nests, I suppose.”

We were ourselves by this time far on our frantic vertical journey. The mighty trunks were beginning to sway and shake slightly in the wind. Then I looked down and saw something which made me feel that we were far from the world in a sense and to a degree that I cannot easily describe. I saw that the almost straight lines of the tall elm trees diminished a little in perspective as they fell. I was used to seeing parallel lines taper towards the sky. But to see them taper towards the earth made me feel lost in space, like a falling star.

“Can nothing be done to stop Basil?” I called out.

“No,” answered my fellow climber. “He’s too far up. He must get to the top, and when he finds nothing but wind and leaves he may go sane again. Hark at him above there; you can just hear him talking to himself.”

“Perhaps he’s talking to us,” I said.

“No,” said Rupert, “he’d shout if he was. I’ve never known him to talk to himself before; I’m afraid he really is bad tonight; it’s a known sign of the brain going.”

“Yes,” I said sadly, and listened. Basil’s voice certainly was sounding above us, and not by any means in the rich and riotous tones in which he had hailed us before. He was speaking quietly, and laughing every now and then, up there among the leaves and stars.

After a silence mingled with this murmur, Rupert Grant suddenly said, “My God!” with a violent voice.

“What’s the matter — are you hurt?” I cried, alarmed.

“No. Listen to Basil,” said the other in a very strange voice. “He’s not talking to himself.”

“Then he is talking to us,” I cried.

“No,” said Rupert simply, “he’s talking to somebody else.”

Great branches of the elm loaded with leaves swung about us in a sudden burst of wind, but when it died down I could still hear the conversational voice above. I could hear two voices.

Suddenly from aloft came Basil’s boisterous hailing voice as before: “Come up, you fellows. Here’s Lieutenant Keith.”

And a second afterwards came the half-American voice we had heard in our chambers more than once. It called out:

“Happy to see you, gentlemen; pray come in.”

Out of a hole in an enormous dark egg-shaped thing, pendent in the branches like a wasps’ nest, was protruding the pale face and fierce moustache of the lieutenant, his teeth shining with that slightly Southern air that belonged to him.

Somehow or other, stunned and speechless, we lifted ourselves heavily into the opening. We fell into the full glow of a lamp-lit, cushioned, tiny room, with a circular wall lined with books, a circular table, and a circular seat around it. At this table sat three people. One was Basil, who, in the instant after alighting there, had fallen into an attitude of marmoreal ease as if he had been there from boyhood; he was smoking a cigar with a slow pleasure. The second was Lieutenant Drummond Keith, who looked happy also, but feverish and doubtful compared with his granite guest. The third was the little bald-headed house-agent with the wild whiskers, who called himself Montmorency. The spears, the green umbrella, and the cavalry sword hung in parallels on the wall. The sealed jar of strange wine was on the mantelpiece, the enormous rifle in the corner. In the middle of the table was a magnum of champagne. Glasses were already set for us.

The wind of the night roared far below us, like an ocean at the foot of a light-house. The room stirred slightly, as a cabin might in a mild sea.

Our glasses were filled, and we still sat there dazed and dumb. Then Basil spoke.

“You seem still a little doubtful, Rupert. Surely there is no further question about the cold veracity of our injured host.”

“I don’t quite grasp it all,” said Rupert, blinking still in the sudden glare. “Lieutenant Keith said his address was—”

“It’s really quite right, sir,” said Keith, with an open smile. “The bobby asked me where I lived. And I said, quite truthfully, that I lived in the elms on Buxton Common, near Purley. So I do. This gentleman, Mr Montmorency, whom I think you have met before, is an agent for houses of this kind. He has a special line in arboreal villas. It’s being kept rather quiet at present, because the people who want these houses don’t want them to get too common. But it’s just the sort of thing a fellow like myself, racketing about in all sorts of queer corners of London, naturally knocks up against.”

“Are you really an agent for arboreal villas?” asked Rupert eagerly, recovering his ease with the romance of reality.

Mr Montmorency, in his embarrassment, fingered one of his pockets and nervously pulled out a snake, which crawled about the table.

“W-well, yes, sir,” he said. “The fact was — er — my people wanted me very much to go into the house-agency business. But I never cared myself for anything but natural history and botany and things like that. My poor parents have been dead some years now, but — naturally I like to respect their wishes. And I thought somehow that an arboreal villa agency was a sort of — of compromise between being a botanist and being a house-agent.”

Rupert could not help laughing. “Do you have much custom?” he asked.

“N-not much,” replied Mr Montmorency, and then he glanced at Keith, who was (I am convinced) his only client. “But what there is — very select.”

“My dear friends,” said Basil, puffing his cigar, “always remember two facts. The first is that though when you are guessing about any one who is sane, the sanest thing is the most likely; when you are guessing about any one who is, like our host, insane, the maddest thing is the most likely. The second is to remember that very plain literal fact always seems fantastic. If Keith had taken a little brick box of a house in Clapham with nothing but railings in front of it and had written ‘The Elms’ over it, you wouldn’t have thought there was anything fantastic about that. Simply because it was a great blaring, swaggering lie you would have believed it.”

“Drink your wine, gentlemen,” said Keith, laughing, “for this confounded wind will upset it.”

We drank, and as we did so, although the hanging house, by a cunning mechanism, swung only slightly, we knew that the great head of the elm tree swayed in the sky like a stricken thistle.

The Noticeable Conduct of Professor Chadd

Basil Grant had comparatively few friends besides myself; yet he was the reverse of an unsociable man. He would talk to any one anywhere, and talk not only well but with perfectly genuine concern and enthusiasm for that person's affairs. He went through the world, as it were, as if he were always on the top of an omnibus or waiting for a train. Most of these chance acquaintances, of course, vanished into darkness out of his life. A few here and there got hooked on to him, so to speak, and became his lifelong intimates, but there was an accidental look about all of them as if they were windfalls, samples taken at random, goods fallen from a goods train or presents fished out of a bran-pie. One would be, let us say, a veterinary surgeon with the appearance of a jockey; another, a mild prebendary with a white beard and vague views; another, a young captain in the Lancers, seemingly exactly like other captains in the Lancers; another, a small dentist from Fulham, in all reasonable certainty precisely like every other dentist from Fulham. Major Brown, small, dry, and dapper, was one of these; Basil had made his acquaintance over a discussion in a hotel cloak-room about the right hat, a discussion which reduced the little major almost to a kind of masculine hysterics, the compound of the selfishness of an old bachelor and the scrupulosity of an old maid. They had gone home in a cab together and then dined with each other twice a week until they died. I myself was another. I had met Grant while he was still a judge, on the balcony of the National Liberal Club, and exchanged a few words about the weather. Then we had talked for about an hour about politics and God; for men always talk about the most important things to total strangers. It is because in the total stranger we perceive man himself; the image of God is not disguised by resemblances to an uncle or doubts of the wisdom of a moustache.

One of the most interesting of Basil's motley group of acquaintances was Professor Chadd. He was known to the ethnological world (which is a very interesting world, but a long way off this one) as the second greatest, if not the greatest, authority on the relations of savages to language. He was known to the neighbourhood of Hart Street, Bloomsbury, as a bearded man with a bald head, spectacles, and a patient face, the face of an unaccountable Nonconformist who had forgotten how to be angry. He went to and fro between the British Museum and a selection of blameless teashops, with an armful of books and a poor but honest umbrella. He was never seen without the books and the umbrella, and was supposed (by the lighter wits of the Persian MS. room) to go to bed with them in his little brick villa in the neighbourhood of Shepherd’s Bush. There he lived with three sisters, ladies of solid goodness, but sinister demeanour. His life was happy, as are almost all the lives of methodical students, but one would not have called it exhilarating. His only hours of exhilaration occurred when his friend, Basil Grant, came into the house, late at night, a tornado of conversation.

Basil, though close on sixty, had moods of boisterous babyishness, and these seemed for some reason or other to descend upon him particularly in the house of his studious and almost dingy friend. I can remember vividly (for I was acquainted with both parties and often dined with them) the gaiety of Grant on that particular evening when the strange calamity fell upon the professor. Professor Chadd was, like most of his particular class and type (the class that is at once academic and middle-class), a Radical of a solemn and old-fashioned type. Grant was a Radical himself, but he was that more discriminating and not uncommon type of Radical who passes most of his time in abusing the Radical party. Chadd had just contributed to a magazine an article called “Zulu Interests and the New Makango Frontier’, in which a precise scientific report of his study of the customs of the people of T’Chaka was reinforced by a severe protest against certain interferences with these customs both by the British and the Germans. He-was sitting with the magazine in front of him, the lamplight shining on his spectacles, a wrinkle in his forehead, not of anger, but of perplexity, as Basil Grant strode up and down the room, shaking it with his voice, with his high spirits and his heavy tread.

“It’s not your opinions that I object to, my esteemed Chadd,” he was saying, “it’s you. You are quite right to champion the Zulus, but for all that you do not sympathize with them. No doubt you know the Zulu way of cooking tomatoes and the Zulu prayer before blowing one’s nose; but for all that you don’t understand them as well as I do, who don’t know an assegai from an alligator. You are more learned, Chadd, but I am more Zulu. Why is it that the jolly old barbarians of this earth are always championed by people who are their antithesis? Why is it? You are sagacious, you are benevolent, you are well informed, but, Chadd, you are not savage. Live no longer under that rosy illusion. Look in the glass. Ask your sisters. Consult the librarian of the British Museum. Look at this umbrella.” And he held up that sad but still respectable article. “Look at it. For ten mortal years to my certain knowledge you have carried that object under your arm, and I have no sort of doubt that you carried it at the age of eight months, and it never occurred to you to give one wild yell and hurl it like a javelin — thus—”

And he sent the umbrella whizzing past the professor’s bald head, so that it knocked over a pile of books with a crash and left a vase rocking.

Professor Chadd appeared totally unmoved, with his face still lifted to the lamp and the wrinkle cut in his forehead.

“Your mental processes,” he said, “always go a little too fast. And they are stated without method. There is no kind of inconsistency” — and no words can convey the time he took to get to the end of the word— “between valuing the right of the aborigines to adhere to their stage in the evolutionary process, so long as they find it congenial and requisite to do so. There is, I say, no inconsistency between this concession which I have just described to you and the view that the evolutionary stage in question is, nevertheless, so far as we can form any estimate of values in the variety of cosmic processes, definable in some degree as an inferior evolutionary stage.”

Nothing but his lips had moved as he spoke, and his glasses still shone like two pallid moons.

Grant was shaking with laughter as he watched him.

“True,” he said, “there is no inconsistency, my son of the red spear. But there is a great deal of incompatibility of temper. I am very far from being certain that the Zulu is on an inferior evolutionary stage, whatever the blazes that may mean. I do not think there is anything stupid or ignorant about howling at the moon or being afraid of devils in the dark. It seems to me perfectly philosophical. Why should a man be thought a sort of idiot because he feels the mystery and peril of existence itself? Suppose, my dear Chadd, suppose it is we who are the idiots because we are not afraid of devils in the dark?”

Professor Chadd slit open a page of the magazine with a bone paper-knife and the intent reverence of the bibliophile.

“Beyond all question,” he said, “it is a tenable hypothesis. I allude to the hypothesis which I understand you to entertain, that our civilization is not or may not be an advance upon, and indeed (if I apprehend you), is or may be a retrogression from states identical with or analogous to the state of the

Zulus. Moreover, I shall be inclined to concede that such a proposition is of the nature, in some degree at least, of a primary proposition, and cannot adequately be argued, in the same sense, I mean, that the primary proposition of pessimism, or the primary proposition of the non-existence of matter, cannot adequately be argued. But I do not conceive you to be under the impression that you have demonstrated anything more concerning this proposition than that it is tenable, which, after all, amounts to little more than the statement that it is not a contradiction in terms."

Basil threw a book at his head and took out a cigar.

"You don't understand," he said, "but, on the other hand, as a compensation, you don't mind smoking. Why you don't object to that disgustingly barbaric rite I can't think. I can only say that I began it when I began to be a Zulu, about the age of ten. What I maintained was that although you knew more about Zulus in the sense that you are a scientist, I know more about them in the sense that I am a savage. For instance, your theory of the origin of language, something about its having come from the formulated secret language of some individual creature, though you knocked me silly with facts and scholarship in its favour, still does not convince me, because I have a feeling that that is not the way that things happen. If you ask me why I think so I can only answer that I am a Zulu; and if you ask me (as you most certainly will) what is my definition of a Zulu, I can answer that also. He is one who has climbed a Sussex apple-tree at seven and been afraid of a ghost in an English lane."

"Your process of thought—" began the immovable Chadd, but his speech was interrupted. His sister, with that masculinity which always in such families concentrates in sisters, flung open the door with a rigid arm and said:

"James, Mr Bingham of the British Museum wants to see you again."

The philosopher rose with a dazed look, which always indicates in such men the fact that they regard philosophy as a familiar thing, but practical life as a weird and unnerving vision, and walked dubiously out of the room.

"I hope you do not mind my being aware of it, Miss Chadd," said Basil Grant, "but I hear that the British Museum has recognized one of the men who have deserved well of their commonwealth. It is true, is it not, that Professor Chadd is likely to be made keeper of Asiatic manuscripts?"

The grim face of the spinster betrayed a great deal of pleasure and a great deal of pathos also. "I believe it's true," she said. "If it is, it will not only be great glory which women, I assure you, feel a great deal, but great relief, which they feel more; relief from worry from a lot of things. James' health has never been good, and while we are as poor as we are he had to do journalism and coaching, in addition to his own dreadful grinding notions and discoveries, which he loves more than man, woman, or child. I have often been afraid that unless something of this kind occurred we should really have to be careful of his brain. But I believe it is practically settled."

"I am delighted," began Basil, but with a worried face, "but these red-tape negotiations are so terribly chancy that I really can't advise you to build on hope, only to be hurled down into bitterness. I've known men, and good men like your brother, come nearer than this and be disappointed. Of course, if it is true—"

"If it is true," said the woman fiercely, "it means that people who have never lived may make an attempt at living."

Even as she spoke the professor came into the room still with the dazed look in his eyes.

"Is it true?" asked Basil, with burning eyes.

"Not a bit true," answered Chadd after a moment's bewilderment. "Your argument was in three points fallacious."

"What do you mean?" demanded Grant.

"Well," said the professor slowly, "in saying that you could possess a knowledge of the essence of Zulu life distinct from—"

"Oh! confound Zulu life," cried Grant, with a burst of laughter. "I mean, have you got the post?"

"You mean the post of keeper of the Asiatic manuscripts," he said, opening his eye with childlike wonder. "Oh, yes, I got that. But the real objection to your argument, which has only, I admit, occurred to me since I have been out of the room, is that it does not merely presuppose a Zulu truth apart from the facts, but infers that the discovery of it is absolutely impeded by the facts."

"I am crushed," said Basil, and sat down to laugh, while the professor's sister retired to her room, possibly, possibly not.

It was extremely late when we left the Chadds, and it is an extremely long and tiresome journey from Shepherd's Bush to Lambeth. This may be our excuse for the fact that we (for I was stopping the night with Grant) got down to breakfast next day at a time inexpressibly criminal, a time, in point of fact, close upon noon. Even to that belated meal we came in a very lounging and leisurely fashion. Grant, in particular, seemed so dreamy at table that he scarcely saw the pile of letters by his plate, and I doubt if he would have opened any of them if there had not lain on the top that one thing which has succeeded amid modern carelessness in being really urgent and coercive — a telegram. This he opened with the same heavy distraction with which he broke his egg and drank his tea. When he read it he did not stir a hair or say a word, but something, I know not what, made me feel that the motionless figure had been pulled together suddenly as strings are tightened on a slack guitar. Though he said nothing and did not move, I knew that he had been for an instant cleared and sharpened with a shock of cold water. It was scarcely any surprise to me when a man who had drifted sullenly to his seat and fallen into it, kicked it away like a cur from under him and came round to me in two strides.

"What do you make of that?" he said, and flattened out the wire in front of me.

It ran: "Please come at once. James' mental state dangerous. Chadd."

"What does the woman mean?" I said after a pause, irritably. "Those women have been saying that the poor old professor was mad ever since he was born."

"You are mistaken," said Grant composedly. "It is true that all sensible women think all studious men mad. It is true, for the matter of that, all women of any kind think all men of any kind mad. But they don't put it in telegrams, any more than they wire to you that grass is green or God all-merciful. These things are truisms, and often private ones at that. If Miss Chadd has written down under the eye of a strange woman in a post-office that her brother is off his head you may be perfectly certain that she did it because it was a matter of life and death, and she can think of no other way of forcing us to come promptly."

"It will force us of course," I said, smiling.

"Oh, yes," he replied; "there is a cab-rank near."

Basil scarcely said a word as we drove across Westminster Bridge, through Trafalgar Square, along Piccadilly, and up the Uxbridge Road. Only as he was opening the gate he spoke.

"I think you will take my word for it, my friend," he said; "this is one of the most queer and complicated and astounding incidents that ever happened in London or, for that matter, in any high civilization."

“I confess with the greatest sympathy and reverence that I don’t quite see it,” I said. “Is it so very extraordinary or complicated that a dreamy somnambulant old invalid who has always walked on the borders of the inconceivable should go mad under the shock of great joy? Is it so very extraordinary that a man with a head like a turnip and a soul like a spider’s web should not find his strength equal to a confounding change of fortunes? Is it, in short, so very extraordinary that James Chadd should lose his wits from excitement?”

“It would not be extraordinary in the least,” answered Basil, with placidity. “It would not be extraordinary in the least,” he repeated, “if the professor had gone mad. That was not the extraordinary circumstance to which I referred.”

“What,” I asked, stamping my foot, “was the extraordinary thing?”

“The extraordinary thing,” said Basil, ringing the bell, “is that he has not gone mad from excitement.”

The tall and angular figure of the eldest Miss Chadd blocked the doorway as the door opened. Two other Miss Chadds seemed in the same way to be blocking the narrow passage and the little parlour. There was a general sense of their keeping something from view. They seemed like three black-clad ladies in some strange play of Maeterlinck, veiling the catastrophe from the audience in the manner of the Greek chorus.

“Sit down, won’t you?” said one of them, in a voice that was somewhat rigid with pain. “I think you had better be told first what has happened.”

Then, with her bleak face looking unmeaningly out of the window, she continued, in an even and mechanical voice:

“I had better state everything that occurred just as it occurred. This morning I was clearing away the breakfast things, my sisters were both somewhat unwell, and had not come down. My brother had just gone out of the room, I believe, to fetch a book. He came back again, however, without it, and stood for some time staring at the empty grate. I said, ‘Were you looking for anything I could get?’ He did not answer, but this constantly happens, as he is often very abstracted. I repeated my question, and still he did not answer. Sometimes he is so wrapped up in his studies that nothing but a touch on the shoulder would make him aware of one’s presence, so I came round the table towards him. I really do not know how to describe the sensation which I then had. It seems simply silly, but at the moment it seemed something enormous, upsetting one’s brain. The fact is, James was standing on one leg.”

Grant smiled slowly and rubbed his hands with a kind of care.

“Standing on one leg?” I repeated.

“Yes,” replied the dead voice of the woman without an inflection to suggest that she felt the fantasticality of her statement. “He was standing on the left leg and the right drawn up at a sharp angle, the toe pointing downwards. I asked him if his leg hurt him. His only answer was to shoot the leg straight at right angles to the other, as if pointing to the other with his toe to the wall. He was still looking quite gravely at the fireplace.

“‘James, what is the matter?’ I cried, for I was thoroughly frightened. James gave three kicks in the air with the right leg, flung up the other, gave three kicks in the air with it also and spun round like a teetotum the other way. ‘Are you mad?’ I cried. ‘Why don’t you answer me?’ He had come to a standstill facing me, and was looking at me as he always does, with his lifted eyebrows and great spectacled eyes. When I had spoken he remained a second or two motionless, and then his only reply was to lift his left foot slowly from the floor and describe circles with it in the air. I rushed to the door and shouted for Christina. I will not dwell on the dreadful hours that followed. All three of us talked to him, implored him to speak to us with appeals that might have brought back the dead, but he has done nothing but hop and dance and kick with a solemn silent face. It looks as if his legs belonged to some one else or were possessed by devils. He has never spoken to us from that time to this.”

“Where is he now?” I said, getting up in some agitation. “We ought not to leave him alone.”

“Doctor Colman is with him,” said Miss Chadd calmly. “They are in the garden. Doctor Colman thought the air would do him good. And he can scarcely go into the street.”

Basil and I walked rapidly to the window which looked out on the garden. It was a small and somewhat smug suburban garden; the flower beds a little too neat and like the pattern of a coloured carpet; but on this shining and opulent summer day even they had the exuberance of something natural, I had almost said tropical. In the middle of a bright and verdant but painfully circular lawn stood two figures. One of them was a small, sharp-looking man with black whiskers and a very polished hat (I presume Dr Colman), who was talking very quietly and clearly, yet with a nervous twitch, as it were, in his face. The other was our old friend, listening with his old forbearing expression and owlish eyes, the strong sunlight gleaming on his glasses as the lamplight had gleamed the night before, when the boisterous Basil had rallied him on his studious decorum. But for one thing the figure of this morning might have been the identical figure of last night. That one thing was that while the face listened reposefully the legs were industriously dancing like the legs of a marionette. The neat flowers and the sunny glitter of the garden lent an indescribable sharpness and incredibility to the prodigy — the prodigy of the head of a hermit and the legs of a harlequin. For miracles should always happen in broad daylight. The night makes them credible and therefore commonplace.

The second sister had by this time entered the room and came somewhat drearily to the window.

“You know, Adelaide,” she said, “that Mr Bingham from the Museum is coming again at three.”

“I know,” said Adelaide Chadd bitterly. “I suppose we shall have to tell him about this. I thought that no good fortune would ever come easily to us.”

Grant suddenly turned round. “What do you mean?” he said. “What will you have to tell Mr Bingham?”

“You know what I shall have to tell him,” said the professor’s sister, almost fiercely. “I don’t know that we need give it its wretched name. Do you think that the keeper of Asiatic manuscripts will be allowed to go on like that?” And she pointed for an instant at the figure in the garden, the shining, listening face and the unresting feet.

Basil Grant took out his watch with an abrupt movement. “When did you say the British Museum man was coming?” he said.

“Three o’clock,” said Miss Chadd briefly.

“Then I have an hour before me,” said Grant, and without another word threw up the window and jumped out into the garden. He did not walk straight up to the doctor and lunatic, but strolling round the garden path drew near them cautiously and yet apparently carelessly. He stood a couple of feet off them, seemingly counting halfpence out of his trousers pocket, but, as I could see, looking up steadily under the broad brim of his hat.

Suddenly he stepped up to Professor Chadd’s elbow, and said, in a loud familiar voice, “Well, my boy, do you still think the Zulus our inferiors?”

The doctor knitted his brows and looked anxious, seeming to be about to speak. The professor turned his bald and placid head towards Grant in a friendly manner, but made no answer, idly flinging his left leg about.

"Have you converted Dr Colman to your views?" Basil continued, still in the same loud and lucid tone.

Chadd only shuffled his feet and kicked a little with the other leg, his expression still benevolent and inquiring. The doctor cut in rather sharply. "Shall we go inside, professor?" he said. "Now you have shown me the garden. A beautiful garden. A most beautiful garden. Let us go in," and he tried to draw the kicking ethnologist by the elbow, at the same time whispering to Grant: "I must ask you not to trouble him with questions. Most risky. He must be soothed."

Basil answered in the same tone, with great coolness:

"Of course your directions must be followed out, doctor. I will endeavour to do so, but I hope it will not be inconsistent with them if you will leave me alone with my poor friend in this garden for an hour. I want to watch him. I assure you, Dr Colman, that I shall say very little to him, and that little shall be as soothing as — as syrup."

The doctor wiped his eyeglass thoughtfully.

"It is rather dangerous for him," he said, "to be long in the strong sun without his hat. With his bald head, too."

"That is soon settled," said Basil composedly, and took off his own big hat and clapped it on the egglike skull of the professor. The latter did not turn round but danced away with his eyes on the horizon.

The doctor put on his glasses again, looked severely at the two for some seconds, with his head on one side like a bird's, and then saying, shortly, "All right," strutted away into the house, where the three Misses Chadd were all looking out from the parlour window on to the garden. They looked out on it with hungry eyes for a full hour without moving, and they saw a sight which was more extraordinary than madness itself.

Basil Grant addressed a few questions to the madman, without succeeding in making him do anything but continue to caper, and when he had done this slowly took a red note-book out of one pocket and a large pencil out of another.

He began hurriedly to scribble notes. When the lunatic skipped away from him he would walk a few yards in pursuit, stop, and make notes again. Thus they followed each other round and round the foolish circle of turf, the one writing in pencil with the face of a man working out a problem, the other leaping and playing like a child.

After about three-quarters of an hour of this imbecile scene, Grant put the pencil in his pocket, but kept the note-book open in his hand, and walking round the mad professor, planted himself directly in front of him.

Then occurred something that even those already used to that wild morning had not anticipated or dreamed. The professor, on finding Basil in front of him, stared with a blank benignity for a few seconds, and then drew up his left leg and hung it bent in the attitude that his sister had described as being the first of all his antics. And the moment he had done it Basil Grant lifted his own leg and held it out rigid before him, confronting Chadd with the flat sole of his boot. The professor dropped his bent leg, and swinging his weight on to it kicked out the other behind, like a man swimming. Basil crossed his feet like a saltire cross, and then flung them apart again, giving a leap into the air. Then before any of the spectators could say a word or even entertain a thought about the matter, both of them were dancing a sort of jig or hornpipe opposite each other; and the sun shone down on two madmen instead of one.

They were so stricken with the deafness and blindness of monomania that they did not see the eldest Miss Chadd come out feverishly into the garden with gestures of entreaty, a gentleman following her. Professor Chadd was in the wildest posture of a pas-de-quatre, Basil Grant seemed about to turn a cart-wheel, when they were frozen in their follies by the steely voice of Adelaide Chadd saying, “Mr Bingham of the British Museum.”

Mr Bingham was a slim, well-clad gentleman with a pointed and slightly effeminate grey beard, unimpeachable gloves, and formal but agreeable manners. He was the type of the over-civilized, as Professor Chadd was of the uncivilized pedant. His formality and agreeableness did him some credit under the circumstances. He had a vast experience of books and a considerable experience of the more dilettante fashionable salons. But neither branch of knowledge had accustomed him to the spectacle of two grey-haired middle-class gentlemen in modern costume throwing themselves about like acrobats as a substitute for an after-dinner nap.

The professor continued his antics with perfect placidity, but Grant stopped abruptly. The doctor had reappeared on the scene, and his shiny black eyes, under his shiny black hat, moved restlessly from one of them to the other.

“Dr Colman,” said Basil, turning to him, “will you entertain Professor Chadd again for a little while? I am sure that he needs you. Mr Bingham, might I have the pleasure of a few moments’ private conversation? My name is Grant.”

Mr Bingham, of the British Museum, bowed in a manner that was respectful but a trifle bewildered.

“Miss Chadd will excuse me,” continued Basil easily, “if I know my way about the house.” And he led the dazed librarian rapidly through the back door into the parlour.

“Mr Bingham,” said Basil, setting a chair for him, “I imagine that Miss Chadd has told you of this distressing occurrence.”

“She has, Mr Grant,” said Bingham, looking at the table with a sort of compassionate nervousness. “I am more pained than I can say by this dreadful calamity. It seems quite heart-rending that the thing should have happened just as we have decided to give your eminent friend a position which falls far short of his merits. As it is, of course — really, I don’t know what to say. Professor Chadd may, of course, retain — I sincerely trust he will — his extraordinarily valuable intellect. But I am afraid — I am really afraid — that it would not do to have the curator of the Asiatic manuscripts — er — dancing about.”

“I have a suggestion to make,” said Basil, and sat down abruptly in his chair, drawing it up to the table.

“I am delighted, of course,” said the gentleman from the British Museum, coughing and drawing up his chair also.

The clock on the mantelpiece ticked for just the moments required for Basil to clear his throat and collect his words, and then he said:

“My proposal is this. I do not know that in the strict use of words you could altogether call it a compromise, still it has something of that character. My proposal is that the Government (acting, as I presume, through your Museum) should pay Professor Chadd L800 a year until he stops dancing.”

“Eight hundred a year!” said Mr Bingham, and for the first time lifted his mild blue eyes to those of his interlocutor — and he raised them with a mild blue stare. “I think I have not quite understood you. Did I understand you to say that Professor Chadd ought to be employed, in his present state, in the Asiatic manuscript department at eight hundred a year?"

Grant shook his head resolutely.

"No," he said firmly. "No. Chadd is a friend of mine, and I would say anything for him I could. But I do not say, I cannot say, that he ought to take on the Asiatic manuscripts. I do not go so far as that. I merely say that until he stops dancing you ought to pay him L800 Surely you have some general fund for the endowment of research."

Mr Bingham looked bewildered.

"I really don't know," he said, blinking his eyes, "what you are talking about. Do you ask us to give this obvious lunatic nearly a thousand a year for life?"

"Not at all," cried Basil, keenly and triumphantly. "I never said for life. Not at all."

"What for, then?" asked the meek Bingham, suppressing an instinct meekly to tear his hair. "How long is this endowment to run? Not till his death? Till the Judgement day?"

"No," said Basil, beaming, "but just what I said. Till he has stopped dancing." And he lay back with satisfaction and his hands in his pockets.

Bingham had by this time fastened his eyes keenly on Basil Grant and kept them there.

"Come, Mr Grant," he said. "Do I seriously understand you to suggest that the Government pay Professor Chadd an extraordinarily high salary simply on the ground that he has (pardon the phrase) gone mad? That he should be paid more than four good clerks solely on the ground that he is flinging his boots about in the back yard?"

"Precisely," said Grant composedly.

"That this absurd payment is not only to run on with the absurd dancing, but actually to stop with the absurd dancing?"

"One must stop somewhere," said Grant. "Of course."

Bingham rose and took up his perfect stick and gloves.

"There is really nothing more to be said, Mr Grant," he said coldly. "What you are trying to explain to me may be a joke — a slightly unfeeling joke. It may be your sincere view, in which case I ask your pardon for the former suggestion. But, in any case, it appears quite irrelevant to my duties. The mental morbidity, the mental downfall, of Professor Chadd, is a thing so painful to me that I cannot easily endure to speak of it. But it is clear there is a limit to everything. And if the Archangel Gabriel went mad it would sever his connection, I am sorry to say, with the British Museum Library."

He was stepping towards the door, but Grant's hand, flung out in dramatic warning, arrested him.

"Stop!" said Basil sternly. "Stop while there is yet time. Do you want to take part in a great work, Mr Bingham? Do you want to help in the glory of Europe — in the glory of science? Do you want to carry your head in the air when it is bald or white because of the part that you bore in a great discovery? Do you want—"

Bingham cut in sharply:

"And if I do want this, Mr Grant—"

"Then," said Basil lightly, "your task is easy. Get Chadd L800 a year till he stops dancing."

With a fierce flap of his swinging gloves Bingham turned impatiently to the door, but in passing out of it found it blocked. Dr Colman was coming in.

"Forgive me, gentlemen," he said, in a nervous, confidential voice, "the fact is, Mr Grant, I — er — have made a most disturbing discovery about Mr Chadd."

Bingham looked at him with grave eyes.

"I was afraid so," he said. "Drink, I imagine."

"Drink!" echoed Colman, as if that were a much milder affair. "Oh, no, it's not drink."

Mr Bingham became somewhat agitated, and his voice grew hurried and vague. "Homicidal mania—" he began.

"No, no," said the medical man impatiently.

"Thinks he's made of glass," said Bingham feverishly, "or says he's God — or—"

"No," said Dr Colman sharply; "the fact is, Mr Grant, my discovery is of a different character. The awful thing about him is—"

"Oh, go on, sir," cried Bingham, in agony.

"The awful thing about him is," repeated Colman, with deliberation, "that he isn't mad."

"Not mad!"

"There are quite well-known physical tests of lunacy," said the doctor shortly; "he hasn't got any of them."

“But why does he dance?” cried the despairing Bingham. “Why doesn’t he answer us? Why hasn’t he spoken to his family?”

“The devil knows,” said Dr Colman coolly. “I’m paid to judge of lunatics, but not of fools. The man’s not mad.”

“What on earth can it mean? Can’t we make him listen?” said Mr Bingham. “Can none get into any kind of communication with him?”

Grant’s voice struck in sudden and clear, like a steel bell:

“I shall be very happy,” he said, “to give him any message you like to send.”

Both men stared at him.

“Give him a message?” they cried simultaneously. “How will you give him a message?”

Basil smiled in his slow way.

“If you really want to know how I shall give him your message,” he began, but Bingham cried:

“Of course, of course,” with a sort of frenzy.

“Well,” said Basil, “like this.” And he suddenly sprang a foot into the air, coming down with crashing boots, and then stood on one leg.

His face was stern, though this effect was slightly spoiled by the fact that one of his feet was making wild circles in the air.

“You drive me to it,” he said. “You drive me to betray my friend. And I will, for his own sake, betray him.”

The sensitive face of Bingham took on an extra expression of distress as of one anticipating some disgraceful disclosure. “Anything painful, of course—” he began.

Basil let his loose foot fall on the carpet with a crash that struck them all rigid in their feeble attitudes.

“Idiots!” he cried. “Have you seen the man? Have you looked at James Chadd going dismally to and fro from his dingy house to your miserable library, with his futile books and his confounded umbrella, and never seen that he has the eyes of a fanatic? Have you never noticed, stuck casually behind his spectacles and above his seedy old collar, the face of a man who might have burned heretics, or died for the philosopher’s stone? It is all my fault, in a way: I lit the dynamite of his deadly faith. I argued against him on the score of his famous theory about language — the theory that language was complete in certain individuals and was picked up by others simply by watching them. I also chaffed him about not understanding things in rough and ready practice. What has this glorious bigot done? He has answered me. He has worked out a system of language of his own (it would take too long to explain); he has made up, I say, a language of his own. And he has sworn that till people understand it, till he can speak to us in this language, he will not speak in any other. And he shall not. I have understood, by taking careful notice; and, by heaven, so shall the others. This shall not be blown upon. He shall finish his experiment. He shall have L800 a year from somewhere till he has stopped dancing. To stop him now is an infamous war on a great idea. It is religious persecution."

Mr Bingham held out his hand cordially.

"I thank you, Mr Grant," he said. "I hope I shall be able to answer for the source of the L800 and I fancy that I shall. Will you come in my cab?"

"No, thank you very much, Mr Bingham," said Grant heartily. "I think I will go and have a chat with the professor in the garden."

The conversation between Chadd and Grant appeared to be personal and friendly. They were still dancing when I left.

The Eccentric Seclusion of the Old Lady

The conversation of Rupert Grant had two great elements of interest — first, the long fantasias of detective deduction in which he was engaged, and, second, his genuine romantic interest in the life of London. His brother Basil said of him: “His reasoning is particularly cold and clear, and invariably leads him wrong. But his poetry comes in abruptly and leads him right.” Whether this was true of Rupert as a whole, or no, it was certainly curiously supported by one story about him which I think worth telling.

We were walking along a lonely terrace in Brompton together. The street was full of that bright blue twilight which comes about half past eight in summer, and which seems for the moment to be not so much a coming of darkness as the turning on of a new azure illuminator, as if the earth were lit suddenly by a sapphire sun. In the cool blue the lemon tint of the lamps had already begun to flame, and as Rupert and I passed them, Rupert talking excitedly, one after another the pale sparks sprang out of the dusk. Rupert was talking excitedly because he was trying to prove to me the nine hundred and ninety-ninth of his amateur detective theories. He would go about London, with this mad logic in his brain, seeing a conspiracy in a cab accident, and a special providence in a falling fusee. His suspicions at the moment were fixed upon an unhappy milkman who walked in front of us. So arresting were the incidents which afterwards overtook us that I am really afraid that I have forgotten what were the main outlines of the milkman’s crime. I think it had something to do with the fact that he had only one small can of milk to carry, and that of that he had left the lid loose and walked so quickly that he spilled milk on the pavement. This showed that he was not thinking of his small burden, and this again showed that he anticipated some other than lacteal business at the end of his walk, and this (taken in conjunction with something about muddy boots) showed something else that I have entirely forgotten. I am afraid that I derided this detailed revelation unmercifully; and I am afraid that Rupert Grant, who, though the best of fellows, had a good deal of the sensitiveness of the artistic temperament, slightly resented my derision. He endeavoured to take a whiff of his cigar, with the placidity which he associated with his profession, but the cigar, I think, was nearly bitten through.

“My dear fellow,” he said acidly, “I’ll bet you half a crown that wherever that milkman comes to a real stop I’ll find out something curious.”

“My resources are equal to that risk,” I said, laughing. “Done.”

We walked on for about a quarter of an hour in silence in the trail of the mysterious milkman. He walked quicker and quicker, and we had some ado to keep up with him; and every now and then he left a splash of milk, silver in the lamplight. Suddenly, almost before we could note it, he disappeared down the area steps of a house. I believe Rupert really believed that the milkman was a fairy; for a second he seemed to accept him as having vanished. Then calling something to me which somehow took no hold on my mind, he darted after the mystic milkman, and disappeared himself into the area.

I waited for at least five minutes, leaning against a lamp-post in the lonely street. Then the milkman came swinging up the steps without his can and hurried off clattering down the road. Two or three minutes more elapsed, and then Rupert came bounding up also, his face pale but yet laughing; a not uncommon contradiction in him, denoting excitement.

“My friend,” he said, rubbing his hands, “so much for all your scepticism. So much for your philistine ignorance of the possibilities of a romantic city. Two and sixpence, my boy, is the form in which your prosaic good nature will have to express itself.”

“What?” I said incredulously, “do you mean to say that you really did find anything the matter with the poor milkman?”

His face fell.

“Oh, the milkman,” he said, with a miserable affectation at having misunderstood me. “No, I — I — didn’t exactly bring anything home to the milkman himself, I—”

“What did the milkman say and do?” I said, with inexorable sternness.

“Well, to tell the truth,” said Rupert, shifting restlessly from one foot to another, “the milkman himself, as far as merely physical appearances went, just said, ‘Milk, Miss,’ and handed in the can. That is not to say, of course, that he did not make some secret sign or some—”

I broke into a violent laugh. “You idiot,” I said, “why don’t you own yourself wrong and have done with it? Why should he have made a secret sign any more than any one else? You own he said nothing and did nothing worth mentioning. You own that, don’t you?”

His face grew grave.

“Well, since you ask me, I must admit that I do. It is possible that the milkman did not betray himself. It is even possible that I was wrong about him.”

“Then come along with you,” I said, with a certain amicable anger, “and remember that you owe me half a crown.”

“As to that, I differ from you,” said Rupert coolly. “The milkman’s remarks may have been quite innocent. Even the milkman may have been. But I do not owe you half a crown. For the terms of the bet were, I think, as follows, as I propounded them, that wherever that milkman came to a real stop I should find out something curious.”

“Well?” I said.

“Well,” he answered, “I jolly well have. You just come with me,” and before I could speak he had turned tail once more and whisked through the blue dark into the moat or basement of the house. I followed almost before I made any decision.

When we got down into the area I felt indescribably foolish literally, as the saying is, in a hole. There was nothing but a closed door, shuttered windows, the steps down which we had come, the ridiculous well in which I found myself, and the ridiculous man who had brought me there, and who stood there with dancing eyes. I was just about to turn back when Rupert caught me by the elbow.

“Just listen to that,” he said, and keeping my coat gripped in his right hand, he rapped with the knuckles of his left on the shutters of the basement window. His air was so definite that I paused and even inclined my head for a moment towards it. From inside was coming the murmur of an unmistakable human voice.

“Have you been talking to somebody inside?” I asked suddenly, turning to Rupert.

“No, I haven’t,” he replied, with a grim smile, “but I should very much like to. Do you know what somebody is saying in there?”

“No, of course not,” I replied.

“Then I recommend you to listen,” said Rupert sharply.

In the dead silence of the aristocratic street at evening, I stood a moment and listened. From behind the wooden partition, in which there was a long lean crack, was coming a continuous and moaning sound which took the form of the words: “When shall I get out? When shall I get out? Will they ever let me out?” or words to that effect.

“Do you know anything about this?” I said, turning upon Rupert very abruptly.

“Perhaps you think I am the criminal,” he said sardonically, “instead of being in some small sense the detective. I came into this area two or three minutes ago, having told you that I knew there was something funny going on, and this woman behind the shutters (for it evidently is a woman) was moaning like mad. No, my dear friend, beyond that I do not know anything about her. She is not, startling as it may seem, my disinherited daughter, or a member of my secret seraglio. But when I hear a human being wailing that she can’t get out, and talking to herself like a mad woman and beating on the shutters with her fists, as she was doing two or three minutes ago, I think it worth mentioning, that is all.”

“My dear fellow,” I said, “I apologize; this is no time for arguing. What is to be done?”

Rupert Grant had a long clasp-knife naked and brilliant in his hand.

“First of all,” he said, “house-breaking.” And he forced the blade into the crevice of the wood and broke away a huge splinter, leaving a gap and glimpse of the dark window-pane inside. The room within was entirely unlighted, so that for the first few seconds the window seemed a dead and opaque surface, as dark as a strip of slate. Then came a realization which, though in a sense gradual, made us step back and catch our breath. Two large dim human eyes were so close to us that the window itself seemed suddenly to be a mask. A pale human face was pressed against the glass within, and with increased distinctness, with the increase of the opening came the words:

“When shall I get out?”

“What can all this be?” I said.

Rupert made no answer, but lifting his walking-stick and pointing the ferrule like a fencing sword at the glass, punched a hole in it, smaller and more accurate than I should have supposed possible. The moment he had done so the voice spouted out of the hole, so to speak, piercing and querulous and clear, making the same demand for liberty.

“Can’t you get out, madam?” I said, drawing near the hole in some perturbation.

“Get out? Of course I can’t,” moaned the unknown female bitterly. “They won’t let me. I told them I would be let out. I told them I’d call the police. But it’s no good. Nobody knows, nobody comes. They could keep me as long as they liked only—”

I was in the very act of breaking the window finally with my stick, incensed with this very sinister mystery, when Rupert held my arm hard, held it with a curious, still, and secret rigidity as if he desired to stop me, but did not desire to be observed to do so. I paused a moment, and in the act swung slightly round, so that I was facing the supporting wall of the front door steps. The act froze me into a sudden stillness like that of Rupert, for a figure almost as motionless as the pillars of the portico, but unmistakably human, had put his head out from between the doorposts and was gazing down into the area. One of the lighted lamps of the street was just behind his head, throwing it into abrupt darkness. Consequently, nothing whatever could be seen of his face beyond one fact, that he was unquestionably staring at us. I must say I thought Rupert’s calmness magnificent. He rang the area bell quite idly, and went on talking to me with the easy end of a conversation which had never had any beginning. The black glaring figure in the portico did not stir. I almost thought it was really a statue. In another moment the grey area was golden with gaslight as the basement door was opened suddenly and a small and decorous housemaid stood in it.

“Pray excuse me,” said Rupert, in a voice which he contrived to make somehow or other at once affable and underbred, “but we thought perhaps that you might do something for the Waifs and Strays. We don’t expect—”

“Not here,” said the small servant, with the incomparable severity of the menial of the non-philanthropic, and slammed the door in our faces.

“Very sad, very sad — the indifference of these people,” said the philanthropist with gravity, as we went together up the steps. As we did so the motionless figure in the portico suddenly disappeared.

“Well, what do you make of that?” asked Rupert, slapping his gloves together when we got into the street.

I do not mind admitting that I was seriously upset. Under such conditions I had but one thought.

“Don’t you think,” I said a trifle timidly, “that we had better tell your brother?”

“Oh, if you like,” said Rupert, in a lordly way. “He is quite near, as I promised to meet him at Gloucester Road Station. Shall we take a cab? Perhaps, as you say, it might amuse him.”

Gloucester Road Station had, as if by accident, a somewhat deserted look. After a little looking about we discovered Basil Grant with his great head and his great white hat blocking the ticket-office window. I thought at first that he was taking a ticket for somewhere and being an astonishingly long time about it. As a matter of fact, he was discussing religion with the booking-office clerk, and had almost got his head through the hole in his excitement. When we dragged him away it was some time before he would talk of anything but the growth of an Oriental fatalism in modern thought, which had been well typified by some of the official’s ingenious but perverse fallacies. At last we managed to get him to understand that we had made an astounding discovery. When he did listen, he listened attentively, walking between us up and down the lamp-lit street, while we told him in a rather feverish duet of the great house in South Kensington, of the equivocal milkman, of the lady imprisoned in the basement, and the man staring from the porch. At length he said:

“If you’re thinking of going back to look the thing up, you must be careful what you do. It’s no good you two going there. To go twice on the same pretext would look dubious. To go on a different pretext would look worse. You may be quite certain that the inquisitive gentleman who looked at you looked thoroughly, and will wear, so to speak, your portraits next to his heart. If you want to find out if there is anything in this without a police raid I fancy you had better wait outside. I’ll go in and see them.”

His slow and reflective walk brought us at length within sight of the house. It stood up ponderous and purple against the last pallor of twilight. It looked like an ogre’s castle. And so apparently it was.

“Do you think it’s safe, Basil,” said his brother, pausing, a little pale, under the lamp, “to go into that place alone? Of course we shall be near enough to hear if you yell, but these devils might do something — something sudden — or odd. I can’t feel it’s safe.”

“I know of nothing that is safe,” said Basil composedly, “except, possibly — death,” and he went up the steps and rang at the bell. When the massive respectable door opened for an instant, cutting a square of gaslight in the gathering dark, and then closed with a bang, burying our friend inside, we could not repress a shudder. It had been like the heavy gaping and closing of the dim lips of some evil leviathan. A freshening night breeze began to blow up the street, and we turned up the collars of our coats. At the end of twenty minutes, in which we had scarcely moved or spoken, we were as cold as icebergs, but more, I think, from apprehension than the atmosphere. Suddenly Rupert made an abrupt movement towards the house.

“I can’t stand this,” he began, but almost as he spoke sprang back into the shadow, for the panel of gold was again cut out of the black house front, and the burly figure of Basil was silhouetted against it coming out. He was roaring with laughter and talking so loudly that you could have heard every syllable across the street. Another voice, or, possibly, two voices, were laughing and talking back at him from within.

“No, no, no,” Basil was calling out, with a sort of hilarious hostility. “That’s quite wrong. That’s the most ghastly heresy of all. It’s the soul, my dear chap, the soul that’s the arbiter of cosmic forces. When you see a cosmic force you don’t like, trick it, my boy. But I must really be off.”

“Come and pitch into us again,” came the laughing voice from out of the house. “We still have some bones unbroken.”

“Thanks very much, I will — good night,” shouted Grant, who had by this time reached the street.

“Good night,” came the friendly call in reply, before the door closed.

“Basil,” said Rupert Grant, in a hoarse whisper, “what are we to do?”

The elder brother looked thoughtfully from one of us to the other.

“What is to be done, Basil?” I repeated in uncontrollable excitement.

“I’m not sure,” said Basil doubtfully. “What do you say to getting some dinner somewhere and going to the Court Theatre tonight? I tried to get those fellows to come, but they couldn’t.”

We stared blankly.

“Go to the Court Theatre?” repeated Rupert. “What would be the good of that?”

“Good? What do you mean?” answered Basil, staring also. “Have you turned Puritan or Passive Resister, or something? For fun, of course.”

“But, great God in Heaven! What are we going to do, I mean!” cried Rupert. “What about the poor woman locked up in that house? Shall I go for the police?”

Basil’s face cleared with immediate comprehension, and he laughed.

“Oh, that,” he said. “I’d forgotten that. That’s all right. Some mistake, possibly. Or some quite trifling private affair. But I’m sorry those fellows couldn’t come with us. Shall we take one of these green omnibuses? There is a restaurant in Sloane Square.”

"I sometimes think you play the fool to frighten us," I said irritably. "How can we leave that woman locked up? How can it be a mere private affair? How can crime and kidnapping and murder, for all I know, be private affairs? If you found a corpse in a man's drawing-room, would you think it bad taste to talk about it just as if it was a confounded dado or an infernal etching?"

Basil laughed heartily.

"That's very forcible," he said. "As a matter of fact, though, I know it's all right in this case. And there comes the green omnibus."

"How do you know it's all right in this ease?" persisted his brother angrily.

"My dear chap, the thing's obvious," answered Basil, holding a return ticket between his teeth while he fumbled in his waistcoat pocket. "Those two fellows never committed a crime in their lives. They're not the kind. Have either of you chaps got a halfpenny? I want to get a paper before the omnibus comes."

"Oh, curse the paper!" cried Rupert, in a fury. "Do you mean to tell me, Basil Grant, that you are going to leave a fellow creature in pitch darkness in a private dungeon, because you've had ten minutes' talk with the keepers of it and thought them rather good men?"

"Good men do commit crimes sometimes," said Basil, taking the ticket out of his mouth. "But this kind of good man doesn't commit that kind of crime. Well, shall we get on this omnibus?"

The great green vehicle was indeed plunging and lumbering along the dim wide street towards us. Basil had stepped from the curb, and for an instant it was touch and go whether we should all have leaped on to it and been borne away to the restaurant and the theatre.

"Basil," I said, taking him firmly by the shoulder, "I simply won't leave this street and this house."

"Nor will I," said Rupert, glaring at it and biting his fingers. "There's some black work going on there. If I left it I should never sleep again."

Basil Grant looked at us both seriously.

"Of course if you feel like that," he said, "we'll investigate further. You'll find it's all right, though. They're only two young Oxford fellows. Extremely nice, too, though rather infected with this pseudo-Darwinian business. Ethics of evolution and all that."

“I think,” said Rupert darkly, ringing the bell, “that we shall enlighten you further about their ethics.”

“And may I ask,” said Basil gloomily, “what it is that you propose to do?”

“I propose, first of all,” said Rupert, “to get into this house; secondly, to have a look at these nice young Oxford men; thirdly, to knock them down, bind them, gag them, and search the house.”

Basil stared indignantly for a few minutes. Then he was shaken for an instant with one of his sudden laughs.

“Poor little boys,” he said. “But it almost serves them right for holding such silly views, after all,” and he quaked again with amusement “there’s something confoundedly Darwinian about it.”

“I suppose you mean to help us?” said Rupert.

“Oh, yes, I’ll be in it,” answered Basil, “if it’s only to prevent your doing the poor chaps any harm.”

He was standing in the rear of our little procession, looking indifferent and sometimes even sulky, but somehow the instant the door opened he stepped first into the hall, glowing with urbanity.

“So sorry to haunt you like this,” he said. “I met two friends outside who very much want to know you. May I bring them in?”

“Delighted, of course,” said a young voice, the unmistakable voice of the Isis, and I realized that the door had been opened, not by the decorous little servant girl, but by one of our hosts in person. He was a short, but shapely young gentleman, with curly dark hair and a square, snub-nosed face. He wore slippers and a sort of blazer of some incredible college purple.

“This way,” he said; “mind the steps by the staircase. This house is more crooked and old-fashioned than you would think from its snobbish exterior. There are quite a lot of odd corners in the place really.”

“That,” said Rupert, with a savage smile, “I can quite believe.”

We were by this time in the study or back parlour, used by the young inhabitants as a sitting-room, an apartment littered with magazines and books ranging from Dante to detective stories. The other youth, who stood with his back to the fire smoking a corncob, was big and burly, with dead brown hair brushed forward and a Norfolk jacket. He was that particular type of man whose every feature and action is heavy and clumsy, and yet who is, you would say, rather exceptionally a gentleman.

"Any more arguments?" he said, when introductions had been effected. "I must say, Mr Grant, you were rather severe upon eminent men of science such as we. I've half a mind to chuck my D.Sc. and turn minor poet."

"Bosh," answered Grant. "I never said a word against eminent men of science. What I complain of is a vague popular philosophy which supposes itself to be scientific when it is really nothing but a sort of new religion and an uncommonly nasty one. When people talked about the fall of man they knew they were talking about a mystery, a thing they didn't understand. Now that they talk about the survival of the fittest they think they do understand it, whereas they have not merely no notion, they have an elaborately false notion of what the words mean. The Darwinian movement has made no difference to mankind, except that, instead of talking unphilosophically about philosophy, they now talk unscientifically about science."

"That is all very well," said the big young man, whose name appeared to be Burrows. "Of course, in a sense, science, like mathematics or the violin, can only be perfectly understood by specialists. Still, the rudiments may be of public use. Greenwood here," indicating the little man in the blazer, "doesn't know one note of music from another. Still, he knows something. He knows enough to take off his hat when they play 'God save the King'. He doesn't take it off by mistake when they play 'Oh, dem Golden Slippers'. Just in the same way science—"

Here Mr Burrows stopped abruptly. He was interrupted by an argument uncommon in philosophical controversy and perhaps not wholly legitimate. Rupert Grant had bounded on him from behind, flung an arm round his throat, and bent the giant backwards.

"Knock the other fellow down, Swinburne," he called out, and before I knew where I was I was locked in a grapple with the man in the purple blazer. He was a wiry fighter, who bent and sprang like a whalebone, but I was heavier and had taken him utterly by surprise. I twitched one of his feet from under him; he swung for a moment on the single foot, and then we fell with a crash amid the litter of newspapers, myself on top.

My attention for a moment released by victory, I could hear Basil's voice finishing some long sentence of which I had not heard the beginning.

"... wholly, I must confess, unintelligible to me, my dear sir, and I need not say unpleasant. Still one must side with one's old friends against the most fascinating new ones. Permit me, therefore, in tying you up in this antimacassar, to make it as commodious as handcuffs can reasonably be while...”

I had staggered to my feet. The gigantic Burrows was toiling in the garotte of Rupert, while Basil was striving to master his mighty hands. Rupert and Basil were both particularly strong, but so was Mr Burrows; how strong, we knew a second afterwards. His head was held back by Rupert’s arm, but a convulsive heave went over his whole frame. An instant after his head plunged forward like a bull’s, and Rupert Grant was slung head over heels, a catherine wheel of legs, on the floor in front of him. Simultaneously the bull’s head butted Basil in the chest, bringing him also to the ground with a crash, and the monster, with a Berserker roar, leaped at me and knocked me into the corner of the room, smashing the waste-paper basket. The bewildered Greenwood sprang furiously to his feet. Basil did the same. But they had the best of it now.

Greenwood dashed to the bell and pulled it violently, sending peals through the great house. Before I could get panting to my feet, and before Rupert, who had been literally stunned for a few moments, could even lift his head from the floor, two footmen were in the room. Defeated even when we were in a majority, we were now outnumbered. Greenwood and one of the footmen flung themselves upon me, crushing me back into the corner upon the wreck of the paper basket. The other two flew at Basil, and pinned him against the wall. Rupert lifted himself on his elbow, but he was still dazed.

In the strained silence of our helplessness I heard the voice of Basil come with a loud incongruous cheerfulness.

“Now this,” he said, “is what I call enjoying oneself.”

I caught a glimpse of his face, flushed and forced against the bookcase, from between the swaying limbs of my captors and his. To my astonishment his eyes were really brilliant with pleasure, like those of a child heated by a favourite game.

I made several apoplectic efforts to rise, but the servant was on top of me so heavily that Greenwood could afford to leave me to him. He turned quickly to come to reinforce the two who were mastering Basil. The latter’s head was already sinking lower and lower, like a leaking ship, as his enemies pressed him down. He flung up one hand just as I thought him falling and hung on to a huge tome in the bookcase, a volume, I afterwards discovered, of St Chrysostom’s theology. Just as Greenwood bounded across the room towards the group, Basil plucked the ponderous tome bodily out of the shelf, swung it, and sent it spinning through the air, so that it struck Greenwood flat in the face and knocked him over like a rolling ninepin. At the same instant Basil's stiffness broke, and he sank, his enemies closing over him.

Rupert's head was clear, but his body shaken; he was hanging as best he could on to the half-prostrate Greenwood. They were rolling over each other on the floor, both somewhat enfeebled by their falls, but Rupert certainly the more so. I was still successfully held down. The floor was a sea of torn and trampled papers and magazines, like an immense waste-paper basket. Burrows and his companion were almost up to the knees in them, as in a drift of dead leaves. And Greenwood had his leg stuck right through a sheet of the Pall Mall Gazette, which clung to it ludicrously, like some fantastic trouser frill.

Basil, shut from me in a human prison, a prison of powerful bodies, might be dead for all I knew. I fancied, however, that the broad back of Mr Burrows, which was turned towards me, had a certain bend of effort in it as if my friend still needed some holding down. Suddenly that broad back swayed hither and thither. It was swaying on one leg; Basil, somehow, had hold of the other. Burrows' huge fists and those of the footman were battering Basil's sunken head like an anvil, but nothing could get the giant's ankle out of his sudden and savage grip. While his own head was forced slowly down in darkness and great pain, the right leg of his captor was being forced in the air. Burrows swung to and fro with a purple face. Then suddenly the floor and the walls and the ceiling shook together, as the colossus fell, all his length seeming to fill the floor. Basil sprang up with dancing eyes, and with three blows like battering-rams knocked the footman into a cocked hat. Then he sprang on top of Burrows, with one antimacassar in his hand and another in his teeth, and bound him hand and foot almost before he knew clearly that his head had struck the floor. Then Basil sprang at Greenwood, whom Rupert was struggling to hold down, and between them they secured him easily. The man who had hold of me let go and turned to his rescue, but I leaped up like a spring released, and, to my infinite satisfaction, knocked the fellow down. The other footman, bleeding at the mouth and quite demoralized, was stumbling out of the room. My late captor, without a word, slunk after him, seeing that the battle was won.

Rupert was sitting astride the pinioned Mr Greenwood, Basil astride the pinioned Mr Burrows.

To my surprise the latter gentleman, lying bound on his back, spoke in a perfectly calm voice to the man who sat on top of him.

“And now, gentlemen,” he said, “since you have got your own way, perhaps you wouldn’t mind telling us what the deuce all this is?”

“This,” said Basil, with a radiant face, looking down at his captive, “this is what we call the survival of the fittest.”

Rupert, who had been steadily collecting himself throughout the latter phases of the fight, was intellectually altogether himself again at the end of it. Springing up from the prostrate Greenwood, and knotting a handkerchief round his left hand, which was bleeding from a blow, he sang out quite coolly:

“Basil, will you mount guard over the captive of your bow and spear and antimacassar? Swinburne and I will clear out the prison downstairs.”

“All right,” said Basil, rising also and seating himself in a leisured way in an armchair. “Don’t hurry for us,” he said, glancing round at the litter of the room, “we have all the illustrated papers.”

Rupert lurched thoughtfully out of the room, and I followed him even more slowly; in fact, I lingered long enough to hear, as I passed through the room, the passages and the kitchen stairs, Basil’s voice continuing conversationally:

“And now, Mr Burrows,” he said, settling himself sociably in the chair, “there’s no reason why we shouldn’t go on with that amusing argument. I’m sorry that you have to express yourself lying on your back on the floor, and, as I told you before, I’ve no more notion why you are there than the man in the moon. A conversationalist like yourself, however, can scarcely be seriously handicapped by any bodily posture. You were saying, if I remember right, when this incidental fracas occurred, that the rudiments of science might with advantage be made public.”

“Precisely,” said the large man on the floor in an easy tone. “I hold that nothing more than a rough sketch of the universe as seen by science can be...”

And here the voices died away as we descended into the basement. I noticed that Mr Greenwood did not join in the amicable controversy. Strange as it may appear, I think he looked back upon our proceedings with a slight degree of resentment. Mr Burrows, however, was all philosophy and chattiness. We left them, as I say, together, and sank deeper and deeper into the under-world of that mysterious house, which, perhaps, appeared to us somewhat more Tartarean than it really was, owing to our knowledge of its semi-criminal mystery and of the human secret locked below.

The basement floor had several doors, as is usual in such a house; doors that would naturally lead to the kitchen, the scullery, the pantry, the servants' hall, and so on. Rupert flung open all the doors with indescribable rapidity. Four out of the five opened on entirely empty apartments. The fifth was locked. Rupert broke the door in like a bandbox, and we fell into the sudden blackness of the sealed, unlighted room.

Rupert stood on the threshold, and called out like a man calling into an abyss:

"Whoever you are, come out. You are free. The people who held you captive are captives themselves. We heard you crying and we came to deliver you. We have bound your enemies upstairs hand and foot. You are free."

For some seconds after he had spoken into the darkness there was a dead silence in it. Then there came a kind of muttering and moaning. We might easily have taken it for the wind or rats if we had not happened to have heard it before. It was unmistakably the voice of the imprisoned woman, drearily demanding liberty, just as we had heard her demand it.

"Has anybody got a match?" said Rupert grimly. "I fancy we have come pretty near the end of this business."

I struck a match and held it up. It revealed a large, bare, yellow-papered apartment with a dark-clad figure at the other end of it near the window. An instant after it burned my fingers and dropped, leaving darkness. It had, however, revealed something more practical — an iron gas bracket just above my head. I struck another match and lit the gas. And we found ourselves suddenly and seriously in the presence of the captive.

At a sort of workbox in the window of this subterranean breakfast-room sat an elderly lady with a singularly high colour and almost startling silver hair. She had, as if designedly to relieve these effects, a pair of Mephistophelian black eyebrows and a very neat black dress. The glare of the gas lit up her piquant hair and face perfectly against the brown background of the shutters. The background was blue and not brown in one place; at the place where Rupert's knife had torn a great opening in the wood about an hour before.

“Madam,” said he, advancing with a gesture of the hat, “permit me to have the pleasure of announcing to you that you are free. Your complaints happened to strike our ears as we passed down the street, and we have therefore ventured to come to your rescue.”

The old lady with the red face and the black eyebrows looked at us for a moment with something of the apoplectic stare of a parrot. Then she said, with a sudden gust or breathing of relief:

“Rescue? Where is Mr Greenwood? Where is Mr Burrows? Did you say you had rescued me?”

“Yes, madam,” said Rupert, with a beaming condescension. “We have very satisfactorily dealt with Mr Greenwood and Mr Burrows. We have settled affairs with them very satisfactorily.”

The old lady rose from her chair and came very quickly towards us.

“What did you say to them? How did you persuade them?” she cried.

“We persuaded them, my dear madam,” said Rupert, laughing, “by knocking them down and tying them up. But what is the matter?”

To the surprise of every one the old lady walked slowly back to her seat by the window.

“Do I understand,” she said, with the air of a person about to begin knitting, “that you have knocked down Mr Burrows and tied him up?”

“We have,” said Rupert proudly; “we have resisted their oppression and conquered it.”

“Oh, thanks,” answered the old lady, and sat down by the window.

A considerable pause followed.

“The road is quite clear for you, madam,” said Rupert pleasantly.

The old lady rose, cocking her black eyebrows and her silver crest at us for an instant.

“But what about Greenwood and Burrows?” she said. “What did I understand you to say had become of them?”

“They are lying on the floor upstairs,” said Rupert, chuckling. “Tied hand and foot.”

“Well, that settles it,” said the old lady, coming with a kind of bang into her seat again, “I must stop where I am.”

Rupert looked bewildered.

“Stop where you are?” he said. “Why should you stop any longer where you are? What power can force you now to stop in this miserable cell?”

"The question rather is," said the old lady, with composure, "what power can force me to go anywhere else?"

We both stared wildly at her and she stared tranquilly at us both.

At last I said, "Do you really mean to say that we are to leave you here?"

"I suppose you don't intend to tie me up," she said, "and carry me off? I certainly shall not go otherwise."

"But, my dear madam," cried out Rupert, in a radiant exasperation, "we heard you with our own ears crying because you could not get out."

"Eavesdroppers often hear rather misleading things," replied the captive grimly. "I suppose I did break down a bit and lose my temper and talk to myself. But I have some sense of honour for all that."

"Some sense of honour?" repeated Rupert, and the last light of intelligence died out of his face, leaving it the face of an idiot with rolling eyes.

He moved vaguely towards the door and I followed. But I turned yet once more in the toils of my conscience and curiosity. "Can we do nothing for you, madam?" I said forlornly.

"Why," said the lady, "if you are particularly anxious to do me a little favour you might untie the gentlemen upstairs."

Rupert plunged heavily up the kitchen staircase, shaking it with his vague violence. With mouth open to speak he stumbled to the door of the sitting-room and scene of battle.

"Theoretically speaking, that is no doubt true," Mr Burrows was saying, lying on his back and arguing easily with Basil; "but we must consider the matter as it appears to our sense. The origin of morality..."

"Basil," cried Rupert, gasping, "she won't come out."

"Who won't come out?" asked Basil, a little cross at being interrupted in an argument.

"The lady downstairs," replied Rupert. "The lady who was locked up. She won't come out. And she says that all she wants is for us to let these fellows loose."

"And a jolly sensible suggestion," cried Basil, and with a bound he was on top of the prostrate Burrows once more and was unknotting his bonds with hands and teeth.

"A brilliant idea. Swinburne, just undo Mr Greenwood."

In a dazed and automatic way I released the little gentleman in the purple jacket, who did not seem to regard any of the proceedings as particularly sensible or brilliant. The gigantic Burrows, on the other hand, was heaving with herculean laughter.

"Well," said Basil, in his cheeriest way, "I think we must be getting away. We've so much enjoyed our evening. Far too much regard for you to stand on ceremony. If I may so express myself, we've made ourselves at home. Good night. Thanks so much. Come along, Rupert."

"Basil," said Rupert desperately, "for God's sake come and see what you can make of the woman downstairs. I can't get the discomfort out of my mind. I admit that things look as if we had made a mistake. But these gentlemen won't mind perhaps..."

"No, no," cried Burrows, with a sort of Rabelaisian uproariousness. "No, no, look in the pantry, gentlemen. Examine the coal-hole. Make a tour of the chimneys. There are corpses all over the house, I assure you."

This adventure of ours was destined to differ in one respect from others which I have narrated. I had been through many wild days with Basil Grant, days for the first half of which the sun and the moon seemed to have gone mad. But it had almost invariably happened that towards the end of the day and its adventure things had cleared themselves like the sky after rain, and a luminous and quiet meaning had gradually dawned upon me. But this day's work was destined to end in confusion worse confounded. Before we left that house, ten minutes afterwards, one half-witted touch was added which rolled all our minds in cloud. If Rupert's head had suddenly fallen off on the floor, if wings had begun to sprout out of Greenwood's shoulders, we could scarcely have been more suddenly stricken. And yet of this we had no explanation. We had to go to bed that night with the prodigy and get up next morning with it and let it stand in our memories for weeks and months. As will be seen, it was not until months afterwards that by another accident and in another way it was explained. For the present I only state what happened.

When all five of us went down the kitchen stairs again, Rupert leading, the two hosts bringing up the rear, we found the door of the prison again closed. Throwing it open we found the place again as black as pitch. The old lady, if she was still there, had turned out the gas: she seemed to have a weird preference for sitting in the dark.

Without another word Rupert lit the gas again. The little old lady turned her bird-like head as we all stumbled forward in the strong gaslight. Then, with a quickness that almost made me jump, she sprang up and swept a sort of old-fashioned curtsey or reverence. I looked quickly at Greenwood and

Burrows, to whom it was natural to suppose this subservience had been offered. I felt irritated at what was implied in this subservience, and desired to see the faces of the tyrants as they received it. To my surprise they did not seem to have seen it at all: Burrows was paring his nails with a small penknife. Greenwood was at the back of the group and had hardly entered the room. And then an amazing fact became apparent. It was Basil Grant who stood foremost of the group, the golden gaslight lighting up his strong face and figure. His face wore an expression indescribably conscious, with the suspicion of a very grave smile. His head was slightly bent with a restrained bow. It was he who had acknowledged the lady's obeisance. And it was he, beyond any shadow of reasonable doubt, to whom it had really been directed.

"So I hear," he said, in a kindly yet somehow formal voice, "I hear, madam, that my friends have been trying to rescue you. But without success."

"No one, naturally, knows my faults better than you," answered the lady with a high colour. "But you have not found me guilty of treachery."

"I willingly attest it, madam," replied Basil, in the same level tones, "and the fact is that I am so much gratified with your exhibition of loyalty that I permit myself the pleasure of exercising some very large discretionary powers. You would not leave this room at the request of these gentlemen. But you know that you can safely leave it at mine."

The captive made another reverence. "I have never complained of your injustice," she said. "I need scarcely say what I think of your generosity."

And before our staring eyes could blink she had passed out of the room, Basil holding the door open for her.

He turned to Greenwood with a relapse into joviality. "This will be a relief to you," he said.

"Yes, it will," replied that immovable young gentleman with a face like a sphinx.

We found ourselves outside in the dark blue night, shaken and dazed as if we had fallen into it from some high tower.

"Basil," said Rupert at last, in a weak voice, "I always thought you were my brother. But are you a man? I mean — are you only a man?"

"At present," replied Basil, "my mere humanity is proved by one of the most unmistakable symbols — hunger. We are too late for the theatre in Sloane Square. But we are not too late for the restaurant. Here comes the green omnibus!” and he had leaped on it before we could speak. —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— ——

As I said, it was months after that Rupert Grant suddenly entered my room, swinging a satchel in his hand and with a general air of having jumped over the garden wall, and implored me to go with him upon the latest and wildest of his expeditions. He proposed to himself no less a thing than the discovery of the actual origin, whereabouts, and headquarters of the source of all our joys and sorrows — the Club of Queer Trades. I should expand this story for ever if I explained how ultimately we ran this strange entity to its lair. The process meant a hundred interesting things. The tracking of a member, the bribing of a cabman, the fighting of roughs, the lifting of a paving stone, the finding of a cellar, the finding of a cellar below the cellar, the finding of the subterranean passage, the finding of the Club of Queer Trades.

I have had many strange experiences in my life, but never a stranger one than that I felt when I came out of those rambling, sightless, and seemingly hopeless passages into the sudden splendour of a sumptuous and hospitable dining-room, surrounded upon almost every side by faces that I knew. There was Mr Montmorency, the Arboreal House-Agent, seated between the two brisk young men who were occasionally vicars, and always Professional Detainers. There was Mr P. G. Northover, founder of the Adventure and Romance Agency. There was Professor Chadd, who invented the dancing Language.

As we entered, all the members seemed to sink suddenly into their chairs, and with the very action the vacancy of the presidential seat gaped at us like a missing tooth.

“The president’s not here,” said Mr P. G. Northover, turning suddenly to Professor Chadd.

“N — no,” said the philosopher, with more than his ordinary vagueness. “I can’t imagine where he is.”

“Good heavens,” said Mr Montmorency, jumping up, “I really feel a little nervous. I’ll go and see.” And he ran out of the room.

An instant after he ran back again, twittering with a timid ecstasy.

“He’s there, gentlemen — he’s there all right — he’s coming in now,” he cried, and sat down. Rupert and I could hardly help feeling the beginnings of a sort of wonder as to who this person might be who was the first member of this insane brotherhood. Who, we thought indistinctly, could be maddest in this world of madmen: what fantastic was it whose shadow filled all these fantastics with so loyal an expectation?

Suddenly we were answered. The door flew open and the room was filled and shaken with a shout, in the midst of which Basil Grant, smiling and in evening dress, took his seat at the head of the table.

How we ate that dinner I have no idea. In the common way I am a person particularly prone to enjoy the long luxuriance of the club dinner. But on this occasion it seemed a hopeless and endless string of courses. Hors-d'oeuvre sardines seemed as big as herrings, soup seemed a sort of ocean, larks were ducks, ducks were ostriches until that dinner was over. The cheese course was maddening. I had often heard of the moon being made of green cheese. That night I thought the green cheese was made of the moon. And all the time Basil Grant went on laughing and eating and drinking, and never threw one glance at us to tell us why he was there, the king of these capering idiots.

At last came the moment which I knew must in some way enlighten us, the time of the club speeches and the club toasts. Basil Grant rose to his feet amid a surge of songs and cheers.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it is a custom in this society that the president for the year opens the proceedings not by any general toast of sentiment, but by calling upon each member to give a brief account of his trade. We then drink to that calling and to all who follow it. It is my business, as the senior member, to open by stating my claim to membership of this club. Years ago, gentlemen, I was a judge; I did my best in that capacity to do justice and to administer the law. But it gradually dawned on me that in my work, as it was, I was not touching even the fringe of justice. I was seated in the seat of the mighty, I was robed in scarlet and ermine; nevertheless, I held a small and lowly and futile post. I had to go by a mean rule as much as a postman, and my red and gold was worth no more than his. Daily there passed before me taut and passionate problems, the stringency of which I had to pretend to relieve by silly imprisonments or silly damages, while I knew all the time, by the light of my living common sense, that they would have been far better relieved by a kiss or a thrashing, or a few words of explanation, or a duel, or a tour in the West Highlands. Then, as this grew on me, there grew on me continuously the sense of a mountainous frivolity. Every word said in the court, a whisper or an oath, seemed more connected with life than the words I had to say. Then came the time when I publicly blasphemed the whole bosh, was classed as a madman and melted from public life."

Something in the atmosphere told me that it was not only Rupert and I who were listening with intensity to this statement.

"Well, I discovered that I could be of no real use. I offered myself privately as a purely moral judge to settle purely moral differences. Before very long these unofficial courts of honour (kept strictly secret) had spread over the whole of society. People were tried before me not for the practical trifles for which nobody cares, such as committing a murder, or keeping a dog without a licence. My criminals were tried for the faults which really make social life impossible. They were tried before me for selfishness, or for an impossible vanity, or for scandalmongering, or for stinginess to guests or dependents. Of course these courts had no sort of real coercive powers. The fulfilment of their punishments rested entirely on the honour of the ladies and gentlemen involved, including the honour of the culprits. But you would be amazed to know how completely our orders were always obeyed. Only lately I had a most pleasing example. A maiden lady in South Kensington whom I had condemned to solitary confinement for being the means of breaking off an engagement through backbiting, absolutely refused to leave her prison, although some well-meaning persons had been inopportune enough to rescue her."

Rupert Grant was staring at his brother, his mouth fallen agape. So, for the matter of that, I expect, was I. This, then, was the explanation of the old lady's strange discontent and her still stranger content with her lot. She was one of the culprits of his Voluntary Criminal Court. She was one of the clients of his Queer Trade.

We were still dazed when we drank, amid a crash of glasses, the health of Basil's new judiciary. We had only a confused sense of everything having been put right, the sense men will have when they come into the presence of God. We dimly heard Basil say:

"Mr P. G. Northover will now explain the Adventure and Romance Agency."

And we heard equally dimly Northover beginning the statement he had made long ago to Major Brown. Thus our epic ended where it had begun, like a true cycle.

THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH AND OTHER STORIES

This collection of detective short stories was first published in 1922. It contains twelve tales, the first eight of which are about ‘The Man Who Knew Too Much’, while the rest are individual stories with separate protagonists.

‘The Man Who Knew Too Much’ refers to Horne Fisher, whose intimate relationship with the leading political figures of his country, allows him to uncover injustices and solve gruesome murders in each of the stories.

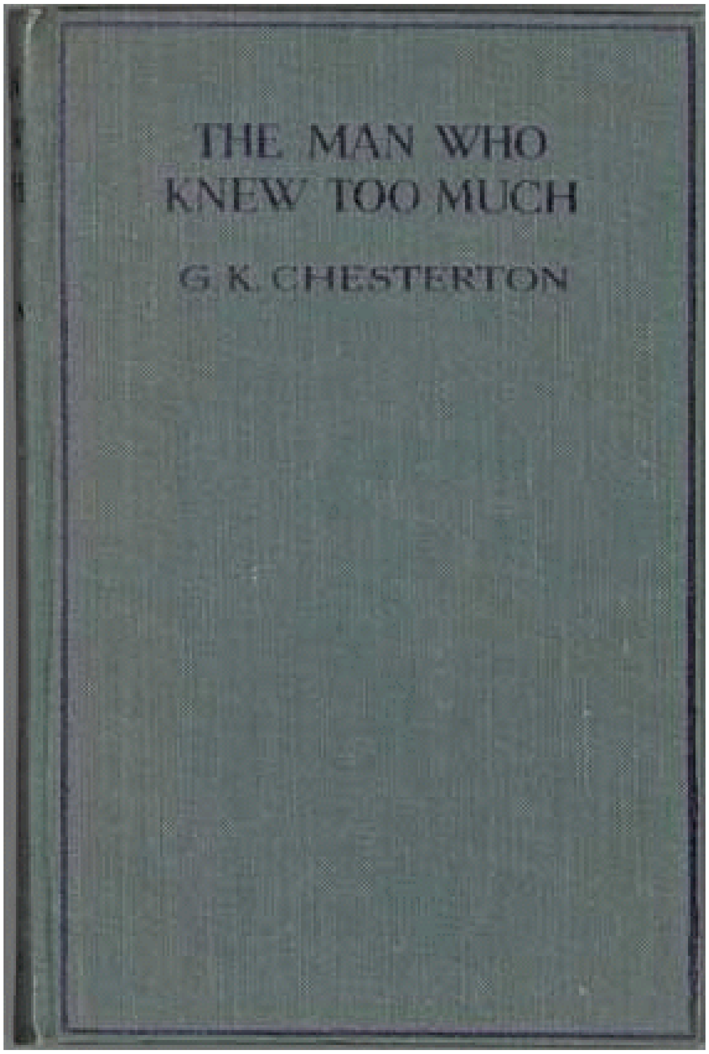
THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH
G. K. CHESTERTON

The first edition

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THE FACE IN THE TARGET

Harold March, the rising reviewer and social critic, was walking vigorously across a great tableland of moors and commons, the horizon of which was fringed with the far-off woods of the famous estate of Torwood Park. He was a good-looking young man in tweeds, with very pale curly hair and pale clear eyes. Walking in wind and sun in the very landscape of liberty, he was still young enough to remember his politics and not merely try to forget them. For his errand at Torwood Park was a political one; it was the place of appointment named by no less a person than the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Howard Horne, then introducing his so-called Socialist budget, and prepared to expound it in an interview with so promising a penman. Harold March was the sort of man who knows everything about politics, and nothing about politicians. He also knew a great deal about art, letters, philosophy, and general culture; about almost everything, indeed, except the world he was living in.

Abruptly, in the middle of those sunny and windy flats, he came upon a sort of cleft almost narrow enough to be called a crack in the land. It was just large enough to be the water-course for a small stream which vanished at intervals under green tunnels of undergrowth, as if in a dwarfish forest. Indeed, he had an odd feeling as if he were a giant looking over the valley of the pygmies. When he dropped into the hollow, however, the impression was lost; the rocky banks, though hardly above the height of a cottage, hung over and had the profile of a precipice. As he began to wander down the course of the stream, in idle but romantic curiosity, and saw the water shining in short strips between the great gray boulders and bushes as soft as great green mosses, he fell into quite an opposite vein of fantasy. It was rather as if the earth had opened and swallowed him into a sort of underworld of dreams. And when he became conscious of a human figure dark against the silver stream, sitting on a large boulder and looking rather like a large bird, it was perhaps with some of the premonition’s proper to a man who meets the strangest friendship of his life.

The man was apparently fishing; or at least was fixed in a fisherman’s attitude with more than a fisherman’s immobility. March was able to examine the man almost as if he had been a statue for some minutes before the statue spoke. He was a tall, fair man, cadaverous, and a little lackadaisical, with heavy eyelids and a highbridged nose. When his face was shaded with his wide white hat, his light mustache and lithe figure gave him a look of youth. But the Panama lay on the moss beside him; and the spectator could see that his brow was prematurely bald; and this, combined with a certain hollowness about the eyes, had an air of headwork and even headache. But the most curious thing about him, realized after a short scrutiny, was that, though he looked like a fisherman, he was not fishing.

He was holding, instead of a rod, something that might have been a landing-net which some fishermen use, but which was much more like the ordinary toy net which children carry, and which they generally use indifferently for shrimps or butterflies. He was dipping this into the water at intervals, gravely regarding its harvest of weed or mud, and emptying it out again.

“No, I haven’t caught anything,” he remarked, calmly, as if answering an unspoken query. “When I do I have to throw it back again; especially the big fish. But some of the little beasts interest me when I get ‘em.”

“A scientific interest, I suppose?” observed March.

“Of a rather amateurish sort, I fear,” answered the strange fisherman. “I have a sort of hobby about what they call ‘phenomena of phosphorescence.’ But it would be rather awkward to go about in society carrying stinking fish.”

“I suppose it would,” said March, with a smile.

“Rather odd to enter a drawing-room carrying a large luminous cod,” continued the stranger, in his listless way. “How quaint it would be if one could carry it about like a lantern, or have little sprats for candles. Some of the seabeasts would really be very pretty like lampshades; the blue sea-snail that glitters all over like starlight; and some of the red starfish really shine like red stars. But, naturally, I’m not looking for them here.”

March thought of asking him what he was looking for; but, feeling unequal to a technical discussion at least as deep as the deep-sea fishes, he returned to more ordinary topics.

“Delightful sort of hole this is,” he said. “This little dell and river here. It’s like those places Stevenson talks about, where something ought to happen.”

“I know,” answered the other. “I think it’s because the place itself, so to speak, seems to happen and not merely to exist. Perhaps that’s what old Picasso and some of the Cubists are trying to express by angles and jagged lines. Look at that wall like low cliffs that juts forward just at right angles to the slope of turf sweeping up to it. That’s like a silent collision. It’s like a breaker and the back-wash of a wave.”

March looked at the low-browed crag overhanging the green slope and nodded. He was interested in a man who turned so easily from the technicalities of science to those of art; and asked him if he admired the new angular artists.

“As I feel it, the Cubists are not Cubist enough,” replied the stranger. “I mean they’re not thick enough. By making things mathematical they make them thin. Take the living lines out of that landscape, simplify it to a right angle, and you flatten it out to a mere diagram on paper. Diagrams have their own beauty; but it is of just the other sort. They stand for the unalterable things; the calm, eternal, mathematical sort of truths; what somebody calls the ‘white radiance of’—”

He stopped, and before the next word came something had happened almost too quickly and completely to be realized. From behind the overhanging rock came a noise and rush like that of a railway train; and a great motor car appeared. It topped the crest of cliff, black against the sun, like a battle-chariot rushing to destruction in some wild epic. March automatically put out his hand in one futile gesture, as if to catch a falling tea-cup in a drawing-room.

For the fraction of a flash it seemed to leave the ledge of rock like a flying ship; then the very sky seemed to turn over like a wheel, and it lay a ruin amid the tall grasses below, a line of gray smoke going up slowly from it into the silent air. A little lower the figure of a man with gray hair lay tumbled down the steep green slope, his limbs lying all at random, and his face turned away.

The eccentric fisherman dropped his net and walked swiftly toward the spot, his new acquaintance following him. As they drew near there seemed a sort of monstrous irony in the fact that the dead machine was still throbbing and thundering as busily as a factory, while the man lay so still.

He was unquestionably dead. The blood flowed in the grass from a hopelessly fatal fracture at the back of the skull; but the face, which was turned to the sun, was uninjured and strangely arresting in itself. It was one of those cases of a strange face so unmistakable as to feel familiar. We feel, somehow, that we ought to recognize it, even though we do not. It was of the broad, square sort with great jaws, almost like that of a highly intellectual ape; the wide mouth shut so tight as to be traced by a mere line; the nose short with the sort of nostrils that seem to gape with an appetite for the air. The oddest thing about the face was that one of the eyebrows was cocked up at a much sharper angle than the other. March thought he had never seen a face so naturally alive as that dead one. And its ugly energy seemed all the stranger for its halo of hoary hair. Some papers lay half fallen out of the pocket, and from among them March extracted a card-case. He read the name on the card aloud.

"Sir Humphrey Turnbull. I'm sure I've heard that name somewhere."

His companion only gave a sort of a little sigh and was silent for a moment, as if ruminating, then he merely said, "The poor fellow is quite gone," and added some scientific terms in which his auditor once more found himself out of his depth.

"As things are," continued the same curiously well-informed person, "it will be more legal for us to leave the body as it is until the police are informed. In fact, I think it will be well if nobody except the police is informed. Don't be surprised if I seem to be keeping it dark from some of our neighbors round here." Then, as if prompted to regularize his rather abrupt confidence, he said: "I've come down to see my cousin at Torwood; my name is Horne Fisher. Might be a pun on my pottering about here, mightn't it?"

"Is Sir Howard Horne your cousin?" asked March. "I'm going to Torwood Park to see him myself; only about his public work, of course, and the wonderful stand he is making for his principles. I think this Budget is the greatest thing in English history. If it fails, it will be the most heroic failure in English history. Are you an admirer of your great kinsman, Mr. Fisher?"

"Rather," said Mr. Fisher. "He's the best shot I know."

Then, as if sincerely repentant of his nonchalance, he added, with a sort of enthusiasm:

"No, but really, he's a *beautiful* shot."

As if fired by his own words, he took a sort of leap at the ledges of the rock above him, and scaled them with a sudden agility in startling contrast to his general lassitude. He had stood for some seconds on the headland above, with his aquiline profile under the Panama hat relieved against the sky and peering over the countryside before his companion had collected himself sufficiently to scramble up after him.

The level above was a stretch of common turf on which the tracks of the fated car were plowed plainly enough; but the brink of it was broken as with rocky teeth; broken boulders of all shapes and sizes lay near the edge; it was almost incredible that any one could have deliberately driven into such a death trap, especially in broad daylight.

“I can’t make head or tail of it,” said March. “Was he blind? Or blind drunk?”

“Neither, by the look of him,” replied the other.

“Then it was suicide.”

“It doesn’t seem a cozy way of doing it,” remarked the man called Fisher. “Besides, I don’t fancy poor old Puggy would commit suicide, somehow.”

“Poor old who?” inquired the wondering journalist. “Did you know this unfortunate man?”

“Nobody knew him exactly,” replied Fisher, with some vagueness. “But one *knew* him, of course. He’d been a terror in his time, in Parliament and the courts, and so on; especially in that row about the aliens who were deported as undesirables, when he wanted one of ’em hanged for murder. He was so sick about it that he retired from the bench. Since then he mostly motored about by himself; but he was coming to Torwood, too, for the week-end; and I don’t see why he should deliberately break his neck almost at the very door. I believe Hoggs — I mean my cousin Howard — was coming down specially to meet him.”

“Torwood Park doesn’t belong to your cousin?” inquired March.

“No; it used to belong to the Winthrops, you know,” replied the other. “Now a new man’s got it; a man from Montreal named Jenkins. Hoggs comes for the shooting; I told you he was a lovely shot.”

This repeated eulogy on the great social statesman affected Harold March as if somebody had defined Napoleon as a distinguished player of nap. But he had another half-formed impression struggling in this flood of unfamiliar things, and he brought it to the surface before it could vanish.

“Jenkins,” he repeated. “Surely you don’t mean Jefferson Jenkins, the social reformer? I mean the man who’s fighting for the new cottage-estate scheme. It would be as interesting to meet him as any Cabinet Minister in the world, if you’ll excuse my saying so.”

“Yes; Hoggs told him it would have to be cottages,” said Fisher. “He said the breed of cattle had improved too often, and people were beginning to laugh. And, of course, you must hang a peerage on to something; though the poor chap hasn't got it yet. Hullo, here's somebody else."

They had started walking in the tracks of the car, leaving it behind them in the hollow, still humming horribly like a huge insect that had killed a man. The tracks took them to the corner of the road, one arm of which went on in the same line toward the distant gates of the park. It was clear that the car had been driven down the long straight road, and then, instead of turning with the road to the left, had gone straight on over the turf to its doom. But it was not this discovery that had riveted Fisher's eye, but something even more solid. At the angle of the white road a dark and solitary figure was standing almost as still as a finger post. It was that of a big man in rough shooting-clothes, bareheaded, and with tousled curly hair that gave him a rather wild look. On a nearer approach this first more fantastic impression faded; in a full light the figure took on more conventional colors, as of an ordinary gentleman who happened to have come out without a hat and without very studiously brushing his hair. But the massive stature remained, and something deep and even cavernous about the setting of the eyes redeemed his animal good looks from the commonplace. But March had no time to study the man more closely, for, much to his astonishment, his guide merely observed, "Hullo, Jack!" and walked past him as if he had indeed been a signpost, and without attempting to inform him of the catastrophe beyond the rocks. It was relatively a small thing, but it was only the first in a string of singular antics on which his new and eccentric friend was leading him.

The man they had passed looked after them in rather a suspicious fashion, but Fisher continued serenely on his way along the straight road that ran past the gates of the great estate.

"That's John Burke, the traveler," he condescended to explain. "I expect you've heard of him; shoots big game and all that. Sorry I couldn't stop to introduce you, but I dare say you'll meet him later on."

"I know his book, of course," said March, with renewed interest. "That is certainly a fine piece of description, about their being only conscious of the closeness of the elephant when the colossal head blocked out the moon."

"Yes, young Halkett writes jolly well, I think. What? Didn't you know Halkett wrote Burke's book for him? Burke can't use anything except a gun; and you can't write with that. Oh, he's genuine enough in his way, you know, as brave as a lion, or a good deal braver by all accounts."

"You seem to know all about him," observed March, with a rather bewildered laugh, "and about a good many other people."

Fisher's bald brow became abruptly corrugated, and a curious expression came into his eyes.

"I know too much," he said. "That's what's the matter with me. That's what's the matter with all of us, and the whole show; we know too much. Too much about one another; too much about ourselves. That's why I'm really interested, just now, about one thing that I don't know."

"And that is?" inquired the other.

"Why that poor fellow is dead."

They had walked along the straight road for nearly a mile, conversing at intervals in this fashion; and March had a singular sense of the whole world being turned inside out. Mr. Horne Fisher did not especially abuse his friends and relatives in fashionable society; of some of them he spoke with affection. But they seemed to be an entirely new set of men and women, who happened to have the same nerves as the men and women mentioned most often in the newspapers. Yet no fury of revolt could have seemed to him more utterly revolutionary than this cold familiarity. It was like daylight on the other side of stage scenery.

They reached the great lodge gates of the park, and, to March's surprise, passed them and continued along the interminable white, straight road. But he was himself too early for his appointment with Sir Howard, and was not disinclined to see the end of his new friend's experiment, whatever it might be. They had long left the moorland behind them, and half the white road was gray in the great shadow of the Torwood pine forests, themselves like gray bars shuttered against the sunshine and within, amid that clear noon, manufacturing their own midnight. Soon, however, rifts began to appear in them like gleams of colored windows; the trees thinned and fell away as the road went forward, showing the wild, irregular copses in which, as Fisher said, the house-party had been blazing away all day. And about two hundred yards farther on they came to the first turn of the road.

At the corner stood a sort of decayed inn with the dingy sign of The Grapes. The signboard was dark and indecipherable by now, and hung black against the sky and the gray moorland beyond, about as inviting as a gallows. March remarked that it looked like a tavern for vinegar instead of wine.

“A good phrase,” said Fisher, “and so it would be if you were silly enough to drink wine in it. But the beer is very good, and so is the brandy.”

March followed him to the bar parlor with some wonder, and his dim sense of repugnance was not dismissed by the first sight of the innkeeper, who was widely different from the genial innkeepers of romance, a bony man, very silent behind a black mustache, but with black, restless eyes. Taciturn as he was, the investigator succeeded at last in extracting a scrap of information from him, by dint of ordering beer and talking to him persistently and minutely on the subject of motor cars. He evidently regarded the innkeeper as in some singular way an authority on motor cars; as being deep in the secrets of the mechanism, management, and mismanagement of motor cars; holding the man all the time with a glittering eye like the Ancient Mariner. Out of all this rather mysterious conversation there did emerge at last a sort of admission that one particular motor car, of a given description, had stopped before the inn about an hour before, and that an elderly man had alighted, requiring some mechanical assistance. Asked if the visitor required any other assistance, the innkeeper said shortly that the old gentleman had filled his flask and taken a packet of sandwiches. And with these words the somewhat inhospitable host had walked hastily out of the bar, and they heard him banging doors in the dark interior.

Fisher’s weary eye wandered round the dusty and dreary inn parlor and rested dreamily on a glass case containing a stuffed bird, with a gun hung on hooks above it, which seemed to be its only ornament.

“Puggy was a humorist,” he observed, “at least in his own rather grim style. But it seems rather too grim a joke for a man to buy a packet of sandwiches when he is just going to commit suicide.”

“If you come to that,” answered March, “it isn’t very usual for a man to buy a packet of sandwiches when he’s just outside the door of a grand house he’s going to stop at.”

“No … no,” repeated Fisher, almost mechanically; and then suddenly cocked his eye at his interlocutor with a much livelier expression.

“By Jove! that’s an idea. You’re perfectly right. And that suggests a very queer idea, doesn’t it?”

There was a silence, and then March started with irrational nervousness as the door of the inn was flung open and another man walked rapidly to the counter. He had struck it with a coin and called out for brandy before he saw the other two guests, who were sitting at a bare wooden table under the window. When he turned about with a rather wild stare, March had yet another unexpected emotion, for his guide hailed the man as Hoggs and introduced him as Sir Howard Horne.

He looked rather older than his boyish portraits in the illustrated papers, as is the way of politicians; his flat, fair hair was touched with gray, but his face was almost comically round, with a Roman nose which, when combined with his quick, bright eyes, raised a vague reminiscence of a parrot. He had a cap rather at the back of his head and a gun under his arm. Harold March had imagined many things about his meeting with the great political reformer, but he had never pictured him with a gun under his arm, drinking brandy in a public house.

“So you’re stopping at Jink’s, too,” said Fisher. “Everybody seems to be at Jink’s.”

“Yes,” replied the Chancellor of the Exchequer. “Jolly good shooting. At least all of it that isn’t Jink’s shooting. I never knew a chap with such good shooting that was such a bad shot. Mind you, he’s a jolly good fellow and all that; I don’t say a word against him. But he never learned to hold a gun when he was packing pork or whatever he did. They say he shot the cockade off his own servant’s hat; just like him to have cockades, of course. He shot the weathercock off his own ridiculous gilded summerhouse. It’s the only cock he’ll ever kill, I should think. Are you coming up there now?”

Fisher said, rather vaguely, that he was following soon, when he had fixed something up; and the Chancellor of the Exchequer left the inn. March fancied he had been a little upset or impatient when he called for the brandy; but he had talked himself back into a satisfactory state, if the talk had not been quite what his literary visitor had expected. Fisher, a few minutes afterward, slowly led the way out of the tavern and stood in the middle of the road, looking down in the direction from which they had traveled. Then he walked back about two hundred yards in that direction and stood still again.

“I should think this is about the place,” he said.

“What place?” asked his companion.

“The place where the poor fellow was killed,” said Fisher, sadly.

“What do you mean?” demanded March.

“He was smashed up on the rocks a mile and a half from here.”

“No, he wasn’t,” replied Fisher. “He didn’t fall on the rocks at all. Didn’t you notice that he only fell on the slope of soft grass underneath? But I saw that he had a bullet in him already."

Then after a pause he added:

"He was alive at the inn, but he was dead long before he came to the rocks. So he was shot as he drove his car down this strip of straight road, and I should think somewhere about here. After that, of course, the car went straight on with nobody to stop or turn it. It's really a very cunning dodge in its way; for the body would be found far away, and most people would say, as you do, that it was an accident to a motorist. The murderer must have been a clever brute."

"But wouldn't the shot be heard at the inn or somewhere?" asked March.

"It would be heard. But it would not be noticed. That," continued the investigator, "is where he was clever again. Shooting was going on all over the place all day; very likely he timed his shot so as to drown it in a number of others. Certainly he was a first-class criminal. And he was something else as well."

"What do you mean?" asked his companion, with a creepy premonition of something coming, he knew not why.

"He was a first-class shot," said Fisher. He had turned his back abruptly and was walking down a narrow, grassy lane, little more than a cart track, which lay opposite the inn and marked the end of the great estate and the beginning of the open moors. March plodded after him with the same idle perseverance, and found him staring through a gap in giant weeds and thorns at the flat face of a painted paling. From behind the paling rose the great gray columns of a row of poplars, which filled the heavens above them with dark-green shadow and shook faintly in a wind which had sunk slowly into a breeze. The afternoon was already deepening into evening, and the titanic shadows of the poplars lengthened over a third of the landscape.

"Are you a first-class criminal?" asked Fisher, in a friendly tone. "I'm afraid I'm not. But I think I can manage to be a sort of fourth-rate burglar."

And before his companion could reply he had managed to swing himself up and over the fence; March followed without much bodily effort, but with considerable mental disturbance. The poplars grew so close against the fence that they had some difficulty in slipping past them, and beyond the poplars they could see only a high hedge of laurel, green and lustrous in the level sun. Something in this limitation by a series of living walls made him feel as if he were really entering a shattered house instead of an open field.

It was as if he came in by a disused door or window and found the way blocked by furniture. When they had circumvented the laurel hedge, they came out on a sort of terrace of turf, which fell by one green step to an oblong lawn like a bowling green. Beyond this was the only building in sight, a low conservatory, which seemed far away from anywhere, like a glass cottage standing in its own fields in fairyland. Fisher knew that lonely look of the outlying parts of a great house well enough. He realized that it is more of a satire on aristocracy than if it were choked with weeds and littered with ruins. For it is not neglected and yet it is deserted; at any rate, it is disused. It is regularly swept and garnished for a master who never comes.

Looking over the lawn, however, he saw one object which he had not apparently expected. It was a sort of tripod supporting a large disk like the round top of a table tipped sideways, and it was not until they had dropped on to the lawn and walked across to look at it that March realized that it was a target. It was worn and weatherstained; the gay colors of its concentric rings were faded; possibly it had been set up in those far-off Victorian days when there was a fashion of archery. March had one of his vague visions of ladies in cloudy crinolines and gentlemen in outlandish hats and whiskers revisiting that lost garden like ghosts.

Fisher, who was peering more closely at the target, startled him by an exclamation.

“Hullo!” he said. “Somebody has been peppering this thing with shot, after all, and quite lately, too. Why, I believe old Jink’s been trying to improve his bad shooting here.”

“Yes, and it looks as if it still wanted improving,” answered March, laughing. “Not one of these shots is anywhere near the bull’s-eye; they seem just scattered about in the wildest way.”

“In the wildest way,” repeated Fisher, still peering intently at the target. He seemed merely to assent, but March fancied his eye was shining under its sleepy lid and that he straightened his stooping figure with a strange effort.

“Excuse me a moment,” he said, feeling in his pockets. “I think I’ve got some of my chemicals; and after that we’ll go up to the house.” And he stooped again over the target, putting something with his finger over each of the shot-holes, so far as March could see merely a dull-gray smear. Then they went through the gathering twilight up the long green avenues to the great house.

Here again, however, the eccentric investigator did not enter by the front door. He walked round the house until he found a window open, and, leaping into it, introduced his friend to what appeared to be the gun-room. Rows of the regular instruments for bringing down birds stood against the walls; but across a table in the window lay one or two weapons of a heavier and more formidable pattern.

"Hullo! these are Burke's big-game rifles," said Fisher. "I never knew he kept them here." He lifted one of them, examined it briefly, and put it down again, frowning heavily. Almost as he did so a strange young man came hurriedly into the room. He was dark and sturdy, with a bumpy forehead and a bulldog jaw, and he spoke with a curt apology.

"I left Major Burke's guns here," he said, "and he wants them packed up. He's going away to-night."

And he carried off the two rifles without casting a glance at the stranger; through the open window they could see his short, dark figure walking away across the glimmering garden. Fisher got out of the window again and stood looking after him.

"That's Halkett, whom I told you about," he said. "I knew he was a sort of secretary and had to do with Burke's papers; but I never knew he had anything to do with his guns. But he's just the sort of silent, sensible little devil who might be very good at anything; the sort of man you know for years before you find he's a chess champion."

He had begun to walk in the direction of the disappearing secretary, and they soon came within sight of the rest of the house-party talking and laughing on the lawn. They could see the tall figure and loose mane of the lion-hunter dominating the little group.

"By the way," observed Fisher, "when we were talking about Burke and Halkett, I said that a man couldn't very well write with a gun. Well, I'm not so sure now. Did you ever hear of an artist so clever that he could draw with a gun? There's a wonderful chap loose about here."

Sir Howard hailed Fisher and his friend the journalist with almost boisterous amiability. The latter was presented to Major Burke and Mr. Halkett and also (by way of a parenthesis) to his host, Mr. Jenkins, a commonplace little man in loud tweeds, whom everybody else seemed to treat with a sort of affection, as if he were a baby.

The irrepressible Chancellor of the Exchequer was still talking about the birds he had brought down, the birds that Burke and Halkett had brought down, and the birds that Jenkins, their host, had failed to bring down. It seemed to be a sort of sociable monomania.

"You and your big game," he ejaculated, aggressively, to Burke. "Why, anybody could shoot big game. You want to be a shot to shoot small game."

"Quite so," interposed Horne Fisher. "Now if only a hippopotamus could fly up in the air out of that bush, or you preserved flying elephants on the estate, why, then—"

"Why even Jink might hit that sort of bird," cried Sir Howard, hilariously slapping his host on the back. "Even he might hit a haystack or a hippopotamus."

"Look here, you fellows," said Fisher. "I want you to come along with me for a minute and shoot at something else. Not a hippopotamus. Another kind of queer animal I've found on the estate. It's an animal with three legs and one eye, and it's all the colors of the rainbow."

"What the deuce are you talking about?" asked Burke.

"You come along and see," replied Fisher, cheerfully.

Such people seldom reject anything nonsensical, for they are always seeking for something new. They gravely rearmed themselves from the gun-room and trooped along at the tail of their guide, Sir Howard only pausing, in a sort of ecstasy, to point out the celebrated gilt summerhouse on which the gilt weathercock still stood crooked. It was dusk turning to dark by the time they reached the remote green by the poplars and accepted the new and aimless game of shooting at the old mark.

The last light seemed to fade from the lawn, and the poplars against the sunset were like great plumes upon a purple hearse, when the futile procession finally curved round, and came out in front of the target. Sir Howard again slapped his host on the shoulder, shoving him playfully forward to take the first shot. The shoulder and arm he touched seemed unnaturally stiff and angular. Mr. Jenkins was holding his gun in an attitude more awkward than any that his satiric friends had seen or expected.

At the same instant a horrible scream seemed to come from nowhere. It was so unnatural and so unsuited to the scene that it might have been made by some inhuman thing flying on wings above them or eavesdropping in the dark woods beyond. But Fisher knew that it had started and stopped on the pale lips of Jefferson Jenkins, of Montreal, and no one at that moment catching sight of Jefferson Jenkins’s face would have complained that it was commonplace. The next moment a torrent of guttural but good-humored oaths came from Major Burke as he and the two other men saw what was in front of them. The target stood up in the dim grass like a dark goblin grinning at them, and it was literally grinning. It had two eyes like stars, and in similar livid points of light were picked out the two upturned and open nostrils and the two ends of the wide and tight mouth. A few white dots above each eye indicated the hoary eyebrows; and one of them ran upward almost erect. It was a brilliant caricature done in bright dotted lines and March knew of whom. It shone in the shadowy grass, smeared with sea fire as if one of the submarine monsters had crawled into the twilight garden; but it had the head of a dead man.

“It’s only luminous paint,” said Burke. “Old Fisher’s been having a joke with that phosphorescent stuff of his.”

“Seems to be meant for old Puggy”’ observed Sir Howard. “Hits him off very well.”

With that they all laughed, except Jenkins. When they had all done, he made a noise like the first effort of an animal to laugh, and Horne Fisher suddenly strode across to him and said:

“Mr. Jenkins, I must speak to you at once in private.”

It was by the little watercourse in the moors, on the slope under the hanging rock, that March met his new friend Fisher, by appointment, shortly after the ugly and almost grotesque scene that had broken up the group in the garden.

“It was a monkey-trick of mine,” observed Fisher, gloomily, “putting phosphorus on the target; but the only chance to make him jump was to give him the horrors suddenly. And when he saw the face he’d shot at shining on the target he practiced on, all lit up with an infernal light, he did jump. Quite enough for my own intellectual satisfaction.”

“I’m afraid I don’t quite understand even now,” said March, “exactly what he did or why he did it.”

“You ought to,” replied Fisher, with his rather dreary smile, “for you gave me the first suggestion yourself. Oh yes, you did; and it was a very shrewd one. You said a man wouldn’t take sandwiches with him to dine at a great house. It was quite true; and the inference was that, though he was going there, he didn’t mean to dine there. Or, at any rate, that he might not be dining there. It occurred to me at once that he probably expected the visit to be unpleasant, or the reception doubtful, or something that would prevent his accepting hospitality. Then it struck me that Turnbull was a terror to certain shady characters in the past, and that he had come down to identify and denounce one of them. The chances at the start pointed to the host — that is, Jenkins. I'm morally certain now that Jenkins was the undesirable alien Turnbull wanted to convict in another shooting-affair, but you see the shooting gentleman had another shot in his locker."

"But you said he would have to be a very good shot," protested March.

"Jenkins is a very good shot," said Fisher. "A very good shot who can pretend to be a very bad shot. Shall I tell you the second hint I hit on, after yours, to make me think it was Jenkins? It was my cousin's account of his bad shooting. He'd shot a cockade off a hat and a weathercock off a building. Now, in fact, a man must shoot very well indeed to shoot so badly as that. He must shoot very neatly to hit the cockade and not the head, or even the hat. If the shots had really gone at random, the chances are a thousand to one that they would not have hit such prominent and picturesque objects. They were chosen because they were prominent and picturesque objects. They make a story to go the round of society. He keeps the crooked weathercock in the summerhouse to perpetuate the story of a legend. And then he lay in wait with his evil eye and wicked gun, safely ambushed behind the legend of his own incompetence.

"But there is more than that. There is the summerhouse itself. I mean there is the whole thing. There's all that Jenkins gets chaffed about, the gilding and the gaudy colors and all the vulgarity that's supposed to stamp him as an upstart. Now, as a matter of fact, upstarts generally don't do this. God knows there's enough of 'em in society; and one knows 'em well enough. And this is the very last thing they do. They're generally only too keen to know the right thing and do it; and they instantly put themselves body and soul into the hands of art decorators and art experts, who do the whole thing for them. There's hardly another millionaire alive who has the moral courage to have a gilt monogram on a chair like that one in the gun-room. For that matter, there's the name as well as the monogram. Names like Tompkins and Jenkins and Jinks are funny without being vulgar; I mean they are vulgar without being common. If you prefer it, they are commonplace without being common. They are just the names to be chosen to *look* ordinary, but they're really rather extraordinary. Do you know many people called Tompkins? It's a good deal rarer than Talbot. It's pretty much the same with the comic clothes of the parvenu. Jenkins dresses like a character in Punch. But that's because he is a character in Punch. I mean he's a fictitious character. He's a fabulous animal. He doesn't exist.

"Have you ever considered what it must be like to be a man who doesn't exist? I mean to be a man with a fictitious character that he has to keep up at the expense not merely of personal talents: To be a new kind of hypocrite hiding a talent in a new kind of napkin. This man has chosen his hypocrisy very ingeniously; it was really a new one. A subtle villain has dressed up as a dashing gentleman and a worthy business man and a philanthropist and a saint; but the loud checks of a comical little cad were really rather a new disguise. But the disguise must be very irksome to a man who can really do things. This is a dexterous little cosmopolitan guttersnipe who can do scores of things, not only shoot, but draw and paint, and probably play the fiddle. Now a man like that may find the hiding of his talents useful; but he could never help wanting to use them where they were useless. If he can draw, he will draw absent-mindedly on blotting paper. I suspect this rascal has often drawn poor old Puggy's face on blotting paper. Probably he began doing it in blots as he afterward did it in dots, or rather shots. It was the same sort of thing; he found a disused target in a deserted yard and couldn't resist indulging in a little secret shooting, like secret drinking. You thought the shots all scattered and irregular, and so they were; but not accidental. No two distances were alike; but the different points were exactly where he wanted to put them. There's nothing needs such mathematical precision as a wild caricature. I've dabbled a little in drawing myself, and I assure you that to put one dot where you want it is a marvel with a pen close to a piece of paper. It was a miracle to do it across a garden with a gun. But a man who can work those miracles will always itch to work them, if it's only in the dark."

After a pause March observed, thoughtfully, "But he couldn't have brought him down like a bird with one of those little guns."

"No; that was why I went into the gun-room," replied Fisher. "He did it with one of Burke's rifles, and Burke thought he knew the sound of it. That's why he rushed out without a hat, looking so wild. He saw nothing but a car passing quickly, which he followed for a little way, and then concluded he'd made a mistake."

There was another silence, during which Fisher sat on a great stone as motionless as on their first meeting, and watched the gray and silver river eddying past under the bushes. Then March said, abruptly, “Of course he knows the truth now.”

“Nobody knows the truth but you and I,” answered Fisher, with a certain softening in his voice. “And I don’t think you and I will ever quarrel.”

“What do you mean?” asked March, in an altered accent. “What have you done about it?”

Horne Fisher continued to gaze steadily at the eddying stream. At last he said, “The police have proved it was a motor accident.”

“But you know it was not.”

“I told you that I know too much,” replied Fisher, with his eye on the river. “I know that, and I know a great many other things. I know the atmosphere and the way the whole thing works. I know this fellow has succeeded in making himself something incurably commonplace and comic. I know you can’t get up a persecution of old Toole or Little Tich. If I were to tell Hoggs or Halkett that old Jink was an assassin, they would almost die of laughter before my eyes. Oh, I don’t say their laughter’s quite innocent, though it’s genuine in its way. They want old Jink, and they couldn’t do without him. I don’t say I’m quite innocent. I like Hoggs; I don’t want him to be down and out; and he’d be done for if Jink can’t pay for his coronet. They were devilish near the line at the last election. But the only real objection to it is that it’s impossible. Nobody would believe it; it’s not in the picture. The crooked weathercock would always turn it into a joke.”

“Don’t you think this is infamous?” asked March, quietly.

“I think a good many things,” replied the other. “If you people ever happen to blow the whole tangle of society to hell with dynamite, I don’t know that the human race will be much the worse. But don’t be too hard on me merely because I know what society is. That’s why I moon away my time over things like stinking fish.”

There was a pause as he settled himself down again by the stream; and then he added:

“I told you before I had to throw back the big fish.”

THE VANISHING PRINCE

This tale begins among a tangle of tales round a name that is at once recent and legendary. The name is that of Michael O'Neill, popularly called Prince Michael, partly because he claimed descent from ancient Fenian princes, and partly because he was credited with a plan to make himself prince president of Ireland, as the last Napoleon did of France. He was undoubtedly a gentleman of honorable pedigree and of many accomplishments, but two of his accomplishments emerged from all the rest. He had a talent for appearing when he was not wanted and a talent for disappearing when he was wanted, especially when he was wanted by the police. It may be added that his disappearances were more dangerous than his appearances. In the latter he seldom went beyond the sensational — pasting up seditious placards, tearing down official placards, making flamboyant speeches, or unfurling forbidden flags. But in order to effect the former he would sometimes fight for his freedom with startling energy, from which men were sometimes lucky to escape with a broken head instead of a broken neck. His most famous feats of escape, however, were due to dexterity and not to violence. On a cloudless summer morning he had come down a country road white with dust, and, pausing outside a farmhouse, had told the farmer's daughter, with elegant indifference, that the local police were in pursuit of him. The girl's name was Bridget Royce, a somber and even sullen type of beauty, and she looked at him darkly, as if in doubt, and said, "Do you want me to hide you?" Upon which he only laughed, leaped lightly over the stone wall, and strode toward the farm, merely throwing over his shoulder the remark, "Thank you, I have generally been quite capable of hiding myself." In which proceeding he acted with a tragic ignorance of the nature of women; and there fell on his path in that sunshine a shadow of doom.

While he disappeared through the farmhouse the girl remained for a few moments looking up the road, and two perspiring policemen came plowing up to the door where she stood. Though still angry, she was still silent, and a quarter of an hour later the officers had searched the house and were already inspecting the kitchen garden and cornfield behind it. In the ugly reaction of her mood she might have been tempted even to point out the fugitive, but for a small difficulty that she had no more notion than the policemen had of where he could possibly have gone. The kitchen garden was inclosed by a very low wall, and the cornfield beyond lay aslant like a square patch on a great green hill on which he could still have been seen even as a dot in the distance. Everything stood solid in its familiar place; the apple tree was too small to support or hide a climber; the only shed stood open and obviously empty; there was no sound save the droning of summer flies and the occasional flutter of a bird unfamiliar enough to be surprised by the scarecrow in the field; there was scarcely a shadow save a few blue lines that fell from the thin tree; every detail was picked out by the brilliant day light as if in a microscope. The girl described the scene later, with all the passionate realism of her race, and, whether or no the policemen had a similar eye for the picturesque, they had at least an eye for the facts of the case, and were compelled to give up the chase and retire from the scene. Bridget Royce remained as if in a trance, staring at the sunlit garden in which a man had just vanished like a fairy. She was still in a sinister mood, and the miracle took in her mind a character of unfriendliness and fear, as if the fairy were decidedly a bad fairy. The sun upon the glittering garden depressed her more than the darkness, but she continued to stare at it. Then the world itself went half-witted and she screamed. The scarecrow moved in the sun light. It had stood with its back to her in a battered old black hat and a tattered garment, and with all its tatters flying, it strode away across the hill.

She did not analyze the audacious trick by which the man had turned to his advantage the subtle effects of the expected and the obvious; she was still under the cloud of more individual complexities, and she noticed most of all that the vanishing scarecrow did not even turn to look at the farm. And the fates that were running so adverse to his fantastic career of freedom ruled that his next adventure, though it had the same success in another quarter, should increase the danger in this quarter. Among the many similar adventures related of him in this manner it is also said that some days afterward another girl, named Mary Cregan, found him concealed on the farm where she worked; and if the story is true, she must also have had the shock of an uncanny experience, for when she was busy at some lonely task in the yard she heard a voice speaking out of the well, and found that the eccentric had managed to drop himself into the bucket which was some little way below, the well only partly full of water. In this case, however, he had to appeal to the woman to wind up the rope. And men say it was when this news was told to the other woman that her soul walked over the border line of treason.

Such, at least, were the stories told of him in the countryside, and there were many more — as that he had stood insolently in a splendid green dressing gown on the steps of a great hotel, and then led the police a chase through a long suite of grand apartments, and finally through his own bedroom on to a balcony that overhung the river. The moment the pursuers stepped on to the balcony it broke under them, and they dropped pell-mell into the eddying waters, while Michael, who had thrown off his gown and dived, was able to swim away. It was said that he had carefully cut away the props so that they would not support anything so heavy as a policeman. But here again he was immediately fortunate, yet ultimately unfortunate, for it is said that one of the men was drowned, leaving a family feud which made a little rift in his popularity. These stories can now be told in some detail, not because they are the most marvelous of his many adventures, but because these alone were not covered with silence by the loyalty of the peasantry. These alone found their way into official reports, and it is these which three of the chief officials of the country were reading and discussing when the more remarkable part of this story begins.

Night was far advanced and the lights shone in the cottage that served for a temporary police station near the coast. On one side of it were the last houses of the straggling village, and on the other nothing but a waste moorland stretching away toward the sea, the line of which was broken by no landmark except a solitary tower of the prehistoric pattern still found in Ireland, standing up as slender as a column, but pointed like a pyramid. At a wooden table in front of the window, which normally looked out on this landscape, sat two men in plain clothes, but with something of a military bearing, for indeed they were the two chiefs of the detective service of that district. The senior of the two, both in age and rank, was a sturdy man with a short white beard, and frosty eyebrows fixed in a frown which suggested rather worry than severity.

His name was Morton, and he was a Liverpool man long pickled in the Irish quarrels, and doing his duty among them in a sour fashion not altogether unsympathetic. He had spoken a few sentences to his companion, Nolan, a tall, dark man with a cadaverous equine Irish face, when he seemed to remember something and touched a bell which rang in another room. The subordinate he had summoned immediately appeared with a sheaf of papers in his hand.

“Sit down, Wilson,” he said. “Those are the dispositions, I suppose.”

“Yes,” replied the third officer. “I think I’ve got all there is to be got out of them, so I sent the people away.”

“Did Mary Cregan give evidence?” asked Morton, with a frown that looked a little heavier than usual.

“No, but her master did,” answered the man called Wilson, who had flat, red hair and a plain, pale face, not without sharpness. “I think he’s hanging round the girl himself and is out against a rival. There’s always some reason of that sort when we are told the truth about anything. And you bet the other girl told right enough.”

“Well, let’s hope they’ll be some sort of use,” remarked Nolan, in a somewhat hopeless manner, gazing out into the darkness.

“Anything is to the good,” said Morton, “that lets us know anything about him.”

“Do we know anything about him?” asked the melancholy Irishman.

“We know one thing about him,” said Wilson, “and it’s the one thing that nobody ever knew before. We know where he is.”

“Are you sure?” inquired Morton, looking at him sharply.

“Quite sure,” replied his assistant. “At this very minute he is in that tower over there by the shore. If you go near enough you’ll see the candle burning in the window.”

As he spoke the noise of a horn sounded on the road outside, and a moment after they heard the throbbing of a motor car brought to a standstill before the door. Morton instantly sprang to his feet.

“Thank the Lord that’s the car from Dublin,” he said. “I can’t do anything without special authority, not if he were sitting on the top of the tower and putting out his tongue at us. But the chief can do what he thinks best.”

He hurried out to the entrance and was soon exchanging greetings with a big handsome man in a fur coat, who brought into the dingy little station the indescribable glow of the great cities and the luxuries of the great world.

For this was Sir Walter Carey, an official of such eminence in Dublin Castle that nothing short of the case of Prince Michael would have brought him on such a journey in the middle of the night. But the case of Prince Michael, as it happened, was complicated by legalism as well as lawlessness. On the last occasion he had escaped by a forensic quibble and not, as usual, by a private escapade; and it was a question whether at the moment he was amenable to the law or not. It might be necessary to stretch a point, but a man like Sir Walter could probably stretch it as far as he liked.

Whether he intended to do so was a question to be considered. Despite the almost aggressive touch of luxury in the fur coat, it soon became apparent that Sir Walter's large leonine head was for use as well as ornament, and he considered the matter soberly and sanely enough. Five chairs were set round the plain deal table, for who should Sir Walter bring with him but his young relative and secretary, Horne Fisher. Sir Walter listened with grave attention, and his secretary with polite boredom, to the string of episodes by which the police had traced the flying rebel from the steps of the hotel to the solitary tower beside the sea. There at least he was cornered between the moors and the breakers; and the scout sent by Wilson reported him as writing under a solitary candle, perhaps composing another of his tremendous proclamations. Indeed, it would have been typical of him to choose it as the place in which finally to turn to bay. He had some remote claim on it, as on a family castle; and those who knew him thought him capable of imitating the primitive Irish chieftains who fell fighting against the sea.

"I saw some queer-looking people leaving as I came in," said Sir Walter Carey. "I suppose they were your witnesses. But why do they turn up here at this time of night?"

Morton smiled grimly. "They come here by night because they would be dead men if they came here by day. They are criminals committing a crime that is more horrible here than theft or murder."

"What crime do you mean?" asked the other, with some curiosity.

"They are helping the law," said Morton.

There was a silence, and Sir Walter considered the papers before him with an abstracted eye. At last he spoke.

"Quite so; but look here, if the local feeling is as lively as that there are a good many points to consider. I believe the new Act will enable me to collar him now if I think it best. But is it best? A serious rising would do us no good in Parliament, and the government has enemies in England as well as Ireland. It won't do if I have done what looks a little like sharp practice, and then only raised a revolution."

"It's all the other way," said the man called Wilson, rather quickly. "There won't be half so much of a revolution if you arrest him as there will if you leave him loose for three days longer. But, anyhow, there can't be anything nowadays that the proper police can't manage."

"Mr. Wilson is a Londoner," said the Irish detective, with a smile.

"Yes, I'm a cockney, all right," replied Wilson, "and I think I'm all the better for that. Especially at this job, oddly enough."

Sir Walter seemed slightly amused at the pertinacity of the third officer, and perhaps even more amused at the slight accent with which he spoke, which rendered rather needless his boast about his origin.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, "that you know more about the business here because you have come from London?"

"Sounds funny, I know, but I do believe it," answered Wilson. "I believe these affairs want fresh methods. But most of all I believe they want a fresh eye."

The superior officers laughed, and the redhaired man went on with a slight touch of temper:

"Well, look at the facts. See how the fellow got away every time, and you'll understand what I mean. Why was he able to stand in the place of the scarecrow, hidden by nothing but an old hat? Because it was a village policeman who knew the scarecrow was there, was expecting it, and therefore took no notice of it. Now I never expect a scarecrow. I've never seen one in the street, and I stare at one when I see it in the field. It's a new thing to me and worth noticing. And it was just the same when he hid in the well. You are ready to find a well in a place like that; you look for a well, and so you don't see it. I don't look for it, and therefore I do look at it."

"It is certainly an idea," said Sir Walter, smiling, "but what about the balcony? Balconies are occasionally seen in London."

"But not rivers right under them, as if it was in Venice," replied Wilson.

"It is certainly a new idea," repeated Sir Walter, with something like respect. He had all the love of the luxurious classes for new ideas. But he also had a critical faculty, and was inclined to think, after due reflection, that it was a true idea as well.

Growing dawn had already turned the window panes from black to gray when Sir Walter got abruptly to his feet. The others rose also, taking this for a signal that the arrest was to be undertaken. But their leader stood for a moment in deep thought, as if conscious that he had come to a parting of the ways.

Suddenly the silence was pierced by a long, wailing cry from the dark moors outside. The silence that followed it seemed more startling than the shriek itself, and it lasted until Nolan said, heavily:

“’Tis the banshee. Somebody is marked for the grave.”

His long, large-featured face was as pale as a moon, and it was easy to remember that he was the only Irishman in the room.

“Well, I know that banshee,” said Wilson, cheerfully, “ignorant as you think I am of these things. I talked to that banshee myself an hour ago, and I sent that banshee up to the tower and told her to sing out like that if she could get a glimpse of our friend writing his proclamation.”

“Do you mean that girl Bridget Royce?” asked Morton, drawing his frosty brows together. “Has she turned king’s evidence to that extent?”

“Yes,” answered Wilson. “I know very little of these local things, you tell me, but I reckon an angry woman is much the same in all countries.”

Nolan, however, seemed still moody and unlike himself. “It’s an ugly noise and an ugly business altogether,” he said. “If it’s really the end of Prince Michael it may well be the end of other things as well. When the spirit is on him he would escape by a ladder of dead men, and wade through that sea if it were made of blood.”

“Is that the real reason of your pious alarms?” asked Wilson, with a slight sneer.

The Irishman’s pale face blackened with a new passion.

“I have faced as many murderers in County Clare as you ever fought with in Clapham junction, Mr. Cockney,” he said.

“Hush, please,” said Morton, sharply. “Wilson, you have no kind of right to imply doubt of your superior’s conduct. I hope you will prove yourself as courageous and trustworthy as he has always been.”

The pale face of the red-haired man seemed a shade paler, but he was silent and composed, and Sir Walter went up to Nolan with marked courtesy, saying, “Shall we go outside now, and get this business done?”

Dawn had lifted, leaving a wide chasm of white between a great gray cloud and the great gray moorland, beyond which the tower was outlined against the daybreak and the sea.

Something in its plain and primitive shape vaguely suggested the dawn in the first days of the earth, in some prehistoric time when even the colors were hardly created, when there was only blank daylight between cloud and clay. These dead hues were relieved only by one spot of gold — the spark of the candle alight in the window of the lonely tower, and burning on into the broadening daylight. As the group of detectives, followed by a cordon of policemen, spread out into a crescent to cut off all escape, the light in the tower flashed as if it were moved for a moment, and then went out. They knew the man inside had realized the daylight and blown out his candle.

"There are other windows, aren't there?" asked Morton, "and a door, of course, somewhere round the corner? Only a round tower has no corners."

"Another example of my small suggestion," observed Wilson, quietly. "That queer tower was the first thing I saw when I came to these parts; and I can tell you a little more about it — or, at any rate, the outside of it. There are four windows altogether, one a little way from this one, but just out of sight. Those are both on the ground floor, and so is the third on the other side, making a sort of triangle. But the fourth is just above the third, and I suppose it looks on an upper floor."

"It's only a sort of loft, reached by a ladder, said Nolan. "I've played in the place when I was a child. It's no more than an empty shell." And his sad face grew sadder, thinking perhaps of the tragedy of his country and the part that he played in it.

"The man must have got a table and chair, at any rate," said Wilson, "but no doubt he could have got those from some cottage. If I might make a suggestion, sir, I think we ought to approach all the five entrances at once, so to speak. One of us should go to the door and one to each window; Macbride here has a ladder for the upper window."

Mr. Horne Fisher languidly turned to his distinguished relative and spoke for the first time.

"I am rather a convert to the cockney school of psychology," he said in an almost inaudible voice.

The others seemed to feel the same influence in different ways, for the group began to break up in the manner indicated. Morton moved toward the window immediately in front of them, where the hidden outlaw had just snuffed the candle; Nolan, a little farther westward to the next window; while Wilson, followed by Macbride with the ladder, went round to the two windows at the back. Sir Walter Carey himself, followed by his secretary, began to walk round toward the only door, to demand admittance in a more regular fashion.

“He will be armed, of course,” remarked Sir Walter, casually.

“By all accounts,” replied Horne Fisher, “he can do more with a candlestick than most men with a pistol. But he is pretty sure to have the pistol, too.”

Even as he spoke the question was answered with a tongue of thunder. Morton had just placed himself in front of the nearest window, his broad shoulders blocking the aperture. For an instant it was lit from within as with red fire, followed by a thundering throng of echoes. The square shoulders seemed to alter in shape, and the sturdy figure collapsed among the tall, rank grasses at the foot of the tower. A puff of smoke floated from the window like a little cloud. The two men behind rushed to the spot and raised him, but he was dead.

Sir Walter straightened himself and called out something that was lost in another noise of firing; it was possible that the police were already avenging their comrade from the other side. Fisher had already raced round to the next window, and a new cry of astonishment from him brought his patron to the same spot. Nolan, the Irish policeman, had also fallen, sprawling all his great length in the grass, and it was red with his blood. He was still alive when they reached him, but there was death on his face, and he was only able to make a final gesture telling them that all was over; and, with a broken word and a heroic effort, motioning them on to where his other comrades were besieging the back of the tower. Stunned by these rapid and repeated shocks, the two men could only vaguely obey the gesture, and, finding their way to the other windows at the back, they discovered a scene equally startling, if less final and tragic. The other two officers were not dead or mortally wounded, but Macbride lay with a broken leg and his ladder on top of him, evidently thrown down from the top window of the tower; while Wilson lay on his face, quite still as if stunned, with his red head among the gray and silver of the sea holly. In him, however, the impotence was but momentary, for he began to move and rise as the others came round the tower.

“My God! it’s like an explosion!” cried Sir Walter; and indeed it was the only word for this unearthly energy, by which one man had been able to deal death or destruction on three sides of the same small triangle at the same instant.

Wilson had already scrambled to his feet and with splendid energy flew again at the window, revolver in hand. He fired twice into the opening and then disappeared in his own smoke; but the thud of his feet and the shock of a falling chair told them that the intrepid Londoner had managed at last to leap into the room. Then followed a curious silence; and Sir Walter, walking to the window through the thinning smoke, looked into the hollow shell of the ancient tower. Except for Wilson, staring around him, there was nobody there.

The inside of the tower was a single empty room, with nothing but a plain wooden chair and a table on which were pens, ink and paper, and the candlestick. Halfway up the high wall there was a rude timber platform under the upper window, a small loft which was more like a large shelf. It was reached only by a ladder, and it seemed to be as bare as the bare walls. Wilson completed his survey of the place and then went and stared at the things on the table. Then he silently pointed with his lean forefinger at the open page of the large notebook. The writer had suddenly stopped writing, even in the middle of a word.

“I said it was like an explosion,” said Sir Walter Carey at last. “And really the man himself seems to have suddenly exploded. But he has blown himself up somehow without touching the tower. He’s burst more like a bubble than a bomb.”

“He has touched more valuable things than the tower,” said Wilson, gloomily.

There was a long silence, and then Sir Walter said, seriously: “Well, Mr. Wilson, I am not a detective, and these unhappy happenings have left you in charge of that branch of the business. We all lament the cause of this, but I should like to say that I myself have the strongest confidence in your capacity for carrying on the work. What do you think we should do next?”

Wilson seemed to rouse himself from his depression and acknowledged the speaker’s words with a warmer civility than he had hitherto shown to anybody. He called in a few of the police to assist in routing out the interior, leaving the rest to spread themselves in a search party outside.

“I think,” he said, “the first thing is to make quite sure about the inside of this place, as it was hardly physically possible for him to have got outside. I suppose poor Nolan would have brought in his banshee and said it was supernaturally possible. But I’ve got no use for disembodied spirits when I’m dealing with facts. And the facts before me are an empty tower with a ladder, a chair, and a table.”

"The spiritualists," said Sir Walter, with a smile, "would say that spirits could find a great deal of use for a table."

"I dare say they could if the spirits were on the table — in a bottle," replied Wilson, with a curl of his pale lip. "The people round here, when they're all sodden up with Irish whisky, may believe in such things. I think they want a little education in this country."

Horne Fisher's heavy eyelids fluttered in a faint attempt to rise, as if he were tempted to a lazy protest against the contemptuous tone of the investigator.

"The Irish believe far too much in spirits to believe in spiritualism," he murmured. "They know too much about 'em. If you want a simple and childlike faith in any spirit that comes along you can get it in your favorite London."

"I don't want to get it anywhere," said Wilson, shortly. "I say I'm dealing with much simpler things than your simple faith, with a table and a chair and a ladder. Now what I want to say about them at the start is this. They are all three made roughly enough of plain wood. But the table and the chair are fairly new and comparatively clean. The ladder is covered with dust and there is a cobweb under the top rung of it. That means that he borrowed the first two quite recently from some cottage, as we supposed, but the ladder has been a long time in this rotten old dustbin. Probably it was part of the original furniture, an heirloom in this magnificent palace of the Irish kings."

Again Fisher looked at him under his eyelids, but seemed too sleepy to speak, and Wilson went on with his argument.

"Now it's quite clear that something very odd has just happened in this place. The chances are ten to one, it seems to me, that it had something specially to do with this place. Probably he came here because he could do it only here; it doesn't seem very inviting otherwise. But the man knew it of old; they say it belonged to his family, so that altogether, I think, everything points to something in the construction of the tower itself."

"Your reasoning seems to me excellent," said Sir Walter, who was listening attentively. "But what could it be?"

"You see now what I mean about the ladder," went on the detective; "it's the only old piece of furniture here and the first thing that caught that cockney eye of mine. But there is something else. That loft up there is a sort of lumber room without any lumber. So far as I can see, it's as empty as everything else; and, as things are, I don't see the use of the ladder leading to it. It seems to me, as I can't find anything unusual down here, that it might pay us to look up there."

He got briskly off the table on which he was sitting (for the only chair was allotted to Sir Walter) and ran rapidly up the ladder to the platform above. He was soon followed by the others, Mr. Fisher going last, however, with an appearance of considerable nonchalance.

At this stage, however, they were destined to disappointment; Wilson nosed in every corner like a terrier and examined the roof almost in the posture of a fly, but half an hour afterward they had to confess that they were still without a clew. Sir Walter's private secretary seemed more and more threatened with inappropriate slumber, and, having been the last to climb up the ladder, seemed now to lack the energy even to climb down again.

"Come along, Fisher," called out Sir Walter from below, when the others had regained the floor. "We must consider whether we'll pull the whole place to pieces to see what it's made of."

"I'm coming in a minute," said the voice from the ledge above their heads, a voice somewhat suggestive of an articulate yawn.

"What are you waiting for?" asked Sir Walter, impatiently. "Can you see anything there?"

"Well, yes, in a way," replied the voice, vaguely. "In fact, I see it quite plain now."

"What is it?" asked Wilson, sharply, from the table on which he sat kicking his heels restlessly.

"Well, it's a man," said Horne Fisher.

Wilson bounded off the table as if he had been kicked off it. "What do you mean?" he cried. "How can you possibly see a man?"

"I can see him through the window," replied the secretary, mildly. "I see him coming across the moor. He's making a bee line across the open country toward this tower. He evidently means to pay us a visit. And, considering who it seems to be, perhaps it would be more polite if we were all at the door to receive him." And in a leisurely manner the secretary came down the ladder.

"Who it seems to be!" repeated Sir Walter in astonishment.

"Well, I think it's the man you call Prince Michael," observed Mr. Fisher, airily. "In fact, I'm sure it is. I've seen the police portraits of him."

There was a dead silence, and Sir Walter's usually steady brain seemed to go round like a windmill.

"But, hang it all!" he said at last, "even supposing his own explosion could have thrown him half a mile away, without passing through any of the windows, and left him alive enough for a country walk — even then, why the devil should he walk in this direction? The murderer does not generally revisit the scene of his crime so rapidly as all that."

"He doesn't know yet that it is the scene of his crime," answered Horne Fisher.

"What on earth do you mean? You credit him with rather singular absence of mind."

"Well, the truth is, it isn't the scene of his crime," said Fisher, and went and looked out of the window.

There was another silence, and then Sir Walter said, quietly: "What sort of notion have you really got in your head, Fisher? Have you developed a new theory about how this fellow escaped out of the ring round him?"

"He never escaped at all," answered the man at the window, without turning round. "He never escaped out of the ring because he was never inside the ring. He was not in this tower at all, at least not when we were surrounding it."

He turned and leaned back against the window, but, in spite of his usual listless manner, they almost fancied that the face in shadow was a little pale.

"I began to guess something of the sort when we were some way from the tower," he said. "Did you notice that sort of flash or flicker the candle gave before it was extinguished? I was almost certain it was only the last leap the flame gives when a candle burns itself out. And then I came into this room and I saw that."

He pointed at the table and Sir Walter caught his breath with a sort of curse at his own blindness. For the candle in the candlestick had obviously burned itself away to nothing and left him, mentally, at least, very completely in the dark.

"Then there is a sort of mathematical question," went on Fisher, leaning back in his limp way and looking up at the bare walls, as if tracing imaginary diagrams there. "It's not so easy for a man in the third angle to face the other two at the same moment, especially if they are at the base of an isosceles. I am sorry if it sounds like a lecture on geometry, but—"

"I'm afraid we have no time for it," said Wilson, coldly. "If this man is really coming back, I must give my orders at once."

"I think I'll go on with it, though," observed Fisher, staring at the roof with insolent serenity.

"I must ask you, Mr. Fisher, to let me conduct my inquiry on my own lines," said Wilson, firmly. "I am the officer in charge now."

"Yes," remarked Horne Fisher, softly, but with an accent that somehow chilled the hearer. "Yes. But why?"

Sir Walter was staring, for he had never seen his rather lackadaisical young friend look like that before. Fisher was looking at Wilson with lifted lids, and the eyes under them seemed to have shed or shifted a film, as do the eyes of an eagle.

"Why are you the officer in charge now?" he asked. "Why can you conduct the inquiry on your own lines now? How did it come about, I wonder, that the elder officers are not here to interfere with anything you do?"

Nobody spoke, and nobody can say how soon anyone would have collected his wits to speak when a noise came from without. It was the heavy and hollow sound of a blow upon the door of the tower, and to their shaken spirits it sounded strangely like the hammer of doom.

The wooden door of the tower moved on its rusty hinges under the hand that struck it and Prince Michael came into the room. Nobody had the smallest doubt about his identity. His light clothes, though frayed with his adventures, were of fine and almost foppish cut, and he wore a pointed beard, or imperial, perhaps as a further reminiscence of Louis Napoleon; but he was a much taller and more graceful man that his prototype. Before anyone could speak he had silenced everyone for an instant with a slight but splendid gesture of hospitality.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is a poor place now, but you are heartily welcome."

Wilson was the first to recover, and he took a stride toward the newcomer.

"Michael O'Neill, I arrest you in the king's name for the murder of Francis Morton and James Nolan. It is my duty to warn you—"

"No, no, Mr. Wilson," cried Fisher, suddenly. "You shall not commit a third murder."

Sir Walter Carey rose from his chair, which fell over with a crash behind him. “What does all this mean?” he called out in an authoritative manner.

“It means,” said Fisher, “that this man, Hooker Wilson, as soon as he had put his head in at that window, killed his two comrades who had put their heads in at the other windows, by firing across the empty room. That is what it means. And if you want to know, count how many times he is supposed to have fired and then count the charges left in his revolver.”

Wilson, who was still sitting on the table, abruptly put a hand out for the weapon that lay beside him. But the next movement was the most unexpected of all, for the prince standing in the doorway passed suddenly from the dignity of a statue to the swiftness of an acrobat and rent the revolver out of the detective’s hand.

“You dog!” he cried. “So you are the type of English truth, as I am of Irish tragedy — you who come to kill me, wading through the blood of your brethren. If they had fallen in a feud on the hillside, it would be called murder, and yet your sin might be forgiven you. But I, who am innocent, I was to be slain with ceremony. There would be long speeches and patient judges listening to my vain plea of innocence, noting down my despair and disregarding it. Yes, that is what I call assassination. But killing may be no murder; there is one shot left in this little gun, and I know where it should go.”

Wilson turned quickly on the table, and even as he turned he twisted in agony, for Michael shot him through the body where he sat, so that he tumbled off the table like lumber.

The police rushed to lift him; Sir Walter stood speechless; and then, with a strange and weary gesture, Horne Fisher spoke.

“You are indeed a type of the Irish tragedy,” he said. “You were entirely in the right, and you have put yourself in the wrong.”

The prince’s face was like marble for a space then there dawned in his eyes a light not unlike that of despair. He laughed suddenly and flung the smoking pistol on the ground.

“I am indeed in the wrong,” he said. “I have committed a crime that may justly bring a curse on me and my children.”

Horne Fisher did not seem entirely satisfied with this very sudden repentance; he kept his eyes on the man and only said, in a low voice, “What crime do you mean?”

"I have helped English justice," replied Prince Michael. "I have avenged your king's officers; I have done the work of his hangman. For that truly I deserve to be hanged."

And he turned to the police with a gesture that did not so much surrender to them, but rather command them to arrest him.

This was the story that Horne Fisher told to Harold March, the journalist, many years after, in a little, but luxurious, restaurant near Piccadilly. He had invited March to dinner some time after the affair he called "The Face in the Target," and the conversation had naturally turned on that mystery and afterward on earlier memories of Fisher's life and the way in which he was led to study such problems as those of Prince Michael. Horne Fisher was fifteen years older; his thin hair had faded to frontal baldness, and his long, thin hands dropped less with affectation and more with fatigue. And he told the story of the Irish adventure of his youth, because it recorded the first occasion on which he had ever come in contact with crime, or discovered how darkly and how terribly crime can be entangled with law.

"Hooker Wilson was the first criminal I ever knew, and he was a policeman," explained Fisher, twirling his wine glass. "And all my life has been a mixed-up business of the sort. He was a man of very real talent, and perhaps genius, and well worth studying, both as a detective and a criminal. His white face and red hair were typical of him, for he was one of those who are cold and yet on fire for fame; and he could control anger, but not ambition. He swallowed the snubs of his superiors in that first quarrel, though he boiled with resentment; but when he suddenly saw the two heads dark against the dawn and framed in the two windows, he could not miss the chance, not only of revenge, but of the removal of the two obstacles to his promotion. He was a dead shot and counted on silencing both, though proof against him would have been hard in any case. But, as a matter of fact, he had a narrow escape, in the case of Nolan, who lived just long enough to say, 'Wilson' and point. We thought he was summoning help for his comrade, but he was really denouncing his murderer. After that it was easy to throw down the ladder above him (for a man up a ladder cannot see clearly what is below and behind) and to throw himself on the ground as another victim of the catastrophe.

"But there was mixed up with his murderous ambition a real belief, not only in his own talents, but in his own theories. He did believe in what he called a fresh eye, and he did want scope for fresh methods. There was something in his view, but it failed where such things commonly fail, because the fresh eye cannot see the unseen. It is true about the ladder and the scarecrow, but not about the life and the soul; and he made a bad mistake about what a man like Michael would do when he heard a woman scream. All Michael's very vanity and vainglory made him rush out at once; he would have walked into Dublin Castle for a lady's glove. Call it his pose or what you will, but he would have done it. What happened when he met her is another story, and one we may never know, but from tales I've heard since, they must have been reconciled. Wilson was wrong there; but there was something, for all that, in his notion that the newcomer sees most, and that the man on the spot may know too much to know anything. He was right about some things. He was right about me."

"About you?" asked Harold March in some wonder.

"I am the man who knows too much to know anything, or, at any rate, to do anything," said Horne Fisher. "I don't mean especially about Ireland. I mean about England. I mean about the whole way we are governed, and perhaps the only way we can be governed. You asked me just now what became of the survivors of that tragedy. Well, Wilson recovered and we managed to persuade him to retire. But we had to pension that damnable murderer more magnificently than any hero who ever fought for England. I managed to save Michael from the worst, but we had to send that perfectly innocent man to penal servitude for a crime we know he never committed, and it was only afterward that we could connive in a sneakish way at his escape. And Sir Walter Carey is Prime Minister of this country, which he would probably never have been if the truth had been told of such a horrible scandal in his department. It might have done for us altogether in Ireland; it would certainly have done for him. And he is my father's old friend, and has always smothered me with kindness. I am too tangled up with the whole thing, you see, and I was certainly never born to set it right. You look distressed, not to say shocked, and I'm not at all offended at it. Let us change the subject by all means, if you like. What do you think of this Burgundy? It's rather a discovery of mine, like the restaurant itself."

And he proceeded to talk learnedly and luxuriantly on all the wines of the world; on which subject, also, some moralists would consider that he knew too much.

THE SOUL OF THE SCHOOLBOY

A large map of London would be needed to display the wild and zigzag course of one day's journey undertaken by an uncle and his nephew; or, to speak more truly, of a nephew and his uncle. For the nephew, a schoolboy on a holiday, was in theory the god in the car, or in the cab, tram, tube, and so on, while his uncle was at most a priest dancing before him and offering sacrifices. To put it more soberly, the schoolboy had something of the stolid air of a young duke doing the grand tour, while his elderly relative was reduced to the position of a courier, who nevertheless had to pay for everything like a patron. The schoolboy was officially known as Summers Minor, and in a more social manner as Stinks, the only public tribute to his career as an amateur photographer and electrician. The uncle was the Rev. Thomas Twyford, a lean and lively old gentleman with a red, eager face and white hair. He was in the ordinary way a country clergyman, but he was one of those who achieve the paradox of being famous in an obscure way, because they are famous in an obscure world. In a small circle of ecclesiastical archaeologists, who were the only people who could even understand one another's discoveries, he occupied a recognized and respectable place. And a critic might have found even in that day's journey at least as much of the uncle's hobby as of the nephew's holiday.

His original purpose had been wholly paternal and festive. But, like many other intelligent people, he was not above the weakness of playing with a toy to amuse himself, on the theory that it would amuse a child. His toys were crowns and miters and croziers and swords of state; and he had lingered over them, telling himself that the boy ought to see all the sights of London. And at the end of the day, after a tremendous tea, he rather gave the game away by winding up with a visit in which hardly any human boy could be conceived as taking an interest — an underground chamber supposed to have been a chapel, recently excavated on the north bank of the Thames, and containing literally nothing whatever but one old silver coin. But the coin, to those who knew, was more solitary and splendid than the Koh-i-noor. It was Roman, and was said to bear the head of St. Paul; and round it raged the most vital controversies about the ancient British Church. It could hardly be denied, however, that the controversies left Summers Minor comparatively cold.

Indeed, the things that interested Summers Minor, and the things that did not interest him, had mystified and amused his uncle for several hours. He exhibited the English schoolboy's startling ignorance and startling knowledge — knowledge of some special classification in which he can generally correct and confound his elders. He considered himself entitled, at Hampton Court on a holiday, to forget the very names of Cardinal Wolsey or William of Orange; but he could hardly be dragged from some details about the arrangement of the electric bells in the neighboring hotel. He was solidly dazed by Westminster Abbey, which is not so unnatural since that church became the lumber room of the larger and less successful statuary of the eighteenth century. But he had a magic and minute knowledge of the Westminster omnibuses, and indeed of the whole omnibus system of London, the colors and numbers of which he knew as a herald knows heraldry. He would cry out against a momentary confusion between a light-green Paddington and a dark-green Bayswater vehicle, as his uncle would at the identification of a Greek ikon and a Roman image.

"Do you collect omnibuses like stamps?" asked his uncle. "They must need a rather large album. Or do you keep them in your locker?"

"I keep them in my head," replied the nephew, with legitimate firmness.

"It does you credit, I admit," replied the clergyman. "I suppose it were vain to ask for what purpose you have learned that out of a thousand things. There hardly seems to be a career in it, unless you could be permanently on the pavement to prevent old ladies getting into the wrong bus. Well, we must get out of this one, for this is our place. I want to show you what they call St. Paul's Penny."

"Is it like St. Paul's Cathedral?" asked the youth with resignation, as they alighted.

At the entrance their eyes were arrested by a singular figure evidently hovering there with a similar anxiety to enter. It was that of a dark, thin man in a long black robe rather like a cassock; but the black cap on his head was of too strange a shape to be a biretta. It suggested, rather, some archaic headdress of Persia or Babylon. He had a curious black beard appearing only at the corners of his chin, and his large eyes were oddly set in his face like the flat decorative eyes painted in old Egyptian profiles. Before they had gathered more than a general impression of him, he had dived into the doorway that was their own destination.

Nothing could be seen above ground of the sunken sanctuary except a strong wooden hut, of the sort recently run up for many military and official purposes, the wooden floor of which was indeed a mere platform over the excavated cavity below. A soldier stood as a sentry outside, and a superior soldier, an Anglo-Indian officer of distinction, sat writing at the desk inside. Indeed, the sightseers soon found that this particular sight was surrounded with the most extraordinary precautions. I have compared the silver coin to the Koh-i-noor, and in one sense it was even conventionally comparable, since by a historical accident it was at one time almost counted among the Crown jewels, or at least the Crown relics, until one of the royal princes publicly restored it to the shrine to which it was supposed to belong. Other causes combined to concentrate official vigilance upon it; there had been a scare about spies carrying explosives in small objects, and one of those experimental orders which pass like waves over bureaucracy had decreed first that all visitors should change their clothes for a sort of official sackcloth, and then (when this method caused some murmurs) that they should at least turn out their pockets. Colonel Morris, the officer in charge, was a short, active man with a grim and leathery face, but a lively and humorous eye — a contradiction borne out by his conduct, for he at once derided the safeguards and yet insisted on them.

“I don’t care a button myself for Paul’s Penny, or such things,” he admitted in answer to some antiquarian openings from the clergyman who was slightly acquainted with him, “but I wear the King’s coat, you know, and it’s a serious thing when the King’s uncle leaves a thing here with his own hands under my charge. But as for saints and relics and things, I fear I’m a bit of a Voltairian; what you would call a skeptic.”

“I’m not sure it’s even skeptical to believe in the royal family and not in the ‘Holy’ Family,” replied Mr. Twyford. “But, of course, I can easily empty my pockets, to show I don’t carry a bomb.”

The little heap of the parson’s possessions which he left on the table consisted chiefly of papers, over and above a pipe and a tobacco pouch and some Roman and Saxon coins. The rest were catalogues of old books, and pamphlets, like one entitled “The Use of Sarum,” one glance at which was sufficient both for the colonel and the schoolboy. They could not see the use of Sarum at all. The contents of the boy’s pockets naturally made a larger heap, and included marbles, a ball of string, an electric torch, a magnet, a small catapult, and, of course, a large pocketknife, almost to be described as a small tool box, a complex apparatus on which he seemed disposed to linger, pointing out that it included a pair of nippers, a tool for punching holes in wood, and, above all, an instrument for taking stones out of a horse's hoof. The comparative absence of any horse he appeared to regard as irrelevant, as if it were a mere appendage easily supplied. But when the turn came of the gentleman in the black gown, he did not turn out his pockets, but merely spread out his hands.

"I have no possessions," he said.

"I'm afraid I must ask you to empty your pockets and make sure," observed the colonel, gruffly.

"I have no pockets," said the stranger.

Mr. Twyford was looking at the long black gown with a learned eye.

"Are you a monk?" he asked, in a puzzled fashion.

"I am a magus," replied the stranger. "You have heard of the magi, perhaps? I am a magician."

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Summers Minor, with prominent eyes.

"But I was once a monk," went on the other. "I am what you would call an escaped monk. Yes, I have escaped into eternity. But the monks held one truth at least, that the highest life should be without possessions. I have no pocket money and no pockets, and all the stars are my trinkets."

"They are out of reach, anyhow," observed Colonel Morris, in a tone which suggested that it was well for them. "I've known a good many magicians myself in India — mango plant and all. But the Indian ones are all frauds, I'll swear. In fact, I had a good deal of fun showing them up. More fun than I have over this dreary job, anyhow. But here comes Mr. Symon, who will show you over the old cellar downstairs."

Mr. Symon, the official guardian and guide, was a young man, prematurely gray, with a grave mouth which contrasted curiously with a very small, dark mustache with waxed points, that seemed somehow, separate from it, as if a black fly had settled on his face. He spoke with the accent of Oxford and the permanent official, but in as dead a fashion as the most indifferent hired guide. They descended a dark stone staircase, at the floor of which Symon pressed a button and a door opened on a dark room, or, rather, a room which had an instant before been dark. For almost as the heavy iron door swung open an almost blinding blaze of electric lights filled the whole interior. The fitful enthusiasm of Stinks at once caught fire, and he eagerly asked if the lights and the door worked together.

"Yes, it's all one system," replied Symon. "It was all fitted up for the day His Royal Highness deposited the thing here. You see, it's locked up behind a glass case exactly as he left it."

A glance showed that the arrangements for guarding the treasure were indeed as strong as they were simple. A single pane of glass cut off one corner of the room, in an iron framework let into the rock walls and the wooden roof above; there was now no possibility of reopening the case without elaborate labor, except by breaking the glass, which would probably arouse the night watchman who was always within a few feet of it, even if he had fallen asleep. A close examination would have showed many more ingenious safeguards; but the eye of the Rev. Thomas Twyford, at least, was already riveted on what interested him much more — the dull silver disk which shone in the white light against a plain background of black velvet.

"St. Paul's Penny, said to commemorate the visit of St. Paul to Britain, was probably preserved in this chapel until the eighth century," Symon was saying in his clear but colorless voice. "In the ninth century it is supposed to have been carried away by the barbarians, and it reappears, after the conversion of the northern Goths, in the possession of the royal family of Gothland. His Royal Highness, the Duke of Gothland, retained it always in his own private custody, and when he decided to exhibit it to the public, placed it here with his own hand. It was immediately sealed up in such a manner—"

Unluckily at this point Summers Minor, whose attention had somewhat strayed from the religious wars of the ninth century, caught sight of a short length of wire appearing in a broken patch in the wall. He precipitated himself at it, calling out, "I say, say, does that connect?"

It was evident that it did connect, for no sooner had the boy given it a twitch than the whole room went black, as if they had all been struck blind, and an instant afterward they heard the dull crash of the closing door.

"Well, you've done it now," said Symon, in his tranquil fashion. Then after a pause he added, "I suppose they'll miss us sooner or later, and no doubt they can get it open; but it may take some little time."

There was a silence, and then the unconquerable Stinks observed:

"Rotten that I had to leave my electric torch."

"I think," said his uncle, with restraint, "that we are sufficiently convinced of your interest in electricity."

Then after a pause he remarked, more amiably: “I suppose if I regretted any of my own impedimenta, it would be the pipe. Though, as a matter of fact, it’s not much fun smoking in the dark. Everything seems different in the dark.”

“Everything is different in the dark,” said a third voice, that of the man who called himself a magician. It was a very musical voice, and rather in contrast with his sinister and swarthy visage, which was now invisible. “Perhaps you don’t know how terrible a truth that is. All you see are pictures made by the sun, faces and furniture and flowers and trees. The things themselves may be quite strange to you. Something else may be standing now where you saw a table or a chair. The face of your friend may be quite different in the dark.”

A short, indescribable noise broke the stillness. Twyford started for a second, and then said, sharply:

“Really, I don’t think it’s a suitable occasion for trying to frighten a child.”

“Who’s a child?” cried the indignant Summers, with a voice that had a crow, but also something of a crack in it. “And who’s a funk, either? Not me.”

“I will be silent, then,” said the other voice out of the darkness. “But silence also makes and unmakes.”

The required silence remained unbroken for a long time until at last the clergyman said to Symon in a low voice:

“I suppose it’s all right about air?”

“Oh, yes,” replied the other aloud; “there’s a fireplace and a chimney in the office just by the door.”

A bound and the noise of a falling chair told them that the irrepressible rising generation had once more thrown itself across the room. They heard the ejaculation: “A chimney! Why, I’ll be—” and the rest was lost in muffled, but exultant, cries.

The uncle called repeatedly and vainly, groped his way at last to the opening, and, peering up it, caught a glimpse of a disk of daylight, which seemed to suggest that the fugitive had vanished in safety. Making his way back to the group by the glass case, he fell over the fallen chair and took a moment to collect himself again. He had opened his mouth to speak to Symon, when he stopped, and suddenly found himself blinking in the full shock of the white light, and looking over the other man’s shoulder, he saw that the door was standing open.

“So they’ve got at us at last,” he observed to Symon.

The man in the black robe was leaning against the wall some yards away, with a smile carved on his face.

“Here comes Colonel Morris,” went on Twyford, still speaking to Symon. “One of us will have to tell him how the light went out. Will you?”

But Symon still said nothing. He was standing as still as a statue, and looking steadily at the black velvet behind the glass screen. He was looking at the black velvet because there was nothing else to look at. St. Paul’s Penny was gone.

Colonel Morris entered the room with two new visitors; presumably two new sightseers delayed by the accident. The foremost was a tall, fair, rather languid-looking man with a bald brow and a high-bridged nose; his companion was a younger man with light, curly hair and frank, and even innocent, eyes. Symon scarcely seemed to hear the newcomers; it seemed almost as if he had not realized that the return of the light revealed his brooding attitude. Then he started in a guilty fashion, and when he saw the elder of the two strangers, his pale face seemed to turn a shade paler.

“Why it’s Horne Fisher!” and then after a pause he said in a low voice, “I’m in the devil of a hole, Fisher.”

“There does seem a bit of a mystery to be cleared up,” observed the gentleman so addressed.

“It will never be cleared up,” said the pale Symon. “If anybody could clear it up, you could. But nobody could.”

“I rather think I could,” said another voice from outside the group, and they turned in surprise to realize that the man in the black robe had spoken again.

“You!” said the colonel, sharply. “And how do you propose to play the detective?”

“I do not propose to play the detective,” answered the other, in a clear voice like a bell. “I propose to play the magician. One of the magicians you show up in India, Colonel.”

No one spoke for a moment, and then Horne Fisher surprised everybody by saying, “Well, let’s go upstairs, and this gentleman can have a try.”

He stopped Symon, who had an automatic finger on the button, saying: “No, leave all the lights on. It’s a sort of safeguard.”

“The thing can’t be taken away now,” said Symon, bitterly.

“It can be put back,” replied Fisher.

Twyford had already run upstairs for news of his vanishing nephew, and he received news of him in a way that at once puzzled and reassured him. On the floor above lay one of those large paper darts which boys throw at each other when the schoolmaster is out of the room. It had evidently been thrown in at the window, and on being unfolded displayed a scrawl of bad handwriting which ran: “Dear Uncle; I am all right. Meet you at the hotel later on,” and then the signature.

Insensibly comforted by this, the clergyman found his thoughts reverting voluntarily to his favorite relic, which came a good second in his sympathies to his favorite nephew, and before he knew where he was he found himself encircled by the group discussing its loss, and more or less carried away on the current of their excitement. But an undercurrent of query continued to run in his mind, as to what had really happened to the boy, and what was the boy’s exact definition of being all right.

Meanwhile Horne Fisher had considerably puzzled everybody with his new tone and attitude. He had talked to the colonel about the military and mechanical arrangements, and displayed a remarkable knowledge both of the details of discipline and the technicalities of electricity. He had talked to the clergyman, and shown an equally surprising knowledge of the religious and historical interests involved in the relic. He had talked to the man who called himself a magician, and not only surprised but scandalized the company by an equally sympathetic familiarity with the most fantastic forms of Oriental occultism and psychic experiment. And in this last and least respectable line of inquiry he was evidently prepared to go farthest; he openly encouraged the magician, and was plainly prepared to follow the wildest ways of investigation in which that magus might lead him.

“How would you begin now?” he inquired, with an anxious politeness that reduced the colonel to a congestion of rage.

“It is all a question of a force; of establishing communications for a force,” replied that adept, affably, ignoring some military mutterings about the police force. “It is what you in the West used to call animal magnetism, but it is much more than that. I had better not say how much more. As to setting about it, the usual method is to throw some susceptible person into a trance, which serves as a sort of bridge or cord of communication, by which the force beyond can give him, as it were, an electric shock, and awaken his higher senses. It opens the sleeping eye of the mind."

"I'm suspectible," said Fisher, either with simplicity or with a baffling irony. "Why not open my mind's eye for me? My friend Harold March here will tell you I sometimes see things, even in the dark."

"Nobody sees anything except in the dark," said the magician.

Heavy clouds of sunset were closing round the wooden hut, enormous clouds, of which only the corners could be seen in the little window, like purple horns and tails, almost as if some huge monsters were prowling round the place. But the purple was already deepening to dark gray; it would soon be night.

"Do not light the lamp," said the magus with quiet authority, arresting a movement in that direction. "I told you before that things happen only in the dark."

How such a topsy-turvy scene ever came to be tolerated in the colonel's office, of all places, was afterward a puzzle in the memory of many, including the colonel. They recalled it like a sort of nightmare, like something they could not control. Perhaps there was really a magnetism about the mesmerist; perhaps there was even more magnetism about the man mesmerized. Anyhow, the man was being mesmerized, for Horne Fisher had collapsed into a chair with his long limbs loose and sprawling and his eyes staring at vacancy; and the other man was mesmerizing him, making sweeping movements with his darkly draped arms as if with black wings. The colonel had passed the point of explosion, and he dimly realized that eccentric aristocrats are allowed their fling. He comforted himself with the knowledge that he had already sent for the police, who would break up any such masquerade, and with lighting a cigar, the red end of which, in the gathering darkness, glowed with protest.

"Yes, I see pockets," the man in the trance was saying. "I see many pockets, but they are all empty. No; I see one pocket that is not empty."

There was a faint stir in the stillness, and the magician said, "Can you see what is in the pocket?"

"Yes," answered the other; "there are two bright things. I think they are two bits of steel. One of the pieces of steel is bent or crooked."

"Have they been used in the removal of the relic from downstairs?"

"Yes."

There was another pause and the inquirer added, “Do you see anything of the relic itself?”

“I see something shining on the floor, like the shadow or the ghost of it. It is over there in the corner beyond the desk.”

There was a movement of men turning and then a sudden stillness, as of their stiffening, for over in the corner on the wooden floor there was really a round spot of pale light. It was the only spot of light in the room. The cigar had gone out.

“It points the way,” came the voice of the oracle. “The spirits are pointing the way to penitence, and urging the thief to restitution. I can see nothing more.” His voice trailed off into a silence that lasted solidly for many minutes, like the long silence below when the theft had been committed. Then it was broken by the ring of metal on the floor, and the sound of something spinning and falling like a tossed halfpenny.

“Light the lamp!” cried Fisher in a loud and even jovial voice, leaping to his feet with far less languor than usual. “I must be going now, but I should like to see it before I go. Why, I came on purpose to see it.”

The lamp was lit, and he did see it, for St. Paul’s Penny was lying on the floor at his feet.

“Oh, as for that,” explained Fisher, when he was entertaining March and Twyford at lunch about a month later, “I merely wanted to play with the magician at his own game.”

“I thought you meant to catch him in his own trap,” said Twyford. “I can’t make head or tail of anything yet, but to my mind he was always the suspect. I don’t think he was necessarily a thief in the vulgar sense. The police always seem to think that silver is stolen for the sake of silver, but a thing like that might well be stolen out of some religious mania. A runaway monk turned mystic might well want it for some mystical purpose.”

“No,” replied Fisher, “the runaway monk is not a thief. At any rate he is not the thief. And he’s not altogether a liar, either. He said one true thing at least that night.”

“And what was that?” inquired March.

“He said it was all magnetism. As a matter of fact, it was done by means of a magnet.” Then, seeing they still looked puzzled, he added, “It was that toy magnet belonging to your nephew, Mr. Twyford.”

“But I don’t understand,” objected March. “If it was done with the schoolboy’s magnet, I suppose it was done by the schoolboy.”

“Well,” replied Fisher, reflectively, “it rather depends which schoolboy.”

“What on earth do you mean?”

“The soul of a schoolboy is a curious thing,” Fisher continued, in a meditative manner. “It can survive a great many things besides climbing out of a chimney. A man can grow gray in great campaigns, and still have the soul of a schoolboy. A man can return with a great reputation from India and be put in charge of a great public treasure, and still have the soul of a schoolboy, waiting to be awakened by an accident. And it is ten times more so when to the schoolboy you add the skeptic, who is generally a sort of stunted schoolboy. You said just now that things might be done by religious mania. Have you ever heard of irreligious mania? I assure you it exists very violently, especially in men who like showing up magicians in India. But here the skeptic had the temptation of showing up a much more tremendous sham nearer home.”

A light came into Harold March’s eyes as he suddenly saw, as if afar off, the wider implication of the suggestion. But Twyford was still wrestling with one problem at a time.

“Do you really mean,” he said, “that Colonel Morris took the relic?”

“He was the only person who could use the magnet,” replied Fisher. “In fact, your obliging nephew left him a number of things he could use. He had a ball of string, and an instrument for making a hole in the wooden floor — I made a little play with that hole in the floor in my trance, by the way; with the lights left on below, it shone like a new shilling.” Twyford suddenly bounded on his chair. “But in that case,” he cried, in a new and altered voice, “why then of course — You said a piece of steel — ?”

“I said there were two pieces of steel,” said Fisher. “The bent piece of steel was the boy’s magnet. The other was the relic in the glass case.”

“But that is silver,” answered the archaeologist, in a voice now almost unrecognizable.

“Oh,” replied Fisher, soothingly, “I dare say it was painted with silver a little.”

There was a heavy silence, and at last Harold March said, “But where is the real relic?”

“Where it has been for five years,” replied Horne Fisher, “in the possession of a mad millionaire named Vandam, in Nebraska. There was a playful little photograph about him in a society paper the other day, mentioning his delusion, and saying he was always being taken in about relics."

Harold March frowned at the tablecloth; then, after an interval, he said: "I think I understand your notion of how the thing was actually done; according to that, Morris just made a hole and fished it up with a magnet at the end of a string. Such a monkey trick looks like mere madness, but I suppose he was mad, partly with the boredom of watching over what he felt was a fraud, though he couldn't prove it. Then came a chance to prove it, to himself at least, and he had what he called 'fun' with it. Yes, I think I see a lot of details now. But it's just the whole thing that knocks me. How did it all come to be like that?"

Fisher was looking at him with level lids and an immovable manner.

"Every precaution was taken," he said. "The Duke carried the relic on his own person, and locked it up in the case with his own hands."

March was silent; but Twyford stammered. "I don't understand you. You give me the creeps. Why don't you speak plainer?"

"If I spoke plainer you would understand me less," said Horne Fisher.

"All the same I should try," said March, still without lifting his head.

"Oh, very well," replied Fisher, with a sigh; "the plain truth is, of course, that it's a bad business. Everybody knows it's a bad business who knows anything about it. But it's always happening, and in one way one can hardly blame them. They get stuck on to a foreign princess that's as stiff as a Dutch doll, and they have their fling. In this case it was a pretty big fling."

The face of the Rev. Thomas Twyford certainly suggested that he was a little out of his depth in the seas of truth, but as the other went on speaking vaguely the old gentleman's features sharpened and set.

"If it were some decent morganatic affair I wouldn't say; but he must have been a fool to throw away thousands on a woman like that. At the end it was sheer blackmail; but it's something that the old ass didn't get it out of the taxpayers. He could only get it out of the Yank, and there you are."

The Rev. Thomas Twyford had risen to his feet.

"Well, I'm glad my nephew had nothing to do with it," he said. "And if that's what the world is like, I hope he will never have anything to do with it."

"I hope not," answered Horne Fisher. "No one knows so well as I do that one can have far too much to do with it."

For Summers Minor had indeed nothing to do with it; and it is part of his higher significance that he has really nothing to do with the story, or with any such stories. The boy went like a bullet through the tangle of this tale of crooked politics and crazy mockery and came out on the other side, pursuing his own unspoiled purposes. From the top of the chimney he climbed he had caught sight of a new omnibus, whose color and name he had never known, as a naturalist might see a new bird or a botanist a new flower. And he had been sufficiently enraptured in rushing after it, and riding away upon that fairy ship.

THE BOTTOMLESS WELL

In an oasis, or green island, in the red and yellow seas of sand that stretch beyond Europe toward the sunrise, there can be found a rather fantastic contrast, which is none the less typical of such a place, since international treaties have made it an outpost of the British occupation. The site is famous among archaeologists for something that is hardly a monument, but merely a hole in the ground. But it is a round shaft, like that of a well, and probably a part of some great irrigation works of remote and disputed date, perhaps more ancient than anything in that ancient land. There is a green fringe of palm and prickly pear round the black mouth of the well; but nothing of the upper masonry remains except two bulky and battered stones standing like the pillars of a gateway of nowhere, in which some of the more transcendental archaeologists, in certain moods at moonrise or sunset, think they can trace the faint lines of figures or features of more than Babylonian monstrosity; while the more rationalistic archaeologists, in the more rational hours of daylight, see nothing but two shapeless rocks. It may have been noticed, however, that all Englishmen are not archaeologists. Many of those assembled in such a place for official and military purposes have hobbies other than archaeology. And it is a solemn fact that the English in this Eastern exile have contrived to make a small golf links out of the green scrub and sand; with a comfortable clubhouse at one end of it and this primeval monument at the other. They did not actually use this archaic abyss as a bunker, because it was by tradition unfathomable, and even for practical purposes unfathomed. Any sporting projectile sent into it might be counted most literally as a lost ball. But they often sauntered round it in their interludes of talking and smoking cigarettes, and one of them had just come down from the clubhouse to find another gazing somewhat moodily into the well.

Both the Englishmen wore light clothes and white pith helmets and puggrees, but there, for the most part, their resemblance ended. And they both almost simultaneously said the same word, but they said it on two totally different notes of the voice.

“Have you heard the news?” asked the man from the club. “Splendid.”

“Splendid,” replied the man by the well. But the first man pronounced the word as a young man might say it about a woman, and the second as an old man might say it about the weather, not without sincerity, but certainly without fervor.

And in this the tone of the two men was sufficiently typical of them. The first, who was a certain Captain Boyle, was of a bold and boyish type, dark, and with a sort of native heat in his face that did not belong to the atmosphere of the East, but rather to the ardors and ambitions of the West. The other was an older man and certainly an older resident, a civilian official — Horne Fisher; and his drooping eyelids and drooping light mustache expressed all the paradox of the Englishman in the East. He was much too hot to be anything but cool.

Neither of them thought it necessary to mention what it was that was splendid. That would indeed have been superfluous conversation about something that everybody knew. The striking victory over a menacing combination of Turks and Arabs in the north, won by troops under the command of Lord Hastings, the veteran of so many striking victories, was already spread by the newspapers all over the Empire, let alone to this small garrison so near to the battlefield.

“Now, no other nation in the world could have done a thing like that,” cried Captain Boyle, emphatically.

Horne Fisher was still looking silently into the well; a moment later he answered: “We certainly have the art of unmaking mistakes. That’s where the poor old Prussians went wrong. They could only make mistakes and stick to them. There is really a certain talent in unmaking a mistake.”

“What do you mean,” asked Boyle, “what mistakes?”

“Well, everybody knows it looked like biting off more than he could chew,” replied Horne Fisher. It was a peculiarity of Mr. Fisher that he always said that everybody knew things which about one person in two million was ever allowed to hear of. “And it was certainly jolly lucky that Travers turned up so well in the nick of time. Odd how often the right thing’s been done for us by the second in command, even when a great man was first in command. Like Colborne at Waterloo.”

“It ought to add a whole province to the Empire,” observed the other.

“Well, I suppose the Zimmernes would have insisted on it as far as the canal,” observed Fisher, thoughtfully, “though everybody knows adding provinces doesn’t always pay much nowadays.”

Captain Boyle frowned in a slightly puzzled fashion. Being cloudily conscious of never having heard of the Zimmernes in his life, he could only remark, stolidly:

“Well, one can’t be a Little Englander.”

Horne Fisher smiled, and he had a pleasant smile.

“Every man out here is a Little Englander,” he said. “He wishes he were back in Little England.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, I’m afraid,” said the younger man, rather suspiciously. “One would think you didn’t really admire Hastings or — or — anything.”

“I admire him no end,” replied Fisher. “He’s by far the best man for this post; he understands the Moslems and can do anything with them. That’s why I’m all against pushing Travers against him, merely because of this last affair.”

“I really don’t understand what you’re driving at,” said the other, frankly.

“Perhaps it isn’t worth understanding,” answered Fisher, lightly, “and, anyhow, we needn’t talk politics. Do you know the Arab legend about that well?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know much about Arab legends,” said Boyle, rather stiffly.

“That’s rather a mistake,” replied Fisher, “especially from your point of view. Lord Hastings himself is an Arab legend. That is perhaps the very greatest thing he really is. If his reputation went it would weaken us all over Asia and Africa. Well, the story about that hole in the ground, that goes down nobody knows where, has always fascinated me, rather. It’s Mohammedan in form now, but I shouldn’t wonder if the tale is a long way older than Mohammed. It’s all about somebody they call the Sultan Aladdin, not our friend of the lamp, of course, but rather like him in having to do with genii or giants or something of that sort. They say he commanded the giants to build him a sort of pagoda, rising higher and higher above all the stars. The Utmost for the Highest, as the people said when they built the Tower of Babel. But the builders of the Tower of Babel were quite modest and domestic people, like mice, compared with old Aladdin. They only wanted a tower that would reach heaven — a mere trifle. He wanted a tower that would pass heaven and rise above it, and go on rising for ever and ever. And Allah cast him down to earth with a thunderbolt, which sank into the earth, boring a hole deeper and deeper, till it made a well that was without a bottom as the tower was to have been without a top. And down that inverted tower of darkness the soul of the proud Sultan is falling forever and ever."

"What a queer chap you are," said Boyle. "You talk as if a fellow could believe those fables."

"Perhaps I believe the moral and not the fable," answered Fisher. "But here comes Lady Hastings. You know her, I think."

The clubhouse on the golf links was used, of course, for many other purposes besides that of golf. It was the only social center of the garrison beside the strictly military headquarters; it had a billiard room and a bar, and even an excellent reference library for those officers who were so perverse as to take their profession seriously. Among these was the great general himself, whose head of silver and face of bronze, like that of a brazen eagle, were often to be found bent over the charts and folios of the library. The great Lord Hastings believed in science and study, as in other severe ideals of life, and had given much paternal advice on the point to young Boyle, whose appearances in that place of research were rather more intermittent. It was from one of these snatches of study that the young man had just come out through the glass doors of the library on to the golf links. But, above all, the club was so appointed as to serve the social conveniences of ladies at least as much as gentlemen, and Lady Hastings was able to play the queen in such a society almost as much as in her own ballroom. She was eminently calculated and, as some said, eminently inclined to play such a part. She was much younger than her husband, an attractive and sometimes dangerously attractive lady; and Mr. Horne Fisher looked after her a little sardonically as she swept away with the young soldier. Then his rather dreary eye strayed to the green and prickly growths round the well, growths of that curious cactus formation in which one thick leaf grows directly out of the other without stalk or twig. It gave his fanciful mind a sinister feeling of a blind growth without shape or purpose. A flower or shrub in the West grows to the blossom which is its crown, and is content. But this was as if hands could grow out of hands or legs grow out of legs in a nightmare. "Always adding a province to the Empire," he said, with a smile, and then added, more sadly, "but I doubt if I was right, after all!"

A strong but genial voice broke in on his meditations and he looked up and smiled, seeing the face of an old friend. The voice was, indeed, rather more genial than the face, which was at the first glance decidedly grim. It was a typically legal face, with angular jaws and heavy, grizzled eyebrows; and it belonged to an eminently legal character, though he was now attached in a semimilitary capacity to the police of that wild district. Cuthbert Grayne was perhaps more of a criminologist than either a lawyer or a policeman, but in his more barbarous surroundings he had proved successful in turning himself into a practical combination of all three. The discovery of a whole series of strange Oriental crimes stood to his credit. But as few people were acquainted with, or attracted to, such a hobby or branch of knowledge, his intellectual life was somewhat solitary. Among the few exceptions was Horne Fisher, who had a curious capacity for talking to almost anybody about almost anything.

"Studying botany, or is it archaeology?" inquired Grayne. "I shall never come to the end of your interests, Fisher. I should say that what you don't know isn't worth knowing."

"You are wrong," replied Fisher, with a very unusual abruptness, and even bitterness. "It's what I do know that isn't worth knowing. All the seamy side of things, all the secret reasons and rotten motives and bribery and blackmail they call politics. I needn't be so proud of having been down all these sewers that I should brag about it to the little boys in the street."

"What do you mean? What's the matter with you?" asked his friend. "I never knew you taken like this before."

"I'm ashamed of myself," replied Fisher. "I've just been throwing cold water on the enthusiasms of a boy."

"Even that explanation is hardly exhaustive," observed the criminal expert.

"Damned newspaper nonsense the enthusiasms were, of course," continued Fisher, "but I ought to know that at that age illusions can be ideals. And they're better than the reality, anyhow. But there is one very ugly responsibility about jolting a young man out of the rut of the most rotten ideal."

"And what may that be?" inquired his friend.

"It's very apt to set him off with the same energy in a much worse direction," answered Fisher; "a pretty endless sort of direction, a bottomless pit as deep as the bottomless well."

Fisher did not see his friend until a fortnight later, when he found himself in the garden at the back of the clubhouse on the opposite side from the links, a garden heavily colored and scented with sweet semitropical plants in the glow of a desert sunset. Two other men were with him, the third being the now celebrated second in command, familiar to everybody as Tom Travers, a lean, dark man, who looked older than his years, with a furrow in his brow and something morose about the very shape of his black mustache. They had just been served with black coffee by the Arab now officiating as the temporary servant of the club, though he was a figure already familiar, and even famous, as the old servant of the general. He went by the name of Said, and was notable among other Semites for that unnatural length of his yellow face and height of his narrow forehead which is sometimes seen among them, and gave an irrational impression of something sinister, in spite of his agreeable smile.

"I never feel as if I could quite trust that fellow," said Grayne, when the man had gone away. "It's very unjust, I take it, for he was certainly devoted to Hastings, and saved his life, they say. But Arabs are often like that, loyal to one man. I can't help feeling he might cut anybody else's throat, and even do it treacherously."

"Well," said Travers, with a rather sour smile, "so long as he leaves Hastings alone the world won't mind much."

There was a rather embarrassing silence, full of memories of the great battle, and then Horne Fisher said, quietly:

"The newspapers aren't the world, Tom. Don't you worry about them. Everybody in your world knows the truth well enough."

"I think we'd better not talk about the general just now," remarked Grayne, "for he's just coming out of the club."

"He's not coming here," said Fisher. "He's only seeing his wife to the car."

As he spoke, indeed, the lady came out on the steps of the club, followed by her husband, who then went swiftly in front of her to open the garden gate. As he did so she turned back and spoke for a moment to a solitary man still sitting in a cane chair in the shadow of the doorway, the only man left in the deserted club save for the three that lingered in the garden. Fisher peered for a moment into the shadow, and saw that it was Captain Boyle.

The next moment, rather to their surprise, the general reappeared and, remounting the steps, spoke a word or two to Boyle in his turn. Then he signaled to Said, who hurried up with two cups of coffee, and the two men re-entered the club, each carrying his cup in his hand. The next moment a gleam of white light in the growing darkness showed that the electric lamps had been turned on in the library beyond.

“Coffee and scientific researches,” said Travers, grimly. “All the luxuries of learning and theoretical research. Well, I must be going, for I have my work to do as well.” And he got up rather stiffly, saluted his companions, and strode away into the dusk.

“I only hope Boyle is sticking to scientific researches,” said Horne Fisher. “I’m not very comfortable about him myself. But let’s talk about something else.”

They talked about something else longer than they probably imagined, until the tropical night had come and a splendid moon painted the whole scene with silver; but before it was bright enough to see by Fisher had already noted that the lights in the library had been abruptly extinguished. He waited for the two men to come out by the garden entrance, but nobody came.

“They must have gone for a stroll on the links,” he said.

“Very possibly,” replied Grayne. “It’s going to be a beautiful night.”

A moment or two after he had spoken they heard a voice hailing them out of the shadow of the clubhouse, and were astonished to perceive Travers hurrying toward them, calling out as he came:

“I shall want your help, you fellows,” he cried. “There’s something pretty bad out on the links.”

They found themselves plunging through the club smoking room and the library beyond, in complete darkness, mental as well as material. But Horne Fisher, in spite of his affectation of indifference, was a person of a curious and almost transcendental sensibility to atmospheres, and he already felt the presence of something more than an accident. He collided with a piece of furniture in the library, and almost shuddered with the shock, for the thing moved as he could never have fancied a piece of furniture moving. It seemed to move like a living thing, yielding and yet striking back. The next moment Grayne had turned on the lights, and he saw he had only stumbled against one of the revolving bookstands that had swung round and struck him; but his involuntary recoil had revealed to him his own subconscious sense of something mysterious and monstrous. There were several of these revolving bookcases standing here and there about the library; on one of them stood the two cups of coffee, and on another a large open book. It was Budge’s book on Egyptian hieroglyphics, with colored plates of strange birds and gods, and even as he rushed past, he was conscious of something odd about the fact that this, and not any work of military science, should be open in that place at that moment. He was even conscious of the gap in the well-lined bookshelf from which it had been taken, and it seemed almost to gape at him in an ugly fashion, like a gap in the teeth of some sinister face.

A run brought them in a few minutes to the other side of the ground in front of the bottomless well, and a few yards from it, in a moonlight almost as broad as daylight, they saw what they had come to see.

The great Lord Hastings lay prone on his face, in a posture in which there was a touch of something strange and stiff, with one elbow erect above his body, the arm being doubled, and his big, bony hand clutching the rank and ragged grass. A few feet away was Boyle, almost as motionless, but supported on his hands and knees, and staring at the body. It might have been no more than shock and accident; but there was something ungainly and unnatural about the quadrupedal posture and the gaping face. It was as if his reason had fled from him. Behind, there was nothing but the clear blue southern sky, and the beginning of the desert, except for the two great broken stones in front of the well. And it was in such a light and atmosphere that men could fancy they traced in them enormous and evil faces, looking down.

Horne Fisher stooped and touched the strong hand that was still clutching the grass, and it was as cold as a stone. He knelt by the body and was busy for a moment applying other tests; then he rose again, and said, with a sort of confident despair:

“Lord Hastings is dead.”

There was a stony silence, and then Travers remarked, gruffly: “This is your department, Grayne; I will leave you to question Captain Boyle. I can make no sense of what he says.”

Boyle had pulled himself together and risen to his feet, but his face still wore an awful expression, making it like a new mask or the face of another man.

“I was looking at the well,” he said, “and when I turned he had fallen down.”

Grayne’s face was very dark. “As you say, this is my affair,” he said. “I must first ask you to help me carry him to the library and let me examine things thoroughly.”

When they had deposited the body in the library, Grayne turned to Fisher and said, in a voice that had recovered its fullness and confidence, “I am going to lock myself in and make a thorough examination first. I look to you to keep in touch with the others and make a preliminary examination of Boyle. I will talk to him later. And just telephone to headquarters for a policeman, and let him come here at once and stand by till I want him.”

Without more words the great criminal investigator went into the lighted library, shutting the door behind him, and Fisher, without replying, turned and began to talk quietly to Travers. “It is curious,” he said, “that the thing should happen just in front of that place.”

“It would certainly be very curious,” replied Travers, “if the place played any part in it.”

“I think,” replied Fisher, “that the part it didn’t play is more curious still.”

And with these apparently meaningless words he turned to the shaken Boyle and, taking his arm, began to walk him up and down in the moonlight, talking in low tones.

Dawn had begun to break abrupt and white when Cuthbert Grayne turned out the lights in the library and came out on to the links. Fisher was lounging about alone, in his listless fashion; but the police messenger for whom he had sent was standing at attention in the background.

“I sent Boyle off with Travers,” observed Fisher, carelessly; “he’ll look after him, and he’d better have some sleep, anyhow.”

“Did you get anything out of him?” asked Grayne. “Did he tell you what he and Hastings were doing?”

“Yes,” answered Fisher, “he gave me a pretty clear account, after all. He said that after Lady Hastings went off in the car the general asked him to take coffee with him in the library and look up a point about local antiquities. He himself was beginning to look for Budge’s book in one of the revolving bookstands when the general found it in one of the bookshelves on the wall. After looking at some of the plates they went out, it would seem, rather abruptly, on to the links, and walked toward the old well; and while Boyle was looking into it he heard a thud behind him, and turned round to find the general lying as we found him. He himself dropped on his knees to examine the body, and then was paralyzed with a sort of terror and could not come nearer to it or touch it. But I think very little of that; people caught in a real shock of surprise are sometimes found in the queerest postures.”

Grayne wore a grim smile of attention, and said, after a short silence:

“Well, he hasn’t told you many lies. It’s really a creditably clear and consistent account of what happened, with everything of importance left out.”

“Have you discovered anything in there?” asked Fisher.

“I have discovered everything,” answered Grayne.

Fisher maintained a somewhat gloomy silence, as the other resumed his explanation in quiet and assured tones.

“You were quite right, Fisher, when you said that young fellow was in danger of going down dark ways toward the pit. Whether or no, as you fancied, the jolt you gave to his view of the general had anything to do with it, he has not been treating the general well for some time. It’s an unpleasant business, and I don’t want to dwell on it; but it’s pretty plain that his wife was not treating him well, either. I don’t know how far it went, but it went as far as concealment, anyhow; for when Lady Hastings spoke to Boyle it was to tell him she had hidden a note in the Budge book in the library. The general overheard, or came somehow to know, and he went straight to the book and found it. He confronted Boyle with it, and they had a scene, of course. And Boyle was confronted with something else; he was confronted with an awful alternative, in which the life of one old man meant ruin and his death meant triumph and even happiness.”

“Well,” observed Fisher, at last, “I don’t blame him for not telling you the woman’s part of the story. But how do you know about the letter?”

“I found it on the general’s body,” answered Grayne, “but I found worse things than that. The body had stiffened in the way rather peculiar to poisons of a certain Asiatic sort. Then I examined the coffee cups, and I knew enough chemistry to find poison in the dregs of one of them. Now, the General went straight to the bookcase, leaving his cup of coffee on the bookstand in the middle of the room. While his back was turned, and Boyle was pretending to examine the bookstand, he was left alone with the coffee cup. The poison takes about ten minutes to act, and ten minutes’ walk would bring them to the bottomless well.”

“Yes,” remarked Fisher, “and what about the bottomless well?”

“What has the bottomless well got to do with it?” asked his friend.

"It has nothing to do with it," replied Fisher. "That is what I find utterly confounding and incredible."

"And why should that particular hole in the ground have anything to do with it?"

"It is a particular hole in your case," said Fisher. "But I won't insist on that just now. By the way, there is another thing I ought to tell you. I said I sent Boyle away in charge of Travers. It would be just as true to say I sent Travers in charge of Boyle."

"You don't mean to say you suspect Tom Travers?" cried the other.

"He was a deal bitterer against the general than Boyle ever was," observed Horne Fisher, with a curious indifference.

"Man, you're not saying what you mean," cried Grayne. "I tell you I found the poison in one of the coffee cups."

"There was always Said, of course," added Fisher, "either for hatred or hire. We agreed he was capable of almost anything."

"And we agreed he was incapable of hurting his master," retorted Grayne.

"Well, well," said Fisher, amiably, "I dare say you are right; but I should just like to have a look at the library and the coffee cups."

He passed inside, while Grayne turned to the policeman in attendance and handed him a scribbled note, to be telegraphed from headquarters. The man saluted and hurried off; and Grayne, following his friend into the library, found him beside the bookstand in the middle of the room, on which were the empty cups.

"This is where Boyle looked for Budge, or pretended to look for him, according to your account," he said.

As Fisher spoke he bent down in a half-crouching attitude, to look at the volumes in the low, revolving shelf, for the whole bookstand was not much higher than an ordinary table. The next moment he sprang up as if he had been stung.

"Oh, my God!" he cried.

Very few people, if any, had ever seen Mr. Horne Fisher behave as he behaved just then. He flashed a glance at the door, saw that the open window was nearer, went out of it with a flying leap, as if over a hurdle, and went racing across the turf, in the track of the disappearing policeman. Grayne, who stood staring after him, soon saw his tall, loose figure, returning, restored to all its normal limpness and air of leisure. He was fanning himself slowly with a piece of paper, the telegram he had so violently intercepted.

"Lucky I stopped that," he observed. "We must keep this affair as quiet as death. Hastings must die of apoplexy or heart disease."

"What on earth is the trouble?" demanded the other investigator.

"The trouble is," said Fisher, "that in a few days we should have had a very agreeable alternative — of hanging an innocent man or knocking the British Empire to hell."

"Do you mean to say," asked Grayne, "that this infernal crime is not to be punished?"

Fisher looked at him steadily.

"It is already punished," he said.

After a moment's pause he went on. "You reconstructed the crime with admirable skill, old chap, and nearly all you said was true. Two men with two coffee cups did go into the library and did put their cups on the bookstand and did go together to the well, and one of them was a murderer and had put poison in the other's cup. But it was not done while Boyle was looking at the revolving bookcase. He did look at it, though, searching for the Budge book with the note in it, but I fancy that Hastings had already moved it to the shelves on the wall. It was part of that grim game that he should find it first.

"Now, how does a man search a revolving bookcase? He does not generally hop all round it in a squatting attitude, like a frog. He simply gives it a touch and makes it revolve."

He was frowning at the floor as he spoke, and there was a light under his heavy lids that was not often seen there. The mysticism that was buried deep under all the cynicism of his experience was awake and moving in the depths. His voice took unexpected turns and inflections, almost as if two men were speaking.

"That was what Boyle did; he barely touched the thing, and it went round as easily as the world goes round. Yes, very much as the world goes round, for the hand that turned it was not his. God, who turns the wheel of all the stars, touched that wheel and brought it full circle, that His dreadful justice might return."

"I am beginning," said Grayne, slowly, "to have some hazy and horrible idea of what you mean."

“It is very simple,” said Fisher, “when Boyle straightened himself from his stooping posture, something had happened which he had not noticed, which his enemy had not noticed, which nobody had noticed. The two coffee cups had exactly changed places.”

The rocky face of Grayne seemed to have sustained a shock in silence; not a line of it altered, but his voice when it came was unexpectedly weakened.

“I see what you mean,” he said, “and, as you say, the less said about it the better. It was not the lover who tried to get rid of the husband, but — the other thing. And a tale like that about a man like that would ruin us here. Had you any guess of this at the start?”

“The bottomless well, as I told you,” answered Fisher, quietly; “that was what stumped me from the start. Not because it had anything to do with it, because it had nothing to do with it.”

He paused a moment, as if choosing an approach, and then went on: “When a man knows his enemy will be dead in ten minutes, and takes him to the edge of an unfathomable pit, he means to throw his body into it. What else should he do? A born fool would have the sense to do it, and Boyle is not a born fool. Well, why did not Boyle do it? The more I thought of it the more I suspected there was some mistake in the murder, so to speak. Somebody had taken somebody there to throw him in, and yet he was not thrown in. I had already an ugly, unformed idea of some substitution or reversal of parts; then I stooped to turn the bookstand myself, by accident, and I instantly knew everything, for I saw the two cups revolve once more, like moons in the sky.”

After a pause, Cuthbert Grayne said, “And what are we to say to the newspapers?”

“My friend, Harold March, is coming along from Cairo to-day,” said Fisher. “He is a very brilliant and successful journalist. But for all that he’s a thoroughly honorable man, so you must not tell him the truth.”

Half an hour later Fisher was again walking to and fro in front of the clubhouse, with Captain Boyle, the latter by this time with a very buffeted and bewildered air; perhaps a sadder and a wiser man.

“What about me, then?” he was saying. “Am I cleared? Am I not going to be cleared?”

“I believe and hope,” answered Fisher, “that you are not going to be suspected. But you are certainly not going to be cleared. There must be no suspicion against him, and therefore no suspicion against you. Any suspicion against him, let alone such a story against him, would knock us endways from Malta to Mandalay. He was a hero as well as a holy terror among the Moslems. Indeed, you might almost call him a Moslem hero in the English service. Of course he got on with them partly because of his own little dose of Eastern blood; he got it from his mother, the dancer from Damascus; everybody knows that."

"Oh," repeated Boyle, mechanically, staring at him with round eyes, "everybody knows that."

"I dare say there was a touch of it in his jealousy and ferocious vengeance," went on Fisher. "But, for all that, the crime would ruin us among the Arabs, all the more because it was something like a crime against hospitality. It's been hateful for you and it's pretty horrid for me. But there are some things that damned well can't be done, and while I'm alive that's one of them."

"What do you mean?" asked Boyle, glancing at him curiously. "Why should you, of all people, be so passionate about it?"

Horne Fisher looked at the young man with a baffling expression.

"I suppose," he said, "it's because I'm a Little Englander."

"I can never make out what you mean by that sort of thing," answered Boyle, doubtfully.

"Do you think England is so little as all that?" said Fisher, with a warmth in his cold voice, "that it can't hold a man across a few thousand miles. You lectured me with a lot of ideal patriotism, my young friend; but it's practical patriotism now for you and me, and with no lies to help it. You talked as if everything always went right with us all over the world, in a triumphant crescendo culminating in Hastings. I tell you everything has gone wrong with us here, except Hastings. He was the one name we had left to conjure with, and that mustn't go as well, no, by God! It's bad enough that a gang of infernal Jews should plant us here, where there's no earthly English interest to serve, and all hell beating up against us, simply because Nosey Zimmern has lent money to half the Cabinet. It's bad enough that an old pawnbroker from Bagdad should make us fight his battles; we can't fight with our right hand cut off. Our one score was Hastings and his victory, which was really somebody else's victory. Tom Travers has to suffer, and so have you."

Then, after a moment's silence, he pointed toward the bottomless well and said, in a quieter tone:

"I told you that I didn't believe in the philosophy of the Tower of Aladdin. I don't believe in the Empire growing until it reaches the sky; I don't believe in the Union Jack going up and up eternally like the Tower. But if you think I am going to let the Union Jack go down and down eternally, like the bottomless well, down into the blackness of the bottomless pit, down in defeat and derision, amid the jeers of the very Jews who have sucked us dry — no I won't, and that's flat; not if the Chancellor were blackmailed by twenty millionaires with their gutter rags, not if the Prime Minister married twenty Yankee Jewesses, not if Woodville and Carstairs had shares in twenty swindling mines. If the thing is really tottering, God help it, it mustn't be we who tip it over."

Boyle was regarding him with a bewilderment that was almost fear, and had even a touch of distaste.

"Somehow," he said, "there seems to be something rather horrid about the things you know."

"There is," replied Horne Fisher. "I am not at all pleased with my small stock of knowledge and reflection. But as it is partly responsible for your not being hanged, I don't know that you need complain of it."

And, as if a little ashamed of his first boast, he turned and strolled away toward the bottomless well.

THE FAD OF THE FISHERMAN

A thing can sometimes be too extraordinary to be remembered. If it is clean out of the course of things, and has apparently no causes and no consequences, subsequent events do not recall it, and it remains only a subconscious thing, to be stirred by some accident long after. It drifts apart like a forgotten dream; and it was in the hour of many dreams, at daybreak and very soon after the end of dark, that such a strange sight was given to a man sculling a boat down a river in the West country. The man was awake; indeed, he considered himself rather wide awake, being the political journalist, Harold March, on his way to interview various political celebrities in their country seats. But the thing he saw was so inconsequent that it might have been imaginary. It simply slipped past his mind and was lost in later and utterly different events; nor did he even recover the memory till he had long afterward discovered the meaning.

Pale mists of morning lay on the fields and the rushes along one margin of the river; along the other side ran a wall of tawny brick almost overhanging the water. He had shipped his oars and was drifting for a moment with the stream, when he turned his head and saw that the monotony of the long brick wall was broken by a bridge; rather an elegant eighteenth-century sort of bridge with little columns of white stone turning gray. There had been floods and the river still stood very high, with dwarfish trees waist deep in it, and rather a narrow arc of white dawn gleamed under the curve of the bridge.

As his own boat went under the dark archway he saw another boat coming toward him, rowed by a man as solitary as himself. His posture prevented much being seen of him, but as he neared the bridge he stood up in the boat and turned round. He was already so close to the dark entry, however, that his whole figure was black against the morning light, and March could see nothing of his face except the end of two long whiskers or mustaches that gave something sinister to the silhouette, like horns in the wrong place. Even these details March would never have noticed but for what happened in the same instant. As the man came under the low bridge he made a leap at it and hung, with his legs dangling, letting the boat float away from under him. March had a momentary vision of two black kicking legs; then of one black kicking leg; and then of nothing except the eddying stream and the long perspective of the wall. But whenever he thought of it again, long afterward, when he understood the story in which it figured, it was always fixed in that one fantastic shape — as if those wild legs were a grotesque graven ornament of the bridge itself, in the manner of a gargoyle. At the moment he merely passed, staring, down the stream. He could see no flying figure on the bridge, so it must have already fled; but he was half conscious of some faint significance in the fact that among the trees round the bridgehead opposite the wall he saw a lamp-post; and, beside the lamp-post, the broad blue back of an unconscious policeman.

Even before reaching the shrine of his political pilgrimage he had many other things to think of besides the odd incident of the bridge; for the management of a boat by a solitary man was not always easy even on such a solitary stream. And indeed it was only by an unforeseen accident that he was solitary. The boat had been purchased and the whole expedition planned in conjunction with a friend, who had at the last moment been forced to alter all his arrangements. Harold March was to have traveled with his friend Horne Fisher on that inland voyage to Willowood Place, where the Prime Minister was a guest at the moment. More and more people were hearing of Harold March, for his striking political articles were opening to him the doors of larger and larger salons; but he had never met the Prime Minister yet. Scarcely anybody among the general public had ever heard of Horne Fisher; but he had known the Prime Minister all his life. For these reasons, had the two taken the projected journey together, March might have been slightly disposed to hasten it and Fisher vaguely content to lengthen it out. For Fisher was one of those people who are born knowing the Prime Minister. The knowledge seemed to have no very exhilarant effect, and in his case bore some resemblance to being born tired. But he was distinctly annoyed to receive, just as he was doing a little light packing of fishing tackle and cigars for the journey, a telegram from Willowood asking him to come down at once by train, as the Prime Minister had to leave that night. Fisher knew that his friend the journalist could not possibly start till the next day, and he liked his friend the journalist, and had looked forward to a few days on the river. He did not particularly like or dislike the Prime Minister, but he intensely disliked the alternative of a few hours in the train. Nevertheless, he accepted Prime Ministers as he accepted railway trains — as part of a system which he, at least, was not the revolutionist sent on earth to destroy. So he telephoned to March, asking him, with many apologetic curses and faint damns, to take the boat down the river as arranged, that they might meet at Willowood by the time settled; then he went outside and hailed a taxicab to take him to the railway station. There he paused at the bookstall to add to his light luggage a number of cheap murder stories, which he read with great pleasure, and without any premonition that he was about to walk into as strange a story in real life.

A little before sunset he arrived, with his light suitcase in hand, before the gate of the long riverside gardens of Willowood Place, one of the smaller seats of Sir Isaac Hook, the master of much shipping and many newspapers. He entered by the gate giving on the road, at the opposite side to the river, but there was a mixed quality in all that watery landscape which perpetually reminded a traveler that the river was near. White gleams of water would shine suddenly like swords or spears in the green thickets. And even in the garden itself, divided into courts and curtained with hedges and high garden trees, there hung everywhere in the air the music of water. The first of the green courts which he entered appeared to be a somewhat neglected croquet lawn, in which was a solitary young man playing croquet against himself. Yet he was not an enthusiast for the game, or even for the garden; and his sallow but well-featured face looked rather sullen than otherwise. He was only one of those young men who cannot support the burden of consciousness unless they are doing something, and whose conceptions of doing something are limited to a game of some kind. He was dark and well. dressed in a light holiday fashion, and Fisher recognized him at once as a young man named James Bullen, called, for some unknown reason, Bunker. He was the nephew of Sir Isaac; but, what was much more important at the moment, he was also the private secretary of the Prime Minister.

“Hullo, Bunker!” observed Horne Fisher. “You’re the sort of man I wanted to see. Has your chief come down yet?”

“He’s only staying for dinner,” replied Bullen, with his eye on the yellow ball. “He’s got a great speech to-morrow at Birmingham and he’s going straight through to-night. He’s motoring himself there; driving the car, I mean. It’s the one thing he’s really proud of.”

“You mean you’re staying here with your uncle, like a good boy?” replied Fisher. “But what will the Chief do at Birmingham without the epigrams whispered to him by his brilliant secretary?”

“Don’t you start ragging me,” said the young man called Bunker. “I’m only too glad not to go trailing after him. He doesn’t know a thing about maps or money or hotels or anything, and I have to dance about like a courier. As for my uncle, as I’m supposed to come into the estate, it’s only decent to be here sometimes.”

“Very proper,” replied the other. “Well, I shall see you later on,” and, crossing the lawn, he passed out through a gap in the hedge.

He was walking across the lawn toward the landing stage on the river, and still felt all around him, under the dome of golden evening, an Old World savor and reverberation in that riverhaunted garden. The next square of turf which he crossed seemed at first sight quite deserted, till he saw in the twilight of trees in one corner of it a hammock and in the hammock a man, reading a newspaper and swinging one leg over the edge of the net.

Him also he hailed by name, and the man slipped to the ground and strolled forward. It seemed fated that he should feel something of the past in the accidents of that place, for the figure might well have been an early-Victorian ghost revisiting the ghosts of the croquet hoops and mallets. It was the figure of an elderly man with long whiskers that looked almost fantastic, and a quaint and careful cut of collar and cravat. Having been a fashionable dandy forty years ago, he had managed to preserve the dandyism while ignoring the fashions. A white top-hat lay beside the Morning Post in the hammock behind him. This was the Duke of Westmoreland, the relic of a family really some centuries old; and the antiquity was not heraldry but history. Nobody knew better than Fisher how rare such noblemen are in fact, and how numerous in fiction. But whether the duke owed the general respect he enjoyed to the genuineness of his pedigree or to the fact that he owned a vast amount of very valuable property was a point about which Mr. Fisher’s opinion might have been more interesting to discover.

“You were looking so comfortable,” said Fisher, “that I thought you must be one of the servants. I’m looking for somebody to take this bag of mine; I haven’t brought a man down, as I came away in a hurry.”

“Nor have I, for that matter,” replied the duke, with some pride. “I never do. If there’s one animal alive I loathe it’s a valet. I learned to dress myself at an early age and was supposed to do it decently. I may be in my second childhood, but I’ve not go so far as being dressed like a child.”

"The Prime Minister hasn't brought a valet; he's brought a secretary instead," observed Fisher. "Devilish inferior job. Didn't I hear that Harker was down here?"

"He's over there on the landing stage," replied the duke, indifferently, and resumed the study of the Morning Post.

Fisher made his way beyond the last green wall of the garden on to a sort of towing path looking on the river and a wooden island opposite. There, indeed, he saw a lean, dark figure with a stoop almost like that of a vulture, a posture well known in the law courts as that of Sir John Harker, the Attorney-General. His face was lined with headwork, for alone among the three idlers in the garden he was a man who had made his own way; and round his bald brow and hollow temples clung dull red hair, quite flat, like plates of copper.

"I haven't seen my host yet," said Horne Fisher, in a slightly more serious tone than he had used to the others, "but I suppose I shall meet him at dinner."

"You can see him now; but you can't meet him," answered Harker.

He nodded his head toward one end of the island opposite, and, looking steadily in the same direction, the other guest could see the dome of a bald head and the top of a fishing rod, both equally motionless, rising out of the tall undergrowth against the background of the stream beyond. The fisherman seemed to be seated against the stump of a tree and facing toward the other bank, so that his face could not be seen, but the shape of his head was unmistakable.

"He doesn't like to be disturbed when he's fishing," continued Harker. "It's a sort of fad of his to eat nothing but fish, and he's very proud of catching his own. Of course he's all for simplicity, like so many of these millionaires. He likes to come in saying he's worked for his daily bread like a laborer."

"Does he explain how he blows all the glass and stuffs all the upholstery," asked Fisher, "and makes all the silver forks, and grows all the grapes and peaches, and designs all the patterns on the carpets? I've always heard he was a busy man."

"I don't think he mentioned it," answered the lawyer. "What is the meaning of this social satire?"

"Well, I am a trifle tired," said Fisher, "of the Simple Life and the Strenuous Life as lived by our little set. We're all really dependent in nearly everything, and we all make a fuss about being independent in something. The Prime Minister prides himself on doing without a chauffeur, but he can't do without a factotum and Jack-of-all-trades; and poor old Bunker has to play the part of a universal genius, which God knows he was never meant for. The duke prides himself on doing without a valet, but, for all that, he must give a lot of people an infernal lot of trouble to collect such extraordinary old clothes as he wears. He must have them looked up in the British Museum or excavated out of the tombs. That white hat alone must require a sort of expedition fitted out to find it, like the North Pole. And here we have old Hook pretending to produce his own fish when he couldn't produce his own fish knives or fish forks to eat it with. He may be simple about simple things like food, but you bet he's luxurious about luxurious things, especially little things. I don't include you; you've worked too hard to enjoy playing at work."

"I sometimes think," said Harker, "that you conceal a horrid secret of being useful sometimes. Haven't you come down here to see Number One before he goes on to Birmingham?"

Horne Fisher answered, in a lower voice: "Yes; and I hope to be lucky enough to catch him before dinner. He's got to see Sir Isaac about something just afterward."

"Hullo!" exclaimed Harker. "Sir Isaac's finished his fishing. I know he prides himself on getting up at sunrise and going in at sunset."

The old man on the island had indeed risen to his feet, facing round and showing a bush of gray beard with rather small, sunken features, but fierce eyebrows and keen, choleric eyes. Carefully carrying his fishing tackle, he was already making his way back to the mainland across a bridge of flat stepping-stones a little way down the shallow stream; then he veered round, coming toward his guests and civilly saluting them. There were several fish in his basket and he was in a good temper.

"Yes," he said, acknowledging Fisher's polite expression of surprise, "I get up before anybody else in the house, I think. The early bird catches the worm."

"Unfortunately," said Harker, "it is the early fish that catches the worm."

"But the early man catches the fish," replied the old man, gruffly.

"But from what I hear, Sir Isaac, you are the late man, too," interposed Fisher. "You must do with very little sleep."

“I never had much time for sleeping,” answered Hook, “and I shall have to be the late man to-night, anyhow. The Prime Minister wants to have a talk, he tells me, and, all things considered, I think we’d better be dressing for dinner.”

Dinner passed off that evening without a word of politics and little enough but ceremonial trifles. The Prime Minister, Lord Merivale, who was a long, slim man with curly gray hair, was gravely complimentary to his host about his success as a fisherman and the skill and patience he displayed; the conversation flowed like the shallow stream through the stepping-stones.

“It wants patience to wait for them, no doubt,” said Sir Isaac, “and skill to play them, but I’m generally pretty lucky at it.”

“Does a big fish ever break the line and get away?” inquired the politician, with respectful interest.

“Not the sort of line I use,” answered Hook, with satisfaction. “I rather specialize in tackle, as a matter of fact. If he were strong enough to do that, he’d be strong enough to pull me into the river.”

“A great loss to the community,” said the Prime Minister, bowing.

Fisher had listened to all these futilities with inward impatience, waiting for his own opportunity, and when the host rose he sprang to his feet with an alertness he rarely showed. He managed to catch Lord Merivale before Sir Isaac bore him off for the final interview. He had only a few words to say, but he wanted to get them said.

He said, in a low voice as he opened the door for the Premier, “I have seen Montmirail; he says that unless we protest immediately on behalf of Denmark, Sweden will certainly seize the ports.”

Lord Merivale nodded. “I’m just going to hear what Hook has to say about it,” he said.

“I imagine,” said Fisher, with a faint smile, “that there is very little doubt what he will say about it.”

Merivale did not answer, but lounged gracefully toward the library, whither his host had already preceded him. The rest drifted toward the billiard room, Fisher merely remarking to the lawyer: “They won’t be long. We know they’re practically in agreement.”

“Hook entirely supports the Prime Minister,” assented Harker.

“Or the Prime Minister entirely supports Hook,” said Horne Fisher, and began idly to knock the balls about on the billiard table.

Horne Fisher came down next morning in a late and leisurely fashion, as was his reprehensible habit; he had evidently no appetite for catching worms. But the other guests seemed to have felt a similar indifference, and they helped themselves to breakfast from the sideboard at intervals during the hours verging upon lunch. So that it was not many hours later when the first sensation of that strange day came upon them. It came in the form of a young man with light hair and a candid expression, who came sculling down the river and disembarked at the landing stage. It was, in fact, no other than Mr. Harold March, whose journey had begun far away up the river in the earliest hours of that day. He arrived late in the afternoon, having stopped for tea in a large riverside town, and he had a pink evening paper sticking out of his pocket. He fell on the riverside garden like a quiet and well-behaved thunderbolt, but he was a thunderbolt without knowing it.

The first exchange of salutations and introductions was commonplace enough, and consisted, indeed, of the inevitable repetition of excuses for the eccentric seclusion of the host. He had gone fishing again, of course, and must not be disturbed till the appointed hour, though he sat within a stone's throw of where they stood.

"You see it's his only hobby," observed Harker, apologetically, "and, after all, it's his own house; and he's very hospitable in other ways."

"I'm rather afraid," said Fisher, in a lower voice, "that it's becoming more of a mania than a hobby. I know how it is when a man of that age begins to collect things, if it's only collecting those rotten little river fish. You remember Talbot's uncle with his toothpicks, and poor old Buzzy and the waste of cigar ashes. Hook has done a lot of big things in his time — the great deal in the Swedish timber trade and the Peace Conference at Chicago — but I doubt whether he cares now for any of those big things as he cares for those little fish."

"Oh, come, come," protested the Attorney-General. "You'll make Mr. March think he has come to call on a lunatic. Believe me, Hook only does it for fun, like any other sport, only he's of the kind that takes his fun sadly. But I bet if there were big news about timber or shipping, he would drop his fun and his fish all right."

"Well, I wonder," said Horne Fisher, looking sleepily at the island in the river.

"By the way, is there any news of anything?" asked Harker of Harold March. "I see you've got an evening paper; one of those enterprising evening papers that come out in the morning.”

“The beginning of Lord Merivale’s Birmingham speech,” replied March, handing him the paper. “It’s only a paragraph, but it seems to me rather good.”

Harker took the paper, flapped and refolded it, and looked at the “Stop Press” news. It was, as March had said, only a paragraph. But it was a paragraph that had a peculiar effect on Sir John Harker. His lowering brows lifted with a flicker and his eyes blinked, and for a moment his leathery jaw was loosened. He looked in some odd fashion like a very old man. Then, hardening his voice and handing the paper to Fisher without a tremor, he simply said:

“Well, here’s a chance for the bet. You’ve got your big news to disturb the old man’s fishing.”

Horne Fisher was looking at the paper, and over his more languid and less expressive features a change also seemed to pass. Even that little paragraph had two or three large headlines, and his eye encountered, “Sensational Warning to Sweden,” and, “We Shall Protest.”

“What the devil—” he said, and his words softened first to a whisper and then a whistle.

“We must tell old Hook at once, or he’ll never forgive us,” said Harker. “He’ll probably want to see Number One instantly, though it may be too late now. I’m going across to him at once. I bet I’ll make him forget his fish, anyhow.” And, turning his back, he made his way hurriedly along the riverside to the causeway of flat stones.

March was staring at Fisher, in amazement at the effect his pink paper had produced.

“What does it all mean?” he cried. “I always supposed we should protest in defense of the Danish ports, for their sakes and our own. What is all this botheration about Sir Isaac and the rest of you? Do you think it bad news?”

“Bad news!” repeated Fisher, with a sort of soft emphasis beyond expression.

“Is it as bad as all that?” asked his friend, at last.

“As bad as all that?” repeated Fisher. “Why of course it’s as good as it can be. It’s great news. It’s glorious news! That’s where the devil of it comes in, to knock us all silly. It’s admirable. It’s inestimable. It is also quite incredible.”

He gazed again at the gray and green colors of the island and the river, and his rather dreary eye traveled slowly round to the hedges and the lawns.

“I felt this garden was a sort of dream,” he said, “and I suppose I must be dreaming. But there is grass growing and water moving; and something impossible has happened.”

Even as he spoke the dark figure with a stoop like a vulture appeared in the gap of the hedge just above him.

“You have won your bet,” said Harker, in a harsh and almost croaking voice. “The old fool cares for nothing but fishing. He cursed me and told me he would talk no politics.”

“I thought it might be so,” said Fisher, modestly. “What are you going to do next?”

“I shall use the old idiot’s telephone, anyhow,” replied the lawyer. “I must find out exactly what has happened. I’ve got to speak for the Government myself to-morrow.” And he hurried away toward the house.

In the silence that followed, a very bewildering silence so far as March was concerned, they saw the quaint figure of the Duke of Westmoreland, with his white hat and whiskers, approaching them across the garden. Fisher instantly stepped toward him with the pink paper in his hand, and, with a few words, pointed out the apocalyptic paragraph. The duke, who had been walking slowly, stood quite still, and for some seconds he looked like a tailor’s dummy standing and staring outside some antiquated shop. Then March heard his voice, and it was high and almost hysterical:

“But he must see it; he must be made to understand. It cannot have been put to him properly.” Then, with a certain recovery of fullness and even pomposity in the voice, “I shall go and tell him myself.”

Among the queer incidents of that afternoon, March always remembered something almost comical about the clear picture of the old gentleman in his wonderful white hat carefully stepping from stone to stone across the river, like a figure crossing the traffic in Piccadilly. Then he disappeared behind the trees of the island, and March and Fisher turned to meet the Attorney-General, who was coming out of the house with a visage of grim assurance.

“Everybody is saying,” he said, “that the Prime Minister has made the greatest speech of his life. Peroration and loud and prolonged cheers. Corrupt financiers and heroic peasants. We will not desert Denmark again.”

Fisher nodded and turned away toward the towing path, where he saw the duke returning with a rather dazed expression. In answer to question, he said, in a husky and confidential voice:

“I really think our poor friend cannot be himself. He refused to listen; he — ah — suggested that I might frighten the fish.”

A keen ear might have detected a murmur from Mr. Fisher on the subject of a white hat, but Sir John Harker struck it more decisively:

“Fisher was quite right. I didn’t believe it myself, but it’s quite clear that the old fellow is fixed on this fishing notion by now. If the house caught fire behind him he would hardly move till sunset.”

Fisher had continued his stroll toward the higher embanked ground of the towing path, and he now swept a long and searching gaze, not toward the island, but toward the distant wooded heights that were the walls of the valley. An evening sky as clear as that of the previous day was settling down all over the dim landscape, but toward the west it was now red rather than gold; there was scarcely any sound but the monotonous music of the river. Then came the sound of a half-stifled exclamation from Horne Fisher, and Harold March looked up at him in wonder.

“You spoke of bad news,” said Fisher. “Well, there is really bad news now. I am afraid this is a bad business.”

“What bad news do you mean?” asked his friend, conscious of something strange and sinister in his voice.

“The sun has set,” answered Fisher.

He went on with the air of one conscious of having said something fatal. “We must get somebody to go across whom he will really listen to. He may be mad, but there’s method in his madness. There nearly always is method in madness. It’s what drives men mad, being methodical. And he never goes on sitting there after sunset, with the whole place getting dark. Where’s his nephew? I believe he’s really fond of his nephew.”

“Look!” cried March, abruptly. “Why, he’s been across already. There he is coming back.”

And, looking up the river once more, they saw, dark against the sunset reflections, the figure of James Bullen stepping hastily and rather clumsily from stone to stone. Once he slipped on a stone with a slight splash. When he rejoined the group on the bank his olive face was unnaturally pale.

The other four men had already gathered on the same spot and almost simultaneously were calling out to him, “What does he say now?”

“Nothing. He says — nothing.”

Fisher looked at the young man steadily for a moment; then he started from his immobility. and, making a motion to March to follow him, himself strode down to the river crossing. In a few moments they were on the little beaten track that ran round the wooded island, to the other side of it where the fisherman sat. Then they stood and looked at him, without a word.

Sir Isaac Hook was still sitting propped up against the stump of the tree, and that for the best of reasons. A length of his own infallible fishing line was twisted and tightened twice round his throat and then twice round the wooden prop behind him. The leading investigator ran forward and touched the fisherman’s hand, and it was as cold as a fish.

“The sun has set,” said Horne Fisher, in the same terrible tones, “and he will never see it rise again.”

Ten minutes afterward the five men, shaken by such a shock, were again together in the garden, looking at one another with white but watchful faces. The lawyer seemed the most alert of the group; he was articulate if somewhat abrupt.

“We must leave the body as it is and telephone for the police,” he said. “I think my own authority will stretch to examining the servants and the poor fellow’s papers, to see if there is anything that concerns them. Of course, none of you gentlemen must leave this place.”

Perhaps there was something in his rapid and rigorous legality that suggested the closing of a net or trap. Anyhow, young Bullen suddenly broke down, or perhaps blew up, for his voice was like an explosion in the silent garden.

“I never touched him,” he cried. “I swear I had nothing to do with it!”

“Who said you had?” demanded Harker, with a hard eye. “Why do you cry out before you’re hurt?”

“Because you all look at me like that,” cried the young man, angrily. “Do you think I don’t know you’re always talking about my damned debts and expectations?”

Rather to March’s surprise, Fisher had drawn away from this first collision, leading the duke with him to another part of the garden. When he was out of earshot of the others he said, with a curious simplicity of manner:

“Westmoreland, I am going straight to the point.”

“Well?” said the other, staring at him stolidly.

“You have a motive for killing him,” said Fisher.

The duke continued to stare, but he seemed unable to speak.

“I hope you had a motive for killing him,” continued Fisher, mildly. “You see, it’s rather a curious situation. If you have a motive for murdering, you probably didn’t murder. But if you hadn’t any motive, why, then perhaps, you did.”

“What on earth are you talking about?” demanded the duke, violently.

“It’s quite simple,” said Fisher. “When you went across he was either alive or dead. If he was alive, it might be you who killed him, or why should you have held your tongue about his death? But if he was dead, and you had a reason for killing him, you might have held your tongue for fear of being accused.” Then after a silence he added, abstractedly: “Cyprus is a beautiful place, I believe. Romantic scenery and romantic people. Very intoxicating for a young man.”

The duke suddenly clenched his hands and said, thickly, “Well, I had a motive.”

“Then you’re all right,” said Fisher, holding out his hand with an air of huge relief. “I was pretty sure you wouldn’t really do it; you had a fright when you saw it done, as was only natural. Like a bad dream come true, wasn’t it?”

While this curious conversation was passing, Harker had gone into the house, disregarding the demonstrations of the sulky nephew, and came back presently with a new air of animation and a sheaf of papers in his hand.

“I’ve telephoned for the police,” he said, stopping to speak to Fisher, “but I think I’ve done most of their work for them. I believe I’ve found out the truth. There’s a paper here—” He stopped, for Fisher was looking at him with a singular expression; and it was Fisher who spoke next:

“Are there any papers that are not there, I wonder? I mean that are not there now?” After a pause he added: “Let us have the cards on the table. When you went through his papers in such a hurry, Harker, weren’t you looking for something to — to make sure it shouldn’t be found?”

Harker did not turn a red hair on his hard head, but he looked at the other out of the corners of his eyes.

“And I suppose,” went on Fisher, smoothly, “that is why you, too, told us lies about having found Hook alive. You knew there was something to show that you might have killed him, and you didn’t dare tell us he was killed. But, believe me, it’s much better to be honest now.”

Harker’s haggard face suddenly lit up as if with infernal flames.

“Honest,” he cried, “it’s not so damned fine of you fellows to be honest. You’re all born with silver spoons in your mouths, and then you swagger about with everlasting virtue because you haven’t got other people’s spoons in your pockets. But I was born in a Pimlico lodging house and I had to make my spoon, and there’d be plenty to say I only spoiled a horn or an honest man. And if a struggling man staggers a bit over the line in his youth, in the lower parts of the law which are pretty dingy, anyhow, there’s always some old vampire to hang on to him all his life for it.”

“Guatemalan Golcondas, wasn’t it?” said Fisher, sympathetically.

Harker suddenly shuddered. Then he said, “I believe you must know everything, like God Almighty.”

“I know too much,” said Horne Fisher, “and all the wrong things.”

The other three men were drawing nearer to them, but before they came too near, Harker said, in a voice that had recovered all its firmness:

“Yes, I did destroy a paper, but I really did find a paper, too; and I believe that it clears us all.”

“Very well,” said Fisher, in a louder and more cheerful tone; “let us all have the benefit of it.”

“On the very top of Sir Isaac’s papers,” explained Harker, “there was a threatening letter from a man named Hugo. It threatens to kill our unfortunate friend very much in the way that he was actually killed. It is a wild letter, full of taunts; you can see it for yourselves; but it makes a particular point of poor Hook’s habit of fishing from the island. Above all, the man professes to be writing from a boat. And, since we alone went across to him,” and he smiled in a rather ugly fashion, “the crime must have been committed by a man passing in a boat.”

“Why, dear me!” cried the duke, with something almost amounting to animation. “Why, I remember the man called Hugo quite well! He was a sort of body servant and bodyguard of Sir Isaac. You see, Sir Isaac was in some fear of assault. He was — he was not very popular with several people. Hugo was discharged after some row or other; but I remember him well. He was a great big Hungarian fellow with great mustaches that stood out on each side of his face.”

A door opened in the darkness of Harold March’s memory, or, rather, oblivion, and showed a shining landscape, like that of a lost dream. It was rather a waterscape than a landscape, a thing of flooded meadows and low trees and the dark archway of a bridge. And for one instant he saw again the man with mustaches like dark horns leap up on to the bridge and disappear.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "Why, I met the murderer this morning!"

* * *

Horne Fisher and Harold March had their day on the river, after all, for the little group broke up when the police arrived. They declared that the coincidence of March's evidence had cleared the whole company, and clinched the case against the flying Hugo. Whether that Hungarian fugitive would ever be caught appeared to Horne Fisher to be highly doubtful; nor can it be pretended that he displayed any very demoniac detective energy in the matter as he leaned back in the boat cushions, smoking, and watching the swaying reeds slide past.

"It was a very good notion to hop up on to the bridge," he said. "An empty boat means very little; he hasn't been seen to land on either bank, and he's walked off the bridge without walking on to it, so to speak. He's got twenty-four hours' start; his mustaches will disappear, and then he will disappear. I think there is every hope of his escape."

"Hope?" repeated March, and stopped sculling for an instant.

"Yes, hope," repeated the other. "To begin with, I'm not going to be exactly consumed with Corsican revenge because somebody has killed Hook. Perhaps you may guess by this time what Hook was. A damned blood-sucking blackmailer was that simple, strenuous, self-made captain of industry. He had secrets against nearly everybody; one against poor old Westmoreland about an early marriage in Cyprus that might have put the duchess in a queer position; and one against Harker about some flutter with his client's money when he was a young solicitor. That's why they went to pieces when they found him murdered, of course. They felt as if they'd done it in a dream. But I admit I have another reason for not wanting our Hungarian friend actually hanged for the murder."

"And what is that?" asked his friend.

"Only that he didn't commit the murder," answered Fisher.

Harold March laid down the oars and let the boat drift for a moment.

"Do you know, I was half expecting something like that," he said. "It was quite irrational, but it was hanging about in the atmosphere, like thunder in the air."

"On the contrary, it's finding Hugo guilty that's irrational," replied Fisher. "Don't you see that they're condemning him for the very reason for which they acquit everybody else? Harker and Westmoreland were silent because they found him murdered, and knew there were papers that made them look like the murderers. Well, so did Hugo find him murdered, and so did Hugo know there was a paper that would make him look like the murderer. He had written it himself the day before."

"But in that case," said March, frowning, "at what sort of unearthly hour in the morning was the murder really committed? It was barely daylight when I met him at the bridge, and that's some way above the island."

"The answer is very simple," replied Fisher. "The crime was not committed in the morning. The crime was not committed on the island."

March stared at the shining water without replying, but Fisher resumed like one who had been asked a question:

"Every intelligent murder involves taking advantage of some one uncommon feature in a common situation. The feature here was the fancy of old Hook for being the first man up every morning, his fixed routine as an angler, and his annoyance at being disturbed. The murderer strangled him in his own house after dinner on the night before, carried his corpse, with all his fishing tackle, across the stream in the dead of night, tied him to the tree, and left him there under the stars. It was a dead man who sat fishing there all day. Then the murderer went back to the house, or, rather, to the garage, and went off in his motor car. The murderer drove his own motor car."

Fisher glanced at his friend's face and went on. "You look horrified, and the thing is horrible. But other things are horrible, too. If some obscure man had been hag-ridden by a blackmailer and had his family life ruined, you wouldn't think the murder of his persecutor the most inexcusable of murders. Is it any worse when a whole great nation is set free as well as a family? By this warning to Sweden we shall probably prevent war and not precipitate it, and save many thousand lives rather more valuable than the life of that viper. Oh, I'm not talking sophistry or seriously justifying the thing, but the slavery that held him and his country was a thousand times less justifiable. If I'd really been sharp I should have guessed it from his smooth, deadly smiling at dinner that night. Do you remember that silly talk about how old Isaac could always play his fish? In a pretty hellish sense he was a fisher of men."

Harold March took the oars and began to row again.

“I remember,” he said, “and about how a big fish might break the line and get away.”

THE HOLE IN THE WALL

Two men, the one an architect and the other an archaeologist, met on the steps of the great house at Prior’s Park; and their host, Lord Bulmer, in his breezy way, thought it natural to introduce them. It must be confessed that he was hazy as well as breezy, and had no very clear connection in his mind, beyond the sense that an architect and an archaeologist begin with the same series of letters. The world must remain in a reverent doubt as to whether he would, on the same principles, have presented a diplomatist to a dipsomaniac or a ratiocinator to a rat catcher. He was a big, fair, bull-necked young man, abounding in outward gestures, unconsciously flapping his gloves and flourishing his stick.

“You two ought to have something to talk about,” he said, cheerfully. “Old buildings and all that sort of thing; this is rather an old building, by the way, though I say it who shouldn’t. I must ask you to excuse me a moment; I’ve got to go and see about the cards for this Christmas romp my sister’s arranging. We hope to see you all there, of course. Juliet wants it to be a fancy-dress affair — abbots and crusaders and all that. My ancestors, I suppose, after all.”

“I trust the abbot was not an ancestor,” said the archaeological gentleman, with a smile.

“Only a sort of great-uncle, I imagine,” answered the other, laughing; then his rather rambling eye rolled round the ordered landscape in front of the house; an artificial sheet of water ornamented with an antiquated nymph in the center and surrounded by a park of tall trees now gray and black and frosty, for it was in the depth of a severe winter.

“It’s getting jolly cold,” his lordship continued. “My sister hopes we shall have some skating as well as dancing.”

“If the crusaders come in full armor,” said the other, “you must be careful not to drown your ancestors.”

“Oh, there’s no fear of that,” answered Bulmer; “this precious lake of ours is not two feet deep anywhere.” And with one of his flourishing gestures he stuck his stick into the water to demonstrate its shallowness. They could see the short end bent in the water, so that he seemed for a moment to lean his large weight on a breaking staff.

“The worst you can expect is to see an abbot sit down rather suddenly,” he added, turning away. “Well, au revoir; I’ll let you know about it later.”

The archaeologist and the architect were left on the great stone steps smiling at each other; but whatever their common interests, they presented a considerable personal contrast, and the fanciful might even have found some contradiction in each considered individually. The former, a Mr. James Haddow, came from a drowsy den in the Inns of Court, full of leather and parchment, for the law was his profession and history only his hobby; he was indeed, among other things, the solicitor and agent of the Prior’s Park estate. But he himself was far from drowsy and seemed remarkably wide awake, with shrewd and prominent blue eyes, and red hair brushed as neatly as his very neat costume. The latter, whose name was Leonard Crane, came straight from a crude and almost cockney office of builders and house agents in the neighboring suburb, sunning itself at the end of a new row of jerry-built houses with plans in very bright colors and notices in very large letters. But a serious observer, at a second glance, might have seen in his eyes something of that shining sleep that is called vision; and his yellow hair, while not affectedly long, was unaffectedly untidy. It was a manifest if melancholy truth that the architect was an artist. But the artistic temperament was far from explaining him; there was something else about him that was not definable, but which some even felt to be dangerous. Despite his dreaminess, he would sometimes surprise his friends with arts and even sports apart from his ordinary life, like memories of some previous existence. On this occasion, nevertheless, he hastened to disclaim any authority on the other man’s hobby.

“I mustn’t appear on false pretences,” he said, with a smile. “I hardly even know what an archaeologist is, except that a rather rusty remnant of Greek suggests that he is a man who studies old things.”

“Yes,” replied Haddow, grimly. “An archaeologist is a man who studies old things and finds they are new.”

Crane looked at him steadily for a moment and then smiled again.

“Dare one suggest,” he said, “that some of the things we have been talking about are among the old things that turn out not to be old?”

His companion also was silent for a moment, and the smile on his rugged face was fainter as he replied, quietly:

“The wall round the park is really old. The one gate in it is Gothic, and I cannot find any trace of destruction or restoration. But the house and the estate generally — well the romantic ideas read into these things are often rather recent romances, things almost like fashionable novels. For instance, the very name of this place, Prior's Park, makes everybody think of it as a moonlit mediaeval abbey; I dare say the spiritualists by this time have discovered the ghost of a monk there. But, according to the only authoritative study of the matter I can find, the place was simply called Prior's as any rural place is called Podger's. It was the house of a Mr. Prior, a farmhouse, probably, that stood here at some time or other and was a local landmark. Oh, there are a great many examples of the same thing, here and everywhere else. This suburb of ours used to be a village, and because some of the people slurred the name and pronounced it Holliwell, many a minor poet indulged in fancies about a Holy Well, with spells and fairies and all the rest of it, filling the suburban drawing-rooms with the Celtic twilight. Whereas anyone acquainted with the facts knows that 'Hollinwall' simply means 'the hole in the wall,' and probably referred to some quite trivial accident. That's what I mean when I say that we don't so much find old things as we find new ones."

Crane seemed to have grown somewhat inattentive to the little lecture on antiquities and novelties, and the cause of his restlessness was soon apparent, and indeed approaching. Lord Bulmer's sister, Juliet Bray, was coming slowly across the lawn, accompanied by one gentleman and followed by two others. The young architect was in the illogical condition of mind in which he preferred three to one.

The man walking with the lady was no other than the eminent Prince Borodino, who was at least as famous as a distinguished diplomatist ought to be, in the interests of what is called secret diplomacy. He had been paying a round of visits at various English country houses, and exactly what he was doing for diplomacy at Prior's Park was as much a secret as any diplomatist could desire. The obvious thing to say of his appearance was that he would have been extremely handsome if he had not been entirely bald. But, indeed, that would itself be a rather bald way of putting it. Fantastic as it sounds, it would fit the case better to say that people would have been surprised to see hair growing on him; as surprised as if they had found hair growing on the bust of a Roman emperor. His tall figure was buttoned up in a tight-waisted fashion that rather accentuated his potential bulk, and he wore a red flower in his buttonhole. Of the two men walking behind one was also bald, but in a more partial and also a more premature fashion, for his drooping mustache was still yellow, and if his eyes were somewhat heavy it was with languor and not with age. It was Horne Fisher, and he was talking as easily and idly about everything as he always did. His always did. His companion was a more striking, and even more sinister, figure, and he had the added importance of being Lord Bulmer's oldest and most intimate friend. He was generally known with a severe simplicity as Mr. Brain; but it was understood that he had been a judge and police official in India, and that he had enemies, who had represented his measures against crime as themselves almost criminal. He was a brown skeleton of a man with dark, deep, sunken eyes and a black mustache that hid the meaning of his mouth. Though he had the look of one wasted by some tropical disease, his movements were much more alert than those of his lounging companion.

"It's all settled," announced the lady, with great animation, when they came within hailing distance. "You've all got to put on masquerade things and very likely skates as well, though the prince says they don't go with it; but we don't care about that. It's freezing already, and we don't often get such a chance in England."

"Even in India we don't exactly skate all the year round," observed Mr. Brain.

"And even Italy is not primarily associated with ice," said the Italian.

"Italy is primarily associated with ices," remarked Mr. Horne Fisher. "I mean with ice cream men. Most people in this country imagine that Italy is entirely populated with ice cream men and organ grinders. There certainly are a lot of them; perhaps they're an invading army in disguise."

"How do you know they are not the secret emissaries of our diplomacy?" asked the prince, with a slightly scornful smile. "An army of organ grinders might pick up hints, and their monkeys might pick up all sort of things."

"The organs are organized in fact," said the flippant Mr. Fisher. "Well, I've known it pretty cold before now in Italy and even in India, up on the Himalayan slopes. The ice on our own little round pond will be quite cozy by comparison."

Juliet Bray was an attractive lady with dark hair and eyebrows and dancing eyes, and there was a geniality and even generosity in her rather imperious ways. In most matters she could command her brother, though that nobleman, like many other men of vague ideas, was not without a touch of the bully when he was at bay. She could certainly command her guests, even to the extent of decking out the most respectable and reluctant of them with her mediaeval masquerade. And it really seemed as if she could command the elements also, like a witch. For the weather steadily hardened and sharpened; that night the ice of the lake, glimmering in the moonlight, was like a marble floor, and they had begun to dance and skate on it before it was dark.

Prior’s Park, or, more properly, the surrounding district of Holinwall, was a country seat that had become a suburb; having once had only a dependent village at its doors, it now found outside all its doors the signals of the expansion of London. Mr. Haddow, who was engaged in historical researches both in the library and the locality, could find little assistance in the latter. He had already realized, from the documents, that Prior’s Park had originally been something like Prior’s Farm, named after some local figure, but the new social conditions were all against his tracing the story by its traditions. Had any of the real rustics remained, he would probably have found some lingering legend of Mr. Prior, however remote he might be. But the new nomadic population of clerks and artisans, constantly shifting their homes from one suburb to another, or their children from one school to another, could have no corporate continuity. They had all that forgetfulness of history that goes everywhere with the extension of education.

Nevertheless, when he came out of the library next morning and saw the wintry trees standing round the frozen pond like a black forest, he felt he might well have been far in the depths of the country. The old wall running round the park kept that inclosure itself still entirely rural and romantic, and one could easily imagine that the depths of that dark forest faded away indefinitely into distant vales and hills. The gray and black and silver of the wintry wood were all the more severe or somber as a contrast to the colored carnival groups that already stood on and around the frozen pool. For the house party had already flung themselves impatiently into fancy dress, and the lawyer, with his neat black suit and red hair, was the only modern figure among them.

“Aren’t you going to dress up?” asked Juliet, indignantly shaking at him a horned and towering blue headdress of the fourteenth century which framed her face very becomingly, fantastic as it was. “Everybody here has to be in the Middle Ages. Even Mr. Brain has put on a sort of brown dressing gown and says he’s a monk; and Mr. Fisher got hold of some old potato sacks in the kitchen and sewed them together; he’s supposed to be a monk, too. As to the prince, he’s perfectly glorious, in great crimson robes as a cardinal. He looks as if he could poison everybody. You simply must be something.”

“I will be something later in the day,” he replied. “At present I am nothing but an antiquary and an attorney. I have to see your brother presently, about some legal business and also some local investigations he asked me to make. I must look a little like a steward when I give an account of my stewardship.”

“Oh, but my brother has dressed up!” cried the girl. “Very much so. No end, if I may say so. Why he’s bearing down on you now in all his glory.”

The noble lord was indeed marching toward them in a magnificent sixteenth-century costume of purple and gold, with a gold-hilted sword and a plumed cap, and manners to match. Indeed, there was something more than his usual expansiveness of bodily action in his appearance at that moment. It almost seemed, so to speak, that the plumes on his hat had gone to his head. He flapped his great, gold-lined cloak like the wings of a fairy king in a pantomime; he even drew his sword with a flourish and waved it about as he did his walking stick. In the light of after events there seemed to be something monstrous and ominous about that exuberance, something of the spirit that is called fey. At the time it merely crossed a few people’s minds that he might possibly be drunk.

As he strode toward his sister the first figure he passed was that of Leonard Crane, clad in Lincoln green, with the horn and baldrick and sword appropriate to Robin Hood; for he was standing nearest to the lady, where, indeed, he might have been found during a disproportionate part of the time. He had displayed one of his buried talents in the matter of skating, and now that the skating was over seemed disposed to prolong the partnership. The boisterous Bulmer playfully made a pass at him with his drawn sword, going forward with the lunge in the proper fencing fashion, and making a somewhat too familiar Shakespearean quotation about a rodent and a Venetian coin.

Probably in Crane also there was a subdued excitement just then; anyhow, in one flash he had drawn his own sword and parried; and then suddenly, to the surprise of everyone, Bulmer’s weapon seemed to spring out of his hand into the air and rolled away on the ringing ice.

“Well, I never!” said the lady, as if with justifiable indignation. “You never told me you could fence, too.”

Bulmer put up his sword with an air rather bewildered than annoyed, which increased the impression of something irresponsible in his mood at the moment; then he turned rather abruptly to his lawyer, saying:

"We can settle up about the estate after dinner; I've missed nearly all the skating as it is, and I doubt if the ice will hold till to-morrow night. I think I shall get up early and have a spin by myself."

"You won't be disturbed with my company," said Horne Fisher, in his weary fashion. "If I have to begin the day with ice, in the American fashion, I prefer it in smaller quantities. But no early hours for me in December. The early bird catches the cold."

"Oh, I sha'n't die of catching a cold," answered Bulmer, and laughed.

* * *

A considerable group of the skating party had consisted of the guests staying at the house, and the rest had tailed off in twos and threes some time before most of the guests began to retire for the night. Neighbors, always invited to Prior's Park on such occasions, went back to their own houses in motors or on foot; the legal and archeological gentleman had returned to the Inns of Court by a late train, to get a paper called for during his consultation with his client; and most of the other guests were drifting and lingering at various stages on their way up to bed. Horne Fisher, as if to deprive himself of any excuse for his refusal of early rising, had been the first to retire to his room; but, sleepy as he looked, he could not sleep. He had picked up from a table the book of antiquarian topography, in which Haddow had found his first hints about the origin of the local name, and, being a man with a quiet and quaint capacity for being interested in anything, he began to read it steadily, making notes now and then of details on which his previous reading left him with a certain doubt about his present conclusions. His room was the one nearest to the lake in the center of the woods, and was therefore the quietest, and none of the last echoes of the evening's festivity could reach him. He had followed carefully the argument which established the derivation from Mr. Prior's farm and the hole in the wall, and disposed of any fashionable fancy about monks and magic wells, when he began to be conscious of a noise audible in the frozen silence of the night. It was not a particularly loud noise, but it seemed to consist of a series of thuds or heavy blows, such as might be struck on a wooden door by a man seeking to enter. They were followed by something like a faint creak or crack, as if the obstacle had either been opened or had given way. He opened his own bedroom door and listened, but as he heard talk and laughter all over the lower floors, he had no reason to fear that a summons would be neglected or the house left without protection. He went to his open window, looking out over the frozen pond and the moonlit statue in the middle of their circle of darkling woods, and listened again. But silence had returned to that silent place, and, after straining his ears for a considerable time, he could hear nothing but the solitary hoot of a distant departing train. Then he reminded himself how many nameless noises can be heard by the wakeful during the most ordinary night, and shrugging his shoulders, went wearily to bed.

He awoke suddenly and sat up in bed with his ears filled, as with thunder, with the throbbing echoes of a rending cry. He remained rigid for a moment, and then sprang out of bed, throwing on the loose gown of sacking he had worn all day. He went first to the window, which was open, but covered with a thick curtain, so that his room was still completely dark; but when he tossed the curtain aside and put his head out, he saw that a gray and silver daybreak had already appeared behind the black woods that surrounded the little lake, and that was all that he did see. Though the sound had certainly come in through the open window from this direction, the whole scene was still and empty under the morning light as under the moonlight. Then the long, rather lackadaisical hand he had laid on a window sill gripped it tighter, as if to master a tremor, and his peering blue eyes grew bleak with fear. It may seem that his emotion was exaggerated and needless, considering the effort of common sense by which he had conquered his nervousness about the noise on the previous night. But that had been a very different sort of noise. It might have been made by half a hundred things, from the chopping of wood to the breaking of bottles. There was only one thing in nature from which could come the sound that echoed through the dark house at daybreak. It was the awful articulate voice of man; and it was something worse, for he knew what man.

He knew also that it had been a shout for help. It seemed to him that he had heard the very word; but the word, short as it was, had been swallowed up, as if the man had been stifled or snatched away even as he spoke. Only the mocking reverberations of it remained even in his memory, but he had no doubt of the original voice. He had no doubt that the great bull’s voice of Francis Bray, Baron Bulmer, had been heard for the last time between the darkness and the lifting dawn.

How long he stood there he never knew, but he was startled into life by the first living thing that he saw stirring in that half-frozen landscape. Along the path beside the lake, and immediately under his window, a figure was walking slowly and softly, but with great composure — a stately figure in robes of a splendid scarlet; it was the Italian prince, still in his cardinal's costume. Most of the company had indeed lived in their costumes for the last day or two, and Fisher himself had assumed his frock of sacking as a convenient dressing gown; but there seemed, nevertheless, something unusually finished and formal, in the way of an early bird, about this magnificent red cockatoo. It was as if the early bird had been up all night.

"What is the matter?" he called, sharply, leaning out of the window, and the Italian turned up his great yellow face like a mask of brass.

"We had better discuss it downstairs," said Prince Borodino.

Fisher ran downstairs, and encountered the great, red-robed figure entering the doorway and blocking the entrance with his bulk.

"Did you hear that cry?" demanded Fisher.

"I heard a noise and I came out," answered the diplomatist, and his face was too dark in the shadow for its expression to be read.

"It was Bulmer's voice," insisted Fisher. "I'll swear it was Bulmer's voice."

"Did you know him well?" asked the other.

The question seemed irrelevant, though it was not illogical, and Fisher could only answer in a, random fashion that he knew Lord Bulmer only slightly.

"Nobody seems to have known him well," continued the Italian, in level tones. "Nobody except that man Brain. Brain is rather older than Bulmer, but I fancy they shared a good many secrets."

Fisher moved abruptly, as if waking from a momentary trance, and said, in a new and more vigorous voice, "But look here, hadn't we better get outside and see if anything has happened."

"The ice seems to be thawing," said the other, almost with indifference.

When they emerged from the house, dark stains and stars in the gray field of ice did indeed indicate that the frost was breaking up, as their host had prophesied the day before, and the very memory of yesterday brought back the mystery of to-day.

"He knew there would be a thaw," observed the prince. "He went out skating quite early on purpose. Did he call out because he landed in the water, do you think?”

Fisher looked puzzled. “Bulmer was the last man to bellow like that because he got his boots wet. And that’s all he could do here; the water would hardly come up to the calf of a man of his size. You can see the flat weeds on the floor of the lake, as if it were through a thin pane of glass. No, if Bulmer had only broken the ice he wouldn’t have said much at the moment, though possibly a good deal afterward. We should have found him stamping and damning up and down this path, and calling for clean boots.”

“Let us hope we shall find him as happily employed,” remarked the diplomatist. “In that case the voice must have come out of the wood.”

“I’ll swear it didn’t come out of the house,” said Fisher; and the two disappeared together into the twilight of wintry trees.

The plantation stood dark against the fiery colors of sunrise, a black fringe having that feathery appearance which makes trees when they are bare the very reverse of rugged. Hours and hours afterward, when the same dense, but delicate, margin was dark against the greenish colors opposite the sunset, the search thus begun at sunrise had not come to an end. By successive stages, and to slowly gathering groups of the company, it became apparent that the most extraordinary of all gaps had appeared in the party; the guests could find no trace of their host anywhere. The servants reported that his bed had been slept in and his skates and his fancy costume were gone, as if he had risen early for the purpose he had himself avowed. But from the top of the house to the bottom, from the walls round the park to the pond in the center, there was no trace of Lord Bulmer, dead or alive. Horne Fisher realized that a chilling premonition had already prevented him from expecting to find the man alive. But his bald brow was wrinkled over an entirely new and unnatural problem, in not finding the man at all.

He considered the possibility of Bulmer having gone off of his own accord, for some reason; but after fully weighing it he finally dismissed it. It was inconsistent with the unmistakable voice heard at daybreak, and with many other practical obstacles. There was only one gateway in the ancient and lofty wall round the small park; the lodge keeper kept it locked till late in the morning, and the lodge keeper had seen no one pass. Fisher was fairly sure that he had before him a mathematical problem in an inclosed space. His instinct had been from the first so attuned to the tragedy that it would have been almost a relief to him to find the corpse. He would have been grieved, but not horrified, to come on the nobleman’s body dangling from one of his own trees as from a gibbet, or floating in his own pool like a pallid weed. What horrified him was to find nothing.

He soon become conscious that he was not alone even in his most individual and isolated experiments. He often found a figure following him like his shadow, in silent and almost secret clearings in the plantation or outlying nooks and corners of the old wall. The dark-mustached mouth was as mute as the deep eyes were mobile, darting incessantly hither and thither, but it was clear that Brain of the Indian police had taken up the trail like an old hunter after a tiger. Seeing that he was the only personal friend of the vanished man, this seemed natural enough, and Fisher resolved to deal frankly with him.

"This silence is rather a social strain," he said. "May I break the ice by talking about the weather? — which, by the way, has already broken the ice. I know that breaking the ice might be a rather melancholy metaphor in this case."

"I don't think so," replied Brain, shortly. "I don't fancy the ice had much to do with it. I don't see how it could."

"What would you propose doing?" asked Fisher.

"Well, we've sent for the authorities, of course, but I hope to find something out before they come," replied the Anglo-Indian. "I can't say I have much hope from police methods in this country. Too much red tape, habeas corpus and that sort of thing. What we want is to see that nobody bolts; the nearest we could get to it would be to collect the company and count them, so to speak. Nobody's left lately, except that lawyer who was poking about for antiquities."

"Oh, he's out of it; he left last night," answered the other. "Eight hours after Bulmer's chauffeur saw his lawyer off by the train I heard Bulmer's own voice as plain as I hear yours now."

"I suppose you don't believe in spirits?" said the man from India. After a pause he added: "There's somebody else I should like to find, before we go after a fellow with an alibi in the Inner Temple. What's become of that fellow in green — the architect dressed up as a forester? I haven't seem him about."

Mr. Brain managed to secure his assembly of all the distracted company before the arrival of the police. But when he first began to comment once more on the young architect's delay in putting in an appearance, he found himself in the presence of a minor mystery, and a psychological development of an entirely unexpected kind.

Juliet Bray had confronted the catastrophe of her brother’s disappearance with a somber stoicism in which there was, perhaps, more paralysis than pain; but when the other question came to the surface she was both agitated and angry.

“We don’t want to jump to any conclusions about anybody,” Brain was saying in his staccato style. “But we should like to know a little more about Mr. Crane. Nobody seems to know much about him, or where he comes from. And it seems a sort of coincidence that yesterday he actually crossed swords with poor Bulmer, and could have stuck him, too, since he showed himself the better swordsman. Of course, that may be an accident and couldn’t possibly be called a case against anybody; but then we haven’t the means to make a real case against anybody. Till the police come we are only a pack of very amateur sleuthhounds.”

“And I think you’re a pack of snobs,” said Juliet. “Because Mr. Crane is a genius who’s made his own way, you try to suggest he’s a murderer without daring to say so. Because he wore a toy sword and happened to know how to use it, you want us to believe he used it like a bloodthirsty maniac for no reason in the world. And because he could have hit my brother and didn’t, you deduce that he did. That’s the sort of way you argue. And as for his having disappeared, you’re wrong in that as you are in everything else, for here he comes.”

And, indeed, the green figure of the fictitious Robin Hood slowly detached itself from the gray background of the trees, and came toward them as she spoke.

He approached the group slowly, but with composure; but he was decidedly pale, and the eyes of Brain and Fisher had already taken in one detail of the green-clad figure more clearly than all the rest. The horn still swung from his baldrick, but the sword was gone.

Rather to the surprise of the company, Brain did not follow up the question thus suggested; but, while retaining an air of leading the inquiry, had also an appearance of changing the subject.

“Now we’re all assembled,” he observed, quietly, “there is a question I want to ask to begin with. Did anybody here actually see Lord Bulmer this morning?”

Leonard Crane turned his pale face round the circle of faces till he came to Juliet’s; then he compressed his lips a little and said:

“Yes, I saw him.”

“Was he alive and well?” asked Brain, quickly. “How was he dressed?”

“He appeared exceedingly well,” replied Crane, with a curious intonation. “He was dressed as he was yesterday, in that purple costume copied from the portrait of his ancestor in the sixteenth century. He had his skates in his hand.”

“And his sword at his side, I suppose,” added the questioner. “Where is your own sword, Mr. Crane?”

“I threw it away.”

In the singular silence that ensued, the train of thought in many minds became involuntarily a series of colored pictures.

They had grown used to their fanciful garments looking more gay and gorgeous against the dark gray and streaky silver of the forest, so that the moving figures glowed like stained-glass saints walking. The effect had been more fitting because so many of them had idly parodied pontifical or monastic dress. But the most arresting attitude that remained in their memories had been anything but merely monastic; that of the moment when the figure in bright green and the other in vivid violet had for a moment made a silver cross of their crossing swords. Even when it was a jest it had been something of a drama; and it was a strange and sinister thought that in the gray daybreak the same figures in the same posture might have been repeated as a tragedy.

“Did you quarrel with him?” asked Brain, suddenly.

“Yes,” replied the immovable man in green. “Or he quarreled with me.”

“Why did he quarrel with you?” asked the investigator; and Leonard Crane made no reply.

Horne Fisher, curiously enough, had only given half his attention to this crucial cross-examination. His heavy-lidded eyes had languidly followed the figure of Prince Borodino, who at this stage had strolled away toward the fringe of the wood; and, after a pause, as of meditation, had disappeared into the darkness of the trees.

He was recalled from his irrelevance by the voice of Juliet Bray, which rang out with an altogether new note of decision:

“If that is the difficulty, it had best be cleared up. I am engaged to Mr. Crane, and when we told my brother he did not approve of it; that is all.”

Neither Brain nor Fisher exhibited any surprise, but the former added, quietly:

"Except, I suppose, that he and your brother went off into the wood to discuss it, where Mr. Crane mislaid his sword, not to mention his companion."

"And may I ask," inquired Crane, with a certain flicker of mockery passing over his pallid features, "what I am supposed to have done with either of them? Let us adopt the cheerful thesis that I am a murderer; it has yet to be shown that I am a magician. If I ran your unfortunate friend through the body, what did I do with the body? Did I have it carried away by seven flying dragons, or was it merely a trifling matter of turning it into a milk-white hind?"

"It is no occasion for sneering," said the Anglo-Indian judge, with abrupt authority. "It doesn't make it look better for you that you can joke about the loss."

Fisher's dreamy, and even dreary, eye was still on the edge of the wood behind, and he became conscious of masses of dark red, like a stormy sunset cloud, glowing through the gray network of the thin trees, and the prince in his cardinal's robes reemerged on to the pathway. Brain had had half a notion that the prince might have gone to look for the lost rapier. But when he reappeared he was carrying in his hand, not a sword, but an ax.

The incongruity between the masquerade and the mystery had created a curious psychological atmosphere. At first they had all felt horribly ashamed at being caught in the foolish disguises of a festival, by an event that had only too much the character of a funeral. Many of them would have already gone back and dressed in clothes that were more funereal or at least more formal. But somehow at the moment this seemed like a second masquerade, more artificial and frivolous than the first. And as they reconciled themselves to their ridiculous trappings, a curious sensation had come over some of them, notably over the more sensitive, like Crane and Fisher and Juliet, but in some degree over everybody except the practical Mr. Brain. It was almost as if they were the ghosts of their own ancestors haunting that dark wood and dismal lake, and playing some old part that they only half remembered. The movements of those colored figures seemed to mean something that had been settled long before, like a silent heraldry. Acts, attitudes, external objects, were accepted as an allegory even without the key; and they knew when a crisis had come, when they did not know what it was. And somehow they knew subconsciously that the whole tale had taken a new and terrible turn, when they saw the prince stand in the gap of the gaunt trees, in his robes of angry crimson and with his lowering face of bronze, bearing in his hand a new shape of death. They could not have named a reason, but the two swords seemed indeed to have become toy swords and the whole tale of them broken and tossed away like a toy. Borodino looked like the Old World headsman, clad in terrible red, and carrying the ax for the execution of the criminal. And the criminal was not Crane.

Mr. Brain of the Indian police was glaring at the new object, and it was a moment or two before he spoke, harshly and almost hoarsely.

“What are you doing with that?” he asked. “Seems to be a woodman’s chopper.”

“A natural association of ideas,” observed Horne Fisher. “If you meet a cat in a wood you think it’s a wildcat, though it may have just strolled from the drawing-room sofa. As a matter of fact, I happen to know that is not the woodman’s chopper. It’s the kitchen chopper, or meat ax, or something like that, that somebody has thrown away in the wood. I saw it in the kitchen myself when I was getting the potato sacks with which I reconstructed a mediaeval hermit.”

“All the same, it is not without interest,” remarked the prince, holding out the instrument to Fisher, who took it and examined it carefully. “A butcher’s cleaver that has done butcher’s work.”

“It was certainly the instrument of the crime,” assented Fisher, in a low voice.

Brain was staring at the dull blue gleam of the ax head with fierce and fascinated eyes. “I don’t understand you,” he said. “There is no — there are no marks on it.”

“It has shed no blood,” answered Fisher, “but for all that it has committed a crime. This is as near as the criminal came to the crime when he committed it.”

“What do you mean?”

“He was not there when he did it,” explained Fisher. “It’s a poor sort of murderer who can’t murder people when he isn’t there.”

“You seem to be talking merely for the sake of mystification,” said Brain. “If you have any practical advice to give you might as well make it intelligible.”

“The only practical advice I can suggest,” said Fisher, thoughtfully, “is a little research into local topography and nomenclature. They say there used to be a Mr. Prior, who had a farm in this neighborhood. I think some details about the domestic life of the late Mr. Prior would throw a light on this terrible business.”

“And you have nothing more immediate than your topography to offer,” said Brain, with a sneer, “to help me avenge my friend?”

“Well,” said Fisher, “I should find out the truth about the Hole in the Wall.”

* * *

That night, at the close of a stormy twilight and under a strong west wind that followed the breaking of the frost, Leonard Crane was wending his way in a wild rotatory walk round and round the high, continuous wall that inclosed the little wood. He was driven by a desperate idea of solving for himself the riddle that had clouded his reputation and already even threatened his liberty. The police authorities, now in charge of the inquiry, had not arrested him, but he knew well enough that if he tried to move far afield he would be instantly arrested. Horne Fisher’s fragmentary hints, though he had refused to expand them as yet, had stirred the artistic temperament of the architect to a sort of wild analysis, and he was resolved to read the hieroglyph upside down and every way until it made sense. If it was something connected with a hole in the wall he would find the hole in the wall; but, as a matter of fact, he was unable to find the faintest crack in the wall. His professional knowledge told him that the masonry was all of one workmanship and one date, and, except for the regular entrance, which threw no light on the mystery, he found nothing suggesting any sort of hiding place or means of escape. Walking a narrow path between the winding wall and the wild eastward bend and sweep of the gray and feathery trees, seeing shifting gleams of a lost sunset winking almost like lightning as the clouds of tempest scudded across the sky and mingling with the first faint blue light from a slowly strengthened moon behind him, he began to feel his head going round as his heels were going round and round the blind recurrent barrier. He had thoughts on the border of thought; fancies about a fourth dimension which was itself a hole to hide anything, of seeing everything from a new angle out of a new window in the senses; or of some mystical light and transparency, like the new rays of chemistry, in which he could see Bulmer’s body, horrible and glaring, floating in a lurid halo over the woods and the wall. He was haunted also with the hint, which somehow seemed to be equally horrifying, that it all had something to do with Mr. Prior. There seemed even to be something creepy in the fact that he was always respectfully referred to as Mr. Prior, and that it was in the domestic life of the dead farmer that he had been bidden to seek the seed of these dreadful things. As a matter of fact, he had found that no local inquiries had revealed anything at all about the Prior family.

The moonlight had broadened and brightened, the wind had driven off the clouds and itself died fitfully away, when he came round again to the artificial lake in front of the house. For some reason it looked a very artificial lake; indeed, the whole scene was like a classical landscape with a touch of Watteau; the Palladian facade of the house pale in the moon, and the same silver touching the very pagan and naked marble nymph in the middle of the pond. Rather to his surprise, he found another figure there beside the statue, sitting almost equally motionless; and the same silver pencil traced the wrinkled brow and patient face of Horne Fisher, still dressed as a hermit and apparently practicing something of the solitude of a hermit. Nevertheless, he looked up at Leonard Crane and smiled, almost as if he had expected him.

“Look here,” said Crane, planting himself in front of him, “can you tell me anything about this business?”

“I shall soon have to tell everybody everything about it,” replied Fisher, “but I’ve no objection to telling you something first. But, to begin with, will you tell me something? What really happened when you met Bulmer this morning? You did throw away your sword, but you didn’t kill him.”

“I didn’t kill him because I threw away my sword,” said the other. “I did it on purpose — or I’m not sure what might have happened.”

After a pause he went on, quietly: “The late Lord Bulmer was a very breezy gentleman, extremely breezy. He was very genial with his inferiors, and would have his lawyer and his architect staying in his house for all sorts of holidays and amusements. But there was another side to him, which they found out when they tried to be his equals. When I told him that his sister and I were engaged, something happened which I simply can’t and won’t describe. It seemed to me like some monstrous upheaval of madness. But I suppose the truth is painfully simple. There is such a thing as the coarseness of a gentleman. And it is the most horrible thing in humanity.”

"I know," said Fisher. "The Renaissance nobles of the Tudor time were like that."

"It is odd that you should say that," Crane went on. "For while we were talking there came on me a curious feeling that we were repeating some scene of the past, and that I was really some outlaw, found in the woods like Robin Hood, and that he had really stepped in all his plumes and purple out of the picture frame of the ancestral portrait. Anyhow, he was the man in possession, and he neither feared God nor regarded man. I defied him, of course, and walked away. I might really have killed him if I had not walked away."

"Yes," said Fisher, nodding, "his ancestor was in possession and he was in possession, and this is the end of the story. It all fits in."

"Fits in with what?" cried his companion, with sudden impatience. "I can't make head or tail of it. You tell me to look for the secret in the hole in the wall, but I can't find any hole in the wall."

"There isn't any," said Fisher. "That's the secret." After reflecting a moment, he added: "Unless you call it a hole in the wall of the world. Look here; I'll tell you if you like, but I'm afraid it involves an introduction. You've got to understand one of the tricks of the modern mind, a tendency that most people obey without noticing it. In the village or suburb outside there's an inn with the sign of St. George and the Dragon. Now suppose I went about telling everybody that this was only a corruption of King George and the Dragoon. Scores of people would believe it, without any inquiry, from a vague feeling that it's probable because it's prosaic. It turns something romantic and legendary into something recent and ordinary. And that somehow makes it sound rational, though it is unsupported by reason. Of course some people would have the sense to remember having seen St. George in old Italian pictures and French romances, but a good many wouldn't think about it at all. They would just swallow the skepticism because it was skepticism. Modern intelligence won't accept anything on authority. But it will accept anything without authority. That's exactly what has happened here.

"When some critic or other chose to say that Prior's Park was not a priory, but was named after some quite modern man named Prior, nobody really tested the theory at all. It never occurred to anybody repeating the story to ask if there *was* any Mr. Prior, if anybody had ever seen him or heard of him. As a matter of fact, it was a priory, and shared the fate of most priories — that is, the Tudor gentleman with the plumes simply stole it by brute force and turned it into his own private house; he did worse things, as you shall hear. But the point here is that this is how the trick works, and the trick works in the same way in the other part of the tale. The name of this district is printed Holinwall in all the best maps produced by the scholars; and they allude lightly, not without a smile, to the fact that it was pronounced Holiwell by the most ignorant and old-fashioned of the poor. But it is spelled wrong and pronounced right."

"Do you mean to say," asked Crane, quickly, "that there really was a well?"

"There is a well," said Fisher, "and the truth lies at the bottom of it."

As he spoke he stretched out his hand and pointed toward the sheet of water in front of him.

"The well is under that water somewhere," he said, "and this is not the first tragedy connected with it. The founder of this house did something which his fellow ruffians very seldom did; something that had to be hushed up even in the anarchy of the pillage of the monasteries. The well was connected with the miracles of some saint, and the last prior that guarded it was something like a saint himself; certainly he was something very like a martyr. He defied the new owner and dared him to pollute the place, till the noble, in a fury, stabbed him and flung his body into the well, whither, after four hundred years, it has been followed by an heir of the usurper, clad in the same purple and walking the world with the same pride."

"But how did it happen," demanded Crane, "that for the first time Bulmer fell in at that particular spot?"

"Because the ice was only loosened at that particular spot, by the only man who knew it," answered Horne Fisher. "It was cracked deliberately, with the kitchen chopper, at that special place; and I myself heard the hammering and did not understand it. The place had been covered with an artificial lake, if only because the whole truth had to be covered with an artificial legend. But don't you see that it is exactly what those pagan nobles would have done, to desecrate it with a sort of heathen goddess, as the Roman Emperor built a temple to Venus on the Holy Sepulchre. But the truth could still be traced out, by any scholarly man determined to trace it. And this man was determined to trace it."

"What man?" asked the other, with a shadow of the answer in his mind.

“The only man who has an alibi,” replied Fisher. “James Haddow, the antiquarian lawyer, left the night before the fatality, but he left that black star of death on the ice. He left abruptly, having previously proposed to stay; probably, I think, after an ugly scene with Bulmer, at their legal interview. As you know yourself, Bulmer could make a man feel pretty murderous, and I rather fancy the lawyer had himself irregularities to confess, and was in danger of exposure by his client. But it’s my reading of human nature that a man will cheat in his trade, but not in his hobby. Haddow may have been a dishonest lawyer, but he couldn’t help being an honest antiquary. When he got on the track of the truth about the Holy Well he had to follow it up; he was not to be bamboozled with newspaper anecdotes about Mr. Prior and a hole in the wall; he found out everything, even to the exact location of the well, and he was rewarded, if being a successful assassin can be regarded as a reward.”

“And how did you get on the track of all this hidden history?” asked the young architect.

A cloud came across the brow of Horne Fisher. “I knew only too much about it already,” he said, “and, after all, it’s shameful for me to be speaking lightly of poor Bulmer, who has paid his penalty; but the rest of us haven’t. I dare say every cigar I smoke and every liqueur I drink comes directly or indirectly from the harrying of the holy places and the persecution of the poor. After all, it needs very little poking about in the past to find that hole in the wall, that great breach in the defenses of English history. It lies just under the surface of a thin sheet of sham information and instruction, just as the black and blood-stained well lies just under that floor of shallow water and flat weeds. Oh, the ice is thin, but it bears; it is strong enough to support us when we dress up as monks and dance on it, in mockery of the dear, quaint old Middle Ages. They told me I must put on fancy dress; so I did put on fancy dress, according to my own taste and fancy. I put on the only costume I think fit for a man who has inherited the position of a gentleman, and yet has not entirely lost the feelings of one.”

In answer to a look of inquiry, he rose with a sweeping and downward gesture.

“Sackcloth,” he said; “and I would wear the ashes as well if they would stay on my bald head.”

THE TEMPLE OF SILENCE

Harold March and the few who cultivated the friendship of Horne Fisher, especially if they saw something of him in his own social setting, were conscious of a certain solitude in his very sociability. They seemed to be always meeting his relations and never meeting his family. Perhaps it would be truer to say that they saw much of his family and nothing of his home. His cousins and connections ramified like a labyrinth all over the governing class of Great Britain, and he seemed to be on good, or at least on good-humored, terms with most of them. For Horne Fisher was remarkable for a curious impersonal information and interest touching all sorts of topics, so that one could sometimes fancy that his culture, like his colorless, fair mustache and pale, drooping features, had the neutral nature of a chameleon. Anyhow, he could always get on with viceroys and Cabinet Ministers and all the great men responsible for great departments, and talk to each of them on his own subject, on the branch of study with which he was most seriously concerned. Thus he could converse with the Minister for War about silkworms, with the Minister of Education about detective stories, with the Minister of Labor about Limoges enamel, and with the Minister of Missions and Moral Progress (if that be his correct title) about the pantomime boys of the last four decades. And as the first was his first cousin, the second his second cousin, the third his brother-in-law, and the fourth his uncle by marriage, this conversational versatility certainly served in one sense to create a happy family. But March never seemed to get a glimpse of that domestic interior to which men of the middle classes are accustomed in their friendships, and which is indeed the foundation of friendship and love and everything else in any sane and stable society. He wondered whether Horne Fisher was both an orphan and an only child.

It was, therefore, with something like a start that he found that Fisher had a brother, much more prosperous and powerful than himself, though hardly, March thought, so entertaining. Sir Henry Harland Fisher, with half the alphabet after his name, was something at the Foreign Office far more tremendous than the Foreign Secretary. Apparently, it ran in the family, after all; for it seemed there was another brother, Ashton Fisher, in India, rather more tremendous than the Viceroy. Sir Henry Fisher was a heavier, but handsomer edition of his brother, with a brow equally bald, but much more smooth. He was very courteous, but a shade patronizing, not only to March, but even, as March fancied, to Horne Fisher as well. The latter gentleman, who had many intuitions about the half-formed thoughts of others, glanced at the topic himself as they came away from the great house in Berkeley Square.

“Why, don’t you know,” he observed quietly, “that I am the fool of the family?”

“It must be a clever family,” said Harold March, with a smile.

“Very gracefully expressed,” replied Fisher; “that is the best of having a literary training. Well, perhaps it is an exaggeration to say I am the fool of the family. It’s enough to say I am the failure of the family.”

“It seems queer to me that you should fail especially,” remarked the journalist. “As they say in the examinations, what did you fail in?”

“Politics,” replied his friend. “I stood for Parliament when I was quite a young man and got in by an enormous majority, with loud cheers and chairing round the town. Since then, of course, I’ve been rather under a cloud.”

“I’m afraid I don’t quite understand the ‘of course,’” answered March, laughing.

“That part of it isn’t worth understanding,” said Fisher. “But as a matter of fact, old chap, the other part of it was rather odd and interesting. Quite a detective story in its way, as well as the first lesson I had in what modern politics are made of. If you like, I’ll tell you all about it.” And the following, recast in a less allusive and conversational manner, is the story that he told.

Nobody privileged of late years to meet Sir Henry Harland Fisher would believe that he had ever been called Harry. But, indeed, he had been boyish enough when a boy, and that serenity which shone on him through life, and which now took the form of gravity, had once taken the form of gayety. His friends would have said that he was all the more ripe in his maturity for having been young in his youth. His enemies would have said that he was still light minded, but no longer light hearted. But in any case, the whole of the story Horne Fisher had to tell arose out of the accident which had made young Harry Fisher private secretary to Lord Saltoun. Hence his later connection with the Foreign Office, which had, indeed, come to him as a sort of legacy from his lordship when that great man was the power behind the throne. This is not the place to say much about Saltoun, little as was known of him and much as there was worth knowing. England has had at least three or four such secret statesmen. An aristocratic polity produces every now and then an aristocrat who is also an accident, a man of intellectual independence and insight, a Napoleon born in the purple. His vast work was mostly invisible, and very little could be got out of him in private life except a crusty and rather cynical sense of humor. But it was certainly the accident of his presence at a family dinner of the Fishers, and the unexpected opinion he expressed, which turned what might have been a dinner-table joke into a sort of small sensational novel.

Save for Lord Saltoun, it was a family party of Fishers, for the only other distinguished stranger had just departed after dinner, leaving the rest to their coffee and cigars. This had been a figure of some interest — a young Cambridge man named Eric Hughes who was the rising hope of the party of Reform, to which the Fisher family, along with their friend Saltoun, had long been at least formally attached. The personality of Hughes was substantially summed up in the fact that he talked eloquently and earnestly through the whole dinner, but left immediately after to be in time for an appointment. All his actions had something at once ambitious and conscientious; he drank no wine, but was slightly intoxicated with words. And his face and phrases were on the front page of all the newspapers just then, because he was contesting the safe seat of Sir Francis Verner in the great by-election in the west. Everybody was talking about the powerful speech against squirarchy which he had just delivered; even in the Fisher circle everybody talked about it except Horne Fisher himself who sat in a corner, lowering over the fire.

“We jolly well have to thank him for putting some new life into the old party,” Ashton Fisher was saying. “This campaign against the old squires just hits the degree of democracy there is in this county. This act for extending county council control is practically his bill; so you may say he’s in the government even before he’s in the House.”

“One’s easier than the other,” said Harry, carelessly. “I bet the squire’s a bigger pot than the county council in that county. Verner is pretty well rooted; all these rural places are what you call reactionary. Damning aristocrats won’t alter it.”

“He damns them rather well,” observed Ashton. “We never had a better meeting than the one in Barkington, which generally goes Constitutional. And when he said, ‘Sir Francis may boast of blue blood; let us show we have red blood,' and went on to talk about manhood and liberty, the room simply rose at him."

"Speaks very well," said Lord Saltoun, gruffly, making his only contribution to the conversation so far.

Then the almost equally silent Horne Fisher suddenly spoke, without taking his brooding eyes off the fire.

"What I can't understand," he said, "is why nobody is ever slanged for the real reason."

"Hullo!" remarked Harry, humorously, "you beginning to take notice?"

"Well, take Verner," continued Horne Fisher. "If we want to attack Verner, why not attack him? Why compliment him on being a romantic reactionary aristocrat? Who is Verner? Where does he come from? His name sounds old, but I never heard of it before, as the man said of the Crucifixion. Why talk about his blue blood? His blood may be gamboge yellow with green spots, for all anybody knows. All we know is that the old squire, Hawker, somehow ran through his money (and his second wife's, I suppose, for she was rich enough), and sold the estate to a man named Verner. What did he make his money in? Oil? Army contracts?"

"I don't know," said Saltoun, looking at him thoughtfully.

"First thing I ever knew you didn't know," cried the exuberant Harry.

"And there's more, besides," went on Horne Fisher, who seemed to have suddenly found his tongue. "If we want country people to vote for us, why don't we get somebody with some notion about the country? We don't talk to people in Threadneedle Street about nothing but turnips and pigsties. Why do we talk to people in Somerset about nothing but slums and socialism? Why don't we give the squire's land to the squire's tenants, instead of dragging in the county council?"

"Three acres and a cow," cried Harry, emitting what the Parliamentary reports call an ironical cheer.

"Yes," replied his brother, stubbornly. "Don't you think agricultural laborers would rather have three acres and a cow than three acres of printed forms and a committee? Why doesn't somebody start a yeoman party in politics, appealing to the old traditions of the small landowner? And why don't they attack men like Verner for what they are, which is something about as old and traditional as an American oil trust?"

"You'd better lead the yeoman party yourself," laughed Harry. "Don't you think it would be a joke, Lord Saltoun, to see my brother and his merry men, with their bows and bills, marching down to Somerset all in Lincoln green instead of Lincoln and Bennet hats?”

“No,” answered Old Saltoun, “I don’t think it would be a joke. I think it would be an exceedingly serious and sensible idea.”

“Well, I’m jiggered!” cried Harry Fisher, staring at him. “I said just now it was the first fact you didn’t know, and I should say this is the first joke you didn’t see.”

“I’ve seen a good many things in my time,” said the old man, in his rather sour fashion. “I’ve told a good many lies in my time, too, and perhaps I’ve got rather sick of them. But there are lies and lies, for all that. Gentlemen used to lie just as schoolboys lie, because they hung together and partly to help one another out. But I’m damned if I can see why we should lie for these cosmopolitan cads who only help themselves. They’re not backing us up any more; they’re simply crowding us out. If a man like your brother likes to go into Parliament as a yeoman or a gentleman or a Jacobite or an Ancient Briton, I should say it would be a jolly good thing.”

In the rather startled silence that followed Horne Fisher sprang to his feet and all his dreary manner dropped off him.

“I’m ready to do it to-morrow,” he cried. “I suppose none of you fellows would back me up.”

Then Harry Fisher showed the finer side of his impetuosity. He made a sudden movement as if to shake hands.

“You’re a sport,” he said, “and I’ll back you up, if nobody else will. But we can all back you up, can’t we? I see what Lord Saltoun means, and, of course, he’s right. He’s always right.”

“So I will go down to Somerset,” said Horne Fisher.

“Yes, it is on the way to Westminster,” said Lord Saltoun, with a smile.

And so it happened that Horne Fisher arrived some days later at the little station of a rather remote market town in the west, accompanied by a light suitcase and a lively brother. It must not be supposed, however, that the brother’s cheerful tone consisted entirely of chaff. He supported the new candidate with hope as well as hilarity; and at the back of his boisterous partnership there was an increasing sympathy and encouragement. Harry Fisher had always had an affection for his more quiet and eccentric brother, and was now coming more and more to have a respect for him. As the campaign proceeded the respect increased to ardent admiration. For Harry was still young, and could feel the sort of enthusiasm for his captain in electioneering that a schoolboy can feel for his captain in cricket.

Nor was the admiration undeserved. As the new three-cornered contest developed it became apparent to others besides his devoted kinsman that there was more in Horne Fisher than had ever met the eye. It was clear that his outbreak by the family fireside had been but the culmination of a long course of brooding and studying on the question. The talent he retained through life for studying his subject, and even somebodys else's subject, had long been concentrated on this idea of championing a new peasantry against a new plutocracy. He spoke to a crowd with eloquence and replied to an individual with humor, two political arts that seemed to come to him naturally. He certainly knew much more about rural problems than either Hughes, the Reform candidate, or Verner, the Constitutional candidate. And he probed those problems with a human curiosity, and went below the surface in a way that neither of them dreamed of doing. He soon became the voice of popular feelings that are never found in the popular press. New angles of criticism, arguments that had never before been uttered by an educated voice, tests and comparisons that had been made only in dialect by men drinking in the little local public houses, crafts half forgotten that had come down by sign of hand and tongue from remote ages when their fathers were free — all this created a curious and double excitement. It startled the well informed by being a new and fantastic idea they had never encountered. It startled the ignorant by being an old and familiar idea they never thought to have seen revived. Men saw things in a new light, and knew not even whether it was the sunset or the dawn.

Practical grievances were there to make the movement formidable. As Fisher went to and fro among the cottages and country inns, it was borne in on him without difficulty that Sir Francis Verner was a very bad landlord. Nor was the story of his acquisition of the land any more ancient and dignified than he had supposed; the story was well known in the county and in most respects was obvious enough. Hawker, the old squire, had been a loose, unsatisfactory sort of person, had been on bad terms with his first wife (who died, as some said, of neglect), and had then married a flashy South American Jewess with a fortune. But he must have worked his way through this fortune also with marvelous rapidity, for he had been compelled to sell the estate to Verner and had gone to live in South America, possibly on his wife's estates. But Fisher noticed that the laxity of the old squire was far less hated than the efficiency of the new squire. Verner's history seemed to be full of smart bargains and financial flutters that left other people short of money and temper. But though he heard a great deal about Verner, there was one thing that continually eluded him; something that nobody knew, that even Saltoun had not known. He could not find out how Verner had originally made his money.

"He must have kept it specially dark," said Horne Fisher to himself. "It must be something he's really ashamed of. Hang it all! what *is* a man ashamed of nowadays?"

And as he pondered on the possibilities they grew darker and more distorted in his mind; he thought vaguely of things remote and repulsive, strange forms of slavery or sorcery, and then of ugly things yet more unnatural but nearer home. The figure of Verner seemed to be blackened and transfigured in his imagination, and to stand against varied backgrounds and strange skies.

As he strode up a village street, brooding thus, his eyes encountered a complete contrast in the face of his other rival, the Reform candidate. Eric Hughes, with his blown blond hair and eager undergraduate face, was just getting into his motor car and saying a few final words to his agent, a sturdy, grizzled man named Gryce. Eric Hughes waved his hand in a friendly fashion; but Gryce eyed him with some hostility. Eric Hughes was a young man with genuine political enthusiasms, but he knew that political opponents are people with whom one may have to dine any day. But Mr. Gryce was a grim little local Radical, a champion of the chapel, and one of those happy people whose work is also their hobby. He turned his back as the motor car drove away, and walked briskly up the sunlit high street of the little town, whistling, with political papers sticking out of his pocket.

Fisher looked pensively after the resolute figure for a moment, and then, as if by an impulse, began to follow it. Through the busy market place, amid the baskets and barrows of market day, under the painted wooden sign of the Green Dragon, up a dark side entry, under an arch, and through a tangle of crooked cobbled streets the two threaded their way, the square, strutting figure in front and the lean, lounging figure behind him, like his shadow in the sunshine. At length they came to a brown brick house with a brass plate, on which was Mr. Gryce's name, and that individual turned and beheld his pursuer with a stare.

"Could I have a word with you, sir?" asked Horne Fisher, politely. The agent stared still more, but assented civilly, and led the other into an office littered with leaflets and hung all round with highly colored posters which linked the name of Hughes with all the higher interests of humanity.

"Mr. Horne Fisher, I believe," said Mr. Gryce. "Much honored by the call, of course. Can't pretend to congratulate you on entering the contest, I'm afraid; you won't expect that. Here we've been keeping the old flag flying for freedom and reform, and you come in and break the battle line."

For Mr. Elijah Gryce abounded in military metaphors and in denunciations of militarism. He was a square-jawed, blunt-featured man with a pugnacious cock of the eyebrow. He had been pickled in the politics of that countryside from boyhood, he knew everybody's secrets, and electioneering was the romance of his life.

"I suppose you think I'm devoured with ambition," said Horne Fisher, in his rather listless voice, "aiming at a dictatorship and all that. Well, I think I can clear myself of the charge of mere selfish ambition. I only want certain things done. I don't want to do them. I very seldom want to do anything. And I've come here to say that I'm quite willing to retire from the contest if you can convince me that we really want to do the same thing."

The agent of the Reform party looked at him with an odd and slightly puzzled expression, and before he could reply, Fisher went on in the same level tones:

"You'd hardly believe it, but I keep a conscience concealed about me; and I am in doubt about several things. For instance, we both want to turn Verner out of Parliament, but what weapon are we to use? I've heard a lot of gossip against him, but is it right to act on mere gossip? Just as I want to be fair to you, so I want to be fair to him. If some of the things I've heard are true he ought to be turned out of Parliament and every other club in London. But I don't want to turn him out of Parliament if they aren't true."

At this point the light of battle sprang into Mr. Gryce's eyes and he became voluble, not to say violent. He, at any rate, had no doubt that the stories were true; he could testify, to his own knowledge, that they were true. Verner was not only a hard landlord, but a mean landlord, a robber as well as a rackrenter; any gentleman would be justified in hounding him out. He had cheated old Wilkins out of his freehold by a trick fit for a pickpocket; he had driven old Mother Biddle to the workhouse; he had stretched the law against Long Adam, the poacher, till all the magistrates were ashamed of him.

"So if you'll serve under the old banner," concluded Mr. Gryce, more genially, "and turn out a swindling tyrant like that, I'm sure you'll never regret it."

"And if that is the truth," said Horne Fisher, "are you going to tell it?"

"What do you mean? Tell the truth?" demanded Gryce.

"I mean you are going to tell the truth as you have just told it," replied Fisher. "You are going to placard this town with the wickedness done to old Wilkins. You are going to fill the newspapers with the infamous story of Mrs. Biddle. You are going to denounce Verner from a public platform, naming him for what he did and naming the poacher he did it to. And you're going to find out by what trade this man made the money with which he bought the estate; and when you know the truth, as I said before, of course you are going to tell it. Upon those terms I come under the old flag, as you call it, and haul down my little pennon."

The agent was eying him with a curious expression, surly but not entirely unsympathetic. "Well," he said, slowly, "you have to do these things in a regular way, you know, or people don't understand. I've had a lot of experience, and I'm afraid what you say wouldn't do. People understand slanging squires in a general way, but those personalities aren't considered fair play. Looks like hitting below the belt."

"Old Wilkins hasn't got a belt, I suppose," replied Horne Fisher. "Verner can hit him anyhow, and nobody must say a word. It's evidently very important to have a belt. But apparently you have to be rather high up in society to have one. Possibly," he added, thoughtfully— "possibly the explanation of the phrase 'a belted earl,' the meaning of which has always escaped me."

"I mean those personalities won't do," returned Gryce, frowning at the table.

"And Mother Biddle and Long Adam, the poacher, are not personalities," said Fisher, "and suppose we mustn't ask how Verner made all the money that enabled him to become — a personality."

Gryce was still looking at him under lowering brows, but the singular light in his eyes had brightened. At last he said, in another and much quieter voice:

“Look here, sir. I like you, if you don’t mind my saying so. I think you are really on the side of the people and I’m sure you’re a brave man. A lot braver than you know, perhaps. We daren’t touch what you propose with a barge pole; and so far from wanting you in the old party, we’d rather you ran your own risk by yourself. But because I like you and respect your pluck, I’ll do you a good turn before we part. I don’t want you to waste time barking up the wrong tree. You talk about how the new squire got the money to buy, and the ruin of the old squire, and all the rest of it. Well, I’ll give you a hint about that, a hint about something precious few people know.”

“I am very grateful,” said Fisher, gravely. “What is it?”

“It’s in two words,” said the other. “The new squire was quite poor when he bought. The old squire was quite rich when he sold.”

Horne Fisher looked at him thoughtfully as he turned away abruptly and busied himself with the papers on his desk. Then Fisher uttered a short phrase of thanks and farewell, and went out into the street, still very thoughtful.

His reflection seemed to end in resolution, and, falling into a more rapid stride, he passed out of the little town along a road leading toward the gate of the great park, the country seat of Sir Francis Verner. A glitter of sunlight made the early winter more like a late autumn, and the dark woods were touched here and there with red and golden leaves, like the last rays of a lost sunset. From a higher part of the road he had seen the long, classical facade of the great house with its many windows, almost immediately beneath him, but when the road ran down under the wall of the estate, topped with towering trees behind, he realized that it was half a mile round to the lodge gates, After walking for a few minutes along the lane, however, he came to a place where the wall had cracked and was in process of repair. As it was, there was a great gap in the gray masonry that looked at first as black as a cavern and only showed at a second glance the twilight of the twinkling trees. There was something fascinating about that unexpected gate, like the opening of a fairy tale.

Horne Fisher had in him something of the aristocrat, which is very near to the anarchist. It was characteristic of him that he turned into this dark and irregular entry as casually as into his own front door, merely thinking that it would be a short cut to the house. He made his way through the dim wood for some distance and with some difficulty, until there began to shine through the trees a level light, in lines of silver, which he did not at first understand. The next moment he had come out into the daylight at the top of a steep bank, at the bottom of which a path ran round the rim of a large ornamental lake. The sheet of water which he had seen shimmering through the trees was of considerable extent, but was walled in on every side with woods which were not only dark, but decidedly dismal. At one end of the path was a classical statue of some nameless nymph, and at the other end it was flanked by two classical urns; but the marble was weather-stained and streaked with green and gray. A hundred other signs, smaller but more significant, told him that he had come on some outlying corner of the grounds neglected and seldom visited. In the middle of the lake was what appeared to be an island, and on the island what appeared to be meant for a classical temple, not open like a temple of the winds, but with a blank wall between its Doric pillars. We may say it only seemed like an island, because a second glance revealed a low causeway of flat stones running up to it from the shore and turning it into a peninsula. And certainly it only seemed like a temple, for nobody knew better than Horne Fisher that no god had ever dwelt in that shrine.

“That’s what makes all this classical landscape gardening so desolate,” he said to himself. “More desolate than Stonehenge or the Pyramids. We don’t believe in Egyptian mythology, but the Egyptians did; and I suppose even the Druids believed in Druidism. But the eighteenth-century gentleman who built these temples didn’t believe in Venus or Mercury any more than we do; that’s why the reflection of those pale pillars in the lake is truly only the shadow of a shade. They were men of the age of Reason; they, who filled their gardens with these stone nymphs, had less hope than any men in all history of really meeting a nymph in the forest.”

His monologue stopped abruptly with a sharp noise like a thundercrack that rolled in dreary echoes round the dismal mere. He knew at once what it was — somebody had fired off a gun. But as to the meaning of it he was momentarily staggered, and strange thoughts thronged into his mind. The next moment he laughed; for he saw lying a little way along the path below him the dead bird that the shot had brought down.

At the same moment, however, he saw something else, which interested him more. A ring of dense trees ran round the back of the island temple, framing the facade of it in dark foliage, and he could have sworn he saw a stir as of something moving among the leaves. The next moment his suspicion was confirmed, for a rather ragged figure came from under the shadow of the temple and began to move along the causeway that led to the bank. Even at that distance the figure was conspicuous by its great height and Fisher could see that the man carried a gun under his arm. There came back into his memory at once the name Long Adam, the poacher.

With a rapid sense of strategy he sometimes showed, Fisher sprang from the bank and raced round the lake to the head of the little pier of stones. If once a man reached the mainland he could easily vanish into the woods. But when Fisher began to advance along the stones toward the island, the man was cornered in a blind alley and could only back toward the temple. Putting his broad shoulders against it, he stood as if at bay; he was a comparatively young man, with fine lines in his lean face and figure and a mop of ragged red hair. The look in his eyes might well have been disquieting to anyone left alone with him on an island in the middle of a lake.

"Good morning," said Horne Fisher, pleasantly. "I thought at first you were a murderer. But it seems unlikely, somehow, that the partridge rushed between us and died for love of me, like the heroines in the romances; so I suppose you are a poacher."

"I suppose you would call me a poacher," answered the man; and his voice was something of a surprise coming from such a scarecrow; it had that hard fastidiousness to be found in those who have made a fight for their own refinement among rough surroundings. "I consider I have a perfect right to shoot game in this place. But I am well aware that people of your sort take me for a thief, and I suppose you will try to land me in jail."

"There are preliminary difficulties," replied Fisher. "To begin with, the mistake is flattering, but I am not a gamekeeper. Still less am I three gamekeepers, who would be, I imagine, about your fighting weight. But I confess I have another reason for not wanting to jail you."

"And what is that?" asked the other.

"Only that I quite agree with you," answered Fisher. "I don't exactly say you have a right to poach, but I never could see that it was as wrong as being a thief. It seems to me against the whole normal notion of property that a man should own something because it flies across his garden. He might as well own the wind, or think he could write his name on a morning cloud. Besides, if we want poor people to respect property we must give them some property to respect. You ought to have land of your own; and I'm going to give you some if I can."

"Going to give me some land!" repeated Long Adam.

"I apologize for addressing you as if you were a public meeting," said Fisher, "but I am an entirely new kind of public man who says the same thing in public and in private. I've said this to a hundred huge meetings throughout the country, and I say it to you on this queer little island in this dismal pond. I would cut up a big estate like this into small estates for everybody, even for poachers. I would do in England as they did in Ireland — buy the big men out, if possible; get them out, anyhow. A man like you ought to have a little place of his own. I don't say you could keep pheasants, but you might keep chickens."

The man stiffened suddenly and he seemed at once to blanch and flame at the promise as if it were a threat.

"Chickens!" he repeated, with a passion of contempt.

"Why do you object?" asked the placid candidate. "Because keeping hens is rather a mild amusement for a poacher? What about poaching eggs?"

"Because I am not a poacher," cried Adam, in a rending voice that rang round the hollow shrines and urns like the echoes of his gun. "Because the partridge lying dead over there is my partridge. Because the land you are standing on is my land. Because my own land was only taken from me by a crime, and a worse crime than poaching. This has been a single estate for hundreds and hundreds of years, and if you or any meddlesome mountebank comes here and talks of cutting it up like a cake, if I ever hear a word more of you and your leveling lies—"

"You seem to be a rather turbulent public," observed Horne Fisher, "but do go on. What will happen if I try to divide this estate decently among decent people?"

The poacher had recovered a grim composure as he replied. "There will be no partridge to rush in between."

With that he turned his back, evidently resolved to say no more, and walked past the temple to the extreme end of the islet, where he stood staring into the water. Fisher followed him, but, when his repeated questions evoked no answer, turned back toward the shore. In doing so he took a second and closer look at the artificial temple, and noted some curious things about it. Most of these theatrical things were as thin as theatrical scenery, and he expected the classic shrine to be a shallow thing, a mere shell or mask. But there was some substantial bulk of it behind, buried in the trees, which had a gray, labyrinthian look, like serpents of stone, and lifted a load of leafy towers to the sky. But what arrested Fisher's eye was that in this bulk of gray-white stone behind there was a single door with great, rusty bolts outside; the bolts, however, were not shot across so as to secure it. Then he walked round the small building, and found no other opening except one small grating like a ventilator, high up in the wall. He retraced his steps thoughtfully along the causeway to the banks of the lake, and sat down on the stone steps between the two sculptured funeral urns. Then he lit a cigarette and smoked it in ruminant manner; eventually he took out a notebook and wrote down various phrases, numbering and renumbering them till they stood in the following order: "(1) Squire Hawker disliked his first wife. (2) He married his second wife for her money. (3) Long Adam says the estate is really his. (4) Long Adam hangs round the island temple, which looks like a prison. (5) Squire Hawker was not poor when he gave up the estate. (6) Verner was poor when he got the estate."

He gazed at these notes with a gravity which gradually turned to a hard smile, threw away his cigarette, and resumed his search for a short cut to the great house. He soon picked up the path which, winding among clipped hedges and flower beds, brought him in front of its long Palladian facade. It had the usual appearance of being, not a private house, but a sort of public building sent into exile in the provinces.

He first found himself in the presence of the butler, who really looked much older than the building, for the architecture was dated as Georgian; but the man's face, under a highly unnatural brown wig, was wrinkled with what might have been centuries. Only his prominent eyes were alive and alert, as if with protest. Fisher glanced at him, and then stopped and said:

"Excuse me. Weren't you with the late squire, Mr. Hawker?"

'Yes, sir, said the man, gravely. "Usher is my name. What can I do for you?"

"Only take me into Sir Francis Verner," replied the visitor.

Sir Francis Verner was sitting in an easy chair beside a small table in a large room hung with tapestries. On the table were a small flask and glass, with the green glimmer of a liqueur and a cup of black coffee. He was clad in a quiet gray suit with a moderately harmonious purple tie; but Fisher saw something about the turn of his fair mustache and the lie of his flat hair — it suddenly revealed that his name was Franz Werner.

“You are Mr. Horne Fisher,” he said. “Won’t you sit down?”

“No, thank you,” replied Fisher. “I fear this is not a friendly occasion, and I shall remain standing. Possibly you know that I am already standing — standing for Parliament, in fact—”

“I am aware we are political opponents,” replied Verner, raising his eyebrows. “But I think it would be better if we fought in a sporting spirit; in a spirit of English fair play.”

“Much better,” assented Fisher. “It would be much better if you were English and very much better if you had ever played fair. But what I’ve come to say can be said very shortly. I don’t quite know how we stand with the law about that old Hawker story, but my chief object is to prevent England being entirely ruled by people like you. So whatever the law would say, I will say no more if you will retire from the election at once.”

“You are evidently a lunatic,” said Verner.

“My psychology may be a little abnormal,” replied Horne Fisher, in a rather hazy manner. “I am subject to dreams, especially day-dreams. Sometimes what is happening to me grows vivid in a curious double way, as if it had happened before. Have you ever had that mystical feeling that things have happened before?”

“I hope you are a harmless lunatic,” said Verner.

But Fisher was still staring in an absent fashion at the golden gigantic figures and traceries of brown and red in the tapestries on the walls; then he looked again at Verner and resumed: “I have a feeling that this interview has happened before, here in this tapestried room, and we are two ghosts revisiting a haunted chamber. But it was Squire Hawker who sat where you sit and it was you who stood where I stand.” He paused a moment and then added, with simplicity, “I suppose I am a blackmailer, too.”

“If you are,” said Sir Francis, “I promise you you shall go to jail.” But his face had a shade on it that looked like the reflection of the green wine gleaming on the table. Horne Fisher regarded him steadily and answered, quietly enough:

“Blackmailers do not always go to jail. Sometimes they go to Parliament. But, though Parliament is rotten enough already, you shall not go there if I can help it. I am not so criminal as you were in bargaining with crime. You made a squire give up his country seat. I only ask you to give up your Parliamentary seat.”

Sir Francis Verner sprang to his feet and looked about for one of the bell ropes of the old-fashioned, curtained room.

“Where is Usher?” he cried, with a livid face.

“And who is Usher?” said Fisher, softly. “I wonder how much Usher knows of the truth.”

Verner’s hand fell from the bell rope and, after standing for a moment with rolling eyes, he strode abruptly from the room. Fisher went but by the other door, by which he had entered, and, seeing no sign of Usher, let himself out and betook himself again toward the town.

That night he put an electric torch in his pocket and set out alone in the darkness to add the last links to his argument. There was much that he did not know yet; but he thought he knew where he could find the knowledge. The night closed dark and stormy and the black gap in the wall looked blacker than ever; the wood seemed to have grown thicker and darker in a day. If the deserted lake with its black woods and gray urns and images looked desolate even by daylight, under the night and the growing storm it seemed still more like the pool of Acheron in the land of lost souls. As he stepped carefully along the jetty stones he seemed to be traveling farther and farther into the abyss of night, and to have left behind him the last points from which it would be possible to signal to the land of the living. The lake seemed to have grown larger than a sea, but a sea of black and slimy waters that slept with abominable serenity, as if they had washed out the world. There was so much of this nightmare sense of extension and expansion that he was strangely surprised to come to his desert island so soon. But he knew it for a place of inhuman silence and solitude; and he felt as if he had been walking for years.

Nerving himself to a more normal mood, he paused under one of the dark dragon trees that branched out above him, and, taking out his torch, turned in the direction of the door at the back of the temple. It was unbolted as before, and the thought stirred faintly in him that it was slightly open, though only by a crack. The more he thought of it, however, the more certain he grew that this was but one of the common illusions of light coming from a different angle. He studied in a more scientific spirit the details of the door, with its rusty bolts and hinges, when he became conscious of something very near him — indeed, nearly above his head.

Something was dangling from the tree that was not a broken branch. For some seconds he stood as still as a stone, and as cold. What he saw above him were the legs of a man hanging, presumably a dead man hanged. But the next moment he knew better. The man was literally alive and kicking; and an instant after he had dropped to the ground and turned on the intruder. Simultaneously three or four other trees seemed to come to life in the same fashion. Five or six other figures had fallen on their feet from these unnatural nests. It was as if the place were an island of monkeys. But a moment after they had made a stampede toward him, and when they laid their hands on him he knew that they were men.

With the electric torch in his hand he struck the foremost of them so furiously in the face that the man stumbled and rolled over on the slimy grass; but the torch was broken and extinguished, leaving everything in a denser obscurity. He flung another man flat against the temple wall, so that he slid to the ground; but a third and fourth carried Fisher off his feet and began to bear him, struggling, toward the doorway. Even in the bewilderment of the battle he was conscious that the door was standing open. Somebody was summoning the roughs from inside.

The moment they were within they hurled him upon a sort of bench or bed with violence, but no damage; for the settee, or whatever it was, seemed to be comfortably cushioned for his reception. Their violence had in it a great element of haste, and before he could rise they had all rushed for the door to escape. Whatever bandits they were that infested this desert island, they were obviously uneasy about their job and very anxious to be quit of it. He had the flying fancy that regular criminals would hardly be in such a panic. The next moment the great door crashed to and he could hear the bolts shriek as they shot into their place, and the feet of the retreating men scampering and stumbling along the causeway. But rapidly as it happened, it did not happen before Fisher had done something that he wanted to to. Unable to rise from his sprawling attitude in that flash of time, he had shot out one of his long legs and hooked it round the ankle of the last man disappearing through the door. The man swayed and toppled over inside the prison chamber, and the door closed between him and his fleeing companions. Clearly they were in too much haste to realize that they had left one of their company behind.

The man sprang to his feet again and hammered and kicked furiously at the door. Fisher's sense of humor began to recover from the struggle and he sat up on his sofa with something of his native nonchalance. But as he listened to the captive captor beating on the door of the prison, a new and curious reflection came to him.

The natural course for a man thus wishing to attract his friends' attention would be to call out, to shout as well as kick. This man was making as much noise as he could with his feet and hands, but not a sound came from his throat. Why couldn't he speak? At first he thought the man might be gagged, which was manifestly absurd. Then his fancy fell back on the ugly idea that the man was dumb. He hardly knew why it was so ugly an idea, but it affected his imagination in a dark and disproportionate fashion. There seemed to be something creepy about the idea of being left in a dark room with a deaf mute. It was almost as if such a defect were a deformity. It was almost as if it went with other and worse deformities. It was as if the shape he could not trace in the darkness were some shape that should not see the sun.

Then he had a flash of sanity and also of insight. The explanation was very simple, but rather interesting. Obviously the man did not use his voice because he did not wish his voice to be recognized. He hoped to escape from that dark place before Fisher found out who he was. And who was he? One thing at least was clear. He was one or other of the four or five men with whom Fisher had already talked in these parts, and in the development of that strange story.

"Now I wonder who you are," he said, aloud, with all his old lazy urbanity. "I suppose it's no use trying to throttle you in order to find out; it would be displeasing to pass the night with a corpse. Besides I might be the corpse. I've got no matches and I've smashed my torch, so I can only speculate. Who could you be, now? Let us think."

The man thus genially addressed had desisted from drumming on the door and retreated sullenly into a corner as Fisher continued to address him in a flowing monologue.

"Probably you are the poacher who says he isn't a poacher. He says he's a landed proprietor; but he will permit me to inform him that, whatever he is, he's a fool. What hope can there ever be of a free peasantry in England if the peasants themselves are such snobs as to want to be gentlemen? How can we make a democracy with no democrats? As it is, you want to be a landlord and so you consent to be a criminal. And in that, you know, you are rather like somebody else. And, now I think of it, perhaps you are somebody else."

There was a silence broken by breathing from the corner and the murmur of the rising storm, that came in through the small grating above the man's head. Horne Fisher continued:

"Are you only a servant, perhaps, that rather sinister old servant who was butler to Hawker and Verner? If so, you are certainly the only link between the two periods. But if so, why do you degrade yourself to serve this dirty foreigner, when you at least saw the last of a genuine national gentry? People like you are generally at least patriotic. Doesn't England mean anything to you, Mr. Usher? All of which eloquence is possibly wasted, as perhaps you are not Mr. Usher.

"More likely you are Verner himself; and it's no good wasting eloquence to make you ashamed of yourself. Nor is it any good to curse you for corrupting England; nor are you the right person to curse. It is the English who deserve to be cursed, and are cursed, because they allowed such vermin to crawl into the high places of their heroes and their kings. I won't dwell on the idea that you're Verner, or the throttling might begin, after all. Is there anyone else you could be? Surely you're not some servant of the other rival organization. I can't believe you're Gryce, the agent; and yet Gryce had a spark of the fanatic in his eye, too; and men will do extraordinary things in these paltry feuds of politics. Or if not the servant, is it the … No, I can't believe it … not the red blood of manhood and liberty … not the democratic ideal …"

He sprang up in excitement, and at the same moment a growl of thunder came through the grating beyond. The storm had broken, and with it a new light broke on his mind. There was something else that might happen in a moment.

"Do you know what that means?" he cried. "It means that God himself may hold a candle to show me your infernal face."

Then next moment came a crash of thunder; but before the thunder a white light had filled the whole room for a single split second.

Fisher had seen two things in front of him. One was the black-and-white pattern of the iron grating against the sky; the other was the face in the corner. It was the face of his brother.

Nothing came from Horne Fisher's lips except a Christian name, which was followed by a silence more dreadful than the dark. At last the other figure stirred and sprang up, and the voice of Harry Fisher was heard for the first time in that horrible room.

"You've seen me, I suppose," he said, "and we may as well have a light now. You could have turned it on at any time, if you'd found the switch."

He pressed a button in the wall and all the details of that room sprang into something stronger than daylight. Indeed, the details were so unexpected that for a moment they turned the captive's rocking mind from the last personal revelation. The room, so far from being a dungeon cell, was more like a drawing-room, even a lady's drawing-room, except for some boxes of cigars and bottles of wine that were stacked with books and magazines on a side table. A second glance showed him that the more masculine fittings were quite recent, and that the more feminine background was quite old. His eye caught a strip of faded tapestry, which startled him into speech, to the momentary oblivion of bigger matters.

"This place was furnished from the great house," he said.

"Yes," replied the other, "and I think you know why."

"I think I do," said Horne Fisher, "and before I go on to more extraordinary things I will, say what I think. Squire Hawker played both the bigamist and the bandit. His first wife was not dead when he married the Jewess; she was imprisoned on this island. She bore him a child here, who now haunts his birthplace under the name of Long Adam. A bankruptcy company promoter named Werner discovered the secret and blackmailed the squire into surrendering the estate. That's all quite clear and very easy. And now let me go on to something more difficult. And that is for you to explain what the devil you are doing kidnaping your born brother."

After a pause Henry Fisher answered:

"I suppose you didn't expect to see me," he said. "But, after all, what could you expect?"'

"I'm afraid I don't follow," said Horne Fisher.

"I mean what else could you expect, after making such a muck of it?" said his brother, sulkily. "We all thought you were so clever. How could we know you were going to be — well, really, such a rotten failure?"

"This is rather curious," said the candidate, frowning. "Without vanity, I was not under the impression that my candidature was a failure. All the big meetings were successful and crowds of people have promised me votes."

"I should jolly well think they had," said' Henry, grimly. "You've made a landslide with your confounded acres and a cow, and Verner can hardly get a vote anywhere. Oh, it’s too rotten for anything!”

“What on earth do you mean?”

“Why, you lunatic,” cried Henry, in tones of ringing sincerity, “you don’t suppose you were meant to *win* the seat, did you? Oh, it’s too childish! I tell you Verner’s got to get in. Of course he’s got to get in. He’s to have the Exchequer next session, and there’s the Egyptian loan and Lord knows what else. We only wanted you to split the Reform vote because accidents might happen after Hughes had made a score at Barkington.”

“I see,” said Fisher, “and you, I think, are a pillar and ornament of the Reform party. As you say, I am not clever.”

The appeal to party loyalty fell on deaf ears; for the pillar of Reform was brooding on other things. At last he said, in a more troubled voice:

“I didn’t want you to catch me; I knew it would be a shock. But I tell you what, you never would have caught me if I hadn’t come here myself, to see they didn’t ill treat you and to make sure everything was as comfortable as it could be.” There was even a sort of break in his voice as he added, “I got those cigars because I knew you liked them.”

Emotions are queer things, and the idiocy of this concession suddenly softened Horne Fisher like an unfathomable pathos.

“Never mind, old chap,” he said; “we’ll say no more about it. I’ll admit that you’re really as kind-hearted and affectionate a scoundrel and hypocrite as ever sold himself to ruin his country. There, I can’t say handsomer than that. Thank you for the cigars, old man. I’ll have one if you don’t mind.”

By the time that Horne Fisher had ended his telling of this story to Harold March they had come out into one of the public parks and taken a seat on a rise of ground overlooking wide green spaces under a blue and empty sky; and there was something incongruous in the words with which the narration ended.

“I have been in that room ever since,” said Horne Fisher. “I am in it now. I won the election, but I never went to the House. My life has been a life in that little room on that lonely island. Plenty of books and cigars and luxuries, plenty of knowledge and interest and information, but never a voice out of that tomb to reach the world outside. I shall probably die there.” And he smiled as he looked across the vast green park to the gray horizon.

THE VENGEANCE OF THE STATUE

It was on the sunny veranda of a seaside hotel, overlooking a pattern of flower beds and a strip of blue sea, that Horne Fisher and Harold March had their final explanation, which might be called an explosion.

Harold March had come to the little table and sat down at it with a subdued excitement smoldering in his somewhat cloudy and dreamy blue eyes. In the newspapers which he tossed from him on to the table there was enough to explain some if not all of his emotion. Public affairs in every department had reached a crisis. The government which had stood so long that men were used to it, as they are used to a hereditary despotism, had begun to be accused of blunders and even of financial abuses. Some said that the experiment of attempting to establish a peasantry in the west of England, on the lines of an early fancy of Horne Fisher's, had resulted in nothing but dangerous quarrels with more industrial neighbors. There had been particular complaints of the ill treatment of harmless foreigners, chiefly Asiatics, who happened to be employed in the new scientific works constructed on the coast. Indeed, the new Power which had arisen in Siberia, backed by Japan and other powerful allies, was inclined to take the matter up in the interests of its exiled subjects; and there had been wild talk about ambassadors and ultimatums. But something much more serious, in its personal interest for March himself, seemed to fill his meeting with his friend with a mixture of embarrassment and indignation.

Perhaps it increased his annoyance that there was a certain unusual liveliness about the usually languid figure of Fisher. The ordinary image of him in March's mind was that of a pallid and bald-browed gentleman, who seemed to be prematurely old as well as prematurely bald. He was remembered as a man who expressed the opinions of a pessimist in the language of a lounger. Even now March could not be certain whether the change was merely a sort of masquerade of sunshine, or that effect of clear colors and clean-cut outlines that is always visible on the parade of a marine resort, relieved against the blue dado of the sea. But Fisher had a flower in his buttonhole, and his friend could have sworn he carried his cane with something almost like the swagger of a fighter. With such clouds gathering over England, the pessimist seemed to be the only man who carried his own sunshine.

"Look here," said Harold March, abruptly, "you've been no end of a friend to me, and I never was so proud of a friendship before; but there's something I must get off my chest. The more I found out, the less I understood how you could stand it. And I tell you I'm going to stand it no longer."

Horne Fisher gazed across at him gravely and attentively, but rather as if he were a long way off.

"You know I always liked you," said Fisher, quietly, "but I also respect you, which is not always the same thing. You may possibly guess that I like a good many people I don't respect. Perhaps it is my tragedy, perhaps it is my fault. But you are very different, and I promise you this: that I will never try to keep you as somebody to be liked, at the price of your not being respected."

"I know you are magnanimous," said March after a silence, "and yet you tolerate and perpetuate everything that is mean." Then after another silence he added: "Do you remember when we first met, when you were fishing in that brook in the affair of the target? And do you remember you said that, after all, it might do no harm if I could blow the whole tangle of this society to hell with dynamite."

"Yes, and what of that?" asked Fisher.

"Only that I'm going to blow it to hell with dynamite," said Harold March, "and I think it right to give you fair warning. For a long time I didn't believe things were as bad as you said they were. But I never felt as if I could have bottled up what you knew, supposing you really knew it. Well, the long and the short of it is that I've got a conscience; and now, at last, I've also got a chance. I've been put in charge of a big independent paper, with a free hand, and we're going to open a cannonade on corruption."

"That will be — Attwood, I suppose," said Fisher, reflectively. "Timber merchant. Knows a lot about China."

"He knows a lot about England," said March, doggedly, "and now I know it, too, we're not going to hush it up any longer. The people of this country have a right to know how they're ruled — or, rather, ruined. The Chancellor is in the pocket of the money lenders and has to do as he is told; otherwise he's bankrupt, and a bad sort of bankruptcy, too, with nothing but cards and actresses behind it. The Prime Minister was in the petrol-contract business; and deep in it, too. The Foreign Minister is a wreck of drink and drugs. When you say that plainly about a man who may send thousands of

Englishmen to die for nothing, you're called personal. If a poor engine driver gets drunk and sends thirty or forty people to death, nobody complains of the exposure being personal. The engine driver is not a person."

"I quite agree with you," said Fisher, calmly. "You are perfectly right."

"If you agree with us, why the devil don't you act with us?" demanded his friend. "If you think it's right, why don't you do what's right? It's awful to think of a man of your abilities simply blocking the road to reform."

"We have often talked about that," replied Fisher, with the same composure. "The Prime Minister is my father's friend. The Foreign Minister married my sister. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is my first cousin. I mention the genealogy in some detail just now for a particular reason. The truth is I have a curious kind of cheerfulness at the moment. It isn't altogether the sun and the sea, sir. I am enjoying an emotion that is entirely new to me; a happy sensation I never remember having had before."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"I am feeling proud of my family," said Horne Fisher.

Harold March stared at him with round blue eyes, and seemed too much mystified even to ask a question. Fisher leaned back in his chair in his lazy fashion, and smiled as he continued.

"Look here, my dear fellow. Let me ask a question in turn. You imply that I have always known these things about my unfortunate kinsmen. So I have. Do you suppose that Attwood hasn't always known them? Do you suppose he hasn't always known you as an honest man who would say these things when he got a chance? Why does Attwood unmuzzle you like a dog at this moment, after all these years? I know why he does; I know a good many things, far too many things. And therefore, as I have the honor to remark, I am proud of my family at last."

"But why?" repeated March, rather feebly.

"I am proud of the Chancellor because he gambled and the Foreign Minister because he drank and the Prime Minister because he took a commission on a contract," said Fisher, firmly. "I am proud of them because they did these things, and can be denounced for them, and know they can be denounced for them, and are *standing firm for all that*. I take off my hat to them because they are defying blackmail, and refusing to smash their country to save themselves. I salute them as if they were going to die on the battlefield.”

After a pause he continued: “And it will be a battlefield, too, and not a metaphorical one. We have yielded to foreign financiers so long that now it is war or ruin, Even the people, even the country people, are beginning to suspect that they are being ruined. That is the meaning of the regrettable incidents in the newspapers.”

“The meaning of the outrages on Orientals?” asked March.

“The meaning of the outrages on Orientals,” replied Fisher, “is that the financiers have introduced Chinese labor into this country with the deliberate intention of reducing workmen and peasants to starvation. Our unhappy politicians have made concession after concession; and now they are asking concessions which amount to our ordering a massacre of our own poor. If we do not fight now we shall never fight again. They will have put England in an economic position of starving in a week. But we are going to fight now; I shouldn’t wonder if there were an ultimatum in a week and an invasion in a fortnight. All the past corruption and cowardice is hampering us, of course; the West country is pretty stormy and doubtful even in a military sense; and the Irish regiments there, that are supposed to support us by the new treaty, are pretty well in mutiny; for, of course, this infernal coolie capitalism is being pushed in Ireland, too. But it’s to stop now; and if the government message of reassurance gets through to them in time, they may turn up after all by the time the enemy lands. For my poor old gang is going to stand to its guns at last. Of course it’s only natural that when they have been whitewashed for half a century as paragons, their sins should come back on them at the very moment when they are behaving like men for the first time in their lives. Well, I tell you, March, I know them inside out; and I know they are behaving like heroes. Every man of them ought to have a statue, and on the pedestal words like those of the noblest ruffian of the Revolution: ‘Que mon nom soit fletri; que la France soit libre.’”

“Good God!” cried March, “shall we never get to the bottom of your mines and countermines?”

After a silence Fisher answered in a lower voice, looking his friend in the eyes.

“Did you think there was nothing but evil at the bottom of them?” he asked, gently. “Did you think I had found nothing but filth in the deep seas into which fate has thrown me? Believe me, you never know the best about men till you know the worst about them. It does not dispose of their strange human souls to know that they were exhibited to the world as impossibly impeccable wax works, who never looked after a woman or knew the meaning of a bribe. Even in a palace, life can be lived well; and even in a Parliament, life can be lived with occasional efforts to live it well. I tell you it is as true of these rich fools and rascals as it is true of every poor footpad and pickpocket; that only God knows how good they have tried to be. God alone knows what the conscience can survive, or how a man who has lost his honor will still try to save his soul."

There was another silence, and March sat staring at the table and Fisher at the sea. Then Fisher suddenly sprang to his feet and caught up his hat and stick with all his new alertness and even pugnacity.

"Look here, old fellow," he cried, "let us make a bargain. Before you open your campaign for Attwood come down and stay with us for one week, to hear what we're really doing. I mean with the Faithful Few, formerly known as the Old Gang, occasionally to be described as the Low Lot. There are really only five of us that are quite fixed, and organizing the national defense; and we're living like a garrison in a sort of broken-down hotel in Kent. Come and see what we're really doing and what there is to be done, and do us justice. And after that, with unalterable love and affection for you, publish and be damned."

Thus it came about that in the last week before war, when events moved most rapidly, Harold March found himself one of a sort of small house party of the people he was proposing to denounce. They were living simply enough, for people with their tastes, in an old brown-brick inn faced with ivy and surrounded by rather dismal gardens. At the back of the building the garden ran up very steeply to a road along the ridge above; and a zigzag path scaled the slope in sharp angles, turning to and fro amid evergreens so somber that they might rather be called everblack. Here and there up the slope were statues having all the cold monstrosity of such minor ornaments of the eighteenth century; and a whole row of them ran as on a terrace along the last bank at the bottom, opposite the back door. This detail fixed itself first in March's mind merely because it figured in the first conversation he had with one of the cabinet ministers.

The cabinet ministers were rather older than he had expected to find them. The Prime Minister no longer looked like a boy, though he still looked a little like a baby. But it was one of those old and venerable babies, and the baby had soft gray hair. Everything about him was soft, to his speech and his way of walking; but over and above that his chief function seemed to be sleep. People left alone with him got so used to his eyes being closed that they were almost startled when they realized in the stillness that the eyes were wide open, and even watching. One thing at least would always make the old gentleman open his eyes. The one thing he really cared for in this world was his hobby of armored weapons, especially Eastern weapons, and he would talk for hours about Damascus blades and Arab swordmanship. Lord James Herries, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was a short, dark, sturdy man with a very sallow face and a very sullen manner, which contrasted with the gorgeous flower in his buttonhole and his festive trick of being always slightly overdressed. It was something of a euphemism to call him a well-known man about town. There was perhaps more mystery in the question of how a man who lived for pleasure seemed to get so little pleasure out of it. Sir David Archer, the Foreign Secretary, was the only one of them who was a self-made man, and the only one of them who looked like an aristocrat. He was tall and thin and very handsome, with a grizzled beard; his gray hair was very curly, and even rose in front in two rebellious ringlets that seemed to the fanciful to tremble like the antennae of some giant insect, or to stir sympathetically with the restless tufted eyebrows over his rather haggard eyes. For the Foreign Secretary made no secret of his somewhat nervous condition, whatever might be the cause of it.

“Do you know that mood when one could scream because a mat is crooked?” he said to March, as they walked up and down in the back garden below the line of dingy statues. “Women get into it when they’ve worked too hard; and I’ve been working pretty hard lately, of course. It drives me mad when Herries will wear his hat a little crooked — habit of looking like a gay dog. Sometime I swear I’ll knock it off. That statue of Britannia over there isn’t quite straight; it sticks forward a bit as if the lady were going to topple over. The damned thing is that it doesn’t topple over and be done with it. See, it’s clamped with an iron prop. Don’t be surprised if I get up in the middle of the night to hike it down.”

They paced the path for a few moments in silence and then he continued. “It’s odd those little things seem specially big when there are bigger things to worry about. We’d better go in and do some work.”

Horne Fisher evidently allowed for all the neurotic possibilities of Archer and the dissipated habits of Herries; and whatever his faith in their present firmness, did not unduly tax their time and attention, even in the case of the Prime Minister. He had got the consent of the latter finally to the committing of the important documents, with the orders to the Western armies, to the care of a less conspicuous and more solid person — an uncle of his named Horne Hewitt, a rather colorless country squire who had been a good soldier, and was the military adviser of the committee. He was charged with expediting the government pledge, along with the concerted military plans, to the half-mutinous command in the west; and the still more urgent task of seeing that it did not fall into the hands of the enemy, who might appear at any moment from the east. Over and above this military official, the only other person present was a police official, a certain Doctor Prince, originally a police surgeon and now a distinguished detective, sent to be a bodyguard to the group. He was a square-faced man with big spectacles and a grimace that expressed the intention of keeping his mouth shut. Nobody else shared their captivity except the hotel proprietor, a crusty Kentish man with a crab-apple face, one or two of his servants, and another servant privately attached to Lord James Herries. He was a young Scotchman named Campbell, who looked much more distinguished than his bilious-looking master, having chestnut hair and a long saturnine face with large but fine features. He was probably the one really efficient person in the house.

After about four days of the informal council, March had come to feel a sort of grotesque sublimity about these dubious figures, defiant in the twilight of danger, as if they were hunchbacks and cripples left alone to defend a town. All were working hard; and he himself looked up from writing a page of memoranda in a private room to see Horne Fisher standing in the doorway, accoutered as if for travel. He fancied that Fisher looked a little pale; and after a moment that gentleman shut the door behind him and said, quietly:

“Well, the worst has happened. Or nearly the worst.”

“The enemy has landed,” cried March, and sprang erect out of his chair.

“Oh, I knew the enemy would land,” said Fisher, with composure. “Yes, he’s landed; but that’s not the worst that could happen. The worst is that there’s a leak of some sort, even from this fortress of ours. It’s been a bit of a shock to me, I can tell you; though I suppose it’s illogical. After all, I was full of admiration at finding three honest men in politics. I ought not to be full of astonishment if I find only two."

He ruminated a moment and then said, in such a fashion that March could hardly tell if he were changing the subject or no:

"It's hard at first to believe that a fellow like Herries, who had pickled himself in vice like vinegar, can have any scruple left. But about that I've noticed a curious thing. Patriotism is not the first virtue. Patriotism rots into Prussianism when you pretend it is the first virtue. But patriotism is sometimes the last virtue. A man will swindle or seduce who will not sell his country. But who knows?"

"But what is to be done?" cried March, indignantly.

"My uncle has the papers safe enough," replied Fisher, "and is sending them west to-night; but somebody is trying to get at them from outside, I fear with the assistance of somebody inside. All I can do at present is to try to head off the man outside; and I must get away now and do it. I shall be back in about twenty-four hours. While I'm away I want you to keep an eye on these people and find out what you can. Au revoir." He vanished down the stairs; and from the window March could see him mount a motor cycle and trail away toward the neighboring town.

On the following morning, March was sitting in the window seat of the old inn parlor, which was oak-paneled and ordinarily rather dark; but on that occasion it was full of the white light of a curiously clear morning — the moon had shone brilliantly for the last two or three nights. He was himself somewhat in shadow in the corner of the window seat; and Lord James Herries, coming in hastily from the garden behind, did not see him. Lord James clutched the back of a chair, as if to steady himself, and, sitting down abruptly at the table, littered with the last meal, poured himself out a tumbler of brandy and drank it. He sat with his back to March, but his yellow face appeared in a round mirror beyond and the tinge of it was like that of some horrible malady. As March moved he started violently and faced round.

"My God!" he cried, "have you seen what's outside?"

"Outside?" repeated the other, glancing over his shoulder at the garden.

"Oh, go and look for yourself," cried Herries in a sort of fury. "Hewitt's murdered and his papers stolen, that's all."

He turned his back again and sat down with a thud; his square shoulders were shaking. Harold March darted out of the doorway into the back garden with its steep slope of statues.

The first thing he saw was Doctor Prince, the detective, peering through his spectacles at something on the ground; the second was the thing he was peering at. Even after the sensational news he had heard inside, the sight was something of a sensation.

The monstrous stone image of Britannia was lying prone and face downward on the garden path; and there stuck out at random from underneath it, like the legs of a smashed fly, an arm clad in a white shirt sleeve and a leg clad in a khaki trouser, and hair of the unmistakable sandy gray that belonged to Horne Fisher's unfortunate uncle. There were pools of blood and the limbs were quite stiff in death.

"Couldn't this have been an accident?" said March, finding words at last.

"Look for yourself, I say," repeated the harsh voice of Herries, who had followed him with restless movements out of the door. "The papers are gone, I tell you. The fellow tore the coat off the corpse and cut the papers out of the inner pocket. There's the coat over there on the bank, with the great slash in it."

"But wait a minute," said the detective, Prince, quietly. "In that case there seems to be something of a mystery. A murderer might somehow have managed to throw the statue down on him, as he seems to have done. But I bet he couldn't easily have lifted it up again. I've tried; and I'm sure it would want three men at least. Yet we must suppose, on that theory, that the murderer first knocked him down as he walked past, using the statue as a stone club, then lifted it up again, took him out and deprived him of his coat, then put him back again in the posture of death and neatly replaced the statue. I tell you it's physically impossible. And how else could he have unclothed a man covered with that stone monument? It's worse than the conjurer's trick, when a man shuffles a coat off with his wrists tied."

"Could he have thrown down the statue after he'd stripped the corpse?" asked March.

"And why?" asked Prince, sharply. "If he'd killed his man and got his papers, he'd be away like the wind. He wouldn't potter about in a garden excavating the pedestals of statues. Besides — Hullo, who's that up there?"

High on the ridge above them, drawn in dark thin lines against the sky, was a figure looking so long and lean as to be almost spidery. The dark silhouette of the head showed two small tufts like horns; and they could almost have sworn that the horns moved.

"Archer!" shouted Herries, with sudden passion, and called to him with curses to come down. The figure drew back at the first cry, with an agitated movement so abrupt as almost to be called an antic. The next moment the man seemed to reconsider and collect himself, and began to come down the zigzag garden path, but with obvious reluctance, his feet falling in slower and slower rhythm. Through March's mind were throbbing the phrases that this man himself had used, about going mad in the middle of the night and wrecking the stone figure. Just so, he could fancy, the maniac who had done such a thing might climb the crest of the hill, in that feverish dancing fashion, and look down on the wreck he had made. But the wreck he had made here was not only a wreck of stone.

When the man emerged at last on to the garden path, with the full light on his face and figure, he was walking slowly indeed, but easily, and with no appearance of fear.

"This is a terrible thing," he said. "I saw it from above; I was taking a stroll along the ridge."

"Do you mean that you saw the murder?" demanded March, "or the accident? I mean did you see the statue fall?"

"No," said Archer, "I mean I saw the statue fallen."

Prince seemed to be paying but little attention; his eye was riveted on an object lying on the path a yard or two from the corpse. It seemed to be a rusty iron bar bent crooked at one end.

"One thing I don't understand," he said, "is all this blood. The poor fellow's skull isn't smashed; most likely his neck is broken; but blood seems to have spouted as if all his arteries were severed. I was wondering if some other instrument … that iron thing, for instance; but I don't see that even that is sharp enough. I suppose nobody knows what it is."

"I know what it is," said Archer in his deep but somewhat shaky voice. "I've seen it in my nightmares. It was the iron clamp or prop on the pedestal, stuck on to keep the wretched image upright when it began to wabble, I suppose. Anyhow, it was always stuck in the stonework there; and I suppose it came out when the thing collapsed."

Doctor Prince nodded, but he continued to look down at the pools of blood and the bar of iron.

"I'm certain there's something more underneath all this," he said at last. "Perhaps something more underneath the statue. I have a huge sort of hunch that there is. We are four men now and between us we can lift that great tombstone there."

They all bent their strength to the business; there was a silence save for heavy breathing; and then, after an instant of the tottering and staggering of eight legs, the great carven column of rock was rolled away, and the body lying in its shirt and trousers was fully revealed. The spectacles of Doctor Prince seemed almost to enlarge with a restrained radiance like great eyes; for other things were revealed also. One was that the unfortunate Hewitt had a deep gash across the jugular, which the triumphant doctor instantly identified as having been made with a sharp steel edge like a razor. The other was that immediately under the bank lay littered three shining scraps of steel, each nearly a foot long, one pointed and another fitted into a gorgeously jeweled hilt or handle. It was evidently a sort of long Oriental knife, long enough to be called a sword, but with a curious wavy edge; and there was a touch or two of blood on the point.

"I should have expected more blood, hardly on the point," observed Doctor Prince, thoughtfully, "but this is certainly the instrument. The slash was certainly made with a weapon shaped like this, and probably the slashing of the pocket as well. I suppose the brute threw in the statue, by way of giving him a public funeral."

March did not answer; he was mesmerized by the strange stones that glittered on the strange sword hilt; and their possible significance was broadening upon him like a dreadful dawn. It was a curious Asiatic weapon. He knew what name was connected in his memory with curious Asiatic weapons. Lord James spoke his secret thought for him, and yet it startled him like an irrelevance.

"Where is the Prime Minister?" Herries had cried, suddenly, and somehow like the bark of a dog at some discovery.

Doctor Prince turned on him his goggles and his grim face; and it was grimmer than ever.

"I cannot find him anywhere," he said. "I looked for him at once, as soon as I found the papers were gone. That servant of yours, Campbell, made a most efficient search, but there are no traces."

There was a long silence, at the end of which Herries uttered another cry, but upon an entirely new note.

"Well, you needn't look for him any longer," he said, "for here he comes, along with your friend Fisher. They look as if they'd been for a little walking tour."

The two figures approaching up the path were indeed those of Fisher, splashed with the mire of travel and carrying a scratch like that of a bramble across one side of his bald forehead, and of the great and gray-haired statesman who looked like a baby and was interested in Eastern swords and swordmanship. But beyond this bodily recognition, March could make neither head nor tail of their presence or demeanor, which seemed to give a final touch of nonsense to the whole nightmare. The more closely he watched them, as they stood listening to the revelations of the detective, the more puzzled he was by their attitude — Fisher seemed grieved by the death of his uncle, but hardly shocked at it; the older man seemed almost openly thinking about something else, and neither had anything to suggest about a further pursuit of the fugitive spy and murderer, in spite of the prodigious importance of the documents he had stolen. When the detective had gone off to busy himself with that department of the business, to telephone and write his report, when Herries had gone back, probably to the brandy bottle, and the Prime Minister had blandly sauntered away toward a comfortable armchair in another part of the garden, Horne Fisher spoke directly to Harold March.

"My friend," he said, "I want you to come with me at once; there is no one else I can trust so much as that. The journey will take us most of the day, and the chief business cannot be done till nightfall. So we can talk things over thoroughly on the way. But I want you to be with me; for I rather think it is my hour."

March and Fisher both had motor bicycles; and the first half of their day's journey consisted in coasting eastward amid the unconversational noise of those uncomfortable engines. But when they came out beyond Canterbury into the flats of eastern Kent, Fisher stopped at a pleasant little public house beside a sleepy stream; and they sat down to eat and to drink and to speak almost for the first time. It was a brilliant afternoon, birds were singing in the wood behind, and the sun shone full on their ale bench and table; but the face of Fisher in the strong sunlight had a gravity never seen on it before.

"Before we go any farther," he said, "there is something you ought to know. You and I have seen some mysterious things and got to the bottom of them before now; and it's only right that you should get to the bottom of this one. But in dealing with the death of my uncle I must begin at the other end from where our old detective yarns began. I will give you the steps of deduction presently, if you want to listen to them; but I did not reach the truth of this by steps of deduction. I will first of all tell you the truth itself, because I knew the truth from the first. The other cases I approached from the outside, but in this case I was inside. I myself was the very core and center of everything."

Something in the speaker's pendent eyelids and grave gray eyes suddenly shook March to his foundations; and he cried, distractedly, "I don't understand!" as men do when they fear that they do understand. There was no sound for a space but the happy chatter of the birds, and then Horne Fisher said, calmly:

"It was I who killed my uncle. If you particularly want more, it was I who stole the state papers from him."

"Fisher!" cried his friend in a strangled voice.

"Let me tell you the whole thing before we part," continued the other, "and let me put it, for the sake of clearness, as we used to put our old problems. Now there are two things that are puzzling people about that problem, aren't there? The first is how the murderer managed to slip off the dead man's coat, when he was already pinned to the ground with that stone incubus. The other, which is much smaller and less puzzling, is the fact of the sword that cut his throat being slightly stained at the point, instead of a good deal more stained at the edge. Well, I can dispose of the first question easily. Horne Hewitt took off his own coat before he was killed. I might say he took off his coat to be killed."

"Do you call that an explanation?" exclaimed March. "The words seem more meaningless, than the facts."

"Well, let us go on to the other facts," continued Fisher, equably. "The reason that particular sword is not stained at the edge with Hewitt's blood is that it was not used to kill Hewitt."

"But the doctor," protested March, "declared distinctly that the wound was made by that particular sword."

"I beg your pardon," replied Fisher. "He did not declare that it was made by that particular sword. He declared it was made by a sword of that particular pattern."

"But it was quite a queer and exceptional pattern," argued March; "surely it is far too fantastic a coincidence to imagine—"

“It was a fantastic coincidence,” reflected Horne Fisher. “It’s extraordinary what coincidences do sometimes occur. By the oddest chance in the world, by one chance in a million, it so happened that another sword of exactly the same shape was in the same garden at the same time. It may be partly explained, by the fact that I brought them both into the garden myself … come, my dear fellow; surely you can see now what it means. Put those two things together; there were two duplicate swords and he took off his coat for himself. It may assist your speculations to recall the fact that I am not exactly an assassin.”

“A duel!” exclaimed March, recovering himself. “Of course I ought to have thought of that. But who was the spy who stole the papers?”

“My uncle was the spy who stole the papers,” replied Fisher, “or who tried to steal the papers when I stopped him — in the only way I could. The papers, that should have gone west to reassure our friends and give them the plans for repelling the invasion, would in a few hours have been in the hands of the invader. What could I do? To have denounced one of our friends at this moment would have been to play into the hands of your friend Attwood, and all the party of panic and slavery. Besides, it may be that a man over forty has a subconscious desire to die as he has lived, and that I wanted, in a sense, to carry my secrets to the grave. Perhaps a hobby hardens with age; and my hobby has been silence. Perhaps I feel that I have killed my mother’s brother, but I have saved my mother’s name. Anyhow, I chose a time when I knew you were all asleep, and he was walking alone in the garden. I saw all the stone statues standing in the moonlight; and I myself was like one of those stone statues walking. In a voice that was not my own, I told him of his treason and demanded the papers; and when he refused, I forced him to take one of the two swords. The swords were among some specimens sent down here for the Prime Minister’s inspection; he is a collector, you know; they were the only equal weapons I could find. To cut an ugly tale short, we fought there on the path in front of the Britannia statue; he was a man of great strength, but I had somewhat the advantage in skill. His sword grazed my forehead almost at the moment when mine sank into the joint in his neck. He fell against the statue, like Caesar against Pompey’s, hanging on to the iron rail; his sword was already broken. When I saw the blood from that deadly wound, everything else went from me; I dropped my sword and ran as if to lift him up. As I bent toward him something happened too quick for me to follow. I do not know whether the iron bar was rotted with rust and came away in his hand, or whether he rent it out of the rock with his apelike strength; but the thing was in his hand, and with his dying energies he swung it over my head, as I knelt there unarmed beside him. I looked up wildly to avoid the blow, and saw above us the great bulk of Britannia leaning outward like the figurehead of a ship. The next instant I saw it was leaning an inch or two more than usual, and all the skies with their outstanding stars seemed to be leaning with it. For the third second it was as if the skies fell; and in the fourth I was standing in the quiet garden, looking down on that flat ruin of stone and bone at which you were looking to-day. He had plucked out the last prop that held up the British goddess, and she had fallen and crushed the traitor in her fall. I turned and darted for the coat which I knew to contain the package, ripped it up with my sword, and raced away up the garden path to where my motor bike was waiting on the road above. I had every reason for haste; but I fled without looking back at the statue and the body; and I think the thing I fled from was the sight of that appalling allegory.

"Then I did the rest of what I had to do. All through the night and into the daybreak and the daylight I went humming through the villages and markets of South England like a traveling bullet, till I came to the headquarters in the West where the trouble was. I was just in time. I was able to placard the place, so to speak, with the news that the government had not betrayed them, and that they would find supports if they would push eastward against the enemy. There's no time to tell you all that happened; but I tell you it was the day of my life. A triumph like a torchlight procession, with torchlights that might have been firebrands. The mutinies simmered down; the men of Somerset and the western counties came pouring into the market places; the men who died with Arthur and stood firm with Alfred. The Irish regiments rallied to them, after a scene like a riot, and marched eastward out of the town singing Fenian songs. There was all that is not understood, about the dark laughter of that people, in the delight with which, even when marching with the English to the defense of England, they shouted at the top of their voices, 'High upon the gallows tree stood the noble-hearted three … With England's cruel cord about them cast.' However, the chorus was 'God save Ireland,' and we could all have sung that just then, in one sense or another.

"But there was another side to my mission. I carried the plans of the defense; and to a great extent, luckily, the plans of the invasion also. I won't worry you with strategics; but we knew where the enemy had pushed forward the great battery that covered all his movements; and though our friends from the West could hardly arrive in time to intercept the main movement, they might get within long artillery range of the battery and shell it, if they only knew exactly where it was. They could hardly tell that unless somebody round about here sent up some sort of signal. But, somehow, I rather fancy that somebody will."

With that he got up from the table, and they remounted their machines and went eastward into the advancing twilight of evening. The levels of the landscape were repeated in flat strips of floating cloud and the last colors of day clung to the circle of the horizon. Receding farther and farther behind them was the semicircle of the last hills; and it was quite suddenly that they saw afar off the dim line of the sea. It was not a strip of bright blue as they had seen it from the sunny veranda, but of a sinister and smoky violet, a tint that seemed ominous and dark. Here Horne Fisher dismounted once more.

"We must walk the rest of the way," he said, "and the last bit of all I must walk alone."

He bent down and began to unstrap something from his bicycle. It was something that had puzzled his companion all the way in spite of what held him to more interesting riddles; it appeared to be several lengths of pole strapped together and wrapped up in paper. Fisher took it under his arm and began to pick his way across the turf. The ground was growing more tumbled and irregular and he was walking toward a mass of thickets and small woods; night grew darker every moment. "We must not talk any more," said Fisher. "I shall whisper to you when you are to halt. Don't try to follow me then, for it will only spoil the show; one man can barely crawl safely to the spot, and two would certainly be caught."

"I would follow you anywhere," replied March, "but I would halt, too, if that is better."

"I know you would," said his friend in a low voice. "Perhaps you're the only man I ever quite trusted in this world."

A few paces farther on they came to the end of a great ridge or mound looking monstrous against the dim sky; and Fisher stopped with a gesture. He caught his companion's hand and wrung it with a violent tenderness, and then darted forward into the darkness. March could faintly see his figure crawling along under the shadow of the ridge, then he lost sight of it, and then he saw it again standing on another mound two hundred yards away. Beside him stood a singular erection made apparently of two rods. He bent over it and there was the flare of a light; all March's schoolboy memories woke in him, and he knew what it was. It was the stand of a rocket. The confused, incongruous memories still possessed him up to the very moment of a fierce but familiar sound; and an instant after the rocket left its perch and went up into endless space like a starry arrow aimed at the stars. March thought suddenly of the signs of the last days and knew he was looking at the apocalyptic meteor of something like a Day of judgment.

Far up in the infinite heavens the rocket drooped and sprang into scarlet stars. For a moment the whole landscape out to the sea and back to the crescent of the wooded hills was like a lake of ruby light, of a red strangely rich and glorious, as if the world were steeped in wine rather than blood, or the earth were an earthly paradise, over which paused forever the sanguine moment of morning.

"God save England!" cried Fisher, with a tongue like the peal of a trumpet. "And now it is for God to save."

As darkness sank again over land and sea, there came another sound; far away in the passes of the hills behind them the guns spoke like the baying of great hounds. Something that was not a rocket, that came not hissing but screaming, went over Harold March's head and expanded beyond the mound into light and deafening din, staggering the brain with unbearable brutalities of noise. Another came, and then another, and the world was full of uproar and volcanic vapor and chaotic light. The artillery of the West country and the Irish had located the great enemy battery, and were pounding it to pieces.

In the mad excitement of that moment March peered through the storm, looking again for the long lean figure that stood beside the stand of the rocket. Then another flash lit up the whole ridge. The figure was not there.

Before the fires of the rocket had faded from the sky, long before the first gun had sounded from the distant hills, a splutter of rifle fire had flashed and flickered all around from the hidden trenches of the enemy. Something lay in the shadow at the foot of the ridge, as stiff as the stick of the fallen rocket; and the man who knew too much knew what is worth knowing.

TALES OF THE LONG BOW

This collection of eight short stories was first published in 1925, containing tales that concern the doing of proverbially impossible deeds. The stories include references to the politics and economics of Chesterton’s time, with subtle and engaging portraits of leading figures such as Lord Eden, Harold and Oliver Green.

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The Unpresentable Appearance of Colonel Crane

These tales concern the doing of things recognized as impossible to do; impossible to believe; and, as the weary reader may well cry aloud, impossible to read about. Did the narrator merely say that they happened, without saying how they happened, they could easily be classified with the cow who jumped over the moon or the more introspective individual who jumped down his own throat. In short, they are all tall stories; and though tall stories may also be true stories, there is something in the very phrase appropriate to such a topsy-turvydom; for the logician will presumably class a tall story with a corpulent epigram or a long-legged essay. It is only proper that such impossible incidents should begin in the most prim and prosaic of all places, and apparently with the most prim and prosaic of all human beings.

The place was a straight suburban road of strictly-fenced suburban houses on the outskirts of a modern town. The time was about twenty minutes to eleven on Sunday morning, when a procession of suburban families in Sunday clothes were passing decorously up the road to church. And the man was a very respectable retired military man named Colonel Crane, who was also going to church, as he had done every Sunday at the same hour for a long stretch of years. There was no obvious difference between him and his neighbours, except that he was a little less obvious. His house was only called White Lodge, and was, therefore, less alluring to the romantic passer-by than Rowanmere on the one side or Heatherbrae on the other. He turned out spick and span for church as if for parade; but he was much too well dressed to be pointed out as a well-dressed man. He was quite handsome in a dry, sun-baked style; but his bleached blond hair was a colourless sort that could look either light brown or pale grey; and though his blue eyes were clear, they looked out a little heavily under lowered lids. Colonel Crane was something of a survival. He was not really old; indeed he was barely middle-aged; and had gained his last distinctions in the great war. But a variety of causes had kept him true to the traditional type of the old professional soldier, as it had existed before 1914; when a small parish would have only one colonel as it had only one curate. It would be quite unjust to call him a dug-out; indeed, it would be much truer to call him a dug-in. For he had remained in the traditions as firmly and patiently as he had remained in the trenches. He was simply a man who had no taste for changing his habits, and had never worried about conventions enough to alter them. One of his excellent habits was to go to church at eleven o'clock, and he therefore went there; and did not know that there went with him something of an old-world air and a passage in the history of England.

As he came out of his front door, however, on that particular morning, he was twisting a scrap of paper in his fingers and frowning with somewhat unusual perplexity. Instead of walking straight to his garden gate he walked once or twice up and down his front garden, swinging his black walking-cane. The note had been handed to him at breakfast, and it evidently called for some practical problem calling for immediate solution. He stood a few minutes with his eye riveted on a red daisy at the corner of the nearest flower-bed; and then a new expression began to work in the muscles of his bronzed face, giving a slightly grim hint of humour, of which few except his intimates were aware. Folding up the paper and putting it into his waistcoat pocket, he strolled round the house to the back garden, behind which was the kitchen-garden, in which an old servant, a sort of factotum or handy-man, named Archer, was acting as kitchen-gardener.

Archer was also a survival. Indeed, the two had survived together; had survived a number of things that had killed a good many other people. But though they had been together through the war that was also a revolution, and had a complete confidence in each other, the man Archer had never been able to lose the oppressive manners of a manservant. He performed the duties of a gardener with the air of a butler. He really performed the duties very well and enjoyed them very much; perhaps he enjoyed them all the more because he was a clever Cockney, to whom the country crafts were a new hobby. But somehow, whenever he said, “I have put in the seeds, sir,” it always sounded like, “I have put the sherry on the table, sir”; and he could not say “Shall I pull the carrots?” without seeming to say, “Would you be requiring the claret?”

“I hope you're not working on Sunday,” said the Colonel, with a much more pleasant smile than most people got from him, though he was always polite to everybody. “You're getting too fond of these rural pursuits. You've become a rustic yokel.”

“I was venturing to examine the cabbages, sir,” replied the rustic yokel, with a painful precision of articulation. “Their condition yesterday evening did not strike me as satisfactory.”

“Glad you didn’t sit up with them,” answered the Colonel. “But it’s lucky you’re interested in cabbages. I want to talk to you about cabbages.”

“About cabbages, sir?” inquired the other respectfully.

But the Colonel did not appear to pursue the topic, for he was gazing in sudden abstraction at another object in the vegetable plots in front of him. The Colonel’s garden, like the Colonel’s house, hat, coat, and demeanour, was well-appointed in an unobtrusive fashion; and in the part of it devoted to flowers there dwelt something indefinable that seemed older that the suburbs. The hedges, even, in being as neat as Surbiton managed to look as mellow as Hampton Court, as if their very artificiality belonged rather to Queen Anne than Queen Victoria; and the stone-rimmed pond with a ring of irises somehow looked like a classic pool and not merely an artificial puddle. It is idle to analyse how a man’s soul and social type will somehow soak into his surroundings; anyhow, the soul of Mr. Archer had sunk into the kitchen-garden so as to give it a fine shade of difference. He was after all a practical man, and the practice of his new trade was much more of a real appetite with him than words would suggest. Hence the kitchen-garden was not artificial, but autochthonous; it really looked like the corner of a farm in the country; and all sorts of practical devices were set up there. Strawberries were netted-in against the birds; strings were stretched across with feathers fluttering from them; and in the middle of the principal bed stood an ancient and authentic scarecrow. Perhaps the only incongruous intruder, capable of disputing with the scarecrow in his rural reign, was the curious boundary-stone which marked the edge of his domain; and which was, in fact, a shapeless South Sea idol, planted there with no more appropriateness than a door-scraper. But Colonel Crane would not have been so complete a type of the old army man if he had not hidden somewhere a hobby connected with his travels. His hobby had at one time been savage folklore; and he had the relic of it on the edge of the kitchen-garden. At the moment, however, he was not looking at the idol, but at the scarecrow.

“By the way, Archer,” he said, “don’t you think the scarecrow wants a new hat?”

“I should hardly think it would be necessary, sir,” said the gardener gravely.

“But look here,” said the Colonel, “you must consider the philosophy of scarecrows. In theory, that is supposed to convince some rather simple-minded bird that I am walking in my garden. That thing with the unmentionable hat is Me. A trifle sketchy, perhaps. Sort of impressionist portrait; but hardly likely to impress. Man with a hat like that would never be really firm with a sparrow. Conflict of wills, and all that, and I bet the sparrow would come out on top. By the way, what's that stick tied on to it?"

"I believe, sir," said Archer, "that it is supposed to represent a gun."

"Held at a highly unconvincing angle," observed Crane. "Man with a hat like that would be sure to miss."

"Would you desire me to procure another hat?" inquired the patient Archer.

"No, no," answered his master carelessly. "As the poor fellow's got such a rotten hat, I'll give him mine. Like the scene of St. Martin and the beggar."

"Give him yours," repeated Archer respectfully, but faintly.

The Colonel took off his burnished top-hat and gravely placed it on the head of the South Sea idol at his feet. It had a queer effect of bringing the grotesque lump of stone to life, as if a goblin in a top-hat was grinning at the garden.

"You think the hat shouldn't be quite new?" he inquired almost anxiously. "Not done among the best scarecrows, perhaps. Well, let's see what we can do to mellow it a little."

He whirled up his walking-stick over his head and laid a smacking stroke across the silk hat, smashing it over the hollow eyes of the idol.

"Softened with the touch of time now, I think," he remarked, holding out the silken remnants to the gardener. "Put it on the scarecrow, my friend; I don't want it. You can bear witness it's no use to me."

Archer obeyed like an automaton, an automaton with rather round eyes.

"We must hurry up," said the Colonel cheerfully. "I was early for church, but I'm afraid I'm a bit late now."

"Did you propose to attend church without a hat, sir?" asked the other.

"Certainly not. Most irreverent," said the Colonel. "Nobody should neglect to remove his hat on entering church. Well, if I haven't got a hat, I shall neglect to remove it. Where is your reasoning power this morning? No, no, just dig up one of your cabbages."

Once more the well-trained servant managed to repeat the word "Cabbages" with his own strict accent; but in its constriction there was a hint of strangulation.

“Yes, go and pull up a cabbage, there’s a good fellow,” said the Colonel. “I must really be getting along; I believe I heard it strike eleven.”

Mr. Archer moved heavily in the direction of a plot of cabbages, which swelled with monstrous contours and many colours; objects, perhaps, more worthy of the philosophic eye than is taken into account by the more flippant of tongue. Vegetables are curious-looking things and less commonplace than they sound. If we called a cabbage a cactus, or some such queer name, we might see it as an equally queer thing.

These philosophical truths did the Colonel reveal by anticipating the dubious Archer, and dragging a great, green cabbage with its trailing root out of the earth. He then picked up a sort of pruning-knife and cut short the long tail of the root; scooped out the inside leaves so as to make a sort of hollow, and gravely reversing it, placed it on his head. Napoleon and other military princes have crowned themselves; and he, like the Caesars, wore a wreath that was, after all, made of green leaves or vegetation. Doubtless there are other comparisons that might occur to any philosophical historian who should look at it in the abstract.

The people going to church certainly looked at it; but they did not look at it in the abstract. To them it appeared singularly concrete; and indeed incredibly solid. The inhabitants of Rowanmere and Heatherbrae followed the Colonel as he strode almost jauntily up the road, with feelings that no philosophy could for the moment meet. There seemed to be nothing to be said, except that one of the most respectable and respected of their neighbours, one who might even be called in a quiet way a pattern of good form if not a leader of fashion, was walking solemnly up to church with a cabbage on the top of his head.

There was indeed no corporate action to meet the crisis. Their world was not one in which a crowd can collect to shout, and still less to jeer. No rotten eggs could be collected from their tidy breakfast-tables; and they were not of the sort to throw cabbage-stalks at the cabbage. Perhaps there was just that amount of truth in the pathetically picturesque names on their front gates, names suggestive of mountains and mighty lakes concealed somewhere on the premises. It was true that in one sense such a house was a hermitage. Each of these men lived alone and they could not be made into a mob. For miles around there was not public house and no public opinion.

As the Colonel approached the church porch and prepared reverently to remove his vegetarian headgear, he was hailed in a tone a little more hearty than the humane civility that was the slender bond of that society. He returned the greeting without embarrassment, and paused a moment as the man who had spoken to him plunged into further speech. He was a young doctor named Horace Hunter, tall, handsomely dressed, and confident in manner; and though his features were rather plain and his hair rather red, he was considered to have a certain fascination.

"Good morning, Colonel," said the doctor in his resounding tones, "what a f — what a fine day it is."

Stars turned from their courses like comets, so to speak, and the world swerved into wilder possibilities, at that crucial moment when Dr. Hunter corrected himself and said, "What a fine day!" instead of "What a funny hat!"

As to why he corrected himself, a true picture of what passed through his mind might sound rather fanciful in itself. It would be less than explicit to say he did so because of a long grey car waiting outside the White Lodge. It might not be a complete explanation to say it was due to a lady walking on stilts at a garden party. Some obscurity might remain, even if we said that it had something to do with a soft shirt and a nickname; nevertheless all these things mingled in the medical gentleman's mind when he made his hurried decision. Above all, it might or might not be sufficient explanation to say that Horace Hunter was a very ambitious young man, that the ring in his voice and the confidence in his manner came from a very simple resolution to rise in the world, and that the world in question was rather worldly.

He liked to be seen talking so confidently to Colonel Crane on that Sunday parade. Crane was comparatively poor, but he knew People. And people who knew People knew what People were doing now; whereas people who didn't know People could only wonder what in the world People would do next. A lady who came with the Duchess when she opened the Bazaar had nodded to Crane and said, "Hullo, Stork," and the doctor had deduced that it was a sort of family joke and not a momentary ornithological confusion. And it was the Duchess who had started all that racing on stilts, which the Vernon-Smiths had introduced at Heatherbrae. But it would have been devilish awkward not to have known what Mrs. Vernon-Smith meant when she said, "Of course you stilt." You never knew what they would start next. He remembered how he himself had thought the first man in a soft shirt-front was some funny fellow from nowhere; and then he had begun to see others here and there, and had found that it was not a faux pas, but a fashion. It was odd to imagine that he would ever begin to see vegetable hats here and there, but you never could tell; and he wasn't going to make the same mistake again. His first medical impulse had been to add to the Colonel's fancy costume with a strait-waistcoat. But Crane did not look like a lunatic, and certainly did not look like a man playing a practical joke. He had not the stiff and self-conscious solemnity of the joker. He took it quite naturally. And one thing was certain: if it really was the latest thing, the doctor must take it as naturally as the Colonel did. So he said it was a fine day, and was gratified to learn that there was no disagreement on that question.

The doctor's dilemma, if we may apply the phrase, had been the whole neighbourhood's dilemma. The doctor's decision was also the whole neighbourhood's decision. It was not so much that most of the good people there shared in Hunter's serious social ambitions, but rather that they were naturally prone to negative and cautious decisions. They lived in a delicate dread of being interfered with; and they were just enough to apply the principle by not interfering with other people. They had also a subconscious sense that the mild and respectable military gentleman would not be altogether an easy person to interfere with. The consequence was that the Colonel carried his monstrous green headgear about the streets of that suburb for nearly a week, and nobody ever mentioned the subject to him. It was about the end of that time (while the doctor had been scanning the horizon for aristocrats crowned with cabbage, and, not seeing any, was summoning his courage to speak) that the final interruption came; and with the interruption the explanation.

The Colonel had every appearance of having forgotten all about the hat. He took it off and on like any other hat; he hung it on the hat-peg in his narrow front hall where there was nothing else but his sword hung on two hooks and an old brown map of the seventeenth century. He handed it to Archer when that correct character seemed to insist on his official right to hold it; he did not insist on his official right to brush it, for fear it should fall to pieces; but he occasionally gave it a cautious shake, accompanied by a look of restrained distaste. But the Colonel himself never had any appearance of either liking or disliking it. The unconventional thing had already become one of his conventions — the conventions which he never considered enough to violate. It is probable, therefore, that what ultimately took place was as much of a surprise to him as to anybody. Anyhow, the explanation, or explosion, came in the following fashion.

Mr. Vernon-Smith, the mountaineer whose foot was on his native heath at Heatherbrae, was a small, dapper gentleman which a big-bridged nose, dark moustache, and dark eyes with a settled expression of anxiety, though nobody knew what there was to be anxious about in his very solid social existence. He was a friend of Dr. Hunter; one might almost say a humble friend. For he had the negative snobbishness that could only admire the positive and progressive snobbishness of that soaring and social figure. A man like Dr. Hunter likes to have a man like Mr. Smith, before whom he can pose as a perfect man of the world. What appears more extraordinary, a man like Mr. Smith really likes to have a man like Dr. Hunter to pose at him and swagger over him and snub him. Anyhow, Vernon-Smith had ventured to hint that the new hat of his neighbour Crane was not of a pattern familiar in every fashion-plate. And Dr. Hunter, bursting with the secret of his own original diplomacy, had snubbed the suggestion and snowed it under with frosty scorn. With shrewd, resolute gestures, with large allusive phrases, he had left on his friend's mind the impression that the whole social world would dissolve if a word were said on so delicate a topic. Mr. Vernon-Smith formed a general idea that the Colonel would explode with a loud bang at the very vaguest allusion to vegetables, or the most harmless adumbration or verbal shadow of a hat. As usually happens in such cases, the words he was forbidden to say repeated themselves perpetually in his mind with the rhythmic pressure of a pulse. It was his temptation at the moment to call all houses hats and all visitors vegetables.

When Crane came out of his front gate that morning he found his neighbour Vernon-Smith standing outside, between the spreading laburnum and the lamp-post, talking to a young lady, a distant cousin of his family. This girl was an art student on her own — a little too much on her own for the standards of Heatherbrae, and, therefore (some would infer), yet further beyond those of White Lodge. Her brown hair was bobbed, and the Colonel did not admire bobbed hair. On the other hand, she had a rather attractive face, with honest brown eyes a little too wide apart, which diminished the impression of beauty but increased the impression of honesty. She also had a very fresh and unaffected voice, and the Colonel had often heard it calling out scores at tennis on the other side of the garden wall. In some vague sort of way it made him feel old; at least, he was not sure whether he felt older than he was, or younger than he ought to be. It was not until they met under the lamp-post that he knew her name was Audrey Smith; and he was faintly thankful for the single monosyllable. Mr. Vernon-Smith presented her, and very nearly said: "May I introduce my cabbage?" instead of "my cousin."

The Colonel, with unaffected dullness, said it was a fine day; and his neighbour, rallying from his last narrow escape, continued the talk with animation. His manner, as when he poked his big nose and beady black eyes into local meetings and committees, was at once hesitating and emphatic.

"This young lady is going in for Art," he said; "a poor look-out, isn't it? I expect we shall see her drawing in chalk on the paving stones and expecting us to throw a penny into the — into a tray, or something." Here he dodged another danger. "But of course, she thinks she's going to be an R.A."

"I hope not," said the young woman hotly. "Pavement artists are much more honest than most of the R.A.'s."

"I wish those friends of yours didn't give you such revolutionary ideas," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "My cousin knows the most dreadful cranks, vegetarians and — and Socialists." He chanced it, feeling that vegetarians were not quite the same as vegetables; and he felt sure the Colonel would share his horror of Socialists. "People who want to be equal, and all that. What I say is — we're not equal and we never can be. As I always say to Audrey — if all the property were divided to-morrow, it would go back into the same hands. It's a law of nature, and if a man thinks he can get round a law of nature, why, he's talking through his — I mean, he's as mad as a—"

Recoiling from the omnipresent image, he groped madly in his mind for the alternative of a March hare. But before he could find it, the girl had cut in and completed his sentence. She smiled serenely, and said in her clear and ringing tones:

"As mad as Colonel Crane's hatter."

It is not unjust to Mr. Vernon-Smith to say that he fled as from a dynamite explosion. It would be unjust to say that he deserted a lady in distress, for she did not look in the least like a distressed lady, and he himself was a very distressed gentleman. He attempted to wave her indoors with some wild pretext, and eventually vanished there himself with an equally random apology. But the other two took no notice of him; they continued to confront each other, and both were smiling.

"I think you must be the bravest man in England," she said. "I don't mean anything about the war, or the D.S.O. and all that; I mean about this. Oh, yes, I do know a little about this, but there's one thing I don't know. Why do you do it?"

"I think it is you who are the bravest woman in England," he answered, "or, at any rate, the bravest person in these parts. I've walked about this town for a week, feeling like the last fool in creation, and expecting somebody to say something. And not a soul has said a word. They all seem to be afraid of saying the wrong thing."

"I think they're deadly," observed Miss Smith. "And if they don't have cabbages for hats, it's only because they have turnips for heads."

"No," said the Colonel gently; "I have many generous and friendly neighbours here, including your cousin. Believe me, there is a case for conventions, and the world is wiser than you know. You are too young not to be intolerant. But I can see you've got the fighting spirit; that is the best part of youth and intolerance. When you said that word just now, by Jove you looked like Britomart."

"She is the Militant Suffragette in the Faerie Queene, isn't she?" answered the girl. "I'm afraid I don't know my English literature so well as you do. You see, I'm an artist, or trying to be one; and some people say that narrows a person. But I can't help getting cross with all the varnished vulgarity they talk about everything — look at what he said about Socialism."

"It was a little superficial," said Crane with a smile.

"And that," she concluded, "is why I admire your hat, though I don't know why you wear it."

This trivial conversation had a curious effect on the Colonel. There went with it a sort of warmth and a sense of crisis that he had not known since the war. A sudden purpose formed itself in his mind, and he spoke like one stepping across a frontier.

"Miss Smith," he said, "I wonder if I might ask you to pay me a further compliment. It may be unconventional, but I believe you do not stand on these conventions. An old friend of mine will be calling on me shortly, to wind up the rather unusual business or ceremonial of which you have chanced to see a part. If you would do me the honour to lunch with me to-morrow at half-past one, the true story of the cabbage awaits you. I promise that you shall hear the real reason. I might even say I promise you shall SEE the real reason."

"Why, of course I will," said the unconventional one heartily. "Thanks awfully."

The Colonel took an intense interest in the appointments of the luncheon next day. With subconscious surprise he found himself not only interested, but excited. Like many of his type, he took a pleasure in doing such things well, and knew his way about in wine and cookery. But that would not alone explain his pleasure. For he knew that young women generally know very little about wine, and emancipated young women possibly least of all. And though he meant the cookery to be good, he knew that in one feature it would appear rather fantastic. Again, he was a good-natured gentleman who would always have liked young people to enjoy a luncheon party, as he would have liked a child to enjoy a Christmas tree. But there seemed no reason why he should have a sort of happy insomnia, like a child on Christmas Eve. There was really no excuse for his pacing up and down the garden with his cigar, smoking furiously far into the night. For as he gazed at the purple irises and the grey pool in the faint moonshine, something in his feelings passed as if from the one tint to the other; he had a new and unexpected reaction. For the first time he really hated the masquerade he had made himself endure. He wished he could smash the cabbage as he had smashed the top-hat. He was little more than forty years old; but he had never realized how much there was of what was dried and faded about his flippancy, till he felt unexpectedly swelling within him the monstrous and solemn vanity of a young man. Sometimes he looked up at the picturesque, the too picturesque, outline of the house next door, dark against the moonrise, and thought he heard faint voices in it, and something like a laugh.

The visitor who called on the Colonel next morning may have been an old friend, but he was certainly an odd contrast. He was a very abstracted, rather untidy man in a rusty knickerbocker suit; he had a long head with straight hair of the dark red called auburn, one or two wisps of which stood on end however he brushed it, and a long face, clean-shaven and heavy about the jaw and chin, which he had a way of sinking and settling squarely into his cravat. His name was Hood, and he was apparently a lawyer, though he had not come on strictly legal business. Anyhow, he exchanged greetings with Crane with a quiet warmth and gratification, smiled at the old manservant as if he were an old joke, and showed every sign of an appetite for his luncheon.

The appointed day was singularly warm and bright and everything in the garden seemed to glitter; the goblin god of the South Seas seemed really to grin; and the scarecrow really to have a new hat. The irises round the pool were swinging and flapping in a light breeze; and he remembered they were called “flags” and thought of purple banners going into battle.

She had come suddenly round the corner of the house. Her dress was of a dark but vivid blue, very plain and angular in outline, but not outrageously artistic; and in the morning light she looked less like a schoolgirl and more like a serious woman of twenty-five or thirty; a little older and a great deal more interesting. And something in this morning seriousness increased the reaction of the night before. One single wave of thanksgiving went up from Crane to think that at least his grotesque green hat was gone and done with for ever. He had worn it for a week without caring a curse for anybody; but during that ten minutes’ trivial talk under the lamp-post, he felt as if he had suddenly grown donkey’s ears in the street.

He had been induced by the sunny weather to have a little table laid for three in a sort of veranda open to the garden. When the three sat down to it, he looked across at the lady and said: “I fear I must exhibit myself as a crank; one of those cranks your cousin disapproves of, Miss Smith. I hope it won’t spoil this little lunch than for anybody else. But I am going to have a vegetarian meal.”

“Are you?” she said. “I should never have said you looked like a vegetarian.”

“Just lately I have only looked like a fool,” he said dispassionately; “but I think I’d sooner look a fool than a vegetarian in the ordinary way. This is rather a special occasion. Perhaps my friend Hood had better begin; it’s really his story more than mine.”

“My name is Robert Owen Hood,” said that gentleman, rather sardonically. “That’s how improbable reminiscences often begin; but the only point now is that my old friend here insulted me horribly by calling me Robin Hood.”

“I should have called it a compliment,” answered Audrey Smith. “Buy why did he call you Robin Hood?”

"Because I drew the long bow," said the lawyer.

"But to do you justice," said the Colonel, "it seems that you hit the bull's eye."

As he spoke Archer came in bearing a dish which he placed before his master. He had already served the others with the earlier courses, but he carried this one with the pomp of one bringing the boar's head at Christmas. It consisted of a plain boiled cabbage.

"I was challenged to do something," went on Hood, "which my friend here declared to be impossible. In fact, any sane man would have declared it to be impossible. But I did it for all that. Only my friend, in the heat of rejecting and ridiculing the notion, made use of a hasty expression. I might almost say he made a rash vow."

"My exact words were," said Colonel Crane solemnly: "`If you can do that, I'll eat my hat.'"

He leaned forward thoughtfully and began to eat it. Then he resumed in the same reflective way:

"You see, all rash vows are verbal or nothing. There might be a debate about the logical and literary way in which my friend Hood fulfilled HIS rash vow. But I put it to myself in the same pedantic sort of way. It wasn't possible to eat any hat that I wore. But it might be possible to wear a hat that I could eat. Articles of dress could hardly be used for diet; but articles of diet could really be used for dress. It seemed to me that I might fairly be said to have made it my hat, if I wore it systematically as a hat and had no other, putting up with all the disadvantages. Making a blasted fool of myself was the fair price to be paid for the vow or wager; for one ought always to lose something on a wager."

And he rose from the table with a gesture of apology.

The girl stood up. "I think it's perfectly splendid," she said. "It's as wild as one of those stories about looking for the Holy Grail."

The lawyer also had risen, rather abruptly, and stood stroking his long chin with his thumb and looking at his old friend under bent brows in a rather reflective manner.

"Well, you've subpoena'd me as a witness all right," he said, "and now, with the permission of the court, I'll leave the witness-box. I'm afraid I must be going. I've got important business at home. Good-bye, Miss Smith."

The girl returned his farewell a little mechanically; and Crane seemed to recover from a similar trance as he stepped after the retreating figure of his friend.

"I say, Owen," he said hastily, "I'm sorry you're leaving so early. Must you really go?"

"Yes," replied Owen Hood gravely. "My private affairs are quite real and practical, I assure you." His grave mouth worked a little humourously at the corners as he added: "The truth is, I don't think I mentioned it, but I'm thinking of getting married."

"Married!" repeated the Colonel, as if thunderstruck.

"Thanks for your compliments and congratulations, old fellow," said the satiric Mr. Hood. "Yes, it's all been thought out. I've even decided whom I am going to marry. She knows about it herself. She has been warned."

"I really beg your pardon," said the Colonel in great distress, "of course I congratulate you most heartily; and her even more heartily. Of course I'm delighted to hear it. The truth is, I was surprised... not so much in that way..."

"Not so much in what way?" asked Hood. "I suppose you mean some would say I am on the way to be an old bachelor. But I've discovered it isn't half so much a matter of years as of ways. Men like me get elderly more by choice than chance; and there's much more choice and less chance in life than your modern fatalists make out. For such people fatalism falsifies even chronology. They're not unmarried because they're old. They're old because they're unmarried."

"Indeed you are mistaken," said Crane earnestly. "As I say, I was surprised, but my surprise was not so rude as you think. It wasn't that I thought there was anything unfitting about... somehow it was rather the other way... as if things could fit better than one thought... as if — but anyhow, little as I know about it, I really do congratulate you."

"I'll tell you all about it before long," replied his friend. "It's enough to say just now that it was all bound up with my succeeding after all in doing — what I did. She was the inspiration, you know. I have done what is called an impossible thing; but believe me, she is really the impossible part of it."

"Well, I must not keep you from such an impossible engagement," said Crane smiling. "Really, I'm confoundedly glad to hear about all this. Well, good-bye for the present."

Colonel Crane stood watching the square shoulders and russet mane of his old friend, as they disappeared down the road, in a rather indescribable state of mind. As he turned hastily back towards his garden and his other guest, he was conscious of a change; things seemed different in some light-headed and illogical fashion. He could not himself trace the connexion; indeed, he did not know whether it was a connexion or a disconnexion. He was very far from being a fool; but his brains were of the sort that are directed outwards to things; the brains of the soldier or the scientific man; and he had no practice in analysing his own mind. He did not quite understand why the news about Owen Hood should give him that dazed sense of a difference in things in general. Doubtless he was very fond of Owen Hood; but he had been fond of other people who had got married without especially disturbing the atmosphere of his own back-garden. He even dimly felt that mere affection might have worked the other way; that it might have made him worry about Hood, and wonder whether Hood was making a fool of himself, or even feel suspicious or jealous of Mrs. Hood — if there had not been something else that made him feel quite the other way. He could not quite understand it; there seemed to be an increasing number of things that he could not understand. This world in which he himself wore garlands of green cabbage and in which his old friend the lawyer got married suddenly like a man going mad — this world was a new world, at once fresh and frightening, in which he could hardly understand the figures that were walking about, even his own. The flowers in the flower-pots had a new look about them, at once bright and nameless; and even the line of vegetables beyond could not altogether depress him with the memories of recent levity. Had he indeed been a prophet, or a visionary seeing the future, he might have seen that green line of cabbages extending infinitely like a green sea to the horizon. For he stood at the beginning of a story which was not to terminate until his incongruous cabbage had come to mean something that he had never meant by it. That green patch was to spread like a great green conflagration almost to the ends of the earth. But he was a practical person and the very reverse of a prophet; and like many other practical persons, he often did things without very clearly knowing what he was doing. He had the innocence of some patriarch or primitive hero in the morning of the world, founding more than he could himself realize of his legend and his line. Indeed he felt very much like someone in the morning of the world; but beyond that he could grasp nothing.

Audrey Smith was standing not so very many yards away; for it was only for a few strides that he had followed his elder guest towards the gate. Yet her figure had fallen far enough back out of the foreground to take on the green framework of the garden; so that her dress might almost have been blue with a shade of distance. And when she spoke to him, even from that little way off, her voice took on inevitably a new suggestion of one calling out familiarly and from afar, as one calls to an old companion. It moved him in a disproportionate fashion, though all that she said was:

"What became of your old hat?"

"I lost it," he replied gravely, "obviously I had to lose it. I believe the scarecrow found it."

"Oh, do let's go and look at the scarecrow," she cried.

He led her without a word to the kitchen-garden and gravely explained each of its outstanding features; from the serious Mr. Archer resting on his spade to the grotesque South Sea Island god grinning at the corner of the plot. He spoke as with an increasing solemnity and verbosity, and all the time knew little or nothing of what he said.

At last she cut into his monologue with an abstraction that was almost rude; yet her brown eyes were bright and her sympathy undisguised.

"Don't talk about it," she cried with illogical enthusiasm. "It looks as if we were really right in the middle of the country. It's as unique as the Garden of Eden. It's simply the most delightful place—"

It was at this moment, for some unaccountable reason, that the Colonel who had lost his hat suddenly proceeded to lose his head. Standing in that grotesque vegetable scenery, a black and stiff yet somehow stately figure, he proceeded in the most traditional manner to offer the lady everything he possessed, not forgetting the scarecrow or the cabbages; a half-humourous memory of which returned to him with the boomerang of bathos.

"When I think of the encumbrances on the estate—" he concluded gloomily. "Well, there they are; a scarecrow and a cannibal fetish and a stupid man who has stuck in a rut of respectability and conventional ways."

"Very conventional," she said, "especially in his taste in hats."

"That was the exception, I'm afraid," he said earnestly. "You'd find those things very rare and most things very dull. I can't help having fallen in love with you; but for all that we are in different worlds; and you belong in a younger world, which says what it thinks, and cannot see what most of our silences and scruples meant."

"I suppose we are very rude," she said thoughtfully, "and you must certainly excuse me if I do say what I think."

"I deserve no better," he replied mournfully.

"Well, I think I must be in love with you too," she replied calmly. "I don't see what time has to do with being fond of people. You are the most original person I ever knew."

"My dear, my dear," he protested almost brokenly, "I fear you are making a mistake. Whatever else I am, I never set up to be original."

"You must remember," she replied, "that I have known a good many people who did set up to be original. An Art School swarms with them; and there are any number among those socialist and vegetarian friends of mine you were talking about. They would think nothing of wearing cabbages on their heads, of course. Any one of them would be capable of getting inside a pumpkin if he could. Any one of them might appear in public dressed entirely in watercress. But that's just it. They might well wear watercress for they are water-creatures; they go with the stream. They do those things because those things are done; because they are done in their own Bohemian set. Unconventionality is their convention. I don't mind it myself; I think it's great fun; but that doesn't mean that I don't know real strength or independence when I see it. All that is just molten and formless; but the really strong man is one who can make a mould and then break it. When a man like you can suddenly do a thing like that, after twenty years of habit, for the sake of his word, then somehow one really does feel that man is man and master of his fate."

"I doubt if I am master of my fate," replied Crane, "and I do not know whether I ceased to be yesterday or two minutes ago."

He stood there for a moment like a man in heavy armour. Indeed, the antiquated image is not inappropriate in more ways than one. The new world within him was so alien from the whole habit in which he lived, from the very gait and gestures of his daily life, conducted through countless days, that his spirit had striven before it broke its shell. But it was also true that even if he could have done what every man wishes to do at such a moment, something supreme and satisfying, it would have been something in a sense formal or it would not have satisfied him. he was one of those to whom it is natural to be ceremonial. Even the music in his mind, too deep and distant for him to catch and echo, was the music of old and ritual dance and not of revelry; and it was not for nothing that he had built gradually about him that garden of the grey stone fountain and the great hedge of yew. He bent suddenly and kissed her hand.

"I like that," she said. "You ought to have powdered hair and a sword."

"I apologize," he said gravely, "no modern man is worthy of you. But indeed I fear, in every sense I am not a very modern man."

"You must never wear that hat again," she said, indicating the battered original topper.

"To tell the truth," he observed mildly, "I had not any intention of resuming that one."

"Silly," she said briefly, "I don't mean that hat; I mean that sort of hat. As a matter of fact, there couldn't be a finer hat than the cabbage."

"My dear—" he protested; but she was looking at him quite seriously.

"I told you I was an artist, and didn't know much about literature," she said. "Well, do you know, it really does make a difference. Literary people let words get between them and things. We do at least look at the things and not the names of the things. You think a cabbage is comic because the name sound comic and even vulgar; something between `cab' and `garbage,' I suppose. But a cabbage isn't really comic or vulgar. You wouldn't think so if you simply had to paint it. Haven't you seen Dutch and Flemish galleries, and don't you know what great men painted cabbages? What they saw was certain lines and colours; very wonderful lines and colours."

"It may be all very well in a picture," he began doubtfully.

She suddenly laughed aloud.

"You idiot," she cried; "don't you know you looked perfectly splendid? The curves were like a great turban of leaves and the root rose like the spike of a helmet; it was rather like the turbaned helmets on some of Rembrandt's figures, with the face like bronze in the shadows of green and purple. That's the sort of thing artists can see, who keep their eyes and heads clear of words! And then you want to apologize for not wearing that stupid stove-pipe covered with blacking, when you went about wearing a coloured crown like a king. And you were like a king in this country; for they were all afraid of you."

As he continued a faint protest, her laughter took on a more mischievous side. "If you'd stuck to it a little longer, I swear they'd all have been wearing vegetables for hats. I swear I saw my cousin the other day standing with a sort of trowel, and looking irresolutely at a cabbage."

Then, after a pause, she said with a beautiful irrelevancy:

“What was it Mr. Hood did that you said he couldn’t do?”

But these are tales of topsy-turvydom even in the sense that they have to be told tail-foremost. And he who would know the answer to that question must deliver himself up to the intolerable tedium of reading the story of The Improbable Success of Mr. Owen Hood, and an interval must be allowed him before such torments are renewed.

The Improbable Success of Mr. Owen Hood

Heroes who have endured the heavy labour of reading to the end the story of The Unpresentable Appearance of Colonel Crane are aware that his achievement was the first of a series of feats counted impossible, like the quests of the Arthurian knights. For the purpose of this tale, in which the Colonel is but a secondary figure, it is enough to say that he was long known and respected, before his last escapade, as a respectable and retired military man in a residential part of Surrey, with a sunburnt complexion and an interest in savage mythology. As a fact, however, he had gathered the sunburn and the savage myths some time before he had managed to collect the respectability and the suburban myths. In his early youth he had been a traveller of the adventurous and even restless sort; and he only concerns this story because he was a member of a sort of club or clique of young men whose adventurousness verged on extravagance. They were all eccentrics of one kind or another, some professing extreme revolutionary and some extreme reactionary opinions, and some both. Among the latter may be classed Mr. Robert Owen Hood, the somewhat unlegal lawyer who is the hero of this tale.

Robert Owen Hood was Crane’s most intimate and incongruous friend. Hood was from the first as sedentary as Crane was adventurous. Hood was to the end as casual as Crane was conventional. The prefix of Robert Owen was a relic of a vague revolutionary tradition in his family; but he inherited along with it a little money that allowed him to neglect the law and to cultivate a taste for liberty and for drifting and dreaming in lost corners of the country, especially in the little hills between the Severn and the Thames. In the upper reaches of the latter river is an islet in which he especially loved to sit fishing, a shabby but not commonplace figure clad in grey, with a mane of rust-coloured hair and a long face with a large chin, rather like Napoleon. Beside him, on the occasion now in question, stood the striking contrast of his alert military friend in full travelling kit; being on the point of starting for one of his odysseys in the South Seas.

“Well,” demanded the impatient traveller in a tone of remonstrance, “have you caught anything?”

“You once asked me,” replied the angler placidly, “what I meant by calling you a materialist. That is what I meant by calling you a materialist.”

“If one must be a materialist or a madman,” snorted the soldier, “give me materialism.”

“On the contrary,” replied his friend, “your fad is far madder than mine. And I doubt if it’s any more fruitful. The moment men like you see a man sitting by a river with a rod, they are insanely impelled to ask him what he has caught. But when you go off to shoot big game, as you call it, nobody ask you what you have caught. Nobody expects you to bring home a hippopotamus for supper. Nobody has ever seen you walking up Pall Mall, followed respectfully by a captive giraffe. Your bag of elephants, though enormous, seems singularly unobtrusive; left in the cloak-room, no doubt. Personally, I doubt if you ever catch anything. It’s all decorously hidden in desert sand and doubt and distance. But what I catch is something far more elusive, and as slippery as any fish. It is the soul of England.”

“I should think you’d catch a cold if not a fish,” answered Crane, “sitting dangling your feet in a pool like that. I like to move about a little more. Dreaming is all very well in its way.”

At this point a symbolic cloud ought to have come across the sun, and a certain shadow of mystery and silence must rest for a moment upon the narrative. For it was at this moment that James Crane, being blind with inspiration, uttered his celebrated Prophecy, upon which this improbable narrative turns. As was commonly the case with men uttering omens, he was utterly unconscious of anything ominous about what he said. A moment after he would probably not know that he had said it. A moment after, it was as if a cloud of strange shape had indeed passed from the face of the sun.

The prophecy has taken the form of a proverb. In due time the patient, all-suffering reader, may learn what proverb. As it happened, indeed, the conversation had largely consisted of proverbs; as is often the case with men like Hood, whose hearts are with that old English country life from which all the proverbs came. But it was Crane who said:

“It’s all very well to be fond of England; but a man who wants to help England mustn’t let the grass grow under his feet.”

“And that’s just what I want to do,” answered Hood. “That’s exactly what even your poor tired people in big towns really want to do. When a wretched clerk walks down Threadneedle Street, wouldn’t he really be delighted if he could look down and see the grass growing under his feet; a magic green carpet in the middle of the pavement? It would be like a fairy-tale."

"Well, but he wouldn't sit like a stone as you do," replied the other. "A man might let the grass grow under his feet without actually letting the ivy grow up his legs. That sounds like a fairy-tale, too, if you like, but there's no proverb to recommend it."

"Oh, there are proverbs on my side, if you come to that," answered Hood laughing. "I might remind you about the rolling stone that gathers no moss."

"Well, who wants to gather moss except a few fussy old ladies?" demanded Crane. "Yes, I'm a rolling stone, I suppose; and I go rolling round the earth as the earth goes rolling round the sun. But I'll tell you what; there's only one kind of stone that does really gather moss."

"And what is that, my rambling geologist?"

"A gravestone," said Crane.

There was a silence, and Hood sat gazing with his owlish face at the dim pools in which the dark woods were mirrored. At last he said:

"Moss isn't the only thing found on that. Sometimes there is the word `Resurgam'."

"Well, I hope you will," said Crane genially. "But the trumpet will have to be pretty loud to wake you up. It's my opinion you'll be too late for the Day of Judgement."

"Now if this were a true dramatic dialogue," remarked Hood, "I should answer that it would be better for you if you were. But it hardly seems a Christian sentiment for a parting. Are you really off to-day?"

"Yes, off to-night," replied his friend. "Sure you won't come with me to the Cannibal Islands?"

"I prefer my own island," said Mr. Owen Hood.

When his friend had gone he continued to gaze abstractedly at the tranquil topsy-turvydom in the green mirror of the pool, nor did he change his posture and hardly moved his head. This might be partly explained by the still habits of a fisherman; but to tell the truth, it was not easy to discover whether the solitary lawyer really wanted to catch any fish. He would often carry a volume of Isaac Walton in his pocket, having a love of the old English literature as of the old English landscape. But if he was an angler, he certainly was not a very complete angler.

But the truth is that Owen Hood had not been quite candid with his friend about the spell that held him to that particular islet in the Upper Thames. If he had said, as he was quite capable of saying, that he expected to catch the miraculous draught of fishes or the whale that swallowed Jonah, or even the great sea-serpent, his expressions would have been merely symbolical. But they would have been the symbol of something as unique and unattainable. For Mr. Owen Hood was really fishing for something that very few fishermen ever catch; and that was a dream of his boyhood, and something that had happened on that lonely spot long ago.

Years before, when he was a very young man, he had sat fishing on that island one evening as the twilight bands turned to dark, and two or three broad bands of silver were all that was left of the sunset behind the darkening trees. The birds were dropping out of the sky and there was no noise except the soft noises of the river. Suddenly, and without a sound, as comes a veritable vision, a girl had come out of the woods opposite. She spoke to him across the stream, asking him he hardly knew what, which he answered he hardly knew how. She was dressed in white and carried a bunch of bluebells loose in her hand; her hair in a straight fringe of gold was low on her forehead; she was pale like ivory, and her pale eyelids had a sort of flutter as of nervous emotion. There came on him a strangling sense of stupidity. But he must have managed to speak civilly, for she lingered; and he must have said something to amuse her, for she laughed. Then followed the incident he could never analyse, though he was an introspective person. Making a gesture towards something, she managed to drop her loose blue flowers in the water. He knew not what sort of whirlwind was in his head, but it seemed to him that prodigious things were happening, as in an epic of the gods, of which all visible things were but the small signs. Before he knew where he was he was standing dripping on the other bank; for he had splashed in somehow and saved the bunch as if it had been a baby drowning. Of all the things she said he could recall one sentence, that repeated itself perpetually in his mind: “You’ll catch your death of cold.”

He only caught the cold and not the death; yet even the notion of the latter did not somehow seem disproportionate. The doctor, to whom he was forced to give some sort of explanation of his immersion, was much interested in the story, or what he heard of it, having a pleasure in working out the pedigrees of the county families and the relationships of the best houses in the neighbourhood. By some rich process of elimination he deduced that the lady must be Miss Elizabeth Seymour from Marley Court. The doctor spoke with a respectful relish of such things; he was a rising young practitioner named Hunter, afterwards a neighbour of Colonel Crane. He shared Hood's admiration for the local landscape, and said it was owing to the beautiful way in which Marley Court was kept up.

"It's land-owners like that," he said, "who have made England. It's all very well for Radicals to talk; but where should we be without the land-owners?"

"Oh, I'm all for land-owners," said Hood rather wearily. "I like them so much I should like more of them. More and more land-owners. Hundreds and thousands of them."

It is doubtful whether Dr. Hunter quite followed his enthusiasm, or even his meaning; but Hood had reason later to remember this little conversation; so far as he was in a mood to remember any conversations except one.

Anyhow, it were vain to disguise from the intelligent though exhausted reader that this was probably the true origin of Mr. Hood's habit of sitting solidly on that island and gazing abstractedly at that bank. All through the years when he felt his first youth was passing, and even when he seemed to be drifting towards middle age, he haunted that valley like a ghost, waiting for something that never came again. It is by no means certain, in the last and most subtle analysis, that he even expected it to come again. Somehow it seemed too like a miracle for that. Only this place had become the shrine of the miracle; and he felt that if anything ever did happen there, he must be there to see. And so it came about that he was there to see when things did happen; and rather queer things had happened before the end.

One morning he saw an extraordinary thing. That indeed would not have seemed extraordinary to most people; but it was quite apocalyptic to him. A dusty man came out of the woods carrying what looked like dusty pieces of timber, and proceeded to erect on the bank what turned out to be a sort of hoarding, a very large wooden notice-board on which was written in enormous letters: "To Be Sold," with remarks in smaller letters about the land and the name of the land agents. For the first time for years Owen Hood stood up in his place and left his fishing, and shouted questions across the river. The man answered with the greatest patience and good-humour; but it is probable that he went away convinced that he had been talking to a wandering lunatic.

That was the beginning of what was for Owen Hood a crawling nightmare. The change advanced slowly, by a process covering years, but it seemed to him that he was helpless and paralysed in its presence, precisely as a man is paralysed in an actual nightmare. He laughed with an almost horrible laughter to think that a man in a modern society is supposed to be master of his fate and free to pursue his pleasures; when he had not power to prevent the daylight he looks on from being darkened, or the air he breathes from being turned to poison, or the silence that is his full possession from being shaken with the cacophony of hell. There was something, he thought grimly, in Dr. Hunter's simple admiration for agricultural aristocracy. There was something in quite primitive and even barbarous aristocracy. Feudal lords went in fitfully for fights and forays; they put collars round the necks of some serfs; they occasionally put halters round the necks of a few of them. But they did not wage war day and night against the five senses of man.

There had appeared first on the river-bank small sheds and shanties, for workmen who seemed to be rather lengthily occupied in putting up larger sheds and shanties. To the very last, when the factory was finished, it was not easy for the traditional eye to distinguish between what was temporary and what was permanent. It did not look as if any of it could be permanent, if there were anything natural in the nature of things, so to speak. But whatever was the name and nature of that amorphous thing, it swelled and increased and even multiplied without clear division; until there stood on the river bank a great black patchwork block of buildings terminating in a tall brick factory chimney from which a stream of smoke mounted into the silent sky. A heap of some sort of debris, scrapped iron and similar things, lay in the foreground; and a broken bar, red with rust, had fallen on the spot where the girl had been standing when she brought bluebells out of the wood.

He did not leave his island. Rural and romantic and sedentary as he may have seemed, he was not the son of an old revolutionist for nothing. It was not altogether in vain that his father had called him Robert Owen or that his friends had sometimes called him Robin Hood. Sometimes, indeed, his soul sank within him with a mortal sickness that was near suicide, but more often he marched up and down in a militant fashion, being delighted to see the tall wild-flowers waving on the banks like flags within a stone's-throw of all he hated, and muttering, "Throw out the banners on the outward wall." He had already, when the estate of Marley Court was broken up for building, taken some steps to establish himself on the island, had built a sort of hut there, in which it was possible to picnic for considerable periods.

One morning when dawn was still radiant behind the dark factory and light lay in a satin sheen upon the water, there crept out upon that satin something like a thickening thread of a different colour and material. It was a thin ribbon of some liquid that did not mingle with the water, but lay on top of it wavering like a worm; and Owen Hood watched it as a man watches a snake. It looked like a snake, having opalescent colours not without intrinsic beauty; but to him it was a very symbolic snake; like the serpent that destroyed Eden. A few days afterward there were a score of snakes covering the surface; little crawling rivers that moved on the river but did not mix with it, being as alien as witch's oils. Later there came darker liquids with no pretensions to beauty, black and brown flakes of grease that floated heavily.

It was highly characteristic of Hood that to the last he was rather hazy about the nature and purpose of the factory; and therefore about the ingredients of the chemicals that were flowing into the river; beyond the fact that they were mostly of the oily sort and floated on the water in flakes and lumps, and that something resembling petrol seemed to predominate, used perhaps rather for power than raw material. He had heard a rustic rumour that the enterprise was devoted to hair-dye. It smelled rather like a soap factory. So far as he ever understood it, he gathered that it was devoted to what might be considered as a golden mean between hair-dye and soap, some kind of new and highly hygienic cosmetics. There had been a yet more feverish fashion in these things, since Professor Hake had written his book proving that cosmetics were of all things the most hygienic. And Hood had seen many of the meadows of his childhood now brightened and adorned by large notices inscribed "Why Grow Old?" with the portrait of a young woman grinning in a regrettable manner. The appropriate name on the notices was Bliss, and he gathered that it all had something to do with the great factory.

Resolved to know a little more than this about the matter, he began to make inquiries and complaints, and engaged in a correspondence which ended in an actual interview with some of the principal persons involved. The correspondence had gone on for a long time before it came anywhere near to anything so natural as that. Indeed, the correspondence for a long time was entirely on his side. For the big businesses are quite as unbusinesslike as the Government departments; they are no better in efficiency and much worse in manners. But he obtained his interview at last, and it was with a sense of sour amusement that he came face to face with four people whom he wanted to meet.

One was Sir Samuel Bliss, for he had not yet performed those party services which led to his being known to us all as Lord Normantowers. He was a small, alert man like a ferret, with bristles of grey beard and hair, and active or even agitated movements. The second was his manager, Mr. Low, a stout, dark man with a thick nose and thick rings, who eyed strangers with a curious heavy suspicion like a congested sense of injury. It is believed that he expected to be persecuted. The third man was somewhat of a surprise, for he was no other than his old friend Dr. Horace Hunter, as healthy and hearty as ever, but even better dressed; as he now had a great official appointment as some kind of medical inspector of the sanitary conditions of the district. But the fourth man was the greatest surprise of all. For it appeared that their conference was honoured by so great a figure in the scientific world as Professor Hake himself, who had revolutionized the modern mind with his new discoveries about the complexion in relation to health. When Hood realized who he was, a light of somewhat sinister understanding dawned on his long face.

On this occasion the Professor advanced an even more interesting theory. He was a big, blond man with blinking eyes and a bull neck; and doubtless there was more in him than met the eye, as is the way with great men. He spoke last, and his theory was expounded with a certain air of finality. The manager had already stated that it was quite impossible for large quantities of petrol to have escaped, as only a given amount was used in the factory. Sir Samuel had explained, in what seemed an irascible and even irrelevant manner, that he had presented several parks to the public, and had the dormitories of his work-people decorated in the simplest and best taste, and nobody could accuse him vandalism or not caring for beauty and all that. Then it was that Professor Hake explained the theory of the Protective Screen. Even if it were possible, he said, for some thin film of petrol to appear on the water, as it would not mix with the water the latter would actually be kept in a clearer condition. It would act, as it were, as a Cap; as does the gelatinous Cap upon certain preserved foods.

"That is a very interesting view," observed Hood; "I suppose you will write another book about that?"

"I think we are all the more privileged," remarked Bliss, "in hearing of the discovery in this personal fashion, before our expert has laid it before the public."

"Yes," said Hood, "your expert is very expert, isn't he — in writing books?"

Sir Samuel Bliss stiffened in all his bristles. "I trust," he said, "you are not implying any doubt that our expert is an expert."

"I have no doubt of your expert," answered Hood gravely. "I do not doubt either that he is expert or that he is yours."

"Really, gentlemen," cried Bliss in a sort of radiance of protest, "I think such an insinuation about a man in Professor Hake's position—"

"Not at all, not at all," said Hood soothingly, "I'm sure it's a most comfortable position."

The Professor blinked at him, but a light burned in the eyeballs under the heavy eyelids.

"If you come here talking like that—" he began, when Hood cut off his speech by speaking across him to somebody else, with a cheerful rudeness that was like a kick in its contempt.

"And what do you say, my dear doctor?" he observed, addressing Hunter. "You used to be almost as romantic as myself about the amenities of this place. Do you remember how much you admired the landlords for keeping the place quiet and select; and how you said the old families preserved the beauty of old England?"

There was a silence, and then the young doctor spoke.

"Well, it doesn't follow a fellow can't believe in progress. That's what's the matter with you, Hood; you don't believe in progress. We must move with the times; and somebody always has to suffer. Besides, it doesn't matter so much about river-water nowadays. It doesn't even matter so much about the main water-supply. When the new Bill is passed, people will be obliged to use the Bulton Filter in any case."

"I see," said Hood reflectively, "You first make a mess of the water for money, and then make a virtue of forcing people to clean it themselves."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Hunter angrily.

"Well, I was thinking at the moment," said Hood in his rather cryptic way. "I was thinking about Mr. Bulton. The man who owns the filters. I was wondering whether he might join us. We seem such a happy family party."

"I cannot see the use of prolonging this preposterous conversation," said Sir Samuel.

"Don't call the poor Professor's theory preposterous," remonstrated Hood. "A little fanciful, perhaps. And as for the doctor's view, surely there's nothing preposterous in that. You don't think the chemicals will poison all the fish I catch, do you, Doctor?"

"No, of course not," replied Hunter curtly.

"They will adapt themselves by natural selection," said Hood dreamily. "They will develop organs suitable to an oily environment — will learn to love petrol."

"Oh, I have no time for this nonsense," said Hunter, and he was turning to go, when Hood stepped in front of him and looked at him very steadily.

"You mustn't call natural selection nonsense," he said. "I know all about that, at any rate. I can't tell whether liquids tipped off the shore will fall into the river, because I don't understand hydraulics. I don't know whether your machinery makes a hell of a noise every morning, for I've never studied acoustics. I don't know whether it stinks or not, because I haven't read your expert's book on `The Nose.' But I know all about adaptation to environment. I know that some of the lower organisms do really change with their changing conditions. I know there are creatures so low that they do survive by surrendering to every succession of mud and slime; and when things are slow they are slow, and when things are fast they are fast, and when things are filthy they are filthy. I thank you for convincing me of that."

He did not wait for a reply, but walked out of the room after bowing curtly to the rest; and that was the end of the great conference on the question of riparian rights and perhaps the end of Thames Conservancy and of the old aristocracy, with all its good and ill.

The general public never heard very much about it; at least until one catastrophic scene which was to follow. There was some faint ripple of the question some months later, when Dr. Horace Hunter was standing for Parliament in that division. One or two questions were asked about his duties in relation to river pollution; but it was soon apparent that no party particularly wished to force the issue against the best opinions advanced on the other side. The greatest living authority on hygiene, Professor Hake, had actually written to The Times (in the interests of science) to say that in such a hypothetical case as that mentioned, a medical man could only do what Dr. Hunter had apparently done. It so happened that the chief captain of industry in that part of the Thames Valley, Sir Samuel Bliss, had himself, after gravely weighing the rival policies, decided to Vote for Hunter. The great organizer's own mind was detached and philosophical in the matter; but it seems that his manager, a Mr. Low, was of the same politics and a more practical and pushful spirit; warmly urging the claims of Hunter on his work-people; pointing out the many practical advantages they would gain by voting for that physician, and the still more practical disadvantages they might suffer by not doing so. Hence it followed that the blue ribbons, which were the local badges of the Hunterians, were not only to be found attached to the iron railings and wooden posts of the factory, but to various human figures, known as "hands," which moved to and fro in it.

Hood took no interest in the election; but while it was proceeding he followed the matter a little further in another form. He was a lawyer, a lazy, but in some ways a learned one; for, his tastes being studious, he had originally learned the trade he had never used. More in defiance than in hope, he once carried the matter into the Courts, pleading his own cause on the basis of a law of Henry the Third against frightening the fish of the King's liege subjects in the Thames Valley. The judge, in giving judgement, complimented him on the ability and plausibility of his contention, but ultimately rejected it on grounds equally historic and remote. His lordship argued that no test seemed to be provided for ascertaining the degree of fear in the fish, or whether it amounted to that bodily fear of which the law took cognizance. But the learned judge pointed out the precedent of a law of Richard the Second against certain witches who had frightened children; which had been interpreted by so great an authority as Coke in the sense that the child "must return and of his own will testify to his fear." It did not seem to be alleged that any one of the fish in question had returned and laid any such testimony before any proper authority; and he therefore gave judgement for the defendants. And when the learned judge happened to meet Lord Normantowers (as he was by this time) out at dinner that evening, he was gaily rallied and congratulated by that new nobleman on the lucidity and finality of his judgement. Indeed, the learned judge had really relished the logic both of his own and Hood's contention; but the conclusion was what he would have come to in any case. For our judges are not hampered by any hide-bound code; they are progressive, like Dr. Hunter, and ally themselves on principle with the progressive forces of the age, especially those they are likely to meet out at dinner.

But it was this abortive law case that led up to something that altogether obliterated it in a blaze of glory, so far as Mr. Owen Hood was concerned. He had just left the courts, and turning down the streets that led in the direction of the station, he made his way thither in something of a brown study, as was his wont. The streets were filled with faces; it struck him for the first time that there were thousands and thousands of people in the world. There were more faces at the railway station, and then, when he had glanced idly at four or five of them, he saw one that was to him as incredible as the face of the dead.

She was coming casually out of the tea-room, carrying a handbag, just like anybody else. That mystical perversity of his mind, which had insisted on sealing up the sacred memory like something hardly to be sought in mere curiosity, had fixed it in its original colours and setting, like something of which no detail could be changed without the vision dissolving. He would have conceived it almost impossible that she could appear in anything but white or out of anything but a wood. And he found himself turned topsy-turvy by an old and common incredulity of men in his condition; being startled by the coincidence that blue suited her as well as white; and that in what he remembered of that woodland there was something else; something to be said even for teashops and railway stations.

She stopped in front of him and her pale, fluttering eyelids lifted from her blue-grey eyes.

“Why,” she said, “you are the boy that jumped in the river!”

“I’m no longer a boy,” answered Hood, “but I’m ready to jump in the river again.”

“Well, don’t jump on the railway-line,” she said, as he turned with a swiftness suggestive of something of the kind.

“To tell you the truth,” he said, “I was thinking of jumping into a railway-train. Do you mind if I jump into your railway-train?”

“Well, I’m going to Birkstead,” she said rather doubtfully.

Mr. Owen Hood did not in the least care where she was going, as he had resolved to go there; but as a matter of fact, he remembered a wayside station on that line that lay very near to what he had in view; so he tumbled into the carriage if possible with more alacrity; and landscapes shot by them as they sat looking in a dazed and almost foolish fashion at each other. At last the girl smiled with a sense of the absurdity of the thing.

"I heard about you from a friend of yours," she said; "he came to call on us soon after it happened; at least that was when he first came. You know Dr. Hunter, don't you?"

"Yes," replied Owen, a shadow coming over his shining hour. "Do you — do you know him well?"

"I know him pretty well now," said Miss Elizabeth Seymour.

The shadow on his spirit blackened swiftly; he suspected something quite suddenly and savagely. Hunter, in Crane's old phrase, was not a man who let the grass grow under his feet. It was so like him to have somehow used the incident as an introduction to the Seymours. Things were always stepping-stones for Hunter, and the little rock in the river had been a stepping-stone to the country-house. But was the country-house a stepping-stone to something else? Suddenly Hood realized that all his angers had been very abstracted angers. He had never hated a man before.

At that moment the train stopped at the station of Cowford.

"I wish you'd get out here with me," he said abruptly, "only for a little — and it might be the last time. I want you to do something."

She looked at him with a curious expression and said in a rather low voice, "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to come and pick bluebells," he said harshly.

She stepped out of the train, and they went up a winding country road without a word.

"I remember!" she said suddenly. "When you get to the top of this hill you see the wood where the bluebells were, and your little island beyond."

"Come on and see it," said Owen.

They stepped on the crest of the hill and stood. Below them the black factory belched its livid smoke into the air; and where the wood had been were rows of little houses like boxes, built of dirty yellow brick.

Hood spoke. "And when you shall see the abomination of desolation sitting in the Holy of Holies — isn't that when the world is supposed to end? I wish the world would end now; with you and me standing on a hill."

She was staring at the place with parted lips and more than her ordinary pallor; he knew she understood something monstrous and symbolic in the scene; yet her first remark was jerky and trivial. On the nearest of the yellow brick boxes were visible the cheap colours of various advertisements; and larger than the rest a blue poster proclaiming “Vote for Hunter.” With a final touch of bathos, Hood remembered that it was the last and most sensational day of the election. But the girl had already found her voice.

“Is that Dr. Hunter?” she asked with commonplace curiosity; “is he standing for parliament?”

A load that lay on Hood’s mind like a rock suddenly rose like an eagle; and he felt as if the hill he stood on were higher than Everest. By the insight of his own insanity, he knew well enough that SHE would have known well enough whether Hunter was standing, if — if there had been anything like what he supposed. The removal of the steadying weight staggered him, and he had said something quite indefensible.

“I thought you would know. I thought you and he were probably — well, the truth is I thought you were engaged, though I really don’t know why.”

“I can’t imagine why,” said Elizabeth Seymour. “I heard he was engaged to Lord Normantower’s daughter. They’ve got our old place now, you know.”

There was a silence and then Hood spoke suddenly in a loud and cheerful voice.

“Well, what I say is, `Vote for Hunter,’” he said heartily. “After all, why not vote for Hunter? Good old Hunter! I hope he’ll be a member of Parliament. I hope he’ll be Prime Minister. I hope he’ll be President of the World State that Wells talks about. By George, he deserves to be Emperor of the Solar System.”

“But why,” she protested, “why should he deserve all that?”

“For not being engaged to you, of course,” he replied.

“Oh!” she said, and something of a secret shiver in her voice went through him like a silver bell.

Abruptly, all of a sudden, the rage of raillery seemed to have left his voice and his face, so that his Napoleonic profile looked earnest and eager and much younger, like the profile of the young Napoleon. His wide shoulders lost the slight stoop that books had given them, and his rather wild red hair fell away from his lifted head.

“There is one thing I must tell you about him,” he said, “and one thing you must hear about me. My friends tell me I am a drifter and a dreamer;

that I let the grass grow under my feet; I must tell you at least how and why I once let it grow. Three days after that day by the river, I talked to Hunter; he was attending me and he talked about it and you. Of course he knew nothing about either. But he is a practical man; a very practical man; he does not dream or drift. From the way he talked I knew he was considering even then how the accident could be turned to account; to his account and perhaps to mine too; for he is good-natured; yes, he is quite good-natured. I think that if I had taken his hint and formed a sort of social partnership, I might have known you six years sooner, not as a memory, but — an acquaintance. And I could not do it. Judge me how you will, I could not bring myself to do it. That is what is meant by being born with a bee in the bonnet, with an impediment in the speech, with a stumbling-block in the path, with a skulky scruple in the soul. I could not bear to approach you by that door, with that gross and grinning flunky holding it open. I could not bear that suffocatingly substantial snob to bulk so big in my story or know so much of my secret. A revulsion I could never utter made me feel that the vision should remain my own even by remaining unfulfilled; but it should not be vulgarized. That is what is meant by being a failure in life. And when my best friend made a prophecy about me, and said there was something I should never do, I thought he was right."

"Why, what do you mean?" she asked rather faintly, "what was it you would never do?"

"Never mind that now," he said, with the shadow of a returning smile. "Rather strange things are stirring in me just now, and who knows but I may attempt something yet? But before all else, I must make clear for once what I am and for what I lived. There are men like me in the world; I am far from thinking they are the best or the most valuable; but they exist, to confound all the clever people and the realists and the new novelists. There has been and there is only one thing for me; something that in the normal sense I never even knew. I walked about the world blind, with my eyes turned inward, looking at you. For days after a night when I had dreamed of you, I was broken; like a man who had seen a ghost. I read over and over the great and grave lines of the old poets, because they alone were worthy of you. And when I saw you again by chance, I thought the world had already ended; and it was that return and tryst beyond the grave that is too good to be true."

“I do not think,” said answered in a low voice, “that the belief is too good to be true.”

As he looked at her a thrill went through him like a message too swift to be understood; and at the back of his mind something awoke that repeated again and again like a song the same words, “too good to be true.” There was always something pathetic, even in her days of pride, about the short-sighted look of her half-closed eyes; but it was for other reasons that they were now blinking in the strong white sunlight, almost as if they were blind. They were blind and bright with tears: she mastered her voice and it was steady.

“You talk about failures,” she said. “I suppose most people would call me a failure and all my people failures now; except those who would say we never failed, because we never had to try. Anyhow, we’re all poor enough now; I don’t know whether you know that I’ve been teaching music. I dare say we deserved to go. I dare say we were useless. Some of us tried to be harmless. But — but now I MUST say something, about some of us who tried rather hard to be harmless — in that way. The new people will tell you those ideals were Victorian and Tennysonian, and all the rest of it — well, it doesn’t matter what they say. They know quite as little about us as we about them. But to you, when you talk like that... what can I do, but tell you that you that if we were stiff, if we were cold, if we were careful and conservative, it was because deep down in our souls some of us DID believe that there might be loyalty and love like that, for which a woman might well wait even to the end of the world. What is it to these people if we chose not to be drugged or distracted with anything less worthy? But it would be hard indeed if when I find it DOES exist after all... hard on you, harder on me, if when I had really found it at last...” The catch in her voice came again and silence caught and held her.

He took one stride forward as into the heart of a whirlwind; and they met on the top of that windy hill as if they had come from the ends of the earth.

“This is an epic,” he said, “which is rather an action than a word. I have lived with words too long.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean you have turned me into a man of action,” he replied. “So long as you were in the past, nothing was better than the past. So long as you were only a dream, nothing was better than dreaming. But now I am going to do something that no man has ever done before.”

He turned towards the valley and flung out his hand with a gesture, almost as if the hand had held a sword.

"I am going to break the Prophecy," he cried in a loud voice. "I am going to defy the omens of my doom and make fun of my evil star. Those who called me a failure shall own I have succeeded where all humanity has failed. The real hero is not he who is bold enough to fulfil the predictions, but he who is bold enough to falsify them. And you shall see one falsified to-night."

"What in the world are you going to do?" she asked.

He laughed suddenly. "The first thing to do," he cried, swinging round with a new air of resolution and even cheerfulness, "the very first thing to do is to Vote for Hunter. Or, at any rate, help to get him into Parliament."

"But why in the world," she asked wondering, "should you want so much to get Dr. Hunter into Parliament?"

"Well, one must do something," he said with an appearance of good sense, "to celebrate the occasion. We must do something; and after all he must go somewhere, poor devil. You will say, why not throw him into the river? It would relieve the feelings and make a splash. But I'm going to make something much bigger than a splash. Besides, I don't want him in my nice river. I'd much rather pick him up and throw him all the way to Westminster. Much more sensible and suitable. Obviously there ought to be a brass band and a torchlight procession somewhere to-night; and why shouldn't he have a bit of the fun?"

He stopped suddenly as if surprised at his own words; for indeed his own phrase had fallen, for him, with the significance of a falling star.

"Of course!" he muttered. "A torchlight procession! I've been feeling that what I wanted was trumpets and what I really want is torches. Yes, I believe it could be done! Yes, the hour is come! By stars and blazes, I will give him a torchlight procession!"

He had been almost dancing with excitement on the top of the ridge; now he suddenly went bounding down the slope beyond, calling to the girl to follow, as carelessly as if they had been two children playing at hide and seek. Strangely enough, perhaps, she did follow; more strangely still when we consider the extravagant scenes through which she allowed herself to be led. They were scenes more insanely incongruous with all her sensitive and even secretive dignity than if she had been changing hats with a costermonger on a Bank Holiday. For there the world would only be loud with vulgarity, and here it was also loud with lies. She could never have described that Saturnalia of a political election; but she did dimly feel the double impression of a harlequinade at the end of a pantomime and of Hood's phrase about the end of the world. It was as if a Bank Holiday could also be a Day of Judgement. But as the farce could no longer offend her, so the tragedy could no longer terrify. She went through it all with a wan smile, which perhaps nobody in the world would have known her well enough to interpret. It was not in the normal sense excitement; yet it was something much more positive than patience. In a sense perhaps, more than ever before in her lonely life, she was walled up in her ivory tower; but it was all alight within, as if it were lit up with candles or lined with gold.

Hood's impetuous movements brought them to the bank of the river and the outer offices of the factory, all of which were covered with the coloured posters of the candidature, and one of which was obviously fitted up as a busy and bustling committee-room. Hood actually met Mr. Low coming out of it, buttoned up in a fur coat and bursting with speechless efficiency. But Mr. Low's beady black eyes glistened with an astonishment bordering on suspicion when Hood in the most hearty fashion offered his sympathy and co-operation. That strange subconscious fear, that underlay all the wealthy manager's success and security in this country, always came to the surface at the sight of Owen Hood's ironical face. Just at that moment, however, one of the local agents rushed at him in a distracted fashion, with telegrams in his hand. They were short of canvassers; they were short of cars; they were short of speakers; the crowd at Little Puddleton had been waiting half an hour; Dr. Hunter could not get round to them till ten past nine, and so on. The agent in his agony would probably have hailed a Margate nigger and entrusted him with the cause of the great National Party, without any really philosophical inquiry into the nigger's theory of citizenship. For all such over-practical push and bustle in our time is always utterly unpractical at the last minute and in the long run. On that night Robert Owen Hood would have been encouraged to go anywhere and say anything; and he did. It might be interesting to imagine what the lady thought about it; but it is possible that she did not think about it. She had a radiantly abstracted sense of passing through a number of ugly rooms and sheds with flaring gas and stacks of leaflets behind which little irritable men ran about like rabbits. The walls were covered with large allegorical pictures printed in line or in a few bright colours, representing Dr. Hunter as clad in armour, as slaying dragons, as rescuing ladies rather like classical goddesses, and so on. Lest it should be too literally understood that Dr. Hunter was in the habit of killing dragons in his daily round, as a form of field-sport, the dragon was inscribed with its name in large letters. Apparently its name was "National Extravagance." Lest there should be any doubt about the alternative which Dr. Hunter had discovered as a corrective to extravagance, the sword which he was thrusting through the dragon's body was inscribed with the word "Economy." Elizabeth Seymour, through whose happy but bewildered mind these pictures passed, could not but reflect vaguely that she herself had lately had to practise a good deal of economy and resist a good many temptations to extravagance; but it would never have occurred to her unaided imagination to conceive of that action as that of plunging a sword into a scaly monster of immense size. In the central committee-room they actually came face to face for a moment with the candidate, who came in very hot and breathless with a silk hat on the back of his head; where he had possibly forgotten it, for he certainly did not remove it. She was a little ashamed of being sensitive about such trifles; but she came to the conclusion that she would not like to have a husband standing for Parliament.

"We've rounded up all those people down Bleak Row," said Dr. Hunter. "No good going down The Hole and those filthy places. No vote there. Streets ought to be abolished and the people too."

"Well, we've had a very good meeting in the Masonic Hall," said the agent cheerfully. "Lord Normantowers spoke, and really he got through all right. Told some stories, you know; and they stood it capitally."

"And now," said Owen Hood, slapping his hands together in an almost convivial manner, "what about this torchlight procession?"

"This what procession?" asked the agent.

"Do you mean to tell me," said Hood sternly, "that arrangements are not complete for the torchlight procession of Dr. Hunter? That you are going to let this night of triumph pass without kindling a hundred flames to light the path of the conqueror? Do you realize that the hearts of a whole people have spontaneously stirred and chosen him? That the suffering poor murmured in their sleep `Vote for Hunter' long before the Caucus came by a providential coincidence to the same conclusion? Would not the people in The Hole set fire to their last poor sticks of furniture to do him honour? Why, from this chair alone—"

He caught up the chair on which Hunter had been sitting and began to break it enthusiastically. In this he was hastily checked; but he actually succeeded in carrying the company with him in his proposal, thus urged at the eleventh hour.

By nightfall he had actually organized his torchlight procession, escorting the triumphant Hunter, covered with blue ribbons, to the riverside, rather as if the worthy doctor were to be baptized like a convert or drowned like a witch. For that matter, Hood might possibly intend to burn the witch; for he brandished the blazing torch he carried so as to make a sort of halo round Hunter's astonished countenance. Then, springing on the scrap-heap by the brink of the river, he addressed the crowd for the last time.

"Fellow-citizens, we meet upon the shore of the Thames, the Thames which is to Englishmen all that the Tiber ever was to Romans. We meet in a valley which has been almost as much the haunt of English poets as of English birds. Never was there an art so native to our island as our old national tradition of landscape-painting in water-colour; never was that water-colour so luminous or so delicate as when dedicated to these holy waters. It was in such a scene that one of the most exquisite of our elder poets repeated as a burden to his meditations the single line, `Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song.'

"Rumours have been heard of some intention to trouble these waters; but we have been amply reassured. Names that now stand as high as those of our national poets and painters are a warrant that the stream is still as clear and pure and beneficent as of old. We all know the beautiful work that Mr. Bulton has done in the matter of filters. Dr. Hunter supports Mr. Bulton. I mean Mr. Bulton supports Dr. Hunter. I may also mention no less a man than Mr. Low. Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song.

"But then, for that matter, we all support Dr. Hunter. I myself have always found him quite supportable; I should say quite satisfactory. He is truly a progressive, and nothing gives me greater pleasure than to watch him progress. As somebody said, I lie awake at night, and in the silence of the whole universe, I seem to hear him climbing, climbing, climbing. All the numerous patients among whom he has laboured so successfully in this locality will join in a heartfelt expression of joy if he passes to the higher world of Westminster. I trust I shall not be misunderstood. Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song.

“My only purpose to-night is to express that unanimity. There may have been times when I differed from Dr. Hunter; but I am glad to say that all that is passed, and I have now nothing but the most friendly feelings towards him, for reasons which I will not mention, though I have plenty to say. In token of this reconciliation I here solemnly cast from me this torch. As that firebrand is quenched in the cool crystal waters of that sacred stream, so shall all such feuds perish in the heating pool of universal peace.”

Before anybody knew what he was doing, he had whirled his flambeau in a flaming wheel round his head and sent it flying like a meteor out into the dim eddies of the river.

The next moment a short, sharp cry was uttered, and every face in that crowd was staring at the river. All the faces were visibly staring, for they were all lit up as by a ghastly firelight by a wide wan unnatural flame that leapt up from the very surface of the stream; a flame that the crowd watched as it might have watched a comet.

“There,” cried Owen Hood, turning suddenly on the girl and seizing her arm, as if demanding congratulations. “So much for old Crane’s prophecy!”

“Who in the world is Old Crane?” she asked, “and what did he prophesy? Is he something like Old Moore?”

“Only an old friend,” said Hood hastily, “only an old friend of mine. It’s what he said that’s so important. He didn’t like my moping about with books and a fishing-rod, and he said, standing on that very island, `You may know a lot; but I don’t think you’ll ever set the Thames on fire. I’ll eat my hat if you do.’”

But the story of how Old Crane ate his hat is one upon which some readers at least can look back as on labour and suffering bravely endured. And if it be possible for any of them to desire to know any more either about Mr. Crane or Mr. Hood, then they must gird themselves for the ordeal of reading the story of The Unobtrusive Traffic of Captain Pierce, and their trials are for a time deferred.

The Unobtrusive Traffic of Captain Pierce

Those acquainted with Colonel Crane and Mr. Owen Hood, the lawyer, may or may not be concerned to know that they partook of an early lunch of eggs and bacon and beer at the inn called the Blue Boar, which stands at the turn of a steep road scaling a wooded ridge in the West Country. Those unacquainted with them may be content to know that the Colonel was a sunburnt, neatly-dressed gentleman, who looked taciturn and was; while the lawyer was a more rusty red-haired gentleman with a long Napoleonic face, who looked taciturn and was rather talkative. Crane was fond of good cooking; and the cooking in that secluded inn was better than that of a Soho restaurant and immeasurably better than that of a fashionable restaurant. Hood was fond of the legends and less-known aspects of the English country-side; and that valley had a quality of repose with a stir of refreshment, as if the west wind had been snared in it and tamed into a summer air. Both had a healthy admiration for beauty, in ladies as well as landscapes; although (or more probably because) both were quite romantically attached to the wives they had married under rather romantic circumstances, which are related elsewhere for such as can wrestle with so steep a narrative. And the girl who waited on them, the daughter of the innkeeper, was herself a very agreeable thing to look at; she was of a slim and quiet sort with a head that moved like a brown bird, brightly and as it were unexpectedly. Her manners were full of unconscious dignity, for her father, old John Hardy, was the type of old innkeeper who had the status, if not of a gentleman, at least of a yeoman. He was not without education and ability; a grizzled man with a keen, stubborn face that might have belonged to Cobbett, whose *Register* he still read on winter's nights. Hardy was well known to Hood, who had the same sort of antiquarian taste in revolutions.

There was little sound in the valley or the brilliant void of sky; the notes of birds fell only intermittently; a faint sound of tapping came from the hills opposite where the wooded slope was broken here and there by the bare face of a quarry, and a distant aeroplane passed and re-passed, leaving a trail of faint thunder. The two men at lunch took no more notice of it than if it had been a buzzing fly; but an attentive study of the girl might have suggested that she was at least conscious of the fly. Occasionally she looked at it, when no one was looking at her; for the rest, she had rather a marked appearance of not looking at it.

“Good bacon you get here,” remarked Colonel Crane.

“The best in England, and in the matter of breakfast England is the Earthly Paradise,” replied Hood readily. “I can’t think why we should descend to boast of the British Empire when we have bacon and eggs to boast of. They ought to be quartered on the Royal Arms: three pigs passant and three poached eggs on a chevron. It was bacon and eggs that gave all that morning glory to the English poets; it must have been a man who had a breakfast like this who could rise with that giant gesture: `Night’s candles are burnt out; and jocund day—’”

“Bacon did write Shakespeare, in fact,” said the Colonel.

“This sort of bacon did,” answered the other laughing; then, noticing the girl within earshot, he added: “We are saying how good your bacon is, Miss Hardy.”

“It is supposed to be very good,” she said with legitimate pride, “but I am afraid you won’t get much more of it. People aren’t going to be allowed to keep pigs much longer.”

“Not allowed to keep pigs!” ejaculated the Colonel in astonishment.

“By the old regulations they had to be away from the house, and we’ve got ground enough for that, though most of the cottagers hadn’t. But now they say the law is evaded, and the county council are going to stop pig-keeping altogether.”

“Silly swine,” snorted the Colonel.

“The epithet is ill chosen,” replied Hood. “Men are lower than swine when they do not appreciate swine. But really I don’t know what the world’s coming to. What will the next generation be like without proper pork? And, talking about the next generation, what has become of our young friend Pierce? He said he was coming down, but he can’t have come by that train.”

“I think Captain Pierce is up there, sir,” said Joan Hardy in a correct voice, as she unobtrusively withdrew.

Her tone might have indicated that the gentleman was upstairs, but her momentary glance had been towards the blue emptiness of the sky. Long after she was gone, Owen Hood remained staring up into it, until he saw the aeroplane darting and wheeling like a swallow.

“Showing off,” said the Colonel shortly, and drained his pewter mug.

“But why should he show off to us?” asked Hood.

“He jolly well wouldn’t,” replied the Colonel. “Showing off to the girl, of course.”

“A very good girl,” said Owen Hood gravely. “If there’s anything going on, you may be sure it’s all straight and serious.”

The Colonel blinked a little. “Well, times change,” he said. “I suppose I’m old-fashioned myself; but speaking as an old Tory, I must confess he might do worse.”

“Yes,” replied Hood, “and speaking as an old Radical, I should say he could hardly do better.”

While they were speaking the erratic aviator had eventually swept earthwards towards a flat field at the foot of the slope, and was now coming towards them. Hilary Pierce had rather the look of a poet than a professional aviator; and though he had distinguished himself in the war, he was very probably one of those whose natural dream was rather of conquering the air than conquering the enemy. His yellow hair was longer and more untidy than when he was in the army; and there was a touch of something irresponsible in his roving blue eye. He had a vein of pugnacity in him, however, as was soon apparent. He had paused to speak to Joan Hardy by the rather tumble-down pig-sty in the corner, and when he came towards the breakfast-table he seemed transfigured as with flame.

“What’s all this infernal insane foolery?” he demanded. “Who has the damned impudence to tell the Hardys they mustn’t keep pigs? Look here, the time is come when we must burst up all this sort of thing. I’m going to do something desperate.”

“You’ve been doing desperate things enough for this morning,” said Hood. “I advise you to take a little desperate luncheon. Do sit down, there’s a good fellow, and don’t stamp about like that.”

“No, but look here—”

Pierce was interrupted by Joan Hardy, who appeared quietly at his elbow and said demurely to the company: “There’s a gentleman here who asks if he may be pardoned for speaking to you.”

The gentleman in question stood some little way behind in a posture that was polite but so stiff and motionless as almost to affect the nerves. He was clad in so complete and correct a version of English light holiday attire that they felt quite certain he was a foreigner. But their imaginations ranged the Continent in vain in the attempt to imagine what sort of foreigner. By the immobility of his almost moonlike face, with its faintly bilious tinge, he might almost have been a Chinaman. But when he spoke, they could instantly locate the alien accent.

"Very much distressed to butt in, gentlemen," he said, "but this young lady allows you are first-class academic authorities on the sights of this locality. I've been mouching around trying to hit the trail of an antiquity or two, but I don't seem to know the way to pick it up. If you'd be so kind as to put me wise about the principal architectural styles and historic items of this region, I'd be under a great obligation."

As they were a little slow in recovering from their first surprise, he added patiently:

"My name is Enoch B. Oates, and I'm pretty well known in Michigan, but I've bought a little place near here; I've looked about this little planet and I've come to think the safest and brightest place for a man with a few dollars is the place of a squire in your fine old feudal landscape. So the sooner I'm introduced to the more mellow mediaeval buildings the better."

In Hilary Pierce the astonishment had given place to an ardour bordering on ecstasy.

"Mediaeval buildings! Architectural styles!" he cried enthusiastically. "You've come to the right shop, Mr. Oates. I'll show you an ancient building, a sacred building, in an architectural style of such sublime antiquity that you'll want to cart it away to Michigan, as they tried to do with Glastonbury Abbey. You shall be privileged to see one historic institution before you die or before all history is forgotten."

He was walking towards the corner of the little kitchen-garden attached to the inn, waving his arm with wild gestures of encouragement; and the American was following him with the same stiff politeness, looking weirdly like an automaton.

"Look on our architectural style before it perishes," cried Pierce dramatically, pointing to the pig-sty, which looked rather a ramshackle affair of leaning and broken boards hung loosely together, though in practice it was practical enough. "This, the most unmistakably mellow of all mediaeval buildings, may soon be only a memory. But when this edifice falls England will fall, and the world will shake with the shock of doom."

The American had what he himself might have described as a poker face; it was impossible to discover whether his utterances indicated the extreme of innocence or of irony.

“And would you say,” he asked, “that this monument exemplifies the mediaeval or Gothic architectural school?”

“I should hardly call it strictly Perpendicular,” answered Pierce, “but there is no doubt that it is Early English.”

“You would say it is antique, anyhow?” observed Mr. Oates.

“I have every reason to believe,” affirmed Pierce solemnly, “that Gurth the Swineherd made use of this identical building. I have no doubt that it is in fact far older. The best authorities believe that the Prodigal Son stayed here for some time, and the pigs — those noble and much maligned animals — gave him such excellent advice that he returned to his family. And now, Mr. Oates, they say that all that magnificent heritage is to be swept away. But it shall not be. We shall not so easily submit to all the vandals and vulgar tyrants who would thus tear down our temples and our holy places. The pig-sty shall rise again in a magnificent resurrection — larger pig-stys, loftier pig-stys, shall yet cover the land; the towers and domes of statelier and more ideal pig-stys, in the most striking architectural styles, shall again declare the victory of the holy hog over his unholy oppressors.”

“And meanwhile,” said Colonel Crane drily, “I think Mr. Oates had much better begin with the church down by the river. Very fine Norman foundations and traces of Roman brick. The vicar understands his church, too, and would give Mr. Oates rather more reliable information than you do.”

A little while later, when Mr. Oates had passed on his way, the Colonel curtly reproved his young friend.

“Bad form,” he said, “making fun of a foreigner asking for information.”

But Pierce turned on him with the same heat on his face.

“But I wasn’t making fun. I was quite serious.”

They stared at him steadily, and he laughed slightly but went on with undiminished fire.

“Symbolical perhaps but serious,” he said. “I may seem to have been talking a bit wildly, but let me tell you the time has come to be wild. We’ve all been a lot too tame. I do mean, as much as I ever meant anything, to fight for the resurrection and the return of the pig; and he shall yet return as a wild boar that shall rend the hunters.”

He looked up and his eye caught the blue heraldic shape on the sign-board of the inn.

“And there is our wooden ensign!” he cried, pointing in the same dramatic fashion. “We will go into battle under the banner of the Blue Boar.”

“Loud and prolonged cheers,” said Crane politely, “and now come away and don’t spoil the peroration. Owen wants to potter about the local antiquities, like Mr. Oates. I’m more interested in novelties. Want to look at that machine of yours.”

They began to descend the zig-zag pebbled path fenced and embanked with hedges and flower-beds like a garden grown on a staircase, and at every corner Hood had to remonstrate with the loitering youth.

“Don’t be for ever gazing back on the paradise of pigs,” he said, “or you’ll be turned into a pillar of salt, or possibly of mustard as more appropriate to such meat. They won’t run away yet. There are other creatures formed by the Creator for the contemplation of man; there are other things made by man after the pattern of the creatures, from the great White Horses of Wessex to that great white bird on which you yourself flew among the birds. Fine subject for a poem of the first and last things.”

“Bird that lays rather dreadful eggs,” said Crane. “In the next war — Why, where the deuce has he gone?”

“Pigs, pigs,” said Hood sadly. “The overpowering charm which pigs exercise upon us at a certain time of life; when we hear their trotters in our dreams and their little curly tails twine about us like the tendrils of the vine —”

“Oh, bosh,” said the Colonel.

For indeed Mr. Hilary Pierce had vanished in a somewhat startling manner, ducking under the corner of a hedge and darting up a steeper path, over a gate and across the corner of a hayfield, where a final bound through bursting bushes brought him on top of a low wall looking down at the pig-sty and Miss Joan Hardy, who was calmly walking away from it. He sprang down on to the path; the morning sun picked out everything in clear colours like a child’s toy-book; and standing with his hands spread out and his wisps of yellow hair brushed in all directions by the bushes, he recalled an undignified memory of Shock-Headed Peter.

“I felt I must speak to you before I went,” he said. “I’m going away, not exactly on active service, but on business — on very active business. I feel like the fellows did when they went to the war... and what they wanted to do first... I am aware that a proposal over a pig-sty is not so symbolical to some as to me, but really and truly... I don't know whether I mentioned it, but you may be aware that I worship you."

Joan Hardy was quite aware of it; but the conventionalities in her case were like concentric castle-walls; the world-old conventions of the countryside. There was in them the stiff beauty of old country dances and the slow and delicate needlework of a peasantry. Of all the ladies whose figures must be faintly traced in the tapestry of those frivolous tales of chivalry, the most reticent and dignified was the one who was not in the worldly sense a lady at all.

She stood looking at him in silence, and he at her; as the lift of her head had some general suggestion of a bird, the line of her profile had a delicate suggestion of a falcon, and her face was of the fine tint that has no name, unless we could talk of a bright brown.

"Really, you seem in a terrible hurry," she said. "I don't want to be talked to in a rush like this."

"I apologize," he said. "I can't help being in a rush, but I didn't want you to be in a rush. I only wanted you to know. I haven't done anything to deserve you, but I am going to try. I'm going off to work; I feel sure you believe in quiet steady work for a young man."

"Are you going into the bank?" she asked innocently. "You said your uncle was in a bank."

"I hope all my conversation was not on that level," he replied. And indeed he would have been surprised if he had known how exactly she remembered all such dull details he had ever mentioned about himself, and how little she knew in comparison about his theories and fancies, which he thought so much more important.

"Well," he said with engaging frankness, "it would be an exaggeration to say I am going into a bank; though of course there are banks and banks. Why, I know a bank whereupon the wild thyme — I beg your pardon, I mean I know a lot of more rural and romantic occupations that are really quite as safe as the bank. The truth is, I think of going into the bacon trade. I think I see an opening for a brisk young man in the ham and pork business. When you see me next I shall be travelling in pork; an impenetrable disguise."

"You mustn't come here, then," she answered. "It won't be allowed here by that time. The neighbours would—"

"Fear not," he said, "I should be a commercial traveller. Oh, such a very commercial traveller. As for not coming here, the thing seems quite unthinkable. You must at least let me write to you every hour or so. You must let me send you a few presents every morning."

"I'm sure my father wouldn't like you to send me presents," she said gravely.

"Ask your father to wait," said Pierce earnestly. "Ask him to wait till he's seen the presents. You see, mine will be rather curious presents. I don't think he'll disapprove of them. I think he'll approve of them. I think he'll congratulate me on my simple tastes and sound business principles. The truth is, dear Joan, I've committed myself to a rather important enterprise. You needn't be frightened; I promise I won't trouble you again till it succeeds. I will be content that you know it is for you I do it; and shall continue to do it, if I defy the world." He sprang up on the wall again and stood there staring down at her almost indignantly.

"That anybody should forbid YOU to keep pigs," he cried. "That anybody should forbid YOU to do anything. That anybody should dispute YOUR right to keep pet crocodiles if you like! That is the unpardonable sin; that is the supreme blasphemy and crime against the nature of things, which shall not go unavenged. You shall have pigs, I say, if the skies fall and the whole world is whelmed in war."

He disappeared like a flash behind the high bank and the wall, and Joan went back in silence to the inn.

The first incident of the war did not seem superficially encouraging, though the hero of it seemed by no means discouraged by it. As reported in the police news of various papers, Hilary Patrick Pierce, formerly of the Flying Corps, was arrested for driving pigs into the county of Bluntshire, in contravention of the regulations made for the public health. He seemed to have had almost as much trouble with the pigs as with the police; but he made a witty and eloquent speech on being arrested, to which the police and the pigs appeared to be equally unresponsive. The incident was considered trivial and his punishment was trifling; but the occasion was valued by some of the authorities as giving an opportunity for the final elucidation and establishment of the new rule.

For this purpose it was fortunate that the principal magistrate of the bench was no less a person than the celebrated hygienist, Sir Horace Hunter, O.B.E., M.D., who had begun life, as some may remember, as a successful suburban doctor and had likewise distinguished himself as an officer of health in the Thames Valley. To him indeed had been largely due the logical extension of the existing precautions against infection from the pig; though he was fully supported by his fellow magistrates, one being Mr. Rosenbaum Low, millionaire and formerly manager of Bliss and Co., and the other the young Socialist, Mr. Amyas Minns, famous for his exposition of Shaw on the Simple Life, who sat on the bench as a Labour alderman. All concurred in the judgement of Sir Horace, that just as all the difficulties and doubtful cases raised by the practice of moderate drinking had been simplified by the solution of Prohibition, so the various quarrels and evasions about swine-fever were best met by a straightforward and simple regulation against swine. In the very improper remarks which he offered after the trial, the prisoner appears to have said that as his three judges were a Jew, a vegetarian, and a quack doctor on the make, he was not surprised that they did not appreciate pork.

The next luncheon at which the three friends met was in a sufficiently different setting; for the Colonel had invited the other two to his club in London. It would have been almost impossible to have been that sort of Colonel without having that sort of club. But as a matter of fact, he very seldom went there. On this occasion it was Owen Hood who arrived first and was by instructions escorted by a waiter to a table in a bow window overlooking the Green Park. Knowing Crane's military punctuality, Hood fancied that he might have mistaken the time; and while looking for the note of invitation in his pocket-book, he paused for a moment upon a newspaper cutting that he had put aside as a curiosity some days before. It was a paragraph headed "Old Ladies as Mad Motorists," and ran as follows:

"An unprecedented number of cases of motorists exceeding the speed limit have lately occurred on the Bath Road and other western highways. The extraordinary feature of the case is that in so large a number of cases the offenders appeared to be old ladies of great wealth and respectability who professed to be merely taking their pugs and other pet animals for an airing. They professed that the health of the animal required much more rapid transit through the air than is the case with human beings."

He was gazing at this extract with as much perplexity as on his first perusal, when the Colonel entered with a newspaper in his hand.

"I say," he said, "I think it is getting rather ridiculous. I'm not a revolutionist like you; quite the reverse. But all these rules and regulations are getting beyond all rational discipline. A little while ago they started forbidding all travelling menageries; not, mind you, stipulating proper conditions for the animals, but forbidding them altogether for some nonsense about the safety of the public. There was a travelling circus stopped near Acton and another on the road to Reading. Crowds of village boys must never see a lion in their lives, because once in fifty years a lion has escaped and been caught again. But that's nothing to what has happened since. Now, if you please, there is such mortal fear of infection that we are to leave the sick to suffer, just as if we were savages. You know those new hospital trains that were started to take patients from the hospitals down to the health resorts. Well, they're not to run after all, it seems, lest by merely taking an invalid of any sort through the open country we should poison the four winds of heaven. If this nonsense goes on, I shall go as mad as Hilary himself."

Hilary Pierce had arrived during this conversation and sat listening to it with a rather curious smile. Somehow the more Hood looked at that smile the more it puzzled him; it puzzled him as much as the newspaper cutting in his hand. He caught himself looking from one to the other, and Pierce smiled in a still more irritating manner.

"You don't look so fierce and fanatical as when we last met, my young friend," observed Owen Hood. "Have you got tired of pigs and police-courts? These coercion acts the Colonel's talking about would have roused you to lift the roof off at once."

"Oh, I'm all against the new rules," answered the young man coolly. "I've been very much against them; what you might call up against them. In fact, I've already broken all those new laws and a few more. Could you let me look at that cutting for a moment?"

Hood handed it to him and he nodded, saying:

"Yes; I was arrested for that."

"Arrested for what?"

"Arrested for being a rich and respectable old lady," answered Hilary Pierce; "but I managed to escape that time. It was a fine sight to see the old lady clear a hedge and skedaddle across a meadow."

Hood looked at him under bended brows and his mouth began to work.

"But what's all this about the old lady having a pug or a pet or something?"

"Well, it was very nearly a pug," said Pierce in a dispassionate manner. "I pointed out to everybody that it was, as it were, an approximate pug. I asked if it was just to punish me for a small mistake in spelling."

"I begin to understand," said Hood. "You were again smuggling swine down to your precious Blue Boar, and thought you could rush the frontier in very rapid cars."

"Yes," replied the smuggler placidly. "We were quite literally Road-Hogs. I thought at first of dressing the pigs up as millionaires and members of Parliament; but when you come to look close, there's more difference than you would imagine to be possible. It was great fun when they forced me to take my pet out of the wrapping of shawls, and they found what a large pet it was."

"And do I understand,' cut in the Colonel, "that it was something like that — with the other laws?"

"The other laws," said Pierce, "are certainly arbitrary, but you do not altogether do them justice. You do not quite appreciate their motive. You do not fully allow for their origin. I may say, I trust with modesty, that I was their origin. I not only had the pleasure of breaking those laws, but the pleasure of making them."

"More of your tricks, you mean," said the Colonel; "but why don't the papers say so?"

"The authorities don't want 'em to," answered Pierce. "The authorities won't advertise me, you bet. I've got far too much popular backing for that. When the real revolution happens, it won't be mentioned in the newspapers."

He paused a moment in meditation and then went on.

"When the police searched for my pug and found it was a pig, I started wondering how they could be stopped from doing it again. It occurred to me they might be shy of a wild pig or a pug that bit them. So, of course, I travelled the next time with dreadfully dangerous animals in cages, warning everybody of the fiercest tigers and panthers that were ever known. When they found it out and didn't want to let it out, they could only fall back on their own tomfoolery of a prohibition wholesale. Of course, it was the same with my other stunt, about the sick people going to health resorts to be cured of various fashionable and refined maladies. The pigs had a dignified, possibly a rather dull time, in elaborately curtained railway carriages with hospital nurses to wait on them; while I stood outside and assured the railway officials that the cure was a rest cure, and the invalids must on no account be disturbed."

"What a liar you are!" exclaimed Hood in simple admiration.

"Not at all," said Pierce with dignity. "It was quite true that they were going to be cured."

Crane, who had been gazing rather abstractedly out of the window, slowly turned his head and said abruptly: "And how's it going to end? Do you propose to go on doing all these impossible things?"

Pierce sprang to his feet with a resurrection of all the romantic abandon of his vow over the pig-sty.

"Impossible!" he cried. "You don't know what you're saying or how true it is. All I've done so far was possible and prosaic. But I will do an impossible thing. I will do something that is written in all books and rhymes as impossible — something that has passed into a proverb of the impossible. The war is not ended yet; and if you two fellows will post yourselves in the quarry opposite the Blue Boar, on Thursday week at sunset, you will see something so impossible and so self-evident that even the organs of public information will find it hard to hide it."

It was in that part of the steep fall of pinewood where the quarry made a sort of ledge under a roof of pine that two gentlemen of something more than middle age who had not altogether lost the appetite of adventure posted themselves with all the preparations due to a picnic or a practical joke. It was from that place, as from a window looking across the valley, that they saw what seemed more like a vision; what seemed indeed rather like the parody of an apocalypse. The large clearance of the western sky was of a luminous lemon tint, as of pale yellow fading to pale green, while one or two loose clouds on the horizon were of a rose-red and yet richer colours. But the settling sun itself was a cloudless fire, so that a tawny light lay over the whole landscape; and the inn of the Blue Boar standing opposite looked almost like a house of gold. Owen Hood was gazing in his dreamy fashion, and said at last:

"There's an apocalyptic sign in heaven for you to start with. It's a queer thing, but that cloud coming up the valley is uncommonly like the shape of a pig."

"Very like a whale," said Colonel Crane, yawning slightly; but when he turned his eyes in that direction, the eyes were keener. Artist have remarked that a cloud has perspective like anything else; but the perspective of the cloud coming up the valley was curiously solid.

"That's not a cloud," he said sharply, "it's a Zeppelin or something."

The solid shape grew larger and larger; and as it grew more obvious it grew more incredible.

"Saints and angels!" cried Hood suddenly. "Why, it IS a pig!"

"It's shaped like a pig all right," said the Colonel curtly; and indeed as the great balloon-like form bulked bigger and bigger above its own reflection in the winding river, they could see that the long sausage-shaped Zeppelin body of it had been fantastically decorated with hanging ears and legs, to complete that pantomimic resemblance.

"I suppose it's some more of Hilary's skylarking," observed Hood; "but what is he up to now?"

As the great aerial monster moved up the valley it paused over the inn of the Blue Boar, and something fell fluttering from it like a brightly coloured feather.

"People are coming down in parachutes," said the Colonel shortly.

"They're queer-looking people," remarked his companion, peering under frowning brows, for the level light was dazzling to the eyes. "By George, they're not people at all! They're pigs!"

From that distance, the objects in question had something of the appearance of cherubs in some gaily coloured Gothic picture, with the yellow sky for their gold-leaf background. The parachute apparatus from which they hung and hovered was designed and coloured with the appearance of a great wheel of gorgeously painted plumage, looking more gaudy than ever in the strong evening light that lay over all. The more the two men in the quarry stared at these strange objects, the more certain it seemed that they were indeed pigs; though whether the pigs were dead or alive it was impossible at that distance to say. They looked down into the garden of the inn into which the feathered things were dropping, and they could see the figure of Joan Hardy standing in front of the old pig-sty, with her bird-like head lifted, looking up into the sky.

"Singular present for a young lady," remarked Crane, "but I suppose when our mad young friend does start love-making, he would be likely to give impossible presents."

The eyes of the more poetical Hood were full of larger visions, and he hardly seemed to be listening. But as the sentence ended he seemed to start from a trance and struck his hands together.

“Yes!” he cried in a new voice, “we always come back to that word!”

“Come back to what word?” asked his friend.

“`Impossible,’” answered Owen Hood. “It’s the word that runs through his whole life, and ours too for that matter. Don’t you see what he has done?”

“I see what he has done all right,” answered the Colonel, “but I’m not at all sure I see what you’re driving at.”

“What we have seen is another impossible thing,” said Owen Hood; “a thing that common speech has set up as a challenge; a thing that a thousand rhymes and jokes and phrases have called impossible. We have seen pigs fly.”

“It’s pretty extraordinary,” admitted Crane, “but it’s not so extraordinary as their not being allowed to walk.”

And they gathered their travelling tackle together and began to descend the steep hill.

In doing so, they descended into a deeper twilight between the stems of the darkling trees; the walls of the valley began to close over them, as it were, and they lost that sense of being in the upper air in a radiant topsy-turvydom of clouds. It was almost as if they had really had a vision; and the voice of Crane came abruptly out of the dusk, almost like that of a doubter when he speaks of a dream.

“The thing I can’t understand,” he said abruptly, “is how Hilary managed to DO all that by himself.”

“He really is a very wonderful fellow,” said Hood. “You told me yourself he did wonders in the War. And though he turns it to these fanatical ends now, it takes as much trouble to do one as the other.”

“Takes a devilish lot more trouble to do it alone,” said Crane. “In the War there was a whole organization.”

“You mean he must be more than a remarkable person,” suggested Hood, “a sort of giant with a hundred hands or god with a hundred eyes. Well, a man will work frightfully hard when he wants something very much; even a man who generally looks like a lounging minor poet. And I think I know what it was he wanted. He deserves to get it. It’s certainly his hour of triumph.”

“Mystery to me all the same,” said the Colonel frowning. “Wonder whether he’ll ever clear it up.” But that part of the mystery was not to be cleared up until many other curious things had come to pass.

Away on another part of the slope Hilary Pierce, new lighted upon the earth like the herald Mercury, leapt down into a red hollow of the quarry and came towards Joan Hardy with uplifted arms.

“This is no time for false modesty,” he said. “It is the hour, and I come to you covered with glory—”

“You come covered with mud,” she said smiling, “and it’s that horrible red mud that takes so long to dry. It’s no use trying to brush it till—”

“I bring you the Golden Fleece, or at any rate the Golden Pig-Skin,” he cried in lyric ecstasy. “I have endured the labours; I have achieved the quest. I have made the Hampshire Hog as legendary as the Calydonian Boar. They forbade me to drive it on foot, and I drove it in a car, disguised as a pug. They forbade me to bring it in a car, and I brought it in a railway-train, disguised as an invalid. They forbade me to use a railway-train, and I took to the wings of the morning and rose to the uttermost parts of the air; by a way secret and pathless and lonely as the wilful way of love. I have made my romance immortal. I have made my romance immortal. I have written your name upon the sky. What do you say to me now? I have turned a Pig into a Pegasus. I have done impossible things.”

“I know you have,” she said, “but somehow I can’t help liking you for all that.”

“BUT you can’t help liking me,” he repeated in a hollow voice. “I have stormed heaven, but still I am not so bad. Hercules can be tolerated in spite of his Twelve Labours. St. George can be forgiven for killing the Dragon. Woman, is this the way I am treated in the hour of victory; and is this the graceful fashion of an older world? Have you become a New Woman, by any chance? What has your father been doing? What does he say — about us?”

“My father says you are quite mad, of course,” she replied, “but he can’t help liking you either. He says he doesn’t believe in people marrying out of their class; but that if I must marry a gentleman he’d rather it was somebody like you, and not one of the new gentlemen.”

“Well, I’m glad I’m an old gentleman, any how,” he answered somewhat mollified. “But really this prevalence of common sense is getting quite dangerous. Will nothing rouse you all to a little unreality; to saying, so to speak, `O, for the wings of a pig that I might flee away and be at rest.’

What would you say if I turned the world upside down and set my foot upon the sun and moon?"

"I should say," replied Joan Hardy, still smiling, "that you wanted somebody to look after you."

He stared at her for a moment in an almost abstracted fashion as if he had not fully understood; then he laughed uncontrollably, like a man who has seen something very close to him that he knows he is a fool not to have seen before. So a man will fall over something in a game of hiding-and-seeking, and get shaken up with laughter.

"What a bump your mother earth gives you when you fall out of an aeroplane," he said, "especially when your flying ship is only a flying pig. The earth of the real peasants and the real pigs — don't be offended; I assure you the confusion is a compliment. What a thing is horse-sense, and how much finer really than the poetry of Pegasus! And when there is everything else as well that makes the sky clean and the earth kind, beauty and bravery and the lifting of the head — well, you are right enough, Joan. Will you take care of me? Will you stop at home and clip my pig's wings?"

He had caught hold of her by the hands; but she still laughed as she answered.

"Yes — I told you I couldn't help — but you really must let go, Hilary. I can see your friends coming down from the quarry."

As she spoke, indeed, Colonel Crane and Owen Hood could be seen descending the slope and passing through a screen of slender trees towards them.

"Hullo!" said Hilary Pierce cheerfully. "I want you to congratulate me. Joan thinks I'm an awful humbug, and right she is; I am what has been called a happy hypocrite. At least you fellows may think I've been guilty of a bit of fake in this last affair, when I tell you the news. Well, I will confess."

"What news do you mean?" inquired the Colonel with curiosity.

Hilary Pierce grinned and made a gesture over his shoulder to the litter of porcine parachutes, to indicate his last and crowning folly.

"The truth is," he said laughing, "that was only a final firework display to celebrate victory or failure, whichever you choose to call it. There isn't any need to do so any more, because the veto is removed.

"Removed?" exclaimed Hood. "Why on earth is that? It's rather unnerving when lunatics suddenly go sane like that."

"It wasn't anything to do with the lunatics," answered Pierce quietly. "The real change was much higher up, or rather lower down. Anyhow, it was much farther at the back of things, where the Big Businesses are settled by the big people."

"What was the change?" asked the Colonel.

"Old Oates has gone into another business," answered Pierce quietly.

"What on earth has old Oates got to do with it?" asked Hood staring. "Do you mean that Yankee mooning about over mediaeval ruins?"

"Oh, I know," said Pierce wearily, "I thought he had nothing to do with it; I thought it was the Jews and vegetarians, and the rest; but they're very innocent instruments. The truth is that Enoch Oates is the biggest pork-packer and importer in the world, and HE didn't want any competition from our cottagers. And what he says goes, as he would express it. Now, thank God, he's taken up another line."

But if any indomitable reader wishes to know what was the new line Mr. Oates pursued and why, it is to be feared that his only course is to await and patiently read the story of the Exclusive Luxury of Enoch Oates; and even before reaching that supreme test, he will have to support the recital of The Elusive Companion of Parson White; for these, as has been said, are tales of topsy-turvydom, and they often work backwards.

The Elusive Companion of Parson White

In the scriptures and the chronicles of the League of the Long Bow, or fellowship of foolish persons doing impossible things, it is recorded that Owen Hood, the lawyer, and his friend Crane, the retired Colonel, were partaking one afternoon of a sort of picnic on the river-island that had been the first scene of a certain romantic incident in the life of the former, the burden of reading about which has fallen upon the readers in other days. Suffice it to say that the island had been devoted by Mr. Hood to his hobby of angling, and that the meal then in progress was a somewhat early interruption of the same leisurely pursuit. The two old cronies had a third companion, who, though considerably younger, was not only a companion but a friend. He was a light-haired, lively young man, with rather a wild eye, known by the name of Pierce, whose wedding to the daughter of the innkeeper of the Blue Boar the others had only recently attended.

He was an aviator and given to many other forms of skylarking. The two older men had eccentric tastes of their own; but there is always a difference between the eccentricity of an elderly man who defies the world and the enthusiasm of a younger man who hopes to alter it. The old gentleman may be willing, in a sense, to stand on his head; but he does not hope, as the boy does, to stand the world on its head. With a young man like Hilary Pierce it was the world itself that was to be turned upside-down; and that was a game at which his more grizzled companions could only look on, as at a child they loved playing with a big coloured balloon.

Perhaps it was this sense of a division by time, altering the tone, though not the fact, of friendship, which sent the mind of one of the older men back to the memory of an older friend. He remembered that he had had a letter that morning from the only contemporary of his who could fitly have made a fourth to their party. Owen Hood drew the letter from his pocket with a smile that wrinkled his long, humourous, cadaverous face.

“By the way, I forgot to tell you,” he said, “I had a letter from White yesterday.”

The bronzed visage of the Colonel was also seamed with the external signs of a soundless chuckle.

“Read it yet?” he asked.

"Yes," replied the lawyer; "the hieroglyphic was attacked with fresh vigour after breakfast this morning, and the clouds and mysteries of yesterday's labours seemed to be rolled away. Some portions of the cuneiform still await an expert translation; but the sentences themselves appear to be in the original English."

"Very original English," snorted Colonel Crane.

"Yes, our friend is an original character," replied Hood. "Vanity tempts me to hint that he is our friend because he has an original taste in friends. The habit of his of putting the pronoun on the first page and the noun on the next has brightened many winter evenings for me. You haven't met our friend White, have you?" he added to Pierce. "That is a shock that still threatens you."

"Why, what's the matter with him?" inquired Pierce.

"Nothing," observed Crane in his more staccato style. "Has a taste for starting a letter with `Yours Truly' and ending it with `Dear Sir'; that's all."

"I should rather like to hear that letter," observed the young man.

"So you shall," answered Hood, "there's nothing confidential in it; and if there were, you wouldn't find it out merely by reading it. The Rev. Wilding White, called by some of his critics `Wild White,' is one of those country parsons, to be found in corners of the English countryside, of whom their old college friends usually think in order to wonder what the devil their parishioners think of them. As a matter of fact, my dear Hilary, he was rather like you when he was your age; and what in the world you would be like as a vicar in the Church of England, aged fifty, might at first stagger the imagination; but the problem might be solved by supposing you would be like him. But I only hope you will have a more lucid style in letter-writing. The old boy is always in such a state of excitement about something that it comes out anyhow."

It has been said elsewhere that these tales are, in some sense, of necessity told tail-foremost, and certainly the letter of the Rev. Wilding White was a document suited to such a scheme of narrative. It was written in what had once been a good hand-writing of the bolder sort, but which had degenerated through excessive energy and haste into an illegible scrawl. It appeared to run as follows:

"`My dear Owen, — My mind is quite made up; though I know the sort of legal long-winded things you will say against it; I know especially one thing a leathery old lawyer like you is bound to say; but as a matter of fact even you can’t say it in a case like this, because the timber came from the other end of the county and had nothing whatever to do with him or any of his flunkeys and sycophants. Besides, I did it all myself with a little assistance I’ll tell you about later; and even in these days I should be surprised to hear THAT sort of assistance could be anything but a man’s own affair. I defy you and all your parchments to maintain that IT comes under the Game Laws. You won’t mind me talking like this; I know jolly well you’d think you were acting as a friend; but I think the time has come to speak plainly.’”

“Quite right,” said the Colonel.

“Yes,” said young Pierce, with a rather vague expression, “I’m glad he feels that the time has come to speak plainly.”

“Quite so,” observed the lawyer dryly; “he continues as follows:”

“`I’ve got a lot to tell you about the new arrangement, which works much better even than I hoped. I was afraid at first it would really be an encumbrance, as you know it’s always supposed to be. But there are more things, and all the rest of it, and God fulfils himself, and so on and so on. It gives one quite a weird Asiatic feeling sometimes.’”

“Yes,” said the Colonel, “it does.”

“What does?” asked Pierce, sitting up suddenly, like one who can bear no more.

“You are not used to the epistolary method,” said Hood indulgently; “you haven’t got into the swing of the style. It goes on:”

“`Of course, he’s a big pot down here, and all sorts of skunks are afraid of him and pretend to boycott me. Nobody could expect anything else of those pineapple people, but I confess I was surprised at Parkinson. Sally of course is as sound as ever; but she goes to Scotland a good deal and you can’t blame her. Sometimes I’m left pretty severely alone, but I’m not downhearted; you’ll probably laugh if I tell you that Snowdrop is really a very intelligent companion.’”

“I confess I am long past laughter,” said Hilary Pierce sadly; “but I rather wish I knew who Snowdrop is.”

“Child, I suppose,” said the Colonel shortly.

“Yes; I suppose it must be a child,” said Pierce. “Has he any children?”

“No,” said the Colonel. “Bachelor.”

“I believe he was in love with a lady in those parts and never married in consequence,” said Hood. “It would be quite on the lines of fiction and film-drama if Snowdrop were the daughter of the lady, when she had married Another. But there seems to be something more about Snowdrop, that little sunbeam in the house:"

"`Snowdrop tries to enter our ways, as they always do; but, of course, it would be awkward if she played tricks. How alarmed they would all be if she took it into her head to walk about on two legs, like everybody else.'"

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Colonel Crane. "Can't be a child — talking about it walking about on two legs."

"After all," said Pierce thoughtfully, "a little girl does walk about on two legs."

"Bit startling if she walked about on three," said Crane.

"If my learned brother will allow me," said Hood, in his forensic manner, "would he describe the fact of a little girl walking on two legs as alarming?"

"A little girl is always alarming," replied Pierce.

"I've come to the conclusion myself," went on Hood, "that Snowdrop must be a pony. It seems a likely enough name for a pony. I thought at first it was a dog or a cat, but alarming seems a strong word even for a dog or a cat sitting up to beg. But a pony on its hind legs might be a little alarming, especially when you're riding it. Only I can't fit this view in with the next sentence: `I've taught her to reach down the things I want.'"

"Lord!" cried Pierce. "It's a monkey!"

"That," replied Hood, "had occurred to me as possibly explaining the weird Asiatic atmosphere. But a monkey on two legs is even less unusual than a dog on two legs. Moreover, the reference to Asiatic mystery seems really to refer to something else and not to any animal at all. For he ends up by saying: `I feel now as if my mind were moving in much larger and more ancient spaces of time or eternity; and as if what I thought at first was an oriental atmosphere was only an atmosphere of the orient in the sense of dayspring and the dawn. It has nothing to do with the stagnant occultism of decayed Indian cults; it is something that unites a real innocence with the immensities, a power as of the mountains with the purity of snow. This vision does not violate my own religion, but rather reinforces it; but I cannot help feeling that I have larger views. I hope in two senses to preach liberty in these parts. So I may live to falsify the proverb after all.'

"That," added Hood, folding up the letter, "is the only sentence in the whole thing that conveys anything to my mind. As it happens, we have all three of us lived to falsify proverbs."

Hilary Pierce had risen to his feet with the restless action that went best with his alert figure. "Yes," he said; "I suppose we can all three of us say we have lived for adventures, or had some curious ones anyhow. And to tell you the truth, the adventure feeling has come on me very strong at this very minute. I've got the detective fever about that parson of yours. I should like to get at the meaning of that letter, as if it were a cipher about buried treasure."

Then he added more gravely: "And if, as I gather, your clerical friend is really a friend worth having, I do seriously advise you to keep an eye on him just now. Writing letters upside-down is all very well, and I shouldn't be alarmed about that. Lots of people think they've explained things in previous letters they never wrote. I don't think it matters who Snowdrop is, or what sort of children or animals he chooses to be fond of. That's all being eccentric in the good old English fashion, like poetical tinkers and mad squires. You're both of you eccentric in that sort of way, and it's one of the things I like about you. But just because I naturally knock about more among the new people, I see something of the new eccentricities. And believe me, they're not half so nice as the old ones. I'm a student of scientific aviation, which is a new thing itself, and I like it. But there's a sort of spiritual aviation that I don't like at all."

"Sorry," observed Crane. "Really no notion of what you're talking about."

"Of course you haven't," answered Pierce with engaging candour; "that's another thing I like about you. But I don't like the way your clerical friend talks about new visions and larger religions and light and liberty from the East. I've heard a good many people talk like that, and they were mountebanks or the dupes of mountebanks. And I'll tell you another thing. It's a long shot even with the long bow we used to talk about. It's a pretty wild guess even in this rather wild business. But I have a creepy sort of feeling that if you went down to his house and private parlour to see Snowdrop, you'd be surprised at what you saw."

"What should we see?" asked the Colonel, staring.

"You'd see nothing at all," replied the young man.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean," replied Pierce, "that you'd find Mr. White talking to somebody who didn't seem to be there."

Hilary Pierce, fired by his detective fever, made a good many more inquiries about the Rev. Wilding White, both of his two old friends and elsewhere.

One long legal conversation with Owen Hood did indeed put him in possession of the legal outline of certain matters, which might be said to throw a light on some parts of the strange letter, and which might in time even be made to throw a light on the rest. White was the vicar of a parish lying deep in the western parts of Somersetshire, where the principal landowner was a certain Lord Arlington. And in this case there had been a quarrel between the squire and the parson, of a more revolutionary sort than is common in the case of parsons. The clergyman intensely resented that irony or anomaly which has caused so much discontent among tenants in Ireland and throughout the world; the fact that improvements or constructive work actually done by the tenant only pass into the possession of the landlord. He had considerably improved a house that he himself had rented from the squire, but in some kind of crisis of defiance or renunciation, he had quitted this more official residence bag and baggage, and built himself a sort of wooden lodge or bungalow on a small hill or mound that rose amid woods on the extreme edge of the same grounds. This quarrel about the claim of the tenant to his own work was evidently the meaning of certain phrases in the letter — such as the timber coming from the other end of the county, the sort of work being a man's own affair, and the general allusion to somebody's flunkeys or sycophants who attempted to boycott the discontented tenant. But it was not quite so clear whether the allusions to a new arrangement, and how it worked, referred to the bungalow or to the other and more elusive mystery of the presence of Snowdrop.

One phrase in the letter he found to have been repeated in many places and to many persons without becoming altogether clear in the process. It was the sentence that ran: "I was afraid at first it would really be an encumbrance, as you know it's always supposed to be." Both Colonel Crane and Owen Hood, and also several other persons whom he met later in his investigations, were agreed in saying that Mr. White had used some expression indicating that he had entangled himself with something troublesome or at least useless; something that he did not want. None of them could remember the exact words he had used; but all could state in general terms that it referred to some sort of negative nuisance or barren responsibility. This could hardly refer to Snowdrop, of whom he always wrote in terms of tenderness as if she were a baby or a kitten. It seemed hard to believe it could refer to the house he had built entirely to suit himself. It seemed as if there must be some third thing in his muddled existence, which loomed vaguely in the background through the vapour of his confused correspondence.

Colonel Crane snapped his fingers with a mild irritation in trying to recall a trifle. "He said it was a — you know, I've forgotten the word — a botheration or embarrassment. But then he's always in a state of botheration and embarrassment. I didn't tell you, by the way, that I had a letter from him too. Came the day after I heard yours. Shorter, and perhaps a little plainer." And he handed the letter to Hood, who read it out slowly:

"`I never knew the old British populace, here in Avalon itself, could be so broken down by squires and sneaking lawyers. Nobody dared help me move my house again; said it was illegal and they were afraid of the police. But Snowdrop helped, and we carted it all away in two or three journeys; took it right clean off the old fool's land altogether this time. I fancy the old fool will have to admit there are things in this world he wasn't prepared to believe in.'"

"But look here," began Hood as if impulsively, and then stopped and spoke more slowly and carefully. "I don't understand this; I think it's extremely odd. I don't mean odd for an ordinary person, but odd for an odd person; odd for this odd person. I know White better than either of you can, and I can tell you that, though he tells a tale anyhow, the tale is always true. He's rather precise and pedantic when you do come to the facts; these litigious quarrelsome people always are. He would do extraordinary things, but he wouldn't make them out more extraordinary than they were. I mean he's the sort of man who might break all the squire's windows, but he wouldn't say he'd broken six when he'd broken five. I've always found when I'd got to the meaning of those mad letters that it was quite true. But how can this be true? How could Snowdrop, whatever she is, have moved a whole house, or old White either?"

"I suppose you know what I think," said Pierce. "I told you that Snowdrop, whatever else she is, is invisible. I'm certain your friend has gone Spiritualist, and Snowdrop is the name of a spirit, or a control, or whatever they call it. The spirit would say, of course, that it was mere child's play to throw the house from one end of the county to the other. But if this unfortunate gentleman believes himself to have been thrown, house and all, in that fashion, I'm very much afraid he's begun really to suffer from delusions."

The faces of the two older men looked suddenly much older, perhaps for the first time they looked old. The young man seeing their dolorous expression was warmed and fired to speak quickly.

"Look here," he said hastily, "I'll go down there myself and find out what I can for you. I'll go this afternoon."

"Train journey takes ages," said the Colonel, shaking his head. "Other end of nowhere. Told me yourself you had an appointment at the Air Ministry to-morrow."

"Be there in no time," replied Pierce cheerfully. "I'll fly down."

And there was something in the lightness and youth of his vanishing gesture that seemed really like Icarus spurning the earth, the first man to mount upon wings.

Perhaps this literally flying figure shone the more vividly in their memories because, when they saw it again, it was in a subtle sense changed. When the other two next saw Hilary Pierce on the steps of the Air Ministry, they were conscious that his manner was a little quieter, but his wild eye rather wilder than usual. They adjourned to a neighbouring restaurant and talked of trivialities while luncheon was served; but the Colonel, who was a keen observer, was sure that Pierce had suffered some sort of shock, or at least some sort of check. While they were considering what to say Pierce himself said abruptly, staring at a mustard-pot on the table:

"What do you think about spirits?"

"Never touch 'em," said the Colonel. "Sound port never hurt anybody."

"I mean the other sort," said Pierce. "Things like ghosts and all that."

"I don't know," said Owen Hood. "The Greek for it is agnosticism. The Latin for it is ignorance. But have you really been dealing with ghosts and spirits down at poor White's parsonage?"

"I don't know," said Pierce gravely.

"You don't mean you really think you saw something!" cried Hood sharply.

"There goes the agnostic!" said Pierce with a rather weary smile. "The minute the agnostic hears a bit of real agnosticism he shrieks out that it's superstition. I say I don't know whether it was a spirit. I also say I don't know what the devil else it was if it wasn't. In plain words, I went down to that place convinced that poor White had got some sort of delusions. Now I wonder whether it's I that have got the delusions."

He paused a moment and then went on in a more collected manner:

"But I'd better tell you all about it. To begin with, I don't admit it as an explanation, but it's only fair to allow for it as a fact — that all that part of the world seems to be full of that sort of thing. You know how the glamour of Glastonbury lies over all that land and the lost tomb of King Arthur and time when he shall return and the prophecies of Merlin and all the rest. To begin with, the village they call Ponder's End ought to be called World's End; it gives one the impression of being somewhere west of the sunset. And then the parsonage is quite a long way west of the parish, in large neglected grounds fading into pathless woods and hills; I mean the old empty rectory that our wild friend has evacuated. It stood there a cold empty shell of flat classical architecture, as hollow as one of those classical temples they used to stick up in country seats. But White must have done some sort of parish work there, for I found a great big empty shed in the grounds — that sort of thing that's used for a schoolroom or drill-hall or what not. But not a sign of him or his work can be seen there now. I've said it's a long way west of the village that you come at last to the old house. Well, it's a long way west of that that you come to the new house — if you come to it at all. As for me, I came and I came now, as in some old riddle of Merlin. But you shall hear.

"I had come down about sunset in a meadow near Ponder's End, and I did the rest of the journey on foot, for I wanted to see things in detail. This was already difficult as it was growing dusk, and I began to fear I should find nothing of importance before nightfall. I had asked a question or two of the villagers about the vicar and his new self-made vicarage. They were very reticent about the former, but I gathered that the latter stood at the extreme edge of his original grounds on a hill rising out of a thicket of wood. In the increasing darkness it was difficult to find the place, but I came on it at last, in a place where a fringe of forest ran along under the low brows of a line of rugged cliffs, such as sometimes break the curves of great downlands. I seemed to be descending a thickly wooded slope, with a sea of tree-tops below me, and out of that sea, like an island, rose the dome of the isolated hill; and I could faintly see the building on it, darker against the dark-clouded sky. For a moment a faint line of light from the masked moon showed me a little more of its shape, which seemed singularly simple and airy in its design. Against that pallid gleam stood four strong columns, with the bulk of building apparently lifted above them; but it produced a queer impression, as if this Christian priest had built for his final home a heathen temple of the winds. As I leaned forward, peering at it, I overbalanced myself and slid rapidly down the steep thicket into the darkest entrails of the wood. From there I could see nothing of the pillared house or temple or whatever it was on the hill; the thick woods had swallowed me up literally like a sea, and I groped for what must have been nearly half an hour amid tangled roots and low branches, in that double darkness of night and shadow, before I found my feet slipping up the opposite slope and began to climb the hill on the top of which the temple stood. It was very difficult climbing, of course, through a network of briars and branching trees, and it was some little time afterwards that I burst through the last screen of foliage and came out upon the bare hill-top.

"Yes; upon the bare hill-top. Rank grasses grew upon it, and the wind blew them about like hair on a head; but for any trace of anything else, that green dome was as bare as a skull. There was no sign or shadow of the building I had seen there a little time before; it had vanished like a fairy palace. A broad track broken through the woods seemed to lead up to it, so far as I could make out in that obscurity; but there was no trace of the building to which it led. And when I saw that, I gave up. Something told me I should find out no more; perhaps I had some shaken sense that there were things past finding out. I retraced my steps, descending the hill as best I might; but when I was again swallowed up in that leafy sea, something happened that, for an instant, turned me cold as stone. An unearthly noise, like long hooting laughter, rang out in vast volume over the forest and rose to the stars. It was no noise to which I could put a name; it was certainly no noise I had ever heard before; it bore some sort of resemblance to the neighing of a horse immensely magnified; yet it might have been half human, and there was triumph in it and derision.

"I will tell you one more thing I learnt before I left those parts. I left them at once, partly because I really had an appointment early this morning, as I told you; partly also, I think, because I felt you had the right to know at once what sort of things were to be faced. I was alarmed when I thought your friend was tormented with imaginary bogies; I am not less alarmed if he had got mixed up with real ones. Anyhow, before I left that village I had told one man what I had seen, and he told me he had seen it also. But he had seen it actually moving, in dusk turning to dark; the whole great house, with its high columns, moving across the fields like a great ship sailing on land."

Owen Hood sat up suddenly, with awakened eyes, and struck the table.

"Look here," he cried, with a new ring in his voice, "we must all go down to Ponder's End and bring this business to a finish."

"Do you think you will bring it to a finish?" asked Pierce gloomily; "or can you tell us what sort of finish?"

"Yes," replied Hood resolutely. "I think I can finish it, and I think I know what the finish will be. The truth is, my friend, I think I understand the whole thing now. And as I told you before, White, so far from being deluded by imaginary bogies, is a gentleman very exact in his statements. In this matter he has been very exact. That has been the whole mystery about him — that he has been very much too exact."

"What on earth do you mean by that?" asked Pierce.

"I mean," said the lawyer, "that I have suddenly remembered the phrase he used. It was very exact; it was dull, deadly, literal truth. But I can be exact, too, at times, and just now I should like to look at a time-table."

They found the village of Ponder's End in a condition as comically incongruous as could well be with the mystical experiences of Mr. Hilary Pierce. When we talk of such places as sleepy, we forget that they are very wide-awake about their own affairs, and especially on their own festive occasions. Piccadilly Circus looks much the same on Christmas Day or any other; but the market-place of a country town or village looks very different on the day of a fair or a bazaar. And Hilary Pierce, who had first come down there to find in a wood at midnight the riddle that he thought worthy of Merlin, came down the second time to find himself plunged suddenly into the middle of the bustling bathos of a jumble sale. It was one of those bazaars to provide bargains for the poor, at which all sorts of odds and ends are sold off. But it was treated as a sort of fete, and highly-coloured posters and handbills announced its nature on every side. The bustle seemed to be dominated by a tall dark lady of distinguished appearance, whom Owen Hood, rather to the surprise of his companions, hailed as an old acquaintance and managed to draw aside for a private talk. She had appeared to have her hands full at the bazaar; nevertheless, her talk with Hood was rather a long one. Pierce heard only the last words of it:

“Oh, he promised he was bringing something for the sale. I assure you he always keeps his word.”

All Hood said when he rejoined his companion was: “That’s the lady White was going to marry. I think I know now why things went wrong, and I hope they may go right. But there seems to be another bother. You see that clump of clod-hopping policemen over there, inspector and all. It seems they’re waiting for White. Says he’s broken the law in taking his house off the land, and that he has always eluded them. I hope there won’t be a scene when he turns up.”

If this was Mr. Hood’s hope, it was ill-founded and destined to disappointment. A scene was but a faint description of what was in store for that hopeful gentleman. Within ten minutes the greater part of the company were in a world in which the sun and the moon seemed to have turned topsy-turvy and the last limit of unlikelihood had been reached. Pierce had imagined he was very near that limit of the imagination when he groped after the vanishing temple in the dark forest. But nothing he had seen in that darkness and solitude was so fantastic as what he saw next in broad daylight and in a crowd.

At one extreme edge of the crowd there was a sudden movement — a wave of recoil and wordless cries. The next moment it had swept like a wind over the whole populace, and hundreds of faces were turned in one direction — in the direction of the road that descended by a gradual slope towards the woods that fringed the vicarage grounds. Out of these woods at the foot of the hill had emerged something that might from its size have been a large light grey omnibus. But it was not an omnibus. It scaled the slope so swiftly, in great strides, that it became instantly self-evident what it was. It was an elephant, whose monstrous form was moulded in grey and silver in the sunlight, and on whose back sat very erect a vigorous middle-aged gentleman in black clerical attire, with blanched hair and a rather fierce aquiline profile that glanced proudly to left and right.

The police inspector managed to make one step forward, and then stood like a statue. The vicar, on his vast steed, sailed into the middle of the market-place as serenely as if he had been the master of a familiar circus. He pointed in triumph to one of the red and blue posters on the wall, which bore the traditional title of “White Elephant Sale.”

“You see I’ve kept my word,” he said to the lady in a loud, cheerful voice. “I’ve brought a white elephant.”

The next moment he had waved his hand hilariously in another direction, having caught sight of Hood and Crane in the crowd.

"Splendid of you to come!" he called out. "Only you were in the secret. I told you I'd got a white elephant."

"So he did," said Hood, "only it never occurred to us that the elephant was an elephant and not a metaphor. So that's what he meant by Asiatic atmosphere and snow and mountains. And that's what the big shed was really for."

"Look here," said the inspector, recovering from his astonishment and breaking in on these felicitations. "I don't understand all these games, but it's my business to ask a few questions. Sorry to say it, sir, but you've ignored our notifications and evaded our attempts to—"

"Have I?" inquired Mr. White brightly. "Have I really evaded you? Well, well, perhaps I have. An elephant is such a standing temptation to evasion, to evanescence, to fading away like a dewdrop. Like a snowdrop perhaps would be more appropriate. Come on, Snowdrop."

The last word came smartly, and he gave a smart smack to the huge head of the pachyderm. Before the inspector could move or anyone had realized what had happened, the whole big bulk had pitched forward with a plunge like a cataract and went in great whirling strides, the crowd scattering before it. The police had not come provided for elephants, which are rare in those parts. Even if they had overtaken it on bicycles, they would have found it difficult to climb it on bicycles. Even if they had had revolvers, they had omitted to conceal about their persons anything in the way of big-game rifles. The white monster vanished rapidly up the long white road, so rapidly that when it dwindled to a small object and disappeared, people could hardly believe that such a prodigy had ever been present, or that their eyes had not been momentarily bewitched. Only, as it disappeared in the distance, Pierce heard once more the high nasal trumpeting noise which, in the eclipse of night, had seemed to fill the forest with fear.

It was at a subsequent meeting in London that Crane and Pierce had an opportunity of learning, more or less, the true story of the affair, in the form of another letter from the parson to the lawyer.

"Now that we know the secret," said Pierce cheerfully, "even his account of it ought to be quite clear."

"Quite clear," replied Hood calmly. "His letter begins, `Dear Owen, I am really tremendously grateful in spite of all I used to say about leather and about horse-hair.'"

"About what?" asked Pierce.

"Horse-hair," said Hood with severity. "He goes on, `The truth is they thought they could do what they liked with me because I always boasted that I hadn't got one, and never wanted to have one; but when they found I had got one, and I must really say a jolly good one, of course it was all quite different.'"

Pierce had his elbows up on the table, and his fingers thrust up into his loose yellow hair. He had rather the appearance of holding his head on. He was muttering to himself very softly, like a schoolboy learning a lesson.

"He had got one, but he didn't want one, and he hadn't got one and he had a jolly good one."

"One what?" asked Crane irritably. "Seems like a missing word competition."

"I've got the prize," observed Hood placidly. "The missing word is `solicitor.' What he means is that the police took liberties with him because they knew he would not have a lawyer. And he is perfectly right; for when I took the matter up on his behalf, I soon found that they had put themselves on the wrong side of the law at least as much as he had. In short, I was able to extricate him from this police business; hence his hearty if not lucid gratitude. But he goes on to talk about something rather more personal; and I think it really has been a rather interesting case, if he does not exactly shine as a narrator of it. As I dare say you noticed, I did know something of the lady whom our eccentric friend went courting years ago, rather in the spirit of Sir Roger de Coverly when he went courting the widow. She is a Miss Julia Drake, daughter of a country gentleman. I hope you won't misunderstand me if I say that she is a rather formidable lady. She is really a thoroughly good sort; but that air of the black-browed Juno she has about her does correspond to some real qualities. She is one of those people who can manage big enterprises, and the bigger they are the happier she is. When that sort of force functions within the limits of a village or a small valley, the impact is sometimes rather overpowering. You saw her managing the White Elephant Sale at Ponder's End. Well, if it had been literally an army of wild elephants, it would hardly have been on too large a scale for her tastes. In that sense, I may say that our friend's white elephant was not so much of a white elephant. I mean that in that sense it was not so much of an irrelevancy and hardly even a surprise. But in another way, it was a very great relief."

"You're getting nearly as obscure as he is," remonstrated Pierce. "What is all this mysterious introduction leading up to? What do you mean?"

"I mean," replied the lawyer, "that experience has taught me a little secret about very practical public characters like that lady. It sounds a paradox; but those practical people are often more morbid than theoretical people. They are capable of acting; but they are also capable of brooding when they are not acting. Their very stoicism makes too sentimental a secret of their sentimentalism. They misunderstand those they love; and make a mystery of the misunderstanding. They suffer in silence; a horrid habit. In short, they can do everything; but they don't know how to do nothing. Theorists, happy people who do nothing, like our friend Pierce—"

"Look here," cried the indignant Pierce. "I should like to know what the devil you mean? I've broken more law than you ever read in your life. If this psychological lecture is the new lucidity, give me Mr. White."

"Oh, very well," replied Hood, "if you prefer his text to my exposition, he describes the same situation as follows: `I ought to be grateful, being perfectly happy after all this muddle; I suppose one ought to be careful about nomenclature; but it never even occurred to me that her nose would be out of joint. Rather funny to be talking about noses, isn't it, for I suppose really it was her rival's nose that figured most prominently. Think of having a rival with a nose like that to turn up at you! Talk about a spire pointing to the stars—'"

"I think," said Crane, interposing mildly, "that it would be better if you resumed your duties as official interpreter. What was it that you were going to say about the lady who brooded over misunderstandings?"

"I was going to say," replied the lawyer, "that when I first came upon that crowd in the village, and saw that tall figure and dark strong face dominating it in the old way, my mind went back to a score of things I remembered about her in the past. Though we have not met for ten years, I knew from the first glimpse of her face that she had been worrying, in a powerful secretive sort of way; worrying about something she didn't understand and would not inquire about. I remember long ago, when she was an ordinary fox-hunting squire's daughter and White was one of Sydney Smith's wild curates, how she sulked for two months over a mistake about a post-card that could have been explained in two minutes. At least it could have been explained by anybody except White. But you will understand that if he tried to explain the post-card on another post-card, the results may not have been luminous, let alone radiant."

"But what has all this to do with noses?" inquired Pierce.

"Don't you understand yet?" asked Hood with a smile. "Don't you know who was the rival with the long nose?"

He paused for a moment and then continued, "It occurred to me as soon as I had guessed at the nature of the nose which may certainly be called the main feature of the story. An elusive, flexible and insinuating nose, the serpent of their Eden. Well, they seem to have returned to their Eden now; and I have no doubt it will be all right; for it is when people are separated that these sort of secrets spring up between them. After all, it was a mystery to us and we cannot be surprised if it was a mystery to her."

"A good deal of this talk is still rather a mystery to me," remarked Pierce, "though I admit it is getting a little clearer. You mean that the point that has just been cleared up is—"

"The point about Snowdrop," replied Hood. "We thought of a pony, and a monkey, and a baby, and a good many other things that Snowdrop might possibly be. But we never thought of the interpretation which was the first to occur to the lady."

There was silence, and then Crane laughed in an internal fashion.

"Well, I don't blame her," he said. "One could hardly expect a lady of any delicacy to deduce an elephant."

"It's an extraordinary business, when you come to think of it," said Pierce. "Where did he get the elephant?"

"He says something about that too," said Hood, referring to the letter. "He says, `I may be a quarrelsome fellow. But quarrels sometimes do good. And though it wasn't actually one of Captain Pierce's caravans—'"

"No, hang it all!" cried Pierce. "This is really too much! To see one's own name entangled in such hieroglyphics — it reminds me of seeing it in a Dutch paper during the war; and wondering whether all the other words were terms of abuse."

"I think I can explain," answered Hood patiently. "I assure you the reverend gentleman is not taking liberties with your name in a merely irresponsible spirit. As I told you before, he is strictly truthful when you get at the facts, though they may be difficult to get at. Curiously enough, there really is a connexion. I sometimes think there is a connexion beyond coincidence running through all our adventures; a purpose in these unconscious practical jokes. It seems rather eccentric to make friends with a white elephant—"

"Rather eccentric to make friends with us," said the Colonel. "We are a set of white elephants."

"As a matter of fact," said the lawyer, "this particular last prank of the parson really did arise out of the last prank of our friend Pierce."

"Me!" said Pierce in surprise. "Have I been producing elephants without knowing it?"

"Yes," replied Hood. "You remember when you were smuggling pigs in defiance of the regulations, you indulged (I regret to say) in a deception of putting them in cages and pretending you were travelling with a menagerie of dangerous animals. The consequence was, you remember, that the authorities forbade menageries altogether. Our friend White took up the case of a travelling circus being stopped in his town as a case of gross oppression; and when they had to break it up, he took over the elephant."

"Sort of small payment for his services, I suppose," said Crane. "Curious idea, taking a tip in the form of an elephant."

"He might not have done it if he'd known what it involved," said Hood. "As I say, he was a quarrelsome fellow, with all his good points."

There was a silence, and then Pierce said in a musing manner: "It's odd it should be the sequel of my little pig adventure. A sort of reversal of the ~parturiunt montes~; I put in a little pig and it brought forth an elephant."

"It will bring forth more monsters yet," said Owen Hood. "We have not see all the sequels of your adventures as a swineherd."

But touching the other monsters or monstrous events so produced the reader has already been warned — nay, threatened — that they are involved in the narrative called the Exclusive Luxury of Enoch Oates, and for the moment the threat must hang like thunder in the air.

The Exclusive Luxury of Enoch Oates

“Since the Colonel ate his hat the Lunatic Asylum has lacked a background.”

The conscientious scribe cannot but be aware that the above sentence, standing alone and without reference to previous matters, may not entirely explain itself. Anyone trying the experiment of using that sentence for practical social purposes; tossing that sentence lightly as a greeting to a passer-by; sending that sentence as a telegram to a total stranger; whispering that sentence hoarsely into the ear of the nearest policeman, and so on, will find that its insufficiency as a full and final statement is generally felt. With no morbid curiosity, with no exaggerated appetite for omniscience, men will want to know more about this statement before acting upon it. And the only way of explaining it, and the unusual circumstances in which it came to be said, is to pursue the doubling and devious course of these narratives, and return to a date very much earlier, when men now more than middle-aged were quite young.

It was in the days when the Colonel was not the Colonel, but only Jimmy Crane, a restless youth tossed about by every wind of adventure, but as yet as incapable of discipline as of dressing for dinner. It was in days before Robert Owen Hood, the lawyer, had ever begun to study the law and had only got so far as to abolish it; coming down to the club every night with a new plan for a revolution to turn all earthly tribunals upside down. It was in days before Wilding White settled down as a country parson, returning to the creed though not the conventions of his class and country; when he was still ready to change his religion once a week, turning up sometimes in the costume of a monk and sometimes of a mufti, and sometimes in what he declared to be the original vestments of a Druid, whose religion was shortly to be resumed by the whole British people. It was in days when their young friend Hilary Pierce, the aviator, was still anticipating aviation by flying a small kite. In short, it was early in the lives even of the elders of the group that they had founded a small social club, in which their long friendships had flourished. The club had to have some sort of name, and the more thoughtful and detached among them, who saw the club steadily and saw it as a whole, considered the point with ripe reflection, and finally called their little society the Lunatic Asylum.

"We might all stick straws in our hair for dinner, as the Romans crowned themselves with roses for the banquet," observed Hood. "It would correspond to dressing for dinner; I don't know what else we could do to vary the vulgar society trick of all wearing the same sort of white waistcoats."

"All wearing strait waistcoats, I suppose," said Crane.

"We might each dine separately in a padded cell, if it comes to that," said Hood; "but there seems to be something lacking in it considered as a social evening."

Here Wilding White, who was then in a monastic phase, intervened eagerly. He explained that in some monasteries a monk of particular holiness was allowed to become a hermit in an inner cell, and proposed a similar arrangement at the club. Hood, with his more mellow rationalism, intervened with a milder amendment. He suggested that a large padded chair should represent the padded cell, and be reserved like a throne for the loftiest of the lunatics.

"Do not," he said gently and earnestly, "do not let us be divided by jealousies and petty ambitions. Do not let us dispute among ourselves which shall be the dottiest in the domain of the dotty. Perhaps one will appear worthier than us all, more manifestly and magnificently weak in the head; for him let the padded throne stand empty."

Jimmy Crane had said no more after his brief suggestion, but was pacing the room like a polar bear, as he generally did when there came upon him a periodical impulse to go off after things like polar bears. He was the wildest of all those wild figures so far as the scale of his adventures was concerned, constantly vanishing to the ends of the earth nobody knew why, and turning up again nobody knew how. He had a hobby, even in his youth, that made his outlook seem even stranger than the bewildering successive philosophies of his friend White. He had an enthusiasm for the myths of savages, and while White was balancing the relative claims of Buddhism and Brahminism, Crane would boldly declare his preference for the belief that a big fish ate the sun every night, or that the whole cosmos was created by cutting up a giant. Moreover, there was with all this something indefinable but in some way more serious about Crane even in those days. There was much that was merely boyish about the blind impetuosity of Wilding White, with his wild hair and eager aquiline face. He was evidently one who might (as he said) learn the secret of Isis, but would be quite incapable of keeping it to himself. The long, legal face of Owen Hood had already learned to laugh at most things, if not to laugh loudly. But in Crane there was something more hard and militant like steel, and as he proved afterwards in the affair of the hat, he could keep a secret even when it was a joke. So that when he finally went off on a long tour round the world, with the avowed intention of studying all the savages he could find, nobody tried to stop him. He went off in a startlingly shabby suit, with a faded sash instead of a waistcoat, and with no luggage in particular, except a large revolver slung round him in a case like a field-glass, and a big, green umbrella that he flourished resolutely as he walked.

“Well, he’ll come back a queerer figure than he went, I suppose,” said Wilding White.

“He couldn’t,” answered Hood, the lawyer, shaking his head. “I don’t believe all the devil-worship in Africa could make him any madder than he is.”

“But he’s going to America first, isn’t he?” said the other.

“Yes,” said Hood. “He’s going to America, but not to see the Americans. He would think the Americans very dull compared with the American Indians. Possibly he will come back in feathers and war-paint.”

“He’ll come back scalped, I suppose,” said White hopefully. “I suppose being scalped is all the rage in the best Red Indian society?”

“Then he’s working round by the South Sea Islands,” said Hood. “They don’t scalp people there; they only stew them in pots.”

“He couldn’t very well come back stewed,” said White, musing. “Does it strike you, Owen, that we should hardly be talking nonsense like this if we hadn’t a curious faith that a fellow like Crane will know how to look after himself?”

“Yes,” said Hood gravely. “I’ve got a very fixed fundamental conviction that Crane will turn up again all right. But it’s true that he may look jolly queer after going ~fantee~ for all that time.”

It became a sort of pastime at the club of the Lunatics to compete in speculations about the guise in which the maddest of their madmen would return, after being so long lost to civilization. And grand preparations were made as for a sort of Walpurgis Night of nonsense when it was known at last that he was really returning. Hood had received letters from him occasionally, full of queer mythologies, and then a rapid succession of telegrams from places nearer and nearer home, culminating in the announcement that he would appear in the club that night. It was about five minutes before dinner-time that a sharp knock on the door announced his arrival.

“Bang all the gongs and the tom-toms,” cried Wilding White. “The Lord High Mumbo-Jumbo arrives riding on the nightmare.”

“We had better bring out the throne of the King of the Maniacs,” said Hood, laughing. “We may want it at last,” and he turned towards the big padded chair that still stood at the top of the table.

As he did so James Crane walked into the room. He was clad in very neat and well-cut evening clothes, not too fashionable, and a little formal. His hair was parted on one side, and his moustache clipped rather close; he took a seat with a pleasant smile, and began talking about the weather.

He was not allowed, however, to confine his conversation to the weather. He had certainly succeeded in giving his old friends the only sort of surprise that they really had not expected; but they were too old friends for their friend to be able to conceal from them the meaning of such a change. And it was on that festive evening that Crane explained his position; a position which he maintained in most things ever afterwards, and one which is the original foundation of the affair that follows.

“I have lived with the men we call savages all over the world,” he said simply, “and I have found out one truth about them. And I tell you, my friends, you may talk about independence and individual self-expression till you burst. But I’ve always found, wherever I went, that the man who could really be trusted to keep his word, and to fight, and to work for his family, was the man who did a war-dance before the moon where the moon was worshipped, and wore a nose-ring in his nose where nose-rings were worn. I have had plenty of fun, and I won’t interfere with anyone else having it. But I believe I have seen what is the real making of mankind, and I have come back to my tribe.”

This was the first act of the drama which ended in the remarkable appearance and disappearance of Mr. Enoch Oates, and it has been necessary to narrate it briefly before passing on to the second act. Ever since that time Crane had preserved at once his eccentric friends and his own more formal customs. And there were many among the newer members of the club who had never known him except as the Colonel, the grizzled, military gentleman whose severe scheme of black and white attire and strict politeness in small things formed the one foil of sharp contrast to that many-coloured Bohemia. One of these was Hilary Pierce, the young aviator; and much as he liked the Colonel, he never quite understood him. He had never known the old soldier in his volcanic youth, as had Hood and White, and therefore never knew how much of the fire remained under the rock or the snows. The singular affair of the hat, which has been narrated to the too patient reader elsewhere, surprised him more than it did the older men, who knew very well that the Colonel was not so old as he looked. And the impression increased with all the incidents which a fanatical love of truth has forced the chronicler to relate in the same connexion; the incident of the river and of the pigs and of the somewhat larger pet of Mr. Wilding White. There was talk of renaming the Lunatic Asylum as the League of the Long Bow, and of commemorating its performances in a permanent ritual. The Colonel was induced to wear a crown of cabbage on state occasions, and Pierce was gravely invited to bring his pigs with him to dine at the club.

"You could easily bring a little pig in your large pocket," said Hood. "I often wonder people do not have pigs as pets."

"A pig in a poke, in fact," said Pierce. "Well, so long as you have the tact to avoid the indelicacy of having pork for dinner that evening, I suppose I could bring my pig in my pocket."

"White'd find it rather a nuisance to bring his elephant in his pocket," observed the Colonel.

Pierce glanced at him, and had again the feeling of incongruity at seeing the ceremonial cabbage adorning his comparatively venerable head. For the Colonel had just been married, and was rejuvenated in an almost jaunty degree. Somehow the philosophical young man seemed to miss something, and sighed. It was then that he made the remark which is the pivot of this precise though laborious anecdote.

"Since the Colonel ate his hat," he said, "the Lunatic Asylum has lacked a background."

"Damn your impudence," said the Colonel cheerfully. "Do you mean to call me a background to my face?"

"A dark background," said Pierce soothingly. "Do not resent my saying a dark background. I mean a grand, mysterious background like that of night; a sublime and even starry background."

"Starry yourself," said Crane indignantly.

"It was against that background of ancient night," went on the young man dreamily, "that the fantastic shapes and fiery colours of our carnival could really be seen. So long as he came here with his black coat and beautiful society manners there was a foil to our follies. We were eccentric, but he was our centre. You cannot be eccentric without a centre."

"I believe Hilary is quite right," said Owen Hood earnestly. "I believe we have made a great mistake. We ought not to have all gone mad at once. We ought to have taken it in turns to go mad. Then I could have been shocked at his behaviour on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and he could have been shocked at my behaviour on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. But there is no moral value in going mad when nobody is shocked. If Crane leaves off being shocked, what are we to do?"

"I know what we want," began Pierce excitedly.

"So do I," interrupted Hood. "We want a sane man."

"Not so easy to find nowadays," said the old soldier. "Going to advertise?"

"I mean a stupid man," explained Owen Hood. "I mean a man who's conventional all through, not a humbug like Crane. I mean, I want a solid, serious, business man, a hard-headed, practical man of affairs, a man to whom vast commercial interests are committed. In a word, I want a fool; some beautiful, rounded, homogenous fool, in whose blameless face, as in a round mirror, all our fancies may really be reflected and renewed. I want a very successful man, a very wealthy man, a man—"

"I know! I know!" cried young Pierce, almost waving his arms. "Enoch Oates!"

"Who's Enoch Oates?" inquired White.

"Are the lords of the world so little known?" asked Hood. "Enoch Oates is Pork, and nearly everything else; Enoch Oates is turning civilization into one vast sausage-machine. Didn't I ever tell you how Hilary ran into him over that pig affair?"

"He's the very man you want," cried Hilary Pierce enthusiastically. "I know him, and I believe I can get him. Being a millionaire, he's entirely ignorant. Being an American, he's entirely in earnest. He's got just that sort of negative Nonconformist conscience of New England that balances the positive money-getting of New York. If we want to surprise anybody we'll surprise him. Let's ask Enoch Oates to dinner."

"I won't have any practical jokes played on guests," said the Colonel.

“Of course not,” replied Hood. “He’ll be only too pleased to take it seriously. Did you ever know an American who didn’t like seeing the Sights? And if you don’t know you’re a Sight with that cabbage on your head, it’s time an American tourist taught you.”

“Besides, there’s a difference,” said Pierce. “I wouldn’t ask a fellow like that doctor, Horace Hunter—”

“Sir Horace Hunter,” murmured Hood reverently.

“I wouldn’t ask him, because I really think him a sneak and a snob, and my invitation could only be meant as an insult. But Oates is not a man I hate, nor is he hateful. That’s the curious part of it. He’s a simple, sincere sort of fellow, according to his lights, which are pretty dim. He’s a thief and a robber of course, but he doesn’t know it. I’m asking him because he’s different; but I don’t imagine he’s at all sorry to be different. There’s no harm in giving a man a good dinner and letting him be a background without knowing it.”

When Mr. Enoch Oates in due course accepted the invitation and presented himself at the club, many were reminded of that former occasion when a stiff and conventional figure in evening dress had first appeared like a rebuke to the revels. But in spite of the stiff sameness of both those black and white costumes, there was a great deal of difference between the old background and the new background. Crane’s good manners were of that casual kind that are rather peculiarly English, and mark an aristocracy at its ease in the saddle. Curiously enough, if the American had one point in common with a Continental noble of ancient lineage (whom his daughter might have married any day), it was that they would both be a little more on the defensive, living in the midst of democracy. Mr. Oates was perfectly polite, but there was something a little rigid about him. He walked to his chair rather stiffly and sat down rather heavily. He was a powerful, ponderous man with a large sallow face, a little suggestive of a corpulent Red Indian. He had a ruminant eye, and an equally ruminant manner of chewing an unlighted cigar. These were signs that might well have gone with a habit of silence. But they did not.

Mr. Oates’s conversation might not be brilliant, but it was continuous. Pierce and his friends had begun with some notion of dangling their own escapades before him, like dancing dolls before a child; they had told him something of the affair of the Colonel and his cabbage, of the captain and his pigs, of the parson and his elephant; but they soon found that their hearer had not come there merely as a listener. What he thought of their romantic buffooneries it would be hard to say; probably he did not understand them, possibly he did not even hear them. Anyhow, his own monologue went on. He was a leisurely speaker. They found themselves revising much that they had heard about the snap and smartness and hurry of American talk. He spoke without haste or embarrassment, his eye boring into space, and he more than fulfilled Mr. Pierce's hopes of somebody who would talk about business matters. His talk was a mild torrent of facts and figures, especially figures. In fact the background was doing all it could to contribute the required undertone of common commercial life. The background was justifying all their hopes that it would be practical and prosaic. Only the background had rather the air of having become the foreground.

"When they put that up to me I saw it was the proposition," Mr. Oates was saying. "I saw I'd got on to something better than my old regulation turnover of eighty-five thousand dollars on each branch. I reckoned I should save a hundred and twenty thousand dollars in the long run by scrapping the old plant, even if I had to drop another thirty thousand dollars on new works, where I'd get the raw material for a red cent. I saw right away that was the point to freeze on to; that I just got a chance to sell something I didn't need to buy; something that could be sort of given away like old match-ends. I figured out it would be better by a long chalk to let the other guys rear the stock and sell me their refuse for next to nix, so I could get ahead with turning it into the goods. So I started in right away and got there at the first go off with an increase of seven hundred and fifty-one thousand dollars."

"Seven hundred and fifty-one thousand dollars," murmured Owen Hood. "How soothing it all seems."

"I reckon those mutts didn't get on to what they were selling me," continued Mr. Oates, "or didn't have the pep to use it that way themselves; for though it was the sure-enough hot tip, it isn't everybody who would have thought of it. When I was in pork, of course, I wanted the other guys out; but just now I wasn't putting anything on pork, but only on just that part of a pig I wanted and they didn't want. By notifying all your pig farmers I was able to import nine hundred and twenty-five thousand pigs' ears this fall, and I guess I can get consignments all winter."

Hood had some little legal experience with long-winded commercial witnesses, and he was listening by this time with a cocked eyebrow and an attention much sharper than the dreamy ecstasy with which the poetic Pierce was listening to the millionaire's monologue, as if to the wordless music of some ever-murmuring brook.

"Excuse me," said Hood earnestly, "but did I understand you to say pigs' ears?"

"That is so, Mr. Hood," said the American with great patience and politeness. "I don't know whether I gave you a sufficiently detailed description for you to catch on to the proposition, but—"

"Well," murmured Pierce wistfully, "it sounded to me like a detailed description."

"Pardon me," said Hood, checking him with a frown. "I really want to understand this proposition of Mr. Oates. Do I understand that you bought pigs' ears cheap, when the pigs were cut up for other purposes, and that you thought you could use them for some purpose of your own?"

"Sure!" said Mr. Enoch Oates, nodding. "And my purpose was about the biggest thing in fancy goods ever done in the States. In the publicity line there's nothing like saying you can do what folks say can't be done. Flying in the face of proverbs instead of providence, I reckon. It catches on at once. We got to work, and got out the first advertisement in no time; just a blank space with `We Can Do It' in the middle. Got folks wondering for a week what it was."

"I hope, sir," said Pierce in a low voice, "that you will not carry sound commercial principles so far as to keep us wondering for a week what it was."

"Well," said Oates, "we found we could subject the pigskin and bristles to a new gelat'nous process for making artificial silk, and we figured that publicity would do the rest. We came out with the second set of posters: `She Wants it Now'... `The Most Wonderful Woman on Earth is waiting by the Old Fireside, hoping you'll bring her home a Pig's Whisper Purse.'"

"A purse!" gasped Hilary.

"I see you're on the notion," proceeded the unmoved American. "We called 'em Pig's Whisper Purses after the smartest and most popular poster we ever had: `There was a Lady Loved a Swine.' You know the nursery rhyme, I guess; featured a slap-up princess whispering in a pig's ear. I tell you there isn’t a smart woman in the States now that can do without one of our pig-silk purses, and all because it upsets the proverb. Why, see here—”

Hilary Pierce had sprung wildly to his feet with a sort of stagger and clutched at the American’s arm.

“Found! Found!” he cried hysterically. “Oh, sir, I implore you to take the chair! Do, do take the chair!”

“Take the chair!” repeated the astonished millionaire, who was already almost struggling in his grasp. “Really, gentlemen, I hadn’t supposed the proceedings were so formal as to require a chairman, but in any case—”

It could hardly be said, however, that the proceedings were formal. Mr. Hilary Pierce had the appearance of forcibly dragging Mr. Enoch Oates in the direction of the large padded arm-chair, that had always stood empty at the top of the club table, uttering cries which, though incoherent, appeared to be partly apologetic.

“No offence,” he gasped. “Hope no misunderstanding... ~Honoris causa~... you, you alone are worthy of that seat... the club has found its king and justified its title at last.”

Here the Colonel intervened and restored order. Mr. Oates departed in peace; but Mr. Hilary Pierce was still simmering.

“And that is the end of our quiet, ordinary business man,” he cried. “Such is the behaviour of our monochrome and unobtrusive background.” His voice rose to a sort of wail. “And we thought we were dotty! We deluded ourselves with the hope that we were pretty well off our chump! Lord have mercy on us! American big business rises to a raving idiocy compared with which we are as sane as the beasts of the field. The modern commercial world is far madder than anything we can do to satirize it.”

“Well,” said the Colonel good-humouredly, “we’ve done some rather ridiculous things ourselves.”

“Yes, yes,” cried Pierce excitedly, “but we did them to make ourselves ridiculous. That unspeakable man is wholly, serenely serious. He thinks those maniacal monkey tricks are the normal life of man. Your argument really answers itself. We did the maddest things we could think of, meaning them to look mad. But they were nothing like so mad as what a modern business man does in the way of business.”

“Perhaps it’s the American business man,” said White, “who’s too keen to see the humour of it.”

“Nonsense,” said Crane. “Millions of Americans have a splendid sense of humour.”

“Then how fortunate are we,” said Pierce reverently, “through whose lives this rare, this ineffable, this divine being has passed.”

“Passed away for ever, I suppose,” said Hood with a sigh. “I fear the Colonel must be our only background once more.”

Colonel Crane was frowning thoughtfully, and at the last words his frown deepened to disapproval. He puffed at his smouldering cigar and then, removing it, said abruptly:

“I suppose you fellows have forgotten how I came to be a background? I mean, why I rather approve of people being backgrounds.”

“I remember something you said a long time ago,” replied Hood. “Hilary must have been in long-clothes at that time.”

“I said I had found out something by going round the world,” said Crane. “You young people think I am an old Tory; but remember I am also an old traveller. Well, it’s part of the same thing. I’m a traditionalist because I’m a traveller. I told you when I came back to the club that I’d come back to the tribe. I told you the best man was the man who wore a nose-ring where nose-rings were worn.”

“I remember,” said Owen Hood.

“No, you forget,” said Crane rather gruffly. “You forget it when you talk about Enoch Oates the American. I’m no politician, thank God, and I shall look on with detachment if you dynamite him for being a millionaire. As a matter of fact, he doesn’t think half so much of money as old Normantowers, who thinks it’s too sacred to talk about. But you’re not dynamiting him for being a millionaire. You’re simply laughing at him for being an American. You’re laughing at him for being national and normal, for being a good citizen, a good tribesman, for wearing a nose-ring where nose-rings are worn.

“I say... Kuklux, you know,” remonstrated Wilding White in his hazy way. “Americans wouldn’t be flattered—”

“Do you suppose you haven’t got a nose-ring?” cried Crane so sharply that the clergyman started from his trance and made a mechanical gesture as if to feel for that feature. “Do you suppose a man like you doesn’t carry his nationality as plain as the nose on his face? Do you think a man as hopelessly English as you are wouldn’t be laughed at in America? You can’t be a good Englishman without being a good joke. The better

Englishman you are the more of a joke you are; but still it's better to be better. Nose-rings are funny to people who don't wear 'em. Nations are funny to people who don't belong to 'em. But it's better to wear a nose-ring than to be a cosmopolitan crank who cuts off his nose to spite his face."

This being by far the longest speech the Colonel had ever delivered since the day he returned from his tropical travels long ago, his old friend looked at him with a certain curiosity; even his old friends hardly understood how much he had been roused in defence of a guest and of his own deep delicacies about the point of hospitality. He went on with undiminished warmth:

"Well, it's like that with poor Oates. He has, as we see it, certain disproportions, certain insensibilities, certain prejudices that stand out in our eyes like deformities. They offend you; they offend me, possibly rather more than they do you. You young revolutionists think you're very liberal and universal; but the only result is that you're narrow and national without knowing it. We old fogeys know our tastes are narrow and national; but we know they are only tastes. And we know, at any rate I know, that Oates is far more likely to be an honest man, a good husband and a good father, because he stinks of the rankest hickory patch in the Middle West, than if he were some fashionable New Yorker pretending to be an English aristocrat or playing the aesthete in Florence."

"Don't say a good husband," pleaded Pierce with a faint shudder. "It reminds me of the grand slap-up advertisement of the Pig's Whisper. How do you feel about that, my dear Colonel? The Most Wonderful Woman on Earth Waiting by the Old Fireside—"

"It makes my flesh creep," replied Crane. "It chills me to the spine. I feel I would rather die than have anything to do with it. But that has nothing to do with my point. I don't belong to the tribe who wear nose-rings; nor to the tribe who talk through their noses."

"Well, aren't you a little thankful for that?" asked White.

"I'm thankful I can be fair in spite of it," answered Crane. "When I put a cabbage on my head, I didn't expect people not to stare at it. And I know that each one of us in a foreign land is a foreigner, and a thing to be stared at."

"What I don't understand about him," said Hood, "is the sort of things he doesn't mind having stared at. How can people tolerate all that vulgar, reeking, gushing commercial cant everywhere? How can a man talk about the Old Fireside? It's obscene. The police ought to interfere."

"And that's just where you're wrong," said the Colonel. "It's vulgar enough and mad enough and obscene enough if you like. But it's not cant. I have travelled amongst these wild tribes, for years on end; and I tell you emphatically it is not cant. And if you want to know, just ask your extraordinary American friend about his own wife and his own relatively Old Fireside. He won't mind. That's the extraordinary part of it."

"What does all this really mean, Colonel?" asked Hilary Pierce.

"It means, my boy," answered the Colonel, "that I think you owe our guest an apology."

So it came about that there was an epilogue, as there had been a prologue, to the drama of the entrance and exit of Mr. Enoch B. Oates; an epilogue which in its turn became a prologue to the later dramas of the League of the Long Bow. For the words of the Colonel had a certain influence on the Captain, and the actions of the Captain had a certain influence on the American millionaire; and so the whole machinery of events was started afresh by that last movement over the nuts and wine, when Colonel Crane had stirred moodily in his seat and taken his cigar out of his mouth.

Hilary Pierce was an amiable and even excessively optimistic young man by temperament, in spite of his pugnacity; he would really have been the last man in the world to wish to hurt the feelings of a harmless stranger; and he had a deep and almost secret respect for the opinions of the older soldier. So, finding himself soon afterwards passing the great gilded gateways of the highly American hotel that was the London residence of the American, he paused a moment in hesitation and then went in and gave his name to various overpowering officials in uniforms that might have been those of the German General Staff. He was relieved when the large American came out to meet him with a simple and lumbering affability, and offered his large limp hand as if there had never been a shadow of misunderstanding. It was somehow borne in upon Pierce that his own rather intoxicated behaviour that evening had merely been noted down along with the architectural styles and the mellow mediaevalism of the pig-sty, as part of the fantasies of a feudal land. All the antics of the Lunatic Asylum had left the American traveller with the impression that similar parlour games were probably being played that evening in all the parlours of England. Perhaps there was something, after all, in Crane's suggestion that every nation assumes that every other nation is a sort of mild madhouse.

Mr. Enoch Oates received his guest with great hospitality and pressed on him cocktails of various occult names and strange colours, though he himself partook of nothing but a regimen of tepid milk.

Pierce fell into the confidence of Mr. Enoch Oates with a silent swiftness that made his brain reel with bewilderment. He was staggered like a man who had fallen suddenly through fifteen floors of a sky-scraper and found himself in somebody's bedroom. At the lightest hint of the sort of thing to which Colonel Crane had alluded, the American opened himself with an expansiveness that was like some gigantic embrace. All the interminable tables of figures and calculations in dollars had for the moment disappeared; yet Oates was talking in the same easy and natural nasal drawl, very leisurely and a little monotonous, as he said:

"I'm married to the best and brightest woman God ever made, and I tell you it's her and God between them that have made me, and I reckon she had the hardest part of it. We had nothing but a few sticks when I started; and it was the way she stood by that gave me the heart to risk even those on my own judgement of how things were going in the Street. I counted on a rise in Pork, and if it hadn't risen I'd have been broke and I dare say in the jug. But she's just wonderful. You should see her."

He produced her photograph with a paralysing promptitude; it represented a very regal lady dressed up to the nines, probably for the occasion, with very brilliant eyes and an elaborate load of light hair.

"`I believe in your star, Enoch,' she said; `you stick to Pork,'" said Oates, with tender reminiscence, "and so we saw it through."

Pierce, who had been speculating with involuntary irreverence on the extreme difficulty of conducting a love-affair or a sentimental conversation in which one party had to address the other as Enoch, felt quite ashamed of his cynicism when the Star of Pork shone with such radiance in the eyes of his new friend.

"It was a terrible time, but I stuck to Pork, sometimes feeling she could see clearer than I could; and of course she was right, and I've never known her wrong. Then came my great chance of making the combination and freezing out competition; and I was able to give her the sort of things she ought to have and let her take the lead as she should. I don't care for society much myself; but I'm often glad on a late night at the office to ring her up and hear she's enjoying it."

He spoke with a ponderous simplicity that seemed to disarm and crush the criticism of a more subtle civilization. It was one of those things that are easily seen to be absurd; but even after they are seen to be absurd, they are still there. It may be, after all, that that is the definition of the great things.

"I reckon that's what people mean by the romance of business," continued Oates, "and though my business got bigger and bigger, it made me feel kinda pleased there had been a romance at the heart of it. It had to get bigger, because we wanted to make the combination water-tight all over the world. I guess I had to fix things up a bit with your politicians. But Congress men are alike all the world over, and it didn't trouble me any."

There was a not uncommon conviction among those acquainted with Captain Hilary Pierce that that ingenious young man was cracked. He did a great many things to justify the impression; and in one sense certainly had never shown any reluctance to make a fool of himself. But if he was a lunatic, he was none the less a very English lunatic. And the notion of talking about his most intimate affections, suddenly, to a foreigner in a hotel, merely because the conversation had taken that turn, was something that he found quite terrifying. And yet an instinct, an impulse running through all these developments, told him that a moment had come and that he must seize some opportunity that he hardly understood.

"Look here," he said rather awkwardly, "I want to tell you something."

He looked down at the table as he continued.

"You said just now you were married to the best woman in the world. Well, curiously enough, so am I. It's a coincidence that often happens. But it's a still more curious coincidence that, in our own quiet way, we went in for Pork too. She kept pigs at the back of the little country inn where I met her; and at one time it looked as if the pigs might have to be given up. Perhaps the inn as well. Perhaps the wedding as well. We were quite poor, as poor as you were when you started; and to the poor those extra modes of livelihood are often life. We might have been ruined; and the reason was, I gather, that you had gone in for Pork. But after all ours was the real pork; pork that walked about on legs. We made the bed for the pigs and filled the inside of the pig; you only bought and sold the name of the pig. You didn't go to business with a live little pig under your arm or walk down Wall

Street followed by a herd of swine. It was a phantom pig, the ghost of a pig, that was able to kill our real pig and perhaps us as well. Can you really justify the way in which your romance nearly ruined our romance? Don’t you think there must be something wrong somewhere?”

“Well,” said Oates after a very long silence, “that’s a mighty big question and will take a lot of discussing.”

But the end to which their discussion led must be left to reveal itself when the prostrate reader has recovered sufficient strength to support the story of The Unthinkable Theory of Professor Green, which those who would endure to the end may read at some later date.

The Unthinkable Theory of Professor Green

If the present passage in the chronicles of the Long Bow seem but a side issue, an interlude and an idyll, a mere romantic episode lacking that larger structural achievement which gives solidity and hard actuality to the other stories, the reader is requested not to be hasty in his condemnation; for in the little love-story of Mr. Oliver Green is to be found, as in a parable, the beginning of the final apotheosis and last judgement of all these things.

It may well begin on a morning when the sunlight came late but brilliant, under the lifting of great clouds from a great grey sweep of wolds that grew purple as they dipped again into distance. Much of that mighty shape was striped and scored with ploughed fields, but a rude path ran across it, along which two figures could be seen in full stride outlined against the morning sky.

They were both tall; but beyond the fact that they had both once been professional soldiers, of rather different types and times, they had very little in common. By their ages they might almost have been father and son; and this would not have been contradicted by the fact that the younger appeared to be talking all the time, in a high, confident and almost crowing voice, while the elder only now and then put in a word. But they were not father and son; strangely enough they were really talking and walking together because they were friends. Those who know only too well their proceedings as narrated elsewhere would have recognized Colonel Crane, once of the Coldstream Guards, and Captain Pierce, late of the Flying Corps.

The young man appeared to be talking triumphantly about a great American capitalist whom he professed to have persuaded to see the error of his ways. He talked rather as if he had been slumming.

“I’m very proud of it, I can tell you,” he said. “Anybody can produce a penitent murderer. It’s something to produce a penitent millionaire. And I do believe that poor Enoch Oates has seen the light (thanks to my conversations at lunch); since I talked to him, Oates is another and a better man.”

“Sown his wild oats, in fact,” remarked Crane.

“Well,” replied the other. “In a sense they were very quiet oats. Almost what you might call Quaker Oats. He was a Puritan and a Prohibitionist and a Pacifist and an Internationalist; in short, everything that is in darkness and the shadow of death. But what you said about him was quite right. His heart's in the right place. It's on his sleeve. That's why I preached the gospel to the noble savage and made him a convert."

"But what did you convert him to?" inquired the other.

"Private property," replied Pierce promptly. "Being a millionaire he had never heard of it. But when I explained the first elementary idea of it in a simple form, he was quite taken with the notion. I pointed out that he might abandon robbery on a large scale and create property on a small scale. He felt it was very revolutionary, but he admitted it was right. Well, you know, he'd bought this big English estate out here. He was going to play the philanthropist, and have a model estate with all the regular trimmings; heads hygienically shaved by machinery every morning; and the cottagers admitted once a month into their own front gardens and told to keep off the grass. But I said to him: `If you're going to give things to people, why not give 'em? If you give your friend a plant in a pot, you don't send him an inspector from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Vegetables to see he waters it properly. If you give your friend a box of cigars, you don't make him write a monthly report of how many he smokes a day. Can't you be a little generous with your generosity? Why don't you use your money to make free men instead of to make slaves? Why don't you give your tenants their land and have done with it, or let 'em have it very cheap?' And he's done it; he's really done it. He's created hundreds of small proprietors, and changed the whole of this countryside. That's why I want you to come up and see one of the small farms."

"Yes," said Colonel Crane, "I should like to see the farm."

"There's a lot of fuss about it, too; there's the devil of a row," went on the young man, in very high spirits. "Lots of big combines and things are trying to crush the small farmers with all sorts of tricks; they even complain of interference by an American. You can imagine how much Rosenbaum Low and Goldstein and Guggenheimer must be distressed by the notion of a foreigner interfering in England. I want to know how a foreigner could interfere less than by giving back their land to the English people and clearing out. They all put it on to me; and right they are. I regard Oates as my property; my convert; captive of my bow and spear."

"Captive of your long bow, I imagine," said the Colonel. "I bet you told him a good many things that nobody but a shrewd business man would have been innocent enough to believe.”

“If I use the long bow,” replied Pierce with dignity, “it is a weapon with heroic memories proper to a yeoman of England. With what more fitting weapon could we try to establish a yeomanry?”

“There is something over there,” said Colonel quietly, “that looks to me rather like another sort of weapon.”

They had by this time come in full sight of the farm buildings which crowned the long slope; and beyond a kitchen-garden and an orchard rose a thatched roof with a row of old-fashioned lattice windows under it; the window at the end standing open. And out of this window at the edge of the block of building protruded a big black object, rigid and apparently cylindrical, thrust out above the garden and dark against the morning daylight.

“A gun!” cried Pierce involuntarily; “looks just like a howitzer; or is it an anti-aircraft gun?”

“Anti-airman gun, no doubt,” said Crane; “they heard you were coming down and took precautions.”

“But what the devil can he want with a gun?” muttered Pierce, peering at the dark outline.

“And who the devil is HE, if it comes to that?” said the Colonel.

“Why, that window,” explained Pierce, “that’s the window of the room they’ve let to a paying guest, I know. Man of the name of Green, I understand; rather a recluse, and I suppose some sort of crank.”

“Not an anti-armament crank, anyhow,” said the Colonel.

“By George!” said Pierce, whistling softly. “I wonder whether things really have moved faster than we could fancy! I wonder whether it’s a revolution or a civil war beginning after all. I suppose we are an army ourselves; I represent the Air Force and you represent the infantry.”

“You represent the infants,” answered the Colonel. “You’re too young for this world; you and your revolutions! As a matter of fact, it isn’t a gun, though it does look rather like one. I see now what it is.”

“And what in the world is it?” asked his friend.

“It’s a telescope,” said Crane. “One of those very big telescopes they usually have in observatories.”

“Couldn’t be partly a gun and partly a telescope?” pleaded Pierce, reluctant to abandon his first fancy. “I’ve often seen the phrase `shooting stars,’ but perhaps I’ve got the grammar and sense of it wrong. The young man lodging with the farmer may be following one of the local sports — the local substitute for duck-shooting!"

"What in the world are you talking about?" growled the other.

"Their lodger may be shooting the stars," explained Pierce.

"Hope their lodger isn't shooting the moon," said the flippant Crane.

As they spoke there came towards them, through the green and twinkling twilight of the orchard, a young woman with copper-coloured hair and a square and rather striking face, whom Pierce saluted respectfully as the daughter of the house. He was very punctilious upon the point that these new peasant farmers must be treated like small squires and not like tenants or serfs.

"I see your friend Mr. Green has got his telescope out," he said.

"Yes, sir," said the girl. "They say Mr. Green is a great astronomer."

"I doubt if you ought to call me `sir,'" said Pierce reflectively. "It suggests rather the forgotten feudalism than the new equality. Perhaps you might oblige me by saying `Yes, citizen,' then we could continue our talk about Citizen Green on an equal footing. By the way, pardon me, let me present Citizen Crane."

Citizen Crane bowed politely to the young woman without any apparent enthusiasm for his new title; but Pierce went on.

"Rather rum to call ourselves citizens when we're all so glad to be out of the city. We really want some term suitable to rural equality. The Socialists have spoilt `Comrade'; you can't be a comrade without a Liberty tie and a pointed beard. Morris had a good notion of one man calling another Neighbour. That sounds a little more rustic. I suppose," he added wistfully to the girl, "I suppose I could not induce you to call me Gaffer?"

"Unless I'm mistaken," observed Crane, "that's your astronomer wandering about in the garden. Thinks he's a botanist, perhaps. Appropriate to the name of Green."

"Oh, he often wanders in the garden and down to the meadow and the cowsheds," said the young woman. "He talks to himself a good deal, explaining a great theory he's got. He explains it to everybody he meets, too. Sometimes he explains it to me when I'm milking the cow."

"Perhaps you can explain it to us?" said Pierce.

"Not so bad as that," she said, laughing. "It's something like that Fourth Dimension they talk about. But I've no doubt he'll explain it to you if you meet him."

“Not for me,” said Pierce. “I’m a simple peasant proprietor and ask nothing but Three Dimensions and a Cow.”

“Cow’s the Fourth Dimension, I suppose,” said Crane.

“I must go and attend to the Fourth Dimension,” she said with a smile.

“Peasants all live by patchwork, running two or three side-shows,” observed Pierce. “Curious sort of livestock on the farm. Think of people living on a cow and chickens and an astronomer.”

As he spoke the astronomer approached along the path by which the girl had just passed. His eyes were covered with huge horn spectacles of a dim blue colour; for he was warned to save his eyesight for his starry vigils. This gave a misleading look of morbidity to a face that was naturally frank and healthy; and the figure, though stooping, was stalwart. He was very absent-minded. Every now and then he looked at the ground and frowned as if he did not like it.

Oliver Green was a very young professor, but a very old young man. He had passed from science as the hobby of a schoolboy to science as the ambition of a middle-aged man, without any intermediate holiday of youth. Moreover, his monomania had been fixed and frozen by success; at least by a considerable success for a man of his years. He was already a fellow of the chief learned societies connected with his subject, when there grew up in his mind the grand, universal, all-sufficing Theory which had come to fill the whole of his life as the daylight fills the day. If we attempted the exposition of that theory here, it is doubtful whether the result would resemble daylight. Professor Green was always ready to prove it; but if we were to set out the proof in this place, the next four or five pages would be covered with closely printed columns of figures, brightened here and there by geometrical designs, such as seldom form part of the text of a romantic story. Suffice it to say that the theory had something to do with Relativity and the reversal of the relations between the stationary and the moving object. Pierce, the aviator, who had passed much of his time on moving objects not without the occasional anticipation of bumping into stationary objects, talked to Green a little on the subject. Being interested in scientific aviation, he was nearer to the abstract sciences than were his friends, Crane with his hobby of folk-lore or Hood with his love of classic literature or Wilding White with his reading of the mystics. But the young aviator frankly admitted that Professor Green soared high into the heavens of the Higher Mathematics, far beyond the flight of his little aeroplane.

The Professor had begun, as he always began, by saying that it was quite easy to explain; which was doubtless true, as he was always explaining it. But he often ended by affirming fallaciously that it was quite easy to understand, and it would be an exaggeration to say that it was always understood. Anyhow, he was just about to read his great paper on his great theory at the great Astronomical Congress that was to be held that year at Bath; which was one reason why he had pitched his astronomical camp, or emplaced his astronomical gun, in the house of Farmer Dale on the hills of Somerset. Mr. Enoch Oates could not but feel the lingering hesitation of the landlord when he heard that his proteges the Dales were about to admit an unknown stranger into their household. But Pierce sternly reminded him that this paternal attitude was a thing of the past and that a free peasant was free to let lodgings to a homicidal maniac if he liked. Nevertheless, Pierce was rather relieved to find the maniac was only an astronomer; but it would have been all the same if he had been an astrologer. Before coming to the farm, the astronomer had set up his telescope in much dingier places — in lodgings in Bloomsbury and the grimy buildings of a Midland University. He thought he was, and to a great extent he was, indifferent to his surroundings. But for all that the air and colour of those country surroundings were slowly and strangely sinking into him.

“The idea is simplicity itself,” he said earnestly, when Pierce rallied him about the theory. “It is only the proof that is, of course, a trifle technical. Put in a very crude and popular shape, it depends on the mathematical formula for the inversion of the sphere.”

“What we call turning the world upside down,” said Pierce. “I’m all in favour of it.”

“Everyone knows the idea of relativity applied to motion,” went on the Professor. “When you run out of a village in a motor-car, you might say that the village runs away from you.”

“The village does run away when Pierce is out motoring,” remarked Crane. “Anyhow, the villagers do. But he generally prefers to frighten them with an aeroplane.”

“Indeed?” said the astronomer with some interest. “An aeroplane would make an even better working model. Compare the movement of an aeroplane with what we call merely for convenience the fixity of the fixed stars.”

“I dare say they got a bit unfixed when Pierce bumped into them,” said the Colonel.

Professor Green sighed in a sad but patient spirit. He could not help being a little disappointed even with the most intelligent outsiders with whom he conversed. Their remarks were pointed but hardly to the point. He felt more and more that he really preferred those who made no remarks. The flowers and the trees made no remarks; they stood in rows and allowed him to lecture to them for hours on the fallacies of accepted astronomy. The cow made no remarks. The girl who milked the cow made no remarks; or, if she did, they were pleasant and kindly remarks, not intended to be clever. He drifted, as he had done many times before, in the direction of the cow.

The young woman who milked the cow was not in the common connotation what is meant by a milkmaid. Margery Dale was the daughter of a substantial farmer already respected in that county. She had been to school and learnt various polite things before she came back to the farm and continued to do the thousand things that she could have taught the schoolmasters. And something of this proportion or disproportion of knowledge was dawning on Professor Green, as he stood staring at the cow and talking, often in a sort of soliloquy. For he had a rather similar sensation of a great many other things growing up thickly like a jungle round his own particular thing; impressions and implications from all the girl’s easy actions and varied avocations. Perhaps he began to have a dim suspicion that he was the schoolmaster who was being taught.

The earth and the sky were already beginning to be enriched with evening; the blue was already almost a glow like apple-green behind the line of branching apple-trees; against it the bulk of the farm stood in a darker outline, and for the first time he realized something quaint or queer added to that outline by his own big telescope stuck up like a gun pointed at the moon. Somehow it looked, he could not tell why, like the beginning of a story. The hollyhocks also looked incredibly tall. To see what he would have called “flowers” so tall as that seemed like seeing a daisy or a dandelion as large as a lamp-post. He was positive there was nothing exactly like it in Bloomsbury. These tall flowers also looked like the beginning of a story — the story of Jack and the Beanstalk. Though he knew little enough of what influences were slowly sinking into him, he felt something apt in the last memory. Whatever was moving within him was something very far back, something that came before reading and writing. He had some dream, as from a previous life, of dark streaks of field under stormy clouds of summer and the sense that the flowers to be found there were things like gems. He was in that country home that every cockney child feels he has always had and never visited.

“I have to read my paper to-night,” he said abruptly. “I really ought to be thinking about it.”

“I do hope it will be a success,” said the girl; “but I rather thought you were always thinking about it.”

“Well, I was — generally,” he said in a rather dazed fashion; and indeed it was probably the first time that he had ever found himself fully conscious of not thinking about it. Of what he was thinking about he was by no means fully conscious.

“I suppose you have to be awfully clever even to understand it,” observed Margery Dale conversationally.

“I don’t know,” he said, slightly stirred to the defensive. “I’m sure I could make you see — I don’t mean you aren’t clever, of course; I mean I’m quite sure you’re clever enough to see — to see anything.”

“Only some sorts of things, I’m afraid,” she said, smiling. “I’m sure your theory has got nothing to do with cows and milking-stools.”

“It’s got to do with anything,” he said eagerly; “with everything, in fact. It would be just as easy to prove it from stools and cows as anything else. It’s really quite simple. Reversing the usual mathematical formula, it’s possible to reach the same results in reality by treating motion as a fixed point and stability as a form of motion. You were told that the earth goes round the sun, and the moon goes round the earth. Well, in my formula, we first treat it as if the sun went round the earth—”

She looked up radiantly. “I always THOUGHT it looked like that,” she said emphatically.

“And you will, of course, see for yourself,” he continued triumphantly, “that by the same logical inversion we must suppose the earth to be going round the moon.”

The radiant face showed a shadow of doubt and she said “Oh!”

“But any of the things you mention, the milking-stool or the cow or what not, would serve the same purpose, since they are objects generally regarded as stationary.”

He looked up vaguely at the moon which was steadily brightening as vast shadows spread over the sky.

"Well, take those things you talk of," he went on, moved by a meaningless unrest and tremor. "You see the moon rise behind the woods over there and sweep in a great curve through the sky and seem to set again beyond the hill. But it would be just as easy to preserve the same mathematical relations by regarding the moon as the centre of the circle and the curve described by some object such as the cow—"

She threw her head back and looked at him, with eyes blazing with laughter that was not in any way mockery, but a childish delight at the crowning coincidence of a fairy-tale.

"Splendid!" she cried. "So the cow really does jump over the moon!"

Green put up his hand to his hair; and after a short silence said suddenly, like a man recalling a recondite Greek quotation:

"Why, I've heard that somewhere. There was something else — `The little dog laughed—'"

Then something happened, which was in the world of ideas much more dramatic than the fact that the little dog laughed. The professor of astronomy laughed. If the world of things had corresponded to the world of ideas, the leaves of the apple tree might have curled up in fear or the birds dropped out of the sky. It was rather as if the cow had laughed.

Following that curt and uncouth noise was a silence; and then the hand he had raised to his head abruptly rent off his big blue spectacles and showed his staring blue eyes. He looked boyish and even babyish.

"I wonder whether you always wore them," she said. "I should think they made that moon of yours look blue. Isn't there a proverb or something about a thing happening once in a blue moon?"

He threw the great goggles on the ground and broke them.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, "you seem to have taken quite a dislike to them all of a sudden. I thought you were going to wear them till — well, till all is blue, as they say."

He shook his head. "All is beautiful," he said. "You are beautiful."

The young woman was normally very lucid and decisive in dealing with gentlemen who made remarks of that kind, especially when she concluded that the gentlemen were not gentlemen. But for some reason in this case it never occurred to her that she needed defence; possibly because the other party seemed more defenceless than indefensible. She said nothing. But the other party said a great deal, and his remarks did not grow more rational. At that moment, far away in their inn-parlour in the neighbouring town, Hood and Crane and the fellowship of the Long Bow were actually discussing with considerable interest the meaning and possibilities of the new astronomical theory. In Bath the lecture-hall was being prepared for the exposition of the theory. The theorist had forgotten all about it.

"I have been thinking a good deal," Hilary Pierce was saying, "about that astronomical fellow who is going to lecture in Bath to-night. It seemed to me somehow that he was a kindred spirit and that sooner or later we were bound to get mixed up with him — or he was bound to get mixed up with us. I don't say it's always very comfortable to get mixed up with us. I feel in my bones that there is going to be a big row soon. I feel as if I'd consulted an astrologer; as if Green were the Merlin of our Round Table. Anyhow, the astrologer has an interesting astronomical theory."

"Why?" inquired Wilding White with some surprise. "What have you got to do with his theory?"

"Because," answered the young man, "I understand his astronomical theory a good deal better than he thinks I do. And, let me tell you, his astronomical theory is an astronomical allegory."

"An allegory?" repeated Crane. "What of?"

"An allegory of us," said Pierce; "and, as with many an allegory, we've acted it without knowing it. I realized something about our history, when he was talking, that I don't think I'd ever thought of before."

"What in the world are you talking about?" demanded the Colonel.

"His theory," said Pierce in a meditative manner, "has got something to do with moving objects being really stationary, and stationary objects being really moving. Well, you always talk of me as if I were a moving object."

"Heartbreaking object sometimes," assented the Colonel with cordial encouragement.

"I mean," continued Pierce calmly, "that you talk of me as if I were always motoring too fast or flying too far. And what you say of me is pretty much what most people say of you. Most sane people think we all go a jolly lot too far. They think we're a lot of lunatics out-running the constable or looping the loop, and always up to some new nonsense. But when you come to think of it, it's we who always stay where we are, and the rest that's always moving and shifting and changing."

“Yes,” said Owen Hood; “I begin to have some dim idea of what you are talking about.”

“In all our little adventures,” went on the other, “we have all of us taken up some definite position and stuck to it, however difficult it might be; that was the whole fun of it. But our critics did not stick to their own position — not even to their own conventional or conservative position. In each one of the stories it was they who were fickle, and we who were fixed. When the Colonel said he would eat his hat, he did it; when he found it meant wearing a preposterous hat, he wore it. But his neighbours didn’t even stick to their own conviction that the hat was preposterous. Fashion is too fluctuating and sensitive a thing; and before the end, half of them were wondering whether they oughtn’t to have hats of the same sort. In that affair of the Thames factory, Hood admired the old landscape and Hunter admired the old landlords. But Hunter didn’t go on admiring the old landlords; he deserted to the new landlords as soon as they got the land. His conservatism was too snobbish to conserve anything. I wanted to import pigs, and I went on importing pigs, though my methods of smuggling might land me in a mad-house. But Enoch Oates, the millionaire, didn’t go on importing pork; he went off at once on some new stunt, first on the booming of his purses, and afterwards on the admirable stunt of starting English farms. The business mind isn’t steadfast; even when it can be turned the right way, it’s too easy to turn. And everything has been like that, down to the little botheration about the elephant. The police began to prosecute Mr. White, but they soon dropped it when Hood showed them that he had some backing. Don’t you see that’s the moral of the whole thing? The modern world is materialistic, but it isn’t solid. It isn’t hard or stern or ruthless in pursuit of its purpose, or all the things that the newspapers and novels say it is; and sometimes actually praise it for being. Materialism isn’t like stone; it’s like mud, and liquid mud at that.”

“There’s something in what you say,” said Owen Hood, “and I should be inclined to add something to it. On a rough reckoning of the chances in modern England, I should say the situation is something like this. In that dubious and wavering atmosphere it is very unlikely there would ever be a revolution, or any very vital reform. But if there were, I believe on my soul that it might be successful. I believe everything else would be too weak and wobbly to stand up against it.”

“I suppose that means,” said the Colonel, “that you’re going to do something silly.”

“Silliest thing I can think of,” replied Pierce cheerfully. “I’m going to an astronomical lecture.”

The degree of silliness involved in the experiment can be most compactly and clearly stated in the newspaper report, at which the friends of the experimentalists found themselves gazing with more than their usual bewilderment on the following morning. The Colonel, sitting at his club with his favourite daily paper spread out before him, was regarding with a grave wonder a paragraph that began with the following head-lines:

AMAZING SCENE AT SCIENTIFIC CONGRESS

LECTURER GOES MAD AND ESCAPES

“A scene equally distressing and astonishing took place at the third meeting of the Astronomical Society now holding its congress at Bath. Professor Oliver Green, one of the most promising of the younger astronomers, was set down in the syllabus to deliver a lecture on `Relativity in Relation to Planetary Motion.’ About an hour before the lecture, however, the authorities received a telegram from Professor Green, altering the subject of his address on the ground that he had just discovered a new star, and wished immediately to communicate his discovery to the scientific world. Great excitement and keen anticipation prevailed at the meeting, but these feelings changed to bewilderment as the lecture proceeded. The lecturer announced without hesitation the existence of a new planet attached to one of the fixed stars, but proceeded to describe its geological formation and other features with a fantastic exactitude beyond anything yet obtained by way of the spectrum or the telescope. He was understood to say that it produced life in an extravagant form, in towering objects which constantly doubled or divided themselves until they ended in flat filaments, or tongues of a bright green colour. He was proceeding to give a still more improbable of a more mobile but equally monstrous form of life, resting on four trunks or columns which swung in rotation, and terminating in some curious curved appendages, when a young man in the front row, whose demeanour had shown an increasing levity, called out abruptly: `Why, that’s a cow!’ To this the professor, abandoning abruptly all pretence of scientific dignity, replied by shouting in a voice like thunder: `Yes, of course it’s a cow; and you fellows would never have noticed a cow, even if she jumped over the moon!’ The unfortunate professor then began to rave in the most incoherent manner, throwing his arms about and shouting aloud that he and his fellow scientists were all a pack of noodles who had never looked at the world they were walking on, which contained the most miraculous things. But the latter part of his remarks, which appeared to be an entirely irrelevant outburst in praise of the beauty of Woman, were interrupted by the Chairman and officials of the Congress, who called for medical and constabulary interference. No less a person than Sir Horace Hunter, who, although best known as a psycho-physiologist, has taken all knowledge for his province and was present to show his interest in astronomical progress, was able to certify on the spot that the unfortunate Green was clearly suffering from dementia, which was immediately corroborated by a local doctor, so that the unhappy man might be removed without further scandal.

"At this point, however, a still more extraordinary development took place. The young man in the front row, who had several times interrupted the proceedings with irrelevant remarks, sprang to his feet, and loudly declaring that Professor Green was the only sane man in the Congress, rushed at the group surrounding him, violently hurled Sir Horace Hunter from the platform, and with the assistance of a friend and fellow-rioter, managed to recapture the lunatic from the doctors and police, and carry him outside the building. Those pursuing the fugitives found themselves at first confronted with a new mystery, in the form of their complete disappearance. It has since been discovered that they actually escaped by aeroplane; the young man, whose name is said to be Pierce, being a well-known aviator formerly connected with the Flying Corps. The other young man, who assisted him and acted as pilot, has not yet been identified."

Night closed and the stars stood out over Dale's Farm; and the telescope pointed at the stars in vain. Its giant lenses had vainly mirrored the moon of which its owner had spoken in so vain a fashion; but its owner did not return. Miss Dale was rather unaccountably troubled by his absence, and mentioned it once or twice; after all, as her family said, it was very natural that he should go to an hotel in Bath for the night, especially if the revels of the roystering astronomers were long and late. "It's no affair of ours," said the farmer's wife cheerfully. "He is not a child." But the farmer's daughter was not quite so sure on the point.

Next morning she rose even earlier than usual and went about her ordinary tasks, which by some accident or other seemed to look more ordinary than usual. In the blank morning hours, it was perhaps natural that her mind should go back to the previous afternoon, when the conduct of the astronomer could by no means be dismissed as ordinary.

"It's all very well to say he's not a child," she said to herself. "I wish I were as certain he's not an idiot. If he goes to an hotel, they'll cheat him."

The more angular and prosaic her own surroundings seemed in the daylight, the more doubt she felt about the probable fate of the moonstruck gentleman who looked at a blue moon through his blue spectacles. She wondered whether his family or his friends were generally responsible for his movements; for really he must be a little dotty. She had never heard him talk about his family; and she remembered a good many things he had talked about. She had never even seen him talking to a friend, except once to Captain Pierce, when they talked about astronomy. But the name of Captain Pierce linked itself up rapidly with other and more relevant suggestions. Captain Pierce lived at the Blue Boar on the other side of the down, having been married a year or two before to the daughter of the innkeeper, who was an old friend of the daughter of the farmer. They had been to the same school in the neighbouring provincial town, and had once been, as the phrase goes, inseparable. Perhaps friends ought to pass through the phase in which they are inseparable to reach the phase in which they can safely be separated.

"Joan might know something about it," she said to herself. "At least her husband might know."

She turned back into the kitchen and began to rout things out for breakfast; when she had done everything she could think of doing for a family that had not yet put in an appearance, she went out again into the garden and found herself at the same gate, staring at the steep wooded hill that lay between the farm and the valley of the Blue Boar. She thought of harnessing the pony; and then went walking rather restlessly along the road over the hill.

On the map it was only a few miles to the Blue Boar; and she was easily capable of walking ten times the distance. But maps, like many other scientific documents, are very inaccurate. The ridge that ran between the two valleys was, relatively to that rolling plain, as definite as a range of mountains. The path through the dark wood that lay just beyond the farm began like a lane and then seemed to go up like a ladder. By the time she had scaled it, under its continuous canopy of low spreading trees, she had the sensation of having walked for a long time. And when the ascent ended with a gap in the trees and a blank space of sky, she looked over the edge like one looking into another world.

Mr. Enoch Oates, in his more expansive moments, had been known to allude to what he called God's Great Prairies. Mr. Rosenbaum Low, having come to London from, or through, Johannesburg, often referred in his imperialistic speeches to the "illimitable veldt." But neither the American prairie nor the African veldt really looks any larger, or could look any larger, than a wide English vale seen from a low English hill. Nothing can be more distant than the distance; the horizon or the line drawn by heaven across the vision of man. Nothing is so illimitable as that limit. Within our narrow island there is a whole series of such infinities; as if the island itself could hold seven seas. As she looked out over that new landscape, the soul seemed to be slaked and satisfied with immensity and, by a paradox, to be filled at last with emptiness. All things seemed not only great but growing in greatness. She could fancy that the tall trees standing up in the sunlight grew taller while she looked at them. The sun was rising and it seemed as if the whole world rose with it. Even the dome of heaven seemed to be lifting slowly; as if the very sky were a skirt drawn up and disappearing into the altitudes of light.

The vast hollow below her was coloured as variously as a map in an atlas. Fields of grass or grain or red earth seemed so far away that they might have been the empires and kingdoms of a world newly created. But she could already see on the brow of a hill above the pine-woods the pale scar of the quarry and below it the glittering twist in the river where stood the inn of the Blue Boar. As she drew nearer and nearer to it she could see more and more clearly a green triangular field with tiny black dots, which were little black pigs; and another smaller dot, which was a child. Something like a wind behind her or within her, that had driven her over the hills, seemed to sweep all the long lines of that landslide of a landscape, so that they pointed to that spot.

As the path dropped to the level and she began to walk by farms and villages, the storm in her mind began to settle and she recovered the reasonable prudence with which she had pottered about her own farm. She even felt some responsibility and embarrassment about troubling her friend by coming on so vague an errand. But she told herself convincingly enough that after all she was justified. One would not normally be alarmed about a strayed lodger as if he were a lion escaped from a menagerie. But she had after all very good reason for regarding this lion as rather a fearful wildfowl. His way of talking had been so eccentric that everybody for miles round would have agreed, if they had heard him, that he had a tile loose. She was very glad they had not heard him; but their imaginary opinion fortified her own. They had a duty in common humanity; they could not let a poor gentleman of doubtful sanity disappear without further inquiry.

She entered the inn with a firm step and hailed her friend with something of that hearty cheerfulness that is so unpopular in the early riser. She was rather younger and by nature rather more exuberant than Joan; and Joan had already felt the drag and concentration of children. But Joan had not lost her rather steely sense of humour, and she heard the main facts of her friend's difficulty with a vigilant smile.

"We should rather like to know what has happened," said the visitor with vague carelessness. "If anything unpleasant had happened, people might even blame us, when we knew he was like that."

"Like what?" asked Joan smiling.

"Why, a bit off, I suppose we must say," answered the other. "The things he said to me about cows and trees and having found a new star were really —"

"Well, it's rather lucky you came to me," said Joan quietly. "For I don't believe you'd have found anybody else on the whole face of the earth who knows exactly where he is now."

"And where is he?"

"Well, he's not on the face of the earth," said Joan Hardy.

"You don't mean he's — dead?" asked the other in an unnatural voice.

"I mean he's up in the air," said Joan, "or, what is often much the same thing, he is with my husband. Hilary rescued him when they were just going to nab him, and carried him off in an aeroplane. He says they'd better hide in the clouds for a bit. You know the way he talks; of course, they do come down every now and then when it's safe."

"Escaped! Nabbed him! Safe!" ejaculated the other young woman with round eyes. "What in the world does it all mean?"

"Well," replied her friend, "he seems to have said the same sort of things that he said to you to a whole roomful of scientific men at Bath. And, of course, the scientific men all said he was mad; I suppose that's what scientific men are for. So they were just going to take him away to an asylum, when Hilary—"

The farmer's daughter rose in a glory of rage that might have seemed to lift the roof, as the great sunrise had seemed to lift the sky.

"Take him away!" she cried. "How dare they talk about such things? How dare they say he is mad? It's they who must be mad to say such stuff! Why, he's got more brains in his boots than they have in all their silly old bald heads knocked together — and I'd like to knock 'em together! Why, they'd all smash like egg-shells, and he's got a head like cast-iron. Don't you know he's beaten all the old duffers at their own business, of stars and things? I expect they're all jealous; it's just what I should have expected of them."

The fact that she was entirely unacquainted with the names, and possibly the existence, of these natural philosophers did not arrest the vigorous word-painting with which she completed their portraits. "Nasty spiteful old men with whiskers," she said, "all bunched together like so many spiders and weaving dirty cobwebs to catch their betters; of course, it's all a conspiracy. Just because they're all mad and hate anybody who's quite sane."

"So you think he's quite sane?" asked her hostess gravely.

"Sane? What do you mean? Of course he's quite sane," retorted Margery Dale.

With a mountainous magnanimity Joan was silent. Then after a pause she said:

"Well, Hilary has taken his case in hand and your friend's safe for the present; Hilary generally brings things off, however queer they sound. And I don't mind telling you in confidence that he's bringing that and a good many other things off, rather big things, just now. You can't keep him from fighting whatever you do; and he seems to be out just now to fight everybody. So I shouldn't wonder if you saw all your old gentlemen's heads knocked together after all. There are rather big preparations going on; that friend of his named Blair is for ever going and coming with his balloons and things; and I believe something will happen soon on a pretty large scale, perhaps all over England."

"Will it?" asked Miss Dale in an absent-minded manner (for she was sadly deficient in civic and political sense). "Is that your Tommy out there?"

And they talked about the child and then about a hundred entirely trivial things; for they understood each other perfectly.

And if there are still things the reader fails to understand, if (as seems almost incredible) there are things that he wishes to understand, then it can only be at the heavy price of studying the story of the Unprecedented Architecture of Commander Blair; and with that, it is comforting to know, the story of all these things will be drawing near its explanation and its end.

The Unprecedented Architecture of Commander Blair

The Earl of Eden had become Prime Minister for the third time, and his face and figure were therefore familiar in the political cartoons and even in the public streets. His yellow hair and lean and springy figure gave him a factitious air of youth; but his face on closer study looked lined and wrinkled and gave almost a shock of decrepitude. He was in truth a man of great experience and dexterity in his own profession. He had just succeeded in routing the Socialist Party and overthrowing the Socialist Government, largely by the use of certain rhymed mottoes and maxims which he had himself invented with considerable amusement. His great slogan of “Don’t Nationalize but Rationalize” was generally believed to have led him to victory. But at the moment when this story begins he had other things to think of. He had just received an urgent request for a consultation from three of his most prominent supporters — Lord Normantowers, Sir Horace Hunter, O.B.E., the great advocate of scientific politics, and Mr. R. Low, the philanthropist. They were confronted with a problem, and their problem concerned the sudden madness of an American millionaire.

The Prime Minister was not unacquainted with American millionaires, even those whose conduct suggested that they were hardly representative of a normal or national type. There was the great Grigg, the millionaire inventor, who had pressed upon the War Office a scheme for finishing the War at a blow; it consisted of electrocuting the Kaiser by wireless telegraphy. There was Mr. Napper, of Nebraska, whose negotiations for removing Shakespeare’s Cliff to America as a symbol of Anglo-Saxon unity were unaccountably frustrated by the firm refusal of the American Republic to send us Plymouth Rock in exchange. And there was that charming and cultured Bostonian, Colonel Hoopoe, whom all England welcomed in his crusade for Purity and the League of the Lily, until England discovered with considerable surprise that the American Ambassador and all respectable Americans flatly refused to meet the Colonel, whose record at home was that of a very narrow escape from Sing-Sing.

But the problem of Enoch Oates, who had made his money in pork, was something profoundly different. As Lord Eden’s three supporters eagerly explained to him, seated round a garden table at his beautiful country seat in

Somerset, Mr. Oates had done something that the maddest millionaire had never thought of doing before. Up to a certain point he had proceeded in a manner normal to such a foreigner. He had purchased amid general approval an estate covering about a quarter of a county; and it was expected that he would make it a field for some of those American experiments in temperance or eugenics for which the English agricultural populace offer a sort of virgin soil. Instead of that, he suddenly went mad and made a present of his land to his tenants; so that by an unprecedented anomaly the farms became the property of the farmers. That an American millionaire should take away English things from England, English rent, English relics, English pictures, English cathedrals or the cliffs of Dover, was a natural operation to which everybody was by this time accustomed. But that an American millionaire should give English land to English people was an unwarrantable interference and tantamount to an alien enemy stirring up revolution. Enoch Oates had therefore been summoned to the Council, and sat scowling at the table as if he were in the dock.

“Results most deplorable already,” said Sir Horace Hunter, in his rather loud voice. “Give you an example, my lord; people of the name of Dale in Somerset took in a lunatic as a lodger. May have been a homicidal maniac for all I know; some do say he had a great cannon or culverin sticking out of his bedroom window. But with no responsible management of the estate, no landlord, no lawyer, no educated person anywhere, there was nothing to prevent their letting the bedroom to a Bengal tiger. Anyhow, the man was mad, rushed raving on to the platform at the Astronomical Congress talking about Lovely Woman and the cow that jumped over the moon. That damned agitator Pierce, who used to be in the Flying Corps, was in the hall, and made a riot and carried the crazy fellow off in an aeroplane. That’s the sort of thing you’ll have happening all over the place if these ignorant fellows are allowed to do just as they like.”

“It is quite true,” said Lord Normantowers. “I could give many other examples. They say that Owen Hood, another of these eccentrics, has actually bought one of these little farms and stuck it all round with absurd battlements and a moat and drawbridge, with the motto `The Englishman’s House is his Castle.’”

“I think,” said the Prime Minister quietly, “that however English the Englishman may be, he will find his castle is a castle in Spain; not to say a castle in the air. Mr. Oates,” he said, addressing very courteously the big brooding American at the other end of the table, “please do not imagine that I cannot sympathize with such romances, although they are only in the air. But I think in all sincerity that you will find they are unsuited to the English climate. ~Et ego in Arcadia~, you know; we have all had such dreams of all men piping in Arcady. But after all, you have already paid the piper; and if you are wise, I think you can still call the tune.”

“Gives me great gratification to say it’s too late,” growled Oates. “I want them to learn to play and pay for themselves.”

“But you want them to learn,” said Lord Eden gently, “and I should not be in too much of a hurry to call it too late. It seems to me that the door is still open for a reasonable compromise; I understand that the deed of gift, considered as a legal instrument, is still the subject of some legal discussion and may well be the subject of revision. I happened to be talking of it yesterday with the law officers of the Crown; and I am sure that the least hint that you yourself—”

“I take it to mean,” said Mr. Oates with great deliberation, “that you’ll tell your lawyers it’ll pay them to pick a hole in the deal.”

“That is what we call the bluff Western humour,” said Lord Eden, smiling, “but I only mean that we do a great deal in this country by reconsideration and revision. We make mistakes and unmake them. We have a phrase for it in our history books; we call it the flexibility of an unwritten constitution.”

“We have a phrase for it too,” said the American reflectively. “We call it graft.”

“Really,” cried Normantowers, a little bristly man, with sudden shrillness, “I did not know you were so scrupulous in your own methods.”

“Motht unthcrupulouth,” said Mr. Low virtuously.

Enoch Oates rose slowly like an enormous leviathan rising to the surface of the sea; his large sallow face had never changed in expression; but he had the air of one drifting dreamily away.

“Wal,” he said, “I dare say it’s true I’ve done some graft in my time, and a good many deals that weren’t what you might call modelled on the Sermon on the Mount. But if I smashed people, it was when they were all out to smash me; and if some of ’em were poor, they were the sort that were ready to shoot or knife or blow me to bits. And I tell you, in my country the whole lot of you would be lynched or tarred and feathered to-morrow, if you talked about lawyers taking away people’s land when once they’d got it. Maybe the English climate's different, as you say; but I'm going to see it through. As for you, Mr. Rosenbaum—"

"My name is Low," said the philanthropist. "I cannot thee why anyone should object to uthing my name."

"Not on your life," said Mr. Oates affably. "Seems to be a pretty appropriate name."

He drifted heavily from the room, and the four other men were left, staring at a riddle.

"He's going on with it, or, rather, they're going on with it," groaned Horace Hunter. "And what the devil is to be done now?"

"It really looks as if he were right in calling it too late," said Lord Normantowers bitterly. "I can't think of anything to be done."

"I can," said the Prime Minister. They all looked at him; but none of them could read the indecipherable subtleties in his old and wrinkled face under his youthful yellow hair.

"The resources of civilization are not exhausted," he said grimly. "That's what the old governments used to say when they started shooting people. Well, I could understand you gentlemen feeling inclined to shoot people now. I suppose it seems to you that all your own power in the State, which you wield with such public spirit of course, all Sir Horace's health reforms, the Normantowers' new estate, and so on, are all broken to bits, to rotten little bits of rusticity. What's to become of a governing class if it doesn't hold all the land, eh? Well, I'll tell you. I know the next move, and the time has come to take it."

"But what is it?" demanded Sir Horace.

"The time has come," said the Prime Minister, "to Nationalize the Land."

Sir Horace Hunter rose from his chair, opened his mouth, shut it, and sat down again, all with what he himself might have called a reflex action.

"But that is Socialism!" cried Lord Normantowers, his eyes standing out of his head.

"True Socialism, don't you think?" mused the Prime Minister. "Better call it True Socialism; just the sort of thing to be remembered at elections. Theirs is Socialism, and ours is True Socialism."

"Do you really mean, my lord," cried Hunter in a heat of sincerity stronger than the snobbery of a lifetime, "that you are going to support the Bolshies?"

"No," said Eden, with the smile of a sphinx. "I mean the Bolshies are going to support me. Idiots!"

After a silence, he added in a more wistful tone:

"Of course, as a matter of sentiment, it is a little sad. All our fine old English castles and manors, the homes of the gentry... they will become public property, like post offices, I suppose. When I think of the happy hours I have myself passed at the Normantowers—" He smiled across at the nobleman of that name and went on. "And Sir Horace has now, I believe, the joy of living in Warbridge Castle — fine old place. Dear me, yes, and I think Mr. Low has a castle, though the name escapes me."

"Rosewood Castle," said Mr. Low rather sulkily.

"But I say," cried Sir Horace, rising, "what becomes of `Don't Nationalize but Rationalize'?"

"I suppose," replied Eden lightly, "it will have to be `Don't Rationalize but Nationalize.' It comes to the same thing. Besides, we can easily get a new motto of some sort. For instance, we, after all, are the patriotic party, the national party. What about `Let the Nationalists Nationalize'?"

"Well, all I can say is—" began Normantowers explosively.

"Compensation, there will be compensation, of course," said the Prime Minister soothingly; "a great deal can be done with compensation. If you will all turn up here this day week, say at four o'clock, I think I can lay all the plans before you."

When they did turn up next week and were shown again into the Prime Minister's sunny garden, they found that the plans were, indeed, laid before them; for the table that stood on the sunny lawn was covered with large and small maps and a mass of official documents. Mr. Eustace Pym, one of the Prime Minister's numerous private secretaries, was hovering over them, and the Prime Minister himself was sitting at the head of the table studying one of them with an intelligent frown.

"I thought you'd like to hear the terms of the arrangements," he said. "I'm afraid we must all make sacrifices in the cause of progress."

"Oh, progress be — —" cried Normantowers, losing patience. "I want to know if you really mean that my estate—"

"It comes under the department of Castle and Abbey Estates in Section Four," said Lord Eden, referring to the paper before him. "By the provisions of the new Bill the public control in such cases will be vested in the Lord-Lieutenant of the County. In the particular case of your castle — let me see — why, yes, of course, you are Lord Lieutenant of that county."

Little Lord Normantowers was staring, with his stiff hair all standing on end; but a new look was dawning in his shrewd though small-featured face.

"The case of Warbridge Castle is different," said the Prime Minister. "It happens unfortunately to stand in a district desolated by all the recent troubles about swine-fever, touching which the Health Comptroller" (here he bowed to Sir Horace Hunter) "has shown such admirable activity. It has been necessary to place the whole of this district in the hands of the Health Comptroller, that he may study any traces of swine-fever that may be found in the Castle, the Cathedral, the Vicarage, and so on. So much for that case, which stands somewhat apart; the others are mostly normal. Rosenbaum Castle — I should say Rosewood Castle — being of a later date, comes under Section Five, and the appointment of a permanent Castle Custodian is left to the discretion of the Government. In this case the Government has decided to appoint Mr. Rosewood Low to the post, in recognition of his local services to social science and economics. In all these cases, of course, due compensation will be paid to the present owners of the estates, and ample salaries and expenses of entertainment paid to the new officials, that the places may be kept up in a manner worthy of their historical and national character."

He paused, as if for cheers, and Sir Horace was vaguely irritated into saying: "But look here, my castle—"

"Damn it all!" said the Prime Minister, with his first flash of impatience and sincerity. "Can't you see you'll get twice as much as before? First you'll be compensated for losing your castle, and then you'll be paid for keeping it."

"My lord," said Lord Normantowers humbly, "I apologize for anything I may have said or suggested. I ought to have known I stood in the presence of a great English statesman."

"Oh, it's easy enough," said Lord Eden frankly. "Look how easily we remained in the saddle, in spite of democratic elections; how we managed to dominate the Commons as well as the Lords. It'll be the same with what they call Socialism. We shall still be there; only we shall be called bureaucrats instead of aristocrats."

"I see it all now!" cried Hunter, "and by Heaven, it'll be the end of all this confounded demagogy of Three Acres and a Cow."

"I think so," said the Prime Minister with a smile; and began to fold up the maps.

As he was folding up the last and largest, he suddenly stopped and said:

"Hallo!"

A letter was lying in the middle of the table; a letter in a sealed envelope, and one which he evidently did not recognize as any part of his paper paraphernalia.

"Where did this letter come from?" he asked rather sharply. "Did you put it here, Eustace?"

"No," said Mr. Pym staring. "I never saw it before. It didn't come with your letters this morning."

"It didn't come by post at all," said Lord Eden; "and none of the servants brought it in. How the devil did it get out here in the garden?"

He ripped it open with his finger and remained for some time staring in mystification at its contents.

"Welkin Castle, Sept. 4th, 19 — .

"Dear Lord Eden, — As I understand you are making public provision for the future disposal of our historic national castles, such as Warbridge Castle, I should much appreciate any information about your intentions touching Welkin Castle, my own estate, as it would enable me to make my own arrangements. — Yours very truly, "Welkyn of Welkin."

"Who is Welkyn?" asked the puzzled politician; "he writes as if he knew me; but I can't recall him at the moment. And where is Welkin Castle? We must look at the maps again."

But though they looked at the maps for hours, and searched Burke, Debrett, "Who's Who," the atlas, and every other work of reference, they could come upon no trace of that firm but polite country gentleman.

Lord Eden was a little worried, because he knew that curiously important people could exist in a corner in this country, and suddenly emerge from their corner to make trouble. He knew it was very important that his own governing class should stand with him in this great public change (and private understanding), and that no rich eccentric should be left out or offended. But although he was worried to that extent, it is probable that his worry would soon have faded from his mind if it had not been for something that happened some days later.

Going out into the same garden to the same table, with the more agreeable purpose of taking tea there, he was amazed to find another letter, though this was lying not on the table but on the turf just beside it. It was unstamped like the other and addressed in the same handwriting; but its tone was more stern.

"Welkin Castle, Oct. 6th, 19 — .

"My Lord, — As you seem to have decided to continue your sweeping scheme of confiscation, as in the case of Warbridge Castle, without the slightest reference to the historic and even heroic claims of Welkin Castle, I can only inform you that I shall defend the fortress of my fathers to the death. Moreover, I have decided to make a protest of a more public kind; and when you next hear from me it will be in the form of a general appeal to the justice of the English people. — Yours truly, Welkyn of Welkin."

The historic and even heroic traditions of Welkin Castle kept a dozen of the Prime Minister's private secretaries busy for a week, looking up encyclopaedias and chronicles and books of history. But the Prime Minister himself was more worried about another problem. How did these mysterious letters get into the house, or rather into the garden? None of them came by post and none of the servants knew anything about them. Moreover, the Prime Minister, in an unobtrusive way, was very carefully guarded. Prime Ministers always are. But he had been especially protected ever since the Vegetarians a few years before had gone about killing everybody who believed in killing animals. There were always plain-clothes policemen at every entrance of his house and garden. And from their testimony it would appear certain that the letter could not have got into the garden; but for the trifling fact that it was lying there on the garden-table. Lord Eden cogitated in a grim fashion for some time; then he said as he rose from his chair:

"I think I will have a talk to our American friend Mr. Oates."

Whether from a sense of humour or a sense of justice, Lord Eden summoned Enoch Oates before the same special jury of three; or summoned them before him, as the case may be. For it was even more difficult than before to read the exact secret of Eden's sympathies or intentions; he talked about a variety of indifferent subjects leading up to that of the letters, which he treated very lightly. Then he said quite suddenly:

"Do you know anything about those letters, by the way?"

The American presented his poker face to the company for some time without reply. Then he said:

"And what makes you think I know anything about them?"

"Because," said Horace Hunter, breaking in with uncontrollable warmth, "we know you're hand and glove with all those lunatics in the League of the Long Bow who are kicking up all this shindy."

"Well," said Oates calmly, "I'll never deny I like some of their ways. I like live wires myself; and, after all, they're about the liveliest thing in this old country. And I'll tell you more. I like people who take trouble; and, believe me, they do take trouble. You say they're all nuts; but I reckon there really is method in their madness. They take trouble to keep those crazy vows of theirs. You spoke about the fellows who carried off the astronomer in an aeroplane. Well, I know Bellew Blair, the man who worked with Pierce in that stunt, and believe me he's not a man to be sniffed at. He's one of the finest experts in aeronautics in the country; and if he's gone over to them, it means there's something in their notion for a scientific intellect to take hold of. It was Blair that worked that pig stunt for Hilary Pierce; made a great gas-bag shaped like a sow and gave all the little pigs parachutes."

"Well, there you are," cried Hunter. "Of all the lunacy—"

"I remember Commander Blair in the War," said the Prime Minister quietly. "Bellows Blair, they called him. He did expert work: some new scheme with dirigible balloons. But I was only going to ask Mr. Oates whether he happens to know where Welkin Castle is."

"Must be somewhere near here," suggested Normantowers, "as the letters seem to come by hand."

"Well, I don't know," said Enoch Oates doubtfully. "I know a man living in Ely, who had one of those letters delivered by hand. And I know another near Land's End who thought the letter must have come from somebody living near. As you say, they all seem to come by hand."

"By what hand?" asked the Prime Minister, with a queer, grim expression.

"Mr. Oates," said Lord Normantowers firmly, "where IS Welkin Castle?"

"Why, it's everywhere, in a manner of speaking," said Mr. Oates reflectively. "It's anywhere, anyhow. Gee — !" he broke off suddenly: "Why, as a matter of fact, it's here!"

“Ah,” said the Prime Minister quietly, “I thought we should see something if we watched here long enough! You didn’t think I kept you hanging about here only to ask Mr. Oates questions that I knew the answer to.”

“What do you mean? Thought we would see what?”

“Where the unstamped letters come from,” replied Lord Eden.

Luminous and enormous, there heaved up above the garden trees something that looked at first like a coloured cloud; it was flushed with light such as lies on clouds opposite the sunset, a light at once warm and wan; and it shone like an opaque flame. But as it came closer it grew more and more incredible. It took on solid proportions and perspective, as if a cloud could brush and crush the dark tree-tops. It was something never seen before in the sky; it was a cubist cloud. Men gazing at such a sunset cloud-land often imagine they see castles and cities of an almost uncanny completeness. But there would be a possible point of completeness at which they would cry aloud, or perhaps shriek aloud, as at a sign in heaven; and that completeness had come. The big luminous object that sailed above the garden was outlined in battlements and turrets like a fairy castle; but with an architectural exactitude impossible in any cloudland. With the very look of it a phrase and a proverb leapt into the mind.

“There, my lord!” cried Oates, suddenly lifting his nasal and drawling voice and pointing, “there’s that dream you told me about. There’s your castle in the air.”

As the shadow of the flying thing travelled over the sun-lit lawn, they looked up and saw for the first time that the lower part of the edifice hung downwards like the car of a great balloon. They remembered the aeronautical tricks of Commander Blair and Captain Pierce and the model of the monstrous pig. As it passed over the table a white speck detached itself and dropped from the car. It was a letter.

The next moment the white speck was followed by a shower that was like a snowstorm. Countless letters, leaflets, and scraps of paper were littered all over the lawn. The guests seemed to stand staring wildly in a wilderness of waste-paper; but the keen and experienced eyes of Lord Eden recognized the material which, in political elections, is somewhat satirically called “literature.”

It took the twelve private secretaries some time to pick them all up and make the lawn neat and tidy again. On examination they proved to be mainly of two kinds: one a sort of electioneering pamphlet of the League of the Long Bow, and the other a somewhat airy fantasy about private property in air. The most important of the documents, which Lord Eden studied more attentively, though with a grim smile, began with the sentence in large letters:

"An Englishman's House Is No Longer His Castle On The Soil Of England. If It Is To Be His Castle, It Must Be A Castle In The Air.

"If There Seem To Be Something Unfamiliar And Even Fanciful In The Idea, We Reply That It Is Not Half So Fantastic To Own Your Own Houses In The Clouds As Not To Own Your Own Houses On The Earth."

Then followed a passage of somewhat less solid political value, in which the acute reader might trace the influence of the poetical Mr. Pierce rather than the scientific Mr. Blair. It began "They Have Stolen the Earth; We Will Divide the Sky." But the writer followed this with a somewhat unconvincing claim to have trained rooks and swallows to hover in rows in the air to represent the hedges of "the blue meadows of the new realm," and he was so obliging as to accompany the explanation with diagrams of space showing the exact ornithological boundaries in dotted lines. There were other equally scientific documents dealing with the treatment of clouds, the driving of birds to graze on insects, and so on. The whole of this section concluded with the great social and economic slogan: "Three Acres and a Crow."

But when Lord Eden read on, his attention appeared graver than this particular sort of social reconstruction would seem to warrant. The writer of the pamphlet resumed:

"Do not be surprised if there seems to be something topsy-turvy in the above programme. That topsy-turvydom marks the whole of our politics. It may seem strange that the air which has always been public should become private, when the land which has always been private has become public. We answer that this is exactly how things really stand to-day in the matter of all publicity and privacy. Private things are indeed being made public. But public things are being kept private.

"Thus we all had the pleasure of seeing in the papers a picture of Sir Horace Hunter, O.B.E., smiling in an ingratiating manner at his favourite cockatoo. We know this detail of his existence, which might seem a merely domestic one. But the fact that he is shortly to be paid thirty thousand pounds of public money, for continuing to live in his own house, is concealed with the utmost delicacy.

“Similarly we have seen whole pages of an illustrated paper filled with glimpses of Lord Normantowers enjoying his honeymoon, which the papers in question are careful to describe as his Romance. Whatever it may be, an antiquated and fastidious taste might possibly be disposed to regard it as his own affair. But the fact that the taxpayer’s money, which is the taxpayer’s affair, is to be given him in enormous quantities, first for going out of his castle, and then for coming back into it — this little domestic detail is thought too trivial for the taxpayer to be told of it.

“Or again, we are frequently informed that the hobby of Mr. Rosenbaum Low is improving the breed of Pekinese, and God knows they need it. But it would seem the sort of hobby that anybody might have without telling everybody else about it. On the other hand, the fact that Mr. Rosenbaum Low is being paid twice over for the same house, and keeping the house as well, is concealed from the public; along with the equally interesting fact that he is allowed to do these things chiefly because he lends money to the Prime Minister.”

The Prime Minister smiled still more grimly and glanced in a light yet lingering fashion at some of the accompanying leaflets. They seemed to be in the form of electioneering leaflets, though not apparently connected with any particular election.

“Vote for Crane. He Said He would Heat His Hat and Did It. Lord Normantowers said he would explain how people came to swallow his coronet; but he hasn’t done it yet.

“Vote for Pierce. He Said Pigs Would Fly And They Did. Rosenbaum Low said a service of international aerial express trains would fly; and they didn’t. It was your money he made to fly.

“Vote for the League of the Long Bow. They Are The Only Men Who Don’t Tell Lies.”

The Prime Minister stood gazing after the vanishing cloud-castle, as it faded into the clouds, with a curious expression in his eyes. Whether it were better or worse for his soul, there was something in him that understood much that the muddled materialists around him could never understand.

“Quite poetical, isn’t it?” he said drily. “Wasn’t it Victor Hugo or some French poet who said something about politics and the clouds?... The people say, `Bah, the poet is in the clouds. So is the thunderbolt.'"

"Thunderbolts!" said Normantowers contemptuously. "What can these fools do but go about flinging fireworks?"

"Quite so," replied Eden; "but I'm afraid by this time they are flinging fireworks into a powder-magazine."

He continued to gaze into the sky with screwed-up eyes, though the object had become invisible.

If his eye could really have followed the thing after which he gazed, he would have been surprised; if his unfathomable scepticism was still capable of surprise. It passed over woods and meadows like a sunset cloud towards the sunset, or a little to the north-west of it, like the fairy castle that was west of the moon. It left behind the green orchards and the red towers of Hereford and passed into bare places whose towers are mightier than any made by man, where they buttress the mighty wall of Wales. Far away in this wilderness of columned cliffs and clefts it found a cleft or hollow, along the floor of which ran a dark line that might have been a black river running through a rocky valley. But it was in fact a crack opening below into another abyss. The strange flying-ship followed the course of the winding fissure till it came to a place where the crack opened into a chasm, round like a cauldron and accidental as the knot in some colossal tree-trunk; through which it sank, entering the twilight of the tremendous cavern beneath. The abyss below was lit here and there with artificial lights, like fallen stars of the underworld, and bridged with wooden platforms and galleries, on which were wooden huts and huge packing-cases and many things somewhat suggestive of a munition dump. On the rocky walls were spread out various balloon coverings, some of them even more grotesque in outline than the castle. Some were in the shapes of animals; and on that primeval background looked like the last fossils, or possibly the first outlines of vast prehistoric creatures. Perhaps there was something suggestive in the fancy that in that underworld a new world was being created. The man who alighted from the flying castle recognized, almost as one recognizes a domestic pet, the outline of a highly primitive pig stretching like a large archaic drawing across the wall. For the young man was called Hilary Pierce, and had had previous dealings with the flying pig, though for that day he had been put in charge of the flying castle.

On the platform on which he alighted stood a table covered with papers, with almost more papers than Lord Eden's table. But these papers were covered almost entirely with figures and numbers and mathematical symbols. Two men were bending over the table, discussing and occasionally disputing. In the taller of the two the scientific world might have recognized Professor Green, whom it was seeking everywhere like the Missing Link, to incarcerate him in the interests of science. In the shorter and sturdier figure a very few people might have recognized Bellew Blair, the organizing brain of the English Revolution.

"I haven't come to stay," explained Pierce hastily. "I'm going on in a minute."

"Why shouldn't you stay?" asked Blair, in the act of lighting a pipe.

"I don't want your talk interrupted. Still less, far, far less, do I want it uninterrupted. I mean while I'm here. A little of your scientific conversation goes a long way with me; I know what you're like when you're really chatty. Professor Green will say in his satirical way `9920.05,' to which you will reply with quiet humour `75.007.' This will be too good an opening for a witty fellow like the Professor, who will instantly retort `982.09.' Not in the best taste perhaps, but a great temptation in the heat of debate."

"Commander Blair," said the Professor, "is very kind to let me share his calculations."

"Lucky for me," said Blair. "I'd have done ten times more with a mathematician like you."

"Well," said Pierce casually, "as you are so much immersed in mathematics, I'll leave you. As a matter of fact, I had a message for Professor Green, about Miss Dale at the house where he was lodging; but we mustn't interrupt scientific studies for a little thing like that."

Green's head came up from the papers with great abruptness.

"Message!" he cried eagerly. "What message? Is it really for me?"

"8282.003," replied Pierce coldly.

"Don't be offended," said Blair. "Give the Professor his message and then go if you like."

"It's only that she came over to see my wife to find out where you had gone to," said Pierce. "I told her, so far as it's possible to tell anybody. That's all," he added, but rather with the air of one saying, "it ought to be enough."

Apparently it was, for Green, who was once more looking down upon the precious papers, crumpled one of them in his clenched hand unconsciously, like a man suddenly controlling his feelings.

"Well, I'm off," said Pierce cheerfully; "got to visit the other dumps."

"Stop a minute," said Blair, as the other turned away. "Haven't you any sort of public news as well as private news? How are things going in the political world?"

"Expressed in mathematical formula," replied Pierce over his shoulder, "the political news is MP squared plus LSD over U equals L. L let loose. L upon earth, my boy."

And he climbed again into his castle of the air.

Oliver Green stood staring at the crumbled paper and suddenly began to straighten it out.

"Mr. Blair," he said, "I am terribly ashamed of myself. When I see you living here like a hermit in the mountains and scrawling your calculations, so to speak, on the rocks of the wilderness, devoted to your great abstract idea, vowed to a great cause, it makes me feel very small to have entangled you and your friends in my small affairs. Of course, the affair isn't at all small to me; but it must seem very small to you."

"I don't know very precisely," answered Blair, "what was the nature of the affair. But that is emphatically your affair. For the rest, I assure you we're delighted to have you, apart from your valuable services as a calculating machine."

Bellew Blair, the last and, in the worldly sense, by far the ablest of the recruits of the Long Bow, was a man in early middle age, square built, but neat in figure and light on his feet, clad in a suit of leather. He mostly moved about so quickly that his figure made more impression than his face; but when he sat down smoking, in one of his rare moments of leisure, as now, it could be remarked that his face was rather calm than vivacious; a short square face with a short resolute nose, but reflective eyes much lighter than his close black hair.

"It's quite Homeric," he added, "the two armies fighting for the body of an astronomer. You would be a sort of symbol anyhow, since they started that insanity of calling you insane. Nobody has any business to bother you about the personal side of the matter."

Green seemed to be ruminating, and the last phrase awoke him to a decision. He began to talk. Quite straightforwardly, though with a certain schoolboy awkwardness, he proceeded to tell his friend the whole of his uncouth love-story — the overturning of his spiritual world to the tune the old cow died of, or rather danced to.

“And I’ve let you in for hiding me like a murderer,” he concluded. “For the sake of something that must seem to you, not even like a cow jumping over the moon, but more like a calf falling over the milking-stool. Perhaps people vowed to a great work like this ought to leave all that sort of thing behind them.”

“Well, I don’t see anything to be ashamed of,” said Blair, “and in this case I don’t agree with what you say about leaving those things behind. Of some sorts of work it’s true; but not this. Shall I tell you a secret?”

“If you don’t mind.”

“The cow never does jump over the moon,” said Blair gravely. “It’s one of the sports of the bulls of the herd.”

“I’m afraid I don’t know what you mean,” said the Professor.

“I mean that women can’t be kept out of this war, because it’s a land war,” answered Blair. “If it were really a war in the air, you could have done it all by yourself. But in all wars of peasants defending their farms and homes, women have been very much on the spot; as they used to pour hot water out of windows during the Irish evictions. Look here, I’ll tell you a story. It’s relevant because it has a moral. After all, it’s my turn, so to speak. You’ve told me the true story of the Cow that Jumped over the Moon. It’s time I told you the true story of the Castle in the Air.”

He smoked silently for a moment, and then said:

“You may have wondered how a very prosaic practical Scotch engineer like myself ever came to make a thing like that pantomime palace over there, as childish as a child’s coloured balloon. Well, the answer is the same; because in certain circumstances a man may be very different from himself. At a certain period of the old war preparations, I was doing some work for the government in a secluded part of the western coast of Ireland. There were very few people for me to talk to; but one of them was the daughter of a bankrupt squire named Malone; and I talked to her a good deal. I was about as mechanical a mechanic as you could dig out anywhere; grimy, grumpy, tinkering about with dirty machinery. She was really like those princesses you read about in the Celtic poems; with a red crown made of curling elf-locks like little flames, and a pale elfin face that seemed somehow thin and luminous like glass; and she could make you listen to silence like a song. It wasn’t a pose with her, it was a poem; there are people like that, but very few of them like her. I tried to keep up my end by telling her about the wonders of science, and the great new architecture of the air. And then Sheila used to say, `And what is the good of them to me, when you HAVE built them. I can see a castle build itself without hands out of gigantic rocks of clear jewels in the sky every night.' And she would point to where crimson or violet clouds hung in the green after-glow over the great Atlantic.

"You would probably say I was mad, if you didn't happen to have been mad yourself. But I was wild with the idea that there was something she admired and that she thought science couldn't do. I was as morbid as a boy; I half thought she despised me; and I wanted half to prove her wrong and half to do whatever she thought right. I resolved my science should beat the clouds at their own game; and I laboured till I'd actually made a sort of rainbow castle that would ride on the air. I think at the back of my mind there was some sort of crazy idea of carrying her off into the clouds she lived among, as if she were literally an angel and ought to dwell on wings. It never quite came to that, as you will hear, but as my experiments progressed my romance progressed too. You won't need any telling about that; I only want to tell you the end of the story because of the moral. We made arrangements to get married; and I had to leave a good many of the arrangements to her, while I completed my great work. Then at last it was ready and I came to seek her like a pagan god descending in a cloud to carry a nymph up to Olympus. And I found she had already taken a very solid little brick villa on the edge of a town, having got it remarkably cheap and furnished it with most modern conveniences. And when I talked to her about castles in the air, she laughed and said her castle had come down to the ground. That is the moral. A woman, especially an Irishwoman, is always uncommonly practical when it comes to getting married. That is what I meant by saying it is never the cow who jumps over the moon. It is the cow who stands firmly planted in the middle of the three acres; and who always counts in any struggle of the land. That is why there must be women in this story, especially like those in your story and Pierce's, women who come from the land. When the world needs a Crusade for communal ideals, it is best waged by men without ties, like the Franciscans. But when it comes to a fight for private property — you can't keep women out of that. You can't have the family farm without the family. You must have concrete Christian marriage again: you can’t have solid small property with all this vagabond polygamy; a harem that isn’t even a home.”

Green nodded and rose slowly to his feet, with his hands in his pockets.

“When it comes to a fight,” he said. “When I look at these enormous underground preparations, it is not difficult to infer that you think it will come to a fight.”

“I think it has come to a fight,” answered Blair. “Lord Eden has decided that. And the others may not understand exactly what they are doing; but he does.”

And Blair knocked out his pipe and stood up, to resume his work in that mountain laboratory, at about the same time at which Lord Eden awoke from his smiling meditations; and, lighting a cigarette, went languidly indoors.

He did not attempt to explain what was in his mind to the men around him. He was the only man there who understood that the England about him was not the England that had surrounded his youth and supported his leisure and luxury; that things were breaking up, first slowly and then more and more swiftly, and that the things detaching themselves were both good and evil. And one of them was this bald, broad and menacing new fact; a peasantry. The class of small farmers already existed, and might yet be found fighting for its farms like the same class all over the world. It was no longer certain that the sweeping social adjustments settled in that garden could be applied to the whole English land. But the story of how far his doubts were justified, and how far his whole project fared, is a part of the story of The Ultimate Ultimatum of the League of the Long Bow, after which the exhausted and broken-spirited reader may find rest at last.

The Ultimate Ultimatum of the League of the Long Bow

Mr. Robert Owen Hood came through his library that was lined with brown leather volumes with a brown paper parcel in his hand; a flippant person (such as his friend Mr. Pierce) might have said he was in a brown study. He came out into the sunlight of his garden, however, where his wife was arranging tea-things, for she was expecting visitors. Even in the strong daylight he looked strangely little altered, despite the long and catastrophic period that had passed since he had met her in the Thames valley and managed really to set the Thames on fire. That fire had since spread in space and time and become a conflagration in which much of modern civilization had been consumed; but in which (as its advocates alleged) English agriculture had been saved and a new and more hopeful chapter opened in English history. His angular face was rather more lined and wrinkled, but his straight shock of copper-coloured hair was as unchanged as if it had been a copper-coloured wig. His wife Elizabeth was even less marked, for she was younger; she had the same slightly nervous or short-sighted look in the eyes that was like a humanizing touch to her beauty made of ivory and gold. But though she was not old she had always been a little old-fashioned; for she came of a forgotten aristocracy whose women had moved with a certain gravity as well as grace about the old country houses, before coronets were sold like cabbages or the Jews lent money to the squires. But her husband was old-fashioned too; though he had just taken part in a successful revolution and bore a revolutionary name, he also had his prejudices; and one of them was a weakness for his wife being a lady — especially that lady.

“Owen,” she said, looking up from the tea-table with alarmed severity, “you’ve been buying more old books.”

“As it happens, these are particularly new books,” he replied; “but I suppose in one sense it’s all ancient history now.”

“What ancient history?” she asked. “Is it a History of Babylon or prehistoric China?”

“It is a History of Us.”

“I hope not,” she said; “but what do you mean?”

“I mean it’s a history of Our Revolution,” said Owen Hood, “a true and authentic account of the late glorious victories, as the old broadsheets said.

The Great War of 1914 started the fashion of bringing out the history of events almost before they'd happened. There were standard histories of that war while it was still going on. Our little civil war is at least finished, thank God; and this is the brand-new history of it. Written by a rather clever fellow, detached but understanding and a little ironical on the right side. Above all, he gives quite a good description of the Battle of the Bows."

"I shouldn't call that our history," said Elizabeth quietly. "I'm devoutly thankful that nobody can ever write our history or put it in a book. Do you remember when you jumped into the water after the flowers? I fancy it was then that you really set the Thames on fire."

"With my red hair, no doubt," he replied; "but I don't think I did set the Thames on fire. I think it was the Thames that set me on fire. Only you were always the spirit of the stream and the goddess of the valley."

"I hope I'm not quite so old as that," answered Elizabeth.

"Listen to this," cried her husband, turning over the pages of the book. "`According to the general belief, which prevailed until the recent success of the agrarian movement of the Long Bow, it was overwhelmingly improbable that a revolutionary change could be effected in England. The recent success of the agrarian protest—'"

"Do come out of that book," remonstrated his wife. "One of our visitors has just arrived."

The visitor proved to be the Reverend Wilding White, a man who had also played a prominent part in the recent triumph, a part that was sometimes highly public and almost pontifical; but in private life he had always a way of entering with his grey hair brushed or blown the wrong way and his eagle face eager or indignant; and his conversation like his correspondence came in a rush and was too explosive to be explanatory.

"I say," he cried, "I've come to talk to you about that idea, you know — Enoch Oates wrote about it from America, and he's a jolly good fellow and all that; but after all he does come from America, and so he thinks it's quite easy. But you can see for yourself it isn't quite so easy, what with Turks and all that. It's all very well to talk about the Unites States—"

"Never you mind about the United States," said Hood easily; "I think I'm rather in favour of the Heptarchy. You just listen to this; the epic of our own Heptarchy, the story of our own dear little domestic war. `The recent success of the agrarian protest—'"

He was interrupted again by the arrival of two more guests; by the silent entrance of Colonel Crane and the very noisy entrance of Captain Pierce, who had brought his young wife with him from the country, for they had established themselves in the ancestral inn of the Blue Boar. White's wife was still in the country, and Crane's having long been busy in her studio with war-posters, was now equally busy with peace-posters.

Hood was one of those men whom books almost literally seize and swallow, like monsters with leather or paper jaws. It was no exaggeration to say he was deep in a book as an incautious traveller might be deep in a swamp or some strange man-eating plant of the tropics; only that the traveller was magnetized and did not even struggle. He would fall suddenly silent in the middle of a sentence and go on reading; or he would suddenly begin to read aloud with great passion, arguing with somebody in the book without reference to anybody in the room. Though not normally rude, he would drift through other people's drawing-rooms towards other people's bookshelves and disappear into them, so to speak, like a rusty family ghost. He would travel a hundred miles to see a friend for an hour, and then waste half an hour with his head in some odd volume he never happened to have seen before. On all that side of him there was a sort of almost creepy unconsciousness. His wife, who had old-world notions of the graces of a hostess, sometimes had double work to do.

"The recent success of the agrarian protest," began Hood cheerfully as his wife rose swiftly to receive two more visitors. These were Professor Green and Commander Bellew Blair; for a queer friendship had long linked together the most practical and the most unpractical of the brothers of the Long Bow. The friendship, as Pierce remarked, was firmly rooted in the square root of minus infinity.

"How beautiful your garden is looking," said Blair to his hostess. "One so seldom sees flower-beds like that now; but I shall always think the old gardeners were right."

"Most things are old-fashioned here, I'm afraid," replied Elizabeth, "but I always like them like that. And how are the children?"

"The recent success of the agrarian protest," remarked her husband in a clear voice, "is doubtless—"

"Really," she said, laughing, "you are too ridiculous for anything. Why in the world should you want to read out the history of the war to the people who were in it, and know quite well already what really happened?"

“I beg your pardon,” said Colonel Crane. “Very improper to contradict a lady, but indeed you are mistaken. The very last thing the soldier generally knows is what has really happened. Has to look at a newspaper next morning for the realistic description of what never happened.”

“Why, then you’d better go on reading, Hood,” said Hilary Pierce. “The Colonel wants to know whether he was killed in battle; or whether there was any truth in that story that he was hanged as a spy on the very tree he had climbed when running away as a deserter.”

“Should rather like to know what they make of it all,” said the Colonel. “After all, we were all too deep in it to see it. I mean see it as a whole.”

“If Owen once begins he won’t stop for hours,” said the lady.

“Perhaps,” began Blair, “we had better—”

“The recent success of the agrarian protest,” remarked Hood in authoritative tones, “is doubtless to be attributed largely to the economic advantage belonging to an agrarian population. It can feed the town or refuse to feed the town; and this question appeared quite early in the politics of the peasantry that had arisen in the western counties. Nobody will forget the scene at Paddington Station in the first days of the rebellion. Men who had grown used to seeing on innumerable mornings the innumerable ranks and rows of great milk-cans, looking leaden in a grey and greasy light, found themselves faced with a blank, in which those neglected things shone in the memory like stolen silver. It was true, as Sir Horace Hunter eagerly pointed out when he was put in command of the highly hygienic problem of the milk supply, that there would be no difficulty about manufacturing the metal cans, perhaps even of an improved pattern, with a rapidity and finish of which the rustics of Somerset were quite incapable. He had long been of the opinion, the learned doctor explained, that the shape of the cans, especially the small cans left outside poor houses, left much to be desired, and the whole process of standing these small objects about in the basements of private houses was open to grave objection in the matter of waste of space. The public, however, showed an indifference to this new issue and a disposition to go back on the old demand for milk; in which matter, they said, there was an unfair advantage for the man who possessed a cow over the man who only possessed a can. But the story that Hunter had rivalled the agrarian slogan by proclaiming the policy of `Three Areas and a Can’ was in all probability a flippant invention of his enemies.

“These agrarian strikes had already occurred at intervals before they culminated in the agrarian war. They were the result of the attempt to enforce on the farmers certain general regulations and precautions about their daily habit, dress and diet, which Sir Horace Hunter and Professor Hake had found to be of great advantage in the large State laboratories for the manufacture of poisons and destructive gases. There was every reason to believe that the people, especially the young people, of the village often evaded the regulation about the gutta-percha masks, and the rule requiring the worker to paint himself all over with an antiseptic gum; and the sending of inspectors from London to see that these rules were enforced led to lamentable scenes of violence. It would be an error, however, to attribute the whole of this great social convulsion to any local agricultural dispute. The causes must also be sought in the general state of society, especially political society. The Earl of Eden was a statesman of great skill by the old Parliamentary standards, but he was already old when he launched his final defiance to the peasants in the form of Land Nationalization; and the General Election which was the result of this departure fell largely into the hands of his lieutenants like Hunter and Low. It soon became apparent that some of the illusions of the Eden epoch had worn rather thin. It was found that the democracy could not always be intimidated even by the threat of consulting them about the choice of a Government.

“Nor can it be denied that the General Election of 19 — was from the first rendered somewhat unreal by certain legal fictions which had long been spreading. There was a custom, originating in the harmless and humane deception used upon excited maiden ladies from the provinces, by which the private secretaries of the Prime Minister would present themselves as that politician himself; sometimes completing the innocent illusion by brushing their hair, waxing their moustaches or wearing their eyeglasses in the manner of their master. When this custom was extended to public platforms it cannot be denied that it became more questionable. In the last days of that venerable statesman it has been asserted that there were no less than five Lloyd Georges touring the country at the same time, and that the contemporary Chancellor of the Exchequer had appeared simultaneously in three cities on the same night, while the original of all these replicas, the popular and brilliant Chancellor himself, was enjoying a well-earned rest by the Lake of Como. The incident of two identical Lord Smiths appearing side by side on the same platform (through a miscalculation of the party agents), though received with good humour and honest merriment by the audience, did but little good to the serious credit of parliamentary institutions. There was of course a certain exaggeration in the suggestion of the satirist that a whole column of identical Prime Ministers, walking two and two like soldiers, marched out of Downing Street every morning and distributed themselves to their various posts like policemen; but such satires were popular and widely scattered, especially by an active young gentleman who was the author of most of them — Captain Hilary Pierce, late of the Flying Corps.

"But if this was true of such trifles as half a dozen of Prime Ministers, it was even truer and more trying in the practical matter of party programmes and proposals. The heading of each party programme with the old promise `Every Man a Millionaire' had of course become merely formal, like a decorative pattern or border. But it cannot be denied that the universal use of this phrase, combined with the equally universal sense of the unfairness of expecting any politician to carry it out, somewhat weakened the force of words in political affairs. It would have been well if statesmen had confined themselves to these accepted and familiar formalities. Unfortunately, under the stress of the struggle which arose out of the menacing organization of the League of the Long Bow, they sought to dazzle their followers with new improbabilities instead of adhering to the tried and trusty improbabilities that had done them yeoman service in the past.

"Thus it was unwise of Lord Normantowers, so far to depart from the temperance principles of a lifetime as to promise all his workers a bottle of champagne at every meal, if they would consent to complete the provision of munitions for suppressing the League of the Long Bow rebellion. The great philanthropist unquestionably had the highest intentions, both in his rash promise and his more reasonable fulfilment. But when the munitions-workers found that the champagne-bottles, though carefully covered with the most beautiful gold-foil, contained in fact nothing but hygienically boiled water, the result was a sudden and sensational strike, which paralysed the whole output of munitions and led to the first incredible victories of the League of the Long Bow.

"There followed in consequence one of the most amazing wars of human history — a one-sided war. One side would have been insignificant if the other had not been impotent. The minority could not have fought for long;

only the majority could not fight at all. There prevailed through the whole of the existing organizations of society a universal distrust that turned them into a dust of disconnected atoms. What was the use of offering men higher pay when they did not believe they would ever receive it, but only alluded jeeringly to Lord Normantowers and his brand of champagne? What was the use of telling every man that he would have a bonus, when you had told him for twenty years that he would soon be a millionaire? What was the good of the Prime Minister pledging his honour in a ringing voice on platform after platform, when it was already an open jest that it was not the Prime Minister at all? The Government voted taxes and they were not paid. It mobilized armies and they did not move. It introduced the pattern of a new all-pulverizing gun, and nobody would make it and nobody would fire it off. We all remember the romantic crisis when no less a genius than Professor Hake came to Sir Horace Hunter, the Minister of Scientific Social Organization, with a new explosive capable of shattering the whole geological formation of Europe and sinking these islands in the Atlantic, but was unable to induce the cabman or any of the clerks to assist him in lifting it out of the cab.

“Against all this anarchy of broken promises the little organization of the League of the Long Bow stood solid and loyal and dependable. The Long Bowmen had become popular by the nickname of the Liars. Everywhere the jest or catchword was repeated like a song, `Only the Liars Tell the Truth.’ They found more and more men to work and fight for them, because it was known that they would pay whatever wages they promised, and refuse to promise anything that they could not perform. The nickname became an ironical symbol of idealism and dignity. A man was proud of being a little precise and even pedantic in his accuracy and probity because he was a Liar. The whole of this strange organization had originated in certain wild bets or foolish practical jokes indulged in by a small group of eccentrics. But they had prided themselves on the logical, if rather literal, fashion in which they had fulfilled certain vows about white elephants or flying pigs. Hence, when they came to stand for a policy of peasant proprietorship, and were enabled by the money of an American crank to establish it in a widespread fashion across the west of England, they took the more serious task with the same tenacity. When their foes mocked them with `the myth of three acres and a cow,’ they answered: `Yes, it is as mythical as the cow that jumped over the moon. But our myths come true.’

“The inexplicable and indeed incredible conclusion of the story was due to a new fact; the fact of the actual presence of the new peasantry. They had first come into complete possession of their new farms, by the deed of gift signed by Enoch Oates in the February of 19 — and had thus been settled on the land a great many years when Lord Eden and his Cabinet finally committed themselves to the scheme of Land Nationalization by which their homesteads were to pass into official control. That curious and inexplicable thing, the spirit of the peasant, had made great strides in the interval. It was found that the Government could not move such people about from place to place, as it is possible to do with the urban poor in the reconstruction of streets or the destruction of slums. It was not a thing like moving pawns, but a thing like pulling up plants; and plants that had already struck their roots very deep. In short, the Government, which had already adopted a policy commonly called Socialist from motives that were in fact very conservative, found itself confronted with the same peasant resistance as brought the Bolshevist Government in Russia to a standstill. And when Lord Eden and his Cabinet put in motion the whole modern machinery of militarism and coercion to crush the little experiment, he found himself confronted with a rural rising such as has not been known in England since the Middle Ages.

“It is said that the men of the Long Bow carried their mediaeval symbolism so far as to wear Lincoln green as their uniform when they retired to the woods in the manner of Robin Hood. It is certain that they did employ the weapon after which they were named; and curiously enough, as will be seen, by no means without effect. But it must be clearly understood that when the new agrarian class took to the woods like outlaws, they did not feel in the least like robbers. They hardly even felt like rebels. From their point of view at least, they were and long had been the lawful owners of their own fields, and the officials who came to confiscate were the robbers. Therefore when Lord Eden proclaimed Nationalization, they turned out in thousands as their fathers would have gone out against pirates or wolves.

“The Government acted with great promptitude. It instantly voted 50,000 pounds to Mr. Rosenbaum Low, the expenditure of which was wisely left to his discretion at so acute a crisis, with no more than the understanding that he should take a thorough general survey of the situation. He proved worthy of the trust; and it was with the gravest consideration and sense of responsibility that he selected Mr. Leonard Kramp, the brilliant young financier, from all his other nephews to take command of the forces in the field. In the field, however, fortune is well known to be somewhat more incalculable; and all the intelligence and presence of mind that had enabled Kramp to postpone the rush on the Potosi Bank were not sufficient to balance the accidental possession by Crane and Pierce of an elementary knowledge of strategy.

"Before considering the successes obtained by these commanders in the rather rude fashion of warfare which they were forced to adopt, it must be noted, of course, that even on their side there were also scientific resources of a kind; and an effective if eccentric kind. The scientific genius of Bellew Blair had equipped his side with many secret processes affecting aviation and aeronautics, and it is the peculiarity of this extraordinary man that his secret processes really remained for a considerable time secret. For he had not told them to anybody with any intention of making any money out of them. This quixotic and visionary behaviour contrasted sharply with the shrewd good sense of the great business men who know that publicity is the soul of business. For some time past they had successfully ignored the outworn sentimental prejudice that had prevented soldiers and sailors from advertising the best methods of defeating the enemy; and we can all recall those brilliantly coloured announcements which used to brighten so many hoardings in those days, `Sink in Smith's Submarine; Pleasure Trips for Patriots.' Or `Duffin's Portable Dug-Out Makes War a Luxury.' Advertisement cannot fail to effect its aim; the name of an aeroplane that had been written on the sky in pink and pea-green lights could not but become a symbol of the conquest of the air; and the patriotic statesman, deeply considering what sort of battleship might best defend his country's coasts, was insensibly and subtly influenced by the number of times that he had seen its name repeated on the steps of a moving staircase at an Imperial Exhibition. Nor could there be any doubt about the brilliant success that attended these scientific specialties so long as their operations were confined to the market. The methods of Commander Blair were in comparison private, local, obscure and lacking any general recognition; and by a strange irony it was a positive advantage to this nameless and secretive crank that he had never advertised his weapons until he used them. He had paraded a number of merely fanciful balloons and fireworks for a jest; but the secrets to which he attached importance he had hidden in cracks of the

Welsh mountains with a curious and callous indifference to the principles of commercial distribution and display. He could not in any case have conducted operations on so large a scale, being deficient in that capital, the lack of which has so often been fatal to inventors; and had made it useless for a man to discover a machine unless he could also discover a millionaire. But it cannot be denied that when his machine was brought into operation it was always operative, even to the point of killing the millionaire who might have financed it. For the millionaire had so persistently cultivated the virtues of self-advertisement that it was difficult for him to become suddenly unknown and undistinguished, even in scenes of conflict where he most ardently desired to do so. There was a movement on foot for treating all millionaires as non-combatants, as being treasures belonging alike to all nations, like the Cathedrals or the Parthenon. It is said that there was even an alternative scheme for camouflaging the millionaire by the pictorial methods that can disguise a gun as a part of the landscape; and that Captain Pierce devoted much eloquence to persuading Mr. Rosenbaum Low how much better it would be for all parties if his face could be made to melt away into the middle distance or take on the appearance of a blank wall or a wooden post."

"The extraordinary thing is," interrupted Pierce, who had been listening eagerly, "that he said I was personal. Just at the moment when I was trying to wave away all personal features that could come between us, he actually said I was personal."

Hood went on reading as if nobody had spoken. "In truth the successes of Blair's instruments revealed a fallacy in the common commercial argument. We talk of a competition between two kinds of soap or two kinds of jam or cocoa, but it is a competition in purchase and not in practice. We do not make two men eat two kinds of jam and then observe which wears the most radiant smile of satisfaction. We do not give two men two kinds of cocoa and note which endures it with most resignation. But we do use two guns directly against each other; and in the case of Blair's methods the less advertised gun was the better. Nevertheless his scientific genius could only cover a corner of the field; and a great part of the war must be considered as a war in the open country of a much more primitive and sometimes almost prehistoric kind.

"It is admitted of course by all students that the victories of Crane and Pierce were gross violations of strategic science. The victors themselves afterwards handsomely acknowledged the fact; but it was then too late to repair the error. In order to understand it, however, it is necessary to grasp the curious condition into which so many elements of social life had sunk in the time just preceding the outbreak. It was this strange social situation which rendered the campaign a contradiction to so many sound military maxims.

"For instance, it is a recognized military maxim that armies depend upon roads. But anyone who had noticed the conditions that were already beginning to appear in the London streets as early as 1924 will understand that a road was something less simple and static than the Romans imagined. The Government had adopted everywhere in their road-making the well-known material familiar to us all from the advertisements by the name of "Nobumpo," thereby both insuring the comfort of travellers and rewarding a faithful supporter by placing a large order with Mr. Hugg. As several members of the Government themselves held shares in Nobumpo their enthusiastic co-operation in the public work was assured. But, as has no doubt been observed everywhere, it is one of the many advantages of Nobumpo, as preserving that freshness of surface so agreeable to the pedestrian, that the whole material can be (and is) taken up and renewed every three months, for the comfort of travellers and the profit and encouragement of trade. It so happened that at the precise moment of the outbreak of hostilities all the country roads, especially in the west, were as completely out of use as if they had been the main thoroughfares of London. This in itself tended to equalize the chances or even to increase them in favour of a guerilla force, such as that which had disappeared into the woods and was everywhere moving under cover of the trees. Under modern conditions, it was found that by carefully avoiding roads, it was still more or less possible to move from place to place.

"Again, another recognized military fact is the fact the bow is an obsolete weapon. And nothing is more irritating to a finely balanced taste than to be killed with an obsolete weapon, especially while persistently pulling the trigger of an efficient weapon, without any apparent effect. Such was the fate of the few unfortunate regiments which ventured to advance into the forests and fell under showers of arrows from trackless ambushes. For it must be remembered that the conditions of this extraordinary campaign entirely reversed the normal military rule about the essential military department of supply. Mechanical communications theoretically accelerate supply, while the supply of a force cut loose and living on the country is soon exhausted. But the mechanical factor also depends upon a moral factor. Ammunition would on normal occasions have been produced with unequalled rapidity by Poole's Process and brought up with unrivalled speed in Blinker's Cars; but not at the moment when riotous employees were engaged in dipping Poole repeatedly in a large vat at the factory; or in the quieter conditions of the country-side, where various tramps were acquiring squatter's rights in Blinker's Cars, accidentally delayed upon their journey. Everywhere the same thing happened; just as the great manufacturer failed to keep his promise to the workers who produced munitions, so the petty officials driving the lorries had failed to keep their promises to loafers and vagrants who had helped them out of temporary difficulties; and the whole system of supply broke down upon a broken word. On the other hand, the supply of the outlaws was in a sense almost infinite. With the woodcutters and the blacksmiths on their side, they could produce their own rude mediaeval weapons everywhere. It was in vain that Professor Hake delivered a series of popular lectures, proving to the lower classes that in the long run it would be to their economic advantage to be killed in battle. Captain Pierce is reported to have said: `I believe the Professor is a botanist as well as an economist; but as a botanist he has not yet discovered that guns and arrows do not grow on trees. Bows and arrows do.'

"But the incident which history will have most difficulty in explaining, and which it may perhaps refer to the region of myth or romance, is the crowning victory commonly called the Battle of the Bows. It was indeed originally called `The Battle of the Bows of God'; in reference to some strangely fantastic boast, equally strangely fulfilled, that is said to have been uttered by the celebrated Parson White, a sort of popular chaplain who seems to have been the Friar Tuck of this new band of Robin Hood. Coming on a sort of embassy to Sir Horace Hunter, this clergyman is said to have threatened the Government with something like a miracle. When rallied about the archaic sport of the long bow, he replied: `Yes, we have long bows and we shall have longer bows; the longest bows the world has ever seen; bows taller than houses; bows given to us by God Himself and big enough for His gigantic angels.'

"The whole business of this battle, historic and decisive as it was, is covered with some obscurity, like that cloud of storm that hung heavy upon the daybreak of that gloomy November day. Had anyone been present with the Government forces who was well acquainted with the western valley in which they were operating, such a person could not have failed to notice that the very landscape looked different; looked new and abnormal. Dimly as it could be traced through the morning twilight, the very line of the woodland against the sky would have shown him a new shape; a deformity like a hump. But the plans had all been laid out in London long before, in imitation of that foresight, fixity of purpose, and final success that will always be associated with the last German Emperor. It was enough for them that there was a wood of some sort marked on the map, and they advanced toward it, low and crouching as its entrance appeared to be.

"Then something happened, which even those who saw it and survived cannot describe. The dark trees seemed to spring up to twice their height as in a nightmare. In the half-dark the whole wood seemed to rise from the earth like a rush of birds and then to turn over in mid-air and come towards the invaders like a roaring wave. Some such dim and dizzy sight they saw; but many of them at least saw little enough afterwards. Simultaneously with the turning of this wheel of waving trees, rocks seemed to rain down out of heaven; beams and stones and shafts and missiles of all kinds, flattening out the advancing force as under a pavement produced by a shower of paving-stones. It is asserted that some of the countrymen cunning in woodcraft, in the service of the Long Bow, had contrived to fit up a tree as a colossal catapult; calculating how to bend back the boughs and sometimes even the trunks to the breaking-point, and gaining a huge and living resilience with their release. If this story is true, it is certainly an appropriate conclusion to the career of the Long Bow and a rather curious fulfilment of the visionary vaunt of Parson White, when he said that the bows would be big enough for giants, and that the maker of the bows was God."

"Yes," interrupted the excitable White, "and do you know what he said to me when I first said it?"

"What who said when you said what?" asked Hood patiently.

"I mean that fellow Hunter," replied the clergyman. "That varnished society doctor turned politician. Do you know what he said when I told him we would get our bows from God?"

Owen Hood paused in the act of lighting a cigar.

"Yes," he said grimly. "I believe I can tell you exactly what he said. I've watched him off and on for twenty years. I bet he began by saying: `I don't profess to be a religious man.'"

"Right, quite right," cried the cleric bounding upon his chair in a joyous manner, "that's exactly how he began. `I don't profess to be a religious man, but I trust I have some reverence and good taste. I don't drag religion into politics.' And I said: `No, I don't think you do.'"

A moment after, he bounded, as it were, in a new direction. "And that reminds me of what I came about," he cried. "Enoch Oates, your American friend, drags religion into politics all right; only it's a rather American sort of religion. He's talking about a United States of Europe and wants to introduce you to a Lithuanian Prophet. It seems this Lithuanian party has started a movement for a Universal Peasant Republic or World State of Workers on the Land; but at present he's only got as far as Lithuania. But he seems inclined to pick up England on the way, after the unexpected success of the English agrarian party."

"What's the good of talking to me about a World State," growled Hood. "Didn't I say I preferred a Heptarchy?"

"Don't you understand?" interrupted Hilary Pierce excitedly. "What can we have to do with international republics? We can turn England upside down if we like; but it's England that we like, whichever way up. Why, our very names and phrases, the very bets and jokes in which the whole thing began, will never be translated. It takes an Englishman to eat his hat; I never heard of a Spaniard threatening to eat his sombrero, or a Chinaman to chew his pigtail. You can only set the Thames on fire; you cannot set the Tiber or the Ganges on fire, because the habit of speech has never been heard of. What's the good of talking about white elephants in countries where they are only white elephants? Go and say to a Frenchman, `Pour mon chateau, je le trouve un elephant blanc' and he will send two Parisian alienists to look at you seriously, like a man who says that his motor-car is a green giraffe. There is no point in telling Czecho-Slovakian pigs to fly, or Jugo-Slavonic cows to jump over the moon. Why, the unhappy Lithuanian would be bewildered to the point of madness by our very name. There is no reason to suppose that he and his countrymen talk about a long bowman when they mean a liar. We talk about tall stories, but a tall story may mean a true story in colloquial Lithuanian."

"Tall stories are true stories sometimes, I hope," said Colonel Crane, "and people don't believe 'em. But people'll say that was a very tall story about the tall trees throwing darts and stones. Afraid it'll come to be a bit of a joke."

"All our battles began as jokes and they will end as jokes," said Owen Hood, staring at the smoke of his cigar as it threaded its way towards the sky in grey and silver arabesque. "They will linger only as faintly laughable legends, if they linger at all; they may pass an hour or two or fill an empty page; and even the man who tells them will not take them seriously. It will all end in smoke like the smoke I am looking at; in eddying and topsy-turvy patterns hovering for a moment in the air. And I wonder how many, who may smile or yawn over them, will realize that where there was smoke there was fire."

There was a silence; then Colonel Crane stood up, a solitary figure in his severe and formal clothes, and gravely said farewell to his hostess. With the failing afternoon light he knew that his own wife, who was a well-known artist, would be abandoning her studio work, and he always looked forward to a talk with her before dinner, which was often a more social function. Nevertheless, as he approached his old home a whim induced him to delay the meeting for a few minutes and to walk round to his old kitchen garden, where his old servant Archer was still leaning on a spade, as in the days before the Flood.

So he stood for a moment amid a changing world, exactly as he had stood on that distant Sunday morning at the beginning of all these things. The South Sea idol still stood at the corner; the scarecrow still wore the hat that he had sacrificed; the cabbages still looked green and solid like the cabbage he had once dug up, digging up so much along with it.

"Queer thing," he said, "how true it is what Hilary once said about acting an allegory without knowing it. Never had a notion of what I was doing when I picked up a cabbage and wore it for a wager. Damned awkward position, but I never dreamed I was being martyred for a symbol. And the right symbol, too, for I've lived to see Britannia crowned with cabbage. All very well to say Britannia ruled the waves; it was the land she couldn't rule, her own land, and it was heaving like earthquakes. But while there's cabbage there's hope. Archer, my friend, this is the moral: any country that tries to do without cabbages is done for. And even in war you often fight as much with cabbages as cannon-balls."

"Yes, sir," said Archer respectfully; "would you be wanting another cabbage now, sir?"

Colonel Crane repressed a slight shudder. "No, thank you; no, thank you," he said hastily. Then he muttered as he turned away: "I don't mind revolutions so much, but I wouldn't go through that again."

And he passed swiftly round his house, of which the windows began to show the glow of kindled lamps, and went in to his wife.

Archer was left alone in the garden, tidying up after his work and shifting the potted shrubs; a dark and solitary figure as sunset and twilight sank all around the enclosure like soft curtains of grey with a border of purple; and the windows, as yet uncurtained and full of lamplight, painted patterns of gold on the lawns and flagged walks without. It was perhaps appropriate that he should remain alone and apart; for he alone in all these changes had remained quite unchanged. It was perhaps fitting that his figure should stand in a dark outline against the darkening scene; for the mystery of his immutable respectability remains more of a riddle than all the riot of the rest. No revolution could revolutionize Mr. Archer. Attempts had been made to provide so excellent a gardener with a garden of his own; with a farm of his own, in accordance with the popular policy of the hour. But he would not adapt himself to the new world; nor would he hasten to die out, as was his duty on evolutionary principles. He was merely a survival; but he showed a perplexing disposition to survive.

Suddenly the lonely gardener realized that he was not alone. A face had appeared above the hedge, gazing at him with blue eyes dreaming yet burning; a face with something of the tint and profile of Shelley. It was impossible that Mr. Archer should have heard of such a person as Shelley: fortunately he recognized the visitor as a friend of his master.

"Forgive me if I am mistaken, Citizen Archer," said Hilary Pierce with pathetic eagerness, "but it seems to me that you are not swept along with the movement; that a man of your abilities has been allowed to stand apart, as it were, from the campaign of the Long Bow. And yet how strange! Are you not Archer? Does not your very name rise up and reproach you? Ought you not to have shot more arrows or told more tarradiddles than all the rest? Or is there perhaps a more elemental mystery behind your immobility, like that of a statue in the garden? Are you indeed the god of the garden, more beautiful than this South Sea idol and more respectable than Priapus? Are you in no mortal sense an Archer? Are you perhaps

Apollo, serving this military Admetus; successfully, yes, successfully, hiding your radiance from me?" He paused for a reply, and then lowered his voice as he resumed: "Or are you not rather that other Archer whose shafts are not shafts of death but of life and fruitfulness; whose arrows plant themselves like little flowering trees; like the little shrubs you are planting in this garden? Are you he that gives the sunstroke not in the head but the heart; and have you stricken each of us in turn with the romance that has awakened us for the revolution? For without that spirit of fruitfulness and the promise of the family, these visions would indeed be vain. Are you in truth the God of Love; and has your arrow stung and startled each of us into telling his story? I will not call you Cupid," he said with a slight air of deprecation or apology, "I will not call you Cupid, Mr. Archer, for I conceive you as no pagan deity, but rather as that image clarified and spiritualized to a symbol almost Christian, as he might have appeared to Chaucer or to Botticelli. Nay, it was you that, clad in no heathen colours, but rather in mediaeval heraldry, blew a blast on his golden trumpet when Beatrice saluted Dante on the bridge. Are you indeed that Archer, O Archer, and did you give each one of us his Vita Nuova?"

"No, sir," said Mr. Archer.

* * * * * * * * *

Thus does the chronicler of the League of the Long Bow come to the end of his singularly unproductive and unprofitable labours, without, perhaps, having yet come to the beginning. The reader may have once hoped, perhaps, that the story would be like the universe; which when it ends, will explain why it ever began. But the reader has long since been sleeping, after the toils and trials of his part in the affair; and the writer is too tactful to ask at how early a stage of his story-telling that generally satisfactory solution of all our troubles was found. He knows not if the sleep has been undisturbed, or in that sleep what dreams may come, if there has been cast upon it any shadow of the shapes of his own very private and comfortable nightmare; turrets clad with the wings of morning or temples marching over dim meadows as living monsters, or swine plumed like cherubim or forests bent like bows, or a fiery river winding through a dark land. Images are in their nature indefensible, if they miss the imagination of another; and the foolish scribe of the Long Bow will not commit the last folly of defending his dreams. He at least has drawn a bow at a venture and shot an arrow into the air; and he has no intention of looking for it in oaks, all over the neighbourhood, or expecting to find it still sticking in a mortal and murderous manner in the heart of a friend. His is only a toy bow; and when a boy shoots with such a bow, it is generally very difficult to find the arrow — or the boy.

THE POET AND THE LUNATICS

This collection of eight short stories was first published in 1929 and the tales concern the adventures of Gabriel Gale, an eccentric poet. He uses his gift of ‘madness of insight’ to solve or prevent crimes committed by madmen. Chesterton clearly suggests the similarities between lunacy and sanity in these short stories.

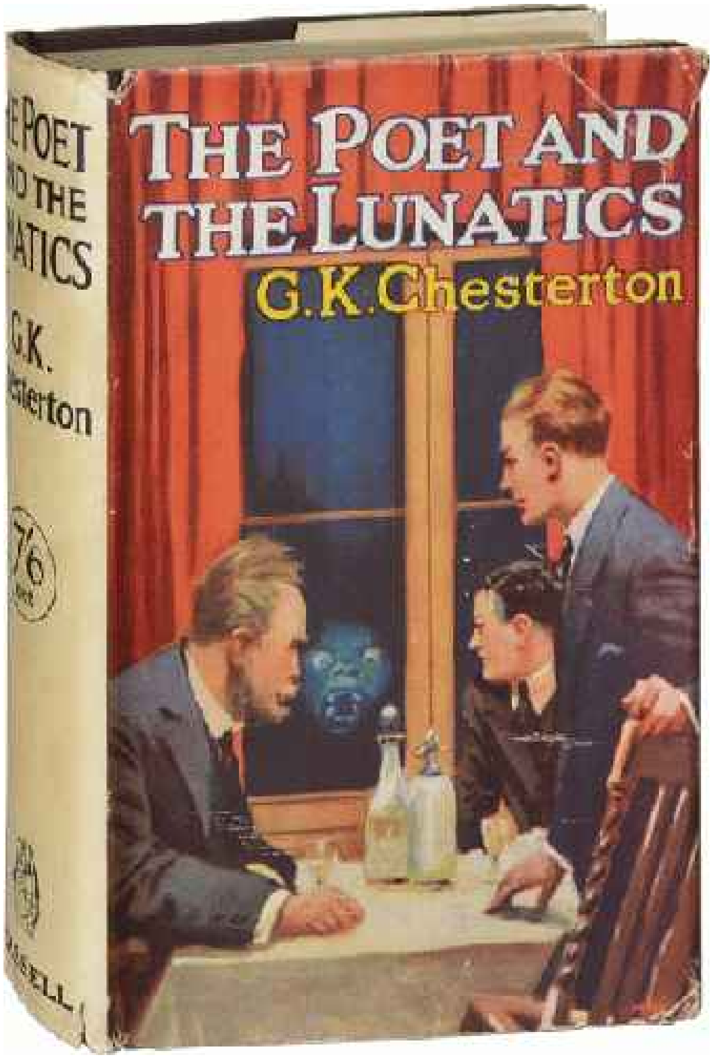
THE POET AND THE LUNATICS
G.K. Chesterton
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The first edition

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THE FANTASTIC FRIENDS

THE inn called the Rising Sun had an exterior rather suggesting the title of the Setting Sun. It stood in a narrow triangle of garden, more grey than green, with broken-down hedges mingling with the melancholy reeds of a river; with a few dark and dank arbours, of which the roofs and the seats had alike collapsed; and a dingy dried-up fountain, with a weather-stained water-nymph and no water. The house itself seemed rather devoured by ivy than decorated with it; as if its old bones of brown brick were slowly broken by the dragon coils of that gigantic parasite. On the other side it looked on a lonely road leading across the hills down to a ford across the river; now largely disused since the building of a bridge lower down. Outside the door was a wooden bench and table, and above it a wooden sign, much darkened, with the gold of the sun's disc faded to a brown; and under the sign stood the inn-keeper, gazing gloomily up the road. His hair was black and flat, and his face, of a congested purple, had all the sombreness, if not all the beauty, of sunset.

The only person in the place who exhibited any liveliness was the person who was leaving it. He was the first and last customer for many months; a solitary swallow who had conspicuously failed to make a summer; and the swallow was now flitting. He was a medical man on a holiday; young, and of an agreeable ugliness, with a humorous hatchet face and red hair; and the cat-like activity of his movements contrasted with the stagnant inertia of the inn by the ford. He was strapping up his own bag on the table under the sign; and neither his host, who stood a yard off, nor the single servant, who moved heavily and obscurely within, offered to help him; possibly through sulkiness, possibly merely through dreaminess and disuse.

The long silence, idle or busy, was broken for the first time by two sharp and explosive sounds. The first was the abrupt bursting of the strap which the doctor was tightening round the bag on the table; and the second was the loud and cheerful "Damn!" which was his comment upon it.

"Here's a pretty go," observed the medical gentleman, who went by the name of Garth; "I shall have to tie it up with something. Have you got a cord or a rope or anything?"

The melancholy inn-keeper turned very slowly and went indoors, coming out presently with a length of dusty rope in a loop like a halter, probably for tethering a donkey or a calf.

"That's all I've got," he said; "I'm pretty well at the end of my own tether anyhow."

"You seem a bit depressed," observed Dr. Garth; "you probably want a tonic. Perhaps this medicine chest burst open to give you one."

"Prussic acid is the kind of tonic I feel inclined for," answered the landlord of the Rising Sun.

"I never recommend it," observed the doctor cheerfully. "It's very pleasant at the moment, no doubt; but I never feel I can guarantee a complete recovery afterwards. But you certainly seem down in the mouth; you didn't even brighten up when I indulged in such an eccentricity as paying my bill."

"Much obliged to you, sir," observed the other gruffly, "but it would want a lot more bills to keep this rotten old show from going to pot. It was a good business once, when the right-of-way was open beyond the river, and everybody used this ford. But the last squire shut up the path somehow; and now everything goes by the new bridge a mile away. Nobody comes this way; and, saving your presence, I don't know why anybody should."

"Well, they say the new squire is nearly bankrupt himself," observed Dr. Garth. "So history brings its revenges. Westermaine's his name, isn't it? I'm told there's a brother and sister living in the big house over there, with precious little to live on. I suppose the whole countryside's rather gone downhill. But you're wrong about nobody coming here," he added suddenly, "for there are two men coming over the hill now."

The road ran across the valley at right angles to the river; beyond the ford the forgotten right-of-way could be traced more faintly up the slope to where the ruined gate that marked Westermaine Abbey stood dark against clouds of a pallor that was faintly lurid, as with a hint of storm. But on the other side of the valley the sky was clear; and the early afternoon seemed as bright and brisk as morning. And on this side, where the white road curved over the hill, two figures were advancing, which seemed, even when they were hardly more than dots in the distance, to be markedly dissimilar.

As they came nearer to the inn, the contrast increased, and was accentuated by the very fact of their air of mutual familiarity; as if they were almost walking arm in arm. One was comparatively short and very sturdy; the other unusually tall and slender. They were both fair; but the blond hair of the shorter man was neatly parted and smoothly plastered down; while that of the other stood up in erratic wisps and tufts that looked fantastic. The shorter man had a full square face sharpened by a very pointed nose, and a pair of bright, bird-like eyes, that made it look like a small beak. There was something of the cock sparrow about him; and, indeed, he seemed more of a town bird than a country bird. His clothes were as neat and commonplace as a clerk's; and he carried a business-like little bag as if he was going up to the City; while his tall companion had bundled on his back a loose knapsack, and what was evidently the paraphernalia of a painter. He had a long, slightly cadaverous face, with absent-minded eyes; but the chin beneath jutted forward, almost as if it had formed an unconscious resolution of its own, of which the blank blue eyes were still unaware. They were both young; and they both walked without hats, probably through the heat of walking; for the one held a hard straw hat in his hand, and the other had a loose grey felt stuffed anyhow into his knapsack.

They came to a halt before the inn; and the shorter man said jovially to his companion, "Here's a field for your efforts, anyhow."

Then he called out with breezy civility to the inn-keeper, asking him to bring out two pots of ale; and when that gloomy character had disappeared into his gloomy place of entertainment, he turned to the doctor with the same radiant loquacity:

"My friend's a painter," he explained, "but rather a special sort of painter. You might call him a house-painter; but he's not quite what most people mean by one. It may surprise you, sir, but he's an R.A., and not the stuffy sort that sometimes suggests, either. One of the first among the young geniuses, and exhibits at all their cranky galleries. But his whole aim and glory in life is to go about repainting inn-signs. There; you don't meet a genius with that little fancy every day. What's the name of this pub?"

And he stood on tiptoe, craning and peering at the blackened sign with an extraordinary contained vivacity in his curiosity.

"The Rising Sun," he commented, turning eagerly again to his silent friend. "That's what you would call an omen, after what you were saying this morning about reviving the real inns. My friend is very poetical; and he said it would make a sunrise all over England."

"Well, they say the sun never sets on the British Empire," observed the doctor, with a laugh.

“I don’t feel it about the Empire so much,” said the painter simply, breaking his silence like one spontaneously thinking aloud. “After all, one doesn’t fancy an English inn on the top of Mount Everest, or somewhere on the Suez Canal. But one’s life would be well spent in waking up the dead inns of England and making them English and Christian again. If I could do it, I would do nothing else till I die.”

“Of course you can do it,” replied his travelling companion. “A picture by an artist like you, and hung outside a public-house, makes it fashionable for miles round.”

“Is it really true, then,” inquired Dr. Garth, “that you employ all your serious powers on subjects like public-house signs?”

“What finer subjects are there, even as subjects?” asked the painter; he was now evidently full of his favourite subject and he was one of those who are either abstractedly silent or ardently argumentative. “Is it more dignified to paint an Academy portrait of some snobbish mayor in a gold chain, or some swindling millionaire’s wife in a diamond tiara, than to paint the heads of great English admirals, to be toasted in good ale? Is it better to paint some nepotistical old noodle wearing his George and Garter than to paint St. George himself in the very act of killing the Dragon? I’ve repainted six old signs of St. George and the Dragon, or even the Dragon without St. George; a sign called the Green Dragon is usually very suggestive to anybody with a little imagination; you can make him a sort of spirit and terror of tropical forests. Even a Blue Boar is suggestive; something nocturnal with stars like the Great Bear; like that dim monstrous boar that stood for chaos and old night in the Celtic mythology.”

And he reached for his pewter pot, and applied himself to it with absorption.

“He’s a poet as well as a painter, you know,” explained the smaller man, still regarding his companion with an absurd air of proprietorship, as if he himself were the keeper and showman of some singular wild animal; “You’ve probably heard of the poems of Gabriel Gale, illustrated by himself? I can get you a copy if you are interested in these things. I’m his agent and business man; my name’s Hurrel… James Hurrel. People laugh at us and call us the Heavenly Twins, because we’re inseparable, and I never let him out of my sight. Have to look after him… eccentricities of genius, you know.”

The painter took his face off the pewter pot, a face fiery with controversy.

“Genius oughtn’t to be eccentric!” he cried in some excitement. “Genius ought to be centric. It ought to be in the core of the cosmos, not on the revolving edges. People seem to think it a compliment to accuse one of being an outsider, and to talk about the eccentricities of genius. What would they think, if I said I only wish to God I had the centricities of genius?”

“I fear they would think it was the beer,” replied Dr. Garth, “that had slightly confused your polysyllables. Well, it may be a romantic idea to revive the old signs, as you say. Romance is not much in my line.”

Mr. Hurrel, the agent, cut in sharply, and even eagerly. “But it isn’t only a romantic idea,” he explained; “it’s a real, practical idea, too. I’m a business man, and you may believe me it’s really a business proposition. Not only for us, but for the other people too… for the inn-keepers and the villagers and the squires, and everybody. Why, look at this broken-down ale-house they call the Rising Sun. If everyone would work together, they could have this empty hole humming like a hive in a year. If the squire would open the old road and let people visit the ruins, if he’d build a bridge here by the inn and hang out a sign painted by Gabriel Gale, you’d have all the cultivated sightseers in Europe stopping here for lunch.”

“Hullo!” cried the doctor. “It looks as if they were coming to lunch already. Really, our pessimistic friend inside talked as if this were a ruin in the desert; but I begin to believe it does a trade like the Savoy.”

They had all been standing with their backs to the road, looking at the dark tavern under discussion; but even before the doctor began to speak, Gabriel Gale, the painter and poet, had become in some odd fashion conscious of an addition to the company. Perhaps it was because the elongated shadows of a horse and two human figures had for some little time rested on the sunny road beside him. He turned his head over his shoulder, and remained staring at what he saw.

A high dog-cart had drawn up on the other side of the road. The reins were in the gloved hands of a tall, dark young lady, clad in dark blue of the tailor-made type, neat but not particularly new. By her side was a man, perhaps ten years older than herself, but seeming in many ways much more, for his high-featured face was wasted as with sickness, and there was a great anxiety in his large grey eyes.

In the momentary silence the clear voice of the girl came like an echo of the doctor's phrase, saying: "I am sure we can get some lunch here." She slipped lightly to the ground and stood by the horse's head, while her companion descended with a little more hesitation. He was dressed in light tweeds, which seemed somehow slightly incongruous with his invalid air, and he addressed Hurrel with a rather nervous smile.

"I hope you won't regard me as an eavesdropper, sir; but you were not exactly speaking as if you were talking secrets."

Hurrel, indeed, had been talking as if he were a cheap-jack dominating the noise of the fair; and he smiled and answered quite pleasantly:

"I was only saying what anybody might about what a squire might do with a property like this. I don't in the least mind anybody listening who happens to be interested."

"I happen to be a little interested," answered the man in tweeds, "because, as it happens, I am the squire if there are any squires nowadays."

"I sincerely apologize," answered the agent, still smiling; "but, if you will play Haroun Alraschid…"

"Oh, I'm not at all offended," answered the other. "To tell the truth, I'm rather wondering whether you aren't quite right."

Gabriel Gale had been looking at the girl in dark blue rather longer than was quite polite; but painters and absent-minded persons may sometimes be excused in such cases. His friend would probably have infuriated him by calling it one of the eccentricities of genius, but it might have been disputed whether his admiration was entirely eccentric. Lady Diana Westermaine would have made a most satisfactory sign for an inn… a bush worthy of the best wine… or might even have uplifted the lowly estate of an Academy picture, though it was long since her unfortunate family could have easily afforded one. She had hair of a curious dark brown, which in ordinary shades looked black, while the lights in it looked almost red; her dark eyebrows had a touch of temper both in the good and the bad sense; her eyes were even larger and greyer than her brother's, but less filled with mere worry and more with a more spiritual weariness. Gale had the sense that her soul was more hungry than her body. But he had also the thought that people are only hungry because they are healthy. He thought all this in the brief moments before he remembered his manners, and turned to consider the other group.

When he had left off looking at her, she began looking at him, but with a somewhat cooler curiosity.

Meanwhile, Mr. James Hurrel had been working wonders, not to say miracles. With something more than the tenacity of a tout, with something of the eloquence of the born diplomatist, he had already wound round the squire a web of suggestions and proposals and possibilities. There was really something about him of that imaginative business man of whom we hear so much and see so little. Affairs which a man like Westermaine could never normally have conceived as being settled except by long lawyers' letters extending over several months, seemed to be arranging themselves before him in several minutes. A new bridge of the most artistic woodwork seemed already to point across the river to the open road; a new and higher class of rents seemed already to be dotting the valley with artistic villages; and a new golden sign of the Rising Sun, with the signature of Gabriel Gale, already blazed above them, a symbol that the sun had risen indeed.

Before they knew where they were the whole company had been bustled in the most friendly fashion through the inn, and set down to a luncheon that was really a committee round the table in the dreary garden beside the river. Hurrel was drawing plans on the wooden table and making calculations on pieces of paper, and reeling off figures and answering objections and growing every moment more restless and radiant. He had one piece of magic for making others believe… the fact that he evidently believed himself; and the squire, who had never met such a person before, had no weapons with which to fight him, even if it had been his interest to do so. Amid all this whirl Lady Diana looked across at Gale, who sat at the opposite corner of the table, somewhat detached and dreamy.

"What do you think of it, Mr. Gale?" she said; but Mr. Gale's business adviser answered for him, as he answered for everybody and answered for everything.

"Oh, it's no good asking him about business," he cried boisterously. "He's only one of the assets; he brings in all the artistic people. He's a great painter; but we only want a painter to paint. Lord bless you, he won't mind my saying that; he never minds what I say, or what anybody says, for that matter. He doesn't answer a question for about half an hour, as a rule."

Nevertheless, the painter answered the lady's question under the time specified; but all he said was, "I think we ought to consult the inn-keeper."

“Oh, very well,” cried the resilient Hurrel, leaping up. “I’ll do that now, if you like. Back in a minute.” And he disappeared again through the dark interior of the inn.

“Our friend is very eager,” said the squire, smiling; “but, after all, those are the sort of people who get things done. I mean practical things.”

The lady was again looking at the painter with a slightly constricted brow; she seemed to be almost sorry for him in his comparative eclipse; but he only smiled and said: “No, I’m no good at practical things.”

Almost as he spoke a noise like a sort of cry came through the inn from the road beyond, and Dr. Garth sprang to his feet and stood peering in at the door. The next moment Gale also seemed to rouse himself with a sort of sudden agitation; and the moment after that the others were all following the doctor, who had already started through the house. But when he came to the front door Gale turned for a moment, barring the exit with his tall figure, and said:

“Don’t let the lady come out.”

The squire had already seen over the painter’s shoulder a horrible instantaneous image. It was the black figure of a man hanging from the signboard of the Rising Sun.

It was only instantaneous; for the next moment Dr. Garth had cut him down, with the assistance of Hurrel, who had presumably uttered the first cry of alarm. The man over whom the doctor was bending was the unfortunate inn-keeper; and this was apparently the form in which he took his prussic acid.

After being busy in silence for a few moments, the doctor gave a grunt of relief and said:

“He’s not dead; in fact he’ll be all right presently.” Then he said, with a sort of disgust: “Why the devil did I leave that rope there instead of tying up my bag like a tidy professional man? I forgot all about it in all this fuss. Well, Mr. Hurrel, the sun nearly rose too late for somebody.”

Hurrel and the doctor carried the unfortunate inn-keeper into his inn, the latter declaring that the would-be suicide would soon be in a position to be questioned, if questioning was necessary. Gale paced up and down outside in his aimless fashion, frequently frowning at the sign that had served as a gallows (and the table that had probably served as the proverbial stool kicked away) with a frown that seemed not only pained but puzzled.

“This is a most distressing business,” said the squire. “Of course I am a magistrate and all that, but I should hate to have to trouble the poor fellow with the police.” At the sound of the word, Gabriel Gale swung round and said in a loud harsh voice:

“Oh, I forgot the police. Of course, he must be locked up in a cell to show him that life is worth living after all, and the world a bright, happy place to live in.”

He laughed shortly and frowned heavily, and then after ruminating a moment, said with a certain abruptness:

“Look here, I want to ask you a favour, which may seem an odd one. I want you to let me question this poor chap when he comes to. Give me ten minutes alone with him, and I will promise to cure him of suicidal mania better than a policeman could.”

“But why you especially?” asked the doctor, in some natural annoyance.

“Because I am no good at practical things,” answered Gale, “and you have got beyond practical things.”

There was another silence, and he spoke again with the same strange air of authority.

“What you want is an unpractical man. That is what people always want in the last resort and the worst conditions. What can practical men do here? Waste their practical time in running after the poor fellow and cutting him down from one pub sign after another? Waste their practical lives watching him day and night, to see he doesn’t get hold of a rope or a razor? Do you call that practical? You can only forbid him to die. Can you persuade him to live? Believe me, that is where we come in. A man must have his head in the clouds and his wits wool-gathering in fairyland, before he can do anything so practical as that.”

The group felt a growing bewilderment at his new attitude; it seemed to fill the stage in a strange fashion; nor was it lessened when he actually or apparently fulfilled his undertaking, coming out of the inn twenty minutes afterwards, and cheerfully announcing that the inn-keeper would not hang himself again. The next moment he had jumped on to the table under the sign with a large piece of chalk in his hand, and was making sketchy and slashing strokes of design on the brown face of the Rising Sun.

Lady Diana was looking on at the operation with a dark and watchful face. She was of a type more intellectual than the others, and she recognized a real thread of thought running through all that seemed to them transcendental tomfoolery. She had understood the implied irony of his first reference to their host; the moral that had come before the frightful fable. After all, they had certainly been thinking of everything about the inn except the inn-keeper. She could see there was an intelligent case, and a practical example, of the occasions when the poet can be more useful than the policeman. But she was conscious also of something baffling about him above and beyond all this; of a disquiet in him with some deeper cause, and something in his eye that belied the new levity of his manner. His draughtsmanship, however, was proceeding in the most dashing and even dazzling fashion, when Lady Diana spoke:

"I can't think how you can do it," she said, "on the very place where a man has hung himself like Judas."

"It was the treason, not the despair of Judas, that was really bad," he answered. "I was just thinking of something like that for the picture. I prefer it to Apollo and all that, for a treatment of the sunrise. Look here, you have a big head blocked in with some shadows, in the centre," and he made some bold markings on the sun's disc. "His dark face hidden in his hands like that, but a burst of golden dawn behind like a glory. Red bars of level cloud and a red cock, just there. The greatest of sinners and of saints; his reproach the cock, and his halo the Rising Sun."

The nameless shadow seemed to have fallen from him as he talked and worked; and by an almost symbolic coincidence the strong afternoon sun fell with a strange fullness and splendour upon him and his work, which shone out against a blackening background of clouds continually gathering and darkening on the stormy side of the valley, beyond the ford. Against those masses of sinister purple and indigo, his figure looked like that of some legendary craftsman clad in gold and painting the frescoes of a golden chapel. The impression increased as the head and halo of St. Peter grew under his hand; and the lady was of the sort not disinclined to dream herself back in some distant period, about which she did not know too much. She felt herself back among the sacred arts and crafts of the medieval world; which were all she knew of the medieval world.

Unfortunately, a shadow came between her and the sun in a shape that did not remind her of the medieval world. Mr. James Hurrel, the agent, his stiff hat a little on one side, jumped on to the same table on which the artist stood, and sat within two yards of him, with dangling legs, and somewhat aggressive cigar. "Always have to keep an eye on him, your ladyship, or he’d be giving ’em away,” he called out, and somehow his voice and figure failed to fit in with the picture of pious and primitive craftsmanship.

Diana Westermaine explained to herself lucidly that she had no sort of reason to be angry; but she was exceedingly angry. The conversation of the two had been of no particular intimacy; but its increase to three had a very practical and painful effect of intrusion. She could not imagine why the artist, who was a gentleman, should go about with such a little bounder as his business adviser; and she wanted to hear more about the picture of St. Peter, or something interesting. As the agent sat down he had audibly observed something about making room for a little one. If he, at that moment, had been suddenly suspended from the sign, it is doubtful if the lady would have cut him down.

At this moment a much quieter voice said in her ear: “Excuse me, but might I have one word with you?”

She turned and found Dr. Garth, with his bag in his hand, evidently about to resume his journey at last.

“I’m going,” he said, “and I feel I really ought to tell you something before I go.”

He drew her a little way up the road of his departure, and then turned with an abrupt and hurried air of farewell.

“Doctors are often in delicate situations,” he said, “and a troublesome sense of duty drives me to saying a rather delicate thing. I tell it to you and not your brother, because I think you have a long way the better nerve of the two. There is something I suspect about those two men who go about painting signs.”

From where they stood on the higher ground she could still see the sign itself shining with its new accretion of colours, and the tall, actively moving figure, shining also with sunlight, and from that distance altogether dwarfing the small and dingy figure near his feet. There returned on her still more strongly the vision of a true creator, making pure colours in the innocent morning of the world.

“They are called the Heavenly Twins,” went on the doctor, “because they are inseparable. Well, there are many kinds of couples that are inseparable, and many causes for their never separating. But there is one sort that specially concerns me, and I should be sorry to see mixed up with you.”

“I haven’t the least idea what you mean,” replied Lady Diana.

“What about a lunatic and his keeper?” said the doctor, and walked on rapidly along the road, leaving her behind him.

She had the sensation of furiously flinging a suggestion from her, from the top of a high tower to the bottom of an abyss, combined with the sensation that the tower was not high enough nor the abyss deep enough; she even had the novel sensation that there was something weak about her throwing. While the tower of her mind was still rocking with the effort, she was interrupted by her brother, who came hastily, and even excitedly, towards her.

“I’ve just asked these gentlemen across to our place,” he said, “to fix up this business better. And we’d better be starting, for there’s a storm beating up, and even the ford sometimes gets pretty dicky. As it is, we shall have to cross two at a time in our own rotten old cart.”

It was in a sort of dream that she found herself again untethering the horse and again taking the reins. It was in a dream that she heard the voice that irritated her so much saying, “Heavenly Twins, you know, Heavenly Twins; we mustn’t be parted”; and then the voice of the squire replying, “Oh, it’ll only be for a minute, anyhow; she’ll send Wilson back with the dog-cart at once. There’s only room for two at a time, I’m afraid.” They stood a little way back in the doorway of the inn as they talked, and Gabriel Gale had just stepped from the table and was standing nearer to the dog-cart.

Then there surged up in her suddenly she knew not what movement of impatience or defiance; and she said in a matter-of-fact tone: “Are you coming first, Mr. Gale?”

The face of the artist blanched as if he were blasted with white lightning in the sun-light. He gave one look over his shoulder and then leapt into the seat beside her, and the horse threw up his head and began to move towards the ford. The rain must have already fallen further upstream, for there was already the sensation of water flowing more deeply about the horse’s legs; and, though they were only fording a river, she had a hazy sensation of crossing a Rubicon.

Enoch Wilson, the groom, one of the small group left at Westermaine Abbey, died and was gathered to his fathers without having the faintest notion of the determining part which he played in the dark events of that night. And his private life, though, like that of other immortal spirits, of an intense interest, does not in any other point affect this story. It is enough to say that he was rather deaf, and, like many grooms, more sympathetic with the moods of horses than of men. Lady Diana sought him out in the stable, which stood far from the house and near the river, and told him to take the dog-cart back for the rest of the party. She spoke hurriedly and told him to hurry, because the rain would soon make the ford difficult; and her phrases, combined with his own bias, turned his mind chiefly to a consideration of the horse. He drove across under the gathering storm, and as he drew near the dark inn he heard high and excited voices. Mr. Hurrel was evidently hot upon his hobby or campaign. The groom got the impression that there was a quarrel; and took a few testy words from his master as meaning that he was not to be disturbed. So the careful Wilson took the horse back across the ford and back into the stable, congratulating himself on having saved the valuable quadruped from the worst inconveniences of what threatened to be a flood. Then he betook himself to his own occupations, leaving a trail of destiny behind him.

Meanwhile Diana Westermaine had left the stable and made her way across the grounds to rejoin the guest who had gone in front of her. As she went up through a lane of hollyhocks and tall plants, she saw the vast flying island or continent of rain cloud, with its volcanic hues and outline, come sailing slowly over the dark, wooded ridge that was the wall of the valley. There was already something faintly lurid about the twilight with which it covered the rich colours of the garden; but higher up the climbing path a strip of lawn was golden in a chance gleam of sunlight, and against it she saw the figure she had come to seek. She recognized it by the light-brown clothes that had looked like gold in the evening light, but there was something very extraordinary about the shape as distinct from the colour. He seemed to be waving his arms slowly like branches in a breeze, and she fancied the arms were unnaturally long. For an instant she had the ugly fancy that the figure was deformed; and yet the more unearthly fancy that it had no head. Then the nightmare turned into ordinary nonsense, for the man threw a sort of cartwheel and alighted on his feet laughing. He had actually been standing on his head, or rather on his hands.

“Excuse me,” he said, “I often do that. It’s a very good thing for a landscape-painter to see the landscape upside down. He sees things then as they really are; yes, and that’s true in philosophy as well as art.” He brooded and then explained explosively.

"It's all very well to talk about being topsy-turvy. But when the angels hang head downwards, we know they come from above. It's only those that come from below that always have their noses in the air."

Despite his hilarious manner, she approached him with a certain subconscious fear; which was not lessened when he lowered his voice and added: "Shall I tell you a secret?"

At the same moment were heard overhead the first heavy movements of the thunder, through which his voice came, perhaps, with an accidental air as of loud whispering.

"The world is upside down. We're all upside down. We're all flies crawling on a ceiling, and it's an everlasting mercy that we don't drop off."

At that instant the twilight turned to a white blaze of lightning; and she was shocked to see that his face was quite serious.

She said with a sort of irritation, "You do say such crazy things," and the next moment her voice was lost in the thronging echoes of the thunder, which seemed to shake everything, shouting the same word again and again… crazy, crazy, crazy. She had unconsciously given a word for the worst thought in her mind.

As yet no rain had fallen on the garden slopes, though the noise of it was already troubling the river beyond. But even had it done so, she herself doubted if the man would have noticed it. Even in more normal moments he seemed to be one who singly pursued a solitary train of thought, and he was still talking, like a man talking to himself, about the rationality of topsy-turvydom.

"We were talking about St. Peter," he said; "you remember that he was crucified upside down. I've often fancied his humility was rewarded by seeing in death the beautiful vision of his boyhood. He also saw the landscape as it really is: with the stars like flowers, and the clouds like hills, and all men hanging on the mercy of God."

Then a heavy drop of rain fell on him; and the effect of it was indescribable. It seemed to sting him like a wasp and wake him out of a trance. He started and stared round; and then said in a new and more natural voice:

"My God, where is Hurrel? What are the others doing? Aren't they here yet?"

With an impulse not to be analysed, Diana dashed through the swaying plants to the top of a neighbouring hillock, and looked across the valley to the inn of the Rising Sun. And she saw flowing between them and that place a heavier and wider flood, which in that wild moment looked impassable, like the river of death.

In a strange way it seemed to her a symbol of something greater than the mere grim realism that would have told her, now only too plainly, that she was left alone with a lunatic. Somehow it seemed that the lunacy itself was only a sort of abominable accident and obstacle between her and something that might have been beautiful and a satisfaction of the soul. Another dark river was flowing between her and her own fairyland.

At the same moment Gabriel Gale gave a terrible cry; he also had seen afar off the sundering flood.

“You were right, after all,” he said. “You spoke of Judas, when I dared to speak of Peter. I have blasphemed and done the unpardonable sin. I am the traitor now.” Then he added in lower and heavier tones: “Yes, I am the man who sold God.”

The girl’s mind was growing clearer with the cold pain of reality. She had heard that maniacs sometimes accused themselves of the unpardonable sin. Something of her natural courage returned also, and she was ready to do anything, though she did not yet see very clearly what to do. As she was fighting for a solution, the question was settled for her in some degree by her companion himself, who started running down the slope.

“I must get across again if I swim the river,” he said. “I ought never to be away from Hurrel like this. I can never tell what will happen next.”

She followed his descent, and was rather surprised to see him deflect it to dart towards the stable. Before she knew where she was, he was struggling with the horse and dragging it out into the shafts; and she felt an irrational pleasure in the fact that he had the strength of a man, if it was the strength of a madman. But her own high spirit and self-respect had returned to her, and there rose in her a furious refusal to be a passive spectator of what might well be merely a suicide. After all, however mad he might be, the man was doing the right thing in trying to rejoin his medical attendant; and she would not have the last effort of his sanity frustrated by the antics of his disease.

“I’ll drive if we must,” she said in a ringing tone. “He’ll go better with me.”

The sun had set behind the hills opposite, and night was already deepening the darkness of the storm. As the rocking vehicle splashed up to the hub of its wheel in the eddying water, she could only faintly see the long water-rushes streaming with the stream, as if they were indeed the shades of the underworld hovering without hope beside the Styx. But she had no longer need to call it, merely in metaphor, a river of death. Death was driving hard against horse and cart, staggering the insecure foothold of the one, and swaying the human burden of the other; the thunder was about their ears, and on their dreadful path scarce any light but the lightning; and her human companion was a man uttering a monologue, of which she heard snatches, more shocking than the thunder. All the reason and realism in her told her that he might at any moment tear her in pieces. But underneath all such things there was something else contrary and incredible; something in the need and the companionship, and the courage and heroism she was showing; and it was too deep in her dizzy soul for her to know that it was exultation.

The horse almost fell just as they came to the end of the ford, but Gale sprang from the cart and held it, standing knee-deep in water.

In a lull in the noise of the storm she heard for the first time voices from the inn beside the river… voices high, and even shrill, as if the altercation that the groom had heard had risen steadily like the rise of the storm. Then there came what sounded like the crash of a falling chair. Gale dragged the horse to land with the energy of a demon, then dropped the bridle, and set off running towards the inn.

Even as he did so a piercing shriek rose into the night from the doors of that solitary and sinister tavern by the river. It died away in a wailing echo along the reedy banks of the river itself, as if the reeds were indeed the lost spirits by the river of Hades; and the very thunder seemed to have stopped and held its breath to hear it. Then before the thunder moved again came one wide flash of lightning, as wide as an instantaneous daylight, picking out the most minute details of the distance, of the branches and twigs upon the wooded heights, and the clover in the flat fields beside the river. And with the same clarity she saw for an instant something incredible and abominable, and yet not wholly new or unfamiliar… something that returned in the waking world as a detested nightmare will return in sleep. It was the black figure of a man dangling from the painted gallows of the Rising Sun. But it was not the same man.

Diana was convinced for the moment that she herself had gone mad. She could only imagine dully that her own mind had snapped under the strain, and that the dark objects she saw were but dancing dots upon a void. But one of those black dots had certainly seemed to be the figure of her own brother thus lassoed to the beam; and the other black dot, literally a dancing dot, had been the figure of that energetic business man, Mr. James Hurrel. For just then his energy was taking the form of dancing; he was hopping and capering with excitement in front of that frightful signboard.

Darkness followed the flash, and a moment after she heard the great voice of Gale himself, a larger and louder voice than she had imagined him to possess, bellowing through the darkness and the stress of wind. "It's all right… he's quite safe now." Little as she understood of anything yet, she understood with a cold thrill that they had come just in time.

She was still dazed when she staggered somehow through the din and distraction of the tempest into the inn parlour, with a smoky lamp on the table, and the three figures of that frustrated tragedy around it. The squire, her brother, in a sort of collapse of convalescence, sat or lay in an arm-chair with a stiff dose of brandy in front of him. Gabriel Gale was standing up, like one who had taken command, with a face as white but as hard as marble. He was speaking to the man named Hurrel in low level, and quiet tones, but with one finger pointed, as when a man speaks to a dog.

"Go over there and sit by the window," he said. "You must keep quite quiet."

The man obeyed, taking a seat at the other end of the room, and looked out of the window at the storm, without hearing or seeking to hear the talk of the others.

"What does it all mean?" asked Diana at last. "I thought you… the truth is Dr. Garth gave me a hint that you were only a lunatic and his keeper."

"And so we are, as you see," answered Gale; "but the keeper has behaved far worse than the lunatic."

"But I thought you were the lunatic," she said with simplicity.

"No," he replied; "I am the criminal."

They had drawn nearer to the doorway, and their voices also were covered by the noise of the elements, so that they were almost as much alone as when they stood beyond the river. She remembered the earlier dialogue, and the violent and mysterious language he had used in it; and she said doubtfully:

"You said things like that and worse over the other side, and that's what made me think so. I couldn't understand why you should say such wild things against yourself."

"I suppose I do talk rather wildly," he said. "Perhaps you were not so wrong, after all, and I have a streak of sympathy with lunatics… and that's why I can manage them. Anyhow, I happen to be the only person who can manage this particular lunatic. It's a long story, and perhaps I shall tell it some day. This poor fellow once did me a great service, and I feel I can only repay it by looking after him and saving him from the infernal brutality of officials. You see, the truth is they say I have a talent for it… a sort of psychological imagination. I generally know what they're going to do or fancy next. I've known a lot of them, one way or another… religious maniacs who thought they were divine or damned, or what not, and revolutionary maniacs, who believed in dynamite or doing without clothes; or philosophical lunatics, of whom I could tell you some tall stories, too… men who behaved as if they lived in another world and under different stars, as I suppose they did. But of all the maniacs I have tried to manage, the maddest of all maniacs was the man of business."

He smiled rather sourly, and then the tragedy returned to his face as he went on:

"As for your other question, I may have talked wildly against myself, but I didn't talk worse than I deserve. Hadn't I deserted my post, like a traitor? Didn't I leave my wretched friend in the lurch, like a Judas? It's true he'd never broken out like this before; but I was sure in my heart there was one of his antics mixed up with that first affair of the inn-keeper. But the inn-keeper really was suicidal, and I fancy Hurrel only helped him, so to speak; but it was that that put the damnable notion in his head. I never dreamed he would break out against your brother, or I would… but why do I try to make excuses when there is no excuse? I followed my own will till it went within an inch of murder; and it's I who ought to be hanging from the wooden sign, if hanging weren't too good for me."

"But why…" she began automatically, and then stopped dead, with the sense of a whole new world surging up against her.

"Ah, why," he repeated with a changed voice; "but I think you know why. It is not your fault, but you know why. You know what has often made a sentinel leave his post. You know what brought Troilus out of Troy and perhaps Adam out of Eden. And I have neither the need nor the right to tell you."

She stood looking out into the darkness, and her face wore a singular smile.

"Well, there's the other story you promised to tell some day," she said. "Perhaps you will tell it me if we meet again." And she held out her hand in farewell.

The sinister and fantastic partners had set off again next morning when the sun first shone upon the road; the storm had rolled away along the valley and the birds were singing after the rain. Stranger things yet were to happen before he and she should meet again; but for the moment she had a curious relapse into repose and contemplation. She reminded herself of the words about the world being upside down; and thought it had indeed turned upside down many times in that single night. And she could not analyse the sensation that, in spite of everything, it had come the right side up.

THE YELLOW BIRD

FIVE men had halted at the top of a hill overlooking a valley beautiful enough to be called a vision, but too neglected ever to have been vulgarised by being called a view. They were a sketching club on a walking tour; but when they had come to that place they did no more walking, and, strangely enough, very little sketching. It was as if they had come to some quiet end of the world; that corner of the earth seemed to have a curious effect on them, varying with their various personalities, but acting on all as something arresting and vaguely final. Yet the quality was as nameless as it was unique; there was nothing definably different from twenty other wooded valleys in those western shires upon the marches of Wales. Green slopes dived into a fringe of dark forests that looked black by comparison, but the grey columns of which were mirrored in the curving river like a long winding colonnade. Only a little way along, on one side of the river, the bank was cleared of timber, and formed a platform for old gardens and orchards, in the midst of which stood an old tall house, of a rich brown brick with blue shutters, and rather neglected creepers clinging to it, more like moss to a stone than like flowers to a flower-bed. The roof was flat, with a chimney near the centre of it, from which a thin thread of smoke was drawn up into the sky; the only sign that the house was not wholly deserted. Of the five men who looked down at the landscape, only one had any special reason for looking at the house.

The eldest of the artists, a dark, active, ambitious man in spectacles, destined to be famous afterwards under the name of Luke Walton, was affected by the place in a curious fashion. It seemed to tease him like a fly or something elusive; he could not please himself with a point of view, but was perpetually shifting his camp-stool from place to place, crossing and recrossing the theatre of these events amid the jeers of his companions. The second, a heavy, fair-haired man named Hutton, stared at the scene in a somewhat bovine fashion, made a few lines on a sketching block, and then announced in a loud voice that it was a good place for a picnic, and that he was going to have his lunch. The third painter agreed with him; but as he was said to be a poet as well as a painter, he was expected to show a certain fervour for any opportunities of avoiding work. Indeed, this particular artist, whose name was Gabriel Gale, did not seem disposed even to look at the landscape, far less to paint it; but after taking a bite out of a ham sandwich, and a swig at somebody else's flask of claret, incontinently lay down on his back under a tree and stared up at the twilight of twinkling leaves; some believing him to be asleep, while others more generously supposed him to be composing poetry. The fourth, a smaller and more alert man named Garth, could only be regarded as an honorary member of the artistic group; for he was more interested in science than in art, and carried not a paint-box but a camera. Nevertheless, he was, not without an intelligent appreciation of scenery, and he was in the act of fixing up his photographic apparatus so that it covered the angle of the river where stood the neglected garden and the distant house. And at that moment the fifth man, who had not yet moved or spoken, made so abrupt and arresting a gesture that one might say that he struck up the camera, like a gun pointed to kill.

"Don't," he said; "it's bad enough when they try to paint it."

"What's the matter?" asked Garth. "Don't you like that house?"

"I like it too much," said the other, "or rather, I love it too much to like it at all."

The fifth man who spoke was the youngest of the party, but he had already at least some local success and celebrity; partly because he had devoted his talent to the landscape and legends of that countryside, and partly because he came of a family of small squires whose name was historic in those hills. He was tall, with dark-brown hair and a long brown face, with a high-bridged nose that looked rather distinguished than handsome; and there was a permanent cloud of consideration on his brow that made him seem much older than his years. He alone of all these men had made no gesture, either of labour or relaxation, on coming to the crest of the hill. While Walton went to and fro, and Hutton started cheerfully on his meal, and Gale flung himself on the couch of leaves to look up into the tree-tops, this man had stood like a statue looking across the valley to the house, and it was only when Garth pointed his camera that he had even lifted a hand.

Garth turned on him a humorous face, in spite of its hard angular features; for the little scientist was a man of admirable good temper.

"I suppose there's a story about it," he said; "you look as if you were in quite a confidential mood. If you like to tell me, I assure you I can keep a secret. I'm a medical man and have to keep secrets, especially those of the insane. That ought to encourage you."

The younger man, whose name was John Mallow, continued to gaze moodily across the valley, but there was something about him that suggested that the other had guessed right, and he was about to speak.

"Don't bother about the others," said Garth, "they can't hear; they're too busy doing nothing. Hutton," he called out in much more strident tones, "Gale, are you fellows listening?"

"Yes; I'm listening to the birds," came the half-buried voice of Gale out of his leafy lair.

"Hutton's asleep," observed Garth with satisfaction. "No wonder, after all that lunch. Are you asleep, Gale?"

"Not asleep, but dreaming," answered the other. "If you look up long enough, there isn't any more up or down, but a sort of green, dizzy dream; with birds that might as well be fishes. They're just odd shapes of different colours against the green, brown and grey, and one of them looks quite yellow."

"A yellow-hammer, I suppose," remarked Garth.

"It doesn't look like a hammer," said Gale, sleepily; "not such an odd shape as all that."

"Ass!" said Garth briefly. "Did you expect it to look like an auctioneer's hammer? You poets who are so strong about Nature are generally weak in natural history. Well, Mallow," he added, turning to his companion, "you've nothing to fear from them, if you like to talk in an ordinary voice. What about this house of yours?"

"It's not mine," said Mallow. "As a matter of fact, it belongs to an old friend of my mother's, a Mrs. Verney, a widow. The place has very much run to seed now, as you see, for the Verneys have got poorer and poorer, and don't know what to do next, which is the beginning of the trouble. But I have passed happier times there than I shall probably ever have again."

"Was Mrs. Verney so enchanting a character?" asked his friend softly; "or may I take the liberty of supposing there was a rising generation?"

"Unfortunately for me, it is a very rising generation," replied Mallow. "It rises in a sort of small revolution; and it rises rather above my head." Then, after a silence, he said somewhat abruptly, "Do you believe in lady doctors?"

"I don't believe in any doctors," answered Garth. "I'm one myself."

"Well, it isn't exactly lady doctors, I believe, but it's something of that sort," went on Mallow; "study of psychological science, and so on. Laura has got it very badly, and is helping some Russian psychologist or other.”

“Your narrative style is a little sketchy,” remarked Dr. Garth, “but I suppose I may infer that Laura is a daughter of Mrs. Verney, and also that Laura has some logical connexion with the happy days that will not return.”

“Suppose it all, and have done with it,” replied the young man. “You know what I mean; but the real point is this. Laura has all the new ideas, and has persuaded her mother to come down off the high horse of genteel poverty in all sorts of ways. I don’t say she’s not right in that; but as it works out there are some curious complications. For one thing, Laura not only earns her own living but earns it in the laboratory of this mysterious Muscovite; and for another, she has bounced her mother into taking a paying guest. And the paying guest is the mysterious Muscovite again, who wants a quiet rest in the country.”

“And I suppose, I may take it,” said the doctor, “that you feel there is a little too much of the Muscovite in your young life?”

“As a matter of fact, he moved into the house late last night,” continued Mallow, “and I suppose that’s really why I drifted in this direction this morning, trailing you all at my heels. I said it was a beautiful place, and so it is; but I don’t want to paint it, and I don’t even want to visit it; but all the same, I had a vague sort of feeling I should like to be somewhere near.”

“And, as you couldn’t get rid of us, you brought us along,” said Garth with a smile. “Well, I think I can understand all that. Do you know anything about this Russian professor?”

“I know nothing whatever against him,” answered the other. “He is a very famous man both in science and politics. He escaped from a Siberian prison in the old days, by blowing up the wall with a bomb of his own construction; it’s quite an exciting story, and he must at least be a man of courage. He has written a great book called *The Psychology of Liberty,* I believe; and Laura is very keen on his views. It’s rather an indescribable thing altogether; she and I are very fond of each other, and I don’t think she mistakes me for a fool, and I don’t think I am a fool. But whenever we have met lately it has been literally like a meeting on a high road, when two people are going opposite ways. And I think I know what it is; she is always going outwards, and I am always going inwards. The more I see of the world, and the more men I meet or books I read or questions I answer, the more I come back with increased conviction to those places where I was born or played as a boy, narrowing my circles like a bird going back to a nest. That seems to me the end of all travel, and especially of the widest travel… to get home. But she has another idea in her mind. It's not only that she says that old brown brick house is like a prison, or that the hills are like walls shutting her in; I dare say things do get pretty dull in such a place. There's a theory in it, too, which I suppose she's got from her psychological friend. She says that even in her own valley, and in her own garden, the trees only grow because they radiate outwards, which is only the Latin for branching. She says the very word 'radiant' shows it is the secret of happiness. There is something in it, I suppose; but I radiate inwards, so to speak; that is why I paint all my pictures of this little corner of the world. If I could only paint this valley, I might go on to paint that garden; and, if only I could paint that garden, I might be worthy to paint the creeper under her window."

The sleeping Hutton awoke with an uproarious yawn, and lifting himself from his bed of leaves, wandered away to where the more industrious Walton had at last settled down to work on the other side of the hill. But the poet Gale still lay gazing at his topsy-turvydom of tree-tops. And the only reply he would make to a further challenge from Garth was to say heavily. "They've driven the yellow one away."

"Who have driven what away?" demanded Mallow, rather irritably.

"The other birds attacked the yellow one and drove it away," said the poet.

"Regarded it as an undesirable alien, no doubt," said Garth.

"The Yellow Peril," said Gale, and relapsed into his dreams.

Mallow had already resumed his monologue:

"The name of this psychologist is Ivanhov, and he's said to be writing another great book in his country retreat; I believe she is acting as his secretary. It is to embody some mathematical theory about the elimination of limits and…"

"Hullo!" cried Garth. "This moated grange of yours is actually coming to life. Somebody is actually beginning to open a window."

"You haven't been looking at it as I have," answered Mallow quietly. "Just round the angle on the left there's a little window that's been open all the time. That belongs to the little sitting-room out of the spare bedroom. It used to be Laura's room, and still has a lot of her things in it; but I think they give it now to their guests."

"Including, doubtless, their paying guest," observed Garth.

"He's a queer sort of guest. I only hope he's a paying one," returned the other. "That big window where they just opened the shutters is at the end of the long library; all these windows belong to it. I expect they'll stick the philosopher in there if he wants to philosophise."

"The philosopher seems to be philosophical about draughts," observed Dr. Garth; "he or somebody else has opened three more windows, and seems to be struggling with another."

Even as he spoke the fifth window burst open, and even from where they stood they could see a creeper that had strayed across it snap and drop with the gesture. It had the look of the snapping of some green chain securing the house like a prison. It had almost the look of the breaking of the seal of a tomb.

For Mallow, against all his prejudices, felt the presence and pressure of that revolutionary ideal which he recognized as his rival. All along the shattered faÃ§ade of the old brown house the windows were opening one after another like the eyes of an Argus waking from his giant sleep. He was forced to admit to himself that he had never seen the place thus coming to life from within, as a plant unfolds itself. The last three windows were now open to the morning; the long room must already be full of light, to say nothing of air. Garth had spoken of a philosopher enduring draughts; but it seemed more as if a pagan priest had been turned into a temple of the winds. But there was more in that morning vision than the mere accident of a row of windows open when they were commonly closed. The same fancy about unfolding life seemed to fill the whole scene like a new atmosphere. It was as if a fresh air had streamed out of the windows instead of into them. The sun was already fairly high, but it came out of the morning mists above the house with something of the silent explosion of daybreak. The very shapes of the forest trees, spreading themselves like fans, seemed to repeat the original word "radiant", which he had thought of almost as a Latin pun. Sailing over his head, as if sent flying by a sort of centrifugal force, the clouds still carried into the height of noon the colours of sunrise. He felt all the fresh things that he feared coming at him by an irrepressible expansion. Everything seemed to enlarge itself. Even when his eye fell on a stunted gate-post standing alone in the old garden, he could fancy that it swelled as he stared at it.

A sharp exclamation from his friend woke him from his unnatural day-dream, which might rather be called, by a contradiction, a white nightmare of light.

“By blazes! he’s found another window,” cried the doctor; “a window in the roof.”

There was, indeed, the gleam of a skylight which caught the sun at an angle as it was forced upwards, and out of the opening emerged the moving figure of a man. Little could be seen of him at that distance, except that he was tall and slim and had yellow hair which looked like gold in the strong sun. He was dressed in some long, light-coloured garment, probably a dressing-gown, and he stretched his long limbs as if with the sleepy exultation of one arisen from sleep.

“Look here!” said Mallow suddenly, an indescribable expression flashing across his face and vanishing; “I’m going to pay a call.”

“I rather thought you might,” answered Garth. “Do you want to go alone?”

As he spoke he looked round for the rest of the company, but Walton and Hutton were still chatting some distance away on the other side of the hill, and only Gale still lay in the shadow of the thick trees staring up at the birds, as if he had never stirred. Garth called to him by name, but it was only after a silence that Gale spoke. What he said was:

“Were you ever an isosceles triangle?

“Very seldom,” replied Garth with restraint. “May I ask what the devil you are talking about?”

“Only something I was thinking about,” answered the poet, lifting himself on to one elbow. “I wondered whether it would be a cramping sort of thing to be surrounded by straight lines, and whether being in a circle would be any better. Did anybody ever live in a round prison?”

“Where do you get these cracked notions?” inquired the doctor.

“A little bird told me,” Gale said gravely. “Oh, it’s quite true.”

He had risen to his feet by this time, and came slowly forward to the brow of the hill, looking across at the house by the river. As he looked his dreamy blue eyes seemed to wake up, like the windows opening in the house he gazed at.

“Another bird,” he said softly, “like a sparrow on the house-tops. And that fits in with it exactly.”

There was some suggestion of truth in the phrase, for the strange figure was standing on the very edge of the roof, with space below him and his hands spread out almost as if he wished to fly. But the last sentence, and still more the strange manner in which it was spoken, puzzled the doctor completely.

“Fits in with what?” he asked, rather sharply.

“He’s like that yellow bird,” said Gale vaguely. “In fact, he is a yellow bird, with that hair and the sun on him. What did you say you thought it was… a yellow-hammer?”

“Yellow-hammer yourself,” retorted Garth; “you’re quite as yellow as he is. In fact, with your long legs and straw-coloured hair, you’re really rather like him.”

Mallow, in his more mystical mood, looked strangely from one to the other, for indeed there was a certain vague similarity between the two tall, fair-haired figures, the one on the house and the other on the hill.

“Perhaps I am rather like him,” said Gale quietly. “Perhaps I’m just sufficiently like him to learn not to be like him, so to speak. We may both be birds of a feather, the yellow feather; but we don’t flock together, because he likes to flock by himself. And as to being a hammer, yellow or otherwise, well, that also is an allegory.”

“I decline to make head or tail of your allegories,” said Dr. Garth shortly.

“I used to want a hammer to smash things with,” continued Gale; “but I’ve learnt to do something else with a hammer, which is what a hammer is meant for; and every now and then I manage to do it.”

“What do you mean by that?” inquired the doctor.

“I can hit the right nail on the head,” answered the poet.

It was not, in fact, until later in the day that Mallow paid his call at Mrs. Verney’s house. Mrs. Verney was going up to the neighbouring village for the afternoon; and Mallow had more than one motive for making his attack when the stranger was alone with his secretary. He had a general idea of using his friends to detach or detain the stranger while he himself sought for explanation from the secretary; so he dragged Garth and Gale along with him to Mrs. Verney’s drawing-room; or rather he would have done so if Gale had been an easy person to drag successfully anywhere. But Gale had a tendency to get detached from any such group, and was always being left behind. Large as he was, he had a way of getting mislaid. His friends forgot him, as they had almost forgotten him when he was lying under the tree. It was not that he was unsociable; on the contrary, he was very fond of his friends and very fond of his opinions, and always delighted to detail the latter to the former. Strangers would have said that he was very fond of the sound of his own voice, but friends who were fond of him knew better. They knew that he had hardly ever heard his own voice, in the sense of listening to it. What made his movements incalculable was that his thinking or talking would start from any small thing that seemed to him a large thing. What are to most men impressions, or half impressions, were to him incidents; and the chief incidents of the day. Many imaginative people know what is meant by saying that certain empty rooms or open doors are suggestive; but he always acted on the suggestion. Most of them understand that there can be something vaguely inviting about a gap in a garden hedge, or the abrupt angle of a path; but he always accepted the invitation. The shape of a hill, or the corner of a house, checked him like a challenge. He wrestled with it seriously till it had given up something of its secret, till he could put something like a name to his nameless fancy; and these things were the active adventures of his life. Hence it was that he would sometimes follow one train of thought for hours, as steadily as a bird winging its way homewards. But it might start anywhere; and hence, in his actual movements, he looked more like a floating tuft of thistledown caught upon any thorn.

On this occasion his friends lost him, or left him behind, as they turned the corner of the house just after passing an old-fashioned bow-window looking out on the garden. Inside the window stood a small round table on which was a bowl of goldfish; and Gale stopped abruptly and stared at it as if he had never seen such a thing before. He had often maintained that the main object of a man’s life was to see a thing as if he had never seen it before. But in this case the twilight of the little empty room, touched here and there with the late afternoon sunlight, seemed somehow a subtle but suitable background for the thing that he saw. The heart of a dark green sphere was alive with little living flames.

“Why the devil do they call them goldfish?” he asked almost irritably. “They’re a much more gorgeous colour than gold; I’ve never seen it anywhere except in very rare red clouds in a sunset. Gold suggests yellow, and not the best yellow either; not half so good as the clear lemon yellow of that bird I saw today. They’re more like copper than gold. And copper is twenty times finer than gold. Why isn’t copper the most precious metal, I wonder?”

He paused a moment and then said reflectively:

“Would it do, I wonder, when one changed a cheque into gold, to give a man coppers instead, and explain that they have more of the rich tones of sunset?”

His inquiry remained unanswered, for he made it to the empty air. His companions were deficient in his sense of the importance of goldfish, and had gone on impatiently to the main entrance of the house, leaving him lingering by the bowl near the bow-window. He continued to look at it for a considerable time, and when at last he turned away, it was not to follow his friends, but to pace the paths of the garden in the deepening and darkening twilight, revolving in his mind some occult romance beginning with a bowl of fish.

Meanwhile, his more practical friends, pursuing the main purpose of the story, had penetrated into the house and found at least some members of the household. There had been many things in the garden or the gateway over which Mallow also might have been disposed to linger if his mood had been merely sentimental; an old swing standing by the corner of the orchard, the angle of a faded tennis lawn, the fork of a pear-tree, all of which had stories attached to them. But he was possessed of a passionate curiosity far too practical for sentiment of the merely reminiscent sort; he was resolved to run to earth the mystery of the new man in the old house. He felt that a change had come over everything with the man’s mere presence; and wished to know how far that change had gone. He half expected to see those familiar rooms swept bare, or filled with strange furniture where the stranger had passed.

Accident, indeed, gave to their passage through those empty rooms an air of pursuit, as if something were escaping. For, as they passed from an outer room into the long library, the stranger, who was at the other end by the window, emphasized his restless love of the open air by putting one long leg over the low window-sill and stepping out on to the lawn. He had evidently, however, no real desire to avoid them, for he stood there smiling in the sunlight, and uttered some greeting very pleasantly with a slight foreign accent. He was still wearing the long lemon-coloured dressing-gown which, along with his yellow hair, had suggested the comparison of a yellow bird. Under the yellow hair his brow was broad but not high, and the nose was not only long and straight, but came down in a single line from the forehead in the manner that may be seen on many Greek coins and carvings, but which has an unnatural and even sinister symmetry when seen in real life.

There was nothing else eccentric or exuberant about him; his manners were casual, but not ungraceful; and nothing contradicted the sunny ease of his situation and demeanour except, perhaps, a slightly strained look in the eyes, which were eager and prominent. Until his acquaintances grew accustomed to it, as a fixed involuntary feature of his face, they occasionally had a sort of shock when catching his quiet face in shadow and realizing that the round eyes were standing out of his head.

The first thing the eyes seemed to encounter was Dr. Garth's hand-camera; and, as soon as introductions and salutations had passed, he plunged into talk about photography. He prophesied its extension at the expense of painting, and brushed aside the objection, which even the doctor offered, that painting had the superiority in colour.

"Colour-photography will soon be completed," he said hastily; "or rather, it will never be completed, but will always be improved. That is the point of science. You know more or less finally what can be done, well or ill, with a draughtsman's chalk or a sculptor's chisel. But with us the instruments themselves are always changing. That's the real triumph of a telescope… that it is telescopic."

"Well," said Mallow grimly, "I shall wait for one more change in the camera as a scientific instrument before I cut up my old easel for firewood."

"What change is that?" asked the Russian with a kind of eagerness.

"I shall wait till one of those tall cameras walks on its own three legs along a country lane to pick out the view it likes best."

"Even something like that may be more possible than you think," replied the other. "In these days when a man has his eyes and ears at the end of long wires; his own nerves, so to speak, spread over a city in the form of telephones and telegraphs. A great modern city will become a great machine with its handle in the human hand. Thus only can a man become a giant."

John Mallow looked at the man rather darkly for a moment, and then said:

"If you are so very fond of a big modern city," he said, "why do you hide yourself in such a quiet little hole in the country?"

For a flash the stranger's face seemed to wince and alter in the white sunlight; but the next instant he was still smiling, though he spoke a little more apologetically.

“There is certainly more space” he answered. “I confess I like a lot of space. But even there the science of the city will ultimately provide its own remedy. The answer is in one word… aviation.”

Before the other could reply the speaker went on, his prominent eye kindling and his whole figure filling out with animation. He made a movement with his hand like a man throwing a stone into the air.

“It’s upwards the new extension will be,” he cried. “That road is wide enough, and that window is always open. The new roads will stand up like towers. The new harbours will stand far out in that sea above our heads… a sea you can never find the end of. It would only be a beginning to conquer the planets and colonize the fixed stars.”

“I think,” said Mallow, “that you will have conquered the remotest star before you really conquer this one old corner of the earth. It has a magic of its own which I think will outlast all such conjuring tricks. This was the house of Merlin; and, though they say Merlin himself fell under a spell, it was not that of Marconi.”

“No,” answered the stranger, still smiling. “We all know the spell under which Merlin fell.”

Mallow knew enough about Russian intellectuals not to be surprised at the wide knowledge of the poetry and culture of the West; but here it seemed the almost satiric symbol of a deeper familiarity, and a mocking whisper told him what might have chained this magician in that western valley.

Laura Verney was coming across the garden towards them with some papers in her hand. She was of a red-haired, full-blooded type, handsome in a fashion which seemed to have a certain pagan exuberance till she came near enough to show the concentrated seriousness of her clear eyes; she might be called a pagan with the eyes of a puritan. She saluted her guests without any change of countenance, and handed the papers to the professor without any word of comment. Something in her automatic manner seemed to sting Mallow to a final impatience; and, picking up his hat from the window-sill, he called out in a loud and careless voice:

“Laura, will you show me the way out of this garden? I’ve forgotten the way.”

It was some time afterwards, however, that he said any sort of final farewell to her, under the shadow of the outer wall, and near the ultimate gate of the garden. In the somewhat bitter intensity of his mood, he seemed rather to be exaggerating the finality of the farewell; not only touching herself, but all the things which he had always felt to be full of her presence.

“You will pull down that old swing, I suppose?” he had said as they went through the garden, “and put up an electric steel swing that will take anybody in ten seconds to the moon.”

“I can’t pull down the moon, anyhow,” replied the girl, with a smile, “and I don’t know that I want to.”

“That’s rather reactionary of you,” remarked Mallow. “The moon is a very extinct volcano, valuable only to old-fashioned romanticists. And I suppose you’ll turn our old lawn-tennis lawn into a place where tennis can be played by machinery, by pressing buttons a hundred miles away. I’m not sure whether they’ve yet finished the plans for a pear-tree that grows pears by electricity.”

“But surely,” she replied, looking a little troubled, “the world can go on without losing the things it seems to leave behind. And, after all, surely the world must go on; at least, it must go on growing. I think that’s where you misunderstand. It isn’t only going on; it’s more like growing outwards.

“It’s expansion, that’s the word; growing broader, always describing wider and wider circles; but that only means more self-fulfilment, and therefore serenity and peace; it means…”

She stopped short, as if at a spoken answer, but it was only because the moon had flung a new shadow across her. It was from a figure standing on the wall. The moonshine made a halo of pale yellow round the head; and for a moment they thought it was the Russian, standing on the wall as he had stood on the roof. Then Mallow looked more closely at the face in shadow, and uttered, with some astonishment, the name of Gale.

“You must get away from here at once,” said the poet sharply; “everybody who can must get away from this house. There’s no time to explain.”

As he spoke, he sprang from the wall and alighted beside them, and his friend, catching his face in a new light, saw that it was quite pale.

“What’s the matter with you?” he demanded. “Have you seen a ghost?”

“The ghost of a fish,” answered the poet; “three little grey ghosts of three little fishes. We must get away at once.”

Without turning his head again, he led the way up the rising ground beyond the garden towards the clump of trees where the party had first encamped. Both Mallow and the girl pursued him with questions; but to only one of them did he give any answer. When Laura insisted on knowing whether her mother had come home yet, he answered shortly, “No; thank God! I sent Garth off to stop her on the road from the village. She’s all right, anyhow.”

But Laura Verney was a lady who could not be indefinitely dragged at the tail of a total stranger talking in a tone of authority; and by the time they came to the top of a hill, and the trees in whose shadow the poet had indulged in his meditations on birds, she halted and resolutely demanded his reasons.

“I won’t go a step farther,” she said firmly, “till you’ve given me some sort of proofs.”

He turned with passion in his pale face.

“Oh, proofs!” he cried; “I know the sort of proofs you want. The footprints of the remarkable boots. The bloody finger-print carefully compared with the one at Scotland Yard. The conveniently mislaid matchbox, and the ashes of the unique tobacco. Do you suppose I’ve never read any detective stories? Well, I haven’t got any proofs… of that sort. I haven’t got any proofs at all, in that sense. If I told you my reasons, you’d think them the most rambling nonsense in the world. You must either do as I tell you and thank me afterwards; or you must let me talk as I like, and as long as I like, and thank your God you’ve come as far as this towards safety.”

Mallow was looking at the poet in his quiet and intense fashion; and after a moment’s pause, he said:

“You’d better tell us your own reasons in your own way. I know you generally have pretty good ones, really.”

Gale’s eyes wandered from the staring face of the girl to that of his friend, and then to the drift of dead leaves under the tree where he had once rested.

“I was lying there looking up at the sky, or, rather, the tree-tops,” he said slowly. “I didn’t hear what the others were talking about, because I was listening to the birds and looking at them. You know what happens when you go on staring at something like that; it turns into a sort of pattern like a wall-paper; and this was a quiet pattern of green and grey and brown. It seemed as if the whole world was that pattern; as if God had never made anything except a world of birds; of tree-tops hung in space.”

Laura made a half-protest that sounded like a laugh, but Mallow said steadily: “Go on!”

“And then I slowly became conscious that there was a spot of yellow in the pattern. I slowly realized that it was another bird, and then what sort of bird. Somebody said it must be a yellow-hammer; but, little as I knew about it, I knew better than that. It was a canary.”

The girl, who had already turned away, looked back at him with her first flash of interest.

“I wondered vaguely how a canary would get on in the world of birds, and how it had got there. I didn’t think of any human being in particular. Only I saw in a sort of vision, somewhere against the morning sky, a window standing open, and the door of a cage standing open. Then I saw that all the brown birds were trying to kill the yellow one, and that started my thoughts off as it might anybody’s. Is it always kind to set a bird at liberty? What exactly is liberty? First and foremost, surely, it is the power of a thing to be itself. In some ways the yellow bird was free in the cage. It was free to be alone. It was free to sing. In the forest its feathers would be torn to pieces and its voice choked for ever. Then I began to think that being oneself, which is liberty, is itself limitation. We are limited by our brains and bodies; and if we break out, we cease to be ourselves, and, perhaps, to be anything. That was when I asked you whether an isosceles triangle felt itself in prison, and if there were such a thing as a round prison. We shall hear more of the round prison before this story is over.

“Then I saw the man on the roof, with his hands spread like wings to the sky. I knew nothing of him; but I knew on the instant that he was the man who had given a bird its freedom at any risk. As we went down the hill I heard a little more about him; how he had escaped by blowing up his prison; and I felt that one fact had filled all his life with a philosophy of emancipation and escape. Always at the back of his mind, I was certain, was that one bursting moment when he saw white daylight shining through the shattered wall. I knew why he let birds out of cages and why he had written a book on the psychology of liberty. Then I stopped outside a window to stare at those gorgeous goldfish, merely because I had a fancy for such things; they coloured my thoughts, so to speak, with a sort of orange or scarlet, for long afterwards. And long afterwards I was again passing that window; and I found their colours were faded and their positions changed. At that time it was already dark, with a rising moon; and what forms I could see scattered in the shadow seemed almost grey, and even outlined in lines of grey light, which might have been moonlight, but I think was the corpse-light of phosphorescence. They lay scattered at random on the round table; and I saw by the faint glimmer that the glass bowl was broken. So I found my romance when I returned to it; for those fantastic fishes had been to me like the hieroglyphics of a message, which the fiery finger of God had thus written in red-hot gold. But when I looked again, the finger had written another lesson in letters of an awful and ashen silver. And what the new message said was: ‘The man is mad.’

“Perhaps you think I am as mad as he; and I have told you that I am at once like him and unlike him. I am like him because I also can go on the wild journeys of such wild minds, and have a sympathy with his love of liberty. I am unlike him because, thank God, I can generally find my way home again. The lunatic is he who loses his way and cannot return. Now, almost before my eyes, this man had made the great stride from liberty to lunacy. The man who opened the bird-cage loved freedom; possibly too much; certainly very much. But the man who broke the bowl merely because he thought it a prison for the fish, when it was their only possible house of life… that man was already outside the world of reason, raging with a desire to be outside everything. In a most literal and living sense, he was out of his wits. And there was another thing revealed to me by the grey ghosts of the fishes. The rise of the insanity had been very rapid and steep. To send the bird into danger was only a disputable kindness, to fling the fish to death was a dance of raving destruction. What would he do next?

“I have spoken of a round prison. After all, to any mind that can move parallel to a mood like this, there really is a round prison. The sky itself, studded with stars, the serene arch of what we call infinity…”

As he spoke he staggered, clutched at the air, and fell all his great length on the grass. At the same moment Mallow was hurled against a tree, and the girl collapsed against him, clinging to him in a way which even in that blinding whirl, was an answer to many of his questionings. It was only when they had picked themselves up and pulled themselves together that they were fully conscious that the valley was still resounding with echoes of one hideous and rending uproar; or that the darkness had just shut down upon a blaze that blinded them like red lightning. For the instant that it lasted it was a standing glory, like a great sunrise. There rose to the surface of Mallow’s memory only one word for it; the word radiant.

Mallow found himself reflecting in a dull fashion that it was lighter than it might have been at that hour, because of a friendly flame that was licking itself in a lively fashion a few yards away. Then he saw that it was the smouldering ruin of the blue wooden gate-post at which he had gazed that morning, flung all the way through the air like a flaming thunderbolt. They had come just far enough from the house to be out of danger. Then he looked again at the blue-painted wood curling with golden flames, and for the first time began to tremble.

The next moment he caught sight of the faces of his other friends, Walton and Hutton, pale in the flame as they hurried up the road from the remoter inn to which they had retired for the evening.

“What was it?” Walton was calling out.

“An explosion,” said Hutton rather hazily.

“An expansion,” replied Mallow, and mastered himself with the effort of a grim smile.

By this time, more people were running out from remote cottages, and Gabriel Gale turned his face to something like a small crowd.

“It was only the prison gun,” he said, “the signal that a prisoner has escaped.”

THE SHADOW OF THE SHARK

IT is notable that the late Mr. Sherlock Holmes, in the course of those inspiring investigations for which we can never be sufficiently grateful to their ingenious author, seems only twice to have ruled out an explanation as intrinsically impossible. And it is curious to notice that in both cases the distinguished author himself has since come to regard that impossible thing as possible, and even as positively true. In the first case the great detective declared that he never knew a crime committed by a flying creature. Since the development of aviation, and especially the development of German aviation, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, patriot and war historian, has seen a good many crimes committed by flying creatures. And in the other case the detective implied that no deed need be attributed to spirits or supernatural beings; in short, to any of the agencies to which Sir Arthur is now the most positive and even passionate witness. Presumably, in his present mood and philosophy, the Hound of the Baskervilles might well have been a really ghostly hound; at least, if the optimism which seems to go with spiritualism would permit him to believe in such a thing as a hell-hound. It may be worth while to note this coincidence, however, in telling a tale in which both these explanations necessarily played a part. The scientists were anxious to attribute it to aviation, and the spiritualists to attribute it to spirits; though it might be questioned whether either the spirit or the flying-man should be congratulated on his utility as an assassin.

A mystery which may yet linger as a memory, but which was in its time a sensation, revolved round the death of a certain Sir Owen Cram, a wealthy eccentric, chiefly known as a patron of learning and the arts. And the peculiarity of the case was that he was found stabbed in the middle of a great stretch of yielding sand by the sea-shore, on which there was absolutely no trace of any foot-prints but his own. It was admitted that the wound could not have been self-inflicted; and it grew more and more difficult even to suggest how it could have been inflicted at all. Many theories were suggested, ranging, as we have said, from that of the enthusiasts for aviation to that of the enthusiasts for psychical research; it being evidently regarded as a feather in the cap either of science or spiritualism to have effected so neat an operation. The true story of this strange business has never been told; it certainly contained elements which, if not supernatural, were at least supernormal. But to make it clear, we must go back to the scene with which it began; the scene on the lawn of Sir Owen's seaside residence, where the old gentleman acted as a sort of affable umpire in the disputes of the young students who were his favourite company; the scene which led up to the singular silence and isolation, and ultimately to the rather eccentric exit of Mr. Amos Boon.

Mr. Amos Boon had been a missionary, and still dressed like one; at any rate, he dressed like nothing else. His sturdy, full-bearded figure carried a broad-brimmed hat combined with a frock-coat; which gave him an air at once outlandish and dowdy. Though he was no longer a missionary, he was still a traveller. His face was brown and his long beard was black; there was a furrow of thought in his brow and a rather strained look in his eyes, one of which sometimes looked a little larger than the other, giving a sinister touch to what was in some ways so commonplace. He had ceased to be a missionary through what he himself would have called the broadening of his mind. Some said there had been a broadening of his morals as well as of his mind; and that the South Sea Islands, where he had lived, had seen not a little of such ethical emancipation. But this was possibly a malicious misrepresentation of his very human curiosity and sympathy in the matter of the customs of the savages; which to the ordinary prejudice was indistinguishable from a white man going *fantee.* Anyhow, travelling about alone with nothing but a big Bible, he had learned to study it minutely, first for oracles and commandments, and afterwards for errors and contradictions; for the Bible-smasher is only the Bible-worshipper turned upside down. He pursued the not very arduous task of proving that David and Saul did not on all occasions merit the Divine favour; and always concluded by roundly declaring that he preferred the Philistines. Boon and his Philistines were already a byword of some levity among the young men who, at that moment, were arguing and joking around him.

At that moment Sir Owen Cram was playfully presiding over a dispute between two or three of his young friends about science and poetry. Sir Owen was a little restless man, with a large head, a bristly grey moustache, and a grey fan of hair like the crest of a cockatoo. There was something sprawling and splayfooted about his continuous movement which was compared by thoughtless youth to that of a crab; and it corresponded to a certain universal eagerness which was really ready to turn in all directions. He was a typical amateur, taking up hobby after hobby with equal inconsistency and intensity. He had impetuously left all his money to a museum of natural history, only to become immediately swallowed up in the single pursuit of landscape painting; and the groups around him largely represented the stages of his varied career. At the moment a young painter, who was also by way of being a poet, was defending some highly poetical notions against the smiling resistance of a rising doctor, whose hobby was biology. The data of agreement would have been difficult to find, and few save Sir Owen could have claimed any common basis of sympathy; but the important matter just then was the curious effect of the young men's controversy upon Mr. Boon.

"The subject of flowers is hackneyed, but the flowers are not," the poet was insisting. "Tennyson was right about the flower in the crannied wall; but most people don't look at flowers in a wall, but only in a wall-paper. If you generalize them, they are dull, but if you simply see them they are always startling. If there's a special providence in a falling star, there's more in a rising star; and a live star at that."

"Well, I can't see it," said the man of science, good-humouredly; he was a red-haired, keen-faced youth in pince-nez, by the name of Wilkes. "I'm afraid we fellows grow out of the way of seeing it like that. You see, a flower is only a growth like any other, with organs and all that; and its inside isn't any prettier or uglier than an animal's. An insect is much the same pattern of rings and radiations. I'm interested in it as I am in an octopus or any sea-beast you would think a monster."

"But why should you put it that way round?" retorted the poet. "Why isn't it quite as logical the other way round? Why not say the octopus is as wonderful as the flower, instead of the flower as ordinary as the octopus? Why not say that crackens and cuttles and all the sea-monsters are themselves flowers; fearful and wonderful flowers in that terrible twilight garden of God. I do not doubt that God can be as fond of a shark as I am of a buttercup."

"As to God, my dear Gale," began the other quietly, and then he seemed to change his form of words. "Well, I am only a man… nay, only a scientific man, which you may think lower than a sea-beast. And the only interest I have in a shark is to cut him up; always on the preliminary supposition that I have prevented him from cutting me up."

"Have you ever met a shark?" asked Amos Boon, intervening suddenly.

“Not in society,” replied the poet with a certain polite discomposure, looking round with something like a flush under his fair hair; he was a long, loose-limbed man named Gabriel Gale, whose pictures were more widely known than his poems.

“You’ve seen them in the tanks, I suppose,” said Boon; “but I’ve seen them in the sea. I’ve seen them where they are lords of the sea, and worshipped by the people as great gods. I’d as soon worship those gods as any other.”

Gale the poet was silent, for his mind always moved in a sort of sympathy with merely imaginative pictures; and he instantly saw, as in a vision, boiling purple seas and plunging monsters. But another young man standing near him, who had hitherto been rather primly silent, cut in quietly; a theological student, named Simon, the deposit of some epoch of faith in Sir Owen’s stratified past. He was a slim man with sleek, dark hair and darting, mobile eyes, in spite of his compressed lips. Whether in caution or contempt, he had left the attack on medical materialism to the poet, who was always ready to plunge into an endless argument with anybody. Now he intervened merely to say:

“Do they only worship a shark? It seems rather a limited sort of religion.”

“Religion!” repeated Amos Boon, rudely; “what do you people know about religion? You pass the plate round, and when Sir Owen puts a penny in it, you put up a shed where a curate can talk to a congregation of maiden-aunts. These people have got something like a religion. They sacrifice things to it… their beasts, their babies, their lives. I reckon you’d turn green with fear if you’d ever so much as caught a glimpse of Religion. Oh, it’s not just a fish in the sea; rather it’s the sea round a fish. The sea is the blue cloud he moves in, or the green veil or curtain hung about him, the skirts of which trail with thunder.”

All faces were turned towards him, for there was something about him beyond his speech. Twilight was spreading over the garden, which lay near the edge of a chalk cliff above the shore, but the last light of sunset still lay on a part of the lawn, painting it yellow rather than green, and glowing almost like gold against the last line of the sea, which was a sombre indigo and violet, changing nearer land to a lurid, pale green. A long cloud of a jagged shape happened to be trailing across the sun; and the broad-hatted, hairy man from the South Seas suddenly pointed at it.

"I know where the shape of that cloud would be called the shadow of the shark," he cried, "and a thousand men would fall on their faces ready to fast or fight, or die. Don't you see the great black dorsal fin, like the peak of a moving mountain? And then you lads discuss him as if he were a stroke at golf; and one of you says he would cut him up like birthday cake; and the other says your Jewish Jehovah would condescend to pat him like a pet rabbit."

"Come, come," said Sir Owen, with a rather nervous waggishness, "we mustn't have any of your broad-minded blasphemies."

Boon turned on him a baneful eye; literally an eye, for one of his eyes grew larger till it glowed like the eye of the Cyclops. His figure was black against the fiery turf, and they could almost hear his beard bristling.

"Blasphemy!" he cried in a new voice, with a crack in it. "Take care it is not you who blaspheme."

And then, before anyone could move, the black figure against the patch of gold had swung round and was walking away from the house, so impetuously that they had a momentary fear that he would walk over the cliff. However, he found the little wooden gate that led to a flight of wooden steps; and they heard him stumbling down the path to the fishing village below.

Sir Owen seemed suddenly to shake off a paralysis like a fit of slumber. "My old friend is a little eccentric," he said. "Don't go, gentlemen; don't let him break up the party. It is early yet."

But growing darkness and a certain social discomfort had already begun to dissolve the group on the lawn; and the host was soon left with a few of the most intimate of his guests. Simon and Gale, and his late antagonist, Dr. Wilkes, were staying to dinner; the darkness drove them indoors, and eventually found them sitting round a flask of green Chartreuse on the table; for Sir Owen had his expensive conventions as well as his expensive eccentricities. The talkative poet, however, had fallen silent, and was staring at the green liquid in his glass as if it were the green depth of the sea. His host attacked with animation the other ordinary topics of the day.

"I bet I'm the most industrious of the lot of you," he said. "I've been at my easel on the beach all day, trying to paint this blessed cliff, and make it look like chalk and not cheese."

"I saw you, but I didn't like to disturb you," said Wilkes. "I generally try to put in an hour or so looking for specimens at high tide: I suppose most people think I'm shrimping or only paddling and doing it for my health. But I've got a pretty good nucleus of that museum we were talking about, or at least the aquarium part of it. I put in most of the rest of the time arranging the exhibits; so I deny the implication of idleness. Gale was on the seashore, too. He was doing nothing as usual; and now he's saying nothing, which is much more uncommon."

"I have been writing letters," said Simon, in his precise way, "but letters are not always trivial. Sometimes they are rather tremendous."

Sir Owen glanced at him for a moment, and a silence followed, which was broken by a thud and a rattle of glasses as Gale brought his fist down on the table like a man who had thought of something suddenly.

"Dagon!" he cried, in a sort of ecstasy.

Most of the company seemed but little enlightened; perhaps they thought that saying "Dagon" was his poetical and professional fashion of saying "Damn". But the dark eyes of Simon brightened, and he nodded quickly.

"Why, of course you're right," he said. "That must be why Mr. Boon is so fond of the Philistines."

In answer to a general stare of inquiry, he said smoothly: "The Philistines were a people from Crete, probably of Hellenic origin, who settled on the coast of Palestine, carrying with them a worship which may very well have been that of Poseidon, but which their enemies, the Israelites, described as that of Dagon. The relevant matter here is that the carved or painted symbol of the god seems always to have been a fish."

The mention of the new matter seemed to reawaken the tendency of the talk to turn into a wrangle between the poet and the professional scientist.

"From my point of view," said the latter, "I must confess myself somewhat disappointed with your friend Mr. Boon. He represented himself as a rationalist like myself, and seemed to have made some scientific studies of folk-lore in the South Seas. But he seemed a little unbalanced; and surely he made a curious fuss about some sort of a fetish, considering it was only a fish."

"No, no, no!" cried Gale, almost with passion. "Better make a fetish of the fish. Better sacrifice yourself and everybody else on the horrible huge altar of the fish. Better do anything than utter the star-blasting blasphemy of saying it is *only* a fish. It's as bad as saying the other thing is only a flower."

"All the same, it *is* only a flower," answered Wilkes, "and the advantage of looking at these things in a cool and rational way from the outside is that you can…”

He stopped a moment and remained quite still, as if he were watching something. Some even fancied that his pale, aquiline face looked paler as well as sharper.

“What was that at the window?” he asked. “Is anybody outside this house?”

“What’s the matter? What did you see?” asked his host, in abrupt agitation.

“Only a face,” replied the doctor, “but it was not… it was not like a man’s face. Let’s get outside and look into this.”

Gabriel Gale was only a moment behind the doctor, who had impetuously dashed out of the room. Despite his lounging demeanour, the poet had already leapt to his feet with his hand on the back of the chair, when he stiffened where he stood; for he had seen it. The faces of the others showed that they had seen it too.

Pressed against the dark window-pane, but only wanly luminous as it protruded out of the darkness, was a large face looking at first rather like a green goblin mask in a pantomime. Yet it was in no sense human; its eyes were set in large circles, rather in the fashion of an owl. But the glimmering covering that faintly showed on it was not of feathers, but of scales.

The next moment it had vanished. The mind of the poet, which made images as rapidly as a cinema, even in a crisis of action, had already imagined a string of fancies about the sort of creature he saw it to be. He had thought involuntarily of some great flying fish winging its way across the foam, and the flat sand and the spire and roofs of the fishing village. He had half-imagined the moist sea air thickening in some strange way to a greener and more liquid atmosphere in which the marine monsters could swim about in the streets. He had entertained the fancy that the house itself stood in the depths of the sea, and that the great goblin-headed fishes were nosing round it, as round the cabin windows of a wreck.

At that moment a loud voice was heard outside crying in distinct accents:

“The fish has legs.”

For that instant, it seemed to give the last touch to the monstrosity. But the meaning of it came back to them, a returning reality, with the laughing face of Dr. Wilkes as he reappeared in the doorway, panting.

“Our fish had two legs, and used them,” he said. “He ran like a hare when he saw me coming; but I could see plainly enough it was a man playing you a trick of some sort. So much for that psychic phenomenon."

He paused and looked at Sir Owen Cram with a smile that was keen and almost suspicious.

"One thing is very clear to me," he said. "You have an enemy."

The mystery of the human fish, however, did not long remain even a primary topic of conversation in a social group that had so many topics of conversation. They continued to pursue their hobbies and pelt each other with their opinions; even the smooth and silent Simon being gradually drawn into the discussions, in which he showed a dry and somewhat cynical dexterity. Sir Owen continued to paint with all the passion of an amateur. Gale continued to neglect to paint, with all the nonchalance of a painter. Mr. Boon was presumably still as busy with his wicked Bible and his good Philistines as Dr. Wilkes with his museum and his microscopic marine animals, when the little seaside town was shaken as by an earthquake with the incomprehensible calamity which spread its name over all the newspapers of the country.

Gabriel Gale was scaling the splendid swell of turf that terminated in the great chalk cliff above the shore, in a mood consonant to the sunrise that was storming the skies above him. Clouds haloed with sunshine were already sailing over his head as if sent flying from a flaming wheel; and when he came to the brow of the cliff he saw one of those rare revelations when the sun does not seem to be merely the most luminous object in a luminous landscape, but itself the solitary focus and streaming fountain of all light. The tide was at the ebb, and the sea was only a strip of delicate turquoise over which rose the tremendous irradiation. Next to the strip of turquoise was a strip of orange sand, still wet, and nearer the sand was a desert of a more dead yellow or brown, growing paler in the increasing light. And as he looked down from the precipice upon that plain of pale gold, he saw two black objects lying in the middle of it. One was a small easel, still standing, with a camp-stool fallen beside it; the other was the flat and sprawling figure of a man.

The figure did not move, but as he stared he became conscious that another human figure was moving, was walking over the flat sands towards it from under the shadow of the cliff. Looking at it steadily, he saw that it was the man called Simon; and in an instant he seemed to realize that the motionless figure was that of Sir Owen Cram. He hastened to the stairway down the cliff and so to the sands; and soon stood face to face with Simon;

for they both looked at each other for a moment before they both looked down at the body. The conviction was already cold in his heart that it was a dead body. Nevertheless, he said sharply: “We must have a doctor; where is Dr. Wilkes?”

“It is no good, I fear,” said Simon, looking away at the sea.

“Wilkes may only confirm our fears that he is dead,” said Gale, “but he may have something to say about how he died.”

“True,” said the other, “I will go for him myself.” And he walked back rapidly towards the cliff in the track of his own foot-prints.

Indeed, it was at the foot-prints that Gale was gazing in a bemused fashion at that moment. The tracks of his own coming were clear enough, and the tracks of Simon’s coming and going; and the third rather more rambling track of the unmistakable boots of the unfortunate Sir Owen, leading up to the spot where his easel was planted. And that was all. The sand was soft, so that the lightest foot would disturb it; it was well above the tides; and there was not the faintest trace of any other human being having been near the body. Yet the body had a deep wound under the angle of the jaw; and there was no sign of any weapon of suicide.

Gabriel Gale was a believer in commonsense, in theory if not always in practice. He told himself repeatedly that these things were the practical clues in such a case; the wound, the weapon or absence of weapon, the foot-prints or absence of foot-prints. But there was also a part of his mind which was always escaping from his control and playing tricks; fixing on his memory meaningless things as if they were symbols, and then haunting him with them as mysteries. He made no point of it; it was rather sub-conscious than self-conscious; but the parts of any living picture that he saw were seldom those that others saw, or that it seemed sensible to see. And there were one or two details in the tragedy before him that haunted him then and long afterwards. Cram had fallen backwards in a rather twisted fashion, with his feet towards the shore; and a few inches from the left foot lay a starfish. He could not say whether it was merely the bright orange colour of the creature that irrationally riveted his eye, or merely some obscure fancy of repetition, in that the human figure was itself spread and sprawling flat like a starfish, with four limbs instead of five. Nor did he attempt to analyse this aesthetic antic of his psychology; it was a suppressed part of his mind which still repeated that the mystery of the untrodden sands would turn out to be something quite simple; but that the starfish possessed the secret.

He looked up to see Simon returning with the doctor, indeed with two doctors; for there was more than one medical representative in the mob of Sir Owen's varied interests. The other was a Dr. Garth, a little man with an angular and humorous face; he was an old friend of Gale's but the poet's greeting was rather *distrait*. Garth and his colleague, however, got to work on a preliminary examination, which made further talk needless. It could not be a full examination till the arrival of the police, but it was sufficient to extinguish any hope of life, if any such had lingered. Garth, who was bent over the body in a crouching posture, spoke to his fellow physician without raising his head.

"There seems to be something rather odd about this wound. It goes almost straight upwards, as if it was struck from below. But Sir Owen was a very small man; and it seems queer that he should be stabbed by somebody smaller still."

Gale's sub-consciousness exploded with a strange note of harsh mockery.

"What," he cried, "you don't think the starfish jumped up and killed him?"

"No, of course not," said Garth, with his gruff good humour. "What on earth is the matter with you?"

"Lunacy, I think," said the poet, and began to walk slowly towards the shore.

As time went on he almost felt disposed to fancy that he had correctly diagnosed his own complaint. The image began to figure even in his dreams, but not merely as a natural nightmare about the body on the sea-shore. The significant sea creature seemed more vivid even than the body. As he had originally seen the corpse from above, spread flat out beneath him, he saw it in his visions as something standing, as if propped against a wall or even merely drawn or graven on a wall. Sometimes the sandy ground had become a ground of old gold in some decoration of the Dark Ages, with the figure in the stiff agonies of a martyr, but the red star always showed like a lamp by his feet. Sometimes it was a hieroglyphic of a more Eastern sort, as of some stone god rigidly dancing; but the five-pointed star was always in the same place below. Sometimes it seemed a rude, red-sandstone sort of drawing; yet more archaic; but the star was always the reddest spot in it. Now and again, while the human figure was as dry and dark as a mummy, the star would seem to be literally alive, waving its flaming fingers as if it were trying to tell him something. Now and then even the whole figure was upside down, as if to restore the star to its proper place in the skies.

"I told Wilkes that a flower was a living star," he said to himself. "A starfish is more literally a living star. But this is like going crazy. And if there is one thing I strongly object to, it is going crazy. What use should I be to all my brother lunatics, if I once really lost my balance on the tight-rope over the abyss?"

He sat staring into vacancy for some time, trying to fit in this small and stubborn fancy with a much steadier stream of much deeper thoughts that were already driving in a certain direction. At last, the light of a possibility began to dawn in his eyes; and it was evidently something very simple when it was realized; something which he felt he ought to have thought of before; for he laughed shortly and scornfully at himself as he rose to his feet.

"If Boon goes about everywhere introducing his shark and I go into society always attended by my starfish," he murmured to himself, "we shall turn the world into an aquarium bigger and better than Dr. Wilkes is fixing up. I'm going down to make some inquiries in the village."

Returning thence across the sands at evening, after several conversations with skippers and fishermen, he wore a more satisfied expression.

"I always did believe," he reflected, "that the foot-print business would be the simplest thing in the affair. But there are some things in it that are by no means simple."

Then he looked up, and saw far off on the sands, lonely and dark against the level evening light, the strange hat and stumpy figure of Amos Boon.

He seemed to consider for a moment the advisability of a meeting; then he turned away and moved towards the stairway up the cliff. Mr. Boon was apparently occupied in idly drawing lines on the sand with his shabby umbrella; like one drawing plans for a child's sand-castle, but apparently without any such intelligent object or excuse. Gale had often seen the man mooning about with equally meaningless and automatic gestures; but as the poet mounted the rocky steps, climbing higher and higher, he had a return of the irrational feeling of a visionary vertigo. He told himself again, as if in warning, that it was his whole duty in life to walk on a tight-rope above a void in which many imaginative men were swallowed up. Then he looked down again at the drop of the dizzy cliffs to the flats that seemed to be swimming below him like a sea. And he saw the long, loose lines drawn in the sand unified into a shape, as flat as a picture on a wall. He had often seen a child, in the same fashion, draw on the sand a pig as large as a house. But in this case he could not shake off his former feeling of something archaic, like a palaeolithic drawing, about the scratching of the brown sand. And Mr. Boon had not drawn a pig, but a shark; conspicuous with its jagged teeth and fin like a horn exalted.

But he was not the only person overlooking this singular decorative scheme. When he came to the short railings along the brow of the cliff in which the stairway terminated, he found three figures leaning on it and looking down; and instantly realized how the case was closing in. For even in their outlines against the sky he had recognized the two doctors and an inspector of police.

“Hullo, Gale,” observed Wilkes, “may I present you to Inspector Davies; a very active and successful officer.”

Garth nodded. “I understand the inspector will soon make an arrest,” he said.

“The inspector must be getting back to his work and not talking about it,” said that official good-humouredly. “I’m going down to the village. Anybody coming my way?”

Dr. Wilkes assented and followed him, but Dr. Garth stopped a moment, being detained by the poet, who caught hold of his sleeve with unusual earnestness.

“Garth,” he said, “I want to apologise. I’m afraid I was wool-gathering when we met the other day, and didn’t hail you as I ought to hail an old friend. You and I have been in one or two queer affairs together, and I want to talk to you about this one. Shall we sit down on that seat over there?”

They seated themselves on an iron seat set up on the picturesque headland; and Gale added, “I wish you could tell me roughly how you got as far as you seem to have got.”

Garth gazed silently out to sea, and said at last:

“Do you know that man Simon?”

“Yes,” replied the poet, “that’s the way it works is it?”

“Well, the investigation soon began to show that Simon knew rather more than he said. He was on the spot before you; and for some time he wouldn’t admit what it was he saw before you turned up. We guessed it was because he was afraid to tell the truth; and in one sense he was.”

“Simon doesn’t talk enough,” said Gale thoughtfully. “He doesn’t talk about himself enough; so he thinks about himself too much. A man like that always gets secretive; not necessarily in the sense of being criminal, or even of being malicious, but merely of being morbid. He is the sort that is ill-treated at school and never says so. As long as a thing terrified him, he couldn’t talk about it.”

“I don’t know how you guessed it,” said Garth, “but that is something like the line of discoveries. At first they thought that Simon’s silence was guilt, but it was only a fear of something more than guilt; of some diabolic destiny and entanglement. The truth is, that when he went up before you to the cliff-head at daybreak, he saw something that hag-rode his morbid spirit ever since. He saw the figure of this man Boon poised on the brink of the precipice, black against the dawn, and waving his arms in some unearthly fashion as if he were going to fly. Simon thought the man was talking to himself, and perhaps even singing. Then the strange creature passed on towards the village and was lost in the twilight; but when Simon came to the edge of the cliff he saw Sir Owen lying dead far out on the sands below, beside his easel.”

“And ever since, I suppose,” observed Gale, “Simon has seen sharks everywhere.”

“You are right again,” said the doctor. “He has admitted since that a shadow on the blind or a cloud on the moon would have the unmistakable shape of the fish with the fin erect. But, in fact, it is a very mistakable shape; anything with a triangular top to it would suggest it to a man in his state of nerves. But the truth is that so long as he thought Boon had dealt death from a distance by some sort of curse or spell, we could get nothing out of him. Our only chance was to show him that Boon might have done it even by natural means. And we did show it, after all.”

“What is your theory, then?” asked the other.

“It is too general to be called a theory yet,” replied the doctor; “but, honestly, I do not think it at all impossible that Boon might have killed a man on the sands from the top of a cliff, without falling back on any supernatural stuff. You’ve got to consider it like this: Boon has been very deep in the secrets of savages, especially in that litter of islands that lie away towards Australia. Now, we know that such savages, for all they are called ignorant, have developed many dexterities and many unique tools. They have blow-pipes that kill at a considerable distance; they harpoon and lasso things, and draw them in on a line. Above all, the Australian savages have discovered the boomerang that actually returns to the hand. Is it quite so inconceivable that Boon might know some way of sending a penetrating projectile from a distance, and even possibly of recovering it in some way? Dr. Wilkes and I, on examining the wound, found it a very curious one: it was made by some tapering, pointed tool, with a slight curve; and it not only curved upwards, but even slightly outwards, as if the curve were returning on itself. Does not that suggest to you some outlandish weapon of a strange shape, and possibly with strange properties? And always remember that such an explanation would explain something else as well, which is generally regarded as the riddle. It would explain why the murderer left no foot-prints round the body."

Gale gazed out to sea in silence, as if considering; then he said simply:

"An extremely shrewd argument. But I know why he left no foot-prints. It is a much simpler explanation than that."

Garth stared at him for a few moments; and then observed gravely:

"May I then ask, in return, what is your theory?"

"My theory will seem a maze of theories, and nothing else," said Gale. "It is, as many would say, of such stuff as dreams are made of. Most modern people have a curious contradiction; they abound in theories, yet they never see the part that theories play in practical life. They are always talking about temperament and circumstances and accident; but most men are what their theories make them; most men go in for murder or marriage, or mere lounging because of some theory of life, asserted or assumed. So I can never manage to begin my explanations in that brisk, pointed, practical way that you doctors and detectives do. I see a man's mind first, sometimes almost without any particular man attached to it. I could only begin this business by describing a mental state… which can't be described. Our murderer or maniac, or whatever you call him, is certainly affected by some of the elements attributed to him. His view has reached an insane degree of simplicity, and in that sense of savagery. But I doubt whether he would necessarily transfer the savagery from the end to the means. In one sense, indeed, his view might be compared to the barbaric. He saw every creature and even every object naked. He did not understand that what clothes a thing is sometimes the most real part of it. Have you ever noticed how true is that old phrase, 'clothed and in his right mind'? Man is not in his right mind when he is not clothed with the symbols of his social dignity.

Humanity is not even human when it is naked. But in a lower sense it is so of lesser things, even of lifeless things. A lot of nonsense is talked about auras; but this is the truth behind it. Everything has a halo. Everything has a sort of atmosphere of what it signifies, which makes it sacred. Even the little creatures he studied had each of them its halo; but he would not see it."

"But what little creatures did Boon study?" asked Garth in some wonder. "Do you mean the cannibals?"

"I was not thinking about Boon," replied Gabriel Gale.

"What do you mean?" cried the other, in sudden excitement. "Why, Boon is almost in the hands of the police."

"Boon is a good man," said Gale, calmly; "he is very stupid; that is why he is an atheist. There are intelligent atheists, as we shall see presently; but that stunted, stupid, sort is much commoner, and much nicer. But he is a good man; his motive is good; he originally talked all that tosh of the superiority of the savage because he thought he was the under-dog. He may be a trifle cracked, by now, about sharks and other things; but that's only because his travels have been too much for his intellect. They say travel broadens the mind; but you must have the mind. He had a mind for a suburban chapel, and there passed before it all the panorama of gilded nature-worship and purple sacrifice. He doesn't know if he's on his head or his heels, any more than a good many others. But I shouldn't wonder if heaven is largely populated with atheists of that sort, scratching their heads and wondering where they are.

"But Boon is a parenthesis; that is all he is. The man I am talking about is very much the point, and a sharp one at that. He dealt in something very different from muddled mysticism about human sacrifice. Human sacrifice is quite a human weakness. He dealt in assassination; direct, secret, straight from a head as inhuman as hell. And I knew it when I first talked to him over the tea-cups and he said he saw nothing pretty in a flower."

"My dear fellow!" remonstrated Dr. Garth.

"I don't mean that a man merely dissecting a daisy must be on the road to the gallows," conceded the poet, magnanimously, "but I do say that to mean it as he meant it is to be on a straight road of logic that leads there if he chooses to follow it. God is inside everything. But this man wanted to be outside everything; to see everything hung in a vacuum, simply its own dead self. It's not only not the same, it's almost the opposite of scepticism in the sense of Boon or the Book of Job. That's a man overwhelmed by the mysteries; but this man denies that there are any mysteries. It's not, in the ordinary sense, a matter of theology, but psychology. Most good pagans and pantheists might talk of the miracles of nature; but this man denies that there are any miracles, even in the sense of marvels. Don't you see that dreadful dry light shed on things must at last wither up the moral mysteries as illusions, respect for age, respect for property, and that the sanctity of life will be a superstition? The men in the street are only organisms, with their organs more or less displayed. For such a one there is no longer any terror in the touch of human flesh, nor does he see God watching him out of the eyes of a man."

"He may not believe in miracles, but he seems to work them," remarked the doctor. "What else was he doing, when he struck a man down on the sand without leaving a mark to show where he stood?"

"He was paddling," answered Gale.

"As high up on the shore as that?" inquired the other.

Gale nodded. "That was what puzzled me; till something I saw on the sand started a train of thought that led to my asking the seafaring people about the tides. It's very simple; the night before we found the body was a flood-tide, and the sea came up higher than usual; not quite to where Cram was sitting, but pretty near. So that was the way that the real human fish came out of the sea. That was the way the divine shark really devoured the sacrifice. The man came paddling in the foam, like a child on a holiday."

"Who came?" asked Garth; but he shuddered.

"Who did go dredging for sea-beasts with a sort of shrimping-net along the shore every evening? Who did inherit the money of the old man for his ambitious museum and his scientific career? Who did tell me in the garden that a cowslip was only a growth like a cancer?"

"I am compelled to understand you," said the doctor gloomily. "You mean that very able young man named Wilkes?"

"To understand Wilkes you must understand a good deal," continued his friend. "You must reconstruct the crime, as they say. Look out over that long line of darkening sea and sand, where the last light runs red as blood; that is where he came dredging every day, in the same bloodshot dusk, looking for big beasts and small; and in a true sense everything was fish that came to his net. He was constructing his museum as a sort of cosmos; with everything traced from the fossil to the flying fish. He had spent enormous sums on it, and had got quite disinterestedly into debt; for instance he had had magnificent models made, in wax or papier machÃ©, of small fish magnified, or extinct fish restored; things that South Kensington cannot afford, and certainly Wilkes could not afford. But he had persuaded Cram to leave his money to the museum, as you know; and for him Cram was simply a silly old fool, who painted pictures he couldn't paint, and talked of sciences he didn't understand; and whose only natural function was to die and save the museum. Well, when every morning Wilkes had done polishing the glass cases of his masks and models, he came round by the cliff and took a turn at the fossils in the chalk with his geological hammer; then he put it back in that great canvas bag of his, and unslung his long shrimping-net and began to wade. This is where I want you to look at that dark red sand and see the picture; one never understands anything till one sees the picture. He went for miles along the shallows of that desolate shore, long inured to seeing one queer creature or another stranded on the sand; here a sea-hedgehog, and there a starfish, and then a crab, and then another creature. I have told you he had reached a stage when he would have looked at an angel with the eye of an ornithologist. What would he think of a man, and a man looking like that? Don't you see that poor Cram must have looked like a crab or a sea-urchin; his dwarfed, hunched figure seen from behind, with his fan of bristling whiskers, his straggling bow legs and restless twisting feet all tangled up with the three legs of his stool; making him look as if he had five limbs like a starfish? Don't you see he looked like a Common Object of the Sea-shore? And Wilkes had only to collect this specimen, and all his other specimens were safe. Everything was fish that came to his net, and…

"He stretched out the long pole in his hand to its full extent, and drew the net over the old man's head as if he were catching a great grey moth. He plucked him backwards off his stool so that he lay kicking on his back on the sand; and doubtless looking more like a large insect than ever. Then the murderer bent forward, propped by one hand upon his pole, and the other armed with his geological hammer. With the pick at the back of that instrument he struck in what he well knew to be a vital spot. The curve you noticed in the wound is due to that sharp side of the hammer being shaped like a pickaxe. But the unusual position of it, and the puzzle of how such a blow could be struck upwards, was due to the queer posture of the two figures. The murderer struck at a head that was upside down. It could only occur as a rule if the victim were standing on his head, a posture in which few persons await the assassin. But with the flourish and sweep of the great net, I fancy a starfish caught in it fell out of it, just beyond the dead man's foot. At any rate, it was that starfish and the accident of its flying so high on the shore, that set my mind drifting in the general direction of tides; and the possibility of the murderer having been moving about in the water. If he made any prints the breakers washed them out; and I should never have begun to think of it but for that red five-fingered little monster."

"Then do you mean to tell me," demanded Garth, "that all this business about the shadow of the shark had nothing to do with it?"

"The shadow of the shark had everything to do with it," replied Gale. "The murderer hid in the shadow of the shark, and struck from under the shadow of the shark. I doubt if he would have struck at all, if he had not had the shadow of that fantastic fin in which to hide. And the proof is that he himself took the trouble to emphasize and exaggerate the legend of poor Boon dancing before Dagon. Do you remember that queer incident of the fish's face at the window? How did anybody merely playing a practical joke get hold of a fish's face? It was very life-like; for it was one of the masks modelled for the Wilkes museum; and Wilkes had left it in the hall in his great canvas bag. It seems simple, doesn't it, for a man to raise an alarm inside a house, walk out to see, and instantly put on a mask and look in at a window? That's all he did; and you can see his idea, from the fact that he proceeded to warn Sir Owen of an enemy. He wanted all this idolatrous and mystical murder business worked for all it was worth, that his own highly reasonable murder might not be noticed. And you see he has succeeded. You tell me that Boon is in the hands of the police."

Garth sprang to his feet. "What is to be done?" he said.

"You will know what to do," said the poet. "You are a good and just man, and a practical man, too. I am not a practical man." He rose with a certain air of apology. "You see, you want an unpractical man for finding out this sort of thing."

And once more he gazed down from the precipice into the abysses below.

THE CRIME OF GABRIEL GALE

DR. BUTTERWORTH, the famous London physician, was sitting in his summer-house in his shirt sleeves, for it was a hot day and he had been playing tennis on the sunny lawns outside. He had a solid face and figure and carried everywhere an atmosphere of bodily health and good humour which helped him not a little in his profession; but he was not serious or self-conscious about it. He was not one of those in whom health has degenerated into hygiene. He played tennis when he felt inclined and left off when he felt inclined; as on the present occasion, when he had retired to smoke a pipe in the shade. He enjoyed a game as he enjoyed a joke; which was interpreted by some as meaning that he would never be a player, and by himself as meaning that he would always be able to play. And he enjoyed a joke very much, even the most minute and trivial joke that his roving eye encountered; and at this moment it encountered a quaint detail, which was something of a quaint contrast, in the glowing garden outside. Framed in the dark doorway of the summer-house, like a lighted scene on the stage, was the perspective of a garden path, bordered with very gay and flamboyant beds of tulips, having something of the gorgeous formality of the borders of a Persian illumination. And down the centre of the central path was advancing a figure that looked by comparison almost completely black, with black top-hat, black clothes and black umbrella; it might have been the mythical Black Tulip come to life and a walking parody of the tall, top-heavy garden flowers. The next moment all such fancies had faded from the doctor’s day-dream; for he had recognized a familiar face under the top-hat; he knew that the contrast was not merely grotesque; and was shocked with the gravity of the visitor’s eyes.

“Hullo, Garth,” he said in a hearty manner, “sit down and tell us all about yourself. You look as if you were going to a funeral.”

“So I am,” replied Dr. Garth, putting his black hat on a chair; he was a small, red-haired, shrewd-faced man and he looked pale and harassed.

“I am so sorry,” said Butterworth quickly, “if I spoke without thinking. I’m afraid you’re really rather cut up.

“I am going to a queer sort of funeral,” said Dr. Garth grimly; “the sort of funeral where we take special precautions to ensure premature burial.”

“What in the world do you mean?” asked his colleague, staring.

"I mean I've got to bury a man alive," said Garth with a ghastly calm. "But it's the sort of burial that requires two doctors' certificates instead of one."

Butterworth stared at the patch of sun-light and sucked in his cheeks with a soundless whistle. "Oh… I see," he said.

Then he added abruptly: "Of course it's always a sad business; but I'm afraid it's rather personal for you. A friend of yours?"

"One of my best friends, I think, barring yourself," replied Garth; "and one of the best and brightest young men of our time as well. I was afraid something of the sort might happen; but I hoped it wouldn't be so bad as this." He stopped for an instant and then said almost explosively:

"It's poor old Gale; and he's done it once too often."

"Done what?" asked Dr. Butterworth.

"It's rather difficult to explain, unless you know him," said Garth. "Gabriel Gale is a poet, also a painter and other wild things of that sort; but he has also a wild theory of his own about how to cure lunatics. In short, the amateur set up as a mad doctor and now the doctor is really mad. It's a horrid tragedy; but really he was asking for it."

"I don't yet understand what it's all about," said the other doctor patiently.

"I tell you he had a theory," said Garth. "He thought he could cure cracked people by what he called sympathy. But it didn't mean what you would mean by sympathy; he meant following their thoughts and going half-way with them, or all the way with them if he could. I used to joke with him, poor fellow, and say that if a lunatic thought he was made of glass, Gale would try hard to feel a little transparent. Anyhow, that was his notion, that he could really look at things to some extent from the lunatic's point of view; and talk to him in his own language. He admitted himself that it was a risky business, to walk on the edge of the precipice like that; and now, as I say, he's done it once too often. I always distrusted it myself."

"I should think so," said Dr. Butterworth, all his solid sanity stiffening against the suggestion. "He might as well say that a doctor ought to limp all the way to cure a lame man, or shut his eyes in order to help the blind."

"If the blind lead the blind," assented the other gloomily. "Well, he's fallen into the ditch this time."

"Why especially this time?" asked Butterworth.

“Well, if he doesn’t go to an asylum, he’ll go to jail,” said Garth grimly. “That’s why I’m in such a hurry to have him certified; God knows I don’t like doing that. But he’s broken out this time in a way he never did before. He was always fanciful and eccentric, of course; but I’m bound to say he had a very sane streak in him somewhere. It’s exactly because he’s never done anything like this before that I’m sure the end has really come. For one thing, he’s committed a perfectly crazy assault and apparently tried to murder a man with a pitchfork. But what hits me much harder, who knew him, is that he tried to murder a perfectly mild and shy and inoffensive person; in fact a rather gauche youth from Cambridge, half developed into a curate. Now that’s quite unlike Gabriel, even at his maddest. The men with whom he wrestled in spirit, if not in body, were intellectual bullies or mesmerists, the sort of men who wanted somebody to stand up to them; like that thin-lipped Dr. Wilkes, or that Russian Professor. I can no more see him savaging somebody like poor young Saunders than I can see him kicking a crippled child. And yet I *did* see him do it. The only explanation is that he wasn’t himself.

“There was another thing which made me sure he wasn’t himself. The weather had been very trying for everybody for some time; hot and stormy and electric; but it was the first time I’ve ever known him upset by such storms. I’ve known him to do the silliest things; I’ve known him stand on his head in the garden; but that was only showing that he was *not* affected by the storm. But this time I’m sure these queer semi-tropical tempests have been too much for him; so that even the very subject of the storm upset him in some way. For this tragedy arose out of the most trivial sort of triviality. The whole terrible unnatural business began with talking about the weather.

“Lady Flamborough said to a guest at her rather damp garden-party, ‘You brought bad weather with you.’ Anybody might say that to anybody; but she did say it to young Herbert Saunders, who is awfully awkward and shy, one of those long, loose boys with large feet, who seem to have outgrown their clothes and their wits; the last sort of person who would want to be singled out by any remark, however trifling. So Saunders only gaped and gurgled or was dumb, but somehow the lady’s remark seemed to get on Gale’s nerves from the first. A little while afterwards Gale met Lady Flamborough again, at another reception where it was raining, and he suddenly pointed, like some comic conspirator, at the tall ungainly figure of Saunders in the distance and said: ‘He still brings bad weather.’ Then happened one of those coincidences that are quite natural but seem to drive madmen really mad. The next time all that set happened to get together was on a really beautiful afternoon at Mrs. Blakeney's; with a clear blue sky without a cloud in it, so that old Blakeney went pottering round and showed all the first comers his gardens and glasshouses. But after that they all went in to tea, which was served in the great peacock-green drawing-room in the middle of the house; and so it happened that Saunders came late and there was a good deal of laughter as he sat down, much to his embarrassment; because the weather joke had been repeated and people were quite pleased to see it falsified for once. Then they all went out into the rooms nearer the entrance; and Gabriel Gale was walking towards the doorway. Between two pillars he caught sight of one of the outer windows and stood rooted to the spot, rigidly pointing with one arm. That gesture alone warned me that something was really rather wrong with him; but when I looked I could hardly help sharing his shock of surprise. For the windows that had been painted blue with summer sky were painted black with rain. On every side of the house the rain dripped and pattered as dismally as if it had been raining for a hundred years. And ten minutes before the whole garden had seemed a garden of gold like the Hesperides. Gale stood staring at this flying storm from nowhere, that had so suddenly struck the house; then he turned slowly and looked, with an expression not to be forgotten, at the man who was standing a few yards away. It was Herbert Saunders.

"You can imagine it's not much in my line to believe in witchcraft or magicians who control the elements; but there did really seem something funny about that cloudless day having so rapidly overclouded, with the coming of the one man whose name was already associated with it, if only by a jest. It was a mere coincidence, of course; but what worried me was the possible effect on my friend's already rather rickety psychology. He and Saunders were both standing and staring out of the same wide window, looking at the deluge-darkened garden and the swaying and tormented trees; but Saunder's simple face seemed to express only amiable bewilderment; indeed, he was smiling vaguely and shyly, as he did when he received a compliment. For he was one of those whose face after a compliment always looks as if it has received a buffet. He obviously saw nothing in it but a repetition of the joke; perhaps he thought that the English climate was keeping up the joke. And, compared with his face, the face of Gabriel was like the face of a fiend. So it seemed at least, as it sprang white out of the growing dark to meet the first white burst of the lightning; then there followed only thunder and the noise of the roaring rain; but I knew that he stood there rocking with that inexplicable excitement. Through the thunder I heard his voice saying, ‘It makes one feel like God.’

“Immediately under the windows a little path ran on the edge of some meadow land attached to the garden, where the Blakeneys had been getting in their hay; and a moderately large mound of hay looked almost mountainously dark against that low and lowering sky; a two-pronged pitchfork lying across it had certainly something grim about its black outline, which may have captured poor Gale’s fancy; for he was always prone to be taken by odd sights as if they were signals. Anyhow at that moment the host and hostess and other guests came hurrying by; the old man lamenting over the ruin of his hay; but the lady of the house apparently much more concerned about the fate of some highly ornamental garden-chairs, which had apparently been left out on the lawn just adjoining the meadow, under the large apple-tree whose boughs were now tossing and twisting in the storm.

“Gabriel Gale, when in his right mind, is the most chivalrous of men, and would have regained the lady’s chairs at a bound. But now he could do nothing but glare at the unfortunate Saunders; who awoke trembling to his social duties, in that agony of self-consciousness in which a man is afraid to do the right thing and afraid not to do it. At length, however, he jerked himself forward, fumbled with the door, flung it open and ran out into the reverberating rain. Then Gale followed him to the open door and shouted something after him. For most of the company, I think, it was lost in the din; but even if they had heard it, they certainly could not have understood it. I heard it; and I thought I understood it only too well. For what Gale shouted through the storm was, ‘Why don’t you call the chairs and they’ll come to you.’

“A second or so afterwards he added, as if it were an afterthought, ‘You might as well tell the tree to come here as well.’ Naturally there was no answer; and indeed Saunders, partly by his natural clumsiness and partly in the distraction of the driving elements, seemed for the moment to have lost his way and was staggering up the steeper path of the meadow some way to the left of the tree. I could just see his long figure and angular awkward elbows traced against the sky. Then followed the sudden, violent and utterly unintelligible incident. A rope happened to lie half round one of the swathes in the foreground; and Gale, leaping out of the door, caught it up and seemed to be knotting it in a sort of savage haste. The next moment there swept across the sky the great swirling curves of a noose thrown in the manner of a lasso. And I could see the wavering figure on the dark ridge alter its attitude and rear up as against an invisible obstacle, as the rope tightened and tugged it back.

"I looked round for assistance; and was surprised and somewhat alarmed to find I was alone. The host and hostess, and the others, having despatched the obliging Saunders after the chairs, had rushed off to summon the servants or secure other doors and windows, or look after other fittings threatened by the weather; and there was no one but myself to watch the unmeaning and apparently imbecile tragedy outside. I saw Gale drag Saunders like a sack at the end of a rope along the whole length of windows and disappear round a corner of the house. But I turned cold with a new fear when, even as he rushed past, he snatched the hay-fork from the mound and seemed to disappear brandishing it, like the fabulous fork of a demon. I rushed after them, but slipping on the wet stones, hurt my foot and had to limp; the raving storm seemed to have swallowed up that lunatic and all his antics; and it was not until some time afterwards that men found how that dance had ended. Herbert Saunders was found tied to a tree, still alive and even unwounded, but presenting the appearance of having barely missed a murderous attack; for the prongs of the pitchfork were driven by sheer fury into the tree on each side of his neck, holding him pinned there as by an iron ring. Gabriel Gale was not found for nearly a day, until after the storm was spent and the sunshine had returned; and he was loitering about in an adjoining meadow blowing the clocks off dandelions. I have seldom known him so serene."

There was a short silence. "How is the other fellow… Saunders?" asked Butterworth, after a pause of frowning consideration. "Was he much hurt?"

"Had a shock and is still shaky, of course," answered Garth. "Had to go for a rest-cure or something; but I believe he's all right now. Only you can hardly expect a harmless person who's been half murdered in a raving attack like that to feel very friendly or forgiving. So I'm afraid they will make it a case of attempted murder unless we can get our friend off on medical grounds. As a matter of fact, I have him waiting outside in the car."

"Very well," said the London doctor, rising with abrupt composure and buttoning up his coat. "We had better go along to see him now and get it over.”

The interview between Gale and the two doctors, at an adjacent hotel, was so short and so extraordinary that they went away with their very level heads turning like wind-mills. For Gale displayed nothing even of the merely childish innocence of levity attributed to him in the tale of the dandelions. He listened with patience, and a humorous and benevolent mildness which made the two doctors, who were considerably his seniors, feel as if they were being treated as juniors. When Garth began to break it to him gently that some sort of rest-cure was required in his own interests, he laughed heartily and anticipated all such periphrases.

“Don’t be nervous, old man,” he said, “you mean I ought to be in a madhouse; and I’m sure you mean well.”

“You know I am your friend,” said Garth earnestly; “and all your friends would say what I say.”

“Indeed,” said Gale, smiling. “Well, if that is the opinion of my friends, perhaps it would be better to get the opinion of my enemies.”

“What do you mean,” demanded the other. “Of your enemies?”

“Shall we say of my enemy?” continued Gale in level tones. “Of the man to whom I have done this perfectly outrageous thing. Well, really, that is all I ask; that before you lock me up for this outrage, you ask Herbert Saunders himself what he thinks about it.”

“Do you mean,” broke in Butterworth rather impatiently, “that we are to ask him whether he liked being half-throttled and impaled on a pitchfork?”

“Yes,” said Gale nodding, “I want you to ask him whether he liked being half throttled and impaled on a pitchfork.”

He slightly knitted his brows as if considering a new and merely practical point and then, added:

“I should send him a telegram now… say anything… ‘How do you like being lassoed?’ or, ‘What price pitchforks?’ or something playful of that sort.”

“We could telephone, if it comes to that,” said Garth.

The poet shook his head. “No,” he said, “that sort of man feels much more free in writing. He will only stammer on the telephone. He won’t stammer anything like what you imagine, even then; but he will stammer. But writing with his head in one of those little cubicles at the telegraph office, he will feel as free as in a confessional box.”

The two doctors, when they parted in some bewilderment, but tacitly accepting this suggestion of a respite, lost no time in fulfilling the condition required. They sent off a carefully worded telegram to Saunders, who had now returned home to his mother’s house, asking him what were his impressions and views about the extraordinary conduct of Gabriel Gale. The reply came back with remarkable promptitude; and Garth came to Butterworth with the open telegram in his hand and a rather dazed expression on his face. For the exact terms of the message were:

“Can never be sufficiently grateful to Gale for his great kindness which more than saved my life.”

The two doctors looked at each other in silence; and in almost as complete a silence got into a car and drove across the hills once more to the Blakeney’s house, where Gale was still staying.

They drove across the hilly country and descended into the wide and shallow valley where stood the house which sheltered that dangerous character, Mr. Gabriel Gale. Garth could recall, and Butterworth could imagine, all the irony suggested to the imagination by such a story about such a scene. The house of the Blakeneys stood high and plain just beyond the river; it was one of those houses that strike the eye as old-fashioned and yet not old. Certainly it was not old enough to be beautiful; but it had everything that recalls, to those that faintly remember them, the last traditions of Early Victorian lingering into Mid-Victorian times. The tall pillars looked so very pallid; the long plain windows looked in dismally upon high-ceilinged rooms; the curtains that hung parallel with the pillars were strips of dull red; and even from that distance the humorous Butterworth was certain that they had heavy and quite useless tassels. It was a strange house to have been the scene of an incredible crime or lunacy. It was an even stranger house to have been, as was alleged, the scene of a yet more incredible or mysterious mercy. All about it lay its ordered gardens and its mown or unmown meadows; its plantations of trees and deep alleys and shrubberies; all the things which on that wild night had been given over to the withering splendour of the lightning and the wind. Now the whole landscape was laid bare in a golden calm of summer; and the blue heavens above it were so deep and still that the sound of a humming fly hung there and was heard as far away as the skylark. Thus glittered in the sun, all solid and objective, the stage properties of that hideous farce. Garth saw all the blank and staring windows which he had last beheld streaming with rain and swept by the wind and the wild dance of the lunatic and his victim. He saw the forked tree to which the victim had been bound, still with the two black holes in it where the fork had pierced it, looking like the hollow eyes of a skull, and making the whole seem like some horned goblin. There was the heaped up hay, still to some extent disordered and scattered as by the dizzy dance of a small cyclone; and beyond it rose the high green wall of the unmown and standing grass of the next meadow. From the very thick of this mild jungle or miniature forest, a long thin line of smoke was drawn up into the sky; as if from a very small fire of weeds. Nothing else human or alive was visible in the sultry summer landscape; but Garth seemed to know and recognize the significance of the smoke. He sent a far halloo across the fields, calling out, “Is that you, Gale?”

Two feet pointed skyward and two long legs upside down rose vertically out of the tall grass, just beyond the smoke; and waved to them like arms, as if according to a preconcerted science of signalling. Then the legs seemed to give a leap and dive and the owner of the legs came the right side up and rose or surged slowly out of the depths of green, gazing across at them with a misty and benevolent expression. He was smoking a long thin cigar: the fire behind the smoke.

He received them and their news with no air of triumph, still less of surprise. Abandoning his grassy nest, he sat down with them on the garden-chairs which had also played their part in the mystery; and only smiled a little as he handed back the telegram.

“Well,” he said; “do you still think I am mad?”

“Well,” said Butterworth, “I can’t help wondering whether he is.”

Gale leaned across, showing his first eagerness, and said, “He isn’t. But he jolly nearly was.”

Then he leaned slowly back again and stared abstractedly at a daisy on the lawn, almost as if he had forgotten their presence. When he spoke again it was in a clear but rather colourless tone, like a lecturer:

“A very large number of young men nearly go mad. But nearly all of them only nearly do it; and normally they recover the normal. You might almost say it’s normal to have an abnormal period. It comes when there’s a lack of adjustment in the scale of things outside and within. Lots of those boys, those big healthy schoolboys you hear about, who care for nothing but cricket or the tuckshop, are bursting with a secret and swelling morbidity. But in this young man it was rather symbolically expressed even in the look of him. It was like his growing out of his clothes, or being too big for his boots. The inside gets too big for the outside. He doesn't know how to relate the two things; and generally he doesn't relate them at all. In one way his own mind and self seem to be colossal and cosmic and everything outside them small or distant. In another way the world is much too big for him; and his thoughts are fragile things to be hidden away. There are any number of cases of that disproportionate secretiveness. You know how silent boys have been about incredible abuses in bad schools. Whether or no it's false to say a girl can't keep a secret, it's often really the ruin of a boy that he can keep a secret.

"Now in that dangerous time, there's a dreadfully dangerous moment; when the first connexion is made between the subjective and objective: the first real bridge between the brain and real things. It all depends what it is; because, while it confirms his self-consciousness, it may happen to confirm his self-deception. That young man had never really been noticed by anybody until Lady Flamborough happened to tell him that he had brought the bad weather. It came just at the moment when his whole sense of proportions and possibilities had gone wild. I think the first thing that made me suspect he was…. By the way," added Gale abruptly, "what was it that made you first suspect *me* of being mad?"

"I think," said Garth slowly, "it was when you were staring out of the window at the storm."

"The storm? Was there a storm?" asked Gale vaguely. "Oh yes, now I come to think of it, there was."

"But, hang it all," replied the doctor, "what else could you have been staring out of the window at, except the storm?"

"I wasn't staring out of the window," answered Gale.

"Really, my dear fellow," remonstrated Dr. Garth.

"I was staring at the window," said the poet. "I often stare at windows. So few people ever look at windows, unless they are stained glass-windows. But glass is a very beautiful thing, like diamonds; and transparency is a sort of transcendental colour. Besides, in this case there was something else; and something far more awful and thrilling than a thunderstorm."

"Well, what *were* you looking at, that was more awful than a thunderstorm?"

"I was looking at two raindrops running down the pane," said Gale. "And so was Saunders."

Seeing the others staring at him he continued: “Oh yes, it’s quite true; as the poet says,” and he recited with great and unusual gravity:

&quot;&#039;Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand,
Make the soul to stagger
Till the stars can hardly stand.&#039;

“Haven’t I told you a thousand times,” he continued with increasing earnestness and animation, “that I always find myself looking at some little thing, a stone or a starfish or what not, and that’s the only way I can ever learn anything? But when I looked at Saunders, I saw his eyes were fixed on the same spot on the window-pane; and I shuddered from head to foot, for I knew I had guessed right. He was wearing a certain kind of unobtrusive smile.

“You know that incurable gamblers sometimes bet on a race between two raindrops. But there is this specially about the sport; that it is abstract and equal and gives one a sense of impartiality. If you bet on a dog-fight, you may find you really sympathize with a Scotch terrier against an Irish terrier, or vice versa; you may like the look of a billiard player or even the colours of a jockey. Therefore the event may go *against* your sympathies; and you will realize your limitations. But in the case of those two crystal spheres hung in a void of transparency, there is something like the equal scales of an abstract justice; you feel that whichever wins might be the one you had chosen. You may easily, in a certain secret megalomania, persuade yourself it is the one you have chosen. It is easy to imagine oneself controlling things hung so evenly. That was when I said to him, to test whether I was following his train of thought, ‘It makes you feel like God.’ Did you think I was talking about the storm? Storm! Pooh! Why should a storm make a man think he’s God? If he’d got any sense it might make him feel he wasn’t. But I knew that Saunders was just at the delicate crisis, where he was half trying to believe he was. He was half trying to think he had really changed the weather and might change everything; and a game like that of the raindrops was just the thing to encourage him. He really felt as if he were Omnipotence looking at two falling stars: and he was the special providence in them.

“Remember that there is always something double about morbidity; the sound old popular phrase said the madman was ‘beside himself’. There is a part of him encouraging itself to go mad; and a part that still doesn’t quite believe in the mania. He would delight in easy self deceptions, as in the raindrops. He would also sub-consciously *avoid* tests too decisive. He would avoid *wanting* to want something incredible; as that a tree should dance. He would avoid it; partly for fear it should and partly for fear it shouldn't. And I was suddenly and furiously certain, with every cell of my brain, that he must stop himself instantly, violently, by telling the tree to dance; and finding it wouldn't.

"That was when I shouted to him to tell the chairs and the tree to move. I was certain that unless he learnt his human limitations sharply and instantly, something illimitable and inhuman would take hold of him in that very hour. He took no notice; he rushed out into the garden; he forgot all about the chairs; he ran up that steep meadow with a leap like that of a wild goat; and I knew he had broken loose from reality and was out of the world. He would go careering through waste places, with the storm within and without; and when he returned from that country walk he would never be the same again. He would leap and dance on that lonely road; he would be horribly happy; nothing would stop him. I was already resolved that something must stop him. It must be something abrupt, arresting, revealing the limit of real things; the throttling shock with which a thing comes to the end of its tether. Then I saw the rope and threw it, catching him back like a wild horse. Somehow there rose in my imagination the image of the pagan Centaur rearing backwards, bridled, and rampant against heaven: for the Centaur, like all paganism, is at once natural and unnatural; a part of nature-worship and yet a monster.

"I went through with the whole wild business; and I was sure I was right; as he himself is now sure I was right. Nobody knew but I how far he had already gone along that road; and I knew that there was nothing for it but acute, practical, painful discovery that he could not control matter or the elements; that he could not move trees or remove pitchforks; that he could struggle for two hours with a rope and a pair of prongs and still be bound.

"It was certainly rather a desperate remedy; there is really nothing to be said for it except that it was a remedy. And I believe profoundly that there was no other remedy. Anything in the nature of soothing or quieting him would only have made him yet more secretive and yet more swollen-headed. As for humouring him, it's the very worst thing to do with people who are losing their sense of humour. No; there was something he was beginning to believe about himself; and it was still possible to prove that it wasn't true."

"Do you think," asked Dr. Butterworth, frowning, "that there was really anything in that theological imagery in the matter? Do you suppose *he* put it in the form that he could bring the rain and thunder because he was God Almighty? Of course there are cases of religious mania that are rather like that."

"You must remember," said Gale, "that he was a theological student and was going to be a clergyman; and he may have brooded upon doubt and inspiration and prophecy till they began to work the wrong way. The worst is always very near the best; there is something much worse than atheism which is Satanism; otherwise known as Being God. But as a matter of mere philosophy, apart from theology, the thing is much nearer to the nerve of all thinking than you might think. That's why it was so insinuating and so difficult to see or to stop. That's what I mean when I say I had a sympathy with the young lunatic. After all, it was a very natural mistake."

"My dear Gale," protested his friend Garth. "You are getting a little too fond of paradox. A young tadpole of a curate thinks he can control the skies and uproot trees and call up the thunder and you call it a natural mistake."

"Have you ever lain on your back in a field and stared at the sky and kicked your heels in the air?" asked the poet.

"Not in a public or professional way," answered the doctor. "It's not generally considered the best bedside manner. But suppose I did?"

"If you think like that, and go back to primitive things," said Gale, "you will find yourself wondering why you can control some things and not others. After all, your legs look a long way off when you wave them in the sky. You can wave legs about, but you can't wave trees about. I'm not sure it's so unnatural, in the abstract, for a man to fancy the whole material universe is his own body; since it all seems equally, in one sense, to be outside his own mind. But when he is in hell is when he fancies it is inside his own mind."

"I'm afraid I don't bother much about all this metaphysical business," said Butterworth. "I suppose I really don't understand it. I know what I mean by a man being outside his mind in the sense of being out of his mind; and I suppose you're right in saying that Saunders was morbid enough to be nearly out of his mind. And as for being outside his body, I know what it means in the sense of his blowing his brains out or his body being left for dead. And really, to be candid, you seem to have come precious near to knocking him out of his body to cure him of being out of his mind. It certainly was an exceedingly desperate remedy; and though it may have been defensible, I shouldn't much like to have to go into a law-court as an expert witness to defend it. I can only go by results, and he certainly seems to be all the better for it. But when it comes to all your mystical explanations, about how it is hell to have everything inside your mind, frankly I give up trying to follow. I'm afraid I'm rather a materialist."

"Afraid!" cried Gale, as if with indignation; "*afraid* you are a materialist! You haven't got much notion of what there really is to be afraid of! Materialists are all right; they are at least near enough to heaven to accept the earth and not imagine they made it. The dreadful doubts are not the doubts of the materialist. The dreadful doubts, the deadly and damnable doubts, are the doubts of the idealist."

"I always imagined you were an idealist," said Garth.

"I use the word idealist in its philosophical sense. I mean the real sceptic who doubts matter and the minds of others and everything except his own ego. I have been through it myself; as I have been through nearly every form of infernal idiocy. That is the only use I am in the world; having been every kind of idiot. But believe me, the worst and most miserable sort of idiot is he who seems to create and contain all things. Man is a creature; all his happiness consists in being a creature; or, as the Great Voice commanded us, in becoming a child. All his fun is in having a gift or present; which the child, with profound understanding, values because it is 'a surprise'. But surprise implies that a thing comes from outside ourselves; and gratitude that it comes from someone other than ourselves. It is thrust through the letter-box; it is thrown in at the window; it is thrown over the wall. Those limits are the lines of the very plan of human pleasure.

"I also dreamed that I had dreamed of the whole creation. I had given myself the stars for a gift; I had handed myself the sun and moon. I had been behind and at the beginning of all things; and without me nothing was made that was made. Anybody who has been in that centre of the cosmos knows that it is to be in hell. And there is only one cure for it. Oh, I know that people have written all kinds of cant and false comfort about the cause of evil; and of why there is pain in the world. God forbid that we should add ourselves to such a chattering monkey-house of moralists. But for all that, this truth is true; objectively and experimentally true. There is no cure for that nightmare of omnipotence except pain; because that is the thing a man *knows* he would not tolerate if he could really control it. A man must be in some place from which he would certainly escape if he could, if he is really to realize that all things do not come from within. That is the meaning of that mad parable or mystery play you have seen acted here like an allegory. I doubt whether any of our action is really anything but an allegory. I doubt whether any truth can be told except in a parable. There was a man who saw himself sitting in the sky; and his servants the angels went to and fro in coloured garments of cloud and flame and the pageant of the seasons; but he was over all and his face seemed to fill the heavens. And, God forgive me for blasphemy, but I nailed him to a tree.”

He had risen to his feet in a suppressed and very unusual excitement; and his face was pale in the sunlight. For he spoke indeed in parables; and the things of which he was thinking were far away from that garden or even from that tale. There swelled up darkly and mountainously in his memory the slopes of another garden against another storm. The skeleton arch of a ruined abbey stood gaunt against the ghastly light, and beyond the racing river was the low and desolate inn among the reeds; and all that grey landscape was to him one purple patch of Paradise… and of Paradise Lost.

“It is the only way,” he kept repeating; “it is the only answer to the heresy of the mystic; which is to fancy that mind is all. It is to break your heart. Thank God for hard stones; thank God for hard facts; thank God for thorns and rocks and deserts and long years. At least I know now that I am not the best or strongest thing in the world. At least I know now that I have not dreamed of everything.”

“You look very strange,” said his friend Garth.

“I know it now,” said Gale. “For there is one who would be here, if dreaming could do it.”

There was again an utter stillness in which the fly could be heard buzzing in the blue; and when he spoke again, though in the same brooding vein, they had an indescribable intuition that a door in his mind had stood open for an instant and had now again closed finally with a clang. He said after the long silence:

“We are all tied to trees and pinned with pitchforks. And as long as these are solid we know the stars will stand and the hills will not melt at our word. Can’t you imagine the huge tide of healthy relief and thanks, like a hymn of praise from all nature, that went up from that captive nailed to the tree, when he had wrestled till the dawn and received at last the great glorious news; the news that he was only a man?”

Dr. Butterworth was looking across the table with a restrained but somewhat amused expression; for the poet’s eyes were shining like lamps and he was speaking on a note not often heard in any man speaking prose.

“If I hadn’t got a good deal of special knowledge and experience,” he said, rising, “I should think there was a bit of a doubt about you after all.”

Gabriel Gale looked sharply over his shoulder and the note of his voice changed once more.

“Don’t say that,” he said rather curtly. “That’s the only sort of danger I really run.”

“I don’t understand,” said Butterworth. “Do you mean the danger of being certified?”

“Certify me till all is blue,” said Gale contemptuously. “Do you suppose I should particularly mind if you did? Do you suppose I couldn’t be reasonably happy in a lunatic asylum, so long as there was dust in a sunbeam or shadows on a wall… so long as I could look at ordinary things and think how extraordinary they are? Do you suppose I couldn’t praise God with tolerable piety for the shape of my keeper’s nose or anything else calculated to give pleasure to a thoughtful mind? I should imagine that a madhouse would be an excellent place to be sane in. I’d a long sight rather live in a nice quiet secluded madhouse than in intellectual clubs full of unintellectual people, all chattering nonsense about the newest book of philosophy; or in some of those earnest, elbowing sort of Movements that want you to go in for Service and help to take away somebody else’s toys. I don’t much mind to what place I may wander to think in, before I die; so long as the thoughts do not wander too much; or wander down the wrong road. And what you said just now does touch the real danger. It does touch the danger that Garth was really thinking about, when he suggested that I had reclaimed lunatics and might myself become a castaway. If people tell me they really do not understand what I mean… if they say they cannot see so simple a truth as that it is best for a man to be a man, that it is dangerous to give oneself divine honours… if they say they do not see *that* for themselves, but imagine it to be some sort of mysticism out of my own head, *then* I am myself again in peril. I am in peril of thinking something that may be wilder and worse than thinking I am God Almighty.”

“And still I don’t understand,” said the smiling physician.

“I shall think I am the only sane man,” said Gabriel Gale.

There was a sort of sequel which came to Garth’s ears long afterwards; an epilogue to the crazy comedy of the pitchfork and the apple-tree. Garth differed from Gale in having a more obvious turn for the rational, or at least the rationalistic; and he often found himself debating with the sceptics of various scientific clubs and groups; finding them a very worthy race, often genuinely hard-headed and sometimes tending rather to be wooden-headed. In a particular country place, the name of which is not material, the post of village atheist had become vacant, so to speak, by the regrettable perversity of the cobbler in being a Congregationalist. His official functions were performed by a more prosperous person named Pond, a worthy hatter who was rather more famous as a cricketer. On the cricket field he was often pitted against another excellent cricketer, who was Vicar of the parish; indeed they contended more frequently on the field of cricket than on the field of spiritual speculation. For the clergyman was one of the type that is uproariously popular and successful chiefly by his proficiency in such sports. He was the sort of parson whom people praise by saying he is not a bit like a parson. He was a big, beefy, jolly man, red-faced and resolute of manner; still young but the father of a boisterous family of boys, and in most ways very like a boy himself. Nevertheless, as was natural, certain passages of chaff, that could hardly be called controversy, occasionally passed between the parson and the village atheist. There was no need to commiserate the clergyman upon the pin-pricks of the scientific materialist; for a pin has no effect on a pachyderm. The parson was the sort of man who seems to be rolled in layers within layers of solid substance resisting anything outside his own cheery and sensible mode of life. But one curious episode had clung to the memory of Pond, and he recounted it to Garth, in something of the puzzled tone in which a materialist tells a ghost story. The rival cricketers had been chipping each other in the usual friendly fashion, which did not go very much below the surface. The Vicar was doubtless a sincere Christian, though chiefly what used to be called a muscular Christian. But it is not unfair to him to say that he was more deeply moved in saying that some action was not Cricket than in saying it was not Christianity. On this and other occasions, however, he relied chiefly on ragging his opponent with rather obvious jokes; such as the oft-repeated inquiry as to how often the hatter might be expected to do the hat-trick. Perhaps the repetition of this epigram eventually annoyed the worthy freethinker; or perhaps there was something in the deeper and more positive tones with which the parson dealt with more serious matters, that had the same effect. It was with more than his usual breeziness that the reverend gentleman on this occasion affirmed the philosophy of his life. “God wants you to play the game,” he said. “That’s all that God wants; people who will play the game.”

“How do you know?” asked Mr. Pond rather snappishly and in unusual irritation. “How do you know what God wants? You never were God, were you?”

There was a silence; and the atheist was seen to be staring at the red face of the parson in a somewhat unusual fashion.

“Yes,” said the clergyman in a queer quiet voice. “I was God once; for about fourteen hours. But I gave it up. I found it was too much of a strain.”

With these words the Rev. Herbert Saunders went back to the cricket tent, where he mingled with Boy Scouts and village girls with all his usual heartiness and hilarity. But Mr. Pond the atheist, sat for some time staring, like one who has seen a miracle. And he afterwards confided to Garth that for a moment the eyes of Saunders had looked out of his red, good-humoured face as out of a mask; with an instantaneous memory of something awful and appalling, and at the same time empty; something the other man could only figure to himself in vague thoughts of some flat stark building with blank windows in a blind alley; and peering out of one of the windows the pale face of an idiot.

THE FINGER OF STONE

THREE young men on a walking tour came to a halt outside the little town of Carillon, in the south of France; which is doubtless described in the guide books as famous for its fine old Byzantine monastery, now the seat of a university; and for having been the scene of the labours of Boyg. At that name, at least, the reader will be reasonably thrilled; for he must have seen it in any number of newspapers and novels. Boyg and the Bible are periodically reconciled at religious conferences; Boyg broadens and slightly bewilders the minds of numberless heroes of long psychological stories, which begin in the nursery and nearly end in the madhouse. The journalist, writing rapidly his recurrent reference to the treatment meted out to pioneers like Galileo, pauses in the effort to think of another example, and always rounds off the sentence either with Bruno or with Boyg. But the mildly orthodox are equally fascinated, and feel a glow of agnosticism while they continue to say that, since the discoveries of Boyg, the doctrine of the Homoousian or of the human conscience does not stand where it did; wherever that was. It is needless to say that Boyg was a great discoverer, for the public has long regarded him with the warmest reverence and gratitude on that ground. It is also unnecessary to say what he discovered; for the public will never display the faintest curiosity about that. It is vaguely understood that it was something about fossils, or the long period required for petrifaction; and that it generally implied those anarchic or anonymous forces of evolution supposed to be hostile to religion. But certainly none of the discoveries he made while he was alive was so sensational, in the newspaper sense, as the discovery that was made about him when he was dead. And this, the more private and personal matter, is what concerns us here.

The three tourists had just agreed to separate for an hour, and meet again for luncheon at the little cafÃ© opposite; and the different ways in which they occupied their time and indulged their tastes will serve for a sufficient working summary of their personalities. Arthur Armitage was a dark and grave young man, with a great deal of money, which he spent on a conscientious and continuous course of self-culture, especially in the matter of art and architecture; and his earnest aquiline profile was already set towards the Byzantine monastery, for the exhaustive examination of which he had already prepared himself, as if he were going to pass an examination rather than to make one. The man next him, though himself an artist, betrayed no such artistic ardour. He was a painter who wasted most of his time as a poet; but Armitage, who was always picking up geniuses, had become in some sense his patron in both departments. His name was Gabriel Gale; a long, loose, rather listless man with yellow hair; but a man not easy for any patron to patronize.

He generally did as he liked in an abstracted fashion; and what he very often liked to do was nothing. On this occasion he showed a lamentable disposition to drift towards the cafÃ© first; and having drunk a glass or two of wine, he drifted not into the town but out of it, roaming about the steep bare slope above, with a rolling eye on the rolling clouds; and talking to himself until he found somebody else to talk to, which happened when he put his foot through the glass roof of a studio just below him on the steep incline. As it was an artist's studio, however, their quarrel fortunately ended in an argument about the future of realistic art; and when he turned up to lunch, that was the extent of his acquaintance with the quaint and historic town of Carillon.

The name of the third man was Garth; he was shorter and uglier and somewhat older than the others, but with a much livelier eye in his hatchet face; he stepped much more briskly, and in the matter of a knowledge of the world, the other two were babies under his charge. He was a very able medical practitioner, with a hobby of more fundamental scientific inquiry; and for him the whole town, university and studio, monastery and cafÃ©, was only the temple of the presiding genius of Boyg. But in this case the practical instinct of Dr. Garth would seem to have guided him rightly; for he discovered things considerably more startling than anything the antiquarian found in the Romanesque arches or the poet in the rolling clouds. And it is his adventures, in that single hour before lunch, upon which this tale must turn.

The cafÃ© tables stood on the pavement under a row of trees opposite the old round gate in the wall, through which could be seen the white gleam of the road up which they had just been walking. But the steep hills were so high round the town that they rose clear above the wall, in a more enormous wall of smooth and slanting rock, bare except for occasional clumps of cactus. There was no crack in that sloping wilderness of stone except the rather shallow and stony bed of a little stream. Lower down, where the stream reached the level of the valley, rose the dark domes of the basilica of the old monastery; and from this a curious stairway of rude stones ran some way up the hill beside the watercourse, and stopped at a small and solitary building looking little more than a shed made of stones. Some little way higher the gleam of the glass roof of the studio, with which Gale had collided in his unconscious wanderings, marked the last spot of human habitation in all those rocky wastes that rose about the little town.

Armitage and Gale were already seated at the table when Dr. Garth walked up briskly and sat down some what abruptly.

“Have you fellows heard the news?” he asked.

He spoke somewhat sharply, for he was faintly annoyed by the attitudes of the antiquarian and the artist, who were deep in their own dreamier and less practical tastes and topics. Armitage was saying at the moment:

“Yes, I suppose I’ve seen today some of the very oldest sculpture of the veritable Dark Ages. And it’s not stiff like some Byzantine work; there’s a touch of the true grotesque you generally get in Gothic.”

“Well, I’ve seen today some of the newest sculpture of the Modern Ages,” replied Gale, “and I fancy they are the veritable Dark Ages. Quite enough of the true grotesque up in that studio, I can tell you.”

“Have you heard the news, I say?” rapped out the doctor. “Boyg is dead.”

Gale stopped in a sentence about Gothic architecture, and said seriously, with a sort of hazy reverence:

“*Requiescat in pace.* Who was Boyg?”

“Well, really,” replied the doctor, “I did think every baby had heard of Boyg.”

“Well, I dare say you’ve never heard of Paradou,” answered Gale. “Each of us lives in his little cosmos with its classes and degrees. Probably you haven’t heard of the most advanced sculptor, or perhaps of the latest lacrosse expert or champion chess player.”

It was characteristic of the two men that while Gale went on talking in the air about an abstract subject, till he had finished his own train of thought, Armitage had a sufficient proper sense of the presence of something more urgent to relapse into silence. Nevertheless, he unconsciously looked down at his notes; at the name of the advanced sculptor he looked up.

“Who is Paradou?” he asked.

“Why, the man I’ve been talking to this morning,” replied Gale. “His sculpture’s advanced enough for anybody. He’s no end of a chap; talks more than I do, and talks very well. Thinks too; I should think he could do everything except sculpt. There his theories get in his way. As I told him, this notion of the new realism…”

“Perhaps we might drop realism and attend to reality,” said Dr. Garth grimly. “I tell you Boyg is dead. And that’s not the worst either.”

Armitage looked up from his notes with something of the vagueness of his friend the poet. “If I remember right,” he said, “Professor Boyg’s discovery was concerned with fossils.”

“Professor Boyg’s discovery involved the extension of the period required for petrifaction as distinct from fossilization,” replied the doctor stiffly, “and thereby relegated biological origins to a period which permits the chronology necessary to the hypothesis of natural selection. It may affect you as humorous to interject the observation ‘loud cheers’, but I assure you the scientific world, which happens to be competent to judge, was really moved with amazement as well as admiration.”

“In fact it was petrified to hear it couldn’t be petrified,” suggested the poet.

“I have really no time for your flippancy,” said Garth. “I am up against a great ugly fact.”

Armitage interposed in the benevolent manner of a chairman. “We must really let Garth speak; come, doctor, what is it all about? Begin at the beginning.”

“Very well,” said the doctor, in his staccato way. “I’ll begin at the beginning. I came to this town with a letter of introduction to Boyg himself; and as I particularly wanted to visit the geological museum, which his own munificence provided for this town, I went there first. I found all the windows of the Boyg Museum were broken; and the stones thrown by the rioters were actually lying about the room within a foot or two of the glass cases, one of which was smashed.”

“Donations to the geological museum, no doubt,” remarked Gale. “A munificent patron happens to pass by, and just heaves in a valuable exhibit through the window. I don’t see why that shouldn’t be done in what you call the world of science; I’m sure it’s done all right in the world of art. Old Paradou’s busts, and bas-reliefs are just great rocks chucked at the public and…”

“Paradou may go to…Paradise, shall we say?” said Garth, with pardonable impatience. “Will nothing make you understand that something has really happened that isn’t any of your ideas and isms? It wasn’t only the geological museum; it was the same everywhere. I passed by the house Boyg first lived in, where they very properly put up a medallion; and the medallion was all splashed with mud. I crossed the market-place, where they put up a statue to him just recently. It was still hung with wreaths of laurel by his pupils and the party that appreciates him; but they were half torn away, as if there had been a struggle, and stones had evidently been thrown, for a piece of the hand was chipped off.”

“Paradou’s statue, no doubt,” observed Gale. “No wonder they threw things at it.”

“I think not,” replied the doctor, in the same hard voice. “It wasn’t because it was Paradou’s statue, but because it was Boyg’s statue. It was the same business as the museum and the medallion. No, there’s been something like a French Revolution here on the subject; the French are like that. You remember the riot in the Breton village where Renan was born, against having a statue of him. You know, I suppose, that Boyg was a Norwegian by birth, and only settled here because the geological formation, and the supposed mineral properties of that stream there, offered the best field for his investigations. Well, besides the fits the parsons were in at his theories in general, it seems he bumped into some barbarous local superstition as well; about it being a sacred stream that froze snakes into ammonites at a wink; a common myth, of course, for the same was told about St. Hilda at Whitby. But there are peculiar conditions that made it pretty hot in this place. The theological students fight with the medical students, one for Rome and the other for Reason; and they say there’s a sort of raving lunatic of a Peter the Hermit, who lives in that hermitage on the hill over there, and every now and then comes out waving his arms and setting the place on fire.”

“I heard something about that,” remarked Armitage. “The priest who showed me over the monastery; I think he was the head man there… anyhow, he was a most learned and eloquent gentleman… told me about a holy man on the hill who was almost canonized already.”

“One is tempted to wish he were martyred already; but the martyrdom, if any, was not his,” said Garth darkly. “Allow me to continue my story in order. I had crossed the market-place to find Professor Boyg’s private house, which stood at the corner of it. I found the shutters up and the house apparently empty, except for one old servant, who refused at first to tell me anything; indeed, I found a good deal of rustic reluctance on both sides to tell a foreigner anything. But when I had managed to make the nature of my introduction quite plain to him, he finally broke down; and told me his master was dead."

There was a pause, and then Gale, who seemed for the first time somewhat impressed, asked abstractedly:

"Where is his tomb? Your tale is really rather strange and dramatic, and obviously it must go on to his tomb. Your pilgrimage ought to end in finding a magnificent monument of marble and gold, like the tomb of Napoleon, and then finding that even the grave had been desecrated."

"He has no tomb," replied Garth sternly, "though he will have many monuments. I hope to see the day when he will have a statue in every town, he whose statue is now insulted in his own town. But he will have no tomb."

"And why not?" asked the staring Armitage.

"His body cannot be found," answered the doctor; "no trace of him can be found anywhere."

"Then how do you know he is dead?" asked the other.

There was an instant of silence, and then the doctor spoke out in a voice fuller and stronger than before:

"Why, as to that," he said, "I think he is dead because I am sure he is murdered."

Armitage shut his note book, but continued to look down steadily at the table. "Go on with your story," he said.

"Boyg's old servant," resumed the doctor, "who is a queer, silent, yellow-faced old card, was at last induced to tell me of the existence of Boyg's assistant, of whom I think he was rather jealous. The Professor's scientific helper and right-hand man is a man of the name of Bertrand, and a very able man, too, eminently worthy of the great man's confidence, and intensely devoted to his cause. He is carrying on Boyg's work so far as it can be carried on; and about Boyg's death or disappearance he knows the little that can be known. It was when I finally ran him to earth in a little house full of Boyg's books and instruments, at the bottom of the hill just beyond the town, that I first began to realize the nature of this sinister and mysterious business. Bertrand is a quiet man, though he has a little of the pardonable vanity which is not uncommon in assistants. One would sometimes fancy the great discovery was almost as much his as his master's; but that does no harm, since it only makes him fight for his master's fame almost as if it were his. But in fact he is not only concerned about the discovery; or rather, he is not only concerned about that discovery. I had not looked for long at the dark bright eyes and keen face of that quiet young man before I realized that there was something else that he is trying to discover. As a matter of fact, he is no longer merely a scientific assistant, or even a scientific student. Unless I am much mistaken, he is playing the part of an amateur detective.

"Your artistic training, my friends, may be an excellent thing for discovering a poet, or even a sculptor; but you will forgive me for thinking a scientific training rather better for discovering a murderer. Bertrand has gone to work in a very workmanlike way, I consider, and I can tell you in outline what he has discovered so far. Boyg was last seen by Bertrand descending the hillside by the watercourse, having just come away from the studio of Gale's friend the sculptor, where he was sitting for an hour every morning. I may say here, rather for the sake of logical method than because it is needed by the logical argument, that the sculptor at any rate had no quarrel with Boyg, but was, on the contrary, an ardent admirer of him as an advanced and revolutionary character."

"I know," said Gale, seeming to take his head suddenly out of the clouds. "Paradou says realistic art must be founded on the modern energy of science; but the fallacy of that…"

"Let me finish with the facts first before you retire into your theories," said the doctor firmly. "Bertrand saw Boyg sit down on the bare hillside for a smoke; and you can see from here how bare a hillside it is; a man walking for hours on it would still be as visible as a fly crawling on a ceiling. Bertrand says he was called away to the crisis of an experiment in the laboratory; when he looked again he could not see his master, and he has never seen him from that day to this.

"At the foot of the hill, and at the bottom of the flight of steps which runs up to the hermitage, is the entrance to the great monastic buildings on the very edge of the town. The very first thing you come to on that side is the great quadrangle, which is enclosed by cloisters, and by the rooms or cells of the clerical or semi-clerical students. I need not trouble you with the tale of the political compromise by which this part of the institution has remained clerical, while the scientific and other schools beyond it are now entirely secular. But it is important to fix in your mind the fact itself: that the monastic part is on the very edge of the town, and the other part bars its way, so to speak, to the inside of the town. Boyg could not possibly have gone past that secular barrier, dead or alive, without being under the eyes of crowds who were more excited about him than about anything else in the world. For the whole place was in a fuss, and even a riot for him as well as against him. Something happened to him on the hillside, or anyhow before he came to the internal barrier. My friend the amateur detective set to work to examine the hillside, or all of it that could seriously count; an enormous undertaking, but he did it as if with a microscope. Well, he found that rocky field, when examined closely, very much what it looks even from here. There are no caves or even holes, there are no chasms or even cracks in that surface of blank stone for miles and miles. A rat could not be hidden in those few tufts of prickly pear. He could not find a hiding-place; but for all that, he found a hint. The hint was nothing more than a faded scrap of paper, damp and draggled from the shallow bed of the brook, but faintly decipherable on it were words in the writing of the Master. They were but part of a sentence, but they included the words, ‘will call on you tomorrow to tell you something you ought to know.’

“My friend Bertrand sat down and thought it out. The letter had been in the water, so it had not been thrown away in the town, for the highly scientific reason that the river does not flow uphill. There only remained on the higher ground the sculptor’s studio and the hermitage. But Boyg would not write to the sculptor to warn him that he was going to call, since he went to his studio every morning. Presumably the person he was going to call on was the hermit; and a guess might well be made about the nature of what he had to say. Bertrand knew better than anybody that Boyg had just brought his great discovery to a crushing completeness, with fresh facts and ratifications; and it seems likely enough that he went to announce it to his most fanatical opponent, to warn him to give up the struggle.”

Gale, who was gazing up into the sky with his eye on a bird, again abruptly intervened.

“In these attacks on Boyg,” he said, “were there any attacks on his private character?”

“Even these madmen couldn’t attack that,” replied Garth with some heat. “He was the best sort of Scandinavian, as simple as a child, and I really believe as innocent. But they hated him for all that; and you can see for yourself that their hatred begins to appear on the horizon of our inquiry. He went to tell the truth in the hour of triumph; and he never reappeared to the light of the sun.”

Armitage’s far-away gaze was fixed on the solitary cell half-way up the hill. “You don’t mean seriously,” he said, “that the man they talk about as a saint, the friend of my friend the abbot, or whatever he is, is neither more nor less than an assassin?”

“You talked to your friend the abbot about Romanesque sculpture,” replied Garth. “If you had talked to him about fossils, you might have seen another side of his character. These Latin priests are often polished enough, but you bet they’re pointed as well. As for the other man on the hill, he’s allowed by his superiors to live what they call the eremitical life; but he’s jolly well allowed to do other things, too. On great occasions he’s allowed to come down here and preach, and I can tell you there is Bedlam let loose when he does. I might be ready to excuse the man as a sort of a maniac; but I haven’t the slightest difficulty in believing that he is a homicidal maniac.”

“Did your friend Bertrand take any legal steps on his suspicions?” asked Armitage, after a pause.

“Ah, that’s where the mystery begins,” replied the doctor.

After a moment of frowning silence, he resumed. “Yes, he did make a formal charge to the police, and the Juge d’Instruction examined a good many people and so on, and said the charge had broken down. It broke down over the difficulty of disposing of the body; the chief difficulty in most murders. Now the hermit, who is called Hyacinth, I believe, was summoned in due course; but he had no difficulty in showing that his hermitage was as bare and as hard as the hill-side. It seemed as if nobody could possibly have concealed a corpse in those stone walls, or dug a grave in that rocky floor. Then it was the turn of the abbot, as you call him, Father Bernard of the Catholic College. And he managed to convince the magistrate that the same was true of the cells surrounding the college quadrangle, and all the other rooms under his control. They were all like empty boxes, with barely a stick or two of furniture; less than usual, in fact, for some of the sticks had been broken up for the bonfire demonstration I told you of. Anyhow, that was the line of defence, and I dare say it was well conducted, for Bernard is a very able man, and knows about many other things besides Romanesque architecture; and Hyacinth, fanatic as he is, is famous as a persuasive orator. Anyhow, it was successful, the case broke down; but I am sure my friend Bertrand is only biding his time, and means to bring it up again. These difficulties about the concealment of a corpse… Hullo! why here he is in person.”

He broke off in surprise as a young man walking rapidly down the street paused a moment, and then approached the cafÃ© table at which they sat. He was dressed with all the funereal French respectability: his black stovepipe hat, his high and stiff black neck-cloth resembling a stock, and the curious corners of dark beard at the edges of his chin, gave him an antiquated air like a character out of Gaboriau. But if he was out of Gaboriau, he was nobody less than Lecocq; the dark eyes in his pale face might indeed be called the eyes of a born detective. At this moment, the pale face was paler than usual with excitement, and as he stopped a moment behind the doctor’s chair, he said to him in a low voice:

“I have found out.”

Dr. Garth sprang to his feet, his eyes brilliant with curiosity; then, recovering his conventional manner, he presented M. Bertrand to his friends, saying to the former, “You may speak freely with us, I think; we have no interest except an interest in the truth.”

“I have found the truth,” said the Frenchman, with compressed lips. “I know now what these murderous monks have done with the body of Boyg.”

“Are we to be allowed to hear it?” asked Armitage gravely.

“Everyone will hear it in three days’ time,” replied the pale Frenchman. “As the authorities refuse to reopen the question, we are holding a public meeting in the market-place to demand that they do so. The assassins will be there, doubtless, and I shall not only denounce but convict them to their faces. Be there yourself, monsieur, on Thursday at half-past two, and you will learn how one of the world’s greatest men was done to death by his enemies. For the moment I will only say one word. As the great Edgar Poe said in your own language, ‘Truth is not always in a well.’ I believe it is sometimes too obvious to be seen.”

Gabriel Gale, who had rather the appearance of having gone to sleep, seemed to rouse himself with an unusual animation.

“That’s true,” he said, “and that’s the truth about the whole business.”

Armitage turned to him with an expression of quiet amusement.

“Surely you’re not playing the detective, Gale,” he said. “I never pictured such a thing as your coming out of fairyland to assist Scotland

Yard.”

“Perhaps Gale thinks he can find the body,” suggested Dr. Garth laughing.

Gale lifted himself slowly and loosely from his seat, and answered in his dazed fashion:

“Why, yes, in a way,” he said; “in fact, I’m pretty sure I can find the body. In fact, in a manner of speaking, I’ve found it.”

Those with any intimations of the personality of Mr. Arthur Armitage will not need to be told that he kept a diary; and endeavoured to note down his impressions of foreign travel with atmospheric sympathy and the *mot juste*. But the pen dropped from his hand, so to speak, or at least wandered over the page in a mazy desperation, in the attempt to describe the great mob meeting, or rather the meeting of two mobs, which took place in the picturesque market-place in which he had wandered alone a few days before, criticising the style of the statue, or admiring the sky-line of the basilica. He had read and written about democracy all his life; and when first he met it, it swallowed him like an earthquake. One actual and appalling difference divided this French mob in a provincial market from all the English mobs he had ever seen in Hyde Park or Trafalgar Square. These Frenchmen had not come there to get rid of their feelings, but to get rid of their enemies. Something would be done as a result of this sort of public meeting; it might be murder, but it would be something.

And although, or rather because, it had this militant ferocity, it had also a sort of military discipline. The clusters of men voluntarily deployed into cordons, and in some rough fashion followed the command of leaders. Father Bernard was there, with a face of bronze, like the mask of a Roman emperor, eagerly obeyed by his crowd of crusading devotees, and beside him the wild preacher, Hyacinth, who looked himself like a dead man brought out of the grave, with a face built out of bones, and cavernous eye-sockets deep and dark enough to hide the eyes. On the other side were the grim pallor of Bertrand and the rat-like activity of the red-haired Dr. Garth; their own anti-clerical mob was roaring behind them, and their eyes were alight with triumph. Before Armitage could collect himself sufficiently to make proper notes of any of these things, Bertrand had sprung upon a chair placed near the pedestal of the statue, and announced almost without words, by one dramatic gesture, that he had come to avenge the dead.

Then the words came, and they came thick and fast, telling and terrible; but Armitage heard them as in a dream till they reached the point for which he was waiting; the point that would awaken any dreamer. He heard the prose poems of laudation, the hymn to Boyg the hero, the tale of his tragedy so far as he knew it already. He heard the official decision about the impossibility of the clerics concealing the corpse, as he had heard it already. And then he and the whole crowd leapt together at something they did not know before; or rather, as in all such riddles, something they did know and did not understand.

“They plead that their cells are bare and their lives simple,” Bertrand was saying, “and it is true that these slaves of superstition are cut off from the natural joys of men. But they have their joys; oh, believe me, they have their festivities. If they cannot rejoice in love, they can rejoice in hatred. And everybody seems to have forgotten that on the very day the Master vanished, the theological students in their own quadrangle burnt him in effigy. In effigy.”

A thrill that was hardly a whisper, but was wilder than a cry, went through the whole crowd; and men had taken in the whole meaning before they could keep pace with the words that followed.

“Did they burn Bruno in effigy? Did they burn Dolet in effigy?” Bertrand was saying, with a white, fanatical face. “Those martyrs of the truth were burned alive for the good of their Church and for the glory of their God. Oh, yes, progress has improved them; and they did not burn Boyg alive. But they burned him dead; and that is how they obliterated the traces of the way they had done him to death. I have said that truth is not always hidden in a well, but rather high on a tower. And while I have searched every crevice and cactus bush for the bones of my master, it was in truth in public, under the open sky, before a roaring crowd in the quadrangle, that his body vanished from the sight of men.”

When the last cheer and howl of a whole hell of such noises had died away, Father Bernard succeeded in making his voice heard.

“It is enough to say in answer to this maniac charge that the atheists who bring it against us cannot induce their own atheistic Government to support them. But as the charge is against Father Hyacinth rather than against me, I will ask him to reply to it.”

There was another tornado of conflicting noises when the eremitical preacher opened his mouth; but his very tones had a certain power of piercing, and quelling it. There was something strange in such a voice coming out of such a skull-and-cross-bones of a countenance; for it was unmistakably the musical and moving voice that had stirred so many congregations and pilgrimages. Only in this crisis it had an awful accent of reality, which was beyond any arts of oratory. But before the tumult had yet died away Armitage, moved by some odd nervous instinct, had turned abruptly to Garth and said, "What's become of Gale? He said he was going to be here. Didn't he talk some nonsense about bringing the body himself?"

Dr. Garth shrugged his shoulders. "I imagine he's talking some other nonsense at the top of the hill somewhere else. You mustn't ask poets to remember all the nonsense they talk."

"My friends," Father Hyacinth was saying, in quiet but penetrating tones. "I have no answer to give to this charge. I have no proofs with which to refute it. If a man can be sent to the guillotine on such evidence, to the guillotine I will go. Do you fancy I do not know that innocent men have been guillotined? M. Bertrand spoke of the burning of Bruno, as if it is only the enemies of the Church that have been burned. Does any Frenchman forget that Joan of Arc was burned; and was she guilty? The first Christians were tortured for being cannibals, a charge as probable as the charge against me. Do you imagine because you kill men now by modern machinery and modern law, that we do not know that you are as likely to kill unjustly as Herod or Heliogabalus? Do you think we do not know that the powers of the world are what they always were, that your lawyers who oppress the poor for hire will shed innocent blood for gold? If I were here to bandy such lawyer's talk, I could use it against you more reasonably than you against me. For what reason am I supposed to have imperilled my soul by such a monstrous crime? For a theory about a theory; for a hypothesis about a hypothesis, for some thin fantastic notion that a discovery about fossils threatened the everlasting truth. I could point to others who had better reasons for murder than that. I could point to a man who by the death of Boyg has inherited the whole power and position of Boyg. I could point to one who is truly the heir and the man whom the crime benefits; who is known to claim much of the discovery as his own; who has been not so much the assistant as the rival of the dead. He alone has given evidence that Boyg was seen on the hill at all on that fatal day. He alone inherits by the death anything solid, from the largest ambitions in the scientific world, to the smallest magnifying glass in his collection. The man lives, and I could stretch out my hand and touch him."

Hundreds of faces were turned upon Bertrand with a frightful expression of inhuman eagerness; the turn of the debate had been too dramatic to raise a cry. Bertrand's very lips were pale, but they smiled as they formed the words:

"And what did I do with the body?"

"God grant you did nothing with it, dead or alive," answered the other. "I do not charge you; but if ever you are charged as I am unjustly, you may need a God on that day. Though I were ten times guillotined, God could testify to my innocence; if it were by bidding me walk these streets, like St. Denis, with my head in my hand. I have no other proof. I can call no other witness. He can deliver me if He will."

There was a sudden silence, which was somehow stronger than a pause; and in it Armitage could be heard saying sharply, and almost querulously:

"Why, here's Gale again, after all. Have you dropped from the sky?"

Gale was indeed sauntering in a clear space round the corner of the statue with all the appearance of having just arrived at a crowded At Home; and Bertrand was quick to seize the chance of an anti-climax to the hermit's oratory.

"This," he cried, "is a gentleman who thinks he can find the body himself. Have you brought it with you, monsieur?"

The joke about the poet as detective had already been passed round among many people, and the suggestion received a new kind of applause. Somebody called out in a high, piping voice, "He's got it in his pocket"; and another, in deep sepulchral tones, "His waistcoat pocket."

Mr. Gale certainly had his hands in his pockets, whether or no he had anything else in them; and it was with great nonchalance that he replied:

"Well, in that sense, I suppose I haven't got it. But you have."

The next moment he had astonished his friends, who were not used to seeing him so alert, by leaping on the chair, and himself addressing the crowd in clear tones, and in excellent French:

"Well, my friends," he said, "the first thing I have to do is to associate myself with everything said by my honourable friend, if he will allow me to call him so, about the merits and high moral qualities of the late Professor Boyg. Boyg, at any rate, is in every way worthy of all the honour you can pay to him. Whatever else is doubtful, whatever else we differ about, we can all salute in him that search for truth which is the most disinterested of all our duties to God. I agree with my friend Dr. Garth that he deserves to have a statue, not only in his own town, but in every town in the world.”

The anti-clericals began to cheer warmly, while their opponents watched in silence, wondering where this last eccentric development might lead. The poet seemed to realize their mystification, and smiled as he continued:

“Perhaps you wonder why I should say that so emphatically. Well, I suppose you all have your own reasons for recognizing this genuine love of truth in the late Professor. But I say it because I happen to know something that perhaps you don’t know, which makes me specially certain about his honesty.”

“And what is that?” asked Father Bernard, in the pause that followed.

“Because,” said Gale, “he was going to see Father Hyacinth to own himself wrong.”

Bertrand made a swift movement forward that seemed almost to threaten an assault: but Garth arrested it, and Gale went on, without noticing it.

“Professor Boyg had discovered that his theory was wrong after all. That was the sensational discovery he had made in those last days and with those last experiments. I suspected it when I compared the current tale with his reputation as a simple and kindly man. I did not believe he would have gone merely to triumph over his worst enemy; it was far more probable that he thought it a point of honour to acknowledge his mistake. For, without professing to know much about these things, I am sure it was a mistake. Things do not, after all, need all those thousand years to petrify in that particular fashion. Under certain conditions, which chemists could explain better than I, they do not need more than one year, or even one day. Something in the properties of the local water, applied or intensified by special methods, can really in a few hours turn an animal organism into a fossil. The scientific experiment has been made; and the proof is before you.”

He made a gesture with his hand, and went on, with something more like excitement:

“M. Bertrand is right in saying that truth is not in a well, but on a tower. It is on a pedestal. You have looked at it every day. There is the body of Boyg!”

And he pointed to the statue in the middle of the market-place, wreathed with laurel and defaced with stones, as it had stood so long in that quiet square, and looked down at so many casual passers-by.

"Somebody suggested just now," he went on, glancing over a sea of gaping faces, "that I carried the statue in my waistcoat pocket. Well, I don't carry all of it, of course, but this is a part of it," and he took out a small object like a stick of grey chalk; "this is a finger of it knocked off by a stone. I picked it up by the pedestal. If anybody who understands these things likes to look at it, he will agree that the consistency is precisely the same as the admitted fossils in the geological museum."

He held it out to them, but the whole mob stood still as if it also was a mob of men turned to stone.

"Perhaps you think I'm mad," he said pleasantly. "Well, I'm not exactly mad, but I have an odd sort of sympathy with madmen. I can manage them better than most people can, because I can fancy somehow the wild way their minds will work. I understand the man who did this. I know he did, because I talked to him for half the morning; and it's exactly the sort of thing he would do. And when first I heard talk of fossil shells and petrified insects and so on, I did the same thing that such men always do. I exaggerated it into a sort of extravagant vision, a vision of fossil forests, and fossil cattle, and fossil elephants and camels; and so, naturally, to another thought: a coincidence that somehow turned me cold. A Fossil Man.

"It was then that I looked up at the statue; and knew it was not a statue. It was a corpse petrified by the curious chemistry of your strange mountain-stream. I call it a fossil as a loose popular term; of course I know enough geology to know it is not the correct term. But I was not exactly concerned with a problem of geology. I was concerned with what some prefer to call criminology and I prefer to call crime. If that extraordinary erection was the corpse, who and where was the criminal? Who was the assassin who had set up the dead man to be at once obvious and invisible; and had, so to speak, hidden him in the broad daylight? Well, you have all heard the arguments about the stream and the scrap of paper, and up to a point I have entirely followed them. Everyone agreed that the secret was somewhere hidden on that bare hill where there was nothing but the glass-roofed studio and the lonely hermitage; and suspicion centred entirely upon the hermitage. For the man in the studio was a fervent friend of the man who was murdered, and one of those rejoicing most heartily at what he had discovered. But perhaps you have rather forgotten what he really had discovered. His real discovery was of the sort that infuriates friends and not foes. The man who has the courage to say he is wrong has to face the worst hatred; the hatred of those who think he is right. Boyg's final discovery, like our final discovery, rather reverses the relations of those two little houses on the hill. Even if Father Hyacinth had been a fiend instead of a saint, he had no possible motive to prevent his enemy from offering him a public apology. It was a believer in Boygism who struck down Boyg. It was his follower who became his pursuer and persecutor; who at last turned in unreasonable fury upon him. It was Paradou the sculptor who snatched up a chisel and struck his philosophical teacher, at the end of some furious argument about the theory which the artist had valued only as a wild inspiration, being quite indifferent to the tame question of its truth. I don't think he meant to kill Boyg; I doubt whether anybody could possibly prove he did; and even if he did, I rather doubt whether he can be held responsible for that or for anything else. But though Paradou may be a lunatic, he is also a logician; and there is one more interesting logical step in this story.

"I met Paradou myself this morning; owing to my good luck in putting my leg through his skylight. He also has his theories and controversies; and this morning he was very controversial. As I say, I had a long argument with him, all about realism in sculpture. I know many people will tell you that nothing has ever come out of arguments; and I tell you that everything has always come out of arguments; and anyhow, if you want to know what has come out of this, you've got to understand this argument. Everybody was always jeering at poor old Paradou as a sculptor and saying he turned men into monsters; that his figures had flat heads like snakes, or sagging knees like elephants, or humps like human camels. And he was always shouting back at them, 'Yes, and eyes like blindworms when it comes to seeing your own hideous selves! This is what you *do* look like, you ugly brutes! These are the crooked, clownish, lumpish attitudes in which you really do stand; only a lot of lying fashionable portrait-painters have persuaded you that you look like Graces and Greek gods.' He was at it hammer and tongs with me this morning; and I dare say I was lucky he didn't finish that argument with a chisel. But anyhow the argument wasn't started then. It all came upon him with a rush, when he had committed his real though probably unintentional killing. As he stood staring at the corpse, there arose out of the very abyss of his disappointment the vision of a strange vengeance or reparation. He began to see the vast outlines of a joke as gigantic as the Great Pyramid. He would set up that grim granite jest in the market-place, to grin forever at his critics and detractors. The dead man himself had just been explaining to him the process by which the water of that place would rapidly petrify organic substances. The notes and documents of his proof lay scattered about the studio where he had fallen. His own proof should be applied to his own body, for a purpose of which he had never dreamed. If the sculptor simply lifted the body in the ungainly attitude in which it had actually fallen, if he froze or fixed it in the stream, or set it upon the public pedestal, it would be the very thing about which he had so bitterly debated; a real man, in a real posture, held up to the scorn of men.

"That insane genius promised himself a lonely laughter, and a secret superiority to all his enemies, in hearing the critics discuss it as the crazy creation of a crank sculptor. He looked forward to the groups that would stand before the statue, and prove the anatomy to be wrong, and clearly demonstrate the posture to be impossible. And he would listen, and laugh inwardly like a true lunatic, knowing that they were proving the utter unreality of a real man. That being his dream, he had no difficulty in carrying it out. He had no need to hide the body; he had it brought down from his studio, not secretly but publicly and even pompously, the finished work of a great sculptor escorted by the devotees of a great discoverer. But indeed, Boyg was something more than a man who made a discovery; and there is, in comparison, a sort of cant even in the talk of a man having the courage to discover it. What other man would have had the courage to undiscover it? That monument that hides a strange sin, hides a much stranger and much rarer virtue. Yes, you do well to hail it as a true scientific trophy. That is the statue of Boyg the Undiscoverer. That cold chimera of the rock is not only the abortion born of some horrible chemical change; it is the outcome of a nobler experiment, which attests for ever the honour and probity of science. You may well praise him as a man of science; for he, at least, in an affair of science, acted like a man. You may well set up statues to him as a hero of science; for he was more of a hero in being wrong than he could ever have been in being right. And though the stars have seen rise, from the soils and substance of our native star, no such monstrosity as that man of stone, heaven may look down with more wonder at the man than at the monster. And we of all schools and of all philosophies can pass it like a funeral procession taking leave of an illustrious grave and, like soldiers, salute it as we pass.”

THE HOUSE OF THE PEACOCK

IT happened that some years ago, down a sunny and empty street of suburban gardens and villas, a young man was walking; a young man in rather outlandish clothes and almost prehistoric hat; for he was newly come to London from a very remote and sleepy small town in the West Country. There was nothing else especially remarkable about him, except what happened to him; which was certainly remarkable, not to say regrettable. There cannonaded into him an elderly gentleman running down the street, breathless, bare-headed, and in festive evening dress, who immediately caught him by the lapels of his antiquated coat and asked him to dinner. It would be truer to say that he implored him to come to dinner. As the bewildered provincial did not know him, or anybody else for miles round, the situation seemed singular; but the provincial, vaguely supposing it to be a hospitable ceremony peculiar to London town, where the streets were paved with gold, finally consented. He went to the hospitable mansion, which was only a few doors down the road; and he was never seen again in the land of the living.

None of the ordinary explanations would seem to have fitted the case. The men were total strangers. The man from the country carried no papers or valuables or money worth mentioning; and certainly did not look in the least as if he were likely to carry them. And, on the other hand, his host had the outward marks of almost offensive prosperity; a gleam of satin in the linings of his clothes, a glitter of opalescent stones in his studs and cuff-links, a cigar that seemed to perfume the street. The guest could hardly have been decoyed with the ordinary motive of robbery, or of any form of fraud. And indeed the motive with which he really was decoyed was one of the queerest in the world; so queer that a man might have a hundred guesses before he hit on it.

It is doubtful whether anyone ever would have hit on it, but for the extra touch of eccentricity which happened to distinguish another young man, who happened to be walking down the same street an hour or two afterwards on the same sunny afternoon. It must not be supposed that he brought to the problem any of the dexterities of a detective; least of all of the usual detective of romance, who solves problems by the closest attention to everything and the promptest presence of mind. It would be truer to say of this man that he sometimes solved them by absence of mind. Some solitary object he was staring at would become fixed in his mind like a talisman, and he stared at it till it began to speak to him like an oracle. On other occasions a stone, a starfish, or a canary had thus riveted his eye and seemed to reply to his questions. On the present occasion his text was less trivial from an ordinary standpoint; but it was some time before his own standpoint could be ordinary. He had drifted along the sunny suburban road, drinking in a certain drowsy pleasure in seeing where the laburnum made lines of gold in the green, or patches of white or red thorn glowed in the growing shadows; for the sunshine was taking on the tinge of sunset. But for the most part he was contented to see the green semicircles of lawn repeat themselves like a pattern of green moons; for he was not one to whom repetition was merely monotony. Only in looking over a particular gate at a particular lawn, he became pleasantly conscious, or half-conscious, of a new note of colour in the greenness; a much bluer green, which seemed to change to vivid blue, as the object at which he was gazing moved sharply, turning a small head on a long neck. It was a peacock. But he had thought of a thousand things before he thought of the obvious thing. The burning blue of the plumage on the neck had reminded him of blue fire, and blue fire had reminded him of some dark fantasy about blue devils, before he had fully realized even that it was a peacock he was staring at. And the tail, that trailing tapestry of eyes, had led his wandering wits away to those dark but divine monsters of the Apocalypse whose eyes were multiplied like their wings, before he had remembered that a peacock, even in a more practical sense, was an odd thing to see in so ordinary a setting.

For Gabriel Gale, as the young man was called, was a minor poet, but something of a major painter; and, in his capacity of celebrity and lover of landscape, he had been invited often enough into those larger landscape gardens of the landed aristocracy, where peacocks as pets are not uncommon. The very thought of such country seats brought back to him the memory of one of them, decayed and neglected indeed compared with most, but having for him the almost unbearable beauty of a lost paradise. He saw standing for a moment in such glimmering grass a figure statelier than any peacock, the colours of whose dress burned blue with a vivid sadness that might indeed be symbolized by a blue devil. But when intellectual fancies and emotional regrets had alike rolled away, there remained a more rational perplexity. After all, a peacock was an unusual thing to see in the front garden of a small suburban villa. It seemed somehow too big for the place, as if it would knock down the little trees when it spread its tail. It was like visiting a maiden lady in lodgings, who might be expected to keep a bird, and finding that she kept an ostrich.

These more practical reflections in their turn had passed through his mind before he came to the most practical reflection of all… that for the last five minutes he had been leaning on somebody else’s front gate with all the air of repose and finality of a rustic leaning on his own stile. Comment might have been aroused if anybody had come out; but nobody came out. On the contrary, somebody went in. As the peacock again turned its tiny crown and trailed away towards the house, the poet calmly opened the garden gate and stepped across the grass, following in the track of the bird. The darkening twilight of that garden was enriched by masses of red may, and altogether the villa had the look of being cruder and more cockney than the grounds in which it stood. Indeed, it was either actually unfinished or undergoing some new alterations and repairs, for a ladder leaned against the wall apparently to allow workmen to reach an upper storey and, moreover, there were marks of bushes having been cut or cleared away, perhaps for some new plan of building. Red bunches thus gathered from the bushes were stacked on the window-sill of the upper storey, and a few petals seemed to have dropped on the ladder, indicating that they had been carried up by that route. All these things the gaze of Gale gradually took in, as he stood with a rather bewildered air at the foot of the ladder. He felt the contrast between the unfinished house with the ladder and the rich garden with the peacock. It was almost as if the aristocratic birds and bushes had been there before the bourgeois bricks and mortar.

He had a curious innocence which often appeared as impudence. Like other human beings, he was quite capable of doing wrong knowingly and being ashamed of it. But so long as he meant no wrong, it never even occurred to him that there could be anything to be ashamed of. For him burglary meant stealing; and he might have strolled, so to speak, down the chimney into a king’s bed-chamber, so long as he had no intent to steal. The invitation of the leaning ladder and the open window was something almost too obvious even to be called an adventure. He began to mount the ladder as if he were going up the front steps of an hotel. But when he came to the upper rungs he seemed to stop a moment, frowned at something; and, accelerating his ascent, slipped quickly over the window-sill into the room.

The twilight of the room seemed like darkness after the golden glare of the evening sunlight, and it was a second or two before the glimmer of light reflected from a round mirror opposite enabled him to make out the main features of the interior. The room itself seemed dusty and even defaced; the dark blue-green hangings, of a peacock pattern, as if carrying out the same scheme as the living decoration of the garden, were themselves, nevertheless, a background of dead colours; and, peering into the dusty mirror, he saw it was cracked. Nevertheless, the neglected room was evidently partly redecorated for a new festivity, for a long table was elaborately laid out for a dinner-party. By every plate was a group of quaint and varied glasses for the wines of every course; and the blue vases on the table and the mantelpiece were filled with the same red and white blooms from the garden which he had seen on the window-sill. Nevertheless, there were odd things about the dinner-table, and his first thought was that it had already been the scene of some struggle or stampede, in which the salt-cellar had been knocked over and, for all he knew, the looking-glass broken. Then he looked at the knives on the table, and a light was beginning to dawn in his eyes, when the door opened and a sturdy, grey-haired man came rapidly into the room.

And at that he came back to common sense like a man flung from a flying ship into the cold shock of the sea. He remembered suddenly where he was and how he had got there. It was characteristic of him that, though he saw a practical point belatedly… and, perhaps, too late… when he did see it he saw it lucidly in all its logical ramifications. Nobody would believe in any legitimate reason for entering a strange house by the window instead of knocking at the door. Also, as it happened, he had no legitimate reason… or none that he could explain without a lecture on poetry and philosophy. He even realized the ugly detail that he was at that very moment fidgeting with the knives on the table, and that a large number of them were silver. After an instant of hesitation, he put down the knife and politely removed his hat.

“Well,” he said at last, with inconsequent irony, “I shouldn’t shoot if I were you; but I suppose you’ll send for the police.”

The new-comer, who was apparently the householder, was also fixed for the moment in a somewhat baffling attitude. When first he opened the door he had given a convulsive start, had opened his mouth as if to shout, and shut it again grimly, as if he was not even going to speak. He was a man with a strong, shrewd face, spoilt by painfully prominent eyes which gave him a look of perpetual protest. But by some accident it was not at these accusing eyes that the sleepy blue eyes of the poetical burglar were directed. The trick by which his rambling eye was so often riveted by some trivial object led him to look no higher at the moment than the stud in the old gentleman's shirt-front, which was an unusually large and luminous opal. Having uttered his highly perverse and even suicidal remark, the poet smiled as if in relief, and waited for the other to speak.

"Are you a burglar?" asked the owner of the house at last.

"To make a clean breast of it, I'm not," answered Gale. "But if you ask me what else I am, I really don't know."

The other man came rapidly round the table towards him, and made a motion as if offering his hand, or even both his hands.

"Of course you're a burglar," he said; "but it doesn't matter. Won't you stay to dinner?"

Then, after a sort of agitated pause, he repeated:

"Come, you really must stay to dinner; there's a place laid for you."

Gale looked gravely along the table and counted the number of places laid for dinner. The number disposed of any final doubts he might have had about the meaning of this string of eccentricities. He knew why the host wore opals, and why the mirror had been deliberately broken and why the salt was spilt, and why the knives shone on the table in a pattern of crosses, and why the eccentric householder brought may into the house, and why he decorated it with peacocks' feathers, and even had a peacock in the garden. He realized that the ladder did not stand where it did to permit people to climb by it to the window, but merely that they might pass under it on entering the door. And he realized that he was the thirteenth man to sit down at that banquet.

"Dinner is just coming in," said the man with the opals with eager amiability. "I'm just going down to fetch the other fellows up. You'll find them very interesting company, I assure you; no nonsense about them; shrewd, sharp fellows out against all this superstitious nonsense. My name is Crundle. Humphrey Crundle, and I'm pretty well known in the business world. I suppose I must introduce myself in order to introduce you to the others."

Gale was vaguely conscious that his absent-minded eye had often rested on the name of Crundle, associated with some soap or lozenge or fountain-pen; and, little as he knew of such things, he could imagine that such an advertiser, though he lived in a little villa, could afford peacocks and five different kinds of wine. But other thoughts were already oppressing his imagination, and he looked in a somewhat sombre fashion out on to the garden of the peacock, where the sunset light was dying on the lawn.

The members of the Thirteen Club, as they came trooping up the stairs and settled into their seats, seemed for the most part to be at least quite ready for their dinner. Most of them had a rather rollicking attitude, which in some took the more vivid form of vulgarity. A few who were quite young, clerks and possibly dependents, had foolish and nervous faces, as if they were doing something a little too daring. Two of them stood out from the company by the singularity of being obviously gentlemen. One of these was a little dried-up old gentleman, with a face that was a labyrinth of wrinkles, on the top of which was perched a very obvious chestnut wig. He was introduced as Sir Daniel Creed, and was apparently a barrister of note in his day, though the day seemed a little distant. The other, who was merely presented as Mr. Noel, was more interesting: a tall, stalwart man of dubious age but indubitable intelligence, even in the first glance of his eyes. His features were handsome in a large and craggy fashion; but the hollows of the temples and the sunken framework of the eyes gave him a look of fatigue that was mental and not physical. The poet’s impalpable intuitions told him that the appearance was not misleading… that the man who had thus come into this odd society had been in many odd societies, probably seeking for something more odd than he had ever found.

It was some time, however, before any of these guests could show anything of their quality, owing to the abounding liveliness and loquacity of their host. Mr. Crundle may, perhaps, have thought it appropriate in a President of a Thirteen Club to talk thirteen to the dozen. Anyhow, for some time he talked for the whole company, rolling about in his chair in radiant satisfaction, like a man who has at last realized his wildest vision of happiness. Indeed, there was something almost abnormal about the gaiety and vivacity of this grey-haired merchant; it seemed to be fed from a fountain within him that owed nothing to the circumstances of festivity. The remarks with which he pelted everybody were often rather random, but always uproariously entertaining to himself. Gale could only dimly speculate on what he would be like when he had emptied all the five glasses in front of him. But, indeed, he was destined to show himself in more than one strange aspect before those glasses were emptied.

It was after one of his repeated assertions that these stories about bad luck were all the same sort of damned nonsense that the keen though quavering voice of old Creed got a word in edgeways.

“There, my dear Crundle, I would make a distinction,” he said in a legal manner. “They are all damned nonsense, but they are not all the same sort of damned nonsense. As a point of historical research, they seem to me to differ in rather a singular fashion. The origin of some is obvious, of others highly obscure. The fancies about Friday and thirteen have probably a religious basis; but what, for instance, can be the basis of objecting to peacocks’ feathers?”

Crundle was replying with a joyful roar that it was some infernal rubbish or other, when Gale, who had quickly slipped into a seat beside the man called Noel, interposed in a conversational manner.

“I fancy I can throw a little light on that. I believe I found a trace of it in looking at some old illuminated manuscripts of the ninth or tenth century. There is a very curious design, in a stiff Byzantine style, representing the two armies preparing for the war in heaven. But St. Michael is handing out spears to the good angels; while Satan is elaborately arming the rebel angels with peacocks’ feathers.”

Noel turned his hollow eyes sharply in the direction of the speaker. “That is really interesting,” he said; “you mean it was all that old theological notion of the wickedness of pride?”

“Well, there’s a whole peacock in the garden for you to pluck,” cried Crundle in his boisterous manner, “if any of you want to go out fighting angels.”

“They are not very effective weapons,” said Gale gravely, “and I fancy that is what the artist in the Dark Ages must have meant. There seems to me to be something that rather hits the wrong imperialism in the right place, about the contrast in the weapon; the fact that the right side was arming for a real and therefore doubtful battle, while the wrong side was already, so to speak, handing out the palms of victory. You cannot fight anybody with the palms of victory.”

Crundle showed a curious restlessness as this conversation proceeded; and a much less radiant restlessness than before. His prominent eyes shot questions at the speakers, his mouth worked, and his fingers began to drum on the table. At last he broke out:

“What’s all this mean, eh? One would think you were half on the side of all the stuff and nonsense… all of you talking about it with those long faces.”

“Pardon me,” interposed the old lawyer, with a relish for repeating the logical point, “my suggestion was very simple, I spoke of causes, not of justifications. I say the cause of the peacock legend is less apparent than that of the bad luck of Friday.”

“Do you think Friday unlucky?” demanded Crundle, like one at bay, turning his starting eyes on the poet.

“No, I think Friday lucky,” answered Gale. “All Christian people, whatever their lighter superstitions, have always thought Friday lucky. Otherwise they would have talked about Bad Friday instead of Good Friday.”

“Oh, Christians be…” began Mr. Crundle with sudden violence; but he was stopped by something in the voice of Noel that seemed to make his violence a vain splutter.

“I’m not a Christian,” said Noel in a voice like stone. “It is useless now to wonder whether I wish I were. But it seems to me that Mr. Gale’s point is a perfectly fair one; that such a religion might well actually contradict such a superstition. And it seems to me also that the truth might be applied yet further. If I believed in God, I should not believe in a God who made happiness depend on knocking over a salt-cellar or seeing a peacock’s feather. Whatever Christianity teaches, I presume it does not teach that the Creator is crazy.”

Gale nodded thoughtfully, as if in partial assent, and answered rather as if he were addressing Noel alone, in the middle of a wilderness.

“In that sense of course you are right,” he said. “But I think there is a little more to be said on the matter. I think most people, as I say, have really taken these superstitions rather lightly, perhaps more lightly than you do. And I think they mostly referred to lighter evils, in that world of rough-and-tumble circumstance which they thought of rather as connected with elves than with angels. But, after all, Christians admit more than one kind even of angels; and some of them are fallen angels… like the people with the peacocks’ feathers. Now I have a feeling that *they* might really have to do with peacocks’ feathers. Just as lower spirits play low tricks with tables and tambourines, they might play low tricks with knives and salt-cellars. Certainly our souls do not depend on a broken mirror; but there's nothing an unclean spirit would like better than to make us think so. Whether he succeeds depends on the spirit in which we break it. And I can imagine that breaking the mirror in a certain moral spirit… as, for instance, a spirit of scorn and inhumanity… might bring one in touch with lower influences. I can imagine that a cloud might rest on the house where such a thing was done, and evil spirits cluster about it."

There was a rather singular silence, a silence that seemed to the speaker to brood and settle even upon the gardens and streets beyond; no one spoke; the silence was punctuated at last by the thin and piercing cry of a peacock.

Then it was that Humphrey Crundle startled them all with his first outbreak. He had been staring at the speaker with bursting eyeballs; at length, when he found his voice, it was so thick and hoarse that the first note of it was hardly more human than the bird's. He stuttered and stammered with rage, and it was only towards the end of the first sentence that he was even intelligible. "… Coming here and jabbering blasted drivel and drinking my burgundy like a lord; talking rubbish against our whole… against the very first… why don't you pull our noses as well? Why the hell don't you pull our noses?"

"Come, come," cut in Noel in his trenchant tones, "you are getting unreasonable, Crundle; I understand that this gentleman came here at your own invitation, to take the place of one of our friends."

"I understood Arthur Bailey sent a wire that he was detained," observed the more precise lawyer, "and that Mr. Gale had kindly taken his place."

"Yes," snapped Crundle, "I asked him to sit down as thirteenth man, and that alone smashes your superstition; for considering how he came in, he's jolly lucky to get a good dinner."

Noel again interposed with a remonstrance; but Gale had already risen to his feet. He did not seem annoyed, but rather distrait; and he addressed himself to Creed and Noel, neglecting his excitable host.

"I am much obliged to you gentlemen," he said, "but I think I shall be going. It is quite true that I was invited to the dinner, but hardly to the house… well, I can't help having a curious notion about it."

He played for a moment with the crossed knives on the table; then he said, looking out into the garden…

"The truth is I'm not sure the thirteenth man has been so lucky after all."

"What do you mean?" cried his host sharply. "Dare you say you haven't had a good dinner? You're not going to pretend you've been poisoned."

Gale was still looking out of the window; and he said without moving:

"I am the fourteenth man, and I did not pass under the ladder."

It was characteristic of old Creed that he could only follow the logical argument in a literal fashion, and missed the symbol and the spiritual atmosphere which the subtler Noel had already understood. For the first time the old lawyer in the red wig really looked a little senile. He blinked at Gale and said querulously: "You don't mean to say you'd bother to keep all those rules about ladders and things?"

"I'm not sure I should bother to keep them," replied Gale, "but I am sure I shouldn't bother to break them. One seems to break so many other things when one begins to break them. There are many things that are almost as easy to break as a looking-glass." He paused a moment, and added as if in apology: "There are the Ten Commandments, you know."

There was another abrupt accidental silence, and Noel found himself listening with irrational rigidity for the ugly voice of the beautiful bird outside. But it did not speak. He had the sub-conscious and still more meaningless fancy that it had been strangled in the dark.

Then the poet for the first time turned his face to Humphrey Crundle, and looked straight into the goggling eyes as he spoke.

"Peacocks may not be unlucky; but pride is unlucky. And it was in insolence and contempt that you set yourself to trample on the traditions or the follies of humbler men; so that you have come to trample on a holier thing at last. Cracked mirrors may not be unlucky; but cracked brains are unlucky; and you have gone mad on reason and common sense till you are a criminal lunatic this day. And red may need not be unlucky; but there is something that is more red and much more unlucky; and there are spots of it on the window-sill and on the steps of the ladder. I took it for the red petals myself."

For the first time in his restless hour of hospitality the man at the head of the table sat perfectly still. Something in his sudden and stony immobility seemed to startle all the rest into life, and they all sprang to their feet with a confused clamour of protest and question. Noel alone seemed to keep his head under the shock.

"Mr. Gale," he said firmly, "you have said too much or too little. A good many people would say you were talking a lot of lurid nonsense, but I have a notion that what you talk is not always such nonsense as it sounds. But if you leave it as it is, it will be simply unsupported slander. In plain words you say there has been a crime here. Whom do you accuse; or are we all to accuse each other?"

"I do not accuse you," answered Gale, "and the proof is that if it must be verified, you had better verify it yourself. Sir Daniel Creed is a lawyer, and may very properly accompany you. Go and look yourselves at the marks on the ladder. You will find some more in the grass round the foot of the ladder, leading away in the direction of that big dust-bin in the corner of the garden. I think it would be as well if you looked in the dust-bin. It may be the end of your search."

Old Crundle continued to sit like a graven image; and something told them that his goggle eyes were now, as it were, turned inward. He was revolving some enigma of his own which seemed to baffle and blind him, so that the whole disordered scene broke about him unnoticed. Creed and Noel left the room and could be heard running down the stairs and talking in low voices under the window. Then their voices died away in the direction of the dust-bin; and still the old man sat with the opal on his breast, as still as an Eastern idol with its sacred gem. Then he seemed suddenly to dilate and glow as if a monstrous lamp had been lit within him. He sprang to his feet, brandished his goblet as if for a toast, and brought it down again on the table so that the glass was shattered and the wine spilt in a blood-red star.

"I've got it; I was right," he cried in a sort of exaltation. "I was right; I was right after all. Don't you see, all of you? Don't you see? That man out there isn't the thirteenth man. He's really the fourteenth man, and the fellow here is the fifteenth. Arthur Bailey's the real thirteenth man, and he's all right, isn't he? He didn't actually come to the house, but why should that matter? Why the devil should that matter? He's the thirteenth member of the club, isn't he? There can't be any more thirteenth men afterwards, can there? I don't care a curse about all the rest; I don't care what you call me or what you do to me. I say all this fool's poetical stuff goes to pot, because the man in the dust-bin isn't number thirteen at all, and I challenge anybody…"

Noel and Creed were standing in the room with very grim faces as the man at the head of the table gabbled on with a frightful volubility. When he gasped and choked for a moment with the rush of his own words, Noel said in a voice of steel:

"I am sorry to say that you were right."

"Most horrible thing I ever saw in my life," said old Creed, and sat down suddenly, lifting a liqueur glass of cognac with a shaking hand.

"The body of an unfortunate man with his throat cut has been concealed in the dust-bin," went on Noel in a lifeless voice. "By the mark on his clothes, which are curiously old-fashioned for a comparatively young man, he seems to have come from Stoke-under-Ham."

"What was he like?" asked Gale with sudden animation.

Noel looked at him curiously. "He was very long and lank, with hair like tow," he replied. "What do you mean?"

"I guessed he must have looked a little like me," answered the poet.

Crundle had collapsed in his chair again after his last and strangest outbreak, and made no attempt at explanation or escape. His mouth was still moving, but he was talking to himself; proving with ever-increasing lucidity and repetition that the man he had murdered had no right to the number thirteen. Sir Daniel Creed seemed for the moment almost as stricken and silent a figure; but it was he who broke the silence. Lifting his bowed head with its grotesque wig, he said suddenly: "This blood cries for justice. I am an old man, but I would avenge it on my own brother."

"I am just going to telephone for the police," said Noel quietly. "I can see no cause for hesitation." His large figure and features looked notably less languid, and his hollow eyes had a glow in them.

A big florid man named Bull, of the commercial traveller type, who had been very noisy and convivial at the other end of the table, now began to take the stage like the foreman of a jury. It was rather typical of him that he waited for more educated people to lead, and then proceeded to lead them.

"No cause for hesitation. No case for sentimentalism," he trumpeted as healthily as an elephant. "Painful business, of course; old member of the club and all that. But I say I'm no sentimentalist; and whoever did this deserves hanging. Well, there's no doubt of who did it. We heard him practically confess a minute ago, when these gentlemen were out of the room."

"Always thought he was a bad lot," said one of the clerks; possibly a clerk with an old score of his own.

"I am all for acting at once," said Noel. "Where is the telephone?"

Gabriel Gale stepped in front of the collapsed figure in the chair, and turned his face to the advancing crowd.

“Stop,” he cried, “let me say a word.”

“Well, what is it?” asked Noel steadily.

“I do not like boasting,” said the poet, “but unfortunately the argument can only take that form. I am a sentimentalist, as Mr. Bull would say; I am by trade a sentimentalist; a mere scribbler of sentimental songs. You are all very hard-headed, rational, sensible people who laugh at superstitions; you are practical men, and men of common sense. But your common sense didn’t discover the dead body. You would have smoked your practical cigars and drunk your practical grog and gone home all over smiles, leaving it to rot in the dust-bin. *You* never found out where your rational sceptical road can lead a man, as it has led that poor gibbering idiot in the chair. A sentimentalist, a dabbler in moonshine, found out that for you; perhaps because he was a sentimentalist. For I really have a streak in me of the moonshine that leads such men astray; that is why I can follow them. And now the lucky sentimentalist must say a word for the unlucky one.”

“Do you mean for the criminal?” asked Creed in his sharp but shaky voice.

“Yes,” replied Gale. “I discovered him and I defend him.”

“So you defend murderers, do you?” demanded Bull.

“Some murderers,” answered Gale calmly. “This one was a rather unique sort of murderer. In fact, I am far from certain that he was a murderer at all. It may have been an accident. It may have been a sort of mechanical action, almost like an automaton.”

The light of long-lost cross-examinations gleamed in Creed’s aged eyes, and his sharp voice no longer shook.

“You mean to say,” he said, “that Crundle read a telegram from Bailey, realized there was a vacant place, went out into the street and talked to a total stranger, brought him in here, went somewhere to fetch a razor or a carving knife, cut his guest’s throat, carried the corpse down the ladder, and carefully covered it with the lid of the dust-bin. And he did all that by accident, or by an automatic gesture.”

“Very well put, Sir Daniel,” answered Gale; “and now let me put you a question, in the same logical style. In your legal language, what about motive? You say he could not assassinate a total stranger by accident; but why should he assassinate a total stranger on purpose? On what purpose? It not only served no end he had in view; it actually ruined everything he had in view. Why in the world should he want to make a gap in his Thirteen Club dinner? Why in the name of wonder should *he* want to make the thirteenth man a monument of disaster? His own crime was at the expense of his own creed, or cranky doubt, denial, or whatever you call it.”

“That is true,” assented Noel, “and what is the meaning of it all?”

“I do believe,” replied Gale, “that nobody can tell you but myself; and I will tell you why. Do you realize how full life is of awkward attitudes? You get them in snapshots; I suppose the new ugly schools of art are trying to snap them; figures leaning stiffly, standing on one leg, resting unconscious hands on incongruous objects. This is a tragedy of awkward positions. I can understand it because I myself, this very afternoon, was in the devil of an awkward position.

“I had climbed in through that window simply out of silly curiosity, and I was standing at the table like a fool, picking up the knives and putting them straight. I still had my hat on, but when Crundle came in I made a movement to take it off with the knife still in my hand; then I corrected myself and put the knife down first. You know those tiny confused movements one sometimes has. Now Crundle, when he first saw me, and before he saw me close, staggered as if I had been God Almighty or the hangman waiting in his dining-room; and I think I know why. I am awkward and tall and tow-haired, too; and I was standing there dark against the daylight where the other had stood. It must have seemed as if the corpse had lifted the dust-bin lid and crawled back up the ladder, and taken up his station like a ghost. But meanwhile my own little irresolute gesture with the half-lifted knife had told me something. It had told me what really happened.

“When that poor rustic from Somerset strayed into this room he was what perhaps none of us can be, he was shocked. He came of some old rural type that really did believe in such omens. He hastily picked up one of the crossed knives and was putting it straight when he caught sight of the heap of spilt salt. Possibly he thought his own gesture had spilt it. At that crucial instant Crundle entered the room, adding to the confusion of his guest and hastening his hurried attempt at doing two things at once. The unhappy guest, with fingers still clutched round the knife-handle, made a grab at the salt and tried to toss some of it over his shoulder. In the same flash the fanatic in the doorway had leapt upon him like a panther and was tugging at the lifted wrist.

"For all Crundle's crazy universe was rocking in that instant. You, who talk of superstitions, have you realized that this house is a house of spells? Don't you know it is chock full of charms and magic rites, only they are all done backwards, as the witches said the Lord's Prayer? Can you imagine how a witch would feel if two words of the prayer came right by accident? Crundle saw that this clown from the country was reversing all the spells of his own black art. If salt was once thrown over the shoulder, all the great work might yet be undone. With all the strength he could call from hell he hung on to the hand with the knife, caring only to prevent a few grains of silver dust from drifting to the floor.

"God alone knows if it was an accident. I do not say it as an idle phrase. That single split second, and all that was really hidden in it, lies open before God as large and luminous as an eternity. But I am a man and he is a man; and I will not give a man to the gallows, if I can help it, for what may have been accidental or automatic or even a sort of self-defence. But if any of you will take a knife and a pinch of salt and put yourself in the poor fellow's position, you will see exactly what happened. All I say is this; that at no time and in no way, perhaps, could things have been precisely in that posture, and the edge of a knife been so near to a man's throat without intention on either side, except by this one particular tangle of trivialities that has led up to this one particular tragedy. It is strange to think of that poor yokel setting out from his far-off Somerset village, with his little handful of local legends, and this brooding eccentric and scoffer rushing out of this villa full of rage of his hobby, and their ending locked in this one unique and ungainly grapple, a wrestle between two superstitions."

The figure at the head of the table had been almost forgotten like a piece of furniture; but Noel turned his eyes slowly towards it, and said with a cold patience as if to an exasperating child: "Is all this true?"

Crundle sprang unsteadily to his feet, his mouth still working, and they saw at the edge of it a touch of foam.

"What I want to know," he began in a resonant voice; and then the voice seemed to dry up in his throat and he swayed twice and pitched forward on the table amid the wreck of his own wine and crystal.

"I don't know about a policeman," said Noel; "but we shall have to send for a doctor."

“You will want two doctors for what will have to be done to him,” said Gale; and walked towards the window by which he had come in.

Noel walked with him to the garden gate, past the peacock and the green lawn, that looked almost as blue as the peacock under a strong moonlight. When the poet was outside the gate, he turned and said a last word.

“You are Norman Noel, the great traveller, I think. You interest me more than that unfortunate monomaniac did; and I want to ask you a question. Forgive me if I imagine things for you, so to speak; it is a way I have. You have studied superstitions all over the world, and you have seen things compared with which all that talk of salt and table-knives is like a child’s game of consequences. You have been in the dark forests over which the vampire seems to pass more vast than a dragon; or in the mountains of the werewolf, where men say a man can see in the face of his friend or his wife the eyes of a wild beast. You have known people who had real superstitions; black, towering, terrific superstitions; you have lived with those people; and I want to ask you a question about them.”

“You seem to know something about them yourself,” answered Noel; “but I will answer any question you like.”

“Were they not happier men than you?”

Gale paused a moment as he put the question, and then went on. “Did they not in fact sing more songs, and dance more dances, and drink wine with more real merriment? That was because they believed in evil. In evil spells, perhaps, in evil luck, in evil under all sorts of stupid and ignorant symbols; but still in something to be fought. They at least read things in black and white, and saw life as the battlefield it is. But you are unhappy because you disbelieve in evil, and think it philosophical to see everything in the same light of grey. And I speak to you thus tonight; because tonight you have had an awakening. You saw something worthy of hate and you were happy. A mere murder might not have done it. If it had been some old man about town, or even some young man about town, it might never have touched the nerve. But I know what you felt; there was something shameful beyond speech in the death of that poor clumsy country cousin.”

Noel nodded. “I think it was the shape of his coat-tails,” he said.

“I thought so,” answered Gale. “Well, that is the road to reality. Good night.”

And he continued his walk along the suburban road, unconsciously taking in the new tint of the lawns by moonlight. But he did not see any more peacocks; and it may be accounted probable that he did not want to see any.

THE PURPLE JEWEL

GABRIEL GALE was a painter and poet; he was the last person to pretend to be even a very private detective. It happened that he had solved several mysteries; but most of them were the sort of mysteries more attractive to a mystic. Nevertheless, it also happened once or twice that he had to step out of the clouds of mysticism into the more brisk and bracing atmosphere of murder. Sometimes he succeeded in showing that a murder was a suicide, sometimes that a suicide was a murder; sometimes he was even involved in the study of lighter occupations like forgery and fraud. But the connexion was generally a coincidence; it concerned some point at which his imaginative interest in men’s strange motives and moods happened to lead him, or at any rate them, across the border-line of legality. And in most cases, as he himself pointed out, the motives of murderers and thieves are perfectly sane and even conventional.

“I am no good at such a sensible job,” he would say. “The police could easily make me look a fool in any practical matter such as they discuss in detective stories. What is the good of asking me to measure the marks made by somebody’s feet all over the ground, to show why he was walking about, or where he was going? If you will show me the marks of somebody’s hands all over the ground, I will tell you why he was walking upside down. But I shall find it out in the only way I ever do find out anything. And that is simply because I am mad, too, and often do it myself.”

A similar brotherhood in folly probably led him into the very baffling mystery of the disappearance of Phineas Salt, the famous author and dramatist. Some of the parties involved may have accepted the parallel of setting a thief to catch a thief, when they set a poet to find a poet. For the problem did involve, in all probability, some of the purely poetical motives of a poet. And even practical people admitted that these might possibly be more familiar to a poet than to a policeman.

Phineas Salt was the sort of man whose private life was rather a public life; like that of Byron or D’Annunzio. He was a remarkable man, and perhaps rather remarkable than respectable. But there was much to be really admired in him; and there were of course any number of people who admired even what was not so admirable. The pessimistic critics claimed him as a great pessimist; and this was widely quoted in support of the theory that his disappearance was in fact a suicide. But the optimistic critics had always obstinately maintained that he was a True Optimist (whatever that may be) and these in their natural rosy rapture of optimism, dwelt rather on the idea that he had been murdered. So lurid and romantic had his whole career been made in the eyes of all Europe, that very few people kept their heads enough to reflect, or summoned their courage to suggest, that there is no particular principle in the nature of things to prevent a great poet falling down a well or being attacked by cramp while swimming at Felixstowe. Most of his admirers, and all those who were by profession journalists, preferred more sublime solutions.

He left no family, of the regular sort, except a brother in a small commercial way in the Midlands, with whom he had had very little to do; but he left a number of other people who stood to him in conspicuous spiritual or economic relations. He left a publisher, whose emotions were of mingled grief and hope in the cessation of his production of books and the high-class advertisement given to those already produced. The publisher was himself a man of considerable social distinction, as such distinctions go today; a certain Sir Walter Drummond, the head of a famous and well-established firm; and a type of a certain kind of successful Scotchman who contradicts the common tradition by combining being business-like with being extremely radiant and benevolent. He left a theatrical manager in the very act of launching his great poetical play about Alexander and the Persians; this was an artistic but adaptable Jew, named Isidore Marx, who was similarly balanced between the advantages and disadvantages of an inevitable silence following the cry of “Author”. He left a beautiful but exceedingly bad-tempered leading actress, who was about to gain fresh glory in the part of the Persian Princess; and who was one of the persons, not indeed few, with whom (as the quaint phrase goes) his name had been connected. He left a number of literary friends; some at least of whom were really literary and a few of whom had really been friendly. But his career had been itself so much like a sensational drama on the stage that it was surprising, when it came to real calculations about his probable conduct, how little anybody seemed to know about the essentials of his real character. And without any such clue, the circumstances seemed to make the poet’s absence as disturbing and revolutionary as his presence.

Gabriel Gale, who also moved in the best literary circles, knew all this side of Phineas Salt well enough. He also had been in literary negotiations with Sir Walter Drummond. He also had been approached for poetical plays by Mr. Isidore Marx. He had managed to avoid having “his name connected” with Miss Hertha Hathaway, the great Shakespearean actress; but he knew her well enough, in a world where everybody knows everybody. But being somewhat carelessly familiar with these noisy outer courts of the fame of Phineas, it gave him a mild shock of irony to pass into the more private and prosaic interior. He owed his connexion with the case, not to this general knowledge he shared with the world of letters, but to the accident that his friend, Dr. Garth, had been the family physician of the Salts. And he could not but be amused, when he attended a sort of family council of the matter, to discover how very domestic and even undistinguished the family council was; and how different from the atmosphere of large rumour and loose reputation that roared like a great wind without. He had to remind himself that it is only natural, after all, that anybody’s private affairs should be private. It was absurd to expect that a wild poet would have a wild solicitor or a strange and fantastic doctor or dentist. But Dr. Garth, in the very professional black suit he always wore, looked such a very family physician. The solicitor looked such a very family solicitor. He was a square-faced, silver-haired gentleman named Gunter; it seemed impossible that his tidy legal files and strong-boxes could contain such material as the prolonged scandal of Phineas Salt. Joseph Salt, the brother of Phineas Salt, come up specially from the provinces, seemed so very provincial. It was hard to believe that this silent, sandy-haired, big, embarrassed tradesman, in his awkward clothes, was the one other remaining representative of such a name. The party was completed by Salt’s secretary, who also seemed disconcertingly secretarial to be closely connected with such an incalculable character. Again Gale had to remind himself that even poets can only go mad on condition that a good many people connected with them remain sane. He reflected, with a faint and dawning interest, that Byron probably had a butler; and possibly even a good butler. The disconnected fancy crossed his mind that even Shelley may have gone to the dentist. He also reflected that Shelley’s dentist was probably rather like any other dentist.

Nevertheless, he did not lose the sense of contrast in stepping into this inner chamber of immediate and practical responsibilities. He felt rather out of place in it; for he had no illusions about himself as a business adviser, or one to settle things with the private secretary and the family lawyer. Garth had asked him to come, and he sat patiently looking at Garth; while Gunter, the solicitor, laid the general state of things before the informal committee.

“Mr. Hatt has been telling us,” said the lawyer, glancing for a moment at the secretary who sat opposite, “that he last saw Mr. Phineas Salt at his own flat two hours after lunch on Friday last. Until about an hour ago, I should have said that this interview (which was apparently very short) was the last occasion on which the missing man had been seen. Rather more than an hour ago, however, I was rung up by a person, a complete stranger to me, who declared that he had been with Phineas Salt for the six or seven hours following on that meeting at the flat and that he was coming round to this office as soon as possible, to lay all the facts before us. This evidence, if we find it in any way worthy of credit, will at least carry the story a considerable stage further and perhaps provide us with some important hint about Mr. Salt’s whereabouts or fate. I do not think we can say much more about it until he comes.”

“I rather fancy he has come,” said Dr. Garth. “I heard somebody answering the door; and that sounds like boots scaling these steep legal stairs”; for they had met in the solicitor’s office in Lincoln’s Inn.

The next moment a slim, middle-aged man slipped rather than stepped into the room; there was indeed something smooth and unobtrusive about the very look of his quiet grey suit, at once shabby and shiny and yet carrying something like the last glimmer of satin and elegance. The only other seizable thing about him was that he not only had rather long dark hair parted down the middle, but his long olive face was fringed with a narrow dark beard, which was also parted in the middle, drooping in two separated strands. But as he entered he laid on a chair a soft black hat with a very large brim and a very low crown; which somehow called up instantly to the fancy the cafÃ©s and the coloured lights of Paris.

“My name is James Florence,” he said in a cultivated accent. “I was a very old friend of Phineas Salt; and in our younger days I have often travelled about Europe with him. I have every reason to believe that I travelled with him on his last journey.”

“His last journey,” repeated the lawyer, looking at him with frowning attention; “are you prepared to say that Mr. Salt is dead, or are you saying this for sensationalism?”

“Well, he is either dead or something still more sensational,” said Mr. James Florence.

“What do you mean?” asked the other sharply. “What could be more sensational than his death?”

The stranger looked at him with a fixed and very grave expression and then said simply: “I cannot imagine.”

Then, when the lawyer made an angry movement, as if suspecting a joke, the man added equally gravely: “I am still trying to imagine.”

“Well,” said Gunter, after a pause, “perhaps you had better tell your story and we will put the conversation on a regular footing. As you probably know, I am Mr. Salt’s legal adviser; this is his brother, Mr. Joseph Salt, whom I am advising also; this is Dr. Garth, his medical adviser. This is Mr. Gabriel Gale.”

The stranger bowed to the company and took a seat with quiet confidence.

“I called on my old friend Salt last Friday afternoon about five o’clock. I think I saw this gentleman leaving the flat as I came in.” He looked across at the secretary, Mr. Hatt, a hard-faced and reticent man, who concealed with characteristic discretion, the American name of Hiram; but could not quite conceal a certain American keenness about the look of his long chin and his spectacles. He regarded the newcomer with a face of wood, and said nothing as usual.

“When I entered the flat, I found Phineas in a very disordered and even violent condition, even for him. In fact somebody seemed to have been breaking the furniture, a statuette was knocked off its pedestal and a bowl of irises upset; and he was striding up and down the room like a roaring lion with his red mane rampant and his beard a bonfire. I thought it might be merely an artistic mood, a fine shade of poetical feeling; but he told me he had been entertaining a lady. Miss Hertha Hathaway, the actress, had only just left.”

“Here, wait a minute,” interposed the solicitor. “It would appear that Mr. Hatt, the secretary, had also only just left. But I don’t think you said anything about a lady, Mr. Hatt.”

“It’s a pretty safe rule,” said the impenetrable Hiram. “You never asked me about any lady. I’ve got my own work to do and I told you how I left when I’d done it.”

“This is rather important, though,” said Gunter doubtfully. “If Salt and the actress threw bowls and statues at each other… well, I suppose we may cautiously conclude there was some slight difference of opinion.”

“There was a final smash-up,” said Florence frankly. “Phineas told me he was through with all that sort of thing and, as far as I could make out, with everything else as well. He was in a pretty wild state; I think he had been drinking a little already; then he routed out a dusty old bottle of absinthe and said that he and I must drink it again in memory of old days in Paris; for it was the last time, or the last day, or some expression of that sort. Well, I hadn’t drunk it myself for a long time; but I knew enough about it to know that he was drinking a great deal too much, and it’s not a thing like ordinary wine or brandy; the state it can get you into is quite extraordinary; more like the clear madness that comes from hashish. And he finally rushed out of the house with that green fire in his brain and began to get out his car; starting it quite correctly and even driving it well, for there is a lucidity in such intoxication; but driving it faster and faster down the dreary vistas of the Old Kent Road and out into the country towards the south-east. He had dragged me with him with the same sort of hypnotic energy and uncanny conviviality; but I confess I felt pretty uncomfortable spinning out along the country roads with twilight turning to dark. We were nearly killed several times; but I don’t think he was trying to be killed… at least not there on the road by an ordinary motor accident. For he kept on crying out that he wanted the high and perilous places of the earth; peaks and precipices and towers; that he would like to take his last leap from some such pinnacle and either fly like an eagle or fall like a stone. And all that seemed the more blind and grotesque because we were driving further and further into some of the flattest country in England, where he certainly would never find any mountains such as towered and toppled in his dream. And then, after I don’t know how many hours, he gave a new sort of cry; and I saw, against the last grey strip of the gloaming and all the flat land towards the east, the towers of Canterbury.”

“I wonder,” said Gabriel Gale suddenly, like a man coming out of a dream, “how they did upset the statuette. Surely the woman threw it, if anybody did. He’d hardly have done a thing like that, even if he was drunk.”

Then he turned his head slowly and stared rather blankly at the equally blank face of Mr. Hatt; but he said no more and, after a slightly impatient silence, the man called Florence went on with his narrative.

“Of course I knew that the moment he saw the great Gothic towers of the cathedral they would mingle with his waking nightmare and in a way fulfil and crown it. I cannot say whether he had taken that road in order to reach the cathedral; or whether it was merely a coincidence; but there was naturally nothing else in all that landscape that could so fit in with his mood about steep places and dizzy heights. And so of course he took up his crazy parable again and talked about riding upon gargoyles, as upon demon horses, or hunting with hell-hounds above the winds of heaven. It was very late before we reached the cathedral; and though it stands more deeply embedded in the town than is common in cathedral cities, it so happened that the houses nearest to us were all barred and silent and we stood in a deep angle of the building, which had something of seclusion and was covered with the vast shadow of the tower. For a strong moon was already brightening behind the cathedral and I remember the light of it made a sort of ring in Salt's ragged red hair like a dull crimson fire. It seemed a rather unholy halo; and it is a detail I remember the more, because he himself was declaiming in praise of moonshine and especially of the effect of stained-glass windows seen against the moon rather than the sun, as in the famous lines in Keats. He was wild to get inside the building and see the coloured glass, which he swore was the only really successful thing religion ever did; and when he found the cathedral was locked up (as was not unusual at that hour) he had a grand final reaction of rage and scorn and began to curse the dean and chapter and everyone else. Then a blast of boyish historical reminiscence seemed to sweep through his changing mind; and he caught up a great ragged stone from the border of the turf and struck thunderous blows on the door with it, as with a hammer, and shouted aloud, ‘King's men! King's men! Where is the traitor? We have come to kill the archbishop.’ Then he laughed groggily and said, ‘Fancy killing Dr. Randall Davidson. … But Becket was really worth killing. He had lived, by God! He had really made the best of both worlds, in a bigger sense than they use the phrase for. Not both at once and both tamely, as the snobs do. But one at a time and both wildly and to the limit. He went clad in crimson and gold and gained laurels and overthrew great knights in tournaments; and then suddenly became a saint, giving his goods to the poor, fasting, dying a martyr. Ah, that is the right way to do it! The right way to live a Double Life! No wonder miracles were worked at his tomb.’ Then he hurled the heavy flint from him; and suddenly all the laughter and historical rant seemed to die out of his face and to leave it rather sad and sober; and as stony as one of the stone faces carved above the Gothic doors. ‘I shall work a miracle tonight,’ he said stolidly, ‘after I have died.’

“I asked him what in the world he meant; and he made no answer. But he began abruptly to talk to me in quite a quiet and friendly and even affectionate way; thanking me for my companionship on this and many occasions; and saying that we must part; for his time was come. But when I asked him where he was going, he only pointed a finger upwards; and I could not make out at all whether he meant metaphorically that he was going to heaven or materially that he was going to scale the high tower. Anyhow, the only stairway for scaling it was inside and I could not imagine how he could reach it. I tried to question him and he answered, ‘I shall ascend…; I shall be lifted up… but no miracles will be worked at my tomb. For my body will never be found.’

“And then, before I could move, and without a gesture of warning, he leapt up and caught a stone bracket by the gateway; in another second he was astride it; in a third standing on it; and in a fourth vanished utterly in the vast shadow of the wall above. Once again I heard his voice much higher up and even far away, crying, ‘I shall ascend.’ Then all was silence and solitude. I cannot undertake to say whether he did ascend. I can only say with tolerable certainty that he did not descend.”

“You mean,” said Gunter gravely, “that you have never seen him since.”

“I mean,” answered James Florence equally gravely, “that I doubt whether anybody on earth has seen him since.”

“Did you make inquiries on the spot?” pursued the lawyer.

The man called Florence laughed in a rather embarrassed fashion. “The truth is,” he said, “that I knocked up the neighbours and even questioned the police; and I couldn’t get anybody to believe me. They said I had had something to drink, which was true enough; and I think they fancied I had seen myself double, and was trying to chase my own shadow over the cathedral roofs. I dare say they know better now there has been a hue and cry in the newspapers. As for me, I took the last train back to London.”

“What about the car?” asked Garth, sharply; and a light of wonder or consternation came over the stranger’s face.

“Why, hang it all!” he cried. “I forgot all about poor Salt’s car! We left it backed into a crack between two old houses just by the cathedral. I never thought of it again till this minute.”

Gunter got up from his desk and went into the inner room in which he was heard obscurely telephoning. When he came back, Mr. Florence had already picked up his round black hat in his usual unembarrassed manner and suggested that he had better be going; for he had told all that he knew about the affair. Gunter watched him walking away with an interested expression; as if he were not quite so certain of the last assertion as he would like to be. Then he turned to the rest of the company and said:

"A curious yarn. A very curious yarn. But there's another curious thing you ought to know, that may or may not be connected with it." For the first time he seemed to take notice of the worthy Joseph Salt, who was present as the nearest surviving relative of the deceased or disappearing person. "Do you happen to know, Mr. Salt, what was your brother's exact financial position?"

"I don't," said the provincial shopkeeper shortly, and contrived to convey an infinite degree of distance and distaste. "Of course you understand, gentlemen, that I'm here to do anything I can for the credit of the family. I wish I could feel quite certain that finding poor Phineas will be for the credit of the family. He and I hadn't much in common, as you may imagine; and to tell the truth, all these newspaper stories don't do a man like me very much good. Men may admire a poet for drinking green fire or trying to fly from a church tower; but they don't order their lunch from a pastry-cook's shop kept by his brother; they get a fancy there might be a little too much green fire in the ginger-ale. And I've only just opened my shop in Croydon; that is, I've bought a new business there. Also," and he looked down at the table with an embarrassment rather rustic but not unmanly, "I'm engaged to be married; and the young lady is very active in church work."

Garth could not suppress a smile at the incongruous lives of the two brothers; but he saw that there was, after all, a good deal of common sense in the more obscure brother's attitude.

"Yes," he said, "I quite see that; but you can hardly expect the public not to be interested."

"The question I wanted to ask," said the solicitor, "has a direct bearing on something I have just discovered. Have you any notion even a vague one, of what Phineas Salt's income was, or if he had any capital?"

"Well," said Joseph Salt reflectively, "I don't think he really had much capital; he may have had the five thousand we each of us got from the old dad's business. In fact, I think he had; but I think he lived up to the edge of his income and a bit beyond. He sometimes made big scoops on a successful play or so; but you know the sort of fellow he was; and the big scoop went in a big splash. I should guess he had two or three thousand in the bank when he disappeared."

"Quite so," said the solicitor gravely. "He had two thousand five hundred in the bank on the day he disappeared. And he drew it all out on the day he disappeared. And it entirely disappeared on the day he disappeared."

"Do you think he's bolted to foreign climes or something?" asked the brother.

"Ah," answered the lawyer, "he may have done so. Or he may have intended to do so and not done so."

"Then how did the money disappear?" asked Garth.

"It may have disappeared," replied Gunter, "while Phineas was drunk and talking nonsense to a rather shady Bohemian acquaintance, with a remarkable gift of narration."

Garth and Gale both glanced sharply across at the speaker; and both, observant in such different ways, realized that the lawyer's face was a shade too grim to be called merely cynical.

"Ah," cried the doctor with something like a catch in his breath. "And you mean something worse than theft."

"I have no right to assert even theft," said the lawyer, without relaxing his sombre expression; "but I have a right to suspect things that go rather deep. To begin with, there is some evidence for the start of Mr. Florence's story, but none for its conclusion. Mr. Florence met Mr. Hatt; I take it, from the absence of contradiction, that Mr. Hatt also met Mr. Florence."

On the poker face of Mr. Hatt there was still an absence of contradiction; that might presumably be taken for confirmation.

"Indeed, I have found some evidence corroborating the story of Salt starting with Florence in the car. There is no evidence corroborating all that wild moonlight antic on the roads of Kent; and if you ask me, I think it very likely that this particular joy-ride ended in some criminal den in the Old Kent Road. I telephoned a moment ago to ask about the car left in Canterbury; and they cannot at present find traces of any such car. Above all, there is the damning fact that this fellow Florence forgot all about his imaginary car, and contradicted himself by saying that he went back by train. That alone makes me think his story is false."

"Does it?" asked Gale, looking at him with childlike wonder. "Why, that alone makes me think his story is true."

"How do you mean?" asked Gunter; "that alone?"

"Yes," said Gale; "that one detail is so true that I could almost believe the truth of all the rest, if he'd described Phineas as flying from the tower on a stone dragon."

He sat frowning and blinking for a moment and then said rather testily: "Don't you see it's just the sort of mistake that would be made by that sort of man? A shabby, impecunious man, a man who never travels far except in trains, is caught up for one wild ride in a rich friend's car, drugged into a sort of dream of absinthe, dragged into a topsy-turvy mystery like a nightmare, wakes up to find his friend caught up into the sky and everybody, in broad daylight, denying that the thing had ever happened. In that sort of chilly, empty awakening, a poor man talking to contemptuous policemen, he would no more have remembered any responsibility for the car than if it had been a fairy chariot drawn by griffins. It was part of the dream. He would automatically fall back on his ordinary way of life and take a third-class ticket home. But he would never make such a blunder in a story he had entirely made up for himself. The instant I heard him make that howler, I knew he was telling the truth."

The others were gazing at the speaker in some mild surprise, when the telephone bell, strident and prolonged, rang in the adjoining office. Gunter got hastily to his feet and went to answer it, and for a few moments there was no sound but the faint buzz of his questions and replies. Then he came back into the room, his strong face graven with a restrained stupefaction.

"This is a most remarkable coincidence," he said; "and, I must admit, a confirmation of what you say. The police down there have found the marks of a car, with tyres and general proportions like Phineas Salt's, evidently having stood exactly where James Florence professed to have left it standing. But what is even more odd, it has gone; the tracks show it was driven off down the road to the south-east by somebody. Presumably by Phineas Salt."

"To the south-east," cried Gale, and sprang to his feet. "I thought so!"

He took a few strides up and down the room and then said: "But we mustn't go too fast. There are several things. To begin with, any fool can see that Phineas would drive to the east; it was nearly daybreak when he disappeared. Of course, in that state, he would drive straight into the sunrise. What else could one do? Then, if he was really full of that craze for crags or towers, he would find himself leaving the last towers behind and driving into flatter and flatter places; for that road leads down into Thanet. What would he do? He must make for the chalk cliffs that look down at least on sea and sand; but I fancy he would want to look down on people, too; just as he might have looked down on the people of Canterbury from the cathedral tower…. I know that south-eastern road….”

Then he faced them solemnly and, like one uttering a sacred mystery, said, “Margate.”

“And why?” asked the staring Garth.

“A form of suicide, I suppose,” said the solicitor dryly. “What could a man of that sort want to do at Margate except commit suicide?”

“What could any man want at Margate except suicide?” asked Dr. Garth, who had a prejudice against such social resorts.

“A good many millions of God’s images go there simply for fun,” said Gale; “but it remains to be shown why one of them should be Phineas Salt… there are possibilities… those black crawling masses seen from the white cliffs might be a sort of vision for a pessimist; possibly a dreadful destructive vision of shutting the gates in the cliffs and inundating them all in the ancient awful sea… or could he have some cranky notion of making Margate glorious by his creative or destructive acts; changing the very sound of the name, making it heroic or tragic for ever? There have been such notions in such men… but wherever this wild road leads I am sure it ends in Margate.”

The worthy tradesman of Croydon was the first to get to his feet after Gale had risen, and he fingered the lapels of his outlandish coat with all his native embarrassment. “I’m afraid all this is beyond me, gentlemen,” he said, “gargoyles and dragons and pessimists and such are not in my line. But it does seem that the police have got a clue that points down the Margate road; and if you ask me, I think we’d better discuss this matter again when the police have investigated a little more.”

“Mr. Salt is perfectly right,” said the lawyer heartily. “See what it is to have a business man to bring us back to business. I will go and make some more inquiries; and soon, perhaps, I may have a little more to tell you.”

If Gabriel Gale was, and felt himself to be, an incongruous figure in the severe framework of leather and parchment, of law and commerce, represented by the office of Mr. Gunter, it might well have been supposed that he would feel even more of a fish out of water in the scene of the second family council. For it was held at the new head-quarters of the family, or all that remained of the family; the little shop in Croydon over which the lost poet's very prosaic brother was presiding with a mixture of the bustle of a new business and the last lingering formalities of a funeral. Mr. J. Salt's suburban shop was a very suburban shop. It was a shop for selling confectionery and sweetmeats and similar things; with a sort of sideshow of very mild refreshments, served on little round shiny tables and apparently chiefly consisting of pale green lemonade. The cakes and sweets were arranged in decorative patterns in the window, to attract the eye of Croydon youth, and as the building consisted chiefly of windows, it seemed full of a sort of cold and discolouring light. A parlour behind, full of neat but illogical knicknacks and mementoes, was not without a sampler, a testimonial from a Provident Society and a portrait of George V. But it was never easy to predict in what place or circumstances Mr. Gale would find a certain intellectual interest. He generally looked at objects, not objectively in the sense of seeing them as themselves, but in connexion with some curious trains of thought of his own; and, for some reason or other, he seemed to take quite a friendly interest in Mr. Salt's suburban shop. Indeed, he seemed to take more interest in this novel scene than in the older and more serious problem which he had come there to solve. He gazed entranced at the china dogs and pink pincushions on the parlour mantelpiece; he was with difficulty drawn away from a rapt contemplation of the diamond pattern of lemon-drops and raspberry-drops which decorated the window; and he looked even at the lemonade as if it were as important as that pale green wine of wormwood, which had apparently played a real part in the tragedy of Phineas Salt.

He had been indeed unusually cheerful all the morning, possibly because it was a beautiful day, possibly for more personal reasons; and had drawn near to the rendezvous through the trim suburban avenues with a step of unusual animation. He saw the worthy confectioner himself, stepping out of a villa of a social shade faintly superior to his own; a young woman with a crown of braided brown hair, and a good grave face, came with him down the garden path. Gale had little difficulty in identifying the young lady interested in church work. The poet gazed at the pale squares of lawn and the few thin and dwarfish trees with quite a sentimental interest, almost as if it were a romance of his own; nor did his universal good humour fail him even when he encountered, a few lamp-posts further down the road, the saturnine and somewhat unsympathetic countenance of Mr. Hiram Hatt. The lover was still lingering at the garden gate, after the fashion of his kind, and Hatt and Gale walked more briskly ahead of him towards his home. To Hatt the poet made the somewhat irrelevant remark: “Do you understand that desire to be one of the lovers of Cleopatra?”

Mr. Hatt, the secretary, indicated that, had he nourished such a desire, his appearance on the historical scene would have lacked something of true American hustle and punctuality.

“Oh, there are plenty of Cleopatras still,” answered Gale; “and plenty of people who have that strange notion of being the hundredth husband of an Egyptian cat. What could have made a man of real intellect, like that fellow’s brother, break himself all up for a woman like Hertha Hathaway?”

“Well, I’m all with you there,” said Hatt. “I didn’t say anything about the woman, because it wasn’t my business; but I tell you, sir, she was just blue ruin and vitriol. Only the fact that I didn’t mention her seems to have set your friend the solicitor off on another dance of dark suspicions. I swear he fancies she and I were mixed up in something; and probably had to do with the disappearance of Phineas Salt.”

Gale looked hard at the man’s hard face for a moment and then said irrelevantly: “Would it surprise you to find him at Margate?”

“No; nor anywhere else,” replied Hatt. “He was restless just then and drifted about into the commonest crowds. He did no work lately; sometimes sat and stared at a blank sheet of paper as if he had no ideas.”

“Or as if he had too many,” said Gabriel Gale.

With that they turned in at the confectioner’s door: and found Dr. Garth already in the outer shop, having only that moment arrived. But when they penetrated to the parlour, they came on a figure that gave them, indescribably, a cold shock of sobriety. The lawyer was already seated in that gimcrack room, resolutely and rather rudely, with his top hat on his head, like a bailiff in possession; but they all sensed something more sinister, as of the bearer of the bowstring.

“Where is Mr. Joseph Salt?” he asked. “He said he would be home at eleven.”

Gale smiled faintly and began to fiddle with the funny little ornaments on the mantelpiece. “He is saying farewell,” he said. “Sometimes it is rather a long word to say.”

“We must begin without him,” said Gunter. “Perhaps it is just as well.”

“You mean you have bad news for him?” asked the doctor, lowering his voice. “Have you the last news of his brother?”

“I believe it may fairly be called the last news,” answered the lawyer dryly. “In the light of the latest discoveries…Mr. Gale, I should be much obliged if you would leave off fidgeting with those ornaments and sit down. There is something that somebody has got to explain.”

“Yes,” replied Gale rather hazily. “Isn’t *this* what he has got to explain?”

He picked up something from the mantelpiece and put it on the central table. It was a very absurd object to be stared at thus, as an exhibit in a grim museum of suicide or crime. It was a cheap, childish, pink and white mug, inscribed in large purple letters, “A Present from Margate.”

“There is a date inside,” said Gale, looking down dreamily into the depths of this remarkable receptacle. “This year. And we’re still at the beginning of the year, you know.”

“Well, it may be one of the things,” said the solicitor. “But I have got some other Presents from Margate.”

He took a sheaf of papers from his breast-pocket and laid them out thoughtfully on the table before he spoke.

“Understand, to begin with, that there really is a riddle and the man really has vanished. Don’t imagine a man can easily melt into a modern crowd; the police have traced his car on the road and could have traced him, if he had left it. Don’t imagine anybody can simply drive down country roads throwing corpses out of cars. There are always a lot of fussy people about, who notice a little thing like that. Whatever he did, sooner or later the explanation would probably be found; and we have found it.”

Gale put down the mug abruptly and stared across, still open-mouthed, but as it were more dry-throated, coughing and stammering now with a real eagerness.

“Have you really found out?” he asked. “Do you know all about the Purple Jewel?”

“Look here!” cried the doctor, as if with a generous indignation; “this is getting too thick. I don’t mind being in a mystery, but it needn’t be a melodrama. Don’t say that we are after the Rajah’s Ruby. Don’t say, oh, don’t say, that it is in the eye of the god Vishnu.”

“No,” replied the poet. “It is in the eye of the Beholder.”

"And who's he?" asked Gunter. "I don't know exactly what you're talking about, but there may have been a theft involved. Anyhow, there was more than a theft."

He sorted out from his papers two or three photographs of the sort that are taken casually with hand-cameras in a holiday crowd. As he did so he said:

"Our investigations at Margate have not been fruitless; in fact they have been rather fruitful. We have found a witness, a photographer on Margate beach, who testifies to having seen a man corresponding to Phineas Salt, burly and with a big red beard and long hair, who stood for some time on an isolated crag of white chalk, which stands out from the cliff, and looked down at the crowds below. Then he descended by a rude stairway cut in the chalk and, crossing a crowded part of the beach, spoke to another man who seemed to be an ordinary clerk or commonplace holiday-maker; and, after a little talk, they went up to the row of bathing-sheds, apparently for the purpose of having a dip in the sea. My informant thinks they did go into the sea; but cannot be quite so certain. What he is quite certain of is that he never saw the red-bearded man again, though he did see the common-place clean-shaven man, both when he returned in his bathing-suit and when he resumed his ordinary, his very ordinary, clothes. He not only saw him, but he actually took a snapshot of him, and there he is."

He handed the photograph to Garth, who gazed at it with slowly rising eyebrows. The photograph represented a sturdy man with a bulldog jaw but rather blank eyes, with his head lifted, apparently staring out to sea. He wore very light holiday clothes, but of a clumsy, unfashionable cut; and, so far as he could be seen under the abrupt shadow and rather too jaunty angle of his stiff straw hat, his hair was of some light colour. Only, as it happened, the doctor had no need to wait for the development of colour photography. For he knew exactly what colour it was. He knew it was a sort of sandy red; he had often seen it, not in the photograph, but on the head where it grew. For the man in the stiff straw hat was most unmistakably Mr. Joseph Salt, the worthy confectioner and new social ornament to the suburb of Croydon.

"So Phineas went down to Margate to meet his brother," said Garth. "After all, that's natural enough in one way. Margate is exactly the sort of place his brother would go to."

"Yes; Joseph went there on one of those motor-charabanc expeditions, with a whole crowd of other trippers, and he seems to have returned the same night on the same vehicle. But nobody knows when, where or *if* his brother Phineas returned."

"I rather gather from your tone," said Garth very gravely, "that you think his brother Phineas never did return."

"I think his brother never will return," said the lawyer, "unless it happens (by a curious coincidence) that he was drowned while bathing and his body is some day washed up on the shore. But there's a strong current running just there that would carry it far away."

"The plot thickens, certainly," said the doctor. "All this bathing business seems to complicate things rather."

"I am afraid," said the lawyer, "that it simplifies them very much."

"What," asked Garth sharply. "Simplifies?"

"Yes," said the other, gripping the arms of his chair and rising abruptly to his feet. "I think this story is as simple as the story of Cain and Abel. And rather like it".

There was a shocked silence, which was at length broken by Gale, who was peering into the Present from Margate, crying or almost crowing, in the manner of a child.

"Isn't it a funny little mug! He must have bought it before he came back in the charabanc. Such a jolly thing to buy, when you have just murdered your own brother."

"It does seem a queer business," said Dr. Garth frowning. "I suppose one might work out some explanation of how he did it. I suppose a man might drown another man while they were bathing, even off a crowded beach like that. But I'm damned if I can understand why he did it. Have you discovered a motive as well as a murder?"

"The motive is old enough and I think obvious enough," answered Gunter. "We have in this case all the necessary elements of a hatred, of that slow and corroding sort that is founded on jealousy. Here you had two brothers, sons of the same insignificant Midland tradesman; having the same education, environment, opportunities; very nearly of an age, very much of one type, even of one physical type, rugged, red-haired, rather plain and heavy, until Phineas made himself a spectacle with that big Bolshevist beard and bush of hair; not so different in youth but that they must have had ordinary rivalries and quarrels on fairly equal terms. And then see the sequel. One of them fills the world with his name, wears a laurel like the crown of Petrach, dines with kings and emperors and is worshipped by women like a hero on the films. The other… isn't it enough to say that the other has had to go on slaving all his life in a room like this?"

"Don't you like the room?" inquired Gale with the same simple eagerness. "Why, I think some of the ornaments are so nice!"

"It is not yet quite clear," went on Gunter, ignoring him, "how the pastry-cook lured the poet down to Margate and a dip in the sea. But the poet was admittedly rather random in his movements just then, and too restless to work; and we have no reason to suppose that he knew of the fraternal hatred or that he in any way reciprocated it. I don't think there would be much difficulty in swimming with a man beyond the crowd of bathers and holding him under water, till you could send his body adrift on a current flowing away from the shore. Then he went back and dressed and calmly took his place in the charabanc."

"Don't forget the dear little mug," said Gale softly. "He stopped to buy that and then went home. Well, it's a very able and thorough explanation and reconstruction of the crime, my dear Gunter, and I congratulate you. Even the best achievements have some little flaw; and there's only one trifling mistake in yours. You've got it the wrong way round."

"What do you mean?" asked the other quickly.

"Quite a small correction," explained Gale. "You think that Joseph was jealous of Phineas. As a matter of fact, Phineas was jealous of Joseph."

"My dear Gale, you are simply playing the goat," said the doctor very sharply and impatiently. "And let me tell you I don't think it's a decent occasion for doing it. I know all about your jokes and fancies and paradoxes, but we're all in a damned hard position, sitting here in the man's own house, and knowing we're in the house of a murderer."

"I know… it's simply infernal," said Gunter, his stiffness shaken for the first time; and he looked up with a shrinking jerk, as if he half expected to see the rope hanging from that dull and dusty ceiling.

At the same moment the door was thrown open and the man they had convicted of murder stood in the room. His eyes were bright like a child's over a new toy, his face was flushed to the roots of his fiery hair, his broad shoulders were squared backwards like a soldier's; and in the lapel of his coat was a large purple flower, of a colour that Gale remembered in the garden-beds of the house down the road. Gale had no difficulty in guessing the reason of this triumphant entry.

Then the man with the buttonhole saw the tragic faces on the other side of the table and stopped, staring.

“Well,” he said at last, in a rather curious tone. “What about your search?”

The lawyer was about to open his locked lips with some such question as was once asked of Cain by the voice out of the cloud, when Gale interrupted him by flinging himself backwards in a chair and emitting a short but cheery laugh.

“I’ve given up the search,” said Gale gaily. “No need to bother myself about that any more.”

“Because you know you will never find Phineas Salt,” said the tradesman steadily.

“Because I have found him,” said Gabriel Gale. Dr. Garth got to his feet quickly and remained staring at them with bright eyes.

“Yes,” said Gale, “because I am talking to him.” And he smiled across at his host, as if he had just been introduced.

Then he said rather more gravely: “Will you tell us all about it, Mr. Phineas Salt? Or must I guess it for you all the way through?”

There was a heavy silence.

“You tell the story,” said the shopkeeeper at last. “I am quite sure you know all about it.”

“I only know about it,” answered Gale gently, “because I think I should have done the same thing myself. It’s what some call having a sympathy with lunatics… including literary men.”

“Hold on for a moment,” interposed the staring Mr. Gunter. “Before you get too literary, am I to understand that this gentleman who owns this shop, actually is the poet, Phineas Salt? In that case, where is his brother?”

“Making the Grand Tour, I imagine,” said Gale. “Gone abroad for a holiday, anyhow; a holiday which will be not the less enjoyable for the two thousand five hundred pounds that his brother gave him to enjoy himself with. His slipping away was easy enough; he only swam a little bit further along the shore to where they had left another suit of clothes. Meanwhile our friend here went back and shaved off his beard and effected the change of appearance in the bathing-tent. He was quite sufficiently like his brother to go back with a crowd of strangers. And then, you will doubtless note, he opened a new shop in an entirely new neighbourhood.”

"But *why?*" cried Garth in a sort of exasperation. "In the name of all the saints and angels, why? That's what I can't make any sense of."

"I will tell you why," said Gabriel Gale, "but you won't make any sense of it."

He stared at the mug on the table for a moment and then said: "This is what you would call a nonsense story; and you can only understand it by understanding nonsense; or, as some politely call it, poetry. The poet Phineas Salt was a man who had made himself master of everything, in a sort of frenzy of freedom and omnipotence. He had tried to feel everything, experience everything, imagine everything that could be or could not be. And he found, as all such men have found, that that illimitable liberty is itself a limit. It is like the circle, which is at once an eternity and a prison. He not only wanted to do everything. He wanted to be everybody. To the Pantheist God is everybody: to the Christian He is also Somebody. But this sort of Pantheist will not narrow himself by a choice. To want everything is to will nothing. Mr. Hatt here told me that Phineas would sit staring at a blank sheet of paper; and I told him it was not because he had nothing to write about, but because he could write about anything. When he stood on that cliff and looked down on that mazy crowd, so common and yet so complex, he felt he could write ten thousand tales and then that he could write none; because there was no reason to choose one more than another.

"Well, what is the step beyond that? What comes next? I tell you there are only two steps possible after that. One is the step over the cliff; to cease to be. The other is to *be* somebody, instead of writing about everybody. It is to become incarnate as one real human being in that crowd; to begin all over again as a real person. Unless a man be born again…

"He tried it and found that this was what he wanted; the things he had not known since childhood; the silly little lower middle-class things; to have to do with lollipops and ginger-beer; to fall in love with a girl round the corner and feel awkward about it; to be young. That was the only paradise still left virgin and unspoilt enough, in the imagination of a man who has turned the seven heavens upside down. That is what he tried as his last experiment, and I think we can say it has been a success."

"Yes," said the confectioner with a stony satisfaction, "it has been a great success."

Mr. Gunter, the solicitor, rose also with a sort of gesture of despair. "Well, I don't think I understand it any better for knowing all about it," he said; “but I suppose it must be as you say. But how in the world did you know it yourself?”

“I think it was those coloured sweets in the window that set me off,” said Gale. “I couldn’t take my eyes off them. They were so pretty. Sweets are better than jewellery: the children are right. For they have the fun of eating rubies and emeralds. I felt sure they were speaking to me in some way. And then I realized what they were saying. Those violet or purple raspberry drops were as vivid and glowing as amethysts, when you saw them from *inside* the shop; but from outside, with the light on them, they would look quite dingy and dark. Meanwhile, there were plenty of other things, gilded or painted with opaque colours, that would have looked much more gay in the shop-window, to the customer looking in at it. Then I remembered the man who said he must break into the cathedral to see the coloured windows from inside, and I knew it in an instant. The man who had arranged that shop-window was not a shopkeeper. He was not thinking of how things looked from the street, but of how they looked to his own artistic eye from inside. From there he saw purple jewels. And then, thinking of the cathedral, of course I remembered something else. I remembered what the poet had said about the Double Life of St. Thomas of Canterbury; and how when he had all the earthly glory, he had to have the exact opposite. St. Phineas of Croydon is also living a Double Life.”

“Well,” broke out Gunter, heaving with a sort of heavy gasp, “with all respect to him, if he has done all this, I can only say that he must have gone mad.”

“No,” said Gale, “a good many of my friends have gone mad and I am by no means without sympathy with them. But you can call this the story of ‘The Man Who went Sane’.”

THE ASYLUM OF ADVENTURE

A VERY small funeral procession passed through a very small churchyard on the rocky coast of Cornwall; carrying a coffin to its grave under the low and windy wall. The coffin was quite formal and unobtrusive; but the knot of fishermen and labourers eyed it with the slanted eyes of superstition; almost as if it had been the misshapen coffin of legend that was said to contain a monster. For it contained the body of a near neighbour, who had long lived a stone’s throw from them, and whom they had never seen.

The figure following the coffin, the chief and only mourner, they had seen fairly often. He had a habit of disappearing into his late friend’s house and being invisible for long periods, but he came and went openly. No one knew when the dead man had first come, but he probably came in the night; and he went out in the coffin. The figure following it was a tall figure in black, bare-headed, with the sea-blast whistling through his wisps of yellow hair as through the pale sea grasses. He was still young and none could have said that his mourning suit sat ill upon him; but some who knew him would have seen it with involuntary surprise and felt that it showed him in a new phase. When he was dressed, as he generally was, in the negligent tweeds and stockings of the pedestrian landscape-painter, he looked merely amiable and absent-minded; but the black brought out something more angular and fixed about his face. With his black garb and yellow hair he might have been the traditional Hamlet; and indeed the look in his eyes was visionary and vague; but the traditional Hamlet would hardly have had so long and straight a chin as that which rested unconsciously on his black cravat. After the ceremony, he left the village church and walked towards the village post office, gradually lengthening and lightening his stride, like a man who, with all care for decency, can hardly conceal that he is rid of a duty.

“It’s a horrible thing to say,” he said to himself, “but I feel like a happy widower.”

He then went in to the post office and sent off a telegram addressed to a Lady Diana Westermaine, Westermaine Abbey: a telegram that said: “I am coming tomorrow to keep my promise and tell you the story of a strange friendship.”

Then he went out of the little shop again and walked eastwards out of the village, with undisguised briskness, till he had left the houses far behind, and his funeral hat and habit were an almost incongruous black spot upon great green uplands and the motley forests of autumn. He had walked for about half a day, lunched on bread and cheese and ale at a little public-house, and resumed his march with unabated cheerfulness, when the first event of that strange day befell him. He was threading his way by a river that ran in a hollow of the green hills; and at one point his path narrowed and ran under a high stone wall. The wall was built of very large flat stones of ragged outline, and a row of them ran along the top like the teeth of a giant. He would not normally have taken so much notice of the structure of the wall; indeed he did not take any notice of it at all until after something had happened. Until (in fact) there was a great gap in the row of craggy teeth, and one of the crags lay flat at his feet, shaking up dust like the smoke of an explosion. It had just brushed one of his long wisps of light hair as it fell.

Looking up, a shade bewildered by the shock of his hairbreadth escape, he saw for an instant in the dark gap left in the stone-work a face, peering and malignant. He called out promptly:

“I see you; I could send you to jail for that!”

“No you can’t,” retorted the stranger, and vanished into the twilight of trees as swiftly as a squirrel.

The gentleman in black, whose name was Gabriel Gale, looked up thoughtfully at the wall, which was rather too high and smooth to scale; besides the fugitive had already far too much of a start. Mr. Gale finally said aloud, in a reflective fashion: “Now I wonder why he did that!” Then he frowned with an entirely new sort of gravity, and after a moment or two of grim silence he added: “But after all its much more odd and mysterious that he should *say* that.”

In truth, though the three words uttered by the unknown person seemed trivial enough, they sufficed to lead Gale’s memories backwards to the beginning of the whole business that ended in the little Cornish churchyard; and as he went briskly on his way he rehearsed all the details of that old story, which he was to tell to the lady at his journey’s end.

Nearly fourteen years before, Gabriel Gale had come of age and inherited the moderate debts and the small freehold of a rather unsuccessful gentleman farmer. But though he grew up with the traditions of a sort of small squire, he was not the sort of person, especially at that age, to have no opinions except those traditions. In early youth his politics were the very reverse of squires' politics; he was very much of a revolutionary and locally rather a firebrand. He intervened on behalf of poachers and gipsies: he wrote letters to the local papers which the editors thought too eloquent to be printed. He denounced the county magistracy in controversies that had to be impartially adjudged by the county magistrates. Finding, curiously enough, that all these authorities were against him, and seemed to be in legal control of all his methods of self-expression, he invented a method of his own which gave him great amusement and the authorities great annoyance. He fell, in fact, to employing a talent for drawing and painting which he was conscious of possessing, along with another talent for guessing people's thoughts and getting a rapid grasp of their characters, which he was less conscious of possessing, but which he certainly possessed. It is a talent very valuable to a portrait-painter: in this case, however, he became a rather peculiar sort of portrait-painter. It was not exactly what is generally called a fashionable portrait-painter. Gale's small estate contained several outhouses with white-washed walls or palings abutting on the high road; and whenever a magnate or magistrate did anything that Gale disapproved of, Gale was in the habit of painting his portrait in public and on a large scale. His pictures were hardly in the ordinary sense caricatures, but they were portraits of souls. There was nothing crude about the picture of the great merchant prince now honoured with a peerage; the eyes looking up from under lowered brows, the sleek hair parted low on the forehead, were hardly exaggerated; but the smiling lips were certainly saying: "And the next article?" One even knew that it was not really a very superior article. The picture of the formidable Colonel Ferrars did justice to the distinction of the face, with its frosty eyebrows and moustaches; but it also very distinctly discovered that it was the face of a fool, and of one sub-consciously frightened of being found to be a fool.

With these coloured proclamations did Mr. Gale beautify the countryside and make himself beloved among his equals. They could not do very much in the matter; it was not libel, for nothing was said; it was not nuisance or damage, for it was done on his own property, though in sight of the whole world. Among those who gathered every day to watch the painter at work, was a sturdy, red-faced, bushy-whiskered farmer, named Banks, seemingly one of those people who delight in any event and are more or less impenetrable by any opinion. He never could be got to bother his head about the sociological symbolism of Gale's caricatures; but he regarded the incident with exuberant interest as one of the great stories calculated to be the glory of the country, like a calf born with five legs or some pleasant ghost story about the old gallows on the moor. Though so little of a theorist he was far from being a fool, and had a whole tangle of tales both humorous and tragic, to show how rich a humanity was packed within the four corners of his countryside. Thus it happened that he and his revolutionary neighbour had many talks over the cakes and ale, and went on many expeditions together to fascinating graves or historic public-houses. And thus it happened that on one of these expeditions Banks fell in with two of his other cronies, who made a party of four, making discoveries not altogether without interest.

The first of the farmer's friends, introduced to Gale under the name of Starkey, was a lively little man with a short stubbly beard and sharp eyes, which he was in the habit however of screwing up with a quizzical smile during the greater part of a conversation. Both he and his friend Banks were eagerly interested in the story of Gale's political protests, if they regarded them only too much as practical jokes. And they were both particularly anxious to introduce a friend of theirs named Wolfe, always referred to as Sim, who had a hobby, it would seem, in such matters, and might have suggestions to make. With a sort of sleepy curiosity which was typical of him, Gale found himself trailed along in an expedition for the discovery of Sim; and Sim was discovered at a little obscure hostelry called the Grapes a mile or so up the river. The three men had taken a boat, with the small Starkey for coxswain; it was a glorious autumn morning but the river was almost hidden under high banks and overhanging woods, intersected with great gaps of glowing sunlight, in one of which the lawns of the little riverside hotel sloped down to the river. And on the bank over-hanging the river a man stood waiting for them; a remarkable looking man with a fine sallow face rather like an actor's and very curly grizzled hair. He welcomed them with a pleasant smile, and then turned towards the house with something of a habit of command or at least of direction. "I've ordered something for you," he said. "If we go in now it will be ready."

As Gabriel Gale brought up the rear of the single file of four men going up the straight paved path to the inn door, his roaming eye took in the rest of the garden, and something stirred in his spirit, which was also prone to roaming, and even in a light sense to a sort of rebellion. The steep path was lined with little trees, looking like the plan of a sampler. He did not see why he should walk straight up so very straight a path, and many things in the garden took his wandering fancy. He would much rather have had lunch at one of the little weather-stained tables standing about on the lawn. He would have been delighted to grope in the dark and tumble-down arbour in the corner, of which he could dimly see the circular table and semi-circular seat in the shadow of its curtain of creepers. He was even more attracted by the accident by which an old children’s swing, with its posts and ropes and hanging seat, stood close up to the bushes of the river bank. In fact, the last infantile temptation was irresistible; and calling out, “I’m going over here,” he ran across the garden towards the arbour, taking the swing with a sort of leap on his way. He landed in the wooden seat and swung twice back and forth, leaving it again with another flying leap. Just as he did so, however, the rope broke at its upper attachment, and he fell all askew, kicking his legs in the air. He was on his feet again immediately, and found himself confronted by his three companions who had followed in doubt or remonstrance. But the smiling Starkey was foremost, and his screwed-up eyes expressed good humour and even sympathy.

“Rotten sort of swing of yours,” he said. “These things are all falling to pieces,” and he gave the other rope a twitch, bringing that down also. Then he added: “Want to feast in the arbour, do you? Very well; you go in first and break the cobwebs. When you’ve collected all the spiders, I’ll follow you.”

Gale dived laughing into the dark corner in question and sat down in the centre of the crescent-shaped seat. The practical Mr. Banks had apparently entirely refused to carouse in this leafy cavern; but the figures of the two other men soon darkened the entrance and they sat down, one at each horn of the crescent.

“I suppose that was a sudden impulse of yours,” said the man named Wolfe, smiling. “You poets often have sudden impulses, don’t you?”

“It’s not for me to say it was a poet’s impulse,” replied Gale; “but I’m sure it would need a poet to describe it. Perhaps I’m not one; anyhow I never could describe those impulses. The only way to do it would be to write a poem about the swing and a poem about the arbour, and put them both into a longer poem about the garden. And poems aren’t produced quite so quickly as all that, though I’ve always had a notion that a real poet would never talk prose. He would talk about the weather in rolling stanzas like the storm-clouds, or ask you to pass the potatoes in an impromptu lyric as beautiful as the blue flower of the potato."

"Make it a prose poem, then," said the man whose name was Simeon Wolfe, "and tell us how you felt about the garden and the garden-swing."

Gabriel Gale was both sociable and talkative; he talked a great deal about himself because he was not an egoist. He talked a great deal about himself on the present occasion. He was pleased to find these two intelligent men interested and attentive; and he tried to put into words the impalpable impulses to which he was always provoked by particular shapes or colours or corners of the straggling road of life. He tried to analyse the attraction of a swing, with its rudiments of aviation; and how it made a man feel more like a boy, because it made a boy feel more like a bird. He explained that the arbour was fascinating precisely because it was a den. He told them at some length of the psychological truth; that dismal and decayed objects raise a man's spirits higher, if they really are already high. His two companions talked in turn; and as luncheon progressed and passed they turned over between them many strange strata of personal experience, and Gale began to understand their personalities and their point of view. Wolfe had travelled a great deal, especially in the East; Starkey's experiences had been more local but equally curious, and they both had known many psychological cases and problems about which to compare notes. They both agreed that Gale's mental processes in the matter, though unusual, were not unique.

"In fact," observed Wolfe, "I think your mind belongs to a particular class, and one of which I have had some experience. Don't you think so, Starkey?"

"I quite agree," said the other man, nodding.

It was at that moment that Gale looked out dreamily at the light upon the lawn, and in the stillness of his inmost mind a light broke on him like lightning; one of the terrible intuitions of his life.

Against the silver light on the river the dark frame of the forsaken swing stood up like a gallows. There was no trace of the seat or the ropes, not merely in their proper place, but even on the ground where they had fallen. Sweeping his eye slowly and searchingly round the scene, he saw them at last, huddled and hidden in a heap behind the bench where Starkey was sitting. In an instant he understood everything. He knew the profession of the two men on each side of him. He knew why they were asking him to describe the processes of his mind. Soon they would be taking out a document and signing it. He would not leave that arbour a free man.

"So you are both doctors," he observed cheerfully, "and you both think I am mad."

"The word is really very unscientific," said Simeon Wolfe in a soothing fashion. "You are of a certain type which friends and admirers will be wise to treat in a certain way, but it need in no sense be an unfriendly or uncomfortable way. You are an artist with that form of the artistic temperament which is necessarily a mode of modified megalomania, and which expresses itself in the form of exaggeration. You cannot see a large blank wall without having an uncontrollable appetite for covering it with large pictures. You cannot see a swing hung in the air without thinking of flying ships careering through the air. I will venture to guess that you never see a cat without thinking of a tiger or a lizard without thinking of a dragon."

"That is perfectly correct," said Gale gravely; "I never do."

Then his mouth twisted a little, as if a whimsical idea had come into his mind. "Psychology is certainly very valuable," he said. "It seems to teach us how to see into each other's minds. You, for instance, have a mind which is very interesting: you have reached a condition which I think I recognize. You are in that particular attitude in which the subject, when he thinks of anything, never thinks of the centre of anything. You see only edges eaten away. Your malady is the opposite to mine, to what you call making a tiger out of a cat, or what some call making a mountain out of a molehill. You do not go on and make a cat more of a cat; you are always trying to work back and prove that it is less than a cat; that it is a defective cat or a mentally deficient cat. But a cat is a cat; that is the supreme sanity which is so thickly clouded in your mind. After all, a molehill is a hill and a mountain is a hill. But you have got into the state of the mad queen, who said she knew hills compared with which this was a valley. You can't grasp the thing called a thing. Nothing for you has a central stalk of sanity. There is no core to your cosmos. Your trouble began with being an atheist."

"I have not confessed to being an atheist," said Wolfe staring.

"I have not confessed to being an artist," replied Gale, "or to have uncontrolled artistic appetites or any of that stuff. But I will tell you one thing: I can only exaggerate things the way they are going. But I'm not often wrong about the way they are going. You may be as sleek as a cat but

I knew you were evolving into a tiger. And I guessed this little lizard could be turned by black magic into a dragon."

As he spoke he was looking grimly at Starkey and out under the dark arch of the arbour, as out of a closing prison, with these two ghouls sitting on each side of the gate. Beyond was the gaunt shape like a gallows and beyond that the green and silver of the garden and the stream shone like a lost paradise of liberty. But it was characteristic of him that even when he was practically hopeless, he liked being logically triumphant; he liked turning the tables on his critics even when, so to speak, they were as abstract as multiplication tables.

"Why, my learned friends," he went on contemptuously, "do you really suppose you are any fitter to write a report on my mind than I am on yours? You can't see any further into me than I can into you. Not half so far. Didn't you know a portrait-painter has to value people at sight as much as a doctor? And I do it better than you; I have a knack that way. That's why I can paint those pictures on the wall; and I could paint your pictures as big as a house. I know what is at the back of your mind, Doctor Simeon Wolfe; and it's a chaos of exceptions with no rule. You could find anything abnormal, because you have no normal. You could find anybody mad; and as for why you specially want to find me mad… why that is another disadvantage of being an atheist. You do not think anything will smite you for the vile treachery you have sold yourself to do today."

"There is no doubt about your condition now," said Dr. Wolfe with a sneer.

"You look like an actor, but you are not a very good actor," answered Gale calmly. "I can see that my guess was correct. These rack-renters and usurers who oppress the poor, in my own native valley, could not find any pettifogging law to prevent me from painting the colours of their souls in hell. So they have bribed you and another cheap doctor to certify me for a madhouse. I know the sort of man you are. I know this is not the first dirty trick you have done to help the rich out of a hole. You would do anything for your paymasters. Possibly the murder of the unborn."

Wolfe's face was still wrinkled with its Semitic sneer, but his olive tint had turned to a sort of loathsome yellow. Starkey called out with sudden shrillness, as abrupt as the bark of a dog.

"Speak more respectfully!"

“There is Dr. Starkey, too,” continued the poet lazily. “Let us turn our medical attention to the mental state of Dr. Starkey.”

As he rolled his eyes with ostentatious languor in the new direction, he was arrested by a change in the scene without. A strange man was standing under the frame of the swing, looking up at it with his head on one side like a bird’s. He was a small, sturdy figure, quite conventionally clad; and Gale could only suppose he was a stray guest of the hotel. His presence did not help very much; for the law was probably on the side of the doctors; and Gale continued his address to them.

“The mental deficiency of Dr. Starkey,” he said, “consists in having forgotten the truth. You, Starkey, have no sceptical philosophy like your friend. You are a practical man, my dear Starkey; but you have told lies so incessantly and from so early an age that you never see anything as it is, but only as it could be made to look. Beside each thing stands the unreal thing that is its shadow; and you see the shadow first. You are very quick in seeing it; you go direct to the deceptive potentialities of anything; you see at once if anything could be used as anything else. You are the original man who went straight down the crooked lane. I could see how quickly you saw that the swing would provide ropes to tie me up if I were violent; and that going first into this arbour, I should be cornered, with you on each side of me. Yet the swing and the arbour were my own idea; and that again is typical of you. You’re not a scientific thinker like the other scoundrel; you have always picked up other men’s ideas, but you pick as swiftly as a pickpocket. In fact, when you see an idea sticking out of a pocket you can hardly help picking it. That’s where you’re mad; you can’t resist being clever, or rather borrowing cleverness. Which means you have sometimes been too clever to be lucky. You are a shabbier sort of scamp; and I rather fancy you have been in prison.”

Starkey sprang to his feet, snatching up the ropes and throwing them on the table.

“Tie him up and gag him,” he cried; “he is raving.”

“There again,” observed Gale, “I enter with sympathy into your thoughts. You mean that I must be gagged at once; for if I were free for half a day, or perhaps half an hour, I could find out the facts about you and tear your reputation to rags.”

As he spoke he again followed with an interested eye the movements of the strange man outside. The man had recrossed the garden, calmly picking up a chair from one of the little tables, and returned carrying it lightly in the direction of the arbour. To the surprise of all, he set it down at the round table in the very entrance of that retreat, and sat down on it with his hands in his pockets, staring at Gabriel Gale. With his face in shadow, his square head, short hair and bulk of shoulders took on a new touch of mystery.

"Hope I don't interrupt," he said. "Perhaps it would be more honest to say I hope I do interrupt. Because I want to interrupt. Honestly, I think you medical gentlemen would be very unwise to gag your friend here, or try to carry him off."

"And why?" asked Starkey sharply.

"Only because I should kill you if you did," replied the stranger.

They all stared at him; and Wolfe sneered again as he said: "You might find it awkward to kill us both at once."

The stranger took his hands out of his pockets; and with the very gesture there was a double flash of metal. For the hands held two revolvers which pointed at them, fixed them like two large fingers of steel.

"I shall only kill you if you run or call out," said the strange gentleman pleasantly.

"If you do you'll be hanged," cried Wolfe violently.

"Oh, no, I shan't," said the stranger; "not unless two dead men can get up and hang me on that nursery gallows in the garden. I'm allowed to kill people. There's a special Act of Parliament permitting me to go about killing anybody I like. I'm never punished, whatever I do. In fact, to tell you the truth, I'm the King of England, and the Constitution says I can do no wrong."

"What are you talking about?" demanded the doctor. "You must be mad."

The stranger uttered a sudden shout of laughter that shook the shed and the nerves of all three hearers.

"You've hit it first shot," he cried. "He said you were quick, didn't he? Yes, I'm mad all right; I've just escaped from the same sanatorium next door, where you want to take your friend to. I escaped in a way of my own; through the chief doctor's private apartments; and he's kind enough to keep two pistols in his drawer. I may be recaptured; but I shan't be hanged. I may be recaptured; but I particularly don't want your young friend to be captured at all. He's got his life before him; I don't choose he should suffer as I've suffered. I like the look of him; I like the way he turned all your medical tomfoolery upside down. So you’ll understand I am at present wielding the power of a perfectly irresponsible sultan. I shall merely be rounding off a very pleasant holiday by blowing both your brains out, unless you will sit quite still and allow your young friend to tie you up with the ropes. That will give us a good start for our escape.”

How he passed through the topsy-turvy transformation scene that followed Gale could afterwards barely remember; it seemed like a sort of dream pantomime, but its results were solid enough. Ten minutes later he and his strange deliverer were walking free in the woods beyond the last hedge of the garden, leaving the two medical gentlemen behind them in the arbour, tied up like two sacks of potatoes.

For Gabriel Gale the wood in which he walked was a new world of wonders. Every tree was a Christmas tree bearing gifts; and every gap in the woods was like a glimpse through the curtain for a child with a toy theatre. For a few moments before all these things had nearly disappeared in the darkness of something worse than death; till heaven had sent him a guardian angel in the shape of an escaped lunatic.

Gale was very young and his youth had not then found its vent and vocation by falling in love. There was in him something of those young Crusaders who made wild vows not to cut their hair till they found the Holy City. His liberty was looking and longing for something to bind itself; and at this moment he could think of but one thing in the world.

Two hundred yards along the path by the river he halted and spoke to his companion:

“It is you who have given me all this,” he said. “Under God, and so far as my life goes, it is you who have created heaven and earth. You set up along my triumphal way these trees like seven-branched candlesticks with their grey branches silver in the sun. You spread before my feet these red leaves that are better than roses. You shaped clouds. You invented birds. Do you think I could enjoy all these things when I knew you were back again in the hell that you hate? I should feel I had tricked you out of everything you have given me. I should feel like a thief who had stolen the stars. You shan’t go back there if I can help it; you saved me and I am going to save you. I owe you my life and I give it you; I vow I will share anything you suffer; God do so to me and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.”

Thus were spoken in that wild place the wild words that determined the life of Gabriel Gale for so many years afterwards; and the walk that began in that wood turned into a wandering over the whole country by those two fantastic outlaws. As a matter of fact a sort of armed truce fell between them and their enemies, for each had something to fear from the other. Gale did not use all he discovered against the two doctors lest they should press the pursuit of his friend; and they did not press it lest he should retaliate with his own revelations. Thus the two came to roam practically unmolested until the day of that adventure, already described in the beginning of all these things, when he fell in love, and his crazy companion fell into a paroxysm which went very near to murder.

In every sense that dreadful day had changed all. That murderous outbreak had at last convinced a sadder and wiser Gabriel that he had other responsibilities besides those of his chivalric vow to his companion-in-arms; and he concluded that their companionship could only be rightly continued in some safe and more secluded form. Then it was that he put his friend into the comfortable and secret house in Cornwall, and spent most of his own time there, leaving a trustworthy servant on guard during his brief absences. His companion, whose name was James Hurrel, had been a business man of great ability and even audacity, until his schemes grew a little too big for his brain; and he lived happily enough in Cornwall, covering the tables with prospectuses and the walls with posters relative to various financial enterprises of the most promising kind. There he died, to all appearance equally happily; and Gale walked back from his funeral a free man.

Next morning, after a few hours' walking a rise and change in the rolling and wooded country told him that he was on the borders of his enchanted ground. He remembered something in the grouping of the trees, and how they seemed to huddle and stand on tiptoe with their backs to him, looking into the happy valley. He came to where the road curved over the hill, as he had come with his friend in former times; and saw below him the meadows falling steeply as thatched roofs and flattening out till they reached the wide and shallow river, and the ford and the dark inn called the Rising Sun.

The gloomy inn-keeper of old days was gone, having found it less gloomy to take service in some stables in the neighbourhood; and a brisker individual with the look of a groom was the recipient of Gale's expansive praises of the beauty of the scene. Gale was good enough to inform the inn-keeper of the beauty of the skies in the neighbourhood of his own inn, telling how he, Gale, had once seen a sunset in that valley quite peculiar to it and unequalled anywhere in the world; and how even the storm that had followed the sunset had been something very sublime in that style. His generalizations however were somewhat checked and diverted by a note which the inn-keeper put into his hand, a note from the great house across the river. It was without any formal opening, as if the writer had hesitated about a form of address; and it ran:

"I want to hear the story and hope you will come over tomorrow (Thursday). I fear I shall be out today, as I have to go to see a Dr. Wilson in Wimbledon about some work I have a chance of doing. I suppose you know we are pretty hard up in these days. D.W."

The whole landscape seemed to him to darken for an instant as he read the letter, but he did not lose his brisk demeanour and breezy mode of speech.

"I find I made a mistake," he said, putting the note in his pocket, "and I must leave here almost at once. I have to visit another spot, if possible more picturesque and poetical than this one. It is Wimbledon that has skies of a strange and unique character at the present time. The sunsets of Wimbledon are famous throughout the world. A storm in Wimbledon would be an apocalypse. But I hope I shall come back here again sooner or later. Good-bye."

The proceedings of Mr. Gale after this were rather more calculated and peculiar. First he sat on a stile and frowned heavily as if thinking hard. Then he sent off a telegram to a certain Dr. Garth, who was a friend of his, and one or two other telegrams to persons in rather responsible positions. When he got to London he went into the offices of the vulgarest and most sensational newspaper he knew, and looked up the back files for the details of forgotten crimes. When he got to Wimbledon he had a long interview with a local house agent and ended up towards evening, outside a high garden wall with a green door, in a wide but empty and silent suburban road. He went quietly up to the door and barely touched it with his finger, as if seeing if the paint were wet. But the door, which was barred across with bands of decorative metal work and had every appearance of being shut, immediately fell ajar, showing the patchy colours of garden beds within. "I thought so," said Gale to himself and slipped into the garden, leaving the door ajar behind him.

The suburban family which he was presumably visiting, and with which the impoverished Diana Westermaine was presumably to take some post as governess or secretary, was evidently the sort who combined a new neatness with a certain early Victorian comfort and indifference to cost. The conservatories were of antiquated pattern, but full of rich and exotic things; there were things still more old-fashioned, such as a grey and rather featureless classical statue in the centre. Within a few yards of it were things so Victorian as croquet hoops and croquet mallets, as if a game had been in progress, and beyond it under the tree was a table set out with tea things, for people for whom tea was not a trifle. All these human things, unused at the moment by human beings, seemed to emphasize the emptiness of the garden. Or rather, so far as he was concerned, they emphasized the fact that it was almost empty, save for the one thing that could so strangely fill it with life. For far away down one of the paths pointing towards the kitchen garden he saw a figure moving as yet unconsciously towards him. It came out under an arch crowned with creepers and there, after so many years, they met. There seemed something symbolical of seriousness and crisis in the accident that they were both in black.

He had always been able to call up the memory of her dark vivid eyebrows and the high-tinted distinction of her face in connexion with corners of the blue dress she had worn; but when he saw her again he wondered that the face had not always annihilated all its lesser associations. She looked at him for a moment with bright motionless eyes and then said:

“Well, really. You seem to be a rather impatient person.”

“Possibly,” he replied; “and yet I have waited four years.”

“They are coming out to tea in a moment,” she said somewhat awkwardly. “I suppose I must introduce you to them. I only accepted the post this morning; but they asked me to stay. I was going to wire to you.”

“Thank God I followed you,” he answered. “I doubt if the wire would have reached me… from this house.”

“What do you mean?” she asked, “and how did you follow?”

“I did not like your Wimbledon address,” he said: and with that, strange figures began to fill the garden, and she walked across to the tea-table. Her face was somewhat paler and more severe than it used to be, but in her grey eyes there was a light not altogether extinguished, curiosity still shot with defiance. By the time they reached the table two or three people had collected round it; and the somewhat irregular visitor had saluted them in a regular and even punctilious fashion.

The host or hostess had apparently not yet become visible; there were only three gentlemen, presumably guests and perhaps members of a house-party. One was introduced as Mr. Wolmer, a young man with a fair moustache and a tall fine figure that made his head look small; with a fine bridged nose that ought to have been like a hawk's if the prominence of the eyes and some deficiency of the chin had not somehow made it more like a parrot's. The second was a Major Bruce, a very short man with a very long head streaked with iron grey hair, and an expression which suggested, truly enough, that he very seldom opened his mouth. The third was an elderly person with a black skull-cap on his bald head and a fringe or fan of red beard or whiskers; he was evidently a person of some importance and known as Professor Patterson.

Gale partook of tea and indulged in polite conversation in quite an animated fashion, wondering all the time who it was who ought to have been at the head of the table, where Diana Westermaine was pouring out the tea. The demeanour of the man named Wolmer was rather restless; and in a little while he stood up and began, as if from the necessity of doing something, to knock the croquet balls about on the lawn. Gale, who was watching him with some interest, followed suit by picking up a mallet and trying some particular trick of putting two balls through a hoop. It was a trick which needed a test of some minuteness, for he went down on his hands and knees to examine the position more closely.

"Going to put your head through the hoop?" asked Wolmer rudely; for he had been growing more and more impatient, almost as if he had taken a mysterious dislike to the newcomer.

"Not quite," answered Gale good-humouredly as he rolled the balls away. "Uncomfortable position, I should think. Like being guillotined."

Wolmer was glaring balefully at the hoop and said something in a thick voice that sounded like "Serve you right." Then he suddenly whirled his mallet above his head like a battle-axe and brought it down with a crash on the hoop, driving it deep into the turf. There was something indescribably shocking about the pantomime, following instantly on the image that had just been suggested of a human head in the hoop. They felt as if an act of decapitation had been done before their very eyes.

"Better put down that mallet now," said the professor in a soothing voice, putting a rather shaky hand on the other's arm.

"Oh, I'll put it down then," said Wolmer, and slung it away over his shoulder like a man putting the hammer at the Highland Sports. It flew through the air like a thunderbolt, striking the forlorn plaster statue in the centre and breaking it off short at the top. Mr. Wolmer laughed in a rather uncontrolled fashion; and then strode away into the house.

The girl had been watching these things with her dark brows bent and her pallor growing somewhat more marked. There was an unpleasant silence, and then Major Bruce spoke for the first time.

"It's the atmosphere of this place," he said. "It is not very wholesome."

The atmosphere of the suburban garden as a matter of fact was very clear, sunny and pleasant, and Diana looked round with a growing and even creeping mystification at the gay flower-pots and the lawns golden in the evening light.

"Perhaps it is my own misfortune," resumed the Major reflectively. "The truth is there is something serious the matter with me. I have a malady which makes this particular place rather awful."

"What do you mean?" she asked quickly.

There was a short silence and then he answered stolidly.

"I am sane."

Then she looked once more at the warm sunshiny garden and began to shudder as if with cold. A thousand things came back to her out of the last few hours. She knew why she had dimly distrusted her new home. She knew now that there is only one place in the world where men say that they are sane.

As the little man with the long head walked away as stiffly as a wooden automaton, she looked round for Gale and found he had vanished. An appalling emptiness, a vast vacuum of terror, opened around her on every side. In that moment she had admitted many things to herself that had been but half conscious: and no one on earth mattered but the man who had vanished into a void. For the moment she balanced the possibility that she was really mad against the possibility that nobody else was sane; when she caught sight, through the gap of a hedge, of figures moving at the other end of the garden. The old professor in the skull-cap was moving rapidly but with trepidation, as if running on tiptoe, his long lean hands flapping like fins and his red chin-beard wagging in the wind. And behind him following, equally softly and swiftly, at the distance of a few yards, was the long grey figure of Gabriel Gale. She could fit together no fancy about what it all meant; she could only continue to stare across the flower-beds at the glass-houses full of monstrous flowers and be vaguely conscious of a sort of symbol in the headless statue in the centre; the god of that garden of unreason.

The next moment she saw Gale reappear at the other extremity of the long hedge and come towards her smiling in the sunshine. He stopped when he saw her white face.

“Do you know what this place is?” she whispered. “It is a madhouse.”

“It’s a very easy one to escape from,” said Gale in a serene manner. “I’ve just seen the professor escape from it. He escapes regularly; probably on Wednesdays and Saturdays.”

“This is no time for your jokes,” she cried. “I tell you we’ve been trapped inside a madhouse.”

“And I tell you we shall soon be outside the madhouse,” he replied firmly. “And under those circumstances, I don’t mind telling you that I regret to say it is not a madhouse.”

“What do you mean?”

“It is something worse,” replied Gale.

“Tell me what you mean,” she repeated. “Tell me what you know about this horrible place.”

“For me it will always be a holy place,” he said. “Was it not under that arch there that you appeared out of the abyss of memory? And after all, it’s a beautiful garden and I’m almost sorry to leave it. The house, too, makes a romantic background; and really we might be very comfortable here… if only it were a madhouse.” And he sighed with regret.

Then after a pause he added, “I might say all I want to say to you in a nice, friendly, comfortable lunatic asylum… but not in a place like this. There are practical things to be done now; and here come the people who will do them!”

She was never able to fit together again the fragments of that bad dream and its wilder way of breaking up. To her astonishment she beheld a new group advancing up the garden path; in front was a red-haired man in a top hat, whose shrewd and good-humoured features were faintly familiar to her; behind were two stalwart figures, obviously in “plain clothes”, and between them the unexpected apparition of Professor Patterson in handcuffs.

“Caught him setting fire to a house,” said the red-haired man briefly. “Valuable documents.”

Later in that bewildering stretch of hours, the friends seated themselves on a garden seat for explanations. “You remember Dr. Garth, I think,” said Gale to the lady. “He has been helping me to clear up this queer business. The truth is, the police have suspected the nature of this Wimbledon retreat for some time. No; it is not a lunatic asylum; it is a den of very accomplished professional criminals. They have hit on the ingenious idea of being certified as irresponsible by a medical confederate; so that the worst that can happen is that he may be censured for laxity in letting them escape. Look up the records, and you will find them responsible, or irresponsible, for quite a long catalogue of crimes. I happened to follow the notion up, because I happened to guess where the notion came from. By the way, I suppose this is the gentleman who engaged you as a typist.”

As he spoke a small alert figure strode out of the house and across the lawns; his short beard thrust forward with something of the gesture of a terrier.

“Yes, that is Dr. Wilson; I made arrangements with him only this morning,” answered Diana, still staring.

The doctor came to a halt in front of them, turning his head right and left in the terrier fashion, and looking at them with wrinkled brows and lids.

“So this is Dr. Wilson,” said Gale politely. “Good day, Dr. Starkey.”

Then as the plain-clothes men shifted and closed round the doctor, Gale added reflectively:

“I knew you would never fail to take a hint.”

A street or two away from the strange madhouse there was a sort of toy park, not much bigger than a back garden, but laid out in ornamental paths and planted with flowering shrubs, as an oasis for nomadic nurses trailing about the babies of that suburb. It was also ornamented with long seats with curly backs, and one of these seats in its turn was ornamented by a couple clad in black and endeavouring, with some bewilderment, to appear respectable. Wild as were the events of that afternoon, they had moved very rapidly and it was barely evening. The sunset was settling down about the corners of the sky and of the quaint little public garden, and there was little noise except the shrill but faint calling of some children lingering over some long-drawn-out-game.

It was here that he told her the whole story of the rash vow and all that happened between the rescue in the riverside garden and the funeral in the Cornish churchyard.

“The only thing I don’t understand,” she said at last, “is why you thought they had got me to that place; or why you thought there was any such place.”

“Why, because,” he said looking at the gravel path with a slight embarrassment, “because I really was not bragging when I told Starkey at the beginning that I understood the sort of mind he had, and could exaggerate it in the way it was going. Starkey never missed a chance of applying or misapplying an idea, especially anybody else’s idea. When poor Jimmy Hurrel boasted of being free from punishment because he was an escaped lunatic, I was sure that a seed had been sown in Starkey’s mind that would sprout. I was sure he would follow it up and use it, as he used my fancy for the swing or the arbour. While Jim was alive he knew I had a motive for silence; but the moment Jim died he struck. He was very quick; his mind is like a flash of lightning; quick but crooked. He sent one of his chartered maniacs to brain me with a stone on my way to you. He intercepted my telegram, and lured you away before you could be told the whole story. But what I want to know is what you think of the whole story.”

“The vow was certainly rash enough,” she said. “All that time you might have been painting pictures and doing all sorts of good. It doesn’t seem right that a genius should be tied to a lunatic by a few words.”

He sat up very suddenly. “For God’s sake don’t say that!” he cried. “Don’t say one oughtn’t to tie oneself to a lunatic by a few words! Don’t say that’s wrong, I implore you, whatever else you say! A shocking thought! A perfectly foul idea!”

“What do you mean?” she asked. “Why not?”

“Because,” he said, “I want you to make a rash vow. I want you to tie yourself with a few words to a lunatic.”

There was a silence, at the end of which she smiled suddenly and put her hand on his arm.

“No,” she said, “only a silly… I always liked you, even when I thought you really were a lunatic; that day when you stood on your head. But now I don’t think my vow will be so very rash…. What on earth are you doing now?… Oh, I say… for heaven’s sake….”

“What else should I do,” he answered calmly, “after what you have just said? I’m going to stand on my head again.”

The children in the corner of the little garden gazed with interest at a gentleman in funeral full-dress behaving in a somewhat unusual manner.

THE END

FOUR FAULTLESS FELONS

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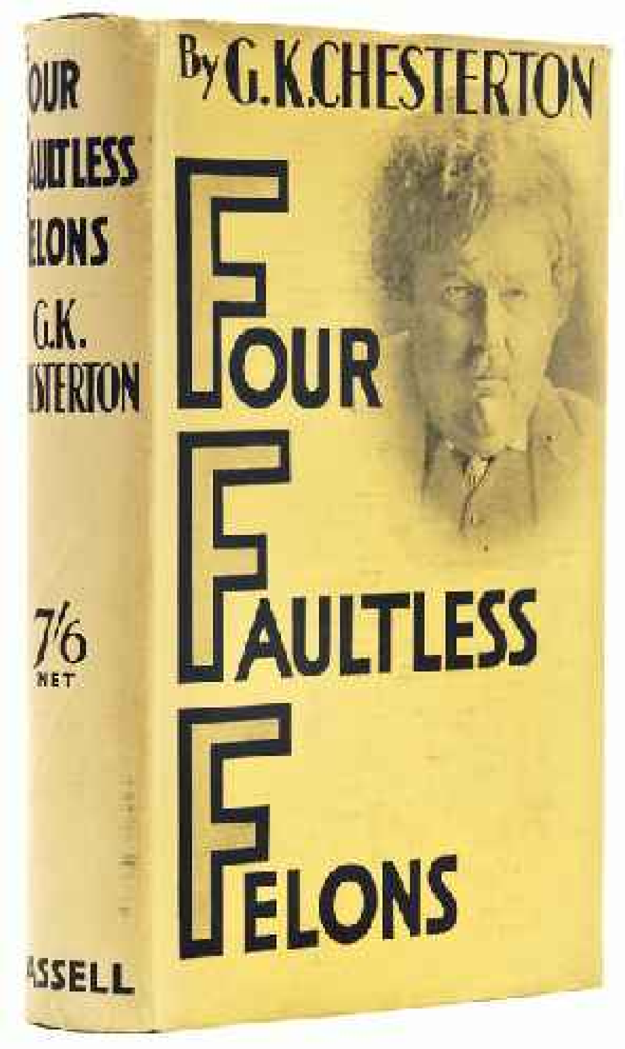
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The first edition

PROLOGUE OF THE PRESSMAN

Mr. Asa Lee Pinion, of the *Chicago Comet*, had crossed half of America, the whole of the Atlantic, and eventually even Piccadilly Circus, in pursuit of the notable, if not notorious figure of Count Raoul de Marillac. Mr. Pinion wanted to get what is called “a story”; a story to put in his paper. He did get a story, but he did not put it in his paper. It was too tall a story, even for the *Comet*. Perhaps the metaphor is true in more ways than one, and the fable was tall like a church-spire or a tower among the stars: beyond comprehension as well as belief. Anyhow, Mr. Pinion decided not to risk his readers’ comments. But that is no reason why the present writer, writing for more exalted, spiritual and divinely credulous readers, should imitate his silence.

Really, the anecdote he heard was quite incredible: and Mr. Pinion was not intolerant. While the Count was painting the town red and himself black, it was quite possible to believe that he was not so black as he was painted. After all, his extravagance and luxury, however ostentatious, did no particular harm to anybody but himself; and if he associated with the dissipated and degraded, he had never been known to interfere with the innocent or the reputable. But while it was credible enough that the nobleman was not so black as he was painted, he certainly could not be quite so white as he was painted, in the wild story that was told that evening. The story came from a friend of the Count’s, much too friendly a friend, thought Mr. Pinion, friendly to the point of feeble-mindedness. He supposed it must be a delusion or a hoax; anyhow he did not put it into his paper. Yet it is because of this highly improbable anecdote that the Count de Marillac stands at the opening of this book, to introduce the four stories which were put forth as parallels to his own.

But there was one fact which struck the journalist as odd even at the beginning. He understood well enough that it would be difficult to catch the Count anywhere, as he whirled from one social engagement to another, in the manner appropriately called “fast”. And he was not offended when Marillac said he could only spare ten minutes at his London club before going on to a theatrical first-night and other ensuing festivities. During that ten minutes, however, Marillac was quite polite, answered the rather superficial society questions which the *Comet* wanted answered, and very genially introduced the journalist to three or four club companions or cronies who were standing about him in the lounge, and who continued to stand about after the Count himself had made his beaming and flashing exit.

"I suppose," said one of them, "that the naughty old man has gone to see the naughty new play with all the naughty new people."

"Yes," grunted a big man standing in front of the fire. "He's gone with the naughtiest person of all, the author, Mrs. Prague. Authoress, I suppose she'd call herself — being only cultured and not educated."

"He always goes to the first night of those plays," assented the other. "P'raps he thinks there won't be a second night, if the police raid the place."

"What play is it?" asked the American in a gentle voice. He was a quiet little man with a very long head and a refined falcon profile; he was much less loud and casual than the Englishmen.

"*Naked Souls*," said the first man with a faint groan. "Dramatized version of the world-shaking novel 'Pan's Pipes.' Grapples grimly with the facts of life."

"Also bold, breezy and back to Nature," said the man by the fire. "We hear a lot just now about Pan's Pipes. They seem to me a little too like drain-pipes."

"You see," said the other, "Mrs. Prague is so very Modern, she has to go back to Pan. She says she cannot bear to believe that Pan is dead."

"I think," said the large man, with a touch of heavy violence, "that Pan is not only dead but rotting and stinking in the street."

It was the four friends of Marillac who puzzled Mr. Pinion. They were obviously rather intimate friends, and yet they were not, on the whole, of the sort likely to be even acquaintances. Marillac himself was much what might have been expected, rather more restless and haggard than his handsome portraits might have implied, a thing likely enough with his late hours and his advancing years. His curly hair was still dark and thick, but his pointed grey beard was whitening fast; his eyes were a little hollow, and had a more anxious expression than could be inferred, at a distance, from his buoyant gestures and rapid walk. All that was quite in character, but the tone of the group was different. One figure alone out of the four seemed in some sense of Marillac's world, having something of the carriage of a military officer, with that fine shade that suggests a foreign officer. He had a clean-shaven, regular and very impassive face; he was sitting down when he bowed politely to the stranger, but something in the bow suggested that, standing up, he would have clicked his heels. The others were quite English and quite different. One of them was the very big man, with big shoulders bowed but powerful and a big head not yet bald but striped with rather thin brown hair. But the arresting thing about him was that indescribable suggestion of dust or cobwebs that belongs to a strong man leading a sedentary life, possibly scientific or scholarly, but certainly obscure, in its method if not its effect; the sort of middle-class man with a hobby, who seems to have been dug out of it with a spade. It was hard to imagine a more complete contradiction to such a meteor of fashion as the Count. The man next him, though more alert, was equally solid and respectable and free from fashionable pretensions; a short, square man with a square face and spectacles, who looked like what he was, an ordinary busy suburban general practitioner. The fourth of Marillac's incongruous intimates was quite frankly shabby. Grey seedy clothes hung limply on his lean figure, and his dark hair and rather ragged beard could, at the best, be only excused as Bohemian. He had very remarkable eyes, sunk very deep in his head and yet, by a paradox, standing out like signals. The visitor found himself continually drawn to them, as if they were magnets.

But, all together, the group bothered and bewildered him. It was not merely a difference of social class, it was an atmosphere of sobriety and even of solid work and worth, which seemed to belong to another world. The four men in question were friendly in a modest and even embarrassed manner; they fell into conversation with the journalist as with any ordinary equal in a tram or a tube, and when, about an hour later, they asked him to share their dinner at the club, he had no such sense of strain as he might have felt in facing one of the fabulous Luculline banquets of their friend the Count de Marillac.

For however seriously Marillac might or might not be taking the serious drama of Sex and Science, there was no doubt that he would take the dinner even more seriously. He was famous as an epicure of almost the classic and legendary sort, and all the *gourmets* of Europe reverenced his reputation. The little man with the spectacles glanced at this fact, indeed, as they sat down to dinner:

"Hope you can put up with our simple fare, Mr. Pinion," he said. "You'd have had a much more carefully selected menu if Marillac had been here."

The American reassured him with polite expressions about the club dinner; but added:

"I suppose it is true that he does make rather an art of dining?"

"Oh, yes," said the man in spectacles. "Always has all the right things at the wrong times. That's the ideal, I suppose."

"I suppose he takes a lot of trouble?" said Pinion.

"Yes," said the other. "He chooses his meals very carefully. Not carefully from my point of view. But then I'm a doctor."

Pinion could not keep his eyes off the magnetic eyes of the man with the shabby clothes and shaggy hair. Just now the man was gazing across the table with a curious intentness, and in the ensuing silence, he suddenly intervened.

"Everybody knows he's very particular in choosing his dinner. But I bet not one man in a million knows the principle on which he chooses it."

"You must remember," said Pinion, with his soft accent, "that I am a journalist, and I should like to be the one man in a million."

The man opposite looked at him steadily and rather strangely for a moment, and then said:

"I have half a mind. . . . Look here, have you any human curiosity as well as journalistic curiosity? I mean, would the one man like to know, even if the million never knew?"

"Oh, yes," replied the journalist, "I have plenty of curiosity, even about things I am told in confidence. But I can't quite see why Marillac's taste in champagne and ortolans should be so very confidential."

"Well," answered the other gravely, "why do you think he chooses them?"

"I guess I've got a bromide mind," said the American, "but I should rather suspect him of choosing the things he likes."

"*Au contraire*, as the other *gourmet* said when asked if he lunched on the boat."

The man with the peculiar eyes broke off from his flippant speech, plunged for a few moments into profound silence, and then resumed in so different a tone that it was like another man suddenly speaking at the table.

"Every age has its bigotry, which is blind to some particular need of human nature; the Puritans to the need for merriment, the Manchester School to the need for beauty, and so on. There is a need in man, or at least in many men, which it is not fashionable to admit or allow for in these days. Most people have had a touch of it in the more serious emotions of youth; in a few men it burns like a flame to the last, as it does here. Christianity, especially Catholic Christianity, has been blamed for imposing it, but in fact, it rather regulated and even restrained the passion than forced it. It exists in all religions, to a wild and frantic extent in some of the religions of Asia. There men hack themselves with knives or hang themselves on hooks, or walk through life with withered arms rigidly uplifted, crucified upon empty air. It is the appetite for what one does not like. Marillac has it."

"What on earth—" began the startled journalist, but the other continued:

"In short, it is what people call Asceticism, and one of the modern mistakes is not allowing for its real existence in rare but quite real people. To live a life of incessant austerity and self-denial, as Marillac does, is surrounded with extraordinary difficulties and misunderstandings in modern society. Society can understand some particular Puritan fad, like Prohibition, especially if it is imposed on other people, above all, on poor people. But a man like Marillac, imposing on himself, not abstinence from wine, but abstinence from worldly pleasures of every sort. . . ."

"Excuse me," said Pinion in his most courteous tones, "I trust I'd never have the incivility to suggest that you have gone mad, so I must ask you to tell me candidly whether I have."

"Most people," replied the other, "would answer that it is Marillac who has gone mad. Perhaps he has; anyhow, if the truth were known, he would certainly be thought so. But it isn't only to avoid being put in a lunatic asylum that he hides his hermit's ideal by pretending to be a man of pleasure. It's part of the whole idea, in its only tolerable form. The worst of those Eastern fakirs hung on hooks is that they are too conspicuous. It may make them just a little vain. I don't deny that Stylites and some of the first hermits may have been touched with the same danger. But our friend is a Christian anchorite; and understands the advice, 'When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face.' He is not seen of men to fast. On the contrary, he is seen of men to feast. Only, don't you see, he has invented a new kind of fasting."

Mr. Pinion of the *Comet* suddenly laughed, a curt and startled laugh, for he was very quick and had already guessed the joke.

"You don't really mean—" he began.

"Well, it's quite simple, isn't it?" replied his informant. "He feasts on all the most luxurious and expensive things that he doesn't like. Especially on the things that he simply detests. Under that cover, nobody can possibly accuse him of virtue. He remains impenetrably protected behind a rampart of repulsive oysters and unwelcome *aperitifs*. In short, the hermit must now hide anywhere but in the hermitage. He generally hides in the latest luxurious gilded hotels, because that’s where they have the worst cooking.”

“This is a very extraordinary tale,” said the American, arching his eyebrows.

“You begin to see the idea?” said the other. “If he has twenty different *hors-d’œuvres* brought to him and takes the olives, who is to know that he hates olives? If he thoughtfully scans the whole wine-list and eventually selects a rather recondite Hock, who will guess that his whole soul rises in disgust at the very thought of Hock: and that he knows that’s the nastiest — even of Hocks? Whereas, if he were to demand dried peas or a mouldy crust at the Ritz, he would probably attract attention.”

“I never can quite see,” said the man in spectacles restlessly, “what is the good of it all.”

The other man lowered his magnetic eyes and looked down with some embarrassment. At last he said:

“I think I can see it, but I don’t think I can say it. I had a touch of it myself once, only in one special direction, and I found it almost impossible to explain to anybody. Only there is one mark of the real mystic and ascetic of this sort; that he only wants to do it to himself. He wants everybody else to have what wine or smokes they want and will ransack the Ritz for it. The moment he wants to dragoon the others, the mystic sinks into a mire of degradation and becomes the moral reformer.”

There was a pause, and then the journalist said suddenly:

“But, look here, this won’t do. It isn’t only wasting his money on wining and dining that has got Marillac a bad name. It’s the whole thing. Why is he such a fan for these rotten erotic plays and things? Why does he go about with a woman like Mrs. Prague? That doesn’t seem like a hermit, anyhow.”

The man facing Pinion smiled and the heavier man on his right half turned with a sort of grunt of laughter.

“Well,” he said, “it’s pretty plain you’ve never been about with Mrs. Prague.”

“Why, what do you mean?” asked Pinion; and this time there was something like a general laugh.

“Some say she’s his Maiden Aunt and it’s his duty to be kind to her,” began the first man, but the second man interrupted him gruffly:

“Why do you call her a Maiden Aunt when she looks like a—”

"Quite so, quite so," said the first man rather hastily, "and why 'looks like' — if it comes to that?"

"But her conversation!" groaned his friend. "And Marillac stands it for hours on end!"

"And her play!" assented the other. "Marillac sits through five mortal acts of it. If that isn't being a martyr—"

"Don't you see?" cried the shabby man with something like excitement. "The Count is a cultivated and even learned man; also he is a Latin and logical to the point of impatience. And yet he sticks it. He endures five or six acts of a Really Modern Intellectual Incisive Drama. The First Act in which she says that Woman will no longer be put on a pedestal; the Second Act in which Woman will no longer be put under a glass case; the Third Act in which Woman will no longer be a plaything for man, and the Fourth in which she will no longer be a chattel; all the *clichés*. And he still has two acts before him, in which she will not be something else, will not be a slave in the home or an outcast flung from the home. He's seen it six times without turning a hair; you can't even see him grind his teeth. And Mrs. Prague's conversation! How her first husband could never understand, and her second husband seemed as if he might understand, only her third husband carried her off as if there was real understanding — and so on, as if there were anything to be understood. You know what an utterly egotistical fool is like. And he suffers even those fools gladly."

"In fact," put in the big man in his brooding manner, "you might say he has invented the Modern Penance. The Penance of Boredom. Hair-shirts and hermits' caves in a howling wilderness would not be so horrible to modern nerves as that."

"By your account," ruminated Pinion, "I've been chasing a pleasure-seeker tripping on the light fantastic toe and only found a hermit standing on his head." After a silence he said abruptly, "Is this really true? How did you find it out?"

"That's rather a long story," replied the man opposite. "The truth is that Marillac allows himself one feast in the year, on Christmas Day, and eats and drinks what he really likes. I found him drinking beer and eating tripe and onions in a quiet pub in Hoxton, and somehow we were forced into confidential conversation. You will understand, of course, that this is a confidential conversation."

“I certainly shan’t print it,” answered the journalist. “I should be regarded as a lunatic if I did. People don’t understand that sort of lunacy nowadays, and I rather wonder you take to it so much yourself.”

“Well, I put my own case before him, you see,” answered the other. “In a small way it was a little like his own. And then I introduced him to my friends, and so he became a sort of President of our little club.”

“Oh,” said Pinion rather blankly, “I didn’t know you were a club.”

“Well, we are four men with a common bond at least. We have all had occasion, like Marillac, to look rather worse than we were.”

“Yes,” grunted the large man rather sourly, “we’ve all been Misunderstood. Like Mrs. Prague.”

“The Club of Men Misunderstood is rather more cheerful than that, however,” continued his friend. “We are all pretty jolly here, considering that our reputations have been blasted by black and revolting crimes. The truth is we have devoted ourselves to a new sort of detective story — or detective service if you like. We do not hunt for crimes but for concealed virtues. Sometimes, as in Marillac’s case, they are very artfully concealed. As you will doubtless be justified in retorting, we conceal our own virtues with brilliant success.”

The journalist’s head began to go round a little, though he thought himself pretty well accustomed both to crazy and criminal surroundings. “But I thought you said,” he objected, “that your reputations were blasted with crime. What sort of crime?”

“Well, mine was murder,” said the man next to him. “The people who blasted me did it because they disapproved of murder, apparently. It’s true I was rather a failure at murder, as at everything else.”

Pinion’s gaze wandered in some bewilderment to the next man who answered cheerfully:

“Mine was only a common fraud. A professional fraud, too, the sort that gets you kicked out of your profession sometimes. Rather like Dr. Cook’s sham discovery of the North Pole.”

“What does all this mean?” asked Pinion; and he looked inquiringly at the man opposite, who had done so much of the explaining so far.

“Oh, theft,” said the man opposite, indifferently; “the charge on which I was actually arrested was petty larceny.”

There was a profound silence, which seemed to settle in a mysterious manner, like a gathering cloud, on the figure of the fourth member, who had not spoken so far a single word. He sat erect in his rather stiff, foreign fashion; his wooden, handsome face was unchanged and his lips had never moved even for so much as a murmur. But now, when the sudden and deep silence seemed to challenge him, his face seemed to harden from wood to stone and when he spoke at last, his foreign accent seemed something more than alien, as if it were almost inhuman.

“I have committed the Unpardonable Sin,” he said. “For what sin did Dante reserve the last and lowest hell; the Circle of Ice?”

Still no one spoke; and he answered his own question in the same hollow tone:

“Treason. I betrayed the four companions of my party, and gave them up to the Government for a bribe.”

Something turned cold inside the sensitive stranger, and for the first time he really felt the air around him sinister and strange. The stillness continued for another half minute, and then all the four men burst out into a great uproar of laughter.

The stories they told, to justify their boasts or confessions, are here retold in a different fashion, as they appeared to those on the outskirts rather than the centre of the events. But the journalist, who liked to collect all the odd things of life, was interested enough to record them, and then afterwards recast them. He felt he had really got something, if not exactly what he had expected, out of his pursuit of the dashing and extravagant Count Raoul de Marillac.

THE MODERATE MURDERER

I

THE MAN WITH THE GREEN UMBRELLA

The new Governor was Lord Tallboys, commonly called Top-hat Tallboys, because of his attachment to that uncanny erection, which he continued to carry balanced on his head as calmly among the palm-trees of Egypt as among the lamp-posts of Westminster. Certainly he carried it calmly enough in lands where few crowns were safe from toppling. The district he had come out to govern may here be described, with diplomatic vagueness, as a strip on the edge of Egypt and called for our convenience Polybia. It is an old story now; but one which many people had reason to remember for many years, and at the time it was an imperial event. One Governor was killed, another Governor was nearly killed, but in this story we are concerned only with one catastrophe, and that was rather a personal and even private catastrophe.

Top-hat Tallboys was a bachelor and yet he brought a family with him. He had a nephew and two nieces of whom one, as it happened, had married the Deputy Governor of Polybia, the man who had been called to rule during the interregnum after the murder of the previous ruler. The other niece was unmarried; her name was Barbara Traill, and she may well be the first figure to cross the stage of this story.

For indeed she was rather a solitary and striking figure, raven dark and rich in colouring with a very beautiful but rather sullen profile, as she crossed the sandy spaces and came under the cover of one long low wall which alone threw a strip of shadow from the sun, which was sloping towards the desert horizon. The wall itself was a quaint example of the patchwork character of that borderland of East and West. It was actually a line of little villas, built for clerks and small officials, and thrown out as by a speculative builder whose speculations spread to the ends of the earth. It was a strip of Streatham amid the ruins of Heliopolis. Such oddities are not unknown, when the oldest countries are turned into the newest colonies. But in this case the young woman, who was not without imagination, was conscious of a quite fantastic contrast. Each of these dolls' houses had its toy shrubs and plants and its narrow oblong of back garden running down to the common and continuous garden wall; and it was just outside this wall that there ran the rough path, fringed with a few hoary and wrinkled olives. Outside the fringe there faded away into infinity the monstrous solitude of sand. Only there could still be detected on that last line of distance a faint triangular shape, a sort of mathematical symbol whose unnatural simplicity has moved all poets and pilgrims for five thousand years. Anyone seeing it really for the first time, as the girl did, can hardly avoid uttering a cry: "The Pyramids!"

Almost as she said it a voice said in her ear, not loud but with alarming clearness and very exact articulation: "The foundations were traced in blood and in blood shall they be traced anew. These things are written for our instruction."

It has been said that Barbara Traill was not without imagination; it would be truer to say that she had rather too much. But she was quite certain she had not imagined the voice, though she certainly could not imagine where it came from. She appeared to be absolutely alone on the little path which ran along the wall and led to the gardens round the Governorate. Then she remembered the wall itself, and looking sharply over her shoulder, she fancied she saw for one moment a head peering out of the shadow of a sycamore, which was the only tree of any size for some distance, since she had left the last of the low sprawling olives two hundred yards behind. Whatever it was, it had instantly vanished, and somehow she suddenly felt frightened, more frightened at its disappearance than its appearance. She began to hurry along the path to her uncle's residence at a pace that was a little like a run. It was probably through this sudden acceleration of movement that she seemed to become aware, rather abruptly, that a man was marching steadily in front of her along the same track towards the gates of the Governorate.

He was a very large man, and seemed to take up the whole of the narrow path. She had something of the sensation, with which she was already slightly acquainted, of walking behind a camel through the narrow and crooked cracks of the Eastern town. But this man planted his feet as firmly as an elephant; he walked, one might say, even with a certain pomp, as if he were in a procession. He wore a long frock-coat and his head was surmounted by a tower of scarlet, a very tall red fez, rather taller than the top-hat of Lord Tallboys. The combination of the red Eastern cap and the black Western clothes is common enough among the *Effendi* class in those countries. But somehow it seemed novel and incongruous in this case, for the man was very fair and had a big blond beard blown about in the breeze. He might have been a model for the idiots who talk of the Nordic type of European, but somehow he did not look like an Englishman. He carried hooked on one finger a rather grotesque green umbrella or parasol, which he twirled idly like a trinket. As he was walking slower and slower and Barbara was walking fast and wanted to walk faster, she could hardly repress an exclamation of impatience and something like a request for room to pass. The large man with the beard immediately faced round and stared at her; then he lifted a monocle and fixed it in his eye and instantly smiled his apologies. She realized that he must be short-sighted and that she had been a mere blur to him a moment before, but there was something else in the change of his face and manner, something that she had seen before, but to which she could not put a name.

He explained, with the most formal courtesy, that he was going to leave a note for an official at the Governorate, and there was really no reason for her to refuse him credence or conversation. They walked a little way together, talking of things in general, and she had not exchanged more than a few sentences before she realized that she was talking to a remarkable man.

We hear much in these days about the dangers of innocence, much that is false and a little that is true. But the argument is almost exclusively applied to sexual innocence. There is a great deal that ought to be said about the dangers of political innocence. That most necessary and most noble virtue of patriotism is very often brought to despair and destruction, quite needlessly and prematurely, by the folly of educating the comfortable classes in a false optimism about the record and security of the Empire. Young people like Barbara Traill have often never heard a word about the other side of the story, as it would be told by Irishmen or Indians or even French Canadians, and it is the fault of their parents and their papers if they often pass abruptly from a stupid Britishism to an equally stupid Bolshevism. The hour of Barbara Traill was come, though she probably did not know it.

"If England keeps her promises," said the man with the beard, frowning, "there is still a chance that things may be quiet."

And Barbara had answered, like a schoolboy:

"England always keeps her promises."

"The Waba have not noticed it," he answered with an air of triumph.

The omniscient are often ignorant. They are often especially ignorant of ignorance. The stranger imagined that he was uttering a very crushing repartee, as perhaps he was, to anybody who knew what he meant. But Barbara had never heard of the Waba. The newspapers had seen to that.

"The British Government," he was saying, "definitely pledged itself two years ago to a complete scheme of local autonomy. If it is a complete scheme, all will be well. If Lord Tallboys has come out here with an incomplete scheme, a compromise, it will be very far from well. I shall be very sorry for everybody, but especially for my English friends."

She answered with a young and innocent sneer, "Oh yes — I suppose you are a great friend of the English."

"Yes," he replied calmly. "A friend: but a candid friend."

"Oh, I know all about that sort," she said with hot sincerity. "I know what they mean by a candid friend. I've always found it meant a nasty, sneering, sneaking, treacherous friend."

He seemed stung for an instant and answered, "Your politicians have no need to learn treachery from the Egyptians." Then he added abruptly: "Do you know on Lord Jaffray's raid they shot a child? Do you know anything at all? Do you even know how England tacked on Egypt to her Empire?"

"England has a glorious Empire," said the patriot stoutly.

"England had a glorious Empire," he said. "So had Egypt."

They had come, somewhat symbolically, to the end of their common path and she turned away indignantly to the gate that led into the private gardens of the Governor. As she did so he lifted his green umbrella and pointed with a momentary gesture at the dark line of the desert and the distant Pyramid. The afternoon had already reddened into evening, and the sunset lay in long bands of burning crimson across the purple desolation of that dry inland sea.

"A glorious Empire," he said. "An Empire on which the sun never sets. Look . . . the sun is setting in blood."

She went through the iron gate like the wind and let it clang behind her. As she went up the avenue towards the inner gardens, she lost a little of her impatient movement and began to trail along in the rather moody manner which was more normal to her. The colours and shadows of that quieter scene seemed to close about her; this place was for the present her nearest approach to home, and at the end of the long perspective of gaily coloured garden walks, she could see her sister Olive picking flowers.

The sight soothed her; but she was a little puzzled about why she should need any soothing. She had a deeply disquieting sense of having touched something alien and terrible, something fierce and utterly foreign, as if she had stroked some strange wild beast of the desert. But the gardens about her and the house beyond had already taken on a tone or tint indescribably English, in spite of the recent settlement and the African sky. And Olive was so obviously choosing flowers to put into English vases or to decorate English dinner-tables, with decanters and salted almonds.

But as she drew nearer to that distant figure, it grew more puzzling. The blossoms grasped in her sister’s hand looked like mere ragged and random handfuls, torn away as a man lying on the turf would idly tear out grass, when he is abstracted or angry. A few loose stalks lay littered on the path; it seemed as if the heads had been merely broken off as if by a child. Barbara did not know why she took in all these details with a slow and dazed eye, before she looked at the central figure they surrounded. Then Olive looked up and her face was ghastly. It might have been the face of Medea in the garden, gathering the poisonous flowers.

II

THE BOY WHO MADE A SCENE

Barbara Traill was a girl with a good deal of the boy about her. This is very commonly said about modern heroines. None the less, the present heroine would be a very disappointing modern heroine. For, unfortunately, the novelists who call their heroines boyish obviously know nothing whatever about boys. The girl they depict, whether we happen to regard her as a bright young thing or a brazen little idiot, is at any rate in every respect the complete contrary of a boy. She is sublimely candid; she is slightly shallow; she is uniformly cheerful; she is entirely unembarrassed; she is everything that a boy is not. But Barbara really was rather like a boy. That is, she was rather shy, obscurely imaginative, capable of intellectual friendships and at the same time of emotional brooding over them; capable of being morbid and by no means incapable of being secretive. She had that sense of misfit which embarrasses so many boys, the sense of the soul being too big to be seen or confessed, and the tendency to cover the undeveloped emotions with a convention. One effect of it was that she was of the sort troubled by Doubt. It might have been religious doubt, at the moment it was a sort of patriotic doubt, though she would have furiously denied that there was any doubt about the matter. She had been upset by her glimpse of the alleged grievances of Egypt or the alleged crimes of England, and the face of the stranger, the white face with the golden beard and the glaring monocle, had come to stand for the tempter or the spirit that denies. But the face of her sister suddenly banished all such merely political problems. It brought her back with a shock to much more private problems, indeed to much more secret problems, for she had never admitted them to anyone but herself.

The Traills had a tragedy, or rather, perhaps, something that Barbara's brooding spirit had come to regard as the dawn of a tragedy. Her younger brother was still a boy; it might more truly be said that he was still a child. His mind had never come to a normal maturity, and though opinions differed about the nature of the deficiency, she was prone in her black moods to take the darkest view and let it darken the whole house of Tallboys. Thus it happened that she said quickly, at the sight of her sister's strange expression:

"Is anything wrong about Tom?"

Olive started slightly, and then said, rather crossly than otherwise: "No, not particularly. . . . Uncle has put him with a tutor here, and they say he's getting on better. . . . Why do you ask? There's nothing special the matter with him."

"Then I suppose," said Barbara, "that there is something special the matter with you."

"Well," answered the other, "isn't there something the matter with all of us?"

With that she turned abruptly and went back towards the house, dropping the flowers she had been making a pretence of gathering, and her sister followed, still deeply disturbed in mind.

As they came near the portico and veranda, she heard the high voice of her uncle Tallboys, who was leaning back in a garden chair and talking to

Olive’s husband, the Deputy Governor. Tallboys was a lean figure with a large nose and ears standing out from his stalk of a head; like many men of that type he had a prominent Adam’s apple and talked in a full-throated gobbling fashion. But what he said was worth listening to, though he had a trick of balancing one clause against another, with alternate gestures of his large, loose hands, which some found a trifle irritating. He was also annoyingly deaf. The Deputy Governor, Sir Harry Smythe, was an amusing contrast, a square man with a rather congested face, the colour high under the eyes, which were very light and clear, and two parallel black bars of brow and moustache, which gave him rather a look of Kitchener, until he stood up and looked stunted by the comparison. It also gave him a rather misleading look of bad temper, for he was an affectionate husband and a good-humoured comrade, if a rather stubborn party man. For the rest the conversation was enough to show that he had a military point of view, which is sufficiently common and even commonplace.

“In short,” the Governor was saying, “I believe the Government scheme is admirably adapted to meet a somewhat difficult situation. Extremists of both types will object to it, but extremists object to everything.”

“Quite so,” answered the other, “the question isn’t so much whether they object as whether they can make themselves objectionable.”

Barbara, with her new and nervous political interests, found herself interrupted in her attempt to listen to the political conversation by the unwelcome discovery that there were other people present. There was a very beautifully dressed young gentleman, with hair like black satin, who seemed to be the local secretary of the Governor; his name was Arthur Meade. There was an old man with a very obvious chestnut wig and a very unobvious, not to say inscrutable yellow face, who was an eminent financier known by the name of Morse. There were various ladies of the official circle who were duly scattered among these gentlemen. It seemed to be the tail-end of a sort of afternoon tea, which made all the more odd and suspicious the strange behaviour of the only hostess, in straying to the other garden and tearing up the flowers. Barbara found herself set down beside a pleasant old clergyman with smooth, silver hair, and an equally smooth, silver voice, who talked to her about the Bible and the Pyramids. She found herself committed to the highly uncomfortable experience of pretending to conduct one conversation while trying to listen to another.

This was the more difficult because the Rev. Ernest Snow, the clergyman in question, had (for all his mildness) not a little gentle pertinacity. She received a confused impression that he held very strong views on the meaning of certain Prophecies in connection with the end of the world and especially with the destiny of the British Empire. He had that habit of suddenly asking questions which is so unkind to the inattentive listener. Thus, she would manage to hear a scrap of the talk between the two rulers of the province; the Governor would say, balancing his sentences with his swaying hands:

"There are two considerations and by this method we meet them both. On the one hand, it is impossible entirely to repudiate our pledge. On the other hand, it is absurd to suppose that the recent atrocious crime does not necessarily modify the nature of that pledge. We can still make sure that our proclamation is a proclamation of a reasonable liberty. We have therefore decided—"

And then, at that particular moment, the poor clergyman would pierce her consciousness with the pathetic question:

"Now how many cubits do you think that would be?"

A little while later she managed to hear Smythe, who talked much less than his companion, say curtly: "For my part, I don't believe it makes much difference what proclamations you make. There are rows here when we haven't got sufficient forces, and there are no rows when we have got sufficient forces. That's all."

"And what is our position at present?" asked the Governor gravely.

"Our position is damned bad, if you ask me," grumbled the other in a low voice. "Nothing has been done to train the men; why, I found the rifle practice consisted of a sort of parlour game with a pea-shooter about twice a year. I've put up proper rifle butts beyond the olive walk there now, but there are other things. The munitions are not—"

"But in that case," came the mild but penetrating voice of Mr. Snow, "in that case what becomes of the Shunamites?"

Barbara had not the least idea what became of them, but in this case she felt she could treat it as a rhetorical question. She forced herself to listen a little more closely to the views of the venerable mystic, and she only heard one more fragment of the political conversation.

"Shall we really want all these military preparations?" asked Lord Tallboys rather anxiously. "When do you think we shall want them?"

“I can tell you,” said Smythe with a certain grimness. “We shall want them when you publish your proclamation of reasonable liberty.”

Lord Tallboys made an abrupt movement in the garden chair, like one breaking up a conference in some irritation; then he made a diversion by lifting a finger and signalling to his secretary Mr. Meade, who slid up to him and after a brief colloquy slid into the house. Released from the strain of State affairs, Barbara fell once more under the spell of the Church and the Prophetical Office. She still had only a confused idea of what the old clergyman was saying, but she began to feel a vague element of poetry in it. At least it was full of things that pleased her fancy like the dark drawings of Blake, prehistoric cities and blind and stony seers and kings who seemed clad in stone like their sepulchres the Pyramids. In a dim way she understood why all that stony and starry wilderness has been the playground of so many cranks. She softened a little towards the clerical crank and even accepted an invitation to his house on the day after the following, to see the documents and the definite proof about the Shunamites. But she was still very vague about what it was supposed to prove.

He thanked her and said gravely: “If the prophecy is fulfilled now, there will be a grave calamity.”

“I suppose,” she said with a rather dreary flippancy, “if the prophecy were not fulfilled, it would be an even greater calamity.”

Even as she spoke there was a stir behind some of the garden palms and the pale and slightly gaping face of her brother appeared above the palm-leaves. The next moment she saw just behind him the secretary and the tutor; it was evident that his uncle had sent for him. Tom Traill had the look of being too big for his clothes, which is not uncommon in the otherwise undeveloped; the gloomy good looks which he would otherwise have shared with his branch of the family were marred by his dark, straight hair being brushed crooked and his habit of looking out the corner of his eye at the corner of the carpet. His tutor was a big man of a dull and dusty exterior, apparently having the name of Hume. His broad shoulders were a little bowed like those of a drudge, though he was as yet hardly middle-aged. His plain and rugged face had a rather tired expression, as well it might. Teaching the defective is not always a hilarious parlour game.

Lord Tallboys had a brief and kindly conversation with the tutor. Lord Tallboys asked a few simple questions. Lord Tallboys gave a little lecture on education, still very kindly, but accompanied by the waving of the hands in rotation. On the one hand, the power to work was a necessity of life and could never be wholly evaded. On the other hand, without a reasonable proportion of pleasure and repose even work would suffer. On the one hand . . . it was at this point that the Prophecy was apparently fulfilled and a highly regrettable Calamity occurred at the Governor's tea-party.

For the boy burst out abruptly into a sort of high, gurgling crow and began to flap his hands about like the wings of a penguin, repeating over and over again, "On the one hand. On the other hand. On the one hand. On the other hand. On the one hand. On the other hand. On the one hand. On the other hand. . . . Golly!"

"Tom!" cried Olive on a sharp accent of agony and there was a ghastly silence over all the garden.

"Well," said the tutor in a reasonable undertone, which was as clear as a bell in that stillness, "you can't expect to have three hands, can you?"

"Three hands?" repeated the boy, and then after a long silence, "Why, how could you?"

"One would have to be in the middle, like an elephant's trunk," went on the tutor in the same colourless, conversational tone. "Wouldn't it be nice to have a long nose like an elephant so that you could turn it this way and that and pick up things on the breakfast-table, and never let go of your knife and fork?"

"Oh, you're *mad*!" ejaculated Tom with a sort of explosion that had a queer touch of exultation.

"I'm not the only mad person in the world, old boy," said Mr. Hume.

Barbara stood staring as she listened to this extraordinary conversation in that deadly silence and that highly unsuitable social setting. The most extraordinary thing about it was that the tutor said these crazy and incongruous things with an absolutely blank face.

"Didn't I ever tell you," he said in the same heavy and indifferent voice, "about the clever dentist who could pull out his own teeth with his own nose? I'll tell you tomorrow."

He was still quite dull and serious; but he had done the trick. The boy was distracted from his dislike of his uncle by the absurd image, just as a child in a temper is distracted by a new toy. Tom was now only looking at the tutor and followed him everywhere with his eyes. Perhaps he was not the only member of his family who did so. For the tutor, Barbara thought, was certainly a very odd person.

There was no more political talk that day, but there was not a little political news on the next. On the following morning proclamations were posted everywhere announcing the just, reasonable and even generous compromise which His Majesty's Government was now offering as a fair and final settlement of the serious social problems of Polybia and eastern Egypt. And on the following evening the news went through the town in one blast, like the wind of the desert, that Viscount Tallboys, Governor of Polybia, had been shot down by the last of the line of olives, at the corner of the wall.

III

THE MAN WHO COULD NOT HATE

Immediately after leaving the little garden-party, Tom and his tutor parted for the evening, for the former lived at the Governorate, while the latter had a sort of lodge or little bungalow higher up on the hill behind amid the taller trees. The tutor said in private what everybody had indignantly expected him to say in public, and remonstrated with the youth for his display of imitative drama.

"Well, I won't like him," said Tom warningly. "I'd like to kill him. His nose sticks out."

"You can hardly expect it to stick in," said Mr. Hume mildly. "I wonder whether there's an old story about the man whose nose stuck in."

"Is there?" demanded the other in the literal spirit of infancy.

"There may be tomorrow," replied the tutor and began to climb the steep path to his abode.

It was a lodge built mostly of bamboo and light timber with a gallery running round outside, from which could be seen the whole district spread out like a map. The grey and green squares of the Governorate building and grounds; the path running straight under the low garden wall and parallel to the line of villas; the solitary sycamore breaking the line at one point and farther along the closer rank of the olive-trees, like a broken cloister, and then another gap and then the corner of the wall, beyond which spread brown slopes of desert, patched here and there with green, where the ground was being turfed as part of some new public works or the Deputy

Governor’s rapid reforms in military organization. The whole hung under him like a vast coloured cloud in the brief afterglow of the Eastern sunset; then it was rapidly rolled in the purple gloom in which the strong stars stood out over his head and seemed nearer than the things of earth.

He stood for some moments on the gallery looking down on the darkening landscape, his blunt features knotted in a frown of curious reflection. Then he went back into the room where he and his pupil had worked all day, or where he had worked to induce his pupil to consider the idea of working. It was a rather bare room and the few objects in it rather odd and varied. A few bookshelves showed very large and gaily coloured books containing the verses of Mr. Edward Lear, and very small and shabby books containing the verses of the principal French and Latin poets. A rack of pipes, all hanging crooked, gave the inevitable touch of the bachelor; a fishing-rod and an old double-barrelled gun leaned dusty and disused in a corner; for it was long ago that this man, in other ways so remote from the sports of his countrymen, had indulged those two hobbies, chiefly because they were unsociable. But what was perhaps most curious of all, the desk and the floor were littered with geometrical diagrams treated in a manner unusual among geometers, for the figures were adorned with absurd faces or capering legs, such as a schoolboy adds to the squares and triangles on the blackboard. But the diagrams were drawn very precisely, as if the draughtsman had an exact eye and excelled in anything depending on that organ.

John Hume sat down at his desk and began to draw more diagrams. A little later he lit a pipe, and began to study those he had drawn, but he did not leave his desk or his preoccupations. So the hours went by amid an unfathomable stillness around that hillside hermitage, until the distant strains of a more or less lively band floated up from below, as a signal that a dance at the Governorate was already in progress. He knew there was a dance that night and took no notice of it; he was not sentimental, but some of the tunes stirred almost mechanical memories. The Tallboys family was a little old-fashioned, even for this rather earlier time. They were old-fashioned in not pretending to be any more democratic than they were. Their dependents were dependents, decently treated; they did not call themselves liberal because they dragged their sycophants into society. It had therefore never crossed the mind of the secretary or the tutor that the dance at the Governorate was any concern of theirs. They were also old-fashioned in the arrangements of the dance itself, and the date must also be allowed for. The new dances had only just begun to pierce, and nobody had dreamed of the wild and varied freedom of our new fashion, by which a person has to walk about all night with the same partner to the same tune. All this sense of distance, material and moral, in the old swaying waltzes moved through his subconsciousness and must be allowed for in estimating what he suddenly looked up and saw.

It seems for one instant as if, in rising through the mist, the tune had taken outline and colour and burst into his room with the bodily presence of a song, for the blues and greens of her patterned dress were like notes of music and her amazing face came to him like a cry; a cry out of the old youth he had lost or never known. A princess flying out of fairyland would not have seemed more impossible than that girl from that ballroom, though he knew her well enough as the younger sister of his charge; and the ball was a few hundred yards away. Her face was like a pale face burning through a dream and itself as unconscious as a dreamer's; for Barbara Traill was curiously unconscious of that mask of beauty fixed on her brooding boyish soul. She had been counted less attractive than her sisters and her sulks had marked her almost as the ugly duckling. Nothing in the solid man before her told of the shock of realization in his mind. She did not even smile. It was also characteristic of her that she blurted out what she had to say at once, almost as crudely as her brother:

"I'm afraid Tom is very rude to you," she said. "I'm very sorry. How do you think he is getting on?"

"I think most people would say," he said slowly at last, "that I ought to apologize for his schooling more than you for his family. I'm sorry about his uncle, but it's always a choice of evils. Tallboys is a very distinguished man and can look after his own dignity, but I've got to look after my charge. And I know that is the right way with him. Don't you be worried about him. He's perfectly all right if you understand him, and it's only a matter of making up for lost time."

She was listening, or not listening, with her characteristic frown of abstraction; she had taken the chair he offered her apparently without noticing it and was staring at the comical diagrams, apparently without seeing them. Indeed, it might well have been supposed that she was not listening at all; for the next remark she made appeared to be about a totally different subject. But she often had a habit of thus showing fragments of her mind; and there was more plan in the jigsaw puzzle than many people understood. Anyhow, she said suddenly, without lifting her eyes from the ludicrous drawing in front of her:

"I met a man going to the Governorate today. A big man with a long, fair beard and a single eyeglass. Do you know who he is? He said all sorts of horrid things against England."

Hume got to his feet with his hands in his pockets and the expression of one about to whistle. He stared at the girl and said softly:

"Hullo! Has he turned up again? I thought there was some trouble coming. Yes, I know him — they call him Dr. Gregory, but I believe he comes from Germany, though he often passes for English. He is a stormy petrel, anyhow; and wherever he goes there's a row. Some say we ought to have used him ourselves; I believe he once offered his talents to our Government. He's a very clever fellow and knows a frightful lot of the facts about these parts."

"Do you mean," she said sharply, "that I'm to believe that man and all the things he said?"

"No," said Hume. "I shouldn't believe that man; not even if you believe all the things he said."

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Frankly, I think he is a thoroughly bad egg," said the tutor. "He's got a pretty rotten reputation about women; I won't go into details, but he'd have gone to prison twice but for suborning perjury. I only say, whatever you may come to believe, don't believe in him."

"He dared to say that our Government broke its word," said Barbara indignantly.

John Hume was silent. Something in his silence affected her like a strain, and she said quite irrationally:

"Oh, for the Lord's sake say something! Do you know he dared to say that somebody on Lord Jaffray's expedition shot a child? I don't mind their saying England's cold and hard and all that; I suppose that's natural prejudice. But can't we stop these wild, wicked lies?"

"Well," replied Hume rather wearily, "nobody can say that Jaffray is cold and hard. The excuse for the whole thing was that he was blind drunk."

"Then I am to take the word of that liar!" she said fiercely.

"He's a liar all right," said the tutor gloomily. "And it's a very dangerous condition of the Press and the public, when only the liars tell the truth."

Something of a massive gravity in his grim humour for the moment overpowered her breathless resentment, and she said in a quieter tone: “Do you believe in this demand for self-government?”

“I’m not very good at believing,” he said. “I find it very hard to believe that these people cannot live or breathe without votes, when they lived contentedly without them for fifty centuries when they had the whole country in their own hands. A Parliament may be a good thing; a top-hat may be a good thing; your uncle certainly thinks so. We may like or dislike our top-hats. But if a wild Turk tells me he has a natural born right to a top-hat, I can’t help answering: ‘Then why the devil didn’t you make one for yourself?’”

“You don’t seem to care much for the Nationalists either,” she said.

“Their politicians are often frauds, but they’re not alone in that. That’s why I find myself forced into an intermediate position, a sort of benevolent neutrality. It simply seems to be a choice between a lot of blasted blackguards and a lot of damned drivelling, doddering idiots. You see I’m a Moderate.”

He laughed a little for the first time, and his plain face was suddenly altered for the better. She was moved to say in a more friendly tone:

“Well, we must prevent a real outbreak. You don’t want all our people murdered.”

“Only a little murdered,” he said, still smiling. “Yes, I think I should like some of them *rather* murdered. Not too much, of course; it’s a question of a sense of proportion.”

“Now you’re talking nonsense,” she said, “and people in our position can’t stand any nonsense. Harry says we may have to make an example.”

“I know,” he said. “He made several examples when he was in command here, before Lord Tallboys came out. It was vigorous — very vigorous. But I think I know what would be better than making an example.”

“And what is that?”

“Setting an example,” said Hume. “What about our own politicians?”

She said suddenly: “Well, why don’t you do something yourself?”

There was a silence. Then he drew a deep breath. “Ah, there you have me. I can’t do anything myself. I am futile; naturally and inevitably futile. I suffer from a deadly weakness.”

She felt suddenly rather frightened; she had encountered his blank and empty eyes.

"I cannot hate," he said. "I cannot be angry."

Something in his heavy voice seemed full of quality, like the fall of a slab of stone on a sarcophagus; she did not protest, and in her subconsciousness yawned a disappointment. She half realized the depth of her strange reliance and felt like one who had dug in the desert and found a very deep well, and found it dry.

When she went out on to the veranda the steep garden and plantation were grey in the moon, and a certain greyness spread over her own spirit, a mood of fatalism and of dull fear. For the first time she realized something of what strikes a Western eye in Eastern places as the unnaturalness of nature. The squat, limbless growth of the prickly pear was not like the green growths of home, springing on light stalks to lovely flowers like butterflies captured out of air. It was more like the dead blind bubbling of some green, squalid slime: a world of plants that were as plain and flat as stones. She hated the hairy surface of some of the squat and swollen trees of that grotesque garden; the tufts here and there irritated her fancy as they might have tickled her face. She felt that even the big, folded flowers, if they opened, would have a foul fragrance. She had a latent sense of the savour of faint horror, lying over all as lightly as the faint moonshine. Just as it had chilled her most deeply, she looked up and saw something that was neither plant nor tree, though it hung as still in the stillness, but it had the unique horror of a human face. It was a very white face, but bearded with gold like the Greek statues of gold and ivory, and at the temples were two golden curls, that might have been the horns of Pan.

For the moment that motionless head might indeed have been that of some terminal god of gardens. But the next moment it had found legs and came to life, springing out upon the pathway behind her. She had already gone some distance from the hut and was not far from the illuminated grounds of the Governorate, whence the music swelled louder as she went. Nevertheless, she swung round and faced the other way, looking desperately at the figure she recognized. He had abandoned his red fez and black frock-coat and was clad completely in white, like many tropical trippers, but it gave him in the moonlight something of the silver touch of a spectral harlequin. As he advanced he screwed the shining disk into his eye and it revealed in a flash the faint memory that had always escaped her. His face in repose was calm and classic and might have been the stone mask of Jove rather than Pan. But the monocle gathered up his features into a sneer and seemed to draw his eyes closer together; and she suddenly saw that he was no more a German than an Englishman. And though she had no Anti-Semitic prejudice in particular, she felt somehow that in that scene there was something sinister in a fair Jew, as in a white negro.

"We meet under a yet more beautiful sky," he said; she hardly heard what else he said. Broken phrases from what she had heard recently tumbled through her mind, mere words like "reputation" and "prison", and she stepped back to increase the distance, but moving in the opposite direction from which she had come. Afterwards she hardly remembered what had happened; he had said other things; he had tried to stop her, and an instantaneous impression of crushing and startling strength, like a chimpanzee, surprised her into a cry. Then she stumbled and ran, but not in the direction of the house of her own people.

Mr. John Hume got out of his chair more quickly than was his wont and went to meet someone who stumbled up the stair without.

"My dear child," he said, and put a hand on her shaking shoulder, giving and receiving a queer thrill like a dull electric shock. Then he went, moving quickly past her. He had seen something in the moonlight beyond and without descending the steps, sprang over the rail to the ground below, standing waist-high in the wild and tangled vegetation. There was a screen of large leaves waving to and fro between Barbara and the rapid drama that followed, but she saw, as in flashes of moonlight, the tutor dart across the path of the figure in white and heard the shock of blows and saw a kick like a catapult. There was a wheel of silver legs like the arms of the Isle of Man, and then out of the dense depth of the lower thicket a spout of curses in a tongue that was not English, nor wholly German, but which shrieked and chattered in all the Ghettoes of the world. But one strange thing remained even in her disordered memory; that when the figure in white had risen tottering and turned to plunge down the hill, the white face and the furious gesture of malediction were turned, not towards the assailant, but towards the house of the Governor.

The tutor was frowning ponderously as he came again up the veranda steps, as if over some of his geometrical problems. She asked him rather wildly what he had done and he answered in his heavy voice: "I hope I half killed him. You know I am in favour of half measures."

She laughed rather hysterically and cried: "You said you could not be angry."

Then they suddenly became very stiff and silent and it was with an almost fatuous formality that he escorted her down the slope to the very doors of the dancing-rooms. The sky behind the green pergolas of foliage was a vivid violet or some sort of blue that seemed warmer than any red; and the furry filaments of the great tree-trunks seemed like the quaint sea-beasts of childhood, which could be stroked and which unfolded their fingers. There was something upon them both beyond speech or even silence. He even went so far as to say it was a fine night.

“Yes,” she answered, “it is a fine night”; and felt instantly as if she had betrayed some secret.

They went through the inner gardens to the gate of the vestibule, which was crowded with people in uniform and evening dress. They parted with the utmost formality; and that night neither of them slept.

IV

THE DETECTIVE AND THE PARSON

It was not until the following evening, as already noted, that the news came that the Governor had fallen by a shot from an unknown hand. And Barbara Traill received the news later than most of her friends, because she had departed rather abruptly that morning for a long ramble amid the ruins and plantations of palm, in the immediate neighbourhood. She took a sort of picnic basket with her, but light as was her visible luggage, it would be true to say that she went away to unpack upon a large scale. She went to unfold a sort of invisible *impedimenta* which had accumulated in her memories, especially her memories of the night before. This sort of impetuous solitude was characteristic of her, but it had an immediate effect which was rather fortunate in her case. For the first news was the worst, and when she returned the worst had been much modified. It was first reported that her uncle was dead; then that he was dying; finally that he had only been wounded and had every prospect of recovery. She walked with her empty basket straight into the hubbub of discussion about these things, and soon found that the police operations for the discovery and pursuit of the criminal were already far advanced. The inquiry was in the hands of a hard-headed, hatchet-faced officer named Hayter, the chief of the detective force; who was being actively seconded by young Meade, the secretary of the Governor. But she was rather more surprised to find her friend the tutor in the very centre of the group, being questioned about his own recent experiences.

The next moment she felt a strange sort of surge of subconscious annoyance, as she realized the subject-matter of the questions. The questioners were Meade and Hayter; but it was significant that they had just received the news that Sir Harry Smythe, with characteristic energy, had arrested Dr. Paulus Gregory, the dubious foreigner with the big beard. The tutor was being examined about his own last glimpse of that questionable public character, and Barbara felt a secret fury at finding the affair of the night before turned into a public problem of police. She felt as if she had come down in the morning to find the whole breakfast-table talking about some very intimate dream she had had in the middle of the night. For though she had carried that picture with her as she wandered among the tombs and the green thickets, she had felt it as something as much peculiar to herself as if she had had a vision in the wilderness. The bland, black-haired Mr. Meade was especially insinuating in his curiosity. She told herself, in a highly unreasonable fashion, that she had always hated Arthur Meade.

“I gather,” the secretary was saying, “that you have excellent reasons of your own for regarding this man as a dangerous character.”

“I regard him as a rotter and I always did,” replied Hume in a rather sulky and reluctant manner. “I did have a bit of a kick up with him last night, but it didn’t make any difference to my views, nor to his either, I should think.”

“It seems to me it might make a considerable difference,” persisted Meade. “Isn’t it true that he went away cursing not only you but especially the Governor? And he went away down the hill towards the place where the Governor was shot. It’s true he wasn’t shot till a good time after, and nobody seems to have seen his assailant; but he might have hung about in the woods and then crept out along the wall at dusk.”

“Having helped himself to a gun from the gun-tree that grows wild in these woods, I suppose,” said the tutor sardonically. “I swear he had no gun or pistol on him when I threw him into the prickly pear.”

“You seem to be making the speech for the defence,” said the secretary with a faint sneer. “But you yourself said he was a pretty doubtful character.”

“I don’t think he is in the least a doubtful character,” replied the tutor in his stolid way. “I haven’t the least doubt about him myself. I think he is a loose, lying, vicious braggart and humbug; a selfish, sensual mountebank. So I’m pretty sure that he didn’t shoot the Governor, whoever else did.”

Colonel Hayter cocked a shrewd eye at the speaker and spoke himself for the first time.

“Ah — and what do you mean by that exactly?”

“I mean what I say,” answered Hume. “It’s exactly because he’s that sort of rascal that he didn’t commit that sort of rascality. Agitators of his type never do things themselves; they incite other people; they hold meetings and send round the hat and then vanish, to do the same thing somewhere else. It’s a jolly different sort of person that’s left to take the risks of playing Brutus or Charlotte Corday. But I confess there are two other little bits of evidence, which I think clear the fellow completely.”

He put two fingers in his waistcoat pocket and slowly and thoughtfully drew out a round, flat piece of glass with a broken string.

“I picked this up on the spot where we struggled,” he said. “It’s Gregory’s eyeglass; and if you look through it you won’t see anything, except the fact that a man who wanted a lens as strong as that could see next to nothing without it. He certainly couldn’t see to shoot as far as the end of the wall from the sycamore, which is whereabouts they think the shot must have been fired from.”

“There may be something in that,” said Hayter, “though the man might have had another glass, of course. You said you had a second reason for thinking him innocent.”

“The second reason,” said Hume, “is that Sir Harry Smythe has just arrested him.”

“What on earth do you mean?” asked Meade sharply. “Why, you brought us the message from Sir Harry yourself.”

“I’m afraid I brought it rather imperfectly,” said the other, in a dull voice. “It’s quite true Sir Harry has arrested the doctor, but he’d arrested him before he heard of the attempt on Lord Tallboys. He had just arrested him for holding a seditious meeting five miles away at Pentapolis, at which he made an eloquent speech, which must have reached its beautiful peroration about the time when Tallboys was being shot at, here at the corner of the road.”

“Good Lord!” cried Meade, staring, “you seem to know a lot about this business.”

The rather sullen tutor lifted his head and looked straight at the secretary with a steady but rather baffling gaze.

“Perhaps I do know a little about it,” he said. “Anyhow, I’m quite sure Gregory’s got a good alibi.”

Barbara had listened to this curious conversation with a confused and rather painful attention; but as the case against Gregory seemed to be crumbling away, a new emotion of her own began to work its way to the surface. She began to realize that she had wanted Gregory to be made responsible, not out of any particular malice towards him, but because it would explain and dispose of the whole incident, and dismiss it from her mind along with another disturbing but hardly conscious thought. Now that the criminal had again become a nameless shadow, he began to haunt her mind with dreadful hints of identity and she had spasms of fear, in which that shadowy figure was suddenly fitted with a face.

As has been already noted, Barbara Traill was a little morbid about her brother and the tragedy of the Traills. She was an omnivorous reader; she had been the sort of schoolgirl who is always found in a corner with a book. And this means generally, under modern conditions, that she read everything she could not understand some time before she read anything that she could. Her mind was a hotch-potch of popular science about heredity and psycho-analysis, and the whole trend of her culture tended to make her pessimistic about everything. People in this mood never have any difficulty in finding reasons for their worst fears. And it was enough for her that, the very morning before her uncle was shot, he had been publicly insulted, and even crazily threatened, by her brother.

That sort of psychological poison works itself deeper and deeper into the brain. Barbara’s broodings branched and thickened like a dark forest; and did not stop with the thought that a dull, undeveloped schoolboy was really a maniac and a murderer. The unnatural generalizations of the books she had read pushed her farther and farther. If her brother, why not her sister? If her sister, why not herself? Here memory exaggerated and distorted the distracted demeanour of her sister in the flower-garden, till she could almost fancy that Olive had torn up the flowers with her teeth. As is always the case in such unbalanced worry, all sorts of accidents took on a terrible significance. Her sister had said, “Is there not something the matter with all of us?” What could that mean but such a family curse? Hume himself had said he was not the only mad person present. What else could that mean? Even Dr. Gregory had declared after talking to her, that her race was degenerate; did he mean that her family was degenerate? After all, he was a doctor, if he was a wicked one. Each of these hateful coincidences gave her a spiritual shock, so that she almost cried aloud when she thought of it. Meanwhile the rest of her mind went round and round in the iron circle of all such logic from hell. She told herself again and again that she was being morbid, and then told herself again and again that she was only morbid because she was mad. But she was not in the least mad, she was only young, and thousands of young people go through such a phase of nightmare, and nobody knows or helps.

But she was moved with a curious impulse in the search for help, and it was the same impulse that had driven her back across the moonlit glade to the wooden hut upon the hill. She was actually mounting that hill again, when she met John Hume coming down.

She poured out all her domestic terrors and suspicions in a flood, as she had poured out all her patriotic doubts and protests, with a confused confidence which rested on no defined reason or relation and yet was sure of itself.

“So there it is,” she said at the end of her impetuous monologue. “I began by being quite sure that poor Tom had done it. But by this time I feel as if I might have done it myself.”

“Well, that’s logical enough,” agreed Hume. “It’s about as sensible to say that you are guilty as that Tom is. And about as sensible to say the Archbishop of Canterbury is guilty as either of you.”

She attempted to explain her highly scientific guesses about heredity, and their effect was more marked. They succeeded at least in arousing this large and slow person to a sort of animation.

“Now the devil take all doctors and scientists,” he cried, “or rather the devil take all novelists and newspaper-men who talk about what even the doctors don’t understand! People abuse the old nurses for frightening children with bogies which pretty soon became a joke. What about the new nurses who let children frighten themselves with all the black bogies they are supposed to take seriously? My dear girl, there is nothing the matter with your brother, any more than with you. He’s only what they call a protected neurotic, which is their long-winded way of saying he has an extra skin that the Public School varnish won’t stick on, but runs off like water off a duck’s back. So much the better for him, as likely as not, in the long run. But even suppose he did remain a little more like a child than the rest of us. Is there anything particularly horrible about a child? Do you shudder when you think of your dog, merely because he’s happy and fond of you and yet can’t do the forty-eighth proposition of Euclid? Being a dog is not a disease. Being a child is not a disease. Even remaining a child is not a disease; don’t you sometimes wish we could all remain children?”

She was of the sort that grapples with notions and suggestions one after another, as they come, and she stood silent, but her mind was busy like a mill. It was he who spoke again, and more lightly.

“It’s like what we were saying about making examples. I think the world is much too solemn and severe about punishments; it would be far better if it were ruled like a nursery. People don’t want penal servitude and execution and all the rest. What most people want is to have their ears boxed or be sent to bed. What fun it would be to take an unscrupulous millionaire and make him stand in the corner! Such an appropriate penalty.”

When she spoke again there was in her tones something of relief and a renewed curiosity.

“What do you do with Tom?” she asked, “and what’s the meaning of all those funny triangles?”

“I play the fool,” he replied gravely. “What he wants is to have his attention aroused and fixed; and foolery always does that for children; very obvious foolery. Don’t you know how they have always liked such images as the cow jumping over the moon? It’s the educational effect of riddles. Well, I have to be the riddle. I have to keep him wondering what I mean or what I shall do next. It means being an ass; but it’s the only way.”

“Yes,” she answered slowly, “there’s something awfully rousing about riddles . . . all sorts of riddles. Even that old parson with his riddles out of Revelations makes you feel he has something to live for . . . by the way, I believe we promised to go to tea there this afternoon; I’ve been in a state to forget everything.”

Even as she spoke she saw her sister Olive coming up the path attired in the unmistakable insignia of one paying calls, and accompanied by her sturdy husband, the Deputy Governor, who did not often attend these social functions.

They all went down the road together and Barbara was vaguely surprised to see ahead of them on the same road, not only the sleek and varnished figure of Mr. Meade the secretary, but also the more angular outline of Colonel Hayter. The clergyman’s invitation had evidently been a comprehensive one.

The Rev. Ernest Snow lived in a very modest manner in one of the little houses that had been erected in a row for the minor officials of the Governorate. It was at the back of this line of villas that the path ran along the garden wall and past the sycamore to the bunch of olives and finally to the corner where the Governor had fallen by the mysterious bullet. That path fringed the open desert and had all the character of a rude, beaten path for the desert pilgrims. But walking on the other side, in front of the row of houses, a traveller might well have imagined himself in any London suburb, so regular were the ornamental railings and so identical the porticos and the small front-garden plots. Nothing but a number distinguished the house of the clergyman, and the entrance to it was so prim and narrow that the group of guests from the Governorate had some difficulty in squeezing through it.

Mr. Snow bowed over Olive’s hand with a ceremony that seemed to make his white hair a ghost of eighteenth-century powder, but also with something else that seemed at first a shade more difficult to define. It was something that went with the lowered voice and lifted hand of his profession at certain moments. His face was composed, but it would almost seem deliberately composed; and in spite of his grieved tone his eyes were very bright and steady. Barbara suddenly realized that he was conducting a funeral, and she was not far out.

“I need not tell you, Lady Smythe,” he said in the same soft accents, “what sympathy we all feel in this terrible hour. If only from a public standpoint, the death of your distinguished uncle—”

Olive Smythe struck in with a rather wild stare.

“But my uncle isn’t dead, Mr. Snow. I know they said so at first, but he only got a shot in his leg and he is trying to limp about already.”

A shock of transformation passed over the clergyman’s face, too quick for most eyes to follow; it seemed to Barbara that his jaw dropped and when it readjusted itself, it was in a grin of utterly artificial congratulation.

“My dear lady,” he breathed, “for this relief—”

He looked round a little vacantly at the furniture. Whether the Rev. Ernest Snow had remembered to prepare tea at tea-time, was not yet quite clear, but the preparations he had made seemed to be of a less assuaging sort. The little tables were loaded with large books, many of them lying open, and these were mostly traced with sprawling plans and designs, mostly architectural or generally archæological, in some cases apparently astronomical or astrological, but giving as a whole a hazy impression of a magician's spells or a library of the black art.

"Apocalyptic studies," he stammered, "a hobby of mine. I believed that my calculations . . . . These things are written for our instruction."

And then Barbara felt a final stab of astonishment and alarm. For two facts became instantly and simultaneously vivid to her consciousness. The first was that the Rev. Ernest Snow had been reposing upon the fact of the Governor's death with something very like a solemn satisfaction, and had heard of his recovery with something quite other than relief. And the second was that he spoke with the same voice that had once uttered the same words, out of the shadow of the sycamore, that sounded in her ears like a wild cry for blood.

V

THE THEORY OF MODERATE MURDER

Colonel Hayter, the Chief of the Police, was moving towards the inner rooms with a motion that was casual but not accidental. Barbara indeed had rather wondered why such an official had accompanied them on a purely social visit, and she now began to entertain dim and rather incredible possibilities. The clergyman had turned away to one of the bookstands and was turning over the leaves of a volume with feverish excitement; it seemed almost that he was muttering to himself. He was a little like a man looking up a quotation on which he has been challenged.

"I hear you have a very nice garden here, Mr. Snow," said Hayter. "I should rather like to look at your garden."

Snow turned a startled face over his shoulder; he seemed at first unable to detach his mind from his preoccupation; then he said sharply but a little shakily, "There's nothing to see in my garden; nothing at all. I was just wondering—"

“Do you mind if I have a squint at it?” asked Hayter indifferently, and shouldered his way to the back door. There was something resolute about his action that made the others trail vaguely after him, hardly knowing what they did. Hume, who was just behind the detective, said to him in an undertone: “What do you expect to find growing in the old man’s garden?”

Hayter looked over his shoulder with a grim geniality.

“Only a particular sort of tree you were talking of lately,” he said.

But when they went out into the neat and narrow strip of back garden, the only tree in sight was the sycamore spreading over the desert path, and Barbara remembered with another subconscious thrill that this was the spot from which, as the experts calculated, the bullet had been fired.

Hayter strode across the lawn and was seen stooping over something in the tangle of tropical plants under the wall. When he straightened himself again he was seen to be holding a long and heavy cylindrical object.

“Here is something fallen from the gun-tree you said grew in these parts,” he said grimly. “Funny that the gun should be found in Mr. Snow’s back-garden, isn’t it? Especially as it’s a double-barrelled gun with one barrel discharged.”

Hume was staring at the big gun in the detective’s hand, and for the first time his usually stolid face wore an expression of amazement and even consternation.

“Damn it all!” he said softly, “I forgot about that. What a rotten fool I am!”

Few except Barbara even heard his strange whisper, and nobody could make any sense of it. Suddenly he swung round and addressed the whole company aloud, almost as if they were a public meeting.

“Look here,” he said, “do you know what this means? This means that poor old Snow, who is probably still fussing over his hieroglyphics, is going to be charged with attempted murder.”

“It’s a bit premature,” said Hayter, “and some would say you were interfering in our job, Mr. Hume. But I owe you something for putting us right about the other fellow, when I admit we were wrong.”

“You were wrong about the other fellow and you are wrong about this fellow,” said Hume, frowning savagely. “But I happened to be able to offer you evidence in the other case. What evidence can I give now?”

“Why should you have any evidence to give?” asked the other, very much puzzled.

“Well, I have,” said Hume, “and I jolly well don’t want to give it.” He was silent for a moment and then broke out in a sort of fury: “Blast it all, can’t you see how silly it is to drag in that silly old man? Don’t you see he’d only fallen in love with his own prophecies of disaster, and was a bit put off when they didn’t come true after all?”

“There are a good many more suspicious circumstances,” cut in Smythe curtly. “There’s the gun in the garden and the position of the sycamore.”

There was a long silence during which Hume stood with huge hunched shoulders frowning resentfully at his boots. Then he suddenly threw up his head and spoke with a sort of explosive lightness.

“Oh, well then, I must give my evidence,” he said, with a smile that was almost gay: “I shot the Governor myself.”

There was a stillness as if the place had been full of statues, and for a few seconds nobody moved or spoke. Then Barbara heard her own voice in the silence, crying out:

“Oh, you didn’t!”

A moment later the Chief of Police was speaking with a new and much more official voice:

“I should like to know whether you are joking,” he said, “or whether you really mean to give yourself up for the attempted murder of Lord Tallboys.”

Hume held up one hand in an arresting gesture, almost like a public speaker. He was still smiling slightly, but his manner had grown more grave.

“Pardon me,” he said. “Pardon me. Let us distinguish. The distinction is of great value to my self-esteem. I did not try to murder the Governor. I tried to shoot him in the leg and I did shoot him in the leg.”

“What is the sense of all this?” cried Smythe with impatience.

“I am sorry to appear punctilious,” said Hume calmly. “Imputations on my morals I must bear, like other members of the criminal class. But imputations on my marksmanship I cannot tolerate; it is the only sport in which I excel.” He picked up the double-barrelled gun before they could stop him and went on rapidly: “And may I draw attention to one technical point? This gun has two barrels and one is still undischarged. If any fool had shot Tallboys at that distance and not killed him, don’t you think even a fool would have shot again, if that was what he wanted to do? Only, you see, it was not what I wanted to do.”

"You seem to fancy yourself a lot as a marksman," said the Deputy Governor rudely.

"Ah, you are sceptical," replied the tutor in the same airy tone. "Well, Sir Harry, you have yourself provided the apparatus of demonstration, and it will not take a moment. The targets which we owe to your patriotic efficiency are already set up, I think, on the slope just beyond the end of the wall." Before anybody could move he had hopped up on to the low garden wall, just under the shadow of the sycamore. From that perch he could see the long line of the butts stretching along the border of the desert.

"Suppose we say," he said pleasantly, in the tone of a popular lecturer, "that I put this bullet about an inch inside the white on the second target."

The group awoke from its paralysis of surprise; Hayter ran forward and Smythe burst out with: "Of all the damned tomfoolery—"

His sentence was drowned in the deafening explosion, and amid the echoes of it the tutor dropped serenely from the wall.

"If anybody cares to go and look," he said, "I think he will find the demonstration of my innocence — not indeed of shooting the Governor, but of wanting to shoot him anywhere else but where I did shoot him."

There was another silence, and then this comedy of unexpected happenings was crowned with another that was still more unexpected; coming from the one person whom everybody had naturally forgotten.

Tom's high, crowing voice was suddenly heard above the crowd.

"Who's going to look?" he cried. "Well, why don't you go and look?"

It was almost as if a tree in the garden had spoken. And indeed the excitement of events had worked upon that vegetating brain till it unfolded rapidly, as do some vegetables at the touch of chemistry. Nor was this all, for the next moment the vegetable had taken on a highly animal energy and hurled itself across the garden. They saw a whirl of lanky limbs against the sky as Tom Traill cleared the garden wall and went plunging away through the sand towards the targets.

"Is this place a lunatic asylum?" cried Sir Harry Smythe, his face still more congested with colour and a baleful light in his eyes, as if a big but buried temper was working its way to the surface.

"Come, Mr. Hume," said Hayter in a cooler tone, "everybody regards you as a very sensible man. Do you mean to tell me seriously that you put a bullet in the Governor's leg for no reason at all, not even murder?"

"I did it for an excellent reason," answered the tutor, still beaming at him in a rather baffling manner. "I did it because I am a sensible man. In fact, I am a Moderate Murderer."

"And what the blazes may that be?"

"The philosophy of moderation in murder," continued the tutor blandly, "is one to which I have given some little attention. I was saying only the other day that what most people want is to be rather murdered, especially persons in responsible political situations. As it is, the punishments on both sides are far too severe. The merest touch or *soupçon* of murder is all that is required for purposes of reform. The little more and how much it is; the little less and the Governor of Polybia gets clean away, as Browning said."

"Do you really ask me to believe," snorted the Chief of Police, "that you make a practice of potting every public man in the left leg?"

"No, no," said Hume, with a sort of hasty solemnity. "The treatment, I assure you, is marked with much more individual attention. Had it been the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I should perhaps have selected a portion of the left ear. In the case of the Prime Minister the tip of the nose would be indicated. But the point is the general principle that *something* should happen to these people, to arouse their dormant faculties by a little personal problem. Now if ever there was a man," he went on with delicate emphasis, as if it were a scientific demonstration, "if ever there was a man meant and marked out by nature to be rather murdered, it is Lord Tallboys. Other eminent men, very often, are just murdered, and everyone feels that the situation has been adequately met, that the incident is terminated. One just murders them and thinks no more about it. But Tallboys is a remarkable case; he is my employer and I know him pretty well. He is a good fellow, really. He is a gentleman, he is a patriot; what is more, he is really a liberal and reasonable man. But by being perpetually in office he has let that pompous manner get worse and worse, till it seems to grow on him, like his confounded top-hat. What is needed in such a case? A few days in bed, I decided. A few healthful weeks standing on one leg and meditating on that fine shade of distinction between oneself and God Almighty, which is so easily overlooked."

"Don't listen to any more of this rubbish," cried the Deputy-Governor. "If he says he shot Tallboys, we've got to take him up for it, I suppose. He ought to know."

"You've hit it at last, Sir Harry," said Hume heartily, "I'm arousing a lot of dormant intellects this afternoon."

"We won't have any more of your joking," cried Smythe with sudden fury; "I'm arresting you for attempted murder."

"I know," answered the smiling tutor, "that's the joke."

At this moment there was another leap and scurry by the sycamore and the boy Tom hurled himself back into the garden, panting aloud:

"It's quite right. It's just where he said."

For the rest of the interview, and until that strange group had broken up on the lawn, the boy continued to stare at Hume as only a boy can stare at somebody who has done something rather remarkable in a game. But as he and Barbara went back to the Governorate together, the latter indescribably dazed and bewildered, she found her companion curiously convinced of some view of his own, which he was hardly competent to describe. It was not exactly as if he disbelieved Hume or his story. It was rather as if he believed what Hume had not said, rather than what he had.

"It's a riddle," repeated Tom with stubborn solemnity. "He's awfully fond of riddles. He says silly things just to make you think. That's what we've got to do. He doesn't like you to give it up."

"What we've got to do?" repeated Barbara.

"Think what it really means," said Tom.

There was some truth perhaps in the suggestion that Mr. John Hume was fond of riddles, for he fired off one more of them at the Chief of Police, even as that official took him into custody.

"Well," he said cheerfully, "you can only half hang me because I'm only half a murderer. I suppose you have hanged people sometimes?"

"Occasionally, I'm sorry to say," replied Colonel Hayter.

"Did you ever hang somebody to prevent him being hanged?" asked the tutor with interest.

VI

THE THING THAT REALLY HAPPENED

It is not true that Lord Tallboys wore his top-hat in bed, during his brief indisposition. Nor is it true, as was more moderately alleged, that he sent for it as soon as he could stand upright and wore it as a finishing touch to a costume consisting of a green dressing-gown and red slippers. But it was quite true that he resumed his hat and his high official duties at the earliest possible opportunity; rather to the annoyance, it was said, of his subordinate the Deputy-Governor, who found himself for the second time checked in some of those vigorous military measures which are always more easily effected after the shock of a political outrage. In plain words, the Deputy-Governor was rather sulky. He had relapsed into a red-faced and irritable silence, and when he broke it his friends rather wished he would relapse into it again. At the mention of the eccentric tutor, whom his department had taken into custody, he exploded with a special impatience and disgust. “Oh, for God’s sake don’t tell me about that beastly madman and mountebank!” he cried, almost in the voice of one tortured and unable to tolerate a moment more of human folly. “Why in the world we are cursed with such filthy fools . . . shooting him in the leg . . . moderate murderer . . . mouldy swine!”

“He’s not a mouldy swine,” said Barbara Traill emphatically, as if it were an exact point of natural history. “I don’t believe a word of what you people are saying against him.”

“Do you believe what he is saying against himself?” asked her uncle, looking at her with screwed-up eyes and a quizzical expression. Tallboys was leaning on a crutch; in marked contrast to the sullenness of Sir Harry Smythe, he carried his disablement in a very plucky and pleasant fashion. The necessity of attending to the interrupted rhythm of his legs had apparently arrested the oratorical rotation of his hands. His family felt that they had never liked him so much before. It seemed almost as if there were some truth in the theory of the Moderate Murderer.

On the other hand, Sir Harry Smythe, usually so much more good-humoured with his family, seemed to be in an increasingly bad humour. The dark red of his complexion deepened, until by contrast there was something almost alarming about the light of his pale eyes.

“I tell you of all these measly, meddlesome blighters,” he began.

“And I tell you you know nothing about it,” retorted his sister-in-law. “He isn’t a bit like that; he—”

At this point, for some reason or other, it was Olive who intervened swiftly and quietly; she looked a little wan and worried.

"Don't let's talk about all that now," she said hastily. "Harry has got such a lot of things to do. . . ."

"I know what I'm going to do," said Barbara stubbornly. "I'm going to ask Lord Tallboys, as Governor of this place, if he will let me visit Mr. Hume and see if I can find out what it means."

She had become for some reason violently excited and her own voice sounded strangely in her ears. She had a dizzy impression of Harry Smythe's eyes standing out of his head in apoplectic anger and of Olive's face in the background growing more and more unnaturally pale and staring, and hovering over all, with something approaching to an elvish mockery, the benevolent amusement of her uncle. She felt as if he had let out too much, or that he had gained a new subtlety of perception.

Meanwhile John Hume was sitting in his place of detention, staring at a blank wall with an equally blank face. Accustomed as he was to solitude, he soon found something of a strain in two or three days and nights of the dehumanized solitude of imprisonment. Perhaps the fact most vivid to his immediate senses was being deprived of tobacco. But he had other and what some could call graver grounds of depression. He did not know what sort of sentence he would be likely to get for confessing to an attempt to wound the Governor. But he knew enough of political conditions and legal expedients to know that it would be easy to inflict heavy punishment immediately after the public scandal of the crime. He had lived in that outpost of civilization for the last ten years, till Tallboys had picked him up in Cairo; he remembered the violent reaction after the murder of the previous Governor, the way in which the Deputy-Governor had been able to turn himself into a despot and sweep the country with coercion acts and punitive expeditions, until his impulsive militarism had been a little moderated by the arrival of Tallboys with a compromise from the home Government. Tallboys was still alive and even, in a modified manner, kicking. But he was probably still under doctor's orders and could hardly be judge in his own cause; so that the autocratic Smythe would probably have another chance of riding the whirlwind and directing the storm. But the truth is that there was at the back of the prisoner's mind something that he feared much more than prison. The tiny point of panic, which had begun to worry and eat away even his rocky stolidity of mind and body, was the fear that his fantastic explanation had given his enemies another sort of opportunity. What he really feared was their saying he was mad and putting him under more humane and hygienic treatment.

And indeed, anyone watching his demeanour for the next hour or so might be excused for entertaining doubts and fancies on the point. He was still staring before him in a rather strange fashion. But he was no longer staring as if he saw nothing, but rather as if he saw something. It seemed to himself that, like a hermit in his cell, he was seeing visions.

"Well, I suppose I am, after all," he said aloud in a dead and distinct voice. "Didn't St. Paul say something? . . . Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. . . . I have seen that heavenly one coming in at the door like that several times, and rather hoped it was real. But real people can't come through prison doors like that. . . . Once it came so that the room might have been full of trumpets and once with a cry like the wind and there was a fight and I found out that I could hate and that I could love. Two miracles on one night. Don't you think that must have been a dream — that is supposing you weren't a dream and could think anything? But I did rather hope you were real then."

"Don't!" said Barbara Trail, "I am real now."

"Do you mean to tell me in cold blood that I am not mad," asked Hume, still staring at her, "and you are here?"

"You are the only sane person I ever knew," she replied.

"Good Lord," he said, "then I've said a good deal just now that ought only to be said in lunatic asylums — or in heavenly visions."

"You have said so much," she said in a low voice, "that I want you to say much more. I mean about the whole of this trouble. After what you have said . . . don't you think I might be allowed to know?"

He frowned at the table and then said rather more abruptly:

"The trouble was that I thought you were the last person who ought to know. You see, there is your family, and you might be brought into it, and one might have to hold one's tongue for the sake of someone you would care about."

"Well," she said steadily, "I *have* been brought into it for the sake of someone I care about."

She paused a moment and went on: "The others never did anything for me. They would have let me go raving mad in a respectable flat, and so long as I was finished at a fashionable school, they wouldn't have cared if

I'd finished myself with laudanum. I never really talked to anybody before. I don't want to talk to anybody else now."

He sprang to his feet; something like an earthquake had shaken him at last out of his long petrified incredulity about happiness. He caught her by both hands and words came out of him he had never dreamed were within. And she, who was younger in years, only stared at him with a steady smile and starry eyes, as if she were older and wiser; and at the end only said:

"You will tell me now."

"You must understand," he said at last more soberly, "that what I said was true. I was not making up fairy-tales to shield my long-lost brother from Australia, or any of that business in the novels. I really did put a bullet in your uncle, and I meant to put it there."

"I know," she said, "but for all that I'm sure I don't know everything. I'm sure there is some extraordinary story behind all this."

"No," he answered. "It isn't an extraordinary story, except an extraordinarily ordinary story."

He paused a moment reflectively and then went on:

"It's really a particularly plain and simple story. I wonder it hasn't happened hundreds of times before. I wonder it hasn't been told in hundreds of stories before. It might so easily happen anywhere, given certain conditions.

"In this case you know some of the conditions. You know that sort of balcony that runs round my bungalow, and how one looks down from it and sees the whole landscape like a map. Well, I was looking down and saw all that flat plan of the place; the row of villas and the wall and path running behind it and the sycamore, and farther on the olives and the end of the wall, and so out into the open slopes being laid out with turf and all the rest. But I saw what surprised me; that the rifle-range was already set up. It must have been a rush order; people must have worked all night. And even as I stared, I saw in the distance a dot that was a man standing by the nearest target, as if adding the last touches. Then he made a sort of signal to somebody away on the other side and moved very rapidly away from the place. Tiny as the figure looked, every gesture told me something; he was quite obviously clearing out just before the firing at the target was to begin. And almost at the same moment I saw something else. Well, I saw one thing, anyhow. I saw why Lady Smythe is worried, and wandered distracted in the garden."

Barbara stared, but he went on: “Travelling along the path from the Governorate and towards the sycamore was a familiar shape. It just showed above the long garden wall in sharp outline like a shape in a shadow pantomime. It was the top-hat of Lord Tallboys. Then I remembered that he always went for a constitutional along this path and out on to the slopes beyond; and I felt an overwhelming suspicion that he did not know that the space beyond was already a firing-ground. You know he is very deaf, and I sometimes doubt whether he hears all the things officially told to him; sometimes I fear they are told so that he cannot hear. Anyhow, he had every appearance of marching straight across as usual, and there came over me in a cataract a solid, an overwhelming and a most shocking certainty.

“I will not say much about that now. I will say as little as I can for the rest of my life. But there were things I knew and you probably don’t about the politics here and what had led up to that dreadful moment. Enough that I had good reason for my dread. Feeling vaguely that if things were interrupted there might be a fight, I snatched up my own gun and dashed down the slope towards the path, waving wildly and trying to hail or head him off. He didn’t see me and couldn’t hear me. I pounded along after him along the path, but he had too long a start. By the time I reached the sycamore, I knew I was too late. He was already half-way down the grove of olives and no mortal runner could reach him before he came to the corner.

“I felt a rage against the fool which a man looks against the background of fate. I saw his lean, pompous figure with the absurd top-hat riding on top of it; and the large ears standing out from his head . . . the large, useless ears. There was something agonizingly grotesque about that unconscious back outlined against the plains of death. For I was certain that the moment he passed the corner that field would be swept by the fire, which would cut across at right angles to his progress. I could think of only one thing to do and I did it. Hayter thought I was mad when I asked him if he had ever hanged a man to prevent his being hanged. That is the sort of practical joke I played. I shot a man to prevent his being shot.

“I put a bullet in his calf and he dropped, about two yards from the corner. I waited a moment and saw that people were coming out of the last houses to pick him up. I did the only thing I really regret. I had a vague idea the house by the sycamore was empty, so I threw the gun over the wall into the garden, and nearly got that poor old ass of a parson into trouble. Then I went home and waited till they summoned me to give evidence about Gregory.”

He concluded with all his normal composure, but the girl was still staring at him with an abnormal attention and even alarm.

“But what was it all about?’ she asked. “Who could have — ?”

“It was one of the best planned things I ever knew,” he said. “I don’t believe I could have proved anything. It would have looked just like an accident.”

“You mean,” she said, “that it wouldn’t have been.”

“As I said before, I don’t want to say much about that now, but . . . Look here, you are the sort of person who likes to think about things. I’ll just ask you to take two things and think about them, and then you can get used to the idea in your own way.

“The first thing is this. I am a Moderate, as I told you; I really am against all the Extremists. But when journalists and jolly fellows in clubs say that, they generally forget that there really are different sorts of Extremists. In practice they think only of revolutionary Extremists. Believe me, the reactionary Extremists are quite as likely to go to extremes. The history of faction fights will show acts of violence by Patricians as well as Plebeians, by Ghibellines as well as Guelphs, by Orangemen as well as Fenians, by Fascists as well as Bolshevists, by the Ku-Klux-Klan as well as the Black Hand. And when a politician comes from London with a compromise in his pocket — it is not only Nationalists who see their plans frustrated.

“The other point is more personal, especially to you. You once told me you feared for the family sanity, merely because you had bad dreams and brooded over things of your own imagination. Believe me, it’s not the imaginative people who become insane. It’s not they who are mad, even when they are morbid. They can always be woken up from bad dreams by broader prospects and brighter visions — because they are imaginative. The men who go mad are unimaginative. The stubborn stoical men who had only room for one idea and take it literally. The sort of man who seems to be silent but stuffed to bursting, congested—”

“I know,” she said hastily; “you needn’t say it, because I believe I understand everything now. Let me tell you two things also; they are shorter; but they have to do with it. My uncle sent me here with an officer who has an order for your release . . . and the Deputy-Governor is going home . . . resignation on the grounds of ill-health.”

“Tallboys is no fool,” said John Hume; “he has guessed.”

She laughed with a little air of embarrassment.

“I’m afraid he has guessed a good many things,” she said.

What the other things were is no necessary part of this story, but Hume proceeded to talk about them at considerable length during the rest of the interview, until the lady herself was moved to a somewhat belated protest. She said she did not believe that he could really be a Moderate after all.

THE HONEST QUACK

I

THE PROLOGUE OF THE TREE

Mr. Walter Windrush, the eminent and eccentric painter and poet, lived in London and had a curious tree in his back garden. This alone would not have provoked the preposterous events narrated here. Many persons, without the excuse of being poets, have planted peculiar vegetables in their back gardens. The two curious facts about this curiosity were, first that he thought it quite remarkable enough to bring crowds from the ends of the earth to look at it, and, second, that if or when the crowds did come to look at it, he would not let them look.

To begin with, he had not planted it at all. Oddly enough, it looked very much as if he had tried to plant it and failed; or possibly tried to pull it up again, and failed again. Cold classical critics said they could understand the pulling up better than the putting in. For it was a grotesque object; a nondescript thing looking stunted or pollarded in the manner recalling Burnham Beeches, but not easily classifiable as vegetation. It was so squat in the trunk that the boughs seemed to spring out of the roots and the roots out of the boughs. The roots also rose clear of the ground, so that light showed through them as through branches, the earth being washed away by a natural spring just behind. But the girth of the whole was very large, and the thing looked rather like a polyp or cuttle-fish radiating in all directions. Sometimes it looked as if some huge hand out of heaven, like the giant in Jack and the Beanstalk, had tried to haul the tree out of the earth by the hair of its head.

Nobody indeed had ever planted this particular garden tree. It had grown like grass; and even like the wild grass of the wildest prairies. It was, in all probability, by far the oldest thing in those parts: there was nothing to prove it was not older than Stonehenge. It had never been planted in anybody’s garden. Everything else had been planted round it. The garden and the garden wall and the house had been planted round it. The street had been planted round it; the suburb had been planted round it. London, in a manner of speaking, had been planted round it. For though the suburb in question was now sunk so deep in the metropolis that nobody ever thought of it as anything but metropolitan, it belonged to a district where the urban expansion had been relatively recent and rapid, and it was not really so very long ago that the strange tree had stood alone on a windy and pathless heath.

The circumstances of its ultimate preservation or captivity were as follows. Nearly half a lifetime before, it happened that Windrush, who was then an art student, was crossing the open common with two companions, one a student of his own age, but attached to the medical and not the artistic section of his own college, the other a somewhat older friend, a businessman whom the young men wished to consult upon a matter of business. They proposed to discuss their business (which was not unconnected with the general incapacity of young students to be businesslike) at the inn of the Three Peacocks on the edge of the common; and the elder man especially showed some impatience to reach its shelter, as the wind was rising and dusk was falling over that rather desolate landscape.

It was at this point that their progress was delayed by the highly exasperating conduct of Walter Windrush. He was moving as rapidly as the rest, when the strange outline of the tree seemed to bring him up all standing. He even raised his hands, not only in a pantomime of amazement unusual in the men of his race, but in gestures that might have been taken for some sort of pagan worship. He spoke in a hushed voice, and pointed, as if drawing their attention to a funeral or some occasion of awe. His scientific friend admitted that the way in which the tree straddled out of the earth was something of a botanical curiosity, but he did not need to be very scientific to discover the cause in the brook or fountain, that broke from the upper ground behind it and had forced its way through the crannies of the roots. He had the curiosity to hop up on one of the high roots and hoist himself up by one of the low branches, and then, remarking that the tree seemed to be half hollow, turned as if to resume his march. The commercial gentleman had already been waiting with some impatience to do so. But Walter Windrush could not be awakened from his trance of admiration. He continued to walk round and round the tree, to stare down into the straggling pools of water and then up to the wide cup or nest formed by the crown of boughs.

"At first," he said at last, "I did not know what had happened to me. Now I understand."

"Can't say I do," said his friend shortly, "unless it's going dotty. How long are you going to hang about here?"

Windrush did not answer immediately; then he said:

"Don't you know that all poets and painters and people like me are naturally Communists? And don't you know that, for the same reason, we're all naturally vagabonds?"

"I confess," said their business adviser rather grimly, "that some of your recent financial antics might appeal to the Communists. But as for vagabonds, I imagine that vagabonds at least have the virtue of getting a move on."

"You don't understand me," said Windrush with a strange sort of dreamy patience; "I mean that I'm not a Communist now. I'm not a vagabond any more."

There was a staring silence and then he said in the same tone:

"I never before in all my life saw anything that I wanted to possess."

"Do you really mean," expostulated the other, "that you would like to possess this one rotten old tree?"

Windrush went on as if the other had not spoken. "I have never before seen, in all my wanderings, any place where I wanted to stop and make my home. There cannot be anywhere in the world anything like that fantasia of earth and sky and water; built upon bridges like Venice, and letting daylight peer through its caverns like hell in Milton's poem; cloven as if by Alph the subterranean river and rising stark and clear of the clinging earth like the dead at the trump of doom. I have never seen anything like it. I do not really want to see anything else."

There was perhaps some excuse for his freak of imagination, in the momentary conditions that added mystery to the freak of nature. The stormy sky above the heath had changed from grey to purple, and from that to a sort of sombre Indian red which only brightened at the horizon in a single scarlet strip of sunset. Against this background the black and bizarre outline of the tree had really the appearance of something more mystical than a natural object; as if a tree were trying to walk or a monster from the waters rising in a wild effort to fly. But even if Windrush's companions had been more sympathetic with such moods than they were, they would hardly have been prepared for the finality with which he flung himself down on a clump of turf beside the brook and took out a pipe and tobacco pouch, rather as if he had just sat down in an arm-chair at the club.

“May I ask what you are doing?” asked his friend.

“I am acquiring squatter’s rights,” said the other.

They both besieged him with remonstrances, and it became more and more apparent to the others that he was perfectly serious, even if he was not perfectly sane. The businessman indicated to him in a brisk manner that, if he was really and truly interested in this absurd scrap of wilderness, he would be wiser to consult the agents of the estate of which it formed a part, as he would not get any “squatter’s rights” in half a century. To the extreme astonishment of the adviser, the poet thanked him quite gravely for the advice and took out a piece of paper to note down the agent’s name and address.

“Meanwhile,” said the commercial gentleman with great decision, “as this does not seem to me at all an agreeable place to squat in, you will have to come and squat in the Three Peacocks if you want to do any further business with me.”

“Don’t be a fool, Windrush,” said his other companion sharply, “you can’t really want to be left here all night.”

“That happens to be exactly what I do want,” replied Windrush. “I have seen the sun sink in my own private pool, and I want to see the moon rise out of it. You can’t blame a prospective purchaser for testing the property under all conditions.”

The business friend had already turned away, and his dark, sturdy figure, expressing scorn in the very line of its back, had disappeared behind the sprawling tree. The other man lingered a moment longer, but in the face of the irrational rationality of the last remark, he also followed in the same path. He had gone about six yards and was also turning round by the tree, when the poet’s whole manner suddenly altered. He threw down his pipe with an apologetic word and pursued his friends with an entirely new style and gesture, bowing with sweeping motions of courtesy.

“I beg your pardon,” he said magnificently; “I do hope you will come down to my little place again. I fear I have failed in hospitality.”

After he had himself lingered a moment or two by the tree and then resumed his seat on the bank, he sat gazing in a fascinated manner at the pools before him which, in the last intensity of sunset, gleamed like lakes of blood. He actually remained thus for many hours, seeing the red pools turn black with night and white with moonlight; as if he were indeed some Hindoo hermit who had gone into a stony ecstasy. But when he first moved on the following morning, he seemed filled with a far more novel and surprising practicality. He betook himself to the agents of the estate; he explained and negotiated for several months, and at length became the actual legal possessor of about two acres of ground surrounding his favourite freak of vegetation, and proceeded to fence it in with the most mathematical rigidity, like a settler staking out a claim in a desert. The rest of his extraordinary enterprise was all the more extraordinary for being comparatively ordinary. He built a small house on the land; he betook himself to habits of literary industry and respectability which soon enabled him to turn it into a very presentable country dwelling. In due course he even completed his social solidification by marrying a wife, who died after presenting him with one child, a daughter. The daughter grew up happily enough in these rustic but not rude conditions, and the life of Mr. Walter Windrush continued in sufficient serenity, until the coming of the great tragedy of his later life.

The name of that tragedy was London. The endless expansion of the city came crawling over those hills and commons like a rising sea, and the rest of his history, or of that part of his history, was entirely concerned with his moods of defiance and measures of defence in the face of so incongruous a deluge. He swore by all the Muses that if this loathsome labyrinth of ugliness and vulgarity must indeed surround his sacred tree and his secret garden, at least it should not touch them. He erected a ridiculously high wall all round the spot; he observed the utmost ceremony about admitting anyone into it, and indeed, towards the end, the ceremony rather hardened into suspicion. Some unwary guests had treated the garden as if it were a garden; nay, even the tree as if it were a tree. And as it was his boast that this his hermitage was the last free space of the earth left in England, and the refuge of a poetry everywhere else conquered by prose, he fell latterly into a habit of locking the door into the garden and putting the key in his pocket. In every other aspect of life he was quite hospitable and humane; he gave his daughter a very good time in every other direction, but he tended more and more to treating this place as sacred to his own solitude, and through long days and nights nothing ever stirred in that strange enclosure but its lonely master walking round and round his tree.

II

THE MAN WITH THE BLACK BAG

Enid Windrush, a very good-looking young woman with a brilliant shock of light hair and a profile of the eager and sanguine sort, had fallen behind her companion in the walk up the steep street and stopped to make a small purchase at a small confectioner’s shop. In front of her the road rose in an abrupt white curve across a hill and the open spaces of a suburban park. The small white rim of what was obviously a colossal white cloud barely showed above the ridge, producing one of those rare effects that almost persuade the natural man, in spite of all the proofs adduced for it, that the world is round. Against that background of blue sky, white road and white rim of cloud, only two human figures happened at that moment to appear. They appeared to be totally disconnected and indeed were in every possible point dissimilar. And yet, a moment afterwards, she stared and started hastily forward. For she saw enacted, on that high place in the broad sunlight, what seemed to be one of the most inexplicable cases of assault and battery in all the annals of crime.

One of the men in question was tall and bearded, with rather long hair under a wide hat; he wore loose clothes and was walking with loose strides in the sunny centre of the thoroughfare. Just before he crested the ridge he turned and looked idly backwards down the road he had climbed. The other man was moving decorously along the pavement and appeared to be in every way a more decorous and even duller sort of person. He wore a top-hat and his compact but not conspicuous figure was clad neatly in dark clothes; he was walking briskly and rapidly, but very quietly, and he carried a small black bag. He might have been a City clerk who prided himself on being punctual, but feared he was a little late. Anyhow, he seemed to look straight in front of him and to take no interest in anything but his goal.

Quite suddenly he turned at right angles from the pavement, hurled himself, bag and all, into the middle of the road and appeared to pin or throttle the gentleman with the beard and the large hat. He was the shorter man of the two, but his spring was like a black cat’s and he had all the advantage of youthful energy and the surprise. The tall man went staggering backwards towards the opposite pavement, but the next moment he had broken away from his mysterious enemy and started hitting back at him with refreshing vigour. At this moment a car coming from over the hill obscured for a moment the girl's view of the conflict, and when the space was clear again, it underwent yet a third change. The man in black, whose top-hat was now stuck somewhat askew on his head, but who still feverishly clasped his bag, appeared to be trying to break contact, in the military phrase, and to be disinclined to continue what he had so wantonly begun. He retreated slightly, waving hand and bag in what not even a girl, at such a distance, could mistake for motions of pugilism; they appeared to be rather motions of expostulation. As, however, the tall man, now hatless and with hair and beard flying, seemed bent on pursuing his vengeance, the other suddenly hurled away his bag, tucked up his neat cuff's and proceeded to slog into the other in an entirely new, vigorous and scientific manner. All this had taken less than half a minute to happen, but by this time the girl was running up the street as fast as she could, leaving a staring confectioner with a small brown-paper parcel dangling from his finger. For, as it happened, Miss Enid Windrush took a certain interest in the tall man with the long beard, an interest which many will rightly rebuke as antiquated and superstitious, but from which she had never been able entirely to emancipate herself. He was her father.

By the time she arrived on the scene, or possibly because she had arrived on the scene, the violence of the pantomime had somewhat abated, but both sides were still panting and snorting with the passions of war. The wearer of the top-hat, on closer inspection, revealed himself as a young man with dark hair, whose square face and square shoulders had a touch of the Napoleonic; for the rest he looked quite respectable and rather reticent than otherwise, and there was certainly nothing about him to explain his antic of attack.

Nor indeed did he appear to think that the explanation was required from him.

"Well!" he said, breathing hard, "of all the blasted old fools! . . . Of all the damned doddering old donkeys. . . ."

"This man," declared Windrush with fiery hauteur, "criminally assaulted me in the middle of the road for no reason whatever and—"

"That's what he says!" cried the young man in a sort of triumphant derision. "For no reason whatever! And in the middle of the road! Oh, my green-eyed grandmother!"

“Well, what reason?” began Miss Windrush, making an attempt to intervene.

“Why, because he was in the middle of the road, of course!” exploded the young man. “He’d have been in the middle of Kensal Green Cemetery pretty soon. And, speaking generally, I should say he ought to be in the middle of Hanwell Asylum now. He must have escaped from there, I should think, to go stravaging up the middle of a modern road like that, and turning his back to admire the landscape, as if he were alone in the Sahara. Why, every reasonably modern village idiot knows that the motorists can’t see what’s on the other side of this hill when they come over it, and if I hadn’t happened to hear the car—”

“The car!” said the artist with a grave and severe astonishment, as one who convicts a child of romancing. “What car?” He turned round in a lordly manner and surveyed the street. “Where is this car?” he said sarcastically.

“By the rate it was going at, I should say it was about seven miles away,” said the other.

“Why, of course it’s quite true,” said Enid, as a light broke upon her. “There was a car that came very fast over the hill, just as you—”

“Just as I committed my criminal assault,” said the young man in the top-hat.

Walter Windrush was a gentleman and, what is by no means always the same thing, a man who valued a reputation for handsome behaviour. But he would have been more than human, if he had found it easy to adjust rapidly his relations to a gentleman, who had first flung him across the road and then, on his retaliating, started pommelling him like a pugilist, and to behold instantly in the same being, and veiled in the same face and form, a beloved friend and saviour to whom he must now dedicate his whole life in gratitude. His acknowledgements were a little dazed and halting, but his daughter was in a position to be more magnanimous and hearty. Upon rational reconsideration, she rather liked the look of the young man, for neatness and respectability do not always displease ladies who have seen a good deal of the sublime liberty of the artistic life. Also, she had not been seized suddenly by the throat in the middle of the road.

Cards and courtesies began to be exchanged; the young man learned with surprise that he had insulted or rescued a distinguished man of letters; and the other learned that his insulter or rescuer was a young doctor, whose brass plate they had seen somewhere in the neighbourhood, inscribed with the name of John Judson.

"Oh, if you're a doctor," said the poet, joking in a rather jerky fashion, "I'm sure you've been guilty of grossly unprofessional conduct. You ought to be reported to the Medical Council for taking the bread out of my doctor's mouth. I thought you medical men only stopped to count the accidents in the street and put them down on the credit side of the ledger. Why, if I had been half killed with the car, you could have finished me off with an operation."

It seemed destined, from the first, that these two somewhat controversial characters should always say the wrong thing to each other. The young doctor smiled grimly, but there was a gleam of battle in his eye as he answered:

"Oh, I think we generally try to save anybody, in the street or the gutter or anywhere. Of course I didn't know I was saving a poet; I thought I was only saving an ordinary useful citizen."

It must be admitted with regret that this was a sample of the common conversations between the two. And, curiously enough, those conversations became rather common. To all appearance, they met only to argue, and yet they were always meeting. For some reason or other, Dr. Judson was continually coming round to the poet's house on one pretext or another, and the poet never failed in hospitality, though it had so strange a ring of hostility. It may be explained in part by the fact that each had met for the first time his complete antithesis and his completely convinced antagonist. Windrush was a man in the old tradition of Shelley or Walt Whitman. He was a poet to whom poetry seemed almost synonymous with liberty. If he had enclosed a wild tree in a tame suburban garden, it was by his account that it might be the last thing really allowed to grow wild. If he walked in a solitary path secluded by high walls, it was apparently by the instinct that has led many a squire to fence in a wilderness and call it a park. He liked loneliness because it was the only perfect form of doing as he liked. He regarded all the mechanical civilization that had spread around him as a mere materialistic slavery, and, as far as possible, treated it as if it were not there; even, as we have seen, to the extent of standing in the middle of a main road with his back to a motor-car.

Dr. Judson was the sort of man of whom his more foolish friends say that he will get on, because he believes in himself. This was probably a slander on him. He did not merely believe in himself; he believed in things requiring far more faith; in things which some think far more incredible and difficult to believe. He believed in modern organization and machinery and the division of labour and the authority of the specialist. Above all, he believed in his job; in his art and science and profession. He was one of an advanced school, propounding many daring theories, especially in the department of psychology and psycho-analysis. Enid Windrush began to notice his name appended to letters in the ordinary papers, and then to articles in the scientific papers. He had the simplicity to carry his highly modern monomanias into private life, and propounded them to her for hours at a time, striding up and down the artistic drawing-room, while Windrush was wandering round his private garden engaged in perennial tree-worship. The walking up and down was characteristic, for the second definite impression which Judson produced, after the impression of professional primness and dullness of attire, was the impression of a bubbling and even restless energy. Sometimes he had, with characteristic directness, broken out in remonstrance against the poet himself upon his own poetical eccentricity: the Tree, which the poet always talked of as the type of radiating energy in the universe.

"But what's the *good* of it?" Judson would cry out of the depths of dark exasperation. "What's the *use* of having a thing like that?"

"Why, no use whatever," replied his host. "I suppose it is quite useless as you understand use. But even if art and poetry have no use, it does not follow that they have no value."

"But look here," the doctor would start in again, scowling painfully. "I don't see the value of it as art and poetry — let alone reason or sense. What's the beauty of one dingy old tree stuck in the middle of bricks and mortar? Why, if you abolished it, you'd have room for a garage and you could go and see all the woods and forests in England — every blessed tree between Cornwall and Caithness."

"Yes," retorted Windrush, "and wherever I went, I should see petrol-pumps instead of trees. That is the logical end of your great progress of science and reason — and a damned illogical end to a damned unreasonable progress. Every spot of England is to be covered with petrol stations, so that people can travel about and see more petrol stations."

"It's only a question of knowing their way about when they travel about," insisted the doctor. "People born in the motoring age have got a new motor-sense, and they don’t mind these things so much as you think. I suppose that’s the real difference between the generations.”

“All right,” said the elder gentleman tartly. “Let us say you have all the motor-sense, and we have all the horse-sense.”

“Well,” said the other, also with a sharpened accent. “If you’d had a little more motor-sense, or any sort of sense, you wouldn’t have been so bally near killed the other day.”

“If there were no motors at all,” answered the poet calmly, “there would have been nothing to kill me.”

And then Dr. Judson would lose his temper and say the poet was cracked, and then he would apologize to the poet’s daughter and say that of course the poet was a gentleman of the old school and had a right to be rather old-fashioned. But she, he would assert, with more earnest appeal, ought to have more sympathy with the future and the new hopes of the world. Then he would leave the house boiling with protests and arguing with invisible persons all the way home. For he really was a man profoundly convinced of the prospects and prophesies of science. He had a great many theories of his own, which he was only too anxious to throw out to the world in general. He was accused by his more playful friends of inventing diseases that nobody had ever experienced, in order to cure them by discoveries that nobody could ever explain. Superficially, he was indeed one with all the faults of a man of action, including the temptation of ambition. But for all that, there was a dark but busy cell in his inmost brain, where thought for thought’s sake went on in an almost dangerous degree of turmoil and intensity. Anyone who could have looked into that dim whirlpool might have guessed that there could arise out of it, in some strange hour of stress, a thing like a monster.

Enid Windrush was a sufficient contrast to this intellectualism and secrecy, and seemed always walking in the sunlight. She was healthy, hearty and athletic, and in her tastes she might have been the shining incarnation of her father’s frustrated love of the open country and the tall trees. She was more conscious of her body than her soul, and expressed in the suburban substitutes of tennis and golf and the swimming-bath, what might have been a native love of country sports. And yet it may be that in her also there was, at odd moments, a touch of her father’s more transcendental fancy. Anyhow, it is true that long afterwards, when this story was ended, she stood again in the sunlight and looked back at those earlier days through a storm of black and brain-racking mysteries, and of horror truly piled upon horror. And looking back at this beginning of her story, she wondered if there were something in the old notion of omens and prefiguring signs. She wondered whether the whole of her riddle would not have been clear to her, from first to last, if she could have read it in those two dark figures dancing and fighting on the sunlit road against the white cloud; like two living letters of an alphabet struggling to spell out a word.

III

THE TRESPASSER IN THE GARDEN

For various causes, which accumulated in his dark and brooding brain for the next day or two, Dr. Judson eventually summoned up all his courage and decided to go and consult Doone.

That he referred to him in his mind in this fashion indicated no familiarity, but rather the reverse of familiarity. The person in question had, of course, passed at some period through the more or less human phases of being Mr. Doone and Dr. Doone and then Professor Doone, before he rose into the higher magnificence of being Doone. Men said Doone just as men said Darwin. It soon became something of an affectation, if not an affront, to say Professor Darwin or Mr. Charles Darwin. And it was now fully twenty years since Professor Doone had published the great work on the parallel diseases of anthropoids and men, which had made him the most famous scientific man in England, and one of the four or five most famous in Europe. But Judson had been one of his pupils when he was still practising medicine at the head of a great hospital. And Judson fancied that the fact might give him a slight advantage in one of those incessant arguments of his, in which the name of Doone had cropped up in a disputed point. To explain how it had cropped up, and how it had come to seem so important, it is necessary to return once more (after the habit of Dr. Judson) to the house of the poet Windrush.

When last Dr. Judson had paid a call there, he had found the one thing in the world calculated to annoy him more than he was already annoyed. He had, in fact, found another young man installed in the family circle, and learned that he was a next-door neighbour who very frequently dropped in for a chat. It may already have been darkly hinted that, whatever were the real sins or virtues of Dr. Judson (and he was full of many rather deep and unexplored possibilities) he did not possess a very good temper. He chose, for some mysterious reason or other, to take a dislike to the other young man. He did not like the way in which two wisps of his long, fair hair lay on his cheek in a suggestion of incipient side whiskers; he did not like the way in which he smiled politely while other people were talking. He did not like the way he talked himself, in a large and indifferent manner, about art, science or sport as if all subjects were equally important or unimportant; or the way in which he apologized alternately to the poet and the doctor for doing so. Lastly, the doctor faintly disapproved of the fact that the visitor was about two and a half inches taller than himself, and also of the (infernally affected) stoop with which he almost redressed the difference. If the doctor had known as much about his own psychology as he did about everybody else's, he might have understood the symptoms better. There is normally only one condition in which a man dislikes another man for all that is repulsive and all that is attractive about him.

The name of the gentleman from next door appeared to be Wilmot, and there was nothing to indicate that he had anything to do in the world except collect impressions of a cultivated sort. He was interested in poetry, which might serve to explain his having found favour with the poet. Unfortunately, he was also interested in science; and this did not by any means find favour with the scientific man. There is nothing that exasperates a passionate specialist and believer in specialism so much as somebody graciously informing him of the elements of his own subject, especially when (as sometimes happens) they are the elements which the specialist himself started to explode and abolish ten years before. The doctor's protest was vehement to the verge of rudeness, and he declared that certain notions about Arboreal Man had been exposed as nonsense when Doone first began to write. It need hardly be said that Doone, being a great man of science, was almost universally praised in the newspapers for saying something very like the opposite of what he actually said in his books and lectures. Judson had attended the lectures; Judson had read the books; but Wilmot had read the newspapers. This naturally gave Wilmot a great advantage in discussion before any modern cultivated audience.

The debate had arisen out of a chance boast of the poet touching his early experiments as a painter. He showed them some old rhythmic designs of a decorative sort; and said he had often practised drawing with both hands simultaneously; and had sometimes begun to detect the beginnings of a difference or independence in the action of the two hands.

“So you might end up, I suppose,” said Wilmot smiling, “by drawing a caricature of your publisher with one hand while you worked out the details of a piece of town-planning with the other.”

“A new version,” said Judson rather grimly, “of not letting your left hand know what your right hand doeth. If you ask me, I should say it was a damned dangerous trick.”

“I should have thought,” said the strange gentleman languidly, “that your friend Doone would have approved of a man using two hands, since his sacred ancestor the monkey actually uses four.”

Judson sprang up in his explosive way. “Doone deals with the brains of men and monkeys, and uses his own like a man,” he said. “I can’t help it if some men prefer to use theirs like monkeys.”

When he had gone, Windrush appeared not a little annoyed with such abrupt manners, though Wilmot was entirely serene.

“That young man is becoming insufferable,” said the artist. “He turns every talk into an argument and every argument into a quarrel. What the devil does it matter to anybody what Doone really said?”

To the scowling Dr. Judson, however, it did evidently matter very much what Doone really said. It mattered so much that the doctor (as already indicated) took the trouble to cross the town in order to hear Doone really say it. Perhaps there was something like a touch of morbidity in his concentration in proving himself right on such a point, and certainly he was the sort of man who cannot bear to leave an argument unanswered; perhaps he had other motives or reasons mixed up in his mind. Anyhow, he went off stormily in the direction of that scientific shrine or tribunal, leaving Windrush angry, Wilmot supercilious and Enid puzzled and pained.

The great West End mansion of Dr. Doone, with its classic and pillared portico and rather funereal blinds, did not daunt the younger doctor as he ran resolutely up the steps and rang vigorously at the bell. He was shown into the great man’s study and after a few sentences succeeded in recalling himself and receiving a mildly benevolent recognition. The great Dr. Doone was a very handsome old gentleman with curly white hair and a hooked nose, and did not look much older than the numerous portraits that appeared in bookish weeklies illustrating the conflict of Religion and Science. It did not take Judson long to verify the accuracy of his version of the original Doone Theory. But all the time they were talking, the dark and restless eyes of the young doctor were darting about the room, probing every corner, in endless professional curiosity about the progress of science. He saw the stacks of new books and magazines lying on the table as they had arrived by post; he even automatically turned over the pages of a few of them, while his eye would wander and run along the serried ranks of the bookcases, and Doone went on talking, as old men will, of old friends and of old enemies.

"It was that egregious Grossmark," he was saying with reawakening animation, "who made the same absurd muddle of my meaning. Do you remember Grossmark? Of all the extraordinary examples of what concerted boosting can do—"

"Rather like the way Cubbitt is being boosted now," said Judson.

"I dare say," said Doone rather irritably. "But Grossmark really made a spectacle of himself on the Arboreal question. He did not answer a single one of my points, except with that absurd quibble about the word Eocene. Branders was better; Branders had made some real contribution in his time, though he could not quite see that his time was past. But Grossmark — well, really!"

And Dr. Doone settled himself back in his arm-chair and laughed genially.

"Well," said Judson, "I am much obliged to you. I knew I should learn a great deal if I came here."

"Not at all," said the great man, rising and shaking hands. "You say you have been discussing it with Windrush, the landscape painter, I think. I met him years ago, but he would hardly remember me. An able man; but eccentric, very eccentric."

Dr. John Judson came away from the house with a very thoughtful expression and seemed to be revolving rather more than might have appeared to have passed at the interview. He had no very clear intention of going back in triumph to the Windrush abode, armed with the thunderbolts of Doone, but he had a general and half-conscious tendency to drift in that direction in any case. And before his own intentions were clear, he found himself in front of the house and saw something which brought him to a standstill, staring up at it with a sort of stolid suspicion. For some instants he stood quite motionless, then crossed the road with catlike swiftness and peered round the corner of the house.

Night had fallen and a large moon painted everything with pale colours. The house or bungalow that the landscape-painter had originally built in an open landscape was now wedged in a row of villas, though it retained something of a quaint or uncouth outline of its own. It almost seemed to be, rather awkwardly, turning its back upon the street. Perhaps this hint of secrecy was only suggested by its own absurd secret, for just behind it could be seen the high spiked walls of the garden like the castellated walls of some pantomime prison. Only one crack gave a green glimpse of the enclosed shrubbery, where, on one side of the house, was a high narrow gate of a lattice pattern, which was always kept locked; but through the loopholes the stranger in the street could just see the glimmer of moonlight on the leaves. But the stranger in the street (if Dr. Judson may be so described) could at this moment see something else, and something that surprised him very much.

A long, slim figure, dark against the moonshine, was most unmistakably using this sort of lattice as a ladder. He was scaling it swiftly from inside, with long-legged sinuous movements that rather recalled the monkeys that had formed the topic of conversation. He seemed, however, to be an unusually tall monkey and when he came to the top rung of his ladder — towering as if he might tip over into the street — the wind of that high place took two long locks of his hair and waved them fantastically, as if he were a sort of demon with two horns which he could move like ears. But that last touch, in which some might find the culmination of the uncanny, the common sense of Dr. Judson found reality and recognition. He was well acquainted with those two exceedingly annoying wisps of hair. He had seen them flopping (as he would have illiberally expressed it) like two womanish whiskers on the countenance of the condescending Mr. Wilmot. And sure enough, the condescending Mr. Wilmot, alighting with a graceful leap, greeted him with no shade of gloom in his condescension.

"What the devil are you doing there?" asked Judson angrily.

"Why, it's the doctor!" said the other, with an air of pleased surprise. "Do I seem to be a case *de lunatico inquirendo*? I had forgotten that it must be quite a case for a psychologist."

"It seems to me to be a case for a policeman," said Dr. Judson. "May I ask what you are doing in Windrush's garden, which he likes to keep locked up — and anyhow, why you should leave it in that fashion?"

"I might very well ask why you should ask," replied the other pleasantly. "Unless I am curiously misinformed, you are not Mr. Walter Windrush any more than I am. But I assure you I don't want to quarrel, Dr. Judson."

"You are taking a rum way to avoid it," said the doctor in a bellicose manner.

The mysterious Mr. Wilmot drew near in a curious confidential manner that was quite new; his rather foolish airs and graces had fallen from him and he said, lowering his voice to a tone of great earnestness:

"I can assure you, doctor, that I have excellent authority, the best possible authority, for being in Windrush's garden."

And with that the mystic neighbour appeared to melt into the shadows, presumably eventually vanishing into his own house next door, and Dr. Judson turned abruptly and, walking up to the front door of the Windrush house, furiously rang the bell.

Mr. Windrush was not at home. He had gone out to some grand banquet of artistic celebrities and would not be home till late. But the conduct of Dr. Judson was certainly rather odd and rude; so much so that the lady who received him had a momentary and horrible feeling that he might have been drinking, incongruous as this was with the hard hygienic routine of his existence. He sat down in the drawing-room, opposite Enid Windrush; he sat down suddenly and resolutely as if resolved to say something and then said nothing. He was as motionless as a dark image and yet he fumed; she could only think of the metaphor that he smouldered. She had never realized before how his broad, round head seemed to bulge at the temples and over the eyebrows; how his clean-shaven jaws and chin seemed to swell implacably and what a glow of dark emotions could look out of his eyes. And all the time he seemed doubly grotesque because his square, strong hands were clasped on the head of an umbrella, the emblem of his precise and prosaic life. She waited, rather as she would have sat watching a round, black bomb that was ticking and smoking in the parlour.

At last he said in a harsh voice:

"I wish I could see that tree your father's so fond of."

"I'm afraid that's impossible," she said. "It's really the only point he is very particular about. He says he would like every other man to have a favourite tree — meaning a place of solitude for himself. But he says he won't lend anybody else his tree any more than his toothbrush."

“This is all nonsense,” said the doctor gruffly. “What would he do if I just jumped over a wall, or somehow went into his garden?”

“I’m awfully sorry,” she said in a wavering voice, “but if you came into his garden, you wouldn’t ever come again into his house.”

Judson sprang to his feet and she felt somehow that the last click had sounded before the catch and the detonation.

“And yet he allows Mr. Wilmot to go into his garden. The gentleman seems privileged in many ways.”

Enid sat staring at him for a few seconds without speech. “Allows Mr. Wilmot to go into his garden!” she repeated.

“Thank God for that,” said the doctor. “You don’t seem to know anything about it, anyhow. Wilmot told me he had the very best authority, and I naturally thought of your authority or your father’s authority. But, of course, it’s just possible . . . . Here, wait a minute. . . . I’ll let you know later. . . . Your father will forbid me the house! Will he?”

And with that, this far from soothing medical practitioner bolted from the house as abruptly as he had come into it. It struck her that he must have a remarkable bedside manner.

Enid dined alone, very thoughtfully revolving very complex and even contradictory criticisms of this extraordinary young man. Then her thoughts went off to her father and his very different sort of unconventionality, and something led her to make her way to his study and studio at the back of the house, jutting out into the garden. Here were the large scrawled canvases with the unfinished sketches about which the argument had raged the day before, and she looked at them uneasily, remembering the controversial extremes to which such things could give rise. She herself was of a straightforward and very sane type of intelligence; and could no more see anything to quarrel about in such things than she could see metaphysics in a wallpaper or morals in a Turkey carpet. But the atmosphere of debate disturbed her, partly because it disturbed her father; and she looked rather moodily out of the trench windows at the extreme end of the studio, into the gloom of the secluded garden.

At first she was subconsciously puzzled that there should be anything like a breeze on that clear moonlit night. She gradually awoke to the realization that nothing was moving in the garden except the one thing in its centre; the uncouth and sprawling outline of the nameless tree. She had an instant of babyish bogy feeling in the notion that it could move of itself like an animal, or create its own wind like a giant fan. Then she saw that its shape was changed, as if a new branch had sprouted, and then saw that a human figure was swinging upon it. The figure swung and dropped in the manner of a monkey and then advanced towards the window in the recognizable outline of a man. As it did so, all lesser thoughts vanished, and she knew it was not her father and not Mr. Wilmot from next door. An increasing but incomprehensible terror took hold of her, as when the faces of friends change in a bad dream. John Judson came close up to the closed window and spoke, but she could not hear what he said. All nightmare was in that soundless moving mouth against that invisible film. It was as if he were dumb like a fish, floating up to a porthole, and his face was as pale as the underside of the deep-sea fishes.

The windows giving on to the garden were locked, like all such exits, but she knew where her father kept the keys, and in a moment they were open. Her indignant greeting was stopped on her lips, for Judson cried, in a hoarse voice she had never heard from any human being:

"Your father . . . he must be mad."

He stopped and seemed startled at his own words. Then he put his hands to his bulging brows, as if clutching his short, dark hair, and after a silence said, but with a different emphasis: "He *must* be mad."

Enid's instinct told her that he had said two quite different things, even in repeating the same words. But it was long before she came to understand the difference between those two exclamations, or what had happened between them.

IV

THE DISEASE OF DUODIAPSYCHOSIS

Enid Windrush was a human being; a very human being. She had several shades and different degrees of indignation, only on the present occasion she had them all at once. She was angry because a visitor turned up at that time of night and entered by the window instead of the door; she was angry that a person for whom she had felt some regard should behave like a cat-burglar; she was angry that her father's wishes should be scornfully disregarded; she was angry at being frightened, and more angry at seeing no sense even in the occasion of the fright. But she was human, and was perhaps most angry of all at the fact that the intruder did not even answer or acknowledge any of her expressions of anger. He sat with his elbows on his knees and his hands clutching his bursting temples, and it was long before there came from him even the impatient reply: “Can’t you see I’m thinking?”

Then he jumped up in his energetic way and ran to one of the large, unfinished pictures and peered into it. Then, equally feverishly, he examined another and then another. Then he turned on her a face about as reassuring as a skull and cross-bones, and said:

“I am greatly grieved to say it, Miss Windrush. In plain words, your father is suffering from Duodiapsychosis.”

“Is that your notion of plain words?” she asked.

He added in a low, hoarse voice: “It began as an example of Arboreal Atavism.”

It is an error for the man of science to lapse into being intelligible. The last two words were sufficiently familiar, in an age of popular science, to cause the lady to leap up like a leaping flame.

“Have you the impudence to suggest,” she cried, “that my father ever wanted to live in a tree like a monkey?”

“What other explanation is there?” he said gloomily. “This is a very painful business; but the hypothesis clearly covers the facts. Why should he wish always to be alone with the tree, unless his dealings with it were more grotesque than seemed suitable to his social dignity? — you know what this suburb is like! For that matter, his own horror of the suburb, his own quite exaggerated horror of towns, his quite feverish and fanatical yearning for woodlands and wild country — what can all this mean except the same Arboreal Atavism? For that matter, what else can explain the whole story — the story of how he found the tree and fixed on the tree? What was the nature of that ungovernable craving that first surged up in him at the very sight of the tree? An appetite as powerful as that must have come out of the depths of nature, out of the very roots of the evolutionary origin of man. It can only have been an anthropoid appetite. It is a melancholy but most convincing example of Doone’s Law.”

“What is all this nonsense?” cried Enid. “Do you imagine my father had never seen a tree before?”

"You must remember," replied the other in the same hollow and hopeless voice, "the peculiar features of the tree. It might have been designed to stimulate the faint memories of the original home of man. It is a tree that seems all branches, of which the very roots are like branches, and invite the climber with a hundred footholds. These primary promptings or fundamental instincts would have been plain enough in any case but unfortunately the case has since grown more complex. It has developed into a case of Semi-Quadrumanous Ambidexterity."

"That's not what you said before," she said suspiciously.

"I admit," he said, with a shudder, "that it is in a sense a discovery of my own."

"And I suppose," she said, "you are so fond of your horrible discoveries that you would sacrifice anybody to them — my father or me."

"Not sacrifice you. Save you," said Judson, and shuddered again. Then he mastered himself with an effort, and went on in the same maddening mechanical tone like that of a lecturer.

"The anthropoid reaction carries with it an attempt to recover the use of all the limbs equally, in the monkey fashion. This leads to experiments in ambidexterity like those he himself admitted. He tried to draw and paint with both hands. At a later stage he would probably attempt also to paint with his feet."

They stared across at each other; it measures the horror of that interview that neither of them laughed.

"The result," went on the doctor, "the really dangerous result lies in a tendency to separation between the functions. Such ambidexterity is not natural to man in his existing evolutionary stage and may lead to a schism between the lobes of the brain. One part of the mind may become unconscious of what is attempted by the other part. Such a person is not responsible . . . and really should be under supervision."

"I will not believe a word of all this," said the lady angrily.

He lifted one finger and pointed in a sombre manner at the sombre canvases and frames of brown paper that hung above them, on which were traced in vortical lines and lurid colours the visions of the ambidextrous artist.

"Look at those pictures," he said. "Look at them long enough and you will see exactly what I mean — and what they mean. The tree-motive is repeated again and again like a monomania; for a tree has a radiating and centrifugal pattern that suggests the waving of both hands at once, with a brush in each. But a tree is not a wheel — there would be less harm in a wheel. Though a tree has branches on each side, they are not the same on each side. And that is where the curse and the creeping peril begins.”

This time there was a deadly silence, which he himself broke by going on with the lecture.

“The attempt to render the variation of branches by simultaneous ambidextrous action leads to a dissociation of cerebral unity and continuity, a breach of responsible moral control and co-ordinated consecutive conservation—”

In the black storm of her mind she had a lightning blaze of intuition and said:

“Is this a sort of revenge?”

He stopped in the very middle of a polysyllable and turned pale to the lips.

“Have you come to the end of your long words, you liar and quack and mountebank?” she cried in a tempest of indescribable fury. “Do you think I don’t know why you’re trying to make out my father isn’t responsible? Because I told you he could turn you out of the house . . . because . . .”

The pale lips seemed to move as if with a grin of agony: “And why should I mind that?”

“Because,” she began and then stopped dead. An abyss had opened in herself into which she did not look. For a moment he sat on the sofa stiff as a corpse and then suddenly the corpse came to life.

“Yes!” he cried, leaping up. “You are right! It is you. It is you all the time! How can I leave you alone with him? You must believe me! I tell you the man is mad.” He cried out suddenly in a new and ringing voice: “I swear to God I am afraid he will kill you! And how should I live after that?”

She was so astounded at this burst of passion after all the pedantry, that for the first time something broke or wavered in her hard voice and she could only say: “If it is me you are thinking about, you must leave him alone.”

And with that a sort of stony detachment suddenly settled back upon him and he said, in a voice that seemed a hundred miles away: “You forget that I am a doctor. I have in any case a duty to the public.”

“And now I know you are a skunk and a scoundrel,” she said. “They always have a duty to the public.”

And then, in the silence that followed, they both heard the sounds which could alone, perhaps, have aroused them from their dumb mutual defiance. A long, light and swinging step was heard down the corridors, and the light humming of some post-prandial song, told Enid with sufficient clearness who had returned, and the next moment Walter Windrush stood in the room, looking festive and rather magnificent in evening dress. He was a tall and handsome old gentleman, and before him the figure of the sullen doctor looked not only square but almost squat. But when the artist looked across his studio, he saw the windows open and the festivity faded from his face.

"I have just walked through your garden," said the doctor in a soft voice.

"Then you will kindly walk out of my house," said the artist.

He had turned pale with anger or some other passion, but he spoke clearly and firmly. After a silence he said: "I must ask you to cease from any communications with me and my family."

Judson started and stepped forward with a violent gesture which he checked as he made it. But his voice broke out of him like something beyond his control.

"You say I am to go out of this house. I say it is you who shall go out of this house!"

Then, as if grinding his teeth, he added with what seemed inconceivable intellectual cruelty: "I am going to have you certified as a lunatic."

He walked furiously out of the room towards the front door, and Windrush turned to his daughter. She was staring at him with wide eyes, but her colour was such that he thought, for the fraction of an instant, that she was dead.

Of the next frightful forty-eight hours in which the threat was carried out with all its consequences, Enid could never remember many details. But she remembered some nameless hour of night or morning that seemed but a part of a sleepless night, when she stood on the doorstep and looked wildly up and down the street, as if expecting her neighbours to rescue her from a house on fire. And there crept upon her the cold certainty, more cruel than any fire, that in this sort of calamity there was no hope from neighbours, nor any appeal against the machine of modern oppression. She saw a policeman standing near the next lamp-post, outside the next house. She thought of calling to the policeman, as if to save her from a burglar, and then she realized that she might as well call to the lamp-post. If two doctors chose to testify that Walter Windrush was mad, they turned the whole modern world with them — police and all. If they chose to testify that it was an emergency case, he could be taken away at once, under the eye of any policeman, and it seemed that he was being taken away at once. Nevertheless, there was something about the policeman planted at that particular spot, where she had never seen one before, that riveted her eye. And even as she gazed, the next-door neighbour, Mr. Wilmot, came out of his front door with a light suitcase in his hand.

She felt a sudden impulse to consult him, perhaps it was an impulse to consult anybody. But he had always seemed to be a man of many types of information, including the scientific, and she impulsively ran across and asked for a moment’s interview. Mr. Wilmot seemed a little hurried, which was far from being his usual demeanour, but he politely bowed her back into his front parlour. When she got there, a rather inexplicable shyness or evasion overcame her. She felt a new and irrational reluctance to give away somebody or something, she knew not what. Moreover, there was something unfamiliar about the familiar face and form of Mr. Wilmot. He was wearing horn spectacles, through which his glance seemed sharper and more alert than of old. His clothes were the same, but they were buttoned up more neatly and all his movements were more brisk. He still had the wisps that looked like whiskers but the face underneath had so altered in expression that one might almost fancy the whiskers were part of a wig.

Dazed and doubtful in a new fashion, she felt impelled to put her point in a more impersonal way, and asked whether he could give any advice to a friend of hers, who had been warned of a disease called Duodiapsychosis. Could he tell her if there was such a disease, as she knew he knew a lot about those things?

He admitted that he knew a little about those things. But he still seemed hurried — courteously but convincingly hurried. He looked it up in a work of reference, turning the pages very rapidly; no, he doubted whether there was any such thing.

“It seems to me,” he said, looking gravely at her through his spectacles, “that your friend may be the victim of a quack.”

With that repetition of her suspicions, she turned homewards and he rather eagerly followed her into the street. The policeman saluted him; there was nothing much in that; policemen saluted her father and other well-known residents. But she did think it odd that he said to the policeman, as he went off: “There’s one thing more I must make sure of. Unless I wire, things can go forward here as arranged.”

When she came back to her own house, she knew it was something worse than a house of death. There was a black taxicab waiting outside it, which made her think of a funeral, almost with envy. If she had known who was already in the taxicab, she might have stopped and made a scene in the street. As it was, she burst into the house and found two grave, dark-clad doctors sitting in the light of the bow-window in front, with a table between them, covered with official documents and pen and ink. One of the doctors, who was just about to sign one of the documents, was a stately, silver-haired gentleman in a very elegant astrakhan overcoat; she gathered from the conversation that his name was Doone. The other doctor was the abominable John Judson.

She had paused an instant just outside the room and heard the tail-end of their scientific talk.

“You and I know, of course,” Judson was saying, “how much the mere idea of subconsciousness, or horizontal division of the mind, has been superseded by vertical division of the mind. But the layman has hardly heard yet of the new double or ambidextrous consciousness.”

“Quite so,” said Dr. Doone in a level and soothing voice.

He had a very soothing voice, and with it he earnestly did his best to soothe Enid Windrush. He really seemed to be profoundly touched with the tragedy of her position.

“I cannot expect you to believe how much I feel for your misfortunes,” he said. “I can only say that anything that can soften the shock for anyone involved will be done. I will not disguise from you that your father is already in the cab outside, under the care of tactful and humane attendants. I will not disguise from you that some deception, such as has to be used to the sick, has been employed in prevailing upon him, but I told him no more than the truth in saying that he was going with his best friends. These things are very terrible, my child, but perhaps we may all draw nearer to each other in—”

“Oh, sign the thing and be done,” said Dr. Judson rudely.

“Be silent, sir,” said Doone, with fine dignity and indignation. “If you have neither the manners nor the morals for dealing with people in misfortune, I, at least, have more experience. Miss Windrush, I am sorry.”

He held out his hand and Enid stood hesitating and then retreated like one distraught; so distraught that she actually turned to Dr. Judson.

“Send that man away,” she cried with the shrillness of hysteria. “Send him away! He is more horrible even than—”

“More horrible than—” repeated Judson, waiting,

She looked at him with a wild inscrutable stare and said:

“More horrible than you.”

“Have you signed that damned thing yet?” said Judson, boiling with impatience. But, even as they had turned away from him, Doone had signed the paper and Judson snatched it up with furious haste and ran out of the house.

And then she saw something that finally put him beyond pardon. For as he ran down the steps, he seemed to give a sort of bound of cheerfulness, like a boy on a holiday; like a man who has at last got what he wanted. She felt she could have forgiven him everything except that last little leap of joy.

Some time after — she could not have said how long — she still sat staring out of the bow-window into the empty street. She had reached that state when the soul feels that nothing worse can happen in the world. But she was wrong. For it was only a few minutes later that two policemen and a man in plain clothes came up those steps and, after some apologies and uncomfortable explanations, announced that they had a warrant for the arrest of Walter Windrush on a charge of murder.

V

THE SECRET OF THE TREE

The motives of the simple are more subtle than those of the subtle. The former do not sort out their own emotions and the result is often more mysterious, especially as they never afterwards attempt to solve the mystery. Enid was a very elemental and unconscious character, who had never before been thrown into such a turmoil of thoughts and feelings. And her first feeling, under her last shock, was a primitive human feeling that for her isolation had come to an end. She had found something more crushing and complicated than she could carry alone, and she must have a friend.

She therefore went straight out of the front door and down the road to find a friend. She went to find a charlatan, a schemer, a grotesque lying mystagogue, a man who had done her and hers the most abominable wrong, and she found him just going into his own house, with the brass plate outside it. Something not to be formulated in words told her that, in some dark, distorted, undiscoverable way he was on her side, and that he would manage to get whatever he chose to try for. She stopped the villain of her strange story and spoke to him quite naturally, as if he were her brother.

"I wish you would come back to our place a moment," she said. "Another ghastly thing has happened now and I can't make head or tail of anything."

He turned promptly and threw a sharp glance up the street.

"Ah," he said, "then the police have come already."

She stared at him speechless for a moment, as a light gradually began to break upon her rocking brain.

"Did you know they were coming?" she cried; and then in a final universal flash she seemed to take in a thousand things at once. The combined product of them all was perhaps curious. For there broke out of her only the expression of incredulous astonishment: "But aren't you wicked, then?"

"Only moderately so," he replied. "But I dare say what I did would be considered indefensible. It was the only thing I could think of to save him. It had to be done in rather a hurry."

She drew a deep breath and there dawned upon her gradually, like something seen in the distance, a memory and a meaning.

"Why, I see now," she said. "It was just like what you did, when you shoved him from under the car."

"I'm afraid I'm impetuous," said Judson, "and perhaps I jump too soon."

"But on both occasions," she said, "you only jumped just in time."

Then she went into the house alone; her mind was still stratified with terror; the notion of her father as a monkey, as a lunatic, as something worse. And yet in a corner of her sunken subconscious soul something was singing, because her friend was not so wicked after all.

Ten minutes later, when Inspector Brandon, a sandy-haired representative of the C.I.D., with a stolid appearance but a lively eye, entered the Windrush parlour, he found himself confronted with a square-faced, square-shouldered medical gentleman, with dark hair and an inscrutable smile. Nobody, who had seen Dr. Judson shaken by the various passions of the late peril and crisis, could have recognized him, in the placid impenetrable friend of the family who now sat facing the policeman.

“I am sure, Inspector, that you agree with me in wishing to spare the unfortunate lady as far as possible,” he said smoothly. “I happen to be the family physician, and I shall have to be responsible for her condition in any case. But I am responsible in other ways, too, and you may take it from me that a man in my position will put no obstacles in your way in doing your duty. I hope you have no objection, for the moment, to explaining the general nature of your business to me.”

“Well, sir,” said the Inspector, “so far as that is concerned, it’s generally rather a relief in these cases to be able to talk to a third party. But you’ll understand, of course, that I shall expect you to talk straight.”

“I’ll talk straight enough,” answered the doctor coolly. “I understand you have a warrant for the arrest of Mr. Walter Windrush.”

The policeman nodded:

“For the murder of Isaac Morse,” he said. “Do you know where Windrush is at present?”

“Yes,” said Judson gravely, “I know where Windrush is at present.”

He looked across the table tranquilly, with level brows, and added:

“I will tell you, if you like. I will take you to him, if you like. I know exactly where he is just now.”

“We mustn’t have any hiding or hanky-panky, you know,” said the Inspector. “You will be taking a serious responsibility, if there’s any chance that he will escape.”

“He will not escape.” said Dr. Judson.

There was a silence, which was broken by a slight scurry outside and a telegraph-boy ran up the steps with a wire for the Inspector. That official read it with a frown of surprise, and then looked across at his companion.

“This comes opportunely in one sense,” he said. “It seems to justify our pausing for an explanation, if you’re quite sure of what you say.”

He handed the telegram to the doctor, who read with his rapid glance the words: DON’T DO ANYTHING ABOUT W. W. TILL I COME. SHALL BE ROUND IN HALF AN HOUR. HARRINGTON.

“That is from my superior officer.” said the official. “The chief detective who has been studying this matter on the spot. Indeed, one of the chief detectives in the world today, I suppose.”

“Yes,” said the doctor, dryly. “Didn’t Mr. Harrington pursue his studies under the name of Mr. Wilmot? And live next door?”

“You seem to know a thing or two,” said Inspector Brandon with a smile.

“Well, your friend behaved so much like a burglar that I guessed he must be a policeman,” said Judson, “and he said he had the best authority; I found it wasn’t the authority of the family, so I assumed it was probably the authority of the law.”

“Whatever he said was pretty sound, you may be certain,” said the other. “Harrington is pretty nearly infallible in the long run. And in this case he was certainly justified by what he found, though nobody would ever have guessed it.”

“What he found,” said the doctor, “was the skeleton of a man, stuffed into the hollow of the tree, evidently having been there for a long time, marked by an unmistakable injury to the occiput, done by violence and inflicted with the left hand.”

Brandon stared across at him. “And how do you know that he found that?” he asked.

“I know because I found it myself,” answered Judson.

There was a pause, and then he added: “Yes, Inspector, it is quite true that I know something about this business; as I told you, I can take you to Windrush himself if necessary. Of course, I don’t claim any right to bargain with you, but since you are hung up by that telegram for the moment, and I may be in a position to help, do you mind doing me a favour in return? Will you tell me the whole story? Or perhaps I should say the whole theory?”

The face of Brandon of the C.I.D was not only humorous and good-humoured; it was also highly intelligent, when the first veneer of official stolidity had worn off. He looked at the doctor thoughtfully for a little, and seemed to approve of what he studied. Then he said with a smile:

“I suppose you are one of those amateur detectives who read detective stories, or even write them. Well, I don’t deny this is a bit of a detective story. And there is one question that’s always turning up in books and talk of that sort, and it’s rather relevant here. You’ve seen it twenty times. Suppose a real Man of Genius wanted to commit a crime?”

He ruminated a little and then went on. “From our point of view, the great problem in any crime of killing is always what to do with the body. I expect that fact has saved many a man from being murdered. The fact that he is more dangerous to his enemy dead than alive. All sorts of tricks are tried; dismembering and dispersing the body, throwing it into kilns and furnaces, putting it under concrete floors, like Dr. Crippen. And in the study of such stories, this story does stand out as the very extraordinary and yet effective expedient of what I call a Man of Genius.

"Isaac Morse flourished about twenty years ago as a financial agent and adviser; I imagine you know what that means. In fact he flourished as a money-lender, and flourished like the green bay-tree, otherwise the wicked man. He flourished so very much, and so very much at other people's expense, that he was probably pretty unpopular with a good many people whose circumstances were not so flourishing. Among these were two students; the one, who was a less interesting person, was a medical student named Duveen. The other was an art student named Windrush.

"The financial adviser was imprudent enough to leave his car and chauffeur, and walk across a corner of a heath to the hotel where the conference was to be held. In doing so, they passed a very desolate dip in the moorland marked only by this queer, hollow tree. . . . What would the ordinary, stupid, professional killer have done? He would have killed, doubtless when his other companion's back was turned, and if he got away with it, would have skulked back and tried to scratch a shallow grave in the sandy heath. Or tried to cart away the corpse in a box under the eyes of all the servants at the inn. That is the difference between him and a man with imagination — an artist. The artist attempted something perfectly wild and new, and apparently absurd; but something that has succeeded for twenty years. He professed to have a romantic affection for that particular spot, he boasted of his intention of buying it and living on it. He did buy it, and he did live on it, and he did by this method bury from all eyes but his own the secret of what he had left there. For in those few moments, when the other student had gone on ahead and was hidden beyond the sprawling tree, he struck Morse a mortal blow with his left hand and threw his body into the yawning cavern in the tree. It was a solitary spot and naturally nobody actually saw him do the deed. But long after the medical student had gone on to the hotel and caught a train to London, another traveller on the moor saw Windrush sitting staring at the tree and the pools, in a dark reverie doubtless full of his daring scheme. And it is an odd thing that even the passer-by thought his solitary figure looked as tragic as Cain, and the pools under the red sunset looked like blood.

"The rest of his audacious scheme, or artistic pose, worked easily enough. By bragging of being cranky, he escaped all chance of the suspicion of being criminal. He could cage up the tree like a wild animal, without anybody thinking it any sillier than it seemed. You will notice that his caging grew more strict; when people began to touch or examine the tree, he locked everybody out of the garden. Except Harrington — and, apparently, you."

"I suppose," said Judson, "that Harrington, or Wilmot, or whatever you call him, told you that the artist admitted being ambidexterous — doing things with his left hand as well as his right."

"Quite so," replied the Inspector. "Well, Dr. Judson, I have obliged you and told you practically all I know at present. If there is anything more that you know, and we don't know, I am bound to warn you in any case that you are bound to return the favour. This is a deadly serious business. It is a hanging matter."

"No," said Dr. Judson thoughtfully; "not a hanging matter."

As the other only stared he added, still in a meditative style:

"You will never hang Walter Windrush."

"What do you mean?" demanded the officer, in a new sharp voice.

"Because," said the doctor, beaming at him, "Walter Windrush has been in a lunatic asylum for some little time. He was certified in the regular old official manner" — he talked of it as of something that happened a hundred years before— "and the medical authorities that certified him noted the symptom of ambidexterous action and a somewhat excessive development of power in the left hand."

Inspector Brandon was staring like one stunned at the brisk and smiling doctor, who rose to his feet as if the interview were over. But even as he stepped towards the door, he found his exit blocked by the presence of a newcomer, and found himself looking once more at the long hair and long, smiling visage of the gentleman he had so heartily disliked under the name of Mr. Wilmot.

"Back again," said Wilmot, or Harrington, his smile widening to a grin, "and apparently just in time."

The Inspector had recovered from his stupefaction and his senses and perceptions were quick enough. He got to his feet quickly and said:

"Is anything the matter?"

“No,” said the great detective; “nothing is the matter. Except that we are after the wrong man.”

And he settled himself comfortably in a chair and smiled at the Inspector.

“The wrong man!” repeated Brandon. “You can’t mean that Windrush is the wrong man! I’ve just been taking the liberty of telling Dr. Judson the real story—”

“Under the impression,” said Harrington, “that you knew the real story. For my part, I never knew it till about twenty minutes ago.”

His face and manner were eminently cheerful; but as he turned to speak to the doctor, they took on a sort of business-like gravity and he seemed to choose and weigh his words.

“Doctor,” he said, “you are a man of science and you understand what hardly anybody in this world does understand. You understand what is really meant of a hypothesis that holds the field. As a man of science, you must have had the experience of building up a very elaborate, a very complete and even a very convincing theory.”

“Why, yes,” said John Judson, with a grim smile; “I have certainly had the experience of building up a very elaborate, very complete and even convincing theory.”

“But,” went on the detective thoughtfully, “as a man of science, you were nevertheless ready to entertain the possibility, even if it were the remote possibility, that your theory was after all untrue.”

“You are right again,” said Judson, and the smile grew grimmer. “I was ready to entertain the remote possibility that my theory was quite untrue.”

“Well, I take full responsibility for the unexpected collapse of my theory,” said the great detective, with his agreeable smile. “You must not blame the Inspector; the whole of that story of the artist criminal and his original scheme of concealment was my idea, and an infernally intelligent and interesting idea too, though I say it who shouldn’t. There’s really nothing to be said against it, except that it can’t be true. Everything has a little weakness somewhere.”

“But why can’t it be true?” asked the astonished Brandon.

“Only,” answered his commanding officer, “because I have just discovered the real murderer.”

Amid the startled silence that followed he added, as in a pleasant abstraction: “That grand and bold artistic crime we dreamed of was, like many great things, too great for this world. Perhaps in Utopia, perhaps in

Paradise, we may have murders of that perfect and poetical sort. But the real murderer behaves in a much more ordinary fashion. . . . Brandon, I have found the other student. Naturally, you know rather less about the other student.”

“Pardon me,” said the Inspector stiffly; “of course, we traced the movements of the other student, and of everybody who could be involved. He took the train to London that evening and, a month after, went to New York on business and thence to the Argentine, where he set up a successful and highly respectable practice as a doctor.”

“Exactly,” said Harrington. “He did the dull, ordinary thing that the real criminal does. He bolted.”

Dr. Judson seemed to find his voice for the first time since the last turn of events, and it was like the voice of a new man.

“Are you quite certain,” he said at last, “that Windrush is innocent after all?”

“I am quite certain,” said Harrington seriously. “This is not a hypothesis but a proof. There are a hundred converging proofs; I will only give you a few. The injury to the skull was done with a very unusual surgical instrument, and I have found the instrument in possession of the man who used it. The spot selected would only have been so chosen by a man of special knowledge. The man called Duveen, whom we know to have been present, and to have had a stronger motive than Windrush (for he was ruined and in fear of exposure), was and is a man with exactly that special knowledge. He is a surgeon and a skilful man. He is also a left-handed man.”

“If you are certain, sir, the thing is settled,” said the Inspector rather regretfully. “As Dr. Judson has explained, the left-handed business was also a part of the disease or aberration of Windrush—”

“You will agree that I never said I was certain about Windrush,” said Harrington calmly; “I do say I am certain now.”

“Doctor Judson says—” began the Inspector.

“Dr. Judson says,” said that physician himself, springing up like a spring released; “Dr. Judson says that everything that Dr. Judson has said for the last forty-eight hours is a pack of lies! Dr. Judson says that Walter Windrush is no more mad than we are. Dr. Judson begs to announce that his celebrated theory of Arboreal Ambidexterity is a blasted mass of balderdash that ought never to have taken in a baby! Duodiapsychosis! Huh!” And he snorted with a violent and indescribable noise.

“This is very extraordinary,” said Inspector Brandon.

“I bet it is,” said the doctor. “We all seem to have made pretty damned fools of ourselves by being too clever, but I was the damndest. Look here, this has got to be put straight at once! It’s bad enough for Miss Windrush that her father should be locked up for a day. I must make out some sort of document admitting a mistake, or announcing a recovery, or some nonsense, and get him out again.”

“But,” said Harrington gravely, “I understood that no less a person than Dr. Doone also signed the emergency order, and his authority—”

“Doone!” cried Judson with a quite indescribable frenzy of contempt, “Doone! Doone would sign anything! Doone would say anything. Doone is a doddering old fraud! He wrote one book that was boomed when I was a baby, and he’s never opened a book since. I saw all the new books on his table with none of the leaves cut. And the way he talked about prehistoric man was more prehistoric than fossils. As if any serious scientific man now believed all his stuff about Arboreal Man! Golly, I didn’t have any difficulty with Doone! I only had to flatter him at first by making it all very Arboreal, and then talking about what he didn’t understand and dared not question. I had great fun with something newer than Psycho-analysis.”

“All the same,” said Harrington, “as Dr. Doone has signed the order, he’ll have to sign the countermanding of it.”

“Oh, very well,” cried the impetuous Judson, who had already scribbled something on a page and was already rushing from the room, “I’ll cut round and get him to sign it, too.”

“I think I should rather like to go with you,” said Harrington.

In the track of the headlong Judson, they trailed round with tolerable rapidity to that stately and pillared house in the West End, the house with the sombre blinds, which the doctor had once visited alone. The scene between him and the stately Dr. Doone was rather curious. Now that they had some inner light on the matter, they could appreciate the evasiveness of the great man and the pertinacity of the smaller one. However, Dr. Doone evidently felt it was wiser to join in his colleague’s recantation, and, carelessly picking up a quill pen, he signed the paper with his left hand.

VI

THE EPILOGUE OF THE GARDEN

A fortnight afterwards, Mr. Walter Windrush was walking round his favourite garden, smiling and smoking as if nothing had happened. He was smoking a small cigarette in a very long cigarette-holder, and he really was doing it as if nothing had happened. For that was the real mystery of Walter Windrush, which neither medical non legal experts were ever in the least likely to fathom. That was the real Secret, which no detective would ever detect.

He had been turned into a monstrosity in the eyes of his nearest and dearest; he had been described to his own child as a chimpanzee and as a chattering maniac; he had been described again as a pitiless and patient assassin, planning his whole life upon the concealment of a crime; he had been dragged through or threatened by every degrading and hideous experience; he had found that his favourite private paradise had been the scene of a murder and that his friend found it possible to believe him to be a murderer; he had been in the madhouse; he had been near to the gallows. And all these things were of less importance to him than the shape of the great coloured cloud of morning that came sailing up out of the east, or the fact that the birds had begun to sing in the branches of the tragic tree. Some would have said his mood was too shallow for such tragedies. Some, who saw deeper, might have said it was too deep for them. But upon such deep springs of levity he lived, and so he walked, as if in another world. It is possible that Inspector Brandon did not completely comprehend the monster called a Man of Genius.

Indeed, he was much less affected by the morbid memories than the man of common sense. When he had strolled about alone for a few moments, he was joined by his young friend the doctor, but the doctor looked comparatively gloomy and embarrassed; so much so that the artist rallied him about it.

“Well,” said Dr. Judson, with something of his old sort of sullen candour, “I ought to be ashamed of it, I suppose, as well as of everything else. But I confess I can’t think how you can bear to hang about in the place.”

"My dear fellow, and you are the cold and rational man of science," said Windrush lightly. "In what superstitions you wallow! In what medieval darkness you brood all your days! I am only a poor, impracticable, poetic dreamer, but I assure you I am in broad daylight. In fact, I have never been out of it, not even when you put me in that pleasant little sanatorium for a day or two. I was quite happy there; and as for the lunatics, well I came to the conclusion that they were rather saner than my friends outside."

"There's no need to rub it in," said Judson with a groan. "I won't apologize for thinking you a madman, because I never did think so. But I suppose that, given a fine sense of delicacy, I ought to apologize for thinking you a murderer. But there are murderers and murderers; all I knew was that I had found a murdered man you had hidden in your garden. I didn't know how far you might have been provoked or justified. Indeed, from all I hear of the late lamented Mr. Morse, he was of the sort that won't be missed. But I knew that Wilmot was a detective and was poking round the tree, and I knew that meant your arrest in precious quick time. I had to act pretty quickly myself; I generally do act a good deal too quickly, for that matter. A plea of insanity after arrest is always weak — especially when it's not true. But if you were already certified you couldn't even be arrested. I had to invent an imaginary disease, entirely out of my own head in about five minutes. I put it together somehow out of bits of that talk we had about ambidexterity and bits of Doone's rotten old rubbish about anthropoids. I put that in, partly because I foresaw that I should have to nobble Doone somehow, and partly because it fitted so well into the tale of the tree. But even now I hate to think of the horrors I made up, even though they were horrors that never happened. But what must one feel about the horrors that really have happened?"

"Well," replied the artist cheerfully, "and what do you feel about them?"

"I can't help feeling," said Judson, "that men might avoid the place like a plague-spot."

"The birds perch on the tree," said Windrush, "as if it were the shoulder of St. Francis."

There was a silence and then the brooding Judson said:

"After all, sir, it is damned extraordinary that you lived alone with this tree for twenty years and never found what was inside it. I know it rotted to bones pretty quickly, because the stream carried away the decomposition; but you might have been pulling the tree about any day."

Walter Windrush looked at him steadily with his clear, glassy eyes.

"I have never even touched the tree," he said. "I have never been within two yards of it."

Something in his manner suggested to the young man that they had come near the nerve of the eccentricity; he was silent and the artist went on:

"You tell us a great deal about Evolution and the Ascent of Man. You scientific men are very superior, of course, and there is nothing legendary about you. You do not believe in the Garden of Eden. You do not believe in Adam and Eve. Above all, you do not believe in the Forbidden Tree."

The doctor shook his head in half-humorous deprecation, but the other went on with the same grave fixity of gaze.

"But I say to you, always have in your garden a Forbidden Tree. Always have in your life something that you may not touch. That is the secret of being young and happy for ever. There was never a story so true as that story you call a fable. But you will evolve and explore and eat of the tree of knowledge, and what comes of it?"

"Well," said the doctor defensively, "a good many things have come of it that are not so bad."

"My friend," said the poet. "You once asked me what was the Use of this tree. I told you I did not wish it to be any Use. And was I wrong? I have got nothing but good out of it, because to me it was useless. What have they got out of it, those to whom it was useful? What did they get who asked, after the manner of that ancient folly, for the Fruit of the tree? It was useful to Duveen, or Doone, or whatever you call him; and what fruit did he gather but the fruit of sin and death? He got murder and suicide out of it; they told me this morning that he had taken poison, leaving a confession of the murder of Morse. It was useful to Wilmot in a way, of course; but what did even Wilmot and Brandon get out of it, but the dreadful duty of dragging a fellow-creature to the gallows? It was useful to you, when you wanted a nonsensical nightmare of some sort, with which to lock me up for life and terrify my family. But it was a nightmare; and you yourself still seem to be a little haunted by the nightmare. But I repeat that it was useless to me; and I am still in the broad daylight."

As he spoke, Judson looked up across the lawn and saw Enid Windrush come out of the shadow of the house into the sun. Something in the golden balance of her figure, with the flushed face and flame-like radiation of her hair, made her look as if she had actually stepped from an allegorical picture of the dawn; and swiftly as she moved, her movements always had the grand, gradual curves of great unconscious forces, of the falling waters and the wind. Something of this congruity with the almost cosmic drift of the conversation doubtless rose into the poet's mind, as he said casually enough:

"Well, Enid, I've been boosting the old property again. I've been modestly comparing my own backyard to the Garden of Eden. But it's no good talking to this deplorable materialistic young man. He doesn't believe in Adam and Eve or anything they tell you about on Sundays."

The young man said nothing; at that moment he was wholly occupied with seeing.

"I don't know whether there are any snakes about," she said, laughing.

"Some of us," said Judson, "have been in the sort of delirium in which men see snakes. But I think we are all cured now, and there are other things to see."

"I suppose you would say," said Windrush dreamily, "that we have evolved into a higher condition and can see something nicer. Well, don't misunderstand me; I'm not against anybody evolving, if he does it quietly, in a gentlemanly way, and without all this fuss. It wouldn't matter much, if we had begun by climbing about in trees. But I still think that even monkeys would have been wise to leave one taboo tree; one sacred tree they did not climb. But evolution only means . . . bother, my cigarette's gone out. I think I must go and smoke in the library henceforward."

"Why do you say henceforward?"

They did not hear his answer as he walked away, but he said: "Because it is The Garden of Eden."

A sudden silence fell between the two who were left facing each other on the lawn. Then John Judson went across to the girl and confronting her with great gravity said:

"In one respect your father underrates my orthodoxy."

Her own smile grew a little graver as she asked him why he said so.

"Because I do believe in Adam and Eve," answered the man of science, and he suddenly seized both her hands.

She left them where they were and continued to gaze at him with an utter stillness and steadiness. Only her eyes had altered.

"I believe in Adam," she said, "though I was once quite firmly convinced that he was the Serpent."

“I never thought you were the Serpent,” he answered in the same new tone of musing, that was almost mystical, “but I thought you were the Angel of the Flaming Sword.”

“I have thrown away the sword,” said Enid Windrush.

“And left only the angel,” he answered, and she rejoined: “Left only the woman.”

On the top of the once accursed tree a small bird burst into song, and at the same moment a great morning wind from the south rushed upon the garden, bending all its shrubs and bushes and seeming, as does the air when it passes over sunlit foliage, to drive the sunshine before it in mighty waves. And it seemed to both of them that something had broken or been loosened, a last bond with chaos and the night, a last strand of the net of some resisting Nothing that obstructs creation; and God had made a new garden and they stood alive on the first foundations of the world.

THE ECSTATIC THIEF

I

THE NAME OF NADOWAY

The name of Nadoway was in one sense famous, and even after a fashion, inspiring and sublime. Alfred the Great had borne it before him like a boon or gift, as he wandered in the woods and awaited the deliverance of Wessex. So at least one would infer from the poster in which he was represented, in flamboyant colours, as repairing the ruin of the Burning Cakes by the offer of Nadoway's Nubs, a superior sort of small biscuit. Shakespeare had heard the name like a trumpet-blast; at least if we may credit the striking picture inscribed "Anne Hathaway Had a Way with Nadoway", and representing the poet lifting a shining morning face on the appearance of these refreshments. Nelson, in the high moment of battle, had seen it written on the sky; at least it is so written on all the gigantic hoardings of the Battle of Trafalgar, with which we are so familiar in the streets; the picture to which are aptly appended the noble lines of Campbell: "Of Nelson and the Nubs, Sing the glorious day's renown." Equally familiar is the more modern patriotic poster representing a British Sailor working a machine-gun, from which a shower of Nubs is perpetually pouring upon the public. This somewhat unjustly exaggerates the deadly character of the Nubs. He who has been privileged to put a Nub to his lips has certainly been somewhat at a loss to distinguish it from other and lesser biscuits. But to have a Nub embedded in the body, by the ordinary process of digestion, has never been known to be actually fatal like a bullet. And, on the whole, many have tended to suspect that the chief difference, between Nadoway's Nubs and anybody else's, lay in the omnipresence of this superb picture-gallery of advertisements, which seemed to surround Nadoway with flamboyant pageantry and splendid heraldic and historic processions.

In the midst of all this encircling blazonry and blowing of trumpets, there was nothing but a little, plain, hard-faced man with a grey, goatish beard and spectacles, who never went anywhere except to business and to a brown brick Baptist Chapel. This was Mr. Jacob Nadoway, later of course Sir Jacob Nadoway, and later still Lord Normandale, the original founder of the firm and fountain of all the Nubs. He still lived very simply himself, but he could afford every luxury. He could afford the luxury of having the Honourable Millicent Milton as private secretary. She was the daughter of a decayed aristocratic house, with which he had been on superficially friendly terms, as they lived in the same neighbourhood, and it was natural that the relative importance of the two should have gradually changed. Mr. Nadoway could afford the luxury of being the Honourable Millicent's patron. The Honourable Millicent could not afford the luxury of not being Mr. Nadoway's secretary.

It was, however, a luxury of which she sometimes had golden dreams. Not that old Nadoway treated her badly, or even paid her badly, or would have ventured to be rude to her in any respect. The old chapel-going Radical was much too shrewd for that. He understood well that there was still something like a bargain and a balance between the New Rich and the New Poor. She had been more or less familiar with the Nadoway household, long before she had an official post there, and could hardly be treated otherwise than as a friend of the family, even if it was not exactly the sort of family she would have sought in which to find her friends. And yet she had found friends there, and had once been even in danger of finding not only friends but a friend. Perhaps, at one time, not only a friend.

Nadoway had two sons, who went to school and college, and in the recognized modern manner were unobtrusively manufactured into gentlemen. The manner of the moulding was indeed somewhat different in the two cases, and in both she watched it with a certain curious interest. It was perhaps symbolic that the elder was John Nadoway, dating from the days when his father retained a taste for plain or preferably Scriptural names. The younger was Norman Nadoway, and the name marked a certain softening towards notions of elegance, foreshadowing the awful possibility of Normandale. There had been a happy time, when John could really be described as Jack. He was a very boyish sort of boy and played cricket and climbed trees with a certain natural grace, like that of a young animal alive and innocent in the sunshine. He was not unattractive and she was not unattracted by him. And yet every time he reappeared, at different stages of his college and early commercial career, she was conscious that something was fading while something was solidifying. He was passing through that mysterious process, by which so many radiant and godlike boys eventually turn into businessmen. She could not help feeling that there must be something wrong with education — or possibly something wrong with life. It seemed somehow as if he was always growing bigger and growing smaller.

Norman Nadoway, on the other hand, began to be interesting just about the moment when Jack Nadoway began to be uninteresting. He was one that flowered late; if the figure of a flower can be used of one who (throughout his early years) resembled a rather pallid turnip. He had a large head and large ears and a colourless face and expression, and for a time passed for something of a mooncalf. But when he was at school, he worked hard at mathematics, and when he was at Cambridge at economics. From this it was but one wild leap to the study of politics and social reform; and from this came the grand bust-up in the House of Nubs and Jacob's wrath, to Nadoway's the direful spring.

Norman had begun by shaking the brown brick chapel to its foundations by announcing his intention of being a Curate in the Church of England — nay, in the High Church party of the Church of England. But his father was less troubled by this than by the reports that reached him of his son's highly successful lectures on Political Economy. It was a very different sort of Political Economy from that which his father had successfully preached and practised. It was so different that his father, in a memorable explosion at the breakfast-table, described it as Socialism.

"Somebody must go down to Cambridge and stop him!" said the elder Mr. Nadoway fidgeting in his chair and rapping restlessly on the table. "You must go and talk to him, John; or you must bring him here and I'll talk to him. Otherwise the business will simply go smash."

Both parts of the alternative programme apparently had to be carried out. John, the junior partner of Nadoway and Son, did go down to Cambridge and talked to him, but apparently did not stop him. John did eventually bring him back to Jacob Nadoway, that Jacob might talk to him. Jacob was in no way reluctant to do so, and yet the interview did not turn quite as he had intended. Indeed, it was a rather puzzling interview.

It took place in old Jacob's study, which looked out through round bow-windows at 'The Lawns', after which the house was still named. It was a very Victorian house, of the sort that would have been described at the time as built by Philistines for Philistines. There was a great deal of curved glass about it, in its conservatories and its semi-circular windows. There was a great deal of dome and cupola and canopy about it, with all the porches covered as if by escalloped wooden umbrellas. There was a good deal of rather ugly coloured glass and a good deal of not altogether ugly, but very artificial, clipped hedges and Dutch gardening. In short, it was the sort of comfortable Victorian home that was regarded as very vulgar by the æsthetes of that period. Mr. Matthew Arnold would have passed the house with a gentle sigh. Mr. John Ruskin would have recoiled in horror and called down curses from heaven on it, from a neighbouring hill. Even Mr. William Morris would have grumbled as he passed, about the sort of architecture that was only upholstery. But I am not so sure about Mr. Sacheverall Sitwell. We have reached a time when the curved windows and canopied porticoes of that house have begun to take on something of a dreamy glamour of distance. And I am not sure that Mr. Sitwell might not have been found wandering in its inner chambers and composing a poem about its dusty charms, though it would certainly have surprised Mr. Jacob Nadoway to find him so engaged. Whether, after the interview, even Mr. Sitwell could write a poem about Mr. Nadoway, I will not undertake to decide.

Millicent Milton had come through the garden to the study, at about the same moment as the junior partner arrived there. She was tall and fair and her lifted and pointed chin gave her profile a distinction beyond mere good looks. Her eyelids looked at the first glance a little sleepy and at the second a little haughty, but she was not really either one or the other, but only reasonably resigned. She sat down at her ordinary desk to do her ordinary work, but she very soon rose from it again, as if with a silent offer to withdraw, since the domestic discussion was becoming very domestic. But old Nadoway motioned her back with irritable reassurance and she remained the spectator of the whole scene.

Old Nadoway had barked out rather abruptly, like one bothered for the first time:

“But I thought you two had had a talk.”

“Yes, father,” said John Nadoway, looking at the carpet, “we have had a talk.”

“I hope you got Norman to see,” went on the old man in a milder tone, “that he simply mustn’t chalk out all these wild projects so long as we’re all really in the business. My business would be ruined in a month if I tried to carry out those crazy ideal schemes about Bonuses and Co-Partnership. And how can I have my son using my name, and shouting everywhere that my methods are not fit for a dog? Is it reasonable? Didn't John explain to you that it's not reasonable?"

The large, pale face of the curate, rather to everybody's surprise, wrinkled into a dry smile, and he said: "Yes, Jack explained a great deal of that to me, but I also did a little explaining. I explained, for instance, that I have a business, too."

"What about your father's business?" asked Jacob.

"I am about my Father's business," said the priest in a hard voice.

There was a glaring silence, broken rather nervously.

"The fact is, father, it won't do," said John Nadoway heavily, and still studying the carpet. "I believe I said everything for you you could have said yourself. But Norman knows the new conditions, and it won't do."

Old Mr. Nadoway made a motion as if swallowing something, and then said: "Do you mean to sit there and tell me you're against me, too? Against me and the whole concern?"

"I'm in favour of the whole concern, and that's the whole point," said John. "I suppose I shall be responsible for it — well, some time. But I'm damned if I'll be responsible for all the old ways of doing things."

"You're glad enough of the money that was got by the old way of doing things," said his father savagely, "and now you come back to me with this nonsensical namby-pamby Socialism."

"My dear Dad," said John Nadoway, staring stolidly. "Do I look like a Socialist?"

Millicent, as an onlooker, took in the whole of his heavy and handsome figure, from its beautifully blacked boots to its beautifully oiled hair, and could hardly repress a laugh.

The voice of Norman Nadoway clove into it with a sudden vibrancy, not without violence.

"We must clear the Nadoway name."

"Do you dare to tell me," cried the old man fiercely, "that my name needs any clearing?"

"By the new standards, yes," said John after a silence.

The old merchant sat down suddenly and silently in his chair and turned to his secretary, as if the interview were ended.

"I find I shall not want you this evening," he said. "You had better take a little time off."

She rose rather waveringly and went towards the french windows that gave upon the garden. The pale evening sky had been suddenly turned to night by the contrast of a large luminous moon coming up behind dark trees and striping the grey-green lawns with dark shadows. She had always been puzzled by the fact that there seemed to be something romantic about the garden and even the grotesque house, which was inhabited by such highly prosaic people. She was already outside the glass doors and in the garden, when she heard old Nadoway speak again.

“The hand of the Lord is heavy upon me,” he said. “It seems hard that I have had three sons and they all turned against me.”

“There is no question of turning against you, father,” said John rapidly and smoothly. “It is only a question of reconstructing the business so as to suit new conditions and a rather different public opinion. I am sure that neither of your sons intends to show ingratitude or impertinence.”

“If either of your sons did that,” said Norman in his deep voice, “it would be every bit as wicked as going on in the old way.”

“Well,” said his father rather wearily, “we will leave it at that just now. I shall not go on much longer.”

But Millicent Milton was staring at the dark house in a new fit of mystification. The two brothers had ignored and slurred over, with something resembling skill, a certain phrase used by their father. But she had quite unmistakably heard the old man say: “Three sons.”

She had never heard of any other son. She remained staring at the rococo outline of that rather ridiculous and yet romantic villa, with its domes and ornamental verandas dark against the moon; with its bulbous windows and plants in bloated pots; its clumsy statues and congested garden-beds and all the swollen outline of the thing made almost monstrous by moonshine and darkness, and she wondered for the first time if it held a secret.

II

THE BURGLAR AND THE BROOCH

It was the scare of the burglary that actually started the story towards the discovery of rather strange things. As a burglary it was trivial enough, in the sense that the thief did not apparently succeed in taking anything, being surprised before he could do so. But it was certainly not only the burglar who was surprised.

Jacob Nadoway had provided his secretary with some excellent apartments leading out of the central hall and not far from his own. He had fitted up the suite with every elegant convenience, including an aunt. It was indeed doubtful, at times, whether the aunt was to be classed as a convenience or an inconvenience. She was supposed in a vague way to regularize the Victorian household and add even to the secretary an extra touch of gentility. But there was a difference, because the aunt, who was a Mrs. Milton-Mowbray, was given to suddenly getting back on the high-horse and then sliding off again, while her niece, with a more negative dignity, trod the dusty path of duty as a proud pedestrian. On this occasion Millicent Milton had been engaged all the evening in soothing her aunt, and after that experience, felt she would like to spend a little time in soothing herself. Instead of going to bed, she took up a book and began reading by the dying fire. She read on till it was very late, without realizing that everybody else had presumably retired to rest, when she heard in the utter stillness a new and unmistakable sound from the central hall without, which led into her employer's study. It was a sort of whirring and grinding sound, such as is produced by metal working its way into metal. And she remembered that in the angle between the two rooms stood the safe.

She had the best sort of quite unconscious courage, and she simply walked out into the hall and looked. What she saw astounded her by being so ordinary. She had seen it in so many films and read about it in so many novels, that she could hardly believe that it really looked like that. The safe stood open and a shabby man was kneeling in front of it, with his back to her, so that she could see nothing but his shabbiness, his head being covered by a battered and shapeless broad-brimmed hat. On one side of him on the floor glittered the steel of a centre-bit and some other tools of his art; on the other side glittered even more brilliantly the silver and stones of some ornament, looking like a chain and clasp, presumably a portion of his spoils. There seemed somehow to be nothing sharp or unexpected about the experience; it was almost conventional, in being so like what it was supposed to be. She only spoke as she felt, in a tone entirely cold and commonplace, when she said: “What are you doing here?”

"Well, I'm not climbing the Matterhorn or playing the trombone at present," grunted the man in a gruff and distant voice. "I suppose it's plain enough what I am doing."

Then, after a silence, he resumed in a warning tone: "Don't you go saying that brooch thing there is yours, because it isn't. I didn't even get it out of this safe; let's say I lifted it off another family earlier in the evening. It's a pretty thing — sort of imitation fourteenth century, with *Amor Vincit Omnia* on it. It's all very well to say that love conquers everything, and force is no remedy and all that. But I've forced this safe: I never found a safe I could open by just loving what was inside."

There was something rather paralysing about the way in which the burglar placidly went on talking without even looking round; and she thought it a little odd that he should know the meaning of the Latin inscription, simple as it was. Nor could she bring herself to scream or run or stop him in any way, when he went on with the same conversational composure.

"Must be meant for a model of the big clasp that Chaucer's Prioress wore; that had the same motto on it. Don't you think Chaucer was a corker in the way he hit off social types — even social types that are there still? Why, the Prioress is an immortal portrait in a few lines of a most extraordinary creature called the English Lady. You can pick her out in foreign hotels and pensions. The Prioress was nicer than most of those, but she's got all the marks; fussing about her little dogs; being particular about table-manners; not liking mice killed; the whole darned thing even down to talking French, but talking it so that Frenchmen can't understand."

He turned very slowly and stared at her.

"Why, *you're* an English Lady!" he cried as if astonished. "Do you know they are getting rare?"

Miss Millicent Milton probably did possess, like the Prioress of Chaucer, the more gracious virtues of the English Lady. But it must in honesty be admitted that she also possessed some of the vices of the type. One of the crimes of the English Lady is an unconscious class-consciousness. Nothing could alter the fact that, the moment the shabby criminal had begun to talk about English literature in the tones of her own class, her whole judgement was turned upside down, and she had a chaotic idea that he could not really be a criminal at all. In abstract logic, she would have been obliged to admit that it ought not to make any difference. In theory, she would concede that a student of medieval English has no more business to break open other people’s safes than anybody else. In principle she might confess that a man does not purchase a right to steal silver brooches, even by showing an intelligent interest in the *Canterbury Tales*. But something of uncontrollable custom in her mind made her feel that the case was altered. Her feeling could only have been conveyed by the very vague colloquialisms which such people employ; as that he wasn’t exactly a *real* burglar, or that it was “Quite Different”, or that there was “some mistake”. What she really meant (to the grave disadvantage of all her culture and her world) was that there were some people, criminals or no, whom she could see from the inside, and all other people she saw from the outside, whether they were burglars or bricklayers.

The young man who was staring at her was dark, shaggy and unshaven, but the neglect of shaving had passed its most repellent stage of transition and might be regarded as a rather imperfect beard. Its patchiness reminded her of the quaintly divided beards of certain foreigners, and gave him something of the general look of a cultivated Italian organ-grinder. There was something else that was abnormal about his face, which she could not immediately define, but she thought it was the fact that his mouth was always twisting with mockery, rather as if it had taught itself always to mock, and yet his dark, sunken eyes were not only grave but in some sort of mad way, enthusiastic. If the grotesque beard could have completely covered the mouth like a mask, they might have been the eyes of a fanatic in the desert shouting a battle-cry of belief. He must be deeply indignant with society to have turned to this lawless life; or perhaps he had had a tragedy with a woman or something. She wondered what the real story was, and what the woman was like.

While she was forming these confused impressions, the remarkable burglar went on talking; whatever else he felt, he seemed to feel no embarrassment about talking.

“It’s jolly fine of you to stand there like that — well, that’s another trait. The English Lady is brave; Edith Cavell was a type of the tribe. But there are other tribes now, and that sort of brooch generally belongs to the last sort of person for whom it was made. That alone would be a justification for the trade of burglary, which keeps things briskly in circulation, doesn’t allow them to stagnate in incongruous surroundings. If that brooch had really been worn by Chaucer’s Prioress at the moment, you don’t imagine

I’d have taken it, do you? On the contrary, if I really met anybody as nice as the Prioress, I might be tempted to give it to her straight away, at the expense of my professional profits. But why should some vulgar cockatoo of a sham Countess own a thing like that? We want more theft, house-breaking and highway robbery to shift and rearrange the furniture of society; to regroup — if you follow me — its goods and chattels, as if after a spring-cleaning; to—”

At this important point in the social programme, it was interrupted by a gasp and snort as startling as a trumpet-blast. And Millicent, looking across, saw her employer, the aged Nadoway, standing framed in the doorway, and looking a very small and shrunken figure in an enormous purple dressing-gown. It was not until that moment that she awoke to astonishment at her own silence and composure; or saw anything odd in the fact that she had stood listening to the criminal in front of the safe, as if he had been talking to her over the tea-table.

“*What*! A burglar?” gasped Mr. Nadoway.

Almost at the same moment there was a scurry of running and the big, breathless figure of the Junior Partner, John Nadoway, dressed in his shirt and trousers, also burst into the room, with a revolver in his hand. But he almost instantly lowered the weapon he had lifted and said, in the same incredulous and curiously emphatic voice: “Damn it all! A *burglar*!”

The Rev. Norman Nadoway was not long behind his brother — he was respectably muffled in a greatcoat and looked very pale and solemn. But perhaps the most curious thing about him was that he also confined himself to saying, with the same inscrutable intensity: “A *burglar*!”

Millicent thought there was, on the face of it, something singularly inept about this triple emphasis. It was about as obvious that the burglar was a burglar as that the safe was a safe. She could not imagine why the three men should all talk as if a burglar were a griffin, or something they had never heard of before, until it suddenly dawned on her that their surprise was not at a burglar paying them a particular visit, but rather at this particular visitor being a burglar.

“Yes,” said the visitor, looking round at them with a smile, “it’s quite true I’m a burglar now. I think I was only a begging-letter writer when we last met. Thus do we rise on our dead selves to higher things; it was a very paltry little misdemeanour compared to this, wasn’t it, for which father first turned me out?”

“Alan,” said Norman Nadoway very gravely, “why do you come back here like this? Why here, of all places?”

“Why, to tell you the truth,” said the other, “I thought that our respected Papa might want a little moral support.”

“What the devil do you mean?” asked John Nadoway irritably. “A nice sort of moral support you are!”

“I am a very moral support,” observed the stranger with proper pride. “Don’t you realize it? I am the only real son and heir. I am the only man who is really carrying on the business. I am an example of atavism; I am a reversion to type.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” cried old Nadoway with sudden fury.

“Jack and Norman know,” said the burglar grimly. “They know what I’m talking about. They know what I mean when I say I’m the real representative of Nadoway and Son. It’s the fact they’ve been trying to cover up, poor old chaps, for the last five or six years.”

“You were born to disgrace me,” said the old man, trembling with anger; “you would have dragged my name in the dirt, if I hadn’t sent you to Australia and got rid of you, and now you come back as a common thief.”

“And the real representative,” said the other, “of the methods that made Nadoway’s Nubs.” Then he said with sudden scorn:

“You say you’re ashamed of me. Good Lord, my dear Dad! Haven’t you discovered yet that both your other sons are ashamed of you? Look at their faces!”

It was enough that the other two sons involuntarily turned their faces away, and even as it was, turned them too late.

“They are ashamed of you. But I am not ashamed of you. We are the Adventurers of the family.”

Norman Nadoway raised a protesting hand, but the other went on with a sweep of spontaneous satire.

“Do you think I don’t know? Do you think everybody doesn’t know? Don’t I know that’s why Norman and Jack are announcing new industrial methods and preaching new social ideals and all the rest? Cleansing the Name of Nadoway — because the Name of Nadoway stinks to the ends of the earth! Because the business was founded on every sort of swindling and sweating and grinding the faces of the poor and cheating the widow and orphan. And, above all, on robbery — on robbing rivals and partners and everybody else, exactly as I have robbed that safe!”

“Do you think it decent,” asked his brother angrily, “to come here and not only rob your father’s safe, but insult and attack your father before his face?”

“I am not attacking my father,” said Alan Nadoway; “I am defending my father. And I am the only man here who can defend him. For I am a criminal, too.”

He let loose the next few words with an energy that made everybody jump. “What do you know about it? You go to college with his money; you get a partnership in his firm; you live on the money he made and are ashamed of the way he made it. But he didn’t begin like that, any more than I did. He was thrown out into the gutter, just as I was thrown out into the gutter. You try it, and see what sort of dirt you will eat! You don’t know anything about the way men are turned into criminals; the shifts and the delays and the despair, and the hopes that an honest job may turn up, that end by taking a dishonest one. You’ve no right to be so damned superior to the Two Thieves of the family.”

Old Nadoway made an abrupt movement, adjusting his spectacles, and Millicent, who was an acute observer, suspected that for one instant he was not only staggered but strongly moved.

“All this,” said John Nadoway after a silence, “doesn’t explain what you’re doing here. As you probably know, there’s practically nothing in that safe, and the thing you’ve got there certainly doesn’t come out of it. I can’t quite make out what you’re up to, in any case.”

“Well,” said Alan, with his ironical smile, “you can examine the safe and the rest of the premises after I’ve gone. Perhaps you may make a few discoveries. And perhaps on the whole I—”

In the middle of his words there arose, faint but shrill and unmistakable, upon Millicent’s ear, the sound of something at once alarming and amusing; something she had been subconsciously expecting for a long time past. In the room beyond, her aunt had awakened; probably she had awakened to all the melodramatic possibilities of an interruption in the middle of the night. The Victorian tradition had still its living witness. Millicent herself had been frozen into a cool acceptance of the adventure — an acceptance she could not fully explain even to herself. But somebody at least had shrieked, in a respectable manner, on hearing a house-breaker.

The five people looked at each other and realized that, after that shriek, the extraordinary family situation could no longer be kept in the family. The only chance was for the burglar to bolt with the promptitude of any other burglar. He turned and darted through the apartments on his left, which happened to be the apartments of Miss Milton and Mrs. Mowbray, so that shriek after shriek now rent the air. But a crash of glass from a remote window told the rest that the intruder had managed to burst out of the house and disappear in the darkness of the garden, and they all, for varied and rather complex reasons, heaved their separate sighs of relief.

Millicent, needless to say, had to resume in a serious manner the duties of soothing an aunt; so that the shriek faded into shrill questions. Then she went into her own room, beyond which the hole in the burst window showed a black star in the slate-green of the glass. Then she realized that, right in the path of the disappearing robber, there was deliberately spread out for inspection, on her own dressing-table, as crown jewels are spread out upon velvet, the silver chain and studded clasp which had been fancifully dedicated to the Prioress, and on which was written in Latin “Love Conquers All”.

III

A QUEER REFORMATION

Millicent Milton could not help wondering a good deal, especially when walking about the garden in her off hours, whether she would ever see the burglar again. In the ordinary way, it would seem improbable. But then, nobody could say that this criminal was connected with the household in an ordinary way. As a burglar, he would presumably vanish; as a brother, he would not improbably turn up again. Especially as he was a rather disreputable brother, for they always turn up again. She tentatively asked questions of the other two brothers, but could get very little light on the situation. The acquisitive Alan had mockingly advised them to examine the house for the traces of his depredations. But he must have conducted them with great secrecy and selection, for nobody seemed sure of how much he had taken. It was one of the many problems in the story that she could not solve, and could not see any particular probability that she ever would solve, when she looked up idly and saw him standing quite calmly on the top of the garden wall and looking down into the garden. The wind plucked the plumes of his dark hair one by one and turned them over as he was turning the leaves of the tree nearest his perch.

"Another way to burgle a house," he said, in a clear distant voice like a popular lecturer, "is to get over the garden wall. It sounds simple, but stealing things is generally simple. Only, in this case, I can't quite make up my mind what to steal.

I think," he added calmly, "that I shall begin by stealing a little of your time. But don't be alarmed, in any secretarial sense. I assure you I have an appointment."

He jumped from the wall and alighted on the turf beside her, but without in any way disturbing the flow of his remarks.

"Yes; it is really true that I am summoned to quite a family council; an inquiry into the possibility of rehabilitating my affairs. But, thank God, I can't be rehabilitated for another hour or so. While I am still in a completely criminal state of mind, I should rather like to have a talk with you."

She said nothing but gazed at the distant line of rather grotesque palm-trees planted as a frontier in the garden and felt returning upon her that irrational sense that this place had always been rather romantic, in spite of the people who lived in it.

"I suppose you know," said Alan Nadoway, "that my father flew into a frightful rage with me when I was only eighteen, and flung me bodily all the way to Australia. Looking back on it now, I can see that there was something to be said for his business standards in the matter. I had given one of my boon companions a handful of money which I really regarded as my own, but which my father regarded rigidly as belonging to the firm. From his point of view, it was stealing. But I didn't really know much about stealing then, compared with the close and conscientious study I have given to it since. But what I want to tell you is what happened to me on my way back from Australia."

"Wouldn't your family like to hear about it?" she could not help asking, with a touch of experimental irony.

"I dare say they would," he said. "But I am not sure they'd understand the story, even if they did hear it." Then after a brief reflective silence he said:

"You see, my story is too simple to be understood. Too simple to be believed. It sounds exactly like a parable; that is, it sounds like a fable and not a fact. There's my brother Norman now — he's a sincere man and very serious. He reads the parables in the New Testament every Sunday. But he could hardly believe in anything so simple as one of those parables, if it happened in real life."

"Do you mean that you are the Prodigal Son?" she asked, "and he is the Elder Brother?"

"Rather hard if the Australians had to be the Swine," said Alan Nadoway. "But I don't mean that at all. On the one hand, it underrates the magnanimity of my brother Norman. On the other hand, it perhaps slightly exaggerates the leaping and ecstatic hospitality of my father."

She could not repress a smile, but, filled with the loftiest secretarial traditions, refrained from comment.

"No; what I mean," he said, "is that stories told in that simple way, for the sake of illustration, always sound as if they weren't true. It's just the same with the parables of political economy. Norman has read a lot of political economy too, if you come to that. He must often have read those textbooks that begin with the statement: 'There is a man on an island.' Somehow the student or the schoolboy always feels inclined to say there never was any man on any island. All the same, there was."

She began to feel a little bewildered. "Was what?" she asked.

"There was me," said Alan. "You can't believe this story because there's a desert island in it. It's like telling a story with a dragon in it. All the same, there's a moral to the dragon."

"Do you mean," she asked, growing rather impatient, "that you have been on a desert island?"

"Yes, and on one or two other odd things. But the extraordinary thing was that everything was all right till I came to an inhabited island. Well, I spent several years, to start with, in a pretty uninhabited part of a more or less inhabited island. I mean, of course, the one marked on the map as Australia. I was trying to farm in a very remote part of the bush, till a run of bad luck forced me to crawl as best I could back to the towns. I was going to say back to civilization, but that sounds odd, if you know the towns. By the final stroke of luck my transport animals fell sick and died in a wilderness and I was left as if I had been on the other side of the moon. Nobody in these historical countries, of course, has an idea of what the earth is like, or how a great lot of it might just as well be the moon. There seemed no more chance of getting across those infinities of futile soil patched with wattle, than of persuading a comet that had knocked you into space to take you back home again. I trudged along quite senselessly, till I saw something like a tall blue bush that wasn't one of the monotonous mass of blue-grey bushes, and I saw it was smoke. It's a good proverb, by God, that where there's smoke there's fire. It's a greater proverb, and one too near to God to be written often, that where there's fire there's man, and nobody knows which is the greater miracle. Well, I found somebody; he wasn't anybody in particular; I dare say you would have found all sorts of deficiencies in him if he'd been in the village or the club. But he was a magician all right; to me he had powers not given to beast or bird or tree, and he gave me some cooked food and set me on the right road to a settlement. At the settlement, a little outpost in the wilds, it was the same. They didn't do much for me; they couldn't; but they did something and didn't think it particularly unusual to be asked. The long and short of it was that I got to a seaport at last and managed to make a bargain to work my passage with the master of a small craft. He wasn't a particularly nice man and I wasn't particularly comfortable, but it was not suicide but a sea-wave that swept me off suddenly one night, early enough to be seen and raise the cry of 'Man overboard!' That nasty little boat, with its still more nasty little captain, coasted about for four hours trying to pick me up, but it couldn't be done, and I was eventually picked up by a sort of native canoe, rowed by a sort of half-native lunatic who really and truly lived on a desert island. I hailed him as I had just been vainly hailing the ship, and he gave me brandy and shelter and the rest of it, as a matter of course. He was quite a character, a white man, or whitish man, who had gone fantee and wore nothing but a pair of spectacles and worshipped a god of his own he had made out of an old umbrella. But he didn't think it odd that I should ask him for help, and in his own way he gave it. Then came the day when we sighted a ship, very far out, but passing the island, and I hailed and hailed and waved long sheets and towels and lit flares and all the rest. And eventually the ship did alter her course and touched at the island to take us off; everybody was pretty dry and official, but they did it as a regular matter of duty. And all this time, and especially on that last stretch of homeward voyage, I was singing to myself a song as old as the world: *Coelum non animam* — By the waters of Babylon — or, in other words, of all things the worst is exile, and it will be well with a man in his own home. After all my wild hairbreadth escapes I stepped on to the dock in Liverpool, as a schoolboy enters his father's house on the first day of the Christmas holidays. I had forgotten that I had practically no money, and I asked a man to give or lend me some. I was immediately arrested for begging and began my career as a criminal by sleeping in jail.

"Now I suppose you see the point of the economic parable. I had been in the ends of the earth, and among the scum of the earth; I had been among all sorts of ragamuffins who had very little to give and were often quite unwilling to give it. I had waved to passing ships and hallooed to passing travellers and doubtless been heartily cursed for doing so. But nobody ever thought it odd that I should *ask* for the help. Nobody certainly thought it criminal that I should shriek at a ship when I was drowning, or crawl towards a camp-fire when I was dying. In all those wild seas and waste places people did assume that they had to rescue the drowning and the dying. I was never actually *punished* for being in want till I came to a civilized city. I was never called a criminal for *asking* for sympathy, till I returned to my own home.

"Well, if you have understood that parable of the New Prodigal Son, you may possibly understand why he thinks he found the Swine when he came home; a lot more Swine than Fatted Calves. The rest of the story consisted largely of assaults on the police, breaking and entering various premises and all the rest. My family has at last woken up to the fact that I might be reclaimed or my position regularized; chiefly, I imagine — in the case of some of them at least — because people like yourself and your aunt having been let into the secret is liable to be socially awkward. Anyhow, we are to meet here this afternoon and form a committee for turning me into a respectable character. But I don't think they quite realize the job they've taken on. I don't think they quite know what happens inside people like me; and it's because I rather want you to understand it, before they begin jabbering, that I've told you what I call the parable of the exile. Always remember that as long as he was among strangers, not to say scoundrels, he had a chance."

They had been sitting on a garden seat during the conversation and Millicent rose from it, as she saw the black-clad group of the father and brothers approaching across the lawn.

Alan Nadoway remained seated with somewhat ostentatious languor, and its significance was sharpened when she realized that old Jacob Nadoway was walking well ahead of the others and that his brows were black as a thunderstorm in the sunshine. It was instantly apparent that something new and nasty had occurred.

“Perhaps it would be affectation to inform you,” said the father with heavy bitterness, “that there has been another burglary in the neighbourhood.”

“Another?” said Alan, raising his eyebrows. “That, when you come to think of it, is a rather curious word. And what is the other?”

“Mrs. Mowbray,” said the father sternly, “went over yesterday to visit her friend, Lady Crayle. She was naturally disturbed about what had happened in our own house, and it seems that something happened about an hour earlier at the Crayles.”

“What did they lift off the Crayles?” asked the young man, with patient interest. “How did they know there was a burglary?”

“The burglar was surprised and bolted,” said Jacob Nadoway. “Unfortunately, he dropped something and left it behind in the haste of his flight.”

“Unfortunately!” repeated Alan with an air of being mildly and conventionally shocked. “Unfortunately for whom?”

“Unfortunately for you,” said his father. There was a painful silence and John Nadoway broke into it in his blundering but unconquerably good-humoured way.

“Look here, Alan,” he said. “If anybody is going to help you, these sort of games have got to stop. We could pass it off as a practical joke of a sort, when you did it to us, but even then you frightened Miss Milton, and Mrs. Mowbray is all up in the air. But how the devil are we to keep you out of the police-court if you break into the neighbours’ houses and leave your cigar-case with a card inside?”

“Careless — careless,” said Alan in a vexed tone, rising with his hands in his pockets. “You must remember I am only at the beginning of my career as a burglar.”

“You are at the end of your career as a burglar,” said old Nadoway, “or else at the beginning of your career as a convict for five years in Dartmoor. With that case and card, Lady Crayle can convict you, and will if I give the word. I’ve only come here to offer you a last chance, when you’ve thrown away a thousand chances. Drop this thieving business, here and now, and I'll find you a job. Take it or leave it."

"Your father and I," said Norman Nadoway, in his detached and delicate accent, "have not always agreed about the treatment of hard cases. But he is obviously justified in this, I have a great deal of sympathy with you in many ways, but it is one thing to forgive a man thieving when he may be starving — it is quite another to forgive him, when he would rather go on starving, if only he may go on thieving."

"That's the point," assented the stolid John in fraternal admiration. "We're willing to recognize a brother who isn't any longer a burglar. The only other thing we could recognize would be a burglar who isn't any longer a brother. Are you just Alan, to whom father's ready to give a job, or a fellow out of the street whom we have simply to hand over to the police? But, by God, you can't be both."

Alan's eyes roamed round the family house and garden and rested for a moment on Millicent, with a certain expression of pathos. Then he sat down on the garden seat again, with his elbows on his knees and buried his head in his hands as if he were wrestling in prayer, or at least in perplexity of spirit. The three other men stood watching him with an awkward rigidity.

At last he threw up his head again, flinging back his black, plume-like locks, and they all saw instantly that his pale face had a new expression.

"Well," said old Jacob, not without a new note of appeal, "won't you give up all this blackguard burglary business?"

Alan Nadoway rose. "Yes, father," he said gravely. "Now I come to look at it seriously, I see you have a right to my promise. I will give up the burglary business."

"Thank God for that," said his brother Norman, his hard delicate voice shaken for the first time. "I'm not going to moralize now, but you'll find there is one thing about any other job you get; it will be one in which a man need not hide."

"After all, it's a rotten job, burglary," said John with his jerky attempt at joviality and general reconciliation. "Must be a perfect nightmare always getting into the wrong house at the wrong end, something like putting on your trousers upside down. It'll pay you better really, and you'll get peace of mind."

"Yes," said Alan thoughtfully; "all that you say is true, and there is a sort of hampering complication about the life; learning the whereabouts of treasures and so on. No, I am going to turn over a new leaf. I am going to reform and go into a different line of life altogether. A simpler, more straightforward line. I am told that picking pockets is much more lucrative nowadays."

He continued to gaze thoughtfully at the distant palms, but all the other faces were turned towards him with an incredulous stare.

"A friend of mine down Lambeth way," said Alan, "does most frightfully well with people coming out of tube stations and so on. Of course, they're much poorer than the people who own all these safes and jewels and things, but then there are a lot of them, and it's wonderful what you can collect by the end of the day. My friend got fifteen shillings in sixpences and coppers off people coming out of the cinema, but then he's awfully nifty with his fingers. I reckon I can learn the knack."

There was a startled silence and then Norman said in a controlled voice:

"It would be of some importance to me to know that this is a joke. I will risk my reputation for humour."

"Joke," said Alan, with an absent-minded air. "Joke. . . . Oh, no, it isn't a joke. It's a job. And a jolly sight better job than any my father will offer me."

"Then you can follow it to jail!" said the old man, and his voice rang out in the garden like a gun announcing sunset. "Clear out of this place in three minutes and I will not call the policeman down the road."

And with that he turned his back and strode away followed by his other sons, and Alan remained standing alone by the garden seat, and he might have been a statue in the garden.

The garden indeed had grown more still, and in a manner grey and statuesque, with the creeping advance of twilight, and something of its too florid character was veiled by dusk and damp vapours beginning to rise from the surrounding meadows, though overhead the sky was clear and beginning to show the points of stars in the general greyness. The points brightened and the dusk sank deeper and deeper, and it did not seem for the moment that the two human statues left in the garden would move. Then the woman moved very swiftly, walking straight across the lawn to where the man stood by the garden seat, and in that greater gravity and stillness he became conscious of the last incongruity. Her face, which was commonly very grave, was puckered with derision, like that of an elf.

"Well," she said, "you've done it now."

"If you mean," he answered, "that I've done for my prospects here, I never thought I had any."

"No, I don't mean that," she said. "When I say you've done it, I mean you've overdone it."

"Overdone what?" he asked in the same stony style.

"Overdone the lie," she said, smiling steadily. "Overdressed the part, if you like. I don't understand what it all means, but it doesn't mean what it says, certainly not what you say. I could bring myself to believe that you were a burglar and broke into rich houses. But when you say you're a pickpocket who pinches sixpences off poor people coming out of the pictures, I simply know you're not, and there's an end of it. It's the last finishing touch that spoils a work of art."

"What do you suppose I am?" he asked harshly.

"Well, won't you tell me?" she inquired with a certain brightness.

After a strained silence he said with a curious intonation, "I would do anything for you."

"Well," she answered, "everybody knows that the curse of my sex is curiosity."

He buried his head in his hands and after a silence said with a great groan: "*Amor Vincit Omnia*."

A moment or two later he lifted his head again and began to talk, and her eyes grew starry with astonishment as she stood and listened under the stars.

IV

THE PROBLEMS OF DETECTIVE PRICE

Mr. Peter Price, the private inquiry agent, did not glow with that historic appreciation of the type known as the English Lady which was such a credit to the heads and hearts of Mr. Geoffrey Chaucer and Mr. Alan Nadoway. The English Lady is a jewel of many facets, or even a flower including some botanical variations. And Mr. Price had seen, on many occasions, that face of the goddess which is turned upon foreign waiters, discontented cabmen, people who want windows shut or open at inappropriate times, and other manifest enemies of human society. And he was just recovering from an interview with a very pronounced specimen of the type, a certain Mrs. Milton-Mowbray, who had talked to him in clear and decisive tones for about three-quarters of an hour, without telling him anything of which he could make any sort of sense.

So far as he could piece it out from his notes, it was something like this. She was sure there had been a burglary in Mr. Nadoway's house, where she and her niece were staying, and that they were keeping it from her, so that she might not find out she had been robbed. She was sure the burglary was at the Nadoways' house, because property belonging to young Mr. Nadoway had been found after a burglary at another house. The other house was Lady Crayle's house, and the burglar must have gone there from the Nadoways, taking the Nadoway things with him and then dropping them in his flight. As a matter of fact, he must have dropped something at the Nadoways too, as she was sure her niece had picked up a sort of brooch thing, that nobody had seen before. But her niece wouldn't say anything about it; they were all keeping things from her — that is, from the indignant Mrs. Milton-Mowbray.

"He seems to be rather a careless burglar," Mr. Price had said, looking at the ceiling, "and not what you might call fortunate in his profession. First he steals something from somebody and leaves it at Mr. Nadoway's. Then he steals something from Mr. Nadoway and leaves it at Lady Crayle's. Did he actually steal anything from Lady Crayle? And at whose house did he leave that?"

He was a short, fat, baldish man whose features seemed to fold in on themselves so that it was impossible to say for certain whether he smiled, but the lady at any rate was neither of the temper nor in the mood to search his face for irony.

"That," she said triumphantly, "is just what I say! Nobody will tell me. Everybody is perfectly vague. Even Lady Crayle is vague. She says she supposes it must have been a burglary, or why should the man run away? And the Nadoways are vaguer still. I've told them again and again they needn't consider my feelings, I'm not going to faint, even if I have been robbed. But I really think I have a right to know."

"Perhaps it would assist them a little," said the private detective, "if you first of all told *them* whether you had been robbed. You see, this seems to me a rather puzzling business in a good many ways, but what I'm trying to get at is what has been taken from whom. We’ll grant, for the sake of argument, that there were two robberies. And we’ll grant, for the sake of argument, that there was only one robber. It’s presumed he was a robber, because he leaves about in other people’s houses, things you think cannot have belonged to him. But none of these things, so far as I understand, belonged to any of the people he was then in the act of robbing. None of these things, for instance, belonged to you.”

“How can I tell?” she said with a sweeping gesture of agnosticism. “Nobody will tell me the truth. I am—”

“My dear madam,” said Mr. Price with belated firmness, “you cannot require anybody to tell you the truth about yourself. Have you lost anything yourself? Have you missed anything yourself? For that matter, has Lady Crayle missed anything herself?”

“Lady Crayle wouldn’t know whether she’d missed anything or not,” said Mrs. Mowbray with sudden acrimony. “She’s the very vaguest of the lot.”

“I see,” said Mr. Price, nodding thoughtfully. “Lady Crayle wouldn’t know whether she’d missed anything or not. And I rather gather that you yourself are in the same difficulty.”

Then, before she could realize the affront sufficiently to reply he said rapidly: “I always thought Lady Crayle was supposed to be very capable, a great organizer and all that.”

“Oh, she can organize meetings and movements and all that nonsense,” said the Victorian lady scornfully. “Talk about her League Against Tobacco or her controversy about defining drugs, and she’s all there. But she never notices anything that’s lying about in her own house.”

“Does she notice her husband, for instance?” inquired Mr. Price. “Is he left lying about in the house much? I always understood he was a very distinguished man in his day, and, of course, it’s an awfully old family. I’m told Lord Crayle suffered badly when the Russian debt was beyond recovery, and I don’t suppose his wife gets a salary for attacking tobacco. So they must be pretty poor, and would surely know whether they’ve lost anything of great value.”

He was silent for a moment, ruminating and then said as suddenly as a pistol-shot:

“What was it exactly they picked up after the burglar bolted?”

“I believe it was nothing but cigars,” replied Mrs. Mowbray shortly. “A whole big case stuffed with them. But as it had a card of one of the Nadoways, we presume the burglar had stolen it from their house.”

“Quite so,” he answered. “And now about the other things he had stolen from their house. I am sure you understand that, if I am to help you, I must be excused for assuming a more or less confidential position. I gather that your niece has become the secretary of Mr. Jacob Nadoway. I think I may infer that her taking such a position implies to some extent the necessity of working for her living.”

“I was against her going to work for such people at all,” said Mrs. Mowbray. “But when all these Socialistic Governments have taken away all our money, what can we do?”

“I know — I know,” said the detective, nodding in an almost dreamy fashion; his eyes were again fixed on the ceiling and he seemed to be following a train of thought thousands of miles away. At last he said:

“We sometimes see these things in pictures that are quite impersonal. No personalities are intended. Let us suppose we are talking about nobody in particular. But the picture I see is that of a girl who once knew all about luxury and pretty things, who has accepted a duller and plainer life because there is nothing else to be done, and who earns her salary from a rather mean old man without expecting anything like a windfall. And then there’s another curious picture. A man who’s been an ordinary man of the world but driven to live the simple life, partly by poverty and partly by having a Puritanical wife with a fad against all his old luxuries and especially against tobacco. . . . Does that suggest anything to you?”

“No, it doesn’t,” said Mrs. Mowbray, rising and rustling. “I consider all this most unsatisfactory, and I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“He was really a very absent-minded housebreaker,” said the detective. “If he had known what he was about, he would have dropped two brooches.”

Ten minutes later Mrs. Mowbray had shaken the dust of the very dusty detective office off her feet and gone on to pour out her woes elsewhere; and Mr. Peter Price went to the telephone with a smile that he seemed to be hiding even from himself. He rang up a certain friend of his in the official police department, and their conversation was long and detailed. It largely concerned the prevalence of petty crime, especially larceny, in some of the very poorest districts of London. And yet, oddly enough, Mr. Price added the notes of this telephone conversation to his notes of the conversation with the aristocratic Mrs. Milton-Mowbray.

Then he once more leaned back in his chair and remained staring at the ceiling, plunged in profound thought and with an almost Napoleonic expression, for, after all, Napoleon also was short and in his later years fat, and in Mr. Peter Price also it is possible that there was more than met the eye.

The truth was that Mr. Peter Price was awaiting another arrival, in accordance with another appointment. The two were not unconnected, though it would have surprised Mrs. Mowbray very much if she had seen a figure so familiar as that of Mr. John Nadoway, of Nadoway and Son, enter the detective's office so soon after she had left. But many years before, the Junior Partner had been put to considerable difficulties in covering up some of the early exploits of the Senior Partner. Long after the elder Nadoway had become rich, and the younger Nadoway had so tardily decided that he should also become respectable, there were old scandals trailing behind the business like a tradition of blackmail, and malcontents whom it was still rather difficult to quash. Young John Nadoway had betaken himself to the private agency and practical experience of Mr. Price, who had paid off or scared off the malcontents so successfully that the new reputation of Nadoways was fairly secure. To Mr. Price, therefore, young Nadoway once more betook himself, when faced with a family scandal on a far more ghastly and gigantic scale.

For Alan Nadoway, no longer acting anonymously or even like a thief in the night, but announcing his name even more plainly than when he left his visiting-card, had declared that it was his intention to pick pockets for a living in the neighbourhood of Lambeth; and that if he were put into the dock and the police news, it would not be under an alias. In the curious communication he had sent his brother, he gravely declared that while there was obviously nothing morally wrong about picking pockets, he could not reconcile it with his conscience (perhaps, he admitted, a too sensitive conscience) to deceive a kind policeman by giving a false name. He had tried three times, he pathetically declared, to call himself Nogglewop and in each case his voice had failed through emotion.

It was three or four days after the receipt of this letter that the thunderbolt fell. The Name of Nadoway, the subject of so many strivings, blazed in black and white in the headlines of all the evening papers; in a very different manner from that in which it blazed from so many of the parallel advertisements. Alan Nadoway, announcing himself as the eldest son of Sir Jacob Nadoway (for such was already the father's title), appeared in the police court, charged with picking pockets not only once but regularly and successfully for several weeks.

The situation was the more sensationally insulting or exasperating, because the thief had not only robbed the poor in a most heartless and cynical fashion, but had selected the poor of the very district where his brother, the Rev. Norman Nadoway, had recently become a charitable and popular parish priest, abounding in every kind of good works.

"It seems incredible," said John Nadoway with heavy emphasis, "that any man could be so wicked."

"Yes," said Peter Price, a little sleepily; "it seems incredible." Then he got up with his hands in his pockets and looked out of the window and remarked: "You know, when you come to think of it, that's just the word for it. It seems incredible."

"And yet it's happened," said John with a groan.

Peter Price was silent so long that John suddenly jumped up as a man might on hearing a noise. "What the devil is the matter with you?" he asked. "Isn't it quite certain that it has happened?"

Price nodded and answered: "If you say it has happened, yes, I am quite certain. But if you ask what has happened, I am not certain at all. Only I begin to have a large general sort of suspicion."

Then after another silence he said abruptly: "Look here, I won't risk raising hopes or suspicions yet, but if you'll let me see the solicitor who's arranging the defence of your brother, I rather think I might have something to suggest to him."

John Nadoway left the offices of the detective with a slow gait and a puzzled expression, which he continued to wear all the way down to his country house, which he reached that evening, driving his own car with his usual competence, but without any shedding of his unusual perplexity and gloom. Everything had grown so puzzling, as well as so painful, that he found himself forced against the edges of existence, in a manner rare in the experience of men of his type. He would have said in all simplicity that he was not a thinker, and he would have seen nothing unnatural in the notion of a man walking through life to death, without stopping anywhere to think. But everything, down to the demeanour of that practical little private detective, was so damned mysterious. Even the dark trees before his father's house seemed to stand up in serpentine shapes like enormous notes of interrogation. The stars looked like those other stars called asterisks, which stand in the suppressed passages of a puzzle or a cipher. And the single window lighted in the dark bulk of the house was like a leering eye. He knew only too well that a cloud of shame and doom was on that house, like a thunder-cloud about to burst. It was the sort of doom he had tried to avert all his life, and now it had come he could hardly even pretend it was not deserved.

In the shadow of the veranda, with a sort of silent shock, he came upon Millicent, sitting in a garden chair and gazing out into the dark. And in all that black and tragic house of riddles, perhaps her face was the darkest and most inscrutable riddle, for it was happy.

As she gazed, indeed, and became conscious of the sturdy figure of the businessman blackening the faint shimmer of light on the lawn, a sort of misty change came across her eyes, that was not pain but had in it something of pathos. She felt a sort of sad friendship go out in a sympathetic wave towards this strong, successful and unfortunate man — as towards something deaf or blind. She could not analyse the softening, which was also a severing, until she remembered that she had nearly been in love with him when he was a boy in that garden. She did not know why she should feel so sharply and almost tragically that she was not in love with him now. That she could never, never, be in love with that kind of man now. That kind of man — well, he was the kind of thoroughly good man who thought that telling the truth was as right as cleaning the teeth. It would be like loving somebody quite flat — only in two dimensions.

For she felt that in herself a depth had opened like a new dimension, full of topsy-turvy stars and the inverted infinities of Einstein. She hardly looked into that abyss behind her, she hardly took in the positive novelty, but only the sharp negative, that she was not in love with John Nadoway.

All the more her cold compassion went out to him, without shyness, as to a brother. "I am so sorry," she cried, "for all you must be suffering just now. It must seem so dreadful to you."

"Thank you," he said, not without emotion. "We are having a trying time, of course — and sympathy from old friends does not hurt."

"I know how good you have been," she said, "and how hard you worked to keep off anything like discredit. And this must seem to you so discreditable.”

The repetition of the one word “seem” at last penetrated his solid mind as a little queer.

“I’m afraid it doesn’t only seem so,” he said, “a Nadoway picking pockets is about the worst one could imagine.”

“That is it,” she said, nodding rather strangely. “Through the worst one could imagine comes the best one could not imagine.”

“I’m afraid I don’t follow,” said the Junior Partner.

“You go through the worst to the best, as you go through the west to the east,” she said, “and there really is a place, at the back of the world, where the east and the west are one. Can’t you feel there is something so frightfully and frantically good that it *must* seem bad?”

He stared at her blankly, and she went on as if thinking aloud.

“A blaze in the sky makes a blot on the eyesight. And after all,” she added, almost in a whisper, “the sun was blotted out, because one man was too good to live.”

The Junior Partner resumed his plodding march with the new addition to his list of worries; that among the inmates of the house, was a lady who was a lunatic.

V

THE THIEF ON TRIAL

There was an extraordinary amount of fuss and delay about the hearing of the case of Alan Nadoway, considering that it was merely the trial of a common pickpocket. First of all, it was repeated everywhere, apparently on good authority, that the prisoner was going to plead Guilty. Then came all sorts of commotion in his original social circle, and a series of privileged interviews between the prisoner and members of his family. But it was not until his father, old Sir Jacob Nadoway, had sent his private secretary to the prison, apparently to conduct unprecedentedly long interviews with the prisoner, that the news went round that he was pleading Not Guilty after all. Then there was the same sort of rumour and dispute about his choice of a counsel, and finally it was announced that he had insisted on conducting his own defence.

He had been committed for trial after purely formal evidence, and in his earlier stages of silence and surrender. It was before a judge and jury that the case against him was fully opened, and the prosecuting counsel opened it in tones of stern regret. The prisoner was unfortunately the son of a great and distinguished family, the blot on the escutcheon of a noble, a generous and a philanthropic house. All were acquainted with the great reforms in the conditions of employment which would always be associated with the name of his elder brother, Mr. John Nadoway. Many who could not approve the ritualistic practices, or submit their intellects to the ecclesiastical dogmas upheld by his other brother, the Rev. Norman Nadoway, had none the less respect for the solid social work and active charity of that clergyman among the poor. But, however it might be in other countries, the English law was no respecter of persons and was bound to follow crime even to its most respectable retreats. This unfortunate man, Alan Nadoway, had always been a ne’er-do-well and a burden and disgrace to his family. He had been suspected, and indeed convicted, of attempts at burglary in the houses of his family and friends.

Here the judge intervened, saying: “That is a most improper remark. I find nothing about burglary in the indictment on which the prisoner is being tried.” On this the prisoner remarked in a cheerful voice: “I don’t mind, my lord.” But nobody took the least notice of *him*, in the presence of a really improper legal procedure, and the judge and the barrister continued to look at each other with lugubrious countenances, until the barrister apologized and resumed. In any case, he said, there could be little doubt upon the charge of petty larceny, in face of the witnesses whom he intended to put in the box.

Police-constable Brindle was sworn and gave his evidence in one long rippling monotone, without any apparent punctuation, as if it were not only all one sentence but all one word.

“Acting on information received I followed the prisoner from the house of the Rev. Norman Nadoway towards the Yperion Cinema Theatre at about a hundred yards distant I saw the prisoner put his hand in the overcoat pocket of a man standing under a lamp-post after warning the man to examine his pockets I followed the prisoner who had joined the crowd outside the theatre a man in the crowd turned round and accused the prisoner of picking his pockets he offered to fight the prisoner and I came up to stop the fight I said do you charge this man and he said yes the prisoner said suppose I charge him with assault while I was questioning the other man the prisoner ran on and put his hand in the tail-coat pocket of a man in the queue. I then told this man to examine his pockets and took the prisoner into custody."

"Do you wish to cross-examine this witness?" asked the judge.

"I am sure your lordship will pardon me in the circumstances," said the prisoner, "If I am not well acquainted with the forms of this court. But may I at this stage ask whether the prosecution is going to call these three persons whom I am supposed to have robbed?"

"I have no objection to stating," said the prosecuting counsel, "that we are calling Harry Hamble, bookmaker's clerk, the man who is said to have threatened to fight the prisoner, and Isidor Green, music-teacher, the last man robbed by the prisoner before his arrest."

"And what about the first man?" asked the prisoner. "Why isn't he being called?"

"As a matter of fact, my lord," said the counsel, "the police have been unable to discover his name and address."

"May I ask the witness," said Alan Nadoway, "how this curious state of things came about?"

"Well," said the constable, "the fact is that as soon as I'd turned my back on him for a minute, he was gone."

"Do you mean to say," asked Nadoway, "that you told a man he was the victim of theft and might recover his money, and he instantly bolted without leaving his name, as if he were a thief himself?"

"Well, I don't understand it, and that's flat," said the policeman.

"Under your lordship's indulgence," said the prisoner, "there is another point. While two names figure as witnesses, only one name, that of Mr. Hamble, appears as prosecuting. It looks as if there was something vague about the third witness, too. Did you think so, constable?"

Outside the inhuman hurdy-gurdy of his official evidence, the policeman was a human being and capable of being amused.

"Well, I must say he was vague enough," he admitted with a faint grin. "He's one of these artistic musical chaps, and his notions of counting money is something chronic. I told him to look if he'd lost any and he added it up six times. And sometimes it was 2s. 8d. and sometimes it was

3s. 4d. and sometimes it got as far as 4s. So we thought he wasn’t quite enough on the spot. . . .”

“This is most irregular,” said the judge. “I understand that the witness, Isidor Green, is to give his own evidence later. The prosecution had better begin calling their witnesses as soon as possible.”

Mr. Harry Hamble wore a very sporting tie and that expression of demure joviality which is seen in those who value their respectability even in the Saloon Bar. He was not incapable, however, of hearty outbursts, and he admitted that he had punched the head of the fellow who tried to pick his pocket. In answer to the prosecution, he told the story very much as the policeman had done, not without a gentle exaggeration of his own pugnacity. In answer to the prisoner, he admitted that he had immediately adjourned to the Pig and Whistle at the corner.

The prosecuting counsel, springing up with theatrical indignation, demanded the meaning of this insinuation.

“I imagine,” said the judge somewhat severely, “that the prisoner implies that the witness did not know exactly what he had lost.”

“Yes,” said Alan Nadoway, and there was something odd and arresting in the roll of his deep voice; “I do mean to imply that he did not know exactly what he had lost.”

Then, turning to the witness, he said briskly: “Did you go to the Pig and Whistle and stand drinks all round, in a regular festive style?”

“My lord,” exploded the prosecuting counsel, “I must emphatically protest against the prisoner wantonly aspersing the character of the witness.”

“Aspersing his character! Why, I am glorifying his character!” cried Nadoway warmly. “I am exalting and almost deifying his character! I am pointing out that he exercised on a noble scale the ancient virtue of hospitality. If I say you give very good dinners, am I aspersing your character? If you ask six other barristers to lunch, and do them well, do you conceal it like a crime? Are you ashamed of your handsome hospitality, Mr. Hamble? Are you a miser and a man-hater?”

“Oh, no, sir,” said Mr. Hamble, who appeared slightly dazed.

“Are you an enemy of the human race, Mr. Hamble?”

“Well, no, sir,” said Mr. Hamble, almost modestly. “No, certainly not, sir,” he added more firmly.

“You always, I take it,” went on the prisoner, “feel friendly to your fellow-creatures, and especially your chosen companions. You would always do them a good turn or stand them a drink, if you could.”

“I hope so, sir,” said the virtuous bookmaker.

“You do not always do it, of course,” went on Alan smoothly, “because you are not always in a position to do so. Why did you do so on this occasion?”

“Well,” admitted Mr. Hamble, a little puzzled, “I suppose I must have been rather flush that evening.”

“Immediately after being robbed?” said Nadoway. “Thank you, that is all I want to ask.”

Mr. Isidor Green, professional teacher of the violin, with long, stringy hair and a coat faded to bottle-green, was certainly as vague as the policeman had represented him. During the examination in chief, he got through well enough by saying that he certainly had a sort of feeling as if his pockets were being rifled; but even under Nadoway’s comparatively gentle and sympathetic cross examination he became extraordinarily hazy. It seemed that he had eventually, with the assistance of two or three friends of superlative mathematical talent, reached the firm conclusion that he still possessed 4s. 7d. after he had been robbed. But the light thus thrown upon the robbery was a little dimmed by the fact that he had then realized, for the first time, that he had never had any notion of what he possessed before he was robbed.

“My thoughts are considerably concentrated on my artistic work,” he said, with not a little dignity. “It is possible that my wife might know.”

“An admirable idea, Mr. Green,” said Alan Nadoway heartily. “As a matter of fact, I am calling your wife as a witness for the defence.”

Everybody stared, but it was plain that Nadoway was serious, and with a gravity tinged with courtliness he proceeded to summon his own witnesses, who actually were no other than the two wives of the two witnesses for the prosecution.

The wife of the violinist was a straightforward and, save for one point, a simple bearer of testimony. She was a solid, jolly looking woman, like a superior cook; probably just the right woman to look after the unmathematical Mr. Green. She said in a comfortable voice that she knew all about Isidor’s money — what there was of it; that he was a good husband with no extravagant tastes and had certainly had 2s. 8d. in his pocket that afternoon.

“In that case, Mrs. Green,” said Alan, “it would seem that your husband’s taste in mathematical friends is as eccentric as his taste in mathematics. He and his friends finally added it up and brought it out as 4s. 7d.”

“Well, he’s a genius,” she said with some pride. “He could bring out anythink as anythink.”

Mrs. Harry Hamble was a very different type; and, by comparison with Mr. Harry Hamble, a somewhat depressing one. She had the long, sallow features and sour mouth not unknown in the wives of those who find refuge in the Pig and Whistle. Asked by Nadoway whether the date in question counted for anything in her domestic memories, she answered grimly: “It orter ‘ave if ‘e’d told me. ‘E must ‘ave ‘ad a raise in wages and not told me.”

“I understand,” Nadoway asked, “that he treated several of his friends to drinks that afternoon?”

“Treated!” cried the amiable lady, in a withering voice. “Treated to drinks! Cadged for drinks, more likely! ‘E got all the drinks ‘e could for nothink, I daresay. But ‘e didn’t pay for nobody else’s.”

“And how do you know that?” asked the prisoner.

“‘Cos he brought back his usual wages and a bit more,” said Mrs. Hamble, as if this alone were a sufficient grievance.

“This is all very puzzling,” said the judge and leaned back in his chair.

“I think I can explain it,” said Alan Nadoway, “if your lordship will allow me to go into the box for two minutes, before I wind up for the defence.”

There was no official difficulty, of course, about the prisoner appearing in both capacities.

Alan Nadoway took the oath and stood gazing at the prosecuting counsel with gloomy composure.

“Do you deny,” asked the barrister, “that you were caught by the policeman with your hand in the pockets of these people?”

“No,” said Nadoway, mournfully shaking his head. “Oh, no.”

“This is very extraordinary,” said the examiner. “I understood that you were pleading Not Guilty.”

“Yes,” said Nadoway sadly. “Oh, yes.”

“What on earth does all this mean?” said the judge in sudden irritation.

“My lord,” said Alan Nadoway, “I can put it all straight in five words. Only in this court one can’t put things straight; one has to do what you call prove them. Well, it’s all simple enough. I did put my hands in their pockets. Only I put money in their pockets, instead of taking it out. And if you look at it, you’ll see that explains everything.”

“But why in the world should you do such a crazy thing?” asked the judge.

“Ah,” said Nadoway; “I’m afraid that would take longer to explain, and perhaps this isn’t the best place to explain it.”

The explanation of the practical problem was indeed set forth in further detail, in the final speech which the prisoner made in his own defence. He pointed out the obvious solution of the first problem; the abrupt disappearance of the first victim. He, that nameless economist, was a much shrewder person than the festive Mr. Hamble or the artistic Mr. Green. One glance at his pockets had shown him that he had got somebody else’s money in addition to his own. A dark familiarity with the police led him to doubt strongly whether he would ultimately be allowed to keep it. He had therefore vanished with the presence of mind of a magician or a fairy. Mr. Hamble, in a hazier state of conviviality, had been mildly surprised at finding more and more pocket-money flowing from his pockets, and, to his everlasting credit, had dedicated it largely to the entertainment of his friends. But even after that, there was a little more than his normal salary left, to raise sinister doubts in the mind of his wife. Lastly, incredible as it may seem, Mr. Green and his friends did eventually arrive at a correct calculation of the number of coins in his pocket. And if it was in excess of his wife’s estimate, it was for the simple reason that more coins had been added, since she sent him out, carefully brushed and buttoned up, in the morning. Everything, in fact, supported the prisoner’s strange contention — that he had filled pockets and not emptied them.

Amid a dazed silence, the judge could only find it possible to charge the jury to acquit, and the jury acquitted. But Mr. Alan Nadoway made a very rapid dart out of court, eluding journalists and friends and especially his family. For one thing, he had seen two pinch-faced men with spectacles, who looked as if they might be psychologists.

VI

THE CLEANSING OF THE NAME

The trial and acquittal of Alan Nadoway in a court of law was only an epilogue to the real drama. He would perhaps have said that it was only a harlequinade at the end of the fairy play. The real concluding scene and curtain had taken place on that green stage of “The Lawns”, which Millicent, oddly enough, had always felt to be like a sort of stage scenery, stiff and yet extravagant, with the jagged outlines of the foreign plants like the jaws of sharks and the low line of bow windows like the motor-goggles of a monster. With all its grotesqueness there had always mingled in her mind something almost operatic and yet genuine; something of real sentiment or passion that there was in the Victorian nineteenth century, despite all that is said of Victorian primness and restraint. It was that essentially innocent, that faulty but not cynical thing, the Romantic Movement. The man standing before her, with his quaint and foreign half-beard, had about him something indescribable that belonged to Alfred de Musset or to Chopin. She did not know in what sort of harmony these fanciful thoughts were mingling, but she knew that the music was like an old tune.

She had just said the words: “I cannot bear the silence, because it is unjust. It is unjust to you.”

And he had answered: “It is because it is unjust to me that it is just. That is the whole story; though I suppose you would call it a strange story.”

“I do not mind your talking in riddles,” answered Millicent Milton steadily, “but I want you to understand something more. It is unjust to me.”

After a silence he said in a low voice: “Yes; that is what has got me. That is what has broken me across. I’ve come up against something bigger than the whole plan I made for my life. Well, I suppose I shall have to tell you my story.”

“I thought,” she said with a faint smile, “that you had already told me your story.”

“Yes,” replied Alan; “I told you my story all right. All quite true, with nothing but the important things left out.”

“Well,” said Millicent, “I should certainly like to hear it with the important things put in.”

“The difficulty is,” he said, “that the important things can’t be described. The words all go wrong when you describe such things. They were bigger than shipwrecks or desert islands, but they all happened inside my head.”

After a silence he resumed, more slowly, like a man trying to find new words.

“When I was drowning in the Pacific, I think I had a Vision. I rose for the third time to the top of a great wave and I saw a Vision. I think that what I saw was Religion.”

Something in the involuntary mental movements of the English Lady was halted and almost chilled. She felt faintly antagonistic to some associations, she hardly knew what. She was herself reverently, if rather vaguely, attached to a High Church tradition, but she only half realized the prejudice that had stirred in her. Men who come from the colonies and the ends of the earth, and say they have got religion, almost always mean that they have “found Jesus” or been to a revivalist meeting somewhere; and the whole thing seemed socially incongruous with his culture and hers. It was not in the least like Alfred de Musset.

With the uncanny clairvoyance of the mystic he seemed to seize on her passing doubt and said cheerfully:

“Oh, I don’t mean that I met a Baptist missionary. There are two kinds of missionaries: the right kind and the wrong kind, and they’re both wrong. At least they’re both wrong as to the thing I am thinking about. The stupid missionaries say the savages grovel in the mud before mud idols, and will all go to hell for idolatry unless they turn teetotallers and wear billycock hats. The intelligent missionaries say the savages have great possibilities and often quite a high moral code, which is quite true, but isn’t the point. What they don’t see is that very often the savages have really got hold of religion, and that lots of people with a high moral code don’t know what religion means. They would run screaming with terror, if they got so much as a glimpse of Religion. It’s an awful thing.

“I learnt something about it from the lunatic with whom I lived on the desert island. I told you he had practically gone mad, as well as gone native. But there was something to learn from him, that can’t be learnt from ethical societies and popular preachers. The poor fellow had floated to shore by hanging on to a queer, old-fashioned umbrella, that happened to have the head carved in a grotesque face, and when he came raving out of his delirium, so far as he ever came out of it, he regarded the umbrella as the god that had saved him, and stuck it up in a sort of shrine and grovelled before it and offered it sacrifices. That's the point. . . . Sacrifices. When he was hungry he would burn some of his food before it. When he was thirsty, he would still pour out some of the native beer that he brewed. I believe he might have sacrificed me to his idol. I'm sure he would have sacrificed himself. I don't mean" — he spoke more slowly still and very thoughtfully — "I don't exactly mean that the cannibals are right, or human sacrifice or all that. They're wrong — if you come to think of it — they're *really* wrong, because people don't want to be eaten. But if I *want* to be sacrificed who is going to stop me? Nobody, not God himself, will stop me, if I want to suffer injustice. To forbid me to suffer injustice would be the greatest injustice of all."

"You are rather disconnected," she said, "but I begin to have a glimmering of what you mean. I presume you don't mean that you saw from the top of the wave the vision of the divine umbrella."

"And do you think," he asked, "that what I saw was a picture of angels playing harps out of the Family Bible? What I saw, so far as I can be said to have merely *seen* anything, was my father sitting at the head of the table, in some great dinner or directors' meeting, and perhaps everybody drinking his health in champagne, while he sat gravely smiling, with his glass of water beside him, because he is a strict temperance man. Oh, my God!"

"Well," said Millicent, the smile rising slowly to the surface again; "it certainly seems rather different from heaven and the harps."

"But I," went on Alan, "was lost like loose seaweed and sinking like a stone, to be forgotten in the slime under the sea."

"It was horribly hard," she said in a trembling voice.

To her surprise he answered with a rather jarring laugh.

"Do you think I mean that I envied him?" he cried. "That would be a rum way of realizing religion. It was all the other way. From the top of the wave I looked down and saw him with a clear horror of pity. From the top of the wave I prayed, for one passionate instant, that my miserable death might avail to deliver him from that hell.

"Horrible hospitality, horrible courtesy, horrible compliments and congratulations, praise and publicity and popularity of the old firm, the old sound business traditions, and the sun of success high in heaven and glittering everywhere on one great ghastly whited sepulchre of human hypocrisy. And I knew that within, it was full of dead men's bones, of men who had died of drink or starvation or despair, in prisons and workhouses and asylums, because this hateful thing had ruined a hundred businesses to build one. Horrible robbery, horrible tyranny, horrible triumph. And most horrible of all, to add to all the horrors, that I loved my father.

"He had been good to me when I was little, and when he was poorer and simpler, and as a boy I began by making hero-worship of his success. The first great coloured advertisements were to me what coloured toy-books are to other children. They were a fairy tale, but, alas, the one fairy tale one could not continue to believe. So there I was, feeling what I felt and yet knowing what I knew. You have to love as I loved and hate as I hated, before you see afar off the thing called Religion, and the other name of it is Human Sacrifice."

"But surely," said Millicent, "things are ever so much better with the business now."

"Yes," he said, "things are better and that is what makes it worse. That is the worst of all."

He paused a moment and went on in a lower key:

"Jack and Norman are good fellows, as good as they can be," he said; "they have done their best, but for what? Their best to make the best of it. To cover it up. To put a new coat of whitewash on the whited sepulchre. Things are to be forgotten, things are to be dropped out of conversation, things are to be *thought* better of — more charitably — after all it's an old story now. But that's nothing to do with what things *are,* in the world where things are, and always are; in the world of heaven and hell. Nobody has apologized. Nobody has confessed. Nobody has done penance. And in that moment, from the top of the wave, I cried to God that I might do penance, if it were only by dying in the sea. . . . Oh, don't you understand? Don't you understand how shallow all these moderns are, when they tell you there is no such thing as Atonement or Expiation, when that is the one thing for which the whole heart is sick before the sins of the world? The whole universe was wrong, while the lie of my father flourished like the green bay-tree. It was not respectability that could redeem it. It was religion, expiation, sacrifice, suffering. Somebody must be terribly good, to balance what was so bad. Somebody must be *needlessly* good, to weigh down the scales of that judgement. He was cruel and got credit for it. Somebody else must be kind and get no credit for it. Don't you understand?"

"Yes, I begin to understand," she said. "I think you are rather incredible."

"I swore in that moment," said Alan, "that I would be called everything that he ought to be called. I would have the name of a thief, because he deserved it. I would be despised and rejected and perhaps go to jail, because I chose after that fashion to *be* my father. Yes, I would inherit. I would be his heir."

He spoke the last words upon a note that shook her out of her statuesque stillness, and she came towards him with an unconscious movement, crying:

"You are the most wonderful and amazing man in the world — to have done such a stupendously stupid thing."

He caught her as she came forward, with an abrupt and crushing compression of the hands, and then answered:

"You are the most wonderful and amazing woman in the world, to have stopped me doing it."

"And that seems terrible, too," she said. "I don't want to feel that I smashed such a magnificent mad thing; perhaps I was wrong after all. But don't you think yourself it was getting impossible — in other ways."

He nodded gravely, continuing to gaze into her eyes, which no one now would have thought languid and proud. "You know the story from the inside by this time. I began as a burglar of the Santa Claus sort, breaking into houses and leaving presents in safes and cupboards. I was sorry for old Crayle, whose confounded prig of a wife would not let him smoke, so I chucked him some cigars. But I'm not sure even there I may not have done more harm than good. Then I thought I was only sorry for you. I should be sorry for anybody who was secretary in our family."

She laughed on a low and tremulous note. "And so you chucked me a silver clasp and chain to cheer me up."

"But in that case," he said, "the clasp caught and held."

"It also scratched my aunt a bit," she said. "And altogether, it did make complications, didn't it? And all that business of the poor people's pockets — well, somehow I couldn't help feeling it might get them as well as you into trouble."

"The poor people are always in trouble," he said gloomily. "They're all what you call known to the police. It was perfectly genuine, when I told you how it riles me that they aren't even allowed to beg, and that's why I started giving them alms before they started begging. But it's quite true that it couldn't have been kept up for long. And that has taught me another lesson as well, and I understand something in human life and history I never understood before. Why the people who do have those wild visions and vows, who want to expiate and to pray for this wicked world, can't really do it anyhow and all over the place. They have to live by rule. They have to go into monasteries and places; it's only fair on the rest of the world. But henceforward, when I see these great prisons of prayer and solitude, or have a glimpse of their cold corridors and bare cells, I shall understand. I shall know that in the heart of that rule and routine there is the wildest freedom of the will of man; a whirlwind of liberty."

"Alan, you frighten me again," she said, "as if you yourself were something strange and solitary, as if you also. . . ."

He shook his head, with a complete understanding. "No," he said; "I've found out all about myself as well. A good many people make that mistake about themselves when they're young. But a man is either of that sort or the other sort, and I'm the other sort. Do you remember when we first met and talked about Chaucer and the chain with *Amor Vincit*?"

And without moving his eyes or hands from where they rested, he repeated the opening words of Theseus in the Knight's Tale about the sacrament of marriage, and as he spoke those noble words as if they were a living language, I will so write them here, to the distress of literary commentators:

". . . The first Mover of the Cause above
When he first made the fair chain of love
Great was the effect and high was his intent:
Well wist he why, and what thereof he meant."

And then he bent swiftly towards her; and she understood why that garden had always seemed to hold a secret and to be waiting for a surprise.

THE LOYAL TRAITOR

I

THE MENACE OF THE WORD

It will be best, both for the reader and the writer, not to bother about what particular country was the scene of this extraordinary incident. It may well be left vague, so long as it is firmly stipulated that it was not in the Balkans, where so many romancers have rushed to stake out claims ever since Mr. Anthony Hope effected his *coup d'état* in Ruritania. The Balkan kingdom is convenient because kings are killed and despotic governments overthrown with pleasing swiftness and frequency, and the crown may fall to any adventurer, good or bad. But meanwhile, in the same Balkan State, the farms remain in the same families, the plot of land, the orchard or the vineyard, descends from father to son; the rude equality of peasant proprietorship has never been greatly disturbed by large financial operations. In short, in the Balkan kingdom there is some safety and continuity for the Family, so long as it is not the Royal Family.

But with the kingdom in question here, how different! Whatever name we may give it, it was at least a highly-civilized and well-ordered society, in which the Royal Family continued serene and safe under police protection and constitutional limitations; in which all the public services were conducted with a regularity verging on tedium, and in which nobody was ever ruined or overthrown except the butcher, the baker, the candle-stick-maker and the various types of tradesmen and common citizens who might happen to cross the path of large commercial operations. The country might well be one of the smaller German States that have been industrialized by dependence on mines and factories, or one of the former dependencies of the Austrian Empire. It does not matter; it is enough to secure the reader's respect and interest to know that it was a thoroughly modern and enlightened community, which had advanced in every science and perfected every social convenience until it was within reasonable distance of revolution; not a potty little palace revolution, in which a few princes are murdered, but a real, international, universal social revolution; probably beginning with a General Strike and probably ending with bankruptcy and famine.

It was all the more possible, because breezy events of this sort had already broken out in a neighbouring industrial state, and after some months of very bewildering civil war, had ended in the victory of one out of the six revolutionary generals fighting each other in the field; the victor being a certain General Casc, an able soldier who had originally come with the Colonial troops garrisoned in the neighbourhood, and who was credited in local gossip with being partly a negro, a fact which considerably consoled those who had been defeated by him. For our own territory, which we will call Pavonia, he was only of importance — as an unluckily lucky example.

The public crisis became acute in Pavonia with the appearance of the rather mysterious agitation about “The Word”. To this day there are disputes about the nature of the movement. Some of the government agents and inquirers swore the ignorant populace did really believe that, with the discovery of a new Word, everything in the world would be explained. A wild pamphlet did actually appear, in which the writer argued with insane ingenuity that, as all modern publicity and popularization consist of concentrating a book into a paragraph, or a chapter into a sentence, so at last the whole truth about the present problem would be concentrated into a word. Crowds of impatient malcontents were adjured to Wait for the Word; and apocalyptic visions were provided, of the scenes of world-change that would follow, when once The Word was spoken. The Word would contain in itself, it was gravely asserted, a complete plan of operations and an explanation of the whole organized strategy of the revolt. Some said the whole fancy had originated with one Bohemian poet, who signed his poems, “Sebastian”, and had certainly composed a lyric invocation full of allusions to The Word. Many repeated the lines which ran:

As Aaron’s serpent swallowed snakes and rods,
As God alone is greater than the gods,
As all stars shrivel in the single sun,
The words are many, but The Word is one.

But nobody in office ever saw the revolutionary poet who tossed these little trifles at the Government and the public; until he was identified one day in the street by the very last person who was likely to meet him.

The Princess Aurelia Augusta Augustina, etc. etc. (who had embedded somewhere in her stratified Christian names the name of Mary, by which she was called for convenience by her family), was the niece of the reigning monarch, and, having only just left school, did not as yet fully appreciate the difference between reigning and ruling. She was a vigorous young woman with red hair and a Roman nose, and having as yet learned more about Royalties in history than in politics, took their position with a certain simplicity and could even imagine (just as if she had really been in the Balkans) that they might be worth murdering or worth obeying. She had come back into the life of the Court and the capital, which she had left as a mere child, full of that irrepressible desire to be useful, which is so normal in women and so dangerous in great ladies, and she was at present making herself a nuisance by asking questions of everybody about everything. She naturally asked questions about the popular political riddle of The Word, and generally, as Mr. Edmund Burke would say, about the cause of the present discontents. She was all the more intrigued when nobody could tell her what The Word was and very few, in her world, what the row was all about. It was therefore with a considerable glow of superiority that she returned to her family one afternoon and announced that she had actually seen the seditious minstrel, who was apparently responsible for the somewhat obscure revolutionary rhyme and the somewhat mysterious revolutionary movement.

Her car was moving slowly down a quiet street, because she was on the look-out for a curio shop she had known in childhood and could not immediately locate. Just beyond the curio shop was a café, with a few tables outside it in the continental manner, and at one of these tables was seated in front of a green liqueur an odd-looking person with very long hair and a very high stock or cravat. I have said that historical and geographical identification matter little in this case; and the reader may, if he likes, clothe this queer episode in any outlandish or antiquated fashion of fantasies of costume, for indeed the most recent fashion is full of quaint revivals and modes that might be either very old or very new. The man with the stock might have been some eccentric contemporary or creation of Balzac; he might equally well have been an art student of today, with the most Futurist views but the most Early Victorian whiskers. His mane of long hair was of an incredible dark auburn that looked like dim crimson rather than ordinary red; his forked or cloven beard was of the same unnatural colour and was shown up by the high cravat which was of a vivid sort of peacock-green. The colour of the cravat varied, however, from day to day; sometimes it was of a brighter green when the spirit of spring inspired his songs; sometimes of purple when he was lamenting the rich tragedy of his loves; sometimes completely black when he had decided that the time had really come to destroy the universe. He would explain to his friends that he followed without faltering the clue of the mood and the sky of morning, but they never recommended a necktie that did not contrast effectively with his beard. For this was no other than the poet Sebastian, whose verses counted for so much in the revolutionary movement of the moment.

The Princess, of course, was quite unaware of his identity, and would have passed him with no particular comment beyond a disapproval of his necktie. But he returned to her attention and remained in it because of the curiously different conditions in which she saw him only an hour or two later, when the shops and factories had shut their doors and poured forth their populations. When she came back again through the quiet street, it was no longer quiet. It was especially the reverse of quiet in the neighbourhood of the café where the stranger had been drinking the green liqueur, and if the car moved slowly now, it was because of the difficulty of making its way through an ever-thickening crowd. For the long-haired person in the cravat was now standing on the café table and declaiming what appeared to be alternate fragments of prose and verse, with some modern intermediate types difficult to define. She came just in time, however, to hear the end of the now familiar jingle or rhymed motto:

“As God alone is greater than the gods,
As all stars shrivel in the single sun,
The words are many, but The Word is one.

“But The Word will not pass my lips, nor those of the Four Wardens of The Word who already know it, until the first part of the work has been accomplished. When the powerless have risen against the powerful, when the poor have risen above the rich, when the weak have risen and proved stronger than the strong, when—”

At this moment he and his hearers suddenly became conscious of the sober but elegant vehicle which was pushing its prow like a boat above the popular waves, and the somewhat haughty countenance that appeared above it, just behind the wooden countenance of the chauffeur. Most people present recognized the lady and there was a sudden stir and stoppage, as of embarrassment, but the poet standing on the table struck a new attitude of sublime impudence and cried aloud:

“But how hard it is for ugliness to rise against beauty. And we are an ugly lot!”

And the Princess drove on in a condition of towering rage.

II

THE PROCESSION OF THE PLOTTERS

It has already been explained that Pavonia was governed on enlightened modern principles. That is to say, the King was popular and powerless; the popularly elected Premier was unpopular and moderately powerful; the head of the Secret Police was much more powerful, and the quiet and intelligent little banker, to whom they all owed money, was most powerful of all. But all four of them were moderate in their respective rôles; none of them had ever pushed matters to a rupture and all four of them were often in the habit of discussing, at an informal Privy Council, the growing problems of the State.

The King, whose historical title was Clovis the Third, was a lank and rather melancholy man with yellow moustaches and imperial and rather hollow eyes; well-bred enough to make his weariness appear impersonal rather than personal in its application, but not otherwise exciting company. The Prime Minister was short and stout, and very vivacious for his stoutness; though a Pavonian of bourgeois origin he was rather like a French politician, which is by no means the same as being like an ordinary Frenchman. He had pince-nez and a short beard and spoke to individuals in a guarded, but to large crowds in a confidential tone of voice. His name was Valence and he had been considered rather a Radical, until the new revolutionary movement had suddenly revealed him as a rather obstinate capitalist, turning, as it were, his sturdy figure black against the red glare. The Chief of Police was a big, bilious soldier named Grimm, whose yellow face told of fevers in many countries and whose tight mouth told very little of anything. He was the only person present who looked as if he would be in any way formidable in an hour of national peril, and he was always the most pessimistic of the four about his own hopes of dealing with it. The last was a slight, refined little figure with straight, grey hair and a hooked nose rather large for his attenuated features. He was dressed in dark grey so that his streaks of limbs seemed to repeat his streaks of hair, and only when he carefully fitted on a pair of tortoise-shell goggles, did his eyes seem suddenly to stand out and come to life, as if he were a monster who put his eyes on and off like a mask. This was Isidor Simon, the banker, and he had never taken any title though many had been offered to him.

The occasion of their special meeting was that the wild and hitherto rather vague movement called the Brotherhood of The Word had suddenly received support from a very unexpected quarter. The poet Sebastian was only a poor Bohemian freelance, of obscure origin and apparently illegitimate birth. Even his surname was doubtful: it was easy for the newspapers to make fun of his real affectations and to underrate his real influence. But when it was actually announced that a man like Professor Phocus had declared himself a friend and follower of the poet, everybody felt that the whole social situation had changed. Phocus was quite another matter; he was the scientific world: the world of colleges and committees. He was a name; he was not indeed very well known personally, being much of a recluse, but his quaint figure with high and narrow top-hat, more like a pipe than a hat, and the green spectacles which he wore to protect his dim eyes from ordinary daylight, was a familiar enough object in certain places, especially the great National Museum, where he not only specialized in certain Palaeo-Pavonian antiquities, but conducted select groups of students round to inspect the relics and sculptures which illustrated that branch of study. He was universally recognized as a man of vast learning and laborious accuracy, and when it was stated in cold print that he, Professor Phocus, had found prophecies concerning The Word in the prehistoric hieroglyphics of Pavonia, only two explanations seemed possible, both equally catastrophic. Either the great Phocus had suddenly gone mad, or there was really something in it.

For some time the banker had succeeded in allaying the fears of the Council, by what might seem a professional, but is in these days a practical argument. A popular poet might set all the crowds in the streets singing his songs, and a learned man of European reputation might induce all the dons in the world to read his book. But the salary of the learned man, for taking the tourists a tour of the hieroglyphics, was a little more than five guineas a week, and the salary of the poet was an unknown quantity that was frequently a minus quantity. You cannot make a modern revolution, or anything modern, without money. It was difficult to see how the poet and the professor managed to pay for the occasional leaflets they circulated or the printing of the poem about The Word; let alone for munitions or commissariat or soldiers' pay or anything that is necessary for the higher purposes of civil war. Mr. Simon, the financial adviser, therefore, had advised the King to disregard the movement until its backing was a little more financial. But to this Council the Chief of Police had brought news which seemed to alter everything.

"Of course," he said in his slow fashion, "I'd often seen the poet going into the pawnbroker's."

"The natural resort of poets, I suppose," said the Prime Minister, and rather missed the schoolgirl giggle with which his joke would have been greeted at a public meeting, for the King's face was blank and sad and the banker's careless and inattentive. No change ever appeared on Grimm's face, even on public platforms, and he went on steadily:

"Of course, any number of people go to the pawnbroker's — especially this pawnbroker; he is little Loeb, who calls himself Lobb and lives at the corner of the Old Market, in the poorest part of the town. He's a Jew, of course, but not so much disliked as some Jews of his trade, and such thousands of people do business with him that we were rather led to look into the matter. The result of our inquiries points to the man being quite incredibly rich, all the more because he lives like a poor man. The general belief is that he is a miser."

The banker had put on the goggles that made his eyes look twice as big, and as they peered across the table they were like gimlets.

"He isn't a miser," said Simon, "and if he's a millionaire, then my question is answered."

"Do you know him?" asked the King, speaking for the first time. "Why do you say he isn't a miser?"

"Because no Jew was ever a miser," answered the banker. "Avarice is not a Jewish vice; it's a peasant's vice, a vice of people who want to protect themselves with personal possessions in perpetuity. Greed is the Jewish vice: greed for luxury; greed for vulgarity; greed for gambling; greed for throwing away other people's money and their own on a harem or a theatre or a grand hotel or some harlotry — or possibly on a grand revolution. But not hoarding it. That is the madness of sane men; of men who have a soil."

"How do you know?" asked the King with mild curiosity. "How did you come to make a study of Jews?"

"Only by being one myself," replied the banker.

There was a short silence, and then the King went on with a reassuring smile: "And so you think he may be spending his millions on financing a revolution."

"It would have to be that or a super-cinema or something," assented Simon, "and that would explain the pamphlets and printed songs, and may explain other things yet."

"The most difficult thing to explain," observed the King thoughtfully, "seems to be where any of these people actually are at any given moment. Professor Phocus is fairly regular in his round at the Museum, but I doubt if we any of us know his private address. My niece tells me that she has actually seen Sebastian, the poet, orating in the public streets, but I've never seen him, and nobody I know seems to have any idea of where he lives. And, from what I can gather, though any number of people go to Lobb's pawnshop, very few of them ever see Lobb. I was told he was dead: but that may be part of the plot, of course."

"It is exactly upon that point," said the Chief of Police gravely, "that I have a very important piece of further information to place before Your Majesty. Through a course of long and rather difficult inquiries, I have discovered that Lobb, the pawnbroker, did, about two years, ago, purchase, under another name, a small but comfortable house in Peacock Crescent. I have set some of my men to watch it, and, according to their report, there is every reason to suppose that it is used, not regularly but intermittently, as a meeting-place for three or four persons who arrive very privately and generally after dark, dine there in comfort, but considerable secrecy, and do not appear to revisit it until the next little dinner of the kind. There seems to be no regular staff of servants, and the house is commonly shuttered and deserted, but a servant of one or other of these people generally goes out about an hour before dinner and gets in wine and provisions and presumably remains to wait at table. The tradesmen in the neighbourhood report that he appears to be catering for three or four people, but beyond that they profess to know nothing. The detective, one of my best men, whom I have set to watch the house, says that the guests always arrive about dusk and very much muffled up in cloaks and coats, but he says he could swear to three of them.”

“Look here,” said the banker after a grave silence, “the fewer people who know about this the better. I think it would be well if one or two of us went down personally, and posted ourselves in that particular street on one of these festive evenings. I don’t mind going there myself, if you will give me the protection of your presence, Colonel Grimm. I know the professor and the pawnbroker by sight, and I dare say we might make a guess at the poet.”

King Clovis, in a dry and rather reluctant voice, gave the details of the poet’s purple and peacock-green appearance, as conveyed to him by his indignant niece.

“Well, that may be a guide, too, sir,” said the banker briskly. And that was how it came about that the most powerful financier in Pavonia, and the officer in charge of the whole police system of that country, kicked their heels patiently or impatiently for several hours, a little way beyond the circle of light thrown by the last lamp-post in the silent and deserted Crescent.

Peacock Crescent was so called, not because its pallid and classical façade had ever been brightened by any peacocks, but out of compliment to the bird which was the royal cognizance of Pavonia, and presumably the origin of its name, and which was represented in very flat relief, with tail outspread, on a medallion at one end of the semicircle of houses. Round the whole semicircle there ran a row of classical pillars, in the manner of many terraces in Bath or old Brighton; the whole classic curve looked very cold and marmoreal in the moon which was rising over the clump of trees opposite, and it seemed to the watchers that every sound they made echoed and re-echoed as through a hollow, silver shell.

Their vigil had already been a long one. They had seen, from about the time of twilight and onward, the routine of the preliminaries which the police had already noted as marking the rare re-awakenings of the house; the servant in his sober livery going out at the regular hour and returning with a basket containing bottles of wine and other provisions; the sudden lighting-up of the dark house from within, or rather of the one room in it presumably reserved for the feast; the drawing down of the blind that the feast might be the more private; but none of the guests had as yet arrived.

Closer inquiries of the local tradesmen had verified the fact that the servant had been making preparations for four diners; the actual number had slipped out in the course of his curt requests. The two distinguished spies in the street were not, of course, so completely isolated as they seemed. Other secret service men were within hail and the Chief of Police could without much difficulty put the constabulary machinery in action. Immediately in front of the crescent of houses was one of those picturesque but unmeaning scraps of ornamental shrubbery, with a railing round it, which are to be found in many city squares and secluded terraces. This clump of bushes threw a big shadow in the moonlight, and at one corner of the railing there lurked a plain-clothes officer with a motor-cycle, ready to start on any errand.

Suddenly, and in utter stillness, a small shadow seemed to detach itself from the big shadow and seemed to skim across the road as lightly as a dry leaf. Indeed it had something of the look of a dried leaf, for though the figure was not abnormally small, it was curled up as if shrunk or withered; the head was sunk so deep in high shoulders and a shabby waterproof that only a few hairy wisps wandered in the air, that might be beard or whiskers or even, as a wilder fancy prompted, eyebrows; the legs were rather long than otherwise but moving in a bent and crooked fashion like a grasshopper’s. His passage across the road was so swift and surprising that the door of the house had opened to him and closed on him again before the watchers had fully recovered from their first surprise. Then Simon looked at Grimm and said, with a faint smile:

“The hurry is hospitality. That is the owner of the house.”

“Yes, I suppose that is the pawnbroker.”

“That is the Revolution,” observed the banker. “At least, that is the real basis of every revolution. They could do nothing without his money. They talk about a rising of the poor, but they cannot even rise so long as they are poor. Why, these four men would have nowhere to meet like this, if Lobb had not bought the house for them.”

“I should be the last to deny that money is useful,” answered Grimm, “but money alone won’t make either a revolution or a realm.”

“My dear Grimm,” said Simon, “I know you are an officer and a gentleman; you can’t help that, but really you are becoming romantic.”

“Do I look romantic?” asked the bilious officer and gentleman. “No soldier is ever romantic — not about soldiering, anyhow. But what I say is horse-sense, for all that. There is no soldiering without soldiers, and money doesn't make soldiers. You can give a mob a mountain of munitions, and it's no good if they won't use them or can't use them."

"Well, I should say. . . . Look out, here's somebody else."

The other had already become conscious of a dull clang of sound for which he could not immediately account, and the next moment another shadow had passed across the scene of that shadow pantomime. This shadow had a sharply outlined and very high black hat like an elongated chimney-pot, and the moon gleamed for a moment on the green spectacles of Professor Phocus of the National Museum. He also disappeared rapidly into the hospitable house.

"That's the Professor," said Simon. "Perhaps, as he is so learned, he will lecture to them on munitions."

"Yes," replied Grimm, "I saw who it was. . . . But I'm bothered about something else. Did you hear a sort of iron creak and clang just before he appeared? It must have been the gate in that railing over there. I believe they must both have come out of that dingy little garden. What could they be doing there?"

"Nesting in the trees, perhaps; they look queer enough birds for anything," answered the other.

"Well, the railing isn't high," said the police chief at last. "They may simply have clambered in and out again to confuse the scent, but it's rum that my man over there didn't see them."

A long interval followed, and the two companions pacing up and down to pass the time, fell again into their discussion. "What I mean," said Grimm, "is that it's a bad blunder to reckon on material without moral. Money doesn't fight. Men fight. If the time comes when men won't fight, even money won't make them. And somebody has got to teach them how. How are your revolutionary armies going to be drilled? Will Mr. Sebastian drill them to recite poems? Will Mr. Lobb drill them to fill in pawn-tickets?"

"Well," said Simon, making a sign of warning, "here is Mr. Sebastian; so you had better ask him."

This time it was unmistakable that the newcomer threw open the gate of the little garden and crossed the road to the house. For Sebastian of the purple beard and peacock scarf walked with a certain swagger, even when a conspirator apparently alone under the moon; the gate closed behind him with a ringing clash and even the door of the house seemed to open and shut again with a shade of greater pomposity.

"Those are all we know of," said Simon thoughtfully.

"The man said there were four," answered Grimm.

The intervals between these flitting appearances seemed to grow longer and wearier, and as the last was especially extended, the banker, having less of the professional patience of a policeman, began to grow more and more sceptical of the unknown guest, and to express a frank readiness for his own bed. But Grimm remained fixed in his theory of the quadrilateral council, and after a long interval, so long that they almost looked for dawn in the east, they heard the gate move once more and a tall figure approached the house. He was clad in a cape or cloak of grey that looked silvery in the moonshine; and as it fell apart showed a gleam, and almost a blaze, of more brilliant silver; for it seemed to be some sort of white and dazzling uniform, with stars and clasps. Then the man turned his face for a moment upwards to the moon, and the face was the final shock; for it was darker than the glittering garments. Under the moon it looked almost blue, or at least took on those varied tints of grey and violet that are the highlights on the African complexion, and Grimm knew that the man was General Casc, the Dictator from beyond the frontier.

III

THE PRINCESS INTERVENES

The moment that Colonel Grimm of the Pavonian Police saw that black face turned like a blue mask to the moon, he knew that the whole machinery of the State must act together like one mantrap to catch one man. He wanted to catch the other three men who were his fellow-conspirators, of course, and he thanked his stars for the chance of catching them all together in one room, but it was the fourth man whose presence made the huge and staggering difference. Before his companion could even speak, or do anything but stare, Grimm had sent his motor-cyclist down the street like a stone from a sling, and knew that police and soldiers were closing round and stopping the mouths of all the streets.

For Grimm had a special score to settle with the great General Casc. He had suspected months before that there might be movements on the frontier and attempts of the revolutionary foreign government to make signals to the discontented classes in Pavonia. He had repeatedly pressed diplomatic inquiries and demands through the Prime Minister and other accredited representatives of Pavonian interests, and the answer had always been soothing and had always been the same. General Casc gave his word of honour that he had not the faintest intention of meddling with the internal affairs of Pavonia. General Casc was a plain soldier and no politician. General Casc was getting on in years, and had every intention of retiring from the Presidency and from all public affairs. General Casc was seriously ill, and had practically already retired. All these diplomatic reassurances had been dispatched one after another, lulling to a large extent the listless amiability of the King, favourably impressing the fussy self-importance of the Prime Minister, and leaving only a very vague and dying doubt even in the more cynical mind of the Chief of Police. And now this was the sequel, and the secret of what was really going on. This was how the aged and more or less dying African retired into private life. General Casc was dangerously ill, but well enough to go out to dinner. By a curious coincidence, he was dining with the three men vowed to destroy the Government with which he professed to be at peace. The Chief of Police ground his teeth and looked down the street eagerly for the two or three files of gendarmes already advancing down it.

It was likely enough that there was little time to lose. The presence of the foreign military leader might mean all sorts of things. It might mean tons of dynamite under the street where they stood; it might at least mean dumps of munitions in every dark corner of the city, accessible to the leaders of the mob. At the worst, there was one thing that might save them yet. And that was the instant, sudden and simultaneous arrest of all the four men in that house, leaving the whole revolution without leaders. Grimm waited till his little troop of armed men had drawn up before the house and then cautiously advanced up the steps to the door. He had already made certain that similar groups were posted behind and on all sides of the row of houses, so that there could be no escape unless there was a subterranean exit. He had even put men with ladders farther along the Crescent, in case there should be a stampede along the roof. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he struck once and heavily upon the door, and the light in the lighted dining-room instantly went out.

For some time there was no other response; then he hammered on the door again, calling out in his strong voice in the King's name and threatening that the door would be forced immediately. Then at last the door was opened by the pale servant in livery, who had evidently received orders to delay the entrance of the police by every exhibition of stupidity and helplessness. With almost inconceivable absence of humour, he said that his master and the company were engaged and could not see any visitors. But Grimm paid no attention to what he guessed to be an order repeated by rote. Without further ceremony he pushed the servant aside, merely saying to his subordinate behind, "Keep hold of this fellow; we may as well bag him with the rest." Then he thrust his way down the dark passage and threw open the door of the dining-room.

It was undoubtedly the dining-room, for it offered a convincing picture of unfinished, or barely finished dinner. Of the four places laid, one at least was occupied by the paraphernalia of coffee, while others seemed to mark various stages of trifling with savouries and sweets. Beside the black coffee was a small and now empty bottle of champagne; opposite to it was a large and half-empty bottle of Burgundy; to the left of that, an even more formidable object, was a large and by no means untouched bottle of brandy, and opposite that, by a sort of meek fantasy of contrast, stood an untasted glass of milk.

Cigars and cigarettes of the best quality were placed on a small side table, so as to be immediately at hand, and there was every sign of a successful dinner-party, which had evidently been luxurious without being altogether conventional. At least, there was every sign of the successful dinner-party except the diners. Their chairs stood about the table, some of them thrust back a little way as if the occupants had risen in a natural and unhurried style; one at least was still drawn up to the table as if the diner was not so easily to be detached from his dinner. But he and all the rest had vanished; suddenly, silently and completely, as the light had vanished from the window with the first blow upon the door.

"Pretty quick work," said the Chief of Police, "but I suppose they're bolting for some other exit. Send the men down to the basement at once, and see that Hart is watching the house at the back. They can't be far off yet; this coffee is still quite hot and I think he was just going to help himself to sugar.”

“Who was?” inquired Simon a little hazily. “Do you think they were all here?”

“Obviously they were,” replied Grimm. “One doesn’t need to be much of a detective to pick out the separate places of all four. Their very plates are like portraits; you can almost see them all sitting there. Look at that glass of milk; you don’t suppose that mad poet or that nigger General drink milk, do you? But that’s Professor Phocus to the life, if you can call it life. He’s one of those dried-up old dyspeptics who talk about nothing but health and get unhealthier every day by doing so. He’s full of all sorts of food fads, and must be a most dismal person to dine with. However, the others have fortified themselves pretty well against dismalness. Our romantic Sebastian, who colours everything crimson and purple, even his hair — what else should he drink but Burgundy? But that hard-headed old savage Casc has gone one better, you see. Brandy for heroes, as Dr. Johnson said. And yet the last is the most typical of all. How absolutely characteristic of the little Jew to have a little champagne, but very expensive, and to have black coffee, the proper digestive, after it. Ah, he understands health better than the health faddist does! But there’s something blood-curdling about these cultured Jews, with their delicate and cautious art of pleasure. Some say it’s because they don’t believe in a future life.”

While he was talking thus, apparently at random, he was thoroughly ransacking the room, leaving to his subordinates the ransacking of the house, and his frown was heavy though his tone was light.

The ransacking of the room could for the present be only superficial, but so far as it went it was hardly hopeful. There were no curtains or cupboards, no bookcases; there was certainly no other door and it was preposterous to suppose that, under the eyes of all the gendarmes, four men could have escaped by the window. Grimm made a preliminary examination of the floor, which seemed quite solid, a sort of concrete, coloured with a dull, wavering pattern of an old-fashioned type. Of course, the four men might have gone out by the door of the room before their servant had opened the door of the house, but even so, it was not easy to say where they had gone to. For indeed the ransacking of the house had proved even more barren than the ransacking of the room; and they were considerably surprised to find that there was so little of the house to ransack. There was no basement;

there was only one narrow back door; there was only one other small room, like a smoking-room, at the back of the dining-room and looking through open windows on to the street behind; there was a large and small bedroom of corresponding size on the floor above, and that was all. Grimm was somewhat surprised at this exiguous accommodation, as compared with the aristocratic stateliness of the façade. It sharpened a certain sense of the whole Crescent having something hollow about it; like a stone mask of some cold, classical comedy. Perhaps the moon also made it look a little spectral, but he could not help entertaining for a flash of that pale light the absurd fancy that the street itself had been staged as a part of the plot or comedy, and that it was like a pasteboard palace in a pantomime. His common sense, returning, told him that the imposture was of an older and more ordinary sort, and bore witness only to the normal snobbishness of men who are content with small quarters so long as it is in a fashionable quarter. That row of showy and shallow mansions, with pillars and bow-windows, was probably only a row of men who liked to look richer than they were. Nevertheless, there was something queer about it considered as the headquarters of a vast conspiracy and the meeting-place of the four tribunes of a revolution. There was not much room to store dynamite or dump munitions *here*, anyhow. But another incongruous fancy flitted across his mind; they might well have been storing an entirely new sort of chemical gas, that made solid human bodies vanish like smoke or turn transparent like glass.

A searching and scientific examination, covering days and weeks, brought them no farther than those first few observations of the first few moments. If there was any crack in the concrete floor, it followed no line or direction that they could discover; if anybody had escaped to anywhere, except into the bowels of the earth, he must have done it under a hundred staring eyes and the staring moon. The giant man-trap had closed with the most scientific precision and perfection; only the trap was empty. It was with this gloomy and even alarmist news that the Chief of Police and the financier, playing the amateur detective, went back to report to the Prime Minister and the King.

Despite the swiftness with which Colonel Grimm had darted out of the rear of the house after the fugitives, he was brought up all standing at the corner of the next street, by an exhibition that affected him like an explosion. The whole of the blank wall was plastered with new placards; so new that they might almost have been put there since the raid on the house; conceivably even flung behind as a last gesture of insolence by the runaway rebels, like the paper scattered by the hares in a paper-chase. He put one finger to the paper-covered wall and found the paste on it still wet.

But it was the proclamations themselves that were most arresting. They were mostly scrawled in red paint or ink, which had even run here and there, perhaps with a melodramatic suggestion of blood. They all began with the word “Now” in gigantic letters, followed by the assertion “The Word will be spoken to-night”. The brief paragraphs that followed were to the effect that all was now ready for the blow at the Government which had failed in its last desperate effort to capture the men who would tomorrow be the rulers of the city. It was notable that the people were adjured especially to “Look to the Frontiers” and it was not only implied that the mysterious “Word” was now to be spoken, but hinted that the thick and thunderous lips of the sinister African would speak it.

Passing up the Poplar Avenue towards the red-brick Georgian palace, they found the King of Pavonia in another room, in another suit of clothes and in another frame of mind. He was no longer in uniform, but in a light-grey lounge suit and very obviously lounging. King Clovis was a paradox in many ways; he hated formality and yet he was very formal, on formal occasions; in spite of the paradox, we might say that he hated formal occasions because they made him very formal. But in this more comfortable apartment, with tea-things on the table, he was in the bosom of his family, so far as the presence of a niece sitting on a sofa and staring out of a window constituted a bosom in the traditional sense. The Princess, whom the works of reference called Aurelia and whom her uncle called Mary, was rather distrait and silent, but the King had no objection to silence. The Prime Minister was not present; he always imparted a nameless nuance of fussiness, and the King had a great objection to fuss.

The Chief of Police told the story of his dramatic disappointment and the King listened to it with mild wonder but without any appearance of irritation.

“I suppose,” he said, “that if that old Jew really bought the house specially for them, he must have fixed up some sort of trick in it.”

“So I had supposed, sir,” assented Grimm. “But we cannot as yet come on the faintest trace of the trick. And I can’t help being a little troubled about what these four rascals may be doing. Their proclamations make it quite plain that they are preparing a big move.”

“If you can’t catch them,” put in Simon, “can’t you arrest anybody else? Surely the Party must have some other leaders.”

The Chief of Police shook his head. “That is the queerest thing about it,” he said. “This is the most extraordinary movement I ever heard of, in the way in which it is disciplined and organized and, above all, silenced. There must be hundreds of them in it, but to hear them talk, or rather decline to talk, you would think there was nobody in it. It’s called the Brotherhood of The Word, but it seems to me more like the Brotherhood of The Silence. They all stare you blindly in the face, and smile, or say a word about the weather, and there’s no catching them by any cross-examination. That’s evidently the policy of the whole business. The crowd is more invisible than the conspirators, so to speak. Only these four famous conspirators are paraded before us. Their private meetings are comparatively public, but the mind of the mob is still private and it melts at a touch. We can convict nobody but these four, and the only people we can convict are the only people we can’t catch.”

“Then we have actually nobody in custody,” said Simon.

Grimm made a wry face. “We hung on to one stupid footman who opened the door to us,” he said. “Not a very glorious bag to boast of when you are out gunning for General Casc.”

“We must be thankful for small things,” said the King. “What does the stupid footman say?”

“He doesn’t say anything. It’s possible he doesn’t know anything. Indeed I think it’s more than possible that the man is too stupid to know anything, a big lump of a fellow, probably chosen for his long legs; they say people choose flunkeys for their calves. Or he may have some dull idea of being loyal to his master.”

The Princess turned her head for the first time and said: “Has anybody suggested the rather brighter idea of being loyal to his King?”

“I’m afraid,” said Clovis, in a nervous and uneasy manner, “that the time has gone by for cavaliers and gallant courtiers, Mary. You can’t solve modern political problems by telling people to be loyal to the King.”

“Why do they tell them to be loyal to everything else except the King?” asked the young lady, with some warmth. “When there’s a strike or something at the soap works, your newspaper tells them to be loyal to the soap-boilers, who are accused of being sweaters. The journalists tell them to be loyal to their Party and to their Trusted Leaders and all the rest. But if I talk of a leader who isn't a Party Leader, who's at least supposed to stand for the whole nation and all patriotic people, then you tell me I'm old-fashioned. Or else you tell me I'm young. It seems to be considered the same thing."

His Majesty the King of Pavonia stared at his niece with a sort of vague alarm, as if a kitten had turned into a tiger-cat on the hearth-rug. But she went on like one who is resolved to release an accumulation of impatience.

"Why must the King be the only private gentleman in Pavonia? All the others are extremely public gentlemen or public parodies of gentlemen. Why may any man talk to the mob except ourselves? Do you know what I really felt when I saw that purple-whiskered poet posturing on a table in the street? Of course, to start with, I had a sense of something horribly artificial; he was like some painted and gilded doll or mummy dancing. But what annoyed me most was that peacock-coloured scarf flapping round his neck, and making me remember the old peacock flag of the Pavonians, and how they say that the peacock fans were carried before the King even in battle. What business has he got to wear such colours, if we mayn't? We have got to be dull and genteel and die of good taste behind the drawn blinds of the palace. But the conspirators may be flamboyant. The republicans may be royal. That's why they appeal to the people; because they do exactly what kings used to do, when kings had any sense. Your papers and politicians talk about the dreadful growth of Red propaganda and wonder how it can be popular. Why, because it's Red, of course. Kings and cardinals and peers and judges used to be Red, when we weren't ashamed of having a little colour in our lives."

The constitutional monarch seemed more and more embarrassed. "Perhaps," he said, "we have wandered a little from the point. It was a small point we were mentioning at the moment, about the questioning of the footman and—"

"I have every intention of sticking to the point," said the Princess firmly. "I have every intention of sticking to the footman, too, and preventing any fool from letting him go. Don't you see he is just the sort of thing I mean? All the nonsense they talk against patriotism and militarism has just let the ordinary poor man slide and sink to be the servant of any rascally adventurer. He is put into a livery to be loyal to a conspirator, because we were afraid to put him into a uniform and ask him to be loyal to a king."

"Personally," said Grimm, "I have a great deal of sympathy with Your Royal Highness's view. But I'm afraid it's too late to do that now."

"How do you know?" demanded the lady with some heat. "Have you ever put the real point to a man like that? Have you ever asked him what he feels about his loyalties and his country and the king he heard about when he was a child? Not you; you've just badgered him like a barrister about details of time and place that no healthy human being ever remembers, and he's reduced to looking like the village idiot, and I don't wonder. I should like to talk to him myself."

"My dear Mary—" began her uncle, now thrown thoroughly into disarray, and at the same moment he caught sight of the face that flashed on him over her shoulder, and his voice seemed to die away. Mr. Simon, the banker, had also begun to talk, after a tactful cough, and was saying: "If Your Royal Highness will allow me to say so, we ought surely to preserve a sense of proportion. The footman is only a common fellow and, I imagine, quite illiterate; in that sense, as Her Royal Highness says, a man of the people — but only one man out of a very large people. As an experiment in social science, it might be very interesting to try these theories upon him, but he is only a sample of the social material all round. Meanwhile, we should surely lose no time in concentrating on the really great and dangerous public characters whom we are pursuing. The Professor is a man of world-wide reputation; the General is a military hero at the head of armies, and really to stand quarrelling over the ignorance of a chance lackey —"

As he spoke he found himself wavering between the door and the advancing Princess, and in his throat also the words seemed to dry up. For both men had suddenly seen the face of something that is intolerant and innocent and not altogether of this world; the completeness of that conviction in youth that as yet cannot believe in the complexity of living, and they fell back before her as the great princess demanded audience with a flunkey, as if there were something in her of that great peasant girl from Domrémy when she demanded audience of a King.

IV

THE UNREASONABLENESS OF WOMAN

When the great police raid on Peacock Crescent had a conclusion *pour rire* in the bursting open of empty rooms and the pinching of a bewildered footman, the functionary was trailed along with the few other sticks of furniture that seemed faintly redolent of clues, and in the impersonal manner of men removing chairs and tables with a van. There was certainly nothing about him to indicate any significance beyond that of furniture. He was of the usual size and shape of fairly imposing flunkeys. His face had the sort of solid good looks, at once wooden and waxen, which went well with the powder of the old régime of flunkeydom; there was nothing notable except perhaps that, while his blank, blue eyes expressed something more than even the fatuity required by his profession, the depressing regularity of his features was rather relieved by a length of chin that suggested some sort of obscure obstinacy. And, indeed, the police who had questioned and cross-questioned him came to the conclusion that they had to deal with a case of stubbornness as well as stupidity.

He had, of course, been bullied and badgered, and threatened with all sorts of entirely illegal things, according to the method which the police of all modern and civilized countries apply on principle to all servants, cabmen, costers and other persons supposed by their poverty to be an outlying province of the criminal classes; though every now and then those methods startle all Europe and are held up in flaming headlines of horror to the whole civilized world, when they happen to have been applied, by some fool or other, to a wealthy Jew or a heavily financed journalist. But the police had got nothing out of him that threw the least light on the meaning of his master’s meetings and projects, and the weary investigators were beginning to attribute his silence to ignorance or idiocy. Only the Chief of Police himself, a man not altogether without sympathy and subtlety, still suspected that the taciturnity was tinged with fidelity.

Anyhow, the servant in his capacity of prisoner was drearily accustomed by this time to see the door of his cell open and some uniformed official come in with a notebook or a menacing forefinger, trying to collect more facts from the barren soil of his speech. He was quite prepared for it to happen again and again, any number of times, but he was not prepared to see the same door open and introduce, not a policeman in uniform, but a beautiful lady in jewels and flaming fashionable colour scheme, who entered his prison as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Only dimly did he perceive the lowering and lumpish visage of a policeman in the shadows behind, and the lady herself seemed quite resolved that the policeman should be left in the shade. She shut the door behind her with a resolute clang and faced the astounded lackey with an equally resolute smile.

He knew who she was, of course; he had seen her in the illustrated papers and even driving about the city in her car. In reply to her first question he attempted some stumbling expressions of respect, but she waved them on one side with a direct familiarity that paralysed him even more.

“Don’t let us worry about all that,” she said. “We are both subjects of the King and patriots of Pavonia. At least I’m sure you must be really a patriot and I want to know why you don’t behave like one.”

There was a long silence, and then he said, looking at the floor and in a rather hang-dog fashion: “I don’t want any misunderstandings, Your Highness. I don’t set up to be much of a patriot, and these people were always good to me.”

“Why, what did they do for you?” she demanded. “Gave you tips from time to time, I suppose. Paid you some sort of salary, probably much too small. What is that compared with what the country has done for us all? You can’t eat bread without eating the corn of Pavonia; you can’t drink water without drinking it from the rivers of your own land; you can’t walk down the street in safety or liberty, without relying on the law that defends the citizens of the State.”

He suddenly threw up his head, and the very blank emptiness of his blue eyes affected her with something dizzy and even dazzling.

“You see,” he said, without a smile, “I am not walking in liberty down the street just now.”

“I know,” she said obstinately, “but it’s your own fault, isn’t it? I’m sure you know of something these men are doing, something that’s hanging over all of us like a thundercloud, and you won’t say a word to save us, by telling us where the bolt will fall.”

He continued to stare in a vacant manner, and then repeated like an automaton: “The men were always good to me.”

She wrung one hand with a gesture of exasperation, and said rather unreasonably: “I don’t believe they did anything at all. I expect they treated you rottenly, really.”

He seemed to meditate in his heavy way, and then said haltingly, but with an increasing suggestion of more instructed speech — as it were, working to the surface through the professional primness of his upper-servant intonation:

“You see, these things go a bit by comparison. At the only school I was ever sent to they had hardly any meals at all; my family never had any money and I was often hungry all night, and out in the cold as well. You see, it’s all very well to talk about the State and patriotism and the rest. Suppose when I was freezing in the gutter I had gone down on my knees to the great statue of Pavonia Victrix in the Fountain Square and said, ‘Pavonia, give me food’, I suppose the great statue would have stepped down from its pedestal at once and brought me a tray of hot cakes or a pile of ham sandwiches. Suppose it began to snow when I had hardly a rag on my back; I suppose the Flag of Pavonia, flying on the top of the palace, would have come down off its pole to wrap me up like a blanket. At least, I suppose some people think it would. You have to have rather rum experiences to find out that it doesn’t.”

His figure remained heavy and motionless, but his voice took a new and rather indescribable turn or change.

“But I did get food at Peacock Crescent. Those horrible revolutionists, who you say are destroying the whole city, at least prevented me from being destroyed. Suppose, if you like that they treated me like a dog; still, I was a stray dog and a starving dog, and they fed and sheltered me like a dog. You know what a dog would feel about turning on them or deserting them. Is thy servant less than a dog, that he should do this thing?”

Something in the lift of his voice on the Scriptural phrase startled her and made her stare at him with a new curiosity.

“What is your name?” she said.

“My name is John Conrad,” he said quite readily. “I have no family now to speak of, but we were once rather better off in the world than we are at present. But I assure Your Royal Highness there’s no particular mystery about that. Coming down in the world is common enough in these days. Commoner than coming up in the world, which is even worse.”

She spoke in a lowered voice. “If you are really an educated man and a gentleman, you ought to be all the more ashamed to work with this gang of wreckers. It’s all very well to talk about a dog, but it’s not fair. A dog has only got a master, and naturally he sticks to the only duty required of him. A dog hasn’t got a country or a cause or a religion or any general sense of right. But can you, as an educated man, reconcile it with any general sense of right to say you are a dog, and on that excuse fill the whole town with mad dogs?”

He gazed at her with a painful intensity; in some strange fashion the staring and startling social disparity between them had really faded away on the heat of intellectual incompatibility, just as she had tried to wave it away with a gesture when she first made her amazing entry to the prison. As he looked at her a slow and singular change seemed to pass over his face and he seemed to realize some meaning to the situation he had as yet been too stunned to see.

“It’s beyond all possible goodness that you should trouble to talk to me like this,” he said. “You, at least, are more generous to me than the men who only gave me food. You, I admit, have done more than they could ever have done for a man like me. But I don’t recognize it about poor old Pavonia with its peacocks and palaces and police courts, and I wouldn’t give up an inch of my own scruples for them.”

“If you like to put it so,” she said quite steadily, “do it for me.”

“I certainly wouldn’t do it for the others,” he said, “but you see, that’s just where my difficulty comes in. To obey you would be a pleasure, but I don’t believe a bit of what you say about it being a duty. And what sort of a dog is it that won’t do it for duty, but will do it for pleasure.”

“Oh, I hate that obstinate expression you’ve got!” she cried with a curious uncontrollable petulance. “I don’t mind dogs, but I hate bulldogs. They’re always so ugly.”

Then, suddenly altering her tone, the Princess added: “I don’t see why you should be kept kicking your heels in this prison, all for your silly prejudices. They’re bound to give you a long sentence for treason, if they do nothing else, if you will protect these devils who want to blow us all up tomorrow.”

“Very well,” he said in a hard voice. “Then I must make up my mind to be punished for treason because I will not be a traitor.”

Something compact in his curt epigram seemed to savour almost of contempt, and her self-control suddenly gave way before a blaze of really royal anger.

"Very well, then," she cried, turning furiously towards the door, "you can lie and rot there for treason, because you won't listen to reason; it's all one to us, of course, except that your mad, sulky obstinacy may smash us all to smithereens in twenty-four hours. God knows, and I suppose you know, what these blasphemous brutes are going to do to us all. And perhaps God cares, but you don't. You don't care for anything or anybody but your own chin and your own brutal pride. I've done with you."

And she flung open the door, incongruously giving another glimpse of the pudding-faced policeman outside; then she vanished through the opening and the door clanged again and the prisoner was left alone in his cell.

He sat down on the plank-bed and put his head in his hands, remaining in this rigid ruminating posture for a long time. Then he rose with a sigh and approached the door once more, for he heard outside it the heavy movements to which he was already and too fully accustomed, and he knew that some other visitor, who would by no means be a beautiful lady, was coming to bother him once more. But on this occasion the official interview was somewhat longer than usual, and of a somewhat different character.

A few hours afterwards, when the Princess was declining, and the King accepting, a glass of Italian vermouth from a tray handed by a footman of a far less disturbing character, the Prime Minister, who was seated opposite in that private apartment of the palace, observed quite casually:

"So it looks as if they may be frustrated after all. I was jolly nervous up to an hour ago, for I swear they had got something big that was just going to burst; all their last proclamations were like the cocking of a rifle before the bang comes. But since this silly footman is going to tell us where they're hidden, I expect we shall be too quick for them after all. Grimm says—"

The Princess Aurelia Augusta, otherwise Mary, had risen to her feet as if she had received a personal insult.

"What's all this mean?" she cried. "The footman hasn't spoken. He refuses absolutely to speak."

“Your Royal Highness will pardon me,” said the Prime Minister stiffly. “I have the news straight from the Chief of Police. The footman has certainly confessed the facts.”

“It’s not true!” said Her Royal Highness obstinately. “I don’t believe it for a minute.”

She seemed quite indignant about it, and indeed those who retain any capacity for surprise at the mystery of feminine psychology may be surprised to learn that, at her next interview with the prisoner, in the prison, she was very harsh and scornful towards him for having decided upon betraying all that she had told him to betray.

“So that’s the end of all your heroics and stubbornness and sticking out your chin,” she said. “You’re going to save yourself after all, and give up all these poor deluded creatures that are in hiding.”

He threw up his head in the rather startling fashion he had and stared at her with the blank but blazing blue eyes, that had always something about them of vertigo and the empty air, making the spectator dizzy.

“Well,” he said, “I certainly didn’t suppose you regarded them with so much sympathy.”

“I regard them with great sympathy for having to do with you,” she said, in a somewhat vicious manner. “Of course, I don’t agree with them, but I’m quite sorry for them, being hunted and having to trust such people to hide them. I expect it was you who led them into mischief.”

The last clause was perhaps an afterthought. She said it on those sound general feminine principles, which some masculine minds, in moments of annoyance, have thought slightly unprincipled. But she was never more surprised in her life than when he smiled and said:

“Yes, perhaps you are right. It was I who led them into mischief.”

As she looked at him with a painful curiosity, he added: “But remember what you said. If I did them wrong, I did it for you.”

An instant afterwards he burst out in a new and volcanic voice, that she had never heard before from him or from any man.

“Do you suppose I don’t know that it’s all utterly unfair? Why should you have that power, as well as all the other kinds? Why should you have the only unanswerable thing, the face that is unanswerable like God on the Judgement Day? We can call up ignorance against science and impotence against power, but who is going to raise up ugliness against beauty? Who — ?”

He had taken a stride forward, but, what was much stranger, she had herself started and moved forward in response. She was staring into his face as if it had been blasted by a lightning-flash.

“Oh, my God!” she cried. “It can’t be that!”

For she had in that instant become aware of an amazing possibility, and the rest of their interview was too wonderful to be believed.

V

THE TERMS OF A TRAITOR

One single thought like a thundercloud brooded over Pavonia, its palace and principal city; the sort of concentration that commonly only possesses some ignorant village where a prophet or fanatic has predicted the instant end of the world. The last proclamations had had their effect; even the most careless were now convinced that at any moment a huge invasion on all the frontiers, or a horrible explosion in the heart of the city, would come at some signal they did not know, and by some gesture they could not arrest. The foreign invasion was felt perhaps as the more maddening of the two but they were all the more bewildered because there had hung over all this mysterious movement the shadow or savour of something foreign. It was admitted that the reputation of Professor Phocus was even greater in other countries than in his own; men began to ask with some irritation where the wealthy pawnbroker had come from, and, with slightly greater hesitation, how he had made his wealth. But nobody doubted that these men had constructed some engine that was about to act with hideous energy. It was in the midst of all this tossing insecurity that the message came that the captive footman would speak. He had actually signed a grave document, which ran: “I can say The Word and stop the work of the Four Destroyers for ever and put them henceforth in your power. But I must name my conditions.”

Whatever may have been the historical facts about the decayed family of John Conrad, there is no doubt that he entered on the scene of a Committee of the State, which was also an audience with the King, with the sort of dignity which does not generally appear in the pomposity of footmen. He approached the small table in the palace, round which were seated the four chief rulers of Pavonia, with a proper gesture of respect but without the least appearance of embarrassment or servility. He bowed to the King and accepted the chair in which the King asked him to be seated, and it was the King who was more embarrassed than the subject. Clovis of Pavonia cleared his throat, looked down his nose reflectively for a moment and then said:

"I hope it is unnecessary for me to add my personal word to any arrangements that may have been made. But I am quite prepared to add it, to avoid any misunderstanding. It is quite understood that you have consented on certain conditions only to reveal what you know, and I shall certainly see that those conditions are fulfilled. It is only reasonable, in consideration of what you regard yourself as sacrificing, that you should receive a really handsome equivalent."

"May I respectfully ask," inquired Conrad, "who is to decide exactly what is an equivalent?"

"Your Majesty," interposed Colonel Grimm, "I do not believe in beating about the bush. We have very little time to spare, if these plotters are really about to spring a mine. I don't see how it can be denied that the prisoner must be the judge of the equivalent. I have tried to get the truth out of him by other methods which he may or may not think he has a right to resent; in plain words, by intimidation. It is only just to say that they have failed. It is also only just to say that when intimidation fails, there is nothing else but bribery. And the plain common sense of it is that he can name the bribe."

The Prime Minister coughed and said a little huskily: "That is rather a sweeping statement, but if Mr. Conrad would give us some idea of what he would regard as a reasonable settlement. . . ."

"I shall require," said John Conrad, "nothing less than ten thousand a year."

"Really," said the Prime Minister, in his rather flustered fashion, "this sort of thing seems to me quite extravagant. You could do anything you wanted to do, in your class of life, on much less."

"You are wrong," replied Conrad calmly. "My class of life is much more exacting than you suppose. I do not see how I could keep up the position of a Grand Duke of Pavonia on less."

"Of a Grand . . ." began Mr. Valence, and his voice seemed to fail and fade away.

"Obviously," said Conrad in a reasonable tone. "It would be a gross disrespect to His Majesty, and to the lineage of one of the most ancient Royal Houses of Europe, to ask His Majesty to allow his own niece to be married to anybody under the rank of a Grand Duke of Pavonia."

The rest of the company regarded the affable footman much as the King and Court may have regarded Perseus when he turned them all to stone. But Grimm recovered his voice first with a good gross military oath, followed by a demand to know what the devil it was all about.

"I shall not ask for any formal political office in the government of the State," went on the footman thoughtfully. "But it is only reasonable to expect that a Grand Duke of Pavonia married to a Royal Princess will have a certain amount of influence on the policy of the country. I shall certainly insist on a number of essential reforms, especially directed to a juster treatment of the poor of this city. Your Majesty and gentlemen, if you are at this moment threatened by a thunderbolt from you know not where, and perhaps with the overthrow of your whole nation by foreign invasion and internal revolt, you have very largely yourselves to thank. I will give up to you these revolutionary leaders of whom you talk so much. I will help you to capture Dr. Phocus and Sebastian and Loeb and, if possible, even General Casc. I will give up my companions, but I will not give up my convictions. And when I come to occupy the high national position with which you will shortly honour me, I can promise you that though there will be no revolution, there will be a very drastic reform."

The Prime Minister rose to his feet in uncontrollable agitation, for professional reformers do not like to hear about drastic reform.

"These suggestions are intolerable," he cried. "They are fantastic. They are not to be listened to for a moment."

"They are my terms," said Conrad gravely. "I am quite ready to go back to prison if you will not accept them. I may say, in so far as I may touch upon such things, that the Lady chiefly involved has already accepted them. But I am quite ready for you to reject them, and I will go back and wait in my prison, and you will sit here and wait in your palace, for you know not what."

There was a long silence and then Colonel Grimm said very softly: "Oh, ten million howling devils in hell!"

The twilight was settling slowly over the long tapestried apartment, of which the ancient gold was sufficiently faded to have lost the mere glare of vainglory and to take on the grandeur of a rich but reflected flame, as if reflected from mirror to mirror down the endless memories of men. In the great sprawling tapestry covered with giants, which made the little group of modern men look so small at their feet, could be traced the mighty figure of Clovis the First going to his last great victory with the peacock fans carried before him and the Grand Dukes of Pavonia lifting behind him a forest of swords. There was nothing in that room that did not in some way recall the unreplaceable achievement of a special civilization; the busts of Pavonian poets, who could have written only in the Pavonian tongue, filled the niches and corners of the room; the dark glimmer of the bookcases told of a national literature not to be lightly lost or possibly replaced, and here and there a picture like a little window gave a glimpse of the distant but beloved landscapes of their native land. Even the dog that lay before the fire was of the breed of their own mountains, and there was not a man there so mean — no, not even the politician — as not to know that by all these things he lived and with all these things he would die. And under all these things, they fancied they could hear something like the steady ticking of a bomb and they waited for the catch that comes before the deafening death.

At length, in that silence as of the ages, Clovis the Third spoke for Pavonia and all his people, as it was in the days of old. He knew not whether it should be called a surrender or a stroke of victory, but he knew it was necessary and he spoke with a fullness and firmness of voice which had long been rare in him.

“The time is short,” he said, “and there is no other course, I think, but to accept your terms. In return, I understand that you do seriously propose and promise to stop the activities of the man called Sebastian, of Professor Phocus, of Casc and Loeb, as enemies of this State, and to deliver them up to us, to deal with them as we will.”

“I promise,” said John Conrad, and the King rose suddenly to his feet, like one who dissolves an audience.

Nevertheless, most of the company that had formed the Council broke up in a curious condition of mystification and ill-ease. Oddly enough, perhaps, it had no reference to the elements in the case that were really extravagant and even absurd. The incredible parts of the story seemed to have stunned them all into a sort of sobriety, so that they could no longer feel them as incredible. It was not the notion of a lackey out of a villa in Peacock Crescent becoming a Grand Duke of Pavonia or marrying a Pavonian princess. It was not concerned with the contrast between his figure and his fate. Curiously enough, it was concerned with the very contrary. After sitting at the same table with the mysterious Mr. Conrad, none of them felt any longer any particular incongruity between him and such high ambitions. He gave rather the impression of a man familiar, not only with high ambitions, but with high aspirations. He moved with the indescribable poise of those who have never really lost their own social self-respect, and his manners seemed quite as fitted to a Court as those of the rough police officer or the rather prosaic politician. He had given his word very much as the King had given it, as if it were a word of some worth. And it was exactly there that the sediment of mystification remained in the mind of many of the company, and it was the same sort of doubt that had more deeply disturbed the mind of the Princess. It was not that the man did not seem like a Grand Duke, but that he did not seem like an informer. However conventional their ideas might be about the duties of a citizen, they could not, somehow, understand a man of this sort not retaining the darker virtues of a conspirator, or, in more popular phrase, the honour that is supposed to exist among thieves. Colonel Grimm was a policeman, but he was also a soldier, and there were elements in him that did not easily adapt themselves to a gentleman — especially when he was a gentleman — who turned King’s Evidence. As he looked at the grave face and rather graceful figure of the ex-flunkey, he, who fancied himself a judge of men, thought that he could imagine Conrad more easily as a man blowing up the town with dynamite than as a man betraying his accomplices.

Nevertheless, the man’s word was given, and Grimm felt certain that he would keep it, and heaved a huge sigh of relief on reflecting that they had probably seen the last of the power of Casc and Phocus and Sebastian over the people of that land. And though the worthy Colonel was in one sense wildly wrong about all his calculations in the case, he was, in fact, perfectly right in that one.

He joined John Conrad outside the palace and said to him with military brevity: “Well, I suppose we had better leave the next step to you.”

The next step led them together down the long poplar avenue, past the outer gates of the palace, across the Fountain Square where stood (now somewhat symbolically) the statue of Pavonia the Victorious, down a number of genteel by-streets striking outward from the square, and finally into the familiar and stately curve of Peacock Crescent. By a coincidence, it was once more a night of broad moonshine and the pale façade of that terrace struck once more into him a certain chill of mystery, as of one looking at a marble mask. But it was not to the line of the familiar houses, or to the door of the familiar house, that Colonel Grimm was conducted by his guide. It was across the road to the little plot or shrubbery, with the railing round it; and, passing through the gate in the railing, they walked in the deep, dim grass and under the shadow of the large shrubs. In a place where the grass was shorter and smoother, immediately under the shadow of one of the bushes, Conrad stooped down and seemed to be moving his finger like one writing in the dust.

"Perhaps you do not know," he said, without lifting his head, "that most of the proclamations and phrases in this revolution are jokes. Almost what you might call practical jokes; certainly private jokes. There is a sort of trap-door or lid that lifts in this place, and that nobody ever found, because ordinary openings are roughly round or square or oblong or triangular, or some such calculable shape. But you cannot lift this until you have traced every curve in an extremely complicated outline. Only it ought to be a familiar outline. Only it isn't."

As he spoke, he appeared to jerk up a certain section of the turf, which seemed to be in reality a board with grass growing on top of it, like a large flat cap covered with green feathers. But when he held up the green lid so that it was black against the moon, the other could perceive that it was of a very elaborate outline, indented and diversified as if with capes and bays.

"You ought to know that," he said. "You must have studied it often enough in the Atlas, especially the military Atlas. That is the map of Pavonia. And *that*, if you will excuse our little joke, is what we meant when we said that we should look for safety to the frontiers."

Before the Chief of Police could reply, his informant had abruptly disappeared with a sort of dive. The earth seemed to have swallowed him up. But Grimm heard his reassuring voice coming out of the newly-uncovered abyss, and saying cheerily: "Come along down. There's quite an easy ladder. Just follow me, and you shall see the last of the men you fear."

Colonel Grimm stood for a moment like a statue in the moonlight. Then he plunged into the black well before him. And indeed, in doing so, he rather deserved to have a statue, not merely in the moonlight, but in the sun and the sight of men; like the statue of Pavonia Victrix. For he had seldom done a braver thing in a life and profession of no little courage. He was unarmed; he was alone; he had really very inadequate reasons, when reasonably reviewed, for trusting this mysterious mountebank and adventurer, or supposing that such a man would keep his promise. But even if he did keep his promise, what after all, was his promise? That through this dark entry the solitary officer should be led into the very lair of the lion; into the presence of the invincible Casc, with his triumvirate of anarchs and the devil knew what array of military violence; all apparently established in a subterranean empire under the earth. It was hardly a metaphor to say that it was like descending into hell; and Grimm, though not given to sentiment, could hardly help feeling something sad and symbolic in the fact that the aperture above his head, growing smaller and smaller with distance, traced upon the dark the glimmering outline of his own country. The last dim light out of the sky looked down on him in the shape of Pavonia and then grew dark. It was almost as if he were falling through all-annihilating space, and Pavonia were a distant star. And indeed, when he came to look back on the unnatural wanderings of that night, he was haunted by a sort of contradiction in time and especially in space; by a sense that he had in fact travelled thousands of miles and covered continents and even worlds; combined with a logical certainty, like that of some mathematical fact apparently evaded in a mathematical puzzle, that he had really been operating over a comparatively small area and close to places that he knew, or (as he told himself somewhat bitterly) that he ought to have known. It was doubtless largely the result of his fatigue and the final perplexity with which he faced the final mystery; but it must be allowed for if we are to understand the dazed and almost drugged spirit of discipline in which he took the final phases of the affair. He had left something behind him in the upper air of the little garden, and he sometimes fancied afterwards that it was the power to laugh.

The light like a distant star above him disappeared, and he continued to descend the ladder, rung by rung, only very vaguely imagining what sort of perils or horrors might be below. But whatever he thought of it, it was nothing so extraordinary as what he found.

VI

THE SPEAKING OF THE WORD

Colonel Grimm of the Pavonian Police was very exactly described as a hard-headed man, and one not easily divorced from reality. It was perhaps all the more strongly that he remembered that night as a nightmare. It really had the indescribable qualities of a dream; the repetitions and the inconsistencies; the scraps of past experience appearing like sudden pictures amid the chaos of the formless and unfamiliar; the general sense of having a double mind, one sane and the other mad. It was all the more so when his subterranean wanderings, beginning in the sunken shaft in the garden, did bring him back into what would normally have been called normal scenes. He did indeed revisit the glimpses of the moon, but it made him feel all the more like Hamlet’s father’s ghost. He could not help feeling that he was revisiting the glimpses of the other side of the moon and had come out on the other side of the world. He could not be certain that he had not found an outlet under some strange sky, with stars, and moons of its own, and yet presenting objects of a mocking familiarity. His first revelation, or rather menace of things yet unrevealed, came to him when, after groping through a level tunnel, he began to ascend what seemed to be a corresponding ladder in a corresponding chimney on the other side. When he was half-way up this vertical tunnel, the man ahead of him turned and said in a low and hoarse tone: “Stay where you are a moment. I will go on and look round; they won’t be alarmed at me.”

He remained hanging on the ladder and looking up at a pale disc of light like the moon itself, which showed the opening of the well. A moment after the disc was darkened, blotted out as by the cap that had covered the corresponding hole, but peering up through the dusk, he fancied there was something curious about this particular stopper. He flashed on his electric torch and nearly fell off the ladder. For the aperture was filled with a face peering down at him and grinning like a goblin; a turnip of a face with green spectacles which he recognized instantly as that of Professor Phocus. And Professor Phocus said, with the horrible distinctness with which things are sometimes said in a dream:

“You won’t catch us so easily. We’ve only to say The Word and the world will be destroyed.”

Then the grotesque stopper was taken out of the strange bottle; the disc of dull light reappeared; and after a few moments of bewildered waiting, he heard the voice of his guide whispering over the brink.

“He’s gone,” said Conrad. “You can come up now.”

When he came up, it was to find himself once more in the moonlight and apparently somewhere in the back premises of Peacock Crescent. It expresses the dazed detachment from daily life which these experiences had somehow produced in him, that he was quite surprised to see the police, whom he had himself stationed to watch the place, standing round and composedly answering the rather conspiratorial signals of Conrad.

“You can go into the house in a minute,” said Conrad in the same low voice. “I’ll just nip in and see that everything’s all right, but I’m sure they’re all boxed up in there. Bring your men with you, of course.”

He darted into the back of a house, which Grimm fancied was the house next door to the original scene of the raid, and for some little time the police and their Chief waited patiently outside. They had just begun to consider the advisability of following their solitary leader into the den of criminals, when they caught their breath and stood still, staring up at the house.

One of the window blinds was jerked up and there appeared at the window the unmistakable face and form which the Princess had beheld upon the café table. The poet, Sebastian, stood staring at the moon, in what is supposed to be the manner of poets, looking more than usually florid with his flaming red moustache and whiskers and a necktie of yet another glowing and romantic shade. Then he stretched out his arm to the moon, with a theatrical gesture, and seemed to begin to sing, or at least to speak in a sing-song fashion. It was impossible to conceive anything more operatic; in the sense in which that word is almost synonymous with idiotic. But the words he was chanting were familiar:

“As Aaron’s serpent swallowed snakes and rods,
As God alone is greater than the gods,
As all stars shrivel in the single sun,
The words are many, but The Word is one.”

Then he suddenly snapped the blind down and vanished, the room behind him turning dark. They could hardly believe that the incident, especially so senseless an incident, had really happened at all.

The next moment they were conscious that their creepy friend the conspirator had come close to them again in complete silence and was whispering:

“You can go in now and nab them all.”

Grimm, at the head of his stolid policemen, stumped up some stairs and along one or two passages and arrived eventually in a large, empty room. It was rather a curious room, having one table in the middle, with four chairs and four pads of blotting paper, as if arranged for a regular committee. But what was much more curious was this: that in each of the four walls of the room there was let in a door, with an old brass knocker, as if they were the four front doors of separate houses. Each of them bore a notice in large letters; one being inscribed “Professor Phocus”, another “General Casc”, a third “Mr. Loeb”, and a fourth simply “Sebastian”, as with that magnificent flourish with which foreign poets sign a single name.

“This is where they live,” said John Conrad, “and I promise you they shall not escape.”

Then after a pause he added: “But before we seek them out in their separate suites of apartments, I want to talk to you about something. I want to talk to you about The Word.”

“I suppose,” said the official grimly, “that we are to be allowed to hear The Word also, though somebody has just told me that it will destroy the world.”

“I do not think it will destroy the world,” answered Conrad gravely. “I hope it will rather recreate it.”

“Then,” said Grimm, “I may take it that when we do know The Word, we shan’t find that is a joke too.”

“In one sense it’s a joke,” answered the other. “In one sense when you know it, you will know it’s a joke. But the joke is that you know it already.”

“I’m sure I don’t know what you mean by saying so,” said the other.

“You have heard The Word twenty times,” said Conrad.

“You heard it only ten minutes ago. We have shouted and bellowed The Word at you all the time, and made it as plain as a placard on the wall. The whole secret of this conspiracy is really in one word; only that we’ve never kept it a secret.”

Grimm was looking at him with gleaming eyes under his heavy brows, and something like a suspicion was creeping into his face. Conrad repeated very seriously, with a slow and heavy enunciation the words:

“As all stars shrivel in the single sun . . .”

Grimm leapt to his feet with an oath and suddenly made a dash at the door labelled “Sebastian”.

“Yes, you’ve got it,” said Conrad with a smile. “It’s only a question of which word you italicize. Or, if you like, of which word you begin with a big letter.”

“The words are many,” muttered Grimm, fumbling at the door.

“Yes,” answered the other, “but the word is One.”

Colonel Grimm flung open the door of the poet’s suite of apartments and found it was a cupboard. It was quite an ordinary shallow cupboard with a few hat-pegs, and from these were hanging a red wig, a red artificial beard, a scarf of peacock colours and all the externals of the popular poet.

“All the history of the great revolution,” went on John Conrad, in the calm tone of a lecturer, “the whole method by which it was enabled to spread and menace the great State of Pavonia is and always was to be summed up in a single word: a word I constantly repeated, but a word that you never guessed. It is the word One.”

He stepped from the table to the door at right angles to the open one; the door inscribed with the name of the Professor, and throwing it open, revealed another cupboard, with a hat-peg supporting an unnaturally narrow, tall hat, a dilapidated waterproof and a bulbous mask bridged by a pair of green spectacles.

“These are the luxurious apartments of the celebrated Professor Phocus,” he said. “Need I explain to you that there never was any Professor Phocus? — except myself, of course, who professed to be the Professor. In the case of Loeb and Casc I ran rather a greater risk, for they were, or had been, real people.”

He paused a moment, rubbing his long chin, and then said:

“But it’s odd how you shrewd policemen blunder by not simply believing what you are told. You said that the Pavonian people must all be drilled in a wonderful conspiracy; simply because they denied that there was a conspiracy. They all agreed in that; so you thought that was conspiracy in itself. As a matter of fact they knew nothing, because there was nothing to know. It was the same with your international relations. Old General Casc told you again and again that he was old, and he was ill and in retirement. And so he is. He’s in such complete retirement that he hasn’t even heard that he is walking about the streets of the Pavonian capital in full uniform. But you wouldn’t believe him, because you wouldn’t believe anybody. The Princess herself said the poet looked all painted and artificial in his purple whiskers. And that would have told you the whole story, if you’d only listened to her. Then everybody said, even the King himself, that old Loeb the pawnbroker was dead, and so he was. He died years before I began to impersonate him with these trifling adornments.”

And he threw open another cupboard, displaying a dusty interior festooned as if with cobwebs with the grey whiskers and shabby grey garments attributed to the miser.

“That was the beginning of the whole business. Old Loeb really did take this house privately, but for very private reasons; not exactly out of pure public spirit; no. I really was his servant, having come down to that sort of service, and the only thing I inherited from the old rascal’s régime, the only thing I didn’t invent myself, was the underground passage, which he had constructed for himself. As I say, there were no political ideals involved in that; odd sort of ladies used it and so on. He was not a nice old gentleman. Well, I don’t know whether you will enter into the fine shade of my feelings, but, although I was starving and ready to be a scavenger, yet three years in the service of a sensual usurer left me in a rather revolutionary state of mind. It seemed to me that the world, as seen from that particular sewer, by that particular scavenger, was rather an ugly place. So I decided to have a revolution. Or rather, I decided to be a revolution. It was all very easy, really, if one did it slowly and with a little tact and imagination. I built up the characters of four quite different public men, two of them quite imaginary. You never saw any two of them at the same moment, and you never noticed it. When they were supposed to gather for their periodical dinner, I had only to put on one disguise after the other and go round behind the scenes, so to speak, in the underground passage, so that they only seemed to turn up one after another in a leisurely fashion. For the rest, you’ve no notion how easy it is to bamboozle a really enlightened, educated modern town, used to newspapers and all that. It was only necessary for each person to have a vast, vague reputation, more or less foreign. When Professor Phocus wrote learned letters to the papers, with half the alphabet after his name, nobody was going to admit they had never heard of the famous Professor Phocus. When Sebastian said he was the greatest poet in modern Europe, everybody felt that he ought to know. And if you get three or four names of that sort nowadays, you have got everything. There never was a time in history when the few counted for so much, and the many for so little. When the newspapers say ‘The nation is behind Mr. Binks’, it means that about three newspaper proprietors are behind him. When the professors say ‘The opinion of Europe has now accepted the Gollywog theory’, it means that about four professors in Germany have accepted it. The moment I’d got my millionaire and my man of science, I knew I was pretty safe; but the poet was a pleasing ornament and I knew the threat of the foreign general would throw you all into fits. By the way,” he added apologetically, “I have not shown you the magnificent apartments of General Casc, but it’s only the uniform. The rest consists chiefly of blacking.”

“Quite so,” said Colonel Grimm, politely. “I will excuse you from exhibiting the blacking. And now, what is to happen?”

The chief conspirator seemed to be still sunken in a sort of reverie. At last he said:

“I felt that all revolutions had failed through treason or disunion among the revolutionists. I resolved that the others should not betray me. I did not foresee that I might betray the others. But after all, this rebellion has also ended in betrayal. Colonel Grimm, I give up my confederates. The great poet Sebastian is captured and hanged; the great soldier Casc is captured and hanged; Phocus and Loeb are captured and hanged. You can see them hanging-on hat-pegs.”

Then he added, with a bow of profound modesty:

“But their humble tool, John Conrad, has the pardon of the King.”

Grimm once more sprang erect with a ringing curse which cracked and turned to a laugh. Then he said:

“John Conrad, you are a devil, but I shouldn’t wonder if you brought it off after all. Clovis the Third may have forgotten that he is still a king, but somewhere in his stale memories he remembers that he is still a gentleman. Go on your way, Grand Duke of Pavonia; it is possible that you know the way to go! After all, you have done what you said you would do, and kept your own word in your own way.”

“Yes,” said Conrad, with a new sobriety, “it is the only thing worth calling The Word.”

It has been already explained that Pavonia possessed a modern and enlightened Government; and in the light of this fact it may seem a strain on the reader’s credulity to say that it did actually keep its word to the eccentric footman. The politicians and the financiers made some difficulties, feeling that the keeping of promises must not become a habit. But for once the King put his foot down, not without a faint and far-off jingle of the ancient spurs and sword. He said it was a point of purely personal honour, but there was a rumour that his niece had a good deal to do with it.

EPILOGUE OF THE PRESSMAN

The Thief, the Quack, the Murderer and the Traitor, had made their confessions of crime to Mr. Pinion of the *Comet* somewhat more briefly and personally than the same tales have been recorded here. Nevertheless, they took a tolerably long time from start to finish, and throughout the whole of that time Mr. Pinion had preserved an air of polite attention and had not interrupted by so much as a word.

When they were over, he coughed slightly and said: “Well, gentlemen, I’m sure I’ve been very much interested in your remarkable narratives. But I suppose most of us get misrepresented a bit from time to time. I hope you’ll do me the honour, gentlemen, of allowing that I haven’t pumped you, or prompted you, or stuck my oar in anyway, but have enjoyed your hospitality without taking advantage of it.”

“I am sure,” said the doctor heartily, “nobody could possibly have been more patient and considerate.”

“I only ask,” proceeded Mr. Pinion, in his gentle tones, “because in the newspaper world of my own country I am known as the Bloody Battering-Ram, also the Home-Wrecker, the Heart-Searcher and occasionally as Jack the Ripper, because of my unscrupulous ripping-up of the most sacred secrets of private life. Headlines such as ‘Bull-Dog Pinion Pins President’, or ‘Home-Wrecker Has Scalp of Screaming Secretary’, are common on the brighter news-pages of my native state. The story is still told of how I hung on to Judge Grogan by one leg, when he was climbing into the aeroplane.”

“Well,” said the doctor, “I own I never should have guessed it of you. Nobody would think you’d ever done a thing like that.”

“I never did,” replied Mr. Pinion calmly. “Judge Grogan and I had a perfectly friendly conversation at his own country residence at his own request. But each of us has got to keep up his own professional reputation, whether it’s as a Murderer, a Robber or a Reporter.”

“Do you mean,” asked the big man intervening, “that you didn’t really batter or wreck or rip anything or anybody?”

“Well, not quite so much as you murdered anybody,” answered the American in his guarded tone. “But I have to let on that I’ve been horribly rude to everybody, or I’d lose my professional prestige and perhaps my job.

As a matter of fact, I generally find I can get anything I want by being polite. My experience is," he added mildly and gravely, "that most folks are only too ready to talk about themselves."

The four men around him looked at each other and then broke into a laugh.

"That's certainly one for us," said the doctor. "You've certainly got our stories out of us and done it by being perfectly polite. Do you really mean to say that if you publish them, you'd have to pretend you could only do it by being rude?"

"I guess so," said Mr. Pinion, nodding gravely. "If I publish your story, I'd have to say I broke down the door of Dr. Judson's surgery as he was bandaging somebody with his throat cut, and just wouldn't let him finish till he'd told me his life-story. I'd have to pretend Mr. Nadoway was just off to his dying mother, when I boarded his car and got his views on Capital versus Labour. I'd be obliged to burgle the third gentleman's house or wreck the fourth gentleman's train, or do something to show my editor I'm a real live wire of a reporter. Of course you never need to do it really, you can do most things by decent manners and talking to people at appropriate times. Or rather," and he again suppressed a smile, "letting them talk to you."

"Do you think," asked the big man thoughtfully, "that that sort of sensationalism really impresses the public?"

"I don't know," said the journalist. "I should rather think not. It impresses the editor, and that's what I've got to think about."

"But, if you'll excuse me, don't you mind yourself," pursued the other. "Don't you mind everybody from Maine to Mexico calling you a Bloody Battering-Ram when you're really a perfectly normal and well-educated gentleman?"

"Well," said the journalist, "I suppose, as I say, that most of us are misunderstood one way or another."

There was a momentary silence at the table, and then Dr. Judson turned in his chair with a sort of jerk and said:

"Gentlemen, I beg to propose Mr. Lee Pinion as a member of the Club."

THE END

THE PARADOXES OF MR. POND

This is Chesterton’s final collection of detective stories, which was published after his death in 1936. Of the eight mysteries, seven were first printed in the *Storyteller* magazine, whilst *The Unmentionable Man* appeared in this collection for the first time.

The stories concern a civil servant named Mr. Pond, who is described as an ordinary man with a habit of startling those that meet him with paradoxical statements. He seems unaware of the oddness of his remarks, and his friend Sir Hubert Wotton explains: “he looks a very sedentary, scientific little cuss... but he’s really had very extraordinary experiences. He doesn’t talk about them; he doesn’t want to talk about them... but when, in the course of talking in the abstract he comes on some concrete thing that he has actually done - well, I can only say he crumples it up. He tries to crush it into a small space and it simply sounds contradictory. Almost every one of those crazy sentences simply stands for one of the adventures in what would be called by most people a very unadventurous life.”

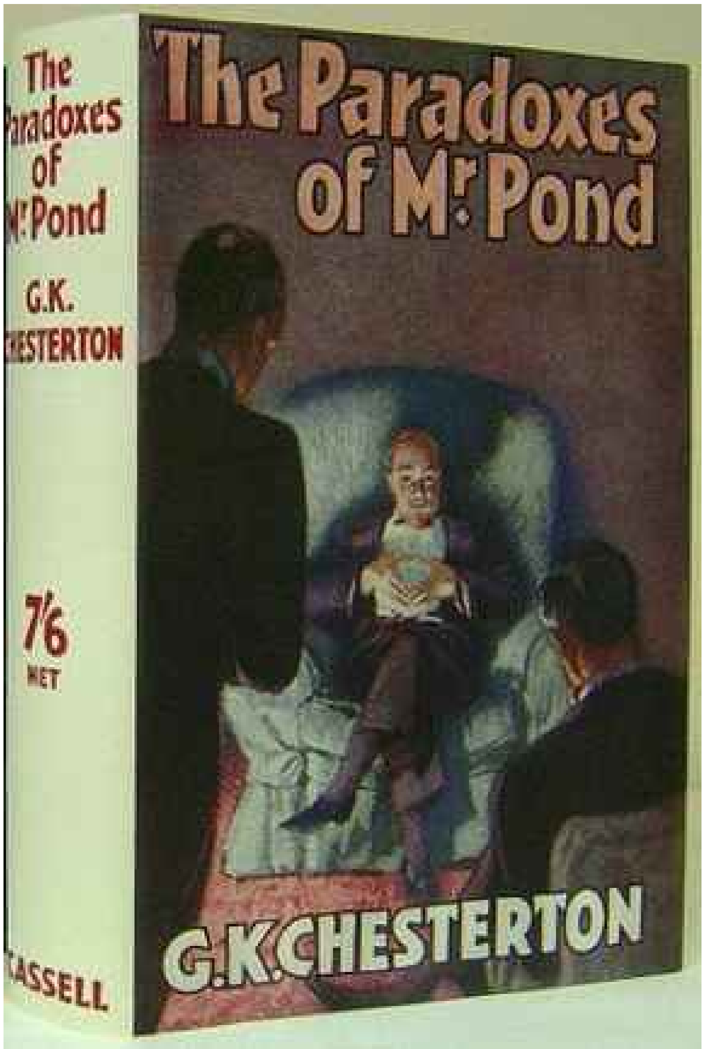
The Paradoxes of Mr. Pond
G.K. CHESTERTON
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THE THREE HORSEMEN OF APOCALYPSE

The curious and sometimes creepy effect which Mr. Pond produced upon me, despite his commonplace courtesy and dapper decorum, was possibly connected with some memories of childhood; and the vague verbal association of his name. He was a Government official who was an old friend of my father; and I fancy my infantile imagination had somehow mixed up the name of Mr. Pond with the pond in the garden. When one came to think of it, he was curiously like the pond in the garden. He was so quiet at all normal times, so neat in shape and so shiny, so to speak, in his ordinary reflections of earth and sky and the common daylight. And yet I knew there were some queer things in the pond in the garden. Once in a hundred times, on one or two days during the whole year, the pond would look oddly different; or there would come a flitting shadow or a flash in its flat serenity; and a fish or a frog or some more grotesque creature would show itself to the sky. And I knew there were monsters in Mr. Pond also: monsters in his mind which rose only for a moment to the surface and sank again. They took the form of monstrous remarks, in the middle of all his mild and rational remarks. Some people thought he had suddenly gone mad in the midst of his sanest conversation. But even they had to admit that he must have suddenly gone sane again.

Perhaps, again, this foolish fantasy was fixed in the youthful mind because, at certain moments, Mr. Pond looked rather like a fish himself. His manners were not only quite polite but quite conventional; his very gestures were conventional, with the exception of one occasional trick of plucking at his pointed beard which seemed to come on him chiefly when he was at last forced to be serious about one of his strange and random statements. At such moments he would stare owlishly in front of him and pull his beard, which had a comic effect of pulling his mouth open, as if it were the mouth of a puppet with hairs for wires. This odd, occasional opening and shutting of his mouth, without speech, had quite a startling similarity to the slow gaping and gulping of a fish. But it never lasted for more than a few seconds, during which, I suppose, he swallowed the unwelcome proposal of explaining what on earth he meant.

He was talking quite quietly one day to Sir Hubert Wotton, the well-known diplomatist; they were seated under gaily-striped tents or giant parasols in our own garden, and gazing towards the pond which I had perversely associated with him. They happened to be talking about a part of the world that both of them knew well, and very few people in Western Europe at all: the vast flats fading into fens and swamps that stretch across Pomerania and Poland and Russia and the rest; right away, for all I know, into the Siberian deserts. And Mr. Pond recalled that, across a region where the swamps are deepest and intersected by pools and sluggish rivers, there runs a single road raised on a high causeway with steep and sloping sides: a straight path safe enough for the ordinary pedestrian, but barely broad enough for two horsemen to ride abreast. That is the beginning of the story.

It concerned a time not very long ago, but a time in which horsemen were still used much more than they are at present, though already rather less as fighters than as couriers. Suffice it to say that it was in one of the many wars that have laid waste that part of the world — in so far as it is possible to lay waste such a wilderness. Inevitably it involved the pressure of the Prussian system on the nation of the Poles, but beyond that it is not necessary to expound the politics of the matter, or discuss its rights and wrongs here. Let us merely say, more lightly, that Mr. Pond amused the company with a riddle.

“I expect you remember hearing,” said Pond, “of all the excitement there was about Paul Petrowski, the poet from Cracow, who did two things rather dangerous in those days: moving from Cracow and going to live in Poznan; and trying to combine being a poet with being a patriot. The town he was living in was held at the moment by the Prussians; it was situated exactly at the eastern end of the long causeway; the Prussian command having naturally taken care to hold the bridgehead of such a solitary bridge across such a sea of swamps. But their base for that particular operation was at the western end of the causeway; the celebrated Marshal Von Grock was in general command; and, as it happened, his own old regiment, which was still his favourite regiment, the White Hussars, was posted nearest to the beginning of the great embanked road. Of course, everything was spick and span, down to every detail of the wonderful white uniforms, with the flame-coloured baldrick slung across them; for this was just before the universal use of colours like mud and clay for all the uniforms in the world. I don’t blame them for that; I sometimes feel the old epoch of heraldry was a finer thing than all that epoch of imitative colouring, that came in with natural history and the worship of chameleons and beetles. Anyhow, this crack regiment of cavalry in the Prussian service still wore its own uniform; and, as you will see, that was another element in the fiasco. But it wasn't only the uniforms; it was the uniformity. The whole thing went wrong because the discipline was too good. Grock's soldiers obeyed him too well; so he simply couldn't do a thing he wanted."

"I suppose that's a paradox," said Wotton, heaving a sigh. "Of course, it's very clever and all that; but really, it's all nonsense, isn't it? Oh, I know people say in a general way that there's too much discipline in the German army. But you can't have too much discipline in an army."

"But I don't say it in a general way," said Pond plaintively. "I say it in a particular way, about this particular case. Grock failed because his soldiers obeyed him. Of course, if *one* of his soldiers had obeyed him, it wouldn't have been so bad. But when *two* of his soldiers obeyed him — why, really, the poor old devil had no chance."

Wotton laughed in a guttural fashion. "I'm glad to hear your new military theory. You'd allow one soldier in a regiment to obey orders; but two soldiers obeying orders strikes you as carrying Prussian discipline a bit too far."

"I haven't got any military theory. I'm talking about a military fact," replied Mr. Pond placidly. "It is a military fact that Grock failed, because two of his soldiers obeyed him. It is a military fact that he might have succeeded, if one of them had disobeyed him. You can make up what theories you like about it afterwards."

"I don't go in much for theories myself," said Wotton rather stiffly, as if he had been touched by a trivial insult.

At this moment could be seen striding across the sun-chequered lawn, the large and swaggering figure of Captain Gahagan, the highly incongruous friend and admirer of little Mr. Pond. He had a flaming flower in his buttonhole and a grey top-hat slightly slanted upon his ginger-haired head; and he walked with a swagger that seemed to come out of an older period of dandies and duellists, though he himself was comparatively young. So long as his tall, broad-shouldered figure was merely framed against the sunlight, he looked like the embodiment of all arrogance. When he came and sat down, with the sun on his face, there was a sudden contradiction of all this in his very soft brown eyes, which looked sad and even a little anxious.

Mr. Pond, interrupting his monologue, was almost in a twitter of apologies: “I’m afraid I’m talking too much, as usual; the truth is I was talking about that poet, Petrowski, who was nearly executed in Poznan — quite a long time ago. The military authorities on the spot hesitated and were going to let him go, unless they had direct orders from Marshal Von Grock or higher; but Marshal Von Grock was quite determined on the poet’s death; and sent orders for his execution that very evening. A reprieve was sent afterwards to save him; but as the man carrying the reprieve died on the way, the prisoner was released, after all.”

“But as—” repeated Wotton mechanically.

“The man carrying the *reprieve,”* added Gahagan somewhat sarcastically.

“Died on the way,” muttered Wotton.

“Why then, of course, the prisoner was released,” observed Gahagan in a loud and cheerful voice. “All as clear as clear can be. Tell us another of those stories, Grandpapa.”

“It’s a perfectly true story,” protested Pond, “and it happened exactly as I say. It isn’t any paradox or anything like that. Only, of course, you have to know the story to see how simple it is.”

“Yes,” agreed Gahagan. “I think I should have to know the story, before realizing how simple it is.”

“Better tell us the story and have done with it,” said Wotton shortly.

Paul Petrowski was one of those utterly unpractical men who are of prodigious importance in practical politics. His power lay in the fact that he was a national poet but an international singer. That is, he happened to have a very fine and powerful voice, with which he sang his own patriotic songs in half the concert halls of the world. At home, of course, he was a torch and trumpet of revolutionary hopes, especially then, in the sort of international crisis in which practical politicians disappear, and their place is taken by men either more or less practical than themselves. For the true idealist and the real realist have at least the love of action in common. And the practical politician thrives by offering practical objections to any action. What the idealist does may be unworkable, and what the man of action does may be unscrupulous; but in neither trade can a man win a reputation by doing nothing. It is odd that these two extreme types stood at the two extreme ends of that one ridge and road among the marshes — the Polish poet a prisoner in the town at one end, the Prussian soldier a commander in the camp at the other.

For Marshal Von Grock was a true Prussian, not only entirely practical but entirely prosaic. He had never read a line of poetry himself; but he was no fool. He had the sense of reality which belongs to soldiers; and it prevented him from falling into the asinine error of the practical politician. He did not scoff at visions; he only hated them. He knew that a poet or a prophet could be as dangerous as an army. And he was resolved that the poet should die. It was his one compliment to poetry; and it was sincere.

He was at the moment sitting at a table in his tent; the spiked helmet that he always wore in public was lying in front of him; and his massive head looked quite bald, though it was only closely shaven. His whole face was also shaven; and had no covering but a pair of very strong spectacles, which alone gave an enigmatic look to his heavy and sagging visage. He turned to a Lieutenant standing by, a German of the pale-haired and rather pudding-faced variety, whose blue saucer-eyes were staring vacantly.

“Lieutenant Von Hocheimer,” he said, “did you say His Highness would reach the camp to-night?”

“Seven forty-five, Marshal,” replied the Lieutenant, who seemed rather reluctant to speak at all, like a large animal learning a new trick of talking.

“Then there is just time,” said Grock, “to send you with that order for execution, before he arrives. We must serve His Highness in every way, but especially in saving him needless trouble. He will be occupied enough reviewing the troops; see that everything is placed at His Highness’s disposal. He will be leaving again for the next outpost in an hour.”

The large Lieutenant seemed partially to come to life and made a shadowy salute. “Of course, Marshal, we must all obey His Highness.”

“I said we must all serve His Highness,” said the Marshal.

With a sharper movement than usual, he unhooked his heavy spectacles and rapped them down upon the table. If the pale blue eyes of the Lieutenant could have seen anything of the sort, or if they could have opened any wider even if they had, they might as well have opened wide enough at the transformation made by the gesture. It was like the removal of an iron mask. An instant before, Marshal Von Grock had looked uncommonly like a rhinoceros, with his heavy folds of leathery cheek and jaw. Now he was a new kind of monster: a rhinoceros with the eyes of an eagle. The bleak blaze of his old eyes would have told almost anybody that he had something within that was not merely heavy; at least, that there was a part of him made of steel and not only of iron. For all men live by a spirit, though it were an evil spirit, or one so strange to the commonalty of Christian men that they hardly know whether it be good or evil.

"I said we must all serve His Highness," repeated Grock. "I will speak more plainly, and say we must all save His Highness. Is it not enough for our kings that they should be our gods? Is it not enough for them to be served and saved? It is we who must do the serving and saving."

Marshal Von Grock seldom talked, or even thought, as more theoretical people would count thinking. And it will generally be found that men of his type, when they do happen to think aloud, very much prefer to talk to the dog. They have even a certain patronizing relish in using long words and elaborate arguments before the dog. It would be unjust to compare Lieutenant Von Hocheimer to a dog. It would be unjust to the dog, who is a much more sensitive and vigilant creature. It would be truer to say that Grock in one of his rare moments of reflection, had the comfort and safety of feeling that he was reflecting aloud in the presence of a cow or a cabbage.

"Again and again, in the history of our Royal House, the servant has saved the master," went on Grock, "and often got little but kicks for it, from the outer world at least, which always whines sentimentalism against the successful and the strong. But at least we were successful and we were strong. They cursed Bismarck for deceiving even his own master over the Ems telegram; but it made that master the master of the world. Paris was taken; Austria dethroned; and we were safe. To-night Paul Petrowski will be dead; and we shall again be safe. That is why I am sending you with his death-warrant at once. You understand that you are bearing the order for Petrowski's instant execution — and that you must remain to see it obeyed?"

The inarticulate Hocheimer saluted; he could understand that all right. And he had some qualities of a dog, after all: he was as brave as a bulldog; and he could be faithful to the death.

"You must mount and ride at once," went on Grock, "and see that nothing delays or thwarts you. I know for a fact that fool Arnheim is going to release Petrowski to-night, if no message comes. Make all speed."

And the Lieutenant again saluted and went out into the night; and mounting one of the superb white chargers that were part of the splendour of that splendid corps, began to ride along the high, narrow road along the ridge, almost like the top of a wall, which overlooked the dark horizon, the dim patterns and decaying colours of those mighty marshes.

Almost as the last echoes of his horse's hoofs died away along the causeway, Von Grock rose and put on his helmet and his spectacles and came to the door of his tent; but for another reason. The chief men of his staff, in full dress, were already approaching him; and all along the more distant lines there were the sounds of ritual salutation and the shouting of orders. His Highness the Prince had come.

His Highness the Prince was something of a contrast, at least in externals, to the men around him; and, even in other things, something of an exception in his world. He also wore a spiked helmet, but that of another regiment, black with glints of blue steel; and there was something half incongruous and half imaginatively appropriate, in some antiquated way, in the combination of that helmet with the long, dark, flowing beard, amid all those shaven Prussians. As if in keeping with the long, dark, flowing beard, he wore a long, dark, flowing cloak, blue with one blazing star on it of the highest Royal Order; and under the blue cloak he wore a black uniform. Though as German as any man, he was a very different kind of German; and something in his proud but abstracted face was consonant with the legend that the one true passion of his life was music.

In truth, the grumbling Grock was inclined to connect with that remote eccentricity the, to him, highly irritating and exasperating fact that the Prince did not immediately proceed to the proper review and reception by the troops, already drawn out in all the labyrinthine parade of the military etiquette of their nation; but plunged at once impatiently into the subject which Grock most desired to see left alone: the subject of this infernal Pole, his popularity and his peril; for the Prince had heard some of the man's songs sung in half the opera-houses of Europe.

"To talk of executing a man like that is madness," said the Prince, scowling under his black helmet. "He is not a common Pole. He is a European institution. He would be deplored and deified by our allies, by our friends, even by our fellow-Germans. Do you want to be the mad women who murdered Orpheus?"

"Highness," said the Marshal, "he would be deplored; but he would be dead. He would be deified; but he would be dead. Whatever he means to do, he would never do it. Whatever he is doing, he would do no more. Death is the fact of all facts; and I am rather fond of facts."

"Do you know nothing of the world?" demanded the Prince.

"I care nothing for the world," answered Grock, "beyond the last black and white post of the Fatherland."

"God in heaven," cried His Highness, "you would have hanged Goethe for a quarrel with Weimar!"

"For the safety of your Royal House," answered Grock, "without one instant's hesitation."

There was a short silence and the Prince said sharply and suddenly: "What does this mean?"

"It means that I had not an instant's hesitation," replied the Marshal steadily. "I have already myself sent orders for the execution of Petrowski."

The Prince rose like a great dark eagle, the swirl of his cloak like the sweep of mighty wings; and all men knew that a wrath beyond mere speech had made him a man of action. He did not even speak to Von Grock; but talking across him, at the top of his voice, called out to the second in command, General Von Voglen, a stocky man with a square head, who had stood in the background as motionless as a stone.

"Who has the best horse in your cavalry division, General? Who is the best rider?"

"Arnold Von Schacht has a horse that might beat a racehorse," replied the General promptly. "And rides it as well as a jockey. He is of the White Hussars."

"Very well," said the Prince, with the same new ring in his voice. "Let him ride at once after the man with this mad message and stop him. I will give him authority, which I think the distinguished Marshal will not dispute. Bring me pen and ink."

He sat down, shaking out the cloak, and they brought him writing materials; and he wrote firmly and with a flourish the order, overriding all other orders, for the reprieve and release of Petrowski the Pole.

Then amid a dead silence, in the midst of which old Grock stood with an unblinking stare like a stone idol of prehistoric times, he swept out of the room, trailing his mantle and sabre. He was so violently displeased that no man dared to remind him of the formal reviewing of the troops. But Arnold Von Schacht, a curly-haired active youth, looking more like a boy, but wearing more than one medal on the white uniform of the Hussars, clicked his heels, and received the folded paper from the Prince; then, striding out, he sprang on his horse and flew along the high, narrow road like a silver arrow or a shooting star.

The old Marshal went back slowly and calmly to his tent, slowly and calmly removed his spiked helmet and his spectacles, and laid them on the table as before. Then he called out to an orderly just outside the tent; and bade him fetch Sergeant Schwartz of the White Hussars immediately.

A minute later, there presented himself before the Marshal a gaunt and wiry man, with a great scar across his jaw, rather dark for a German, unless all his colours had been changed by years of smoke and storm and bad weather. He saluted and stood stiffly at attention, as the Marshal slowly raised his eyes to him. And vast as was the abyss between the Imperial Marshal, with Generals under him, and that one battered non-commissioned officer, it is true that of all the men who have talked in this tale, these two men alone looked and understood each other without words.

“Sergeant,” said the Marshal, curtly, “I have seen you twice before. Once, I think, when you won the prize of the whole army for marksmanship with the carbine.”

The sergeant saluted and said nothing.

“And once again,” went on Von Grock, “when you were questioned for shooting that damned old woman who would not give us information about the ambush. The incident caused considerable comment at the time, even in some of our own circles. Influence, however, was exerted on your side. My influence.”

The sergeant saluted again; and was still silent. The Marshal continued to speak in a colourless but curiously candid way.

“His Highness the Prince has been misinformed and deceived on a point essential to his own safety and that of the Fatherland. Under this error, he has rashly sent a reprieve to the Pole Petrowski, who is to be executed to-night. I repeat: who is to be executed to-night. You must immediately ride after Von Schacht, who carried the reprieve, and stop him.”

“I can hardly hope to overtake him, Marshal,” said Sergeant Schwartz. “He has the swiftest horse in the regiment, and is the finest rider.”

“I did not tell you to overtake him. I told you to stop him,” said Grock. Then he spoke more slowly: “A man may often be stopped or recalled by various signals: by shouting or shooting.” His voice dragged still more ponderously, but without a pause. “The discharge of a carbine might attract his attention.”

And then the dark sergeant saluted for the third time; and his grim mouth was again shut tight.

“The world is changed,” said Grock, “not by what is said, or what is blamed or praised, but by what is done. The world never recovers from what is done. At this moment the killing of a man is a thing that must be done.” He suddenly flashed his brilliant eyes of steel at the other, and added: “I mean, of course, Petrowski.”

And Sergeant Schwartz smiled still more grimly; and he also, lifting the flap of the tent, went out into the darkness and mounted his horse and rode.

The last of the three riders was even less likely than the first to indulge in imaginative ideas for their own sake. But because he also was in some imperfect manner human, he could not but feel, on such a night and such an errand, the oppressiveness of that inhuman landscape. While he rode along that one abrupt ridge, there spread out to infinity all round him something a myriad times more inhuman than the sea. For a man could not swim in it, nor sail boats on it, nor do anything human with it; he could only sink in it, and practically without a struggle. The sergeant felt vaguely the presence of some primordial slime that was neither solid nor liquid nor capable of any form; and he felt its presence behind the forms of all things.

He was atheist, like so many thousands of dull, clever men in Northern Germany; but he was not that happier sort of pagan who can see in human progress a natural flowering of the earth. That world before him was not a field in which green or living things evolved and developed and bore fruit; it was only an abyss in which all living things would sink for ever as in a bottomless pit; and the thought hardened him for all the strange duties he had to do in so hateful a world. The grey-green blotches of flattened vegetation, seen from above like a sprawling map, seemed more like the chart of a disease than a development; and the land-locked pools might have been of poison rather than water. He remembered some humanitarian fuss or other about the poisoning of pools.

But the reflections of the sergeant, like most reflections of men not normally reflective, had a root in some subconscious strain on his nerves and his practical intelligence. The truth was that the straight road before him was not only dreary, but seemed interminably long. He would never have believed he could have ridden so far without catching some distant glimpse of the man he followed. Von Schacht must indeed have the fleetest of horses to have got so far ahead already; for, after all, he had only started, at whatever speed, within a comparatively short time. As Schwartz had said, he hardly expected to overtake him; but a very realistic sense of the distances involved had told him that he must very soon come in sight of him. And then, just as despair was beginning to descend and spread itself vaguely over the desolate landscape, he saw him at last.

A white spot, which slightly, slowly, enlarged into something like a white figure, appeared far ahead, riding furiously. It enlarged to that extent because Schwartz managed a spurt of riding furiously himself; but it was large enough to show the faint streak of orange across the white uniform that marked the regiment of the Hussars. The winner of the prize for shooting, in the whole army, had hit the white of smaller targets than that.

He unslung his carbine; and a shock of unnatural noise shook up all the wild fowl for miles upon the silent marshes. But Sergeant Schwartz did not trouble about them. What interested him was that, even at such a distance, he could see the straight, white figure turn crooked and alter in shape, as if the man had suddenly grown deformed. He was hanging like a humpback over the saddle; and Schwartz, with his exact eye and long experience, was certain that his victim was shot through the body; and almost certain that he was shot through the heart. Then he brought the horse down with a second shot; and the whole equestrian group heeled over and slipped and slid and vanished in one white flash into the dark fenland below.

The hard-headed sergeant was certain that his work was done. Hard-headed men of his sort are generally very precise about what they are doing; that is why they are so often quite wrong about what they do. He had outraged the comradeship that is the soul of armies; he had killed a gallant officer who was in the performance of his duty; he had deceived and defied his sovereign and committed a common murder without excuse of personal quarrel; but he had obeyed his superior officer and he had helped to kill a Pole. These two last facts for the moment filled his mind; and he rode thoughtfully back again to make his report to Marshal Von Grock. He had no doubts about the thoroughness of the work he had done. The man carrying the reprieve was certainly dead; and even if by some miracle he were only dying, he could not conceivably have ridden his dead or dying horse to the town in time to prevent the execution. No; on the whole it was much more practical and prudent to get back under the wing of his protector, the author of the desperate project. With his whole strength he leaned on the strength of the great Marshal.

And truly the great Marshal had this greatness about him; that after the monstrous thing he had done, or caused to be done, he disdained to show any fear of facing the facts on the spot or the compromising possibilities of keeping in touch with his tool. He and the sergeant, indeed, an hour or so later, actually rode along the ridge together, till they came to a particular place where the Marshal dismounted, but bade the other ride on. He wished the sergeant to go forward to the original goal of the riders, and see if all was quiet in the town after the execution, or whether there remained some danger from popular resentment.

“Is it here, then, Marshal?” asked the sergeant in a low voice. “I fancied it was further on; but it’s a fact the infernal road seemed to lengthen out like a nightmare.”

“It is here,” answered Grock, and swung himself heavily from saddle and stirrup, and then went to the edge of the long parapet and looked down.

The moon had risen over the marshes and gone up strengthening in splendour and gleaming on dark waters and green scum; and in the nearest clump of reeds, at the foot of the slope, there lay, as in a sort of luminous and radiant ruin, all that was left of one of those superb white horses and white horsemen of his old brigade. Nor was the identity doubtful; the moon made a sort of aureole of the curled golden hair of young Arnold, the second rider and the bearer of the reprieve; and the same mystical moonshine glittered not only on baldrick and buttons, but on the special medals of the young soldier and the stripes and signs of his degree. Under such a glamorous veil of light, he might almost have been in the white armour of Sir Galahad; and there could scarcely have been a more horrible contrast than that between such fallen grace and youth below and the rocky and grotesque figure looking down from above. Grock had taken off his helmet again; and though it is possible that this was the vague shadow of some funereal form of respect, its visible effect was that the queer naked head and neck like that of a pachyderm glittered stonily in the moon, like the hairless head and neck of some monster of the Age of Stone. Rops, or some such etcher of the black, fantastic German schools, might have drawn such a picture: of a huge beast as inhuman as a beetle looking down on the broken wings and white and golden armour of some defeated champion of the Cherubim.

Grock said no prayer and uttered no pity; but in some dark way his mind was moved, as even the dark and mighty swamp will sometimes move like a living thing; and as such men will, when feeling for the first time faintly on their defence before they know not what, he tried to formulate his only faith and confront it with the stark universe and the staring moon.

“After and before the deed the German Will is the same. It cannot be broken by changes and by time, like that of those others who repent. It stands outside time like a thing of stone, looking forward and backward with the same face.”

The silence that followed lasted long enough to please his cold vanity with a certain sense of portent; as if a stone figure had spoken in a valley of silence. But the silence began to thrill once more with a distant whisper which was the faint throb of horsehoofs; and a moment later the sergeant came galloping, or rather racing, back along the uplifted road, and his scarred and swarthy visage was no longer merely grim but ghastly in the moon.

“Marshal,” he said, saluting with a strange stiffness, “I have seen Petrowski the Pole!”

“Haven’t they buried him yet?” asked the Marshal, still staring down and in some abstraction.

“If they have,” said Schwartz, “he has rolled the stone away and risen from the dead.”

He stared in front of him at the moon and marshes; but, indeed, though he was far from being a visionary character, it was not these things that he saw, but rather the things he had just seen. He had, indeed, seen Paul Petrowski walking alive and alert down the brilliantly illuminated main avenue of that Polish town to the very beginning of the causeway; there was no mistaking the slim figure with plumes of hair and tuft of Frenchified beard which figured in so many private albums and illustrated magazines. And behind him he had seen that Polish town aflame with flags and firebrands and a population boiling with triumphant hero-worship, though perhaps less hostile to the government than it might have been, since it was rejoicing at the release of its popular hero.

“Do you mean,” cried Grock with a sudden croaking stridency of voice, “that they have dared to release him in defiance of my message?”

Schwartz saluted again and said:

“They had already released him and they have received no message.”

“Do you ask me, after all this,” said Grock, “to believe that no messenger came from our camp at all?”

“No messenger at all,” said the sergeant.

There was a much longer silence, and then Grock said, hoarsely: “What in the name of hell has happened? Can you think of anything to explain it all?”

“I have seen something,” said the sergeant, “which I think does explain it all.”

When Mr. Pond had told the story up to this point, he paused with an irritating blankness of expression.

“Well,” said Gahagan impatiently, “and do *you* know anything that would explain it all?”

“Well, I think I do,” said Mr. Pond meekly. “You see, I had to worry it out for myself, when the report came round to my department. It really did arise from an excess of Prussian obedience. It also arose from an excess of another Prussian weakness: contempt. And of all the passions that blind and madden and mislead men, the worst is the coldest: contempt.

“Grock had talked much too comfortably before the cow, and much too confidently before the cabbage. He despised stupid men even on his own staff; and treated Von Hocheimer, the first messenger, as a piece of furniture merely because he looked like a fool; but the Lieutenant was not such a fool as he looked. He also understood what the great Marshal meant, quite as well as the cynical sergeant, who had done such dirty work all his life. Hocheimer also understood the Marshal’s peculiar moral philosophy: that an act is unanswerable even when it is indefensible. He knew that what his commander wanted was simply the corpse of Petrowski; that he wanted it anyhow, at the expense of any deception of princes or destruction of soldiers. And when he heard a swifter horseman behind him, riding to overtake him, he knew as well as Grock himself that the new messenger must be carrying with him the message of the mercy of the Prince. Von Schacht, that very young but gallant officer, looking like the very embodiment of all that more generous tradition of Germany that has been too much neglected in this tale, was worthy of the accident that made him the herald of a more generous policy. He came with the speed of that noble horsemanship that has left behind it in Europe the very name of chivalry, calling out to the other in a tone like a herald’s trumpet to stop and stand and turn. And Von Hocheimer obeyed. He stopped, he reined in his horse, he turned in his saddle; but his hand held the carbine levelled like a pistol, and he shot the boy between the eyes.

“Then he turned again and rode on, carrying the death-warrant of the Pole. Behind him horse and man had crashed over the edge of the embankment, so that the whole road was clear. And along that clear and open road toiled in his turn the third messenger, marvelling at the interminable length of his journey; till he saw at last the unmistakable uniform of a Hussar like a white star disappearing in the distance, and he shot also. Only he did not kill the second messenger, but the first.

“That was why no messenger came alive to the Polish town that night. That was why the prisoner walked out of his prison alive. Do you think I was quite wrong in saying that Von Grock had two faithful servants, and one too many?”

THE CRIME OF CAPTAIN GAHAGAN

It must be confessed that some people thought Mr. Pond a bore. He had a weakness for long speeches, not out of self-importance, but because he had an old-fashioned taste in literature; and had unconsciously inherited the habit of Gibbon or Butler or Burke. Even his paradoxes were not what are called brilliant paradoxes. The word brilliant has long been the most formidable weapon of criticism; but Mr. Pond could not be blasted and withered with a charge of brilliancy. Thus, in the case now to be considered, when Mr. Pond said (referring, I grieve to say, to the greater part of the female sex, at least in its most modern phase): "They go so fast that they get no farther," he did not mean it as an epigram. And somehow it did not sound epigrammatic; but only odd and obscure. And the ladies to whom he said it, notably the Hon. Violet Varney, could see no sense in it. They thought Mr. Pond, when he was not boring, was only bewildering.

Anyhow, Mr. Pond did sometimes indulge in long speeches. Triumph therefore and great glory belongs to anyone who could successfully stop Mr. Pond from making long speeches; and this laurel is for the brows of Miss Artemis Asa-Smith, of Pentapolis, Pa. She came to interview Mr. Pond for *The Live Wire*, touching his alleged views on the Haggis Mystery; and she did not let him get a word in edgeways.

"I believe," began Mr. Pond, rather nervously, "that your paper is inquiring about what some call Private Execution, and I call murder, but—"

"Forget it," said the young lady briefly. "It's just too wonderful for me to be sitting here next to all secrets of your government; why—"

She continued her monologue; though in a style of dots and dashes. As she would not let Mr. Pond interrupt her, she seemed to think it only fair to interrupt herself. Somehow it seemed at once as if her speech would never end; and not one sentence of it was ever ended.

We have all heard of American interviewers who rip up family secrets, break down bedroom doors and collect information in the manner of burglars. There are some; but there are also others. There are, or were, when the writer remembers them, a very large number of intelligent men ready to discuss intelligent things; and there was Miss Asa-Smith. She was small and dark; she was rather pretty and would have been very pretty if she had not dipped her lipstick in hues of earthquake and eclipse. Her finger-nails were painted five different colours, looking like the paints in a child's paintbox; and she was as innocent as a child. She was also as garrulous as a child. She felt something paternal about Mr. Pond and told him everything. He did not have to tell her anything. No buried tragedies of the Pond family were dug up; no secrets of the crimes committed behind Mr. Pond's bedroom door. Conversation, so to describe it, revolved largely round her early days in Pennsylvania; her first ambitions and ideals; which two things, like many of her local traditions, she seemed to imagine to be the same. She was a Feminist and had stood up with Ada P. Tuke against clubs and saloons and the selfishness of man. She had written a play; and she just longed to read it to Mr. Pond.

"About that question of Private Execution," said Mr. Pond politely, "I suppose we've all been tempted in desperate moments—"

"Well, I'm just desperate to read you this play, and — you know how it is. You see, my play's awfully *modern*. But even the modernest people haven't done just that — I mean, beginning in the water and then—"

"Beginning in the water?" inquired Mr. Pond.

"Yes, isn't it just too — oh, you know. I suppose they will have all characters in bathing dresses soon — but they'll only just enter L. or R.; come on at the side, you know — and all the old stuff. My characters enter from above, diving, with a splash — Well, that'll be a splash, won't it? I mean to say, it begins like that." She began to read very rapidly:

"*Scene*, sea outside the Lido.

"Voice of Tom Toxin (*from above*): 'See me make a splash, if—' (*Toxin dives from above to stage in pea-green bathing-suit*).

"Voice of Duchess (*from above*): 'Only sort of splash you'll ever make, you—' (*Duchess dives from above in scarlet bathing-suit*).

"Toxin (*coming up spluttering*): 'Splutter as splutter . . . splosh is the only splash by your — .'

"Duchess: 'Oh, Grandpa!'"

"She calls him Grandpa, you see, because 'splosh' means money in that ever-so-old comic song — they're quite young really, of course, and rather . . . you know. But—"

Mr. Pond interposed with delicacy and firmness: “I wonder whether you would be so very kind, Miss Asa-Smith, as to leave the manuscript with me or send me a copy, so that I can enjoy it at leisure. It reads rather quickly for old buffers like me; and nobody ever seems to finish a sentence. But do you think you can persuade our leading actors and actresses to dive from great heights into a stage sea?”

“Oh, I dare say some of the old-stagers would be stuffy about it,” she replied, “because — can’t fancy your great tragedienne, Olivia Feversham — though she’s not so old really and just lovely still, only — but so Shakespearian! But I’ve got the Honourable Violet Varney to *promise,* and her sister’s quite a friend of mine, though of course not so — and lots of amateurs would do it for fun. That Gahagan guy is a good swimmer, and he’s acted, too, and — oh, well, he’d click if Joan Varney’s in it.”

The face of Mr. Pond, hitherto patient and stoical, became quite silently alert and alive. He said with a new gravity:

“Captain Gahagan is a great friend of mine, and he has introduced me to Miss Varney. As to her sister, the one on the stage—”

“Not a patch on Joan, is she? But—” said Miss Asa-Smith.

Mr. Pond had formed an impression. He liked Miss Asa-Smith. He liked her very much. And the thought of the Honourable Violet Varney, that English aristocrat, made him like the American even more. The Honourable Violet was one of those wealthy women who pay to act badly; and blackleg the poorer people who might have been paid to act well. She certainly was quite capable of diving in a bathing dress, or in anything or nothing, if it were the only way to the stage and the spot-light. She was quite capable of helping Miss Asa-Smith in her absurd play and talking similar nonsense about being modern and independent of selfish man. But there was a difference; and it was not to the advantage of the Honourable Violet. Poor Artemis followed idiotic fashions because she was a hard-working journalist who had to earn her living; and Violet Varney only took away other people’s living. They both spoke in the style that was a string of unfinished sentences. It was the one language Mr. Pond thought that might truly be called broken English. But Violet dropped the tail of a sentence as if she were too tired to finish it; Artemis did so as if she were really too eager to get on to the next. There was within her, somehow, a thing, a spirit of life, which survives every criticism of America.

"Joan Varney's much nicer," continued Artemis, "and you bet your friend Gahagan thinks so. Do you think they'll really hitch up? He's a queer fellow, you know."

Mr. Pond did not deny it. Captain Gahagan, that swaggering and restless and sometimes sullen man-about-town, was queer in many ways; and in none more than in his almost incongruous affection for the precise and prosaic Mr. Pond.

"Some say he's a rotter," said the candid American. "I don't say that; but I do say he's a dark horse. And he does shilly-shally about Joan Varney, doesn't he? Some say he's really in love with the great Olivia — your only tragic actress. Only she's so jolly tragic."

"God send she doesn't play in a real tragedy," said Pond.

He knew what he meant; but he had not the faintest foreshadowing of the awful tragedy of real life and death in which Olivia Feversham was to play within the next twenty-four hours.

He was only thinking of his Irish friend as he knew him; and he was near enough to know all that he did not know. Peter Patrick Gahagan lived the modern life, perhaps to excess, was a prop of nightclubs and a driver of sports cars, still comparatively young; but, for all that, he was a survival. He belonged to the times of a more Byronic pose. When Mr. W. B. Yeats wrote: "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone; it's with O'Leary in the grave," he had never met Gahagan, who was not yet in the grave. He was of that older tradition by a hundred tests; he had been a cavalry soldier and also a member of Parliament; the last to follow the old Irish orators with their rounded periods. Like all these, for some reason, he adored Shakespeare. Isaac Butt filled speeches with Shakespeare; Tim Healy could quote the poet so that his poetry seemed part of the living talk at table; Russell of Killowen read no other book. But he, like they, was Shakespearian in an eighteenth-century way: the way of Garrick; and that eighteenth century that he recalled had a pretty pagan side to it. Pond could not dismiss the chances of Gahagan having an affair with Olivia or anyone else; and if so a storm might be brewing. For Olivia was married; and to no complaisant husband, either.

Frederick Feversham was something worse than an unsuccessful actor; he was one who had been successful. He was now forgotten in the theatre and remembered only in the law-courts. A dark and crabbed man, still haggardly handsome, he had become famous, or familiar, as a sort of permanent litigant. He was eternally bringing actions against people whom he charged with trivial tricks and distant and disputable wrongs: managers and rivals and the rest. He had as yet no special quarrel with his wife, younger than himself and still popular in the profession. But he was much less intimate with his wife than with his solicitor.

Through court after court Feversham passed, pursuing his rights and followed like a shadow by his solicitor, Luke, of the firm of Masters, Luke and Masters; a young man with flat, yellow hair and a rather wooden face. What he thought of his client's feuds and how far he ventured to restrain them, that wooden face would never reveal. But he worked well for his client; and the two had necessarily become in a way companions-in-arms. Of one thing Pond was certain. Neither Feversham nor Luke was likely to spare Gahagan, if that erratic gentleman put himself in the wrong. But this part of the problem was destined to find a worse solution than he dreamed of. Twenty-four hours after Pond's talk with the interviewer, he learned that Frederick Feversham was dead.

Like other litigious persons, Mr. Feversham had left a legal problem behind him, to feed many lawyers with fees. But it was not the problem of an ill-drawn will or a dubious signature. It was the problem of a stiff and staring corpse, lying just inside a garden-gate and nailed there by a fencing-sword with the button broken off. Frederick Feversham, that legalist, had suffered at least one final and indisputable illegality; he had been stabbed to death as he entered his own home.

Long before certain facts, slowly collected, were put before the police, they were put before Mr. Pond. This may seem odd, but there were reasons; indeed Mr. Pond, like many other Government officials, had rather secret and unsuspected spheres of influence; his public powers were very private. Younger and more conspicuous men had even been known to stand in a certain awe of him, owing to special circumstances. But to explain all that is to explore the labyrinth of the most unconstitutional of all constitutions. In any case, his first warning of the trouble took the commonplace form of an ordinary legal letter, with the heading of the well-known firm of Masters, Luke and Masters, expressing the hope that Mr. Luke might be allowed to discuss certain information with Mr. Pond, before it was necessary for it to reach the police authorities or the Press. Mr. Pond replied equally formally that he would be delighted to receive Mr. Luke at a certain hour upon the following day. Then he sat and stared into vacancy, with that rather goggling expression which led some of his friends to compare him to a fish.

He had already thought of about two-thirds of what the solicitor was going to tell him.

“The truth is, Mr. Pond,” said the solicitor, in a confidential but still careful voice, when he was at length deposited on the other side of Mr. Pond’s table next day. “The truth is that the possibilities of this affair, painful in any case, may be specially painful for you. Most of us find it impossible to imagine that a personal friend might come under suspicion in such matters.”

The mild eyes of Mr. Pond opened very wide, and even his mouth made the momentary movement which some thought so very fishy. The lawyer probably assumed that he was shocked at the first suggestion of his friend being affected; in fact, he was mildly amazed to suppose that anybody had not entertained the idea long ago. He knew that words to that effect were common in the more conventional detective stories, which he heartily enjoyed, as a change from Burke and Gibbon. He could see the printed words on a hundred pages: “None of us could believe that this handsome young cricketer had committed a crime,” or: “It seemed absurd to connect murder with a man like Captain Pickleboy, the most popular figure in Society.” He had always wondered what the words meant. To his simple and sceptical eighteenth-century mind, they seemed to mean nothing at all. Why should not pleasant and fashionable men commit murders, like anybody else? He was very much upset himself, inside, about this particular case; but he still did not understand that way of talking.

“I am sorry to say,” continued the lawyer in a low voice, “that private investigation which we have already made, on our own account, places your friend, Captain Gahagan, in a position requiring explanation.”

“Yes,” thought Pond, “and, my God, Gahagan really does require explanation! That’s exactly the difficulty about him — but, Lord, how slow this fellow is!” In short, the real trouble was that Pond was very fond of Captain Gahagan; but in so far as one could ask whether men were capable of murder, he was rather inclined to think that Gahagan *was* capable of murder — more capable of murder than of meanness to a cabman.

Suddenly, with extraordinary vividness, the image of Gahagan himself sprang up in Pond’s memory: Gahagan as he had last seen him lounging with his large shoulders and long stride, and strange dark-red hair under the rather rakishly tilted grey top-hat, and behind him a space of sunset where the evening clouds passed in a sort of crumbling purple pomp, rather like the pomp of poor Gahagan himself. No; the Irishman was a man seventy-and-seven times to be forgiven; but not a man to be lightly acquitted.

"Mr. Luke," said Pond suddenly, "will it save time if I tell you, to start with, what I know there is against Gahagan? He was hanging round Mrs. Feversham, the great actress; I don't know why he was; my own belief is that he is really in love with another woman. Yet he did unquestionably give the actress a huge amount of his time: hours and hours and late hours too. But if Feversham caught him doing anything unconventional, Feversham was not the man to let him off without a lawsuit and a scandal and God knows what. I don't want to criticize your client; but, speaking crudely, he almost lived on lawsuits and scandals all his life. And if Feversham was the man to threaten or blackmail, I give it you frankly that Gahagan was the man to hit him back in a bodily fashion; and perhaps kill him, especially if a lady's name were involved. That is the case against Captain Gahagan; and I tell you at the start that I don't believe in it."

"Unfortunately it is not the whole case against Captain Gahagan," replied Luke smoothly, "and I fear the full Statement may make even you believe it. Perhaps the most serious result of our investigations is this. It is now quite clearly established that Captain Gahagan gave three quite contrary and inconsistent accounts of his movements, or proposed movements, on the evening of the murder. Allowing him the highest possible marks for truthfulness in the matter, he must at least have told two lies to one truth."

"I have always found Gahagan truthful enough," replied Pond, "except when he was telling lies for amusement; which is really rather the mark of a man who doesn't prostitute the sublime art of lying to the base uses of necessity. About all ordinary practical things, I have found him not only frank but also rather precise."

"Even accepting what you say," answered Mr. Luke dubiously, "we should still have to answer: If he was commonly candid and truthful, it must have been a mortal and desperate occasion that made him lie."

"To whom did he tell these lies?" asked Pond.

"That is where the whole matter is so painful and delicate," said the lawyer, shaking his head. "That afternoon, it seems, Gahagan had been talking to several ladies."

"He generally has," said Pond. "Or was it they who were talking to him? If one of them happened, for instance, to be that very charming lady, Miss Asa-Smith of Pentapolis, I would venture to guess that it was she who was talking to him."

"This is rather extraordinary," said Luke in some surprise. "I do not know if it was a guess; but one of them certainly was a Miss Asa-Smith of Pentapolis. The other two were the Hon. Violet Varney and, last but not least, the Hon. Joan Varney. As a matter of fact, it was the last that he spoke to first; which, I suppose, was only natural. It is notable, on your own suggestion, that he is really attached to this last lady, that his statement to her was apparently much the nearest to the truth."

"Ah," said Mr. Pond, and pulled his beard thoughtfully.

"Joan Varney," observed the lawyer gravely, "stated most definitely, before she knew that there was any trouble or tragedy in this case, that Captain Gahagan had left the house saying: 'I am going round to the Fevershams'.'"

"And you say that is contradicted by his statement to the others," said Mr. Pond.

"Most emphatically," replied Luke. "The other sister, well known on the stage as Violet Varney, stopped him as he was going out and they exchanged a little light conversation. But, as he left, he distinctly said to her: 'I'm not going to the Fevershams'; they're still at Brighton,' or something like that."

"And now we come," said Mr. Pond, smiling, "to my young friend from Pentapolis. What was she doing there, by the way?"

"He found her on the doorstep when he opened the front door," replied Mr. Luke, also smiling. "She had arrived in a rush of enthusiasm to interview Violet Varney as 'Comedienne and Social Leader.' Neither she nor Gahagan are the sort of people not to be noticed; or to fail to notice each other. So Gahagan had a little talk with her, too; at the end of which he departed, with a flourish of his grey top-hat, telling her that he was going immediately to the club."

"Are you certain of that?" asked Pond, frowning.

"She was certain of it; because she was in a red-hot rage about it," replied Luke. "It seems that she has some feminist fad on the subject. She thinks all male persons who go to clubs go there to tell slanderous anecdotes about women and then drink themselves under the table. She may have had a little professional feeling about it too; perhaps she would have liked to have a longer interview, either for herself or *The Live Wire*. But I'll swear she's quite honest."

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Pond emphatically but rather gloomily, "she's absolutely honest."

"Well, there it is," said Luke, speaking also not without a decent gloom. "It seems to me that the psychology's only too obvious under the circumstances. He blurted out where he was really going to the girl he was accustomed to confide in; perhaps he didn't really plan the crime till later; or perhaps it wasn't entirely planned or premeditated. But by the time he talked to less friendly people he saw how unwise it would be to say he was going to the Fevershams'. His first impulse is to say, hastily and too crudely, that he was *not* going to the Fevershams'. Then, by the third interview, he thinks of a really good lie, normal and sufficiently vague, and says he is going to the club."

"It might be like that," replied Pond, "or it might—" And Mr. Pond fell for the first time into the lax habit of Miss Asa-Smith, and failed to finish his sentence. Instead he sat staring at the distance with his rather goggle-eyed and fish-like gaze; then he put his head on his hands, said apologetically: "Please pardon me if I think for a minute," and buried his bald brows once more.

The bearded fish came to the surface again with a somewhat new expression, and said with a brisk and almost sharp tone:

"You seem very much bent on bringing the crime home to poor Gahagan."

For the first time Luke's features stiffened to hardness, or even harshness. "We naturally wish to bring the murderer of our client to justice."

Pond bent forward and his eyes were penetrating as he repeated: "But you will have it that the murderer was Gahagan."

"I've given you the evidence," said Luke, lowering; "you know the witnesses."

"And yet, oddly enough," said Pond very slowly, "you haven't mentioned the really damning thing against him in the report of those witnesses."

"It's damning enough — what do you mean?" snapped the lawyer.

“I mean the fact that they are *unwilling* witnesses,” replied Pond. “It couldn’t be a conspiracy. My little Yank is as honest as the day and would never join a conspiracy. He’s the sort of man women like. Even Violet Varney likes him. Joan Varney loves him. And yet they all give evidence to contradict him or, at least, show he contradicted himself. And yet they’re all wrong.”

“What the devil do you mean,” cried Luke with sudden impatience, “by saying they’re all wrong?”

“They’re all wrong about what he said,” answered Pond. “Did you ask them if he said anything else?”

“What else is needed?” cried the lawyer, now really angry. “They could all swear he said what I say. Going to the Fevershams’; not going to the Fevershams’; going to some unnamed club — and then bolting down the street so as to leave a lady in a rage.”

“Precisely,” said Pond. “You say he said three different things. I say he said the same thing to all three. He turned it the other way round and made it the same.”

“He turned it the other way round all right,” retorted Luke almost viciously. “But if he goes into the witness-box, he’ll find out whether the law of perjury says that turning a thing round makes it the same.”

There was a pause and then Mr. Pond said serenely:

“So now we know all about the Crime of Captain Gahagan.”

“Who says we know all about anything? I don’t. Do you?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Pond. “The Crime of Captain Gahagan was that he didn’t understand women; especially modern women. These men with a vague air of being lady-killers seldom do. Don’t you know that dear old Gahagan is really your great-great-grandfather?”

Mr. Luke made a movement as of sudden and sincere alarm; he was not the first man to fancy for a moment that Mr. Pond was mad.

“Can’t you see,” went on Pond, “that he belongs to the school of the old bucks and beaux who called her ‘Woman, Lovely Woman,’ and knew nothing whatever about her — to the considerable increase of her power? But how they could pay compliments! ‘Stand close about, you Stygian set. . . .’ But perhaps, as you seem to suggest, it is not quite relevant. But you see what I mean by Gahagan being the old sort of lady-killer?”

“I know he’s a very old sort of gentleman-killer,” cried Luke quite violently, “and that he killed the worthy and greatly wronged gentleman who was my client and friend!”

“You seem a little annoyed,” said Mr. Pond. “Have you tried reading Dr. Johnson’s *Vanity of Human Wishes?* Very soothing. Believe me, those eighteenth-century writers I wanted to quote are very soothing. Have you read Addison’s play about Cato?”

“You appear to be mad,” said the lawyer, now positively pale.

“Or again,” continued Mr. Pond in a chatty way, “have you read Miss Asa-Smith’s play about the duchess in the bathing-suit? All the sentences curiously cut short — like the bathing-suit.”

“Do you mean anything whatever?” asked the lawyer in a low voice.

“Oh, yes, I mean a great deal,” replied Pond. “But it takes quite a long time to explain — like the Vanity of Human Wishes. What I mean is this. My friend Gahagan is very fond of those old wits and orators, just as I am; speeches where you have to wait for the peroration; epigrams with the sting in the tail. That’s how we first became friends, by both being fond of the eighteenth-century style; balance and antithesis and all that. Now if you have this habit and read, say, the hackneyed lines in *Cato*: ‘’Tis not in mortals to command success; but we’ll do more, Sempronius, we’ll deserve it’ — well, it may be good or bad; but you’ve got to wait for the end of the sentence; because it begins with a platitude and ends with a point. But the modern sort of sentence never ends; and nobody waits for it to end.

“Now women were always a little like that. It isn’t that they don’t think, they think quicker than we do. They often talk better. But they don’t *listen* so well. They leap so quickly upon the first point; they see so much more in it; and go off in a gallop of inference about it — so that they sometimes don’t notice the rest of the speech at all. But Gahagan, being of the other sort, the old oratorical sort, would always end his sentence properly, and be as careful to say what he meant at the end as the beginning.

“I suggest to you, as the barristers say, that what Captain Gahagan really said to Joan in the first case was this: ‘I’m going round to the Fevershams’; I don’t believe they are back from Brighton yet, but I’ll just look in and see. If they’re not. I’ll go on to the club.’ That is what Peter Gahagan said; but that is not what Joan Varney heard. She heard about going to the Fevershams’ and felt at once that she knew all about it — far too much about it — to the not unnatural tune of ‘He’s going to see that woman’; even though his next words were that the woman almost certainly wasn’t there. Stuff about Brighton and the club didn’t interest her, and she didn’t even remember it. Very well, let us go on to the next case. What Gahagan said to Violet Varney was this: ‘It’s no good going to the Fevershams’ really; they’re not back from Brighton; but perhaps I’ll look in and see; if they’re not back, I shall go on to the club.’ Violet is much less truthful and careful than Joan; and she was jealous of Olivia herself, but in a much shallower way, Violet supposing herself to be an actress. She also heard the word Feversham and remembered vaguely that he said it was no good going there; that is, that he was not going there. She was pleased at this and condescended to chat with him; but did not condescend to pay any attention whatever to anything else he said.

“Now for the third case. What Gahagan said to Miss Artemis Asa-Smith on the doorstep was this: ‘I’m going to the club; I promised to look in on some friends of mine on the way, the Fevershams; but I don’t believe they’re back from Brighton.’ That’s what he said. What Artemis heard, saw and blasted with her blazing eye, was a typical insolent, selfish, self-indulgent male brazenly bragging in the open street of his intention to go to his infamous club, where women are slandered and men drugged with alcohol. After the shock of this shameless avowal, of course she could not stoop to pick up the pieces of any other silly things he had said. He was simply the man who went to the club.

“Now all those three real statements of Gahagan are exactly the same. They all mean the same thing; map out the same course of action; give the same reasons for the same acts. But they sound totally different according to which sentence comes first; especially to these rather jumpy modern girls, accustomed only to jump at the sentence that comes first — very often because there isn’t any thing at all to come after it. The Asa-Smith school of drama, in which every sentence stops as soon as it starts, if it doesn’t strike you as having much to do with the Tragedy of Cato, has had a very great deal to do with the Tragedy of Captain Gahagan. They might have hanged my friend between them, with the best intentions in the world, simply and solely because they will think only in half-sentences. Broken necks, broken hearts, broken lives, and all because they won’t learn any language but broken English. Don’t you think there’s something to be said for that musty old taste of his and mine, for the sort of literature that makes you read all that a man writes and listen to all that he says? Wouldn’t you rather have an important statement made to you in the language of Addison or Johnson than in the splutterings of Mr. Toxin and the Diving Duchess?”

During this monologue, certainly rather long, the lawyer had grown more and more restless and full of nervous irritation.

“This is all fancywork,” he said almost feverishly. “You haven’t proved any of this.”

“No,” said Pond gravely, “as you say, I fancied it. At least I guessed it. But I did ring up Gahagan and hear something of the truth of his words and movements that afternoon.”

“Truth!” cried Luke, with very extraordinary bitterness.

Pond looked at him curiously. That woodenness of visage which was the first impression produced by Mr. Luke was found on examination to consist mostly of a rather forced look of fixity, combined with the rigid smoothness of his head and hair, the latter looking as if it had been painted on with some rather sticky yellow paint: a gummy gamboge. His eyelids indeed were cold and often partially closed; but inside them the grey-green eyes seemed strangely small, as if they were distant; and they were dancing and darting about like microscopic green flies. The more Mr. Pond looked at those veiled but restless eyes, the less he liked them. The old fancy came back to him about an actual conspiracy against Gahagan; though certainly not one worked by Artemis or Joan. At last he broke the silence very abruptly.

“Mr. Luke,” he said, “you are naturally concerned for your late client; but some might feel you had a more than professional interest. Since you study his interests so deeply, can you give me a piece of information about him? *Did* Mr. Feversham and his wife come back from Brighton that day? Was Mrs. Feversham at the house that afternoon, whether Gahagan went there, or not?”

“She was not,” said Luke shortly. “They were both expected to return next morning. I have no idea why Feversham himself did return that night.”

“Looks almost as if somebody had sent for him,” said Mr. Pond.

Mr. Luke the solicitor rose abruptly from his seat and turned away. “I cannot see any use in all these speculations of yours,” he said, and, making a stiff salute, he took his top-hat and was gone from the house with a swiftness that seemed hardly normal.

Next day Mr. Pond clad himself even more conventionally and carefully than usual, and proceeded to pay a round of calls on a series of ladies: a frivolous solemnity which with him was by no means usual. The first lady he waited upon was the Hon. Violet Varney, whom he had hitherto only seen in the distance, and was gently depressed at having to see so close. She was what he believed, in these latter days, to be described as a platinum blonde. It was doubtless a graceful reminiscence of her own name which led her to tint her mouth and cheeks with a colour that was rather violet than purple, giving an effect which her friends called ghostly and her foes ghastly. Even from this listless lady he did extract some admissions lending to help in the reconstruction of Gahagan’s real remarks; though the lady’s own remarks had their usual air of expiring with a gasp before they were really finished. Then he had another interview with her sister, Joan, and marvelled inwardly at the strange thing which is human personality and stands apart from modes and manners. For Joan had very much the same tricks of style; the same rather high, well-bred voice, the same sketchy, uncompleted sentences; but, fortunately, not the same purple powder and not in the least the same eyes or gestures or mind or immortal soul. Mr. Pond, with all his old-fashioned prejudices, knew at once that in this other girl the new virtues were virtues, whether or not they were new. She really was brave and generous and fond of the truth, though the Society papers did say so. “She’s all right,” said Mr. Pond to himself. “She’s as good as gold. A great deal better than gold. And oh, how much better than platinum!”

Stopping at the next stage of his pilgrimage, he visited the monstrous and ludicrous large hotel which had the honour of housing Miss Artemis Asa-Smith of Pennsylvania. She received him with the rather overwhelming enthusiasm which bore her everywhere through the world; and Mr. Pond had very little difficulty in her case in extracting an admission that even a man who goes to a club may happen not to be a murderer. Though this explanation was naturally less personal and intimate than his interview with Joan (about which he always refused to say a word to anybody), the ardent Artemis continued to earn his approval by her reserves of good sense and good nature. She saw the point about the order of the topics mentioned, and its probable effect on her own mind; and so far the diplomacy of Mr. Pond had been successful. All the three ladies, with whatever degrees of seriousness or concentration, had listened to his theory of what Gahagan had said; and had all agreed that he might very probably have said it. This part of his task being done, Mr. Pond paused a little, and perhaps rather pulled himself together, before approaching his last duty — which also took the form of calling on a lady. He might be excused; for it also involved passing through that grim garden where a man had lain murdered, to that high and sinister house where his widow was still living alone: the great Olivia, queen of tragedy, now tragic by a double claim.

He stepped, not without repugnance, across that dark corner inside the gate and under the holly tree where poor Fred Feversham had been spiked to the earth by a mere splinter of a sword; and as he climbed the crooked path to the doorway in the narrow and bare brick house that stood above him like a tower, dark against the stars, he revolved difficulties much deeper than had yet troubled him in the more trifling matter of the supposed inconsistencies of Gahagan's conversation. There was a real question behind all that nonsense; and it demanded an answer. Somebody had murdered the unfortunate Frederick Feversham; and there were some real reasons for directing the suspicion upon Gahagan. After all, he had been in the habit of spending whole days, or half of the nights as well, with this actress; nothing seemed more horribly natural, more repulsively probable, than that they had been surprised by Feversham and had taken the bloody way out. Mrs. Feversham had often been compared to Mrs. Siddons. Her own external behaviour had always been full of dignity and discretion. A scandal for her was not an advertisement, as it would be for Violet Varney. She had really the stronger motive of the two . . . but, good God, this would never do! Suppose Gahagan really was innocent — but at that price! Whatever his weaknesses, he was just the man to be hanged like a gentleman rather than let The Lady — He looked up with growing terror at the tower of dark brick, wondering if he were to meet the murderess. . . . Then he furiously flung off the morbidity, and tried again to fix himself on the facts. After all, what was there against Gahagan or the widow? It seemed to him, as he forced himself to colder considerations, that it really resolved itself into a matter of time.

Gahagan had certainly spent a huge amount of *time* with Olivia; that was really the only external proof of his passion for her. The proofs of his passion for Joan were very external indeed. Pond could have sworn that the Irishman was really in love with Joan. He threw himself at her head; and she, on the accepted standards of modern youth, threw herself back at him. But these encounters, one might say collisions, were as brief as they were brilliant. Why did a lover full of such triumphs want to go off and spend such a lot of *time* with a much older woman? . . . These broodings had turned him into an automaton and brought him unconsciously past the servants and up the stairs and into the very room where he was asked to wait for Mrs. Feversham. He nervously picked up an old battered book, apparently dating from the time when the actress was a schoolgirl, for the flyleaf showed in a very schoolgirl hand: “Olivia Malone.” Perhaps the great Shakespearian actress claimed descent from the great Shakespearian critic. But, anyhow, she must be Irish — at least by tradition. . . .

As he bent over the shabby book in the dusky anteroom, there shot into his mind a white ray of serene and complete understanding: so far as this tale goes, the last of the paradoxes of Mr. Pond. He felt full and complete certainty; and yet the only words to express it wrote themselves rapidly across his brain with the bewildering brevity of a hieroglyphic.

“Love never needs time. But Friendship always needs time. More and more and more time, up to long past midnight.”

When Gahagan had done those crazy things that blazoned his devotion to Joan Varney, they had hardly occupied any time. When he fell on her from a parachute as she came out of church at Bournemouth, the fall was naturally very rapid. When he tore up a return ticket costing hundreds of pounds to stay with her half an hour longer in Samoa, it was only half an hour longer. When he swam the Hellespont in imitation of Leander, it was only for exactly thirty-five minutes’ conversation with Hero. But Love is like that. It is a thing of great moments; and it lives on the memory of moments. Perhaps it is a fragile illusion; perhaps, on the other hand, it is eternal and beyond time. But Friendship eats up time. If poor Gahagan had a real intellectual friendship, then he would go on talking till long past midnight. And with whom would Gahagan be so likely to have one as with an Irish actress who was chiefly interested in Shakespeare? Even as he had the thought, he heard the rich and faintly Irish voice of Olivia welcoming him; and he knew he was right.

“Don’t you know,” asked the widow with a mournful smile, when he had tactfully steered the conversation past condolences to Captain Gahagan, “don’t you know we poor Irishes have a secret vice? It’s called Poetry; or perhaps I ought to say it’s generally called Recitation. It’s been suppressed by the police in all the English salons; and that’s the worst of the Irish wrongs. People in London are not allowed to recite poems to each other all night, as they do in Dublin. Poor Peter used to come to me and talk Shakespeare till morning; but I had to turn him out at last. When a man calls on *me,* and tries to recite the whole of *Romeo and Juliet,* it gets past a joke.

But you see how it was. The English won't allow the poor fellow to recite Shakespeare."

Mr. Pond did indeed see how it was. He knew enough about men to know that a man must have a friend, if possible a female friend, to talk to till all is blue. He knew enough about Dubliners to know that neither devils nor dynamite will stop them from reciting verse. All the black clouds of morbid brooding on the murder which had oppressed him in the garden had rolled away at the first sound of this strong, good-humoured irishwoman's voice. But after a little while they began to gather again, though more remotely. After all, as he had said before, *somebody* had killed poor Fred Feversham.

He was quite certain now that it was not Feversham's wife. He was practically certain it was not Gahagan. He went home that night turning the question over and over; but he had only one night's unrest. For the next day's paper contained the news of the unexplained suicide of Mr. Luke, of the well-known firm of Masters, Luke and Masters; and Mr. Pond sat gently chiding himself, because he had not thought of the obvious fact that a man who is always tearing and rending people because he has been swindled, may possibly discover one day that he has been swindled by his own solicitor. Feversham had summoned Luke to that midnight meeting in the garden, in order to tell him so; but Mr. Luke, a man careful of his professional standing, had taken very prompt steps to prevent Mr. Feversham telling anybody else.

"It makes me feel very bad," said Mr. Pond, meekly and almost tremulously. "At that last meeting of ours I could see he was awfully frightened already; and, do you know, I'm very much afraid that it was I who frightened him."

WHEN DOCTORS AGREE

Mr. Ponds paradoxes were of a very peculiar kind. They were indeed paradoxical defiances even of the law of paradox. Paradox has been defined as “Truth standing on her head to attract attention.” Paradox has been defended; on the ground that so many fashionable fallacies still stand firmly on their feet, because they have no heads to stand on. But it must be admitted that writers, like other mendicants and mountebanks, frequently do try to attract attention. They set out conspicuously, in a single line in a play, or at the head or tail of a paragraph, remarks of this challenging kind; as when Mr. Bernard Shaw wrote: “The Golden Rule is that there is no Golden Rule”; or Oscar Wilde observed: “I can resist everything except temptation”; or a duller scribe (not to be named with these and now doing penance for his earlier vices in the nobler toil of celebrating the virtues of Mr. Pond) said in defence of hobbies and amateurs and general duffers like himself: “If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.” To these things do writers sink; and then the critics tell them that they “talk for effect”; and then the writers answer: “What the devil else should we talk for? Ineffectualness?” It is a sordid scene.

But Mr. Pond belonged to a more polite world and his paradoxes were quite different. It was quite impossible to imagine Mr. Pond standing on his head. But it was quite as easy to imagine him standing on his head as to imagine him trying to attract attention. He was the quietest man in the world to be a man of the world; he was a small, neat Civil Servant; with nothing notable about him except a beard that looked not only old-fashioned but vaguely foreign, and perhaps a little French, though he was as English as any man alive. But, for that matter, French respectability is far more respectable than English; and Mr. Pond, though in some ways cosmopolitan, was completely respectable. Another thing that was faintly French about him was the level ripple of his speech: a tripping monotone that never tripped over a single vowel. For the French carry their sense of equality even to the equality of syllables. With this equable flow, full of genteel gossip on Vienna, he was once entertaining a lady; and five minutes later she rejoined her friends with a very white face; and whispered to them the shocking secret that the mild little man was mad.

The peculiarity of his conversation was this: in the middle of a steady stream of sense, there would suddenly appear two or three words which seemed simply to be nonsense. It was as if something had suddenly gone wrong with the works of a gramophone. It was nonsense which the speaker never seemed to notice himself; so that sometimes his hearers also hardly noticed that speech so natural was nonsensical. But to those who did notice, he seemed to be saying something like, “Naturally, having no legs, he won the walking-race easily,” or “As there was nothing to drink, they all got tipsy at once.” Broadly speaking, two kinds of people stopped him with stares or questions: the very stupid and the very clever. The stupid because the absurdity alone stuck out from a level of intelligence that baffled them; it was indeed in itself an example of the truth in paradox. The only part of his conversation they could understand was the part they could not understand. And the clever stopped him because they knew that, behind each of these queer compact contradictions, there was a very queer story — like the queer story to be narrated here.

His friend Gahagan, that ginger-haired giant and somewhat flippant Irish dandy, declared that Pond put in these senseless phrases merely to find out whether his listeners were listening. Pond never said so; and his motive remained rather a mystery. But Gahagan declared that there is a whole tribe of modern intellectual ladies, who have learned nothing except the art of turning on a talker a face of ardour and attention, while their minds are so very absent that some little phrase like, “Finding himself in India, he naturally visited Toronto,” will pass harmlessly in at one ear and out at the other, without disturbing the cultured mind within.

It was at a little dinner given by old Wotton to Gahagan and Pond and others, that we first got a glimpse of the real meaning of these wild parentheses of so tame a talker. The truth was, to begin with, that Mr. Pond, in spite of his French beard, was very English in his habit of assuming that he ought to be a little dull, in deference to other people. He disliked telling long and largely fantastic stories about himself, such as his friend Gahagan told, though Pond thoroughly enjoyed them when Gahagan told them. Pond himself had had some very curious experiences; but, as he would not turn them into long stories, they appeared only as short stories; and the short stories were so very short as to be quite unintelligible. In trying to explain the eccentricity, it is best to begin with the simplest example, like a diagram in a primer of logic. And I will begin with the short story, which was concealed in the shorter phrase, which puzzled poor old Wotton so completely on that particular evening. Wotton was an old-fashioned diplomatist, of the sort that seemed to grow more national by trying to be international. Though far from militarist, he was very military. He kept the peace by staccato sentences under a stiff grey moustache. He had more chin than forehead.

“They tell me,” Wotton was saying, “that the Poles and Lithuanians have come to an agreement about Wilno. It was an old row, of course; and I expect it was six to one and half a dozen to the other.”

“You are a real Englishman, Wotton,” said Gahagan, “and you say in your heart, ‘All these foreigners are alike.’ You’re right enough if you mean that we’re all unlike you. The English are the lunatics of the earth, who know that everybody else is mad. But we do sometimes differ a little from each other, you know. Even we in Ireland have been known to differ from each other. But you see the Pope denouncing the Bolshevists, or the French Revolution rending the Holy Roman Empire, and you still say in your hearts, ‘What can the difference be betwixt Tweedledum and Tweedledee?’”

“There was no difference,” said Pond, “between Tweedledum and Tweedledee. You will remember that it is distinctly recorded that they agreed. But remember what they agreed about.”

Wotton looked a little baffled and finally grunted: “Well, if these fellows have agreed, I suppose there will be a little peace.”

“Funny things, agreements,” said Pond. “Fortunately people generally go on disagreeing, till they die peacefully in their beds. Men very seldom do fully and finally agree. I did know two men who came to agree so completely that one of them naturally murdered the other; but as a rule . . .”

“‘Agreed so completely,’” said Wotton thoughtfully. “Don’t you — are you quite sure you don’t mean: ‘Disagreed so completely’?”

Gahagan uttered a sort of low whoop of laughter. “Oh, no,” he said, “he doesn’t mean that. I don’t know what the devil he does mean; but he doesn’t mean anything so sensible as that.”

But Wotton, in his ponderous way, still attempted to pin down the narrator to a more responsible statement; and the upshot of it was that Mr. Pond was reluctantly induced to explain what he really meant and let us hear the whole story.

The mystery was involved at first in another mystery: the strange murder of Mr. James Haggis, of Glasgow, which filled the Scottish and English newspapers not many years ago. On the face of it, the thing was a curious story; to introduce a yet more curious sequel. Haggis had been a prominent and wealthy citizen, a bailie of the city and an elder of the kirk. Nobody denied that even in these capacities he had sometimes been rather unpopular; but, to do him justice, he had often been unpopular through his loyalty to unpopular causes. He was the sort of old Radical who is more rigid and antiquated than any Tory; and, maintaining in theory the cause of Retrenchment and Reform, he managed to suggest that almost any Reform was too expensive for the needs of Retrenchment. Thus he had stood alone in opposition to the universal support given to old Dr. Campbell's admirable campaign for fighting the epidemic in the slums during the slump. But to deduce from his economics that he was a demon delighting in the sight of poor children dying of typhoid was perhaps an exaggerated inference. Similarly, he was prominent in the Presbyterian councils as refusing all modern compromise with the logic of Calvinism; but to infer that he actually hoped all his neighbours were damned before they were born is too personal an interpretation of theological theory.

On the other side, he was admittedly honest in business and faithful to his wife and family; so that there was a general reaction in favour of his memory when he was found stabbed to the heart in the meagre grass of the grim little churchyard that adjoined his favourite place of worship. It was impossible to imagine Mr. Haggis as involved in any romantic Highland feud calling for the dirk, or any romantic assignation interrupted with the stiletto; and it was generally fell that to be knifed and left unburied among the buried dead was an exaggerated penalty for being a rather narrow Scottish merchant of the old school.

It happened that Mr. Pond himself had been present at a little party where there was high debate about the murder as a mystery. His host, Lord Glenorchy, had a hobby of reading books on criminology; his hostess, Lady Glenorchy, had the less harmful hobby of reading those much more solid and scientific books which are called detective stories. There were present, as the society papers say, Major MacNabb, the Chief Constable, and Mr. Lancelot Browne, a brilliant London barrister who found it much more of a bore to be a lawyer than to pretend to be a detective; also, among those present, was the venerable and venerated Dr. Campbell, whose work among the poor has already been inadequately commended, and a young friend of his named Angus, whom he was understood to be coaching and instructing generally for his medical examinations and his scientific career.

Responsible people naturally love to be irresponsible. All these persons delighted to throw theories about in private which they need not answer for in public. The barrister, being a humane man, was delighted to prosecute somebody whom he would not have to hang. The criminologist was enchanted to analyse the lunacy of somebody he could never have proved to be a lunatic. And Lady Glenorchy was charmed at the chance of considering poor Mr. Haggis (of all people) as the principal character in a shocker. Hilarious attempts were made to fix the crime on the United Presbyterian minister, a notorious Sublapsarian, naturally, nay inevitably, impelled to stick a dirk in a Supralapsarian. Lord Glenorchy was more serious, not to say monotonous. Having learnt from his books of criminology the one great discovery of that science, that mental and moral deformity are found only among poor people, he suspected a plot of local Communists (all with the wrong-shaped thumb and ear) and picked for his fancy a Socialist agitator of the city. Mr. Angus made bold to differ; his choice was an old lag, or professional criminal, known to be in the place, who had been almost everything that is alarming except a Socialist agitator. Then it was that the point was referred, not without a certain reverence, to the white-haired and wise old physician, who had now behind him a whole lifetime of charity and good works. One of the many ways in which Dr. Campbell seemed to have emerged from an elder and perhaps honester world was the fact that he not only spoke with a Scottish accent but he spoke Scottish. His speech will, therefore, be rendered here with difficulty and in doubt and trembling.

“Weel, ye will a’ be asking wha dirked Jamie Haggis? And I’ll tell ye fair at the start that I winna gie a bawbee to ken wha dirked Jamie Haggis. Gin I kent, I wadna’ say. It’s a sair thing, na doot, that the freens and benefactors o’ puir humanity should no be named and fitly celebrated; but like the masons that built our gran’ cathedral and the gran’ poets that wrote our ballads of Otterburn and Sir Patrick Spens, the man that achieved the virtuous act o’ killing Jamie Haggis will ha’e nae pairsonal credit for’t in this world; it is even possible he might be a wee bit inconvenienced. So ye’ll get nae guesses out of me; beyond saying I’ve lang been seekin’ a man of sic prudence and public spirit.”

There followed that sort of silence in which people are not certain whether to laugh, at a deliberate stroke of wit; but before they could do so, young Angus, who kept his eyes fixed on his venerable preceptor, had spoken with the eagerness of the ardent student.

“But you’ll not say, Dr. Campbell, that murder is right because some acts or opinions of the murdered man are wrong?”

“Aye, if they’re wrang enough,” replied the benevolent Dr. Campbell blandly. “After all, we’ve nae ither test o’ richt and wrang. *Salus populi suprema lex.*”

“Aren’t the Ten Commandments a bit of a test?” asked the young man, with a rather heated countenance, emphasized by his red hair, that stood up on his head like stiff flames.

The silver-haired saint of sociology continued to regard him with a wholly benevolent smile; but there was an odd gleam in his eye as he answered:

“Aye, the Ten Commandments are a test. What we doctors are beginning to ca’ an Intelligence Test.”

Whether it was an accident, or whether the intuitions of Lady Glenorchy were a little alarmed by the seriousness of the subject, it was at this point that she struck in.

“Well, if Dr. Campbell won’t pronounce for us, I suppose we must all stick to our own suspicions. I don’t know whether you like cigarettes in the middle of dinner; it’s a fashion I can’t get used to myself.”

At this point in his narrative, Mr. Pond threw himself back in his chair with a more impatient movement than he commonly permitted himself.

“Of course, they will do it,” he said, with a mild explosiveness. “They’re admired and thought very tactful when they do it.”

“When who do what?” said Wotton. “What on earth are you talking about now?”

“I’m talking about hostesses,” said Pond, with an air of pain. “Good hostesses. Really successful hostesses. They will cut into conversation, on the theory that it can be broken off anywhere. Just as it’s quite the definition of a good hostess to make two people talk when they hate it, and part them when they are beginning to like it. But they sometimes do the most deadly and awful damage. You see, they stop conversations that are not worth starting again. And that’s horrible, like murder.”

“But if the conversation’s not worth starting again, why is it horrible to stop it?” asked the conscientious Wotton, still laboriously in pursuit.

“Why, *that’s* why it’s horrible to stop it,” answered Pond, almost snappishly for so polite a person. “Talk ought to be sacred because it is so light, so tenuous, so trivial, if you will; anyhow, so frail and easy to destroy. Cutting short its life is worse than murder; it’s infanticide. It’s like killing a baby that’s trying to come to life. It can never be restored to life, though one rose from the dead. A good light conversation can never be put together again when it’s broken to pieces; because you can’t get all the pieces. I remember a splendid talk at Trefusis’s place, that began because there was a crack of thunder over the house and a cat howled in the garden, and somebody made a rather crude joke about a catastrophe. And then Gahagan here had a perfectly lovely theory that sprang straight out of cats and catastrophes and everything, and would have started a splendid talk about a political question on the Continent.”

“The Catalonian question, I suppose,” said Gahagan, laughing, “but I fear I’ve quite forgotten my lovely theory.”

“That’s just what I say,” said Pond, gloomily. “It could only have been started then; it ought to have been sacred because it wasn’t worth starting again. The hostess swept it all out of our heads, and then had the cheek to say afterwards that we could talk about it some other time. Could we? Could we make a contract with a cloud to break just over the roof, and tie a cat up in the garden and pull its tail at the right moment, and give Gahagan just enough champagne to inspire him with a theory so silly that he’s forgotten it already? It was then or never with that debate being started; and yet bad results enough followed from it being stopped. But that, as they say, is another story.”

“You must tell it to us another time,” said Gahagan. “At present I am still curious about the man who murdered another man because he agreed with him.”

“Yes,” assented Wotton, “we’ve rather strayed from the subject, haven’t we?”

“So Mrs. Trefusis said,” murmured Mr. Pond sadly. “I suppose we can’t all feel the sanctity of really futile conversation. But if you’re really interested in the other matter, I don’t mind telling you all about it; though I’d rather not tell you exactly how I came to know all about it. That was rather a confidential matter — what they call a confession. Pardon my little interlude on the tactful hostess; it had something to do with what followed and I have a reason for mentioning it.

“Lady Glenorchy quite calmly changed the subject from murder to cigarettes; and everybody’s first feeling was that we had been done out of a very entertaining little tiff about the Ten Commandments. A mere trifle, too light and airy to recur to our minds at any other time. But there was another trifle that did recur to my own mind afterwards; and kept my attention on a murder of which I might have thought little enough at the time, as De Quincey says. I remembered once looking up Glenorchy in *Who’s Who,* and seeing that he had married the daughter of a very wealthy squire near Lowestoft in Suffolk.”

“Lowestoft, Suffolk. These are dark hints,” said Gahagan. “Do these in themselves point to some awful and suspicious fact?”

“They point,” said Pond, “to the awful fact that Lady Glenorchy is not Scottish. If she had introduced the cigarettes at her father’s dinner-table in Suffolk, such trifles as the Ten Commandments would instantly have been tossed away from everyone’s mind and memory. But I knew I was in Scotland and that the story had only just begun. I have told you that old Campbell was tutoring or coaching young Angus for his medical degree. It was a great honour for a lad like Angus to have Campbell for a coach; but it must have been quite agreeable even to an authority like Campbell to have Angus for a pupil. For he had always been a most industrious and ambitious and intelligent pupil, and one likely to do the old man credit; and after the time I speak of, he seemed to grow more industrious and ambitious than ever. In fact, he shut himself up so exclusively with his coach that he failed in his examination. That was what first convinced me that my guess was right.”

“And very lucid, too,” said Gahagan with a grin. “He worked so hard with his coach that he failed in his examination. Another statement that might seem to some to require expansion.”

“It’s very simple, really,” said Mr. Pond innocently. “But in order to expand it, we must go back for a moment to the mystery of Mr. Haggis’s murder. It had already spread a sort of detective fever in the neighbourhood; for all the Scots love arguing and it really was rather a fascinating riddle. One great point in the mystery was the wound, which seemed at first to have been made by a dirk or dagger of some kind but was afterwards found by the experts to demand a different instrument of rather peculiar shape.

Moreover, the district had been combed for knives and daggers; and temporary suspicion fixed on any wild youths from beyond the Highland line, who might retain an historic tenderness for the possession of dirks. All the medical authorities agreed that the instrument had been something more subtle than a dirk, though no medical authorities would consent even to guess what it was. People were perpetually ransacking the churchyard and the church in search of clues. And just about this time young Angus, who had been a strict supporter of this particular church, and had even once induced his old tutor and friend to sit under its minister for one evening service, suddenly left off going there; indeed, he left off going to any church at all. So I realized that I was still on the right track."

"Oh," said Wotton blankly, "so you realized that you were still on the right track."

"I fear I did not realize that you were on any track," said Gahagan. "To speak with candour, my dear Pond, I should say that of all the trackless and aimless and rambling human statements I have ever heard, the most rambling was the narrative we have just been privileged to hear from you. First you tell us that two Scotsmen began a conversation about the morality of murder and never finished it; then you go off on a tirade against society hostesses; then you reveal the horrid fact that one of them came from Lowestoft; then you go back to one of the Scotsmen and say he failed to pass his examination because he worked so hard with his tutor; then, pausing for a moment upon the peculiar shape of an undiscovered dagger, you tell us that the Scotsman has left off going to church and you are on the right track. Frankly, if you really do find something sacred about futile conversation, I should say that you were on the track of that all right."

"I know," said Mr. Pond patiently, "all I've said is quite relevant to what really happened; but, of course, you don't know what really happened. A story always does seem rambling and futile if you leave out what really happened. That's why newspapers are so dull. All the political news, and much of the polite news (though rather higher in tone than the other), is made quite bewildering and pointless by the necessity of telling stories without telling the story."

"Well, then," said Gahagan, "let us try to get some sense out of all this nonsense, which has not even the excuses of newspaper nonsense. To take one of your nonsense remarks as a test, why do you say that Angus failed to pass because he worked so much with his coach?"

"Because he didn't work with his coach," replied Pond. "Because I didn't say he worked with his coach. At least I didn't say he worked for the examination. I said he was with his coach. I said he spent days and nights with his coach; but they weren't preparing for any examination."

"Well, what were they doing?" asked Wotton gruffly.

"They were going on with the argument," cried Pond, in a squeak that was almost shrill. "They hardly stopped to sleep or eat; but they went on with the argument; the argument interrupted at the dinner-table. Have you never known any Scotsmen? Do you suppose that a woman from Suffolk with a handful of cigarettes, and a mouthful of irrelevance, can stop two Scotsmen from going on with an argument when they've started it? They began it again when they were getting their hats and coats; they were at it hammer and tongs as they went out of the gate, and only a Scottish poet can describe what they did then:

And the tane went hame with the ither; and then,
The tither went hame with the ither again.

"And for hours and weeks and months they never turned aside from the same interminable debate on the thesis first propounded by Dr. Campbell: that when a good man is well and truly convinced that a bad man is actively bad for the community, and is doing evil on a large scale which cannot be checked by law or any other action, the good man has a moral right to murder the bad man, and thereby only increases his own goodness."

Pond paused a moment, pulling his beard and staring at the table; then he began again:

"For reasons I've already mentioned but not explained—"

"That's what's the matter with you, my boy," said Gahagan genially. "There are always such a damned lot of things you have mentioned but not explained."

"For those reasons," went on Pond deliberately, "I happen to know a great deal about the stages of that stubborn and forcible controversy, about which nobody else knew anything at all. For Angus was a genuine truth-seeker who wished to satisfy his soul and not merely to make his name; and Campbell was enough of a great man to be quite as anxious to convince a pupil as to convince a crowd in a lecture-room. But I am not going to tell you about those stages of the controversy at any great length. To tell the truth, I am not what people call impartial on this controversy. How any man can form any conviction, and remain what they call impartial on any controversy, is more than I have ever understood. But I suppose they would say I couldn't describe the debate fairly; because the side I sympathize with was not the side that won.

"Society hostesses, especially when they come from near Lowestoft, do not know where an argument is tending. They will drop not only bricks but bombshells; and then expect them not to explode. Anyhow, I knew where that argument at Glenorchy's table was tending. When Angus made a test of the Ten Commandments, and Campbell said they were an Intelligence Test, I knew what would come next. In another minute, he would be saying that nobody of intelligence now troubles about the Ten Commandments.

"What a disguise there is in snowy hair and the paternal stoop of age! Dickens somewhere describes a patriarch who needed no virtue except his white hair. As Dr. Campbell smiled across the table at Angus, most people saw nothing in that smile but patriarchal and parental kindness. But I happened to see also a glint in the eye. which told me that the old man was quite as much of a fighter as the red-haired boy who had rashly challenged him. In some odd way, indeed, I seemed suddenly to see old age itself as a masquerade. The white hair had turned into a white wig, the powder of the eighteenth century; and the smiling face underneath it was the face of Voltaire.

"Dr. Andrew Glenlyon Campbell was a real philanthropist; so was Voltaire. It is not always certain whether philanthropy means a love of men, or of man, or of mankind. There is a difference. I think he cared less about the individual than about the public or the race; hence doubtless his gentle eccentricity of defending an act of private execution. But anyhow, I knew he was one of the grim line of Scottish sceptics, from Hume down to Ross or Robertson. And, whatever else they are, they are stubborn and stick to their point. Angus also was stubborn, and as I have already said, he was a devout worshipper in the same dingy kirk as the late James Haggis; that is, one of the extreme irreconcilable sectaries of the seventeenth-century Puritanism. And so the Scottish atheist and the Scottish Calvinist argued and argued and argued, until milder races might have expected them to drop down dead with fatigue. But it was not of disagreement that either of them died.

"But the advantage was with the older and more learned man in his attack; and you must remember that the younger man had only a rather narrow and provincial version of the creed to defend. As I say, I will not bore you with the arguments; I confess they rather bore me. Doubtless Dr. Campbell said that the Ten Commandments could not be of divine origin, because two of them are mentioned by the virtuous Emperor Foo Chi, in the Second Dynasty; or one of them is paraphrased by Synesius of Samothrace and attributed to the lost code of Lycurgus."

"Who was Synesius of Samothrace?" inquired Gahagan, with an appearance of sudden and eager curiosity.

"He was a mythical character of the Minoan Age first discovered in the twentieth century A.D.," replied the unruffled Pond. "I made him up just now; but you know the sort of thing I mean — the mythical nature of Mount Sinai proved from the parallel myth that the ark rested on Mount Ararat, and the mountain that would not come to Mahomet. But all this textual criticism really affects a religion only founded on texts. I knew how the fight was going; and I knew when it ended. I knew when Robert Angus left off going to kirk on the Sabbath."

The end of the debate may best be described more directly; for, indeed, Mr. Pond described it himself with a strange sort of directness; almost as if he had unaccountably been present, or had seen it in a vision. Anyhow, it appears that the operating-theatre of the medical schools was the scene of the final phase of disagreement and agreement. They had gone back there very late at night, when the schools were closed and the theatre deserted, because Angus fancied he had left some of his instruments there, which it would be more neat and proper to lock up. There was no sound in that hollow place but the echo of their own footsteps, and very little light save a faint moonshine that trickled through the cracks between the curtained windows. Angus had retrieved his operating-tool, and was turning again towards the steep stairs that climbed through the semi-circular rows of seats, when Campbell said to him casually.

"Ye'll find the facts I mentioned aboot the Aztec hymns in the—"

Angus tossed the tool on the table like a man throwing down his sword, and turned on his companion with a new and transfigured air of candour and finality.

"You needn't trouble about hymns any more; I may as well tell you that I've done with them, for one. You're too strong for me — or, rather, the truth is too strong for me. I've defended my own nursery nightmare as long as I could; but you've woken me up at last. You are right, you must be right; I don't see any way out of it."

After a silence, Campbell answered very softly: "I'll no mak' apologies for fighting for the truth; but, man, ye made a real bonny fight for the falsehood."

It might well have seemed that the old blasphemer had never spoken on the topic in a tone so delicate and respectful; and it seemed strange that his new convert did not respond to the appeal. Looking up, Campbell saw that his new convert's attention had been abruptly abstracted; he was standing staring at the implement in his hand: a surgical knife made upon an odd pattern for special purposes. At last he said in a hoarse and almost inaudible voice:

"A knife of an unusual shape."

"See report o' inquest on Jamie Haggis," said the old man, nodding benevolently. "Aye, ye've guessed richt, I'm thinking." Then, after a pause, he added, with equal calm:

"Noo that we are agreed, and a' of one mind, aboot the need for sic social surgery, it's as weel ye should know the hale truth. Aye, lad, I did it mysel'; and with a blade like yon. That nicht ye took me to the kirk — weel, it's the fairst time, I hope, I've ever been hypocreetical; but I stayed behind to pray, and I think ye had hopes of my convairsion. But I prayed because Jamie prayed; and when he rose from his prayers, I followed him and killed him i' the kirkyard."

Angus was still looking at the knife in silence; then he said suddenly: "Why did you kill him?"

"Ye needna ask, noo we are agreed in moral philosophy," replied the old doctor simply. "It was just plain surgery. As we sacrifice a finger to save the body, so we maun sacrifice a man to save the body politic. I killed him because he was doing evil, and inhumanly preventing what was guid for humanity: the scheme for the slums and the lave. And I understand that, upon reflection, ye tak the same view."

Angus nodded grimly.

The proverb asks: "Who shall decide when doctors disagree?" But in that dark and ominous theatre of doctoring the doctors agreed.

"Yes," said Angus, "I take the same view. Also, I have had the same experience."

“And what’s that?” inquired the other.

“I have had daily dealings with a man I thought was doing nothing but evil,” answered Angus. “I still think you were doing evil; even though you were serving truth. You have convinced me that my beliefs were dreams; but not that dreaming is worse than waking up. You brutally broke the dreams of the humble, sneered at the weak hopes of the bereaved. You seem cruel and inhuman to me, just as Haggis seemed cruel and inhuman to you. You are a good man by your own code, but so was Haggis a good man by his code. He did not pretend to believe in salvation by good works, any more than you pretended to believe in the Ten Commandments. He was good to individuals, but the crowd suffered; you are good to the crowd and an individual suffered. But, after all, you also are only an individual.”

Something in the last words, that were said very softly, made the old doctor stiffen suddenly and then start backwards towards the steps behind. Angus sprang like a wildcat and pinned him to his place with a choking violence; still talking, but now at the top of his voice.

“Day after day, I have itched and tingled to kill you; and been held back only by the superstition you have destroyed tonight. Day after day, you have been battering down the scruples which alone defended you from death. You wise thinker; you wary reasoner; you fool! It would be better for you to-night if I still believed in God and in his Commandment against murder.”

The old man twisted speechlessly in the throttling grip, but he was too feeble, and Angus flung him with a crash across the operating-table, where he lay as if fainting. Round them and above them the empty tiers of concentric seats glimmered in the faint and frigid moonlight as desolate as the Colosseum under the moon; a deserted amphitheatre where there was no human voice to cry *“Habet!”* The red-haired slayer stood with the knife uplifted, as strange in shape as the flint knife of some prehistoric sacrifice; and still he talked on in the high tones of madness.

“One thing alone protected you and kept the peace between us: that we disagreed. Now we agree, now we are at one in thought — and deed, I can do as you would do. I can do as you have done. We are at peace.”

And with the sound of that word he struck; and Andrew Campbell moved for the last time. In his own cold temple, upon his own godless altar . . . he stirred and then lay still; and the murderer bent and fled from the building and from the city and across the Highland line at night, to hide himself in the hills.

When Pond had told this story, Gahagan rose slowly to his gigantic height and knocked out his cigar in an ashtray: “I darkly suspect, Pond,” he said, “that you are not quite so irrelevant as you sound. Not quite irrelevant, I mean, even to our opening talk about European affairs.”

“Tweedledum and Tweedledee agreed — to have a battle,” said Pond. “We are rather easily satisfied with saying that some people like Poles or Prussians or other foreigners have agreed. We don’t often ask what they’ve agreed on. But agreement can be rather risky, unless it’s agreement with the truth.”

Wotton looked at him with a smouldering suspicion; but finally decided, with a sigh of relief, that it was only metaphysics.

POND THE PANTALOON

"No, no, no," said Mr. Pond, with a gentle shrillness which he occasionally showed, when any doubt was thrown on the prosaic precision of his statements or arguments. "I did not say it was a red pencil, and that was why it made such black marks. I said it was relatively a red pencil, or resembled a red pencil, as compared with Wotton's view in regarding it as a blue pencil; and *that* was why it made such black marks. The distinction may seem a small one; but I assure you the most enormous errors arise out of this habit of taking a remark out of its context, and then stating it not quite correctly. The most ordinary and obvious truths, when reported in that way, may be made to sound almost absurd."

"Almost," said Captain Gahagan, nodding gravely and gazing at the little man opposite him, rather as if he were a mysterious monster in a tank.

Mr. Pond was in his private tank, or private office, in a hive of Government offices, sitting at a desk and busy at the work of blue-pencilling the proofs of some official report; whence had arisen the talk about the colour of the pencil. Pond, in short, was doing his morning's work as usual; Peter Gahagan was doing nothing, also as usual; his large figure lounged in a chair that looked too small for him; he was attached to Mr. Pond and even more attached to watching other people work.

"I may resemble Polonius," said Pond, modestly; and, indeed, his old-fashioned beard, owlish expression and official courtliness made the comparison almost apt. "I may be like Polonius; but I am not Polonius — which is just the point I wish to illustrate. Hamlet told Polonius that a cloud in the sky was like a camel. The effect would have been somewhat different if Hamlet had stated, seriously and scientifically, that he had seen a camel in the sky. In that case, Polonius might have been pardoned in regarding the Prince's madness as finally proved. Touchy officials have been known to express the view that you, my dear Gahagan, come into this office like a buffalo, and there 'lie wallowing through the long summer day,' as an outmoded poet puts it. But if the authorities of the Zoo sent for you on the ground that you actually *were* a buffalo, the department would hardly move in the matter without further inquiries."

"No doubt you have my *dossier*," said Gahagan, "with official calculations and statistics about the number of my legs, not to mention my horns; all annotated with blue and red pencil — and most certainly with some very black marks against my name. But that brings me back to the original subject of my simple wonder. You hardly seem to have noticed what was really peculiar in your own remark. In any case, I do not quite understand what you mean by a pencil being relatively red. . . ."

"Even that phrase might be defended," observed Mr. Pond, with a faint smile. "You would say, for instance, that my notes on this proof are in blue pencil; and yet—" He held out a pencil with its red chalk point towards the other. It looked like a mild conjuring trick, until he twiddled it so as to show it was one of those pencils sold by most stationers, with red at one end and blue at the other. "Now suppose I wear down the blue point till it has nearly gone (and really the misprints they can put into a simple report on Baluchistan Bimetallism are incredible), then you would say the pencil was relatively red, though still perhaps rather blue. If the red end were worn away, you would say it was mostly blue, though a little red."

"I should say nothing of the sort," exclaimed Gahagan with abrupt impatience. "I should say what I said before; that the queer thing about you is that you are quite blind to what was really mad in your statement. You can't see the paradox in your own remark. You can't see the point of your own remark."

"The point of my remark," said Mr. Pond, with dignity, "which I thought I had made sufficiently clear, was that people are very inexact in reporting statements, as in cases like a camel and 'something like a camel.'"

Peter Gahagan continued to stare with round eyes at his friend, like a buffalo in a very ruminant phase; and eventually heaved himself up, collecting his grey top-hat and walking-stick with a sort of clatter.

"No," he said, "I will not point out the point. It would be breaking a crystal or shattering a perfectly rounded soap-bubble. To pierce the pure and spherical perfection of your maniacal calm would be like invading the innocence of a child. If you really and truly do not know when you are talking nonsense, if you do not even notice what part of it is nonsense, I feel I must leave your nonsensical intellect intact. I will go and talk it over with Wotton. As he has often breezily observed, there is no nonsense about him."

And he sauntered out of the room, swinging his stick, in the direction of the very important department presided over by Sir Hubert Wotton; that he might enjoy the inspiriting spectacle of another friend doing his day's work and being interrupted by an idle man.

Sir Hubert Wotton, however, was of a type somewhat different from Mr. Pond; in that, even if he was busy, he was never fussy. Mr. Pond was bent over the poised point of his blue pencil; Sir Hubert was first visible behind the red end of a cigar, which he was puffing, with a frown of reflection, as he turned over the papers on his desk. He recognized the entry of the beaming Captain with a grim but not ungracious smile, and waved him to a seat.

Gahagan sat down with his hands crossed on his stick and thumped it on the floor.

"Wotton," he said, "I've solved the problem of the Paradoxes of Pond. He doesn't know when he's said these crazy things. There's a blind spot on his excellent brain, or a cloud comes over his mind for a moment; and he forgets that he's even said anything peculiar. He goes on arguing about the reasonable part of his speech; he never stops to explain the only thing that was really unreasonable. He talked to me quite sensibly about a pencil that was bright red, or something like it, and therefore marked very black on the paper. I tried to nail him to that piece of inconsequence; and he completely eluded me. He went on talking about when a blue pencil was not a blue pencil; but he somehow forgot all about the black marks."

"Black marks!" said Wotton; and sat up so abruptly that he spilt the ash of his cigar over his usually immaculate waistcoat. He dusted off the defilement with a frown; and then, after a pause, spoke in the staccato fashion that occasionally revealed that he was much less conventional than he looked.

"Most fellows who talk paradoxes are only trying to show off. It's not like that with Pond; he does it because he's trying *not* to show off. You see — he looks a very sedentary, scientific little cuss, as if he'd never been unhooked from a desk or a typewriter; but he's really had some very extraordinary experiences. He doesn't talk about them; he doesn't want to talk about them; but he does want to talk about reason and philosophy and theoretical things in books; you know he loves reading all the rational eighteenth-century literature. But when, in the course of talking in the abstract, he comes on some concrete thing that he has actually *done* — well, I can only say he crumples it up. He tries to crush it into a small space and it simply sounds contradictory. Almost every one of those crazy sentences simply stands for one of the adventures in what would be called by most people a very unadventurous life."

"I think I see what you mean," said Gahagan, after a pause of radiant reflection. "Yes, you're right. You can't expect me to be taken in, mind you, by most of your swagger of stoicism in the English public-school man. Half the time they are simply showing off by not showing off. But in Pond it's genuine. He really does hate the limelight; in that way you may say he was made for the Secret Service. And you mean that he only becomes mysterious, in this particular manner, when he really does want to keep the secret of his services. In other words, you mean there is a story behind every paradox of Pond. Certainly that is true — of all those cases when I have been told the story."

"I know all about this story," said Wotton, "and it was one of the most remarkable things that Pond ever did. It was a matter of immense importance — the sort of public affair that has to be kept a very private affair. Pond gave two pieces of advice, which some thought very odd and which turned out exactly right; and he ended by making a rather extraordinary discovery. I don't know how he came to mention it just now; but I'm pretty sure it was by accident. When it turned up, he tried to tuck it away again in a hurry and change the subject. But he certainly saved England; also he nearly got killed."

"What!" exclaimed Gahagan with some astonishment.

"The fellow must have fired five times at him," said Wotton reminiscently, "before he turned the sixth shot on himself."

"Well, I'm blowed," said the Captain elegantly. "I always thought Pond the most charming of tea-table comedies; I never knew he figured in a melodrama. I should as soon have thought of his figuring in a fairy-pantomime. But he seems somehow associated with theatrical things at the moment. He asked me himself if he was like Polonius; and I suppose some malicious people would say he was more like Pantaloon. I like the notion of you and he magically transplanted to a Christmas pantomime: 'Harlequin Hubert and the Fairies' Pond,' all ending with a real Harlequinade, with red fire and the Pantaloon falling over the Policeman. Pardon my talking nonsense — you know my unfortunate mind only becomes fertile about impossible things."

"It's curious you should call it impossible," said Sir Hubert Wotton, knitting his brows, "because that's almost exactly what really happened to us.”

Sir Hubert Wotton showed a certain reticence and deliberate vagueness about the official details of the story; even in telling it after so many years to an intimate friend. In England especially, there are enormous events which never get into the newspapers, and are apparently intended never to get into the history-books. It may be enough to say here that there was at one time under the surface, but very near to the surface, a conspiracy aiming at a *coup d’état*, which was backed by a Continental Power of similar leanings. Gun-running, secret drilling and plans for stealing State documents were involved; and it was feared that a certain number of minor officials had been corrupted or converted by the conspirators. Hence, when it was a question of sending certain very private official documents (about the nature of which Wotton remained somewhat hazy to the end) from one of the great northern ports to a particular Government department in London, the first Council was a very small and select one, presided over by Sir Hubert and held in the smaller office of Mr. Pond. Indeed, Mr. Pond was the official in charge of the job. The only other person permanently present was one of the first officials from Scotland Yard; Wotton had brought his clerk with him to arrange and explain certain matters; but had later made an excuse for sending the man out on an errand. Dyer, the detective from the Yard, a heavy-shouldered, hard-headed person with a toothbrush moustache, explained methodically, if a little mechanically, the precautions and arrangements he would consider necessary for protecting the transport of the papers to their destination. He wanted an armoured car with a machine-gun, a certain number of men carrying concealed arms, a police search of everybody involved in first dispatching and in finally receiving the box or parcel — and several other conditions of the kind.

“Pond will think all this terribly expensive,” said Wotton, with a sad smile. “Pond is quite the Old Liberal in the matter of economy and retrenchment. But he will agree that we are all bound to show particular care in this case.”

“N-no,” said Mr. Pond, pursing his lips dubiously. “I don’t think I should show any particular care in this case.”

“Not show any particular care!” repeated the astonished Wotton.

“I certainly shouldn’t *show* it,” said Mr. Pond. “In such cases, nobody of sense would take such particular precautions, any more than anybody would send an important letter by registered post.”

“Well, you must pardon my dullness,” said Sir Hubert, “but, as a matter of fact, I have heard of people sending an important letter by registered post.”

“It is done, I believe,” said Mr. Pond, with distant disparagement. “But that is when you are trying to prevent a letter being lost. Just now you are trying to prevent a letter being found.”

“That sounds rather interesting,” said Dyer, with some restrained amusement.

“Don’t you see? It’s quite simple,” answered Pond. “If you want to prevent a document from being dropped down a drain, or thrown into a dustbin, or used to light the fire or to make a bird’s nest, or any other accident of neglect, then it is a good thing to draw attention to it, by stamping or sealing or safeguarding it in some particular way. But if you want to prevent it from being tracked and spotted and snatched out of your hands, by violence or stratagem, then it’s the worst thing in the world to mark it in a particular way. Registration, for instance, doesn’t mean that your messenger can’t be knocked on the head or have his pocket picked. It only means that your messenger or his department can be held responsible; may have to apologize or compensate. But you don’t want apologies or compensations; you want the letter. I should say it would be far safer from a watchful enemy, if it were unmarked and sent along with a thousand others looking exactly the same.”

It is a tribute to the essential shrewdness, underlying the apparent woodenness of Wotton and Dyer, that the paradox of Pond prevailed. The documents, however, were too bulky to be treated as ordinary letters; and after some discussion, they were placed in one of a large number of white wooden boxes, light and not very large, which were in general use for sending chocolate and other provisions to the army or navy or some branches of the public service. The only part of his original program on which the hard-headed Dyer continued to insist was that of putting guards and searchers at essential points of the route of travel.

“I suppose there’ll be some damned fuss about it afterwards,” he said, “and people will pester us about interfering with the liberty of the subject. We’re handicapped in this confounded constitutional country. Now if we were in—”

He shut his mouth rather sharply, as a discreet knock sounded on the door, and Sir Hubert’s clerk glided in to say he had discharged his commission. Sir Hubert did not see him at first, his frowning gaze being fixed on the railway-map of the route to be pursued; and Dyer happened at the moment to be examining very closely the white deal box, which had already been selected and sent in as a sample. But Mr. Pond noticed the clerk; and could not help thinking that he was rather worth noticing. He was a young man named Franks, with fair hair correctly flattened, and neat enough in figure and costume; but his wide face had that indescribable look which is sometimes seen, of which we can only say that it suggests the large head on the little figure of a dwarf, or perhaps that sunken between the shoulders of a hunchback; the face is not normal, even upon a normal figure. But the other causes which arrested Mr. Pond's eye for a moment were, first, the fact that the clerk was noticeably ill at ease when he silently handed papers to his superior; and, last but not least, that he had started visibly when he saw the detective from Scotland Yard.

The second Council, if it may be called so, was held in what all agreed was the strategical centre of the whole manœuvre: a certain railway-junction in the Midlands. It so happened that the consignment of boxes, along with mailbags and similar things, had to be shifted here from one train to another, which came up afterwards to the same platform. It was at this point that there was most possibility of any interference from outside; and it is to be feared that Dyer stretched several points in his reluctant compromise with the British Constitution, in the matter of police orders which stopped, detained or examined persons attempting to enter or leave the station.

"I have told our people they mustn't even let *us* out of the station," he said, "without close examination, for fear somebody should have a fancy for dressing up as Mr. Pond."

"It has quite a festive sound, so near Christmas," said Mr. Pond dolefully. "So I take it that for the present we must stay on the station; and one can hardly say it looks particularly festive."

Nothing, indeed, can well look more desolate than one of the numerous side platforms of an empty railway-station on a dreary winter day; unless it is the empty Third Class Waiting-Room which is provided to be a human refuge from the winter blast. Somehow the waiting-room looks even less human than the platform from which it is a refuge; hung with a few printed notices that nobody could possibly read, tables of trains or dusty plans of railways, equipped in one corner with broken pens with which nobody could write, and dried inkstands containing no ink to write with; with one dab of dull colours, the faded advertisement of an insurance company. It certainly seemed to the casual mind a godforsaken place to be spending any part of Christmas; but Mr. Pond had a stoical cheerfulness under such circumstances which rather surprised those who only knew his catlike love of comfortable domestic routine.

He entered this empty and unsightly apartment with a brisk step, stopping for a moment to stare reflectively at the dried ink and broken pens on the corner table.

"Well," he said, turning away, "they couldn't do very much with those, anyhow; but, of course, they might have pencils or fountain-pens. I'm rather glad I did it, on the whole."

"Pond," said Wotton gravely, "this is in your department anyhow; and I'm sure that Dyer will agree that we've done well to follow your advice so far. But I hope you don't mind my having a mild curiosity about what it is that you've done."

"Not at all," replied Pond. "Perhaps I ought to have told you about it before. Very likely I ought to have done it before. But just after you'd been good enough to let me have my own way, about sending it along with all the other stuff in plain identical boxes, I sat down and had a hard think about what would be the next best precaution following on that. I'm pretty certain that if it had been taken in a special car by armed men, that car would have been wrecked and those armed men perhaps robbed by force of arms; anyhow, there was too much of a risk of it. There's a much more elaborate gangster organization working against us already than most people have any notion of; and to multiply purchases and preparations is to multiply clues and transactions for their spies to trail. But I don't think the gangs could possibly get in here, especially now that the police are holding the gates of all these stations like fortresses. An isolated man or so could do very little against them. But what could an isolated man do?"

"Well," said Wotton rather impatiently. "What could he do?"

"As I say," continued Mr. Pond calmly, "I sat down and had a good think about what a spy or stray intruder might do, in a quiet way without any noise of battle, murder or sudden death, if he did manage somehow to spot the right box. So I got on to the private telephone to headquarters; and told them to see that the postal and transport authorities held up every one of the boxes or packages on which the address seemed to have been altered; anything crossed out or anything substituted. A man might conceivably snatch a moment to re-direct a box to some of his friends in London; though he could never take the box out of the station without being searched. That's what I did; and it was these broken-down penholders that reminded me of it. It's a pretty broken-down place to spend Christmas in, as you say; they have given us a sort of a fire, which is more than some waiting-rooms do; but it looks as if it were dying of depression; and I don't wonder."

He stirred up the neglected fire, making quite a creditable blaze, with his usual instinct for the comforts of life; then he added: "I hope you don't disagree with that second precaution of mine."

"No; I think that also is a very sensible precaution; though I hope there is no chance of anybody hitting on the right box, even by accident." Hubert Wotton frowned a moment at the renewed flame and the dancing sparks, and then said gloomily, "This is about the time when people at Christmas are going to the pantomime. Or, at any rate, to the pictures."

Mr. Pond nodded; he seemed to be suddenly smitten with a fit of abstraction. At last he said:

"I sometimes wonder whether things weren't better when pictures meant the pictures in the fire, instead of the pictures on the film."

Sir Hubert Wotton gruffly suggested, in a general way, that the dingy fire in a Third Class Waiting-Room was not one in which he would prefer to look for pictures.

"The fire pictures, like the cloud pictures," went on Mr. Pond, "are just incomplete enough to call out the imagination to complete them. Besides," he added, cheerfully poking the fire, "you can stick a poker into the coals and break them up into a different picture; whereas, if you push a great pole through the screen because you don't like the face of a film-star, there is all sorts of trouble."

Dyer, who had stamped out on to the platform during this imaginative interlude, returned at this moment with highly practical news. By exploring many tunnels, and scouring many platforms on that labyrinthine junction, he had found that there really was a remote refreshment-room, in which it was possible to have some sort of lunch; which had been a silent problem for all three of the officials involved.

"I'll stay on this platform," he said; "in fact I shall stay on this platform all night if necessary. This is my particular job. But you go and get your lunch first and come back; and I'll see if I can get some afterwards. Never mind about the trains; I've arranged for all that; and, anyhow, I shall be there when the only possible moment of danger comes."

In fact, his last words were almost drowned in the throb and racket of the approach of the first train. They all saw the mailbags and boxes and packages duly put out on the platform; and then Wotton, a man of regular habits, who was beginning to feel rather peckish, was easily persuaded by Dyer to accept his arrangement and go in search of a bite of food. Wotton and Pond dispatched their rather meagre lunch with reasonable rapidity; but even so had occasion to quicken their footsteps as they came within sight of their own original platform; since a train, which was apparently the second train, was beginning to shift and puff out of the station; and when they rejoined their companion, the platform was already bare.

"All safe," said Dyer, with satisfaction. "I saw all the boxes and things into the van myself; and nobody's been here to interfere with them. Our main trouble is really over; and I shouldn't mind having a little lunch myself."

He grinned at them, rubbing his hands in a congratulatory manner; and as he turned towards the subterranean passages, they turned once more with the intention of returning to the hollow and smoky cell of the waiting-room.

"It does seem as if there were nothing more for us to do here," said Wotton. "It rather increases the freezing futility of this shack."

"I consider it quite a Christmas triumph," said Mr. Pond, with undiminished cheerfulness, "that we have managed to keep the fire in, anyhow. . . . Why, I believe it's begun to snow."

For some time they had noted that the afternoon, already darkening towards the early winter evening, had something of that lurid greenish light which often glows under the load of snow-clouds; a sprinkling began to fall as they went along the apparently interminable platform; and by the time they reached the austere waiting-room, its roof and doorway were powdered with silver. The fire was burning briskly inside; Dyer had evidently been keeping himself warm.

"It's devilish queer," said Wotton, "but the whole thing is really beginning to look like a Christmas card. Our dismal *salle d'attente* will soon be a parody of Father Christmas's cottage in a pantomime."

“The whole thing is like the parody of a pantomime,” said Pond in a lower and more disquieted tone, “and as you say, it is very queer.”

After a pause, Wotton added abruptly:

“What is worrying you, Pond?”

“I’m wondering, if not worrying,” answered Pond, “about exactly what a man *would* do to intercept or misdirect that box, in a place like this, with no pens or anything. . . . Of course, there’s not much in that; he might have a fountain-pen or a pencil.”

“Oh, you’ve settled all that; you seem to be mad on pencils,” said Wotton impatiently. “It comes of always blue-pencilling those everlasting proofs of yours.”

“It wouldn’t be a blue pencil,” said Pond, shaking his head. “I was thinking of something more like a red pencil; which would mark very black indeed. But what bothers me is that there are always more ways of doing anything than you’d fancy, even in a place like this.”

“But you’ve blocked all that already,” insisted the other; “by telephoning as you did.”

“Well,” said Pond obstinately, “and what would they do then; if they knew I’d telephoned?”

Wotton looked puzzled; and Pond sat down in silence, stirring the fire and staring at it.

After a silence he said abruptly: “I wish Dyer were back.”

“What do you want him now for?” asked his friend. “I should say he’d earned a little late lunch. As far as I can see, he’s finished the business; and it’s all over here.”

“I fear,” said Pond, without taking his head out of the fireplace, “that it’s only just going to begin.”

There was another silence of growing mystification, like the gathering darkness outside. And then Pond observed suddenly:

“I suppose we’ve come back to the right platform.”

Wotton’s face only expressed the stolid stupefaction natural under the circumstances; but in his depths, which were deeper than some supposed, an unearthly chill touched him for the first time. Nightmare stirred in its sleep; not the mere practical perplexity of a problem, but all those doubts beyond reason which revolve round place and time. Before he could speak, Pond added:

“This is a different shaped poker.”

“What the devil do you mean?” exploded Wotton at last. “They have locked up the station; and there is nobody on it but ourselves; except that girl in the bar. You don’t imagine she has put a new set of furniture and fire-irons in all the waiting-rooms?”

“No,” said Mr. Pond. “I didn’t say a new poker. I said a new shape of poker.”

Almost as he spoke, he leapt away from the fireplace, leaving the poker in the fire, and ran to the doorway, craning out his head and listening. His companion listened also; and recognized as an objective reality, which was no nightmare, a noise of scrambling footsteps somewhere on the platform. But, when they ran out, the platform appeared to be perfectly empty, now a blank and solid table of snow; and they began to realize that the noise came from underneath their feet. Looking over the railing, they saw that the whole raised woodwork of the station was intercepted at one point by a belt of grassy embankment, very grey and discoloured with the smoke; they were just in time to see a dark lean figure scramble up this bank and dive under the platform, in such a manner that he was able the next moment to crawl out on the line. Then he calmly mounted the platform, and stood there like a passenger waiting for a train.

Apart from the fact that the stranger had practically burgled the station, against such very special difficulties, Wotton’s mind, already full of suspicions, decided at a glance that he was very much of a dark horse. Curiously enough, he looked a little like a horse, having a long equine visage and a strange sort of stoop; he was swarthy and haggard and his hollow eyes were such dense patches of shadow that it was a sort of shock to realize that the eyes within were glaring. He was dressed with the last extreme of shabbiness, in a long threadbare and almost ragged waterproof; and they thought they had never seen before a face and figure so symbolic of desolation and dreary tragedy. It seemed to Wotton that he himself had his first real glimpse of those depths in which despair manufactures the many revolutionary movements which it had been his duty to combat; but, of necessity, his duty prevailed.

He stepped up to the man, asking him who and what he was, and why he had thus evaded the police blockade. The man appeared to ignore the other questions for the moment; but in answer to the question about what he was, his tragic lantern-jaw moved and emitted a very unexpected reply.

“I am a Clown,” he said in a depressed voice.

At this answer Mr. Pond seemed to start with altogether a new sort of surprise. He had ruminated on the puzzles hitherto, like one pursuing the study of things which some might find surprising, but at which he himself was no longer very much surprised. But he gaped helplessly at this as a man does at a miracle; or still more, in a case like this, at a coincidence. Then another and yet more undignified change came over him. It can only be said that, having begun by goggling, he ended by giggling.

“Oh, Lord, this is an extra!” he exclaimed, and seemed once more broken up by almost senile laughter. “This has nothing to do with the story; but it is a marvellous addition to the pantomime. I always noticed that the chief features in the pantomime had nothing to do with the story.”

But Sir Hubert Wotton was having no more for the moment of Mr. Pond’s fanciful mysteries; least of all, of the last and most mysterious, the mystery of his mirth. He had already begun to cross-examine the stranger in the style of the police; and the stranger stood up to him with gloomy but unshaken lucidity. His name, by his own account, was Hankin, and he was a public entertainer who also gave private entertainments; who was, indeed, only too glad to give any entertainments, in the depressed condition of his state of livelihood. He had an engagement to perform as clown at a children’s party that evening, and had insisted on the necessity of catching a particular train; nor had he been cheered by the assurance of the police at the entrance that regular trains for passengers would be running again in an hour, at a time that would make him too late for his appointment; and lose him the first few shillings he had earned in many months. He had done what many such people would probably have been glad to do, if they had had the activity and audacity, and had climbed into the station by an unguarded loophole. This statement was made with firmness and simplicity, and Pond evidently believed it; but Wotton was still smouldering with some suspicions.

“I must ask you to come with us to the waiting-room,” he said. “Have you anything about you to confirm your story?”

“I haven’t got my visiting-card,” said the sombre Mr. Hankin. “I lost it along with my Rolls-Royce and my little castle in Scotland. But you can see me in my resplendent and fashionable evening-dress, if you like. I think that ought to convince you.”

The man was carrying a shabby and misshapen bag, which he lugged along to the waiting-room; and there, before the staring eyes of Wotton, he stripped off his waterproof and appeared in a sort of white circus dress, but for retaining his shabby boots and trousers. Then he dived into the bag and brought out a monstrous grinning and glaring white mask, picked out with red ornaments, and fitted it on his head. And there, solid and seemingly incredible before their eyes, was the genuine clown of the old-fashioned pantomime, such as they had been discussing.

“He came up through a trapdoor, I suppose we must say,” murmured the awestruck Mr. Pond. “But I feel as if he had fallen out of the sky like the snow. Fate or the fairies have added this final touch; see how they built up gradually round us the whole palace of pantomime in this wilderness; first the firelight and then the snow and now the only original ‘Here We Are Again!’ Such a cosy happy Christmas! Screams of joy from all the tiny tots. . . . Oh, my God, how ghastly it all is!”

His friend looked at him and received a second shock in realizing that the bearded face, though it still wore the elfish look of its first amusement at the accident, was in fact terribly pale.

“And the ghastliest part of it,” said Mr. Pond, “is that I am going to complete your costume, Sir.”

He suddenly plucked out the poker, from where it was standing in the fire, and it emerged already red-hot. He handed it politely to the Clown.

“I may look like a pantaloon,” he said, “but this will obviously be more suitable to the Clown. This is the red-hot poker, with which you make the Policeman jump.”

Wotton stared at a scene to which he had now entirely lost the clue; and in the silence that followed, the long platform outside resounded with a firm and heavy stride coming nearer and nearer. The large figure of Dyer the detective appeared framed in the doorway; and he stood as if turned to stone by what he saw.

Wotton was not astonished at his astonishment. He presumed that it was an astonishment like his own, at the irrelevant intrusion of the pantomime figure. But Pond was watching more closely; and for Pond that moment was the confirmation of the creeping suspicion that had worked its way into his mind for the last hour or so. Nobody could have been surprised at Dyer staring at the Clown. But Dyer was not staring at the Clown. Nor was Dyer merely astonished; perhaps the most astonishing thing was that he was not exactly astonished. He was staring only at the poker; and he obviously saw nothing funny about it. His face was distorted by almost demoniac fear and fury; and he looked at the red pantomime poker rather as if it had been the flaming sword of an accusing angel.

“Yes, it’s the red-hot poker,” said Pond, in a low and almost forced voice, “and it does make the policeman jump.”

The policeman jumped; he jumped back three paces, and as he leapt he loosened a big official revolver and fired at Mr. Pond again and again; the shocks of explosion shaking the thin shanty in which they stood. The first shot buried itself in the wall about an inch from Mr. Pond’s dome-like forehead; the other four went rather wild; for Wotton and the stranger had woken up to the situation and were struggling with the would-be assassin, and forcing his hand away. Finally, he managed to wrench his hand loose again and twist the pistol inwards upon himself; the body of the big man stiffened in their arms; and Dyer of the detective service lay dead on the floor before the dancing fire.

The explanation of events was given by Mr. Pond some time later; for his first action after the catastrophe left no time for explanations. He had repeatedly, at intervals, looked at the clock in the waiting-room, and seemed satisfied; but he was leaving nothing to chance. He darted out of the door, raced down the platform, and found his way to the telephone-box he had used earlier in the day. He came out wiping his brow, in spite of the cold; but wearing a smile of relative relief in the midst of the tragedy. When asked what he was doing, he answered simply: “I was telephoning a description of the package. It’ll be all right now; they will hold it up.”

“Do you mean *the* package?” asked Wotton. “I thought that was just like all the rest.”

“I’ll tell you all about it presently,” replied Pond. “Let us go and take a polite farewell of the public entertainer, who has given us such a delightful entertainment. I really think we ought to give him a fiver or so in compensation.”

Wotton was very much the gentleman, in the more generous sense, and he heartily agreed to this; and, though it was difficult for the melancholy man with the horse-face to produce anything nearer to a laugh than a neigh, he was manifestly much cheered internally and his gaunt face was cracked with a crooked smile. Then, by way of finishing their Christmas feast on this curious scene of festivity, the two friends adjourned to the one and only refreshment-room and sat down behind two tall glasses of beer; having no taste for warming their hands at that rather too blood-red fire that still burned in the sinister waiting-room.

“It was curious you were able to corner Dyer like that,” said Wotton. “I never had a thought of him.”

“I never had a thought of him either,” said Pond, “and he cornered himself, just as he killed himself. I fancy many conspirators are really chasing themselves into corners like that. Don’t you see that he locked himself into a logical prison, when he would empty and close the whole station, to impress us with his efficiency. By the way, I ought to have guessed there was a double meaning in his dictatorial ways and demands to override the Constitution; he was talking exactly as our enemies and their foreign friends talk. But the point is this. I wasn’t thinking about him particularly; I never thought of him at all until I found him wandering about inside the logical square or enclosure, like a rectangle in geometry. I was thinking all the time about one thing: what would these people probably do to divert or intercept the box, now that they could hardly do it by direct attack or anything that made a noise? I was more and more convinced they would try to redirect it somehow, so that its going normally through the post would serve them and not us. So I warned the authorities to stop all altered addresses on suspicion; and I said to myself: What will the enemy do now? What can he do, shut up in this enormous shed, bare of all conveniences and appliances? But don’t you see that with that very thought came the overpowering suspicion of who the enemy was?

“Nobody was there but you and Dyer when I said I had ‘phoned to stop all altered addresses. I know in a mystery story I should have to allow for the station being thronged with silent eavesdroppers, a spy up the chimney and another crawling out of the luggage; but in practical life it doesn’t happen. We heard the one and only intruder, when he began to scramble up from the street. The man who did hear it was Dyer; and notice that he almost immediately wandered away up the platform, professing to find our luncheon place for us; but really striding up and down and brooding upon what the devil he should do next, for I am sure his original plan had been to alter the address as I suggested. Was there anything else in that bare beastly place he could use for the same purpose, or another similar purpose? There was. But I never guessed what it was, until I came back to the waiting-room and happened to look at the poker. I saw it was twisted at a slightly different angle; that could only mean it had been red-hot and hammered half crooked like a horseshoe on the anvil. And then, of course, I realized that a red-hot poker would serve as well as a pen or pencil, or rather better, for altering an inscription on a wooden box. A pen could only cross it out; but a poker could burn it out. Managed neatly, it might well remove all trace of there ever having been any label or previous inscription at all. But it would do a great deal more than that. The clown is not the only artist who wields a poker; there is the whole elegant craft called poker-work. It would be quite easy to change the whole appearance of a white deal box, so that it would no longer be classed with the other boxes; running a black border round it, covering it with a pattern, perhaps blackening it almost entirely. Then in one blank space left he would brand the address he wanted it to reach, very plain in black block letters, avoiding incidentally all the dangers of being traced by handwriting. The thing would have gone through the post to that address as a separate thing in an ordinary way; and our scheme for posting it in an ordinary way would have recoiled on our heads. As it was, I was just in time to describe the poker-work box and stop it. I made a silly joke about a red pencil marking black; but even then I had barely begun to suspect Dyer; I'm ashamed to say the only person I began by suspecting was your unfortunate clerk Franks, who is rather exceptionally innocent."

"Franks!" exclaimed Wotton. "Why on earth did you suspect him?"

"Because I was an ass," said Pond, "and much more like a Pantaloon than you may imagine. He's a queer-looking fellow; but I ought to have known that suffering sort of look is more often conscientiousness than unconscientiousness. But where I was a priceless ass was when I looked at the suspect instead of looking at the detective. At that moment, Dyer was holding the box up, looking at it very closely; and Franks, from the other side, could see that he made a minute mark on it, very unobtrusively; so that he would know it again. Franks knew about the box scheme; and seeing that very swift and furtive act, he started and stared; and I don't wonder. In fact, Franks was the real detective and was far ahead of me, for I hadn't suspected Dyer at all. Not till, so to speak, I actually found him like a burglar on the premises. I might say on the logical premises." He coughed slightly. "Pray excuse the pun."

“Well,” said Captain Gahagan, when Wotton had told him the story long afterwards. “My favourite character in your drama is the Clown. He is so irrelevant. I am like that myself. I am so irrelevant.”

“You are,” said Sir Hubert Wotton, and resumed the study of his documents.

“He is like the Clown in Shakespeare,” went on Gahagan with unchanged buoyancy. “The Clown in Shakespeare seems to be there by accident unconnected with the story and yet he is the chorus of the tragedy. The Fool is like a fantastic dancing flame lighting up the features and furniture of the dark house of death. Perhaps we may connect Pond and Polonius after all.” And he continued to illustrate his theory of the buffoons in Shakespeare, a dramatic poet to whom he was fervently devoted, quoting large portions of the plays in question in the old oratorical Irish fashion, to the no small aid and acceleration of the business of the department, busy at the moment with oppressing and delicate problems about American claims concerning the commerce of Vancouver.

THE UNMENTIONABLE MAN

Mr. Pond was eating oysters — a serious and improving sight. His friend Wotton did not care for oysters; saying he could not see the sense of swallowing something you could hardly taste. He often said he could not see the sense of things; and was deaf to the wistful questions of his friend Gahagan, about whether he might perhaps see the nonsense. There was no nonsense about Sir Hubert Wotton; and there was a great deal of nonsense about Captain Gahagan. Gahagan enjoyed oysters, yet one could not say he cared for them, being a careless card; and the towers of oyster-shells before him showed that he had enjoyed them rapidly and recklessly, as a mere *hors d'œuvre*. But Mr. Pond was really caring for oysters: counting them like sheep and consuming them with the utmost care.

"It is comparatively little known," observed Gahagan, "that Pond actually is an oyster. He builds up out of oysters the permanent type or image. Hasty naturalists (I need only name the impetuous Pilk) have repeated the report that he resembles a fish. But what a fish! It was left to the researches of Nibbles, in his epoch-making work, *Pondus Ostroanthropus, or The Human Oyster Revealed*, to give our friend his high and rightful rank in the biological order. I need not trouble you with the arguments. Pond wears a beard. He and the oyster alone confront the world of modern fashions with such a decoration. When he shuts up his head he is as close as an oyster. When he persuades us to swallow something, it is only afterwards (as we have often agreed) that we realize what a monster of the deep we have swallowed. But, above all, within that oyster are the paradoxes; which are pearls of great price." And he waved a glass towards Pond, as if concluding a speech and proposing a toast.

Mr. Pond bowed gravely and swallowed another oyster. "As a matter of fact, I was reminded of something relevant to the discussion by the sight of the oysters; or, more strictly, of the oyster-shells. This question of deporting dangerous characters, even when they are only suspects, has some curious and baffling problems. I remember one rather queer case, in which a government had to consider the deporting of a desirable alien—"

"I suppose you mean an undesirable alien," said Wotton.

Mr. Pond digested another oyster with an unobtrusive gulp and continued: ". . . the deporting of a desirable alien; and it found that the difficulties were really quite insurmountable. I assure you I am describing the peculiar position in perfectly appropriate terms. If any point might be questioned, it is not so much the word 'desirable' as the word 'alien.' In one sense, he might have been described as a very desirable native."

"Oysters," said Gahagan mournfully. "The Mind is still brooding upon oysters. They are certainly very desirable natives."

"If he was not desirable, he was at least desired," continued the unruffled Pond. "No, my dear Gahagan, when I say 'desired,' I do not mean 'wanted by the police.' I mean that nearly everybody wanted him to stay, and that was why it seemed obvious that he must go. He was something which, without profanity, I trust, I might call the desire of all nations; or what poets have described as the world's desire. And yet he was not deported. Although he was desired, he was not deported. That is the only real paradox."

"Oh," said the staring Wotton. "So that's the real paradox."

"You should remember something of the case, Wotton," went on Mr. Pond. "It was about that time when we went over to Paris together about a rather delicate—"

"Pond in Paris," murmured Gahagan. "Pond in his Pagan Youth, when (as Swinburne says so beautifully) 'Love was the pearl of his oyster and Venus rose red out of wine.'"

"Paris is on the way to many capitals," replied Pond with diplomatic reserve. "In any case, there is no need to define the precise scene of this little international problem. Suffice it to say that it was one of those many modern States in which a Republic, resting on representative and democratic claims, has now long replaced a Monarchy which disappeared somehow amid all the modern wars and revolutions. Like many such, it did not find all its troubles were over with the establishment of political equality; in face of a world deeply disturbed about economic equality. When I went there, a strike in the transport services had brought the life of the capital to a deadlock; the Government was accused of being under the influence of a millionaire named Kramp, who controlled the lines involved; and the crisis was the more alarming because it was insisted (on the Government side) that the strike was secretly engineered by the famous terrorist, Tarnowski, sometimes called the Tiger of Tartary, who having been exiled from his own part of Eastern Europe, was believed to be spreading conspiracies from some unknown hiding-place in the West.” Mr. Pond then proceeded to narrate his little experience, which, when purged of Gahagan’s interruptions and Pond’s somewhat needless exactitudes, was substantially this.

Pond was rather lonely in this strange capital; for Wotton had gone elsewhere on the other delicate mission; and, having no friends, Pond picked up only a few acquaintances. But he picked up at least three acquaintances who turned out to be rather interesting in various ways. The first case was commonplace enough, it might seem; consisting merely of talking to a bookseller who was otherwise a fairly ordinary shopkeeper, but well acquainted with early eighteenth-century scientific books; and the period was a hobby with Pond. Otherwise Mr. Huss was highly *bourgeois,* with a heavy frockcoat and long, antiquated whiskers which met under his chin in a patriarchal beard. When he went outside his shop, which was not often, he wore a funereal chimney-pot hat. Scientific studies seemed to have left in him the sort of stagnant atheism that is at once respectable and depressing; but beyond that there was nothing to distinguish him from countless Continental shopkeepers. The next man with whom Pond fell into any sort of conversation, in a café, was much more vigorous and vigilant, and belonged to a younger world. But he also was very serious; a dark, strenuous young man who was a Government official actually believing in the Government; or at least in the principles of the Government; and he was the sort of man who thinks first about principles. He denounced the strike and even the trade union; not because he was a snob, for he lived as simply as a workman; but because he really did believe in the old individualistic theory of what he called free contract. The type is almost unknown in England; the theory is more common in America. But nobody who looked at the baldish, rather corrugated brow that bulged between the streaks of black hair, and the anxious, though angry, eyes, could doubt that he was in fanatical good faith. His name was Marcus, and he held a minor Government office, in which he could survey with satisfaction the principles of the Republic, without being admitted to its counsels. It was while talking outside a café with this second acquaintance, that Mr. Pond became conscious of the third, who was by far the most extraordinary of the three.

This man was a sort of magnet for the human eye; Pond soon realized that this was true of everybody's eyes and not merely his own. One way or another, a current of communications seemed to be always circling round the little table where the man sat smoking a cigarette and sipping black coffee and benedictine. At the moment when Pond first saw him, a group of young men was breaking up after some tangle of talk and laughter; they seemed to have stopped by the table merely for the sake of the talk. The next moment a string of gutter-children invaded his solitude and received the pieces of sugar not used for his coffee; then a hulking and rather sulky-looking labourer came up and talked to him, for a much longer time than any of the others. Strangest of all, a lady, of the stiff aristocratic sort seldom seen outside the house in such countries, actually got out of a carriage and stood staring at the strange gentleman; and then got into the carriage again. These things alone might have led Pond to look at the person in question; but in fact, for some reason or other, he had looked at him with great curiosity from the first.

The man wore a wide white hat and a rather shabby dark blue suit; he had a high-bridged nose and a pale yellow beard brushed to a point. He had long, bony, but elegant, hands, on one of which was a ring with a stone coloured like a kingfisher, the only spot of luxury on what was otherwise a rather threadbare appearance; and in the grey shadow of the white hat his eyes shone as blue as the stone. There was nothing in his position that claimed prominence; he did not sit in the front but up against the wall of the café, just under a creeper and a fire-escape. Despite the little crowds that clustered round him, he had in the intervals an odd air of preferring to be alone. Pond made many inquiries, then and afterwards, about his name; but learnt nothing except that he was commonly called M. Louis; but whether that was his real surname, or perhaps the adaptation of some foreign surname, or whether his queer and eccentric popularity led everybody to use his Christian name, did not very clearly emerge.

"Marcus," said Mr. Pond to his young companion, "who *is* this man?"

"Everybody knows him and nobody knows who he is," replied Marcus in a rather grating voice. "But I'm jolly well going to find out."

As he spoke, the hawkers of the revolutionary paper, published by the strikers and conspicuous by being printed on vivid scarlet paper, were distributing it among a considerable number of purchasers in the crowd outside the café; a black block thus rapidly diversified with blots of blood-red colour. Some, indeed, looked at the paper only to jeer at it; some with a colder curiosity; perhaps only a few with the respect of real sympathizers. Among those reading it with detachment, but not apparently with definite disapproval, was the gentleman with the beard and the blue ring: M. Louis.

"Well," said Marcus, with a darkening brow. "Let them. It's their last chance, I suppose."

"Why, what do you mean?" inquired Pond.

The brow of Marcus became still more corrugated and troubled; at length he said in a gruff and rather reluctant manner: "I'm bound to say I don't approve of it myself. I can't see how the Republic can reconcile it with its liberal principles to suppress newspapers. But they're going to suppress that newspaper. They've been a good deal goaded. I don't believe the Prime Minister himself really likes the suppression; but the Minister of the Interior is a fiery little devil and generally gets his own way. Anyhow, they're going to raid the offices with police to-morrow; and that's probably the last issue."

M. Marcus proved himself a true prophet, so far as concerned the general situation next morning.

There had apparently been another issue; but if it had ever been displayed it had not been successfully distributed; the police had seized all copies of it everywhere; and the black-clad *bourgeoisie* sitting outside the café were now blameless and unspotted with any hues of blood; save in one corner under the fire-escape and the creeper, where M. Louis was reading his copy of the sanguinary sheet in complete indifference to the change. Some of those around him eyed him slightly askance; and Pond specially noticed Mr. Huss, the bookseller, complete with black top-hat and white whiskers, seated at a table close by and eyeing the reader of the red paper with bristling suspicion.

Marcus and Pond took their seats at their own original table; and even as they did so, a contingent of police came by, marching very rapidly, cleaning up the streets. There marched with them, with yet more furious rapidity, a squat, square man with arrogant moustaches, wearing an official decoration and flourishing an umbrella like a sabre. This was the eminent and highly militant Dr. Koch, the Minister of the Interior; he had been presiding over the police raid, and his rolling eye instantly spotted the one red spot in the corner of the crowded café. He planted himself before M. Louis; and shouted as if on parade:

"You are forbidden to read that paper. It contains direct incitement to crime."

"And how," asked M. Louis courteously, "and how can I discover this deplorable fact except by reading it?"

Something in that polite tone seemed, for some odd reason, to cause the Minister of the Interior to fly, as the phrase goes, right off the handle. Pointing his umbrella at the man in the café, he vociferated with a violent distinctness:

"You could be arrested, you could be deported; and you know why. Not for all that bloody nonsense. You don't need that scrap of a scarlet rag to mark you out among decent citizens."

"Because my own sins are as scarlet," said the other, gently inclining his head, "the scandal of my presence here is indeed highly scandalous. And why don't you arrest me?"

"You wait and see whether we arrest you," said the Minister grinding his teeth. "Anyhow, you shan't arrest us or hold up the whole machinery of society by a trick like this. Do you think we will let that sort of dirty little red rusty nail in the road stop all the wheels of progress?"

"And do you think," answered the other sternly, "that all the wheels of your sort of progress have ever done anything yet but grind the faces of the poor? No; I have not the honour of being one of the citizens of your State; one of those happy, joyful, well-fed, wealthy citizens one sees standing about in the street, on whom you wage war by hunger. But I am not a subject of any foreign State; and you will have quite a peculiar difficulty in deporting me back to my own country."

The Minister took one furious step forward; and then stopped. Then he walked off twirling his moustaches, as if suddenly forgetting the very existence of the other; and followed in the track of the police.

"There seem to be a number of mysteries here," said Mr. Pond to his friend. "First, why should he be deported? Second, why shouldn't he be deported?"

"I don't know," said Marcus, and stood up stiff and frowning.

"All the same," said Mr. Pond, "I am beginning to have a sort of fancy about who he is."

"Yes," said Marcus grimly, "and I'm beginning to have a fancy about what he is. Not a nice fancy." And he strode abruptly away from the table and up the street alone.

Mr. Pond remained seated in a condition of profound thought. After some minutes he rose and made his way towards the table where his friend the bookseller, the excellent Huss, was still seated in somewhat darkling majesty.

Even as he crossed the crowded *trottoir,* a roar broke from the street behind him, which was filling with twilight; and he realized that the great grey crowd of the strikers was on the march past, following the same route as the police who had just cleared out their offices. But the cause of the cry was more particular and even personal. The sardonic eyes of the semi-starving mob had swept the whole dark and decorous crowd of respectable people outside the café, and marked the absence of their proscribed paper; then they had suddenly perceived the familiar red flare of its fluttering pages in the hands of M. Louis, who was continuing to read it with unaltered calm. All the strikers stood still, halting and saluting like an army; and a great shout, seeming to shake the lamp-posts and little trees, went up for the one man who remained faithful to the red rag. M. Louis rose and gravely bowed to the applauding mob. Mr. Pond sat down opposite his friend the bookseller and scrutinized his whiskered face with interest.

"Well," said Mr. Pond, "our friend over there looks as if he might soon be the leader of the revolutionary party."

This remark had a rather strange effect on Mr. Huss; he started as in disorder by saying: "No, no"; controlled his countenance, and then enunciated a number of short sentences with an extraordinary exactitude.

"Myself of the *bourgeoisie*, I have yet remained apart from politics. I have taken no part in any class-war proceeding under present conditions. I have no reason to identify myself either with the protest of the proletariat or with the present phase of capitalism."

"Oh," said Mr. Pond; and an understanding began to dawn in his eyes. After a moment he said: "I apologize most sincerely, old man. I didn't know you were a Communist."

"I have confessed to nothing of the sort," said Huss heatedly; then he added abruptly: "You will say somebody has betrayed me."

"Your speech betrays you, like the Galilean," said Pond. "Every sect talks its own language. You could tell a man was a Buddhist from his way of saying he was not a Buddhist. It’s no business of mine; and I won’t mention it to a soul, if you prefer not. I only ventured to say that the man over there seems to be very popular with the strikers, and might lead the movement.”

“No, no, no,” cried Huss, beating on the table with his two fists. “Never, never, shall he lead the movement! Understand me! We are a scientific movement. We are not moral. We have done with *bourgeois* ideologies of right and wrong. We are *Realpolilik.* What helps the program of Marx is alone good. What hinders the program of Marx is alone evil. But there are limits. There are names so infamous, there are persons so infamous, that they must always be excluded from the Party.”

“You mean somebody is so wicked that he has awakened a dormant moral sense even in a Bolshevist bookseller,” said Pond. “Why, what has he done?”

“It is not only what he does but what he is,” said Mr. Huss.

“Curious that you should say that,” said Pond. “For I have just made a sort of a guess about what he is.”

He took a newspaper-cutting from his waistcoat pocket and pushed it across to the other, remarking casually: “You will note that Tarnowski the Terrorist is now said to be fomenting strikes and revolutions not only in this country but definitely in this capital. Well, our friend in the white hat seems to me to be rather an old hand.”

Huss was still drumming faintly on the table and obscurely muttering: “Never, never, shall he be the leader.”

“But suppose he is the leader?” said Pond. “He obviously has a sort of habit of old leadership about him; a sort of gesture of authority. Isn’t he going on exactly as Tarnowski the Tiger probably would go on?”

Mr. Pond may have expected to surprise the bookseller; but it was Mr. Pond who got the surprise. The effect on the bookseller was such that surprise would be a comically inadequate description. Mr. Huss stiffened and sat as still as a stone idol; but the change in the face of the graven image was appalling. It suggested some nightmare story of a man at a solitary table finding he was dining with a devil.

“My God,” said the atheist at last, in a small, weak rather squeaky voice, “and so you think *he* is Tarnowski!” And with that, the bookseller in the top-hat suddenly went off into hoots of hollow laughter, like the dismal noises of an owl, shrill and monotonous and apparently to be repeated indefinitely without control.

“Well,” interrupted Pond, mildly exasperated, “how can you possibly know that he is not Tarnowski?”

“Only because I am Tarnowski,” said the bookseller, with sudden sobriety. “You say you are not a spy. But you can betray me if you choose.”

“I assure Your Excellency,” said Mr. Pond, “that I am not a spy or even, what is worse, a gossip. I am only a tourist who is not talkative and a traveller who tells no traveller’s tales. Besides, I owe a debt to Your Excellency, for having illuminated my mind with an important principle. I never saw it so clearly before. A man always says exactly what he means; but especially when he hides it.”

“That,” observed the other with guttural slowness, “is what I think you call a paradox.”

“Oh, don’t say that,” groaned Mr. Pond. “Everybody in England says that. And I have honestly no notion of what it means.”

“But in that case,” said Mr. Pond to himself, “who on earth *is* the man in the white hat? What crime has he committed? What crime is it for which he can be arrested or deported? Or again, what crime is it for which he *can’t* be arrested or deported?”

It was in a burst of splendid sunshine, on the following morning, that Pond sat at his little table in the café ruminating on the renewed difficulties of the problem. The sun gave a sort of golden gaiety to a scene that had lately looked rather sombre, and even black, bloodshot with the glimpses of the Bolshevist journal. In the social sense at least, there seemed to be a clearance in the storm, of the strikers if not the strike; the threat of riots had been outmanœuvred; and the police were picketed at intervals down the street; but seemed in the tranquil sunshine as harmless as the toy trees and the painted lamp-posts. Mr. Pond felt an irrational return of that vague exhilaration which an Englishman sometimes feels in the mere fact of being abroad; the smell of the French coffee affected him as some are affected by the smell of hayfields or the sea. M. Louis had resumed his amiable hobby of distributing sugar to the *gamins;* and the very shape of those oblong blocks of beetroot-sugar pleased Mr. Pond in the same manner. He had a hazy feeling that he was looking at the scene through the eyes of one of the children. Even the *gendarmes* posted along the pavement amused him in a merely nonsensical manner, as if they had been dolls or dummies in some delightful puppet-play; their cocked hats carrying a vague memory of the beadle in a Punch-and-Judy show. Through all this coloured comedy there advanced the rigid figure of M. Marcus, with a visage which announced vividly that that political Puritan did not believe in puppet-shows.

"Well," he said, glaring at Pond with a sort of controlled rage, "I fancy I can guess the truth about *him.*"

Pond made polite inquiries; and was answered by an unexpectedly ugly and jeering laugh.

"What sort of man is it," asked Marcus, "who is received everywhere with bows and smiles? Who is it to whom everybody is always so courteous and complimentary? What generous Friend of the People? What holy Father of the Poor? Deported! That sort of fellow ought to be hanged."

"I fear I do not understand anything yet," answered Pond mildly, "except that for some reason he cannot even be deported."

"Looks very patriarchal, doesn't he, sitting in the sunshine and playing with the children? It was darker last night and I caught him in a darker piece of business. . . . Listen to this, first of all. It was at the end of dusk, yesterday evening; and but for myself, he was alone in the café; I don't think he saw me; but I don't know if he would care. There drove up a dark, closely curtained carriage; and that lady we saw once before got out; a very grand lady, I am sure, though I fancy not so rich as she had been. She had an interview with this man, in which she actually went on her knees to him on the muddy pavement, begging him for something; and he only sat there and smiled. What sort of a man is it who sees ladies grovelling before him and only grins like a demon and doesn't even take off his hat? What sort of man is it who can play the Sultan in society and be sure that everybody will smile and be polite? Only the very basest sort of criminal."

"In plain words," said Mr. Pond, "you mean he ought to be arrested because he's a blackmailer. You also mean he can't be arrested because he's a blackmailer."

For the first time the rage of Marcus seemed mixed with a sort of embarrassment, almost amounting to shame, as he looked down scowling at the table.

"It has no doubt occurred to you," proceeded Pond placidly, "that the second inference involves some suggestions that are rather delicate;

especially if I may say so, for a man in your position.”

Marcus remained in a silence swollen with anger; then at last he broke out abruptly, as if beyond control: “I’ll swear the Prime Minister is perfectly honest.”

“I do not think,” said Mr. Pond, “that I have ever regaled you with any scandals about the Prime Minister.”

“And I can’t believe the little doctor is really in it,” went on Marcus savagely. “I’ve always thought it was just sincerity that made him spluttering and spiteful. It was just trying to be straight amid all this—”

“All this what?” asked Mr. Pond.

Marcus turned in his chair with an abrupt gesture of the elbow, saying: “Oh, you don’t understand.”

“On the contrary,” replied Pond. “I think I do understand.”

There was a lengthy silence and then Pond resumed:

“I understand the horrid truth that you yourself are a perfectly honourable and high-minded person and that your own problem is extremely difficult to solve. I assure you that I am quite incapable of taunting you with it. It was to the Republic, to the idea of equality and justice, that you swore loyalty; and to that you have been loyal.”

“You had better say what you think.” said Marcus gloomily. “You mean that I am really only serving a gang of crooks, whom any blackguard can blackmail.”

“No, I will not ask you to admit that now,” answered Pond. “Just now I wanted to ask you quite another question. Can’t you imagine a man sympathizing with the strikers, or even being a sincere Socialist?”

“Well,” replied Marcus, after a spasm of concentration, “I suppose one ought to imagine. I suppose he might hold that, the Republic resting on the Social Contract, it might supersede even free contracts.”

“Thank you,” said Mr. Pond with satisfaction, “that is exactly what I wanted. It is an important contribution to Pond’s Law of Paradox, if I may be pardoned for expressing myself so playfully. And now let us go and talk to M. Louis.”

He stood up before the astonished official, who had no apparent alternative but to follow him as he passed swiftly across the café. Some vivacious and talkative young men were taking leave of M. Louis, who courteously invited the newcomers to the empty chairs, saying something about “my young friends often enliven my solitude with their rather Socialistic views.”

“I should not agree with your young friends,” said Marcus curtly, “I am so old-fashioned as to believe in free contract.”

“I, being older, perhaps believe in it even more,” answered M. Louis smiling. “But surely it is a very old principle of law that a leonine contract is not a free contract. And it is hypocrisy to pretend that a bargain between a starving man and a man with all the food is anything but a leonine contract.” He glanced up at the fire-escape, a ladder leading up to the balcony of a very high attic above. “I live in that garret; or rather on that balcony. If I fell off the balcony and hung on a spike, so far from the steps that somebody with a ladder could offer to rescue me if I gave him a hundred million francs, I should be quite morally justified in using his ladder and then telling him to go to hell for his hundred million. Hell, indeed, is not out of the picture; for it is a sin of injustice to force an advantage against the desperate. Well, all those poor men are desperate; they all hang starving on spikes. If they must not bargain collectively, they cannot bargain at all. You are not supporting contract; you are opposing all contract; for yours cannot be a real contract at all.”

While the smoke of his cigarette mounted towards the balcony, Mr. Pond’s eye followed it and found the balcony fitted out with what looked like a bedstead, a screen, and an old looking-glass, all very shabby. The only other object was a dusty old cross-hilted sword, such as might have come from a curiosity shop. Mr. Pond eyed this last object with considerable curiosity.

“Please permit me to play the host,” said M. Louis affably. “Perhaps you would like a cocktail or something; I stick to a little benedictine.”

As he turned in his chair towards the waiter, a shot rang through the café and the little glass before him lay in a star of splinters. The bullet that spilt the drink had missed the drinker by half a yard. Marcus looked wildly round; the café was deserted, for it was already late; no figure was in sight but the solid back of the *gendarme* standing outside. But Marcus went white with horror; for M. Louis made one quaint little gesture which, if it meant anything, could only mean that the policeman himself had turned for an instant and fired.

“A little reminder, perhaps, that it is time to go to bed,” said M. Louis gaily. “I go up by the fire-escape and I sleep on the balcony. Doctors think so much of this open-air treatment. Well, my people have always gone to bed in public; so many tramps do, don't they? Good night, gentlemen."

He lightly scaled the iron ladder and began on the balcony, before their astonished eyes, to assume a capacious dressing-gown and prepare for slumber.

"Pond," said Marcus, "we are in a nightmare of nonsense."

"No," replied Pond, "for the first lime it begins to make sense. I have been stupid; but I am beginning at last to see what it all means." After ruminating a moment, he resumed rather apologetically:

"Forgive me if I refer again to my foolish jest about Pond's Law. I think I have discovered a rather useful principle. It is this. Men may argue *for* principles not entirely their own, for various reasons; as a joke in a rag debate, or covered by professional etiquette, like a barrister, or merely exaggerating something neglected and needing emphasis; long before we come to those who do it hypocritically or for hire. A man can argue *for* principles not his own. But a man cannot argue *from* principles not his own; the first principles he assumes, even for sophistry or advocacy, will probably be his own fundamental first principles. The very language he uses will betray him. That Bolshevist bookseller professed to be a *bourgeois;* but he talked like a Bolshevist about a *bourgeois.* He talked about exploitation and the class-war. So you tried to imagine yourself a Socialist; but you did not talk like a Socialist. You talked about the Social Contract, like old Rousseau. Now our friend M. Louis was defending his sympathy with strikers and even Socialists. But he used the oldest and most traditional argument of all, older than the Roman Law. The idea about leonine contract is as old as Leo and a long sight older than Leo XIII. Therefore, he represents something even older than your Rousseau and your Revolution. I knew after five words that he was not the blackmailing blackguard of romance; and yet he is romantic. And he could be legally arrested; but only for a rather curious crime. And yet again, he cannot be arrested. He can only be assassinated.

"The blackmail charge rests on one scene, in which a lady knelt to him in the street. You argued truly that ladies in your country think so much of formality and propriety, that they could never do this except in some extreme of agony and despair. It did not occur to you that, perhaps, it might be only an extreme of formality and propriety."

Marcus began slowly: “What the devil—” And then Mr. Pond rapped out quite smartly: “And then the sword. What is a sword *for?* It’s absurd to say for fighting; he wouldn’t wave a mediæval sword against people shooting him with guns. If it were for duels he would have a duelling-sword; and probably two in a case. What else can you do with a sword? Well, you can swallow it; and at one time I really had a fancy he might be a conjurer. But it’s too big a swallow; so is the notion. What *can* be done with a sword, but not with a spear or gun or battle-axe? Have you heard of the Accolade? Long ago a man could be knighted by any knight; but by all modern custom it can only be done—”

“Only—” began Marcus, beginning to stare.

“Only by a King,” said Pond. And the young Republican sprang up rigid at the challenge.

“Yes,” continued Pond, “the King has crept back among you. It is not your fault. Republics might be all right if Republicans were as honourable as you are; but you have confessed that they are not . . . and that’s what he meant about going to bed in public. You know the old kings really did. But he had another reason. He had one real fear; that they might deport him secretly. They could deport him technically, of course; all these Republics have laws against Royalist claimants remaining in the realm. But if they did it publicly, he would proclaim himself and—”

“Why don’t they do it publicly?” asked the Republican explosively.

“Politicians do not understand much; but politicians do understand politics,” said Pond pensively. “I mean they do understand the *immediate* effect on mobs and movements. Somehow he had slipped in and started a campaign of private popularity before they even knew who he was. When once he was popular, they were helpless. How could they say: ‘Yes, he is popular, he is on the side of the people and the poor; the young men accept his leadership; but he is the King and therefore he must go’? They know how horribly near the world is to answering: ‘Yes; he is the King and, by God, he shall stay.’”

Mr. Pond had told this story, at somewhat greater length but in far more classic diction; and by that time had actually finished the oysters. He gazed pensively at the shells and added: “You will of course recall the meaning of the word ostracism. It meant that in ancient Athens a man was sometimes exiled merely for being important; and the votes were recorded by oyster-shells. In this case he should have been exiled for being important; but he was so very important that nobody could be told of his importance.”

RING OF LOVERS

“As I said before,” observed Mr. Pond, towards the end of one of his lucid but rather lengthy speeches, “our friend Gahagan here is a very truthful man and tells wanton and unnecessary lies. But this very truthfulness—”

Captain Gahagan waved a gloved hand as in courteous acknowledgement of anything anybody liked to say; he had an especially flamboyant flower in his coat and looked unusually gay. But Sir Hubert Wotton, the third party at the little conference, sat up. For he followed the flow of words with tireless, intelligent attention, while Gahagan, though radiant, seemed rather abstracted; and these abrupt absurdities always brought Sir Hubert up standing.

“Say that again,” he said, not without sarcasm.

“Surely that is obvious enough,” pleaded Mr. Pond. “A real liar does not tell wanton and unnecessary lies. He tells wise and necessary lies. It was not necessary for Gahagan to tell us once that he had seen not one sea-serpent but six sea-serpents, each larger than the last; still less to inform us that each reptile in turn swallowed the last one whole; and that the last of all was opening its mouth to swallow the ship, when he saw it was only a yawn after too heavy a meal, and the monster suddenly went to sleep. I will not dwell on the mathematical symmetry with which snake within snake yawned, and snake within snake went to sleep, all except the smallest, which had had no dinner and walked out to look for some. It was not, I say, necessary for Gahagan to tell this story. It was hardly even wise. It is very unlikely that it would promote his worldly prospects, or gain him any rewards or decorations for scientific research. The official scientific world, I know not why, is prejudiced against any story even of one sea-serpent, and would be the less likely to accept the narrative in its present form.

“Or again, when Captain Gahagan told us he had been a Broad Church missionary, and had readily preached in the pulpits of Nonconformists, then in the mosques of Moslems, then in the monasteries of Tibet, but was most warmly welcomed by a mystical sect of Theists in those parts, people in a state of supreme spiritual exaltation who worshipped him like a god, until he found they were enthusiasts for Human Sacrifice and he was the victim. This statement was also quite unnecessary. To have been a latitudinarian clergyman is but little likely to advance him in his present profession, or to fit him for his present pursuits. I suspect the story was partially a parable or allegory. But anyhow, it was quite unnecessary and it was obviously untrue. And when a thing is obviously untrue, it is obviously not a lie."

"Suppose," said Gahagan abruptly, "suppose I were to tell you a story that really is true?"

"I should regard it with great suspicion," said Wotton grimly.

"You mean you would think I was still romancing. But why?"

"Because it would be so very like a romance," retorted Wotton.

"But don't you think," asked the Captain thoughtfully, "that real life sometimes is like a romance?"

"I think," replied Wotton, with a certain genuine shrewdness that lay very deep in him, "that I could always really tell the difference."

"You are right," said Pond; "and it seems to me the difference is this. Life is artistic in parts, but not as a whole; it's like broken bits of different works of art. When everything hangs together, and it all fits in, we doubt. I might even believe that Gahagan saw six sea-serpents; but not that each was larger than the last. If he'd said there was first a large one and then a little one and then a larger one, he might have taken us in. We often say that one social situation is like being in a novel; but it doesn't finish like the novel — at least, not the same novel."

"Pond," said Gahagan, "I sometimes think you are inspired, or possessed of a devil in a quiet way. It's queer you should say that; because my experience was just like that. With this difference; each familiar melodrama broke off; but only turned to blacker melodrama — or tragedy. Again and again, in this affair, I thought I was in a magazine story; and then it turned to quite another story. Sort of dissolving view, or a nightmare. Especially a nightmare."

"And why especially?" asked Wotton.

"It's a horrible story," said Gahagan, lowering his voice. "But it's not so horrible now."

"Of course," said Mr. Pond, nodding. "You are happy and wish to tell us a horrible story."

"And what does *that* mean?" demanded Wotton.

"It means," said Gahagan, "that I got engaged to be married this morning."

"The devil you — I beg your pardon," said Wotton, very red in the face. "Congratulations, of course, and all that. But what has it to do with the nightmare?"

"There is a connexion," said Gahagan dreamily. "But you want the horrible story and not the happy one. Well, it was a bit of a mystery, at least to me; but I understood it at last."

"And when you've done mystifying us, you will tell us the solution?"

"No; Pond will tell you the solution," said Gahagan maliciously. "He's already puffed up because he guessed the kind of story, before he even heard it. If he can't finish the story, when he has heard it—"

He broke off and then resumed more solidly:

"It began with a dinner-party, what they call a stag-party, given by Lord Crome, following on a cocktail-party mostly given by Lady Crome. Lady Crome was a tall and swift and graceful person with a small dark head. Lord Crome was quite the reverse; he was in every way, physical and mental, a 'long-headed' person. You've heard of a hatchet-face; his was a hatchet that cut off his own head — or rather his own body, abolishing the slighter and more insignificant figure. He is an economist and he gave one the impression of being *distrait* and rather bored with all the ladies who swam about in the wake of his wonderful wife, that darting swan; and perhaps that was why he wanted the cooler society of his own sex. Anyhow, he kept some of his male guests for a little dinner after the at-home was over. I happened to be one of them; but, in spite of that, it was a select company.

"It was a select company; and yet it hardly seemed to have been selected. They were mostly well-known men, and yet it looked as if Crome had taken their names out of a hat. The first person I ran into was Captain Blande, supposed to be one of the biggest officers in the British Army, and I should think the stupidest, for any strategic purposes. Of course he looks magnificent — like a chryselephantine statue of Hercules, and about as useful in time of war. I once used the word 'chryselephantine,' meaning gold and ivory; and he thought I was calling him elephantine. Classical education of the *pukka sahib*. Well, the man he was put next to was Count Kranz, the Hungarian scientist and social reformer. He speaks twenty-seven languages, including philosophical language. I wonder what language he talked to Captain Blande in. Just beyond the Count was another fellow more of Blande's sort; but darker and leaner and livelier; a fellow called Wooster of some Bengal regiment. His language also would be limited: the Latin verb *polo, polas, polat;* I play polo, thou playest polo, he plays polo, or (more devastatingly) he does not play polo. But just as polo itself was an Asiatic game, and can be traced through the gilded jungle of Persian and Indian illuminations, so there was something faintly Eurasian about this man Wooster; he was like a dark-striped tiger and one could fancy him gliding through a jungle. That pair at least looked a little more well-matched; for Kranz also was dark and good-looking, with arched, black, Assyrian eyebrows and a long, dark beard, spreading like a fan or the forked tail of a bird. I sat next, and got on with Wooster pretty well; on the other side of me was Sir Oscar Marvell, the great actor-manager, all very fine and large, with the Olympian curls and the Roman nose. Here also there was some lack of *rapport.* Sir Oscar Marvell didn't want to talk about anything but Sir Oscar Marvell; and the other men didn't want to talk about Sir Oscar Marvell at all. The three remaining men were the new Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Pitt-Palmer, a very frigid-looking young man like the bust of Augustus Cæsar — and indeed *he* was classical enough, and could have quoted the classics all right; one Italian singer, whose name I could not remember, and one Polish diplomat, whose name nobody could remember. And I was saying to myself all the time: 'What a funny collection!'"

"I know this story," said Wotton positively. "A humorous host collects a lot of incompatible people for the pleasure of hearing them quarrel. Done very well in one of Anthony Berkeley's detective stories."

"No," replied Gahagan. "I think their incompatibility was quite accidental, and I know that Crome didn't use it to make them quarrel. As a matter of fact, he was a most tactful host, and it would be truer to say he prevented them from quarrelling. He did it rather cleverly, too, by beginning to talk about heirlooms and family jewels and so on. Different as they were, most of them were well-off, and what is called of a good family; and it was about as close to common ground as they could get. The Pole, who was a baldish but graceful person, with very charming manners, and much the wittiest man at table, was giving an amusing account of the adventures of a medal of Sobieski when it fell into the hands first of a Jew, and then of a Prussian, and then of a Cossack. In contrast to the Pole, who was hairless and talkative, the Italian beyond him was silent, and rather sulky, under his bush of black hair.

"'That's an interesting-looking ring you are wearing yourself, Lord Crome,' said the Pole politely. 'Those heavy rings are generally historic. I think I should really like to wear an episcopal ring or, better still, a Papal ring. But then there are all those tiresome preliminaries about being made Pope; it involves celibacy; and I—' And he shrugged his shoulders.

"'Very annoying, no doubt,' said Lord Crome, smiling at him grimly. 'As for this ring here — well, it is rather interesting in a way, in that sort of family way, of course. I don't know the details, but it is obviously sixteenth century. Care to look at it?' And he slipped off his finger a heavy ring with a red stone and passed it to the Pole, who was silting next to him. It proved on examination to be set with a cluster of extremely fine rubies and carved with a central device of a heart inside a rose. I saw it myself, since it was handed round the table; and there was some lettering in old French which meant something like 'From the lover only and only to the beloved.'

"'A romance in your family history, I suppose?' suggested the Hungarian Count. 'And about the sixteenth century. But you do not know the story?"

"'No,' said Crome, 'but I suppose it was, as you say, a romance in the family.'

"They began talking about sixteenth-century romances, at some length; and at last Crome asked very courteously if everybody had seen the ring."

"Oh," cried Wotton, with a deep breath, rather like a schoolboy at a conjurer's performance. "I know *this* story, anyhow. This is a magazine story, if you like! The ring wasn't returned and everybody was searched or somebody refused to be searched; and there was some awfully romantic reason for his refusing to be searched."

"You are right," said Gahagan. "Right, up to a point. The ring was not returned. We were all searched. We all insisted on being searched. Nobody refused to be searched. But the ring was gone."

Gahagan turned rather restlessly and threw an elbow over the back of his chair; after a moment he went on:

"Please don't imagine I didn't feel all you say; that we seemed to have got inside a novel; and not a very novel sort of novel. But the difference was exactly what Pond says: that the novel didn't finish properly, but seemed to go on to something else. We had just reached about the coffee stage of the dinner, while this fuss about the first discovery of the loss was being discussed. But all the nonsense about searching was really very swift and simple; and the coffee hadn't even got cold in the interlude, though

Crome offered to send for some more. We all said that of course it didn’t matter; but Crome summoned the butler who’d been handing it round; and they whispered together in what was obviously a rather agitated conversation. Then, just as Pitt-Palmer was lifting his coffee cup to his lips, Lord Crome sprang up stiff and bristling and called out like the crack of a whip:

“‘Gentlemen, do not touch this coffee. It is poisoned.’”

“But dash it all,” interrupted Wotton, “that’s a different story! I say, Gahagan, are you sure you didn’t dream all this? After reading through a stack of out-of-date magazines and mixing up all the results? Of course we know the story about a whole company laid out with poison—”

“The results in this case were rather more extraordinary,” said Gahagan calmly. “Most of us naturally sat like stone statues under such a thunderbolt of a threat. But young Pitt-Palmer, with his cold, clean-cut, classical face, rose to his feet with the coffee cup in his hand and said in the coolest way:

“‘Awfully sorry; but I do hate letting my coffee get cold.’

“And he drained his cup; and, as God sees me, his face turned black or a blend of dreadful colours; and after horrible and inhuman noises, he fell down as in a fit before our eyes.

“Of course, we were not certain at first. But the Hungarian scientist had a doctor’s degree; and what he reported was confirmed by the local doctor, who was sent for at once. There was no doubt that he was dead.”

“You mean,” said Wotton, “that the doctors agreed that he was poisoned?”

Gahagan shook his head and repeated: “I said they agreed that he was dead.”

“But why should he be dead unless he was poisoned?”

“He was choked,” said Gahagan; and for one instant a shudder caught his whole powerful frame.

After a silence that seemed suddenly imposed by his agitation, Wotton said at last:

“I don’t understand a word you say. Who poisoned the coffee?”

“Nobody poisoned the coffee; because it wasn’t poisoned,” answered Gahagan. “The only reason for saying that was to make sure the coffee should remain in the cup, to be analysed just as it was. Poor Pitt-Palmer had put in a very large lump of sugar just before; but the sugar would melt. Some things do not melt."

Sir Hubert Wotton stared for some seconds into vacancy; and then his eyes began to glow with his own very real though not very rapid intelligence.

"You mean," he said, "that Pitt-Palmer somehow dropped the ring into the black coffee, where it wouldn't be seen, before he was searched. In other words, Pitt-Palmer was the thief?"

"Pitt-Palmer is dead," said Gahagan very gravely, "and it is the more my duty to defend his memory. What he did was doubtless wrong, as I have come to see more clearly than I did; but not worse than many a man has done. You may say what you like about that very common sort of wrong-doing. But he was not a thief."

"Will you or will you not explain what all this means?" cried Wotton with abrupt annoyance.

"No," replied Gahagan, with a sudden air of relapsing into laziness and fatigue. "Mr. Pond will now oblige."

"Pond wasn't there, was he?" asked Wotton sharply.

"Oh, no," answered Gahagan, rather with the air of one about to go to sleep. "But I can see by his eyebrows that he knows all about it. Besides, it's somebody else's turn."

He closed his eyes with so hopeless a placidity that the baffled Wotton was forced to turn on the third party, rather like a bewildered bull.

"Do you really know anything about this?" he demanded. "What does he mean by saying that the man who hid the ring wasn't a thief?"

"Well, perhaps I can guess a little," said Mr. Pond modestly. "But that's only because I've kept in mind what we said at the beginning — about the misleading way in which things remind us of romantic things; only they are never rounded off like the romance. You see, the trouble is that, when a real event reminds us of a novel, we unconsciously think we know all about it, because we know all about the novel. We have got into a groove or rut of familiar fiction; and we can't help thinking the groove runs forward and backward as it does in fiction. We've got the whole background of the story at the back of our minds; and we can't believe that we're really in another story. We always assume something that is assumed in the fictional story; and it isn't true. Once assume the wrong beginning, and you'll not only give the wrong answer but you ask the wrong question. In this case, you've got a mystery; but you've got hold of the wrong mystery."

"Gahagan said you would explain everything," said Wotton, with controlled satire. "May I ask if this is the explanation? Is this the solution or the mystery?"

"The real mystery of the ring," said Pond gravely, "is not where it went to, but where it came from."

Wotton stared at him steadily for an instant, and then said in rather a new voice: "Go on."

Mr. Pond went on. "Gahagan has said very truly that poor Pitt-Palmer was not the thief. Pitt-Palmer did not steal the ring."

"Then," exploded Wotton, "who the devil was it who stole the ring?"

"Lord Crome stole the ring," said Mr. Pond.

There was a silence upon the whole group for a brief space; and then the somnolent Gahagan stirred and said: "I knew you would see the point."

By way of making things clearer, Mr. Pond added almost apologetically:

"But, you see, he had to hand it round, to find out whom he had stolen it from."

After a moment he resumed in his usual logical but laborious manner: "Don't you see, as I said, you assume something at the start, simply because it is in all the stories? You assume that when a host hands round something at dinner, it's something belonging to him and his household, probably an old family possession; because that is in all the stories. But Lord Crome meant something much blacker and bitterer than that when he said, with a dreadful irony, that it commemorated a romance in his family.

"Lord Crome had stolen that ring by intercepting correspondence; or, in other words, tearing open an envelope addressed to his wife and containing nothing but the ring. The address was typewritten; nor indeed did he know all the handwritings involved. But he knew the very ancient writing engraved on that ring; which was such that it could only have been given with one purpose. He assembled those men to find out who was the sender; or, in other words, who was the owner. He knew the owner would somehow attempt to reclaim his possession, if he possibly could; to stop the scandal and remove the evidence. And indeed the man who did so, though he might be a blackguard, would certainly not be a thief. As a matter of fact, after a heathen fashion, he was a bit of a hero. Perhaps it was not for nothing that he had that cold, strong face that is the stone mask of Augustus. He took, first of all, the simple but sensible course of slipping the ring into his black coffee, under cover of a gesture of taking sugar. There it would not be seen, for the moment, anyhow; and he could safely offer himself to be searched. That demented moment, which really seemed to turn the whole thing into a frightful dream, when Crome screamed out that the coffee was poisoned, was only Crome's desperate counterstroke when he had guessed the trick; to make sure that the coffee should be left alone and the ring recovered. But that young man with the cold face preferred to die in that dreadful fashion: by swallowing the heavy ring and choking; on the chance that his secret, or rather Lady Crome's secret, might yet be overlooked. It was a desperate chance, anyway; but of all the courses open to him, that being his object, it was probably the best he could have taken. In any case, I feel that we must all support Gahagan in saying, very properly, that the poor fellow's memory should be protected from any baser suggestions, and that a gentleman is certainly not a robber when he prefers to choke himself with his own ring."

Mr. Pond coughed delicately, having brought his argument to a close; and Sir Hubert Wotton remained staring at him, rather more bewildered by the solution than by the problem. When he rose slowly to his feet, it was with the air of one shaking off something that was still an evil dream, even when he knew that it had happened.

"Well, I've got to be going, anyhow," he said, with an air of heavy relief. "Got to look in at Whitehall and I fancy I'm late already. By the way, if what you say is true, this must have happened very lately. So far as I know, the news of Pitt-Palmer's suicide hasn't come through yet — at least it hadn't come through this morning."

"It happened last night," said Gahagan, and rose from the chair where he had been sprawling, to take leave of his friend.

When Wotton had departed, a long silence fell upon the two other friends who remained looking gravely at each other.

"It happened last night," repeated Gahagan. "That is why I told you it had something to do with what happened this morning. I got engaged to Joan Varney this morning."

"Yes," said Mr. Pond gently. "I think I understand."

"Yes, I think you do," said Gahagan, "but I am going to try to explain, for all that. Do you know there was one thing almost more awful than that poor fellow’s death? And it only hit me when I was half a mile from that accursed house. I knew why I had been one of the guests.”

He was standing and staring out of the window, with his broad back turned to Pond; and after the last words he was silent and continued to stare at the stormy landscape outside. Perhaps something in it stirred another memory, for when he spoke again, it was as if he started a new subject, though it was another aspect of the same one.

“I didn’t tell you anything much about the sort of garden party, with cocktails, that they had that afternoon before the dinner, because I felt that until one realized the climax, one couldn’t realize anything; it would all sound like vapouring about the weather. But it was rather rum sort of weather yesterday, as it still is; only it was stormier, and I think the storm has passed over now. And it was a rum sort of atmosphere, too; though the weather was only a coincidence, of course, it does sometimes happen that meteorological conditions make men more conscious of moral conditions. There was a queer, lurid sort of sky over the garden, though there was a fair amount of fitful sunshine almost as capricious as lightning. A huge great mountain of cloud, coloured like ink and indigo, was coming up behind the pale, pillared façade of the house, which was still in a wan flush of light; and I remember even then being chilled by a childish fancy that Pitt-Palmer was a pale marble statue and part of the building. But there was little else to give any hint of the secret; nobody could say that Lady Crome was like a statue; for she went flying and flaunting about like a bird of paradise. But, whether you believe it or not, I did from the first feel an oppression, both physical and psychical; especially psychical. It increased when we went indoors and the dining-room curtains cut us off from any actual sight of the storm. They were old-fashioned, dark-red curtains, with heavy, gilded tassels; and it was as if everything was steeped in the same dye. You’ve heard of a man seeing red; well, what I saw was dark red. That’s as near as I can get to the feeling; for it was a feeling from the first; and I guessed nothing.

“And then that sinister and revolting thing happened before my eyes at the table; I can see the dark red wine in the port decanters and the dull glow of the lampshades. And still it seemed as if I were invisible and impersonal; I was hardly conscious of myself. Of course, we all had to answer some questions about ourselves; but I need not tell you about the trail of official fussing that crossed the track of the tragedy. It did not take long, since it was so obviously a case of suicide; and the party broke up, straggling out into the stormy night through the garden. As they passed out, they seemed to have taken on new shapes, new outlines. Between the hot night and the horrible death and that foul fog of throttling hatred in which we had tried to breathe, I began to see something else about them; perhaps to see them as they were. They were no longer incongruous but grotesquely congruous; as in a hideous *camaraderie.* Of course, this was a mood, and a morbid one; they really had been different enough; but they had something in common.

"I liked the Pole best; he had a sense of humour, and admirable manners; but I knew what he meant when he so courteously declined the position of Pope, because it would involve celibacy. Crome knew it too, and grinned back at him like a demon. The other one I liked was Major Wooster, the Anglo-Indian; but something told me that he was really of the jungle; a *shikar* not only hunting tigers, a tiger not only hunting deer. Then there was the titled doctor with the Assyrian brows and beard; I bet he was more Semitic than Magyar. But anyhow, he had thick lips in his thick beard, and a look in his almond eyes that I did not like at all. One of the worst of them, I should say. I wouldn't say anything worse of Blande than that he's probably too stupid to understand anything but his own body. He hasn't enough mind to know that he has a mind. We all know Sir Oscar Marvell; I remember him marching out, his furred cloak flapping as if it trailed behind it infinite echoes of the harmless applause of flappers — but of more foolish women as well. As to the Italian tenor, he was uncommonly like the English actor. One could not say any worse of him than that.

"Yes; they were, after all, a very select company. They were selected by a clever if nearly crazy man as being the six men in London most likely to lay a plot to seduce his wife. Then, with a great shock, I quite literally came to myself. I actually realized my own presence. I was there, too. Crome had made up a choice party of profligates and picked them carefully. And he had honoured *me* with an invitation to the feast.

"That was what I was. That, at least, was what I was supposed to be. A damned dandy and dawdling blackguard, always dangling after other men's wives. . . . You know, Pond, that I was not really so bad as all that; but then, perhaps, neither were they. We were all innocent in this case; and yet the thundercloud upon the garden rested on us like a judgment. So was I innocent, in that case you remember, when I nearly got hanged for hanging round a woman I really didn't care about. But it served us right; it was our atmosphere that was all wrong — what quaint old people used to call the state of our souls, what the unspeakable bounders in the papers call sex-appeal. That was why I nearly got hanged; and why there was a corpse in the house behind me. And there went through my head like the tramp of armies, old lines written long ago, about what is in legend the noblest of all lawless loves, when Guinevere, refusing Lancelot at the last, says in words that had for me a ring of iron:

“For well ye wot that of this life
There comes but lewd and bitter strife
And death of men and great travail.

“I had hung round all that sort of thing, and yet never quite clearly seen myself doing it; till two judgments struck me like the storm out of the sky. I nearly received a sentence from a judge in a black cap and blood-red robes, that I should be hanged by the neck until I was dead. And, worse still, I received an invitation from Lord Crome.”

He continued to gaze out of the window; but Pond heard him mutter again, like the faint grumbling of the thunder: *“And death of men and great travail.”*

In the vast silence that followed, Mr. Pond said in a very small voice:

“What was the matter with you was that you liked being libelled.”

Gahagan faced about, almost with the gesture of throwing up his hands, which seemed to fill the frame of the window with his own gigantic frame; but he was noticeably pale.

“Kamerad, yes,” he said. “I was as small as that.”

He smiled at his friend, but with a glassy and rather ghastly smile, and then went on:

“Yes; I cared more for that dirty rag of vanity, worse than any vice, than I did for any vices. How many men have sold their souls to be admired by fools? I nearly did it, merely to be suspected by fools. To be the dangerous man, the dark horse, the man of whom families should be afraid — that is the sort of abject ambition for which I wasted so much of my life, and nearly lost the fulfilment of my love. I dawdled, I lounged about, because I could not give up a bad name. And, by God, it nearly hanged the dog.”

“That is what I supposed,” said Mr. Pond in his most prime and polite manner. And then Gahagan broke out again:

"I was better than I seemed. But what did that mean, except the spiritual blasphemy that I wanted to seem worse than I was? What could it mean, except that, far worse than one who practised vice, I admired it? Yes, admired it in myself; even when it wasn't there. I was the new hypocrite; but mine was the homage that virtue pays to vice."

"I understand, however," said Mr. Pond, in that curiously cold and distant tone, which had yet a very soothing effect on everybody, "that you are now effectually cured."

"I am cured," said Gahagan grimly. "But it took two dead men and a gallows to cure me. But the point is, what was I cured of? You have diagnosed it exactly right, my dear doctor, if I may call you so. I could not give up the secret pleasure of being slandered."

"By this time, however," said Mr. Pond, "other considerations have come in and induced you to support the insupportable charge of virtue."

Gahagan suddenly laughed, harshly and yet, somehow, heartily. Some would count his first comment a peculiar extension of the laugh. "I went to confession and the rest of it this morning," he said, "and in a vaguer sort of way I've come to confession to you. To confess that I didn't kill the man. To confess that I never made love to the man's wife. In short, to confess that I was a humbug. To confess that I am not a dangerous man . . . well, anyhow, after I'd done all that, I went on whistling, and as happy as a bird, to — well, I think you know where I went to. There's a girl I ought to have fixed things up with long ago; and I always wanted to do it; that's the paradox. But a damned sight sillier paradox than any of your paradoxes, Pond."

Mr. Pond laughed gently, as he generally did when somebody had told him, at considerable length, all that he knew already. And he was not so old, nor despite his manner so cold, as not to form some sort of guess about the actual termination of the rather exasperating romance of Captain Gahagan.

This story started with some statements about the way in which stories tend to get into a tangle, one tale being mixed up with another tale, especially when they are true tales. This story also started, and ought also presumably to stop, with the very extraordinary tragedy and scandal in the house of Lord Crome, when that promising young politician, Mr. Pitt-Palmer, unaccountably tumbled down dead. It ought really to end with a proper account of his impressive public funeral; of the chorus of praise devoted to him in the Press; and the stately compliments laid on his tomb like flowers from the leaders of all the parties in Parliament; from those eloquent words of the Leader of the Opposition beginning “Much as we may have differed in politics,” to those (if possible) still more eloquent observations of the Leader of the House, beginning “Confident as I am that our cause is independent even of the noblest personality, I yet have to lament, etc.”

Anyhow, it is really very irrelevant to the central plot of this story that it should stray from the funeral of Pitt-Palmer to the wedding of Gahagan. It will be enough to say that, as already hinted, the actual effect of this shocking incident on Gahagan was to drive him back to an old love; an old love who was still conveniently young. A certain Miss Violet Varney was at that time prominent on the stage; the word “prominent” has been selected with some care from other possible adjectives. In the general view of society, Miss Joan Varney was the sister of Miss Violet Varney. In the perverse and personal view of Captain Gahagan, Miss Violet Varney was the sister of Miss Joan Varney; nor was he eager to insist on this relationship. He loved Joan but he did not even like Violet; but there is no need to enter on the entanglements of that other story here. Are not all these things written in the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?

It is enough to say that on that particular morning, swept clear and shining after the storm, Captain Gahagan came out of the church in the little by-street and very cheerfully took the road to the house of the Varney family, where he found Miss Joan Varney pottering about in the garden with a spud, and told her several things of some importance to both of them. When Miss Violet Varney heard that her younger sister was engaged to Captain Gahagan, she went off with admirable promptitude to a theatrical club and got engaged to one of the numerous noodles of more or less noble birth who could be used for the purpose. She very sensibly broke off this engagement about a month afterwards; but she got *her* engagement into the society papers first.

THE TERRIBLE TROUBADOUR

"In nature you must go very low to find things that go so high."

This was commonly included by collectors among the Paradoxes of Mr. Pond; for it came towards the end of a rather dull and eminently sensible discourse, and it made no sense. And these were recognized as the stigmata of the stylistic methods of Mr. Pond. But in this case, as a fact, he had plagiarized from his old acquaintance Dr. Paul Green, author of *The Dog or the Monkey, Studies in the Domestication of Anthropoids, Notes on Neanderthal Development,* etc., etc.

Dr. Paul Green was a smallish man, pale, slender and slightly lame; but his activity, even in bodily movement, was relatively remarkable, and his mind moved as quickly as a quick-firing gun.

It was this old acquaintance who, on one sunny afternoon, came out of Mr. Pond's past to bring him shocking and even nerve-shattering news; a report as alarming as the report of a gun.

But when Mr. Pond was told, on such very solid authority, that his friend Captain Gahagan was an escaped murderer, after all, he said, "Tut, tut." He was given to what is called understatement; of which he knew the Greek name, but did not employ it needlessly. The conversation, indeed, had opened casually enough, turning from the doctor's health to the doctor's hobby of studying animal habits. A little light talk about Eohippus; some airy badinage about Homo Kanensis; a little bright back-chat about Vialleton's *Études sur les Reflexes des Animaux Tétrapodes;* rising to a certain sharpness of dialogue, for on this point of Darwin and Natural Selection the two friends had never agreed.

"I never can see," said Mr. Pond, "how a change, that might have helped an animal if it came quickly, could have helped him if it came slowly. And came to his great-grandchild, long after he ought to have perished without leaving any grandchildren. It might be better if I had three legs, say, in order to stand firmly on two while kicking a fellow bureaucrat with the third. It might be better if I had three legs; but it wouldn't be better if I only had a rudimentary leg."

"It might be better if I had two legs," said the doctor grimly, "instead of one lame leg that is hardly a leg at all. And yet I find it fairly useful."

Mr. Pond, who was commonly very tactful, chid himself softly for tactlessness in forgetting that his old acquaintance was lame. But, at least, he was far too tactful to apologize, or even too obviously to change the subject.

He proceeded in his mild and fluent way: “I mean that till a leg is long enough to run or climb, it would only be an extra weight for the runner or climber to carry.”

“It’s pretty queer,” said the doctor, “that we should have started off talking about running and climbing. I didn’t come here to discuss Darwinism or anything half so sane and sensible. But if you think I’m suspect, as the atrocious atheist, I may explain that I don’t want you just now to listen to me, but to my friend the vicar of Hanging Burgess, the Reverend Cyprian Whiteways, whose views are probably quite as anti-scientific as your own. I don’t suppose he’s a Darwinian; but, anyhow, I promised to introduce him to you, and he wants to tell you about things that happened rather later than the later Stone Age.”

“Then, what do you mean,” asked Pond, “by talking about running and climbing?”

“I meant, I am sorry to say,” replied Dr. Green, “that the vicar has a pretty bad story about that friend of yours, Captain Gahagan, whose legs seem to be very good at climbing, and still better at running away.”

“It’s a serious thing,” said Pond, gravely, “to accuse a soldier of running away.”

“It’s a much more serious thing of which the vicar accuses him,” said Green. “He accuses him of climbing a balcony and shooting a rival, and then running away. But it’s not my story; I’m not the story, but only the introduction.”

“Climbing a balcony,” mused Mr. Pond; “for a vicar it sounds rather a romantic story.”

“I know,” said the doctor, “the sort of story that begins with a rope-ladder and ends with a rope.”

Mr. Pond, as he heard the unequal step of his lame friend echoing away down the paved paths of the garden, relapsed into a gloomy mood. He was quite willing to accept his medical friend merely as a letter of introduction. But it was a rather black-edged and tragic sort of letter of introduction. Whatever story the Rev. Cyprian was going to tell, it was another story against his unfortunate friend Peter Gahagan. And Gahagan was so very unfortunate as to suggest to some a wild doubt about whether he was merely unfortunate. Some had the sudden and horrible thought that, perhaps, he was fortunate. Twice before, he had been mixed up in matters involving a mysterious and violent death; with, at least, a savour of murder. In both cases he had been cleared. But three is an unlucky number.

Finally, the Rev. Cyprian Whiteways was a shock; a shock because of his frankness and fair-mindedness.

Mr. Pond would never, at any time, have stooped to the stupid idea that clergymen are stupid. He did not take his ideas of real life from farces like *The Private Secretary.* But the Rev. Cyprian was so very much the reverse of stupid; a man with a rugged face like old red sandstone; and, indeed, he suggested a rock of that rich colouring which glows with the past; he carried his English countryside with him in an indescribable suggestion of depth and background; he could not talk of common things without, somehow, suggesting the weather or the turn of night or day; he was a born descriptive writer who only talked. But nobody could doubt that it was truth; or, at least, truthfulness.

It was so substantial a witness who told Mr. Pond in considerable detail the black and bloody story of Gahagan's hidden sin. And the curious effect of all this on Mr. Pond was to make him jump up briskly with a broad smile of relief on his bearded and somewhat owlish visage; declaring with unusual cheeriness that it was quite all right, they had only to ask Gahagan himself, and he would tell them all about it. Confrontation, it was sometimes called.

As for Dr. Green, with the letter of introduction, his job was done, and he was somewhat impatient of Pond's formalities; he stumped off, merely warning the vicar that he had better have a lawyer, if he was to confront that plausible Irish rogue.

So, when the scientist was already far away, reabsorbed in the study of a pithecanthropos as a pet, all that remained of his intervention was a solicitor named Luke Little, very much on the spot.

Mr. Pond's friend, Sir Hubert Wotton, the well-known diplomatist, took the chair; but Mr. Little did not mind who took chairs so long as he took charge.

“This is a very irregular inquiry, gentlemen,” he said. “Only a special assurance would have induced me to place my client’s case before it. Sir Hubert and Mr. Pond declare, I understand, that an explanation will be demanded here and now.”

Then he added: “It is a painful matter, as I think Mr. Pond will agree.”

“It is a very painful matter, indeed,” replied Pond, gravely, “that an old friend of mine should be under suspicion of a horrible action.”

His friend, Wotton, looked at Pond for a moment with a frosty stare of surprise; but he stared a great deal more when he was startled by Gahagan himself, speaking, suddenly, for the first and last time in all the first hours of the interview.

“Yes,” he said, with a grim and inscrutable visage. “It is certainly a horrible story.”

“In any case, then,” resumed the lawyer, “I can now ask my client, without prejudice, to repeat the story.”

“It’s an ugly story,” said the clergyman in his honest way, “and I’ll tell it as shortly as I can.”

Pond had heard the story, already, told in a way at once looser and more elaborate, and allowing of more descriptive detail or inference than the statement made under such very legal supervision. But even as he heard it again in more exact form, he could not get rid of a feeling that the scene described was unnaturally vivid to him, but with the vividness of a nightmare.

There was no particular reason, at that stage, for comparing the story to a nightmare; except that the two principal incidents happened at night.

They happened in the vicar’s garden, close to the balcony of the vicar’s house; and perhaps the impression, which was rather like an oppression, was somehow connected with another night darkening the night; a living night of vegetation; for it was suggested, throughout, that the balcony was loaded with pots and palms and clutched by climbing plants with heavy and pendent leaves.

Perhaps, after all, it was only some vague, verbal association with the name of Hanging Burgess; as if the mystery were somehow associated with the hanging gardens of Babylon. Perhaps, again, it was partly the irrational trail of the talk with Dr. Green, with his creed of blind growth and a groping life-force in a godless dark; for Green developed his view of development with every fancy from botany as well as biology.

On the whole, however, Mr. Pond concluded that his own queer mood was the result of the one fact, which it had really been necessary to describe in detail. For the vicar had been obliged to explain, on both occasions, in order to make his tale intelligible, that the front of the balcony was scaled from below by a titanic, tropical creeper, with ribbed and interlaced limbs and large, fantastic leaves. It is not altogether an exaggeration to say that the creeper was the principal character in the story.

"This business happened during the Great War," explained the clergyman, "when my daughter and I were living in my house at Hanging Burgess. But the two houses on each side of us were empty, due to the drainage of human material common at the time. At least, they were both empty for a considerable period, though they were handsome houses with large gardens, sloping down to the river. Then my friend Dr. Green came down to be my next-door neighbour and prosecute his scientific researches in a quiet place. He was writing a book, you know, on the domestication of animals; dogs and cats and pet marmosets and monkeys, and so on; and my daughter, who is interested in such pets, helped him a little with his work.

"It is a happy time to look back upon, for us who were old cronies; perhaps because it was a quiet time.

"And then our solitude was broken, as it seemed by accident, and all the trouble and tragedy began.

"First of all, a young artist of the name of Albert Ayres rented the house next door, though he seemed to want it mostly for a base in which to leave his baggage, for he was wandering over the country making sketches; and it is only fair, as you will see presently, to admit that he did say, once, that he would start straight away next morning on one of his sketching tours. I mean that we cannot, in any case, actually prove what became of him. Unfortunately, I know only too well what became of him.

"He was an interesting individual; perhaps a little too like the old notion of an artist; the sort one can hardly call either carelessly or carefully picturesque; with a halo of yellow hair which the sympathetic might connect with Galahad and the unsympathetic with Struwwelpeter. Mind you, there was nothing about him effeminate, and nothing false about his position in relation to the war. He had been invalided out, and what he was doing was a necessary job and not a funk-hole; and, at the moment, he was enjoying a short and very well-earned holiday.

“It is only fair to Captain Gahagan to say that, even in their subsequent quarrel, even in the last, blackest days of hatred, and, I hope, of madness, which ended in murder, the Captain never sneered at his rival upon that point, or assumed anything like the swagger of khaki. But, at the time, Captain Gahagan was still in khaki, having a very short leave from the front, which he was supposed to spend at the neighbouring inn, but did spend mostly in my house.

“You will understand my reluctance in speaking of the matter; the fact that he was on short leave may have given a certain impatience to his rather headlong courtship of my daughter, for it could be called nothing else. Some say that women do not specially object to that; but I would much prefer not to presume on any speculations about that matter. But to deal entirely with the facts. They are as follows:

“One evening, just after sunset, or about dusk, I was walking in my garden with the doctor, and we were joined, shortly afterwards, by Albert Ayres. I had just asked my friend Green to drop in and take some dinner with us; but he happened to be rather exhausted with a heavy day of his scientific work; he looked pale and tired; and he declined in a rather distant and distracted manner. In fact, I thought he was looking ill.”

“He has not very good health,” interposed Mr. Pond, suddenly. “He doesn’t go about very much. You must remember he is lame.” The others stared at him again, as if not seeing any importance in the interruption; and again they were still more puzzled by his further comment; for he added quite calmly:

“The clue to all this mystery is the fact that Dr. Green is lame.”

“I have not the wildest notion what you mean,” said the vicar of Hanging Burgess briskly. “But, anyhow, I had better get on and tell you what really happened; and you will see that it certainly had nothing to do with either lameness or Dr. Green.

“In strolling round the garden we had paused under the giant creeper that grows out of the flower-bed and shoots right up to the balcony; and Ayres was just remarking on its unique strength and luxuriousness, when we all had a sort of a shock. For we saw the whole creeper move and twist like a monstrous serpent, in that still garden; every limb of it heaved and writhed and the whole framework of its foliage was shaken as by some impossibly localized earthquake. Then we saw that long legs like a giant’s were swinging downwards and kicking wildly above our heads; and Captain

Gahagan, missing his last foothold, fell on his feet on the gravel path and faced us with a broad grin.

"'Pray forgive me,' he said,' I have been paying an afternoon call. I dropped in to tea, or perhaps I should say, hopped up to tea; and I have just dropped out again.'

"I told him, perhaps a little frigidly, that we were always pleased to receive visitors, but that they generally came in by the front door. He asked me, in a rather brazen way, if I had no poetic sympathy with Romeo and the romance of climbing balconies. I preferred not to reply; but my friend, the doctor, was staring curiously at the creeper, probably in some freak of his merely botanical curiosity; and he said, with his faintly acid humour: 'Isn't there rather a satire on Romeo in the fact that a weed like that can climb a balcony? It isn't quite so common to see a tropical plant ringing the bell and coming in at the front door. Climbing doesn't seem a safe way of classifying. In nature, you must go very low to find things that go so high.'"

Mr. Pond sat up abruptly and seemed to exhale a breath; but all he said was, "I thought so."

"The artist named Ayres," continued the vicar, "seemed more annoyed than either of us at this absurd adventure; and his comment was really much more provocative, though he only said, coolly: 'Well, it looks an easy thing to climb; as easy as a great, green ladder. I fancy I could climb it myself, if it came to that.'

"Then I realized for the first lime, for I'm rather slow in these things, that Gahagan was glaring at him, as he answered sharply: 'Am I to understand that it may come to that?' And then I realized that they were both glaring at each other; and I guessed, for the first time, why they hated each other; and what was the meaning of that scene in my quiet garden.

"Well, I will get on as quickly as I can to the culmination of these rash boasts, or challenges, of the two tragic rivals. For, indeed, I do not know which of them had the worst tragedy. Night had fallen and the moon had risen, though it was not very much later, cutting up the shady garden into a new pattern of shadows, when I happened to look out of my study window, which is on an upper floor.

"I was smoking and reading a book, when a noise like a dog barking, or rather howling, made me put my head, more or less carelessly, out of the window; I assumed that it was one of Dr. Green's dogs and did not think much of the matter; subconsciously, perhaps, something spectral about the moonstruck garden and the mood that it stirred, or some more mysterious premonition of what was to follow, made the howl sound more hollow and even horrible than it really was.

“A clear moon was rising high behind me; most of the shady garden was in all the denser shade; but there were large, pale patches and squares of moonshine on the paths and the wall in front of me, cut out as sharply as the pasteboard frame of some shadow-pantomime. Perhaps the parallel seized on my fancy, partly because light and shadow were thus bent or doubled into different planes, vertical or horizontal, like the black and white paper from which children cut out the figures for such a play. Anyhow, I did think, instantly and very vividly, of a shadow-pantomime; and, the next instant, I saw one of the pantomime figures passing in black silhouette across the wall.

“I knew at once whose shadow it was. Of course, it was drawn out and distorted; you know how deceptive shadows are; but I could see the straggling tufts that reminded one of Struwwelpeter; and I think I told you before that Ayres, the artist, was a little too like the traditional artist who hasn’t had his hair cut. Also, he affected that sort of languid stoop that such artists assume; and there was the high-shouldered stoop exaggerated, as shadows do exaggerate.

“The next moment, another of these dark caricatures had appeared on the wall; and it was even more unmistakable. It was also more active; it was not only a shadow-pantomime but — in a pretty creepy sense — a knockabout pantomime.”

“Shadows are very deceptive,” said Mr. Pond; and again his friends stared at him, not because his intervention was important, but because it seemed trivial and totally unnecessary. But before he relapsed again into silence, he added:

“The most deceptive thing about a shadow is that it may be quite accurate.”

“Well, really!” exploded Wotton; but his moderately mild explosion was overshadowed by one of the abrupt movements which once or twice moved the gigantic Gahagan to overwhelming but rather baffling gestures, to detached and yet outrageous interventions. He turned to his accuser with a bow of overbearing courtesy, or even courtliness, and said:

“You need not be alarmed, sir. That is one of Mr. Pond’s paradoxes. We are all very proud of our Pond and of his paradoxes. Try them in your bath.

Pond’s paradoxes are in every home. What would Mother do without Pond’s—”

“Don’t be a fool, Gahagan!” said Hubert Wotton; and his voice had a ring of steel which his friends had always respected. There was a silence, in which Mr. Pond said simply:

“I never uttered a paradox in my life. What I said was a truism.”

The vicar of Hanging Burgess looked considerably baffled, but did not lose his composure, and continued his story.

“I’m afraid all this seems to me rather off the point; especially as I haven’t come to the point. I mean the point of my story. Of course, it doesn’t matter whether the shadows were deceptive or not; because I saw the real people a minute or two afterwards. It’s true I only saw one of them for a minute, you might say for a flash; but the other I saw plainly enough.

“The first figure, the long-haired figure I had already identified with the artist, ran very quickly across the moonlit patch and vanished into the vast shadow of the creeper that climbed the balcony; but there is no doubt that he began to climb the creeper.

“The second figure stood for a moment, staring, in the full stare of the moon; and there was no doubt about him at all. It was Captain Gahagan, in khaki, and he already had his big service revolver in his hand. In a high, unnatural voice he cried after and cursed the other unfortunate troubadour, who had climbed his romantic rope-ladder of leaves, exactly as he had climbed it himself.

“At that instant the whole situation became finally clear; for I saw the hairy head of the unfortunate artist rising out of the tangle of tropical leaves, in shadow, but all the more unmistakable for being haloed in the moonshine. But the same moonshine fell full on the face of the Captain, as glaring as a photographic portrait; and it glared with a frightful grin or grimace of hatred.”

Mr. Pond again interposed gently, but with the general effect of a jerk: “You say it was hatred. Are you sure it was not horror?”

The vicar was very intelligent, and thought before he answered, even when he did not in the least understand. Then he said: “I think so. Besides, why should Captain Gahagan be horrified merely at seeing Mr. Ayres?”

“Perhaps,” said Pond, after a pause, “because he had not had his hair cut.”

“Pond!” said Wotton very sharply. “Do you fancy this is a case for jokes? You seem to have forgotten that you said, yourself, it was a painful matter.”

“I said it was a painful matter,” said Pond, “to think a horrible thing was done by an old friend.” Then he said, after one of his sudden pauses: “But I wasn’t thinking of Gahagan.”

The stupefied vicar seemed to have given up everything but the stubborn pursuit of his story.

“As I have told you, Captain Gahagan cursed his rival from below, and called on him to come down; but he did not attempt to climb the creeper himself, though he had already shown how quickly he could do it. Unfortunately, he did something else; which he could do much more quickly. I saw the blue flash of the pistol-barrel in the moon, as he lifted it; and then the red flash; and then a puff of smoke detached itself and climbed the sky, like a cloud; and the man on the green ladder fell crashing like a stone through the thrashing great leaves to the dark space below.

“I could not see so clearly what was happening in that dark space; but I knew, for all practical purposes, that the man was dead; for his slayer laid hold of one leg of the corpse and dragged it away down the darkling and descending paths of the garden. And when I heard a distant splash, I knew he had thrown the corpse into the river.

“Well, as I told you before, that is my very serious testimony to what I saw and knew; but I give it only from a sense of social duty to any individuals who may be involved; I admit the circumstances are such that legal proof would be very difficult now.

“Albert Ayres had entirely disappeared by next morning; but it is true, as I have said, that he had once spoken of going off on a sketching-tour very early.

“Captain Gahagan had also entirely disappeared by next morning; but I believe it is true that his leave was practically up, that in any case he had to return to the front; and it was utterly hopeless to raise a question — which would, already, be called a doubtful question — at a moment when every man was needed, when common convicts were already working out their expiation in the field; and when all information had to be hampered, and a veil hung between us and all that vast labyrinth called ‘somewhere in France.’ But hearing that, for personal reasons, it was essential that Captain Gahagan should be asked to clear or explain his record, I have brought the matter up again now. And I have stated nothing that I did not see.”

“You have stated it very clearly,” said Mr. Pond. “More clearly than you know. But even on the clearest moonlight night, as we agreed, shadows can be very deceptive.”

“You’ve said that before,” said Sir Hubert rather irritably.

“And, as I have also said before,” observed the unruffled Mr. Pond, “a shadow is most misleading when it is precisely correct.”

Silence suddenly fell on the group; and the silence became more and more tense, for, after these random shots, which seemed so very random, fired by Mr. Pond as he retired from the argument, everyone felt that nothing could now delay the main action. For some time it looked rather like inaction; for Gahagan, who had been growing gloomier and gloomier, still sat kicking his heels, as if he had nothing to say. And indeed, when sharply called on by Sir Hubert for his statement, he was, at first, understood to declare seriously, not to say grimly, that he had nothing to say.

“What can I say, except what they call pleading guilty? What can I say, except that I did do a horrible thing; I did commit a hateful crime; and my sin is ever before me.”

The solicitor seemed suddenly to bristle with electric needles of a sort of cold excitement.

“Pardon me, pardon me!” he cried. “Before you say any more, before you say a word more, it must be understood that it may be necessary to take note of it in a legal manner. On some minor matters we are permitted a certain discretion; but if we are to listen to an actual confession of murder —”

Gahagan shouted; he shouted so loud that the others were almost too surprised to notice that it was a shout of laughter, but not very genial laughter.

“What!” he cried. “Do you think I’m confessing to a murder? Oh, this is getting tiresome! Of course I never committed any murder. I said I committed a crime; but it’s not to any damned little lawyer that I have to apologize for it.”

He swung round, facing the clergyman; and his whole bodily and mental attitude seemed to alter; so that, when he spoke at last, it was like a new man speaking.

“I mean, it’s for you. What can I say to you? It’s personal for you; I mean, it’s real. It’s no good talking at large about such things. It’s no good hiding in a crowd; or saying that the crime was committed by a lot of poor devils on leave from hell; to whom a holiday was heaven; only it was a very earthly paradise; a little too like a Moslem paradise. I did make love to your daughter when I had no right to, for I didn't really know my own mind. None of us had any mind on those holidays from hell. And it's true that I did have a rival. It's true I was in a rage with my rival; I'm still in a rage with him, when I think of what he did. Only—" He paused, as with a new embarrassment.

"Go on," said Mr. Pond gently.

"Only my rival wasn't the artist with the long hair," said Gahagan.

Hubert Wotton again looked up sharply, with a frowning stare; but he spoke quietly as he directed Gahagan to tell his story properly from the start.

"I had better start," said Gahagan, "where the other story started: just about the time when we both heard the howl of a dog in the dark garden. I may explain that I was actually staying with Ayres, the artist, for that night; we had become quite good friends, really; though there may have been a bit of romantic swagger about the troubadour business at an earlier time.

"I was packing up and sorting out some of my light luggage; that is how I happened to be cleaning my service revolver. Ayres was looking through some of his sketch-books; and I left him at it when I went out, just as Mr. Whiteways looked out, in casual curiosity, over that sudden noise in the night. Only I heard what he did not hear. I not only heard what sounded like the howl of a dog, but I also heard a whistle, such as a man uses when calling a dog.

"Also, I saw what he did not see. For an instant, in a gap in the trellis and tracery of a vine, I saw, very white in the moonlight, the face of Paul Green, that distinguished man of science. He is distinguished and he looks distinguished; I remember thinking, at the time, what a fine head he had, and that the silver moulding of his features under the moon made them quite beautiful. I had a reason for having my attention thus arrested by that silvery mask, for, at that precise moment, it wore a sort of smile of hatred that turned one's blood cold.

"Then the face vanished; and again my experience was much like the vicar's, except that I did not see everything which happened just behind my back. But I swung round in time to see that somebody had run across the path, and begun to climb the creeper. He climbed it very quickly, much quicker than I had done, but it was not easy to see him or recognize him in the dark shadow of the leaves.

"I had an idea that he was long in the limbs and had the sort of high-shouldered stoop that has been described; then I saw, as the vicar did, the head emerge clear of the foliage, only outlined by the moon with a sort of bristly halo of hair. Only then, for the second time that night, I saw what the vicar did not see. The Romeo, the climbing troubadour, turned his head, and, for a moment, I saw it in profile, a black shape against the moon. And I said to myself: 'My God! It's a dog, after all.'"

The vicar echoed the invocation faintly; the lawyer made a sharp movement as if to intervene; and Wotton told his friend rather brusquely to go on; which had the effect of producing a sort of abrupt languor, alarmingly like a disposition to leave off.

"Rather interesting man, Marco Polo," said Captain Gahagan, in a vaguely conversational tone. "I think it was Marco Polo, the Venetian; anyhow, it was one of those early mediæval travellers. You know everybody used to say they told nothing but tall stories about mandrakes and mermaids; but, in many cases, it has been found since that their tall tales were true. Anyhow, this chap said there were men walking about with the heads of dogs. Now, if you'll look at one of the larger apes, like the baboon, you'll see that his head really is very like a dog's; not nearly so much like a man's as the head of one of the smaller monkeys."

Mr. Little, the lawyer, was rapidly turning over some of his papers, with a shrewd frown and a sharp, alert manner.

"One moment, Captain Gahagan," he interposed. "I have a fancy that you are rather a traveller, yourself; and have picked up travellers' tales in many different places. It looks to me as if you had picked up this one in the *Rue Morgue*."

"I wish I had," replied the Captain.

"In the story there," pursued the solicitor, "I think there was an escaped anthropoid ape who disobeyed his master and would not return."

"Yes," said Mr. Pond, in a low voice, rather like a groan. "But in this case it was not disobeying its master."

"You had better tell the rest of this story, Pond," said the Captain, with one of his curious collapses into irresponsible repose. "You evidently guessed the real story, I don't know how, before I began to tell it."

Mr. Little appeared to be somewhat annoyed, and snapped out: “I consider the Captain told this curious tale, for what it is worth, in a very melodramatic and misleading manner. I have it, in my notes, that he certainly said that ‘Somebody ran across the path and began to climb the creeper.’”

“I was quite pedantically correct,” said Gahagan, waving his hand, condescendingly. “I was careful to state that some *body* ran and climbed. I attempted no theological or metaphysical speculations about the soul of an ape.”

“But this is perfectly ghastly!” cried the clergyman, who was deeply shaken. “Are you sure the thing I saw was an ape?”

“I was quite close,” said the Captain. “I saw the shape and you only saw the shadow.”

“No,” said Pond softly, “he saw the shape and could not believe it because it was the shadow. That is what I meant by saying a shadow can deceive by accuracy. Nine times out of ten, a shadow is out of drawing. But it can happen, in special circumstances, that it is an exact silhouette. Only we always expect it to be distorted; and so we are deceived by its not being distorted. The vicar was not surprised that the hairy, high-shouldered Mr. Ayres should throw a shadow looking like a shambling hunchback or a bristly, humped figure. But in reality it *was* a bristly, humped figure. I guessed that when he first said, just afterwards, that your own figure was much more unmistakable. Why should it be unmistakable, unless the other was a mistake?”

“From where I was, there could be no mistake,” said Gahagan. “I knew it was an ape, and I guessed it was from the cages or kennels of the eminent biologist next door. I had a wild hope it might have been meant as some ghastly joke; but I wasn’t taking any risks; I happen to know that sort of anthropoid is no joke. At the best, he might easily bite and then — well, there were all sorts of nightmare notions half-formed in one’s mind.

“There was another side to your biological friend’s interest in pets; vivisection, inoculation, intoxication, drugs — Lord knows what might be mixed up in it. So I shot the brute dead, and I’m afraid I can’t apologize. I threw the body into the river; as you know, it’s a very rapid and rushing river, and, so far as I know, nothing more was ever heard of it. Certainly, Dr. Paul Green did not venture to advertise for it in the papers.”

The solid and deep-chested rustic parson suddenly shuddered from head to foot. The spasm passed and he said, heavily, that it was an awful business.

“And *that* is what I meant,” said Mr. Pond, “by saying how bad it is to hear an old acquaintance accused of a horrible action. It was, also, what I meant by saying that the key to all this riddle is the fact that Dr. Green is lame.”

“Even now,” muttered the vicar, “I’m not so clear what you mean by that.”

“It’s all ugly enough,” answered Pond, “but I suppose we may fairly say that the doctor is, in a rather literal sense, a mad doctor. The point is that I think I know what finally drove him mad. He had a remarkable personality; he was in love with the lady at the Vicarage and had got a good deal of influence there; as Gahagan truly says, he’s really a very fine-looking fellow and, naturally, quite active; only everything was conditioned by the accident that he was lame.

“What put the finishing touch to his madness, on that terrible summer night under the moon, was something that I think one can partly understand, with a little imagination; something not altogether unnatural, if anything ending in such insanity can be anything but unnatural. He heard his rivals boasting about doing the one thing he could not do. First, one of the young men swaggered about having done it — you do swagger, Gahagan, and it’s no good saying you don’t. And the other young man was worse; for he actually sneered at doing it because it was so easy to do when, for Green, it was impossible to do.

“Naturally, a mind like his leapt, as we know it did leap, even in conversation, to the retort that climbing is no great sign of superiority; that a brainless creeper can climb; that an ape can climb better than a man. ‘You have to go very low to find things that go so high.’ Considered as a logical repartee, it was quite a good one. But his mind was not running merely on logic and repartee; he was blind and boiling with jealousy and passion, and he was a little cracked. Let’s hope he only meant to make a sort of demonstration; but, anyhow, that was what he was trying to demonstrate.”

Mr. Little, the lawyer, still turned a flinty face to the company; he had obviously taken a dislike to Gahagan, who had a way of irritating legal and law-abiding persons.

“I do not know if we are required to accept this extraordinary story, on the strength of Mr. Pond’s ingenious hypothesis,” he said rather sharply; “but there is one more question I should like to ask.”

He looked down at his papers, as if consulting them, and then looked up again, saying, still more sharply, in the style he had learnt from cross-examinations: “Is it not true, Captain Gahagan, that you are rather famous for telling remarkable stories? I have it in my notes that you once delighted the company by saying you had seen six great sea-serpents, each swallowing the last. You reported a remarkable little incident of a giant who was buried up to the eyebrows in Muswell Hill; and you are supposed to have given a very vivid description of a water-spout frozen all the way up to the sky. Your interesting account of the discovery of the ruins of the Tower of Babel—”

Sir Hubert Wotton, with all his apparent simplicity, had a quality of sense that sometimes struck like a sledge-hammer. He had preserved the silence of perfect impartiality throughout; but he suddenly stopped the last splutter of the solicitor’s spitefulness, as if he had struck him physically dumb.

“I cannot have all this,” he said. “We know Gahagan; and his yarns are all nonsense, and your trying to turn them against him is worse nonsense. So long as you had a serious charge to bring, we gave you every opportunity to prove it. If you are going to talk about things that nobody alive ever took seriously, least of all Gahagan, I rule them out.”

“Very well,” snapped Mr. Little, “my last question shall be a very practical one. If Captain Gahagan only did what he says he did, why the devil didn’t he say so? Why did he disappear? Why did he do a bolt early next morning?”

Peter Gahagan lifted his large figure laboriously out of the seat; he did not even look at the lawyer; but his eyes were fixed on the old clergyman, with a profound expression of sorrow.

“There is an answer to that,” he said. “But I would much rather give it to anybody except Mr. Whiteways.”

And, strangely enough perhaps, the moment Mr. Whiteways heard this refusal he rose also and held out his hand to Gahagan.

“I believe you,” he said. “It’s just that last sentence that has made me believe you.”

The scornful solicitor, being thus deserted by his own client, stuffed his papers back into his little black bag; and the irregular conference broke up.

Gahagan did tell the truth about the last question afterwards, to the person to whom he told everything, to Joan Varney, to whom he was engaged. And, queer as it sounded, she seemed to understand.

"If you like to put it so," he said, "I didn't run away from the police; I ran away from the girl. And I know it sounds mad; but I really felt at the moment I was doing my best for her, in a beastly situation and among a lot of beastly alternatives. I knew by next morning that the vicar was saying he had seen me commit murder. Suppose I contradicted it — well, to begin with, she would have to know that her old friend, the friend of her pets, was a horrible lunatic who had offered her a sort of disgusting insult at the best.

"But it wasn't only that. I had behaved as badly as anybody; I was in a shamefully false position; and, if I remained, there was nothing before us but crawling through all that mire of miserable explanation and hopeless remorse, in which it is hard to say whether the man or the woman has the worst of it. And then a queer thought came to me — a secret, almost subconscious thought; but I couldn't get rid of the notion. Suppose she went on thinking, and remembered afterwards, in calmer times, that one man had killed another for her. She would be horrified; but she would not be humiliated. A mad whisper kept on repeating to me that in the long run she would be — a little proud."

"I think you're right about her," said Joan, in her straight way. "But, all the same, you ought to have told her the truth."

"Joan," he said, "I simply hadn't the courage."

"I know," she said. "I also know all about your having the D.S.O.; and I've seen you, myself, jump a chasm it made me sick to look at. But that's what's the matter with all you fine, fighting gentlemen." Her head lifted very slightly. "You haven't the courage."

A TALL STORY

They had been discussing the new troubles in Germany: the three old friends, Sir Hubert Wotton, the famous official; Mr. Pond, the obscure official; and Captain Gahagan, who never did a stroke of work in the way of putting pen to paper, but liked making up the most fantastic stories on the spur of the moment. On this occasion, however, the group was increased to four; for Gahagan's wife was present, a candid-looking young woman with light-brown hair and dark-brown eyes. They had only just recently been married; and the presence of Joan Gahagan still stimulated the Captain to rather excessive flights of showing-off.

Captain Gahagan looked like a Regency buck; Mr. Pond looked like a round-eyed fish, with the beard and brow of Socrates; Sir Hubert Wotton looked like Sir Hubert Wotton — it summed up a very sound and virile quality in him, for which his friends had a great respect.

"It's an infernal shame," Wotton was saying, "the way these fellows have treated the Jews: perfectly decent and harmless Jews, who were no more Communists than I am; little men who'd worked their way up by merit and industry, all kicked out of their posts without a penny of compensation. Surely you agree with that, Gahagan?"

"Of course I do," replied Gahagan. "I never kicked a Jew. I can distinctly remember three and a half occasions on which I definitely refrained from doing so. As for all those hundreds and thousands of poor little fiddlers and actors and chess-players, I think it was a damned shame that they should be kicked out or kicked at all. But I fancy they must be kicking themselves, for having been so faithful to Germany and even, everywhere else, pretty generally pro-German."

"Even that can be exaggerated," said Mr. Pond. "Do you remember the case of Carl Schiller, that happened during the War? It was all kept rather quiet, as I have reason to know; for the thing happened, in some sense, in my department. I have generally found spy stories the dullest of all forms of detective fiction; in my own modest researches into the light literature of murder, I invariably avoid them. But this story really did have an unexpected and rather astonishing ending. Of course, you know that in wartime the official dealing with these things is very much exposed to amateurs, as the Duke of Wellington was exposed to authors. We persecuted the spies; and the spy-maniacs persecuted us. They were always coming to us to say they had seen certain persons who looked like spies. We vainly assured them that spies do not look like spies. As a matter of fact, the enemy was pretty ingenious in keeping the really suspicious character just out of sight; sometimes by his being ordinary; sometimes actually by his being extraordinary; one would be too small to be noticed, another too tall to be seen; one was apparently paralysed in a hospital and got out of the window at night—"

Joan looked across at him with a troubled expression in her honest brown eyes.

"Please, Mr. Pond, do tell us what you mean by a man being too tall to be seen."

Gahagan's spirits, already high, soared into laughter and light improvisation.

"These things do happen, my dear girl," he said. "I can throw out a thousand instances that would meet the case. Take, for example, the case of my unfortunate friends the Balham-Browns who lived at Muswell Hill. Mr. Balham-Brown had just come home from the office (of the Imperial and International Lead-Piping Company) and was exercising the lawn-mower in the usual manner, when he noticed in the grass a growth not green but reddish-brown and resembling animal hair; nay, even human hair. My friend Mr. Pond, whose private collection of Giant Whiskers is unrivalled (except, of course, by the unique collection of Sir Samuel Snodd), was able to identify it with the long hair of the Anakin; and judged by its vigour, the son of Anak was buried but still alive. With the spitefulness of the scientific world, Professor Pooter countered with the theory that Jupiter buried the Titans, one under Etna, another under Ossa, and a third under Muswell Hill. Anyhow, the villa of my ill-fated friends the Balham-Browns was ruined, and the whole suburb overturned as by an earthquake, in order to excavate the monster. When his head alone emerged, it was like a colossal sphinx; and Mrs. Balham-Brown complained to the authorities that the face frightened her, because it was too large. Mr. Pond, who happened to be passing at the moment, immediately produced a paradox (of which he always carries a small supply) and said that, on the contrary, they would soon find that the face was too small. To cut a long story short—"

"Or a tall story shorter," said Joan in a trenchant manner.

"When the Titan was extricated, he was so tall that by the common converging laws of perspective, his head in the remote sky was a mere dot. It was impossible to discern or recall one feature of that old familiar face. He strode away; and fortunately decided to walk across the Atlantic, where even he was apparently submerged. It is believed that the unfortunate creature was going to give lectures in America; driven by that mysterious instinct which leads any person who is notorious for any reason to adopt that course."

"Well, have you done?" demanded Joan. "We know all about you and your yarns; and they don't mean anything. But when Mr. Pond says that somebody was too tall to be seen, he does mean something. And what can he possibly mean?"

"Well," said Mr. Pond, coughing slightly, "it was really a part of the story to which I was alluding just now. I did not notice anything odd about the expression when I used it; but I recognize, on second thought, that it is, perhaps, a phrase requiring explanation." And he proceeded, in his slightly pedantic way, to narrate the story which is now retold here.

It all happened in a fashionable watering-place, which was also a famous seaport, and, therefore, naturally a place of concentration for all the vigilance against spies, whether official or amateur. Sir Hubert Wotton was in general charge of the district, but Mr. Pond was in more practical though private occupation of the town, watching events from a narrow house in a back street, an upper room of which had been unobtrusively turned into an office; and he had two assistants under him; a sturdy and very silent young man named Butt, bull-necked and broad-shouldered, but quite short; and a much taller and more talkative and elegant government-office clerk named Travers, but referred to by nearly everybody as Arthur. The stalwart Butt commonly occupied a desk on the ground floor, watching the door and anyone who entered it; while Arthur Travers worked in the office upstairs, where there were some very valuable State papers, including the only plan of the mines in the harbour.

Mr. Pond himself always spent several hours in the office, but he had more occasion than the others to pay visits in the town, and had a general grasp of the neighbourhood. It was a very shabby neighbourhood; indeed, it consisted of a few genteel, old-fashioned houses, now mostly shuttered and empty, standing on the very edge of a sort of slum of small houses, at that time riddled with what is called Unrest in a degree very dangerous, especially in time of war. Immediately outside his door, he found but few things that could be called features in that featureless street; but there was an old curiosity shop opposite, with a display of ancient Asiatic weapons; and there was Mrs. Hartog-Haggard next door, more alarming than all the weapons of the world.

Mrs. Hartog-Haggard was one of those persons, to be found here and there, who look like the conventional caricature of the spinster, though they are in fact excellent mothers of families. Rather in the same way, she looked very like the sort of lady who is horribly in earnest at Pacifist meetings; yet, as a matter of fact, she was passionately patriotic, not to say militaristic. And, indeed, it is often true that those two extremes lend themselves to the same sort of fluent fanaticism. Poor Mr. Pond had reason to remember the woeful day when he first saw her angular and agitated figure darkening his doorway as she entered out of the street, peering suspiciously through her curious square spectacles. There was apparently some slight delay about her entrance; some repairs were being done to the porch and some loose board or pole was not removed sufficiently promptly from her path: was, in fact, as she declared, removed reluctantly and in a grumbling spirit by the workmen employed on the job; and by the time she had reached the responsible official, a theory had fully formed and hardened in her mind.

“That man is a *Socialist,* Mr. Pond,” she declared in the ear of that unfortunate functionary. “I heard him with my own ears mutter something about what his Trade Union would say. What is he doing so near to your office?”

“We must distinguish,” said Mr. Pond. “A Trade Unionist, even a militant Trade Unionist, is not necessarily a Socialist; a Socialist is not necessarily a Pacifist, still less a Pro-German. In my opinion, the chief S.D.F. men are the most extreme Marxians in England; and they are all out for the Allies. One of the Dock Strike leaders is in a mood to make recruiting speeches all over the Empire.”

“I’m sure he’s not English; he doesn’t look a bit English,” said the lady, still thinking of her wicked proletarian without.

“Thank you, Mrs. Hartog-Haggard,” said Pond, patiently. “I will certainly make a note of your warning and see that inquiries are made about it.”

And so he did, with the laborious precision of one who could not leave any loophole unguarded. Certainly the man did not look very English; though perhaps rather Scandinavian than German. His name was Peterson: it was possible that it was really Petersen. But that was not all. Mr. Pond had learned the last lesson of the wise man: that the fool is sometimes right.

He soon forgot the incident in the details of his work; and next day it was with a start that he looked up from his desk, or rather from Mr. Butt's desk which he was using at the moment, and saw once again the patriotic lady hovering like an avenging shadow in the doorway. This time she glided swiftly in, unchecked by any Socialist barricade, and warned him that she had news of the most terrible kind. She seemed to have forgotten all about her last suspicions; and, in truth, her new ones were naturally more important to her. This time she had warmed the viper on her own hearth. She had suddenly become conscious of the existence of her own German governess, whom she had never especially noticed before. Pond himself had noticed the alien in question with rather more attention; he had seen her, a dumpy lady with pale hair, returning with Mrs. Hartog-Haggard's three little girls and one little boy from the pantomime of Puss-in-Boots that was being performed on the pier. He had even heard her instructing her charges, and saying something educational about a folk-tale; and had smiled faintly at that touch of Teutonic pedantry that talks about a folk-tale when we would talk about a fairy-tale. But he knew a good deal about the lady; and saw no reason to move in the matter.

"She shuts herself up for hours in her room and won't come out," Mrs. Hartog-Haggard was already breathing hoarsely in his ear. "Do you think she is signalling, or does she climb down the fire-escape? What do you think it means, Mr. Pond?"

"Hysterics," said Mr. Pond. "What, do you think the poor lady cannot be hysterical, because she does not scream the house down? But any doctor will tell you that hysteria is mostly secretive and silent. And there really is a vein of hysteria in a great many of the Germans; it is at the very opposite extreme to the external excitability of the Latins. No, madam, I do not think she is climbing down the fire-escape. I think she is saying that her pupils do not love her, and thinking about *weltschmerz* and suicide. And really, poor woman, she is in a very hard position."

"She won't come to family prayers," continued the patriotic matron, not to be turned from her course, "because we pray for a British victory."

"You had better pray," said Mr. Pond, "for all the unhappy Englishwomen stranded in Germany by poverty or duty or dependence. If she loves her native land, it only shows she is a human being. If she expresses it by ostentatious absences or sulks or banging doors, that may show she is too much of a German. It also shows she is not much of a German spy."

Here again, however, Mr. Pond was careful not to ignore or entirely despise the warning; he kept an eye on the German governess, and even engaged that learned lady in talk upon some trivial pretext — if anything she touched could remain trivial.

"Your study of our national drama," he said gravely, "must sometimes recall to you the greatest and noblest work that ever came out of Germany."

"You refer to Goethe's *Faust*, I presume," she replied.

"I refer to Grimm's Fairy-Tales," said Mr. Pond. "I fear I have forgotten for the moment whether the story we call *Puss-in-Boots* exists in Grimm's collection in the same form; but I am pretty certain there is some variant of it. It always seems to me about the best story in the world."

The German governess obliged him with a short lecture on the parallelism of folk-lore; and Pond could not help feeling faintly amused at the idea of this ethnological and scientific treatment of a folk-tale which had just been presented on the pier by Miss Patsy Pickles, in lights and various other embellishments, supported by that world-famed comedian who called himself Alberto Tizzi and was born in the Blackfriars Road.

When he returned to his office at twilight, and, turning, beheld the figure of Mrs. Hartog-Haggard again hovering without, Mr. Pond began to think he was in a nightmare. He wondered wildly whether she had drawn some dark conclusions from his own meeting with the Teutonic teacher of youth. Perhaps he, Mr. Pond, was a German spy, too. But he ought to have known his neighbour better; for when Mrs. Hartog-Haggard spoke she had once again forgotten, for the moment, her last cause of complaint. But she was more excited than ever; she ducked under the frame of scaffolding and darted into the room, crying out as she came:

"Mr. Pond, do you know what is right opposite your own house?"

"Well, I think so," said Mr. Pond, doubtfully, "more or less."

"I never read the name over the shop before!" cried the lady. "You know it is all dark and dirty and obliterated — that curiosity shop, I mean; with all the spears and daggers. Think of the impudence of the man! He's actually written up his name there: 'C. Schiller.'"

"He's written up C. Schiller; I'm not so sure he's written up his name," said Mr. Pond.

"Do you mean," she cried, "that you actually know he goes by two names? Why, that makes it worse than ever!"

"Well," said Mr. Pond, rising suddenly, and with a curtness that cut all his own courtesy, "I'll see what I can do about it."

And for the third time did Mr. Pond take some steps to verify the Hartog-Haggard revelations. He took the ten or twelve steps necessary to take him across the road and into the shop of C. Schiller, amid all the shining sabres and yataghans. It was a very peaceable-looking person who waited behind all this array of arms; not to say a rather smooth and sleek one; and Pond, leaning across the counter, addressed him in a low and confidential voice.

"Why the dickens do you people do it? It will be more than half your own fault if there's a row of some kind and a Jingo mob comes here and breaks your windows for your absurd German name. I know very well this is no quarrel of yours. I am well aware," Mr. Pond continued with an earnest gaze, "that you never invaded Belgium. I am fully conscious that your national tastes do not lie in that direction. I know you had nothing to do with burning the Louvain Library or sinking the *Lusitania.* Then why the devil can't you say so? Why can't you call yourself Levy, like your fathers before you — your fathers who go back to the most ancient priesthood of the world? And you'll get into trouble with the Germans, too, some day, if you go about calling yourself Schiller. You might as well go and live in Stratford-on-Avon and call yourself Shakespeare."

"There'th a lot of prejudith againth my rathe," said the warden of the armoury.

"There'll be a lot more, unless you take my advice," said Mr. Pond with unusual brevity; and left the shop to return to the office.

The square figure of Mr. Butt, who was sitting at the desk looking towards the doorway, rose at his entrance; but Pond waved him to his seat again and, lighting a cigarette, began to moon about the room in a rather moody fashion. He did not believe that there was anything very much in any of the three avenues of suspicion that had been opened to him; though he owned that there were indirect possibilities about the last. Mr. Levy was certainly not a German; and it was very improbable that he was a real enthusiast for Germany; but it was not altogether impossible to suppose, in the tangle and distraction of all the modern international muddle, that he might be some sort of tool, conscious or unconscious, of a real German conspiracy. So long as that was possible, he must be watched. Mr. Pond was very glad that Mr. Levy lived in the shop exactly opposite.

Indeed, he found himself gazing across the street in the gathering dusk with feelings which he found it hard to analyse. He could still see the shop, with its pattern of queer, archaic weapons, through the frame of the last few poles left in the low scaffolding round the porch; for the workmen's business had been entirely limited to the porch itself and the props were mostly cleared away, the work being practically over; but there was just enough suggestion of a cluster or network of lines to confuse the prospect at that very confusing turn of the twilight. Once he fancied he saw something flicker behind them, as if a shadow had shifted; and there arose within him the terror of Mrs. Hartog-Haggard, which is the terror of boredom and a sort of paralysed impatience, one of the worst of the woes of life.

Then he saw that the shifting shadow must have been produced by the fact that the lights had been turned up in the shop opposite; and he saw again, and now much more clearly, the queer outline of all those alien Asiatic weapons, the crooked darts and monstrous missiles, the swords with a horrid resemblance to hooks or the blades that bent back and forth like snakes of iron. . . . He became dreamily conscious of the chasm between Christendom and that great other half of human civilization; so dreamily that he hardly knew which was a torture implement and which was a tool. Whether the thought was mingled with his own belief that he was fighting a barbarism at heart as hostile, or whether he had caught a whiff of the strange smell of the East from that apparently harmless human accident who kept the shop, he could hardly be certain himself; but he felt the peculiar oppression of his work as he had never felt it before.

Then he shook himself awake, telling himself sharply that his business was working and not worrying about the atmosphere of the work; and that he should be ashamed to idle when his two subordinates were still busy, Butt behind him, and Travers in the office above. He was all the more surprised, when he turned sharply around, to find that Butt was not working at all; but, like himself, was staring, not to say glaring, as in a congested mystification, into the twilight. Butt was commonly the most calm and prosaic of subordinates; but the look on his face was quite enough to prove that something was really the matter.

"Is anything bothering you?" asked Pond, in a gentle voice which people found very encouraging.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Butt. "I'm bothering about whether I'm going to be a beast or not. It's a beastly caddish thing to say a word, or hint a word, against your comrades or anybody connected with them. But after all — well, sir, there is the country, isn't there?"

"There is certainly the country," said Mr. Pond, very seriously.

"Well," Butt blurted out at last, "I'm not a bit comfortable about Arthur."

Then, after a sort of gasp, he tried again: "At least, it isn't so much Arthur as Arthur's . . . what Arthur's doing. It makes it all the nastier to have put it like that. But you know he got engaged last week. Have you met his fiancée, sir?"

"I have not yet had the honour," replied Pond, in his punctilious way.

"Well, sir, Arthur brought her in here to-day while you were out; he'd just taken her to the pantomime of Puss-in-Boots on the pier, and they were laughing like anything. Of course, that's quite all right; it was his off time; but it seemed to me it wasn't quite all right that she walked straight upstairs without any invitation, even from him, to the private office where we don't allow visitors to go. Of course, that's about the only possible case where I could hardly prevent it. In the ordinary way, we're perfectly safe; I mean the documents are perfectly safe. There's only one door, and you or I are always sitting bang in front of it; and there's only one staircase, and nobody uses it but we three. Of course, she might have done it in all innocence; that's what made it seem quite too ghastly to snub her. And yet. . . . Well, she's a very nice-looking girl, and no doubt a very nice girl; but somehow that's just the one word that wouldn't jump to my mind about her — innocence."

"Why, what sort of a girl is she?" asked Pond.

"Well," said Mr. Butt, gloomily seeking words, "we all know that making-up and even dyeing your hair doesn't mean what it once did; lots of women do it who are perfectly decent; but not those who are — well, utterly inexperienced. It seemed to me that, while she might be perfectly honest, she *would* know very decidedly whether a thing is done or not."

"If she is engaged to him," said Pond, with a rather unusual severity, "she must know that he is here on highly confidential work, and she must be as anxious to protect his honour as we are. I'm afraid that I shall have to ask you for some sort of description."

"Well," said Butt, "she's very tall and elegant, or . . . no, elegant is exactly the word. She has beautiful golden hair — very beautiful golden hair — and very beautiful long dark eyes that make it look rather like a gilded wig. She has high cheekbones, not in the way that Scotch girls have, but somehow as if it were part of the shape of the skull; and though she's not at all long in the tooth, in any sense, her teeth are just a little to the fore."

"Did he meet her in Besançon, near Belfort?"

"Pretty rum you should say that," said Butt, miserably; "because he did."

Mr. Pond received the news in silence.

"I hope, sir, you won't assume anything against Arthur," said Butt, huskily. "I'm sure I'd do anything to clear him of any—"

As he spoke, the ceiling above them shook with a thud like thunder; then there was a sound of scampering feet; and then utter stillness. No one acquainted with Mr. Pond's usual process of ambulation could have believed that he flew up the staircase as he did just then.

They flung open the door, and they saw all that was to be seen. All that was to be seen was Arthur Travers stretched out face downwards on the ground, and between his shoulder-blades stood out the very long hilt of a very strange-looking sword. Butt impetuously laid hold of it, and was startled to find that it was sunk so deep in the corpse and the carpeted floor that he could not have plucked it out without the most violent muscular effort. Pond had already touched the wrist and felt the rigidity of the muscles and he waved his subordinate away.

"I am sorry to say that our friend is certainly dead," he said steadily. "In that case, you had better not touch things till they can be properly examined." Then, looking at Butt very solemnly, he added:

"You said you would do anything to clear him. One thing is certain: that he is quite cleared."

Pond then walked in silence to the desk, which contained the secret drawer and the secret plan of the harbour. He only compressed his lips when he saw that the drawer was empty.

Pond walked to the telephone and issued orders to about six different people. He did about twenty things, but he did not speak again for about three-quarters of an hour. It was only about the same time that the stunned and bewildered Butt stumbled into speech.

"I simply can't make head or tail of anything. That woman had gone; and, besides, no woman could have nailed him to the floor like that."

"And with such an extraordinary nail," said Pond, and was silent once more.

And indeed the riddle revolved more and more on the one thing that thief and murderer had left behind him: the enormous misshapen weapon. It was not difficult to guess why he had left it behind; it was so difficult to tug out of the floor that he probably had no time to try effectually, hearing Pond clattering up the stairs; he thought it wiser to escape somehow, presumably through the window. But about the nature of the thing itself it was hard to say anything, for it seemed quite abnormal. It was as long as a claymore; yet it was not upon the pattern of any known sword. It had no guard or pommel of any kind. The hilt was as long as the blade; the blade was twice as broad as the hilt; at least, at its base, whence it tapered to a point in a sort of right-angled triangle, only the outer edge or hypotenuse being sharpened. Pond gazed musingly at this uncouth weapon, which was made very rudely of iron and wood painted with garish colours; and his thoughts crept slowly back to that shop across the road that was hung with strange and savage weapons. Yet this seemed to be in a somewhat cruder and gaudier style. Mr. Schiller-Levy naturally denied all knowledge of it, which he would presumably have done in any case; but what was much more cogent, all the real authorities on such barbaric or Oriental arms said that they had never seen such a thing before.

Touching many other things, the darkness began to thin away to a somewhat dreary dawn. It was ascertained that poor Arthur's equivocal fiancée had indeed fled; very possibly in company with the missing plan. She was known by this time to be a woman quite capable of stealing a document or even stabbing a man. But it was doubtful whether any woman was capable of stabbing a man, with that huge and heavy and clumsy instrument, so as to fix him to the floor; and quite impossible to imagine why she should select it for the purpose.

"It would all be as clear as death," said Mr. Butt, bitterly, "except for that lumbering, long-hilted short-sword, or whatever it is. It never was in Levy's shop. It never was in Asia or Africa or any of the tribes the learned jossers tell us about. It's the real remaining mystery of the whole thing."

Mr. Pond seemed to be waking up slowly from a trance of hours or days.

"Oh, *that,*" he said, "that's the only thing about it I'm really beginning to understand."

It has been hinted, with every delicacy, we may hope, that the attitude of Mr. Pond towards the visits of Mrs. Hartog-Haggard was, perhaps, rather passive than receptive; that he did not look forward to them as pants the hart for cooling streams; and that for him they rather resembled getting into hot water. It is all the more worthy of record that, on the last occasion of her bringing him a new tale of woe, he actually leapt to his feet with an air of excitement and even of triumph. He had been right in his premonitions about the wisdom of folly; and the triumph was truly the triumph of the fool. Mrs. Hartog-Haggard gave him the clue after all.

She darted in under the scaffolding by the doorway, the same dark and almost antic figure. Full of the Cause, she was utterly oblivious of such trifles as the murder of his friend. She had now reverted to her original disapproval of her own governess. She had altered nothing, except all her reasons for disapproving of her governess. On the former occasion she had appeared to claim the fairy-tale used for pantomimes as exclusively English and part of the healthy innocence of the stately homes of England. Now she was denouncing the German woman for taking the children to the pantomime at all; regarding it as a ruse for filling them with the gruesome tales of Grimm and the terrors of the barbaric forest.

"They're *sent* to do that," she repeated in the fierce, confidential voice she used in such cases. "They're sent here to undermine all our children's nerves and minds. Could any other nation be such fiends, Mr. Pond? She's been poisoning their poor little minds with horrors about magicians and magic cats; and now the worst has happened, as I knew it would. Well — *you* haven't done anything to stop it; and my life is simply ruined. My three girls are all twittering with terror; and my boy is mad."

The symptoms of Mr. Pond were still mainly those of fatigue; and she rapped out a repetition.

"He is *mad*, I tell you, Mr. Pond; he is actually *seeing* things out of those horrible German fairy-tales; says he saw a giant with a great knife walking through the town by moonlight . . . a *giant,* Mr. Pond."

Mr. Pond staggered to his feet and for once really goggled and gulped like a fish. Mrs. Hartog-Haggard watched him with wild eyes, intermittently exclaiming: "Have you no word of consolation for a mother?"

Mr. Pond abruptly controlled himself and managed to recapture, at least, a hazy courtesy.

"Yes, madam," he said. "I have the best possible consolation for a mother. Your son is not mad."

He looked more judicial, and even severe, when he next sat in consultation with Mr. Butt, Sir Hubert Wotton, and Inspector Grote, the leading detective of the district.

"What it comes to is this," said Mr. Pond, very sternly: "that you do not really know the story of Puss-in-Boots. And they talk about this as an epoch of Education."

"Oh, I know it's about a clever cat and all the rest of it," said Butt, vaguely. "A cat that helps its master to get things—"

The Inspector smote his knee with a smack that rang through the office.

"A cat burglar!" he cried. "So that's what you mean. I fancied at first there was something wrong about that bit of scaffolding round the door; but I soon saw it was far too low and small for anybody to climb up to the window by it. But, of course, if we're talking about a really clever cat burglar, there's always some chance that—"

"Pardon me," said Mr. Pond, "does a cat burglar, or for that matter any burglar, any more than any cat, load himself with a gigantic knife rather bigger than a garden spade? Nobody carries a gigantic knife except a giant. This crime was committed by a giant."

They all stared at him; but he resumed with the same air of frigid rebuke:

"What I remark upon, what I regret and regard as symptomatic of serious intellectual decay, is that you apparently do not know that the story of Puss-in-Boots includes a giant. He is also a magician; but he is always depicted, in pictures and pantomimes, as an ogre with a large knife. Signor Alberto Tizzi, that somewhat dubious foreign artist, enacts the part on the pier by the usual expedient of walking on very high stilts, covered by very long trousers. But he sometimes walks about on the stilts and dispenses with the trousers; taking a walk through the almost entirely deserted streets at night. Just round here, especially, the chances are against his being even seen; all the big houses are shut up, except ours and Mrs. Hartog-Haggard's, which only looks on the street through a landing window; through which her little boy (probably in his nightgown) peered and beheld a real ogre, with a great gory knife, and, perhaps, a great grinning mask, walking majestically under the moon — rather a fine sight to put among the memories of childhood.

For the rest, all the poor houses are low houses of one storey; and the people would see nothing but his legs, or rather his stilts, even if they did look out; and they probably didn't. The really native poor, in these seaport towns, have country habits; and generally go to bed early. But it wouldn't really have been fatal to his plans even if he had been seen. He was a recognized public entertainer, dressed in his recognized part; and there is nothing illegal in walking about on stilts. The really clever part of it was the trick by which he could leave the stilts standing, and climb out of them on to any ledge or roof or other upper level. So he left them standing outside our doorway, among the poles of the little scaffolding, while he climbed in at the upper window and killed poor Travers."

"If you are sure of this," cried Sir Hubert Wotton, starting to his feet hastily, "you ought to act on it at once!"

"I did act on it at once," replied Pond, with a slight sigh. "This morning two or three clowns with white faces were going about on stilts on the beach, distributing leaflets of the pantomime. One of them was arrested and found to be Signor Tizzi. He was also found, I am glad to say, to be still in possession of the plans." But he sighed again.

"For after all," as Mr. Pond observed, in telling the tale long after, "though we did manage to save the secret plans, the incident was much more of a tragedy than a triumph. And what I most intensely disliked about the tragedy was the irony — what I believe is called the tragic irony, or, alternatively, the Greek irony. We felt perfectly certain we were guarding the only entrance to the office, because we sat staring at the street between two little clusters of sticks, which we knew were a temporary part of the furniture. We didn't count the sticks; we didn't know when there happened to be two more wooden poles standing up among the other wooden poles. We certainly had no notion of what was on top of those two poles; nor would our fancy have easily entertained the idea that it was a pantomime giant. We ought to have seen him — only," said Mr. Pond, ending, as he had begun, with an apologetic little laugh, "he was too tall to be seen."

DAYLIGHT AND NIGHTMARE

This book of uncollected short fiction was published as late as 1986 and contains thirty-two short stories.

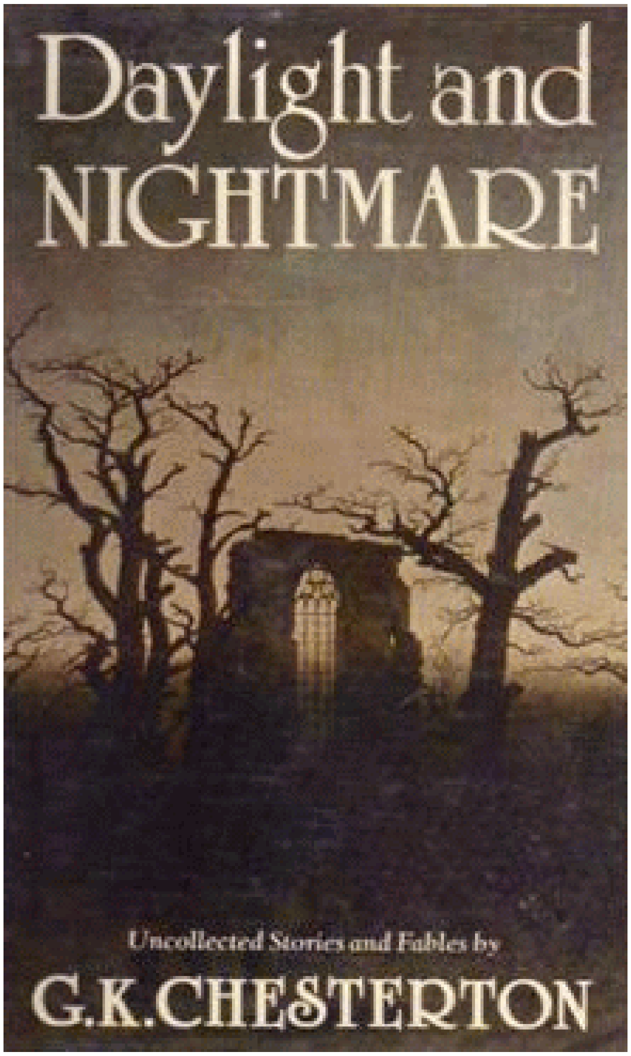
Daylight and NIGHTMARE
Uncollected Stories and Fables by
G.K. CHESTERTON

The first edition

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INTRODUCTORY

On Gargoyles

Alone at some distance from the wasting walls of a disused abbey I found half sunken in the grass the grey and goggle-eyed visage of one of those graven monsters that made the ornamental water-spouts in the cathedrals of the Middle Ages. It lay there, scoured by ancient rains or striped by recent fungus, but still looking like the head of some huge dragon slain by a primeval hero. And as I looked at it, I thought of the meaning of the grotesque, and passed into some symbolic reverie of the three great stages of art.

I

Once upon a time there lived upon an island a merry and innocent people, mostly shepherds and tillers of the earth. They were republicans, like all primitive and simple souls; they talked over their affairs under a tree, and the nearest approach they had to a personal ruler was a sort of priest or white witch who said their prayers for them. They worshipped the sun, not idolatrously, but as the golden crown of the god whom all such infants see almost as plainly as the sun.

Now this priest was told by his people to build a great tower, pointing to the sky in salutation of the Sun-god; and he pondered long and heavily before he picked his materials. For he was resolved to use nothing that was not almost as clear and exquisite as sunshine itself; he would use nothing that was not washed as white as the rain can wash the heavens, nothing that did not sparkle as spotlessly as that crown of God. He would have nothing grotesque or obscure; he would not have even anything emphatic or even anything mysterious. He would have all the arches as light as laughter and as candid as logic. He built the temple in three concentric courts, which were cooler and more exquisite in substance each than the other. For the outer wall was a hedge of white lilies, ranked so thick that a green stalk was hardly to be seen; and the wall within that was of crystal, which smashed the sun into a million stars. And the wall within that, which was the tower itself, was a tower of pure water, forced up in an everlasting fountain; and upon the very tip and crest of that foaming spire was one big and blazing diamond, which the water tossed up eternally and caught again as a child catches a ball.

“Now”, said the priest, “I have made a tower which is a little worthy of the sun.”

II

But about this time the island was caught in a swarm of pirates; and the shepherds had to turn themselves into rude warriors and seamen; and at first they were utterly broken down in blood and shame; and the pirates might have taken the jewel flung up for ever from their sacred fount. And then, after years of horror and humiliation, they gained a little and began to conquer because they did not mind defeat. And the pride of the pirates went sick within them after a few unexpected foils; and at last the invasion rolled back into the empty seas and the island was delivered. And for some reason after this men began to talk quite differently about the temple and the sun. Some, indeed, said, “You must not touch the temple; it is classical; it is perfect, since it admits no imperfections.” But the others answered, “In that it differs from the sun, that shines on the evil and the good and on mud and monsters everywhere. The temple is of the noon; it is made of white marble clouds and sapphire sky. But the sun is not always of the noon. The sun dies daily; every night he is crucified in blood and fire.”

Now the priest had taught and fought through all the war, and his hair had grown white, but his eyes had grown young. And he said, “I was wrong and they are right. The sun, the symbol of our father, gives life to all those earthly things that are full of ugliness and energy. All the exaggerations are right, if they exaggerate the right thing. Let us point to heaven with tusks and horns and fins and trunks and tails so long as they all point to heaven. The ugly animals praise God as much as the beautiful. The frog’s eyes stand out of his head because he is staring at heaven. The giraffe’s neck is long because he is stretching towards heaven. The donkey has ears to hear — let him hear.”

And under the new inspiration they planned a gorgeous cathedral in the Gothic manner, with all the animals of the earth crawling over it, and all the possible ugly things making up one common beauty, because they all appealed to the god. The columns of the temple were carved like the necks of giraffes; the dome was like an ugly tortoise; and the highest pinnacle was a monkey standing on his head and his tail pointing at the sun. And yet the whole was beautiful, because it was lifted up in one living and religious gesture as a man lifts his hands in prayer.

III.

But this great plan was never properly completed. The people had brought up on great wagons the heavy tortoise roof and the huge necks of stone, and all the thousand and one oddities that made up that unity, the owls and the efts and the crocodiles and the kangaroos, which hideous by themselves might have been magnificent if reared in one definite proportion and dedicated to the sun. For this was Gothic, this was romantic, this was Christian art; this was the whole advance of Shakespeare upon Sophocles. And that symbol which was to crown it all, the ape upside down, was really Christian; for man is the ape upside down.

But the rich, who had grown riotous in the long peace, obstructed the thing, and in some squabble a stone struck the priest on the head and he lost his memory. He saw piled in front of him frogs and elephants, monkeys and giraffes, toadstools and sharks, all the ugly things of the universe which he had collected to do honour to God. But he forgot why he had collected them. He could not remember the design or the object. He piled them all wildly into one heap fifty feet high; and when he had done it all the rich and influential went into a passion of applause and cried, “This is real art! This is Realism!

This is things as they really are!”

* * *

That, I fancy, is the only true origin of Realism. Realism is simply Romanticism that has lost its reason. This is so not merely in the sense of insanity but of suicide. It has lost its reason; that is its reason for existing. The old Greeks summoned godlike things to worship their god. The mediaeval Christians summoned all things to worship theirs, dwarfs and pelicans, monkeys and madmen. The modern realists summon all these million creatures to worship their god; and then have no god for them to worship. Paganism was in art a pure beauty; that was the dawn. Christianity was a beauty created by controlling a million monsters of ugliness; and that in my belief was the zenith and the noon. Modern art and science practically mean having the million monsters and being unable to control them; and I will venture to call that the disruption and the decay. The finest lengths of the Elgin marbles consist of splendid horses going to the temple of a virgin. Christianity, with its gargoyles and grotesques, really amounted to saying this: that a donkey could go before all the horses of the world when it was really going to the temple. Romance means a holy donkey going to the temple. Realism means a lost donkey going nowhere.

The fragments of futile journalism or fleeting impression which are here collected are very like the wrecks and riven blocks that were piled in a heap round my imaginary priest of the sun. They are very like that grey and gaping head of stone that I found overgrown with the grass. Yet I will venture to make even of these trivial fragments the high boast that I am a mediaevalist and not a modern. That is, I really have a notion of why I have collected all the nonsensical things there are. I have not the patience nor perhaps the constructive intelligence to state the connecting link between all these chaotic papers. But it could be stated. This row of shapeless and ungainly monsters which I now set before the reader does not consist of separate idols cut out capriciously in lonely valleys or various islands. These monsters are meant for the gargoyles of a definite cathedral. I have to carve the gargoyles, because I can carve nothing else; I leave to others the angels and the arches and the spires. But I am very sure of the style of the architecture and of the consecration of the church.

A Crazy Tale

“Hey, diddle, diddle,
The cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon.”

It is incredible, but true, that a young man sat opposite me in a restaurant and spoke as is hereafter set down.

He was a tall, spare man, carefully dressed in a formal frock-coat and silk hat. His tone was low and casual, his manner simple and very slow, and his bleak blue eyes never changed. Anyone just out of earshot of the words would have supposed that he was describing, in a rather leisurely way, an opera or a cycling tour. I alone heard the words; and ever since that day I have gone about ready for the Apocalypse, expecting the news of some incalculable revolution in human affairs. For I know that we have reached a new era in the history of our planet: the creation of a second Adam.

He spoke as follows, between the puffs of a cigar:

“I do not ask anyone to believe this story. Only in some wild hour of a windy night, when we could believe anything, when the craziest of a knot of old wives is wiser than all the schools of reason, when the blood is lawless and the brain dethroned, when we could see the windmills grind the wind, and the sea drag the moon, the apple-tree grow lemons, and the cow lay eggs, as in a wild half-holiday of nature; then, in the ear and coarsely, let this tale be told.

“When my story begins, I was walking in a still green place. The words sound strange and abrupt even in my own ears; but there is a reason for their abruptness.

“At that point the record of my life breaks off. The day, hour, or second before some stunning blow, some tremendous event befell me, and I awoke without a memory.

“Of the lost knowledge thus sealed within me I have a kind of halfwitted fear. I move trembling in the close proximity of something huge, yet hidden in the darkness of my brain. Only of two things I am convinced. The first is, that this event, which I cannot recall, was the greatest of my life; that all my after adventures, wild as they were, were dwarfed in its unapproachable presence. The second comes of a certain hour, when suddenly, and for a second, the veil was lifted and I knew all. It had gone in a flash, but I am profoundly convinced that if I tell to another all the circumstances that led up to that instantaneous revelation, to him also, as he studies them, the words will suddenly give up their meaning, and their simplicity strike him with an awful laughter.

“This, then, is the story.

“The greenness, that I walked like one in a dream, stretched away on all sides to the edges of the sky. Sleepily, I let my eyes fall and woke, with a stunning thrill, to clearness. I stood shrunken with the shock, clutching myself in the smallest compass.

“Every inch of the green place was a living thing, a spire or tongue, rooted in the ground for those fantastic armies. The silence deafened me with a sense of busy eating, working, and breeding. I thought of that multitudinous life, and my brain reeled.

“Treading fearfully amid the growing fingers of the earth, I raised my eyes, and at the next moment shut them, as at a blow. High in the empty air blazed and streamed a great fire, which burnt and blinded me every time I raised my eyes to it. I have lived many years under this meteor of a fixed Apocalypse, but I have never survived the feelings of that moment. Men eat and drink, buy and sell, marry, are given in marriage, and all the time there is something in the sky at which they cannot look. They must be very brave.

“Again, a little while after, as in one of the changes in a dream, I found myself looking at something standing in the fields, something which looked at first like a man, and then like two men, and then like two men joined, till, after dizzy turning and tramping round it like the searching of a maze, I found it was some great abortion of nature with two legs at each end, calmly cropping the grass under the staring sun. I have said that I ask no one to believe this story.

“So I travelled along a road of portents, like undeciphered parables. There was no twilight as in a dream; everything was clear cut in the sunlight, standing out in defiant plainness and infantile absurdity. All was in simple colours, like the landscape of a child’s alphabet, but to a child who had not learnt the meaning.

“At one time I seemed to come to the end of the earth; to a place where it fell into space. A little beyond, the land re-commenced, but between the two I looked down into the sky. As I bent over I saw another bending over under me, hanging head downwards in those fallen heavens, a little child with round eyes. It was some strange mercy of God assuredly that the child did not fall far into hopeless eternity."

The young man paused reflectively. I tried to say "a pool," but the words would not come. I seemed to have forgotten it. I seemed to have forgotten everything except his terrible blue eyes, big with unsupportable significance. Then I realised that he was speaking again. "I heard a great noise out of the sky, and I turned and saw a giant. Stories and legends there are of those who, in the morning of the world, strayed also into the borders of the land of giants. But it is impossible for any tongue to utter the overpowering sense of anarchy and portent felt in seeing so much of the landscape moving upon two legs, of looking up and seeing a face like my own, colossal, filling the heavens.

"He lifted me like a flying bird through space and set me upon his shoulder. I shall never forget the sight of his huge bare features growing larger as I came nearer to them; the sun shining on them as they smiled and smiled; a sight to give one dreams."

The young man paused again. I seemed to feel the whole sane universe of custom and experience slipping from me, and with an effort like a drowning man's I cried out desperately. "But it was a man — it was your father."

He raised his eyebrows, as at a coincidence. "So they said," he observed. "Do you know what it means?"

I found myself broken and breathless, as Job might have been, battered with the earthquake question of Omniscience.

He went on, smoking slowly.

"With the giant was a woman. When I saw her something stirred within me like the memory of a previous existence. And after I had lived some little while with them, I began to have an idea of what the truth must be. Instead of killing me, the giant and giantess fed and tended me like servants. I began to understand that in that lost epic of adventures which led up to the greatest event of my life, I must have done some great service for these good people. What it was, I had, by a quaint irony, myself forgotten. But I loved to see it shining with inscrutable affection in the woman's eyes like the secret of the stars. There are few things more beautiful than gratitude.

"One day, as I stood beside her knee, she spoke to me; but I was speechless. A new and dreadful fancy had me by the throat. The woman was smaller than before. The house was smaller: the ceiling was nearer. Heaven and earth, even to the remotest star, were closing in to crush me.

"The next moment I had realised the truth, fled from the house, and plunged into the thickets like a thing possessed. A disease of transformation too monstrous for nightmare had quickened within me. I was growing larger and larger whether I would or no.

"I rolled in the gravel, revolving wild guesses as to whether I should grow to fill the sky, a giant with my head in heaven, bewildered among the golden plumage of Cherubim. This, as a matter of fact, I never did.

"It will always fill me with awe to think that no sign or premonition gave me warning of what I saw next. I merely raised my eyes — and saw it.

"Within a few feet of me was kneeling one of my own size, a little girl with big blue eyes and hair black as crows.

"The landscape behind her was the same in every hedge and tree that I had left; yet I felt sure I had come into a new world.

"I had got to my feet and made her a kind of bow, looking a fantastic figure enough; but a red star came into her cheek.

"'Why, you are quite nice,' she said.

"I looked at her enquiringly.

"'They say you are the mad boy,' she said, 'who stares at everything. But I think I like them mad.'

"I said nothing. I only stood up straight, and thanked God for every turn of my rambling path through that elvish topsey-turveydom, which had led at length to this. Although I had not asked for a miracle in answer, two or three drops of clear water fell out of the open sky.

"'There will be a storm,' cried the girl hastily.

"She seemed quite frightened of the dark that had come over the wood, and the shocks of sound that shook the sky now and again. This fear surprised me, for she had not seemed afraid of the grass.

"She seemed so broken with the noise and dark and driving rain that I put my arm round her. As I did so, something new came over me: a feeling less alien, and disturbed, more responsible and strangely strong; as if I had inherited a trust and privilege. For the first time I felt a kinship with the monstrous landscape; I knew that I had been sent to the right place.

"'You are very brave,' she said, as the deafening skies seemed bowed about us and shouting in our ears; 'Do you not hear it?'

"'I hear the daisies growing,' I said.

"Her answer was lost in the thunder.

"We were miles further on before she said, 'but are you not mad?'

"I spoke; but it seemed as if another spoke in my ear.

"'I am the first that ever saw in the world. Prophets and sages there have been, out of whose great hearts came schools and churches. But I am the first that ever saw a dandelion as it is.'

"Wind and dark rain swept round, swathing in a cloud the place of that awful proclamation."

The young man paused once more. Some one near me moved his chair against mine. I remember with what a start I realised that I was in a crowded room; not in a desert with an insane hermit.

"But you have not told me," I said, "of the great moment: when you seemed to have discovered all."

"It is soon told," he said. "Ten years afterwards the girl and I stood in one room together: we were man and wife. Other men and women went in and out, all of my own stature. There were no more giants; it was as though I had dreamed of them. I seemed to have come back among my own people.

"Just then my wife, who was bending over a kind of couch, lifted a coverlet, and I saw that for which, haply, I have been sent to this fantastic borderland of things.

"It was a little human creature hardly bigger than a bird. And when I saw it, I — knew everything. I knew what was the greatest event of my life: the event I had forgotten."

I said "Being born" in a low voice.

I did not dare to look at his face.

The next consciousness I had was that he had risen to his feet, and was putting on his gloves very carefully.

I sprang erect also and spoke quickly.

"What does it mean? Are you a man? What thing are you? Are you a savage, or a spirit, or a child? You wear the dress and speak the language of a cultivated pupil of this over-cultivated time: yet you see everything as if you saw it for the first time. What does it mean?"

After a silence he spoke in his quiet way.

"Have you ever said some simple word over and over till it became unmeaning, a scrap of an unknown tongue, till you seem to be opening and shutting your mouth with a cry like an animal's? So it is with the great world in which we live: it begins familiar: it ends unfamiliar. When first men began to think and talk and theorise and work the world over and over with phrases and associations, then it was involved and fated, as a psychological necessity, that some day a creature should be produced, corresponding to the twentieth pronunciation of the word, a new animal with eyes to see and ears to hear; with an intellect capable of performing a new function never before conceived truly; thanking God for his creation. I tell you religion is in its infancy; dervish and anchorite, Crusader and Ironside, were not fanatical enough, or frantic enough, in their adoration. A new type has arrived. You have seen it."

He moved towards the door. Then I noticed he had come to a standstill again, and was gazing at the floor apparently in deep thought.

"I have never understood them," he said. "Those two creatures I see everywhere, stumping along the ground, first one and then the other. I have never been content with the current explanation that they were my feet."

And he passed out, still carefully buttoning his gloves.

I went back to the table and sat down. About four minutes after he was gone I felt a kind of mental shock, like something resuming its place in my brain.

It occurred to me that the man was mad. I am almost ashamed to admit with what suddenness it came. For so long as I was in his presence, I had believed him and his whole attitude to be sane, normal, complete, and that it was the rest, the whole human race, that were half-witted, since the making of the world.

Homesick At Home

One, seeming to be a traveller, came to me and said, “What is the shortest journey from one place to the same place?”

The sun was behind his head, so that his face was illegible.

“Surely,” I said, “to stand still.”

“That is no journey at all,” he replied. “The shortest journey from one place to the same place is round the world.” And he was gone.

White Wynd had been born, brought up, married and made the father of a family in the White Farmhouse by the river. The river enclosed it on three sides like a castle: on the fourth side there were stables and beyond that a kitchen-garden and beyond that an orchard and beyond that a low wall and beyond that a road and beyond that a pinewood and beyond that a cornfield and beyond that slopes meeting the sky, and beyond that — but we must not catalogue the whole earth, though it is a great temptation. White Wynd had known no other home but this. Its walls were the world to him and its roof the sky.

This is what makes his action so strange.

In his later years he hardly ever went outside the door. And as he grew lazy he grew restless: angry with himself and everyone. He found himself in some strange way weary of every moment and hungry for the next.

His heart had grown stale and bitter towards the wife and children whom he saw every day, though they were five of the good faces of the earth. He remembered, in glimpses, the days of his toil and strife for bread, when, as he came home in the evening, the thatch of his home burned with gold as though angels were standing there. But he remembered it as one remembers a dream.

Now he seemed to be able to see other homes, but not his own. That was merely a house. Prose had got hold of him: the sealing of the eyes and the closing of the ears.

At last something occurred in his heart: a volcano; an earthquake; an eclipse; a daybreak; a deluge; an apocalypse. We might pile up colossal words, but we should never reach it.

Eight hundred times the white daylight had broken across the bare kitchen as the little family sat at breakfast. And the eight hundred and first time the father paused with the cup he was passing in his hand.

“That green cornfield through the window,” he said dreamily, “shining in the sun. Somehow, somehow it reminds me of a field outside my own home.”

“Your own home?” cried his wife. “This is your home.”

White Wynd rose to his feet, seeming to fill the room. He stretched forth his hand and took a staff. He stretched it forth again and took a hat. The dust came in clouds from both of them.

“Father,” cried one child. “Where are you going?”

“Home,” he replied.

“What can you mean? This is your home. What home are you going to?”

“To the White Farmhouse by the river.”

“This is it.”

He was looking at them very tranquilly when his eldest daughter caught sight of his face.

“Oh, he is mad!” she screamed, and buried her face in her hands.

He spoke calmly. “You are a little like my eldest daughter,” he said. “But you haven’t got the look, no, not the look which is a welcome after work.”

“Madam,” he said, turning to his thunderstruck wife with a stately courtesy. “I thank you for your hospitality, but indeed I fear I have trespassed on it too long. And my home—”

“Father, father, answer me! Is not this your home?”

The old man waved his stick.

“The rafters are cobwebbed, the walls are rain-stained. The doors bind me, the rafters crush me. There are littlenesses and bickerings and heartburnings here behind the dusty lattices where I have dozed too long. But the fire roars and the door stands open. There is bread and raiment, fire and water and all the crafts and mysteries of love. There is rest for heavy feet on the matted floor, and for starved heart in the pure faces, far away at the end of the world, in the house where I was born.”

“Where, where?”

“In the White Farmhouse by the river.”

And he passed out of the front door, the sun shining on his face.

And the other inhabitants of the White Farmhouse stood staring at each other.

White Wynd was standing on the timber bridge across the river, with the world at his feet.

And a great wind came flying from the opposite edge of the sky (a land of marvellous pale golds) and met him. Some may know what that first wind outside the door is to a man. To this man it seemed that God had bent back his head by the hair and kissed him on the forehead.

He had been weary with resting, without knowing that the whole remedy lay in sun and wind and his own body. Now he half believed that he wore the seven-leagued boots.

He was going home. The White Farmhouse was behind every wood and beyond every mountain wall. He looked for it as we all look for fairyland, at every turn of the road. Only in one direction he never looked for it, and that was where, only a thousand yards behind him, the White Farmhouse stood up, gleaming with thatch and whitewash against the gutsy blue of morning.

He looked at the dandelions and crickets and realised that he was gigantic. We are too fond of reckoning always by mountains. Every object is infinitely vast as well as infinitely small.

He stretched himself like one crucified in an uncontainable greatness.

“Oh God, who hast made me and all things, hear four songs of praise. One for my feet that Thou hast made strong and light upon Thy daisies. One for my head, which Thou hast lifted and crowned above the four corners of Thy heaven. One for my heart, which Thou hast made a heaven of angels singing Thy glory. And one for that pearl-tinted cloudlet far away above the stone pines on the hill.”

He felt like Adam newly created. He had suddenly inherited all things, even the suns and stars.

Have you ever been out for a walk?

The story of the journey of White Wynd would be an epic. He was swallowed up in huge cities and forgotten: yet he came out on the other side. He worked in quarries, and in docks in country after country. Like a transmigrating soul, he lived a series of existences: a knot of vagabonds, a colony of workmen, a crew of sailors, a group of fishermen, each counted him a final fact in their lives, the great spare man with eyes like two stars, the stars of an ancient purpose.

But he never diverged from the line that girdles the globe.

On a mellow summer evening, however, he came upon the strangest thing in all his travels. He was plodding up a great dim down, that hid everything, like the dome of the earth itself.

Suddenly a strange feeling came over him. He glanced back at the waste of turf to see if there were any trace of boundary, for he felt like one who has just crossed the border of elfland. With his head a belfry of new passions, assailed with confounding memories, he toiled on the brow of the slope.

The setting sun was raying out a universal glory. Between him and it, lying low on the fields, there was what seemed to his swimming eyes a white cloud. No, it was a marble palace. No, it was the White Farmhouse by the river.

He had come to the end of the world. Every spot on earth is either the beginning or the end, according to the heart of man. That is the advantage of living on an oblate spheroid.

It was evening. The whole swell of turf on which he stood was turned to gold. He seemed standing in fire instead of grass. He stood so still that the birds settled on his staff.

All the earth and the glory of it seemed to rejoice round the madman’s homecoming. The birds on their way to their nests knew him, Nature herself was in his secret, the man who had gone from one place to the same place.

But he leaned wearily on his staff. Then he raised his voice once more.

“O God, who hast made me and all things, hear four songs of praise. One for my feet, because they are sore and slow, now that they draw near the door. One for my head, because it is bowed and hoary, now that Thou crownest it with the sun. One for my heart, because Thou hast taught it in sorrow and hope deferred that it is the road that makes the home. And one for that daisy at my feet.”

He came down over the hillside and into the pinewood. Through the trees he could see the red and gold sunset settling down among the white farm-buildings and the green apple-branches. It was his home now. But it could not be his home till he had gone out from it and returned to it. Now he was the Prodigal Son.

He came out of the pinewood and across the road. He surmounted the low wall and tramped through the orchard, through the kitchen garden, past the cattle-sheds. And in the stony courtyard he saw his wife drawing water.

Culture And The Light

The Traveller had the third-class railway carriage to himself all the way from London into the wilds of Yorkshire; dusk was already turning to dark upon the high wilderness of the moors; he had just taken out his cigar case to beguile the tedium with smoking, when the train slowed down at a wayside halt and the Stranger got into the carriage. The Stranger was grey of hair and garb, with certain oddities and even contradictions in his appearance: his shoulders were stooping, but his step light and springy, and his face was of the long sort called cadaverous, and associated with melancholy; yet he could often be seen to be secretly smiling. A few moments after the train had started again he leaned across and said politely, “Could you oblige me with a light?”

The Traveller immediately produced his match-box, and then hesitated a little, for his companion remained in the same polite posture, and showed no signs of producing anything to smoke.

“Excuse me,” said the Traveller, “have you any tobacco? Or may I offer you a cigar?”

“Thank you,” replied the other. “But I did not ask for a cigar; I only asked for a light.”

Even as he spoke, the other had automatically struck a match and lit his own cigar. He was just about to toss away the match, when the Stranger made a sudden gesture as if seizing his wrist.

“For heaven’s sake,” he cried, “do not put it out yet! Why, it is not a third burnt through!”

The Traveller stared at the man, and began, for the first time, to be creepily conscious of the solitude and the stormy twilight. The flame of the match was in truth the only light in that world of shadow; and it lit the haggard face before him with an expression that was something more than fanatical. The man was still speaking.

“What waste! If you had thrown away the cigar and left the match burning — that would, at least, have been an ordinary, natural gesture. But to throw away the match and leave the cigar burning — what madness, what paradox, what perversity! Do you not remember in your holy childhood what a fairy transformation-scene it was to strike one of those little sticks of wood? And now you can buy boxes of them for twopence, bushels of them for a shilling, as if you were walking in a palace of fireworks. And then you will pay more to stick an ugly brown weed in your mouth and smell it!”

“Well,” said the Traveller, humouring his lunatic, “the flame only lasts for a minute.”

“It has lasted for ten thousand years,” said the Stranger. “It will last till the planet freezes. It is your trumpery tobacco that has only lasted a few centuries among civilised men. And even then it depends on the fire. Fire has run through every religion; history has been a procession with torches; could it ever be a procession of cigars? What would be the good of a whole forest of cigars without the first spark of fire?”

“A smoker’s inferno, I suppose,” answered the other; “but some American millionaires chew unlighted cigars.”

“I said among civilised men,” said the Stranger; “but believe me, you have to choose between the old civilisation that can make fire and the new that can only manufacture cigars... Excuse me if I hold that match for a moment.”

He took the flaming stump and held it tight, until his fingers seemed to shrink and blister with the heat.

“Should one not suffer a little,” he asked calmly, “for having seen such glory?”

Perhaps the Traveller was a little relieved when he got out.

A Picture Of Tuesday

Oscar Plumtree was a rising artist, who painted his general impressions of his intimate friends, and belonged to a sketching club which met every Tuesday. He was a small square man with masses of black hair, and stood with his hands in his pockets, a little too conscious that his head was against a green curtain.

“How decorative Plumtree is,” said Noel Starwood, symbolist, to Patrick Staunton, realist. “I never noticed that his colour was so arbitrary. But, like all the works of God, you have to see him twenty times before you see him for the first time.”

“If you can suggest any course likely to result in seeing him for the last time,” said Staunton, lighting a pipe, “I shall be more gratified. So he looks decorative, does he?”

“So flat,” murmured Starwood, dreamily. “So admirably flat. He looks as if he had just come out of a panel by Albert Moor.”

“Yes,” said Staunton; “I wish he’d go back again.”

Patrick Staunton was a large young man with a handsome passive face, that looked *blasé* but was only sleepy. He was very young, it is true, but not quite young enough to have grown weary of the world. He was, in fact, the average young man, with the average young man’s two admirable qualities, a sense of humour and an aversion to egoists. This was why he disliked Plumtree. Noel Starwood, a slight, fiery- haired, fiery-tinted type, like a high-spirited girl, was a visionary, the painter of a series of ‘Seven Dreams of Adam before the Creation of Eve.’ He did not dislike Plumtree. He said it was the great test and trial of true Christian philosophy not to dislike Plumtree.

He moved off, and another member came up to Staunton.

“Do you know it is Plumtree’s turn to give out a subject for the sketches?” he said. “These subject days are generally rather a lark. Do you remember the first time Starwood was asked for one? There was a silence, and then such a gentle, plaintive little voice said, ‘The Resurrection of Cain.’ But then he’s a mystic, don’t you know, and pities the Devil.”

“Well, well,” said Staunton charitably. “I heard Plumtree was going to the devil the other day and since then I rather pitied the devil myself.”

“But the joke of the thing is,” continued the other, “that Plumtree is for ever telling us that the artistic mind cares no more for the subject of a picture, than for its weight in avoirdupois. He was immensely proud of his last picture, because three eminent art-critics looked at it the wrong way up.”

A small crowd had already gathered round Plumtree, and were pressing him for a subject.

“What do you want with a subject?” he said, contemptuously. “I don’t want a subject, I want a picture. Won’t anything do?”

“The primal enigma, Anything,” said Starwood thoughtfully. “A fine conception. Something bizarre, hasty, fantastic. Some wild, low shape of life, to symbolise the germ-fact, the indestructible minimum, the everlasting Yea. After all, it is but a superficial philosophy which is founded on the existence of everything. The deeper philosophy is founded on the existence of anything.”

“Well, we won’t have that,” said Plumtree, abruptly. “You fellows don’t seem to understand that art—”

Staunton cut him short hastily. “I say, Plumtree, I asked for bread and you gave me a piece of india-rubber. Thanks. You were saying that the subject—”

“Oh, take anything you like: what does the subject matter? What’s the day of the week? Tuesday; very well.” He turned to the throng and said in a clear voice, “The subject for the sketches will be Tuesday.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Staunton politely.

“Tuesday,” repeated Plumtree. “A picture of — Tuesday.”

Patrick Staunton lifted his full six feet two from the bench, and formally announced that he was relegated to a state of spiritual reprobation.

Only four members of the club exhibited sketches on this singular subject. The group consisted of Plumtree, Staunton and Starwood, and one Middleton, who had before him a lucrative career in virtue of an inexhaustible output of corpulent and comic monks.

The uncovering of his picture was received with loud cheers and laughter. It represented six monastic gentlemen of revolting joviality tossing pancakes. Thus it suggested Shrove Tuesday. Plumtree’s was an admirable little suggestion of gaslight in early morning. It might just as well be Tuesday morning as any other morning.

Staunton annoyed him very much by elaborately describing the noble thoughts that the picture suggested to him. His own was a study of his mother’s at-home day, which occurred on Tuesday, in which he introduced all the uncles who had told him things for his own good.

Starwood’s picture was the largest. When it was unveiled it seemed to fill the room. It was a dark picture, dark with an intricate density of profound colours, a complex scheme of sombre and subtle harmonies, a kind of gorgeous twilight. Plumtree, who was far too good an artist to let cynicism rob him of the gift of wonder, followed the labyrinth of colour keenly and slowly.

Suddenly he gave a little cry and stepped back.

The whole was a huge human figure. Grey and gigantic, it rose with its back to the spectator. As far as the vast outline could be traced, he had one hand heaved above his head, driving up a load of waters, while below, his feet moved upon a solemn, infinite sea. It was a dark picture, but when grasped, it blinded like a sun.

Above it was written ‘Tuesday,’ and below, ‘And God divided the waters that were under the firmament from the waters that were above the firmament: and the evening and the morning were the second day.’

There was a long silence, and Staunton was heard damning himself softly.

“It is certainly very good,” he said, “like creation. But why did you reckon Tuesday the second instead of the third day of the Jewish week?”

“I had to reckon from my own seventh day: the day of praise, the day of saying ‘It is good,’ or I could not have felt it a reality.”

“Do you seriously mean that you, yourself, look at the days of the week in that way?”

“The week is the colossal epic of creation,” cried Starwood excitedly. “Why are there not rituals for every day? The Day of the Creation of Light, why is it not honoured with mystic illuminations? The Day of the Waters, why is it not the day of awful cleansings and sacred immersions—”

“Do you Transcendentalists only wash once a week?” asked Staunton.

“The Day of the Earth — what a fire of flowers and fruit; the Day of Birds, what a blaze of decorative plumage; the Day of Beasts, what a—”

“What a deed lot of nonsense,” said Middleton, who was getting a trifle tired of all this. “If it comes to religion, and quotations from the Bible, what is there for us, Staunton? Can you think of a text for an at-home day?”

Staunton suggested, “And Job lifted up his voice and cursed his day.” But Plumtree was staring at the picture of Tuesday.

The Two Taverns

In the country of Old King Cole, the founder of the Colchester Oyster Feast, and therefore a distinguished diner-out, there were two partners who owned an inn called The Sun and Moon. One of them called Giles was rather loud and boastful, and the other called Miles rather silent and sarcastic; so that they soon quarrelled and set up opposition signs. That of Giles was called optimistically The Rising Sun, and that of Miles more modestly The Half Moon. There had been some dispute about the one barrel of sound wine they possessed; but at last it was drawn off into two smaller barrels in exactly equal quantities. It so happened that King Cole, with his celebrated Violin Orchestra and all his royal retinue, came riding from Colchester to the little village of London. He came first to the inn of The Rising Sun, with its beautiful groves of bushes festooned with coloured lights forming the legend: “Rising Sun Ruby Wine is the Best.” Mr. Giles received the monarch with prostrations of hospitality, and took occasion to observe that the Ruby Wine sold at his establishment was the Best Wine in the World. And indeed the potentate had occasion to note that a similar opinion was inscribed on the flag flying from the turret, on the large blue bow decorating the dog, and that even the sardines and other *hors d’oeuvres* were arranged in patterns expressive of the same thought. When therefore the exuberant Giles had broken out for the sixth or seventh time into cries of admiring anticipation, touching the wine he intended to serve, the King, familiar by this time with the sentiment, suggested with some sharpness that the wine should be produced. His annoyance must be his excuse for the curious perversity which led him, even when the wine was produced, to say that he did not think so much of it after all. It must be remembered that he was a gentleman of the old school.

Leaving The Rising Sun, he resolved to push on to London, as there was evidently no other first-class hotel on the road; nothing but a shabby and unpretentious tavern called The Half Moon. At this, however, he consented to pause for a moment, his thirst having been greatly increased by the curious cookery of the superior hostel. “I am afraid,” said Miles, the melancholy innkeeper, with an air of depression, “that there is really nothing in the house that is in the least fit to be offered to Your Majesty. We have a little cheap wine, but I fear you will think it the worst wine you ever drank in your life."

"Not at all, not at all," said the King breezily. I assure you I know how to rough it." And he proceeded to give Miles somewhat misleading accounts of all he had gone through in his campaigns against the King of Chelmsford. And when the wine was served to him, he drank it with quite a roistering gesture and banged the goblet on the table, crying: "Blessed St. Julian, what uncommonly decent drink one can get in these little out- of-the-way places! Really, this stuff is quite excellent! I have indeed fallen on my feet."

This was not quite a correct figure of speech; he went on drinking the wine, and even attempted to dance with the village maidens; but it was not always on his feet that he fell.

The Taming of the Nightmare

Little Jack Horner sat in the corner — so far the traditional surroundings of the nursery hero correspond with those in which we find him for the purposes of the story, but there being no Christmas pie in the neighbourhood, he was unable to give vent to the joyful, if somewhat egotistical, sentiment which is recorded of him elsewhere. He sat in a corner, under the window, listening to the weird moaning of the night-wind without, now tapping at the door like a wayfarer, now whistling in the chimney like a sweep, now seeming to wander, darkly muttering, like some mysterious wild thing in the copse around the cottage, now rushing like some vast monster over the roof with a hoarse roar rising to a piping shriek as it died away. Then came violent rattling at the window above him, which grew louder and fiercer till Jack expected the glass to fly to pieces, and the next moment he fancied he could hear a hoarse voice, muffled by coming through the window say, "Let me in, why can't you let me in?" The vague, mystified awe that he had felt at the thousand suggestive voices of the wind changed into weird terror, and he cowered beneath the window striving not to look round, but compelled to turn by the horrible fascination of the presence of something behind him. He turned, threw open the window and looked out into the night. At first he could see nothing but the darkness, but the next moment he made out a broad, weird, goblin face with goggle eyes and a broad, queer hat, peering in through the window. "You're wanted," said the creature who appeared to be some species of watchman, in a muffled voice. "What for, Sir?" gasped Jack faintly. "You," said the goblin, "are commissioned by the local Board of Good Fairies to find the Mare's Nest. The Grey Mare, who built her nest in the suburbs of Creation, where people don't so much mind what they do, has a large family, all mares and all grey, except one, the youngest, who is as black as night, and as weird. And she is called the Nightmare. Her you must catch and tame and saddle and bridle, and she is the only steed you shall ever ride."

"And who are you, Sir?" asked the boy in some wonder.

"I am the Wind," answered the Spirit. "I fill the ears of men with a thousand voices, but never before have mortal eyes seen me. I go where I list and sing what song I please. I alone can guide you to the land of the Mare's Nest. Catch hold of my cloak."

A deep, solemn fear at his heart made Jack lay hold of the mantle obediently, the Wind turned with a whistle, and the next moment Jack was jerked bodily out of the window and carried away far over the house-tops under the midnight sky, hanging on behind to the vast, wild coat-tails of the guide. They left the city, with its roofs and chimney-pots, behind, and passed on over fields and lanes, over glens and ravines, on over dim, barren wildernesses. For hours they flew, leaving the bats and owls behind, till they came to a low, lonely wall, beside which there was a dilapidated notice board, looking the other way, stating that trespassers would be prosecuted, by order of somebody, no one quite knew who.

And beyond the wall there appeared to be nothing but mist and moonshine. And the Wind turned and said gravely, "Can't go any farther, Sir, not my beat. But that's your way." And jerking his head in the direction of the mysterious land over the wall, he moved away. And Jack clambered over the wall and entered the borderland of Creation. Before he had gone very far he came to a drop in the barren moors, which showed him the broad pale face of the moon, ten times as large as usual, and dark against it the lank melancholy figure of what looked like an overgrown calf. He came nearer, and had to violently pull the large animal's tail before he consented to take the least notice of his presence. Then he slowly swung round, a large, pale, overgrown head, with round rolling eyes, and looked abstractedly at the wayfarer. "Can you tell me, where is the Mare's Nest?" asked Jack.

The Calf eyed him wistfully for a moment, and then replied in a melancholy voice, with what appeared to be an impromptu rhyme of doubtful relevancy:

"Oh, my limbs are very feeble,
My head is very big,
My ears are round, O do not, pray
Mistake me for a pig."

"Well, who wants to?" said the exasperated Horner. "I only want to be directed."

The Calf lifted his eyes to the moon a moment and then sang plaintively:

"This Calf was the Mooncalf, the Cow was the Moon, She died from effects of a popular tune, And now in her glory she shines in the sky; Oh, never had Calf such a mother as I.”

And so sweet and pathetic for the moment was the upward look of the poor monster that Jack was quite touched and forgot his own business and just stroked the lean ribs of the Mooncalf. And after a long pause there rose again from the creature the wild queer songs of worship:

“I forget all the creatures that taunt and despise,
When through the dark night-mists my mother doth rise,
She is tender and kind and she shines the night long
On her lunatic child as he sings her his song.

I was dropped on the dim earth to wander alone,
And save this pale monster no child she hath known.

Without like on the earth, without sister or brother,
I sit here and sing to my mystical mother.”

And he sat there and sang for the remainder of the interview and as Jack, slowly and almost reluctantly, made his way onward over the dark moors, he could still hear the plaintive songs of the poetic Mooncalf rising, a solitary hum upon that gloomy waste, to the white moon overhead.

And he went on until he came to what appeared to be a low garden wall, along which he ran until he came to where it sloped down a little to a small wooden gate, and looking through he saw a strange spectacle. The whole of the sloping downs beyond, as far almost as to the horizon, were apparently cultivated like a gigantic kitchen garden, on which grew enormous turnips, almost entirely above ground, with round goblin eyes, that glimmered in ranks like gas-lamps lining all the slopes under the night-sky. And above these armies of goblin turnips on the hill was a little thatched cottage, apparently belonging to the Gardener. Presently, as he stood there, staring at this singular back-garden, one or two of the round, glowing eyes suddenly went out, and a dull, gibbering moan came out of the darkness. The next moment the door of the cottage opened and a tall, bony figure with a turned-down broad hat and a demoniac-looking rake came out of the cottage and, rolling round a pair of eyes as bright and glowing as theirs, requested to know what was the matter.

“The light’s gone out, oh, the light’s gone out,” moaned the turnips. The Gardener retired into the house, and came out again with a short candle burning in each hand. He made his way through the lines of turnips. Opening a door in the back of their heads, he placed the light inside, and instantly two pairs of eyes glared out as fiercely as ever. Back came the Gardener, taking half a mile at a stride over the wide downs of his kitchen-garden, and as he came back he saw Jack, who was peeping through the wooden paling.

“Who are you?” he roared with a voice like thunder.

“I am Jack Horner,” replied that intrepid individual.

The nursery rhymes had not formed part of the Gardener’s course of reading, so he knitted his brow and bellowed. “Do you know where you are?”

“Well, not altogether,” replied the boy. “Where am I?”

“This,” replied the tall Gardener, “is the garden of the turnip- ghosts. They are grown and sent to Covent Garden every morning. They have a great sale among people of your race, but none of your race ever came here before, or shall again. Come, you won’t object to being buried up to the neck and having a candle put inside your head, will you?”

“Indeed, I shall object very much,” replied Jack stoutly. “And what’s more, I shan’t do it.”

“Shan’t is rude,” said the tall Gardener, showing a row of gleaming teeth, and, making a sudden dart, he lifted Jack by the collar and dropped him inside the enclosure. Jack, however, was not beaten so easily, but running full tilt at the Gardener he upset him with a bang among the turnips, sending his long rake flying ten miles off. But the Giant was on his feet again in a moment, and, snatching his largest flower-pot, he hurled it so as to come down neatly enclosing Jack underneath; but the boy kicked it to pieces and clutching the nearest missiles, two large turnips, which he tore up by the roots, he hurled them at the head of his enemy, who sent them back with additions. Then began a battle worthy of an epic. For days and nights they fought each other all over the hills, tearing up the turnips by thousands and flinging them pell-mell about the land. And at the end of a week’s fighting, there was not a turnip lighted or growing in the land, but here and there a dying candle would make a dismal flame in the chaotic darkness. And the Gardener went aimlessly about the world, looking for his hat, and Jack continued his pilgrimage.

And at last he came to a strange land, where the rocks and mountain crests seemed as ragged and fantastic as the clouds of sunset, where wild and sudden lights, breaking out in nooks and clefts, were all that lit the sombre twilight of the world. And one day, as he wandered over the rocks and dales, he heard, suddenly, sounding through the darkness from over his head, a kind of long, shrill, demoniac neigh, which echoed weirdly over the lonely hills. And perched upon a hill- crest far above the dark mists, he could see the outline of what looked like a grey foal, looking down into the valley. The next moment the wild sound echoed again and it disappeared. Then he said to himself, “I am near the nest of the Grey Mare.”

And after walking for a long time there came a fierce glare of light behind the hills, and he saw on the loftiest and most mysterious crest the fantastic head and mane of a great grey mare, perched in a nest like an eagle’s. After a long climb he came to the base of the cliff on which the nest was perched and he could see the Grey Mare rolling her fiery eyes far over the lonely world; and scattered over the crags beneath her weird brood of mares were playing their demoniac gambols. And farthest of all, on the brink of an awful precipice, was the long black form and floating mane of the Nightmare, the darkest and most hideous of all. And when he saw it he gave a cry and ran towards it. All the grey mares, wandering like ghosts about the slopes, eyed him doubtfully as he went past, but the Nightmare, when she saw him, gave a scream like thunder and skipped wildly down the other side of the hill, whither Jack followed her. Then began a chase in which leagues and months were covered. Now the Nightmare would be flying far ahead of him, like a startled deer, far over the level plain and moors, now, with a still more maddening agility, she would be dancing indolently a few feet in front of him, in and out among the rocks, seeming to suggest by the very tossing of her long tail her contempt for human pursuit. Sometimes she would stand on her head a few yards off and smile at him till he came near, then flash off and grin at him round the corner of a rock. But neither his failure nor her scorn could make the stubborn little boy give up his appointed task, and in time he began to see the reward for his persistence.

The Nightmare began to lose her temper and try to get rid of him, thereby denoting that she no longer felt herself equal to the race, till at length, when they came to the strand of a moaning sea, close under a level face of cliffs, the Nightmare ran along at a quick trot till she came to a round hole in the rocks, which looked ten times too small for her, gave a squirm and vanished inside. Jack began to feel that things were even getting a little, as it were, unusual, if one may say so, but he clenched his hands and crept into the hole, which only just held him, and crawled along a dark low passage, at the end of which, upon a heap of skulls and bones, sat the Nightmare with gleaming eyes and teeth, and he knew that she was at bay. But Jack, who always felt compassion at inopportune moments, was willing to make an amicable arrangement. "Why do you object to my riding on you?" he asked. "I wish you no harm, but rather that we may both help each other. All things should help each other. It is the will of the Central Board."

"Mortal," replied the Nightmare, with a hideous laugh. "Dost though not know that I am no common mare. The Nightmare am I, the child of horror, and mine is it to ride upon thee. Many myriads of thy race have I ridden and made them my slaves, oppressing them with visions." And with that her eyes flamed terribly and her nose seemed to grow longer and longer as she came towards him. The next moment they were struggling for the mastery, rolling over one another, so that now one was uppermost and now the other.

And when Jack was undermost, with the black fiend sitting grinning on his chest, strange trances fell upon him and he fancied that he was falling from heights and fleeing down interminable roads, with a strange hopelessness in everything. And when, with a mighty effort, he cast them off, and threw his enemy under him, he found himself upon a silent moor under the starlight. So, through a long night, they kept changing places, till at last, after one fierce, foaming struggle- side by side, Jack rose uppermost, and tossed back his dishevelled hair, and the Nightmare sank helpless beneath him. She appeared to have fainted, and, after what the poor lady had gone through, it was perhaps not to be wondered at.

And Jack took the big, ugly head in his lap and kissed it and guarded it in silence, till at last the Nightmare opened her eyes, now as mild as the Mooncalf s, whinnied sorrowfully and rubbed her head against him. At last the Nightmare rose and stood silent and ready and Jack sprang upon her back and they rode away. And as they went, they passed by the Mooncalf, who was sitting on a stone, singing, with his tail feebly beating time.

"On thy poor offspring thy pale beams be given,
Turning the dull moor to white halls of heaven,
And in my songs, O Cow, from your memory slide off

The painful effects of the tune that you died of.

We sit here alone, but a joy to each other,
The light to the child and the songs to the mother."

He feared at first lest the grisly form of the Nightmare should frighten the poor Mooncalf, as indeed it frightened everything else on his way, but fears, like every other emotion save the filial, were unknown to the pale and lonely monstrosity. He was quite content, gazing plaintively up to the moon, and let the grim Nightmare go by as if it were the most conventional of quadrupeds. Once men had tried to domesticate the Mooncalf by taking it into the land of sunlight and decorating it with laurels, but it pined and wailed pathetically for the moon, which was proverbially absurd. And at last it broke loose from the everyday world and wandered away again into the land of moonshine, far more happy than many people would believe.

Meanwhile Jack and his dark steed had made their way to the wall and the notice-board, and re-entered the land of the real. But before he had gone far over the hard fields and stony ways of the old world, Jack saw that the poor Nightmare was limping and stumbling lamentably, and remembered that shoes were not provided in the vicinity of which she had been an inhabitant. Leading her with all speed to the nearest town he interviewed a blacksmith, who agreed to shoe her for the usual consideration. But the curious, not to say discommoding, part of the proceeding was that the Nightmare, who walked as mildly as a lamb while Jack himself was holding her, no sooner did the latter let go and the blacksmith approached her with a shoe than she gave a demoniac roar and kicked him through the roof. The apprentices and bystanders made a rush to secure the animal, but she fired out like a prize fighter; her legs appeared to have about twenty joints, from the way in which they flashed and curled about, knocking down man after man.

She appeared to thoroughly enjoy the fight, which was more than they did: her eyes glared with a lurid flame, her teeth and tongue pro- traded derisively, she appeared to grow more frightful every moment. None of the men dared approach her, as she sat viciously rubbing her nose with her hoof and grinning at them.

"Aha," she said, scornfully, "worms of mortal race, would ye lift your puny iron machinery against the living machinery of infernal life. Well may ye tremble, for my shadow is in your doors, and I will eat out your hearts with terror.” Just at this promising stage of affairs, Jack came quietly forward with a hammer in one hand and the shoe in the other. The moment the flaring eyes of the monster encountered his face, she moaned and bowed her head, and Jack, taking the tools into his own hand, shoed her himself and rode away. And as he passed through the streets all the people murmured and hooted, and one man incautiously got in the way, whereupon the Nightmare spurned him over the chimney pots and the rest preserved a respectful distance.

Now it so happened that the King was resolved to hold a great display of tournaments in the town, to which came all the knights and warriors of his and the neighbouring countries. And when the lists were ready under the throne and bannered galleries and canopies, there rode forth on either side, with flaming crests and snorting chargers, the mightiest tilters of the land. And third of those who entered the lists, after the Prince Valentine of Vandala, and Lord Breacan of the Lance, rode a wild-eyed bare-headed boy, on a lank, black mare, broken- kneed, with a mane and tail brushing the ground. And all the while the broken-kneed mare and her rider stood silent. Suddenly, at the turning point of the fight, when Prince Valentine threw down his strongest opponent and rose victorious over the thick of the fray, the strange boy shook the hair from his forehead, levelled his rude spear and whispered something to his dismal and shabby steed. The mare gave a piercing yell that made the whole company jump out of their skin, and went like a thunderbolt, so that the boy’s spear smote Prince Valentine on the vizor and laid him neatly on his back.

The Prince sprang up, amid the shouts, and flew at him, sword in hand, but ere either could strike, the Nightmare, who now stood as dismal as ever, showed its frightful teeth and, biting the weapon off short, munched it up with much apparent enjoyment. The Prince retired cursing, but Breacan of the Lance, a mailed giant, with a spear like a ship’s mast, galloped down upon them. The Nightmare gave a hideous grin and, shooting forward, squirmed and vanished suddenly, rider and all, between the front legs of the giant’s horse, so that in another moment he was suddenly shot head over heels and rolled on the ground.

The boy rode forward to the King’s throne. “Give me the prize,” he cried. “I and my good steed have vanquished the victors.”

The King started to his feet, and his brow was dark. “There is some sorcery,” he said, “in this boy and his black jade. Secure him.”

The boy laughed. “Secure me yourself, liar,” he said. “While I ride my mare, you may try.” He was about to turn away, but the Nightmare took matters into her own hands. With a roar like a clap of thunder she shot forward, upset throne and King and the next moment was miles away on the moors. “Come,” said the boy dismounting, “since men will not receive us, we will go on our way together. Perhaps we will visit the Mooncalf again and see your mother and your brothers.”

“My master,” said the Nightmare, sitting down at his feet. “I have no mother nor brothers. I know no one but you, who does not shrink from me. But you are my master and I will go with you whither you will.”

The Long Bow

Come, let us tell each other stories. There was once a king who was very fond of listening to stories, like the king in the Arabian Nights. The only difference was that, unlike that cynical Oriental, this king believed all the stories that he heard. It is hardly necessary to add that he lived in England. His face had not the swarthy secrecy of the tyrant of the thousand tales; on the contrary, his eyes were as big and innocent as two blue moons; and when his yellow beard turned totally white he seemed to be growing younger. Above him hung still his heavy sword and horn, to remind men that he had been a tall hunter and warrior in his time: indeed, with that rusted sword he had wrecked armies. But he was one of those who will never know the world, even when they conquer it. Besides his love of this old Chaucerian pastime of the telling of tales, he was, like many old English kings, specially interested in the art of the bow. He gathered round him great archers of the stature of Ulysses and Robin Hood, and to four of these he gave the whole government of his kingdom. They did not mind governing his kingdom; but they were sometimes a little bored with the necessity of telling him stories. None of their stories were true; but the king believed all of them, and this became very depressing. They created the most preposterous romances; and could not get the credit of creating them. Their true ambition was sent empty away. They were praised as archers; but they desired to be praised as poets. They were trusted as men, but they would rather have been admired as literary men.

At last, in an hour of desperation, they formed themselves into a club or conspiracy with the object of inventing some story which even the king could not swallow. They called it The League of the Long Bow; thus attaching themselves by a double bond to their motherland of England, which has been steadily celebrated since the Norman Conquest for its heroic archery and for the extraordinary credulity of its people.

At last it seemed to the four archers that their hour had come. The king commonly sat in a green curtained chamber, which opened by four doors, and was surmounted by four turrets. Summoning his champions to him on an April evening, he sent out each of them by a separate door, telling him to return at morning with the tale of his journey. Every champion bowed low, and, girding on great armour as for awful adventures, retired to some part of the garden to think of a lie. They did not want to think of a lie which would deceive the king; any lie would do that. They wanted to think of a lie so outrageous that it would not deceive him, and that was a serious matter.

The first archer who returned was a dark, quiet, clever fellow, very dexterous in small matters of mechanics. He was more interested in the science of the bow than in the sport of it. Also he would only shoot at a mark, for he thought it cruel to kill beasts and birds, and atrocious to kill men. When he left the king he had gone out into the wood and tried all sorts of tiresome experiments about the bending of branches and the impact of arrows; when even he found it tiresome he returned to the house of the four turrets and narrated his adventure. “Well,” said the king, “what have you been shooting?”

“Arrows,” answered the archer. “So I suppose,” said the king smiling; “but I mean, I mean what wild things have you shot?”

“I have shot nothing but arrows,” answered the bowman obstinately. “When I went out on to the plain I saw in a crescent the black army of the Tartars, the terrible archers whose bows are of bended steel, and their bolts as big as javelins. They spied me afar off, and the shower of their arrows shut out the sun and made a rattling roof above me. You know, I think it wrong to kill a bird, or worm, or even a Tartar. But such is the precision and rapidity of perfect science that, with my own arrows, I split every arrow as it came against me. I struck every flying shaft as if it were a flying bird. Therefore, Sire, I may say truly, that I shot nothing but arrows.” The king said, “I know how clever you engineers are with your fingers.” The archer said, “Oh,” and went out.

The second archer, who had curly hair and was pale, poetical, and rather effeminate, had merely gone out into the garden and stared at the moon. When the moon had become too wide, blank, and watery, even for his own wide, blank, and watery eyes, he came in again. And when the king said “What have you been shooting?” he answered with great volubility, “I have shot a man; not a man from Tartary, not a man from Europe, Asia, Africa, or America; not a man on this earth at all. I have shot the Man in the Moon.”

“Shot the Man in the Moon?” repeated the king with something like a mild surprise. “It is easy to prove it,” said the archer with hysterical haste. “Examine the moon through this particularly powerful telescope, and you will no longer find any traces of a man there.” The king glued his big blue idiotic eye to the telescope for about ten minutes, and then said, “You are right: as you have often pointed out, scientific truth can only be tested by the senses. I believe you." And the second archer went out, and being of a more emotional temperament burst into tears.

The third archer was a savage, brooding sort of man with tangled hair and dreamy eyes, and he came in without any preface, saying, "I have lost all my arrows. They have turned into birds." Then as he saw that they all stared at him, he said, "Well, you know everything changes on the earth; mud turns into marigolds, eggs turn into chickens; one can even breed dogs into quite different shapes. Well, I shot my arrows at the awful eagles that clash their wings round the Himalayas; great gold eagles as big as elephants, which snap the tall trees by perching on them. My arrows fled so far over mountain and valley that they turned slowly into fowls in their flight. See here," and he threw down a dead bird and laid an arrow beside it. "Can't you see they are the same structure. The straight shaft is the backbone; the sharp point is the beak; the feather is the rudimentary plumage. It is merely modification and evolution." After a silence the king nodded gravely and said, "Yes; of course everything is evolution." At this the third archer suddenly and violently left the room, and was heard in some distant part of the building making extraordinary noises either of sorrow or of mirth.

The fourth archer was a stunted man with a face as dead as wood, but with wicked little eyes close together, and very much alive. His comrades dissuaded him from going in because they said that they had soared up into the seventh heaven of living lies, and that there was literally nothing which the old man would not believe. The face of the little archer became a little more wooden as he forced his way in, and when he was inside he looked round with blinking bewilderment. "Ha, the last," said the king heartily, "welcome back again!"

There was a long pause, and then the stunted archer said, "What do you mean by 'again'? I have never been here before." The king stared for a few seconds, and said, "I sent you out from this room with the four doors last night." After another pause the little man slowly shook his head. "I never saw you before," he said simply; "You never sent me out from anywhere. I only saw your four turrets in the distance, and strayed in here by accident. I was born in an island in the Greek Archipelago; I am by profession an auctioneer, and my name is Punk." The king sat on his throne for seven long instants like a statue; and then there awoke in his mild and ancient eyes an awful thing; the complete conviction of untruth. Every one has felt it who has found a child obstinately false. He rose to his height and took down the heavy sword above him, plucked it out naked, and then spoke. “I will believe your mad tales about the exact machinery of arrows; for that is science. I will believe your mad tales about traces of life in the moon; for that is science. I will believe your mad tales about jellyfish turning into gentlemen, and everything turning into anything; for that is science. But I will not believe you when you tell me what I know to be untrue. I will not believe you when you say that you did not all set forth under my authority and out of my house. The other three may conceivably have told the truth; but this last man has certainly lied. Therefore I will kill him.” And with that the old and gentle king ran at the man with uplifted sword; but he was arrested by the roar of happy laughter, which told the world that there is, after all, something which an Englishman will not swallow.

The Three Dogs

Argus, the noble hound, that died at the feet of Odysseus, had long been a household word in Ithaca; and while (in the old Minoan phrase) there was life in the old dog yet, he would often give advice to the younger dogs that belonged to the Suitors and were, like their masters, puppies. He would tell them fables of the first days in the manner of a canine Aesop; and this is one of his tales. Once upon a time there were Three Dogs, who hunted together like a small pack. And it is said that, in the Golden Age, they never strove against each other, but had a treaty by which they took all things in turn; of which legendary time a memory remains in common speech, in the Ithican saying that every dog has his day. But one morning, as they went along the road in amity, they met Hermes, the god of trade, who desired it always to be free; and he mocked at this mildness they inherited from the age of the elder gods. He said that only by dogs fighting in rivalry could the best dog be developed, or the production of bones increased. So that the whole city became the scene of one furious and interminable dog-fight; the three dogs snatching bones from each other, until two of them were always hungry and the third horribly watchful; and all the town started at them in terror, for they were haggard and ferocious as wolves.

And about this time they met again with Hermes the god of the merchants (and, as some say, also of thieves) when he was out walking with great Plutus, the god of gold. And Hermes mocked at the emaciation he had made, and cried “There is hardly enough of them, all three, to make one good dog put together.”

And Plutus, looking cunning, answered: ‘And indeed, why not? For I have now in bondage Hephaestus of the Forge, that was the god of craftsmen; and he has still such cunning tricks as belong to a god that has become a slave. And in his enchanted furnace, I doubt not but it is possible to weld these three into one. We might make a creature that had three mouths with which to bark and awaken the town, and three sets of teeth with which to bite and terrify beggars and rioters; and yet have only one body to feed — to the general thrift.”

Then was Hermes overjoyed and cried aloud: “This shall be the wonder of the ages, and do work never known before, for the good of gods and men.”

So did the god of crafts labour and create the marvel: the dog that could work as three and feed as one; and the other gods bore it proudly up to heaven, where dwell the peacocks of Hera and the holy eagle of Zeus. Above them suddenly, like summer lightning in that dome of light, they heard the answer of the Father of Gods and Men: “He is indeed worthy, as you say, of some great work. Cleave then the rock down to the roots of the abyss and uncover the place of abominable things; for he is worthy to be the warden of Hell.”

The Curious Englishman

The trees closed over us in a complete dome of foliage; but the sun was so strong that it glared through the translucent leaves as if through coloured glass of green and gold. We were sitting at one of those singular woodland restaurants which the Germans, with their instinct at once for the obvious and the picturesque, scatter along the line of their toy railways in their ornamental forests. To come upon such a place is like coming upon the house which Hansel and Gretel found in the German forest, the house made of things to eat. This house was also largely made of things to eat, and we began to eat it. My German friend spread on his plate a colour scheme of sausages, and procured a beer mug like a moderate-sized tower. I ordered a glass of white German wine, and took from my knapsack the remains of what had once been English biscuits, but were now in the last stage of dissolution. It was when we had finished this slight refreshment, and I was expecting either a rich conversation or a rich silence (in both of which all nice Germans excel), that the awful thing happened. It came like a thunderbolt. My companion shut down sharply the lid of his mug.

The waiters staggered back to right and left. For you must know that in Germany this is a signal that a man will drink no more. If he does not make the signal, but leaves the lid open, the attendants go on pouring in beer with the automatic placidity of a quiet river flowing over the stones. The intellectual principle of the thing is subtle and interesting. These waiters seem to regard drinking beer as the normal state of a human being. Not drinking beer they regard as a positive, exceptional, and even daring, action, to be emphasised by some startling signal. My friend made this startling signal, and almost immediately stood upright.

“You will come,” he said earnestly, “and see the Roman camp; the Roman remains?”

“My friend,” I replied equally earnestly, “I will not come and see the Roman camp; the Roman remains. I will stop where I am, and drink this Roman wine and eat these ancient Roman biscuits.”

“They look ancient,” he replied, “but scarcely Roman.”

“What language is ‘bis’,” I asked, “and of what past participle is ‘cuit’ a corruption? Where did you learn the word ‘wine’? and who planted vines in your valleys? You may go and look at ruins; for you think that the old civilization is dead. But I think the old civilization is still alive; and I will no more weep because this one Roman camp is in ruins, than I will weep because this one English biscuit is in ruins. In the same way you think Christianity is dead; so naturally you go and look at Christian abbeys. But I think Christianity is still alive, and I can go and look at Christian tram-cars. Rome and what it stands for is not for me a thing for museums. So I will sit on this ancient Roman stool at this ancient Roman table and eat my ancient Roman lunch. Roman camp! Why, all Europe is still a camp, and a Roman camp! Roman remains! Why, what are you and I but Roman remains? Let us look at each other."

"At any rate," said my friend, putting on his hat, "I am not a remains, for I am not remaining."

"I suppose I shall have to go with you," I said, getting to my feet, "and to enliven the unsupportable stupidity of sightseeing I will tell you a true story. I will tell you a little tale about a great man I once met, of whom it is sufficient to say that compared with him I am a sightseer."

I was once passing across Normandy in my boyhood, and seeing for the first time the tall, flamboyant churches which stand like tall, eternal lilies in that garden of architecture. I was a sightseer in those days, and a very good thing too. Now, in the long list of the splendid spired towns of which I wished to see as many as possible, there was one which was a doubtful case. It lay a long way out of the route, and was itself tiny and trivial, save for certain details about the parish church, which were said to join the Renaissance and the later Medieval building in a somewhat strange way. After some hesitation I left the main journey and took the long loop that led me to this minor curiosity. It was a small hill standing in the middle of an immense plain with poplars. The church hung on the crest of the hill, the town lay at the bottom, and it was as dull a town as there can well be in the world.

It was ugly with the extreme ugliness of French utilitarianism, and rigid to the very final pitch of French respectability. It was also very small, and seemed like a forgotten suburb of the universe. Leaving my baggage in a desolate cafe, I climbed the hill, and with considerable relief reached the church, the only place that could possibly repay the visit. And it did repay it. Without being so striking in general design as some of the great Norman churches, it had a quaint conglomeration of the two great styles, the late

Christian and the revived Pagan, which could scarcely be seen so well elsewhere. There were actually caryatids in the confusion of Gothic ornament. It seemed like some great struggle in stone, and the war between the saints and the heathen heroes in a moment of its frenzy frozen for ever.

I descended the hill and re-entered that repulsive little town. I went into the dingy cafe and asked for dinner, and when I sat down to it I found to my supreme astonishment that there was another Englishman quietly eating his dinner opposite.

He was a man with a carefully pointed beard, hair touched with grey, and eyes touched with a sort of satire; he had very much the look of a certain kind of young Oxford don; I mean the tolerable kind. We fell into conversation first about the weather then about the sky, then about heaven and hell, and everything there is. It is literally true that I have hardly ever in my life met a man with more real intellectual force. He knew things as they are known, not merely by a man who is learned, but by a man who is learning — that is, who is still alive. He talked like a man of the world, but also like a man of all the other worlds. In the course of some conversation (I think about Buddha), I asked him if he had arrived that afternoon.

“No,” he replied carelessly, “I came here first four years ago.”

“Great Heavens!” I cried, quite startled. “Have you been in this hole for four years? Have you never left it?”

“Yes,” he said simply. “I once went out for a week. I found a railway train, and got into it. It brought me back here.”

Then, as if dreamily, he added, “An omen, perhaps. I suppose I shall die here.”

“Have you any reason for stopping here?” I asked.

“Not the faintest reason,” he replied, with a sort of languid fervour.

For a moment I was stunned to find such a man chained to such a spot. Then I suddenly remembered the church.

“After all,” I said, “I suppose that architecture is inexhaustible. A good Gothic church is a sort of human forest. One could live in an old church and actually even find novelty. I suppose you have not got to the end of that church yet.”

“I have not got to the beginning of it,” he answered, calmly finishing his coffee. “I have never been up to look at it.”

I never saw again the ugly town or the beautiful church or the incomprehensible man who clung to the ugly town and would not look at the beautiful church. I do not know whether he meant how little we should think of lovely things or how happy we can really be with dull things. But he meant something; he was that kind of man.

“If you ask me,” said my German friend, “I should say that the police were looking for him.” And with that we came out above the great curves of the Roman Camp.

A Nightmare

In the dimly lighted railway carriage a man had been talking to me about the structural weakness of St. Paul’s Cathedral. He spoke in a bold, fresh, scientific spirit, and I suppose I had gone to sleep. At any rate, when I roused myself at Blackfriars Station and found myself alone I felt unusually chilly, and the station seemed unusually dark. I dropped on the dim platform, however, and went quickly across it, with the swinging rapidity of a routine, to the exit where stood the ticket-collector. He was not dressed like a ticket-collector, however. For some reason (possibly the cold I had myself remarked) he was cloaked from head to foot in a black hooded gown, such as had been worn centuries before by those friars after whom the place was named. And instead of taking my ticket he only said to me, “Do not go upstairs.”

I looked at him with a dull wonder, and then I looked around equally doubtfully. It seemed to me that other monkish forms had gathered in the shadows, and that the place was like a monastery, with every light extinguished.

“Do not go upstairs,” said the hooded man. “You will not like what is being done there. A man like you had far better stay with us.”

“Do you calmly propose,” I asked, “that I should stay in the Underground for ever?”

“Yes, in the Underground,” he answered. “We of the ancient Church remained in the Underground, in the Catacombs. For what was done in the daylight was not good for a good man to see.”

“What on earth is it?” I asked. “Is there a massacre?”

“Would to God,” he answered, “that it were only that!”

“I will go up!” I cried. “It is open air, at any rate.”

“Consider it well,” he answered, with curious calm. “We guard ourselves with walls; we gird ourselves with sackcloth. But our laughter and our levity are within. But the new philosophers are girt all round with gaiety, and their despair is in their hearts.”

“I will go up,” I cried, and broke past him and ran upstairs.

Yet I did it with such swollen and expectant passions that I took it for granted that I should rush out upon some enormous orgy, obvious and obscene in the sunlight. And it was like the first crash into cold water when I found myself in an utterly empty street, turned almost white by the moon.

I strode up the street, turned two corners, and stood before St. Paul’s Cathedral. It stood up quite cold and colossal in the empty night, like the lost temple of some empty planet. Only, when I had stared a little while, I saw the foolish figure of a young man standing straddling on the uppermost steps, as if he owned the Cathedral.

The instant I had started to mount the steps he waved at me wildly and cried, “Have you got a new design?”

And as I paused irresolute there popped like rabbits out of their holes, three pale men from between the pillars, peering at me.

The young man ran half-way down the steps, and I saw that he had long wandering auburn hair and an impudent smile, but his face was whiter than a corpse’s.

“We have cleared the London streets,” he explained, “of everyone who has not a design. These three gentlemen have all got new designs. That one,” he added, lowering his voice and pointing at one man, who had a hairless head and huge ears, “That one is Pyffer himself.”

“And who is Pyffer?” I asked, staring at the man, whose horrible ears seemed to grow larger as I stared.

“You know the great pessimist, surely,” he asked anxiously. “But you must not speak to him. He never speaks. He sometimes — seems to begin to speak, but it always ends in a yawn. Yet how well that yawn seems to express his terrible creed!”

I had reached the top step, and now saw the other two men more clearly: one was a blonde German with watery eyes and wild moustaches. The other was an elderly man with black whiskers and green spectacles. He was in the middle of an oration when I reached him.

“It is merely,” he said, “a matter of science — a matter for experts. What could be more absurd than the present construction of the thing?”

At this point the pale young man (who seemed to be a sort of showman) whispered in my ear: “Dr. Blood; he has made Conduct a science.”

Dr. Blood continued: “What can be more absurd, architecturally, than that singular object at the top of the cathedral; I mean the object with the projecting arms? Think of putting up a thing with projecting arms, and expecting it to stand upright? The ball, too, is obviously top-heavy. The dome is a curve. I am against curves.”

He paused for an instant, and Professor Pyffer opened his mouth as if to speak. Then he opened his mouth as if to shout; and then he shut it in silence. He had only yawned.

“In that yawn,” whispered the young man to me, “he has swallowed all the stars.”

I replied that they did not seem to agree with him; but Dr. Blood was still going on.

“The matter is to an expert, obvious. The thing at the top should be a small cube of stone. The ball should be a cube of stone slightly larger. The dome should be represented by a cube larger still, and so on. If it were built like that, it would never fall down.”

“Has it ever occurred to you,” I asked, “that if it were built like that we should want it to fall down?”

“The stranger speaks right,” broke in the fair man with the watery eyes. “It should be upwards ever! From the man to the superman! From the structure to the superstructure! I will tell you the fault of your architecture; it is not upon the nature-energy based! Your churches are larger at the bottom, smaller at the top. But the all- mother-born trees are smaller at the bottom, larger at the top. So should this cathedral be. In the first floor two domes, in the second floor three domes, in the third floor, and so on, ever branching, ever increasing, each landing larger than the last one, till at last...”

He had flung up his arms in a rigid ecstasy. His voice failed, but his arms remained vertical; so we all murmured “Quite so.”

Then Dr. Blood said in a curious, cool voice, “Now you trust the expert. I’ll put this place right in two minutes.”

He strode into the interior, and then we heard three taps. And the next moment this dome that filled the sky shook as in an earthquake, and tilted sideways. Nothing could express the enormous unreason of that familiar scene silently gone wrong.

I awoke to hear the hoarse voice of the yawning man, speaking for the first and last time in my ear.

“Do you see,” he whispered, “the sky is crooked?”

The Giant

When Jack the Giant Killer really first saw the giant his experience was not such as has been generally supposed. If you care to hear it I will tell you the real story of Jack the Giant Killer. To begin with, the most awful thing which Jack first felt about the giant was that he was not a giant. He came striding across an interminable wooded plain, and against its remote horizon the giant was quite a small figure, like a figure in a picture — he seemed merely a man walking across the grass. Then Jack was shocked by remembering that the grass which the man was treading down was one of the tallest forests upon that plain. The man came nearer and nearer, growing bigger and bigger, and at the instant when he passed the possible stature of humanity Jack almost screamed. The rest was an intolerable apocalypse.

The giant had the one frightful quality of a miracle: the more he became incredible the more he became solid. The less one could believe in him the more plainly one could see him. It was unbearable that so much of the sky should be occupied by one human face. His eyes which had stood out like bow windows, became bigger yet, and there was no metaphor that could contain their bigness; yet still they were human eyes. Jack's intellect was utterly gone under that huge hypnotism of the face that filled the sky; his last hope was submerged, his five wits all still with terror.

But there stood up in him still a kind of cold chivalry, a dignity of dead honour that would not forget the small and futile sword in his hand. He rushed at one of the colossal feet of this human tower, and when he came quite close to it the ankle-bone arched over him like a cave. Then he planted the point of his sword against the foot and leant on it with all his weight, till it went up to the hilt and broke the hilt, and then snapped just under it. And it was plain that the giant felt a sort of prick, for he snatched up his great foot into his great hand for an instant; and then, putting it down again, he bent over and stared at the ground until he had seen his enemy.

Then he picked up Jack between a big finger and thumb and threw him away; and as Jack went through the air he felt as if he were flying from system to system through the universe of stars. But, as the giant had thrown him away carelessly, he did not strike a stone, but struck soft mire by the side of a distant river. There he lay insensible for several hours; but when he awoke again his horrible conqueror was still in sight. He was striding away across the void and wooded plain towards where it ended in the sea; and by this time he was only much higher than any of the hills. He grew less and less indeed; but only as a really high mountain grows at last less and less when we leave it in a railway train. Half an hour afterwards he was a bright blue colour, as are the distant hills; but his outline was still human and still gigantic. Then the big blue figure seemed to come to the brink of the big blue sea, and even as it did so it altered its attitude. Jack, stunned and bleeding, lifted himself laboriously upon one elbow to stare. The giant once more caught hold of his ankle, wavered twice as in a wind, and then went over into the great sea which washes the whole world, and which, alone of all things God has made, was big enough to drown him.

The Tree of Pride

If you go down to the Barbary Coast, where the last wedge of the forest narrows down between the desert and the great tideless sea, you will find the natives still telling a strange story about a saint of the Dark Ages. There, on the twilight border of the Dark Continent, you feel the Dark Ages. I have only visited the place once, though it lies so to speak, opposite to the Italian city where I lived for years, and yet you would hardly believe how the topsy-turveydom and transmigration of this myth somehow seemed less mad than they really are, with the wood loud with lions at night and that dark red solitude beyond. They say that the hermit St. Securis, living there among trees, grew to love them like companions; since, though great giants with many arms like Briareus, they were the mildest and most blameless of the creatures; they did not devour like the lions, but rather opened their arms to all the little birds. And he prayed that they might be loosened from time to time to walk like other things. And the trees were moved upon the prayers of Securis, as they were at the songs of Orpheus. The men of the desert were stricken from afar with fear, seeing the saint walking with a walking grove, like a schoolmaster with his boys. For the trees were thus freed under strict conditions of discipline. They were to return at the sound of the hermit's bell, and, above all, to copy the wild beasts in walking only — to destroy and devour nothing. Well, it is said that one of the trees heard a voice that was not the saint's; that, in the warm green twilight of one summer evening it became conscious of something sitting and speaking in its branches in the guise of a great bird, and it was that which once spoke from a tree in the guise of a great serpent. As the voice grew louder among its murmuring leaves the tree was torn with a great desire to stretch out and snatch at the birds that flew harmlessly about their nests, and pluck them to pieces. Finally, the tempter filled the tree-top with his own birds of pride, the starry pageant of the peacocks. And the spirit of the brute overcame the spirit of the tree, and it rent and consumed the blue-green birds till not a plume was left, and returned to the quiet tribe of trees. But they say that when spring came all the other trees put forth leaves, but this put forth feathers of a strange hue and pattern. And by that monstrous assimilation the saint knew of the sin, and he rooted that one tree to the earth with a judgement so that evil should fall on any who removed it again.

A Legend of Saint Francis

St. Francis, playing in the fields of heaven, had been informed by his spiritual great-grandson Friar Bacon (who takes an interest in new and curious things) that the modern world was just about to witness a great celebration in honour of the great founder. St. Francis, out of his great love for his fellows, felt an ardent desire to be present; but the Blessed Thomas More, who had seen the modern world begin and had his doubts, shook his head with the melancholy humour that made him so charming a companion. “I fear,” he said, “that you will find the present state of the world very distressing to your hopes of Holy Poverty and charity to all. Even when I left (rather abruptly) men were beginning to grab land greedily, to pile up gold and silver, to live for nothing but pleasure and luxury in the arts.” St. Francis said he was prepared for that; but although he came down to the world in that sense prepared, as he walked about the world he was puzzled.

At first he had a kind of hope, not unmixed with holy fear, that all the people had become Franciscans. Nearly all of them were without land. Large numbers of them were without homes. If they had really all of them been grabbing property, it seems strange that hardly any of them had got any. Then he met a Philanthropist, who professed to have ideals very similar to his own, though less clearly expressed; and St. Francis had occasion to apologise, with all his characteristic good manners, for the fact that his vow forbade him to carry any gold or silver in his purse. “I never carry money about myself,” said the Philanthropist nodding; “Our system of credit has become so complete that coins seem quite antiquated.” Then he took out a little piece of paper and wrote on it; and the saint could not but admire the beautiful faith and simplicity with which this scribble was received as a substitute for cash. But when he went a little deeper into conversation with the Philanthropist, he grew more and more doubtful and troubled in his mind. For instance, it was doubtless in consequence of some highly respectable Vow that the Philanthropist and most other commercial persons were dressed in black and grey and other sober colours. Indeed they seemed, in a rapture of Christian humility, to have made themselves as hideous as possible; the shapes of their hats and trousers being quite horrible to the artistic sensibilities of the Italian. But when he began to talk with gentle awe about their sacrifice, and how hard he had himself felt it even to surrender the crimson cloaks and capes, the gilded belts and swordhilts of his own gay and gallant youth, he was mystified to find that the merchants of his own guild in this epoch had never felt even the obvious temptation to wear swords. More and more did he feel convinced that they were of a finer spiritual order than himself; but, as this was no new feeling for him, he continued to confide in these ascetics about the defects of his own asceticism. He told them how he had cried: “I may yet have children,” and how much family life attracted him; at which they all laughed, and began to explain that few of them had any children or wanted any. And as they went on talking, that understanding which is terribly alert even in the most innocent of saints, began to creep upon him like a dreadful paralysis. It is uncertain whether he fully understood why and how they denied themselves this natural pleasure; but it is certain that he went rather hurriedly back to heaven. Nobody knows what saints really think; but he was said by some to have concluded that the bad men of his time were better than the good men of ours.

The Angry Street

I cannot remember whether this tale is true or not. If I read it through very carefully I have a suspicion that I should come to the conclusion that it is not. But, unfortunately, I cannot read it through very carefully, because, you see, it is not written yet. The image and idea of it clung to me through a great part of my boyhood; I may have dreamt it before I could talk; or told it to myself before I could read; or read it before I could remember. On the whole, however, I am certain that I did not read it. For children have very clear memories about things like that; and of the books of which I was really fond I can still remember not only the shape and bulk and binding, but even the position of the printed words on many of the pages. On the whole, I incline to the opinion that it happened to me before I was born.

At any rate, let us tell the story now with all the advantages of the atmosphere that has clung to it. You may suppose me, for the sake of argument, sitting at lunch in one of those quick-lunch restaurants in the City where men take their food so fast that it has none of the quality of food, and take their half-hour's vacation so fast that it has none of the qualities of leisure. To hurry through one's leisure is the most unbusiness-like of actions. They all wore tall shiny hats as if they could not lose an instant even to hang them on a peg, and they all had one eye a little off, hypnotized by the huge eye of the clock. In short they were the slaves of the modern bondage, you could hear their fetters clanking. Each was, in fact, bound by a chain; the heaviest chain ever tied to a man — it is called a watch-chain.

Now, among these there entered and sat down opposite to me a man who almost immediately opened an uninterrupted monologue. He was like all the other men in dress, yet he was startlingly opposite to them all in manner. He wore a high shiny hat and a long frock coat, but he wore them as such solemn things were meant to be worn; he wore the silk hat as if it were a mitre, and the frock coat as if it were the ephod of a high priest. He not only hung his hat up on the peg, but he seemed (such was his stateliness) almost to ask permission of the hat for doing so, and to apologize to the peg for making use of it. When he had sat down on a wooden chair with the air of one considering its feelings and given a sort of slight stoop or bow to the wooden table itself, as if it were an altar, I could not help some comment springing to my lips. For the man was a big, sanguine-faced, prosperous-looking man, and yet he treated everything with a care that almost amounted to nervousness.

For the sake of saying something to express my interest I said, “This furniture is fairly solid; but, of course, people do treat it much too carelessly.”

As I looked up doubtfully my eye caught his, and was fixed as his was fixed, in an apocalyptic stare. I had thought him ordinary as he entered, save for his strange, cautious manner; but if the other people had seen him then they would have screamed and emptied the room. They did not see him, and they went on making a clatter with their forks, and a murmur with their conversation. But the man’s face was the face of a maniac.

“Did you mean anything particular by that remark?” he asked at last, and the blood crawled back slowly into his face.

“Nothing whatever,” I answered. “One does not mean anything here; it spoils people’s digestions.”

He leaned back and wiped his broad forehead with a high handkerchief; and yet there seemed to be a sort of regret in his relief.

“I thought perhaps,” he said in a low voice, “that another of them had gone wrong.”

“If you mean another digestion gone wrong,” I said, “I never heard of one here that went right. This is the heart of the Empire, and the other organs are in an equally bad way.”

“No, I mean another street gone wrong,” he said heavily and quietly, “but as I suppose that doesn’t explain much to you, I think I shall have to tell you the story. I do so with all the less responsibility; because I know you won’t believe it. For forty years of my life I invariably left my office, which is in Leadenhall Street, at half-past five in the afternoon, taking with me an umbrella in the right hand and a bag in the left hand. For forty years two months and four days I passed out of the side office door, walked down the street on the left-hand side, took the first turning to the left and the third to the right, from where I bought an evening paper, followed the road on the right-hand side round two obtuse angles, and came out just outside a Metropolitan station, where I took a train home. For forty years two months and four days I fulfilled this course by accumulated habit: it was not a long street that I traversed, and it took me about four and a half minutes to do it. After forty years two months and four days, on the fifth day I went out in the same manner, with my umbrella in the right hand and my bag in the left, and I began to notice that walking along the familiar street tired me somewhat more than usual. At first I thought I must be breathless and out of condition; though this, again, seemed unnatural, as my habits had always been like clockwork. But after a little while I became convinced that the road was distinctly on a more steep incline that I had known previously; I was positively panting uphill. Owing to this no doubt the corner of the street seemed further off than usual; and when I turned it I was convinced that I had turned down the wrong one. For now the street shot up quite a steep slant, such as one only sees in the hilly parts of London, and in this part there were no hills at all. Yet it was not the wrong street. The name written on it was the same; the shuttered shops were the same; the lamp-posts and the whole look of the perspective was the same; only it was tilted upwards like a lid. Forgetting any trouble about breathlessness or fatigue I ran furiously forward, and reached the second of my accustomed turnings, which ought to bring me almost within sight of the station. And as I turned that corner I nearly fell on the pavement. For now the street went up straight in front of my face like a steep staircase or the side of a pyramid. There was not for miles round that place so much as a slope like that of Ludgate Hill. And this was a slope like that of the Matterhorn. The whole street had lifted itself like a single wave, and yet every speck and detail of it was the same, and I saw in the high distance, as at the top of an Alpine pass, picked out in pink letters the name over my paper shop.

“I ran on and on blindly now, passing all the shops, and coming to a part of the road where there was a long grey row of private houses. I had, I know not why, an irrational feeling that I was on a long iron bridge in empty space. An impulse seized me, and I pulled up the iron trap of a coal hole. Looking down through it I saw empty space and the stars.

“When I looked up again a man was standing in his front garden, having apparently come out of his house; he was leaning over the railings and gazing at me. We were all alone on that nightmare road; his face was in shadow; his dress was dark and ordinary; but when I saw him standing so perfectly still I knew somehow that he was not of this world. And the stars behind his head were larger and fiercer than ought to be endured by the eyes of men.

“‘If you are a kind angel,’ I said, ‘or a wise devil, or have anything in common with mankind, tell me what is this street possessed of devils.’

“After a long silence he said, ‘What do you say that it is?’

“‘It is Bumpton Street, of course,’ I snapped. ‘It goes to Oldgate Station.’

“‘Yes,’ he admitted gravely; ‘it goes there sometimes. Just now, however, it is going to heaven.’

“‘To heaven?’ I said. ‘Why?’

“‘It is going to heaven for justice,’ he replied. ‘You must have treated it badly. Remember always that there is one thing that cannot be endured by anybody or anything. That one unendurable thing is to be overworked and also neglected. For instance, you can overwork women — everybody does. But you can’t neglect women — I defy you to. At the same time, you can neglect tramps and gipsies and all the apparent refuse of the State, so long as you do not overwork them. But no beast of the field, no horse, no dog can endure long to be asked to do more than his work and yet have less than his honour. It is the same with streets. You have worked this street to death, and yet you have never remembered its existence. If you had owned a healthy democracy, even of pagans, they would have hung this street with garlands and given it the name of a god. Then it would have gone quietly. But at last the street has grown tired of your tireless insolence; and it is bucking and rearing its head to heaven. Have you never sat on a bucking horse?’

“I looked at the long grey street, and for a moment it seemed to me to be exactly like the long grey neck of a horse flung up to heaven. But in a moment my sanity returned, and I said, ‘But this is all nonsense. Streets go to the place they have to go to. A street must always go to its end.’

“‘Why do you think so of a street?’ he asked, standing very still.

“‘Because I have always seen it do the same thing,’ I replied, in reasonable anger. ‘Day after day, year after year, it has always gone to Oldgate Station; day after...’

“I stopped, for he had flung up his head with the fury of the road in revolt.

“‘And you?’ he cried terribly. ‘What do you think the road thinks of you? Does the road think you are alive? Are you alive! Day after day, year after year, *you* have gone to Oldgate Station...’ Since then I have respected the things called inanimate.”

And bowing slightly to the mustard-pot, the man in the restaurant withdrew.

The Legend Of The Sword

A strange story is told of the Spanish-American War, of a sort that sounds like the echo of some elder epic: of how an active Yankee, pursuing the enemy, came at last to a forgotten Spanish station on an island and felt as if he had intruded on the presence of a ghost. For he found in a house hung with ragged Cordova leather and old gold tapestries, a Spaniard as out of time as Don Quixote, who had no weapon but an ancient sword. This he declared his family had kept bright and sharp since the days of Cortes: and it may be imagined with what a smile the American regarded it, standing spick and span with his Sam Browne belt and his new service revolver.

His amusement was naturally increased when he found, moored close by, the gilded skeleton of an old galley. When the Spanish spectre sprang on board, brandishing his useless weapon, and his captor followed, the whole parted amidships and the two were left clinging to a spar. And here (says the legend) the story took a strange turn: for they floated far on this rude raft together: and were ultimately cast up on a desert island.

The shelving shores of the island were covered with a jungle of rush and tall grasses; which it was necessary to clear away, both to make space for a hut and to plait mats or curtains for it. With an activity rather surprising in one so slow and old-fashioned, the Spaniard drew his sword and began to use it in the manner of a scythe. The other asked if he could assist.

“This, as you say, is a rude and antiquated tool,” replied the swordsman, “and your own is a weapon of precision and promptitude. If, therefore, you (with your unerring aim) will condescend to shoot off each blade of grass, one at a time, who can doubt that the task will be more rapidly accomplished?”

The face of the Iberian, under the closest scrutiny, seemed full of gravity and even gloom: and the work continued in silence. In spite of his earthly toils, however, the Hidalgo contrived to remain reasonably neat and spruce: and the puzzle was partially solved one morning when the American, rising early, found his comrade shaving himself with the sword, which that foolish family legend had kept particularly keen.

“A man with no earthly possessions but an old iron blade,” said the Spaniard apologetically, “must shave himself as best he can. But you, equipped as you are with every luxury of science, will have no difficulty in shooting off your whiskers with a pistol.”

So far from profiting by this graceful felicitation, the modern traveller seemed for a moment a little ruffled or put out: then he said abruptly, unslinging his revolver, “Well, I guess I can’t eat my whiskers, anyhow; and this little toy may be more use in getting breakfast.”

And blazing away rapidly and with admirable aim, he brought down five birds and emptied his revolver.

“Let me assure you,” said the other courteously, “that you have provided the materials for more than one elegant repast. Only after that, your ammunition being now exhausted, shall we have to fall back on a clumsy trick of mine, of spiking fish on the sword.”

“You can spike me now, I suppose, as well as the fish,” said the other bitterly. “We seem to have sunk back into a state of barbarism.”

“We have sunk into a state,” said the Spaniard, nodding gravely, “in which we can get anything we want with what we have got already.”

“But,” cried the American, “that is the end of all Progress!”

“I wonder whether it matters much which end?” said the other.

How I Found The Superman

Readers of Mr. Bernard Shaw and other modern writers may be interested to know that the Superman has been found. I found him; he lives in South Croydon. My success will be a great blow to Mr. Shaw, who has been following quite a false scent, and is now looking for the creature in Blackpool; and as for Mr. Wells's notion of generating him out of gases in a private laboratory, I always thought it doomed to failure. I assure Mr. Wells that the Superman at Croydon was born in the ordinary way, though he himself, of course, is anything but ordinary.

Nor are his parents unworthy of the wonderful being whom they have given to the world. The name of Lady Hypatia Smythe-Browne (now Lady Hypatia Hagg) will never be forgotten in the East End, where she did such splendid social work. Her constant cry of "Save the children!" referred to the cruel neglect of children's eyesight involved in allowing them to play with crudely painted toys. She quoted unanswerable statistics to prove that children allowed to look at violet and vermilion often suffered from failing eyesight in their extreme old age; and it was owing to her ceaseless crusade that the pestilence of the Monkey-on-the-Stick was almost swept from Hoxton. The devoted worker would tramp the streets untiringly, taking away the toys from all the poor children, who were often moved to tears by her kindness. Her good work was interrupted, partly by a new interest in the creed of Zoroaster, and partly by a savage blow from an umbrella. It was inflicted by a dissolute Irish apple-woman, who, on returning from some orgy to her ill-kept apartment, found Lady Hypatia in the bedroom taking down an oleograph, which, to say the least of it, could not really elevate the mind. At this the ignorant and partly intoxicated Celt dealt the social reformer a severe blow, adding to it an absurd accusation of theft. The lady's exquisitely balanced mind received a shock, and it was during a short mental illness that she married Dr. Hagg.

Of Dr. Hagg himself I hope there is no need to speak. Any one even slightly acquainted with those daring experiments in Neo-Individualist Eugenics, which are now the one absorbing interest of the English democracy, must know his name and often commend it to the personal protection of an impersonal power. Early in life he brought to bear that ruthless insight into the history of religions which he had gained in boyhood as an electrical engineer. Later he became one of our greatest geologists; and achieved that bold and bright outlook upon the future of Socialism which only geology can give. At first there seemed something like a rift, a faint, but perceptible, fissure, between his views and those of his aristocratic wife. For she was in favour (to use her own powerful epigram) of protecting the poor against themselves; while he declared pitilessly, in a new and striking metaphor, that the weakest must go to the wall. Eventually, however, the married pair perceived an essential union in the unmistakably modern character of both their views; and in this enlightening and intelligible formula their souls found peace. The result is that this union of the two highest types of our civilization, the fashionable lady and the all but vulgar medical man, has been blessed by the birth"- of the Superman, that being whom all the labourers in Battersea are so eagerly expecting night and day.

I found the house Of Dr. and Lady Hypatia Hagg without much difficulty; it is situated in one of the last straggling streets of Croydon, and overlooked by a line of poplars. I reached the door towards the twilight, and it was natural that I should fancifully see something dark and monstrous in the dim bulk of that house which contained the creature who was more marvellous than the children of men. When I entered the house I was received with exquisite courtesy by Lady Hypatia and her husband; but I found much greater difficulty in actually seeing the Superman, who is now about fifteen years old, and is kept by himself in a quiet room. Even my conversation with the father and mother did not quite clear up the character of this mysterious being. Lady Hypatia, who has a pale and poignant face, and is clad in those impalpable and pathetic greys and greens with which she has brightened so many homes in Hoxton, did not appear to talk of her offspring with any of the vulgar vanity of an ordinary human mother. I took a bold step and asked if the Superman was nice looking.

"He creates his own standard, you see," she replied, with a slight sigh. "Upon that plane he is more than Apollo. Seen from our lower plane, of course— "And she sighed again.

I had a horrible impulse, and said suddenly, "Has he got any hair?"

There was a long and painful silence, and then Dr. Hagg said smoothly: "Everything upon that plane is different; what he has got is not... well, not, of course, what we call hair... but—"

“Don’t you think,” said his wife, very softly, “don’t you think that really, for the sake of argument, when talking to the mere public, one might call it hair?”

“Perhaps you are right,” said the doctor after a few moments’ reflection. “In connexion with hair like that one must speak in parables.”

“Well, what on earth is it,” I asked in some irritation, “if it isn’t hair? Is it feathers?”

“Not feathers, as we understand feathers,” answered Hagg in an awful voice.

I got up in some irritation. “Can I see him, at any rate?” I asked. “I am a journalist, and have no earthly motives except curiosity and personal vanity. I should like to say that I had shaken hands with the Superman.”

The husband and wife had both got heavily to their feet, and stood, embarrassed.

“Well, of course, you know,” said Lady Hypatia, with the really charming smile of the aristocratic hostess. “You know he can’t exactly shake hands... not hands, you know... The structure, of course—”

I broke out of all social bounds, and rushed at the door of the room which I thought to contain the incredible creature. I burst it open; the room was pitch dark. But from in front of me came a small sad yelp, and from behind me a double shriek.

“You have done it, now!” cried Dr. Hagg, burying his bald brow in his hands. “You have let in a draught on him; and he is dead.”

As I walked away from Croydon that night I saw men in black carrying out a coffin that was not of any human shape. The wind wailed above me, whirling the poplars, so that they drooped and nodded like the plumes of some cosmic funeral. “It is, indeed,” said Dr. Hagg, “the whole universe weeping over the frustration of its most magnificent birth.” But I thought that there was a hoot of laughter in the high wail of the wind.

Dukes

The Due de Chambertin-Pommard was a small but lively relic of a really aristocratic family, the members of which were nearly all Atheists up to the time of the French Revolution, but since that event (beneficial in such various ways) had been very devout. He was a Royalist, a Nationalist, and a perfectly sincere patriot in that particular style which consists of ceaselessly asserting that one's country is not so much in danger as already destroyed. He wrote cheery little articles for the Royalist Press entitled "The End of France" or "The Last Cry," or what not, and he gave the final touches to a picture of the Kaiser riding across a pavement of prostrate Parisians with a glow of patriotic exultation. He was quite poor, and even his relations had no money. He walked briskly to all his meals at a little open cafe, and he looked just like everybody else.

Living in a country where aristocracy does not exist, he had a high opinion of it. He would yearn for the swords and the stately manners of the Pommards before the Revolution — most of whom had been (in theory) Republicans. But he turned with a more practical eagerness to the one country in Europe where the tricolour has never flown and men have never been roughly equalized before the State. The beacon and comfort of his life was England, which all Europe sees clearly as the one pure aristocracy that remains. He had, moreover, a mild taste for sport and kept an English bulldog, and he believed the English to be a race of bulldogs, of heroic squires, and hearty yeomen vassals, because he read all this in English Conservative papers, written by exhausted little Levantine clerks. But his reading was naturally for the most part in the French Conservative papers (though he knew English well), and it was in these that he first heard of the horrible Budget. There he read of the confiscatory revolution planned by the Lord Chancellor of the Exchequer, the sinister Georges Lloyd. He also read how chivalrously Prince Arthur Balfour of Burleigh had defied that demagogue, assisted by Austen, the Lord Chamberlain and the gay and witty Walter Lang. And being a brisk partisan and a capable journalist, he decided to pay England a special visit and report to his paper upon the struggle.

He drove for an eternity in an open fly through beautiful woods, with a letter of introduction in his pocket to one duke, who was to introduce him to another duke. The endless and numberless avenues of bewildering pine woods gave him a queer feeling that he was driving through the countless corridors of a dream. Yet the vast silence and freshness healed his irritation at modern ugliness and unrest. It seemed a background fit for the return of chivalry. In such a forest a king and all his court might lose themselves hunting or a knight errant might perish with no companion but God. The castle itself when he reached it was somewhat smaller than he had expected, but he was delighted with its romantic and castellated outline. He was just about to alight when somebody opened two enormous gates at the side and the vehicle drove briskly through.

“That is not the house?” he inquired politely of the driver.

“No, sir,” said the driver, controlling the corners of his mouth. “The lodge, sir.”

“Indeed,” said the Due de Chambertin-Pommard, “that is where the Duke’s land begins?”

“Oh no, sir,” said the man, quite in distress. “We’ve been in his Grace’s land all day.”

The Frenchman thanked him and leant back in the carriage, feeling as if everything were incredibly huge and vast, like Gulliver in the country of the Brobdingnags.

He got out in front of a long facade of a somewhat severe building, and a little careless man in a shooting jacket and knickerbockers ran down the steps. He had a weak, fair moustache and dull, blue, babyish eyes; his features were insignificant, but his manner extremely pleasant and hospitable. This was the Duke of Aylesbury, perhaps the largest landowner in Europe, and known only as a horsebreeder until he began to write abrupt little letters about the Budget. He led the French Duke upstairs, talking trivialities in a hearty way, and there presented him to another and more important English oligarch, who got up from a writing-desk with a slightly senile jerk. He had a gleaming bald head and glasses; the lower part of his face was masked with a short, dark beard, which did not conceal a beaming smile, not unmixed with sharpness. He stooped a little as he ran, like some sedentary head clerk or cashier; and even without the cheque-book and papers on his desk would have given the impression of a merchant or man of business. He was dressed in a light grey check jacket. He was the Duke of Windsor, the great Unionist statesman. Between these two loose, amiable men, the little Gaul stood erect in his black frock coat, with the monstrous gravity of French ceremonial good manners. This stiffness led the Duke of Windsor to put him at his ease (like a tenant), and he said, rubbing his hands:

"I was delighted with your letter... delighted. I shall be very pleased if I can give you — er — any details."

"My visit," said the Frenchman, "scarcely suffices for the scientific exhaustion of detail. I seek only the idea. The idea, that is always the immediate thing."

"Quite so," said the other rapidly; "quite so... the idea."

Feeling somehow that it was his turn (the English Duke having done all that could be required of him) Pommard had to say: "I mean the idea of aristocracy. I regard this as the last great battle for the idea. Aristocracy, like any other thing, must justify itself to mankind. Aristocracy is good because it preserves a picture of human dignity in a world where that dignity is often obscured by servile necessities. Aristocracy alone can keep a certain high reticence of soul and body, a certain noble distance between the sexes."

The Duke of Aylesbury, who had a clouded recollection of having squirted soda-water down the neck of a Countess on the previous evening, looked somewhat gloomy, as if lamenting the theoretic spirit of the Latin race. The elder Duke laughed heartily, and said: "Well, well, you know; we English are horribly practical. With us the great question is the land. Out here in the country... do you know this part?"

"Yes, yes," cried the Frenchman eagerly. "I see what you mean. The country! The old rustic life of humanity! A holy war upon the bloated and filthy towns. What right have these anarchists to attack your busy and prosperous countrysides? Have they not thriven under your management? Are not the English villages always growing larger and gayer under the enthusiastic leadership of their encouraging squires? Have you not the Maypole? Have you not Merry England?"

The Duke of Aylesbury made a noise in his throat, and then said very indistinctly: "They all go to London."

"All go to London?" repeated Pommard, with a blank stare. "Why?"

This time nobody answered, and Pommard had to attack again.

"The spirit of aristocracy is essentially opposed to the greed of the industrial cities. Yet in France there are actually one or two nobles so vile as to drive coal and gas trades, and drive them hard."

The Duke of Windsor looked at the carpet.

The Duke of Aylesbury went and looked out of the window. At length the latter said: “That’s rather stiff, you know. One has to look after one’s own business in town, as well.”

“Do not say it,” cried the little Frenchman, starting up. “I tell you all Europe is one fight between business and honour. If we do not fight for honour, who will? What other right have we poor two- legged sinners to titles and quartered shields except that we staggeringly support some idea of giving things which cannot be demanded and avoiding things which cannot be punished? Our only claim is to be a wall across Christendom against the Jew pedlars and pawnbrokers, against the Goldsteins and the—”

The Duke of Aylesbury swung round with his hands in his pockets.

“Oh, I say,” he said, “you’ve been readin’ Lloyd George. Nobody but dirty Radicals can say a word against Goldstein.”

“I certainly cannot permit,” said the elder Duke, rising rather shakily, “the respected name of Lord Goldstein—”

He intended to be impressive, but there was something in the Frenchman’s eye that is not so easily impressed; there shone there that steel which is the mind of France.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I think I have all the details now. You have ruled England for four hundred years. By your own account you have not made the countryside endurable to men. By your own account you have helped the victory of vulgarity and smoke. And by your own account you are hand and glove with those very money- grubbers and adventurers whom gentlemen have no other business but to keep at bay. I do not know what your people will do; but my people would kill you.”

Some seconds afterwards he had left the Duke’s house, and some hours afterwards the Duke’s estate.

The Roots of the World

Once upon a time a little boy lived in a garden in which he was permitted to pick the flowers but forbidden to pull them up by the roots. There was, however, one particular plant, insignificant, somewhat thorny, with a small, star-like flower, which he very much wanted to pull up by the roots. His tutors and guardians, who lived in the house with him, were worthy, formal people, and they gave him reasons why he should not pull it up. They were silly reasons as a rule. But none of the reasons against doing the thing was quite so silly as the little boy's reason for wanting to do it; for his reason was that Truth demanded that he should pull the thing up by the roots to see how it was growing. Still it was a sleepy, thoughtless kind of house, and nobody gave him the real answer to his argument, which was that it would kill the plant, and that there is no more Truth about a dead plant than about a live one. So one dark night, when clouds sealed the moon like a secret too good or too bad to be told, the little boy came down the old creaking stairs of his farmhouse and crept into the garden in his nightgown. He told himself repeatedly that there was no more reason against his pulling this plant off the garden than against his knocking off a thistle-top idly in a lane. Yet the darkness which he had chosen contradicted him, and also his own throbbing pulse, for he told himself continually that next morning he might be crucified as the blasphemer who had torn up the sacred tree.

Perhaps he might have been so crucified if he had so torn it up. I cannot say. But he did not tear it up; and it was not for want of trying. For when he laid hold of the little plant in the garden he tugged and tugged, and found the thing held as if clamped to the earth with iron. And when he strained himself a third time there came a frightful noise behind him, and either nerves or (which he would have denied) conscience made him leap back and stagger and stare around. The house he lived in was a mere bulk of blackness against a sky almost as black. Yet after staring long he saw that the very outline had grown unfamiliar, for the great chimney of the kitchen had fallen crooked and calamitous. Desperately he gave another pull at the plant, and heard far off the roof of the stables fall in and the horses shriek and plunge. Then he ran into the house and rolled himself in the bedclothes. Next morning found the kitchen ruined, the day's food destroyed, two horses dead, and three broken loose and lost. But the boy still kept a furious curiosity, and a little while after, when a fog from the sea had hidden house and garden, he dragged again at the roots of the indestructable plant. He hung on to it like a boy on the rope of a tug of war, but it did not give. Only through the grey sea- fog came choking and panic-stricken cries; they cried that the King's castle had fallen, that the towers guarding the coast were gone; that half the great sea-city had split away and slid into the sea. Then the boy was frightened for a little while, and said no more about the plant, but when he had come to a strong and careless manhood, and the destruction in the district had been repaired, he said openly before the people, "Let us have done with the riddle of this irrational weed. In the name of Truth let us drag it up." And he gathered a great company of strong men, like an army to meet invaders, and they all laid hold of the little plant and they tugged night and day. And the Great Wall fell down in China for forty miles. And the Pyramids were split up into jagged stones. And the Eiffel Tower in Paris went over like a ninepin, killing half the Parisians; and the Statue of Liberty in New York harbour fell forward suddenly and smashed the American fleet; and St. Paul's Cathedral killed all the journalists in Fleet Street, and Japan had a record series of earthquakes and then sank into the sea. Some have declared that these last two incidents were not calamities properly so called; but into that I will not enter. The point was that when they had tugged for about twenty-four hours the strong men of that country had pulled down about half of the civilized world, but had not pulled up the plant. I will not weary the reader with the full facts of this realistic story, with how they used first elephants and then steam-engines to tear up the flower, and how the only result was that the flower stuck fast, but that the moon began to be agitated and even the sun was a bit dicky. At last the human race interfered, as it always does at last, by means of a revolution. But long before that the boy, or man, who is the hero of this tale, had thrown up the business, merely saying to his pastors and masters, "You gave me a number of elaborate and idle reasons why I should not pull up this shrub. Why did you not give me the two good reasons; first, that I can't; second, that I should damage everything else if I ever tried it on?"

Chivalry Begins At Home

Mr. William Hicks of West Kensington rose from breakfast, giving the morning paper a flourish as if it were a flag. A new light was in his eyes; he had been fired by the appeal of Mr. Mitchell-Hedges and his demand for a return of the old English spirit of adventure, as shown by explorers and pioneers. A moment's reflection showed him that adventure was difficult for a clerk with a small salary; for it seemed to cost a good deal to "fit out" an expedition. Adventure, which would seem to be the cheapest thing, is really the most expensive. And then a second and more reasonable reflection occurred to him. The essential of the explorer's appeal was to energy and courage, to seeking peril and experience, not latitude and longitude. After all, an adventurous life can be lived anywhere, so long as there is danger and an honourable cause.

His next-door neighbour, who had furnished his house on the hire system, had indeed paid the whole of the highly profiteering price in instalments, save for a few shillings, and had then lost everything, both the money and the furniture, and been practically ruined. The neighbour was ready enough to say it was a swindle, as it was. None the less was he somewhat surprised at the appearance of Mr. Hicks climbing by moonlight over the garden wall, with a mask, a pistol, a jemmy and a rope-ladder and a proposal to recover the furniture from the neighbouring warehouse by burglary. Mr. Hicks was surprised by the sudden cooling of the spirit of adventure in the victim of oppression; for, as he pointed out, the cause was more just than that against any savage tribe and the peril defied far greater than that of lions.

Mr. Hicks was arrested by the police when halfway down a rope with the third bedroom chair in his teeth. Seldom, he admitted, had he felt so much the thrill of adventure. He received a short sentence as a first offender; a defect that he at once set about to correct. Proceeding to the mansion of a usurer, he fought with three footmen and a butler on the way to deliver his denunciation and was eventually arrested again for demanding money with threats. But he was so stubborn and pertinacious in his course that it seemed more safe and scientific to convict him of being feeble-minded. Finding himself shut up in an asylum with several people as sane as himself, he raised a mutiny, put all the doctors into strait waistcoats and fled to London.

He resolved to attack head-quarters, and by climbing on the roof of Downing Street and coining down the chimney, he presented himself before a Cabinet Minister, a pleasant, rather humorous-looking man, smoking a pipe-after dinner. Indeed his reception was so disarmingly genial that he found himself speaking warmly in his own defence: “What does it mean?” he demanded. “You all praise courage and adventure; all your novels are full of it; all your newspapers urge us to it, saying the pioneers are the only patriots. Why do you praise all these adventurers in distant lands?”

“Precisely,” said the politician with a smile. “In distant lands. Don’t you think you’ve answered your own question, Mr. Hicks? Or must you be let in to a little more of the secret? My dear sir, adventure is a great thing, a glorious thing; and why? Because it kills off adventurous people. Empire-Building at the ends of the earth is splendid, and why? Because it keeps all adventurers out of the country — just like undesirable aliens. Patriots — yes, indeed; have you never understood the pathos of those lovely lines: ‘True patriots they, for be it understood they left their country for their country’s good.’”

The statesman’s smile was rather subtle: and Mr. Hicks left the house thoughtfully, not by the chimney but the door.

The Sword Of Wood

Down in the little village of Grayling-Abbot, in Somerset, men did not know that the world we live in had begun. They did not know that all we have come to call ‘modern’ had silently entered England, and changed the air of it. Well, they did not know it very clearly even in London: though one or two shrewd men like my Lord Clarendon, and perhaps Prince Rupert, with his chemicals and his sad eyes, may have had a glimmer of it.

On the contrary, by the theory of the thing, the old world had returned. Christmas could be kept again; the terrible army was disbanded; the swarthy young man with the sour, humorous face, who had been cheered from Dover to Whitehall, brought back in him the blood of kings. Every one was saying (especially in Grayling-Abbot) that now it would be Merry England again. But the swarthy young man knew better. The Merry Monarch knew he was not meant to make Merry England. If he treated his own life as a comedy, it was for a philosophical reason; because comedy is the only poetry of compromise. And he was a compromise; and he knew it. Therefore he turned, like Prince Rupert, to the chemicals; and played with the little toys that were to become the terrible engines of modern science. So he might have played with tiger-cubs, so long as they were as small as his spaniels.

But down in Grayling-Abbot it was much easier to believe that old England had been restored, because it had never, in any serious sense, been disturbed. The fierce religious quarrels of the seventeenth century had only stirred that rustic neighbourhood to occasional panics of witch-burning. And these, though much rarer in the medieval society, were not inconsistent with it. The squire, Sir Guy Griffin, was famous as a fighter quite in the medieval style. Though he had commanded a troop under Newcastle in the Civil Wars with conspicuous success, the local legend of his bodily prowess eclipsed any national chronicle of his military capacity. Through two or three counties round Grayling-Abbot, his reputation for swordsmanship had quite eclipsed his reputation for generalship. So, in the Middle Ages, it happened that Coeur-de-Lion’s hand could keep his head: it happened that Bruce’s hand could keep his head. And in both cases the head has suffered unfairly from the glorification of the hand.

The same almost unbroken medieval tradition even clung round the young schoolmaster, Dennis Tryon, who was just locking up his little school for the last time; having been transferred to a private post at Sir Guy's own house, to teach Sir Guy's six hulking sons, who had learned their father's skill with the sword, and hitherto declined to learn anything else. In numberless and nameless ways, Tryon expressed the old traditions. He was not a Puritan, yet he wore black clothes because he might have been a priest. Though he had learned to fence and dance at College, like Milton, he was plainly dressed and weaponless; because the vague legend remained that a student was a sort of clerk, and a clerk was a sort of clergyman. He wore his brown hair long, like a Cavalier. But as it was his own hair, it was long and straight: while the Cavaliers were already beginning to wear other people's hair, which was long and curly. In that strict brown frame, his face had the boyish, frank, rather round appearance that may be seen in old miniatures of Falkland or the Duke of Monmouth. His favourite authors were George Herbert and Sir Thomas Browne; and he was very young.

He was addressing a last word to a last pupil, who happened to be lingering outside the school — a minute boy of seven, playing with one of those wooden swords, made of two lengths of lath nailed across each other, which boys have played with in all centuries.

"Jeremy Bunt," said Tyron, with a rather melancholy playfulness, "your sword is, as it seems to me, much an improvement on most we have lately looked on. I observe its end is something blunt; doubtless for that gallant reason that led Orlando to blunt his sword when fighting the lady, whose name, in the ingenious romance, escapes me. Let it suffice you, little one. It will kill the Giants, like Master Jack's sword of sharpness, at least as well as the swords of a standing army ever will. If you be minded to save the Lady Angelica from the ogre, it will turn the dragon to stone as quick as any sword of steel would do. And, oh, Jeremy, if the fable be false, the moral is not false. If a little boy be good and brave, he should be great, and he may be. If he be bad and base, he should be beaten with a staff" — here Tryon tapped him very softly on the shoulders with a long black walking-cane that was commonly his only ferule— "but in either way, to my thinking, your sword is as good as any other. Only, dear Jeremy" — and he bent over the child swiftly, with a sudden tenderness— "always remember your kind of sword is stronger if one holds it by the wrong end."

He reversed the little sword in the child’s hand, making it a wooden cross, and then went striding up the road like the wind, leaving the staring boy behind.

When he became conscious that human feet were following him, he knew they could not possibly be the feet of the boy. He looked round; and Jeremy was still hovering in the distance; but the rush of feet came from a far different cause.

A young lady was hurrying by close under the high hedge that was nearly as old as the Plantagenets. Her costume was like his own, in the sense that it had the quietude of the Puritan with the cut of the Cavalier. Her dress was as dark as Barebones could have asked; but the ringlets under her hood were yellow and curly, for the same reason that his own hair was brown and straight: because they were her own. Nothing else was notable about her, except that she was pretty and seemed rather in a hurry; and that her delicate profile was pointed resolutely up the road. The face was a little pale.

Tryon turned again to look back on his tracks; and this time saw another figure more formidable than Jeremy with the wooden sword.

A tall, swaggering figure, almost black against the sunlight, was coming down the road with a rapidity that almost amounted to a run. He had a wide hat with feathers, and long, luxuriant hair, in the latest London manner; but it was not any such feathers or flourishes that arrested Tryon’s attention. He had seen old Sir Guy Griffin, who still wore his wild, white hair half-way down his back, to show (very unnecessarily) that he was not a Puritan. He had seen Sir Guy stick in his hat the most startling cock’s feathers, but that was because he had no other feathers. But Tryon knew at a glance that Sir Guy would never have come forward in such extraordinary attitudes. The tall, fantastic man actually drew his sword as he rushed forward; and offered it like a lance to be splintered as from the end of a long tilting-yard. Such frolics may have happened a hundred times round the ‘Cock’ of Buckingham and Dorset. But it was an action utterly unknown to the gentry round Grayling-Abbot, when they settled affairs of honour.

While he was still looking up the road at the advancing figure, he found himself breathlessly addressed by the escaping girl.

“You must not fight him,” she said, “he has beaten everybody. He has beaten even Sir Guy, and all his sons.” She cast her eyes about him and cried out in horror: “And where is your sword?”

"With my spurs, mistress," replied the schoolmaster, in the best style of Ariosto. "I have to win them both."

She looked at him rather wildly and said: "But he has never been beaten in swordsmanship."

Tryon, with a smile, made a salute with his black walking-stick. "A man with no sword," he said, "can never be beaten in swordsmanship."

The girl stood for one moment staring at him as if, even in that scene of scurry and chase, time were suspended for a flash. Then she seemed to leap again like a hunted thing and plunged on: and it was only some hundred yards higher up the road that she again halted, hesitated, and looked back. In much the same manner Master Jeremy Bunt, who had not the faintest intention of deserting the delightful school in which he was no longer required to do any work, actually ran forward. Perhaps their curiosity ought to be excused. For they were certainly looking at the most astounding duel the world had ever seen. It was the duel of the naked sword and the walking-stick: probably the only merely defensive battle ever fought on this earth.

The day was full of sun and wind, the two chief ingredients of a glorious day; but till that moment even Mr. Tryon, though of a pastoral and poetical turn, had not noticed anything specially splendid in the sky or landscape. Now the beauty of this world came upon him with the violence of a supernatural vision; for he was very certain it was a vision that he soon must lose. He was a good fencer with the foil in the Collegiate manner. But it was not to be expected that any human being could emerge victorious from a prolonged fight in which he had no means of retaliation; and especially as his opponent, whether from drink or devilry, was clearly fighting to the death. Tryon could not be certain that the wild creature even knew that his sword only struck against wood.

Dennis Tryon took in every glory of the good English land, and the still more glorious English climate, with the corner of his eye; he took it in with that same swift, indirect and casual, yet absolutely substantial way in which Nature is noticed in the old English poets that he loved. For the great poets of England, from Chaucer to Dryden, had a trick that has since been lost, the trick of implying the nature of a scene without apparently even attempting to describe it. Thus, any one reading the line "Pack, clouds, away," knows at once it is the kind of clouds called *cumuli,* and could not possibly be meant for level or streaky clouds. Or any one reading Milton's line about the princess’s turret ‘bosomed high in tufted trees’ knows it means partly leafless trees, as in early spring or autumn, when the edge of the forest shows soft against the sky, like a brush or broom, sweeping heaven. With the same sort of subconscious solidity, Tryon realized the rounded and half-rosy morning clouds that curled or huddled in the blue above the downs; and the mute mercy of the forests, that faded from grey to purple before they mixed with heaven. Death, in a hat with black plumes, was shooting a thousand shining arrows at him every instant; and he had never loved the world so much before.

For indeed that one streak of white steel came at him like a shower of shining arrows. He had to make a new parry for every new lunge; and, with each, perversely remembered some episode of College fencing. When the bright point of death missed his heart and slid past his elbow, he saw suddenly a meadow beside the Thames. When he seemed blinded, by the very light on that lightning blade, leaping at his eyes but passing over his shoulder, he saw the old lawn at Merton as if its grass had sprung out of the road around him. But he began more and more to realize something else. He realized that if he had held a real sword, he could have killed his enemy six times over with the *riposte.* When the heart-thrust was turned, he could have put his sword like a carving-knife into a pudding — if it had been a sword. When the parry protected his eyes, nothing else could have protected his opponent, except the unpenetrating quality of a walking-stick. His brain was of the very clear kind that can play two games of chess at once. While still whirling his black walking-stick in a complicated but impromptu clockwork of fence, he saw quite clearly a logical alternative. Either the man thought he was fighting someone with a sword: in which case he was a very bad fencer. Or else he knew he was fighting someone with a stick, in which case he was a very bad man: or (as the more timid modern phrase goes) a very bad sportsman.

He acted suddenly in a way adapted to either case. He introduced into his swordplay a stroke of single-stick, also learned at College, jerking his stick up so as to strike and jar the man’s elbow; and then, before the arm could recover its nerve, smote the sword clean out of the hand. A look at the man’s black, bewildered expression was enough. Tryon was now quite certain the man’s advantage had only been in his sword. He was also quite certain the man knew it. With all the rush of his released romanticism, which roared like the wind, and rolled like the clouds, and blazed like the sun which he had thought to see no more, he sprang forward and pinned the man by the throat, with a shout of laughter. Then he said, with more restrained humour, what he had said to the little boy up the road.

"If he be bad and base," said Tryon, "he should be beaten with a staff." And whirling the walking-stick round his head, he laid three thundering and echoing thwacks across the shoulders of his disarmed enemy, and walked off up the road again like the wind.

He did not notice further what his murderous enemy might attempt, but he was honestly puzzled about the conduct of the crowd. For, by this time, there was a very considerable crowd. The sword-bearing Jeremy was quite prominent in the throng behind him; the lady with the golden curls and the sensitive profile was herself pausing a moment on the outskirts of the throng in front.

As he started up the road again, the mob set up a roar, redoubled and quadrupled, and several gentlemen present whirled their plumed hats and shouted observations he could not hear. What was even more extraordinary, a great part of the crowd (including the young lady, who vanished early) appeared to be disappearing up the road, as if bringing news of some great victory like Agincourt.

By the time he came from Grayling-Abbot to Grayling-le-Griffin, the next village, there were ten heads at every cottage window; and girls threw flowers, that missed him and fell on the road. By the time he came to the outskirts of the Park, with the stone griffins, there were triumphal arches.

"It seems that I was not a little hasty with Master Bunt," said Tryon to himself, with a puzzled smile. "It is plain I have fallen into the Kingdom of Queen Mab. It is I, and not Master Jeremy, who have, in some sense, saved Angelica from the dragon. I was rather more embarrassed in the matter of arms, and she rather less embarrassed in the matter of attire, and there, truly, the difference seems to end. But the strangest thing of all is that, whatever I have done, I have done it with a sword of wood, like little Jeremy's."

In his academic reflections, he lifted his long black stick to look at it; and, as he did so, the cry of many crowds broke about him like a cannonade. For he had come to the very doors of Griffin Grange, to which he had been summoned on his much milder tutorial errand. And the great Sir Guy himself came out at the entrance. He might even have justified his mythic name, allowing for certain alterations of accident. For a griffin was supposed to be a mixture of the lion and the eagle; and certainly Sir Guy's mane might have been a lion’s, but that it was largely white; and his nose might have been an eagle’s, but that it was partly red.

His face had at first a dangerous and even dissipated look, and Tryon had one momentary doubt about the reason of his defeat. But when he looked again at Sir Guy’s erect figure and animated eye; when he rather timidly accepted his decisive handshake and received congratulations in his clear and comfortable voice, the doubt vanished. And the young schoolmaster felt even more bewildered in receiving the equally adoring, though rather more gaping, congratulations of the six strenuous sons. At the first glance, Tryon felt something like despair about their Greek and Latin. But he also felt an increasing conviction that any of them could have knocked him anywhere with a cudgel. His own triumph began to seem as fantastic and incredible as his triumphal arches.

“Assuredly it is a strange matter,” he said to himself in his simplicity. “I was a tolerable good fencer at Merton, but not excellent. Not so good as Wilton or Smith or old King of Christ Church. It is not to be believed that men like these could not beat him with their great swords, when I could beat him with a stick. This is some jest of the great gentry, as in the ingenious tale of Master Cervantes.”

He therefore received the uproarious plaudits of old Griffin and his sons with some reserve; but, after a little time, it was hard for one so simple not to perceive their simplicity. They really did regard him, as little Jeremy would have regarded him, as a fairy-tale hero who had freed their valley from an ogre. The people at the windows had not been conspirators. The triumphal arches had not been practical jokes. He was really the god of the countryside and he had not a notion why.

Three things convinced him finally of the reality of his reputation. One was the mysterious fact that the young Griffins (that brood of mythic monsters) really made some attempt to learn. Humphrey, the eldest and biggest, got the genitive of *quis* right the third time, though wrong again the fourth, fifth, and sixth. The attempts of Geoffrey to distinguish between *fingo* and *figo* would have moved a heart of stone; and Miles, the youngest, was really interested in the verb *ferre,* though (being a waterside character) he had some tendency to end it with a ‘y ‘. Underneath all this exceptional mental ambition, Tryon could see the huge, silent respect which savages and schoolboys feel everywhere for one who has ‘done’ something in the bodily way. The old rural and real aristocracy of England had not that rather cold and clumsy class-consciousness we now call the public-school spirit; and they enjoyed sports instead of worshipping them. But boys are the same in all ages, and one of their sports is hero-worship.

The next and yet more fascinating fact was Sir Guy. He was not, it was clear, in the common sense an amiable man. Just as the slash he had at the battle of Newbury made his eagle face almost as ugly as it was handsome, so the neglects and disappointments of his once promising military career had made his tongue and temper as bitter as they were sincere. Yet Tryon felt he owed the very knowledge of such an attitude to a confidence the old man would not have reposed in other people.

"The King hath his own again," old Griffin would say gloomily. "But I think it is too late. Indeed it might nigh as well be the King of France come to rule us as the King of England. He hath brought back with him French women that act in stage plays as if they were boys; and tricks fit for pothecaries or conjurers at a fair, and tricks like this fellow's that twitched away my sword, and every one else's — till he met his master, thank God." And he smiled at Tryon, sourly, but with respect.

"Is the gentleman I met," asked Tryon, rather timidly, "one from the Court?"

"Yes," answered the old man. "Did you look at his face?"

"Only his eyes," said the fencer, smiling; "they are black."

"His face is painted," said Griffin. "That is the sort of thing they do in London. And he wears a pile of false hair out of a barber's; and walks about in it, like the house of a Jack-in-the-Green. But his was the best sword, as old Noll's was the best army. And what could we do?"

The third fact, which affected Dennis Tryon most deeply of all, was a glimpse or two of the girl he had saved from the obstreperous courtier. It appeared she was the parson's daughter, one Dorothy Hood, who was often in and out of the Grange, but always avoided him. He had every sort of delicacy himself; and a comprehension of her attitude made him finally certain of his own inexplicable importance. If this had been, as he first thought, a trick played on him in the style of the Duke and the Tinker, so charming a girl (and he thought her more charming every time she flashed down a corridor or disappeared through a door) would certainly have been set to draw him on. If there was a conspiracy, she must be in it; and her part in it would be plain. But she was not playing the part. He caught himself rather wishing she were.

The last stroke came when he heard her saying to Sir Guy, by the accident of two open doors: “All say, ’twas witchcraft; and that God helped the young gentleman only because he was good, and—”

He walked wildly away. He was the kind of academic cavalier, who had learnt all worldly manners in an unworldly cloister. To him, therefore, eavesdropping was in all cases, horrible; in her case, damnable.

On one occasion he plucked up his courage to stop and thank her for having warned him of the danger of the duel.

Her delicate, pale face, always tremulous, became positively troubled. “But then I did not know” she said. “I knew you were not afraid. But I did not know then you were fighting the devils.”

“Truly, and I do not know it now,” he answered. “By my thinking, I was fighting one man, and no such great fighting at that.”

“Everybody says it was the devils,” she said with a beautiful simplicity. “My father says so.”

When she had slipped away, Dennis was left meditating: and a new and rather grim impression grew stronger and stronger upon him. The more he heard from servants or strangers, the clearer it was that the local legend was hardening into a tale of himself as exorcist breaking the spell of a warlock.

The youngest boy, Miles, who had been (as usual) down by the river, said the villagers were walking along the bank, looking for the old pool where witches were drowned. Humphrey said it would be no good if they found it, for the tall man with the painted face had gone back to London. But an hour later, Geoffrey came in with other news: the wicked wizard had gone out of Grayling, but the mob had stopped him on the road to Salisbury.

When Tryon bestirred himself with curiosity and alarm and looked out of the Grange gates he found fearful confirmation, almost in the image of a place of pestilence or a city of the dead. The whole population of the two villages of Grayling (save for such non- combatants as the wooden-sworded Bunt) had vanished from their streets and houses. They returned in the dark hour before dawn; and they brought with them the man with the magic sword.

Men in modern England, who have never seen a revolution, who have never seen even a real mob, cannot imagine what the capture of a witch was like. It was for all the populace of that valley a vast rising against an emperor and oppressor, a being taller, more terrible, more universal, than any one would have called either Charles I or Cromwell, even in jest. It was not, as the modern people say, the worrying of some silly old woman. It was for them a revolt against Kehama, the Almighty Man. It was for them a rebellion of the good angels after the victory of Satan. Dorothy Hood was sufficiently frightened of the mob to take Tryon's hand in the crowd, and hold it in a way that made them understand each other with an intimate tenderness never afterwards dissolved. But it never occurred to her to be sorry for the warlock.

He was standing on the river bank, with his hands tied behind him, but the sword still at his side; no one feeling disposed to meddle with it. His peruke had been torn off; and his cropped head seemed to make more glaring and horrible the unnatural colours of his face. It was like some painted demon mask. But he was quite composed, and even contemptuous. Every now and then people threw things at him, as at one in the pillory; even little Jeremy Bunt flinging his wooden sword, with all the enthusiasm of the Children's Crusade. But most things missed him and fell into the flowing river behind, into which (there could be little doubt) he himself was to be flung at last.

Then stood up for an instant in the stormy light, that rare but real spirit, for whose sake alone men have endured aristocracy, or the division of man from man. Sir Guy's scarred face looked rather unusually sulky, or even spiteful; but he turned to his bodyguard of sons. "We must get him back safe to the Grange," he said sourly; "you boys have all your swords, I think. You had best draw them."

"Why?" asked the staring Humphrey.

"Why," answered his father, "because they are conquered swords, like my own." And he drew his long blade, that took the white light of the morning.

"Boys," he said, "it is in the hand of God if he be warlock or no. But is it to be said of our blood that we brought crowds and clubs to kill a man who had whipped each one of us fairly with the sword? Shall men say that when Griffins met their match they whined about magic? Make a ring round him, and we will bring him alive through a thousand witch-smellers."

Already a half-ring of naked swords had swung round the victim like a spiked necklace. In those days mobs were much bolder against their masters than they are to-day. But even that mob gave to the Griffins a military reputation beyond their mere territorial rank; and the parties were thus the more equal. There was no sword in that crowd better than a Griffin sword; except the sword that hung useless at the hip of a pinioned man.

Before the next moment, which must have been blood and destruction, the man with the useless sword spoke. “If some gentleman,” he said with marmoreal calm, “will but put a hand in the pocket of my doublet, I think bloodshed will be spared.”

There was a long silence; and every one looked at Dennis Tryon: the man who had not feared the wizard. Every one included Dorothy; and Dennis stepped forward. He found a folded piece of paper in the doublet, opened it and read it with more and more wonder on his round young face. At the third sentence he took his hat off. At this the crowd stared more and more: it had fallen suddenly silent and all were conscious of a change and a cooling in that intense air.

“It would appear,” he said at last, “that this is a privy letter from His Majesty, which I will not read in entirety. But it advises and permits Sir Godfrey Skene to practise with the new Magnetic Sword which the Royal Society has for some little time attempted to manufacture in pursuance of a suggestion of Lord Verulam, the founder of our Natural Philosophy. The whole blade is magnetized; and it is thought it may even pull any other iron weapon out of the hand.”

He paused a moment, in some embarrassment, and then said: “It is added that only a weapon of wood or such other material could be used against it.”

Sir Guy turned to him suddenly and said: “Is that what you call Natural Philosophy?”

“Yes,” replied Tryon.

“I thank you,” said Griffin. “You need not teach it to my sons.”

Then he strode towards the prisoner, and rent the sword away, bursting the belt that held it.

“If it were not His Majesty’s own hand,” he said, “I would throw you with it after all.”

The next instant the Magnetic Sword of the Royal Society vanished from men’s view for ever; and Tryon could see nothing but Jeremy’s little cross of wood heaving with the heaving stream.

The Dragon at Hide-and-Seek

Once upon a time there was a knight who was an outlaw, that is a man hiding from the king and everybody else; and one who lived so wild and lawless a life, in being hunted from one hiding-place to another, that he had great difficulty in going to church every Sunday. Although his ordinary way of life was full of fighting, and burning, and breaking down doors, and therefore looked a little careless, he had been very carefully brought up, and it was obviously a very serious thing that he should be late for church. But he was so clever and daring in his way of getting from one place to another without being caught, that he generally managed it somehow. And it was often a considerable disturbance to the congregation when he came with a great crash flying in through the big stained-glass window and smashing it to atoms, having been patiently hanging on a gargoyle outside for half an hour; or, when he dropped suddenly out of the belfry, where he had been hiding in one of the big bells, and alighted almost on the heads of the worshippers. Nor were they better pleased when he preferred to dig a hole in the churchyard and crawl under the church-wall, coming up suddenly under a lifted paving-stone in the middle of the nave or the chancel. They were too well-behaved, of course, to notice the incident during the service; and the more just among them admitted that even outlaws must get to church somehow; but it caused a certain amount of talk in the town, and the history of the knight and his wonderful way of hiding everywhere and anywhere was by this time familiar to the whole country-side. At last this knight, who was called Sir Laverok, began to feel so sure of his power of escaping and hiding, whenever he wanted to, that he would come into the market-place in the most impudent manner when any great business was being transacted, such as the elections of the guilds, or even to the coronation of the King, to whom he addressed some well-chosen words of advice about his public duties, in a loud voice from the chimney-pot of an adjoining house. Often, when the King and his lords were out hunting, or even when they were in camp during a great war, they would look up and see Sir Laverok perched like a bird on a tree above their heads, and ever ready with friendly counsels and almost fatherly good wishes. But though they pursued him with emotions of uninterrupted rage, lasting over several months, they were never able to discover what were the holes and corners in which he hid himself. They were forced to admit that his talent for disappearing into undiscovered places was of the highest order, and that in a children's game of Hide-and-Seek he would have covered himself with everlasting glory; but they all felt that a fugitive from justice should be strictly forbidden to cultivate genius of this kind.

Now it was just about this time that there fell upon the whole of that country an enormous calamity far worse than any war or pestilence. It was a kind which we have very few chances of experiencing nowadays; though in the other matter of wars and diseases our opportunities are still wide and varied. There had appeared in the wilderness to the north of that country, a monster of huge size and horrible habits and disposition; a monster who might have been called, for the sake of simplicity, a dragon, only he had feet like an elephant, but a hundred times bigger, with which he used to stamp and crush everything to a flat and fine paste before he licked it up with a tongue as long and large as the Great Sea Serpent; and his great jaws opened wide like a whale's, only that they could have swallowed a shoal of whales as if they were whitebait. No weapons or missiles seemed to be of any avail against him; for his skin was plated with iron of incredible thickness. Indeed, some declared that he was entirely composed of iron, and that he had been made out of that material by a magician who lived beyond the wilderness, where such crafts and spells were more seriously studied. Indeed, it was hinted by some that the land of the magicians was in every way in advance of their own, and well worthy of emulation; and that if anyone objected that this marvellous machinery had no apparent effect except in killing people and destroying beautiful things, he should be rebuked as one lacking in enterprise and a larger outlook upon the future. But those who said this, commonly said it before they had actually met the new animal, and it was noticed that after meeting him they seldom uttered these thoughts, or, indeed, any other.

The monster may have been made of iron, and his nerves and muscles may have been, as some said, made like an arrangement of wheels and wires, but he was most unmistakably alive; and proved it by having a hearty appetite and an evident enjoyment of life. He trampled and devoured first, all the fortifications of the frontier, and then the castles and the larger towns of the interior; and by the time that he was marching towards the capital, the King and his courtiers were all climbing to the tops of towers, and everybody else to the tops of trees. These precautions proved inadequate in practical experience; in very practical experience. So long as the monster could be seen twenty miles away like a marching mountain, already fantastic in outline, but still blue or purple with distance, and there was no other sign of him except a slight shaking of the houses as in a mild earthquake, these conjectures and expedients could be debated copiously, if not always calmly. But when the creature came near enough for his habits to be closely studied, it was clear that he could tread down trees like grass, and flatten out castles like houses of cards. It became more and more the fashion to seek out less showy and more secluded country resorts; the whole population, led by magistrates, merchants, and all its natural leaders, fleeing with startling rapidity to the mountains and concealing themselves in holes and caverns, which they blocked behind them with big rocks. Even this was not very successful; the monster proceeded to scale the mountains with the gaiety of a goat, to kick the rocky barricades to pieces, letting in daylight on the cowering company within; and many of them were able to recognize the familiar shape of the long and curling tongue of the intelligent creature, exploring their retreat and coiling and twisting and darting about in a very playful and sportive manner. Those who had not found any hole to crawl into, and who were clinging in crowds to the crags higher up the hill, were at this moment, however, surprised with a sight that almost took their thoughts for an instant off the universal peril. On the highest crag of all, above their heads, had appeared suddenly the figure of Sir Laverok with his old spear in his hand, with his sword girt around his ragged armour, and the wind waving about his wild hair that was the colour of flame. In all that huddling crowd it was only the man in hiding who stood out conspicuous; and only the man fleeing from justice who did not flee.

“I am not afraid,” he said in answer to their wild cries. “You know I have a trick of finding my way to places of safety. And as it happens, I know a castle to which I shall retreat, and to which the dragon can never come.”

“But, my good Sir,” said the Chancellor, pausing in the act of trying to creep into a rabbit-burrow, “the dragon can grind castles to powder with his heel. I regret to say that he showed not the least embarrassment even in approaching the Law Courts.”

“I know of a castle which he cannot reach,” said Sir Laverok.

“The offensive animal,” said the Lord Chamberlain, poking his head for a moment out of a hole in the ground, “actually entered the King’s private chamber without knocking.”

"I know of a private chamber that he cannot enter," replied the outlaw knight.

"It is very doubtful," came the muffled voice of the Lord High Admiral from somewhere underground, "whether we shall even be safe in any of the caverns."

"I know a cavern where I shall be safe," said Sir Laverok.

At the foot of the steep slope to which they clung spread a large plateau like a plain; and over this bare tableland, at the moment, the monster was prowling up and down like a polar bear; considering what he would destroy next. Every time he turned his head towards them, the crowds clambered a little higher up the hill; but they soon saw, to their astonishment, that Sir Laverok was not climbing up, but climbing down. He dropped from the last overhanging rock, and rushed out upon the plain against the monster; when he came within a short distance, the knight gave one wild leap and threw his spear like a thunderbolt.

What happened in the flash of that thunderbolt nobody in the crowd seemed to know. Those who knew them best were of the opinion that they all shut their eyes tight, and most probably fell flat on their faces. Others say that the monster stamped his foot upon his enemy with so stunning a shock that a cloud of dust rolled up to the clouds of heaven, and for a moment hid the whole scene. Others, again, explained that the vast immeasurable bulk of the monster had come between them and the victim. Anyhow, it is certain that when that vast bulk turned once more and began swaying and lurching backwards and forwards on its lonely prowl, no sign of the victim could be seen. Probably he had been stamped to mire as everything else had been.

But if it were conceivable that he had indeed escaped, as he had boasted, it was hard to say where; as there did not seem to be anywhere for him to escape to. And the authorities in the holes and caves could not but regret that they had not condemned him to be burned as a wizard instead of hanged as a rebel, whenever they should have put the final touch to the sentence by carrying it into effect. They comforted themselves in the cave by the reflection that at least no hasty capture or premature execution had yet put it out of their power to rectify the mistake; but for the moment it seemed clear that their chances either of hanging or burning the gentleman were further off than ever.

Just at that moment, however, there was a new interruption. It so happened that the King’s third daughter was standing in the crowd on the slope; for all the elder members of the royal family were enjoying a temporary and semi-official retirement from the cares of state at the bottom of a dry well on the other side of the mountain range. But she had been unable or unwilling to travel with the extreme rapidity which they had had the presence of mind to exhibit; for she was rather an absent-minded person, wholly without aptitude for practical politics. She was called the Princess Philomel, and was a dreamy sort of person, with long hair and blue eyes that were like the blue of distant horizons, and she was commonly very silent; but she had watched the adventure of the vanishing outlaw with more interest than she commonly showed in anything; and she startled everybody at this stage by breaking her silence and calling out in a clear voice:

“Yes; he has found his fairy castle where no dragon can come.”

The more dignified Councillors of State were just venturing to put their noses above ground in order to remonstrate respectfully against the breach of etiquette, when everybody’s attention was again distracted to the monster, who was behaving in an even more extraordinary way than usual. Instead of pacing backwards and forwards with a certain pomposity as he had done before, he was bounding to and fro, taking totally unnecessary leaps into the air and clawing in a most uncomfortable and inconsequent fashion.

“What is the matter with him now?” enquired the Master of the Buckhounds, who was something of a student of animal life, and would, under other circumstances, have been much interested in the phenomenon.

“The monster is angry,” replied the Princess Philomel in the same absolute if abstracted fashion. “He is angry because the knight has reached the magic chamber and cannot be found.”

If the monster was indeed exhibiting anger, it would seem that his anger had an element of self-reproach. For he was evidently clawing and scratching at himself rather in the manner of a dog hunting a flea, but much more savagely.

“Can he be killing himself?” asked the Lord Chancellor hopefully. “I am the keeper of the King’s conscience, and not, of course, the keeper of the dragon’s. But it seems possible that his conscience, if once aroused, would find in retrospect some legitimate ground for remorse.”

“Nonsense,” said the Chamberlain, “why should he kill himself?”

“If it comes to that,” answered the other, “why should he fight himself, as he seems to be doing?”

“Because,” answered the Princess, “Sir Laverok has at last reached the cavern where he is safe.”

But even as she spoke, a further and final change seemed to pass over the monster. For a moment it looked as if he had turned into two or three different monsters, for the different parts of him were behaving in different ways. One hind leg rested as calmly on the earth as the column of a temple, while the other was kicking wildly up behind and thrashing the air like the sail of a windmill. One eye was standing out of the head in hideous prominence, and rolling round and round like a catherine-wheel of fury, while the other was already closed with the placid expression of a cow who had gone to sleep. Then the next moment both eyes were closed, and both feet stationary, and the whole monster, with a deprecating expression, turned his back and began to retreat towards the plains at an amiable and ambling trot.

Thus began the last phase of the celebrated Dragon of the Wilderness, which was more of a mystery than his wildest massacres and deeds of destruction. He interfered with nobody; he stood politely on one side for people to pass; he even succeeded, with some signs of reluctance, in becoming a vegetarian and subsisting entirely upon grass. But when the ultimate goal of his pilgrimage was discovered, the surprise was even more general. The wondering and still doubt- fill crowds that followed him across that country became gradually convinced of the incredible idea that he intended to go to church. Moreover, he approached the sacred edifice in a far more tactful and unobtrusive and respectful way than Sir Laverok had done in the old days, when he broke windows and tore up pavements in his in- discriminating excess of punctuality. Finally, the monster surprised them most of all by kneeling down and opening his mouth very wide with an ingratiating expression; and the Princess surprised them still more by walking inside.

Something in the way in which she did it revealed to the more thoughtful among them the fact that Sir Laverok had been inside the animal all the time. It is unnecessary to repeat here the explanations which gradually enlightened them about the inner truth of the story of the inner machinery of the dragon. This exact and scientific narrative is also addressed only to the thoughtful. And these will have no difficulty in guessing that a magnificent marriage ceremony took place in the interior of the dragon, which was treated as a temporary chapel while within the precincts of the consecrated building. They may even form some notion of what was meant when the Princess, who was given to oracular remarks, said, “The whole world will behave differently when heroes find their hiding-place in the world.” But it must be confessed that those learned men, the Chancellor and the Chamberlain, could make very little of it.

The Second Miracle

The Missionary had wandered into a remote and savage land; around him was a wilderness of wild superstitions, of men demanding dreadful and barbaric things. Dark passions found expression in obscure rites and bewildering dances; the strange craving for erecting altars, dedicating priests and prophets, setting apart particular spaces for ceremonies connected with the supernatural, seeking divine aid in the form of a feast or a sacrifice — these and a hundred other human antics disturbed the land; and he felt an equal horror and repugnance for them all. By which it will be understood that the clergyman in question was a broad-minded clergyman, and that he belonged to the Liberal school.

In the course of his wandering he came upon a particularly flagrant case of credulity. It was a legend concerned with the hero or holy man who was said to have founded the tribe. He had been the best of men and an example to all mankind; yet (strangely enough) he had been killed. And as a mark of contempt his body was cast forth into a barren and burnt-out place of ashes and dust and dry sand, where it was notorious that nothing could grow, not even the hardiest thorn or weed. But in spite of this, said the legend, there had sprung up out of his grave in that grey desert a great green tree bearing golden fruit and flowers of all the colours in the world. The tribe sheltered under it, worshipping as in a shrine; and declared that the spirit of the dead was present in the trunk and branches. Then came an evil time of invasion; and heathens laid waste the land and cut down the tree, so that when it was recaptured by the faithful it was in the form of a mere log or lopped trunk. But they still believed that the spirit of their god was in it; and they set the sacred timber upon an altar and worshipped it, and rejoiced and prospered as of old.

The missionary really had great difficulty in explaining to these simple people their simple error. Taking a large magnifying-glass from his pocket, he examined the surface of the bark and found it to be of a ligneous nature. He had little doubt, he said, that if the timber were dissected, transverse sections and all other sections would exhibit the same tree-like formation. He even offered good-naturedly to draw up the diagrams beforehand; for he was an expert mathematician. In short, he showed that a thorough scientific analysis confirms the popular suspicion that wood is wooden. He was quite gratified with his reception; indeed, it was far better than he could have hoped. The simple savages seemed almost ready to worship him, prostrating themselves before him at a signal from the chief priest, who marched in front of him at the head of a triumphal procession, crying aloud strange words in an unknown tongue. For the Missionary did not know that the words, when translated from the hieratic tongue, were as follows: “Once more the gods are good to us! For centuries there has dwelt with us a man in the likeness of a lump of wood. And now, for a new miracle, we have a lump of wood in the likeness of a man.”

The Conversion of an Anarchist

Lady Joan Garnet had eyebrows long before she had any hair; and a cock of the eyebrow from which the wisest and oldest nurses in the family deduced that she would marry the wrong man. Perhaps she did; those who read this tale must decide the point for themselves. For (however that may be) some twenty-three years afterwards, when Lady Joan had plenty of hair, almost too much in fact, and of a heavy bronze tint, she still had the distinct and defiant eyebrow, darker in colour and, as it were, disconnected from the rest of her face. But though she ran to eyebrow, she did not look supercilious; only rather cross.

She was indeed of a restless and enterprising temper, and in our modern, highly civilised society it did not take her long to find a man wrong enough to marry. The prophetic nurses, indeed, had no notion it would be as wrong as that. In the Smart Set in which she lived, men talking Socialism and Anarchism were common enough, of course, but men believing in them (or in anything else) were rare, and Andrew Home was a perfectly serious Anarchist. He was a young Scot who had worked his way up from a plough to a professorship, and been taken up by the aristocrats as aristocrats will take up anything curious — so long as it is not of ancient lineage. The rich gentleman shrinks from nobody, except the poor gentleman.

He was strong, lank, and rawboned, yet with a certain air, not uncommon in Scotch peasants, of being (in the strict and literal sense) well bred; he had a long, handsome, hatchet face with something like a sneer on it; yet he was very compassionate to the poor and to animals. He had a complete philosophic scheme of negations. He looked at Nothing from every possible point of view; he divided Nothing into sections and then recombined it into systems; he distinguished one kind of Nothing from another kind of Nothing, and then proved that the difference amounted to Nothing, after all. Yet he was not a bore, though uncontroversial persons might call him a bully; he made with Lady Joan the one mistake so often made by a clever man with a clever woman, that of arguing with her just ten minutes too long.

For the rest he was famous and fairly rich by this time, and when Lady Joan announced her engagement to him, the scandal that ensued did not in the least arise from his being a parvenu, still less from his being an Atheist, but solely from his refusal to be married in a church. As was pointed out by more than one member of our most intellectual class, a fellow may come from all kinds of things, and a fellow may think all kinds of things, but a fellow ought to be able to stick it out for an hour in church. The Scot was a hard man to drive; he had shaken the foundations of his fiancée's conventional morality, and his answer was a threat as well as a defiance. It amounted to a broad hint that marriage itself (if examined through his best microscope) was one of the varying and allotropic forms of Nothing, and that if they would not allow him the Registrar he would do without that official. Joan, so far from being shocked, took the thing with an innocent anarchism not uncommon in the young, and the cause of many highly intellectual elopements. In fact, she said that if she was forbidden to marry the wrong man, she would — not marry him, which would be worse. Now this is a thing still considered wrong, even by the rich.

Nevertheless, about three weeks afterwards, Mr. Andrew Home, F.R.S., was decorously and thoroughly married to Lady Joan Garnet in a fashionable church crowded with all kinds of important people with whom (Heaven be thanked) this story has nothing to do. If anyone cares to know how the conversion or surrender came about, it befell through the world-embracing beneficence of the Liberty Hall Club. Lady Joan had come in, looking particularly radiant; she was talkative and full of tales for her lover about this Bohemian (though by no means democratic) society in which she had spent an evening. "They say I may be elected to the club," she said with great relish. "But they doubt if I'm advanced enough."

"Advanced in what direction?" asked Home.

"Oh, in all directions!" cried Lady Joan, waving her muff and boa with a world-embracing gesture. "Why, that's just the point. You can say *anything* at the Liberty Hall Club — you can defend *any* view, Anarchist or Atheist or — or whatever's supposed to be worse. They include all, yes, all the opinions in the world — and then they talk."

"It must be rather stimulating for you," he said, and a shade crossed his brow that was not thought, but very ancient instinct.

"It's frightfully exciting," she agreed. "Do come with me to the meeting there this evening! You'll be sure to secure my election, and you'll probably be elected yourself. Remember," and the nature of her smile altered a little, "remember sometimes, please, that I am really very proud of you."

"All right," said Andrew Home, turning away, and putting his pipe in the rack; he also spoke in a somewhat changed voice. Two hours later they both got into a cab and drove to the place assigned.

They were received at the Club of all the opinions by a bony lady, whose green clothes clung to her like long seaweed; she had a long, wooden face, and also a long wooden arm and hand; which shot out so as to startle a guest, who could not believe an arm could be so long unless it were a telescope. To Lady Joan she said in a deep voice, "Happy to see you here again!" To Professor Home she said in a lower voice still, "We are proud of this acquisition."

The acquisition walked up the room with the heavy sneer, that was his least human trait, decidedly deepening on his face. He was in dull and strict evening dress, while the people all around him were in clothes that can be assigned to no hour of the recognised day or night: a medley of pyjamas, shooting-knickers and early morning dressing gowns might partly explain the men: a medley of winding sheets with improper bathing costumes might explain the women — only they all hastened to explain themselves. To judge by his face, the Anarchist found this explanation inadequate.

Joan knew the men she liked, as women do know men in such cases. She knew that all these men in mad costumes were harmless; and she knew that her own man was dangerous. She kept on turning her face to him to see what he thought of all the people to whom he was introduced; and each time she thought she was nearer and nearer to some lawless outbreak. She was almost relieved to think that the shabby evening clothes falling about his long, lank figure could not possibly conceal a bomb.

He was introduced to Dr. Omar Ross, an enormous atheist in almost clerical costume, above which rose a long pink neck terminating in a round, red face and a grin. He was introduced to Mr. Thaddeus Wilkes, the celebrated student of Eastern Religions; one of those unlucky little men for whom, wherever they sit, the light always catches their eyeglasses. Before the end of the evening he was actually introduced to his hostess, the lady who had welcomed him at the door. She was a Mrs. Gurge, Mr. Gurge was, presumably, out.

It may have been Joan's personal infatuation, but all these people seemed to look much smaller than they had the evening before. It seemed to her that Satan himself had come to visit a lot of little devils. She felt a disquiet and a disproportion as she heard Mr. Thaddeus Wilkes explaining to Andrew the very things Mr. Wilkes last night explained to her.

"... every kind of opinion, you see," Mr. Wilkes was saying, "can be expressed in the club..."

"Well," said Home, with a stolid face, "suppose I express the opinion that the police ought to raid this club?"

"But you don't express that opinion," said Mr. Wilkes, cocking his eyeglasses coquettishly, "a man of your known Liberal tendencies..."

"I do express that opinion," said Home with decision. "I think everyone now in this room ought to be in jail."

"He, he; and why?" tittered the Student of Eastern Religions.

"Because we're not respectable," answered Home. "One must be respectable."

"Respectability!" shrieked the little man, leaping up and looking for his eyeglasses, "why, it's respectability that's created all the persecutions and superstitions, and abominations; all the loss of individuality, of progress, of self-ownership, and self-respect..."

"Self-respect," repeated Home, nodding. "True. And how can one respect anything that is not respectable?"

"It is a quibble — a common pun!" shrieked the eager Wilkes, but his outcry was cut through by the heavy voice of Mrs. Gurge asking, with tragic eyes on Home, the following simple question:

"Don't all these things come," she said, "because love is not free?"

"Well, of course, it isn't," said Andrew Home, simply, "love means that a man, in one respect at least, is not free."

"But would there not be more joy, more old Greek gaiety," said Mrs. Gurge in a lugubrious voice, "if marriage were abolished?"

"Why?" asked Home blankly. "The Greeks believed in marriage."

"Do you really mean to say," broke out Mrs. Gurge, with an alteration of voice that was as startling as an animal's cry, "do you dare to say that it's just or right that a woman should be tied to a man — that it's tolerable — that—"

"That's what I mean to say," said Mr. Home.

Then, after a pause, he added, "But I think they should be married in a church, and, therefore, of course, before three o'clock."

"And what right have you to say such things?" cried Mrs. Gurge, standing up, and trembling all over. "You are the sort that has persecuted everything — what right have you — where have you got your right?"

"I got it from you," said Home, with great gentleness. "You and this gentleman told me that all opinions are permitted in this club." He looked at the ceiling, and then proceeded, "so I think that an indissoluble church marriage, celebrated in a church before three o'clock -"

"Oh tcha!" cried Mr. Wilkes, rising with very crooked eyeglasses, "that a mere building or a mere hour can matter."

"No?" said Home, with a broad and beaming smile. "Why not?"

The little man with the eyeglasses turned with angry gestures of shoulders, but the big atheist in the semi-clerical dress bawled out in a good big parson's voice, "It's all environment."

"I beg your pardon," inquired Home brightly.

"It's all environment," bellowed the big man. "You think respectability's all right because you've always been respectable; you believe in being married in church because you've always been to church—"

"That must-be the explanation," assented Home, getting wearily to his feet. "I always thought that perpetual church-going of mine would be my undoing. But I think, mind you," and he lifted a warning finger, "I think you gravely neglect religious considerations! To say that 'it's all environment' is decidedly against sound Church teaching; it neglects the degree of self-determination evidently deducible from the dogma of original sin, as implied even in Holy Scripture and finally defined at the Third Council of Thessapol—"

"Oh, such damned rubbish," said the apoplectic Dr. Ross, and turned his back before the other could finish.

"Dr. Omar Ross, I believe?" said Andrew Home, very coolly, but in such a way as to make the big man turn his red face round again and say, "Well?"

"That man in eyeglasses," said Home quietly, "is so small that it would be smaller still to hit him. But as you are different, may I say that I am not used to these manners? I come to a club where I am expressly told that any opinion is tolerated, and while I am expressing an opinion for which thousands have died, a gentleman cuts me short in the very middle of a Greek word and turns his back on me. When that happens, there are only two other things that can happen. If we are rationalists, you will apologise. If we are savages and gentlemen, let us go and fight in the backyard."

Dr. Omar Ross gasped for a moment like a fish; his scarlet face turned a sort of salmon pink, and he answered in a quite new voice, "I will fight you if you like, but really — really! Perhaps it was rather rude of me to turn my back, but upon my blessed word, I — I'd never heard such things in my life! Sound Church teaching! And Original Sin! I do apologise, Mr. Home. I think you had a right, by the rules of the club, but really, really — there is a limit to — to—"

"There is," said Home, nodding. "There is a limit to Liberty Hall. I know now what the limit is."

Striding swiftly across the room, he reached Lady Joan, who was engaged in conversation, apparently of great gloom, with Mrs. Gurge in the doorway. As he came near he heard Mrs. Gurge saying:

"I'm very sorry, of course; extremely sorry. But I don't think I could promise anything like a chance. The vacancies in the club are so few — and — and some of the members are so very keen on having people who are really advanced, that really—"

"That really we must be going," said Mr. Home, shaking hands with her heartily. "I've never got such good out of an evening in my life. Come along, Joan; we can get a taxi at the corner."

When they had bundled into the taxi-cab, there was a long silence, and then Lady Joan said: "You are an extraordinary person, Andrew. Are you mad?"

"Not now," he answered, with composure. "But those people were all arguing for the things you've always been arguing for."

"Permit me a masculine distinction," said Andrew. "They were arguing badly."

"Well, you were pretty wild," she said, laughing. "And you don't believe in any of those things, respectability and marriage and all the rest that you were defending."

He was silent.

"You don't believe that a marriage must take place in a church before three; you don't believe in a church at all, and as for a Council of the Church—" And she laughed with delight.

"You have such a pretty laugh, Joan," he said very softly, "much nicer to hear than Dr. Omar Ross's."

"What *do* you mean?" she asked, and stopped, staring.

"I don't believe I can say what I mean; I don't believe you can hear it," he said, "but I have found the limit of anarchy. Anarchists will endure everything except one thing — sense. They will tolerate a hundred heresies

— they will not tolerate orthodoxy. There is one thing that is sure to be right; the thing that is most hated. There is one thing that is most hated. Respectability!”

She was still looking at him with a devoted but painful curiosity; she saw his rigid face taking on that white flame which marks the eternal fanatic in every Scotchman. They are a race of the suddenly converted.

“Look at that poor chap out in the rain,” he said. “That’s what they call the Man of the Street. It means that he’s ordinary. Why is he outcast? Because he’s ordinary. He wants a house, a wife, and a baby — all the humdrum things God dreamed of when he made the world. That’s why we put that man to sweep our streets and black our boots; because he wants what God wanted long ago; and not whatever we shall want the Wednesday after next. Think of him, and then think of those people in Liberty Hall Club — “A surge of disgust went over him like an earthquake— “those foxes have holes, and those vultures of the air have nests; but man has nowhere to lay his head.”

“I don’t think I understand it,” said Lady Joan Garnet.

“Do you understand this?” asked Andrew Home. “A man will be married to a woman in a particular brick or stone church before three.”

“Yes,” she said. “I understand that easily.”

“You were always cleverer than I,” he said quite simply. “I have only just understood it myself.”

Concerning Grocers as Gods

Mr. William Williams was a grocer's assistant. For many years the grocer had groced and the assistant had assisted; but of late his employer had begun to have doubts of whether he was of much assistance; and one bright and brisk spring morning he rather suddenly and dramatically ceased to assist.

As Mr. Stiggles was one of the three competing shopkeepers of a small village by the seaside, his shop had something of the general character of a village shop; and he sold several things that may or may not be defined as groceries; such as certain large vials of Home- Made Lemonade which it was William's duty at that moment to set prominently in the window. Some had been known to question some of the titles attached to the goods of Mr. Stiggles. Some had murmured that his superfine sugar had suffered contact with his sandy floor; and that his celebrated Fresh Eggs were ornaments rather of an ornathological museum than a shop. But nobody had ever disputed the tide of Home-Made Lemonade; or doubted that Mr. Stiggles made it himself, by some recipe as secret as that of the Benedictine monks. Many believed sea-water to be the staple, but there was a suggestion of soap; and other ingredients such as verdigris and chopped-up grass were suspected. Mr. Stiggles came into his shop with sudden violence, to find William hurriedly concealing a cigarette; for Mr. Stiggles disapproved of smoking. It was perhaps the only suggestion of a moral sense that he ever exhibited.

"Why aren't those things in the window?" he demanded. "Pinker and Bootle have both got theirs out. Why don't you put 'em in the front where they can be seen?"

"Oh, all right," said William with a sinister air of languor. He lifted one of the large lemonade bottles and hurled it with a crash through the front window, so that it made a star of green liquid and broken glass on the cobbled street. "I should think it could be seen there," he added.

He then left the shop in a leisurely manner, and when Mr. Stiggles demanded what he was going to do, he explained.

"I'm going to pick pockets," he said. 'I'm going to live with thieves and thugs and burglars. I want a little honest company."

Mr. William Williams left his village grocer, full of a fine fury against the mean tricks of grocers in competition, but he did not have any chance of comparing their morals with those of thieves; for before he could attempt it, he met somebody who profoundly influenced his life, and gave him a larger view of thieving and other things. This was a tall man he met in a lane; a man with long wisps of hair and a wide hat; he had a very kindly and encouraging smile and bulging eyes like a mesmerist's. Perhaps he mesmerised William; anyhow he made him feel very happy and good; telling him how there was a land beyond the sea where everybody was happy and good without the least apparent trouble; for instead of two grocers fighting like cat and dog, there was one common fellowship and unity of interests between the grocer and the groced.

So William went away across the sea with the old gentleman, who was called the Prophet Hinks, and somewhere on the shining plains of America he found the shining city. It was certainly very calm and beautiful to look at, with terraces of white not divided into separate houses, but marked by doors at intervals all painted an exquisite peacock green and flanked by little shrubs in little tubs, to show that the new civilisation was not indifferent to art and beauty. But the chief thing that struck William about the new civilisation, when he came to study it, was that he could not get a cigarette there. He thought at first he might get it in the Vegetarian Hostel, as tobacco is a vegetable; but his argument was sadly waved away. He thought he might look for it in the House of Joy, otherwise called (out of William Morris) "The House of Fulfilment of Craving"; but though he had a very definite craving, he could not get it fulfilled. Then he lost his temper and said:

"If you're so fond of giving people plants in little tubs, I shall grow a tobacco-plant in my little tub."

"*Your* little tub?" said the Prophet Hinks in low and heart-broken tones. "*Your* little tub? How little you have understood the spirit that is here!"

And indeed he found that Professor Hinks and his Committee were the owners of the ground as well as the buildings; and that nothing could be done that they did not want to do themselves. So he thoughtfully picked up the red Russian bowl, in which his luke-warm water had been served to him that morning, and threw that also through the window with a loud crash.

"Stiggles was a stinking rat," he observed, "but at least he was only my employer and not also my landlord and my lord and my god. I'd rather go back to where they fight each other like rats, and at least show they are alive."

So he strode away and betook himself homewards; and the nearer he came to home the more his reaction rose within him and his heart went out to the rough-and-tumble tradition of his fathers. He wanted to go back to a human place, where there was a little human and kindly hatred; where everything was not chilled and frozen with universal Love. It would be fine to see the two grocers fighting in the streets, and to take sides in the funny old family quarrels; and perhaps to find friendship and marriage as well as quarrels, and try his luck at bringing up a family and die and be buried in his own land.

When he entered his own village he stood still and stared down the principal street. There were two long perspectives of stately classical buildings, along the whole frontage of which on both sides ran an inscription in gigantic golden letters: "Stiggles Universal Stores." There was no other shop or house visible in the circle of the horizon. The solid block was divided into a series of departments, flanked by little shrubs in little tubs, to show that the new system was not indifferent to art and beauty.

What struck Mr. William Williams most about the new system established by Stiggle's Stores was that he could not get a cigarette there. For Mr. Stiggles (now indeed a nobleman) retained the one moral principle in his life. He would really have felt it an unclean and unholy thing to have gained a little more money by selling the nicotian poison along with the various quack medicines, widely advertised and dangerous drugs, alcoholic cures for alcoholism and other house comforts that were provided at his Stores. But outside this honourable scruple, it really seemed that the Universal Stores was really universal, in the sense that it did really possess an inferior form of almost everything in the world. Artists might buy their colours there if they did not want the right colours; musicians might purchase violins and church organs cheaply and rapidly manufactured; indeed, people had been known to order a cathedral from Stiggles, who had put it up with the utmost rapidity, neatness and despatch. Mr. William Williams wondered whether there was something inherently wrong in his own character, whereby a strange discontent seemed still to possess him even in the most smooth and satisfactory social conditions. His mind began to revert with another unreasoning and sentimental reaction to all the real simplicity of the lunatic under the luminous American sky. They had at least in some sort of half-witted way been looking for things that are too good for this world. William was beginning in a puzzled way to tell the people in the shop about his American adventure; but when he came to mention the name of the Prophet Hinks, they were filled with horror; and the sort of pity that is akin to loathing. “He is a Socialist!” they cried, “and Socialism is fatal to individuality.”

At which Mr. Williams gave a great cry, and seizing a yellow Oriental vase from the counter, he hurled it through the window with a loud crash and leapt after it, running wildly down the street and waving his arms. For he remembered that, in the days of his childhood, there had been a dark and depressing pool just beyond the bridge, which many suicides had found suitable and convenient. But in this he was intercepted; for although this enlightened community had, of course, long outgrown any prejudice against suicide, they preferred things done in a decent and orderly fashion. So he was conducted to Stiggles’s Lethal Chamber in Stiggles’s Death Department; and was afterwards enclosed in one of the fashionable and universally coveted Stiggles Coffins and buried in the popular and universally frequented Stiggles Cemetery. So he had his prayer, as is given to few mortals, and died and was buried in the village that was his home.

A Real Discovery By a Would-Be Discoverer

Robert Raven was something of a mystery in more ways than one. He was what is called a precocious child; and precocious children are generally of two types. The more fortunate are killed; as was the Admirable Crichton at the age of twenty-two. The other sort, a doomed and accursed race, survive; and nobody notices that they do so. But the case of Robert Raven was rather peculiar. He had shown what is called brilliant promise in his scientific studies at the school and college; and what is much more important, as an indication of sincerity, he had made himself a nuisance to everybody from childhood by surrounding himself with the litter and the stinks of very experimental chemistry. And then, quite suddenly, somewhere about the age at which the brilliant Scot of the sixteenth century had fallen fighting amid the Italian swords and daggers, the English infant prodigy had retired into private life like a man of eighty.

But there was an additional mystery attaching to the case of Robert Raven. He was comparatively poor, though he had it in his power to become very rich, in a period when science was a fashion; and one ordinary essential of retirement is riches, or at least a competence. But Raven did not sink into mere poverty. On the contrary, everyone who met him remarked that he presented a much more comfortable figure than the lean and fanatical student who had once neglected his meals for the sake of his experiments. It was something like the difference between the young and the old Napoleon; for there was something Napoleonic about his eagle face and hanging hair, though in his case the hair was red. But Napoleon looked less hungry when he had fed upon success; and nobody had any notion of what Raven fed on. He prospered in the shadow like some monstrous and yet obscure vegetable growth; and among all his old scientific associates, there was no botanist who could classify him.

It was at the period in which the new applications of physics and electricity had reached their widest and wildest triumphs. Invisible wires linked together the remotest continents and islands: a tangled and tingling net of vibration and sound. Everybody travelled by aeroplane, except the large but unimportant section who were too poor to travel at all; for the main lines of social distinction had of course remained untouched by scientific development. Of the more prosperous classes, who alone need concern the scientific historian, every little villa had its aeroplane shed in the garden like a dog’s kennel; only the dog-kennel was often larger than the house. Every house, it need hardly be said, was fitted up with receptacles for the new signalling; and woven about with a viewless veil of voices from all the ends of the earth. American interviewers were saved the trouble of crossing the Atlantic; their flying ghosts or spirits could besiege the house and make the householder happy with their ceaseless and artless queries about all the details of the household. The less reputable member of the Smith family, who had been paid a considerable sum of money on condition of his becoming an empire-builder in the more remote parts of Canada, was enabled to revisit his home at all hours of the day; and his flowing and continuous demands for more money filled the house with the sense of something uninterrupted and familiar. The rich uncle, who was so much respected by reason of his living in Australia, was enabled to lend his somewhat loud and hearty voice to the most intimate conversation of the tea-table, as if the intervening seas and continents had been swallowed up in his large and roaring mouth, as in the mouth of Gargantua. In short, the family enjoyed all the latest comforts and conveniences that science can provide.

It was about this time that an accident led to my surprising the secret of my friend, Robert Raven. He had gone to live down in the country, as had so many other town people of his time. But unlike the other town people, he had not first deliberately gone to live in the country and then made desperate efforts to connect himself again with the town. There was no wireless apparatus on his house. There was no aeroplane-shed in his grounds. His homestead was to all appearance a survival of the quiet and isolated homesteads of the remote past; with a thatched roof and hedges that enclosed his garden like green walls. And yet it was in the very centre of this old farmhouse that I came on the discovery which revealed his hobby: the hobby which still connected him with the world of science.

It is needless to narrate here the stages of the growing suspicion that led me to the notion that my host was not always so solitary as I had supposed, in his rural solitude. I took no steps to surprise his secret; and indeed the surprise was mine, when descending to the ground floor in the middle of the night, in search of a book to beguile my sleeplessness, I found one of the flagstones of the old paved kitchen lifted like a lid and a subterranean light striking upwards from some illuminated cellar, throwing the aquiline features of my friend into an almost infernal chiaroscuro. Indeed his face and figure thus lit from below seemed for the moment so fantastic as to obliterate a less familiar presence; and it was a moment or two before I realised that he was looking down on a companion whose head appeared black and grotesque, out of the gleaming slit of the trap-door. But it was the strange man who spoke first.

"I suppose the thing will not want re-charging. It is rather difficult to come down here like this."

"It is," said Raven, with a sinister smile. "But I notice that you all manage to come."

"All!" repeated the stranger in surprise.

"You are the hundred and fifteenth this week," answered Raven.

"Why, I thought— "began the other; and then suddenly catching sight of me, ducked and disappeared.

I advanced to the edge of the hole; but could see no sign of him. I could see nothing indeed but a vast, vague pattern, as of some mazy mathematical design. The staring, unnatural light may have dazzled me; but it seemed to me that the labyrinth of lines, whatever it was, was incredibly far away; like some fallen floor of space. Raven bent over and shut the strange door; and that is all I ever saw or knew of the methods of his nameless science.

Raven stepped back to the kitchen-table and lit a candle in an old-fashioned candlestick, in quaint contrast to the dizzy and distant world of blinding illumination sealed up in the cavern below. In the more familiar light his features fell into a more natural expression; and I saw that he was smiling. He spoke in a tone of humorous resignation.

"As you've seen so much," he said, "there's no reason for not telling you the rest. There never was any reason so far as I'm concerned. It's my customers who like to keep it dark."

"Do you mean to say," I asked, "that you can live in this out-of- the-way hole and get hundreds of clients to come down to see you in your cellars; why, I never even heard of it, whatever it is that you're doing?"

"People will always come after the thing they really want," he replied. "People say the big newspapers and the advertisers are giving the public what it wants. But they aren't; they are giving the public what it doesn't want; that's why they have to push it and ram it down our throats. If the public wants something, it will run after it as it runs after me — yes, and crawl underground to get it if necessary."

“But what is it?” I demanded impatiently. “What do you do? What have you discovered?”

“I will tell you what I do,” he said, soberly. “What I do is to undo what all the other men of science are doing. It is the greatest scientific discovery of the age. That is why it is kept dark.”

“It is very dark to me,” I answered. “I asked you what it is that you do?”

“And I said I would tell you,” he replied. “I manufacture Distance. I manufacture Silence. All the others are making the world smaller, but I am making it larger. Don’t you see that is what all these inconsistent idiots really want, when they rush deeper and deeper into the country, trailing all their telephones and telegraph wires behind them? They don’t really want the roads to London made shorter. What they really want is the street in London made longer. What they want is their next-door neighbour wafted away upon a great wave of space. Nobody before me has ever manufactured space. This is the real intensive cultivation; the manufacture of small infinites. This is the real application of science to the small proprietors. This, without altering one visible boundary, gives three hundred acres to the cow.”

“And all these people who come to you,” I said, “are all wanting to indulge this illusion of distance secretly, like a drug.”

“Well, it is a delicate matter sometimes, you see. To sit talking to an aristocratic but rather reminiscent maiden-aunt — or rather to sit being talked to by her — it is sometimes rather a relief to be able to make her fade gradually into the middle distance, her voice dying away like a faint farewell; but of course it is as well to conceal from her the fact that she is doing so. It could hardly be done so tactfully, if an apparatus for removing aunts were advertised on all the hoardings.”

“There certainly seems something a little cynical about it,” I said. “I suppose that is why your traffic is as secret as dope.”

“It has a more human side,” said Raven, “though doubtless, like all scientific discoveries, it is dangerous and liable to abuse. It is a great temptation when you see somebody you do not very much like walking briskly up the road towards your house, to press a button and lengthen the road by a mile or so. To see him continuing to walk briskly forward while the road shoots telescopically backwards, to see him resuming his march with dauntless resolution and always appearing further and further away down the perspective of the street, is a gratification that many find it hard to resist. But, as I say, it has its more ideal side. It is very doubtful whether all this piling of people on top of one another, in the big cities, really leads to sympathy or social fellowship. Man is a mountain that should be seen from a greater distance. Man is a monument or a statue that requires a more open space and a simpler background. I assure you that the householder in question is often quite carried away with love and affection for the stranger, when the stranger has really become a sort of vanishing dot on the horizon. If you are English, you know that the secret of an Englishman is that he really feels sociable so long as he is in solitude."

"I must apologise for having broken into your solitude," I said, "I had really no intention of thrusting myself between you and your client."

"Not at all," replied Raven, politely. "I am sensible of no intrusion. Indeed, to tell you the truth, I have got the apparatus working now; and I have succeeded in removing you to a distance of about a mile and a half. Given these conditions, I find your company delightful."

The Paradise of Human Fishes

Mr. Peter Paul Smith had just put on a new suit of clothes; but he did not strike any special attitudes of vanity over it. His face was more or less masked with a sort of goggles, even larger than those which perfect the personal beauty of the American dude; but he was not going motoring. His trousers were as roomy and shapeless as plus fours; but he was not going golfing. His costume was in a sense a uniform, for he was an official; but it was not a uniform such as tradition associates with the ambition to fascinate the fair. It was even in a sense a bathing-suit; but not one which the most sensitive town councillor would forbid as being of a seductive indelicacy. It was in fact the costume of a deep-sea diver, with the helmet like the head of a huge owl, the four limbs like the legs of an elephant and a long pipe protruding from the back of the head like a monkey's tail in the wrong place. The town councillor might well consider the compulsory enforcement of this costume at all our watering-places, since it would at once quiet his moral alarms about mixed bathing, and extend the educational range for the innocent and scientific study of the wonders of the deep. Some such reform is bound to come sooner or later, for we live in an age of re-organised efficiency; as nobody knew better than Mr. Smith himself, who was re-organising something or other in connection with contraband; which had necessitated his going with his friend, Dr. Robinson, and a staff of assistants, who were now cautiously lowering him into the sea.

He got on much better than he had expected. Only once in the course of the first half hour's groping did he feel anything like a hitch, an instantaneous strangling sensation as if his communications were cut or caught somewhere; but it passed away; and he must have acted automatically even during the seizure, for he recovered to find himself walking stolidly on the great grey slime under the sea. At first it seemed as dark as a cavern; but he began to be conscious that the darkness itself was less and less impenetrable. The profiles of fishes seemed to be drawn in faint lines of light; as extravagant as caricatures of politicians. It was as if devils as well as angels could have halos. But the halo came from a faintly increasing light which turned the twilight at last into a transparency unnatural in colour but luminous enough as a medium for movement. Smith thought of a great green sunrise. It suggested some grand savage myth about the sun being drowned in the sea. He was surprised, however, to find how soon he grew accustomed to the green daylight. Something in the elemental transition had acted like the transit of time; he felt as if he had been walking on that slimy floor for a hundred years. The smooth and serpentine columns of titanic seaweed seemed to him quite as natural as trees; tall trees round which the birds dart and wheel. For an instant he almost expected the birds to sing; when he remembered that they were fishes; the dumb birds of those buried skies.

He stood still and stared at something in front of him. The shapeless slime rose into the shape of a sharp ridge with an opening cut through it, cut sharply and squarely as by the hand of man. Through this opening gleamed stripes and patches of all the colours of sunset, as when one looks through a gate into a garden. It was a garden; and none the less a garden because a glimpse of hundreds of writhing tentacles or twiddling fingers showed that it was made of sea anemones instead of flowers. They were arranged in mathematical patterns following their variegated colours, as nature does not arrange them. At the end of the straight path between the coloured plots was the low dome of a building, dark against the light of whatever mysterious dayspring illumined those springs of the sea. Grey gleams clinging to it here and there suggested some metal like lead or pewter. It might have been a giant diver’s helmet; and coming towards him down the path surmounted by the dark streak of his pipe of communication was another diver. But as the man came nearer, he saw that the helmet was of another shape than his own, moulded into other metal features, like those of a mask. He had a momentary thrill at the thought that the head inside the helmet might also be of a strange shape; that the thing looking at him out of its windows was not a man.

On this, however, he was soon reassured. The stranger unhooked some apparatus resembling a telephone and clapped it against Smith’s helmet; he immediately felt a new electric throbbing, and then the unmistakeable voice of the United States speaking very distantly in his ear.

“See here,” said the voice, “has the City Inspector seen you?”

“What Inspector? What City?” asked Smith.

“Why, our City, of course. Gubbina City,” answered the native.

“Good heavens,” cried Smith. “You don’t mean to tell me that men actually *live* down here.”

"Only seventy-five thousand of them at present," admitted the other man, "but we're an expansive burg. You must be about the only guy that don't know how Old Man Gubbins bought all the bottom of the Atlantic dirt cheap, because all the other boobs thought it was only dirt with nothing to it. He's planted his factories here; and I tell you, Sir, this is going to be the new civilisation. Folks used to put paradise above the sky, but I guess the real paradise is going to be under the sea."

"It's got a garden like paradise anyhow," said Smith, "a garden of sea-anemones for flowers. You'll be telling me next you have a dogfish chained up instead of a dog."

"Why, as to that," answered the other, "these private fancies aren't exactly encouraged by the old man, and he says the gardens have got to go. Of course in our situation we have to do pretty much as we're told by the headquarters on land; and the old man likes to keep his finger on the string — I guess we're all on a string; and if we did have a dog, it would be on a chain."

"And I think you're on a chain yourself," said Smith. "What an awful life — to live and die breathing air that is only pumped down to you by the favour of somebody miles away."

"Where do you live?" asked the American abruptly.

"Brompton," replied Smith; he found the conversation had become quite easy, easier than an ordinary telephone.

"Are there many brooks in Brompton?" asked his companion, "or have you a well in your front garden, or do you go out and drink the rain? No, you have all your water pumped to you by the favour of somebody miles away. I don't see there's much difference between us. You are surrounded by air and have water pumped to you. We are surrounded by water and have air pumped to us. But we should both die if anything went wrong."

"You must have great confidence in Mr. Gubbins and the people who sent you down," said Smith. "Suppose he sold the plant to somebody else; suppose he went mad; suppose there was a strike or a revolution. Who are these gods who sit above you in the heights and give you the very breath of life in your underworld?"

"Let's see," said the other, with an air of abstraction, "I forget the names of the Water Board that supplies Brompton."

"My God," cried Smith, "and I never knew them either!"

Then he was silent and stared away into the distance beyond the dome. He saw something that looked at first like a forest of very thin trees of almost infinite height; then he saw it was a bunch or fringe formed of countless filaments like the filament he had seen attached to the distant figure of the other diver. It seemed to waver in a rhythmic manner and then gradually recede.

"Men falling in for work," said his informant briefly.

"It's horrible," cried Smith suddenly. "They are like marionettes."

"I fancy you people are hung on wires too; telephone wires; telegraph wires; all sorts of wires. But it's odd you should mention marionettes; for there really is a proposal for something of the sort. Some of them up there think the work could be better checked if wires were really attached to the arms and legs of the operatives, so that — what are you doing?"

"I'm going back!" cried Smith, "I'm going back where I can get a breath of fresh air."

"No," said the other, and his voice rang sad and hollow in his helmet. "That is the one thing you can never do. You cannot go back. You cannot go back to the primitive man drinking of the river. This is the way the whole world is going; if you did return to your own cities, you would soon find them so thick with chemical vapours that air will have to be pumped into them from the country outside. But you will never go."

He lurched forward and caught the other diver by his vital part, which is the pipe above him, only to be caught by the other in the same fashion. They hung there in a deadlock, each in a new fashion with his grip on the other's wind-pipe. Then Smith felt everything blacken about him, and awoke very slowly to find Dr. Robinson administering first aid on the pier.

"You're all right," he was saying, reassuringly, "You weren't down ten minutes when the thing caught somehow for a jiffy — here, you needn't be so energetic as that yet. Where do you think you're going?"

"Brompton," replied Smith, rising on wavering legs, "I want to see if anything — if anything more's happened there."

The Great Amalgamation

(From the lost Book of Arthur, mentioned by Geoffrey of Monmouth.)

But when Sir Percivale, the good knight, came to the mouth of the mighty cavern where the monster lay, he was sore astonished to behold the heaps of whitened bones of them that had gone before him on the quest, with here and there the cloven shield or splintered lance of some knight who would ride no more. And there went to and fro amid the mounds of death an aged man with a grey beard, that was a wizard, and seemed to be numbering the bones and writing down the names of the dead in a great book.

“By my science,” he said, “I am thus enabled to prophesy what are the chances of any champion’s good fortune. For the laws of number cannot lie; and it is my pleasure, fair sir, to bid you know that there are now five thousand three hundred and seventy-two chances to one, that the end of your venture will be evil.”

But Sir Percivale, being young and careless of science, hardly heard the words of the wise man; but rather lamented aloud over the dead, among whom lay many whose crests and quarterings he knew; and cried weeping:

“Alas, Sir Fortinbras, the good lord, that was clad from head to heel in copper and red gold and his hair red as a sunset; like a fire or a moving furnace was he ever in the front of battle; and here he lies pale like ashes. And woe is me for the good knight Sir Scudemore that dwelt in the high wood and drew the bow of which the shafts were like thunderbolts; six heathen kings they slew in the path that went down to Severne.

And while the young man wept, the old man smiled and said, as one who speaks comfortably to another: —

“Trust me, Sir Knight, that all is well with them; and that they have but amended the folly of their first attempt. For it was their error that they went always one by one, so that the foe could devour them piece-meal; but now they have become part of a mighty order and act together always, without it being possible for one to go lonely or to stray; fierce and smiling youth at which the sun stands amazed; and when that might and splendour comes out of its cavern, it is as though there were a new sunrise at moon.”

And even as he spoke, there was a far-off movement as if in dim and distant halls hollowed out of the very heart of the mountains; and along vast and vaulted corridors there was a trampling as of many terrible feet and a high hard noise like the trumpets before an army; and a moment after there came out into the sun a vast and fearful thing, covered with scales larger than scutcheons, and rayed with spikes standing out like many spears; carrying with it all the weapons of an army and yet one soul and one body, such as God permits to walk upon the hills of the world. For this was the Dragon, that had devoured many men, and Sir Percivale spurned aside the sage and the scattered bones, and, with a great cry, set his lance in rest...

On Secular Education

Once upon a time a boy was born in a square enclosure between four blank walls, where he grew up without knowledge of any other place; nor did he remember his mother or what had become of her. The only person he ever saw, as he grew up, was a sort of Guardian or Warder of the place, who passed a great deal of the time walking round and round the top of the walls like a sentinel. He was a rather remarkable old party, with a quaint sort of old-fashioned top hat and very big and bushy beard or whiskers. But he wore a very big and powerful pair of spectacles, which showed that he was delightfully scientific as well as nearly blind; and he always carried under his arm a big gun; which was enough to prove that he was the Law and the Executive.

The occupation of the boy, to which he was introduced very early in life, was as follows. In one of the walls there was a round hole, just large enough to allow a sort of iron rope or rod to pass out across the enclosure and vanish into an exactly identical round hole in the opposite wall. In this continuously moving cord it was the boy's business to cut notches at very exact intervals and with very considerable exertion. Sometimes, at noon and late at night, he was allowed to desist, to sleep and eat a little food which the old gentleman brought to him; and on these occasions the old gentleman was so kind as to utter a short homily of the most humane and sympathetic sort; pointing out the privileges which the youth enjoyed in so orderly and reliable an environment.

"You have complete liberty of thought," explained the Guardian, "and you are doubtless exercising that faculty by admiring the neatness of the mechanism and wondering how less happy human beings can support a rude existence without it."

"Well," answered the boy, "it must be remembered that I have never yet seen any other human beings, happy or otherwise. As a matter of fact, I am rather wondering who I am."

"We will resume this discussion in twelve hours' time," said the Guardian, looking at his watch, "when the conversation will turn upon what is the most hygienic meal-time."

The youth resumed his labours; but his mind was clearly given over to a morbid brooding, for he actually stopped in the middle of his pleasing industry to say:

“What is all this for?”

“Enjoying as you do complete liberty of speech,” replied the old gentleman on the wall, “you will probably wish to discuss whether your hour of sleep should be fifteen minutes later.”

“I mean,” cried the boy, with a gesture as of despair, “where does all this stuff go to?”

“The complete liberty of public discussion of which you justly boast,” remarked the Guardian, “will be resumed in three weeks’ time.”

So the boy took up his chopper again and began to chop bits out of the iron rope until he was weary; when he suddenly hurled his chopper over the wall and flung out his arms with a wild gesture to the sky.

“Who made all this?” he cried, “Who built this place, and why?”

“Silence!” cried the Guardian from the wall, in a voice of thunder, “You enjoy complete liberty of thought and speech; and I will not allow you to be fettered by Creed or Dogma.”

A Fish Story

There was a thoughtful silence in the inn parlour, when the fisherman had finished a statement accompanied with wide lateral gestures but exact calculations. The parson said in a ruminant manner:

“They say the first story about a fish was the story of Jonah.”

“What do you mean?” said the fisherman indignantly, “are you implying that you don’t believe my story?”

“It is far more improper,” said the parson, controlling the corners of his mouth, “for you to be implying that I don’t believe the story of Jonah.”

“Why, nobody believes that nowadays,” snorted the fisherman, “science exploded all those fairy tales long ago. Even you parsons can’t explain how a whale could swallow a man.”

“There are things almost as hard to swallow,” observed his clerical companion. “For that matter, science itself has her fish stories. Look at Wells’s scientific romances; and some that have come true as well.”

“That’s just the difference,” replied the angler excitedly “those can be explained; you may not know the explanation but a scientist could explain them step by step. The mind of man is the explanation; I can always believe that a man can do marvellous things.”

“Evidently,” said the parson gravely.

“Yes,” interposed the traveller, who had so far remained silent; for he was a stranger in these parts and not a country gentleman like the fisherman; he was (I am sorry to say) a journalist; and on a walking tour at that. None the less he continued, though in a low and almost hollow voice, “yes, it’s the human explanation that counts. I remember a trifling incident that happened to me when I was young; which shows how a little human ingenuity will produce something that seems quite odd for the moment. I used to fish as a boy, as boys do, with any bit of string or bent pin that came to hand; I had a good deal of luck; and I have prided myself since on getting practical results without bothering much about theory or expert advice. I think I was a bit put off all that by an old uncle of mine, who was so fearfully theoretical that he would go and study the skeletons of fishes in the museum, and pore over diagrams and sections of the cells and organs of fishes, before he would even go out to catch a tittlebat in a pond. The consequence was that the poor old boy got his legs entangled in his own tackle the first time he ever went fishing and fell off the end of a pier and got drowned, just when he was explaining the system of nerve-centres in some of the polyps of the South Seas. Well, as I say, I think this old tragedy of my Uncle William drove me to the opposite extreme: but I went about whipping all the streams and seas of the world with anything that came handy, and swearing that experience is the only way to anywhere. Sometimes I used the wrong thing and caught a log; sometimes, by some mistake or other, I used the right and caught nothing. They say any stick is good enough to beat a dog with; any rod is good enough to catch a shark with — that was my motto and a very good one, even if it didn't catch the shark. It caught other things, of course. As the other proverb says, anything was fish that came to my net; and when I had played an old hat for hours at Margate and nearly been pulled into the water by a plunging packing case bent on escape, I told myself that I was getting experience every hour.

"One evening about dusk I was sitting near the end of a long, narrow stone breakwater that ran out into a gently troubled sea. The waves swayed and swelled restlessly but with little noise, now and again rising high enough before they sank to catch a gleam from the last livid strip of sunset. Then, as I watched through the growing twilight such surges rise and fall, I became conscious of one that rose and did not fall. The ridge of the high wave remained rigid against the sky as if suddenly frozen into an iceberg; then I looked again and myself seemed turned to ice. The black shape was the shape of a fin, like the fin of a shark, but as big as the flapper of a whale. The next moment the world turned upside down.

"I might have thought it was an earthquake, or rather a seaquake; for a mountain had risen out of the sea. Only I saw that the mountain had eyes; eyes as huge as bay windows and standing out of its head almost like horns. The monster was of a dim purple shade changing below to a chocolate or dark red fringed with fins lined as with copper or red gold. But I had but an instant to observe it, for by the next it had butted into the breakwater shaking it from end to end like a vibrant cord; and in that same instant I knew the monster had my hook in its mouth. And then something happened that convinced me I was not awake: or there was no reason in Nature. What followed was nightmare enough, but nothing could ever equal that first departure from the sanity of sight. Instead of rebounding from the breakwater or breaking it, the great fish threw one fin across it, seeming to clutch as with a claw. Then with one huge, sickening heave, it heaved itself on to that wall of stone and remained balanced on it, like a balloon on a tightrope, its fins waving on each side to keep the balance like the wings of an enormous bird. In desperation, I plucked at my line, only to find it pulled in the opposite direction and myself along with it. The thing did not move; but by some munching or swallowing motion it was sucking my line into its inside as a windlass winds up a rope. I was dragged to its very jaws before I had time to let go. Then line and rod vanished with a flick and a jerk down the living cavern, and I turned and ran back along the causeway, shrieking aloud. Once I looked wildly over my shoulder, and beheld a new horror. The monster had moved. It was measurably nearer to me than it had been. How in the name of Hell a fish could thus live and walk out of water I did not know; but I knew I was being pursued with a mysterious malignity; it was like being hunted by a giant snail. When I came to the steep slopes of grey, glimmering, multitudinous pebbles, they sank and failed under my feet, even as all reality was failing under me. It was like trying to escape on a treadmill. I tumbled on my face, as if to bury my head in the heaped-up stones in despair; and I heard behind the dragging and shifting noises of the shingle, as the shapeless fish crawled up the hill; the land of the living, where it had no right to be alive. Then I turned recklessly and realised, as a final light of unreason, that it was dead. It was moving: but it was dead. It was marching inland on its flat fins like a huge starfish; but it was dead. Something told me there was no light behind those protuberant eyes that glistened in the growing moonshine; and in a final fury, I caught up a spar of sea-timber that lay on the shore and struck furiously at the foe. The spar had a long, rusty nail standing out like the head of a pickaxe. It rent the monstrous bulk from end to end, like the ripping up of a balloon; and from the inside there stepped out my Uncle William, whom I had not met for years.

“After the usual family greetings and inquiries, he explained everything in a quite satisfactory and entirely scientific manner. The whole story, indeed, is a most profitable lesson to the young, showing that diligence and study are always profitable in later life. Those scientific researches, which I had thought so abstract and theoretical, were not thrown away. We all are scientific enough to know the thing as a general theory; we know that touching particular nerves produces reflex actions jerking particular limbs. But as but few of us have ever happened to be swallowed alive by an enormous prehistoric fish cast up out of the deep seas by a submarine volcano, we have had but little opportunity of seeing the problem, so to speak, from the inside. My Uncle William, with his immense knowledge of ichthyology, and especially of anatomy and nerve structure, soon found that it was possible to work the fish from the inside, just as if he were steering a boat. The interior of a prehistoric fish is a simple and unpretentious place; and he was as well acquainted with the points at which it communicated with motor nerves and muscular action as you are with the corners of your room containing the telephone or the electric bell. He was thus enabled, long after the fish was dead, to travel about in it, visiting foreign countries at leisure, and even forcing the fish to perform many athletic acts to which it was quite unaccustomed in life. Such are the profoundly practical advantages of purely theoretical study."

The traveller looked around him with an air of simple benevolence; then he seemed to remember the argument, and turned to the parson with a polite explanatory gesture.

"Now why can we all believe a story of that simple sort immediately?" he asked. "Why is it instantly accepted by all as reasonable, and even probable, in itself? Why do none of you feel any of that faint scepticism about my story which distresses you in the Biblical story? Because there is nothing supernatural about it. It needs nothing beyond man as our friend says, the mind of man is the explanation and the scientist can explain it step by step. It is plainly preposterous to say that God who made the fishes could open and shut a fish's mouth if He liked. But we can believe anything, as our friend says, about the marvellous things that Man can do. That is why my story, so to speak, carries conviction on the face of it."

"I'm hanged if I know what you mean," grumbled the fisherman. "Are you making fun of the parson?"

"That must be it, I think," said the parson, cheerfully putting his pipe in his pocket, and he smiled at the traveller; and they parted.

On Private Property

When Captain Nicholas Nicholson found himself falling head downwards through empty space, the whole of his previous life passed before him. At least if it did not, the narrator of his adventures will certainly say it did; as it affords that unscrupulous scribe the most rapid method of describing who the Captain was and how he happened to be in mid air at the moment. He would describe at some length the life at a public school, the first faint stirring of the human brain at Cambridge, the joining of a Socialist society, the growing belief in social order and system of the German type so abruptly interrupted by enlistment in 1914, the incident of the girl in the tea-shop of whom he could never find further traces, the quarrel with the solicitor who had put all the family patrimony to the higher purposes of finance, and finally the experiences in the Air Force which had terminated in the way described above.

He never heard himself crash; but he came to semi-consciousness in an atmosphere of racking clamour which gradually lessened till he heard voices round him; one saying something about somebody having an artificial leg and the other observing that such legs were very beautifully made nowadays. Then he relapsed into unconsciousness with an under current of pain; and woke in a white light to see men standing about in white clothes and wearing spectacles; he supposed they were Prussians, but their faces looked hard and alien enough to be Chinese. The talk was still of the excellence of artificial limbs; and looking down, Nicholas saw that his own legs had been replaced by lengths of shining steel rods with mechanical joints of glittering complexity.

“Well,” he said, forcing his courage to cheerfulness, “by your account it is almost as good as having real ones.”

“It is much better,” said a man with shaven head and shining spectacles, without a movement in his wooden face, “The leg of nature is a most inefficient instrument.”

“Come now,” said Nicholas, “if that were true you might just as well cut off my arms as well.”

“We are going to,” said the man in goggles.

Darkness redescended and when he awoke he was sitting up with metal arms and legs and looking down a long white-washed corridor; and the man at his side told him breakfast would be ready in half-an- hour. They walked past rows of doors, as in the passages of an hotel, and outside each door stood a pair of steel legs, newly burnished, like the boots left outside bedrooms to be cleaned.

“You won’t want your legs at breakfast,” said his companion; and such was clearly the case; for he was lowered by a sort of chain from above so that his truncated body fitted into a hole in the long benches flanking the tables. He had left his legs in a sort of cloakroom, duly receiving a ticket. He said something about exercise; and was gravely told that after the meal (which was of a simple but scientific sort) he would parade for a proper constitutional in the grounds. It is true that when the time came for this, he was in turn relieved of his arms, by another official (duly receiving a ticket for them) since science had already discovered that arms are not used in walking or legs in eating.

After this his story becomes a little confused; there are improbable passages about his renewing the quarrel with the solicitor and sending for legs to kick him, or reunion with the tea-shop girl and a temporary lack of arms with which to embrace her; but familiar faces and old emotions often come back in this confused way in dreams; and this experience must be regarded as a dream; for he shortly woke up in an ordinary hospital and found the world had not yet progressed quite so far as he had fancied.

The End of Wisdom

We have all had dreams or memories about some gang of pirates, grim to the point of the grotesque, as they were in the story-books of childhood, who yet pointed with awe, and almost with horror, at some super-pirate in the background; a solitary and sinister figure, compared with whose unsearchable wickedness they were all as innocent as an infant school. Such was the attitude of the hard-headed and acquisitive business men of Bison City, III., U.S.A., towards a certain Mr. Crake, who had committed the Unpardonable Sin.

He committed it at a lucheon party of the B.B.B., supposed by some to stand for “Better and Brighter Bisons,” but by the moderate for “Better and Brighter Business.” The room in the large hotel was already decorated with American flags and also with bright bunches of American ladies, the beauty and fashion of Bison City, who were allowed to lean over the stone balustrade of the gallery and look down on the Bisons feeding. But the Bisons themselves were rather late, as is the habit of the brisk business-like salesmen of those parts; and for some time there was only one lean, leathery, bilious-looking man, whose profound gloom was relieved by a large disc or label on his coat, inscribed, “Call me Johnny.” After a time, however, similar revellers arrived with similar decorations; notably a white-haired withered little man, whose label bore the blazon of, “Please, I’m Tom,” and a very hearty, heavy man, with dark sleek hair, whose disc was adorned with the words, “Oh, Boy, I’m Little Frankie.” As the seats gradually filled up, it was seen that all the guests were decked with such gay proclamations, except two. One of these was evidently a guest of importance from outside: a compact, carefully dressed man, with yellow hair, which shone like yellow soap. The other sat further down the table, dark and angular, with a hatchet face, which was somehow handsome, and a rather sullen expression. This was John P. Crake; but there was no invitation, either in his dress or in his demeanour, to call him Johnny.

He was far from being an outcast, however; his fellow-townsmen being only too delighted to recite the precise number of dollars which he made every week in the biggest business in that neighbourhood. For Americans, who are accused of loving money, have this most generous trait: that they can actually love each other’s money. They were ready to put it down to his being "sick," in the American sense, if he really failed to rejoice in the eloquence around him. That anybody could be sick of it, in the English sense, never crossed their minds. He heard the big dark Bison still orating: "...A man like that's just God's own American citizen and won't stay down. He goes right out for the highest ideal in sight. He won't stay 'put' with ten thousand dollars when there's twenty thousand dollars knocking around. Now we figure that about the highest ideal going is this Service...."As in a dream, Crake heard the voice change, and knew that the yellow- haired politician was speaking: "... Here on false pretences, gentlemen. I am not a Bison. Nor was George Washington, but he would have been. (Cheers.) Wasn't it just this ideal of Service...." There were more cheers, silence, a little commotion, and Crake heard his own name. Everybody was looking at him; they wanted a speech; a speech from the first citizen of Bison City. He refused. They cheered and hammered the table as if he had accepted. He refused again. The man from Washington, shining all over with diplomacy and yellow soap, insinuated his persuasion; could not be expected to leave Bison City without hearing its greatest American citizen. John P. Crake boiled with black indescribable rage and shot suddenly and rigidly to his feet. He began in a harsh jarring voice:

"Gentlemen. We're all here to tell lies, and I'll begin with that one. Gentlemen." He gazed around at the somewhat startled audience and went on: "We all tell lies in business, because we only want to make money; but I can't see why the hell we should tell lies for fun in the lunch hour. I don't care a blasted button for Service, and I don't intend to be anybody's servant; certainly not yours. Every business man here wants to make money for himself, including me; and though he may use other men, he doesn't care if they're dead and damned when he's used them. That's the reality, and I like doing business with realities. As for ideals, I've nothing to say of them except that they make me sick as a dog." He sat down more slowly and with a greater air of calm and relief.

It would be hard to say how the luncheon party broke up; but the first to come was the last to go. For, as Crake went out of the room, he found the lean bilious man looking more unpleasant than ever, because his face was deformed with a smile.

"Good for you," he said, showing his yellow teeth. "I daren't do it; I have to wear this fool thing. But that's the way to get on top. Treat 'em like dirt." After pause, he added: "Say can I see you about that consignment?"

"Come round to my office at four," said Crake abstractedly, and went out.

At four he was going through a pile of letters, not without a grim smile. Personal letters had already begun to arrive, sent round by hand as a sequel to his disgraceful outburst. Ladies especially, whom he had never seen in his life, remonstrated with him at enormous length over his unfamiliarity with Ideals. Some recommended particular books, especially their own books; some particular ministers, at whose feet a taste for ideals might be imbibed. As he turned them over, the bilious man was shown in, a certain J. Jackson Drill, a broker, and, incidentally, a bootlegger. Crake pushed the papers across to him with a gesture of contempt; a contempt, it is to be feared, which included Mr. Drill as well as the papers. For Crake was inconsistent, like many such men; and did not really like the dirty pessimism of Jackson Drill any more than the greasy optimism of Little Frankie. Perhaps the cynic does not respect somebody else's cynicism.

Drill picked up the letters with his unpleasing grin, and began reading fragments aloud:"... If your ideals do not satisfy you, I am sure you have not heard the real message of the Broad Daylight Church, which promises spiritual progress and business success for all. The Church is now in serious need of funds...." Drill dropped the letter and took up another: "...May a sister in the sight of God express her grief at the dreadful avowal revealing your spiritual state touching dollars. Wealth is worthless in itself (seem to be a lot of Bible references here; handwriting very illiterate); it is a means to an end, and some of our wealthiest citizens set a noble example...." Drill picked up a third letter, remarking, "Not so illiterate; nice handwriting," but continued in the same derisive sing-song, "I have been thinking about what you said today, and I cannot decide whether it was the Only Way. Of course, I see your point. If these people go on being idealists, there won't be a decent ideal, or a decent idea left in the world. Somebody must do something to stop their befouling everything. Courage has come to mean readiness to risk other people's money. Service has come to mean servility to any rich man who waddles along."

Crake had lifted his head and was listening, suddenly alert with curiosity, but the other went droning on:

"Somebody must do something; and you did do something. You broke the back of it with sheer brutality; but I can't help wondering whether there isn't another way. I expect you've wondered yourself; because you are not a brute. You’re supposed to be sulky because you are always longing for a little time to yourself, to think these things out. So am I.”

“Here,” said Crake sharply, “give me that letter.”

“Rather a scream, isn’t it?” said Drill; “it goes on, ‘If we can’t shut off this deafening nonsense, we shall have no inner life at all....’ “Crake snatched the letter out of his companion’s hand with a violence that tore it across at the corner. Then he spread it out before him and looked at Drill; and Drill knew that he was not wanted in that room any more.

The letter was an extraordinary letter. The extracts he had heard gave no real idea of it. There were moments when he thought he was reading his own diary. In some cases it was rather as if he were looking into his own subconsciousness. It was signed with an evasive female pen-name, and had an address that was no clue to identity. Yet he was not primarily impressed with how much, or rather how little, he knew about the writer. He was impressed with how much the writer knew about him. She knew one thing at least, which he hardly knew himself till he had done reading. That he hated ideals and idealism because he was himself very much too bitter and fastidious an idealist. That he hated his wealth and his work and his fellow-workmen because of an unnamed comparison and because his kingdom was not of this world. He sat down and wrote a long and even laborious letter in reply; the beginning of a prolonged private correspondence that spread over years. And through all those years he never made an effort (so strong was something in him making for refinement and renunciation) to find out the name or dwelling of the woman who was his best friend.

For some little time Bison City did regard Mr. Crake as something between a leper, a lunatic, a wicked wizard commanding the elements and the blasphemer whose duty it is to be struck by lightning in the religious tracts of that region. Americans do not worship riches in the sense of forgiving anything to the rich; and they do not easily forgive a blasphemy against the gods whom they do worship. Mr. Crake had defied the gods of the tribe that were of stone and brass- especially brass. He had violated the highest morality of Bison City, which is well named, because its morality consists of going at anything with your head down. Yet, strangely enough, Mr. Crake grew happier as time went on, and even more good humoured with his fellows; so that his unpopularity began to fade away. In fact, his loneliness was ended. He no longer boiled with an incommunicable disgust. He poured out his feelings every night in long letters to his unknown friend;

and received letters which had a slow but steady effect of restoring him to sanity and even to sociability. In this respect his invisible companion both puzzled and pleased him. She had read much more than he, though he was not an uncultivated man; but she seemed to have reached a balance from the study of opposite extremes. Left alone, with one book at a time, he might have been tempted to go mad like Nietzsche or turn peasant like Tolstoy. But she seemed to have accepted all the abnormalities and then returned to the normal. She was sufficiently cultured to know even the case against culture; and he could not shock her by cursing books as he shocked Bison City by cursing business. The result was that, unknown to himself and by minute gradations, he was turning from a monomaniac into a man. And then, one fine day, something happened to him, that suddenly revealed to him his manhood; which came on him with a rush like a return of boyhood.

And the strangest thing about it was this: That when he sat down, on the evening of that fine day, to write the letter that had become like a diary, to be read only by a second self, he found for the first time that he could not write. At least it seemed in a new unnatural way impossible...almost indecent. Nothing might seem more remote than that relation; yet his friend had always remained a woman; the mere fact, the slope of the feminine handwriting, a hundred delicate details, had left hanging over the affair that distant and disembodied sentiment that can never be conjured away; something like the smell of old gardens or that dust of dead roses that was preserved in old bowls and cabinets. He knew now that he had been living through a long convalescence in the large rooms of some such ancient and quiet house; under the large tact of an invisible hostess. And what had just happened to him, in the street outside, was so vivid and violent, so concrete, so incongruous. After poising his pen for a moment of doubt, he dismissed the matter, and only answered her remarks about the poetry of Claudel. And then a strange thing happened; giving him a rather terrifying sense of being watched in that house of healing by an all-seeing eye. For she wrote, in her next letter, quite casually and even humorously: “Something has happened to you. I was very much interested in what you did not tell me.”

Then he told her; but it was an effort, and he felt for the first time that he was living in two worlds. As he walked where the town opened into a country road, he had suddenly realised that he was happy. His cure was complete. The disease of disdain for common things no longer devoured his brain, and yet his appreciation of the common was no nearer to the vulgar.

Indeed, the common things around him, the stones in the road, the weeds in the ditch, stood out with a distinctness that was the reverse of flat. It was as if he had felt the third dimension for the first time. It reminded him of something his friend has said about religion, as compared with the mere herding both of Capitalism and Communism. “There is a delicacy about the Day of Judgment.” It was at least supposed to deal with individuals. “Yes, that is it,” he said to himself. “They used to say in the sight of God we are all distinguished. We may be damned; but, damn it all, we’re distinguished.”

He was wandering away into the nondescript landscape outside the wooden town, dotted with frame-houses and the thin trees of those plains, now lit up with the delicate clarity of the Indian summer. A born critic, born in a world where criticism is rare, he had often felt something frail and collapsible about the frame-houses of his country; as if they would fold up flat like a portable stage; something of the nomadism of a travelling show. But in his new normal mood it pleased him — not so much that they should shut as that they could open — as a child is pleased when a hinged toy opens like a telescope. Then something happened which showed sharply how very new was the mood, and even how very abnormal was the normality. He caught sight of a string stretched across a backyard, with some coloured clothes hanging on it; some of them seemed to be blouses or pinafores such as artists wear; some pyjamas of a garish cut and pattern. Before he had begun to browse in that great library of his literary correspondence, he would have felt the sight as the most unsightly sort of commonplace. A woman hanging out the washing would have been something on a level with the Comic Strip in the loathsome local paper. But at this queer moment of his life he actually liked it. The headless figures of the shirts, the dancing legs of the pantaloons looked like giant marionettes acting a pantomime in the sunlight of Italy; the stripes and patches of crude colour had the note of carnival. He thought inconsequently of the double fate of the word “Pantaloon.” A very strenuous young woman was struggling with the line; and her copper hair in the sun gave a touch that brought to life the colours of a blue and green frock fluttering behind her. The garments on the line were puffed out by the wind into preposterous shapes of hollow solidity; and just at that moment a very big one, looking like a complete suit of yellow, broke from its peg and went careering across the bushes towards him, like some fat yellow buffoon dancing across the countryside. He made one wild leap and caught the runaway, which collapsed like a balloon and then hung like a rag; and, bounding across the grass plots and pathways, solemnly handed it to the young woman, who was already laughing.

"Oh, thank you very much," she said, "that's Uncle Bill. He's supposed to be an artist and likes yellow. Used to have to do with something called the Yellow Book."

"The Yellow Peril, I should think," said Crake, "but artists are proverbially liable to abscond."

"So all my business uncles tell me," she said. "I'm afraid I don't understand either sort. They would never condescend to run after the washing."

"I wish they ran after anything so clean," replied Crake. "In the business and politics I've seen — Well, there isn't any washing, only whitewashing."

She was looking at him in an unembarrassed manner, slightly amused; she had a square, open face which would have been even conventionally handsome if her wide, blue eyes had not been a shade too far apart; everything else about her expressed only the strength and strenuous bodily vigour of her first attitude; and she had one trick that is only found in people who are physically almost perfect. When she was not darting and dashing about she stood absolutely still.

His eyes strayed towards the little wooden house to which the yard was attached; and she answered his unspoken question without losing her steady smile.

"No, I'm not the Hired Help; I rather doubt if I'm a Help at all. But the rest of the family's out."

"Ah, of course," he said, "the yellow gentleman is your uncle."

"The Scarlet Woman is my aunt," she said, indicating another garment. "She has gone to hear a Hindoo who lectures on Health- Spirals and the Super-Gland."

"I know him," said Crake gloomily, "he deepens your inner life and gives you tips about Wall Street."

"The peacock blue and green contraption is my sister," she went on. "She's gone to the Purple Possum, the celebrated playground of the New Youth. All very brilliant, I believe, and prides itself especially on being Frank. What did you say?"

“Oh, nothing,” said Crake, who had involuntarily murmured, “Oh, boy, I’m Little Frankie.”

“Uncle goes to a speakeasy; but it’s supposed to be one for artists. It’s all too intellectual for me. Will you come inside?”

“Intellectuals haven’t intellect enough to boil an egg,” he said as he went inside. “I’m all for the eggs.”

And as he went in through the sheds and sculleries and kitchen, bowing his head a little, something was whispering in his ear: “You will not return; you will not come back free; you are going into a new world; a little, real world. You are going to live in a dolls’ house; and you will come out a doll.”

And the change that was already in his heart made him answer with a challenge: “What a fool Ibsen was,” he muttered. “What could be jollier than living in a dolls’ house?”

And when he went through the dark interior and saw at last the light from the front windows, it was not the dead daylight he had left behind; for those windows looked on to the strange streets of some other star; he was in love.

A few days afterwards, with his head full of these new things, that capered in many colours like the headless puppets in the sun, he came back suddenly into the cool shadow of that older friendship in which he had lived so long. He opened the letter, which went straight to the point, silently and from within, as was her strange habit.

“You understood my first letter at once; when most men would have thought I was mad. You will understand that this is my last letter quite as easily. You will not think any of the vulgar things: jealousy or the fear that somebody else will be jealous. You could not be vulgar; at first you had almost nothing except not being vulgar. You began with nothing but a hatred; but I knew your hatred was noble, and I know your love would be noble. No; it is not that sort of obvious difficulty at all. We must end here because we have gone round the whole world and thought as far as thinking will go. That is not conceit; it is not a question of knowing everything now, but of being ready to understand anybody at any time. You would not melt into a Regular Guy; you did not dry up into a Superman; and after that you will become a man and understand all men. We must end now, because of all those who have thus understood all things, from the cedar to the hyssop, hardly any (not even Solomon himself) have resisted the temptation to say a last word, to sum it all up, and to say, Vanity of Vanities. Let us, let me at least, resist the temptation, and say, not *Vanitas,* but only *Vale*...Farewell."

John Crake sat down and wrote a long and earnest and delicate letter of thanks, surveying all the thousand things that he had gained in that voyage round the world with that invisible companion. Then he sprang up like a spring released and rushed down the road like a boy freed from school; all the noises of nature seemed to be shouting and cheering him on, for he felt for the first time that he had a body, and it was racing to outstrip his sole.

Before that autumn had turned to winter he was married to Mary Wendover, the lady of the clothes-line; and it is typical of the tail foremost or back-door fashion of his introduction that he never knew her name was Wendover until about a month after he knew it was Mary. She was apparently a guest in the house of her relative; but the guest seemed to do all the work while the hosts pursued self- development. "Very self-development," said Crake, "but I think, as usual, the Cinderella was the favourite of the fairies." And indeed she seemed to show a more artistic ardour for pots and pans than they did for arts; as if the teapot were indeed a familiar goblin or the broom a benevolent witch's broomstick. After their marriage her creative concentration increased; and Crake, remembering his own chance words of encouragement, felt it natural to be infected with the same fury of efficiency. He wanted to deal with things directly, with his own hands, as she did; and he announced one day that he had sold out his business and was going to work a farm he had about ten miles from the city. She only laughed, and said: "I thought you were already doing business with realities."

"Why," he cried, "that is out of my celebrated disgraceful speech. I didn't know...."

"You must have known ladies are allowed to overhear Bisons eating," she said.

"Well, it shows how little I knew in those days. Business men do business with unrealities. Only with unrealities. With rubber forests nobody has seen or ivory from elephants who might be fabulous like unicorns. I want to cut down a real tree and ride a real horse and be real."

Indeed, there was a reality in their very romance; and their common passion went back to its romantic origin. Slight as had been the gesture of their introduction, it had been active and abrupt. What he had seen had been a woman wrestling with a rope; and what she had seen had been a man bounding over a bush; and all their love and life went with that gallop of bodily vigour and the high gestures of the mastery of man.

It was about three years later, and, save for the noise of two children in the old farmhouse, a man would have said that their whole life was unchanged. He still rode his horses round the farm, and his body was still young enough to find automatic exultation in the exercise; she still practised a hundred arts and crafts under the name of housekeeping, and would have let loose a violent scorn against anyone who called it drudgery. They both enjoyed to the full the pleasure of doing things well, and there are few pleasures more enduring; and yet a more subtle critic might have said that things were changed. But John Crake could only think of one critic who would have been subtle enough to say it.

Perhaps it was a proof that things were changed that he had thought of that subtle critic at all. But he did now recall that cooler background of friendship, and told himself that she would have understood. Above all, she would not have misunderstood. She would not have been cheap, and supposed that he was merely tired of his wife. In reality, he was not tired in the least. He felt that he wanted her and he had missed her, in spite of having married her. Moreover, there grew upon him a dull pain in the feeling that his wife herself had become sad and estranged. He had seen her staring out of the window on bright summer days; and her face was sadder for the sunlight. Her plunging practicality was often interrupted by her sudden stillness. She liked more and more to be alone. John Crake was no fool, and would have thought nothing of these moods if they had occurred in a moody person. If she had been of the sentimental sort it would not have distressed him much even if he had thought (as he was sometimes inclined to think) that they were somehow connected with personal memories, and even with personal memories of another person. He was shrewd enough to know that romances do very little harm to the romantic. The sort of person for whom lost loves or faded fancies can be stirred by music or turned into minor poetry is generally the sort of person who can indulge them without much danger to the solid loyalties of life. But Mary Crake was not particularly romantic; and certainly the very reverse of sentimental. She had a passion for the practical, for translating thoughts into things. She would no more desire to have a romance without turning it into a reality than to have a recipe without turning it into a dish. She could no more have lived on dreams than she could have dined on a cookery book. Ever since he had seen her wrestling with a clothes-line like an Amazon lassooing a wild horse, he had been affected by her powerful impatience and directness of design. People of that sort do not brood for pleasure. If she was brooding, she was suffering.

He, in his turn, brooded long upon that brooding; pacing up and down the long verandah into which was extended the wide porch of the American farmhouse. All round him was that dreary plain that is the incongruous background of that cheery people, and one straight American road ran up to the very steps of his own porch, a road lined with lean, spidery trees. The road ended with the farm, and it seemed to his sullen eye like the road of destiny, that leads so straight to achievement and disappointment. With an abrupt movement, he turned his back upon it, went into his study, and sat down at his desk. Before he had risen from it he had broken the silence of four years, and written to that long-lost friend and counsellor who had never had a name.

He came out again upon the porch, with his sealed and stamped letter in his hand, and saw that the long road between the thin trees had a black object upon it, the dark angular figure of a man, with a hat tilted over his eyes, so as to show nothing but a sour grin. It was Jackson Drill, the bootlegger; and Crake had an instant overwhelming sense of repugnance. There had been a time when they were the two cynics of Bison City, and seemed to be in a sort of sympathy in their lack of sympathy. It measured the distance that Crake had really travelled along that road of destiny, that the distant sight of Drill was like the sight of a black scorpion. He had long felt that that sort of pessimism was mere poison. The hand that held the letter made an involuntary movement, as if not wishing even the externals of such an understanding to be exposed to such a misunderstanding. The movement, of course, produced the very effect it was meant to avoid.

“Very confidential correspondence, I suppose,” said Drill. “Three years after marriage is about the time they start. In fact, old man, I fear it isn’t the only confidential correspondence in the house.”

Crake said in a very low and restrained voice: “What the devil in hell do you mean?”

Drill laughed with disagreeable agreeableness; for Americans are not afraid to be familiar with their wealthier employers, so far as language is concerned. “Well,” he said, “if you have your private correspondence, why shouldn’t she? By all accounts, she used to have letters, even in the old days, that you didn’t see. That you weren’t meant to see.”

“Oh, indeed!” said Crake, thoughtfully, and hit the man a crack on his crooked mouth that sent him from the top of the steps to the bottom, and left him spread-eagled on the flat road below. Then Crake turned and entered his own house in so towering a passion that it might have shaken the topmost chimneys and brought them down.

His wife was sitting with her back to him at a writing-desk, reading an old faded letter, and, though he could not see her face, he knew when he first heard her voice that she had been in tears; a terrible and portentous thing in her case.

“Who is that letter from?” he asked, with his voice on a dead level.

She rose and faced him, and her low voice rang out:

“Who are you to talk about letters?” she said. “Who is that letter for?”

Then, after a deadly silence, she added, almost grimly:

“Give me that letter.”

“Why should I?” he answered, frowning at her.

“Oh,” she replied, almost lightly, “only because it is addressed to-me.”

And with that he looked across at the old letter she was reading, and saw that it was one of those that he had sent to the same address.

There are thirty-seven morals to this story; but one of them is that it is he who has really gone round the whole world who is anxious to come home; that the end of wisdom is the beginning of life; and that God Himself bowed down to enter a narrow door, in the hour when the Word was made flesh.

UNCOLLECTED SHORT STORIES

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THE SHOP OF GHOSTS

1909

Nearly all the best and most precious things in the universe you can get for a halfpenny. I make an exception, of course, of the sun, the moon, the earth, people, stars, thunderstorms, and such trifles. You can get them for nothing. Also I make an exception of another thing, which I am not allowed to mention in this paper, and of which the lowest price is a penny halfpenny. But the general principle will be at once apparent. In the street behind me, for instance, you can now get a ride on an electric tram for a halfpenny. To be on an electric tram is to be on a flying castle in a fairy tale. You can get quite a large number of brightly coloured sweets for a halfpenny. Also you can get the chance of reading this article for a halfpenny; along, of course, with other and irrelevant matter.

But if you want to see what a vast and bewildering array of valuable things you can get at a halfpenny each you should do as I was doing last night. I was gluing my nose against the glass of a very small and dimly lit toy shop in one of the greyest and leanest of the streets of Battersea. But dim as was that square of light, it was filled (as a child once said to me) with all the colours God ever made. Those toys of the poor were like the children who buy them; they were all dirty; but they were all bright. For my part, I think brightness more important than cleanliness; since the first is of the soul, and the second of the body. You must excuse me; I am a democrat; I know I am out of fashion in the modern world.

As I looked at that palace of pigmy wonders, at small green omnibuses, at small blue elephants, at small black dolls, and small red Noah’s arks, I must have fallen into some sort of unnatural trance. That lit shop-window became like the brilliantly lit stage when one is watching some highly coloured comedy. I forgot the grey houses and the grimy people behind me as one forgets the dark galleries and the dim crowds at a theatre. It seemed as if the little objects behind the glass were small, not because they were toys, but because they were objects far away. The green omnibus was really a green omnibus, a green Bayswater omnibus, passing across some huge desert on its ordinary way to Bayswater. The blue elephant was no longer blue with paint; he was blue with distance. The black doll was really a negro relieved against passionate tropic foliage in the land where every weed is flaming and only man is black. The red Noah's ark was really the enormous ship of earthly salvation riding on the rain-swollen sea, red in the first morning of hope.

Every one, I suppose, knows such stunning instants of abstraction, such brilliant blanks in the mind. In such moments one can see the face of one's own best friend as an unmeaning pattern of spectacles or moustaches. They are commonly marked by the two signs of the slowness of their growth and the suddenness of their termination. The return to real thinking is often as abrupt as bumping into a man. Very often indeed (in my case) it is bumping into a man. But in any case the awakening is always emphatic and, generally speaking, it is always complete. Now, in this case, I did come back with a shock of sanity to the consciousness that I was, after all, only staring into a dingy little toy-shop; but in some strange way the mental cure did not seem to be final. There was still in my mind an unmanageable something that told me that I had strayed into some odd atmosphere, or that I had already done some odd thing. I felt as if I had worked a miracle or committed a sin. It was as if I had at any rate, stepped across some border in the soul.

To shake off this dangerous and dreamy sense I went into the shop and tried to buy wooden soldiers. The man in the shop was very old and broken, with confused white hair covering his head and half his face, hair so startlingly white that it looked almost artificial. Yet though he was senile and even sick, there was nothing of suffering in his eyes; he looked rather as if he were gradually falling asleep in a not unkindly decay. He gave me the wooden soldiers, but when I put down the money he did not at first seem to see it; then he blinked at it feebly, and then he pushed it feebly away.

"No, no," he said vaguely. "I never have. I never have. We are rather old-fashioned here."

"Not taking money," I replied, "seems to me more like an uncommonly new fashion than an old one."

"I never have," said the old man, blinking and blowing his nose; "I've always given presents. I'm too old to stop."

"Good heavens!" I said. "What can you mean? Why, you might be Father Christmas."

"I am Father Christmas," he said apologetically, and blew his nose again.

The lamps could not have been lighted yet in the street outside. At any rate, I could see nothing against the darkness but the shining shop-window.

There were no sounds of steps or voices in the street; I might have strayed into some new and sunless world. But something had cut the chords of common sense, and I could not feel even surprise except sleepily. Something made me say, “You look ill, Father Christmas.”

“I am dying,” he said.

I did not speak, and it was he who spoke again.

“All the new people have left my shop. I cannot understand it. They seem to object to me on such curious and inconsistent sort of grounds, these scientific men, and these innovators. They say that I give people superstitions and make them too visionary; they say I give people sausages and make them too coarse. They say my heavenly parts are too heavenly; they say my earthly parts are too earthly; I don’t know what they want, I’m sure. How can heavenly things be too heavenly, or earthly things too earthly? How can one be too good, or too jolly? I don’t understand. But I understand one thing well enough. These modern people are living and I am dead.”

“You may be dead,” I replied. “You ought to know. But as for what they are doing, do not call it living.”

A silence fell suddenly between us which I somehow expected to be unbroken. But it had not fallen for more than a few seconds when, in the utter stillness, I distinctly heard a very rapid step coming nearer and nearer along the street. The next moment a figure flung itself into the shop and stood framed in the doorway. He wore a large white hat tilted back as if in impatience; he had tight black old-fashioned pantaloons, a gaudy old-fashioned stock and waistcoat, and an old fantastic coat. He had large, wide-open, luminous eyes like those of an arresting actor; he had a pale, nervous face, and a fringe of beard. He took in the shop and the old man in a look that seemed literally a flash and uttered the exclamation of a man utterly staggered.

“Good lord!” he cried out; “it can’t be you! It isn’t you! I came to ask where your grave was.”

“I’m not dead yet, Mr. Dickens,” said the old gentleman, with a feeble smile; “but I’m dying,” he hastened to add reassuringly.

“But, dash it all, you were dying in my time,” said Mr. Charles Dickens with animation; “and you don’t look a day older.”

“I’ve felt like this for a long time,” said Father Christmas.

Mr. Dickens turned his back and put his head out of the door into the darkness.

"Dick," he roared at the top of his voice; "he's still alive."

Another shadow darkened the doorway, and a much larger and more full-blooded gentleman in an enormous periwig came in, fanning his flushed face with a military hat of the cut of Queen Anne. He carried his head well back like a soldier, and his hot face had even a look of arrogance, which was suddenly contradicted by his eyes, which were literally as humble as a dog's. His sword made a great clatter, as if the shop were too small for it.

"Indeed," said Sir Richard Steele, "'tis a most prodigious matter, for the man was dying when I wrote about Sir Roger de Coverley and his Christmas Day."

My senses were growing dimmer and the room darker. It seemed to be filled with newcomers.

"It hath ever been understood," said a burly man, who carried his head humorously and obstinately a little on one side (I think he was Ben Jonson) "It hath ever been understood, consule Jacobo, under our King James and her late Majesty, that such good and hearty customs were fallen sick, and like to pass from the world. This grey beard most surely was no lustier when I knew him than now."

And I also thought I heard a green-clad man, like Robin Hood, say in some mixed Norman French, "But I saw the man dying."

"I have felt like this a long time," said Father Christmas, in his feeble way again.

Mr. Charles Dickens suddenly leant across to him.

"Since when?" he asked. "Since you were born?"

"Yes," said the old man, and sank shaking into a chair. "I have been always dying."

Mr. Dickens took off his hat with a flourish like a man calling a mob to rise.

"I understand it now," he cried, "you will never die."

TELEGRAPH POLES

1911

MY friend and I were walking in one of those wastes of pine-wood which make inland seas of solitude in every part of Western Europe; which have the true terror of a desert, since they are uniform, and so one may lose one's way in them. Stiff, straight, and similar, stood up all around us the pines of the wood, like the pikes of a silent mutiny. There is a truth in talking of the variety of Nature; but I think that Nature often shows her chief strangeness in her sameness. There is weird rhythm in this very repetition; it is as if the earth were resolved to repeat a single shape until the shape shall turn terrible.

Have you ever tried the experiment of saying some plain word, such as "dog," thirty times? By the thirtieth time it has become a word like "snark" or "pobble." It does not become tame, it becomes wild, by repetition. In the end a dog walks about as startling and undecipherable as Leviathan or Croquemitaine.

It may be that this explains the repetitions in Nature; it may be for this reason that there are so many million leaves and pebbles. Perhaps they are not repeated so that they may grow familiar. Perhaps they are repeated only in the hope that they may at last grow unfamiliar. Perhaps a man is not startled at the first cat he sees, but jumps into the air with surprise at the seventy-ninth cat. Perhaps he has to pass through thousands of pine trees before he finds the one that is really a pine tree. However, this may be, there is something singularly thrilling, even something urgent and intolerant, about the endless forest repetitions; there is the hint of something like madness in that musical monotony of the pines.

I said something like this to my friend; and he answered with sardonic truth, "Ah, you wait till we come to a telegraph post."

* * * *

My friend was right, as he occasionally is in our discussions, especially upon points of fact. We had crossed the pine forest by one of its paths which happened to follow the wires of the provincial telegraphy; and though the poles occurred at long intervals they made a difference when they came. The instant we came to the straight pole we could see that the pines were not really straight. It was like a hundred straight lines drawn with schoolboy pencils all brought to judgment suddenly by one straight line drawn with a ruler. All the amateur lines seemed to reel to right and left. A moment before I could have sworn they stood as straight as lances; now I could see them curve and waver everywhere, like scimitars and yataghans. Compared with the telegraph post the pines were crooked-and alive. That lonely vertical rod at once deformed and enfranchised the forest. It tangled it all together and yet made it free, like any grotesque undergrowth of oak or holly.

“Yes,” said my gloomy friend, answering my thoughts. “You don’t know what a wicked shameful thing straightness is if you think these trees are straight. You never will know till your precious intellectual civilization builds a forty-mile forest of telegraph poles.”

* * * *

We had started walking from our temporary home later in the day than we intended; and the long afternoon was already lengthening itself out into a yellow evening when we came out of the forest on to the hills above a strange town or village, of which the lights had already begun to glitter in the darkening valley. The change had already happened which is the test and definition of evening, I mean that while the sun seemed still as bright, the earth was growing blacker against it, especially at the edges, he hills and the pine-tops. This brought out yet more clearly the owlish secrecy of pine-woods; and my friend cast a regretful glance at them as he came out under the sky. Then he turned to the view in front; and, as it happened, one of the telegraph posts stood up in front of him in the last sunlight. It was no longer crossed and softened by the more delicate lines of pine wood; it stood up ugly, arbitrary, and angular as any crude figure in geometry. My friend stopped, pointing his stick at it, and all his anarchic philosophy rushed to his lips.

“Demon,” he said to me briefly, “behold your work. That place of proud trees behind us is what the world was before you civilized men, Christians or democrats or the rest, came to make it dull with your dreary rules of morals and equality. In the silent fight of that forest, tree fights speechless against tree, branch against branch. And the upshot of that dumb battle is inequality-and beauty. Now lift up your eyes and look at equality and ugliness. See how regularly the white buttons are arranged on that black stick, and defend your dogmas if you dare."

"Is that telegraph post so much a symbol of democracy?" I asked. "I fancy that while three men have made the telegraph to get dividends, about a thousand men have preserved the forest to cut wood. But if the telegraph pole is hideous (as I admit) it is not due to doctrine but rather to commercial anarchy. If any one had a doctrine about a telegraph pole it might be carved in ivory and decked with gold. Modern things are ugly, because modern men are careless, not because they are careful."

"No," answered my friend with his eye on the end of a splendid and sprawling sunset, "there is something intrinsically deadening about the very idea of a doctrine. A straight line is always ugly. Beauty is always crooked. These rigid posts at regular intervals are ugly because they are carrying across the world the real message of democracy."

"At this moment," I answered, "they are probably carrying across the world the message, 'Buy Bulgarian Rails.' They are probably the prompt communication between some two of the wealthiest and wickedest of His children with whom God has ever had patience. No; these telegraph poles are ugly and detestable, they are inhuman and indecent. But their baseness lies in their privacy, not in their publicity. That black stick with white buttons is not the creation of the soul of a multitude. It is the mad creation of the souls of two millionaires."

"At least you have to explain," answered my friend gravely, "how it is that the hard democratic doctrine and the hard telegraphic outline have appeared together; you have . . . But bless my soul, we must be getting home. I had no idea it was so late. Let me see, I think this is our way through the wood. Come, let us both curse the telegraph post for entirely different reasons and get home before it is dark."

We did not get home before it was dark. For one reason or another we had underestimated the swiftness of twilight and the suddenness of night, especially in the threading of thick woods. When my friend, after the first five minutes' march, had fallen over a log, and I, ten minutes after, had stuck nearly to the knees in mire, we began to have some suspicion of our direction. At last my friend said, in a low, husky voice:

"I'm afraid we're on the wrong path. It's pitch dark."

"I thought we went the right way," I said, tentatively.

“Well,” he said; and then, after a long pause, “I can’t see any telegraph poles. I’ve been looking for them.”

“So have I,” I said. “They’re so straight.”

We groped away for about two hours of darkness in the thick of the fringe of trees which seemed to dance round us in derision. Here and there, however, it was possible to trace the outline of something just too erect and rigid to be a pine tree. By these we finally felt our way home, arriving in a cold green twilight before dawn.

THE TREES OF PRIDE

1922

I. The Tale of the Peacock Trees

Squire Vane was an elderly schoolboy of English education and Irish extraction. His English education, at one of the great public schools, had preserved his intellect perfectly and permanently at the stage of boyhood. But his Irish extraction subconsciously upset in him the proper solemnity of an old boy, and sometimes gave him back the brighter outlook of a naughty boy. He had a bodily impatience which played tricks upon him almost against his will, and had already rendered him rather too radiant a failure in civil and diplomatic service. Thus it is true that compromise is the key of British policy, especially as effecting an impartiality among the religions of India; but Vane's attempt to meet the Moslem halfway by kicking off one boot at the gates of the mosque, was felt not so much to indicate true impartiality as something that could only be called an aggressive indifference. Again, it is true that an English aristocrat can hardly enter fully into the feelings of either party in a quarrel between a Russian Jew and an Orthodox procession carrying relics; but Vane's idea that the procession might carry the Jew as well, himself a venerable and historic relic, was misunderstood on both sides. In short, he was a man who particularly prided himself on having no nonsense about him; with the result that he was always doing nonsensical things. He seemed to be standing on his head merely to prove that he was hard-headed.

He had just finished a hearty breakfast, in the society of his daughter, at a table under a tree in his garden by the Cornish coast. For, having a glorious circulation, he insisted on as many outdoor meals as possible, though spring had barely touched the woods and warmed the seas round that southern extremity of England. His daughter Barbara, a good-looking girl with heavy red hair and a face as grave as one of the garden statues, still sat almost motionless as a statue when her father rose. A fine tall figure in light clothes, with his white hair and mustache flying backwards rather fiercely from a face that was good-humored enough, for he carried his very wide Panama hat in his hand, he strode across the terraced garden, down some stone steps flanked with old ornamental urns to a more woodland path fringed with little trees, and so down a zigzag road which descended the craggy Cliff to the shore, where he was to meet a guest arriving by boat. A yacht was already in the blue bay, and he could see a boat pulling toward the little paved pier.

And yet in that short walk between the green turf and the yellow sands he was destined to find. his hard-headedness provoked into a not unfamiliar phase which the world was inclined to call hot-headedness. The fact was that the Cornish peasantry, who composed his tenantry and domestic establishment, were far from being people with no nonsense about them. There was, alas! a great deal of nonsense about them; with ghosts, witches, and traditions as old as Merlin, they seemed to surround him with a fairy ring of nonsense. But the magic circle had one center: there was one point in which the curving conversation of the rustics always returned. It was a point that always pricked the Squire to exasperation, and even in this short walk he seemed to strike it everywhere. He paused before descending the steps from the lawn to speak to the gardener about potting some foreign shrubs, and the gardener seemed to be gloomily gratified, in every line of his leathery brown visage, at the chance of indicating that he had formed a low opinion of foreign shrubs.

"We wish you'd get rid of what you've got here, sir," he observed, digging doggedly. "Nothing'll grow right with them here."

"Shrubs!" said the Squire, laughing. "You don't call the peacock trees shrubs, do you? Fine tall trees — you ought to be proud of them."

"Ill weeds grow apace," observed the gardener. "Weeds can grow as houses when somebody plants them." Then he added: "Him that sowed tares in the Bible, Squire."

"Oh, blast your—" began the Squire, and then replaced the more apt and alliterative word "Bible" by the general word "superstition." He was himself a robust rationalist, but he went to church to set his tenants an example. Of what, it would have puzzled him to say.

A little way along the lower path by the trees he encountered a woodcutter, one Martin, who was more explicit, having more of a grievance. His daughter was at that time seriously ill with a fever recently common on that coast, and the Squire, who was a kind-hearted gentleman, would normally have made allowances for low spirits and loss of temper. But he came near to losing his own again when the peasant persisted in connecting his tragedy with the traditional monomania about the foreign trees.

“If she were well enough I’d move her,” said the woodcutter, “as we can’t move them, I suppose. I’d just like to get my chopper into them and feel ’em come crashing down.”

“One would think they were dragons,” said Vane.

“And that’s about what they look like,” replied Martin. “Look at ‘em!”

The woodman was naturally a rougher and even wilder figure than the gardener. His face also was brown, and looked like an antique parchment, and it was framed in an outlandish arrangement of raven beard and whiskers, which was really a fashion fifty years ago, but might have been five thousand years old or older. Phoenicians, one felt, trading on those strange shores in the morning of the world, might have combed or curled or braided their blue-black hair into some such quaint patterns. For this patch of population was as much a corner of Cornwall as Cornwall is a corner of England; a tragic and unique race, small and interrelated like a Celtic clan. The clan was older than the Vane family, though that was old as county families go. For in many such parts of England it is the aristocrats who are the latest arrivals. It was the sort of racial type that is supposed to be passing, and perhaps has already passed.

The obnoxious objects stood some hundred yards away from the speaker, who waved toward them with his ax; and there was something suggestive in the comparison. That coast, to begin with, stretching toward the sunset, was itself almost as fantastic as a sunset cloud. It was cut out against the emerald or indigo of the sea in graven horns and crescents that might be the cast or mold of some such crested serpents; and, beneath, was pierced and fretted by caves and crevices, as if by the boring of some such titanic worms. Over and above this draconian architecture of the earth a veil of gray woods hung thinner like a vapor; woods which the witchcraft of the sea had, as usual, both blighted and blown out of shape. To the right the trees trailed along the sea front in a single line, each drawn out in thin wild lines like a caricature. At the other end of their extent they multiplied into a huddle of hunchbacked trees, a wood spreading toward a projecting part of the high coast. It was here that the sight appeared to which so many eyes and minds seemed to be almost automatically turning.

Out of the middle of this low, and more or less level wood, rose three separate stems that shot up and soared into the sky like a lighthouse out of the waves or a church spire out of the village roofs. They formed a clump of three columns close together, which might well be the mere bifurcation, or rather trifurcation, of one tree, the lower part being lost or sunken in the thick wood around. Everything about them suggested something stranger and more southern than anything even in that last peninsula of Britain which pushes out farthest toward Spain and Africa and the southern stars. Their leathery leafage had sprouted in advance of the faint mist of yellow-green around them, and it was of another and less natural green, tinged with blue, like the colors of a kingfisher. But one might fancy it the scales of some three-headed dragon towering over a herd of huddled and fleeing cattle.

"I am exceedingly sorry your girl is so unwell," said Vane shortly. "But really—" and he strode down the steep road with plunging strides.

The boat was already secured to the little stone jetty, and the boatman, a younger shadow of the woodcutter — and, indeed, a nephew of that useful malcontent — saluted his territorial lord with the sullen formality of the family. The Squire acknowledged it casually and had soon forgotten all such things in shaking hands with the visitor who had just come ashore. The visitor was a long, loose man, very lean to be so young, whose long, fine features seemed wholly fitted together of bone and nerve, and seemed somehow to contrast with his hair, that showed in vivid yellow patches upon his hollow temples under the brim of his white holiday hat. He was carefully dressed in exquisite taste, though he had come straight from a considerable sea voyage; and he carried something in his hand which in his long European travels, and even longer European visits, he had almost forgotten to call a gripsack.

Mr. Cyprian Paynter was an American who lived in Italy. There was a good deal more to be said about him, for he was a very acute and cultivated gentleman; but those two facts would, perhaps, cover most of the others. Storing his mind like a museum with the wonder of the Old World, but all lit up as by a window with the wonder of the New, he had fallen heir to some thing of the unique critical position of Ruskin or Pater, and was further famous as a discoverer of minor poets. He was a judicious discoverer, and he did not turn all his minor poets into major prophets. If his geese were swans, they were not all Swans of Avon. He had even incurred the deadly suspicion of classicism by differing from his young friends, the Punctuist Poets, when they produced versification consisting exclusively of commas and colons. He had a more humane sympathy with the modern flame kindled from the embers of Celtic mythology, and it was in reality the recent appearance of a Cornish poet, a sort of parallel to the new Irish poets, which had brought him on this occasion to Cornwall. He was, indeed, far too well-mannered to allow a host to guess that any pleasure was being sought outside his own hospitality. He had a long standing invitation from Vane, whom he had met in Cyprus in the latter's days of undiplomatic diplomacy; and Vane was not aware that relations had only been thus renewed after the critic had read Merlin and Other Verses, by a new writer named John Treherne. Nor did the Squire even begin to realize the much more diplomatic diplomacy by which he had been induced to invite the local bard to lunch on the very day of the American critic's arrival.

Mr. Paynter was still standing with his gripsack, gazing in a trance of true admiration at the hollowed crags, topped by the gray, grotesque wood, and crested finally by the three fantastic trees.

"It is like being shipwrecked on the coast of fairyland," he said,

"I hope you haven't been shipwrecked much," replied his host, smiling. "I fancy Jake here can look after you very well."

Mr. Paynter looked across at the boatman and smiled also. "I am afraid," he said, "our friend is not quite so enthusiastic for this landscape as I am."

"Oh, the trees, I suppose!" said the Squire wearily.

The boatman was by normal trade a fisherman; but as his house, built of black tarred timber, stood right on the foreshore a few yards from the pier, he was employed in such cases as a sort of ferryman. He was a big, black-browed youth generally silent, but something seemed now to sting him into speech.

"Well, sir," he said, "everybody knows it's not natural. Everybody knows the sea blights trees and beats them under, when they're only just trees. These things thrive like some unholy great seaweed that don't belong to the land at all. It's like the — the blessed sea serpent got on shore, Squire, and eating everything up."

"There is some stupid legend," said Squire Vane gruffly. "But come up into the garden; I want to introduce you to my daughter."

When, however, they reached the little table under the tree, the apparently immovable young lady had moved away after all, and it was some time before they came upon the track of her. She had risen, though languidly, and wandered slowly along the upper path of the terraced garden looking down on the lower path where it ran closer to the main bulk of the little wood by the sea.

Her languor was not a feebleness but rather a fullness of life, like that of a child half awake; she seemed to stretch herself and enjoy everything without noticing anything. She passed the wood, into the gray huddle of which a single white path vanished through a black hole. Along this part of the terrace ran something like a low rampart or balustrade, embowered with flowers at intervals; and she leaned over it, looking down at another glimpse of the glowing sea behind the clump of trees, and on another irregular path tumbling down to the pier and the boatman's cottage on the beach.

As she gazed, sleepily enough, she saw that a strange figure was very actively climbing the path, apparently coming from the fisherman's cottage; so actively that a moment afterwards it came out between the trees and stood upon the path just below her. It was not only a figure strange to her, but one somewhat strange in itself. It was that of a man still young, and seeming somehow younger than his own clothes, which were not only shabby but antiquated; clothes common enough in texture, yet carried in an uncommon fashion. He wore what was presumably a light waterproof, perhaps through having come off the sea; but it was held at the throat by one button, and hung, sleeves and all, more like a cloak than a coat. He rested one bony hand on a black stick; under the shadow of his broad hat his black hair hung down in a tuft or two. His face, which was swarthy, but rather handsome in itself, wore something that may have been a slightly embarrassed smile, but had too much the appearance of a sneer.

Whether this apparition was a tramp or a trespasser, or a friend of some of the fishers or woodcutters, Barbara Vane was quite unable to guess. He removed his hat, still with his unaltered and rather sinister smile, and said civilly: "Excuse me. The Squire asked me to call." Here he caught sight of Martin, the woodman, who was shifting along the path, thinning the thin trees; and the stranger made a familiar salute with one finger.

The girl did not know what to say. "Have you — have you come about cutting the wood?" she asked at last.

"I would I were so honest a man," replied the stranger. "Martin is, I fancy, a distant cousin of mine; we Cornish folk just round here are nearly all related, you know; but I do not cut wood. I do not cut anything, except, perhaps, capers. I am, so to speak, a jongleur."

“A what?” asked Barbara.

“A minstrel, shall we say?” answered the newcomer, and looked up at her more steadily. During a rather odd silence their eyes rested on each other. What she saw has been already noted, though by her, at any rate, not in the least understood. What he saw was a decidedly beautiful woman with a statuesque face and hair that shone in the sun like a helmet of copper.

“Do you know,” he went on, “that in this old place, hundreds of years ago, a jongleur may really have stood where I stand, and a lady may really have looked over that wall and thrown him money?”

“Do you want money?” she asked, all at sea.

“Well,” drawled the stranger, “in the sense of lacking it, perhaps, but I fear there is no place now for a minstrel, except nigger minstrel. I must apologize for not blacking my face.”

She laughed a little in her bewilderment, and said: “Well, I hardly think you need do that.”

“You think the natives here are dark enough already, perhaps,” he observed calmly. “After all, we are aborigines, and are treated as such.”

She threw out some desperate remark about the weather or the scenery, and wondered what would happen next.

“The prospect is certainly beautiful,” he assented, in the same enigmatic manner. “There is only one thing in it I am doubtful about.”

While she stood in silence he slowly lifted his black stick like a long black finger and pointed it at the peacock trees above the wood. And a queer feeling of disquiet fell on the girl, as if he were, by that mere gesture, doing a destructive act and could send a blight upon the garden.

The strained and almost painful silence was broken by the voice of Squire Vane, loud even while it was still distant.

“We couldn’t make out where you’d got to, Barbara,” he said. “This is my friend, Mr. Cyprian Paynter.” The next moment he saw the stranger and stopped, a little puzzled. It was only Mr. Cyprian Paynter himself who was equal to the situation. He had seen months ago a portrait of the new Cornish poet in some American literary magazine, and he found himself, to his surprise, the introducer instead of the introduced.

“Why, Squire,” he said in considerable astonishment, “don’t you know Mr. Treherne? I supposed, of course, he was a neighbor.”

“Delighted to see you, Mr. Treherne,” said the Squire, recovering his manners with a certain genial confusion. “So pleased you were able to come. This is Mr. Paynter — -my daughter," and, turning with a certain boisterous embarrassment, he led the way to the table under the tree.

Cyprian Paynter followed, inwardly revolving a puzzle which had taken even his experience by surprise. The American, if intellectually an aristocrat, was still socially and subconsciously a democrat. It had never crossed his mind that the poet should be counted lucky to know the squire and not the squire to know the poet. The honest patronage in Vane's hospitality was something which made Paynter feel he was, after all, an exile in England.

The Squire, anticipating the trial of luncheon with a strange literary man, had dealt with the case tactfully from his own standpoint. County society might have made the guest feel like a fish out of water; and, except for the American critic and the local lawyer and doctor, worthy middle-class people who fitted into the picture, he had kept it as a family party. He was a widower, and when the meal had been laid out on the garden table, it was Barbara who presided as hostess. She had the new poet on her right hand and it made her very uncomfortable. She had practically offered that fallacious jongleur money, and it did not make it easier to offer him lunch.

"The whole countryside's gone mad," announced the Squire, by way of the latest local news. "It's about this infernal legend of ours."

"I collect legends," said Paynter, smiling.

"You must remember I haven't yet had a chance to collect yours. And this," he added, looking round at the romantic coast, "is a fine theater for anything dramatic."

"Oh, it's dramatic in its way," admitted Vane, not without a faint satisfaction. "It's all about those things over there we call the peacock trees — I suppose, because of the queer color of the leaf, you know, though I have heard they make a shrill noise in a high wind that's supposed to be like the shriek of a peacock; something like a bamboo in the botanical structure, perhaps. Well, those trees are supposed to have been brought over from Barbary by my ancestor Sir Walter Vane, one of the Elizabethan patriots or pirates, or whatever you call them. They say that at the end of his last voyage the villagers gathered on the beach down there and saw the boat standing in from the sea, and the new trees stood up in the boat like a mast, all gay with leaves out of season, like green bunting. And as they watched they thought at first that the boat was steering oddly, and then that it wasn't steering at all; and when it drifted to the shore at last every man in that boat was dead, and Sir Walter Vane, with his sword drawn, was leaning up against the tree trunk, as stiff as the tree."

"Now this is rather curious," remarked Paynter thoughtfully. "I told you I collected legends, and I fancy I can tell you the beginning of the story of which that is the end, though it comes hundreds of miles across the sea."

He tapped meditatively on the table with his thin, taper fingers, like a man trying to recall a tune. He had, indeed, made a hobby of such fables, and he was not without vanity about his artistic touch in telling them.

"Oh, do tell us your part of it?" cried Barbara Vane, whose air of sunny sleepiness seemed in some vague degree to have fallen from her.

The American bowed across the table with a serious politeness, and then began playing idly with a quaint ring on his long finger as he talked.

"If you go down to the Barbary Coast, where the last wedge of the forest narrows down between the desert and the great tideless sea, you will find the natives still telling a strange story about a saint of the Dark Ages. There, on the twilight border of the Dark Continent, you feel the Dark Ages. I have only visited the place once, though it lies, so to speak, opposite to the Italian city where I lived for years, and yet you would hardly believe how the topsy-turvydom and transmigration of this myth somehow seemed less mad than they really are, with the wood loud with lions at night and that dark red solitude beyond. They say that the hermit St. Securis, living there among trees, grew to love them like companions; since, though great giants with many arms like Briareus, they were the mildest and most blameless of the creatures; they did not devour like the lions, but rather opened their arms to all the little birds. And he prayed that they might be loosened from time to time to walk like other things. And the trees were moved upon the prayers of Securis, as they were at the songs of Orpheus. The men of the desert were stricken from afar with fear, seeing the saint walking with a walking grove, like a schoolmaster with his boys. For the trees were thus freed under strict conditions of discipline. They were to return at the sound of the hermit's bell, and, above all, to copy the wild beasts in walking only to destroy and devour nothing. Well, it is said that one of the trees heard a voice that was not the saint's; that in the warm green twilight of one summer evening it became conscious of some thing sitting and speaking in its branches in the guise of a great bird, and it was that which once spoke from a tree in the guise of a great serpent. As the voice grew louder among its murmuring leaves the tree was torn with a great desire to stretch out and snatch at the birds that flew harmlessly about their nests, and pluck them to pieces. Finally, the tempter filled the tree-top with his own birds of pride, the starry pageant of the peacocks. And the spirit of the brute overcame the spirit of the tree, and it rent and consumed the blue-green birds till not a plume was left, and returned to the quiet tribe of trees. But they say that when spring came all the other trees put forth leaves, but this put forth feathers of a strange hue and pattern. And by that monstrous assimilation the saint knew of the sin, and he rooted that one tree to the earth with a judgment, so that evil should fall on any who removed it again. That, Squire, is the beginning in the deserts of the tale that ended here, almost in this garden."

"And the end is about as reliable as the beginning, I should say," said Vane. "Yours is a nice plain tale for a small tea-party; a quiet little bit of still-life, that is."

"What a queer, horrible story," exclaimed Barbara. "It makes one feel like a cannibal."

"Ex Africa," said the lawyer, smiling. "it comes from a cannibal country. I think it's the touch of the tar-brush, that nightmare feeling that you don't know whether the hero is a plant or a man or a devil. Don't you feel it sometimes in 'Uncle Remus'?"

"True," said Paynter. "Perfectly true." And he looked at the lawyer with a new interest. The lawyer, who had been introduced as Mr. Ashe, was one of those people who are more worth looking at than most people realize when they look. If Napoleon had been red-haired, and had bent all his powers with a curious contentment upon the petty lawsuits of a province, he might have looked much the same; the head with the red hair was heavy and powerful; the figure in its dark, quiet clothes was comparatively insignificant, as was Napoleon's. He seemed more at ease in the Squire's society than the doctor, who, though a gentleman, was a shy one, and a mere shadow of his professional brother.

"As you truly say," remarked Paynter, "the story seems touched with quite barbarous elements, probably Negro. Originally, though, I think there was really a hagiological story about some hermit, though some of the higher critics say St. Securis never existed, but was only an allegory of arboriculture, since his name is the Latin for an ax."

"Oh, if you come to that," remarked the poet Treherne, "you might as well say Squire Vane doesn't exist, and that he's only an allegory for a weathercock." Something a shade too cool about this sally drew the lawyer's red brows together. He looked across the table and met the poet's somewhat equivocal smile.

"Do I understand, Mr. Treherne," asked Ashe, "that you support the miraculous claims of St. Securis in this case. Do you, by any chance, believe in the walking trees?"

"I see men as trees walking," answered the poet, "like the man cured of blindness in the Gospel. By the way, do I understand that you support the miraculous claims of that — thaumaturgist?"

Paynter intervened swiftly and suavely. "Now that sounds a fascinating piece of psychology. You see men as trees?"

"As I can't imagine why men should walk, I can't imagine why trees shouldn't," answered Treherne.

"Obviously, it is the nature of the organism", interposed the medical guest, Dr. Burton Brown; "it is necessary in the very type of vegetable structure."

"In other words, a tree sticks in the mud from year's end to year's end," answered Treherne. "So do you stop in your consulting room from ten to eleven every day. And don't you fancy a fairy, looking in at your window for a flash after having just jumped over the moon and played mulberry bush with the Pleiades, would think you were a vegetable structure, and that sitting still was the nature of the organism?"

"I don't happen to believe in fairies," said the doctor rather stiffly, for the argumentum ad hominem was becoming too common. A sulphurous subconscious anger seemed to radiate from the dark poet.

"Well, I should hope not, Doctor," began the Squire, in his loud and friendly style, and then stopped, seeing the other's attention arrested. The silent butler waiting on the guests had appeared behind the doctor's chair, and was saying something in the low, level tones of the welltrained servant. He was so smooth a specimen of the type that others never noticed, at first, that he also repeated the dark portrait, however varnished, so common in this particular family of Cornish Celts. His face was sallow and even yellow, and his hair indigo black. He went by the name of Miles. Some felt oppressed by the tribal type in this tiny corner of England. They felt somehow as if all these dark faces were the masks of a secret society.

The doctor rose with a half apology. "I must ask pardon for disturbing this pleasant party; I am called away on duty. Please don't let anybody move. We have to be ready for these things, you know. Perhaps Mr. Treherne will admit that my habits are not so very vegetable, after all.” With this Parthian shaft, at which there was some laughter, he strode away very rapidly across the sunny lawn to where the road dipped down toward the village.

“He is very good among the poor,” said the girl with an honorable seriousness.

“A capital fellow,” agreed the Squire. “Where is Miles? You will have a cigar, Mr. Treherne?” And he got up from the table; the rest followed, and the group broke up on the lawn.

“Remarkable man, Treherne,” said the American to the lawyer conversationally.

“Remarkable is the word,” assented Ashe rather grimly. “But I don’t think I’ll make any remark about him.”

The Squire, too impatient to wait for the yellow-faced Miles, had betaken himself indoors for the cigars, and Barbara found herself once more paired off with the poet, as she floated along the terrace garden; but this time, symbolically enough, upon the same level of lawn. Mr. Treherne looked less eccentric after having shed his curious cloak, and seemed a quieter and more casual figure.

“I didn’t mean to be rude to you just now,” she said abruptly.

“And that’s the worst of it,” replied the man of letters, “for I’m horribly afraid I did mean to be rude to you. When I looked up and saw you up there something surged up in me that was in all the revolutions of history. Oh, there was admiration in it too! Perhaps there was idolatry in all the iconoclasts.”

He seemed to have a power of reaching rather intimate conversation in one silent and cat-like bound, as he had scaled the steep road, and it made her feel him to be dangerous, and perhaps unscrupulous. She changed the subject sharply, not without it movement toward gratifying her own curiosity.

“What DID you mean by all that about walking trees?” she asked. “Don’t tell me you really believe in a magic tree that eats birds!”

“I should probably surprise you,” said Treherne gravely, “more by what I don’t believe than by what I do.”

Then, after a pause, he made a general gesture toward the house and garden. “I’m afraid I don’t believe in all this; for instance, in Elizabethan houses and Elizabethan families and the way estates have been improved, and the rest of it. Look at our friend the woodcutter now.” And he pointed to the man with the quaint black beard, who was still plying his ax upon the timber below.

“That man’s family goes back for ages, and it was far richer and freer in what you call the Dark Ages than it is now. Wait till the Cornish peasant writes a history of Cornwall.”

“But what in the world,” she demanded, “has this to do with whether you believe in a tree eating birds?”

“Why should I confess what I believe in?” he said, a muffled drum of mutiny in his voice. “The gentry came here and took our land and took our labor and took our customs. And now, after exploitation, a viler thing, education! They must take our dreams!”

“Well, this dream was rather a nightmare, wasn’t it?” asked Barbara, smiling; and the next moment grew quite grave, saying almost anxiously: “But here’s Doctor Brown back again. Why, he looks quite upset.”

The doctor, a black figure on the green lawn, was, indeed, coming toward them at a very vigorous walk. His body and gait very much younger than his face, which seemed prematurely lined as with worry; his brow was bald, and projected from the straight, dark hair behind it. He was visibly paler than when he left the lunch table.

“I am sorry to say, Miss Vane,” he said, “that I am the bearer of bad news to poor Martin, the woodman here. His daughter died half an hour ago.”

“Oh,” cried Barbara warmly, “I am SO sorry!”

“So am I,” said the doctor, and passed on rather abruptly; he ran down the stone steps between the stone urns; and they saw him in talk with the woodcutter. They could not see the woodcutter’s face. He stood with his back to them, but they saw something that seemed more moving than any change of countenance. The man’s hand holding the ax rose high above his head, and for a flash it seemed as if he would have cut down the doctor. But in fact he was not looking at the doctor. His face was set toward the cliff, where, sheer out of the dwarf forest, rose, gigantic and gilded by the sun, the trees of pride.

The strong brown hand made a movement and was empty. The ax went circling swiftly through the air, its head showing like a silver crescent against the gray twilight of the trees. It did not reach its tall objective, but fell among the undergrowth, shaking up a flying litter of birds. But in the poet’s memory, full of primal things, something seemed to say that he had seen the birds of some pagan augury, the ax of some pagan sacrifice.

A moment after the man made a heavy movement forward, as if to recover his tool; but the doctor put a hand on his arm.

“Never mind that now,” they heard him say sadly and kindly. “The Squire will excuse you any more work, I know.”

Something made the girl look at Treherne. He stood gazing, his head a little bent, and one of his black elf-locks had fallen forward over his forehead. And again she had the sense of a shadow over the grass; she almost felt as if the grass were a host of fairies, and that the fairies were not her friends.

II. The Wager of Squire Vane

It was more than a month before the legend of the peacock trees was again discussed in the Squire’s circle. It fell out one evening, when his eccentric taste for meals in the garden that gathered the company round the same table, now lit with a lamp and laid out for dinner in a glowing spring twilight. It was even the same company, for in the few weeks intervening they had insensibly grown more and more into each other’s lives, forming a little group like a club. The American aesthete was of course the most active agent, his resolution to pluck out the heart of the Cornish poet’s mystery leading him again and again to influence his flighty host for such reunions. Even Mr. Ashe, the lawyer, seemed to have swallowed his half-humorous prejudices; and the doctor, though a rather sad and silent, was a companionable and considerate man. Paynter had even read Treherne’s poetry aloud, and he read admirably; he had also read other things, not aloud, grubbing up everything in the neighborhood, from guidebooks to epitaphs, that could throw a light on local antiquities. And it was that evening when the lamplight and the last daylight had kindled the colors of the wine and silver on the table under the tree, that he announced a new discovery.

“Say, Squire,” he remarked, with one of his rare Americanisms, “about those bogey trees of yours; I don’t believe you know half the tales told round here about them. It seems they have a way of eating things. Not that I have any ethical objection to eating things,” he continued, helping himself elegantly to green cheese. “But I have more or less, broadly speaking, an objection to eating people.”

“Eating people!” repeated Barbara Vane.

“I know a globe-trotter mustn’t be fastidious,” replied Mr. Paynter. “But I repeat firmly, an objection to eating people. The peacock trees seem to have progressed since the happy days of innocence when they only ate peacocks. If you ask the people here — the fisherman who lives on that beach, or the man that mows this very lawn in front of us — they’ll tell you tales taller than any tropical one I brought you from the Barbary Coast. If you ask them what happened to the fisherman Peters, who got drunk on All Hallows Eve, they’ll tell you he lost his way in that little wood, tumbled down asleep under the wicked trees, and then — evaporated, vanished, was licked up like dew by the sun. If you ask them where Harry Hawke is, the widow’s little son, they’ll just tell you he’s swallowed; that he was dared to climb the trees and sit there all night, and did it. What the trees did God knows; the habits of a vegetable ogre leave one a little vague. But they even add the agreeable detail that a new branch appears on the tree when somebody has petered out in this style.”

“What new nonsense is this?” cried Vane. “I know there’s some crazy yarn about the trees spreading fever, though every educated man knows why these epidemics return occasionally. And I know they say you can tell the noise of them among other trees in a gale, and I dare say you can. But even Cornwall isn’t a lunatic asylum, and a tree that dines on a passing tourist—”

“Well, the two tales are reconcilable enough,” put in the poet quietly. “If there were a magic that killed men when they came close, it’s likely to strike them with sickness when they stand far off. In the old romance the dragon, that devours people, often blasts others with a sort of poisonous breath.”

Ashe looked across at the speaker steadily, not to say stonily.

“Do I understand,” he inquired, “that you swallow the swallowing trees too?”

Treherne’s dark smile was still on the defensive; his fencing always annoyed the other, and he seemed not without malice in the matter.

“Swallowing is a metaphor,” he said, “about me, if not about the trees. And metaphors take us at once into dreamland — no bad place, either. This garden, I think, gets more and more like a dream at this corner of the day and night, that might lead us anywhere.”

The yellow horn of the moon had appeared silently and as if suddenly over the black horns of the seaweed, seeming to announce as night something which till then had been evening. A night breeze came in between the trees and raced stealthily across the turf, and as they ceased speaking they heard, not only the seething grass, but the sea itself move and sound in all the cracks and caves round them and below them and on every side. They all felt the note that had been struck — the American as an art critic and the poet as a poet; and the Squire, who believed himself boiling with an impatience purely rational, did not really understand his own impatience. In him, more perhaps than the others — more certainly than he knew himself — the sea wind went to the head like wine.

“Credulity is a curious thing,” went on Treherne in a low voice. “It is more negative than positive, and yet it is infinite. Hundreds of men will avoid walking under a ladder; they don’t know where the door of the ladder will lead. They don’t really think God would throw a thunderbolt at them for such a thing. They don’t know what would happen, that is just the point; but yet they step aside as from a precipice. So the poor people here may or may not believe anything; they don’t go into those trees at night.”

“I walk under a ladder whenever I can,” cried Vane, in quite unnecessary excitement.

“You belong to a Thirteen Club,” said the poet. “You walk under a ladder on Friday to dine thirteen at a table, everybody spilling the salt. But even you don’t go into those trees at night.”

Squire Vane stood up, his silver hair flaming in the wind.

“I’ll stop all night in your tomfool wood and up your tomfool trees,” he said. “I’ll do it for twopence or two thousand pounds, if anyone will take the bet.”

Without waiting for reply, he snatched up his wide white hat and settled it on with a fierce gesture, and had gone off in great leonine strides across the lawn before anyone at the table could move.

The stillness was broken by Miles, the butler, who dropped and broke one of the plates he carried. He stood looking after his master with his long, angular chin thrust out, looking yellower where it caught the yellow light of the lamp below. His face was thus sharply in shadow, but Paynter fancied for a moment it was convulsed by some passion passing surprise. But the face was quite as usual when it turned, and Paynter realized that a night of fancies had begun, like the cross purposes of the “Midsummer Night’s Dream.”

The wood of the strange trees, toward which the Squire was walking, lay so far forward on the headland, which ultimately almost overhung the sea, that it could be approached by only one path, which shone clearly like a silver ribbon in the twilight. The ribbon ran along the edge of the cliff, where the single row of deformed trees ran beside it all the way, and eventually plunged into the closer mass of trees by one natural gateway, a mere gap in the wood, looking dark, like a lion’s mouth. What became of the path inside could not be seen, but it doubtless led round the hidden roots of the great central trees. The Squire was already within a yard or two of this dark entry when his daughter rose from the table and took a step or two after him as if to call him back.

Treherne had also risen, and stood as if dazed at the effect of his idle defiance. When Barbara moved he seemed to recover himself, and stepping after her, said something which Paynter did not hear. He said it casually and even distantly enough, but it clearly suggested something to her mind; for, after a moment’s thought, she nodded and walked back, not toward the table, but apparently toward the house. Paynter looked after her with a momentary curiosity, and when he turned again the Squire had vanished into the hole in the wood.

“He’s gone,” said Treherne, with a clang of finality in his tones, like the slamming of a door.

“Well, suppose he has?” cried the lawyer, roused at the voice. “The Squire can go into his own wood, I suppose! What the devil’s all the fuss about, Mr. Paynter? Don’t tell me you think there’s any harm in that plantation of sticks.”

“No, I don’t,” said Paynter, throwing one leg over another and lighting a cigar. “But I shall stop here till he comes out.”

“Very well,” said Ashe shortly, “I’ll stop with you, if only to see the end of this farce.”

The doctor said nothing, but he also kept his seat and accepted one of the American’s cigars. If Treherne had been attending to the matter he might have noted, with his sardonic superstition, a curious fact — that, while all three men were tacitly condemning themselves to stay out all night if necessary, all, by one blank omission or oblivion, assumed that it was impossible to follow their host into the wood just in front of them. But Treherne, though still in the garden, had wandered away from the garden table, and was pacing along the single line of trees against the dark sea. They had in their regular interstices, showing the sea as through a series of windows, something of the look of the ghost or skeleton of a cloister, and he, having thrown his coat once more over his neck, like a cape, passed to and fro like the ghost of some not very sane monk.

All these men, whether skeptics or mystics, looked back for the rest of their lives on that night as on something unnatural. They sat still or started up abruptly, and paced the great garden in long detours, so that it seemed that no three of them were together at a time, and none knew who would be his companion; yet their rambling remained within the same dim and mazy space. They fell into snatches of uneasy slumber; these were very brief, and yet they felt as if the whole sitting, strolling, or occasional speaking had been parts of a single dream.

Paynter woke once, and found Ashe sitting opposite him at a table otherwise empty; his face dark in shadow and his cigar-end like the red eye of a Cyclops. Until the lawyer spoke, in his steady voice, Paynter was positively afraid of him. He answered at random and nodded again; when he again woke the lawyer was gone, and what was opposite him was the bald, pale brow of the doctor; there seemed suddenly something ominous in the familiar fact that he wore spectacles. And yet the vanishing Ashe had only vanished a few yards away, for he turned at that instant and strolled back to the table. With a jerk Paynter realized that his nightmare was but a trick of sleep or sleeplessness, and spoke in his natural voice, but rather loud.

“So you’ve joined us again; where’s Treherne?”

“Oh, still revolving, I suppose, like a polar bear under those trees on the cliff,” replied Ashe, motioning with his cigar, “looking at what an older (and you will forgive me for thinking a somewhat better) poet called the wine-dark sea. It really has a sort of purple shade; look at it.”

Paynter looked; he saw the wine-dark sea and the fantastic trees that fringed it, but he did not see the poet; the cloister was already empty of its restless monk.

“Gone somewhere else,” he said, with futility far from characteristic. “He’ll be back here presently. This is an interesting vigil, but a vigil loses some of its intensity when you can’t keep awake. Ah! Here’s Treherne; so we’re all mustered, as the politician said when Mr. Colman came late for dinner. No, the doctor’s off again. how restless we all are!” The poet had drawn near, his feet were falling soft on the grass, and was gazing at them with a singular attentiveness.

“It will soon be over,” he said.

“What?” snapped Ashe very abruptly.

“The night, of course,” replied Treherne in a motionless manner. “The darkest hour has passed.”

“Didn’t some other minor poet remark,” inquired Paynter flippantly, “that the darkest hour before the dawn — ? My God, what was that? It was like a scream.”

“It was a scream,” replied the poet. “The scream of a peacock.”

Ashe stood up, his strong pale face against his red hair, and said furiously: “What the devil do you mean?”

“Oh, perfectly natural causes, as Dr. Brown would say,” replied Treherne. “Didn’t the Squire tell us the trees had a shrill note of their own when the wind blew? The wind’s beating up again from the sea; I shouldn’t wonder if there was a storm before dawn.”

Dawn indeed came gradually with a growing noise of wind, and the purple sea began to boil about the dark volcanic cliffs. The first change in the sky showed itself only in the shapes of the wood and the single stems growing darker but clearer; and above the gray clump, against a glimpse of growing light, they saw aloft the evil trinity of the trees. In their long lines there seemed to Paynter something faintly serpentine and even spiral. He could almost fancy he saw them slowly revolving as in some cyclic dance, but this, again, was but a last delusion of dreamland, for a few seconds later he was again asleep. In dreams he toiled through a tangle of inconclusive tales, each filled with the same stress and noise of sea and sea wind; and above and outside all other voices the wailing of the Trees of Pride.

When he woke it was broad day, and a bloom of early light lay on wood and garden and on fields and farms for miles away. The comparative common sense that daylight brings even to the sleepless drew him alertly to his feet, and showed him all his companions standing about the lawn in similar attitudes of expectancy. There was no need to ask what they were expecting. They were waiting to hear the nocturnal experiences, comic or commonplace or whatever they might prove to be, of that eccentric friend, whose experiment (whether from some subconscious fear or some fancy of honor) they had not ventured to interrupt. Hour followed hour, and still nothing stirred in the wood save an occasional bird. The Squire, like most men of his type, was an early riser, and it was not likely that he would in this case sleep late; it was much more likely, in the excitement in which he had left them, that he would not sleep at all. Yet it was clear that he must be sleeping, perhaps by some reaction from a strain. By the time the sun was high in heaven Ashe the lawyer, turning to the others, spoke abruptly and to the point.

"Shall we go into the wood now?" asked Paynter, and almost seemed to hesitate.

"I will go in," said Treherne simply. Then, drawing up his dark head in answer to their glances, he added:

"No, do not trouble yourselves. It is never the believer who is afraid."

For the second time they saw a man mount the white curling path and disappear into the gray tangled wood, but this time they did not have to wait long to see him again.

A few minutes later he reappeared in the woodland gateway, and came slowly toward them across the grass. He stopped before the doctor, who stood nearest, and said something. It was repeated to the others, and went round the ring with low cries of incredulity. The others plunged into the wood and returned wildly, and were seen speaking to others again who gathered from the house; the wild wireless telegraphy which is the education of countryside communities spread it farther and farther before the fact itself was fully realized; and before nightfall a quarter of the county knew that Squire Vane had vanished like a burst bubble.

Widely as the wild story was repeated, and patiently as it was pondered, it was long before there was even the beginning of a sequel to it. In the interval Paynter had politely removed himself from the house of mourning, or rather of questioning, but only so far as the village inn; for Barbara Vane was glad of the traveler's experience and sympathy, in addition to that afforded her by the lawyer and doctor as old friends of the family. Even Treherne was not discouraged from his occasional visits with a view to helping the hunt for the lost man. The five held many counsels round the old garden table, at which the unhappy master of the house had dined for the last time; and Barbara wore her old mask of stone, if it was now a more tragic mask. She had shown no passion after the first morning of discovery, when she had broken forth once, speaking strangely enough in the view of some of her hearers.

She had come slowly out of the house, to which her own or some one else's wisdom had relegated her during the night of the wager; and it was clear from her face that somebody had told her the truth; Miles, the butler, stood on the steps behind her; and it was probably he.

"Do not be much distressed, Miss Vane," said Doctor Brown, in a low and rather uncertain voice. "The search in the wood has hardly begun. I am convinced we shall find — something quite simple."

"The doctor is right," said Ashe, in his firm tones; "I myself—"

"The doctor is not right," said the girl, turning a white face on the speaker, "I know better. The poet is right. The poet is always right. Oh, he has been here from the beginning of the world, and seen wonders and terrors that are all round our path, and only hiding behind a bush or a stone. You and your doctoring and your science — why, you have only been here for a few fumbling generations; and you can't conquer even your own enemies of the flesh. Oh, forgive me, Doctor, I know you do splendidly; but the fever comes in the village, and the people die and die for all that. And now it's my poor father. God help us all! The only thing left is to believe in God; for we can't help believing in devils." And she left them, still walking quite slowly, but in such a fashion that no one could go after her.

The spring had already begun to ripen into summer, and spread a green tent from the tree over the garden table, when the American visitor, sitting there with his two professional companions, broke the silence by saying what had long been in his mind.

"Well," he said, "I suppose whatever we may think it wise to say, we have all begun to think of a possible conclusion. It can't be put very delicately anyhow; but, after all, there's a very necessary business side to it. What are we going to do about poor Vane's affairs, apart from himself? I suppose you know," he added, in a low voice to the lawyer, "whether he made a will?"

"He left everything to his daughter unconditionally," replied Ashe. "But nothing can be done with it. There's no proof whatever that he's dead." "No legal proof?" remarked Paynter dryly. A wrinkle of irritation had appeared in the big bald brow of Doctor Brown; and he made an impatient movement.

“Of course he’s dead,” he said. “What’s the sense of all this legal fuss? We were watching this side of the wood, weren’t we? A man couldn’t have flown off those high cliffs over the sea; he could only have fallen off. What else can he be but dead?”

“I speak as a lawyer,” returned Ashe, raising his eyebrows. “We can’t presume his death, or have an inquest or anything till we find the poor fellow’s body, or some remains that may reasonably be presumed to be his body.”

“I see,” observed Paynter quietly. “You speak as a lawyer; but I don’t think it’s very hard to guess what you think as a man.”

“I own I’d rather be a man than a lawyer,” said the doctor, rather roughly. “I’d no notion the law was such an ass. What’s the good of keeping the poor girl out of her property, and the estate all going to pieces? Well, I must be off, or my patients will be going to pieces too.”

And with a curt salutation he pursued his path down to the village.

“That man does his duty, if anybody does,” remarked Paynter. “We must pardon his — shall I say manners or manner?”

“Oh, I bear him no malice,” replied Ashe good-humoredly, “But I’m glad he’s gone, because — well, because I don’t want him to know how jolly right he is.” And he leaned back in his chair and stared up at the roof of green leaves.

“You are sure,” said Paynter, looking at the table, “that Squire Vane is dead?”

“More than that,” said Ashe, still staring at the leaves. “I’m sure of how he died.”

“Ah!” said the American, with an intake of breath, and they remained for a moment, one gazing at the tree and the other at the table.

“Sure is perhaps too strong a word,” continued Ashe. “But my conviction will want some shaking. I don’t envy the counsel for the defense.”

“The counsel for the defense,” repeated Paynter, and looked up quickly at his companion. He was struck again by the man’s Napoleonic chin and jaw, as he had been when they first talked of the legend of St. Securis.

“Then,” he began, “you don’t think the trees—”

“The trees be damned!” snorted the lawyer. “The tree had two legs on that evening. What our friend the poet,” he added, with a sneer, “would call a walking tree. Apropos of our friend the poet, you seemed surprised that night to find he was not walking poetically by the sea all the time, and I fear I affected to share your ignorance. I was not so sure then as I am now."

"Sure of what?" demanded the other.

"To begin with," said Ashe, "I'm sure our friend the poet followed Vane into the wood that night, for I saw him coming out again."

Paynter leaned forward, suddenly pale with excitement, and struck the wooden table so that it rattled.

"Mr. Ashe, you're wrong," he cried. "You're a wonderful man and you're wrong. You've probably got tons of true convincing evidence, and you're wrong. I know this poet; I know him as a poet; and that's just what you don't. I know you think he gave you crooked answers, and seemed to be all smiles and black looks at once; but you don't understand the type. I know now why you don't understand the Irish. Sometimes you think it's soft, and sometimes sly, and sometimes murderous, and sometimes uncivilized; and all the time it's only civilized; quivering with the sensitive irony of understanding all that you don't understand."

"Well," said Ashe shortly, "we'll see who's right."

"We will," cried Cyprian, and rose suddenly from the table. All the drooping of the aesthete had dropped from him; his Yankee accent rose high, like a horn of defiance, and there was nothing about him but the New World.

"I guess I will look into this myself," he said, stretching his long limbs like an athlete. "I search that little wood of yours to-morrow. It's a bit late, or I'd do it now."

"The wood has been searched," said the lawyer, rising also.

"Yes," drawled the American. "It's been searched by servants, policemen, local policeman, and quite a lot of people; and do you know I have a notion that nobody round here is likely to have searched it at all."

"And what are you going to do with it?" asked Ashe.

"What I bet they haven't done," replied Cyprian. "I'm going to climb a tree."

And with a quaint air of renewed cheerfulness he took himself away at a rapid walk to his inn.

He appeared at daybreak next morning outside the Vane Arms with all the air of one setting out on his travels in distant lands. He had a field glass slung over his shoulder, and a very large sheath knife buckled by a belt round his waist, and carried with the cool bravado of the bowie knife of a cowboy. But in spite of this backwoodsman’s simplicity, or perhaps rather because of it, he eyed with rising relish the picturesque plan and sky line of the antiquated village, and especially the wooden square of the old inn sign that hung over his head; a shield, of which the charges seemed to him a mere medley of blue dolphins, gold crosses, and scarlet birds. The colors and cubic corners of that painted board pleased him like a play or a puppet show. He stood staring and straddling for some moments on the cobbles of the little market place; then he gave a short laugh and began to mount the steep streets toward the high park and garden beyond. From the high lawn, above the tree and table, he could see on one side the land stretch away past the house into a great rolling plain, which under the clear edges of the dawn seemed dotted with picturesque details. The woods here and there on the plain looked like green hedgehogs, as grotesque as the incongruous beasts found unaccountably walking in the blank spaces of mediaeval maps. The land, cut up into colored fields, recalled the heraldry of the signboard; this also was at once ancient and gay. On the other side the ground to seaward swept down and then up again to the famous or infamous wood; the square of strange trees lay silently tilted on the slope, also suggesting, if not a map, or least a bird’s-eye view. Only the triple centerpiece of the peacock trees rose clear of the sky line; and these stood up in tranquil sunlight as things almost classical, a triangular temple of the winds. They seemed pagan in a newer and more placid sense; and he felt a newer and more boyish curiosity and courage for the consulting of the oracle. In all his wanderings he had never walked so lightly, for the connoisseur of sensations had found something to do at last; he was fighting for a friend.

He was brought to a standstill once, however, and that at the very gateway of the garden of the trees of knowledge. Just outside the black entry of the wood, now curtained with greener and larger leafage, he came on a solitary figure.

It was Martin, the woodcutter, wading in the bracken and looking about him in rather a lost fashion. The man seemed to be talking to himself.

“I dropped it here,” he was saying. “But I’ll never work with it again I reckon. Doctor wouldn’t let me pick it up, when I wanted to pick it up; and now they’ve got it, like they’ve got the Squire. Wood and iron, wood and iron, but eating it’s nothing to them.”

“Come!” said Paynter kindly, remembering the man’s domestic trouble. “Miss Vane will see you have anything you want, I know. And look here, don't brood on all those stories about the Squire. Is there the slightest trace of the trees having anything to do with it? Is there even this extra branch the idiots talked about?"

There had been growing on Paynter the suspicion that the man before him was not perfectly sane; yet he was much more startled by the sudden and cold sanity that looked for. an instant out of the woodman's eyes, as he answered in his ordinary manner.

"Well, sir, did you count the branches before?"

Then he seemed to relapse; and Paynter left him wandering and wavering in the undergrowth; and entered the wood like one across whose sunny path a shadow has fallen for an instant.

Diving under the wood, he was soon threading a leafy path which, even under that summer sun, shone only with an emerald twilight, as if it were on the floor of the sea. It wound about more shakily than he had supposed, as if resolved to approach the central trees as if they were the heart of the maze at Hampton Court. They were the heart of the maze for him, anyhow; he sought them as straight as a crooked road would carry him; and, turning a final corner, he beheld, for the first time, the foundations of those towers of vegetation he had as yet only seen from above, as they stood waist-high in the woodland. He found the suspicion correct which supposed the tree branched from one great root, like a candelabrum; the fork, though stained and slimy with green fungoids, was quite near the ground, and offered a first foothold. He put his foot in it, and without a flash of hesitation went aloft, like Jack climbing the Bean stalk.

Above him the green roof of leaves and boughs seemed sealed like a firmament of foliage; but, by bending and breaking the branches to right and left he slowly forced a passage upward; and had at last, and suddenly, the sensation coming out on the top of the world. He felt as if he had never been in the open air before. Sea and land lay in a circle below and about him, as he sat astride a branch of the tall tree; he was almost surprised to see the sun still comparatively low in the sky; as if he were looking over a land of eternal sunrise.

"Silent upon a peak in Darien," he remarked, in a needlessly loud and cheerful voice; and though the claim, thus expressed, was illogical, it was not inappropriate. He did feel as if he were a primitive adventurer just come to the New World, instead of a modern traveler just come from it.

"I wonder," he proceeded, "whether I am really the first that ever burst into this silent tree. It looks like it. Those—"

He stopped and sat on his branch quite motionless, but his eyes were turned on a branch a little below it, and they were brilliant with a vigilance, like those of a man watching a snake.

What he was looking at might, at first sight, have been a large white fungus spreading on the smooth and monstrous trunk; but it was not.

Leaning down dangerously from his perch, he detached it from the twig on which it had caught, and then sat holding it in his hand and gazing at it. It was Squire Vane's white Panama hat, but there was no Squire Vane under it. Paynter felt a nameless relief in the very fact that there was not.

There in the clear sunlight and sea air, for an instant, all the tropical terrors of his own idle tale surrounded and suffocated him. It seemed indeed some demon tree of the swamps; a vegetable serpent that fed on men. Even the hideous farce in the fancy of digesting a whole man with the exception of his hat, seemed only to simplify the nightmare. And he found himself gazing dully at one leaf of the tree, which happened to be turned toward him, so that the odd markings, which had partly made the legend, really looked a little like the eye in a peacock's feather. It was as if the sleeping tree had opened one eye upon him.

With a sharp effort he steadied himself in mind and posture on the bough; his reason returned, and he began to descend with the hat in his teeth. When he was back in the underworld of the wood, he studied the hat again and with closer attention. In one place in the crown there was a hole or rent, which certainly had not been there when it had last lain on the table under the garden tree. He sat down, lit a cigarette, and reflected for a long time.

A wood, even a small wood, is not an easy thing to search minutely; but he provided himself with some practical tests in the matter. In one sense the very density of the thicket was a help; he could at least see where anyone had strayed from the path, by broken and trampled growths of every kind. After many hours' industry, he had made a sort of new map of the place; and had decided beyond doubt that some person or persons had so strayed, for some purpose, in several defined directions. There was a way burst through the bushes, making a short cut across a loop of the wandering path; there was another forking out from it as an alternative way into the central space. But there was one especially which was unique, and which seemed to him, the more he studied it, to point to some essential of the mystery.

One of these beaten and broken tracks went from the space under the peacock trees outward into the wood for about twenty yards and then stopped. Beyond that point not a twig was broken nor a leaf disturbed. It had no exit, but he could not believe that it had no goal. After some further reflection, he knelt down and began to cut away grass and clay with his knife, and was surprised at the ease with which they detached themselves. In a few moments a whole section of the soil lifted like a lid; it was a round lid and presented a quaint appearance, like a flat cap with green feathers. For though the disc itself was made of wood, there was a layer of earth on it with the live grass still growing there. And the removal of the round lid revealed a round hole, black as night and seemingly bottomless. Paynter understood it instantly. It was rather near the sea for a well to be sunk, but the traveler had known wells sunk even nearer. He rose to his feet with the great knife in his hand, a frown on his face, and his doubts resolved. He no longer shrank from naming what he knew. This was not the first corpse that had been thrown down a well; here, without stone or epitaph, was the grave of Squire Vane. In a flash all the mythological follies about saints and peacocks were forgotten; he was knocked on the head, as with a stone club, by the human common sense of crime.

Cyprian Paynter stood long by the well in the wood, walked round it in meditation, examined its rim and the ring of grass about it, searched the surrounding soil thoroughly, came back and stood beside the well once more. His researches and reflections had been so long that he had not realized that the day had passed and that the wood and the world round it were beginning already to be steeped in the enrichment of evening. The day had been radiantly calm; the sea seemed to be as still as the well, and the well was as still as a mirror. And then, quite without warning, the mirror moved of itself like a living thing.

In the well, in the wood, the water leapt and gurgled, with a grotesque noise like something swallowing, and then settled again with a second sound. Cyprian could not see into the well clearly, for the opening, from where he stood, was an ellipse, a mere slit, and half masked by thistles and rank grass like a green beard. For where he stood now was three yards away from the well, and he had not yet himself realized that he had sprung back all that distance from the brink when the water spoke.

III. The Mystery of the Well

Cyprian Paynter did not know what he expected to see rise out of the well — the corpse of the murdered man or merely the spirit of the fountain. Anyhow, neither of them rose out of it, and he recognized after an instant that this was, after all, perhaps the more natural course of things. Once more he pulled himself together, walked to the edge of the well and looked down. He saw, as before, a dim glimmer of water, at that depth no brighter than ink; he fancied he still heard a faint convulsion and murmur, but it gradually subsided to an utter stillness. Short of suicidally diving in, there was nothing to be done. He realized that, with all his equipment, he had not even brought anything like a rope or basket, and at length decided to return for them. As he retraced his steps to the entrance, he recurred to, and took stock of, his more solid discoveries. Somebody had gone into the wood, killed the Squire and thrown him down the well, but he did not admit for a moment that it was his friend the poet; but if the latter had actually been seen coming out of the wood the matter was serious. As he walked the rapidly darkening twilight was cloven with red gleams, that made him almost fancy for a moment that some fantastic criminal had set fire to the tiny forest as he fled. A second glance showed him nothing but one of those red sunsets in which such serene days sometimes close.

As he came out of the gloomy gate of trees into the full glow he saw a dark figure standing quite still in the dim bracken, on the spot where he had left the woodcutter. It was not the woodcutter.

It was topped by a tall black hat of a funeral type, and the whole figure stood so black against the field of crimson fire that edged the sky line that he could not for an instant understand or recall it. When he did, it was with an odd change in the whole channel of his thoughts.

“Doctor Brown!” he cried. “Why, what are you doing up here?”

“I have been talking to poor Martin,” answered the doctor, and made a rather awkward movement with his hand toward the road down to the village. Following the gesture, Paynter dimly saw another dark figure walking down in the blood-red distance. He also saw that the hand motioning was really black, and not merely in shadow; and, coming nearer, found the doctor’s dress was really funereal, down to the detail of the dark gloves. It gave the American a small but queer shock, as if this were actually an undertaker come up to bury the corpse that could not be found.

“Poor Martin’s been looking for his chopper,” observed Doctor Brown, “but I told him I’d picked it up and kept it for him. Between ourselves, I hardly think he’s fit to be trusted with it.” Then, seeing the glance at his black garb, he added: “I’ve just been to a funeral. Did you know there’s been another loss? Poor Jake the fisherman’s wife, down in the cottage on the shore, you know. This infernal fever, of course.”

As they both turned, facing the red evening light, Paynter instinctively made a closer study, not merely of the doctor’s clothes, but of the doctor. Dr. Burton Brown was a, tall, alert man, neatly dressed, who would otherwise have had an almost military air but for his spectacles and an almost painful intellectualism in his lean brown face and bald brow. The contrast was clinched by the fact that, while his face was of the ascetic type generally conceived as clean-shaven, he had a strip of dark mustache cut too short for him to bite, and yet a mouth that often moved as if trying to bite it. He might have been a very intelligent army surgeon, but he had more the look of an engineer or one of those services that combine a military silence with a more than military science. Paynter had always respected something ruggedly reliable about the man, and after a little hesitation he told him all the discoveries.

The doctor took the hat of the dead Squire in his hand, and examined it with frowning care. He put one finger through the hole in the crown and moved it meditatively. And Paynter realized how fanciful his own fatigue must have made him; for so silly a thing as the black finger waggling through the rent in that frayed white relic unreasonably displeased him. The doctor soon made the same discovery with professional acuteness, and applied it much further. For when Paynter began to tell him of the moving water in the well he looked at him a moment through his spectacles, and then said:

“Did you have any lunch?”

Paynter for the first time realized that he had, as a fact, worked and thought furiously all day without food.

“Please don’t fancy I mean you had too much lunch,” said the medical man, with mournful humor. “On the contrary, I mean you had too little. I think you are a bit knocked out, and your nerves exaggerate things. Anyhow, let me advise you not to do any more to-night. There’s nothing to be done without ropes or some sort of fishing tackle, if with that; but I think I can get you some of the sort of grappling irons the fishermen use for dragging. Poor Jake's got some, I know; I'll bring them round to you tomorrow morning. The fact is, I'm staying there for a bit as he's rather in a state, and I think is better for me to ask for the things and not a stranger. I am sure you'll understand."

Paynter understood sufficiently to assent, and hardly knew why he stood vacantly watching the doctor make his way down the steep road to the shore and the fisher's cottage. Then he threw off thoughts he had not examined, or even consciously entertained, and walked slowly and rather heavily back to the Vane Arms.

The doctor, still funereal in manner, though no longer so in costume, appeared punctually under the wooden sign next morning, laden with what he had promised; an apparatus of hooks and a hanging net for hoisting up anything sunk to a reasonable depth. He was about to proceed on his professional round, and said nothing further to deter the American from proceeding on his own very unprofessional experiment as a detective. That buoyant amateur had indeed recovered most, if not all, of yesterday's buoyancy, was now well fitted to pass any medical examination, and returned with all his own energy to the scene of yesterday's labors.

It may well have brightened and made breezier his second day's toil that he had not only the sunlight and the bird's singing in the little wood, to say nothing of a more scientific apparatus to work with, but also human companionship, and that of the most intelligent type. After leaving the doctor and before leaving the village be had bethought himself of seeking the little court or square where stood the quiet brown house of Andrew Ashe, solicitor, and the operations of dragging were worked in double harness. Two heads were peering over the well in the wood: one yellow-haired, lean and eager; the other redhaired, heavy and pondering; and if it be true that two heads are better than one, it is truer that four hands are better than two. In any case, their united and repeated efforts bore fruit at last, if anything so hard and meager and forlorn can be called a fruit. It weighed loosely in the net as it was lifted, and rolled out on the grassy edge of the well; it was a bone.

Ashe picked it up and stood with it in his hand, frowning.

"We want Doctor Brown here," he said. "This may be the bone of some animal. Any dog or sheep might fall into a hidden well." Then he broke off, for his companion was already detaching a second bone from the net.

After another half hour's effort Paynter had occasion to remark, "It must have been rather a large dog." There were already a heap of such white fragments at his feet.

"I have seen nothing yet," said Ashe, speaking more plainly. "That is certainly a human bone." "I fancy this must be a human bone," said the American.

And he turned away a little as he handed the other a skull.

There was no doubt of what sort of skull; there was the one unique curve that holds the mystery of reason, and underneath it the two black holes that had held human eyes. But just above that on the left was another and smaller black hole, which was not an eye.

Then the lawyer said, with something like an effort: "We may admit it is a man without admitting it is — any particular man. There may be something, after all, in that yarn about the drunkard; he may have tumbled into the well. Under certain conditions, after certain natural processes, I fancy, the bones might be stripped in this way, even without the skill of any assassin. We want the doctor again."

Then he added suddenly, and the very sound of his voice suggested that he hardly believed his own words.

"Haven't you got poor Vane's hat there?"

He took it from the silent American's hand, and with a sort of hurry fitted it on the bony head.

"Don't!" said the other involuntarily.

The lawyer had put his finger, as the doctor had done, through the hole in the hat, and it lay exactly over the hole in the skull.

"I have the better right to shrink," he said steadily, but in a vibrant voice. "I think I am the older friend."

Paynter nodded without speech, accepting the final identification. The last doubt, or hope, had departed, and he turned to the dragging apparatus, and did not speak till he had made his last find.

The singing of the birds seemed to grow louder about them, and the dance of the green summer leaves was repeated beyond in the dance of the green summer sea. Only the great roots of the mysterious trees could be seen, the rest being far aloft, and all round it was a wood of little, lively and happy things. They might have been two innocent naturalists, or even two children fishing for eels or tittlebats on that summer holiday when Paynter pulled up something that weighed in the net more heavily than any bone. it nearly broke the meshes, and fell against a mossy stone with a clang.

“Truth lies at the bottom of a well,” cried the American, with lift in his voice. “The woodman’s ax.”

It lay, indeed, flat and gleaming in the grasses by the well in the wood, just as it had lain in the thicket where the woodman threw it in the beginning of all these things. But on one corner of the bright blade was a dull brown stain.

“I see,” said Ashe, “the woodman’s ax, and therefore the Woodman. Your deductions are rapid.”

“My deductions are reasonable,” said Paynter, “Look here, Mr. Ashe; I know what you’re thinking. I know you distrust Treherne; but I’m sure you will be just for all that. To begin with, surely the first assumption is that the woodman’s ax is used by the Woodman. What have you to say to it?”

“I say ‘No’ to it,” replied the lawyer. “The last weapon a woodman would use would be a woodman’s ax; that is if he is a sane man.”

“He isn’t,” said Paynter quietly; “you said you wanted the doctor’s opinion just now. The doctor’s opinion on this point is the same as my own. We both found him meandering about outside there; it’s obvious this business has gone to his head, at any rate. If the murderer were a man of business like yourself, what you say might be sound. But this murderer is a mystic. He was driven by some fanatical fad about the trees. It’s quite likely he thought there was something solemn and sacrificial about the ax, and would have liked to cut off Vane’s head before a crowd, like Charles I’s. He’s looking for the ax still, and probably thinks it a holy relic.”

“For which reason,” said Ashe, smiling, “he instantly chucked it down a well.”

Paynter laughed.

“You have me there certainly,” he said. “But I think you have something else in your mind. You’ll say, I suppose, that we were all watching the wood; but were we? Frankly, I could almost fancy the peacock trees did strike me with a sort of sickness — a sleeping sickness.”

“Well,” admitted Ashe, “you have me there too. I’m afraid I couldn’t swear I was awake all the time; but I don’t put it down to magic trees — only to a private hobby of going to bed at night. But look here, Mr. Paynter; there’s another and better argument against any outsider from the village or countryside having committed the crime. Granted he might have slipped past us somehow, and gone for the Squire. But why should he go for him in the wood? How did he know he was in the wood? You remember how suddenly the poor old boy bolted into it, on what a momentary impulse. “It’s the last place where one would normally look for such a man, in the middle of the night. No, it’s an ugly thing to say, but we, the group round that garden table, were the only people who knew. Which brings me back to the one point in your remarks which I happen to think perfectly true.”

“What was that?” inquired the other.

“That the murderer was a mystic,” said Ashe. “But a cleverer mystic than poor old Martin.”

Paynter made a murmur of protest, and then fell silent.

“Let us talk plainly,” resumed the lawyer. “Treherne had all those mad motives you yourself admit against the woodcutter. He had the knowledge of Vane’s whereabouts, which nobody can possibly attribute to the woodcutter. But he had much more. Who taunted and goaded the Squire to go into the wood at all? Treherne. Who practically prophesied, like an infernal quack astrologer, that something would happen to him if he did go into the wood? Treherne. Who was, for some reason, no matter what, obviously burning with rage and restlessness all that night, kicking his legs impatiently to and fro on the cliff, and breaking out with wild words about it being all over soon? Treherne. And on top of all this, when I walked closer to the wood, whom did I see slip out of it swiftly and silently like a shadow, but turning his face once to the moon? On my oath and on my honor — Treherne.”

“It is awful,” said Paynter, like a man stunned. “What you say is simply awful.”

“Yes,” said Ashe seriously, “very awful, but very simple. Treherne knew where the ax was originally thrown. I saw him, on that day he lunched here first, watching it like a wolf, while Miss Vane was talking to him. On that dreadful night he could easily have picked it up as he went into the wood. He knew about the well, no doubt; who was so likely to know any old traditions about the peacock trees? He hid the hat in the trees, where perhaps he hoped (though the point is unimportant) that nobody would dare to look. Anyhow, he hid it, simply because it was the one thing that would not sink in the well. Mr. Paynter, do you think I would say this of any man in mere mean dislike? Could any man. say it of any man unless the case was complete, as this is complete?”

"It is complete," said Paynter, very pale. "I have nothing left against it but a faint, irrational feeling; a feeling that, somehow or other, if poor Vane could stand alive before us at this moment he might tell some other and even more incredible tale."

Ashe made a mournful gesture.

"Can these dry bones live?" he said.

"Lord Thou knowest," answered the other mechanically. "Even these dry bones—"

And he stopped suddenly with his mouth open, a blinding light of wonder in his pale eyes.

"See here," he said hoarsely and hastily. "You have said the word. What does it mean? What can it mean? Dry? Why are these bones dry?"

The lawyer started and stared down at the heap.

"Your case complete!" cried Paynter, in mounting excitement. "Where is the water in the well? The water I saw leap like a flame? Why did it leap? Where is it gone to? Complete! We are buried under riddles."

Ashe stooped, picked up a bone and looked at it.

"You are right," he said, in a low and shaken voice: "this bone is as dry — as a bone."

"Yes, I am right," replied Cyprian. "And your mystic is still as mysterious as a mystic."

There was a long silence. Ashe laid down the bone, picked up the ax and studied it more closely. Beyond the dull stain at the corner of the steel there was nothing unusual about it save a broad white rag wrapped round the handle, perhaps to give a better grip. The lawyer thought it worth noting, however, that the rag was certainly newer and cleaner than the chopper. But both were quite dry.

"Mr. Paynter," he said at last, "I admit you have scored, in the spirit if not in the letter. In strict logic, this greater puzzle is not a reply to my case. If this ax has not been dipped in water, it has been dipped in blood; and the water jumping out of the well is not an explanation of the poet jumping out of the wood. But I admit that morally and practically it does make a vital difference. We are #not# faced with a colossal contradiction, and we don't know how far it extends. The body might have been broken up or boiled down to its bones by the murderer, though it may be hard to connect it with the conditions of the murder. It might conceivably have been so reduced by some property in the water and soil, for decomposition varies vastly with these things. I should not dismiss my strong prima facie case against the likely person because of these difficulties. But here we have something entirely different. That the bones themselves should remain dry in a well full of water, or a well that yesterday was full of water — that brings us to the edge of something beyond which we can make no guess. There is a new factor, enormous and quite unknown. While we can't fit together such prodigious facts, we can't fit together a case against Treherne or against anybody. No; there is only one thing to be done now. Since we can't accuse Treherne, we must appeal to him. We must put the case against him frankly before him, and trust he has an explanation — and will give it. I suggest we go back and do it now."Paynter, beginning to follow, hesitated a moment, and then said: "Forgive me for a kind of liberty; as you say, you are an older friend of the family. I entirely agree with your suggestion, but before you act on your present suspicions, do you know, I think Miss Vane ought to be warned a little? I rather fear all this will be a new shock to her."

"Very well," said Ashe, after looking at him steadily for an instant. "Let us go across to her first."

From the opening of the wood they could see Barbara Vane writing at the garden table, which was littered with correspondence, and the butler with his yellow face waiting behind her chair. As the lengths of grass lessened between them, and the little group at the table grew larger and clearer in the sunlight, Paynter had a painful sense of being part of an embassy of doom. It sharpened when the girl looked up from the table and smiled on seeing them.

"I should like to speak to you rather particularly if I may," said the lawyer, with a touch of authority in his respect; and when the butler was dismissed he laid open the whole matter before her, speaking sympathetically, but leaving out nothing, from the strange escape of the poet from the wood to the last detail of the dry bones out of the well. No fault could be found with any one of his tones or phrases, and yet Cyprian, tingling in every nerve with the fine delicacy of his nation about the other sex, felt as if she were faced with an inquisitor. He stood about uneasily, watched the few colored clouds in the clear sky and the bright birds darting about the wood, and he heartily wished himself up the tree again.

Soon, however, the way the girl took it began to move him to perplexity rather than pity. It was like nothing he had expected, and yet he could not name the shade of difference. The final identification of her father's skull, by the hole in the hat, turned her a little pale, but left her composed; this was, perhaps, explicable, since she had from the first taken the pessimistic view. But during the rest of the tale there rested on her broad brows under her copper coils of hair, a brooding spirit that was itself a mystery. He could only tell himself that she was less merely receptive, either firmly or weakly, than he would have expected. It was as if she revolved, not their problem, but her own. She was silent a long time, and said at last:

"Thank you, Mr. Ashe, I am really very grateful for this. After all, it brings things to the point where they must have come sooner or later." She looked dreamily at the wood and sea, and went on: "I've not only had myself to consider, you see; but if you're really thinking THAT, it's time I spoke out, without asking anybody. You say, as if it were something very dreadful, 'Mr. Treherne was in the wood that night.' Well, it's not quite so dreadful to me, you see, because I know he was. In fact, we were there together."

"Together!" repeated the lawyer.

"We were together," she said quietly, "because we had a right to be together."

"Do you mean," stammered Ashe, surprised out of himself, "that you were engaged?"

"No, no," she said. "We were married."

Then, amid a startled silence, she added, as a kind of afterthought:

"In fact, we are still."

Strong as was his composure, the lawyer sat back in his chair with a sort of solid stupefaction at which Paynter could not help smiling.

"You will ask me, of course," went on Barbara in the same measured manner, "why we should be married secretly, so that even my poor father did not know. Well, I answer you quite frankly to begin with; because, if he had known, he would certainly have cut me off with a shilling. He did not like my husband, and I rather fancy you do not like him either. And when I tell you this, I know perfectly well what you will say — the usual adventurer getting hold of the usual heiress. It is quite reasonable, and, as it happens, it is quite wrong. If I had deceived my father for the sake of the money, or even for the sake of a man, I should be a little ashamed to talk to you about it. And I think you can see that I am not ashamed."

"Yes," said the American, with a grave inclination, "yes, I can see that."

She looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, as if seeking words for an obscure matter, and then said:

"Do you remember, Mr. Paynter, that day you first lunched here and told us about the African trees? Well, it was my birthday; I mean my first birthday. I was born then, or woke up or something. I had walked in this garden like a somnambulist in the sun. I think there are many such somnambulists in our set and our society; stunned with health, drugged with good manners, fitting their surroundings too well to be alive. Well, I came alive somehow; and you know how deep in us are the things we first realize when we were babies and began to take notice. I began to take notice. One of the first things I noticed was your own story, Mr. Paynter. I feel as if I heard of St. Securis as children hear of Santa Claus, and as if that big tree were a bogey I still believed in. For I do still believe in such things, or rather I believe in them more and more; I feel certain my poor father drove on the rocks by disbelieving, and you are all racing to ruin after him. That is why I do honestly want the estate, and that is why I am not ashamed of wanting it. I am perfectly certain, Mr. Paynter, that nobody can save this perishing land and this perishing people but those who understand. I mean who understand a thousand little signs and guides in the very soil and lie of the land, and traces that are almost trampled out. My husband understands, and I have begun to understand; my father would never have understood. There are powers, there is the spirit of a place, there are presences that are not to be put by. Oh, don't fancy I am sentimental and hanker after the good old days. The old days were not all good; that is just the point, and we must understand enough to know the good from the evil. We must understand enough to save the traces of a saint or a sacred tradition, or, where a wicked god has been worshiped, to destroy his altar and to cut down his grove."

"His grove," said Paynter automatically, and looked toward the little wood, where the sunbright birds were flying.

"Mrs. Treherne," said Ashe, with a formidable quietness, "I am not so unsympathetic with all this as you may perhaps suppose. I will not even say it is all moonshine, for it is something better. It is, if I may say so, honeymoonshine. I will never deny the saying that it makes the world go round, if it makes people's heads go round too. But there are other sentiments, madam, and other duties. I need not tell you your father was a good man, and that what has befallen him would be pitiable, even as the fate of the wicked. This is a horrible thing, and it is chiefly among horrors that we must keep our common sense. There are reasons for everything, and when my old friend lies butchered do not come to me with even the most beautiful fairy tales about a saint and his enchanted grove."

"Well, and you!" she cried, and rose radiantly and swiftly. "With what kind of fairy tales do you come to me? In what enchanted groves are YOU walking? You come and tell me that Mr. Paynter found a well where the water danced and then disappeared; but of course miracles are all moonshine! You tell me you yourself fished bones from under the same water, and every bone was as dry as a biscuit; but for Heaven's sake let us say nothing that makes anybody's head go round! Really, Mr. Ashe, you must try to preserve your common sense!"

She was smiling, but with blazing eyes; and Ashe got to his feet with an involuntary laugh of surrender.

"Well, we must-be going," he said. "May I say that a tribute is really due to your new transcendental training? If I may say so, I always knew you had brains; and you've been learning to use them."

The two amateur detectives went back to the wood for the moment, that Ashe might consider the removal of the unhappy Squire's remains. As he pointed out, it was now legally possible to have an inquest, and, even at that early stage of investigations, he was in favor of having it at once.

"I shall be the coroner," he said, "and I think it will be a case of 'some person or persons unknown.' Don't be surprised; it is often done to give the guilty a false security. This is not the first time the police have found it convenient to have the inquest first and the inquiry afterward."

But Paynter had paid little attention to the point; for his great gift of enthusiasm, long wasted on arts and affectations, was lifted to inspiration by the romance of real life into which he had just walked. He was really a great critic; he had a genius for admiration, and his admiration varied fittingly with everything he admired.

"A splendid girl and a splendid story," he cried. "I feel as if I were in love again myself, not so much with her as with Eve or Helen of Troy, or some such tower of beauty in the morning of the world. Don't you love all heroic things, that gravity and great candor, and the way she took one step from a sort of throne to stand in a wilderness with a vagabond? Oh, believe me, it is she who is the poet; she has the higher reason, and honor and valor are at rest in her soul."

"In short, she is uncommonly pretty," replied Ashe, with some cynicism. "I knew a murderess rather well who was very much like her, and had just that colored hair."

"You talk as if a murderer could be caught red-haired instead of red-handed," retorted Paynter. "Why, at this very minute, you could be caught red-haired yourself. Are you a murderer, by any chance?"

Ashe looked up quickly, and then smiled.

"I'm afraid I'm a connoisseur in murderers, as you are in poets," he answered, "and I assure you they are of all colors in hair as well as temperament. I suppose it's inhumane, but mine is a monstrously interesting trade, even in a little place like this. As for that girl, of course I've known her all her life, and — but but that is just the question. Have I known her all her life? Have I known her at all? Was she even there to be known? You admire her for telling the truth; and so she did, by God, when she said that some people wake up late, who have never lived before. Do we know what they might do — we, who have only seen them asleep?"

"Great heavens!" cried Paynter. "You don't dare suggest that she—"

"No, I don't," said the lawyer, with composure, "but there are other reasons. . . . I don't suggest anything fully, till we've had our interview with this poet of yours. I think I know where to find him."

They found him, in fact, before they expected him, sitting on the bench outside the Vane Arms, drinking a mug of cider and waiting for the return of his American friend; so it was not difficult to open conversation with him. Nor did he in any way avoid the subject of the tragedy; and the lawyer, seating himself also on the long bench that fronted the little market place, was soon putting the last developments as lucidly as he had put them to Barbara.

"Well," said Treherne at last, leaning back and frowning at the signboard, with the colored birds and dolphins, just about his head; "suppose somebody did kill the Squire. He'd killed a good many people with his hygiene and his enlightened landlordism."

Paynter was considerably uneasy at this alarming opening; but the poet went on quite coolly, with his hands in his pockets and his feet thrust out into the street.

"When a man has the power of a Sultan in Turkey, and uses it with the ideas of a spinster in Tooting, I often wonder that nobody puts a knife in him. I wish there were more sympathy for murderers, somehow. I'm very sorry the poor old fellow’s gone myself; but you gentlemen always seem to forget there are any other people in the world. He’s all right; he was a good fellow, and his soul, I fancy, has gone to the happiest paradise of all.”

The anxious American could read nothing of the effect of this in the dark Napoleonic face of the lawyer, who merely said: “What do you mean?”

“The fool’s paradise,” said Treherne, and drained his pot of cider.

The lawyer rose. He did not look at Treherne, or speak to him; but looked and spoke straight across him to the American, who found the utterance not a little unexpected.

“Mr. Paynter,” said Ashe, “you thought it rather morbid of me to collect murderers; but it’s fortunate for your own view of the case that I do. It may surprise you to know that Mr. Treherne has now, in my eyes, entirely cleared himself of suspicion. I have been intimate with several assassins, as I remarked; but there’s one thing none of them ever did. I never knew a murderer to talk about the murder, and then at once deny it and defend it. No, if a man is concealing his crime, why should he go out of his way to apologize for it?”

“Well,” said Paynter, with his ready appreciation, “I always said you were a remarkable man; and that’s certainly a remarkable idea.”

“Do I understand,” asked the poet, kicking his heels on the cobbles, “that both you gentlemen have been kindly directing me toward the gallows?”

“No,” said Paynter thoughtfully. “I never thought you guilty; and even supposing I had, if you understand me, I should never have thought it quite so guilty to be guilty. It would not have been for money or any mean thing, but for something a little wilder and worthier of a man of genius. After all, I suppose, the poet has passions like great unearthly appetites; and the world has always judged more gently of his sins. But now that Mr. Ashe admits your innocence, I can honestly say I have always affirmed it.”

The poet rose also. “Well, I am innocent, oddly enough,” he said. “I think I can make a guess about your vanishing well, but of the death and dry bones I know no more than the dead; if so much. And, by the way, my dear Paynter” — and he turned two bright eyes on the art critic— “I will excuse you from excusing me for all the things I haven’t done; and you, I hope, will excuse me if I differ from you altogether about the morality of poets. As you suggest, it is a fashionable view, but I think it is a fallacy. No man has less right to be lawless than a man of imagination. For he has spiritual adventures, and can take his holidays when he likes. I could picture the poor

Squire carried off to elfland whenever I wanted him carried off, and that wood needed no crime to make it wicked for me. That red sunset the other night was all that a murder would have been to many men. No, Mr. Ashe; show, when next you sit in judgment, a little mercy to some wretched man who drinks and robs because he must drink beer to taste it, and take it to drink it. Have compassion on the next batch of poor thieves, who have to hold things in order to have them. But if ever you find ME stealing one small farthing, when I can shut my eyes and see the city of El Dorado, then" — and he lifted his head like a falcon— "show me no mercy, for I shall deserve none."

"Well," remarked Ashe, after a pause, "I must go and fix things up for the inquest. Mr. Treherne, your attitude is singularly interesting; I really almost wish I could add you to my collection of murderers. They are a varied and extraordinary set."

"Has it ever occurred to you," asked Paynter, "that perhaps the men who have never committed murder are a varied and very extraordinary set? Perhaps every plain man's life holds the real mystery, the secret of sins avoided."

"Possibly," replied Ashe. "It would be a long business to stop the next man in the street and ask him what crimes he never committed and why not. And I happen to be busy, so you'll excuse me."

"What," asked the American, when he and the poet were alone, "is this guess of yours about the vanishing water?"

"Well, I'm not sure I'll tell you yet," answered Treherne, something of the old mischief coming back into his dark eyes. "But I'll tell you something else, which may be connected with it; something I couldn't tell until my wife had told you about our meeting in the wood." His face had grown grave again, and he resumed after a pause:

"When my wife started to follow her father I advised her to go back first to the house, to leave it by another door and to meet me in the wood in half an hour. We often made these assignations, of course, and generally thought them great fun, but this time the question was serious, and I didn't want the wrong thing done in a hurry. It was a question whether anything could be done to undo an experiment we both vaguely felt to be dangerous, and she especially thought, after reflection, that interference would make things worse. She thought the old sportsman, having been dared to do something, would certainly not be dissuaded by the very man who had dared him or by a woman whom he regarded as a child. She left me at last in a sort of despair, but I lingered with a last hope of doing something, and drew doubtfully near to the heart of the wood; and there, instead of the silence I expected, I heard a voice. It seemed as if the Squire must be talking to himself, and I had the unpleasant fancy that he had already lost his reason in that wood of witchcraft. But I soon found that if he was talking he was talking with two voices. Other fancies attacked me, as that the other was the voice of the tree or the voices of the three trees talking together, and with no man near. But it was not the voice of the tree. The next moment I knew the voice, for I had heard it twenty times across the table. It was the voice of that doctor of yours; I heard it as certainly as you hear my voice now."

After a moment's silence, he resumed: "I left the wood, I hardly knew why, and with wild and bewildered feelings; and as I came out into the faint moonshine I saw that old lawyer standing quietly, but staring at me like an owl. At least, the light touched his red hair with fire, but his square old face was in shadow. But I knew, if I could have read it, that it was the face of a hanging judge."

He threw himself on the bench again, smiled a little, and added: "Only, like a good many hanging judges, I fancy, he was waiting patiently to hang the wrong man."

"And the right man—" said Paynter mechanically. Treherne shrugged his shoulders, sprawling on the ale bench, and played with his empty pot.

IV. The Chase After the Turth

Some time after the inquest, which had ended in the inconclusive verdict which Mr. Andrew Ashe had himself predicted and achieved, Paynter was again sitting on the bench outside the village inn, having on the little table in front of it a tall glass of light ale, which he enjoyed much more as local color than as liquor. He had but one companion on the bench, and that a new one, for the little market place was empty at that hour, and he had lately, for the rest, been much alone. He was not unhappy, for he resembled his great countryman, Walt Whitman, in carrying a kind of universe with him like an open umbrella; but he was not only alone, but lonely. For Ashe had gone abruptly up to London, and since his return had been occupied obscurely with legal matters, doubtless bearing on the murder. And

Treherne had long since taken up his position openly, at the great house, as the husband of the great lady, and he and she were occupied with sweeping reforms on the estate. The lady especially, being of the sort whose very dreams "drive at practice," was landscape gardening as with the gestures of a giantess. It was natural, therefore, that so sociable a spirit as Paynter should fall into speech with the one other stranger who happened to be staying at the inn, evidently a bird of passage like himself. This man, who was smoking a pipe on the bench beside him, with his knapsack before him on the table, was an artist come to sketch on that romantic coast; a tall man in a velvet jacket, with a shock of tow-colored hair, a long fair beard, but eyes of dark brown, the effect of which contrast reminded Paynter vaguely, he hardly knew why, of a Russian. The stranger carried his knapsack into many picturesque corners; he obtained permission to set up his easel in that high garden where the late Squire had held his al fresco banquets. But Paynter had never had an opportunity of judging of the artist's work, nor did he find it easy to get the artist even to talk of his art. Cyprian himself was always ready to talk of any art, and he talked of it excellently, but with little response. He gave his own reasons for preferring the Cubists to the cult of Picasso, but his new friend seemed to have but a faint interest in either. He insinuated that perhaps the Neo-Primitives were after all only thinning their line, while the true Primitives were rather tightening it; but the stranger seemed to receive the insinuation without any marked reaction of feeling. When Paynter had even gone back as far into the past as the Post-Impressionists to find a common ground, and not found it, other memories began to creep back into his mind. He was just reflecting, rather darkly, that after all the tale of the peacock trees needed a mysterious stranger to round it off, and this man had much the air of being one, when the mysterious stranger himself said suddenly:

"Well, I think I'd better show you the work I'm doing down here."

He had his knapsack before him on the table, and he smiled rather grimly as he began to unstrap it. Paynter looked on with polite expressions of interest, but was considerably surprised when the artist unpacked and placed on the table, not any recognizable works of art, even of the most Cubist description, but (first) a quire of foolscap closely written with notes in black and red ink, and (second), to the American's extreme amazement, the old woodman's ax with the linen wrapper, which he had himself found in the well long ago.

“Sorry to give you a start, sir,” said the Russian artist, with a marked London accent. “But I’d better explain straight off that I’m a policeman.”

“You don’t look it,” said Paynter.

“I’m not supposed to,” replied the other. “Mr. Ashe brought me down here from the Yard to investigate; but he told me to report to you when I’d got anything to go on. Would you like to go into the matter now?

“When I took this matter up,” explained the detective, “I did it at Mr. Ashe’s request, and largely, of course, on Mr. Ashe’s lines. Mr. Ashe is a great criminal lawyer; with a beautiful brain, sir, as full as the Newgate Calendar. I took, as a working notion, his view that only you five gentlemen round the table in the Squire’s garden were acquainted with the Squire’s movements. But you gentlemen, if I may say so, have a way of forgetting certain other things and other people which we are rather taught to look for first. And as I followed Mr. Ashe’s inquiries through the stages you know already, through certain suspicions I needn’t discuss because they’ve been dropped, I found the thing shaping after all toward something, in the end, which I think we should have considered at the beginning. Now, to begin with, it is not true that there were five men round the table. There were six.”

The creepy conditions of that garden vigil vaguely returned upon Paynter; and he thought of a ghost, or something more nameless than a ghost. But the deliberate speech of the detective soon enlightened him.

“There were six men and five gentlemen, if you like to put it so,” he proceeded. “That man Miles, the butler, saw the Squire vanish as plainly as you did; and I soon found that Miles was a man worthy of a good deal of attention.”

A light of understanding dawned on Paynter’s face. “So that was it, was it!” he muttered.

“Does all our mythological mystery end with a policeman collaring a butler? Well, I agree with you he is far from an ordinary butler, even to look at; and the fault in imagination is mine. Like many faults in imagination, it was simply snobbishness.”

“We don’t go quite so fast as that,” observed the officer, in an impassive manner. “I only said I found the inquiry pointing to Miles; and that he was well worthy of attention. He was much more in the old Squire’s confidence than many people supposed; and when I cross-examined him he told me a good deal that was worth knowing. I’ve got it all down in these notes here; but at the moment I’ll only trouble you with one detail of it. One night this butler was just outside the Squire's dining-room door, when he heard the noise of a violent quarrel. The Squire was a violent gentleman, from time to time; but the curious thing about this scene was that the other gentleman was the more violent of the two. Miles heard him say repeatedly that the Squire was a public nuisance, and that his death would be a good riddance for everybody. I only stop now to tell you that the other gentleman was Dr. Burton Brown, the medical man of this village.

"The next examination I made was that of Martin, the woodcutter. Upon one point at least his evidence is quite clear, and is, as you will see, largely confirmed by other witnesses. He says first that the doctor prevented him from recovering his ax, and this is corroborated by Mr. and Mrs. Treherne. But he says further that the doctor admitted having the thing himself; and this again finds support in other evidence by the gardener, who saw the doctor, some time afterward, come by himself and pick up the chopper. Martin says that Doctor Brown repeatedly refused to give it up, alleging some fanciful excuse every time. And, finally, Mr. Paynter, we will hear the evidence of the ax itself."

He laid the woodman's tool on the table in front of him, and began to rip up and unwrap the curious linen covering round the handle.

"You will admit this is an odd bandage," he said. "And that's just the odd thing about it, that it really is a bandage. This white stuff is the sort of lint they use in hospitals, cut into strips like this. But most doctors keep some; and I have the evidence of Jake the fisherman, with whom Doctor Brown lived for some time, that the doctor had this useful habit. And, last," he added, flattening out a corner of the rag on the table, "isn't it odd that it should be marked T.B.B.?"

The American gazed at the rudely inked initials, but hardly saw them. What he saw, as in a mirror in his darkened memory, was the black figure with the black gloves against the blood-red sunset, as he had seen it when he came out of the wood, and which had always haunted him, he knew not why.

"Of course, I see what you mean," he said, "and it's very painful for me, for I knew and respected the man. But surely, also, it's very far from explaining everything. If he is a murderer, is he a magician? Why did the well water all evaporate in a night, and leave the dead man's bones dry as dust? That's not a common operation in the hospitals, is it?"

“As to the water, we do know the explanation,” said the detective. “I didn’t tumble to it at first myself, being a Cockney; but a little talk with Jake and the other fisherman about the old smuggling days put me straight about that. But I admit the dried remains still stump us all. All the same—”

A shadow fell across the table, and his talk was sharply cut short. Ashe was standing under the painted sign, buttoned up grimly in black, and with the face of the hanging judge, of which the poet had spoken, plain this time in the broad sunlight. Behind him stood two big men in plain clothes, very still; but Paynter knew instantly who they were.

“We must move at once,” said the lawyer. “Dr. Burton Brown is leaving the village.”

The tall detective sprang to his feet, and Paynter instinctively imitated him.

“He has gone up to the Trehernes possibly to say good-by,” went on Ashe rapidly. “I’m sorry, but we must arrest him in the garden there, if necessary. I’ve kept the lady out of the way, I think. But you” — addressing the factitious landscape painter— “must go up at once and rig up that easel of yours near the table and be ready. We will follow quietly, and come up behind the tree. We must be careful, for it’s clear he’s got wind of us, or he wouldn’t be doing a bolt.”

“I don’t like this job,” remarked Paynter, as they mounted toward the park and garden, the detective darting on ahead.

“Do you suppose I do?” asked Ashe; and, indeed, his strong, heavy face looked so lined and old that the red hair seemed unnatural, like a red wig. “I’ve known him longer than you, though perhaps I’ve suspected him longer as well.”

When they topped the slope of the garden the detective had already erected his easel, though a strong breeze blowing toward the sea rattled and flapped his apparatus and blew about his fair (and false) beard in the wind. Little clouds curled like feathers, were scudding seaward across the many-colored landscape, which the American art critic had once surveyed on a happier morning; but it is doubtful if the landscape painter paid much attention to it. Treherne was dimly discernible in the doorway of what was now his house; he would come no nearer, for he hated such a public duty more bitterly than the rest. The others posted themselves a little way behind the tree. Between the lines of these masked batteries the black figure of the doctor could be seen coming across the green lawn, traveling straight, as a bullet, as he had done when he brought the bad news to the woodcutter. To-day he was smiling, under the dark mustache that was cut short of the upper lip, though they fancied him a little pale, and he seemed to pause a moment and peer through his spectacles at the artist.

The artist turned from his easel with a natural movement, and then in a flash had captured the doctor by the coat collar.

"I arrest you—" he began; but Doctor Brown plucked himself free with startling promptitude, took a flying leap at the other, tore off his sham beard, tossing it into the air like one of the wild wisps of the cloud; then, with one wild kick, sent the easel flying topsy-turvy, and fled like a hare for the shore. Even at that dazzling instant Paynter felt that this wild reception was a novelty and almost an anticlimax; but he had no time for analysis when he and the whole pack had to follow in the hunt; even Treherne bringing up the rear with a renewed curiosity and energy.

The fugitive collided with one of the policemen who ran to head him off, sending him sprawling down the slope; indeed, the fugitive seemed inspired with the strength of a wild ape. He cleared at a bound the rampart of flowers, over which Barbara had once leaned to look at her future lover, and tumbled with blinding speed down the steep path up which that troubadour had climbed. Racing with the rushing wind they all streamed across the garden after him, down the path, and finally on to the seashore by the fisher's cot, and the pierced crags and caverns the American had admired when he first landed. The runaway did not, however, make for the house he had long inhabited, but rather for the pier, as if with a mind to seize the boat or to swim. Only when he reached the other end of the small stone jetty did he turn, and show them the pale face with the spectacles; and they saw that it was still smiling.

"I'm rather glad of this," said Treherne, with a great sigh. "The man is mad."

Nevertheless, the naturalness of the doctor's voice, when he spoke, startled them as much as a shriek.

"Gentleman," he said, "I won't protract your painful duties by asking you what you want; but I will ask at once for a small favor, which will not prejudice those duties in any way. I came down here rather in a hurry perhaps; but the truth is I thought I was late for an appointment." He looked dispassionately at his watch. "I find there is still some fifteen minutes. Will you wait with me here for that short time; after which I am quite at your service."

There was a bewildered silence, and then Paynter said: "For my part, I feel as if it would really be better to humor him."

"Ashe," said the doctor, with a new note of seriousness, "for old friendship, grant me this last little indulgence. It will make no difference; I have no arms or means of escape; you. can search me if you like. I know you think you are doing right, and I also know you will do it as fairly as you can. Well, after all, you get friends to help you; look at our friend with the beard, or the remains of the beard. Why shouldn't I have a friend to help me? A man will be here in a few minutes in whom I put some confidence; a great authority on these things. Why not, if only out of curiosity, wait and hear his view of the case?"

"This seems all moonshine," said Ashe, "but on the chance of any light on things — well, from the moon — I don't mind waiting a quarter of an hour. Who is this friend, I wonder; some amateur detective, I suppose."

"I thank you," said the doctor, with some dignity. "I think you will trust him when you have talked to him a little. And now," he added with an air of amiably relaxing into lighter matters, "let us talk about the murder.

"This case," he said in a detached manner, "will be found, I suspect, to be rather unique. There is a very clear and conclusive combination of evidence against Thomas Burton Brown, otherwise myself. But there is one peculiarity about that evidence, which you may perhaps have noticed. It all comes ultimately from one source, and that a rather unusual one. Thus, the woodcutter says I had his ax, but what makes him think so? He says I told him I had his ax; that I told him so again and again. Once more, Mr. Paynter here pulled up the ax out of the well; but how? I think Mr. Paynter will testify that I brought him the tackle for fishing it up, tackle he might never have got in any other way. Curious, is it not? Again, the ax is found to be wrapped in lint that was in my possession, according to the fisherman. But who showed the lint to the fisherman? I did. Who marked it with large letters as mine? I did. Who wrapped it round the handle at all? I did. Rather a singular thing to do; has anyone ever explained it?"

His words, which had been heard at first with painful coldness were beginning to hold more and more of their attention.

"Then there is the well itself," proceeded the doctor, with the same air of insane calm. "I suppose some of you by this time know at least the secret of that. The secret of the well is simply that it is not a well. It is purposely shaped at the top so as to look like one, but it is really a sort of chimney opening from the roof of one of those caves over there; a cave that runs inland just under the wood, and indeed IS connected by tunnels and secret passages with other openings miles and miles away. It is a sort of labyrinth used by smugglers and such people for ages past. This doubtless explains many of those disappearances we have heard of. But to return to the well that is not a well, in case some of you still don't know about it. When the sea rises very high at certain seasons it fills the low cave, and even rises a little way in the funnel above, making it look more like a well than ever. The noise Mr. Paynter heard was the natural eddy of a breaker from outside, and the whole experience depended on something so elementary as the tide."

The American was startled into ordinary speech.

"The tide!" he said. "And I never even thought of it! I guess that comes of living by the Mediterranean."

"The next step will be obvious enough," continued the speaker, "to a logical mind like that of Mr. Ashe, for instance. If it be asked why, even so, the tide did not wash away the Squire's remains that had lain there since his disappearance, there is only one possible answer. The remains had NOT lain there since his disappearance. The remains had been deliberately put there in the cavern under the wood, and put there AFTER Mr. Paynter had made his first investigation. They were put there, in short, after the sea had retreated and the cave was again dry. That is why they were dry; of course, much drier than the cave. Who put them there, I wonder?"

He was gazing gravely through his spectacles over their heads into vacancy, and suddenly he smiled.

"Ah," he cried, jumping up from the rock with alacrity, "here is the amateur detective at last!"

Ashe turned his head over his shoulder, and for a few seconds did not move it again, but stood as if with a stiff neck. In the cliff just behind him was one of the clefts or cracks into which it was everywhere cloven. Advancing from this into the sunshine, as if from a narrow door, was Squire Vane, with a broad smile on his face.

The wind was tearing from the top of the high cliff out to sea, passing over their heads, and they had the sensation that everything was passing over their heads and out of their control. Paynter felt as if his head had been blown off like a hat. But none of this gale of unreason seemed to stir a hair on the white head of the Squire, whose bearing, though self-important and bordering on a swagger, seemed if anything more comfortable than in the old days. His red face was, however, burnt like a sailor's, and his light clothes had a foreign look.

"Well, gentlemen," he said genially, "so this is the end of the legend of the peacock trees. Sorry to spoil that delightful traveller's tale, Mr. Paynter, but the joke couldn't be kept up forever. Sorry to put a stop to your best poem, Mr. Treherne, but I thought all this poetry had been going a little too far. So Doctor Brown and I fixed up a little surprise for you. And I must say, without vanity, that you look a little surprised."

"What on earth," asked Ashe at last, "is the meaning of all this?"

The Squire laughed pleasantly, and even a little apologetically,

"I'm afraid I'm fond of practical jokes," he said, "and this I suppose is my last grand practical joke. But I want you to understand that the joke is really practical. I flatter myself it will be of very practical use to the cause of progress and common sense, and the killing of such superstitions everywhere. The best part of it, I admit, was the doctor's idea and not mine. All I meant to do was to pass a night in the trees, and then turn up as fresh as paint to tell you what fools you were. But Doctor Brown here followed me into the wood, and we had a little talk which rather changed my plans. He told me that a disappearance for a few hours like that would never knock the nonsense on the head; most people would never even hear of it, and those who did would say that one night proved nothing. He showed me a much better way, which had been tried in several cases where bogus miracles had been shown up. The thing to do was to get the thing really believed everywhere as a miracle, and then shown up everywhere as a sham miracle. I can't put all the arguments as well as he did, but that was the notion, I think."

The doctor nodded, gazing silently at the sand; and the Squire resumed with undiminished relish.

"We agreed that I should drop through the hole into the cave, and make my way through the tunnels, where I often used to play as a boy, to the railway station a few miles from here, and there take a train for London. It was necessary for the joke, of course, that I should disappear without being traced; so I made my way to a port, and put in a very pleasant month or two round my old haunts in Cyprus and the Mediterranean. There's no more to say of that part of the business, except that I arranged to be back by a particular time; and here I am. But I've heard enough of what's gone on round here to be satisfied that I've done the trick. Everybody in Cornwall and most people in South England have heard of the Vanishing Squire; and thousands of noodles have been nodding their heads over crystals and tarot cards at this marvelous proof of an unseen world. I reckon the Reappearing Squire will scatter their cards and smash their crystals, so that such rubbish won't appear again in the twentieth century. I'll make the peacock trees the laughing stock of all Europe and America."

"Well," said the lawyer, who was the first to rearrange his wits, "I'm sure we're all only too delighted to see you again, Squire; and I quite understand your explanation and your own very natural motives in the matter. But I'm afraid I haven't got the hang of everything yet. Granted that you wanted to vanish, was it necessary to put bogus bones in the cave, so as nearly to put a halter round the neck of Doctor Brown? And who put it there? The statement would appear perfectly maniacal; but so far as I can make head or tail out of anything, Doctor Brown seems to have put it there himself."

The doctor lifted his head for the first time.

"Yes; I put the bones there," he said. "I believe I am the first son of Adam who ever manufactured all the evidence of a murder charge against himself."

It was the Squire's turn to look astonished. The old gentleman looked rather wildly from one to the other.

"Bones! Murder charge!" he ejaculated. "What the devil is all this? Whose bones?"

"Your bones, in a manner of speaking," delicately conceded the doctor. "I had to make sure you had really died, and not disappeared by magic."

The Squire in his turn seemed more hopelessly puzzled than the whole crowd of his friends had been over his own escapade. "Why not?" he demanded. "I thought it was the whole point to make it look like magic. Why did you want me to die so much?"

Doctor Brown had lifted his head; and he now very slowly lifted his hand. He pointed with outstretched arm at the headland overhanging the foreshore, just above the entrance to the cave. It was the exact part of the beach where Paynter had first landed, on that spring morning when he had looked up in his first fresh wonder at the peacock trees. But the trees were gone.

The fact itself was no surprise to them; the clearance had naturally been one of the first of the sweeping changes of the Treherne regime. But though they knew it well, they had wholly forgotten it; and its significance returned on them suddenly like a sign in heaven.

"That is the reason," said the doctor. "I have worked for that for fourteen years."

They no longer looked at the bare promontory on which the feathery trees had once been so familiar a sight; for they had something else to look at. Anyone seeing the Squire now would have shifted his opinion about where to find the lunatic in that crowd. It was plain in a flash that the change had fallen on him like a thunderbolt; that he, at least, had never had the wildest notion that the tale of the Vanishing Squire had been but a prelude to that of the vanishing trees. The next half hour was full of his ravings and expostulations, which gradually died away into demands for explanation and incoherent questions repeated again and again. He had practically to be overruled at last, in spite of the respect in which he was held, before anything like a space and silence were made in which the doctor could tell his own story. It was perhaps a singular story, of which he alone had ever had the knowledge; and though its narration was not uninterrupted, it may be set forth consecutively in his own words.

"First, I wish it clearly understood that I believe in nothing. I do not even give the nothing I believe a name; or I should be an atheist. I have never had inside my head so much as a hint of heaven and hell. I think it most likely we are worms in the mud; but I happen to be sorry for the other worms under the wheel. And I happen myself to be a sort of worm that turns when he can. If I care nothing for piety, I care less for poetry. I'm not like Ashe here, who is crammed with criminology, but has all sorts of other culture as well. I know nothing about culture, except bacteria culture. I sometimes fancy Mr. Ashe is as much an art critic as Mr. Paynter; only he looks for his heroes, or villains, in real life. But I am a very practical man; and my stepping stones have been simply scientific facts. In this village I found a fact — a fever. I could not classify it; it seemed peculiar to this corner of the coast; it had singular reactions of delirium and mental breakdown. I studied it exactly as I should a queer case in the hospital, and corresponded and compared notes with other men of science. But nobody had even a working hypothesis about it, except of course the ignorant peasantry, who said the peacock trees were in some wild way poisonous.

"Well, the peacock trees were poisonous. The peacock trees did produce the fever. I verified the fact in the plain plodding way required, comparing all the degrees and details of a vast number of cases; and there were a shocking number to compare. At the end of it I had discovered the thing as Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood. Everybody was the worse for being near the things; those who came off best were exactly the exceptions that proved the rule, abnormally healthy and energetic people like the Squire and his daughter. In other words, the peasants were right. But if I put it that way, somebody will cry: 'But do you believe it was supernatural then?' In fact, that's what you'll all say; and that's exactly what I complain of. I fancy hundreds of men have been left dead and diseases left undiscovered, by this suspicion of superstition, this stupid fear of fear. Unless you see daylight through the forest of facts from the first, you won't venture into the wood at all. Unless we can promise you beforehand that there shall be what you call a natural explanation, to save your precious dignity from miracles, you won't even hear the beginning of the plain tale. Suppose there isn't a natural explanation! Suppose there is, and we never find it! Suppose I haven't a notion whether there is or not! What the devil has that to do with you, or with me in dealing with the facts I do know? My own instinct is to think there is; that if my researches could be followed far enough it would be found that some horrible parody of hay fever, some effect analogous to that of pollen, would explain all the facts. I have never found the explanation. What I have found are the facts. And the fact is that those trees on the top there dealt death right and left, as certainly as if they had been giants, standing on a hill and knocking men down in crowds with a club. It will be said that now I had only to produce my proofs and have the nuisance removed. Perhaps I might have convinced the scientific world finally, when more and more processions of dead men had passed through the village to the cemetery. But I had not got to convince the scientific world, but the Lord of the Manor. The Squire will pardon my saying that it was a very different thing. I tried it once; I lost my temper, and said things I do not defend; and I left the Squire's prejudices rooted anew, like the trees. I was confronted with one colossal coincidence that was an obstacle to all my aims. One thing made all my science sound like nonsense. It was the popular legend.

"Squire, if there were a legend of hay fever, you would not believe in hay fever. If there were a popular story about pollen, you would say that pollen was only a popular story. I had something against me heavier and more hopeless than the hostility of the learned; I had the support of the ignorant. My truth was hopelessly tangled up with a tale that the educated were resolved to regard as entirely a lie. I never tried to explain again; on the contrary, I apologized, affected a conversion to the common-sense view, and watched events. And all the time the lines of a larger, if more crooked plan, began to get clearer in my mind. I knew that Miss Vane, whether or no she were married to Mr. Treherne, as I afterward found she was, was so much under his influence that the first day of her inheritance would be the last day of the poisonous trees. But she could not inherit, or even interfere, till the Squire died. It became simply self-evident, to a rational mind, that the Squire must die. But wishing to be humane as well as rational, I desired his death to be temporary.

"Doubtless my scheme was completed by a chapter of accidents, but I was watching for such accidents. Thus I had a foreshadowing of how the ax would figure in the tale when it was first flung at the trees; it would have surprised the woodman to know how near our minds were, and how I was but laying a more elaborate siege to the towers of pestilence. But when the Squire spontaneously rushed on what half the countryside would call certain death, I jumped at my chance. I followed him, and told him all that he has told you. I don't suppose he'll ever forgive me now, but that shan't prevent me saying that I admire him hugely for being what people would call a lunatic and what is really a sportsman. It takes rather a grand old man to make a joke in the grand style. He came down so quick from the tree he had climbed that he had no time to pull his hat off the bough it had caught in.

"At first I found I had made a miscalculation. I thought his disappearance would be taken as his death, at least after a little time; but Ashe told me there could be no formalities without a corpse. I fear I was a little annoyed, but I soon set myself to the duty of manufacturing a corpse. It's not hard for a doctor to get a skeleton; indeed, I had one, but Mr. Paynter's energy was a day too early for me, and I only got the bones into the well when he had already found it. His story gave me another chance, however; I noted where the hole was in the hat, and made a precisely corresponding hole in the skull. The reason for creating the other clues may not be so obvious. It may not yet be altogether apparent to you that I am not a fiend in human form. I could not substantiate a murder without at least suggesting a murderer, and I was resolved that if the crime happened to be traced to anybody, it should be to me. So I'm not surprised you were puzzled about the purpose of the rag round the ax, because it had no purpose, except to incriminate the man who put it there. The chase had to end with me, and when it was closing in at last the joke of it was too much for me, and I fear I took liberties with the gentleman's easel and beard. I was the only person who could risk it, being the only person who could at the last moment produce the Squire and prove there had been no crime at all. That, gentlemen, is the true story of the peacock trees; and that bare crag up there, where the wind is whistling as it would over a wilderness, is a waste place I have labored to make, as many men have labored to make a cathedral.

"I don't think there is any more to say, and yet something moves in my blood and I will try to say it. Could you not have trusted a little these peasants whom you already trust so much? These men are men, and they meant something; even their fathers were not wholly fools. If your gardener told you of the trees you called him a madman, but he did not plan and plant your garden like a madman. You would not trust your woodman about these trees, yet you trusted him with all the others. Have you ever thought what all the work of the world would be like if the poor were so senseless as you think them? But no, you stuck to your rational principle. And your rational principle was that a thing must be false because thousands of men had found it true; that BECAUSE many human eyes had seen something it could not be there."

He looked across at Ashe with a sort of challenge, but though the sea wind ruffled the old lawyer's red mane, his Napoleonic mask was unruffled; it even had a sort of beauty from its new benignity.

"I am too happy just now in thinking how wrong I have been," he answered, "to quarrel with you, doctor, about our theories. And yet, in justice to the Squire as well as myself, I should demur to your sweeping inference. I respect these peasants, I respect your regard for them; but their stories are a different matter. I think I would do anything for them but believe them. Truth and fancy, after all, are mixed in them, when in the more instructed they are separate; and I doubt if you have considered what would be involved in taking their word for anything. Half the ghosts of those who died of fever may be walking by now; and kind as these people are, I believe they might still burn a witch. No, doctor, I admit these people have been badly used, I admit they are in many ways our betters, but I still could not accept anything in their evidence."

The doctor bowed gravely and respectfully enough, and then, for the last time that day, they saw his rather sinister smile.

"Quite so," he said. "But you would have hanged me on their evidence."

And, turning his back on them, as if automatically, he set his face toward the village, where for so many years he had gone his round.

FOR LOVERS ONLY

An Impetuous Painter and a Discerning Critic

Gabriel Gale was energetically painting a new sign for the Rising Sun Inn when his attention was engaged by a new arrival, Diana Westermaine.

The lady was tall and dark, and Gale looked at her steadily and rather longer than is strictly polite — but painters are absent-minded.

When he left off looking at her, she began looking at him. She saw genuine artistry in his dazzling rendition of the rising sun, and she recognized a real thread of thought running through his rambling conversation.

Then he stood on his head for a moment and with a sort of cartwheel alighted on his feet. “It’s a very good thing for a painter to see things upside down — as they really are. When angels hang head downwards, we know they come from above. It’s only those that come from below that always have their noses in the air.”

She laughed. But then a shadow came between them in the shape of the artist’s friend, Hurrel. Diana explained to herself that she had no reason to be angry, but she was exceedingly angry. The increase of the group from two to three had the painful effect of an intrusion. But the two men were inseparable companions.

Months later, Gale was able to tell her of the rash vow that had bound him to Hurrel who, as it happened, was a hopeless madman.

“I was the only person who could handle him,” Gale explained. “The poor fellow once did me a great service, and I could only repay it by looking after him.”

“Your vow was certainly rash enough,” she said. “It doesn’t seem right to be tied to a lunatic by a few words.”

“Don’t say that!” he cried.

“Why not?” she asked.

“Because, I want you to make a rash vow. I want you to tie yourself to a lunatic with a few words.”

There was a silence, at the end of which she smiled suddenly and put her hand on his arm.

“I don’t think my vow will be so very rash — oh, for heavens sake!”

Gabriel Gale was standing on his head again.

THE DISADVANTAGE OF HAVING TWO HEADS

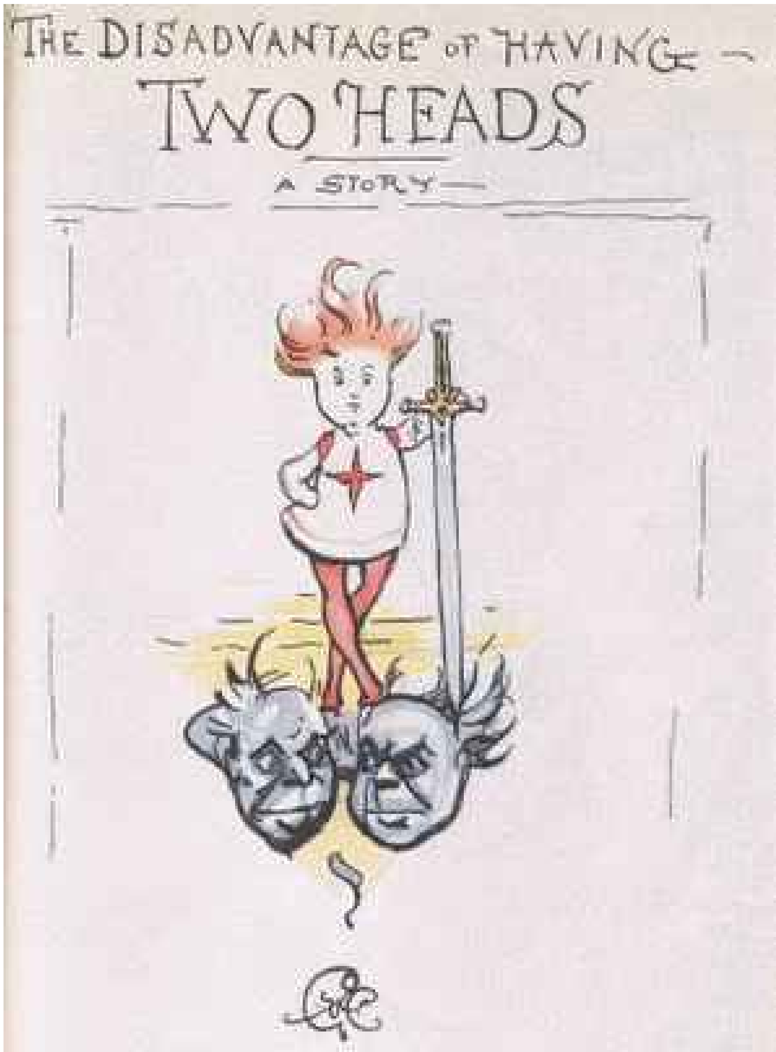
THE DISADVANTAGE OF HAVING —
TWO HEADS
A STORY

TO BERYL BLANCHE

DELAFORCE

FROM
G. K. Chesterton
HOPING THAT
SHOULD SHE EVER BE TEMPTED
TO ACCEPT THE OFFER
OF
TWO HEADS
THIS BRIEF NARRATIVE
MAY SUFFICE
TO DISSUADE HER FROM SO MISTAKEN
A COURSE.

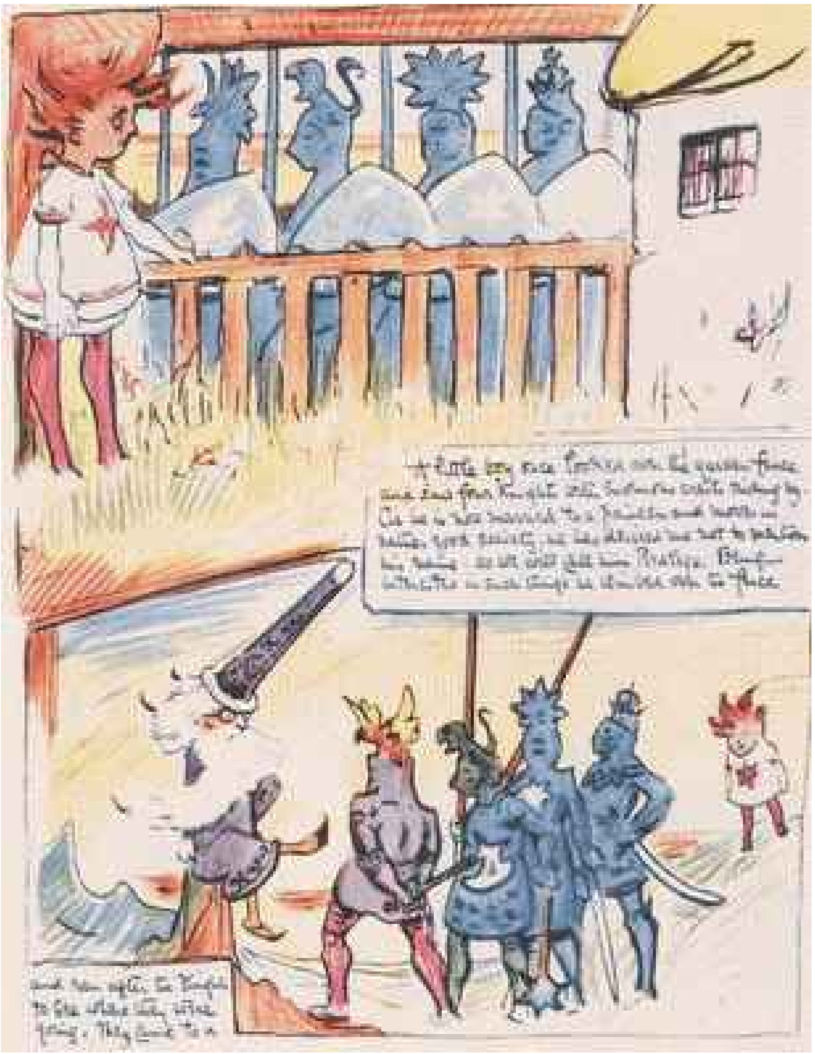

A little boy once looked over the garden fence and saw four knights with enormous crests riding by. As he is now married to a princess and moves in rather good society, he has desired me not to mention his name: so we will call him Redlegs. Being interested in such things he climbed over the fence and ran after the knights to see where they were going. They came to a very old man, who was sitting on the very sharp point of a rock, balancing himself. The knights, seeing by his sugar-loaf hat and white beard that he was a Magician, asked him where they could find the Princess Japonica (for so the Princess, who is a relative of mine, desires to be described). “The Princess Japonica,” replied the Magician, “lives in the Castle beyond the Last Wood in the World, in the place where it is always sunset. She cannot come and visit anyone, and no one can visit her, because there are only two roads to it: and the right hand road is held by a Giant with One Head, and the left hand road is held by a Giant with Two Heads.” Then the first knight said with great excitement (he was Bromley Smunk on the mother’s side, and you know what they are), “I will soon clear the giant out of the way. But I think I will confine myself to the giant with one head. For I am a humane man and desire to cut off as few heads as possible.”

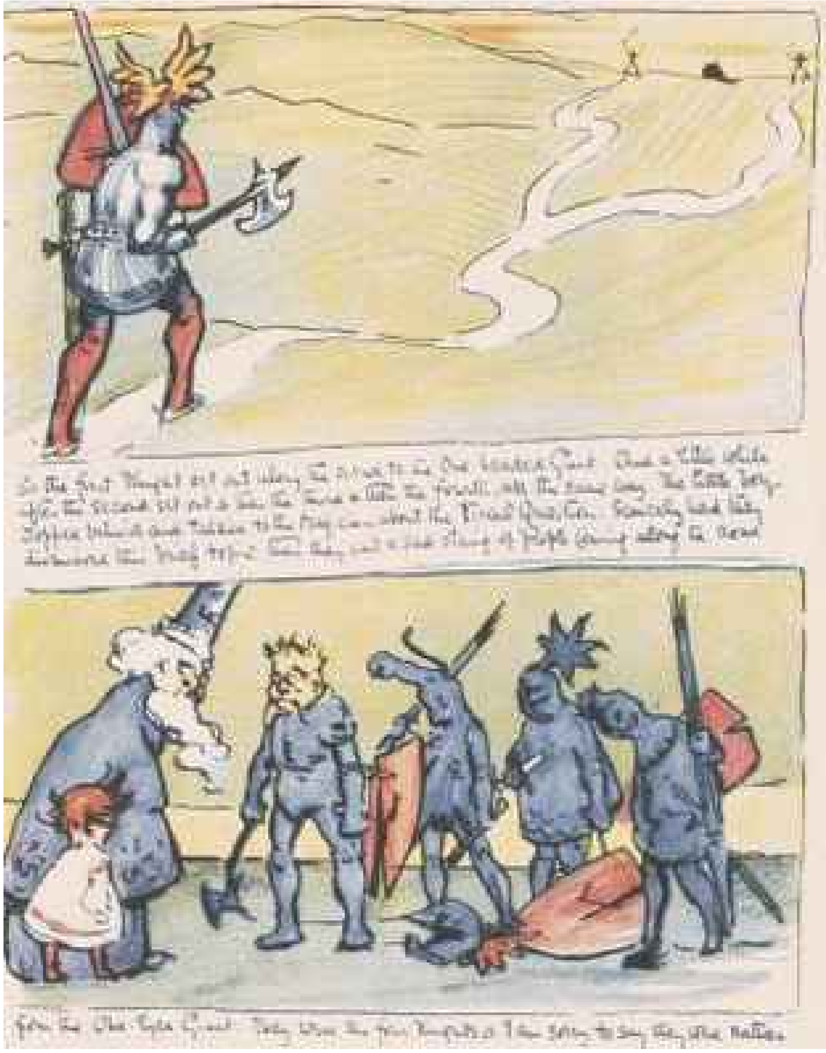

So the first knight set out along the road to the One-Headed Giant. And a little while after the second knight set out & then the third & then the fourth, all the same way. The little boy stopped behind and talked to the Magician about the Fiscal Question. Scarcely had they dismissed this brief topic, then they saw a sad string of people coming along the road from the One-Headed Giant. They were the four knights & and I am sorry to say that they were rather smashed. Then Redlegs said suddenly, “I should very much like to see a Two-Headed Giant. Lend me a sword.” Then they all roared with laughter and told him how silly he was to think that he could kill the Two-Headed Giant when they couldn’t kill even the One-Headed Giant. But he went off all the same, with his head in the air & he found the Two-Headed Giant on the great hills where it is always sunset. And then he found out a funny thing. The Two-Headed Giant did not rush at him and tear him to pieces as he had expected.

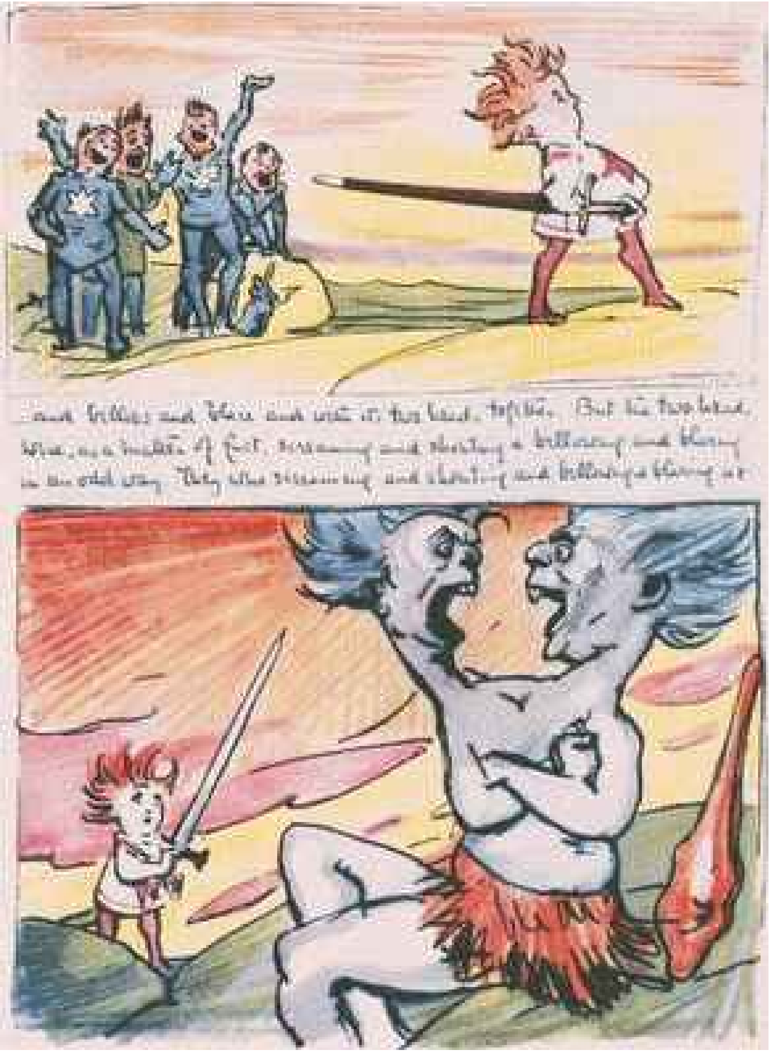

It did certainly scream & shout and bellow and blare and with its two heads together. But the two heads were, as a matter of fact, screaming and shouting & bellowing and blaring in an odd way. They were screaming and shouting and bellowing & blaring at each other. One head said, “You are a Pro-Boer”: the other said, with bitter humour, “You’re another”; in fact, the argument might have gone on for ever, growing more savage & brilliant every moment, but it was cut short by Redlegs, who took out the great sword he had borrowed from one of the knights & poked it sharpley into the giant & killed him. The huge creature sprawled & writhed for a moment in death & said “You are beneath my notice.” Then it died happily.

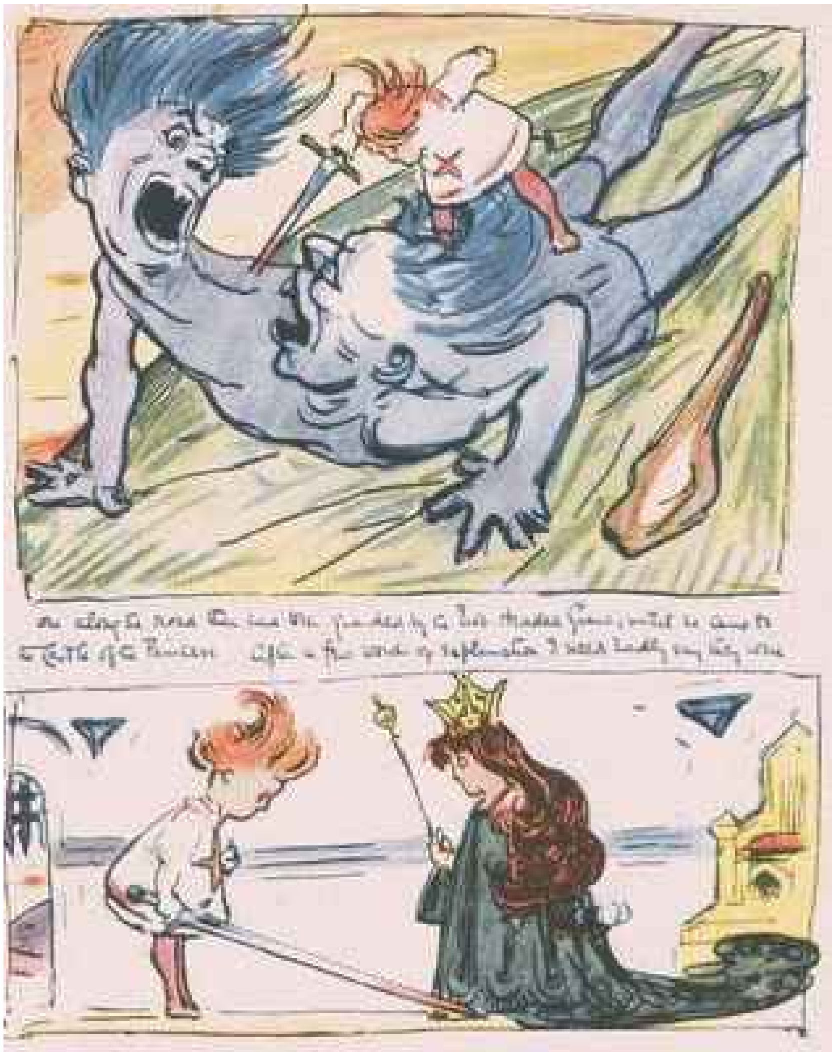

Redlegs went on along the road that had been guarded by the Two-Headed Giant, until he came to the Castle of the Princess. After a few words of explanation, I need hardly say they were married - and lived happily ever after. The Magician, who gave the bride away, said after the conclusion of the ceremony the following cabalistic and totally unintelligible words: “My son, the Giant who had one head was stronger than the Giant who had two. When you grow up there will come to you other magicians who will say, ‘[Something in Greek; I don’t have the font for it, and don’t know what it says anyway]. Examine your soul, wretched kid. Cultivate a sense of the differentiations possible in a single psychology. Have nineteen religions suitable to different moods.’ My son, these will be wicked magicians; they will want to turn you into a two-headed giant.” Redlegs did not know what this meant and nor do I.

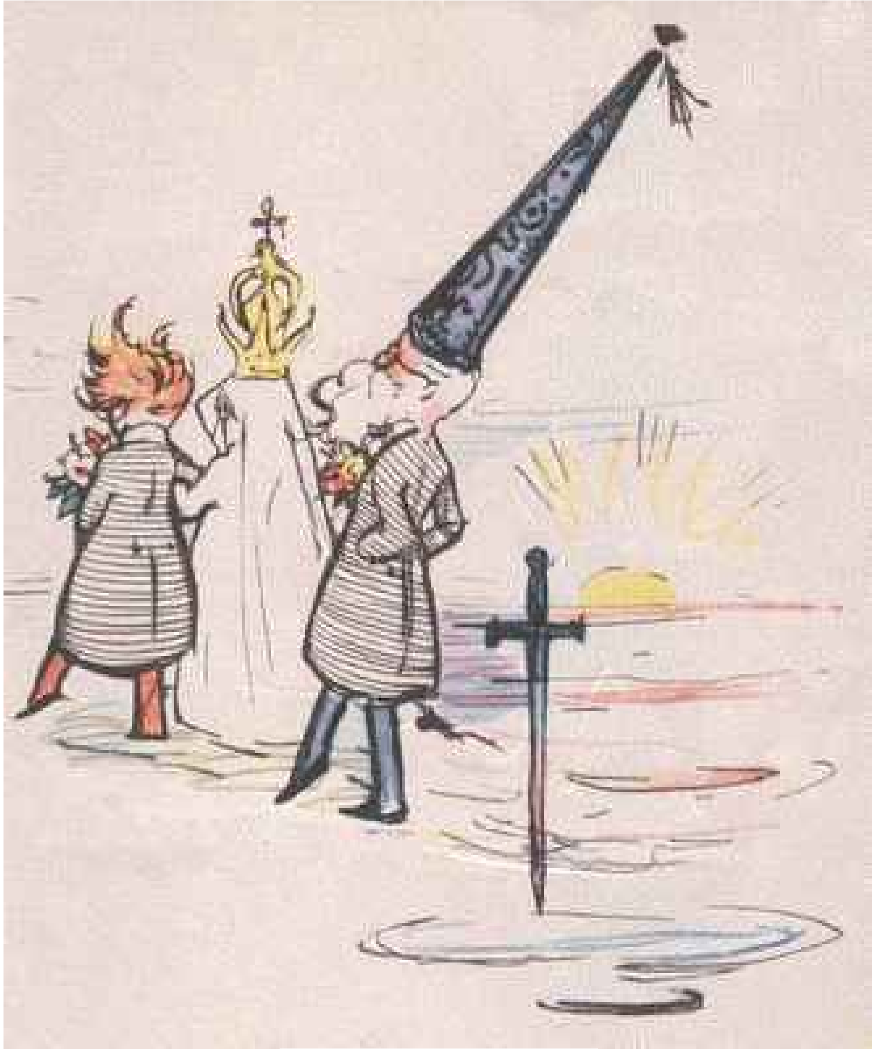

The Short Stories

11 Warwick Gardens, London — Chesterton’s home during his childhood until his marriage in 1909

LIST OF SHORT STORIES IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

THE TREMENDOUS ADVENTURES OF MAJOR BROWN
THE PAINFUL FALL OF A GREAT REPUTATION
THE AWFUL REASON OF THE VICAR’S VISIT
THE SINGULAR SPECULATION OF THE HOUSE-AGENT
THE NOTICEABLE CONDUCT OF PROFESSOR CHADD
THE ECCENTRIC SECLUSION OF THE OLD LADY
THE FACE IN THE TARGET
THE VANISHING PRINCE
THE SOUL OF THE SCHOOLBOY
THE BOTTOMLESS WELL
THE FAD OF THE FISHERMAN
THE HOLE IN THE WALL
THE TEMPLE OF SILENCE
THE VENGEANCE OF THE STATUE
THE UNPRESENTABLE APPEARANCE OF COLONEL CRANE
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THE YELLOW BIRD
WHEN DOCTORS AGREE

The Plays

Chesterton, as a young man

MAGIC

This play was presented under the management of Kenelm Foss at The Little Theatre, London, on November 7, 1913, with the following cast:

THE STRANGER - FRANKLIN DYALL
PATRICIA CARLEON - MISS GRACE
CROFT THE REV. CYRIL SMITH - O.P. HEGGIE
DR. GRIMTHORPE - WILLIAM FARREN
THE DUKE - FRED LEWIS
HASTINGS - FRANK RANDELL
MORRIS CARLEON - LYONEL WATTS

The Haymarket theatre where the play was first performed in 1913

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THE CHARACTERS

THE DUKE
DOCTOR GRIMTHORPE
THE REV. CYRIL SMITH
MORRIS CARLEON
HASTINGS, the Duke’s Secretary
THE STRANGER PATRICIA CARLEON

The action takes place in the Duke’s Drawing-room.

THE PRELUDE

SCENE: A plantation of thin young trees, in a misty and rainy twilight; some woodland blossom showing the patches on the earth between the stems.

THE STRANGER is discovered, a cloaked figure with a pointed hood. His costume might belong to modern or any other time, and the conical hood is so drawn over the head that little can be seen of the face.

A distant voice, a woman’s, is heard, half-singing, half-chanting, unintelligible words. The cloaked figure raises its head and listens with interest. The song draws nearer and *PATRICIA CARLEON* enters. She is dark and slight, and has a dreamy expression. Though she is artistically dressed, her hair is a little wild. She has a broken branch of some flowering tree in her hand. She does not notice the stranger, and though he has watched her with interest, makes no sign. Suddenly she perceives him and starts back.

PATRICIA. Oh! Who are you?

STRANGER. Ah! Who am I? [Commences to mutter to himself, and maps out the ground with his staff.]

I have a hat, but not to wear; I wear a sword, but not to slay, And ever in my bag I bear A pack of cards, but not to play.

PATRICIA. What are you? What are you saying?

STRANGER. It is the language of the fairies, O daughter of Eve.

PATRICIA. But I never thought fairies were like you. Why, you are taller than I am.

STRANGER. We are of such stature as we will. But the elves grow small, not large, when they would mix with mortals.

PATRICIA. You mean they are beings greater than we are.

STRANGER. Daughter of men, if you would see a fairy as he truly is, look for his head above all the stars and his feet amid the floors of the sea. Old women have taught you that the fairies are too small to be seen. But I tell you the fairies are too mighty to be seen. For they are the elder gods before whom the giants were like pigmies. They are the Elemental Spirits, and any one of them is larger than the world. And you look for them in acorns and on toadstools and wonder that you never see them.

PATRICIA. But you come in the shape and size of a man?

STRANGER. Because I would speak with a woman.

PATRICIA. [Drawing back in awe.] I think you are growing taller as you speak.

ACT I

[*The scene appears to fade away, and give place to the milieu of* ACT ONE, the Duke's drawing-room, an apartment with open French windows or any opening large enough to show a garden and one house fairly near. It is evening, and there is a red lamp lighted in the house beyond. The REV. CYRIL SMITH is sitting with hat and umbrella beside him, evidently a visitor. He is a young man with the highest of High Church dog-collars and all the qualities of a restrained fanatic. He is one of the Christian Socialist sort and takes his priesthood seriously. He is an honest man, and not an ass.

[*To him enters* MR. HASTINGS with papers in his hand.

HASTINGS. Oh, good evening. You are Mr. Smith. [Pause.] I mean you are the Rector, I think.

SMITH. I am the Rector.

HASTINGS. I am the Duke’s secretary. His Grace asks me to say that he hopes to see you very soon; but he is engaged just now with the Doctor.

SMITH. Is the Duke ill?

HASTINGS. [Laughing.] Oh, no; the Doctor has come to ask him to help some cause or other. The Duke is never ill.

SMITH. Is the Doctor with him now?

HASTINGS. Why, strictly speaking, he is not. The Doctor has gone over the road to fetch a paper connected with his proposal. But he hasn’t far to go, as you can see. That’s his red lamp at the end of his grounds.

SMITH. Yes, I know. I am much obliged to you. I will wait as long as is necessary.

HASTINGS. [Cheerfully.] Oh, it won’t be very long.

[Exit.

[*Enter by the garden doors* DR. GRIMTHORPE reading an open paper. He is an old-fashioned practitioner, very much of a gentleman and very carefully dressed in a slightly antiquated style. He is about sixty years old and might have been a friend of Huxley’s.

DOCTOR. [Folding up the paper.] I beg your pardon, sir, I did not notice there was anyone here.

SMITH. [Amicably.] I beg yours. A new clergyman cannot expect to be expected. I only came to see the Duke about some local affairs.

DOCTOR. [Smiling.] And so, oddly enough, did I. But I suppose we should both like to get hold of him by a separate ear.

SMITH. Oh, there’s no disguise as far as I’m concerned. I’ve joined this league for starting a model public-house in the parish; and in plain words, I’ve come to ask his Grace for a subscription to it.

DOCTOR. [Grimly.] And, as it happens, I have joined in the petition against the erection of a model public-house in this parish. The similarity of our position grows with every instant.

SMITH. Yes, I think we must have been twins.

DOCTOR. [More good-humouredly.] Well, what is a model public-house? Do you mean a toy?

SMITH. I mean a place where Englishmen can get decent drink and drink it decently. Do you call that a toy?

DOCTOR. No; I should call that a conjuring trick. Or, in apology to your cloth, I will say a miracle.

SMITH. I accept the apology to my cloth. I am doing my duty as a priest. How can the Church have a right to make men fast if she does not allow them to feast?

DOCTOR. [Bitterly.] And when you have done feasting them, you will send them to me to be cured.

SMITH. Yes; and when you've done curing them you'll send them to me to be buried.

DOCTOR. [After a pause, laughing.] Well, you have all the old doctrines. It is only fair you should have all the old jokes too.

SMITH. [Laughing also.] By the way, you call it a conjuring trick that poor people should drink moderately.

DOCTOR. I call it a chemical discovery that alcohol is not a food.

SMITH. You don't drink wine yourself?

DOCTOR. [Mildly startled.] Drink wine! Well — what else is there to drink?

SMITH. So drinking decently is a conjuring trick that you can do, anyhow?

DOCTOR. [Still good-humouredly.] Well, well, let us hope so. Talking about conjuring tricks, there is to be conjuring and all kinds of things here this afternoon.

SMITH. Conjuring? Indeed? Why is that?

Enter HASTINGS with a letter in each hand.

HASTINGS. His Grace will be with you presently. He asked me to deal with the business matter first of all.

[He gives a note to each of them.

SMITH. [*Turning eagerly to the* DOCTOR.] But this is rather splendid. The Duke's given L50 to the new public-house.

HASTINGS. The Duke is very liberal.

[Collects papers.

DOCTOR. [Examining his cheque.] Very. But this is rather curious. He has also given L50 to the league for opposing the new public-house.

HASTINGS. The Duke is very liberal-minded.

[Exit.

SMITH. [Staring at his cheque.] Liberal-minded!... Absent-minded, I should call it.

DOCTOR. [Sitting down and lighting a cigar.] Well, yes. The Duke does suffer a little from absence [*puts his cigar in his mouth and pulls during the pause*] of mind. He is all for compromise. Don't you know the kind of man who, when you talk to him about the five best breeds of dog, always ends up by buying a mongrel? The Duke is the kindest of men, and always trying to please everybody. He generally finishes by pleasing nobody.

SMITH. Yes; I think I know the sort of thing.

DOCTOR. Take this conjuring, for instance. You know the Duke has two wards who are to live with him now?

SMITH. Yes. I heard something about a nephew and niece from Ireland.

DOCTOR. The niece came from Ireland some months ago, but the nephew comes back from America to-night. [He gets up abruptly and walks about the room.] I think I will tell you all about it. In spite of your precious public-house you seem to me to be a sane man. And I fancy I shall want all the sane men I can get to-night.

SMITH. [Rising also.] I am at your service. Do you know, I rather guessed you did not come here only to protest against my precious public-house.

DOCTOR. [Striding about in subdued excitement.] Well, you guessed right. I was family physician to the Duke's brother in Ireland. I knew the family pretty well.

SMITH. [Quietly.] I suppose you mean you knew something odd about the family?

DOCTOR. Well, they saw fairies and things of that sort.

SMITH. And I suppose, to the medical mind, seeing fairies means much the same as seeing snakes?

DOCTOR. [With a sour smile.] Well, they saw them in Ireland. I suppose it's quite correct to see fairies in Ireland. It's like gambling at Monte Carlo. It's quite respectable. But I do draw the line at their seeing fairies in England. I do object to their bringing their ghosts and goblins and witches into the poor Duke's own back garden and within a yard of my own red lamp. It shows a lack of tact.

SMITH. But I do understand that the Duke's nephew and niece see witches and fairies between here and your lamp.

[He walks to the garden window and looks out.

DOCTOR. Well, the nephew has been in America. It stands to reason you can't see fairies in America. But there is this sort of superstition in the family, and I am not easy in my mind about the girl.

SMITH. Why, what does she do?

DOCTOR. Oh, she wanders about the park and the woods in the evenings. Damp evenings for choice. She calls it the Celtic twilight. I've no use for the Celtic twilight myself. It has a tendency to get on the chest. But what is worse, she is always talking about meeting somebody, some elf or wizard or something. I don't like it at all.

SMITH. Have you told the Duke?

DOCTOR. [With a grim smile.] Oh, yes, I told the Duke. The result was the conjurer.

SMITH. [With amazement.] The *conjurer*?

DOCTOR. [Puts down his cigar in the ash-tray.] The Duke is indescribable. He will be here presently, and you shall judge for yourself. Put two or three facts or ideas before him, and the thing he makes out of them is always something that seems to have nothing to do with it. Tell any other human being about a girl dreaming of the fairies and her practical brother from America, and he would settle it in some obvious way and satisfy some one: send her to America or let her have her fairies in Ireland. Now the Duke thinks a conjurer would just meet the case. I suppose he vaguely thinks it would brighten things up, and somehow satisfy the believers' interest in supernatural things and the unbelievers' interest in smart things. As a matter of fact the unbeliever thinks the conjurer's a fraud, and the believer thinks he's a fraud, too. The conjurer satisfies nobody. That is why he satisfies the Duke.

[*Enter the* DUKE, *with* HASTINGS, carrying papers. The *DUKE* is a healthy, hearty man in tweeds, with a rather wandering eye. In the present state of the peerage it is necessary to explain that the *DUKE*, though an ass, is a gentleman.

DUKE. Good-morning, Mr. Smith. So sorry to have kept you waiting, but we’re rather in a rush to-day. [*Turns to* HASTINGS, who has gone over to a table with the papers.] You know Mr. Carleon is coming this afternoon?

HASTINGS. Yes, your Grace. His train will be in by now. I have sent the trap.

DUKE. Thank you. [Turning to the other two.] My nephew, Dr. Grimthorpe, Morris, you know, Miss Carleon’s brother from America. I hear he’s been doing great things out there. Petrol, or something. Must move with the times, eh?

DOCTOR. I’m afraid Mr. Smith doesn’t always agree with moving with the times.

DUKE. Oh, come, come! Progress, you know, progress! Of course I know how busy you are; you mustn’t overwork yourself, you know. Hastings was telling me you laughed over those subscriptions of mine. Well, well, I believe in looking at both sides of a question, you know. Aspects, as old Buffle called them. Aspects. [With an all-embracing gesture of the arm.] You represent the tendency to drink in moderation, and you do good in *your* way. The Doctor represents the tendency not to drink at all; and he does good in *his* way. We can’t be Ancient Britons, you know.

[*A prolonged and puzzled silence, such as always follows the more abrupt of the* DUKE’S associations or disassociations of thought.

SMITH. [At last, faintly.] Ancient Britons....

DOCTOR. [*To* SMITH in a low voice.] Don’t bother. It’s only his broad-mindedness.

DUKE. [With unabated cheerfulness.] I saw the place you’re putting up for it, Mr. Smith. Very good work. Very good work, indeed. Art for the people, eh? I particularly liked that woodwork over the west door — I’m glad to see you’re using the new sort of graining ... why, it all reminds one of the French Revolution.

[Another silence. As the *DUKE* lounges alertly about the room, *SMITH* speaks to the *DOCTOR* in an undertone.

SMITH. Does it remind you of the French Revolution?

DOCTOR. As much as of anything else. His Grace never reminds me of anything.

[A young and very high American voice is heard calling in the garden. "Say, could somebody see to one of these trunks?"

[MR. HASTINGS goes out into the garden. He returns with *MORRIS CARLEON*, a very young man: hardly more than a boy, but with very grown-up American dress and manners. He is dark, smallish, and active; and the racial type under his Americanism is Irish.

MORRIS. [Humorously, as he puts in his head at the window.] See here, does a Duke live here?

DOCTOR. [Who is nearest to him, with great gravity.] Yes, only one.

MORRIS. I reckon he's the one I want, anyhow. I'm his nephew.

[*The* DUKE, *who is ruminating in the foreground, with one eye rather off, turns at the voice and shakes* MORRIS warmly by the hand.

DUKE. Delighted to see you, my dear boy. I hear you've been doing very well for yourself.

MORRIS. [Laughing.] Well, pretty well, Duke; and better still for Paul T. Vandam, I guess. I manage the old man's mines out in Arizona, you know.

DUKE. [Shaking his head sagaciously.] Ah, very go-ahead man! Very go-ahead methods, I'm told. Well, I dare say he does a great deal of good with his money. And we can't go back to the Spanish Inquisition.

[Silence, during which the three men look at each other.

MORRIS. [Abruptly.] And how's Patricia?

DUKE. [A little hazily.] Oh, she’s very well, I think. She....

[He hesitates slightly.

MORRIS. [Smiling.] Well, then, where’s Patricia?

[*There is a slightly embarrassed pause, and the* DOCTOR speaks.

DOCTOR. Miss Carleon is walking about the grounds, I think.

[MORRIS goes to the garden doors and looks out.

MORRIS. It’s a mighty chilly night to choose. Does my sister commonly select such evenings to take the air — and the damp?

DOCTOR. [After a pause.] If I may say so, I quite agree with you. I have often taken the liberty of warning your sister against going out in all weathers like this.

DUKE. [Expansively waving his hands about.] The artist temperament! What I always call the artistic temperament! Wordsworth, you know, and all that.

[Silence.

MORRIS. [Staring.] All what?

DUKE. [Continuing to lecture with enthusiasm.] Why, everything’s temperament, you know! It’s her temperament to see the fairies. It’s my temperament not to see the fairies. Why, I’ve walked all round the grounds twenty times and never saw a fairy. Well, it’s like that about this wizard or whatever she calls it. For her there is somebody there. For us there would not be somebody there. Don’t you see?

MORRIS. [Advancing excitedly.] Somebody there! What do you mean?

DUKE. [Airily.] Well, you can’t quite call it a man.

MORRIS. [Violently.] A man!

DUKE. Well, as old Buffle used to say, what is a man?

MORRIS. [With a strong rise of the American accent.] With your permission, Duke, I eliminate old Buffle. Do you mean that anybody has had the tarnation coolness to suggest that some man....

DUKE. Oh, not a *man*, you know. A magician, something mythical, you know.

SMITH. Not a *man*, but a medicine man.

DOCTOR. [Grimly.] I am a medicine man.

MORRIS. And you don’t look mythical, Doc.

[He bites his finger and begins to pace restlessly up and down the room.

DUKE. Well, you know, the artistic temperament....

MORRIS. [Turning suddenly.] See here, Duke! In most commercial ways we’re a pretty forward country. In these moral ways we’re content to be a pretty backward country. And if you ask me whether I like my sister walking about the woods on a night like this! Well, I don’t.

DUKE. I am afraid you Americans aren’t so advanced as I’d hoped. Why! as old Buffle used to say....

[As he speaks a distant voice is heard singing in the garden; it comes nearer and nearer, and *SMITH* turns suddenly to the DOCTOR.

SMITH. Whose voice is that?

DOCTOR. It is no business of mine to decide!

MORRIS. [Walking to the window.] You need not trouble. I know who it is.

Enter PATRICIA CARLEON

[Still agitated.] Patricia, where have you been?

PATRICIA. [Rather wearily.] Oh! in Fairyland.

DOCTOR. [Genially.] And whereabouts is that?

PATRICIA. It’s rather different from other places. It’s either nowhere or it’s wherever you are.

MORRIS. [Sharply.] Has it any inhabitants?

PATRICIA. Generally only two. Oneself and one’s shadow. But whether he is my shadow or I am his shadow is never found out.

MORRIS. He? Who?

PATRICIA. [Seeming to understand his annoyance for the first time, and smiling.] Oh, you needn’t get conventional about it, Morris. He is not a mortal.

MORRIS. What’s his name?

PATRICIA. We have no names there. You never really know anybody if you know his name.

MORRIS. What does he look like?

PATRICIA. I have only met him in the twilight. He seems robed in a long cloak, with a peaked cap or hood like the elves in my nursery stories. Sometimes when I look out of the window here, I see him passing round this house like a shadow; and see his pointed hood, dark against the sunset or the rising of the moon.

SMITH. What does he talk about?

PATRICIA. He tells me the truth. Very many true things. He is a wizard.

MORRIS. How do you know he’s a wizard? I suppose he plays some tricks on you.

PATRICIA. I should know he was a wizard if he played no tricks. But once he stooped and picked up a stone and cast it into the air, and it flew up into God’s heaven like a bird.

MORRIS. Was that what first made you think he was a wizard?

PATRICIA. Oh, no. When I first saw him he was tracing circles and pentacles in the grass and talking the language of the elves.

MORRIS. [Sceptically.] Do you know the language of the elves?

PATRICIA. Not until I heard it.

MORRIS. [Lowering his voice as if for his sister, but losing patience so completely that he talks much louder than he imagines.] See here, Patricia, I reckon this kind of thing is going to be the limit. I’m just not going to have you let in by some blamed tramp or fortune-teller because you choose to read minor poetry about the fairies. If this gipsy or whatever he is troubles you again....

DOCTOR. [*Putting his hand on* MORRIS’S shoulder.] Come, you must allow a little more for poetry. We can’t all feed on nothing but petrol.

DUKE. Quite right, quite right. And being Irish, don’t you know, Celtic, as old Buffle used to say, charming songs, you know, about the Irish girl who has a plaid shawl — and a Banshee. [Sighs profoundly.] Poor old Gladstone!

[Silence as usual.

SMITH. [*Speaking to* DOCTOR.] I thought you yourself considered the family superstition bad for the health?

DOCTOR. I consider a family superstition is better for the health than a family quarrel. [*He walks casually across to* PATRICIA.] Well, it must be nice to be young and still see all those stars and sunsets. We old buffers won’t be too strict with you if your view of things sometimes gets a bit — mixed up, shall we say? If the stars get loose about the grass by mistake; or if, once or twice, the sunset gets into the east. We should only say, “Dream as much as you like. Dream for all mankind. Dream for us who can dream no longer. But do not quite forget the difference.”

PATRICIA. What difference?

DOCTOR. The difference between the things that are beautiful and the things that are there. That red lamp over my door isn’t beautiful; but it’s there. You might even come to be glad it is there, when the stars of gold and silver have faded. I am an old man now, but some men are still glad to find my red star. I do not say they are the wise men.

PATRICIA. [Somewhat affected.] Yes, I know you are good to everybody. But don’t you think there may be floating and spiritual stars which will last longer than the red lamps?

SMITH. [With decision.] Yes. But they are fixed stars.

DOCTOR. The red lamp will last my time.

DUKE. Capital! Capital! Why, it’s like Tennyson. [Silence.] I remember when I was an undergrad....

[The red light disappears; no one sees it at first except *PATRICIA*, who points excitedly.

MORRIS. What’s the matter?

PATRICIA. The red star is gone.

MORRIS. Nonsense! [Rushes to the garden doors.] It’s only somebody standing in front of it. Say, Duke, there’s somebody standing in the garden.

PATRICIA. [Calmly.] I told you he walked about the garden.

MORRIS. If it’s that fortune-teller of yours....

[*Disappears into the garden, followed by the* DOCTOR.

DUKE. [Staring.] Somebody in the garden! Really, this Land Campaign....

[Silence.

[MORRIS reappears rather breathless.

MORRIS. A spry fellow, your friend. He slipped through my hands like a shadow.

PATRICIA. I told you he was a shadow.

MORRIS. Well, I guess there's going to be a shadow hunt. Got a lantern, Duke?

PATRICIA. Oh, you need not trouble. He will come if I call him.

[She goes out into the garden and calls out some half-chanted and unintelligible words, somewhat like the song preceding her entrance. The red light reappears; and there is a slight sound as of fallen leaves shuffled by approaching feet. The cloaked *STRANGER* with the pointed hood is seen standing outside the garden doors.

PATRICIA. You may enter all doors.

[*The figure comes into the room*

MORRIS. [Shutting the garden doors behind him.] Now, see here, wizard, we've got you. And we know you're a fraud.

SMITH. [Quietly.] Pardon me, I do not fancy that we know that. For myself I must confess to something of the Doctor's agnosticism.

MORRIS. [Excited, and turning almost with a snarl.] I didn't know you parsons stuck up for any fables but your own.

SMITH. I stick up for the thing every man has a right to. Perhaps the only thing that every man has a right to.

MORRIS. And what is that?

SMITH. The benefit of the doubt. Even your master, the petroleum millionaire, has a right to that. And I think he needs it more.

MORRIS. I don’t think there’s much doubt about the question, Minister. I’ve met this sort of fellow often enough — the sort of fellow who wheedles money out of girls by telling them he can make stones disappear.

DOCTOR. [*To the* STRANGER.] Do you say you can make stones disappear?

STRANGER. Yes. I can make stones disappear.

MORRIS. [Roughly.] I reckon you’re the kind of tough who knows how to make a watch and chain disappear.

STRANGER. Yes; I know how to make a watch and chain disappear.

MORRIS. And I should think you were pretty good at disappearing yourself.

STRANGER. I have done such a thing.

MORRIS. [With a sneer.] Will you disappear now?

STRANGER. [After reflection.] No, I think I’ll appear instead. [He throws back his hood, showing the head of an intellectual-looking man, young but rather worn. Then he unfastens his cloak and throws it off, emerging in complete modern evening dress. He advances down the room towards the *DUKE,* taking out his watch as he does so.] Good-evening, your Grace. I’m afraid I’m rather too early for the performance. But this gentleman [*with a gesture towards* MORRIS] seemed rather impatient for it to begin.

DUKE. [Rather at a loss.] Oh, good-evening. Why, really — are you the...?

STRANGER. [Bowing.] Yes. I am the Conjurer.

[*There is general laughter, except from* PATRICIA. *As the others mingle in talk, the* STRANGER goes up to her.

STRANGER. [Very sadly.] I am very sorry I am not a wizard.

PATRICIA. I wish you were a thief instead.

STRANGER. Have I committed a worse crime than thieving?

PATRICIA. You have committed the cruellest crime, I think, that there is.

STRANGER. And what is the cruellest crime?

PATRICIA. Stealing a child’s toy.

STRANGER. And what have I stolen?

PATRICIA. A fairy tale.

CURTAIN

ACT II

The same room lighted more brilliantly an hour later in the evening. On one side a table covered with packs of cards, pyramids, etc., at which the *CONJURER* in evening dress is standing quietly setting out his tricks. A little more in the foreground the DUKE; *and* HASTINGS with a number of papers.

HASTINGS. There are only a few small matters. Here are the programmes of the entertainment your Grace wanted. Mr. Carleon wishes to see them very much.

DUKE. Thanks, thanks. [Takes the programmes.]

HASTINGS. Shall I carry them for your Grace?

DUKE. No, no; I shan't forget, I shan't forget. Why, you've no idea how businesslike I am. We have to be, you know. [Vaguely.] I know you're a bit of a Socialist; but I assure you there's a good deal to do — stake in the country, and all that. Look at remembering faces now! The King never forgets faces. [Waves the programmes about.] I never forget faces. [*Catches sight of the* CONJURER and genially draws him into the discussion.] Why, the Professor here who performs before the King [*puts down the programmes*] — you see it on the caravans, you know — performs before the King almost every night, I suppose....

CONJURER. [Smiling.] I sometimes let his Majesty have an evening off. And turn my attention, of course, to the very highest nobility. But naturally I have performed before every sovereign potentate, white and black. There never was a conjurer who hadn't.

DUKE. That's right, that's right! And you'll say with me that the great business for a King is remembering people?

CONJURER. I should say it was remembering which people to remember.

DUKE. Well, well, now.... [Looks round rather wildly for something.] Being really businesslike....

HASTINGS. Shall I take the programmes for your Grace?

DUKE. [Picking them up.] No, no, I shan't forget. Is there anything else?

HASTINGS. I have to go down the village about the wire to Stratford. The only other thing at all urgent is the Militant Vegetarians.

DUKE. Ah! The Militant Vegetarians! You've heard of them, I'm sure. Won't obey the law [*to the* CONJURER] so long as the Government serves out meat.

CONJURER. Let them be comforted. There are a good many people who don't get much meat.

DUKE. Well, well, I'm bound to say they're very enthusiastic. Advanced, too — oh, certainly advanced. Like Joan of Arc.

[*Short silence, in which the* CONJURER stares at him.]

CONJURER. *Was* Joan of Arc a Vegetarian?

DUKE. Oh, well, it's a very high ideal, after all. The Sacredness of Life, you know — the Sacredness of Life. [Shakes his head.] But they carry it too far. They killed a policeman down in Kent.

CONJURER. Killed a policeman? How Vegetarian! Well, I suppose it was, so long as they didn't eat him.

HASTINGS. They are asking only for small subscriptions. Indeed, they prefer to collect a large number of half-crowns, to prove the popularity of their movement. But I should advise....

DUKE. Oh, give them three shillings, then.

HASTINGS. If I might suggest....

DUKE. Hang it all! We gave the Anti-Vegetarians three shillings. It seems only fair.

HASTINGS. If I might suggest anything, I think your Grace will be wise not to subscribe in this case. The Anti-Vegetarians have already used their funds to form gangs ostensibly to protect their own meetings. And if the Vegetarians use theirs to break up the meetings — well, it will look rather funny that we have paid roughs on both sides. It will be rather difficult to explain when it comes before the magistrate.

DUKE. But I shall be the magistrate. [CONJURER stares at him again.] That's the system, my dear Hastings, that's the advantage of the system. Not a logical system — no Rousseau in it — but see how well it works! I shall be the very best magistrate that could be on the Bench. The others would be biassed, you know. Old Sir Lawrence is a Vegetarian himself; and might be hard on the Anti-Vegetarian roughs. Colonel Crashaw would be sure to be hard on the Vegetarian roughs. But if I've paid both of 'em, of course I shan't be hard on either of 'em — and there you have it. Just perfect impartiality.

HASTINGS. [Restrainedly.] Shall I take the programmes, your Grace?

DUKE. [Heartily.] No, no; I won't forget 'em. [*Exit* HASTINGS.] Well, Professor, what's the news in the conjuring world?

CONJURER. I fear there is never any news in the conjuring world.

DUKE. Don't you have a newspaper or something? Everybody has a newspaper now, you know. The — er — Daily Sword-Swallower or that sort of thing?

CONJURER. No, I have been a journalist myself; but I think journalism and conjuring will always be incompatible.

DUKE. Incompatible — Oh, but that's where I differ — that's where I take larger views! Larger laws, as old Buffle said. Nothing's *incompatible,* you know — except husband and wife and so on; you must talk to Morris about that. It's wonderful the way incompatibility has gone forward in the States.

CONJURER. I only mean that the two trades rest on opposite principles. The whole point of being a conjurer is that you won’t explain a thing that has happened.

DUKE. Well, and the journalist?

CONJURER. Well, the whole point of being a journalist is that you do explain a thing that hasn’t happened.

DUKE. But you’ll want somewhere to discuss the new tricks.

CONJURER. There are no new tricks. And if there were we shouldn’t want ’em discussed.

DUKE. I’m afraid you’re not *really* advanced. Are you interested in modern progress?

CONJURER. Yes. We are interested in all tricks done by illusion.

DUKE. Well, well, I must go and see how Morris is. Pleasure of seeing you later.

[*Exit* DUKE, leaving the programmes.

CONJURER. Why are nice men such asses? [Turns to arrange the table.] That seems all right. The pack of cards that is a pack of cards. And the pack of cards that isn’t a pack of cards. The hat that looks like a gentleman’s hat. But which, in reality, is no gentleman’s hat. Only my hat; and I am not a gentleman. I am only a conjurer, and this is only a conjurer’s hat. I could not take off this hat to a lady. I can take rabbits out of it, goldfish out of it, snakes out of it. Only I mustn’t take my own head out of it. I suppose I’m a lower animal than a rabbit or a snake. Anyhow they can get out of the conjurer’s hat; and I can’t. I am a conjurer and nothing else but a conjurer. Unless I could show I was something else, and that would be worse.

[He begins to dash the cards rather irregularly about the table. Enter PATRICIA.

PATRICIA. [*Coldly*] I beg your pardon. I came to get some programmes. My uncle wants them.

[She walks swiftly across and takes up the programmes.

CONJURER. [Still dashing cards about the table.] Miss Carleon, might I speak to you a moment? [He puts his hands in his pockets, stares at the table; and his face assumes a sardonic expression.] The question is purely practical.

PATRICIA. [Pausing at the door.] I can hardly imagine what the question can be.

CONJURER. I am the question.

PATRICIA. And what have I to do with that?

CONJURER. You have everything to do with it. I am the question: you....

PATRICIA. [Angrily.] Well, what am I?

CONJURER. You are the answer.

PATRICIA. The answer to what?

CONJURER. [Coming round to the front of the table and sitting against it.] The answer to me. You think I'm a liar because I walked about the fields with you and said I could make stones disappear. Well, so I can. I'm a conjurer. In mere point of fact, it wasn't a lie. But if it had been a lie I should have told it just the same. I would have told twenty such lies. You may or may not know why.

PATRICIA. I know nothing about such lies.

[*She puts her hand on the handle of the door, but the* CONJURER, who is sitting on the table and staring at his boots, does not notice the action, and goes on as in a sincere soliloquy.

CONJURER. I don’t know whether you have any notion of what it means to a man like me to talk to a lady like you, even on false pretences. I am an adventurer. I am a blackguard, if one can earn the title by being in all the blackguard societies of the world. I have thought everything out by myself, when I was a guttersnipe in Fleet Street, or, lower still, a journalist in Fleet Street. Before I met you I never guessed that rich people ever thought at all. Well, that is all I have to say. We had some good conversations, didn’t we? I am a liar. But I told you a great deal of the truth.

[He turns and resumes the arrangement of the table.

PATRICIA. [Thinking.] Yes, you did tell me a great deal of the truth. You told me hundreds and thousands of truths. But you never told me the truth that one wants to know.

CONJURER. And what is that?

PATRICIA. [Turning back into the room.] You never told me the truth about yourself. You never told me you were only the Conjurer.

CONJURER. I did not tell you that because I do not even know it. I do not know whether I am only the Conjurer....

PATRICIA. What do you mean?

CONJURER. Sometimes I am afraid I am something worse than the Conjurer.

PATRICIA. [Seriously.] I cannot think of anything worse than a conjurer who does not call himself a conjurer.

CONJURER. [Gloomily.] There is something worse. [Rallying himself.] But that is not what I want to say. Do you really find that very unpardonable? Come, let me put you a case. Never mind about whether it is our case. A man spends his time incessantly in going about in third-class carriages to fifth-rate lodgings. He has to make up new tricks, new patter, new nonsense, sometimes every night of his life. Mostly he has to do it in the beastly black cities of the Midlands and the North, where he can’t get out into the country. Now and again he does it at some gentleman's country-house, where he can get out into the country. Well, you know that actors and orators and all sorts of people like to rehearse their effects in the open air if they can. [Smiles.] You know that story of the great statesman who was heard by his own gardener saying, as he paced the garden, "Had I, Mr. Speaker, received the smallest intimation that I could be called upon to speak this evening...." [PATRICIA controls a smile, and he goes on with overwhelming enthusiasm.] Well, conjurers are just the same. It takes some time to prepare an impromptu. A man like that walks about the woods and fields doing all his tricks beforehand, and talking all sorts of gibberish because he thinks he is alone. One evening this man found he was not alone. He found a very beautiful child was watching him.

PATRICIA. A child?

CONJURER. Yes. That was his first impression. He is an intimate friend of mine. I have known him all my life. He tells me he has since discovered she is not a child. She does not fulfil the definition.

PATRICIA. What is the definition of a child?

CONJURER. Somebody you can play with.

PATRICIA. [Abruptly.] Why did you wear that cloak with the hood up?

CONJURER. [Smiling.] I think it escaped your notice that it was raining.

PATRICIA. [Smiling faintly.] And what did this friend of yours do?

CONJURER. You have already told me what he did. He destroyed a fairy tale, for he created a fairy tale that he was bound to destroy. [Swinging round suddenly on the table.] But do you blame a man very much, Miss Carleon, if he enjoyed the only fairy tale he had had in his life? Suppose he said the silly circles he was drawing for practice were really magic circles? Suppose he said the bosh he was talking was the language of the elves? Remember, he has read fairy tales as much as you have. Fairy tales are the only democratic institutions. All the classes have heard all the fairy tales.

Do you blame him very much if he, too, tried to have a holiday in fairyland?

PATRICIA. [Simply.] I blame him less than I did. But I still say there can be nothing worse than false magic. And, after all, it was he who brought the false magic.

CONJURER. [Rising from his seat.] Yes. It was she who brought the real magic.

[*Enter* MORRIS, in evening-dress. He walks straight up to the conjuring-table; and picks up one article after another, putting each down with a comment.

MORRIS. I know that one. I know that. I know that. Let's see, that's the false bottom, I think. That works with a wire. I know that; it goes up the sleeve. That's the false bottom again. That's the substituted pack of cards — that....

PATRICIA. Really, Morris, you mustn't talk as if you knew everything.

CONJURER. Oh, I don't mind anyone knowing everything, Miss Carleon. There is something that is much more important than knowing how a thing is done.

MORRIS. And what's that?

CONJURER. Knowing how to do it.

MORRIS. [Becoming nasal again in anger.] That's so, eh? Being the high-toned conjurer because you can't any longer take all the sidewalk as a fairy.

PATRICIA. [Crossing the room and speaking seriously to her brother.] Really, Morris, you are very rude. And it's quite ridiculous to be rude. This gentleman was only practising some tricks by himself in the garden. [With a certain dignity.] If there was any mistake, it was mine. Come, shake hands, or whatever men do when they apologize. Don't be silly. He won't turn you into a bowl of goldfish.

MORRIS. [Reluctantly.] Well, I guess that's so. [Offering his hand.] Shake. [They shake hands.] And you won't turn me into a bowl of goldfish anyhow, Professor. I understand that when you do produce a bowl of goldfish, they are generally slips of carrot. That is so, Professor?

CONJURER. [Sharply.] Yes. [Produces a bowl of goldfish from his tail pockets and holds it under the other's nose.] Judge for yourself.

MORRIS. [In monstrous excitement.] Very good! Very good! But I know how that's done — I know how that's done. You have an india-rubber cap, you know, or cover....

CONJURER. Yes.

[Goes back gloomily to his table and sits on it, picking up a pack of cards and balancing it in his hand.

MORRIS. Ah, most mysteries are tolerably plain if you know the apparatus. [*Enter* DOCTOR *and* SMITH, talking with grave faces, but growing silent as they reach the group.] I guess I wish we had all the old apparatus of all the old Priests and Prophets since the beginning of the world. I guess most of the old miracles and that were a matter of just panel and wires.

CONJURER. I don't quite understand you. What old apparatus do you want so much?

MORRIS. [Breaking out with all the frenzy of the young free-thinker.] Well, sir, I just want that old apparatus that turned rods into snakes. I want those smart appliances, sir, that brought water out of a rock when old man Moses chose to hit it. I guess it's a pity we've lost the machinery. I would like to have those old conjurers here that called themselves Patriarchs and Prophets in your precious Bible....

PATRICIA. Morris, you mustn't talk like that.

MORRIS. Well, I don't believe in religion....

DOCTOR. [Aside.] Hush, hush. Nobody but women believe in religion.

PATRICIA. [Humorously.] I think this is a fitting opportunity to show you another ancient conjuring trick.

DOCTOR. Which one is that?

PATRICIA. The Vanishing Lady!

[*Exit* PATRICIA.

SMITH. There is one part of their old apparatus I regret especially being lost.

MORRIS. [Still excited.] Yes!

SMITH. The apparatus for writing the Book of Job.

MORRIS. Well, well, they didn’t know everything in those old times.

SMITH. No, and in those old times they knew they didn’t. [Dreamily.] Where shall wisdom be found, and what is the place of understanding?

CONJURER. Somewhere in America, I believe.

SMITH. [Still dreamily.] Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The deep sayeth it is not in me, the sea sayeth it is not with me. Death and destruction say we have heard tell of it. God understandeth the way thereof and He knoweth the place thereof. For He looketh to the ends of the earth and seeth under the whole Heaven. But to man He hath said: Behold the fear of the Lord that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding. [*Turns suddenly to the* DOCTOR.] How’s that for Agnosticism, Dr. Grimthorpe? What a pity that apparatus is lost.

MORRIS. Well, you may just smile how you choose, I reckon. But I say the Conjurer here could be the biggest man in the big blessed centuries if he could just show us how the Holy old tricks were done. We must say this for old man Moses, that he was in advance of his time. When he did the old tricks they were new tricks. He got the pull on the public. He could do his tricks before grown men, great bearded fighting men who could win battles and sing Psalms. But this modern conjuring is all behind the times. That’s why they only do it with schoolboys. There isn’t a trick on that table I don’t know. The whole trade’s as dead as mutton; and not half so satisfying. Why he [*pointing to the* CONJURER] brought out a bowl of goldfish just now — an old trick that anybody could do.

CONJURER. Oh, I quite agree. The apparatus is perfectly simple. By the way, let me have a look at those goldfish of yours, will you?

MORRIS. [Angrily.] I’m not a paid play-actor come here to conjure. I’m not here to do stale tricks; I’m here to see through ‘em. I say it’s an old trick and....

CONJURER. True. But as you said, we never show it except to schoolboys.

MORRIS. And may I ask you, Professor Hocus Pocus, or whatever your name is, whom you are calling a schoolboy?

CONJURER. I beg your pardon. Your sister will tell you I am sometimes mistaken about children.

MORRIS. I forbid you to appeal to my sister.

CONJURER. That is exactly what a schoolboy would do.

MORRIS. [With abrupt and dangerous calm.] I am not a schoolboy, Professor. I am a quiet business man. But I tell you in the country I come from, the hand of a quiet business man goes to his hip pocket at an insult like that.

CONJURER. [Fiercely.] Let it go to his pocket! I thought the hand of a quiet business man more often went to someone else’s pocket.

MORRIS. You....

[Puts his hand to his hip. The *DOCTOR* puts his hand on his shoulder.

DOCTOR. Gentlemen, I think you are both forgetting yourselves.

CONJURER. Perhaps. [His tone sinks suddenly to weariness.] I ask pardon for what I said. It was certainly in excess of the young gentleman’s deserts. [Sighs.] I sometimes rather wish I could forget myself.

MORRIS. [Sullenly, after a pause.] Well, the entertainment’s coming on; and you English don’t like a scene. I reckon I’ll have to bury the blamed old hatchet too.

DOCTOR. [With a certain dignity, his social type shining through his profession.] Mr. Carleon, you will forgive an old man, who knew your father well, if he doubts whether you are doing yourself justice in treating yourself as an American Indian, merely because you have lived in America. In my old friend Huxley’s time we of the middle classes disbelieved in reason and all sorts of things. But we did believe in good manners. It is a pity if the aristocracy can’t. I don’t like to hear you say you are a savage and have buried a tomahawk. I would rather hear you say, as your Irish ancestors would have said, that you have sheathed your sword with the dignity proper to a gentleman.

MORRIS. Very well. I’ve sheathed my sword with the dignity proper to a gentleman.

CONJURER. And I have sheathed my sword with the dignity proper to a conjurer.

MORRIS. How does the Conjurer sheath a sword?

CONJURER. Swallows it.

DOCTOR. Then we all agree there shall be no quarrel.

SMITH. May I say a word? I have a great dislike of a quarrel, for a reason quite beyond my duty to my cloth.

MORRIS. And what is that?

SMITH. I object to a quarrel because it always interrupts an argument. May I bring you back for a moment to the argument? You were saying that these modern conjuring tricks are simply the old miracles when they have once been found out. But surely another view is possible. When we speak of things being sham, we generally mean that they are imitations of things that are genuine. Take that Reynolds over there of the Duke’s great-grandfather. [Points to a picture on the wall.] If I were to say it was a copy....

MORRIS. Wal, the Duke’s real amiable; but I reckon you’d find what you call the interruption of an argument.

SMITH. Well, suppose I did say so, you wouldn’t take it as meaning that Sir Joshua Reynolds never lived. Why should sham miracles prove to us that real Saints and Prophets never lived. There may be sham magic and real magic also.

[*The* CONJURER raises his head and listens with a strange air of intentness.

SMITH. There may be turnip ghosts precisely because there are real ghosts. There may be theatrical fairies precisely because there are real fairies. You do not abolish the Bank of England by pointing to a forged bank-note.

MORRIS. I hope the Professor enjoys being called a forged bank-note.

CONJURER. Almost as much as being called the Prospectus of some American Companies.

DOCTOR. Gentlemen! Gentlemen!

CONJURER. I am sorry.

MORRIS. Wal, let’s have the argument first, then I guess we can have the quarrel afterwards. I’ll clean this house of some encumbrances. See here, Mr. Smith, I’m not putting anything on your real miracle notion. I say, and Science says, that there’s a cause for everything. Science will find out that cause, and sooner or later your old miracle will look mighty mean. Sooner or later Science will botanise a bit on your turnip ghosts; and make you look turnips yourselves for having taken any. I say....

DOCTOR. [*In a low voice to* SMITH.] I don’t like this peaceful argument of yours. The boy is getting much too excited.

MORRIS. You say old man Reynolds lived; and Science don’t say no. [He turns excitedly to the picture.] But I guess he’s dead now; and you’ll no more raise your Saints and Prophets from the dead than you’ll raise the Duke’s great-grandfather to dance on that wall.

[The picture begins to sway slightly to and fro on the wall.

DOCTOR. Why, the picture is moving!

MORRIS. [*Turning furiously on the* CONJURER.] You were in the room before us. Do you reckon that will take us in? You can do all that with wires.

CONJURER. [Motionless and without looking up from the table.] Yes, I could do all that with wires.

MORRIS. And you reckoned I shouldn’t know. [Laughs with a high crowing laugh.] That’s how the derned dirty Spiritualists do all their tricks. They say they can make the furniture move of itself. If it does move they move it; and we mean to know how.

[A chair falls over with a slight crash.

[MORRIS almost staggers and momentarily fights for breath and words.

MORRIS. You ... why ... that ... every one knows that ... a sliding plank. It can be done with a sliding plank.

CONJURER. [Without looking up.] Yes. It can be done with a sliding plank.

[*The* DOCTOR *draws nearer to* MORRIS, who faces about, addressing him passionately.

MORRIS. You were right on the spot, Doc, when you talked about that red lamp of yours. That red lamp is the light of science that will put out all the lanterns of your turnip ghosts. It’s a consuming fire, Doctor, but it is the red light of the morning. [Points at it in exalted enthusiasm.] Your priests can no more stop that light from shining or change its colour and its radiance than Joshua could stop the sun and moon. [Laughs savagely.] Why, a real fairy in an elfin cloak strayed too near the lamp an hour or two ago; and it turned him into a common society clown with a white tie.

[The lamp at the end of the garden turns blue. They all look at it in silence.

MORRIS. [Splitting the silence on a high unnatural note.] Wait a bit! Wait a bit! I’ve got you! I’ll have you!... [He strides wildly up and down the room, biting his finger.] You put a wire ... no, that can’t be it....

DOCTOR. [Speaking to him soothingly.] Well, well, just at this moment we need not inquire....

MORRIS. [Turning on him furiously.] You call yourself a man of science, and you dare to tell me not to inquire!

SMITH. We only mean that for the moment you might let it alone.

MORRIS. [Violently.] No, Priest, I will not let it alone. [Pacing the room again.] Could it be done with mirrors? [He clasps his brow.] You have a mirror.... [Suddenly, with a shout.] I’ve got it! I’ve got it! Mixture of lights! Why not? If you throw a green light on a red light....

[Sudden silence.

SMITH. [*Quietly to the* DOCTOR.] You don’t get blue.

DOCTOR. [*Stepping across to the* CONJURER.] If you have done this trick, for God’s sake undo it.

[After a silence, the light turns red again.

MORRIS. [Dashing suddenly to the glass doors and examining them.] It’s the glass! You’ve been doing something to the glass!

[He stops suddenly and there is a long silence.

CONJURER. [Still without moving.] I don’t think you will find anything wrong with the glass.

MORRIS. [Bursting open the glass doors with a crash.] Then I’ll find out what’s wrong with the lamp.

[Disappears into the garden.

DOCTOR. It is still a wet night, I am afraid.

SMITH. Yes. And somebody else will be wandering about the garden now.

[*Through the broken glass doors* MORRIS can be seen marching backwards and forwards with swifter and swifter steps.

SMITH. I suppose in this case the Celtic twilight will not get on the chest.

DOCTOR. Oh, if it were only the chest!

Enter PATRICIA.

PATRICIA. Where is my brother?

[*There is an embarrassed silence, in which the* CONJURER answers.

CONJURER. I am afraid he is walking about in Fairyland.

PATRICIA. But he mustn’t go out on a night like this; it’s very dangerous!

CONJURER. Yes, it is very dangerous. He might meet a fairy.

PATRICIA. What do you mean?

CONJURER. You went out in this sort of weather and you met this sort of fairy, and so far it has only brought you sorrow.

PATRICIA. I am going out to find my brother.

[She goes out into the garden through the open doors.

SMITH. [After a silence, very suddenly.] What is that noise? She is not singing those songs to him, is she?

CONJURER. No. He does not understand the language of the elves.

SMITH. But what are all those cries and gasps I hear?

CONJURER. The normal noises, I believe, of a quiet business man.

DOCTOR. Sir, I can understand your being bitter, for I admit you have been uncivilly received; but to speak like that just now....

[PATRICIA reappears at the garden doors, very pale.

PATRICIA. Can I speak to the Doctor?

DOCTOR. My dear lady, certainly. Shall I fetch the Duke?

PATRICIA. I would prefer the Doctor.

SMITH. Can I be of any use?

PATRICIA. I only want the Doctor.

[*She goes out again, followed by* DR. GRIMTHORPE. The others look at each other.

SMITH. [Quietly.] That last was a wonderful trick of yours.

CONJURER. Thank you. I suppose you mean it was the only one you didn't see through.

SMITH. Something of the kind, I confess. Your last trick was the best trick I have ever seen. It is so good that I wish you had not done it.

CONJURER. And so do I.

SMITH. How do you mean? Do you wish you had never been a conjurer?

CONJURER. I wish I had never been born.

[*Exit* CONJURER.

[A silence. The *DOCTOR* enters, very grave.

DOCTOR. It is all right so far. We have brought him back.

SMITH. [Drawing near to him.] You told me there was mental trouble with the girl.

DOCTOR. [Looking at him steadily.] No. I told you there was mental trouble in the family.

SMITH. [After a silence.] Where is Mr. Morris Carleon?

DOCTOR. I have got him into bed in the next room. His sister is looking after him.

SMITH. His sister! Oh, then do you believe in fairies?

DOCTOR. Believe in fairies? What do you mean?

SMITH. At least you put the person who does believe in them in charge of the person who doesn't.

DOCTOR. Well, I suppose I do.

SMITH. You don't think she'll keep him awake all night with fairy tales?

DOCTOR. Certainly not.

SMITH. You don't think she'll throw the medicine-bottle out of window and administer — er — a dewdrop, or anything of that sort? Or a four-leaved clover, say?

DOCTOR. No; of course not.

SMITH. I only ask because you scientific men are a little hard on us clergymen. You don't believe in a priesthood; but you'll admit I'm more really a priest than this Conjurer is really a magician. You've been talking a lot about the Bible and the Higher Criticism. But even by the Higher Criticism the Bible is older than the language of the elves — which was, as far as I can make out, invented this afternoon. But Miss Carleon believed in the wizard. Miss Carleon believed in the language of the elves. And you put her in charge of an invalid without a flicker of doubt: because you trust women.

DOCTOR. [Very seriously.] Yes, I trust women.

SMITH. You trust a woman with the practical issues of life and death, through sleepless hours when a shaking hand or an extra grain would kill.

DOCTOR. Yes.

SMITH. But if the woman gets up to go to early service at my church, you call her weak-minded and say that nobody but women can believe in religion.

DOCTOR. I should never call this woman weak-minded — no, by God, not even if she went to church.

SMITH. Yet there are many as strong-minded who believe passionately in going to church.

DOCTOR. Weren't there as many who believed passionately in Apollo?

SMITH. And what harm came of believing in Apollo? And what a mass of harm may have come of not believing in Apollo? Does it never strike you that doubt can be a madness, as well be faith? That asking questions may be a disease, as well as proclaiming doctrines? You talk of religious mania! Is there no such thing as irreligious mania? Is there no such thing in the house at this moment?

DOCTOR. Then you think no one should question at all.

SMITH. [With passion, pointing to the next room.] I think *that* is what comes of questioning! Why can't you leave the universe alone and let it mean what it likes? Why shouldn't the thunder be Jupiter? More men have made themselves silly by wondering what the devil it was if it wasn't Jupiter.

DOCTOR. [Looking at him.] Do you believe in your own religion?

SMITH. [Returning the look equally steadily.] Suppose I don't: I should still be a fool to question it. The child who doubts about Santa Claus has insomnia. The child who believes has a good night's rest.

DOCTOR. You are a Pragmatist.

Enter DUKE, absent-mindedly.

SMITH. That is what the lawyers call vulgar abuse. But I do appeal to practise. Here is a family over which you tell me a mental calamity hovers. Here is the boy who questions everything and a girl who can believe anything. Upon which has the curse fallen?

DUKE. Talking about the Pragmatists. I'm glad to hear.... Ah, very forward movement! I suppose Roosevelt now.... [Silence.] Well, we move you know, we move! First there was the Missing Link. [Silence.] No! *First* there was Protoplasm — and *then* there was the Missing Link; and Magna Carta and so on. [Silence.] Why, look at the Insurance Act!

DOCTOR. I would rather not.

DUKE. [Wagging a playful finger at him.] Ah, prejudice, prejudice! You doctors, you know! Well, I never had any myself.

[Silence.

DOCTOR. [Breaking the silence in unusual exasperation.] Any what?

DUKE. [Firmly.] Never had any Marconis myself. Wouldn't touch 'em. [Silence.] Well, I must speak to Hastings.

[*Exit* DUKE, aimlessly.

DOCTOR. [Exploding.] Well, of all the.... [*Turns to* SMITH.] You asked me just now which member of the family had inherited the family madness.

SMITH. Yes; I did.

DOCTOR. [In a low, emphatic voice.] On my living soul, I believe it must be the Duke.

CURTAIN

ACT III

Room partly darkened, a table with a lamp on it, and an empty chair. From room next door faint and occasional sounds of the tossing or talking of the invalid.

Enter DOCTOR GRIMTHORPE with a rather careworn air, and a medicine bottle in his hand. He puts it on the table, and sits down in the chair as if keeping a vigil.

Enter CONJURER, carrying his bag, and cloaked for departure. As he crosses the room the *DOCTOR* rises and calls after him.

DOCTOR. Forgive me, but may I detain you for one moment? I suppose you are aware that — [*he hesitates*] that there have been rather grave developments in the case of illness which happened after your performance. I would not say, of course, because of your performance.

CONJURER. Thank you.

DOCTOR. [Slightly encouraged, but speaking very carefully.] Nevertheless, mental excitement is necessarily an element of importance in physiological troubles, and your triumphs this evening were really so extraordinary that I cannot pretend to dismiss them from my patient's case. He is at present in a state somewhat analogous to delirium, but in which he can still partially ask and answer questions. The question he continually asks is how you managed to do your last trick.

CONJURER. Ah! My last trick!

DOCTOR. Now I was wondering whether we could make any arrangement which would be fair to you in the matter. Would it be possible for you to give me in confidence the means of satisfying this — this fixed idea he seems to have got. [He hesitates again, and picks his words more slowly.] This special condition of semi-delirious disputation is a rare one, and connected in my experience with rather unfortunate cases.

CONJURER. [Looking at him steadily.] Do you mean he is going mad?

DOCTOR. [Rather taken aback for the first time.] Really, you ask me an unfair question. I could not explain the fine shades of these things to a layman. And even if — if what you suggest were so, I should have to regard it as a professional secret.

CONJURER. [Still looking at him.] And don't you think you ask me a rather unfair question, Dr. Grimthorpe? If yours is a professional secret, is not mine a professional secret too? If you may hide truth from the world, why may not I? You don't tell your tricks. I don't tell my tricks.

DOCTOR. [With some heat.] Ours are not tricks.

CONJURER. [Reflectively.] Ah, no one can be sure of that till the tricks are told.

DOCTOR. But the public can see a doctor's cures as plain as....

CONJURER. Yes. As plain as they saw the red lamp over his door this evening.

DOCTOR. [After a pause.] Your secret, of course, would be strictly kept by every one involved.

CONJURER. Oh, of course. People in delirium always keep secrets strictly.

DOCTOR. No one sees the patient but his sister and myself.

CONJURER. [Starts slightly.] Yes, his sister. Is she very anxious?

DOCTOR. [In a lower voice.] What would you suppose?

[CONJURER throws himself into the chair, his cloak slipping back from his evening dress. He ruminates for a short space and then speaks.

CONJURER. Doctor, there are about a thousand reasons why I should not tell you how I really did that trick. But one will suffice, because it is the most practical of all.

DOCTOR. Well? And why shouldn't you tell me?

CONJURER. Because you wouldn't believe me if I did.

[*A silence, the* DOCTOR looking at him curiously.

[*Enter the* DUKE with papers in his hand. His usual gaiety of manner has a rather forced air, owing to the fact that by some vague sick-room associations he walks as if on tip-toe and begins to speak in a sort of loud or shrill whisper. This he fortunately forgets and falls into his more natural voice.

DUKE. [*To* CONJURER.] So very kind of you to have waited, Professor. I expect Dr. Grimthorpe has explained the little difficulty we are in much better than I could. Nothing like the medical mind for a scientific statement. [Hazily.] Look at Ibsen.

[Silence.

DOCTOR. Of course the Professor feels considerable reluctance in the matter. He points out that his secrets are an essential part of his profession.

DUKE. Of course, of course. Tricks of the trade, eh? Very proper, of course. Quite a case of *noblesse oblige* [Silence.] But I dare say we shall be able to find a way out of the matter. [*He turns to the* CONJURER.] Now, my dear sir, I hope you will not be offended if I say that this ought to be a business matter. We are asking you for a piece of your professional work and knowledge, and if I may have the pleasure of writing you a cheque....

CONJURER. I thank your Grace, I have already received my cheque from your secretary. You will find it on the counterfoil just after the cheque you so kindly gave to the Society for the Suppression of Conjuring.

DUKE. Now I don't want you to take it in that way. I want you to take it in a broader way. Free, you know. [With an expansive gesture.] Modern and all that! Wonderful man, Bernard Shaw!

[Silence.

DOCTOR. [With a slight cough, resuming.] If you feel any delicacy the payment need not be made merely to you. I quite respect your feelings in the matter.

DUKE. [Approvingly.] Quite so, quite so. Haven't you got a Cause or something? Everybody has a cause now, you know. Conjurers' widows or something of that kind.

CONJURER. [With restraint.] No; I have no widows.

DUKE. Then something like a pension or annuity for any widows you may — er — procure. [Gaily opening his cheque-book and talking slang to show there is no ill-feeling.] Come, let me call it a couple of thou.

[*The* CONJURER takes the cheque and looks at it in a grave and doubtful way. As he does so the *RECTOR* comes slowly into the room.

CONJURER. You would really be willing to pay a sum like this to know the way I did that trick?

DUKE. I would willingly pay much more.

DOCTOR. I think I explained to you that the case is serious.

CONJURER. [More and more thoughtful.] You would pay much more.... [Suddenly.] But suppose I tell you the secret and you find there's nothing in it?

DOCTOR. You mean that it's really quite simple? Why, I should say that that would be the best thing that could possibly happen. A little healthy laughter is the best possible thing for convalescence.

CONJURER. [Still looking gloomily at the cheque.] I do not think you will laugh.

DUKE. [Reasoning genially.] But as you say it is something quite simple.

CONJURER. It is the simplest thing there is in the world. That is why you will not laugh.

DOCTOR. [Almost nervously.] Why, what do you mean? What shall we do?

CONJURER. [Gravely.] You will disbelieve it.

DOCTOR. And why?

CONJURER. Because it is so simple. [He springs suddenly to his feet, the cheque still in his hand.] You ask me how I really did the last trick. I will tell you how I did the last trick. I did it by magic.

[*The* DUKE *and* DOCTOR stare at him motionless; but the REV. SMITH starts and takes a step nearer the table. The *CONJURER* pulls his cloak round his shoulders. This gesture, as of departure, brings the *DOCTOR* to his feet.

DOCTOR. [Astonished and angry.] Do you really mean that you take the cheque and then tell us it was only magic?

CONJURER. [Pulling the cheque to pieces.] I tear the cheque, and I tell you it was only magic.

DOCTOR. [With violent sincerity.] But hang it all, there’s no such thing.

CONJURER. Yes there is. I wish to God I did not know that there is.

DUKE. [Rising also.] Why, really, magic....

CONJURER. [Contemptuously.] Yes, your Grace, one of those larger laws you were telling us about.

[He buttons his cloak up at his throat and takes up his bag. As he does so the REV. SMITH steps between him and the door and stops him for a moment.

SMITH. [In a low voice.] One moment, sir.

CONJURER. What do you want?

SMITH. I want to apologize to you. I mean on behalf of the company. I think it was wrong to offer you money. I think it was more wrong to mystify you with medical language and call the thing delirium. I have more respect for conjurer's patter than for doctor's patter. They are both meant to stupify; but yours only to stupify for a moment. Now I put it to you in plain words and on plain human Christian grounds. Here is a poor boy who may be going mad. Suppose you had a son in such a position, would you not expect people to tell you the whole truth if it could help you?

CONJURER. Yes. And I have told you the whole truth. Go and find out if it helps you.

[Turns again to go, but more irresolutely.

SMITH. You know quite well it will not help us.

CONJURER. Why not?

SMITH. You know quite well why not. You are an honest man; and you have said it yourself. Because he would not believe it.

CONJURER. [With a sort of fury.] Well, does anybody believe it? Do you believe it?

SMITH. [With great restraint.] Your question is quite fair. Come, let us sit down and talk about it. Let me take your cloak.

CONJURER. I will take off my cloak when you take off your coat.

SMITH. [Smiling.] Why? Do you want me to fight?

CONJURER. [Violently.] I want you to be martyred. I want you to *bear* witness to your own creed. I say these things are supernatural. I say this was done by a spirit. The Doctor does not believe me. He is an agnostic; and he knows everything. The Duke does not believe me; he cannot believe anything so plain as a miracle. But what the devil are you for, if you don't believe in a miracle? What does your coat mean, if it doesn't mean that there is such a thing as the supernatural? What does your cursed collar mean if it doesn’t mean that there is such a thing as a spirit? [Exasperated.] Why the devil do you dress up like that if you don’t believe in it? [With violence.] Or perhaps you don’t believe in devils?

SMITH. I believe.... [After a pause.] I wish I could believe.

CONJURER. Yes. I wish I could disbelieve.

[*Enter* PATRICIA pale and in the slight negligee of the amateur nurse.

PATRICIA. May I speak to the Conjurer?

SMITH. [Hastening forward.] You want the Doctor?

PATRICIA. No, the Conjurer.

DOCTOR. Are there any developments?

PATRICIA. I only want to speak to the Conjurer.

[They all withdraw, either at the garden or the other doors. *PATRICIA* walks up to CONJURER.

PATRICIA. You must tell me how you did the trick. You will. I know you will. O, I know my poor brother was rude to you. He’s rude to everybody! [Breaks down.] But he’s such a little, little boy!

CONJURER. I suppose you know there are things men never tell to women. They are too horrible.

PATRICIA. Yes. And there are things women never tell to men. They also are too horrible. I am here to hear them all.

CONJURER. Do you really mean I may say anything I like? However dark it is? However dreadful it is? However damnable it is?

PATRICIA. I have gone through too much to be terrified now. Tell me the very worst.

CONJURER. I will tell you the very worst. I fell in love with you when I first saw you.

[Sits down and crosses his legs.

PATRICIA. [Drawing back.] You told me I looked like a child and....

CONJURER. I told a lie.

PATRICIA. O; this is terrible.

CONJURER. I was in love, I took an opportunity. You believed quite simply that I was a magician? but I....

PATRICIA. It is terrible. It is terrible. I never believed you were a magician.

CONJURER. [Astounded.] Never believed I was a magician...!

PATRICIA. I always knew you were a man.

CONJURER. [Doing whatever passionate things people do on the stage.] I am a man. And you are a woman. And all the elves have gone to elfland, and all the devils to hell. And you and I will walk out of this great vulgar house and be married.... Every one is crazy in this house to-night, I think. What am I saying? As if *you* could marry *me*! O my God!

PATRICIA. This is the first time you have failed in courage.

CONJURER. What do you mean?

PATRICIA. I mean to draw your attention to the fact that you have recently made an offer, I accept it.

CONJURER. Oh, it’s nonsense, it’s nonsense. How can a man marry an archangel, let alone a lady. My mother was a lady and she married a dying fiddler who tramped the roads; and the mixture plays the cat and banjo with my body and soul. I can see my mother now cooking food in dirtier and dirtier lodgings, darning socks with weaker and weaker eyes when she might have worn pearls by consenting to be a rational person.

PATRICIA. And she might have grown pearls, by consenting to be an oyster.

CONJURER. [Seriously.] There was little pleasure in her life.

PATRICIA. There is little, a very little, in everybody’s. The question is, what kind? We can’t turn life into a pleasure. But we can choose such pleasures as are worthy of us and our immortal souls. Your mother chose and I have chosen.

CONJURER. [Staring.] Immortal souls!... And I suppose if I knelt down to worship you, you and every one else would laugh.

PATRICIA. [With a smile of perversity.] Well, I think this is a more comfortable way. [She sits down suddenly beside him in a sort of domestic way and goes on talking.] Yes. I’ll do everything your mother did, not so well, of course; I’ll darn that conjurer’s hat — does one darn hats? — and cook the Conjurer’s dinner. By the way, what is a Conjurer’s dinner? There’s always the goldfish, of course....

CONJURER. [With a groan.] Carrots.

PATRICIA. And, of course, now I come to think of it, you can always take rabbits out of the hat. Why, what a cheap life it must be! How do you cook rabbits? The Duke is always talking about poached rabbits. Really, we shall be as happy as is good for us. We’ll have confidence in each other at least, and no secrets. I insist on knowing all the tricks.

CONJURER. I don’t think I know whether I’m on my head or my heels.

PATRICIA. And now, as we’re going to be so confidential and comfortable, you’ll just tell me the real, practical, tricky little way you did that last trick.

CONJURER. [Rising, rigid with horror.] How I did that trick? I did it by devils. [*Turning furiously on* PATRICIA.] You could believe in fairies. Can’t you believe in devils?

PATRICIA. [Seriously.] No, I can’t believe in devils.

CONJURER. Well, this room is full of them.

PATRICIA. What does it all mean?

CONJURER. It only means that I have done what many men have done; but few, I think, have thriven by. [He sits down and talks thoughtfully.] I told you I had mixed with many queer sets of people. Among others, I mixed with those who pretend, truly and falsely, to do our tricks by the aid of spirits. I dabbled a little in table-rapping and table-turning. But I soon had reason to give it up.

PATRICIA. Why did you give it up?

CONJURER. It began by giving me headaches. And I found that every morning after a Spiritualist *seance* I had a queer feeling of lowness and degradation, of having been soiled; much like the feeling, I suppose, that people have the morning after they have been drunk. But I happen to have what people call a strong head; and I have never been really drunk.

PATRICIA. I am glad of that.

CONJURER. It hasn’t been for want of trying. But it wasn’t long before the spirits with whom I had been playing at table-turning, did what I think they generally do at the end of all such table-turning.

PATRICIA. What did they do?

CONJURER. They turned the tables. They turned the tables upon me. I don’t wonder at your believing in fairies. As long as these things were my servants they seemed to me like fairies. When they tried to be my masters.... I found they were not fairies. I found the spirits with whom I at least had come in contact were evil ... awfully, unnaturally evil.

PATRICIA. Did they say so?

CONJURER. Don’t talk of what they said. I was a loose fellow, but I had not fallen so low as such things. I resisted them; and after a pretty bad time, psychologically speaking, I cut the connexion. But they were always tempting me to use the supernatural power I had got from them. It was not very great, but it was enough to move things about, to alter lights, and so on. I don’t know whether you realize that it’s rather a strain on a man to drink bad coffee at a coffee-stall when he knows he has just enough magic in him to make a bottle of champagne walk out of an empty shop.

PATRICIA. I think you behaved very well.

CONJURER. [Bitterly.] And when I fell at last it was for nothing half so clean and Christian as champagne. In black blind pride and anger and all kinds of heathenry, because of the impudence of a schoolboy, I called on the fiends and they obeyed.

PATRICIA. [Touches his arm.] Poor fellow!

CONJURER. Your goodness is the only goodness that never goes wrong.

PATRICIA. And what *are* we to do with Morris? I — I believe you now, my dear. But he — he will never believe.

CONJURER. There is no bigot like the atheist. I must think.

[Walks towards the garden windows. The other men reappear to arrest his movement.

DOCTOR. Where are you going?

CONJURER. I am going to ask the God whose enemies I have served if I am still worthy to save a child.

[Exit into garden. He paces up and down exactly as *MORRIS* has done. As he does so, *PATRICIA* slowly goes out; and a long silence follows, during which the remaining men stir and stamp very restlessly. The darkness increases. It is long before anyone speaks.

DOCTOR. [Abruptly.] Remarkable man that Conjurer. Clever man. Curious man. Very curious man. A kind of man, you know.... Lord bless us! What’s that?

DUKE. What’s what, eh? What’s what?

DOCTOR. I swear I heard a footstep.

Enter HASTINGS with papers.

DUKE. Why, Hastings — Hastings — we thought you were a ghost. You must be — er — looking white or something.

HASTINGS. I have brought back the answer of the Anti-Vegetarians ... I mean the Vegetarians.

[Drops one or two papers.

DUKE. Why, Hastings, you *are* looking white.

HASTINGS. I ask your Grace’s pardon. I had a slight shock on entering the room.

DOCTOR. A shock? What shock?

HASTINGS. It is the first time, I think, that your Grace’s work has been disturbed by any private feelings of mine. I shall not trouble your Grace with them. It will not occur again.

[*Exit* HASTINGS.

DUKE. What an extraordinary fellow. I wonder if....

[Suddenly stops speaking.

DOCTOR. [*After a long silence, in a low voice to* SMITH.] How do you feel?

SMITH. I feel I must have a window shut or I must have it open, and I don’t know which it is.

[Another long silence.

SMITH. [Crying out suddenly in the dark.] In God’s name, go!

DOCTOR. [Jumping up rather in a tremble.] Really, sir, I am not used to being spoken to....

SMITH. It was not you whom I told to go.

DOCTOR. No. [Pause.] But I think I will go. This room is simply horrible.

[He marches towards the door.

DUKE. [Jumping up and bustling about, altering cards, papers, etc., on tables.] Room horrible? Room horrible? No, no, no. [Begins to run quicker round the room, flapping his hands like fins.] Only a little crowded. A little crowded. And I don’t seem to know all the people. We can’t like everybody. These large at-homes....

[Tumbles on to a chair.

CONJURER. [Reappearing at the garden doors.] Go back to hell from which I called you. It is the last order I shall give.

DOCTOR. [Rising rather shakily.] And what are you going to do?

CONJURER. I am going to tell that poor little lad a lie. I have found in the garden what he did not find in the garden. I have managed to think of a natural explanation of that trick.

DOCTOR. [Warmly moved.] I think you are something like a great man. Can I take your explanation to him now?

CONJURER. [Grimly.] No thank you. I will take it myself.

[Exit into the other room.

DUKE. [Uneasily.] We all felt devilish queer just now. Wonderful things there are in the world. [After a pause.] I suppose it’s all electricity.

[Silence as usual.

SMITH. I think there has been more than electricity in all this.

Enter PATRICIA, still pale, but radiant.

PATRICIA. Oh, Morris is ever so much better! The Conjurer has told him such a good story of how the trick was done.

Enter CONJURER.

DUKE. Professor, we owe you a thousand thanks!

DOCTOR. Really, you have doubled your claim to originality!

SMITH. It is much more marvellous to explain a miracle than to work a miracle. What was your explanation, by the way?

CONJURER. I shall not tell you.

SMITH. [Starting.] Indeed? Why not?

CONJURER. Because God and the demons and that Immortal Mystery that you deny has been in this room to-night. Because you know it has been here. Because you have felt it here. Because you know the spirits as well as I do and fear them as much as I do.

SMITH. Well?

CONJURER. Because all this would not avail. If I told you the lie I told Morris Carleon about how I did that trick....

SMITH. Well?

CONJURER. YOU would believe it as he believed it. You cannot think [*pointing to the lamp*] how that trick could be done naturally. I alone found out how it could be done — after I had done it by magic. But if I tell you a natural way of doing it....

SMITH. Well?...

CONJURER. Half an hour after I have left this house you will be all saying how it was done.

[CONJURER *buttons up his cloak and advances to* PATRICIA.

CONJURER. Good-bye.

PATRICIA. I shall not say good-bye.

PATRICIA. Yes. That fairy tale has really and truly come to an end. [Looks at him a little in the old mystical manner.] It is very hard for a fairy tale to come to an end. If you leave it alone it lingers everlastingly. Our fairy tale has come to an end in the only way a fairy tale can come to an end. The only way a fairy tale can leave off being a fairy tale.

CONJURER. I don’t understand you.

PATRICIA. It has come true.

CURTAIN

THE JUDGMENT OF DR. JOHNSON

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FOREWORD

A FOREWORD to this play (and indeed anything of Mr. Chesterton's) would be intolerable were it not that in this series Forewords are demanded.

I therefore venture to suggest that, after reading this play, you suddenly perceive that part of your great contentment is due partly, no doubt, to having mixed in a world that troubled to talk good English, but also to your having been able to like everyone who figures in it. Most modern novels leave you wondering whether there is even one person in them that you really like. Here the author had such a chance of making these very people into such rascals, or at least such fools. It is part of his great generosity — of his wisdom, which is better than any amount of cleverness — that he profited by no part of this manifold chance. You like the poor dear, Swift, and he ends as so much better than poor dear. You are so glad when you find you can freely continue to like and esteem his far from "poor dear" little wife, even though at one moment you bewilderedly wondered what had really happened. Perhaps a quiet English "liking" does not altogether suit the brilliant Frenchwoman; but, when you see that you are finding what to like and even esteem in Wilkes, you know that Mr. Chesterton has written in a spirit, so to say, that kneels. That he *cares* what he is writing about is no less rare to-day, and makes the sustained brilliance of the play, and its unceasing ripple of laughter, the more astonishing. For when you are in earnest, you are apt to give up epigrams — indeed, there is just one speech where perhaps there are none. And in the Saints, who presumably care about things more than anyone else does, they sometimes say that pity has swallowed humour up. It is true that it must be difficult to care very much indeed for what is not eternal. The more astonishing, again, it therefore is that Mr. Chesterton reaches what can whole-heartedly be cared about, without once deserting his story and its period. Political and social situations repeat and repeat themselves, different as may be their dress; ideas prolong themselves, and, by enduring, have certainly in them something of the nobility of the eternal. But in the last great speech of Johnson, that everlasting Right which must give permanence even to the idea that has turned into ideal, is sublimely invoked. Somewhere Dr. Johnson is called Sage, not Prophet. Here and there in the play he provides a moment or two of prophecy, without laying the author open to the charge of foretelling what he, at any rate, knows well to have happened. But now, at the end, is a moment of true Apocalypse. Level behind level of reality is surmised, in each of which an identical law subsists, operating with freedom, energy and perfection ever more complete. St. John, who set for all time the supreme standard for Apocalypse, saw Nero, saw the line of Roman Emperors, saw' Caesar'' and “Rome” for ever slain, for ever resurgent, saw World-Wanton confronting the most pure Spouse, Michael against Satan, Wild Beast as the would-be everlasting parody of God's Lamb. Increasingly approximate to this vision had been the immemorial contemplation of all Hebrew seers. Does it seem ludicrous to say that this play is authentic heir to some fragment, at least, of our huge inheritance? Well, let it too be said that the author lightens, quite at the end, the pressure of these vast things. Horace is twice quoted in the play. Horace loved quiet endings to his most ominous poems. It is right that Boswell should have his final little say; and right, again, lest there should be any hint of triviality in its littleness, that Johnson should make the reply on which the curtain falls.

C. C. MARTINDALE, S.V.

NOTE

IT will be noted that the dates and details of this story are doubtful, difficult to fix or fit into their place in history. It will also be noted that real remarks of Dr. Johnson are scattered among inferior parodies of him: the former in circumstances quite other than those recorded by his biographer. This might be explained by supposing that Boswell so anxiously guarded the secret of Mr. and Mrs. Swift as actually to transfer the Johnsonian jewels to another setting. The only other explanation I can think of is that this is only a story, made up by somebody who wanted a plot for a play.

G. K. C.

CHARACTERS

IAN MACLEAN.
MOIRA (*his wife*).
MR. JOHN SWALLOW SWIFT.
MARY (*his wife*).
GRANT OF INVERBALLOCH.
JAMES BOSWELL OF AUCHINLECK.
DR. JOHNSON.
CAPTAIN DRAPER.
JOHN WILKES.
MARQUISE DE MONTMARAT.
MR. BURKE.
CROCKFORD.
BLACK FRANK.
A SERVANT. Two GRENADIERS.

ACT I

SCENE. — *A wild scene on the coast of the Hebrides.*

A rock stands upright with a smaller rock at its foot, forming a sort of natural throne. There is a thin fringe of silver birches or other slight trees, and branches and twigs lopped from them lie heaped and scattered in the foreground. On one side of the shore is rolled a large iron pot. A pipe is heard in the distance, the sound coming nearer; and IAN MACLEAN *enters playing the bagpipes. After a turn or two he sits on the rocky seat and puts down the pipes.*

IAN. That is the pibroch that my father played for a dirge for his foes and friends on the morning of the great battle; and it was his own dirge also that he played, for he died on Culloden Moor.

Enter MOIRA, *his wife.*

MOIRA. I thought you would be gathering the sticks for the fire.

IAN. I will be gathering the sticks. That does not change the pibroch of my father, which it is very proper should be played; for he was the first piper of the Macleans; and he told me to play that tune for ever, until the Prince should come again.

MOIRA. I think there are other words of your father that you are forgetting. He told us always to give food and fire to the stranger. And there are two strangers come to this island in a boat from far out to sea; a man and his young wife. I do not know who they are; they speak the Saxon speech, but not in the same fashion as any that come from the lowlands.

IAN. It does not matter who they are. We must give them bed and food and fire, and never ask them for a name. When strangers come it is a good man’s duty to feast them. But if they said their names, without doubt, it might be a good man’s duty to kill them.

MOIRA. How can we feast them if you will not make the fire and put on the pot?

IAN. There was a man of the Maclans that lived in a lonely tower at the head of Glencoe, and a wanderer came to him one night when the storm was on the hills [MOIRA *stamps impatiently*] and Maclan gave him the last of his bread and the best of his wine and watched him from the top of the tower, when he departed between the dark and the daybreak. And a great longing fell on the man upon the tower to know who the stranger was, even when he was far away. [MOIRA *begins to gather the sticks and pile them up to make a fire].* So he called out the question after him; and the wind brought back to him the black name of the Campbells of Glenlyon. Then the man on the tower seized his musket and shot the man from afar; and having done it he said, “He has died one death, but I deserve to die two,” and he stabbed himself twice with the dirk, and fell dead at the foot of his own tower. And as he struck twice he cried aloud, “That is for having feasted a Campbell, and that is for having slain a guest.”

MOIRA *[sharply.]* There is your fire laid. Now put on the pot, for the poor man and his young wife must be cold coming off the sea. Whence they come there is no telling whatever; for the boat came neither from Scotland nor from Ireland; but straight out of the West and the wide sea.

IAN. That must be from the Island of St. Brandon that is beyond even the sunset; for St. Brandon sailed —

MOIRA. Will you put on the pot?

IAN. The pot has no wings. It will not fly away as did the pot of Duncan Macnab because he had angered the fairies. [MOIRA *lays hold of the iron pot and begins to drag it across the shore.]* Three times he set up the pot in a new place, and three times he saw it flying through the air with the birds and the clouds of morning, because —

Enter MR. JOHN SWALLOW SWIFT OF VIRGINIA, *followed by* MARY, *his wife. They are a young married couple; the man is big and boyish in his movements, with an eager but somewhat abstracted eye. He is plainly clad in the manner of a gentleman of the period, with his hair tied but not* *powdered; he wears a walking sword and carries a portmanteau. His wife enters, smoothing her hair and dress after the seavoyage; she is a lady with a considerable share of the sort of beauty that is consistent with a strong chin. The man enters with an impetuous step, but as he sees the other group, draws back towards his wife and points with a certain restrained excitement.*

SWIFT. Look, my love. That is exactly what I was talking about on the boat.

MARY *[smiling]*. Why, John, I think you talked about a good many things on the boat. And I should not be surprised if you talked about a good many things off the boat.

SWIFT. I mean about barbarism and civilisation. You have there a perfect picture of the primitive or savage state. The man taking his ease, while the woman is forced to perform all the servile labour. I have seen exactly that group among our own red-skins on the other side.

MOIRE *[who has risen to her feet and is staring intently at the sea. Turns to* IAN]. We must both go now whatever. There is another boat coming in from Scotland, and you will be needed. *[She goes out, and* IAN, *rising, follows her more slowly.]*

SWIFT *[continuing]*, I remember seeing just that scene among the Ojibways when our Government sent me to make the treaty between them and the Choctaws. It is the one unmistakable sign of a state of barbarism everywhere.

MARY. I don’t think you ought to call these kind people barbarians. I’m sure they have been very hospitable to us. See, they’ve made a fire and put a pot on already. It only wants fighting; and there’s a flint and tinder in that bag, if you’ll only open it for me. I never could manage that lock.

SWIFT. I never said they were not hospitable. I said they were barbaric. Do you know I have often noticed a singular thing about your admirable sex, and about you as the most adorable member of it?

MARY *[curtsying]*. Thank you. But do open the bag, John; and I'll make some tea. Do you know, I've brought real tea in the bag; and I'll be the first who ever made it on this island, I guess.

SWIFT. I mean that when a woman hears a truth stated as a part of any science, she always imagines that it must have the intention of praising or blaming somebody. I said that these people were barbarians; I did not say they were not charming. I have known several charming Choctaws. I did not say they had no virtues. I did not deny that hospitality was one of their virtues. But I do deny that a consideration for the leisure of ladies is one of their virtues. *[Walks up and down, talking, and eventually seats himself on the throne of rock;* MARY *is struggling with the lock of the bag.]* As a matter of fact, it is easy to be misled about the real sign and definition of barbarism. Most other tests will be found to be curiously contradictory and confusing. There are men walking about naked and talking the polished rhetoric of Cicero. There are men who cannot plough or cook who recite whole epics in the manner of Homer. [MARY *bursts open the bag, finds the tinder and begins to light the fire.]* And as for hospitality, no men are more punctiliously and courteously hospitable than the cannibals. I am told that a guest is always invited to a state banquet, even if he finds somewhere about the fifth course that he is dining on an intimate friend. No, the one real and unvarying test is that of the labour of women, which I mentioned. Wherever we find the manual work forced upon the weaker sex, while the man merely amuses himself in his own fashion, there we have the rude original savage state of man, before the first dawn of reason.

MARY. Yes, I suppose so.

SWIFT. It is not strange, after all, that the very rudest life should linger in a place like this. It makes me feel more than ever that I ought never to have brought you here. It was the best possible place for my own purposes, and my own particular errand. If I had sailed into any regular port people would begin to ask questions; but I was sure that from here I could work my way to Edinburgh and to England, without the Government getting wind of my business. But what in the world possessed me to let you come into such a dangerous affair? Was there ever a man alive who took his wife with him on such an errand as mine?

MARY. You did not take her. She came. She had made up her mind to come whatever happened. My dear John, I am just as American as you are; and an American woman generally gets what she wants.

SWIFT. And the American man, what does he get?

MARY. He gets what she wants, too. *[She begins to set out the tea-things on the shore.]* Except occasionally when he is very eloquent *[puts down the tea-pot]* and very wonderful *[puts down the teacaddy]* and very rational and convincing; and then he sometimes forgets to get what she wants.

SWIFT *[starting up suddenly]*. Oh, I beg your pardon — I —

MARY. Oh, John! *[going into a peal of laughter]* you barbarian! You Choctaw! Are you a Choctaw or an Ojibway?

SWIFT. I am a fool, anyhow; and not only about such a small matter but about a much bigger one. Seriously, my dear, has it dawned on you, as it has only recently dawned on me, what a horrible position it is. There are no words worthy of such loyalty as yours; but it is horrible for all that. A man doing this sort of work for his country ought not to bring a wife. I am not sure that he ought to have a wife.

MARY. Well, you can’t help it now; and wherever you go I go, and there’s an end of it.

SWIFT. When there was first talk of a rising I volunteered for service. Would you follow me on to the battlefield?

MARY. I should probably try.

SWIFT. And this is worse than that. I was originally sent to watch events in England, and see if there were opportunities for revolutionary propaganda. But when fighting has begun people give another name to such a mission. It is an ugly name. *[With sudden violence.]* Suppose you saw me hanged as a spy?

MARY. I should know I had succeeded in following you to the battlefield.

SWIFT. This is a magnificent madness.

MARY. NO, my dear John, it is exceedingly good common sense. I think I am rather more practical than you are, especially about making tea. You say no man doing such work ever went with his wife. For that very reason they will never suspect you are doing such work. Besides, what is the work? To go into society, to entertain, to know everybody, to find out bit by bit what they think of the Revolution. Do you mean to say you can’t do that better as a respectable gentleman with an agreeable wife? Do you suppose you and your fellow-conspirators are going to meet in a cave? I intended to have a salon.

Enter IAN.

IAN. There are three more gentlemen landed on the island, and one of them has the speech of the English.

MARY. Oh, that will be charming. There is plenty of tea for them. Will you have a cup yourself?

IAN *[drinks the tea and makes a face]*. I thank you. Will you in return drink of our own usquebaugh, lady? *[Unslings a drinking-horn and hands it to her.]*

MARY [*drinking and making a face]*. Thank you. Here come your three friends.

Enter GRANT OF INVERBALLOCH, JAMES BOSWELL OF AUCHINLECK, *and* DR. JOHNSON.

JOHNSON. NO, Sir, I do not think it has a sublime desolation. I observe the desolation but not the sublimity.

GRANT. I fear that is due to your prejudice against our country. Dr. Johnson. Come, Sir, I know you are a champion of the great cause of religion. Has it occurred to you, Dr. Johnson, that, after all, God made Scotland?

JOHNSON. Sir, you are to remember that He made it for Scotchmen. *[Gazing round.]* Comparisons are odious; but God made Hell.

BOSWELL. Hell is hardly desolate in the sense of deserted; and it seems at the moment to have denizens proper to earth, or perhaps to heaven. A most charming lady appears to be doing something with a pot. *[Crosses to* MARY *and bows.]* Madam I trust that travellers meeting in so wild a place may salute each other without ceremony?

MARY. I am delighted. Will your friends take some tea?

BOSWELL *[turning to* JOHNSON, *who has partly followed him]*. The lady is asking whether you will have some tea?

JOHNSON[*bowing]*. Madam, among other infirmities of age, I am incommoded by deafness; and I have a difficulty in trusting my ears when they report to me, in so inhospitable a desert, an offer that appears equally incredible and intoxicating.

MARY. Oh, it is not in the least intoxicating; it's just tea. Do have some.

JOHNSON [*taking the cup and drinking]*. I shall have henceforth a greater difficulty in rejecting those legends of the fairies, and their occasional beneficence to mortals, which are so commonly repeated in these mountains. Madam, if you are not a fairy queen, you should be established as the goddess of these islands; leaning classically upon an urn brimming with blessings for humanity.

MARY. Why, that is a very big and magnificent compliment in return for one little cup of tea.

JOHNSON. Indeed, Madam, I am in no way averse to drinking another. *[He drinks another, and drinks a great many more at various intervals during the amicable conversation.]* But I can make no pretence that any verbal compliment would be an adequate recompense. I know not what I could find for you in Bolt Court that would be as rare and refreshing as tea in the Hebrides. But if ever I have the privilege of meeting you again nearer to my customary haunts, I shall make a point of attempting to repay you.

MARY. That is very delightful of you. *[To* SWIFT, *with a smile.]* This is my first salon, and it is going to be a success.

GRANT. It is a strange place to hold one, but I assure you it is not so uncivilised as it looks. We have our simple arts here, like pastoral shepherds. I must persuade our Cory don, my friend Ian Maclean, to pipe to you in Arcady. The Macleans are great pipers. You know they were very prominent in fighting for the Young Pretender.

JOHNSON. Sir, I am informed that they distinguished themselves in fighting for the young Prince.

GRANT. I did not know you were such a Jacobite, Dr. Johnson. Who would have thought of finding you defending a rebellion?

JOHNSON. Why, Sir, rebellion is a relative term, especially in their case. They did not admit the authority of King George.

SWIFT *[eagerly]*. And you think, Sir, that, since they did not admit King George's authority, they were morally justified in fighting him?

JOHNSON. Yes, Sir; morally justified, though not necessarily politically wise. For that matter a great many people agree with them, without thinking it necessary to copy them. Even in England the majority of the people would still prefer to see the legitimate line restored. They would not risk their necks for it. Perhaps they would not risk a penny piece for it. But if a vote could do it they would vote down King George to-morrow.

SWIFT. And you agree, Sir, that a vote against King George should decide the question.

JOHNSON. Why, Sir, apathy seldom decides anything; and the English nation is very apathetic about the matter. It may be, however, that there is a certain sagacity in their indifference. It is of very little moment to the individual under what form of rule he lives. I suspect that a merchant might ply his trade without knowing whether he was under the Doge of Venice or the Duke of Savoy. I am willing to pardon my countrymen, if they do not think the restoration of their rightful king worth the horror and devastation of civil war.

[More warmly.] But, Sir, there is one thing I will not do. I will not call men rebels because they were loyal when we were indifferent. I will not affect to despise men because they dared to do what we only approve. If I am to tolerate a tyrannical and usurped authority, I will not slander better men who had the honesty to find it intolerable. These poor Highlanders were none the less heroes because the tyrant triumphed, and subjected the defeated people to an abominable butchery. And I never walk under Temple Bar but I wish to uncover my head to the heads that are rotting on top of it.

GRANT. Nay, Sir, if you are so romantic a Jacobite as that, you must certainly hear the great pibroch of the Macleans, that was played at Culloden. I will fetch Ian Maclean to play it to you.

[Exit.]

SWIFT *[with increasing excitement]*. I am deeply interested, Sir, in your apologia for the rebels, and your striking denunciation of the tyranny of King George. I hope you will look on me with indulgence if I confess I have been moved to similar opinions, though I never expressed them so forcibly.

MARY. John, if I were you I should be careful. This gentleman may not be interested in your politics.

SWIFT. He has expressed most lucidly the very foundations of my politics. The right of a people to rise against an authority it does not recognise; the intolerable character of tyranny and especially the legal revenges of tyranny; the great truth that any rule, which a vote would overturn, is already a usurpation.

MARY. YOU are both of you using very long words; but you are making a mistake.

SWIFT. Sir, I am a member of another oppressed people, living west of the Western Highlands. We also suffer the same wrongs from the same dynasty.

We also are ready to risk all that can fall upon us from the fury of King George. We also prefer death, and even defeat, to the further endurance of our lot.

JOHNSON *[frowning reflectively*]. Sir, if you come from Ireland, as I suppose, I can pardon the passion of your language. Your people endure a most unjust system; the oppression of a great majority by a very small minority. Nothing inflicted upon the Early Christians by Nero was worse than what has been inflicted on Ireland by England. We are now accumulating against ourselves a judgment, of which our most distant descendants will hardly see the end.

SWIFT. Sir, my people live further west than Ireland.

BOSWELL *[jumping suddenly*]. Oh Lord!

SWIFT. They live a long way further west. But I am very sure that a mind like your own will not be affected by geographical remoteness, to the abandonment of political principle. In the name of those great political principles you have laid down, the right of the majority against the minority, the right of rebellion against a tyranny unrecognised by any popular vote, I appeal to you as the representative of the people of Virginia —

JOHNSON *[exploding]*. How, Sir? What, Sir? What is the meaning of this business, Sir? Is this a joke? Do you imagine you have played a trick on me? Do you suppose, Sir, that it is feasible to entrap me? Had you the temerity, Sir, to calculate that you could involve me in anything resembling a contradiction?

MARY. DO have another cup of tea.

SWIFT. I only applied your own excellent argument to —

JOHNSON. YOU only applied it to a pack of nigger-driving ragamuffins who do not know when they are well off. You demand my sympathy for the gratuitous outrage of a rebellion ——

SWIFT. Which is only a relative term.

JOHNSON. Against the just authority of the King —

SWIFT. Who would be dethroned by a vote of his subjects.

JOHNSON *[stiffening suddenly and with marked deliberation*]. Sir, he who has the impatience to interrupt the words of another seldom has the patience rationally to select his own. What, Sir, does all this amount to? The colonies are in rebellion.

SWIFT. NO, Sir, the United States are at war.

JOHNSON. Sir, there are no such states; and they will soon be united, where they ought to be united, under the British Flag and the British Constitution.

SWIFT. NO, for that matter, we are going to have a flag of our own. I have it here, though it is not yet officially adopted. Where is that flag?

[He plunges among the contents of the bag.]

MARY. Oh, never mind the flag. I put it among the coloured handkerchiefs.

[SWIFT *draws out the Stars and Stripes and displays it to* DR. JOHNSON.

JOHNSON. Sir, I can well believe that it is not officially adopted. I should advise you to keep it dark, along with the rest of your conspiracy.

SWIFT *[with rising enthusiasm*]. The Stars and Stripes —

JOHNSON. Stars! Certainly, Sir, stars would seem highly appropriate to conspirators.

SWIFT. What do you mean?

JOHNSON. Because stars only come out at night.

SWIFT *[in a lyric frenzy]*. These are all the stars of morning; and you shall yet hear them sing together, and the Sons of God shouting for joy.

JOHNSON. Nay, Sir, if you take refuge in attempting to blaspheme —

SWIFT. I do not blaspheme. All men are the Sons of God, and by God are created free and equal. We will write that truth in words imperishable, which men shall not misread or forget. We will not have that truth tangled up in feudal traditions, or illegible on old legal parchments. You tell me of the British Constitution. What is the British Constitution? A King annoys you by being a Papist and you bring over a Dutchman, and that is the British Constitution. A King can only talk German, and you invent a new Prime Minister, and *that* is the British Constitution. We will have our laws of a lucidity more worthy of the human intellect. We will have our liberty in black and white.

JOHNSON. Yes, Sir. That is how you and your nigger-drivers for a long time will have your liberty. In black and white.

SWIFT. I hope for the extinction of negro slavery, in the loyal colonies as well as our own. But I gather your own solution is that black men and white should be slaves together.

JOHNSON *[roaring]*. Yes, Sir, when the white men have no more sense than the black. I do not know how many of your crazy colonists you may represent —

MARY *[rising]*. He represents one at any rate.

I think you are a very rude old gentleman, and if your King George comes over and gets his brains knocked out there won't be much to sweep up.

JOHNSON *[thunders]*. As for you, Madam — *[Stops.]* Nay, Madam, you are right to go with your husband. If he goes to a masquerade ball dressed up as a monkey you are right to go with your husband. If he ends in a madhouse saying he is the Emperor of China you are right to go with your husband. Stick straws in your own hair and let us hope they will be becoming.

SWIFT. YOU seem to have the opinions of the Dark Ages on a great many topics, Sir. You do not understand the American woman, if you think she is cut out for the part of Patient Grizel.

JOHNSON [*turning to him]*. Why, Sir, Patient Grizel may very reasonably be a pattern for your wife or any woman. We read that she did her duty under many exacting trials; of which the most excruciating was being married to a fool.

[Turns his back on them and walks to the opposite entrance; where he meets GRANT, *who re-enters.*

GRANT. YOU must not go yet, Doctor, Ian Maclean is just coming with his pipes.

[Piping is heard and IAN *marches across playing furiously.*

GRANT. This is the Maclean style of piping, and is rather unique. They march for long distances and back again, giving that effect of the rise and fall of sound. I think it is delightful to hear the strange music swell into a stirring march and then slowly fade away.

JOHNSON. I agree, Sir, that it is delightful to hear it fade away.

GRANT. That might have two meanings, I fear; but I assure you piping is a real and complex art. Men study it for a life-time; it is very difficult.

BOSWELL. Certainly, it is extremely difficult.

JOHNSON. I wish it were impossible.

GRANT. Why, what has become of your Jacobite enthusiasm, Sir? This is the very pibroch to which your loyal clansmen died at Culloden.

JOHNSON. I do not wonder that they died.

[Turning suddenly and shouting across at SWIFT.] Since you compare yourselves to the Highlanders, let me recommend bagpipes to the American Army. You will find them suitable, for they need nothing but wind.

[Exit JOHNSON *in a Jury, followed by* BOSWELL *and* GRANT.

SWIFT *[breaking out]*. The old mummy! The old blockhead! I've a good mind —

MARY *[detaining him]*. Now, John, don't make a scene at my salon!

SWIFT. Give me the flag. I'd like to strangle him with it. I'd like to run it up to the tallest tree on the island.

MARY. There are times when I doubt whether you were meant to be a secret agent.

SWIFT. Oh, it doesn't matter in a hole like this; and he's only some old schoolmaster; we shan't see him again. *[Rushes out.]*

MARY. I have a notion we shall see him again.

[Enter MOIRA, *and the two women begin to put away the tea-things and rake out the fire.*

MARY. YOU have children, I think. Somebody told me you had children.

MOIRA. I have two sons and a daughter.

MARY. I should love to see your children. Ever since I came here, and people were saying what a wild and lonely place it was, I was thinking that it would be a wonderful playground for children.

MOIRA. Yes, I was born on this island myself; and I used to play in that wood and paddle in the sea; and it was a beautiful place.

[IAN *re-crosses the stage still piping vigorously.*

But when the lasses grow up they have other things to do.

MARY. And when the lads grow up?

MOIRA. The lads never grow up.

[The Stars and Stripes rises beyond tie trees, waving in the wind.

ACT II

SCENE — *The rooms of* MR. *and* MRS. SWIFT *in London. The walls are mostly lined with bookshelves, and there are books and papers heaped on the table. In the foreground there is a smaller table; and at one side of the room a sofa. There is a door at the back leading into an inner room, and beside it a sort of alcove let into the wall with a bench in it.* SWIFT *is sitting at the larger table reading in a flowered dressing-gown of the period;* MARY SWIFT *is fully dressed for a reception and is moving rather restlessly about the room.*

MARY. John, you must really go and put on your coat. Those people will be arriving very soon.

SWIFT. Very well, my dear, very well. *[Goes on reading.]* Where is the other volume of this book, I wonder?

MARY. DO you mean the book the French lady lent you? I put it back in its place. *[Goes towards the bookcase.]*

SWIFT. Never mind, my dear. It really does not matter. I will get it myself when I want it. Do sit down; you must be tired.

MARY. I am a little tired.

SWIFT. Then do please sit down. Sit down on the sofa.

MARY. Very well. *[Goes to the bookcase and brings him the book.]*

SWIFT. Thank you, thank you; but really I didn’t mean you to. I wish you would take a rest on the sofa.

MARY. There are books on the sofa. *[Begins to put them away in the bookcase.]*

SWIFT *[with some exasperation]*. Why on earth should *you* put away the books? You said yourself you were tired.

MARY. I am tired of seeing them lying about.

SWIFT. I'm not sure I know what you mean by being tired of seeing things.

MARY. I'm very tired of seeing that dressing gown, with people coming to call in a few minutes. The French lady's book must be very interesting.

SWIFT. It is very interesting; by one of the new French philosophers, the Marquise de Montmarat — by the way we had better remember her name as it is part of our story.

MARY. Oh, I shall not forget it.

SWIFT. Well, it is really important that we should be connected with French books and French people; because we are supposed to have come from France. To avoid complications I admitted that we were both born in America; but I said I was taken to France at an early age and educated there; and that I found you in a Belgian convent school.

MARY. Oh, I know my story. It's enough to make my poor mother in New England turn in her grave, to say I was ever at a convent school.

SWIFT. Well, it would hardly be wise to go so far as saying that I had run away with a nun. But it pleases our liberal friends to think I have romantically rescued you from the general atmosphere of the cloister. But the main point is that we have been on the Continent most of our lives, and only crossed the Channel recently, like the Marquise herself. That clears us of all practical connection with the Revolution at home, and at the same time allows us to express tolerably revolutionary opinions in the abstract — also like the Marquise herself.

MARY. And that is your reason for reading the Marquise's book.

SWIFT. Well, it is a very interesting book, and the Marquise is a very interesting woman. With the opinions about the state I have long agreed; but some of the opinions about the family are new to me; and, I confess, rather startling as well as striking. But the main point is that our French friends help us to polish up our French autobiography, and the real story is less likely to come out. It obliterates all traces of the two lunatics who landed in the Hebrides.

[A knock is heard at the door.

MARY. I told you they would come before you were dressed.

A SERVANT *[entering]*. Captain Draper.

[Enter CAPTAIN DRAPER, *a rather stiff and dry-looking man, carefully dressed and bowing with ceremony.*

DRAPER. Madam, your humble servant. Your servant, Mr. Swift. I am distressed, Madam, to disturb you so early, especially as I promise myself the pleasure of waiting on you at a later hour. I ventured to look in in passing merely to ask you a favour. I am going on to the lodgings of a friend, Mr. Boswell of Auchinleck, and I should be much gratified if you would permit me to bring him along with me, supposing him to be at leisure. He is a very sociable gentleman, and may himself be entertaining friends.

SWIFT. Most certainly, Captain Draper; let him come and bring his friends too if he likes.

[DRAPER *bows, and moves across the room towards a map hanging on the wall.*

DRAPER. I am vastly obliged, Sir. Mr. Boswell is a Scottish gentleman of very good family. *[Stands looking at the map.]* And what is perhaps more valuable to a visitor, is well acquainted with all the wits and scholars in England as well as Scotland. *[lie swings round rather abruptly.]* Were you ever in Scotland, Mr. Swift?

SWIFT. I? No. As I think I told you, I came over recently from Paris, where I was educated.

DRAPER. Yes, I remember you told me that. Well, Mr. Boswell himself has travelled a good deal in Scotland, even in the remote Highlands, where there are very strange people to be met with. But I must not detain you now; I shall have the pleasure of paying my respects later. *[Bows, exit.]*

MARY. John, I am afraid of that man. He suspects something.

SWIFT *[who has resumed his reading]*. What! Draper? Why should he suspect?

MARY. Why should he ask you whether you had been in Scotland?

SWIFT. An accident; wasn't he looking at Scotland on the big map?

MARY. NO; he was looking at Virginia.

SWIFT *[cheerfully]*. Oh, I often talk about Virginia. You can say almost anything here, in a general way, about the case for the Colonies. Mr. Burke is openly supporting the Colonies. Mr. Wilkes goes even further, in private conversation.

MARY. Mr. Wilkes' conversation is at least amusing; but it does not make any difference to the danger from Mr. Draper. *[Another knock at the door.]* John, there is somebody else coming, and you must go and put on your coat instantly.

SWIFT. Oh, very well. *[Goes into the inner room, book in hand and still reading.]*

SERVANT. Mr. Wilkes.

[Enter JOHN WILKES, *a man dressed in the height of fashion with powder, ruffles and sword; with an ugly intelligent face and a squint.*

WILKES. Madam, your most humble servant. The formula is in this case sincere; though many would find it easier to believe in my service than in my humility. Your husband, I see, is still occupied with literature.

MARY. SO that there is nowhere for you to put your hat down. I ought to have cleared the literature away.

WILKES. Permit me to assist you. *[Begins to sort out the books.]* These, by the binding, should go in the upper shelf.

MARY. YOU are evidently very neat in your ways.

WILKES. I shine in the smaller virtues, Madam; I never could manage the greater ones. I expend all the qualities of a hero and a saint upon my toilet.

MARY..You are certainly very neat in your dress to-day.

WILKES. Madam, I was dressing for your reception.

MARY. YOU are neat in your compliments as well. Is that one of your virtues?

WILKES. An ugly fellow should always be beautifully dressed. Then the lady can find a momentary relief by looking at his stockings; or, by fixing her eye firmly on his waistcoat, avoid the risk of inadvertently noticing his face.

MARY *[laughing]*. That is very magnanimous of him.

WILKES. Some of our liberal friends favour divorce for drunkenness or cruelty. There is a far stronger case for divorcing a woman because her shoes creak, or a man for biting his nails or wearing his hat at an irritating angle. These, Madam, are the things that destroy happiness. I have never been presented to Dr. Johnson, but I have seen him in public places with his bands distressingly displaced; and great ladies listening to him with bright eyes as if they heard every syllable. And I knew they were sick and faint with the desire to seize that venerable sage by the throat, and put his neckcloth straight.

MARY. SO your motive is entirely unselfish.

WILKES. I will confess to a more selfish one also. Madam, I am an adventurer, and I am proud of it; for life to me is an adventure. You can form no notion of the ironic pleasure there is in being dressed like a gentleman among people who refuse to regard you as one. It has the thrill of a perpetual challenge. That is life; to be alone; to be against the world; to depend only on your own wits and courage; and always to know what to do.

MARY *[after a pause]*. Do you use your wits only for yourself?

WILKES. May I, dear lady, answer the question you have not asked? There are some whom it would be truly a privilege to help. When I came into this room it struck me that you were in trouble.

MARY. Well, I am in trouble, or fear of trouble; but I must not tell you about it.

WILKES. YOU need not tell me. I know.

MARY. What do you mean?

WILKES. TO take the words out of a lady's mouth is never courteous, but I think it is sometimes chivalrous. I will speak, and you need say nothing. For some time I have suspected that you and your husband were more than you seemed. I mean that you are serving the cause of liberty at a greater risk than the world would approve. My approval will sound like a jest; but I do approve. You have nothing to fear from me, and perhaps something to hope. If ever there is need to do anything for you with tongue or pen or purse or pistol, count upon me; I will save you as I have always saved myself.

MARY. Are you so devoted as that to the liberty of America?

WILKES *[hesitates a moment and then sits down]*. Why there, dear lady, you touch me upon a point of honour. Yes, it is really true that Jack Wilkes has his own point of honour. And it is not to deceive himself. I often tell lies. I like telling lies. I do it so well. But I *can* tell the truth; and so many honourable and virtuous gentlemen can't. I can tell the truth about myself. I *know* the truth about myself. When I write verses full of ribaldry I do not say, like your Popes and your Churchills, that I am lashing the vices of the age. When I serve as hanger-on to a rich nobleman I do not say, like Mr. Burke, that I am serving the great Whig Party and the cause of Constitutional Liberty. I know why I do things, and if necessary I can put it into words. [SWIFT *comes in behind, wearing his full dress and sword.* I am a rascal, but I am not a coward, and so far as you are concerned I am not a liar. I do not come here to serve the cause of American freedom. I come here to make love to you. I am at this moment making love to you. What else could I possibly do?

MARY *[rising.* Why, you are talking nonsense, and spoiling everything. *[Goes out at the back.]*

SWIFT. Mr. Wilkes, I heard you remark that you were not a coward. I am very willing to believe it; but I may have occasion to ask you to prove it.

WILKES *[standing up].* Sir, I am firm as Regulus. Do you propose to read me one of your own pamphlets? *Atqui sciebat quod sibi barbarus* — Well though he knew of what an American is capable —

SWIFT *[with sudden violence].* You sniggering monkey, you shall prove it now. You have a sword. *[Draws.]*

WILKES. Why, Sir, I have drawn it before now; but I do not especially desire to fight you in your own house.

SWIFT. Sir, I am well acquainted with your respect for my house.

WILKES. Oh, very well. *[Draws, and they cross swords. A knock is heard at the door.]*

SERVANT *[entering].* The Marquise de Montmarat.

[Enter the MARQUISE DE MONTMARAT; *she is a beautiful lady with a rather far-away, almost hypnotic expression in her bright eyes, and a slight smile of permanent composure. The two men lower their swords, but have not time to sheathe them.*

MARQUISE. Why, Mr. Swift, this is a very war-like demonstration.

WILKES. Nay, Madam, it is but a salute. The arch of swords for the Queen of Beauty. *[He raises his sword on high, and* SWIFT *more slowly crosses his own with it, making an arch under which the lady passes with a regal expression.]*

MARQUISE. Mr. Wilkes, I acknowledge your politeness; and, let me add, your presence of mind. And now put away your triumphal arch, for it is a little too military for a mere attaché’s wife. You forget that we diplomatic ladies are supposed to promote the friendship of nations. And you forget that France is at peace with your country.

WILKES. I rather fancy that France will soon forget it too.

MARQUISE. YOU must not say that to me; but of course you always say what you ought not to say to those to whom you ought not to say it. It is your only heroic quality, Mr. Wilkes.. But for my part, I wish as a woman, and not as an official lady, that all quarrels should end, public and private. But it will come, the time of peace and wisdom and the brotherhood of nations. There are times when I yearn for it so much as to condescend to that old weakness of being impatient. But those who know are never impatient. It will come; perhaps the very impatience of the less enlightened brings it a little nearer. Perhaps it will be through all these wars and revolutions that unity will come at last.

WILKES. The goddess, after all, will enter under an arch of swords.

MARQUISE. I sometimes think that when the two swords clash, they are only the two blades of the shears of Fate. Perhaps each blade of a pair of scissors fancies it is fighting the other to the death; but in truth, they are in a greater hand, used together to a single end.

WILKES. Fair Atropos, the simile is adorable. Nothing could so far reconcile me to religion as the image of a divine and omniscient tailor cutting out a divine and perfect coat.

MARQUISE. GO, monster! you think far too much about coats and all other trifles. [*Turning to* SWIFT.] YOU agree with me, at least, that freedom, when it comes, must be freedom from all such frippery and foppery. A natural life, that is the thing beyond; that is the one thing more civilised than civilisation.

SWIFT *[brooding and in a low tone]*. That was strange and striking; what you said about the swords and the shears.

[While the two begin to talk more intimately, WILKES *withdraws carelessly, studies them cynically from a distance, and disappears into the inner room.*

MARQUISE. Oh, I know that the wise should also be calm; but sometimes I grow a little weary of these jealousies and competitions. *[Looking at him more earnestly.]* Mr. Wilkes is Mr. Wilkes; he is of the world and can look after himself. But why should you, with a mind and soul, play with suicide about such trinkets? Do not tell me what you were fighting for; what does it matter? You were competing for something, like schoolboys struggling for an apple. When will men leave off competing for things, and learn how easy it is to share them?

SWIFT. There are some things one cannot share.

MARQUISE. Are there? I wonder! Tell me, would you not think it strange if two men were butchering each other with clubs because they both admired the same sunset?

SWIFT. Your figures of speech are always so fascinating. But you open up rather large and alarming views.

MARQUISE. Large views are always alarming. My dear friend, I hate all these small views and small rules that restrict a woman in speaking. I am going to violate one of them now. Let us go out and sit on that seat, where we can talk comfortably.

SWIFT. I beg a thousand pardons. *[Leads her to the seat in the alcove behind, where they sit down still talking. The servant knocks again and enters.]*

SERVANT. Mr. Boswell. Dr. Johnson.

[Enter DR. JOHNSON *and* BOSWELL. *They advance to the centre of the room, supposing it empty; as* SWIFT *and the* MARQUISE *are in deep conversation behind and do not hear them.*

BOSWELL. Captain Draper, Sir, should properly have been here before us; but I believe he is following immediately with Mr. Burke. I do not imagine Mr. Swift will be disturbed, for I am told he is a most hospitable gentleman and issued a most cordial invitation.

JOHNSON. Sir, I am very glad to wait on him.

BOSWELL *[in an airy manner]*. Provided, I suppose, that the company is to your liking.

JOHNSON. HOW, Sir? What do you mean, Sir? Do you suppose me so ill-acquainted with the customs of society as to dictate to a gentleman what guests he should entertain in his own house?

BOSWELL. Nay, Sir, but I feared your disapproval if some of our liberal friends should be present here.

JOHNSON *[with rising annoyance]*. Well, Sir, and suppose they were? Am I to dictate to a gentleman the politics of his own friends? Am I to tell him to tell them what political opinion to profess?

BOSWELL *[laughing exuberantly]*. Nay, nay, you are joking, Dr. Johnson; you are certainly joking. Why, for a fancy example — suppose Jack Wilkes were here! Ha, ha, ha!

JOHNSON *[bellowing]*. And suppose Jack Wilkes *were* here, Sir? Am I not capable of meeting him with propriety? Am I so devoid of decorum and delicacy as to be unfit for the society of my fellow-creatures?

[SWIFT, *who has been roused by the roar of* JOHNSON, *starts up.*

SWIFT. Lord! My visitors are arriving. Where is my wife?

MARQUISE. Go and fetch her. I will take her place for the moment. *[She advances as* SWIFT *goes out at the back.]* Good-day, Dr. Johnson; we met at Mrs. Thrale’s; she is a dear friend of mine. I am Madam de Montmarat, you know; my husband is in the French Embassy.

JOHNSON *[still rather surly]*. Madam, your servant.

MARQUISE. Mr. and Mrs. Swift will be here in a moment; we should have saluted you before, but I fear we were too deep in one of those philosophical conversations in which you shine so much yourself, Doctor. Surely we ought to call you in to adjudicate.

BOSWELL *[eagerly]*. Madam, I never knew any subject on which Dr. Johnson could not adjudicate.

MARQUISE. It is rather a large subject. It began with the possibility of preventing quarrels, and the tragedy of all these wars and revolutions.

SERVANT *[enters and announces]*. Captain Draper. Mr. Burke.

[Enter DRAPER *and* BURKE; BURKE *looks round for his host, then seeing* JOHNSON *the centre of a disputing group, smiles and sits down.* DRAPER *remains standing and watching the group keenly.*

MARQUISE. And then I said that quarrels arose more from little things than from great, and that we are tripped up with a network of all this etiquette, especially all this etiquette about ladies. I am sure ladies are tired of being put on pedestals or in glass cases. Surely what we all need is simplicity. All the sages of east and west have been in favour of a simple life. You are yourself one of the great sages, Dr. Johnson; I am sure you are in favour of a simple life.

JOHNSON. Madam, a cow lives a simple life. A cow needs nothing but grass. The intercourse of oxen with cows is not entangled with etiquette. But I never heard that oxen were philosophers.

MARQUISE. Surely, Dr. Johnson, you will not be so unkind as to compare a lady to a cow.

JOHNSON. NO, Madam, I shall compare her to a donkey, if she dislikes being treated with civility. A punctilious politeness to ladies is one of the signs which distinguishes us from the brutes, whether they be cows or donkeys.

[SWIFT *and* MARY *enter from behind;* JOHNSON *has his back to them and continues the dispute for some time without seeing them.*

MARY *[in a low voice to* SWIFT]. Who are these people? I have seen that man’s back before.

SWIFT. That must be Dr. Johnson, I suppose. They say he is here.

[She advances to JOHNSON’S *elbow and greets him, but he remains facing the* MARQUISE *and concentrated on controversy. The* SERVANT *brings in tea-things on a tray and puts them down.* JOHNSON *manages to knock a tea-cup over without noticing it.*

MARY. I am delighted to see you, Sir. It was very good of you to come.

JOHNSON *[to the* MARQUISE]. The advocates of simplicity, Madam, talk a great deal of the natural relation of men and women; but the last thing that all you learned ladies would like would be to be treated naturally. Why, Madam, how would you like it if I were to say that you were a flock of silly geese?

MARY *[obstinately]*. How do you do, Dr. Johnson?

JOHNSON *[continuing]*. Convention is civilisation, Madam, and we cannot dispense with courtesy without losing humanity.

MARQUISE. I do not know that I would make away with courtesy, but only with all these small points of politeness, all these little things which —

JOHNSON *[interrupting with a roar]*. Madam, that is all stuff. Reason will tell anyone but a fool to attend to little things. The bullet that kills a man is a little thing. The pill that saves his life is a little thing. It is by his consciousness of little things that a man proves himself to be properly alive. He who is proud of being unaware of his surroundings, be he a sage of the east or of the west, is proud of being a stock or a stone. A turnip is unconscious of its surroundings.

MARY. HOW do you do?

BOSWELL [*having enjoyed this scene like an artist, and now thinking it had gone jar enough*]. Sir, may I present you to our hostess; this, I think, is Mrs. Swift.

JOHNSON *[turning slowly round and knocking over another tea-cup*]. Madam, I ask your pardon. *[After a silence.]* I believe, Madam, that we have met before.

DRAPER. That is very interesting.

JOHNSON *[turning again slowly and bowing to* SWIFT], Mr. Swift, also, I believe I have had the pleasure of meeting.

DRAPER. That is curious; I wonder where you can have met?

JOHNSON. Why, Sir, it was in the Hebrides, unless my memory misleads me.

SWIFT. I fear it does mislead you, Sir. There must be some mistake.

MARY *[to the* MARQUISE *in a low voice]*. Where is Mr. Wilkes?

MARQUISE. He went into the other room. He had quarrelled with your husband.

MARY. Never mind about quarrels or my husband. We must get Mr. Wilkes. I must have Mr. Wilkes.

MARQUISE. Why do you want him?

MARY. Because he can lie, and my husband can’t.

[She *goes into the next room and reappears with* WILKES.

DRAPER. This seems to be a singular situation.

MARY. Dr. Johnson, may I present Mr. John Wilkes?

[JOHNSON *starts and stares at him; then he bows very slightly and, slowly swinging round, turns an awful face upon* BOSWELL.

WILKES. I have often hoped for this pleasure, Doctor Johnson. I think we know each other by reputation.

MARY *[settling down]*. And I hope now you will all have some tea.

[JOHNSON *moves away and sits down very sullenly at the table behind, which is covered with books and pamphlets. He picks one up to read and puts it down in disgust, picks up another and puts it down also.*

WILKES [*slipping gracefully towards him]*. A cup of tea, Doctor Johnson.

*[*JOHNSON *grunts, but accepts it.]*

DRAPER. I confess there is a mystery here which I should like, for certain reasons, to clear up. I understood from Mr. Swift that he had never been in Scotland, but had spent all his youth in France.

MARY. Yes, we were both of us exiles in France you know. That is why we have to ask Mr. Burke for all the news of America. Mr. Burke knows all there is to know about America. He is always making beautiful speeches about it, when he is not denouncing the King’s Friends.

BURKE. Nay, Madam, I hope I am myself one of the King’s Friends. Which were the friends of King Charles the First, Hyde and Falkland who made him pause and consider, or Laud and Strafford who encouraged him on the road he went?

BOSWELL *[warmly]*. At least those who died for him were more friendly than those who killed him.

MARY. Well, I always thought Charles the First —

DRAPER. Pardon me, Madam, my question was not about Charles the First.

WILKES *[assiduously]*. Dr. Johnson, another cup of tea?

JOHNSON. Sir, I thank you.

DRAPER. There seem here to be the elements of one of those ghost stories in which Dr. Johnson is interested. Your bodies were in France, but your souls, if I may say so, seem to have been very much in America. Finally, by a truly Highland flight of the supernatural your wraiths have appeared in the Hebrides.

SWIFT. Our souls are in America, and we have never disguised it; as every man's must be in the land of his birth. But you are quite mistaken if you suppose there was anything unusual in professing those sympathies in France. France is overflowing with sympathy for the American Colonies.

MARQUISE. France is full of republican principles and royal and aristocratic practices. We are so tired of being ladies and gentlemen that we have tried dressing up as shepherds and shepherdesses, and are now so desperate that we even attempt to be human beings.

WILKES. Another cup, Dr. Johnson?

JOHNSON. Sir, you are very obliging. But I am aware that I must not impose on you in this fashion. A man whose foible requires such attention from others should learn to provide it for himself. *[To* MARY.] Madam, since I must not thus monopolise Mr. "Wilkes, may I without offence introduce an attendant of my own for the occasion? [MARY *bows assent*.] I am obliged, Madam. *[To* BOSWELL.] Would you do me the favour, sir, to ask Frank into the room for a moment? He is waiting outside. *[Exit* BOSWELL.]

MARQUISE *[continuing]*. France, in fact, is full of Utopia. Our uniforms and liveries and armorial bearing are of centuries ago, when men were barons or vassals. But we are living and thinking and talking centuries hence, when all men shall be free and equal.

DRAPER. I should still like my question answered.

MARY. And what is your Utopia, Mr. Burke?

BURKE. Why, Madam, I have only one objection to Utopia. I have looked through many libraries, but I could never find a history of Utopia. It is the history of nations that interests me.

DRAPER. It is the history of people that interests me.

[Re-enter BOSWELL, *followed by* BLACK

FRANK, *the negro servant of* DR. JOHNSON.

JOHNSON. That is right, Frank. I only wished you to assist in handing the tea-things.

[WILKES *retires and leans elegantly on the back of* MARY’S *chair.*

MARQUISE. AS to history, Mr. Burke, we have a very grand history in France, and I think it has begun to weigh on us somewhat too heavily; as our coronets do on the few grand occasions when we put them on. I would gladly lose mine.

BURKE. If your ladyship ever casts away your coronet, I hope I shall be there to pick it up and restore it to you.

MARQUISE. Oh, I shall not listen; I shall have lost my head, too, by that time. But why should you care about coronets; I thought you were a friend of freedom.

BURKE. Madam, I confess once more to that vice of the reading of history. As I read history there have been two things that have always trampled upon freedom, a king and a mob. There has been one atmosphere, at once generous and moderate, at once flexible and secure, in which freedom of word and thought could flourish — the atmosphere of a liberal and enlightened gentry. They were nobles who extorted Magna Charta; they were Russells and Cavendishes who effected our Great Revolution. You speak as if a political balance were an obvious and easy thing, as if our constitutional liberties grew on every hedge. I think it requires a blend of many soils, a tradition of many tricks of gardening, before deep in one of our old historic gardens is born a lonely and a lovely flower, and its name is Liberty.

SWIFT. Sir, I can take you — at least I can tell you where Freedom does grow on every hedge. There is room for it to grow like grass on the great prairies of the west.

DRAPER. I suppose you observed them as a child?

SWIFT *[ignoring him in a rush of enthusiasm].* America has no history. That is why I believe in America.- Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden had no history, because they were near to God. Americans are going back to God, back to Man, back to the fundamental fact of our humanity. I would rather that all American citizens walked about as naked as Adam and Eve than that they should be loaded with these shields and coronets by which history makes them forget humanity. As men said that at the trumpet of resurrection all should rise equally naked, so at the trumpet of revolution all shall rise equally free.

BOSWELL *[to* JOHNSON]. Sir, I can no longer endure hearing these anarchical principles. I must appeal to you to crush them.

BURKE. Yes, Dr. Johnson. You are far more fitted than I to defend a civilised order against Mr. Swift.

JOHNSON *[after a pause].* Why, Sir, strictly speaking Mr. Swift is right. *[They stare at him.]* Providence has doubtless created all men for their good and his glory, and in that sense men are created equal and originally created innocent. And though I hold social subordination essential to social felicity, it was never intended that this should involve a denial of the fraternal charity men owe to each other. There are worthy men in every rank and condition, and it is doubtless well to accustom ourselves to association with them. Here is one of them, for example. Frank, would you sit down, please; and perhaps Mr. Swift would pass you a cup of tea.

[FRANK, *with great bewilderment and irresolution, finally sits down on the seat vacated by* WILKES. SWIFT *involuntarily rises, clutching the back of his chair.*

WILKES. Well, I am damned. Who would have accused Dr. Johnson of a practical joke?

JOHNSON *[to* SWIFT]. Nay, Sir, you need not look surprised. Frank is a man, and all men are equal. He is a good man, and most men are not equal to him in that. He is a good friend, and has done all for me while I lived and shall have all I leave when I die.

SWIFT *[resuming his seat]*. I confess, Sir, that you caught me out fairly; and that surprise was itself an inconsistency. To tell the truth I was not so much surprised, for the moment, at a servant sitting down as — *[He stops.]*

JOHNSON. AS at a black servant, you would say. Sir, as you left Virginia in your childhood, I can but congratulate you on the precocious intelligence with which you absorbed its prejudices.

[There is a silence. Then JOHNSON *claps* FRANK *on the shoulder in a friendly fashion.]* There, that will do, my friend. I am sorry to have embarrassed you for a foolish jest.

DRAPER. It was far from foolish, Sir, and I think the effect of it rather more than a jest. I fear the time has come when I must speak plainly. It is an unpleasant matter, but I wear the King’s uniform and am occupied in a special manner in his business. And there are suspicions involved here which I cannot be asked to ignore. *[To* SWIFT *abruptly.]* Have you any evidence to show that you came from France?

WILKES *[carelessly, leaning on the back of the chair]*. Well, that ought to be easy enough. Any of our old Caudebec friends would testify for you. Giraud or Pinson or old Gautière, the wine merchant, or that old fellow at whose estaminet we used to play dominoes. How Madame Colbert would be amused, wouldn’t she, to hear it suggested that you were never in France?

BURKE *[in surprise]*. Why, did you know Mr. Swift in France?

WILKES. Better than I know him here, I fancy. We were both there *en garçon*, you know; during my own exile and before he went to Belgium and found a wife. *[Looking round with an agreeable smile.]* Our friend Swift was something of a gay fellow in France in those days, if his wife will allow me to say so.

DRAPER. And do you mean you could get evidence from this French place? Are there any people who could really testify?

WILKES. My dear Sir, the table must have held twenty at least — the table d’hôte at the old Trois Étoiles, you know — there must be more than I can remember, but Gamier and the Mayor must still be there, anyhow. It was only in ‘73; the summer and autumn.

DRAPER. But that was when Dr. Johnson was in the Hebrides, and he says he saw Mr. Swift there.

WILKES. Dr. Johnson is one of the most farsighted of critics, but, if he will excuse me, one of the most short-sighted of men. Truth, Sir, comes before all; truth is my sole concern in this matter. Dr. Johnson would be the first to agree that my devotion to truth is here a higher duty even than his own favourite virtue of a polished social elegance. And truth compels me to state that I can only clear Dr. Johnson of the charge of wilfully misleading you, by saying that he must be going blind.

JOHNSON. In the matter of eyes, as of other things, we must all accept with gratitude what Providence has apportioned to us.

DRAPER. Mr. Boswell is not short-sighted.

WILKES. Mr. Boswell is blind to everything except Dr. Johnson. The rest of us appear to him as mere shadows forming a sort of grey background.

DRAPER. Dr. Johnson, this is a serious matter and it is my duty to press it seriously. Do you think it possible that your recognition was an error?

JOHNSON *[rising]*. Sir, if you ask me, I must — *[Stands ruminating and frowning down at* MARY *who is making tea.]* I must have been mistaken. It would, indeed, be inconceivable that any man should be willing to wallow in so squalid and repulsive a depravity as to invoke the name of truth, as Mr. Wilkes has done, when in the very act of saying what was untrue.

WILKES. Sir, I thank you for this touching testimony to my honour.

JOHNSON *[still ruminating.* And it is the more possible, Sir, that I am mistaken since I have not your own familiarity with the fashions of politics and the high affairs of public life. It would appear almost an impiety to profess to be more virtuous than a Lord Mayor of London. And I am the more reconciled to my ignorance of public life by a habit of finding in private life much that is more essential to human happiness. So long as I see private life pure and constant and sustained by the wiser affections, I shall ask the fewer questions about the names and badges of political faction.

MARY [*looking up at him earnestly*]. But it is no use denying, Dr. Johnson, that we are both in theory good republicans.

JOHNSON. If you present to me such a paradox, Madam, I shall put aside the problem of whether such persons can be called republican; so long as I am satisfied that they can be called good. The domestic virtues may flourish under very peculiar politics; and so long as they remain, even the most perfect and ideal commonwealth will do comparatively little mischief. There is a passage in one of Bishop Sherlock’s sermons on the Duties of Wives which expresses this with great felicity; but the book is somewhat rare; indeed I believe the only copy is in the Bodleian. As I shall be visiting Oxford almost immediately I will give myself the pleasure of copying it out for you. And now Madam, I feel we have encumbered your company too long; I shall return to the town in some six weeks’ time, when I may perhaps have the pleasure of placing my manuscript in your hands.

MARY. You are very kind, Sir, I hope you will. We shall probably remain in these lodgings.

JOHNSON *[bowing]*. Why, Madam, I know the town very well. I shall find you wherever you are.

[Exit, followed by BOSWELL *and* BURKE.

WILKES *[strolling forward arm in arm with the somewhat reluctant* SWIFT]. By the way you know that girl in Caudebec who poured the jug of cider over you?

SWIFT *[rather shortly*]. Yes.

WILKES. Oh Lud, my dear Sir, do not be sulky about it now. Do not permit the memory of so petty an indignity to disturb you after all these years.

DRAPER *[walking up to him, hat in hand]*. Mr. Wilkes, do you stand by the words you have uttered?

WILKES. Sir, I always stand by my words. I am not a member of the present government. Nor am I a spy in its service.

DRAPER. It is better than being a spy in the service of the enemy's government. But it is true I have admission to the government offices; and I am going there to make some enquiries. Madam, your servant. *[Exit.]*

WILKES *[genially to* SWIFT]. You don't seem very anxious to talk about the girl in Caudebec. The presence of Mrs. Swift, no doubt.

MARY. You will be relieved of her presence. I have things to attend to. *[Goes out at the back.]*

[WILKES, *who is still standing arm in arm with* SWIFT, *waits till an inner door closes, then drops his arm, steps back and draws his sword.*

WILKES. And now, Mr. Swift, after that little interruption, I am quite ready to be killed.

SWIFT. YOU know I cannot kill you now.

WILKES. What is the difficulty?

SWIFT. YOU have just saved my life.

WILKES. Oh Lud, is there a point of honour about that too? What a complicated etiquette!

SWIFT. It seems to me very simple. I cannot take away the very life to which I owe my own.

WILKES. Sir, it is a great relief. Not that I object to fighting; but I very much prefer talking. Under our present highly civilised system of etiquette it seems so very difficult to talk without fighting. But it appears that you and I are in a peculiar and privileged position. Whatever we say to each other, we cannot fight each other. That is what I call real freedom. We are free to talk, and it occurs to me that we might possibly use our freedom to talk sense? Have you any particular objection to my talking a little sense?

SWIFT. YOU can say what you like, of course.

WILKES. Then we are in Utopia after all. We have founded the ideal republic. Come, since we cannot meet as duellists, let us really meet as philosophers. Two real philosophers, who can think what they like and say what they think.

SWIFT. What do you want to say?

WILKES. First of all, before I put this sword away, oblige by looking at it. [*Twirls it in his hand like a toy]*. Look at it calmly and, if it be possible, seriously. Suppose I had to walk about at a ladies' tea-party with a large battle-axe hung on to my breeches. Suppose you had to come from Virginia with a tomahawk pinned to your coat-tails. Would not all the town have laughed at the Choctaw? But what are these but tomahawks, and what are we but Choctaws so long as we make it a point of honour to flourish them?

SWIFT. YOU are one of those who think that honour would not suffer if duelling were abolished.

WILKES. Sir, I think we should not suffer if honour were abolished. Perhaps you think I have no more of it to abolish. I am the fox that has lost his tail. But what is civilised man but a monkey who has lost his tail? And what is this fantastic tail that we are always flourishing in each other's faces, but the jealousy and vanity of a monkey? What is your jealousy but the suspicion of a savage strutting about his wigwam and watching his squaw? Discount my own vices as you will; they do not make so much misery in the world as your virtues do.

SWIFT. In my country I have been accustomed to a less cynical explanation. It is our virtues that are in revolt and not our vices. It is farmers with the spirit of Cincinnatus, it is peasant women with the soul of Cornelia, who are defying the luxury and corruption of courts and giving a religion to our revolution.

WILKES. And what is the use of your revolution? What is the good of it if it cannot prevent Cincinnatus from bullying or Cornelia from nagging? What is the good of defying a court of thousands of miles away, if in your own village you cannot prevent Cornelia from driving Cincinnatus to drink or Cincinnatus from frightening Cornelia to death? What is the use of restraining some old fool like King George in the Commonwealth, when you make the same kind of old fool omnipotent in the family?

SWIFT. But where does all this tend?

WILKES. Sir, we must have a revolution in the family as well as in the state. The one revolution without the other will make the world more Puritanical and provincial than ever. Dr. Johnson is consistent, for he opposes both revolutions. But you are not consistent; for you are a citizen in the forum and a sultan in the harem.

SWIFT *[after a pause]*. There were views somewhat like this in the book Madam de Montmarat lent me; and I confess they were forcibly stated.

WILKES. My dear Sir, they are everywhere, and they state themselves. Most of what you hear about the direful dissipation and general devilry of myself and my friends only means that we are beginning to say what everybody thinks. Societies have been springing up here and in France; secret societies they call them; but indeed it is a very open secret. It may truly be called a secret de Polichinelle; since it is positively acted by Punch and Judy before the children in the street. It is the secret, known to the satirists of all time, that to be merely a married man or woman is to be a wooden puppet, hideous, tragic and absurd.

SWIFT. DO you mean that you belong to these societies?

WILKES. TO some of them; there is one of which you have probably heard. We call it the Hell Fire Club, to disarm suspicion.

SWIFT. Sir, I can congratulate you on your conception of a euphemism.

WILKES. The flames of hell are only painted on the gates to frighten away the fools. Within are the flowers of the earthly paradise; the paradise of the wise. There the old superstitious charms and chains fall from us without our knowing it, and friendships form themselves naturally; free and grand friendships such as those that moulded the ancient world; the union of Pericles and Aspasia.

SWIFT *[doubtfully]*. I suppose Pericles had a wife.

WILKES. Doubtless; but he did not expect his wife to be his muse; and, if I may take the freedom of this talk, neither can you. My dear Sir, it is not rational to suppose that the sentimental accident of eighteen can be the intellectual inspiration of thirty-five. Why should something mumbled years ago, in some village chapel thousands of miles away, condemn you or anyone else to unhappiness?

SWIFT. What do you mean by unhappiness? I imagine we have been happy.

WILKES. Who have been happy? You and your wife? Or you and your pamphlets? You have been content to write and declaim, and distinguish between the Whiggism of Mr. Burke and the Republicanism of Mr. Jefferson. Have you never noticed your wife growing restless under these things? Can you affirm in honesty that she has not grown weary of them? Have you never seen her pacing the room and throwing the books about? She was not meant to be imprisoned in a library. She was meant to reign in a salon.

SWIFT. It is true she said she wanted a salon.

WILKES. Remember that we are philosophers and have thrown away our swords; and let me call up an ideal or platonic fancy. I am a fantastic figure on the fringe of society; I lack nothing of the grotesque. I have even been Lord Mayor of London. But I tell you that if your wife and I were married, we could be a King and Queen.

SWIFT. I thought you were both supposed to be republicans.

WILKES. I do not think that would trouble us. That is the one resemblance between her and me. That is the one difference between us and you.

SWIFT. And what part am I to play in your royal court? The Court fool?

WILKES. NO; another king, with another and perhaps a better kingdom. You may still be shocked if I add another Queen, but since we are for once speaking frankly of the first truths of life, let us follow them into the future. Suppose that some fine day Pericles does meet Aspasia. Suppose you do meet a woman who is more than beautiful and more than good; who is more than a wife, because she can also be a friend. Suppose she does kindle at the right turn of words in the eloquence of Mr. Jefferson; suppose she can share the delight of detecting the precise fallacy of Mr. Burke. Suppose there is somewhere waiting, like a princess in a tower or on an island, the queen of your own intellectual kingdom. Suppose she is destined yet to cross your path.

[A single knock is heard on the door, which is then thrown open, and the MARQUISE *appears somewhat disordered with haste; with her brilliant eyes blazing with an excitement she still tries to control.*

MARQUISE. Oh, I know you will both stare at me as if I were a miracle.

SWIFT. Just then... I thought you were a miracle.

WILKES. NO. Like every other miracle, she is only a coincidence.

MARQUISE. Well, I am a miracle at this moment; the sort of sudden miracle that is sent to snatch a man from a precipice or a shipwreck. There is not a moment to lose, if the miracle is to save your life.

SWIFT. What does it all mean?

MARQUISE. Mr. Swift, I have risked everything in coming here. But for you it is not risk, but certain death if you remain. That man Draper is a creature of Lord Sandwich and the government; and he is determined to hunt you down. He was baffled for the moment by Jack’s lies and Dr. Johnson’s forbearance; but he has made enquiries since, and orders are already out to arrest you. I saw Draper talking to Lieutenant Crockford, a friend of his, who was in uniform and evidently on duty. And there is a soldier with a fixed bayonet outside this house as I speak.

SWIFT *[with dignity]*. In that case, Madam, it only remains to decide whether I shall receive the Captain with a bow or a drawn sword. In either case it is merely death.

MARQUISE. YOU shall not die. I say you shall not die. There is but one thing to do, and I have come that you may do it. I have a coach waiting at the back entrance at the end of the garden, and it will take us at once to the Embassy.

SWIFT. TO the Embassy?

MARQUISE. Yes, to the French Embassy. You are officially attached to the French Embassy. That is why you came over from France about the same time as we did. You are one of my husband’s secretaries. Your diplomatic work for the French Embassy has been most industrious and intelligent.

SWIFT. I am glad to hear it; but I hardly understand it. I am not very likely to show any fear of death, Madam, especially in your presence. But I fail to understand why one of your husband’s secretaries should be immortal.

MARQUISE. One of my husband’s secretaries is at least inviolable. Anything connected with the Embassy is sacred; it is treated as French soil, and they dare not touch you there. Come, we are wasting time. They will raid this place, seize your papers and read the secrets of the whole revolution. It is not only yourself, but your country.

SWIFT. My country... and my wife?

MARQUISE. Your wife can follow in another. coach. Mr. Wilkes will attend to it. [*Breaking out.]* Oh, don’t you see we are in a world of real things now, as real as life and death, where our nearest neighbours are those that can help us? You know that nobody can help you but I. You know that you yourself could not carry your wife out of this trap so cleverly as Jack could do it.

SWIFT [as *if dazed]*. In that case I suppose I ought... they must not get the papers... these are the only papers that matter. *[Ransacks a drawer and stuffs them into his pocket.]*

MARQUISE. Take them and come. I can hear the soldiers under the window.

[The voice of an officer is heard without calling out orders.

SWIFT *[abruptly and with firmness]*. Mr. Wilkes, will you be so kind as to escort my wife?. *[Goes out with* MARQUISE.]

[WILKES *bows and passes into the inner room, reappearing with* MARY.

MARY. I do not understand. What has happened? Do you tell me that John wishes me to go with you?

WILKES. He has done me that honour. It is a very short journey.

MARY. It is a very great journey, I know; longer than the journey from America. Oh, I am not deceived about that; I have been thinking for myself, too; and I know we have come to the beginning of a new world. But to go now, to-night, in your company —

WILKES. But by his permission.

MARY. We shall be following my husband’s coach?

WILKES. YOU will also be following your husband’s example.

MARY. TO go after him, and yet with you —

WILKES. Why do you hesitate? Do you think it is a fine point of casuistry?

MARY. Nothing. I should not let it affect me, after all; I told you I had been thinking for myself. But a queer thought went through my head; it had nothing to do with anything; it was a piece of nonsense from nowhere.

WILKES. Why, what are you talking about?

MARY. I was wondering —

WILKES. Well?

MARY. I was wondering what Dr. Johnson would think. *[Takes his arm and they go out.]*

ACT III

SCENE. — *The outer room of the Red Cock Coffee House. At the back there are folding doors which are shut, but through which comes fitfully the noise of talk or song. The room in front is furnished with tables and benches, but is at present deserted.*

[Enter CAPTAIN DRAPER *and* LIEUTENANT

CROCKFORD *in front from opposite sides; the latter is in uniform.*

CROCKFORD. This is a strange place for your appointment.

DRAPER. It is a strange place meant for strange people. Some of the most dangerous characters in London meet behind those doors. The men of the old Hell Fire Club, with ladies to match. They are playing at revolution just now; and I am interested in one of the revolutionists.

CROCKFORD. DO you mean your old friend the American spy? Are you still trying to arrest him?

DRAPER. NO; I am trying to arrest her. She is the real American spy; at least, she is much the more important of the two.

CROCKFORD. YOU mean his wife?

DRAPER. Yes, the woman who is always going about with Jack Wilkes. She has adopted all the new ideas; including the notion of not troubling much about whose wife she is. Her husband pairs off with the Marquise de Montmarat, of course; and between them they are turning the town upside down. But she is the real queen of the revels, for all she was such a little Puritan when we first knew her. It’s always the quiet ones who surprise you in that style. But we can’t arrest her without him.

CROCKFORD. YOU can’t arrest either of them. Your American spy has turned into a French diplomatist.

DRAPER. We shall arrest them to-night.

CROCKFORD. What is the use? You will only have the French Embassy after you to-morrow.

DRAPER. There will be no French Embassy to-morrow.

CROCKFORD. NO French Embassy? What on earth do you mean?

DRAPER. I have very serious news. It is bad news, I suppose, but it’s an ill wind that blows nobody good. The French King declared war on us this morning. He is supporting the American rebels.

CROCKFORD. A good thing for them and a bad thing for us, I take it.

DRAPER. A good thing for most of them, but a bad thing for one of them. If we can catch that fellow now, I fancy the lawyers will tell us a different tale.

CROCKFORD. Well, and what do you want me to do?

DRAPER. The situation should be defined by midnight at latest. I want you to be here when the clock strikes one, with a file or two of your grenadiers, that’s all. Till then, the less we are seen here the better, for the choice spirits are arriving. Till one o’clock, then.

CROCKFORD. Very well, till one.

[They go out at opposite sides. Enter SWIFT *and the* MARQUISE *in front, but passing towards the inner room.*

MARQUISE. From news I hear, which I must not detail, you may have to go to France in earnest this time, my friend.

SWIFT. And visit all those French friends that Jack was so kind as to provide for me. We must make sure that Mary is safe; though I admit, of course, that she is quite capable of taking care of herself. That is true, at least, in practice as well as principle.

MARQUISE. She is a wonderful woman. I suppose all the petty respectable people would be surprised at my admiring her so much as I do. Oh, what a relief it is to have risen above all these envies and private rivalries. The respectable people point at us because we have free and philosophical opinions, as if we were only wallowing in the mire of self-indulgence and selfishness. How absurd they are! It is we who are unselfish. It is we who are generous and sympathetic and can yield to others. It is we heathens who do, in fact, fulfil the Christian ideal which is found impossible for Christians. Yes, it is we who can love our enemies.

SWIFT. Yes, ours is surely the higher principle. I cannot see any answer to it. I am go glad that Mary takes the same view; indeed she takes it more vigorously.

MARQUISE. Yes, it is the vigour that I admire; she has vigour more than vision. I will give you an example of the sort of thing that she can do and we could not. I happened to mention that a revolutionary society in France has adopted as a symbol the ancient cap of Phrygia, coloured red to represent a revolt for freedom. If somebody had told that to you or me we should have been lost in visions; we should have seen that strange archaic head-dress on the heads of ancient Phrygian priests who reared altars to nature and the earth; we should have wondered if the old Greek Mysteries had handed down some secret of the worship of liberty. But she saw at once that it might be a badge for our own club; the red cap of the Red Cock Tavern. With her own hands she set to work to make them; and with her servants and her friends had made fifty before morning. That is the way that revolutions are made.

SWIFT. Yes, I feel that I for one am comparatively useless.

MARQUISE. You are not useless; you are only something more than useful. Believe me, my friend, without us also there could be no hope for humanity. The world needs philosophers as well as politicians; philosophers are rarer than saints. Do you know what it is that I really admire in you? It is that you always listen to reason.

SWIFT. Surely it is a man’s first duty to do so.

MARQUISE. Very few men try to do it, and no women. They listen to friends, to foes, to faces and voices and gestures and intentions; to anything except the thing that is said to them. It is your strength that you think first of, whether the thing is true. You listened to poor Jack Wilkes as if he were an angel from heaven, because he made a logical deduction from liberty. You said, as you said just now, that you could not see the answer to it. Most men would have seen a hundred answers; that Wilkes was a liar, a looseliver, a man with a profligate motive, a man to whom no gentleman would listen, a rascal to be run through like a rat. Yes; there were any number of answers to Jack Wilkes; but there was no answer to what he said. You listened to what he said; and that is what I mean by the magnanimity of a philosopher. People would call you absent-minded and short-sighted; but when I see these things, I know what was meant when the gods made justice blind.

SWIFT *[after a pause]*. You have one very divine gift, and a strange one. You can pay a convincing compliment. The trouble is that when people praise us we always know instantly that we do not deserve it. What you say is flattering, and yet in honesty I do not think it is false.

MARQUISE. Those who follow truth never find falsehood. Truth often leads us into strange places, but it is always truth that leads.

SWIFT *[bowing]*. Lead on.

[She passes in front of him towards the inner room; he follows and opens the doors. As they disappear within WILKES *and* MARY *appear in the foreground. She is much more fashionably dressed than before and flushed with some excitement or pleasure, anger or triumph.*

WILKES. The whole town is ringing with it. They say your encounter with Mrs. Montague was worthy of two Amazons in an epic. I would give a hundred pounds to have been there, especially as the money is my creditors'.

MARY. It was truly very laughable; and I do not think she had the best of it. I am afraid I played a trick on her and told her that some of our dreadful demagogues in America were making demands; and I quoted whole passages. And when she cried out on them, I confessed they were quoted from her own friend the great patriotic Minister; from the speeches of my Lord Chatham himself. There, I said, it is your own great Minister, who conquered Canada and India, who says you cannot conquer America.

WILKES. The practical joke did not amuse her, I fear.

MARY. She was furious, and tried to say hateful things. Oh yes, she spoke about you. Your friend, Lord Sandwich, the old brute, who sold your secret to the Government was standing there leering like a satyr. And she asked in front of him,” Has Mr. Wilkes read you his Essay on Woman?” And I said, “He reserves his more scandalous works for his ministerial friends. I do not steal private papers; but if he had shown it me, I would never have betrayed him.” When I left Jemmy Twitcher was lowering instead of leering.

WILKES. The work referred to is not one of which I am proud. But I ask you to remember that I wrote the Essay on Woman before I knew how great a woman can be.

MARY. One doesn’t need to be very great to stick a pin in that stuck-up old woman; but I enjoyed doing it.

WILKES. The revolutionary salon has met the respectable salon and defeated it.

MARY *[more thoughtfully]*. It is odd that I used to say I wanted a salon; but I never thought it would be such a revolutionary one as it is. Of course our ideas alter; but it gave me a queer little twinge the other day to hear that Dr. Johnson had returned to London and had even mentioned my name.

WILKES *[rather sharply]*. What, Dr. Johnson?

MARY. It was like finding an old nursery doll covered with dust. Of course he would never understand us now; but somehow I hate to think of that funny snuffy old man being disappointed.

WILKES. Dr. Johnson? And enquiring for you? I confess I do not like this. I think it is rather dangerous.

MARY. What are you afraid of?

WILKES. Nay, Madam, I hope I do not often boast. But when I say there is danger, ’tis scarce identical with saying I am afraid.

MARY. But what danger do you mean?

WILKES. The danger is that when Dr. Johnson finds that you have set the Thames on fire, he may have a shock. He is an old-fashioned old gentleman; and it may be a severe shock. In that case —

MARY. Well?

WILKES. The doctors tell us that a shock can sometimes restore the memory.

MARY. Oh, I see now. You mean he will tell people about our landing in the Hebrides. You said he must have been mistaken being so shortsighted.

WILKES. Short-sighted be damned; pardon the simplicity of my speech. Dr. Johnson is very seldom mistaken unless he wants to be mistaken. When you last met he did want to be mistaken; and he told us why. He said that so long as the domestic virtues were safe, he would not interfere with politics. I hardly think he would consider our present views purely political. The best chance is that he may treat all the scandal as slander; but if he really meets you, there will be an explosion. Therefore he must not meet you; I must see to that. Fortunately I asked his friend, Mr. Burke, to meet me here on political business; and I think he would help us. Anyhow, I do not suppose Dr. Johnson carries a horse pistol; but he shall not enter your presence but over my dead body.

MARY. Then there is really danger?

WILKES. Danger! What is danger? What is not danger? When is one alive except in danger? Come! [*Draws the red cap from his coat-tails and flourishes it like a flag.]* You are the goddess of freedom, and it is you should wear the Phrygian cap. That is our answer to all the arguments of danger. *[Advances to the folding doors to throw them open.]* Fling wide the palace gates and let the lackeys announce us. Wilkes and Liberty!

[They enter the inner room and are received with a roar of applause. The doors close behind them, and almost at the same moment BURKE *enters in the front in hat and cloak. He looks about him as if expecting somebody; goes up to the inner doors, hesitates, and comes back to sit down on one of the benches.*

Enter WILKES *behind, wearing the red cap.*

BURKE *does not see him at first, but remains as if ruminating.*

WILKES. Dreaming about the British Constitution, Mr. Burke? I think the Constitution must haunt even your dreams.

BURKE. Why, Sir, I might dream of worse things. My old nurse used to think there was something to be learnt from dreams.

WILKES. She was an Irish nurse, I take it, and saw things that do not exist. Shall I let you into a secret? The British Constitution does not exist. It requires an Irishman to dream of it.

BURKE. You dreamed of it a good deal yourself, Mr. Wilkes, when you were turning the world upside down to get into the House of Commons. Do you regard the House of Commons as a dream?

WILKES. I regard it as a nightmare. Trying to get into it is somewhat diverting; and being indignantly kept out of it is delightful. But being in it! Lord deliver us! Mr. Burke, do you know why the English people have always supported me?

BURKE. To be frank with you, I have sometimes pondered on the point.

WILKES. It is because I have been found out. The English people are ruled by men who have not been found out. But they know in their hearts what I know with my head; that their rulers are rascals, who are also hypocrites. But at least the people are too generous for one final cowardice; they will not punish another rascal for not being a hypocrite. In politics they are sure of nobody's virtue; but they are sure of my vices; I am in the open. When once they can give a dog a bad name, they will never hang him.

BURKE. Your notion of politics is indeed something of a nightmare.

WILKES. It would be if I had not wakened up long ago. I do believe Mr. Burke, that when you see Westminster you see the barons defying John or the Peers trying Strafford. I see a mob of money-grubbers about as dignified as a monkeyhouse. Bribes, places, salaries, South Sea Bubbles; these are the realities for which men live.

BURKE. It is only for the dreams that they die.

WILKES. Are they very wise in that?

BURKE. Yes, they are very wise. If states have held together and survived revolt and ruin, it has been by the wilder wisdom of that magnanimous folly. You talk to me of practice and experience; I tell you you could not hire a coach or get credit for a coat if there were not spread over all society this atmosphere of authority, this grand illusion of civic sublimity and the glamour of a great past. Men can obey that which is royal or republican, that which is or is not despotic or which is or is not democratical. But believe me, men cannot obey that which is not dignified, or which does not believe in its own dignity. For this reason has all authority from the beginning clothed itself in trailing robes and towering headdresses; and carried strange emblems in the hand and worn strange symbols on the head.

WILKES. That is true; and I am wearing one myself at this moment. How do you like it, Mr. Burke?

BURKE. Why, I do not think I like it very much. I never saw it before.

WILKES. You will see it again. But I do not think you will like it any better. Well, Mr. Burke, I must not waste your time, which is so valuable, and I did not ask you here to admire my taste in caps. I am well aware, Sir, that your admirable work for liberty and peace would bring you into alliance with many enthusiasts, whom you yourself would recognise with some reluctance. One of these, my friend Mr. Swift, has recently adopted certain philosophical principles which I cannot expect you or any of your circle to regard with anything but horror. Nevertheless I would submit —

[Enter BOSWELL, *walking in great haste and looking round rather wildly.*

BOSWELL. IS Dr. Johnson here?

BURKE. Dr. Johnson! No, of course not.

BOSWELL. He is coming here. He is on the way, for all I know. I have tried to head him off, but it seems impossible.

BURKE. Why should he come here?

WILKES. He shouldn't.

BOSWELL. He mustn't.

BURKE. Well, why shouldn't he come here?

WILKES. AS Mr. Boswell is speechless with horror, I will try to explain why he should and should not. For the first, he is desirous of renewing the acquaintance of my revolutionary friend Swift, and the equally revolutionary Mrs. Swift.

BOSWELL. He has brought a manuscript from Oxford, which he promised to show to Mrs. Swift.

WILKES. Something out of a sermon, I believe, on the duty of wives.

BOSWELL. And now he has obtained the manuscript, I fear that his lady friend does not require it.

WILKES. Or requires it too much. Perhaps that is how he would put it. Frankly, Mr. Burke, the situation is a delicate one, but I feel sure you will help us, if only for the Doctor's sake.

BURKE. For his sake? How will it affect him?

BOSWELL. It will affect him more than I like to think of. He has returned to town in complete innocence of all these society scandals. He remembers this lady as a sort of New England Puritan; and he will know nothing till he comes here.

WILKES. Dr. Johnson is an old man.

BURKE. Yes, Sir, I begin to see what you mean. And it is very terrible; it would come on him like a thunderbolt. What shall I do if the collision comes between him and all these wild spirits; and I can only stand by and pity my old friend?

BOSWELL. If the collision comes, I shall pity them. But it will be none the less dreadful; more dreadful than you know.

BURKE. What do you mean?

BOSWELL. Mr. Burke, I know that you literary gentlemen sometimes laugh at me; but I sometimes fancy the world will say that I knew something about you. At least I think the world will say one thing of me; that I know Dr. Johnson. Dr. Johnson is very fond of this young lady; it is in such cases that he remembers that he has no children. There are other things you do not know about the possibilities here, and I can only give a frightened guess. You have never seen Dr. Johnson angry.

BURKE. Faith! I should have fancied that we all had that privilege. He has honoured me by calling me a fool before now.

BOSWELL. I do not mean angry in an argument. Do you remember what he said to a girl who complained that he called her a goose? “If I had thought that, I certainly should not have said it.” He calls you a fool because he knows very well you are not one. He tells me he hates all Scotchmen, because I know very well he does not hate me. Only twice in my life, and long ago, I have seen Johnson really angry, with something that he really did hate. And I tell you that I remember those few far-off moments as he remembers the hour of death and the Day of Judgment. I turn cold when I think of them.

WILKES. What do you imagine will happen?

BOSWELL. I do not imagine it. I can only say that he will do no murder; but if that woman died in her chair I could hardly be incredulous.

WILKES. The only thing I can suggest is that if he comes here we should delay him with talk as long as possible. He will generally lose himself in an argument.

BURKE. Yes, he loses all sense of time; and so do I. Indeed, there would seem to be something in the very nature of a quest after abstract truth —

WILKES. I thought I heard a step outside.

BOSWELL. SO did I; and I know the step.

BURKE. I feel as if I were watching a great thunder-cloud moving slowly across a landscape. *[Enter* DR. JOHNSON.*]*

BURKE. Why, is it you, Doctor? I wished to consult you about something.

JOHNSON. Mr. and Mrs. Swift are here, I am told.

BURKE. The matter on which I wish to consult you concerned a young friend of mine, who is of your own politics and religious views. He has an opportunity of going into Parliament; and as I am myself of the opposite party, I hardly trust myself to give him unbiassed advice. But he is a young man of considerable sensibility; and fears that political life would only be painful to him; that it would vex him if things went wrong.

JOHNSON. That is cant, Sir. It would vex him no more in the House than in the gallery. Public affairs vex no man.

BOSWELL. Have they not vexed yourself not a little, Sir? Have you not been vexed by all the turbulence of this reign and by that absurd vote of the House of Commons against the King?

JOHNSON. I have never slept an hour less, nor ate an ounce less meat. I would have knocked the factious dogs on the head, to be sure; but I was not *vexed.*

WILKES. I am sure you would not knock Mr. Burke on the head; but I am a little more apprehensive for myself, even if public affairs vex no man. I should have supposed that public affairs were for every patriotic man the most reasonable ground of vexation. What should a good Englishman be concerned about, if not about public affairs?

JOHNSON. Sir, I am now concerned about private affairs; which are the only affairs that matter.

WILKES. Have you no conception of patriotism?

JOHNSON. Sir, after the experience of some years I have formed a very clear conception of patriotism. I have generally found it thrust into the foreground by some fellow who has something to hide in the background. I have seen a great deal of patriotism; and I have generally found it the last refuge of a scoundrel. *[He moves past* WILKES *towards the inner door; just as a chorus is heard growing louder in the room within.* BOSWELL *starts up in his path in great agitation.]*

BOSWELL. Dr. Johnson — pardon me — a question I have often wanted — I have often wondered, Dr. Johnson, what you would do if — you were left alone in a tower with a baby.

JOHNSON. Sir, I should not much like my company. *[Walks towards the inner doors and passes in.]*

[The chorus stops suddenly, and there is a silence.

BOSWELL. We can do no more.

BURKE. The hush before the thunder.

WILKES. You are right, gentlemen, you can do no more here. I must go back to my post. I advise you to go back to your homes.

BURKE. I shall go outside at least. I cannot endure this silence.

[BURKE *and* BOSWELL *go out in front and* WILKES *goes to the inner doors, listens, and then slips inside. After a silence, the inner doors are flung open and* MARY *comes out with an air of flaming impatience and defiance, followed by* DR. JOHNSON.

MARY. What is the use of your seeing me alone? What is the use of your seeing me at all? If my old nurse in New England came back like a ghost and told me to take care of my dolls and my pinafore, I suppose I should be glad to see her, but do you think I should attend to what she said? I have grown up; I have new ideas that you would never understand; you think there is a sort of supernatural flame, I suppose, on the hearth or altar that will burn for ever. But what is the good of your making things more miserable by coming here to curse me with bell, book and candle? What is the use of your thundering at me from a throne like the Pope of Rome, without even knowing I am a Protestant? Why should you trouble to excommunicate me from a church I do not belong to, and send me to a hell I do not believe in?

JOHNSON. Nay, Madam, I only called to pay my respects. *[After a pause.]* Or something which, perhaps, is not always the same. My respect.

MARY. Your respect?

JOHNSON. Why, Madam, it is only among very abject spirits that compassion destroys respect; and these are cases very pitiable in which respect will remain the stronger passion. Had I beheld one of the virgin martyrs of the Early Church undergoing torments for the Faith, it would doubtless be deeply distressing; but reverence would surely predominate. It is such reverence that I am bound to feel for your sorrows, your courage and your constancy.

MARY. Is this what you men of letters call irony?

JOHNSON. Nay, Madam, I am not ironical. I do not pretend to think your course of action theoretically correct; but a man may admire when he does not approve. If not of a Christian martyr, it is at least a case of a pagan heroine. When the wife of Brutus swallowed fire in order to die with her husband, a Christian must formally call it suicide, but surely a man may call it sublime. Pardon me if my admiration for your own fidelity as a wife should praise you rather as Portia than as Perpetua.

MARY. My fidelity as a wife?

JOHNSON. And it would be the more inconsistent of me to condemn your tragic devotion since, even if it be erroneous, it is in some sense identical with the advice I myself gave you.

MARY. The advice you gave me?

JOHNSON. When first we met in the Highlands, and you gave me a cup of tea —

MARY *[with a smile]*. I think, Dr. Johnson, that you had more than one.

JOHNSON. Madam, it is possible that I had two. On that occasion I told you you were right to follow your husband, if he dressed up as a monkey in a masquerade or went mad and said he was the Emperor of China. On that same occasion I told you that some day I would come back and repay you for that cup of tea; and I am here to repay. It was a long journey, and has led me into strange places; but I have found you, Patient Grizel.

MARY. Nobody ever called me patient before.

JOHNSON. Then nobody has done you justice. He has done all that I said and more. He has brought you to the masquerade. He has brought you to the mad-house. You have, as I said, stuck straws in your own hair; and to me at least they become you like a crown of laurel.

MARY. But madness is a matter of opinion. We have other opinions. I do not think my husband is mad.

JOHNSON. Madam, you are humouring him like a lunatic, and you are right. You are loyal to him, and you are right. You are lying to me, and you are right.

MARY. No, no.

JOHNSON *[with greater warmth*]. *Splendide mendux et in omne virgo nobilis œvum.*

MARY. Nay, if you curse me in Latin, I shall be none the worse for it.

JOHNSON. It is a pleasure to translate the curse. It only means, “A splendid liar ana a noble woman, worthy to be honoured for all time.”

MARY. Then you do not believe my word?

JOHNSON. NO, Madam, I do not.

MARY *[after a pause]*. Have you ever had a wife, Dr. Johnson?

JOHNSON. Yes, Madam, I have known what it is to have and lose a wife.

MARY. I thought so. I daresay she had a good deal to put up with.

JOHNSON *[rather taken aback]*. Why, yes; I fear it is possible that she did.

MARY. YOU see there is always something to put up with. We begin life expecting that; and sometimes I think that men do not. Your opinions may be quite correct, but I am sure you’ll forgive me for saying that your neckcloth is very crooked. I’ve been wanting to put it straight for the last ten minutes, and what it would be like to sit opposite it for ten years — [SWIFT *comes out through the folding doors, and stops in surprise.* So whether it’s opinions or cravats, there’s always something. John’s cravats are more straight even if his opinions are more crooked —

SWIFT. What does all this mean?

MARY. Dr. Johnson is telling me that I suffer in secret.

SWIFT. And you denied it of course.

MARY. Yes, I denied it — of course.

SWIFT. I think Dr. Johnson does not understand; with all respect for him, I think he could hardly be expected to understand. Mary and I are excellent friends, and all the more for having agreed to follow our social tastes in freedom. It is precisely because we agree in opinion that we are free to differ in taste. We are excellent friends; and in so far as there is any separation, it is a separation by mutual consent.

JOHNSON. Sir, there is no such thing. There is not and never has been a separation by mutual consent. I am an old man now, and have known something of the conjugal difficulties of many couples. I have known them separated by all manner of things; I have known them separated by jealousy and levity and lust, by poverty and by wealth, by sin and self-righteousness. But I never knew a couple separated by mutual consent. There is always one who divorces and the other who endures the divorce. There is always one who succeeds and one who suffers. You asked me if I believed in a supernatural fire on the hearth that would burn for ever. Let me ask you a question in return. Did you ever know two natural fires that went out at exactly the same moment?

SWIFT *[frowning]*. I confess that is a fair point.

JOHNSON *[with energy]*. And now, Sir, for your new philosophical morality, as it compares with the old. There is always a faithless and a faithful partner in such a case. But your new morality means that it shall be always the faithful who suffers, and only the faithful who suffers. Your new morality provides that the faithless shall always be happy, that he or she only needs to be faithless in order to be happy. Suffer me to retain my prejudice in favour of a more primitive philosophy. I am not yet converted to a creed which systematically rewards people for breaking their word, and punishes them for keeping it.

SWIFT. But how can we prove the existence of these faithful people who are punished?

JOHNSON. You have not far to look.

SWIFT *[in sudden agitation, as if a light broke on him],* Mary, is this true, have you been deceiving me — putting me in the wrong — wearing a mask as if you were at a carnival. How could you dare —

JOHNSON. Nay, Sir, if you are free to be a bad husband, surely she is free to be a good wife.

SWIFT *[to* MARY]. Are you going to answer my question?

MARY. NO, I am going away.

JOHNSON *[moving towards the inner doors].* Are you going this way?

MARY. NO; I am going the other way. I am going home.

SWIFT. Why in the world are you going home now?

MARY. Because I never could see the use of listening to a discussion when I know how it will end. *[She goes out at the front.]*

SWIFT *[turning with sudden fierceness].* What have you been doing with my wife?

JOHNSON. Nay, Sir, I understood that this barbarous proprietorship was abolished. I understood we were free of all these antiquated forms.

I have surely as much right to talk to her as Jack Wilkes.

SWIFT. I did not know you modelled yourself on Jack Wilkes.

JOHNSON. And I wish, Sir, that you would model yourself upon him.

SWIFT. What do you mean?

JOHNSON. Jack Wilkes is a better man than you. He neglects his wife. He deserts his wife. He leaves her at home on her death-bed, for all he knows, while he runs after other men's wives. But Jack is honest, and there is a sort of magnanimity about him. He does not go back and stand by her death-bed, and tell her to get up and dance to show her delight at being deserted. He does not rob her even of her own right to be angry, by plastering her all over with sham philosophies that she can neither answer nor understand. He does not force her to pretend to agree with him, to pretend to copy him, merely that he may feel more comfortable in his own infamy. Come, Sir, I use harsh words, but I do believe your understanding to be naturally open to the truth; look the truth in the face. Are you not reposing all the time on your wife’s magnanimous silence, as much as any tyrant ever reposed on the meaner silence of a slave?

SWIFT. But she is not silent. Again and again, when I have asked her, she has fully assented to the opinions I hold. They are accepted and recognised as hers. In this matter you are not only disregarding my own opinions. You are also riding rough-shod over my wife’s opinions.

JOHNSON. Sir, your wife has no opinions. She has as good a head as yours; and there is not and never has been a single opinion in it. Men like you and me, who have to do with books and pamphlets, fall into a fashion of imagining opinion to be the pre-occupation of all mankind. But, if I may suggest so strange a course to a republican, go among the common people; talk to the men, and especially the women, who do the real work of the world. Talk to the girl who serves in your kitchen. Ask the old woman who sells apples at the corner of the street. You will be surprised to find how large a proportion of your fellowcreatures live and die and do good work without being troubled even with good opinions; the more reason, Sir, that they should have good customs and a sound religion. Your wife would do better than we in managing a shop or a farm. I am far from sure she would not do better in ruling a ship or a Highland clan. But I am a man of some reading and experience in controversy; and you really must not ask me to give a brass button for her opinions. They never were anything but your opinions; and that alone, under your favour, does not suffice to recommend them to me.

SWIFT. What am I to do, when you tell me this on your own authority, and my own wife tells me the exact opposite?

JOHNSON. Why, Sir, you are to use your own common sense. Was she wearing a red cap like a cockatoo when you first met her in the New England village? Did she utter a eulogium on Jack Wilkes when she gave us tea in the Hebrides? Did she ever invent one single sophistry on her own account? It is you and your precious opinions that have boxed the compass from Puritanism to profligacy; is it not rather strange that her free and independent opinions always changed at the same time as yours?

SWIFT. By your account, I have wasted my life upon a sophistry.

JOHNSON. My young friend, you have not had much of your life to waste. There are many things that may happen yet, and I hope more rationally. [*After a pause.]* Poor Bozzy asked me just now what I should do if I were left alone with a baby. I should not shine on the occasion.

SWIFT. I know what you mean.

JOHNSON *[lowering his voice].* She would not regard a baby as an opinion. She does not regard you as an opinion. She is of a sort that always has been and always will be the nucleus and norm of humanity; and it understands its duties before it has defined them.

SWIFT. Mr. Wilkes said there must be a revolution in the family as well as in the state.

JOHNSON. The family is a reality; and realities last longer than revolutions. I will put the reality as rudely as you will. When you are left alone to play with your own baby, you will not desire, any more than any other man, that people should laugh and look to see if it has a squint.

SWIFT. Good God!

JOHNSON. Nay, I know it is not so; I know your platonic philosophies and philanderings. I know your wife cares nothing for Wilkes, and I doubt if you care much for that French bluestocking who flatters you. The more fools you, to sell your honour without even getting the price of pleasure that the devil would give you.

SWIFT. YOU say that the French lady flatters me, and perhaps she does. But she paid me a compliment to-day which I value. She said I accepted the truth when I saw it, from whom ever it came, and however it went against me. I am going to prove that I deserved it. *[After a pause.]* I know now that all my work here has been wasted; or rather that I have done no work, but only dissipated my days with fine company and fine words. I am useless, or I have been used by those who care nothing for me. What am I to do now?

JOHNSON *[taking a paper from his pocket]*. Do? Go back to America. Fight on the wrong side if you must; but fight. You would make a good soldier; you have certainly made a very bad spy. This is a safe conduct from the King, which I got from one of the King's friends at Westminster; it will see you out of the country. Take your wife with you and go; but go quickly, for there are many to make trouble about a royal favour. I need not ask whose fault it is if the royal power is not very secure.

SWIFT *[takes the paper doubtfully]*. You are very generous, and I wish now that I could do it. But I am attached formally to the French Embassy.

JOHNSON. The French Embassy is going too. France has taken up the cause of the colonies and declared war on England.

SWIFT *[starting forward and speaking with all his old impetuosity*]. Declared war! Great God! Then the Revolution is saved! The Revolution will triumph after all; and we shall live to see all tyranny go down to hell. War! What does it matter about me or about any man? What does it matter whether I have helped or hindered? The Republic is born.

JOHNSON *[smiling]*. Nay, Sir, you shall not draw me into an argument.

SWIFT. I see now that a man never knows he is right till he knows he is wrong. As clearly as I see my own labour in ruins, I see the future full of republics and free parliaments, and the peoples of the earth driving forward to democracy. Yes, I know now that the world will break its ancient chains; I know it firmly and finally as I know I am a fool. And I know that future ages will be asking how such a man as Samuel Johnson came to support such a man as George the Third; and how he came to discredit such a man as George Washington.

JOHNSON. Why, Sir, I certainly will not argue with you if you have become a prophet.

SWIFT. I am a prophet. You are a wiser man than I; but you are a sage and not a prophet. Prophets and poets shall know what I know; many of them men as weak and unwise as I; but they shall know. They shall sing of the Republic before it is born, and see it when it is invisible. For all the simple know in their hearts that men should be free and equal; and all the doubts of all the sages will go down before that simplicity. And men looking back, up the long perspective of our age, shall see even you as a sublime ruin or a solitary obstacle. They shall see you like some great statue, for nothing can depress you from greatness; a figure mighty and monumental; but dark, dark against the dawn.

JOHNSON. Sir, I have told you that I will not argue. I told you that I counted private affairs greater than public; I came but to end a private difference; and I thank Heaven it is ended. For the rest, it is true that I am of an older fashion; much that I love has been destroyed or sent into exile, and it may be that the future of mankind is all your own. Only I will say this. Suppose that you have deposed your tyrants and created your republics, suppose that a hundred years from now the earth is full of your free parliaments and free citizens. You have often reminded me that Kings are only men. Suppose you have discovered by that time that citizens are only men. Suppose that those wielding power should still be bad men. Suppose your parliaments are as unpopular as monarchies. Suppose your politicians are more hated than Kings. Suppose there returns to you war, the ancient enemy of mankind laying the world waste and leaving riddles to be read by a decimated race of demagogues and hucksters. If in that far-off day you are thus disappointed and embittered, I ask of you one thing. Do not in that day turn upon the people and curse them, because in your own whims and fancies you have chosen to ask of them more than men can give. Do not be like poor Gulliver, your great namesake, Jonathan Swift, who saw so clearly where the world was going, and turned on men and called them Yahoos. When your parliaments grow more corrupt and your wars more cruel, do not dream that you can breed a Houyhnhnm like a race-horse, or summon monsters from the moon, or cry out in your madness for something beyond the stature of man. Do you in that day of disillusion still have the strength to say: these are no Yahoos; these are men; these are fallen men; these are they for whom their Omnipotent Creator did not disdain to die.

[The clock strikes one. JOHNSON *points with his finger to the door; and* SWIFT *after a moment’s hesitation goes out.* JOHNSON *sits down at one of the tables and leans his head on his hand. Enter* CAPTAIN

DRAPER, LIEUTENANT CROCKFORD *and two Grenadiers.*

DRAPER. Dr. Johnson! I should never have dreamed of finding you here. We have come to arrest the Swifts; they are spies of the rebels.

JOHNSON. YOU will not find them. They have gone home.

[While he is speaking CROCKFORD *has gone into the inner room and returned with a bewildered expression.*

DRAPER. Home? You mean home to their lodgings?

JOHNSON. They have gone home to their own country, under a safe conduct from His Majesty.

DRAPER, *[after a silence*]. Do you give me your word that they have a safe conduct?

JOHNSON. I give you my word.

DRAPER. It is due to you to say that you are the only man whose word I would take for it. Crockford, we are too late.

CROCKFORD. Yes, I shall tell my men to turn in.

[They go out. JOHNSON *leans forward with his elbows on the table, covers his face with his hands and remains as if he were praying.* BOSWELL *enters almost on tiptoe and quietly takes a seat on an adjoining bench.*

BOSWELL *[in a low voice]*. I fear this has been a terrible hour for you, Dr. Johnson.

JOHNSON *[looking up and speaking in a strong voice]*. It has been the happiest hour in my life, which has known not a few terrible ones.

BOSWELL. Why, Sir, that is even more interesting. I have never attempted to disguise from your penetration that I have occasionally taken notes of our conversations, and may perhaps make some attempt to benefit the world by them. And the happiest hour of Dr. Johnson’s fife — that is an incident for which they will certainly look with interest in my book.

JOHNSON. This incident will not be found in your book.

Curtain.

THE TURKEY AND THE TURK

CAST

Father Christmas
The Doctor
The Princess of the Mountains
The Turkish Knight
St. George

The Turkey and the Turk

Father Christmas
Here am I, Father Christmas; well you know it,
Though critics say it fades, my Christmas Tree,
Yet was it Dickens who became my poet
And who the Dickens may the critics be?

St. George
I am St. George, whose cross in scutcheon scored,
Red as the Rose of England on me glows,
The Dragon who would pluck it, found this sword *[draws sword]*
Which is the thorn upon the English Rose.

Doctor
I am the Doctor from Berlin. I kill
Germs and diseases upon handsome terms
There are so many ways of being ill —
Some trust the Germans. Some prefer the Germs.

The Turkish Knight
I am the Turkish Knight: to sink and rise
In every Mummer’s Play has been my work.
I am that Wrath that falls but never flies,
A Turkish Knight — but a most knightly Turk.

The Princess of the Mountains
I am the Princess come from mountains shady
That are the world’s last wall against the Turk.
I had to come; or there would be no lady
In this remarkable dramatic work.

[Enter Father Christmas with Christmas Pudding, Turkey, Flagons, etc.]

Father Christmas
I will not drink; let the great flagon here
Till the great toasts are drunk, stand where it is.

But Christmas pudding comes but once a year
But many times a day. And none amiss *[cuts off a piece]*
The Christmas Pudding, round as the round sky,
Speckled with better things than stars.

Doctor *[rushes in and arrests his hands]*
Forgive my haste. But men who eat that pudding die.

Father Christmas
And men who do not eat it do not live. *[eats]*

Doctor
Our last proofs show, for perils that appal,
A Christmas pudding is a cannon ball.
But you grow old —

Father Christmas
And you grow always new
And every year you take a different view.
My every Christmas brings, with change and chills,
New doctors’ doctrines with new doctors’ bills.
Next year this pudding where I plant my knife
Will be the only food sustaining life.
The proverb holds; who shall decide or choose
When doctors disagree — with their own views?
Your drugs turn poisons and your poisons food.
And still this round and solid fact holds good —
While with themselves the doctors disagree
No Christmas pudding disagrees with me.

Doctor
Progress is change; so is the whole world’s youth
Afoot betimes to catch the newest truth,
While you in night-long wassail waste your breath
The early bird catches the worm of death,
Conquers the grave; and doth the secret know
Of life immortal.

Father Christmas
For a month or so.
That, too, will change. Soon you will tell us all
That early rising is a daily fall,
That fever waits in fiery morning skies,
And Bed is the most bracing exercise.
You’ll find for sluggards some more pleasing term
And cry “The Early Bird catches the Germ”.

[Enter the Princess of the Mountians.]

Princess
Save me and harbour me, all Christian folk,
For I am fleeing from the heathen might.
My mountain city is a trail of smoke,
My track is trampled by the Turkish Knight,
Already where I sink they shake the ground,
The flying towers, the horsemen of Mahound.

Doctor
Mahound. More properly Muhammad. Quaint!
The wars of creeds — or demons — smoke and smother.
Each of the demons calls himself a saint —
Until two men can tolerate each other.

Princess
So were we taught by many Turkish kings
To tolerate intolerable things.

Father Christmas
I have a creed. Its name is charity
And at my table all men may agree.

Princess
Folk of the West, bethink you, far from strife,
Through what more weary ages than you think,
Our broken swords covered your carving knife
And with our blood you bought the wine you drink,

That you might ply your kindlier Christmas work
And kill the Turkey while we killed the Turk.

Father Christmas
I see one from the mounts ride amain
Who rather comes to slay than to be slain.

[Enter Turkish Knight.]

Turkish Knight
I am the master of the sons of battle,
The cohorts of the Crescent of the night,
I for whom queens are slaves and slaves are cattle,
I claim this queen and slave out of my right.
I have burned her town and slain her sire in strife,
Is there a better way to earn a wife?

Princess
A wife! This Turkish dog, like sheep in pen,
May herd a hundred wives — or bondwomen.

Doctor
Consider, Set above the smoke of passion
Where high philosophy and reason reign.
I can give counsel in a cooler fashion
Who am the friend of peace, the foe of pain.
Consider — should this gentleman insist —
He might be worse than a polygamist.

Princess
What could be worse, and what unworthier?

Doctor
He might, like Bluebeard, be a widower.
The habit which enjoys a hundred wives
Suggests at least, that every wife — survives.

Princess
Such are not things that such as I survive,
Nor shall such bridal see us both alive,
Nor I consent —

Turkish Knight
Nor did I ask consent.
I did not ask your banner to be rent;
Your sire to fall, your battle-line to break,
I do not ask for anything I take.

Doctor
She will find comfort in Philosophy.

Father Christmas
You were right, Doctor; I am old. Woe’s me,
My knife is a clown’s sword for cutting grease. *[flings down his carving knife]*

Doctor *[looking piously upward]*
Peace! Is not this the certain road to Peace?

[Enter St. George]

St. George
Stop! For the doors are shut upon your treason,
I, George of Merry England, bar the way.
Not all so easily, not for a season,
You brave the anger of the saints at bay.
Red shall your cohorts be, your Crescent faint,
The hour you find — what will provoke a Saint.

Doctor
Who is this mad Crusader?

Father Christmas *[lifting his flagon]*
He is come!
Let burst the trumpets, dance upon the drum!

Shout till you deafen the dead! I drain the flagon.
England in arms! St. George that beat the Dragon!

Doctor
You dream, old dotard, and your drunken tales
Are fumes of Yuletide vintages and ales.
The wine is in your head. Water and wine.
A Dragon! Snapdragon is more your line.

Father Christmas
It may be. Who shall choose between us twain
Wine in the head or water on the brain?
But what of you, most prudent paragon,
You are frightened of the snapdragon
As of the Dragon, that St. George has beaten,
More scared to eat than he was to be eaten.

St. George
At least I come in time to do redress
On a new Dragon for a new Princess.

Turkish Knight
Sir, if my hundred wives indeed be sheep
I am the shepherd, who can count and keep,
And I keep this; had you a hundred lives
This sword should teach you to respect my wives.

St. George
I will respect your widows.

Turkish Knight
They that keep
The oracles of the Prophet see you sleep
Dead on your shield.

St. George
I bear upon my shield

Death, and a certain lesson how to die —
Your Prophet lived to late to prophesy.

Princess
See how the face of your strange Doctor sneers!

Doctor
How should Peace stay when Piety appears
And men do murder for a change of words?
Yet might the Peace be held. Ere you cross swords
Knights of the Cross and Crescent, count the loss —

St. George
Two swords in crossing make the sign of the cross
That frightens fiends.

[Doctor leaps back from the dash of swords.]

He's wounded in the hand;
Doctor, a Doctor — let the battle stand.

Doctor
I am a doctor, sir, and I can cure
Complaints and maladies such Turks endure;
In Turkish camps where air and water taints —

Turkish Knight
You will find maladies, but not complaints.

Doctor
But who will pay me if I cure the Turk?

St. George
This hand will give you pay, which gives you work.

[He hangs his Red Cross shield up behind the Turkish Knight and Doctor.]

St. George
For proof that Christian men war not as cattle

Above my foeman’s head I hang my shield,
That shows far off o’er hideous wastes of battle
My sword has shattered but my shield has healed.

Father Christmas
They say to every shield there are two sides.
So shall our champion show them as he rides,
And milder servants follow him in fight,
The Red Cross nurses to the Red Cross Knight.

Doctor
Nurses and knights and all your chivalry
Would still be barren mercies but for me.
While you with liberal words would mend the Turk,
The healing hand of Science does your work,
While you show generous gestures, vague or grand
The healing hand of Science finds a hand.

[Produces a Mailed Fist — any sort of big pantomime glove of armour.]

Father Christmas
Here is the sort of trick the doctors love
To take a hand and give us back a glove.

Turkish Knight
What would you do? I do not understand.

Doctor
The Gauntlet shall be mightier than the hand,
Science has found the hand of your desire
An iron hand, a hand for flinging fire,
A mailed fist, the ensign of your legions,
And from the fingers of it flames shall go,
Smoke and thick flames that poison vasty regions,
And blight the fields as well as blight the foe.
Fool and fantastic in your red-cross coat,
A more than human hand is at your throat,
A hand that chokes.

St. George
I know that this is sure
Whatever man can do, man can endure,
Though you shall loose all laws of fight, and fashion
A torture-chamber from a tilting-yard,
Though iron hard as doom grow hot as passion,
Man shall be hotter, man shall be more hard,
And when an army in your hell-fire faints,
You shall find martyrs who were never saints.

Doctor
I am weary of your sainthood. If you knew
You would, as even I do, quake. But you
Who in a painted halo put reliance
Fear naught.

St. George
Not even the healing hand of science.

Doctor *[furiously]*
Then at him, wound him, waste him utterly.

[They fight.]

Turkish Knight
Ere I could wound him he has wounded me.

Princess
The Turk is wounded in the leg —

Father Christmas
Well fought!

Turkish Knight
A Doctor, quick, a Doctor! It is naught,
To heal such scathe should be a petty task.
I answer for my answering of it. Ask
The Princess of the Mountains, for she knows,

How long wars wage in Eastern sands or snows.
No splitting of a slender tilting lance
For a crowd’s gaping or a lady’s glance,
War to the knife!

Doctor
The surgeon’s knife, my lord
The surgeon’s knife is mightier than the sword.
Answer me now, old driveller, as you can,
When your great carving-knife has cured a man,
Or if these bones the war-dogs crush and crunch
Can be patched up with pudding or with punch.
Lady, I tell you all your mountain dead
Who on Kossovo of the Blakcbirds bled,
There were the hero dies as a dog dies,
Might have re-risen as this man shall rise,
Answer me now, proud lady, as you can
Does Science help? Can Science save a man?
What do you see, for all your savage pride?

Princess
I see always helping the wrong side.

Father Christmas *[to St. George]*
This is not just. You fight not one but three,
I think that you grew wearier than he.

Princess
Why should we patch this pirate up again?
Why should you always win, and win in vain?
Bid him not cut the leg, but cut the loss.

St. George
I will not fire upon my own Red Cross.

Princess
If you lay there, would he let *you* escape?

St. George
I am his Conqueror and not his ape.

Doctor
Be not so sure of conquering. He shall rise
On lighter feet, on feet that vault the skies.
Science shall make a mighty foot and new,

[Produces a sort of pantomime leg in armour and with wings.]

Light as the feather feet of Perseus flew,
Long as the seven-leagued boots in tales gone by,
This shall bestride the sea and ride the sky.
Thus shall he fly, and beat above your nation
The clashing pinions of Apocalypse,
Ye shall be deep-sea fish in pale prostration
Under the sky-foam of his flying ships.

[The Turkish Knight advances with the new leg, to fight again.]

When terror above your cities, dropping doom,
Shall shut all England in a lampless tomb,
Your widows and your orphans now forlorn
Shall be no safer than the dead they mourn.
When all their lights grow dark, their lives grow grey,
What will those widows and those orphans say?

St. George
St. George for Merry England!

[They fight again, with more doubtful effect, but St. George at last smites the Turkish Knight on the head and he falls.]

Princess
Down is the Crescent and its crest abased!

Doctor
A head is very easily replaced.

Father Christmas
More of this ironmongery that he hires.

Doctor
Here is a Head no headache ever tires
Which never wants its hair cut, singed or curled,
The Business Head of all the Working World.

[Produces pantomime head of a German with a spiked helmet and spectacles — perhaps rather like the Doctor's own.]

Father Christmas
Shall we again grant respite to our foe?

St. George
I tell you Yes, man!

[The Turkish Knight suddenly lifts himself on his elbow.]

Turkish knight
And I tell you No.
I'll have no more of your pale wizardry,
Leave me my wounded head and let me be.

Doctor
What do you mean? A wound is only pain.
And why should I who twice, and now again,
Lead you to conquer, leave you now to die?

Turkish Knight
Something may conquer. It will not be I.
If always thus you mend me when I fall,
There will be nothing of myself at all.
You arm me and you tame me and you trim,
Each time I gain a tool and lose a limb.
In wings and wheels all that I was will fade
And I shall be a monster You have made.

Doctor
You hoped to have his head when you began.

Turkish Knight
Base leech, I hoped to be the better man
And not the better mantrap. Leave alone!
I hoped to have his head — and keep my own *[rousing himself]*.
When I came riding from the tents of morning
Clean as an arrow from my bended bow,
I had not need of such dead things' adorning,
No, by the panoply of the Prophet, no! *[rises]*
Lady, if we be less than you in love,
At least our hate as high as your shall stand.
And I have lost. The Devil take my glove *[flings away the mailed hand]*,
And George of Merry England take my hand.

Princess
Now is the Turkish Knight a knight at least.

Doctor
A knight! They will be snivelling for a priest
To wed you to your Red Cross cut-throat here,
With all the mummeries of Faith — and Fear —
To suit this medieval mummery,
These fighting-cocks are caught in — Chivalry!
That in a tangle of fantastic rules
Makes them first foes, then friends, and always fools;
I would have rapt your souls to clearer rages,
On the top wave of Time, alive, alert.
I had done all that could outdare the ages.

Father Christmas *[poking him with the carving knife]*

Friend, did you ever laugh? And did it hurt?
No matter — if you cannot laugh, my friend,
You can be laughed at: let us laugh — and end.
Dragon and snapdragon alike take flight
With cockcrow. Take a slash at Turkish Knight,

Or take a slice of Turkey, as you choose,
And have the German Doctor for the goose —
And if the goose must cackle — if he tease
With talk of medieval mummeries,
Ask him what else but Mummery, I pray,
He asks from Mummers upon Christmas Day?

THE SURPRISE

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CHARACTERS

FRANCISCAN FRIAR
AUTHOR
Characters which appear as puppets in Act I and as human beings in Act II
OLIVER OLIVAREZ, a Poet
PRINCESS CHRISTINA of Garfagnana
DONNA MARIA DI COMPOSTELLA, her friend
PHOEBUS, King of Fontarabia
CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD
GUARD

THIS play was written in 1932 for production by Miss Patricia R. Burke, but it was put aside before revision and has never been acted.

ACT I

SCENE I

SCENE. — *A brown sunbaked landscape in the foothills of the Pyrenees. At the crest of a hill is a wayside crucifix and on the slope below it, tilted, a caravan of a gypsy sort, gilded and striped with colours. Beside it stands a Guard or Halberdier, in sixteenth-century uniform, with his back to the audience, looking across the countryside.*

Enter, on the other side, a Franciscan Friar with a big beard and spectacles; he wears the brown habit with the addition of a broad battered straw hat. He carries some fruit and a gourd, at which he is gazing shortsightedly, as if he had just picked them up. Then he catches sight of the crucifix and prays in front of it for a moment, and then turns and sees the Guard.

FRIAR. Heaven be with us, is this caravan the King's coach, that it should have a sentry outside it? (*Raising his voice.)* Bless you, my son (*The Guard does not answer.)* Rather unresponsive. Anti-clerical perhaps. *(Louder still.)* I said bless you. You may say curse you, but at least say something. (*Guard does not move.)* Dear me; a strong silent man. It's very hot here; would you like some fruit? (*Guard still motionless.)* Really this seems like carrying military modesty too far. Some kind people have just given me a melon and some bread and wine. Will you have some fruit? Or some bread? *(Silence.)* Oh, he must be deaf. Or some wine? *(Silence.)* Oh, he must be dead!

A bald head with brisk black moustaches and pointed beard appears suddenly out of the parted curtains of the caravan, and its owner, hereinafter called the Author, calls across to the Friar.

AUTHOR. Really, Reverend Father, that is rather a fine point. Is he dead? Would it be a proper use of philosophic language to say that he is dead? *(He has come down the stage and is gazing at the Guard's back reflectively, with his head on one side. He is a smallish, active man, plainly clad in the doublet and collar of the time, looking rather like a Spanish Shakespeare.)* One school of thinkers will doubtless declare, dogmatically, that a thing cannot be dead when it has never been alive. Others, of a more mechanistic school, may hold that a thing is alive because it gives the material manifestations of life; as he will do in a minute, when he is wound up. Anyhow, you will admit he is a model soldier and a quite incorruptible sentinel.

FRIAR. Who is he? Do you know him?

AUTHOR. Yes; I knew him before he was made.

Author runs across and picks up the Guard in his arms and carries him like a bundle, setting him down facing the audience. The Guard stares steadily into vacancy and his eyes do not even blink.

FRIAR. Heaven have mercy on us! He’s a dummy!

AUTHOR. For the present... for the present. Until I bring him to life.

FRIAR *(crossing himself)*. Who are you in the name of God? Is this magic?

AUTHOR. Have no fear. It is no more magic than the science that Holy Albert studied, or that for which the Pope honoured Friar Bacon. It is but a machine; though I swear it walks and talks like a man.

FRIAR. But who are you?

AUTHOR. My name matters nothing now. Perhaps it will be known some day. You have the honour, Reverend Sir, to be conversing with the Master Puppet-Maker of the World, who has made marionettes to move without wires and speak human speech as melodiously as a musical-box. I ought to be at this moment performing before all the crowned heads of Europe; but they have kept me waiting so long, that now I keep them waiting a little longer. I am a king myself and this is my very loyal court. After all, it owes everything to me. What scenery there is, I paint. What plays there are, I write. I make them all and the story for which they are made. I am like a little god in my own mimic world.

FRIAR. Do not forget the real God or the real world.

AUTHOR (*looking across for an instant at the crucifix)*. Do not misunderstand me. I am not one of those who lightly sneer at our fathers or the faith. The real world is very grievous; and doubtless it is right that it should worship a grievous god. I only say, for the world that I have made, that though I cannot make it as real, I have at least made it less grievous. Inside that box on wheels, though not outside it, there is a very happy universe; not cosy, but nobly happy; indeed I think the little world is larger than the large one. All my creatures behave with majesty and magnanimity. Heroic virtue always conquers in my stories, and when I come out of my little theatre, full of towering generosity and the gestures of giants, into this wicked world, I think the world is mean as well as wicked; and the truth is smaller than the tale.

FRIAR. DO you know what has made the world mean and wicked?

AUTHOR. I only know who has made my own puppets great, so that even when they are wicked, they are never mean. Come, we have talked enough of theory; it is time that you should see something of them.

He goes behind the curtain and brings out two female figures entirely swathed in long veils, covering the face as well as the figure; one is all white and silver, the other black emblazoned with dark red.

AUTHOR (*introducing them with a bow).* Two noble and high-born ladies, both of dazzling beauty. One, you will notice, fair and full-blooded, with a frank and rather resolute expression, something of a fighter, perhaps too much of a ruler; the other, you will observe, darker in colouring and more subtle in appeal, touched with an elfin strangeness and fretted within with the pale flame of the mystics.

FRIAR. But which is which?

AUTHOR. That, Father, you will learn when you have paid for your seat.

He goes back and drags out two more figures: one of a very magnificent young man clad in cloth-of-gold which clings to his athletic limbs like chain armour; he has close curling hair and something of the profile of Caesar on a bronze coin; he has a sword at his side and carries a golden rose in his right hand. The other is the figure of a somewhat older man, who has also an eagle nose but hair black and ragged like his clothes, which might *almost be those of a beggar, but that he wears a sword, carries a guitar, and has a long red feather stuck in his hat.*

FRIAR. Who is this expansive youth in gilded armour?

AUTHOR. That, Father, is one of the mightiest heroes, one of the most adventurous kings of history. He conquers half Asia — when he is wound up. With the Captain of the Guard you have already been in affable conversation, and he has another halberdier to assist him. That is really all.

FRIAR. But who is this unfortunate scarecrow all in rags and tatters?

AUTHOR *(bowing)*. That is a distinguished man of letters; a representative poet and author, like myself.

AUTHOR. Come! The play is very short, and it will be an act of charity. Sit down. Have you ever seen a play?

FRIAR. I have seen a miracle play.

AUTHOR *(suddenly)*. Have you ever seen a miracle?

FRIAR *(very slowly)*. Yes, I have seen a miracle.

AUTHOR *(starts and then stares at him intently)*. Who are you?... By God, I know who you are.

FRIAR. YOU know more than I do.

AUTHOR. YOU are Fra Francesco from Andorra, whom the pilgrims come in crowds to see, as they come to the shrine of Compostella.

FRIAR. I am one of the little brothers.

AUTHOR. And you worked the miracle.

FRIAR. NO man has ever worked a miracle. The atheists are often right. It is God who works miracles.

AUTHOR. But He worked it through you. *(The friar is silent.)* Ever since you came here, I have known that the air was changed as to a burning transparency, as if paradise were breaking through. As if new powers were pouring into the world. As if you could make the trees walk and the horse of my caravan grow wings, or turn me into one of my own puppets.

FRIAR. It would be a mortal sin to do that, if anyone could do it. Only witches and wicked sorcerers make men captives by their enchantment; imprison them in beasts or birds or turn them to stone statues. God’s miracles always free men from captivity and give them back their bodies. But such portents as you name are sometimes shown in a vision, as a parable or a warning.

AUTHOR *(abruptly).* Will you hear my confession?... Even if it is my puppets who confess?

FRIAR. What do you mean?

AUTHOR. Will you see my play? It is a part of my confession. Don’t you know how it is, with our wretched trade? We poets never tell the truth, except when we tell it in fables. I should try to tell the truth, in respect for the Sacrament of Penance; but I should always be weighed down with the thought of how little I had to tell. But these clockwork dolls will tell you the truth about me. Come, Father, I have a reason and I really want you to see my play.

FRIAR. What is the name of your play?

AUTHOR. It is called “The Surprise”. But I fear you will not be very much surprised at it. It is not only very short, but very simple. The sort of old-fashioned romantic play we act before rustics at country fairs. Oh, such a very simple complication. How oddly simple those old complications are! Joan is mistaken for Jill and Jill is disguised as Jack, and they all marry each other by mistake and live happily ever after. That is the sort of play it is; and, thank God, it is soon over. But yet there is a question to ask you: and you could hardly answer without hearing the tale. Not perhaps a question in the play. A question after the play.

FRIAR. Do you mean a question about the play?

AUTHOR. No; I mean a question about the playwright. A question about me. It might possibly be put in the form: Have I gone mad? Or it might be put in the other form: Please, Sir, may I go mad? Will you work a miracle and turn me into a lunatic instead of a stone statue? Father, I talk in riddles, until you have seen the play. Will you see my play?

FRIAR. Yes; I will hear your confession.

AUTHOR. Sit down on this green bank; and you shall *not* pay for your seat.

SCENE II

SCENE. — *The corner of a garden, showing the corner of a castle; in which there is one lighted window. In the background, jutting from the building, is an archway through which there climbs a flight of steps. It is a moonlight night. The first Guard or Halberdier passes slowly across the stage and then back again, pacing up and down as a sentinel.*

GUARD (*stops suddenly in the middle and levels his halberd).* Halt! Who goes there?

Enter the ragged man with the red feather and the guitar. For the present we will call him the Poet.

POET (*with a high and scornful gesture).* Go away! Go away at once! I am composing a Serenade. I climbed a tree and fell off a high wall into this garden, simply because it was the most dreary and desolate spot I could find. A man of any delicacy must find a quiet spot for a Serenade. Go away!

GUARD (*mildly amused).* We can't have Serenades in Her Highness's garden, especially the night before her wedding, can we? I put it to you. The princess is very good-natured —

POET. The what?

GUARD. YOU must know this is the castle of Her Highness the Princess of Garfagnana.

POET (*with a burst of petulance).* Well! I do think it's perfectly intolerable that a man can't get away by himself to compose a Serenade, without some woman hanging about to hear it. These women! — always eavesdropping and poking their noses in where they're not wanted! I do think it's hard if a poor harmless Troubadour can't even have his Serenade to himself. Send her away. Tell her to go away at once!

GUARD. My good man, you can't expect the Princess to go away from her own castle.

POET. When once she fully understands that a distinguished poet and musician requires a little solitude for a few minutes, merely to compose the Greatest Song in the World, I feel sure that she will have the tact, she will have the taste, she will have the good feeling and *savoir faire,* to move her castle somewhere else. By the way, who did you say she was?

GUARD *(saluting)*. Her Highness the Princess of Garfagnana.

POET *(starting)*. Stop a moment! Why, that is she whom they call the Good Princess. She gave food to ten thousand beggars; nay, wine to no less than two thousand poets. I apologise. Her castle shall not be removed. *(With a commanding gesture)*. Let it remain. To this great pattern of charity, to this patron saint of poets and the poor, to her I will consent to sing the Serenade that is the Greatest Song in the World.

GUARD. If she has been good to all the poets and musicians, that is no reason why she should be disturbed on the night before her wedding-day.

POET. If she has been good to all the poets and musicians, it is probably about time that she heard a little good music and poetry.

GUARD. Oh, you are joking.

POET. Let me explain. I have reached a crisis. I have reached what we, in a world somewhat different from your own simple round of duties, describe as the creative crisis. It may be described as the crisis at which you want to create something and can't. In most distinguished artists it lasts for a lifetime. It is then called the artistic temperament. But something tells me tonight that I am very near to turning the corner. There are four notes that I can almost hear, but cannot yet name or number, that lift the last line of the song suddenly into heaven. Or at least they will, when I know what they are.... (*Strums on his guitar.)*... "Awake, awake, *awake!"*

GUARD. That's what I complain of. I can't have Her Highness awake — awake — awaked at eleven o'clock just before her wedding.

Enter the Captain of the Guard; holding a drawn sword but without a halberd.

CAPTAIN. What is all this noise? Send this ragamuffin away or clap him in the guard-room.

POET *(sternly).* Ingrates! Thankless dogs! She has fed and clothed you and maintained you in the arms and authority you abuse. She has set you an example of welcoming poets even in rags; and you call them ragamuffins. And it is this great protectress, this peerless lady, whom you would cheat and despoil by depriving her of My Ode, by leaving her desolate and without the joy and inspiration of My Poetry. Thieves that would pilfer from her this treasure, cut-purses and pickpockets who —

CAPTAIN *(running at him with the sword).* Do you call us thieves, you gallows-bird?

POET *(leaps back and draws his sword).* I could fight a hundred guards! My hand holds a hundred swords! Such a woman! Such a poem! *(He disarms the Captain. The Guard strikes with his halberd. The Poet turns and wounds the Guard.)* To it again! I feel the poetry coming.... Awake, awake.... No, that's not it.

(Captain picks up his sword and they re-engage.) Awake. Hi! Stop a minute! I'll kill you in a minute! I've got it! (*Drops his sword and seizes his guitar.)* Awake, awake, *awake! Strikes four notes triumphantly; and the Guard knocks him down with the halberd.*

POET (*from the ground).* There you are! Now you've killed me, I suppose, and nobody will remember the notes. *(His head falls back.)* Found. And lost.

(Silence.)

GUARD. IS he dead?

Four notes sound from the tower of the castle.

CAPTAIN. That's his blasted guitar. He's not dead.

GUARD. Those weren't from his guitar.

CAPTAIN. I’ll swear those were the notes he played.

GUARD. Those are the notes he played; but he did not play them.

CAPTAIN. What do you mean?

GUARD. They came from that window in the castle.

CAPTAIN. Good Lord! You don’t mean that he *was* serenading —

GUARD. And I suppose we’ve killed him.

A window opens in the castle and the voice of the Princess is heard calling down.

PRINCESS. What is that? Is anyone hurt?... I will come down. *(Enter Princess.)* What is all this? Is this man hurt? What are you all fighting about?

CAPTAIN. We were afraid he would disturb Your Highness.

PRINCESS. I see. So you started a fight for fear I should be disturbed. *(Looks at the Poet.)* He is only stunned. Bring out that bench from under the wall. I have told you again and again not to treat trespassers in this way.

GUARD. Shall we take him to the hospital, Your Highness?

PRINCESS *(reflecting a moment).* Not yet.... He is recovering. Bring me some wine.

GUARD. We were sorry this should happen so soon before Your Highness’s bridal day.

PRINCESS. DO you think I shall be harder upon the poor, because it is my bridal day?

CAPTAIN. Your Highness has admitted that the man is only stunned.

PRINCESS. The man is stunned and the music has stopped. A good deal may happen when a man is stunned. He had only just remembered. When he wakes up he may forget.

CAPTAIN. If Your Highness is interested, I can only hope he will not forget.

PRINCESS (*more lightly)*. Oh, it is no matter... I shall remember.

SCENE III

The Scene is pitch-dark. At first there is silence and then groans and grunts, which gradually turn into the voice of the Poet waking up.

POET.... Let us discuss this question calmly. Am I dead or am I not dead? It is dark; but that may only mean that I am blind. After all, I was a wandering minstrel and they blinded me to complete a resemblance which must leap to every intelligent mind. They heard a few lines of my verse and the identificaation was fixed for ever; “Homer has come among us they cried in chorus.” It is but little that we can do to provide such a visitor with a worthy welcome, or suitable surroundings”, cried the simple enthusiasts. “But at least we can make him blind.” A compliment. But one which I should have courteously waved away.... Or perhaps I’m not blind but blind drunk. Or possibly not dead but only dead drunk. Anyhow, if I’m not dead in this tomb, I suppose I soon shall be. Ten cities will claim to be the place where I was born; but this will triumphantly establish itself as the place where I died. Perhaps there is already a magnificent marble monument outside, while I’m dead inside. I hope they haven’t buried me alive; but this tomb... You infernal fool! It’s much more likely that it’s a jail.... It’s all coming back, as they say. I had a fight with the Princess’s Guard and now I’m in jail. *(He feels and gropes round him.)* Yes, by St. Julian — here’s the bread and water; a great earthenware jug of cold water. When they give you a great hunk of dry bread, then you know you’re in prison — *Life of The Poor*, in Twelve Volumes, by the author of... Well, bread is better than nothing when you’re hungry; and even water may be drunk in extreme and desperate cases of thirst. *(Drinks.)*... God Almighty! It’s wine! *(Drinks again.)* Christ and all Archangels! It’s good wine.... Bread and wine... Bread and *(eats and shouts suddenly with his mouth full)* Cake! It is — it is — it is! It’s the old ginger cake with currants, that I liked when I was a little boy. But, on the other hand, it may be reasonably urged, I’m not a little boy. There is only one possible explanation. The question is settled. I’m dead and gone to heaven.

The door opens, flooding the room with light and showing it as a sort of pavilion in the garden decorated simply with a few spoils of the chase. The

Princess is standing in the doorway.

POET *(falling on his knees, blinded with the burst of light).* Holy Mary, Mother of God.

PRINCESS NO; I am afraid you are mistaken I am only — shall we say — your hostess.

POET *(staring at her).* Forgive me. I have had rather a shock. I thought I was dead. And now, I suppose, I have to accept another shock. I find I am alive.

PRINCESS. Do you find that so very shocking?

POET. Well, I find it a little embarrassing. You see, I never was alive before.

PRINCESS. I was certainly afraid those guards of mine had really killed you. It would have been, to say the least, an excessive punishment for playing the guitar — or the fool. I've told them again and again not to interfere with troubadours or fools. So I sent them back to barracks for a bit; which is letting them off lightly.

POET. I do hope the poor fellows have not got into any trouble through my fault.

PRINCESS. I don't think you need worry. I am not very severe. They will drink water for one night and be back again in the taverns tomorrow for wine.

POET. May I respectfully make a suggestion?

PRINCESS. Oh, I am always open to suggestions.

POET. Don't let them find bread and water in the cells and cakes and ale in the taverns. Keep them in prison, lock all the doors; and then put wine in their water-pots.

PRINCESS. What on earth do you mean?

POET. I have just drunk wine that was like nectar, because I thought it was going to be water.

PRINCESS. YOU are an odd person; but there may be something in what you say.

POET. Lady, you are the sunlight of your people; sunlight and starlight, as you watch them night and day. They must be as happy as the day is long and dance from dawn to dusk. They must fight for a glimpse of your face and sing of you in every street; and thank God when they think of you.

PRINCESS (*after a silence)*. I do my best. I think I do some good. Nearly all the people round here own their own land, and all those that cannot have good regular wages. They seem contented. There are few complaints. Every man is secure of finding ale in the alecask; every man has a pig at the pig-trough. But as for dancing — well, perhaps they are not a dancing sort. Perhaps they are not a singing sort. And as for thanking God in the street... no, I won’t say they are not a thanking sort. They are — well, they are contented and I am content.

POET. You are a little sad. People generally are when they say they are content.

PRINCESS. Oh, no, no —

POET. Oh, my God, what am I? Mud out of the highway soiling your carpets; a rag blown over the wall. But will you let me speak one moment for all the ragged people on the road, the truth that your officers do not tell you; what I know out of the very mouths of the poor of God?

PRINCESS. What in the world do they want?

POET. They want surprise. They do not want sufficiency or security. They want surprise. They do not want regular wages. They want irregular wealth. You say they can always find a pig at the pigtrough and ale in the ale-cask. If ever, one fine morning, they found the pig in the ale-cask and could drink ale out of the pig-trough — they would think they were in a fairy-tale.

PRINCESS. IS that why you want them to find wine in the prison?

POET. It is because I have just drunk such wine as was never drunk since the feast of Cana.... The wine of surprise. Only God could work such a miracle.

I never drank that at any banquet or in any tavern; for there I was expecting wine. I never drank it till this night, when I was stunned, blinded, in the black darkness, desperate, believing myself buried alive. But thou hast kept the good wine until now.

PRINCESS. Was not that the miracle of the wedding-feast?

POET. Yes, Your Highness. I have been told that you are near your own.

PRINCESS. A wedding, I fear, is not always a surprise.

POET. It would be better if it were, I fancy. I have sometimes wondered whether the wedding could be as sudden as the wooing.

PRINCESS. You think there should be two miracles of Cana; that it should apply to the wedding as well as the wine. It is strange you should say that just now.

POET. Your Highness thinks it strange.

PRINCESS. Because of something that has been in my thoughts for some time.

POET. I trust I said nothing unfitting.

PRINCESS. No; very fitting. It was strange because it fitted so well... into what I had been thinking.

POET. I do not presume to enquire into Your Highness's affairs.

PRINCESS. I suppose you know what everybody knows. *(Speaking rather rapidly, but sharply and clearly.)* Phoebus, now King of Fontarabia, was once an outlaw knight fleeing from the wrath of his overlord, and he hid in this castle; which was a more famous and powerful castle in my father’s day. My father protected him and gave him horse and money for escape; and the whole world knows the rest. The wild boy who hid with us became the first soldier of fortune of the age, defeated his overlord, conquered four or five kingdoms, till his glory shone from Baghdad to Biscay. He is now more like an Emperor than a King. Meanwhile, our own fortunes have fallen, and my little province is shrunken and impoverished. All that remains to be said is this. That before he left us long ago, he had proposed for my hand, and promised to come back and claim it. He is coming back today.

POET. He seems a very unique and eccentric sort of hero. He has actually gained his glory and not lost his honour.

PRINCESS. Oh, I never had any doubt about his being faithful to his honour.

POET (*looking at her steadily)*. To his honour.

PRINCESS *(suddenly).* Why am I telling you all this?

POET. Great lady — great angel — saint — I have not the wildest notion why you do not throw me out of the front door.

PRINCESS. Because I am not a stupid woman; and I can see you are a clever man. I am only a practical woman; I do not know much about poetry; but I know about men. I do not know whether you are a poet; but I know you are a diplomatist.

POET. One frequently in danger of being thrown out of the front-door does, perhaps, become a diplomatist.

PRINCESS. I do not mean that. I mean you can persuade. You persuaded me, with your very surprising theory of surprises. What would look more like lunacy, to many people, than all your talk about the pig in the ale-cask? And yet it was true; I know it and I shall remember it. It fits into my plan; and for that plan I want the help of your diplomacy and persuasion. For that plan it is necessary (I am bold enough to say so) that the King of Fontarabia should keep his pledge and the nuptials be celebrated here.

POET. You mean his marriage with Your Highness. There can be no man alive who needs to be persuaded to that.

PRINCESS. I am not so sure; but I want you to make it sure. Come, I appoint you my Ambassador.

POET (*looking down at his garments).* It would be as great an honour, and more in character, if you appointed me scarecrow in your kitchen-garden.

PRINCESS. YOU may scare the crows but not the eagle. Phoebus of Fontarabia at least will not mock my Ambassador’s poverty — or mine.

POET. It would be easier to be your scarecrow.

PRINCESS. AS if I did not know you were a man who trusts his own wits everywhere!

POET. Until about an hour ago, I did trust my own wits everywhere. Unfortunately, about an hour ago, I lost my wits.

PRINCESS. What do you mean?

POET. What I mean is something so mad and monstrous, that we should have to think seriously of throwing me out of the front-door after all. It is better to say simply that it is my privilege and duty as a diplomatist to complete the negotiations for this Royal marriage. It should be happy; it should even be easy for everyone else. It is only difficult for the diplomatist.

PRINCESS *(with a new warmth and emphasis).* I do want to make people happy. I have always tried to make them happy. And if I did not always succeed, you have shown me the reason why. There is really no happiness without Surprise.

A sevenfold peal of trumpets is heard without and rings through the whole castle. Almost at the same moment, Maria Margarita di Compostella enters, *pale and dark, but with something of a flame of excitement showing through her transparency.*

POET. Trumpets!

MARIA. Princess, it is the King! And he has sounded the Seven Trumpets, that he never sounded but once, before the Emperor. But, of course, *you* know the story.

PRINCESS. I am afraid, my dear, that you know more stories than I do.

MARIA. But everyone knows how the Emperor brought up seven great cannons to destroy his little company; and he only answered them scornfully with the noise of seven bugles; and then charged and cut them to pieces with the cold steel. But I must go and see that the household is ready for his train.

She goes out on the other side swiftly; and the Princess turns again to the Poet.

PRINCESS. I was telling you that I want people to be happy. But you were quite wrong when you called me a saint. Now *she* is a saint. And yet, in a strange way, I find it difficult to make her happy.

POET. Perhaps that is because she is happy.

PRINCESS *(with some slight annoyance).* She seems to be only happy when she is making herself unhappy. You know the sort of person who always chooses goat because she prefers venison. It generally ends with my forcibly giving her venison, even if she prefers goat. And serve her right, for being a saint.

POET. Yes, I know the type. If you want to give her anything she really wants herself, you will have to bind her hand and foot and thrust it down her throat by violence.

PRINCESS. You are an amazing man. Do you mean you have guessed anything of my Plan?

POET. I am a diplomatist, Madam, and know nothing beyond my instructions.

Re-enter Donna Maria in the same wind of speed and enthusiasm, with the Princess's white robe and bridal veil over her arm.

MARIA. I have been to the chapel. The priest is ready.

PRINCESS *(rather dryly).* And this gentleman will enquire whether the bridegroom is ready.

[Exit Poet.

MARIA. It seems a rather hurried wedding; but there is nothing to do but to fit on the wedding-dress and veil. Did you expect a great crowd of wedding-guests? Surely you remember the old custom of the castle; that the priest is alone with the bride and bridegroom, and the bride does not lift her veil till after the thing is done. I think that is the happiest way of being married. I should like to be married that way.

PRINCESS. Oh... you would like to be married that way. Well, you could have been married hundreds of times, in any way you liked, and I often wanted you to; but you seemed to be quite happy without it.

MARIA. Who would not be happy in a house where such things happen? Who would not be happy in a world where such things happen? It is like having Charlemagne in the house! I always say his victories have been more wonderful than Charlemagne's. Roland would not have died with the deserted rearguard, if he had served Fontarabia. At the first faint sound of the horn, he would have wheeled his whole force and surprised and routed the enemy by the very suddenness of his return, as he did in the gap at Alcalar.

PRINCESS. You puzzle me very much, my dear, sometimes. I always thought you were a sort of nun; and you talk like a musketeer.

MARIA. After all, my fathers rode behind your fathers in a hundred feudal wars; and were always faithful. But you had better try on your dress and veil, before you actually go to the chapel.

She drapes the Princess in the white veil and robe and fusses about in the proper feminine manner.

PRINCESS. It seems all right; but this veil is very long and heavy. I suppose it's part of that notion of nobody knowing anybody till it's all over, that you're so fond of. All the same, I still don't understand your oddly assorted enthusiasms. What is the common idea, that makes you like nuns and like soldiers?

MARIA. Obedience. The most thrilling word in the world; a very thunderclap of a word. Why do all these fools fancy that the soul is only free when it disagrees with the common command? Even the mobs who rise to burn and destroy owe all their grandeur and terror, and a sort of authority, not to their anger but to their agreement. Why should mere disagreement make us feel free? I know you are fond of dancing; do you want to dance to a different tune from your partner's? You are a fine horsewoman; do you want to think of walking northward all by yourself, when you and your horse are going southward together? You have called me a nun; I am not a nun, I am not good enough to be a nun. I do not... I have not set... *(she breaks off the sentence)*. But do you suppose that nuns are unhappy? I never see them pass, silent and hooded, through their quiet cloisters but I have a vision: a vast vision of Amazons, wilder than any heathen Valkyrs, riders rushing into battle; a charge of chivalry going all one way, and every rider as free as Joan of Arc; galloping, galloping to God. That is the real vision of Obedience.

PRINCESS. I don't believe this veil hangs quite right. I wish you'd put the thing on for a minute and let me see. (*The dress and veil are put on Maria; and the Princess surveys them critically.)* I am interested to know you really believe in Obedience; even in all that funny old feudal obedience. You are always such a dreadful reactionary. Just turn round this way a minute. The train.... Yes, the train will have to do, I think.

MARIA. If it is all right, you had really better put it on; it is hardly a public occasion, but you never know if there will be silly gossip about any delay.

PRINCESS. Don’t take it off just yet. So you really do believe that on the whole obedience has done more good than harm; in spite of wars and terrible vows. And you would observe it yourself.

MARIA. Yes, yes — but do get these things on; the King may be waiting there already.

PRINCESS. Maria Margarita, I charge you on your allegiance not to lift that veil, or drop that robe. I command you to walk as you are into the chapel and to stand before the priest. As your father carried the shield before my father in twenty battles, I command you to go before me. You may yet behold a vision. And it will be the Vision of Obedience.

Maria stands quite stiffly for an instant and then walks equally stiffly up the stairs towards the chapel. The Princess turns rapidly and picks up the black and red dress and veil of Maria, wraps herself in them, and retires to the back of the scene.

Enter the Poet escorting the King of Fontarabia, as previously described.

KING. I mean no discourtesy, Sir; but this haste is dreadful. I had hoped to see Her Highness the Princess; and explain — well, anything that might need to be explained.

POET. AS we are dealing with Your Majesty, I doubt whether there is anything to be explained; and, most certainly, nothing to be explained away. You have only shown that loyalty and love of honour that shines upon your whole career in coming here, to this defenceless castle, to show that your word is greater than the world. Of course, it is an entirely defenceless castle. Her Highness the Princess is rich in nothing but the love of all who have known her; she has but a few guards and the sword of a poor balladmonger who is almost a beggar. You are a captain of great armies and can come and go as you will. It is for you to choose.

KING. Who the devil are you? You say you are a balladmonger. But by God, you know how to speak to a gentleman.

POET. I have only stated the obvious facts of the position.

KING. Because, curse your cunning, you know that the only way to bind a gentleman is to tell him he is free.

POET. Most respectfully, I repeat that I stated facts. You could claim great alliances; the daughter of the Emperor or anyone else you choose. The political power of this family is less than it was.

KING (*bursting out with some violence*). And now, by God, you are slandering me. I don’t care what a thousand idiots may think; but I can see you are a man with brains; and I will not have a man with brains who slanders me. In the devil’s name, kick into hell all that nonsense about being a King or knowing an Emperor. I am a coarse man and a common soldier. I have won most of my battles by understanding coarse men and common soldiers. But you will never understand them in a thousand years, if you suppose that coarse and common men love nothing except coarseness and commonness. Like all other men, I suppose, we love our opposites; especially in women. But we are quite sincere. I do love beauty and purity and the high heart in a woman.

POET (*proudly).* Then indeed the friends of the Princess of Garfagnana have nothing to fear.

KING. Oh God! I came here as a lover. Not a Princess but a woman called me out of the wastes and the wars. And when I passed, I heard her where she walked under the willows and the wind in her swinging robes.

POET *[in a low voice).* They swing when she throws back her head.

KING. I felt her in the very sun and wind upon the mountains.

POET. She fans the wind. She shines upon the sun.

KING. A woman in a castle, which is the casket of a jewel.

POET. The only jewel in the world.

KING. The only woman in the world. But not your Princess.

POET *(very carefully)*. Sire, you honour me in a way that no man could forget, when you tell me so frankly of your feelings. But am I to understand that those feelings have nothing to do with your pledged word to my Princess?

KING. YOU are to understand that I shall love Maria Margarita till I die. And there it stands; and what would a hundred other kings or a thousand other soldiers have said of it? They would have said that I could marry the Princess and love Maria, and be happy with both, in a way that is common enough. Yet I have never thought of it.

POET. I trust because you could not utter such an insult to the Princess of Garfagnana.

KING. No. Because I could not think of such an insult to Maria Margarita. She is different from all other women. She loves my honour.

POET *(sharply)*. Then go and deserve her love. *(The King is arrested for an instant, and the Poet goes on, with loosened and impetuous speech.)* She believes you will keep your word; do not break her by breaking your word. Never mind about what they call happiness; women as high as that are above happiness. Do not treat her as some vulgar thing and give her a lover. Leave her the man she loves.

KING. I know what you mean. And I... Oh, my God! *(He realises that the Princess, completely shrouded in the black and red robes of Maria, is standing just behind him.)* It is she; I could have won, if she were not here. Don’t I know that black dress with drops of blood — my heart’s blood? Shall a man not turn back, when it is his own burning soul that is standing behind him?

POET *(in a ringing voice)*. How many more poor devils are rotting in ditches and on ramparts, because you told them it is dishonour to turn back?

KING *(stiffens and is still for an instant, and then speaks quietly).*

Break your guitar, master balladmonger. You have learned to blow the bugle and sound the charge.

POET *(in a loud voice)*. I am assured that Your Majesty is passing to your happy and most noble wedding-feast, on which we all invoke so many blessings and joys.

KING. I shall go whistling, comrade. For I have often faced death before.

He mounts quickly the stairway leading to the chapel and disappears; and the Poet, who has held himself rigid and taut and vigilant through the whole dialogue, shows an abrupt relaxation rather like a collapse. Very slowly and wearily, he turns towards the figure in black and red, which is completely veiled, and which he also takes for Donna Maria. He says nothing for some time; and then speaks quite casually and rather brokenly, as to an equal from whom he need hardly conceal anything. The figure in the black and red robes has not moved at all, through all this part of the action.

POET. Well, that's over. Every dog has his day; and I am a stray dog that has had a most amazing day; and now must go out again into the night. But before I go, Donna Maria, I have a fancy to make a confession; and I think somehow I can make it to you. I was a dog and I had my day; but for all that I was a dog in the manger. I could never in a thousand years have even asked for what I wanted for myself; and yet I was most damnably annoyed at having to help another man to get it. Several times I nearly went mad and bit him. Yes... you are silent, and I don't wonder. I came here crawling out of the gutter and I fell in love with the Princess of Garfagnana at first sight. A joke, isn't it? — a joke no living creature shall ever have the chance to laugh at. Except you — and you will not laugh. What a consolation, in a world weary of laughter, are you people who do not laugh. What wells in a desert; what pools of shame in a dazzling and crackling land. I do not know whether she would laugh. I rather fancy she would not even hear. If I were standing beside the Princess as I am standing beside you, I doubt whether my words would reach her. It would be like going out into the garden and shouting at the stars. Never in the aeons needed to reach such stars shall I ever say to the woman I love, "I love you". I say it to you, for you are merciful; and perhaps — I sometimes think — perhaps I have a feeling that you also can stand alone. You are still silent. Are you also horrified? Somehow, I do not think so. If you were, you would go away. Come, Donna Maria, I have thrown off the mask; can you not throw off the veil, and let me see one good woman and perhaps hear one good word, before I go back to the taverns of the trulls and thieves? I cannot see your face; but somehow I cannot imagine it as cruel.

The Princess unveils her own face and stands motionless. There is a long silence.

POET. Your Highness has certainly learnt the little trick of Surprise (*rather bitterly).* Well, am I to be hanged on a garden tree or will you want to pardon me because it is your wedding-day?

PRINCESS. I have to thank you if it is my wedding-day. But, indeed, in truth it is Donna Maria's wedding-day.

POET. What do you mean?

PRINCESS. I sent her in my place. They have always loved each other and I told you that I like making people happy.

POET. You did this? And then — great God, great heart, you are surprised that men love you.

PRINCESS (*rather hastily).* Oh, it fits in well enough with my plans. The King will protect my house and my people, when he is married to my friend, as much as if he were married to me. And Maria will do what I should want done for the poor — including the poets.

(She smiles.) Perhaps I may be allowed to advise her a little; I shall be a good confidante — an excellent lady-in-waiting! And that is all I really cared about — the city and state of Garfagnana.

A distant cry is heard from the chapel. The Poet turns and looks towards the steps.

POET. What is that?

PRINCESS. That is the cry that has not been heard on earth since it was heard in Eden. It is the cry of Surprise. For once in all our fallen and mazy wanderings, a man has seen his most secret daydream come true. Many a man has been lucky in marrying the woman he loves. But he is luckier; in loving the woman he marries.

POET. YOU mean it is more of a Surprise. But could you not —

PRINCESS. NO, I could not. If I had gone to Maria and offered to give place to her, she would have been burnt at the stake before she accepted the sacrifice. She would never have allowed me to sacrifice anything. To the last, by every sort of stubborn dodging and delay and mulish silence, she would have insisted on sacrificing herself. That was the problem. And even if I had gone to the King, to do him justice, and myself offered to release him from his word, he might have refused to be released. There was nothing for it but the trick of the great Surprise — the trick you taught me, as you have taught me so many things.

POET. There is something I should never dare to teach you.

PRINCESS. My friend, you have many others to teach. Listen to me for a moment. I have told you that I know something of men; after all, perhaps I know something even of literary men. You have honoured me in speaking of an enthusiasm — a flame or what you will — of which I shall remain proud. But the flame is from you and not from me. We may dare hope to be some sort of inspiration; but poets live for the poem and not for the muse. You will grow older and perhaps leave off serenading people you have never seen; but you will not leave off thinking; and I am quite sure you will not leave off talking. In the long reaches of time it is another quest that will remain with you; and you will come to care more for the four lost notes of your song than you care for me. And somewhere else, perhaps, you will find them. Somewhere at the end of the world, somewhere perhaps beyond the world, you may see a tower of a strange shape and hear a wiser woman sound those chords upon a solitary harp; and she will open her door and say: “I have waited long for my serenade”. You have not found it yet. You have only found in passing a way in which you could save us all. You have been my best friend; and I do not even know your name.

POET. My name is Oliver Olivarez.

PRINCESS. My name is Christina. Good-bye, Oliver.

POET. Good-bye, Christina.

They take hands once and part; and the stage goes dark. Whether by a change of scene or not, or by some other indication, the Poet is next seen alone and outside the castle.

POET. And so we go back to the old road. How familiar all the muddy paths look and how strange the castle; as if I had never been inside it. Was it a dream and is it indeed fading?

The four notes sound from inside the castle and the windows are suddenly illuminated from within. The Princess is standing in the doorway in the light.

PRINCESS. I have waited long for my serenade.

POET (*staggers*). O God! The Surprise!

ACT II

SCENE I

Scene as in Act I, Scene I. The Friar is sitting facing the audience on a low bank or ledge; behind him, the Author is striding to and fro on the slightly higher ground. The Guard stands with his halberd outside the caravan, motionless as at the beginning of the play.

AUTHOR. There it is, you see, such as it is. As you see, a very simple play. If you ask me, a rather dull play. But you have no idea how much it excites the rustic audiences who like to see drawn swords and golden crowns, and princes and princesses living happily ever afterwards. Anyhow, you would say, an oldfashioned stale stock romantic melodrama. One of a hundred, you may say. Quite conventional. *(He suddenly stops, springs from the bank and pokes his head enquiringly beside the friar's.)* Did you notice anything *peculiar* about that play?

FRIAR. I rather think I did; but I would rather hear your own explanation of it. As St. Thomas said, authority is in the author. And though he was a Dominican, he was often right.

AUTHOR. I wrote this play for a bet. I won the bet. I did not incidentally win the money; because, to tell the truth, I made the bet with an itinerant artist like myself. He was a showman with a very popular and successful set of puppets; and his plays were infested with villains. They depended entirely on villains. Whenever the heroine was doubtful about the hero, up jumped a most valuable villain, with a tactful taste for poison or a diplomatic dagger; and then she knew that the hero *was* a hero. It seemed as if all virtue was really produced by villains. Well, he betted me I could not write a play without a villain. That was easy. Let me make up the conditions, and the most virtuous person may act or appear like a villain. But I swore I would do something more than that. I swore I would make a whole play, not only of good people, but of good actions. In that play, not only is there not a single villain, but there is not a single deed of villainy.

FRIAR. Yes; I noticed that.

AUTHOR. I do not mean you are bound to approve the prudence of everything that is done. The Princess is not above a sort of practical joke, so long as it is really practical. Donna Maria puts obedience even before sacrifice, and sacrifice before sanity. Perhaps you do not approve of the dynastic marriages like that to which the King was pledged; but the King did. He shrank from his duty; but he never doubted it. In short, I mean, they all behaved handsomely according to their lights. They were all at their best. Everyone behaved well. That is why the play was rather short.

FRIAR. DO you mean merely that men do not go on being at their best?

AUTHOR. Yes; but not only that. Because each acts rightly, each acts rapidly; and they swiftly attain their end. And so the play reaches its end also. Anyhow, as I say, a simple plot — a simple solution — you may say even simple ideals. And then —

FRIAR. Were you going to say there were simple characters?

AUTHOR (*suddenly agitated).* AH — that is the burning light; that is the light in which things turn transparent. Now I know I was right when I said you could read the heart.

FRIAR. I know what you desire. I do not call it very blameable, though some would call it blasphemy. Whether it were possible is another thing.

AUTHOR. If you know my secret, you will know why it was that I asked you for a miracle.

FRIAR. Because the people in your play are not really simple people?

AUTHOR *(abruptly quiet)*. You see, I knew them. I knew them very well. I have met that troubadour in twenty taverns or tramping twenty roads. I was with the army at Alcala and saw the victories of Fontarabia. Do you know what I mean? Believe me, they are not all simple characters, though they appear for a moment in a very simple story. They are very passionate, very complicated, very real people; capable of a thousand other things besides the things they have to do on this stage. Only it all moves swiftly and smoothly and is soon over, because they do right. When a clock is right, you do not bother about the clockwork; you only look at the face and hands. While a servant is a good servant, you hardly notice that you have a servant. So these very real people flash past you in a few movements; and they seem unreal, because they only do right.

FRIAR. DO you want them to do wrong?

AUTHOR. NO — No! They could do right. They would do right. They have it in them to do exactly what they do in the play, these people I know so well. They have it in them... and yet they have nothing in them.

FRIAR. YOU are not content when they do right and you do not want them to do wrong. What do you want them to do?

AUTHOR (*breaking into a sort of cry*). I want them to be and not to do. I want them to exist.

FRIAR. YOU were saying that you knew them intimately.

AUTHOR. I know them down to their vitals and they do not exist. Ah — you have come on it at last. On the tragedy of the author.

FRIAR. Of the human author — perhaps.

AUTHOR. Father, where *are* these people? I know them better than my father and mother — but where are they? Not in their own bodies; their bodies are only clocks that I filled myself with clockwork. Not, as my friend the fashionable puppet-master would say, in the mind of the public — heavens no! My public, his public, any public, only sees a king behaving in a kingly way and a poet in a poetical way, and then it is all over. Lucky if it realises some of the things I tell about these children of mine, let alone the things I know about them, and do not tell. And then, of course, you will say —

FRIAR. Shall I?

AUTHOR YOU will say that they exist in *my* mind! Ah, that is the tragedy of the author indeed. Why, they only existed because I wanted to get them out of my mind. I wanted them separated from me and my life and living lives quite different and entirely their own. And so, after all, they are. Have I got a great hog-in-armour of a halberdier in my mind? A considerable incubus. Am I a Princess? Can you look at me, as man to man, and say I am a delicate and sensitive lady-in-waiting, with a turn for religion? My whole purpose in making these personalities was to put them away from me — to put them a long way off, where I could look at them from outside. But where have I put them? They exist. They have minds of their own. Why have they not got wills of their own?

FRIAR *(sitting up straight).* Ah, you want them to have wills of their own?

AUTHOR *(with humility).* Remember, Father, that I began by asking you if you could work a miracle.

FRIAR. And I began by answering you that no man can work a miracle. But to some men there has been granted a sign. *(He stares up into the sky somewhat abstractedly.)*

AUTHOR. Father, these people deserve to be alive. They are everything else except alive. They are intelligent, complex, combative, brilliant, bursting with life and yet they are not alive. You do not answer. Perhaps there is no answer. But, indeed, and most truly, there is a very interesting question. I see these people from within, as many-sided, full of possibilities, capable of figuring in a hundred different plots and plays. I am familiar with the secrets of each; and yet, what it is and where it is, and what exactly I mean when I say it is at all, I do not know. *(Glances at the Friar, who remains rigid and staring upwards into the sky.)* Do you know that the young critics of the conventions of the stage are often very conventional critics? It is really they and not we who are taken in by our stage properties and labels. For instance — all your critics who talk about real life will say my romantic ending is quite unreal. They will say that the Princess and the Poet or the Soldier and the Saint would hardly last out the honeymoon. They are wrong; and I know these people much better than they do. It is they who go by labels, and would pair off the Princess with the Soldier as practical people. It is they who are misled by the label of the Poet; for that troubadour is not a troubadour, but much more a satirist; a ribald, a rebel. But the Princess, though she has her faults, more faults than *they* know or can guess from the play, really does care about justice and the right ruling of things for the poor; and she is the first princess that ever had a poor man for a Prime Minister. I should hope for great things with a philanthropist for a Sultan and a revolutionist as a Grand Vizier. For the Poet is not a poet but a critic. His wallet, like Villon's, is stuffed with gross and real experiences. But to the King, war really is poetical, a thing of pageants and cavalcades, like great frescoes or tapestries. The Princess does want to rule the whole world; the King, who could conquer the whole world, does not want to rule it in the least. He wants to win battles with a romantic risk; in fact, he has exactly the same romantic view of them as Donna Maria. And as neither of them will ever have any doubts about the duties of a lady and gentleman, they will pass their lives quite happily — in a dream. I have told you all this, Father (I am not quite sure that you heard me), merely to show that I do see rather deeper into my own —

The Guard, who has been hitherto motionless, shifts his hand an inch or two on the halberd. The Author remains staring at it, his eyes starting from his head.

AUTHOR. Father, the Puppet is moving. And I never wound it up.

The Guard gradually relaxes his stiff attitude as if waking up; and at the same time the Friar also begins to stir from the state of trance in which he has remained. The Author is clutching at the Friar, almost like a child clinging to his nurse.

GUARD. I wish I'd brought that leather bottle along with me, instead of leaving it at home like a fool. Well, perhaps it'll be safer to take a swig in the nightwatch.

AUTHOR (*gasping and groping for words at random).* They used to say... people used to say these waxworks and dolls were ghastly and bloodcurdling, because they were only puppets.... But they *are* ghastly. It's true they are ghastly....

FRIAR. Because they are not puppets.

The Poet appears on the raised ground above, his broad hat cocked and his red feather erect with bravado, his sword at a swaggering angle.

AUTHOR. They are coming!

FRIAR. Yes, you have seen your wish come true. You have put them outside yourself. They have wills of their own; they are living lives of their own.

AUTHOR. I only wanted my play —

FRIAR. It is their play now. Do you remember telling me I might call up a hippogriff or some monster from the land of miracles? The most monstrous of all monsters are marching across your stage, shaking the earth like dragons and chimeras; the most towering, the most terrible creatures that life ever let loose upon chaos. Stand back — stand out of their way. They are living men.

SCENE II

Garden scene as in Act I, Scene II; but a rather mistier moonlight.

The Guard is pacing backwards and forwards like a sentry as before, his figure seen more darkly as in a silhouette. He passes and repasses twice in a rigid manner; then, in the middle of the third turn, he stops, produces a large leather winebottle, and drinks out of it. He resumes his march, drinking at intervals, until he crosses the stage for the last time with a hint of slouching and staggering.

GUARD (*levelling his halberd).* Halt, who goes there?

Enter the Poet, strumming on his guitar. But the Guard, who has turned rather wildly, has his back to the Poet and is pointing his halberd in the opposite direction. At the sound of the music, he staggers back a little and collides with the Poet.

GUARD. Who goes there?

POET. Ah, who goes where? That is the immediate and practical problem. Where do you think you are going, for example?

GUARD *(angrily over his shoulder).* What are you doing here?

POET. Being barged into by a person in a tin hat to whom I have never been introduced. Permit me, however, to arrange your hat; and to arrange your sentence in a more logical form. If you mean what do I intend or purpose to do here, I beg to inform you that I intend to sing in a loud voice the serenade which will be known henceforward as the Greatest Song in the World. Except for four notes — which do not yet exist.

GUARD. Who are you going to serenade?

POET. I am not one of those incompetent troubadours who want a lady to hang about and listen. I never need a lady accompanist to my serenades.

GUARD. You mustn’t do it here. Princess won’t like it. Why — why, tomorrow’s her wedding-day.

POET. What Princess?

GUARD. Highness the Princess of Gar — f (*stops dead and then tries again very seriously)* Garnaf —

POET. By a scholarly process of transliteration, I infer that you are trying to say Garfagnana. If it is indeed the Princess of that State, I am both honoured and gratified to find myself in Her Highness’s dominions; in fact there is something that I should very much like to say to her. In any case, the reputation of that noble lady is surely in itself a rebuke to your own somewhat inhospitable attitude. Are you not aware that your mistress is famous throughout the world for her charity even to vagabonds, and especially to poets? I assure you the poets are well aware of it. There is a story that on one occasion she gave wine to no less than two thousand poets.

GUARD *(solemnly).* Wine. Yes, wine. She is a good sort, the Princess. Doesn’t object to wine.

POET. Nor, I infer, do you.

GUARD. NO, my boy, no.... Here, have some. *(Holds out the bottle.)*

POET. Thank you, you are a generous fellow. But I think not. To be frank, as between two Lyaeans, I have already had some. In the nearest tavern, with some of the last of my remaining coin, I reached the perfect stage which is never recovered. The drunkard deserves his fate; for he is not content with being drunk. He is always trying to be drunker; a deplorable case of the sin of discontent. Also remember this. It is a maxim for all poets. A man should keep sober enough to praise wine.... (*Suddenly darts a finger at him.)* Now you are not sober enough to praise wine. No clear and classic cry of ‘Evoe Iacche’ will leap to your lips. Will you now produce on the spot a golden ode to Dionysus of the dancing flame and the flying spoil of the leopard? You will not. But I, mark you, I have a yet more solemn office to perform. It is my plain and obvious duty here and now to sing the

Greatest Song in the World. But I cannot get the last four notes. It begins like this (*sings in a somewhat declamatory manner):* "Man is the lord of the fruit he gathers."... Oh, this won't do. I can't sing — throat too dry or something.... "Man..." Well, it's against my strict rule, but I think I must have some of that. *(Drinks.)* I say, it really is a jolly good song; but I can't get the last notes. *(Strums on his guitar.)* "Man is..." Can't get the first notes now. It was a mistake to drink that stuff; but now I've done it, I suppose it's a hair of the dog — a hair of the damned old mad dog.

(Drinks again.)

GUARD (*suddenly belligerent).* Here — whose wine are you drinking — ?

They collide and collapse. The Captain of the Guard comes out hastily.

CAPTAIN. What is all this noise? Guard!

GUARD *(making inarticulate sounds).* Urr.

The windows in the castle are lighted up and the Princess is heard speaking from the window.

PRINCESS. What is happening? I will come down.

CAPTAIN *(goes across to Guard).* Stand up, man. The Princess is coming.

Enter Princess. Guard rises on wavering legs.

CAPTAIN. Your Highness, I am sorry to say that the Guard appears to be drunk.

PRINCESS (*cheerfully).* Oh, well, take him back to the barracks. Put his head under the pump if you like, but don't be too hard on him. Isn't there another over there?

CAPTAIN. The other seems to have hit his head a little in falling; but he's all right, and he was certainly drunk too.

PRINCESS. Oh, put that pavilion over him, to keep the rain off, and leave him plenty of water for when he wakes up.

CAPTAIN. Your Highness is always very merciful to these vagabonds.

PRINCESS. Shall I be less merciful to a vagabond who may be drunk because he had nothing to eat than I am to my own servants, who have good food and shelter?

CAPTAIN. Your Highness’s rebuke is just.

PRINCESS (*walks across and looks down at the Poet in silence for some little time)*. When this man recovers, let me know before he goes.

SCENE III

The scene is quite dark, as in Act I, Scene III. The voice of the Poet is heard soliloquizing as before.

POET. No, definitely no.... It seems clear that I am not being examined by the Inquisition after all. I thought they put a sort of a band round my head; in fact there still seems to be a sort of a band round my head; but it’s getting looser; and the Inquisitors have politely withdrawn. They seem to have been a nightmare. But I’m still in the dark, and I’m feeling damned thirsty.... Well, I’m in luck after all, for there seems to be a huge great pitcher full of water... just what I wanted.... *(Drinks).* Ah, that does one good. That does one a lot of good. It’s a good drink is water... but come, this will never do. A problem of the most profound kind presents itself to the mind of the philosopher. Who am I? What can be the matter with me? I had hitherto supposed that I was Olivarez the Troubadour, pride of the banquets of the bards, star of symposia, prop of many inns and not a few pothouses, round whose ambrosial brows the vine is wreathed with the laurel. And what am I doing? Drinking water. Nay, enjoying water. The scientific intellect bends itself in vain to explore the mystery. Surely I can’t have become an infidel Turk in my sleep. Yet here I am lying on the floor like a slave of Mahound and lapping up water. Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing? Well, I suppose the Princess might be a witch and turn me into a dog; but I’m sure she could not turn me into a Mohammedan. That would be heresy; and it would be my obvious duty to send for the Inquisitors after all. No, I am afraid that the scientific intellect arrives painfully at another conclusion. It seems clear to my slowly awakening consciousness that I must have been very drunk last night. I’m sober now, I suppose; but I still feel a little queer.

The curtain of the pavilion is drawn aside, letting in a flood of light, and the Princess appears. The Poet staggers to his feet and there is a long silence.

POET. Well, it is just like my luck.

PRINCESS. What do you mean?

POET. I mean that I am in heaven and I have a slight headache.

PRINCESS. Still I fear I do not understand.

POET. Your Highness, I was drunk in a ditch and deserved to be left in the ditch. And it is with all that mire upon me that I must stand and speak in the presence that I honour most; that I fear most; that shames me like an army of angels.

PRINCESS. But you have only just seen me this moment.

POET. Yes, just at this moment. That is what is blackest and bitterest. *This* moment. Lady, you will hardly believe me now; but I have had happier and more honourable moments, in which I could somehow have stood up before you and, however humbly, given my testimony.

PRINCESS. Your testimony?

POET. Oh, we always give our testimony. We always manage to give that somehow, even if it is discredited by the witness.

PRINCESS. And who are *we?*

POET. We are the miserable race of poets, of writers, of men who think they have something to say. Oh, they always say it. Never mind about my writings or sayings — but think of all the great singers and sayers who have sustained and refreshed the world. Think of all the great songs and epics you have known and the men who wrote them. And think how few of them, how very few, were ever worthy of what they sang or said. Far away upon the terraces of Antiquity, the voice of our father Ovid cries aloud for all the poets, his children: *Video meliora proboque; détériora sequor*— "The better things I see and I approve them; but it is the baser that I follow". The sin I would not, that I do — and through the ages there have been prophets prophesying and poets testifying to eternal truths; but hardly ever a man behind them; hardly ever a strong, sane, balanced, complete man to follow them. The poets sit in the throne of Dante; whatsoever they command you to do, that do; but do not after their works. For they say and do not.

PRINCESS. I think I know what you mean; and yet perhaps you are a little too sweeping. Do you know, I still have a sort of fancy that you might do something some day, if you did not say so much.

POET. YOU are right, Your Highness; and yet that is the devil of it all. For there is always something that we have to say.

PRINCESS *(smiling)*. I am sure there will always be something else you have to say.

POET. Oh, I know I talk the hind leg off a donkey — a very useless thing to do to a very useful thing like a donkey. But if you had tried as often as I have to talk the head off a human donkey —

PRINCESS. Am I the human donkey?... No, I will have pity on your face of horror. What is it you have to say?

POET. And now, after all, I cannot say it.

PRINCESS. That would certainly be very extraordinary.

POET. If I say it, you will think I am mad. Well, you can always say I am drunk. Have you ever heard that a drunken man sees double? Oddly enough, I am seeing double now. All this scene between us is doubled somewhere — Oh, I risk the joke — there are two of you and two of me; or we are shadows of ourselves, which stand somewhere in the light. This has happened before — you know that feeling. Or it will happen or it is happening now — and happening better. Somewhere you and I are talking and I am not so much ashamed, nor you so rightly scornful. Perhaps it was my dream; but I felt it again with that draught of water and that flood of light when you opened the door. This is good but something is better; this is glorious but somewhere I could feel more of the glory. And it seemed to me that somewhere, or at some other time, I had come to you like an ambassador, a tribune of the people, speaking for all the poor of your dominions; and telling you what can never be learned from lawyers and public officers. That what the people want is not food but feasts. Not security but surprises. And now I have lost my right to tell it; and I tell it still.

PRINCESS. YOU say that what men need is Surprise.

POET. Yes. If you raise your servants' wages, do not tell them so. Throw people money through the window as you pass, or drop things down the chimney, like Santa Claus. Put wine in the water-pots, like a greater than Santa Claus when He gave the Great Surprise. I have said that before.

PRINCESS. If you will say it again, as I am sure you will, perhaps people might begin to understand it. You really mean that we could increase the good we do to others, by always adding some element of surprise.

POET. There are some people who would hardly accept any direct happiness, unless you sprang it on them as a surprise.

PRINCESS. Yes. Yes. You are right there. My friend Maria Margarita is like that; and it is strange that you should speak of it, for I have had something of the sort in my own mind before. I suppose you know the circumstances of my betrothal and marriage — they are all over the countryside and a troubadour must have heard them. Phoebus, King of Fontarabia, arrives today to redeem the promise he made when he hid in my father's castle as a hunted man. Since then, as all the world knows, the hunted man has become a hero and a conqueror; and it is now he who can extend to us, in this impoverished state, his alliance and protection. You probably know that these alliances, even when they are alliances by marriage, are not — are not sentimental. If it were a sentimental matter, I suppose I might hesitate to tell you that I want this alliance secured. And I want your help.

POET. Your Highness, do you realise that I am not only a shabby tramp, but what my cheery companions would call a common drunk?

PRINCESS. I realise that you are an uncommon and rather clever man — and I am not quite a fool myself. Do you think I am such a fool as not to know that clever men can sometimes get drunk? Believe me, I have seen something of the poor you talk about; and I am not squeamish. Now there is nobody else for miles round this castle who can possibly help me where brains are wanted. I want you to be my family diplomatist to the King, when he arrives, and make sure that this wedding-contract goes through.

POET *(staring).* You want *me* to see that *your* weddingcontract goes through?

PRINCESS. Yes. What is there odd about that?

POET. Oh, nothing odd, of course. Not odd. Only impossible — simply starkly impossible.

PRINCESS. Nonsense — I know you are just the sort of man who can manage a piece of business like that, in a tactful sort of way, if you like.

POET. If I like. If I *like.* Oh, of course, if I am doing what I like I shall like it, shan’t I? I shall wallow in it. It will be perfectly delicious to be a diplomatist and get Your Highness married to this infernal — this imperial gentleman who is arriving with so much pomp and triumph.

PRINCESS. What on earth are you talking about?

POET. AS I have had the honour to explain to Your Highness, I happen to have gone mad. Quite sober now — only mad. But not so mad as the King of Fontarabia, if he can’t find his own way to his own wedding under these particular circumstances. I beg your pardon. Of course, I am entirely at Your Highness’s command. I will do my best. I have often noticed that people do their best, when there is nothing else to be done. I may as well take to diplomacy as take to drink. Drink has not served me well in this affair. It has spoilt the best scene of my life.

PRINCESS. Don’t you see that I am giving you a chance to redeem yourself and more? I know it is the sort of thing you could do. I know you have a head on your shoulders.

POET. Yes; I have a head. I also have a headache. But Your Highness can trust me entirely. Only —

PRINCESS. Well, what is it now?

POET. Oh, I wish we were in that world that never was; in that story that never was told. When I did not have a headache; but only a heartache.

PRINCESS. I don’t know what you mean; but I should like my diplomatist to look a little more cheerful. Come, we must never be cast down; perhaps we shall all of us end with a great Surprise.

A sevenfold peal of trumpets is heard through the whole castle; and almost with the sound of it Donna Maria Margarita enters swiftly, carrying the Princess’s white bridal veil and robe.

MARIA. Princess, it is the King; and he has sounded the seven trumpets that he only sounds before the Emperor; since that day when they brought up seven cannon —

PRINCESS (*rather impatiently, like one who has been under a strain).* Oh, you know so many of those stories, my dear. I know it is the King, of course; I have asked this gentleman to receive him.

The Poet bows and goes out.

PRINCESS. I am sorry if I was impatient, Maria; but it has often puzzled me that you are so enthusiastic about soldiers and soldiering, when you live a life like a nun. Soldiers and nuns seem to make a curious combination.

MARIA. At least they can both combine. I think that is what I like about them. Nobody seems to understand that people can be free to combine — and not only free to resist and rebel and live for themselves. At least they both believe in Obedience.

PRINCESS. And you believe in Obedience?

MARIA. Yes, I do. My fathers obeyed your fathers and I will obey you in everything. But the most obedient servant has the advantage of being allowed to make suggestions. And I really think you had better try on this dress and veil, before you actually go into the chapel. The priest is there already.

She drapes the Princess in the white garments.

PRINCESS. The bridegroom is not there yet. He is talking to a friend of mine. This veil is very heavy; I suppose it is all part of that idea of not being seen till after the ceremony. Or perhaps I have got it on crooked. I wish you would put it on for a moment and let me see.

Maria puts on the robe and veil and the Princess considers it critically.

PRINCESS. Well, my dear, you have certainly obeyed me so far. But I was wondering.

MARIA. Wondering?

PRINCESS (*more seriously).* Would you really obey me in serious things if I were really serious?

MARIA. I should obey you in all things. It is for you to judge if they are serious. But I do think you should put on your veil again. It seems to me to hang all right.

PRINCESS. Maria Margarita, I charge you on your allegiance not to remove it; but to walk as you are into the chapel and stand before the priest.

Maria stands motionless for a moment and then walks without a word up the steps towards the chapel. The Princess picks up the black and red veil and robe of Maria and retires into the background.

Enter the King of Fontarabia followed by the Poet.

KING. I fear, Sir, that we are travelling over the same ground again. I came here — well, to be frank, I came here because I was afraid to come here. I think I may fairly say that I am not often afraid. But at least I can say, what is better, that when I am afraid to do a thing, I do it.

POET. Sire, it is your glory and all your history. I cannot doubt that the same great sense of honour will carry Your Majesty through all your problems to the fulfilment of all your promises.

KING. I have put my cards on the table. Unfortunately, the cards a man holds and hopes in are not always court cards.

POET. Nevertheless, your great honour has brought you to the castle of the Queen of Hearts.

KING. I have told you who is the queen of my heart.

POET. Your Majesty will forgive me if I say what can never be said of you. It is not such players at the great game as you are who would win even a Queen of Hearts by cheating at cards.

KING. When a man says a thing like that, there are only two things to do: to kill him or to thank him. I thank you.

POET (*passing his hand across his brow)*. What can I say in thanks, except that you were born to be a king? For I may take it that your pledge stands firm.

KING. There has never yet been any question about any pledge of mine. And even here — (*The Princess, shrouded in the dark robes of Maria, draws nearer).* Oh, my God — it is she! I could have won, if she were not here. Don’t I know that black dress with drops of blood — my heart’s blood? Shall a man not turn back, when it is his own burning soul that is standing behind him?

POET. Oh, damn your burning soul! Let it burn in hell, as mine is burning.

KING (*bewildered).* What did you say?

POET *(with an absolutely stiff face).* I said nothing, Your Majesty. My lips were locked in an impenetrable diplomatic silence.

KING. Really, to look at your face, I could believe you had never said a word. But somebody certainly said something.

POET. I trust you do not suggest it was the lady.

KING. NO, by God! But I should like the lady to say something.

POET *(impatiently).* Sire, the lady I represent has already said something; and I must insist that her word comes first in this house.

KING. YOU take a high tone, Sir. But I have to consider —

POET. Your Majesty has the choice. For Her Highness’s sake, for all our sakes — choose and be done with it.

KING (*incensed*). Then by the crown of Charlemagne, I will choose — and you shall be the witness of my choice, since you are so much concerned about it. I have sought an opportunity to explain; and you have practically refused it. Very well. You see, my love, that fate is — (*Laughs suddenly.)* By all the gods, I was going to say that fate is against me. And, behold, fate is for me! Fate is for us both and my own will goes with it like the wind. When will and fate are one, then only is a man a god; and this is my hour of godhood. Is it my fault if fate set me on fire when I first saw your face? Must I walk the world in flames and agony like a martyr or a heretic, and never look to the heaven for which I suffer? You know me; all I have to give and all I have to lose — my heart, my hand, my sword, my crown, I offer everything to you.

PRINCESS (*drawing back the dark veil and showing her own face).* Sire, it is my privilege to accept.

POET. My god!

KING *(still staring).* What is this jugglery?

PRINCESS. I think it was you who juggled. *(Turns to Poet in a magnificent manner.)* Sir, you are the witness to these events and to this final declaration. His Majesty, the King of Fontarabia, has repeated in your presence the offer for the alliance of our houses. There was never any doubt about the pledge that His Majesty had placed in our keeping long before. But I am glad that my ambassador should receive the notification in regular form.

POET. Your Highness — but this is madness!

PRINCESS. That is not quite in regular form.

POET. My lady, I am past all such forms. I must speak or see you ruined. You do not even love this man.

PRINCESS. If I did not love him before, when he was a noble knight, on whose word I rested as on the foundations of this castle, how much do you think I love him now, when his spurs are broken off and his sword broken across his head?

POET. Then where is everything to end? You will be utterly unhappy.

PRINCESS. Can I be more unhappy than I am, when he has laid in ruins all my plans for the happiness of others?

POET. Then why —

PRINCESS (*breaking out passionately).* Why should *he* be happy? Why should he enjoy insolently and infamously, as a foe, what I was going to give him as a friend? *(Her voice rises yet more furious and beyond control.)* Why should this dog snatch out of my hand the bone I had myself saved for him — and then be rewarded for doing it? Oh, I am to stand aside and watch a beautiful idyll of beatitude; he is to have all it was mine to grant or to withhold by right — not because I was generous, but because he was base. I wanted these people to be happy in peace and honour; all my plans respected that in him that he insults —

KING. Yes, you care for your plans. If you really cared for your friends, you would let them be happy now. But it is always your plans.

POET. Both Your Highness and His Majesty continue to talk about your plans. I seem to be the only person who is thinking about your happiness.

PRINCESS *(with a blazing stare).* Or about your own?

POET *(suddenly sobered).* Are you indeed the Eye of God? Or are we all transparent in this light from hell?

PRINCESS. There is no happiness now for any of us. There is only justice.

KING. Or only vengeance?

PRINCESS. Yes, if you will, only vengeance. Is it my fault if you have left nothing alive but indignation? Maria could sacrifice herself for love. What is it to you, if I could sacrifice myself for hate?

POET. It is everything to me, at any rate. Is this man worth hating so much? Is any man worth hating so much? Oh, I know my style of argument may not be fit for a palace; but your argument is fit for a madhouse. You treat His Majesty as a criminal who deserves nothing but vengeance; and then because he is a criminal he must be your husband. He is mean and false and therefore worthy to be your husband. He has betrayed you and made everybody miserable; and these are your reasons for choosing him as a husband.

PRINCESS. At least I had good reasons in choosing you as a diplomatist. I am glad to note that you have a clear mind and a very logical method of persuasion. Like a good many other men with clear minds, you do not understand women.

KING (*furiously*). By Hecate, but I think I understand one woman! All you care for is power. You are the real autocrat. I rule kingdoms and lead big armies into battles; and in armies men must do as they are told, or they all die together. But I am not such a despot as you are. In your heart and soul, you are more of a bully when you feed one beggar than I am when I am driven to lay waste a province. You want to win the battle. I only want the battle to be won. We who live in camps have at least good fellowship and can often be glad when a comrade covers himself with glory. I have known men who were great enough to be glad when a comrade had redeemed their own blunder. But you will not let us redeem your blunder. You care for nothing but your plan.

PRINCESS. Who has thought for anybody but themselves in all this business but I? I have thought for everybody else and all my thoughts are to go for nothing.

POET. I should like you to think for yourself.

PRINCESS. AS His Majesty condescends to say, I had a plan. As a mother has a plan for babes unborn; as a creator has a plan for worlds uncreated.

For all you knew of that, you might as well have been uncreated or unborn. Yes, in that sense I looked to the triumph of my plan.

Enter Donna Maria down the steps from the chapel; she is deadwhite but her face is without expression.

PRINCESS (*rushing towards her as if released).* You at least know I never meant to bring you to all this misery. You obeyed me; but you know I did not only want your obedience. I did love you at least — we have always loved each other — you do know that, do you not?

Maria looks at her with a blank face and does not answer.

POET (*intervening tactfully).* Donna Maria, this is too distressing a business for you to be forced into it any further. Perhaps I might be permitted to summon your attendants or escort you towards your apartment.

Maria looks at him with the same uncomprehending face, and preserves the same silence. The King stands quite still where he is; but has an air of swelling and glowing from within, because of her presence.

KING. Maria! You will hear my voice at least; when I say I love you.

Maria is still silent, with the same dazed expression. The King continues almost sharply.

KING. Maria! You cannot be struck deaf and dumb. It is I and I have lost all and chosen you. And you say nothing. Say at least that you can hear me speak.

(Maria is silent as before.) My God, you have sent her mad between you. She has lost her reason.

PRINCESS. We, Your Majesty? Did we break tryst at the altar, where she was waiting as a bride? Did we dally with another on the way?

KING. YOU witch, you queen of devils — it was you —

POET *(bursting out).* Choke with your lies, you mudmouthed liar! Do you think I care that you are a king, now that you are less than a man? Do you think I will hear such snarling at the Princess, without sticking a skewer through a rat? Defend yourself.

(He draws his sword and rushes forward).

KING *(amazed for the moment).* A fight?

POET. Yes, Your Majesty — A fight without cannons or cavalry or convenient hills from which to survey the campaign or hosts of poor men to perish between you and the enemy. Fight in the devil’s name if you will; I fight in my lady’s.

KING *(drawing his sword).* In the devil’s name, then. On that at least I can prove you are the liar.

Their swords clash and engage.

AUTHOR *(his head bursting out through an upper part of the scenery).* And in the devil’s name, what do you think you are doing with my play? Drop it! Stop! I am coming down.

Curtain.

The Poetry Collections

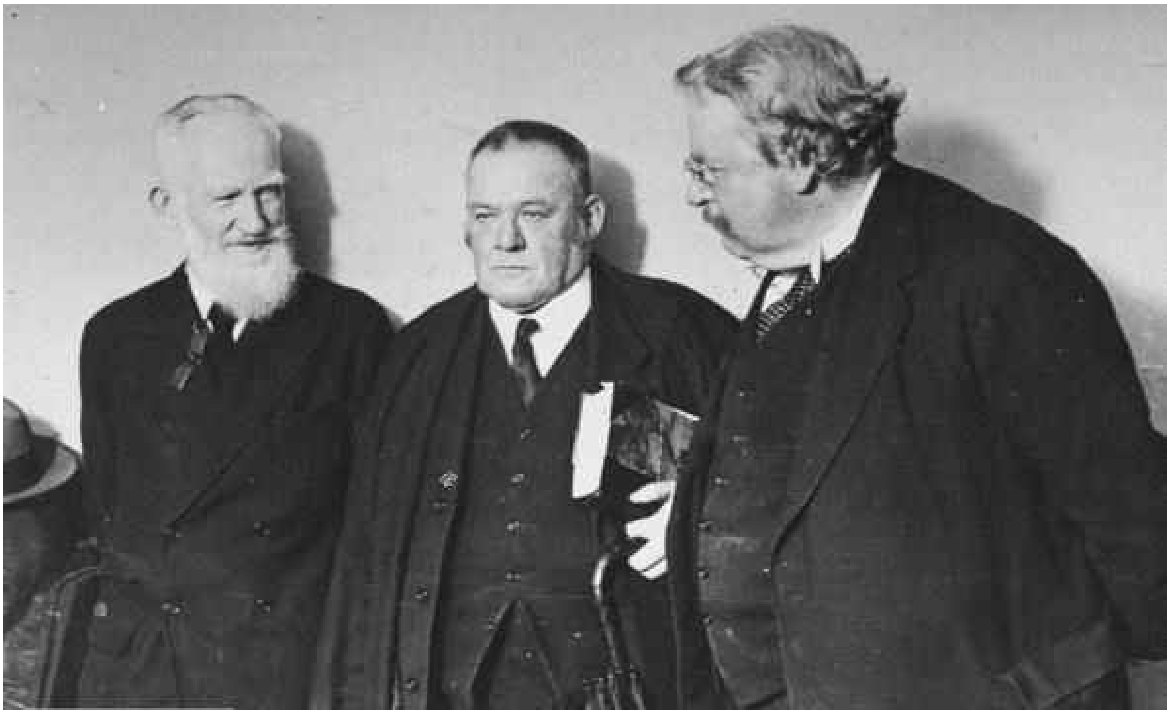

George Bernard Shaw, Hilaire Belloc, and G. K. Chesterton.

GREYBEARDS AT PLAY

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A DEDICATION TO E.C.B.
OF THE DANGERS ATTENDING ALTRUISM ON THE HIGH SEAS
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GREYBEARDS AT PLAY

LITERATURE AND ART FOR OLD GENTLEMEN

RHYMES AND SKETCHES BY GILBERT CHESTERTON

A DEDICATION TO E.C.B.

He was, through boyhood’s storm and shower,
My best, my nearest friend;
We wore one hat, smoked one cigar,
One standing at each end.
We were two hearts with single hope,
Two faces in one hood;
I knew the secrets of his youth;
I watched his every mood.
The little things that none but I
Saw were beyond his wont,
The streaming hair, the tie behind,
The coat tails worn in front.

I marked the absent-minded scream,
The little nervous trick
Of rolling in the grate, with eyes
By friendship’s light made quick.
But youth’s black storms are gone and past,
Bare is each aged brow;
And, since with age we’re growing bald,
Let us be babies now.
Learning we knew; but still to-day,
With spelling-book devotion,
Words of one syllable we seek
In moments of emotion.

Riches we knew; and well dressed dolls —
Dolls living — who expressed
No filial thoughts, however much
You thumped them in the chest.
Old happiness is grey as we,
And we may still outstrip her;
If we be slippered pantaloons,
Oh let us hunt the slipper!
The old world glows with colours clear;
And if, as saith the saint,
The world is but a painted show,
Oh let us lick the paint!

Far, far behind are morbid hours,
And lonely hearts that bleed.
Far, far behind us are the days,
When we were old indeed.
Leave we the child: he is immersed
With scientists and mystics:
With deep prophetic voice he cries
Canadian food statistics.
But now I know how few and small,
The things we crave need be —
Toys and the universe and you —
A little friend to tea.

Behold the simple sum of things,
Where, in one splendour spun,
The stars go round the Mulberry Bush,
The Burning Bush, the Sun.
Now we are old and wise and grey,
And shaky at the knees;
Now is the true time to delight
In picture books like these.
Hoary and bent I dance one hour:
What though I die at morn?
There is a shout among the stars,

“To-night a child is born.”

THE ONENESS OF THE PHILOSOPHER WITH NATURE.

I love to see the little stars
All dancing to one tune;
I think quite highly of the Sun,
And kindly of the Moon.

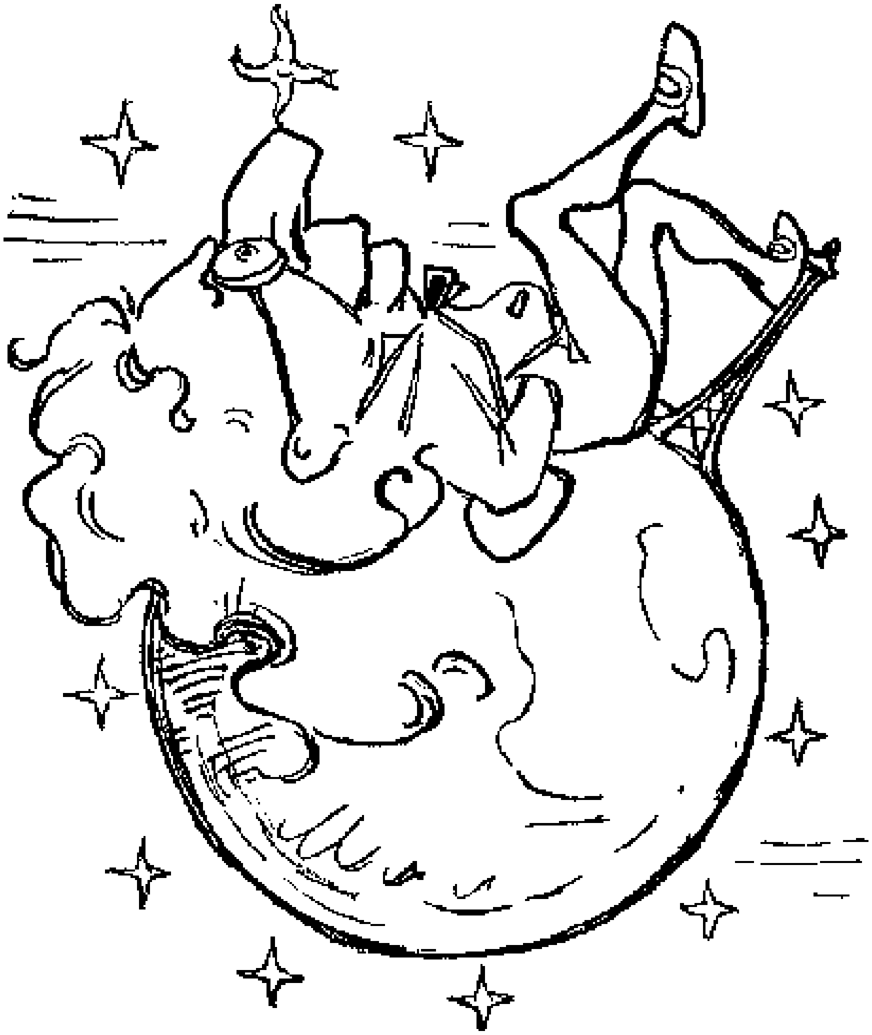

The million forests of the Earth
Come trooping in to tea.
The great Niagara waterfall
Is never shy with me.

I am the tiger's confidant,
And never mention names:
The lion drops the formal "Sir,"
And lets me call him James.

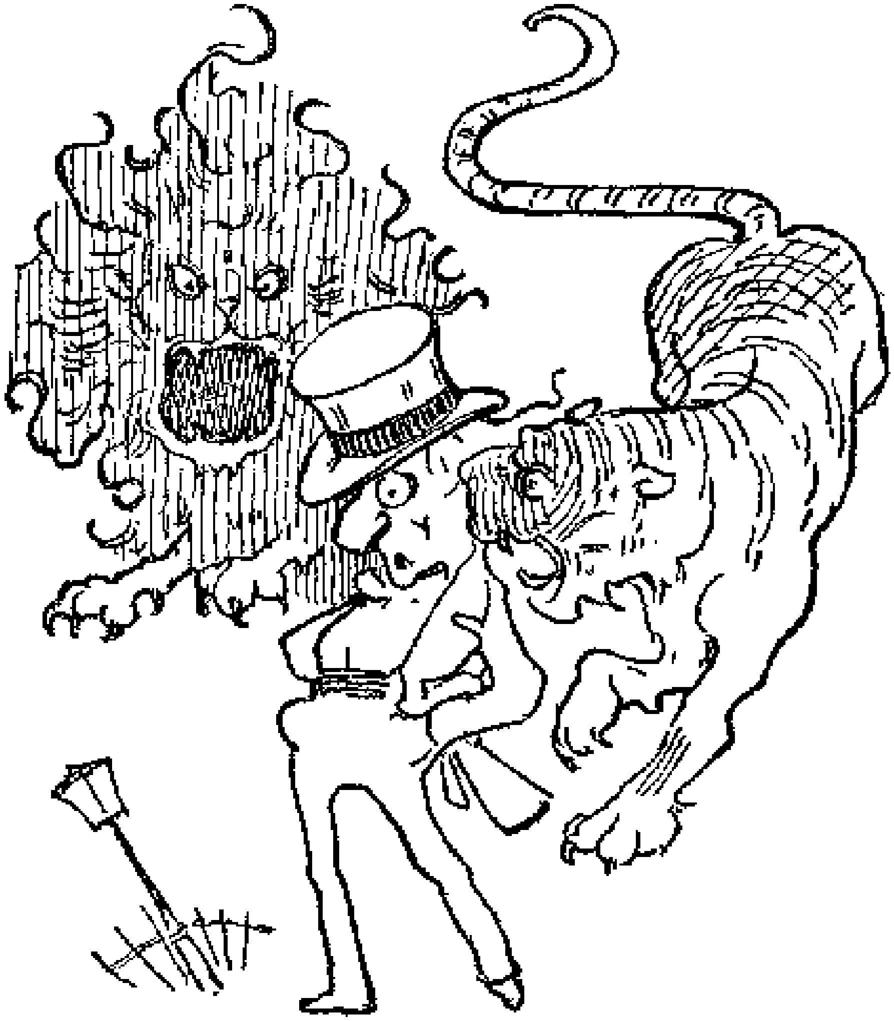

Into my ear the blushing Whale
Stammers his love. I know
Why the Rhinoceros is sad,
— Ah, child! ’twas long ago.

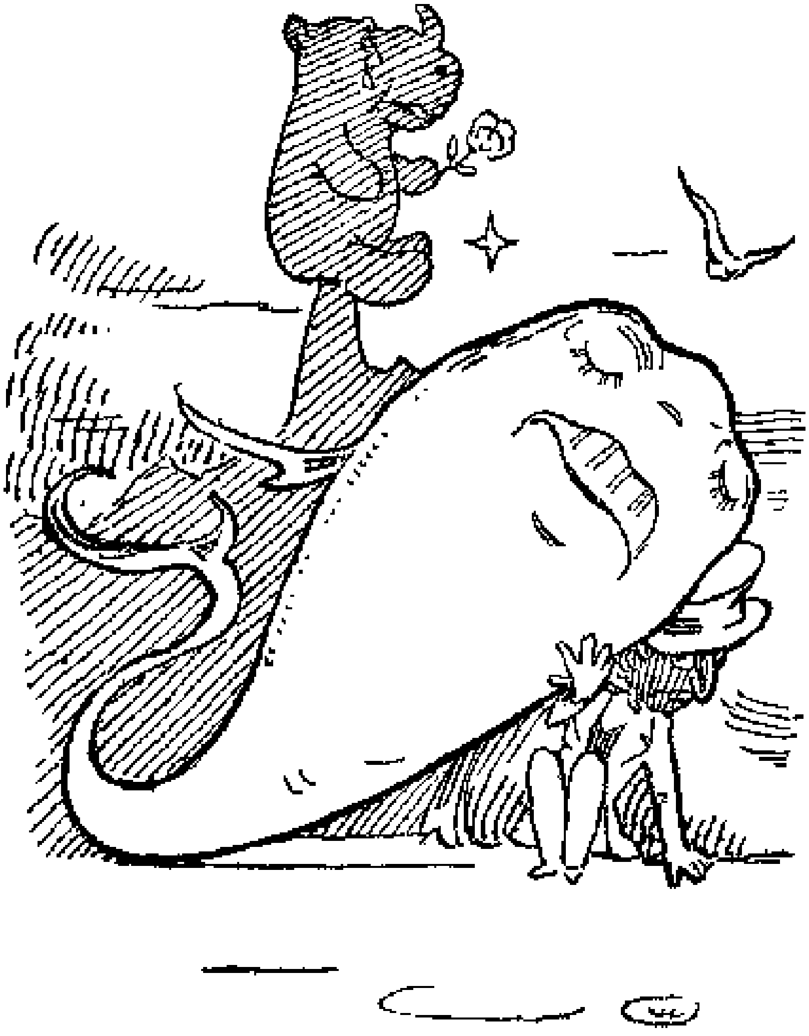

I am akin to all the Earth
By many a tribal sign:
The aged Pig will often wear
That sad, sweet smile of mine.

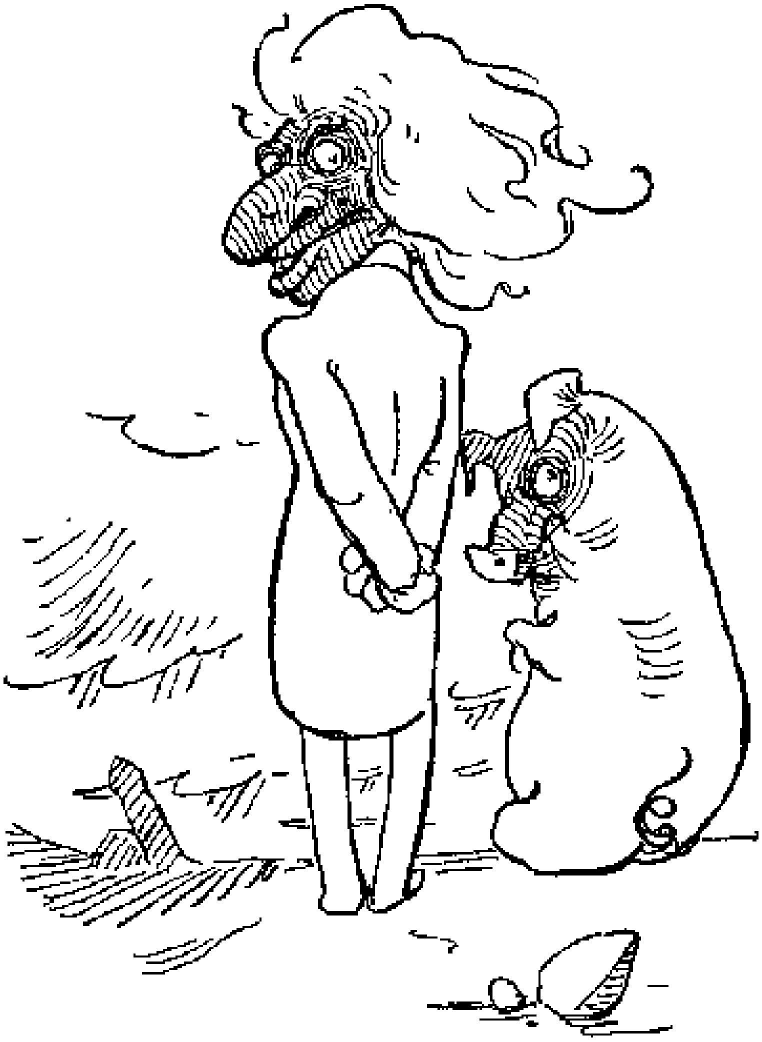

My niece, the Barnacle, has got
My piercing eyes of black;
The Elephant has got my nose,
I do not want it back.

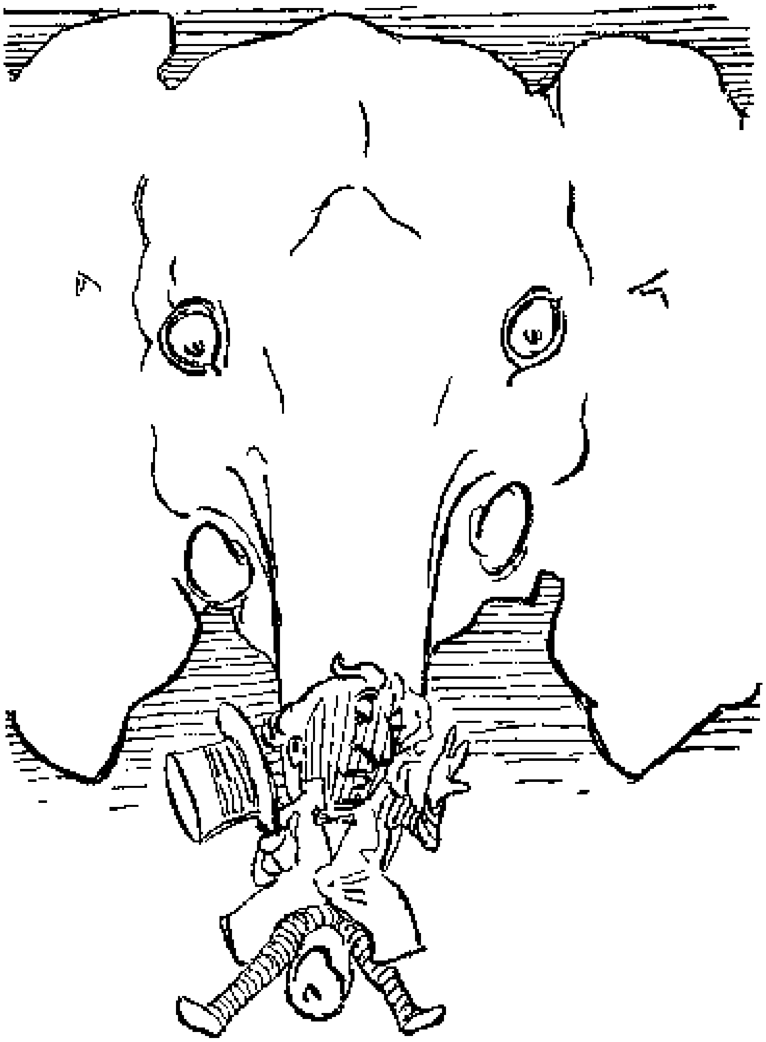

I know the strange tale of the Slug;
The Early Sin — the Fall —
The Sleep — the Vision — and the Vow —
The Quest — the Crown — the Call.

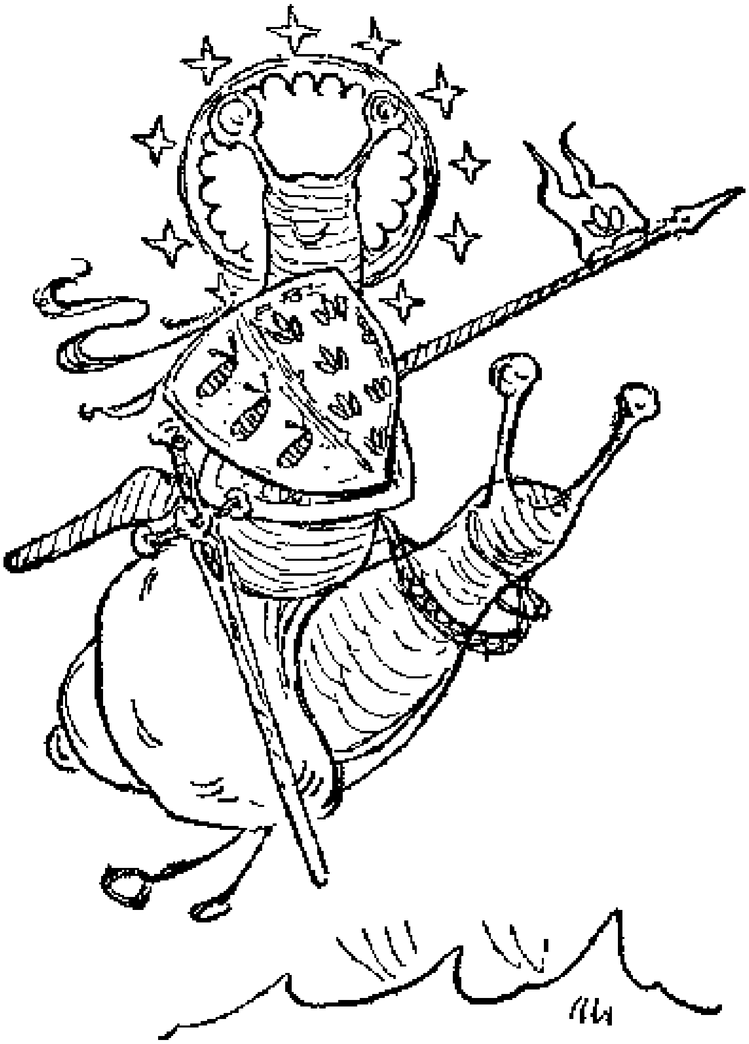

And I have loved the Octopus,
Since we were boys together.
I love the Vulture and the Shark:
I even love the weather.

I love to bask in sunny fields,
And when that hope is vain,
I go and bask in Baker Street,
All in the pouring rain.

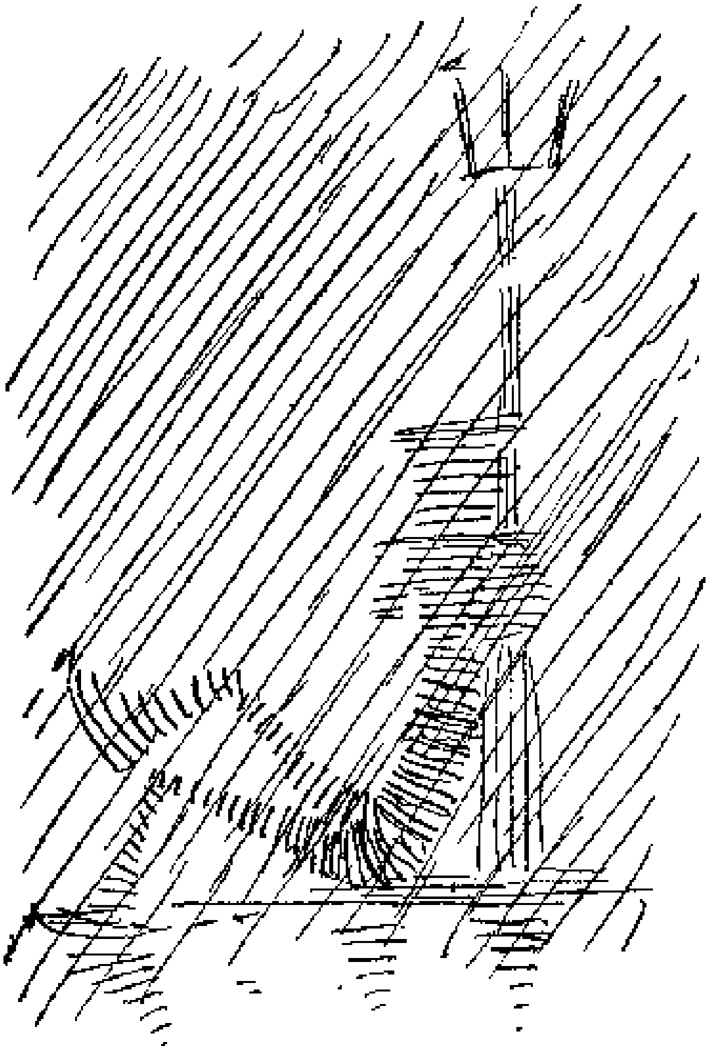

Come snow! where fly, by some strange law,
Hard snowballs — without noise —
Through streets untenanted, except
By good unconscious boys.

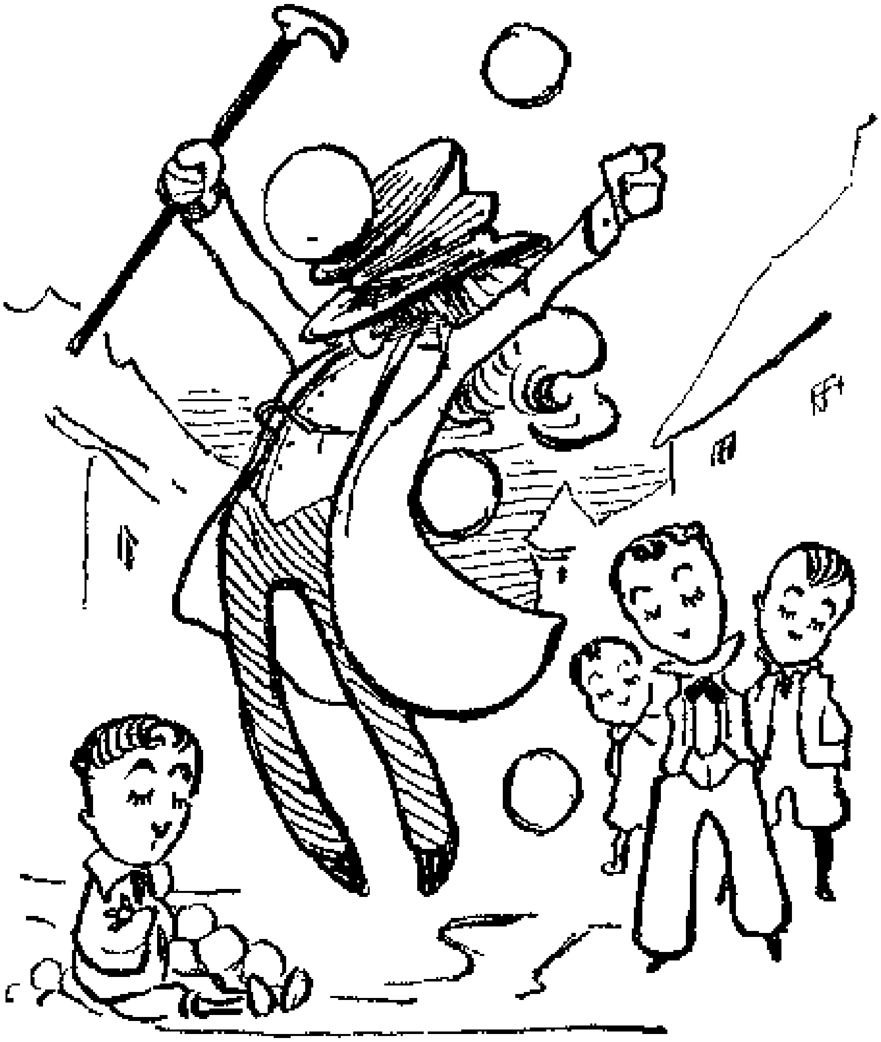

Come fog! exultant mystery —
Where, in strange darkness rolled,
The end of my own nose becomes
A lovely legend old.

Come snow, and hail, and thunderbolts,
Sleet, fire, and general fuss;
Come to my arms, come all at once —
Oh photograph me thus!

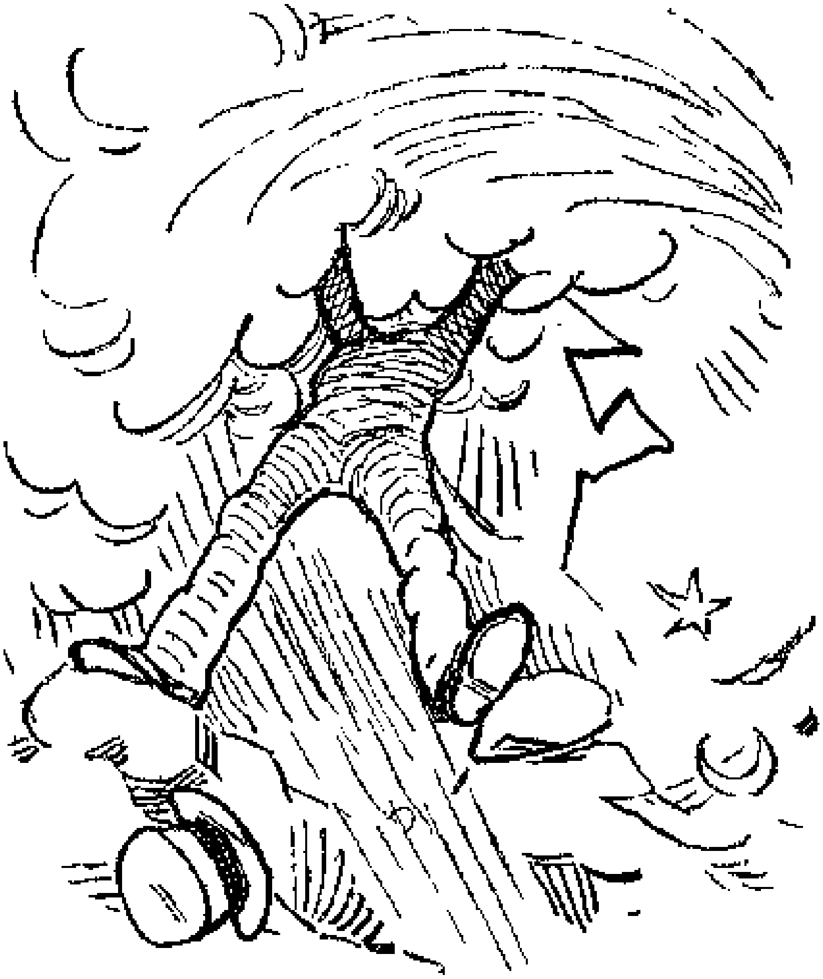

OF THE DANGERS ATTENDING ALTRUISM ON THE HIGH SEAS

Observe these Pirates bold and gay,
That sail a gory sea:
Notice their bright expression: —
The handsome one is me.

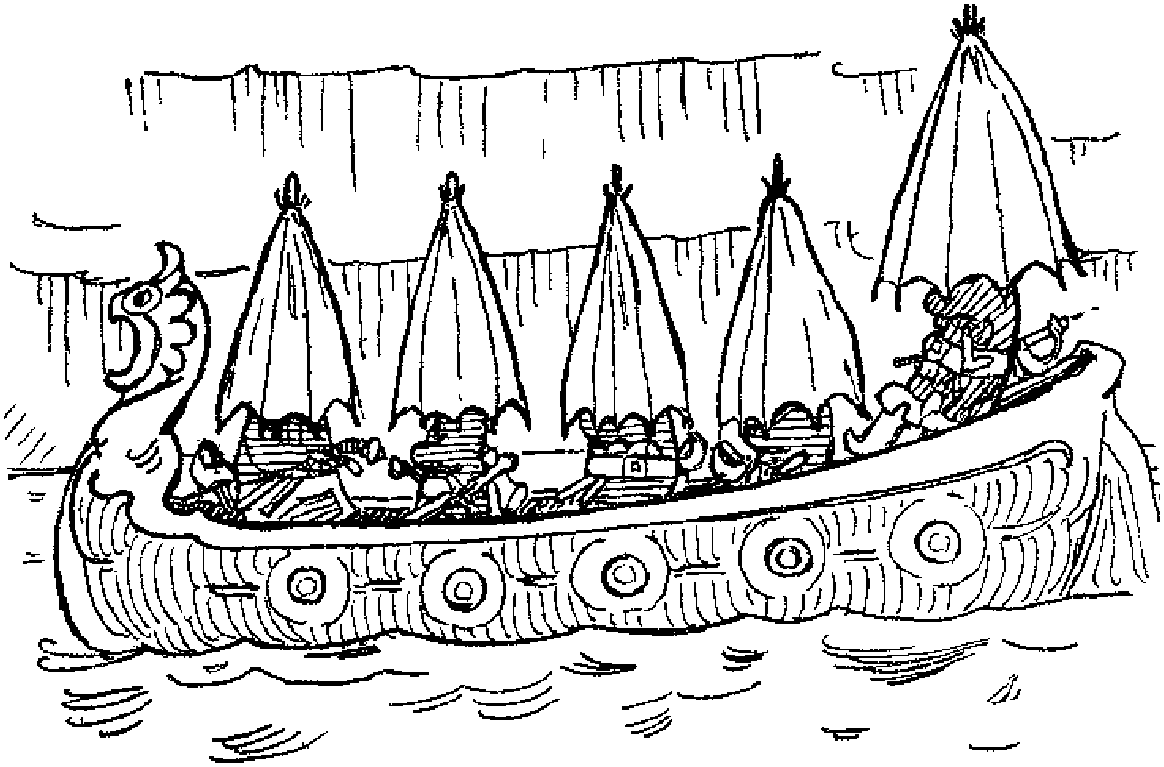

We plundered ships and harbours,
We spoiled the Spanish main;
But Nemesis watched over us,
For it began to rain.
Oh all well-meaning folk take heed!
Our Captain’s fate was sore;
A more well-meaning Pirate,
Had never dripped with gore.

The rain was pouring long and loud,
The sea was drear and dim;
A little fish was floating there:
Our Captain pitied him.

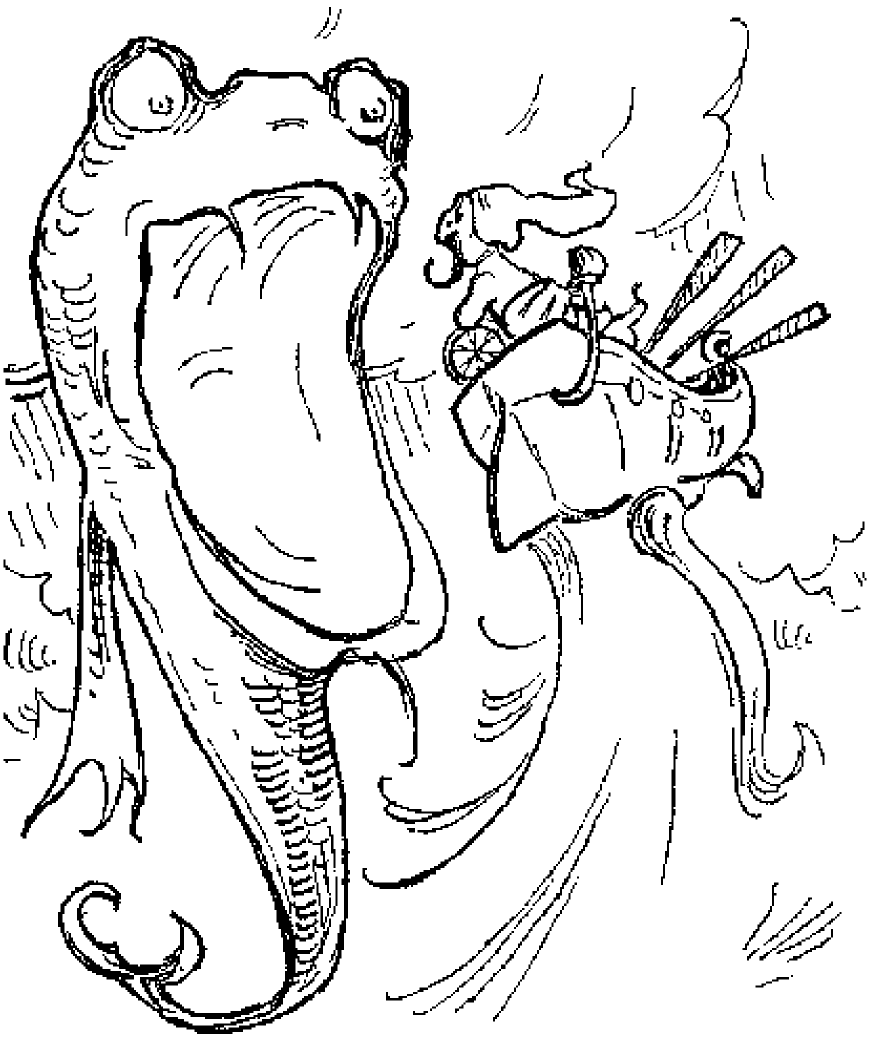

“How sad,” he said, and dropped a tear
Splash on the cabin roof,
“That we are dry, while he is there
Without a waterproof.
“We’ll get him up on board at once;
For Science teaches me,
He will be wet if he remains
Much longer in the sea.”

They fished him out; the First Mate wept,
And came with rugs and ale:
The Boatswain brought him one golosh,
And fixed it on his tail.

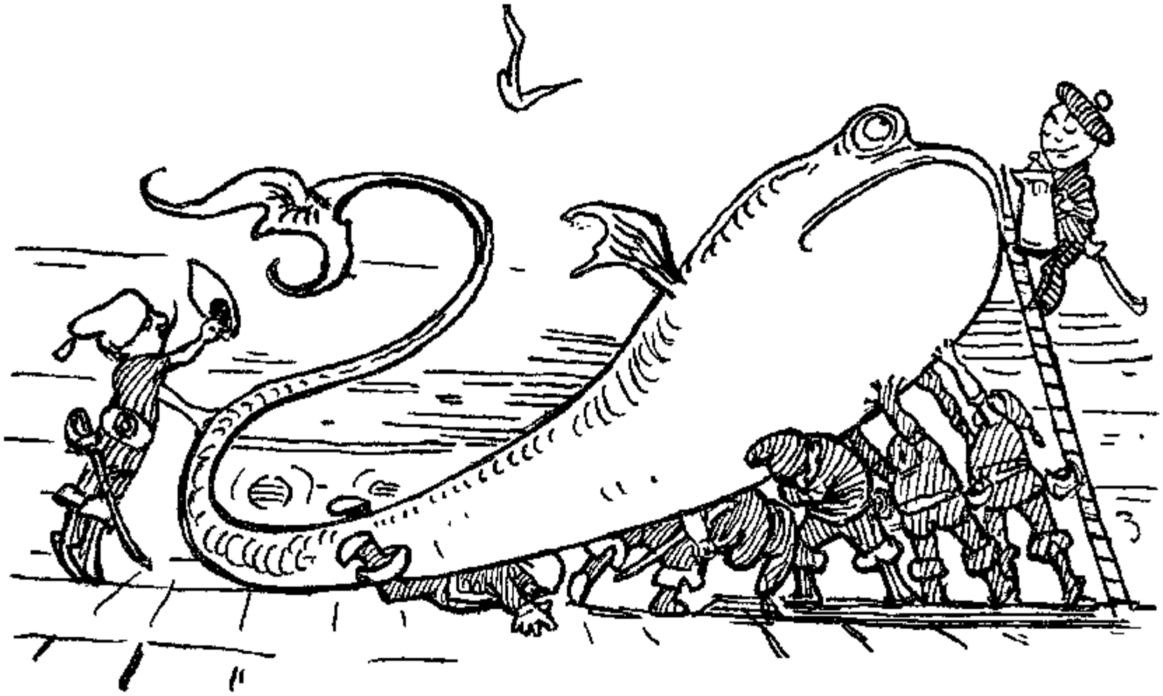

But yet he never loved the ship;
Against the mast he’d lean;
If spoken to, he coughed and smiled,
And blushed a pallid green.
Though plied with hardbake, beef and beer,
He showed no wish to sup:
The neatest riddles they could ask,
He always gave them up.

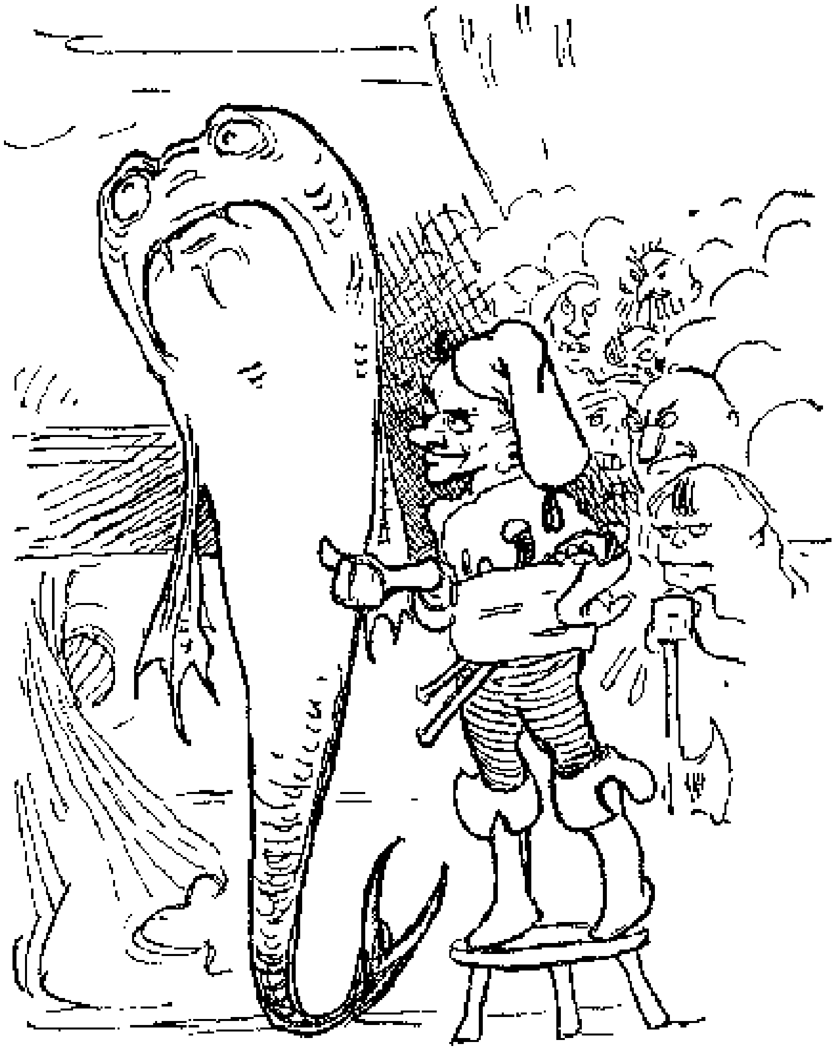

They seized him and court-martialled him,
In some excess of spleen,
For lack of social sympathy,
(Victoria xii. 18).
They gathered every evidence
That might remove a doubt:
They wrote a postcard in his name,
And partly scratched it out.
Till, when his guilt was clear as day,
With all formality
They doomed the traitor to be drowned,
And threw him in the sea.

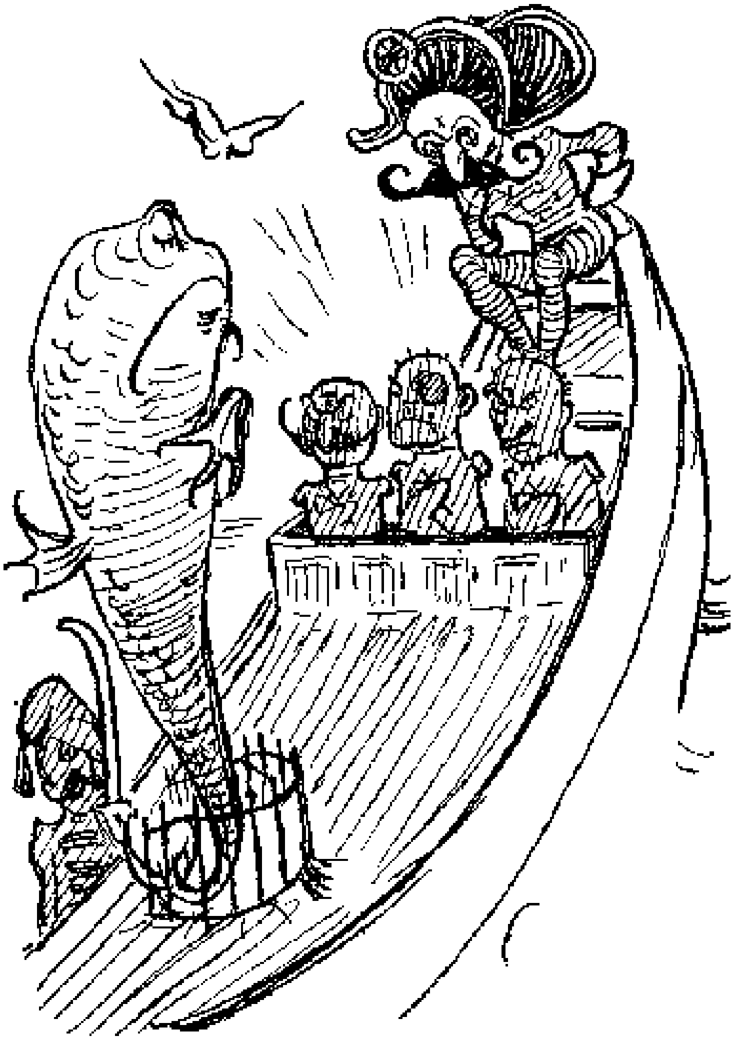

The flashing sunset, as he sank,
Made every scale a gem;
And, turning with a graceful bow,
He kissed his fin to them.

MORAL

I am, I think I have remarked,
Terrifically old,
(The second Ice-age was a farce,
The first was rather cold.)
A friend of mine, a trilobite
Had gathered in his youth,
When trilobites *were* trilobites,
This all-important truth.

We aged ones play solemn parts —
Sire — guardian — uncle — king.
Affection is the salt of life,
Kindness a noble thing.
The old alone may comprehend
A sense in my decree;
But — if you find a fish on land,
Oh throw it in the sea.

ON THE DISASTROUS SPREAD OF ÆSTHETICISM IN ALL CLASSES

Impetuously I sprang from bed,
Long before lunch was up,
That I might drain the dizzy dew
From day’s first golden cup.

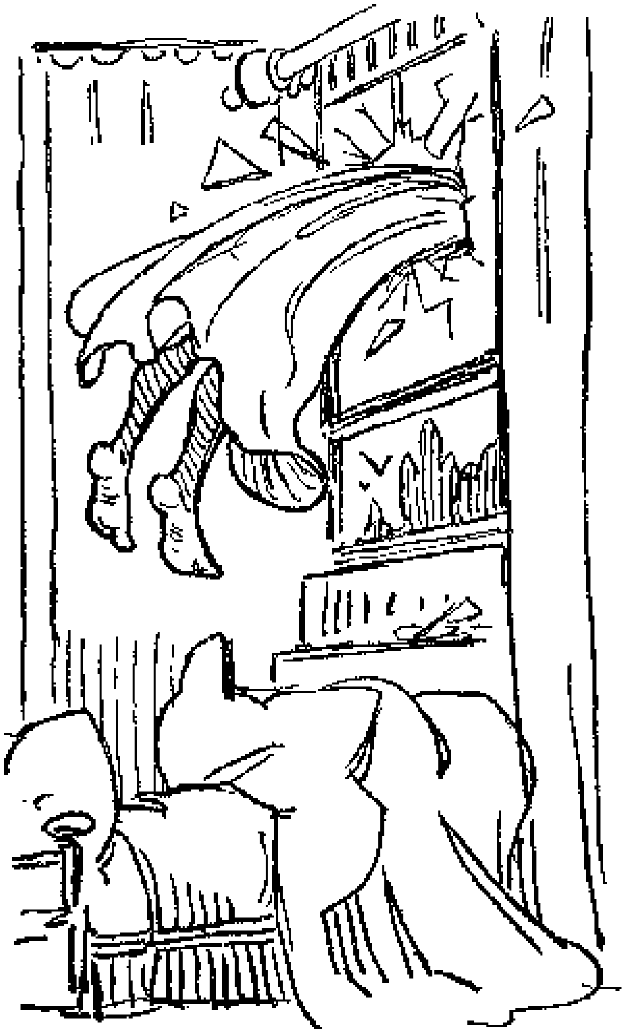

In swift devouring ecstacy
Each toil in turn was done;
I had done lying on the lawn

Three minutes after one.
For me, as Mr. Wordsworth says,
The duties shine like stars;
I formed my uncle’s character,
Decreasing his cigars.

But could my kind engross me? No!
Stern Art — what sons escape her?
Soon I was drawing Gladstone’s nose
On scraps of blotting paper.

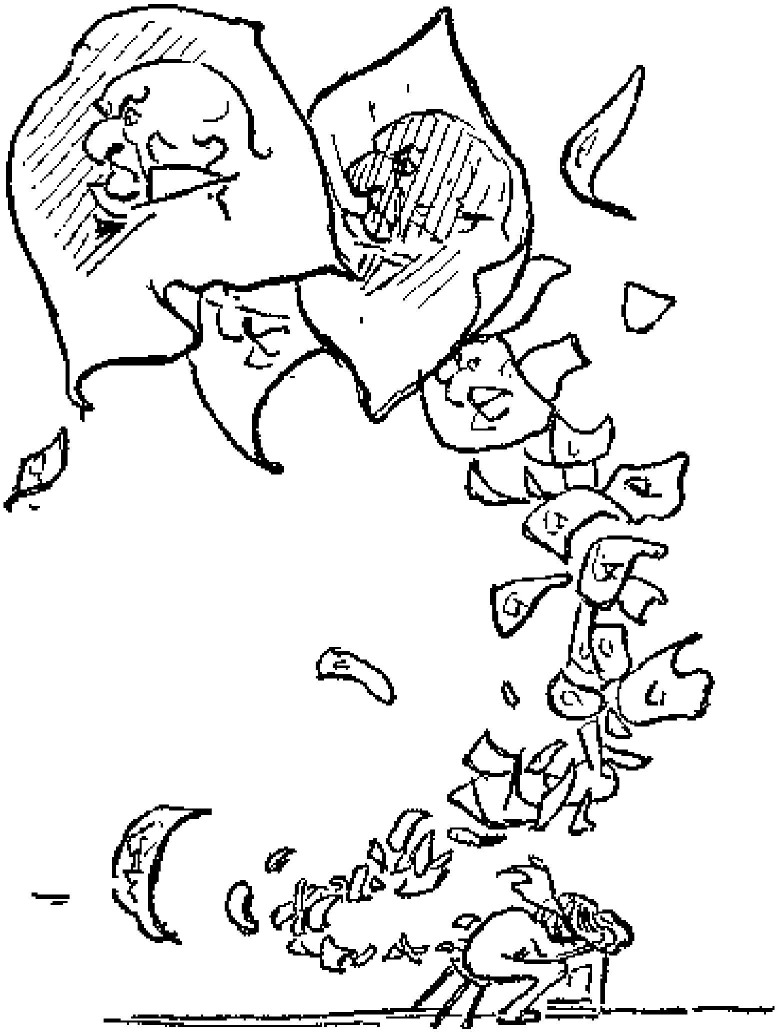

Then on — to play one-fingered tunes
Upon my aunt’s piano.

In short, I have a headlong soul,
I much resemble Hanno.
(Forgive the entrance of the not
Too cogent Carthaginian.
It may have been to make a rhyme;
I lean to that opinion).

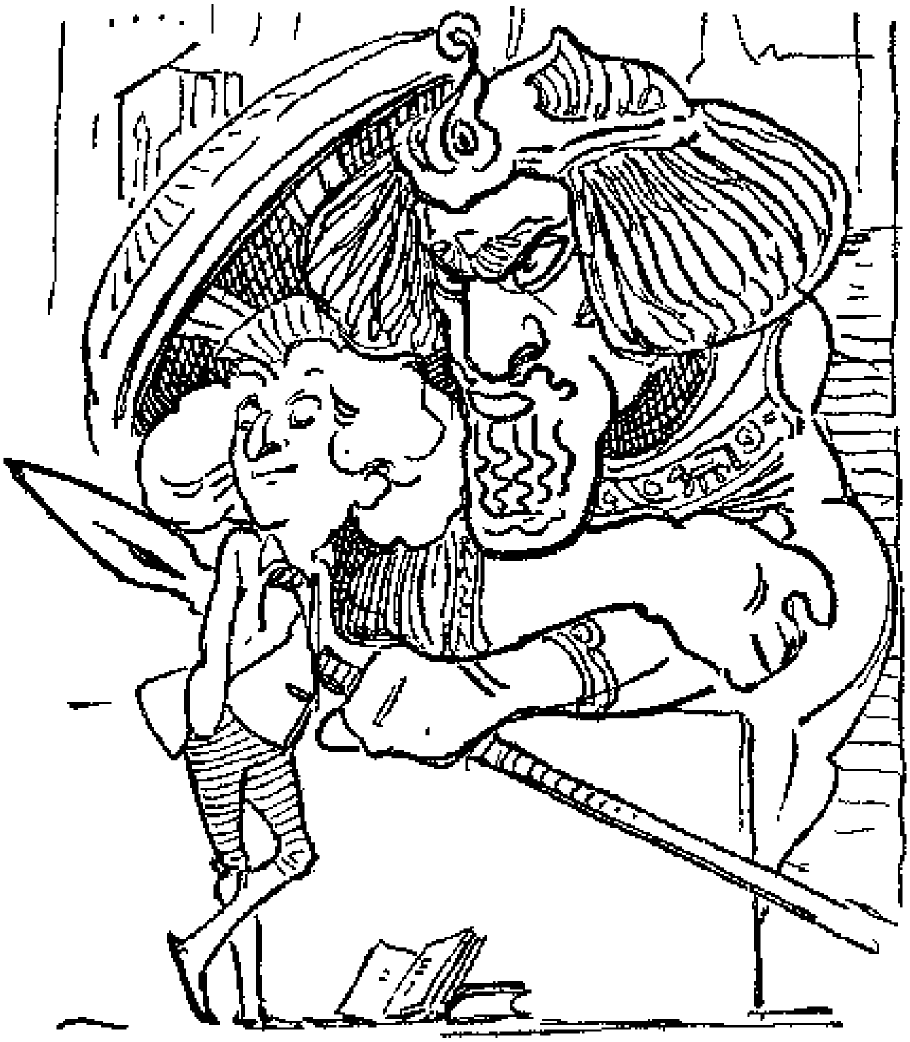

Then my great work of book research
Till dusk I took in hand —
The forming of a final, sound
Opinion on *The Strand*.
But when I quenched the midnight oil,
And closed *The Referee*,

Whose thirty volumes folio
I take to bed with me,
I had a rather funny dream,
Intense, that is, and mystic;
I dreamed that, with one leap and yell,
The world became artistic.

The Shopmen, when their souls were still,
Declined to open shops —

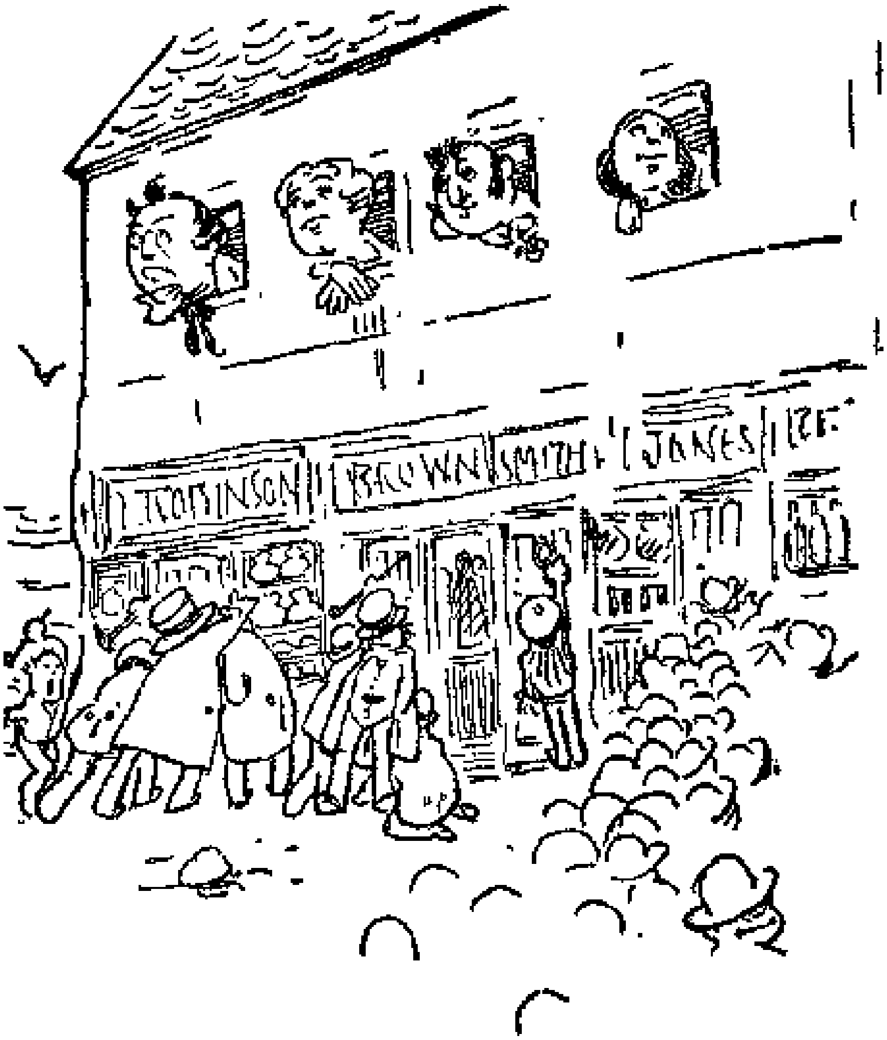

And Cooks recorded frames of mind
In sad and subtle chops.

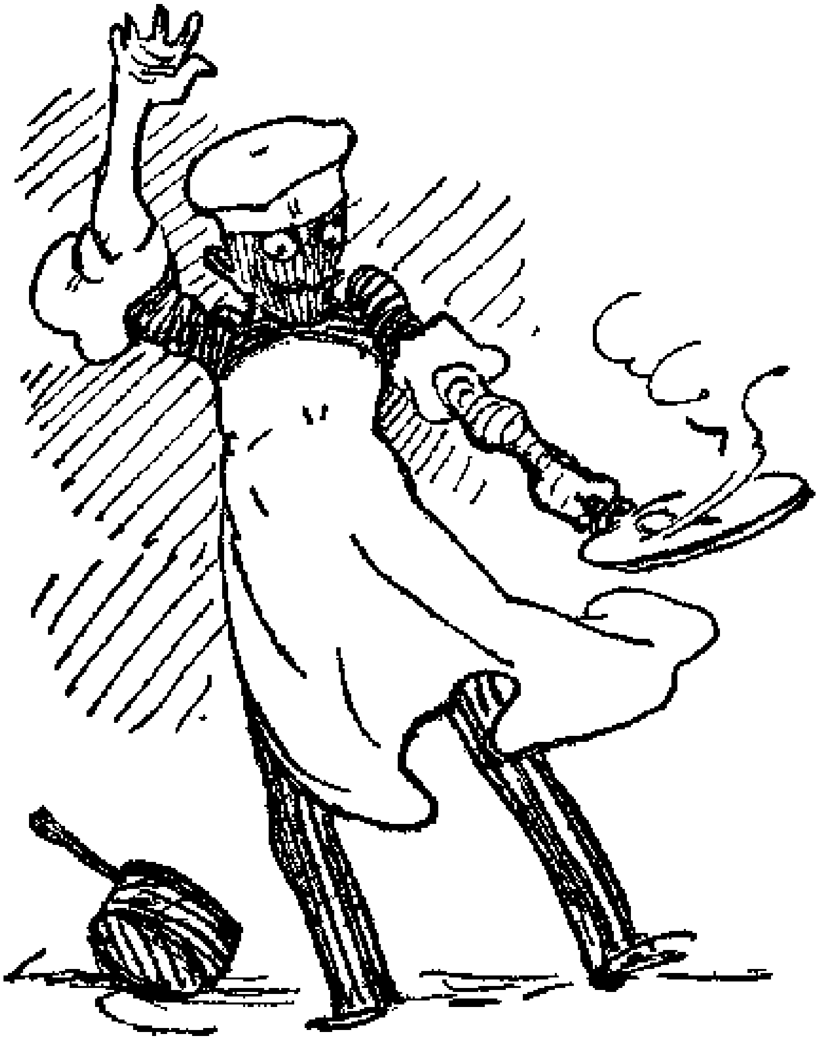

The stars were weary of routine:
The trees in the plantation
Were growing every fruit at once,
In search of a sensation.
The moon went for a moonlight stroll,
And tried to be a bard,
And gazed enraptured at itself:
I left it trying hard.

The sea had nothing but a mood
Of ‘vague ironic gloom,’
With which t’explain its presence in
My upstairs drawing-room.

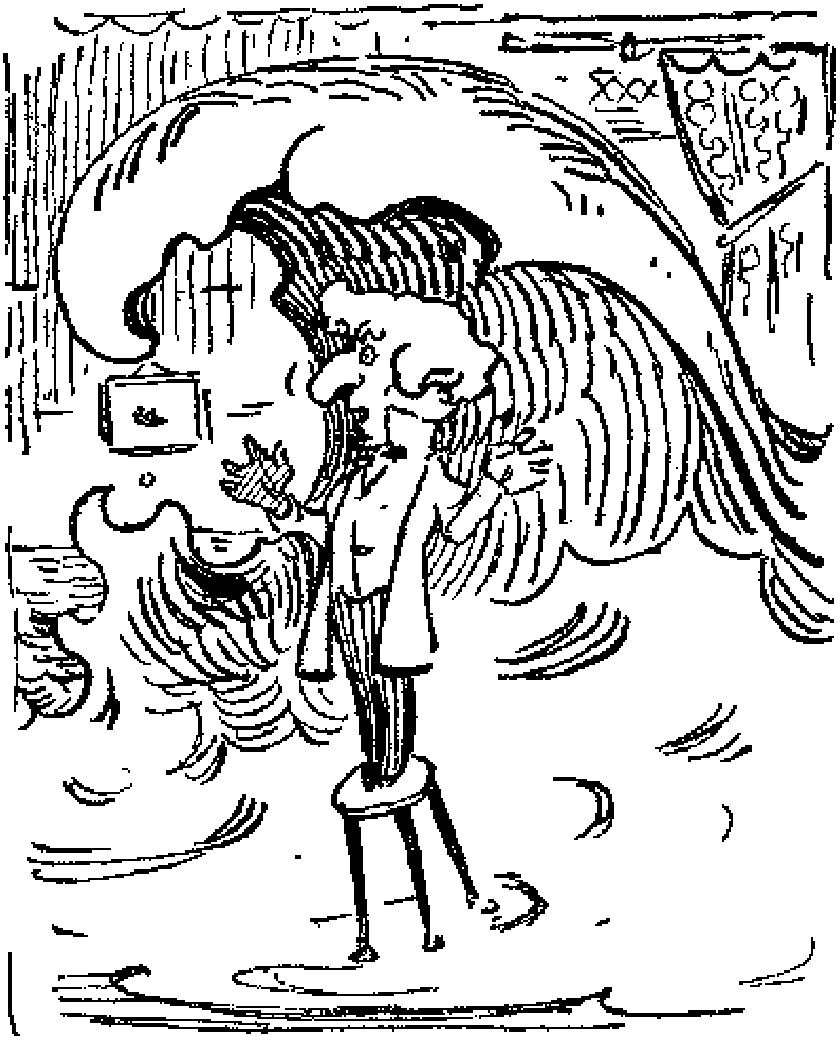

The sun had read a little book
That struck him with a notion:
He drowned himself and all his fires
Deep in the hissing ocean.
Then all was dark, lawless, and lost:
I heard great devilish wings:
I knew that Art had won, and snapt
The Covenant of Things.

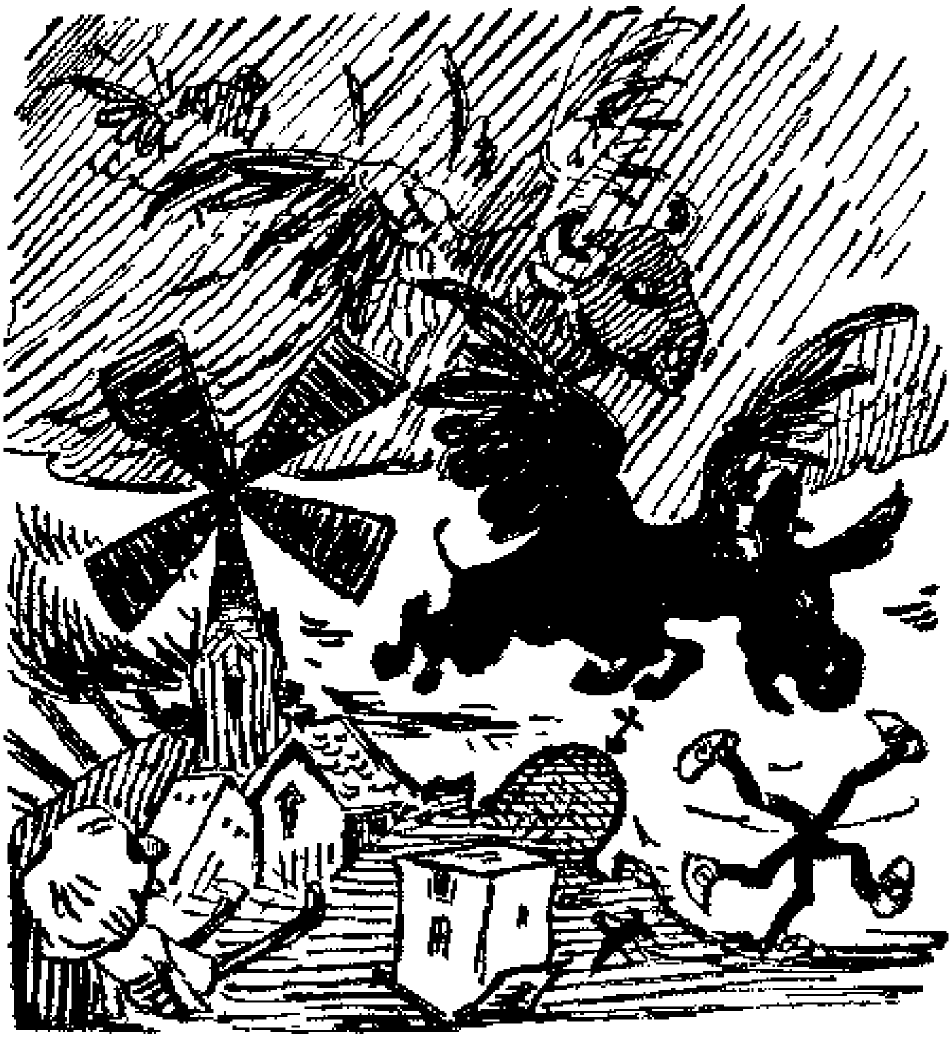

I cried aloud, and I awoke,
New labours in my head.
I set my teeth, and manfully
Began to lie in bed.
Toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing,
So I my life conduct.
Each morning see some task begun,
Each evening see it chucked.
But still, in sudden moods of dusk,
I hear those great weird wings,
Feel vaguely thankful to the vast
Stupidity of things.

ENVOY

Clear was the night: the moon was young:
The larkspurs in the plots
Mingled their orange with the gold
Of the forget-me-nots.
The poppies seemed a silver mist:
 So darkly fell the gloom.
 You scarce had guessed yon crimson streaks
 Were buttercups in bloom.
 But one thing moved: a little child
 Crashed through the flower and fern:
 And all my soul rose up to greet
 The sage of whom I learn.

 I looked into his awful eyes:
 I waited his decree:
 I made ingenious attempts
 To sit upon his knee.
 The babe upraised his wondering eyes,
 And timidly he said,
 “A trend towards experiment
 In modern minds is bred.
 “I feel the will to roam, to learn
 By test, experience, *nous*,
 That fire is hot and ocean deep,
 And wolves carnivorous.

 “My brain demands complexity.”
 The lisping cherub cried.
 I looked at him, and only said,
 “Go on. The world is wide.”
 A tear rolled down his pinafore,
 “Yet from my life must pass
 The simple love of sun and moon,
 The old games in the grass;

“Now that my back is to my home
Could these again be found?”
I looked on him, and only said,
“Go on. The world is round.”

THE WILD KNIGHT AND OTHER POEMS

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THE BALLAD OF GOD-MAKERS
AT NIGHT
THE WOOD-CUTTER
ART COLOURS
THE TWO WOMEN
THE WILD KNIGHT
THE WILD KNIGHT
GOOD NEWS

NOTE

My thanks are due to the Editors of the *Outlook* and the *Speaker* for the kind permission they have given me to reprint a considerable number of the following poems. They have been selected and arranged rather with a view to unity of spirit than to unity of time or value; many of them being juvenile.

Another tattered rhymster in the ring,
With but the old plea to the sneering schools,
That on him too, some secret night in spring
Came the old frenzy of a hundred fools

To make some thing: the old want dark and deep,
The thirst of men, the hunger of the stars,
Since first it tinged even the Eternal’s sleep,
With monstrous dreams of trees and towns and mars.

When all He made for the first time He saw,
Scattering stars as misers shake their pelf.
Then in the last strange wrath broke His own law,
And made a graven image of Himself.

BY THE BABE UNBORN

If trees were tall and grasses short,
  As in some crazy tale,
If here and there a sea were blue
  Beyond the breaking pale,

If a fixed fire hung in the air
  To warm me one day through,
If deep green hair grew on great hills,
  I know what I should do.

In dark I lie: dreaming that there
  Are great eyes cold or kind,
And twisted streets and silent doors,
  And living men behind.

Let storm-clouds come: better an hour,
  And leave to weep and fight,
Than all the ages I have ruled
  The empires of the night.

I think that if they gave me leave
  Within that world to stand,
I would be good through all the day
  I spent in fairyland.

They should not hear a word from me
  Of selfishness or scorn,
If only I could find the door,
  If only I were born.

THE WORLD’S LOVER

My eyes are full of lonely mirth:
  Reeling with want and worn with scars,
For pride of every stone on earth,
  I shake my spear at all the stars.

A live bat beats my crest above,
  Lean foxes nose where I have trod,
And on my naked face the love
  Which is the loneliness of God.

Outlawed: since that great day gone by —
  When before prince and pope and queen
I stood and spoke a blasphemy —
  ’Behold the summer leaves are green.’

They cursed me: what was that to me
  Who in that summer darkness furled,
With but an owl and snail to see,
  Had blessed and conquered all the world?

They bound me to the scourging-stake,
  They laid their whips of thorn on me;
I wept to see the green rods break,
  Though blood be beautiful to see.

Beneath the gallows’ foot abhorred
  The crowds cry ‘Crucify!’ and ‘Kill!’
Higher the priests sing, ‘Praise the Lord,
  The warlock dies’; and higher still

Shall heaven and earth hear one cry sent
  Even from the hideous gibbet height,
‘Praise to the Lord Omnipotent,
  The vultures have a feast to-night.’

THE SKELETON

Chattering finch and water-fly
Are not merrier than I;
Here among the flowers I lie
Laughing everlastingly.
No: I may not tell the best;
Surely, friends, I might have guessed
Death was but the good King’s jest,
  It was hid so carefully.

A CHORD OF COLOUR

My Lady clad herself in grey,
  That caught and clung about her throat;
Then all the long grey winter day
  On me a living splendour smote;
And why grey palmers holy are,
  And why grey minsters great in story,
And grey skies ring the morning star,
  And grey hairs are a crown of glory.

My Lady clad herself in green,
  Like meadows where the wind-waves pass;
Then round my spirit spread, I ween,
  A splendour of forgotten grass.
Then all that dropped of stem or sod,
  Hoarded as emeralds might be,
I bowed to every bush, and trod
  Amid the live grass fearfully.

My Lady clad herself in blue,
  Then on me, like the seer long gone,
The likeness of a sapphire grew,
  The throne of him that sat thereon.
Then knew I why the Fashioner
  Splashed reckless blue on sky and sea;
And ere ’twas good enough for her,
  He tried it on Eternity.

Beneath the gnarled old Knowledge-tree
  Sat, like an owl, the evil sage:
‘The World’s a bubble,’ solemnly
  He read, and turned a second page.
‘A bubble, then, old crow,’ I cried,
  ’God keep you in your weary wit!
‘A bubble — have you ever spied
  ’The colours I have seen on it?’

THE HAPPY MAN

To teach the grey earth like a child,
  To bid the heavens repent,
I only ask from Fate the gift
  Of one man well content.

Him will I find: though when in vain
  I search the feast and mart,
The fading flowers of liberty,
  The painted masks of art.

I only find him at the last,
  On one old hill where nod
Golgotha’s ghastly trinity —
  Three persons and one god.

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

I do not cry, beloved, neither curse.
  Silence and strength, these two at least are good.
  He gave me sun and stars and ought He could,
But not a woman's love; for that is hers.

He sealed her heart from sage and questioner —
  Yea, with seven seals, as he has sealed the grave.
  And if she give it to a drunken slave,
The Day of Judgment shall not challenge her.

Only this much: if one, deserving well,
  Touching your thin young hands and making suit,
  Feel not himself a crawling thing, a brute,
Buried and bricked in a forgotten hell;

Prophet and poet be he over sod,
  Prince among angels in the highest place,
  God help me, I will smite him on the face,
Before the glory of the face of God.

A NOVELTY

Why should I care for the Ages
  Because they are old and grey?
To me, like sudden laughter,
  The stars are fresh and gay;
The world is a daring fancy,
  And finished yesterday.

Why should I bow to the Ages
  Because they were drear and dry?
Slow trees and ripening meadows
  For me go roaring by,
A living charge, a struggle
  To escalade the sky.

The eternal suns and systems,
  Solid and silent all,
To me are stars of an instant,
  Only the fires that fall
From God's good rocket, rising
  On this night of carnival.

ULTIMATE

The vision of a haloed host
  That weep around an empty throne;
And, aureoles dark and angels dead,
  Man with his own life stands alone.

‘I am,’ he says his bankrupt creed:
  ’I am,’ and is again a clod:
The sparrow starts, the grasses stir,
  For he has said the name of God.

THE DONKEY

When fishes flew and forests walked
  And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
  Then surely I was born;

With monstrous head and sickening cry
  And ears like errant wings,
The devil’s walking parody
  On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
  Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
  I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;
  One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
  And palms before my feet.

THE BEATIFIC VISION

Through what fierce incarnations, furled
  In fire and darkness, did I go,
Ere I was worthy in the world
  To see a dandelion grow?

Well, if in any woes or wars
  I bought my naked right to be,
Grew worthy of the grass, nor gave
  The wren, my brother, shame for me.

But what shall God not ask of him
  In the last time when all is told,
Who saw her stand beside the hearth,
  The firelight garbing her in gold?

THE HOPE OF THE STREETS

The still sweet meadows shimmered: and I stood
  And cursed them, bloom of hedge and bird of tree,
And bright and high beyond the hunch-backed wood
  The thunder and the splendour of the sea.

Give back the Babylon where I was born,
  The lips that gape give back, the hands that grope,
And noise and blood and suffocating scorn
  An eddy of fierce faces — and a hope

That ‘mid those myriad heads one head find place,
  With brown hair curled like breakers of the sea,
And two eyes set so strangely in the face
  That all things else are nothing suddenly.

ECCLESIASTES

There is one sin: to call a green leaf grey,
  Whereat the sun in heaven shuddereth.
There is one blasphemy: for death to pray,
  For God alone knoweth the praise of death.

There is one creed: ‘neath no world-terror’s wing
  Apples forget to grow on apple-trees.
There is one thing is needful — everything —
  The rest is vanity of vanities.

THE SONG OF THE CHILDREN

The World is ours till sunset,
  Holly and fire and snow;
And the name of our dead brother
  Who loved us long ago.

The grown folk mighty and cunning,
  They write his name in gold;
But we can tell a little
  Of the million tales he told.

He taught them laws and watchwords,
  To preach and struggle and pray;
But he taught us deep in the hayfield
  The games that the angels play.

Had he stayed here for ever,
  Their world would be wise as ours —
And the king be cutting capers,
  And the priest be picking flowers.

But the dark day came: they gathered:
  On their faces we could see
They had taken and slain our brother,
  And hanged him on a tree.

THE FISH

Dark the sea was: but I saw him,
  One great head with goggle eyes,
Like a diabolic cherub
  Flying in those fallen skies.

I have heard the hoarse deniers,
  I have known the wordy wars;
I have seen a man, by shouting,
  Seek to orphan all the stars.

I have seen a fool half-fashioned
  Borrow from the heavens a tongue,
So to curse them more at leisure —
 — And I trod him not as dung.

For I saw that finny goblin
  Hidden in the abyss untrod;
And I knew there can be laughter
  On the secret face of God.

Blow the trumpets, crown the sages,
  Bring the age by reason fed!
(He that sitteth in the heavens,
  ’He shall laugh’ — the prophet said.)

GOLD LEAVES

Lo! I am come to autumn,
  When all the leaves are gold;
Grey hairs and golden leaves cry out
  The year and I are old.

In youth I sought the prince of men,
  Captain in cosmic wars,
Our Titan, even the weeds would show
  Defiant, to the stars.

But now a great thing in the street
  Seems any human nod,
Where shift in strange democracy
  The million masks of God.

In youth I sought the golden flower
  Hidden in wood or wold,
But I am come to autumn,
  When all the leaves are gold.

THOU SHALT NOT KILL

I had grown weary of him; of his breath
And hands and features I was sick to death.
Each day I heard the same dull voice and tread;
I did not hate him: but I wished him dead.
And he must with his blank face fill my life —
Then my brain blackened; and I snatched a knife.

But ere I struck, my soul’s grey deserts through
A voice cried, ‘Know at least what thing you do.’
‘This is a common man: knowest thou, O soul,
What this thing is? somewhere where seasons roll
There is some living thing for whom this man
Is as seven heavens girt into a span,
For some one soul you take the world away —
Now know you well your deed and purpose. Slay!’

Then I cast down the knife upon the ground
And saw that mean man for one moment crowned.
I turned and laughed: for there was no one by —
The man that I had sought to slay was I.

A CERTAIN EVENING

That night the whole world mingled,
  The souls were babes at play,
And angel danced with devil.
  And God cried, ‘Holiday!’

The sea had climbed the mountain peaks,
  And shouted to the stars
To come to play: and down they came
  Splashing in happy wars.

The pine grew apples for a whim,
  The cart-horse built a nest;
The oxen flew, the flowers sang,
  The sun rose in the west.

And ‘neath the load of many worlds,
  The lowest life God made
Lifted his huge and heavy limbs
  And into heaven strayed.

To where the highest life God made
  Before His presence stands;
But God himself cried, ‘Holiday!’
  And she gave me both her hands.

A MAN AND HIS IMAGE

All day the nations climb and crawl and pray
  In one long pilgrimage to one white shrine,
Where sleeps a saint whose pardon, like his peace,
  Is wide as death, as common, as divine.

His statue in an aureole fills the shrine,
  The reckless nightingale, the roaming fawn,
Share the broad blessing of his lifted hands,
  Under the canopy, above the lawn.

But one strange night, a night of gale and flood,
  A sound came louder than the wild wind’s tone;
The grave-gates shook and opened: and one stood
  Blue in the moonlight, rotten to the bone.

Then on the statue, graven with holy smiles,
  There came another smile — tremendous — one
Of an Egyptian god. ‘Why should you rise?
  ’Do I not guard your secret from the sun?

The nations come; they kneel among the flowers
  Sprung from your blood, blossoms of May and June,
Which do not poison them — is it not strange?
  Speak!’ And the dead man shuddered in the moon.

Shall I not cry the truth?’ — the dead man cowered —
  Is it not sad, with life so tame and cold,
What earth should fade into the sun’s white fires
  With the best jest in all its tales untold?

‘If I should cry that in this shrine lie hid
  Stories that Satan from his mouth would spew;
Wild tales that men in hell tell hoarsely — speak!
  Saint and Deliverer! Should I slander you?’

Slowly the cowering corse reared up its head,
  ’Nay, I am vile … but when for all to see,
You stand there, pure and painless — death of life!
  Let the stars fall — I say you slander me!

‘You make me perfect, public, colourless;
  You make my virtues sit at ease — you lie!
For mine were never easy — lost or saved,
  I had a soul — I was. And where am I?

Where is my good? the little real hoard,
  The secret tears, the sudden chivalries;
The tragic love, the futile triumph — where?
  Thief, dog, and son of devils — where are these?

I will lift up my head: in leprous loves
  Lost, and the soul’s dishonourable scars —
By God I was a better man than This
  That stands and slanders me to all the stars.

‘Come down!’ And with an awful cry, the corse
  Sprang on the sacred tomb of many tales,
And stone and bone, locked in a loathsome strife,
  Swayed to the singing of the nightingales.

Then one was thrown: and where the statue stood
  Under the canopy, above the lawn,
The corse stood; grey and lean, with lifted hands
  Raised in tremendous welcome to the dawn.

‘Now let all nations climb and crawl and pray;
  Though I be basest of my old red clan,
They shall not scale, with cries or sacrifice,
  The stature of the spirit of a man.’

THE MARINER

The violet scent is sacred
  Like dreams of angels bright;
The hawthorn smells of passion
  Told in a moonless night.

But the smell is in my nostrils,
  Through blossoms red or gold,
Of my own green flower unfading,
  A bitter smell and bold.

The lily smells of pardon,
  The rose of mirth; but mine
Smells shrewd of death and honour,
  And the doom of Adam’s line.

The heavy scent of wine-shops
  Floats as I pass them by,
But never a cup I quaff from,
  And never a house have I.

Till dropped down forty fathoms,
  I lie eternally;
And drink from God’s own goblet
  The green wine of the sea.

THE TRIUMPH OF MAN

I plod and peer amid mean sounds and shapes,
  I hunt for dusty gain and dreary praise,
  And slowly pass the dismal grinning days,
Monkeying each other like a line of apes.

What care? There was one hour amid all these
  When I had stripped off like a tawdry glove
  My starriest hopes and wants, for very love
Of time and desolate eternities.

Yea, for one great hour’s triumph, not in me
  Nor any hope of mine did I rejoice,
  But in a meadow game of girls and boys
Some sunset in the centuries to be.

CYCLOPEAN

A mountainous and mystic brute
No rein can curb, no arrow shoot,
Upon whose domed deformed back
I sweep the planets scorching track.

Old is the elf, and wise, men say,
His hair grows green as ours grows grey;
He mocks the stars with myriad hands.
High as that swinging forest stands.

But though in pigmy wanderings dull
I scour the deserts of his skull,
I never find the face, eyes, teeth.
Lowering or laughing underneath.

I met my foe in an empty dell,
His face in the sun was naked hell.
I thought, ‘One silent, bloody blow.
No priest would curse, no crowd would know.’

Then cowered: a daisy, half concealed,
Watched for the fame of that poor field;
And in that flower and suddenly
Earth opened its one eye on me.

JOSEPH

If the stars fell; night’s nameless dreams
  Of bliss and blasphemy came true,
If skies were green and snow were gold,
  And you loved me as I love you;

O long light hands and curled brown hair,
  And eyes where sits a naked soul;
Dare I even then draw near and burn
  My fingers in the aureole?

Yes, in the one wise foolish hour
  God gives this strange strength to a man.
He can demand, though not deserve,
  Where ask he cannot, seize he can.

But once the blood’s wild wedding o’er,
  Were not dread his, half dark desire,
To see the Christ-child in the cot,
  The Virgin Mary by the fire?

MODERN ELFLAND

I Cut a staff in a churchyard copse,
  I clad myself in ragged things,
I set a feather in my cap
  That fell out of an angel’s wings.

I filled my wallet with white stones,
  I took three foxgloves in my hand,
I slung my shoes across my back,
  And so I went to fairyland.

But Lo, within that ancient place
  Science had reared her iron crown,
And the great cloud of steam went up
  That telleth where she takes a town.

But cowled with smoke and starred with lamps
  That strange land’s light was still its own;
The word that witched the woods and hills
  Spoke in the iron and the stone.

Not Nature’s hand had ever curved
  That mute unearthly porter’s spine.
Like sleeping dragon’s sudden eyes
  The signals leered along the line.

The chimneys thronging crooked or straight
  Were fingers signalling the sky;
The dog that strayed across the street
  Seemed four-legged by monstrosity.

‘In vain,’ I cried, ‘though you too touch
  The new time’s desecrating hand,
Through all the noises of a town
  I hear the heart of fairyland.’

I read the name above a door,
  Then through my spirit pealed and passed:
‘This is the town of thine own home,
  And thou hast looked on it at last.’

ETERNITIES

I cannot count the pebbles in the brook.
  Well hath He spoken: ‘Swear not by thy head,
  Thou knowest not the hairs,’ though He, we read,
Writes that wild number in his own strange book.

I cannot count the sands or search the seas,
  Death cometh, and I leave so much untrod.
  Grant my immortal aureole, O my God,
And I will name the leaves upon the trees.

In heaven I shall stand on gold and glass,
  Still brooding earth’s arithmetic to spell;
  Or see the fading of the fires of hell
Ere I have thanked my God for all the grass.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

The Christ-child lay on Mary’s lap,
  His hair was like a light.
(O weary, weary were the world,
  But here is all aright.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary’s breast,
  His hair was like a star.
(O stern and cunning are the kings,
  But here the true hearts are.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary’s heart,
  His hair was like a fire.
(O weary, weary is the world,
  But here the world’s desire.)

The Christ-child stood at Mary’s knee,
  His hair was like a crown,
And all the flowers looked up at him.
  And all the stars looked down.

ALONE

Blessings there are of cradle and of clan,
  Blessings that fall of priests’ and princes’ hands;
  But never blessing full of lives and lands,
Broad as the blessing of a lonely man.

Though that old king fell from his primal throne,
  And ate among the cattle, yet this pride
  Had found him in the deepest grass, and cried
An ‘Ecce Homo’ with the trumpets blown.

And no mad tyrant, with almighty ban,
  Who in strong madness dreams himself divine,
  But hears through fumes of flattery and of wine
The thunder of this blessing name him man.

Let all earth rot past saints’ and seraphs’ plea,
  Yet shall a Voice cry through its last lost war,
  ’This is the world, this red wreck of a star,
That a man blessed beneath an alder-tree.’

KING’S CROSS STATION

This circled cosmos whereof man is god
  Has suns and stars of green and gold and red,
And cloudlands of great smoke, that range o’er range
  Far floating, hide its iron heavens o’erhead.

God! shall we ever honour what we are,
  And see one moment ere the age expire,
The vision of man shouting and erect,
  Whirled by the shrieking steeds of flood and fire?

Or must Fate act the same grey farce again,
  And wait, till one, amid Time’s wrecks and scars,
Speaks to a ruin here, ‘What poet-race
  Shot such cyclopean arches at the stars?’

THE HUMAN TREE

Many have Earth’s lovers been,
Tried in seas and wars, I ween;
Yet the mightiest have I seen:
  Yea, the best saw I.
One that in a field alone
Stood up stiller than a stone
Lest a moth should fly.

Birds had nested in his hair,
On his shoon were mosses rare.
Insect empires flourished there,
  Worms in ancient wars;
But his eyes burn like a glass,
Hearing a great sea of grass
  Roar towards the stars.

From, them to the human tree
Rose a cry continually,
‘Thou art still, our Father, we
  Fain would have thee nod.
Make the skies as blood below thee,
Though thou slay us, we shall know thee.
  Answer us, O God!

‘Show thine ancient flame and thunder,
Split the stillness once asunder,
Lest we whisper, lest we wonder
  Art thou there at all?’
But I saw him there alone,
Standing stiller than a stone
  Lest a moth should fall.

TO THEM THAT MOURN

(W.E.G., May 1898)

Lift up your heads: in life, in death,
God knoweth his head was high.
Quit we the coward's broken breath
Who watched a strong man die.

If we must say, 'No more his peer
Cometh; the flag is furled.'
Stand not too near him, lest he hear
That slander on the world.

The good green earth he loved and trod
Is still, with many a scar,
Writ in the chronicles of God,
A giant-bearing star.

He fell: but Britain's banner swings
Above his sunken crown.
Black death shall have his toll of kings
Before that cross goes down.

Once more shall move with mighty things
His house of ancient tale,
Where kings whose hands were kissed of kings
Went in: and came out pale.

O young ones of a darker day,
In art's wan colours clad,
Whose very love and hate are grey —
Whose very sin is sad.

Pass on: one agony long-drawn
Was merrier than your mirth,

When hand-in-hand came death and dawn,
  And spring was on the earth.

THE OUTLAW

Priest, is any song-bird stricken?
  Is one leaf less on the tree?
Is this wine less red and royal
  That the hangman waits for me?

He upon your cross that hangeth,
  It is writ of priestly pen,
On the night they built his gibbet,
  Drank red wine among his men.

Quaff, like a brave man, as he did,
  Wine and death as heaven pours —
This is my fate: O ye rulers,
  O ye pontiffs, what is yours?

To wait trembling, lest yon loathly
  Gallows-shape whereon I die,
In strange temples yet unbuilded,
  Blaze upon an altar high.

BEHIND

I saw an old man like a child,
His blue eyes bright, his white hair wild,
Who turned for ever, and might not stop,
Round and round like an urchin’s top.

‘Fool,’ I cried, ‘while you spin round,
‘Others grow wise, are praised, are crowned.’
Ever the same round road he trod,
‘This is better: I seek for God.’

‘We see the whole world, left and right,
Yet at the blind back hides from sight
The unseen Master that drives us forth
To East and West, to South and North.

‘Over my shoulder for eighty years
I have looked for the gleam of the sphere of spheres.’
‘In all your turning, what have you found?’
‘At least, I know why the world goes round.’

THE END OF FEAR

Though the whole heaven be one-eyed with the moon,
Though the dead landscape seem a thing possessed,
Yet I go singing through that land oppressed
As one that singeth through the flowers of June.

No more, with forest-fingers crawling free
O’er dark flint wall that seems a wall of eyes,
Shall evil break my soul with mysteries
Of some world-poison maddening bush and tree.

No more shall leering ghosts of pimp and king
With bloody secrets veiled before me stand.
Last night I held all evil in my hand
Closed: and behold it was a little thing.

I broke the infernal gates and looked on him
Who fronts the strong creation with a curse;
Even the god of a lost universe,
Smiling above his hideous cherubim.

And pierced far down in his soul’s crypt unriven
The last black crooked sympathy and shame,
And hailed him with that ringing rainbow name
Erased upon the oldest book in heaven.

Like emptied idiot masks, sin’s loves and wars
Stare at me now: for in the night I broke
The bubble of a great world’s jest, and woke
Laughing with laughter such as shakes the stars.

THE HOLY OF HOLIES

‘Elder father, though thine eyes
Shine with hoary mysteries,
Canst thou tell what in the heart
Of a cowslip blossom lies?

‘Smaller than all lives that be,
Secret as the deepest sea,
Stands a little house of seeds,
Like an elfin’s granary,

‘Speller of the stones and weeds,
Skilled in Nature’s crafts and creeds,
Tell me what is in the heart
Of the smallest of the seeds.’

‘God Almighty, and with Him
Cherubim and Seraphim,
Filling all eternity —
Adonai Elohim.’

THE MIRROR OF MADMEN

I dreamed a dream of heaven, white as frost,
The splendid stillness of a living host;
Vast choirs of upturned faces, line o’er line.
Then my blood froze; for every face was mine.

Spirits with sunset plumage throng and pass,
Glassed darkly in the sea of gold and glass.
But still on every side, in every spot,
I saw a million selves, who saw me not.

I fled to quiet wastes, where on a stone,
Perchance, I found a saint, who sat alone;
I came behind: he turned with slow, sweet grace,
And faced me with my happy, hateful face.

I cowered like one that in a tower doth bide,
Shut in by mirrors upon every side;
Then I saw, islanded in skies alone
And silent, one that sat upon a throne.

His robe was bordered with rich rose and gold,
Green, purple, silver out of sunsets old;
But o’er his face a great cloud edged with fire,
Because it covereth the world’s desire.

But as I gazed, a silent worshipper,
Methought the cloud began to faintly stir;
Then I fell flat, and screamed with grovelling head,
‘If thou hast any lightning, strike me dead!

‘But spare a brow where the clean sunlight fell,
The crown of a new sin that sickens hell.
Let me not look aloft and see mine own
Feature and form upon the Judgment-throne.’

Then my dream snapped: and with a heart that leapt
I saw across the tavern where I slept,
The sight of all my life most full of grace,
A gin-damned drunkard’s wan half-witted face.

E.C.B.

Before the grass grew over me,
  I knew one good man through and through,
And knew a soul and body joined
  Are stronger than the heavens are blue.

A wisdom worthy of thy joy,
  O great heart, read I as I ran;
Now, though men smite me on the face,
  I cannot curse the face of man.

I loved the man I saw yestreen
  Hanged with his babe's blood on his palms.
I loved the man I saw to-day
  Who knocked not when he came with alms.

Hush! — for thy sake I even faced
  The knowledge that is worse than hell;
And loved the man I saw but now
  Hanging head downwards in the well.

THE DESECRATERS

Witness all: that unrepenting,
  Feathers flying, music high,
I go down to death unshaken
  By your mean philosophy.

For your wages, take my body,
  That at least to you I leave;
Set the sulky plumes upon it,
  Bid the grinning mummers grieve.

Stand in silence: steep your raiment
  In the night that hath no star;
Don the mortal dress of devils,
  Blacker than their spirits are.

Since ye may not, of your mercy,
  Ere I lie on such a hearse,
Hurl me to the living jackals
  God hath built for sepulchres.

AN ALLIANCE

This is the weird of a world-old folk,
That not till the last link breaks,
Not till the night is blackest,
The blood of Hengist wakes.
When the sun is black in heaven,
The moon as blood above,
And the earth is full of hatred,
This people tells its love.

In change, eclipse, and peril,
Under the whole world’s scorn,
By blood and death and darkness
The Saxon peace is sworn;
That all our fruit be gathered,
And all our race take hands,
And the sea be a Saxon river
That runs through Saxon lands.

Lo! not in vain we bore him;
Behold it! not in vain,
Four centuries’ dooms of torture
Choked in the throat of Spain,
Ere priest or tyrant triumph —
We know how well — we know —
Bone of that bone can whiten,
Blood of that blood can flow.

Deep grows the hate of kindred,
Its roots take hold on hell;
No peace or praise can heal it,
But a stranger heals it well.
Seas shall be red as sunsets,
And kings’ bones float as foam,
And heaven be dark with vultures,
The night our son comes home.

THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

A child sits in a sunny place,
  Too happy for a smile,
And plays through one long holiday
  With balls to roll and pile;
A painted wind-mill by his side
  Runs like a merry tune,
But the sails are the four great winds of heaven,
  And the balls are the sun and moon.

A staring doll’s-house shows to him
  Green floors and starry rafter,
And many-coloured graven dolls
  Live for his lonely laughter.
The dolls have crowns and aureoles,
  Helmets and horns and wings.
For they are the saints and seraphim,
  The prophets and the kings.

THE LAST MASQUERADE

A wan new garment of young green
  Touched, as you turned your soft brown hair
  And in me surged the strangest prayer
Ever in lover’s heart hath been.

That I who saw your youth’s bright page,
  A rainbow change from robe to robe,
  Might see you on this earthly globe,
Crowned with the silver crown of age.

Your dear hair powdered in strange guise,
  Your dear face touched with colours pale:
  And gazing through the mask and veil
The mirth of your immortal eyes.

THE EARTH’S SHAME

Name not his deed: in shuddering and in haste
  We dragged him darkly o’er the windy fell:
That night there was a gibbet in the waste,
    And a new sin in hell.

Be his deed hid from commonwealths and kings,
  By all men born be one true tale forgot;
But three things, braver than all earthly things,
    Faced him and feared him not.

Above his head and sunken secret face
  Nested the sparrow’s young and dropped not dead.
From the red blood and slime of that lost place
    Grew daisies white, not red.

And from high heaven looking upon him,
  Slowly upon the face of God did come
A smile the cherubim and seraphim
    Hid all their faces from.

VANITY

A wan sky greener than the lawn,
  A wan lawn paler than the sky.
She gave a flower into my hand,
  And all the hours of eve went by.

Who knows what round the corner waits
  To smite? If shipwreck, snare, or slur
Shall leave me with a head to lift,
  Worthy of him that spoke with her.

A wan sky greener than the lawn,
  A wan lawn paler than the sky.
She gave a flower into my hand,
  And all the days of life went by.

Live ill or well, this thing is mine,
From all I guard it, ill or well.
One tawdry, tattered, faded flower
To show the jealous kings in hell.

THE LAMP POST

Laugh your best, O blazoned forests,
  Me ye shall not shift or shame
With your beauty: here among you
  Man hath set his spear of flame.

Lamp to lamp we send the signal,
  For our lord goes forth to war;
Since a voice, ere stars were builded,
  Bade him colonise a star.

Laugh ye, cruel as the morning,
  Deck your heads with fruit and flower,
Though our souls be sick with pity,
  Yet our hands are hard with power.

We have read your evil stories,
  We have heard the tiny yell
Through the voiceless conflagration
  Of your green and shining hell.

And when men, with fires and shouting,
  Break your old tyrannic pales;
And where ruled a single spider
  Laugh and weep a million tales.

This shall be your best of boasting:
  That some poet, poor of spine.
Full and sated with our wisdom,
  Full and fiery with our wine,

Shall steal out and make a treaty
  With the grasses and the showers,
Rail against the grey town-mother,
  Fawn upon the scornful flowers;

Rest his head among the roses,
  Where a quiet song-bird sounds,
And no sword made sharp for traitors,
  Hack him into meat for hounds.

THE PESSIMIST

You that have snarled through the ages, take your answer and go —
I know your hoary question, the riddle that all men know.
You have weighed the stars in a balance, and grasped the skies in a span:
Take, if you must have answer, the word of a common man.

Deep in my life lies buried one love unhealed, unshriven,
One hunger still shall haunt me — yea, in the streets of heaven;
This is the burden, babbler, this is the curse shall cling,
This is the thing I bring you; this is the pleasant thing.

‘Gainst you and all your sages, no joy of mine shall strive,
This one dead self shall shatter the men you call alive.
My grief I send to smite you, no pleasure, no belief,
Lord of the battered grievance, what do you know of grief?

I only know the praises to heaven that one man gave,
That he came on earth for an instant, to stand beside a grave,
The peace of a field of battle, where flowers are born of blood.
I only know one evil that makes the whole world good.

Beneath this single sorrow the globe of moon and sphere
Turns to a single jewel, so bright and brittle and dear
That I dread lest God should drop it, to be dashed into stars below.

You that have snarled through the ages, take your answer and go.

A FAIRY TALE

All things grew upwards, foul and fair:
The great trees fought and beat the air
With monstrous wings that would have flown;
But the old earth clung to her own,
Holding them back from heavenly wars,
Though every flower sprang at the stars.

But he broke free: while all things ceased,
Some hour increasing, he increased.
The town beneath him seemed a map,
Above the church he cocked his cap,
Above the cross his feather flew
Above the birds and still he grew.

The trees turned grass; the clouds were riven;
His feet were mountains lost in heaven;
Through strange new skies he rose alone,
The earth fell from him like a stone,
And his own limbs beneath him far
Seemed tapering down to touch a star.

He reared his head, shaggy and grim,
Staring among the cherubim;
The seven celestial floors he rent,
One crystal dome still o’er him bent:
Above his head, more clear than hope,
All heaven was a microscope.

A PORTRAIT

Fair faces crowd on Christmas night
  Like seven suns a-row,
But all beyond is the wolfish wind
  And the crafty feet of the snow.

But through the rout one figure goes
  With quick and quiet tread;
Her robe is plain, her form is frail —
  Wait if she turn her head.

I say no word of line or hue,
  But if that face you see,
Your soul shall know the smile of faith’s
  Awful frivolity.

Know that in this grotesque old masque
  Too loud we cannot sing,
Or dance too wild, or speak too wide
  To praise a hidden thing.

That though the jest be old as night,
  Still shaketh sun and sphere
An everlasting laughter
  Too loud for us to hear.

FEMINA CONTRA MUNDUM

The sun was black with judgment, and the moon
Blood: but between
I saw a man stand, saying, ‘To me at least
The grass is green.

‘There was no star that I forgot to fear
With love and wonder.
The birds have loved me’; but no answer came —
Only the thunder.

Once more the man stood, saying, ‘A cottage door,
Wherethrough I gazed
That instant as I turned — yea, I am vile;
Yet my eyes blazed.

‘For I had weighed the mountains in a balance,
And the skies in a scale,
I come to sell the stars — old lamps for new —
Old stars for sale.’

Then a calm voice fell all the thunder through,
A tone less rough:
‘Thou hast begun to love one of my works
Almost enough.’

TO A CERTAIN NATION

We will not let thee be, for thou art ours.
  We thank thee still, though thou forget these things,
For that hour's sake when thou didst wake all powers
  With a great cry that God was sick of kings.

Leave thee there grovelling at their rusted greaves,
  These hulking cowards on a painted stage,
Who, with imperial pomp and laurel leaves,
  Show their Marengo — one man in a cage.

These, for whom stands no type or title given
  In all the squalid tales of gore and pelf;
Though cowed by crashing thunders from all heaven.
  Cain never said, 'My brother slew himself.'

Tear you the truth out of your drivelling spy,
  The maniac whom you set to swing death's scythe.
Nay; torture not the torturer — let him lie:
  What need of racks to teach a worm to writhe?

Bear with us, O our sister, not in pride,
  Nor any scorn we see thee spoiled of knaves,
But only shame to hear, where Danton died,
  Thy foul dead kings all laughing in their graves.

Thou hast a right to rule thyself; to be
  The thing thou wilt; to grin, to fawn, to creep:
To crown these clumsy liars; ay, and we
  Who knew thee once, we have a right to weep.

THE PRAISE OF DUST

‘What of vile dust?’ the preacher said.
  Methought the whole world woke,
The dead stone lived beneath my foot,
  And my whole body spoke.

‘You, that play tyrant to the dust,
  And stamp its wrinkled face,
This patient star that flings you not
  Far into homeless space.

‘Come down out of your dusty shrine
  The living dust to see,
The flowers that at your sermon’s end
  Stand blazing silently.

‘Rich white and blood-red blossom; stones,
  Lichens like fire encrust;
A gleam of blue, a glare of gold,
  The vision of the dust.

‘Pass them all by: till, as you come
  Where, at a city’s edge,
Under a tree — I know it well —
  Under a lattice ledge,

‘The sunshine falls on one brown head.
  You, too, O cold of clay,
Eater of stones, may haply hear
  The trumpets of that day

‘When God to all his paladins
  By his own splendour swore
To make a fairer face than heaven,
  Of dust and nothing more.’

THE BALLAD OF THE BATTLE OF GIBEON

Five kings rule o’er the Amorite,
Mighty as fear and old as night;
Swathed with unguent and gold and jewel,
Waxed they merry and fat and cruel.
Zedek of Salem, a terror and glory,
Whose face was hid while his robes were gory;
And Hoham of Hebron, whose loathly face is
Heavy and dark o’er the ruin of races;
And Piram of Jarmuth, drunk with strange wine,
Who dreamed he had fashioned all stars that shine;
And Debir of Eglon wild, without pity,
Who raged like a plague in the midst of his city;
And Japhia of Lachish, a fire that flameth,
Who did in the daylight what no man nameth.

These five kings said one to another,
‘King unto king o’er the world is brother,
Seeing that now, for a sign and a wonder,
A red eclipse and a tongue of thunder,
A shape and a finger of desolation,
Is come against us a kingless nation.
Gibeon hath failed us: it were not good
That a man remember where Gibeon stood.’
Then Gibeon sent to our captain, crying,
‘Son of Nun, let a shaft be flying,
For unclean birds are gathering greedily;
Slack not thy hand, but come thou speedily.
Yea, we are lost save thou maintain’st us,
For the kings of the mountains are gathered against us.’

Then to our people spake the Deliverer,
‘Gibeon is high, yet a host may shiver her;
Gibeon hath sent to me crying for pity,
For the lords of the cities encompass the city

With chariot and banner and bowman and lancer,
And I swear by the living God I will answer.
Gird you, O Israel, quiver and javelin,
Shield and sword for the road we travel in;
Verily, as I have promised, pay I
Life unto Gibeon, death unto Ai.’

Sudden and still as a bolt shot right
Up on the city we went by night.
Never a bird of the air could say,
‘This was the children of Israel’s way.’

Only the hosts sprang up from sleeping,
Saw from the heights a dark stream sweeping;
Sprang up straight as a great shout stung them,
And heard the Deliverer’s war-cry among them,
Heard under cupola, turret, and steeple
The awful cry of the kingless people.

Started the weak of them, shouted the strong of them,
Crashed we a thunderbolt into the throng of them,
Blindly with heads bent, and shields forced before us,
We heard the dense roar of the strife closing o’er us.
And drunk with the crash of the song that it sung them,
We drove the great spear-blade in God’s name among them.

Redder and redder the sword-flash fell.
Our eyes and our nostrils were hotter than hell;
Till full all the crest of the spear-surge shocking us,
Hoham of Hebron cried out mocking us,
‘Nay, what need of the war-sword’s plying,
Out of the desert the dust comes flying.
A little red dust, if the wind be blowing —
Who shall reck of its coming or going?’
Back the Deliverer spake as a clarion,
‘Mock at thy slaves, thou eater of carrion!
Laughest thou at us, in thy kingly clowning,
We, that laughed upon Ramases frowning.

We that stood up proud, unpardoned,
When his face was dark and his heart was hardened?
Pharaoh we knew and his steeds, not faster
Than the word of the Lord in thine ear, O master.

Sheer through the turban his wantons wove him,
Clean to the skull the Deliverer clove him;
And the two hosts reeled at the sign appalling,
As the great king fell like a great house falling.

Loudly we shouted, and living and dying.
Bore them all backward with strength and strong crying;
And Caleb struck Zedek hard at the throat,
And Japhia of Lachish Zebulon smote.
The war-swords and axes were clashing and groaning,
The fallen were fighting and foaming and moaning;
The war-spears were breaking, the war-horns were braying,
Ere the hands of the slayers were sated with slaying.
And deep in the grasses grown gory and sodden,
The treaders of all men were trampled and trodden;
And over them, routed and reeled like cattle,
High over the turn of the tide of the battle,
High over noises that deafen and cover us,
Rang the Deliverer’s voice out over us.

‘Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon,
Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!
Shout thou, people, a cry like thunder,
For the kings of the earth are broken asunder.
Now we have said as the thunder says it,
Something is stronger than strength and slays it.
Now we have written for all time later,
Five kings are great, yet a law is greater.
Stare, O sun! in thine own great glory,
This is the turn of the whole world’s story.
Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon,
Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!

‘Smite! amid spear-blades blazing and breaking.
More than we know of is rising and making.
Stab with the javelin, crash with the car!
Cry! for we know not the thing that we are.
Stand, O sun! that in horrible patience
Smiled on the smoke and the slaughter of nations.
Thou shalt grow sad for a little crying,
Thou shalt be darkened for one man’s dying —
Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon,
Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!’

After the battle was broken and spent
Up to the hill the Deliverer went,
Flung up his arms to the storm-clouds flying,
And cried unto Israel, mightily crying,
‘Come up, O warriors! come up, O brothers!
Tribesmen and herdsmen, maidens and mothers;
The bondman’s son and the bondman’s daughter,
The hewer of wood and the drawer of water,
He that carries and he that brings,
And set your foot on the neck of kings.’

This is the story of Gibeon fight —
Where we smote the lords of the Amorite;
Where the banners of princes with slaughter were sodden.
And the beards of seers in the rank grass trodden;
Where the trees were wrecked by the wreck of cars,
And the reek of the red field blotted the stars;
Where the dead heads dropped from the swords that sever,
Because His mercy endureth for ever.

VULGARISED

All round they murmur, ‘O profane,
  Keep thy heart’s secret hid as gold’;
But I, by God, would sooner be
  Some knight in shattering wars of old,

In brown outlandish arms to ride,
  And shout my love to every star
With lungs to make a poor maid’s name
  Deafen the iron ears of war.

Here, where these subtle cowards crowd,
  To stand and so to speak of love,
That the four corners of the world
  Should hear it and take heed thereof.

That to this shrine obscure there be
  One witness before all men given,
As naked as the hanging Christ,
  As shameless as the sun in heaven.

These whimperers — have they spared to us
  One dripping woe, one reeking sin?
These thieves that shatter their own graves
  To prove the soul is dead within.

They talk; by God, is it not time
  Some of Love’s chosen broke the girth,
And told the good all men have known
  Since the first morning of the earth?

THE BALLAD OF GOD-MAKERS

A bird flew out at the break of day
  From the nest where it had curled,
And ere the eve the bird had set
  Fear on the kings of the world.

The first tree it lit upon
  Was green with leaves unshed;
The second tree it lit upon
  Was red with apples red;

The third tree it lit upon
  Was barren and was brown,
Save for a dead man nailed thereon
  On a hill above a town.

That right the kings of the earth were gay
  And filled the cup and can;
Last night the kings of the earth were chill
  For dread of a naked man.

‘If he speak two more words,’ they said,
  ’The slave is more than the free;
If he speak three more words,’ they said,
  ’The stars are under the sea.’

Said the King of the East to the King of the West,
  I wot his frown was set,
‘Lo; let us slay him and make him as dung,
  It is well that the world forget.’

Said the King of the West to the King of the East,
  I wot his smile was dread,
‘Nay, let us slay him and make him a god,
  It is well that our god be dead.’

They set the young man on a hill,
  They nailed him to a rod;
And there in darkness and in blood
  They made themselves a god.

And the mightiest word was left unsaid,
  And the world had never a mark,
And the strongest man of the sons of men
  Went dumb into the dark.

Then hymns and harps of praise they brought,
  Incense and gold and myrrh,
And they thronged above the seraphim,
  The poor dead carpenter.

‘Thou art the prince of all,’ they sang,
  ’Ocean and earth and air.’
Then the bird flew on to the cruel cross,
  And hid in the dead man’s hair.

‘Thou art the sun of the world,’ they cried,
  ’Speak if our prayers be heard.’
And the brown bird stirred in the dead man’s hair,
  And it seemed that the dead man stirred.

Then a shriek went up like the world’s last cry
  From all nations under heaven,
And a master fell before a slave
  And begged to be forgiven.

They cowered, for dread in his wakened eyes
  The ancient wrath to see;
And the bird flew out of the dead Christ’s hair,
  And lit on a lemon-tree.

AT NIGHT

How many million stars there be,
That only God hath numberéd;
But this one only chosen for me
In time before her face was fled.
Shall not one mortal man alive
    Hold up his head?

THE WOOD-CUTTER

We came behind him by the wall,
  My brethren drew their brands,
And they had strength to strike him down —
  And I to bind his hands.

Only once, to a lantern gleam,
  He turned his face from the wall,
And it was as the accusing angel’s face
  On the day when the stars shall fall.

I grasped the axe with shaking hands,
  I stared at the grass I trod;
For I feared to see the whole bare heavens
  Filled with the face of God.

I struck: the serpentine slow blood
  In four arms soaked the moss —
Before me, by the living Christ,
  The blood ran in a cross.

Therefore I toil in forests here
  And pile the wood in stacks,
And take no fee from the shivering folk
  Till I have cleansed the axe.

But for a curse God cleared my sight,
  And where each tree doth grow
I see a life with awful eyes,
  And I must lay it low.

ART COLOURS

On must we go: we search dead leaves,
  We chase the sunset’s saddest flames,
The nameless hues that o’er and o’er
  In lawless wedding lost their names.

God of the daybreak! Better be
  Black savages; and grin to gird
Our limbs in gaudy rags of red,
  The laughing-stock of brute and bird;

And feel again the fierce old feast,
  Blue for seven heavens that had sufficed,
A gold like shining hoards, a red
  Like roses from the blood of Christ.

THE TWO WOMEN

Lo! very fair is she who knows the ways
  Of joy: in pleasure’s mocking wisdom old,
The eyes that might be cold to flattery, kind;
  The hair that might be grey with knowledge, gold.

But thou art more than these things, O my queen,
  For thou art clad in ancient wars and tears.
And looking forth, framed in the crown of thorns,
  I saw the youngest face in all the spheres.

THE WILD KNIGHT

The wasting thistle whitens on my crest,
The barren grasses blow upon my spear,
A green, pale pennon: blazon of wild faith
And love of fruitless things: yea, of my love,
Among the golden loves of all the knights,
Alone: most hopeless, sweet, and blasphemous,
The love of God:
        I hear the crumbling creeds
Like cliffs washed down by water, change, and pass;
I hear a noise of words, age after age,
A new cold wind that blows across the plains,
And all the shrines stand empty; and to me
All these are nothing: priests and schools may doubt
Who never have believed; but I have loved.
Ah friends, I know it passing well, the love
Wherewith I love; it shall not bring to me
Return or hire or any pleasant thing —
Ay, I have tried it: Ay, I know its roots.
Earthquake and plague have burst on it in vain
And rolled back shattered —
        Babbling neophytes!
Blind, startled fools — think you I know it not?
Think you to teach me? Know I not His ways?
Strange-visaged blunders, mystic cruelties.
All! all! I know Him, for I love Him. Go!

So, with the wan waste grasses on my spear,
I ride for ever, seeking after God.
My hair grows whiter than my thistle plume,
And all my limbs are loose; but in my eyes
The star of an unconquerable praise:
For in my soul one hope for ever sings,
That at the next white corner of a road
My eyes may look on Him….

Hush — I shall know
The place when it is found: a twisted path
Under a twisted pear-tree — this I saw
In the first dream I had ere I was born,
Wherein He spoke….
But the grey clouds come down
In hail upon the icy plains: I ride,
Burning for ever in consuming fire.

THE WILD KNIGHT

A dark manor-house shuttered and unlighted, outlined against a pale sunset: in front a large, but neglected, garden. To the right, in the foreground, the porch of a chapel, with coloured windows lighted. Hymns within.

Above the porch a grotesque carved bracket, supporting a lantern. Astride of it sits CAPTAIN REDFEATHER, a flagon in his hand.

REDFEATHER.

I have drunk to all I know of,
To every leaf on the tree,
To the highest bird of the heavens,
To the lowest fish of the sea.
What toast, what toast remaineth,
Drunk down in the same good wine,
By the tippler’s cup in the tavern,
And the priest’s cup at the shrine?

[*A Priest comes out, stick in hand, and looks right and left.*]

VOICES WITHIN.

The brawler …

PRIEST.

He has vanished

REDFEATHER.

To the stars.

[*The Priest looks up.*]

PRIEST [*angrily*].

What would you there, sir?

REDFEATHER.

Give you all a toast.

[*Lifts his flagon. More priests come out.*]

I see my life behind me: bad enough —
Drink, duels, madness, beggary, and pride,
The life of the unfit: yet ere I drop
On Nature's rubbish heap, I weigh it all,
And give you all a toast —

[*Reels to his feet and stands.*]

The health of God!

[*They all recoil from him.*]

Let's give the Devil of the Heavens His due!
He that made grass so green, and wine so red,
Is not so black as you have painted him.

[*Drinks.*]

PRIEST.

Blaspheming profligate!

REDFEATHER [*hurls the flagon among them.*]

Howl! ye dumb dogs,
I named your King — let me have one great shout,
Flutter the seraphim like startled birds;
Make God recall the good days of His youth
Ere saints had saddened Him: when He came back
Conqueror of Chaos in a six days' war,
With all the sons of God shouting for joy …

PRIEST.

And you — what is your right, and who are you,
To praise God?

REDFEATHER.

        A lost soul. In earth or heaven
What has a better right?

PRIEST.

        Go, pagan, go!
Drink, dice, and dance: take no more thought than blind
Beasts of the field….

REDFEATHER.

        Or … lilies of the field,
To quote a pagan sage. I go my way.

PRIEST [*solemnly*].

And when Death comes….

REDFEATHER.

He shall not find me dead.

[*Puts on his plumed hat. The priests go out.*]

REDFEATHER.

These frozen fools….

[*The Lady Olive comes out of the chapel. He sees her.*]

Oh, they were right enough.
Where shall I hide my carrion from the sun?

[*Buries his face. His hat drops to the ground.*]

OLIVE [*looking up.*]

Captain, are you from church? I saw you not.

REDFEATHER.

No, I am here.

[*Lays his hand on a gargoyle.*]

        I, too, am a grotesque,
And dance with all the devils on the roof.

OLIVE [*with a strange smile.*]

For Satan, also, I have often prayed.

REDFEATHER [*roughly*].

Satan may worry women if he will,
For he was but an angel ere he fell,
But I — before I fell — I was a man.

OLIVE.

He too, my Master, was a man: too strong
To fear a strong man’s sins: ’tis written He
Descended into hell.

REDFEATHER.

Write, then, that I

[*Leaps to the ground before her.*]

Descended into heaven….
        You are ill?

OLIVE.

No, well….

REDFEATHER.

You speak the truth — you are the Truth —
Lady, say once again then, ‘I am *well*.’

OLIVE.

I — ah! God give me grace — I am nigh dead.

REDFEATHER [*quietly.*]

Lord Orm?

OLIVE.

Yes — yes.

REDFEATHER.

        Is in your father’s house —
Having the title-deeds — would drive you forth.
Homeless, and with your father sick to death,
Into this winter, save on a condition
Named….

OLIVE.

   And unnameable. Even so; Lord Orm —
Ah! do you know him?

REDFEATHER.

        Ay, I saw him once.
The sun shone on his face, that smiled and smiled,
A sight not wholesome to the eyes of man.

OLIVE.

Captain, I tell you God once fell asleep.
And in that hour the world went as it would;
Dogs brought forth cats, and poison grew in grapes,
And Orm was born….

REDFEATHER.

        Why, curse him! can he not
Be kicked or paid?

OLIVE [*feverishly*].

        Hush! He is just behind
There in the house — see how the great house glares,
Glares like an ogre’s mask — the whole dead house
Possessed with bestial meaning….

[*Screams*]

        Ah! the face!
The whole great grinning house — his face! his face!
His face!

REDFEATHER [*in a voice of thunder, pointing away from the house*].

Look there — look there!

OLIVE.

What is it? What?

REDFEATHER.

I think it was a bird.

OLIVE.

What thought you, truly?

REDFEATHER.

I think a mighty thought is drawing near.

[*Enter THE WILD KNIGHT.*]

THE WILD KNIGHT.

That house….

[*Points.*]

OLIVE.

Ah Christ! [*Shudders.*] I had forgotten it.

THE WILD KNIGHT [*still pointing*].

That house! the house at last, the house of God,
Wherein God makes an evening feast for me.
The house at last: I know the twisted path
Under the twisted pear-tree: this I saw
In the first dream I had ere I was born.
It is the house of God. He welcomes me.

[*Strides forward.*]

REDFEATHER.

That house. God’s blood!

OLIVE [*hysterically*].

Is not this hell’s own wit?

THE WILD KNIGHT.

God grows impatient, and His wine is poured,
His bread is broken.

[*Rushes forward.*]

REDFEATHER [*leaps between*].

Stand away, great fool,
There is a devil there!

THE WILD KNIGHT [*draws his sword, and waves it as he rushes*].

God's house! — God's house!

REDFEATHER [*plucks out his own sword*].

Better my hand than his.

[*The blades clash.*]

God alone knows
What That within might do to you, poor fool,
I can but kill you.

[*They fight. OLIVE tries to part them.*]

REDFEATHER.

Olive, stand away!

OLIVE.

I will not stand away!

[*Steps between the swords.*]

Stranger, a word,
Yes — you are right — God is within that house.

REDFEATHER.

Olive!

OLIVE.

But He is all too beautiful
For us who only know of stars and flowers.
The thing within is all too pure and fair,

[*Shudders.*]

Too awful in its ancient innocence,
For men to look upon it and not die;
Ourselves would fade into those still white fires
Of peace and mercy.

[*Struggles with her voice.*]

There … enough … the law —
No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

REDFEATHER [*sticking his sword in the ground*].

You are the bravest lady in the world.

THE WILD KNIGHT [*dazed*].

May I not go within?

REDFEATHER.

Keep you the law —
No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

THE WILD KNIGHT [*sadly*].

Then I will go and lay me in the flowers,
For He may haply, as in ancient time,

Walk in the garden in the cool of day.

[*He goes out.*]

[OLIVE *reels.* REDFEATHER *catches her.*]

You are the strongest woman upon earth.
The weakest woman than the strongest man
Is stronger in her hour: this is the law.
When the hour passes — then may we be strong.

OLIVE [*wildly.*]

The House … the Face.

REDFEATHER [*fiercely*].

I love you. Look at me!

OLIVE [*turns her face to him.*]

I hear six birds sing in that little tree,
Say, is the old earth laughing at my fears?
I think I love you also….

REDFEATHER.

        What I am
You know. But I will never curse a man,
Even in a mirror.

OLIVE [*smiling at him*].

And the Devil's dance?

REDFEATHER.

The Devil plotted since the world was young
With alchemies of fire and witches' oils

And magic. But he never made a man.

OLIVE.

No; not a man.

REDFEATHER.

        Not even my Lord Orm.
Look at the house now —

[*She starts and looks.*]

Honest brick and tiles.

OLIVE.

You have a strange strength in this hour.

REDFEATHER.

        This hour
I see with mortal eye as in one flash
The whole divine democracy of things,
And dare the stars to scorn a scavenge-heap.
Olive, I tell you every soul is great.
Weave we green crowns — how noble and how high;
Fling we white flowers — how radiant and how pure
Is he, whoe’er he be, who next shall cross
This scrap of grass….

[*Enter LORD ORM.*]

OLIVE [*screams*].

Ah!

REDFEATHER [*pointing to the chapel*].

Olive, go and pray for a man soon to die. Good-day, my Lord.

[*She goes in.*]

LORD ORM.

Good-day.

REDFEATHER.

I am a friend to Lady Olive.

LORD ORM.

Sir, you are fortunate.

REDFEATHER.

        Most fortunate
In finding, sword on thigh and ready, one
Who is a villain and a gentleman.

LORD ORM [*picks up the flagon*].

Empty, I see.

REDFEATHER.

        Oh sir, you never drink.
You dread to lose yourself before the stars —
Do you not dread to sleep?

LORD ORM [*violently*].

What would you here?

REDFEATHER.

Receive from you the title-deeds you hold.

LORD ORM.

You entertain me.

REDFEATHER.

With a bout at foils?

LORD ORM.

I will not fight.

REDFEATHER.

        I know you better, then.
I have seen men grow mangier than the beasts,
Eat bread with blood upon their fingers, grin
While women burned: but one last law they served.
When I say ‘Coward,’ is the law awake?

LORD ORM.

Hear me, then, too: I have seen robbers rule,
And thieves go clad in gold — age after age —
Because, though sordid, ragged, rude, and mean,
They saw, like gods, no law above their heads.
But when they fell — then for this cause they fell,
This last mean cobweb of the fairy tales
Of good and ill: that they must stand and fight
When a man bade, though they had chose to stand
And fight not. I am stronger than the world.

[*Folds his arms.*]

REDFEATHER [*lifts his hand*].

If in your body be the blood of man,

[*Strikes him.*]

Now let it rush to the face —
        God! Have you sunk
Lower than anger?

LORD ORM.

How I triumph now.

REDFEATHER [*stamps wildly]*.

Damned, whimpering dog! vile, snivelling, sick poltroon!
Are you alive?

LORD ORM.

        Evil, be thou my good;
Let the sun blacken and the moon be blood:
I have said the words.

REDFEATHER [*studying him*].

        And if I struck you dead,
You would turn to daisies!

LORD ORM.

And you do not strike.

REDFEATHER [*dreamily*].

Indeed, poor soul, such magic would be kind
And full of pity as a fairy-tale:
One touch of this bright wand [*Lifts his sword*]
    and down would drop
The dark abortive blunder that is you.
And you would change, forgiven, into flowers.

LORD ORM.

And yet — and yet you do not strike me dead.
I do not draw: the sword is in your hand —
Drive the blade through me where I stand.

REDFEATHER.

Lord Orm,
You asked the Lady Olive (I can speak
As to a toad to you, my lord) — you asked
Olive to be your paramour: and she —

LORD ORM.

Refused.

REDFEATHER.

And yet her father was at stake,
And she is soft and kind. Now look at me,
Ragged and ruined, soaked in bestial sins:
My lord, I too have my virginity —
Turn the thing round, my lord, and topside down,
You cannot spell it. Be the fact enough,
I use no sword upon a swordless man.

LORD ORM.

For her?

REDFEATHER.

I too have my virginity.

LORD ORM.

Now look on me: I am the lord of earth,
For I have broken the last bond of man.
I stand erect, crowned with the stars — and why?

Because I stand a coward — because you
Have mercy — on a coward. Do I win?

REDFEATHER.

Though there you stand with moving mouth and eyes,
I think, my lord, you are not possible —
God keep you from my dreams.

[*Goes out.*]

LORD ORM.

            Alone and free.
Since first in flowery meads a child I ran,
My one long thirst — to be alone and free.
Free of all laws, creeds, codes, and common tests,
Shameless, anarchic, infinite.
            Why, then,
I might have done in that dark liberty —
If I should say ‘a good deed,’ men would laugh,
But here are none to laugh.
            The godless world
Be thanked there is no God to spy on me,
Catch me and crown me with a vulgar crown
For what I do: if I should once believe
The horror of that ancient Eavesdropper
Behind the starry arras of the skies,
I should — well, well, enough of menaces —
should not do the thing I come to do.
What do I come to do? Let me but try
To spell it to my soul.
            Suppose a man
Perfectly free and utterly alone,
Free of all love of law, equally free
Of all the love of mutiny it breeds,
Free of the love of heaven, and also free
Of all the love of hell it drives us to;

Not merely void of rules, unconscious of them;
So strong that naught alive could do him hurt,
So wise that he knew all things, and so great
That none knew what he was or what he did —
A lawless giant.

[*A pause: then in a low voice.*]

Would he not be good?
Hate is the weakness of a thwarted thing,
Pride is the weakness of a thing unpraised.
But he, this man….
He would be like a child
Girt with the tomes of some vast library,
Who reads romance after romance, and smiles
When every tale ends well: impersonal
As God he grows — melted in suns and stars;
So would this boundless man, whom none could spy,
Taunt him with virtue, censure him with vice,
Rejoice in all men’s joys; with golden pen
Write all the live romances of the earth
To a triumphant close….
Alone and free —
In this grey, cool, clean garden, washed with winds,
What do I come to do among the grass,
The daisies, and the dews? An awful thing,
To prove I am that man.
That while these saints
Taunt me with trembling, dare me to revenge,
I breathe an upper air of ancient good
And strong eternal laughter; send my sun
And rain upon the evil and the just,
Turn my left cheek unto the smiter. He
That told me, sword in hand, that I had fallen
Lower than anger, knew not I had risen
Higher than pride….
Enough, the deeds are mine.

[*Takes out the title-deeds.*]

I come to write the end of a romance.
A good romance: the characters — Lord Orm.
Type of the starvéd heart and storéd brain,
Who strives to hate and cannot; fronting him —
Redfeather, rake in process of reform,
At root a poet: I have hopes of him:
He can love virtue, for he still loves vice.
He is not all burnt out. He beats me there
(How I beat him in owning it!); in love
He is still young, and has the joy of shame.
And for the Lady Olive — who shall speak?
A man may weigh the courage of a man,
But if there be a bottomless abyss
It is a woman’s valour: such as I
Can only bow the knee and hide the face
(Thank God there is no God to spy on me
And bring his curséd crowns).
            No, there is none:
The old incurable hunger of the world
Surges in wolfish wars, age after age.
There was no God before me: none sees where,
Between the brute-womb and the deaf, dead grave,
Unhoping, unrecorded, unrepaid,
I make with smoke, fire, and burnt-offering
This sacrifice to Chaos. [*Lights the papers.*] None behold
Me write in fire the end of the romance.
Burn! I am God, and crown myself with stars.
Upon creation day: before was night
And chaos of a blind and cruel world.
I am the first God; I will trample hell,
Fight, conquer, make the story of the stars,
Like this poor story, end like a romance:

[*The paper burns.*]

Before was brainless night: but I am God
In this black world I rend. Let there be light!

[*The paper blazes up, illuminating the garden.*]

I, God …

THE WILD KNIGHT [*rushes forward*].

    God’s Light! God’s Voice; yes, it is He
Walking in Eden in the cool of the day!

LORD ORM [*screams*].

Tricked! Caught!
Damned screeching rat in a hole!

[*Stabs him again and again with his sword; stamps on his face.*]

THE WILD KNIGHT [*faintly*].

Earth grows too beautiful around me: shapes
And colours fearfully wax fair and clear,
For I have heard, as thro’ a door ajar,
Scraps of the huge soliloquy of God
That moveth as a mask the lips of man,
If man be very silent: they were right,
No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

[*Dies.*]

LORD ORM [*staggers back laughing*].

Saved, saved, my secret.

REDFEATHER [*rushing in, sword in hand*].

        The drawn sword at last!
Guard, son of hell!

[*They fight. ORM falls. OLIVE comes in.*]

        He too can die. Keep back!
Olive, keep back from him! I did not fear
Him living, and he fell before my sword;
But dead I fear him. All is ended now;
A man’s whole life tied in a bundle there,
And no good deed. I fear him. Come away.

GOOD NEWS

Between a meadow and a cloud that sped
  In rain and twilight, in desire and fear.
  I heard a secret — hearken in your ear,
‘Behold the daisy has a ring of red.’

That hour, with half of blessing, half of ban,
  A great voice went through heaven, and earth and hell,
  Crying, ‘We are tricked, my great ones, is it well?
Now is the secret stolen by a man.’

Then waxed I like the wind because of this,
  And ran, like gospel and apocalypse,
  From door to door, with new anarchic lips,
Crying the very blasphemy of bliss.

In the last wreck of Nature, dark and dread,
  Shall in eclipse’s hideous hieroglyph,
  One wild form reel on the last rocking cliff,
And shout, ‘The daisy has a ring of red.’

THE BALLAD OF THE WHITE HORSE

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PREFATORY NOTE

This ballad needs no historical notes, for the simple reason that it does not profess to be historical. All of it that is not frankly fictitious, as in any prose romance about the past, is meant to emphasize tradition rather than history. King Alfred is not a legend in the sense that King Arthur may be a legend; that is, in the sense that he may possibly be a lie. But King Alfred is a legend in this broader and more human sense, that the legends are the most important things about him.

The cult of Alfred was a popular cult, from the darkness of the ninth century to the deepening twilight of the twentieth. It is wholly as a popular legend that I deal with him here. I write as one ignorant of everything, except that I have found the legend of a King of Wessex still alive in the land. I will give three curt cases of what I mean. A tradition connects the ultimate victory of Alfred with the valley in Berkshire called the Vale of the White Horse. I have seen doubts of the tradition, which may be valid doubts. I do not know when or where the story started; it is enough that it started somewhere and ended with me; for I only seek to write upon a hearsay, as the old balladists did. For the second case, there is a popular tale that Alfred played the harp and sang in the Danish camp; I select it because it is a popular tale, at whatever time it arose. For the third case, there is a popular tale that Alfred came in contact with a woman and cakes; I select it because it is a popular tale, because it is a vulgar one. It has been disputed by grave historians, who were, I think, a little too grave to be good judges of it. The two chief charges against the story are that it was first recorded long after Alfred’s death, and that (as Mr. Oman urges) Alfred never really wandered all alone without any thanes or soldiers. Both these objections might possibly be met. It has taken us nearly as long to learn the whole truth about Byron, and perhaps longer to learn the whole truth about Pepys, than elapsed between Alfred and the first writing of such tales. And as for the other objection, do the historians really think that Alfred after Wilton, or Napoleon after Leipsic, never walked about in a wood by himself for the matter of an hour or two? Ten minutes might be made sufficient for the essence of the story. But I am not concerned to prove the truth of these popular traditions. It is enough for me to maintain two things: that they are popular traditions; and that without these popular traditions we should have bothered about Alfred about as much as we bother about Eadwig.

One other consideration needs a note. Alfred has come down to us in the best way (that is, by national legends) solely for the same reason as Arthur and Roland and the other giants of that darkness, because he fought for the Christian civilization against the heathen nihilism. But since this work was really done by generation after generation, by the Romans before they withdrew, and by the Britons while they remained, I have summarised this first crusade in a triple symbol, and given to a fictitious Roman, Celt, and Saxon, a part in the glory of Ethandune. I fancy that in fact Alfred’s Wessex was of very mixed bloods; but in any case, it is the chief value of legend to mix up the centuries while preserving the sentiment; to see all ages in a sort of splendid foreshortening. That is the use of tradition: it telescopes history.

G. K.C.

DEDICATION

Of great limbs gone to chaos,
A great face turned to night —
Why bend above a shapeless shroud
Seeking in such archaic cloud
Sight of strong lords and light?

Where seven sunken Englands
Lie buried one by one,
Why should one idle spade, I wonder,
Shake up the dust of thanes like thunder
To smoke and choke the sun?

In cloud of clay so cast to heaven
What shape shall man discern?
These lords may light the mystery
Of mastery or victory,
And these ride high in history,
But these shall not return.

Gored on the Norman gonfalon
The Golden Dragon died:
We shall not wake with ballad strings
The good time of the smaller things,
We shall not see the holy kings
Ride down by Severn side.

Stiff, strange, and quaintly coloured
As the broidery of Bayeux
The England of that dawn remains,
And this of Alfred and the Danes
Seems like the tales a whole tribe feigns
Too English to be true.

Of a good king on an island

That ruled once on a time;
And as he walked by an apple tree
There came green devils out of the sea
With sea-plants trailing heavily
And tracks of opal slime.

Yet Alfred is no fairy tale;
His days as our days ran,
He also looked forth for an hour
On peopled plains and skies that lower,
From those few windows in the tower
That is the head of a man.

But who shall look from Alfred’s hood
Or breathe his breath alive?
His century like a small dark cloud
Drifts far; it is an eyeless crowd,
Where the tortured trumpets scream aloud
And the dense arrows drive.

Lady, by one light only
We look from Alfred’s eyes,
We know he saw athwart the wreck
The sign that hangs about your neck,
Where One more than Melchizedek
Is dead and never dies.

Therefore I bring these rhymes to you
Who brought the cross to me,
Since on you flaming without flaw
I saw the sign that Guthrum saw
When he let break his ships of awe,
And laid peace on the sea.

Do you remember when we went
Under a dragon moon,
And ‘mid volcanic tints of night

Walked where they fought the unknown fight
And saw black trees on the battle-height,
Black thorn on Ethandune?

And I thought, “I will go with you,
As man with God has gone,
And wander with a wandering star,
The wandering heart of things that are,
The fiery cross of love and war
That like yourself, goes on.”

O go you onward; where you are
Shall honour and laughter be,
Past purpled forest and pearled foam,
God’s winged pavilion free to roam,
Your face, that is a wandering home,
A flying home for me.

Ride through the silent earthquake lands,
Wide as a waste is wide,
Across these days like deserts, when
Pride and a little scratching pen
Have dried and split the hearts of men,
Heart of the heroes, ride.

Up through an empty house of stars,
Being what heart you are,
Up the inhuman steeps of space
As on a staircase go in grace,
Carrying the firelight on your face
Beyond the loneliest star.

Take these; in memory of the hour
We strayed a space from home
And saw the smoke-hued hamlets, quaint
With Westland king and Westland saint,
And watched the western glory faint

Along the road to Frome.

BOOK I. THE VISION OF THE KING

Before the gods that made the gods
Had seen their sunrise pass,
The White Horse of the White Horse Vale
Was cut out of the grass.

Before the gods that made the gods
Had drunk at dawn their fill,
The White Horse of the White Horse Vale
Was hoary on the hill.

Age beyond age on British land,
Aeons on aeons gone,
Was peace and war in western hills,
And the White Horse looked on.

For the White Horse knew England
When there was none to know;
He saw the first oar break or bend,
He saw heaven fall and the world end,
O God, how long ago.

For the end of the world was long ago,
And all we dwell to-day
As children of some second birth,
Like a strange people left on earth
After a judgment day.

For the end of the world was long ago,
When the ends of the world waxed free,
When Rome was sunk in a waste of slaves,
And the sun drowned in the sea.

When Caesar’s sun fell out of the sky
And whoso hearkened right

Could only hear the plunging
Of the nations in the night.

When the ends of the earth came marching in
To torch and cresset gleam.
And the roads of the world that lead to Rome
Were filled with faces that moved like foam,
Like faces in a dream.

And men rode out of the eastern lands,
Broad river and burning plain;
Trees that are Titan flowers to see,
And tiger skies, striped horribly,
With tints of tropic rain.

Where Ind’s enamelled peaks arise
Around that inmost one,
Where ancient eagles on its brink,
Vast as archangels, gather and drink
The sacrament of the sun.

And men brake out of the northern lands,
Enormous lands alone,
Where a spell is laid upon life and lust
And the rain is changed to a silver dust
And the sea to a great green stone.

And a Shape that moveth murkily
In mirrors of ice and night,
Hath blanched with fear all beasts and birds,
As death and a shock of evil words
Blast a man’s hair with white.

And the cry of the palms and the purple moons,
Or the cry of the frost and foam,
Swept ever around an inmost place,
And the din of distant race on race

Cried and replied round Rome.

And there was death on the Emperor
And night upon the Pope:
And Alfred, hiding in deep grass,
Hardened his heart with hope.

A sea-folk blinder than the sea
Broke all about his land,
But Alfred up against them bare
And gripped the ground and grasped the air,
Staggered, and strove to stand.

He bent them back with spear and spade,
With desperate dyke and wall,
With foemen leaning on his shield
And roaring on him when he reeled;
And no help came at all.

He broke them with a broken sword
A little towards the sea,
And for one hour of panting peace,
Ringed with a roar that would not cease,
With golden crown and girded fleece
Made laws under a tree.
The Northmen came about our land
A Christless chivalry:
Who knew not of the arch or pen,
Great, beautiful half-witted men
From the sunrise and the sea.

Misshapen ships stood on the deep
Full of strange gold and fire,
And hairy men, as huge as sin
With horned heads, came wading in
Through the long, low sea-mire.

Our towns were shaken of tall kings
With scarlet beards like blood:
The world turned empty where they trod,
They took the kindly cross of God
And cut it up for wood.

Their souls were drifting as the sea,
And all good towns and lands
They only saw with heavy eyes,
And broke with heavy hands,

Their gods were sadder than the sea,
Gods of a wandering will,
Who cried for blood like beasts at night,
Sadly, from hill to hill.

They seemed as trees walking the earth,
As witless and as tall,
Yet they took hold upon the heavens
And no help came at all.

They bred like birds in English woods,
They rooted like the rose,
When Alfred came to Athelney
To hide him from their bows

There was not English armour left,
Nor any English thing,
When Alfred came to Athelney
To be an English king.

For earthquake swallowing earthquake
Uprent the Wessex tree;
The whirlpool of the pagan sway
Had swirled his sires as sticks away
When a flood smites the sea.

And the great kings of Wessex
Wearied and sank in gore,
And even their ghosts in that great stress
Grew greyer and greyer, less and less,
With the lords that died in Lyonesse
And the king that comes no more.

And the God of the Golden Dragon
Was dumb upon his throne,
And the lord of the Golden Dragon
Ran in the woods alone.

And if ever he climbed the crest of luck
And set the flag before,
Returning as a wheel returns,
Came ruin and the rain that burns,
And all began once more.

And naught was left King Alfred
But shameful tears of rage,
In the island in the river
In the end of all his age.

In the island in the river
He was broken to his knee:
And he read, writ with an iron pen,
That God had wearied of Wessex men
And given their country, field and fen,
To the devils of the sea.

And he saw in a little picture,
Tiny and far away,
His mother sitting in Egbert’s hall,
And a book she showed him, very small,
Where a sapphire Mary sat in stall
With a golden Christ at play.

It was wrought in the monk’s slow manner,
From silver and sanguine shell,
Where the scenes are little and terrible,
Keyholes of heaven and hell.

In the river island of Athelney,
With the river running past,
In colours of such simple creed
All things sprang at him, sun and weed,
Till the grass grew to be grass indeed
And the tree was a tree at last.

Fearfully plain the flowers grew,
Like the child’s book to read,
Or like a friend’s face seen in a glass;
He looked; and there Our Lady was,
She stood and stroked the tall live grass
As a man strokes his steed.

Her face was like an open word
When brave men speak and choose,
The very colours of her coat
Were better than good news.

She spoke not, nor turned not,
Nor any sign she cast,
Only she stood up straight and free,
Between the flowers in Athelney,
And the river running past.

One dim ancestral jewel hung
On his ruined armour grey,
He rent and cast it at her feet:
Where, after centuries, with slow feet,
Men came from hall and school and street
And found it where it lay.

“Mother of God,” the wanderer said,
“I am but a common king,
Nor will I ask what saints may ask,
To see a secret thing.

“The gates of heaven are fearful gates
Worse than the gates of hell;
Not I would break the splendours barred
Or seek to know the thing they guard,
Which is too good to tell.

“But for this earth most pitiful,
This little land I know,
If that which is for ever is,
Or if our hearts shall break with bliss,
Seeing the stranger go?

“When our last bow is broken, Queen,
And our last javelin cast,
Under some sad, green evening sky,
Holding a ruined cross on high,
Under warm westland grass to lie,
Shall we come home at last?”

And a voice came human but high up,
Like a cottage climbed among
The clouds; or a serf of hut and croft
That sits by his hovel fire as oft,
But hears on his old bare roof aloft
A belfry burst in song.

“The gates of heaven are lightly locked,
We do not guard our gain,
The heaviest hind may easily
Come silently and suddenly
Upon me in a lane.

“And any little maid that walks
In good thoughts apart,
May break the guard of the Three Kings
And see the dear and dreadful things
I hid within my heart.

“The meanest man in grey fields gone
Behind the set of sun,
Heareth between star and other star,
Through the door of the darkness fallen ajar,
The council, eldest of things that are,
The talk of the Three in One.

“The gates of heaven are lightly locked,
We do not guard our gold,
Men may uproot where worlds begin,
Or read the name of the nameless sin;
But if he fail or if he win
To no good man is told.

“The men of the East may spell the stars,
And times and triumphs mark,
But the men signed of the cross of Christ
Go gaily in the dark.

“The men of the East may search the scrolls
For sure fates and fame,
But the men that drink the blood of God
Go singing to their shame.

“The wise men know what wicked things
Are written on the sky,
They trim sad lamps, they touch sad strings,
Hearing the heavy purple wings,
Where the forgotten seraph kings
Still plot how God shall die.

“The wise men know all evil things
Under the twisted trees,
Where the perverse in pleasure pine
And men are weary of green wine
And sick of crimson seas.

“But you and all the kind of Christ
Are ignorant and brave,
And you have wars you hardly win
And souls you hardly save.

“I tell you naught for your comfort,
Yea, naught for your desire,
Save that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher.

“Night shall be thrice night over you,
And heaven an iron cope.
Do you have joy without a cause,
Yea, faith without a hope?”

Even as she spoke she was not,
Nor any word said he,
He only heard, still as he stood
Under the old night’s nodding hood,
The sea-folk breaking down the wood
Like a high tide from sea.

He only heard the heathen men,
Whose eyes are blue and bleak,
Singing about some cruel thing
Done by a great and smiling king
In daylight on a deck.

He only heard the heathen men,
Whose eyes are blue and blind,
Singing what shameful things are done

Between the sunlit sea and the sun
When the land is left behind.

BOOK II. THE GATHERING OF THE CHIEFS

Up across windy wastes and up
Went Alfred over the shaws,
Shaken of the joy of giants,
The joy without a cause.

In the slopes away to the western bays,
Where blows not ever a tree,
He washed his soul in the west wind
And his body in the sea.

And he set to rhyme his ale-measures,
And he sang aloud his laws,
Because of the joy of the giants,
The joy without a cause.

The King went gathering Wessex men,
As grain out of the chaff
The few that were alive to die,
Laughing, as littered skulls that lie
After lost battles turn to the sky
An everlasting laugh.

The King went gathering Christian men,
As wheat out of the husk;
Eldred, the Franklin by the sea,
And Mark, the man from Italy,
And Colan of the Sacred Tree,
From the old tribe on Usk.

The rook croaked homeward heavily,
The west was clear and warm,
The smoke of evening food and ease
Rose like a blue tree in the trees
When he came to Eldred's farm.

But Eldred’s farm was fallen awry,
Like an old cripple’s bones,
And Eldred’s tools were red with rust,
And on his well was a green crust,
And purple thistles upward thrust,
Between the kitchen stones.

But smoke of some good feasting
Went upwards evermore,
And Eldred’s doors stood wide apart
For loitering foot or labouring cart,
And Eldred’s great and foolish heart
Stood open like his door.

A mighty man was Eldred,
A bulk for casks to fill,
His face a dreaming furnace,
His body a walking hill.

In the old wars of Wessex
His sword had sunken deep,
But all his friends, he signed and said,
Were broken about Ethelred;
And between the deep drink and the dead
He had fallen upon sleep.

“Come not to me, King Alfred, Save always for the ale:
Why should my harmless hinds be slain
Because the chiefs cry once again,
As in all fights, that we shall gain,
And in all fights we fail?

“Your scalds still thunder and prophesy
That crown that never comes;
Friend, I will watch the certain things,
Swine, and slow moons like silver rings,

And the ripening of the plums.”

And Alfred answered, drinking,
And gravely, without blame,
“Nor bear I boast of scald or king,
The thing I bear is a lesser thing,
But comes in a better name.

“Out of the mouth of the Mother of God,
More than the doors of doom,
I call the muster of Wessex men
From grassy hamlet or ditch or den,
To break and be broken, God knows when,
But I have seen for whom.

“Out of the mouth of the Mother of God
Like a little word come I;
For I go gathering Christian men
From sunken paving and ford and fen,
To die in a battle, God knows when,
By God, but I know why.

“And this is the word of Mary,
The word of the world’s desire
‘No more of comfort shall ye get,
Save that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher.’”

Then silence sank. And slowly
Arose the sea-land lord,
Like some vast beast for mystery,
He filled the room and porch and sky,
And from a cobwebbed nail on high
Unhooked his heavy sword.

Up on the shrill sea-downs and up
Went Alfred all alone,

Turning but once e’er the door was shut,
Shouting to Eldred over his butt,
That he bring all spears to the woodman’s hut
Hewn under Egbert’s Stone.

And he turned his back and broke the fern,
And fought the moths of dusk,
And went on his way for other friends
Friends fallen of all the wide world’s ends,
From Rome that wrath and pardon sends
And the grey tribes on Usk.

He saw gigantic tracks of death
And many a shape of doom,
Good steadings to grey ashes gone
And a monk’s house white like a skeleton
In the green crypt of the combe.

And in many a Roman villa
Earth and her ivies eat,
Saw coloured pavements sink and fade
In flowers, and the windy colonnade
Like the spectre of a street.

But the cold stars clustered
Among the cold pines
Ere he was half on his pilgrimage
Over the western lines.

And the white dawn widened
Ere he came to the last pine,
Where Mark, the man from Italy,
Still made the Christian sign.

The long farm lay on the large hill-side,
Flat like a painted plan,
And by the side the low white house,

Where dwelt the southland man.

A bronzed man, with a bird’s bright eye,
And a strong bird’s beak and brow,
His skin was brown like buried gold,
And of certain of his sires was told
That they came in the shining ship of old,
With Caesar in the prow.

His fruit trees stood like soldiers
Drilled in a straight line,
His strange, stiff olives did not fail,
And all the kings of the earth drank ale,
But he drank wine.

Wide over wasted British plains
Stood never an arch or dome,
Only the trees to toss and reel,
The tribes to bicker, the beasts to squeal;
But the eyes in his head were strong like steel,
And his soul remembered Rome.

Then Alfred of the lonely spear
Lifted his lion head;
And fronted with the Italian’s eye,
Asking him of his whence and why,
King Alfred stood and said:

“I am that oft-defeated King
Whose failure fills the land,
Who fled before the Danes of old,
Who chaffered with the Danes with gold,
Who now upon the Wessex wold
Hardly has feet to stand.

“But out of the mouth of the Mother of God
I have seen the truth like fire,

This — that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher.”

Long looked the Roman on the land;
The trees as golden crowns
Blazed, drenched with dawn and dew-empearled
While faintlier coloured, freshlier curled,
The clouds from underneath the world
Stood up over the downs.

“These vines be ropes that drag me hard,”
He said. “I go not far;
Where would you meet? For you must hold
Half Wiltshire and the White Horse wold,
And the Thames bank to Owsenfold,
If Wessex goes to war.

“Guthrum sits strong on either bank
And you must press his lines
Inwards, and eastward drive him down;
I doubt if you shall take the crown
Till you have taken London town.
For me, I have the vines.”

“If each man on the Judgment Day
Meet God on a plain alone,”
Said Alfred, “I will speak for you
As for myself, and call it true
That you brought all fighting folk you knew
Lined under Egbert’s Stone.

“Though I be in the dust ere then,
I know where you will be.”
And shouldering suddenly his spear
He faded like some elfin fear,
Where the tall pines ran up, tier on tier
Tree overtoppling tree.

He shouldered his spear at morning
And laughed to lay it on,
But he leaned on his spear as on a staff,
With might and little mood to laugh,
Or ever he sighted chick or calf
Of Colan of Caerleon.

For the man dwelt in a lost land
Of boulders and broken men,
In a great grey cave far off to the south
Where a thick green forest stopped the mouth,
Giving darkness in his den.

And the man was come like a shadow,
From the shadow of Druid trees,
Where Usk, with mighty murmurings,
Past Caerleon of the fallen kings,
Goes out to ghostly seas.

Last of a race in ruin —
He spoke the speech of the Gaels;
His kin were in holy Ireland,
Or up in the crags of Wales.

But his soul stood with his mother’s folk,
That were of the rain-wrapped isle,
Where Patrick and Brandan westerly
Looked out at last on a landless sea
And the sun’s last smile.

His harp was carved and cunning,
As the Celtic craftsman makes,
Graven all over with twisting shapes
Like many headless snakes.

His harp was carved and cunning,

His sword prompt and sharp,
And he was gay when he held the sword,
Sad when he held the harp.

For the great Gaels of Ireland
Are the men that God made mad,
For all their wars are merry,
And all their songs are sad.

He kept the Roman order,
He made the Christian sign;
But his eyes grew often blind and bright,
And the sea that rose in the rocks at night
Rose to his head like wine.

He made the sign of the cross of God,
He knew the Roman prayer,
But he had unreason in his heart
Because of the gods that were.

Even they that walked on the high cliffs,
High as the clouds were then,
Gods of unbearable beauty,
That broke the hearts of men.

And whether in seat or saddle,
Whether with frown or smile,
Whether at feast or fight was he,
He heard the noise of a nameless sea
On an undiscovered isle.

Lifting the great green ivy
And the great spear lowering,
One said, “I am Alfred of Wessex,
And I am a conquered king.”

And the man of the cave made answer,

And his eyes were stars of scorn,
“And better kings were conquered
Or ever your sires were born.

“What goddess was your mother,
What fay your breed begot,
That you should not die with Uther
And Arthur and Lancelot?

“But when you win you brag and blow,
And when you lose you rail,
Army of eastland yokels
Not strong enough to fail.”

“I bring not boast or railing,”
Spake Alfred not in ire,
“I bring of Our Lady a lesson set,
This — that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher.”

Then Colan of the Sacred Tree
Tossed his black mane on high,
And cried, as rigidly he rose,
“And if the sea and sky be foes,
We will tame the sea and sky.”

Smiled Alfred, “Seek ye a fable
More dizzy and more dread
Than all your mad barbarian tales
Where the sky stands on its head?

“A tale where a man looks down on the sky
That has long looked down on him;
A tale where a man can swallow a sea
That might swallow the seraphim.

“Bring to the hut by Egbert’s Stone

All bills and bows ye have.”
And Alfred strode off rapidly,
And Colan of the Sacred Tree
Went slowly to his cave.

BOOK III. THE HARP OF ALFRED

In a tree that yawned and twisted
The King’s few goods were flung,
A mass-book mildewed, line by line,
And weapons and a skin of wine,
And an old harp unstrung.

By the yawning tree in the twilight
The King unbound his sword,
Severed the harp of all his goods,
And there in the cool and soundless woods
Sounded a single chord.

Then laughed; and watched the finches flash,
The sullen flies in swarm,
And went unarmed over the hills,
With the harp upon his arm,
Until he came to the White Horse Vale
And saw across the plains,
In the twilight high and far and fell,
Like the fiery terraces of hell,
The camp fires of the Danes —

The fires of the Great Army
That was made of iron men,
Whose lights of sacrilege and scorn
Ran around England red as morn,
Fires over Glastonbury Thorn —
Fires out on Ely Fen.

And as he went by White Horse Vale
He saw lie wan and wide
The old horse graven, God knows when,
By gods or beasts or what things then
Walked a new world instead of men

And scrawled on the hill-side.

And when he came to White Horse Down
The great White Horse was grey,
For it was ill scoured of the weed,
And lichen and thorn could crawl and feed,
Since the foes of settled house and creed
Had swept old works away.

King Alfred gazed all sorrowful
At thistle and mosses grey,
Till a rally of Danes with shield and bill
Rolled drunk over the dome of the hill,
And, hearing of his harp and skill,
They dragged him to their play.

And as they went through the high green grass
They roared like the great green sea;
But when they came to the red camp fire
They were silent suddenly.

And as they went up the wastes away
They went reeling to and fro;
But when they came to the red camp fire
They stood all in a row.

For golden in the firelight,
With a smile carved on his lips,
And a beard curled right cunningly,
Was Guthrum of the Northern Sea,
The emperor of the ships —

With three great earls King Guthrum
Went the rounds from fire to fire,
With Harold, nephew of the King,
And Ogier of the Stone and Sling,
And Elf, whose gold lute had a string

That sighed like all desire.

The Earls of the Great Army
That no men born could tire,
Whose flames anear him or aloof
Took hold of towers or walls of proof,
Fire over Glastonbury roof
And out on Ely, fire.

And Guthrum heard the soldiers’ tale
And bade the stranger play;
Not harshly, but as one on high,
On a marble pillar in the sky,
Who sees all folk that live and die —
Pigmy and far away.

And Alfred, King of Wessex,
Looked on his conqueror —
And his hands hardened; but he played,
And leaving all later hates unsaid,
He sang of some old British raid
On the wild west march of yore.

He sang of war in the warm wet shires,
Where rain nor fruitage fails,
Where England of the motley states
Deepens like a garden to the gates
In the purple walls of Wales.

He sang of the seas of savage heads
And the seas and seas of spears,
Boiling all over Offa’s Dyke,
What time a Wessex club could strike
The kings of the mountaineers.

Till Harold laughed and snatched the harp,
The kinsman of the King,

A big youth, beardless like a child,
Whom the new wine of war sent wild,
Smote, and began to sing —

And he cried of the ships as eagles
That circle fiercely and fly,
And sweep the seas and strike the towns
From Cyprus round to Skye.

How swiftly and with peril
They gather all good things,
The high horns of the forest beasts,
Or the secret stones of kings.

“For Rome was given to rule the world,
And gat of it little joy —
But we, but we shall enjoy the world,
The whole huge world a toy.

“Great wine like blood from Burgundy,
Cloaks like the clouds from Tyre,
And marble like solid moonlight,
And gold like frozen fire.

“Smells that a man might swill in a cup,
Stones that a man might eat,
And the great smooth women like ivory
That the Turks sell in the street.”

He sang the song of the thief of the world,
And the gods that love the thief;
And he yelled aloud at the cloister-yards,
Where men go gathering grief.

“Well have you sung, O stranger,
Of death on the dyke in Wales,
Your chief was a bracelet-giver;

But the red unbroken river
Of a race runs not for ever,
But suddenly it fails.

“Doubtless your sires were sword-swingers
When they waded fresh from foam,
Before they were turned to women
By the god of the nails from Rome;

“But since you bent to the shaven men,
Who neither lust nor smite,
Thunder of Thor, we hunt you
A hare on the mountain height.”

King Guthrum smiled a little,
And said, “It is enough,
Nephew, let Elf retune the string;
A boy must needs like bellowing,
But the old ears of a careful king
Are glad of songs less rough.”

Blue-eyed was Elf the minstrel,
With womanish hair and ring,
Yet heavy was his hand on sword,
Though light upon the string.

And as he stirred the strings of the harp
To notes but four or five,
The heart of each man moved in him
Like a babe buried alive.

And they felt the land of the folk-songs
Spread southward of the Dane,
And they heard the good Rhine flowing
In the heart of all Allemagne.

They felt the land of the folk-songs,

Where the gifts hang on the tree,
Where the girls give ale at morning
And the tears come easily.

The mighty people, womanlike,
That have pleasure in their pain
As he sang of Balder beautiful,
Whom the heavens loved in vain.

As he sang of Balder beautiful,
Whom the heavens could not save,
Till the world was like a sea of tears
And every soul a wave.

“There is always a thing forgotten
When all the world goes well;
A thing forgotten, as long ago,
When the gods forgot the mistletoe,
And soundless as an arrow of snow
The arrow of anguish fell.

“The thing on the blind side of the heart,
On the wrong side of the door,
The green plant groweth, menacing
Almighty lovers in the spring;
There is always a forgotten thing,
And love is not secure.”

And all that sat by the fire were sad,
Save Ogier, who was stern,
And his eyes hardened, even to stones,
As he took the harp in turn;

Earl Ogier of the Stone and Sling
Was odd to ear and sight,
Old he was, but his locks were red,
And jests were all the words he said

Yet he was sad at board and bed
And savage in the fight.

“You sing of the young gods easily
In the days when you are young;
But I go smelling yew and sods,
And I know there are gods behind the gods,
Gods that are best unsung.

“And a man grows ugly for women,
And a man grows dull with ale,
Well if he find in his soul at last
Fury, that does not fail.

“The wrath of the gods behind the gods
Who would rend all gods and men,
Well if the old man’s heart hath still
Wheels sped of rage and roaring will,
Like cataracts to break down and kill,
Well for the old man then —

“While there is one tall shrine to shake,
Or one live man to rend;
For the wrath of the gods behind the gods
Who are weary to make an end.

“There lives one moment for a man
When the door at his shoulder shakes,
When the taut rope parts under the pull,
And the barest branch is beautiful
One moment, while it breaks.

“So rides my soul upon the sea
That drinks the howling ships,
Though in black jest it bows and nods
Under the moons with silver rods,
I know it is roaring at the gods,

Waiting the last eclipse.

“And in the last eclipse the sea
Shall stand up like a tower,
Above all moons made dark and riven,
Hold up its foaming head in heaven,
And laugh, knowing its hour.

“And the high ones in the happy town
Propped of the planets seven,
Shall know a new light in the mind,
A noise about them and behind,
Shall hear an awful voice, and find
Foam in the courts of heaven.

“And you that sit by the fire are young,
And true love waits for you;
But the king and I grow old, grow old,
And hate alone is true.”

And Guthrum shook his head but smiled,
For he was a mighty clerk,
And had read lines in the Latin books
When all the north was dark.

He said, “I am older than you, Ogier;
Not all things would I rend,
For whether life be bad or good
It is best to abide the end.”

He took the great harp wearily,
Even Guthrum of the Danes,
With wide eyes bright as the one long day
On the long polar plains.

For he sang of a wheel returning,
And the mire trod back to mire,

And how red hells and golden heavens
Are castles in the fire.

“It is good to sit where the good tales go,
To sit as our fathers sat;
But the hour shall come after his youth,
When a man shall know not tales but truth,
And his heart fail thereat.

“When he shall read what is written
So plain in clouds and clods,
When he shall hunger without hope
Even for evil gods.

“For this is a heavy matter,
And the truth is cold to tell;
Do we not know, have we not heard,
The soul is like a lost bird,
The body a broken shell.

“And a man hopes, being ignorant,
Till in white woods apart
He finds at last the lost bird dead:
And a man may still lift up his head
But never more his heart.

“There comes no noise but weeping
Out of the ancient sky,
And a tear is in the tiniest flower
Because the gods must die.

“The little brooks are very sweet,
Like a girl’s ribbons curled,
But the great sea is bitter
That washes all the world.

“Strong are the Roman roses,

Or the free flowers of the heath,
But every flower, like a flower of the sea,
Smelleth with the salt of death.

“And the heart of the locked battle
Is the happiest place for men;
When shrieking souls as shafts go by
And many have died and all may die;
Though this word be a mystery,
Death is most distant then.

“Death blazes bright above the cup,
And clear above the crown;
But in that dream of battle
We seem to tread it down.

“Wherefore I am a great king,
And waste the world in vain,
Because man hath not other power,
Save that in dealing death for dower,
He may forget it for an hour
To remember it again.”

And slowly his hands and thoughtfully
Fell from the lifted lyre,
And the owls moaned from the mighty trees
Till Alfred caught it to his knees
And smote it as in ire.

He heaved the head of the harp on high
And swept the framework barred,
And his stroke had all the rattle and spark
Of horses flying hard.

“When God put man in a garden
He girt him with a sword,
And sent him forth a free knight

That might betray his lord;

“He brake Him and betrayed Him,
And fast and far he fell,
Till you and I may stretch our necks
And burn our beards in hell.

“But though I lie on the floor of the world,
With the seven sins for rods,
I would rather fall with Adam
Than rise with all your gods.

“What have the strong gods given?
Where have the glad gods led?
When Guthrum sits on a hero’s throne
And asks if he is dead?

“Sirs, I am but a nameless man,
A rhymester without home,
Yet since I come of the Wessex clay
And carry the cross of Rome,

“I will even answer the mighty earl
That asked of Wessex men
Why they be meek and monkish folk,
And bow to the White Lord’s broken yoke;
What sign have we save blood and smoke?
Here is my answer then.

“That on you is fallen the shadow,
And not upon the Name;
That though we scatter and though we fly,
And you hang over us like the sky,
You are more tired of victory,
Than we are tired of shame.

“That though you hunt the Christian man

Like a hare on the hill-side,
The hare has still more heart to run
Than you have heart to ride.

"That though all lances split on you,
All swords be heaved in vain,
We have more lust again to lose
Than you to win again.

"Your lord sits high in the saddle,
A broken-hearted king,
But our king Alfred, lost from fame,
Fallen among foes or bonds of shame,
In I know not what mean trade or name,
Has still some song to sing;

"Our monks go robed in rain and snow,
But the heart of flame therein,
But you go clothed in feasts and flames,
When all is ice within;

"Nor shall all iron dooms make dumb
Men wondering ceaselessly,
If it be not better to fast for joy
Than feast for misery.

"Nor monkish order only
Slides down, as field to fen,
All things achieved and chosen pass,
As the White Horse fades in the grass,
No work of Christian men.

"Ere the sad gods that made your gods
Saw their sad sunrise pass,
The White Horse of the White Horse Vale,
That you have left to darken and fail,
Was cut out of the grass.

“Therefore your end is on you,
Is on you and your kings,
Not for a fire in Ely fen,
Not that your gods are nine or ten,
But because it is only Christian men
Guard even heathen things.

“For our God hath blessed creation,
Calling it good. I know
What spirit with whom you blindly band
Hath blessed destruction with his hand;
Yet by God’s death the stars shall stand
And the small apples grow.”

And the King, with harp on shoulder,
Stood up and ceased his song;
And the owls moaned from the mighty trees,
And the Danes laughed loud and long.

BOOK IV. THE WOMAN IN THE FOREST

Thick thunder of the snorting swine,
Enormous in the gloam,
Rending among all roots that cling,
And the wild horses whinnying,
Were the night’s noises when the King
Shouldering his harp, went home.

With eyes of owl and feet of fox,
Full of all thoughts he went;
He marked the tilt of the pagan camp,
The paling of pine, the sentries’ tramp,
And the one great stolen altar-lamp
Over Guthrum in his tent.

By scrub and thorn in Ethandune
That night the foe had lain;
Whence ran across the heather grey
The old stones of a Roman way;
And in a wood not far away
The pale road split in twain.

He marked the wood and the cloven ways
With an old captain’s eyes,
And he thought how many a time had he
Sought to see Doom he could not see;
How ruin had come and victory,
And both were a surprise.

Even so he had watched and wondered
Under Ashdown from the plains;
With Ethelred praying in his tent,
Till the white hawthorn swung and bent,
As Alfred rushed his spears and rent
The shield-wall of the Danes.

Even so he had watched and wondered,
Knowing neither less nor more,
Till all his lords lay dying,
And axes on axes plying,
Flung him, and drove him flying
Like a pirate to the shore.

Wise he had been before defeat,
And wise before success;
Wise in both hours and ignorant,
Knowing neither more nor less.

As he went down to the river-hut
He knew a night-shade scent,
Owls did as evil cherubs rise,
With little wings and lantern eyes,
As though he sank through the under-skies;
But down and down he went.

As he went down to the river-hut
He went as one that fell;
Seeing the high forest domes and spars.
Dim green or torn with golden scars,
As the proud look up at the evil stars,
In the red heavens of hell.

For he must meet by the river-hut
Them he had bidden to arm,
Mark from the towers of Italy,
And Colan of the Sacred Tree,
And Eldred who beside the sea
Held heavily his farm.

The roof leaned gaping to the grass,
As a monstrous mushroom lies;
Echoing and empty seemed the place;

But opened in a little space
A great grey woman with scarred face
And strong and humbled eyes.

King Alfred was but a meagre man,
Bright eyed, but lean and pale:
And swordless, with his harp and rags,
He seemed a beggar, such as lags
Looking for crusts and ale.

And the woman, with a woman’s eyes
Of pity at once and ire,
Said, when that she had glared a span,
“There is a cake for any man
If he will watch the fire.”

And Alfred, bowing heavily,
Sat down the fire to stir,
And even as the woman pitied him
So did he pity her.

Saying, “O great heart in the night,
O best cast forth for worst,
Twilight shall melt and morning stir,
And no kind thing shall come to her,
Till God shall turn the world over
And all the last are first.

“And well may God with the serving-folk
Cast in His dreadful lot;
Is not He too a servant,
And is not He forgot?

“For was not God my gardener
And silent like a slave;
That opened oaks on the uplands
Or thicket in graveyard gave?

“And was not God my armourer,
All patient and unpaid,
That sealed my skull as a helmet,
And ribs for hauberk made?

“Did not a great grey servant
Of all my sires and me,
Build this pavilion of the pines,
And herd the fowls and fill the vines,
And labour and pass and leave no signs
Save mercy and mystery?

“For God is a great servant,
And rose before the day,
From some primordial slumber torn;
But all we living later born
Sleep on, and rise after the morn,
And the Lord has gone away.

“On things half sprung from sleeping,
All sleepy suns have shone,
They stretch stiff arms, the yawning trees,
The beasts blink upon hands and knees,
Man is awake and does and sees —
But Heaven has done and gone.

“For who shall guess the good riddle
Or speak of the Holiest,
Save in faint figures and failing words,
Who loves, yet laughs among the swords,
Labours, and is at rest?

“But some see God like Guthrum,
Crowned, with a great beard curled,
But I see God like a good giant,
That, labouring, lifts the world.

“Wherefore was God in Golgotha,
Slain as a serf is slain;
And hate He had of prince and peer,
And love He had and made good cheer,
Of them that, like this woman here,
Go powerfully in pain.

“But in this grey morn of man’s life,
Cometh sometime to the mind
A little light that leaps and flies,
Like a star blown on the wind.

“A star of nowhere, a nameless star,
A light that spins and swirls,
And cries that even in hedge and hill,
Even on earth, it may go ill
At last with the evil earls.

“A dancing sparkle, a doubtful star,
On the waste wind whirled and driven;
But it seems to sing of a wilder worth,
A time discrowned of doom and birth,
And the kingdom of the poor on earth
Come, as it is in heaven.

“But even though such days endure,
How shall it profit her?
Who shall go groaning to the grave,
With many a meek and mighty slave,
Field-breaker and fisher on the wave,
And woodman and waggoner.

“Bake ye the big world all again
A cake with kinder leaven;
Yet these are sorry evermore —
Unless there be a little door,

A little door in heaven.”

And as he wept for the woman
He let her business be,
And like his royal oath and rash
The good food fell upon the ash
And blackened instantly.

Screaming, the woman caught a cake
Yet burning from the bar,
And struck him suddenly on the face,
Leaving a scarlet scar.

King Alfred stood up wordless,
A man dead with surprise,
And torture stood and the evil things
That are in the childish hearts of kings
An instant in his eyes.

And even as he stood and stared
Drew round him in the dusk
Those friends creeping from far-off farms,
Marcus with all his slaves in arms,
And the strange spears hung with ancient charms
Of Colan of the Usk.

With one whole farm marching afoot
The trampled road resounds,
Farm-hands and farm-beasts blundering by
And jars of mead and stores of rye,
Where Eldred strode above his high
And thunder-throated hounds.

And grey cattle and silver lowed
Against the unlifted morn,
And straw clung to the spear-shafts tall.
And a boy went before them all

Blowing a ram’s horn.

As mocking such rude revelry,
The dim clan of the Gael
Came like a bad king’s burial-end,
With dismal robes that drop and rend
And demon pipes that wail —

In long, outlandish garments,
Torn, though of antique worth,
With Druid beards and Druid spears,
As a resurrected race appears
Out of an elder earth.

And though the King had called them forth
And knew them for his own,
So still each eye stood like a gem,
So spectral hung each broidered hem,
Grey carven men he fancied them,
Hewn in an age of stone.

And the two wild peoples of the north
Stood fronting in the gloam,
And heard and knew each in its mind
The third great thunder on the wind,
The living walls that hedge mankind,
The walking walls of Rome.

Mark’s were the mixed tribes of the west,
Of many a hue and strain,
Gurth, with rank hair like yellow grass,
And the Cornish fisher, Gorlias,
And Halmer, come from his first mass,
Lately baptized, a Dane.

But like one man in armour
Those hundreds trod the field,

From red Arabia to the Tyne
The earth had heard that marching-line,
Since the cry on the hill Capitoline,
And the fall of the golden shield.

And the earth shook and the King stood still
Under the greenwood bough,
And the smoking cake lay at his feet
And the blow was on his brow.

Then Alfred laughed out suddenly,
Like thunder in the spring,
Till shook aloud the lintel-beams,
And the squirrels stirred in dusty dreams,
And the startled birds went up in streams,
For the laughter of the King.

And the beasts of the earth and the birds looked down,
In a wild solemnity,
On a stranger sight than a sylph or elf,
On one man laughing at himself
Under the greenwood tree —

The giant laughter of Christian men
That roars through a thousand tales,
Where greed is an ape and pride is an ass,
And Jack’s away with his master’s lass,
And the miser is banged with all his brass,
The farmer with all his flails;

Tales that tumble and tales that trick,
Yet end not all in scorning —
Of kings and clowns in a merry plight,
And the clock gone wrong and the world gone right,
That the mummers sing upon Christmas night
And Christmas Day in the morning.

“Now here is a good warrant,”
Cried Alfred, “by my sword;
For he that is struck for an ill servant
Should be a kind lord.

“He that has been a servant
Knows more than priests and kings,
But he that has been an ill servant,
He knows all earthly things.

“Pride flings frail palaces at the sky,
As a man flings up sand,
But the firm feet of humility
Take hold of heavy land.

“Pride juggles with her toppling towers,
They strike the sun and cease,
But the firm feet of humility
They grip the ground like trees.

“He that hath failed in a little thing
Hath a sign upon the brow;
And the Earls of the Great Army
Have no such seal to show.

“The red print on my forehead,
Small flame for a red star,
In the van of the violent marching, then
When the sky is torn of the trumpets ten,
And the hands of the happy howling men
Fling wide the gates of war.

“This blow that I return not
Ten times will I return
On kings and earls of all degree,
And armies wide as empires be
Shall slide like landslips to the sea

If the red star burn.

“One man shall drive a hundred,
As the dead kings drave;
Before me rocking hosts be riven,
And battering cohorts backwards driven,
For I am the first king known of Heaven
That has been struck like a slave.

“Up on the old white road, brothers,
Up on the Roman walls!
For this is the night of the drawing of swords,
And the tainted tower of the heathen hordes
Leans to our hammers, fires and cords,
Leans a little and falls.

“Follow the star that lives and leaps,
Follow the sword that sings,
For we go gathering heathen men,
A terrible harvest, ten by ten,
As the wrath of the last red autumn — then
When Christ reaps down the kings.

“Follow a light that leaps and spins,
Follow the fire unfurled!
For riseth up against realm and rod,
A thing forgotten, a thing downtrod,
The last lost giant, even God,
Is risen against the world.”

Roaring they went o’er the Roman wall,
And roaring up the lane,
Their torches tossed a ladder of fire,
Higher their hymn was heard and higher,
More sweet for hate and for heart’s desire,
And up in the northern scrub and brier,
They fell upon the Dane.

BOOK V. ETHANDUNE: THE FIRST STROKE

King Guthrum was a dread king,
Like death out of the north;
Shrines without name or number
He rent and rolled as lumber,
From Chester to the Humber
He drove his foemen forth.

The Roman villas heard him
In the valley of the Thames,
Come over the hills roaring
Above their roofs, and pouring
On spire and stair and flooring
Brimstone and pitch and flames.

Sheer o’er the great chalk uplands
And the hill of the Horse went he,
Till high on Hampshire beacons
He saw the southern sea.

High on the heights of Wessex
He saw the southern brine,
And turned him to a conquered land,
And where the northern thornwoods stand,
And the road parts on either hand,
There came to him a sign.

King Guthrum was a war-chief,
A wise man in the field,
And though he prospered well, and knew
How Alfred’s folk were sad and few,
Not less with weighty care he drew
Long lines for pike and shield.

King Guthrum lay on the upper land,

On a single road at gaze,
And his foe must come with lean array,
Up the left arm of the cloven way,
To the meeting of the ways.

And long ere the noise of armour,
An hour ere the break of light,
The woods awoke with crash and cry,
And the birds sprang clamouring harsh and high,
And the rabbits ran like an elves’ army
Ere Alfred came in sight.

The live wood came at Guthrum,
On foot and claw and wing,
The nests were noisy overhead,
For Alfred and the star of red,
All life went forth, and the forest fled
Before the face of the King.

But halted in the woodways
Christ’s few were grim and grey,
And each with a small, far, bird-like sight
Saw the high folly of the fight;
And though strange joys had grown in the night,
Despair grew with the day.

And when white dawn crawled through the wood,
Like cold foam of a flood,
Then weakened every warrior’s mood,
In hope, though not in hardihood;
And each man sorrowed as he stood
In the fashion of his blood.

For the Saxon Franklin sorrowed
For the things that had been fair;
For the dear dead woman, crimson-clad,
And the great feasts and the friends he had;

But the Celtic prince’s soul was sad
For the things that never were.

In the eyes Italian all things
But a black laughter died;
And Alfred flung his shield to earth
And smote his breast and cried —

“I wronged a man to his slaying,
And a woman to her shame,
And once I looked on a sworn maid
That was wed to the Holy Name.

“And once I took my neighbour’s wife,
That was bound to an eastland man,
In the starkness of my evil youth,
Before my griefs began.

“People, if you have any prayers,
Say prayers for me:
And lay me under a Christian stone
In that lost land I thought my own,
To wait till the holy horn is blown,
And all poor men are free.”

Then Eldred of the idle farm
Leaned on his ancient sword,
As fell his heavy words and few;
And his eyes were of such alien blue
As gleams where the Northman saileth new
Into an unknown fiord.

“I was a fool and wasted ale —
My slaves found it sweet;
I was a fool and wasted bread,
And the birds had bread to eat.

“The kings go up and the kings go down,
And who knows who shall rule;
Next night a king may starve or sleep,
But men and birds and beasts shall weep
At the burial of a fool.

“O, drunkards in my cellar,
Boys in my apple tree,
The world grows stern and strange and new,
And wise men shall govern you,
And you shall weep for me.

“But yoke me my own oxen,
Down to my own farm;
My own dog will whine for me,
My own friends will bend the knee,
And the foes I slew openly
Have never wished me harm.”

And all were moved a little,
But Colan stood apart,
Having first pity, and after
Hearing, like rat in rafter,
That little worm of laughter
That eats the Irish heart.

And his grey-green eyes were cruel,
And the smile of his mouth waxed hard,
And he said, “And when did Britain
Become your burying-yard?

“Before the Romans lit the land,
When schools and monks were none,
We reared such stones to the sun-god
As might put out the sun.

“The tall trees of Britain

We worshipped and were wise,
But you shall raid the whole land through
And never a tree shall talk to you,
Though every leaf is a tongue taught true
And the forest is full of eyes.

“On one round hill to the seaward
The trees grow tall and grey
And the trees talk together
When all men are away.

“O’er a few round hills forgotten
The trees grow tall in rings,
And the trees talk together
Of many pagan things.

“Yet I could lie and listen
With a cross upon my clay,
And hear unhurt for ever
What the trees of Britain say.”

A proud man was the Roman,
His speech a single one,
But his eyes were like an eagle’s eyes
That is staring at the sun.

“Dig for me where I die,” he said,
“If first or last I fall —
Dead on the fell at the first charge,
Or dead by Wantage wall;

“Lift not my head from bloody ground,
Bear not my body home,
For all the earth is Roman earth
And I shall die in Rome.”

Then Alfred, King of England,

Bade blow the horns of war,
And fling the Golden Dragon out,
With crackle and acclaim and shout,
Scrolled and aflame and far.

And under the Golden Dragon
Went Wessex all along,
Past the sharp point of the cloven ways,
Out from the black wood into the blaze
Of sun and steel and song.

And when they came to the open land
They wheeled, deployed and stood;
Midmost were Marcus and the King,
And Eldred on the right-hand wing,
And leftwards Colan darkling,
In the last shade of the wood.

But the Earls of the Great Army
Lay like a long half moon,
Ten poles before their palisades,
With wide-winged helms and runic blades
Red giants of an age of raids,
In the thornland of Ethandune.

Midmost the saddles rose and swayed,
And a stir of horses’ manes,
Where Guthrum and a few rode high
On horses seized in victory;
But Ogier went on foot to die,
In the old way of the Danes.

Far to the King’s left Elf the bard
Led on the eastern wing
With songs and spells that change the blood;
And on the King’s right Harold stood,
The kinsman of the King.

Young Harold, coarse, with colours gay,
Smoking with oil and musk,
And the pleasant violence of the young,
Pushed through his people, giving tongue
Foewards, where, grey as cobwebs hung,
The banners of the Usk.

But as he came before his line
A little space along,
His beardless face broke into mirth,
And he cried: “What broken bits of earth
Are here? For what their clothes are worth
I would sell them for a song.”

For Colan was hung with raiment
Tattered like autumn leaves,
And his men were all as thin as saints,
And all as poor as thieves.

No bows nor slings nor bolts they bore,
But bills and pikes ill-made;
And none but Colan bore a sword,
And rusty was its blade.

And Colan’s eyes with mystery
And iron laughter stirred,
And he spoke aloud, but lightly
Not labouring to be heard.

“Oh, truly we be broken hearts,
For that cause, it is said,
We light our candles to that Lord
That broke Himself for bread.

“But though we hold but bitterly
What land the Saxon leaves,

Though Ireland be but a land of saints,
And Wales a land of thieves,

“I say you yet shall weary
Of the working of your word,
That stricken spirits never strike
Nor lean hands hold a sword.

“And if ever ye ride in Ireland,
The jest may yet be said,
There is the land of broken hearts,
And the land of broken heads.”

Not less barbarian laughter
Choked Harold like a flood,
“And shall I fight with scarecrows
That am of Guthrum’s blood?

“Meeting may be of war-men,
Where the best war-man wins;
But all this carrion a man shoots
Before the fight begins.”

And stopping in his onward strides,
He snatched a bow in scorn
From some mean slave, and bent it on
Colan, whose doom grew dark; and shone
Stars evil over Caerleon,
In the place where he was born.

For Colan had not bow nor sling,
On a lonely sword leaned he,
Like Arthur on Excalibur
In the battle by the sea.

To his great gold ear-ring Harold
Tugged back the feathered tail,

And swift had sprung the arrow,
But swifter sprang the Gael.

Whirling the one sword round his head,
A great wheel in the sun,
He sent it splendid through the sky,
Flying before the shaft could fly —
It smote Earl Harold over the eye,
And blood began to run.

Colan stood bare and weaponless,
Earl Harold, as in pain,
Strove for a smile, put hand to head,
Stumbled and suddenly fell dead;
And the small white daisies all waxed red
With blood out of his brain.

And all at that marvel of the sword,
Cast like a stone to slay,
Cried out. Said Alfred: “Who would see
Signs, must give all things. Verily
Man shall not taste of victory
Till he throws his sword away.”

Then Alfred, prince of England,
And all the Christian earls,
Unhooked their swords and held them up,
Each offered to Colan, like a cup
Of chrysolite and pearls.

And the King said, “Do thou take my sword
Who have done this deed of fire,
For this is the manner of Christian men,
Whether of steel or priestly pen,
That they cast their hearts out of their ken
To get their heart’s desire.

“And whether ye swear a hive of monks,
Or one fair wife to friend,
This is the manner of Christian men,
That their oath endures the end.

“For love, our Lord, at the end of the world,
Sits a red horse like a throne,
With a brazen helm and an iron bow,
But one arrow alone.

“Love with the shield of the Broken Heart
Ever his bow doth bend,
With a single shaft for a single prize,
And the ultimate bolt that parts and flies
Comes with a thunder of split skies,
And a sound of souls that rend.

“So shall you earn a king’s sword,
Who cast your sword away.”
And the King took, with a random eye,
A rude axe from a hind hard by
And turned him to the fray.

For the swords of the Earls of Daneland
Flamed round the fallen lord.
The first blood woke the trumpet-tune,
As in monk’s rhyme or wizard’s rune,
Beginneth the battle of Ethandune
With the throwing of the sword.

BOOK VI. ETHANDUNE: THE SLAYING OF THE CHIEFS

As the sea flooding the flat sands
Flew on the sea-born horde,
The two hosts shocked with dust and din,
Left of the Latian paladin,
Clanged all Prince Harold's howling kin
On Colan and the sword.

Crashed in the midst on Marcus,
Ogier with Guthrum by,
And eastward of such central stir,
Far to the right and faintlier,
The house of Elf the harp-player,
Struck Eldred's with a cry.

The centre swat for weariness,
Stemming the screaming horde,
And wearily went Colan's hands
That swung King Alfred's sword.

But like a cloud of morning
To eastward easily,
Tall Eldred broke the sea of spears
As a tall ship breaks the sea.

His face like a sanguine sunset,
His shoulder a Wessex down,
His hand like a windy hammer-stroke;
Men could not count the crests he broke,
So fast the crests went down.

As the tall white devil of the Plague
Moves out of Asian skies,
With his foot on a waste of cities
And his head in a cloud of flies;

Or purple and peacock skies grow dark
With a moving locust-tower;
Or tawny sand-winds tall and dry,
Like hell's red banners beat and fly,
When death comes out of Araby,
Was Eldred in his hour.

But while he moved like a massacre
He murmured as in sleep,
And his words were all of low hedges
And little fields and sheep.

Even as he strode like a pestilence,
That strides from Rhine to Rome,
He thought how tall his beans might be
If ever he went home.

Spoke some stiff piece of childish prayer,
Dull as the distant chimes,
That thanked our God for good eating
And corn and quiet times —

Till on the helm of a high chief
Fell shatteringly his brand,
And the helm broke and the bone broke
And the sword broke in his hand.

Then from the yelling Northmen
Driven splintering on him ran
Full seven spears, and the seventh
Was never made by man.

Seven spears, and the seventh
Was wrought as the faerie blades,
And given to Elf the minstrel
By the monstrous water-maids;

By them that dwell where luridly
Lost waters of the Rhine
Move among roots of nations,
Being sunken for a sign.

Under all graves they murmur,
They murmur and rebel,
Down to the buried kingdoms creep,
And like a lost rain roar and weep
O’er the red heavens of hell.

Thrice drowned was Elf the minstrel,
And washed as dead on sand;
And the third time men found him
The spear was in his hand.

Seven spears went about Eldred,
Like stays about a mast;
But there was sorrow by the sea
For the driving of the last.

Six spears thrust upon Eldred
Were splintered while he laughed;
One spear thrust into Eldred,
Three feet of blade and shaft.

And from the great heart grievously
Came forth the shaft and blade,
And he stood with the face of a dead man,
Stood a little, and swayed —

Then fell, as falls a battle-tower,
On smashed and struggling spears.
Cast down from some unconquered town
That, rushing earthward, carries down
Loads of live men of all renown —

Archers and engineers.

And a great clamour of Christian men
Went up in agony,
Crying, “Fallen is the tower of Wessex
That stood beside the sea.”

Centre and right the Wessex guard
Grew pale for doubt and fear,
And the flank failed at the advance,
For the death-light on the wizard lance —
The star of the evil spear.

“Stand like an oak,” cried Marcus,
“Stand like a Roman wall!
Eldred the Good is fallen —
Are you too good to fall?

“When we were wan and bloodless
He gave you ale enow;
The pirates deal with him as dung,
God! are you bloodless now?”

“Grip, Wulf and Gorlias, grip the ash!
Slaves, and I make you free!
Stamp, Hildred hard in English land,
Stand Gurth, stand Gorlias, Gawen stand!
Hold, Halfgar, with the other hand,
Halmer, hold up on knee!

“The lamps are dying in your homes,
The fruits upon your bough;
Even now your old thatch smoulders, Gurth,
Now is the judgment of the earth,
Now is the death-grip, now!”

For thunder of the captain,

Not less the Wessex line,
Leaned back and reeled a space to rear
As Elf charged with the Rhine maids’ spear,
And roaring like the Rhine.

For the men were borne by the waving walls
Of woods and clouds that pass,
By dizzy plains and drifting sea,
And they mixed God with glamoury,
God with the gods of the burning tree
And the wizard’s tower and glass.

But Mark was come of the glittering towns
Where hot white details show,
Where men can number and expound,
And his faith grew in a hard ground
Of doubt and reason and falsehood found,
Where no faith else could grow.

Belief that grew of all beliefs
One moment back was blown
And belief that stood on unbelief
Stood up iron and alone.

The Wessex crescent backwards
Crushed, as with bloody spear
Went Elf roaring and routing,
And Mark against Elf yet shouting,
Shocked, in his mid-career.

Right on the Roman shield and sword
Did spear of the Rhine maids run;
But the shield shifted never,
The sword rang down to sever,
The great Rhine sang for ever,
And the songs of Elf were done.

And a great thunder of Christian men
Went up against the sky,
Saying, “God hath broken the evil spear
Ere the good man’s blood was dry.”

“Spears at the charge!” yelled Mark amain.
“Death on the gods of death!
Over the thrones of doom and blood
Goeth God that is a craftsman good,
And gold and iron, earth and wood,
Loveth and laboureth.

“The fruits leap up in all your farms,
The lamps in each abode;
God of all good things done on earth,
All wheels or webs of any worth,
The God that makes the roof, Gurth,
The God that makes the road.

“The God that heweth kings in oak
Writeth songs on vellum,
God of gold and flaming glass,
Confregit potentias
Acrcuum, scutum, Gorlias,
Gladium et bellum.”

Steel and lightning broke about him,
Battle-bays and palm,
All the sea-kings swayed among
Woods of the Wessex arms upflung,
The trumpet of the Roman tongue,
The thunder of the psalm.

And midmost of that rolling field
Ran Ogier ragingly,
Lashing at Mark, who turned his blow,
And brake the helm about his brow,

And broke him to his knee.

Then Ogier heaved over his head
His huge round shield of proof;
But Mark set one foot on the shield,
One on some sundered rock upheeled,
And towered above the tossing field,
A statue on a roof.

Dealing far blows about the fight,
Like thunder-bolts a-roam,
Like birds about the battle-field,
While Ogier writhed under his shield
Like a tortoise in his dome.

But hate in the buried Ogier
Was strong as pain in hell,
With bare brute hand from the inside
He burst the shield of brass and hide,
And a death-stroke to the Roman’s side
Sent suddenly and well.

Then the great statue on the shield
Looked his last look around
With level and imperial eye;
And Mark, the man from Italy,
Fell in the sea of agony,
And died without a sound.

And Ogier, leaping up alive,
Hurled his huge shield away
Flying, as when a juggler flings
A whizzing plate in play.

And held two arms up rigidly,
And roared to all the Danes:
“Fallen is Rome, yea, fallen

The city of the plains!

“Shall no man born remember,
That breaketh wood or weald,
How long she stood on the roof of the world
As he stood on my shield.

“The new wild world forgetteth her
As foam fades on the sea,
How long she stood with her foot on Man
As he with his foot on me.

“No more shall the brown men of the south
Move like the ants in lines,
To quiet men with olives
Or madden men with vines.

“No more shall the white towns of the south,
Where Tiber and Nilus run,
Sitting around a secret sea
Worship a secret sun.

“The blind gods roar for Rome fallen,
And forum and garland gone,
For the ice of the north is broken,
And the sea of the north comes on.

“The blind gods roar and rave and dream
Of all cities under the sea,
For the heart of the north is broken,
And the blood of the north is free.

“Down from the dome of the world we come,
Rivers on rivers down,
Under us swirl the sects and hordes
And the high dooms we drown.

"Down from the dome of the world and down,
Struck flying as a skiff
On a river in spate is spun and swirled
Until we come to the end of the world
That breaks short, like a cliff.

"And when we come to the end of the world
For me, I count it fit
To take the leap like a good river,
Shot shrieking over it.

"But whatso hap at the end of the world,
Where Nothing is struck and sounds,
It is not, by Thor, these monkish men
These humbled Wessex hounds —

"Not this pale line of Christian hinds,
This one white string of men,
Shall keep us back from the end of the world,
And the things that happen then.

"It is not Alfred's dwarfish sword,
Nor Egbert's pigmy crown,
Shall stay us now that descend in thunder,
Rending the realms and the realms thereunder,
Down through the world and down."

There was that in the wild men back of him,
There was that in his own wild song,
A dizzy throbbing, a drunkard smoke,
That dazed to death all Wessex folk,
And swept their spears along.

Vainly the sword of Colan
And the axe of Alfred plied —
The Danes poured in like a brainless plague,
And knew not when they died.

Prince Colan slew a score of them,
And was stricken to his knee;
King Alfred slew a score and seven
And was borne back on a tree.

Back to the black gate of the woods,
Back up the single way,
Back by the place of the parting ways
Christ’s knights were whirled away.

And when they came to the parting ways
Doom’s heaviest hammer fell,
For the King was beaten, blind, at bay,
Down the right lane with his array,
But Colan swept the other way,
Where he smote great strokes and fell.

The thorn-woods over Ethandune
Stand sharp and thick as spears,
By night and furze and forest-harms
Far sundered were the friends in arms;
The loud lost blows, the last alarms,
Came not to Alfred’s ears.

The thorn-woods over Ethandune
Stand stiff as spikes in mail;
As to the Haut King came at morn
Dead Roland on a doubtful horn,
Seemed unto Alfred lightly borne
The last cry of the Gael.

BOOK VII. ETHANDUNE: THE LAST CHARGE

Away in the waste of White Horse Down
An idle child alone
Played some small game through hours that pass,
And patiently would pluck the grass,
Patiently push the stone.

On the lean, green edge for ever,
Where the blank chalk touched the turf,
The child played on, alone, divine,
As a child plays on the last line
That sunders sand and surf.

For he dwelleth in high divisions
Too simple to understand,
Seeing on what morn of mystery
The Uncreated rent the sea
With roarings, from the land.

Through the long infant hours like days
He built one tower in vain —
Piled up small stones to make a town,
And evermore the stones fell down,
And he piled them up again.

And crimson kings on battle-towers,
And saints on Gothic spires,
And hermits on their peaks of snow,
And heroes on their pyres,

And patriots riding royally,
That rush the rocking town,
Stretch hands, and hunger and aspire,
Seeking to mount where high and higher,
The child whom Time can never tire,

Sings over White Horse Down.

And this was the might of Alfred,
At the ending of the way;
That of such smiters, wise or wild,
He was least distant from the child,
Piling the stones all day.

For Eldred fought like a frank hunter
That killeth and goeth home;
And Mark had fought because all arms
Rang like the name of Rome.

And Colan fought with a double mind,
Moody and madly gay;
But Alfred fought as gravely
As a good child at play.

He saw wheels break and work run back
And all things as they were;
And his heart was orbed like victory
And simple like despair.

Therefore is Mark forgotten,
That was wise with his tongue and brave;
And the cairn over Colan crumbled,
And the cross on Eldred’s grave.

Their great souls went on a wind away,
And they have not tale or tomb;
And Alfred born in Wantage
Rules England till the doom.

Because in the forest of all fears
Like a strange fresh gust from sea,
Struck him that ancient innocence
That is more than mastery.

And as a child whose bricks fall down
Re-piles them o’er and o’er,
Came ruin and the rain that burns,
Returning as a wheel returns,
And crouching in the furze and ferns
He began his life once more.

He took his ivory horn unslung
And smiled, but not in scorn:
“Endeth the Battle of Ethandune
With the blowing of a horn.”

On a dark horse at the double way
He saw great Guthrum ride,
Heard roar of brass and ring of steel,
The laughter and the trumpet peal,
The pagan in his pride.

And Ogier’s red and hated head
Moved in some talk or task;
But the men seemed scattered in the brier,
And some of them had lit a fire,
And one had broached a cask.

And waggons one or two stood up,
Like tall ships in sight,
As if an outpost were encamped
At the cloven ways for night.

And joyous of the sudden stay
Of Alfred’s routed few,
Sat one upon a stone to sigh,
And some slipped up the road to fly,
Till Alfred in the fern hard by
Set horn to mouth and blew.

And they all abode like statues —
One sitting on the stone,
One half-way through the thorn hedge tall,
One with a leg across a wall,
And one looked backwards, very small,
Far up the road, alone.

Grey twilight and a yellow star
Hung over thorn and hill;
Two spears and a cloven war-shield lay
Loose on the road as cast away,
The horn died faint in the forest grey,
And the fleeing men stood still.

“Brothers at arms,” said Alfred,
“On this side lies the foe;
Are slavery and starvation flowers,
That you should pluck them so?

“For whether is it better
To be prodded with Danish poles,
Having hewn a chamber in a ditch,
And hounded like a howling witch,
Or smoked to death in holes?

“Or that before the red cock crow
All we, a thousand strong,
Go down the dark road to God’s house,
Singing a Wessex song?

“To sweat a slave to a race of slaves,
To drink up infamy?
No, brothers, by your leave, I think
Death is a better ale to drink,
And by all the stars of Christ that sink,
The Danes shall drink with me.

“To grow old cowed in a conquered land,
With the sun itself discrowned,
To see trees crouch and cattle slink —
Death is a better ale to drink,
And by high Death on the fell brink
That flagon shall go round.

“Though dead are all the paladins
Whom glory had in ken,
Though all your thunder-sworded thanes
With proud hearts died among the Danes,
While a man remains, great war remains:
Now is a war of men.

“The men that tear the furrows,
The men that fell the trees,
When all their lords be lost and dead
The bondsmen of the earth shall tread
The tyrants of the seas.

“The wheel of the roaring stillness
Of all labours under the sun,
Speed the wild work as well at least
As the whole world’s work is done.

“Let Hildred hack the shield-wall
Clean as he hacks the hedge;
Let Gurth the fowler stand as cool
As he stands on the chasm’s edge;

“Let Gorlias ride the sea-kings
As Gorlias rides the sea,
Then let all hell and Denmark drive,
Yelling to all its fiends alive,
And not a rag care we.”

When Alfred’s word was ended

Stood firm that feeble line,
Each in his place with club or spear,
And fury deeper than deep fear,
And smiles as sour as brine.

And the King held up the horn and said,
“See ye my father’s horn,
That Egbert blew in his empery,
Once, when he rode out commonly,
Twice when he rode for venery,
And thrice on the battle-morn.

“But heavier fates have fallen
The horn of the Wessex kings,
And I blew once, the riding sign,
To call you to the fighting line
And glory and all good things.

“And now two blasts, the hunting sign,
Because we turn to bay;
But I will not blow the three blasts,
Till we be lost or they.

“And now I blow the hunting sign,
Charge some by rule and rod;
But when I blow the battle sign,
Charge all and go to God.”

Wild stared the Danes at the double ways
Where they loitered, all at large,
As that dark line for the last time
Doubled the knee to charge —

And caught their weapons clumsily,
And marvelled how and why —
In such degree, by rule and rod,
The people of the peace of God

Went roaring down to die.

And when the last arrow
Was fitted and was flown,
When the broken shield hung on the breast,
And the hopeless lance was laid in rest,
And the hopeless horn blown,

The King looked up, and what he saw
Was a great light like death,
For Our Lady stood on the standards rent,
As lonely and as innocent
As when between white walls she went
And the lilies of Nazareth.

One instant in a still light
He saw Our Lady then,
Her dress was soft as western sky,
And she was a queen most womanly —
But she was a queen of men.

Over the iron forest
He saw Our Lady stand,
Her eyes were sad withouten art,
And seven swords were in her heart —
But one was in her hand.

Then the last charge went blindly,
And all too lost for fear:
The Danes closed round, a roaring ring,
And twenty clubs rose o’er the King,
Four Danes hewed at him, halloing,
And Ogier of the Stone and Sling
Drove at him with a spear.

But the Danes were wild with laughter,
And the great spear swung wide,

The point stuck to a straggling tree,
And either host cried suddenly,
As Alfred leapt aside.

Short time had shaggy Ogier
To pull his lance in line —
He knew King Alfred’s axe on high,
He heard it rushing through the sky,

He cowered beneath it with a cry —
It split him to the spine:
And Alfred sprang over him dead,
And blew the battle sign.

Then bursting all and blasting
Came Christendom like death,
Kicked of such catapults of will,
The staves shiver, the barrels spill,
The waggons waver and crash and kill
The waggoners beneath.

Barriers go backwards, banners rend,
Great shields groan like a gong —
Horses like horns of nightmare
Neigh horribly and long.

Horses ramp high and rock and boil
And break their golden reins,
And slide on carnage clamorously,
Down where the bitter blood doth lie,
Where Ogier went on foot to die,
In the old way of the Danes.

“The high tide!” King Alfred cried.
“The high tide and the turn!
As a tide turns on the tall grey seas,
See how they waver in the trees,

How stray their spears, how knock their knees,
How wild their watchfires burn!

“The Mother of God goes over them,
Walking on wind and flame,
And the storm-cloud drifts from city and dale,
And the White Horse stamps in the White Horse Vale,
And we all shall yet drink Christian ale
In the village of our name.

“The Mother of God goes over them,
On dreadful cherubs borne;
And the psalm is roaring above the rune,
And the Cross goes over the sun and moon,
Endeth the battle of Ethandune
With the blowing of a horn.”

For back indeed disorderly
The Danes went clamouring,
Too worn to take anew the tale,
Or dazed with insolence and ale,
Or stunned of heaven, or stricken pale
Before the face of the King.

For dire was Alfred in his hour
The pale scribe witnesseth,
More mighty in defeat was he
Than all men else in victory,
And behind, his men came murderously,
Dry-throated, drinking death.

And Edgar of the Golden Ship
He slew with his own hand,
Took Ludwig from his lady’s bower,
And smote down Harmar in his hour,
And vain and lonely stood the tower —
The tower in Guelderland.

And Torr out of his tiny boat,
Whose eyes beheld the Nile,
Wulf with his war-cry on his lips,
And Harco born in the eclipse,
Who blocked the Seine with battleships
Round Paris on the Isle.

And Hacon of the Harvest-Song,
And Dirck from the Elbe he slew,
And Cnut that melted Durham bell
And Fulk and fiery Oscar fell,
And Goderic and Sigael,
And Uriel of the Yew.

And highest sang the slaughter,
And fastest fell the slain,
When from the wood-road’s blackening throat
A crowning and crashing wonder smote
The rear-guard of the Dane.

For the dregs of Colan’s company —
Lost down the other road —
Had gathered and grown and heard the din,
And with wild yells came pouring in,
Naked as their old British kin,
And bright with blood for woad.

And bare and bloody and aloft
They bore before their band
The body of the mighty lord,
Colan of Caerleon and its horde,
That bore King Alfred’s battle-sword
Broken in his left hand.

And a strange music went with him,
Loud and yet strangely far;

The wild pipes of the western land,
Too keen for the ear to understand,
Sang high and deathly on each hand
When the dead man went to war.

Blocked between ghost and buccaneer,
Brave men have dropped and died;
And the wild sea-lords well might quail
As the ghastly war-pipes of the Gael
Called to the horns of White Horse Vale,
And all the horns replied.

And Hildred the poor hedger
Cut down four captains dead,
And Halmar laid three others low,
And the great earls wavered to and fro
For the living and the dead.

And Gorlias grasped the great flag,
The Raven of Odin, torn;
And the eyes of Guthrum altered,
For the first time since morn.

As a turn of the wheel of tempest
Tilts up the whole sky tall,
And cliffs of wan cloud luminous
Lean out like great walls over us,
As if the heavens might fall.

As such a tall and tilted sky
Sends certain snow or light,
So did the eyes of Guthrum change,
And the turn was more certain and more strange
Than a thousand men in flight.

For not till the floor of the skies is split,
And hell-fire shines through the sea,

Or the stars look up through the rent earth’s knees,
Cometh such rending of certainties,
As when one wise man truly sees
What is more wise than he.

He set his horse in the battle-breech
Even Guthrum of the Dane,
And as ever had fallen fell his brand,
A falling tower o’er many a land,
But Gurth the fowler laid one hand
Upon this bridle rein.

King Guthrum was a great lord,
And higher than his gods —
He put the popes to laughter,
He chid the saints with rods,

He took this hollow world of ours
For a cup to hold his wine;
In the parting of the woodways
There came to him a sign.

In Wessex in the forest,
In the breaking of the spears,
We set a sign on Guthrum
To blaze a thousand years.

Where the high saddles jostle
And the horse-tails toss,
There rose to the birds flying
A roar of dead and dying;
In deafness and strong crying
We signed him with the cross.

Far out to the winding river
The blood ran down for days,
When we put the cross on Guthrum

In the parting of the ways.

BOOK VIII. THE SCOURING OF THE HORSE

In the years of the peace of Wessex,
When the good King sat at home;
Years following on that bloody boon
When she that stands above the moon
Stood above death at Ethandune
And saw his kingdom come —

When the pagan people of the sea
Fled to their palisades,
Nailed there with javelins to cling
And wonder smote the pirate king,
And brought him to his christening
And the end of all his raids.

(For not till the night's blue slate is wiped
Of its last star utterly,
And fierce new signs writ there to read,
Shall eyes with such amazement heed,
As when a great man knows indeed
A greater thing than he.)

And there came to his chrism-loosing
Lords of all lands afar,
And a line was drawn north-westerly
That set King Egbert's empire free,
Giving all lands by the northern sea
To the sons of the northern star.

In the days of the rest of Alfred,
When all these things were done,
And Wessex lay in a patch of peace,
Like a dog in a patch of sun —

The King sat in his orchard,

Among apples green and red,
With the little book in his bosom
And the sunshine on his head.

And he gathered the songs of simple men
That swing with helm and hod,
And the alms he gave as a Christian
Like a river alive with fishes ran;
And he made gifts to a beggar man
As to a wandering god.

And he gat good laws of the ancient kings,
Like treasure out of the tombs;
And many a thief in thorny nook,
Or noble in sea-stained turret shook,
For the opening of his iron book,
And the gathering of the dooms.

Then men would come from the ends of the earth,
Whom the King sat welcoming,
And men would go to the ends of the earth
Because of the word of the King.

For folk came in to Alfred’s face
Whose javelins had been hurled
On monsters that make boil the sea,
Crakens and coils of mystery.
Or thrust in ancient snows that be
The white hair of the world.

And some had knocked at the northern gates
Of the ultimate icy floor,
Where the fish freeze and the foam turns black,
And the wide world narrows to a track,
And the other sea at the world’s back
Cries through a closed door.

And men went forth from Alfred’s face,
Even great gift-bearing lords,
Not to Rome only, but more bold,
Out to the high hot courts of old,
Of negroes clad in cloth of gold,
Silence, and crooked swords,

Scrawled screens and secret gardens
And insect-laden skies —
Where fiery plains stretch on and on
To the purple country of Prester John
And the walls of Paradise.

And he knew the might of the Terre Majeure,
Where kings began to reign;
Where in a night-rout, without name,
Of gloomy Goths and Gauls there came
White, above candles all aflame,
Like a vision, Charlemagne.

And men, seeing such embassies,
Spake with the King and said:
“The steel that sang so sweet a tune
On Ashdown and on Ethandune,
Why hangs it scabbarded so soon,
All heavily like lead?

“Why dwell the Danes in North England,
And up to the river ride?
Three more such marches like thine own
Would end them; and the Pict should own
Our sway; and our feet climb the throne
In the mountains of Strathclyde.”

And Alfred in the orchard,
Among apples green and red,
With the little book in his bosom,

Looked at green leaves and said:

“When all philosophies shall fail,
This word alone shall fit;
That a sage feels too small for life,
And a fool too large for it.

“Asia and all imperial plains
Are too little for a fool;
But for one man whose eyes can see
The little island of Athelney
Is too large a land to rule.

“Haply it had been better
When I built my fortress there,
Out in the reedy waters wide,
I had stood on my mud wall and cried:
‘Take England all, from tide to tide —
Be Athelney my share.’

“Those madmen of the throne-scramble —
Oppressors and oppressed —
Had lined the banks by Athelney,
And waved and wailed unceasingly,
Where the river turned to the broad sea,
By an island of the blest.

“An island like a little book
Full of a hundred tales,
Like the gilt page the good monks pen,
That is all smaller than a wren,
Yet hath high towns, meteors, and men,
And suns and spouting whales;

“A land having a light on it
In the river dark and fast,
An isle with utter clearness lit,

Because a saint had stood in it;
Where flowers are flowers indeed and fit,
And trees are trees at last.

“So were the island of a saint;
But I am a common king,
And I will make my fences tough
From Wantage Town to Plymouth Bluff,
Because I am not wise enough
To rule so small a thing.”

And it fell in the days of Alfred,
In the days of his repose,
That as old customs in his sight
Were a straight road and a steady light,
He bade them keep the White Horse white
As the first plume of the snows.

And right to the red torchlight,
From the trouble of morning grey,
They stripped the White Horse of the grass
As they strip it to this day.

And under the red torchlight
He went dreaming as though dull,
Of his old companions slain like kings,
And the rich irrevocable things
Of a heart that hath not openings,
But is shut fast, being full.

And the torchlight touched the pale hair
Where silver clouded gold,
And the frame of his face was made of cords,
And a young lord turned among the lords
And said: “The King is old.”

And even as he said it

A post ran in amain,
Crying: “Arm, Lord King, the hamlets arm,
In the horror and the shade of harm,
They have burnt Brand of Aynger’s farm —
The Danes are come again!

“Danes drive the white East Angles
In six fights on the plains,
Danes waste the world about the Thames,
Danes to the eastward — Danes!”

And as he stumbled on one knee,
The thanes broke out in ire,
Crying: “Ill the watchmen watch, and ill
The sheriffs keep the shire.”

But the young earl said: “Ill the saints,
The saints of England, guard
The land wherein we pledge them gold;
The dykes decay, the King grows old,
And surely this is hard,

“That we be never quit of them;
That when his head is hoar
He cannot say to them he smote,
And spared with a hand hard at the throat,
‘Go, and return no more.’”

Then Alfred smiled. And the smile of him
Was like the sun for power.
But he only pointed: bade them heed
Those peasants of the Berkshire breed,
Who plucked the old Horse of the weed
As they pluck it to this hour.

“Will ye part with the weeds for ever?
Or show daisies to the door?

Or will you bid the bold grass
Go, and return no more?

“So ceaseless and so secret
Thrive terror and theft set free;
Treason and shame shall come to pass
While one weed flowers in a morass;
And like the stillness of stiff grass
The stillness of tyranny.

“Over our white souls also
Wild heresies and high
Wave prouder than the plumes of grass,
And sadder than their sigh.

“And I go riding against the raid,
And ye know not where I am;
But ye shall know in a day or year,
When one green star of grass grows here;
Chaos has charged you, charger and spear,
Battle-axe and battering-ram.

“And though skies alter and empires melt,
This word shall still be true:
If we would have the horse of old,
Scour ye the horse anew.

“One time I followed a dancing star
That seemed to sing and nod,
And ring upon earth all evil’s knell;
But now I wot if ye scour not well
Red rust shall grow on God’s great bell
And grass in the streets of God.”

Ceased Alfred; and above his head
The grand green domes, the Downs,
Showed the first legions of the press,

Marching in haste and bitterness
For Christ’s sake and the crown’s.

Beyond the cavern of Colan,
Past Eldred’s by the sea,
Rose men that owned King Alfred’s rod,
From the windy wastes of Exe untrod,
Or where the thorn of the grave of God
Burns over Glastonbury.

Far northward and far westward
The distant tribes drew nigh,
Plains beyond plains, fell beyond fell,
That a man at sunset sees so well,
And the tiny coloured towns that dwell
In the corners of the sky.

But dark and thick as thronged the host,
With drum and torch and blade,
The still-eyed King sat pondering,
As one that watches a live thing,
The scoured chalk; and he said,

“Though I give this land to Our Lady,
That helped me in Athelney,
Though lordlier trees and lustier sod
And happier hills hath no flesh trod
Than the garden of the Mother of God
Between Thames side and the sea,

“I know that weeds shall grow in it
Faster than men can burn;
And though they scatter now and go,
In some far century, sad and slow,
I have a vision, and I know
The heathen shall return.

“They shall not come with warships,
They shall not waste with brands,
But books be all their eating,
And ink be on their hands.

“Not with the humour of hunters
Or savage skill in war,
But ordering all things with dead words,
Strings shall they make of beasts and birds,
And wheels of wind and star.

“They shall come mild as monkish clerks,
With many a scroll and pen;
And backward shall ye turn and gaze,
Desiring one of Alfred’s days,
When pagans still were men.

“The dear sun dwarfed of dreadful suns,
Like fiercer flowers on stalk,
Earth lost and little like a pea
In high heaven’s towering forestry,
— These be the small weeds ye shall see
Crawl, covering the chalk.

“But though they bridge St. Mary’s sea,
Or steal St. Michael’s wing —
Though they rear marvels over us,
Greater than great Vergilius
Wrought for the Roman king;

“By this sign you shall know them,
The breaking of the sword,
And man no more a free knight,
That loves or hates his lord.

“Yea, this shall be the sign of them,
The sign of the dying fire;

And Man made like a half-wit,
That knows not of his sire.

“What though they come with scroll and pen,
And grave as a shaven clerk,
By this sign you shall know them,
That they ruin and make dark;

“By all men bond to Nothing,
Being slaves without a lord,
By one blind idiot world obeyed,
Too blind to be abhorred;

“By terror and the cruel tales
Of curse in bone and kin,
By weird and weakness winning,
Accursed from the beginning,
By detail of the sinning,
And denial of the sin;

“By thought a crawling ruin,
By life a leaping mire,
By a broken heart in the breast of the world,
And the end of the world’s desire;

“By God and man dishonoured,
By death and life made vain,
Know ye the old barbarian,
The barbarian come again —

“When is great talk of trend and tide,
And wisdom and destiny,
Hail that undying heathen
That is sadder than the sea.

“In what wise men shall smite him,
Or the Cross stand up again,

Or charity or chivalry,
My vision saith not; and I see
No more; but now ride doubtfully
To the battle of the plain.”

And the grass-edge of the great down
Was cut clean as a lawn,
While the levies thronged from near and far,
From the warm woods of the western star,
And the King went out to his last war
On a tall grey horse at dawn.

And news of his far-off fighting
Came slowly and brokenly
From the land of the East Saxons,
From the sunrise and the sea.

From the plains of the white sunrise,
And sad St. Edmund’s crown,
Where the pools of Essex pale and gleam
Out beyond London Town —

In mighty and doubtful fragments,
Like faint or fabled wars,
Climbed the old hills of his renown,
Where the bald brow of White Horse Down
Is close to the cold stars.

But away in the eastern places
The wind of death walked high,
And a raid was driven athwart the raid,
The sky reddened and the smoke swayed,
And the tall grey horse went by.

The gates of the great river
Were breached as with a barge,
The walls sank crowded, say the scribes,

And high towers populous with tribes
Seemed leaning from the charge.

Smoke like rebellious heavens rolled
Curled over coloured flames,
Mirrored in monstrous purple dreams
In the mighty pools of Thames.

Loud was the war on London wall,
And loud in London gates,
And loud the sea-kings in the cloud
Broke through their dreaming gods, and loud
Cried on their dreadful Fates.

And all the while on White Horse Hill
The horse lay long and wan,
The turf crawled and the fungus crept,
And the little sorrel, while all men slept,
Unwrought the work of man.

With velvet finger, velvet foot,
The fierce soft mosses then
Crept on the large white commonweal
All folk had striven to strip and peel,
And the grass, like a great green witch’s wheel,
Unwound the toils of men.

And clover and silent thistle throve,
And buds burst silently,
With little care for the Thames Valley
Or what things there might be —

That away on the widening river,
In the eastern plains for crown
Stood up in the pale purple sky
One turret of smoke like ivory;
And the smoke changed and the wind went by,

And the King took London Town.

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THREE DEDICATIONS

TO EDMUND CLERIHEW BENTLEY

THE DEDICATION OF *THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY*

A cloud was on the mind of men, and wailing went the weather,
Yea, a sick cloud upon the soul when we were boys together.
Science announced nonentity and art admired decay;
The world was old and ended: but you and I were gay.
Round us in antic order their crippled vices came —
Lust that had lost its laughter, fear that had lost its shame.
Like the white lock of Whistler, that lit our aimless gloom,
Men showed their own white feather as proudly as a plume.
Life was a fly that faded, and death a drone that stung;
The world was very old indeed when you and I were young.
They twisted even decent sin to shapes not to be named:
Men were ashamed of honour; but we were not ashamed.
Weak if we were and foolish, not thus we failed, not thus;
When that black Baal blocked the heavens he had no hymns from us.
Children we were — our forts of sand were even as weak as we,
High as they went we piled them up to break that bitter sea.
Fools as we were in motley, all jangling and absurd,
When all church bells were silent our cap and bells were heard.

Not all unhelped we held the fort, our tiny flags unfurled;
Some giants laboured in that cloud to lift it from the world.
I find again the book we found, I feel the hour that flings
Far out of fish-shaped Paumanok some cry of cleaner things;
And the Green Carnation withered, as in forest fires that pass,
Roared in the wind of all the world ten million leaves of grass;
Or sane and sweet and sudden as a bird sings in the rain
Truth out of Tusitala spoke and pleasure out of pain.
Yea, cool and clear and sudden as a bird sings in the grey,
Dunedin to Samoa spoke, and darkness unto day,
But we were young; we lived to see God break their bitter charms,

God and the good Republic come riding back in arms:
We have seen the city of Mansoul, even as it rocked, relieved — Blessed
are they who did not see, but being blind, believed.

This is a tale of those old fears, even of those emptied hells,
And none but you shall understand the true thing that it tells —
Of what colossal gods of shame could cow men and yet crash,
Of what huge devils hid the stars, yet fell at a pistol flash.
The doubts that were so plain to chase, so dreadful to withstand —
Oh, who shall understand but you; yea, who shall understand?
The doubts that drove us through the night as we two talked amain,
And day had broken on the streets e’er it broke upon the brain.
Between us, by the peace of God, such truth can now be told;
Yea, there is strength in striking root, and good in growing old.
We have found common things at last, and marriage and a creed.
And I may safely write it now, and you may safely read.

TO HILAIRE BELLOC

THE DEDICATION OF *THE NAPOLEON OF NOTTING HILL*

For every tiny town or place
God made the stars especially;
Babies look up with owlish face
And see them tangled in a tree:
You saw a moon from Sussex Downs,
A Sussex moon, untravelled still,
I saw a moon that was the town’s,
The largest lamp on Campden Hill.

Yea, Heaven is everywhere at home.
The big blue cap that always fits,
And so it is (be calm; they come
To goal at last, my wandering wits),
So it is with the heroic thing;
This shall not end for the world’s end,
And though the sullen engines swing,
Be you not much afraid, my friend.

This did not end by Nelson’s urn
Where an immortal England sits —
Nor where your tall young men in turn
Drank death like wine at Austerlitz.
And when the pedants bade us mark
What cold mechanic happenings
Must come; our souls said in the dark,
“Belike; but there are likelier things.”

Likelier across these flats afar,
These sulky levels smooth and free,
The drums shall crash a waltz of war
And Death shall dance with Liberty;
Likelier the barricades shall blare
Slaughter below and smoke above,

And death and hate and hell declare
That men have found a thing to love.

Far from your sunny uplands set
I saw the dream; the streets I trod,
The lit straight streets shot out and met
The starry streets that point to God;
The legend of an epic hour
A child I dreamed, and dream it still,
Under the great grey water-tower
That strikes the stars on Campden Hill

TO M. E. W.

Words, for alas my trade is words, a barren burst of rhyme,
Rubbed by a hundred rhymesters, battered a thousand times,
Take them, you, that smile on strings, those nobler sounds than mine,
The words that never lie, or brag, or flatter, or malign.

I give a hand to my lady, another to my friend,
To whom you too have given a hand; and so before the end
We four may pray, for all the years, whatever suns beset,
The sole two prayers worth praying — to live and not forget.

The pale leaf falls in pallor, but the green leaf turns to gold;
We that have found it good to be young shall find it good to be old;
Life that bringeth the marriage bell, the cradle and the grave,
Life that is mean to the mean of heart, and only brave to the brave.

In the calm of the last white winter, when all the past is ours,
Old tears are frozen as jewels, old storms frosted as flowers.
Dear Lady, may we meet again, stand up again, we four,
Beneath the burden of the years, and praise the earth once more.

WAR POEMS

LEPANTO

White founts falling in the Courts of the sun,
And the Soldan of Byzantium is smiling as they run;
There is laughter like the fountains in that face of all men feared,
It stirs the forest darkness, the darkness of his beard,
It curls the blood-red crescent, the crescent of his lips,
For the inmost sea of all the earth is shake with his ships.
They have dared the white republics up the cape of Italy,
They have dashed the Adriatic round the Lion of the Sea,
And the Pope has cast his arms abroad for agony and loss,
And called the kings of Christendom for swords about the Cross.
The cold queen of England is looking in the glass;
The shadow of the Valois is yawning at the Mass;
From evening isles fantastical rings faint the Spanish gun,
And the Lord upon the Golden Horn is laughing in the sun.

Dim drums throbbing, in the hills half heard,
Where only on a nameless throne a crownless prince has stirred,
Where, risen from a doubtful seat and half attainted stall,
The last knight of Europe takes weapons from the wall,
The last and lingering troubadour to whom the bird has sung,
That once went singing southward when all the world was young.
In that enormous silence, tiny and unafraid,
Comes up along a winding road the noise of the Crusade.

Strong gongs groaning as the guns boom far,
Don John of Austria is going to the war,
Stiff flags straining in the night-blasts cold
In the gloom black-purple, in the glint old-gold,
Torchlight crimson on the copper kettle-drums,
Then the tuckets, then the trumpets, then the cannon, and he comes.
Don John laughing in the brave beard curled.
Spuming of his stirrups like the thrones of all the world,
Holding his head up for a flag of all the free.
Love-light of Spain — hurrah!

Death-light of Africa!
Don John of Austria
Is riding to the sea.

Mahound is in his paradise above the evening star,
(Don John of Austria is going to the war.)
He moves a mighty turban on the timeless houri’s knees,
His turban that is woven of the sunsets and the seas.
He shakes the peacock gardens as he rises from his ease,
And he strides among the tree-tops and is taller than the trees,
And his voice through all the garden is a thunder sent to bring
Black Azrael and Ariel and Ammon on the wing.
Giants and the Genii,
Multiplex of wing and eye,
Whose strong obedience broke the sky
When Solomon was king.

They rush in red and purple from the red clouds of the morn,
From temples where the yellow gods shut up their eyes in scorn;
They rise in green robes roaring from the green hells of the sea
Where fallen skies and evil hues and eyeless creatures be;
On them the sea-valves cluster and the grey sea-forests curl,
Splashed with a splendid sickness, the sickness of the pearl;
They swell in sapphire smoke out of the blue cracks of the ground, —
They gather and they wonder and give worship to Mahound.
And he saith, “Break up the mountains where the hermit-folk can hide,
And sift the red and silver sands lest bone of saint abide,
And chase the Giaours flying night and day, not giving rest,
For that which was our trouble comes again out of the west.
We have set the seal of Solomon on all things under sun,
Of knowledge and of sorrow and endurance of things done,
But a noise is in ‘the mountains, in the mountains, and I know
The voice that shook our palaces — four hundred years ago:
It is he that saith not ‘Kismet’; it is he that knows not Fate;
It is Richard, it is Raymond, it is Godfrey in the gate!
It is he whose loss is laughter when he counts the wager worth,
Put down your feet upon him, that our peace be on the earth.”

For he heard drums groaning and he heard guns jar,
(Don John of Austria is going to the war.)
Sudden and still — hurrah!
Bolt from Iberia!
Don John of Austria
Is gone by Alcalar.

St. Michael’s on his Mountain in the sea-roads of the north
(Don John of Austria is girt and going forth.)
Where the grey seas glitter and the sharp tides shift
And the sea-folk labour and the red sails lift.
He shakes his lance of iron and he claps his wings of stone;
The noise is gone through Normandy; the noise is gone alone;
The North is full of tangled things and texts and aching eyes
And dead is all the innocence of anger and surprise,
And Christian killeth Christian in a narrow dusty
And Christian dreadeth Christ that hath a newer face of doom,
And Christian hateth Mary that God kissed in Galilee,
But Don John of Austria is riding to the sea.
Don John calling through the blast and the eclipse
Crying with the trumpet, with the trumpet of his lips,
Trumpet that sayeth ha!
Domino gloria!
Don John of Austria
Is shouting to the ships.

King Philip’s in his closet with the Fleece about his neck
(Don John of Austria is armed upon the deck.)
The walls are hung with velvet that is black and soft as sin,
And little dwarfs creep out of it and little dwarfs creep in.
He holds a crystal phial that has colours like the moon,
He touches, and it tingles, and he trembles very
And his face is as a fungus of a leprous white and grey
Like plants in the high houses that are shuttered from the day.
And death is in the phial and the end of noble work,
But Don John of Austria has fired upon the Turk.
Don John’s hunting, and his hounds have bayed — Booms

away past Italy the rumour of his raid.
Gun upon gun, ha! ha!
Gun upon gun, hurrah!
Don John of Austria
Has loosed the cannonade.

The Pope was in his chapel before day or battle broke,
(Don John of Austria is hidden in the smoke.)
The hidden room in man's house where God sits all the year,
The secret window whence the world looks small and very dear.
He sees as in a mirror on the monstrous twilight sea
The crescent of his cruel ships whose name is mystery;
They fling great shadows foe-wards, making Cross and Castle dark,
They veil the plumed lions on the galleys of St. Mark;
And above the ships are palaces of brown, black-bearded chiefs,
And below the ships are prisons, where with multitudinous griefs,
Christian captives sick and sunless, all a labouring race repines
Like a race in sunken cities, like a nation in the mines.
They are lost like slaves that swat, and in the skies of morning hung
The stair-ways of the tallest gods when tyranny was young.
They are countless, voiceless, hopeless as those fallen or fleeing on
Before the high Kings' horses in the granite of Babylon.
And many a one grows witless in his quiet room in hell
Where a yellow face looks inward through the lattice of his cell,
And he finds his God forgotten, and he seeks no more a sign*(But*
Don John of Austria has burst the battle-line!)
Don John pounding from the slaughter-painted poop,
Purpling all the ocean like a bloody pirate's sloop,
Scarlet running over on the silvers and the golds,
Breaking of the hatches up and bursting of the holds,
Thronging of the thousands up that labour under sex
White for bliss and blind for sun and stunned for liberty.
Vivat Hispania!
Domino Gloria!
Don John of Austria
Has set his people free!

Cervantes on his galley sets the sword back in the sheath
(Don John of Austria rides homeward with a wreath.)
And he sees across a weary land a straggling road in Spain,
Up which a lean and foolish knight for ever rides in vain,
And he smiles, but not as Sultans smile, and settles back the blade....
(But Don John of Austria rides home from the Crusade.)

THE MARCH OF THE BLACK MOUNTAIN 1913

What will there be to remember
Of us in the days to be?
Whose faith was a trodden ember
And even our doubt not free;
Parliaments built of paper,
And the soft swords of gold
That twist like a waxen taper
In the weak aggressor's hold;
A hush around Hunger, slaying
A city of serfs unfed;
What shall we leave for a saying
To praise us when we are dead?
But men shall remember the Mountain
That broke its forest chains,
And men shall remember the Mountain
When it arches against the plains:
And christen their children from it
And season and ship and street,
When the Mountain came to Mahomet
And looked small before his feet.

His head was as high as the crescent
Of the moon that seemed his crown,
And on glory of past and present
The light of his eyes looked down;
One hand went out to the morning
Over Brahmin and Buddhist slain,
And one to the West in scorning
To point at the scars of Spain;
One foot on the hills for warden
By the little Mountain trod;
And one was in a garden
And stood on the grave of God.
But men shall remember the Mountain,

Though it fall down like a tree,
They shall see the sign of the Mountain
Faith cast into the sea;
Though the crooked swords overcome it
And the Crooked Moon ride free,
When the Mountain comes to Mahomet
It has more life than he.

But what will there be to remember
Or what will there be to see —
Though our towns through a long November
Abide to the end and be?
Strength of slave and mechanic
Whose iron is ruled by gold,
Peace of immortal panic,
Love that is hate grown cold —
Are these a bribe or a warning
That we turn not to the sun,
Nor look on the lands of morning
Where deeds at last are done?
Where men shall remember the Mountain
When truth forgets the plain —
And walk in the way of the Mountain
That did not fail in vain;
Death and eclipse and comet,
Thunder and seals that rend:
When the Mountain came to Mahomet;
Because it was the end.

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

Of old with a divided heart
I saw my people’s pride expand,
Since a man’s soul is torn apart
By mother earth and fatherland.

I knew, through many a tangled tale,
Glory and truth not one but two:
King, Constable, and Amirail
Took me like trumpets: but I knew

A blacker thing than blood’s own dye
Weighed down great Hawkins on the sea;
And Nelson turned his blindest eye
On Naples and on liberty.

Therefore to you my thanks, O throne,
O thousandfold and frozen folk,
For whose cold frenzies all your own
The Battle of the Rivers broke;

Who have no faith a man could mourn.
Nor freedom any man desires;
But in a new clean light of scorn
Close up my quarrel with my sires;

Who bring my English heart to me,
Who mend me like a broken toy;
Till I can see you fight and flee,
And laugh as if I were a boy.

THE WIFE OF FLANDERS

Low and brown barns thatched and repatched and tattered
Where I had seven sons until to-day,
A little hill of hay your spur has scattered....
This is not Paris. You have lost the way.

You, staring at your sword to find it brittle,
Surprised at the surprise that was your plan,
Who shaking and breaking barriers not a little
Find never more the death-door of Sedan.

Must I for more than carnage call you claimant,
Paying you a penny for each son you slay?
Man, the whole globe in gold were no repayment
For what *you* have lost. And how shall I repay?

What is the price of that red spark that caught me
From a kind farm that never had a name?
What is the price of that dead man they brought me?
For other dead men do not look the same.

How should I pay for one poor graven steeple
Whereon you shattered what you shall not know,
How should I pay you, miserable people?
How should I pay you everything you owe?34

Unhappy, can I give you back your honour?
Though I forgave would any man forget?
While all the great green land has trampled on her
The treason and terror of the night we met.

Not any more in vengeance or in pardon
An old wife bargains for a bean that’s hers.
You have no word to break: no heart to harden.
Ride on and prosper. You have lost your spurs.

THE CRUSADER RETURNS FROM CAPTIVITY

I have come forth alive from the land of purple and poison and glamour,
Where the charm is strong as the torture, being chosen to change the mind;
Torture of wordless dance and wineless feast without clamour,
Palace hidden in palace, garden with garden behind;

Women veiled in the sun, or bare as brass in the shadows,
And the endless eyeless patterns where each thing seems an eye....
And my stride is on Caesar’s sand where it slides to the English meadows,
To the last low woods of Sussex and the road that goes to Rye.

In the cool and careless woods the eyes of the eunuchs burned not,
But the wild hawk went before me, being free to return or roam,
The hills had broad unconscious backs; and the tree-tops turned not,
And the huts were heedless of me: and I knew I was at home.

And I saw my lady afar and her holy freedom upon her,
A head, without veil, averted, and not to be turned with charms,
And I heard above bannerets blown the intolerant trumpets of honour,
That usher with iron laughter the coming of Christian arms.

My shield hangs stainless still; but I shall not go where they praise it,
A sword is still at my side, but I shall not ride with the King.
Only to walk and to walk and to stun my soul and amaze it,
A day with the stone and the sparrow and every marvellous thing.

I have trod the curves of the Crescent, in the maze of them that adore it,
Curved around doorless chambers and unbeholden abodes,
But I walk in the maze no more; on the sign of the cross I swore it,
The wild white cross of freedom, the sign of the white cross-roads.

And the land shall leave me or take, and the Woman take me or leave me,
There shall be no more Night, or nightmares seen in a glass;
But Life shall hold me alive, and Death shall never deceive me
As long as I walk in England in the lanes that let me pass.

LOVE POEMS

GLENCOE

The star-crowned cliffs seem hinged upon the sky,
The clouds are floating rags across them curled,
They open to us like the gates of God
Cloven in the last great wall of all the world.

I looked, and saw the valley of my soul
Where naked crests fight to achieve the skies,
Where no grain grows nor wine, no fruitful thing,
Only big words and starry blasphemies.

But you have clothed with mercy like a moss
The barren violence of its primal wars,
Sterile although they be and void of rule,
You know my shapeless crags have Wed the stars.

How shall I thank you, O courageous heart.
That of this wasteful world you had no fear;
But bade it blossom in clear faith and sent
Your fair flower-feeding rivers: even as here

The peat burns brimming from their cups of stone
Glow brown and blood-red down the vast decline
As if Christ stood on yonder clouded peak
And turned its thousand waters into wine.

LOVE’S TRAPPIST

There is a place where lute and lyre are broken.
Where scrolls are torn and on a wild wind go,
Where tablets stand wiped naked for a token,
Where laurels wither and the daisies grow.

Lo: I too join the brotherhood of silence,
I am Love’s Trappist and you ask in vain,
For man through Love’s gate, even as through Death’s gate,
Goeth alone and comes not back again.

Yet here I pause, look back across the threshold.
Cry to my brethren, though the world be old,
Prophets and sages, questioners and doubters,
O world, old world, the best hath ne’er been told!

CONFESSIONAL

Now that I kneel at the throne, O Queen,
Pity and pardon me.
Much have I striven to sing the same,
Brother of beast and tree;
Yet when the stars catch me alone
Never a linnet sings —
And the blood of a man is a bitter voice
And cries for foolish things.

Not for me be the vaunt of woe;
Was not I from a boy
Vowed with the helmet and spear and spur
To the blood-red banner of joy?
A man may sing his psalms to a stone,
Pour his blood for a weed,
But the tears of a man are a sudden thing,
And come not of his creed.

Nay, but the earth is kind to me,
Though I cry for a Star,
Leaves and grasses, feather and flower,
Cover the foolish scar,
Prophets and saints and seraphim
Lighten the load with song,
And the heart of a man is a heavy load
For a man to bear along.

MUSIC

Sounding brass and tinkling cymbal,
He that made me sealed my ears,
And the pomp of gorgeous noises,
Waves of triumph, waves of tears,

Thundered empty round and past me,
Shattered, lost for ever more,
Ancient gold of pride and passion,
Wrecked like treasure on a shore.

But I saw her cheek and forehead
Change, as at a spoken word,
And I saw her head uplifted
Like a lily to the Lord.

Nought is lost, but all transmuted,
Ears are sealed, yet eyes have seen;
Saw her smiles (O soul be worthy!),
Saw her tears (O heart be clean!).

THE DELUGE

Though giant rains put out the sun,
Here stand I for a sign.
Though Earth be filled with waters dark,
My cup is filled with wine.
Tell to the trembling priests that here
Under the deluge rod,
One nameless, tattered, broken man
Stood up and drank to God.

Sun has been where the rain is now,
Bees in the heat to hum,
Haply a humming maiden came,
Now let the Deluge come:
Brown of aureole, green of garb,
Straight as a golden rod,
Drink to the throne of thunder now!
Drink to the wrath of God.

High in the wreck I held the cup,
I clutched my rusty sword,
I cocked my tattered feather
To the glory of the Lord.
Not undone were the heaven and earth,
This hollow world thrown up,
Before one man had stood up straight!
And drained it like a cup.

THE STRANGE MUSIC

Other loves may sink and settle, other loves may loose and slack,
But I wander like a minstrel with a harp upon his back,
Though the harp be on my bosom, though I finger and I fret,
Still, my hope is all before me: for I cannot play it yet.

In your strings is hid a music that no hand hath ere let fall,
In your soul is sealed a pleasure that you have not known at all;
Pleasure subtle as your spirit, strange and slender as your frame,
Fiercer than the pain that folds you, softer than your sorrow’s name.

Not as mine, my soul’s anointed, not as mine the rude and light
Easy mirth of many faces, swaggering pride of song and fight;
Something stranger, something sweeter, something waiting you afar,
Secret as your stricken senses, magic as your sorrows are.

But on this, God’s harp supernal, stretched but to be stricken once.
Hoary Time is a beginner, Life a bungler, Death a dunce.
But I will not fear to match them — no, by God, I will not fear,
I will learn you, I will play you and the stars stand still to hear.

THE GREAT MINIMUM

It is something to have wept as we have wept,
It is something to have done as we have done,
It is something to have watched when all men slept,
And seen the stars which never see the sun.

It is something to have smelt the mystic rose,
Although it break and leave the thorny rods,
It is something to have hungered once as those
Must hunger who have ate the bread of gods.

To have seen you and your unforgotten face,
Brave as a blast of trumpets for the fray.
Pure as white lilies in a watery space,
It were something, though you went from me to-day.

To have known the things that from the weak are furled,
Perilous ancient passions, strange and high;
It is something to be wiser than the world,
It is something to be older than the sky.

In a time of sceptic moths and cynic rusts,
And fatted lives that of their sweetness tire,
In a world of flying loves and fading lusts,
It is something to be sure of a desire.

Lo, blessed are our ears for they have heard;
Yea, blessed are our eyes for they have seen:
Let thunder break on man and beast and bird
And the lightning. It is something to have been.

THE MORTAL ANSWERS

.................COME AWAY —
WITH THE FAIRIES, HAND IN HAND,
FOR THE WORLD IS MORE FULL OF WEEPING
THAN YOU CAN UNDERSTAND.

W.B. Yeats.

From the Wood of the Old Wives' Fables
They glittered out of the grey,
And with all the Armies of Elf-land
I strove like a beast at bay;

With only a right arm wearied,
Only a red sword worn,
And the pride of the House of Adam
That holdeth the stars in scorn.

For they came with chains of flowers
And lilies lances free,
There in the quiet greenwood
To take my grief from me.

And I said, "Now all is shaken
When heavily hangs the brow,
When the hope of the years is taken
The last star sunken. Now —

"Hear, you chattering cricket,
Hear, you spawn of the sod,
The strange strong cry in the darkness
Of one man praising God,

"That out of the night and nothing
With travail of birth he came

To stand one hour in the sunlight
Only to say her name.

“Falls through her hair the sunshine
In showers; it touches, see,
Her high bright cheeks in turning;
Ah, Elfin Company,

“The world is hot and cruel,
We are weary of heart and hand.
But the world is more full of glory
Than you can understand.”

A MARRIAGE SONG

Why should we reck of hours that rend
While we two ride together?
The heavens rent from end to end
Would be but windy weather,
The strong stars shaken down in spate
Would be a shower of spring,
And we should list the trump of fate
And hear a linnet sing.

We break the line with stroke and luck,
The arrows run like rain,
If you be struck, or I be struck,
There’s one to strike again.
If you befriend, or I befriend,
The strength is in us twain,
And good things end and bad things end,
And you and I remain.

Why should we reck of ill or well
While we two ride together?
The fires that over Sodom fell
Would be but sultry weather.
Beyond all ends to all men given
Our race is far and fell,
We shall but wash our feet in heaven,
And warm our hands in hell.

Battles unborn and vast shall view
Our faltered standards stream,
New friends shall come and frenzies new.
New troubles toil and teem;
New friends shall pass and still renew
One truth that does not seem,
That I am I, and you are you,
And Death a morning dream.

Why should we reck of scorn or praise
While we two ride together?
The icy air of godless days
Shall be but wintry weather.
If hell were highest, if the heaven
Were blue with devils blue,
I should have guessed that all was even,
If I had dreamed of you.

Little I reck of empty prides,
Of creeds more cold than clay;
To nobler ends and longer rides,
My lady rides to-day.
To swing our swords and take our sides
In that all-ending fray
When stars fall down and darkness hides,
When God shall turn to bay.

Why should we reck of grin and groan
While we two ride together?
The triple thunders of the throne
Would be but stormy weather.
For us the last great fight shall roar,
Upon the ultimate plains,
And we shall turn and tell once more
Our love in English lanes.

BAY COMBE

With leaves below and leaves above,
And groping under tree and tree,
I found the home of my true love,
Who is a wandering home for me.

Who, lost in ruined worlds aloof,
Bore the dread dove wings like a roof;
Who, past the last lost stars of space
Carried the fire-light on her face.

Who, passing as in idle hours,
Tamed the wild weeds to garden flowers;
Stroked the strange whirlwind’s whirring wings,
And made the comets homely things.

Where she went by upon her way
The dark was dearer than the day;
Where she paused in heaven or hell,
The whole world’s tale had ended well.

With leaves below and leaves above.
And groping under tree and tree,
I found the home of my true love,
Who is a wandering home for me.

Where she was flung, above, beneath,
By the rude dance of life and death,
Grow she at Gotham — die at Rome,
Between the pine trees is her home.

In some strange town, some silver morn,
She may have wandered to be born;
Stopped at some motley crowd impressed,
And called them kinsfolk for a jest.

If we again En goodness thrive,
And the dead saints become alive,
Then pedants bald and parchments brown
May claim her blood for London town.

But leaves below and leaves above.
And groping under tree and tree,
I found the home of my true love,
Who is a wandering home for me.

The great gravestone she may pass by,
And without noticing, may die;
The streets of silver Heaven may tread,
With her grey awful eyes unfed.

The city of great peace in pain
May pass, until she find again
This little house of holm and fir
God built before the stars for her.

Here in the fallen leaves is furled
Her secret centre of the world.
We sit and feel in dusk and dun
The stars swing round us like a sun.

For leaves below and leaves above.
And groping under tree and tree,
I found the home of my true love.
Who is a wandering home for me.

RELIGIOUS POEMS

THE WISE MEN

Step softly, under snow or rain,
To find the place where men can pray;
The way is all so very plain
That we may lose the way.

Oh, we have learnt to peer and pore
On tortured puzzles from our youth,
We know all labyrinthine lore,
We are the three wise mert of yore,
And we know all things but the truth.

We have gone round and round the hill,
And lost the wood among the trees,
And learnt long names for every ill,
And served the mad gods, naming still
The Furies the Eumenides.

The gods of violence took the veil
Of vision and philosophy,
The Serpent that brought all men bale,
He bites his own accursed tail,
And calls himself Eternity.

Go humbly ... it has hailed and snowed ...
With voices low and lanterns lit;
So very simple is the road,
That we may stray from it.

The world grows terrible and white,
And blinding white the breaking day;
We walk bewildered in the light,
For something is too large for sight,
And something much too plain to say.

The Child that was ere worlds begun
(... We need but walk a little way,
We need but see a latch undone,...)
The Child that played with moon and sun
Is playing with a little hay.

The house from which the heavens are fed,
The old strange house that is our own,
Where tricks of words are never said.
And Mercy is as plain as bread,
And Honour is as hard as stone.

Go humbly; humble are the skies,
And low and large and fierce the Star;
So very near the Manger lies
That we may travel far.

Hark! Laughter like a lion wakes
To roar to the resounding plain,
And the whole heaven shouts and shakes,
For God Himself is born again,
And we are little children walking
Through the snow and rain.

THE HOUSE OF CHRISTMAS

There fared a mother driven forth
Out of an inn to roam;
In the place where she was homeless
All men are at home.
The crazy stable close at hand,
With shaking timber and shifting sand,
Grew a stronger thing to abide and stand
Than the square stones of Rome.

For men are homesick in their homes,
And strangers under the sun,
And they lay their heads in a foreign land
Whenever the day is done.
Here we have battle and blazing eyes,
And chance and honour and high surprise,
Where the yule tale was begun.

A Child in a foul stable,
Where the beasts feed and foam;
Only where He was homeless
Are you and I at home;
We have hands that fashion and heads that
But our hearts we lost — how long ago!
In a place no chart nor ship can show
Under the sky’s dome.

This world is wild as an old wives’ tale,
And strange the plain things are,
The earth is enough and the air is enough
For our wonder and our war;
But our rest is as far as the fire-drake swings
And our peace is put in impossible things
Where clashed and thundered unthinkable wings
Round an incredible star.

To an open house in the evening
Home shall men come,
To an older place than Eden
And a taller town than Rome.
To the end of the way of the wandering star,
To the things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home.

A SONG OF GIFTS TO GOD

When the first Christmas presents came, the straw where Christ was rolled
Smelt sweeter than their frankincense, burnt brighter than their gold,
And a wise man said, “We will not give; the thanks would be but cold.”

“Nay,” said the next, “To all new gifts, to this gift or another,
Bends the high gratitude of God; even as He now, my brother,
Who had a Father for all time, yet thanks Him for a Mother.

“Yet scarce for Him this yellow stone or prickly-smells and sparse.
Who holds the gold heart of the sun that fed these timber bars,
Nor any scentless lily lives for One that smells the stars.”

Then spake the third of the Wise Men; the wisest of the three:
“We may not with the widest lives enlarge His liberty,
Whose wings are wider than the world. It is not He, but we.

“We say not He has more to gain, but we have more to lose.
Less gold shall go astray, we say, less gold, if thus we choose,
Go to make harlots of the Greeks and hucksters of the Jews.

“Less clouds before colossal feet redden in the under-light,
To the blind gods from Babylon less incense burn to-night,
To the high beasts of Babylon, whose mouths make mock of right.”

Babe of the thousand birthdays, we that are young yet grey,
White with the centuries, still can find no better thing to say,
We that with sects and whims and wars have wasted Christmas Day.

Light Thou Thy censer to Thyself, for all our fires are dim,
Stamp Thou Thine image on our coin, for Caesar’s face grows dim,
And a dumb devil of pride and greed has taken hold of him.

We bring Thee back great Christendom, churches and towns and towers.
And if our hands are glad, O God, to cast them down like flowers,

’Tis not that they enrich Thine hands, but they are saved from ours.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Said the Lord God, “Build a house,
Build it in the gorge of death,
Found it in the throats of hell.
Where the lost sea muttereth,
Fires and whirlwinds, build it well.”

Laboured sternly flame and wind,
But a little, and they cry,
“Lord, we doubt of this Thy will,
We are blind and murmur why,”
And the winds are murmuring still.

Said the Lord God, “Build a house,
Cleave its treasure from the earth,
With the jarring powers of hell
Strive with formless might and mirth,
Tribes and war-men, build it well.”

Then the raw red sons of men
Brake the soil, and lopped the wood,
But a little and they shrill,
“Lord, we cannot view Thy good,”
And the wild men clamour still.

Said the Lord God, “Build a house,
Smoke and iron, spark and steam,
Speak and vote and buy and sell;
Let a new world throb and stream,
Seers and makers, build it well.”

Strove the cunning men and strong,
But a little and they cry,
“Lord, mayhap we are but clay,
And we cannot know the why,”
And the wise men doubt to-day.

Yet though worn and deaf and blind,
Force and savage, king and seer
Labour still, they know not why;
At the dim foundation here,
Knead and plough and think and ply.

Till at last, mayhap, hereon,
Fused of passion and accord,
Love its crown and peace its stay
Rise the city of the Lord
That we darkly build to-day.

A HYMN FOR THE CHURCH MILITANT

Great God, that bowest sky and star,
Bow down our towering thoughts to thee,
And grant us in a faltering war
The firm feet of humility.

Lord, we that snatch the swords of flame,
Lord, we that cry about Thy car.
We too are weak with pride and shame,
We too are as our foemen are.

Yea, we are mad as they are mad,
Yea, we are blind as they are blind,
Yea, we are very sick and sad
Who bring good news to all mankind.

The dreadful joy Thy Son has sent
Is heavier than any care;
We find, as Cain his punishment,
Our pardon more than we can bear.

Lord, when we cry Thee far and near
And thunder through all lands unknown
The gospel into every ear,
Lord, let us not forget our own.

Cleanse us from ire of creed or class,
The anger of the idle tings;
Sow in our souls, like living grass,
The laughter of all lowly things.

THE BEATIFIC VISION

Then Bernard smiled at me, that I should gaze
But I had gazed already; caught the view,
Faced the unfathomable ray of rays
Which to itself and by itself is true.

Then was my vision mightier than man’s speech;
Speech snapt before it like a flying spell;
And memory and all that time can teach
Before that splendid outrage failed and fell.

As when one dreameth and remembereth not
Waking, what were his pleasures or his pains,
With every feature of the dream forgot,
The printed passion of the dream remains: —

Even such am I; within whose thoughts resides
No picture of that sight nor any part
Nor any memory: in whom abides
Only a happiness within the heart,

A secret happiness that soaks the heart
As hills are soaked by slow unsealing snow,
Or secret as that wind without a chart
Whereon did the wild leaves of Sibyl go.

O light uplifted from all mortal knowing,
Send back a little of that glimpse of thee.
That of its glory I may kindle glowing
One tiny spark for all men yet to be.

THE TRUCE OF CHRISTMAS

Passionate peace is in the sky —
And in the snow in silver sealed
The beasts are perfect in the field,
And men seem men so suddenly —
(But take ten swords and ten times ten
And blow the bugle in praising men;
For we are for all men under the sun,
And they are against us every one;
And misers haggle and madmen clutch,
And there is peril in praising much.
And we have the terrible tongues uncurled
That praise the world to the sons of the world.)

The idle humble hill and wood
Are bowed upon the sacred birth,
And for one little hour the earth
Is lazy with the love of good —
(But ready are you, and ready am I,
If the battle blow and the guns go by;
For we are for all men under the sun,
And they are against us every one;
And the men that hate herd all together,
To pride and gold, and the great white feather
And the thing is graven in star and stone
That the men who love are all alone.)

Hunger is hard and time is tough,
But bless the beggars and kiss the kings,
For hope has broken the heart of things,
And nothing was ever praised enough.
(But bold the shield for a sudden swing
And point the sword when you praise a thing,
For we are for all men under the sun,
And they are against us every one;

And mime and merchant, thane and thrall
Hate us because we love them all;
Only till Christmastide go by
Passionate peace is in the sky.)

A HYMN

O God of earth and altar,
Bow down and hear our cry
Our earthly rulers falter,
Our people drift and die;
The walls of gold entomb us,
The swords of scorn divide,
Take not thy thunder from us,
But take away our pride.

From all that terror teaches,
From lies of tongue and pen,
From all the easy speeches
That comfort cruel men,
From sale and profanation
Of honour and the sword,
From sleep and from damnation,
Deliver us, good Lord!

Tie in a living tether
The prince and priest and thrall,
Bind all our lives together,
Smite us and save us all;
In ire and exultation
Aflame with faith, and free,
Lift up a living nation,
A single sword to thee.

A CHRISTMAS SONG FOR THREE GUILDS

TO BE SUNG A LONG TIME AGO — OR HENCE

THE CARPENTERS

St. Joseph to the Carpenters said on a Christmas Day:
“The master shall have patience and the prentice shall obey;
And your word unto your women shall be nowise hard or wild:
For the sake of me, your master, who have worshipped Wife and Child.
But softly you shall frame the fence, and softly carve the door,
And softly plane the table — as to spread it for the poor,
And all your thoughts be soft and white as the wood of the white tree.
But if they tear the Charter, Jet the tocsin speak for me!
Let the wooden sign above your shop be prouder to be scarred
Than the lion-shield of Lancelot that hung at Joyous Garde.”

THE SHOEMAKERS

St. Crispin to the shoemakers said on a Christmastide:
“Who fashions at another’s feet will get no good of pride.
They were bleeding on the Mountain, the feet that brought good news,
The latchet of whose shoes we were not worthy to unloose.
See that your feet offend not, nor lightly lift your head,
Tread softly on the sunlit roads the bright dust of the dead.
Let your own feet be shod with peace; be lowly all your lives.
But if they touch the Charter, ye shall nail it with your knives.
And the bill-blades of the commons drive in all as dense array
As once a crash of arrows came, upon St. Crispin’s Day.”

THE PAINTERS

St. Luke unto the painters on Christmas Day he said:
“See that the robes are white you dare to dip in gold and red;
For only gold the kings can give, and only blood the saints;
And his high task grows perilous that mixes them in paints.
Keep you the ancient order; follow the men that knew

The labyrinth of black and whits, the maze of green and blue;
Paint mighty things, paint paltry things, paint silly things or sweet.
But if men break the Charter, you may slay them in the street.
And if you paint one post for them, then ... but you know it well,
You paint a harlot’s face to drag all heroes down to hell.”

ALL TOGETHER

Almighty God to all mankind on Christmas Day said He:
“I rent you from the old red hills and, rending, made you free.
There was charter, there was challenge; in a blast of breath I gave;
You can be all things other; you cannot be a slave.
You shall be tired and tolerant of fancies as they fade,
But if men doubt the Charter, ye shall call on the Crusade —
Trumpet and torch and catapult, cannon and bow and blade,
Because it was My challenge to all the things I made.”

THE NATIVITY

The thatch on the roof was as golden,
Though dusty the straw was and old,
The wind had a peal as of trumpets,
Though blowing and barren and cold,
The mother’s hair was a glory
Though loosened and torn,
For under the eaves in the gloaming
A child was born.

Have a myriad children been quickened.
Have a myriad children grown old,
Grown gross and unloved and embittered,
Grown cunning and savage and cold?
God abides In a terrible patience,
Unangered, unworn,
And again for the child that was squandered
A child is born.

What know we of æons behind us,
Dim dynasties lost long ago,
Huge empires, like dreams unremembered,
Huge cities for ages laid low?
This at least — that with blight and with blessing
With flower and with thorn,
Love was there, and his cry was among them,
“A child is born.”

Though the darkness be noisy with systems,
Dark fancies that fret and disprove,
Still the plumes stir around us, above us
The wings of the shadow of love:
Oh! princes and priests, have ye seen it
Grow pale through your scorn.
Huge dawns sleep before us, deep changes,
A child is born.

And the rafters of toil still are gilded
With the dawn of the star of the heart,
And the wise men draw near in the twilight,
Who are weary of learning and art,
And the face of the tyrant is darkened.
His spirit is torn,
For a new King is enthroned; yea, the sternest,
A child is born.

And the mother still joys for the whispered
First stir of unspeakable things,
Still feels that high moment unfurling
Red glory of Gabriel’s wings.
Still the babe of an hour is a master
Whom angels adorn,
Emmanuel, prophet, anointed,
A child is born.

And thou, that art still in thy cradle,
The sun being crown for thy brow.
Make answer, our flesh, make an answer,
Say, whence art thou come — who art thou?
Art thou come back on earth for our teaching
To train or to warn — ?
Hush — how may we know? — knowing only
A child is born.

A CHILD OF THE SNOWS

There is heard a hymn when the panes dim
And never before or again,
When the nights are strong with a darkness long,
And the dark is alive with rain.

Never we know but in sleet and in snow,
The place where the great fires are,
That the midst of the earth is a raging mirth
And the heart of the earth a star.

And at night we win to the ancient inn
Where the child in the frost is furled,
We follow the feet where all souls meet
At the inn at the end of the world.

The gods lie dead where the leaves lie red,
For the flame of the sun is flown.
The gods lie cold where the leaves lie gold.
And a Child comes forth alone.

A WORD

A word came forth in Galilee, a word like to a star;
It climbed and rang and blessed and burnt wherever brave hearts are;
A word of sudden secret hope, of trial and increase
Of wrath and pity fused in fire, and passion kissing peace.
A star that o’er the citied world beckoned, a sword of flame;
A star with myriad thunders tongued: a mighty word there came.

The wedge’s dart passed into it, the groan of timberwains,
The ringing of the rivet nails, the shrieking of the planes;
The hammering on the roofs at morn, the busy workshop roar;
The hiss of shavings drifted deep along the windy floor;
The heat-browned toiler’s crooning song, the hum of human worth —
Mingled of all the noise of crafts, the ringing word went forth.

The splash of nets passed into it, the grind of sand and shell,
The boat-hook’s clash, the boat-oars’ jar, the cries to buy and sell,
The flapping of the landed shoals, the canvas crackling free,
And through all varied notes and cries, the roaring of the sea,
The noise of little lives and brave, of needy lives and high;
In gathering all the throes of earth, the living word went by.

Earth’s giant sins bowed down to it, in Empire’s huge eclipse,
When darkness sat above the thrones, seven thunders on her lips,
The woe of cities entered it, the clang of idols’ falls,
The scream of filthy Caesars stabbed high in their brazen halls,
The dim hoarse Hoods of naked men, the worldrealms snapping girth,
The trumpets of Apocalypse, the darkness of the earth:

The wrath that brake the eternal lamp and hid the eternal hill,
A world’s destruction loading, the word went onward still —
The blaze of creeds passed into it, the hiss of horrid fires,
The headlong spear, the scarlet cross, the hair-shirt and the briars,
The cloistered brethren’s thunderous chaunt, the errant champion’s song,
The shifting of the crowns and thrones, the tangle of the strong.

The shattering fall of crest and crown and shield and cross and cope,
The tearing of the gauds of time, the blight of prince and pope,
The reign of ragged millions leagued to wrench a loaded debt,
Loud with the many throated roar, the word went forward yet.
The song of wheels passed into it, the roaring and the smoke
The riddle of the want and wage, the fogs that burn and choke.
The breaking of the girths of gold, the needs that creep and swell.
The strengthening hope, the dazing light, the deafening evangel,
Through kingdoms dead and empires damned, through changes without cease,
With earthquake, chaos, born and fed, rose, — and the word was “Peace.”

RHYMES FOR THE TIMES

ANTICHRIST, OR THE REUNION OF CHRISTENDOM: AN ODE

"A BILL WHICH HAS SHOCKED THE CONSCIENCE OF
EVERY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN EUROPE." —
Mr. F.E. Smith, ON THE WELSH DISESTABLISHMENT BILL.

Are they clinging to their crosses,
F.E. Smith,
Where the Breton boat-fleet tosses,
Are they, Smith?
Do they, fasting, tramping, bleeding,
Wait the news from this our city?
Groaning "That's the Second Reading!"
Hissing "There is still Committed"
If the voice of Cecil falters,
If McKenna's point has pith,
Do they tremble for their altars?
Do they, Smith?

Russian peasants round their pope
Huddled, Smith,
Hear about it all, I hope,
Don't they, Smith?
In the mountain hamlets clothing
Peaks beyond Caucasian pales,
Where Establishment means nothing
And they never heard of Wales,
Do they read it all in Hansard
With a crib to read it with —
"Welsh Tithes: Dr. Clifford Answered,"
Really, Smith?

In the lands where Christians were,
F.E. Smith,
In the little lands laid bare,

Smith, O Smith!
Where the Turkish bands are busy,
And the Tory name is blessed
Since they hailed the Cross of Dizzy
On the banners from the West!
Men don’t think it half so hard if
Islam burns their kin and kith,
Since a curate lives in Cardiff
Saved by Smith.

It would greatly, I must own,
Soothe me, Smith,
If you left this theme alone,
Holy Smith!
For your legal cause or civil
You fight well and get your fee;
For your God or dream or devil
You will answer, not to me.
Talk about the pews and steeples
And the Cash that goes therewith!
But the souls of Christian peoples....
— Chuck it, Smith!

THE REVOLUTIONIST: OR LINES TO A STATESMAN

“I WAS NEVER STANDING BY WHILE A REVOLUTION
WAS GOING ON.” — *Speech by the Rt. Hon. Walter Long*.

When Death was on thy drums, Democracy,
And with one rush of slaves the world was free,
In that high dawn that Kings shall not forget,
A void there was and Walter was not yet.
Through sacked Versailles, at Valmy in the fray,
They did without him in some kind of way;
Red Christendom all Walterless they cross,
And in their fury hardly feel their loss....
Fades the Republic; faint as Roland’s horn,
Her trumpets taunt us with a sacred scorn....
Then silence fell; and Mr. Long was born.

From his first hours in his expensive cot
He never saw the tiniest viscount shot.
In deference to his wealthy parents’ whim
The wildest massacres were kept from him.
The wars that dyed Pall Mall and Brompton red
Passed harmless o’er that one unconscious head:
For all that little Long could understand
The rich might still be rulers of the land.
Vain are the pious arts of parenthood,
Foiled Revolution bubbled in his blood;
Until one day (the babe unborn shall rue it)
The Constitution bored him and he slew it.

If I were wise and good and rich and strong —
Fond, impious thought, if I were Walter Long —
If I could water sell like molten gold,
And make grown people do as they are told,
If over private fields and wastes as wide
As a Greek city for which heroes died,
I owned the houses and the men inside —

If all this hung on one thin thread of habit
I would not revolutionize a rabbit.

I would sit tight with all my gifts and glories,
And even preach to unconverted Tories,
That the fixed system that our land inherits,
Viewed from a certain standpoint, has its merits.
I’d guard the laws like any Radical,
And keep each precedent, however small,
However subtle, misty, dusty, dreamy,
Lest man by chance should look at me and see me;
Lest men should ask what madman made me lord
Of English ploughshares and the English sword;
Lest men should mark how sleepy is the nod
That drills the dreadful images of God!

Walter, be wise! avoid the wild and new,
The Constitution is the game for you.
Walter, beware! scorn not the gathering throng
It suffers, yet it may not suffer wrong,
It suffers, yet it cannot suffer Long.
And if you goad it these grey rules to break,
For a few pence, see that you do not wake
Death and the splendour of the scarlet cap,
Boston and Valmy, Yorktown and Jemmappes,
Freedom in arms, the riding and the routing,
The thunder of the captains and the shouting,
All that lost riot that you did not share — And
when that riot comes — you *will* be there.

THE SHAKESPEARE MEMORIAL

Lord Lilac thought it rather rotten
That Shakespeare should be quite
And therefore got on a Committee
With several chaps out of the city.
And Shorter and Sir Herbert Tree,
Lord Rothschild and Lord Rosebery
And F.C.G. and Comyns Carr,
Two dukes and a dramatic star,
Also a clergyman now dead;
And while the vain world careless sped
Unheeding the heroic name —
The souls most fed with Shakespeare’s flame
Still sat unconquered in a ring,
Remembering him like anything.

Lord Lilac did not long remain.
Lord Lilac did not come again.
He softly lit a cigarette
And sought some other social set
Where, in some other knots or rings,
People were doing cultured things,
— Miss Zwilt’s Humane Vivarium
— The little men that paint on gum
— The exquisite Gorilla Girl....
He sometimes, in this giddy whirl
(Not being really bad at heart),
Remembered Shakespeare with a start —
But not with that grand constancy
Of Clement Shorter, Herbert Tree,
Lord Rosebery and Comyns Carr
And all the other names there are;
Who stuck like limpets to the spot,
Lest they forgot, lest they forgot.

Lord Lilac was of slighter stuff;
Lord Lilac had had quite enough.

THE HORRIBLE HISTORY OF JONES

Jones had a dog; it had a chain;
Not often worn, not causing pain;
But, as the I.K.L. had passed
Their “Unleashed Cousins Act” at last,
Inspectors took the chain away;
Whereat the canine barked “hurray”!
At which, of course, the S.P.U.
(Whose Nervous Motorists’ Bill was through),
Were forced to give the dog in charge
For being Audibly at Large.
None, you will say, were now annoyed,
Save haply Jones — the yard was void.
But something being in the lease
About “alarms to aid police,”
The U.S.U. annexed the yard
For having no sufficient guards
Now if there’s one condition
The C.C.P. are strong upon
It is that every house one buys
Must have a yard for exercise;
So Jones, as tenant, was unfit.
His state of health was proof of it.
Two doctors of the T.T.U.’s
Told him his legs from long disuse,
Were atrophied; and saying “So
From step to higher step we go
Till everything is New and True,”
They cut his legs off and withdrew.
You know the E.T.S.T.’s views
Are stronger than the T.T.U.’s:
And soon (as one may say) took wing
The Arms, though not the Man, I sing.
To see him sitting limbless there
Was more than the K.K. could bear

“In mercy silence with all speed
That mouth there are no hands to feed;
What cruel sentimentalist,
O Jones, would doom thee to exist —
Clinging to selfish Selfhood yet?
Weak one! Such reasoning might upset
The Pump Act, and the accumulation
Of all constructive legislation;
Let us construct you up a bit—”
The head fell off when it was hit:
Then words did rise and honest doubt,
And four Commissions sat about
Whether the slash that left him dead
Cut off his body or his head.

An author in the Isle of Wight
Observed with unconcealed delight
A land of old and just renown
Where Freedom slowly broadened down
From Precedent to Precedent....
And this, I think, was what he meant.

THE NEW FREETHINKER

John Grubby, who was short and stout
And troubled with religious doubt,
Refused about the age of three
To sit upon the curate’s knee;
(For so the eternal strife must rage
Between the spirit of the age
And Dogma, which, as is well known.
Does simply hate to be outgrown).
Grubby, the young idea that shoots,
Outgrew the ages like old boots;
While still, to all appearance, small,
Would have no Miracles at all;
And just before the age of ten
Firmly refused Free Will to men.
The altars reeled, the hen-ens shook,
Just as he read of in the book;
Flung from his house went forth the youth
Alone with tempests and the Truth,
Up to the distant city and dim
Where his papa had bought for him
A partnership in Chepe and Deer
Worth, say, twelve hundred pounds a year.
But he was resolute. Lord Brute
Had found him useful; and Lord Loot,
With whom few other men would act,
Valued his promptitude and tact;
Never did even philanthropy
Enrich a man more rapidly:
Twas he that stopped the Strike in Coal,
For hungry children racked his soul;
To end their misery there and then
He filled the mines with Chinamen —
Sat in that House that broke the Kings,
And voted for all sores of things —

And rose from Under-Sec. to Sec.
Some grumbled. Growlers who gave less
Than generous worship to success,
The little printers in Dundee
Who got ten years for blasphemy,
(Although he let them off with seven)
Respect him rather less than heaven.
No matter. This can still be said:
Never to supernatural dread,
Never to unseen deity,
Did Sir John Grubby bend the knee;
Never did dream of hell or wrath
Turn Viscount Grubby from his path;
Nor was he bribed by fabled bliss
To kneel to any world but this.
The curate lives in Camden Town,
His lap still empty of renown,
And still across the waste of years
John Grubby, in the House of Peers,
Faces that curate, proud and free,
And never sits upon his knee.

IN MEMORIAM P.D.

NICE, JANUARY 30, 1914.

If any in an island cradle curled
Of comfort, may make offerings to you,
Who in the day of all denial blew
A bugle through the blackness of the world,

An English hand would touch your shroud, in trust
That truth again be told in English speech.
And we too yet may practise what we preach,
Though it were practising the bayonet thrust.

Cutting that giant neck from sand to sand,
From sea to sea; it was a little thing
Beside your sudden shout and sabre-swing
That cut the throat of thieves in every land.

Heed not if half-wits mock your broken blade:
Mammon our master doeth all things ill.
You are the Fool that charged a windmill. Still,
The Miller is a Knave; and was afraid.

Lay down your sword. Ruin will know her own.
Let each small statesman sow his weak wild oat,
Or turn his coat to decorate his coat,
Or take the throne and perish by the throne.

Lay down your sword. And let the White Flag fade
To grey; and let the Red Flag fade to pink,
For these that climb and climb; and cannot sink
So deep as death and honour, Déroulède.

SONNET WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE SEASON

TO A POPULAR LEADER MUCH TO BE CONGRATULATED
ON THE AVOIDANCE OF A STRIKE AT CHRISTMAS.

I know you. You will hail the huge release,
Saying the sheathing of a thousand swords,
In silence and injustice, well accords
With Christmas bells. And you will gild with grease
The papers, the employers, the police,
And vomit up the void your windy words
To your New Christ; who bears no whip of cords
For them that traffic in the doves of peace.

The feast of friends, the candle-fruited tree,
I have not failed to honour. And I say
It would be better for such men as we,
And we be nearer Bethlehem, it we lay
Shot dead on scarlet snows for liberty,
Dead in the daylight upon Christmas Day.

A SONG OF SWORDS

"A DROVE OF CATTLE CAME INTO A VILLAGE CALLED SWORDS, AND WAS STOPPED BY THE RIOTERS." — -*Daily Paper*.

In the place called Swords on the Irish road
It is told for a new renown
How we field the horns of the cattle, and how
We will hold the horns of the devil now
Ere the lord of bell, with the horn on his brow,
Is crowned in Dublin town

Light in the East and light in the West,
And light on the cruel lords,
On the souls that suddenly all men knew,
And the green flag flew and the red flag flew,
And many a wheel of the world stopped, too,
When the cattle were stopped at Swords.

Be they sinners or less than saints
That smite in the street for rage,
We know where the shame shines bright; we know
You that they smite at, you their foe,
Lords of the lawless wage and low.
This is your lawful wage.

You pinched a child to a torture price
That you dared not name in words;
So black a jest was the silver bit
That your own speech shook for the shame of
And the coward was plain as a cow they hit
When the cattle have strayed at Swords.

The wheel of the torment of wives went round
To break men's brotherhood;
You gave the good Irish blood to grease
The clubs of your country's enemies;

You saw the brave man beat to the knees:
And you saw that it was good.

The rope of the rich is long and long —
The longest of hangmen’s cords;
But the kings and crowds are holding their bream,
In a giant shadow o’er all beneath
Where God stands holding the scales of Death
Between the cattle and Swords.

Haply the lords that hire and lend,
The lowest of all men’s lords,
Who sell their kind like kine at a fair.
Will find no head of their cattle there;
But faces of men where cattle were:
Faces of men — and Swords.

And the name shining and terrible,
The sternest of all man’s words,
Still mark that place to seek or shun,
In the streets where the struggling cattle run —
Grass and a silence of judgment done
In the place that is called Swords.

A SONG OF DEFEAT

The line breaks and the guns go under,
The lords and the lackeys ride the plain;
I draw deep breaths of the dawn and thunder,
And the whole of my heart grows young again.
For our Chiefs said “Done,” and I did not deem it;
Our Seers said “Peace,” and it was not peace;
Earth will grow worse till men redeem it,
And wars more evil, ere all wars cease.
But the old flags reel and the old drums rattle.
As once in my life they throbbed and reeled;
I have found ray youth in the lost battle,
I have found my heart on the battlefield.
For we that fight till the world is free,
We are not easy in victory:
We have known each other too long, my brother,
And fought each other, the world and we.

And I dream of the days when work was scrappy,
And rare in our pockets the mark of the mint,
When we were angry and poor and happy,
And proud of seeing our names in print.
For so they conquered and so we scattered,
When the Devil rode and his dogs smelt gold,
And the peace of a harmless folk was shattered;
When I was twenty and odd years old.
When the mongrel men that the market classes
Had slimy hands upon England’s rod,
And sword in hand upon Afric’s passes
Her last Republic cried to God.
For the men no lords can buy or sell,
They sit not easy when all goes well.
They have said to each other what naught can smother,
They have seen each other, our souls and hell.

It is all as of old; the empty clangour.
The Nothing scrawled on a five-foot page,
The huckster who, mocking holy anger,
Painfully paints his face with rage.
And the faith of the poor is faint and partial,
And the pride of the rich is all for sale,
And the chosen heralds of England's Marshal
Are the sandwich-men of the "Daily Mail."
And the niggards that dare not give are glutted,
And the feeble that dare not fail are strong,
So while the City of Toil is gutted,
I sit in the saddle and sing my song.
For we that fight till the world is free,
We have no comfort in victory;
We have read each other as Cain his brother,
We know each other, these slaves and we.

SONNET

ON HEARING A LANDLORD ACCUSED (FALSELY, FOR ALL THE BARD CAN SAY) OF NEGLECTING ONE OF THE NUMEROUS WHITE HORSES THAT WERE OR WERE NOT CONNECTED WITH ALFRED THE GREAT

If you have picked your lawn of leaves and snails,
If you have told your valet, even with oaths,
Once a week or so, to brush your clothes.
If you have dared to clean your teeth, or nails,
While the Horse upon the holy mountain fails —
Then God that Alfred to his earth betrothes
Send on you screaming all that honour loathes,
Horsewhipping, Hounsditch, debts, and *Daily Mails*.

Can you not even conserve? For if indeed
The White Horse fades; then closer creeps the fight
When we shall scour the face of England white,
Plucking such men as you up like a weed,
And fling them far beyond a shaft shot right
When Wessex went to battle for the creed.

AFRICA

A sleepy people, without priests or kings,
Dreamed here, men say, to drive us to the sea:
O let us drive ourselves! For it is free
And smells of honour and of English things.
How came we brawling by these bitter springs,
We of the North? — two kindly nations — we?
Though the dice rattles and the clear coin rings,
Here is no place for living men to be.
Leave them the gold that worked and whined for it,
Let them that have no nation anywhere
Be native here, and fat and full of bread;
But we, whose sins were human, we will quit
The land of blood, and leave these vultures there,
Noiselessly happy, feeding on the dead.

THE DEAD HERO

We never saw you, like our sires,
For whom your face was Freedom’s face,
Nor know what office-tapes and wires
With such strong cords may interlace;
We know not if the statesmen then
Were fashioned as the sort we see,
We know that not under your ken
Did England laugh at Liberty.

Yea, this one thing is known of you,
We know that not till you were dumb,
Not till your course was thundered through,
Did Mammon see his kingdom come.
The songs of theft, the swords of hire,
The clerks that raved, the troops that ran
The empire of the world’s desire,
The dance of all the dirt began.

The happy jewelled alien men
Worked then but as a little leaven;
From some more modest palace then
The Soul of Dives stank to Heaven.
But when they planned with lisp and leer
Their careful war upon the weak,
They smote your body on its bier,
For surety that you could not speak.

A hero in the desert died;
Men cried that saints should bury him.
And round the grave should guard and ride,
A chivalry of Cherubim.
God said: “There is a better place,
A nobler trophy and more tall;
The beasts that fled before his face
Shall come to make his funeral.

“The mighty vermin of the void
That hid them from his bended bow,
Shall crawl from caverns overjoyed,
Jackal and snake and carrion crow.
And perched above the vulture’s eggs,
Reversed upon its hideous head,
A blue-faced ape shall wave its legs
To tell the world that he is dead.”

AN ELECTION ECHO 1906

This is their trumpet ripe and rounded,
They have burnt the wheat and gathered the chaff,
And we that have fought them, we that have watched them,
Have we at least not cause to laugh?

Never so low at least we stumbled —
Dead we have been but not so dead
As these that live on the life they squandered,
As these that drink of the blood they shed.

We never boasted the thing we blundered,
We never Haunted the thing that fails,
We never quailed from the living laughter,
To howl to the dead who tell no tales,

’Twas another finger at least that pointed
Our wasted men or our emptied bags,
It was not we that sounded the trumpet
In front of the triumph of wrecks and rags.

Fear not these, they have made their bargain,
They have counted the cost of the last of raids,
They have staked their lives on the things that live not,
They have burnt their house for a fire that fades.

Five years ago and we might have feared them,
Been drubbed by the coward and taught by the dunce;
Truth may endure and be told and re-echoed,
But a lie can never be young but once.

Five years ago and we might have feared them;
Now, when they lift the laurelled brow,
There shall naught go up from our hosts assembled
But a laugh like thunder. We know them now.

THE SONG OF THE WHEELS

WRITTEN DURING A FRIDAY AND SATURDAY IN AUGUST 1911.

King Dives he was waiting in his garden all alone,
Where his flowers are made of iron and his trees are made of stone,
And his hives are full of thunder and the lightning leaps and kills,
For the mills of God grind slowly; and he works with other mills.
Dives found a mighty silence; and he missed the throb and leap,
The noise of all the sleepless creatures singing him to sleep.
And he said: “A screw has fallen — or a bolt has slipped aside —
Some little thing has shifted”: and the little things replied:

“Call upon the wheels, master, call upon the wheels;
We are taking rest, master, finding how it feels,
Strict the law of thine and mine: theft we ever shun —
All the wheels are thine, master — tell the wheels to run!
Yea, the Wheels are mighty gods — set them going then!
We are only men, master, have you heard of men?

“O, they live on earth like fishes, and a gasp is all their breath.
God for empty honours only gave them death and scorn of death,
And you walk the worms for carpet and you tread a stone that squeals —
Only, God that made them worms did not make them wheels.
Man shall shut his heart against you and you shall not find the spring.
Man who wills the thing he wants not, the intolerable thing —
Once he likes his empty belly better than your empty head
Earth and heaven are dumb before him: he is stronger than the dead.

“Call upon the wheels, master, call upon the wheels,
Steel is beneath your hand, stone beneath your heels,
Steel will never laugh aloud, hearing what we heard,
Stone will never break its heart, mad with hope deferred —
Men of tact that arbitrate, slow reform that heals —
Save the stinking grease, master, save it for the wheels.

"King Dives in the garden, we have naught to give or hold —
(Even while the baby came alive the rotten sticks were sold.)
The savage knows a cavern and the peasants keep a plot,
Of all the things that men have had — lo! we have them not.
Not a scrap of earth where ants could lay their eggs —
Only this poor lump of earth that walks about on legs —
Only this poor wandering mansion, only these two walking trees.
Only hands and hearts and stomachs — what have you to do with these?
You have engines big and burnished, tall beyond our fathers' ken,
Why should you make peace and traffic with such feeble folk as men?

"Call upon the wheels, master, call upon the wheels,
They are deaf to demagogues, deaf to crude appeals;
Are our hands our own, master? — how the doctors doubt!
Are our legs our own, master? wheels can run without —
Prove the points are delicate — they will understand.
All the wheels are loyal; see how still they stand!"

King Dives he was walking in his garden in the sun,
He shook his hand at heaven, and he called the wheels to run,
And the eyes of him were hateful eyes, the lips of him were curled,
And he called upon his father that is lord below the world,
Sitting in the Gate of Treason, in the gate of broken seals,
"Bend and bind them, bend and bind them, bend and bind them into wheels,
Then once more in all my garden there may swing and sound and sweep —
The noise of all the sleepless things that sing the soul to sleep."

Call upon the wheels, master, call upon the wheels.
Weary grow the holidays when you miss the meals,
Through the Gate of Treason, through the gate within,
Cometh fear and greed of fame, cometh deadly sin;
If a man grow faint, master, take him ere he kneels.
Take him, break him, rend him, end him, roll him, crush him with the wheels.

THE SECRET PEOPLE

Smile at us, pay us, pass us; but do not quite forget.
For we are the people of England, that never has spoken yet.
There is many a fat farmer that drinks less cheerfully,
There is many a free French peasant who is richer and sadder than we.
There are no folk in the whole world so helpless or so wise.
There is hunger in our bellies, there is laughter in our eyes;
You laugh at us and love us, both mugs and eyes are wet:
Only you do not know us. For we have not spoken yet.

The fine French kings came over in a flutter of flags and dames.
We liked their smiles and battles, but we never could say their names.
The blood ran red to Bosworth and the High French lords went down;
There was naught but a naked people under a naked crown.

And the eyes of the King’s Servants turned terribly every way,
And the gold of the King’s Servants rose higher every day.
They burnt the homes of the shaven men, that had been quaint and kind,
Till there was no bed in a monk’s house, nor food that man could find.
The inns of God where no man paid, that were the wall of the weak,
The King’s Servants ate them all. And Still we did not speak.

And the face of the King’s Servants grew greater than the King:
He tricked them, and they trapped him, and stood round him in a ring.
The new grave lords closed round him, that had eaten the abbey’s fruits.
And the men of the new religion, with their bibles in their boots.
We saw their shoulders moving, to menace or discuss,
And some were pure and some were vile; but none took heed of us.
We saw the King as they killed him, and his face was proud and pale;
And a few men talked of freedom, while England talked of ale.

A war that we understood not came over the world and woke
Americans, Frenchmen, Irish; but we knew not the things they spoke.
They talked about rights and nature and peace and the people’s reign:
And the squires, our masters, bade us fight; and never scorned us again.
Weak if we be for ever, could none condemn us then;

Men called us serfs and drudges; men knew that we were men.
In foam and flame at Trafalgar, on Albuera plains,
We did and died like lions, to keep ourselves in chains,
We lay in living ruins; firing and fearing not
The strange fierce face of the Frenchmen who knew for what they fought,
And the man who seemed to be more than man we strained against and broke;
And we broke our own rights with him. And still we never spoke.

Our patch of glory ended; we never heard guns again.
But the squire seemed struck in the saddle; he was foolish, as if in pain
He leaned on a staggering lawyer, he clutched a cringing Jew,
He was stricken; it may be, after all, he was stricken at Waterloo.
Or perhaps the shades of the shaven men, whose spoil is in his house,
Come back in shining shapes at last to spoil his last carouse:
We only know the last sad squires ride slowly towards the sea.
And a new people takes the land: and still it is not we.

They have given us into the hand of the new unhappy lords,
Lords without anger and honour, who dare not carry their swords.
They fight by shuffling papers; they have bright dead alien eyes;
They look at our labour and laughter as a tired man looks at flies.
And the load 01 their loveless pity is worse than the ancient wrongs,
Their doors are shut in the evening; and they know no songs.

We hear men speaking for us of new laws strong and sweet,
Yet is there no man speaketh as we speak in the street.
It may be we shall rise the last as Frenchmen rose the first,
Our wrath come after Russia’s wrath and our wrath be the worst.
It may be we are meant to mark with our riot and our rest
God’s scorn for all men governing. It may be beer is best.
But we are the people of England; and we have not spoken yet.
Smile at us, pay us, pass us. But do not quite forget.

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

LOST

So you have gained the golden crowns, so you have piled together
The laurels and the jewels, the pearls out of the blue,
But I will beat the bounding drum and I will fly the feather
For all the glory I have lost, the good I never knew.

I saw the light of morning pale on princely human faces,
In tales irrevocably gone, in final night enfurled,
I saw the tail of flying fights, a glimpse of burning blisses,
And laughed to think what I had lost — the wealth of all the world.

Yea, ruined in a royal game I was before my cradle;
Was ever gambler hurling gold who lost such things as I?
The purple moth that died an hour ere I was born of
That great green sunset God shall make three days after I die.

When all the lights are lost and done, when all the skies are broken,
Above the ruin of the stars my soul shall sit in state,
With a brain made rich, with the irrevocable sunsets,
And a closed heart happy in the fullness of a fate.

So you have gained the golden crowns and grasped the golden weather,
The kingdoms and the hemispheres that all men buy and sell,
But I will lash the leaping drum and swing the flaring feather,
For the light of seven heavens that are lost to me like hell.

BALLAD OF THE SUN

O well for him that loves the sun
That sees the heaven-race ridden or run,
The splashing seas of sunset won,
And shouts for victory.

God made the sun to crown his head,
And when death’s dart at last is sped,
At least it will not find him dead,
And pass the carrion by.

O ill for him that loves the sun;
Shall the sun stoop for anyone?
Shall the sun weep for hearts undone
Or heavy souls that pray?

Not less for us and everyone
Was that white web of splendour spun;
O well for him who loves the sun
Although the sun should slay.

TRANSLATION FROM DU BELLAY

Happy, who like Ulysses or that lord
Who raped the fleece, returning full and sage,
With usage and the world’s wide reason stored,
With his own kin can wait the end of age.
When shall I see, when shall I see, God knows!
My little village smoke; or pass the door,
The old dear door of that unhappy house
That is to me a kingdom and much more?
Mightier to me the house my fathers made
Than your audacious heads, O Halls of Rome!
More than immortal marbles undecayed,
The thin sad slates that cover up my home;
More than your Tiber is my Loire to me,
Than Palatine my little Lyré there;
And more than all the winds of all the sea
The quiet kindness of the Angevin air.

THE HIGHER UNITY

“The Rev. Isaiah Bunter has disappeared into the interior
of the Solomon Islands, and it is feared that he may have
been devoured by the natives, as there has been a considerable
revival of religious customs among the Polynesians.”
A real paragraph from a real Paper; only the names altered.

It was Isaiah Bunter
Who sailed to the world’s end,
And spread religion in a way
That he did not intend.

He gave, if not the gospel-feast,
At least a ritual meal;
And in a highly painful sense
He was devoured with zeal.

And who are we (as Henson says)
That we should close the door?
And should not Evangelicals
All jump at shedding Gore?

And many a man will melt in man,
Becoming one, not two,
When smacks across the startled earth
The Kiss of Kikuyu.

When Man is the Turk, and the Atheist,
Essene, Erastian Whig,
And the Thug and the Druse and the Catholic,
And the crew of the Captain’s gig.

THE EARTH’S VIGIL

The old earth keepeth her watch the same.
Alone in a voiceless void doth stand,
Her orange flowers in her bosom flame,
Her gold ring in her hand.
The surfs of the long gold-crested morns
Break ever more at her great robe’s hem,
And evermore come the bleak moon-horns.
But she keepeth not watch for them.

She keepeth her watch through the awns,
But the heart of her groweth not old,
For the peal of the bridegroom’s paeans,
And the tale she once was told.

The nations shock and the cities reel,
The empires travail and rive and rend,
And she looks on havoc and smoke and steel,
And knoweth it is not the end.
The faiths may choke and the powers despair,
The powers re-arise and the faiths renew,
She is only a maiden, waiting there,
For the love whose word is true.

She keepeth her watch through the aeons,
But the heart of her groweth not old,
For the peal of the bridegroom’s paeans,
And the tale she once was told.

Through the cornfield’s gleam and the cottage shade,
They wait unwearied, the young and old,
Mother for child and man for maid.
For a love that once was told.
The hair grows grey under thatch or slates,
The eyes grow dim behind lattice panes,

The earth-race wait as the old earth waits,
And the hope in the heart remains.

She keepeth her watch through the aeons,
But the heart of her groweth not old,
For the peal of the bridegroom’s paeans,
And the tale she once was told.

God’s gold ring on her hand is bound,
She fires with blossom the grey hill-sides,
Her fields are quickened, her forests crowned,
While the love of her heart abides,
And we from the fears that fret and mar
Look up in hours and behold awhile
Her face, colossal, mid star on star,
Still looking forth with a smile.

She keepeth her watch through the sons,
But the heart of her groweth not old,
For the peal of the bridegroom’s paeans,
And the tale she once was told.

ON RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION

When Adam went from Paradise
He saw the Sword and ran;
The dreadful shape, the new device,
The pointed end of Paradise,
And saw what Peril is and Price,
And knew he was a man.

When Adam went from Paradise,
He turned him back and cried
For a little flower from Paradise;
There came no flower from Paradise;
The woods were dark in Paradise,
And not a bird replied.

For only comfort or contempt,
For jest or great reward,
Over the walls of Paradise,
The flameless gates of Paradise,
The dumb shut doors of Paradise,
God flung the flaming sword.

It burns the hand that holds it
More than the skull it scores;
It doubles like a snake and stings,
Yet he in whose hand it swings
He is the most masterful of things,
A scorner of the stars.

WHEN I CAME BACK TO FLEET STREET

When I came back to Fleet Street,
Through a sunset nook at night,
And saw the old Green Dragon
With the windows all alight,
And hailed the old Green Dragon
And the Cock I used to know,
Where all good fellows were my friends
A little while ago;

I had been long in meadows,
And the trees took hold of me,
And the still towns in the beech-woods,
Where men were meant to be.
But old things held; the laughter,
The long unnatural night,
And all the truth they talk in hell,
And all the lies they write.

For I came back to Fleet Street,
And not in peace I came;
A cloven pride was in my heart,
And half my love was shame.
I came to fight in fairy-tale,
Whose end shall no man know —
To fight the old Green Dragon
Until the Cock shall crow!

Under the broad bright windows
Of men I serve no more,
The groaning of the old great wheels
Thickened to a throttled roar;
All buried things broke upward;
And peered from its retreat,
Ugly and silent, like an elf,
The secret of the street.

They did not break the padlocks,
Or clear the wall away.
The men in debt that drank of old
Still drink in debt to-day;
Chained to the rich by ruin,
Cheerful in chains, as then
When old unbroken Pickwick walked
Among the broken men.

Still he that dreams and rambles
Through his own elfin air,
Knows that the street's a prison,
Knows that the gates are there:
Still he that scorns or struggles
Sees, frightful and afar.
All that they leave of rebels
Rot high on Temple Bar.

All that I loved and hated,
All that I shunned and knew,
Clears in broad battle lightning,
Where they, and I, and you,
Run high the barricade that breaks
The barriers of the street,
And shout to them that shrink within,
The Prisoners of the Fleet.

A CIDER SONG

To J.S.M.

EXTRACT FROM A ROMANCE WHICH IS NOT YET WRITTEN AND PROBABLY NEVER WILL BE.

The wine they drink in Paradise
They make in Haute Lorraine;
God brought it burning from the sod
To be a sign and signal rod
That they that drink the blood of God
Shall never thirst again.

The wine they praise in Paradise
They make in Ponterey,
The purple wine of Paradise,
But we have better at the price;
It’s wine they praise in Paradise,
It’s cider that they pray.

The wine they want in Paradise
They find in Plodder’s End,
The apple wine of Hereford,
Of Hafod Hill and Hereford,
Where woods went down to Hereford,
And there I had a friend.

The soft feet of the blessed go
In the soft western vales,
The road the silent saints accord,
The road from Heaven to Hereford,
Where the apple wood of Hereford
Goes all the way to Wales.

THE LAST HERO

The wind blew out from Bergen from the dawning to the day,
There was a wreck of trees and fall of towers a score of miles away,
And drifted like a livid leaf I go before its tide,
Spewed out of house and stable, beggared of flag and bride.
The heavens are bowed about my head, shouting like seraph wars.
With rains that might put out the sun and clean the sky of stars,
Rains like the fall of ruined seas from secret worlds above,
The roaring of the rains of God none but the lonely love.
Feast in my hall, O foemen, and eat and drink and drain,
You never loved the sun in heaven as I have loved the rain.

The chance of battle changes — so may all battle be;
I stole my lady bride from them, they stole her back from me.
I rent her from her red-roofed hall, I rode and saw arise
More lovely than the living flowers the hatred in her eyes.
She never loved me, never bent, never was less divine;
The sunset never loved me; the wind was never mine.
Was it all nothing that she stood imperial in duresse?
Silence itself made softer with the sweeping of her dress.
O you who drain the cup of life, O you who wear the crown,
You never loved a woman’s smile as I have loved her frown.

The wind blew out from Bergen from the dawning to the day,
They ride and run with fifty spears to break and bar my way,
I shall not die alone, alone, but kin to all the powers.
As merry as the ancient sun and fighting like the flowers.
How white their steel, how bright their eyes! I love each laughing knave.
Cry high and bid him welcome to the banquet of the brave.
Yea, I will bless them as they bend and love them where they lie,
When on their skulls the sword I swing falls shattering from the sky.
The hour when death is like a light and blood is like a rose, —
You never loved your friends, my friends, as I shall love my foes.

Know you what earth shall lose to-night, what rich, uncounted loans,
What heavy gold of tales untold you bury with my bones?

My loves in deep dim meadows, my ships that rode at ease,
Ruffling the purple plumage of strange and secret seas.
To see this fair earth as it is to me alone was given,
The blow that breaks my brow to-night shall break the dome of heaven.
The skies I saw, the trees I saw after no eyes shall see.
To-night I die the death of God; the stars shall die with me:
One sound shall sunder all the spears and break the trumpet’s breath:
You never laughed in all your life as I shall laugh in death.

BALLADES

BALLADE D’UNE GRANDE DAME

Heaven shall forgive you Bridge at dawn,
The clothes you wear — or do not wear —
And Ladies’ Leap-frog on the lawn
And dyes and drugs, and *petits verres.*
Your vicious things shall melt in air ...
... But for the Virtuous Things you do,
The Righteous Work, the Public Care,
It shall not be forgiven you.

Because you could not even yawn
When your Committees would prepare
To have the teeth of paupers drawn,
Or strip the slums of Human Hair;
Because a Doctor Otto Maehr
Spoke of “a segregated few” —
And you sat smiling in your chair —
It shall not be forgiven you.

Though your sins cried to — -Father Vaughan,
These desperate you could not spare
Who steal, with nothing left to pawn;
You caged a man up like a bear
For ever in a jailor’s care
Because his sins were more than *two* ...
... I know a house in Hoxton where
It shall not be forgiven you.

ENVOI

Princess, you trapped a guileless Mayor
To meet some people that you knew ...
When the Last Trumpet rends the air
It shall not be forgiven you.

A BALLADE OF AN ANTI-PURITAN

They spoke of Progress spiring round,
Of Light and Mrs. Humphry Ward —
It is not true to say I frowned,
Or ran about the room and roared;
I might have simply sat and snored —
I rose politely in the club
And said, “I feel a little bored;
Will someone take me to a pub?”

The new world’s wisest did surround
Me; and it pains me to record
I did not think their views profound,
Or their conclusions well assured;
The simple life I can’t afford,
Besides, I do not like the grub —
I wait a mash and sausage, “scored” —
Will someone take me to a pub?

I know where Men can still be found,
Anger and clamorous accord,
And virtues growing from the ground,
And fellowship of beer and board,
And song, that is a sturdy cord.
And hope, that is a hardy shrub,
And goodness, that is God’s last word —
Will someone take me to a pub?

ENVOI

Prince, Bayard would have smashed his sword
To see the sort of knights you dub — Is
that the last of them — O Lord!
Will someone take me to a pub?

A BALLADE OF A BOOK-REVIEWER

I have not read a rotten page
Of “Sex-Hate” or “The Social Test,”
And here comes “Husks” and “Heritage”....
O Moses, give us all a rest!
“Ethics of Empire”!... I protest
I will not even cut the strings,
I’ll read “Jack Redskin on the Quest”
And feed my brain with better things.

Somebody wants a Wiser Age
(He also wants me to invest);
Somebody likes the Finnish Stage
Because the Jesters do not jest;
And grey with dust is Dante’s crest,
The bell of Rabelais soundless swings;
And the winds come out of the west
And feed my brain with better things.

Lord of our laughter and our rage.
Look on us with our sins oppressed!
I, too, have trodden mine heritage,
Wickedly wearying of the best.
Burn from my brain and from my breast
Sloth, and the cowardice that clings,
And stiffness and the soul’s arrest:
And feed my brain with better things.

ENVOI

Prince, you are host and I am guest,
Therefore I shrink from cavillings....
But I should have that fizz suppressed
And feed my brain with better things.

A BALLADE OF SUICIDE

The gallows in my garden, people say,
Is new and neat and adequately tall.
I tie the noose on in a knowing way
As one that knots his necktie for a ball;
But just as all the neighbours — on the wall —
Are drawing a long breath to shout “Hurray!”
The strangest whim has seized me.... After all
I think I will not hang myself to-day.

To-morrow is the time I get my pay — My
uncle’s sword is hanging in the hall —
I see a little cloud all pink and grey —
Perhaps the rector’s mother will *not* call —
I fancy that I heard from Mr. Gall
That mushrooms could be cooked another way —
I never read the works of Juvenal —
I think I will not hang myself to-day.

The world will have another washing day;
The decadents decay; the pedants pall;
And H.G. Wells has found that children play.
And Bernard Shaw discovered that they squall;
Rationalists are growing rational —
And through thick woods one finds a stream astray,
So secret that the very sky seems small —
I think I will not hang myself to-day.

ENVOI

Prince, I can hear the trumpet of Germinal,
The tumbrils toiling up the terrible way;
Even to-day your royal head may fall —
I think I will not hang myself to-day.

A BALLADE OF THE FIRST RAIN

The sky is blue with summer and the sun,
The woods are brown as autumn with the tan,
It might as well be Tropics and be done,
I might as well be born a copper Khan;
I fashion me an oriental fan
Made of the wholly unreceipted bills
Brought by the ice-man, sleeping in his van
(A storm is coming on the Chiltern Hills).

I read the Young Philosophers for fun
— Fresh as our sorrow for the late Queen Anne —
The Dionysians whom a pint would stun,
The Pantheists who never heard of Pan.
— But through my hair electric needles ran,
And on my book a gout of water spills,
And on the skirts of heaven the guns began
(A storm is coming on the Chiltern Hills).

O fields of England, cracked and dry and dun,
O soul of England, sick of words, and wan! —
The clouds grow dark; — the down-rush has begun.
— It comes, it comes, as holy darkness can,
Black as with banners, ban and arriere-ban;
A falling laughter all the valley fills,
Deep as God’s thunder and the thirst of man:
(A storm is coming on the Chiltern Hills).

ENVOI

Prince, Prince-Elective on the modern plan
Fulfilling such a lot of People’s Wills,
You take the Chiltern Hundreds while you can —
A storm is coming on the Chiltern Hills.

WINE, WATER AND SONG

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The Englishman

St. George he was for England,
And before he killed the dragon
He drank a pint of English ale
Out of an English flagon.
For though he fast right readily
In hair-shirt or in mail,
It isn’t safe to give him cakes
Unless you give him ale.

St. George he was for England,
And right gallantly set free
The lady left for dragon’s meat
And tied up to a tree;
But since he stood for England
And knew what England means,
Unless you give him bacon
You mustn’t give him beans.

St. George he is for England,
And shall wear the shield he wore
When we go out in armour
With the battle-cross before.
But though he is jolly company
And very pleased to dine,
It isn’t safe to give him nuts
Unless you give him wine.

Wine and Water

Old Noah he had an ostrich farm and fowls on the largest scale,
He ate his egg with a ladle in an egg-cup big as a pail,
And the soup he took was Elephant Soup and the fish he took was Whale,
But they all were small to the cellar he took when he set out to sail,
And Noah he often said to his wife when he sat down to dine,
“I don’t care where the water goes if it doesn’t get into the wine.”

The cataract of the cliff of heaven fell blinding off the brink
As if it would wash the stars away as suds go down a sink,
The seven heavens came roaring down for the throats of hell to drink,
And Noah he cocked his eye and said, “It looks like rain, I think,
The water has drowned the Matterhorn as deep as a Mendip mine,
But I don’t care where the water goes if it doesn’t get into the wine.”

But Noah he sinned, and we have sinned; on tipsy feet we trod,
Till a great big black teetotaller was sent to us for a rod,
And you can’t get wine at a P.S.A., or chapel, or Eisteddfod,
For the Curse of Water has come again because of the wrath of God,
And water is on the Bishop’s board and the Higher Thinker’s shrine,
But I don’t care where the water goes if it doesn’t get into the wine.

The Song Against Grocers

God made the wicked Grocer
For a mystery and a sign,
That men might shun the awful shops
And go to inns to dine;
Where the bacon’s on the rafter
And the wine is in the wood,
And God that made good laughter
Has seen that they are good.

The evil-hearted Grocer
Would call his mother “Ma’am,”
And bow at her and bob at her,
Her aged soul to damn,
And rub his horrid hands and ask
What article was next,
Though =mortis in articulo=
Should be her proper text.

His props are not his children,
But pert lads underpaid,
Who call out “Cash!” and bang about
To work his wicked trade;
He keeps a lady in a cage
Most cruelly all day,
And makes her count and calls her “Miss”
Until she fades away.

The righteous minds of innkeepers
Induce them now and then
To crack a bottle with a friend
Or treat unmoneyed men,
But who hath seen the Grocer
Treat housemaids to his teas
Or crack a bottle of fish-sauce
Or stand a man a cheese?

He sells us sands of Araby
As sugar for cash down;
He sweeps his shop and sells the dust
The purest salt in town,
He crams with cans of poisoned meat
Poor subjects of the King,
And when they die by thousands
Why, he laughs like anything.

The wicked Grocer groces
In spirits and in wine,
Not frankly and in fellowship
As men in inns do dine;
But packed with soap and sardines
And carried off by grooms,
For to be snatched by Duchesses
And drunk in dressing-rooms.

The hell-instructed Grocer
Has a temple made of tin,
And the ruin of good innkeepers
Is loudly urged therein;
But now the sands are running out
From sugar of a sort,
The Grocer trembles; for his time,
Just like his weight, is short.

The Rolling English Road

Before the Roman came to Rye or out to Severn strode,
The rolling English drunkard made the rolling English road.
A reeling road, a rolling road, that rambles round the shire,
And after him the parson ran, the sexton and the squire;
A merry road, a mazy road, and such as we did tread
The night we went to Birmingham by way of Beachy Head.

I knew no harm of Bonaparte and plenty of the Squire,
And for to fight the Frenchman I did not much desire;
But I did bash their baggonets because they came arrayed
To straighten out the crooked road an English drunkard made,
Where you and I went down the lane with ale-mugs in our hands,
The night we went to Glastonbury by way of Goodwin Sands.

His sins they were forgiven him; or why do flowers run
Behind him; and the hedges all strengthing in the sun?
The wild thing went from left to right and knew not which was which,
But the wild rose was above him when they found him in the ditch.
God pardon us, nor harden us; we did not see so clear
The night we went to Bannockburn by way of Brighton Pier.

My friends, we will not go again or ape an ancient rage,
Or stretch the folly of our youth to be the shame of age,
But walk with clearer eyes and ears this path that wandereth,
And see undrugged in evening light the decent inn of death;
For there is good news yet to hear and fine things to be seen,
Before we go to Paradise by way of Kensal Green.

The Song of Quoodle

They haven’t got no noses,
The fallen sons of Eve;
Even the smell of roses
Is not what they supposes;
But more than mind discloses
And more than men believe.

They haven’t got no noses,
They cannot even tell
When door and darkness closes
The park a Jew encloses,
Where even the Law of Moses
Will let you steal a smell.

The brilliant smell of water,
The brave smell of a stone,
The smell of dew and thunder,
The old bones buried under,
Are things in which they blunder
And err, if left alone.

The wind from winter forests,
The scent of scentless flowers,
The breath of brides’ adorning,
The smell of snare and warning,
The smell of Sunday morning,
God gave to us for ours.

. . . . .

And Quoodle here discloses
All things that Quoodle can,
They haven’t got no noses,
They haven’t got no noses,

And goodness only knowses
The Noselessness of Man.

Pioneers, O Pioneers

Nebuchadnezzar the King of the Jews
Suffered from new and original views,
He crawled on his hands and knees, it’s said,
With grass in his mouth and a crown on his head.
    With a wowtyiddly, etc.

Those in traditional paths that trod
Thought the thing was a curse from God,
But a Pioneer men always abuse
Like Nebuchadnezzar the King of the Jews.

Black Lord Foulon the Frenchman slew
Thought it a Futurist thing to do.
He offered them grass instead of bread.
So they stuffed him with grass when they cut off his head.
    With a wowtyiddly, etc.

For the pride of his soul he perished then —
But of course it is always of Pride that men,
A Man in Advance of his Age accuse,
Like Nebuchadnezzar the King of the Jews.

Simeon Scudder of Styx, in Maine,
Thought of the thing and was at it again.
He gave good grass and water in pails
To a thousand Irishmen hammering rails.
    With a wowtyiddly, etc.

Appetites differ; and tied to a stake
He was tarred and feathered for Conscience’ Sake.
But stoning the prophets is ancient news,
Like Nebuchadnezzar the King of the Jews.

The Logical Vegetarian

"Why shouldn't I have a purely vegetarian drink? Why shouldn't I take vegetables in their highest form, so to speak? The modest vegetarians ought obviously to stick to wine or beer, plain vegetarian drinks, instead of filling their goblets with the blood of bulls and elephants, as all conventional meat-eaters do, I suppose." — Dalroy.

  You will find me drinking rum,
  Like a sailor in a slum,
You will find me drinking beer like a Bavarian.
  You will find me drinking gin
  In the lowest kind of inn,
Because I am a rigid Vegetarian.

  So I cleared the inn of wine,
  And I tried to climb the sign,
And I tried to hail the constable as "Marion."
  But he said I couldn't speak,
  And he bowled me to the Beak
Because I was a Happy Vegetarian.

  Oh, I knew a Doctor Gluck,
  And his nose it had a hook,
And his attitudes were anything but Aryan;
  So I gave him all the pork
  That I had, upon a fork;
Because I am myself a Vegetarian.

  I am silent in the Club,
  I am silent in the pub.,
I am silent on a bally peak in Darien;
  For I stuff away for life
  Shoving peas in with a knife,
Because I am at heart a Vegetarian.

  No more the milk of cows
  Shall pollute my private house
Than the milk of the wild mares of the Barbarian;
  I will stick to port and sherry,
  For they are so very, very,
So very, very, very Vegetarian.

The Saracen’s Head

“The Saracen’s Head” looks down the lane,
Where we shall never drink wine again,
For the wicked old women who feel well-bred
Have turned to a tea-shop “The Saracen’s Head.”

“The Saracen’s Head” out of Araby came,
King Richard riding in arms like flame,
And where he established his folk to be fed
He set up a spear — and the Saracen’s Head.

But “The Saracen’s Head” outlived the Kings,
It thought and it thought of most horrible things,
Of Health and of Soap and of Standard Bread,
And of Saracen drinks at “The Saracen’s Head.”

So “The Saracen’s Head” fulfils its name,
They drink no wine — a ridiculous game —
And I shall wonder until I’m dead,
How it ever came into the Saracen’s Head.

The Good Rich Man

Mr. Mandragon, the Millionaire, he wouldn’t have wine or wife,
He couldn’t endure complexity: he lived the Simple Life.
He ordered his lunch by megaphone in manly, simple tones,
And used all his motors for canvassing voters, and twenty telephones;
Besides a dandy little machine,
Cunning and neat as ever was seen,
With a hundred pulleys and cranks between,
Made of metal and kept quite clean,
To hoist him out of his healthful bed on every day of his life,
And wash him and dress him and shave him and brush him
— to live the Simple Life.

Mr. Mandragon was most refined and quietly, neatly dressed,
Say all the American newspapers that know refinement best;
Quiet and neat the hat and hair and the coat quiet and neat,
A trouser worn upon either leg, while boots adorn the feet;
And not, as any one would expect,
A Tiger’s Skin all striped and specked,
And a Peacock Hat with the tail erect,
A scarlet tunic with sunflowers decked,
Which might have had a more marked effect,
And pleased the pride of a weaker man that yearned for wine or wife;
But Fame and the Flagon, for Mr. Mandragon
— obscured the Simple Life.

Mr. Mandragon, the Millionaire, I am happy to say, is dead;
He enjoyed a quiet funeral in a Crematorium shed.
And he lies there fluffy and soft and grey and certainly quite refined;
When he might have rotted to flowers and fruit with Adam and all mankind,
Or been eaten by wolves athirst for blood,
Or burnt on a good tall pyre of wood,
In a towering flame, as a heathen should,
Or even sat with us here at food,

Merrily taking twopenny ale and pork with a pocket-knife;
But this was luxury not for one that went for the Simple Life.

The Song Against Songs

The song of the sorrow of Melisande is a weary song and a dreary song,
The glory of Mariana’s grange had got into great decay,
The song of the Raven Never More has never been called a cheery song,
And the brightest things in Baudelaire are anything else but gay.

But who will write us a riding song,
Or a hunting song or a drinking song,
Fit for them that arose and rode
When day and the wine were red?
But bring me a quart of claret out,
And I will write you a clinking song,
A song of war and a song of wine
And a song to wake the dead.

The song of the fury of Fragolette is a florid song and a torrid song,
The song of the sorrow of Tara is sung to a harp unstrung,
The song of the cheerful Shropshire Lad I consider a perfectly horrid song,
And the song of the happy Futurist is a song that can’t be sung.

But who will write us a riding song
Or a fighting song or a drinking song,
Fit for the fathers of you and me,
That knew how to think and thrive?
But the song of Beauty and Art and Love
Is simply an utterly stinking song,
To double you up and drag you down
And damn your soul alive.

Me Heart

I come from Castlepatrick, and me heart is on me sleeve,
And any sword or pistol boy can hit it with me leave,
It shines there for an epaulette, as golden as a flame,
As naked as me ancestors, as noble as me name.
For I come from Castlepatrick, and me heart is on me sleeve,
But a lady stole it from me on St. Gallowglass's Eve.

The folk that live in Liverpool, their heart is in their boots;
They go to hell like lambs, they do, because the hooter hoots.
Where men may not be dancin', though the wheels may dance all day;
And men may not be smokin'; but only chimneys may.
But I come from Castlepatrick, and me heart is on me sleeve,
But a lady stole it from me on St. Poleander's Eve.

The folk that live in black Belfast, their heart is in their mouth,
They see us making murders in the meadows of the South;
They think a plough's a rack, they do, and cattle-calls are creeds,
And they think we're burnin' witches when we're only burnin' weeds;
But I come from Castlepatrick, and me heart is on me sleeve;
But a lady stole it from me on St. Barnabas's Eve.

The Song of the Oak

The Druids waved their golden knives
And danced around the Oak
When they had sacrificed a man;
But though the learned search and scan,
No single modern person can
Entirely see the joke.
But though they cut the throats of men
They cut not down the tree,
And from the blood the saplings sprang
Of oak-woods yet to be.
  But Ivywood, Lord Ivywood,
  He rots the tree as ivy would,
  He clings and crawls as ivy would
  About the sacred tree.

King Charles he fled from Worcester fight
And hid him in an Oak;
In convent schools no man of tact
Would trace and praise his every act,
Or argue that he was in fact
A strict and sainted bloke,
But not by him the sacred woods
Have lost their fancies free,
And though he was extremely big
He did not break the tree.
  But Ivywood, Lord Ivywood,
  He breaks the tree as ivy would,
  And eats the woods as ivy would
  Between us and the sea.

Great Collingwood walked down the glade
And flung the acorns free,
That oaks might still be in the grove
As oaken as the beams above,

When the great Lover sailors love
Was kissed by Death at sea.
But though for him the oak-trees fell
To build the oaken ships,
The woodman worshipped what he smote
And honoured even the chips.
  But Ivywood, Lord Ivywood,
  He hates the tree as ivy would,
  As the dragon of the ivy would
  That has us in his grips.

The Road to Roundabout

Some say that Guy of Warwick,
The man that killed the Cow
And brake the mighty Boar alive
Beyond the Bridge at Slough;
Went up against a Loathly Worm
That wasted all the Downs,
And so the roads they twist and squirm
(If I may be allowed the term)
From the writhing of the stricken Worm
That died in seven towns.
  I see no scientific proof
  That this idea is sound,
  And I should say they wound about
  To find the town of Roundabout,
  The merry town of Roundabout,
  That makes the world go round.

Some say that Robin Goodfellow,
Whose lantern lights the meads
(To steal a phrase Sir Walter Scott
In heaven no longer needs),
Such dance around the trysting-place
The moonstruck lover leads;
Which superstition I should scout
There is more faith in honest doubt
(As Tennyson has pointed out)
Than in those nasty creeds.
  But peace and righteousness (St. John)
  In Roundabout can kiss,
  And since that’s all that’s found about
  The pleasant town of Roundabout,
  The roads they simply bound about
  To find out where it is.

Some say that when Sir Lancelot
Went forth to find the Grail,
Grey Merlin wrinkled up the roads
For hope that he should fail;
All roads led back to Lyonesse
And Camelot in the Vale,
I cannot yield assent to this
Extravagant hypothesis,
The plain, shrewd Briton will dismiss
Such rumours (=Daily Mail=).
  But in the streets of Roundabout
  Are no such factions found,
  Or theories to expound about,
  Or roll upon the ground about,
  In the happy town of Roundabout,
  That makes the world go round.

The Song of the Strange Ascetic

If I had been a Heathen,
  I'd have praised the purple vine,
My slaves should dig the vineyards,
  And I would drink the wine;
But Higgins is a Heathen,
  And his slaves grow lean and grey,
That he may drink some tepid milk
  Exactly twice a day.

If I had been a Heathen,
  I'd have crowned Neoera's curls,
And filled my life with love affairs,
  My house with dancing girls;
But Higgins is a Heathen,
  And to lecture rooms is forced,
Where his aunts, who are not married,
  Demand to be divorced.

If I had been a Heathen,
  I'd have sent my armies forth,
And dragged behind my chariots
  The Chieftains of the North.
But Higgins is a Heathen,
  And he drives the dreary quill,
To lend the poor that funny cash
  That makes them poorer still.

If I had been a Heathen,
  I'd have piled my pyre on high,
And in a great red whirlwind
  Gone roaring to the sky;
But Higgins is a Heathen,
  And a richer man than I;
And they put him in an oven,
  Just as if he were a pie.

Now who that runs can read it,
  The riddle that I write,
Of why this poor old sinner,
  Should sin without delight — ?
But I, I cannot read it
  (Although I run and run),
Of them that do not have the faith,
  And will not have the fun.

The Song of Right and Wrong

Feast on wine or fast on water,
And your honour shall stand sure,
God Almighty’s son and daughter
He the valiant, she the pure;
If an angel out of heaven
Brings you other things to drink,
Thank him for his kind attentions,
Go and pour them down the sink.

Tea is like the East he grows in,
A great yellow Mandarin
With urbanity of manner
And unconsciousness of sin;
All the women, like a harem,
At his pig-tail troop along;
And, like all the East he grows in,
He is Poison when he’s strong.

Tea, although an Oriental,
Is a gentleman at least;
Cocoa is a cad and coward,
Cocoa is a vulgar beast,
Cocoa is a dull, disloyal,
Lying, crawling cad and clown,
And may very well be grateful
To the fool that takes him down.

As for all the windy waters,
They were rained like tempests down
When good drink had been dishonoured
By the tipplers of the town;
When red wine had brought red ruin
And the death-dance of our times,
Heaven sent us Soda Water
As a torment for our crimes.

Who Goes Home?

In the city set upon slime and loam
They cry in their parliament “Who goes home?”
And there comes no answer in arch or dome,
For none in the city of graves goes home.
Yet these shall perish and understand,
For God has pity on this great land.

Men that are men again; who goes home?
Tocsin and trumpeter! Who goes home?
For there’s blood on the field and blood on the foam
And blood on the body when Man goes home.
And a voice valedictory.... Who is for Victory?
Who is for Liberty? Who goes home?

THE BALLAD OF ST. BARBARA AND OTHER POEMS

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TO F. C. IN MEMORIAM PALESTINE, ‘19

Do you remember one immortal
Lost moment out of time and space,
What time we thought, who passed the portal
Of that divine disastrous place
Where Life was slain and Truth was slandered
On that one holier hill than Rome,
How far abroad our bodies wandered
That evening when our souls came home?

The mystic city many-gated,
With monstrous columns, was your own:
Herodian stones fell down and waited
Two thousand years to be your throne.
In the grey rocks the burning blossom
Glowed terrible as the sacred blood:
It was no stranger to your bosom
Than bluebells of an English wood.

Do you remember a road that follows
The way of unforgotten feet,
Where from the waste of rocks and hollows
Climb up the crawling crooked street
The stages of one towering drama
Always ahead and out of sight ...
Do you remember Aceldama
And the jackal barking in the night?

Life is not void or stuff for scorners:
We have laughed loud and kept our love,
We have heard singers in tavern corners
And not forgotten the birds above:
We have known smiters and sons of thunder
And not unworthily walked with them,
We have grown wiser and lost not wonder;

And we have seen Jerusalem.

THE BALLAD OF ST. BARBARA

(St. Barbara is the patron saint of artillery and of those in
danger of sudden death.)

When the long grey lines came flooding upon Paris in the plain,
We stood and drank of the last free air we never could taste again:
They had led us back from the lost battle, to halt we knew not where
And stilled us; and our gaping guns were dumb with our despair.
The grey tribes flowed for ever from the infinite lifeless lands
And a Norman to a Breton spoke, his chin upon his hands.

“There was an end to Ilium; and an end came to Rome;
And a man plays on a painted stage in the land that he calls home;
Arch after arch of triumph, but floor beyond falling floor,
That lead to a low door at last; and beyond there is no door.”

And the Breton to the Norman spoke, like a small child spoke he,
And his sea-blue eyes were empty as his home beside the sea:
“There are more windows in one house than there are eyes to see,
There are more doors in a man’s house, but God has hid the key:
Ruin is a builder of windows; her legend witnesseth
Barbara, the saint of gunners, and a stay in sudden death.”

It seemed the wheel of the world stood still an instant in its turning,
More than the kings of the earth that turned with the turning of Valmy mill:
While trickled the idle tale and the sea-blue eyes were burning,
Still as the heart of a whirlwind the heart of the world stood still.

“Barbara the beautiful
Had praise of lute and pen:
Her hair was like a summer night
Dark and desired of men.

Her feet like birds from far away
That linger and light in doubt;

And her face was like a window
Where a man’s first love looked out.

Her sire was master of many slaves
A hard man of his hands;
They built a tower about her
In the desolate golden lands,

Sealed as the tyrants sealed their tombs,
Planned with an ancient plan,
And set two windows in the tower
Like the two eyes of a man.”

Our guns were set toward the foe; we had no word, for firing.
Grey in the gateway of St. Gond the Guard of the tyrant shone;
Dark with the fate of a falling star, retiring and retiring,
The Breton line went backward and the Breton tale went on.

“Her father had sailed across the sea
From the harbour of Africa
When all the slaves took up their tools
For the bidding of Barbara.

She smote the bare wall with her hand
And bad them smite again;
She poured them wealth of wine and meat
To stay them in their pain.

And cried through the lifted thunder
Of thronging hammer and hod
‘Throw open the third window
In the third name of God.’

Then the hearts failed and the tools fell,
And far towards the foam,
Men saw a shadow on the sands
And her father coming home.”

Speak low and low, along the line the whispered word is flying
Before the touch, before the time, we may not loose a breath:
Their guns must mash us to the mire and there be no replying,
Till the hand is raised to fling us for the final dice to death.

“There were two windows in your tower,
Barbara, Barbara,
For all between the sun and moon
In the lands of Africa.

Hath a man three eyes, Barbara,
A bird three wings,
That you have riven roof and wall
To look upon vain things?”

Her voice was like a wandering thing
That falters yet is free,
Whose soul has drunk in a distant land
Of the rivers of liberty.

“There are more wings than the wind knows
Or eyes than see the sun
In the light of the lost window
And the wind of the doors undone.

For out of the first lattice
Are the red lands that break
And out of the second lattice
Sea like a green snake,

But out of the third lattice
Under low eaves like wings
Is a new corner of the sky
And the other side of things.”

It opened in the inmost place an instant beyond uttering,
A casement and a chasm and a thunder of doors undone,

A seraph's strong wing shaken out the shock of its unshuttering,
That split the shattered sunlight from a light behind the sun.

"Then he drew sword and drave her
Where the judges sat and said
'Caesar sits above the gods,
Barbara the maid.

Caesar hath made a treaty
With the moon and with the sun,
All the gods that men can praise
Praise him every one.

There is peace with the anointed
Of the scarlet oils of Bel,
With the Fish God, where the whirlpool
Is a winding stair to hell,

With the pathless pyramids of slime,
Where the mitred negro lifts
To his black cherub in the cloud
Abominable gifts,

With the leprous silver cities
Where the dumb priests dance and nod,
But not with the three windows
And the last name of God.'"

They are firing, we are falling, and the red skies rend and shiver us,
Barbara, Barbara, we may not loose a breath —
Be at the bursting doors of doom, and in the dark deliver us,
Who loosen the last window on the sun of sudden death.

"Barbara the beautiful
Stood up as queen set free,
Whose mouth is set to a terrible cup
And the trumpet of liberty.

‘I have looked forth from a window
That no man now shall bar,
Caesar’s toppling battle-towers
Shall never stretch so far.

The slaves are dancing in their chains,
The child laughs at the rod,
Because of the bird of the three wings,
And the third face of God.’

The sword upon his shoulder
Shifted and shone and fell,
And Barbara lay very small
And crumpled like a shell.”

What wall upon what hinges turned stands open like a door?
Too simple for the sight of faith, too huge for human eyes,
What light upon what ancient way shines to a far-off floor,
The line of the lost land of France or the plains of Paradise?

“Caesar smiled above the gods,
His lip of stone was curled,
His iron armies wound like chains
Round and round the world,

And the strong slayer of his own
That cut down flesh for grass,
Smiled too, and went to his own tower
Like a walking tower of brass,

And the songs ceased and the slaves were dumb;
And far towards the foam
Men saw a shadow on the sands;
And her father coming home....

Blood of his blood upon the sword
Stood red but never dry.

He wiped it slowly, till the blade
Was blue as the blue sky.

But the blue sky split with a thunder-crack,
Spat down a blinding brand,
And all of him lay back and flat
As his shadow on the sand.”

The touch and the tornado; all our guns give tongue together
St. Barbara for the gunnery and God defend the right,
They are stopped and gapped and battered as we blast away the weather.
Building window upon window to our lady of the light.
For the light is come on Liberty, her foes are falling, falling,
They are reeling, they are running, as the shameful years have run,
She is risen for all the humble, she has heard the conquered calling,
St. Barbara of the Gunners, with her hand upon the gun.
They are burst asunder in the midst that eat of their own flatteries,
Whose lip is curled to order as its barbered hair is curled....
Blast of the beauty of sudden death, St. Barbara of the batteries!
That blow the new white window in the wall of all the world.

For the hand is raised behind us, and the bolt smites hard
Through the rending of the doorways, through the death-gap of the Guard,
For the cry of the Three Colours is in Condé and beyond
And the Guard is flung for carrion in the graveyard of St. Gond,
Through Mondemont and out of it, through Morin marsh and on
With earthquake of salutation the impossible thing is gone,
Gaul, charioted and charging, great Gaul upon a gun,
Tip-toe on all her thousand years and trumpeting to the sun:
As day returns, as death returns, swung backwards and swung home,
Back on the barbarous reign returns the battering-ram of Rome.
While that that the east held hard and hot like pincers in a forge,
Came like the west wind roaring up the cannon of St. George,
Where the hunt is up and racing over stream and swamp and tarn
And their batteries, black with battle, hold the bridgeheads of the Marne

And across the carnage of the Guard, by Paris in the plain,
The Normans to the Bretons cried and the Bretons cheered again....
But he that told the tale went home to his house beside the sea
And burned before St. Barbara, the light of the windows three,
Three candles for an unknown thing, never to come again,
That opened like the eye of God on Paris in the plain.

ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD

The men that worked for England
They have their graves at home:
And bees and birds of England
About the cross can roam.

But they that fought for England,
Following a falling star,
Alas, alas for England
They have their graves afar.

And they that rule in England,
In stately conclave met,
Alas, alas for England
They have no graves as yet.

THE SWORD OF SURPRISE

Sunder me from my bones, O sword of God,
Till they stand stark and strange as do the trees;
That I whose heart goes up with the soaring woods
May marvel as much at these.

Sunder me from my blood that in the dark
I hear that red ancestral river run,
Like branching buried floods that find the sea
But never see the sun.

Give me miraculous eyes to see my eyes,
Those rolling mirrors made alive in me,
Terrible crystal more incredible
Than all the things they see.

Sunder me from my soul, that I may see
The sins like streaming wounds, the life’s brave beat;
Till I shall save myself, as I would save
A stranger in the street.

A WEDDING IN WAR-TIME

Our God who made two lovers in a garden,
And smote them separate and set them free,
Their four eyes wild for wonder and wrath and pardon
And their kiss thunder as lips of land and sea:
Each rapt unendingly beyond the other,
Two starry worlds of unknown gods at war,
Wife and not mate, a man and not a brother,
We thank thee thou hast made us what we are.

Make not the grey slime of infinity
To swamp these flowers thou madest one by one;
Let not the night that was thine enemy
Mix a mad twilight of the moon and sun;
Waken again to thunderclap and clamour
The wonder of our sundering and the song,
Or break our hearts with thine hell-shattering hammer
But leave a shade between us all day long.

Shade of high shame and honourable blindness
When youth, in storm of dizzy and distant things,
Finds the wild windfall of a little kindness
And shakes to think that all the world has wings.
When the one head that turns the heavens in turning
Moves yet as lightly as a lingering bird,
And red and random, blown astray but burning,
Like a lost spark goes by the glorious word.

Make not this sex, this other side of things,
A thing less distant than the world’s desire;
What colour to the end of evening clings
And what far cry of frontiers and what fire
Fallen too far beyond the sun for seeking,
Let it divide us though our kingdom come;
With a far signal in our secret speaking
To hang the proud horizon in our home.

Once we were one, a shapeless cloud that lingers
Loading the seas and shutting out the skies,
One with the woods, a monster of myriad fingers,
You laid on me no finger of surprise.
One with the stars, a god with myriad eyes,
I saw you nowhere and was blind for scorn:
One till the world was riven and the rise
Of the white days when you and I were born.

Darkens the world: the world-old fetters rattle;
And these that have no hope behind the sun
May feed like bondmen and may breed like cattle,
One in the darkness as the dead are one;
Us if the rended grave give up its glory
Trumpets shall summon asunder and face to face:
We will be strangers in so strange a story
And wonder, meeting in so wild a place.

Ah, not in vain or utterly for loss
Come even the black flag and the battle-hordes,
If these grey devils flee the sign of the cross
Even in the symbol of the crossing swords.
Nor shall death doubt Who made our souls alive
Swords meeting and not stakes set side by side,
Bade us in the sunburst and the thunder thrive
Earthquake and Dawn; the bridegroom and the bride.

Death and not dreams or doubt of things undying,
Of whose the holy hearth or whose the sword;
Though sacred spirits dissever in strong crying
Into Thy hands, but Thy two hands, O Lord,
Though not in Earth as once in Eden standing
So plain again we see Thee what thou art,
As in this blaze, the blasting and the branding
Of this wild wedding where we meet and part.

THE MYSTERY

If sunset clouds could grow on trees
It would but match the may in flower;
And skies be underneath the seas
No topsyturvier than a shower.

If mountains rose on wings to wander
They were no wilder than a cloud;
Yet all my praise is mean as slander,
Mean as these mean words spoken aloud.

And never more than now I know
That man’s first heaven is far behind;
Unless the blazing seraph’s blow
Has left him in the garden blind.

Witness, O Sun that blinds our eyes,
Unthinkable and unthankable King,
That though all other wonder dies
I wonder at not wondering.

THE MYTH OF ARTHUR

O learned man who never learned to learn,
Save to deduce, by timid steps and small,
From towering smoke that fire can never burn
And from tall tales that men were never tall.
Say, have you thought what manner of man it is
Of whom men say “He could strike giants down”?
Or what strong memories over time’s abyss
Bore up the pomp of Camelot and the crown.
And why one banner all the background fills,
Beyond the pageants of so many spears,
And by what witchery in the western hills
A throne stands empty for a thousand years.
Who hold, unheeding this immense impact,
Immortal story for a mortal sin;
Lest human fable touch historic fact,
Chase myths like moths, and fight them with a pin.
Take comfort; rest — there needs not this ado.
You shall not be a myth, I promise you.

THE OLD SONG

(On the Embankment in stormy weather.)

A livid sky on London
And like iron steeds that rear
A shock of engines halted,
And I knew the end was near:
And something said that far away, over the hills and far away,
There came a crawling thunder and the end of all things here.
For London Bridge is broken down, broken down, broken down,
As digging lets the daylight on the sunken streets of yore,
The lightning looked on London town, the broken bridge of London town,
The ending of a broken road where men shall go no more.

I saw the kings of London town,
The kings that buy and sell,
That built it up with penny loaves
And penny lies as well:
And where the streets were paved with gold, the shrivelled paper shone for gold,
The scorching light of promises that pave the streets of hell.
For penny loaves will melt away, melt away, melt away,
Mock the mean that haggled in the grain they did not grow;
With hungry faces in the gate, a hundred thousand in the gate,
A thunder-flash on London and the finding of the foe.

I heard the hundred pin-makers
Slow down their racking din,
Till in the stillness men could hear
The dropping of the pin:
And somewhere men without the wall, beneath the wood, without the wall,
Had found the place where London ends and England can begin.
For pins and needles bend and break, bend and break, bend and break,
Faster than the breaking spears or the bending of the bow
Of pageants pale in thunder-light, ‘twixt thunder-load and

thunder-light,
The Hundreds marching on the hills in the wars of long ago.

I saw great Cobbett riding,
The horseman of the shires;
And his face was red with judgment
And a light of Luddite fires:
And south to Sussex and the sea the lights leapt up for liberty,
The trumpet of the yeomanry, the hammer of the squires;
For bars of iron rust away, rust away, rust away,
Rend before the hammer and the horseman riding in,
Crying that all men at the last, and at the worst and at the last,
Have found the place where England ends and England can begin.

His horse-hoofs go before you,
Far beyond your bursting tyres;
And time is bridged behind him
And our sons are with our sires.
A trailing meteor on the Downs he rides above the rotting towns,
The Horseman of Apocalypse, the Rider of the Shires.
For London Bridge is broken down, broken down, broken down;
Blow the horn of Huntingdon from Scotland to the sea —
... Only a flash of thunder-light, a flying dream of thunder-light,
Had shown under the shattered sky a people that were free.

THE TRINKETS

A wandering world of rivers,
A wavering world of trees,
If the world grow dim and dizzy
With all changes and degrees,
It is but Our Lady’s mirror
Hung dreaming in its place,
Shining with only shadows
Till she wakes it with her face.

The standing whirlpool of the stars,
The wheel of all the world,
Is a ring on Our Lady’s finger
With the suns and moons empearled
With stars for stones to please her
Who sits playing with her rings
With the great heart that a woman has
And the love of little things.

Wings of the whirlwind of the world
From here to Ispahan,
Spurning the flying forests
Are light as Our Lady’s fan:
For all things violent here and vain
Lie open and all at ease
Where God has girded heaven to guard
Her holy vanities.

THE PHILANTHROPIST

(With apologies to a beautiful poem.)

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe decrease
By cautious birth-control and die in peace)
Mellow with learning lightly took the word
That marked him not with them that love the Lord,
And told the angel of the book and pen
“Write me as one that loves his fellow-men:
For them alone I labour; to reclaim
The ragged roaming Bedouin and to tame
To ordered service; to uproot their vine
Who mock the Prophet, being mad with wine,
Let daylight through their tents and through their lives,
Number their camels, even count their wives,
Plot out the desert into streets and squares;
And count it a more fruitful work than theirs
Who lift a vain and visionary love
To your vague Allah in the skies above.”

Gently replied the angel of the pen:
“Labour in peace and love your fellow-men:
And love not God, since men alone are dear,
Only fear God; for you have cause to fear.”

ON THE DOWNS

When you came over the top of the world
In the great day on the Downs,
The air was crisp and the clouds were curled,
When you came over the top of the world,
And under your feet were spire and street
And seven English towns.

And I could not think that the pride was perished
As you came over the down;
Liberty, chivalry, all we cherished,
Lost in a rattle of pelf and perished;
Or the land we love that you walked above
Withering town by town.

For you came out on the dome of the earth
Like a vision of victory,
Out on the great green dome of the earth
As the great blue dome of the sky for girth,
And under your feet the shires could meet
And your eyes went out to sea.

Under your feet the towns were seven,
Alive and alone on high,
Your back to the broad white wall of heaven;
You were one and the towns were seven,
Single and one as the soaring sun
And your head upheld the sky.

And I thought of a thundering flag unfurled
And the roar of the burghers' bell:
Beacons crackled and bolts were hurled
As you came over the top of the world;
And under your feet were chance and cheat
And the slime of the slopes of hell.

It has not been as the great wind spoke
On the great green down that day:
We have seen, wherever the wide wind spoke,
Slavery slaying the English folk:
The robbers of land we have seen command
The rulers of land obey.

We have seen the gigantic golden worms
In the garden of paradise:
We have seen the great and the wise make terms
With the peace of snakes and the pride of worms,
and them that plant make covenant
With the locust and the lice.

And the wind blows and the world goes on
And the world can say that we,
Who stood on the cliffs where the quarries shone,
Stood upon clouds that the sun shone on:
And the clouds dissunder and drown in thunder
The news that will never be.

Lady of all that have loved the people,
Light over roads astray,
Maze of steading and street and steeple,
Great as a heart that has loved the people:
Stand on the crown of the soaring down,
Lift up your arms and pray.

Only you I have not forgotten
For wreck of the world’s renown,
Rending and ending of things gone rotten,
Only the face of you unforgotten:
And your head upthrown in the skies alone
As you came over the down.

THE RED SEA

Our souls shall be Leviathans
In purple seas of wine
When drunkenness is dead with death,
And drink is all divine;
Learning in those immortal vats
What mortal vineyards mean;
For only in heaven we shall know
How happy we have been.

Like clouds that wallow in the wind
Be free to drift and drink;
Tower without insolence when we rise,
Without surrender sink:
Dreams dizzy and crazy we shall know
And have no need to write
Our blameless blasphemies of praise,
Our nightmares of delight.

For so in such misshapen shape
The vision came to me,
Where such titanian dolphins dark
Roll in a sunset sea:
Dark with dense colours, strange and strong
As terrible true love,
Haloed like fish in phospher light
The holy monsters move.

Measure is here and law, to learn,
When honour rules it so,
To lift the glass and lay it down
Or break the glass and go.
But when the world’s New Deluge boils
From the New Noah’s vine,
Our souls shall be Leviathans
In sanguine seas of wine.

FOR A WAR MEMORIAL

(Suggested Inscription probably not selected by the Committee.)

The hucksters haggle in the mart
The cars and carts go by;
Senates and schools go droning on;
For dead things cannot die.

A storm stooped on the place of tombs
With bolts to blast and rive;
But these be names of many men
The lightning found alive.

If usurers rule and rights decay
And visions view once more
Great Carthage like a golden shell
Gape hollow on the shore,

Still to the last of crumbling time
Upon this stone be read
How many men of England died
To prove they were not dead.

MEMORY

If I ever go back to Baltimore,
The city of Maryland,
I shall miss again as I missed before
A thousand things of the world in store,
The story standing in every door
That beckons with every hand.

I shall not know where the bonds were riven
And a hundred faiths set free,
Where a wandering cavalier had given
Her hundredth name to the Queen of Heaven,
And made oblation of feuds forgiven
To Our Lady of Liberty.

I shall not travel the tracks of fame
Where the war was not to the strong;
When Lee the last of the heroes came
With the Men of the South and a flag like flame,
And called the land by its lovely name
In the unforgotten song.

If ever I cross the sea and stray
To the city of Maryland,
I will sit on a stone and watch or pray
For a stranger's child that was there one day:
And the child will never come back to play,
And no-one will understand.

THE ENGLISH GRAVES

Were I that wandering citizen whose city is the world,
I would not weep for all that fell before the flags were furled;
I would not let one murmur mar the trumpets volleying forth
How God grew weary of the kings, and the cold hell in the north.
But we whose hearts are homing birds have heavier thoughts of home,
Though the great eagles burn with gold on Paris or on Rome,
Who stand beside our dead and stare, like seers at an eclipse,
At the riddle of the island tale and the twilight of the ships.

For these were simple men that loved with hands and feet and eyes,
Whose souls were humbled to the hills and narrowed to the skies,
The hundred little lands within one little land that lie,
Where Severn seeks the sunset isles or Sussex scales the sky.

And what is theirs, though banners blow on Warsaw risen again,
Or ancient laughter walks in gold through the vineyards of Lorraine,
Their dead are marked on English stones, their loves on English trees,
How little is the prize they win, how mean a coin for these —
How small a shrivelled laurel-leaf lies crumpled here and curled:
They died to save their country and they only saved the world.

NIGHTMARE

The silver and violet leopard of the night
Spotted with stars and smooth with silence sprang;
And though three doors stood open, the end of light
Closed like a trap; and stillness was a clang.

Under the leopard sky of lurid stars
I strove with evil sleep the hot night long,
Dreams dumb and swollen of triumphs without wars,
Of tongueless trumpet and unanswering gong.

I saw a pale imperial pomp go by,
Helmet and hornèd mitre and heavy wreath;
Their high strange ensigns hung upon the sky
And their great shields were like the doors of death.

Their mitres were as moving pyramids
And all their crowns as marching towers were tall;
Their eyes were cold under their carven lids
And the same carven smile was on them all.

Over a paven plain that seemed unending
They passed unfaltering till it found an end
In one long shallow step; and these descending
Fared forth anew as long away to wend.

I thought they travelled for a thousand years;
And at the end was nothing for them all,
For all that splendour of sceptres and of spears,
But a new step, another easy fall.

The smile of stone seemed but a little less,
The load of silver but a little more:
And ever was that terraced wilderness
And falling plain paved like a palace floor.

Rust red as gore crawled on their arms of might
And on their faces wrinkles and not scars:
Till the dream suddenly ended; noise and light
Loosened the tyranny of the tropic stars.

But over them like a subterranean sun
I saw the sign of all the fiends that fell;
And a wild voice cried “Hasten and be done,
Is there no steepness in the stairs of hell?”

He that returns, He that remains the same,
Turned the round real world, His iron vice;
Down the grey garden paths a bird called twice,
And through three doors mysterious daylight came.

A SECOND CHILDHOOD

When all my days are ending
And I have no song to sing,
I think I shall not be too old
To stare at everything;
As I stared once at a nursery door
Or a tall tree and a swing.

Wherein God's ponderous mercy hangs
On all my sins and me,
Because He does not take away
The terror from the tree
And stones still shine along the road
That are and cannot be.

Men grow too old for love, my love,
Men grow too old for wine,
But I shall not grow too old to see
Unearthly daylight shine,
Changing my chamber's dust to snow
Till I doubt if it be mine.

Behold, the crowning mercies melt,
The first surprises stay;
And in my dross is dropped a gift
For which I dare not pray:
That a man grow used to grief and joy
But not to night and day.

Men grow too old for love, my love,
Men grow too old for lies;
But I shall not grow too old to see
Enormous night arise,
A cloud that is larger than the world
And a monster made of eyes.

Nor am I worthy to unloose
The latchet of my shoe;
Or shake the dust from off my feet
Or the staff that bears me through
On ground that is too good to last,
Too solid to be true.

Men grow too old to woo, my love,
Men grow too old to wed:
But I shall not grow too old to see
Hung crazily overhead
Incredible rafters when I wake
And find I am not dead.

A thrill of thunder in my hair:
Though blackening clouds be plain,
Still I am stung and startled
By the first drop of the rain:
Romance and pride and passion pass
And these are what remain.

Strange crawling carpets of the grass,
Wide windows of the sky:
So in this perilous grace of God
With all my sins go I:
And things grow new though I grow old,
Though I grow old and die.

MEDIÆVALISM

If men should rise and return to the noise and time of the tourney,
The name and fame of the tabard, the tangle of gules and gold,
Would these things stand and suffice for the bourne of a backward
  journey,
A light on our days returning, as it was in the days of old?

Nay, there is none rides back to pick up a glove or a feather,
Though the gauntlet rang with honour or the plume was more than a crown:
And hushed is the holy trumpet that called the nations together
And under the Horns of Hattin the hope of the world went down.

Ah, not in remembrance stored, but out of oblivion starting,
Because you have sought new homes and all that you sought is so,
Because you had trodden the fire and barred the door in departing,
Returns in your chosen exile the glory of long ago.

Not then when you barred the door, not then when you trod the embers,
But now, at your new road's end, you have seen the face of a fate,
That not as a child looks back, and not as a fool remembers,
All that men took too lightly and all that they love too late.

It is you that have made no rubric for saints, no raiment for lovers,
Your caps that cry for a feather, your roofs that sigh for a spire:
Is it a dream from the dead if your own decay discovers
Alive in your rotting graveyard the worm of the world's desire?

Therefore the old trees tower, that the green trees grow and are stunted:
Therefore these dead men mock you, that you the living are dead:
Since ever you battered the saints and the tools of your crafts were
  blunted,
Or shattered the glass in its glory and loaded yourselves with the
  lead.

When the usurer hunts the squire as the squire has hunted the peasant,
As sheep that are eaten of worms where men were eaten of sheep:

Now is the judgment of earth, and the weighing of past and present,
Who scorn to weep over ruins, behold your ruin and weep.

Have ye not known, ye fools, that have made the present a prison,
That thirst can remember water and hunger remember bread?
We went not gathering ghosts; but the shriek of your shame is arisen
Out of your own black Babel too loud; and it woke the dead.

POLAND

Augurs that watched archaic birds
Such plumèd prodigies might read,
The eagles that were double-faced,
The eagle that was black indeed;
And when the battle-birds went down
And in their track the vultures come,
We know what pardon and what peace
Will keep our little masters dumb.

The men that sell what others make,
As vultures eat what others slay,
Will prove in matching plume with plume
That naught is black and all is grey;
Grey as those dingy doves that once,
By money-changers palmed and priced,
Amid the crash of tables flapped
And huddled from the wrath of Christ.

But raised for ever for a sign
Since God made anger glorious,
Where eagles black and vultures grey
Flocked back about the heroic house,
Where war is holier than peace,
Where hate is holier than love,
Shone terrible as the Holy Ghost
An eagle whiter than a dove.

THE HUNTING OF THE DRAGON

When we went hunting the Dragon
In the days when we were young,
We tossed the bright world over our shoulder
As bugle and baldrick slung;
Never was world so wild and fair
As what went by on the wind,
Never such fields of paradise
As the fields we left behind:
  For this is the best of a rest for men
  That men should rise and ride
  Making a flying fairyland
  Of market and country-side,
  Wings on the cottage, wings on the wood,
  Wings upon pot and pan,
  For the hunting of the Dragon
  That is the life of a man.

For men grow weary of fairyland
When the Dragon is a dream,
And tire of the talking bird in the tree,
The singing fish in the stream;
And the wandering stars grow stale, grow stale,
And the wonder is stiff with scorn;
For this is the honour of fairyland
And the following of the horn;

  Beauty on beauty called us back
  When we could rise and ride,
  And a woman looked out of every window
  As wonderful as a bride:
  And the tavern-sign as a tabard blazed,
  And the children cheered and ran,
  For the love of the hate of the Dragon
  That is the pride of a man.

The sages called him a shadow
And the light went out of the sun:
And the wise men told us that all was well
And all was weary and one:
And then, and then, in the quiet garden,
With never a weed to kill,
We knew that his shining tail had shone
In the white road over the hill:
We knew that the clouds were flakes of flame,
We knew that the sunset fire
Was red with the blood of the Dragon
Whose death is the world’s desire.

For the horn was blown in the heart of the night
That men should rise and ride,
Keeping the tryst of a terrible jest
Never for long untried;
Drinking a dreadful blood for wine,
Never in cup or can,
The death of a deathless Dragon,
That is the life of a man.

SONNET

High on the wall that holds Jerusalem
I saw one stand under the stars like stone.
And when I perish it shall not be known
Whether he lived, some strolling son of Shem,
Or was some great ghost wearing the diadem
Of Solomon or Saladin on a throne:
I only know, the features being unshown,
I did not dare draw near and look on them.

Did ye not guess ... the diadem might be
Plaited in stranger style by hands of hate ...
But when I looked, the wall was desolate
And the grey starlight powdered tower and tree:
And vast and vague beyond the Golden Gate
Heaved Moab of the mountains like a sea.

FANTASIA

The happy men that lose their heads
They find their heads in heaven,
As cherub heads with cherub wings,
And cherub haloes even:
Out of the infinite evening lands
Along the sunset sea,
Leaving the purple fields behind,
The cherub wings beat down the wind
Back to the groping body and blind
As the bird back to the tree.

Whether the plumes be passion-red
For him that truly dies
By headsmen’s blade or battle-axe,
Or blue like butterflies,
For him that lost it in a lane
In April’s fits and starts,
His folly is forgiven then:
But higher, and far beyond our ken,
Is the healing of the unhappy men,
The men that lost their hearts.

Is there not pardon for the brave
And broad release above,
Who lost their heads for liberty
Or lost their hearts for love?
Or is the wise man wise indeed
Whom larger thoughts keep whole?
Who sees life equal like a chart,
Made strong to play the saner part,
And keep his head and keep his heart,
And only lose his soul.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

(The Chief Constable has issued a statement declaring that carol singing in the streets by children is illegal, and morally and physically injurious. He appeals to the public to discourage the practice. — Daily Paper.)

God rest you merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay;
The Herald Angels cannot sing,
The cops arrest them on the wing,
And warn them of the docketing
Of anything they say.

God rest you merry gentlemen,
May nothing you dismay:
On your reposeful cities lie
Deep silence, broken only by
The motor horn’s melodious cry,
The hooter’s happy bray.

So, when the song of children ceased
And Herod was obeyed,
In his high hall Corinthian
With purple and with peacock fan,
Rested that merry gentleman;
And nothing him dismayed.

TO CAPTAIN FRYATT

Trampled yet red is the last of the embers,
Red the last cloud of a sun that has set;
What of your sleeping though Flanders remembers,
What of your waking, if England forget?

Why should you share in the hearts that we harden,
In the shame of our nature, who see it and live?
How more than the godly the greedy can pardon,
How well and how quickly the hungry forgive.

Ah, well if the soil of the stranger had wrapped you,
While the lords that you served and the friends that you knew
Hawk in the marts of the tyrants that trapped you,
Tout in the shops of the butchers that slew.

Why should you wake for a realm that is rotten,
Stuffed with their bribes and as dead to their debts?
Sleep and forget us, as we have forgotten;
For Flanders remembers and England forgets.

FOR FOUR GUILDS

FOR FOUR GUILDS:

I. THE GLASS-STAINERS

To every Man his Mystery,
A trade and only one:
The masons make the hives of men,
The domes of grey or dun,
But we have wrought in rose and gold
The houses of the sun.

The shipwrights build the houses high,
Whose green foundations sway
Alive with fish like little flames,
When the wind goes out to slay.
But we abide with painted sails
The cyclone of the day.

The weavers make the clothes of men
And coats for everyone;
They walk the streets like sunset clouds;
But we have woven and spun
In scarlet or in golden-green
The gay coats of the sun.

You whom the usurers and the lords
With insolent liveries trod,
Deep in dark church behold, above
Their lance-lengths by a rod,
Where we have blazed the tabard
Of the trumpeter of God.

FOR FOUR GUILDS:

II. THE BRIDGE-BUILDERS

In the world’s whitest morning
As hoary with hope,
The Builder of Bridges
Was priest and was pope:
And the mitre of mystery
And the canopy his,
Who darkened the chasms
And domed the abyss.

To eastward and westward
Spread wings at his word
The arch with the key-stone
That stoops like a bird;
That rides the wild air
And the daylight cast under;
The highway of danger,
The gateway of wonder.

Of his throne were the thunders
That rivet and fix
Wild weddings of strangers
That meet and not mix;
The town and the cornland;
The bride and the groom:
In the breaking of bridges
Is treason and doom.

But he bade us, who fashion
The road that can fly,
That we build not too heavy
And build not too high:
Seeing alway that under
The dark arch’s bend
Shine death and white daylight
Unchanged to the end.

Who walk on his mercy
Walk light, as he saith,

Seeing that our life
Is a bridge above death;
And the world and its gardens
And hills, as ye heard,
Are born above space
On the wings of a bird.

Not high and not heavy
Is building of his:
When ye seal up the flood
And forget the abyss,
When your towers are uplifted,
Your banners unfurled,
In the breaking of bridges
Is the end of the world.

FOR FOUR GUILDS:

III. THE STONE-MASONS

We have graven the mountain of God with hands,
As our hands were graven of God, they say,
Where the seraphs burn in the sun like brands
And the devils carry the rains away;
Making a thrift of the throats of hell,
Our gargoyles gather the roaring rain,
Whose yawn is more than a frozen yell
And their very vomiting not in vain.

Wilder than all that a tongue can utter,
Wiser than all that is told in words,
The wings of stone of the soaring gutter
Fly out and follow the flight of the birds;
The rush and rout of the angel wars
Stand out above the astounded street,
Where we flung our gutters against the stars
For a sign that the first and the last shall meet.

We have graven the forest of heaven with hands,
Being great with a mirth too gross for pride,
In the stone that battered him Stephen stands
And Peter himself is petrified:
Such hands as have grubbed in the glebe for bread
Have bidden the blank rock blossom and thrive,
Such hands as have stricken a live man dead
Have struck, and stricken the dead alive.

Fold your hands before heaven in praying,
Lift up your hands into heaven and cry;
But look where our dizziest spires are saying
What the hands of a man did up in the sky:
Drenched before you have heard the thunder,
White before you have felt the snow;
For the giants lift up their hands to wonder
How high the hands of a man could go.

FOR FOUR GUILDS:

IV. THE BELL-RINGERS

The angels are singing like birds in a tree
In the organ of good St. Cecily:
And the parson reads with his hand upon
The graven eagle of great St. John:
But never the fluted pipes shall go
Like the fifes of an army all a-row,
Merrily marching down the street
To the marts where the busy and idle meet;
And never the brazen bird shall fly
Out of the window and into the sky,
Till men in cities and shires and ships
Look up at the living Apocalypse.

But all can hark at the dark of even
The bells that bay like the hounds of heaven,
Tolling and telling that over and under,

In the ways of the air like a wandering thunder,
The hunt is up over hills untrod:
For the wind is the way of the dogs of God:
From the tyrant's tower to the outlaw's den
Hunting the souls of the sons of men.
Ruler and robber and pedlar and peer,
Who will not harken and yet will hear;
Filling men's heads with the hurry and hum
Making them welcome before they come.

And we poor men stand under the steeple
Drawing the cords that can draw the people,
And in our leash like the leaping dogs
Are God's most deafening demagogues:
And we are but little, like dwarfs underground,
While hang up in heaven the houses of sound,
Moving like mountains that faith sets free,
Yawning like caverns that roar with the sea,
As awfully loaded, as airily buoyed,
Armoured archangels that trample the void:
Wild as with dancing and weighty with dooms,
Heavy as their panoply, light as their plumes.

Neither preacher nor priest are we:
Each man mount to his own degree:
Only remember that just such a cord
Tosses in heaven the trumpet and sword;
Souls on their terraces, saints on their towers,
Rise up in arms at alarum like ours:
Glow like great watchfires that redden the skies
Titans whose wings are a glory of eyes,
Crowned constellations by twelves and by sevens,
Domed dominations more old than the heavens,
Virtues that thunder and thrones that endure
Sway like a bell to the prayers of the poor.

THE CONVERT

After one moment when I bowed my head
And the whole world turned over and came upright,
And I came out where the old road shone white,
I walked the ways and heard what all men said,
Forests of tongues, like autumn leaves unshed,
Being not unlovable but strange and light;
Old riddles and new creeds, not in despite
But softly, as men smile about the dead.

The sages have a hundred maps to give
That trace their crawling cosmos like a tree,
They rattle reason out through many a sieve
That stores the sand and lets the gold go free:
And all these things are less than dust to me
Because my name is Lazarus and I live.

SONGS OF EDUCATION

SONGS OF EDUCATION:

I. HISTORY

Form 991785, Sub-Section D

The Roman threw us a road, a road,
And sighed and strolled away:
The Saxon gave us a raid, a raid,
A raid that came to stay;
The Dane went west, but the Dane confessed
That he went a bit too far;
And we all became, by another name,
The Imperial race we are.

Chorus

The Imperial race, the inscrutable race,
The invincible race we are.

Though Sussex hills are bare, are bare,
And Sussex weald is wide,
From Chichester to Chester
Men saw the Norman ride;
He threw his sword in the air and sang
To a sort of a light guitar;
It was all the same, for we all became
The identical nobs we are.

Chorus

The identical nobs, individual nobs
Unmistakable nobs we are.

The people lived on the land, the land,
They pottered about and prayed;
They built a cathedral here and there
Or went on a small crusade:
Till the bones of Becket were bundled out
For the fun of a fat White Czar,
And we all became, in spoil and flame,
The intelligent lot we are.

Chorus

The intelligent lot, the intuitive lot,
The infallible lot we are.

O Warwick woods are green, are green,
But Warwick trees can fall:
And Birmingham grew so big, so big,
And Stratford stayed so small.
Till the hooter howled to the morning lark
That sang to the morning star;
And we all became, in freedom's name,
The fortunate chaps we are.

Chorus

The fortunate chaps, felicitous chaps,
The fairy-like chaps we are.

The people they left the land, the land,
But they went on working hard;
And the village green that had got mislaid
Turned up in the squire's back-yard:
But twenty men of us all got work
On a bit of his motor car;
And we all became, with the world's acclaim,
The marvellous mugs we are:

Chorus

The marvellous mugs, miraculous mugs,
The mystical mugs we are.

SONGS OF EDUCATION:

II. GEOGRAPHY

Form 17955301, Sub-Section Z

The earth is a place on which England is found,
And you find it however you twirl the globe round;
For the spots are all red and the rest is all grey,
And that is the meaning of Empire Day.

Gibraltar’s a rock that you see very plain,
And attached to its base is the district of Spain.
And the island of Malta is marked further on,
Where some natives were known as the Knights of St. John.
Then Cyprus, and east to the Suez Canal,
That was conquered by Dizzy and Rothschild his pal
With the Sword of the Lord in the old English way;
And that is the meaning of Empire Day.

Our principal imports come far as Cape Horn;
For necessities, cocoa; for luxuries, corn;
Thus Brahmins are born for the rice-field, and thus,
The Gods made the Greeks to grow currants for us;
Tobacco and petrol and Jazzing and Jews:
The Jazzing will pass but the Jews they will stay;
And that is the meaning of Empire Day.

Our principal exports, all labelled and packed,
At the ends of the earth are delivered intact:
Our soap or our salmon can travel in tins
Between the two poles and as like as two pins;
So that Lancashire merchants whenever they like
Can water the beer of a man in Klondike

Or poison the meat of a man in Bombay;
And that is the meaning of Empire Day.

The day of St. George is a musty affair
Which Russians and Greeks are permitted to share;
The day of Trafalgar is Spanish in name
And the Spaniards refuse to pronounce it the same;
But the Day of the Empire from Canada came
With Morden and Borden and Beaverbrook's fame
And saintly seraphical souls such as they:
And that is the meaning of Empire Day.

SONGS OF EDUCATION:

III. FOR THE CRÊCHE

Form 8277059, Sub-Section K

I remember my mother, the day that we met,
A thing I shall never entirely forget;
And I toy with the fancy that, young as I am,
I should know her again if we met in a tram.
  But mother is happy in turning a crank
  That increases the balance at somebody's bank;
  And I feel satisfaction that mother is free
  From the sinister task of attending to me.

They have brightened our room, that is spacious and cool,
With diagrams used in the Idiot School,
And Books for the Blind that will teach us to see;
But mother is happy, for mother is free.
  For mother is dancing up forty-eight floors,
  For love of the Leeds International Stores,
  And the flame of that faith might perhaps have grown cold,
  With the care of a baby of seven weeks old.

For mother is happy in greasing a wheel
For somebody else, who is cornering Steel;

And though our one meeting was not very long,
She took the occasion to sing me this song:
  "O, hush thee, my baby, the time soon will come
  When thy sleep will be broken with hooting and hum;
  There are handles want turning and turning all day,
  And knobs to be pressed in the usual way;

O, hush thee, my baby, take rest while I croon,
For Progress comes early, and Freedom too soon."

SONGS OF EDUCATION:

IV. CITIZENSHIP

Form 8889512, Sub-Section Q

How slowly learns the child at school
The names of all the nobs that rule
From Ponsonby to Pennant;
Ere his bewildered mind find rest,
Knowing his host can be a Guest,
His landlord is a Tennant.

He knew not, at the age of three,
What Lord St. Leger next will be
Or what he was before;
A Primrose in the social swim
A Mr. Primrose is to him,
And he is nothing more.

But soon, about the age of ten,
He finds he is a Citizen,
And knows his way about;
Can pause within, or just beyond,
The line 'twixt Mond and Demi-Mond,
'Twixt Getting On — or Out.

The Citizen will take his share
(In every sense) as bull and bear;
Nor need this oral ditty
Invoke the philologic pen
To show you that a Citizen
Means Something in the City.

Thus gains he, with the virile gown,
The fasces and the civic crown,
The forum of the free;
Not more to Rome’s high law allied
Is Devonport in all his pride
Or Lipton’s self than he.

For he will learn, if he will try,
The deep interior truths whereby
We rule the Commonwealth;
What is the Food-Controller’s fee
And whether the Health Ministry
Are in it for their health.

SONGS OF EDUCATION:

V. THE HIGHER MATHEMATICS

Form 339125, Sub-Section M

    Twice one is two,
    Twice two is four,
But twice two is ninety-six if you know the way to score.
    Half of two is one,
    Half of four is two,
But half of four is forty per cent. if your name is Montagu:
  For everything else is on the square
  If done by the best quadratics;
  And nothing is low in High Finance
  Or the Higher Mathematics.

A straight line is straight
And a square mile is flat:
But you learn in trigonometrics a trick worth two of that.
Two straight lines
Can’t enclose a Space,
But they can enclose a Corner to support the Chosen Race:
For you never know what Dynamics do
With the lower truths of Statics;
And half of two is a touring car
In the Higher Mathematics.

There is a place apart
Beyond the solar ray,
Where parallel straight lines can meet in an unofficial way.
There is a room that holds
The examiner or his clerks,
Where you can square the circle or the man that gives the marks.
Where you hide in the cellar and then look down
On the poets that live in the attics;
For the whole of the house is upside down
In the Higher Mathematics.

SONGS OF EDUCATION:

VI. HYGIENE

Form 394411102, Sub-Section X

“All practical Eugenists are agreed on the importance of sleep.” — The Eugenic Congress.

When Science taught mankind to breathe
A little while ago,
Only a wise and thoughtful few
Were really in the know:
Nor could the Youth his features wreathe,
Puffing from all the lungs beneath:

When Duty whispered softly “Breathe!”
The Youth would answer “Blow!”

When Science proved with lucid care
The need of Exercise,
Our thoughtless Youth was climbing trees
Or lightly blacking eyes:
To reckless idlers breaking bounds
For football or for hare-and-hounds,
Or fighting hard for fourteen rounds,
It came as a surprise.

But when she boldly counsels Sleep
To persons when in bed,
Then, then indeed men blush to see
The daybreak blushing red:
The early risers whom we term
Healthy, grow sickly and infirm;
The Early Bird who caught the Worm
Will catch the Germ instead.

For this at least be Science praised
If all the rest be rot,
That now she snubs the priggish child
That quits too soon his cot:
The pharisaic pachyderm
Of spiritual pride shall squirm:
The Early Bird catches the worm,
The Worm that dieth not.

GLORIA IN PROFUNDIS

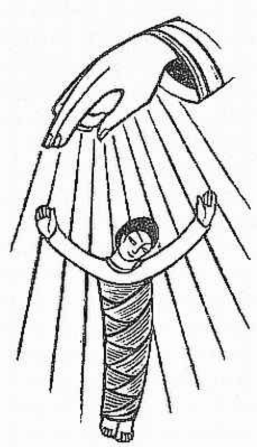

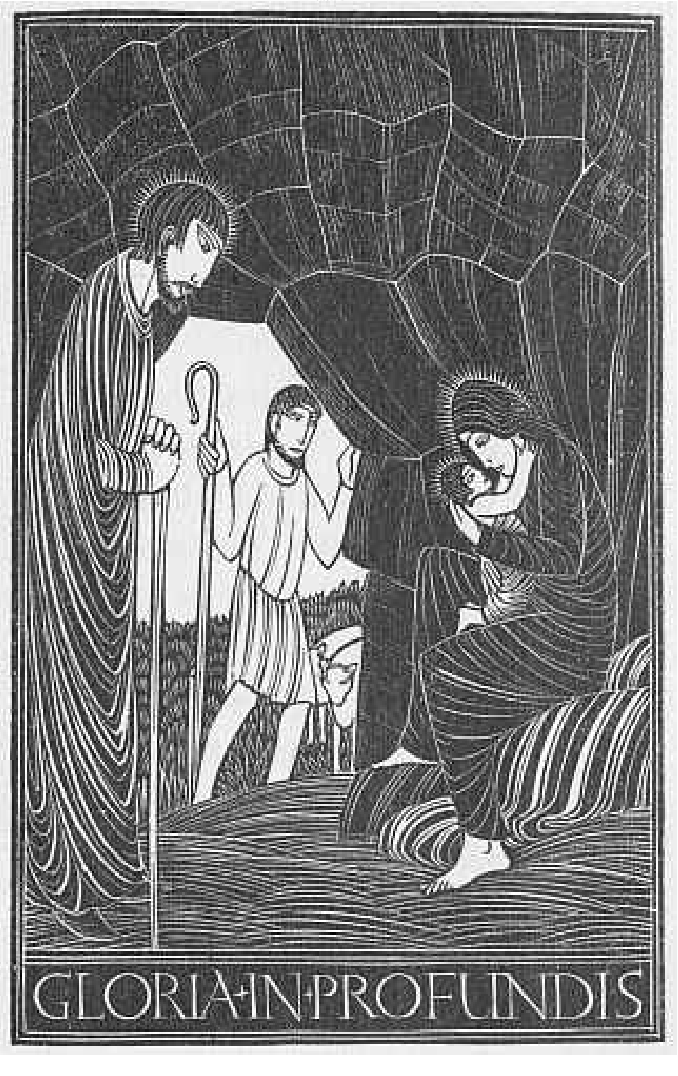
GLORIA·IN·PROFUNDIS

GLORIA IN PROFUNDIS

(*Chorus from an Unfinished Play*)

There has fallen on earth for a token
A god too great for the sky.
He has burst out of all things and broken
The bounds of eternity:
Into time and the terminal land
He has strayed like a thief or a lover,
For the wine of the world brims over,
Its splendour is spilt on the sand.

Who is proud when the heavens are humble,
Who mounts if the mountains fall,
If the fixed suns topple and tumble
And a deluge of love drown all —
Who rears up his head for a crown,
Who holds up his will for a warrant,
Who strives with the starry torrent
When all that is good goes down?

For in dread of such falling and failing
The Fallen Angels fell
Inverted in insolence, scaling
The hanging mountain of hell:
But unmeasured of plummet and rod
Too deep for their sight to scan,
Outrushing the fall of man
Is the height of the fall of God.

Glory to God in the Lowest
The spout of the stars in spate —
Where the thunderbolt thinks to be slowest
And the lightning fears to be late:
As men dive for a sunken gem
Pursuing, we hunt and hound it,

The fallen star that has found it
In the cavern of Bethlehem.

UBI ECCLESIA

UBI ECCLESIA

“You must seek a castle east of the sun and west of the moon.”

“For as the lightning cometh out of the east
and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the
coming of the Son of Man be.” — St. *Matthew, XXIV.* 27.

Our Castle is East of the Sun
Aiid our Castle is West of the Moon
So wisely hidden from all the wise
In a twist of the air, in a fold of the skies,
They go East, they go West, of the land where it lies
And a fool finds it soon.
Our Castle is East of the Sun
And abides not the law of the sunlight
The last long shot of Apollo
Falls spent ere i t strikes the tower
Far East of the steep, of the strong.
Going up of the golden horses.
Strange suns have governed our going.
Strange dials the day and the hour.
With hearts not fed of Demeter
With thoughts unappeased of Athene
We have groped through the earth’s dead daylight
To a night that is more, not less:
We have seen his star in the East
That is dark as a cloud from the westward
To the Roman a reek out of Asia
To the Greeks foolishness.
For the sun is not lord but a servant
Of the secret sun we have seen
The sun of the crypt and the cavern
The crown of a secret queen

Where things are not what they seem
But what they mean.

But our Castle is West of the Moon
Nor the Moon hath lordship upon it
The Horns and the horsemen crying
On their great ungraven God:
And West of the moons of magic
And the sleep of the moon-faced idols
And the great moon-colored crystal
Where the Mages mutter and nod:
The black and the purple poppies
That grow in Gautama’s garden
Have waved not ever upon us
The smell of their sweet despair
And the yellow masks of the Ancients
Looking west from their tinkling temples
See Hope on our hill Mountjoy,
And the dawn and the dancers there.
For the moon is not lord but a servant
Of the Smile more bright than the sun
And all they desire and despair of
And weary of winning is won
In our Castle of Joyous Garde
Desired and done.

So abides it dim in the midmost
The Bridge called Both-and-Neither,
To the East a wind from the westward
To the West a light from the East;
But the map is not made of man
That can plot out its place under heaven.
That is counted and lost and left over
The largest thing and the least.

For our Castle is East of the Sun
And our Castle is West of the Moon

And the dark labyrinthine charts of the wise
Point East and point West of the land where it lies
And a Pool walks blind on the highway
And finds it soon.

THE GRAVE OF ARTHUR

THE GRAVE OF ARTHUR

Down through the rocks where the dark roots dry,
The last long roots of the Glaston Thorn,
Dead is the King that never was born,
Dead is the King that never shall die.

They found him between the pyramids
In the subterranean land, men say,
And there was not rending nor rolling
Of linen nor lifting of coffin-lids,

But the giant bones like the columns lie,
The far-flung towers of a flattened city
That is dead with a doom too old for pity
(Dead is the King who does not die).

Coiled on his left from neck to knee,
Huge and hollow the horn is curled,
White as the worm that devours the world,
Carved with the cold white snakes of the sea.

Flat on his right, in the dust grown grey,
Is patterned the vast cross-hilted sword
Graven with the Coming of Christ the Lord,
Gold with the trumpets of Judgment Day.

Between the first and the last he lies
And between the false and the true dreams he:
Born without birth of a fabled sea
Amoured in death till the dead shall rise.

And back and forth as a tolling bell
And forth and backward the Roman rhyme
Rolls in a ring that mocks at time
Tolling the truth that none can tell.

In the high still hollow where Time is not
Or all times turn and exchange and borrow
In the glass wherein God remembers tomorrow
And truth looks forward to times forgot.

Where God looks back on the days to be
And heaven is yet hoping for yesterday;
The light in which time shall be taken away
And the soul that faces all ways is free,

The rune shall be read though it twist and turn,
And the riddle be learnt that is past all learning,
Of the Man unborn who is ever returning
And ever delaying, till God return.

And for ever and ever till death discover
Why truth speaks double in dreams and day;
And the Myth and the Man that wandered away
Make tryst together as lover to lover,

A dream shall wail through the worm-shaped horn
“Dead is a King that never was born”
And a trumpet of truth from the Cross reply
“Dead is the King who shall not die.”

NEW POEMS

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The Judgment of England

‘Ill fares the land, to hastening woes a prey
Where Wealth accumulates and Men decay.’
So rang of old the noble voice in vain
O’er the Last Peasants wandering on the plain,
Doom has reversed the riddle and the rhyme,
While sinks the commerce reared upon that crime,
The thriftless towns litter with lives undone,
To whom our madness left no joy but one;
And irony that glares like Judgment Day
Sees Men accumulate and Wealth decay.

The Monster

‘The degenerate Greek intellect wasted itself in
futile debates about the dual nature of Christ.’
MAGAZINE ARTICLE

One with the golden eagle of the morning,
Flat and flung wide above the spinning plains,
It seemed my spirit sprang and wheeled and flew.
The world went under us like a river of light,
An ecstasy of order, where each life,
Rejoicing in its law, rushed to its end:
To break itself and breed; the embattled vines,
Grassland and grainland waved their thousand spears
In one wild rhythm as they swept along,
A map of marching armies, all one way;
And ploughmen on their uplands ribbed with gold,
Went forward happy, with their backs to heaven.

Only the sacred eagle up the stream
Strove back to his beginnings; left behind
The white archaic dawns on herb less hills,
The first cold hues of chaos; like a stair
Mounted the soundless cataracts of the sun,
Seeking the sun of suns; till suddenly
The last heavens opened; for one flash 1 saw
Something too large and calm for sight or reason,
The Urns of Evil and Good, vast as two worlds,
And over them a larger face than Fate’s
Of that first Will that is when all was not.
But that unblinded burning eagle soared
And perched upon His thunderous right hand.
I cowered, and heard a cry torn out of me
In an unknown tongue older than all my race,
‘O Father of Gods and Men’; and saw no more.

The vulture from his dark and hairy nest
Far down the low-browed cliffs of the abyss
Stood black against the sun; a shape of shame:
A plumed eclipse; and all the ways of men
Were paved with upturned faces; masks of hate:
For that hooked head was like a horrible tool,
An instrument of torture made alive
With creaking pinions; for what end they knew:
The vulture of the vengeance of the gods.

For a red under-light on all that land,
A hell that is the underside of heaven,
Glowed from men’s struggling fires; and as I followed
That evil bird over lost battle-fields,
Where panoplied and like fallen palaces
The great and foolish kings who warred with doom
Lay sunken with their star; I saw far off,
Misshapen, against the dark red dome of sky,
A mountain on a mountain. As I gazed
The shape seemed changed: the upper mountain moved.
It heaved vast flanks ribbed like the red-ribbed hills,
Thrust down an uprooted forest with one heel
And stretched a Titan’s arm to touch the sky.
‘You slay for ever, but you slay too late;
A stolen secret turns not home again.
While I lie lifted high against your wrath.
Hanged on this gibbet of rock, far down below
The fire is spreading on the earth’s dark plains
And my red stars come forth like flowers of night
And my red sun bums when your white sun dies.
See where man’s watchfire dances and derides,
The sickly servile sunset crawling away:
Lo; my red banner thrashes through the air,
Nor dare your vulture peck it if he pass.’

The vulture passed, a shadow on the fire,
And the dark hills were loud with dreadful cries.

I woke; the skies were empty of the eagle,
And empty of the vulture all the abyss:
And something in the yawning silence cried
Giants and gods were dying in new dawns:
Daylight itself had deepened; there opened in it
New depths or new dimensions; stone and tree
In that strange light grew solid; as does a statue
Or many-sided monument set beside
The flattened fables on a bas-relief.
Only in dark thin lines against the dawn
The last and lingering monsters limped away,
The boys with crooked legs and cries of goats
Ran as from one pursuing; amid the weeds
Wailed the strange women, neither fish nor flesh,
And from the hoary splendours of the sea
Rose Triton with the limbs that curled like whirlpools,
Stonily staring at some sign afar.

For a new light in a new silence shone
From some new nameless quarter of the sky
Behind us on the road; and all strange things
Looked back to something stranger than themselves.
And, towering still and trampling, the Last Centaur
Cried in a roar that shook the shuddering trees,
‘We rode our bodies without bridle at will,
We hurled our high breasts forward on flying hooves:
But these two bodies are a simple thing
Beside that Fear that comes upon the world.
A Monster walks behind.’ I dared not turn;
A shape lay like a shadow on the road.
I saw not but I heard; a sound more awful,
Then from the blackest cypress-close the call
Of some dark Janus shouting with two mouths:

‘I am Prometheus. I am Jupiter.
In ravening obedience down from heaven,

Hailed of my hand and by this sign alone,
My eagle comes to tear me. Touch me not.’

I lay there as one dead. But since I woke
This single world is double till I die.

The Modern Manichee

He sayeth there is no sin, and all his sin
Swells round him into a world made merciless;
The midnight of his universe of shame
Is the vast shadow of his shamelessness.
He blames all that begat him, gods or brutes.
And sires not sons he chides as with a rod.
The sins of the children visited on the fathers
Through all generations, back to a jealous God.

The fields that heal the humble, the happy forests
That sing to men confessed and men consoled,
To him are jungles only, greedy and groping,
Heartlessly new, unvenerably old.
Beyond the pride of his own cold compassion
Is only cruelty and imputed pain:
Matched with that mood, a boy’s sport in the forest
Makes comrades of the slayer and the slain.

The innocent lust of the unfallen creatures
Moves him to hidden horror but no mirth;
Misplaced morality rots in the roots unconscious,
His stifled conscience stinks through the green earth.
The green things thrust like horrible huge snails,
Horns green and gross, each lifting a leering eye
He scarce can call a flower; it lolls obscene,
Its organs gaping to the sneering sky.

Dark with that dusk the old red god of gardens,
Still pagan but not merry any more,
Stirs up the dull adulteries of the dust.
Blind, frustrate, hopeless, hollow at the core;
The plants are brutes tied with green rope and roaring
Their terrible dark loves from tree to tree:
He shrinks as from a shaft, if by him singing,

A gilded pimp and pandar, goes the bee.’

He sayeth, ‘I have no sin; I cast the stone,’
And throws his little pebble at the shrine,
Casts sin and stone away against the house
Whose health has turned earth’s waters into wine.
The venom of that repudiated guilt
Poisons the sea and every natural flood
As once a wavering tyrant washed his hands,
And touching, turned the water black with blood.

The Port of London Authority

Mr *Ben TiUett is reported to have once prayed*
in public for the death of Lord Devonport.
DAILY PAPER

We whom great mercy holds in fear,
Boast not the claim to cry,
Stricken of any mortal wrong,
‘Lord, let this live man die!’

But not incuriously we ask,
Pondering on life and death,
What name befits that round of years,
What name that span of breath.
That perfect dullness counting hands
That have no man or woman.
That fullness of the commonplace
That can despise the common.

That startling smallness that can stop
The breath like an abyss,
As, staring at rows of nought, we cry,
‘And men grow old for this!’

The thing that sniggers when it sneers,
That never can forget,
The billycock outshines the cap,
And then - the coronet!

O mighty to arise and smite,
O mightier to forgive,
Sunburst that blasted Lazarus,
Lord, let this dead man live!

By a Reactionary

Smoke rolls in stinking, suffocating wrack
On Shakespeare’s land, turning the green one black;
The crowds that once to harvest home would come
Hope for no harvest and possess no home,
While poor old tramps that liked a little ale,
In natural procession passed to gaol;
Because the world must, like the tramp, move on,
There does not seem much else that can be done.
As Lord Vangelt said in the House of Peers:
‘None of us want Reaction.’ (Tory cheers).

So doubtful doctors punch and prod and prick
A man thought dead; and when there’s not a kick
Left in the corpse, no twitch or faint contraction,
The doctors say: ‘See . . . there is no Reaction.’

A Broad Minded Bishop Rebukes

The Verminous St Francis
If Brother Francis pardoned Brother Flea,
There still seems need of such strange charity,
Seeing he is, for all his gay goodwill,
Bitten by funny little creatures still.

The Battle of the Stories (1915)

In the Caucasus.
They came uncounted like the stars that circle or are set,
They circled and they caught us as in a sparkling casting-net
We burst it in the mountain gate where all the guns began,
When the snow stood up at Christmas on the hills of Ardahan.
The guns - and not a bell to tell that God was made a man -
But we did all remember, though all the world forget.

Before Paris.
The kings came over the olden Rhine to break an ancient debt,
We took their rush at the river of death in the fields where first we met,
But we marked their millions swaying; then we marked a standard fell;
And far beyond them, like a bird, Maunoury's bugle call:
And there were not kings or debts or doubts or anything at all
But the People that remembers and the peoples that forget.

In Flanders.
Empty above your bleating hordes his throne abides the threat,
Who drew the sword of his despair to front your butcher's bet:
You shall scan the empty scabbard; you shall search the empty seat.
While he along the ruined skies rides royal with retreat,
In the judgment and the silence and the grass upon the street.
And the oath the heavens remember and you would fein forget.

In Poland.
A cloud was on the face of God when three kings met,
What hour the worst of men were made the sun hath suffered yet.
We knew them in their nibbling peace or ever they went to war.
In petty school and pilfered field we know them what they are.
And we drank the cup of anguish to the pardon of the Czar,
To the nations that remember and the empires that forget.
In the Dardanelles.

To the home mount of the high Mahound of moon and of minaret
Labouring go the sieging trains whose tracks are blood and sweat.
The ships break in a sanguine sea; and far to the front a boy
Fallen, and his face flung back to shout with the Son of God for joy.
And the long land under the lifted smoke; and a great light on Troy,
And all that men remember and madmen can forget.

In the Balkans.
They thrice on crags of death were dry and thrice in Danube wet
To prove an old man's empty heart was empty of regret,
For the Turks have taken his city's soul: his spurs of gold are dross,
And the Crescent hangs upon him while we hang upon the Cross.
But we heave our tower of pride upon Kossovo of the loss,
For a proof that we remember and the infidels forget.

In the Alps.
Master of Arts and mastery of arms, master of all things yet,
For the musket as for the mandolin the master fingers fret;
The news to the noise of the mandolin that all the world comes home,
And the young are young and the years return and the days of the kingdom come.
When the wars wearied, and the tribes turned; and the sun rose on Rome,
And all that Rome remembers when all her realms forget.

In the North Sea.
Though the seas were sown with the news dragons that knew not what they ate,
We broke St George's banner out to the black wind and the wet,
He hath broken all the bridges we could fling, the world and we,
But the bridge of death in heaven that His people might be free,
That we straddled for the saddle of the riders of the sea.
For St George that shall remember if the Dragon shall forget.

All the Voices.
Behold, we are men of many lands, in motley seasons set,
From Riga to the rock of Spain, from Orkney to Olivet,

Who stand up in the council in the turning of the year,
And, standing, give the judgment on the evil house of fear;
Knowing the End shall write again what we have written here,
On the day when God remembers and no man can forget.

To the Unknown Warrior

You whom the king saluted; who refused not
The one great gesture of ignoble days,
Fame without name and glory without gossip,
Whom no biographer befouls with praise.
Who said of you ‘Defeated? In the darkness
The dug-out where the limelight never comes,
Nor the big drum of Bamum’s Show can shatter
That vibrant stillness after all the drums.

Though the time come when every Yankee circus
Can use our soldiers for its sandwich-men,
When those that pay the piper call the tune,
You will not dance. You will not move again.

You will not march for Fatty Arbuckle,
Though he have yet a favourable press,
Tender a San Francisco to St Francis,
Or all the Angels of Los Angeles.

They shall not storm the last unfallen fortress,
The lonely castle where uncowed and free
Dwells the unknown and undefeated warrior
That did alone defeat Publicity.

To a Lady

Light of the young, before you have grown old
The world will have grown weary of its youth,
All its cheap charity and loose-lipped truth,
And passion that goes naked - and grows cold.

Tire of a pity so akin to hate,
Turn on a truth that is so near to treason,
When Time, the god of traitors, in their season
Marks down for dated all the up-to-date.

Then shall men know by the great grace you are,
How something better than blind fear or blunder
Bade us stand back, where we could watch with wonder,
Ladies like landscapes, very fair and far.

A crowd shall call your high estrangéd face,
A mask of blind reaction and resistance,
Because you have made large the world with distance,
As God made large the universe with space.

Yet beautiful your feet upon the mountains,
Moving in soundless music shall return,
And they that look into your eyes shall learn -
Having forced up the secret sea in fountains.

And having vulgarised infinity,
And splashed their brains against the starry steeps,
In what unfathomable inward deeps
Dwells the last mystery men call Liberty.

When they shall say we scorned and held in thrall
Spirits like yours; the mother of the tribe
Slandered, a slave, a butt for slur and gibe,
You shall confound the one great slur of all.

The one great slander answered long ago
By Her that hid all things within her heart,
One speaking when the veil was rent apart,
‘Women alone can keep a secret so.’

The World State

Oh, how I love Humanity,
With love so pure and pringlish,
And how I hate the horrid French,
Who never will be English!

The International Idea,
The largest and the clearest,
Is welding all the nations now,
Except the one that’s nearest.

This compromise has long been known,
This scheme of partial pardons,
In ethical societies
And small suburban gardens —

The villas and the chapels where
I learned with little labour
The way to love my fellow-man
And hate my next-door neighbour.

The Old Gentleman in the Park

Beyond the trees like iron trees,
The painted lamp-posts stand.
The old red road runs like the rust
Upon this iron land.

Cars flat as fish and fleet as birds,
Low-bodied and high speeded,
Go on their belly like the Snake,
And eat the dust as he did.

But down the red dust never more
Her happy horse-hoofs go.
O, what a road of rust indeed!
O, what a Rotten Row!

The Buried City

You that go forth upon the buried cities,
Whose witchcraft holds the withered kings together,
Seals up the very air of ancient seasons,
Like secret skies walled up from the world's weather.
You that dig up dead towns - arise and strive:
Strike through the slums and save the towns alive!

Dig London out of London; pierce the cavern
Where Manchester lies lost in Manchester.
You that re-chart the choked-up squares and markets,
Retrace the plan our blindness made a blur:
Until a name no more, but wide and tall,
Arise and shine the shield of London Wall.

Strike you the stones of these most desert places,
Huge warehouses the lonely watchmen tread,
Where ringed in noise the hollow heart of London
Lies all night long a city of the dead.
Or does One watch high o'er this maze that sprawls,
High on the vanished spire of Old St Paul's?

Life up your heads, ye gates of our remembrance,
Be lifted up, ye everlasting walls,
The gates revolve upon their giant hinges,
The guilds return unto their ancient halls.
Tell Bishopsgate a Bishop rides to town,
Not only come to pull the churches down.

You that let light into the sunken cities,
Let life into the void where light is vain
Ere vandals wreck the temples, porch and pillar,
Bring back fhe people to the porch again
Who find in tombs strange flowers, flattened and dried,
Quicken the incredible seed of London Pride.

If our vain haste has smothered home in houses
As our vain creeds have smothered man in men.
Though in that rock tomb sleeps the King less deeply
Than in this brick tomb sleeps the Citizen,
What will not God achieve if Man awake,
Since a rock-tomb was rended for our sake?

Namesake

Maty of Holyrood may smile indeed,
Knowing what grim historic shade it shocks
To see wit, laughter and the Popish creed,
Cluster and sparkle in the name of Knox.

Outline of History

A fishbone pattern of flint arrows battened
A fossil vision of the Age of Stone -
And sages in war-weary empires quarrel
With those quaint quarrels and forget their own.
What riddle is of the elf-darts or the elves
But the strange stony riddle of ourselves?

As by long worms the hills are pierced with holes,
Where long day’s joumeyings without light of day
Lead to a painted cave, a buried sky,
Whose clouds are creatures sprawling in coloured clay;
And men ask how and why such things were done
Darkly, with dyes that never saw the sun.

I have seen a statue in a London square.
One whose long-winded lies are long forgot,
Gleams with the rain above the twinkling bushes,
And birds perch on him in that unroofed plot.
Unriddle that dark image; and I will show
The secret of your pictured rocks below.

As green volcanic skies bury dark sunsets,
Green rust like snakes crawled, and their work concealed
The men who were red shadows in copper mirrors,
When groaned the golden and the brazen shield.
And the slaves worked the copper for their lords,
Stiff swarthy kings holding their yellow swords.

We have written the names of hucksters on the heavens
And tied our pigmy slaves to giant tools,
And chosen our nobles from the mart; and never
Stank to the sky the praise of prouder fools.
And amid the blare, the doctors and the dons,
In the Age of Brass brood on the Age of Bronze.

We clothe the dead in their theatric raiment
To hide their nakedness of normality;
Disguise by gilded mash or homed mitre
The accusing faces of such men as we:
Till the last brotherhood of men brings down
Us with the troglodites in their twilight town.

On a Prohibitionist Poem

Though Shakespeare’s Mermaid, ocean’s mightiest daughter,
With vintage could the seas incarnadine:
And Keats’s name that was not writ in water
Was often writ in wine.

Though wine that seeks the loftiest habitation
Went to the heads of Villon and Verlaine,
Yet Hiram Hopper needs no inspiration
But water on the brain.

The Modern Magic

Prester John on his lands looked down
He bore in one mystery mitre and crown,
And the scaly webs of the strange attire
Stripped from the dragon that feeds on fire,
And high over luminous rocks and trees
And the purple fish of his secret seas
And the whole sprawled map of the magical place,
A crystal mirror before his face
For ever stood; in whose circle shone
The world and all that is done thereon.
And the Seven Kings by his throne that stand
Cried, ‘Tell us the news from the Holy Land.’

‘Richard the King, of the scarlet ships,
Sweeps over Acre, but swerves and slips
From Godfrey’s gate and from God’s own crown,
And is shot in the ditch of a small French town.
Such is the news of the world,’ he said;
‘But the signs of the world will never be read
In a glass darkly, by anyone;
We must wait for the sunrise,’ said Prester John.

Nigh on a thousand years were past
To the strange priest’s paradise pierced at last,
The men of the west, with the wondrous things
Of western wizards and western kings,
And high on their staggering engines borne
A marvel of marvels, the mighty Horn
Within whose cave, like a giant’s ear,
Might all men speak and might all men hear
The noise of a battle, the noise of a bird,
Even all the sounds of the earth were heard.

And the Seven Kings said ‘It is ended then,

The demon of distance, rending men,
Deafness of deserts and random deeds,
When everyone knows what everyone needs,
Seeing that words like winds can come,
All will be Bethlehem, all will be Rome,
And all men answer and understand,
Tell us the news from the Holy Land.

‘No battle-noise and no battle-news,
But shaking of shekels and laughter of Jews,
And a rattle of golden balls they toss
High o’er the ruin of Crescent and Cross,
And a usurer’s voice in cold command,
These are the sounds from the Holy Land.
O, horns may call us from far away,
But men hear only what men can say,
And words may go as the wide wind blows,
But what everyone wants is what nobody knows:
And the Horn will not tell it to anyone,
We must wait for the Trumpet,’ said Prester John.

Lines to an Old Pro-Boer Who Asked for

a Contribution to a Peace Periodical

You cannot think my heart so tough
To shrieks that ring or shards that rend;
You cannot think me bad enough
Nor good enough for tortures, friend.

Nor do I lightly talk of tears
Through some vague pageant of the past;
The shriek of shafts, the shock of spears,
The bursting of the arbelast.

Do you recall in that base fight,
When men were crushed with clubs of gold,
The meek and murderous flag of white
Of which our English lies were told,

Till white had washed away the red
And a calmed country found release?
Look forth today, and count the dead
Under your leprous flag of peace.

Rather than peace’s pearl to pray,
When cast before us by such swine,
I would again your friends and mine
Were riding to Pretoria.

The Apology of Bottom the Weaver

Once when an honest weaver slept,
And Puck passed by, a kindly traitor,
And on his shoulders set the head
Of a Shakespearean commentator,

The man had walked proverbial ways,
Fair Science frowned not on his birth,
Nor lost in long and tangled dreams,
The mother-wit of mother-earth.

Elaborate surgeons had not found
The cobweb made the cure too brief,
Nor vegetarians taught the rule
Of eating mustard without beef.

Only in that green night of growth
Came to him, splendid, without scorn,
The lady of the dreams of men;
The rival of all women born.

And he, for all his after weaving,
Drew up from that abysmal dream
Immortal art, that proves by seeming
All things more real than they seem.

The dancing moth was in his shuttle,
The pea’s pink blossom in his woof,
Your driving schools, your dying hamlets,
Go through them all and find the proof-

That you, where’er the old crafts linger,
Draw in their webs like nets of gold,
Hang up like banners for a pattern,
The leavings of the looms of old.

And even as this home-made rhyme
Drags but the speech of Shakespeare down,
These home-made patterns but repeat
The traceries of an ancient clown.
And while the modem fashions fade,
And while the ancient standards stream,
No psycho-analyst has knocked
The bottom out of Bottom’s dream.

The New Omar

A book of verses underneath the bough,
Provided that the verses do not scan,
A loaf of bread, a jug of wine and Thou,
Short-haired, all angles, looking like a man.
But let the wine be unfermented, pale,
Of chemicals compounded, God knows how -
This were indeed the Prophets’ Paradise,
O Paradise were Wilderness enow.

Américanisation

Britannia needs no Boulevards,
No spaces wide and gay:
Her march was through the crooked streets
Along the narrow way.
Nor looks she where, New York's seduction,
The Broadway leadeth to destruction.

Britannia needs no Cafés:
If Coffee needs must be.
Its place should be the Coffee-house
Where Johnson growled for Tea;
But who can hear that human mountain
Growl for an ice-cream soda-fountain?

She needs no Russian Theatre,
Where Father strangles Mother,
In scenes where all the characters
And colours kill each other:
Her boast is freedom had by halves,
And Britons never shall be Slavs.
But if not hers the Dance of Death,
Great Dostoievsky's dance,
And if the things most finely French
Are better done in France -
Might not Américanisation
Be best applied to its own nation?

Ere every shop shall be a store
And every Trade a Trust. . .
Lo, many men in many lands
Know when their cause is just.
There will be quite a large attendance
When *we* Declare our Independence.

Alliterativism (1914)

THE LATEST SCHOOL

French airmen have been lying over Baden and Bavaria, violating Belgian neutrality. Stated on German authority in the "Westminster Gazette.'

See the flying French depart
Like the bees of Bonaparte,
Swarming up with a most venomous vitality.
Over Baden and Bavaria,
And Brighton and Bulgaria,
Thus violating Belgian neutrality.

And the injured Prussian may
Not unreasonably say
'Why, it cannot be so small a nationality!'
Since Brixton and Batavia,
Bolivia and Belgravia,
Are bursting with the Belgian neutrality.

By pure Alliteration
You may trace this curious nation,
And respect this somewhat scattered principality;
When you see a B in Both
You may take your Bible oath
You are violating Belgian neutrality.

Race-Memory

By a dazed Darwinian

I remember, I remember.
Long before I was bom,
The tree-tops where my racial self
Went dancing round at mom.

Green wavering archipelagos,
Great gusty bursts of blue,
In my race-memory I recall
(Or I am told I do).

In that green-turreted Monkeyville
(So I have often heard)
It seemed as if a Blue Baboon
Might soar like a Blue Bird.

Low crawling Fundamentalists
Glared up through the green mist,
I hung upon my tail in heaven
A Firmamentalist.
*

I am too fat to climb a tree,
There are no trees to climb;
Instead, the factory chimneys rise,
Unscaleable, sublime.

The past was bestial ignorance:
But I feel a little funky,
To think I’m further off from heaven
Than when I was a monkey.

A Patriotic Song

The Golden Hind went bowling
Nor'westward of the Main,
And Drake drank deep of Spanish wine
And spat the lees at Spain.
Till northward on the colder coasts
The savages came out
To hail the ship with tossing spear
And tomahawk and shout:
For the red gods and the witch-doctors
Had cursed the golden grape
Bidding him yield up Malvoisie
And wine in every shape.

And need I say that Drake complied
And poured the wine over the side,
Invited all the Reds inside
And let them ransack far and wide
The ship that was his sinful pride
For anything his men might hide.
That so he might escape.

The top-sails of the Victory
Turned westward on a day
Great Nelson saw his sunrise land
Like a sunset fade away.
And pledged immortal beauty
And the isle beyond the foam
In the dark wine of Oporto
That his father drank at home.
His hand and glass were lifted
When they reached the rebel shore
And Hiram Hugginburg came forth
And bade him drink no more.

And naturally Nelson ran
To do his bidding and began
To empty every cup and can
And snatch the rum from every man
Who (ignorant of Hiram’s ban)
Had broken with him the battle-van
From the Nile to Elsinore.

Lo, of that leaping pennant learn,
Of those world-wandering graves,
In what more modest modem style
Britannia rules the waves.
If, loyal to some foreign cause,
We still are careful, clause by clause,
Obeying other countries’ laws.
We never shall be slaves.

Some Wishes at Xmas

Mince-pies grant Wishes: let each name his Prize,
But as for us, we wish for more Mince-Pies.

Mr *Epstein*
What wish has Epstein's art portrayed?
Toward what does Rima rise?
Those little hands were never made
To tear out eagle's eyes:
She for Green Mansions yearns; but not
So green a mansion as she got.

Dean Inge
What deep desires inspire the Gloomy Dean,
While Rima chants The Wearing of the Green?
Does he have childlike hopes at Christmas time
And sing a carol or a nursery rhyme?
Does he hang up a stocking - or a gaiter -
Or ask for gifts from any Alma Mater?
(Tell me, do Matthew, Mark, and Luke and John
Bless beds the Higher Critics lie upon?
Or if, while the Fourth Gospel is re-read,
'Synoptists' sleep on a three-cornered bed).
Or, like the Deutero-Job, who far away
On his interpolated ash-heap lay,
Damns he the day whereon his body and soul
Escaped the vigilance of Birth-Control?
Or, softened while the herald angel sings,
Does he more mildly wish for lesser things
That warning cracks, marking the house that falls,
Should decorate St Peter's, not St Paul's;
Or wish in all good faith to friends held dear
A Gloomy Christmas and a Glum New Year?
A Merry Christmas to a Merrier Dean!
Whatever he may want, whatever mean,

He won’t be happy till he gets it; when
He does, perhaps he won’t be happy then.

A *Lady* M. P.
She wants a new England, more bright and more clean.
Where foul tap-room revelries never are seen.
And after the quarter-staff flies the quart-pot,
For she wants a new England where these things are not,
And our love of old England is vain in her sight,
As the noise of blind drunkards that strive in the night,
As if our old England like fable could fade,
And a Puritan purge through the ages had made
A Shaker of Shakespeare, a grave man of Gay,
And a Pussyfoot Johnson with Boswell to play.
For she wants a new England, where censors and prigs
Can browbeat our jokes and can bridle our jigs.
The title is apt, and the tale is soon told,
She wants a New England, three hundred years old.

The Communists
There are two normal nuisances
That stir us late or soon:
One is the man who wants the earth,
The other wants the moon.
Choosing between these last and Jix,
We much prefer the lunatics.
*

Jix
Since Christmas time brings charity
For Jix and for the Kaiser,
We wish that they were wise enough
To wish that they were wiser.

Commercial Candour

On the outside of a sensational novel is printed the statement: ‘The back of the cover will tell you the plot.’

Our fathers to creed and tradition were tied,
They opened a book to see what was inside,
And of various methods they deemed not the worst
Was to find the first chapter and look at it first.
And so from the first to the second they passed,
Till in servile routine they arrived at the last.
But a literate age, unbenighted by creed,
Can find on two boards all it wishes to read;
For the front of the cover shows somebody shot
And the back of the cover will tell you the plot.
Between, that the book may be handily padded,
Some pages of mere printed matter are added.
Expanding the theme, which in case of great need
The curious reader might very well read
With the zest that is lent to a game worth the winning,
By knowing the end when you start the beginning;
While our barbarous sires, who would read every word
With a morbid desire to find out what occurred
Went drearily drudging through Dickens and Scott.
But the back of the cover will tell you the plot.

The wild village folk in earth’s earliest prime
Could often sit still for an hour at a time
And hear a blind beggar, nor did the tale pall
Because Hector must fight before Hector could fall:
Nor was Scheherazade required, at the worst,
To tell her tales backwards and finish them first;
And the minstrels who sang about battle and banners
Found the rude camp-fire crowd had some notion of manners.
Till Forster (who pelted the people like crooks,
The Irish with buckshot, the English with books).

Established the great educational scheme
Of compulsory schooling, that glorious theme.
Some learnt how to read, and the others forgot,
And the back of the cover will tell you the plot.
O Genius of Business! O marvellous brain,
Come in place of the priests and the warriors to reign!
O Will to Get On that makes everything go -
O Hustle! O Pep! O Publicity! O!
Shall I spend three-and-sixpence to purchase the book,
Which we all can pick up on the bookstall and look?
Well, it may appear strange, but I think I shall not,
For the back of the cover will tell you the plot.

Human Nature: or Marconi Memories

From our 'Simplified Psychology for Statesmen' series
Human nature is a bird
Whose complaint is often heard,
And will make demands of any legislature;
And you need not claim to be
Giving seven pence for three;
It exceeds the wildest hopes of Human Nature.

Human Nature is a thing
It is difficult to sing,
And very much more difficult to deal with:
But you need not call it 'function' -
You can own without compunction
That your brother is a man you take a meal with.
Human Nature it prefers
To be told of what occurs
Without suppressing any vital feature;
And when statesmen hold their peace
Until searched by the police,
It rasps the finer edge of Human Nature.

Human Nature, it is said,
Thinks investment should be made
By someone who has cash enough to pay it;
And that one who pouched the pay,
And had nothing more to say.
Need not go to South America to say it.

Human Nature is not keen
On the words 'corrupt' or 'clean'
Or any other shades of nomenclature;
But, when what the Party cost
Is discovered when its lost,
A shade of doubt is merely Human Nature.

Human Nature it is prone
To be soft about the Throne,
And even make the Peerage paramounter;
But it startles it to drop
Into Mr Pearson’s shop,
And find a Scottish Lord behind the counter.

So till all men learn the truth
(And not only Handel Booth)
And the Gospel has been preached to every creature,
Even rotten things may fail,
Even thieves may go to gaol,
And all through not observing Human Nature.

The Peace of Petrol

To be sung to the air of ‘Kabul River’ on the conclusion of an English peace brought about by American intervention.

He has many a car and chuffer
(Still the bugle, sheathe the sword),
So I left my mates to suffer
All because of Mr Ford.
Ford, Ford, Ford of many millions,
Ford of many motors in the Park;
And our lord will laugh like thunder at the Good Cause going under
When we stab it, to oblige him, in the dark.
We’ll give up the blasted place
(Drop the bugle, break the sword)
For one smile upon his face,
O, the shiny face of Ford!
Ford, Ford, Ford; the French are falling,
And the Serbians on the mountains lying stark.
All their eyes on us, disdaining, and it ain’t no use explaining
That a millionaire has bought us for a lark.

O the motors he can make!
(Sell the bugle, pawn the sword)
We’ll be humbled for his sake,
Break our faith and keep our Ford.
Ford, Ford, Ford - till death remove him
To a place on which it’s needless to remark,
And the rich whose minds are muddy, who consider honour bloody,
Go down to their damnation in the dark.

To a Holy Roller

The sect of the holy rollers demonstrated
against evolution at Dayton.

‘Roll on,’ said Gilbert to the earth:
‘Roll on,’ said Byron to the sea:
Accepting natural features thus,
Freely I say ‘Roll on’ to thee.

Time like an ever rolling stream
Bears his most rolling sons away
Bryanite saint, Darwinian sage,
And even Dayton has its day.

Earth changes; sings another bard,
‘There rolls the deep where grew the tree’;
Convulsions viewed with equal calm
By Tennyson and Tennessee.

But ere you roll down history’s slope,
A moment you may set us thinking
How Prohibition suits their mood,
Who get so drunk by never drinking.
What rows of bottles, blends of liquor,
We need to reach in one wild leap
Those reels and rolls you get for nothing.
Great Bacchic Maenads on the cheap!

I blame you not that, writhing prone,
You flout the grave Darwinian’s view,
Of his extremely Missing Link,
For he is quite amusing too.

Marking the human ape evolve
(He puts his rolling into Latin),

Through epochs barely large enough
To swing an old Egyptian cat in.

Since you believe Man truly tilled
The Garden for the great Controller,
You back your Garden party up,
Like a consistent Garden Roller.

We, too, may deem on Adam’s birth
Some more mysterious splendour shone,
Than prigs can pick off monkey’s bones,
Never you mind! Roll on! Roll on!

Grovel and gambol on all fours
Till you have proved beyond dispute,
That human dignity is freed
From all connection with the brute.

The New Fiction

‘Leave them alone, ‘ we seem to hear Mr
Galsworthy say of his young people.
FROM A REVIEW BY MR BETTANY

Little Blue-Fits has lost his wits,
And doesn’t know where to find them;
Leave them alone and they’ll come home,
And leave their tales behind them.
The remarkable tales, with remarkable sales,
And Bonnets and Bees in disorder;
For the Bonnets we view are exceedingly Blue,
And decidedly over the Border.

Answers to the Poets

THE SKYLARK REPLIES TO WORDSWORTH
As is *might have appeared to Byron*

Ephemeral minstrel, staring at the sky,
Dost thou despise the earth where wrongs abound,
Or, eyeing me, hast thou the other eye
Still on the Court, with pay-day coming round,
That pension that could bring thee down at will
Those rebel wings composed, that protest still?

Past the last trace of meaning and beyond
Mount, daring babbler, that pay-prompted strain
‘Twixt thee and Kings a never-failing bond
Swells not the less their carnage o’er the plain.
Type of the wise, who drill but never fight,
True to the kindred points of Might and Right.

THE SEA REPLIES TO BYRON
As *it might have appeared to Wordsworth*

Stroll on, thou dark not deep ‘blue’ dandy, stroll,
Ten thousand duns call after thee in vain.
The tailor’s marked with ruin; his control
Stops with my shore; beyond he doth retain
No shadow of a chance of what’s his own,
But sinks above his bills with bubbling groan,
‘Absconded; gone; abroad; address unknown.’

Thy songs are speeches, void of all save Thee,
Childe Harold, Lara, Manfred, what care I?
My water washed them down - you got it free,
And many a wine-cup since when you were dry,
Till nature blows the man-hater sky-high,
Howling against his gods in stark D.T.,

And dashes him against the Truth. There let him *lie*.

THE FAT WHITE WOMAN SPEAKS

Why do you rush through the field in trains,
Guessing so much and so much.
Why do you flash through the flowery meads,
Fat-head poet that nobody reads;
And why do you know such a frightful lot
About people in gloves as such?

And how the devil can you be sure,
Guessing so much and so much,
How do you know but what someone who loves
Always to see me in nice white gloves
At the end of the field you are rushing by,
Is waiting for his Old Dutch?

LUCASTA REPLIES TO LOVELACE

Tell me not, friend, you are unkind,
If ink and books laid by,
You turn up in a uniform
Looking all smart and spry.
I thought your ink one horrid smudge,
Your books one pile of trash,
And with less fear of smear embrace
A sword, a belt, a sash.
Yet this inconstancy forgive,
Though gold lace I adore,
I could not love the lace so much
Loved I not Lovelace more.

BY A CAPTAIN, OR PERHAPS A COLONEL, OR POSSIBLY A KNIGHT-AT-ARMS

Poet or pamphleteer, or what you please,
Who chance behind this space of wall to dwell,
Upon my soul I cannot very well
Correct my fire for arguments like these,

The great Emathian conqueror be blowed!

I have not got a spear or you a bower.
London is packed with poets; temple and tower
Swarm with them; where the devil should we be
Storming a town, if the repeated plea
Of Puritanic poets had the power
To stop a piece of ordnance with an ode?
*

FROM THE SPANISH CLOISTER

Grrrr - what’s that? A dog? A poet?
Uttering his damnations thus -
If hate killed things, Brother Browning,
God’s Word, would not hate kill us?

If we’d ever meet together,
Salve tibi! I might hear
How you know poor monks are really
So much worse than they appear.

There’s a great text in Corinthians
Hinting that our faith entails
Something else, that never faileth,
Yet in you, perhaps, it fails.

But if plena *gratia* chokes you,
You at least can teach us how
To converse in wordless noises,
Hy, zi; hullo! - Grrrr - Bow-wow!

DOLORES REPLIES TO SWINBURNE

Cold passions, and perfectly cruel,
Long odes that go on for an hour,
With a most economical jewel
And a quite metaphorical flower.

I implore you to stop it and stow it,
I adjure you, relent and refrain,
Oh, pagan Priapean poet,
You give me a pain.

I am sorry, old dear, if I hurt you,
No doubt it is all very nice
With the lilies and languors of virtue
And the raptures and roses of vice.
But the notion impels me to anger,
That vice is all rapture for me,
And if you think virtue is languor
Just try it and see.

We shall know what the critics discover
If your poems were shallow or deep,
Who read you from cover to cover,
Will know if they sleep not or sleep.
But you say I’ve endured through the ages
(Which is rude) as Our Lady of Pain,
You have said it for several pages,
So say it again.

TO A MODERN POET

Well,
What
about it?
I am sorry
if you have
a green pain
gnawing your brain away.
I suppose
quite a lot of it is
gnawed away
by this time.

I did not give you
a green pain
or even
a grey powder.
It is rather you, so winged, so vortical,
Who give me a pain.

When I have a pain
I never notice
the colour.

But I am very unobservant.
I cannot say
I ever noticed that the pillar-box
was like a baby
skinned alive and screaming.
I have not
a Poet’s
Eye
which can see Beauty
everywhere.

Now you mention it,
Of course, the sky
is like a large mouth
shown to a dentist,
and I never noticed
a little thing
like that.

But I can’t help wishing
You got more fun out of it;
you seem to have taken
quite a dislike
to things
They seem to make you jump
And double up unexpectedly —

And when you write
like other poets,
on subjects
not entirely
novel,
such as, for instance,
the Sea,
it is mostly about
Sea-sickness.
As you say -
It is the New Movement,
The Emetic Ecstacy.

POST-RECESSIONAL

God of your fathers, known of old,
For patience with man’s swaggering line,
He did not answer you when told
About you and your palm and pine,
Though you deployed your far-flung host
And boasted that you did not boast.

Though drunk with sight of power and blind,
Even as you bowed your head in awe,
You kicked up both your heels behind
At lesser breeds without the law;
Lest they forget, lest they forget,
That yours was the exclusive set.

We fancied heaven preferring much,
Your rowdiest song, your slangiest sentence,
Your honest banjo banged to such
Very recessional repentance;
Now if your native land be dear,
Whisper (or shout) and we shall hear.

Cut down, our navies melt away.
From ode and war-song fades the fire,

We are a jolly sight today
Too near to Sidon and to Tyre
To make it sound so very nice
To offer ancient sacrifice.
Rise up and bid the trumpets blow
When it is gallant to be gay,
Tell the wide world it shall not know
Our face until we turn to bay.
Bless you, you shall be blameless yet,
For God forgives and men forget.

Variations on an Air: Composed on Having to

Appear in a Pageant as Old King Cole

Old King Cole was a merry old soul,
And a merry old soul was he;
He called for his pipe,
He called for his bowl,
And he called for his fiddlers three.

After Lord Tennyson.
Cole, that unwearied prince of Colchester,
Growing more gay with age and with long days
Deeper in laughter and desire of life,
As that Virginian climber on our walls
Flames scarlet with the fading of the year;
Called for his wassail and that other weed
Virginian also, from the western woods
Where English Raleigh checked the boast of Spain,
And lighting joy with joy, and piling up
Pleasure as crown for pleasure, bade men bring
Those three, the minstrels whose emblazoned coats
Shone with the oyster-shells of Colchester;
And these three played, and playing grew more fain
Of mirth and music; till the heathen came,
And the King slept beside the northern sea.

After W. B. Yeats.

Of an old King in a story
From the grey sea-folk I have heard,
Whose heart was no more broken
Than the wings of a bird.
As soon as the moon was silver
And the thin stars began,
He took his pipe and his tankard,

Like an old peasant man.

And three tall shadows were with him
And came at his command;
And played before him for ever
The fiddles of fairyland.

And he died in the young summer
Of the world's desire;
Before our hearts were broken
Like sticks in a fire.

After *Robert Browning.*

Who smoke-snorts toasts o' My Lady Nicotine,
Kicks stuffing out of Pussyfoot, bids his trio
Stick up their Stradivarii (that's the plural
Or near enough, my fatheads; *nimium*
Vicina Cremonce; that's a bit too near.)
Is there some stockfish fails to understand?
Catch hold o' the notion, bellow and blurt back 'Cole'?
Must I bawl lessons from a hom-book, howl,
Cat-call the cat-gut 'fiddles'? Fiddlesticks!

After Walt Whitman.

Me clairvoyant,
Me conscious of you, old camarado,
Needing no telescope, lorgnette, field-glass, opera-glass, myopic pince-nez,
Me piercing two thousand years with eye naked and not ashamed;
The crown cannot hide you from me;
Musty old feudal-heraldic trappings cannot hide you from me,
I perceive that you drink.
(I am drinking with you. I am as drunk as you are).
I see you are inhaling tobacco, puffing, smoking, spitting
(I do not object to your spitting),

You prophetic of American largeness,
You anticipating the broad masculine manners of these States;
I see in you also there are movements, tremors, tears, desire for
the melodious,
I salute your three violinists, endlessly making vibrations,
Rigid, relentless, capable of going on for ever;
They play my accompaniment; but I shall take no notice of any
accompaniment;
I myself am a complete orchestra.
So long.

After Swinburne.

In the time of old sin without sadness
And golden with wastage of gold
Like the gods that grow old in their gladness
Was the king that was glad, growing old:
And with sound of loud lyres from his palace
The voice of his oracles spoke,
And the lips that were red from his chalice
Were splendid with smoke.

When the weed was as flame for a token
And the wine was as blood for a sign;
And upheld in his hands and unbroken
The fountains of fire and of wine.
And a song without speech, without singer,
Stung the soul of a thousand in three
As the flesh of the earth has to sting her,
The soul of the sea.

A Ballad of Abbreviations

The American’s a hustler, for he says so,
And surely the American must know.
He will prove to you with figures why it pays so
Beginning with his boyhood long ago.
When the slow-maturing anecdote is ripest,
He’ll dictate it like a Board of Trade Report,
And because he has no time to call a typist,
He calls her a Stenographer for short.
He is never known to loiter or malinger,
He rushes, for he knows he has ‘a date’;
He is always on the spot and full of ginger,
Which is why he is invariably late.
When he guesses that it’s getting even later,
His vocabulary’s vehement and swift,
And he yells for what he calls the Elevator,
A slang abbreviation for a lift.

Then nothing can be nattier or nicer
For those who like a light and rapid style,
Than to trifle with a work of Mr Dreiser
As it comes along in waggons by the mile.
He has taught us what a swift selective art meant
By description of his dinners and all that,
And his dwelling, which he says is an Apartment,
Because he cannot stop to say a flat.

We may whisper of his wild precipitation,
That it’s speed is rather longer than a span,
But there really is a definite occasion
When he does not use the longest word he can.
When he substitutes, I freely make admission,
One shorter and much easier to spell;
If you ask him what he thinks of Prohibition,
He may tell you quite succinctly it is Hell.

A Song of Self-Esteem

The Simple Social Lifer is a harmless sort of elf,
He feeds a dog on mutton that he mustn't eat himself.
I tolerate his sandals and his tresses long and lank,
I reverence his madness but I deprecate his Swank

O the Swank of the Crank in the future's foremost rank,
And the child of all the ages there was nobody to spank.
He has told us all he means by his water and his beans
In a style that might be pardoned on the theory that he drank.
The Banker is an expert on economy and strikes,
He uses all your money to do anything he likes;
And the usurer who uses it you're called upon to thank
I do not mind the swindle but I do not like the swank.

O the Swank of the Bank and the cheque you give it -
For the ciyptic explanations when the rate of wages sank.
But I hope to see the fun when a Frenchman with a gun
Shall ask him what the devil he is doing with the Franc.

The Yankee is a dab at electricity and crime,
He tells you how he hustles and it takes him quite a time,
I like his hospitality that's cordial and frank,
I do not mind his money but I do not like his swank.

O the Swank of the Yank on the Prohibition Plank,
O take the water-waggoner and drown him in the tank.
Since the Faith of Tennessee has wafted o'er the sea,
The odour of its sanctity - and Golly how it stank!

A Song of Moderation

They have said, the good and wise,
That it pays to advertise,
And it’s only right to speak with Moderation
Of a truth that stands so high,
Simply written on the sky,
Though perhaps with just a touch of ostentation.

The beers that are best known
Are not arsenic alone,
It is modified by salt and other things.
If you tell a waiter ‘And please
Will you bring some Gruyere cheese,’
You can trifle with the substance that he brings.

There’s a Port that you can drink,
And distinguish it from ink
By a something that’s not easy to define,
But not only from the poster
Of an after-dinner toaster
Who has drunk enough to talk of it as wine.

The Yankee car is slick.
Put together very quick.
  When it comes apart with similar rapidity,
It will comfort you to know
It would take an hour or so
  To make it with Victorian solidity.

For it pay to advertise,
And when the engine lies
  On your stomach and the petrol’s in a blaze,
And the car lies round you wrecked,
You’ll have leisure to reflect
  Upon whom it is exactly that it pays.

The Poems

‘Overroads’ in Grove Road, Beaconsfield, where Chesterton lived with his wife from 1909 till his death in 1936

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ENVOY
BY THE BABE UNBORN
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A CHORD OF COLOUR
THE HAPPY MAN
THE UNPARDONABLE SIN
A NOVELTY
ULTIMATE
THE DONKEY
THE BEATIFIC VISION
THE HOPE OF THE STREETS
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THE SONG OF THE CHILDREN
THE FISH
GOLD LEAVES
THOU SHALT NOT KILL
A CERTAIN EVENING
A MAN AND HIS IMAGE
THE MARINER
THE TRIUMPH OF MAN
CYCLOPEAN
JOSEPH
MODERN ELFLAND
ETERNITIES

A CHRISTMAS CAROL
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KING’S CROSS STATION
THE HUMAN TREE
TO THEM THAT MOURN
THE OUTLAW
BEHIND
THE END OF FEAR
THE HOLY OF HOLIES
THE MIRROR OF MADMEN
E.C.B.
THE DESECRATERS
AN ALLIANCE
THE ANCIENT OF DAYS
THE LAST MASQUERADE
THE EARTH’S SHAME
VANITY
THE LAMP POST
THE PESSIMIST
A FAIRY TALE
A PORTRAIT
FEMINA CONTRA MUNDUM
TO A CERTAIN NATION
THE PRAISE OF DUST
THE BALLAD OF THE BATTLE OF GIBEON
VULGARISED
THE BALLAD OF GOD-MAKERS
AT NIGHT
THE WOOD-CUTTER
ART COLOURS
THE TWO WOMEN
THE WILD KNIGHT
THE WILD KNIGHT
GOOD NEWS
DEDICATION
BOOK I. THE VISION OF THE KING
BOOK II. THE GATHERING OF THE CHIEFS

BOOK III. THE HARP OF ALFRED
BOOK IV. THE WOMAN IN THE FOREST
BOOK V. ETHANDUNE: THE FIRST STROKE
BOOK VI. ETHANDUNE: THE SLAYING OF THE CHIEFS
BOOK VII. ETHANDUNE: THE LAST CHARGE
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THE LOGICAL VEGETARIAN
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A BALLAD OF ABBREVIATIONS
A SONG OF SELF-ESTEEM
A SONG OF MODERATION

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A BALLADE OF THE FIRST RAIN
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THE DEFENDANT

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IN DEFENCE OF A NEW EDITION

The reissue of a series of essays so ephemeral and even superfluous may seem at the first glance to require some excuse; probably the best excuse is that they will have been completely forgotten, and therefore may be read again with entirely new sensations. I am not sure, however, that this claim is so modest as it sounds, for I fancy that Shakespeare and Balzac, if moved to prayers, might not ask to be remembered, but to be forgotten, and forgotten thus; for if they were forgotten they would be everlastingly re-discovered and re-read. It is a monotonous memory which keeps us in the main from seeing things as splendid as they are. The ancients were not wrong when they made Lethe the boundary of a better land; perhaps the only flaw in their system is that a man who had bathed in the river of forgetfulness would be as likely as not to climb back upon the bank of the earth and fancy himself in Elysium.

If, therefore, I am certain that most sensible people have forgotten the existence of this book — I do not speak in modesty or in pride — I wish only to state a simple and somewhat beautiful fact. In one respect the passing of the period during which a book can be considered current has afflicted me with some melancholy, for I had intended to write anonymously in some daily paper a thorough and crushing exposure of the work inspired mostly by a certain artistic impatience of the too indulgent tone of the critiques and the manner in which a vast number of my most monstrous fallacies have passed unchallenged. I will not repeat that powerful article here, for it cannot be necessary to do anything more than warn the reader against the perfectly indefensible line of argument adopted at the end of p. 28. I am also conscious that the title of the book is, strictly speaking, inaccurate. It is a legal metaphor, and, speaking legally, a defendant is not an enthusiast for the character of King John or the domestic virtues of the prairie-dog. He is one who defends himself, a thing which the present writer, however poisoned his mind may be with paradox, certainly never dreamed of attempting.

Criticism upon the book considered as literature, if it can be so considered, I should, of course, never dream of discussing — firstly, because it is ridiculous to do so; and, secondly, because there was, in my opinion, much justice in such criticism.

But there is one matter on which an author is generally considered as having a right to explain himself, since it has nothing to do with capacity or intelligence, and that is the question of his morals.

I am proud to say that a furious, uncompromising, and very effective attack was made upon what was alleged to be the utter immorality of this book by my excellent friend Mr. C.F.G. Masterman, in the ‘Speaker.’ The tendency of that criticism was to the effect that I was discouraging improvement and disguising scandals by my offensive optimism. Quoting the passage in which I said that ‘diamonds were to be found in the dust-bin,’ he said: ‘There is no difficulty in finding good in what humanity rejects. The difficulty is to find it in what humanity accepts. The diamond is easy enough to find in the dust-bin. The difficulty is to find it in the drawing-room.’ I must admit, for my part, without the slightest shame, that I have found a great many very excellent things in drawing-rooms. For example, I found Mr. Masterman in a drawing-room. But I merely mention this purely ethical attack in order to state, in as few sentences as possible, my difference from the theory of optimism and progress therein enunciated. At first sight it would seem that the pessimist encourages improvement. But in reality it is a singular truth that the era in which pessimism has been cried from the house-tops is also that in which almost all reform has stagnated and fallen into decay. The reason of this is not difficult to discover. No man ever did, and no man ever can, create or desire to make a bad thing good or an ugly thing beautiful. There must be some germ of good to be loved, some fragment of beauty to be admired. The mother washes and decks out the dirty or careless child, but no one can ask her to wash and deck out a goblin with a heart like hell. No one can kill the fatted calf for Mephistopheles. The cause which is blocking all progress today is the subtle scepticism which whispers in a million ears that things are not good enough to be worth improving. If the world is good we are revolutionaries, if the world is evil we must be conservatives. These essays, futile as they are considered as serious literature, are yet ethically sincere, since they seek to remind men that things must be loved first and improved afterwards.

G. K. C.

THE DEFENDANT

INTRODUCTION

In certain endless uplands, uplands like great flats gone dizzy, slopes that seem to contradict the idea that there is even such a thing as a level, and make us all realize that we live on a planet with a sloping roof, you will come from time to time upon whole valleys filled with loose rocks and boulders, so big as to be like mountains broken loose. The whole might be an experimental creation shattered and cast away. It is often difficult to believe that such cosmic refuse can have come together except by human means. The mildest and most cockney imagination conceives the place to be the scene of some war of giants. To me it is always associated with one idea, recurrent and at last instinctive. The scene was the scene of the stoning of some prehistoric prophet, a prophet as much more gigantic than after-prophets as the boulders are more gigantic than the pebbles. He spoke some words — words that seemed shameful and tremendous — and the world, in terror, buried him under a wilderness of stones. The place is the monument of an ancient fear.

If we followed the same mood of fancy, it would he more difficult to imagine what awful hint or wild picture of the universe called forth that primal persecution, what secret of sensational thought lies buried under the brutal stones. For in our time the blasphemies are threadbare. Pessimism is now patently, as it always was essentially, more commonplace than piety. Profanity is now more than an affectation — it is a convention. The curse against God is Exercise I. in the primer of minor poetry. It was not, assuredly, for such babyish solemnities that our imaginary prophet was stoned in the morning of the world. If we weigh the matter in the faultless scales of imagination, if we see what is the real trend of humanity, we shall feel it most probable that he was stoned for saying that the grass was green and that the birds sang in spring; for the mission of all the prophets from the beginning has not been so much the pointing out of heavens or hells as primarily the pointing out of the earth.

Religion has had to provide that longest and strangest telescope — the telescope through which we could see the star upon which we dwelt. For the mind and eyes of the average man this world is as lost as Eden and as sunken as Atlantis. There runs a strange law through the length of human history — that men are continually tending to undervalue their environment, to undervalue their happiness, to undervalue themselves. The great sin of mankind, the sin typified by the fall of Adam, is the tendency, not towards pride, but towards this weird and horrible humility.

This is the great fall, the fall by which the fish forgets the sea, the ox forgets the meadow, the clerk forgets the city, every man forgets his environment and, in the fullest and most literal sense, forgets himself. This is the real fall of Adam, and it is a spiritual fall. It is a strange thing that many truly spiritual men, such as General Gordon, have actually spent some hours in speculating upon the precise location of the Garden of Eden. Most probably we are in Eden still. It is only our eyes that have changed.

The pessimist is commonly spoken of as the man in revolt. He is not. Firstly, because it requires some cheerfulness to continue in revolt, and secondly, because pessimism appeals to the weaker side of everybody, and the pessimist, therefore, drives as roaring a trade as the publican. The person who is really in revolt is the optimist, who generally lives and dies in a desperate and suicidal effort to persuade all the other people how good they are. It has been proved a hundred times over that if you really wish to enrage people and make them angry, even unto death, the right way to do it is to tell them that they are all the sons of God. Jesus Christ was crucified, it may be remembered, not because of anything he said about God, but on a charge of saying that a man could in three days pull down and rebuild the Temple. Every one of the great revolutionists, from Isaiah to Shelley, have been optimists. They have been indignant, not about the badness of existence, but about the slowness of men in realizing its goodness. The prophet who is stoned is not a brawler or a marplot. He is simply a rejected lover. He suffers from an unrequited attachment to things in general.

It becomes increasingly apparent, therefore, that the world is in a permanent danger of being misjudged. That this is no fanciful or mystical idea may be tested by simple examples. The two absolutely basic words ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ descriptive of two primal and inexplicable sensations, are not, and never have been, used properly. Things that are bad are not called good by any people who experience them; but things that are good are called bad by the universal verdict of humanity.

Let me explain a little: Certain things are bad so far as they go, such as pain, and no one, not even a lunatic, calls a tooth-ache good in itself; but a knife which cuts clumsily and with difficulty is called a bad knife, which it certainly is not. It is only not so good as other knives to which men have grown accustomed. A knife is never bad except on such rare occasions as that in which it is neatly and scientifically planted in the middle of one’s back. The coarsest and bluntest knife which ever broke a pencil into pieces instead of sharpening it is a good thing in so far as it is a knife. It would have appeared a miracle in the Stone Age. What we call a bad knife is a good knife not good enough for us; what we call a bad hat is a good hat not good enough for us; what we call bad cookery is good cookery not good enough for us; what we call a bad civilization is a good civilization not good enough for us. We choose to call the great mass of the history of mankind bad, not because it is bad, but because we are better. This is palpably an unfair principle. Ivory may not be so white as snow, but the whole Arctic continent does not make ivory black.

Now it has appeared to me unfair that humanity should be engaged perpetually in calling all those things bad which have been good enough to make other things better, in everlastingly kicking down the ladder by which it has climbed. It has appeared to me that progress should be something else besides a continual parricide; therefore I have investigated the dust-heaps of humanity, and found a treasure in all of them. I have found that humanity is not incidentally engaged, but eternally and systematically engaged, in throwing gold into the gutter and diamonds into the sea. I have found that every man is disposed to call the green leaf of the tree a little less green than it is, and the snow of Christmas a little less white than it is; therefore I have imagined that the main business of a man, however humble, is defence. I have conceived that a defendant is chiefly required when worldlings despise the world — that a counsel for the defence would not have been out of place in that terrible day when the sun was darkened over Calvary and Man was rejected of men.

A DEFENCE OF PENNY DREADFULS

One of the strangest examples of the degree to which ordinary life is undervalued is the example of popular literature, the vast mass of which we contentedly describe as vulgar. The boy’s novelette may be ignorant in a literary sense, which is only like saying that a modern novel is ignorant in the chemical sense, or the economic sense, or the astronomical sense; but it is not vulgar intrinsically — it is the actual centre of a million flaming imaginations.

In former centuries the educated class ignored the ruck of vulgar literature. They ignored, and therefore did not, properly speaking, despise it. Simple ignorance and indifference does not inflate the character with pride. A man does not walk down the street giving a haughty twirl to his moustaches at the thought of his superiority to some variety of deep-sea fishes. The old scholars left the whole under-world of popular compositions in a similar darkness.

To-day, however, we have reversed this principle. We do despise vulgar compositions, and we do not ignore them. We are in some danger of becoming petty in our study of pettiness; there is a terrible Circean law in the background that if the soul stoops too ostentatiously to examine anything it never gets up again. There is no class of vulgar publications about which there is, to my mind, more utterly ridiculous exaggeration and misconception than the current boys’ literature of the lowest stratum. This class of composition has presumably always existed, and must exist. It has no more claim to be good literature than the daily conversation of its readers to be fine oratory, or the lodging-houses and tenements they inhabit to be sublime architecture. But people must have conversation, they must have houses, and they must have stories. The simple need for some kind of ideal world in which fictitious persons play an unhampered part is infinitely deeper and older than the rules of good art, and much more important. Every one of us in childhood has constructed such an invisible *dramatis personæ*, but it never occurred to our nurses to correct the composition by careful comparison with Balzac. In the East the professional story-teller goes from village to village with a small carpet; and I wish sincerely that anyone had the moral courage to spread that carpet and sit on it in Ludgate Circus. But it is not probable that all the tales of the carpet-bearer are little gems of original artistic workmanship. Literature and fiction are two entirely different things. Literature is a luxury; fiction is a necessity. A work of art can hardly be too short, for its climax is its merit. A story can never be too long, for its conclusion is merely to be deplored, like the last halfpenny or the last pipelight. And so, while the increase of the artistic conscience tends in more ambitious works to brevity and impressionism, voluminous industry still marks the producer of the true romantic trash. There was no end to the ballads of Robin Hood; there is no end to the volumes about Dick Deadshot and the Avenging Nine. These two heroes are deliberately conceived as immortal.

But instead of basing all discussion of the problem upon the common-sense recognition of this fact — that the youth of the lower orders always has had and always must have formless and endless romantic reading of some kind, and then going on to make provision for its wholesomeness — we begin, generally speaking, by fantastic abuse of this reading as a whole and indignant surprise that the errand-boys under discussion do not read ‘The Egoist’ and ‘The Master Builder.’ It is the custom, particularly among magistrates, to attribute half the crimes of the Metropolis to cheap novelettes. If some grimy urchin runs away with an apple, the magistrate shrewdly points out that the child’s knowledge that apples appease hunger is traceable to some curious literary researches. The boys themselves, when penitent, frequently accuse the novelettes with great bitterness, which is only to be expected from young people possessed of no little native humour. If I had forged a will, and could obtain sympathy by tracing the incident to the influence of Mr. George Moore’s novels, I should find the greatest entertainment in the diversion. At any rate, it is firmly fixed in the minds of most people that gutter-boys, unlike everybody else in the community, find their principal motives for conduct in printed books.

Now it is quite clear that this objection, the objection brought by magistrates, has nothing to do with literary merit. Bad story writing is not a crime. Mr. Hall Caine walks the streets openly, and cannot be put in prison for an anticlimax. The objection rests upon the theory that the tone of the mass of boys’ novelettes is criminal and degraded, appealing to low cupidity and low cruelty. This is the magisterial theory, and this is rubbish.

So far as I have seen them, in connection with the dirtiest book-stalls in the poorest districts, the facts are simply these: The whole bewildering mass of vulgar juvenile literature is concerned with adventures, rambling, disconnected and endless. It does not express any passion of any sort, for there is no human character of any sort. It runs eternally in certain grooves of local and historical type: the medieval knight, the eighteenth-century duellist, and the modern cowboy, recur with the same stiff simplicity as the conventional human figures in an Oriental pattern. I can quite as easily imagine a human being kindling wild appetites by the contemplation of his Turkey carpet as by such dehumanized and naked narrative as this.

Among these stories there are a certain number which deal sympathetically with the adventures of robbers, outlaws and pirates, which present in a dignified and romantic light thieves and murderers like Dick Turpin and Claude Duval. That is to say, they do precisely the same thing as Scott's 'Ivanhoe,' Scott's 'Rob Roy,' Scott's 'Lady of the Lake,' Byron's 'Corsair,' Wordsworth's 'Rob Roy's Grave,' Stevenson's 'Macaire,' Mr. Max Pemberton's 'Iron Pirate,' and a thousand more works distributed systematically as prizes and Christmas presents. Nobody imagines that an admiration of Locksley in 'Ivanhoe' will lead a boy to shoot Japanese arrows at the deer in Richmond Park; no one thinks that the incautious opening of Wordsworth at the poem on Rob Roy will set him up for life as a blackmailer. In the case of our own class, we recognise that this wild life is contemplated with pleasure by the young, not because it is like their own life, but because it is different from it. It might at least cross our minds that, for whatever other reason the errand-boy reads 'The Red Revenge,' it really is not because he is dripping with the gore of his own friends and relatives.

In this matter, as in all such matters, we lose our bearings entirely by speaking of the 'lower classes' when we mean humanity minus ourselves. This trivial romantic literature is not especially plebeian: it is simply human. The philanthropist can never forget classes and callings. He says, with a modest swagger, 'I have invited twenty-five factory hands to tea.' If he said 'I have invited twenty-five chartered accountants to tea,' everyone would see the humour of so simple a classification. But this is what we have done with this lumberland of foolish writing: we have probed, as if it were some monstrous new disease, what is, in fact, nothing but the foolish and valiant heart of man. Ordinary men will always be sentimentalists: for a sentimentalist is simply a man who has feelings and does not trouble to invent a new way of expressing them. These common and current publications have nothing essentially evil about them. They express the sanguine and heroic truisms on which civilization is built; for it is clear that unless civilization is built on truisms, it is not built at all. Clearly, there could be no safety for a society in which the remark by the Chief Justice that murder was wrong was regarded as an original and dazzling epigram.

If the authors and publishers of ‘Dick Deadshot,’ and such remarkable works, were suddenly to make a raid upon the educated class, were to take down the names of every man, however distinguished, who was caught at a University Extension Lecture, were to confiscate all our novels and warn us all to correct our lives, we should be seriously annoyed. Yet they have far more right to do so than we; for they, with all their idiotcy, are normal and we are abnormal. It is the modern literature of the educated, not of the uneducated, which is avowedly and aggressively criminal. Books recommending profligacy and pessimism, at which the high-souled errand-boy would shudder, lie upon all our drawing-room tables. If the dirtiest old owner of the dirtiest old bookstall in Whitechapel dared to display works really recommending polygamy or suicide, his stock would be seized by the police. These things are our luxuries. And with a hypocrisy so ludicrous as to be almost unparalleled in history, we rate the gutter-boys for their immorality at the very time that we are discussing (with equivocal German Professors) whether morality is valid at all. At the very instant that we curse the Penny Dreadful for encouraging thefts upon property, we canvass the proposition that all property is theft. At the very instant we accuse it (quite unjustly) of lubricity and indecency, we are cheerfully reading philosophies which glory in lubricity and indecency. At the very instant that we charge it with encouraging the young to destroy life, we are placidly discussing whether life is worth preserving.

But it is we who are the morbid exceptions; it is we who are the criminal class. This should be our great comfort. The vast mass of humanity, with their vast mass of idle books and idle words, have never doubted and never will doubt that courage is splendid, that fidelity is noble, that distressed ladies should be rescued, and vanquished enemies spared. There are a large number of cultivated persons who doubt these maxims of daily life, just as there are a large number of persons who believe they are the Prince of Wales; and I am told that both classes of people are entertaining conversationalists. But the average man or boy writes daily in these great gaudy diaries of his soul, which we call Penny Dreadfuls, a plainer and better gospel than any of those iridescent ethical paradoxes that the fashionable change as often as their bonnets. It may be a very limited aim in morality to shoot a ‘many-faced and fickle traitor,’ but at least it is a better aim than to be a many-faced and fickle traitor, which is a simple summary of a good many modern systems from Mr. d’Annunzio’s downwards. So long as the coarse and thin texture of mere current popular romance is not touched by a paltry culture it will never be vitally immoral. It is always on the side of life. The poor — the slaves who really stoop under the burden of life — have often been mad, scatter-brained and cruel, but never hopeless. That is a class privilege, like cigars. Their drivelling literature will always be a ‘blood and thunder’ literature, as simple as the thunder of heaven and the blood of men.

A DEFENCE OF RASH VOWS

If a prosperous modern man, with a high hat and a frock-coat, were to solemnly pledge himself before all his clerks and friends to count the leaves on every third tree in Holland Walk, to hop up to the City on one leg every Thursday, to repeat the whole of Mill's 'Liberty' seventy-six times, to collect 300 dandelions in fields belonging to anyone of the name of Brown, to remain for thirty-one hours holding his left ear in his right hand, to sing the names of all his aunts in order of age on the top of an omnibus, or make any such unusual undertaking, we should immediately conclude that the man was mad, or, as it is sometimes expressed, was 'an artist in life.' Yet these vows are not more extraordinary than the vows which in the Middle Ages and in similar periods were made, not by fanatics merely, but by the greatest figures in civic and national civilization — by kings, judges, poets, and priests. One man swore to chain two mountains together, and the great chain hung there, it was said, for ages as a monument of that mystical folly. Another swore that he would find his way to Jerusalem with a patch over his eyes, and died looking for it. It is not easy to see that these two exploits, judged from a strictly rational standpoint, are any saner than the acts above suggested. A mountain is commonly a stationary and reliable object which it is not necessary to chain up at night like a dog. And it is not easy at first sight to see that a man pays a very high compliment to the Holy City by setting out for it under conditions which render it to the last degree improbable that he will ever get there.

But about this there is one striking thing to be noticed. If men behaved in that way in our time, we should, as we have said, regard them as symbols of the 'decadence.' But the men who did these things were not decadent; they belonged generally to the most robust classes of what is generally regarded as a robust age. Again, it will be urged that if men essentially sane performed such insanities, it was under the capricious direction of a superstitious religious system. This, again, will not hold water; for in the purely terrestrial and even sensual departments of life, such as love and lust, the medieval princes show the same mad promises and performances, the same misshapen imagination and the same monstrous self-sacrifice. Here we have a contradiction, to explain which it is necessary to think of the whole nature of vows from the beginning. And if we consider seriously and correctly the nature of vows, we shall, unless I am much mistaken, come to the conclusion that it is perfectly sane, and even sensible, to swear to chain mountains together, and that, if insanity is involved at all, it is a little insane not to do so.

The man who makes a vow makes an appointment with himself at some distant time or place. The danger of it is that himself should not keep the appointment. And in modern times this terror of one's self, of the weakness and mutability of one's self, has perilously increased, and is the real basis of the objection to vows of any kind. A modern man refrains from swearing to count the leaves on every third tree in Holland Walk, not because it is silly to do so (he does many sillier things), but because he has a profound conviction that before he had got to the three hundred and seventy-ninth leaf on the first tree he would be excessively tired of the subject and want to go home to tea. In other words, we fear that by that time he will be, in the common but hideously significant phrase, *another man*. Now, it is this horrible fairy tale of a man constantly changing into other men that is the soul of the Decadence. That John Paterson should, with apparent calm, look forward to being a certain General Barker on Monday, Dr. Macgregor on Tuesday, Sir Walter Carstairs on Wednesday, and Sam Slugg on Thursday, may seem a nightmare; but to that nightmare we give the name of modern culture. One great decadent, who is now dead, published a poem some time ago, in which he powerfully summed up the whole spirit of the movement by declaring that he could stand in the prison yard and entirely comprehend the feelings of a man about to be hanged:

'For he that lives more lives than one
More deaths than one must die.'

And the end of all this is that maddening horror of unreality which descends upon the decadents, and compared with which physical pain itself would have the freshness of a youthful thing. The one hell which imagination must conceive as most hellish is to be eternally acting a play without even the narrowest and dirtiest greenroom in which to be human. And this is the condition of the decadent, of the aesthete, of the free-lover. To be everlastingly passing through dangers which we know cannot scathe us, to be taking oaths which we know cannot bind us, to be defying enemies who we know cannot conquer us — this is the grinning tyranny of decadence which is called freedom.

Let us turn, on the other hand, to the maker of vows. The man who made a vow, however wild, gave a healthy and natural expression to the greatness of a great moment. He vowed, for example, to chain two mountains together, perhaps a symbol of some great relief, or love, or aspiration. Short as the moment of his resolve might be, it was, like all great moments, a moment of immortality, and the desire to say of it *exegi monumentum oere perennius* was the only sentiment that would satisfy his mind. The modern aesthetic man would, of course, easily see the emotional opportunity; he would vow to chain two mountains together. But, then, he would quite as cheerfully vow to chain the earth to the moon. And the withering consciousness that he did not mean what he said, that he was, in truth, saying nothing of any great import, would take from him exactly that sense of daring actuality which is the excitement of a vow. For what could be more maddening than an existence in which our mother or aunt received the information that we were going to assassinate the King or build a temple on Ben Nevis with the genial composure of custom?

The revolt against vows has been carried in our day even to the extent of a revolt against the typical vow of marriage. It is most amusing to listen to the opponents of marriage on this subject. They appear to imagine that the ideal of constancy was a yoke mysteriously imposed on mankind by the devil, instead of being, as it is, a yoke consistently imposed by all lovers on themselves. They have invented a phrase, a phrase that is a black and white contradiction in two words— ‘free-love’ — as if a lover ever had been, or ever could be, free. It is the nature of love to bind itself, and the institution of marriage merely paid the average man the compliment of taking him at his word. Modern sages offer to the lover, with an ill-flavoured grin, the largest liberties and the fullest irresponsibility; but they do not respect him as the old Church respected him; they do not write his oath upon the heavens, as the record of his highest moment. They give him every liberty except the liberty to sell his liberty, which is the only one that he wants.

In Mr. Bernard Shaw’s brilliant play ‘The Philanderer,’ we have a vivid picture of this state of things. Charteris is a man perpetually endeavouring to be a free-lover, which is like endeavouring to be a married bachelor or a white negro. He is wandering in a hungry search for a certain exhilaration which he can only have when he has the courage to cease from wandering.

Men knew better than this in old times — in the time, for example, of Shakespeare’s heroes. When Shakespeare’s men are really celibate they praise the undoubted advantages of celibacy, liberty, irresponsibility, a chance of continual change. But they were not such fools as to continue to talk of liberty when they were in such a condition that they could be made happy or miserable by the moving of someone else’s eyebrow. Suckling classes love with debt in his praise of freedom.

‘And he that’s fairly out of both
Of all the world is blest.
He lives as in the golden age,
When all things made were common;
He takes his pipe, he takes his glass,
He fears no man or woman.’

This is a perfectly possible, rational and manly position. But what have lovers to do with ridiculous affectations of fearing no man or woman? They know that in the turning of a hand the whole cosmic engine to the remotest star may become an instrument of music or an instrument of torture. They hear a song older than Suckling’s, that has survived a hundred philosophies. ‘Who is this that looketh out of the window, fair as the sun, clear as the moon, terrible as an army with banners?’

As we have said, it is exactly this backdoor, this sense of having a retreat behind us, that is, to our minds, the sterilizing spirit in modern pleasure. Everywhere there is the persistent and insane attempt to obtain pleasure without paying for it. Thus, in politics the modern Jingoes practically say, ‘Let us have the pleasures of conquerors without the pains of soldiers: let us sit on sofas and be a hardy race.’ Thus, in religion and morals, the decadent mystics say: ‘Let us have the fragrance of sacred purity without the sorrows of self-restraint; let us sing hymns alternately to the Virgin and Priapus.’ Thus in love the free-lovers say: ‘Let us have the splendour of offering ourselves without the peril of committing ourselves; let us see whether one cannot commit suicide an unlimited number of times.’

Emphatically it will not work. There are thrilling moments, doubtless, for the spectator, the amateur, and the aesthete; but there is one thrill that is known only to the soldier who fights for his own flag, to the ascetic who starves himself for his own illumination, to the lover who makes finally his own choice. And it is this transfiguring self-discipline that makes the vow a truly sane thing. It must have satisfied even the giant hunger of the soul of a lover or a poet to know that in consequence of some one instant of decision that strange chain would hang for centuries in the Alps among the silences of stars and snows. All around us is the city of small sins, abounding in backways and retreats, but surely, sooner or later, the towering flame will rise from the harbour announcing that the reign of the cowards is over and a man is burning his ships.

A DEFENCE OF SKELETONS

Some little time ago I stood among immemorial English trees that seemed to take hold upon the stars like a brood of Ygdrasils. As I walked among these living pillars I became gradually aware that the rustics who lived and died in their shadow adopted a very curious conversational tone. They seemed to be constantly apologizing for the trees, as if they were a very poor show. After elaborate investigation, I discovered that their gloomy and penitent tone was traceable to the fact that it was winter and all the trees were bare. I assured them that I did not resent the fact that it was winter, that I knew the thing had happened before, and that no forethought on their part could have averted this blow of destiny. But I could not in any way reconcile them to the fact that it *was* winter. There was evidently a general feeling that I had caught the trees in a kind of disgraceful deshabille, and that they ought not to be seen until, like the first human sinners, they had covered themselves with leaves. So it is quite clear that, while very few people appear to know anything of how trees look in winter, the actual foresters know less than anyone. So far from the line of the tree when it is bare appearing harsh and severe, it is luxuriantly indefinable to an unusual degree; the fringe of the forest melts away like a vignette. The tops of two or three high trees when they are leafless are so soft that they seem like the gigantic brooms of that fabulous lady who was sweeping the cobwebs off the sky. The outline of a leafy forest is in comparison hard, gross and blotchy; the clouds of night do not more certainly obscure the moon than those green and monstrous clouds obscure the tree; the actual sight of the little wood, with its gray and silver sea of life, is entirely a winter vision. So dim and delicate is the heart of the winter woods, a kind of glittering gloaming, that a figure stepping towards us in the chequered twilight seems as if he were breaking through unfathomable depths of spiders' webs.

But surely the idea that its leaves are the chief grace of a tree is a vulgar one, on a par with the idea that his hair is the chief grace of a pianist. When winter, that healthy ascetic, carries his gigantic razor over hill and valley, and shaves all the trees like monks, we feel surely that they are all the more like trees if they are shorn, just as so many painters and musicians would be all the more like men if they were less like mops. But it does appear to be a deep and essential difficulty that men have an abiding terror of their own structure, or of the structure of things they love. This is felt dimly in the skeleton of the tree: it is felt profoundly in the skeleton of the man.

The importance of the human skeleton is very great, and the horror with which it is commonly regarded is somewhat mysterious. Without claiming for the human skeleton a wholly conventional beauty, we may assert that he is certainly not uglier than a bull-dog, whose popularity never wanes, and that he has a vastly more cheerful and ingratiating expression. But just as man is mysteriously ashamed of the skeletons of the trees in winter, so he is mysteriously ashamed of the skeleton of himself in death. It is a singular thing altogether, this horror of the architecture of things. One would think it would be most unwise in a man to be afraid of a skeleton, since Nature has set curious and quite insuperable obstacles to his running away from it.

One ground exists for this terror: a strange idea has infected humanity that the skeleton is typical of death. A man might as well say that a factory chimney was typical of bankruptcy. The factory may be left naked after ruin, the skeleton may be left naked after bodily dissolution; but both of them have had a lively and workmanlike life of their own, all the pulleys creaking, all the wheels turning, in the House of Livelihood as in the House of Life. There is no reason why this creature (new, as I fancy, to art), the living skeleton, should not become the essential symbol of life.

The truth is that man's horror of the skeleton is not horror of death at all. It is man's eccentric glory that he has not, generally speaking, any objection to being dead, but has a very serious objection to being undignified. And the fundamental matter which troubles him in the skeleton is the reminder that the ground-plan of his appearance is shamelessly grotesque. I do not know why he should object to this. He contentedly takes his place in a world that does not pretend to be genteel — a laughing, working, jeering world. He sees millions of animals carrying, with quite a dandified levity, the most monstrous shapes and appendages, the most preposterous horns, wings, and legs, when they are necessary to utility. He sees the good temper of the frog, the unaccountable happiness of the hippopotamus. He sees a whole universe which is ridiculous, from the animalcule, with a head too big for its body, up to the comet, with a tail too big for its head. But when it comes to the delightful oddity of his own inside, his sense of humour rather abruptly deserts him.

In the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance (which was, in certain times and respects, a much gloomier period) this idea of the skeleton had a vast influence in freezing the pride out of all earthly pomps and the fragrance out of all fleeting pleasures. But it was not, surely, the mere dread of death that did this, for these were ages in which men went to meet death singing; it was the idea of the degradation of man in the grinning ugliness of his structure that withered the juvenile insolence of beauty and pride. And in this it almost assuredly did more good than harm. There is nothing so cold or so pitiless as youth, and youth in aristocratic stations and ages tended to an impeccable dignity, an endless summer of success which needed to be very sharply reminded of the scorn of the stars. It was well that such flamboyant prigs should be convinced that one practical joke, at least, would bowl them over, that they would fall into one grinning man-trap, and not rise again. That the whole structure of their existence was as wholesomely ridiculous as that of a pig or a parrot they could not be expected to realize; that birth was humorous, coming of age humorous, drinking and fighting humorous, they were far too young and solemn to know. But at least they were taught that death was humorous.

There is a peculiar idea abroad that the value and fascination of what we call Nature lie in her beauty. But the fact that Nature is beautiful in the sense that a dado or a Liberty curtain is beautiful, is only one of her charms, and almost an accidental one. The highest and most valuable quality in Nature is not her beauty, but her generous and defiant ugliness. A hundred instances might be taken. The croaking noise of the rooks is, in itself, as hideous as the whole hell of sounds in a London railway tunnel. Yet it uplifts us like a trumpet with its coarse kindliness and honesty, and the lover in ‘Maud’ could actually persuade himself that this abominable noise resembled his lady-love’s name. Has the poet, for whom Nature means only roses and lilies, ever heard a pig grunting? It is a noise that does a man good — a strong, snorting, imprisoned noise, breaking its way out of unfathomable dungeons through every possible outlet and organ. It might be the voice of the earth itself, snoring in its mighty sleep. This is the deepest, the oldest, the most wholesome and religious sense of the value of Nature — the value which comes from her immense babyishness. She is as top-heavy, as grotesque, as solemn and as happy as a child. The mood does come when we see all her shapes like shapes that a baby scrawls upon a slate — simple, rudimentary, a million years older and stronger than the whole disease that is called Art. The objects of earth and heaven seem to combine into a nursery tale, and our relation to things seems for a moment so simple that a dancing lunatic would be needed to do justice to its lucidity and levity. The tree above my head is flapping like some gigantic bird standing on one leg; the moon is like the eye of a Cyclops. And, however much my face clouds with sombre vanity, or vulgar vengeance, or contemptible contempt, the bones of my skull beneath it are laughing for ever.

A DEFENCE OF PUBLICITY

It is a very significant fact that the form of art in which the modern world has certainly not improved upon the ancient is what may roughly be called the art of the open air. Public monuments have certainly not improved, nor has the criticism of them improved, as is evident from the fashion of condemning such a large number of them as pompous. An interesting essay might be written on the enormous number of words that are used as insults when they are really compliments. It is in itself a singular study in that tendency which, as I have said, is always making things out worse than they are, and necessitating a systematic attitude of defence. Thus, for example, some dramatic critics cast contempt upon a dramatic performance by calling it theatrical, which simply means that it is suitable to a theatre, and is as much a compliment as calling a poem poetical. Similarly we speak disdainfully of a certain kind of work as sentimental, which simply means possessing the admirable and essential quality of sentiment. Such phrases are all parts of one peddling and cowardly philosophy, and remind us of the days when ‘enthusiast’ was a term of reproach. But of all this vocabulary of unconscious eulogies nothing is more striking than the word ‘pompous.’

Properly speaking, of course, a public monument ought to be pompous. Pomp is its very object; it would be absurd to have columns and pyramids blushing in some coy nook like violets in the woods of spring. And public monuments have in this matter a great and much-needed lesson to teach. Valour and mercy and the great enthusiasms ought to be a great deal more public than they are at present. We are too fond nowadays of committing the sin of fear and calling it the virtue of reverence. We have forgotten the old and wholesome morality of the Book of Proverbs, ‘Wisdom crieth without; her voice is heard in the streets.’ In Athens and Florence her voice was heard in the streets. They had an outdoor life of war and argument, and they had what modern commercial civilization has never had — an outdoor art. Religious services, the most sacred of all things, have always been held publicly; it is entirely a new and debased notion that sanctity is the same as secrecy. A great many modern poets, with the most abstruse and delicate sensibilities, love darkness, when all is said and done, much for the same reason that thieves love it. The mission of a great spire or statue should be to strike the spirit with a sudden sense of pride as with a thunderbolt. It should lift us with it into the empty and ennobling air. Along the base of every noble monument, whatever else may be written there, runs in invisible letters the lines of Swinburne:

‘This thing is God:
To be man with thy might,
To go straight in the strength of thy spirit, and live
out thy life in the light.’

If a public monument does not meet this first supreme and obvious need, that it should be public and monumental, it fails from the outset.

There has arisen lately a school of realistic sculpture, which may perhaps be better described as a school of sketchy sculpture. Such a movement was right and inevitable as a reaction from the mean and dingy pomposity of English Victorian statuary. Perhaps the most hideous and depressing object in the universe — far more hideous and depressing than one of Mr. H.G. Wells’s shapeless monsters of the slime (and not at all unlike them) — is the statue of an English philanthropist. Almost as bad, though, of course, not quite as bad, are the statues of English politicians in Parliament Fields. Each of them is cased in a cylindrical frock-coat, and each carries either a scroll or a dubious-looking garment over the arm that might be either a bathing-towel or a light great-coat. Each of them is in an oratorical attitude, which has all the disadvantage of being affected without even any of the advantages of being theatrical. Let no one suppose that such abortions arise merely from technical demerit. In every line of those leaden dolls is expressed the fact that they were not set up with any heat of natural enthusiasm for beauty or dignity. They were set up mechanically, because it would seem indecorous or stingy if they were not set up. They were even set up sulkily, in a utilitarian age which was haunted by the thought that there were a great many more sensible ways of spending money. So long as this is the dominant national sentiment, the land is barren, statues and churches will not grow — for they have to grow, as much as trees and flowers. But this moral disadvantage which lay so heavily upon the early Victorian sculpture lies in a modified degree upon that rough, picturesque, commonplace sculpture which has begun to arise, and of which the statue of Darwin in the South Kensington Museum and the statue of Gordon in Trafalgar Square are admirable examples. It is not enough for a popular monument to be artistic, like a black charcoal sketch; it must be striking; it must be in the highest sense of the word sensational; it must stand for humanity; it must speak for us to the stars; it must declare in the face of all the heavens that when the longest and blackest catalogue has been made of all our crimes and follies there are some things of which we men are not ashamed.

The two modes of commemorating a public man are a statue and a biography. They are alike in certain respects, as, for example, in the fact that neither of them resembles the original, and that both of them commonly tone down not only all a man's vices, but all the more amusing of his virtues. But they are treated in one respect differently. We never hear anything about biography without hearing something about the sanctity of private life and the necessity for suppressing the whole of the most important part of a man's existence. The sculptor does not work at this disadvantage. The sculptor does not leave out the nose of an eminent philanthropist because it is too beautiful to be given to the public; he does not depict a statesman with a sack over his head because his smile was too sweet to be endurable in the light of day. But in biography the thesis is popularly and solidly maintained, so that it requires some courage even to hint a doubt of it, that the better a man was, the more truly human life he led, the less should be said about it.

For this idea, this modern idea that sanctity is identical with secrecy, there is one thing at least to be said. It is for all practical purposes an entirely new idea; it was unknown to all the ages in which the idea of sanctity really flourished. The record of the great spiritual movements of mankind is dead against the idea that spirituality is a private matter. The most awful secret of every man's soul, its most lonely and individual need, its most primal and psychological relationship, the thing called worship, the communication between the soul and the last reality — this most private matter is the most public spectacle in the world. Anyone who chooses to walk into a large church on Sunday morning may see a hundred men each alone with his Maker. He stands, in truth, in the presence of one of the strangest spectacles in the world — a mob of hermits. And in thus definitely espousing publicity by making public the most internal mystery, Christianity acts in accordance with its earliest origins and its terrible beginning. It was surely by no accident that the spectacle which darkened the sun at noonday was set upon a hill. The martyrdoms of the early

Christians were public not only by the caprice of the oppressor, but by the whole desire and conception of the victims.

The mere grammatical meaning of the word ‘martyr’ breaks into pieces at a blow the whole notion of the privacy of goodness. The Christian martyrdoms were more than demonstrations: they were advertisements. In our day the new theory of spiritual delicacy would desire to alter all this. It would permit Christ to be crucified if it was necessary to His Divine nature, but it would ask in the name of good taste why He could not be crucified in a private room. It would declare that the act of a martyr in being torn in pieces by lions was vulgar and sensational, though, of course, it would have no objection to being torn in pieces by a lion in one’s own parlour before a circle of really intimate friends.

It is, I am inclined to think, a decadent and diseased purity which has inaugurated this notion that the sacred object must be hidden. The stars have never lost their sanctity, and they are more shameless and naked and numerous than advertisements of Pears’ soap. It would be a strange world indeed if Nature was suddenly stricken with this ethereal shame, if the trees grew with their roots in the air and their load of leaves and blossoms underground, if the flowers closed at dawn and opened at sunset, if the sunflower turned towards the darkness, and the birds flew, like bats, by night.

A DEFENCE OF NONSENSE

There are two equal and eternal ways of looking at this twilight world of ours: we may see it as the twilight of evening or the twilight of morning; we may think of anything, down to a fallen acorn, as a descendant or as an ancestor. There are times when we are almost crushed, not so much with the load of the evil as with the load of the goodness of humanity, when we feel that we are nothing but the inheritors of a humiliating splendour. But there are other times when everything seems primitive, when the ancient stars are only sparks blown from a boy's bonfire, when the whole earth seems so young and experimental that even the white hair of the aged, in the fine biblical phrase, is like almond-trees that blossom, like the white hawthorn grown in May. That it is good for a man to realize that he is 'the heir of all the ages' is pretty commonly admitted; it is a less popular but equally important point that it is good for him sometimes to realize that he is not only an ancestor, but an ancestor of primal antiquity; it is good for him to wonder whether he is not a hero, and to experience ennobling doubts as to whether he is not a solar myth.

The matters which most thoroughly evoke this sense of the abiding childhood of the world are those which are really fresh, abrupt and inventive in any age; and if we were asked what was the best proof of this adventurous youth in the nineteenth century we should say, with all respect to its portentous sciences and philosophies, that it was to be found in the rhymes of Mr. Edward Lear and in the literature of nonsense. 'The Dong with the Luminous Nose,' at least, is original, as the first ship and the first plough were original.

It is true in a certain sense that some of the greatest writers the world has seen — Aristophanes, Rabelais and Sterne — have written nonsense; but unless we are mistaken, it is in a widely different sense. The nonsense of these men was satiric — that is to say, symbolic; it was a kind of exuberant capering round a discovered truth. There is all the difference in the world between the instinct of satire, which, seeing in the Kaiser's moustaches something typical of him, draws them continually larger and larger; and the instinct of nonsense which, for no reason whatever, imagines what those moustaches would look like on the present Archbishop of Canterbury if he grew them in a fit of absence of mind. We incline to think that no age except our own could have understood that the Quangle-Wangle meant absolutely nothing, and the Lands of the Jumblies were absolutely nowhere. We fancy that if the account of the knave's trial in 'Alice in Wonderland' had been published in the seventeenth century it would have been bracketed with Bunyan's 'Trial of Faithful' as a parody on the State prosecutions of the time. We fancy that if 'The Dong with the Luminous Nose' had appeared in the same period everyone would have called it a dull satire on Oliver Cromwell.

It is altogether advisedly that we quote chiefly from Mr. Lear's 'Nonsense Rhymes.' To our mind he is both chronologically and essentially the father of nonsense; we think him superior to Lewis Carroll. In one sense, indeed, Lewis Carroll has a great advantage. We know what Lewis Carroll was in daily life: he was a singularly serious and conventional don, universally respected, but very much of a pedant and something of a Philistine. Thus his strange double life in earth and in dreamland emphasizes the idea that lies at the back of nonsense — the idea of *escape*, of escape into a world where things are not fixed horribly in an eternal appropriateness, where apples grow on pear-trees, and any odd man you meet may have three legs. Lewis Carroll, living one life in which he would have thundered morally against any one who walked on the wrong plot of grass, and another life in which he would cheerfully call the sun green and the moon blue, was, by his very divided nature, his one foot on both worlds, a perfect type of the position of modern nonsense. His Wonderland is a country populated by insane mathematicians. We feel the whole is an escape into a world of masquerade; we feel that if we could pierce their disguises, we might discover that Humpty Dumpty and the March Hare were Professors and Doctors of Divinity enjoying a mental holiday. This sense of escape is certainly less emphatic in Edward Lear, because of the completeness of his citizenship in the world of unreason. We do not know his prosaic biography as we know Lewis Carroll's. We accept him as a purely fabulous figure, on his own description of himself:

'His body is perfectly spherical,
He weareth a runcible hat.'

While Lewis Carroll's Wonderland is purely intellectual, Lear introduces quite another element — the element of the poetical and even emotional.

Carroll works by the pure reason, but this is not so strong a contrast; for, after all, mankind in the main has always regarded reason as a bit of a joke. Lear introduces his unmeaning words and his amorphous creatures not with the pomp of reason, but with the romantic prelude of rich hues and haunting rhythms.

‘Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live,’

is an entirely different type of poetry to that exhibited in ‘Jabberwocky.’ Carroll, with a sense of mathematical neatness, makes his whole poem a mosaic of new and mysterious words. But Edward Lear, with more subtle and placid effrontery, is always introducing scraps of his own elvish dialect into the middle of simple and rational statements, until we are almost stunned into admitting that we know what they mean. There is a genial ring of commonsense about such lines as,

‘For his aunt Jobiska said “Every one knows
That a Pobble is better without his toes,”’

which is beyond the reach of Carroll. The poet seems so easy on the matter that we are almost driven to pretend that we see his meaning, that we know the peculiar difficulties of a Pobble, that we are as old travellers in the ‘Gromboolian Plain’ as he is.

Our claim that nonsense is a new literature (we might almost say a new sense) would be quite indefensible if nonsense were nothing more than a mere aesthetic fancy. Nothing sublimely artistic has ever arisen out of mere art, any more than anything essentially reasonable has ever arisen out of the pure reason. There must always be a rich moral soil for any great aesthetic growth. The principle of *art for art’s sake* is a very good principle if it means that there is a vital distinction between the earth and the tree that has its roots in the earth; but it is a very bad principle if it means that the tree could grow just as well with its roots in the air. Every great literature has always been allegorical — allegorical of some view of the whole universe. The ‘Iliad’ is only great because all life is a battle, the ‘Odyssey’ because all life is a journey, the Book of Job because all life is a riddle. There is one attitude in which we think that all existence is summed up in the word ‘ghosts’; another, and somewhat better one, in which we think it is summed up in the words ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream.’ Even the vulgarest melodrama or detective story can be good if it expresses something of the delight in sinister possibilities — the healthy lust for darkness and terror which may come on us any night in walking down a dark lane. If, therefore, nonsense is really to be the literature of the future, it must have its own version of the Cosmos to offer; the world must not only be the tragic, romantic, and religious, it must be nonsensical also. And here we fancy that nonsense will, in a very unexpected way, come to the aid of the spiritual view of things. Religion has for centuries been trying to make men exult in the ‘wonders’ of creation, but it has forgotten that a thing cannot be completely wonderful so long as it remains sensible. So long as we regard a tree as an obvious thing, naturally and reasonably created for a giraffe to eat, we cannot properly wonder at it. It is when we consider it as a prodigious wave of the living soil sprawling up to the skies for no reason in particular that we take off our hats, to the astonishment of the park-keeper. Everything has in fact another side to it, like the moon, the patroness of nonsense. Viewed from that other side, a bird is a blossom broken loose from its chain of stalk, a man a quadruped begging on its hind legs, a house a gigantesque hat to cover a man from the sun, a chair an apparatus of four wooden legs for a cripple with only two.

This is the side of things which tends most truly to spiritual wonder. It is significant that in the greatest religious poem existent, the Book of Job, the argument which convinces the infidel is not (as has been represented by the merely rational religionism of the eighteenth century) a picture of the ordered beneficence of the Creation; but, on the contrary, a picture of the huge and undecipherable unreason of it. ‘Hast Thou sent the rain upon the desert where no man is?’ This simple sense of wonder at the shapes of things, and at their exuberant independence of our intellectual standards and our trivial definitions, is the basis of spirituality as it is the basis of nonsense. Nonsense and faith (strange as the conjunction may seem) are the two supreme symbolic assertions of the truth that to draw out the soul of things with a syllogism is as impossible as to draw out Leviathan with a hook. The well-meaning person who, by merely studying the logical side of things, has decided that ‘faith is nonsense,’ does not know how truly he speaks; later it may come back to him in the form that nonsense is faith.

A DEFENCE OF PLANETS

A book has at one time come under my notice called ‘Terra Firma: the Earth not a Planet.’ The author was a Mr. D. Wardlaw Scott, and he quoted very seriously the opinions of a large number of other persons, of whom we have never heard, but who are evidently very important. Mr. Beach of Southsea, for example, thinks that the world is flat; and in Southsea perhaps it is. It is no part of my present intention, however, to follow Mr. Scott’s arguments in detail. On the lines of such arguments it may be shown that the earth is flat, and, for the matter of that, that it is triangular. A few examples will suffice:

One of Mr. Scott’s objections was that if a projectile is fired from a moving body there is a difference in the distance to which it carries according to the direction in which it is sent. But as in practice there is not the slightest difference whichever way the thing is done, in the case of the earth ‘we have a forcible overthrow of all fancies relative to the motion of the earth, and a striking proof that the earth is not a globe.’

This is altogether one of the quaintest arguments we have ever seen. It never seems to occur to the author, among other things, that when the firing and falling of the shot all take place upon the moving body, there is nothing whatever to compare them with. As a matter of fact, of course, a shot fired at an elephant does actually often travel towards the marksman, but much slower than the marksman travels. Mr. Scott probably would not like to contemplate the fact that the elephant, properly speaking, swings round and hits the bullet. To us it appears full of a rich cosmic humour.

I will only give one other example of the astronomical proofs:

‘If the earth were a globe, the distance round the surface, say, at 45 degrees south latitude, could not possibly be any greater than the same latitude north; but since it is found by navigators to be twice the distance — to say the least of it — or double the distance it ought to be according to the globular theory, it is a proof that the earth is not a globe.’

This sort of thing reduces my mind to a pulp. I can faintly resist when a man says that if the earth were a globe cats would not have four legs; but when he says that if the earth were a globe cats would not have five legs I am crushed.

But, as I have indicated, it is not in the scientific aspect of this remarkable theory that I am for the moment interested. It is rather with the difference between the flat and the round worlds as conceptions in art and imagination that I am concerned. It is a very remarkable thing that none of us are really Copernicans in our actual outlook upon things. We are convinced intellectually that we inhabit a small provincial planet, but we do not feel in the least suburban. Men of science have quarrelled with the Bible because it is not based upon the true astronomical system, but it is certainly open to the orthodox to say that if it had been it would never have convinced anybody.

If a single poem or a single story were really transfused with the Copernican idea, the thing would be a nightmare. Can we think of a solemn scene of mountain stillness in which some prophet is standing in a trance, and then realize that the whole scene is whizzing round like a zoetrope at the rate of nineteen miles a second? Could we tolerate the notion of a mighty King delivering a sublime fiat and then remember that for all practical purposes he is hanging head downwards in space? A strange fable might be written of a man who was blessed or cursed with the Copernican eye, and saw all men on the earth like tintacks clustering round a magnet. It would be singular to imagine how very different the speech of an aggressive egoist, announcing the independence and divinity of man, would sound if he were seen hanging on to the planet by his boot soles.

For, despite Mr. Wardlaw Scott’s horror at the Newtonian astronomy and its contradiction of the Bible, the whole distinction is a good instance of the difference between letter and spirit; the letter of the Old Testament is opposed to the conception of the solar system, but the spirit has much kinship with it. The writers of the Book of Genesis had no theory of gravitation, which to the normal person will appear a fact of as much importance as that they had no umbrellas. But the theory of gravitation has a curiously Hebrew sentiment in it — a sentiment of combined dependence and certainty, a sense of grappling unity, by which all things hang upon one thread. ‘Thou hast hanged the world upon nothing,’ said the author of the Book of Job, and in that sentence wrote the whole appalling poetry of modern astronomy. The sense of the preciousness and fragility of the universe, the sense of being in the hollow of a hand, is one which the round and rolling earth gives in its most thrilling form. Mr. Wardlaw Scott’s flat earth would be the true territory for a comfortable atheist. Nor would the old Jews have any objection to being as much upside down as right way up. They had no foolish ideas about the dignity of man.

It would be an interesting speculation to imagine whether the world will ever develop a Copernican poetry and a Copernican habit of fancy; whether we shall ever speak of ‘early earth-turn’ instead of ‘early sunrise,’ and speak indifferently of looking up at the daisies, or looking down on the stars. But if we ever do, there are really a large number of big and fantastic facts awaiting us, worthy to make a new mythology. Mr. Wardlaw Scott, for example, with genuine, if unconscious, imagination, says that according to astronomers, ‘the sea is a vast mountain of water miles high.’ To have discovered that mountain of moving crystal, in which the fishes build like birds, is like discovering Atlantis: it is enough to make the old world young again. In the new poetry which we contemplate, athletic young men will set out sturdily to climb up the face of the sea. If we once realize all this earth as it is, we should find ourselves in a land of miracles: we shall discover a new planet at the moment that we discover our own. Among all the strange things that men have forgotten, the most universal and catastrophic lapse of memory is that by which they have forgotten that they are living on a star.

In the early days of the world, the discovery of a fact of natural history was immediately followed by the realization of it as a fact of poetry. When man awoke from the long fit of absent-mindedness which is called the automatic animal state, and began to notice the queer facts that the sky was blue and the grass green, he immediately began to use those facts symbolically. Blue, the colour of the sky, became a symbol of celestial holiness; green passed into the language as indicating a freshness verging upon unintelligence. If we had the good fortune to live in a world in which the sky was green and the grass blue, the symbolism would have been different. But for some mysterious reason this habit of realizing poetically the facts of science has ceased abruptly with scientific progress, and all the confounding portents preached by Galileo and Newton have fallen on deaf ears. They painted a picture of the universe compared with which the Apocalypse with its falling stars was a mere idyll. They declared that we are all careering through space, clinging to a cannon-ball, and the poets ignore the matter as if it were a remark about the weather. They say that an invisible force holds us in our own armchairs while the earth hurtles like a boomerang; and men still go back to dusty records to prove the mercy of God. They tell us that Mr. Scott’s monstrous vision of a mountain of sea-water rising in a solid dome, like the glass mountain in the fairy-tale, is actually a fact, and men still go back to the fairy-tale. To what towering heights of poetic imagery might we not have risen if only the poetizing of natural history had continued and man’s fancy had played with the planets as naturally as it once played with the flowers! We might have had a planetary patriotism, in which the green leaf should be like a cockade, and the sea an everlasting dance of drums. We might have been proud of what our star has wrought, and worn its heraldry haughtily in the blind tournament of the spheres. All this, indeed, we may surely do yet; for with all the multiplicity of knowledge there is one thing happily that no man knows: whether the world is old or young.

A DEFENCE OF CHINA SHEPHERDESSES

There are some things of which the world does not like to be reminded, for they are the dead loves of the world. One of these is that great enthusiasm for the Arcadian life which, however much it may now lie open to the sneers of realism, did, beyond all question, hold sway for an enormous period of the world's history, from the times that we describe as ancient down to times that may fairly be called recent. The conception of the innocent and hilarious life of shepherds and shepherdesses certainly covered and absorbed the time of Theocritus, of Virgil, of Catullus, of Dante, of Cervantes, of Ariosto, of Shakespeare, and of Pope. We are told that the gods of the heathen were stone and brass, but stone and brass have never endured with the long endurance of the China Shepherdess. The Catholic Church and the Ideal Shepherd are indeed almost the only things that have bridged the abyss between the ancient world and the modern. Yet, as we say, the world does not like to be reminded of this boyish enthusiasm.

But imagination, the function of the historian, cannot let so great an element alone. By the cheap revolutionary it is commonly supposed that imagination is a merely rebellious thing, that it has its chief function in devising new and fantastic republics. But imagination has its highest use in a retrospective realization. The trumpet of imagination, like the trumpet of the Resurrection, calls the dead out of their graves. Imagination sees Delphi with the eyes of a Greek, Jerusalem with the eyes of a Crusader, Paris with the eyes of a Jacobin, and Arcadia with the eyes of a Euphuist. The prime function of imagination is to see our whole orderly system of life as a pile of stratified revolutions. In spite of all revolutionaries it must be said that the function of imagination is not to make strange things settled, so much as to make settled things strange; not so much to make wonders facts as to make facts wonders. To the imaginative the truisms are all paradoxes, since they were paradoxes in the Stone Age; to them the ordinary copy-book blazes with blasphemy.

Let us, then, consider in this light the old pastoral or Arcadian ideal. But first certainly one thing must be definitely recognised. This Arcadian art and literature is a lost enthusiasm. To study it is like fumbling in the love-letters of a dead man. To us its flowers seem as tawdry as cockades; the lambs that dance to the shepherd's pipe seem to dance with all the artificiality of a ballet. Even our own prosaic toil seems to us more joyous than that holiday. Where its ancient exuberance passed the bounds of wisdom and even of virtue, its caperings seem frozen into the stillness of an antique frieze. In those gray old pictures a bacchanal seems as dull as an archdeacon. Their very sins seem colder than our restraints.

All this may be frankly recognised: all the barren sentimentality of the Arcadian ideal and all its insolent optimism. But when all is said and done, something else remains.

Through ages in which the most arrogant and elaborate ideals of power and civilization held otherwise undisputed sway, the ideal of the perfect and healthy peasant did undoubtedly represent in some shape or form the conception that there was a dignity in simplicity and a dignity in labour. It was good for the ancient aristocrat, even if he could not attain to innocence and the wisdom of the earth, to believe that these things were the secrets of the priesthood of the poor. It was good for him to believe that even if heaven was not above him, heaven was below him. It was well that he should have amid all his flamboyant triumphs the never-extinguished sentiment that there was something better than his triumphs, the conception that ‘there remaineth a rest.’

The conception of the Ideal Shepherd seems absurd to our modern ideas. But, after all, it was perhaps the only trade of the democracy which was equalized with the trades of the aristocracy even by the aristocracy itself. The shepherd of pastoral poetry was, without doubt, very different from the shepherd of actual fact. Where one innocently piped to his lambs, the other innocently swore at them; and their divergence in intellect and personal cleanliness was immense. But the difference between the ideal shepherd who danced with Amaryllis and the real shepherd who thrashed her is not a scrap greater than the difference between the ideal soldier who dies to capture the colours and the real soldier who lives to clean his accoutrements, between the ideal priest who is everlastingly by someone’s bed and the real priest who is as glad as anyone else to get to his own. There are ideal conceptions and real men in every calling; yet there are few who object to the ideal conceptions, and not many, after all, who object to the real men.

The fact, then, is this: So far from resenting the existence in art and literature of an ideal shepherd, I genuinely regret that the shepherd is the only democratic calling that has ever been raised to the level of the heroic callings conceived by an aristocratic age. So far from objecting to the Ideal Shepherd, I wish there were an Ideal Postman, an Ideal Grocer, and an Ideal Plumber. It is undoubtedly true that we should laugh at the idea of an Ideal Postman; it is true, and it proves that we are not genuine democrats.

Undoubtedly the modern grocer, if called upon to act in an Arcadian manner, if desired to oblige with a symbolic dance expressive of the delights of grocery, or to perform on some simple instrument while his assistants skipped around him, would be embarrassed, and perhaps even reluctant. But it may be questioned whether this temporary reluctance of the grocer is a good thing, or evidence of a good condition of poetic feeling in the grocery business as a whole. There certainly should be an ideal image of health and happiness in any trade, and its remoteness from the reality is not the only important question. No one supposes that the mass of traditional conceptions of duty and glory are always operative, for example, in the mind of a soldier or a doctor; that the Battle of Waterloo actually makes a private enjoy pipeclaying his trousers, or that the ‘health of humanity’ softens the momentary phraseology of a physician called out of bed at two o’clock in the morning. But although no ideal obliterates the ugly drudgery and detail of any calling, that ideal does, in the case of the soldier or the doctor, exist definitely in the background and makes that drudgery worth while as a whole. It is a serious calamity that no such ideal exists in the case of the vast number of honourable trades and crafts on which the existence of a modern city depends. It is a pity that current thought and sentiment offer nothing corresponding to the old conception of patron saints. If they did there would be a Patron Saint of Plumbers, and this would alone be a revolution, for it would force the individual craftsman to believe that there was once a perfect being who did actually plumb.

When all is said and done, then, we think it much open to question whether the world has not lost something in the complete disappearance of the ideal of the happy peasant. It is foolish enough to suppose that the rustic went about all over ribbons, but it is better than knowing that he goes about all over rags and being indifferent to the fact. The modern realistic study of the poor does in reality lead the student further astray than the old idyllic notion. For we cannot get the chiaroscuro of humble life so long as its virtues seem to us as gross as its vices and its joys as sullen as its sorrows. Probably at the very moment that we can see nothing but a dull-faced man smoking and drinking heavily with his friend in a pot-house, the man himself is on his soul’s holiday, crowned with the flowers of a passionate idleness, and far more like the Happy Peasant than the world will ever know.

A DEFENCE OF USEFUL INFORMATION

It is natural and proper enough that the masses of explosive ammunition stored up in detective stories and the replete and solid sweet-stuff shops which are called sentimental novelettes should be popular with the ordinary customer. It is not difficult to realize that all of us, ignorant or cultivated, are primarily interested in murder and love-making. The really extraordinary thing is that the most appalling fictions are not actually so popular as that literature which deals with the most undisputed and depressing facts. Men are not apparently so interested in murder and love-making as they are in the number of different forms of latchkey which exist in London or the time that it would take a grasshopper to jump from Cairo to the Cape. The enormous mass of fatuous and useless truth which fills the most widely-circulated papers, such as *Tit-Bits, Science Siftings*, and many of the illustrated magazines, is certainly one of the most extraordinary kinds of emotional and mental pabulum on which man ever fed. It is almost incredible that these preposterous statistics should actually be more popular than the most blood-curdling mysteries and the most luxurious debauches of sentiment. To imagine it is like imagining the humorous passages in Bradshaw's Railway Guide read aloud on winter evenings. It is like conceiving a man unable to put down an advertisement of Mother Seigel's Syrup because he wished to know what eventually happened to the young man who was extremely ill at Edinburgh. In the case of cheap detective stories and cheap novelettes, we can most of us feel, whatever our degree of education, that it might be possible to read them if we gave full indulgence to a lower and more facile part of our natures; at the worst we feel that we might enjoy them as we might enjoy bull-baiting or getting drunk. But the literature of information is absolutely mysterious to us. We can no more think of amusing ourselves with it than of reading whole pages of a Surbiton local directory. To read such things would not be a piece of vulgar indulgence; it would be a highly arduous and meritorious enterprise. It is this fact which constitutes a profound and almost unfathomable interest in this particular branch of popular literature.

Primarily, at least, there is one rather peculiar thing which must in justice be said about it. The readers of this strange science must be allowed to be, upon the whole, as disinterested as a prophet seeing visions or a child reading fairy-tales. Here, again, we find, as we so often do, that whatever view of this matter of popular literature we can trust, we can trust least of all the comment and censure current among the vulgar educated. The ordinary version of the ground of this popularity for information, which would be given by a person of greater cultivation, would be that common men are chiefly interested in those sordid facts that surround them on every side. A very small degree of examination will show us that whatever ground there is for the popularity of these insane encyclopaedias, it cannot be the ground of utility. The version of life given by a penny novelette may be very moonstruck and unreliable, but it is at least more likely to contain facts relevant to daily life than compilations on the subject of the number of cows’ tails that would reach the North Pole. There are many more people who are in love than there are people who have any intention of counting or collecting cows’ tails. It is evident to me that the grounds of this widespread madness of information for information’s sake must be sought in other and deeper parts of human nature than those daily needs which lie so near the surface that even social philosophers have discovered them somewhere in that profound and eternal instinct for enthusiasm and minding other people’s business which made great popular movements like the Crusades or the Gordon Riots.

I once had the pleasure of knowing a man who actually talked in private life after the manner of these papers. His conversation consisted of fragmentary statements about height and weight and depth and time and population, and his conversation was a nightmare of dulness. During the shortest pause he would ask whether his interlocutors were aware how many tons of rust were scraped every year off the Menai Bridge, and how many rival shops Mr. Whiteley had bought up since he opened his business. The attitude of his acquaintances towards this inexhaustible entertainer varied according to his presence or absence between indifference and terror. It was frightful to think of a man’s brain being stocked with such inexpressibly profitless treasures. It was like visiting some imposing British Museum and finding its galleries and glass cases filled with specimens of London mud, of common mortar, of broken walking-sticks and cheap tobacco. Years afterwards I discovered that this intolerable prosaic bore had been, in fact, a poet. I learnt that every item of this multitudinous information was totally and unblushingly untrue, that for all I knew he had made it up as he went along; that no tons of rust are scraped off the Menai

Bridge, and that the rival tradesmen and Mr. Whiteley were creatures of the poet’s brain. Instantly I conceived consuming respect for the man who was so circumstantial, so monotonous, so entirely purposeless a liar. With him it must have been a case of art for art’s sake. The joke sustained so gravely through a respected lifetime was of that order of joke which is shared with omniscience. But what struck me more cogently upon reflection was the fact that these immeasurable trivialities, which had struck me as utterly vulgar and arid when I thought they were true, immediately became picturesque and almost brilliant when I thought they were inventions of the human fancy. And here, as it seems to me, I laid my finger upon a fundamental quality of the cultivated class which prevents it, and will, perhaps, always prevent it from seeing with the eyes of popular imagination. The merely educated can scarcely ever be brought to believe that this world is itself an interesting place. When they look at a work of art, good or bad, they expect to be interested, but when they look at a newspaper advertisement or a group in the street, they do not, properly and literally speaking, expect to be interested. But to common and simple people this world is a work of art, though it is, like many great works of art, anonymous. They look to life for interest with the same kind of cheerful and uneradicable assurance with which we look for interest at a comedy for which we have paid money at the door. To the eyes of the ultimate school of contemporary fastidiousness, the universe is indeed an ill-drawn and over-coloured picture, the scrawlings in circles of a baby upon the slate of night; its starry skies are a vulgar pattern which they would not have for a wallpaper, its flowers and fruits have a cockney brilliancy, like the holiday hat of a flower-girl. Hence, degraded by art to its own level, they have lost altogether that primitive and typical taste of man — the taste for news. By this essential taste for news, I mean the pleasure in hearing the mere fact that a man has died at the age of 110 in South Wales, or that the horses ran away at a funeral in San Francisco. Large masses of the early faiths and politics of the world, numbers of the miracles and heroic anecdotes, are based primarily upon this love of something that has just happened, this divine institution of gossip. When Christianity was named the good news, it spread rapidly, not only because it was good, but also because it was news. So it is that if any of us have ever spoken to a navvy in a train about the daily paper, we have generally found the navvy interested, not in those struggles of Parliaments and trades unions which sometimes are, and are always supposed to be, for his benefit; but in the fact that an unusually large whale has been washed up on the coast of Orkney, or that some leading millionaire like Mr. Harmsworth is reported to break a hundred pipes a year. The educated classes, cloyed and demoralized with the mere indulgence of art and mood, can no longer understand the idle and splendid disinterestedness of the reader of *Pearson's Weekly*. He still keeps something of that feeling which should be the birthright of men — the feeling that this planet is like a new house into which we have just moved our baggage. Any detail of it has a value, and, with a truly sportsmanlike instinct, the average man takes most pleasure in the details which are most complicated, irrelevant, and at once difficult and useless to discover. Those parts of the newspaper which announce the giant gooseberry and the raining frogs are really the modern representatives of the popular tendency which produced the hydra and the werewolf and the dog-headed men. Folk in the Middle Ages were not interested in a dragon or a glimpse of the devil because they thought that it was a beautiful prose idyll, but because they thought that it had really just been seen. It was not like so much artistic literature, a refuge indicating the dulness of the world: it was an incident pointedly illustrating the fecund poetry of the world.

That much can be said, and is said, against the literature of information, I do not for a moment deny. It is shapeless, it is trivial, it may give an unreal air of knowledge, it unquestionably lies along with the rest of popular literature under the general indictment that it may spoil the chance of better work, certainly by wasting time, possibly by ruining taste. But these obvious objections are the objections which we hear so persistently from everyone that one cannot help wondering where the papers in question procure their myriads of readers. The natural necessity and natural good underlying such crude institutions is far less often a subject of speculation; yet the healthy hungers which lie at the back of the habits of modern democracy are surely worthy of the same sympathetic study that we give to the dogmas of the fanatics long dethroned and the intrigues of commonwealths long obliterated from the earth. And this is the base and consideration which I have to offer: that perhaps the taste for shreds and patches of journalistic science and history is not, as is continually asserted, the vulgar and senile curiosity of a people that has grown old, but simply the babyish and indiscriminate curiosity of a people still young and entering history for the first time. In other words, I suggest that they only tell each other in magazines the same kind of stories of commonplace portents and conventional eccentricities which, in any case, they would tell each other in taverns. Science itself is only the exaggeration and specialization of this thirst for useless fact, which is the mark of the youth of man. But science has become strangely separated from the mere news and scandal of flowers and birds; men have ceased to see that a pterodactyl was as fresh and natural as a flower, that a flower is as monstrous as a pterodactyl. The rebuilding of this bridge between science and human nature is one of the greatest needs of mankind. We have all to show that before we go on to any visions or creations we can be contented with a planet of miracles.

A DEFENCE OF HERALDRY

The modern view of heraldry is pretty accurately represented by the words of the famous barrister who, after cross-examining for some time a venerable dignitary of Heralds' College, summed up his results in the remark that 'the silly old man didn't even understand his own silly old trade.'

Heraldry properly so called was, of course, a wholly limited and aristocratic thing, but the remark needs a kind of qualification not commonly realized. In a sense there was a plebeian heraldry, since every shop was, like every castle, distinguished not by a name, but a sign. The whole system dates from a time when picture-writing still really ruled the world. In those days few could read or write; they signed their names with a pictorial symbol, a cross — and a cross is a great improvement on most men's names.

Now, there is something to be said for the peculiar influence of pictorial symbols on men's minds. All letters, we learn, were originally pictorial and heraldic: thus the letter A is the portrait of an ox, but the portrait is now reproduced in so impressionist a manner that but little of the rural atmosphere can be absorbed by contemplating it. But as long as some pictorial and poetic quality remains in the symbol, the constant use of it must do something for the aesthetic education of those employing it. Public-houses are now almost the only shops that use the ancient signs, and the mysterious attraction which they exercise may be (by the optimistic) explained in this manner. There are taverns with names so dreamlike and exquisite that even Sir Wilfrid Lawson might waver on the threshold for a moment, suffering the poet to struggle with the moralist. So it was with the heraldic images. It is impossible to believe that the red lion of Scotland acted upon those employing it merely as a naked convenience like a number or a letter; it is impossible to believe that the Kings of Scotland would have cheerfully accepted the substitute of a pig or a frog. There are, as we say, certain real advantages in pictorial symbols, and one of them is that everything that is pictorial suggests, without naming or defining. There is a road from the eye to the heart that does not go through the intellect. Men do not quarrel about the meaning of sunsets; they never dispute that the hawthorn says the best and wittiest thing about the spring.

Thus in the old aristocratic days there existed this vast pictorial symbolism of all the colours and degrees of aristocracy. When the great trumpet of equality was blown, almost immediately afterwards was made one of the greatest blunders in the history of mankind. For all this pride and vivacity, all these towering symbols and flamboyant colours, should have been extended to mankind. The tobacconist should have had a crest, and the cheesemonger a war-cry. The grocer who sold margarine as butter should have felt that there was a stain on the escutcheon of the Higginses. Instead of doing this, the democrats made the appalling mistake — a mistake at the root of the whole modern malady — of decreasing the human magnificence of the past instead of increasing it. They did not say, as they should have done, to the common citizen, ‘You are as good as the Duke of Norfolk,’ but used that meaner democratic formula, ‘The Duke of Norfolk is no better than you are.’

For it cannot be denied that the world lost something finally and most unfortunately about the beginning of the nineteenth century. In former times the mass of the people was conceived as mean and commonplace, but only as comparatively mean and commonplace; they were dwarfed and eclipsed by certain high stations and splendid callings. But with the Victorian era came a principle which conceived men not as comparatively, but as positively, mean and commonplace. A man of any station was represented as being by nature a dingy and trivial person — a person born, as it were, in a black hat. It began to be thought that it was ridiculous for a man to wear beautiful garments, instead of it being — as, of course, it is — ridiculous for him to deliberately wear ugly ones. It was considered affected for a man to speak bold and heroic words, whereas, of course, it is emotional speech which is natural, and ordinary civil speech which is affected. The whole relations of beauty and ugliness, of dignity and ignominy were turned upside down. Beauty became an extravagance, as if top-hats and umbrellas were not the real extravagance — a landscape from the land of the goblins. Dignity became a form of foolery and shamelessness, as if the very essence of a fool were not a lack of dignity. And the consequence is that it is practically most difficult to propose any decoration or public dignity for modern men without making them laugh. They laugh at the idea of carrying crests and coats-of-arms instead of laughing at their own boots and neckties. We are forbidden to say that tradesmen should have a poetry of their own, although there is nothing so poetical as trade. A grocer should have a coat-of-arms worthy of his strange merchandise gathered from distant and fantastic lands; a postman should have a coat-of-arms capable of expressing the strange honour and responsibility of the man who carries men’s souls in a bag; the chemist should have a coat-of-arms symbolizing something of the mysteries of the house of healing, the cavern of a merciful witchcraft.

There were in the French Revolution a class of people at whom everybody laughed, and at whom it was probably difficult, as a practical matter, to refrain from laughing. They attempted to erect, by means of huge wooden statues and brand-new festivals, the most extraordinary new religions. They adored the Goddess of Reason, who would appear, even when the fullest allowance has been made for their many virtues, to be the deity who had least smiled upon them. But these capering maniacs, disowned alike by the old world and the new, were men who had seen a great truth unknown alike to the new world and the old. They had seen the thing that was hidden from the wise and understanding, from the whole modern democratic civilization down to the present time. They realized that democracy must have a heraldry, that it must have a proud and high-coloured pageantry, if it is to keep always before its own mind its own sublime mission. Unfortunately for this ideal, the world has in this matter followed English democracy rather than French; and those who look back to the nineteenth century will assuredly look back to it as we look back to the reign of the Puritans, as the time of black coats and black tempers. From the strange life the men of that time led, they might be assisting at the funeral of liberty instead of at its christening. The moment we really believe in democracy, it will begin to blossom, as aristocracy blossomed, into symbolic colours and shapes. We shall never make anything of democracy until we make fools of ourselves. For if a man really cannot make a fool of himself, we may be quite certain that the effort is superfluous.

A DEFENCE OF UGLY THINGS

There are some people who state that the exterior, sex, or physique of another person is indifferent to them, that they care only for the communion of mind with mind; but these people need not detain us. There are some statements that no one ever thinks of believing, however often they are made.

But while nothing in this world would persuade us that a great friend of Mr. Forbes Robertson, let us say, would experience no surprise or discomfort at seeing him enter the room in the bodily form of Mr. Chaplin, there is a confusion constantly made between being attracted by exterior, which is natural and universal, and being attracted by what is called physical beauty, which is not entirely natural and not in the least universal. Or rather, to speak more strictly, the conception of physical beauty has been narrowed to mean a certain kind of physical beauty which no more exhausts the possibilities of external attractiveness than the respectability of a Clapham builder exhausts the possibilities of moral attractiveness.

The tyrants and deceivers of mankind in this matter have been the Greeks. All their splendid work for civilization ought not to have wholly blinded us to the fact of their great and terrible sin against the variety of life. It is a remarkable fact that while the Jews have long ago been rebelled against and accused of blighting the world with a stringent and one-sided ethical standard, nobody has noticed that the Greeks have committed us to an infinitely more horrible asceticism — an asceticism of the fancy, a worship of one aesthetic type alone. Jewish severity had at least common-sense as its basis; it recognised that men lived in a world of fact, and that if a man married within the degrees of blood certain consequences might follow. But they did not starve their instinct for contrasts and combinations; their prophets gave two wings to the ox and any number of eyes to the cherubim with all the riotous ingenuity of Lewis Carroll. But the Greeks carried their police regulation into elfland; they vetoed not the actual adulteries of the earth but the wild weddings of ideas, and forbade the banns of thought.

It is extraordinary to watch the gradual emasculation of the monsters of Greek myth under the pestilent influence of the Apollo Belvedere. The chimaera was a creature of whom any healthy-minded people would have been proud; but when we see it in Greek pictures we feel inclined to tie a ribbon round its neck and give it a saucer of milk. Who ever feels that the giants in Greek art and poetry were really big — big as some folk-lore giants have been? In some Scandinavian story a hero walks for miles along a mountain ridge, which eventually turns out to be the bridge of the giant's nose. That is what we should call, with a calm conscience, a large giant. But this earthquake fancy terrified the Greeks, and their terror has terrified all mankind out of their natural love of size, vitality, variety, energy, ugliness. Nature intended every human face, so long as it was forcible, individual, and expressive, to be regarded as distinct from all others, as a poplar is distinct from an oak, and an apple-tree from a willow. But what the Dutch gardeners did for trees the Greeks did for the human form; they lopped away its living and sprawling features to give it a certain academic shape; they hacked off noses and pared down chins with a ghastly horticultural calm. And they have really succeeded so far as to make us call some of the most powerful and endearing faces ugly, and some of the most silly and repulsive faces beautiful. This disgraceful *via media*, this pitiful sense of dignity, has bitten far deeper into the soul of modern civilization than the external and practical Puritanism of Israel. The Jew at the worst told a man to dance in fetters; the Greek put an exquisite vase upon his head and told him not to move.

Scripture says that one star differeth from another in glory, and the same conception applies to noses. To insist that one type of face is ugly because it differs from that of the Venus of Milo is to look at it entirely in a misleading light. It is strange that we should resent people differing from ourselves; we should resent much more violently their resembling ourselves. This principle has made a sufficient hash of literary criticism, in which it is always the custom to complain of the lack of sound logic in a fairy tale, and the entire absence of true oratorical power in a three-act farce. But to call another man's face ugly because it powerfully expresses another man's soul is like complaining that a cabbage has not two legs. If we did so, the only course for the cabbage would be to point out with severity, but with some show of truth, that we were not a beautiful green all over.

But this frigid theory of the beautiful has not succeeded in conquering the art of the world, except in name. In some quarters, indeed, it has never held sway. A glance at Chinese dragons or Japanese gods will show how independent are Orientals of the conventional idea of facial and bodily regularity, and how keen and fiery is their enjoyment of real beauty, of goggle eyes, of sprawling claws, of gaping mouths and writhing coils. In the Middle Ages men broke away from the Greek standard of beauty, and lifted up in adoration to heaven great towers, which seemed alive with dancing apes and devils. In the full summer of technical artistic perfection the revolt was carried to its real consummation in the study of the faces of men. Rembrandt declared the sane and manly gospel that a man was dignified, not when he was like a Greek god, but when he had a strong, square nose like a cudgel, a boldly-blocked head like a helmet, and a jaw like a steel trap.

This branch of art is commonly dismissed as the grotesque. We have never been able to understand why it should be humiliating to be laughable, since it is giving an elevated artistic pleasure to others. If a gentleman who saw us in the street were suddenly to burst into tears at the mere thought of our existence, it might be considered disquieting and uncomplimentary; but laughter is not uncomplimentary. In truth, however, the phrase ‘grotesque’ is a misleading description of ugliness in art. It does not follow that either the Chinese dragons or the Gothic gargoyles or the goblinish old women of Rembrandt were in the least intended to be comic. Their extravagance was not the extravagance of satire, but simply the extravagance of vitality; and here lies the whole key of the place of ugliness in aesthetics. We like to see a crag jut out in shameless decision from the cliff, we like to see the red pines stand up hardily upon a high cliff, we like to see a chasm cloven from end to end of a mountain. With equally noble enthusiasm we like to see a nose jut out decisively, we like to see the red hair of a friend stand up hardily in bristles upon his head, we like to see his mouth broad and clean cut like the mountain crevasse. At least some of us like all this; it is not a question of humour. We do not burst with amusement at the first sight of the pines or the chasm; but we like them because they are expressive of the dramatic stillness of Nature, her bold experiments, her definite departures, her fearlessness and savage pride in her children. The moment we have snapped the spell of conventional beauty, there are a million beautiful faces waiting for us everywhere, just as there are a million beautiful spirits.

A DEFENCE OF FARCE

I have never been able to understand why certain forms of art should be marked off as something debased and trivial. A comedy is spoken of as ‘degenerating into farce’; it would be fair criticism to speak of it ‘changing into farce’; but as for degenerating into farce, we might equally reasonably speak of it as degenerating into tragedy. Again, a story is spoken of as ‘melodramatic,’ and the phrase, queerly enough, is not meant as a compliment. To speak of something as ‘pantomimic’ or ‘sensational’ is innocently supposed to be biting, Heaven knows why, for all works of art are sensations, and a good pantomime (now extinct) is one of the pleasantest sensations of all. ‘This stuff is fit for a detective story,’ is often said, as who should say, ‘This stuff is fit for an epic.’

Whatever may be the rights and wrongs of this mode of classification, there can be no doubt about one most practical and disastrous effect of it. These lighter or wilder forms of art, having no standard set up for them, no gust of generous artistic pride to lift them up, do actually tend to become as bad as they are supposed to be. Neglected children of the great mother, they grow up in darkness, dirty and unlettered, and when they are right they are right almost by accident, because of the blood in their veins. The common detective story of mystery and murder seems to the intelligent reader to be little except a strange glimpse of a planet peopled by congenital idiots, who cannot find the end of their own noses or the character of their own wives. The common pantomime seems like some horrible satiric picture of a world without cause or effect, a mass of ‘jarring atoms,’ a prolonged mental torture of irrelevancy. The ordinary farce seems a world of almost piteous vulgarity, where a half-witted and stunted creature is afraid when his wife comes home, and amused when she sits down on the doorstep. All this is, in a sense, true, but it is the fault of nothing in heaven or earth except the attitude and the phrases quoted at the beginning of this article. We have no doubt in the world that, if the other forms of art had been equally despised, they would have been equally despicable. If people had spoken of ‘sonnets’ with the same accent with which they speak of ‘music-hall songs,’ a sonnet would have been a thing so fearful and wonderful that we almost regret we cannot have a specimen; a rowdy sonnet is a thing to dream about. If people had said that epics were only fit for children and nursemaids, ‘Paradise

Lost' might have been an average pantomime: it might have been called 'Harlequin Satan, or How Adam 'Ad 'em.' For who would trouble to bring to perfection a work in which even perfection is grotesque? Why should Shakespeare write 'Othello' if even his triumph consisted in the eulogy, 'Mr. Shakespeare is fit for something better than writing tragedies'?

The case of farce, and its wilder embodiment in harlequinade, is especially important. That these high and legitimate forms of art, glorified by Aristophanes and Molière, have sunk into such contempt may be due to many causes: I myself have little doubt that it is due to the astonishing and ludicrous lack of belief in hope and hilarity which marks modern aesthetics, to such an extent that it has spread even to the revolutionists (once the hopeful section of men), so that even those who ask us to fling the stars into the sea are not quite sure that they will be any better there than they were before. Every form of literary art must be a symbol of some phase of the human spirit; but whereas the phase is, in human life, sufficiently convincing in itself, in art it must have a certain pungency and neatness of form, to compensate for its lack of reality. Thus any set of young people round a tea-table may have all the comedy emotions of 'Much Ado about Nothing' or 'Northanger Abbey,' but if their actual conversation were reported, it would possibly not be a worthy addition to literature. An old man sitting by his fire may have all the desolate grandeur of Lear or Père Goriot, but if he comes into literature he must do something besides sit by the fire. The artistic justification, then, of farce and pantomime must consist in the emotions of life which correspond to them. And these emotions are to an incredible extent crushed out by the modern insistence on the painful side of life only. Pain, it is said, is the dominant element of life; but this is true only in a very special sense. If pain were for one single instant literally the dominant element in life, every man would be found hanging dead from his own bed-post by the morning. Pain, as the black and catastrophic thing, attracts the youthful artist, just as the schoolboy draws devils and skeletons and men hanging. But joy is a far more elusive and elvish matter, since it is our reason for existing, and a very feminine reason; it mingles with every breath we draw and every cup of tea we drink. The literature of joy is infinitely more difficult, more rare and more triumphant than the black and white literature of pain. And of all the varied forms of the literature of joy, the form most truly worthy of moral reverence and artistic ambition is the form called 'farce' — or its wilder shape in pantomime. To the quietest human being, seated in the quietest house, there will sometimes come a sudden and unmeaning hunger for the possibilities or impossibilities of things; he will abruptly wonder whether the teapot may not suddenly begin to pour out honey or sea-water, the clock to point to all hours of the day at once, the candle to burn green or crimson, the door to open upon a lake or a potato-field instead of a London street. Upon anyone who feels this nameless anarchism there rests for the time being the abiding spirit of pantomime. Of the clown who cuts the policeman in two it may be said (with no darker meaning) that he realizes one of our visions. And it may be noted here that this internal quality in pantomime is perfectly symbolized and preserved by that commonplace or cockney landscape and architecture which characterizes pantomime and farce. If the whole affair happened in some alien atmosphere, if a pear-tree began to grow apples or a river to run with wine in some strange fairyland, the effect would be quite different. The streets and shops and door-knockers of the harlequinade, which to the vulgar aesthete make it seem commonplace, are in truth the very essence of the aesthetic departure. It must be an actual modern door which opens and shuts, constantly disclosing different interiors; it must be a real baker whose loaves fly up into the air without his touching them, or else the whole internal excitement of this elvish invasion of civilization, this abrupt entrance of Puck into Pimlico, is lost. Some day, perhaps, when the present narrow phase of aesthetics has ceased to monopolize the name, the glory of a farcical art may become fashionable. Long after men have ceased to drape their houses in green and gray and to adorn them with Japanese vases, an aesthete may build a house on pantomime principles, in which all the doors shall have their bells and knockers on the inside, all the staircases be constructed to vanish on the pressing of a button, and all the dinners (humorous dinners in themselves) come up cooked through a trapdoor. We are very sure, at least, that it is as reasonable to regulate one’s life and lodgings by this kind of art as by any other.

The whole of this view of farce and pantomime may seem insane to us; but we fear that it is we who are insane. Nothing in this strange age of transition is so depressing as its merriment. All the most brilliant men of the day when they set about the writing of comic literature do it under one destructive fallacy and disadvantage: the notion that comic literature is in some sort of way superficial. They give us little knick-knacks of the brittleness of which they positively boast, although two thousand years have beaten as vainly upon the follies of the ‘Frogs’ as on the wisdom of the ‘Republic.’ It is all a mean shame of joy. When we come out from a performance of the ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream’ we feel as near to the stars as when we come out from ‘King Lear.’ For the joy of these works is older than sorrow, their extravagance is saner than wisdom, their love is stronger than death.

The old masters of a healthy madness, Aristophanes or Rabelais or Shakespeare, doubtless had many brushes with the precisians or ascetics of their day, but we cannot but feel that for honest severity and consistent self-maceration they would always have had respect. But what abysses of scorn, inconceivable to any modern, would they have reserved for an aesthetic type and movement which violated morality and did not even find pleasure, which outraged sanity and could not attain to exuberance, which contented itself with the fool’s cap without the bells!

A DEFENCE OF HUMILITY

The act of defending any of the cardinal virtues has to-day all the exhilaration of a vice. Moral truisms have been so much disputed that they have begun to sparkle like so many brilliant paradoxes. And especially (in this age of egoistic idealism) there is about one who defends humility something inexpressibly rakish.

It is no part of my intention to defend humility on practical grounds. Practical grounds are uninteresting, and, moreover, on practical grounds the case for humility is overwhelming. We all know that the ‘divine glory of the ego’ is socially a great nuisance; we all do actually value our friends for modesty, freshness, and simplicity of heart. Whatever may be the reason, we all do warmly respect humility — in other people.

But the matter must go deeper than this. If the grounds of humility are found only in social convenience, they may be quite trivial and temporary. The egoists may be the martyrs of a nobler dispensation, agonizing for a more arduous ideal. To judge from the comparative lack of ease in their social manner, this seems a reasonable suggestion.

There is one thing that must be seen at the outset of the study of humility from an intrinsic and eternal point of view. The new philosophy of self-esteem and self-assertion declares that humility is a vice. If it be so, it is quite clear that it is one of those vices which are an integral part of original sin. It follows with the precision of clockwork every one of the great joys of life. No one, for example, was ever in love without indulging in a positive debauch of humility. All full-blooded and natural people, such as schoolboys, enjoy humility the moment they attain hero-worship. Humility, again, is said both by its upholders and opponents to be the peculiar growth of Christianity. The real and obvious reason of this is often missed. The pagans insisted upon self-assertion because it was the essence of their creed that the gods, though strong and just, were mystic, capricious, and even indifferent. But the essence of Christianity was in a literal sense the New Testament — a covenant with God which opened to men a clear deliverance. They thought themselves secure; they claimed palaces of pearl and silver under the oath and seal of the Omnipotent; they believed themselves rich with an irrevocable benediction which set them above the stars; and immediately they discovered humility. It was only another example of the same immutable paradox. It is always the secure who are humble.

This particular instance survives in the evangelical revivalists of the street. They are irritating enough, but no one who has really studied them can deny that the irritation is occasioned by these two things, an irritating hilarity and an irritating humility. This combination of joy and self-prostration is a great deal too universal to be ignored. If humility has been discredited as a virtue at the present day, it is not wholly irrelevant to remark that this discredit has arisen at the same time as a great collapse of joy in current literature and philosophy. Men have revived the splendour of Greek self-assertion at the same time that they have revived the bitterness of Greek pessimism. A literature has arisen which commands us all to arrogate to ourselves the liberty of self-sufficing deities at the same time that it exhibits us to ourselves as dingy maniacs who ought to be chained up like dogs. It is certainly a curious state of things altogether. When we are genuinely happy, we think we are unworthy of happiness. But when we are demanding a divine emancipation we seem to be perfectly certain that we are unworthy of anything.

The only explanation of the matter must be found in the conviction that humility has infinitely deeper roots than any modern men suppose; that it is a metaphysical and, one might almost say, a mathematical virtue. Probably this can best be tested by a study of those who frankly disregard humility and assert the supreme duty of perfecting and expressing one’s self. These people tend, by a perfectly natural process, to bring their own great human gifts of culture, intellect, or moral power to a great perfection, successively shutting out everything that they feel to be lower than themselves. Now shutting out things is all very well, but it has one simple corollary — that from everything that we shut out we are ourselves shut out. When we shut our door on the wind, it would be equally true to say that the wind shuts its door on us. Whatever virtues a triumphant egoism really leads to, no one can reasonably pretend that it leads to knowledge. Turning a beggar from the door may be right enough, but pretending to know all the stories the beggar might have narrated is pure nonsense; and this is practically the claim of the egoism which thinks that self-assertion can obtain knowledge. A beetle may or may not be inferior to a man — the matter awaits demonstration; but if he were inferior by ten thousand fathoms, the fact remains that there is probably a beetle view of things of which a man is entirely ignorant. If he wishes to conceive that point of view, he will scarcely reach it by persistently revelling in the fact that he is not a beetle. The most brilliant exponent of the egoistic school, Nietszche, with deadly and honourable logic, admitted that the philosophy of self-satisfaction led to looking down upon the weak, the cowardly, and the ignorant. Looking down on things may be a delightful experience, only there is nothing, from a mountain to a cabbage, that is really *seen* when it is seen from a balloon. The philosopher of the ego sees everything, no doubt, from a high and rarified heaven; only he sees everything foreshortened or deformed.

Now if we imagine that a man wished truly, as far as possible, to see everything as it was, he would certainly proceed on a different principle. He would seek to divest himself for a time of those personal peculiarities which tend to divide him from the thing he studies. It is as difficult, for example, for a man to examine a fish without developing a certain vanity in possessing a pair of legs, as if they were the latest article of personal adornment. But if a fish is to be approximately understood, this physiological dandyism must be overcome. The earnest student of fish morality will, spiritually speaking, chop off his legs. And similarly the student of birds will eliminate his arms; the frog-lover will with one stroke of the imagination remove all his teeth, and the spirit wishing to enter into all the hopes and fears of jelly-fish will simplify his personal appearance to a really alarming extent. It would appear, therefore, that this great body of ours and all its natural instincts, of which we are proud, and justly proud, is rather an encumbrance at the moment when we attempt to appreciate things as they should be appreciated. We do actually go through a process of mental asceticism, a castration of the entire being, when we wish to feel the abounding good in all things. It is good for us at certain times that ourselves should be like a mere window — as clear, as luminous, and as invisible.

In a very entertaining work, over which we have roared in childhood, it is stated that a point has no parts and no magnitude. Humility is the luxurious art of reducing ourselves to a point, not to a small thing or a large one, but to a thing with no size at all, so that to it all the cosmic things are what they really are — of immeasurable stature. That the trees are high and the grasses short is a mere accident of our own foot-rules and our own stature. But to the spirit which has stripped off for a moment its own idle temporal standards the grass is an everlasting forest, with dragons for denizens; the stones of the road are as incredible mountains piled one upon the other; the dandelions are like gigantic bonfires illuminating the lands around; and the heath-bells on their stalks are like planets hung in heaven each higher than the other. Between one stake of a paling and another there are new and terrible landscapes; here a desert, with nothing but one misshapen rock; here a miraculous forest, of which all the trees flower above the head with the hues of sunset; here, again, a sea full of monsters that Dante would not have dared to dream. These are the visions of him who, like the child in the fairy tales, is not afraid to become small. Meanwhile, the sage whose faith is in magnitude and ambition is, like a giant, becoming larger and larger, which only means that the stars are becoming smaller and smaller. World after world falls from him into insignificance; the whole passionate and intricate life of common things becomes as lost to him as is the life of the infusoria to a man without a microscope. He rises always through desolate eternities. He may find new systems, and forget them; he may discover fresh universes, and learn to despise them. But the towering and tropical vision of things as they really are — the gigantic daisies, the heaven-consuming dandelions, the great Odyssey of strange-coloured oceans and strange-shaped trees, of dust like the wreck of temples, and thistledown like the ruin of stars — all this colossal vision shall perish with the last of the humble.

A DEFENCE OF SLANG

The aristocrats of the nineteenth century have destroyed entirely their one solitary utility. It is their business to be flaunting and arrogant; but they flaunt unobtrusively, and their attempts at arrogance are depressing. Their chief duty hitherto has been the development of variety, vivacity, and fulness of life; oligarchy was the world's first experiment in liberty. But now they have adopted the opposite ideal of 'good form,' which may be defined as Puritanism without religion. Good form has sent them all into black like the stroke of a funeral bell. They engage, like Mr. Gilbert's curates, in a war of mildness, a positive competition of obscurity. In old times the lords of the earth sought above all things to be distinguished from each other; with that object they erected outrageous images on their helmets and painted preposterous colours on their shields. They wished to make it entirely clear that a Norfolk was as different, say, from an Argyll as a white lion from a black pig. But to-day their ideal is precisely the opposite one, and if a Norfolk and an Argyll were dressed so much alike that they were mistaken for each other they would both go home dancing with joy.

The consequences of this are inevitable. The aristocracy must lose their function of standing to the world for the idea of variety, experiment, and colour, and we must find these things in some other class. To ask whether we shall find them in the middle class would be to jest upon sacred matters. The only conclusion, therefore, is that it is to certain sections of the lower class, chiefly, for example, to omnibus-conductors, with their rich and rococo mode of thought, that we must look for guidance towards liberty and light.

The one stream of poetry which is continually flowing is slang. Every day a nameless poet weaves some fairy tracery of popular language. It may be said that the fashionable world talks slang as much as the democratic; this is true, and it strongly supports the view under consideration. Nothing is more startling than the contrast between the heavy, formal, lifeless slang of the man-about-town and the light, living, and flexible slang of the coster. The talk of the upper strata of the educated classes is about the most shapeless, aimless, and hopeless literary product that the world has ever seen. Clearly in this, again, the upper classes have degenerated. We have ample evidence that the old leaders of feudal war could speak on occasion with a certain natural symbolism and eloquence that they had not gained from books. When Cyrano de Bergerac, in Rostand’s play, throws doubts on the reality of Christian’s dulness and lack of culture, the latter replies:

‘Bah! on trouve des mots quand on monte à l’assaut;
Oui, j’ai un certain esprit facile et militaire;’

and these two lines sum up a truth about the old oligarchs. They could not write three legible letters, but they could sometimes speak literature. Douglas, when he hurled the heart of Bruce in front of him in his last battle, cried out, ‘Pass first, great heart, as thou wert ever wont.’ A Spanish nobleman, when commanded by the King to receive a high-placed and notorious traitor, said: ‘I will receive him in all obedience, and burn down my house afterwards.’ This is literature without culture; it is the speech of men convinced that they have to assert proudly the poetry of life.

Anyone, however, who should seek for such pearls in the conversation of a young man of modern Belgravia would have much sorrow in his life. It is not only impossible for aristocrats to assert proudly the poetry of life; it is more impossible for them than for anyone else. It is positively considered vulgar for a nobleman to boast of his ancient name, which is, when one comes to think of it, the only rational object of his existence. If a man in the street proclaimed, with rude feudal rhetoric, that he was the Earl of Doncaster, he would be arrested as a lunatic; but if it were discovered that he really was the Earl of Doncaster, he would simply be cut as a cad. No poetical prose must be expected from Earls as a class. The fashionable slang is hardly even a language; it is like the formless cries of animals, dimly indicating certain broad, well-understood states of mind. ‘Bored,’ ‘cut up,’ ‘jolly,’ ‘rotten,’ and so on, are like the words of some tribe of savages whose vocabulary has only twenty of them. If a man of fashion wished to protest against some solecism in another man of fashion, his utterance would be a mere string of set phrases, as lifeless as a string of dead fish. But an omnibus conductor (being filled with the Muse) would burst out into a solid literary effort: ‘You’re a gen’leman, aren’t yer ... yer boots is a lot brighter than yer ‘ed...there’s precious little of yer, and that’s clothes...that’s right, put yer cigar in yer mouth ‘cos I can’t see yer be’ind it...take it out again, do yer! you’re young for smokin’, but I’ve sent for yer mother.... Goin’? oh, don’t run away: I won’t ‘arm yer. I’ve got a good ‘art, I ‘ave....

“Down with croolty to animals,” I say,’ and so on. It is evident that this mode of speech is not only literary, but literary in a very ornate and almost artificial sense. Keats never put into a sonnet so many remote metaphors as a coster puts into a curse; his speech is one long allegory, like Spenser’s ‘Faerie Queen.’

I do not imagine that it is necessary to demonstrate that this poetic allusiveness is the characteristic of true slang. Such an expression as ‘Keep your hair on’ is positively Meredithian in its perverse and mysterious manner of expressing an idea. The Americans have a well-known expression about ‘swelled-head’ as a description of self-approval, and the other day I heard a remarkable fantasia upon this air. An American said that after the Chinese War the Japanese wanted ‘to put on their hats with a shoe-horn.’ This is a monument of the true nature of slang, which consists in getting further and further away from the original conception, in treating it more and more as an assumption. It is rather like the literary doctrine of the Symbolists.

The real reason of this great development of eloquence among the lower orders again brings us back to the case of the aristocracy in earlier times. The lower classes live in a state of war, a war of words. Their readiness is the product of the same fiery individualism as the readiness of the old fighting oligarchs. Any cabman has to be ready with his tongue, as any gentleman of the last century had to be ready with his sword. It is unfortunate that the poetry which is developed by this process should be purely a grotesque poetry. But as the higher orders of society have entirely abdicated their right to speak with a heroic eloquence, it is no wonder that the language should develop by itself in the direction of a rowdy eloquence. The essential point is that somebody must be at work adding new symbols and new circumlocutions to a language.

All slang is metaphor, and all metaphor is poetry. If we paused for a moment to examine the cheapest cant phrases that pass our lips every day, we should find that they were as rich and suggestive as so many sonnets. To take a single instance: we speak of a man in English social relations ‘breaking the ice.’ If this were expanded into a sonnet, we should have before us a dark and sublime picture of an ocean of everlasting ice, the sombre and baffling mirror of the Northern nature, over which men walked and danced and skated easily, but under which the living waters roared and toiled fathoms below. The world of slang is a kind of topsy-turveydom of poetry, full of blue moons and white elephants, of men losing their heads, and men whose tongues run away with them — a whole chaos of fairy tales.

A DEFENCE OF BABY-WORSHIP

The two facts which attract almost every normal person to children are, first, that they are very serious, and, secondly, that they are in consequence very happy. They are jolly with the completeness which is possible only in the absence of humour. The most unfathomable schools and sages have never attained to the gravity which dwells in the eyes of a baby of three months old. It is the gravity of astonishment at the universe, and astonishment at the universe is not mysticism, but a transcendent common-sense. The fascination of children lies in this: that with each of them all things are remade, and the universe is put again upon its trial. As we walk the streets and see below us those delightful bulbous heads, three times too big for the body, which mark these human mushrooms, we ought always primarily to remember that within every one of these heads there is a new universe, as new as it was on the seventh day of creation. In each of those orbs there is a new system of stars, new grass, new cities, a new sea.

There is always in the healthy mind an obscure prompting that religion teaches us rather to dig than to climb; that if we could once understand the common clay of earth we should understand everything. Similarly, we have the sentiment that if we could destroy custom at a blow and see the stars as a child sees them, we should need no other apocalypse. This is the great truth which has always lain at the back of baby-worship, and which will support it to the end. Maturity, with its endless energies and aspirations, may easily be convinced that it will find new things to appreciate; but it will never be convinced, at bottom, that it has properly appreciated what it has got. We may scale the heavens and find new stars innumerable, but there is still the new star we have not found — that on which we were born.

But the influence of children goes further than its first trifling effort of remaking heaven and earth. It forces us actually to remodel our conduct in accordance with this revolutionary theory of the marvellousness of all things. We do (even when we are perfectly simple or ignorant) — we do actually treat talking in children as marvellous, walking in children as marvellous, common intelligence in children as marvellous. The cynical philosopher fancies he has a victory in this matter — that he can laugh when he shows that the words or antics of the child, so much admired by its worshippers, are common enough. The fact is that this is precisely where baby-worship is so profoundly right. Any words and any antics in a lump of clay are wonderful, the child's words and antics are wonderful, and it is only fair to say that the philosopher's words and antics are equally wonderful.

The truth is that it is our attitude towards children that is right, and our attitude towards grown-up people that is wrong. Our attitude towards our equals in age consists in a servile solemnity, overlying a considerable degree of indifference or disdain. Our attitude towards children consists in a condescending indulgence, overlying an unfathomable respect. We bow to grown people, take off our hats to them, refrain from contradicting them flatly, but we do not appreciate them properly. We make puppets of children, lecture them, pull their hair, and reverence, love, and fear them. When we reverence anything in the mature, it is their virtues or their wisdom, and this is an easy matter. But we reverence the faults and follies of children.

We should probably come considerably nearer to the true conception of things if we treated all grown-up persons, of all titles and types, with precisely that dark affection and dazed respect with which we treat the infantile limitations. A child has a difficulty in achieving the miracle of speech, consequently we find his blunders almost as marvellous as his accuracy. If we only adopted the same attitude towards Premiers and Chancellors of the Exchequer, if we genially encouraged their stammering and delightful attempts at human speech, we should be in a far more wise and tolerant temper. A child has a knack of making experiments in life, generally healthy in motive, but often intolerable in a domestic commonwealth. If we only treated all commercial buccaneers and bumptious tyrants on the same terms, if we gently chided their brutalities as rather quaint mistakes in the conduct of life, if we simply told them that they would 'understand when they were older,' we should probably be adopting the best and most crushing attitude towards the weaknesses of humanity. In our relations to children we prove that the paradox is entirely true, that it is possible to combine an amnesty that verges on contempt with a worship that verges upon terror. We forgive children with the same kind of blasphemous gentleness with which Omar Khayyam forgave the Omnipotent.

The essential rectitude of our view of children lies in the fact that we feel them and their ways to be supernatural while, for some mysterious reason, we do not feel ourselves or our own ways to be supernatural. The very smallness of children makes it possible to regard them as marvels; we seem to be dealing with a new race, only to be seen through a microscope. I doubt if anyone of any tenderness or imagination can see the hand of a child and not be a little frightened of it. It is awful to think of the essential human energy moving so tiny a thing; it is like imagining that human nature could live in the wing of a butterfly or the leaf of a tree. When we look upon lives so human and yet so small, we feel as if we ourselves were enlarged to an embarrassing bigness of stature. We feel the same kind of obligation to these creatures that a deity might feel if he had created something that he could not understand.

But the humorous look of children is perhaps the most endearing of all the bonds that hold the Cosmos together. Their top-heavy dignity is more touching than any humility; their solemnity gives us more hope for all things than a thousand carnivals of optimism; their large and lustrous eyes seem to hold all the stars in their astonishment; their fascinating absence of nose seems to give to us the most perfect hint of the humour that awaits us in the kingdom of heaven.

A DEFENCE OF DETECTIVE STORIES

In attempting to reach the genuine psychological reason for the popularity of detective stories, it is necessary to rid ourselves of many mere phrases. It is not true, for example, that the populace prefer bad literature to good, and accept detective stories because they are bad literature. The mere absence of artistic subtlety does not make a book popular. Bradshaw’s Railway Guide contains few gleams of psychological comedy, yet it is not read aloud uproariously on winter evenings. If detective stories are read with more exuberance than railway guides, it is certainly because they are more artistic. Many good books have fortunately been popular; many bad books, still more fortunately, have been unpopular. A good detective story would probably be even more popular than a bad one. The trouble in this matter is that many people do not realize that there is such a thing as a good detective story; it is to them like speaking of a good devil. To write a story about a burglary is, in their eyes, a sort of spiritual manner of committing it. To persons of somewhat weak sensibility this is natural enough; it must be confessed that many detective stories are as full of sensational crime as one of Shakespeare’s plays.

There is, however, between a good detective story and a bad detective story as much, or, rather more, difference than there is between a good epic and a bad one. Not only is a detective story a perfectly legitimate form of art, but it has certain definite and real advantages as an agent of the public weal.

The first essential value of the detective story lies in this, that it is the earliest and only form of popular literature in which is expressed some sense of the poetry of modern life. Men lived among mighty mountains and eternal forests for ages before they realized that they were poetical; it may reasonably be inferred that some of our descendants may see the chimney-pots as rich a purple as the mountain-peaks, and find the lamp-posts as old and natural as the trees. Of this realization of a great city itself as something wild and obvious the detective story is certainly the ‘Iliad.’ No one can have failed to notice that in these stories the hero or the investigator crosses London with something of the loneliness and liberty of a prince in a tale of elfland, that in the course of that incalculable journey the casual omnibus assumes the primal colours of a fairy ship. The lights of the city begin to glow like innumerable goblin eyes, since they are the guardians of some secret, however crude, which the writer knows and the reader does not. Every twist of the road is like a finger pointing to it; every fantastic skyline of chimney-pots seems wildly and derisively signalling the meaning of the mystery.

This realization of the poetry of London is not a small thing. A city is, properly speaking, more poetic even than a countryside, for while Nature is a chaos of unconscious forces, a city is a chaos of conscious ones. The crest of the flower or the pattern of the lichen may or may not be significant symbols. But there is no stone in the street and no brick in the wall that is not actually a deliberate symbol — a message from some man, as much as if it were a telegram or a post-card. The narrowest street possesses, in every crook and twist of its intention, the soul of the man who built it, perhaps long in his grave. Every brick has as human a hieroglyph as if it were a graven brick of Babylon; every slate on the roof is as educational a document as if it were a slate covered with addition and subtraction sums. Anything which tends, even under the fantastic form of the minutiae of Sherlock Holmes, to assert this romance of detail in civilization, to emphasize this unfathomably human character in flints and tiles, is a good thing. It is good that the average man should fall into the habit of looking imaginatively at ten men in the street even if it is only on the chance that the eleventh might be a notorious thief. We may dream, perhaps, that it might be possible to have another and higher romance of London, that men's souls have stranger adventures than their bodies, and that it would be harder and more exciting to hunt their virtues than to hunt their crimes. But since our great authors (with the admirable exception of Stevenson) decline to write of that thrilling mood and moment when the eyes of the great city, like the eyes of a cat, begin to flame in the dark, we must give fair credit to the popular literature which, amid a babble of pedantry and preciosity, declines to regard the present as prosaic or the common as commonplace. Popular art in all ages has been interested in contemporary manners and costume; it dressed the groups around the Crucifixion in the garb of Florentine gentlefolk or Flemish burghers. In the last century it was the custom for distinguished actors to present Macbeth in a powdered wig and ruffles. How far we are ourselves in this age from such conviction of the poetry of our own life and manners may easily be conceived by anyone who chooses to imagine a picture of Alfred the Great toasting the cakes dressed in tourist's knickerbockers, or a performance of ‘Hamlet’ in which the Prince appeared in a frock-coat, with a crape band round his hat. But this instinct of the age to look back, like Lot’s wife, could not go on for ever. A rude, popular literature of the romantic possibilities of the modern city was bound to arise. It has arisen in the popular detective stories, as rough and refreshing as the ballads of Robin Hood.

There is, however, another good work that is done by detective stories. While it is the constant tendency of the Old Adam to rebel against so universal and automatic a thing as civilization, to preach departure and rebellion, the romance of police activity keeps in some sense before the mind the fact that civilization itself is the most sensational of departures and the most romantic of rebellions. By dealing with the unsleeping sentinels who guard the outposts of society, it tends to remind us that we live in an armed camp, making war with a chaotic world, and that the criminals, the children of chaos, are nothing but the traitors within our gates. When the detective in a police romance stands alone, and somewhat fatuously fearless amid the knives and fists of a thieves’ kitchen, it does certainly serve to make us remember that it is the agent of social justice who is the original and poetic figure, while the burglars and footpads are merely placid old cosmic conservatives, happy in the immemorial respectability of apes and wolves. The romance of the police force is thus the whole romance of man. It is based on the fact that morality is the most dark and daring of conspiracies. It reminds us that the whole noiseless and unnoticeable police management by which we are ruled and protected is only a successful knight-errantry.

A DEFENCE OF PATRIOTISM

The decay of patriotism in England during the last year or two is a serious and distressing matter. Only in consequence of such a decay could the current lust of territory be confounded with the ancient love of country. We may imagine that if there were no such thing as a pair of lovers left in the world, all the vocabulary of love might without rebuke be transferred to the lowest and most automatic desire. If no type of chivalrous and purifying passion remained, there would be no one left to say that lust bore none of the marks of love, that lust was rapacious and love pitiful, that lust was blind and love vigilant, that lust sated itself and love was insatiable. So it is with the 'love of the city,' that high and ancient intellectual passion which has been written in red blood on the same table with the primal passions of our being. On all sides we hear to-day of the love of our country, and yet anyone who has literally such a love must be bewildered at the talk, like a man hearing all men say that the moon shines by day and the sun by night. The conviction must come to him at last that these men do not realize what the word 'love' means, that they mean by the love of country, not what a mystic might mean by the love of God, but something of what a child might mean by the love of jam. To one who loves his fatherland, for instance, our boasted indifference to the ethics of a national war is mere mysterious gibberism. It is like telling a man that a boy has committed murder, but that he need not mind because it is only his son. Here clearly the word 'love' is used unmeaningly. It is the essence of love to be sensitive, it is a part of its doom; and anyone who objects to the one must certainly get rid of the other. This sensitiveness, rising sometimes to an almost morbid sensitiveness, was the mark of all great lovers like Dante and all great patriots like Chatham. 'My country, right or wrong,' is a thing that no patriot would think of saying except in a desperate case. It is like saying, 'My mother, drunk or sober.' No doubt if a decent man's mother took to drink he would share her troubles to the last; but to talk as if he would be in a state of gay indifference as to whether his mother took to drink or not is certainly not the language of men who know the great mystery.

What we really need for the frustration and overthrow of a deaf and raucous Jingoism is a renascence of the love of the native land. When that comes, all shrill cries will cease suddenly. For the first of all the marks of love is seriousness: love will not accept sham bulletins or the empty victory of words. It will always esteem the most candid counsellor the best. Love is drawn to truth by the unerring magnetism of agony; it gives no pleasure to the lover to see ten doctors dancing with vociferous optimism round a death-bed.

We have to ask, then, Why is it that this recent movement in England, which has honestly appeared to many a renascence of patriotism, seems to us to have none of the marks of patriotism — at least, of patriotism in its highest form? Why has the adoration of our patriots been given wholly to qualities and circumstances good in themselves, but comparatively material and trivial: — trade, physical force, a skirmish at a remote frontier, a squabble in a remote continent? Colonies are things to be proud of, but for a country to be only proud of its extremities is like a man being only proud of his legs. Why is there not a high central intellectual patriotism, a patriotism of the head and heart of the Empire, and not merely of its fists and its boots? A rude Athenian sailor may very likely have thought that the glory of Athens lay in rowing with the right kind of oars, or having a good supply of garlic; but Pericles did not think that this was the glory of Athens. With us, on the other hand, there is no difference at all between the patriotism preached by Mr. Chamberlain and that preached by Mr. Pat Rafferty, who sings ‘What do you think of the Irish now?’ They are both honest, simple-minded, vulgar eulogies upon trivialities and truisms.

I have, rightly or wrongly, a notion of the chief cause of this pettiness in English patriotism of to-day, and I will attempt to expound it. It may be taken generally that a man loves his own stock and environment, and that he will find something to praise in it; but whether it is the most praiseworthy thing or no will depend upon the man’s enlightenment as to the facts. If the son of Thackeray, let us say, were brought up in ignorance of his father’s fame and genius, it is not improbable that he would be proud of the fact that his father was over six feet high. It seems to me that we, as a nation, are precisely in the position of this hypothetical child of Thackeray’s. We fall back upon gross and frivolous things for our patriotism, for a simple reason. We are the only people in the world who are not taught in childhood our own literature and our own history.

We are, as a nation, in the truly extraordinary condition of not knowing our own merits. We have played a great and splendid part in the history of universal thought and sentiment; we have been among the foremost in that eternal and bloodless battle in which the blows do not slay, but create. In painting and music we are inferior to many other nations; but in literature, science, philosophy, and political eloquence, if history be taken as a whole, we can hold our own with any. But all this vast heritage of intellectual glory is kept from our schoolboys like a heresy; and they are left to live and die in the dull and infantile type of patriotism which they learnt from a box of tin soldiers. There is no harm in the box of tin soldiers; we do not expect children to be equally delighted with a beautiful box of tin philanthropists. But there is great harm in the fact that the subtler and more civilized honour of England is not presented so as to keep pace with the expanding mind. A French boy is taught the glory of Molière as well as that of Turenne; a German boy is taught his own great national philosophy before he learns the philosophy of antiquity. The result is that, though French patriotism is often crazy and boastful, though German patriotism is often isolated and pedantic, they are neither of them merely dull, common, and brutal, as is so often the strange fate of the nation of Bacon and Locke. It is natural enough, and even righteous enough, under the circumstances. An Englishman must love England for something; consequently, he tends to exalt commerce or prize-fighting, just as a German might tend to exalt music, or a Flamand to exalt painting, because he really believes it is the chief merit of his fatherland. It would not be in the least extraordinary if a claim of eating up provinces and pulling down princes were the chief boast of a Zulu. The extraordinary thing is, that it is the chief boast of a people who have Shakespeare, Newton, Burke, and Darwin to boast of.

The peculiar lack of any generosity or delicacy in the current English nationalism appears to have no other possible origin but in this fact of our unique neglect in education of the study of the national literature. An Englishman could not be silly enough to despise other nations if he once knew how much England had done for them. Great men of letters cannot avoid being humane and universal. The absence of the teaching of English literature in our schools is, when we come to think of it, an almost amazing phenomenon. It is even more amazing when we listen to the arguments urged by headmasters and other educational conservatives against the direct teaching of English. It is said, for example, that a vast amount of English grammar and literature is picked up in the course of learning Latin and Greek. This is perfectly true, but the topsy-turviness of the idea never seems to strike them. It is like saying that a baby picks up the art of walking in the course of learning to hop, or that a Frenchman may successfully be taught German by helping a Prussian to learn Ashanti. Surely the obvious foundation of all education is the language in which that education is conveyed; if a boy has only time to learn one thing, he had better learn that.

We have deliberately neglected this great heritage of high national sentiment. We have made our public schools the strongest walls against a whisper of the honour of England. And we have had our punishment in this strange and perverted fact that, while a unifying vision of patriotism can ennoble bands of brutal savages or dingy burghers, and be the best thing in their lives, we, who are — the world being judge — humane, honest, and serious individually, have a patriotism that is the worst thing in ours. What have we done, and where have we wandered, we that have produced sages who could have spoken with Socrates and poets who could walk with Dante, that we should talk as if we have never done anything more intelligent than found colonies and kick niggers? We are the children of light, and it is we that sit in darkness. If we are judged, it will not be for the merely intellectual transgression of failing to appreciate other nations, but for the supreme spiritual transgression of failing to appreciate ourselves.

THE END

ROBERT BROWNING

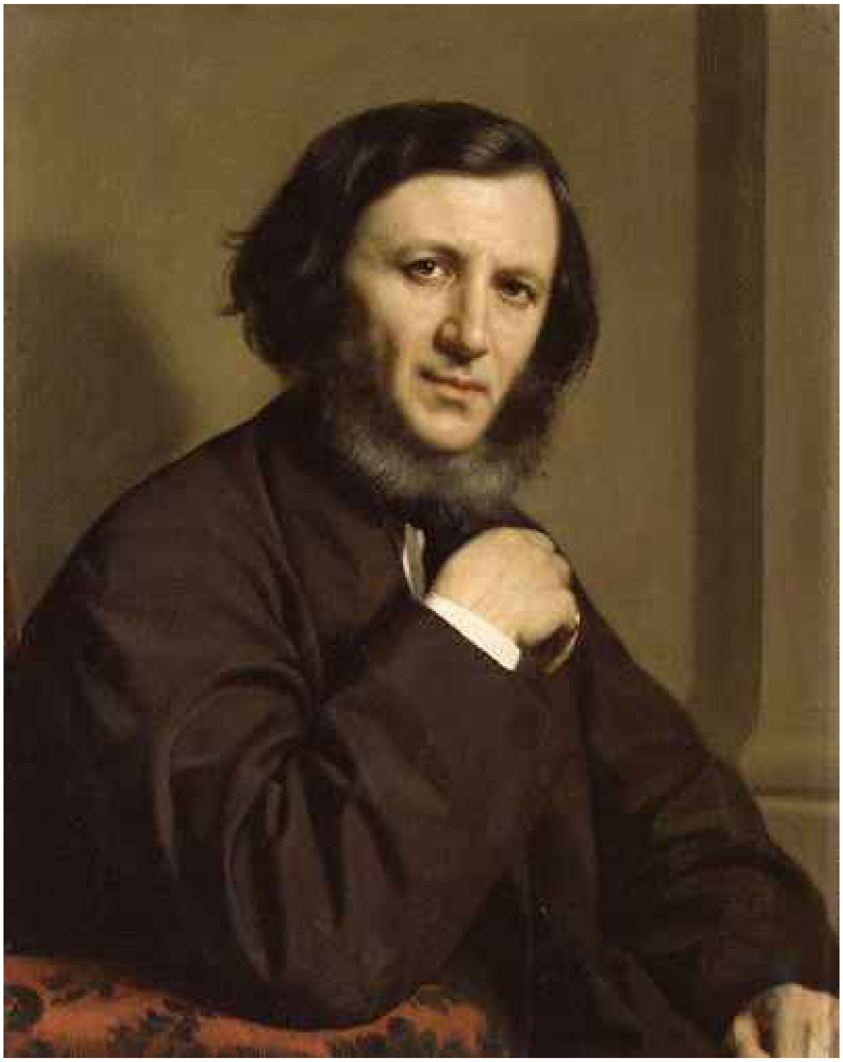

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CHAPTER I

BROWNING IN EARLY LIFE

On the subject of Browning’s work innumerable things have been said and remain to be said; of his life, considered as a narrative of facts, there is little or nothing to say. It was a lucid and public and yet quiet life, which culminated in one great dramatic test of character, and then fell back again into this union of quietude and publicity. And yet, in spite of this, it is a great deal more difficult to speak finally about his life than about his work. His work has the mystery which belongs to the complex; his life the much greater mystery which belongs to the simple. He was clever enough to understand his own poetry; and if he understood it, we can understand it. But he was also entirely unconscious and impulsive, and he was never clever enough to understand his own character; consequently we may be excused if that part of him which was hidden from him is partly hidden from us. The subtle man is always immeasurably easier to understand than the natural man; for the subtle man keeps a diary of his moods, he practises the art of self-analysis and self-revelation, and can tell us how he came to feel this or to say that. But a man like Browning knows no more about the state of his emotions than about the state of his pulse; they are things greater than he, things growing at will, like forces of Nature. There is an old anecdote, probably apocryphal, which describes how a feminine admirer wrote to Browning asking him for the meaning of one of his darker poems, and received the following reply: “When that poem was written, two people knew what it meant — God and Robert Browning. And now God only knows what it means.” This story gives, in all probability, an entirely false impression of Browning’s attitude towards his work. He was a keen artist, a keen scholar, he could put his finger on anything, and he had a memory like the British Museum Library. But the story does, in all probability, give a tolerably accurate picture of Browning’s attitude towards his own emotions and his psychological type. If a man had asked him what some particular allusion to a Persian hero meant he could in all probability have quoted half the epic; if a man had asked him which third cousin of Charlemagne was alluded to in *Sordello*, he could have given an account of the man and an account of his father and his grandfather. But if a man had asked him what he thought of himself, or what were his emotions an hour before his wedding, he would have replied with perfect sincerity that God alone knew.

This mystery of the unconscious man, far deeper than any mystery of the conscious one, existing as it does in all men, existed peculiarly in Browning, because he was a very ordinary and spontaneous man. The same thing exists to some extent in all history and all affairs. Anything that is deliberate, twisted, created as a trap and a mystery, must be discovered at last; everything that is done naturally remains mysterious. It may be difficult to discover the principles of the Rosicrucians, but it is much easier to discover the principles of the Rosicrucians than the principles of the United States: nor has any secret society kept its aims so quiet as humanity. The way to be inexplicable is to be chaotic, and on the surface this was the quality of Browning's life; there is the same difference between judging of his poetry and judging of his life, that there is between making a map of a labyrinth and making a map of a mist. The discussion of what some particular allusion in *Sordello* means has gone on so far, and may go on still, but it has it in its nature to end. The life of Robert Browning, who combines the greatest brain with the most simple temperament known in our annals, would go on for ever if we did not decide to summarise it in a very brief and simple narrative.

Robert Browning was born in Camberwell on May 7th 1812. His father and grandfather had been clerks in the Bank of England, and his whole family would appear to have belonged to the solid and educated middle class — the class which is interested in letters, but not ambitious in them, the class to which poetry is a luxury, but not a necessity.

This actual quality and character of the Browning family shows some tendency to be obscured by matters more remote. It is the custom of all biographers to seek for the earliest traces of a family in distant ages and even in distant lands; and Browning, as it happens, has given them opportunities which tend to lead away the mind from the main matter in hand. There is a tradition, for example, that men of his name were prominent in the feudal ages; it is based upon little beyond a coincidence of surnames and the fact that Browning used a seal with a coat-of-arms. Thousands of middle-class men use such a seal, merely because it is a curiosity or a legacy, without knowing or caring anything about the condition of their ancestors in the Middle Ages. Then, again, there is a theory that he was of Jewish blood; a view which is perfectly conceivable, and which Browning would have been the last to have thought derogatory, but for which, as a matter of fact, there is exceedingly little evidence. The chief reason assigned by his contemporaries for the belief was the fact that he was, without doubt, specially and profoundly interested in Jewish matters. This suggestion, worthless in any case, would, if anything, tell the other way. For while an Englishman may be enthusiastic about England, or indignant against England, it never occurred to any living Englishman to be interested in England. Browning was, like every other intelligent Aryan, interested in the Jews; but if he was related to every people in which he was interested, he must have been of extraordinarily mixed extraction. Thirdly, there is the yet more sensational theory that there was in Robert Browning a strain of the negro. The supporters of this hypothesis seem to have little in reality to say, except that Browning's grandmother was certainly a Creole. It is said in support of the view that Browning was singularly dark in early life, and was often mistaken for an Italian. There does not, however, seem to be anything particular to be deduced from this, except that if he looked like an Italian, he must have looked exceedingly unlike a negro.

There is nothing valid against any of these three theories, just as there is nothing valid in their favour; they may, any or all of them, be true, but they are still irrelevant. They are something that is in history or biography a great deal worse than being false — they are misleading. We do not want to know about a man like Browning, whether he had a right to a shield used in the Wars of the Roses, or whether the tenth grandfather of his Creole grandmother had been white or black: we want to know something about his family, which is quite a different thing. We wish to have about Browning not so much the kind of information which would satisfy Clarencieux King-at-Arms, but the sort of information which would satisfy us, if we were advertising for a very confidential secretary, or a very private tutor. We should not be concerned as to whether the tutor were descended from an Irish king, but we should still be really concerned about his extraction, about what manner of people his had been for the last two or three generations. This is the most practical duty of biography, and this is also the most difficult. It is a great deal easier to hunt a family from tombstone to tombstone back to the time of Henry II. than to catch and realise and put upon paper that most nameless and elusive of all things — social tone.

It will be said immediately, and must as promptly be admitted, that we could find a biographical significance in any of these theories if we looked for it. But it is, indeed, the sin and snare of biographers that they tend to see significance in everything; characteristic carelessness if their hero drops his pipe, and characteristic carefulness if he picks it up again. It is true, assuredly, that all the three races above named could be connected with Browning's personality. If we believed, for instance, that he really came of a race of mediæval barons, we should say at once that from them he got his pre-eminent spirit of battle: we should be right, for every line in his stubborn soul and his erect body did really express the fighter; he was always contending, whether it was with a German theory about the Gnostics, or with a stranger who elbowed his wife in a crowd. Again, if we had decided that he was a Jew, we should point out how absorbed he was in the terrible simplicity of monotheism: we should be right, for he was so absorbed. Or again, in the case even of the negro fancy; it would not be difficult for us to suggest a love of colour, a certain mental gaudiness, a pleasure

"When reds and blues were indeed red and blue,"

as he says in *The Ring and the Book*. We should be right; for there really was in Browning a tropical violence of taste, an artistic scheme compounded as it were, of orchids and cockatoos, which, amid our cold English poets, seems scarcely European. All this is extremely fascinating; and it may be true. But, as has above been suggested, here comes in the great temptation of this kind of work, the noble temptation to see too much in everything. The biographer can easily see a personal significance in these three hypothetical nationalities. But is there in the world a biographer who could lay his hand upon his heart and say that he would not have seen as much significance in any three other nationalities? If Browning's ancestors had been Frenchmen, should we not have said that it was from them doubtless that he inherited that logical agility which marks him among English poets? If his grandfather had been a Swede, should we not have said that the old sea-roving blood broke out in bold speculation and insatiable travel? If his great-aunt had been a Red Indian, should we not have said that only in the Ojibways and the Blackfeet do we find the Browning fantasticality combined with the Browning stoicism? This over-readiness to seize hints is an inevitable part of that secret hero-worship which is the heart of biography. The lover of great men sees signs of them long before they begin to appear on the earth, and, like some old mythological chronicler, claims as their heralds the storms and the falling stars.

A certain indulgence must therefore be extended to the present writer if he declines to follow that admirable veteran of Browning study, Dr. Furnivall, into the prodigious investigations which he has been conducting into the condition of the Browning family since the beginning of the world. For his last discovery, the descent of Browning from a footman in the service of a country magnate, there seems to be suggestive, though not decisive evidence. But Browning's descent from barons, or Jews, or lackeys, or black men, is not the main point touching his family. If the Brownings were of mixed origin, they were so much the more like the great majority of English middle-class people. It is curious that the romance of race should be spoken of as if it were a thing peculiarly aristocratic; that admiration for rank, or interest in family, should mean only interest in one not very interesting type of rank and family. The truth is that aristocrats exhibit less of the romance of pedigree than any other people in the world. For since it is their principle to marry only within their own class and mode of life, there is no opportunity in their case for any of the more interesting studies in heredity; they exhibit almost the unbroken uniformity of the lower animals. It is in the middle classes that we find the poetry of genealogy; it is the suburban grocer standing at his shop door whom some wild dash of Eastern or Celtic blood may drive suddenly to a whole holiday or a crime. Let us admit then, that it is true that these legends of the Browning family have every abstract possibility. But it is a far more cogent and apposite truth that if a man had knocked at the door of every house in the street where Browning was born, he would have found similar legends in all of them. There is hardly a family in Camberwell that has not a story or two about foreign marriages a few generations back; and in all this the Brownings are simply a typical Camberwell family. The real truth about Browning and men like him can scarcely be better expressed than in the words of that very wise and witty story, Kingsley's *Water Babies*, in which the pedigree of the Professor is treated in a manner which is an excellent example of the wild common sense of the book. "His mother was a Dutch woman, and therefore she was born at Curaçoa (of course, you have read your geography and therefore know why), and his father was a Pole, and therefore he was brought up at Petropaulowski (of course, you have learnt your modern politics, and therefore know why), but for all that he was as thorough an Englishman as ever coveted his neighbour's goods."

It may be well therefore to abandon the task of obtaining a clear account of Brownings family, and endeavour to obtain, what is much more important, a clear account of his home. For the great central and solid fact, which these heraldic speculations tend inevitably to veil and confuse, is that Browning was a thoroughly typical Englishman of the middle class. He may have had alien blood, and that alien blood, by the paradox we have observed, may have made him more characteristically a native. A phase, a fancy, a metaphor may or may not have been born of eastern or southern elements, but he was, without any question at all, an Englishman of the middle class. Neither all his liberality nor all his learning ever made him anything but an Englishman of the middle class. He expanded his intellectual tolerance until it included the anarchism of *Fifine at the Fair* and the blasphemous theology of Caliban; but he remained himself an Englishman of the middle class. He pictured all the passions of the earth since the Fall, from the devouring amorousness of *Time's Revenges* to the despotic fantasy of *Instans Tyrannus*; but he remained himself an Englishman of the middle class. The moment that he came in contact with anything that was slovenly, anything that was lawless, in actual life, something rose up in him, older than any opinions, the blood of generations of good men. He met George Sand and her poetical circle and hated it, with all the hatred of an old city merchant for the irresponsible life. He met the Spiritualists and hated them, with all the hatred of the middle class for borderlands and equivocal positions and playing with fire. His intellect went upon bewildering voyages, but his soul walked in a straight road. He piled up the fantastic towers of his imagination until they eclipsed the planets; but the plan of the foundation on which he built was always the plan of an honest English house in Camberwell. He abandoned, with a ceaseless intellectual ambition, every one of the convictions of his class; but he carried its prejudices into eternity.

It is then of Browning as a member of the middle class, that we can speak with the greatest historical certainty; and it is his immediate forebears who present the real interest to us. His father, Robert Browning, was a man of great delicacy of taste, and to all appearance of an almost exaggerated delicacy of conscience. Every glimpse we have of him suggests that earnest and almost worried kindliness which is the mark of those to whom selfishness, even justifiable selfishness, is really a thing difficult or impossible. In early life Robert Browning senior was placed by his father (who was apparently a father of a somewhat primitive, not to say barbaric, type) in an important commercial position in the West Indies. He threw up the position however, because it involved him in some recognition of slavery. Whereupon his unique parent, in a transport of rage, not only disinherited him and flung him out of doors, but by a superb stroke of humour, which stands alone in the records of parental ingenuity, sent him in a bill for the cost of his education. About the same time that he was suffering for his moral sensibility he was also disturbed about religious matters, and he completed his severance from his father by joining a dissenting sect. He was, in short, a very typical example of the serious middle-class man of the Wilberforce period, a man to whom duty was all in all, and who would revolutionise an empire or a continent for the satisfaction of a single moral scruple. Thus, while he was Puritan at the core, not the ruthless Puritan of the seventeenth, but the humanitarian Puritan of the eighteenth century, he had upon the surface all the tastes and graces of a man of culture. Numerous accomplishments of the lighter kind, such as drawing and painting in water colours, he possessed; and his feeling for many kinds of literature was fastidious and exact. But the whole was absolutely redolent of the polite severity of the eighteenth century. He lamented his son’s early admiration for Byron, and never ceased adjuring him to model himself upon Pope.

He was, in short, one of the old-fashioned humanitarians of the eighteenth century, a class which we may or may not have conquered in moral theory, but which we most certainly have not conquered in moral practice. Robert Browning senior destroyed all his fortunes in order to protest against black slavery; white slavery may be, as later economists tell us, a thing infinitely worse, but not many men destroy their fortunes in order to protest against it. The ideals of the men of that period appear to us very unattractive; to them duty was a kind of chilly sentiment. But when we think what they did with those cold ideals, we can scarcely feel so superior. They uprooted the enormous Upas of slavery, the tree that was literally as old as the race of man. They altered the whole face of Europe with their deductive fancies. We have ideals that are really better, ideals of passion, of mysticism, of a sense of the youth and adventurousness of the earth; but it will be well for us if we achieve as much by our frenzy as they did by their delicacies. It scarcely seems as if we were as robust in our very robustness as they were robust in their sensibility.

Robert Browning's mother was the daughter of William Wiedermann, a German merchant settled in Dundee, and married to a Scotch wife. One of the poet's principal biographers has suggested that from this union of the German and Scotch, Browning got his metaphysical tendency; it is possible; but here again we must beware of the great biographical danger of making mountains out of molehills. What Browning's mother unquestionably did give to him, was in the way of training — a very strong religious habit, and a great belief in manners. Thomas Carlyle called her "the type of a Scottish gentlewoman," and the phrase has a very real significance to those who realise the peculiar condition of Scotland, one of the very few European countries where large sections of the aristocracy are Puritans; thus a Scottish gentlewoman combines two descriptions of dignity at the same time. Little more is known of this lady except the fact that after her death Browning could not bear to look at places where she had walked.

Browning's education in the formal sense reduces itself to a minimum. In very early boyhood he attended a species of dame-school, which, according to some of his biographers, he had apparently to leave because he was too clever to be tolerable. However this may be, he undoubtedly went afterwards to a school kept by Mr. Ready, at which again he was marked chiefly by precocity. But the boy's education did not in truth take place at any systematic seat of education; it took place in his own home, where one of the quaintest and most learned and most absurdly indulgent of fathers poured out in an endless stream fantastic recitals from the Greek epics and mediæval chronicles. If we test the matter by the test of actual schools and universities, Browning will appear to be almost the least educated man in English literary history. But if we test it by the amount actually learned, we shall think that he was perhaps the most educated man that ever lived; that he was in fact, if anything, overeducated. In a spirited poem he has himself described how, when he was a small child, his father used to pile up chairs in the drawing-room and call them the city of Troy. Browning came out of the home crammed with all kinds of knowledge — knowledge about the Greek poets, knowledge about the Provençal Troubadours, knowledge about the Jewish Rabbis of the Middle Ages. But along with all this knowledge he carried one definite and important piece of ignorance, an ignorance of the degree to which such knowledge was exceptional. He was no spoilt and self-conscious child, taught to regard himself as clever. In the atmosphere in which he lived learning was a pleasure, and a natural pleasure, like sport or wine. He had in it the pleasure of some old scholar of the Renascence, when grammar itself was as fresh as the flowers of spring. He had no reason to suppose that every one did not join in so admirable a game. His sagacious destiny, while giving him knowledge of everything else, left him in ignorance of the ignorance of the world.

Of his boyish days scarcely any important trace remains, except a kind of diary which contains under one date the laconic statement, “Married two wives this morning.” The insane ingenuity of the biographer would be quite capable of seeing in this a most suggestive foreshadowing of the sexual dualism which is so ably defended in *Fifine at the Fair*. A great part of his childhood was passed in the society of his only sister Sariana; and it is a curious and touching fact that with her also he passed his last days. From his earliest babyhood he seems to have lived in a more or less stimulating mental atmosphere; but as he emerged into youth he came under great poetic influences, which made his father’s classical poetic tradition look for the time insipid. Browning began to live in the life of his own age.

As a young man he attended classes at University College; beyond this there is little evidence that he was much in touch with intellectual circles outside that of his own family. But the forces that were moving the literary world had long passed beyond the merely literary area. About the time of Browning’s boyhood a very subtle and profound change was beginning in the intellectual atmosphere of such homes as that of the Brownings. In studying the careers of great men we tend constantly to forget that their youth was generally passed and their characters practically formed in a period long previous to their appearance in history. We think of Milton, the Restoration Puritan, and forget that he grew up in the living shadow of Shakespeare and the full summer of the Elizabethan drama. We realise Garibaldi as a sudden and almost miraculous figure rising about fifty years ago to create the new Kingdom of Italy, and we forget that he must have formed his first ideas of liberty while hearing at his father’s dinner-table that Napoleon was the master of Europe. Similarly, we think of Browning as the great Victorian poet, who lived long enough to have opinions on Mr. Gladstone’s Home Rule Bill, and forget that as a young man he passed a bookstall and saw a volume ticketed “Mr. Shelley’s Atheistic Poem,” and had to search even in his own really cultivated circle for some one who could tell him who Mr. Shelley was. Browning was, in short, born in the afterglow of the great Revolution.

The French Revolution was at root a thoroughly optimistic thing. It may seem strange to attribute optimism to anything so destructive; but, in truth, this particular kind of optimism is inevitably, and by its nature, destructive. The great dominant idea of the whole of that period, the period before, during, and long after the Revolution, is the idea that man would by his nature live in an Eden of dignity, liberty and love, and that artificial and decrepit systems are keeping him out of that Eden. No one can do the least justice to the great Jacobins who does not realise that to them breaking the civilisation of ages was like breaking the cords of a treasure-chest. And just as for more than a century great men had dreamed of this beautiful emancipation, so the dream began in the time of Keats and Shelley to creep down among the dullest professions and the most prosaic classes of society. A spirit of revolt was growing among the young of the middle classes, which had nothing at all in common with the complete and pessimistic revolt against all things in heaven or earth, which has been fashionable among the young in more recent times. The Shelleyan enthusiast was altogether on the side of existence; he thought that every cloud and clump of grass shared his strict republican orthodoxy. He represented, in short, a revolt of the normal against the abnormal; he found himself, so to speak, in the heart of a wholly topsy-turvy and blasphemous state of things, in which God was rebelling against Satan. There began to arise about this time a race of young men like Keats, members of a not highly cultivated middle class, and even of classes lower, who felt in a hundred ways this obscure alliance with eternal things against temporal and practical ones, and who lived on its imaginative delight. They were a kind of furtive universalist; they had discovered the whole cosmos, and they kept the whole cosmos a secret. They climbed up dark stairs to meagre garrets, and shut themselves in with the gods. Numbers of the great men, who afterwards illuminated the Victorian era, were at this time living in mean streets in magnificent daydreams. Ruskin was solemnly visiting his solemn suburban aunts; Dickens was going to and fro in a blacking factory; Carlyle, slightly older, was still lingering on a poor farm in Dumfriesshire; Keats had not long become the assistant of the country surgeon when Browning was a boy in Camberwell. On all sides there was the first beginning of the æsthetic stir in the middle classes which expressed itself in the combination of so many poetic lives with so many prosaic livelihoods. It was the age of inspired office-boys.

Browning grew up, then, with the growing fame of Shelley and Keats, in the atmosphere of literary youth, fierce and beautiful, among new poets who believed in a new world. It is important to remember this, because the real Browning was a quite different person from the grim moralist and metaphysician who is seen through the spectacles of Browning Societies and University Extension Lecturers. Browning was first and foremost a poet, a man made to enjoy all things visible and invisible, a priest of the higher passions. The misunderstanding that has supposed him to be other than poetical, because his form was often fanciful and abrupt, is really different from the misunderstanding which attaches to most other poets. The opponents of Victor Hugo called him a mere windbag; the opponents of Shakespeare called him a buffoon. But the admirers of Hugo and Shakespeare at least knew better. Now the admirers and opponents of Browning alike make him out to be a pedant rather than a poet. The only difference between the Browningite and the anti-Browningite, is that the second says he was not a poet but a mere philosopher, and the first says he was a philosopher and not a mere poet. The admirer disparages poetry in order to exalt Browning; the opponent exalts poetry in order to disparage Browning; and all the time Browning himself exalted poetry above all earthly things, served it with single-hearted intensity, and stands among the few poets who hardly wrote a line of anything else.

The whole of the boyhood and youth of Robert Browning has as much the quality of pure poetry as the boyhood and youth of Shelley. We do not find in it any trace of the analytical Browning who is believed in by learned ladies and gentlemen. How indeed would such sympathisers feel if informed that the first poems that Browning wrote in a volume called *Incondita* were noticed to contain the fault of “too much splendour of language and too little wealth of thought”? They were indeed Byronic in the extreme, and Browning in his earlier appearances in society presents himself in quite a romantic manner. Macready, the actor, wrote of him: “He looks and speaks more like a young poet than any one I have ever seen.” A picturesque tradition remains that Thomas Carlyle, riding out upon one of his solitary gallops necessitated by his physical sufferings, was stopped by one whom he described as a strangely beautiful youth, who poured out to him without preface or apology his admiration for the great philosopher’s works. Browning at this time seems to have left upon many people this impression of physical charm. A friend who attended University College with him says: “He was then a bright handsome youth with long black hair falling over his shoulders.” Every tale that remains of him in connection with this period asserts and reasserts the completely romantic spirit by which he was then possessed. He was fond, for example, of following in the track of gipsy caravans, far across country, and a song which he heard with the refrain, “Following the Queen of the Gipsies oh!” rang in his ears long enough to express itself in his soberer and later days in that splendid poem of the spirit of escape and Bohemianism, *The Flight of the Duchess*. Such other of these early glimpses of him as remain, depict him as striding across Wimbledon Common with his hair blowing in the wind, reciting aloud passages from Isaiah, or climbing up into the elms above Norwood to look over London by night. It was when looking down from that suburban eyrie over the whole confounding labyrinth of London that he was filled with that great irresponsible benevolence which is the best of the joys of youth, and conceived the idea of a perfectly irresponsible benevolence in the first plan of *Pippa Passes*. At the end of his father’s garden was a laburnum “heavy with its weight of gold,” and in the tree two nightingales were in the habit of singing against each other, a form of competition which, I imagine, has since become less common in Camberwell. When Browning as a boy was intoxicated with the poetry of Shelley and Keats, he hypnotised himself into something approaching to a positive conviction that these two birds were the spirits of the two great poets who had settled in a Camberwell garden, in order to sing to the only young gentleman who really adored and understood them. This last story is perhaps the most typical of the tone common to all the rest; it would be difficult to find a story which across the gulf of nearly eighty years awakens so vividly a sense of the sumptuous folly of an intellectual boyhood. With Browning, as with all true poets, passion came first and made intellectual expression, the hunger for beauty making literature as the hunger for bread made a plough. The life he lived in those early days was no life of dull application; there was no poet whose youth was so young. When he was full of years and fame, and delineating in great epics the beauty and horror of the romance of southern Europe, a young man, thinking to please him, said, “There is no romance now except in Italy.” “Well,” said Browning, “I should make an exception of Camberwell.”

Such glimpses will serve to indicate the kind of essential issue that there was in the nature of things between the generation of Browning and the generation of his father. Browning was bound in the nature of things to become at the outset Byronic, and Byronism was not, of course, in reality so much a pessimism about civilised things as an optimism about savage things. This great revolt on behalf of the elemental which Keats and Shelley represented was bound first of all to occur. Robert Browning junior had to be a part of it, and Robert Browning senior had to go back to his water colours and the faultless couplets of Pope with the full sense of the greatest pathos that the world contains, the pathos of the man who has produced something that he cannot understand.

The earliest works of Browning bear witness, without exception, to this ardent and somewhat sentimental evolution. *Pauline* appeared anonymously in 1833. It exhibits the characteristic mark of a juvenile poem, the general suggestion that the author is a thousand years old. Browning calls it a fragment of a confession; and Mr. Johnson Fox, an old friend of Browning's father, who reviewed it for *Tait's Magazine*, said, with truth, that it would be difficult to find anything more purely confessional. It is the typical confession of a boy laying bare all the spiritual crimes of infidelity and moral waste, in a state of genuine ignorance of the fact that every one else has committed them. It is wholesome and natural for youth to go about confessing that the grass is green, and whispering to a priest hoarsely that it has found a sun in heaven. But the records of that particular period of development, even when they are as ornate and beautiful as *Pauline*, are not necessarily or invariably wholesome reading. The chief interest of *Pauline*, with all its beauties, lies in a certain almost humorous singularity, the fact that Browning, of all people, should have signalised his entrance into the world of letters with a poem which may fairly be called morbid. But this is a morbidity so general and recurrent that it may be called in a contradictory phrase a healthy morbidity; it is a kind of intellectual measles. No one of any degree of maturity in reading *Pauline* will be quite so horrified at the sins of the young gentleman who tells the story as he seems to be himself. It is the utterance of that bitter and heartrending period of youth which comes before we realise the one grand and logical basis of all optimism — the doctrine of original sin. The boy at this stage being an ignorant and inhuman idealist, regards all his faults as frightful secret malformations, and it is only later that he becomes conscious of that large and beautiful and benignant explanation that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. That Browning, whose judgment on his own work was one of the best in the world, took this view of *Pauline* in after years is quite obvious. He displayed a very manly and unique capacity of really laughing at his own work without being in the least ashamed of it. “This,” he said of *Pauline*, “is the only crab apple that remains of the shapely tree of life in my fool’s paradise.” It would be difficult to express the matter more perfectly. Although *Pauline* was published anonymously, its authorship was known to a certain circle, and Browning began to form friendships in the literary world. He had already become acquainted with two of the best friends he was ever destined to have, Alfred Domett, celebrated in “The Guardian Angel” and “Waring,” and his cousin Silverthorne, whose death is spoken of in one of the most perfect lyrics in the English language, Browning’s “May and Death.” These were men of his own age, and his manner of speaking of them gives us many glimpses into that splendid world of comradeship which. Plato and Walt Whitman knew, with its endless days and its immortal nights. Browning had a third friend destined to play an even greater part in his life, but who belonged to an older generation and a statelier school of manners and scholarship. Mr. Kenyon was a schoolfellow of Browning’s father, and occupied towards his son something of the position of an irresponsible uncle. He was a rotund, rosy old gentleman, fond of comfort and the courtesies of life, but fond of them more for others, though much for himself. Elizabeth Barrett in after years wrote of “the brightness of his carved speech,” which would appear to suggest that he practised that urbane and precise order of wit which was even then old-fashioned. Yet, notwithstanding many talents of this kind, he was not so much an able man as the natural friend and equal of able men.

Browning’s circle of friends, however, widened about this time in all directions. One friend in particular he made, the Comte de Ripert-Monclar, a French Royalist with whom he prosecuted with renewed energy his studies in the mediæval and Renaissance schools of philosophy. It was the Count who suggested that Browning should write a poetical play on the subject of Paracelsus. After reflection, indeed, the Count retracted this advice on the ground that the history of the great mystic gave no room for love. Undismayed by this terrible deficiency, Browning caught up the idea with characteristic enthusiasm, and in 1835 appeared the first of his works which he himself regarded as representative — *Paracelsus*. The poem shows an enormous advance in technical literary power; but in the history of Browning’s mind it is chiefly interesting as giving an example of a peculiarity which clung to him during the whole of his literary life, an intense love of the holes and corners of history. Fifty-two years afterwards he wrote *Parleyings with certain Persons of Importance in their Day*, the last poem published in his lifetime; and any reader of that remarkable work will perceive that the common characteristic of all these persons is not so much that they were of importance in their day as that they are of no importance in ours. The same eccentric fastidiousness worked in him as a young man when he wrote *Paracelsus* and *Sordello*. Nowhere in Browning’s poetry can we find any very exhaustive study of any of the great men who are the favourites of the poet and moralist. He has written about philosophy and ambition and music and morals, but he has written nothing about Socrates or Cæsar or Napoleon, or Beethoven or Mozart, or Buddha or Mahomet. When he wishes to describe a political ambition he selects that entirely unknown individual, King Victor of Sardinia. When he wishes to express the most perfect soul of music, he unearths some extraordinary persons called Abt Vogler and Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha. When he wishes to express the largest and sublimest scheme of morals and religion which his imagination can conceive, he does not put it into the mouth of any of the great spiritual leaders of mankind, but into the mouth of an obscure Jewish Rabbi of the name of Ben Ezra. It is fully in accordance with this fascinating craze of his that when he wishes to study the deification of the intellect and the disinterested pursuit of the things of the mind, he does not select any of the great philosophers from Plato to Darwin, whose investigations are still of some importance in the eyes of the world. He selects the figure of all figures most covered with modern satire and pity, the *à priori* scientist of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. His supreme type of the human intellect is neither the academic nor the positivist, but the alchemist. It is difficult to imagine a turn of mind constituting a more complete challenge to the ordinary modern point of view. To the intellect of our time the wild investigators of the school of Paracelsus seem to be the very crown and flower of futility, they are collectors of straws and careful misers of dust. But for all that Browning was right. Any critic who understands the true spirit of mediæval science can see that he was right; no critic can see how right he was unless he understands the spirit of mediæval science as thoroughly as he did. In the character of Paracelsus, Browning wished to paint the dangers and disappointments which attend the man who believes merely in the intellect. He wished to depict the fall of the logician; and with a perfect and unerring instinct he selected a man who wrote and spoke in the tradition of the Middle Ages, the most thoroughly and even painfully logical period that the world has ever seen. If he had chosen an ancient Greek philosopher, it would have been open to the critic to have said that that philosopher relied to some extent upon the most sunny and graceful social life that ever flourished. If he had made him a modern sociological professor, it would have been possible to object that his energies were not wholly concerned with truth, but partly with the solid and material satisfaction of society. But the man truly devoted to the things of the mind was the mediæval magician. It is a remarkable fact that one civilisation does not satisfy itself by calling another civilisation wicked — it calls it uncivilised. We call the Chinese barbarians, and they call us barbarians. The mediæval state, like China, was a foreign civilisation, and this was its supreme characteristic, that it cared for the things of the mind for their own sake. To complain of the researches of its sages on the ground that they were not materially fruitful, is to act as we should act in telling a gardener that his roses were not as digestible as our cabbages. It is not only true that the mediæval philosophers never discovered the steam-engine; it is quite equally true that they never tried. The Eden of the Middle Ages was really a garden, where each of God's flowers — truth and beauty and reason — flourished for its own sake, and with its own name. The Eden of modern progress is a kitchen garden.

It would have been hard, therefore, for Browning to have chosen a better example for his study of intellectual egotism than Paracelsus. Modern life accuses the mediæval tradition of crushing the intellect; Browning, with a truer instinct, accuses that tradition of over-glorifying it. There is, however, another and even more important deduction to be made from the moral of *Paracelsus*. The usual accusation against Browning is that he was consumed with logic; that he thought all subjects to be the proper pabulum of intellectual disquisition; that he gloried chiefly in his own power of plucking knots to pieces and rending fallacies in two; and that to this method he sacrificed deliberately, and with complete self-complacency, the element of poetry and sentiment. To people who imagine Browning to have been this frigid believer in the intellect there is only one answer necessary or sufficient. It is the fact that he wrote a play designed to destroy the whole of this intellectualist fallacy at the age of twenty-three.

Paracelsus was in all likelihood Browning's introduction to the literary world. It was many years, and even many decades, before he had anything like a public appreciation, but a very great part of the minority of those who were destined to appreciate him came over to his standard upon the publication of *Paracelsus*. The celebrated John Forster had taken up *Paracelsus* "as a thing to slate," and had ended its perusal with the wildest curiosity about the author and his works. John Stuart Mill, never backward in generosity, had already interested himself in Browning, and was finally converted by the same poem. Among other early admirers were Landor, Leigh Hunt, Horne, Serjeant Talfourd, and Monckton-Milnes. One man of even greater literary stature seems to have come into Browning's life about this time, a man for whom he never ceased to have the warmest affection and trust. Browning was, indeed, one of the very few men of that period who got on perfectly with Thomas Carlyle. It is precisely one of those little things which speak volumes for the honesty and unfathomable good humour of Browning, that Carlyle, who had a reckless contempt for most other poets of his day, had something amounting to a real attachment to him. He would run over to Paris for the mere privilege of dining with him. Browning, on the other hand, with characteristic impetuosity, passionately defended and justified Carlyle in all companies. "I have just seen dear Carlyle," he writes on one occasion; "catch me calling people dear in a hurry, except in a letter beginning." He sided with Carlyle in the vexed question of the Carlyle domestic relations, and his impression of Mrs. Carlyle was that she was "a hard unlovable woman." As, however, it is on record that he once, while excitedly explaining some point of mystical philosophy, put down Mrs. Carlyle's hot kettle on the hearthrug, any frigidity that he may have observed in her manner may possibly find a natural explanation. His partisanship in the Carlyle affair, which was characteristically headlong and human, may not throw much light on that painful problem itself, but it throws a great deal of light on the character of Browning, which was pugnaciously proud of its friends, and had what may almost be called a lust of loyalty. Browning was not capable of that most sagacious detachment which enabled Tennyson to say that he could not agree that the Carlyles ought never to have married, since if they had each married elsewhere there would have been four miserable people instead of two.

Among the motley and brilliant crowd with which Browning had now begun to mingle, there was no figure more eccentric and spontaneous than that of Macready the actor. This extraordinary person, a man living from hand to mouth in all things spiritual and pecuniary, a man feeding upon flying emotions, conceived something like an attraction towards Browning, spoke of him as the very ideal of a young poet, and in a moment of peculiar excitement suggested to him the writing of a great play. Browning was a man fundamentally indeed more steadfast and prosaic, but on the surface fully as rapid and easily infected as Macready. He immediately began to plan out a great historical play, and selected for his subject "Strafford."

In Browning's treatment of the subject there is something more than a trace of his Puritan and Liberal upbringing. It is one of the very earliest of the really important works in English literature which are based on the Parliamentarian reading of the incidents of the time of Charles I. It is true that the finest element in the play is the opposition between Strafford and Pym, an opposition so complete, so lucid, so consistent, that it has, so to speak, something of the friendly openness and agreement which belongs to an alliance. The two men love each other and fight each other, and do the two things at the same time completely. This is a great thing of which even to attempt the description. It is easy to have the impartiality which can speak judicially of both parties, but it is not so easy to have that larger and higher impartiality which can speak passionately on behalf of both parties. Nevertheless, it may be permissible to repeat that there is in the play a definite trace of Browning's Puritan education and Puritan historical outlook.

For *Strafford* is, of course, an example of that most difficult of all literary works — a political play. The thing has been achieved once at least admirably in Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*, and something like it, though from a more one-sided and romantic stand-point, has been done excellently in *L'Aiglon*. But the difficulties of such a play are obvious on the face of the matter. In a political play the principal characters are not merely men. They are symbols, arithmetical figures representing millions of other men outside. It is, by dint of elaborate stage management, possible to bring a mob upon the boards, but the largest mob ever known is nothing but a floating atom of the people; and the people of which the politician has to think does not consist of knots of rioters in the street, but of some million absolutely distinct individuals, each sitting in his own breakfast room reading his own morning paper. To give even the faintest suggestion of the strength and size of the people in this sense in the course of a dramatic performance is obviously impossible. That is why it is so easy on the stage to concentrate all the pathos and dignity upon such persons as Charles I. and Mary Queen of Scots, the vampires of their people, because within the minute limits of a stage there is room for their small virtues and no room for their enormous crimes. It would be impossible to find a stronger example than the case of *Strafford*. It is clear that no one could possibly tell the whole truth about the life and death of Strafford, politically considered, in a play. Strafford was one of the greatest men ever born in England, and he attempted to found a great English official despotism. That is to say, he attempted to found something which is so different from what has actually come about that we can in reality scarcely judge of it, any more than we can judge whether it would be better to live in another planet, or pleasanter to have been born a dog or an elephant. It would require enormous imagination to reconstruct the political ideals of Strafford. Now Browning, as we all know, got over the matter in his play, by practically denying that Strafford had any political ideals at all. That is to say, while crediting Strafford with all his real majesty of intellect and character, he makes the whole of his political action dependent upon his passionate personal attachment to the King. This is unsatisfactory; it is in reality a dodging of the great difficulty of the political play. That difficulty, in the case of any political problem, is, as has been said, great. It would be very hard, for example, to construct a play about Mr. Gladstone’s Home Rule Bill. It would be almost impossible to get expressed in a drama of some five acts and some twenty characters anything so ancient and complicated as that Irish problem, the roots of which lie in the darkness of the age of Strongbow, and the branches of which spread out to the remotest commonwealths of the East and West. But we should scarcely be satisfied if a dramatist overcame the difficulty by ascribing Mr. Gladstone’s action in the Home Rule question to an overwhelming personal affection for Mr. Healy. And in thus basing Strafford’s action upon personal and private reasons, Browning certainly does some injustice to the political greatness, of Strafford. To attribute Mr. Gladstone’s conversion to Home Rule to an infatuation such as that suggested above, would certainly have the air of implying that the writer thought the Home Rule doctrine a peculiar or untenable one. Similarly, Browning’s choice of a motive for Strafford has very much the air of an assumption that there was nothing to be said on public grounds for Strafford’s political ideal. Now this is certainly not the case. The Puritans in the great struggles of the reign of Charles I. may have possessed more valuable ideals than the Royalists, but it is a very vulgar error to suppose that they were any more idealistic. In Browning’s play Pym is made almost the incarnation of public spirit, and Strafford of private ties. But not only may an upholder of despotism be public-spirited, but in the case of prominent upholders of it like Strafford he generally is. Despotism indeed, and attempts at despotism, like that of Strafford, are a kind of disease of public spirit. They represent, as it were, the drunkenness of responsibility. It is when men begin to grow desperate in their love for the people, when they are overwhelmed with the difficulties and blunders of humanity, that they fall back upon a wild desire to manage everything themselves. Their faith in themselves is only a disillusionment with mankind. They are in that most dreadful position, dreadful alike in personal and public affairs — the position of the man who has lost faith and not lost love. This belief that all would go right if we could only get the strings into our own hands is a fallacy almost without exception, but nobody can justly say that it is not public-spirited. The sin and sorrow of despotism is not that it does not love men, but that it loves them too much and trusts them too little. Therefore from age to age in history arise these great despotic dreamers, whether they be Royalists or Imperialists or even Socialists, who have at root this idea, that the world would enter into rest if it went their way and forswore altogether the right of going its own way. When a man begins to think that the grass will not grow at night unless he lies awake to watch it, he generally ends either in an asylum or on the throne of an Emperor. Of these men Strafford was one, and we cannot but feel that Browning somewhat narrows the significance and tragedy of his place in history by making him merely the champion of a personal idiosyncrasy against a great public demand. Strafford was something greater than this; if indeed, when we come to think of it, a man can be anything greater than the friend of another man. But the whole question is interesting, because Browning, although he never again attacked a political drama of such palpable importance as *Strafford*, could never keep politics altogether out of his dramatic work. *King Victor and King Charles*, which followed it, is a political play, the study of a despotic instinct much meaner than that of Strafford. *Colombe's Birthday*, again, is political as well as romantic. Politics in its historic aspect would seem to have had a great fascination for him, as indeed it must have for all ardent intellects, since it is the one thing in the world that is as intellectual as the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and as rapid as the Derby.

One of the favourite subjects among those who like to conduct long controversies about Browning (and their name is legion) is the question of whether Browning's plays, such as *Strafford*, were successes upon the stage. As they are never agreed about what constitutes a success on the stage, it is difficult to adjudge their quarrels. But the general fact is very simple; such a play as *Strafford* was not a gigantic theatrical success, and nobody, it is to be presumed, ever imagined that it would be. On the other hand, it was certainly not a failure, but was enjoyed and applauded as are hundreds of excellent plays which run only for a week or two, as many excellent plays do, and as all plays ought to do. Above all, the definite success which attended the representation of *Strafford* from the point of view of the more educated and appreciative was quite enough to establish Browning in a certain definite literary position. As a classical and established personality he did not come into his kingdom for years and decades afterwards; not, indeed, until he was near to entering upon the final rest. But as a detached and eccentric personality, as a man who existed and who had arisen on the outskirts of literature, the world began to be conscious of him at this time.

Of what he was personally at the period that he thus became personally apparent, Mrs. Bridell Fox has left a very vivid little sketch. She describes how Browning called at the house (he was acquainted with her father), and finding that gentleman out, asked with a kind of abrupt politeness if he might play on the piano. This touch is very characteristic of the mingled aplomb and unconsciousness of Browning's social manner. "He was then," she writes, "slim and dark, and very handsome, and — may I hint it? — just a trifle of a dandy, addicted to lemon-coloured kid gloves and such things, quite the glass of fashion and the mould of form. But full of 'ambition,' eager for success, eager for fame, and, what is more, determined to conquer fame and to achieve success." That is as good a portrait as we can have of the Browning of these days — quite self-satisfied, but not self-conscious young man; one who had outgrown, but only just outgrown, the pure romanticism of his boyhood, which made him run after gipsy caravans and listen to nightingales in the wood; a man whose incandescent vitality, now that it had abandoned gipsies and not yet immersed itself in casuistical poems, devoted itself excitedly to trifles, such as lemon-coloured kid gloves and fame. But a man still above all things perfectly young and natural, professing that foppery which follows the fashions, and not that sillier and more demoralising foppery which defies them. Just as he walked in coolly and yet impulsively into a private drawing-room and offered to play, so he walked at this time into the huge and crowded salon of European literature and offered to sing.

CHAPTER II

EARLY WORKS

In 1840 *Sordello* was published. Its reception by the great majority of readers, including some of the ablest men of the time, was a reception of a kind probably unknown in the rest of literary history, a reception that was neither praise nor blame. It was perhaps best expressed by Carlyle, who wrote to say that his wife had read *Sordello* with great interest, and wished to know whether Sordello was a man, or a city, or a book. Better known, of course, is the story of Tennyson, who said that the first line of the poem —

“Who will, may hear Sordello’s story told,”

and the last line —

“Who would, has heard Sordello’s story told,”

were the only two lines in the poem that he understood, and they were lies.

Perhaps the best story, however, of all the cycle of Sordello legends is that which is related of Douglas Jerrold. He was recovering from an illness; and having obtained permission for the first time to read a little during the day, he picked up a book from a pile beside the bed and began *Sordello*. No sooner had he done so than he turned deadly pale, put down the book, and said, “My God! I’m an idiot. My health is restored, but my mind’s gone. I can’t understand two consecutive lines of an English poem.” He then summoned his family and silently gave the book into their hands, asking for their opinion on the poem; and as the shadow of perplexity gradually passed over their faces, he heaved a sigh of relief and went to sleep. These stories, whether accurate or no, do undoubtedly represent the very peculiar reception accorded to *Sordello*, a reception which, as I have said, bears no resemblance whatever to anything in the way of eulogy or condemnation that had ever been accorded to a work of art before. There had been authors whom it was fashionable to boast of admiring and authors whom it was fashionable to boast of despising; but with *Sordello* enters into literary history the Browning of popular badinage, the author whom it is fashionable to boast of not understanding.

Putting aside for the moment the literary qualities which are to be found in the poem, when it becomes intelligible, there is one question very relevant to the fame and character of Browning which is raised by *Sordello* when it is considered, as most people consider it, as hopelessly unintelligible. It really throws some light upon the reason of Browning's obscurity. The ordinary theory of Browning's obscurity is to the effect that it was a piece of intellectual vanity indulged in more and more insolently as his years and fame increased. There are at least two very decisive objections to this popular explanation. In the first place, it must emphatically be said for Browning that in all the numerous records and impressions of him throughout his long and very public life, there is not one iota of evidence that he was a man who was intellectually vain. The evidence is entirely the other way. He was vain of many things, of his physical health, for example, and even more of the physical health which he contrived to bestow for a certain period upon his wife. From the records of his early dandyism, his flowing hair and his lemon-coloured gloves, it is probable enough that he was vain of his good looks. He was vain of his masculinity, his knowledge of the world, and he was, I fancy, decidedly vain of his prejudices, even, it might be said, vain of being vain of them. But everything is against the idea that he was much in the habit of thinking of himself in his intellectual aspect. In the matter of conversation, for example, some people who liked him found him genial, talkative, anecdotal, with a certain strengthening and sanative quality in his mere bodily presence. Some people who did not like him found him a mere frivolous chatterer, afflicted with bad manners. One lady, who knew him well, said that, though he only met you in a crowd and made some commonplace remark, you went for the rest of the day with your head up. Another lady who did not know him, and therefore disliked him, asked after a dinner party, "Who was that too-exuberant financier?" These are the diversities of feeling about him. But they all agree in one point — that he did not talk cleverly, or try to talk cleverly, as that proceeding is understood in literary circles. He talked positively, he talked a great deal, but he never attempted to give that neat and æsthetic character to his speech which is almost invariable in the case of the man who is vain of his mental superiority. When he did impress people with mental gymnastics, it was mostly in the form of pouring out, with passionate enthusiasm, whole epics written by other people, which is the last thing that the literary egotist would be likely to waste his time over. We have therefore to start with an enormous psychological improbability that Browning made his poems complicated from mere pride in his powers and contempt of his readers.

There is, however, another very practical objection to the ordinary theory that Browning’s obscurity was a part of the intoxication of fame and intellectual consideration. We constantly hear the statement that Browning’s intellectual complexity increased with his later poems, but the statement is simply not true. *Sordello*, to the indescribable density of which he never afterwards even approached, was begun before *Strafford*, and was therefore the third of his works, and even if we adopt his own habit of ignoring *Pauline*, the second. He wrote the greater part of it when he was twenty-four. It was in his youth, at the time when a man is thinking of love and publicity, of sunshine and singing birds, that he gave birth to this horror of great darkness; and the more we study the matter with any knowledge of the nature of youth, the more we shall come to the conclusion that Browning’s obscurity had altogether the opposite origin to that which is usually assigned to it. He was not unintelligible because he was proud, but unintelligible because he was humble. He was not unintelligible because his thoughts were vague, but because to him they were obvious.

A man who is intellectually vain does not make himself incomprehensible, because he is so enormously impressed with the difference between his readers’ intelligence and his own that he talks down to them with elaborate repetition and lucidity. What poet was ever vainer than Byron? What poet was ever so magnificently lucid? But a young man of genius who has a genuine humility in his heart does not elaborately explain his discoveries, because he does not think that they are discoveries. He thinks that the whole street is humming with his ideas, and that the postman and the tailor are poets like himself. Browning’s impenetrable poetry was the natural expression of this beautiful optimism. *Sordello* was the most glorious compliment that has ever been paid to the average man.

In the same manner, of course, outward obscurity is in a young author a mark of inward clarity. A man who is vague in his ideas does not speak obscurely, because his own dazed and drifting condition leads him to clutch at phrases like ropes and use the formulæ that every one understands. No one ever found Miss Marie Corelli obscure, because she believes only in words. But if a young man really has ideas of his own, he must be obscure at first, because he lives in a world of his own in which there are symbols and correspondences and categories unknown to the rest of the world. Let us take an imaginary example. Suppose that a young poet had developed by himself a peculiar idea that all forms of excitement, including religious excitement, were a kind of evil intoxication, he might say to himself continually that churches were in reality taverns, and this idea would become so fixed in his mind that he would forget that no such association existed in the minds of others. And suppose that in pursuance of this general idea, which is a perfectly clear and intellectual idea, though a very silly one, he were to say that he believed in Puritanism without its theology, and were to repeat this idea also to himself until it became instinctive and familiar, such a man might take up a pen, and under the impression that he was saying something figurative indeed, but quite clear and suggestive, write some such sentence as this, "You will not get the godless Puritan into your white taverns," and no one in the length and breadth of the country could form the remotest notion of what he could mean. So it would have been in any example, for instance, of a man who made some philosophical discovery and did not realise how far the world was from it. If it had been possible for a poet in the sixteenth century to hit upon and learn to regard as obvious the evolutionary theory of Darwin, he might have written down some such line as "the radiant offspring of the ape," and the maddest volumes of mediæval natural history would have been ransacked for the meaning of the allusion. The more fixed and solid and sensible the idea appeared to him, the more dark and fantastic it would have appeared to the world. Most of us indeed, if we ever say anything valuable, say it when we are giving expression to that part of us which has become as familiar and invisible as the pattern on our wall paper. It is only when an idea has become a matter of course to the thinker that it becomes startling to the world.

It is worth while to dwell upon this preliminary point of the ground of Browning's obscurity, because it involves an important issue about him. Our whole view of Browning is bound to be absolutely different, and I think absolutely false, if we start with the conception that he was what the French call an intellectual. If we see Browning with the eyes of his particular followers, we shall inevitably think this. For his followers are pre-eminently intellectuals, and there never lived upon the earth a great man who was so fundamentally different from his followers. Indeed, he felt this heartily and even humorously himself. "Wilkes was no Wilkite," he said, "and I am very far from being a Browningite." We shall, as I say, utterly misunderstand Browning at every step of his career if we suppose that he was the sort of man who would be likely to take a pleasure in asserting the subtlety and abstruseness of his message. He took pleasure beyond all question in himself; in the strictest sense of the word he enjoyed himself. But his conception of himself was never that of the intellectual. He conceived himself rather as a sanguine and strenuous man, a great fighter. “I was ever,” as he says, “a fighter.” His faults, a certain occasional fierceness and grossness, were the faults that are counted as virtues among navvies and sailors and most primitive men. His virtues, boyishness and absolute fidelity, and a love of plain words and things are the virtues which are counted as vices among the æsthetic prigs who pay him the greatest honour. He had his more objectionable side, like other men, but it had nothing to do with literary egotism. He was not vain of being an extraordinary man. He was only somewhat excessively vain of being an ordinary one.

The Browning then who published *Sordello* we have to conceive, not as a young pedant anxious to exaggerate his superiority to the public, but as a hot-headed, strong-minded, inexperienced, and essentially humble man, who had more ideas than he knew how to disentangle from each other. If we compare, for example, the complexity of Browning with the clarity of Matthew Arnold, we shall realise that the cause lies in the fact that Matthew Arnold was an intellectual aristocrat, and Browning an intellectual democrat. The particular peculiarities of *Sordello* illustrate the matter very significantly. A very great part of the difficulty of *Sordello*, for instance, is in the fact that before the reader even approaches to tackling the difficulties of Browning’s actual narrative, he is apparently expected to start with an exhaustive knowledge of that most shadowy and bewildering of all human epochs — the period of the Guelph and Ghibelline struggles in mediæval Italy. Here, of course, Browning simply betrays that impetuous humility which we have previously observed. His father was a student of mediæval chronicles, he had himself imbibed that learning in the same casual manner in which a boy learns to walk or to play cricket. Consequently in a literary sense he rushed up to the first person he met and began talking about Ecelo and Taurello Salinguerra with about as much literary egotism as an English baby shows when it talks English to an Italian organ grinder. Beyond this the poem of *Sordello*, powerful as it is, does not present any very significant advance in Browning’s mental development on that already represented by *Pauline* and *Paracelsus*. *Pauline, Paracelsus*, and *Sordello* stand together in the general fact that they are all, in the excellent phrase used about the first by Mr. Johnson Fox, “confessional.” All three are analyses of the weakness which every artistic temperament finds in itself. Browning is still writing about himself, a subject of which he, like all good and brave men, was profoundly ignorant. This kind of self-analysis is always misleading. For we do not see in ourselves those dominant traits strong enough to force themselves out in action which our neighbours see. We see only a welter of minute mental experiences which include all the sins that were ever committed by Nero or Sir Willoughby Patterne. When studying ourselves, we are looking at a fresco with a magnifying glass. Consequently, these early impressions which great men have given of themselves are nearly always slanders upon themselves, for the strongest man is weak to his own conscience, and Hamlet flourished to a certainty even inside Napoleon. So it was with Browning, who when he was nearly eighty was destined to write with the hilarity of a schoolboy, but who wrote in his boyhood poems devoted to analysing the final break-up of intellect and soul.

Sordello, with all its load of learning, and almost more oppressive load of beauty, has never had any very important influence even upon Browningites, and with the rest of the world the name has passed into a jest. The most truly memorable thing about it was Browning's saying in answer to all gibes and misconceptions, a saying which expresses better than anything else what genuine metal was in him, "I blame no one, least of all myself, who did my best then and since." This is indeed a model for all men of letters who do not wish to retain only the letters and to lose the man.

When next Browning spoke, it was from a greater height and with a new voice. His visit to Asolo, "his first love," as he said, "among Italian cities," coincided with the stir and transformation in his spirit and the breaking up of that splendid palace of mirrors in which a man like Byron had lived and died. In 1841 *Pippa Passes* appeared, and with it the real Browning of the modern world. He had made the discovery which Byron never made, but which almost every young man does at last make — the thrilling discovery that he is not Robinson Crusoe. *Pippa Passes* is the greatest poem ever written, with the exception of one or two by Walt Whitman, to express the sentiment of the pure love of humanity. The phrase has unfortunately a false and pedantic sound. The love of humanity is a thing supposed to be professed only by vulgar and officious philanthropists, or by saints of a superhuman detachment and universality. As a matter of fact, love of humanity is the commonest and most natural of the feelings of a fresh nature, and almost every one has felt it alight capriciously upon him when looking at a crowded park or a room full of dancers. The love of those whom we do not know is quite as eternal a sentiment as the love of those whom we do know. In our friends the richness of life is proved to us by what we have gained; in the faces in the street the richness of life is proved to us by the hint of what we have lost. And this feeling for strange faces and strange lives, when it is felt keenly by a young man, almost always expresses itself in a desire after a kind of vagabond beneficence, a desire to go through the world scattering goodness like a capricious god. It is desired that mankind should hunt in vain for its best friend as it would hunt for a criminal; that he should be an anonymous Saviour, an unrecorded Christ. Browning, like every one else, when awakened to the beauty and variety of men, dreamed of this arrogant self-effacement. He has written of himself that he had long thought vaguely of a being passing through the world, obscure and unnameable, but moulding the destinies of others to mightier and better issues. Then his almost faultless artistic instinct came in and suggested that this being, whom he dramatised as the work-girl, Pippa, should be even unconscious of anything but her own happiness, and should sway men's lives with a lonely mirth. It was a bold and moving conception to show us these mature and tragic human groups all at the supreme moment eavesdropping upon the solitude of a child. And it was an even more precise instinct which made Browning make the errant benefactor a woman. A man's good work is effected by doing what he does, a woman's by being what she is.

There is one other point about *Pippa Passes* which is worth a moment's attention. The great difficulty with regard to the understanding of Browning is the fact that, to all appearance, scarcely any one can be induced to take him seriously as a literary artist. His adversaries consider his literary vagaries a disqualification for every position among poets; and his admirers regard those vagaries with the affectionate indulgence of a circle of maiden aunts towards a boy home for the holidays. Browning is supposed to do as he likes with form, because he had such a profound scheme of thought. But, as a matter of fact, though few of his followers will take Browning's literary form seriously, he took his own literary form very seriously. Now *Pippa Passes* is, among other things, eminently remarkable as a very original artistic form, a series of disconnected but dramatic scenes which have only in common the appearance of one figure. For this admirable literary departure Browning, amid all the laudations of his "mind" and his "message," has scarcely ever had credit. And just as we should, if we took Browning seriously as a poet, see that he had made many noble literary forms, so we should also see that he did make from time to time certain definite literary mistakes. There is one of them, a glaring one, in *Pippa Passes*; and, as far as I know, no critic has ever thought enough of Browning as an artist to point it out. It is a gross falsification of the whole beauty of *Pippa Passes* to make the Monseigneur and his accomplice in the last act discuss a plan touching the fate of Pippa herself. The whole central and splendid idea of the drama is the fact that Pippa is utterly remote from the grand folk whose lives she troubles and transforms. To make her in the end turn out to be the niece of one of them, is like a whiff from an Adelphi melodrama, an excellent thing in its place, but destructive of the entire conception of Pippa. Having done that, Browning might just as well have made Sebald turn out to be her long lost brother, and Luigi a husband to whom she was secretly married. Browning made this mistake when his own splendid artistic power was only growing, and its merits and its faults in a tangle. But its real literary merits and its real literary faults have alike remained unrecognised under the influence of that unfortunate intellectualism which idolises Browning as a metaphysician and neglects him as a poet. But a better test was coming. Browning's poetry, in the most strictly poetical sense, reached its flower in *Dramatic Lyrics*, published in 1842. Here he showed himself a picturesque and poignant artist in a wholly original manner. And the two main characteristics of the work were the two characteristics most commonly denied to Browning, both by his opponents and his followers, passion and beauty; but beauty had enlarged her boundaries in new modes of dramatic arrangement, and passion had found new voices in fantastic and realistic verse. Those who suppose Browning to be a wholly philosophic poet, number a great majority of his commentators. But when we come to look at the actual facts, they are strangely and almost unexpectedly otherwise.

Let any one who believes in the arrogantly intellectual character of Browning's poetry run through the actual repertoire of the *Dramatic Lyrics*. The first item consists of those splendid war chants called "Cavalier Tunes." I do not imagine that any one will maintain that there is any very mysterious metaphysical aim in them. The second item is the fine poem "The Lost Leader," a poem which expresses in perfectly lucid and lyrical verse a perfectly normal and old-fashioned indignation. It is the same, however far we carry the query. What theory does the next poem, “How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix,” express, except the daring speculation that it is often exciting to ride a good horse in Belgium? What theory does the poem after that, “Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr,” express, except that it is also frequently exciting to ride a good horse in Africa? Then comes “Nationality in Drinks,” a mere technical oddity without a gleam of philosophy; and after that those two entirely exquisite “Garden Fancies,” the first of which is devoted to the abstruse thesis that a woman may be charming, and the second to the equally abstruse thesis that a book may be a bore. Then comes “The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister,” from which the most ingenious “Browning student” cannot extract anything except that people sometimes hate each other in Spain; and then “The Laboratory,” from which he could extract nothing except that people sometimes hate each other in France. This is a perfectly honest record of the poems as they stand. And the first eleven poems read straight off are remarkable for these two obvious characteristics — first, that they contain not even a suggestion of anything that could be called philosophy; and second, that they contain a considerable proportion of the best and most typical poems that Browning ever wrote. It may be repeated that either he wrote these lyrics because he had an artistic sense, or it is impossible to hazard even the wildest guess as to why he wrote them.

It is permissible to say that the *Dramatic Lyrics* represent the arrival of the real Browning of literary history. It is true that he had written already many admirable poems of a far more ambitious plan — *Paracelsus* with its splendid version of the faults of the intellectual, *Pippa Passes* with its beautiful deification of unconscious influence. But youth is always ambitious and universal; mature work exhibits more of individuality, more of the special type and colour of work which a man is destined to do. Youth is universal, but not individual. The genius who begins life with a very genuine and sincere doubt whether he is meant to be an exquisite and idolised violinist, or the most powerful and eloquent Prime Minister of modern times, does at last end by making the discovery that there is, after all, one thing, possibly a certain style of illustrating Nursery Rhymes, which he can really do better than any one else. This was what happened to Browning; like every one else, he had to discover first the universe, and then humanity, and at last himself. With him, as with all others, the great paradox and the great definition of life was this, that the ambition narrows as the mind expands. In *Dramatic Lyrics* he discovered the one thing that he could really do better than any one else — the dramatic lyric. The form is absolutely original: he had discovered a new field of poetry, and in the centre of that field he had found himself.

The actual quality, the actual originality of the form is a little difficult to describe. But its general characteristic is the fearless and most dexterous use of grotesque things in order to express sublime emotions. The best and most characteristic of the poems are love-poems; they express almost to perfection the real wonderland of youth, but they do not express it by the ideal imagery of most poets of love. The imagery of these poems consists, if we may take a rapid survey of Browning’s love poetry, of suburban streets, straws, garden-rakes, medicine bottles, pianos, window-blinds, burnt cork, fashionable fur coats. But in this new method he thoroughly expressed the true essential, the insatiable realism of passion. If any one wished to prove that Browning was not, as he is said to be, the poet of thought, but pre-eminently one of the poets of passion, we could scarcely find a better evidence of this profoundly passionate element than Browning’s astonishing realism in love poetry. There is nothing so fiercely realistic as sentiment and emotion. Thought and the intellect are content to accept abstractions, summaries, and generalisations; they are content that ten acres of ground should be called for the sake of argument X, and ten widows’ incomes called for the sake of argument Y; they are content that a thousand awful and mysterious disappearances from the visible universe should be summed up as the mortality of a district, or that ten thousand intoxications of the soul should bear the general name of the instinct of sex. Rationalism can live upon air and signs and numbers. But sentiment must have reality; emotion demands the real fields, the real widows’ homes, the real corpse, and the real woman. And therefore Browning’s love poetry is the finest love poetry in the world, because it does not talk about raptures and ideals and gates of heaven, but about window-panes and gloves and garden walls. It does not deal much with abstractions; it is the truest of all love poetry, because it does not speak much about love. It awakens in every man the memories of that immortal instant when common and dead things had a meaning beyond the power of any dictionary to utter, and a value beyond the power of any millionaire to compute. He expresses the celestial time when a man does not think about heaven, but about a parasol. And therefore he is, first, the greatest of love poets, and, secondly, the only optimistic philosopher except Whitman.

The general accusation against Browning in connection with his use of the grotesque comes in very definitely here; for in using these homely and practical images, these allusions, bordering on what many would call the commonplace, he was indeed true to the actual and abiding spirit of love. In that delightful poem "Youth and Art" we have the singing girl saying to her old lover —

"No harm! It was not my fault
If you never turned your eye's tail up As I shook upon E *in alt*,
Or ran the chromatic scale up."

This is a great deal more like the real chaff that passes between those whose hearts are full of new hope or of old memory than half the great poems of the world. Browning never forgets the little details which to a man who has ever really lived may suddenly send an arrow through the heart. Take, for example, such a matter as dress, as it is treated in "A Lover's Quarrel."

"See, how she looks now, dressed
In a sledging cap and vest!
'Tis a huge fur cloak — Like a reindeer's yoke Falls the lappet along the breast:
Sleeves for her arms to rest,
Or to hang, as my Love likes best."

That would almost serve as an order to a dressmaker, and is therefore poetry, or at least excellent poetry of this order. So great a power have these dead things of taking hold on the living spirit, that I question whether any one could read through the catalogue of a miscellaneous auction sale without coming upon things which, if realised for a moment, would be near to the elemental tears. And if any of us or all of us are truly optimists, and believe as Browning did, that existence has a value wholly inexpressible, we are most truly compelled to that sentiment not by any argument or triumphant justification of the cosmos, but by a few of these momentary and immortal sights and sounds, a gesture, an old song, a portrait, a piano, an old door.

In 1843 appeared that marvellous drama *The Return of the Druses*, a work which contains more of Browning's typical qualities exhibited in an exquisite literary shape, than can easily be counted. We have in *The Return of the Druses* his love of the corners of history, his interest in the religious mind of the East, with its almost terrifying sense of being in the hand of heaven, his love of colour and verbal luxury, of gold and green and purple, which made some think he must be an Oriental himself. But, above all, it presents the first rise of that great psychological ambition which Browning was thenceforth to pursue. In *Pauline* and the poems that follow it, Browning has only the comparatively easy task of giving an account of himself. In *Pippa Passes* he has the only less easy task of giving an account of humanity. In *The Return of the Druses* he has for the first time the task which is so much harder than giving an account of humanity — the task of giving an account of a human being. Djabal, the great Oriental impostor, who is the central character of the play, is a peculiarly subtle character, a compound of blasphemous and lying assumptions of Godhead with genuine and stirring patriotic and personal feelings: he is a blend, so to speak, of a base divinity and of a noble humanity. He is supremely important in the history of Browning's mind, for he is the first of that great series of the apologiæ of apparently evil men, on which the poet was to pour out so much of his imaginative wealth — Djabal, Fra Lippo, Bishop Blougram, Sludge, Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, and the hero of *Fifine at the Fair*.

With this play, so far as any point can be fixed for the matter, he enters for the first time on the most valuable of all his labours — the defence of the indefensible. It may be noticed that Browning was not in the least content with the fact that certain human frailties had always lain more or less under an implied indulgence; that all human sentiment had agreed that a profligate might be generous, or that a drunkard might be high-minded. He was insatiable: he wished to go further and show in a character like Djabal that an impostor might be generous and that a liar might be high-minded. In all his life, it must constantly be remembered, he tried always the most difficult things. Just as he tried the queerest metres and attempted to manage them, so he tried the queerest human souls and attempted to stand in their place. Charity was his basic philosophy; but it was, as it were, a fierce charity, a charity that went man-hunting. He was a kind of cosmic detective who walked into the foulest of thieves' kitchens and accused men publicly of virtue. The character of Djabal in *The Return of the Druses* is the first of this long series of forlorn hopes for the relief of long surrendered castles of misconduct. As we shall see, even realising the humanity of a noble impostor like Djabal did not content his erratic hunger for goodness. He went further again, and realised the humanity of a mean impostor like Sludge. But in all things he retained this essential characteristic, that he was not content with seeking sinners — he sought the sinners whom even sinners cast out.

Browning's feeling of ambition in the matter of the drama continued to grow at this time. It must be remembered that he had every natural tendency to be theatrical, though he lacked the essential lucidity. He was not, as a matter of fact, a particularly unsuccessful dramatist; but in the world of abstract temperaments he was by nature an unsuccessful dramatist. He was, that is to say, a man who loved above all things plain and sensational words, open catastrophes, a clear and ringing conclusion to everything. But it so happened, unfortunately, that his own words were not plain; that his catastrophes came with a crashing and sudden unintelligibleness which left men in doubt whether the thing were a catastrophe or a great stroke of good luck; that his conclusion, though it rang like a trumpet to the four corners of heaven, was in its actual message quite inaudible. We are bound to admit, on the authority of all his best critics and admirers, that his plays were not failures, but we can all feel that they should have been. He was, as it were, by nature a neglected dramatist. He was one of those who achieve the reputation, in the literal sense, of eccentricity by their frantic efforts to reach the centre.

A Blot on the 'Scutcheon followed *The Return of the Druses*. In connection with the performance of this very fine play a quarrel arose which would not be worth mentioning if it did not happen to illustrate the curious energetic simplicity of Browning's character. Macready, who was in desperately low financial circumstances at this time, tried by every means conceivable to avoid playing the part; he dodged, he shuffled, he tried every evasion that occurred to him, but it never occurred to Browning to see what he meant. He pushed off the part upon Phelps, and Browning was contented; he resumed it, and Browning was only discontented on behalf of Phelps. The two had a quarrel; they were both headstrong, passionate men, but the quarrel dealt entirely with the unfortunate condition of Phelps. Browning beat down his own hat over his eyes; Macready flung Browning's manuscript with a slap upon the floor. But all the time it never occurred to the poet that Macready’s conduct was dictated by anything so crude and simple as a desire for money. Browning was in fact by his principles and his ideals a man of the world, but in his life far otherwise. That worldly ease which is to most of us a temptation was to him an ideal. He was as it were a citizen of the New Jerusalem who desired with perfect sanity and simplicity to be a citizen of Mayfair. There was in him a quality which can only be most delicately described; for it was a virtue which bears a strange resemblance to one of the meanest of vices. Those curious people who think the truth a thing that can be said violently and with ease, might naturally call Browning a snob. He was fond of society, of fashion and even of wealth: but there is no snobbery in admiring these things or any things if we admire them for the right reasons. He admired them as worldlings cannot admire them: he was, as it were, the child who comes in with the dessert. He bore the same relation to the snob that the righteous man bears to the Pharisee: something frightfully close and similar and yet an everlasting opposite.

CHAPTER III

BROWNING AND HIS MARRIAGE

Robert Browning had his faults, and the general direction of those faults has been previously suggested. The chief of his faults, a certain uncontrollable brutality of speech and gesture when he was strongly roused, was destined to cling to him all through his life, and to startle with the blaze of a volcano even the last quiet years before his death. But any one who wishes to understand how deep was the elemental honesty and reality of his character, how profoundly worthy he was of any love that was bestowed upon him, need only study one most striking and determining element in the question — Browning’s simple, heartfelt, and unlimited admiration for other people. He was one of a generation of great men, of great men who had a certain peculiar type, certain peculiar merits and defects. Carlyle, Tennyson, Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, were alike in being children of a very strenuous and conscientious age, alike in possessing its earnestness and air of deciding great matters, alike also in showing a certain almost noble jealousy, a certain restlessness, a certain fear of other influences. Browning alone had no fear; he welcomed, evidently without the least affectation, all the influences of his day. A very interesting letter of his remains in which he describes his pleasure in a university dinner. “Praise,” he says in effect, “was given very deservedly to Matthew Arnold and Swinburne, and to that pride of Oxford men, Clough.” The really striking thing about these three names is the fact that they are united in Browning’s praise in a way in which they are by no means united in each other’s. Matthew Arnold, in one of his extant letters, calls Swinburne “a young pseudo-Shelley,” who, according to Arnold, thinks he can make Greek plays good by making them modern. Mr. Swinburne, on the other hand, has summarised Clough in a contemptuous rhyme: —

“There was a bad poet named Clough,
Whom his friends all united to puff.
But the public, though dull,
Has not quite such a skull
As belongs to believers in Clough.”

The same general fact will be found through the whole of Browning’s life and critical attitude. He adored Shelley, and also Carlyle who sneered at him. He delighted in Mill, and also in Ruskin who rebelled against Mill. He excused Napoleon III. and Landor who hurled interminable curses against Napoleon. He admired all the cycle of great men who all contemned each other. To say that he had no streak of envy in his nature would be true, but unfair; for there is no justification for attributing any of these great men’s opinions to envy. But Browning was really unique, in that he had a certain spontaneous and unthinking tendency to the admiration of others. He admired another poet as he admired a fading sunset or a chance spring leaf. He no more thought whether he could be as good as that man in that department than whether he could be redder than the sunset or greener than the leaf of spring. He was naturally magnanimous in the literal sense of that sublime word; his mind was so great that it rejoiced in the triumphs of strangers. In this spirit Browning had already cast his eyes round in the literary world of his time, and had been greatly and justifiably struck with the work of a young lady poet, Miss Barrett.

That impression was indeed amply justified. In a time when it was thought necessary for a lady to dilute the wine of poetry to its very weakest tint, Miss Barrett had contrived to produce poetry which was open to literary objection as too heady and too high-coloured. When she erred it was through an Elizabethan audacity and luxuriance, a straining after violent metaphors. With her reappeared in poetry a certain element which had not been present in it since the last days of Elizabethan literature, the fusion of the most elementary human passion with something which can only be described as wit, a certain love of quaint and sustained similes, of parallels wildly logical, and of brazen paradox and antithesis. We find this hot wit, as distinct from the cold wit of the school of Pope, in the puns and buffooneries of Shakespeare. We find it lingering in *Hudibras*, and we do not find it again until we come to such strange and strong lines as these of Elizabeth Barrett in her poem on Napoleon: —

“Blood fell like dew beneath his sunrise — sooth,
But glittered dew-like in the covenanted
And high-rayed light. He was a despot — granted,
But the of his autocratic mouth

Said ‘Yea’ i’ the people’s French! He magnified
The image of the freedom he denied.”

Her poems are full of quaint things, of such things as the eyes in the peacock fans of the Vatican, which she describes as winking at the Italian tricolor. She often took the step from the sublime to the ridiculous: but to take this step one must reach the sublime. Elizabeth Barrett contrived to assert, what still needs but then urgently needed assertion, the fact that womanliness, whether in life or poetry, was a positive thing, and not the negative of manliness. Her verse at its best was quite as strong as Browning’s own, and very nearly as clever. The difference between their natures was a difference between two primary colours, not between dark and light shades of the same colour.

Browning had often heard not only of the public, but of the private life of this lady from his father’s friend Kenyon. The old man, who was one of those rare and valuable people who have a talent for establishing definite relationships with people after a comparatively short intercourse, had been appointed by Miss Barrett as her “fairy godfather.” He spoke much about her to Browning, and of Browning to her, with a certain courtly garrulity which was one of his talents. And there could be little doubt that the two poets would have met long before had it not been for certain peculiarities in the position of Miss Barrett. She was an invalid, and an invalid of a somewhat unique kind, and living beyond all question under very unique circumstances.

Her father, Edward Moulton Barrett, had been a landowner in the West Indies, and thus, by a somewhat curious coincidence, had borne a part in the same social system which stung Browning’s father into revolt and renunciation. The parts played by Edward Barrett, however, though little or nothing is known of it, was probably very different. He was a man Conservative by nature, a believer in authority in the nation and the family, and endowed with some faculties for making his conceptions prevail. He was an able man, capable in his language of a certain bitter felicity of phrase. He was rigidly upright and responsible, and he had a capacity for profound affection. But selfishness of the most perilous sort, an unconscious selfishness, was eating away his moral foundations, as it tends to eat away those of all despots. His most fugitive moods changed and controlled the whole atmosphere of the house, and the state of things was fully as oppressive in the case of his good moods as in the case of his bad ones. He had, what is perhaps the subtlest and worst spirit of egotism, not that spirit merely which thinks that nothing should stand in the way of its ill-temper, but that spirit which thinks that nothing should stand in the way of its amiability. His daughters must be absolutely at his beck and call, whether it was to be brow-beaten or caressed. During the early years of Elizabeth Barrett's life, the family had lived in the country, and for that brief period she had known a more wholesome life than she was destined ever to know again until her marriage long afterwards. She was not, as is the general popular idea, absolutely a congenital invalid, weak, and almost moribund from the cradle. In early girlhood she was slight and sensitive indeed, but perfectly active and courageous. She was a good horsewoman, and the accident which handicapped her for so many years afterwards happened to her when she was riding. The injury to her spine, however, will be found, the more we study her history, to be only one of the influences which were to darken those bedridden years, and to have among them a far less important place than has hitherto been attached to it. Her father moved to a melancholy house in Wimpole Street; and his own character growing gloomier and stranger as time went on, he mounted guard over his daughter's sickbed in a manner compounded of the pessimist and the disciplinarian. She was not permitted to stir from the sofa, often not even to cross two rooms to her bed. Her father came and prayed over her with a kind of melancholy glee, and with the avowed solemnity of a watcher by a deathbed. She was surrounded by that most poisonous and degrading of all atmospheres — a medical atmosphere. The existence of this atmosphere has nothing to do with the actual nature or prolongation of disease. A man may pass three hours out of every five in a state of bad health, and yet regard, as Stevenson regarded, the three hours as exceptional and the two as normal. But the curse that lay on the Barrett household was the curse of considering ill-health the natural condition of a human being. The truth was that Edward Barrett was living emotionally and æsthetically, like some detestable decadent poet, upon his daughter's decline. He did not know this, but it was so. Scenes, explanations, prayers, fury, and forgiveness had become bread and meat for which he hungered; and when the cloud was upon his spirit, he would lash out at all things and every one with the insatiable cruelty of the sentimentalist.

It is wonderful that Elizabeth Barrett was not made thoroughly morbid and impotent by this intolerable violence and more intolerable tenderness. In her estimate of her own health she did, of course, suffer. It is evident that she practically believed herself to be dying. But she was a high-spirited woman, full of that silent and quite unfathomable kind of courage which is only found in women, and she took a much more cheerful view of death than her father did of life. Silent rooms, low voices, lowered blinds, long days of loneliness, and of the sickliest kind of sympathy, had not tamed a spirit which was swift and headlong to a fault. She could still own with truth the magnificent fact that her chief vice was impatience, "tearing open parcels instead of untying them;" looking at the end of books before she had read them was, she said, incurable with her. It is difficult to imagine anything more genuinely stirring than the achievement of this woman, who thus contrived, while possessing all the excuses of an invalid, to retain some of the faults of a tomboy.

Impetuosity, vividness, a certain absoluteness and urgency in her demands, marked her in the eyes of all who came in contact with her. In after years, when Browning had experimentally shaved his beard off, she told him with emphatic gestures that it must be grown again "that minute." There we have very graphically the spirit which tears open parcels. Not in vain, or as a mere phrase, did her husband after her death describe her as "all a wonder and a wild desire."

She had, of course, lived her second and real life in literature and the things of the mind, and this in a very genuine and strenuous sense. Her mental occupations were not mere mechanical accomplishments almost as colourless as the monotony they relieved, nor were they coloured in any visible manner by the unwholesome atmosphere in which she breathed. She used her brains seriously; she was a good Greek scholar, and read Æschylus and Euripides unceasingly with her blind friend, Mr. Boyd; and she had, and retained even to the hour of her death, a passionate and quite practical interest in great public questions. Naturally she was not uninterested in Robert Browning, but it does not appear that she felt at this time the same kind of fiery artistic curiosity that he felt about her. He does appear to have felt an attraction, which may almost be called mystical, for the personality which was shrouded from the world by such sombre curtains. In 1845 he addressed a letter to her in which he spoke of a former occasion on which they had nearly met, and compared it to the sensation of having once been outside the chapel of some marvellous illumination and found the door barred against him. In that phrase it is easy to see how much of the romantic boyhood of Browning remained inside the resolute man of the world into which he was to all external appearance solidifying. Miss Barrett replied to his letters with charming sincerity and humour, and with much of that leisurely self-revelation which is possible for an invalid who has nothing else to do. She herself, with her love of quiet and intellectual companionship, would probably have been quite happy for the rest of her life if their relations had always remained a learned and delightful correspondence. But she must have known very little of Robert Browning if she imagined he would be contented with this airy and bloodless tie. At all times of his life he was sufficiently fond of his own way; at this time he was especially prompt and impulsive, and he had always a great love for seeing and hearing and feeling people, a love of the physical presence of friends, which made him slap men on the back and hit them in the chest when he was very fond of them. The correspondence between the two poets had not long begun when Browning suggested something which was almost a blasphemy in the Barrett household, that he should come and call on her as he would on any one else. This seems to have thrown her into a flutter of fear and doubt. She alleges all kinds of obstacles, the chief of which were her health and the season of the year and the east winds. “If my truest heart’s wishes avail,” replied Browning obstinately, “you shall laugh at east winds yet as I do.”

Then began the chief part of that celebrated correspondence which has within comparatively recent years been placed before the world. It is a correspondence which has very peculiar qualities and raises many profound questions.

It is impossible to deal at any length with the picture given in these remarkable letters of the gradual progress and amalgamation of two spirits of great natural potency and independence, without saying at least a word about the moral question raised by their publication and the many expressions of disapproval which it entails. To the mind of the present writer the whole of such a question should be tested by one perfectly clear intellectual distinction and comparison. I am not prepared to admit that there is or can be, properly speaking, in the world anything that is too sacred to be known. That spiritual beauty and spiritual truth are in their nature communicable, and that they should be communicated, is a principle which lies at the root of every conceivable religion. Christ was crucified upon a hill, and not in a cavern, and the word Gospel itself involves the same idea as the ordinary name of a daily paper. Whenever, therefore, a poet or any similar type of man can, or conceives that he can, make all men partakers in some splendid secret of his own heart, I can imagine nothing saner and nothing manlier than his course in doing so. Thus it was that Dante made a new heaven and a new hell out of a girl's nod in the streets of Florence. Thus it was that Paul founded a civilisation by keeping an ethical diary. But the one essential which exists in all such cases as these is that the man in question believes that he can make the story as stately to the whole world as it is to him, and he chooses his words to that end. Yet when a work contains expressions which have one value and significance when read by the people to whom they were addressed, and an entirely different value and significance when read by any one else, then the element of the violation of sanctity does arise. It is not because there is anything in this world too sacred to tell. It is rather because there are a great many things in this world too sacred to parody. If Browning could really convey to the world the inmost core of his affection for his wife, I see no reason why he should not. But the objection to letters which begin "My dear Ba," is that they do not convey anything of the sort. As far as any third person is concerned, Browning might as well have been expressing the most noble and universal sentiment in the dialect of the Cherokees. Objection to the publication of such passages as that, in short, is not the fact that they tell us about the love of the Brownings, but that they do not tell us about it.

Upon this principle it is obvious that there should have been a selection among the Letters, but not a selection which should exclude anything merely because it was ardent and noble. If Browning or Mrs. Browning had not desired any people to know that they were fond of each other, they would not have written and published "One Word More" or "The Sonnets from the Portuguese." Nay, they would not have been married in a public church, for every one who is married in a church does make a confession of love of absolutely national publicity, and tacitly, therefore, repudiates any idea that such confessions are too sacred for the world to know. The ridiculous theory that men should have no noble passions or sentiments in public may have been designed to make private life holy and undefiled, but it has had very little actual effect except to make public life cynical and preposterously unmeaning. But the words of a poem or the words of the

English Marriage Service, which are as fine as many poems, is a language dignified and deliberately intended to be understood by all. If the bride and bridegroom in church, instead of uttering those words, were to utter a poem compounded of private allusions to the foibles of Aunt Matilda, or of childish secrets which they would tell each other in a lane, it would be a parallel case to the publication of some of the Browning Letters. Why the serious and universal portions of those Letters could not be published without those which are to us idle and unmeaning it is difficult to understand. Our wisdom, whether expressed in private or public, belongs to the world, but our folly belongs to those we love.

There is at least one peculiarity in the Browning Letters which tends to make their publication far less open to objection than almost any other collection of love letters which can be imagined. The ordinary sentimentalist who delights in the most emotional of magazine interviews, will not be able to get much satisfaction out of them, because he and many persons more acute will be quite unable to make head or tail of three consecutive sentences. In this respect it is the most extraordinary correspondence in the world. There seem to be only two main rules for this form of letter-writing: the first is, that if a sentence can begin with a parenthesis it always should; and the second is, that if you have written from a third to half of a sentence you need never in any case write any more. It would be amusing to watch any one who felt an idle curiosity as to the language and secrets of lovers opening the Browning Letters. He would probably come upon some such simple and lucid passage as the following: “I ought to wait, say a week at least, having killed all your mules for you, before I shot down your dogs.... But not being Phoibos Apollon, you are to know further that when I *did* think I might go modestly on ... , let me get out of this slough of a simile, never mind with what dislocated ankles.”

What our imaginary sentimentalist would make of this tender passage it is difficult indeed to imagine. The only plain conclusion which appears to emerge from the words is the somewhat curious one — that Browning was in the habit of taking a gun down to Wimpole Street and of demolishing the live stock on those somewhat unpromising premises. Nor will he be any better enlightened if he turns to the reply of Miss Barrett, which seems equally dominated with the great central idea of the Browning correspondence that the most enlightening passages in a letter consist of dots. She replies in a letter following the above: “But if it could be possible that you should mean to say you would show me. . . . Can it be? or am I reading this ‘Attic contraction’ quite the wrong way. You see I am afraid of the difference between flattering myself and being flattered . . . the fatal difference. And now will you understand that I should be too overjoyed to have revelations from the Portfolio . . . however incarnated with blots and pen scratches . . . to be able to ask impudently of them now? Is that plain?” Most probably she thought it was.

With regard to Browning himself this characteristic is comparatively natural and appropriate. Browning’s prose was in any case the most roundabout affair in the world. Those who knew him say that he would often send an urgent telegram from which it was absolutely impossible to gather where the appointment was, or when it was, or what was its object. This fact is one of the best of all arguments against the theory of Browning’s intellectual conceit. A man would have to be somewhat abnormally conceited in order to spend sixpence for the pleasure of sending an unintelligible communication to the dislocation of his own plans. The fact was, that it was part of the machinery of his brain that things came out of it, as it were, backwards. The words “tail foremost” express Browning’s style with something more than a conventional accuracy. The tail, the most insignificant part of an animal, is also often the most animated and fantastic. An utterance of Browning is often like a strange animal walking backwards, who flourishes his tail with such energy that every one takes it for his head. He was in other words, at least in his prose and practical utterances, more or less incapable of telling a story without telling the least important thing first. If a man who belonged to an Italian secret society, one local branch of which bore as a badge an olive-green ribbon, had entered his house, and in some sensational interview tried to bribe or blackmail him, he would have told the story with great energy and indignation, but he would have been incapable of beginning with anything except the question of the colour of olives. His whole method was founded both in literature and life upon the principle of the “ex pede Herculem,” and at the beginning of his description of Hercules the foot appears some sizes larger than the hero. It is, in short, natural enough that Browning should have written his love letters obscurely, since he wrote his letters to his publisher and his solicitor obscurely. In the case of Mrs. Browning it is somewhat more difficult to understand. For she at least had, beyond all question, a quite simple and lucent vein of humour, which does not easily reconcile itself with this subtlety. But she was partly under the influence of her own quality of passionate ingenuity or emotional wit of which we have already taken notice in dealing with her poems, and she was partly also no doubt under the influence of Browning. Whatever was the reason, their correspondence was not of the sort which can be pursued very much by the outside public. Their letters may be published a hundred times over, they still remain private. They write to each other in a language of their own, an almost exasperatingly impressionist language, a language chiefly consisting of dots and dashes and asterisks and italics, and brackets and notes of interrogation. Wordsworth when he heard afterwards of their eventual elopement said with that slight touch of bitterness he always used in speaking of Browning, “So Robert Browning and Miss Barrett have gone off together. I hope they understand each other — nobody else would.” It would be difficult to pay a higher compliment to a marriage. Their common affection for Kenyon was a great element in their lives and in their correspondence. “I have a convenient theory to account for Mr. Kenyon,” writes Browning mysteriously, “and his otherwise unaccountable kindness to me.” “For Mr. Kenyon’s kindness,” retorts Elizabeth Barrett, “no theory will account. I class it with mesmerism for that reason.” There is something very dignified and beautiful about the simplicity of these two poets vying with each other in giving adequate praise to the old dilettante, of whom the world would never have heard but for them. Browning’s feeling for him was indeed especially strong and typical. “There,” he said, pointing after the old man as he left the room, “there goes one of the most splendid men living — a man so noble in his friendship, so lavish in his hospitality, so large-hearted and benevolent, that he deserves to be known all over the world as ‘Kenyon the Magnificent.’” There is something thoroughly worthy of Browning at his best in this feeling, not merely of the use of sociability, or of the charm of sociability, but of the magnificence, the heroic largeness of real sociability. Being himself a warm champion of the pleasures of society, he saw in Kenyon a kind of poetic genius for the thing, a mission of superficial philanthropy. He is thoroughly to be congratulated on the fact that he had grasped the great but now neglected truth, that a man may actually be great, yet not in the least able.

Browning’s desire to meet Miss Barrett was received on her side, as has been stated, with a variety of objections. The chief of these was the strangely feminine and irrational reason that she was not worth seeing, a point on which the seeker for an interview might be permitted to form his own opinion. “There is nothing to see in me; nor to hear in me. — I never learned to talk as you do in London; although I can admire that brightness of carved speech in Mr. Kenyon and others. If my poetry is worth anything to any eye, it is the flower of me. I have lived most and been most happy in it, and so it has all my colours; the rest of me is nothing but a root, fit for the ground and dark.” The substance of Browning’s reply was to the effect, “I will call at two on Tuesday.”

They met on May 20, 1845. A short time afterwards he had fallen in love with her and made her an offer of marriage. To a person in the domestic atmosphere of the Barretts, the incident would appear to have been paralysing. “I will tell you what I once said in jest ...” she writes, “If a prince of El Dorado should come with a pedigree of lineal descent from some signory in the moon in one hand and a ticket of good behaviour from the nearest Independent chapel in the other!— ‘Why, even *then,*’ said my sister Arabel, ‘it would not *do*.’ And she was right; we all agreed that she was right.”

This may be taken as a fairly accurate description of the real state of Mr. Barrett’s mind on one subject. It is illustrative of the very best and breeziest side of Elizabeth Barrett’s character that she could be so genuinely humorous over so tragic a condition of the human mind.

Browning’s proposals were, of course, as matters stood, of a character to dismay and repel all those who surrounded Elizabeth Barrett. It was not wholly a matter of the fancies of her father. The whole of her family, and most probably the majority of her medical advisers, did seriously believe at this time that she was unfit to be moved, to say nothing of being married, and that a life passed between a bed and a sofa, and avoiding too frequent and abrupt transitions even from one to the other, was the only life she could expect on this earth. Almost alone in holding another opinion and in urging her to a more vigorous view of her condition, stood Browning himself. “But you are better,” he would say; “you look so and speak so.” Which of the two opinions was right is of course a complex medical matter into which a book like this has neither the right nor the need to enter. But this much may be stated as a mere question of fact. In the summer of 1846 Elizabeth Barrett was still living under the great family convention which provided her with nothing but an elegant deathbed, forbidden to move, forbidden to see proper daylight, forbidden to receive a friend lest the shock should destroy her suddenly. A year or two later, in Italy, as Mrs. Browning, she was being dragged up hill in a wine hamper, toiling up to the crests of mountains at four o'clock in the morning, riding for five miles on a donkey to what she calls "an inaccessible volcanic ground not far from the stars." It is perfectly incredible that any one so ill as her family believed her to be should have lived this life for twenty-four hours. Something must be allowed for the intoxication of a new tie and a new interest in life. But such exaltations can in their nature hardly last a month, and Mrs. Browning lived for fifteen years afterwards in infinitely better health than she had ever known before. In the light of modern knowledge it is not very difficult or very presumptuous, of us to guess that she had been in her father's house to some extent inoculated with hysteria, that strange affliction which some people speak of as if it meant the absence of disease, but which is in truth the most terrible of all diseases. It must be remembered that in 1846 little or nothing was known of spine complaints such as that from which Elizabeth Barrett suffered, less still of the nervous conditions they create, and least of all of hysterical phenomena. In our day she would have been ordered air and sunlight and activity, and all the things the mere idea of which chilled the Barretts with terror. In our day, in short, it would have been recognised that she was in the clutch of a form of neurosis which exhibits every fact of a disease except its origin, that strange possession which makes the body itself a hypocrite. Those who surrounded Miss Barrett knew nothing of this, and Browning knew nothing of it; and probably if he knew anything, knew less than they did. Mrs. Orr says, probably with a great deal of truth, that of ill-health and its sensations he remained "pathetically ignorant" to his dying day. But devoid as he was alike of expert knowledge and personal experience, without a shadow of medical authority, almost without anything that can be formally called a right to his opinion, he was, and remained, right. He at least saw, he indeed alone saw, to the practical centre of the situation. He did not know anything about hysteria or neurosis, or the influence of surroundings, but he knew that the atmosphere of Mr. Barrett's house was not a fit thing for any human being, alive, dying, or dead. His stand upon this matter has really a certain human interest, since it is an example of a thing which will from time to time occur, the interposition of the average man to the confounding of the experts. Experts are undoubtedly right nine times out of ten, but the tenth time comes, and we find in military matters an Oliver Cromwell who will make every mistake known to strategy and yet win all his battles, and in medical matters a Robert

Browning whose views have not a technical leg to stand on and are entirely correct.

But while Browning was thus standing alone in his view of the matter, while Edward Barrett had to all appearance on his side a phalanx of all the sanities and respectabilities, there came suddenly a new development, destined to bring matters to a crisis indeed, and to weigh at least three souls in the balance. Upon further examination of Miss Barrett's condition, the physicians had declared that it was absolutely necessary that she should be taken to Italy. This may, without any exaggeration, be called the turning-point and the last great earthly opportunity of Barrett's character. He had not originally been an evil man, only a man who, being stoical in practical things, permitted himself, to his great detriment, a self-indulgence in moral things. He had grown to regard his pious and dying daughter as part of the furniture of the house and of the universe. And as long as the great mass of authorities were on his side, his illusion was quite pardonable. His crisis came when the authorities changed their front, and with one accord asked his permission to send his daughter abroad. It was his crisis, and he refused.

He had, if we may judge from what we know of him, his own peculiar and somewhat detestable way of refusing. Once when his daughter had asked a perfectly simple favour in a matter of expediency, permission, that is, to keep her favourite brother with her during an illness, her singular parent remarked that "she might keep him if she liked, but that he had looked for greater self-sacrifice." These were the weapons with which he ruled his people. For the worst tyrant is not the man who rules by fear; the worst tyrant is he who rules by love and plays on it as on a harp. Barrett was one of the oppressors who have discovered the last secret of oppression, that which is told in the fine verse of Swinburne: —

"The racks of the earth and the rods
Are weak as the foam on the sands;
The heart is the prey for the gods,
Who crucify hearts, not hands."

He, with his terrible appeal to the vibrating consciences of women, was, with regard to one of them, very near to the end of his reign. When Browning heard that the Italian journey was forbidden, he proposed definitely that they should marry and go on the journey together.

Many other persons had taken cognisance of the fact, and were active in the matter. Kenyon, the gentlest and most universally complimentary of mortals, had marched into the house and given Arabella Barrett, the sister of the sick woman, his opinion of her father's conduct with a degree of fire and frankness which must have been perfectly amazing in a man of his almost antiquated social delicacy. Mrs. Jameson, an old and generous friend of the family, had immediately stepped in and offered to take Elizabeth to Italy herself, thus removing all questions of expense or arrangement. She would appear to have stood to her guns in the matter with splendid persistence and magnanimity. She called day after day seeking for a change of mind, and delayed her own journey to the continent more than once. At length, when it became evident that the extraction of Mr. Barrett's consent was hopeless, she reluctantly began her own tour in Europe alone. She went to Paris, and had not been there many days, when she received a formal call from Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who had been married for some days. Her astonishment is rather a picturesque thing to think about.

The manner in which this sensational elopement, which was, of course, the talk of the whole literary world, had been effected, is narrated, as every one knows, in the Browning Letters. Browning had decided that an immediate marriage was the only solution; and having put his hand to the plough, did not decline even when it became obviously necessary that it should be a secret marriage. To a man of his somewhat stormily candid and casual disposition this necessity of secrecy was really exasperating; but every one with any imagination or chivalry will rejoice that he accepted the evil conditions. He had always had the courage to tell the truth; and now it was demanded of him to have the greater courage to tell a lie, and he told it with perfect cheerfulness and lucidity. In thus disappearing surreptitiously with an invalid woman he was doing something against which there were undoubtedly a hundred things to be said, only it happened that the most cogent and important thing of all was to be said for it.

It is very amusing, and very significant in the matter of Browning's character, to read the accounts which he writes to Elizabeth Barrett of his attitude towards the approaching *coup de théâtre*. In one place he says, suggestively enough, that he does not in the least trouble about the disapproval of her father; the man whom he fears as a frustrating influence is Kenyon. Mr. Barrett could only walk into the room and fly into a passion;

and this Browning could have received with perfect equanimity. “But,” he says, “if Kenyon knows of the matter, I shall have the kindest and friendliest of explanations (with his arm on my shoulder) of how I am ruining your social position, destroying your health, etc., etc.” This touch is very suggestive of the power of the old worldling, who could manoeuvre with young people as well as Major Pendennis. Kenyon had indeed long been perfectly aware of the way in which things were going; and the method he adopted in order to comment on it is rather entertaining. In a conversation with Elizabeth Barrett, he asked carelessly whether there was anything between her sister and a certain Captain Cooke. On receiving a surprised reply in the negative, he remarked apologetically that he had been misled into the idea by the gentleman calling so often at the house. Elizabeth Barrett knew perfectly well what he meant; but the logical allusiveness of the attack reminds one of a fragment of some Meredithian comedy.

The manner in which Browning bore himself in this acute and necessarily dubious position is, perhaps, more thoroughly to his credit than anything else in his career. He never came out so well in all his long years of sincerity and publicity as he does in this one act of deception. Having made up his mind to that act, he is not ashamed to name it; neither, on the other hand, does he rant about it, and talk about Philistine prejudices and higher laws and brides in the sight of God, after the manner of the cockney decadent. He was breaking a social law, but he was not declaring a crusade against social laws. We all feel, whatever may be our opinions on the matter, that the great danger of this kind of social opportunism, this pitting of a private necessity against a public custom, is that men are somewhat too weak and self-deceptive to be trusted with such a power of giving dispensations to themselves. We feel that men without meaning to do so might easily begin by breaking a social by-law and end by being thoroughly anti-social. One of the best and most striking things to notice about Robert Browning is the fact that he did this thing considering it as an exception, and that he contrived to leave it really exceptional. It did not in the least degree break the rounded clearness of his loyalty to social custom. It did not in the least degree weaken the sanctity of the general rule. At a supreme crisis of his life he did an unconventional thing, and he lived and died conventional. It would be hard to say whether he appears the more thoroughly sane in having performed the act, or in not having allowed it to affect him.

Elizabeth Barrett gradually gave way under the obstinate and almost monotonous assertion of Browning that this elopement was the only possible course of action. Before she finally agreed, however, she did something, which in its curious and impulsive symbolism, belongs almost to a more primitive age. The sullen system of medical seclusion to which she had long been subjected has already been described. The most urgent and hygienic changes were opposed by many on the ground that it was not safe for her to leave her sofa and her sombre room. On the day on which it was necessary for her finally to accept or reject Browning’s proposal, she called her sister to her, and to the amazement and mystification of that lady asked for a carriage. In this she drove into Regent’s Park, alighted, walked on to the grass, and stood leaning against a tree for some moments, looking round her at the leaves and the sky. She then entered the cab again, drove home, and agreed to the elopement. This was possibly the best poem that she ever produced.

Browning arranged the eccentric adventure with a great deal of prudence and knowledge of human nature. Early one morning in September 1846 Miss Barrett walked quietly out of her father’s house, became Mrs. Robert Browning in a church in Marylebone, and returned home again as if nothing had happened. In this arrangement Browning showed some of that real insight into the human spirit which ought to make a poet the most practical of all men. The incident was, in the nature of things, almost overpoweringly exciting to his wife, in spite of the truly miraculous courage with which she supported it; and he desired, therefore, to call in the aid of the mysteriously tranquillising effect of familiar scenes and faces. One trifling incident is worth mentioning which is almost unfathomably characteristic of Browning. It has already been remarked in these pages that he was pre-eminently one of those men whose expanding opinions never alter by a hairsbreadth the actual ground-plan of their moral sense. Browning would have felt the same things right and the same things wrong, whatever views he had held. During the brief and most trying period between his actual marriage and his actual elopement, it is most significant that he would not call at the house in Wimpole Street, because he would have been obliged to ask if Miss Barrett was disengaged. He was acting a lie; he was deceiving a father; he was putting a sick woman to a terrible risk; and these things he did not disguise from himself for a moment, but he could not bring himself to say two words to a maidservant. Here there may be partly the feeling of the literary man for the sacredness of the uttered word, but there is far more of a certain rooted traditional morality which it is impossible either to describe or to justify. Browning’s respectability was an older and more primeval thing than the oldest and most primeval passions of other men. If we wish to understand him, we must always remember that in dealing with any of his actions we have not to ask whether the action contains the highest morality, but whether we should have felt inclined to do it ourselves.

At length the equivocal and exhausting interregnum was over. Mrs. Browning went for the second time almost on tiptoe out of her father’s house, accompanied only by her maid and her dog, which was only just successfully prevented from barking. Before the end of the day in all probability Barrett had discovered that his dying daughter had fled with Browning to Italy.

They never saw him again, and hardly more than a faint echo came to them of the domestic earthquake which they left behind them. They do not appear to have had many hopes, or to have made many attempts at a reconciliation. Elizabeth Barrett had discovered at last that her father was in truth not a man to be treated with; hardly, perhaps, even a man to be blamed. She knew to all intents and purposes that she had grown up in the house of a madman.

CHAPTER IV

BROWNING IN ITALY

The married pair went to Pisa in 1846, and moved soon afterwards to Florence. Of the life of the Brownings in Italy there is much perhaps to be said in the way of description and analysis, little to be said in the way of actual narrative. Each of them had passed through the one incident of existence. Just as Elizabeth Barrett’s life had before her marriage been uneventfully sombre, now it was uneventfully happy. A succession of splendid landscapes, a succession of brilliant friends, a succession of high and ardent intellectual interests, they experienced; but their life was of the kind that if it were told at all, would need to be told in a hundred volumes of gorgeous intellectual gossip. How Browning and his wife rode far into the country, eating strawberries and drinking milk out of the basins of the peasants; how they fell in with the strangest and most picturesque figures of Italian society; how they climbed mountains and read books and modelled in clay and played on musical instruments; how Browning was made a kind of arbiter between two improvising Italian bards; how he had to escape from a festivity when the sound of Garibaldi’s hymn brought the knocking of the Austrian police; these are the things of which his life is full, trifling and picturesque things, a series of interludes, a beautiful and happy story, beginning and ending nowhere. The only incidents, perhaps, were the birth of their son and the death of Browning’s mother in 1849.

It is well known that Browning loved Italy; that it was his adopted country; that he said in one of the finest of his lyrics that the name of it would be found written on his heart. But the particular character of this love of Browning for Italy needs to be understood. There are thousands of educated Europeans who love Italy, who live in it, who visit it annually, who come across a continent to see it, who hunt out its darkest picture and its most mouldering carving; but they are all united in this, that they regard Italy as a dead place. It is a branch of their universal museum, a department of dry bones. There are rich and cultivated persons, particularly Americans, who seem to think that they keep Italy, as they might keep an aviary or a hothouse, into which they might walk whenever they wanted a whiff of beauty. Browning did not feel at all in this manner; he was intrinsically incapable of offering such an insult to the soul of a nation. If he could not have loved Italy as a nation, he would not have consented to love it as an old curiosity shop. In everything on earth, from the Middle Ages to the amoeba, who is discussed at such length in “Mr. Sludge the Medium,” he is interested in the life in things. He was interested in the life in Italian art and in the life in Italian politics.

Perhaps the first and simplest example that can be given of this matter is in Browning’s interest in art. He was immeasurably fascinated at all times by painting and sculpture, and his sojourn in Italy gave him, of course, innumerable and perfect opportunities for the study of painting and sculpture. But his interest in these studies was not like that of the ordinary cultured visitor to the Italian cities. Thousands of such visitors, for example, study those endless lines of magnificent Pagan busts which are to be found in nearly all the Italian galleries and museums, and admire them, and talk about them, and note them in their catalogues, and describe them in their diaries. But the way in which they affected Browning is described very suggestively in a passage in the letters of his wife. She describes herself as longing for her husband to write poems, beseeching him to write poems, but finding all her petitions useless because her husband was engaged all day in modelling busts in clay and breaking them as fast as he made them. This is Browning’s interest in art, the interest in a living thing, the interest in a growing thing, the insatiable interest in how things are done. Every one who knows his admirable poems on painting— “Fra Lippo Lippi” and “Andrea del Sarto” and “Pictor Ignotus” — will remember how fully they deal with technicalities, how they are concerned with canvas, with oil, with a mess of colours. Sometimes they are so technical as to be mysterious to the casual reader. An extreme case may be found in that of a lady I once knew who had merely read the title of “Pacchiarotto and how he worked in distemper,” and thought that Pacchiarotto was the name of a dog, whom no attacks of canine disease could keep from the fulfilment of his duty. These Browning poems do not merely deal with painting; they smell of paint. They are the works of a man to whom art is not what it is to so many of the non-professional lovers of art, a thing accomplished, a valley of bones: to him it is a field of crops continually growing in a busy and exciting silence. Browning was interested, like some scientific man, in the obstetrics of art. There is a large army of educated men who can talk art with artists; but Browning could not merely talk art with artists — he could talk shop with them. Personally he may not have known enough about painting to be more than a fifth-rate painter, or enough about the organ to be more than a sixth-rate organist. But there are, when all is said and done, some things which a fifth-rate painter knows which a first-rate art critic does not know; there are some things which a sixth-rate organist knows which a first-rate judge of music does not know. And these were the things that Browning knew.

He was, in other words, what is called an amateur. The word amateur has come by the thousand oddities of language to convey an idea of tepidity; whereas the word itself has the meaning of passion. Nor is this peculiarity confined to the mere form of the word; the actual characteristic of these nameless dilettanti is a genuine fire and reality. A man must love a thing very much if he not only practises it without any hope of fame or money, but even practises it without any hope of doing it well. Such a man must love the toils of the work more than any other man can love the rewards of it. Browning was in this strict sense a strenuous amateur. He tried and practised in the course of his life half a hundred things at which he can never have even for a moment expected to succeed. The story of his life is full of absurd little ingenuities, such as the discovery of a way of making pictures by roasting brown paper over a candle. In precisely the same spirit of fruitless vivacity, he made himself to a very considerable extent a technical expert in painting, a technical expert in sculpture, a technical expert in music. In his old age, he shows traces of being so bizarre a thing as an abstract police detective, writing at length in letters and diaries his views of certain criminal cases in an Italian town. Indeed, his own *Ring and the Book* is merely a sublime detective story. He was in a hundred things this type of man; he was precisely in the position, with a touch of greater technical success, of the admirable figure in Stevenson’s story who said, “I can play the fiddle nearly well enough to earn a living in the orchestra of a penny gaff, but not quite.”

The love of Browning for Italian art, therefore, was anything but an antiquarian fancy; it was the love of a living thing. We see the same phenomenon in an even more important matter — the essence and individuality of the country itself.

Italy to Browning and his wife was not by any means merely that sculptured and ornate sepulchre that it is to so many of those cultivated English men and women who live in Italy and enjoy and admire and despise it. To them it was a living nation, the type and centre of the religion and politics of a continent; the ancient and flaming heart of Western history, the very Europe of Europe. And they lived at the time of the most moving and gigantic of all dramas — the making of a new nation, one of the things that makes men feel that they are still in the morning of the earth. Before their eyes, with every circumstance of energy and mystery, was passing the panorama of the unification of Italy, with the bold and romantic militarism of Garibaldi, the more bold and more romantic diplomacy of Cavour. They lived in a time when affairs of State had almost the air of works of art; and it is not strange that these two poets should have become politicians in one of those great creative epochs when even the politicians have to be poets.

Browning was on this question and on all the questions of continental and English politics a very strong Liberal. This fact is not a mere detail of purely biographical interest, like any view he might take of the authorship of the "Eikon Basilike" or the authenticity of the Tichborne claimant. Liberalism was so inevitably involved in the poet's whole view of existence, that even a thoughtful and imaginative Conservative would feel that Browning was bound to be a Liberal. His mind was possessed, perhaps even to excess, by a belief in growth and energy and in the ultimate utility of error. He held the great central Liberal doctrine, a belief in a certain destiny of the human spirit beyond, and perhaps even independent of, our own sincerest convictions. The world was going right he felt, most probably in his way, but certainly in its own way. The sonnet which he wrote in later years, entitled "Why I am a Liberal," expresses admirably this philosophical root of his politics. It asks in effect how he, who had found truth in so many strange forms after so many strange wanderings, can be expected to stifle with horror the eccentricities of others. A Liberal may be defined approximately as a man who, if he could by waving his hand in a dark room, stop the mouths of all the deceivers of mankind for ever, would not wave his hand. Browning was a Liberal in this sense.

And just as the great Liberal movement which followed the French Revolution made this claim for the liberty and personality of human beings, so it made it for the liberty and personality of nations. It attached indeed to the independence of a nation something of the same wholly transcendental sanctity which humanity has in all legal systems attached to the life of a man. The grounds were indeed much the same; no one could say absolutely that a live man was useless, and no one could say absolutely that a variety of national life was useless or must remain useless to the world. Men remembered how often barbarous tribes or strange and alien Scriptures had been called in to revive the blood of decaying empires and civilisations. And this sense of the personality of a nation, as distinct from the personalities of all other nations, did not involve in the case of these old Liberals international bitterness; for it is too often forgotten that friendship demands independence and equality fully as much as war. But in them it led to great international partialities, to a great system, as it were, of adopted countries which made so thorough a Scotchman as Carlyle in love with Germany, and so thorough an Englishman as Browning in love with Italy.

And while on the one side of the struggle was this great ideal of energy and variety, on the other side was something which we now find it difficult to realise or describe. We have seen in our own time a great reaction in favour of monarchy, aristocracy, and ecclesiasticism, a reaction almost entirely noble in its instinct, and dwelling almost entirely on the best periods and the best qualities of the old *régime*. But the modern man, full of admiration for the great virtue of chivalry which is at the heart of aristocracies, and the great virtue of reverence which is at the heart of ceremonial religion, is not in a position to form any idea of how profoundly unchivalrous, how astonishingly irreverent, how utterly mean, and material, and devoid of mystery or sentiment were the despotic systems of Europe which survived, and for a time conquered, the Revolution. The case against the Church in Italy in the time of Pio Nono was not the case which a rationalist would urge against the Church of the time of St. Louis, but diametrically the opposite case. Against the mediæval Church it might be said that she was too fantastic, too visionary, too dogmatic about the destiny of man, too indifferent to all things but the devotional side of the soul. Against the Church of Pio Nono the main thing to be said was that it was simply and supremely cynical; that it was not founded on the unworldly instinct for distorting life, but on the worldly counsel to leave life as it is; that it was not the inspirer of insane hopes, of reward and miracle, but the enemy, the cool and sceptical enemy, of hope of any kind or description. The same was true of the monarchical systems of Prussia and Austria and Russia at this time. Their philosophy was not the philosophy of the cavaliers who rode after Charles I. or Louis XIII. It was the philosophy of the typical city uncle, advising every one, and especially the young, to avoid enthusiasm, to avoid beauty, to regard life as a machine, dependent only upon the two forces of comfort and fear. That was, there can be little doubt, the real reason of the fascination of the Napoleon legend — that while Napoleon was a despot like the rest, he was a despot who went somewhere and did something, and defied the pessimism of Europe, and erased the word “impossible.” One does not need to be a Bonapartist to rejoice at the way in which the armies of the First Empire, shouting their songs and jesting with their colonels, smote and broke into pieces the armies of Prussia and Austria driven into battle with a cane.

Browning, as we have said, was in Italy at the time of the break-up of one part of this frozen continent of the non-possumus, Austria’s hold in the north of Italy was part of that elaborate and comfortable and wholly cowardly and unmeaning compromise, which the Holy Alliance had established, and which it believed without doubt in its solid unbelief would last until the Day of Judgment, though it is difficult to imagine what the Holy Alliance thought would happen then. But almost of a sudden affairs had begun to move strangely, and the despotic princes and their chancellors discovered with a great deal of astonishment that they were not living in the old age of the world, but to all appearance in a very unmanageable period of its boyhood. In an age of ugliness and routine, in a time when diplomatists and philosophers alike tended to believe that they had a list of all human types, there began to appear men who belonged to the morning of the world, men whose movements have a national breadth and beauty, who act symbols and become legends while they are alive. Garibaldi in his red shirt rode in an open carriage along the front of a hostile fort calling to the coachman to drive slower, and not a man dared fire a shot at him. Mazzini poured out upon Europe a new mysticism of humanity and liberty, and was willing, like some passionate Jesuit of the sixteenth century, to become in its cause either a philosopher or a criminal. Cavour arose with a diplomacy which was more thrilling and picturesque than war itself. These men had nothing to do with an age of the impossible. They have passed, their theories along with them, as all things pass; but since then we have had no men of their type precisely, at once large and real and romantic and successful. Gordon was a possible exception. They were the last of the heroes.

When Browning was first living in Italy, a telegram which had been sent to him was stopped on the frontier and suppressed on account of his known sympathy with the Italian Liberals. It is almost impossible for people living in a commonwealth like ours to understand how a small thing like that will affect a man. It was not so much the obvious fact that a great practical injury was really done to him; that the telegram might have altered all his plans in matters of vital moment. It was, over and above that, the sense of a hand laid on something personal and essentially free. Tyranny like this is not the worst tyranny, but it is the most intolerable. It interferes with men not in the most serious matters, but precisely in those matters in which they most resent interference. It may be illogical for men to accept cheerfully unpardonable public scandals, benighted educational systems, bad sanitation, bad lighting, a blundering and inefficient system of life, and yet to resent the tearing up of a telegram or a post-card; but the fact remains that the sensitiveness of men is a strange and localised thing, and there is hardly a man in the world who would not rather be ruled by despots chosen by lot and live in a city like a mediæval Ghetto, than be forbidden by a policeman to smoke another cigarette, or sit up a quarter of an hour later; hardly a man who would not feel inclined in such a case to raise a rebellion for a caprice for which he did not really care a straw. Unmeaning and muddle-headed tyranny in small things, that is the thing which, if extended over many years, is harder to bear and hope through than the massacres of September. And that was the nightmare of vexatious triviality which was lying over all the cities of Italy that were ruled by the bureaucratic despotisms of Europe. The history of the time is full of spiteful and almost childish struggles — struggles about the humming of a tune or the wearing of a colour, the arrest of a journey, or the opening of a letter. And there can be little doubt that Browning's temperament under these conditions was not of the kind to become more indulgent, and there grew in him a hatred of the Imperial and Ducal and Papal systems of Italy, which sometimes passed the necessities of Liberalism, and sometimes even transgressed its spirit. The life which he and his wife lived in Italy was extraordinarily full and varied, when we consider the restrictions under which one at least of them had always lain. They met and took delight, notwithstanding their exile, in some of the most interesting people of their time — Ruskin, Cardinal Manning, and Lord Lytton. Browning, in a most characteristic way, enjoyed the society of all of them, arguing with one, agreeing with another, sitting up all night by the bedside of a third.

It has frequently been stated that the only difference that ever separated Mr. and Mrs. Browning was upon the question of spiritualism. That statement must, of course, be modified and even contradicted if it means that they never differed; that Mr. Browning never thought an *Act of Parliament* good when Mrs. Browning thought it bad; that Mr. Browning never thought bread stale when Mrs. Browning thought it new. Such unanimity is not only inconceivable, it is immoral; and as a matter of fact, there is abundant evidence that their marriage constituted something like that ideal marriage, an alliance between two strong and independent forces. They differed, in truth, about a great many things, for example, about Napoleon III. whom Mrs. Browning regarded with an admiration which would have been somewhat beyond the deserts of Sir Galahad, and whom Browning with his emphatic Liberal principles could never pardon for the *Coup d'État*. If they differed on spiritualism in a somewhat more serious way than this, the reason must be sought in qualities which were deeper and more elemental in both their characters than any mere matter of opinion. Mrs. Orr, in her excellent *Life of Browning*, states that the difficulty arose from Mrs. Browning's firm belief in psychical phenomena and Browning's absolute refusal to believe even in their possibility. Another writer who met them at this time says, "Browning cannot believe, and Mrs. Browning cannot help believing." This theory, that Browning's aversion to the spiritualist circle arose from an absolute denial of the tenability of such a theory of life and death, has in fact often been repeated. But it is exceedingly difficult to reconcile it with Browning's character. He was the last man in the world to be intellectually deaf to a hypothesis merely because it was odd. He had friends whose opinions covered every description of madness from the French legitimism of De Ripert-Monclar to the Republicanism of Landor. Intellectually he may be said to have had a zest for heresies. It is difficult to impute an attitude of mere impenetrable negation to a man who had expressed with sympathy the religion of "Caliban" and the morality of "Time's Revenges." It is true that at this time of the first popular interest in spiritualism a feeling existed among many people of a practical turn of mind, which can only be called a superstition against believing in ghosts. But, intellectually speaking, Browning would probably have been one of the most tolerant and curious in regard to the new theories, whereas the popular version of the matter makes him unusually intolerant and negligent even for that time. The fact was in all probability that Browning's aversion to the spiritualists had little or nothing to do with spiritualism. It arose from quite a different side of his character — his uncompromising dislike of what is called Bohemianism, of eccentric or slovenly cliques, of those straggling camp followers of the arts who exhibit dubious manners and dubious morals, of all abnormality and of all irresponsibility. Any one, in fact, who wishes to see what it was that Browning disliked need only do two things. First, he should read the *Memoirs* of David Home, the famous spiritualist medium with whom Browning came in contact. These *Memoirs* constitute a more thorough and artistic self-revelation than any monologue that Browning ever wrote. The ghosts, the raps, the flying hands, the phantom voices are infinitely the most respectable and infinitely the most credible part of the narrative. But the bragging, the sentimentalism, the moral and intellectual foppery of the composition is everywhere, culminating perhaps in the disgusting passage in which Home describes Mrs. Browning as weeping over him and assuring him that all her husband's actions in the matter have been adopted against her will. It is in this kind of thing that we find the roots of the real anger of Browning. He did not dislike spiritualism, but spiritualists. The second point on which any one wishing to be just in the matter should cast an eye, is the record of the visit which Mrs. Browning insisted on making while on their honeymoon in Paris to the house of George Sand. Browning felt, and to some extent expressed, exactly the same aversion to his wife mixing with the circle of George Sand which he afterwards felt at her mixing with the circle of Home. The society was "of the ragged red, diluted with the low theatrical, men who worship George Sand, *à genou bas* between an oath and an ejection of saliva." When we find that a man did not object to any number of Jacobites or Atheists, but objected to the French Bohemian poets and to the early occultist mediums as friends for his wife, we shall surely be fairly right in concluding that he objected not to an opinion, but to a social tone. The truth was that Browning had a great many admirably Philistine feelings, and one of them was a great relish for his responsibilities towards his wife. He enjoyed being a husband. This is quite a distinct thing from enjoying being a lover, though it will scarcely be found apart from it. But, like all good feelings, it has its possible exaggerations, and one of them is this almost morbid healthiness in the choice of friends for his wife.

David Home, the medium, came to Florence about 1857. Mrs. Browning undoubtedly threw herself into psychical experiments with great ardour at first, and Browning, equally undoubtedly, opposed, and at length forbade, the enterprise. He did not do so however until he had attended one *séance* at least, at which a somewhat ridiculous event occurred, which is described in

Home’s *Memoirs* with a gravity even more absurd than the incident. Towards the end of the proceedings a wreath was placed in the centre of the table, and the lights being lowered, it was caused to rise slowly into the air, and after hovering for some time, to move towards Mrs. Browning, and at length to alight upon her head. As the wreath was floating in her direction, her husband was observed abruptly to cross the room and stand beside her. One would think it was a sufficiently natural action on the part of a man whose wife was the centre of a weird and disturbing experiment, genuine or otherwise. But Mr. Home gravely asserts that it was generally believed that Browning had crossed the room in the hope that the wreath would alight on his head, and that from the hour of its disobliging refusal to do so dated the whole of his goaded and malignant aversion to spiritualism. The idea of the very conventional and somewhat bored Robert Browning running about the room after a wreath in the hope of putting his head into it, is one of the genuine gleams of humour in this rather foolish affair. Browning could be fairly violent, as we know, both in poetry and conversation; but it would be almost too terrible to conjecture what he would have felt and said if Mr. Home’s wreath had alighted on his head.

Next day, according to Home’s account, he called on the hostess of the previous night in what the writer calls “a ridiculous state of excitement,” and told her apparently that she must excuse him if he and his wife did not attend any more gatherings of the kind. What actually occurred is not, of course, quite easy to ascertain, for the account in Home’s *Memoirs* principally consists of noble speeches made by the medium which would seem either to have reduced Browning to a pulverised silence, or else to have failed to attract his attention. But there can be no doubt that the general upshot of the affair was that Browning put his foot down, and the experiments ceased. There can be little doubt that he was justified in this; indeed, he was probably even more justified if the experiments were genuine psychical mysteries than if they were the *hocus-pocus* of a charlatan. He knew his wife better than posterity can be expected to do; but even posterity can see that she was the type of woman so much adapted to the purposes of men like Home as to exhibit almost invariably either a great craving for such experiences or a great terror of them. Like many geniuses, but not all, she lived naturally upon something like a borderland; and it is impossible to say that if Browning had not interposed when she was becoming hysterical she might not have ended in an asylum.

The whole of this incident is very characteristic of Browning; but the real characteristic note in it has, as above suggested, been to some extent missed. When some seven years afterwards he produced “Mr. Sludge the Medium,” every one supposed that it was an attack upon spiritualism and the possibility of its phenomena. As we shall see when we come to that poem, this is a wholly mistaken interpretation of it. But what is really curious is that most people have assumed that a dislike of Home’s investigations implies a theoretic disbelief in spiritualism. It might, of course, imply a very firm and serious belief in it. As a matter of fact it did not imply this in Browning, but it may perfectly well have implied an agnosticism which admitted the reasonableness of such things. Home was infinitely less dangerous as a dexterous swindler than he was as a bad or foolish man in possession of unknown or ill-comprehended powers. It is surely curious to think that a man must object to exposing his wife to a few conjuring tricks, but could not be afraid of exposing her to the loose and nameless energies of the universe.

Browning’s theoretic attitude in the matter was, therefore, in all probability quite open and unbiassed. His was a peculiarly hospitable intellect. If any one had told him of the spiritualist theory, or theories a hundred times more insane, as things held by some sect of Gnostics in Alexandria, or of heretical Talmudists at Antwerp, he would have delighted in those theories, and would very likely have adopted them. But Greek Gnostics and Antwerp Jews do not dance round a man’s wife and wave their hands in her face and send her into swoons and trances about which nobody knows anything rational or scientific. It was simply the stirring in Browning of certain primal masculine feelings far beyond the reach of argument — things that lie so deep that if they are hurt, though there may be no blame and no anger, there is always pain. Browning did not like spiritualism to be mentioned for many years.

Robert Browning was unquestionably a thoroughly conventional man. There are many who think this element of conventionality altogether regrettable and disgraceful; they have established, as it were, a convention of the unconventional. But this hatred of the conventional element in the personality of a poet is only possible to those who do not remember the meaning of words. Convention means only a coming together, an agreement; and as every poet must base his work upon an emotional agreement among men, so every poet must base his work upon a convention. Every art is, of course, based upon a convention, an agreement between the speaker and the listener that certain objections shall not be raised. The most realistic art in the world is open to realistic objection. Against the most exact and everyday drama that ever came out of Norway it is still possible for the realist to raise the objection that the hero who starts a subject and drops it, who runs out of a room and runs back again for his hat, is all the time behaving in a most eccentric manner, considering that he is doing these things in a room in which one of the four walls has been taken clean away and been replaced by a line of footlights and a mob of strangers. Against the most accurate black-and-white artist that human imagination can conceive it is still to be admitted that he draws a black line round a man’s nose, and that that line is a lie. And in precisely the same fashion a poet must, by the nature of things, be conventional. Unless he is describing an emotion which others share with him, his labours will be utterly in vain. If a poet really had an original emotion; if, for example, a poet suddenly fell in love with the buffers of a railway train, it would take him considerably more time than his allotted three-score years and ten to communicate his feelings.

Poetry deals with primal and conventional things — the hunger for bread, the love of woman, the love of children, the desire for immortal life. If men really had new sentiments, poetry could not deal with them. If, let us say, a man did not feel a bitter craving to eat bread; but did, by way of substitute, feel a fresh, original craving to eat brass fenders or mahogany tables, poetry could not express him. If a man, instead of falling in love with a woman, fell in love with a fossil or a sea anemone, poetry could not express him. Poetry can only express what is original in one sense — the sense in which we speak of original sin. It is original, not in the paltry sense of being new, but in the deeper sense of being old; it is original in the sense that it deals with origins.

All artists, who have any experience of the arts, will agree so far, that a poet is bound to be conventional with regard to matters of art. Unfortunately, however, they are the very people who cannot, as a general rule, see that a poet is also bound to be conventional in matters of conduct. It is only the smaller poet who sees the poetry of revolt, of isolation, of disagreement; the larger poet sees the poetry of those great agreements which constitute the romantic achievement of civilisation. Just as an agreement between the dramatist and the audience is necessary to every play; just as an agreement between the painter and the spectators is necessary to every picture, so an agreement is necessary to produce the worship of any of the great figures of morality — the hero, the saint, the average man, the gentleman. Browning had, it must thoroughly be realised, a real pleasure in these great agreements, these great conventions. He delighted, with a true poetic delight, in being conventional. Being by birth an Englishman, he took pleasure in being an Englishman; being by rank a member of the middle class, he took a pride in its ancient scruples and its everlasting boundaries. He was everything that he was with a definite and conscious pleasure — a man, a Liberal, an Englishman, an author, a gentleman, a lover, a married man.

This must always be remembered as a general characteristic of Browning, this ardent and headlong conventionality. He exhibited it pre-eminently in the affair of his elopement and marriage, during and after the escape of himself and his wife to Italy. He seems to have forgotten everything, except the splendid worry of being married. He showed a thoroughly healthy consciousness that he was taking up a responsibility which had its practical side. He came finally and entirely out of his dreams. Since he had himself enough money to live on, he had never thought of himself as doing anything but writing poetry; poetry indeed was probably simmering and bubbling in his head day and night. But when the problem of the elopement arose he threw himself with an energy, of which it is pleasant to read, into every kind of scheme for solidifying his position. He wrote to Monckton Milnes, and would appear to have badgered him with applications for a post in the British Museum. “I will work like a horse,” he said, with that boyish note, which, whenever in his unconsciousness he strikes it, is more poetical than all his poems. All his language in this matter is emphatic; he would be “glad and proud,” he says, “to have any minor post” his friend could obtain for him. He offered to read for the Bar, and probably began doing so. But all this vigorous and very creditable materialism was ruthlessly extinguished by Elizabeth Barrett. She declined altogether even to entertain the idea of her husband devoting himself to anything else at the expense of poetry. Probably she was right and Browning wrong, but it was an error which every man would desire to have made.

One of the qualities again which make Browning most charming, is the fact that he felt and expressed so simple and genuine a satisfaction about his own achievements as a lover and husband, particularly in relation to his triumph in the hygienic care of his wife. “If he is vain of anything,” writes Mrs. Browning, “it is of my restored health.” Later, she adds with admirable humour and suggestiveness, “and I have to tell him that he really must not go telling everybody how his wife walked here with him, or walked there with him, as if a wife with two feet were a miracle in Nature.” When a lady in Italy said, on an occasion when Browning stayed behind with his wife on the day of a picnic, that he was “the only man who behaved like a Christian to his wife,” Browning was elated to an almost infantile degree. But there could scarcely be a better test of the essential manliness and decency of a man than this test of his vanities. Browning boasted of being domesticated; there are half a hundred men everywhere who would be inclined to boast of not being domesticated. Bad men are almost without exception conceited, but they are commonly conceited of their defects.

One picturesque figure who plays a part in this portion of the Brownings’ life in Italy is Walter Savage Landor. Browning found him living with some of his wife’s relations, and engaged in a continuous and furious quarrel with them, which was, indeed, not uncommonly the condition of that remarkable man when living with other human beings. He had the double arrogance which is only possible to that old and stately but almost extinct blend — the aristocratic republican. Like an old Roman senator, or like a gentleman of the Southern States of America, he had the condescension of a gentleman to those below him, combined with the jealous self-assertiveness of a Jacobin to those above. The only person who appears to have been able to manage him and bring out his more agreeable side was Browning. It is, by the way, one of the many hints of a certain element in Browning which can only be described by the elementary and old-fashioned word goodness, that he always contrived to make himself acceptable and even lovable to men of savage and capricious temperament, of detached and erratic genius, who could get on with no one else. Carlyle, who could not get a bitter taste off his tongue in talking of most of his contemporaries, was fond of Browning. Landor, who could hardly conduct an ordinary business interview without beginning to break the furniture, was fond of Browning. These are things which speak more for a man than many people will understand. It is easy enough to be agreeable to a circle of admirers, especially feminine admirers, who have a peculiar talent for discipleship and the absorption of ideas. But when a man is loved by other men of his own intellectual stature and of a wholly different type and order of eminence, we may be certain that there was something genuine about him, and something far more important than anything intellectual. Men do not like another man because he is a genius, least of all when they happen to be geniuses themselves. This general truth about Browning is like hearing of a woman who is the most famous beauty in a city, and who is at the same time adored and confided in by all the women who live there.

Browning came to the rescue of the fiery old gentleman, and helped by Seymour Kirkup put him under very definite obligations by a course of very generous conduct. He was fully repaid in his own mind for his trouble by the mere presence and friendship of Landor, for whose quaint and volcanic personality he had a vast admiration, compounded of the pleasure of the artist in an oddity and of the man in a hero. It is somewhat amusing and characteristic that Mrs. Browning did not share this unlimited enjoyment of the company of Mr. Landor, and expressed her feelings in her own humorous manner. She writes, “Dear, darling Robert amuses me by talking of his gentleness and sweetness. A most courteous and refined gentleman he is, of course, and very affectionate to Robert (as he ought to be), but of self-restraint he has not a grain, and of suspicion many grains. What do you really say to dashing down a plate on the floor when you don’t like what’s on it? Robert succeeded in soothing him, and the poor old lion is very quiet on the whole, roaring softly to beguile the time in Latin alcaics against his wife and Louis Napoleon.”

One event alone could really end this endless life of the Italian Arcadia. That event happened on June 29, 1861. Robert Browning’s wife died, stricken by the death of her sister, and almost as hard (it is a characteristic touch) by the death of Cavour. She died alone in the room with Browning, and of what passed then, though much has been said, little should be. He, closing the door of that room behind him, closed a door in himself, and none ever saw Browning upon earth again but only a splendid surface.

CHAPTER V

BROWNING IN LATER LIFE

Browning's confidences, what there were of them, immediately after his wife's death were given to several women-friends; all his life, indeed, he was chiefly intimate with women. The two most intimate of these were his own sister, who remained with him in all his later years, and the sister of his wife, who seven years afterwards passed away in his presence as Elizabeth had done. The other letters, which number only one or two, referring in any personal manner to his bereavement are addressed to Miss Haworth and Isa Blagden. He left Florence and remained for a time with his father and sister near Dinard. Then he returned to London and took up his residence in Warwick Crescent. Naturally enough, the thing for which he now chiefly lived was the education of his son, and it is characteristic of Browning that he was not only a very indulgent father, but an indulgent father of a very conventional type: he had rather the chuckling pride of the city gentleman than the educational gravity of the intellectual.

Browning was now famous, *Bells and Pomegranates*, *Men and Women, Christmas Eve*, and *Dramatis Personæ* had successively glorified his Italian period. But he was already brooding half-unconsciously on more famous things. He has himself left on record a description of the incident out of which grew the whole impulse and plan of his greatest achievement. In a passage marked with all his peculiar sense of material things, all that power of writing of stone or metal or the fabric of drapery, so that we seem to be handling and smelling them, he has described a stall for the selling of odds and ends of every variety of utility and uselessness: —

"picture frames White through the worn gilt, mirror-sconces chipped,
Bronze angel-heads once knobs attached to chests,
(Handled when ancient dames chose forth brocade)
Modern chalk drawings, studies from the nude,
Samples of stone, jet, breccia, porphyry
Polished and rough, sundry amazing busts
In baked earth, (broken, Providence be praised!)
A wreck of tapestry proudly-purposed web

When reds and blues were indeed red and blue,
Now offer'd as a mat to save bare feet
(Since carpets constitute a cruel cost).

Vulgarised Horace for the use of schools,
'The Life, Death, Miracles of Saint Somebody,
Saint Somebody Else, his Miracles, Death, and Life' —
With this, one glance at the lettered back of which,
And 'Stall,' cried I; a *lira* made it mine."

This sketch embodies indeed the very poetry of *débris*, and comes nearer than any other poem has done to expressing the pathos and picturesqueness of a low-class pawnshop. "This," which Browning bought for a lira out of this heap of rubbish, was, of course, the old Latin record of the criminal case of Guido Franceschini, tried for the murder of his wife Pompilia in the year 1698. And this again, it is scarcely necessary to say, was the ground-plan and motive of *The Ring and the Book*.

Browning had picked up the volume and partly planned the poem during his wife's lifetime in Italy. But the more he studied it, the more the dimensions of the theme appeared to widen and deepen; and he came at last, there can be little doubt, to regard it definitely as his *magnum opus* to which he would devote many years to come. Then came the great sorrow of his life, and he cast about him for something sufficiently immense and arduous and complicated to keep his brain going like some huge and automatic engine. "I mean to keep writing," he said, "whether I like it or not." And thus finally he took up the scheme of the Franceschini story, and developed it on a scale with a degree of elaboration, repetition, and management, and inexhaustible scholarship which was never perhaps before given in the history of the world to an affair of two or three characters. Of the larger literary and spiritual significance of the work, particularly in reference to its curious and original form of narration, I shall speak subsequently. But there is one peculiarity about the story which has more direct bearing on Browning's life, and it appears singular that few, if any, of his critics have noticed it. This peculiarity is the extraordinary resemblance between the moral problem involved in the poem if understood in its essence, and the moral problem which constituted the crisis and centre of Browning's own life. Nothing, properly speaking, ever happened to Browning after his wife's death; and his greatest work during that time was the telling, under alien symbols and the veil of a wholly different story, the inner truth about his own greatest trial and hesitation. He himself had in this sense the same difficulty as Caponsacchi, the supreme difficulty of having to trust himself to the reality of virtue not only without the reward, but even without the name of virtue. He had, like Caponsacchi, preferred what was unselfish and dubious to what was selfish and honourable. He knew better than any man that there is little danger of men who really know anything of that naked and homeless responsibility seeking it too often or indulging it too much. The conscientiousness of the law-abider is nothing in its terrors to the conscientiousness of the conscientious law-breaker. Browning had once, for what he seriously believed to be a greater good, done what he himself would never have had the cant to deny, ought to be called deceit and evasion. Such a thing ought never to come to a man twice. If he finds that necessity twice, he may, I think, be looked at with the beginning of a suspicion. To Browning it came once, and he devoted his greatest poem to a suggestion of how such a necessity may come to any man who is worthy to live.

As has already been suggested, any apparent danger that there may be in this excusing of an exceptional act is counteracted by the perils of the act, since it must always be remembered that this kind of act has the immense difference from all legal acts — that it can only be justified by success. If Browning had taken his wife to Paris, and she had died in an hotel there, we can only conceive him saying, with the bitter emphasis of one of his own lines, "How should I have borne me, please?" Before and after this event his life was as tranquil and casual a one as it would be easy to imagine; but there always remained upon him something which was felt by all who knew him in after years — the spirit of a man who had been ready when his time came, and had walked in his own devotion and certainty in a position counted indefensible and almost along the brink of murder. This great moral of Browning, which may be called roughly the doctrine of the great hour, enters, of course, into many poems besides *The Ring and the Book*, and is indeed the mainspring of a great part of his poetry taken as a whole. It is, of course, the central idea of that fine poem, "The Statue and the Bust," which has given a great deal of distress to a great many people because of its supposed invasion of recognised morality. It deals, as every one knows, with a Duke Ferdinand and an elopement which he planned with the bride of one of the Riccardi. The lovers begin by deferring their flight for various more or less comprehensible reasons of convenience; but the habit of shrinking from the final step grows steadily upon them, and they never take it, but die, as it were, waiting for each other. The objection that the act thus avoided was a criminal one is very simply and quite clearly answered by Browning himself. His case against the dilatory couple is not in the least affected by the viciousness of their aim. His case is that they exhibited no virtue. Crime was frustrated in them by cowardice, which is probably the worse immorality of the two. The same idea again may be found in that delightful lyric "Youth and Art," where a successful cantatrice reproaches a successful sculptor with their failure to understand each other in their youth and poverty.

"Each life unfulfilled, you see;
It hangs still, patchy and scrappy:
We have not sighed deep, laughed free,
Starved, feasted, despaired, — been happy."

And this conception of the great hour, which breaks out everywhere in Browning, it is almost impossible not to connect with his own internal drama. It is really curious that this correspondence has not been insisted on. Probably critics have been misled by the fact that Browning in many places appears to boast that he is purely dramatic, that he has never put himself into his work, a thing which no poet, good or bad, who ever lived could possibly avoid doing.

The enormous scope and seriousness of *The Ring and the Book* occupied Browning for some five or six years, and the great epic appeared in the winter of 1868. Just before it was published Smith and Elder brought out a uniform edition of all Browning's works up to that time, and the two incidents taken together may be considered to mark the final and somewhat belated culmination of Browning's literary fame. The years since his wife's death, that had been covered by the writing of *The Ring and the Book*, had been years of an almost feverish activity in that and many other ways. His travels had been restless and continued, his industry immense, and for the first time he began that mode of life which afterwards became so characteristic of him — the life of what is called society. A man of a shallower and more sentimental type would have professed to find the life of dinner-tables and soirées vain and unsatisfying to a poet, and especially to a poet in mourning. But if there is one thing more than another which is stirring and honourable about Browning, it is the entire absence in him of this cant of dissatisfaction. He had the one great requirement of a poet — he was not difficult to please. The life of society was superficial, but it is only very superficial people who object to the superficial. To the man who sees the marvellousness of all things, the surface of life is fully as strange and magical as its interior; clearness and plainness of life is fully as mysterious as its mysteries. The young man in evening dress, pulling on his gloves, is quite as elemental a figure as any anchorite, quite as incomprehensible, and indeed quite as alarming.

A great many literary persons have expressed astonishment at, or even disapproval of, this social frivolity of Browning's. Not one of these literary people would have been shocked if Browning's interest in humanity had led him into a gambling hell in the Wild West or a low tavern in Paris; but it seems to be tacitly assumed that fashionable people are not human at all. Humanitarians of a material and dogmatic type, the philanthropists and the professional reformers go to look for humanity in remote places and in huge statistics. Humanitarians of a more vivid type, the Bohemian artists, go to look for humanity in thieves' kitchens and the studios of the Quartier Latin. But humanitarians of the highest type, the great poets and philosophers, do not go to look for humanity at all. For them alone among all men the nearest drawing-room is full of humanity, and even their own families are human. Shakespeare ended his life by buying a house in his own native town and talking to the townsmen. Browning was invited to a great many conversaziones and private views, and did not pretend that they bored him. In a letter belonging to this period of his life he describes his first dinner at one of the Oxford colleges with an unaffected delight and vanity, which reminds the reader of nothing so much as the pride of the boy-captain of a public school if he were invited to a similar function and received a few compliments. It may be indeed that Browning had a kind of second youth in this long-delayed social recognition, but at least he enjoyed his second youth nearly as much as his first, and it is not every one who can do that.

Of Browning's actual personality and presence in this later middle age of his, memories are still sufficiently clear. He was a middle-sized, well set up, erect man, with somewhat emphatic gestures, and, as almost all testimonies mention, a curiously strident voice. The beard, the removal of which his wife had resented with so quaint an indignation, had grown again, but grown quite white, which, as she said when it occurred, was a signal mark of the justice of the gods. His hair was still fairly dark, and his whole appearance at this time must have been very well represented by Mr. G.F. Watts's fine portrait in the National Portrait Gallery. The portrait bears one of the many testimonies which exist to Mr. Watts's grasp of the essential of character, for it is the only one of the portraits of Browning in which we get primarily the air of virility, even of animal virility, tempered but not disguised, with a certain touch of the pallor of the brain-worker. He looks here what he was — a very healthy man, too scholarly to live a completely healthy life.

His manner in society, as has been more than once indicated, was that of a man anxious, if anything, to avoid the air of intellectual eminence. Lockhart said briefly, "I like Browning; he isn't at all like a damned literary man." He was, according to some, upon occasion, talkative and noisy to a fault; but there are two kinds of men who monopolise conversation. The first kind are those who like the sound of their own voice; the second are those who do not know what the sound of their own voice is like. Browning was one of the latter class. His volubility in speech had the same origin as his voluminousness and obscurity in literature — a kind of headlong humility. He cannot assuredly have been aware that he talked people down or have wished to do so. For this would have been precisely a violation of the ideal of the man of the world, the one ambition and even weakness that he had. He wished to be a man of the world, and he never in the full sense was one. He remained a little too much of a boy, a little too much even of a Puritan, and a little too much of what may be called a man of the universe, to be a man of the world.

One of his faults probably was the thing roughly called prejudice. On the question, for example, of table-turning and psychic phenomena he was in a certain degree fierce and irrational. He was not indeed, as we shall see when we come to study "Sludge the Medium," exactly prejudiced against spiritualism. But he was beyond all question stubbornly prejudiced against spiritualists. Whether the medium Home was or was not a scoundrel it is somewhat difficult in our day to conjecture. But in so far as he claimed supernatural powers, he may have been as honest a gentleman as ever lived.

And even if we think that the moral atmosphere of Home is that of a man of dubious character, we can still feel that Browning might have achieved his purpose without making it so obvious that he thought so. Some traces again, though much fainter ones, may be found of something like a subconscious hostility to the Roman Church, or at least a less full comprehension of the grandeur of the Latin religious civilisation than might have been expected of a man of Browning's great imaginative tolerance. Æstheticism, Bohemianism, the irresponsibilities of the artist, the untidy morals of Grub Street and the Latin Quarter, he hated with a consuming hatred. He was himself exact in everything, from his scholarship to his clothes; and even when he wore the loose white garments of the lounger in Southern Europe, they were in their own way as precise as a dress suit. This extra carefulness in all things he defended against the cant of Bohemianism as the right attitude for the poet. When some one excused coarseness or negligence on the ground of genius, he said, "That is an error: Noblesse oblige."

Browning's prejudices, however, belonged altogether to that healthy order which is characterised by a cheerful and satisfied ignorance. It never does a man any very great harm to hate a thing that he knows nothing about. It is the hating of a thing when we do know something about it which corrodes the character. We all have a dark feeling of resistance towards people we have never met, and a profound and manly dislike of the authors we have never read. It does not harm a man to be certain before opening the books that Whitman is an obscene ranter or that Stevenson is a mere trifler with style. It is the man who can think these things after he has read the books who must be in a fair way to mental perdition. Prejudice, in fact, is not so much the great intellectual sin as a thing which we may call, to coin a word, "postjudice," not the bias before the fair trial, but the bias that remains afterwards. With Browning's swift and emphatic nature the bias was almost always formed before he had gone into the matter. But almost all the men he really knew he admired, almost all the books he had really read he enjoyed. He stands pre-eminent among those great universalists who praised the ground they trod on and commended existence like any other material, in its samples. He had no kinship with those new and strange universalists of the type of Tolstoi who praise existence to the exclusion of all the institutions they have lived under, and all the ties they have known. He thought the world good because he had found so many things that were good in it — religion, the nation, the family, the social class. He did not, like the new humanitarian, think the world good because he had found so many things in it that were bad.

As has been previously suggested, there was something very queer and dangerous that underlay all the good humour of Browning. If one of these idle prejudices were broken by better knowledge, he was all the better pleased. But if some of the prejudices that were really rooted in him were trodden on, even by accident, such as his aversion to loose artistic cliques, or his aversion to undignified publicity, his rage was something wholly transfiguring and alarming, something far removed from the shrill disapproval of Carlyle and Ruskin. It can only be said that he became a savage, and not always a very agreeable or presentable savage. The indecent fury which danced upon the bones of Edward Fitzgerald was a thing which ought not to have astonished any one who had known much of Browning's character or even of his work. Some unfortunate persons on another occasion had obtained some of Mrs. Browning's letters shortly after her death, and proposed to write a *Life* founded upon them. They ought to have understood that Browning would probably disapprove; but if he talked to them about it, as he did to others, and it is exceedingly probable that he did, they must have thought he was mad. "What I suffer with the paws of these black-guards in my bowels you can fancy," he says. Again he writes: "Think of this beast working away, not deeming my feelings, or those of her family, worthy of notice. It shall not be done if I can stop the scamp's knavery along with his breath." Whether Browning actually resorted to this extreme course is unknown; nothing is known except that he wrote a letter to the ambitious biographer which reduced him to silence, probably from stupefaction.

The same peculiarity ought, as I have said, to have been apparent to any one who knew anything of Browning's literary work. A great number of his poems are marked by a trait of which by its nature it is more or less impossible to give examples. Suffice it to say that it is truly extraordinary that poets like Swinburne (who seldom uses a gross word) should have been spoken of as if they had introduced moral license into Victorian poetry. What the Non-conformist conscience has been doing to have passed Browning is something difficult to imagine. But the peculiarity of this occasional coarseness in his work is this — that it is always used to express a certain wholesome fury and contempt for things sickly, or ungenerous, or unmanly. The poet seems to feel that there are some things so contemptible that you can only speak of them in pothouse words. It would be idle, and perhaps undesirable, to give examples; but it may be noted that the same brutal physical metaphor is used by his Caponsacchi about the people who could imagine Pompilia impure and by his Shakespeare in “At the Mermaid,” about the claim of the Byronic poet to enter into the heart of humanity. In both cases Browning feels, and perhaps in a manner rightly, that the best thing we can do with a sentiment essentially base is to strip off its affectations and state it basely, and that the mud of Chaucer is a great deal better than the poison of Sterne. Herein again Browning is close to the average man; and to do the average man justice, there is a great deal more of this Browningesque hatred of Byronism in the brutality of his conversation than many people suppose.

Such, roughly and as far as we can discover, was the man who, in the full summer and even the full autumn of his intellectual powers, began to grow upon the consciousness of the English literary world about this time. For the first time friendship grew between him and the other great men of his time. Tennyson, for whom he then and always felt the best and most personal kind of admiration, came into his life, and along with him Gladstone and Francis Palgrave. There began to crowd in upon him those honours whereby a man is to some extent made a classic in his lifetime, so that he is honoured even if he is unread. He was made a Fellow of Balliol in 1867, and the homage of the great universities continued thenceforth unceasingly until his death, despite many refusals on his part. He was unanimously elected Lord Rector of Glasgow University in 1875. He declined, owing to his deep and somewhat characteristic aversion to formal public speaking, and in 1877 he had to decline on similar grounds the similar offer from the University of St. Andrews. He was much at the English universities, was a friend of Dr. Jowett, and enjoyed the university life at the age of sixty-three in a way that he probably would not have enjoyed it if he had ever been to a university. The great universities would not let him alone, to their great credit, and he became a D.C.L. of Cambridge in 1879, and a D.C.L. of Oxford in 1882. When he received these honours there were, of course, the traditional buffooneries of the undergraduates, and one of them dropped a red cotton night-cap neatly on his head as he passed under the gallery. Some indignant intellectuals wrote to him to protest against this affront, but Browning took the matter in the best and most characteristic way. “You are far too hard,” he wrote in answer, “on the very harmless drolleries of the young men. Indeed, there used to be a regularly appointed jester, ‘Filius Terrae’ he was called, whose business it was to gibe and jeer at the honoured ones by way of reminder that all human glories are merely gilded baubles and must not be fancied metal.” In this there are other and deeper things characteristic of Browning besides his learning and humour. In discussing anything, he must always fall back upon great speculative and eternal ideas. Even in the tomfoolery of a horde of undergraduates he can only see a symbol of the ancient office of ridicule in the scheme of morals. The young men themselves were probably unaware that they were the representatives of the “Filius Terrae.”

But the years during which Browning was thus reaping some of his late laurels began to be filled with incidents that reminded him how the years were passing over him. On June 20, 1866, his father had died, a man of whom it is impossible to think without a certain emotion, a man who had lived quietly and persistently for others, to whom Browning owed more than it is easy to guess, to whom we in all probability mainly owe Browning. In 1868 one of his closest friends, Arabella Barrett, the sister of his wife, died, as her sister had done, alone with Browning. Browning was not a superstitious man; he somewhat stormily prided himself on the contrary; but he notes at this time “a dream which Arabella had of Her, in which she prophesied their meeting in five years,” that is, of course, the meeting of Elizabeth and Arabella. His friend Milsand, to whom *Sordello* was dedicated, died in 1886. “I never knew,” said Browning, “or ever shall know, his like among men.” But though both fame and a growing isolation indicated that he was passing towards the evening of his days, though he bore traces of the progress, in a milder attitude towards things, and a greater preference for long exiles with those he loved, one thing continued in him with unconquerable energy — there was no diminution in the quantity, no abatement in the immense designs of his intellectual output.

In 1871 he produced *Balaustion’s Adventure*, a work exhibiting not only his genius in its highest condition of power, but something more exacting even than genius to a man of his mature and changed life, immense investigation, prodigious memory, the thorough assimilation of the vast literature of a remote civilisation. *Balaustion’s Adventure,* which is, of course, the mere framework for an English version of the Alcestis of Euripides, is an illustration of one of Browning’s finest traits, his immeasurable capacity for a classic admiration. Those who knew him tell us that in conversation he never revealed himself so impetuously or so brilliantly as when declaiming the poetry of others; and *Balaustion's Adventure* is a monument of this fiery self-forgetfulness. It is penetrated with the passionate desire to render Euripides worthily, and to that imitation are for the time being devoted all the gigantic powers which went to make the songs of Pippa and the last agony of Guido. Browning never put himself into anything more powerfully or more successfully; yet it is only an excellent translation. In the uncouth philosophy of Caliban, in the tangled ethics of Sludge, in his wildest satire, in his most feather-headed lyric, Browning was never more thoroughly Browning than in this splendid and unselfish plagiarism. This revived excitement in Greek matters; "his passionate love of the Greek language" continued in him thenceforward till his death. He published more than one poem on the drama of Hellas. *Aristophanes' Apology* came out in 1875, and *The Agamemnon of Æschylus*, another paraphrase, in 1877. All three poems are marked by the same primary characteristic, the fact that the writer has the literature of Athens literally at his fingers' ends. He is intimate not only with their poetry and politics, but with their frivolity and their slang; he knows not only Athenian wisdom, but Athenian folly; not only the beauty of Greece, but even its vulgarity. In fact, a page of *Aristophanes' Apology* is like a page of Aristophanes, dark with levity and as obscure as a schoolman's treatise, with its load of jokes.

In 1871 also appeared *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau: Saviour of Society*, one of the finest and most picturesque of all Browning's apologetic monologues. The figure is, of course, intended for Napoleon III., whose Empire had just fallen, bringing down his country with it. The saying has been often quoted that Louis Napoleon deceived Europe twice — once when he made it think he was a noodle, and once when he made it think he was a statesman. It might be added that Europe was never quite just to him, and was deceived a third time, when it took him after his fall for an exploded mountebank and nonentity. Amid the general chorus of contempt which was raised over his weak and unscrupulous policy in later years, culminating in his great disaster, there are few things finer than this attempt of Browning's to give the man a platform and let him speak for himself. It is the apologia of a political adventurer, and a political adventurer of a kind peculiarly open to popular condemnation. Mankind has always been somewhat inclined to forgive the adventurer who destroys or re-creates, but there is nothing inspiring about the adventurer who merely preserves. We have sympathy with the rebel who aims at reconstruction, but there is something repugnant to the imagination in the rebel who rebels in the name of compromise. Browning had to defend, or rather to interpret, a man who kidnapped politicians in the night and deluged the Montmartre with blood, not for an ideal, not for a reform, not precisely even for a cause, but simply for the establishment of a *régime*. He did these hideous things not so much that he might be able to do better ones, but that he and every one else might be able to do nothing for twenty years; and Browning's contention, and a very plausible contention, is that the criminal believed that his crime would establish order and compromise, or, in other words, that he thought that nothing was the very best thing he and his people could do. There is something peculiarly characteristic of Browning in thus selecting not only a political villain, but what would appear the most prosaic kind of villain. We scarcely ever find in Browning a defence of those obvious and easily defended publicans and sinners whose mingled virtues and vices are the stuff of romance and melodrama — the generous rake, the kindly drunkard, the strong man too great for parochial morals. He was in a yet more solitary sense the friend of the outcast. He took in the sinners whom even sinners cast out. He went with the hypocrite and had mercy on the Pharisee.

How little this desire of Browning's, to look for a moment at the man's life with the man's eyes, was understood, may be gathered from the criticisms on *Hohenstiel-Schwangau*, which, says Browning, "the Editor of the *Edinburgh Review* calls my eulogium on the Second Empire, which it is not, any more than what another wiseacre affirms it to be, a scandalous attack on the old constant friend of England. It is just what I imagine the man might, if he pleased, say for himself."

In 1873 appeared *Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country,* which, if it be not absolutely one of the finest of Browning's poems, is certainly one of the most magnificently Browningesque. The origin of the name of the poem is probably well known. He was travelling along the Normandy coast, and discovered what he called

"Meek, hitherto un-Murrayed bathing-places,
Best loved of sea-coast-nook-full Normandy!"

Miss Thackeray, who was of the party, delighted Browning beyond measure by calling the sleepy old fishing district “White Cotton Night-Cap Country.” It was exactly the kind of elfish phrase to which Browning had, it must always be remembered, a quite unconquerable attraction. The notion of a town of sleep, where men and women walked about in nightcaps, a nation of somnambulists, was the kind of thing that Browning in his heart loved better than *Paradise Lost*. Some time afterwards he read in a newspaper a very painful story of profligacy and suicide which greatly occupied the French journals in the year 1871, and which had taken place in the same district. It is worth noting that Browning was one of those wise men who can perceive the terrible and impressive poetry of the police-news, which is commonly treated as vulgarity, which is dreadful and may be undesirable, but is certainly not vulgar. From *The Ring and the Book* to *Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country* a great many of his works might be called magnificent detective stories. The story is somewhat ugly, and its power does not alter its ugliness, for power can only make ugliness uglier. And in this poem there is little or nothing of the revelation of that secret wealth of valour and patience in humanity which makes real and redeems the revelation of its secret vileness in *The Ring and the Book*. It almost looks at first sight as if Browning had for a moment surrendered the whole of his impregnable philosophical position and admitted the strange heresy that a human story can be sordid. But this view of the poem is, of course, a mistake. It was written in something which, for want of a more exact word, we must call one of the bitter moods of Browning; but the bitterness is entirely the product of a certain generous hostility against the class of morbidities which he really detested, sometimes more than they deserved. In this poem these principles of weakness and evil are embodied to him as the sicklier kind of Romanism, and the more sensual side of the French temperament. We must never forget what a great deal of the Puritan there remained in Browning to the end. This outburst of it is fierce and ironical, not in his best spirit. It says in effect, “You call this a country of sleep, I call it a country of death. You call it ‘White Cotton Night-Cap Country’; I call it ‘Red Cotton Night-Cap Country.’”

Shortly before this, in 1872, he had published *Fifine at the Fair*, which his principal biographer, and one of his most uncompromising admirers, calls a piece of perplexing cynicism. Perplexing it may be to some extent, for it was almost impossible to tell whether Browning would or would not be perplexing even in a love-song or a post-card. But cynicism is a word that cannot possibly be applied with any propriety to anything that Browning ever wrote. Cynicism denotes that condition of mind in which we hold that life is in its nature mean and arid; that no soul contains genuine goodness, and no state of things genuine reliability. *Fifine at the Fair,* like *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau,* is one of Browning's apologetic soliloquies — the soliloquy of an epicurean who seeks half-playfully to justify upon moral grounds an infidelity into which he afterwards actually falls. This casuist, like all Browning's casuists, is given many noble outbursts and sincere moments, and therefore apparently the poem is called cynical. It is difficult to understand what particular connection there is between seeing good in nobody and seeing good even in a sensual fool.

After *Fifine at the Fair* appeared the *Inn Album*, in 1875, a purely narrative work, chiefly interesting as exhibiting in yet another place one of Browning's vital characteristics, a pleasure in retelling and interpreting actual events of a sinister and criminal type; and after the *Inn Album* came what is perhaps the most preposterously individual thing he ever wrote, *Of Pacchiarotto, and How He Worked in Distemper*, in 1876. It is impossible to call the work poetry, and it is very difficult indeed to know what to call it. Its chief characteristic is a kind of galloping energy, an energy that has nothing intellectual or even intelligible about it, a purely animal energy of words. Not only is it not beautiful, it is not even clever, and yet it carries the reader away as he might be carried away by romping children. It ends up with a voluble and largely unmeaning malediction upon the poet's critics, a malediction so outrageously good-humoured that it does not take the trouble even to make itself clear to the objects of its wrath. One can compare the poem to nothing in heaven or earth, except to the somewhat humorous, more or less benevolent, and most incomprehensible catalogues of curses and oaths which may be heard from an intoxicated navvy. This is the kind of thing, and it goes on for pages: —

"Long after the last of your number
Has ceased my front-court to encumber
While, treading down rose and ranunculus,
You *Tommy-make-room-for-your-uncle*-us!
Troop, all of you man or homunculus,
Quick march! for Xanthippe, my housemaid,

If once on your pates she a souse made
With what, pan or pot, bowl or *skoramis*,
First comes to her hand — things were more amiss!
I would not for worlds be your place in —
Recipient of slops from the basin!
You, Jack-in-the-Green, leaf-and-twiggishness
Won't save a dry thread on your priggishness!"

You can only call this, in the most literal sense of the word, the brute-force of language.

In spite however of this monstrosity among poems, which gives its title to the volume, it contains some of the most beautiful verses that Browning ever wrote in that style of light philosophy in which he was unequalled. Nothing ever gave so perfectly and artistically what is too loosely talked about as a thrill, as the poem called "Fears and Scruples," in which a man describes the mystifying conduct of an absent friend, and reserves to the last line the climax —

"Hush, I pray you! What if this friend happen to be — God."

It is the masterpiece of that excellent but much-abused literary quality, Sensationalism.

The volume entitled *Pacchiarotto*, moreover, includes one or two of the most spirited poems on the subject of the poet in relation to publicity— "At the Mermaid," "House," and "Shop."

In spite of his increasing years, his books seemed if anything to come thicker and faster. Two were published in 1878 — *La Saisiaz*, his great metaphysical poem on the conception of immortality, and that delightfully foppish fragment of the *ancien régime*, *The Two Poets of Croisic*. Those two poems would alone suffice to show that he had not forgotten the hard science of theology or the harder science of humour. Another collection followed in 1879, the first series of *Dramatic Idylls*, which contain such masterpieces as "Pheidippides" and "Ivàn Ivànovitch." Upon its heels, in 1880, came the second series of *Dramatic Idylls*, including "Muléykeh" and "Clive," possibly the two best stories in poetry, told in the best manner of story-telling. Then only did the marvellous fountain begin to slacken in quantity, but never in quality. *Jocoseria* did not appear till 1883. It contains among other things a cast-back to his very earliest manner in the lyric of "Never the Time and the Place," which we may call the most light-hearted love-song that was ever written by a man over seventy. In the next year appeared *Ferishtah's Fancies,* which exhibit some of his shrewdest cosmic sagacity, expressed in some of his quaintest and most characteristic images. Here perhaps more than anywhere else we see that supreme peculiarity of Browning — his sense of the symbolism of material trifles. Enormous problems, and yet more enormous answers, about pain, prayer, destiny, liberty, and conscience are suggested by cherries, by the sun, by a melon-seller, by an eagle flying in the sky, by a man tilling a plot of ground. It is this spirit of grotesque allegory which really characterises Browning among all other poets. Other poets might possibly have hit upon the same philosophical idea — some idea as deep, as delicate, and as spiritual. But it may be safely asserted that no other poet, having thought of a deep, delicate, and spiritual idea, would call it "A Bean Stripe; also Apple Eating."

Three more years passed, and the last book which Browning published in his lifetime was *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day*, a book which consists of apostrophes, amicable, furious, reverential, satirical, emotional to a number of people of whom the vast majority even of cultivated people have never heard in their lives — Daniel Bartoli, Francis Furini, Gerard de Lairesse, and Charles Avison. This extraordinary knowledge of the fulness of history was a thing which never ceased to characterise Browning even when he was unfortunate in every other literary quality. Apart altogether from every line he ever wrote, it may fairly be said that no mind so rich as his ever carried its treasures to the grave. All these later poems are vigorous, learned, and full-blooded. They are thoroughly characteristic of their author. But nothing in them is quite so characteristic of their author as this fact, that when he had published all of them, and was already near to his last day, he turned with the energy of a boy let out of school, and began, of all things in the world, to re-write and improve "Pauline," the boyish poem that he had written fifty-five years before. Here was a man covered with glory and near to the doors of death, who was prepared to give himself the elaborate trouble of reconstructing the mood, and rebuilding the verses of a long juvenile poem which had been forgotten for fifty years in the blaze of successive victories. It is such things as these which give to Browning an interest of personality which is far beyond the more interest of genius. It was of such things that Elizabeth Barrett wrote in one of her best moments of insight — that his genius was the least important thing about him.

During all these later years, Browning's life had been a quiet and regular one. He always spent the winter in Italy and the summer in London, and carried his old love of precision to the extent of never failing day after day throughout the year to leave the house at the same time. He had by this time become far more of a public figure than he had ever been previously, both in England and Italy. In 1881, Dr. Furnivall and Miss E.H. Hickey founded the famous "Browning Society." He became President of the new "Shakespeare Society" and of the "Wordsworth Society." In 1886, on the death of Lord Houghton, he accepted the post of Foreign Correspondent to the Royal Academy. When he moved to De Vere Gardens in 1887, it began to be evident that he was slowly breaking up. He still dined out constantly; he still attended every reception and private view; he still corresponded prodigiously, and even added to his correspondence; and there is nothing more typical of him than that now, when he was almost already a classic, he answered any compliment with the most delightful vanity and embarrassment. In a letter to Mr. George Bainton, touching style, he makes a remark which is an excellent criticism on his whole literary career: "I myself found many forgotten fields which have proved the richest of pastures." But despite his continued energy, his health was gradually growing worse. He was a strong man in a muscular, and ordinarily in a physical sense, but he was also in a certain sense a nervous man, and may be said to have died of brain-excitement prolonged through a lifetime. In these closing years he began to feel more constantly the necessity for rest. He and his sister went to live at a little hotel in Llangollen, and spent hours together talking and drinking tea on the lawn. He himself writes in one of his quaint and poetic phrases that he had come to love these long country retreats, "another term of delightful weeks, each tipped with a sweet starry Sunday at the little church." For the first time, and in the last two or three years, he was really growing old. On one point he maintained always a tranquil and unvarying decision. The pessimistic school of poetry was growing up all round him; the decadents, with their belief that art was only a counting of the autumn leaves, were approaching more and more towards their tired triumph and their tasteless popularity. But Browning would not for one instant take the scorn of them out of his voice. "Death, death, it is this harping on death that I despise so much. In fiction, in poetry, French as well as English, and I am told in American also, in art and literature, the shadow of death, call it what you will, despair, negation, indifference, is upon us. But what fools who talk thus! Why, *amico mio*, you know as well as I, that death is life, just as our daily momentarily dying body is none the less alive, and ever recruiting new forces of existence. Without death, which is our church-yardy crape-like word for change, for growth, there could be no prolongation of that which we call life. Never say of me that I am dead."

On August 13, 1888, he set out once more for Italy, the last of his innumerable voyages. During his last Italian period he seems to have fallen back on very ultimate simplicities, chiefly a mere staring at nature. The family with whom he lived kept a fox cub, and Browning would spend hours with it watching its grotesque ways; when it escaped, he was characteristically enough delighted. The old man could be seen continually in the lanes round Asolo, peering into hedges and whistling for the lizards.

This serene and pastoral decline, surely the mildest of slopes into death, was suddenly diversified by a flash of something lying far below. Browning's eye fell upon a passage written by the distinguished Edward Fitzgerald, who had been dead for many years, in which Fitzgerald spoke in an uncomplimentary manner of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Browning immediately wrote the "Lines to Edward Fitzgerald," and set the whole literary world in an uproar. The lines were bitter and excessive to have been written against any man, especially bitter and excessive to have been written against a man who was not alive to reply. And yet, when all is said, it is impossible not to feel a certain dark and indescribable pleasure in this last burst of the old barbaric energy. The mountain had been tilled and forested, and laid out in gardens to the summit; but for one last night it had proved itself once more a volcano, and had lit up all the plains with its forgotten fire. And the blow, savage as it was, was dealt for that great central sanctity — the story of a man's youth. All that the old man would say in reply to every view of the question was, "I felt as if she had died yesterday."

Towards December of 1889 he moved to Venice, where he fell ill. He took very little food; it was indeed one of his peculiar small fads that men should not take food when they are ill, a matter in which he maintained that the animals were more sagacious. He asserted vigorously that this somewhat singular regimen would pull him through, talked about his plans, and appeared cheerful. Gradually, however, the talking became more infrequent, the cheerfulness passed into a kind of placidity; and without any particular crisis or sign of the end, Robert Browning died on December 12, 1889. The body was taken on board ship by the Venice Municipal Guard, and received by the Royal Italian marines. He was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey, the choir singing his wife's poem, "He giveth His beloved sleep." On the day that he died *Asolando* was published.

CHAPTER VI

BROWNING AS A LITERARY ARTIST

Mr. William Sharp, in his *Life* of Browning, quotes the remarks of another critic to the following effect: “The poet’s processes of thought are scientific in their precision and analysis; the sudden conclusion that he imposes upon them is transcendental and inept.”

This is a very fair but a very curious example of the way in which Browning is treated. For what is the state of affairs? A man publishes a series of poems, vigorous, perplexing, and unique. The critics read them, and they decide that he has failed as a poet, but that he is a remarkable philosopher and logician. They then proceed to examine his philosophy, and show with great triumph that it is unphilosophical, and to examine his logic and show with great triumph that it is not logical, but “transcendental and inept.” In other words, Browning is first denounced for being a logician and not a poet, and then denounced for insisting on being a poet when they have decided that he is to be a logician. It is just as if a man were to say first that a garden was so neglected that it was only fit for a boys’ playground, and then complain of the unsuitability in a boys’ playground of rockeries and flower-beds.

As we find, after this manner, that Browning does not act satisfactorily as that which we have decided that he shall be — a logician — it might possibly be worth while to make another attempt to see whether he may not, after all, be more valid than we thought as to what he himself professed to be — a poet. And if we study this seriously and sympathetically, we shall soon come to a conclusion. It is a gross and complete slander upon Browning to say that his processes of thought are scientific in their precision and analysis. They are nothing of the sort; if they were, Browning could not be a good poet. The critic speaks of the conclusions of a poem as “transcendental and inept”; but the conclusions of a poem, if they are not transcendental, must be inept. Do the people who call one of Browning’s poems scientific in its analysis realise the meaning of what they say? One is tempted to think that they know a scientific analysis when they see it as little as they know a good poem. The one supreme difference between the scientific method and the artistic method is, roughly speaking, simply this

— that a scientific statement means the same thing wherever and whenever it is uttered, and that an artistic statement means something entirely different, according to the relation in which it stands to its surroundings. The remark, let us say, that the whale is a mammal, or the remark that sixteen ounces go to a pound, is equally true, and means exactly the same thing, whether we state it at the beginning of a conversation or at the end, whether we print it in a dictionary or chalk it up on a wall. But if we take some phrase commonly used in the art of literature — such a sentence, for the sake of example, as "the dawn was breaking" — the matter is quite different. If the sentence came at the beginning of a short story, it might be a mere descriptive prelude. If it were the last sentence in a short story, it might be poignant with some peculiar irony or triumph. Can any one read Browning's great monologues and not feel that they are built up like a good short story, entirely on this principle of the value of language arising from its arrangement. Take such an example as "Caliban upon Setebos," a wonderful poem designed to describe the way in which a primitive nature may at once be afraid of its gods and yet familiar with them. Caliban in describing his deity starts with a more or less natural and obvious parallel between the deity and himself, carries out the comparison with consistency and an almost revolting simplicity, and ends in a kind of blasphemous extravaganza of anthropomorphism, basing his conduct not merely on the greatness and wisdom, but also on the manifest weaknesses and stupidities, of the Creator of all things. Then suddenly a thunderstorm breaks over Caliban's island, and the profane speculator falls flat upon his face —

"Lo! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos!
'Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip,
Will let those quails fly, will not eat this month
One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape!"

Surely it would be very difficult to persuade oneself that this thunderstorm would have meant exactly the same thing if it had occurred at the beginning of "Caliban upon Setebos." It does not mean the same thing, but something very different; and the deduction from this is the curious fact that Browning is an artist, and that consequently his processes of thought are not "scientific in their precision and analysis."

No criticism of Browning’s poems can be vital, none in the face of the poems themselves can be even intelligible, which is not based upon the fact that he was successfully or otherwise a conscious and deliberate artist. He may have failed as an artist, though I do not think so; that is quite a different matter. But it is one thing to say that a man through vanity or ignorance has built an ugly cathedral, and quite another to say that he built it in a fit of absence of mind, and did not know whether he was building a lighthouse or a first-class hotel. Browning knew perfectly well what he was doing; and if the reader does not like his art, at least the author did. The general sentiment expressed in the statement that he did not care about form is simply the most ridiculous criticism that could be conceived. It would be far nearer the truth to say that he cared more for form than any other English poet who ever lived. He was always weaving and modelling and inventing new forms. Among all his two hundred to three hundred poems it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that there are half as many different metres as there are different poems.

The great English poets who are supposed to have cared more for form than Browning did, cared less at least in this sense — that they were content to use old forms so long as they were certain that they had new ideas. Browning, on the other hand, no sooner had a new idea than he tried to make a new form to express it. Wordsworth and Shelley were really original poets; their attitude of thought and feeling marked without doubt certain great changes in literature and philosophy. Nevertheless, the “Ode on the Intimations of Immortality” is a perfectly normal and traditional ode, and “Prometheus Unbound” is a perfectly genuine and traditional Greek lyrical drama. But if we study Browning honestly, nothing will strike us more than that he really created a large number of quite novel and quite admirable artistic forms. It is too often forgotten what and how excellent these were. *The Ring and the Book*, for example, is an illuminating departure in literary method — the method of telling the same story several times and trusting to the variety of human character to turn it into several different and equally interesting stories. *Pippa Passes*, to take another example, is a new and most fruitful form, a series of detached dramas connected only by the presence of one fugitive and isolated figure. The invention of these things is not merely like the writing of a good poem — it is something like the invention of the sonnet or the Gothic arch. The poet who makes them does not merely create himself — he creates other poets. It is so in a degree long past enumeration with regard to Browning's smaller poems. Such a pious and horrible lyric as "The Heretic's Tragedy," for instance, is absolutely original, with its weird and almost blood-curdling echo verses, mocking echoes indeed —

"And dipt of his wings in Paris square,
They bring him now to lie burned alive.

[And wanteth there grace of lute or clavicithern, ye shall say to confirm him who singeth —
We bring John now to be burned alive."

A hundred instances might, of course, be given. Milton's "Sonnet on his Blindness," or Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," are both thoroughly original, but still we can point to other such sonnets and other such odes. But can any one mention any poem of exactly the same structural and literary type as "Fears and Scruples," as "The Householder," as "House" or "Shop," as "Nationality in Drinks," as "Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis," as "My Star," as "A Portrait," as any of "Ferishtah's Fancies," as any of the "Bad Dreams."

The thing which ought to be said about Browning by those who do not enjoy him is simply that they do not like his form; that they have studied the form, and think it a bad form. If more people said things of this sort, the world of criticism would gain almost unspeakably in clarity and common honesty. Browning put himself before the world as a good poet. Let those who think he failed call him a bad poet, and there will be an end of the matter. There are many styles in art which perfectly competent æsthetic judges cannot endure. For instance, it would be perfectly legitimate for a strict lover of Gothic to say that one of the monstrous rococo altar-pieces in the Belgian churches with bulbous clouds and oaken sun-rays seven feet long, was, in his opinion, ugly. But surely it would be perfectly ridiculous for any one to say that it had no form. A man's actual feelings about it might be better expressed by saying that it had too much. To say that Browning was merely a thinker because you think "Caliban upon Setebos" ugly, is precisely as absurd as it would be to call the author of the old Belgian altarpiece a man devoted only to the abstractions of religion. The truth about Browning is not that he was indifferent to technical beauty, but that he invented a particular kind of technical beauty to which any one else is free to be as indifferent as he chooses.

There is in this matter an extraordinary tendency to vague and unmeaning criticism. The usual way of criticising an author, particularly an author who has added something to the literary forms of the world, is to complain that his work does not contain something which is obviously the speciality of somebody else. The correct thing to say about Maeterlinck is that some play of his in which, let us say, a princess dies in a deserted tower by the sea, has a certain beauty, but that we look in vain in it for that robust geniality, that really boisterous will to live which may be found in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The right thing to say about *Cyrano de Bergerac* is that it may have a certain kind of wit and spirit, but that it really throws no light on the duty of middle-aged married couples in Norway. It cannot be too much insisted upon that at least three-quarters of the blame and criticism commonly directed against artists and authors falls under this general objection, and is essentially valueless. Authors both great and small are, like everything else in existence, upon the whole greatly under-rated. They are blamed for not doing, not only what they have failed to do to reach their own ideal, but what they have never tried to do to reach every other writer’s ideal. If we can show that Browning had a definite ideal of beauty and loyally pursued it, it is not necessary to prove that he could have written *In Memoriam* if he had tried.

Browning has suffered far more injustice from his admirers than from his opponents, for his admirers have for the most part got hold of the matter, so to speak, by the wrong end. They believe that what is ordinarily called the grotesque style of Browning was a kind of necessity boldly adopted by a great genius in order to express novel and profound ideas. But this is an entire mistake. What is called ugliness was to Browning not in the least a necessary evil, but a quite unnecessary luxury, which he enjoyed for its own sake. For reasons that we shall see presently in discussing the philosophical use of the grotesque, it did so happen that Browning’s grotesque style was very suitable for the expression of his peculiar moral and metaphysical view. But the whole mass of poems will be misunderstood if we do not realise first of all that he had a love of the grotesque of the nature of art for art’s sake. Here, for example, is a short distinct poem merely descriptive of one of those elfish German jugs in which it is to be presumed Tokay had been served to him. This is the whole poem, and a very good poem too —

“Up jumped Tokay on our table,
Like a pigmy castle-warder,
Dwarfish to see, but stout and able,
Arms and accoutrements all in order;
And fierce he looked North, then, wheeling South
Blew with his bugle a challenge to Drouth,
Cocked his flap-hat with the tosspot-feather,
Twisted his thumb in his red moustache,
Jingled his huge brass spurs together,
Tightened his waist with its Buda sash,
And then, with an impudence nought could abash,
Shrugged his hump-shoulder, to tell the beholder,
For twenty such knaves he would laugh but the bolder:
And so, with his sword-hilt gallantly jutting,
And dexter-hand on his haunch abutting,
Went the little man, Sir Ausbruch, strutting!”

I suppose there are Browning students in existence who would think that this poem contained something pregnant about the Temperance question, or was a marvellously subtle analysis of the romantic movement in Germany. But surely to most of us it is sufficiently apparent that Browning was simply fashioning a ridiculous knick-knack, exactly as if he were actually moulding one of these preposterous German jugs. Now before studying the real character of this Browningesque style, there is one general truth to be recognised about Browning’s work. It is this — that it is absolutely necessary to remember that Browning had, like every other poet, his simple and indisputable failures, and that it is one thing to speak of the badness of his artistic failures, and quite another thing to speak of the badness of his artistic aim. Browning’s style may be a good style, and yet exhibit many examples of a thoroughly bad use of it. On this point there is indeed a singularly unfair system of judgment used by the public towards the poets. It is very little realised that the vast majority of great poets have written an enormous amount of very bad poetry. The unfortunate Wordsworth is generally supposed to be almost alone in this; but any one who thinks so can scarcely have read a certain number of the minor poems of Byron and Shelley and Tennyson.

Now it is only just to Browning that his more uncouth effusions should not be treated as masterpieces by which he must stand or fall, but treated simply as his failures. It is really true that such a line as

“Irks fear the crop-full bird, frets doubt the maw-crammed beast?”

is a very ugly and a very bad line. But it is quite equally true that Tennyson’s

“And that good man, the clergyman, has told me words of peace,”

is a very ugly and a very bad line. But people do not say that this proves that Tennyson was a mere crabbed controversialist and metaphysician. They say that it is a bad example of Tennyson’s form; they do not say that it is a good example of Tennyson’s indifference to form. Upon the whole, Browning exhibits far fewer instances of this failure in his own style than any other of the great poets, with the exception of one or two like Spenser and Keats, who seem to have a mysterious incapacity for writing bad poetry. But almost all original poets, particularly poets who have invented an artistic style, are subject to one most disastrous habit — the habit of writing imitations of themselves. Every now and then in the works of the noblest classical poets you will come upon passages which read like extracts from an American book of parodies. Swinburne, for example, when he wrote the couplet —

“From the lilies and languors of virtue
To the raptures and roses of vice,”

wrote what is nothing but a bad imitation of himself, an imitation which seems indeed to have the wholly unjust and uncritical object of proving that the Swinburnian melody is a mechanical scheme of initial letters. Or again, Mr. Rudyard Kipling when he wrote the line —

“Or ride with the reckless seraphim on the rim of a red-maned star,”

was caricaturing himself in the harshest and least sympathetic spirit of American humour. This tendency is, of course, the result of the self-consciousness and theatricality of modern life in which each of us is forced to conceive ourselves as part of a *dramatis personæ* and act perpetually in character. Browning sometimes yielded to this temptation to be a great deal too like himself.

“Will I widen thee out till thou turnest
From Margaret Minnikin mou’ by God’s grace,
To Muckle-mouth Meg in good earnest.”

This sort of thing is not to be defended in Browning any more than in Swinburne. But, on the other hand, it is not to be attributed in Swinburne to a momentary exaggeration, and in Browning to a vital æsthetic deficiency.

In the case of Swinburne, we all feel that the question is not whether that particular preposterous couplet about lilies and roses redounds to the credit of the Swinburnian style, but whether it would be possible in any other style than the Swinburnian to have written the Hymn to Proserpine. In the same way, the essential issue about Browning as an artist is not whether he, in common with Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley, Tennyson, and Swinburne, sometimes wrote bad poetry, but whether in any other style except Browning's you could have achieved the precise artistic effect which is achieved by such incomparable lyrics as "The Patriot" or "The Laboratory." The answer must be in the negative, and in that answer lies the whole justification of Browning as an artist.

The question now arises, therefore, what was his conception of his functions as an artist? We have already agreed that his artistic originality concerned itself chiefly with the serious use of the grotesque. It becomes necessary, therefore, to ask what is the serious use of the grotesque, and what relation does the grotesque bear to the eternal and fundamental elements in life?

One of the most curious things to notice about popular æsthetic criticism is the number of phrases it will be found to use which are intended to express an æsthetic failure, and which express merely an æsthetic variety. Thus, for instance, the traveller will often hear the advice from local lovers of the picturesque, "The scenery round such and such a place has no interest; it is quite flat." To disparage scenery as quite flat is, of course, like disparaging a swan as quite white, or an Italian sky as quite blue. Flatness is a sublime quality in certain landscapes, just as rockiness is a sublime quality in others. In the same way there are a great number of phrases commonly used in order to disparage such writers as Browning which do not in fact disparage, but merely describe them. One of the most distinguished of Browning's biographers and critics says of him, for example, "He has never meant to be rugged, but has become so in striving after strength." To say that Browning never tried to be rugged is to say that Edgar Allan Poe never tried to be gloomy, or that Mr. W.S. Gilbert never tried to be extravagant. The whole issue depends upon whether we realise the simple and essential fact that ruggedness is a mode of art like gloominess or extravagance. Some poems ought to be rugged, just as some poems ought to be smooth. When we see a drift of stormy and fantastic clouds at sunset, we do not say that the cloud is beautiful although it is ragged at the edges. When we see a gnarled and sprawling oak, we do not say that it is fine although it is twisted. When we see a mountain, we do not say that it is impressive although it is rugged, nor do we say apologetically that it never meant to be rugged, but became so in its striving after strength. Now, to say that Browning's poems, artistically considered, are fine although they are rugged, is quite as absurd as to say that a rock, artistically considered, is fine although it is rugged. Ruggedness being an essential quality in the universe, there is that in man which responds to it as to the striking of any other chord of the eternal harmonies. As the children of nature, we are akin not only to the stars and flowers, but also to the toad-stools and the monstrous tropical birds. And it is to be repeated as the essential of the question that on this side of our nature we do emphatically love the form of the toad-stools, and not merely some complicated botanical and moral lessons which the philosopher may draw from them. For example, just as there is such a thing as a poetical metre being beautifully light or beautifully grave and haunting, so there is such a thing as a poetical metre being beautifully rugged. In the old ballads, for instance, every person of literary taste will be struck by a certain attractiveness in the bold, varying, irregular verse —

"He is either himsell a devil frae hell,
Or else his mother a witch maun be;
I wadna have ridden that wan water
For a' the gowd in Christentie,"

is quite as pleasing to the ear in its own way as

"There's a bower of roses by Bendemeer stream,
And the nightingale sings in it all the night long,"

is in another way. Browning had an unrivalled ear for this particular kind of staccato music. The absurd notion that he had no sense of melody in verse is only possible to people who think that there is no melody in verse which is not an imitation of Swinburne. To give a satisfactory idea of Browning's rhythmic originality would be impossible without quotations more copious than entertaining. But the essential point has been suggested.

"They were purple of raiment and golden,
Filled full of thee, fiery with wine,
Thy lovers in haunts unbeholden,
In marvellous chambers of thine,"

is beautiful language, but not the only sort of beautiful language. This, for instance, has also a tune in it —

“I— ‘next poet.’ No, my hearties,
I nor am, nor fain would be!
Choose your chiefs and pick your parties,
Not one soul revolt to me!

Which of you did I enable
Once to slip inside my breast,
There to catalogue and label
What I like least, what love best,
Hope and fear, believe and doubt of,
Seek and shun, respect, deride,
Who has right to make a rout of
Rarities he found inside?”

This quick, gallantly stepping measure also has its own kind of music, and the man who cannot feel it can never have enjoyed the sound of soldiers marching by. This, then, roughly is the main fact to remember about Browning’s poetical method, or about any one’s poetical method — that the question is not whether that method is the best in the world, but the question whether there are not certain things which can only be conveyed by that method. It is perfectly true, for instance, that a really lofty and lucid line of Tennyson, such as —

“Thou art the highest, and most human too”

and

“We needs must love the highest when we see it”

would really be made the worse for being translated into Browning. It would probably become

“High’s human; man loves best, best visible,”

and would lose its peculiar clarity and dignity and courtly plainness. But it is quite equally true that any really characteristic fragment of Browning, if it were only the tempestuous scolding of the organist in “Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha” —

“Hallo, you sacristan, show us a light there!
Down it dips, gone like a rocket.
What, you want, do you, to come unawares,
>Sweeping the church up for first morning-prayers,

And find a poor devil has ended his cares
At the foot of your rotten-runged rat-riddled stairs?
Do I carry the moon in my pocket?"

— it is quite equally true that this outrageous gallop of rhymes ending with a frantic astronomical image would lose in energy and spirit if it were written in a conventional and classical style, and ran —

"What must I deem then that thou dreamest to find
Disjected bones adrift upon the stair
Thou sweepest clean, or that thou deemest that I
Pouch in my wallet the vice-regal sun?"

Is it not obvious that this statelier version might be excellent poetry of its kind, and yet would be bad exactly in so far as it was good; that it would lose all the swing, the rush, the energy of the preposterous and grotesque original? In fact, we may see how unmanageable is this classical treatment of the essentially absurd in Tennyson himself. The humorous passages in *The Princess*, though often really humorous in themselves, always appear forced and feeble because they have to be restrained by a certain metrical dignity, and the mere idea of such restraint is incompatible with humour. If Browning had written the passage which opens *The Princess*, descriptive of the "larking" of the villagers in the magnate's park, he would have spared us nothing; he would not have spared us the shrill uneducated voices and the unburied bottles of ginger beer. He would have crammed the poem with uncouth similes; he would have changed the metre a hundred times; he would have broken into doggerel and into rhapsody; but he would have left, when all is said and done, as he leaves in that paltry fragment of the grumbling organist, the impression of a certain eternal human energy. Energy and joy, the father and the mother of the grotesque, would have ruled the poem. We should have felt of that rowdy gathering little but the sensation of which Mr. Henley writes —

"Praise the generous gods for giving,
In this world of sin and strife,
With some little time for living,
Unto each the joy of life,"

the thought that every wise man has when looking at a Bank Holiday crowd at Margate.

To ask why Browning enjoyed this perverse and fantastic style most would be to go very deep into his spirit indeed, probably a great deal deeper than it is possible to go. But it is worth while to suggest tentatively the general function of the grotesque in art generally and in his art in particular. There is one very curious idea into which we have been hypnotised by the more eloquent poets, and that is that nature in the sense of what is ordinarily called the country is a thing entirely stately and beautiful as those terms are commonly understood. The whole world of the fantastic, all things top-heavy, lop-sided, and nonsensical are conceived as the work of man, gargoyles, German jugs, Chinese pots, political caricatures, burlesque epics, the pictures of Mr. Aubrey Beardsley and the puns of Robert Browning. But in truth a part, and a very large part, of the sanity and power of nature lies in the fact that out of her comes all this instinct of caricature. Nature may present itself to the poet too often as consisting of stars and lilies; but these are not poets who live in the country; they are men who go to the country for inspiration and could no more live in the country than they could go to bed in Westminster Abbey. Men who live in the heart of nature, farmers and peasants, know that nature means cows and pigs, and creatures more humorous than can be found in a whole sketch-book of Callot. And the element of the grotesque in art, like the element of the grotesque in nature, means, in the main, energy, the energy which takes its own forms and goes its own way. Browning's verse, in so far as it is grotesque, is not complex or artificial; it is natural and in the legitimate tradition of nature. The verse sprawls like the trees, dances like the dust; it is ragged like the thunder-cloud, it is top-heavy like the toadstool. Energy which disregards the standard of classical art is in nature as it is in Browning. The same sense of the uproarious force in things which makes Browning dwell on the oddity of a fungus or a jellyfish makes him dwell on the oddity of a philosophical idea. Here, for example, we have a random instance from "The Englishman in Italy" of the way in which Browning, when he was most Browning, regarded physical nature.

"And pitch down his basket before us,
All trembling alive
With pink and grey jellies, your sea-fruit;
You touch the strange lumps,
And mouths gape there, eyes open, all manner
Of horns and of humps,
Which only the fisher looks grave at."

Nature might mean flowers to Wordsworth and grass to Walt Whitman, but to Browning it really meant such things as these, the monstrosities and living mysteries of the sea. And just as these strange things meant to Browning energy in the physical world, so strange thoughts and strange images meant to him energy in the mental world. When, in one of his later poems, the professional mystic is seeking in a supreme moment of sincerity to explain that small things may be filled with God as well as great, he uses the very same kind of image, the image of a shapeless sea-beast, to embody that noble conception.

“The Name comes close behind a stomach-cyst,
The simplest of creations, just a sac
That’s mouth, heart, legs, and belly at once, yet lives
And feels, and could do neither, we conclude,
If simplified still further one degree.”

(SLUDGE.)

These bulbous, indescribable sea-goblins are the first thing on which the eye of the poet lights in looking on a landscape, and the last in the significance of which he trusts in demonstrating the mercy of the Everlasting.

There is another and but slightly different use of the grotesque, but which is definitely valuable in Browning’s poetry, and indeed in all poetry. To present a matter in a grotesque manner does certainly tend to touch the nerve of surprise and thus to draw attention to the intrinsically miraculous character of the object itself. It is difficult to give examples of the proper use of grotesqueness without becoming too grotesque. But we should all agree that if St. Paul’s Cathedral were suddenly presented to us upside down we should, for the moment, be more surprised at it, and look at it more than we have done all the centuries during which it has rested on its foundations. Now it is the supreme function of the philosopher of the grotesque to make the world stand on its head that people may look at it. If we say “a man is a man” we awaken no sense of the fantastic, however much we ought to, but if we say, in the language of the old satirist, “that man is a two-legged bird, without feathers,” the phrase does, for a moment, make us look at man from the outside and gives us a thrill in his presence. When the author of the Book of Job insists upon the huge, half-witted, apparently unmeaning magnificence and might of Behemoth, the hippopotamus, he is appealing precisely to this sense of wonder provoked by the grotesque. “Canst thou play with him as with a bird, canst thou bind him for thy maidens?” he says in an admirable passage. The notion of the hippopotamus as a household pet is curiously in the spirit of the humour of Browning.

But when it is clearly understood that Browning’s love of the fantastic in style was a perfectly serious artistic love, when we understand that he enjoyed working in that style, as a Chinese potter might enjoy making dragons, or a mediæval mason making devils, there yet remains something definite which must be laid to his account as a fault. He certainly had a capacity for becoming perfectly childish in his indulgence in ingenuities that have nothing to do with poetry at all, such as puns, and rhymes, and grammatical structures that only just fit into each other like a Chinese puzzle. Probably it was only one of the marks of his singular vitality, curiosity, and interest in details. He was certainly one of those somewhat rare men who are fierily ambitious both in large things and in small. He prided himself on having written *The Ring and the Book*, and he also prided himself on knowing good wine when he tasted it. He prided himself on re-establishing optimism on a new foundation, and it is to be presumed, though it is somewhat difficult to imagine, that he prided himself on such rhymes as the following in *Pacchiarotto*: —

“The wolf, fox, bear, and monkey,
By piping advice in one key —
That his pipe should play a prelude
To something heaven-tinged not hell-hued,
Something not harsh but docile,
Man-liquid, not man-fossil.”

This writing, considered as writing, can only be regarded as a kind of joke, and most probably Browning considered it so himself. It has nothing at all to do with that powerful and symbolic use of the grotesque which may be found in such admirable passages as this from “Holy Cross Day”: —

“Give your first groan — compunction’s at work;
And soft! from a Jew you mount to a Turk.
Lo, Micah — the self-same beard on chin
He was four times already converted in!”

This is the serious use of the grotesque. Through it passion and philosophy are as well expressed as through any other medium. But the rhyming frenzy of Browning has no particular relation even to the poems in which it occurs. It is not a dance to any measure; it can only be called the horse-play of literature. It may be noted, for example, as a rather curious fact, that the ingenious rhymes are generally only mathematical triumphs, not triumphs of any kind of assonance. “The Pied Piper of Hamelin,” a poem written for children, and bound in general to be lucid and readable, ends with a rhyme which it is physically impossible for any one to say: —

“And, whether they pipe us free, fróm rats or fróm mice,
If we’ve promised them aught, let us keep our promise!”

This queer trait in Browning, his inability to keep a kind of demented ingenuity even out of poems in which it was quite inappropriate, is a thing which must be recognised, and recognised all the more because as a whole he was a very perfect artist, and a particularly perfect artist in the use of the grotesque. But everywhere when we go a little below the surface in Browning we find that there was something in him perverse and unusual despite all his working normality and simplicity. His mind was perfectly wholesome, but it was not made exactly like the ordinary mind. It was like a piece of strong wood with a knot in it.

The quality of what, can only be called buffoonery which is under discussion is indeed one of the many things in which Browning was more of an Elizabethan than a Victorian. He was like the Elizabethans in their belief in the normal man, in their gorgeous and over-loaded language, above all in their feeling for learning as an enjoyment and almost a frivolity. But there was nothing in which he was so thoroughly Elizabethan, and even Shakespearian, as in this fact, that when he felt inclined to write a page of quite uninteresting nonsense, he immediately did so. Many great writers have contrived to be tedious, and apparently aimless, while expounding some thought which they believed to be grave and profitable; but this frivolous stupidity had not been found in any great writer since the time of Kabelais and the time of the Elizabethans. In many of the comic scenes of Shakespeare we have precisely this elephantine ingenuity, this hunting of a pun to death through three pages. In the Elizabethan dramatists and in Browning it is no doubt to a certain extent the mark of a real hilarity. People must be very happy to be so easily amused.

In the case of what is called Browning’s obscurity, the question is somewhat more difficult to handle. Many people have supposed Browning to be profound because he was obscure, and many other people, hardly less mistaken, have supposed him to be obscure because he was profound. He was frequently profound, he was occasionally obscure, but as a matter of fact the two have little or nothing to do with each other. Browning's dark and elliptical mode of speech, like his love of the grotesque, was simply a characteristic of his, a trick of is temperament, and had little or nothing to do with whether what he was expressing was profound or superficial. Suppose, for example, that a person well read in English poetry but unacquainted with Browning's style were earnestly invited to consider the following verse: —

"Hobbs hints blue — straight he turtle eats.
Nobbs prints blue — claret crowns his cup. Nokes outdares Stokes in azure feats —
Both gorge. Who fished the murex up? What porridge had John Keats?"

The individual so confronted would say without hesitation that it must indeed be an abstruse and indescribable thought which could only be conveyed by remarks so completely disconnected. But the point of the matter is that the thought contained in this amazing verse is not abstruse or philosophical at all, but is a perfectly ordinary and straightforward comment, which any one might have made upon an obvious fact of life. The whole verse of course begins to explain itself, if we know the meaning of the word "murex," which is the name of a sea-shell, out of which was made the celebrated blue dye of Tyre. The poet takes this blue dye as a simile for a new fashion in literature, and points out that Hobbs, Nobbs, etc., obtain fame and comfort by merely using the dye from the shell; and adds the perfectly natural comment: —

"... Who fished the murex up?
What porridge had John Keats?"

So that the verse is not subtle, and was not meant to be subtle, but is a perfectly casual piece of sentiment at the end of a light poem. Browning is not obscure because he has such deep things to say, any more than he is grotesque because he has such new things to say. He is both of these things primarily, because he likes to express himself in a particular manner. The manner is as natural to him as a man's physical voice, and it is abrupt, sketchy, allusive, and full of gaps. Here comes in the fundamental difference between Browning and such a writer as George Meredith, with whom the Philistine satirist would so often in the matter of complexity class him. The works of George Meredith are, as it were, obscure even when we know what they mean. They deal with nameless emotions, fugitive sensations, subconscious certainties and uncertainties, and it really requires a somewhat curious and unfamiliar mode of speech to indicate the presence of these. But the great part of Browning's actual sentiments, and almost all the finest and most literary of them, are perfectly plain and popular and eternal sentiments. Meredith is really a singer producing strange notes and cadences difficult to follow because of the delicate rhythm of the song he sings. Browning is simply a great demagogue, with an impediment in his speech. Or rather, to speak more strictly, Browning is a man whose excitement for the glory of the obvious is so great that his speech becomes disjointed and precipitate: he becomes eccentric through his advocacy of the ordinary, and goes mad for the love of sanity.

If Browning and George Meredith were each describing the same act, they might both be obscure, but their obscurities would be entirely different. Suppose, for instance, they were describing even so prosaic and material an act as a man being knocked downstairs by another man to whom he had given the lie, Meredith's description would refer to something which an ordinary observer would not see, or at least could not describe. It might be a sudden sense of anarchy in the brain of the assaulter, or a stupefaction and stunned serenity in that of the object of the assault. He might write, "Wainwood's 'Men vary in veracity,' brought the baronet's arm up. He felt the doors of his brain burst, and Wainwood a swift rushing of himself through air accompanied with a clarity as of the annihilated." Meredith, in other words, would speak queerly because he was describing queer mental experiences. But Browning might simply be describing the material incident of the man being knocked downstairs, and his description would run: —

"What then? 'You lie' and doormat below stairs
Takes bump from back."

This is not subtlety, but merely a kind of insane swiftness. Browning is not like Meredith, anxious to pause and examine the sensations of the combatants, nor does he become obscure through this anxiety. He is only so anxious to get his man to the bottom of the stairs quickly that he leaves out about half the story.

Many who could understand that ruggedness might be an artistic quality, would decisively, and in most cases rightly, deny that obscurity could under any conceivable circumstances be an artistic quality. But here again Browning's work requires a somewhat more cautious and sympathetic analysis. There is a certain kind of fascination, a strictly artistic fascination, which arises from a matter being hinted at in such a way as to leave a certain tormenting uncertainty even at the end. It is well sometimes to half understand a poem in the same manner that we half understand the world. One of the deepest and strangest of all human moods is the mood which will suddenly strike us perhaps in a garden at night, or deep in sloping meadows, the feeling that every flower and leaf has just uttered something stupendously direct and important, and that we have by a prodigy of imbecility not heard or understood it. There is a certain poetic value, and that a genuine one, in this sense of having missed the full meaning of things. There is beauty, not only in wisdom, but in this dazed and dramatic ignorance.

But in truth it is very difficult to keep pace with all the strange and unclassified artistic merits of Browning. He was always trying experiments; sometimes he failed, producing clumsy and irritating metres, top-heavy and over-concentrated thought. Far more often he triumphed, producing a crowd of boldly designed poems, every one of which taken separately might have founded an artistic school. But whether successful or unsuccessful, he never ceased from his fierce hunt after poetic novelty. He never became a conservative. The last book he published in his life-time, *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day*, was a new poem, and more revolutionary than *Paracelsus*. This is the true light in which to regard Browning as an artist. He had determined to leave no spot of the cosmos unadorned by his poetry which he could find it possible to adorn. An admirable example can be found in that splendid poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came." It is the hint of an entirely new and curious type of poetry, the poetry of the shabby and hungry aspect of the earth itself. Daring poets who wished to escape from conventional gardens and orchards had long been in the habit of celebrating the poetry of rugged and gloomy landscapes, but Browning is not content with this. He insists upon celebrating the poetry of mean landscapes. That sense of scrubbiness in nature, as of a man unshaved, had never been conveyed with this enthusiasm and primeval gusto before.

"If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk

All hope of greenness? ’tis a brute must walk
Pashing their life out, with a brute’s intents.”

This is a perfect realisation of that eerie sentiment which comes upon us, not so often among mountains and water-falls, as it does on some half-starved common at twilight, or in walking down some grey mean street. It is the song of the beauty of refuse; and Browning was the first to sing it. Oddly enough it has been one of the poems about which most of those pedantic and trivial questions have been asked, which are asked invariably by those who treat Browning as a science instead of a poet, “What does the poem of ‘Childe Roland’ mean?” The only genuine answer to this is, “What does anything mean?” Does the earth mean nothing? Do grey skies and wastes covered with thistles mean nothing? Does an old horse turned out to graze mean nothing? If it does, there is but one further truth to be added — that everything means nothing.

CHAPTER VII

THE RING AND THE BOOK

When we have once realised the great conception of the plan of *The Ring and the Book*, the studying of a single matter from nine different stand-points, it becomes exceedingly interesting to notice what these stand-points are; what figures Browning has selected as voicing the essential and distinct versions of the case. One of the ablest and most sympathetic of all the critics of Browning, Mr. Augustine Birrell, has said in one place that the speeches of the two advocates in *The Ring and the Book* will scarcely be very interesting to the ordinary reader. However that may be, there can be little doubt that a great number of the readers of Browning think them beside the mark and adventitious. But it is exceedingly dangerous to say that anything in Browning is irrelevant or unnecessary. We are apt to go on thinking so until some mere trifle puts the matter in a new light, and the detail that seemed meaningless springs up as almost the central pillar of the structure. In the successive monologues of his poem, Browning is endeavouring to depict the various strange ways in which a fact gets itself presented to the world. In every question there are partisans who bring cogent and convincing arguments for the right side; there are also partisans who bring cogent and convincing arguments for the wrong side. But over and above these, there does exist in every great controversy a class of more or less official partisans who are continually engaged in defending each cause by entirely inappropriate arguments. They do not know the real good that can be said for the good cause, nor the real good that can be said for the bad one. They are represented by the animated, learned, eloquent, ingenious, and entirely futile and impertinent arguments of Juris Doctor Bottinius and Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis. These two men brilliantly misrepresent, not merely each other's cause, but their own cause. The introduction of them is one of the finest and most artistic strokes in *The Ring and the Book.*

We can see the matter best by taking an imaginary parallel. Suppose that a poet of the type of Browning lived some centuries hence and found in some *cause célèbre* of our day, such as the Parnell Commission, an opportunity for a work similar in its design to *The Ring and the Book*. The first monologue, which would be called “Half-London,” would be the arguments of an ordinary educated and sensible Unionist who believed that there really was evidence that the Nationalist movement in Ireland was rooted in crime and public panic. The “Otherhalf-London” would be the utterance of an ordinary educated and sensible Home Ruler, who thought that in the main Nationalism was one distinct symptom, and crime another, of the same poisonous and stagnant problem. The “Tertium Quid” would be some detached intellectual, committed neither to Nationalism nor to Unionism, possibly Mr. Bernard Shaw, who would make a very entertaining Browning monologue. Then of course would come the speeches of the great actors in the drama, the icy anger of Parnell, the shuffling apologies of Pigott. But we should feel that the record was incomplete without another touch which in practice has so much to do with the confusion of such a question. Bottinius and Hyacinthus de Archangelis, the two cynical professional pleaders, with their transparent assumptions and incredible theories of the case, would be represented by two party journalists; one of whom was ready to base his case either on the fact that Parnell was a Socialist or an Anarchist, or an Atheist or a Roman Catholic; and the other of whom was ready to base his case on the theory that Lord Salisbury hated Parnell or was in league with him, or had never heard of him, or anything else that was remote from the world of reality. These are the kind of little touches for which we must always be on the look-out in Browning. Even if a digression, or a simile, or a whole scene in a play, seems to have no point or value, let us wait a little and give it a chance. He very seldom wrote anything that did not mean a great deal.

It is sometimes curious to notice how a critic, possessing no little cultivation and fertility, will, in speaking of a work of art, let fall almost accidentally some apparently trivial comment, which reveals to us with an instantaneous and complete mental illumination the fact that he does not, so far as that work of art is concerned, in the smallest degree understand what he is talking about. He may have intended to correct merely some minute detail of the work he is studying, but that single movement is enough to blow him and all his diplomas into the air. These are the sensations with which the true Browningite will regard the criticism made by so many of Browning’s critics and biographers about *The Ring and the Book*. That criticism was embodied by one of them in the words “the theme looked at dispassionately is unworthy of the monument in which it is entombed for eternity.” Now this remark shows at once that the critic does not know what *The Ring and the Book* means. We feel about it as we should feel about a man who said that the plot of *Tristram Shandy* was not well constructed, or that the women in Rossetti’s pictures did not look useful and industrious. A man who has missed the fact that *Tristram Shandy is* a game of digressions, that the whole book is a kind of practical joke to cheat the reader out of a story, simply has not read *Tristram Shandy* at all. The man who objects to the Rossetti pictures because they depict a sad and sensuous day-dream, objects to their existing at all. And any one who objects to Browning writing his huge epic round a trumpery and sordid police-case has in reality missed the whole length and breadth of the poet’s meaning. The essence of *The Ring and the Book* is that it is the great epic of the nineteenth century, because it is the great epic of the enormous importance of small things. The supreme difference that divides *The Ring and the Book* from all the great poems of similar length and largeness of design is precisely the fact that all these are about affairs commonly called important, and *The Ring and the Book* is about an affair commonly called contemptible. Homer says, “I will show you the relations between man and heaven as exhibited in a great legend of love and war, which shall contain the mightiest of all mortal warriors, and the most beautiful of all mortal women.” The author of the Book of Job says, “I will show you the relations between man and heaven by a tale of primeval sorrows and the voice of God out of a whirlwind.” Virgil says, “I will show you the relations of man to heaven by the tale of the origin of the greatest people and the founding of the most wonderful city in the world.” Dante says, “I will show you the relations of man to heaven by uncovering the very machinery of the spiritual universe, and letting you hear, as I have heard, the roaring of the mills of God.” Milton says, “I will show you the relations of man to heaven by telling you of the very beginning of all things, and the first shaping of the thing that is evil in the first twilight of time.” Browning says, “I will show you the relations of man to heaven by telling you a story out of a dirty Italian book of criminal trials from which I select one of the meanest and most completely forgotten.” Until we have realised this fundamental idea in *The Ring and the Book* all criticism is misleading.

In this Browning is, of course, the supreme embodiment of his time. The characteristic of the modern movements *par excellence* is the apotheosis of the insignificant. Whether it be the school of poetry which sees more in one cowslip or clover-top than in forests and waterfalls, or the school of fiction which finds something indescribably significant in the pattern of a hearth-rug, or the tint of a man's tweed coat, the tendency is the same. Maeterlinck stricken still and wondering by a deal door half open, or the light shining out of a window at night; Zola filling note-books with the medical significance of the twitching of a man's toes, or the loss of his appetite; Whitman counting the grass and the heart-shaped leaves of the lilac; Mr. George Gissing lingering fondly over the third-class ticket and the dilapidated umbrella; George Meredith seeing a soul's tragedy in a phrase at the dinner-table; Mr. Bernard Shaw filling three pages with stage directions to describe a parlour; all these men, different in every other particular, are alike in this, that they have ceased to believe certain things to be important and the rest to be unimportant. Significance is to them a wild thing that may leap upon them from any hiding-place. They have all become terribly impressed with and a little bit alarmed at the mysterious powers of small things. Their difference from the old epic poets is the whole difference between an age that fought with dragons and an age that fights with microbes.

This tide of the importance of small things is flowing so steadily around us upon every side to-day, that we do not sufficiently realise that if there was one man in English literary history who might with justice be called its fountain and origin, that man was Robert Browning. When Browning arose, literature was entirely in the hands of the Tennysonian poet. The Tennysonian poet does indeed mention trivialities, but he mentions them when he wishes to speak trivially; Browning mentions trivialities when he wishes to speak sensationally. Now this sense of the terrible importance of detail was a sense which may be said to have possessed Browning in the emphatic manner of a demoniac possession. Sane as he was, this one feeling might have driven him to a condition not far from madness. Any room that he was sitting in glared at him with innumerable eyes and mouths gaping with a story. There was sometimes no background and no middle distance in his mind. A human face and the pattern on the wall behind it came forward with equally aggressive clearness. It may be repeated, that if ever he who had the strongest head in the world had gone mad, it would have been through this turbulent democracy of things. If he looked at a porcelain vase or an old hat, a cabbage, or a puppy at play, each began to be bewitched with the spell of a kind of fairyland of philosophers: the vase, like the jar in the *Arabian Nights*, to send up a smoke of thoughts and shapes; the hat to produce souls, as a conjuror's hat produces rabbits; the cabbage to swell and overshadow the earth, like the Tree of Knowledge; and the puppy to go off at a scamper along the road to the end of the world. Any one who has read Browning's longer poems knows how constantly a simile or figure of speech is selected, not among the large, well-recognised figures common in poetry, but from some dusty corner of experience, and how often it is characterised by smallness and a certain quaint exactitude which could not have been found in any more usual example. Thus, for instance, *Prince Hohenstiel — Schwangau* explains the psychological meaning of all his restless and unscrupulous activities by comparing them to the impulse which has just led him, even in the act of talking, to draw a black line on the blotting-paper exactly, so as to connect two separate blots that were already there. This queer example is selected as the best possible instance of a certain fundamental restlessness and desire to add a touch to things in the spirit of man. I have no doubt whatever that Browning thought of the idea after doing the thing himself, and sat in a philosophical trance staring at a piece of inked blotting-paper, conscious that at that moment, and in that insignificant act, some immemorial monster of the mind, nameless from the beginning of the world, had risen to the surface of the spiritual sea.

It is therefore the very essence of Browning's genius, and the very essence of *The Ring and the Book*, that it should be the enormous multiplication of a small theme. It is the extreme of idle criticism to complain that the story is a current and sordid story, for the whole object of the poem is to show what infinities of spiritual good and evil a current and sordid story may contain. When once this is realised, it explains at one stroke the innumerable facts about the work. It explains, for example, Browning's detailed and picturesque account of the glorious dust-bin of odds and ends for sale, out of which he picked the printed record of the trial, and his insistence on its cheapness, its dustiness, its yellow leaves, and its crabbed Latin. The more soiled and dark and insignificant he can make the text appear, the better for his ample and gigantic sermon. It explains again the strictness with which Browning adhered to the facts of the forgotten intrigue. He was playing the game of seeing how much was really involved in one paltry fragment of fact. To have introduced large quantities of fiction would not have been sportsmanlike. *The Ring and the Book* therefore, to re-capitulate the view arrived at so far, is the typical epic of our age, because it expresses the richness of life by taking as a text a poor story. It pays to existence the highest of all possible compliments — the great compliment which monarchy paid to mankind — the compliment of selecting from it almost at random.

But this is only the first half of the claim of *The Ring and the Book* to be the typical epic of modern times. The second half of that claim, the second respect in which the work is representative of all modern development, requires somewhat more careful statement. *The Ring and the Book* is of course, essentially speaking, a detective story. Its difference from the ordinary detective story is that it seeks to establish, not the centre of criminal guilt, but the centre of spiritual guilt. But it has exactly the same kind of exciting quality that a detective story has, and a very excellent quality it is. But the element which is important, and which now requires pointing out, is the method by which that centre of spiritual guilt and the corresponding centre of spiritual rectitude is discovered. In order to make clear the peculiar character of this method, it is necessary to begin rather nearer the beginning, and to go back some little way in literary history.

I do not know whether anybody, including the editor himself, has ever noticed a peculiar coincidence which may be found in the arrangement of the lyrics in Sir Francis Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*. However that may be, two poems, each of them extremely well known, are placed side by side, and their juxtaposition represents one vast revolution in the poetical manner of looking at things. The first is Goldsmith's almost too well known

"When lovely woman stoops to folly,
And finds too late that men betray,
What charm can soothe her melancholy?
What art can wash her guilt away?"

Immediately afterwards comes, with a sudden and thrilling change of note, the voice of Burns: —

"Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon,
How can ye bloom sae fair? How can ye chant, ye little birds,
And I sae fu' of care?
Thou'll break my heart, thou bonny bird,
That sings upon the bough, Thou minds me of the happy days
When my fause Love was true."

A man might read those two poems a great many times without happening to realise that they are two poems on exactly the same subject — the subject of a trusting woman deserted by a man. And the whole difference — the difference struck by the very first note of the voice of any one who reads them — is this fundamental difference, that Goldsmith’s words are spoken about a certain situation, and Burns’s words are spoken in that situation.

In the transition from one of these lyrics to the other, we have a vital change in the conception of the functions of the poet; a change of which Burns was in many ways the beginning, of which Browning, in a manner that we shall see presently, was the culmination.

Goldsmith writes fully and accurately in the tradition of the old historic idea of what a poet was. The poet, the *vates*, was the supreme and absolute critic of human existence, the chorus in the human drama; he was, to employ two words, which when analysed are the same word, either a spectator or a seer. He took a situation, such as the situation of a woman deserted by a man before-mentioned, and he gave, as Goldsmith gives, his own personal and definite decision upon it, entirely based upon general principles, and entirely from the outside. Then, as in the case of *The Golden Treasury*, he has no sooner given judgment than there comes a bitter and confounding cry out of the very heart of the situation itself, which tells us things which would have been quite left out of account by the poet of the general rule. No one, for example, but a person who knew something of the inside of agony would have introduced that touch of the rage of the mourner against the chattering frivolity of nature, “Thou’ll break my heart, thou bonny bird.” We find and could find no such touch in Goldsmith. We have to arrive at the conclusion therefore, that the *vates* or poet in his absolute capacity is defied and overthrown by this new method of what may be called the songs of experience.

Now Browning, as he appears in *The Ring and the Book*, represents the attempt to discover, not the truth in the sense that Goldsmith states it, but the larger truth which is made up of all the emotional experiences, such as that rendered by Burns. Browning, like Goldsmith, seeks ultimately to be just and impartial, but he does it by endeavouring to feel acutely every kind of partiality. Goldsmith stands apart from all the passions of the case, and Browning includes them all. If Browning were endeavouring to do strict justice in a case like that of the deserted lady by the banks of Doon, he would not touch or modify in the smallest particular the song as Burns sang it, but he would write other songs, perhaps equally pathetic. A lyric or a soliloquy would convince us suddenly by the mere pulse of its language, that there was some pathos in the other actors in the drama; some pathos, for example, in a weak man, conscious that in a passionate ignorance of life he had thrown away his power of love, lacking the moral courage to throw his prospects after it. We should be reminded again that there was some pathos in the position, let us say, of the seducer's mother, who had built all her hopes upon developments which a mésalliance would overthrow, or in the position of some rival lover, stricken to the ground with the tragedy in which he had not even the miserable comfort of a *locus standi*. All these characters in the story, Browning would realise from their own emotional point of view before he gave judgment. The poet in his ancient office held a kind of terrestrial day of judgment, and gave men halters and haloes; Browning gives men neither halter nor halo, he gives them voices. This is indeed the most bountiful of all the functions of the poet, that he gives men words, for which men from the beginning of the world have starved more than for bread.

Here then we have the second great respect in which *The Ring and the Book* is the great epic of the age. It is the great epic of the age, because it is the expression of the belief, it might almost be said, of the discovery, that no man ever lived upon this earth without possessing a point of view. No one ever lived who had not a little more to say for himself than any formal system of justice was likely to say for him. It is scarcely necessary to point out how entirely the application of this principle would revolutionise the old heroic epic, in which the poet decided absolutely the moral relations and moral value of the characters. Suppose, for example, that Homer had written the *Odyssey* on the principle of *The Ring and the Book*, how disturbing, how weird an experience it would be to read the story from the point of view of Antinous! Without contradicting a single material fact, without telling a single deliberate lie, the narrative would so change the whole world around us, that we should scarcely know we were dealing with the same place and people. The calm face of Penelope would, it may be, begin to grow meaner before our eyes, like a face changing in a dream. She would begin to appear as a fickle and selfish woman, passing falsely as a widow, and playing a double game between the attentions of foolish but honourable young men, and the fitful appearances of a wandering and good-for-nothing sailor-husband; a man prepared to act that most well-worn of melodramatic rôles, the conjugal bully and blackmailer, the man who uses marital rights as an instrument for the worse kind of wrongs. Or, again, if we had the story of the fall of King Arthur told from the stand-point of Mordred, it would only be a matter of a word or two; in a turn, in the twinkling of an eye, we should find ourselves sympathising with the efforts of an earnest young man to frustrate the profligacies of high-placed paladins like Lancelot and Tristram, and ultimately discovering, with deep regret but unshaken moral courage, that there was no way to frustrate them, except by overthrowing the cold and priggish and incapable egotist who ruled the country, and the whole artificial and bombastic schemes which bred these moral evils. It might be that in spite of this new view of the case, it would ultimately appear that Ulysses was really right and Arthur was really right, just as Browning makes it ultimately appear that Pompilia was really right. But any one can see the enormous difference in scope and difficulty between the old epic which told the whole story from one man's point of view, and the new epic which cannot come to its conclusion, until it has digested and assimilated views as paradoxical and disturbing as our imaginary defence of Antinous and apologia of Mordred.

One of the most important steps ever taken in the history of the world is this step, with all its various aspects, literary, political, and social, which is represented by *The Ring and the Book*. It is the step of deciding, in the face of many serious dangers and disadvantages, to let everybody talk. The poet of the old epic is the poet who had learnt to speak; Browning in the new epic is the poet who has learnt to listen. This listening to truth and error, to heretics, to fools, to intellectual bullies, to desperate partisans, to mere chatterers, to systematic poisoners of the mind, is the hardest lesson that humanity has ever been set to learn. *The Ring and the Book* is the embodiment of this terrible magnanimity and patience. It is the epic of free speech.

Free speech is an idea which has at present all the unpopularity of a truism; so that we tend to forget that it was not so very long ago that it had the more practical unpopularity which attaches to a new truth. Ingratitude is surely the chief of the intellectual sins of man. He takes his political benefits for granted, just as he takes the skies and the seasons for granted. He considers the calm of a city street a thing as inevitable as the calm of a forest clearing, whereas it is only kept in peace by a sustained stretch and effort similar to that which keeps up a battle or a fencing match. Just as we forget where we stand in relation to natural phenomena, so we forget it in relation to social phenomena. We forget that the earth is a star, and we forget that free speech is a paradox.

It is not by any means self-evident upon the face of it that an institution like the liberty of speech is right or just. It is not natural or obvious to let a man utter follies and abominations which you believe to be bad for mankind any more than it is natural or obvious to let a man dig up a part of the public road, or infect half a town with typhoid fever. The theory of free speech, that truth is so much larger and stranger and more many-sided than we know of, that it is very much better at all costs to hear every one's account of it, is a theory which has been justified upon the whole by experiment, but which remains a very daring and even a very surprising theory. It is really one of the great discoveries of the modern time; but, once admitted, it is a principle that does not merely affect politics, but philosophy, ethics, and finally poetry.

Browning was upon the whole the first poet to apply the principle to poetry. He perceived that if we wish to tell the truth about a human drama, we must not tell it merely like a melodrama, in which the villain is villainous and the comic man is comic. He saw that the truth had not been told until he had seen in the villain the pure and disinterested gentleman that most villains firmly believe themselves to be, or until he had taken the comic man as seriously as it is the custom of comic men to take themselves. And in this Browning is beyond all question the founder of the most modern school of poetry. Everything that was profound, everything, indeed, that was tolerable in the aesthetes of 1880, and the decadent of 1890, has its ultimate source in Browning's great conception that every one's point of view is interesting, even if it be a jaundiced or a blood-shot point of view. He is at one with the decadents, in holding that it is emphatically profitable, that it is emphatically creditable, to know something of the grounds of the happiness of a thoroughly bad man. Since his time we have indeed been somewhat over-satisfied with the moods of the burglar, and the pensive lyrics of the receiver of stolen goods. But Browning, united with the decadents on this point, of the value of every human testimony, is divided from them sharply and by a chasm in another equally important point. He held that it is necessary to listen to all sides of a question in order to discover the truth of it. But he held that there was a truth to discover. He held that justice was a mystery, but not, like the decadents, that justice was a delusion. He held, in other words, the true Browning doctrine, that in a dispute every one was to a certain extent right; not the decadent doctrine that in so mad a place as the world, every one must be by the nature of things wrong.

Browning's conception of the Universe can hardly be better expressed than in the old and pregnant fable about the five blind men who went to visit an elephant. One of them seized its trunk, and asserted that an elephant was a kind of serpent; another embraced its leg, and was ready to die for the belief that an elephant was a kind of tree. In the same way to the man who leaned against its side it was a wall; to the man who had hold of its tail a rope, and to the man who ran upon its tusk a particularly unpleasant kind of spear. This, as I have said, is the whole theology and philosophy of Browning. But he differs from the psychological decadents and impressionists in this important point, that he thinks that although the blind men found out very little about the elephant, the elephant was an elephant, and was there all the time. The blind men formed mistaken theories because an elephant is a thing with a very curious shape. And Browning firmly believed that the Universe was a thing with a very curious shape indeed. No blind poet could even imagine an elephant without experience, and no man, however great and wise, could dream of God and not die. But there is a vital distinction between the mystical view of Browning, that the blind men are misled because there is so much for them to learn, and the purely impressionist and agnostic view of the modern poet, that the blind men were misled because there was nothing for them to learn. To the impressionist artist of our time we are not blind men groping after an elephant and naming it a tree or a serpent. We are maniacs, isolated in separate cells, and dreaming of trees and serpents without reason and without result.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PHILOSOPHY OF BROWNING

The great fault of most of the appreciation of Browning lies in the fact that it conceives the moral and artistic value of his work to lie in what is called “the message of Browning,” or “the teaching of Browning,” or, in other words, in the mere opinions of Browning. Now Browning had opinions, just as he had a dress-suit or a vote for Parliament. He did not hesitate to express these opinions any more than he would have hesitated to fire off a gun, or open an umbrella, if he had possessed those articles, and realised their value. For example, he had, as his students and eulogists have constantly stated, certain definite opinions about the spiritual function of love, or the intellectual basis of Christianity. Those opinions were very striking and very solid, as everything was which came out of Browning’s mind. His two great theories of the universe may be expressed in two comparatively parallel phrases. The first was what may be called the hope which lies in the imperfection of man. The characteristic poem of “Old Pictures in Florence” expresses very quaintly and beautifully the idea that some hope may always be based on deficiency itself; in other words, that in so far as man is a one-legged or a one-eyed creature, there is something about his appearance which indicates that he should have another leg and another eye. The poem suggests admirably that such a sense of incompleteness may easily be a great advance upon a sense of completeness, that the part may easily and obviously be greater than the whole. And from this Browning draws, as he is fully justified in drawing, a definite hope for immortality and the larger scale of life. For nothing is more certain than that though this world is the only world that we have known, or of which we could even dream, the fact does remain that we have named it “a strange world.” In other words, we have certainly felt that this world did not explain itself, that something in its complete and patent picture has been omitted. And Browning was right in saying that in a cosmos where incompleteness implies completeness, life implies immortality. This then was the first of the doctrines or opinions of Browning: the hope that lies in the imperfection of man. The second of the great Browning doctrines requires some audacity to express. It can only be properly stated as the hope that lies in the imperfection of God. That is to say, that Browning held that sorrow and self-denial, if they were the burdens of man, were also his privileges. He held that these stubborn sorrows and obscure valours might, to use a yet more strange expression, have provoked the envy of the Almighty. If man has self-sacrifice and God has none, then man has in the Universe a secret and blasphemous superiority. And this tremendous story of a Divine jealousy Browning reads into the story of the Crucifixion. If the Creator had not been crucified He would not have been as great as thousands of wretched fanatics among His own creatures. It is needless to insist upon this point; any one who wishes to read it splendidly expressed need only be referred to "Saul." But these are emphatically the two main doctrines or opinions of Browning which I have ventured to characterise roughly as the hope in the imperfection of man, and more boldly as the hope in the imperfection of God. They are great thoughts, thoughts written by a great man, and they raise noble and beautiful doubts on behalf of faith which the human spirit will never answer or exhaust. But about them in connection with Browning there nevertheless remains something to be added.

Browning was, as most of his upholders and all his opponents say, an optimist. His theory, that man's sense of his own imperfection implies a design of perfection, is a very good argument for optimism. His theory that man's knowledge of and desire for self-sacrifice implies God's knowledge of and desire for self-sacrifice is another very good argument for optimism. But any one will make the deepest and blackest and most incurable mistake about Browning who imagines that his optimism was founded on any arguments for optimism. Because he had a strong intellect, because he had a strong power of conviction, he conceived and developed and asserted these doctrines of the incompleteness of Man and the sacrifice of Omnipotence. But these doctrines were the symptoms of his optimism, they were not its origin. It is surely obvious that no one can be argued into optimism since no one can be argued into happiness. Browning's optimism was not founded on opinions which were the work of Browning, but on life which was the work of God. One of Browning's most celebrated biographers has said that something of Browning's theology must be put down to his possession of a good digestion. The remark was, of course, like all remarks touching the tragic subject of digestion, intended to be funny and to convey some kind of doubt or diminution touching the value of Browning's faith. But if we examine the matter with somewhat greater care we shall see that it is indeed a thorough compliment to that faith. Nobody, strictly speaking, is happier on account of his digestion. He is happy because he is so constituted as to forget all about it. Nobody really is convulsed with delight at the thought of the ingenious machinery which he possesses inside him; the thing which delights him is simply the full possession of his own human body. I cannot in the least understand why a good digestion — that is, a good body — should not be held to be as mystic a benefit as a sunset or the first flower of spring. But there is about digestion this peculiarity throwing a great light on human pessimism, that it is one of the many things which we never speak of as existing until they go wrong. We should think it ridiculous to speak of a man as suffering from his boots if we meant that he had really no boots. But we do speak of a man suffering from digestion when we mean that he suffers from a lack of digestion. In the same way we speak of a man suffering from nerves when we mean that his nerves are more inefficient than any one else’s nerves. If any one wishes to see how grossly language can degenerate, he need only compare the old optimistic use of the word nervous, which we employ in speaking of a nervous grip, with the new pessimistic use of the word, which we employ in speaking of a nervous manner. And as digestion is a good thing which sometimes goes wrong, as nerves are good things which sometimes go wrong, so existence itself in the eyes of Browning and all the great optimists is a good thing which sometimes goes wrong. He held himself as free to draw his inspiration from the gift of good health as from the gift of learning or the gift of fellowship. But he held that such gifts were in life innumerable and varied, and that every man, or at least almost every man, possessed some window looking out on this essential excellence of things.

Browning’s optimism then, since we must continue to use this somewhat inadequate word, was a result of experience — experience which is for some mysterious reason generally understood in the sense of sad or disillusioning experience. An old gentleman rebuking a little boy for eating apples in a tree is in the common conception the type of experience. If he really wished to be a type of experience he would climb up the tree himself and proceed to experience the apples. Browning’s faith was founded upon joyful experience, not in the sense that he selected his joyful experiences and ignored his painful ones, but in the sense that his joyful experiences selected themselves and stood out in his memory by virtue of their own extraordinary intensity of colour. He did not use experience in that mean and pompous sense in which it is used by the worldling advanced in years. He rather used it in that healthier and more joyful sense in which it is used at revivalist meetings. In the Salvation Army a man's experiences mean his experiences of the mercy of God, and to Browning the meaning was much the same. But the revivalists' confessions deal mostly with experiences of prayer and praise; Browning's dealt pre-eminently with what may be called his own subject, the experiences of love.

And this quality of Browning's optimism, the quality of detail, is also a very typical quality. Browning's optimism is of that ultimate and unshakeable order that is founded upon the absolute sight, and sound, and smell, and handling of things. If a man had gone up to Browning and asked him with all the solemnity of the eccentric, "Do you think life is worth living?" it is interesting to conjecture what his answer might have been. If he had been for the moment under the influence of the orthodox rationalistic deism of the theologian he would have said, "Existence is justified by its manifest design, its manifest adaptation of means to ends," or, in other words, "Existence is justified by its completeness." If, on the other hand, he had been influenced by his own serious intellectual theories he would have said, "Existence is justified by its air of growth and doubtfulness," or, in other words, "Existence is justified by its incompleteness." But if he had not been influenced in his answer either by the accepted opinions, or by his own opinions, but had simply answered the question "Is life worth living?" with the real, vital answer that awaited it in his own soul, he would have said as likely as not, "Crimson toadstools in Hampshire." Some plain, glowing picture of this sort left on his mind would be his real verdict on what the universe had meant to him. To his traditions hope was traced to order, to his speculations hope was traced to disorder. But to Browning himself hope was traced to something like red toadstools. His mysticism was not of that idle and wordy type which believes that a flower is symbolical of life; it was rather of that deep and eternal type which believes that life, a mere abstraction, is symbolical of a flower. With him the great concrete experiences which God made always come first; his own deductions and speculations about them always second. And in this point we find the real peculiar inspiration of his very original poems.

One of the very few critics who seem to have got near to the actual secret of Browning's optimism is Mr. Santayana in his most interesting book *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*. He, in contradistinction to the vast mass of Browning's admirers, had discovered what was the real root virtue of Browning's poetry; and the curious thing is, that having discovered that root virtue, he thinks it is a vice. He describes the poetry of Browning most truly as the poetry of barbarism, by which he means the poetry which utters the primeval and indivisible emotions. "For the barbarian is the man who regards his passions as their own excuse for being, who does not domesticate them either by understanding their cause, or by conceiving their ideal goal." Whether this be or be not a good definition of the barbarian, it is an excellent and perfect definition of the poet. It might, perhaps, be suggested that barbarians, as a matter of fact, are generally highly traditional and respectable persons who would not put a feather wrong in their head-gear, and who generally have very few feelings and think very little about those they have. It is when we have grown to a greater and more civilised stature that we begin to realise and put to ourselves intellectually the great feelings that sleep in the depths of us. Thus it is that the literature of our day has steadily advanced towards a passionate simplicity, and we become more primeval as the world grows older, until Whitman writes huge and chaotic psalms to express the sensations of a schoolboy out fishing, and Maeterlinck embodies in symbolic dramas the feelings of a child in the dark.

Thus, Mr. Santayana is, perhaps, the most valuable of all the Browning critics. He has gone out of his way to endeavour to realise what it is that repels him in Browning, and he has discovered the fault which none of Browning's opponents have discovered. And in this he has discovered the merit which none of Browning's admirers have discovered. Whether the quality be a good or a bad quality, Mr. Santayana is perfectly right. The whole of Browning's poetry does rest upon primitive feeling; and the only comment to be added is that so does the whole of every one else's poetry. Poetry deals entirely with those great eternal and mainly forgotten wishes which are the ultimate despots of existence. Poetry presents things as they are to our emotions, not as they are to any theory, however plausible, or any argument, however conclusive. If love is in truth a glorious vision, poetry will say that it is a glorious vision, and no philosophers will persuade poetry to say that it is the exaggeration of the instinct of sex. If bereavement is a bitter and continually aching thing, poetry will say that it is so, and no philosophers will persuade poetry to say that it is an evolutionary stage of great biological value. And here comes in the whole value and object of poetry, that it is perpetually challenging all systems with the test of a terrible sincerity. The practical value of poetry is that it is realistic upon a point upon which nothing else can be realistic, the point of the actual desires of man. Ethics is the science of actions, but poetry is the science of motives. Some actions are ugly, and therefore some parts of ethics are ugly. But all motives are beautiful, or present themselves for the moment as beautiful, and therefore all poetry is beautiful. If poetry deals with the basest matter, with the shedding of blood for gold, it ought to suggest the gold as well as the blood. Only poetry can realise motives, because motives are all pictures of happiness. And the supreme and most practical value of poetry is this, that in poetry, as in music, a note is struck which expresses beyond the power of rational statement a condition of mind, and all actions arise from a condition of mind. Prose can only use a large and clumsy notation; it can only say that a man is miserable, or that a man is happy; it is forced to ignore that there are a million diverse kinds of misery and a million diverse kinds of happiness. Poetry alone, with the first throb of its metre, can tell us whether the depression is the kind of depression that drives a man to suicide, or the kind of depression that drives him to the Tivoli. Poetry can tell us whether the happiness is the happiness that sends a man to a restaurant, or the much richer and fuller happiness that sends him to church.

Now the supreme value of Browning as an optimist lies in this that we have been examining, that beyond all his conclusions, and deeper than all his arguments, he was passionately interested in and in love with existence. If the heavens had fallen, and all the waters of the earth run with blood, he would still have been interested in existence, if possible a little more so. He is a great poet of human joy for precisely the reason of which Mr. Santayana complains: that his happiness is primal, and beyond the reach of philosophy. He is something far more convincing, far more comforting, far more religiously significant than an optimist: he is a happy man.

This happiness he finds, as every man must find happiness, in his own way. He does not find the great part of his joy in those matters in which most poets find felicity. He finds much of it in those matters in which most poets find ugliness and vulgarity. He is to a considerable extent the poet of towns. “Do you care for nature much?” a friend of his asked him. “Yes, a great deal,” he said, “but for human beings a great deal more.” Nature, with its splendid and soothing sanity, has the power of convincing most poets of the essential worthiness of things. There are few poets who, if they escaped from the rowdiest waggonette of trippers, could not be quieted again and exalted by dropping into a small wayside field. The speciality of Browning is rather that he would have been quieted and exalted by the waggonette.

To Browning, probably the beginning and end of all optimism was to be found in the faces in the street. To him they were all the masks of a deity, the heads of a hundred-headed Indian god of nature. Each one of them looked towards some quarter of the heavens, not looked upon by any other eyes. Each one of them wore some expression, some blend of eternal joy and eternal sorrow, not to be found in any other countenance. The sense of the absolute sanctity of human difference was the deepest of all his senses. He was hungrily interested in all human things, but it would have been quite impossible to have said of him that he loved humanity. He did not love humanity but men. His sense of the difference between one man and another would have made the thought of melting them into a lump called humanity simply loathsome and prosaic. It would have been to him like playing four hundred beautiful airs at once. The mixture would not combine all, it would lose all. Browning believed that to every man that ever lived upon this earth had been given a definite and peculiar confidence of God. Each one of us was engaged on secret service; each one of us had a peculiar message; each one of us was the founder of a religion. Of that religion our thoughts, our faces, our bodies, our hats, our boots, our tastes, our virtues, and even our vices, were more or less fragmentary and inadequate expressions.

In the delightful memoirs of that very remarkable man Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, there is an extremely significant and interesting anecdote about Browning, the point of which appears to have attracted very little attention. Duffy was dining with Browning and John Forster, and happened to make some chance allusion to his own adherence to the Roman Catholic faith, when Forster remarked, half jestingly, that he did not suppose that Browning would like him any the better for that. Browning would seem to have opened his eyes with some astonishment. He immediately asked why Forster should suppose him hostile to the Roman Church. Forster and Duffy replied almost simultaneously, by referring to “Bishop Blougram’s Apology,” which had just appeared, and asking whether the portrait of the sophistical and self-indulgent priest had not been intended for a satire on Cardinal Wiseman. “Certainly,” replied Browning cheerfully, “I intended it for Cardinal Wiseman, but I don't consider it a satire, there is nothing hostile about it." This is the real truth which lies at the heart of what may be called the great sophistical monologues which Browning wrote in later years. They are not satires or attacks upon their subjects, they are not even harsh and unfeeling exposures of them. They are defences; they say or are intended to say the best that can be said for the persons with whom they deal. But very few people in this world would care to listen to the real defence of their own characters. The real defence, the defence which belongs to the Day of Judgment, would make such damaging admissions, would clear away so many artificial virtues, would tell such tragedies of weakness and failure, that a man would sooner be misunderstood and censured by the world than exposed to that awful and merciless eulogy. One of the most practically difficult matters which arise from the code of manners and the conventions of life, is that we cannot properly justify a human being, because that justification would involve the admission of things which may not conventionally be admitted. We might explain and make human and respectable, for example, the conduct of some old fighting politician, who, for the good of his party and his country, acceded to measures of which he disapproved; but we cannot, because we are not allowed to admit that he ever acceded to measures of which he disapproved. We might touch the life of many dissolute public men with pathos, and a kind of defeated courage, by telling the truth about the history of their sins. But we should throw the world into an uproar if we hinted that they had any. Thus the decencies of civilisation do not merely make it impossible to revile a man, they make it impossible to praise him.

Browning, in such poems as "Bishop Blougram's Apology," breaks this first mask of goodness in order to break the second mask of evil, and gets to the real goodness at last; he dethrones a saint in order to humanise a scoundrel. This is one typical side of the real optimism of Browning. And there is indeed little danger that such optimism will become weak and sentimental and popular, the refuge of every idler, the excuse of every ne'er-do-well. There is little danger that men will desire to excuse their souls before God by presenting themselves before men as such snobs as Bishop Blougram, or such dastards as Sludge the Medium. There is no pessimism, however stern, that is so stern as this optimism, it is as merciless as the mercy of God.

It is true that in this, as in almost everything else connected with Browning's character, the matter cannot be altogether exhausted by such a generalisation as the above. Browning's was a simple character, and therefore very difficult to understand, since it was impulsive, unconscious, and kept no reckoning of its moods. Probably in a great many cases, the original impulse which led Browning to plan a soliloquy was a kind of anger mixed with curiosity; possibly the first charcoal sketch of Blougram was a caricature of a priest. Browning, as we have said, had prejudices, and had a capacity for anger, and two of his angriest prejudices were against a certain kind of worldly clericalism, and against almost every kind of spiritualism. But as he worked upon the portraits at least, a new spirit began to possess him, and he enjoyed every spirited and just defence the men could make of themselves, like triumphant blows in a battle, and towards the end would come the full revelation, and Browning would stand up in the man's skin and testify to the man's ideals. However this may be, it is worth while to notice one very curious error that has arisen in connection with one of the most famous of these monologues.

When Robert Browning was engaged in that somewhat obscure quarrel with the spiritualist Home, it is generally and correctly stated that he gained a great number of the impressions which he afterwards embodied in “Mr. Sludge the Medium.” The statement so often made, particularly in the spiritualist accounts of the matter, that Browning himself is the original of the interlocutor and exposer of Sludge, is of course merely an example of that reckless reading from which no one has suffered more than Browning despite his students and societies. The man to whom Sludge addresses his confession is a Mr. Hiram H. Horsfall, an American, a patron of spiritualists, and, as it is more than once suggested, something of a fool. Nor is there the smallest reason to suppose that Sludge considered as an individual bears any particular resemblance to Home considered as an individual. But without doubt “Mr. Sludge the Medium” is a general statement of the view of spiritualism at which Browning had arrived from his acquaintance with Home and Home's circle. And about that view of spiritualism there is something rather peculiar to notice. The poem, appearing as it did at the time when the intellectual public had just become conscious of the existence of spiritualism, attracted a great deal of attention, and aroused a great deal of controversy. The spiritualists called down thunder upon the head of the poet, whom they depicted as a vulgar and ribald lampooner who had not only committed the profanity of sneering at the mysteries of a higher state of life, but the more unpardonable profanity of sneering at the convictions of his own wife. The sceptics, on the other hand, hailed the poem with delight as a blasting exposure of spiritualism, and congratulated the poet on making himself the champion of the sane and scientific view of magic. Which of these two parties was right about the question of attacking the reality of spiritualism it is neither easy nor necessary to discuss. For the simple truth, which neither of the two parties and none of the students of Browning seem to have noticed, is that "Mr. Sludge the Medium" is not an attack upon spiritualism. It would be a great deal nearer the truth, though not entirely the truth, to call it a justification of spiritualism. The whole essence of Browning's method is involved in this matter, and the whole essence of Browning's method is so vitally misunderstood that to say that "Mr. Sludge the Medium" is something like a defence of spiritualism will bear on the face of it the appearance of the most empty and perverse of paradoxes. But so, when we have comprehended Browning's spirit, the fact will be found to be.

The general idea is that Browning must have intended "Sludge" for an attack on spiritual phenomena, because the medium in that poem is made a vulgar and contemptible mountebank, because his cheats are quite openly confessed, and he himself put into every ignominious situation, detected, exposed, throttled, horsewhipped, and forgiven. To regard this deduction as sound is to misunderstand Browning at the very start of every poem that he ever wrote. There is nothing that the man loved more, nothing that deserves more emphatically to be called a speciality of Browning, than the utterance of large and noble truths by the lips of mean and grotesque human beings. In his poetry praise and wisdom were perfected not only out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, but out of the mouths of swindlers and snobs. Now what, as a matter of fact, is the outline and development of the poem of "Sludge"? The climax of the poem, considered as a work of art, is so fine that it is quite extraordinary that any one should have missed the point of it, since it is the whole point of the monologue. Sludge the Medium has been caught out in a piece of unquestionable trickery, a piece of trickery for which there is no conceivable explanation or palliation which will leave his moral character intact. He is therefore seized with a sudden resolution, partly angry, partly frightened, and partly humorous, to become absolutely frank, and to tell the whole truth about himself for the first time not only to his dupe, but to himself. He excuses himself for the earlier stages of the trickster's life by a survey of the border-land between truth and fiction, not by any means a piece of sophistry or cynicism, but a perfectly fair statement of an ethical difficulty which does exist. There are some people who think that it must be immoral to admit that there are any doubtful cases of morality, as if a man should refrain from discussing the precise boundary at the upper end of the Isthmus of Panama, for fear the inquiry should shake his belief in the existence of North America. People of this kind quite consistently think Sludge to be merely a scoundrel talking nonsense. It may be remembered that they thought the same thing of Newman. It is actually supposed, apparently in the current use of words, that casuistry is the name of a crime; it does not appear to occur to people that casuistry is a science, and about as much a crime as botany. This tendency to casuistry in Browning's monologues has done much towards establishing for him that reputation for pure intellectualism which has done him so much harm. But casuistry in this sense is not a cold and analytical thing, but a very warm and sympathetic thing. To know what combination of excuse might justify a man in manslaughter or bigamy, is not to have a callous indifference to virtue; it is rather to have so ardent an admiration for virtue as to seek it in the remotest desert and the darkest incognito.

This is emphatically the case with the question of truth and falsehood raised in "Sludge the Medium." To say that it is sometimes difficult to tell at what point the romancer turns into the liar is not to state a cynicism, but a perfectly honest piece of human observation. To think that such a view involves the negation of honesty is like thinking that red is green, because the two fade into each other in the colours of the rainbow. It is really difficult to decide when we come to the extreme edge of veracity, when and when not it is permissible to create an illusion. A standing example, for instance, is the case of the fairy-tales. We think a father entirely pure and benevolent when he tells his children that a beanstalk grew up into heaven, and a pumpkin turned into a coach. We should consider that he lapsed from purity and benevolence if he told his children that in walking home that evening he had seen a beanstalk grow half-way up the church, or a pumpkin grow as large as a wheelbarrow. Again, few people would object to that general privilege whereby it is permitted to a person in narrating even a true anecdote to work up the climax by any exaggerative touches which really tend to bring it out. The reason of this is that the telling of the anecdote has become, like the telling of the fairy-tale, almost a distinct artistic creation; to offer to tell a story is in ordinary society like offering to recite or play the violin. No one denies that a fixed and genuine moral rule could be drawn up for these cases, but no one surely need be ashamed to admit that such a rule is not entirely easy to draw up. And when a man like Sludge traces much of his moral downfall to the indistinctness of the boundary and the possibility of beginning with a natural extravagance and ending with a gross abuse, it certainly is not possible to deny his right to be heard.

We must recur, however, to the question of the main development of the Sludge self-analysis. He begins, as we have said, by urging a general excuse by the fact that in the heat of social life, in the course of telling tales in the intoxicating presence of sympathisers and believers, he has slid into falsehood almost before he is aware of it. So far as this goes, there is truth in his plea. Sludge might indeed find himself unexpectedly justified if we had only an exact record of how true were the tales told about Conservatives in an exclusive circle of Radicals, or the stories told about Radicals in a circle of indignant Conservatives. But after this general excuse, Sludge goes on to a perfectly cheerful and unfeeling admission of fraud; this principal feeling towards his victims is by his own confession a certain unfathomable contempt for people who are so easily taken in. He professes to know how to lay the foundations for every species of personal acquaintanceship, and how to remedy the slight and trivial slips of making Plato write Greek in naughts and crosses.

“As I fear, sir, he sometimes used to do
Before I found the useful book that knows.”

It would be difficult to imagine any figure more indecently confessional, more entirely devoid of not only any of the restraints of conscience, but of any of the restraints even of a wholesome personal conceit, than Sludge the Medium. He confesses not only fraud, but things which are to the natural man more difficult to confess even than fraud — effeminacy, futility, physical cowardice. And then, when the last of his loathsome secrets has been told, when he has nothing left either to gain or to conceal, then he rises up into a perfect bankrupt sublimity and makes the great avowal which is the whole pivot and meaning of the poem. He says in effect: “Now that my interest in deceit is utterly gone, now that I have admitted, to my own final infamy, the frauds that I have practised, now that I stand before you in a patent and open villainy which has something of the disinterestedness and independence of the innocent, now I tell you with the full and impartial authority of a lost soul that I believe that there is something in spiritualism. In the course of a thousand conspiracies, by the labour of a thousand lies, I have discovered that there is really something in this matter that neither I nor any other man understands. I am a thief, an adventurer, a deceiver of mankind, but I am not a disbeliever in spiritualism. I have seen too much for that." This is the confession of faith of Mr. Sludge the Medium. It would be difficult to imagine a confession of faith framed and presented in a more impressive manner. Sludge is a witness to his faith as the old martyrs were witnesses to their faith, but even more impressively. They testified to their religion even after they had lost their liberty, and their eyesight, and their right hands. Sludge testifies to his religion even after he has lost his dignity and his honour.

It may be repeated that it is truly extraordinary that any one should have failed to notice that this avowal on behalf of spiritualism is the pivot of the poem. The avowal itself is not only expressed clearly, but prepared and delivered with admirable rhetorical force: —

"Now for it, then! Will you believe me, though?
You've heard what I confess: I don't unsay
A single word: I cheated when I could,
Rapped with my toe-joints, set sham hands at work,
Wrote down names weak in sympathetic ink.
Rubbed odic lights with ends of phosphor-match,
And all the rest; believe that: believe this,
By the same token, though it seem to set
The crooked straight again, unsay the said,
Stick up what I've knocked down; I can't help that,
It's truth! I somehow vomit truth to-day.
This trade of mine — I don't know, can't be sure
But there was something in it, tricks and all!"

It is strange to call a poem with so clear and fine a climax an attack on spiritualism. To miss that climax is like missing the last sentence in a good anecdote, or putting the last act of *Othello* into the middle of the play. Either the whole poem of "Sludge the Medium" means nothing at all, and is only a lampoon upon a cad, of which the matter is almost as contemptible as the subject, or it means this — that some real experiences of the unseen lie even at the heart of hypocrisy, and that even the spiritualist is at root spiritual.

One curious theory which is common to most Browning critics is that Sludge must be intended for a pure and conscious impostor, because after his confession, and on the personal withdrawal of Mr. Horsfall, he bursts out into horrible curses against that gentleman and cynical boasts of his future triumphs in a similar line of business. Surely this is to have a very feeble notion either of nature or art. A man driven absolutely into a corner might humiliate himself, and gain a certain sensation almost of luxury in that humiliation, in pouring out all his imprisoned thoughts and obscure victories. For let it never be forgotten that a hypocrite is a very unhappy man; he is a man who has devoted himself to a most delicate and arduous intellectual art in which he may achieve masterpieces which he must keep secret, fight thrilling battles, and win hair's-breadth victories for which he cannot have a whisper of praise. A really accomplished impostor is the most wretched of geniuses; he is a Napoleon on a desert island. A man might surely, therefore, when he was certain that his credit was gone, take a certain pleasure in revealing the tricks of his unique trade, and gaining not indeed credit, but at least a kind of glory. And in the course of this self-revelation he would come at last upon that part of himself which exists in every man — that part which does believe in, and value, and worship something. This he would fling in his hearer's face with even greater pride, and take a delight in giving a kind of testimony to his religion which no man had ever given before — the testimony of a martyr who could not hope to be a saint. But surely all this sudden tempest of candour in the man would not mean that he would burst into tears and become an exemplary ratepayer, like a villain in the worst parts of Dickens. The moment the danger was withdrawn, the sense of having given himself away, of having betrayed the secret of his infamous freemasonry, would add an indescribable violence and foulness to his reaction of rage. A man in such a case would do exactly as Sludge does. He would declare his own shame, declare the truth of his creed, and then, when he realised what he had done, say something like this: —

“R-r-r, you brute-beast and blackguard! Cowardly scamp!
I only wish I dared burn down the house
And spoil your sniggering!”

and so on, and so on.

He would react like this; it is one of the most artistic strokes in Browning. But it does not prove that he was a hypocrite about spiritualism, or that he was speaking more truthfully in the second outburst than in the first. Whence came this extraordinary theory that a man is always speaking most truly when he is speaking most coarsely? The truth about oneself is a very difficult thing to express, and coarse speaking will seldom do it.

When we have grasped this point about "Sludge the Medium," we have grasped the key to the whole series of Browning's casuistical monologues — *Bishop Blaugram's Apology, Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Fra Lippo Lippi, Fifine at the Fair, Aristophanes' Apology*, and several of the monologues in *The Ring and the Book*. They are all, without exception, dominated by this one conception of a certain reality tangled almost inextricably with unrealities in a man's mind, and the peculiar fascination which resides in the thought that the greatest lies about a man, and the greatest truths about him, may be found side by side in the same eloquent and sustained utterance.

"For Blougram, he believed, say, half he spoke."

Or, to put the matter in another way, the general idea of these poems is, that a man cannot help telling some truth even when he sets out to tell lies. If a man comes to tell us that he has discovered perpetual motion, or been swallowed by the sea-serpent, there will yet be some point in the story where he will tell us about himself almost all that we require to know.

If any one wishes to test the truth, or to see the best examples of this general idea in Browning's monologues, he may be recommended to notice one peculiarity of these poems which is rather striking. As a whole, these apologies are written in a particularly burly and even brutal English. Browning's love of what is called the ugly is nowhere else so fully and extravagantly indulged. This, like a great many other things for which Browning as an artist is blamed, is perfectly appropriate to the theme. A vain, ill-mannered, and untrustworthy egotist, defending his own sordid doings with his own cheap and weather-beaten philosophy, is very likely to express himself best in a language flexible and pungent, but indelicate and without dignity. But the peculiarity of these loose and almost slangy soliloquies is that every now and then in them there occur bursts of pure poetry which are like a burst of birds singing. Browning does not hesitate to put some of the most perfect lines that he or anyone else have ever written in the English language into the mouths of such slaves as Sludge and Guido Franceschini. Take, for the sake of example, “Bishop Blougram’s Apology.” The poem is one of the most grotesque in the poet’s works. It is intentionally redolent of the solemn materialism and patrician grossness of a grand dinner-party *à deux*. It has many touches of an almost wild bathos, such as the young man who bears the impossible name of Gigadibs. The Bishop, in pursuing his worldly argument for conformity, points out with truth that a condition of doubt is a condition that cuts both ways, and that if we cannot be sure of the religious theory of life, neither can we be sure of the material theory of life, and that in turn is capable of becoming an uncertainty continually shaken by a tormenting suggestion. We cannot establish ourselves on rationalism, and make it bear fruit to us. Faith itself is capable of becoming the darkest and most revolutionary of doubts. Then comes the passage: —

“Just when we are safest, there’s a sunset-touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one’s death,
A chorus ending from Euripides, —
And that’s enough for fifty hopes and fears
As old and new at once as Nature’s self,
To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
Round the ancient idol, on his base again, —
The grand Perhaps!”

Nobler diction and a nobler meaning could not have been put into the mouth of Pompilia, or Rabbi Ben Ezra. It is in reality put into the mouth of a vulgar, fashionable priest, justifying his own cowardice over the comfortable wine and the cigars.

Along with this tendency to poetry among Browning’s knaves, must be reckoned another characteristic, their uniform tendency to theism. These loose and mean characters speak of many things feverishly and vaguely; of one thing they always speak with confidence and composure, their relation to God. It may seem strange at first sight that those who have outlived the indulgence, and not only of every law, but of every reasonable anarchy, should still rely so simply upon the indulgence of divine perfection. Thus

Sludge is certain that his life of lies and conjuring tricks has been conducted in a deep and subtle obedience to the message really conveyed by the conditions created by God. Thus Bishop Blougram is certain that his life of panic-stricken and tottering compromise has been really justified as the only method that could unite him with God. Thus Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau is certain that every dodge in his thin string of political dodges has been the true means of realising what he believes to be the will of God. Every one of these meagre swindlers, while admitting a failure in all things relative, claims an awful alliance with the Absolute. To many it will at first sight appear a dangerous doctrine indeed. But, in truth, it is a most solid and noble and salutary doctrine, far less dangerous than its opposite. Every one on this earth should believe, amid whatever madness or moral failure, that his life and temperament have some object on the earth. Every one on the earth should believe that he has something to give to the world which cannot otherwise be given. Every one should, for the good of men and the saving of his own soul, believe that it is possible, even if we are the enemies of the human race, to be the friends of God. The evil wrought by this mystical pride, great as it often is, is like a straw to the evil wrought by a materialistic self-abandonment. The crimes of the devil who thinks himself of immeasurable value are as nothing to the crimes of the devil who thinks himself of no value. With Browning's knaves we have always this eternal interest, that they are real somewhere, and may at any moment begin to speak poetry. We are talking to a peevish and garrulous sneak; we are watching the play of his paltry features, his evasive eyes, and babbling lips. And suddenly the face begins to change and harden, the eyes glare like the eyes of a mask, the whole face of clay becomes a common mouthpiece, and the voice that comes forth is the voice of God, uttering His everlasting soliloquy.

TWELVE TYPES

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CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Objection is often raised against realistic biography because it reveals so much that is important and even sacred about a man's life. The real objection to it will rather be found in the fact that it reveals about a man the precise points which are unimportant. It reveals and asserts and insists on exactly those things in a man's life of which the man himself is wholly unconscious; his exact class in society, the circumstances of his ancestry, the place of his present location. These are things which do not, properly speaking, ever arise before the human vision. They do not occur to a man's mind; it may be said, with almost equal truth, that they do not occur in a man's life. A man no more thinks about himself as the inhabitant of the third house in a row of Brixton villas than he thinks about himself as a strange animal with two legs. What a man's name was, what his income was, whom he married, where he lived, these are not sanctities; they are irrelevancies.

A very strong case of this is the case of the Brontës. The Brontë is in the position of the mad lady in a country village; her eccentricities form an endless source of innocent conversation to that exceedingly mild and bucolic circle, the literary world. The truly glorious gossips of literature, like Mr Augustine Birrell and Mr Andrew Lang, never tire of collecting all the glimpses and anecdotes and sermons and side-lights and sticks and straws which will go to make a Brontë museum. They are the most personally discussed of all Victorian authors, and the limelight of biography has left few darkened corners in the dark old Yorkshire house. And yet the whole of this biographical investigation, though natural and picturesque, is not wholly suitable to the Brontës. For the Brontë genius was above all things deputed to assert the supreme unimportance of externals. Up to that point truth had always been conceived as existing more or less in the novel of manners. Charlotte Brontë electrified the world by showing that an infinitely older and more elemental truth could be conveyed by a novel in which no person, good or bad, had any manners at all. Her work represents the first great assertion that the humdrum life of modern civilisation is a disguise as tawdry and deceptive as the costume of a 'bal masqué.' She showed that abysses may exist inside a governess and eternities inside a manufacturer; her heroine is the commonplace spinster, with the dress of merino and the soul of flame. It is significant to notice that Charlotte Brontë, following consciously or unconsciously the great trend of her genius, was the first to take away from the heroine not only the artificial gold and diamonds of wealth and fashion, but even the natural gold and diamonds of physical beauty and grace. Instinctively she felt that the whole of the exterior must be made ugly that the whole of the interior might be made sublime. She chose the ugliest of women in the ugliest of centuries, and revealed within them all the hells and heavens of Dante.

It may, therefore, I think, be legitimately said that the externals of the Brontës' life, though singularly picturesque in themselves, matter less than the externals of almost any other writers. It is interesting to know whether Jane Austen had any knowledge of the lives of the officers and women of fashion whom she introduced into her masterpieces. It is interesting to know whether Dickens had ever seen a shipwreck or been inside a workhouse. For in these authors much of the conviction is conveyed, not always by adherence to facts, but always by grasp of them. But the whole aim and purport and meaning of the work of the Brontës is that the most futile thing in the whole universe is fact. Such a story as 'Jane Eyre' is in itself so monstrous a fable that it ought to be excluded from a book of fairy tales. The characters do not do what they ought to do, nor what they would do, nor, it might be said, such is the insanity of the atmosphere, not even what they intend to do. The conduct of Rochester is so primevally and superhumanly caddish that Bret Harte in his admirable travesty scarcely exaggerated it. 'Then, resuming his usual manner, he threw his boots at my head and withdrew,' does perhaps reach to something resembling caricature. The scene in which Rochester dresses up as an old gipsy has something in it which is really not to be found in any other branch of art, except in the end of the pantomime, where the Emperor turns into a pantaloon. Yet, despite this vast nightmare of illusion and morbidity and ignorance of the world, 'Jane Eyre' is perhaps the truest book that was ever written. Its essential truth to life sometimes makes one catch one's breath. For it is not true to manners, which are constantly false, or to facts, which are almost always false; it is true to the only existing thing which is true, emotion, the irreducible minimum, the indestructible germ. It would not matter a single straw if a Brontë story were a hundred times more moonstruck and improbable than 'Jane Eyre,' or a hundred times more moonstruck and improbable than 'Wuthering Heights.' It would not matter if George Read stood on his head, and Mrs Read rode on a dragon, if Fairfax Rochester had four eyes and St John Rivers three legs, the story would still remain the truest story in the world. The typical Brontë character is, indeed, a kind of monster. Everything in him except the essential is dislocated. His hands are on his legs and his feet on his arms, his nose is above his eyes, but his heart is in the right place.

The great and abiding truth for which the Brontë cycle of fiction stands is a certain most important truth about the enduring spirit of youth, the truth of the near kinship between terror and joy. The Brontë heroine, dingily dressed, badly educated, hampered by a humiliating inexperience, a kind of ugly innocence, is yet, by the very fact of her solitude and her gaucherie, full of the greatest delight that is possible to a human being, the delight of expectation, the delight of an ardent and flamboyant ignorance. She serves to show how futile it is of humanity to suppose that pleasure can be attained chiefly by putting on evening dress every evening, and having a box at the theatre every first night. It is not the man of pleasure who has pleasure; it is not the man of the world who appreciates the world. The man who has learnt to do all conventional things perfectly has at the same time learnt to do them prosaically. It is the awkward man, whose evening dress does not fit him, whose gloves will not go on, whose compliments will not come off, who is really full of the ancient ecstasies of youth. He is frightened enough of society actually to enjoy his triumphs. He has that element of fear which is one of the eternal ingredients of joy. This spirit is the central spirit of the Brontë novel. It is the epic of the exhilaration of the shy man. As such it is of incalculable value in our time, of which the curse is that it does not take joy reverently because it does not take it fearfully. The shabby and inconspicuous governess of Charlotte Brontë, with the small outlook and the small creed, had more commerce with the awful and elemental forces which drive the world than a legion of lawless minor poets. She approached the universe with real simplicity, and, consequently, with real fear and delight. She was, so to speak, shy before the multitude of the stars, and in this she had possessed herself of the only force which can prevent enjoyment being as black and barren as routine. The faculty of being shy is the first and the most delicate of the powers of enjoyment. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of pleasure.

Upon the whole, therefore, I think it may justifiably be said that the dark wild youth of the Brontës in their dark wild Yorkshire home has been somewhat exaggerated as a necessary factor in their work and their conception. The emotions with which they dealt were universal emotions, emotions of the morning of existence, the springtide joy and the springtide terror. Every one of us as a boy or girl has had some midnight dream of nameless obstacle and unutterable menace, in which there was, under whatever imbecile forms, all the deadly stress and panic of ‘Wuthering Heights.’ Every one of us has had a day-dream of our own potential destiny not one atom more reasonable than ‘Jane Eyre.’ And the truth which the Brontës came to tell us is the truth that many waters cannot quench love, and that suburban respectability cannot touch or damp a secret enthusiasm. Clapham, like every other earthly city, is built upon a volcano. Thousands of people go to and fro in the wilderness of bricks and mortar, earning mean wages, professing a mean religion, wearing a mean attire, thousands of women who have never found any expression for their exaltation or their tragedy but to go on working harder and yet harder at dull and automatic employments, at scolding children or stitching shirts. But out of all these silent ones one suddenly became articulate, and spoke a resonant testimony, and her name was Charlotte Brontë. Spreading around us upon every side to-day like a huge and radiating geometrical figure are the endless branches of the great city. There are times when we are almost stricken crazy, as well we may be, by the multiplicity of those appalling perspectives, the frantic arithmetic of that unthinkable population. But this thought of ours is in truth nothing but a fancy. There are no chains of houses; there are no crowds of men. The colossal diagram of streets and houses is an illusion, the opium dream of a speculative builder. Each of these men is supremely solitary and supremely important to himself. Each of these houses stands in the centre of the world. There is no single house of all those millions which has not seemed to some one at some time the heart of all things and the end of travel.

WILLIAM MORRIS AND HIS SCHOOL

It is proper enough that the unveiling of the bust of William Morris should approximate to a public festival, for while there have been many men of genius in the Victorian era more despotic than he, there have been none so representative. He represents not only that rapacious hunger for beauty which has now for the first time become a serious problem in the healthy life of humanity, but he represents also that honourable instinct for finding beauty in common necessities of workmanship which gives it a stronger and more bony structure. The time has passed when William Morris was conceived to be irrelevant to be described as a designer of wall-papers. If Morris had been a hatter instead of a decorator, we should have become gradually and painfully conscious of an improvement in our hats. If he had been a tailor, we should have suddenly found our frock-coats trailing on the ground with the grandeur of mediæval raiment. If he had been a shoemaker, we should have found, with no little consternation, our shoes gradually approximating to the antique sandal. As a hairdresser, he would have invented some massing of the hair worthy to be the crown of Venus; as an ironmonger, his nails would have had some noble pattern, fit to be the nails of the Cross. The limitations of William Morris, whatever they were, were not the limitations of common decoration. It is true that all his work, even his literary work, was in some sense decorative, had in some degree the qualities of a splendid wall-paper. His characters, his stories, his religious and political views, had, in the most emphatic sense, length and breadth without thickness. He seemed really to believe that men could enjoy a perfectly flat felicity. He made no account of the unexplored and explosive possibilities of human nature, of the unnameable terrors, and the yet more unnameable hopes. So long as a man was graceful in every circumstance, so long as he had the inspiring consciousness that the chestnut colour of his hair was relieved against the blue forest a mile behind, he would be serenely happy. So he would be, no doubt, if he were really fitted for a decorative existence; if he were a piece of exquisitely coloured cardboard.

But although Morris took little account of the terrible solidity of human nature — took little account, so to speak, of human figures in the round, it is altogether unfair to represent him as a mere æsthete. He perceived a great public necessity and fulfilled it heroically. The difficulty with which he grappled was one so immense that we shall have to be separated from it by many centuries before we can really judge of it. It was the problem of the elaborate and deliberate ugliness of the most self-conscious of centuries. Morris at least saw the absurdity of the thing. He felt that it was monstrous that the modern man, who was pre-eminently capable of realising the strangest and most contradictory beauties, who could feel at once the fiery aureole of the ascetic, and the colossal calm of the Hellenic god, should himself, by a farcical bathos, be buried in a black coat, and hidden under a chimney-pot hat. He could not see why the harmless man who desired to be an artist in raiment should be condemned to be, at best, a black and white artist. It is indeed difficult to account for the clinging curse of ugliness which blights everything brought forth by the most prosperous of centuries. In all created nature there is not, perhaps, anything so completely ugly as a pillar-box. Its shape is the most unmeaning of shapes, its height and thickness just neutralising each other; its colour is the most repulsive of colours — a fat and soulless red, a red without a touch of blood or fire, like the scarlet of dead men’s sins. Yet there is no reason whatever why such hideousness should possess an object full of civic dignity, the treasure-house of a thousand secrets, the fortress of a thousand souls. If the old Greeks had had such an institution, we may be sure that it would have been surmounted by the severe, but graceful, figure of the god of letter-writing. If the mediæval Christians had possessed it, it would have had a niche filled with the golden aureole of St Rowland of the Postage Stamps. As it is, there it stands at all our street-corners, disguising one of the most beautiful of ideas under one of the most preposterous of forms. It is useless to deny that the miracles of science have not been such an incentive to art and imagination as were the miracles of religion. If men in the twelfth century had been told that the lightning had been driven for leagues underground, and had dragged at its destroying tail loads of laughing human beings, and if they had then been told that the people alluded to this pulverising portent chirpily as ‘The Twopenny Tube,’ they would have called down the fire of Heaven on us as a race of half-witted atheists. Probably they would have been quite right.

This clear and fine perception of what may be called the anæsthetic element in the Victorian era was, undoubtedly, the work of a great reformer: it requires a fine effort of the imagination to see an evil that surrounds us on every side. The manner in which Morris carried out his crusade may, considering the circumstances, be called triumphant. Our carpets began to bloom under our feet like the meadows in spring, and our hitherto prosaic stools and sofas seemed growing legs and arms at their own wild will. An element of freedom and rugged dignity came in with plain and strong ornaments of copper and iron. So delicate and universal has been the revolution in domestic art that almost every family in England has had its taste cunningly and treacherously improved, and if we look back at the early Victorian drawing-rooms it is only to realise the strange but essential truth that art, or human decoration, has, nine times out of ten in history, made things uglier than they were before, from the ‘coiffure’ of a Papuan savage to the wall-paper of a British merchant in 1830.

But great and beneficent as was the æsthetic revolution of Morris, there was a very definite limit to it. It did not lie only in the fact that his revolution was in truth a reaction, though this was a partial explanation of his partial failure. When he was denouncing the dresses of modern ladies, ‘upholstered like arm-chairs instead of being draped like women,’ as he forcibly expressed it, he would hold up for practical imitation the costumes and handicrafts of the Middle Ages. Further than this retrogressive and imitative movement he never seemed to go. Now, the men of the time of Chaucer had many evil qualities, but there was at least one exhibition of moral weakness they did not give. They would have laughed at the idea of dressing themselves in the manner of the bowmen at the battle of Senlac, or painting themselves an æsthetic blue, after the custom of the ancient Britons. They would not have called that a movement at all. Whatever was beautiful in their dress or manners sprang honestly and naturally out of the life they led and preferred to lead. And it may surely be maintained that any real advance in the beauty of modern dress must spring honestly and naturally out of the life we lead and prefer to lead. We are not altogether without hints and hopes of such a change, in the growing orthodoxy of rough and athletic costumes. But if this cannot be, it will be no substitute or satisfaction to turn life into an interminable historical fancy-dress ball. But the limitation of Morris’s work lay deeper than this. We may best suggest it by a method after his own heart. Of all the various works he performed, none, perhaps, was so splendidly and solidly valuable as his great protest for the fables and superstitions of mankind. He has the supreme credit of showing that the fairy-tales contain the deepest truth of the earth, the real record of men’s feeling for things. Trifling details may be inaccurate, Jack may not have climbed up so tall a beanstalk, or killed so tall a giant; but it is not such things that make a story false; it is a far different class of things that makes every modern book of history as false as the father of lies; ingenuity, self-consciousness, hypocritical impartiality. It appears to us that of all the fairy-tales none contains so vital a moral truth as the old story, existing in many forms, of Beauty and the Beast. There is written, with all the authority of a human scripture, the eternal and essential truth that until we love a thing in all its ugliness we cannot make it beautiful. This was the weak point in William Morris as a reformer: that he sought to reform modern life, and that he hated modern life instead of loving it. Modern London is indeed a beast, big enough and black enough to be the beast in Apocalypse, blazing with a million eyes, and roaring with a million voices. But unless the poet can love this fabulous monster as he is, can feel with some generous excitement his massive and mysterious 'joie-de-vivre,' the vast scale of his iron anatomy and the beating of his thunderous heart, he cannot and will not change the beast into the fairy prince. Morris's disadvantage was that he was not honestly a child of the nineteenth century: he could not understand its fascination, and consequently he could not really develop it. An abiding testimony to his tremendous personal influence in the æsthetic world is the vitality and recurrence of the Arts and Crafts Exhibitions, which are steeped in his personality like a chapel in that of a saint. If we look round at the exhibits in one of these æsthetic shows, we shall be struck by the large mass of modern objects that the decorative school leaves untouched. There is a noble instinct for giving the right touch of beauty to common and necessary things, but the things that are so touched are the ancient things, the things that always to some extent commended themselves to the lover of beauty. There are beautiful gates, beautiful fountains, beautiful cups, beautiful chairs, beautiful reading-desks. But there are no modern things made beautiful. There are no beautiful lamp-posts, beautiful letter-boxes, beautiful engines, beautiful bicycles. The spirit of William Morris has not seized hold of the century and made its humblest necessities beautiful. And this was because, with all his healthiness and energy, he had not the supreme courage to face the ugliness of things; Beauty shrank from the Beast and the fairy-tale had a different ending.

But herein, indeed, lay Morris's deepest claim to the name of a great reformer: that he left his work incomplete. There is, perhaps, no better proof that a man is a mere meteor, merely barren and brilliant, than that his work is done perfectly. A man like Morris draws attention to needs he cannot supply. In after-years we may have perhaps a newer and more daring Arts and Crafts Exhibition. In it we shall not decorate the armour of the twelfth century but the machinery of the twentieth. A lamp-post shall be wrought nobly in twisted iron, fit to hold the sanctity of fire. A pillar-box shall be carved with figures emblematical of the secrets of comradeship and the silence and honour of the State. Railway signals, of all earthly things the most poetical, the coloured stars of life and death, shall be lamps of green and crimson worthy of their terrible and faithful service. But if ever this gradual and genuine movement of our time towards beauty — not backwards, but forwards — does truly come about, Morris will be the first prophet of it. Poet of the childhood of nations, craftsman in the new honesties of art, prophet of a merrier and wiser life, his full-blooded enthusiasm will be remembered when human life has once more assumed flamboyant colours and proved that this painful greenish grey of the æsthetic twilight in which we now live is, in spite of all the pessimists, not of the greyness of death, but the greyness of dawn.

THE OPTIMISM OF BYRON

Everything is against our appreciating the spirit and the age of Byron. The age that has just passed from us is always like a dream when we wake in the morning, a thing incredible and centuries away. And the world of Byron seems a sad and faded world, a weird and inhuman world, where men were romantic in whiskers, ladies lived, apparently, in bowers, and the very word has the sound of a piece of stage scenery. Roses and nightingales recur in their poetry with the monotonous elegance of a wall-paper pattern. The whole is like a revel of dead men, a revel with splendid vesture and half-witted faces.

But the more shrewdly and earnestly we study the histories of men, the less ready shall we be to make use of the word "artificial." Nothing in the world has ever been artificial. Many customs, many dresses, many works of art are branded with artificiality because they exhibit vanity and self-consciousness: as if vanity were not a deep and elemental thing, like love and hate and the fear of death. Vanity may be found in darkling deserts, in the hermit and in the wild beasts that crawl around him. It may be good or evil, but assuredly it is not artificial: vanity is a voice out of the abyss.

The remarkable fact is, however, and it bears strongly on the present position of Byron, that when a thing is unfamiliar to us, when it is remote and the product of some other age or spirit, we think it not savage or terrible, but merely artificial. There are many instances of this: a fair one is the case of tropical plants and birds. When we see some of the monstrous and flamboyant blossoms that enrich the equatorial woods, we do not feel that they are conflagrations of nature; silent explosions of her frightful energy. We simply find it hard to believe that they are not wax flowers grown under a glass case. When we see some of the tropic birds, with their tiny bodies attached to gigantic beaks, we do not feel that they are freaks of the fierce humour of Creation. We almost believe that they are toys out of a child's play-box, artificially carved and artificially coloured. So it is with the great convulsion of Nature which was known as Byronism. The volcano is not an extinct volcano now; it is the dead stick of a rocket. It is the remains not of a natural but of an artificial fire.

But Byron and Byronism were something immeasurably greater than anything that is represented by such a view as this: their real value and meaning are indeed little understood. The first of the mistakes about Byron lies in the fact that he is treated as a pessimist. True, he treated himself as such, but a critic can hardly have even a slight knowledge of Byron without knowing that he had the smallest amount of knowledge of himself that ever fell to the lot of an intelligent man. The real character of what is known as Byron's pessimism is better worth study than any real pessimism could ever be.

It is the standing peculiarity of this curious world of ours that almost everything in it has been extolled enthusiastically and invariably extolled to the disadvantage of everything else.

One after another almost every one of the phenomena of the universe has been declared to be alone capable of making life worth living. Books, love, business, religion, alcohol, abstract truth, private emotion, money, simplicity, mysticism, hard work, a life close to nature, a life close to Belgrave Square are every one of them passionately maintained by somebody to be so good that they redeem the evil of an otherwise indefensible world. Thus while the world is almost always condemned in summary, it is always justified, and indeed extolled, in detail after detail.

Existence has been praised and absolved by a chorus of pessimists. The work of giving thanks to Heaven is, as it were, divided ingeniously among them. Schopenhauer is told off as a kind of librarian in the House of God, to sing the praises of the austere pleasures of the mind. Carlyle, as steward, undertakes the working department and eulogises a life of labour in the fields. Omar Khayyam is established in the cellar and swears that it is the only room in the house. Even the blackest of pessimistic artists enjoys his art. At the precise moment that he has written some shameless and terrible indictment of Creation, his one pang of joy in the achievement joins the universal chorus of gratitude, with the scent of the wild flower and the song of the bird.

Now Byron had a sensational popularity, and that popularity was, as far as words and explanations go, founded upon his pessimism. He was adored by an overwhelming majority, almost every individual of which despised the majority of mankind. But when we come to regard the matter a little more deeply we tend in some degree to cease to believe in this popularity of the pessimist. The popularity of pure and unadulterated pessimism is an oddity; it is almost a contradiction in terms. Men would no more receive the news of the failure of existence or of the harmonious hostility of the stars with ardour or popular rejoicing than they would light bonfires for the arrival of cholera or dance a breakdown when they were condemned to be hanged. When the pessimist is popular it must always be not because he shows all things to be bad, but because he shows some things to be good. Men can only join in a chorus of praise even if it is the praise of denunciation. The man who is popular must be optimistic about something even if he is only optimistic about pessimism. And this was emphatically the case with Byron and the Byronists. Their real popularity was founded not upon the fact that they blamed everything, but upon the fact that they praised something. They heaped curses upon man, but they used man merely as a foil. The things they wished to praise by comparison were the energies of Nature. Man was to them what talk and fashion were to Carlyle, what philosophical and religious quarrels were to Omar, what the whole race after practical happiness was to Schopenhauer, the thing which must be censured in order that somebody else may be exalted. It was merely a recognition of the fact that one cannot write in white chalk except on a blackboard.

Surely it is ridiculous to maintain seriously that Byron’s love of the desolate and inhuman in nature was the mark of vital scepticism and depression. When a young man can elect deliberately to walk alone in winter by the side of the shattering sea, when he takes pleasure in storms and stricken peaks, and the lawless melancholy of the older earth, we may deduce with the certainty of logic that he is very young and very happy. There is a certain darkness which we see in wine when seen in shadow; we see it again in the night that has just buried a gorgeous sunset. The wine seems black, and yet at the same time powerfully and almost impossibly red; the sky seems black, and yet at the same time to be only too dense a blend of purple and green. Such was the darkness which lay around the Byronic school. Darkness with them was only too dense a purple. They would prefer the sullen hostility of the earth because amid all the cold and darkness their own hearts were flaming like their own firesides.

Matters are very different with the more modern school of doubt and lamentation. The last movement of pessimism is perhaps expressed in Mr Aubrey Beardsley’s allegorical designs. Here we have to deal with a pessimism which tends naturally not towards the oldest elements of the cosmos, but towards the last and most fantastic fripperies of artificial life. Byronism tended towards the desert; the new pessimism towards the restaurant. Byronism was a revolt against artificiality; the new pessimism is a revolt in its favour. The Byronic young man had an affectation of sincerity; the decadent, going a step deeper into the avenues of the unreal, has positively an affectation of affectation. And it is by their fopperies and their frivolities that we know that their sinister philosophy is sincere; in their lights and garlands and ribbons we read their indwelling despair. It was so, indeed, with Byron himself; his really bitter moments were his frivolous moments. He went on year after year calling down fire upon mankind, summoning the deluge and the destructive sea and all the ultimate energies of nature to sweep away the cities of the spawn of man. But through all this his sub-conscious mind was not that of a despairer; on the contrary, there is something of a kind of lawless faith in thus parleying with such immense and immemorial brutalities. It was not until the time in which he wrote 'Don Juan' that he really lost this inward warmth and geniality, and a sudden shout of hilarious laughter announced to the world that Lord Byron had really become a pessimist.

One of the best tests in the world of what a poet really means is his metre. He may be a hypocrite in his metaphysics, but he cannot be a hypocrite in his prosody. And all the time that Byron's language is of horror and emptiness, his metre is a bounding 'pas de quatre.' He may arraign existence on the most deadly charges, he may condemn it with the most desolating verdict, but he cannot alter the fact that on some walk in a spring morning when all the limbs are swinging and all the blood alive in the body, the lips may be caught repeating:

'Oh, there's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away, When the glow of early youth declines in beauty's dull decay; 'Tis not upon the cheek of youth the blush that fades so fast, But the tender bloom of heart is gone ere youth itself be past.'

That automatic recitation is the answer to the whole pessimism of Byron.

The truth is that Byron was one of a class who may be called the unconscious optimists, who are very often, indeed, the most uncompromising conscious pessimists, because the exuberance of their nature demands for an adversary a dragon as big as the world. But the whole of his essential and unconscious being was spirited and confident, and that unconscious being, long disguised and buried under emotional artifices, suddenly sprang into prominence in the face of a cold, hard, political necessity. In Greece he heard the cry of reality, and at the time that he was dying, he began to live. He heard suddenly the call of that buried and sub-conscious happiness which is in all of us, and which may emerge suddenly at the sight of the grass of a meadow or the spears of the enemy.

POPE AND THE ART OF SATIRE

The general critical theory common in this and the last century is that it was very easy for the imitators of Pope to write English poetry. The classical couplet was a thing that anyone could do. So far as that goes, one may justifiably answer by asking any one to try. It may be easier really to have wit, than really, in the boldest and most enduring sense, to have imagination. But it is immeasurably easier to pretend to have imagination than to pretend to have wit. A man may indulge in a sham rhapsody, because it may be the triumph of a rhapsody to be unintelligible. But a man cannot indulge in a sham joke, because it is the ruin of a joke to be unintelligible. A man may pretend to be a poet: he can no more pretend to be a wit than he can pretend to bring rabbits out of a hat without having learnt to be a conjuror. Therefore, it may be submitted, there was a certain discipline in the old antithetical couplet of Pope and his followers. If it did not permit of the great liberty of wisdom used by the minority of great geniuses, neither did it permit of the great liberty of folly which is used by the majority of small writers. A prophet could not be a poet in those days, perhaps, but at least a fool could not be a poet. If we take, for the sake of example, such a line as Pope's

'Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,'

the test is comparatively simple. A great poet would not have written such a line, perhaps. But a minor poet could not.

Supposing that a lyric poet of the new school really had to deal with such an idea as that expressed in Pope's line about Man:

'A being darkly wise and rudely great.'

Is it really so certain that he would go deeper into the matter than that old antithetical jingle goes? I venture to doubt whether he would really be any wiser or weirder or more imaginative or more profound. The one thing that he would really be, would be longer. Instead of writing

'A being darkly wise and rudely great,'

the contemporary poet, in his elaborately ornamented book of verses, would produce something like the following: —

'A creature Of feature More dark, more dark, more dark than skies, Yea, darkly wise, yea, darkly wise: Darkly wise as a formless fate And if he be great If he be great, then rudely great, Rudely great as a plough that plies, And darkly wise, and darkly wise.’

Have we really learnt to think more broadly? Or have we only learnt to spread our thoughts thinner? I have a dark suspicion that a modern poet might manufacture an admirable lyric out of almost every line of Pope.

There is, of course, an idea in our time that the very antithesis of the typical line of Pope is a mark of artificiality. I shall have occasion more than once to point out that nothing in the world has ever been artificial. But certainly antithesis is not artificial. An element of paradox runs through the whole of existence itself. It begins in the realm of ultimate physics and metaphysics, in the two facts that we cannot imagine a space that is infinite, and that we cannot imagine a space that is finite. It runs through the inmost complications of divinity, in that we cannot conceive that Christ in the wilderness was truly pure, unless we also conceive that he desired to sin. It runs, in the same manner, through all the minor matters of morals, so that we cannot imagine courage existing except in conjunction with fear, or magnanimity existing except in conjunction with some temptation to meanness. If Pope and his followers caught this echo of natural irrationality, they were not any the more artificial. Their antitheses were fully in harmony with existence, which is itself a contradiction in terms.

Pope was really a great poet; he was the last great poet of civilisation. Immediately after the fall of him and his school come Burns and Byron, and the reaction towards the savage and the elemental. But to Pope civilisation was still an exciting experiment. Its perruques and ruffles were to him what feathers and bangles are to a South Sea Islander — the real romance of civilisation. And in all the forms of art which peculiarly belong to civilisation, he was supreme. In one especially he was supreme — the great and civilised art of satire. And in this we have fallen away utterly.

We have had a great revival in our time of the cult of violence and hostility. Mr Henley and his young men have an infinite number of furious epithets with which to overwhelm any one who differs from them. It is not a placid or untroubled position to be Mr Henley’s enemy, though we know that it is certainly safer than to be his friend. And yet, despite all this, these people produce no satire. Political and social satire is a lost art, like pottery and stained glass. It may be worth while to make some attempt to point out a reason for this.

It may seem a singular observation to say that we are not generous enough to write great satire. This, however, is approximately a very accurate way of describing the case. To write great satire, to attack a man so that he feels the attack and half acknowledges its justice, it is necessary to have a certain intellectual magnanimity which realises the merits of the opponent as well as his defects. This is, indeed, only another way of putting the simple truth that in order to attack an army we must know not only its weak points, but also its strong points. England in the present season and spirit fails in satire for the same simple reason that it fails in war: it despises the enemy. In matters of battle and conquest we have got firmly rooted in our minds the idea (an idea fit for the philosophers of Bedlam) that we can best trample on a people by ignoring all the particular merits which give them a chance of trampling upon us. It has become a breach of etiquette to praise the enemy; whereas when the enemy is strong every honest scout ought to praise the enemy. It is impossible to vanquish an army without having a full account of its strength. It is impossible to satirise a man without having a full account of his virtues. It is too much the custom in politics to describe a political opponent as utterly inhumane, as utterly careless of his country, as utterly cynical, which no man ever was since the beginning of the world. This kind of invective may often have a great superficial success: it may hit the mood of the moment; it may raise excitement and applause; it may impress millions. But there is one man among all those millions whom it does not impress, whom it hardly even touches; that is the man against whom it is directed. The one person for whom the whole satire has been written in vain is the man whom it is the whole object of the institution of satire to reach. He knows that such a description of him is not true. He knows that he is not utterly unpatriotic, or utterly self-seeking, or utterly barbarous and revengeful. He knows that he is an ordinary man, and that he can count as many kindly memories, as many humane instincts, as many hours of decent work and responsibility as any other ordinary man. But behind all this he has his real weaknesses, the real ironies of his soul: behind all these ordinary merits lie the mean compromises, the craven silences, the sullen vanities, the secret brutalities, the unmanly visions of revenge. It is to these that satire should reach if it is to touch the man at whom it is aimed. And to reach these it must pass and salute a whole army of virtues.

If we turn to the great English satirists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, we find that they had this rough but firm grasp of the size and strength, the value and the best points of their adversary. Dryden, before hewing Ahitophel in pieces, gives a splendid and spirited account of the insane valour and inspired cunning of the

‘daring pilot in extremity,’

who was more untrustworthy in calm than in storm, and

‘Steered too near the rocks to boast his wit.’

The whole is, so far as it goes, a sound and picturesque version of the great Shaftesbury. It would, in many ways, serve as a very sound and picturesque account of Lord Randolph Churchill. But here comes in very pointedly the difference between our modern attempts at satire and the ancient achievement of it. The opponents of Lord Randolph Churchill, both Liberal and Conservative, did not satirise him nobly and honestly, as one of those great wits to madness near allied. They represented him as a mere puppy, a silly and irreverent upstart whose impudence supplied the lack of policy and character. Churchill had grave and even gross faults, a certain coarseness, a certain hard boyish assertiveness, a certain lack of magnanimity, a certain peculiar patrician vulgarity. But he was a much larger man than satire depicted him, and therefore the satire could not and did not overwhelm him. And here we have the cause of the failure of contemporary satire, that it has no magnanimity, that is to say, no patience. It cannot endure to be told that its opponent has his strong points, just as Mr Chamberlain could not endure to be told that the Boers had a regular army. It can be content with nothing except persuading itself that its opponent is utterly bad or utterly stupid — that is, that he is what he is not and what nobody else is. If we take any prominent politician of the day — such, for example, as Sir William Harcourt — we shall find that this is the point in which all party invective fails. The Tory satire at the expense of Sir William Harcourt is always desperately endeavouring to represent that he is inept, that he makes a fool of himself, that he is disagreeable and disgraceful and untrustworthy. The defect of all this is that we all know that it is untrue. Everyone knows that Sir William Harcourt is not inept, but is almost the ablest Parliamentarian now alive. Everyone knows that he is not disagreeable or disgraceful, but a gentleman of the old school who is on excellent social terms with his antagonists. Everyone knows that he is not untrustworthy, but a man of unimpeachable honour who is much trusted.

Above all, he knows it himself, and is therefore affected by the satire exactly as any one of us would be if we were accused of being black or of keeping a shop for the receiving of stolen goods. We might be angry at the libel, but not at the satire; for a man is angry at a libel because it is false, but at a satire because it is true.

Mr Henley and his young men are very fond of invective and satire: if they wish to know the reason of their failure in these things, they need only turn to the opening of Pope’s superb attack upon Addison. The Henleyite’s idea of satirising a man is to express a violent contempt for him, and by the heat of this to persuade others and himself that the man is contemptible. I remember reading a satiric attack on Mr Gladstone by one of the young anarchic Tories, which began by asserting that Mr Gladstone was a bad public speaker. If these people would, as I have said, go quietly and read Pope’s ‘Atticus,’ they would see how a great satirist approaches a great enemy:

‘Peace to all such! But were there one whose fires True genius kindles, and fair fame inspires, Blest with each talent, and each art to please, And born to write, converse, and live with ease. Should such a man—’

And then follows the torrent of that terrible criticism. Pope was not such a fool as to try to make out that Addison was a fool. He knew that Addison was not a fool, and he knew that Addison knew it. But hatred, in Pope’s case, had become so great and, I was almost going to say, so pure, that it illuminated all things, as love illuminates all things. He said what was really wrong with Addison; and in calm and clear and everlasting colours he painted the picture of the evil of the literary temperament:

‘Bear like the Turk, no brother near the throne, View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes, And hate for arts that caused himself to rise.

Like Cato give his little Senate laws, And sit attentive to his own applause. While wits and templars every sentence raise, And wonder with a foolish face of praise.’

This is the kind of thing which really goes to the mark at which it aims. It is penetrated with sorrow and a kind of reverence, and it is addressed directly to a man. This is no mock-tournament to gain the applause of the crowd. It is a deadly duel by the lonely seashore.

In current political materialism there is everywhere the assumption that, without understanding anything of his case or his merits, we can benefit a man practically. Without understanding his case and his merits, we cannot even hurt him.

FRANCIS

Asceticism is a thing which in its very nature, we tend in these days to misunderstand. Asceticism, in the religious sense, is the repudiation of the great mass of human joys because of the supreme joyfulness of the one joy, the religious joy. But asceticism is not in the least confined to religious asceticism: there is scientific asceticism which asserts that truth is alone satisfying: there is æsthetic asceticism which asserts that art is alone satisfying: there is amatory asceticism which asserts that love is alone satisfying. There is even epicurean asceticism, which asserts that beer and skittles are alone satisfying. Wherever the manner of praising anything involves the statement that the speaker could live with that thing alone, there lies the germ and essence of asceticism. When William Morris, for example, says that ‘love is enough,’ it is obvious that he asserts in those words that art, science, politics, ambition, money, houses, carriages, concerts, gloves, walking-sticks, door-knockers, railway-stations, cathedrals and any other things one may choose to tabulate are unnecessary. When Omar Khayyam says:

‘A book of verse beneath the bough A loaf of bread, a jug of wine and thou Sitting beside me in the wilderness O wilderness were Paradise enow.’

It is clear that he speaks fully as much ascetically as he does æsthetically. He makes a list of things and says that he wants no more. The same thing was done by a mediæval monk. Examples might, of course, be multiplied a hundred-fold. One of the most genuinely poetical of our younger poets says, as the one thing certain, that

‘From quiet home and first beginning Out to the undiscovered ends — There’s nothing worth the wear of winning But laughter and the love of friends.’

Here we have a perfect example of the main important fact, that all true joy expresses itself in terms of asceticism.

But if in any case it should happen that a class or a generation lose the sense of the peculiar kind of joy which is being celebrated, they immediately begin to call the enjoyers of that joy gloomy and self-destroying. The most formidable liberal philosophers have called the monks melancholy because they denied themselves the pleasures of liberty and marriage. They might as well call the trippers on a Bank Holiday melancholy because they deny themselves, as a rule, the pleasures of silence and meditation. A simpler and stronger example is, however, to hand. If ever it should happen that the system of English athletics should vanish from the public schools and the universities, if science should supply some new and non-competitive manner of perfecting the physique, if public ethics swung round to an attitude of absolute contempt and indifference towards the feeling called sport, then it is easy to see what would happen. Future historians would simply state that in the dark days of Queen Victoria young men at Oxford and Cambridge were subjected to a horrible sort of religious torture. They were forbidden, by fantastic monastic rules, to indulge in wine or tobacco during certain arbitrarily fixed periods of time, before certain brutal fights and festivals. Bigots insisted on their rising at unearthly hours and running violently around fields for no object. Many men ruined their health in these dens of superstition, many died there. All this is perfectly true and irrefutable. Athleticism in England is an asceticism, as much as the monastic rules. Men have over-strained themselves and killed themselves through English athleticism. There is one difference and one only: we do feel the love of sport; we do not feel the love of religious offices. We see only the price in the one case and only the purchase in the other.

The only question that remains is what was the joy of the old Christian ascetics of which their ascetism was merely the purchasing price. The mere possibility of the query is an extraordinary example of the way in which we miss the main points of human history. We are looking at humanity too close, and see only the details and not the vast and dominant features. We look at the rise of Christianity, and conceive it as a rise of self-abnegation and almost of pessimism. It does not occur to us that the mere assertion that this raging and confounding universe is governed by justice and mercy is a piece of staggering optimism fit to set all men capering. The detail over which these monks went mad with joy was the universe itself; the only thing really worthy of enjoyment. The white daylight shone over all the world, the endless forests stood up in their order. The lightning awoke and the tree fell and the sea gathered into mountains and the ship went down, and all these disconnected and meaningless and terrible objects were all part of one dark and fearful conspiracy of goodness, one merciless scheme of mercy. That this scheme of Nature was not accurate or well founded is perfectly tenable, but surely it is not tenable that it was not optimistic. We insist, however, upon treating this matter tail foremost. We insist that the ascetics were pessimists because they gave up threescore years and ten for an eternity of happiness. We forget that the bare proposition of an eternity of happiness is by its very nature ten thousand times more optimistic than ten thousand pagan saturnalias.

Mr Adderley’s life of Francis of Assisi does not, of course, bring this out; nor does it fully bring out the character of Francis. It has rather the tone of a devotional book. A devotional book is an excellent thing, but we do not look in it for the portrait of a man, for the same reason that we do not look in a love-sonnet for the portrait of a woman, because men in such conditions of mind not only apply all virtues to their idol, but all virtues in equal quantities. There is no outline, because the artist cannot bear to put in a black line. This blaze of benediction, this conflict between lights, has its place in poetry, not in biography. The successful examples of it may be found, for instance, in the more idealistic odes of Spenser. The design is sometimes almost indecipherable, for the poet draws in silver upon white.

It is natural, of course, that Mr Adderley should see Francis primarily as the founder of the Franciscan Order. We suspect this was only one, perhaps a minor one, of the things that he was; we suspect that one of the minor things that Christ did was to found Christianity. But the vast practical work of Francis is assuredly not to be ignored, for this amazingly unworldly and almost maddeningly simple — minded infant was one of the most consistently successful men that ever fought with this bitter world. It is the custom to say that the secret of such men is their profound belief in themselves, and this is true, but not all the truth. Workhouses and lunatic asylums are thronged with men who believe in themselves. Of Francis it is far truer to say that the secret of his success was his profound belief in other people, and it is the lack of this that has commonly been the curse of these obscure Napoleons. Francis always assumed that everyone must be just as anxious about their common relative, the water-rat, as he was. He planned a visit to the Emperor to draw his attention to the needs of ‘his little sisters the larks.’ He used to talk to any thieves and robbers he met about their misfortune in being unable to give rein to their desire for holiness. It was an innocent habit, and doubtless the robbers often ‘got round him,’ as the phrase goes. Quite as often, however, they discovered that he had ‘got round’ them, and discovered the other side, the side of secret nobility.

Conceiving of St Francis as primarily the founder of the Franciscan Order, Mr Adderley opens his narrative with an admirable sketch of the history of Monasticism in Europe, which is certainly the best thing in the book. He distinguishes clearly and fairly between the Manichæan ideal that underlies so much of Eastern Monasticism and the ideal of self-discipline which never wholly vanished from the Christian form. But he does not throw any light on what must be for the outsider the absorbing problem of this Catholic asceticism, for the excellent reason that not being an outsider he does not find it a problem at all.

To most people, however, there is a fascinating inconsistency in the position of St Francis. He expressed in loftier and bolder language than any earthly thinker the conception that laughter is as divine as tears. He called his monks the mountebanks of God. He never forgot to take pleasure in a bird as it flashed past him, or a drop of water as it fell from his finger: he was, perhaps, the happiest of the sons of men. Yet this man undoubtedly founded his whole polity on the negation of what we think the most imperious necessities; in his three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, he denied to himself and those he loved most, property, love, and liberty. Why was it that the most large-hearted and poetic spirits in that age found their most congenial atmosphere in these awful renunciations? Why did he who loved where all men were blind, seek to blind himself where all men loved? Why was he a monk, and not a troubadour? These questions are far too large to be answered fully here, but in any life of Francis they ought at least to have been asked; we have a suspicion that if they were answered we should suddenly find that much of the enigma of this sullen time of ours was answered also. So it was with the monks. The two great parties in human affairs are only the party which sees life black against white, and the party which sees it white against black, the party which macerates and blackens itself with sacrifice because the background is full of the blaze of an universal mercy, and the party which crowns itself with flowers and lights itself with bridal torches because it stands against a black curtain of incalculable night. The revellers are old, and the monks are young. It was the monks who were the spendthrifts of happiness, and we who are its misers.

Doubtless, as is apparent from Mr Adderley’s book, the clear and tranquil life of the Three Vows had a fine and delicate effect on the genius of Francis. He was primarily a poet. The perfection of his literary instinct is shown in his naming the fire ‘brother,’ and the water ‘sister,’ in the quaint demagogic dexterity of the appeal in the sermon to the fishes ‘that they alone were saved in the Flood.’ In the amazingly minute and graphic dramatisation of the life, disappointments and excuses of any shrub or beast that he happened to be addressing, his genius has a curious resemblance to that of Burns. But if he avoided the weakness of Burns’ verses to animals, the occasional morbidity, bombast and moralisation on himself, the credit is surely due to a cleaner and more transparent life.

The general attitude of St Francis, like that of his Master, embodied a kind of terrible common-sense. The famous remark of the Caterpillar in ‘Alice in Wonderland’— ‘Why not?’ impresses us as his general motto. He could not see why he should not be on good terms with all things. The pomp of war and ambition, the great empire of the Middle Ages and all its fellows begin to look tawdry and top-heavy, under the rationality of that innocent stare. His questions were blasting and devastating, like the questions of a child. He would not have been afraid even of the nightmares of cosmogony, for he had no fear in him. To him the world was small, not because he had any views as to its size, but for the reason that gossiping ladies find it small, because so many relatives were to be found in it. If you had taken him to the loneliest star that the madness of an astronomer can conceive, he would have only beheld in it the features of a new friend.

ROSTAND

When ‘Cyrano de Bergerac’ was published, it bore the subordinate title of a heroic comedy. We have no tradition in English literature which would justify us in calling a comedy heroic, though there was once a poet who called a comedy divine. By the current modern conception, the hero has his place in a tragedy, and the one kind of strength which is systematically denied to him is the strength to succeed. That the power of a man’s spirit might possibly go to the length of turning a tragedy into a comedy is not admitted; nevertheless, almost all the primitive legends of the world are comedies, not only in the sense that they have a happy ending, but in the sense that they are based upon a certain optimistic assumption that the hero is destined to be the destroyer of the monster. Singularly enough, this modern idea of the essential disastrous character of life, when seriously considered, connects itself with a hyper-æsthetic view of tragedy and comedy which is largely due to the influence of modern France, from which the great heroic comedies of Monsieur Rostand have come. The French genius has an instinct for remedying its own evil work, and France gives always the best cure for ‘Frenchiness.’ The idea of comedy which is held in England by the school which pays most attention to the technical niceties of art is a view which renders such an idea as that of heroic comedy quite impossible. The fundamental conception in the minds of the majority of our younger writers is that comedy is, ‘par excellence,’ a fragile thing. It is conceived to be a conventional world of the most absolutely delicate and gimcrack description. Such stories as Mr Max Beerbohm’s ‘Happy Hypocrite’ are conceptions which would vanish or fall into utter nonsense if viewed by one single degree too seriously. But great comedy, the comedy of Shakespeare or Sterne, not only can be, but must be, taken seriously. There is nothing to which a man must give himself up with more faith and self-abandonment than to genuine laughter. In such comedies one laughs with the heroes and not at them. The humour which steeps the stories of Falstaff and Uncle Toby is a cosmic and philosophic humour, a geniality which goes down to the depths. It is not superficial reading, it is not even, strictly speaking, light reading. Our sympathies are as much committed to the characters as if they were the predestined victims in a Greek tragedy. The modern writer of comedies may be said to boast of the brittleness of his characters. He seems always on the eve of knocking his puppets to pieces. When John Oliver Hobbes wrote for the first time a comedy of serious emotions, she named it, with a thinly-disguised contempt for her own work, ‘A Sentimental Comedy.’ The ground of this conception of the artificiality of comedy is a profound pessimism. Life in the eyes of these mournful buffoons is itself an utterly tragic thing; comedy must be as hollow as a grinning mask. It is a refuge from the world, and not even, properly speaking, a part of it. Their wit is a thin sheet of shining ice over the eternal waters of bitterness.

‘Cyrano de Bergerac’ came to us as the new decoration of an old truth, that merriment was one of the world’s natural flowers, and not one of its exotics. The gigantesque levity, the flamboyant eloquence, the Rabelaisian puns and digressions were seen to be once more what they had been in Rabelais, the mere outbursts of a human sympathy and bravado as old and solid as the stars. The human spirit demanded wit as headlong and haughty as its will. All was expressed in the words of Cyrano at his highest moment of happiness. ‘Il me faut des géants.’ An essential aspect of this question of heroic comedy is the question of drama in rhyme. There is nothing that affords so easy a point of attack for the dramatic realist as the conduct of a play in verse. According to his canons, it is indeed absurd to represent a number of characters facing some terrible crisis in their lives by capping rhymes like a party playing ‘bouts rimés.’ In his eyes it must appear somewhat ridiculous that two enemies taunting each other with insupportable insults should obligingly provide each other with metrical spacing and neat and convenient rhymes. But the whole of this view rests finally upon the fact that few persons, if any, to-day understand what is meant by a poetical play. It is a singular thing that those poetical plays which are now written in England by the most advanced students of the drama follow exclusively the lines of Maeterlinck, and use verse and rhyme for the adornment of a profoundly tragic theme. But rhyme has a supreme appropriateness for the treatment of the higher comedy. The land of heroic comedy is, as it were, a paradise of lovers, in which it is not difficult to imagine that men could talk poetry all day long. It is far more conceivable that men’s speech should flower naturally into these harmonious forms, when they are filled with the essential spirit of youth, than when they are sitting gloomily in the presence of immemorial destiny. The great error consists in supposing that poetry is an unnatural form of language. We should all like to speak poetry at the moment when we truly live, and if we do not speak it, it is because we have an impediment in our speech. It is not song that is the narrow or artificial thing, it is conversation that is a broken and stammering attempt at song. When we see men in a spiritual extravaganza, like Cyrano de Bergerac, speaking in rhyme, it is not our language disguised or distorted, but our language rounded and made whole. Rhymes answer each other as the sexes in flowers and in humanity answer each other. Men do not speak so, it is true. Even when they are inspired or in love they talk inanities. But the poetic comedy does not misrepresent the speech one half so much, as the speech misrepresents the soul. Monsieur Rostand showed even more than his usual insight when he called ‘Cyrano de Bergerac’ a comedy, despite the fact that, strictly speaking, it ends with disappointment and death. The essence of tragedy is a spiritual breakdown or decline, and in the great French play the spiritual sentiment mounts unceasingly until the last line. It is not the facts themselves, but our feeling about them, that makes tragedy and comedy, and death is more joyful in Rostand than life in Maeterlinck. The same apparent contradiction holds good in the case of the drama of ‘L’Aiglon,’ now being performed with so much success. Although the hero is a weakling, the subject a fiasco, the end a premature death and a personal disillusionment, yet, in spite of this theme, which might have been chosen for its depressing qualities, the unconquerable pæan of the praise of things, the ungovernable gaiety of the poet’s song swells so high that at the end it seems to drown all the weak voices of the characters in one crashing chorus of great things and great men. A multitude of mottoes might be taken from the play to indicate and illustrate, not only its own spirit, but much of the spirit of modern life. When in the vision of the field of Wagram the horrible voices of the wounded cry out, ‘Les corbeaux, les corbeaux,’ the Duke, overwhelmed with a nightmare of hideous trivialities, cries out, ‘Où, où sont les aigles?’ That antithesis might stand alone as an invocation at the beginning of the twentieth century to the spirit of heroic comedy. When an ex-General of Napoleon is asked his reason for having betrayed the Emperor, he replies, ‘La fatigue,’ and at that a veteran private of the Great Army rushes forward, and crying passionately, ‘Et nous?’ pours out a terrible description of the life lived by the common soldier. To-day when pessimism is almost as much a symbol of wealth and fashion as jewels or cigars, when the pampered heirs of the ages can sum up life in few other words but ‘la fatigue,’ there might surely come a cry from the vast mass of common humanity from the beginning ‘et nous?’ It is this potentiality for enthusiasm among the mass of men that makes the function of comedy at once common and sublime. Shakespeare’s ‘Much Ado about Nothing’ is a great comedy, because behind it is the whole pressure of that love of love which is the youth of the world, which is common to all the young, especially to those who swear they will die bachelors and old maids. ‘Love’s Labour Lost’ is filled with the same energy, and there it falls even more definitely into the scope of our subject since it is a comedy in rhyme in which all men speak lyrically as naturally as the birds sing in pairing time. What the love of love is to the Shakespearian comedies, that other and more mysterious human passion, the love of death, is to ‘L’Aiglon.’ Whether we shall ever have in England a new tradition of poetic comedy it is difficult at present to say, but we shall assuredly never have it until we realise that comedy is built upon everlasting foundations in the nature of things, that it is not a thing too light to capture, but too deep to plumb. Monsieur Rostand, in his description of the Battle of Wagram, does not shrink from bringing about the Duke’s ears the frightful voices of actual battle, of men torn by crows, and suffocated with blood, but when the Duke, terrified at these dreadful appeals, asks them for their final word, they all cry together ‘Vive l’Empereur!’ Monsieur Rostand, perhaps, did not know that he was writing an allegory. To me that field of Wagram is the field of the modern war of literature. We hear nothing but the voices of pain; the whole is one phonograph of horror. It is right that we should hear these things, it is right that not one of them should be silenced; but these cries of distress are not in life as they are in modern art the only voices, they are the voices of men, but not the voice of man. When questioned finally and seriously as to their conception of their destiny, men have from the beginning of time answered in a thousand philosophies and religions with a single voice and in a sense most sacred and tremendous, ‘Vive l’Empereur.’

CHARLES II

There are a great many bonds which still connect us with Charles II., one of the idlest men of one of the idlest epochs. Among other things Charles II. represented one thing which is very rare and very satisfying; he was a real and consistent sceptic. Scepticism both in its advantages and disadvantages is greatly misunderstood in our time. There is a curious idea abroad that scepticism has some connection with such theories as materialism and atheism and secularism. This is of course a mistake; the true sceptic has nothing to do with these theories simply because they are theories. The true sceptic is as much a spiritualist as he is a materialist. He thinks that the savage dancing round an African idol stands quite as good a chance of being right as Darwin. He thinks that mysticism is every bit as rational as rationalism. He has indeed the most profound doubts as to whether St Matthew wrote his own gospel. But he has quite equally profound doubts as to whether the tree he is looking at is a tree and not a rhinoceros.

This is the real meaning of that mystery which appears so prominently in the lives of great sceptics, which appears with especial prominence in the life of Charles II. I mean their constant oscillation between atheism and Roman Catholicism. Roman Catholicism is indeed a great and fixed and formidable system, but so is atheism. Atheism is indeed the most daring of all dogmas, more daring than the vision of a palpable day of judgment. For it is the assertion of a universal negative; for a man to say that there is no God in the universe is like saying that there are no insects in any of the stars.

Thus it was with that wholesome and systematic sceptic, Charles II. When he took the Sacrament according to the forms of the Roman Church in his last hour he was acting consistently as a philosopher. The wafer might not be God; similarly it might not be a wafer. To the genuine and poetical sceptic the whole world is incredible, with its bulbous mountains and its fantastic trees. The whole order of things is as outrageous as any miracle which could presume to violate it. Transubstantiation might be a dream, but if it was, it was assuredly a dream within a dream. Charles II. sought to guard himself against hell fire because he could not think hell itself more fantastic than the world as it was revealed by science. The priest crept up the staircase, the doors were closed, the few of the faithful who were present hushed themselves respectfully, and so, with every circumstance of secrecy and sanctity, with the cross uplifted and the prayers poured out, was consummated the last great act of logical unbelief.

The problem of Charles II. consists in this, that he has scarcely a moral virtue to his name, and yet he attracts us morally. We feel that some of the virtues have been dropped out in the lists made by all the saints and sages, and that Charles II. was pre-eminently successful in these wild and unmentionable virtues. The real truth of this matter and the real relation of Charles II. to the moral ideal is worth somewhat more exhaustive study.

It is a commonplace that the Restoration movement can only be understood when considered as a reaction against Puritanism. But it is insufficiently realised that the tyranny which half frustrated all the good work of Puritanism was of a very peculiar kind. It was not the fire of Puritanism, the exultation in sobriety, the frenzy of a restraint, which passed away; that still burns in the heart of England, only to be quenched by the final overwhelming sea. But it is seldom remembered that the Puritans were in their day emphatically intellectual bullies, that they relied swaggeringly on the logical necessity of Calvinism, that they bound omnipotence itself in the chains of syllogism. The Puritans fell, through the damning fact that they had a complete theory of life, through the eternal paradox that a satisfactory explanation can never satisfy. Like Brutus and the logical Romans, like the logical French Jacobins, like the logical English utilitarians, they taught the lesson that men’s wants have always been right and their arguments always wrong. Reason is always a kind of brute force; those who appeal to the head rather than the heart, however pallid and polite, are necessarily men of violence. We speak of ‘touching’ a man’s heart, but we can do nothing to his head but hit it. The tyranny of the Puritans over the bodies of men was comparatively a trifle; pikes, bullets, and conflagrations are comparatively a trifle. Their real tyranny was the tyranny of aggressive reason over the cowed and demoralised human spirit. Their brooding and raving can be forgiven, can in truth be loved and reverenced, for it is humanity on fire; hatred can be genial, madness can be homely. The Puritans fell, not because they were fanatics, but because they were rationalists.

When we consider these things, when we remember that Puritanism, which means in our day a moral and almost temperamental attitude, meant in that day a singularly arrogant logical attitude, we shall comprehend a little more the grain of good that lay in the vulgarity and triviality of the Restoration. The Restoration, of which Charles II. was a pre-eminent type, was in part a revolt of all the chaotic and unclassed parts of human nature, the parts that are left over, and will always be left over, by every rationalistic system of life. This does not merely account for the revolt of the vices and of that empty recklessness and horseplay which is sometimes more irritating than any vice. It accounts also for the return of the virtue of politeness, for that also is a nameless thing ignored by logical codes. Politeness has indeed about it something mystical; like religion, it is everywhere understood and nowhere defined. Charles is not entirely to be despised because, as the type of this movement, he let himself float upon this new tide of politeness. There was some moral and social value in his perfection in little things. He could not keep the Ten Commandments, but he kept the ten thousand commandments. His name is unconnected with any great acts of duty or sacrifice, but it is connected with a great many of those acts of magnanimous politeness, of a kind of dramatic delicacy, which lie on the dim borderland between morality and art. ‘Charles II.,’ said Thackeray, with unerring brevity, ‘was a rascal but not a snob.’ Unlike George IV. he was a gentleman, and a gentleman is a man who obeys strange statutes, not to be found in any moral text-book, and practises strange virtues nameless from the beginning of the world.

So much may be said and should be said for the Restoration, that it was the revolt of something human, if only the débris of human nature. But more cannot be said. It was emphatically a fall and not an ascent, a recoil and not an advance, a sudden weakness and not a sudden strength. That the bow of human nature was by Puritanism bent immeasurably too far, that it overstrained the soul by stretching it to the height of an almost horrible idealism, makes the collapse of the Restoration infinitely more excusable, but it does not make it any the less a collapse. Nothing can efface the essential distinction that Puritanism was one of the world’s great efforts after the discovery of the true order, whereas it was the essence of the Restoration that it involved no effort at all. It is true that the Restoration was not, as has been widely assumed, the most immoral epoch of our history. Its vices cannot compare for a moment in this respect with the monstrous tragedies and almost suffocating secrecies and villainies of the Court of James I. But the dram-drinking and nose-slitting of the saturnalia of Charles II. seem at once more human and more detestable than the passions and poisons of the Renaissance, much in the same way that a monkey appears inevitably more human and more detestable than a tiger. Compared with the Renaissance, there is something Cockney about the Restoration. Not only was it too indolent for great morality, it was too indolent even for great art. It lacked that seriousness which is needed even for the pursuit of pleasure, that discipline which is essential even to a game of lawn tennis. It would have appeared to Charles II.'s poets quite as arduous to write 'Paradise Lost' as to regain Paradise.

All old and vigorous languages abound in images and metaphors, which, though lightly and casually used, are in truth poems in themselves, and poems of a high and striking order. Perhaps no phrase is so terribly significant as the phrase 'killing time.' It is a tremendous and poetical image, the image of a kind of cosmic parricide. There is on the earth a race of revellers who do, under all their exuberance, fundamentally regard time as an enemy. Of these were Charles II. and the men of the Restoration. Whatever may have been their merits, and as we have said we think that they had merits, they can never have a place among the great representatives of the joy of life, for they belonged to those lower epicureans who kill time, as opposed to those higher epicureans who make time live.

Of a people in this temper Charles II. was the natural and rightful head. He may have been a pantomime King, but he was a King, and with all his geniality he let nobody forget it. He was not, indeed, the aimless flaneur that he has been represented. He was a patient and cunning politician, who disguised his wisdom under so perfect a mask of folly that he not only deceived his allies and opponents, but has deceived almost all the historians that have come after him. But if Charles was, as he emphatically was, the only Stuart who really achieved despotism, it was greatly due to the temper of the nation and the age. Despotism is the easiest of all governments, at any rate for the governed.

It is indeed a form of slavery, and it is the despot who is the slave. Men in a state of decadence employ professionals to fight for them, professionals to dance for them, and a professional to rule them.

Almost all the faces in the portraits of that time look, as it were, like masks put on artificially with the perruque. A strange unreality broods over the period. Distracted as we are with civic mysteries and problems, we can afford to rejoice. Our tears are less desolate than their laughter, our restraints are larger than their liberty.

STEVENSON

A recent incident has finally convinced us that Stevenson was, as we suspected, a great man. We knew from recent books that we have noticed, from the scorn of ‘Ephemera Critica’ and Mr George Moore, that Stevenson had the first essential qualification of a great man: that of being misunderstood by his opponents. But from the book which Messrs Chatto & Windus have issued, in the same binding as Stevenson’s works, ‘Robert Louis Stevenson,’ by Mr H. Bellyse Baildon, we learn that he has the other essential qualification, that of being misunderstood by his admirers. Mr Baildon has many interesting things to tell us about Stevenson himself, whom he knew at college. Nor are his criticisms by any means valueless. That upon the plays, especially ‘Beau Austin,’ is remarkably thoughtful and true. But it is a very singular fact, and goes far, as we say, to prove that Stevenson had that unfathomable quality which belongs to the great, that this admiring student of Stevenson can number and marshal all the master’s work and distribute praise and blame with decision and even severity, without ever thinking for a moment of the principles of art and ethics which would have struck us as the very things that Stevenson nearly killed himself to express.

Mr Baildon, for example, is perpetually lecturing Stevenson for his ‘pessimism’; surely a strange charge against the man who has done more than any modern artist to make men ashamed of their shame of life. But he complains that, in ‘The Master of Ballantrae’ and ‘Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde,’ Stevenson gives evil a final victory over good. Now if there was one point that Stevenson more constantly and passionately emphasised than any other it was that we must worship good for its own value and beauty, without any reference whatever to victory or failure in space and time. ‘Whatever we are intended to do,’ he said, ‘we are not intended to succeed.’ That the stars in their courses fight against virtue, that humanity is in its nature a forlorn hope, this was the very spirit that through the whole of Stevenson’s work sounded a trumpet to all the brave. The story of Henry Durie is dark enough, but could anyone stand beside the grave of that sodden monomaniac and not respect him? It is strange that men should see sublime inspiration in the ruins of an old church and see none in the ruins of a man.

The author has most extraordinary ideas about Stevenson’s tales of blood and spoil; he appears to think that they prove Stevenson to have had (we use Mr Baildon’s own phrase) a kind of ‘homicidal mania.’ ‘He (Stevenson) arrives pretty much at the paradox that one can hardly be better employed than in taking life.’ Mr Baildon might as well say that Dr Conan Doyle delights in committing inexplicable crimes, that Mr Clark Russell is a notorious pirate, and that Mr Wilkie Collins thought that one could hardly be better employed than in stealing moonstones and falsifying marriage registers. But Mr Baildon is scarcely alone in this error: few people have understood properly the goriness of Stevenson. Stevenson was essentially the robust schoolboy who draws skeletons and gibbets in his Latin grammar. It was not that he took pleasure in death, but that he took pleasure in life, in every muscular and emphatic action of life, even if it were an action that took the life of another.

Let us suppose that one gentleman throws a knife at another gentleman and pins him to the wall. It is scarcely necessary to remark that there are in this transaction two somewhat varying personal points of view. The point of view of the man pinned is the tragic and moral point of view, and this Stevenson showed clearly that he understood in such stories as ‘The Master of Ballantrae’ and ‘Weir of Hermiston.’ But there is another view of the matter — that in which the whole act is an abrupt and brilliant explosion of bodily vitality, like breaking a rock with a blow of a hammer, or just clearing a five-barred gate. This is the standpoint of romance, and it is the soul of ‘Treasure Island’ and ‘The Wrecker.’ It was not, indeed, that Stevenson loved men less, but that he loved clubs and pistols more. He had, in truth, in the devouring universalism of his soul, a positive love for inanimate objects such as has not been known since St Francis called the sun brother and the well sister. We feel that he was actually in love with the wooden crutch that Silver sent hurtling in the sunlight, with the box that Billy Bones left at the ‘Admiral Benbow,’ with the knife that Wicks drove through his own hand and the table. There is always in his work a certain clean-cut angularity which makes us remember that he was fond of cutting wood with an axe.

Stevenson’s new biographer, however, cannot make any allowance for this deep-rooted poetry of mere sight and touch. He is always imputing something to Stevenson as a crime which Stevenson really professed as an object. He says of that glorious riot of horror, ‘The Destroying Angel,’ in

‘The Dynamiter,’ that it is ‘highly fantastic and putting a strain on our credulity.’ This is rather like describing the travels of Baron Munchausen as ‘unconvincing.’ The whole story of ‘The Dynamiter’ is a kind of humorous nightmare, and even in that story ‘The Destroying Angel’ is supposed to be an extravagant lie made up on the spur of the moment. It is a dream within a dream, and to accuse it of improbability is like accusing the sky of being blue. But Mr Baildon, whether from hasty reading or natural difference of taste, cannot in the least comprehend the rich and romantic irony of Stevenson’s London stories. He actually says of that portentous monument of humour, Prince Florizel of Bohemia, that, ‘though evidently admired by his creator, he is to me on the whole rather an irritating presence.’ From this we are almost driven to believe (though desperately and against our will) that Mr Baildon thinks that Prince Florizel is to be taken seriously, as if he were a man in real life. For ourselves, Prince Florizel is almost our favourite character in fiction; but we willingly add the proviso that if we met him in real life we should kill him.

The fact is, that the whole mass of Stevenson’s spiritual and intellectual virtues have been partly frustrated by one additional virtue — that of artistic dexterity. If he had chalked up his great message on a wall, like Walt Whitman, in large and straggling letters, it would have startled men like a blasphemy. But he wrote his light-headed paradoxes in so flowing a copy-book hand that everyone supposed they must be copy-book sentiments. He suffered from his versatility, not, as is loosely said, by not doing every department well enough, but by doing every department too well. As child, cockney, pirate, or Puritan, his disguises were so good that most people could not see the same man under all. It is an unjust fact that if a man can play the fiddle, give legal opinions, and black boots just tolerably, he is called an Admirable Crichton, but if he does all three thoroughly well, he is apt to be regarded, in the several departments, as a common fiddler, a common lawyer, and a common boot-black. This is what has happened in the case of Stevenson. If ‘Dr Jekyll,’ ‘The Master of Ballantrae,’ ‘The Child’s Garden of Verses,’ and ‘Across the Plains’ had been each of them one shade less perfectly done than they were, everyone would have seen that they were all parts of the same message; but by succeeding in the proverbial miracle of being in five places at once, he has naturally convinced others that he was five different people. But the real message of

Stevenson was as simple as that of Mahomet, as moral as that of Dante, as confident as that of Whitman, and as practical as that of James Watt.

The conception which unites the whole varied work of Stevenson was that romance, or the vision of the possibilities of things, was far more important than mere occurrences: that one was the soul of our life, the other the body, and that the soul was the precious thing. The germ of all his stories lies in the idea that every landscape or scrap of scenery has a soul: and that soul is a story. Standing before a stunted orchard with a broken stone wall, we may know as a mere fact that no one has been through it but an elderly female cook. But everything exists in the human soul: that orchard grows in our own brain, and there it is the shrine and theatre of some strange chance between a girl and a ragged poet and a mad farmer. Stevenson stands for the conception that ideas are the real incidents: that our fancies are our adventures. To think of a cow with wings is essentially to have met one. And this is the reason for his wide diversities of narrative: he had to make one story as rich as a ruby sunset, another as grey as a hoary monolith: for the story was the soul, or rather the meaning, of the bodily vision. It is quite inappropriate to judge 'The Teller of Tales' (as the Samoans called him) by the particular novels he wrote, as one would judge Mr George Moore by 'Esther Waters.' These novels were only the two or three of his soul's adventures that he happened to tell. But he died with a thousand stories in his heart.

'Robert Louis Stevenson: A Life Study in Criticism.' By H. Bellyse Baildon. Chatto & Windus.

THOMAS CARLYLE

There are two main moral necessities for the work of a great man: the first is that he should believe in the truth of his message; the second is that he should believe in the acceptability of his message. It was the whole tragedy of Carlyle that he had the first and not the second.

The ordinary capital, however, which is made out of Carlyle's alleged gloom is a very paltry matter. Carlyle had his faults, both as a man and as a writer, but the attempt to explain his gospel in terms of his 'liver' is merely pitiful. If indigestion invariably resulted in a 'Sartor Resartus,' it would be a vastly more tolerable thing than it is. Diseases do not turn into poems; even the decadent really writes with the healthy part of his organism. If Carlyle's private faults and literary virtues ran somewhat in the same line, he is only in the situation of every man; for every one of us it is surely very difficult to say precisely where our honest opinions end and our personal predilections begin. But to attempt to denounce Carlyle as a mere savage egotist cannot arise from anything but a pure inability to grasp Carlyle's gospel. 'Ruskin,' says a critic, 'did, all the same, verily believe in God; Carlyle believed only in himself.' This is certainly a distinction between the author he has understood and the author he has not understood. Carlyle believed in himself, but he could not have believed in himself more than Ruskin did; they both believed in God, because they felt that if everything else fell into wrack and ruin, themselves were permanent witnesses to God. Where they both failed was not in belief in God or in belief in themselves; they failed in belief in other people. It is not enough for a prophet to believe in his message; he must believe in its acceptability. Christ, St Francis, Bunyan, Wesley, Mr Gladstone, Walt Whitman, men of indescribable variety, were all alike in a certain faculty of treating the average man as their equal, of trusting to his reason and good feeling without fear and without condescension. It was this simplicity of confidence, not only in God, but in the image of God, that was lacking in Carlyle.

But the attempts to discredit Carlyle's religious sentiment must absolutely fall to the ground. The profound security of Carlyle's sense of the unity of the Cosmos is like that of a Hebrew prophet; and it has the same expression that it had in the Hebrew prophets — humour. A man must be very full of faith to jest about his divinity. No Neo-Pagan delicately suggesting a revival of Dionysius, no vague, half-converted Theosophist groping towards a recognition of Buddha, would ever think of cracking jokes on the matter. But to the Hebrew prophets their religion was so solid a thing, like a mountain or a mammoth, that the irony of its contact with trivial and fleeting matters struck them like a blow. So it was with Carlyle. His supreme contribution, both to philosophy and literature, was his sense of the sarcasm of eternity. Other writers had seen the hope or the terror of the heavens, he alone saw the humour of them. Other writers had seen that there could be something elemental and eternal in a song or statute, he alone saw that there could be something elemental and eternal in a joke. No one who ever read it will forget the passage, full of dark and agnostic gratification, in which he narrates that some Court chronicler described Louis XV. as 'falling asleep in the Lord.' 'Enough for us that he did fall asleep; that, curtained in thick night, under what keeping we ask not, he at least will never, through unending ages, insult the face of the sun any more ... and we go on, if not to better forms of beastliness, at least to fresher ones.'

The supreme value of Carlyle to English literature was that he was the founder of modern irrationalism; a movement fully as important as modern rationalism. A great deal is said in these days about the value or valuelessness of logic. In the main, indeed, logic is not a productive tool so much as a weapon of defence. A man building up an intellectual system has to build like Nehemiah, with the sword in one hand and the trowel in the other. The imagination, the constructive quality, is the trowel, and argument is the sword. A wide experience of actual intellectual affairs will lead most people to the conclusion that logic is mainly valuable as a weapon wherewith to exterminate logicians.

But though this may be true enough in practice, it scarcely clears up the position of logic in human affairs. Logic is a machine of the mind, and if it is used honestly it ought to bring out an honest conclusion. When people say that you can prove anything by logic, they are not using words in a fair sense. What they mean is that you can prove anything by bad logic. Deep in the mystic ingratitude of the soul of man there is an extraordinary tendency to use the name for an organ, when what is meant is the abuse or decay of that organ. Thus we speak of a man suffering from 'nerves,' which is about as sensible as talking about a man suffering from ten fingers. We speak of 'liver' and 'digestion' when we mean the failure of liver and the absence of digestion. And in the same manner we speak of the dangers of logic, when what we really mean is the danger of fallacy.

But the real point about the limitation of logic and the partial overthrow of logic by writers like Carlyle is deeper and somewhat different. The fault of the great mass of logicians is not that they bring out a false result, or, in other words, are not logicians at all. Their fault is that by an inevitable psychological habit they tend to forget that there are two parts of a logical process — the first the choosing of an assumption, and the second the arguing upon it; and humanity, if it devotes itself too persistently to the study of sound reasoning, has a certain tendency to lose the faculty of sound assumption. It is astonishing how constantly one may hear from rational and even rationalistic persons such a phrase as ‘He did not prove the very thing with which he started,’ or ‘The whole of his case rested upon a pure assumption,’ two peculiarities which may be found by the curious in the works of Euclid. It is astonishing, again, how constantly one hears rationalists arguing upon some deep topic, apparently without troubling about the deep assumptions involved, having lost their sense, as it were, of the real colour and character of a man’s assumption. For instance, two men will argue about whether patriotism is a good thing and never discover until the end, if at all, that the cosmopolitan is basing his whole case upon the idea that man should, if he can, become as God, with equal sympathies and no prejudices, while the nationalist denies any such duty at the very start, and regards man as an animal who has preferences, as a bird has feathers.

Thus it was with Carlyle: he startled men by attacking not arguments but assumptions. He simply brushed aside all the matters which the men of the nineteenth century held to be incontrovertible, and appealed directly to the very different class of matters which they knew to be true. He induced men to study less the truth of their reasoning, and more the truth of the assumptions upon which they reasoned. Even where his view was not the highest truth, it was always a refreshing and beneficent heresy. He denied every one of the postulates upon which the age of reason based itself. He denied the theory of progress which assumed that we must be better off than the people of the twelfth century. Whether we were better than the people of the twelfth century according to him depended entirely upon whether we chose or deserved to be.

He denied every type and species of prop or association or support which threw the responsibility upon civilisation or society, or anything but the individual conscience. He has often been called a prophet. The real ground of the truth of this phrase is often neglected. Since the last era of purely religious literature, the era of English Puritanism, there has been no writer in whose eyes the soul stood so much alone.

Carlyle was, as we have suggested, a mystic, and mysticism was with him, as with all its genuine professors, only a transcendent form of common-sense. Mysticism and common-sense alike consist in a sense of the dominance of certain truths and tendencies which cannot be formally demonstrated or even formally named. Mysticism and common-sense are alike appeals to realities that we all know to be real, but which have no place in argument except as postulates. Carlyle's work did consist in breaking through formulas, old and new, to these old and silent and ironical sanities. Philosophers might abolish kings a hundred times over, he maintained, they could not alter the fact that every man and woman does choose a king and repudiate all the pride of citizenship for the exultation of humility. If inequality of this kind was a weakness, it was a weakness bound up with the very strength of the universe. About hero worship, indeed, few critics have done the smallest justice to Carlyle. Misled by those hasty and choleric passages in which he sometimes expressed a preference for mere violence, passages which were a great deal more connected with his temperament than with his philosophy, they have finally imbibed the notion that Carlyle's theory of hero worship was a theory of terrified submission to stern and arrogant men. As a matter of fact, Carlyle is really inhumane about some questions, but he is never inhumane about hero worship. His view is not that human nature is so vulgar and silly a thing that it must be guided and driven; it is, on the contrary, that human nature is so chivalrous and fundamentally magnanimous a thing that even the meanest have it in them to love a leader more than themselves, and to prefer loyalty to rebellion. When he speaks of this trait in human nature Carlyle's tone invariably softens. We feel that for the moment he is kindled with admiration of mankind, and almost reaches the verge of Christianity. Whatever else was acid and captious about Carlyle's utterances, his hero worship was not only humane, it was almost optimistic. He admired great men primarily, and perhaps correctly, because he thought that they were more human than other men. The evil side of the influence of Carlyle and his religion of hero worship did not consist in the emotional worship of valour and success; that was a part of him, as, indeed, it is a part of all healthy children. Where Carlyle really did harm was in the fact that he, more than any modern man, is responsible for the increase of that modern habit of what is vulgarly called ‘Going the whole hog.’ Often in matters of passion and conquest it is a singularly hoggish hog. This remarkable modern craze for making one’s philosophy, religion, politics, and temper all of a piece, of seeking in all incidents for opportunities to assert and reassert some favourite mental attitude, is a thing which existed comparatively little in other centuries. Solomon and Horace, Petrarch and Shakespeare were pessimists when they were melancholy, and optimists when they were happy. But the optimist of to-day seems obliged to prove that gout and unrequited love make him dance with joy, and the pessimist of to-day to prove that sunshine and a good supper convulse him with inconsolable anguish. Carlyle was strongly possessed with this mania for spiritual consistency. He wished to take the same view of the wars of the angels and of the paltriest riot at Donnybrook Fair. It was this species of insane logic which led him into his chief errors, never his natural enthusiasms. Let us take an example. Carlyle’s defence of slavery is a thoroughly ridiculous thing, weak alike in argument and in moral instinct. The truth is, that he only took it up from the passion for applying everywhere his paradoxical defence of aristocracy. He blundered, of course, because he did not see that slavery has nothing in the world to do with aristocracy, that it is, indeed, almost its opposite. The defence which Carlyle and all its thoughtful defenders have made for aristocracy was that a few persons could more rapidly and firmly decide public affairs in the interests of the people. But slavery is not even supposed to be a government for the good of the governed. It is a possession of the governed avowedly for the good of the governors. Aristocracy uses the strong for the service of the weak; slavery uses the weak for the service of the strong. It is no derogation to man as a spiritual being, as Carlyle firmly believed he was, that he should be ruled and guided for his own good like a child — for a child who is always ruled and guided we regard as the very type of spiritual existence. But it is a derogation and an absolute contradiction to that human spirituality in which Carlyle believed that a man should be owned like a tool for someone else’s good, as if he had no personal destiny in the Cosmos. We draw attention to this particular error of Carlyle’s because we think that it is a curious example of the waste and unclean places into which that remarkable animal, ‘the whole hog,’ more than once led him.

In this respect Carlyle has had unquestionably long and an unquestionably bad influence. The whole of that recent political ethic which conceives that if we only go far enough we may finish a thing for once and all, that being strong consists chiefly in being deliberately deaf and blind, owes a great deal of its complete sway to his example. Out of him flows most of the philosophy of Nietzsche, who is in modern times the supreme maniac of this moonstruck consistency. Though Nietzsche and Carlyle were in reality profoundly different, Carlyle being a stiff-necked peasant and Nietzsche a very fragile aristocrat, they were alike in this one quality of which we speak, the strange and pitiful audacity with which they applied their single ethical test to everything in heaven and earth. The disciple of Nietzsche, indeed, embraces immorality like an austere and difficult faith. He urges himself to lust and cruelty with the same tremulous enthusiasm with which a Christian urges himself to purity and patience; he struggles as a monk struggles with bestial visions and temptations with the ancient necessities of honour and justice and compassion. To this madhouse, it can hardly be denied, has Carlyle’s intellectual courage brought many at last.

TOLSTOY AND THE CULT OF SIMPLICITY

The whole world is certainly heading for a great simplicity, not deliberately, but rather inevitably. It is not a mere fashion of false innocence, like that of the French aristocrats before the Revolution, who built an altar to Pan, and who taxed the peasantry for the enormous expenditure which is needed in order to live the simple life of peasants. The simplicity towards which the world is driving is the necessary outcome of all our systems and speculations and of our deep and continuous contemplation of things. For the universe is like everything in it; we have to look at it repeatedly and habitually before we see it. It is only when we have seen it for the hundredth time that we see it for the first time. The more consistently things are contemplated, the more they tend to unify themselves and therefore to simplify themselves. The simplification of anything is always sensational. Thus monotheism is the most sensational of things: it is as if we gazed long at a design full of disconnected objects, and, suddenly, with a stunning thrill, they came together into a huge and staring face.

Few people will dispute that all the typical movements of our time are upon this road towards simplification. Each system seeks to be more fundamental than the other; each seeks, in the literal sense, to undermine the other. In art, for example, the old conception of man, classic as the Apollo Belvedere, has first been attacked by the realist, who asserts that man, as a fact of natural history, is a creature with colourless hair and a freckled face. Then comes the Impressionist, going yet deeper, who asserts that to his physical eye, which alone is certain, man is a creature with purple hair and a grey face. Then comes the Symbolist, and says that to his soul, which alone is certain, man is a creature with green hair and a blue face. And all the great writers of our time represent in one form or another this attempt to re-establish communication with the elemental, or, as it is sometimes more roughly and fallaciously expressed, to return to nature. Some think that the return to nature consists in drinking no wine; some think that it consists in drinking a great deal more than is good for them. Some think that the return to nature is achieved by beating swords into ploughshares; some think it is achieved by turning ploughshares into very ineffectual British War Office bayonets. It is natural, according to the Jingo, for a man to kill other people with gunpowder and himself with gin. It is natural, according to the humanitarian revolutionist, to kill other people with dynamite and himself with vegetarianism. It would be too obviously Philistine a sentiment, perhaps, to suggest that the claim of either of these persons to be obeying the voice of nature is interesting when we consider that they require huge volumes of paradoxical argument to persuade themselves or anyone else of the truth of their conclusions. But the giants of our time are undoubtedly alike in that they approach by very different roads this conception of the return to simplicity. Ibsen returns to nature by the angular exterior of fact, Maeterlinck by the eternal tendencies of fable. Whitman returns to nature by seeing how much he can accept, Tolstoy by seeing how much he can reject.

Now, this heroic desire to return to nature is, of course, in some respects, rather like the heroic desire of a kitten to return to its own tail. A tail is a simple and beautiful object, rhythmic in curve and soothing in texture; but it is certainly one of the minor but characteristic qualities of a tail that it should hang behind. It is impossible to deny that it would in some degree lose its character if attached to any other part of the anatomy. Now, nature is like a tail in the sense that it is vitally important if it is to discharge its real duty that it should be always behind. To imagine that we can see nature, especially our own nature, face to face is a folly; it is even a blasphemy. It is like the conduct of a cat in some mad fairy-tale, who should set out on his travels with the firm conviction that he would find his tail growing like a tree in the meadows at the end of the world. And the actual effect of the travels of the philosopher in search of nature when seen from the outside looks very like the gyrations of the tail-pursuing kitten, exhibiting much enthusiasm but little dignity, much cry and very little tail. The grandeur of nature is that she is omnipotent and unseen, that she is perhaps ruling us most when we think that she is heeding us least. ‘Thou art a God that hidest Thyself,’ said the Hebrew poet. It may be said with all reverence that it is behind a man’s back that the spirit of nature hides.

It is this consideration that lends a certain air of futility even to all the inspired simplicities and thunderous veracities of Tolstoy. We feel that a man cannot make himself simple merely by warring on complexity; we feel, indeed, in our saner moments that a man cannot make himself simple at all. A self-conscious simplicity may well be far more intrinsically ornate than luxury itself. Indeed, a great deal of the pomp and sumptuousness of the world’s history was simple in the truest sense. It was born of an almost babyish receptiveness; it was the work of men who had eyes to wonder and men who had ears to hear.

‘King Solomon brought merchant men Because of his desire With peacocks, apes and ivory, From Tarshish unto Tyre.’

But this proceeding was not a part of the wisdom of Solomon; it was a part of his folly — I had almost said of his innocence. Tolstoy, we feel, would not be content with hurling satire and denunciation at ‘Solomon in all his glory.’ With fierce and unimpeachable logic he would go a step further. He would spend days and nights in the meadows stripping the shameless crimson coronals off the lilies of the field.

The new collection of ‘Tales from Tolstoy,’ translated and edited by Mr R. Nisbet Bain, is calculated to draw particular attention to this ethical and ascetic side of Tolstoy’s work. In one sense, and that the deepest sense, the work of Tolstoy is, of course, a genuine and noble appeal to simplicity. The narrow notion that an artist may not teach is pretty well exploded by now. But the truth of the matter is, that an artist teaches far more by his mere background and properties, his landscape, his costume, his idiom and technique — all the part of his work, in short, of which he is probably entirely unconscious, than by the elaborate and pompous moral dicta which he fondly imagines to be his opinions. The real distinction between the ethics of high art and the ethics of manufactured and didactic art lies in the simple fact that the bad fable has a moral, while the good fable is a moral. And the real moral of Tolstoy comes out constantly in these stories, the great moral which lies at the heart of all his work, of which he is probably unconscious, and of which it is quite likely that he would vehemently disapprove. The curious cold white light of morning that shines over all the tales, the folklore simplicity with which ‘a man or a woman’ are spoken of without further identification, the love — one might almost say the lust — for the qualities of brute materials, the hardness of wood, and the softness of mud, the ingrained belief in a certain ancient kindliness sitting beside the very cradle of the race of man — these influences are truly moral. When we put beside them the trumpeting and tearing nonsense of the didactic Tolstoy, screaming for an obscene purity, shouting for an inhuman peace, hacking up human life into small sins with a chopper, sneering at men, women, and children out of respect to humanity, combining in one chaos of contradictions an unmanly Puritan and an uncivilised prig, then, indeed, we scarcely know whither Tolstoy has vanished. We know not what to do with this small and noisy moralist who is inhabiting one corner of a great and good man.

It is difficult in every case to reconcile Tolstoy the great artist with Tolstoy the almost venomous reformer. It is difficult to believe that a man who draws in such noble outlines the dignity of the daily life of humanity regards as evil that divine act of procreation by which that dignity is renewed from age to age. It is difficult to believe that a man who has painted with so frightful an honesty the heartrending emptiness of the life of the poor can really grudge them every one of their pitiful pleasures, from courtship to tobacco. It is difficult to believe that a poet in prose who has so powerfully exhibited the earth-born air of man, the essential kinship of a human being, with the landscape in which he lives, can deny so elemental a virtue as that which attaches a man to his own ancestors and his own land. It is difficult to believe that the man who feels so poignantly the detestable insolence of oppression would not actually, if he had the chance, lay the oppressor flat with his fist. All, however, arises from the search after a false simplicity, the aim of being, if I may so express it, more natural than it is natural to be. It would not only be more human, it would be more humble of us to be content to be complex. The truest kinship with humanity would lie in doing as humanity has always done, accepting with a sportsmanlike relish the estate to which we are called, the star of our happiness, and the fortunes of the land of our birth.

The work of Tolstoy has another and more special significance. It represents the re-assertion of a certain awful common-sense which characterised the most extreme utterances of Christ. It is true that we cannot turn the cheek to the smiter; it is true that we cannot give our cloak to the robber; civilisation is too complicated, too vainglorious, too emotional. The robber would brag, and we should blush; in other words, the robber and we are alike sentimentalists. The command of Christ is impossible, but it is not insane; it is rather sanity preached to a planet of lunatics. If the whole world was suddenly stricken with a sense of humour it would find itself mechanically fulfilling the Sermon on the Mount. It is not the plain facts of the world which stand in the way of that consummation, but its passions of vanity and self-advertisement and morbid sensibility. It is true that we cannot turn the cheek to the smiter, and the sole and sufficient reason is that we have not the pluck. Tolstoy and his followers have shown that they have the pluck, and even if we think they are mistaken, by this sign they conquer.

Their theory has the strength of an utterly consistent thing. It represents that doctrine of mildness and non-resistance which is the last and most audacious of all the forms of resistance to every existing authority. It is the great strike of the Quakers which is more formidable than many sanguinary revolutions. If human beings could only succeed in achieving a real passive resistance they would be strong with the appalling strength of inanimate things, they would be calm with the maddening calm of oak or iron, which conquer without vengeance and are conquered without humiliation. The theory of Christian duty enunciated by them is that we should never conquer by force, but always, if we can, conquer by persuasion. In their mythology St George did not conquer the dragon: he tied a pink ribbon round its neck and gave it a saucer of milk. According to them, a course of consistent kindness to Nero would have turned him into something only faintly represented by Alfred the Great. In fact, the policy recommended by this school for dealing with the bovine stupidity and bovine fury of this world is accurately summed up in the celebrated verse of Mr Edward Lear:

‘There was an old man who said, “How Shall I flee from this terrible cow? I will sit on a stile and continue to smile, Till I soften the heart of this cow.”’

Their confidence in human nature is really honourable and magnificent; it takes the form of refusing to believe the overwhelming majority of mankind, even when they set out to explain their own motives. But although most of us would in all probability tend at first sight to consider this new sect of Christians as little less outrageous than some brawling and absurd sect in the Reformation, yet we should fall into a singular error in doing so. The Christianity of Tolstoy is, when we come to consider it, one of the most thrilling and dramatic incidents in our modern civilisation. It represents a tribute to the Christian religion more sensational than the breaking of seals or the falling of stars.

From the point of view of a rationalist, the whole world is rendered almost irrational by the single phenomenon of Christian Socialism. It turns the scientific universe topsy-turvy, and makes it essentially possible that the key of all social evolution may be found in the dusty casket of some discredited creed. It cannot be amiss to consider this phenomenon as it really is.

The religion of Christ has, like many true things, been disproved an extraordinary number of times. It was disproved by the Neo-Platonist philosophers at the very moment when it was first starting forth upon its startling and universal career. It was disproved again by many of the sceptics of the Renaissance only a few years before its second and supremely striking embodiment, the religion of Puritanism, was about to triumph over many kings, and civilise many continents. We all agree that these schools of negation were only interludes in its history; but we all believe naturally and inevitably that the negation of our own day is really a breaking up of the theological cosmos, an Armageddon, a Ragnorak, a twilight of the gods. The man of the nineteenth century, like a schoolboy of sixteen, believes that his doubt and depression are symbols of the end of the world. In our day the great irreligionists who did nothing but dethrone God and drive angels before them have been outstripped, distanced, and made to look orthodox and humdrum. A newer race of sceptics has found something infinitely more exciting to do than nailing down the lids upon a million coffins, and the body upon a single cross. They have disputed not only the elementary creeds, but the elementary laws of mankind, property, patriotism, civil obedience. They have arraigned civilisation as openly as the materialists have arraigned theology; they have damned all the philosophers even lower than they have damned the saints. Thousands of modern men move quietly and conventionally among their fellows while holding views of national limitation or landed property that would have made Voltaire shudder like a nun listening to blasphemies. And the last and wildest phase of this saturnalia of scepticism, the school that goes furthest among thousands who go so far, the school that denies the moral validity of those ideals of courage or obedience which are recognised even among pirates, this school bases itself upon the literal words of Christ, like Dr Watts or Messrs Moody and Sankey. Never in the whole history of the world was such a tremendous tribute paid to the vitality of an ancient creed. Compared with this, it would be a small thing if the Red Sea were cloven asunder, or the sun did stand still at mid-day. We are faced with the phenomenon that a set of revolutionists whose contempt for all the ideals of family and nation would evoke horror in a thieves' kitchen, who can rid themselves of those elementary instincts of the man and the gentleman which cling to the very bones of our civilisation, cannot rid themselves of the influence of two or three remote Oriental anecdotes written in corrupt Greek. The fact, when realised, has about it something stunning and hypnotic. The most convinced rationalist is in its presence suddenly stricken with a strange and ancient vision, sees the immense sceptical cosmogonies of this age as dreams going the way of a thousand forgotten heresies, and believes for a moment that the dark sayings handed down through eighteen centuries may, indeed, contain in themselves the revolutions of which we have only begun to dream.

This value which we have above suggested, unquestionably belongs to the Tolstoians, who may roughly be described as the new Quakers. With their strange optimism, and their almost appalling logical courage, they offer a tribute to Christianity which no orthodoxies could offer. It cannot but be remarkable to watch a revolution in which both the rulers and the rebels march under the same symbol. But the actual theory of non-resistance itself, with all its kindred theories, is not, I think, characterised by that intellectual obviousness and necessity which its supporters claim for it. A pamphlet before us shows us an extraordinary number of statements about the New Testament, of which the accuracy is by no means so striking as the confidence. To begin with, we must protest against a habit of quoting and paraphrasing at the same time. When a man is discussing what Jesus meant, let him state first of all what He said, not what the man thinks He would have said if he had expressed Himself more clearly. Here is an instance of question and answer:

Q. ‘How did our Master Himself sum up the law in a few words?’

A. ‘Be ye merciful, be ye perfect even as your Father; your Father in the spirit world is merciful, is perfect.’

There is nothing in this, perhaps, which Christ might not have said except the abominable metaphysical modernism of ‘the spirit world’; but to say that it is recorded that He did say it, is like saying it is recorded that He preferred palm trees to sycamores. It is a simple and unadulterated untruth. The author should know that these words have meant a thousand things to a thousand people, and that if more ancient sects had paraphrased them as cheerfully as he, he would never have had the text upon which he founds his theory. In a pamphlet in which plain printed words cannot be left alone, it is not surprising if there are mis-statements upon larger matters. Here is a statement clearly and philosophically laid down which we can only content ourselves with flatly denying: ‘The fifth rule of our Lord is that we should take special pains to cultivate the same kind of regard for people of foreign countries, and for those generally who do not belong to us, or even have an antipathy to us, which we already entertain towards our own people, and those who are in sympathy with us.’ I should very much like to know where in the whole of the New Testament the author finds this violent, unnatural, and immoral proposition. Christ did not have the same kind of regard for one person as for another. We are specifically told that there were certain persons whom He specially loved. It is most improbable that He thought of other nations as He thought of His own. The sight of His national city moved Him to tears, and the highest compliment He paid was, ‘Behold an Israelite indeed.’ The author has simply confused two entirely distinct things. Christ commanded us to have love for all men, but even if we had equal love for all men, to speak of having the same love for all men is merely bewildering nonsense. If we love a man at all, the impression he produces on us must be vitally different to the impression produced by another man whom we love. To speak of having the same kind of regard for both is about as sensible as asking a man whether he prefers chrysanthemums or billiards. Christ did not love humanity; He never said He loved humanity: He loved men. Neither He nor anyone else can love humanity; it is like loving a gigantic centipede. And the reason that the Tolstoians can even endure to think of an equally distributed affection is that their love of humanity is a logical love, a love into which they are coerced by their own theories, a love which would be an insult to a tom-cat.

But the greatest error of all lies in the mere act of cutting up the teaching of the New Testament into five rules. It precisely and ingeniously misses the most dominant characteristic of the teaching — its absolute spontaneity. The abyss between Christ and all His modern interpreters is that we have no record that He ever wrote a word, except with His finger in the sand. The whole is the history of one continuous and sublime conversation. Thousands of rules have been deduced from it before these Tolstoian rules were made, and thousands will be deduced afterwards. It was not for any pompous proclamation, it was not for any elaborate output of printed volumes; it was for a few splendid and idle words that the cross was set up on Calvary, and the earth gaped, and the sun was darkened at noonday.

SAVONAROLA

Savonarola is a man whom we shall probably never understand until we know what horror may lie at the heart of civilisation. This we shall not know until we are civilised. It may be hoped, in one sense, that we may never understand Savonarola.

The great deliverers of men have, for the most part, saved them from calamities which we all recognise as evil, from calamities which are the ancient enemies of humanity. The great law-givers saved us from anarchy: the great physicians saved us from pestilence: the great reformers saved us from starvation. But there is a huge and bottomless evil compared with which all these are flea-bites, the most desolating curse that can fall upon men or nations, and it has no name, except we call it satisfaction. Savonarola did not save men from anarchy, but from order; not from pestilence, but from paralysis; not from starvation, but from luxury. Men like Savonarola are the witnesses to the tremendous psychological fact at the back of all our brains, but for which no name has ever been found, that ease is the worst enemy of happiness, and civilisation potentially the end of man.

For I fancy that Savonarola's thrilling challenge to the luxury of his day went far deeper than the mere question of sin. The modern rationalistic admirers of Savonarola, from George Eliot downwards, dwell, truly enough, upon the sound ethical justification of Savonarola's anger, upon the hideous and extravagant character of the crimes which polluted the palaces of the Renaissance. But they need not be so anxious to show that Savonarola was no ascetic, that he merely picked out the black specks of wickedness with the priggish enlightenment of a member of an Ethical Society. Probably he did hate the civilisation of his time, and not merely its sins; and that is precisely where he was infinitely more profound than a modern moralist. He saw that the actual crimes were not the only evils: that stolen jewels and poisoned wine and obscene pictures were merely the symptoms; that the disease was the complete dependence upon jewels and wine and pictures. This is a thing constantly forgotten in judging of ascetics and Puritans in old times. A denunciation of harmless sports did not always mean an ignorant hatred of what no one but a narrow moralist would call harmful. Sometimes it meant an exceedingly enlightened hatred of what no one but a narrow moralist would call harmless. Ascetics are sometimes more advanced than the average man, as well as less.

Such, at least, was the hatred in the heart of Savonarola. He was making war against no trivial human sins, but against godless and thankless quiescence, against getting used to happiness, the mystic sin by which all creation fell. He was preaching that severity which is the sign-manual of youth and hope. He was preaching that alertness, that clean agility and vigilance, which is as necessary to gain pleasure as to gain holiness, as indispensable in a lover as in a monk. A critic has truly pointed out that Savonarola could not have been fundamentally anti-æsthetic, since he had such friends as Michael Angelo, Botticelli, and Luca della Robbia. The fact is that this purification and austerity are even more necessary for the appreciation of life and laughter than for anything else. To let no bird fly past unnoticed, to spell patiently the stones and weeds, to have the mind a storehouse of sunset, requires a discipline in pleasure, and an education in gratitude.

The civilisation which surrounded Savonarola on every side was a civilisation which had already taken the wrong turn, the turn that leads to endless inventions and no discoveries, in which new things grow old with confounding rapidity, but in which no old things ever grow new. The monstrosity of the crimes of the Renaissance was not a mark of imagination; it was a mark, as all monstrosity is, of the loss of imagination. It is only when a man has really ceased to see a horse as it is, that he invents a centaur, only when he can no longer be surprised at an ox, that he worships the devil. Diablerie is the stimulant of the jaded fancy; it is the dram-drinking of the artist. Savonarola addressed himself to the hardest of all earthly tasks, that of making men turn back and wonder at the simplicities they had learnt to ignore. It is strange that the most unpopular of all doctrines is the doctrine which declares the common life divine. Democracy, of which Savonarola was so fiery an exponent, is the hardest of gospels; there is nothing that so terrifies men as the decree that they are all kings. Christianity, in Savonarola’s mind, identical with democracy, is the hardest of gospels; there is nothing that so strikes men with fear as the saying that they are all the sons of God.

Savonarola and his republic fell. The drug of despotism was administered to the people, and they forgot what they had been. There are some at the present day who have so strange a respect for art and letters, and for mere men of genius, that they conceive the reign of the Medici to be an improvement on that of the great Florentine republican. It is such men as these and their civilisation that we have at the present day to fear. We are surrounded on many sides by the same symptoms as those which awoke the unquenchable wrath of Savonarola — a hedonism that is more sick of happiness than an invalid is sick of pain, an art sense that seeks the assistance of crime since it has exhausted nature. In many modern works we find veiled and horrible hints of a truly Renaissance sense of the beauty of blood, the poetry of murder. The bankrupt and depraved imagination does not see that a living man is far more dramatic than a dead one. Along with this, as in the time of the Medici, goes the falling back into the arms of despotism, the hunger for the strong man which is unknown among strong men. The masterful hero is worshipped as he is worshipped by the readers of the ‘Bow Bells Novelettes,’ and for the same reason — a profound sense of personal weakness. That tendency to devolve our duties descends on us, which is the soul of slavery, alike whether for its menial tasks it employs serfs or emperors. Against all this the great clerical republican stands in everlasting protest, preferring his failure to his rival’s success. The issue is still between him and Lorenzo, between the responsibilities of liberty and the licence of slavery, between the perils of truth and the security of silence, between the pleasure of toil and the toil of pleasure. The supporters of Lorenzo the Magnificent are assuredly among us, men for whom even nations and empires only exist to satisfy the moment, men to whom the last hot hour of summer is better than a sharp and wintry spring. They have an art, a literature, a political philosophy, which are all alike valued for their immediate effect upon the taste, not for what they promise of the destiny of the spirit. Their statuettes and sonnets are rounded and perfect, while ‘Macbeth’ is in comparison a fragment, and the Moses of Michael Angelo a hint. Their campaigns and battles are always called triumphant, while Cæsar and Cromwell wept for many humiliations. And the end of it all is the hell of no resistance, the hell of an unfathomable softness, until the whole nature recoils into madness and the chamber of civilisation is no longer merely a cushioned apartment, but a padded cell.

This last and worst of human miseries Savonarola saw afar off, and bent his whole gigantic energies to turning the chariot into another course. Few men understood his object; some called him a madman, some a charlatan, some an enemy of human joy. They would not even have understood if he had told them, if he had said that he was saving them from a calamity of contentment which should be the end of joys and sorrows alike. But there are those to-day who feel the same silent danger, and who bend themselves to the same silent resistance. They also are supposed to be contending for some trivial political scruple.

Mr M’Hardy says, in defending Savonarola, that the number of fine works of art destroyed in the Burning of the Vanities has been much exaggerated. I confess that I hope the pile contained stacks of incomparable masterpieces if the sacrifice made that one real moment more real. Of one thing I am sure, that Savonarola’s friend Michael Angelo would have piled all his own statues one on top of the other, and burnt them to ashes, if only he had been certain that the glow transfiguring the sky was the dawn of a younger and wiser world.

THE POSITION OF SIR WALTER SCOTT

Walter Scott is a writer who should just now be re-emerging into his own high place in letters, for unquestionably the recent, though now dwindling, schools of severely technical and æsthetic criticism have been unfavourable to him. He was a chaotic and unequal writer, and if there is one thing in which artists have improved since his time, it is in consistency and equality. It would perhaps be unkind to inquire whether the level of the modern man of letters, as compared with Scott, is due to the absence of valleys or the absence of mountains. But in any case, we have learnt in our day to arrange our literary effects carefully, and the only point in which we fall short of Scott is in the incidental misfortune that we have nothing particular to arrange.

It is said that Scott is neglected by modern readers; if so, the matter could be more appropriately described by saying that modern readers are neglected by Providence. The ground of this neglect, in so far as it exists, must be found, I suppose, in the general sentiment that, like the beard of Polonius, he is too long. Yet it is surely a peculiar thing that in literature alone a house should be despised because it is too large, or a host impugned because he is too generous. If romance be really a pleasure, it is difficult to understand the modern reader’s consuming desire to get it over, and if it be not a pleasure, it is difficult to understand his desire to have it at all. Mere size, it seems to me, cannot be a fault. The fault must lie in some disproportion. If some of Scott’s stories are dull and dilatory, it is not because they are giants but because they are hunchbacks or cripples. Scott was very far indeed from being a perfect writer, but I do not think that it can be shown that the large and elaborate plan on which his stories are built was by any means an imperfection. He arranged his endless prefaces and his colossal introductions just as an architect plans great gates and long approaches to a really large house. He did not share the latter-day desire to get quickly through a story. He enjoyed narrative as a sensation; he did not wish to swallow a story like a pill that it should do him good afterwards. He desired to taste it like a glass of port, that it might do him good at the time. The reader sits late at his banquets. His characters have that air of immortality which belongs to those of Dumas and Dickens. We should not be surprised to meet them in any number of sequels. Scott, in his heart of hearts, probably would have liked to write an endless story without either beginning or close.

Walter Scott is a great, and, therefore, mysterious man. He will never be understood until Romance is understood, and that will be only when Time, Man, and Eternity are understood. To say that Scott had more than any other man that ever lived a sense of the romantic seems, in these days, a slight and superficial tribute. The whole modern theory arises from one fundamental mistake — the idea that romance is in some way a plaything with life, a figment, a conventionality, a thing upon the outside. No genuine criticism of romance will ever arise until we have grasped the fact that romance lies not upon the outside of life but absolutely in the centre of it. The centre of every man’s existence is a dream. Death, disease, insanity, are merely material accidents, like toothache or a twisted ankle. That these brutal forces always besiege and often capture the citadel does not prove that they are the citadel. The boast of the realist (applying what the reviewers call his scalpel) is that he cuts into the heart of life; but he makes a very shallow incision if he only reaches as deep as habits and calamities and sins. Deeper than all these lies a man’s vision of himself, as swaggering and sentimental as a penny novelette. The literature of candour unearths innumerable weaknesses and elements of lawlessness which is called romance. It perceives superficial habits like murder and dipsomania, but it does not perceive the deepest of sins — the sin of vanity — vanity which is the mother of all day-dreams and adventures, the one sin that is not shared with any boon companion, or whispered to any priest.

In estimating, therefore, the ground of Scott’s pre-eminence in romance we must absolutely rid ourselves of the notion that romance or adventure are merely materialistic things involved in the tangle of a plot or the multiplicity of drawn swords. We must remember that it is, like tragedy or farce, a state of the soul, and that, for some dark and elemental reason which we can never understand, this state of the soul is evoked in us by the sight of certain places or the contemplation of certain human crises, by a stream rushing under a heavy and covered wooden bridge, or by a man plunging a knife or sword into tough timber. In the selection of these situations which catch the spirit of romance as in a net, Scott has never been equalled or even approached. His finest scenes affect us like fragments of a hilarious dream. They have the same quality which is often possessed by those nocturnal comedies — that of seeming more human than our waking life — even while they are less possible. Sir Arthur Wardour, with his daughter and the old beggar crouching in a cranny of the cliff as night falls and the tide closes around them, are actually in the coldest and bitterest of practical situations. Yet the whole incident has a quality that can only be called boyish. It is warmed with all the colours of an incredible sunset. Rob Roy trapped in the Tolbooth, and confronted with Bailie Nicol Jarvie, draws no sword, leaps from no window, affects none of the dazzling external acts upon which contemporary romance depends, yet that plain and humorous dialogue is full of the essential philosophy of romance which is an almost equal betting upon man and destiny. Perhaps the most profoundly thrilling of all Scott's situations is that in which the family of Colonel Mannering are waiting for the carriage which may or may not arrive by night to bring an unknown man into a princely possession. Yet almost the whole of that thrilling scene consists of a ridiculous conversation about food, and flirtation between a frivolous old lawyer and a fashionable girl. We can say nothing about what makes these scenes, except that the wind bloweth where it listeth, and that here the wind blows strong.

It is in this quality of what may be called spiritual adventurousness that Scott stands at so different an elevation to the whole of the contemporary crop of romancers who have followed the leadership of Dumas. There has, indeed, been a great and inspiriting revival of romance in our time, but it is partly frustrated in almost every case by this rooted conception that romance consists in the vast multiplication of incidents and the violent acceleration of narrative. The heroes of Mr Stanley Weyman scarcely ever have their swords out of their hands; the deeper presence of romance is far better felt when the sword is at the hip ready for innumerable adventures too terrible to be pictured. The Stanley Weyman hero has scarcely time to eat his supper except in the act of leaping from a window or whilst his other hand is employed in lunging with a rapier. In Scott's heroes, on the other hand, there is no characteristic so typical or so worthy of honour as their disposition to linger over their meals. The conviviality of the Clerk of Copmanhurst or of Mr Pleydell, and the thoroughly solid things they are described as eating, is one of the most perfect of Scott's poetic touches. In short, Mr Stanley Weyman is filled with the conviction that the sole essence of romance is to move with insatiable rapidity from incident to incident. In the truer romance of Scott there is more of the sentiment of 'Oh! still delay, thou art so fair'; more of a certain patriarchal enjoyment of things as they are — of the sword by the side and the wine-cup in the hand. Romance, indeed, does not consist by any means so much in experiencing adventures as in being ready for them. How little the actual boy cares for incidents in comparison to tools and weapons may be tested by the fact that the most popular story of adventure is concerned with a man who lived for years on a desert island with two guns and a sword, which he never had to use on an enemy.

Closely connected with this is one of the charges most commonly brought against Scott, particularly in his own day — the charge of a fanciful and monotonous insistence upon the details of armour and costume. The critic in the 'Edinburgh Review' said indignantly that he could tolerate a somewhat detailed description of the apparel of Marmion, but when it came to an equally detailed account of the apparel of his pages and yeomen the mind could bear it no longer. The only thing to be said about that critic is that he had never been a little boy. He foolishly imagined that Scott valued the plume and dagger of Marmion for Marmion's sake. Not being himself romantic, he could not understand that Scott valued the plume because it was a plume, and the dagger because it was a dagger. Like a child, he loved weapons with a manual materialistic love, as one loves the softness of fur or the coolness of marble. One of the profound philosophical truths which are almost confined to infants is this love of things, not for their use or origin, but for their own inherent characteristics, the child's love of the toughness of wood, the wetness of water, the magnificent soapiness of soap. So it was with Scott, who had so much of the child in him. Human beings were perhaps the principal characters in his stories, but they were certainly not the only characters. A battle-axe was a person of importance, a castle had a character and ways of its own. A church bell had a word to say in the matter. Like a true child, he almost ignored the distinction between the animate and inanimate. A two-handed sword might be carried only by a menial in a procession, but it was something important and immeasurably fascinating — it was a two-handed sword.

There is one quality which is supreme and continuous in Scott which is little appreciated at present. One of the values we have really lost in recent fiction is the value of eloquence. The modern literary artist is compounded of almost every man except the orator. Yet Shakespeare and Scott are certainly alike in this, that they could both, if literature had failed, have earned a living as professional demagogues. The feudal heroes in the

‘Waverley Novels’ retort upon each other with a passionate dignity, haughty and yet singularly human, which can hardly be paralleled in political eloquence except in ‘Julius Cæsar.’ With a certain fiery impartiality which stirs the blood, Scott distributes his noble orations equally among saints and villains. He may deny a villain every virtue or triumph, but he cannot endure to deny him a telling word; he will ruin a man, but he will not silence him. In truth, one of Scott’s most splendid traits is his difficulty, or rather incapacity, for despising any of his characters. He did not scorn the most revolting miscreant as the realist of to-day commonly scorns his own hero. Though his soul may be in rags, every man of Scott can speak like a king.

This quality, as I have said, is sadly to seek in the fiction of the passing hour. The realist would, of course, repudiate the bare idea of putting a bold and brilliant tongue in every man’s head, but even where the moment of the story naturally demands eloquence the eloquence seems frozen in the tap. Take any contemporary work of fiction and turn to the scene where the young Socialist denounces the millionaire, and then compare the stilted sociological lecture given by that self-sacrificing bore with the surging joy of words in Rob Roy’s declaration of himself, or Athelstane’s defiance of De Bracy. That ancient sea of human passion upon which high words and great phrases are the resplendent foam is just now at a low ebb. We have even gone the length of congratulating ourselves because we can see the mud and the monsters at the bottom. In politics there is not a single man whose position is due to eloquence in the first degree; its place is taken by repartees and rejoinders purely intellectual, like those of an omnibus conductor. In discussing questions like the farm-burning in South Africa no critic of the war uses his material as Burke or Grattan (perhaps exaggeratively) would have used it — the speaker is content with facts and expositions of facts. In another age he might have risen and hurled that great song in prose, perfect as prose and yet rising into a chant, which Meg Merrilees hurled at Ellangowan, at the rulers of Britain: ‘Ride your ways, Laird of Ellangowan; ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram — this day have ye quenched seven smoking hearths. See if the fire in your ain parlour burns the blyther for that. Ye have riven the thack of seven cottar houses. Look if your ain roof-tree stands the faster for that. Ye may stable your stirks in the sheilings of Dern-cleugh. See that the hare does not couch on the hearthstane of Ellangowan. Ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram.’

The reason is, of course, that these men are afraid of bombast and Scott was not. A man will not reach eloquence if he is afraid of bombast, just as a man will not jump a hedge if he is afraid of a ditch. As the object of all eloquence is to find the least common denominator of men’s souls, to fall just within the natural comprehension, it cannot obviously have any chance with a literary ambition which aims at falling just outside it. It is quite right to invent subtle analyses and detached criticisms, but it is unreasonable to expect them to be punctuated with roars of popular applause. It is possible to conceive of a mob shouting any central and simple sentiment, good or bad, but it is impossible to think of a mob shouting a distinction in terms. In the matter of eloquence, the whole question is one of the immediate effect of greatness, such as is produced even by fine bombast. It is absurd to call it merely superficial; here there is no question of superficiality; we might as well call a stone that strikes us between the eyes merely superficial. The very word ‘superficial’ is founded on a fundamental mistake about life, the idea that second thoughts are best. The superficial impression of the world is by far the deepest. What we really feel, naturally and casually, about the look of skies and trees and the face of friends, that and that alone will almost certainly remain our vital philosophy to our dying day.

Scott’s bombast, therefore, will always be stirring to anyone who approaches it, as he should approach all literature, as a little child. We could easily excuse the contemporary critic for not admiring melodramas and adventure stories, and Punch and Judy, if he would admit that it was a slight deficiency in his artistic sensibilities. Beyond all question, it marks a lack of literary instinct to be unable to simplify one’s mind at the first signal of the advance of romance. ‘You do me wrong,’ said Brian de Bois-Guilbert to Rebecca. ‘Many a law, many a commandment have I broken, but my word, never.’ ‘Die,’ cries Balfour of Burley to the villain in ‘Old Mortality.’ ‘Die, hoping nothing, believing nothing—’ ‘And fearing nothing,’ replies the other. This is the old and honourable fine art of bragging, as it was practised by the great worthies of antiquity. The man who cannot appreciate it goes along with the man who cannot appreciate beef or claret or a game with children or a brass band. They are afraid of making fools of themselves, and are unaware that that transformation has already been triumphantly effected.

Scott is separated, then, from much of the later conception of fiction by this quality of eloquence. The whole of the best and finest work of the modern novelist (such as the work of Mr Henry James) is primarily concerned with that delicate and fascinating speech which burrows deeper and deeper like a mole; but we have wholly forgotten that speech which mounts higher and higher like a wave and falls in a crashing peroration. Perhaps the most thoroughly brilliant and typical man of this decade is Mr Bernard Shaw. In his admirable play of ‘Candida’ it is clearly a part of the character of the Socialist clergyman that he should be eloquent, but he is not eloquent, because the whole ‘G.B.S.’ condition of mind renders impossible that poetic simplicity which eloquence requires. Scott takes his heroes and villains seriously, which is, after all, the way that heroes and villains take themselves — especially villains. It is the custom to call these old romantic poses artificial; but the word artificial is the last and silliest evasion of criticism. There was never anything in the world that was really artificial. It had some motive or ideal behind it, and generally a much better one than we think.

Of the faults of Scott as an artist it is not very necessary to speak, for faults are generally and easily pointed out, while there is yet no adequate valuation of the varieties and contrasts of virtue. We have compiled a complete botanical classification of the weeds in the poetical garden, but the flowers still flourish neglected and nameless. It is true, for example, that Scott had an incomparably stiff and pedantic way of dealing with his heroines: he made a lively girl of eighteen refuse an offer in the language of Dr Johnson. To him, as to most men of his time, woman was not an individual, but an institution — a toast that was drunk some time after that of Church and King. But it is far better to consider the difference rather as a special merit, in that he stood for all those clean and bracing shocks of incident which are untouched by passion or weakness, for a certain breezy bachelorhood, which is almost essential to the literature of adventure. With all his faults, and all his triumphs, he stands for the great mass of natural manliness which must be absorbed into art unless art is to be a mere luxury and freak. An appreciation of Scott might be made almost a test of decadence. If ever we lose touch with this one most reckless and defective writer, it will be a proof to us that we have erected round ourselves a false cosmos, a world of lying and horrible perfection, leaving outside of it Walter Scott and that strange old world which is as confused and as indefensible and as inspiring and as healthy as he.

HERETICS

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XX. Concluding Remarks on the Importance of Orthodoxy

I. Introductory Remarks on the Importance of Orthodoxy

Nothing more strangely indicates an enormous and silent evil of modern society than the extraordinary use which is made nowadays of the word “orthodox.” In former days the heretic was proud of not being a heretic. It was the kingdoms of the world and the police and the judges who were heretics. He was orthodox. He had no pride in having rebelled against them; they had rebelled against him. The armies with their cruel security, the kings with their cold faces, the decorous processes of State, the reasonable processes of law — all these like sheep had gone astray. The man was proud of being orthodox, was proud of being right. If he stood alone in a howling wilderness he was more than a man; he was a church. He was the centre of the universe; it was round him that the stars swung. All the tortures torn out of forgotten hells could not make him admit that he was heretical. But a few modern phrases have made him boast of it. He says, with a conscious laugh, “I suppose I am very heretical,” and looks round for applause. The word “heresy” not only means no longer being wrong; it practically means being clear-headed and courageous. The word “orthodoxy” not only no longer means being right; it practically means being wrong. All this can mean one thing, and one thing only. It means that people care less for whether they are philosophically right. For obviously a man ought to confess himself crazy before he confesses himself heretical. The Bohemian, with a red tie, ought to pique himself on his orthodoxy. The dynamiter, laying a bomb, ought to feel that, whatever else he is, at least he is orthodox.

It is foolish, generally speaking, for a philosopher to set fire to another philosopher in Smithfield Market because they do not agree in their theory of the universe. That was done very frequently in the last decadence of the Middle Ages, and it failed altogether in its object. But there is one thing that is infinitely more absurd and unpractical than burning a man for his philosophy. This is the habit of saying that his philosophy does not matter, and this is done universally in the twentieth century, in the decadence of the great revolutionary period. General theories are everywhere contemned; the doctrine of the Rights of Man is dismissed with the doctrine of the Fall of Man. Atheism itself is too theological for us to-day. Revolution itself is too much of a system; liberty itself is too much of a restraint. We will have no generalizations. Mr. Bernard Shaw has put the view in a perfect epigram: “The golden rule is that there is no golden rule.” We are more and more to discuss details in art, politics, literature. A man’s opinion on tramcars matters; his opinion on Botticelli matters; his opinion on all things does not matter. He may turn over and explore a million objects, but he must not find that strange object, the universe; for if he does he will have a religion, and be lost. Everything matters — except everything.

Examples are scarcely needed of this total levity on the subject of cosmic philosophy. Examples are scarcely needed to show that, whatever else we think of as affecting practical affairs, we do not think it matters whether a man is a pessimist or an optimist, a Cartesian or a Hegelian, a materialist or a spiritualist. Let me, however, take a random instance. At any innocent tea-table we may easily hear a man say, “Life is not worth living.” We regard it as we regard the statement that it is a fine day; nobody thinks that it can possibly have any serious effect on the man or on the world. And yet if that utterance were really believed, the world would stand on its head. Murderers would be given medals for saving men from life; firemen would be denounced for keeping men from death; poisons would be used as medicines; doctors would be called in when people were well; the Royal Humane Society would be rooted out like a horde of assassins. Yet we never speculate as to whether the conversational pessimist will strengthen or disorganize society; for we are convinced that theories do not matter.

This was certainly not the idea of those who introduced our freedom. When the old Liberals removed the gags from all the heresies, their idea was that religious and philosophical discoveries might thus be made. Their view was that cosmic truth was so important that every one ought to bear independent testimony. The modern idea is that cosmic truth is so unimportant that it cannot matter what any one says. The former freed inquiry as men loose a noble hound; the latter frees inquiry as men fling back into the sea a fish unfit for eating. Never has there been so little discussion about the nature of men as now, when, for the first time, any one can discuss it. The old restriction meant that only the orthodox were allowed to discuss religion. Modern liberty means that nobody is allowed to discuss it. Good taste, the last and vilest of human superstitions, has succeeded in silencing us where all the rest have failed. Sixty years ago it was bad taste to be an avowed atheist. Then came the Bradlaughites, the last religious men, the last men who cared about God; but they could not alter it.

It is still bad taste to be an avowed atheist. But their agony has achieved just his — that now it is equally bad taste to be an avowed Christian. Emancipation has only locked the saint in the same tower of silence as the heresiarch. Then we talk about Lord Anglesey and the weather, and call it the complete liberty of all the creeds.

But there are some people, nevertheless — and I am one of them — who think that the most practical and important thing about a man is still his view of the universe. We think that for a landlady considering a lodger, it is important to know his income, but still more important to know his philosophy. We think that for a general about to fight an enemy, it is important to know the enemy's numbers, but still more important to know the enemy's philosophy. We think the question is not whether the theory of the cosmos affects matters, but whether in the long run, anything else affects them. In the fifteenth century men cross-examined and tormented a man because he preached some immoral attitude; in the nineteenth century we feted and flattered Oscar Wilde because he preached such an attitude, and then broke his heart in penal servitude because he carried it out. It may be a question which of the two methods was the more cruel; there can be no kind of question which was the more ludicrous. The age of the Inquisition has not at least the disgrace of having produced a society which made an idol of the very same man for preaching the very same things which it made him a convict for practising.

Now, in our time, philosophy or religion, our theory, that is, about ultimate things, has been driven out, more or less simultaneously, from two fields which it used to occupy. General ideals used to dominate literature. They have been driven out by the cry of "art for art's sake." General ideals used to dominate politics. They have been driven out by the cry of "efficiency," which may roughly be translated as "politics for politics' sake." Persistently for the last twenty years the ideals of order or liberty have dwindled in our books; the ambitions of wit and eloquence have dwindled in our parliaments. Literature has purposely become less political; politics have purposely become less literary. General theories of the relation of things have thus been extruded from both; and we are in a position to ask, "What have we gained or lost by this extrusion? Is literature better, is politics better, for having discarded the moralist and the philosopher?"

When everything about a people is for the time growing weak and ineffective, it begins to talk about efficiency. So it is that when a man's body is a wreck he begins, for the first time, to talk about health. Vigorous organisms talk not about their processes, but about their aims. There cannot be any better proof of the physical efficiency of a man than that he talks cheerfully of a journey to the end of the world. And there cannot be any better proof of the practical efficiency of a nation than that it talks constantly of a journey to the end of the world, a journey to the Judgment Day and the New Jerusalem. There can be no stronger sign of a coarse material health than the tendency to run after high and wild ideals; it is in the first exuberance of infancy that we cry for the moon. None of the strong men in the strong ages would have understood what you meant by working for efficiency. Hildebrand would have said that he was working not for efficiency, but for the Catholic Church. Danton would have said that he was working not for efficiency, but for liberty, equality, and fraternity. Even if the ideal of such men were simply the ideal of kicking a man downstairs, they thought of the end like men, not of the process like paralytics. They did not say, "Efficiently elevating my right leg, using, you will notice, the muscles of the thigh and calf, which are in excellent order, I—" Their feeling was quite different. They were so filled with the beautiful vision of the man lying flat at the foot of the staircase that in that ecstasy the rest followed in a flash. In practice, the habit of generalizing and idealizing did not by any means mean worldly weakness. The time of big theories was the time of big results. In the era of sentiment and fine words, at the end of the eighteenth century, men were really robust and effective. The sentimentalists conquered Napoleon. The cynics could not catch De Wet. A hundred years ago our affairs for good or evil were wielded triumphantly by rhetoricians. Now our affairs are hopelessly muddled by strong, silent men. And just as this repudiation of big words and big visions has brought forth a race of small men in politics, so it has brought forth a race of small men in the arts. Our modern politicians claim the colossal license of Caesar and the Superman, claim that they are too practical to be pure and too patriotic to be moral; but the upshot of it all is that a mediocrity is Chancellor of the Exchequer. Our new artistic philosophers call for the same moral license, for a freedom to wreck heaven and earth with their energy; but the upshot of it all is that a mediocrity is Poet Laureate. I do not say that there are no stronger men than these; but will any one say that there are any men stronger than those men of old who were dominated by their philosophy and steeped in their religion? Whether bondage be better than freedom may be discussed. But that their bondage came to more than our freedom it will be difficult for any one to deny.

The theory of the unmorality of art has established itself firmly in the strictly artistic classes. They are free to produce anything they like. They are free to write a “Paradise Lost” in which Satan shall conquer God. They are free to write a “Divine Comedy” in which heaven shall be under the floor of hell. And what have they done? Have they produced in their universality anything grander or more beautiful than the things uttered by the fierce Ghibbeline Catholic, by the rigid Puritan schoolmaster? We know that they have produced only a few roundels. Milton does not merely beat them at his piety, he beats them at their own irreverence. In all their little books of verse you will not find a finer defiance of God than Satan’s. Nor will you find the grandeur of paganism felt as that fiery Christian felt it who described Faranata lifting his head as in disdain of hell. And the reason is very obvious. Blasphemy is an artistic effect, because blasphemy depends upon a philosophical conviction. Blasphemy depends upon belief and is fading with it. If any one doubts this, let him sit down seriously and try to think blasphemous thoughts about Thor. I think his family will find him at the end of the day in a state of some exhaustion.

Neither in the world of politics nor that of literature, then, has the rejection of general theories proved a success. It may be that there have been many moonstruck and misleading ideals that have from time to time perplexed mankind. But assuredly there has been no ideal in practice so moonstruck and misleading as the ideal of practicality. Nothing has lost so many opportunities as the opportunism of Lord Rosebery. He is, indeed, a standing symbol of this epoch — the man who is theoretically a practical man, and practically more unpractical than any theorist. Nothing in this universe is so unwise as that kind of worship of worldly wisdom. A man who is perpetually thinking of whether this race or that race is strong, of whether this cause or that cause is promising, is the man who will never believe in anything long enough to make it succeed. The opportunist politician is like a man who should abandon billiards because he was beaten at billiards, and abandon golf because he was beaten at golf. There is nothing which is so weak for working purposes as this enormous importance attached to immediate victory. There is nothing that fails like success.

And having discovered that opportunism does fail, I have been induced to look at it more largely, and in consequence to see that it must fail. I perceive that it is far more practical to begin at the beginning and discuss theories. I see that the men who killed each other about the orthodoxy of the Homoousion were far more sensible than the people who are quarrelling about the Education Act. For the Christian dogmatists were trying to establish a reign of holiness, and trying to get defined, first of all, what was really holy. But our modern educationists are trying to bring about a religious liberty without attempting to settle what is religion or what is liberty. If the old priests forced a statement on mankind, at least they previously took some trouble to make it lucid. It has been left for the modern mobs of Anglicans and Nonconformists to persecute for a doctrine without even stating it.

For these reasons, and for many more, I for one have come to believe in going back to fundamentals. Such is the general idea of this book. I wish to deal with my most distinguished contemporaries, not personally or in a merely literary manner, but in relation to the real body of doctrine which they teach. I am not concerned with Mr. Rudyard Kipling as a vivid artist or a vigorous personality; I am concerned with him as a Heretic — that is to say, a man whose view of things has the hardihood to differ from mine. I am not concerned with Mr. Bernard Shaw as one of the most brilliant and one of the most honest men alive; I am concerned with him as a Heretic — that is to say, a man whose philosophy is quite solid, quite coherent, and quite wrong. I revert to the doctrinal methods of the thirteenth century, inspired by the general hope of getting something done.

Suppose that a great commotion arises in the street about something, let us say a lamp-post, which many influential persons desire to pull down. A grey-clad monk, who is the spirit of the Middle Ages, is approached upon the matter, and begins to say, in the arid manner of the Schoolmen, “Let us first of all consider, my brethren, the value of Light. If Light be in itself good—” At this point he is somewhat excusably knocked down. All the people make a rush for the lamp-post, the lamp-post is down in ten minutes, and they go about congratulating each other on their unmediaeval practicality. But as things go on they do not work out so easily. Some people have pulled the lamp-post down because they wanted the electric light; some because they wanted old iron; some because they wanted darkness, because their deeds were evil. Some thought it not enough of a lamp-post, some too much; some acted because they wanted to smash municipal machinery; some because they wanted to smash something. And there is war in the night, no man knowing whom he strikes. So, gradually and inevitably, to-day, to-morrow, or the next day, there comes back the conviction that the monk was right after all, and that all depends on what is the philosophy of Light. Only what we might have discussed under the gas-lamp, we now must discuss in the dark.

II. On the negative spirit

Much has been said, and said truly, of the monkish morbidity, of the hysteria which as often gone with the visions of hermits or nuns. But let us never forget that this visionary religion is, in one sense, necessarily more wholesome than our modern and reasonable morality. It is more wholesome for this reason, that it can contemplate the idea of success or triumph in the hopeless fight towards the ethical ideal, in what Stevenson called, with his usual startling felicity, “the lost fight of virtue.” A modern morality, on the other hand, can only point with absolute conviction to the horrors that follow breaches of law; its only certainty is a certainty of ill. It can only point to imperfection. It has no perfection to point to. But the monk meditating upon Christ or Buddha has in his mind an image of perfect health, a thing of clear colours and clean air. He may contemplate this ideal wholeness and happiness far more than he ought; he may contemplate it to the neglect of exclusion of essential THINGS he may contemplate it until he has become a dreamer or a driveller; but still it is wholeness and happiness that he is contemplating. He may even go mad; but he is going mad for the love of sanity. But the modern student of ethics, even if he remains sane, remains sane from an insane dread of insanity.

The anchorite rolling on the stones in a frenzy of submission is a healthier person fundamentally than many a sober man in a silk hat who is walking down Cheapside. For many such are good only through a withering knowledge of evil. I am not at this moment claiming for the devotee anything more than this primary advantage, that though he may be making himself personally weak and miserable, he is still fixing his thoughts largely on gigantic strength and happiness, on a strength that has no limits, and a happiness that has no end. Doubtless there are other objections which can be urged without unreason against the influence of gods and visions in morality, whether in the cell or street. But this advantage the mystic morality must always have — it is always jollier. A young man may keep himself from vice by continually thinking of disease. He may keep himself from it also by continually thinking of the Virgin Mary. There may be question about which method is the more reasonable, or even about which is the more efficient. But surely there can be no question about which is the more wholesome.

I remember a pamphlet by that able and sincere secularist, Mr. G. W. Foote, which contained a phrase sharply symbolizing and dividing these two methods. The pamphlet was called BEER AND BIBLE, those two very noble things, all the nobler for a conjunction which Mr. Foote, in his stern old Puritan way, seemed to think sardonic, but which I confess to thinking appropriate and charming. I have not the work by me, but I remember that Mr. Foote dismissed very contemptuously any attempts to deal with the problem of strong drink by religious offices or intercessions, and said that a picture of a drunkard's liver would be more efficacious in the matter of temperance than any prayer or praise. In that picturesque expression, it seems to me, is perfectly embodied the incurable morbidity of modern ethics. In that temple the lights are low, the crowds kneel, the solemn anthems are uplifted. But that upon the altar to which all men kneel is no longer the perfect flesh, the body and substance of the perfect man; it is still flesh, but it is diseased. It is the drunkard's liver of the New Testament that is marred for us, which we take in remembrance of him.

Now, it is this great gap in modern ethics, the absence of vivid pictures of purity and spiritual triumph, which lies at the back of the real objection felt by so many sane men to the realistic literature of the nineteenth century. If any ordinary man ever said that he was horrified by the subjects discussed in Ibsen or Maupassant, or by the plain language in which they are spoken of, that ordinary man was lying. The average conversation of average men throughout the whole of modern civilization in every class or trade is such as Zola would never dream of printing. Nor is the habit of writing thus of these things a new habit. On the contrary, it is the Victorian prudery and silence which is new still, though it is already dying. The tradition of calling a spade a spade starts very early in our literature and comes down very late. But the truth is that the ordinary honest man, whatever vague account he may have given of his feelings, was not either disgusted or even annoyed at the candour of the moderns. What disgusted him, and very justly, was not the presence of a clear realism, but the absence of a clear idealism. Strong and genuine religious sentiment has never had any objection to realism; on the contrary, religion was the realistic thing, the brutal thing, the thing that called names. This is the great difference between some recent developments of Nonconformity and the great Puritanism of the seventeenth century. It was the whole point of the Puritans that they cared nothing for decency. Modern Nonconformist newspapers distinguish themselves by suppressing precisely those nouns and adjectives which the founders of Nonconformity distinguished themselves by flinging at kings and queens. But if it was a chief claim of religion that it spoke plainly about evil, it was the chief claim of all that it spoke plainly about good. The thing which is resented, and, as I think, rightly resented, in that great modern literature of which Ibsen is typical, is that while the eye that can perceive what are the wrong things increases in an uncanny and devouring clarity, the eye which sees what things are right is growing mistier and mistier every moment, till it goes almost blind with doubt. If we compare, let us say, the morality of the DIVINE COMEDY with the morality of Ibsen’s GHOSTS, we shall see all that modern ethics have really done. No one, I imagine, will accuse the author of the INFERNO of an Early Victorian prudishness or a Podsnapian optimism. But Dante describes three moral instruments — Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell, the vision of perfection, the vision of improvement, and the vision of failure. Ibsen has only one — Hell. It is often said, and with perfect truth, that no one could read a play like GHOSTS and remain indifferent to the necessity of an ethical self-command. That is quite true, and the same is to be said of the most monstrous and material descriptions of the eternal fire. It is quite certain the realists like Zola do in one sense promote morality — they promote it in the sense in which the hangman promotes it, in the sense in which the devil promotes it. But they only affect that small minority which will accept any virtue of courage. Most healthy people dismiss these moral dangers as they dismiss the possibility of bombs or microbes. Modern realists are indeed Terrorists, like the dynamiters; and they fail just as much in their effort to create a thrill. Both realists and dynamiters are well-meaning people engaged in the task, so obviously ultimately hopeless, of using science to promote morality.

I do not wish the reader to confuse me for a moment with those vague persons who imagine that Ibsen is what they call a pessimist. There are plenty of wholesome people in Ibsen, plenty of good people, plenty of happy people, plenty of examples of men acting wisely and things ending well. That is not my meaning. My meaning is that Ibsen has throughout, and does not disguise, a certain vagueness and a changing attitude as well as a doubting attitude towards what is really wisdom and virtue in this life — a vagueness which contrasts very remarkably with the decisiveness with which he pounces on something which he perceives to be a root of evil, some convention, some deception, some ignorance. We know that the hero of GHOSTS is mad, and we know why he is mad. We do also know that Dr. Stockman is sane; but we do not know why he is sane. Ibsen does not profess to know how virtue and happiness are brought about, in the sense that he professes to know how our modern sexual tragedies are brought about. Falsehood works ruin in THE PILLARS OF SOCIETY, but truth works equal ruin in THE WILD DUCK. There are no cardinal virtues of Ibsenism. There is no ideal man of Ibsen. All this is not only admitted, but vaunted in the most valuable and thoughtful of all the eulogies upon Ibsen, Mr. Bernard Shaw's QUINTESSENCE OF IBSENISM. Mr. Shaw sums up Ibsen's teaching in the phrase, "The golden rule is that there is no golden rule." In his eyes this absence of an enduring and positive ideal, this absence of a permanent key to virtue, is the one great Ibsen merit. I am not discussing now with any fullness whether this is so or not. All I venture to point out, with an increased firmness, is that this omission, good or bad, does leave us face to face with the problem of a human consciousness filled with very definite images of evil, and with no definite image of good. To us light must be henceforward the dark thing — the thing of which we cannot speak. To us, as to Milton's devils in Pandemonium, it is darkness that is visible. The human race, according to religion, fell once, and in falling gained knowledge of good and of evil. Now we have fallen a second time, and only the knowledge of evil remains to us.

A great silent collapse, an enormous unspoken disappointment, has in our time fallen on our Northern civilization. All previous ages have sweated and been crucified in an attempt to realize what is really the right life, what was really the good man. A definite part of the modern world has come beyond question to the conclusion that there is no answer to these questions, that the most that we can do is to set up a few notice-boards at places of obvious danger, to warn men, for instance, against drinking themselves to death, or ignoring the mere existence of their neighbours. Ibsen is the first to return from the baffled hunt to bring us the tidings of great failure.

Every one of the popular modern phrases and ideals is a dodge in order to shirk the problem of what is good. We are fond of talking about "liberty"; that, as we talk of it, is a dodge to avoid discussing what is good. We are fond of talking about "progress"; that is a dodge to avoid discussing what is good. We are fond of talking about "education"; that is a dodge to avoid discussing what is good. The modern man says, "Let us leave all these arbitrary standards and embrace liberty." This is, logically rendered, "Let us not decide what is good, but let it be considered good not to decide it." He says, "Away with your old moral formulae; I am for progress." This, logically stated, means, "Let us not settle what is good; but let us settle whether we are getting more of it." He says, "Neither in religion nor morality, my friend, lie the hopes of the race, but in education." This, clearly expressed, means, "We cannot decide what is good, but let us give it to our children."

Mr. H.G. Wells, that exceedingly clear-sighted man, has pointed out in a recent work that this has happened in connection with economic questions. The old economists, he says, made generalizations, and they were (in Mr. Wells's view) mostly wrong. But the new economists, he says, seem to have lost the power of making any generalizations at all. And they cover this incapacity with a general claim to be, in specific cases, regarded as "experts", a claim "proper enough in a hairdresser or a fashionable physician, but indecent in a philosopher or a man of science." But in spite of the refreshing rationality with which Mr. Wells has indicated this, it must also be said that he himself has fallen into the same enormous modern error. In the opening pages of that excellent book MANKIND IN THE MAKING, he dismisses the ideals of art, religion, abstract morality, and the rest, and says that he is going to consider men in their chief function, the function of parenthood. He is going to discuss life as a "tissue of births." He is not going to ask what will produce satisfactory saints or satisfactory heroes, but what will produce satisfactory fathers and mothers. The whole is set forward so sensibly that it is a few moments at least before the reader realises that it is another example of unconscious shirking. What is the good of begetting a man until we have settled what is the good of being a man? You are merely handing on to him a problem you dare not settle yourself. It is as if a man were asked, "What is the use of a hammer?" and answered, "To make hammers"; and when asked, "And of those hammers, what is the use?" answered, "To make hammers again". Just as such a man would be perpetually putting off the question of the ultimate use of carpentry, so Mr. Wells and all the rest of us are by these phrases successfully putting off the question of the ultimate value of the human life.

The case of the general talk of "progress" is, indeed, an extreme one. As enunciated today, "progress" is simply a comparative of which we have not settled the superlative. We meet every ideal of religion, patriotism, beauty, or brute pleasure with the alternative ideal of progress — that is to say, we meet every proposal of getting something that we know about, with an alternative proposal of getting a great deal more of nobody knows what. Progress, properly understood, has, indeed, a most dignified and legitimate meaning. But as used in opposition to precise moral ideals, it is ludicrous. So far from it being the truth that the ideal of progress is to be set against that of ethical or religious finality, the reverse is the truth. Nobody has any business to use the word “progress” unless he has a definite creed and a cast-iron code of morals. Nobody can be progressive without being doctrinal; I might almost say that nobody can be progressive without being infallible — at any rate, without believing in some infallibility. For progress by its very name indicates a direction; and the moment we are in the least doubtful about the direction, we become in the same degree doubtful about the progress. Never perhaps since the beginning of the world has there been an age that had less right to use the word “progress” than we. In the Catholic twelfth century, in the philosophic eighteenth century, the direction may have been a good or a bad one, men may have differed more or less about how far they went, and in what direction, but about the direction they did in the main agree, and consequently they had the genuine sensation of progress. But it is precisely about the direction that we disagree. Whether the future excellence lies in more law or less law, in more liberty or less liberty; whether property will be finally concentrated or finally cut up; whether sexual passion will reach its sanest in an almost virgin intellectualism or in a full animal freedom; whether we should love everybody with Tolstoy, or spare nobody with Nietzsche; — these are the things about which we are actually fighting most. It is not merely true that the age which has settled least what is progress is this “progressive” age. It is, moreover, true that the people who have settled least what is progress are the most “progressive” people in it. The ordinary mass, the men who have never troubled about progress, might be trusted perhaps to progress. The particular individuals who talk about progress would certainly fly to the four winds of heaven when the pistol-shot started the race. I do not, therefore, say that the word “progress” is unmeaning; I say it is unmeaning without the previous definition of a moral doctrine, and that it can only be applied to groups of persons who hold that doctrine in common. Progress is not an illegitimate word, but it is logically evident that it is illegitimate for us. It is a sacred word, a word which could only rightly be used by rigid believers and in the ages of faith.

III. On Mr. Rudyard Kipling and Making the World Small

There is no such thing on earth as an uninteresting subject; the only thing that can exist is an uninterested person. Nothing is more keenly required than a defence of bores. When Byron divided humanity into the bores and bored, he omitted to notice that the higher qualities exist entirely in the bores, the lower qualities in the bored, among whom he counted himself. The bore, by his starry enthusiasm, his solemn happiness, may, in some sense, have proved himself poetical. The bored has certainly proved himself prosaic.

We might, no doubt, find it a nuisance to count all the blades of grass or all the leaves of the trees; but this would not be because of our boldness or gaiety, but because of our lack of boldness and gaiety. The bore would go onward, bold and gay, and find the blades of grass as splendid as the swords of an army. The bore is stronger and more joyous than we are; he is a demigod — nay, he is a god. For it is the gods who do not tire of the iteration of things; to them the nightfall is always new, and the last rose as red as the first.

The sense that everything is poetical is a thing solid and absolute; it is not a mere matter of phraseology or persuasion. It is not merely true, it is ascertainable. Men may be challenged to deny it; men may be challenged to mention anything that is not a matter of poetry. I remember a long time ago a sensible sub-editor coming up to me with a book in his hand, called “Mr. Smith,” or “The Smith Family,” or some such thing. He said, “Well, you won’t get any of your damned mysticism out of this,” or words to that effect. I am happy to say that I undeceived him; but the victory was too obvious and easy. In most cases the name is unpoetical, although the fact is poetical. In the case of Smith, the name is so poetical that it must be an arduous and heroic matter for the man to live up to it. The name of Smith is the name of the one trade that even kings respected, it could claim half the glory of that arma virumque which all epics acclaimed. The spirit of the smithy is so close to the spirit of song that it has mixed in a million poems, and every blacksmith is a harmonious blacksmith.

Even the village children feel that in some dim way the smith is poetic, as the grocer and the cobbler are not poetic, when they feast on the dancing sparks and deafening blows in the cavern of that creative violence. The brute repose of Nature, the passionate cunning of man, the strongest of earthly metals, the wierdest of earthly elements, the unconquerable iron subdued by its only conqueror, the wheel and the ploughshare, the sword and the steam-hammer, the arraying of armies and the whole legend of arms, all these things are written, briefly indeed, but quite legibly, on the visiting-card of Mr. Smith. Yet our novelists call their hero “Aylmer Valence,” which means nothing, or “Vernon Raymond,” which means nothing, when it is in their power to give him this sacred name of Smith — this name made of iron and flame. It would be very natural if a certain hauteur, a certain carriage of the head, a certain curl of the lip, distinguished every one whose name is Smith. Perhaps it does; I trust so. Whoever else are parvenus, the Smiths are not parvenus. From the darkest dawn of history this clan has gone forth to battle; its trophies are on every hand; its name is everywhere; it is older than the nations, and its sign is the Hammer of Thor. But as I also remarked, it is not quite the usual case. It is common enough that common things should be poetical; it is not so common that common names should be poetical. In most cases it is the name that is the obstacle. A great many people talk as if this claim of ours, that all things are poetical, were a mere literary ingenuity, a play on words. Precisely the contrary is true. It is the idea that some things are not poetical which is literary, which is a mere product of words. The word “signal-box” is unpoetical. But the thing signal-box is not unpoetical; it is a place where men, in an agony of vigilance, light blood-red and sea-green fires to keep other men from death. That is the plain, genuine description of what it is; the prose only comes in with what it is called. The word “pillar-box” is unpoetical. But the thing pillar-box is not unpoetical; it is the place to which friends and lovers commit their messages, conscious that when they have done so they are sacred, and not to be touched, not only by others, but even (religious touch!) by themselves. That red turret is one of the last of the temples. Posting a letter and getting married are among the few things left that are entirely romantic; for to be entirely romantic a thing must be irrevocable. We think a pillar-box prosaic, because there is no rhyme to it. We think a pillar-box unpoetical, because we have never seen it in a poem. But the bold fact is entirely on the side of poetry. A signal-box is only called a signal-box; it is a house of life and death. A pillar-box is only called a pillar-box; it is a sanctuary of human words. If you think the name of “Smith” prosaic, it is not because you are practical and sensible; it is because you are too much affected with literary refinements. The name shouts poetry at you. If you think of it otherwise, it is because you are steeped and sodden with verbal reminiscences, because you remember everything in Punch or Comic Cuts about Mr. Smith being drunk or Mr. Smith being henpecked. All these things were given to you poetical. It is only by a long and elaborate process of literary effort that you have made them prosaic.

Now, the first and fairest thing to say about Rudyard Kipling is that he has borne a brilliant part in thus recovering the lost provinces of poetry. He has not been frightened by that brutal materialistic air which clings only to words; he has pierced through to the romantic, imaginative matter of the things themselves. He has perceived the significance and philosophy of steam and of slang. Steam may be, if you like, a dirty by-product of science. Slang may be, if you like, a dirty by-product of language. But at least he has been among the few who saw the divine parentage of these things, and knew that where there is smoke there is fire — that is, that wherever there is the foulest of things, there also is the purest. Above all, he has had something to say, a definite view of things to utter, and that always means that a man is fearless and faces everything. For the moment we have a view of the universe, we possess it.

Now, the message of Rudyard Kipling, that upon which he has really concentrated, is the only thing worth worrying about in him or in any other man. He has often written bad poetry, like Wordsworth. He has often said silly things, like Plato. He has often given way to mere political hysteria, like Gladstone. But no one can reasonably doubt that he means steadily and sincerely to say something, and the only serious question is, What is that which he has tried to say? Perhaps the best way of stating this fairly will be to begin with that element which has been most insisted by himself and by his opponents — I mean his interest in militarism. But when we are seeking for the real merits of a man it is unwise to go to his enemies, and much more foolish to go to himself.

Now, Mr. Kipling is certainly wrong in his worship of militarism, but his opponents are, generally speaking, quite as wrong as he. The evil of militarism is not that it shows certain men to be fierce and haughty and excessively warlike. The evil of militarism is that it shows most men to be tame and timid and excessively peaceable. The professional soldier gains more and more power as the general courage of a community declines. Thus the Pretorian guard became more and more important in Rome as

Rome became more and more luxurious and feeble. The military man gains the civil power in proportion as the civilian loses the military virtues. And as it was in ancient Rome so it is in contemporary Europe. There never was a time when nations were more militarist. There never was a time when men were less brave. All ages and all epics have sung of arms and the man; but we have effected simultaneously the deterioration of the man and the fantastic perfection of the arms. Militarism demonstrated the decadence of Rome, and it demonstrates the decadence of Prussia.

And unconsciously Mr. Kipling has proved this, and proved it admirably. For in so far as his work is earnestly understood the military trade does not by any means emerge as the most important or attractive. He has not written so well about soldiers as he has about railway men or bridge builders, or even journalists. The fact is that what attracts Mr. Kipling to militarism is not the idea of courage, but the idea of discipline. There was far more courage to the square mile in the Middle Ages, when no king had a standing army, but every man had a bow or sword. But the fascination of the standing army upon Mr. Kipling is not courage, which scarcely interests him, but discipline, which is, when all is said and done, his primary theme. The modern army is not a miracle of courage; it has not enough opportunities, owing to the cowardice of everybody else. But it is really a miracle of organization, and that is the truly Kiplingite ideal. Kipling's subject is not that valour which properly belongs to war, but that interdependence and efficiency which belongs quite as much to engineers, or sailors, or mules, or railway engines. And thus it is that when he writes of engineers, or sailors, or mules, or steam-engines, he writes at his best. The real poetry, the "true romance" which Mr. Kipling has taught, is the romance of the division of labour and the discipline of all the trades. He sings the arts of peace much more accurately than the arts of war. And his main contention is vital and valuable. Every thing is military in the sense that everything depends upon obedience. There is no perfectly epicurean corner; there is no perfectly irresponsible place. Everywhere men have made the way for us with sweat and submission. We may fling ourselves into a hammock in a fit of divine carelessness. But we are glad that the net-maker did not make the hammock in a fit of divine carelessness. We may jump upon a child's rocking-horse for a joke. But we are glad that the carpenter did not leave the legs of it unglued for a joke. So far from having merely preached that a soldier cleaning his side-arm is to be adored because he is military, Kipling at his best and clearest has preached that the baker baking loaves and the tailor cutting coats is as military as anybody.

Being devoted to this multitudinous vision of duty, Mr. Kipling is naturally a cosmopolitan. He happens to find his examples in the British Empire, but almost any other empire would do as well, or, indeed, any other highly civilized country. That which he admires in the British army he would find even more apparent in the German army; that which he desires in the British police he would find flourishing, in the French police. The ideal of discipline is not the whole of life, but it is spread over the whole of the world. And the worship of it tends to confirm in Mr. Kipling a certain note of worldly wisdom, of the experience of the wanderer, which is one of the genuine charms of his best work.

The great gap in his mind is what may be roughly called the lack of patriotism — that is to say, he lacks altogether the faculty of attaching himself to any cause or community finally and tragically; for all finality must be tragic. He admires England, but he does not love her; for we admire things with reasons, but love them without reasons. He admires England because she is strong, not because she is English. There is no harshness in saying this, for, to do him justice, he avows it with his usual picturesque candour. In a very interesting poem, he says that —

“If England was what England seems”

— that is, weak and inefficient; if England were not what (as he believes) she is — that is, powerful and practical —

“How quick we’d chuck ‘er! But she ain’t!”

He admits, that is, that his devotion is the result of a criticism, and this is quite enough to put it in another category altogether from the patriotism of the Boers, whom he hounded down in South Africa. In speaking of the really patriotic peoples, such as the Irish, he has some difficulty in keeping a shrill irritation out of his language. The frame of mind which he really describes with beauty and nobility is the frame of mind of the cosmopolitan man who has seen men and cities.

“For to admire and for to see,
For to be’old this world so wide.”

He is a perfect master of that light melancholy with which a man looks back on having been the citizen of many communities, of that light melancholy with which a man looks back on having been the lover of many women. He is the philanderer of the nations. But a man may have learnt much about women in flirtations, and still be ignorant of first love; a man may have known as many lands as Ulysses, and still be ignorant of patriotism.

Mr. Rudyard Kipling has asked in a celebrated epigram what they can know of England who know England only. It is a far deeper and sharper question to ask, “What can they know of England who know only the world?” for the world does not include England any more than it includes the Church. The moment we care for anything deeply, the world — that is, all the other miscellaneous interests — becomes our enemy. Christians showed it when they talked of keeping one’s self “unspotted from the world;” but lovers talk of it just as much when they talk of the “world well lost.” Astronomically speaking, I understand that England is situated on the world; similarly, I suppose that the Church was a part of the world, and even the lovers inhabitants of that orb. But they all felt a certain truth — the truth that the moment you love anything the world becomes your foe. Thus Mr. Kipling does certainly know the world; he is a man of the world, with all the narrowness that belongs to those imprisoned in that planet. He knows England as an intelligent English gentleman knows Venice. He has been to England a great many times; he has stopped there for long visits. But he does not belong to it, or to any place; and the proof of it is this, that he thinks of England as a place. The moment we are rooted in a place, the place vanishes. We live like a tree with the whole strength of the universe.

The globe-trotter lives in a smaller world than the peasant. He is always breathing, an air of locality. London is a place, to be compared to Chicago; Chicago is a place, to be compared to Timbuctoo. But Timbuctoo is not a place, since there, at least, live men who regard it as the universe, and breathe, not an air of locality, but the winds of the world. The man in the saloon steamer has seen all the races of men, and he is thinking of the things that divide men — diet, dress, decorum, rings in the nose as in Africa, or in the ears as in Europe, blue paint among the ancients, or red paint among the modern Britons. The man in the cabbage field has seen nothing at all; but he is thinking of the things that unite men — hunger and babies, and the beauty of women, and the promise or menace of the sky. Mr. Kipling, with all his merits, is the globe-trotter; he has not the patience to become part of anything. So great and genuine a man is not to be accused of a merely cynical cosmopolitanism; still, his cosmopolitanism is his weakness. That weakness is splendidly expressed in one of his finest poems, “The Sestina of the Tramp Royal,” in which a man declares that he can endure anything in the way of hunger or horror, but not permanent presence in one place. In this there is certainly danger. The more dead and dry and dusty a thing is the more it travels about; dust is like this and the thistle-down and the High Commissioner in South Africa. Fertile things are somewhat heavier, like the heavy fruit trees on the pregnant mud of the Nile. In the heated idleness of youth we were all rather inclined to quarrel with the implication of that proverb which says that a rolling stone gathers no moss. We were inclined to ask, “Who wants to gather moss, except silly old ladies?” But for all that we begin to perceive that the proverb is right. The rolling stone rolls echoing from rock to rock; but the rolling stone is dead. The moss is silent because the moss is alive.

The truth is that exploration and enlargement make the world smaller. The telegraph and the steamboat make the world smaller. The telescope makes the world smaller; it is only the microscope that makes it larger. Before long the world will be cloven with a war between the telescopists and the microscopists. The first study large things and live in a small world; the second study small things and live in a large world. It is inspiriting without doubt to whizz in a motor-car round the earth, to feel Arabia as a whirl of sand or China as a flash of rice-fields. But Arabia is not a whirl of sand and China is not a flash of rice-fields. They are ancient civilizations with strange virtues buried like treasures. If we wish to understand them it must not be as tourists or inquirers, it must be with the loyalty of children and the great patience of poets. To conquer these places is to lose them. The man standing in his own kitchen-garden, with fairyland opening at the gate, is the man with large ideas. His mind creates distance; the motor-car stupidly destroys it. Moderns think of the earth as a globe, as something one can easily get round, the spirit of a schoolmistress. This is shown in the odd mistake perpetually made about Cecil Rhodes. His enemies say that he may have had large ideas, but he was a bad man. His friends say that he may have been a bad man, but he certainly had large ideas. The truth is that he was not a man essentially bad, he was a man of much geniality and many good intentions, but a man with singularly small views. There is nothing large about painting the map red; it is an innocent game for children. It is just as easy to think in continents as to think in cobble-stones. The difficulty comes in when we seek to know the substance of either of them. Rhodes' prophecies about the Boer resistance are an admirable comment on how the "large ideas" prosper when it is not a question of thinking in continents but of understanding a few two-legged men. And under all this vast illusion of the cosmopolitan planet, with its empires and its Reuter's agency, the real life of man goes on concerned with this tree or that temple, with this harvest or that drinking-song, totally uncomprehended, totally untouched. And it watches from its splendid parochialism, possibly with a smile of amusement, motor-car civilization going its triumphant way, outstripping time, consuming space, seeing all and seeing nothing, roaring on at last to the capture of the solar system, only to find the sun cockney and the stars suburban.

IV. Mr. Bernard Shaw

In the glad old days, before the rise of modern morbidities, when genial old Ibsen filled the world with wholesome joy, and the kindly tales of the forgotten Emile Zola kept our firesides merry and pure, it used to be thought a disadvantage to be misunderstood. It may be doubted whether it is always or even generally a disadvantage. The man who is misunderstood has always this advantage over his enemies, that they do not know his weak point or his plan of campaign. They go out against a bird with nets and against a fish with arrows. There are several modern examples of this situation. Mr. Chamberlain, for instance, is a very good one. He constantly eludes or vanquishes his opponents because his real powers and deficiencies are quite different to those with which he is credited, both by friends and foes. His friends depict him as a strenuous man of action; his opponents depict him as a coarse man of business; when, as a fact, he is neither one nor the other, but an admirable romantic orator and romantic actor. He has one power which is the soul of melodrama — the power of pretending, even when backed by a huge majority, that he has his back to the wall. For all mobs are so far chivalrous that their heroes must make some show of misfortune — that sort of hypocrisy is the homage that strength pays to weakness. He talks foolishly and yet very finely about his own city that has never deserted him. He wears a flaming and fantastic flower, like a decadent minor poet. As for his bluffness and toughness and appeals to common sense, all that is, of course, simply the first trick of rhetoric. He fronts his audiences with the venerable affectation of Mark Antony —

“I am no orator, as Brutus is;
But as you know me all, a plain blunt man.”

It is the whole difference between the aim of the orator and the aim of any other artist, such as the poet or the sculptor. The aim of the sculptor is to convince us that he is a sculptor; the aim of the orator, is to convince us that he is not an orator. Once let Mr. Chamberlain be mistaken for a practical man, and his game is won. He has only to compose a theme on empire, and people will say that these plain men say great things on great occasions. He has only to drift in the large loose notions common to all artists of the second rank, and people will say that business men have the biggest ideals after all. All his schemes have ended in smoke; he has touched nothing that he did not confuse. About his figure there is a Celtic pathos; like the Gaels in Matthew Arnold’s quotation, “he went forth to battle, but he always fell.” He is a mountain of proposals, a mountain of failures; but still a mountain. And a mountain is always romantic.

There is another man in the modern world who might be called the antithesis of Mr. Chamberlain in every point, who is also a standing monument of the advantage of being misunderstood. Mr. Bernard Shaw is always represented by those who disagree with him, and, I fear, also (if such exist) by those who agree with him, as a capering humorist, a dazzling acrobat, a quick-change artist. It is said that he cannot be taken seriously, that he will defend anything or attack anything, that he will do anything to startle and amuse. All this is not only untrue, but it is, glaringly, the opposite of the truth; it is as wild as to say that Dickens had not the boisterous masculinity of Jane Austen. The whole force and triumph of Mr. Bernard Shaw lie in the fact that he is a thoroughly consistent man. So far from his power consisting in jumping through hoops or standing on his head, his power consists in holding his own fortress night and day. He puts the Shaw test rapidly and rigorously to everything that happens in heaven or earth. His standard never varies. The thing which weak-minded revolutionists and weak-minded Conservatives really hate (and fear) in him, is exactly this, that his scales, such as they are, are held even, and that his law, such as it is, is justly enforced. You may attack his principles, as I do; but I do not know of any instance in which you can attack their application. If he dislikes lawlessness, he dislikes the lawlessness of Socialists as much as that of Individualists. If he dislikes the fever of patriotism, he dislikes it in Boers and Irishmen as well as in Englishmen. If he dislikes the vows and bonds of marriage, he dislikes still more the fiercer bonds and wilder vows that are made by lawless love. If he laughs at the authority of priests, he laughs louder at the pomposity of men of science. If he condemns the irresponsibility of faith, he condemns with a sane consistency the equal irresponsibility of art. He has pleased all the bohemians by saying that women are equal to men; but he has infuriated them by suggesting that men are equal to women. He is almost mechanically just; he has something of the terrible quality of a machine. The man who is really wild and whirling, the man who is really fantastic and incalculable, is not Mr. Shaw, but the average Cabinet Minister. It is Sir Michael Hicks-Beach who jumps through hoops. It is Sir Henry Fowler who stands on his head. The solid and respectable statesman of that type does really leap from position to position; he is really ready to defend anything or nothing; he is really not to be taken seriously. I know perfectly well what Mr. Bernard Shaw will be saying thirty years hence; he will be saying what he has always said. If thirty years hence I meet Mr. Shaw, a reverent being with a silver beard sweeping the earth, and say to him, “One can never, of course, make a verbal attack upon a lady,” the patriarch will lift his aged hand and fell me to the earth. We know, I say, what Mr. Shaw will be, saying thirty years hence. But is there any one so darkly read in stars and oracles that he will dare to predict what Mr. Asquith will be saying thirty years hence?

The truth is, that it is quite an error to suppose that absence of definite convictions gives the mind freedom and agility. A man who believes something is ready and witty, because he has all his weapons about him. He can apply his test in an instant. The man engaged in conflict with a man like Mr. Bernard Shaw may fancy he has ten faces; similarly a man engaged against a brilliant duellist may fancy that the sword of his foe has turned to ten swords in his hand. But this is not really because the man is playing with ten swords, it is because he is aiming very straight with one. Moreover, a man with a definite belief always appears bizarre, because he does not change with the world; he has climbed into a fixed star, and the earth whizzes below him like a zoetrope. Millions of mild black-coated men call themselves sane and sensible merely because they always catch the fashionable insanity, because they are hurried into madness after madness by the maelstrom of the world.

People accuse Mr. Shaw and many much sillier persons of “proving that black is white.” But they never ask whether the current colour-language is always correct. Ordinary sensible phraseology sometimes calls black white, it certainly calls yellow white and green white and reddish-brown white. We call wine “white wine” which is as yellow as a Blue-coat boy’s legs. We call grapes “white grapes” which are manifestly pale green. We give to the European, whose complexion is a sort of pink drab, the horrible title of a “white man” — a picture more blood-curdling than any spectre in Poe.

Now, it is undoubtedly true that if a man asked a waiter in a restaurant for a bottle of yellow wine and some greenish-yellow grapes, the waiter would think him mad. It is undoubtedly true that if a Government official, reporting on the Europeans in Burmah, said, “There are only two thousand pinkish men here” he would be accused of cracking jokes, and kicked out of his post. But it is equally obvious that both men would have come to grief through telling the strict truth. That too truthful man in the restaurant; that too truthful man in Burmah, is Mr. Bernard Shaw. He appears eccentric and grotesque because he will not accept the general belief that white is yellow. He has based all his brilliancy and solidity upon the hackneyed, but yet forgotten, fact that truth is stranger than fiction. Truth, of course, must of necessity be stranger than fiction, for we have made fiction to suit ourselves.

So much then a reasonable appreciation will find in Mr. Shaw to be bracing and excellent. He claims to see things as they are; and some things, at any rate, he does see as they are, which the whole of our civilization does not see at all. But in Mr. Shaw’s realism there is something lacking, and that thing which is lacking is serious.

Mr. Shaw’s old and recognized philosophy was that powerfully presented in “The Quintessence of Ibsenism.” It was, in brief, that conservative ideals were bad, not because They were conservative, but because they were ideals. Every ideal prevented men from judging justly the particular case; every moral generalization oppressed the individual; the golden rule was there was no golden rule. And the objection to this is simply that it pretends to free men, but really restrains them from doing the only thing that men want to do. What is the good of telling a community that it has every liberty except the liberty to make laws? The liberty to make laws is what constitutes a free people. And what is the good of telling a man (or a philosopher) that he has every liberty except the liberty to make generalizations. Making generalizations is what makes him a man. In short, when Mr. Shaw forbids men to have strict moral ideals, he is acting like one who should forbid them to have children. The saying that “the golden rule is that there is no golden rule,” can, indeed, be simply answered by being turned round. That there is no golden rule is itself a golden rule, or rather it is much worse than a golden rule. It is an iron rule; a fetter on the first movement of a man.

But the sensation connected with Mr. Shaw in recent years has been his sudden development of the religion of the Superman. He who had to all appearance mocked at the faiths in the forgotten past discovered a new god in the unimaginable future. He who had laid all the blame on ideals set up the most impossible of all ideals, the ideal of a new creature. But the truth, nevertheless, is that any one who knows Mr. Shaw's mind adequately, and admires it properly, must have guessed all this long ago.

For the truth is that Mr. Shaw has never seen things as they really are. If he had he would have fallen on his knees before them. He has always had a secret ideal that has withered all the things of this world. He has all the time been silently comparing humanity with something that was not human, with a monster from Mars, with the Wise Man of the Stoics, with the Economic Man of the Fabians, with Julius Caesar, with Siegfried, with the Superman. Now, to have this inner and merciless standard may be a very good thing, or a very bad one, it may be excellent or unfortunate, but it is not seeing things as they are. It is not seeing things as they are to think first of a Briareus with a hundred hands, and then call every man a cripple for only having two. It is not seeing things as they are to start with a vision of Argus with his hundred eyes, and then jeer at every man with two eyes as if he had only one. And it is not seeing things as they are to imagine a demigod of infinite mental clarity, who may or may not appear in the latter days of the earth, and then to see all men as idiots. And this is what Mr. Shaw has always in some degree done. When we really see men as they are, we do not criticise, but worship; and very rightly. For a monster with mysterious eyes and miraculous thumbs, with strange dreams in his skull, and a queer tenderness for this place or that baby, is truly a wonderful and unnerving matter. It is only the quite arbitrary and priggish habit of comparison with something else which makes it possible to be at our ease in front of him. A sentiment of superiority keeps us cool and practical; the mere facts would make, our knees knock under as with religious fear. It is the fact that every instant of conscious life is an unimaginable prodigy. It is the fact that every face in the street has the incredible unexpectedness of a fairy-tale. The thing which prevents a man from realizing this is not any clear-sightedness or experience, it is simply a habit of pedantic and fastidious comparisons between one thing and another. Mr. Shaw, on the practical side perhaps the most humane man alive, is in this sense inhumane. He has even been infected to some extent with the primary intellectual weakness of his new master, Nietzsche, the strange notion that the greater and stronger a man was the more he would despise other things. The greater and stronger a man is the more he would be inclined to prostrate himself before a periwinkle. That Mr. Shaw keeps a lifted head and a contemptuous face before the colossal panorama of empires and civilizations, this does not in itself convince one that he sees things as they are. I should be most effectively convinced that he did if I found him staring with religious astonishment at his own feet. “What are those two beautiful and industrious beings,” I can imagine him murmuring to himself, “whom I see everywhere, serving me I know not why? What fairy godmother bade them come trotting out of elfland when I was born? What god of the borderland, what barbaric god of legs, must I propitiate with fire and wine, lest they run away with me?”

The truth is, that all genuine appreciation rests on a certain mystery of humility and almost of darkness. The man who said, “Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall not be disappointed,” put the eulogy quite inadequately and even falsely. The truth “Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall be gloriously surprised.” The man who expects nothing sees redder roses than common men can see, and greener grass, and a more startling sun. Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall possess the cities and the mountains; blessed is the meek, for he shall inherit the earth. Until we realize that things might not be we cannot realize that things are. Until we see the background of darkness we cannot admire the light as a single and created thing. As soon as we have seen that darkness, all light is lightening, sudden, blinding, and divine. Until we picture nonentity we underrate the victory of God, and can realize none of the trophies of His ancient war. It is one of the million wild jests of truth that we know nothing until we know nothing.

Now this is, I say deliberately, the only defect in the greatness of Mr. Shaw, the only answer to his claim to be a great man, that he is not easily pleased. He is an almost solitary exception to the general and essential maxim, that little things please great minds. And from this absence of that most uproarious of all things, humility, comes incidentally the peculiar insistence on the Superman. After belabouring a great many people for a great many years for being unprogressive, Mr. Shaw has discovered, with characteristic sense, that it is very doubtful whether any existing human being with two legs can be progressive at all. Having come to doubt whether humanity can be combined with progress, most people, easily pleased, would have elected to abandon progress and remain with humanity. Mr. Shaw, not being easily pleased, decides to throw over humanity with all its limitations and go in for progress for its own sake. If man, as we know him, is incapable of the philosophy of progress, Mr. Shaw asks, not for a new kind of philosophy, but for a new kind of man. It is rather as if a nurse had tried a rather bitter food for some years on a baby, and on discovering that it was not suitable, should not throw away the food and ask for a new food, but throw the baby out of window, and ask for a new baby. Mr. Shaw cannot understand that the thing which is valuable and lovable in our eyes is man — the old beer-drinking, creed-making, fighting, failing, sensual, respectable man. And the things that have been founded on this creature immortally remain; the things that have been founded on the fancy of the Superman have died with the dying civilizations which alone have given them birth. When Christ at a symbolic moment was establishing His great society, He chose for its corner-stone neither the brilliant Paul nor the mystic John, but a shuffler, a snob a coward — in a word, a man. And upon this rock He has built His Church, and the gates of Hell have not prevailed against it. All the empires and the kingdoms have failed, because of this inherent and continual weakness, that they were founded by strong men and upon strong men. But this one thing, the historic Christian Church, was founded on a weak man, and for that reason it is indestructible. For no chain is stronger than its weakest link.

V. Mr. H. G. Wells and the Giants

We ought to see far enough into a hypocrite to see even his sincerity. We ought to be interested in that darkest and most real part of a man in which dwell not the vices that he does not display, but the virtues that he cannot. And the more we approach the problems of human history with this keen and piercing charity, the smaller and smaller space we shall allow to pure hypocrisy of any kind. The hypocrites shall not deceive us into thinking them saints; but neither shall they deceive us into thinking them hypocrites. And an increasing number of cases will crowd into our field of inquiry, cases in which there is really no question of hypocrisy at all, cases in which people were so ingenuous that they seemed absurd, and so absurd that they seemed disingenuous.

There is one striking instance of an unfair charge of hypocrisy. It is always urged against the religious in the past, as a point of inconsistency and duplicity, that they combined a profession of almost crawling humility with a keen struggle for earthly success and considerable triumph in attaining it. It is felt as a piece of humbug, that a man should be very punctilious in calling himself a miserable sinner, and also very punctilious in calling himself King of France. But the truth is that there is no more conscious inconsistency between the humility of a Christian and the rapacity of a Christian than there is between the humility of a lover and the rapacity of a lover. The truth is that there are no things for which men will make such herculean efforts as the things of which they know they are unworthy. There never was a man in love who did not declare that, if he strained every nerve to breaking, he was going to have his desire. And there never was a man in love who did not declare also that he ought not to have it. The whole secret of the practical success of Christendom lies in the Christian humility, however imperfectly fulfilled. For with the removal of all question of merit or payment, the soul is suddenly released for incredible voyages. If we ask a sane man how much he merits, his mind shrinks instinctively and instantaneously. It is doubtful whether he merits six feet of earth. But if you ask him what he can conquer — he can conquer the stars. Thus comes the thing called Romance, a purely Christian product. A man cannot deserve adventures; he cannot earn dragons and hippogriffs. The mediaeval Europe which asserted humility gained Romance; the civilization which gained Romance has gained the habitable globe. How different the Pagan and Stoical feeling was from this has been admirably expressed in a famous quotation. Addison makes the great Stoic say —

"'Tis not in mortals to command success;
But we'll do more, Sempronius, we'll deserve it."

But the spirit of Romance and Christendom, the spirit which is in every lover, the spirit which has bestridden the earth with European adventure, is quite opposite. 'Tis not in mortals to deserve success. But we'll do more, Sempronius; we'll obtain it.

And this gay humility, this holding of ourselves lightly and yet ready for an infinity of unmerited triumphs, this secret is so simple that every one has supposed that it must be something quite sinister and mysterious. Humility is so practical a virtue that men think it must be a vice. Humility is so successful that it is mistaken for pride. It is mistaken for it all the more easily because it generally goes with a certain simple love of splendour which amounts to vanity. Humility will always, by preference, go clad in scarlet and gold; pride is that which refuses to let gold and scarlet impress it or please it too much. In a word, the failure of this virtue actually lies in its success; it is too successful as an investment to be believed in as a virtue. Humility is not merely too good for this world; it is too practical for this world; I had almost said it is too worldly for this world.

The instance most quoted in our day is the thing called the humility of the man of science; and certainly it is a good instance as well as a modern one. Men find it extremely difficult to believe that a man who is obviously uprooting mountains and dividing seas, tearing down temples and stretching out hands to the stars, is really a quiet old gentleman who only asks to be allowed to indulge his harmless old hobby and follow his harmless old nose. When a man splits a grain of sand and the universe is turned upside down in consequence, it is difficult to realize that to the man who did it, the splitting of the grain is the great affair, and the capsizing of the cosmos quite a small one. It is hard to enter into the feelings of a man who regards a new heaven and a new earth in the light of a by-product. But undoubtedly it was to this almost eerie innocence of the intellect that the great men of the great scientific period, which now appears to be closing, owed their enormous power and triumph. If they had brought the heavens down like a house of cards their plea was not even that they had done it on principle; their quite unanswerable plea was that they had done it by accident. Whenever there was in them the least touch of pride in what they had done, there was a good ground for attacking them; but so long as they were wholly humble, they were wholly victorious. There were possible answers to Huxley; there was no answer possible to Darwin. He was convincing because of his unconsciousness; one might almost say because of his dulness. This childlike and prosaic mind is beginning to wane in the world of science. Men of science are beginning to see themselves, as the fine phrase is, in the part; they are beginning to be proud of their humility. They are beginning to be aesthetic, like the rest of the world, beginning to spell truth with a capital T, beginning to talk of the creeds they imagine themselves to have destroyed, of the discoveries that their forbears made. Like the modern English, they are beginning to be soft about their own hardness. They are becoming conscious of their own strength — that is, they are growing weaker. But one purely modern man has emerged in the strictly modern decades who does carry into our world the clear personal simplicity of the old world of science. One man of genius we have who is an artist, but who was a man of science, and who seems to be marked above all things with this great scientific humility. I mean Mr. H. G. Wells. And in his case, as in the others above spoken of, there must be a great preliminary difficulty in convincing the ordinary person that such a virtue is predicable of such a man. Mr. Wells began his literary work with violent visions — visions of the last pangs of this planet; can it be that a man who begins with violent visions is humble? He went on to wilder and wilder stories about carving beasts into men and shooting angels like birds. Is the man who shoots angels and carves beasts into men humble? Since then he has done something bolder than either of these blasphemies; he has prophesied the political future of all men; prophesied it with aggressive authority and a ringing decision of detail. Is the prophet of the future of all men humble? It will indeed be difficult, in the present condition of current thought about such things as pride and humility, to answer the query of how a man can be humble who does such big things and such bold things. For the only answer is the answer which I gave at the beginning of this essay. It is the humble man who does the big things. It is the humble man who does the bold things. It is the humble man who has the sensational sights vouchsafed to him, and this for three obvious reasons: first, that he strains his eyes more than any other men to see them; second, that he is more overwhelmed and uplifted with them when they come; third, that he records them more exactly and sincerely and with less adulteration from his more commonplace and more conceited everyday self. Adventures are to those to whom they are most unexpected — that is, most romantic. Adventures are to the shy: in this sense adventures are to the unadventurous.

Now, this arresting, mental humility in Mr. H. G. Wells may be, like a great many other things that are vital and vivid, difficult to illustrate by examples, but if I were asked for an example of it, I should have no difficulty about which example to begin with. The most interesting thing about Mr. H. G. Wells is that he is the only one of his many brilliant contemporaries who has not stopped growing. One can lie awake at night and hear him grow. Of this growth the most evident manifestation is indeed a gradual change of opinions; but it is no mere change of opinions. It is not a perpetual leaping from one position to another like that of Mr. George Moore. It is a quite continuous advance along a quite solid road in a quite definable direction. But the chief proof that it is not a piece of fickleness and vanity is the fact that it has been upon the whole in advance from more startling opinions to more humdrum opinions. It has been even in some sense an advance from unconventional opinions to conventional opinions. This fact fixes Mr. Wells's honesty and proves him to be no poseur. Mr. Wells once held that the upper classes and the lower classes would be so much differentiated in the future that one class would eat the other. Certainly no paradoxical charlatan who had once found arguments for so startling a view would ever have deserted it except for something yet more startling. Mr. Wells has deserted it in favour of the blameless belief that both classes will be ultimately subordinated or assimilated to a sort of scientific middle class, a class of engineers. He has abandoned the sensational theory with the same honourable gravity and simplicity with which he adopted it. Then he thought it was true; now he thinks it is not true. He has come to the most dreadful conclusion a literary man can come to, the conclusion that the ordinary view is the right one. It is only the last and wildest kind of courage that can stand on a tower before ten thousand people and tell them that twice two is four.

Mr. H. G. Wells exists at present in a gay and exhilarating progress of conservativism. He is finding out more and more that conventions, though silent, are alive. As good an example as any of this humility and sanity of his may be found in his change of view on the subject of science and marriage. He once held, I believe, the opinion which some singular sociologists still hold, that human creatures could successfully be paired and bred after the manner of dogs or horses. He no longer holds that view. Not only does he no longer hold that view, but he has written about it in “Mankind in the Making” with such smashing sense and humour, that I find it difficult to believe that anybody else can hold it either. It is true that his chief objection to the proposal is that it is physically impossible, which seems to me a very slight objection, and almost negligible compared with the others. The one objection to scientific marriage which is worthy of final attention is simply that such a thing could only be imposed on unthinkable slaves and cowards. I do not know whether the scientific marriage-mongers are right (as they say) or wrong (as Mr. Wells says) in saying that medical supervision would produce strong and healthy men. I am only certain that if it did, the first act of the strong and healthy men would be to smash the medical supervision.

The mistake of all that medical talk lies in the very fact that it connects the idea of health with the idea of care. What has health to do with care? Health has to do with carelessness. In special and abnormal cases it is necessary to have care. When we are peculiarly unhealthy it may be necessary to be careful in order to be healthy. But even then we are only trying to be healthy in order to be careless. If we are doctors we are speaking to exceptionally sick men, and they ought to be told to be careful. But when we are sociologists we are addressing the normal man, we are addressing humanity. And humanity ought to be told to be recklessness itself. For all the fundamental functions of a healthy man ought emphatically to be performed with pleasure and for pleasure; they emphatically ought not to be performed with precaution or for precaution. A man ought to eat because he has a good appetite to satisfy, and emphatically not because he has a body to sustain. A man ought to take exercise not because he is too fat, but because he loves foils or horses or high mountains, and loves them for their own sake. And a man ought to marry because he has fallen in love, and emphatically not because the world requires to be populated. The food will really renovate his tissues as long as he is not thinking about his tissues. The exercise will really get him into training so long as he is thinking about something else. And the marriage will really stand some chance of producing a generous-blooded generation if it had its origin in its own natural and generous excitement. It is the first law of health that our necessities should not be accepted as necessities; they should be accepted as luxuries. Let us, then, be careful about the small things, such as a scratch or a slight illness, or anything that can be managed with care. But in the name of all sanity, let us be careless about the important things, such as marriage, or the fountain of our very life will fail.

Mr. Wells, however, is not quite clear enough of the narrower scientific outlook to see that there are some things which actually ought not to be scientific. He is still slightly affected with the great scientific fallacy; I mean the habit of beginning not with the human soul, which is the first thing a man learns about, but with some such thing as protoplasm, which is about the last. The one defect in his splendid mental equipment is that he does not sufficiently allow for the stuff or material of men. In his new Utopia he says, for instance, that a chief point of the Utopia will be a disbelief in original sin. If he had begun with the human soul — that is, if he had begun on himself — he would have found original sin almost the first thing to be believed in. He would have found, to put the matter shortly, that a permanent possibility of selfishness arises from the mere fact of having a self, and not from any accidents of education or ill-treatment. And the weakness of all Utopias is this, that they take the greatest difficulty of man and assume it to be overcome, and then give an elaborate account of the overcoming of the smaller ones. They first assume that no man will want more than his share, and then are very ingenious in explaining whether his share will be delivered by motor-car or balloon. And an even stronger example of Mr. Wells's indifference to the human psychology can be found in his cosmopolitanism, the abolition in his Utopia of all patriotic boundaries. He says in his innocent way that Utopia must be a world-state, or else people might make war on it. It does not seem to occur to him that, for a good many of us, if it were a world-state we should still make war on it to the end of the world. For if we admit that there must be varieties in art or opinion what sense is there in thinking there will not be varieties in government? The fact is very simple. Unless you are going deliberately to prevent a thing being good, you cannot prevent it being worth fighting for. It is impossible to prevent a possible conflict of civilizations, because it is impossible to prevent a possible conflict between ideals. If there were no longer our modern strife between nations, there would only be a strife between Utopias. For the highest thing does not tend to union only; the highest thing, tends also to differentiation. You can often get men to fight for the union; but you can never prevent them from fighting also for the differentiation. This variety in the highest thing is the meaning of the fierce patriotism, the fierce nationalism of the great European civilization. It is also, incidentally, the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity.

But I think the main mistake of Mr. Wells's philosophy is a somewhat deeper one, one that he expresses in a very entertaining manner in the introductory part of the new Utopia. His philosophy in some sense amounts to a denial of the possibility of philosophy itself. At least, he maintains that there are no secure and reliable ideas upon which we can rest with a final mental satisfaction. It will be both clearer, however, and more amusing to quote Mr. Wells himself.

He says, "Nothing endures, nothing is precise and certain (except the mind of a pedant).... Being indeed! — there is no being, but a universal becoming of individualities, and Plato turned his back on truth when he turned towards his museum of specific ideals." Mr. Wells says, again, "There is no abiding thing in what we know. We change from weaker to stronger lights, and each more powerful light pierces our hitherto opaque foundations and reveals fresh and different opacities below." Now, when Mr. Wells says things like this, I speak with all respect when I say that he does not observe an evident mental distinction. It cannot be true that there is nothing abiding in what we know. For if that were so we should not know it all and should not call it knowledge. Our mental state may be very different from that of somebody else some thousands of years back; but it cannot be entirely different, or else we should not be conscious of a difference. Mr. Wells must surely realize the first and simplest of the paradoxes that sit by the springs of truth. He must surely see that the fact of two things being different implies that they are similar. The hare and the tortoise may differ in the quality of swiftness, but they must agree in the quality of motion. The swiftest hare cannot be swifter than an isosceles triangle or the idea of pinkness. When we say the hare moves faster, we say that the tortoise moves. And when we say of a thing that it moves, we say, without need of other words, that there are things that do not move. And even in the act of saying that things change, we say that there is something unchangeable.

But certainly the best example of Mr. Wells's fallacy can be found in the example which he himself chooses. It is quite true that we see a dim light which, compared with a darker thing, is light, but which, compared with a stronger light, is darkness. But the quality of light remains the same thing, or else we should not call it a stronger light or recognize it as such. If the character of light were not fixed in the mind, we should be quite as likely to call a denser shadow a stronger light, or vice versa If the character of light became even for an instant unfixed, if it became even by a hair's-breadth doubtful, if, for example, there crept into our idea of light some vague idea of blueness, then in that flash we have become doubtful whether the new light has more light or less. In brief, the progress may be as varying as a cloud, but the direction must be as rigid as a French road. North and South are relative in the sense that I am North of Bournemouth and South of Spitzbergen. But if there be any doubt of the position of the North Pole, there is in equal degree a doubt of whether I am South of Spitzbergen at all. The absolute idea of light may be practically unattainable. We may not be able to procure pure light. We may not be able to get to the North Pole. But because the North Pole is unattainable, it does not follow that it is indefinable. And it is only because the North Pole is not indefinable that we can make a satisfactory map of Brighton and Worthing.

In other words, Plato turned his face to truth but his back on Mr. H. G. Wells, when he turned to his museum of specified ideals. It is precisely here that Plato shows his sense. It is not true that everything changes; the things that change are all the manifest and material things. There is something that does not change; and that is precisely the abstract quality, the invisible idea. Mr. Wells says truly enough, that a thing which we have seen in one connection as dark we may see in another connection as light. But the thing common to both incidents is the mere idea of light — which we have not seen at all. Mr. Wells might grow taller and taller for unending aeons till his head was higher than the loneliest star. I can imagine his writing a good novel about it. In that case he would see the trees first as tall things and then as short things; he would see the clouds first as high and then as low. But there would remain with him through the ages in that starry loneliness the idea of tallness; he would have in the awful spaces for companion and comfort the definite conception that he was growing taller and not (for instance) growing fatter.

And now it comes to my mind that Mr. H. G. Wells actually has written a very delightful romance about men growing as tall as trees; and that here, again, he seems to me to have been a victim of this vague relativism. "The Food of the Gods" is, like Mr. Bernard Shaw's play, in essence a study of the Superman idea. And it lies, I think, even through the veil of a half-pantomimic allegory, open to the same intellectual attack. We cannot be expected to have any regard for a great creature if he does not in any manner conform to our standards. For unless he passes our standard of greatness we cannot even call him great. Nietszche summed up all that is interesting in the Superman idea when he said, “Man is a thing which has to be surpassed.” But the very word “surpass” implies the existence of a standard common to us and the thing surpassing us. If the Superman is more manly than men are, of course they will ultimately deify him, even if they happen to kill him first. But if he is simply more supermanly, they may be quite indifferent to him as they would be to another seemingly aimless monstrosity. He must submit to our test even in order to overawe us. Mere force or size even is a standard; but that alone will never make men think a man their superior. Giants, as in the wise old fairy-tales, are vermin. Supermen, if not good men, are vermin.

“The Food of the Gods” is the tale of “Jack the Giant-Killer” told from the point of view of the giant. This has not, I think, been done before in literature; but I have little doubt that the psychological substance of it existed in fact. I have little doubt that the giant whom Jack killed did regard himself as the Superman. It is likely enough that he considered Jack a narrow and parochial person who wished to frustrate a great forward movement of the life-force. If (as not unfrequently was the case) he happened to have two heads, he would point out the elementary maxim which declares them to be better than one. He would enlarge on the subtle modernity of such an equipment, enabling a giant to look at a subject from two points of view, or to correct himself with promptitude. But Jack was the champion of the enduring human standards, of the principle of one man one head and one man one conscience, of the single head and the single heart and the single eye. Jack was quite unimpressed by the question of whether the giant was a particularly gigantic giant. All he wished to know was whether he was a good giant — that is, a giant who was any good to us. What were the giant’s religious views; what his views on politics and the duties of the citizen? Was he fond of children — or fond of them only in a dark and sinister sense? To use a fine phrase for emotional sanity, was his heart in the right place? Jack had sometimes to cut him up with a sword in order to find out. The old and correct story of Jack the Giant-Killer is simply the whole story of man; if it were understood we should need no

Bibles or histories. But the modern world in particular does not seem to understand it at all. The modern world, like Mr. Wells is on the side of the giants; the safest place, and therefore the meanest and the most prosaic. The modern world, when it praises its little Caesars, talks of being strong and brave: but it does not seem to see the eternal paradox involved in the conjunction of these ideas. The strong cannot be brave. Only the weak can be brave; and yet again, in practice, only those who can be brave can be trusted, in time of doubt, to be strong. The only way in which a giant could really keep himself in training against the inevitable Jack would be by continually fighting other giants ten times as big as himself. That is by ceasing to be a giant and becoming a Jack. Thus that sympathy with the small or the defeated as such, with which we Liberals and Nationalists have been often reproached, is not a useless sentimentalism at all, as Mr. Wells and his friends fancy. It is the first law of practical courage. To be in the weakest camp is to be in the strongest school. Nor can I imagine anything that would do humanity more good than the advent of a race of Supermen, for them to fight like dragons. If the Superman is better than we, of course we need not fight him; but in that case, why not call him the Saint? But if he is merely stronger (whether physically, mentally, or morally stronger, I do not care a farthing), then he ought to have to reckon with us at least for all the strength we have. It we are weaker than he, that is no reason why we should be weaker than ourselves. If we are not tall enough to touch the giant's knees, that is no reason why we should become shorter by falling on our own. But that is at bottom the meaning of all modern hero-worship and celebration of the Strong Man, the Caesar the Superman. That he may be something more than man, we must be something less.

Doubtless there is an older and better hero-worship than this. But the old hero was a being who, like Achilles, was more human than humanity itself. Nietzsche's Superman is cold and friendless. Achilles is so foolishly fond of his friend that he slaughters armies in the agony of his bereavement. Mr. Shaw's sad Caesar says in his desolate pride, "He who has never hoped can never despair." The Man-God of old answers from his awful hill, "Was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow?" A great man is not a man so strong that he feels less than other men; he is a man so strong that he feels more. And when Nietszche says, "A new commandment I give to you, 'be hard,'" he is really saying, "A new commandment I give to you, 'be dead.'" Sensibility is the definition of life.

I recur for a last word to Jack the Giant-Killer. I have dwelt on this matter of Mr. Wells and the giants, not because it is specially prominent in his mind; I know that the Superman does not bulk so large in his cosmos as in that of Mr. Bernard Shaw. I have dwelt on it for the opposite reason; because this heresy of immoral hero-worship has taken, I think, a slighter hold of him, and may perhaps still be prevented from perverting one of the best thinkers of the day. In the course of "The New Utopia" Mr. Wells makes more than one admiring allusion to Mr. W. E. Henley. That clever and unhappy man lived in admiration of a vague violence, and was always going back to rude old tales and rude old ballads, to strong and primitive literatures, to find the praise of strength and the justification of tyranny. But he could not find it. It is not there. The primitive literature is shown in the tale of Jack the Giant-Killer. The strong old literature is all in praise of the weak. The rude old tales are as tender to minorities as any modern political idealist. The rude old ballads are as sentimentally concerned for the under-dog as the Aborigines Protection Society. When men were tough and raw, when they lived amid hard knocks and hard laws, when they knew what fighting really was, they had only two kinds of songs. The first was a rejoicing that the weak had conquered the strong, the second a lamentation that the strong had, for once in a way, conquered the weak. For this defiance of the statu quo, this constant effort to alter the existing balance, this premature challenge to the powerful, is the whole nature and inmost secret of the psychological adventure which is called man. It is his strength to disdain strength. The forlorn hope is not only a real hope, it is the only real hope of mankind. In the coarsest ballads of the greenwood men are admired most when they defy, not only the king, but what is more to the point, the hero. The moment Robin Hood becomes a sort of Superman, that moment the chivalrous chronicler shows us Robin thrashed by a poor tinker whom he thought to thrust aside. And the chivalrous chronicler makes Robin Hood receive the thrashing in a glow of admiration. This magnanimity is not a product of modern humanitarianism; it is not a product of anything to do with peace. This magnanimity is merely one of the lost arts of war. The Henleyites call for a sturdy and fighting England, and they go back to the fierce old stories of the sturdy and fighting English. And the thing that they find written across that fierce old literature everywhere, is "the policy of Majuba."

VI. Christmas and the Aesthetes

The world is round, so round that the schools of optimism and pessimism have been arguing from the beginning whether it is the right way up. The difficulty does not arise so much from the mere fact that good and evil are mingled in roughly equal proportions; it arises chiefly from the fact that men always differ about what parts are good and what evil. Hence the difficulty which besets “undenominational religions.” They profess to include what is beautiful in all creeds, but they appear to many to have collected all that is dull in them. All the colours mixed together in purity ought to make a perfect white. Mixed together on any human paint-box, they make a thing like mud, and a thing very like many new religions. Such a blend is often something much worse than any one creed taken separately, even the creed of the Thugs. The error arises from the difficulty of detecting what is really the good part and what is really the bad part of any given religion. And this pathos falls rather heavily on those persons who have the misfortune to think of some religion or other, that the parts commonly counted good are bad, and the parts commonly counted bad are good.

It is tragic to admire and honestly admire a human group, but to admire it in a photographic negative. It is difficult to congratulate all their whites on being black and all their blacks on their whiteness. This will often happen to us in connection with human religions. Take two institutions which bear witness to the religious energy of the nineteenth century. Take the Salvation Army and the philosophy of Auguste Comte.

The usual verdict of educated people on the Salvation Army is expressed in some such words as these: “I have no doubt they do a great deal of good, but they do it in a vulgar and profane style; their aims are excellent, but their methods are wrong.” To me, unfortunately, the precise reverse of this appears to be the truth. I do not know whether the aims of the Salvation Army are excellent, but I am quite sure their methods are admirable. Their methods are the methods of all intense and hearty religions; they are popular like all religion, military like all religion, public and sensational like all religion. They are not reverent any more than Roman Catholics are reverent, for reverence in the sad and delicate meaning of the term reverence is a thing only possible to infidels. That beautiful twilight you will find in Euripides, in Renan, in Matthew Arnold; but in men who believe you will not find it — you will find only laughter and war. A man cannot pay that kind of reverence to truth solid as marble; they can only be reverent towards a beautiful lie. And the Salvation Army, though their voice has broken out in a mean environment and an ugly shape, are really the old voice of glad and angry faith, hot as the riots of Dionysus, wild as the gargoyles of Catholicism, not to be mistaken for a philosophy. Professor Huxley, in one of his clever phrases, called the Salvation Army "corybantic Christianity." Huxley was the last and noblest of those Stoics who have never understood the Cross. If he had understood Christianity he would have known that there never has been, and never can be, any Christianity that is not corybantic.

And there is this difference between the matter of aims and the matter of methods, that to judge of the aims of a thing like the Salvation Army is very difficult, to judge of their ritual and atmosphere very easy. No one, perhaps, but a sociologist can see whether General Booth's housing scheme is right. But any healthy person can see that banging brass cymbals together must be right. A page of statistics, a plan of model dwellings, anything which is rational, is always difficult for the lay mind. But the thing which is irrational any one can understand. That is why religion came so early into the world and spread so far, while science came so late into the world and has not spread at all. History unanimously attests the fact that it is only mysticism which stands the smallest chance of being understanded of the people. Common sense has to be kept as an esoteric secret in the dark temple of culture. And so while the philanthropy of the Salvationists and its genuineness may be a reasonable matter for the discussion of the doctors, there can be no doubt about the genuineness of their brass bands, for a brass band is purely spiritual, and seeks only to quicken the internal life. The object of philanthropy is to do good; the object of religion is to be good, if only for a moment, amid a crash of brass.

And the same antithesis exists about another modern religion — I mean the religion of Comte, generally known as Positivism, or the worship of humanity. Such men as Mr. Frederic Harrison, that brilliant and chivalrous philosopher, who still, by his mere personality, speaks for the creed, would tell us that he offers us the philosophy of Comte, but not all Comte's fantastic proposals for pontiffs and ceremonials, the new calendar, the new holidays and saints' days. He does not mean that we should dress ourselves up as priests of humanity or let off fireworks because it is Milton's birthday.

To the solid English Comtist all this appears, he confesses, to be a little absurd. To me it appears the only sensible part of Comtism. As a philosophy it is unsatisfactory. It is evidently impossible to worship humanity, just as it is impossible to worship the Savile Club; both are excellent institutions to which we may happen to belong. But we perceive clearly that the Savile Club did not make the stars and does not fill the universe. And it is surely unreasonable to attack the doctrine of the Trinity as a piece of bewildering mysticism, and then to ask men to worship a being who is ninety million persons in one God, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.

But if the wisdom of Comte was insufficient, the folly of Comte was wisdom. In an age of dusty modernity, when beauty was thought of as something barbaric and ugliness as something sensible, he alone saw that men must always have the sacredness of mummery. He saw that while the brutes have all the useful things, the things that are truly human are the useless ones. He saw the falsehood of that almost universal notion of to-day, the notion that rites and forms are something artificial, additional, and corrupt. Ritual is really much older than thought; it is much simpler and much wilder than thought. A feeling touching the nature of things does not only make men feel that there are certain proper things to say; it makes them feel that there are certain proper things to do. The more agreeable of these consist of dancing, building temples, and shouting very loud; the less agreeable, of wearing green carnations and burning other philosophers alive. But everywhere the religious dance came before the religious hymn, and man was a ritualist before he could speak. If Comtism had spread the world would have been converted, not by the Comtist philosophy, but by the Comtist calendar. By discouraging what they conceive to be the weakness of their master, the English Positivists have broken the strength of their religion. A man who has faith must be prepared not only to be a martyr, but to be a fool. It is absurd to say that a man is ready to toil and die for his convictions when he is not even ready to wear a wreath round his head for them. I myself, to take a corpus vile, am very certain that I would not read the works of Comte through for any consideration whatever. But I can easily imagine myself with the greatest enthusiasm lighting a bonfire on Darwin Day.

That splendid effort failed, and nothing in the style of it has succeeded. There has been no rationalist festival, no rationalist ecstasy. Men are still in black for the death of God. When Christianity was heavily bombarded in the last century upon no point was it more persistently and brilliantly attacked than upon that of its alleged enmity to human joy. Shelley and Swinburne and all their armies have passed again and again over the ground, but they have not altered it. They have not set up a single new trophy or ensign for the world's merriment to rally to. They have not given a name or a new occasion of gaiety. Mr. Swinburne does not hang up his stocking on the eve of the birthday of Victor Hugo. Mr. William Archer does not sing carols descriptive of the infancy of Ibsen outside people's doors in the snow. In the round of our rational and mournful year one festival remains out of all those ancient gaieties that once covered the whole earth. Christmas remains to remind us of those ages, whether Pagan or Christian, when the many acted poetry instead of the few writing it. In all the winter in our woods there is no tree in glow but the holly.

The strange truth about the matter is told in the very word "holiday." A bank holiday means presumably a day which bankers regard as holy. A half-holiday means, I suppose, a day on which a schoolboy is only partially holy. It is hard to see at first sight why so human a thing as leisure and larkiness should always have a religious origin. Rationally there appears no reason why we should not sing and give each other presents in honour of anything — the birth of Michael Angelo or the opening of Euston Station. But it does not work. As a fact, men only become greedily and gloriously material about something spiritualistic. Take away the Nicene Creed and similar things, and you do some strange wrong to the sellers of sausages. Take away the strange beauty of the saints, and what has remained to us is the far stranger ugliness of Wandsworth. Take away the supernatural, and what remains is the unnatural.

And now I have to touch upon a very sad matter. There are in the modern world an admirable class of persons who really make protest on behalf of that antiqua pulchritudo of which Augustine spoke, who do long for the old feasts and formalities of the childhood of the world. William Morris and his followers showed how much brighter were the dark ages than the age of Manchester. Mr. W. B. Yeats frames his steps in prehistoric dances, but no man knows and joins his voice to forgotten choruses that no one but he can hear. Mr. George Moore collects every fragment of Irish paganism that the forgetfulness of the Catholic Church has left or possibly her wisdom preserved. There are innumerable persons with eye-glasses and green garments who pray for the return of the maypole or the Olympian games. But there is about these people a haunting and alarming something which suggests that it is just possible that they do not keep Christmas. It is painful to regard human nature in such a light, but it seems somehow possible that Mr. George Moore does not wave his spoon and shout when the pudding is set alight. It is even possible that Mr. W. B. Yeats never pulls crackers. If so, where is the sense of all their dreams of festive traditions? Here is a solid and ancient festive tradition still plying a roaring trade in the streets, and they think it vulgar. if this is so, let them be very certain of this, that they are the kind of people who in the time of the maypole would have thought the maypole vulgar; who in the time of the Canterbury pilgrimage would have thought the Canterbury pilgrimage vulgar; who in the time of the Olympian games would have thought the Olympian games vulgar. Nor can there be any reasonable doubt that they were vulgar. Let no man deceive himself; if by vulgarity we mean coarseness of speech, rowdiness of behaviour, gossip, horseplay, and some heavy drinking, vulgarity there always was wherever there was joy, wherever there was faith in the gods. Wherever you have belief you will have hilarity, wherever you have hilarity you will have some dangers. And as creed and mythology produce this gross and vigorous life, so in its turn this gross and vigorous life will always produce creed and mythology. If we ever get the English back on to the English land they will become again a religious people, if all goes well, a superstitious people. The absence from modern life of both the higher and lower forms of faith is largely due to a divorce from nature and the trees and clouds. If we have no more turnip ghosts it is chiefly from the lack of turnips.

VII. Omar and the Sacred Vine

A new morality has burst upon us with some violence in connection with the problem of strong drink; and enthusiasts in the matter range from the man who is violently thrown out at 12.30, to the lady who smashes American bars with an axe. In these discussions it is almost always felt that one very wise and moderate position is to say that wine or such stuff should only be drunk as a medicine. With this I should venture to disagree with a peculiar ferocity. The one genuinely dangerous and immoral way of drinking wine is to drink it as a medicine. And for this reason, If a man drinks wine in order to obtain pleasure, he is trying to obtain something exceptional, something he does not expect every hour of the day, something which, unless he is a little insane, he will not try to get every hour of the day. But if a man drinks wine in order to obtain health, he is trying to get something natural; something, that is, that he ought not to be without; something that he may find it difficult to reconcile himself to being without. The man may not be seduced who has seen the ecstasy of being ecstatic; it is more dazzling to catch a glimpse of the ecstasy of being ordinary. If there were a magic ointment, and we took it to a strong man, and said, “This will enable you to jump off the Monument,” doubtless he would jump off the Monument, but he would not jump off the Monument all day long to the delight of the City. But if we took it to a blind man, saying, “This will enable you to see,” he would be under a heavier temptation. It would be hard for him not to rub it on his eyes whenever he heard the hoof of a noble horse or the birds singing at daybreak. It is easy to deny one’s self festivity; it is difficult to deny one’s self normality. Hence comes the fact which every doctor knows, that it is often perilous to give alcohol to the sick even when they need it. I need hardly say that I do not mean that I think the giving of alcohol to the sick for stimulus is necessarily unjustifiable. But I do mean that giving it to the healthy for fun is the proper use of it, and a great deal more consistent with health.

The sound rule in the matter would appear to be like many other sound rules — a paradox. Drink because you are happy, but never because you are miserable. Never drink when you are wretched without it, or you will be like the grey-faced gin-drinker in the slum; but drink when you would be happy without it, and you will be like the laughing peasant of Italy. Never drink because you need it, for this is rational drinking, and the way to death and hell. But drink because you do not need it, for this is irrational drinking, and the ancient health of the world.

For more than thirty years the shadow and glory of a great Eastern figure has lain upon our English literature. Fitzgerald’s translation of Omar Khayyam concentrated into an immortal poignancy all the dark and drifting hedonism of our time. Of the literary splendour of that work it would be merely banal to speak; in few other of the books of men has there been anything so combining the gay pugnacity of an epigram with the vague sadness of a song. But of its philosophical, ethical, and religious influence which has been almost as great as its brilliancy, I should like to say a word, and that word, I confess, one of uncompromising hostility. There are a great many things which might be said against the spirit of the Rubaiyat, and against its prodigious influence. But one matter of indictment towers ominously above the rest — a genuine disgrace to it, a genuine calamity to us. This is the terrible blow that this great poem has struck against sociability and the joy of life. Some one called Omar “the sad, glad old Persian.” Sad he is; glad he is not, in any sense of the word whatever. He has been a worse foe to gladness than the Puritans.

A pensive and graceful Oriental lies under the rose-tree with his wine-pot and his scroll of poems. It may seem strange that any one’s thoughts should, at the moment of regarding him, fly back to the dark bedside where the doctor doles out brandy. It may seem stranger still that they should go back to the grey wastrel shaking with gin in Houndsditch. But a great philosophical unity links the three in an evil bond. Omar Khayyam’s wine-bibbing is bad, not because it is wine-bibbing. It is bad, and very bad, because it is medical wine-bibbing. It is the drinking of a man who drinks because he is not happy. His is the wine that shuts out the universe, not the wine that reveals it. It is not poetical drinking, which is joyous and instinctive; it is rational drinking, which is as prosaic as an investment, as unsavoury as a dose of camomile. Whole heavens above it, from the point of view of sentiment, though not of style, rises the splendour of some old English drinking-song —

“Then pass the bowl, my comrades all,
And let the zider vlow.”

For this song was caught up by happy men to express the worth of truly worthy things, of brotherhood and garrulity, and the brief and kindly leisure of the poor. Of course, the great part of the more stolid reproaches directed against the Omarite morality are as false and babyish as such reproaches usually are. One critic, whose work I have read, had the incredible foolishness to call Omar an atheist and a materialist. It is almost impossible for an Oriental to be either; the East understands metaphysics too well for that. Of course, the real objection which a philosophical Christian would bring against the religion of Omar, is not that he gives no place to God, it is that he gives too much place to God. His is that terrible theism which can imagine nothing else but deity, and which denies altogether the outlines of human personality and human will.

“The ball no question makes of Ayes or Noes,
But Here or There as strikes the Player goes;
And He that tossed you down into the field,
He knows about it all — he knows — he knows.”

A Christian thinker such as Augustine or Dante would object to this because it ignores free-will, which is the valour and dignity of the soul. The quarrel of the highest Christianity with this scepticism is not in the least that the scepticism denies the existence of God; it is that it denies the existence of man.

In this cult of the pessimistic pleasure-seeker the Rubaiyat stands first in our time; but it does not stand alone. Many of the most brilliant intellects of our time have urged us to the same self-conscious snatching at a rare delight. Walter Pater said that we were all under sentence of death, and the only course was to enjoy exquisite moments simply for those moments’ sake. The same lesson was taught by the very powerful and very desolate philosophy of Oscar Wilde. It is the carpe diem religion; but the carpe diem religion is not the religion of happy people, but of very unhappy people. Great joy does, not gather the rosebuds while it may; its eyes are fixed on the immortal rose which Dante saw. Great joy has in it the sense of immortality; the very splendour of youth is the sense that it has all space to stretch its legs in. In all great comic literature, in “Tristram Shandy” or “Pickwick”, there is this sense of space and incorruptibility; we feel the characters are deathless people in an endless tale.

It is true enough, of course, that a pungent happiness comes chiefly in certain passing moments; but it is not true that we should think of them as passing, or enjoy them simply “for those moments’ sake.” To do this is to rationalize the happiness, and therefore to destroy it. Happiness is a mystery like religion, and should never be rationalized. Suppose a man experiences a really splendid moment of pleasure. I do not mean something connected with a bit of enamel, I mean something with a violent happiness in it — an almost painful happiness. A man may have, for instance, a moment of ecstasy in first love, or a moment of victory in battle. The lover enjoys the moment, but precisely not for the moment’s sake. He enjoys it for the woman’s sake, or his own sake. The warrior enjoys the moment, but not for the sake of the moment; he enjoys it for the sake of the flag. The cause which the flag stands for may be foolish and fleeting; the love may be calf-love, and last a week. But the patriot thinks of the flag as eternal; the lover thinks of his love as something that cannot end. These moments are filled with eternity; these moments are joyful because they do not seem momentary. Once look at them as moments after Pater’s manner, and they become as cold as Pater and his style. Man cannot love mortal things. He can only love immortal things for an instant.

Pater’s mistake is revealed in his most famous phrase. He asks us to burn with a hard, gem-like flame. Flames are never hard and never gem-like — they cannot be handled or arranged. So human emotions are never hard and never gem-like; they are always dangerous, like flames, to touch or even to examine. There is only one way in which our passions can become hard and gem-like, and that is by becoming as cold as gems. No blow then has ever been struck at the natural loves and laughter of men so sterilizing as this carpe diem of the aesthetes. For any kind of pleasure a totally different spirit is required; a certain shyness, a certain indeterminate hope, a certain boyish expectation. Purity and simplicity are essential to passions — yes even to evil passions. Even vice demands a sort of virginity.

Omar’s (or Fitzgerald’s) effect upon the other world we may let go, his hand upon this world has been heavy and paralyzing. The Puritans, as I have said, are far jollier than he. The new ascetics who follow Thoreau or Tolstoy are much livelier company; for, though the surrender of strong drink and such luxuries may strike us as an idle negation, it may leave a man with innumerable natural pleasures, and, above all, with man’s natural power of happiness. Thoreau could enjoy the sunrise without a cup of coffee. If

Tolstoy cannot admire marriage, at least he is healthy enough to admire mud. Nature can be enjoyed without even the most natural luxuries. A good bush needs no wine. But neither nature nor wine nor anything else can be enjoyed if we have the wrong attitude towards happiness, and Omar (or Fitzgerald) did have the wrong attitude towards happiness. He and those he has influenced do not see that if we are to be truly gay, we must believe that there is some eternal gaiety in the nature of things. We cannot enjoy thoroughly even a pas-de-quatre at a subscription dance unless we believe that the stars are dancing to the same tune. No one can be really hilarious but the serious man. “Wine,” says the Scripture, “maketh glad the heart of man,” but only of the man who has a heart. The thing called high spirits is possible only to the spiritual. Ultimately a man cannot rejoice in anything except the nature of things. Ultimately a man can enjoy nothing except religion. Once in the world’s history men did believe that the stars were dancing to the tune of their temples, and they danced as men have never danced since. With this old pagan eudaemonism the sage of the Rubaiyat has quite as little to do as he has with any Christian variety. He is no more a Bacchanal than he is a saint. Dionysus and his church was grounded on a serious joie-de-vivre like that of Walt Whitman. Dionysus made wine, not a medicine, but a sacrament. Jesus Christ also made wine, not a medicine, but a sacrament. But Omar makes it, not a sacrament, but a medicine. He feasts because life is not joyful; he revels because he is not glad. “Drink,” he says, “for you know not whence you come nor why. Drink, for you know not when you go nor where. Drink, because the stars are cruel and the world as idle as a humming-top. Drink, because there is nothing worth trusting, nothing worth fighting for. Drink, because all things are lapsed in a base equality and an evil peace.” So he stands offering us the cup in his hand. And at the high altar of Christianity stands another figure, in whose hand also is the cup of the vine. “Drink” he says “for the whole world is as red as this wine, with the crimson of the love and wrath of God. Drink, for the trumpets are blowing for battle and this is the stirrup-cup. Drink, for this my blood of the new testament that is shed for you. Drink, for I know of whence you come and why. Drink, for I know of when you go and where.”

VIII. The Mildness of the Yellow Press

There is a great deal of protest made from one quarter or another nowadays against the influence of that new journalism which is associated with the names of Sir Alfred Harmsworth and Mr. Pearson. But almost everybody who attacks it attacks on the ground that it is very sensational, very violent and vulgar and startling. I am speaking in no affected contrariety, but in the simplicity of a genuine personal impression, when I say that this journalism offends as being not sensational or violent enough. The real vice is not that it is startling, but that it is quite insupportably tame. The whole object is to keep carefully along a certain level of the expected and the commonplace; it may be low, but it must take care also to be flat. Never by any chance in it is there any of that real plebeian pungency which can be heard from the ordinary cabman in the ordinary street. We have heard of a certain standard of decorum which demands that things should be funny without being vulgar, but the standard of this decorum demands that if things are vulgar they shall be vulgar without being funny. This journalism does not merely fail to exaggerate life — it positively underrates it; and it has to do so because it is intended for the faint and languid recreation of men whom the fierceness of modern life has fatigued. This press is not the yellow press at all; it is the drab press. Sir Alfred Harmsworth must not address to the tired clerk any observation more witty than the tired clerk might be able to address to Sir Alfred Harmsworth. It must not expose anybody (anybody who is powerful, that is), it must not offend anybody, it must not even please anybody, too much. A general vague idea that in spite of all this, our yellow press is sensational, arises from such external accidents as large type or lurid headlines. It is quite true that these editors print everything they possibly can in large capital letters. But they do this, not because it is startling, but because it is soothing. To people wholly weary or partly drunk in a dimly lighted train, it is a simplification and a comfort to have things presented in this vast and obvious manner. The editors use this gigantic alphabet in dealing with their readers, for exactly the same reason that parents and governesses use a similar gigantic alphabet in teaching children to spell. The nursery authorities do not use an A as big as a horseshoe in order to make the child jump; on the contrary, they use it to put the child at his ease, to make things smoother and more evident. Of the same character is the dim and quiet dame school which Sir Alfred Harmsworth and Mr. Pearson keep. All their sentiments are spelling-book sentiments — that is to say, they are sentiments with which the pupil is already respectfully familiar. All their wildest posters are leaves torn from a copy-book.

Of real sensational journalism, as it exists in France, in Ireland, and in America, we have no trace in this country. When a journalist in Ireland wishes to create a thrill, he creates a thrill worth talking about. He denounces a leading Irish member for corruption, or he charges the whole police system with a wicked and definite conspiracy. When a French journalist desires a frisson there is a frisson; he discovers, let us say, that the President of the Republic has murdered three wives. Our yellow journalists invent quite as unscrupulously as this; their moral condition is, as regards careful veracity, about the same. But it is their mental calibre which happens to be such that they can only invent calm and even reassuring things. The fictitious version of the massacre of the envoys of Pekin was mendacious, but it was not interesting, except to those who had private reasons for terror or sorrow. It was not connected with any bold and suggestive view of the Chinese situation. It revealed only a vague idea that nothing could be impressive except a great deal of blood. Real sensationalism, of which I happen to be very fond, may be either moral or immoral. But even when it is most immoral, it requires moral courage. For it is one of the most dangerous things on earth genuinely to surprise anybody. If you make any sentient creature jump, you render it by no means improbable that it will jump on you. But the leaders of this movement have no moral courage or immoral courage; their whole method consists in saying, with large and elaborate emphasis, the things which everybody else says casually, and without remembering what they have said. When they brace themselves up to attack anything, they never reach the point of attacking anything which is large and real, and would resound with the shock. They do not attack the army as men do in France, or the judges as men do in Ireland, or the democracy itself as men did in England a hundred years ago. They attack something like the War Office — something, that is, which everybody attacks and nobody bothers to defend, something which is an old joke in fourth-rate comic papers. just as a man shows he has a weak voice by straining it to shout, so they show the hopelessly unsensational nature of their minds when they really try to be sensational. With the whole world full of big and dubious institutions, with the whole wickedness of civilization staring them in the face, their idea of being bold and bright is to attack the War Office. They might as well start a campaign against the weather, or form a secret society in order to make jokes about mothers-in-law. Nor is it only from the point of view of particular amateurs of the sensational such as myself, that it is permissible to say, in the words of Cowper's Alexander Selkirk, that "their tameness is shocking to me." The whole modern world is pining for a genuinely sensational journalism. This has been discovered by that very able and honest journalist, Mr. Blatchford, who started his campaign against Christianity, warned on all sides, I believe, that it would ruin his paper, but who continued from an honourable sense of intellectual responsibility. He discovered, however, that while he had undoubtedly shocked his readers, he had also greatly advanced his newspaper. It was bought — first, by all the people who agreed with him and wanted to read it; and secondly, by all the people who disagreed with him, and wanted to write him letters. Those letters were voluminous (I helped, I am glad to say, to swell their volume), and they were generally inserted with a generous fulness. Thus was accidentally discovered (like the steam-engine) the great journalistic maxim — that if an editor can only make people angry enough, they will write half his newspaper for him for nothing.

Some hold that such papers as these are scarcely the proper objects of so serious a consideration; but that can scarcely be maintained from a political or ethical point of view. In this problem of the mildness and tameness of the Harmsworth mind there is mirrored the outlines of a much larger problem which is akin to it.

The Harmsworthian journalist begins with a worship of success and violence, and ends in sheer timidity and mediocrity. But he is not alone in this, nor does he come by this fate merely because he happens personally to be stupid. Every man, however brave, who begins by worshipping violence, must end in mere timidity. Every man, however wise, who begins by worshipping success, must end in mere mediocrity. This strange and paradoxical fate is involved, not in the individual, but in the philosophy, in the point of view. It is not the folly of the man which brings about this necessary fall; it is his wisdom. The worship of success is the only one out of all possible worships of which this is true, that its followers are foredoomed to become slaves and cowards. A man may be a hero for the sake of Mrs. Gallup's ciphers or for the sake of human sacrifice, but not for the sake of success. For obviously a man may choose to fail because he loves Mrs. Gallup or human sacrifice; but he cannot choose to fail because he loves success. When the test of triumph is men's test of everything, they never endure long enough to triumph at all. As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is a mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength at all. Like all the Christian virtues, it is as unreasonable as it is indispensable.

It was through this fatal paradox in the nature of things that all these modern adventurers come at last to a sort of tedium and acquiescence. They desired strength; and to them to desire strength was to admire strength; to admire strength was simply to admire the statu quo. They thought that he who wished to be strong ought to respect the strong. They did not realize the obvious verity that he who wishes to be strong must despise the strong. They sought to be everything, to have the whole force of the cosmos behind them, to have an energy that would drive the stars. But they did not realize the two great facts — first, that in the attempt to be everything the first and most difficult step is to be something; second, that the moment a man is something, he is essentially defying everything. The lower animals, say the men of science, fought their way up with a blind selfishness. If this be so, the only real moral of it is that our unselfishness, if it is to triumph, must be equally blind. The mammoth did not put his head on one side and wonder whether mammoths were a little out of date. Mammoths were at least as much up to date as that individual mammoth could make them. The great elk did not say, "Cloven hoofs are very much worn now." He polished his own weapons for his own use. But in the reasoning animal there has arisen a more horrible danger, that he may fail through perceiving his own failure. When modern sociologists talk of the necessity of accommodating one's self to the trend of the time, they forget that the trend of the time at its best consists entirely of people who will not accommodate themselves to anything. At its worst it consists of many millions of frightened creatures all accommodating themselves to a trend that is not there. And that is becoming more and more the situation of modern England. Every man speaks of public opinion, and means by public opinion, public opinion minus his opinion. Every man makes his contribution negative under the erroneous impression that the next man's contribution is positive. Every man surrenders his fancy to a general tone which is itself a surrender. And over all the heartless and fatuous unity spreads this new and wearisome and platitudinous press, incapable of invention, incapable of audacity, capable only of a servility all the more contemptible because it is not even a servility to the strong. But all who begin with force and conquest will end in this.

The chief characteristic of the “New journalism” is simply that it is bad journalism. It is beyond all comparison the most shapeless, careless, and colourless work done in our day.

I read yesterday a sentence which should be written in letters of gold and adamant; it is the very motto of the new philosophy of Empire. I found it (as the reader has already eagerly guessed) in Pearson’s Magazine, while I was communing (soul to soul) with Mr. C. Arthur Pearson, whose first and suppressed name I am afraid is Chilperic. It occurred in an article on the American Presidential Election. This is the sentence, and every one should read it carefully, and roll it on the tongue, till all the honey be tasted.

“A little sound common sense often goes further with an audience of American working-men than much high-flown argument. A speaker who, as he brought forward his points, hammered nails into a board, won hundreds of votes for his side at the last Presidential Election.”

I do not wish to soil this perfect thing with comment; the words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo. But just think for a moment of the mind, the strange inscrutable mind, of the man who wrote that, of the editor who approved it, of the people who are probably impressed by it, of the incredible American working-man, of whom, for all I know, it may be true. Think what their notion of “common sense” must be! It is delightful to realize that you and I are now able to win thousands of votes should we ever be engaged in a Presidential Election, by doing something of this kind. For I suppose the nails and the board are not essential to the exhibition of “common sense;” there may be variations. We may read —

“A little common sense impresses American working-men more than high-flown argument. A speaker who, as he made his points, pulled buttons off his waistcoat, won thousands of votes for his side.” Or, “Sound common sense tells better in America than high-flown argument. Thus Senator Budge, who threw his false teeth in the air every time he made an epigram, won the solid approval of American working-men.” Or again, “The sound common sense of a gentleman from Earlswood, who stuck straws in his hair during the progress of his speech, assured the victory of Mr. Roosevelt.”

There are many other elements in this article on which I should love to linger. But the matter which I wish to point out is that in that sentence is perfectly revealed the whole truth of what our Chamberlainites, hustlers, bustlers, Empire-builders, and strong, silent men, really mean by "commonsense." They mean knocking, with deafening noise and dramatic effect, meaningless bits of iron into a useless bit of wood. A man goes on to an American platform and behaves like a mountebank fool with a board and a hammer; well, I do not blame him; I might even admire him. He may be a dashing and quite decent strategist. He may be a fine romantic actor, like Burke flinging the dagger on the floor. He may even (for all I know) be a sublime mystic, profoundly impressed with the ancient meaning of the divine trade of the Carpenter, and offering to the people a parable in the form of a ceremony. All I wish to indicate is the abyss of mental confusion in which such wild ritualism can be called "sound common sense." And it is in that abyss of mental confusion, and in that alone, that the new Imperialism lives and moves and has its being. The whole glory and greatness of Mr. Chamberlain consists in this: that if a man hits the right nail on the head nobody cares where he hits it to or what it does. They care about the noise of the hammer, not about the silent drip of the nail. Before and throughout the African war, Mr. Chamberlain was always knocking in nails, with ringing decisiveness. But when we ask, "But what have these nails held together? Where is your carpentry? Where are your contented Outlanders? Where is your free South Africa? Where is your British prestige? What have your nails done?" then what answer is there? We must go back (with an affectionate sigh) to our Pearson for the answer to the question of what the nails have done: "The speaker who hammered nails into a board won thousands of votes."

Now the whole of this passage is admirably characteristic of the new journalism which Mr. Pearson represents, the new journalism which has just purchased the Standard. To take one instance out of hundreds, the incomparable man with the board and nails is described in the Pearson's article as calling out (as he smote the symbolic nail), "Lie number one. Nailed to the Mast! Nailed to the Mast!" In the whole office there was apparently no compositor or office-boy to point out that we speak of lies being nailed to the counter, and not to the mast. Nobody in the office knew that Pearson's Magazine was falling into a stale Irish bull, which must be as old as St. Patrick. This is the real and essential tragedy of the sale of the

Standard. It is not merely that journalism is victorious over literature. It is that bad journalism is victorious over good journalism.

It is not that one article which we consider costly and beautiful is being ousted by another kind of article which we consider common or unclean. It is that of the same article a worse quality is preferred to a better. If you like popular journalism (as I do), you will know that Pearson's Magazine is poor and weak popular journalism. You will know it as certainly as you know bad butter. You will know as certainly that it is poor popular journalism as you know that the Strand, in the great days of Sherlock Holmes, was good popular journalism. Mr. Pearson has been a monument of this enormous banality. About everything he says and does there is something infinitely weak-minded. He clamours for home trades and employs foreign ones to print his paper. When this glaring fact is pointed out, he does not say that the thing was an oversight, like a sane man. He cuts it off with scissors, like a child of three. His very cunning is infantile. And like a child of three, he does not cut it quite off. In all human records I doubt if there is such an example of a profound simplicity in deception. This is the sort of intelligence which now sits in the seat of the sane and honourable old Tory journalism. If it were really the triumph of the tropical exuberance of the Yankee press, it would be vulgar, but still tropical. But it is not. We are delivered over to the bramble, and from the meanest of the shrubs comes the fire upon the cedars of Lebanon.

The only question now is how much longer the fiction will endure that journalists of this order represent public opinion. It may be doubted whether any honest and serious Tariff Reformer would for a moment maintain that there was any majority for Tariff Reform in the country comparable to the ludicrous preponderance which money has given it among the great dailies. The only inference is that for purposes of real public opinion the press is now a mere plutocratic oligarchy. Doubtless the public buys the wares of these men, for one reason or another. But there is no more reason to suppose that the public admires their politics than that the public admires the delicate philosophy of Mr. Crosse or the darker and sterner creed of Mr. Blackwell. If these men are merely tradesmen, there is nothing to say except that there are plenty like them in the Battersea Park Road, and many much better. But if they make any sort of attempt to be politicians, we can only point out to them that they are not as yet even good journalists.

IX. The Moods of Mr. George Moore

Mr. George Moore began his literary career by writing his personal confessions; nor is there any harm in this if he had not continued them for the remainder of his life. He is a man of genuinely forcible mind and of great command over a kind of rhetorical and fugitive conviction which excites and pleases. He is in a perpetual state of temporary honesty. He has admired all the most admirable modern eccentrics until they could stand it no longer. Everything he writes, it is to be fully admitted, has a genuine mental power. His account of his reason for leaving the Roman Catholic Church is possibly the most admirable tribute to that communion which has been written of late years. For the fact of the matter is, that the weakness which has rendered barren the many brilliancies of Mr. Moore is actually that weakness which the Roman Catholic Church is at its best in combating. Mr. Moore hates Catholicism because it breaks up the house of looking-glasses in which he lives. Mr. Moore does not dislike so much being asked to believe in the spiritual existence of miracles or sacraments, but he does fundamentally dislike being asked to believe in the actual existence of other people. Like his master Pater and all the aesthetes, his real quarrel with life is that it is not a dream that can be moulded by the dreamer. It is not the dogma of the reality of the other world that troubles him, but the dogma of the reality of this world.

The truth is that the tradition of Christianity (which is still the only coherent ethic of Europe) rests on two or three paradoxes or mysteries which can easily be impugned in argument and as easily justified in life. One of them, for instance, is the paradox of hope or faith — that the more hopeless is the situation the more hopeful must be the man. Stevenson understood this, and consequently Mr. Moore cannot understand Stevenson. Another is the paradox of charity or chivalry that the weaker a thing is the more it should be respected, that the more indefensible a thing is the more it should appeal to us for a certain kind of defence. Thackeray understood this, and therefore Mr. Moore does not understand Thackeray. Now, one of these very practical and working mysteries in the Christian tradition, and one which the Roman Catholic Church, as I say, has done her best work in singling out, is the conception of the sinfulness of pride. Pride is a weakness in the character; it dries up laughter, it dries up wonder, it dries up chivalry and energy. The Christian tradition understands this; therefore Mr. Moore does not understand the Christian tradition.

For the truth is much stranger even than it appears in the formal doctrine of the sin of pride. It is not only true that humility is a much wiser and more vigorous thing than pride. It is also true that vanity is a much wiser and more vigorous thing than pride. Vanity is social — it is almost a kind of comradeship; pride is solitary and uncivilized. Vanity is active; it desires the applause of infinite multitudes; pride is passive, desiring only the applause of one person, which it already has. Vanity is humorous, and can enjoy the joke even of itself; pride is dull, and cannot even smile. And the whole of this difference is the difference between Stevenson and Mr. George Moore, who, as he informs us, has "brushed Stevenson aside." I do not know where he has been brushed to, but wherever it is I fancy he is having a good time, because he had the wisdom to be vain, and not proud. Stevenson had a windy vanity; Mr. Moore has a dusty egoism. Hence Stevenson could amuse himself as well as us with his vanity; while the richest effects of Mr. Moore's absurdity are hidden from his eyes.

If we compare this solemn folly with the happy folly with which Stevenson belauds his own books and berates his own critics, we shall not find it difficult to guess why it is that Stevenson at least found a final philosophy of some sort to live by, while Mr. Moore is always walking the world looking for a new one. Stevenson had found that the secret of life lies in laughter and humility. Self is the gorgon. Vanity sees it in the mirror of other men and lives. Pride studies it for itself and is turned to stone.

It is necessary to dwell on this defect in Mr. Moore, because it is really the weakness of work which is not without its strength. Mr. Moore's egoism is not merely a moral weakness, it is a very constant and influential aesthetic weakness as well. We should really be much more interested in Mr. Moore if he were not quite so interested in himself. We feel as if we were being shown through a gallery of really fine pictures, into each of which, by some useless and discordant convention, the artist had represented the same figure in the same attitude. "The Grand Canal with a distant view of Mr. Moore," "Effect of Mr. Moore through a Scotch Mist," "Mr. Moore by Firelight," "Ruins of Mr. Moore by Moonlight," and so on, seems to be the endless series. He would no doubt reply that in such a book as this he intended to reveal himself. But the answer is that in such a book as this he does not succeed. One of the thousand objections to the sin of pride lies precisely in this, that self-consciousness of necessity destroys self-revelation. A man who thinks a great deal about himself will try to be many-sided, attempt a theatrical excellence at all points, will try to be an encyclopaedia of culture, and his own real personality will be lost in that false universalism. Thinking about himself will lead to trying to be the universe; trying to be the universe will lead to ceasing to be anything. If, on the other hand, a man is sensible enough to think only about the universe; he will think about it in his own individual way. He will keep virgin the secret of God; he will see the grass as no other man can see it, and look at a sun that no man has ever known. This fact is very practically brought out in Mr. Moore's "Confessions." In reading them we do not feel the presence of a clean-cut personality like that of Thackeray and Matthew Arnold. We only read a number of quite clever and largely conflicting opinions which might be uttered by any clever person, but which we are called upon to admire specifically, because they are uttered by Mr. Moore. He is the only thread that connects Catholicism and Protestantism, realism and mysticism — he or rather his name. He is profoundly absorbed even in views he no longer holds, and he expects us to be. And he intrudes the capital "I" even where it need not be intruded — even where it weakens the force of a plain statement. Where another man would say, "It is a fine day," Mr. Moore says, "Seen through my temperament, the day appeared fine." Where another man would say "Milton has obviously a fine style," Mr. Moore would say, "As a stylist Milton had always impressed me." The Nemesis of this self-centred spirit is that of being totally ineffectual. Mr. Moore has started many interesting crusades, but he has abandoned them before his disciples could begin. Even when he is on the side of the truth he is as fickle as the children of falsehood. Even when he has found reality he cannot find rest. One Irish quality he has which no Irishman was ever without — pugnacity; and that is certainly a great virtue, especially in the present age. But he has not the tenacity of conviction which goes with the fighting spirit in a man like Bernard Shaw. His weakness of introspection and selfishness in all their glory cannot prevent him fighting; but they will always prevent him winning.

X. On Sandals and Simplicity

The great misfortune of the modern English is not at all that they are more boastful than other people (they are not); it is that they are boastful about those particular things which nobody can boast of without losing them. A Frenchman can be proud of being bold and logical, and still remain bold and logical. A German can be proud of being reflective and orderly, and still remain reflective and orderly. But an Englishman cannot be proud of being simple and direct, and still remain simple and direct. In the matter of these strange virtues, to know them is to kill them. A man may be conscious of being heroic or conscious of being divine, but he cannot (in spite of all the Anglo-Saxon poets) be conscious of being unconscious.

Now, I do not think that it can be honestly denied that some portion of this impossibility attaches to a class very different in their own opinion, at least, to the school of Anglo-Saxonism. I mean that school of the simple life, commonly associated with Tolstoy. If a perpetual talk about one's own robustness leads to being less robust, it is even more true that a perpetual talking about one's own simplicity leads to being less simple. One great complaint, I think, must stand against the modern upholders of the simple life — the simple life in all its varied forms, from vegetarianism to the honourable consistency of the Doukhobors. This complaint against them stands, that they would make us simple in the unimportant things, but complex in the important things. They would make us simple in the things that do not matter — that is, in diet, in costume, in etiquette, in economic system. But they would make us complex in the things that do matter — in philosophy, in loyalty, in spiritual acceptance, and spiritual rejection. It does not so very much matter whether a man eats a grilled tomato or a plain tomato; it does very much matter whether he eats a plain tomato with a grilled mind. The only kind of simplicity worth preserving is the simplicity of the heart, the simplicity which accepts and enjoys. There may be a reasonable doubt as to what system preserves this; there can surely be no doubt that a system of simplicity destroys it. There is more simplicity in the man who eats caviar on impulse than in the man who eats grape-nuts on principle. The chief error of these people is to be found in the very phrase to which they are most attached— “plain living and high thinking.” These people do not stand in need of, will not be improved by, plain living and high thinking. They stand in need of the contrary. They would be improved by high living and plain thinking. A little high living (I say, having a full sense of responsibility, a little high living) would teach them the force and meaning of the human festivities, of the banquet that has gone on from the beginning of the world. It would teach them the historic fact that the artificial is, if anything, older than the natural. It would teach them that the loving-cup is as old as any hunger. It would teach them that ritualism is older than any religion. And a little plain thinking would teach them how harsh and fanciful are the mass of their own ethics, how very civilized and very complicated must be the brain of the Tolstoyan who really believes it to be evil to love one’s country and wicked to strike a blow.

A man approaches, wearing sandals and simple raiment, a raw tomato held firmly in his right hand, and says, “The affections of family and country alike are hindrances to the fuller development of human love;” but the plain thinker will only answer him, with a wonder not untinged with admiration, “What a great deal of trouble you must have taken in order to feel like that.” High living will reject the tomato. Plain thinking will equally decisively reject the idea of the invariable sinfulness of war. High living will convince us that nothing is more materialistic than to despise a pleasure as purely material. And plain thinking will convince us that nothing is more materialistic than to reserve our horror chiefly for material wounds.

The only simplicity that matters is the simplicity of the heart. If that be gone, it can be brought back by no turnips or cellular clothing; but only by tears and terror and the fires that are not quenched. If that remain, it matters very little if a few Early Victorian armchairs remain along with it. Let us put a complex entree into a simple old gentleman; let us not put a simple entree into a complex old gentleman. So long as human society will leave my spiritual inside alone, I will allow it, with a comparative submission, to work its wild will with my physical interior. I will submit to cigars. I will meekly embrace a bottle of Burgundy. I will humble myself to a hansom cab. If only by this means I may preserve to myself the virginity of the spirit, which enjoys with astonishment and fear. I do not say that these are the only methods of preserving it. I incline to the belief that there are others. But I will have nothing to do with simplicity which lacks the fear, the astonishment, and the joy alike. I will have nothing to do with the devilish vision of a child who is too simple to like toys.

The child is, indeed, in these, and many other matters, the best guide. And in nothing is the child so righteously childlike, in nothing does he exhibit more accurately the sounder order of simplicity, than in the fact that he sees everything with a simple pleasure, even the complex things. The false type of naturalness harps always on the distinction between the natural and the artificial. The higher kind of naturalness ignores that distinction. To the child the tree and the lamp-post are as natural and as artificial as each other; or rather, neither of them are natural but both supernatural. For both are splendid and unexplained. The flower with which God crowns the one, and the flame with which Sam the lamplighter crowns the other, are equally of the gold of fairy-tales. In the middle of the wildest fields the most rustic child is, ten to one, playing at steam-engines. And the only spiritual or philosophical objection to steam-engines is not that men pay for them or work at them, or make them very ugly, or even that men are killed by them; but merely that men do not play at them. The evil is that the childish poetry of clockwork does not remain. The wrong is not that engines are too much admired, but that they are not admired enough. The sin is not that engines are mechanical, but that men are mechanical.

In this matter, then, as in all the other matters treated in this book, our main conclusion is that it is a fundamental point of view, a philosophy or religion which is needed, and not any change in habit or social routine. The things we need most for immediate practical purposes are all abstractions. We need a right view of the human lot, a right view of the human society; and if we were living eagerly and angrily in the enthusiasm of those things, we should, ipso facto, be living simply in the genuine and spiritual sense. Desire and danger make every one simple. And to those who talk to us with interfering eloquence about Jaeger and the pores of the skin, and about Plasmon and the coats of the stomach, at them shall only be hurled the words that are hurled at fops and gluttons, “Take no thought what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, or wherewithal ye shall be clothed. For after all these things do the Gentiles seek. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” Those amazing words are not only extraordinarily good, practical politics; they are also superlatively good hygiene. The one supreme way of making all those processes go right, the processes of health, and strength, and grace, and beauty, the one and only way of making certain of their accuracy, is to think about something else. If a man is bent on climbing into the seventh heaven, he may be quite easy about the pores of his skin. If he harnesses his waggon to a star, the process will have a most satisfactory effect upon the coats of his stomach. For the thing called “taking thought,” the thing for which the best modern word is “rationalizing,” is in its nature, inapplicable to all plain and urgent things. Men take thought and ponder rationalistically, touching remote things — things that only theoretically matter, such as the transit of Venus. But only at their peril can men rationalize about so practical a matter as health.

XI Science and the Savages

A permanent disadvantage of the study of folk-lore and kindred subjects is that the man of science can hardly be in the nature of things very frequently a man of the world. He is a student of nature; he is scarcely ever a student of human nature. And even where this difficulty is overcome, and he is in some sense a student of human nature, this is only a very faint beginning of the painful progress towards being human. For the study of primitive race and religion stands apart in one important respect from all, or nearly all, the ordinary scientific studies. A man can understand astronomy only by being an astronomer; he can understand entomology only by being an entomologist (or, perhaps, an insect); but he can understand a great deal of anthropology merely by being a man. He is himself the animal which he studies. Hence arises the fact which strikes the eye everywhere in the records of ethnology and folk-lore — the fact that the same frigid and detached spirit which leads to success in the study of astronomy or botany leads to disaster in the study of mythology or human origins. It is necessary to cease to be a man in order to do justice to a microbe; it is not necessary to cease to be a man in order to do justice to men. That same suppression of sympathies, that same waving away of intuitions or guess-work which make a man preternaturally clever in dealing with the stomach of a spider, will make him preternaturally stupid in dealing with the heart of man. He is making himself inhuman in order to understand humanity. An ignorance of the other world is boasted by many men of science; but in this matter their defect arises, not from ignorance of the other world, but from ignorance of this world. For the secrets about which anthropologists concern themselves can be best learnt, not from books or voyages, but from the ordinary commerce of man with man. The secret of why some savage tribe worships monkeys or the moon is not to be found even by travelling among those savages and taking down their answers in a note-book, although the cleverest man may pursue this course. The answer to the riddle is in England; it is in London; nay, it is in his own heart. When a man has discovered why men in Bond Street wear black hats he will at the same moment have discovered why men in Timbuctoo wear red feathers. The mystery in the heart of some savage war-dance should not be studied in books of scientific travel; it should be studied at a subscription ball. If a man desires to find out the origins of religions, let him not go to the Sandwich Islands; let him go to church. If a man wishes to know the origin of human society, to know what society, philosophically speaking, really is, let him not go into the British Museum; let him go into society.

This total misunderstanding of the real nature of ceremonial gives rise to the most awkward and dehumanized versions of the conduct of men in rude lands or ages. The man of science, not realizing that ceremonial is essentially a thing which is done without a reason, has to find a reason for every sort of ceremonial, and, as might be supposed, the reason is generally a very absurd one — absurd because it originates not in the simple mind of the barbarian, but in the sophisticated mind of the professor. The teamed man will say, for instance, “The natives of Mumbojumbo Land believe that the dead man can eat and will require food upon his journey to the other world. This is attested by the fact that they place food in the grave, and that any family not complying with this rite is the object of the anger of the priests and the tribe.” To any one acquainted with humanity this way of talking is topsy-turvy. It is like saying, “The English in the twentieth century believed that a dead man could smell. This is attested by the fact that they always covered his grave with lilies, violets, or other flowers. Some priestly and tribal terrors were evidently attached to the neglect of this action, as we have records of several old ladies who were very much disturbed in mind because their wreaths had not arrived in time for the funeral.” It may be of course that savages put food with a dead man because they think that a dead man can eat, or weapons with a dead man because they think that a dead man can fight. But personally I do not believe that they think anything of the kind. I believe they put food or weapons on the dead for the same reason that we put flowers, because it is an exceedingly natural and obvious thing to do. We do not understand, it is true, the emotion which makes us think it obvious and natural; but that is because, like all the important emotions of human existence it is essentially irrational. We do not understand the savage for the same reason that the savage does not understand himself. And the savage does not understand himself for the same reason that we do not understand ourselves either.

The obvious truth is that the moment any matter has passed through the human mind it is finally and for ever spoilt for all purposes of science. It has become a thing incurably mysterious and infinite; this mortal has put on immortality. Even what we call our material desires are spiritual, because they are human. Science can analyse a pork-chop, and say how much of it is phosphorus and how much is protein; but science cannot analyse any man's wish for a pork-chop, and say how much of it is hunger, how much custom, how much nervous fancy, how much a haunting love of the beautiful. The man's desire for the pork-chop remains literally as mystical and ethereal as his desire for heaven. All attempts, therefore, at a science of any human things, at a science of history, a science of folk-lore, a science of sociology, are by their nature not merely hopeless, but crazy. You can no more be certain in economic history that a man's desire for money was merely a desire for money than you can be certain in hagiology that a saint's desire for God was merely a desire for God. And this kind of vagueness in the primary phenomena of the study is an absolutely final blow to anything in the nature of a science. Men can construct a science with very few instruments, or with very plain instruments; but no one on earth could construct a science with unreliable instruments. A man might work out the whole of mathematics with a handful of pebbles, but not with a handful of clay which was always falling apart into new fragments, and falling together into new combinations. A man might measure heaven and earth with a reed, but not with a growing reed.

As one of the enormous follies of folk-lore, let us take the case of the transmigration of stories, and the alleged unity of their source. Story after story the scientific mythologists have cut out of its place in history, and pinned side by side with similar stories in their museum of fables. The process is industrious, it is fascinating, and the whole of it rests on one of the plainest fallacies in the world. That a story has been told all over the place at some time or other, not only does not prove that it never really happened; it does not even faintly indicate or make slightly more probable that it never happened. That a large number of fishermen have falsely asserted that they have caught a pike two feet long, does not in the least affect the question of whether any one ever really did so. That numberless journalists announce a Franco-German war merely for money is no evidence one way or the other upon the dark question of whether such a war ever occurred. Doubtless in a few hundred years the innumerable Franco-German wars that did not happen will have cleared the scientific mind of any belief in the legendary war of '70 which did. But that will be because if folk-lore students remain at all, their nature will be unchanged; and their services to folk-lore will be still as they are at present, greater than they know. For in truth these men do something far more godlike than studying legends; they create them.

There are two kinds of stories which the scientists say cannot be true, because everybody tells them. The first class consists of the stories which are told everywhere, because they are somewhat odd or clever; there is nothing in the world to prevent their having happened to somebody as an adventure any more than there is anything to prevent their having occurred, as they certainly did occur, to somebody as an idea. But they are not likely to have happened to many people. The second class of their “myths” consist of the stories that are told everywhere for the simple reason that they happen everywhere. Of the first class, for instance, we might take such an example as the story of William Tell, now generally ranked among legends upon the sole ground that it is found in the tales of other peoples. Now, it is obvious that this was told everywhere because whether true or fictitious it is what is called “a good story;” it is odd, exciting, and it has a climax. But to suggest that some such eccentric incident can never have happened in the whole history of archery, or that it did not happen to any particular person of whom it is told, is stark impudence. The idea of shooting at a mark attached to some valuable or beloved person is an idea doubtless that might easily have occurred to any inventive poet. But it is also an idea that might easily occur to any boastful archer. It might be one of the fantastic caprices of some story-teller. It might equally well be one of the fantastic caprices of some tyrant. It might occur first in real life and afterwards occur in legends. Or it might just as well occur first in legends and afterwards occur in real life. If no apple has ever been shot off a boy’s head from the beginning of the world, it may be done tomorrow morning, and by somebody who has never heard of William Tell.

This type of tale, indeed, may be pretty fairly paralleled with the ordinary anecdote terminating in a repartee or an Irish bull. Such a retort as the famous “je ne vois pas la necessite” we have all seen attributed to Talleyrand, to Voltaire, to Henri Quatre, to an anonymous judge, and so on. But this variety does not in any way make it more likely that the thing was never said at all. It is highly likely that it was really said by somebody unknown. It is highly likely that it was really said by Talleyrand. In any case, it is not any more difficult to believe that the mot might have occurred to a man in conversation than to a man writing memoirs. It might have occurred to any of the men I have mentioned. But there is this point of distinction about it, that it is not likely to have occurred to all of them. And this is where the first class of so-called myth differs from the second to which I have previously referred. For there is a second class of incident found to be common to the stories of five or six heroes, say to Sigurd, to Hercules, to Rustem, to the Cid, and so on. And the peculiarity of this myth is that not only is it highly reasonable to imagine that it really happened to one hero, but it is highly reasonable to imagine that it really happened to all of them. Such a story, for instance, is that of a great man having his strength swayed or thwarted by the mysterious weakness of a woman. The anecdotal story, the story of William Tell, is as I have said, popular, because it is peculiar. But this kind of story, the story of Samson and Delilah of Arthur and Guinevere, is obviously popular because it is not peculiar. It is popular as good, quiet fiction is popular, because it tells the truth about people. If the ruin of Samson by a woman, and the ruin of Hercules by a woman, have a common legendary origin, it is gratifying to know that we can also explain, as a fable, the ruin of Nelson by a woman and the ruin of Parnell by a woman. And, indeed, I have no doubt whatever that, some centuries hence, the students of folk-lore will refuse altogether to believe that Elizabeth Barrett eloped with Robert Browning, and will prove their point up to the hilt by the unquestionable fact that the whole fiction of the period was full of such elopements from end to end.

Possibly the most pathetic of all the delusions of the modern students of primitive belief is the notion they have about the thing they call anthropomorphism. They believe that primitive men attributed phenomena to a god in human form in order to explain them, because his mind in its sullen limitation could not reach any further than his own clownish existence. The thunder was called the voice of a man, the lightning the eyes of a man, because by this explanation they were made more reasonable and comfortable. The final cure for all this kind of philosophy is to walk down a lane at night. Any one who does so will discover very quickly that men pictured something semi-human at the back of all things, not because such a thought was natural, but because it was supernatural; not because it made things more comprehensible, but because it made them a hundred times more incomprehensible and mysterious. For a man walking down a lane at night can see the conspicuous fact that as long as nature keeps to her own course, she has no power with us at all. As long as a tree is a tree, it is a top-heavy monster with a hundred arms, a thousand tongues, and only one leg.

But so long as a tree is a tree, it does not frighten us at all. It begins to be something alien, to be something strange, only when it looks like ourselves. When a tree really looks like a man our knees knock under us. And when the whole universe looks like a man we fall on our faces.

XII Paganism and Mr. Lowes Dickinson

Of the New Paganism (or neo-Paganism), as it was preached flamboyantly by Mr. Swinburne or delicately by Walter Pater, there is no necessity to take any very grave account, except as a thing which left behind it incomparable exercises in the English language. The New Paganism is no longer new, and it never at any time bore the smallest resemblance to Paganism. The ideas about the ancient civilization which it has left loose in the public mind are certainly extraordinary enough. The term "pagan" is continually used in fiction and light literature as meaning a man without any religion, whereas a pagan was generally a man with about half a dozen. The pagans, according to this notion, were continually crowning themselves with flowers and dancing about in an irresponsible state, whereas, if there were two things that the best pagan civilization did honestly believe in, they were a rather too rigid dignity and a much too rigid responsibility. Pagans are depicted as above all things inebriate and lawless, whereas they were above all things reasonable and respectable. They are praised as disobedient when they had only one great virtue — civic obedience. They are envied and admired as shamelessly happy when they had only one great sin — despair.

Mr. Lowes Dickinson, the most pregnant and provocative of recent writers on this and similar subjects, is far too solid a man to have fallen into this old error of the mere anarchy of Paganism. In order to make hay of that Hellenic enthusiasm which has as its ideal mere appetite and egotism, it is not necessary to know much philosophy, but merely to know a little Greek. Mr. Lowes Dickinson knows a great deal of philosophy, and also a great deal of Greek, and his error, if error he has, is not that of the crude hedonist. But the contrast which he offers between Christianity and Paganism in the matter of moral ideals — a contrast which he states very ably in a paper called "How long halt ye?" which appeared in the Independent Review — does, I think, contain an error of a deeper kind. According to him, the ideal of Paganism was not, indeed, a mere frenzy of lust and liberty and caprice, but was an ideal of full and satisfied humanity. According to him, the ideal of Christianity was the ideal of asceticism. When I say that I think this idea wholly wrong as a matter of philosophy and history, I am not talking for the moment about any ideal Christianity of my own, or even of any primitive Christianity undefiled by after events. I am not, like so many modern

Christian idealists, basing my case upon certain things which Christ said. Neither am I, like so many other Christian idealists, basing my case upon certain things that Christ forgot to say. I take historic Christianity with all its sins upon its head; I take it, as I would take Jacobinism, or Mormonism, or any other mixed or unpleasing human product, and I say that the meaning of its action was not to be found in asceticism. I say that its point of departure from Paganism was not asceticism. I say that its point of difference with the modern world was not asceticism. I say that St. Simeon Stylites had not his main inspiration in asceticism. I say that the main Christian impulse cannot be described as asceticism, even in the ascetics.

Let me set about making the matter clear. There is one broad fact about the relations of Christianity and Paganism which is so simple that many will smile at it, but which is so important that all moderns forget it. The primary fact about Christianity and Paganism is that one came after the other. Mr. Lowes Dickinson speaks of them as if they were parallel ideals — even speaks as if Paganism were the newer of the two, and the more fitted for a new age. He suggests that the Pagan ideal will be the ultimate good of man; but if that is so, we must at least ask with more curiosity than he allows for, why it was that man actually found his ultimate good on earth under the stars, and threw it away again. It is this extraordinary enigma to which I propose to attempt an answer.

There is only one thing in the modern world that has been face to face with Paganism; there is only one thing in the modern world which in that sense knows anything about Paganism: and that is Christianity. That fact is really the weak point in the whole of that hedonistic neo-Paganism of which I have spoken. All that genuinely remains of the ancient hymns or the ancient dances of Europe, all that has honestly come to us from the festivals of Phoebus or Pan, is to be found in the festivals of the Christian Church. If any one wants to hold the end of a chain which really goes back to the heathen mysteries, he had better take hold of a festoon of flowers at Easter or a string of sausages at Christmas. Everything else in the modern world is of Christian origin, even everything that seems most anti-Christian. The French Revolution is of Christian origin. The newspaper is of Christian origin. The anarchists are of Christian origin. Physical science is of Christian origin. The attack on Christianity is of Christian origin. There is one thing, and one thing only, in existence at the present day which can in any sense accurately be said to be of pagan origin, and that is Christianity.

The real difference between Paganism and Christianity is perfectly summed up in the difference between the pagan, or natural, virtues, and those three virtues of Christianity which the Church of Rome calls virtues of grace. The pagan, or rational, virtues are such things as justice and temperance, and Christianity has adopted them. The three mystical virtues which Christianity has not adopted, but invented, are faith, hope, and charity. Now much easy and foolish Christian rhetoric could easily be poured out upon those three words, but I desire to confine myself to the two facts which are evident about them. The first evident fact (in marked contrast to the delusion of the dancing pagan) — the first evident fact, I say, is that the pagan virtues, such as justice and temperance, are the sad virtues, and that the mystical virtues of faith, hope, and charity are the gay and exuberant virtues. And the second evident fact, which is even more evident, is the fact that the pagan virtues are the reasonable virtues, and that the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity are in their essence as unreasonable as they can be.

As the word “unreasonable” is open to misunderstanding, the matter may be more accurately put by saying that each one of these Christian or mystical virtues involves a paradox in its own nature, and that this is not true of any of the typically pagan or rationalist virtues. Justice consists in finding out a certain thing due to a certain man and giving it to him. Temperance consists in finding out the proper limit of a particular indulgence and adhering to that. But charity means pardoning what is unpardonable, or it is no virtue at all. Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all. And faith means believing the incredible, or it is no virtue at all.

It is somewhat amusing, indeed, to notice the difference between the fate of these three paradoxes in the fashion of the modern mind. Charity is a fashionable virtue in our time; it is lit up by the gigantic firelight of Dickens. Hope is a fashionable virtue to-day; our attention has been arrested for it by the sudden and silver trumpet of Stevenson. But faith is unfashionable, and it is customary on every side to cast against it the fact that it is a paradox. Everybody mockingly repeats the famous childish definition that faith is “the power of believing that which we know to be untrue.” Yet it is not one atom more paradoxical than hope or charity. Charity is the power of defending that which we know to be indefensible. Hope is the power of being cheerful in circumstances which we know to be desperate. It is true that there is a state of hope which belongs to bright prospects and the morning; but that is not the virtue of hope. The virtue of hope exists only in earthquake and, eclipse. It is true that there is a thing crudely called charity, which means charity to the deserving poor; but charity to the deserving is not charity at all, but justice. It is the undeserving who require it, and the ideal either does not exist at all, or exists wholly for them. For practical purposes it is at the hopeless moment that we require the hopeful man, and the virtue either does not exist at all, or begins to exist at that moment. Exactly at the instant when hope ceases to be reasonable it begins to be useful. Now the old pagan world went perfectly straightforward until it discovered that going straightforward is an enormous mistake. It was nobly and beautifully reasonable, and discovered in its death-pang this lasting and valuable truth, a heritage for the ages, that reasonableness will not do. The pagan age was truly an Eden or golden age, in this essential sense, that it is not to be recovered. And it is not to be recovered in this sense again that, while we are certainly jollier than the pagans, and much more right than the pagans, there is not one of us who can, by the utmost stretch of energy, be so sensible as the pagans. That naked innocence of the intellect cannot be recovered by any man after Christianity; and for this excellent reason, that every man after Christianity knows it to be misleading. Let me take an example, the first that occurs to the mind, of this impossible plainness in the pagan point of view. The greatest tribute to Christianity in the modern world is Tennyson's "Ulysses." The poet reads into the story of Ulysses the conception of an incurable desire to wander. But the real Ulysses does not desire to wander at all. He desires to get home. He displays his heroic and unconquerable qualities in resisting the misfortunes which baulk him; but that is all. There is no love of adventure for its own sake; that is a Christian product. There is no love of Penelope for her own sake; that is a Christian product. Everything in that old world would appear to have been clean and obvious. A good man was a good man; a bad man was a bad man. For this reason they had no charity; for charity is a reverent agnosticism towards the complexity of the soul. For this reason they had no such thing as the art of fiction, the novel; for the novel is a creation of the mystical idea of charity. For them a pleasant landscape was pleasant, and an unpleasant landscape unpleasant. Hence they had no idea of romance; for romance consists in thinking a thing more delightful because it is dangerous; it is a Christian idea. In a word, we cannot reconstruct or even imagine the beautiful and astonishing pagan world. It was a world in which common sense was really common.

My general meaning touching the three virtues of which I have spoken will now, I hope, be sufficiently clear. They are all three paradoxical, they are all three practical, and they are all three paradoxical because they are practical. it is the stress of ultimate need, and a terrible knowledge of things as they are, which led men to set up these riddles, and to die for them. Whatever may be the meaning of the contradiction, it is the fact that the only kind of hope that is of any use in a battle is a hope that denies arithmetic. Whatever may be the meaning of the contradiction, it is the fact that the only kind of charity which any weak spirit wants, or which any generous spirit feels, is the charity which forgives the sins that are like scarlet. Whatever may be the meaning of faith, it must always mean a certainty about something we cannot prove. Thus, for instance, we believe by faith in the existence of other people.

But there is another Christian virtue, a virtue far more obviously and historically connected with Christianity, which will illustrate even better the connection between paradox and practical necessity. This virtue cannot be questioned in its capacity as a historical symbol; certainly Mr. Lowes Dickinson will not question it. It has been the boast of hundreds of the champions of Christianity. It has been the taunt of hundreds of the opponents of Christianity. It is, in essence, the basis of Mr. Lowes Dickinson’s whole distinction between Christianity and Paganism. I mean, of course, the virtue of humility. I admit, of course, most readily, that a great deal of false Eastern humility (that is, of strictly ascetic humility) mixed itself with the main stream of European Christianity. We must not forget that when we speak of Christianity we are speaking of a whole continent for about a thousand years. But of this virtue even more than of the other three, I would maintain the general proposition adopted above. Civilization discovered Christian humility for the same urgent reason that it discovered faith and charity — that is, because Christian civilization had to discover it or die.

The great psychological discovery of Paganism, which turned it into Christianity, can be expressed with some accuracy in one phrase. The pagan set out, with admirable sense, to enjoy himself. By the end of his civilization he had discovered that a man cannot enjoy himself and continue to enjoy anything else. Mr. Lowes Dickinson has pointed out in words too excellent to need any further elucidation, the absurd shallowness of those who imagine that the pagan enjoyed himself only in a materialistic sense. Of course, he enjoyed himself, not only intellectually even, he enjoyed himself morally, he enjoyed himself spiritually. But it was himself that he was enjoying; on the face of it, a very natural thing to do. Now, the psychological discovery is merely this, that whereas it had been supposed that the fullest possible enjoyment is to be found by extending our ego to infinity, the truth is that the fullest possible enjoyment is to be found by reducing our ego to zero.

Humility is the thing which is for ever renewing the earth and the stars. It is humility, and not duty, which preserves the stars from wrong, from the unpardonable wrong of casual resignation; it is through humility that the most ancient heavens for us are fresh and strong. The curse that came before history has laid on us all a tendency to be weary of wonders. If we saw the sun for the first time it would be the most fearful and beautiful of meteors. Now that we see it for the hundredth time we call it, in the hideous and blasphemous phrase of Wordsworth, “the light of common day.” We are inclined to increase our claims. We are inclined to demand six suns, to demand a blue sun, to demand a green sun. Humility is perpetually putting us back in the primal darkness. There all light is lightning, startling and instantaneous. Until we understand that original dark, in which we have neither sight nor expectation, we can give no hearty and childlike praise to the splendid sensationalism of things. The terms “pessimism” and “optimism,” like most modern terms, are unmeaning. But if they can be used in any vague sense as meaning something, we may say that in this great fact pessimism is the very basis of optimism. The man who destroys himself creates the universe. To the humble man, and to the humble man alone, the sun is really a sun; to the humble man, and to the humble man alone, the sea is really a sea. When he looks at all the faces in the street, he does not only realize that men are alive, he realizes with a dramatic pleasure that they are not dead.

I have not spoken of another aspect of the discovery of humility as a psychological necessity, because it is more commonly insisted on, and is in itself more obvious. But it is equally clear that humility is a permanent necessity as a condition of effort and self-examination. It is one of the deadly fallacies of Jingo politics that a nation is stronger for despising other nations. As a matter of fact, the strongest nations are those, like Prussia or Japan, which began from very mean beginnings, but have not been too proud to sit at the feet of the foreigner and learn everything from him. Almost every obvious and direct victory has been the victory of the plagiarist. This is, indeed, only a very paltry by-product of humility, but it is a product of humility, and, therefore, it is successful. Prussia had no Christian humility in its internal arrangements; hence its internal arrangements were miserable. But it had enough Christian humility slavishly to copy France (even down to Frederick the Great's poetry), and that which it had the humility to copy it had ultimately the honour to conquer. The case of the Japanese is even more obvious; their only Christian and their only beautiful quality is that they have humbled themselves to be exalted. All this aspect of humility, however, as connected with the matter of effort and striving for a standard set above us, I dismiss as having been sufficiently pointed out by almost all idealistic writers.

It may be worth while, however, to point out the interesting disparity in the matter of humility between the modern notion of the strong man and the actual records of strong men. Carlyle objected to the statement that no man could be a hero to his valet. Every sympathy can be extended towards him in the matter if he merely or mainly meant that the phrase was a disparagement of hero-worship. Hero-worship is certainly a generous and human impulse; the hero may be faulty, but the worship can hardly be. It may be that no man would be a hero to his valet. But any man would be a valet to his hero. But in truth both the proverb itself and Carlyle's stricture upon it ignore the most essential matter at issue. The ultimate psychological truth is not that no man is a hero to his valet. The ultimate psychological truth, the foundation of Christianity, is that no man is a hero to himself. Cromwell, according to Carlyle, was a strong man. According to Cromwell, he was a weak one.

The weak point in the whole of Carlyle's case for aristocracy lies, indeed, in his most celebrated phrase. Carlyle said that men were mostly fools. Christianity, with a surer and more reverent realism, says that they are all fools. This doctrine is sometimes called the doctrine of original sin. It may also be described as the doctrine of the equality of men. But the essential point of it is merely this, that whatever primary and far-reaching moral dangers affect any man, affect all men. All men can be criminals, if tempted; all men can be heroes, if inspired. And this doctrine does away altogether with Carlyle’s pathetic belief (or any one else’s pathetic belief) in “the wise few.” There are no wise few. Every aristocracy that has ever existed has behaved, in all essential points, exactly like a small mob. Every oligarchy is merely a knot of men in the street — that is to say, it is very jolly, but not infallible. And no oligarchies in the world’s history have ever come off so badly in practical affairs as the very proud oligarchies — the oligarchy of Poland, the oligarchy of Venice. And the armies that have most swiftly and suddenly broken their enemies in pieces have been the religious armies — the Moslem Armies, for instance, or the Puritan Armies. And a religious army may, by its nature, be defined as an army in which every man is taught not to exalt but to abase himself. Many modern Englishmen talk of themselves as the sturdy descendants of their sturdy Puritan fathers. As a fact, they would run away from a cow. If you asked one of their Puritan fathers, if you asked Bunyan, for instance, whether he was sturdy, he would have answered, with tears, that he was as weak as water. And because of this he would have borne tortures. And this virtue of humility, while being practical enough to win battles, will always be paradoxical enough to puzzle pedants. It is at one with the virtue of charity in this respect. Every generous person will admit that the one kind of sin which charity should cover is the sin which is inexcusable. And every generous person will equally agree that the one kind of pride which is wholly damnable is the pride of the man who has something to be proud of. The pride which, proportionally speaking, does not hurt the character, is the pride in things which reflect no credit on the person at all. Thus it does a man no harm to be proud of his country, and comparatively little harm to be proud of his remote ancestors. It does him more harm to be proud of having made money, because in that he has a little more reason for pride. It does him more harm still to be proud of what is nobler than money — intellect. And it does him most harm of all to value himself for the most valuable thing on earth — goodness. The man who is proud of what is really creditable to him is the Pharisee, the man whom Christ Himself could not forbear to strike.

My objection to Mr. Lowes Dickinson and the reassertors of the pagan ideal is, then, this. I accuse them of ignoring definite human discoveries in the moral world, discoveries as definite, though not as material, as the discovery of the circulation of the blood. We cannot go back to an ideal of reason and sanity. For mankind has discovered that reason does not lead to sanity. We cannot go back to an ideal of pride and enjoyment. For mankind has discovered that pride does not lead to enjoyment. I do not know by what extraordinary mental accident modern writers so constantly connect the idea of progress with the idea of independent thinking. Progress is obviously the antithesis of independent thinking. For under independent or individualistic thinking, every man starts at the beginning, and goes, in all probability, just as far as his father before him. But if there really be anything of the nature of progress, it must mean, above all things, the careful study and assumption of the whole of the past. I accuse Mr. Lowes Dickinson and his school of reaction in the only real sense. If he likes, let him ignore these great historic mysteries — the mystery of charity, the mystery of chivalry, the mystery of faith. If he likes, let him ignore the plough or the printing-press. But if we do revive and pursue the pagan ideal of a simple and rational self-completion we shall end — where Paganism ended. I do not mean that we shall end in destruction. I mean that we shall end in Christianity.

XIII. Celts and Celtophiles

Science in the modern world has many uses; its chief use, however, is to provide long words to cover the errors of the rich. The word “kleptomania” is a vulgar example of what I mean. It is on a par with that strange theory, always advanced when a wealthy or prominent person is in the dock, that exposure is more of a punishment for the rich than for the poor. Of course, the very reverse is the truth. Exposure is more of a punishment for the poor than for the rich. The richer a man is the easier it is for him to be a tramp. The richer a man is the easier it is for him to be popular and generally respected in the Cannibal Islands. But the poorer a man is the more likely it is that he will have to use his past life whenever he wants to get a bed for the night. Honour is a luxury for aristocrats, but it is a necessity for hall-porters. This is a secondary matter, but it is an example of the general proposition I offer — the proposition that an enormous amount of modern ingenuity is expended on finding defences for the indefensible conduct of the powerful. As I have said above, these defences generally exhibit themselves most emphatically in the form of appeals to physical science. And of all the forms in which science, or pseudo-science, has come to the rescue of the rich and stupid, there is none so singular as the singular invention of the theory of races.

When a wealthy nation like the English discovers the perfectly patent fact that it is making a ludicrous mess of the government of a poorer nation like the Irish, it pauses for a moment in consternation, and then begins to talk about Celts and Teutons. As far as I can understand the theory, the Irish are Celts and the English are Teutons. Of course, the Irish are not Celts any more than the English are Teutons. I have not followed the ethnological discussion with much energy, but the last scientific conclusion which I read inclined on the whole to the summary that the English were mainly Celtic and the Irish mainly Teutonic. But no man alive, with even the glimmering of a real scientific sense, would ever dream of applying the terms “Celtic” or “Teutonic” to either of them in any positive or useful sense.

That sort of thing must be left to people who talk about the Anglo-Saxon race, and extend the expression to America. How much of the blood of the Angles and Saxons (whoever they were) there remains in our mixed British, Roman, German, Dane, Norman, and Picard stock is a matter only interesting to wild antiquaries. And how much of that diluted blood can possibly remain in that roaring whirlpool of America into which a cataract of Swedes, Jews, Germans, Irishmen, and Italians is perpetually pouring, is a matter only interesting to lunatics. It would have been wiser for the English governing class to have called upon some other god. All other gods, however weak and warring, at least boast of being constant. But science boasts of being in a flux for ever; boasts of being unstable as water.

And England and the English governing class never did call on this absurd deity of race until it seemed, for an instant, that they had no other god to call on. All the most genuine Englishmen in history would have yawned or laughed in your face if you had begun to talk about Anglo-Saxons. If you had attempted to substitute the ideal of race for the ideal of nationality, I really do not like to think what they would have said. I certainly should not like to have been the officer of Nelson who suddenly discovered his French blood on the eve of Trafalgar. I should not like to have been the Norfolk or Suffolk gentleman who had to expound to Admiral Blake by what demonstrable ties of genealogy he was irrevocably bound to the Dutch. The truth of the whole matter is very simple. Nationality exists, and has nothing in the world to do with race. Nationality is a thing like a church or a secret society; it is a product of the human soul and will; it is a spiritual product. And there are men in the modern world who would think anything and do anything rather than admit that anything could be a spiritual product.

A nation, however, as it confronts the modern world, is a purely spiritual product. Sometimes it has been born in independence, like Scotland. Sometimes it has been born in dependence, in subjugation, like Ireland. Sometimes it is a large thing cohering out of many smaller things, like Italy. Sometimes it is a small thing breaking away from larger things, like Poland. But in each and every case its quality is purely spiritual, or, if you will, purely psychological. It is a moment when five men become a sixth man. Every one knows it who has ever founded a club. It is a moment when five places become one place. Every one must know it who has ever had to repel an invasion. Mr. Timothy Healy, the most serious intellect in the present House of Commons, summed up nationality to perfection when he simply called it something for which people will die, As he excellently said in reply to Lord Hugh Cecil, “No one, not even the noble lord, would die for the meridian of Greenwich.” And that is the great tribute to its purely psychological character. It is idle to ask why Greenwich should not cohere in this spiritual manner while Athens or Sparta did. It is like asking why a man falls in love with one woman and not with another.

Now, of this great spiritual coherence, independent of external circumstances, or of race, or of any obvious physical thing, Ireland is the most remarkable example. Rome conquered nations, but Ireland has conquered races. The Norman has gone there and become Irish, the Scotchman has gone there and become Irish, the Spaniard has gone there and become Irish, even the bitter soldier of Cromwell has gone there and become Irish. Ireland, which did not exist even politically, has been stronger than all the races that existed scientifically. The purest Germanic blood, the purest Norman blood, the purest blood of the passionate Scotch patriot, has not been so attractive as a nation without a flag. Ireland, unrecognized and oppressed, has easily absorbed races, as such trifles are easily absorbed. She has easily disposed of physical science, as such superstitions are easily disposed of. Nationality in its weakness has been stronger than ethnology in its strength. Five triumphant races have been absorbed, have been defeated by a defeated nationality.

This being the true and strange glory of Ireland, it is impossible to hear without impatience of the attempt so constantly made among her modern sympathizers to talk about Celts and Celticism. Who were the Celts? I defy anybody to say. Who are the Irish? I defy any one to be indifferent, or to pretend not to know. Mr. W. B. Yeats, the great Irish genius who has appeared in our time, shows his own admirable penetration in discarding altogether the argument from a Celtic race. But he does not wholly escape, and his followers hardly ever escape, the general objection to the Celtic argument. The tendency of that argument is to represent the Irish or the Celts as a strange and separate race, as a tribe of eccentrics in the modern world immersed in dim legends and fruitless dreams. Its tendency is to exhibit the Irish as odd, because they see the fairies. Its trend is to make the Irish seem weird and wild because they sing old songs and join in strange dances. But this is quite an error; indeed, it is the opposite of the truth. It is the English who are odd because they do not see the fairies. It is the inhabitants of Kensington who are weird and wild because they do not sing old songs and join in strange dances. In all this the Irish are not in the least strange and separate, are not in the least Celtic, as the word is commonly and popularly used. In all this the Irish are simply an ordinary sensible nation, living the life of any other ordinary and sensible nation which has not been either sodden with smoke or oppressed by money-lenders, or otherwise corrupted with wealth and science. There is nothing Celtic about having legends. It is merely human. The Germans, who are (I suppose) Teutonic, have hundreds of legends, wherever it happens that the Germans are human. There is nothing Celtic about loving poetry; the English loved poetry more, perhaps, than any other people before they came under the shadow of the chimney-pot and the shadow of the chimney-pot hat. It is not Ireland which is mad and mystic; it is Manchester which is mad and mystic, which is incredible, which is a wild exception among human things. Ireland has no need to play the silly game of the science of races; Ireland has no need to pretend to be a tribe of visionaries apart. In the matter of visions, Ireland is more than a nation, it is a model nation.

XIV On Certain Modern Writers and the Institution of the Family

The family may fairly be considered, one would think, an ultimate human institution. Every one would admit that it has been the main cell and central unit of almost all societies hitherto, except, indeed, such societies as that of Lacedaemon, which went in for “efficiency,” and has, therefore, perished, and left not a trace behind. Christianity, even enormous as was its revolution, did not alter this ancient and savage sanctity; it merely reversed it. It did not deny the trinity of father, mother, and child. It merely read it backwards, making it run child, mother, father. This it called, not the family, but the Holy Family, for many things are made holy by being turned upside down. But some sages of our own decadence have made a serious attack on the family. They have impugned it, as I think wrongly; and its defenders have defended it, and defended it wrongly. The common defence of the family is that, amid the stress and fickleness of life, it is peaceful, pleasant, and at one. But there is another defence of the family which is possible, and to me evident; this defence is that the family is not peaceful and not pleasant and not at one.

It is not fashionable to say much nowadays of the advantages of the small community. We are told that we must go in for large empires and large ideas. There is one advantage, however, in the small state, the city, or the village, which only the wilfully blind can overlook. The man who lives in a small community lives in a much larger world. He knows much more of the fierce varieties and uncompromising divergences of men. The reason is obvious. In a large community we can choose our companions. In a small community our companions are chosen for us. Thus in all extensive and highly civilized societies groups come into existence founded upon what is called sympathy, and shut out the real world more sharply than the gates of a monastery. There is nothing really narrow about the clan; the thing which is really narrow is the clique. The men of the clan live together because they all wear the same tartan or are all descended from the same sacred cow; but in their souls, by the divine luck of things, there will always be more colours than in any tartan. But the men of the clique live together because they have the same kind of soul, and their narrowness is a narrowness of spiritual coherence and contentment, like that which exists in hell. A big society exists in order to form cliques. A big society is a society for the promotion of narrowness. It is a machinery for the purpose of guarding the solitary and sensitive individual from all experience of the bitter and bracing human compromises. It is, in the most literal sense of the words, a society for the prevention of Christian knowledge.

We can see this change, for instance, in the modern transformation of the thing called a club. When London was smaller, and the parts of London more self-contained and parochial, the club was what it still is in villages, the opposite of what it is now in great cities. Then the club was valued as a place where a man could be sociable. Now the club is valued as a place where a man can be unsociable. The more the enlargement and elaboration of our civilization goes on the more the club ceases to be a place where a man can have a noisy argument, and becomes more and more a place where a man can have what is somewhat fantastically called a quiet chop. Its aim is to make a man comfortable, and to make a man comfortable is to make him the opposite of sociable. Sociability, like all good things, is full of discomforts, dangers, and renunciations. The club tends to produce the most degraded of all combinations — the luxurious anchorite, the man who combines the self-indulgence of Lucullus with the insane loneliness of St. Simeon Stylites.

If we were to-morrow morning snowed up in the street in which we live, we should step suddenly into a much larger and much wilder world than we have ever known. And it is the whole effort of the typically modern person to escape from the street in which he lives. First he invents modern hygiene and goes to Margate. Then he invents modern culture and goes to Florence. Then he invents modern imperialism and goes to Timbuctoo. He goes to the fantastic borders of the earth. He pretends to shoot tigers. He almost rides on a camel. And in all this he is still essentially fleeing from the street in which he was born; and of this flight he is always ready with his own explanation. He says he is fleeing from his street because it is dull; he is lying. He is really fleeing from his street because it is a great deal too exciting. It is exciting because it is exacting; it is exacting because it is alive. He can visit Venice because to him the Venetians are only Venetians; the people in his own street are men. He can stare at the Chinese because for him the Chinese are a passive thing to be stared at; if he stares at the old lady in the next garden, she becomes active. He is forced to flee, in short, from the too stimulating society of his equals — of free men, perverse, personal, deliberately different from himself. The street in Brixton is too glowing and overpowering. He has to soothe and quiet himself among tigers and vultures, camels and crocodiles. These creatures are indeed very different from himself. But they do not put their shape or colour or custom into a decisive intellectual competition with his own. They do not seek to destroy his principles and assert their own; the stranger monsters of the suburban street do seek to do this. The camel does not contort his features into a fine sneer because Mr. Robinson has not got a hump; the cultured gentleman at No. 5 does exhibit a sneer because Robinson has not got a dado. The vulture will not roar with laughter because a man does not fly; but the major at No. 9 will roar with laughter because a man does not smoke. The complaint we commonly have to make of our neighbours is that they will not, as we express it, mind their own business. We do not really mean that they will not mind their own business. If our neighbours did not mind their own business they would be asked abruptly for their rent, and would rapidly cease to be our neighbours. What we really mean when we say that they cannot mind their own business is something much deeper. We do not dislike them because they have so little force and fire that they cannot be interested in themselves. We dislike them because they have so much force and fire that they can be interested in us as well. What we dread about our neighbours, in short, is not the narrowness of their horizon, but their superb tendency to broaden it. And all aversions to ordinary humanity have this general character. They are not aversions to its feebleness (as is pretended), but to its energy. The misanthropes pretend that they despise humanity for its weakness. As a matter of fact, they hate it for its strength.

Of course, this shrinking from the brutal vivacity and brutal variety of common men is a perfectly reasonable and excusable thing as long as it does not pretend to any point of superiority. It is when it calls itself aristocracy or aestheticism or a superiority to the bourgeoisie that its inherent weakness has in justice to be pointed out. Fastidiousness is the most pardonable of vices; but it is the most unpardonable of virtues. Nietzsche, who represents most prominently this pretentious claim of the fastidious, has a description somewhere — a very powerful description in the purely literary sense — of the disgust and disdain which consume him at the sight of the common people with their common faces, their common voices, and their common minds. As I have said, this attitude is almost beautiful if we may regard it as pathetic. Nietzsche's aristocracy has about it all the sacredness that belongs to the weak. When he makes us feel that he cannot endure the innumerable faces, the incessant voices, the overpowering omnipresence which belongs to the mob, he will have the sympathy of anybody who has ever been sick on a steamer or tired in a crowded omnibus. Every man has hated mankind when he was less than a man. Every man has had humanity in his eyes like a blinding fog, humanity in his nostrils like a suffocating smell. But when Nietzsche has the incredible lack of humour and lack of imagination to ask us to believe that his aristocracy is an aristocracy of strong muscles or an aristocracy of strong wills, it is necessary to point out the truth. It is an aristocracy of weak nerves.

We make our friends; we make our enemies; but God makes our next-door neighbour. Hence he comes to us clad in all the careless terrors of nature; he is as strange as the stars, as reckless and indifferent as the rain. He is Man, the most terrible of the beasts. That is why the old religions and the old scriptural language showed so sharp a wisdom when they spoke, not of one's duty towards humanity, but one's duty towards one's neighbour. The duty towards humanity may often take the form of some choice which is personal or even pleasurable. That duty may be a hobby; it may even be a dissipation. We may work in the East End because we are peculiarly fitted to work in the East End, or because we think we are; we may fight for the cause of international peace because we are very fond of fighting. The most monstrous martyrdom, the most repulsive experience, may be the result of choice or a kind of taste. We may be so made as to be particularly fond of lunatics or specially interested in leprosy. We may love negroes because they are black or German Socialists because they are pedantic. But we have to love our neighbour because he is there — a much more alarming reason for a much more serious operation. He is the sample of humanity which is actually given us. Precisely because he may be anybody he is everybody. He is a symbol because he is an accident.

Doubtless men flee from small environments into lands that are very deadly. But this is natural enough; for they are not fleeing from death. They are fleeing from life. And this principle applies to ring within ring of the social system of humanity. It is perfectly reasonable that men should seek for some particular variety of the human type, so long as they are seeking for that variety of the human type, and not for mere human variety. It is quite proper that a British diplomatist should seek the society of Japanese generals, if what he wants is Japanese generals. But if what he wants is people different from himself, he had much better stop at home and discuss religion with the housemaid. It is quite reasonable that the village genius should come up to conquer London if what he wants is to conquer London. But if he wants to conquer something fundamentally and symbolically hostile and also very strong, he had much better remain where he is and have a row with the rector. The man in the suburban street is quite right if he goes to Ramsgate for the sake of Ramsgate — a difficult thing to imagine. But if, as he expresses it, he goes to Ramsgate "for a change," then he would have a much more romantic and even melodramatic change if he jumped over the wall into his neighbours garden. The consequences would be bracing in a sense far beyond the possibilities of Ramsgate hygiene.

Now, exactly as this principle applies to the empire, to the nation within the empire, to the city within the nation, to the street within the city, so it applies to the home within the street. The institution of the family is to be commended for precisely the same reasons that the institution of the nation, or the institution of the city, are in this matter to be commended. It is a good thing for a man to live in a family for the same reason that it is a good thing for a man to be besieged in a city. It is a good thing for a man to live in a family in the same sense that it is a beautiful and delightful thing for a man to be snowed up in a street. They all force him to realize that life is not a thing from outside, but a thing from inside. Above all, they all insist upon the fact that life, if it be a truly stimulating and fascinating life, is a thing which, of its nature, exists in spite of ourselves. The modern writers who have suggested, in a more or less open manner, that the family is a bad institution, have generally confined themselves to suggesting, with much sharpness, bitterness, or pathos, that perhaps the family is not always very congenial. Of course the family is a good institution because it is uncongenial. It is wholesome precisely because it contains so many divergencies and varieties. It is, as the sentimentalists say, like a little kingdom, and, like most other little kingdoms, is generally in a state of something resembling anarchy. It is exactly because our brother George is not interested in our religious difficulties, but is interested in the Trocadero Restaurant, that the family has some of the bracing qualities of the commonwealth. It is precisely because our uncle Henry does not approve of the theatrical ambitions of our sister Sarah that the family is like humanity. The men and women who, for good reasons and bad, revolt against the family, are, for good reasons and bad, simply revolting against mankind. Aunt Elizabeth is unreasonable, like mankind. Papa is excitable, like mankind Our youngest brother is mischievous, like mankind. Grandpapa is stupid, like the world; he is old, like the world.

Those who wish, rightly or wrongly, to step out of all this, do definitely wish to step into a narrower world. They are dismayed and terrified by the largeness and variety of the family. Sarah wishes to find a world wholly consisting of private theatricals; George wishes to think the Trocadero a cosmos. I do not say, for a moment, that the flight to this narrower life may not be the right thing for the individual, any more than I say the same thing about flight into a monastery. But I do say that anything is bad and artificial which tends to make these people succumb to the strange delusion that they are stepping into a world which is actually larger and more varied than their own. The best way that a man could test his readiness to encounter the common variety of mankind would be to climb down a chimney into any house at random, and get on as well as possible with the people inside. And that is essentially what each one of us did on the day that he was born.

This is, indeed, the sublime and special romance of the family. It is romantic because it is a toss-up. It is romantic because it is everything that its enemies call it. It is romantic because it is arbitrary. It is romantic because it is there. So long as you have groups of men chosen rationally, you have some special or sectarian atmosphere. It is when you have groups of men chosen irrationally that you have men. The element of adventure begins to exist; for an adventure is, by its nature, a thing that comes to us. It is a thing that chooses us, not a thing that we choose. Falling in love has been often regarded as the supreme adventure, the supreme romantic accident. In so much as there is in it something outside ourselves, something of a sort of merry fatalism, this is very true. Love does take us and transfigure and torture us. It does break our hearts with an unbearable beauty, like the unbearable beauty of music. But in so far as we have certainly something to do with the matter; in so far as we are in some sense prepared to fall in love and in some sense jump into it; in so far as we do to some extent choose and to some extent even judge — in all this falling in love is not truly romantic, is not truly adventurous at all. In this degree the supreme adventure is not falling in love. The supreme adventure is being born. There we do walk suddenly into a splendid and startling trap. There we do see something of which we have not dreamed before. Our father and mother do lie in wait for us and leap out on us, like brigands from a bush. Our uncle is a surprise. Our aunt is, in the beautiful common expression, a bolt from the blue. When we step into the family, by the act of being born, we do step into a world which is incalculable, into a world which has its own strange laws, into a world which could do without us, into a world that we have not made. In other words, when we step into the family we step into a fairy-tale.

This colour as of a fantastic narrative ought to cling to the family and to our relations with it throughout life. Romance is the deepest thing in life; romance is deeper even than reality. For even if reality could be proved to be misleading, it still could not be proved to be unimportant or unimpressive. Even if the facts are false, they are still very strange. And this strangeness of life, this unexpected and even perverse element of things as they fall out, remains incurably interesting. The circumstances we can regulate may become tame or pessimistic; but the "circumstances over which we have no control" remain god-like to those who, like Mr. Micawber, can call on them and renew their strength. People wonder why the novel is the most popular form of literature; people wonder why it is read more than books of science or books of metaphysics. The reason is very simple; it is merely that the novel is more true than they are. Life may sometimes legitimately appear as a book of science. Life may sometimes appear, and with a much greater legitimacy, as a book of metaphysics. But life is always a novel. Our existence may cease to be a song; it may cease even to be a beautiful lament. Our existence may not be an intelligible justice, or even a recognizable wrong. But our existence is still a story. In the fiery alphabet of every sunset is written, "to be continued in our next." If we have sufficient intellect, we can finish a philosophical and exact deduction, and be certain that we are finishing it right. With the adequate brain-power we could finish any scientific discovery, and be certain that we were finishing it right. But not with the most gigantic intellect could we finish the simplest or silliest story, and be certain that we were finishing it right. That is because a story has behind it, not merely intellect which is partly mechanical, but will, which is in its essence divine. The narrative writer can send his hero to the gallows if he likes in the last chapter but one. He can do it by the same divine caprice whereby he, the author, can go to the gallows himself, and to hell afterwards if he chooses. And the same civilization, the chivalric European civilization which asserted freewill in the thirteenth century, produced the thing called “fiction” in the eighteenth. When Thomas Aquinas asserted the spiritual liberty of man, he created all the bad novels in the circulating libraries.

But in order that life should be a story or romance to us, it is necessary that a great part of it, at any rate, should be settled for us without our permission. If we wish life to be a system, this may be a nuisance; but if we wish it to be a drama, it is an essential. It may often happen, no doubt, that a drama may be written by somebody else which we like very little. But we should like it still less if the author came before the curtain every hour or so, and forced on us the whole trouble of inventing the next act. A man has control over many things in his life; he has control over enough things to be the hero of a novel. But if he had control over everything, there would be so much hero that there would be no novel. And the reason why the lives of the rich are at bottom so tame and uneventful is simply that they can choose the events. They are dull because they are omnipotent. They fail to feel adventures because they can make the adventures. The thing which keeps life romantic and full of fiery possibilities is the existence of these great plain limitations which force all of us to meet the things we do not like or do not expect. It is vain for the supercilious moderns to talk of being in uncongenial surroundings. To be in a romance is to be in uncongenial surroundings. To be born into this earth is to be born into uncongenial surroundings, hence to be born into a romance. Of all these great limitations and frameworks which fashion and create the poetry and variety of life, the family is the most definite and important. Hence it is misunderstood by the moderns, who imagine that romance would exist most perfectly in a complete state of what they call liberty. They think that if a man makes a gesture it would be a startling and romantic matter that the sun should fall from the sky. But the startling and romantic thing about the sun is that it does not fall from the sky. They are seeking under every shape and form a world where there are no limitations — that is, a world where there are no outlines; that is, a world where there are no shapes. There is nothing baser than that infinity. They say they wish to be, as strong as the universe, but they really wish the whole universe as weak as themselves.

XV On Smart Novelists and the Smart Set

In one sense, at any rate, it is more valuable to read bad literature than good literature. Good literature may tell us the mind of one man; but bad literature may tell us the mind of many men. A good novel tells us the truth about its hero; but a bad novel tells us the truth about its author. It does much more than that, it tells us the truth about its readers; and, oddly enough, it tells us this all the more the more cynical and immoral be the motive of its manufacture. The more dishonest a book is as a book the more honest it is as a public document. A sincere novel exhibits the simplicity of one particular man; an insincere novel exhibits the simplicity of mankind. The pedantic decisions and definable readjustments of man may be found in scrolls and statute books and scriptures; but men's basic assumptions and everlasting energies are to be found in penny dreadfuls and halfpenny novelettes. Thus a man, like many men of real culture in our day, might learn from good literature nothing except the power to appreciate good literature. But from bad literature he might learn to govern empires and look over the map of mankind.

There is one rather interesting example of this state of things in which the weaker literature is really the stronger and the stronger the weaker. It is the case of what may be called, for the sake of an approximate description, the literature of aristocracy; or, if you prefer the description, the literature of snobbishness. Now if any one wishes to find a really effective and comprehensible and permanent case for aristocracy well and sincerely stated, let him read, not the modern philosophical conservatives, not even Nietzsche, let him read the Bow Bells Novelettes. Of the case of Nietzsche I am confessedly more doubtful. Nietzsche and the Bow Bells Novelettes have both obviously the same fundamental character; they both worship the tall man with curling moustaches and herculean bodily power, and they both worship him in a manner which is somewhat feminine and hysterical. Even here, however, the Novelette easily maintains its philosophical superiority, because it does attribute to the strong man those virtues which do commonly belong to him, such virtues as laziness and kindliness and a rather reckless benevolence, and a great dislike of hurting the weak. Nietzsche, on the other hand, attributes to the strong man that scorn against weakness which only exists among invalids. It is not, however, of the secondary merits of the great German philosopher, but of the primary merits of the Bow Bells Novelettes, that it is my present affair to speak. The picture of aristocracy in the popular sentimental novelette seems to me very satisfactory as a permanent political and philosophical guide. It may be inaccurate about details such as the title by which a baronet is addressed or the width of a mountain chasm which a baronet can conveniently leap, but it is not a bad description of the general idea and intention of aristocracy as they exist in human affairs. The essential dream of aristocracy is magnificence and valour; and if the Family Herald Supplement sometimes distorts or exaggerates these things, at least, it does not fall short in them. It never errs by making the mountain chasm too narrow or the title of the baronet insufficiently impressive. But above this sane reliable old literature of snobbishness there has arisen in our time another kind of literature of snobbishness which, with its much higher pretensions, seems to me worthy of very much less respect. Incidentally (if that matters), it is much better literature. But it is immeasurably worse philosophy, immeasurably worse ethics and politics, immeasurably worse vital rendering of aristocracy and humanity as they really are. From such books as those of which I wish now to speak we can discover what a clever man can do with the idea of aristocracy. But from the Family Herald Supplement literature we can learn what the idea of aristocracy can do with a man who is not clever. And when we know that we know English history.

This new aristocratic fiction must have caught the attention of everybody who has read the best fiction for the last fifteen years. It is that genuine or alleged literature of the Smart Set which represents that set as distinguished, not only by smart dresses, but by smart sayings. To the bad baronet, to the good baronet, to the romantic and misunderstood baronet who is supposed to be a bad baronet, but is a good baronet, this school has added a conception undreamed of in the former years — the conception of an amusing baronet. The aristocrat is not merely to be taller than mortal men and stronger and handsomer, he is also to be more witty. He is the long man with the short epigram. Many eminent, and deservedly eminent, modern novelists must accept some responsibility for having supported this worst form of snobbishness — an intellectual snobbishness. The talented author of “Dodo” is responsible for having in some sense created the fashion as a fashion. Mr. Hichens, in the “Green Carnation,” reaffirmed the strange idea that young noblemen talk well; though his case had some vague biographical foundation, and in consequence an excuse. Mrs. Craigie is considerably guilty in the matter, although, or rather because, she has combined the aristocratic note with a note of some moral and even religious sincerity. When you are saving a man's soul, even in a novel, it is indecent to mention that he is a gentleman. Nor can blame in this matter be altogether removed from a man of much greater ability, and a man who has proved his possession of the highest of human instinct, the romantic instinct — I mean Mr. Anthony Hope. In a galloping, impossible melodrama like "The Prisoner of Zenda," the blood of kings fanned an excellent fantastic thread or theme. But the blood of kings is not a thing that can be taken seriously. And when, for example, Mr. Hope devotes so much serious and sympathetic study to the man called Tristram of Blent, a man who throughout burning boyhood thought of nothing but a silly old estate, we feel even in Mr. Hope the hint of this excessive concern about the oligarchic idea. It is hard for any ordinary person to feel so much interest in a young man whose whole aim is to own the house of Blent at the time when every other young man is owning the stars.

Mr. Hope, however, is a very mild case, and in him there is not only an element of romance, but also a fine element of irony which warns us against taking all this elegance too seriously. Above all, he shows his sense in not making his noblemen so incredibly equipped with impromptu repartee. This habit of insisting on the wit of the wealthier classes is the last and most servile of all the servilities. It is, as I have said, immeasurably more contemptible than the snobbishness of the novelette which describes the nobleman as smiling like an Apollo or riding a mad elephant. These may be exaggerations of beauty and courage, but beauty and courage are the unconscious ideals of aristocrats, even of stupid aristocrats.

The nobleman of the novelette may not be sketched with any very close or conscientious attention to the daily habits of noblemen. But he is something more important than a reality; he is a practical ideal. The gentleman of fiction may not copy the gentleman of real life; but the gentleman of real life is copying the gentleman of fiction. He may not be particularly good-looking, but he would rather be good-looking than anything else; he may not have ridden on a mad elephant, but he rides a pony as far as possible with an air as if he had. And, upon the whole, the upper class not only especially desire these qualities of beauty and courage, but in some degree, at any rate, especially possess them. Thus there is nothing really mean or sycophantic about the popular literature which makes all its marquises seven feet high. It is snobbish, but it is not servile. Its exaggeration is based on an exuberant and honest admiration; its honest admiration is based upon something which is in some degree, at any rate, really there. The English lower classes do not fear the English upper classes in the least; nobody could. They simply and freely and sentimentally worship them. The strength of the aristocracy is not in the aristocracy at all; it is in the slums. It is not in the House of Lords; it is not in the Civil Service; it is not in the Government offices; it is not even in the huge and disproportionate monopoly of the English land. It is in a certain spirit. It is in the fact that when a navvy wishes to praise a man, it comes readily to his tongue to say that he has behaved like a gentleman. From a democratic point of view he might as well say that he had behaved like a viscount. The oligarchic character of the modern English commonwealth does not rest, like many oligarchies, on the cruelty of the rich to the poor. It does not even rest on the kindness of the rich to the poor. It rests on the perennial and unfailing kindness of the poor to the rich.

The snobbishness of bad literature, then, is not servile; but the snobbishness of good literature is servile. The old-fashioned halfpenny romance where the duchesses sparkled with diamonds was not servile; but the new romance where they sparkle with epigrams is servile. For in thus attributing a special and startling degree of intellect and conversational or controversial power to the upper classes, we are attributing something which is not especially their virtue or even especially their aim. We are, in the words of Disraeli (who, being a genius and not a gentleman, has perhaps primarily to answer for the introduction of this method of flattering the gentry), we are performing the essential function of flattery which is flattering the people for the qualities they have not got. Praise may be gigantic and insane without having any quality of flattery so long as it is praise of something that is noticeably in existence. A man may say that a giraffe’s head strikes the stars, or that a whale fills the German Ocean, and still be only in a rather excited state about a favourite animal. But when he begins to congratulate the giraffe on his feathers, and the whale on the elegance of his legs, we find ourselves confronted with that social element which we call flattery. The middle and lower orders of London can sincerely, though not perhaps safely, admire the health and grace of the English aristocracy. And this for the very simple reason that the aristocrats are, upon the whole, more healthy and graceful than the poor. But they cannot honestly admire the wit of the aristocrats. And this for the simple reason that the aristocrats are not more witty than the poor, but a very great deal less so. A man does not hear, as in the smart novels, these gems of verbal felicity dropped between diplomatists at dinner. Where he really does hear them is between two omnibus conductors in a block in Holborn. The witty peer whose impromptus fill the books of Mrs. Craigie or Miss Fowler, would, as a matter of fact, be torn to shreds in the art of conversation by the first boot-black he had the misfortune to fall foul of. The poor are merely sentimental, and very excusably sentimental, if they praise the gentleman for having a ready hand and ready money. But they are strictly slaves and sycophants if they praise him for having a ready tongue. For that they have far more themselves.

The element of oligarchical sentiment in these novels, however, has, I think, another and subtler aspect, an aspect more difficult to understand and more worth understanding. The modern gentleman, particularly the modern English gentleman, has become so central and important in these books, and through them in the whole of our current literature and our current mode of thought, that certain qualities of his, whether original or recent, essential or accidental, have altered the quality of our English comedy. In particular, that stoical ideal, absurdly supposed to be the English ideal, has stiffened and chilled us. It is not the English ideal; but it is to some extent the aristocratic ideal; or it may be only the ideal of aristocracy in its autumn or decay. The gentleman is a Stoic because he is a sort of savage, because he is filled with a great elemental fear that some stranger will speak to him. That is why a third-class carriage is a community, while a first-class carriage is a place of wild hermits. But this matter, which is difficult, I may be permitted to approach in a more circuitous way.

The haunting element of ineffectualness which runs through so much of the witty and epigrammatic fiction fashionable during the last eight or ten years, which runs through such works of a real though varying ingenuity as “Dodo,” or “Concerning Isabel Carnaby,” or even “Some Emotions and a Moral,” may be expressed in various ways, but to most of us I think it will ultimately amount to the same thing. This new frivolity is inadequate because there is in it no strong sense of an unuttered joy. The men and women who exchange the repartees may not only be hating each other, but hating even themselves. Any one of them might be bankrupt that day, or sentenced to be shot the next. They are joking, not because they are merry, but because they are not; out of the emptiness of the heart the mouth speaketh. Even when they talk pure nonsense it is a careful nonsense — a nonsense of which they are economical, or, to use the perfect expression of Mr. W. S. Gilbert in “Patience,” it is such “precious nonsense.” Even when they become light-headed they do not become light-hearted. All those who have read anything of the rationalism of the moderns know that their Reason is a sad thing. But even their unreason is sad.

The causes of this incapacity are also not very difficult to indicate. The chief of all, of course, is that miserable fear of being sentimental, which is the meanest of all the modern terrors — meaner even than the terror which produces hygiene. Everywhere the robust and uproarious humour has come from the men who were capable not merely of sentimentalism, but a very silly sentimentalism. There has been no humour so robust or uproarious as that of the sentimentalist Steele or the sentimentalist Sterne or the sentimentalist Dickens. These creatures who wept like women were the creatures who laughed like men. It is true that the humour of Micawber is good literature and that the pathos of little Nell is bad. But the kind of man who had the courage to write so badly in the one case is the kind of man who would have the courage to write so well in the other. The same unconsciousness, the same violent innocence, the same gigantesque scale of action which brought the Napoleon of Comedy his Jena brought him also his Moscow. And herein is especially shown the frigid and feeble limitations of our modern wits. They make violent efforts, they make heroic and almost pathetic efforts, but they cannot really write badly. There are moments when we almost think that they are achieving the effect, but our hope shrivels to nothing the moment we compare their little failures with the enormous imbecilities of Byron or Shakespeare.

For a hearty laugh it is necessary to have touched the heart. I do not know why touching the heart should always be connected only with the idea of touching it to compassion or a sense of distress. The heart can be touched to joy and triumph; the heart can be touched to amusement. But all our comedians are tragic comedians. These later fashionable writers are so pessimistic in bone and marrow that they never seem able to imagine the heart having any concern with mirth. When they speak of the heart, they always mean the pangs and disappointments of the emotional life. When they say that a man’s heart is in the right place, they mean, apparently, that it is in his boots. Our ethical societies understand fellowship, but they do not understand good fellowship. Similarly, our wits understand talk, but not what Dr. Johnson called a good talk. In order to have, like Dr. Johnson, a good talk, it is emphatically necessary to be, like Dr. Johnson, a good man — to have friendship and honour and an abysmal tenderness. Above all, it is necessary to be openly and indecently humane, to confess with fulness all the primary pities and fears of Adam. Johnson was a clear-headed humorous man, and therefore he did not mind talking seriously about religion. Johnson was a brave man, one of the bravest that ever walked, and therefore he did not mind avowing to any one his consuming fear of death.

The idea that there is something English in the repression of one's feelings is one of those ideas which no Englishman ever heard of until England began to be governed exclusively by Scotchmen, Americans, and Jews. At the best, the idea is a generalization from the Duke of Wellington — who was an Irishman. At the worst, it is a part of that silly Teutonism which knows as little about England as it does about anthropology, but which is always talking about Vikings. As a matter of fact, the Vikings did not repress their feelings in the least. They cried like babies and kissed each other like girls; in short, they acted in that respect like Achilles and all strong heroes the children of the gods. And though the English nationality has probably not much more to do with the Vikings than the French nationality or the Irish nationality, the English have certainly been the children of the Vikings in the matter of tears and kisses. It is not merely true that all the most typically English men of letters, like Shakespeare and Dickens, Richardson and Thackeray, were sentimentalists. It is also true that all the most typically English men of action were sentimentalists, if possible, more sentimental. In the great Elizabethan age, when the English nation was finally hammered out, in the great eighteenth century when the British Empire was being built up everywhere, where in all these times, where was this symbolic stoical Englishman who dresses in drab and black and represses his feelings? Were all the Elizabethan palladins and pirates like that? Were any of them like that? Was Grenville concealing his emotions when he broke wine-glasses to pieces with his teeth and bit them till the blood poured down? Was Essex restraining his excitement when he threw his hat into the sea? Did Raleigh think it sensible to answer the Spanish guns only, as Stevenson says, with a flourish of insulting trumpets? Did Sydney ever miss an opportunity of making a theatrical remark in the whole course of his life and death? Were even the Puritans Stoics? The English Puritans repressed a good deal, but even they were too English to repress their feelings. It was by a great miracle of genius assuredly that Carlyle contrived to admire simultaneously two things so irreconcilably opposed as silence and Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell was the very reverse of a strong, silent man. Cromwell was always talking, when he was not crying. Nobody, I suppose, will accuse the author of “Grace Abounding” of being ashamed of his feelings. Milton, indeed, it might be possible to represent as a Stoic; in some sense he was a Stoic, just as he was a prig and a polygamist and several other unpleasant and heathen things. But when we have passed that great and desolate name, which may really be counted an exception, we find the tradition of English emotionalism immediately resumed and unbrokenly continuous. Whatever may have been the moral beauty of the passions of Etheridge and Dorset, Sedley and Buckingham, they cannot be accused of the fault of fastidiously concealing them. Charles the Second was very popular with the English because, like all the jolly English kings, he displayed his passions. William the Dutchman was very unpopular with the English because, not being an Englishman, he did hide his emotions. He was, in fact, precisely the ideal Englishman of our modern theory; and precisely for that reason all the real Englishmen loathed him like leprosy. With the rise of the great England of the eighteenth century, we find this open and emotional tone still maintained in letters and politics, in arts and in arms. Perhaps the only quality which was possessed in common by the great Fielding, and the great Richardson was that neither of them hid their feelings. Swift, indeed, was hard and logical, because Swift was Irish. And when we pass to the soldiers and the rulers, the patriots and the empire-builders of the eighteenth century, we find, as I have said, that they were, If possible, more romantic than the romancers, more poetical than the poets. Chatham, who showed the world all his strength, showed the House of Commons all his weakness. Wolfe walked about the room with a drawn sword calling himself Caesar and Hannibal, and went to death with poetry in his mouth. Clive was a man of the same type as Cromwell or Bunyan, or, for the matter of that, Johnson — that is, he was a strong, sensible man with a kind of running spring of hysteria and melancholy in him. Like Johnson, he was all the more healthy because he was morbid. The tales of all the admirals and adventurers of that England are full of braggadocio, of sentimentality, of splendid affectation. But it is scarcely necessary to multiply examples of the essentially romantic Englishman when one example towers above them all. Mr. Rudyard Kipling has said complacently of the English, “We do not fall on the neck and kiss when we come together.” It is true that this ancient and universal custom has vanished with the modern weakening of England. Sydney would have thought nothing of kissing Spenser. But I willingly concede that Mr. Broderick would not be likely to kiss Mr. Arnold-Foster, if that be any proof of the increased manliness and military greatness of England. But the Englishman who does not show his feelings has not altogether given up the power of seeing something English in the great sea-hero of the Napoleonic war. You cannot break the legend of Nelson. And across the sunset of that glory is written in flaming letters for ever the great English sentiment, “Kiss me, Hardy.”

This ideal of self-repression, then, is, whatever else it is, not English. It is, perhaps, somewhat Oriental, it is slightly Prussian, but in the main it does not come, I think, from any racial or national source. It is, as I have said, in some sense aristocratic; it comes not from a people, but from a class. Even aristocracy, I think, was not quite so stoical in the days when it was really strong. But whether this unemotional ideal be the genuine tradition of the gentleman, or only one of the inventions of the modern gentleman (who may be called the decayed gentleman), it certainly has something to do with the unemotional quality in these society novels. From representing aristocrats as people who suppressed their feelings, it has been an easy step to representing aristocrats as people who had no feelings to suppress. Thus the modern oligarchist has made a virtue for the oligarchy of the hardness as well as the brightness of the diamond. Like a sonneteer addressing his lady in the seventeenth century, he seems to use the word “cold” almost as a eulogium, and the word “heartless” as a kind of compliment. Of course, in people so incurably kind-hearted and babyish as are the English gentry, it would be impossible to create anything that can be called positive cruelty; so in these books they exhibit a sort of negative cruelty. They cannot be cruel in acts, but they can be so in words. All this means one thing, and one thing only. It means that the living and invigorating ideal of England must be looked for in the masses; it must be looked for where Dickens found it — Dickens among whose glories it was to be a humorist, to be a sentimentalist, to be an optimist, to be a poor man, to be an Englishman, but the greatest of whose glories was that he saw all mankind in its amazing and tropical luxuriance, and did not even notice the aristocracy; Dickens, the greatest of whose glories was that he could not describe a gentleman.

XVI On Mr. McCabe and a Divine Frivolity

A critic once remonstrated with me saying, with an air of indignant reasonableness, “If you must make jokes, at least you need not make them on such serious subjects.” I replied with a natural simplicity and wonder, “About what other subjects can one make jokes except serious subjects?” It is quite useless to talk about profane jesting. All jesting is in its nature profane, in the sense that it must be the sudden realization that something which thinks itself solemn is not so very solemn after all. If a joke is not a joke about religion or morals, it is a joke about police-magistrates or scientific professors or undergraduates dressed up as Queen Victoria. And people joke about the police-magistrate more than they joke about the Pope, not because the police-magistrate is a more frivolous subject, but, on the contrary, because the police-magistrate is a more serious subject than the Pope. The Bishop of Rome has no jurisdiction in this realm of England; whereas the police-magistrate may bring his solemnity to bear quite suddenly upon us. Men make jokes about old scientific professors, even more than they make them about bishops — not because science is lighter than religion, but because science is always by its nature more solemn and austere than religion. It is not I; it is not even a particular class of journalists or jesters who make jokes about the matters which are of most awful import; it is the whole human race. If there is one thing more than another which any one will admit who has the smallest knowledge of the world, it is that men are always speaking gravely and earnestly and with the utmost possible care about the things that are not important, but always talking frivolously about the things that are. Men talk for hours with the faces of a college of cardinals about things like golf, or tobacco, or waistcoats, or party politics. But all the most grave and dreadful things in the world are the oldest jokes in the world — being married; being hanged.

One gentleman, however, Mr. McCabe, has in this matter made to me something that almost amounts to a personal appeal; and as he happens to be a man for whose sincerity and intellectual virtue I have a high respect, I do not feel inclined to let it pass without some attempt to satisfy my critic in the matter. Mr. McCabe devotes a considerable part of the last essay in the collection called “Christianity and Rationalism on Trial” to an objection, not to my thesis, but to my method, and a very friendly and dignified appeal to me to alter it. I am much inclined to defend myself in this matter out of mere respect for Mr. McCabe, and still more so out of mere respect for the truth which is, I think, in danger by his error, not only in this question, but in others. In order that there may be no injustice done in the matter, I will quote Mr. McCabe himself. “But before I follow Mr. Chesterton in some detail I would make a general observation on his method. He is as serious as I am in his ultimate purpose, and I respect him for that. He knows, as I do, that humanity stands at a solemn parting of the ways. Towards some unknown goal it presses through the ages, impelled by an overmastering desire of happiness. To-day it hesitates, lightheartedly enough, but every serious thinker knows how momentous the decision may be. It is, apparently, deserting the path of religion and entering upon the path of secularism. Will it lose itself in quagmires of sensuality down this new path, and pant and toil through years of civic and industrial anarchy, only to learn it had lost the road, and must return to religion? Or will it find that at last it is leaving the mists and the quagmires behind it; that it is ascending the slope of the hill so long dimly discerned ahead, and making straight for the long-sought Utopia? This is the drama of our time, and every man and every woman should understand it.

“Mr. Chesterton understands it. Further, he gives us credit for understanding it. He has nothing of that paltry meanness or strange density of so many of his colleagues, who put us down as aimless iconoclasts or moral anarchists. He admits that we are waging a thankless war for what we take to be Truth and Progress. He is doing the same. But why, in the name of all that is reasonable, should we, when we are agreed on the momentousness of the issue either way, forthwith desert serious methods of conducting the controversy? Why, when the vital need of our time is to induce men and women to collect their thoughts occasionally, and be men and women — nay, to remember that they are really gods that hold the destinies of humanity on their knees — why should we think that this kaleidoscopic play of phrases is inopportune? The ballets of the Alhambra, and the fireworks of the Crystal Palace, and Mr. Chesterton’s Daily News articles, have their place in life. But how a serious social student can think of curing the thoughtlessness of our generation by strained paradoxes; of giving people a sane grasp of social problems by literary sleight-of-hand; of settling important questions by a reckless shower of rocket-metaphors and inaccurate ‘facts,’ and the substitution of imagination for judgment, I cannot see.”

I quote this passage with a particular pleasure, because Mr. McCabe certainly cannot put too strongly the degree to which I give him and his school credit for their complete sincerity and responsibility of philosophical attitude. I am quite certain that they mean every word they say. I also mean every word I say. But why is it that Mr. McCabe has some sort of mysterious hesitation about admitting that I mean every word I say; why is it that he is not quite as certain of my mental responsibility as I am of his mental responsibility? If we attempt to answer the question directly and well, we shall, I think, have come to the root of the matter by the shortest cut.

Mr. McCabe thinks that I am not serious but only funny, because Mr. McCabe thinks that funny is the opposite of serious. Funny is the opposite of not funny, and of nothing else. The question of whether a man expresses himself in a grotesque or laughable phraseology, or in a stately and restrained phraseology, is not a question of motive or of moral state, it is a question of instinctive language and self-expression. Whether a man chooses to tell the truth in long sentences or short jokes is a problem analogous to whether he chooses to tell the truth in French or German. Whether a man preaches his gospel grotesquely or gravely is merely like the question of whether he preaches it in prose or verse. The question of whether Swift was funny in his irony is quite another sort of question to the question of whether Swift was serious in his pessimism. Surely even Mr. McCabe would not maintain that the more funny “Gulliver” is in its method the less it can be sincere in its object. The truth is, as I have said, that in this sense the two qualities of fun and seriousness have nothing whatever to do with each other, they are no more comparable than black and triangular. Mr. Bernard Shaw is funny and sincere. Mr. George Robey is funny and not sincere. Mr. McCabe is sincere and not funny. The average Cabinet Minister is not sincere and not funny.

In short, Mr. McCabe is under the influence of a primary fallacy which I have found very common in men of the clerical type. Numbers of clergymen have from time to time reproached me for making jokes about religion; and they have almost always invoked the authority of that very sensible commandment which says, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.” Of course, I pointed out that I was not in any conceivable sense taking the name in vain. To take a thing and make a joke out of it is not to take it in vain. It is, on the contrary, to take it and use it for an uncommonly good object. To use a thing in vain means to use it without use. But a joke may be exceedingly useful; it may contain the whole earthly sense, not to mention the whole heavenly sense, of a situation. And those who find in the Bible the commandment can find in the Bible any number of the jokes. In the same book in which God's name is fenced from being taken in vain, God himself overwhelms Job with a torrent of terrible levities. The same book which says that God's name must not be taken vainly, talks easily and carelessly about God laughing and God winking. Evidently it is not here that we have to look for genuine examples of what is meant by a vain use of the name. And it is not very difficult to see where we have really to look for it. The people (as I tactfully pointed out to them) who really take the name of the Lord in vain are the clergymen themselves. The thing which is fundamentally and really frivolous is not a careless joke. The thing which is fundamentally and really frivolous is a careless solemnity. If Mr. McCabe really wishes to know what sort of guarantee of reality and solidity is afforded by the mere act of what is called talking seriously, let him spend a happy Sunday in going the round of the pulpits. Or, better still, let him drop in at the House of Commons or the House of Lords. Even Mr. McCabe would admit that these men are solemn — more solemn than I am. And even Mr. McCabe, I think, would admit that these men are frivolous — more frivolous than I am. Why should Mr. McCabe be so eloquent about the danger arising from fantastic and paradoxical writers? Why should he be so ardent in desiring grave and verbose writers? There are not so very many fantastic and paradoxical writers. But there are a gigantic number of grave and verbose writers; and it is by the efforts of the grave and verbose writers that everything that Mr. McCabe detests (and everything that I detest, for that matter) is kept in existence and energy. How can it have come about that a man as intelligent as Mr. McCabe can think that paradox and jesting stop the way? It is solemnity that is stopping the way in every department of modern effort. It is his own favourite "serious methods;" it is his own favourite "momentousness;" it is his own favourite "judgment" which stops the way everywhere. Every man who has ever headed a deputation to a minister knows this. Every man who has ever written a letter to the Times knows it. Every rich man who wishes to stop the mouths of the poor talks about "momentousness." Every Cabinet minister who has not got an answer suddenly develops a “judgment.” Every sweater who uses vile methods recommends “serious methods.” I said a moment ago that sincerity had nothing to do with solemnity, but I confess that I am not so certain that I was right. In the modern world, at any rate, I am not so sure that I was right. In the modern world solemnity is the direct enemy of sincerity. In the modern world sincerity is almost always on one side, and solemnity almost always on the other. The only answer possible to the fierce and glad attack of sincerity is the miserable answer of solemnity. Let Mr. McCabe, or any one else who is much concerned that we should be grave in order to be sincere, simply imagine the scene in some government office in which Mr. Bernard Shaw should head a Socialist deputation to Mr. Austen Chamberlain. On which side would be the solemnity? And on which the sincerity?

I am, indeed, delighted to discover that Mr. McCabe reckons Mr. Shaw along with me in his system of condemnation of frivolity. He said once, I believe, that he always wanted Mr. Shaw to label his paragraphs serious or comic. I do not know which paragraphs of Mr. Shaw are paragraphs to be labelled serious; but surely there can be no doubt that this paragraph of Mr. McCabe’s is one to be labelled comic. He also says, in the article I am now discussing, that Mr. Shaw has the reputation of deliberately saying everything which his hearers do not expect him to say. I need not labour the inconclusiveness and weakness of this, because it has already been dealt with in my remarks on Mr. Bernard Shaw. Suffice it to say here that the only serious reason which I can imagine inducing any one person to listen to any other is, that the first person looks to the second person with an ardent faith and a fixed attention, expecting him to say what he does not expect him to say. It may be a paradox, but that is because paradoxes are true. It may not be rational, but that is because rationalism is wrong. But clearly it is quite true that whenever we go to hear a prophet or teacher we may or may not expect wit, we may or may not expect eloquence, but we do expect what we do not expect. We may not expect the true, we may not even expect the wise, but we do expect the unexpected. If we do not expect the unexpected, why do we go there at all? If we expect the expected, why do we not sit at home and expect it by ourselves? If Mr. McCabe means merely this about Mr. Shaw, that he always has some unexpected application of his doctrine to give to those who listen to him, what he says is quite true, and to say it is only to say that Mr. Shaw is an original man.

But if he means that Mr. Shaw has ever professed or preached any doctrine but one, and that his own, then what he says is not true. It is not my business to defend Mr. Shaw; as has been seen already, I disagree with him altogether. But I do not mind, on his behalf offering in this matter a flat defiance to all his ordinary opponents, such as Mr. McCabe. I defy Mr. McCabe, or anybody else, to mention one single instance in which Mr. Shaw has, for the sake of wit or novelty, taken up any position which was not directly deducible from the body of his doctrine as elsewhere expressed. I have been, I am happy to say, a tolerably close student of Mr. Shaw's utterances, and I request Mr. McCabe, if he will not believe that I mean anything else, to believe that I mean this challenge.

All this, however, is a parenthesis. The thing with which I am here immediately concerned is Mr. McCabe's appeal to me not to be so frivolous. Let me return to the actual text of that appeal. There are, of course, a great many things that I might say about it in detail. But I may start with saying that Mr. McCabe is in error in supposing that the danger which I anticipate from the disappearance of religion is the increase of sensuality. On the contrary, I should be inclined to anticipate a decrease in sensuality, because I anticipate a decrease in life. I do not think that under modern Western materialism we should have anarchy. I doubt whether we should have enough individual valour and spirit even to have liberty. It is quite an old-fashioned fallacy to suppose that our objection to scepticism is that it removes the discipline from life. Our objection to scepticism is that it removes the motive power. Materialism is not a thing which destroys mere restraint. Materialism itself is the great restraint. The McCabe school advocates a political liberty, but it denies spiritual liberty. That is, it abolishes the laws which could be broken, and substitutes laws that cannot. And that is the real slavery.

The truth is that the scientific civilization in which Mr. McCabe believes has one rather particular defect; it is perpetually tending to destroy that democracy or power of the ordinary man in which Mr. McCabe also believes. Science means specialism, and specialism means oligarchy. If you once establish the habit of trusting particular men to produce particular results in physics or astronomy, you leave the door open for the equally natural demand that you should trust particular men to do particular things in government and the coercing of men. If, you feel it to be reasonable that one beetle should be the only study of one man, and that one man the only student of that one beetle, it is surely a very harmless consequence to go on to say that politics should be the only study of one man, and that one man the only student of politics. As I have pointed out elsewhere in this book, the expert is more aristocratic than the aristocrat, because the aristocrat is only the man who lives well, while the expert is the man who knows better. But if we look at the progress of our scientific civilization we see a gradual increase everywhere of the specialist over the popular function. Once men sang together round a table in chorus; now one man sings alone, for the absurd reason that he can sing better. If scientific civilization goes on (which is most improbable) only one man will laugh, because he can laugh better than the rest.

I do not know that I can express this more shortly than by taking as a text the single sentence of Mr. McCabe, which runs as follows: “The ballets of the Alhambra and the fireworks of the Crystal Palace and Mr. Chesterton’s Daily News articles have their places in life.” I wish that my articles had as noble a place as either of the other two things mentioned. But let us ask ourselves (in a spirit of love, as Mr. Chadband would say), what are the ballets of the Alhambra? The ballets of the Alhambra are institutions in which a particular selected row of persons in pink go through an operation known as dancing. Now, in all commonwealths dominated by a religion — in the Christian commonwealths of the Middle Ages and in many rude societies — this habit of dancing was a common habit with everybody, and was not necessarily confined to a professional class. A person could dance without being a dancer; a person could dance without being a specialist; a person could dance without being pink. And, in proportion as Mr. McCabe’s scientific civilization advances — that is, in proportion as religious civilization (or real civilization) decays — the more and more “well trained,” the more and more pink, become the people who do dance, and the more and more numerous become the people who don’t. Mr. McCabe may recognize an example of what I mean in the gradual discrediting in society of the ancient European waltz or dance with partners, and the substitution of that horrible and degrading oriental interlude which is known as skirt-dancing. That is the whole essence of decadence, the effacement of five people who do a thing for fun by one person who does it for money. Now it follows, therefore, that when Mr. McCabe says that the ballets of the Alhambra and my articles “have their place in life,” it ought to be pointed out to him that he is doing his best to create a world in which dancing, properly speaking, will have no place in life at all. He is, indeed, trying to create a world in which there will be no life for dancing to have a place in. The very fact that Mr. McCabe thinks of dancing as a thing belonging to some hired women at the Alhambra is an illustration of the same principle by which he is able to think of religion as a thing belonging to some hired men in white neckties. Both these things are things which should not be done for us, but by us. If Mr. McCabe were really religious he would be happy. If he were really happy he would dance.

Briefly, we may put the matter in this way. The main point of modern life is not that the Alhambra ballet has its place in life. The main point, the main enormous tragedy of modern life, is that Mr. McCabe has not his place in the Alhambra ballet. The joy of changing and graceful posture, the joy of suiting the swing of music to the swing of limbs, the joy of whirling drapery, the joy of standing on one leg, — all these should belong by rights to Mr. McCabe and to me; in short, to the ordinary healthy citizen. Probably we should not consent to go through these evolutions. But that is because we are miserable moderns and rationalists. We do not merely love ourselves more than we love duty; we actually love ourselves more than we love joy.

When, therefore, Mr. McCabe says that he gives the Alhambra dances (and my articles) their place in life, I think we are justified in pointing out that by the very nature of the case of his philosophy and of his favourite civilization he gives them a very inadequate place. For (if I may pursue the too flattering parallel) Mr. McCabe thinks of the Alhambra and of my articles as two very odd and absurd things, which some special people do (probably for money) in order to amuse him. But if he had ever felt himself the ancient, sublime, elemental, human instinct to dance, he would have discovered that dancing is not a frivolous thing at all, but a very serious thing. He would have discovered that it is the one grave and chaste and decent method of expressing a certain class of emotions. And similarly, if he had ever had, as Mr. Shaw and I have had, the impulse to what he calls paradox, he would have discovered that paradox again is not a frivolous thing, but a very serious thing. He would have found that paradox simply means a certain defiant joy which belongs to belief. I should regard any civilization which was without a universal habit of uproarious dancing as being, from the full human point of view, a defective civilization. And I should regard any mind which had not got the habit in one form or another of uproarious thinking as being, from the full human point of view, a defective mind. It is vain for Mr. McCabe to say that a ballet is a part of him. He should be part of a ballet, or else he is only part of a man. It is in vain for him to say that he is "not quarrelling with the importation of humour into the controversy." He ought himself to be importing humour into every controversy; for unless a man is in part a humorist, he is only in part a man. To sum up the whole matter very simply, if Mr. McCabe asks me why I import frivolity into a discussion of the nature of man, I answer, because frivolity is a part of the nature of man. If he asks me why I introduce what he calls paradoxes into a philosophical problem, I answer, because all philosophical problems tend to become paradoxical. If he objects to my treating of life riotously, I reply that life is a riot. And I say that the Universe as I see it, at any rate, is very much more like the fireworks at the Crystal Palace than it is like his own philosophy. About the whole cosmos there is a tense and secret festivity — like preparations for Guy Fawkes' day. Eternity is the eve of something. I never look up at the stars without feeling that they are the fires of a schoolboy's rocket, fixed in their everlasting fall.

XVII On the Wit of Whistler

That capable and ingenious writer, Mr. Arthur Symons, has included in a book of essays recently published, I believe, an apologia for "London Nights," in which he says that morality should be wholly subordinated to art in criticism, and he uses the somewhat singular argument that art or the worship of beauty is the same in all ages, while morality differs in every period and in every respect. He appears to defy his critics or his readers to mention any permanent feature or quality in ethics. This is surely a very curious example of that extravagant bias against morality which makes so many ultra-modern aesthetes as morbid and fanatical as any Eastern hermit. Unquestionably it is a very common phrase of modern intellectualism to say that the morality of one age can be entirely different to the morality of another. And like a great many other phrases of modern intellectualism, it means literally nothing at all. If the two moralities are entirely different, why do you call them both moralities? It is as if a man said, "Camels in various places are totally diverse; some have six legs, some have none, some have scales, some have feathers, some have horns, some have wings, some are green, some are triangular. There is no point which they have in common." The ordinary man of sense would reply, "Then what makes you call them all camels? What do you mean by a camel? How do you know a camel when you see one?" Of course, there is a permanent substance of morality, as much as there is a permanent substance of art; to say that is only to say that morality is morality, and that art is art. An ideal art critic would, no doubt, see the enduring beauty under every school; equally an ideal moralist would see the enduring ethic under every code. But practically some of the best Englishmen that ever lived could see nothing but filth and idolatry in the starry piety of the Brahmin. And it is equally true that practically the greatest group of artists that the world has ever seen, the giants of the Renaissance, could see nothing but barbarism in the ethereal energy of Gothic.

This bias against morality among the modern aesthetes is nothing very much paraded. And yet it is not really a bias against morality; it is a bias against other people's morality. It is generally founded on a very definite moral preference for a certain sort of life, pagan, plausible, humane. The modern aesthete, wishing us to believe that he values beauty more than conduct, reads Mallarme, and drinks absinthe in a tavern. But this is not only his favourite kind of beauty; it is also his favourite kind of conduct. If he really wished us to believe that he cared for beauty only, he ought to go to nothing but Wesleyan school treats, and paint the sunlight in the hair of the Wesleyan babies. He ought to read nothing but very eloquent theological sermons by old-fashioned Presbyterian divines. Here the lack of all possible moral sympathy would prove that his interest was purely verbal or pictorial, as it is; in all the books he reads and writes he clings to the skirts of his own morality and his own immorality. The champion of l'art pour l'art is always denouncing Ruskin for his moralizing. If he were really a champion of l'art pour l'art, he would be always insisting on Ruskin for his style.

The doctrine of the distinction between art and morality owes a great part of its success to art and morality being hopelessly mixed up in the persons and performances of its greatest exponents. Of this lucky contradiction the very incarnation was Whistler. No man ever preached the impersonality of art so well; no man ever preached the impersonality of art so personally. For him pictures had nothing to do with the problems of character; but for all his fiercest admirers his character was, as a matter of fact far more interesting than his pictures. He gloried in standing as an artist apart from right and wrong. But he succeeded by talking from morning till night about his rights and about his wrongs. His talents were many, his virtues, it must be confessed, not many, beyond that kindness to tried friends, on which many of his biographers insist, but which surely is a quality of all sane men, of pirates and pickpockets; beyond this, his outstanding virtues limit themselves chiefly to two admirable ones — courage and an abstract love of good work. Yet I fancy he won at last more by those two virtues than by all his talents. A man must be something of a moralist if he is to preach, even if he is to preach unmorality. Professor Walter Raleigh, in his "In Memoriam: James McNeill Whistler," insists, truly enough, on the strong streak of an eccentric honesty in matters strictly pictorial, which ran through his complex and slightly confused character. "He would destroy any of his works rather than leave a careless or inexpressive touch within the limits of the frame. He would begin again a hundred times over rather than attempt by patching to make his work seem better than it was."

No one will blame Professor Raleigh, who had to read a sort of funeral oration over Whistler at the opening of the Memorial Exhibition, if, finding himself in that position, he confined himself mostly to the merits and the stronger qualities of his subject. We should naturally go to some other type of composition for a proper consideration of the weaknesses of Whistler. But these must never be omitted from our view of him. Indeed, the truth is that it was not so much a question of the weaknesses of Whistler as of the intrinsic and primary weakness of Whistler. He was one of those people who live up to their emotional incomes, who are always taut and tingling with vanity. Hence he had no strength to spare; hence he had no kindness, no geniality; for geniality is almost definable as strength to spare. He had no god-like carelessness; he never forgot himself; his whole life was, to use his own expression, an arrangement. He went in for "the art of living" — a miserable trick. In a word, he was a great artist; but emphatically not a great man. In this connection I must differ strongly with Professor Raleigh upon what is, from a superficial literary point of view, one of his most effective points. He compares Whistler's laughter to the laughter of another man who was a great man as well as a great artist. "His attitude to the public was exactly the attitude taken up by Robert Browning, who suffered as long a period of neglect and mistake, in those lines of 'The Ring and the Book' —

"'Well, British Public, ye who like me not,
(God love you!) and will have your proper laugh
At the dark question; laugh it! I'd laugh first.'

"Mr. Whistler," adds Professor Raleigh, "always laughed first." The truth is, I believe, that Whistler never laughed at all. There was no laughter in his nature; because there was no thoughtlessness and self-abandonment, no humility. I cannot understand anybody reading "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies" and thinking that there is any laughter in the wit. His wit is a torture to him. He twists himself into arabesques of verbal felicity; he is full of a fierce carefulness; he is inspired with the complete seriousness of sincere malice. He hurts himself to hurt his opponent. Browning did laugh, because Browning did not care; Browning did not care, because Browning was a great man. And when Browning said in brackets to the simple, sensible people who did not like his books, "God love you!" he was not sneering in the least. He was laughing — that is to say, he meant exactly what he said.

There are three distinct classes of great satirists who are also great men — that is to say, three classes of men who can laugh at something without losing their souls. The satirist of the first type is the man who, first of all enjoys himself, and then enjoys his enemies. In this sense he loves his enemy, and by a kind of exaggeration of Christianity he loves his enemy the more the more he becomes an enemy. He has a sort of overwhelming and aggressive happiness in his assertion of anger; his curse is as human as a benediction. Of this type of satire the great example is Rabelais. This is the first typical example of satire, the satire which is voluble, which is violent, which is indecent, but which is not malicious. The satire of Whistler was not this. He was never in any of his controversies simply happy; the proof of it is that he never talked absolute nonsense. There is a second type of mind which produces satire with the quality of greatness. That is embodied in the satirist whose passions are released and let go by some intolerable sense of wrong. He is maddened by the sense of men being maddened; his tongue becomes an unruly member, and testifies against all mankind. Such a man was Swift, in whom the saeva indignatio was a bitterness to others, because it was a bitterness to himself. Such a satirist Whistler was not. He did not laugh because he was happy, like Rabelais. But neither did he laugh because he was unhappy, like Swift.

The third type of great satire is that in which he satirist is enabled to rise superior to his victim in the only serious sense which superiority can bear, in that of pitying the sinner and respecting the man even while he satirises both. Such an achievement can be found in a thing like Pope’s “Atticus” a poem in which the satirist feels that he is satirising the weaknesses which belong specially to literary genius. Consequently he takes a pleasure in pointing out his enemy’s strength before he points out his weakness. That is, perhaps, the highest and most honourable form of satire. That is not the satire of Whistler. He is not full of a great sorrow for the wrong done to human nature; for him the wrong is altogether done to himself.

He was not a great personality, because he thought so much about himself. And the case is stronger even than that. He was sometimes not even a great artist, because he thought so much about art. Any man with a vital knowledge of the human psychology ought to have the most profound suspicion of anybody who claims to be an artist, and talks a great deal about art. Art is a right and human thing, like walking or saying one’s prayers; but the moment it begins to be talked about very solemnly, a man may be fairly certain that the thing has come into a congestion and a kind of difficulty.

The artistic temperament is a disease that afflicts amateurs. It is a disease which arises from men not having sufficient power of expression to utter and get rid of the element of art in their being. It is healthful to every sane man to utter the art within him; it is essential to every sane man to get rid of the art within him at all costs. Artists of a large and wholesome vitality get rid of their art easily, as they breathe easily, or perspire easily. But in artists of less force, the thing becomes a pressure, and produces a definite pain, which is called the artistic temperament. Thus, very great artists are able to be ordinary men — men like Shakespeare or Browning. There are many real tragedies of the artistic temperament, tragedies of vanity or violence or fear. But the great tragedy of the artistic temperament is that it cannot produce any art.

Whistler could produce art; and in so far he was a great man. But he could not forget art; and in so far he was only a man with the artistic temperament. There can be no stronger manifestation of the man who is a really great artist than the fact that he can dismiss the subject of art; that he can, upon due occasion, wish art at the bottom of the sea. Similarly, we should always be much more inclined to trust a solicitor who did not talk about conveyancing over the nuts and wine. What we really desire of any man conducting any business is that the full force of an ordinary man should be put into that particular study. We do not desire that the full force of that study should be put into an ordinary man. We do not in the least wish that our particular law-suit should pour its energy into our barrister’s games with his children, or rides on his bicycle, or meditations on the morning star. But we do, as a matter of fact, desire that his games with his children, and his rides on his bicycle, and his meditations on the morning star should pour something of their energy into our law-suit. We do desire that if he has gained any especial lung development from the bicycle, or any bright and pleasing metaphors from the morning star, that the should be placed at our disposal in that particular forensic controversy. In a word, we are very glad that he is an ordinary man, since that may help him to be an exceptional lawyer.

Whistler never ceased to be an artist. As Mr. Max Beerbohm pointed out in one of his extraordinarily sensible and sincere critiques, Whistler really regarded Whistler as his greatest work of art. The white lock, the single eyeglass, the remarkable hat — these were much dearer to him than any nocturnes or arrangements that he ever threw off. He could throw off the nocturnes; for some mysterious reason he could not throw off the hat. He never threw off from himself that disproportionate accumulation of aestheticism which is the burden of the amateur.

It need hardly be said that this is the real explanation of the thing which has puzzled so many dilettante critics, the problem of the extreme ordinariness of the behaviour of so many great geniuses in history. Their behaviour was so ordinary that it was not recorded; hence it was so ordinary that it seemed mysterious. Hence people say that Bacon wrote Shakespeare. The modern artistic temperament cannot understand how a man who could write such lyrics as Shakespeare wrote, could be as keen as Shakespeare was on business transactions in a little town in Warwickshire. The explanation is simple enough; it is that Shakespeare had a real lyrical impulse, wrote a real lyric, and so got rid of the impulse and went about his business. Being an artist did not prevent him from being an ordinary man, any more than being a sleeper at night or being a diner at dinner prevented him from being an ordinary man.

All very great teachers and leaders have had this habit of assuming their point of view to be one which was human and casual, one which would readily appeal to every passing man. If a man is genuinely superior to his fellows the first thing that he believes in is the equality of man. We can see this, for instance, in that strange and innocent rationality with which Christ addressed any motley crowd that happened to stand about Him. “What man of you having a hundred sheep, and losing one, would not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which was lost?” Or, again, “What man of you if his son ask for bread will he give him a stone, or if he ask for a fish will he give him a serpent?” This plainness, this almost prosaic camaraderie, is the note of all very great minds.

To very great minds the things on which men agree are so immeasurably more important than the things on which they differ, that the latter, for all practical purposes, disappear. They have too much in them of an ancient laughter even to endure to discuss the difference between the hats of two men who were both born of a woman, or between the subtly varied cultures of two men who have both to die. The first-rate great man is equal with other men, like Shakespeare. The second-rate great man is on his knees to other men, like Whitman. The third-rate great man is superior to other men, like Whistler.

XVIII The Fallacy of the Young Nation

To say that a man is an idealist is merely to say that he is a man; but, nevertheless, it might be possible to effect some valid distinction between one kind of idealist and another. One possible distinction, for instance, could be effected by saying that humanity is divided into conscious idealists and unconscious idealists. In a similar way, humanity is divided into conscious ritualists and unconscious ritualists. The curious thing is, in that example as in others, that it is the conscious ritualism which is comparatively simple, the unconscious ritual which is really heavy and complicated. The ritual which is comparatively rude and straightforward is the ritual which people call “ritualistic.” It consists of plain things like bread and wine and fire, and men falling on their faces. But the ritual which is really complex, and many coloured, and elaborate, and needlessly formal, is the ritual which people enact without knowing it. It consists not of plain things like wine and fire, but of really peculiar, and local, and exceptional, and ingenious things — things like door-mats, and door-knockers, and electric bells, and silk hats, and white ties, and shiny cards, and confetti. The truth is that the modern man scarcely ever gets back to very old and simple things except when he is performing some religious mummery. The modern man can hardly get away from ritual except by entering a ritualistic church. In the case of these old and mystical formalities we can at least say that the ritual is not mere ritual; that the symbols employed are in most cases symbols which belong to a primary human poetry. The most ferocious opponent of the Christian ceremonials must admit that if Catholicism had not instituted the bread and wine, somebody else would most probably have done so. Any one with a poetical instinct will admit that to the ordinary human instinct bread symbolizes something which cannot very easily be symbolized otherwise; that wine, to the ordinary human instinct, symbolizes something which cannot very easily be symbolized otherwise. But white ties in the evening are ritual, and nothing else but ritual. No one would pretend that white ties in the evening are primary and poetical. Nobody would maintain that the ordinary human instinct would in any age or country tend to symbolize the idea of evening by a white necktie. Rather, the ordinary human instinct would, I imagine, tend to symbolize evening by cravats with some of the colours of the sunset, not white neckties, but tawny or crimson neckties — neckties of purple or olive, or some darkened gold. Mr. J. A. Kensit, for example, is under the impression that he is not a ritualist. But the daily life of Mr. J. A. Kensit, like that of any ordinary modern man, is, as a matter of fact, one continual and compressed catalogue of mystical mummery and flummery. To take one instance out of an inevitable hundred: I imagine that Mr. Kensit takes off his hat to a lady; and what can be more solemn and absurd, considered in the abstract, than, symbolizing the existence of the other sex by taking off a portion of your clothing and waving it in the air? This, I repeat, is not a natural and primitive symbol, like fire or food. A man might just as well have to take off his waistcoat to a lady; and if a man, by the social ritual of his civilization, had to take off his waistcoat to a lady, every chivalrous and sensible man would take off his waistcoat to a lady. In short, Mr. Kensit, and those who agree with him, may think, and quite sincerely think, that men give too much incense and ceremonial to their adoration of the other world. But nobody thinks that he can give too much incense and ceremonial to the adoration of this world. All men, then, are ritualists, but are either conscious or unconscious ritualists. The conscious ritualists are generally satisfied with a few very simple and elementary signs; the unconscious ritualists are not satisfied with anything short of the whole of human life, being almost insanely ritualistic. The first is called a ritualist because he invents and remembers one rite; the other is called an anti-ritualist because he obeys and forgets a thousand. And a somewhat similar distinction to this which I have drawn with some unavoidable length, between the conscious ritualist and the unconscious ritualist, exists between the conscious idealist and the unconscious idealist. It is idle to inveigh against cynics and materialists — there are no cynics, there are no materialists. Every man is idealistic; only it so often happens that he has the wrong ideal. Every man is incurably sentimental; but, unfortunately, it is so often a false sentiment. When we talk, for instance, of some unscrupulous commercial figure, and say that he would do anything for money, we use quite an inaccurate expression, and we slander him very much. He would not do anything for money. He would do some things for money; he would sell his soul for money, for instance; and, as Mirabeau humorously said, he would be quite wise “to take money for muck.” He would oppress humanity for money; but then it happens that humanity and the soul are not things that he believes in; they are not his ideals. But he has his own dim and delicate ideals; and he would not violate these for money. He would not drink out of the soup-tureen, for money. He would not wear his coat-tails in front, for money. He would not spread a report that he had softening of the brain, for money. In the actual practice of life we find, in the matter of ideals, exactly what we have already found in the matter of ritual. We find that while there is a perfectly genuine danger of fanaticism from the men who have unworldly ideals, the permanent and urgent danger of fanaticism is from the men who have worldly ideals.

People who say that an ideal is a dangerous thing, that it deludes and intoxicates, are perfectly right. But the ideal which intoxicates most is the least idealistic kind of ideal. The ideal which intoxicates least is the very ideal ideal; that sobers us suddenly, as all heights and precipices and great distances do. Granted that it is a great evil to mistake a cloud for a cape; still, the cloud, which can be most easily mistaken for a cape, is the cloud that is nearest the earth. Similarly, we may grant that it may be dangerous to mistake an ideal for something practical. But we shall still point out that, in this respect, the most dangerous ideal of all is the ideal which looks a little practical. It is difficult to attain a high ideal; consequently, it is almost impossible to persuade ourselves that we have attained it. But it is easy to attain a low ideal; consequently, it is easier still to persuade ourselves that we have attained it when we have done nothing of the kind. To take a random example. It might be called a high ambition to wish to be an archangel; the man who entertained such an ideal would very possibly exhibit asceticism, or even frenzy, but not, I think, delusion. He would not think he was an archangel, and go about flapping his hands under the impression that they were wings. But suppose that a sane man had a low ideal; suppose he wished to be a gentleman. Any one who knows the world knows that in nine weeks he would have persuaded himself that he was a gentleman; and this being manifestly not the case, the result will be very real and practical dislocations and calamities in social life. It is not the wild ideals which wreck the practical world; it is the tame ideals.

The matter may, perhaps, be illustrated by a parallel from our modern politics. When men tell us that the old Liberal politicians of the type of Gladstone cared only for ideals, of course, they are talking nonsense — they cared for a great many other things, including votes. And when men tell us that modern politicians of the type of Mr. Chamberlain or, in another way, Lord Rosebery, care only for votes or for material interest, then again they are talking nonsense — these men care for ideals like all other men. But the real distinction which may be drawn is this, that to the older politician the ideal was an ideal, and nothing else. To the new politician his dream is not only a good dream, it is a reality. The old politician would have said, "It would be a good thing if there were a Republican Federation dominating the world." But the modern politician does not say, "It would be a good thing if there were a British Imperialism dominating the world." He says, "It is a good thing that there is a British Imperialism dominating the world;" whereas clearly there is nothing of the kind. The old Liberal would say "There ought to be a good Irish government in Ireland." But the ordinary modern Unionist does not say, "There ought to be a good English government in Ireland." He says, "There is a good English government in Ireland;" which is absurd. In short, the modern politicians seem to think that a man becomes practical merely by making assertions entirely about practical things. Apparently, a delusion does not matter as long as it is a materialistic delusion. Instinctively most of us feel that, as a practical matter, even the contrary is true. I certainly would much rather share my apartments with a gentleman who thought he was God than with a gentleman who thought he was a grasshopper. To be continually haunted by practical images and practical problems, to be constantly thinking of things as actual, as urgent, as in process of completion — these things do not prove a man to be practical; these things, indeed, are among the most ordinary signs of a lunatic. That our modern statesmen are materialistic is nothing against their being also morbid. Seeing angels in a vision may make a man a supernaturalist to excess. But merely seeing snakes in delirium tremens does not make him a naturalist.

And when we come actually to examine the main stock notions of our modern practical politicians, we find that those main stock notions are mainly delusions. A great many instances might be given of the fact. We might take, for example, the case of that strange class of notions which underlie the word "union," and all the eulogies heaped upon it. Of course, union is no more a good thing in itself than separation is a good thing in itself. To have a party in favour of union and a party in favour of separation is as absurd as to have a party in favour of going upstairs and a party in favour of going downstairs. The question is not whether we go up or down stairs, but where we are going to, and what we are going, for? Union is strength; union is also weakness. It is a good thing to harness two horses to a cart; but it is not a good thing to try and turn two hansom cabs into one four-wheeler. Turning ten nations into one empire may happen to be as feasible as turning ten shillings into one half-sovereign. Also it may happen to be as preposterous as turning ten terriers into one mastiff. The question in all cases is not a question of union or absence of union, but of identity or absence of identity. Owing to certain historical and moral causes, two nations may be so united as upon the whole to help each other. Thus England and Scotland pass their time in paying each other compliments; but their energies and atmospheres run distinct and parallel, and consequently do not clash. Scotland continues to be educated and Calvinistic; England continues to be uneducated and happy. But owing to certain other Moral and certain other political causes, two nations may be so united as only to hamper each other; their lines do clash and do not run parallel. Thus, for instance, England and Ireland are so united that the Irish can sometimes rule England, but can never rule Ireland. The educational systems, including the last Education Act, are here, as in the case of Scotland, a very good test of the matter. The overwhelming majority of Irishmen believe in a strict Catholicism; the overwhelming majority of Englishmen believe in a vague Protestantism. The Irish party in the Parliament of Union is just large enough to prevent the English education being indefinitely Protestant, and just small enough to prevent the Irish education being definitely Catholic. Here we have a state of things which no man in his senses would ever dream of wishing to continue if he had not been bewitched by the sentimentalism of the mere word “union.”

This example of union, however, is not the example which I propose to take of the ingrained futility and deception underlying all the assumptions of the modern practical politician. I wish to speak especially of another and much more general delusion. It pervades the minds and speeches of all the practical men of all parties; and it is a childish blunder built upon a single false metaphor. I refer to the universal modern talk about young nations and new nations; about America being young, about New Zealand being new. The whole thing is a trick of words. America is not young, New Zealand is not new. It is a very discussable question whether they are not both much older than England or Ireland.

Of course we may use the metaphor of youth about America or the colonies, if we use it strictly as implying only a recent origin. But if we use it (as we do use it) as implying vigour, or vivacity, or crudity, or inexperience, or hope, or a long life before them or any of the romantic attributes of youth, then it is surely as clear as daylight that we are duped by a stale figure of speech. We can easily see the matter clearly by applying it to any other institution parallel to the institution of an independent nationality. If a club called “The Milk and Soda League” (let us say) was set up yesterday, as I have no doubt it was, then, of course, “The Milk and Soda League” is a young club in the sense that it was set up yesterday, but in no other sense. It may consist entirely of moribund old gentlemen. It may be moribund itself. We may call it a young club, in the light of the fact that it was founded yesterday. We may also call it a very old club in the light of the fact that it will most probably go bankrupt to-morrow. All this appears very obvious when we put it in this form. Any one who adopted the young-community delusion with regard to a bank or a butcher’s shop would be sent to an asylum. But the whole modern political notion that America and the colonies must be very vigorous because they are very new, rests upon no better foundation. That America was founded long after England does not make it even in the faintest degree more probable that America will not perish a long time before England. That England existed before her colonies does not make it any the less likely that she will exist after her colonies. And when we look at the actual history of the world, we find that great European nations almost invariably have survived the vitality of their colonies. When we look at the actual history of the world, we find, that if there is a thing that is born old and dies young, it is a colony. The Greek colonies went to pieces long before the Greek civilization. The Spanish colonies have gone to pieces long before the nation of Spain — nor does there seem to be any reason to doubt the possibility or even the probability of the conclusion that the colonial civilization, which owes its origin to England, will be much briefer and much less vigorous than the civilization of England itself. The English nation will still be going the way of all European nations when the Anglo-Saxon race has gone the way of all fads. Now, of course, the interesting question is, have we, in the case of America and the colonies, any real evidence of a moral and intellectual youth as opposed to the indisputable triviality of a merely chronological youth? Consciously or unconsciously, we know that we have no such evidence, and consciously or unconsciously, therefore, we proceed to make it up. Of this pure and placid invention, a good example, for instance, can be found in a recent poem of Mr. Rudyard Kipling’s. Speaking of the English people and the South African War Mr. Kipling says that “we fawned on the younger nations for the men that could shoot and ride.” Some people considered this sentence insulting. All that I am concerned with at present is the evident fact that it is not true. The colonies provided very useful volunteer troops, but they did not provide the best troops, nor achieve the most successful exploits. The best work in the war on the English side was done, as might have been expected, by the best English regiments. The men who could shoot and ride were not the enthusiastic corn merchants from Melbourne, any more than they were the enthusiastic clerks from Cheapside. The men who could shoot and ride were the men who had been taught to shoot and ride in the discipline of the standing army of a great European power. Of course, the colonials are as brave and athletic as any other average white men. Of course, they acquitted themselves with reasonable credit. All I have here to indicate is that, for the purposes of this theory of the new nation, it is necessary to maintain that the colonial forces were more useful or more heroic than the gunners at Colenso or the Fighting Fifth. And of this contention there is not, and never has been, one stick or straw of evidence.

A similar attempt is made, and with even less success, to represent the literature of the colonies as something fresh and vigorous and important. The imperialist magazines are constantly springing upon us some genius from Queensland or Canada, through whom we are expected to smell the odours of the bush or the prairie. As a matter of fact, any one who is even slightly interested in literature as such (and I, for one, confess that I am only slightly interested in literature as such), will freely admit that the stories of these geniuses smell of nothing but printer’s ink, and that not of first-rate quality. By a great effort of Imperial imagination the generous English people reads into these works a force and a novelty. But the force and the novelty are not in the new writers; the force and the novelty are in the ancient heart of the English. Anybody who studies them impartially will know that the first-rate writers of the colonies are not even particularly novel in their note and atmosphere, are not only not producing a new kind of good literature, but are not even in any particular sense producing a new kind of bad literature. The first-rate writers of the new countries are really almost exactly like the second-rate writers of the old countries. Of course they do feel the mystery of the wilderness, the mystery of the bush, for all simple and honest men feel this in Melbourne, or Margate, or South St. Pancras. But when they write most sincerely and most successfully, it is not with a background of the mystery of the bush, but with a background, expressed or assumed, of our own romantic cockney civilization. What really moves their souls with a kindly terror is not the mystery of the wilderness, but the Mystery of a Hansom Cab.

Of course there are some exceptions to this generalization. The one really arresting exception is Olive Schreiner, and she is quite as certainly an exception that proves the rule. Olive Schreiner is a fierce, brilliant, and realistic novelist; but she is all this precisely because she is not English at all. Her tribal kinship is with the country of Teniers and Maarten Maartens — that is, with a country of realists. Her literary kinship is with the pessimistic fiction of the continent; with the novelists whose very pity is cruel. Olive Schreiner is the one English colonial who is not conventional, for the simple reason that South Africa is the one English colony which is not English, and probably never will be. And, of course, there are individual exceptions in a minor way. I remember in particular some Australian tales by Mr. McIlwain which were really able and effective, and which, for that reason, I suppose, are not presented to the public with blasts of a trumpet. But my general contention if put before any one with a love of letters, will not be disputed if it is understood. It is not the truth that the colonial civilization as a whole is giving us, or shows any signs of giving us, a literature which will startle and renovate our own. It may be a very good thing for us to have an affectionate illusion in the matter; that is quite another affair. The colonies may have given England a new emotion; I only say that they have not given the world a new book.

Touching these English colonies, I do not wish to be misunderstood. I do not say of them or of America that they have not a future, or that they will not be great nations. I merely deny the whole established modern expression about them. I deny that they are “destined” to a future. I deny that they are “destined” to be great nations. I deny (of course) that any human thing is destined to be anything. All the absurd physical metaphors, such as youth and age, living and dying, are, when applied to nations, but pseudo-scientific attempts to conceal from men the awful liberty of their lonely souls.

In the case of America, indeed, a warning to this effect is instant and essential. America, of course, like every other human thing, can in spiritual sense live or die as much as it chooses. But at the present moment the matter which America has very seriously to consider is not how near it is to its birth and beginning, but how near it may be to its end. It is only a verbal question whether the American civilization is young; it may become a very practical and urgent question whether it is dying. When once we have cast aside, as we inevitably have after a moment's thought, the fanciful physical metaphor involved in the word "youth," what serious evidence have we that America is a fresh force and not a stale one? It has a great many people, like China; it has a great deal of money, like defeated Carthage or dying Venice. It is full of bustle and excitability, like Athens after its ruin, and all the Greek cities in their decline. It is fond of new things; but the old are always fond of new things. Young men read chronicles, but old men read newspapers. It admires strength and good looks; it admires a big and barbaric beauty in its women, for instance; but so did Rome when the Goth was at the gates. All these are things quite compatible with fundamental tedium and decay. There are three main shapes or symbols in which a nation can show itself essentially glad and great — by the heroic in government, by the heroic in arms, and by the heroic in art. Beyond government, which is, as it were, the very shape and body of a nation, the most significant thing about any citizen is his artistic attitude towards a holiday and his moral attitude towards a fight — that is, his way of accepting life and his way of accepting death.

Subjected to these eternal tests, America does not appear by any means as particularly fresh or untouched. She appears with all the weakness and weariness of modern England or of any other Western power. In her politics she has broken up exactly as England has broken up, into a bewildering opportunism and insincerity. In the matter of war and the national attitude towards war, her resemblance to England is even more manifest and melancholy. It may be said with rough accuracy that there are three stages in the life of a strong people. First, it is a small power, and fights small powers. Then it is a great power, and fights great powers. Then it is a great power, and fights small powers, but pretends that they are great powers, in order to rekindle the ashes of its ancient emotion and vanity. After that, the next step is to become a small power itself. England exhibited this symptom of decadence very badly in the war with the Transvaal; but America exhibited it worse in the war with Spain. There was exhibited more sharply and absurdly than anywhere else the ironic contrast between the very careless choice of a strong line and the very careful choice of a weak enemy. America added to all her other late Roman or Byzantine elements the element of the Caracallan triumph, the triumph over nobody.

But when we come to the last test of nationality, the test of art and letters, the case is almost terrible. The English colonies have produced no great artists; and that fact may prove that they are still full of silent possibilities and reserve force. But America has produced great artists. And that fact most certainly proves that she is full of a fine futility and the end of all things. Whatever the American men of genius are, they are not young gods making a young world. Is the art of Whistler a brave, barbaric art, happy and headlong? Does Mr. Henry James infect us with the spirit of a schoolboy? No; the colonies have not spoken, and they are safe. Their silence may be the silence of the unborn. But out of America has come a sweet and startling cry, as unmistakable as the cry of a dying man.

XIX Slum Novelists and the Slums

Odd ideas are entertained in our time about the real nature of the doctrine of human fraternity. The real doctrine is something which we do not, with all our modern humanitarianism, very clearly understand, much less very closely practise. There is nothing, for instance, particularly undemocratic about kicking your butler downstairs. It may be wrong, but it is not unfraternal. In a certain sense, the blow or kick may be considered as a confession of equality: you are meeting your butler body to body; you are almost according him the privilege of the duel. There is nothing, undemocratic, though there may be something unreasonable, in expecting a great deal from the butler, and being filled with a kind of frenzy of surprise when he falls short of the divine stature. The thing which is really undemocratic and unfraternal is not to expect the butler to be more or less divine. The thing which is really undemocratic and unfraternal is to say, as so many modern humanitarians say, “Of course one must make allowances for those on a lower plane.” All things considered indeed, it may be said, without undue exaggeration, that the really undemocratic and unfraternal thing is the common practice of not kicking the butler downstairs.

It is only because such a vast section of the modern world is out of sympathy with the serious democratic sentiment that this statement will seem to many to be lacking in seriousness. Democracy is not philanthropy; it is not even altruism or social reform. Democracy is not founded on pity for the common man; democracy is founded on reverence for the common man, or, if you will, even on fear of him. It does not champion man because man is so miserable, but because man is so sublime. It does not object so much to the ordinary man being a slave as to his not being a king, for its dream is always the dream of the first Roman republic, a nation of kings.

Next to a genuine republic, the most democratic thing in the world is a hereditary despotism. I mean a despotism in which there is absolutely no trace whatever of any nonsense about intellect or special fitness for the post. Rational despotism — that is, selective despotism — is always a curse to mankind, because with that you have the ordinary man misunderstood and misgoverned by some prig who has no brotherly respect for him at all. But irrational despotism is always democratic, because it is the ordinary man enthroned. The worst form of slavery is that which is called Caesarism, or the choice of some bold or brilliant man as despot because he is suitable. For that means that men choose a representative, not because he represents them, but because he does not. Men trust an ordinary man like George III or William IV. because they are themselves ordinary men and understand him. Men trust an ordinary man because they trust themselves. But men trust a great man because they do not trust themselves. And hence the worship of great men always appears in times of weakness and cowardice; we never hear of great men until the time when all other men are small.

Hereditary despotism is, then, in essence and sentiment democratic because it chooses from mankind at random. If it does not declare that every man may rule, it declares the next most democratic thing; it declares that any man may rule. Hereditary aristocracy is a far worse and more dangerous thing, because the numbers and multiplicity of an aristocracy make it sometimes possible for it to figure as an aristocracy of intellect. Some of its members will presumably have brains, and thus they, at any rate, will be an intellectual aristocracy within the social one. They will rule the aristocracy by virtue of their intellect, and they will rule the country by virtue of their aristocracy. Thus a double falsity will be set up, and millions of the images of God, who, fortunately for their wives and families, are neither gentlemen nor clever men, will be represented by a man like Mr. Balfour or Mr. Wyndham, because he is too gentlemanly to be called merely clever, and just too clever to be called merely a gentleman. But even an hereditary aristocracy may exhibit, by a sort of accident, from time to time some of the basically democratic quality which belongs to a hereditary despotism. It is amusing to think how much conservative ingenuity has been wasted in the defence of the House of Lords by men who were desperately endeavouring to prove that the House of Lords consisted of clever men. There is one really good defence of the House of Lords, though admirers of the peerage are strangely coy about using it; and that is, that the House of Lords, in its full and proper strength, consists of stupid men. It really would be a plausible defence of that otherwise indefensible body to point out that the clever men in the Commons, who owed their power to cleverness, ought in the last resort to be checked by the average man in the Lords, who owed their power to accident. Of course, there would be many answers to such a contention, as, for instance, that the House of Lords is largely no longer a House of Lords, but a House of tradesmen and financiers, or that the bulk of the commonplace nobility do not vote, and so leave the chamber to the prigs and the specialists and the mad old gentlemen with hobbies. But on some occasions the House of Lords, even under all these disadvantages, is in some sense representative. When all the peers flocked together to vote against Mr. Gladstone's second Home Rule Bill, for instance, those who said that the peers represented the English people, were perfectly right. All those dear old men who happened to be born peers were at that moment, and upon that question, the precise counterpart of all the dear old men who happened to be born paupers or middle-class gentlemen. That mob of peers did really represent the English people — that is to say, it was honest, ignorant, vaguely excited, almost unanimous, and obviously wrong. Of course, rational democracy is better as an expression of the public will than the haphazard hereditary method. While we are about having any kind of democracy, let it be rational democracy. But if we are to have any kind of oligarchy, let it be irrational oligarchy. Then at least we shall be ruled by men.

But the thing which is really required for the proper working of democracy is not merely the democratic system, or even the democratic philosophy, but the democratic emotion. The democratic emotion, like most elementary and indispensable things, is a thing difficult to describe at any time. But it is peculiarly difficult to describe it in our enlightened age, for the simple reason that it is peculiarly difficult to find it. It is a certain instinctive attitude which feels the things in which all men agree to be unspeakably important, and all the things in which they differ (such as mere brains) to be almost unspeakably unimportant. The nearest approach to it in our ordinary life would be the promptitude with which we should consider mere humanity in any circumstance of shock or death. We should say, after a somewhat disturbing discovery, "There is a dead man under the sofa." We should not be likely to say, "There is a dead man of considerable personal refinement under the sofa." We should say, "A woman has fallen into the water." We should not say, "A highly educated woman has fallen into the water." Nobody would say, "There are the remains of a clear thinker in your back garden." Nobody would say, "Unless you hurry up and stop him, a man with a very fine ear for music will have jumped off that cliff." But this emotion, which all of us have in connection with such things as birth and death, is to some people native and constant at all ordinary times and in all ordinary places. It was native to St. Francis of Assisi. It was native to Walt Whitman. In this strange and splendid degree it cannot be expected, perhaps, to pervade a whole commonwealth or a whole civilization; but one commonwealth may have it much more than another commonwealth, one civilization much more than another civilization. No community, perhaps, ever had it so much as the early Franciscans. No community, perhaps, ever had it so little as ours.

Everything in our age has, when carefully examined, this fundamentally undemocratic quality. In religion and morals we should admit, in the abstract, that the sins of the educated classes were as great as, or perhaps greater than, the sins of the poor and ignorant. But in practice the great difference between the mediaeval ethics and ours is that ours concentrate attention on the sins which are the sins of the ignorant, and practically deny that the sins which are the sins of the educated are sins at all. We are always talking about the sin of intemperate drinking, because it is quite obvious that the poor have it more than the rich. But we are always denying that there is any such thing as the sin of pride, because it would be quite obvious that the rich have it more than the poor. We are always ready to make a saint or prophet of the educated man who goes into cottages to give a little kindly advice to the uneducated. But the medieval idea of a saint or prophet was something quite different. The mediaeval saint or prophet was an uneducated man who walked into grand houses to give a little kindly advice to the educated. The old tyrants had enough insolence to despoil the poor, but they had not enough insolence to preach to them. It was the gentleman who oppressed the slums; but it was the slums that admonished the gentleman. And just as we are undemocratic in faith and morals, so we are, by the very nature of our attitude in such matters, undemocratic in the tone of our practical politics. It is a sufficient proof that we are not an essentially democratic state that we are always wondering what we shall do with the poor. If we were democrats, we should be wondering what the poor will do with us. With us the governing class is always saying to itself, “What laws shall we make?” In a purely democratic state it would be always saying, “What laws can we obey?” A purely democratic state perhaps there has never been. But even the feudal ages were in practice thus far democratic, that every feudal potentate knew that any laws which he made would in all probability return upon himself. His feathers might be cut off for breaking a sumptuary law. His head might be cut off for high treason. But the modern laws are almost always laws made to affect the governed class, but not the governing. We have public-house licensing laws, but not sumptuary laws.

That is to say, we have laws against the festivity and hospitality of the poor, but no laws against the festivity and hospitality of the rich. We have laws against blasphemy — that is, against a kind of coarse and offensive speaking in which nobody but a rough and obscure man would be likely to indulge. But we have no laws against heresy — that is, against the intellectual poisoning of the whole people, in which only a prosperous and prominent man would be likely to be successful. The evil of aristocracy is not that it necessarily leads to the infliction of bad things or the suffering of sad ones; the evil of aristocracy is that it places everything in the hands of a class of people who can always inflict what they can never suffer. Whether what they inflict is, in their intention, good or bad, they become equally frivolous. The case against the governing class of modern England is not in the least that it is selfish; if you like, you may call the English oligarchs too fantastically unselfish. The case against them simply is that when they legislate for all men, they always omit themselves.

We are undemocratic, then, in our religion, as is proved by our efforts to “raise” the poor. We are undemocratic in our government, as is proved by our innocent attempt to govern them well. But above all we are undemocratic in our literature, as is proved by the torrent of novels about the poor and serious studies of the poor which pour from our publishers every month. And the more “modern” the book is the more certain it is to be devoid of democratic sentiment.

A poor man is a man who has not got much money. This may seem a simple and unnecessary description, but in the face of a great mass of modern fact and fiction, it seems very necessary indeed; most of our realists and sociologists talk about a poor man as if he were an octopus or an alligator. There is no more need to study the psychology of poverty than to study the psychology of bad temper, or the psychology of vanity, or the psychology of animal spirits. A man ought to know something of the emotions of an insulted man, not by being insulted, but simply by being a man. And he ought to know something of the emotions of a poor man, not by being poor, but simply by being a man. Therefore, in any writer who is describing poverty, my first objection to him will be that he has studied his subject. A democrat would have imagined it.

A great many hard things have been said about religious slumming and political or social slumming, but surely the most despicable of all is artistic slumming. The religious teacher is at least supposed to be interested in the costermonger because he is a man; the politician is in some dim and perverted sense interested in the costermonger because he is a citizen; it is only the wretched writer who is interested in the costermonger merely because he is a costermonger. Nevertheless, so long as he is merely seeking impressions, or in other words copy, his trade, though dull, is honest. But when he endeavours to represent that he is describing the spiritual core of a costermonger, his dim vices and his delicate virtues, then we must object that his claim is preposterous; we must remind him that he is a journalist and nothing else. He has far less psychological authority even than the foolish missionary. For he is in the literal and derivative sense a journalist, while the missionary is an eternalist. The missionary at least pretends to have a version of the man's lot for all time; the journalist only pretends to have a version of it from day to day. The missionary comes to tell the poor man that he is in the same condition with all men. The journalist comes to tell other people how different the poor man is from everybody else.

If the modern novels about the slums, such as novels of Mr. Arthur Morrison, or the exceedingly able novels of Mr. Somerset Maugham, are intended to be sensational, I can only say that that is a noble and reasonable object, and that they attain it. A sensation, a shock to the imagination, like the contact with cold water, is always a good and exhilarating thing; and, undoubtedly, men will always seek this sensation (among other forms) in the form of the study of the strange antics of remote or alien peoples. In the twelfth century men obtained this sensation by reading about dog-headed men in Africa. In the twentieth century they obtained it by reading about pig-headed Boers in Africa. The men of the twentieth century were certainly, it must be admitted, somewhat the more credulous of the two. For it is not recorded of the men in the twelfth century that they organized a sanguinary crusade solely for the purpose of altering the singular formation of the heads of the Africans. But it may be, and it may even legitimately be, that since all these monsters have faded from the popular mythology, it is necessary to have in our fiction the image of the horrible and hairy East-ender, merely to keep alive in us a fearful and childlike wonder at external peculiarities. But the Middle Ages (with a great deal more common sense than it would now be fashionable to admit) regarded natural history at bottom rather as a kind of joke; they regarded the soul as very important. Hence, while they had a natural history of dog-headed men, they did not profess to have a psychology of dog-headed men. They did not profess to mirror the mind of a dog-headed man, to share his tenderest secrets, or mount with his most celestial musings. They did not write novels about the semi-canine creature, attributing to him all the oldest morbidities and all the newest fads. It is permissible to present men as monsters if we wish to make the reader jump; and to make anybody jump is always a Christian act. But it is not permissible to present men as regarding themselves as monsters, or as making themselves jump. To summarize, our slum fiction is quite defensible as aesthetic fiction; it is not defensible as spiritual fact.

One enormous obstacle stands in the way of its actuality. The men who write it, and the men who read it, are men of the middle classes or the upper classes; at least, of those who are loosely termed the educated classes. Hence, the fact that it is the life as the refined man sees it proves that it cannot be the life as the unrefined man lives it. Rich men write stories about poor men, and describe them as speaking with a coarse, or heavy, or husky enunciation. But if poor men wrote novels about you or me they would describe us as speaking with some absurd shrill and affected voice, such as we only hear from a duchess in a three-act farce. The slum novelist gains his whole effect by the fact that some detail is strange to the reader; but that detail by the nature of the case cannot be strange in itself. It cannot be strange to the soul which he is professing to study. The slum novelist gains his effects by describing the same grey mist as draping the dingy factory and the dingy tavern. But to the man he is supposed to be studying there must be exactly the same difference between the factory and the tavern that there is to a middle-class man between a late night at the office and a supper at Pagani’s. The slum novelist is content with pointing out that to the eye of his particular class a pickaxe looks dirty and a pewter pot looks dirty. But the man he is supposed to be studying sees the difference between them exactly as a clerk sees the difference between a ledger and an edition de luxe. The chiaroscuro of the life is inevitably lost; for to us the high lights and the shadows are a light grey. But the high lights and the shadows are not a light grey in that life any more than in any other. The kind of man who could really express the pleasures of the poor would be also the kind of man who could share them. In short, these books are not a record of the psychology of poverty. They are a record of the psychology of wealth and culture when brought in contact with poverty. They are not a description of the state of the slums. They are only a very dark and dreadful description of the state of the slummers. One might give innumerable examples of the essentially unsympathetic and unpopular quality of these realistic writers. But perhaps the simplest and most obvious example with which we could conclude is the mere fact that these writers are realistic. The poor have many other vices, but, at least, they are never realistic. The poor are melodramatic and romantic in grain; the poor all believe in high moral platitudes and copy-book maxims; probably this is the ultimate meaning of the great saying, “Blessed are the poor.” Blessed are the poor, for they are always making life, or trying to make life like an Adelphi play. Some innocent educationalists and philanthropists (for even philanthropists can be innocent) have expressed a grave astonishment that the masses prefer shilling shockers to scientific treatises and melodramas to problem plays. The reason is very simple. The realistic story is certainly more artistic than the melodramatic story. If what you desire is deft handling, delicate proportions, a unit of artistic atmosphere, the realistic story has a full advantage over the melodrama. In everything that is light and bright and ornamental the realistic story has a full advantage over the melodrama. But, at least, the melodrama has one indisputable advantage over the realistic story. The melodrama is much more like life. It is much more like man, and especially the poor man. It is very banal and very inartistic when a poor woman at the Adelphi says, “Do you think I will sell my own child?” But poor women in the Battersea High Road do say, “Do you think I will sell my own child?” They say it on every available occasion; you can hear a sort of murmur or babble of it all the way down the street. It is very stale and weak dramatic art (if that is all) when the workman confronts his master and says, “I’m a man.” But a workman does say “I’m a man” two or three times every day. In fact, it is tedious, possibly, to hear poor men being melodramatic behind the footlights; but that is because one can always hear them being melodramatic in the street outside. In short, melodrama, if it is dull, is dull because it is too accurate. Somewhat the same problem exists in the case of stories about schoolboys. Mr. Kipling’s “Stalky and Co.” is much more amusing (if you are talking about amusement) than the late Dean Farrar’s “Eric; or, Little by Little.” But “Eric” is immeasurably more like real school-life. For real school-life, real boyhood, is full of the things of which Eric is full — priggishness, a crude piety, a silly sin, a weak but continual attempt at the heroic, in a word, melodrama. And if we wish to lay a firm basis for any efforts to help the poor, we must not become realistic and see them from the outside. We must become melodramatic, and see them from the inside. The novelist must not take out his notebook and say, “I am an expert.” No; he must imitate the workman in the Adelphi play. He must slap himself on the chest and say, “I am a man.”

XX. Concluding Remarks on the Importance of Orthodoxy

Whether the human mind can advance or not, is a question too little discussed, for nothing can be more dangerous than to found our social philosophy on any theory which is debatable but has not been debated. But if we assume, for the sake of argument, that there has been in the past, or will be in the future, such a thing as a growth or improvement of the human mind itself, there still remains a very sharp objection to be raised against the modern version of that improvement. The vice of the modern notion of mental progress is that it is always something concerned with the breaking of bonds, the effacing of boundaries, the casting away of dogmas. But if there be such a thing as mental growth, it must mean the growth into more and more definite convictions, into more and more dogmas. The human brain is a machine for coming to conclusions; if it cannot come to conclusions it is rusty. When we hear of a man too clever to believe, we are hearing of something having almost the character of a contradiction in terms. It is like hearing of a nail that was too good to hold down a carpet; or a bolt that was too strong to keep a door shut. Man can hardly be defined, after the fashion of Carlyle, as an animal who makes tools; ants and beavers and many other animals make tools, in the sense that they make an apparatus. Man can be defined as an animal that makes dogmas. As he piles doctrine on doctrine and conclusion on conclusion in the formation of some tremendous scheme of philosophy and religion, he is, in the only legitimate sense of which the expression is capable, becoming more and more human. When he drops one doctrine after another in a refined scepticism, when he declines to tie himself to a system, when he says that he has outgrown definitions, when he says that he disbelieves in finality, when, in his own imagination, he sits as God, holding no form of creed but contemplating all, then he is by that very process sinking slowly backwards into the vagueness of the vagrant animals and the unconsciousness of the grass. Trees have no dogmas. Turnips are singularly broad-minded.

If then, I repeat, there is to be mental advance, it must be mental advance in the construction of a definite philosophy of life. And that philosophy of life must be right and the other philosophies wrong. Now of all, or nearly all, the able modern writers whom I have briefly studied in this book, this is especially and pleasingly true, that they do each of them have a constructive and affirmative view, and that they do take it seriously and ask us to take it seriously. There is nothing merely sceptically progressive about Mr. Rudyard Kipling. There is nothing in the least broad minded about Mr. Bernard Shaw. The paganism of Mr. Lowes Dickinson is more grave than any Christianity. Even the opportunism of Mr. H. G. Wells is more dogmatic than the idealism of anybody else. Somebody complained, I think, to Matthew Arnold that he was getting as dogmatic as Carlyle. He replied, “That may be true; but you overlook an obvious difference. I am dogmatic and right, and Carlyle is dogmatic and wrong.” The strong humour of the remark ought not to disguise from us its everlasting seriousness and common sense; no man ought to write at all, or even to speak at all, unless he thinks that he is in truth and the other man in error. In similar style, I hold that I am dogmatic and right, while Mr. Shaw is dogmatic and wrong. But my main point, at present, is to notice that the chief among these writers I have discussed do most sanely and courageously offer themselves as dogmatists, as founders of a system. It may be true that the thing in Mr. Shaw most interesting to me, is the fact that Mr. Shaw is wrong. But it is equally true that the thing in Mr. Shaw most interesting to himself, is the fact that Mr. Shaw is right. Mr. Shaw may have none with him but himself; but it is not for himself he cares. It is for the vast and universal church, of which he is the only member.

The two typical men of genius whom I have mentioned here, and with whose names I have begun this book, are very symbolic, if only because they have shown that the fiercest dogmatists can make the best artists. In the fin de siecle atmosphere every one was crying out that literature should be free from all causes and all ethical creeds. Art was to produce only exquisite workmanship, and it was especially the note of those days to demand brilliant plays and brilliant short stories. And when they got them, they got them from a couple of moralists. The best short stories were written by a man trying to preach Imperialism. The best plays were written by a man trying to preach Socialism. All the art of all the artists looked tiny and tedious beside the art which was a byproduct of propaganda.

The reason, indeed, is very simple. A man cannot be wise enough to be a great artist without being wise enough to wish to be a philosopher. A man cannot have the energy to produce good art without having the energy to wish to pass beyond it. A small artist is content with art; a great artist is content with nothing except everything. So we find that when real forces, good or bad, like Kipling and G. B. S., enter our arena, they bring with them not only startling and arresting art, but very startling and arresting dogmas. And they care even more, and desire us to care even more, about their startling and arresting dogmas than about their startling and arresting art. Mr. Shaw is a good dramatist, but what he desires more than anything else to be is a good politician. Mr. Rudyard Kipling is by divine caprice and natural genius an unconventional poet; but what he desires more than anything else to be is a conventional poet. He desires to be the poet of his people, bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh, understanding their origins, celebrating their destiny. He desires to be Poet Laureate, a most sensible and honourable and public-spirited desire. Having been given by the gods originality — that is, disagreement with others — he desires divinely to agree with them. But the most striking instance of all, more striking, I think, even than either of these, is the instance of Mr. H. G. Wells. He began in a sort of insane infancy of pure art. He began by making a new heaven and a new earth, with the same irresponsible instinct by which men buy a new necktie or button-hole. He began by trifling with the stars and systems in order to make ephemeral anecdotes; he killed the universe for a joke. He has since become more and more serious, and has become, as men inevitably do when they become more and more serious, more and more parochial. He was frivolous about the twilight of the gods; but he is serious about the London omnibus. He was careless in “The Time Machine,” for that dealt only with the destiny of all things; but he is careful, and even cautious, in “Mankind in the Making,” for that deals with the day after to-morrow. He began with the end of the world, and that was easy. Now he has gone on to the beginning of the world, and that is difficult. But the main result of all this is the same as in the other cases. The men who have really been the bold artists, the realistic artists, the uncompromising artists, are the men who have turned out, after all, to be writing “with a purpose.” Suppose that any cool and cynical art-critic, any art-critic fully impressed with the conviction that artists were greatest when they were most purely artistic, suppose that a man who professed ably a humane aestheticism, as did Mr. Max Beerbohm, or a cruel aestheticism, as did Mr. W. E. Henley, had cast his eye over the whole fictional literature which was recent in the year 1895, and had been asked to select the three most vigorous and promising and original artists and artistic works, he would, I think, most certainly have said that for a fine artistic audacity, for a real artistic delicacy, or for a whiff of true novelty in art, the things that stood first were “Soldiers Three,” by a Mr. Rudyard Kipling; “Arms and the Man,” by a Mr. Bernard Shaw; and “The Time Machine,” by a man called Wells. And all these men have shown themselves ingrainedly didactic. You may express the matter if you will by saying that if we want doctrines we go to the great artists. But it is clear from the psychology of the matter that this is not the true statement; the true statement is that when we want any art tolerably brisk and bold we have to go to the doctrinaires.

In concluding this book, therefore, I would ask, first and foremost, that men such as these of whom I have spoken should not be insulted by being taken for artists. No man has any right whatever merely to enjoy the work of Mr. Bernard Shaw; he might as well enjoy the invasion of his country by the French. Mr. Shaw writes either to convince or to enrage us. No man has any business to be a Kiplingite without being a politician, and an Imperialist politician. If a man is first with us, it should be because of what is first with him. If a man convinces us at all, it should be by his convictions. If we hate a poem of Kipling’s from political passion, we are hating it for the same reason that the poet loved it; if we dislike him because of his opinions, we are disliking him for the best of all possible reasons. If a man comes into Hyde Park to preach it is permissible to hoot him; but it is discourteous to applaud him as a performing bear. And an artist is only a performing bear compared with the meanest man who fancies he has anything to say.

There is, indeed, one class of modern writers and thinkers who cannot altogether be overlooked in this question, though there is no space here for a lengthy account of them, which, indeed, to confess the truth, would consist chiefly of abuse. I mean those who get over all these abysses and reconcile all these wars by talking about “aspects of truth,” by saying that the art of Kipling represents one aspect of the truth, and the art of William Watson another; the art of Mr. Bernard Shaw one aspect of the truth, and the art of Mr. Cunningham Grahame another; the art of Mr. H. G. Wells one aspect, and the art of Mr. Coventry Patmore (say) another. I will only say here that this seems to me an evasion which has not even had the sense to disguise itself ingeniously in words. If we talk of a certain thing being an aspect of truth, it is evident that we claim to know what is truth; just as, if we talk of the hind leg of a dog, we claim to know what is a dog. Unfortunately, the philosopher who talks about aspects of truth generally also asks, “What is truth?” Frequently even he denies the existence of truth, or says it is inconceivable by the human intelligence. How, then, can he recognize its aspects? I should not like to be an artist who brought an architectural sketch to a builder, saying, “This is the south aspect of Sea-View Cottage. Sea-View Cottage, of course, does not exist.” I should not even like very much to have to explain, under such circumstances, that Sea-View Cottage might exist, but was unthinkable by the human mind. Nor should I like any better to be the bungling and absurd metaphysician who professed to be able to see everywhere the aspects of a truth that is not there. Of course, it is perfectly obvious that there are truths in Kipling, that there are truths in Shaw or Wells. But the degree to which we can perceive them depends strictly upon how far we have a definite conception inside us of what is truth. It is ludicrous to suppose that the more sceptical we are the more we see good in everything. It is clear that the more we are certain what good is, the more we shall see good in everything.

I plead, then, that we should agree or disagree with these men. I plead that we should agree with them at least in having an abstract belief. But I know that there are current in the modern world many vague objections to having an abstract belief, and I feel that we shall not get any further until we have dealt with some of them. The first objection is easily stated.

A common hesitation in our day touching the use of extreme convictions is a sort of notion that extreme convictions specially upon cosmic matters, have been responsible in the past for the thing which is called bigotry. But a very small amount of direct experience will dissipate this view. In real life the people who are most bigoted are the people who have no convictions at all. The economists of the Manchester school who disagree with Socialism take Socialism seriously. It is the young man in Bond Street, who does not know what socialism means much less whether he agrees with it, who is quite certain that these socialist fellows are making a fuss about nothing. The man who understands the Calvinist philosophy enough to agree with it must understand the Catholic philosophy in order to disagree with it. It is the vague modern who is not at all certain what is right who is most certain that Dante was wrong. The serious opponent of the Latin Church in history, even in the act of showing that it produced great infamies, must know that it produced great saints. It is the hard-headed stockbroker, who knows no history and believes no religion, who is, nevertheless, perfectly convinced that all these priests are knaves. The Salvationist at the Marble Arch may be bigoted, but he is not too bigoted to yearn from a common human kinship after the dandy on church parade. But the dandy on church parade is so bigoted that he does not in the least yearn after the Salvationist at the Marble Arch. Bigotry may be roughly defined as the anger of men who have no opinions. It is the resistance offered to definite ideas by that vague bulk of people whose ideas are indefinite to excess. Bigotry may be called the appalling frenzy of the indifferent. This frenzy of the indifferent is in truth a terrible thing; it has made all monstrous and widely pervading persecutions. In this degree it was not the people who cared who ever persecuted; the people who cared were not sufficiently numerous. It was the people who did not care who filled the world with fire and oppression. It was the hands of the indifferent that lit the faggots; it was the hands of the indifferent that turned the rack. There have come some persecutions out of the pain of a passionate certainty; but these produced, not bigotry, but fanaticism — a very different and a somewhat admirable thing. Bigotry in the main has always been the pervading omnipotence of those who do not care crushing out those who care in darkness and blood.

There are people, however, who dig somewhat deeper than this into the possible evils of dogma. It is felt by many that strong philosophical conviction, while it does not (as they perceive) produce that sluggish and fundamentally frivolous condition which we call bigotry, does produce a certain concentration, exaggeration, and moral impatience, which we may agree to call fanaticism. They say, in brief, that ideas are dangerous things. In politics, for example, it is commonly urged against a man like Mr. Balfour, or against a man like Mr. John Morley, that a wealth of ideas is dangerous. The true doctrine on this point, again, is surely not very difficult to state. Ideas are dangerous, but the man to whom they are least dangerous is the man of ideas. He is acquainted with ideas, and moves among them like a lion-tamer. Ideas are dangerous, but the man to whom they are most dangerous is the man of no ideas. The man of no ideas will find the first idea fly to his head like wine to the head of a teetotaller. It is a common error, I think, among the Radical idealists of my own party and period to suggest that financiers and business men are a danger to the empire because they are so sordid or so materialistic. The truth is that financiers and business men are a danger to the empire because they can be sentimental about any sentiment, and idealistic about any ideal, any ideal that they find lying about. just as a boy who has not known much of women is apt too easily to take a woman for the woman, so these practical men, unaccustomed to causes, are always inclined to think that if a thing is proved to be an ideal it is proved to be the ideal. Many, for example, avowedly followed Cecil Rhodes because he had a vision. They might as well have followed him because he had a nose; a man without some kind of dream of perfection is quite as much of a monstrosity as a noseless man. People say of such a figure, in almost feverish whispers, “He knows his own mind,” which is exactly like saying in equally feverish whispers, “He blows his own nose.” Human nature simply cannot subsist without a hope and aim of some kind; as the sanity of the Old Testament truly said, where there is no vision the people perisheth. But it is precisely because an ideal is necessary to man that the man without ideals is in permanent danger of fanaticism. There is nothing which is so likely to leave a man open to the sudden and irresistible inroad of an unbalanced vision as the cultivation of business habits. All of us know angular business men who think that the earth is flat, or that Mr. Kruger was at the head of a great military despotism, or that men are graminivorous, or that Bacon wrote Shakespeare. Religious and philosophical beliefs are, indeed, as dangerous as fire, and nothing can take from them that beauty of danger. But there is only one way of really guarding ourselves against the excessive danger of them, and that is to be steeped in philosophy and soaked in religion.

Briefly, then, we dismiss the two opposite dangers of bigotry and fanaticism, bigotry which is a too great vagueness and fanaticism which is a too great concentration. We say that the cure for the bigot is belief; we say that the cure for the idealist is ideas. To know the best theories of existence and to choose the best from them (that is, to the best of our own strong conviction) appears to us the proper way to be neither bigot nor fanatic, but something more firm than a bigot and more terrible than a fanatic, a man with a definite opinion. But that definite opinion must in this view begin with the basic matters of human thought, and these must not be dismissed as irrelevant, as religion, for instance, is too often in our days dismissed as irrelevant. Even if we think religion insoluble, we cannot think it irrelevant. Even if we ourselves have no view of the ultimate verities, we must feel that wherever such a view exists in a man it must be more important than anything else in him. The instant that the thing ceases to be the unknowable, it becomes the indispensable. There can be no doubt, I think, that the idea does exist in our time that there is something narrow or irrelevant or even mean about attacking a man's religion, or arguing from it in matters of politics or ethics. There can be quite as little doubt that such an accusation of narrowness is itself almost grotesquely narrow. To take an example from comparatively current events: we all know that it was not uncommon for a man to be considered a scarecrow of bigotry and obscurantism because he distrusted the Japanese, or lamented the rise of the Japanese, on the ground that the Japanese were Pagans. Nobody would think that there was anything antiquated or fanatical about distrusting a people because of some difference between them and us in practice or political machinery. Nobody would think it bigoted to say of a people, "I distrust their influence because they are Protectionists." No one would think it narrow to say, "I lament their rise because they are Socialists, or Manchester Individualists, or strong believers in militarism and conscription." A difference of opinion about the nature of Parliaments matters very much; but a difference of opinion about the nature of sin does not matter at all. A difference of opinion about the object of taxation matters very much; but a difference of opinion about the object of human existence does not matter at all. We have a right to distrust a man who is in a different kind of municipality; but we have no right to mistrust a man who is in a different kind of cosmos. This sort of enlightenment is surely about the most unenlightened that it is possible to imagine. To recur to the phrase which I employed earlier, this is tantamount to saying that everything is important with the exception of everything. Religion is exactly the thing which cannot be left out — because it includes everything. The most absent-minded person cannot well pack his Gladstone-bag and leave out the bag. We have a general view of existence, whether we like it or not; it alters or, to speak more accurately, it creates and involves everything we say or do, whether we like it or not. If we regard the Cosmos as a dream, we regard the Fiscal Question as a dream. If we regard the Cosmos as a joke, we regard St. Paul's Cathedral as a joke. If everything is bad, then we must believe (if it be possible) that beer is bad; if everything be good, we are forced to the rather fantastic conclusion that scientific philanthropy is good. Every man in the street must hold a metaphysical system, and hold it firmly. The possibility is that he may have held it so firmly and so long as to have forgotten all about its existence.

This latter situation is certainly possible; in fact, it is the situation of the whole modern world. The modern world is filled with men who hold dogmas so strongly that they do not even know that they are dogmas. It may be said even that the modern world, as a corporate body, holds certain dogmas so strongly that it does not know that they are dogmas. It may be thought "dogmatic," for instance, in some circles accounted progressive, to assume the perfection or improvement of man in another world. But it is not thought "dogmatic" to assume the perfection or improvement of man in this world; though that idea of progress is quite as unproved as the idea of immortality, and from a rationalistic point of view quite as improbable. Progress happens to be one of our dogmas, and a dogma means a thing which is not thought dogmatic. Or, again, we see nothing "dogmatic" in the inspiring, but certainly most startling, theory of physical science, that we should collect facts for the sake of facts, even though they seem as useless as sticks and straws. This is a great and suggestive idea, and its utility may, if you will, be proving itself, but its utility is, in the abstract, quite as disputable as the utility of that calling on oracles or consulting shrines which is also said to prove itself. Thus, because we are not in a civilization which believes strongly in oracles or sacred places, we see the full frenzy of those who killed themselves to find the sepulchre of Christ. But being in a civilization which does believe in this dogma of fact for facts' sake, we do not see the full frenzy of those who kill themselves to find the North Pole. I am not speaking of a tenable ultimate utility which is true both of the Crusades and the polar explorations. I mean merely that we do see the superficial and aesthetic singularity, the startling quality, about the idea of men crossing a continent with armies to conquer the place where a man died. But we do not see the aesthetic singularity and startling quality of men dying in agonies to find a place where no man can live — a place only interesting because it is supposed to be the meeting-place of some lines that do not exist.

Let us, then, go upon a long journey and enter on a dreadful search. Let us, at least, dig and seek till we have discovered our own opinions. The dogmas we really hold are far more fantastic, and, perhaps, far more beautiful than we think. In the course of these essays I fear that I have spoken from time to time of rationalists and rationalism, and that in a disparaging sense. Being full of that kindliness which should come at the end of everything, even of a book, I apologize to the rationalists even for calling them rationalists. There are no rationalists. We all believe fairy-tales, and live in them. Some, with a sumptuous literary turn, believe in the existence of the lady clothed with the sun. Some, with a more rustic, elvish instinct, like Mr. McCabe, believe merely in the impossible sun itself. Some hold the undemonstrable dogma of the existence of God; some the equally undemonstrable dogma of the existence of the man next door.

Truths turn into dogmas the instant that they are disputed. Thus every man who utters a doubt defines a religion. And the scepticism of our time does not really destroy the beliefs, rather it creates them; gives them their limits and their plain and defiant shape. We who are Liberals once held Liberalism lightly as a truism. Now it has been disputed, and we hold it fiercely as a faith. We who believe in patriotism once thought patriotism to be reasonable, and thought little more about it. Now we know it to be unreasonable, and know it to be right. We who are Christians never knew the great philosophic common sense which inheres in that mystery until the anti-Christian writers pointed it out to us. The great march of mental destruction will go on. Everything will be denied. Everything will become a creed. It is a reasonable position to deny the stones in the street; it will be a religious dogma to assert them. It is a rational thesis that we are all in a dream; it will be a mystical sanity to say that we are all awake. Fires will be kindled to testify that two and two make four. Swords will be drawn to prove that leaves are green in summer. We shall be left defending, not only the incredible virtues and sanities of human life, but something more incredible still, this huge impossible universe which stares us in the face. We shall fight for visible prodigies as if they were invisible. We shall look on the impossible grass and the skies with a strange courage. We shall be of those who have seen and yet have believed.

THE END

VARIED TYPES

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CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Objection is often raised against realistic biography because it reveals so much that is important and even sacred about a man's life. The real objection to it will rather be found in the fact that it reveals about a man the precise points which are unimportant. It reveals and asserts and insists on exactly those things in a man's life of which the man himself is wholly unconscious; his exact class in society, the circumstances of his ancestry, the place of his present location. These are things which do not, properly speaking, ever arise before the human vision. They do not occur to a man's mind; it may be said, with almost equal truth, that they do not occur in a man's life. A man no more thinks about himself as the inhabitant of the third house in a row of Brixton villas than he thinks about himself as a strange animal with two legs. What a man's name was, what his income was, whom he married, where he lived, these are not sanctities; they are irrelevancies.

A very strong case of this is the case of the Brontës. The Brontë is in the position of the mad lady in a country village; her eccentricities form an endless source of innocent conversation to that exceedingly mild and bucolic circle, the literary world. The truly glorious gossips of literature, like Mr. Augustine Birrell and Mr. Andrew Lang, never tire of collecting all the glimpses and anecdotes and sermons and side-lights and sticks and straws which will go to make a Brontë museum. They are the most personally discussed of all Victorian authors, and the limelight of biography has left few darkened corners in the dark old Yorkshire house. And yet the whole of this biographical investigation, though natural and picturesque, is not wholly suitable to the Brontës. For the Brontë genius was above all things deputed to assert the supreme unimportance of externals. Up to that point truth had always been conceived as existing more or less in the novel of manners. Charlotte Brontë electrified the world by showing that an infinitely older and more elemental truth could be conveyed by a novel in which no person, good or bad, had any manners at all. Her work represents the first great assertion that the humdrum life of modern civilisation is a disguise as tawdry and deceptive as the costume of a *bal masqué*. She showed that abysses may exist inside a governess and eternities inside a manufacturer; her heroine is the commonplace spinster, with the dress of merino and the soul of flame. It is significant to notice that Charlotte Brontë, following consciously or unconsciously the great trend of her genius, was the first to take away from the heroine not only the artificial gold and diamonds of wealth and fashion, but even the natural gold and diamonds of physical beauty and grace. Instinctively she felt that the whole of the exterior must be made ugly that the whole of the interior might be made sublime. She chose the ugliest of women in the ugliest of centuries, and revealed within them all the hells and heavens of Dante.

It may, therefore, I think, be legitimately said that the externals of the Brontës' life, though singularly picturesque in themselves, matter less than the externals of almost any other writers. It is interesting to know whether Jane Austen had any knowledge of the lives of the officers and women of fashion whom she introduced into her masterpieces. It is interesting to know whether Dickens had ever seen a shipwreck or been inside a workhouse. For in these authors much of the conviction is conveyed, not always by adherence to facts, but always by grasp of them. But the whole aim and purport and meaning of the work of the Brontës is that the most futile thing in the whole universe is fact. Such a story as "Jane Eyre" is in itself so monstrous a fable that it ought to be excluded from a book of fairy tales. The characters do not do what they ought to do, nor what they would do, nor it might be said, such is the insanity of the atmosphere, not even what they intend to do. The conduct of Rochester is so primevally and superhumanly caddish that Bret Harte in his admirable travesty scarcely exaggerated it. "Then, resuming his usual manner, he threw his boots at my head and withdrew," does perhaps reach to something resembling caricature. The scene in which Rochester dresses up as an old gipsy has something in it which is really not to be found in any other branch of art, except in the end of the pantomime, where the Emperor turns into a pantaloon. Yet, despite this vast nightmare of illusion and morbidity and ignorance of the world, "Jane Eyre" is perhaps the truest book that was ever written. Its essential truth to life sometimes makes one catch one's breath. For it is not true to manners, which are constantly false, or to facts, which are almost always false; it is true to the only existing thing which is true, emotion, the irreducible minimum, the indestructible germ. It would not matter a single straw if a Brontë story were a hundred times more moonstruck and improbable than "Jane Eyre," or a hundred times more moonstruck and improbable than "Wuthering Heights." It would not matter if George Read stood on his head, and Mrs. Read rode on a dragon, if Fairfax Rochester had four eyes and St. John Rivers three legs, the story would still remain the truest story in the world. The typical Brontë character is, indeed, a kind of monster. Everything in him except the essential is dislocated. His hands are on his legs and his feet on his arms, his nose is above his eyes, but his heart is in the right place.

The great and abiding truth for which the Brontë cycle of fiction stands is a certain most important truth about the enduring spirit of youth, the truth of the near kinship between terror and joy. The Brontë heroine, dingily dressed, badly educated, hampered by a humiliating inexperience, a kind of ugly innocence, is yet, by the very fact of her solitude and her gaucherie, full of the greatest delight that is possible to a human being, the delight of expectation, the delight of an ardent and flamboyant ignorance. She serves to show how futile it is of humanity to suppose that pleasure can be attained chiefly by putting on evening dress every evening, and having a box at the theatre every first night. It is not the man of pleasure who has pleasure; it is not the man of the world who appreciates the world. The man who has learnt to do all conventional things perfectly has at the same time learnt to do them prosaically. It is the awkward man, whose evening dress does not fit him, whose gloves will not go on, whose compliments will not come off, who is really full of the ancient ecstasies of youth. He is frightened enough of society actually to enjoy his triumphs. He has that element of fear which is one of the eternal ingredients of joy. This spirit is the central spirit of the Brontë novel. It is the epic of the exhilaration of the shy man. As such it is of incalculable value in our time, of which the curse is that it does not take joy reverently because it does not take it fearfully. The shabby and inconspicuous governess of Charlotte Brontë, with the small outlook and the small creed, had more commerce with the awful and elemental forces which drive the world than a legion of lawless minor poets. She approached the universe with real simplicity, and, consequently, with real fear and delight. She was, so to speak, shy before the multitude of the stars, and in this she had possessed herself of the only force which can prevent enjoyment being as black and barren as routine. The faculty of being shy is the first and the most delicate of the powers of enjoyment. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of pleasure.

Upon the whole, therefore, I think it may justifiably be said that the dark wild youth of the Brontës in their dark wild Yorkshire home has been somewhat exaggerated as a necessary factor in their work and their conception. The emotions with which they dealt were universal emotions, emotions of the morning of existence, the springtide joy and the springtide terror. Every one of us as a boy or girl has had some midnight dream of nameless obstacle and unutterable menace, in which there was, under whatever imbecile forms, all the deadly stress and panic of “Wuthering Heights.” Every one of us has had a day-dream of our own potential destiny not one atom more reasonable than “Jane Eyre.” And the truth which the Brontës came to tell us is the truth that many waters cannot quench love, and that suburban respectability cannot touch or damp a secret enthusiasm. Clapham, like every other earthly city, is built upon a volcano. Thousands of people go to and fro in the wilderness of bricks and mortar, earning mean wages, professing a mean religion, wearing a mean attire, thousands of women who have never found any expression for their exaltation or their tragedy but to go on working harder and yet harder at dull and automatic employments, at scolding children or stitching shirts. But out of all these silent ones one suddenly became articulate, and spoke a resonant testimony, and her name was Charlotte Brontë. Spreading around us upon every side to-day like a huge and radiating geometrical figure are the endless branches of the great city. There are times when we are almost stricken crazy, as well we may be, by the multiplicity of those appalling perspectives, the frantic arithmetic of that unthinkable population. But this thought of ours is in truth nothing but a fancy. There are no chains of houses; there are no crowds of men. The colossal diagram of streets and houses is an illusion, the opium dream of a speculative builder. Each of these men is supremely solitary and supremely important to himself. Each of these houses stands in the centre of the world. There is no single house of all those millions which has not seemed to someone at some time the heart of all things and the end of travel.

WILLIAM MORRIS AND HIS SCHOOL

It is proper enough that the unveiling of the bust of William Morris should approximate to a public festival, for while there have been many men of genius in the Victorian era more despotic than he, there have been none so representative. He represents not only that rapacious hunger for beauty which has now for the first time become a serious problem in the healthy life of humanity, but he represents also that honourable instinct for finding beauty in common necessities of workmanship which gives it a stronger and more bony structure. The time has passed when William Morris was conceived to be irrelevant to be described as a designer of wall-papers. If Morris had been a hatter instead of a decorator, we should have become gradually and painfully conscious of an improvement in our hats. If he had been a tailor, we should have suddenly found our frock-coats trailing on the ground with the grandeur of mediæval raiment. If he had been a shoemaker, we should have found, with no little consternation, our shoes gradually approximating to the antique sandal. As a hairdresser, he would have invented some massing of the hair worthy to be the crown of Venus; as an ironmonger, his nails would have had some noble pattern, fit to be the nails of the Cross.

The limitations of William Morris, whatever they were, were not the limitations of common decoration. It is true that all his work, even his literary work, was in some sense decorative, had in some degree the qualities of a splendid wall-paper. His characters, his stories, his religious and political views, had, in the most emphatic sense, length and breadth without thickness. He seemed really to believe that men could enjoy a perfectly flat felicity. He made no account of the unexplored and explosive possibilities of human nature, of the unnameable terrors, and the yet more unnameable hopes. So long as a man was graceful in every circumstance, so long as he had the inspiring consciousness that the chestnut colour of his hair was relieved against the blue forest a mile behind, he would be serenely happy. So he would be, no doubt, if he were really fitted for a decorative existence; if he were a piece of exquisitely coloured card-board.

But although Morris took little account of the terrible solidity of human nature — took little account, so to speak, of human figures in the round, it is altogether unfair to represent him as a mere æsthete. He perceived a great public necessity and fulfilled it heroically. The difficulty with which he grappled was one so immense that we shall have to be separated from it by many centuries before we can really judge of it. It was the problem of the elaborate and deliberate ugliness of the most self-conscious of centuries. Morris at least saw the absurdity of the thing. He felt it was monstrous that the modern man, who was pre-eminently capable of realising the strangest and most contradictory beauties, who could feel at once the fiery aureole of the ascetic and the colossal calm of the Hellenic god, should himself, by a farcical bathos, be buried in a black coat, and hidden under a chimney-pot hat. He could not see why the harmless man who desired to be an artist in raiment should be condemned to be, at best, a black and white artist. It is indeed difficult to account for the clinging curse of ugliness which blights everything brought forth by the most prosperous of centuries. In all created nature there is not, perhaps, anything so completely ugly as a pillar-box. Its shape is the most unmeaning of shapes, its height and thickness just neutralising each other; its colour is the most repulsive of colours — a fat and soulless red, a red without a touch of blood or fire, like the scarlet of dead men’s sins. Yet there is no reason whatever why such hideousness should possess an object full of civic dignity, the treasure-house of a thousand secrets, the fortress of a thousand souls. If the old Greeks had had such an institution, we may be sure that it would have been surmounted by the severe, but graceful, figure of the god of letter-writing. If the mediæval Christians has possessed it, it would have had a niche filled with the golden aureole of St. Rowland of the Postage Stamps. As it is, there it stands at all our street-corners, disguising one of the most beautiful of ideas under one of the most preposterous of forms. It is useless to deny that the miracles of science have not been such an incentive to art and imagination as were the miracles of religion. If men in the twelfth century had been told that the lightning had been driven for leagues underground, and had dragged at its destroying tail loads of laughing human beings, and if they had then been told that the people alluded to this pulverising portent chirpily as “The Twopenny Tube,” they would have called down the fire of Heaven on us as a race of half-witted atheists. Probably they would have been quite right.

This clear and fine perception of what may be called the anæsthetic element in the Victorian era was, undoubtedly, the work of a great reformer: it requires a fine effort of the imagination to see an evil that surrounds us on every side. The manner in which Morris carried out his crusade may, considering the circumstances, be called triumphant. Our carpets began to bloom under our feet like the meadows in spring, and our hitherto prosaic stools and sofas seemed growing legs and arms at their own wild will. An element of freedom and rugged dignity came in with plain and strong ornaments of copper and iron. So delicate and universal has been the revolution in domestic art that almost every family in England has had its taste cunningly and treacherously improved, and if we look back at the early Victorian drawing-rooms it is only to realise the strange but essential truth that art, or human decoration, has, nine times out of ten in history, made things uglier than they were before, from the "coiffure" of a Papuan savage to the wall-paper of a British merchant in 1830.

But great and beneficent as was the æsthetic revolution of Morris, there was a very definite limit to it. It did not lie only in the fact that his revolution was in truth a reaction, though this was a partial explanation of his partial failure. When he was denouncing the dresses of modern ladies, "upholstered like arm-chairs instead of being draped like women," as he forcibly expressed it, he would hold up for practical imitation the costumes and handicrafts of the Middle Ages. Further than this retrogressive and imitative movement he never seemed to go. Now, the men of the time of Chaucer had many evil qualities, but there was at least one exhibition of moral weakness they did not give. They would have laughed at the idea of dressing themselves in the manner of the bowmen at the battle of Senlac, or painting themselves an æsthetic blue, after the custom of the ancient Britons. They would not have called that a movement at all. Whatever was beautiful in their dress or manners sprang honestly and naturally out of the life they led and preferred to lead. And it may surely be maintained that any real advance in the beauty of modern dress must spring honestly and naturally out of the life we lead and prefer to lead. We are not altogether without hints and hopes of such a change, in the growing orthodoxy of rough and athletic costumes. But if this cannot be, it will be no substitute or satisfaction to turn life into an interminable historical fancy-dress ball.

But the limitation of Morris's work lay deeper than this. We may best suggest it by a method after his own heart. Of all the various works he performed, none, perhaps, was so splendidly and solidly valuable as his great protest for the fables and superstitions of mankind. He has the supreme credit of showing that the fairy tales contain the deepest truth of the earth, the real record of men's feeling for things. Trifling details may be inaccurate, Jack may not have climbed up so tall a beanstalk, or killed so tall a giant; but it is not such things that make a story false; it is a far different class of things that makes every modern book of history as false as the father of lies; ingenuity, self-consciousness, hypocritical impartiality. It appears to us that of all the fairy-tales none contains so vital a moral truth as the old story, existing in many forms, of Beauty and the Beast. There is written, with all the authority of a human scripture, the eternal and essential truth that until we love a thing in all its ugliness we cannot make it beautiful. This was the weak point in William Morris as a reformer: that he sought to reform modern life, and that he hated modern life instead of loving it. Modern London is indeed a beast, big enough and black enough to be the beast in Apocalypse, blazing with a million eyes, and roaring with a million voices. But unless the poet can love this fabulous monster as he is, can feel with some generous excitement his massive and mysterious *joie-de-vivre*, the vast scale of his iron anatomy and the beating of his thunderous heart, he cannot and will not change the beast into the fairy prince. Morris's disadvantage was that he was not honestly a child of the nineteenth century: he could not understand its fascination, and consequently he could not really develop it. An abiding testimony to his tremendous personal influence in the æsthetic world is the vitality and recurrence of the Arts and Crafts Exhibitions, which are steeped in his personality like a chapel in that of a saint. If we look round at the exhibits in one of these æsthetic shows, we shall be struck by the large mass of modern objects that the decorative school leaves untouched. There is a noble instinct for giving the right touch of beauty to common and necessary things, but the things that are so touched are the ancient things, the things that always to some extent commended themselves to the lover of beauty. There are beautiful gates, beautiful fountains, beautiful cups, beautiful chairs, beautiful reading-desks. But there are no modern things made beautiful. There are no beautiful lamp-posts, beautiful letter-boxes, beautiful engines, beautiful bicycles. The spirit of William Morris has not seized hold of the century and made its humblest necessities beautiful. And this was because, with all his healthiness and energy, he had not the supreme courage to face the ugliness of things; Beauty shrank from the Beast and the fairy-tale had a different ending.

But herein, indeed, lay Morris's deepest claim to the name of a great reformer: that he left his work incomplete. There is, perhaps, no better proof that a man is a mere meteor, merely barren and brilliant, than that his work is done perfectly. A man like Morris draws attention to needs he cannot supply. In after-years we may have perhaps a newer and more daring Arts and Crafts Exhibition. In it we shall not decorate the armour of the twelfth century, but the machinery of the twentieth. A lamp-post shall be wrought nobly in twisted iron, fit to hold the sanctity of fire. A pillar-box shall be carved with figures emblematical of the secrets of comradeship and the silence and honour of the State. Railway signals, of all earthly things the most poetical, the coloured stars of life and death, shall be lamps of green and crimson worthy of their terrible and faithful service. But if ever this gradual and genuine movement of our time towards beauty — not backwards, but forwards — does truly come about, Morris will be the first prophet of it. Poet of the childhood of nations, craftsman in the new honesties of art, prophet of a merrier and wiser life, his full-blooded enthusiasm will be remembered when human life has once more assumed flamboyant colours and proved that this painful greenish grey of the æsthetic twilight in which we now live is, in spite of all the pessimists, not of the greyness of death, but the greyness of dawn.

OPTIMISM OF BYRON

Everything is against our appreciating the spirit and the age of Byron. The age that has just passed from us is always like a dream when we wake in the morning, a thing incredible and centuries away. And the world of Byron seems a sad and faded world, a weird and inhuman world, where men were romantic in whiskers, ladies lived, apparently, in bowers, and the very word has the sound of a piece of stage scenery. Roses and nightingales recur in their poetry with the monotonous elegance of a wall-paper pattern. The whole is like a revel of dead men, a revel with splendid vesture and half-witted faces.

But the more shrewdly and earnestly we study the histories of men, the less ready shall we be to make use of the word “artificial.” Nothing in the world has ever been artificial. Many customs, many dresses, many works of art are branded with artificiality because they exhibit vanity and self-consciousness: as if vanity were not a deep and elemental thing, like love and hate and the fear of death. Vanity may be found in darkling deserts, in the hermit and in the wild beasts that crawl around him. It may be good or evil, but assuredly it is not artificial: vanity is a voice out of the abyss.

The remarkable fact is, however, and it bears strongly on the present position of Byron, that when a thing is unfamiliar to us, when it is remote and the product of some other age or spirit, we think it not savage or terrible, but merely artificial. There are many instances of this: a fair one is the case of tropical plants and birds. When we see some of the monstrous and flamboyant blossoms that enrich the equatorial woods, we do not feel that they are conflagrations of nature; silent explosions of her frightful energy. We simply find it hard to believe that they are not wax flowers grown under a glass case. When we see some of the tropic birds, with their tiny bodies attached to gigantic beaks, we do not feel that they are freaks of the fierce humour of Creation. We almost believe that they are toys out of a child’s play-box, artificially carved and artificially coloured. So it is with the great convulsion of Nature which was known as Byronism. The volcano is not an extinct volcano now; it is the dead stick of a rocket. It is the remains not of a natural but of an artificial fire.

But Byron and Byronism were something immeasurably greater than anything that is represented by such a view as this: their real value and meaning are indeed little understood. The first of the mistakes about Byron lies in the fact that he is treated as a pessimist. True, he treated himself as such, but a critic can hardly have even a slight knowledge of Byron without knowing that he had the smallest amount of knowledge of himself that ever fell to the lot of an intelligent man. The real character of what is known as Byron’s pessimism is better worth study than any real pessimism could ever be.

It is the standing peculiarity of this curious world of ours that almost everything in it has been extolled enthusiastically and invariably extolled to the disadvantage of everything else.

One after another almost every one of the phenomena of the universe has been declared to be alone capable of making life worth living. Books, love, business, religion, alcohol, abstract truth, private emotion, money, simplicity, mysticism, hard work, a life close to nature, a life close to Belgrave Square are every one of them passionately maintained by somebody to be so good that they redeem the evil of an otherwise indefensible world. Thus, while the world is almost always condemned in summary, it is always justified, and indeed extolled, in detail after detail.

Existence has been praised and absolved by a chorus of pessimists. The work of giving thanks to Heaven is, as it were, divided ingeniously among them. Schopenhauer is told off as a kind of librarian in the House of God, to sing the praises of the austere pleasures of the mind. Carlyle, as steward, undertakes the working department and eulogises a life of labour in the fields. Omar Khayyam is established in the cellar, and swears that it is the only room in the house. Even the blackest of pessimistic artists enjoys his art. At the precise moment that he has written some shameless and terrible indictment of Creation, his one pang of joy in the achievement joins the universal chorus of gratitude, with the scent of the wild flower and the song of the bird.

Now Byron had a sensational popularity, and that popularity was, as far as words and explanations go, founded upon his pessimism. He was adored by an overwhelming majority, almost every individual of which despised the majority of mankind. But when we come to regard the matter a little more deeply we tend in some degree to cease to believe in this popularity of the pessimist. The popularity of pure and unadulterated pessimism is an oddity; it is almost a contradiction in terms. Men would no more receive the news of the failure of existence or of the harmonious hostility of the stars with ardour or popular rejoicing than they would light bonfires for the arrival of cholera or dance a breakdown when they were condemned to be hanged. When the pessimist is popular it must always be not because he shows all things to be bad, but because he shows some things to be good.

Men can only join in a chorus of praise, even if it is the praise of denunciation. The man who is popular must be optimistic about something, even if he is only optimistic about pessimism. And this was emphatically the case with Byron and the Byronists. Their real popularity was founded not upon the fact that they blamed everything, but upon the fact that they praised something. They heaped curses upon man, but they used man merely as a foil. The things they wished to praise by comparison were the energies of Nature. Man was to them what talk and fashion were to Carlyle, what philosophical and religious quarrels were to Omar, what the whole race after practical happiness was to Schopenhauer, the thing which must be censured in order that somebody else may be exalted. It was merely a recognition of the fact that one cannot write in white chalk except on a black-board.

Surely it is ridiculous to maintain seriously that Byron's love of the desolate and inhuman in nature was the mark of vital scepticism and depression. When a young man can elect deliberately to walk alone in winter by the side of the shattering sea, when he takes pleasure in storms and stricken peaks, and the lawless melancholy of the older earth, we may deduce with the certainty of logic that he is very young and very happy. There is a certain darkness which we see in wine when seen in shadow; we see it again in the night that has just buried a gorgeous sunset. The wine seems black, and yet at the same time powerfully and almost impossibly red; the sky seems black, and yet at the same time to be only too dense a blend of purple and green. Such was the darkness which lay around the Byronic school. Darkness with them was only too dense a purple. They would prefer the sullen hostility of the earth because amid all the cold and darkness their own hearts were flaming like their own firesides.

Matters are very different with the more modern school of doubt and lamentation. The last movement of pessimism is perhaps expressed in Mr. Aubrey Beardsley's allegorical designs. Here we have to deal with a pessimism which tends naturally not towards the oldest elements of the cosmos, but towards the last and most fantastic fripperies of artificial life. Byronism tended towards the desert; the new pessimism towards the restaurant. Byronism was a revolt against artificiality; the new pessimism is a revolt in its favour.

The Byronic young man had an affectation of sincerity; the decadent, going a step deeper into the avenues of the unreal, has positively an affectation of affectation. And it is by their fopperies and their frivolities that we know that their sinister philosophy is sincere; in their lights and garlands and ribbons we read their indwelling despair. It was so, indeed, with Byron himself; his really bitter moments were his frivolous moments. He went on year after year calling down fire upon mankind, summoning the deluge and the destructive sea and all the ultimate energies of nature to sweep away the cities of the spawn of man. But through all this his subconscious mind was not that of a despairer; on the contrary, there is something of a kind of lawless faith in thus parleying with such immense and immemorial brutalities. It was not until the time in which he wrote "Don Juan" that he really lost this inward warmth and geniality, and a sudden shout of hilarious laughter announced to the world that Lord Byron had really become a pessimist.

One of the best tests in the world of what a poet really means is his metre. He may be a hypocrite in his metaphysics, but he cannot be a hypocrite in his prosody. And all the time that Byron's language is of horror and emptiness, his metre is a bounding *pas de quatre*. He may arraign existence on the most deadly charges, he may condemn it with the most desolating verdict, but he cannot alter the fact that on some walk in a spring morning when all the limbs are swinging and all the blood alive in the body, the lips may be caught repeating:

"Oh, there's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away, When the glow of early youth declines in beauty's dull decay; 'Tis not upon the cheek of youth the blush that fades so fast, But the tender bloom of heart is gone ere youth itself be past."

That automatic recitation is the answer to the whole pessimism of Byron.

The truth is that Byron was one of a class who may be called the unconscious optimists, who are very often, indeed, the most uncompromising conscious pessimists, because the exuberance of their nature demands for an adversary a dragon as big as the world. But the whole of his essential and unconscious being was spirited and confident, and that unconscious being, long disguised and buried under emotional artifices, suddenly sprang into prominence in the face of a cold, hard, political necessity. In Greece he heard the cry of reality, and at the time that he was dying, he began to live. He heard suddenly the call of that buried and subconscious happiness which is in all of us, and which may emerge suddenly at the sight of the grass of a meadow or the spears of the enemy.

POPE AND THE ART OF SATIRE

The general critical theory common in this and the last century is that it was very easy for the imitators of Pope to write English poetry. The classical couplet was a thing that anyone could do. So far as that goes, one may justifiably answer by asking anyone to try. It may be easier really to have wit, than really, in the boldest and most enduring sense, to have imagination. But it is immeasurably easier to pretend to have imagination than to pretend to have wit. A man may indulge in a sham rhapsody, because it may be the triumph of a rhapsody to be unintelligible. But a man cannot indulge in a sham joke, because it is the ruin of a joke to be unintelligible. A man may pretend to be a poet: he can no more pretend to be a wit than he can pretend to bring rabbits out of a hat without having learnt to be a conjuror. Therefore, it may be submitted, there was a certain discipline in the old antithetical couplet of Pope and his followers. If it did not permit of the great liberty of wisdom used by the minority of great geniuses, neither did it permit of the great liberty of folly which is used by the majority of small writers. A prophet could not be a poet in those days, perhaps, but at least a fool could not be a poet. If we take, for the sake of example, such a line as Pope’s:

“Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,”

the test is comparatively simple. A great poet would not have written such a line, perhaps. But a minor poet could not.

Supposing that a lyric poet of the new school really had to deal with such an idea as that expressed in Pope’s line about Man:

“A being darkly wise and rudely great,”

Is it really so certain that he would go deeper into the matter than that old antithetical jingle goes? I venture to doubt whether he would really be any wiser or weirder or more imaginative or more profound. The one thing that he would really be, would be longer. Instead of writing,

“A being darkly wise and rudely great,”

the contemporary poet, in his elaborately ornamented book of verses, would produce something like the following:

“A creature Of feature More dark, more dark, more dark than skies, Yea, darkly wise, yea, darkly wise: Darkly wise as a formless fate. And if he be great, If he be great, then rudely great, Rudely great as a plough that plies, And darkly wise, and darkly wise.”

Have we really learnt to think more broadly? Or have we only learnt to spread our thoughts thinner? I have a dark suspicion that a modern poet might manufacture an admirable lyric out of almost every line of Pope.

There is, of course, an idea in our time that the very antithesis of the typical line of Pope is a mark of artificiality. I shall have occasion more than once to point out that nothing in the world has ever been artificial. But certainly antithesis is not artificial. An element of paradox runs through the whole of existence itself. It begins in the realm of ultimate physics and metaphysics, in the two facts that we cannot imagine a space that is infinite, and that we cannot imagine a space that is finite. It runs through the inmost complications of divinity, in that we cannot conceive that Christ in the wilderness was truly pure, unless we also conceive that he desired to sin. It runs, in the same manner, through all the minor matters of morals, so that we cannot imagine courage existing except in conjunction with fear, or magnanimity existing except in conjunction with some temptation to meanness. If Pope and his followers caught this echo of natural irrationality, they were not any the more artificial. Their antitheses were fully in harmony with existence, which is itself a contradiction in terms.

Pope was really a great poet; he was the last great poet of civilisation. Immediately after the fall of him and his school come Burns and Byron, and the reaction towards the savage and the elemental. But to Pope civilisation was still an exciting experiment. Its perruques and ruffles were to him what feathers and bangles are to a South Sea Islander — the real romance of civilisation. And in all the forms of art which peculiarly belong to civilisation, he was supreme. In one especially he was supreme — the great and civilised art of satire. And in this we have fallen away utterly.

We have had a great revival in our time of the cult of violence and hostility. Mr. Henley and his young men have an infinite number of furious epithets with which to overwhelm anyone who differs from them. It is not a placid or untroubled position to be Mr. Henley’s enemy, though we know that it is certainly safer than to be his friend. And yet, despite all this, these people produce no satire. Political and social satire is a lost art, like pottery and stained glass. It may be worth while to make some attempt to point out a reason for this.

It may seem a singular observation to say that we are not generous enough to write great satire. This, however, is approximately a very accurate way of describing the case. To write great satire, to attack a man so that he feels the attack and half acknowledges its justice, it is necessary to have a certain intellectual magnanimity which realises the merits of the opponent as well as his defects. This is, indeed, only another way of putting the simple truth that in order to attack an army we must know not only its weak points, but also its strong points. England in the present season and spirit fails in satire for the same simple reason that it fails in war: it despises the enemy. In matters of battle and conquest we have got firmly rooted in our minds the idea (an idea fit for the philosophers of Bedlam) that we can best trample on a people by ignoring all the particular merits which give them a chance of trampling upon us. It has become a breach of etiquette to praise the enemy; whereas, when the enemy is strong, every honest scout ought to praise the enemy. It is impossible to vanquish an army without having a full account of its strength. It is impossible to satirise a man without having a full account of his virtues. It is too much the custom in politics to describe a political opponent as utterly inhuman, as utterly careless of his country, as utterly cynical, which no man ever was since the beginning of the world. This kind of invective may often have a great superficial success: it may hit the mood of the moment; it may raise excitement and applause; it may impress millions. But there is one man among all those millions whom it does not impress, whom it hardly ever touches; that is the man against whom it is directed. The one person for whom the whole satire has been written in vain is the man whom it is the whole object of the institution of satire to reach. He knows that such a description of him is not true. He knows that he is not utterly unpatriotic, or utterly self-seeking, or utterly barbarous and revengeful. He knows that he is an ordinary man, and that he can count as many kindly memories, as many humane instincts, as many hours of decent work and responsibility as any other ordinary man. But behind all this he has his real weaknesses, the real ironies of his soul: behind all these ordinary merits lie the mean compromises, the craven silences, the sullen vanities, the secret brutalities, the unmanly visions of revenge. It is to these that satire should reach if it is to touch the man at whom it is aimed. And to reach these it must pass and salute a whole army of virtues.

If we turn to the great English satirists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, we find that they had this rough, but firm, grasp of the size and strength, the value and the best points of their adversary. Dryden, before hewing Ahitophel in pieces, gives a splendid and spirited account of the insane valour and inspired cunning of the

“daring pilot in extremity,”

who was more untrustworthy in calm than in storm, and

“Steered too near the rocks to boast his wit.”

The whole is, so far as it goes, a sound and picturesque version of the great Shaftesbury. It would, in many ways, serve as a very sound and picturesque account of Lord Randolph Churchill. But here comes in very pointedly the difference between our modern attempts at satire and the ancient achievement of it. The opponents of Lord Randolph Churchill, both Liberal and Conservative, did not satirise him nobly and honestly, as one of those great wits to madness near allied. They represented him as a mere puppy, a silly and irreverent upstart whose impudence supplied the lack of policy and character. Churchill had grave and even gross faults, a certain coarseness, a certain hard boyish assertiveness, a certain lack of magnanimity, a certain peculiar patrician vulgarity. But he was a much larger man than satire depicted him, and therefore the satire could not and did not overwhelm him. And here we have the cause of the failure of contemporary satire, that it has no magnanimity, that is to say, no patience. It cannot endure to be told that its opponent has his strong points, just as Mr. Chamberlain could not endure to be told that the Boers had a regular army. It can be content with nothing except persuading itself that its opponent is utterly bad or utterly stupid — that is, that he is what he is not and what nobody else is. If we take any prominent politician of the day — such, for example, as Sir William Harcourt — we shall find that this is the point in which all party invective fails. The Tory satire at the expense of Sir William Harcourt is always desperately endeavouring to represent that he is inept, that he makes a fool of himself, that he is disagreeable and disgraceful and untrustworthy. The defect of all that is that we all know that it is untrue. Everyone knows that Sir William Harcourt is not inept, but is almost the ablest Parliamentarian now alive. Everyone knows that he is not disagreeable or disgraceful, but a gentleman of the old school who is on excellent social terms with his antagonists. Everyone knows that he is not untrustworthy, but a man of unimpeachable honour who is much trusted.

Above all, he knows it himself, and is therefore affected by the satire exactly as any one of us would be if we were accused of being black or of keeping a shop for the receiving of stolen goods. We might be angry at the libel, but not at the satire: for a man is angry at a libel because it is false, but at a satire because it is true.

Mr. Henley and his young men are very fond of invective and satire; if they wish to know the reason of their failure in these things, they need only turn to the opening of Pope's superb attack upon Addison. The Henleyite's idea of satirising a man is to express a violent contempt for him, and by the heat of this to persuade others and himself that the man is contemptible. I remember reading a satiric attack on Mr. Gladstone by one of the young anarchic Tories, which began by asserting that Mr. Gladstone was a bad public speaker. If these people would, as I have said, go quietly and read Pope's "Atticus," they would see how a great satirist approaches a great enemy:

"Peace to all such! But were there one whose fires True genius kindles, and fair fame inspires, Blest with each talent, and each art to please, And born to write, converse, and live with ease. Should such a man—"

And then follows the torrent of that terrible criticism. Pope was not such a fool as to try to make out that Addison was a fool. He knew that Addison was not a fool, and he knew that Addison knew it. But hatred, in Pope's case, had become so great and, I was almost going to say, so pure, that it illuminated all things, as love illuminates all things. He said what was really wrong with Addison; and in calm and clear and everlasting colours he painted the picture of the evil of the literary temperament:

"Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne, View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes, And hate for arts that caused himself to rise.

* * * * *

Like Cato give his little Senate laws, And sit attentive to his own applause. While wits and templars every sentence raise, And wonder with a foolish face of praise."

This is the kind of thing which really goes to the mark at which it aims. It is penetrated with sorrow and a kind of reverence, and it is addressed directly to a man. This is no mock-tournament to gain the applause of the crowd. It is a deadly duel by the lonely seashore.

In current political materialism there is everywhere the assumption that, without understanding anything of his case or his merits, we can benefit a man practically. Without understanding his case and his merits, we cannot even hurt him.

FRANCIS

Asceticism is a thing which, in its very nature, we tend in these days to misunderstand. Asceticism, in the religious sense, is the repudiation of the great mass of human joys because of the supreme joyfulness of the one joy, the religious joy. But asceticism is not in the least confined to religious asceticism: there is scientific asceticism which asserts that truth is alone satisfying: there is æsthetic asceticism which asserts that art is alone satisfying: there is amatory asceticism which asserts that love is alone satisfying. There is even epicurean asceticism, which asserts that beer and skittles are alone satisfying. Wherever the manner of praising anything involves the statement that the speaker could live with that thing alone, there lies the germ and essence of asceticism. When William Morris, for example, says that “love is enough,” it is obvious that he asserts in those words that art, science, politics, ambition, money, houses, carriages, concerts, gloves, walking-sticks, door-knockers, railway-stations, cathedrals, and any other things one may choose to tabulate are unnecessary. When Omar Khayyam says:

“A book of verses underneath the bough, A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou Beside me singing in the wilderness — O wilderness were Paradise enow.”

It is clear that he speaks fully as much ascetically as he does æsthetically. He makes a list of things and says that he wants no more. The same thing was done by a mediæval monk. Examples might, of course, be multiplied a hundred-fold. One of the most genuinely poetical of our younger poets says, as the one thing certain, that

“From quiet home and first beginning Out to the undiscovered ends — There’s nothing worth the wear of winning But laughter and the love of friends.”

Here we have a perfect example of the main important fact, that all true joy expresses itself in terms of asceticism.

But if, in any case, it should happen that a class or a generation lose the sense of the peculiar kind of joy which is being celebrated, they immediately begin to call the enjoyers of that joy gloomy and self-destroying. The most formidable liberal philosophers have called the monks melancholy because they denied themselves the pleasures of liberty and marriage. They might as well call the trippers on a Bank Holiday melancholy because they deny themselves, as a rule, the pleasures of silence and meditation. A simpler and stronger example is, however, to hand. If ever it should happen that the system of English athletics should vanish from the public schools and the universities, if science should supply some new and non-competitive manner of perfecting the physique, if public ethics swung round to an attitude of absolute contempt and indifference towards the feeling called sport, then it is easy to see what would happen. Future historians would simply state that in the dark days of Queen Victoria young men at Oxford and Cambridge were subjected to a horrible sort of religious torture. They were forbidden, by fantastic monastic rules, to indulge in wine or tobacco during certain arbitrarily fixed periods of time, before certain brutal fights and festivals. Bigots insisted on their rising at unearthly hours and running violently around fields for no object. Many men ruined their health in these dens of superstition, many died there. All this is perfectly true and irrefutable. Athleticism in England is an asceticism, as much as the monastic rules. Men have overstrained themselves and killed themselves through English athleticism. There is one difference and one only: we do feel the love of sport; we do not feel the love of religious offices. We see only the price in the one case and only the purchase in the other.

The only question that remains is what was the joy of the old Christian ascetics of which their asceticism was merely the purchasing price? The mere possibility of the query is an extraordinary example of the way in which we miss the main points of human history. We are looking at humanity too close, and see only the details and not the vast and dominant features. We look at the rise of Christianity, and conceive it as a rise of self-abnegation and almost of pessimism. It does not occur to us that the mere assertion that this raging and confounding universe is governed by justice and mercy is a piece of staggering optimism fit to set all men capering. The detail over which these monks went mad with joy was the universe itself; the only thing really worthy of enjoyment. The white daylight shone over all the world, the endless forests stood up in their order. The lightning awoke and the tree fell and the sea gathered into mountains and the ship went down, and all these disconnected and meaningless and terrible objects were all part of one dark and fearful conspiracy of goodness, one merciless scheme of mercy. That this scheme of Nature was not accurate or well founded is perfectly tenable, but surely it is not tenable that it was not optimistic. We insist, however, upon treating this matter tail foremost. We insist that the ascetics were pessimists because they gave up threescore years and ten for an eternity of happiness. We forget that the bare proposition of an eternity of happiness is by its very nature ten thousand times more optimistic than ten thousand pagan saturnalias.

Mr. Adderley's life of Francis of Assisi does not, of course, bring this out; nor does it fully bring out the character of Francis. It has rather the tone of a devotional book. A devotional book is an excellent thing, but we do not look in it for the portrait of a man, for the same reason that we do not look in a love-sonnet for the portrait of a woman, because men in such conditions of mind not only apply all virtues to their idol, but all virtues in equal quantities. There is no outline, because the artist cannot bear to put in a black line. This blaze of benediction, this conflict between lights, has its place in poetry, not in biography. The successful examples of it may be found, for instance, in the more idealistic odes of Spenser. The design is sometimes almost indecipherable, for the poet draws in silver upon white.

It is natural, of course, that Mr. Adderley should see Francis primarily as the founder of the Franciscan Order. We suspect this was only one, perhaps a minor one, of the things that he was; we suspect that one of the minor things that Christ did was to found Christianity. But the vast practical work of Francis is assuredly not to be ignored, for this amazingly unworldly and almost maddeningly simple-minded infant was one of the most consistently successful men that ever fought with this bitter world. It is the custom to say that the secret of such men is their profound belief in themselves, and this is true, but not all the truth. Workhouses and lunatic asylums are thronged with men who believe in themselves. Of Francis it is far truer to say that the secret of his success was his profound belief in other people, and it is the lack of this that has commonly been the curse of these obscure Napoleons. Francis always assumed that everyone must be just as anxious about their common relative, the water-rat, as he was. He planned a visit to the Emperor to draw his attention to the needs of "his little sisters the larks." He used to talk to any thieves and robbers he met about their misfortune in being unable to give rein to their desire for holiness. It was an innocent habit, and doubtless the robbers often "got round him," as the phrase goes. Quite as often, however, they discovered that he had "got round" them, and discovered the other side, the side of secret nobility.

Conceiving of St. Francis as primarily the founder of the Franciscan Order, Mr. Adderley opens his narrative with an admirable sketch of the history of Monasticism in Europe, which is certainly the best thing in the book. He distinguishes clearly and fairly between the Manichæan ideal that underlies so much of Eastern Monasticism and the ideal of self-discipline which never wholly vanished from the Christian form. But he does not throw any light on what must be for the outsider the absorbing problem of this Catholic asceticism, for the excellent reason that, not being an outsider, he does not find it a problem at all.

To most people, however, there is a fascinating inconsistency in the position of St. Francis. He expressed in loftier and bolder language than any earthly thinker the conception that laughter is as divine as tears. He called his monks the mountebanks of God. He never forgot to take pleasure in a bird as it flashed past him, or a drop of water, as it fell from his finger: he was, perhaps, the happiest of the sons of men. Yet this man undoubtedly founded his whole polity on the negation of what we think the most imperious necessities; in his three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, he denied to himself and those he loved most, property, love, and liberty. Why was it that the most large-hearted and poetic spirits in that age found their most congenial atmosphere in these awful renunciations? Why did he who loved where all men were blind, seek to blind himself where all men loved? Why was he a monk, and not a troubadour? These questions are far too large to be answered fully here, but in any life of Francis they ought at least to have been asked; we have a suspicion that if they were answered, we should suddenly find that much of the enigma of this sullen time of ours was answered also. So it was with the monks. The two great parties in human affairs are only the party which sees life black against white, and the party which sees it white against black, the party which macerates and blackens itself with sacrifice because the background is full of the blaze of an universal mercy, and the party which crowns itself with flowers and lights itself with bridal torches because it stands against a black curtain of incalculable night. The revellers are old, and the monks are young. It was the monks who were the spendthrifts of happiness, and we who are its misers.

Doubtless, as is apparent from Mr. Adderley’s book, the clear and tranquil life of the Three Vows had a fine and delicate effect on the genius of Francis. He was primarily a poet. The perfection of his literary instinct is shown in his naming the fire “brother,” and the water “sister,” in the quaint demagogic dexterity of the appeal in the sermon to the fishes “that they alone were saved in the Flood.” In the amazingly minute and graphic dramatisation of the life, disappointments, and excuses of any shrub or beast that he happened to be addressing, his genius has a curious resemblance to that of Burns. But if he avoided the weakness of Burns’ verses to animals, the occasional morbidity, bombast, and moralisation on himself, the credit is surely due to a cleaner and more transparent life.

The general attitude of St. Francis, like that of his Master, embodied a kind of terrible common sense. The famous remark of the Caterpillar in “Alice in Wonderland”— “Why not?” impresses us as his general motto. He could not see why he should not be on good terms with all things. The pomp of war and ambition, the great empire of the Middle Ages, and all its fellows begin to look tawdry and top-heavy, under the rationality of that innocent stare. His questions were blasting and devastating, like the questions of a child. He would not have been afraid even of the nightmares of cosmogony, for he had no fear in him. To him the world was small, not because he had any views as to its size, but for the reason that gossiping ladies find it small, because so many relatives were to be found in it. If you had taken him to the loneliest star that the madness of an astronomer can conceive, he would have only beheld in it the features of a new friend.

ROSTAND

When “Cyrano de Bergerac” was published, it bore the subordinate title of a heroic comedy. We have no tradition in English literature which would justify us in calling a comedy heroic, though there was once a poet who called a comedy divine. By the current modern conception, the hero has his place in a tragedy, and the one kind of strength which is systematically denied to him is the strength to succeed. That the power of a man’s spirit might possibly go to the length of turning a tragedy into a comedy is not admitted; nevertheless, almost all the primitive legends of the world are comedies, not only in the sense that they have a happy ending, but in the sense that they are based upon a certain optimistic assumption that the hero is destined to be the destroyer of the monster. Singularly enough, this modern idea of the essential disastrous character of life, when seriously considered, connects itself with a hyper-æsthetic view of tragedy and comedy which is largely due to the influence of modern France, from which the great heroic comedies of Monsieur Rostand have come. The French genius has an instinct for remedying its own evil work, and France gives always the best cure for “Frenchiness.” The idea of comedy which is held in England by the school which pays most attention to the technical niceties of art is a view which renders such an idea as that of heroic comedy quite impossible. The fundamental conception in the minds of the majority of our younger writers is that comedy is, *par excellence*, a fragile thing. It is conceived to be a conventional world of the most absolutely delicate and gimcrack description. Such stories as Mr. Max Beerbohm’s “Happy Hypocrite” are conceptions which would vanish or fall into utter nonsense if viewed by one single degree too seriously. But great comedy, the comedy of Shakespeare or Sterne, not only can be, but must be, taken seriously. There is nothing to which a man must give himself up with more faith and self-abandonment than to genuine laughter. In such comedies one laughs with the heroes, and not at them. The humour which steeps the stories of Falstaff and Uncle Toby is a cosmic and philosophic humour, a geniality which goes down to the depths. It is not superficial reading, it is not even, strictly speaking, light reading. Our sympathies are as much committed to the characters as if they were the predestined victims in a Greek tragedy. The modern writer of comedies may be said to boast of the brittleness of his characters. He seems always on the eve of knocking his puppets to pieces. When John Oliver Hobbes wrote for the first time a comedy of serious emotions, she named it, with a thinly-disguised contempt for her own work, “A Sentimental Comedy.” The ground of this conception of the artificiality of comedy is a profound pessimism. Life in the eyes of these mournful buffoons is itself an utterly tragic thing; comedy must be as hollow as a grinning mask. It is a refuge from the world, and not even, properly speaking, a part of it. Their wit is a thin sheet of shining ice over the eternal waters of bitterness.

“Cyrano de Bergerac” came to us as the new decoration of an old truth, that merriment was one of the world’s natural flowers, and not one of its exotics. The gigantesque levity, the flamboyant eloquence, the Rabelaisian puns and digressions were seen to be once more what they had been in Rabelais, the mere outbursts of a human sympathy and bravado as old and solid as the stars. The human spirit demanded wit as headlong and haughty as its will. All was expressed in the words of Cyrano at his highest moment of happiness, *Il me faut des géants*. An essential aspect of this question of heroic comedy is the question of drama in rhyme. There is nothing that affords so easy a point of attack for the dramatic realist as the conduct of a play in verse. According to his canons, it is indeed absurd to represent a number of characters facing some terrible crisis in their lives by capping rhymes like a party playing *bouts rimés*. In his eyes it must appear somewhat ridiculous that two enemies taunting each other with insupportable insults should obligingly provide each other with metrical spacing and neat and convenient rhymes. But the whole of this view rests finally upon the fact that few persons, if any, to-day understand what is meant by a poetical play. It is a singular thing that those poetical plays which are now written in England by the most advanced students of the drama follow exclusively the lines of Maeterlinck, and use verse and rhyme for the adornment of a profoundly tragic theme. But rhyme has a supreme appropriateness for the treatment of the higher comedy. The land of heroic comedy is, as it were, a paradise of lovers, in which it is not difficult to imagine that men could talk poetry all day long. It is far more conceivable that men’s speech should flower naturally into these harmonious forms, when they are filled with the essential spirit of youth, than when they are sitting gloomily in the presence of immemorial destiny. The great error consists in supposing that poetry is an unnatural form of language. We should all like to speak poetry at the moment when we truly live, and if we do not speak, it is because we have an impediment in our speech. It is not song that is the narrow or artificial thing, it is conversation that is a broken and stammering attempt at song. When we see men in a spiritual extravaganza, like “Cyrano de Bergerac,” speaking in rhyme, it is not our language disguised or distorted, but our language rounded and made whole. Rhymes answer each other as the sexes in flowers and in humanity answer each other. Men do not speak so, it is true. Even when they are inspired or in love they talk inanities. But the poetic comedy does not misrepresent the speech one half so much as the speech misrepresents the soul. Monsieur Rostand showed even more than his usual insight when he called “Cyrano de Bergerac” a comedy, despite the fact that, strictly speaking, it ends with disappointment and death. The essence of tragedy is a spiritual breakdown or decline, and in the great French play the spiritual sentiment mounts unceasingly until the last line. It is not the facts themselves, but our feeling about them, that makes tragedy and comedy, and death is more joyful in Rostand than life in Maeterlinck. The same apparent contradiction holds good in the case of the drama of “L’Aiglon,” now being performed with so much success. Although the hero is a weakling, the subject a fiasco, the end a premature death and a personal disillusionment, yet, in spite of this theme, which might have been chosen for its depressing qualities, the unconquerable pæan of the praise of things, the ungovernable gaiety of the poet’s song swells so high that at the end it seems to drown all the weak voices of the characters in one crashing chorus of great things and great men. A multitude of mottoes might be taken from the play to indicate and illustrate, not only its own spirit, but much of the spirit of modern life. When in the vision of the field of Wagram the horrible voices of the wounded cry out, *Les corbeaux, les corbeaux*, the Duke, overwhelmed with a nightmare of hideous trivialities, cries out, *Où, où, sont les aigles?* That antithesis might stand alone as an invocation at the beginning of the twentieth century to the spirit of heroic comedy. When an ex-General of Napoleon is asked his reason for having betrayed the Emperor, he replies, *La fatigue*, and at that a veteran private of the Great Army rushes forward, and crying passionately, *Et nous?* pours out a terrible description of the life lived by the commoner soldier. To-day, when pessimism is almost as much a symbol of wealth and fashion as jewels or cigars, when the pampered heirs of the ages can sum up life in few other words but *la fatigue*, there might surely come a cry from the vast mass of common humanity from the beginning — *et nous?* It is this potentiality for enthusiasm among the mass of men that makes the function of comedy at once common and sublime. Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing" is a great comedy, because behind it is the whole pressure of that love of love which is the youth of the world, which is common to all the young, especially to those who swear they will die bachelors and old maids. "Love's Labour's Lost" is filled with the same energy, and there it falls even more definitely into the scope of our subject, since it is a comedy in rhyme in which all men speak lyrically as naturally as the birds sing in pairing time. What the love of love is to the Shakespearean comedies, that other and more mysterious human passion, the love of death, is to "L'Aiglon." Whether we shall ever have in England a new tradition of poetic comedy it is difficult at present to say, but we shall assuredly never have it until we realise that comedy is built upon everlasting foundations in the nature of things, that it is not a thing too light to capture, but too deep to plumb. Monsieur Rostand, in his description of the Battle of Wagram, does not shrink from bringing about the Duke's ears the frightful voices of actual battle, of men torn by crows, and suffocated with blood, but when the Duke, terrified at these dreadful appeals, asks them for their final word, they all cry together *Vive l'Empereur!* Monsieur Rostand, perhaps, did not know that he was writing an allegory. To me that field of Wagram is the field of the modern war of literature. We hear nothing but the voices of pain; the whole is one phonograph of horror. It is right that we should hear these things, it is right that not one of them should be silenced; but these cries of distress are not in life, as they are in modern art, the only voices; they are the voices of men, but not the voice of man. When questioned finally and seriously as to their conception of their destiny, men have from the beginning of time answered in a thousand philosophies and religions with a single voice and in a sense most sacred and tremendous, *Vive l'Empereur*.

CHARLES II

There are a great many bonds which still connect us with Charles II., one of the idlest men of one of the idlest epochs. Among other things Charles II. represented one thing which is very rare and very satisfying; he was a real and consistent sceptic. Scepticism, both in its advantages and disadvantages, is greatly misunderstood in our time. There is a curious idea abroad that scepticism has some connection with such theories as materialism and atheism and secularism. This is of course a mistake; the true sceptic has nothing to do with these theories simply because they are theories. The true sceptic is as much a spiritualist as he is a materialist. He thinks that the savage dancing round an African idol stands quite as good a chance of being right as Darwin. He thinks that mysticism is every bit as rational as rationalism. He has indeed the most profound doubts as to whether St. Matthew wrote his own gospel. But he has quite equally profound doubts as to whether the tree he is looking at is a tree and not a rhinoceros.

This is the real meaning of that mystery which appears so prominently in the lives of great sceptics, which appears with especial prominence in the life of Charles II. I mean their constant oscillation between atheism and Roman Catholicism. Roman Catholicism is indeed a great and fixed and formidable system, but so is atheism. Atheism is indeed the most daring of all dogmas, more daring than the vision of a palpable day of judgment. For it is the assertion of a universal negative; for a man to say that there is no God in the universe is like saying that there are no insects in any of the stars.

Thus it was with that wholesome and systematic sceptic, Charles II. When he took the Sacrament according to the forms of the Roman Church in his last hour he was acting consistently as a philosopher. The wafer might not be God; similarly it might not be a wafer. To the genuine and poetical sceptic the whole world is incredible, with its bulbous mountains and its fantastic trees. The whole order of things is as outrageous as any miracle which could presume to violate it. Transubstantiation might be a dream, but if it was, it was assuredly a dream within a dream. Charles II. sought to guard himself against hell fire because he could not think hell itself more fantastic than the world as it was revealed by science. The priest crept up the staircase, the doors were closed, the few of the faithful who were present hushed themselves respectfully, and so, with every circumstance of secrecy and sanctity, with the cross uplifted and the prayers poured out, was consummated the last great act of logical unbelief.

The problem of Charles II. consists in this, that he has scarcely a moral virtue to his name, and yet he attracts us morally. We feel that some of the virtues have been dropped out in the lists made by all the saints and sages, and that Charles II. was pre-eminently successful in these wild and unmentionable virtues. The real truth of this matter and the real relation of Charles II. to the moral ideal is worth somewhat more exhaustive study.

It is a commonplace that the Restoration movement can only be understood when considered as a reaction against Puritanism. But it is insufficiently realised that the tyranny which half frustrated all the good work of Puritanism was of a very peculiar kind. It was not the fire of Puritanism, the exultation in sobriety, the frenzy of a restraint, which passed away; that still burns in the heart of England, only to be quenched by the final overwhelming sea. But it is seldom remembered that the Puritans were in their day emphatically intellectual bullies, that they relied swaggeringly on the logical necessity of Calvinism, that they bound omnipotence itself in the chains of syllogism. The Puritans fell, through the damning fact that they had a complete theory of life, through the eternal paradox that a satisfactory explanation can never satisfy. Like Brutus and the logical Romans, like the logical French Jacobins, like the logical English utilitarians, they taught the lesson that men’s wants have always been right and their arguments always wrong. Reason is always a kind of brute force; those who appeal to the head rather than the heart, however pallid and polite, are necessarily men of violence. We speak of “touching” a man’s heart, but we can do nothing to his head but hit it. The tyranny of the Puritans over the bodies of men was comparatively a trifle; pikes, bullets, and conflagrations are comparatively a trifle. Their real tyranny was the tyranny of aggressive reason over the cowed and demoralised human spirit. Their brooding and raving can be forgiven, can in truth be loved and reverenced, for it is humanity on fire; hatred can be genial, madness can be homely. The Puritans fell, not because they were fanatics, but because they were rationalists.

When we consider these things, when we remember that Puritanism, which means in our day a moral and almost temperamental attitude, meant in that day a singularly arrogant logical attitude, we shall comprehend a little more the grain of good that lay in the vulgarity and triviality of the Restoration. The Restoration, of which Charles II. was a pre-eminent type, was in part a revolt of all the chaotic and unclassed parts of human nature, the parts that are left over, and will always be left over, by every rationalistic system of life. This does not merely account for the revolt of the vices and of that empty recklessness and horseplay which is sometimes more irritating than any vice. It accounts also for the return of the virtue of politeness, for that also is a nameless thing ignored by logical codes. Politeness has indeed about it something mystical; like religion, it is everywhere understood and nowhere defined. Charles is not entirely to be despised because, as the type of this movement, he let himself float upon this new tide of politeness. There was some moral and social value in his perfection in little things. He could not keep the Ten Commandments, but he kept the ten thousand commandments. His name is unconnected with any great acts of duty or sacrifice, but it is connected with a great many of those acts of magnanimous politeness, of a kind of dramatic delicacy, which lie on the dim borderland between morality and art. “Charles II.,” said Thackeray, with unerring brevity, “was a rascal, but not a snob.” Unlike George IV. he was a gentleman, and a gentleman is a man who obeys strange statutes, not to be found in any moral text-book, and practises strange virtues nameless from the beginning of the world.

So much may be said and should be said for the Restoration, that it was the revolt of something human, if only the debris of human nature. But more cannot be said. It was emphatically a fall and not an ascent, a recoil and not an advance, a sudden weakness and not a sudden strength. That the bow of human nature was by Puritanism bent immeasurably too far, that it overstrained the soul by stretching it to the height of an almost horrible idealism, makes the collapse of the Restoration infinitely more excusable, but it does not make it any the less a collapse. Nothing can efface the essential distinction that Puritanism was one of the world’s great efforts after the discovery of the true order, whereas it was the essence of the Restoration that it involved no effort at all. It is true that the Restoration was not, as has been widely assumed, the most immoral epoch of our history. Its vices cannot compare for a moment in this respect with the monstrous tragedies and almost suffocating secrecies and villainies of the Court of James I. But the dram-drinking and nose-slitting of the saturnalia of Charles

II. seem at once more human and more detestable than the passions and poisons of the Renaissance, much in the same way that a monkey appears inevitably more human and more detestable than a tiger. Compared with the Renaissance, there is something Cockney about the Restoration. Not only was it too indolent for great morality, it was too indolent even for great art. It lacked that seriousness which is needed even for the pursuit of pleasure, that discipline which is essential even to a game of lawn tennis. It would have appeared to Charles II.'s poets quite as arduous to write "Paradise Lost" as to regain Paradise.

All old and vigorous languages abound in images and metaphors, which, though lightly and casually used, are in truth poems in themselves, and poems of a high and striking order. Perhaps no phrase is so terribly significant as the phrase "killing time." It is a tremendous and poetical image, the image of a kind of cosmic parricide. There are on the earth a race of revellers who do, under all their exuberance, fundamentally regard time as an enemy. Of these were Charles II. and the men of the Restoration. Whatever may have been their merits, and as we have said we think that they had merits, they can never have a place among the great representatives of the joy of life, for they belonged to those lower epicureans who kill time, as opposed to those higher epicureans who make time live.

Of a people in this temper Charles II. was the natural and rightful head. He may have been a pantomime King, but he was a King, and with all his geniality he let nobody forget it. He was not, indeed, the aimless flaneur that he has been represented. He was a patient and cunning politician, who disguised his wisdom under so perfect a mask of folly that he not only deceived his allies and opponents, but has deceived almost all the historians that have come after him. But if Charles was, as he emphatically was, the only Stuart who really achieved despotism, it was greatly due to the temper of the nation and the age. Despotism is the easiest of all governments, at any rate for the governed.

It is indeed a form of slavery, and it is the despot who is the slave. Men in a state of decadence employ professionals to fight for them, professionals to dance for them, and a professional to rule them.

Almost all the faces in the portraits of that time look, as it were, like masks put on artificially with the perruque. A strange unreality broods over the period. Distracted as we are with civic mysteries and problems we can afford to rejoice. Our tears are less desolate than their laughter, our restraints are larger than their liberty.

STEVENSON

A recent incident has finally convinced us that Stevenson was, as we suspected, a great man. We knew from recent books that we have noticed, from the scorn of “Ephemera Critica” and Mr. George Moore, that Stevenson had the first essential qualification of a great man: that of being misunderstood by his opponents. But from the book which Messrs. Chatto & Windus have issued, in the same binding as Stevenson’s works, “Robert Louis Stevenson,” by Mr. H. Bellyse Baildon, we learn that he has the other essential qualification, that of being misunderstood by his admirers. Mr. Baildon has many interesting things to tell us about Stevenson himself, whom he knew at college. Nor are his criticisms by any means valueless. That upon the plays, especially “Beau Austin,” is remarkably thoughtful and true. But it is a very singular fact, and goes far, as we say, to prove that Stevenson had that unfathomable quality which belongs to the great, that this admiring student of Stevenson can number and marshal all the master’s work and distribute praise and blame with decision and even severity, without ever thinking for a moment of the principles of art and ethics which would have struck us as the very things that Stevenson nearly killed himself to express.

Mr. Baildon, for example, is perpetually lecturing Stevenson for his “pessimism”; surely a strange charge against a man who has done more than any modern artist to make men ashamed of their shame of life. But he complains that, in “The Master of Ballantrae” and “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,” Stevenson gives evil a final victory over good. Now if there was one point that Stevenson more constantly and passionately emphasised than any other it was that we must worship good for its own value and beauty, without any reference whatever to victory or failure in space and time. “Whatever we are intended to do,” he said, “we are not intended to succeed.” That the stars in their courses fight against virtue, that humanity is in its nature a forlorn hope, this was the very spirit that through the whole of Stevenson’s work sounded a trumpet to all the brave. The story of Henry Durie is dark enough, but could anyone stand beside the grave of that sodden monomaniac and not respect him? It is strange that men should see sublime inspiration in the ruins of an old church and see none in the ruins of a man.

The author has most extraordinary ideas about Stevenson's tales of blood and spoil; he appears to think that they prove Stevenson to have had (we use Mr. Baildon's own phrase) a kind of "homicidal mania." "He arrives pretty much at the paradox that one can hardly be better employed than in taking life." Mr. Baildon might as well say that Dr. Conan Doyle delights in committing inexplicable crimes, that Mr. Clark Russell is a notorious pirate, and that Mr. Wilkie Collins thought that one could hardly be better employed than in stealing moonstones and falsifying marriage registers. But Mr. Baildon is scarcely alone in this error: few people have understood properly the goriness of Stevenson. Stevenson was essentially the robust schoolboy who draws skeletons and gibbets in his Latin grammar. It was not that he took pleasure in death, but that he took pleasure in life, in every muscular and emphatic action of life, even if it were an action that took the life of another.

Let us suppose that one gentleman throws a knife at another gentleman and pins him to the wall. It is scarcely necessary to remark that there are in this transaction two somewhat varying personal points of view. The point of view of the man pinned is the tragic and moral point of view, and this Stevenson showed clearly that he understood in such stories as "The Master of Ballantrae" and "Weir of Hermiston." But there is another view of the matter — that in which the whole act is an abrupt and brilliant explosion of bodily vitality, like breaking a rock with a blow of a hammer, or just clearing a five-barred gate. This is the standpoint of romance, and it is the soul of "Treasure Island" and "The Wrecker." It was not, indeed, that Stevenson loved men less, but that he loved clubs and pistols more. He had, in truth, in the devouring universalism of his soul, a positive love for inanimate objects such as has not been known since St. Francis called the sun brother and the well sister. We feel that he was actually in love with the wooden crutch that Silver sent hurtling in the sunlight, with the box that Billy Bones left at the "Admiral Benbow," with the knife that Wicks drove through his own hand and the table. There is always in his work a certain clean-cut angularity which makes us remember that he was fond of cutting wood with an axe.

Stevenson's new biographer, however, cannot make any allowance for this deep-rooted poetry of mere sight and touch. He is always imputing something to Stevenson as a crime which Stevenson really professed as an object. He says of that glorious riot of horror, "The Destroying Angel," in

“The Dynamiter,” that it is “highly fantastic and putting a strain on our credulity.” This is rather like describing the travels of Baron Munchausen as “unconvincing.” The whole story of “The Dynamiter” is a kind of humorous nightmare, and even in that story “The Destroying Angel” is supposed to be an extravagant lie made up on the spur of the moment. It is a dream within a dream, and to accuse it of improbability is like accusing the sky of being blue. But Mr. Baildon, whether from hasty reading or natural difference of taste, cannot in the least comprehend that rich and romantic irony of Stevenson’s London stories. He actually says of that portentous monument of humour, Prince Florizel of Bohemia, that, “though evidently admired by his creator, he is to me on the whole rather an irritating presence.” From this we are almost driven to believe (though desperately and against our will) that Mr. Baildon thinks that Prince Florizel is to be taken seriously, as if he were a man in real life. For ourselves. Prince Florizel is almost our favourite character in fiction; but we willingly add the proviso that if we met him in real life we should kill him.

The fact is, that the whole mass of Stevenson’s spiritual and intellectual virtues have been partly frustrated by one additional virtue — that of artistic dexterity. If he had chalked up his great message on a wall, like Walt Whitman, in large and straggling letters, it would have startled men like a blasphemy. But he wrote his light-headed paradoxes in so flowing a copy-book hand that everyone supposed they must be copy-book sentiments. He suffered from his versatility, not, as is loosely said, by not doing every department well enough, but by doing every department too well. As child, cockney, pirate, or Puritan, his disguises were so good that most people could not see the same man under all. It is an unjust fact that if a man can play the fiddle, give legal opinions, and black boots just tolerably, he is called an Admirable Crichton, but if he does all three thoroughly well, he is apt to be regarded, in the several departments, as a common fiddler, a common lawyer, and a common boot-black. This is what has happened in the case of Stevenson. If “Dr. Jekyll,” “The Master of Ballantrae,” “The Child’s Garden of Verses,” and “Across the Plains” had been each of them one shade less perfectly done than they were, everyone would have seen that they were all parts of the same message; but by succeeding in the proverbial miracle of being in five places at once, he has naturally convinced others that he was five different people. But the real message of Stevenson was as simple as that of Mohamet, as moral as that of Dante, as confident as that of Whitman, and as practical as that of James Watt. The conception which unites the whole varied work of Stevenson was that romance, or the vision of the possibilities of things, was far more important than mere occurrences: that one was the soul of our life, the other the body, and that the soul was the precious thing. The germ of all his stories lies in the idea that every landscape or scrap of scenery has a soul: and that soul is a story. Standing before a stunted orchard with a broken stone wall, we may know as a mere fact that no one has been through it but an elderly female cook. But everything exists in the human soul: that orchard grows in our own brain, and there it is the shrine and theatre of some strange chance between a girl and a ragged poet and a mad farmer. Stevenson stands for the conception that ideas are the real incidents: that our fancies are our adventures. To think of a cow with wings is essentially to have met one. And this is the reason for his wide diversities of narrative: he had to make one story as rich as a ruby sunset, another as grey as a hoary monolith: for the story was the soul, or rather the meaning, of the bodily vision. It is quite inappropriate to judge "The Teller of Tales" (as the Samoans called him) by the particular novels he wrote, as one would judge Mr. George Moore by "Esther Waters." These novels were only the two or three of his soul's adventures that he happened to tell. But he died with a thousand stories in his heart.

THOMAS CARLYLE

There are two main moral necessities for the work of a great man: the first is that he should believe in the truth of his message; the second is that he should believe in the acceptability of his message. It was the whole tragedy of Carlyle that he had the first and not the second.

The ordinary capital, however, which is made out of Carlyle's alleged gloom is a very paltry matter. Carlyle had his faults, both as a man and as a writer, but the attempt to explain his gospel in terms of his "liver" is merely pitiful. If indigestion invariably resulted in a "Sartor Resartus," it would be a vastly more tolerable thing than it is. Diseases do not turn into poems; even the decadent really writes with the healthy part of his organism. If Carlyle's private faults and literary virtues ran somewhat in the same line, he is only in the situation of every man; for every one of us it is surely very difficult to say precisely where our honest opinions end and our personal predilections begin. But to attempt to denounce Carlyle as a mere savage egotist cannot arise from anything but a pure inability to grasp Carlyle's gospel. "Ruskin," says a critic, "did, all the same, verily believe in God; Carlyle believed only in himself." This is certainly a distinction between the author he has understood and the author he has not understood. Carlyle believed in himself, but he could not have believed in himself more than Ruskin did; they both believed in God, because they felt that if everything else fell into wrack and ruin, themselves were permanent witnesses to God. Where they both failed was not in belief in God or in belief in themselves; they failed in belief in other people. It is not enough for a prophet to believe in his message; he must believe in its acceptability. Christ, St. Francis, Bunyan, Wesley, Mr. Gladstone, Walt Whitman, men of indescribable variety, were all alike in a certain faculty of treating the average man as their equal, of trusting to his reason and good feeling without fear and without condescension. It was this simplicity of confidence, not only in God, but in the image of God, that was lacking in Carlyle.

But the attempts to discredit Carlyle's religious sentiment must absolutely fall to the ground. The profound security of Carlyle's sense of the unity of the Cosmos is like that of a Hebrew prophet; and it has the same expression that it had in the Hebrew prophets — humour. A man must be very full of faith to jest about his divinity. No Neo-Pagan delicately suggesting a revival of Dionysus, no vague, half-converted Theosophist groping towards a recognition of Buddha, would ever think of cracking jokes on the matter. But to the Hebrew prophets their religion was so solid a thing, like a mountain or a mammoth, that the irony of its contact with trivial and fleeting matters struck them like a blow. So it was with Carlyle. His supreme contribution, both to philosophy and literature, was his sense of the sarcasm of eternity. Other writers had seen the hope or the terror of the heavens, he alone saw the humour of them. Other writers had seen that there could be something elemental and eternal in a song or statute, he alone saw that there could be something elemental and eternal in a joke. No one who ever read it will forget the passage, full of dark and agnostic gratification, in which he narrates that some Court chronicler described Louis XV. as "falling asleep in the Lord." "Enough for us that he did fall asleep; that, curtained in thick night, under what keeping we ask not, he at least will never, through unending ages, insult the face of the sun any more ... and we go on, if not to better forms of beastliness, at least to fresher ones."

The supreme value of Carlyle to English literature was that he was the founder of modern irrationalism; a movement fully as important as modern rationalism. A great deal is said in these days about the value or valuelessness of logic. In the main, indeed, logic is not a productive tool so much as a weapon of defence. A man building up an intellectual system has to build like Nehemiah, with the sword in one hand and the trowel in the other. The imagination, the constructive quality, is the trowel, and argument is the sword. A wide experience of actual intellectual affairs will lead most people to the conclusion that logic is mainly valuable as a weapon wherewith to exterminate logicians.

But though this may be true enough in practice, it scarcely clears up the position of logic in human affairs. Logic is a machine of the mind, and if it is used honestly it ought to bring out an honest conclusion. When people say that you can prove anything by logic, they are not using words in a fair sense. What they mean is that you can prove anything by bad logic. Deep in the mystic ingratitude of the soul of man there is an extraordinary tendency to use the name for an organ, when what is meant is the abuse or decay of that organ. Thus we speak of a man suffering from "nerves," which is about as sensible as talking about a man suffering from ten fingers. We speak of "liver" and "digestion" when we mean the failure of liver and the absence of digestion. And in the same manner we speak of the dangers of logic, when what we really mean is the danger of fallacy.

But the real point about the limitation of logic and the partial overthrow of logic by writers like Carlyle is deeper and somewhat different. The fault of the great mass of logicians is not that they bring out a false result, or, in other words, are not logicians at all. Their fault is that by an inevitable psychological habit they tend to forget that there are two parts of a logical process, the first the choosing of an assumption, and the second the arguing upon it, and humanity, if it devotes itself too persistently to the study of sound reasoning, has a certain tendency to lose the faculty of sound assumption. It is astonishing how constantly one may hear from rational and even rationalistic persons such a phrase as “He did not prove the very thing with which he started,” or, “The whole of his case rested upon a pure assumption,” two peculiarities which may be found by the curious in the works of Euclid. It is astonishing, again, how constantly one hears rationalists arguing upon some deep topic, apparently without troubling about the deep assumptions involved, having lost their sense, as it were, of the real colour and character of a man’s assumption. For instance, two men will argue about whether patriotism is a good thing and never discover until the end, if at all, that the cosmopolitan is basing his whole case upon the idea that man should, if he can, become as God, with equal sympathies and no prejudices, while the nationalist denies any such duty at the very start, and regards man as an animal who has preferences, as a bird has feathers.

Thus it was with Carlyle: he startled men by attacking not arguments, but assumptions. He simply brushed aside all the matters which the men of the nineteenth century held to be incontrovertible, and appealed directly to the very different class of matters which they knew to be true. He induced men to study less the truth of their reasoning, and more the truth of the assumptions upon which they reasoned. Even where his view was not the highest truth, it was always a refreshing and beneficent heresy. He denied every one of the postulates upon which the age of reason based itself. He denied the theory of progress which assumed that we must be better off than the people of the twelfth century. Whether we were better than the people of the twelfth century, according to him, depended entirely upon whether we chose or deserved to be.

He denied every type and species of prop or association or support which threw the responsibility upon civilisation or society, or anything but the individual conscience. He has often been called a prophet. The real ground of the truth of this phrase is often neglected. Since the last era of purely religious literature, the era of English Puritanism, there has been no writer in whose eyes the soul stood so much alone.

Carlyle was, as we have suggested, a mystic, and mysticism was with him, as with all its genuine professors, only a transcendent form of common sense. Mysticism and common sense alike consist in a sense of the dominance of certain truths and tendencies which cannot be formally demonstrated or even formally named. Mysticism and common sense are alike appeals to realities that we all know to be real, but which have no place in argument except as postulates. Carlyle's work did consist in breaking through formulæ, old and new, to these old and silent and ironical sanities. Philosophers might abolish kings a hundred times over, he maintained, they could not alter the fact that every man and woman does choose a king and repudiate all the pride of citizenship for the exultation of humility. If inequality of this kind was a weakness, it was a weakness bound up with the very strength of the universe. About hero worship, indeed, few critics have done the smallest justice to Carlyle. Misled by those hasty and choleric passages in which he sometimes expressed a preference for mere violence, passages which were a great deal more connected with his temperament than with his philosophy, they have finally imbibed the notion that Carlyle's theory of hero worship was a theory of terrified submission to stern and arrogant men. As a matter of fact, Carlyle is really inhumane about some questions, but he is never inhumane about hero worship. His view is not that human nature is so vulgar and silly a thing that it must be guided and driven; it is, on the contrary, that human nature is so chivalrous and fundamentally magnanimous a thing that even the meanest have it in them to love a leader more than themselves, and to prefer loyalty to rebellion. When he speaks of this trait in human nature Carlyle's tone invariably softens. We feel that for the moment he is kindled with admiration of mankind, and almost reaches the verge of Christianity. Whatever else was acid and captious about Carlyle's utterances, his hero worship was not only humane, it was almost optimistic. He admired great men primarily, and perhaps correctly, because he thought that they were more human than other men. The evil side of the influence of Carlyle and his religion of hero worship did not consist in the emotional worship of valour and success; that was a part of him, as, indeed, it is a part of all healthy children. Where Carlyle really did harm was in the fact that he, more than any modern man, is responsible for the increase of that modern habit of what is vulgarly called “Going the whole hog.” Often in matters of passion and conquest it is a singularly hoggish hog. This remarkable modern craze for making one’s philosophy, religion, politics, and temper all of a piece, of seeking in all incidents for opportunities to assert and reassert some favourite mental attitude, is a thing which existed comparatively little in other centuries. Solomon and Horace, Petrarch and Shakespeare were pessimists when they were melancholy, and optimists when they were happy. But the optimist of to-day seems obliged to prove that gout and unrequited love make him dance with joy, and the pessimist of to-day to prove that sunshine and a good supper convulse him with inconsolable anguish. Carlyle was strongly possessed with this mania for spiritual consistency. He wished to take the same view of the wars of the angels and of the paltriest riot at Donnybrook Fair. It was this species of insane logic which led him into his chief errors, never his natural enthusiasms. Let us take an example. Carlyle’s defence of slavery is a thoroughly ridiculous thing, weak alike in argument and in moral instinct. The truth is, that he only took it up from the passion for applying everywhere his paradoxical defence of aristocracy. He blundered, of course, because he did not see that slavery has nothing in the world to do with aristocracy, that it is, indeed, almost its opposite. The defence which Carlyle and all its thoughtful defenders have made for aristocracy was that a few persons could more rapidly and firmly decide public affairs in the interests of the people. But slavery is not even supposed to be a government for the good of the governed. It is a possession of the governed avowedly for the good of the governors. Aristocracy uses the strong for the service of the weak; slavery uses the weak for the service of the strong. It is no derogation to man as a spiritual being, as Carlyle firmly believed he was, that he should be ruled and guided for his own good like a child — for a child who is always ruled and guided we regard as the very type of spiritual existence. But it is a derogation and an absolute contradiction to that human spirituality in which Carlyle believed that a man should be owned like a tool for someone else’s good, as if he had no personal destiny in the Cosmos. We draw attention to this particular error of Carlyle’s because we think that it is a curious example of the waste and unclean places into which that remarkable animal, “the whole hog,” more than once led him.

In this respect Carlyle has had unquestionably long and an unquestionably bad influence. The whole of that recent political ethic which conceives that if we only go far enough we may finish a thing for once and all, that being strong consists chiefly in being deliberately deaf and blind, owes a great deal of its complete sway to his example. Out of him flows most of the philosophy of Nietzsche, who is in modern times the supreme maniac of this moonstruck consistency. Though Nietzsche and Carlyle were in reality profoundly different, Carlyle being a stiff-necked peasant and Nietzsche a very fragile aristocrat, they were alike in this one quality of which we speak, the strange and pitiful audacity with which they applied their single ethical test to everything in heaven and earth. The disciple of Nietzsche, indeed, embraces immorality like an austere and difficult faith. He urges himself to lust and cruelty with the same tremulous enthusiasm with which a Christian urges himself to purity and patience; he struggles as a monk struggles with bestial visions and temptations with the ancient necessities of honour and justice and compassion. To this madhouse, it can hardly be denied, has Carlyle’s intellectual courage brought many at last.

TOLSTOY AND THE CULT OF SIMPLICITY

The whole world is certainly heading for a great simplicity, not deliberately, but rather inevitably. It is not a mere fashion of false innocence, like that of the French aristocrats before the Revolution, who built an altar to Pan, and who taxed the peasantry for the enormous expenditure which is needed in order to live the simple life of peasants. The simplicity towards which the world is driving is the necessary outcome of all our systems and speculations and of our deep and continuous contemplation of things. For the universe is like everything in it; we have to look at it repeatedly and habitually before we see it. It is only when we have seen it for the hundredth time that we see it for the first time. The more consistently things are contemplated, the more they tend to unify themselves and therefore to simplify themselves. The simplification of anything is always sensational. Thus monotheism is the most sensational of things: it is as if we gazed long at a design full of disconnected objects, and, suddenly, with a stunning thrill, they came together into a huge and staring face.

Few people will dispute that all the typical movements of our time are upon this road towards simplification. Each system seeks to be more fundamental than the other; each seeks, in the literal sense, to undermine the other. In art, for example, the old conception of man, classic as the Apollo Belvedere, has first been attacked by the realist, who asserts that man, as a fact of natural history, is a creature with colourless hair and a freckled face. Then comes the Impressionist, going yet deeper, who asserts that to his physical eye, which alone is certain, man is a creature with purple hair and a grey face. Then comes the Symbolist, and says that to his soul, which alone is certain, man is a creature with green hair and a blue face. And all the great writers of our time represent in one form or another this attempt to reestablish communication with the elemental, or, as it is sometimes more roughly and fallaciously expressed, to return to nature. Some think that the return to nature consists in drinking no wine; some think that it consists in drinking a great deal more than is good for them. Some think that the return to nature is achieved by beating swords into ploughshares; some think it is achieved by turning ploughshares into very ineffectual British War Office bayonets. It is natural, according to the Jingo, for a man to kill other people with gunpowder and himself with gin. It is natural, according to the humanitarian revolutionist, to kill other people with dynamite and himself with vegetarianism. It would be too obviously Philistine a sentiment, perhaps, to suggest that the claim of either of these persons to be obeying the voice of nature is interesting when we consider that they require huge volumes of paradoxical argument to persuade themselves or anyone else of the truth of their conclusions. But the giants of our time are undoubtedly alike in that they approach by very different roads this conception of the return to simplicity. Ibsen returns to nature by the angular exterior of fact, Maeterlinck by the eternal tendencies of fable. Whitman returns to nature by seeing how much he can accept, Tolstoy by seeing how much he can reject.

Now, this heroic desire to return to nature, is, of course, in some respects, rather like the heroic desire of a kitten to return to its own tail. A tail is a simple and beautiful object, rhythmic in curve and soothing in texture; but it is certainly one of the minor but characteristic qualities of a tail that it should hang behind. It is impossible to deny that it would in some degree lose its character if attached to any other part of the anatomy. Now, nature is like a tail in the sense that it vitally important, if it is to discharge its real duty, that it should be always behind. To imagine that we can see nature, especially our own nature, face to face, is a folly; it is even a blasphemy. It is like the conduct of a cat in some mad fairy-tale, who should set out on his travels with the firm conviction that he would find his tail growing like a tree in the meadows at the end of the world. And the actual effect of the travels of the philosopher in search of nature, when seen from the outside, looks very like the gyrations of the tail-pursuing kitten, exhibiting much enthusiasm but little dignity, much cry and very little tail. The grandeur of nature is that she is omnipotent and unseen, that she is perhaps ruling us most when we think that she is heeding us least. “Thou art a God that hidest Thyself,” said the Hebrew poet. It may be said with all reverence that it is behind a man’s back that the spirit of nature hides.

It is this consideration that lends a certain air of futility even to all the inspired simplicities and thunderous veracities of Tolstoy. We feel that a man cannot make himself simple merely by warring on complexity; we feel, indeed, in our saner moments, that a man cannot make himself simple at all. A self-conscious simplicity may well be far more intrinsically ornate than luxury itself. Indeed, a great deal of the pomp and sumptuousness of the world’s history was simple in the truest sense. It was born of an almost babyish receptiveness; it was the work of men who had eyes to wonder and men who had ears to hear.

"King Solomon brought merchant men Because of his desire With peacocks, apes, and ivory, From Tarshish unto Tyre."

But this proceeding was not a part of the wisdom of Solomon; it was a part of his folly — I had almost said of his innocence. Tolstoy, we feel, would not be content with hurling satire and denunciation at "Solomon in all his glory." With fierce and unimpeachable logic he would go a step further. He would spend days and nights in the meadows stripping the shameless crimson coronals off the lilies of the field.

The new collection of "Tales from Tolstoy," translated and edited by Mr. R. Nisbet Bain, is calculated to draw particular attention to this ethical and ascetic side of Tolstoy's work. In one sense, and that the deepest sense, the work of Tolstoy is, of course, a genuine and noble appeal to simplicity. The narrow notion that an artist may not teach is pretty well exploded by now. But the truth of the matter is, that an artist teaches far more by his mere background and properties, his landscape, his costume, his idiom and technique — all the part of his work, in short, of which he is probably entirely unconscious, than by the elaborate and pompous moral dicta which he fondly imagines to be his opinions. The real distinction between the ethics of high art and the ethics of manufactured and didactic art lies in the simple fact that the bad fable has a moral, while the good fable is a moral. And the real moral of Tolstoy comes out constantly in these stories, the great moral which lies at the heart of all his work, of which he is probably unconscious, and of which it is quite likely that he would vehemently disapprove. The curious cold white light of morning that shines over all the tales, the folklore simplicity with which "a man or a woman" are spoken of without further identification, the love — one might almost say the lust — for the qualities of brute materials, the hardness of wood, and the softness of mud, the ingrained belief in a certain ancient kindliness sitting beside the very cradle of the race of man — these influences are truly moral. When we put beside them the trumpeting and tearing nonsense of the didactic Tolstoy, screaming for an obscene purity, shouting for an inhuman peace, hacking up human life into small sins with a chopper, sneering at men, women, and children out of respect to humanity, combining in one chaos of contradictions an unmanly Puritan and an uncivilised prig, then, indeed, we scarcely know whither Tolstoy has vanished. We know not what to do with this small and noisy moralist who is inhabiting one corner of a great and good man.

It is difficult in every case to reconcile Tolstoy the great artist with Tolstoy the almost venomous reformer. It is difficult to believe that a man who draws in such noble outlines the dignity of the daily life of humanity regards as evil that divine act of procreation by which that dignity is renewed from age to age. It is difficult to believe that a man who has painted with so frightful an honesty the heartrending emptiness of the life of the poor can really grudge them every one of their pitiful pleasures, from courtship to tobacco. It is difficult to believe that a poet in prose who has so powerfully exhibited the earth-born air of man, the essential kinship of a human being, with the landscape in which he lives, can deny so elemental a virtue as that which attaches a man to his own ancestors and his own land. It is difficult to believe that the man who feels so poignantly the detestable insolence of oppression would not actually, if he had the chance, lay the oppressor flat with his fist. All, however, arises from the search after a false simplicity, the aim of being, if I may so express it, more natural than it is natural to be. It would not only be more human, it would be more humble of us to be content to be complex. The truest kinship with humanity would lie in doing as humanity has always done, accepting with a sportsmanlike relish the estate to which we are called, the star of our happiness, and the fortunes of the land of our birth.

The work of Tolstoy has another and more special significance. It represents the re-assertion of a certain awful common sense which characterised the most extreme utterances of Christ. It is true that we cannot turn the cheek to the smiter; it is true that we cannot give our cloak to the robber; civilisation is too complicated, too vain-glorious, too emotional. The robber would brag, and we should blush; in other words, the robber and we are alike sentimentalists. The command of Christ is impossible, but it is not insane; it is rather sanity preached to a planet of lunatics. If the whole world was suddenly stricken with a sense of humour it would find itself mechanically fulfilling the Sermon on the Mount. It is not the plain facts of the world which stand in the way of that consummation, but its passions of vanity and self-advertisement and morbid sensibility. It is true that we cannot turn the cheek to the smiter, and the sole and sufficient reason is that we have not the pluck. Tolstoy and his followers have shown that they have the pluck, and even if we think they are mistaken, by this sign they conquer.

Their theory has the strength of an utterly consistent thing. It represents that doctrine of mildness and non-resistance which is the last and most audacious of all the forms of resistance to every existing authority. It is the great strike of the Quakers which is more formidable than many sanguinary revolutions. If human beings could only succeed in achieving a real passive resistance they would be strong with the appalling strength of inanimate things, they would be calm with the maddening calm of oak or iron, which conquer without vengeance and are conquered without humiliation. The theory of Christian duty enunciated by them is that we should never conquer by force, but always, if we can, conquer by persuasion. In their mythology St. George did not conquer the dragon: he tied a pink ribbon round its neck and gave it a saucer of milk. According to them, a course of consistent kindness to Nero would have turned him into something only faintly represented by Alfred the Great. In fact, the policy recommended by this school for dealing with the bovine stupidity and bovine fury of this world is accurately summed up in the celebrated verse of Mr. Edward Lear:

“There was an old man who said, ‘How Shall I flee from this terrible cow? I will sit on a stile and continue to smile Till I soften the heart of this cow.’”

Their confidence in human nature is really honourable and magnificent; it takes the form of refusing to believe the overwhelming majority of mankind, even when they set out to explain their own motives. But although most of us would in all probability tend at first sight to consider this new sect of Christians as little less outrageous than some brawling and absurd sect in the Reformation, yet we should fall into a singular error in doing so. The Christianity of Tolstoy is, when we come to consider it, one of the most thrilling and dramatic incidents in our modern civilisation. It represents a tribute to the Christian religion more sensational than the breaking of seals or the falling of stars.

From the point of view of a rationalist, the whole world is rendered almost irrational by the single phenomenon of Christian Socialism. It turns the scientific universe topsy-turvy, and makes it essentially possible that the key of all social evolution may be found in the dusty casket of some discredited creed. It cannot be amiss to consider this phenomenon as it realty is.

The religion of Christ has, like many true things, been disproved an extraordinary number of times. It was disproved by the Neo-Platonist philosophers at the very moment when it was first starting forth upon its startling and universal career. It was disproved again by many of the sceptics of the Renaissance only a few years before its second and supremely striking embodiment, the religion of Puritanism, was about to triumph over many kings and civilise many continents. We all agree that these schools of negation were only interludes in its history; but we all believe naturally and inevitably that the negation of our own day is really a breaking up of the theological cosmos, an Armageddon, a Ragnorak, a twilight of the gods. The man of the nineteenth century, like a schoolboy of sixteen, believes that his doubt and depression are symbols of the end of the world. In our day the great irreligionists who did nothing but dethrone God and drive angels before them have been outstripped, distanced, and made to look orthodox and humdrum. A newer race of sceptics has found something infinitely more exciting to do than nailing down the lids upon a million coffins, and the body upon a single cross. They have disputed not only the elementary creeds, but the elementary laws of mankind, property, patriotism, civil obedience. They have arraigned civilisation as openly as the materialists have arraigned theology; they have damned all the philosophers even lower than they have damned the saints. Thousands of modern men move quietly and conventionally among their fellows while holding views of national limitation or landed property that would have made Voltaire shudder like a nun listening to blasphemies. And the last and wildest phase of this saturnalia of scepticism, the school that goes furthest among thousands who go so far, the school that denies the moral validity of those ideals of courage or obedience which are recognised even among pirates, this school bases itself upon the literal words of Christ, like Dr. Watts or Messrs. Moody and Sankey. Never in the whole history of the world was such a tremendous tribute paid to the vitality of an ancient creed. Compared with this, it would be a small thing if the Red Sea were cloven asunder, or the sun did stand still at midday. We are faced with the phenomenon that a set of revolutionists whose contempt for all the ideals of family and nation would evoke horror in a thieves’ kitchen, who can rid themselves of those elementary instincts of the man and the gentleman which cling to the very bones of our civilisation, cannot rid themselves of the influence of two or three remote Oriental anecdotes written in corrupt Greek. The fact, when realised, has about it something stunning and hypnotic. The most convinced rationalist is in its presence suddenly stricken with a strange and ancient vision, sees the immense sceptical cosmogonies of this age as dreams going the way of a thousand forgotten heresies, and believes for a moment that the dark sayings handed down through eighteen centuries may, indeed, contain in themselves the revolutions of which we have only begun to dream.

This value which we have above suggested unquestionably belongs to the Tolstoians, who may roughly be described as the new Quakers. With their strange optimism, and their almost appalling logical courage, they offer a tribute to Christianity which no orthodoxies could offer. It cannot but be remarkable to watch a revolution in which both the rulers and the rebels march under the same symbol. But the actual theory of non-resistance itself, with all its kindred theories, is not, I think, characterised by that intellectual obviousness and necessity which its supporters claim for it. A pamphlet before us shows us an extraordinary number of statements about the new Testament, of which the accuracy is by no means so striking as the confidence. To begin with, we must protest against a habit of quoting and paraphrasing at the same time. When a man is discussing what Jesus meant, let him state first of all what He said, not what the man thinks He would have said if he had expressed Himself more clearly. Here is an instance of question and answer:

Q. “How did our Master Himself sum up the law in a few words?”

A. “Be ye merciful, be ye perfect even as your Father; your Father in the spirit world is merciful, is perfect.”

There is nothing in this, perhaps, which Christ might not have said except the abominable metaphysical modernism of “the spirit world”; but to say that it is recorded that He did say it, is like saying it is recorded that He preferred palm trees to sycamores. It is a simple and unadulterated untruth. The author should know that these words have meant a thousand things to a thousand people, and that if more ancient sects had paraphrased them as cheerfully as he, he would never have had the text upon which he founds his theory. In a pamphlet in which plain printed words cannot be left alone, it is not surprising if there are mis-statements upon larger matters. Here is a statement clearly and philosophically laid down which we can only content ourselves with flatly denying: “The fifth rule of our Lord is that we should take special pains to cultivate the same kind of regard for people of foreign countries, and for those generally who do not belong to us, or even have an antipathy to us, which we already entertain towards our own people, and those who are in sympathy with us.” I should very much like to know where in the whole of the New Testament the author finds this violent, unnatural, and immoral proposition. Christ did not have the same kind of regard for one person as for another. We are specifically told that there were certain persons whom He specially loved. It is most improbable that He thought of other nations as He thought of His own. The sight of His national city moved Him to tears, and the highest compliment He paid was, “Behold an Israelite indeed.” The author has simply confused two entirely distinct things. Christ commanded us to have love for all men, but even if we had equal love for all men, to speak of having the same love for all men is merely bewildering nonsense. If we love a man at all, the impression he produces on us must be vitally different to the impression produced by another man whom we love. To speak of having the same kind of regard for both is about as sensible as asking a man whether he prefers chrysanthemums or billiards. Christ did not love humanity; He never said He loved humanity; He loved men. Neither He nor anyone else can love humanity; it is like loving a gigantic centipede. And the reason that the Tolstoians can even endure to think of an equally distributed affection is that their love of humanity is a logical love, a love into which they are coerced by their own theories, a love which would be an insult to a tom-cat.

But the greatest error of all lies in the mere act of cutting up the teaching of the New Testament into five rules. It precisely and ingeniously misses the most dominant characteristic of the teaching — its absolute spontaneity. The abyss between Christ and all His modern interpreters is that we have no record that He ever wrote a word, except with His finger in the sand. The whole is the history of one continuous and sublime conversation. Thousands of rules have been deduced from it before these Tolstoian rules were made, and thousands will be deduced afterwards. It was not for any pompous proclamation, it was not for any elaborate output of printed volumes; it was for a few splendid and idle words that the cross was set up on Calvary, and the earth gaped, and the sun was darkened at noonday.

SAVONAROLA

Savonarola is a man whom we shall probably never understand until we know what horror may lie at the heart of civilisation. This we shall not know until we are civilised. It may be hoped, in one sense, that we may never understand Savonarola.

The great deliverers of men have, for the most part, saved them from calamities which we all recognise as evil, from calamities which are the ancient enemies of humanity. The great law-givers saved us from anarchy: the great physicians saved us from pestilence: the great reformers saved us from starvation. But there is a huge and bottomless evil compared with which all these are fleabites, the most desolating curse that can fall upon men or nations, and it has no name except we call it satisfaction. Savonarola did not save men from anarchy, but from order; not from pestilence, but from paralysis; not from starvation, but from luxury. Men like Savonarola are the witnesses to the tremendous psychological fact at the back of all our brains, but for which no name has ever been found, that ease is the worst enemy of happiness, and civilisation potentially the end of man.

For I fancy that Savonarola's thrilling challenge to the luxury of his day went far deeper than the mere question of sin. The modern rationalistic admirers of Savonarola, from George Eliot downwards, dwell, truly enough, upon the sound ethical justification of Savonarola's anger, upon the hideous and extravagant character of the crimes which polluted the palaces of the Renaissance. But they need not be so anxious to show that Savonarola was no ascetic, that he merely picked out the black specks of wickedness with the priggish enlightenment of a member of an Ethical Society. Probably he did hate the civilisation of his time, and not merely its sins; and that is precisely where he was infinitely more profound than a modern moralist. He saw, that the actual crimes were not the only evils: that stolen jewels and poisoned wine and obscene pictures were merely the symptoms; that the disease was the complete dependence upon jewels and wine and pictures. This is a thing constantly forgotten in judging of ascetics and Puritans in old times. A denunciation of harmless sports did not always mean an ignorant hatred of what no one but a narrow moralist would call harmful. Sometimes it meant an exceedingly enlightened hatred of what no one but a narrow moralist would call harmless. Ascetics are sometimes more advanced than the average man, as well as less.

Such, at least, was the hatred in the heart of Savonarola. He was making war against no trivial human sins, but against godless and thankless quiescence, against getting used to happiness, the mystic sin by which all creation fell. He was preaching that severity which is the sign-manual of youth and hope. He was preaching that alertness, that clean agility and vigilance, which is as necessary to gain pleasure as to gain holiness, as indispensable in a lover as in a monk. A critic has truly pointed out that Savonarola could not have been fundamentally anti-æsthetic, since he had such friends as Michael Angelo, Botticelli, and Luca della Robbia. The fact is that this purification and austerity are even more necessary for the appreciation of life and laughter than for anything else. To let no bird fly past unnoticed, to spell patiently the stones and weeds, to have the mind a storehouse of sunset, requires a discipline in pleasure, and an education in gratitude.

The civilisation which surrounded Savonarola on every side was a civilisation which had already taken the wrong turn, the turn that leads to endless inventions and no discoveries, in which new things grow old with confounding rapidity, but in which no old things ever grow new. The monstrosity of the crimes of the Renaissance was not a mark of imagination; it was a mark, as all monstrosity is, of the loss of imagination. It is only when a man has really ceased to see a horse as it is, that he invents a centaur, only when he can no longer be surprised at an ox, that he worships the devil. Diablerie is the stimulant of the jaded fancy; it is the dram-drinking of the artist. Savonarola addressed himself to the hardest of all earthly tasks, that of making men turn back and wonder at the simplicities they had learnt to ignore. It is strange that the most unpopular of all doctrines is the doctrine which declares the common life divine. Democracy, of which Savonarola was so fiery an exponent, is the hardest of gospels; there is nothing that so terrifies men as the decree that they are all kings. Christianity, in Savonarola’s mind, identical with democracy, is the hardest of gospels; there is nothing that so strikes men with fear as the saying that they are all the sons of God.

Savonarola and his republic fell. The drug of despotism was administered to the people, and they forgot what they had been. There are some at the present day who have so strange a respect for art and letters, and for mere men of genius, that they conceive the reign of the Medici to be an improvement on that of the great Florentine republican. It is such men as these and their civilisation that we have at the present day to fear. We are surrounded on many sides by the same symptoms as those which awoke the unquenchable wrath of Savonarola — a hedonism that is more sick of happiness than an invalid is sick of pain, an art sense that seeks the assistance of crime since it has exhausted nature. In many modern works we find veiled and horrible hints of a truly Renaissance sense of the beauty of blood, the poetry of murder. The bankrupt and depraved imagination does not see that a living man is far more dramatic than a dead one. Along with this, as in the time of the Medici, goes the falling back into the arms of despotism, the hunger for the strong man which is unknown among strong men. The masterful hero is worshipped as he is worshipped by the readers of the "Bow Bells Novelettes," and for the same reason — a profound sense of personal weakness. That tendency to devolve our duties descends on us, which is the soul of slavery, alike whether for its menial tasks it employs serfs or emperors. Against all this the great clerical republican stands in everlasting protest, preferring his failure to his rival's success. The issue is still between him and Lorenzo, between the responsibilities of liberty and the license of slavery, between the perils of truth and the security of silence, between the pleasure of toil and the toil of pleasure. The supporters of Lorenzo the Magnificent are assuredly among us, men for whom even nations and empires only exist to satisfy the moment, men to whom the last hot hour of summer is better than a sharp and wintry spring. They have an art, a literature, a political philosophy, which are all alike valued for their immediate effect upon the taste, not for what they promise of the destiny of the spirit. Their statuettes and sonnets are rounded and perfect, while "Macbeth" is in comparison a fragment, and the Moses of Michael Angelo a hint. Their campaigns and battles are always called triumphant, while Cæsar and Cromwell wept for many humiliations. And the end of it all is the hell of no resistance, the hell of an unfathomable softness, until the whole nature recoils into madness and the chamber of civilisation is no longer merely a cushioned apartment, but a padded cell.

This last and worst of human miseries Savonarola saw afar off, and bent his whole gigantic energies to turning the chariot into another course. Few men understood his object; some called him a madman, some a charlatan, some an enemy of human joy. They would not even have understood if he had told them, if he had said that he was saving them from a calamity of contentment which should be the end of joys and sorrows alike. But there are those to-day who feel the same silent danger, and who bend themselves to the same silent resistance. They also are supposed to be contending for some trivial political scruple.

Mr. M’Hardy says, in defending Savonarola, that the number of fine works of art destroyed in the Burning of the Vanities has been much exaggerated. I confess that I hope the pile contained stacks of incomparable masterpieces if the sacrifice made that one real moment more real. Of one thing I am sure, that Savonarola’s friend Michael Angelo would have piled all his own statues one on top of the other, and burnt them to ashes, if only he had been certain that the glow transfiguring the sky was the dawn of a younger and wiser world.

THE POSITION OF SIR WALTER SCOTT

Walter Scott is a writer who should just now be re-emerging into his own high place in letters, for unquestionably the recent, though now dwindling, schools of severely technical and æsthetic criticism have been unfavourable to him. He was a chaotic and unequal writer, and if there is one thing in which artists have improved since his time, it is in consistency and equality. It would perhaps be unkind to inquire whether the level of the modern man of letters, as compared with Scott, is due to the absence of valleys or the absence of mountains. But in any case, we have learnt in our day to arrange our literary effects carefully, and the only point in which we fall short of Scott is in the incidental misfortune that we have nothing particular to arrange.

It is said that Scott is neglected by modern readers; if so, the matter could be more appropriately described by saying that modern readers are neglected by Providence. The ground of this neglect, in so far as it exists, must be found, I suppose, in the general sentiment that, like the beard of Polonius, he is too long. Yet it is surely a peculiar thing that in literature alone a house should be despised because it is too large, or a host impugned because he is too generous. If romance be really a pleasure, it is difficult to understand the modern reader’s consuming desire to get it over, and if it be not a pleasure, it is difficult to understand his desire to have it at all. Mere size, it seems to me, cannot be a fault. The fault must lie in some disproportion. If some of Scott’s stories are dull and dilatory, it is not because they are giants, but because they are hunchbacks or cripples. Scott was very far indeed from being a perfect writer, but I do not think that it can be shown that the large and elaborate plan on which his stories are built was by any means an imperfection. He arranged his endless prefaces and his colossal introductions just as an architect plans great gates and long approaches to a really large house. He did not share the latter-day desire to get quickly through a story. He enjoyed narrative as a sensation; he did not wish to swallow a story like a pill, that it should do him good afterwards. He desired to taste it like a glass of port, that it might do him good at the time. The reader sits late at his banquets. His characters have that air of immortality which belongs to those of Dumas and Dickens. We should not be surprised to meet them in any number of sequels. Scott, in his heart of hearts, probably would have liked to write an endless story without either beginning or close.

Walter Scott is a great, and, therefore, mysterious man. He will never be understood until Romance is understood, and that will be only when Time, Man, and Eternity are understood. To say that Scott had more than any other man that ever lived a sense of the romantic seems, in these days, a slight and superficial tribute. The whole modern theory arises from one fundamental mistake — the idea that romance is in some way a plaything with life, a figment, a conventionality, a thing upon the outside. No genuine criticism of romance will ever arise until we have grasped the fact that romance lies not upon the outside of life, but absolutely in the centre of it. The centre of every man's existence is a dream. Death, disease, insanity, are merely material accidents, like toothache or a twisted ankle. That these brutal forces always besiege and often capture the citadel does not prove that they are the citadel. The boast of the realist (applying what the reviewers call his scalpel) is that he cuts into the heart of life; but he makes a very shallow incision, if he only reaches as deep as habits and calamities and sins. Deeper than all these lies a man's vision of himself, as swaggering and sentimental as a penny novelette. The literature of can-dour unearths innumerable weaknesses and elements of lawlessness which is called romance. It perceives superficial habits like murder and dipsomania, but it does not perceive the deepest of sins — the sin of vanity — vanity which is the mother of all day-dreams and adventures, the one sin that is not shared with any boon companion, or whispered to any priest.

In estimating, therefore, the ground of Scott's pre-eminence in romance we must absolutely rid ourselves of the notion that romance or adventure are merely materialistic things involved in the tangle of a plot or the multiplicity of drawn swords. We must remember that it is, like tragedy or farce, a state of the soul, and that, for some dark and elemental reason which we can never understand, this state of the soul is evoked in us by the sight of certain places or the contemplation of certain human crises, by a stream rushing under a heavy and covered wooden bridge, or by a man plunging a knife or sword into tough timber. In the selection of these situations which catch the spirit of romance as in a net, Scott has never been equalled or even approached. His finest scenes affect us like fragments of a hilarious dream. They have the same quality which is often possessed by those nocturnal comedies — that of seeming more human than our waking life — even while they are less possible. Sir Arthur Wardour, with his daughter and the old beggar crouching in a cranny of the cliff as night falls and the tide closes around them, are actually in the coldest and bitterest of practical situations. Yet the whole incident has a quality that can only be called boyish. It is warmed with all the colours of an incredible sunset. Rob Roy trapped in the Tolbooth, and confronted with Bailie Nicol Jarvie, draws no sword, leaps from no window, affects none of the dazzling external acts upon which contemporary romance depends, yet that plain and humourous dialogue is full of the essential philosophy of romance which is an almost equal betting upon man and destiny. Perhaps the most profoundly thrilling of all Scott's situations is that in which the family of Colonel Mannering are waiting for the carriage which may or may not arrive by night to bring an unknown man into a princely possession. Yet almost the whole of that thrilling scene consists of a ridiculous conversation about food, and flirtation between a frivolous old lawyer and a fashionable girl. We can say nothing about what makes these scenes, except that the wind bloweth where it listeth, and that here the wind blows strong.

It is in this quality of what may be called spiritual adventurousness that Scott stands at so different an elevation to the whole of the contemporary crop of romancers who have followed the leadership of Dumas. There has, indeed, been a great and inspiriting revival of romance in our time, but it is partly frustrated in almost every case by this rooted conception that romance consists in the vast multiplication of incidents and the violent acceleration of narrative. The heroes of Mr. Stanley Weyman scarcely ever have their swords out of their hands; the deeper presence of romance is far better felt when the sword is at the hip ready for innumerable adventures too terrible to be pictured. The Stanley Weyman hero has scarcely time to eat his supper except in the act of leaping from a window or whilst his other hand is employed in lunging with a rapier. In Scott's heroes, on the other hand, there is no characteristic so typical or so worthy of humour as their disposition to linger over their meals. The conviviality of the Clerk of Copmanhurst or of Mr. Pleydell, and the thoroughly solid things they are described as eating, is one of the most perfect of Scott's poetic touches. In short, Mr. Stanley Weyman is filled with the conviction that the sole essence of romance is to move with insatiable rapidity from incident to incident. In the truer romance of Scott there is more of the sentiment of "Oh! still delay, thou art so fair"! more of a certain patriarchal enjoyment of things as they are — of the sword by the side and the wine-cup in the hand. Romance, indeed, does not consist by any means so much in experiencing adventures as in being ready for them. How little the actual boy cares for incidents in comparison to tools and weapons may be tested by the fact that the most popular story of adventure is concerned with a man who lived for years on a desert island with two guns and a sword, which he never had to use on an enemy.

Closely connected with this is one of the charges most commonly brought against Scott, particularly in his own day — the charge of a fanciful and monotonous insistence upon the details of armour and costume. The critic in the *Edinburgh Review* said indignantly that he could tolerate a somewhat detailed description of the apparel of Marmion, but when it came to an equally detailed account of the apparel of his pages and yeomen the mind could bear it no longer. The only thing to be said about that critic is that he had never been a little boy. He foolishly imagined that Scott valued the plume and dagger of Marmion for Marmion’s sake. Not being himself romantic, he could not understand that Scott valued the plume because it was a plume, and the dagger because it was a dagger. Like a child, he loved weapons with a manual materialistic love, as one loves the softness of fur or the coolness of marble. One of the profound philosophical truths which are almost confined to infants is this love of things, not for their use or origin, but for their own inherent characteristics, the child’s love of the toughness of wood, the wetness of water, the magnificent soapiness of soap. So it was with Scott, who had so much of the child in him. Human beings were perhaps the principal characters in his stories, but they were certainly not the only characters. A battle-axe was a person of importance, a castle had a character and ways of its own. A church bell had a word to say in the matter. Like a true child, he almost ignored the distinction between the animate and inanimate. A two-handed sword might be carried only by a menial in a procession, but it was something important and immeasurably fascinating — it was a two-handed sword.

There is one quality which is supreme and continuous in Scott which is little appreciated at present. One of the values we have really lost in recent fiction is the value of eloquence. The modern literary artist is compounded of almost every man except the orator. Yet Shakespeare and Scott are certainly alike in this, that they could both, if literature had failed, have earned a living as professional demagogues. The feudal heroes in the

“Waverley Novels” retort upon each other with a passionate dignity, haughty and yet singularly human, which can hardly be paralleled in political eloquence except in “Julius Cæsar.” With a certain fiery impartiality which stirs the blood, Scott distributes his noble orations equally among saints and villains. He may deny a villain every virtue or triumph, but he cannot endure to deny him a telling word; he will ruin a man, but he will not silence him. In truth, one of Scott’s most splendid traits is his difficulty, or rather incapacity, for despising any of his characters. He did not scorn the most revolting miscreant as the realist of to-day commonly scorns his own hero. Though his soul may be in rags, every man of Scott can speak like a king.

This quality, as I have said, is sadly to seek in the fiction of the passing hour. The realist would, of course, repudiate the bare idea of putting a bold and brilliant tongue in every man’s head, but even where the moment of the story naturally demands eloquence the eloquence seems frozen in the tap. Take any contemporary work of fiction and turn to the scene where the young Socialist denounces the millionaire, and then compare the stilted sociological lecture given by that self-sacrificing bore with the surging joy of words in Rob Roy’s declaration of himself, or Athelstane’s defiance of De Bracy. That ancient sea of human passion upon which high words and great phrases are the resplendent foam is just now at a low ebb. We have even gone the length of congratulating ourselves because we can see the mud and the monsters at the bottom.

In politics there is not a single man whose position is due to eloquence in the first degree; its place is taken by repartees and rejoinders purely intellectual, like those of an omnibus conductor. In discussing questions like the farm-burning in South Africa no critic of the war uses his material as Burke or Grattan (perhaps exaggeratively) would have used it — the speaker is content with facts and expositions of facts. In another age he might have risen and hurled that great song in prose, perfect as prose and yet rising into a chant, which Meg Merrilies hurled at Ellangowan, at the rulers of Britain: “Ride your ways. Laird of Ellangowan; ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram — this day have ye quenched seven smoking hearths. See if the fire in your ain parlour burns the blyther for that. Ye have riven the thack of seven cottar houses. Look if your ain roof-tree stands the faster for that. Ye may stable your stirks in the sheilings of Dern-cleugh. See that the hare does not couch on the hearthstane of Ellangowan. Ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram."

The reason is, of course, that these men are afraid of bombast and Scott was not. A man will not reach eloquence if he is afraid of bombast, just as a man will not jump a hedge if he is afraid of a ditch. As the object of all eloquence is to find the least common denominator of men's souls, to fall just within the natural comprehension, it cannot obviously have any chance with a literary ambition which aims at falling just outside it. It is quite right to invent subtle analyses and detached criticisms, but it is unreasonable to expect them to be punctuated with roars of popular applause. It is possible to conceive of a mob shouting any central and simple sentiment, good or bad, but it is impossible to think of a mob shouting a distinction in terms. In the matter of eloquence, the whole question is one of the immediate effect of greatness, such as is produced even by fine bombast. It is absurd to call it merely superficial; here there is no question of superficiality; we might as well call a stone that strikes us between the eyes merely superficial. The very word "superficial" is founded on a fundamental mistake about life, the idea that second thoughts are best. The superficial impression of the world is by far the deepest. What we really feel, naturally and casually, about the look of skies and trees and the face of friends, that and that alone will almost certainly remain our vital philosophy to our dying day.

Scott's bombast, therefore, will always be stirring to anyone who approaches it, as he should approach all literature, as a little child. We could easily excuse the contemporary critic for not admiring melodramas and adventure stories, and Punch and Judy, if he would admit that it was a slight deficiency in his artistic sensibilities. Beyond all question, it marks a lack of literary instinct to be unable to simplify one's mind at the first signal of the advance of romance. "You do me wrong," said Brian de Bois-Guilbert to Rebecca. "Many a law, many a commandment have I broken, but my word, never." "Die," cries Balfour of Burley to the villain in "Old Mortality." "Die, hoping nothing, believing nothing—" "And fearing nothing," replies the other. This is the old and honourable fine art of bragging, as it was practised by the great worthies of antiquity. The man who cannot appreciate it goes along with the man who cannot appreciate beef or claret or a game with children or a brass band. They are afraid of making fools of themselves, and are unaware that that transformation has already been triumphantly effected.

Scott is separated, then, from much of the later conception of fiction by this quality of eloquence. The whole of the best and finest work of the modern novelist (such as the work of Mr. Henry James) is primarily concerned with that delicate and fascinating speech which burrows deeper and deeper like a mole; but we have wholly forgotten that speech which mounts higher and higher like a wave and falls in a crashing peroration. Perhaps the most thoroughly brilliant and typical man of this decade is Mr. Bernard Shaw. In his admirable play of “Candida” it is clearly a part of the character of the Socialist clergyman that he should be eloquent, but he is not eloquent because the whole “G.B.S.” condition of mind renders impossible that poetic simplicity which eloquence requires. Scott takes his heroes and villains seriously, which is, after all, the way that heroes and villains take themselves — especially villains. It is the custom to call these old romantic poses artificial; but the word artificial is the last and silliest evasion of criticism. There was never anything in the world that was really artificial. It had some motive or ideal behind it, and generally a much better one than we think.

Of the faults of Scott as an artist it is not very necessary to speak, for faults are generally and easily pointed out, while there is yet no adequate valuation of the varieties and contrasts of virtue. We have compiled a complete botanical classification of the weeds in the poetical garden, but the flowers still flourish, neglected and nameless. It is true, for example, that Scott had an incomparably stiff and pedantic way of dealing with his heroines: he made a lively girl of eighteen refuse an offer in the language of Dr. Johnson. To him, as to most men of his time, woman was not an individual, but an institution — a toast that was drunk some time after that of Church and King. But it is far better to consider the difference rather as a special merit, in that he stood for all those clean and bracing shocks of incident which are untouched by passion or weakness, for a certain breezy bachelorhood, which is almost essential to the literature of adventure. With all his faults, and all his triumphs, he stands for the great mass of natural manliness which must be absorbed into art unless art is to be a mere luxury and freak. An appreciation of Scott might be made almost a test of decadence. If ever we lose touch with this one most reckless and defective writer, it will be a proof to us that we have erected round ourselves a false cosmos, a world of lying and horrible perfection, leaving outside of it

Walter Scott and that strange old world which is as confused and as indefensible and as inspiring and as healthy as he.

BRET HARTE

There are more than nine hundred and ninety-nine excellent reasons which we could all have for admiring the work of Bret Harte. But one supreme reason stands not in a certain general superiority to them all — a reason which may be stated in three propositions united in a common conclusion: first, that he was a genuine American; second, that he was a genuine humourist; and, third, that he was not an American humourist. Bret Harte had his own peculiar humour, but it had nothing in particular to do with American humour. American humour has its own peculiar excellence, but it has nothing in particular to do with Bret Harte. American humour is purely exaggerative; Bret Harte's humour was sympathetic and analytical.

In order fully to understand this, it is necessary to realise, genuinely and thoroughly, that there is such a thing as an international difference in humour. If we take the crudest joke in the world — the joke, let us say, of a man sitting down on his hat — we shall yet find that all the nations would differ in their way of treating it humourously, and that if American humour treated it at all, it would be in a purely American manner. For example, there was a case of an orator in the House of Commons, who, after denouncing all the public abuses he could think of, did sit down on his hat. An Irishman immediately rose, full of the whole wealth of Irish humour, and said, "Should I be in order, Sir, in congratulating the honourable gentleman on the fact that when he sat down on his hat his head was not in it?" Here is a glorious example of Irish humour — the bull not unconscious, not entirely conscious, but rather an idea so absurd that even the utterer of it can hardly realise how abysmally absurd it is. But every other nation would have treated the idea in a manner slightly different. The Frenchman's humour would have been logical: he would have said, "The orator denounces modern abuses and destroys to himself the top-hat: behold a good example!" What the Scotchman's humour would have said I am not so certain, but it would probably have dealt with the serious advisability of making such speeches on top of someone else's hat. But American humour on such a general theme would be the humour of exaggeration. The American humourist would say that the English politicians so often sat down on their hats that the noise of the House of Commons was one crackle of silk. He would say that when an important orator rose to speak in the

House of Commons, long rows of hatters waited outside the House with note-books to take down orders from the participants in the debate. He would say that the whole hat trade of London was disorganised by the news that a clever remark had been made by a young M. P. on the subject of the imports of Jamaica. In short, American humour, neither unfathomably absurd like the Irish, nor transfiguringly lucid and appropriate like the French, nor sharp and sensible and full of realities of life like the Scotch, is simply the humour of imagination. It consists in piling towers on towers and mountains on mountains; of heaping a joke up to the stars and extending it to the end of the world.

With this distinctively American humour Bret Harte had little or nothing in common. The wild, sky-breaking humour of America has its fine qualities, but it must in the nature of things be deficient in two qualities, not only of supreme importance to life and letters, but of supreme importance to humour — reverence and sympathy. And these two qualities were knit into the closest texture of Bret Harte's humour. Everyone who has read and enjoyed Mark Twain as he ought to be read and enjoyed will remember a very funny and irreverent story about an organist who was asked to play appropriate music to an address upon the parable of the Prodigal Son, and who proceeded to play with great spirit, "We'll all get blind drunk, when Johnny comes marching home." The best way of distinguishing Bret Harte from the rest of American humour is to say that if Bret Harte had described that scene, it would in some subtle way have combined a sense of the absurdity of the incident with some sense of the sublimity and pathos of the theme. You would have felt that the organist's tune was funny, but not that the Prodigal Son was funny. But America is under a kind of despotism of humour. Everyone is afraid of humour: the meanest of human nightmares. Bret Harte had, to express the matter briefly but more or less essentially, the power of laughing not only at things, but also with them. America has laughed at things magnificently, with Gargantuan reverberations of laughter. But she has not even begun to learn the richer lesson of laughing with them.

The supreme proof of the fact that Bret Harte had the instinct of reverence may be found in the fact that he was a really great parodist. This may have the appearance of being a paradox, but, as in the case of many other paradoxes, it is not so important whether it is a paradox as whether it is not obviously true. Mere derision, mere contempt, never produced or could produce parody. A man who simply despises Paderewski for having long hair is not necessarily fitted to give an admirable imitation of his particular touch on the piano. If a man wishes to parody Paderewski’s style of execution, he must emphatically go through one process first: he must admire it, and even reverence it. Bret Harte had a real power of imitating great authors, as in his parodies on Dumas, on Victor Hugo, on Charlotte Brontë. This means, and can only mean, that he had perceived the real beauty, the real ambition of Dumas and Victor Hugo and Charlotte Brontë. To take an example, Bret Harte has in his imitation of Hugo a passage like this:

“M. Madeline was, if possible, better than M. Myriel. M. Myriel was an angel. M. Madeline was a good man.” I do not know whether Victor Hugo ever used this antithesis; but I am certain that he would have used it and thanked his stars if he had thought of it. This is real parody, inseparable from admiration. It is the same in the parody of Dumas, which is arranged on the system of “Aramis killed three of them. Porthos three. Athos three.” You cannot write that kind of thing unless you have first exulted in the arithmetical ingenuity of the plots of Dumas. It is the same in the parody of Charlotte Brontë, which opens with a dream of a storm-beaten cliff, containing jewels and pelicans. Bret Harte could not have written it unless he had really understood the triumph of the Brontës, the triumph of asserting that great mysteries lie under the surface of the most sullen life, and that the most real part of a man is in his dreams.

This kind of parody is for ever removed from the purview of ordinary American humour. Can anyone imagine Mark Twain, that admirable author, writing even a tolerable imitation of authors so intellectually individual as Hugo or Charlotte Brontë? Mark Twain would yield to the spirit of contempt which destroys parody. All those who hate authors fail to satirise them, for they always accuse them of the wrong faults. The enemies of Thackeray call him a worldling, instead of what he was, a man too ready to believe in the goodness of the unworldly. The enemies of Meredith call his gospel too subtle, instead of what it is, a gospel, if anything, too robust. And it is this vulgar misunderstanding which we find in most parody — which we find in all American parody — but which we never find in the parodies of Bret Harte.

“The skies they were ashen and sober, The streets they were dirty and drear, It was the dark month of October, In that most immemorial year. Like the skies, I was perfectly sober, But my thoughts they were palsied and sear, Yes, my thoughts were decidedly queer.”

This could only be written by a genuine admirer of Edgar Allan Poe, who permitted himself for a moment to see the fun of the thing. Parody might indeed be defined as the worshipper’s half-holiday.

The same general characteristic of sympathy amounting to reverence marks Bret Harte’s humour in his better-known class of works, the short stories. He does not make his characters absurd in order to make them contemptible: it might almost be said that he makes them absurd in order to make them dignified. For example, the greatest creation of Bret Harte, greater even than Colonel Starbottle (and how terrible it is to speak of anyone greater than Colonel Starbottle!) is that unutterable being who goes by the name of Yuba Bill. He is, of course, the coach-driver in the Bret Harte district. Some ingenious person, whose remarks I read the other day, had compared him on this ground with old Mr. Weller. It would be difficult to find a comparison indicating a more completely futile instinct for literature. Tony Weller and Yuba Bill were both coach-drivers, and this fact establishes a resemblance just about as much as the fact that Jobson in “Rob Roy” and George Warrington in “Pendennis” were both lawyers; or that Antonio and Mr. Pickwick were both merchants; or that Sir Galahad and Sir Willoughby Patten were both knights. Tony Weller is a magnificent grotesque. He is a gargoyle, and his mouth, like the mouths of so many gargoyles, is always open. He is garrulous, exuberant, flowery, preposterously sociable. He holds that great creed of the convivial, the creed which is at the back of so much that is greatest in Dickens, the creed that eternity begins at ten o’clock at night, and that nights last forever. But Yuba Bill is a figure of a widely different character. He is not convivial; it might almost be said that he is too great ever to be sociable. A circle of quiescence and solitude such as that which might ring a saint or a hermit rings this majestic and profound humourist. His jokes do not flow upon him like those of Mr. Weller, sparkling, continual, and deliberate, like the play of a fountain in a pleasure garden; they fall suddenly and capriciously, like a crash of avalanches from a great mountain. Tony Weller has the noisy humour of London, Yuba Bill has the silent humour of the earth.

One of the worst of the disadvantages of the rich and random fertility of Bret Harte is the fact that it is very difficult to trace or recover all the stories that he has written. I have not within reach at the moment the story in which the character of Yuba Bill is exhibited in its most solemn grandeur, but I remember that it concerned a ride on the San Francisco stage coach, a difficulty arising from storm and darkness, and an intelligent young man who suggested to Yuba Bill that a certain manner of driving the coach in a certain direction might minimise the dangers of the journey. A profound silence followed the intelligent young man’s suggestion, and then (I quote from memory) Yuba Bill observed at last:

“Air you settin’ any value on that remark?”

The young man professed not fully to comprehend him, and Yuba Bill continued reflectively:

“‘Cos there’s a comic paper in ‘Frisco pays for them things, and I’ve seen worse in it.”

To be rebuked thus is like being rebuked by the Pyramids or by the starry heavens. There is about Yuba Bill this air of a pugnacious calm, a stepping back to get his distance for a shattering blow, which is like that of Dr. Johnson at his best. And the effect is inexpressively increased by the background and the whole picture which Bret Harte paints so powerfully; the stormy skies, the sombre gorge, the rocking and spinning coach, and high above the feverish passengers the huge dark form of Yuba Bill, a silent mountain of humour.

Another unrecovered and possibly irrecoverable fragment about Yuba Bill, I recall in a story about his visiting a lad who had once been his protége in the Wild West, and who had since become a distinguished literary man in Boston. Yuba Bill visits him, and on finding him in evening dress lifts up his voice in a superb lamentation over the tragedy of finding his old friend at last “a ‘otel waiter.” Then, vindictively pursuing the satire, he calls fiercely to his young friend, “Hi, Alphonse! bring me a patty de foy gras, damme.” These are the things that make us love the eminent Bill. He is one of those who achieve the noblest and most difficult of all the triumphs of a fictitious character — the triumph of giving us the impression of having a great deal more in him than appears between the two boards of the story. Smaller characters give us the impression that the author has told the whole truth about them, greater characters give the impression that the author has given of them, not the truth, but merely a few hints and samples. In some mysterious way we seem to feel that even if Shakespeare was wrong about Falstaff, Falstaff existed and was real; that even if Dickens was wrong about Micawber, Micawber existed and was real. So we feel that there is in the great salt-sea of Yuba Bill's humour as good fish as ever came out of it. The fleeting jests which Yuba Bill throws to the coach passengers only give us the opportunity of fancying and deducing the vast mass of jests which Yuba Bill shares with his creator.

Bret Harte had to deal with countries and communities of an almost unexampled laxity, a laxity passing the laxity of savages, the laxity of civilised men grown savage. He dealt with a life which we in a venerable and historic society may find it somewhat difficult to realise. It was the life of an entirely new people, a people who, having no certain past, could have no certain future. The strangest of all the sardonic jests that history has ever played may be found in this fact: that there is a city which is of all cities the most typical of innovation and dissipation, and a certain almost splendid vulgarity, and that this city bears the name in a quaint old European language of the most perfect exponent of the simplicity and holiness of the Christian tradition; the city is called San Francisco. San Francisco, the capital of the Bret Harte country, is a city typifying novelty in a manner in which it is typified by few modern localities. San Francisco has in all probability its cathedrals, but it may well be that its cathedrals are less old and less traditional than many of our hotels. If its inhabitants built a temple to the most primal and forgotten god of whose worship we can find a trace, that temple would still be a modern thing compared with many taverns in Suffolk round which there lingers a faint tradition of Mr. Pickwick. And everything in that new gold country was new, even to the individual inhabitants. Good, bad, and indifferent, heroes and dastards, they were all men from nowhere.

Most of us have come across the practical problem of London landladies, the problem of the doubtful foreign gentleman in a street of respectable English people. Those who have done so can form some idea of what it would be to live in a street full of doubtful foreign gentlemen, in a parish, in a city, in a nation composed entirely of doubtful foreign gentlemen. Old California, at the time of the first rush after gold, was actually this paradox of the nation of foreigners. It was a republic of incognitos: no one knew who anyone else was, and only the more ill-mannered and uneasy even desired to know. In such a country as this, gentlemen took more trouble to conceal their gentility than thieves living in South Kensington would take to conceal their blackguardism. In such a country everyone is an equal, because everyone is a stranger. In such a country it is not strange if men in moral matters feel something of the irresponsibility of a dream. To plan plans which are continually miscarrying against men who are continually disappearing by the assistance of you know not whom, to crush you know not whom, this must be a demoralising life for any man; it must be beyond description demoralising for those who have been trained in no lofty or orderly scheme of right. Small blame to them indeed if they become callous and supercilious and cynical. And the great glory and achievement of Bret Harte consists in this, that he realised that they do not become callous, supercilious, and cynical, but that they do become sentimental and romantic, and profoundly affectionate. He discovered the intense sensibility of the primitive man. To him we owe the realisation of the fact that while modern barbarians of genius like Mr. Henley, and in his weaker moments Mr. Rudyard Kipling, delight in describing the coarseness and crude cynicism and fierce humour of the unlettered classes, the unlettered classes are in reality highly sentimental and religious, and not in the least like the creations of Mr. Henley and Mr. Kipling. Bret Harte tells the truth about the wildest, the grossest, the most rapacious of all the districts of the earth — the truth that, while it is very rare indeed in the world to find a thoroughly good man, it is rarer still, rare to the point of monstrosity, to find a man who does not either desire to be one, or imagine that he is one already.

ALFRED THE GREAT

The celebrations in connection with the millenary of King Alfred struck a note of sympathy in the midst of much that was unsympathetic, because, altogether apart from any peculiar historical opinions, all men feel the sanctifying character of that which is at once strong and remote; the ancient thing is always the most homely, and the distant thing the most near. The only possible peacemaker is a dead man, ever since by the sublime religious story a dead man only could reconcile heaven and earth. In a certain sense we always feel the past ages as human, and our own age as strangely and even weirdly dehumanised. In our own time the details overpower us; men's badges and buttons seem to grow larger and larger as in a horrible dream. To study humanity in the present is like studying a mountain with a magnifying glass; to study it in the past is like studying it through a telescope.

For this reason England, like every other great and historic nation, has sought its typical hero in remote and ill-recorded times. The personal and moral greatness of Alfred is, indeed, beyond question. It does not depend any more than the greatness of any other human hero upon the accuracy of any or all of the stories that are told about him. Alfred may not have done one of the things which are reported of him, but it is immeasurably easier to do every one of those things than to be the man of whom such things are reported falsely. Fable is, generally speaking, far more accurate than fact, for fable describes a man as he was to his own age, fact describes him as he is to a handful of inconsiderable antiquarians many centuries after. Whether Alfred watched the cakes for the neat-herd's wife, whether he sang songs in the Danish camp, is of no interest to anyone except those who set out to prove under considerable disadvantages that they are genealogically descended from him. But the man is better pictured in these stories than in any number of modern realistic trivialities about his favourite breakfast and his favourite musical composer. Fable is more historical than fact, because fact tells us about one man and fable tells us about a million men. If we read of a man who could make green grass red and turn the sun into the moon, we may not believe these particular details about him, but we learn something infinitely more important than such trivialities, the fact that men could look into his face and believe it possible. The glory and greatness of

Alfred, therefore, is like that of all the heroes of the morning of the world, set far beyond the chance of that strange and sudden dethronement which may arise from the unsealing of a manuscript or the turning over of a stone. Men may have told lies when they said that he first entrapped the Danes with his song and then overcame them with his armies, but we know very well that it is not of us that such lies are told. There may be myths clustering about each of our personalities; local saga-men and chroniclers have very likely circulated the story that we are addicted to drink, or that we ferociously ill-use our wives. But they do not commonly lie to the effect that we have shed our blood to save all the inhabitants of the street. A story grows easily, but a heroic story is not a very easy thing to evoke. Wherever that exists we may be pretty certain that we are in the presence of a dark but powerful historic personality. We are in the presence of a thousand lies all pointing with their fantastic fingers to one undiscovered truth.

Upon this ground alone every encouragement is due to the cult of Alfred. Every nation requires to have behind it some historic personality, the validity of which is proved, as the validity of a gun is proved, by its long range. It is wonderful and splendid that we treasure, not the truth, but the very gossip about a man who died a thousand years ago. We may say to him, as M. Rostand says to the Austrian Prince:

“Dors, ce n’est pas toujours la Légende qui ment: Une rêve est parfois moins trompeur qu’un document.”

To have a man so simple and so honourable to represent us in the darkness of primeval history, binds all the intervening centuries together, and mollifies all their monstrosities. It makes all history more comforting and intelligible; it makes the desolate temple of the ages as human as an inn parlour.

But whether it come through reliable facts or through more reliable falsehoods the personality of Alfred has its own unmistakable colour and stature. Lord Rosebery uttered a profound truth when he said that that personality was peculiarly English. The great magnificence of the English character is expressed in the word “service.” There is, perhaps, no nation so vitally theocratical as the English; no nation in which the strong men have so consistently preferred the instrumental to the despotic attitude, the pleasures of the loyal to the pleasures of the royal position. We have had tyrants like Edward I. and Queen Elizabeth, but even our tyrants have had the worried and responsible air of stewards of a great estate. Our typical hero is such a man as the Duke of Wellington, who had every kind of traditional and external arrogance, but at the back of all that the strange humility which made it physically possible for him without a gleam of humour or discomfort to go on his knees to a preposterous bounder like George IV. Across the infinite wastes of time and through all the mists of legend we still feel the presence in Alfred of this strange and unconscious self-effacement. After the fullest estimate of our misdeeds we can still say that our very despots have been less self-assertive than many popular patriots. As we consider these things we grow more and more impatient of any modern tendencies towards the enthronement of a more self-conscious and theatrical ideal. Lord Rosebery called up before our imaginations the picture of what Alfred would have thought of the vast modern developments of his nation, its immense fleet, its widespread Empire, its enormous contribution to the mechanical civilisation of the world. It cannot be anything but profitable to conceive Alfred as full of astonishment and admiration at these things; it cannot be anything but good for us that we should realise that to the childlike eyes of a great man of old time our inventions and appliances have not the vulgarity and ugliness that we see in them. To Alfred a steamboat would be a new and sensational sea-dragon, and the penny postage a miracle achieved by the despotism of a demi-god.

But when we have realised all this there is something more to be said in connection with Lord Rosebery’s vision. What would King Alfred have said if he had been asked to expend the money which he devoted to the health and education of his people upon a struggle with some race of Visigoths or Parthians inhabiting a small section of a distant continent? What would he have said if he had known that that science of letters which he taught to England would eventually be used not to spread truth, but to drug the people with political assurances as imbecile in themselves as the assurance that fire does not burn and water does not drown? What would he have said if the same people who, in obedience to that ideal of service and sanity of which he was the example, had borne every privation in order to defeat Napoleon, should come at last to find no better compliment to one of their heroes than to call him the Napoleon of South Africa? What would he have said if that nation for which he had inaugurated a long line of incomparable men of principle should forget all its traditions and coquette with the immoral mysticism of the man of destiny?

Let us follow these things by all means if we find them good, and can see nothing better. But to pretend that Alfred would have admired them is like pretending that St. Dominic would have seen eye to eye with Mr. Bradlaugh, or that Fra Angelico would have revelled in the posters of Mr. Aubrey Beardsley. Let us follow them if we will, but let us take honestly all the disadvantages of our change; in the wildest moment of triumph let us feel the shadow upon our glories of the shame of the great king.

MAETERLINCK

The selection of “Thoughts from Maeterlinck” is a very creditable and also a very useful compilation. Many modern critics object to the hacking and hewing of a consistent writer which is necessary for this kind of work, but upon more serious consideration, the view is not altogether adequate. Maeterlinck is a very great man; and in the long run this process of mutilation has happened to all great men. It was the mark of a great patriot to be drawn and quartered and his head set on one spike in one city and his left leg on another spike in another city. It was the mark of a saint that even these fragments began to work miracles. So it has been with all the very great men of the world. However careless, however botchy, may be the version of Maeterlinck or of anyone else given in such a selection as this, it is assuredly far less careless and far less botchy than the version, the parody, the wild misrepresentation of Maeterlinck which future ages will hear and distant critics be called upon to consider.

No one can feel any reasonable doubt that we have heard about Christ and Socrates and Buddha and St. Francis a mere chaos of excerpts, a mere book of quotations. But from those fragmentary epigrams we can deduce greatness as clearly as we can deduce Venus from the torso of Venus or Hercules *ex pede Herculem*. If we knew nothing else about the Founder of Christianity, for example, beyond the fact that a religious teacher lived in a remote country, and in the course of his peregrinations and proclamations consistently called Himself “the Son of Man,” we should know by that alone that he was a man of almost immeasurable greatness. If future ages happened to record nothing else about Socrates except that he owned his title to be the wisest of men because he knew that he knew nothing, they would be able to deduce from that the height and energy of his civilisation, the glory that was Greece. The credit of such random compilations as that which “E.S.S.” and Mr. George Allen have just effected is quite secure. It is the pure, pedantic, literal editions, the complete works of this author or that author which are forgotten. It is such books as this that have revolutionised the destiny of the world. Great things like Christianity or Platonism have never been founded upon consistent editions; all of them have been founded upon scrap-books.

The position of Maeterlinck in modern life is a thing too obvious to be easily determined in words. It is, perhaps, best expressed by saying that it is the great glorification of the inside of things at the expense of the outside. There is one great evil in modern life for which nobody has found even approximately a tolerable description: I can only invent a word and call it "remotism." It is the tendency to think first of things which, as a matter of fact, lie far away from the actual centre of human experience. Thus people say, "All our knowledge of life begins with the amoeba." It is false; our knowledge of life begins with ourselves. Thus they say that the British Empire is glorious, and at the very word Empire they think at once of Australia and New Zealand, and Canada, and Polar bears, and parrots and kangaroos, and it never occurs to any one of them to think of the Surrey Hills. The one real struggle in modern life is the struggle between the man like Maeterlinck, who sees the inside as the truth, and the man like Zola, who sees the outside as the truth. A hundred cases might be given. We may take, for the sake of argument, the case of what is called falling in love. The sincere realist, the man who believes in a certain finality in physical science, says, "You may, if you like, describe this thing as a divine and sacred and incredible vision; that is your sentimental theory about it. But what it is, is an animal and sexual instinct designed for certain natural purposes." The man on the other side, the idealist, replies, with quite equal confidence, that this is the very reverse of the truth. I put it as it has always struck me; he replies, "Not at all. You may, if you like, describe this thing as an animal and sexual instinct, designed for certain natural purposes; that is your philosophical or zoölogical theory about it. What it is, beyond all doubt of any kind, is a divine and sacred and incredible vision." The fact that it is an animal necessity only comes to the naturalistic philosopher after looking abroad, studying its origins and results, constructing an explanation of its existence, more or less natural and conclusive. The fact that it is a spiritual triumph comes to the first errand boy who happens to feel it. If a lad of seventeen falls in love and is struck dead by a hansom cab an hour afterwards, he has known the thing as it is, a spiritual ecstasy; he has never come to trouble about the thing as it may be, a physical destiny. If anyone says that falling in love is an animal thing, the answer is very simple. The only way of testing the matter is to ask those who are experiencing it, and none of those would admit for a moment that it was an animal thing.

Maeterlinck’s appearance in Europe means primarily this subjective intensity; by this the materialism is not overthrown: materialism is undermined. He brings, not something which is more poetic than realism, not something which is more spiritual than realism, not something which is more right than realism, but something which is more real than realism. He discovers the one indestructible thing. This material world on which such vast systems have been superimposed — this may mean anything. It may be a dream, it may be a joke, it may be a trap or temptation, it may be a charade, it may be the beatific vision: the only thing of which we are certain is this human soul. This human soul finds itself alone in a terrible world, afraid of the grass. It has brought forth poetry and religion in order to explain matters; it will bring them forth again. It matters not one atom how often the lulls of materialism and scepticism occur; they are always broken by the reappearance of a fanatic. They have come in our time: they have been broken by Maeterlinck.

RUSKIN

I do not think anyone could find any fault with the way in which Mr. Collingwood has discharged his task, except, of course, Mr. Ruskin himself, who would certainly have scored through all the eulogies in passionate red ink and declared that his dear friend had selected for admiration the very parts of his work which were vile, brainless, and revolting. That, however, was merely Ruskin’s humour, and one of the deepest disappointments with Mr. Collingwood is that he, like everyone else, fails to appreciate Ruskin as a humourist. Yet he was a great humourist: half the explosions which are solemnly scolded as “one-sided” were simply meant to be one-sided, were mere laughing experiments in language. Like a woman, he saw the humour of his own prejudices, did not sophisticate them by logic, but deliberately exaggerated them by rhetoric. One tenth of his paradoxes would have made the fortune of a modern young man with gloves of an art yellow. He was as fond of nonsense as Mr. Max Beerbohm. Only ... he was fond of other things too. He did not ask humanity to dine on pickles.

But while his kaleidoscope of fancy and epigram gives him some kinship with the present day, he was essentially of an earlier type: he was the last of the prophets. With him vanishes the secret of that early Victorian simplicity which gave a man the courage to mount a pulpit above the head of his fellows. Many elements, good and bad, have destroyed it; humility as well as fear, camaraderie as well as scepticism, have bred in us a desire to give our advice lightly and persuasively, to mask our morality, to whisper a word and glide away. The contrast was in some degree typified in the House of Commons under the last leadership of Mr. Gladstone: the old order with its fist on the box, and the new order with its feet on the table. Doubtless the wine of that prophecy was too strong even for the strong heads that carried it. It made Ruskin capricious and despotic, Tennyson lonely and whimsical, Carlyle harsh to the point of hatred, and Kingsley often rabid to the ruin of logic and charity. One alone of that race of giants, the greatest and most neglected, was sober after the cup. No mission, no frustration could touch with hysteria the humanity of Robert Browning.

But though Ruskin seems to close the roll of the militant prophets, we feel how needful are such figures when we consider with what pathetic eagerness men pay prophetic honours even to those who disclaim the prophetic character. Ibsen declares that he only depicts life, that as far as he is concerned there is nothing to be done, and still armies of “Ibsenites” rally to the flag and enthusiastically do nothing. I have found traces of a school which avowedly follows Mr. Henry James: an idea full of humour. I like to think of a crowd with pikes and torches shouting passages from “The Awkward Age.” It is right and proper for a multitude to declare its readiness to follow a prophet to the end of the world, but if he himself explains, with pathetic gesticulations, that he is only going for a walk in the park, there is not much for the multitude to do. But the disciple of Ruskin had plenty to do. He made roads; in his spare moments he studied the whole of geology and botany. He lifted up paving stones and got down into early Florentine cellars, where, by hanging upside down, he could catch a glimpse of a Cimabue unpraisable but by divine silence. He rushed from one end of a city to the other comparing ceilings. His limbs were weary, his clothes were torn, and in his eyes was that unfathomable joy of life which man will never know again until once more he takes himself seriously.

Mr. Collingwood’s excellent chapters on the art criticism of Ruskin would be better, in my opinion, if they showed more consciousness of the after revolutions that have reversed, at least in detail, much of Ruskin’s teaching. We no longer think that art became valueless when it was first corrupted with anatomical accuracy. But if we return to that Raphaelism to which he was so unjust, let us not fall into the old error of intelligent reactionaries, that of ignoring our own debt to revolutions. Ruskin could not destroy the market of Raphaelism, but he could and did destroy its monopoly. We may go back to the Renaissance, but let us remember that we go back free. We can picnic now in the ruins of our dungeon and deride our deliverer.

But neither in Mr. Collingwood’s book nor in Ruskin’s own delightful “Præterita” shall we ever get to the heart of the matter. The work of Ruskin and his peers remains incomprehensible by the very completeness of their victory. Fallen forever is that vast brick temple of Utilitarianism, of which we may find the fragments but never renew the spell. Liberal Unionists howl in its high places, and in its ruins Mr. Lecky builds his nest. Its records read with something of the mysterious arrogance of Chinese: hardly a generation away from us, we read of a race who believed in the present with the same sort of servile optimism with which the Oriental believes in the past. It may be that banging his head against that roof for twenty years did not improve the temper of the prophet. But he made what he praised in the old Italian pictures— “an opening into eternity.”

QUEEN VICTORIA

Anyone who possesses spiritual or political courage has made up his mind to a prospect of immutable mutability; but even in a “transformation” there is something catastrophic in the removal of the back scene. It is a truism to say of the wise and noble lady who is gone from us that we shall always remember her; but there is a subtler and higher compliment still in confessing that we often forgot her. We forgot her as we forget the sunshine, as we forget the postulates of an argument, as we commonly forget our own existence. Mr. Gladstone is the only figure whose loss prepared us for such earthquakes altering the landscape. But Mr. Gladstone seemed a fixed and stationary object in our age for the same reason that one railway train looks stationary from another; because he and the age of progress were both travelling at the same impetuous rate of speed. In the end, indeed, it was probably the age that dropped behind. For a symbol of the Queen’s position we must rather recur to the image of a stretch of scenery, in which she was as a mountain so huge and familiar that its disappearance would make the landscape round our own door seem like a land of strangers. She had an inspired genius for the familiarising virtues; her sympathy and sanity made us feel at home even in an age of revolutions. That indestructible sense of security which for good and evil is so typical of our nation, that almost scornful optimism which, in the matter of ourselves, cannot take peril or even decadence seriously, reached by far its highest and healthiest form in the sense that we were watched over by one so thoroughly English in her silence and self-control, in her shrewd trustfulness and her brilliant inaction. Over and above those sublime laws of labour and pity by which she ordered her life, there are a very large number of minor intellectual matters in which we might learn a lesson from the Queen. There is one especially which is increasingly needed in an age when moral claims become complicated and hysterical. That Queen Victoria was a model of political unselfishness is well known; it is less often remarked that few modern people have an unselfishness so completely free from morbidity, so fully capable of deciding a moral question without exaggerating its importance. No eminent person of our time has been so utterly devoid of that disease of self-assertion which is often rampant among the unselfish. She had one most rare and valuable faculty, the faculty of letting things pass — Acts of

Parliament and other things. Her predecessors, whether honest men or knaves, were attacked every now and then with a nightmare of despotic responsibility; they suddenly conceived that it rested with them to save the world and the Protestant Constitution. Queen Victoria had far too much faith in the world to try to save it. She knew that Acts of Parliament, even bad Acts of Parliament, do not destroy nations. But she knew that ignorance, ill-temper, tyranny, and officiousness do destroy nations, and not upon any provocation would she set an example in these things. We fancy that this sense of proportion, this largeness and coolness of intellectual magnanimity is the one of the thousand virtues of Queen Victoria of which the near future will stand most in need. We are gaining many new mental powers, and with them new mental responsibilities. In psychology, in sociology, above all in education, we are learning to do a great many clever things. Unless we are much mistaken the next great task will be to learn not to do them. If that time comes, assuredly we cannot do better than turn once more to the memory of the great Queen who for seventy years followed through every possible tangle and distraction the fairy thread of common sense.

We are suffering just now from an outbreak of the imagination which exhibits itself in politics and the most unlikely places. The German Emperor, for example, is neither a tyrant nor a lunatic, as used to be absurdly represented; he is simply a minor poet; and he feels just as any minor poet would feel if he found himself on the throne of Barbarossa. The revival of militarism and ecclesiasticism is an invasion of politics by the artistic sense; it is heraldry rather than chivalry that is lusted after. Amid all this waving of wands and flaunting of uniforms, all this hedonistic desire to make the most of everything, there is something altogether quiet and splendid about the sober disdain with which this simple and courteous lady in a black dress left idle beside her the sceptre of a hundred tyrants. The heart of the whole nation warmed as it had never warmed for centuries at the thought of having in their midst a woman who cared nothing for her rights, and nothing for those fantastic duties which are more egotistical than rights themselves.

The work of the Queen for progressive politics has surely been greatly underrated. She invented democratic monarchy as much as James Watt invented the steam engine. William IV., from whom we think of her as inheriting her Constitutional position, held in fact a position entirely different to that which she now hands on to Edward VII. William IV. was a limited monarch; that is to say, he had a definite, open, and admitted power in politics, but it was a limited power. Queen Victoria was not a limited monarch; in the only way in which she cared to be a monarch at all she was as unlimited as Haroun Alraschid. She had unlimited willing obedience, and unlimited social supremacy. To her belongs the credit of inventing a new kind of monarchy; in which the Crown, by relinquishing the whole of that political and legal department of life which is concerned with coercion, regimentation, and punishment, was enabled to rise above it and become the symbol of the sweeter and purer relations of humanity, the social intercourse which leads and does not drive. Too much cannot be said for the wise audacity and confident completeness with which the Queen cut away all those cords of political supremacy to which her predecessors had clung madly as the only stays of the monarchy. She had her reward. For while William IV.'s supremacy may be called a survival, it is not too much to say that the Queen's supremacy might be called a prophecy. By lifting a figure purely human over the heads of judges and warriors, we uttered in some symbolic fashion the abiding, if unreasoning, hope which dwells in all human hearts, that some day we may find a simpler solution of the woes of nations than the summons and the treadmill, that we may find in some such influence as the social influence of a woman, what was called in the noble old language of mediæval monarchy, "a fountain of mercy and a fountain of honour."

In the universal reverence paid to the Queen there was hardly anywhere a touch of snobbishness. Snobbishness, in so far as it went out towards former sovereigns, went out to them as aristocrats rather than as kings, as heads of that higher order of men, who were almost angels or demons in their admitted superiority to common lines of conduct. This kind of reverence was always a curse: nothing can be conceived as worse for the mass of the people than that they should think the morality for which they have to struggle an inferior morality, a thing unfitted for a haughtier class. But of this patrician element there was hardly a trace in the dignity of the Queen. Indeed, the degree to which the middle and lower classes took her troubles and problems to their hearts was almost grotesque in its familiarity. No one thought of the Queen as an aristocrat like the Duke of Devonshire, or even as a member of the governing classes like Mr. Chamberlain. Men thought of her as something nearer to them even in being further off; as one who was a good queen, and who would have been, had her fate demanded, with equal cheerfulness, a good washerwoman. Herein lay her unexampled triumph, the greatest and perhaps the last triumph of monarchy. Monarchy in its healthiest days had the same basis as democracy: the belief in human nature when entrusted with power. A king was only the first citizen who received the franchise.

Both royalty and religion have been accused of despising humanity, and in practice it has been too often true; but after all both the conception of the prophet and that of the king were formed by paying humanity the supreme compliment of selecting from it almost at random. This daring idea that a healthy human being, when thrilled by all the trumpets of a great trust, would rise to the situation, has often been tested, but never with such complete success as in the case of our dead Queen. On her was piled the crushing load of a vast and mystical tradition, and she stood up straight under it. Heralds proclaimed her as the anointed of God, and it did not seem presumptuous. Brave men died in thousands shouting her name, and it did not seem unnatural. No mere intellect, no mere worldly success could, in this age of bold inquiry, have sustained that tremendous claim; long ago we should have stricken Cæsar and dethroned Napoleon. But these glories and these sacrifices did not seem too much to celebrate a hardworking human nature; they were possible because at the heart of our Empire was nothing but a defiant humility. If the Queen had stood for any novel or fantastic imperial claims, the whole would have seemed a nightmare; the whole was successful because she stood, and no one could deny that she stood, for the humblest, the shortest and the most indestructible of human gospels, that when all troubles and troublemongers have had their say, our work can be done till sunset, our life can be lived till death.

THE GERMAN EMPEROR

The list of the really serious, the really convinced, the really important and comprehensible people now alive includes, as most Englishmen would now be prepared to admit, the German Emperor. He is a practical man and a poet. I do not know whether there are still people in existence who think there is some kind of faint antithesis between these two characters; but I incline to think there must be, because of the surprise which the career of the German Emperor has generally evoked. When he came to the throne it became at once apparent that he was poetical; people assumed in consequence that he was unpractical; that he would plunge Europe into war, that he would try to annex France, that he would say he was the Emperor of Russia, that he would stand on his head in the Reichstag, that he would become a pirate on the Spanish Main. Years upon years have passed; he has gone on making speeches, he has gone on talking about God and his sword, he has poured out an ever increased rhetoric and æstheticism. And yet all the time people have slowly and surely realised that he knows what he is about, that he is one of the best friends of peace, that his influence on Europe is not only successful, but in many ways good, that he knows what world he is living in better than a score of materialists.

The explanation never comes to them — he is a poet; therefore, a practical man. The affinity of the two words, merely as words, is much nearer than many people suppose, for the matter of that. There is one Greek word for “I do” from which we get the word practical, and another Greek word for “I do” from which we get the word poet. I was doubtless once informed of a profound difference between the two, but I have forgotten it. The two words practical and poetical may mean two subtly different things in that old and subtle language, but they mean the same in English and the same in the long run. It is ridiculous to suppose that the man who can understand the inmost intricacies of a human being who has never existed at all cannot make a guess at the conduct of man who lives next door. It is idle to say that a man who has himself felt the mad longing under the mad moon for a vagabond life cannot know why his son runs away to sea. It is idle to say that a man who has himself felt the hunger for any kind of exhilaration, from angel or devil, cannot know why his butler takes to drink. It is idle to say that a man who has been fascinated with the wild fastidiousness of destiny does not know why stockbrokers gamble, to say that a man who has been knocked into the middle of eternal life by a face in a crowd does not know why the poor marry young; that a man who found his path to all things kindly and pleasant blackened and barred suddenly by the body of a man does not know what it is to desire murder. It is idle, in short, for a man who has created men to say that he does not understand them. A man who is a poet may, of course, easily make mistakes in these personal and practical relations; such mistakes and similar ones have been made by poets; such mistakes and greater ones have been made by soldiers and statesmen and men of business. But in so far as a poet is in these things less of a practical man he is also less of a poet.

If Shakespeare really married a bad wife when he had conceived the character of Beatrice he ought to have been ashamed of himself: he had failed not only in his life, he had failed in his art. If Balzac got into rows with his publishers he ought to be rebuked and not commiserated, having evolved so many consistent business men from his own inside. The German Emperor is a poet, and therefore he succeeds, because poetry is so much nearer to reality than all the other human occupations. He is a poet, and succeeds because the majority of men are poets. It is true, if that matter is at all important, that the German Emperor is not a good poet. The majority of men are poets, only they happen to be bad poets. The German Emperor fails ridiculously, if that is all that is in question, in almost every one of the artistic occupations to which he addresses himself: he is neither a first-rate critic, nor a first-rate musician, nor a first-rate painter, nor a first-rate poet. He is a twelfth-rate poet, but because he is a poet at all he knocks to pieces all the first-rate politicians in the war of politics.

Having made clear my position so far, I discover with a certain amount of interest that I have not yet got to the subject of these remarks. The German Emperor is a poet, and although, as far as I know, every line he ever wrote may be nonsense, he is a poet in this real sense, that he has realised the meaning of every function he has performed. Why should we jeer at him because he has a great many uniforms, for instance? The very essence of the really imaginative man is that he realises the various types or capacities in which he can appear. Every one of us, or almost every one of us, does in reality fulfil almost as many offices as Pooh-Bah. Almost every one of us is a ratepayer, an immortal soul, an Englishman, a baptised person, a mammal, a minor poet, a juryman, a married man, a bicyclist, a

Christian, a purchaser of newspapers, and a critic of Mr. Alfred Austin. We ought to have uniforms for all these things. How beautiful it would be if we appeared to-morrow in the uniform of a ratepayer, in brown and green, with buttons made in the shape of coins, and a blue income-tax paper tastefully arranged as a favour; or, again, if we appeared dressed as immortal souls, in a blue uniform with stars. It would be very exciting to dress up as Englishmen, or to go to a fancy dress ball as Christians.

Some of the costumes I have suggested might appear a little more difficult to carry out. The dress of a person who purchases newspapers (though it mostly consists of coloured evening editions arranged in a stiff skirt, like that of a saltatrice, round the waist of the wearer) has many mysterious points. The attire of a person prepared to criticise the Poet Laureate is something so awful and striking that I dare not even begin to describe it; the one fact which I am willing to reveal, and to state seriously and responsibly, is that it buttons up behind.

But most assuredly we ought not to abuse the Kaiser because he is fond of putting on all his uniforms; he does so because he has a large number of established and involuntary incarnations. He tries to do his duty in that state of life to which it shall please God to call him; and it so happens that he has been called to as many different estates as there are regiments in the German Army. He is a huntsman and proud of being a huntsman, an engineer and proud of being an engineer, an infantry soldier and proud of being so, a light horseman and proud of being so. There is nothing wrong in all this; the only wrong thing is that it should be confined to the merely destructive arts of war. The sight of the German Kaiser in the most magnificent of the uniforms in which he had led armies to victory is not in itself so splendid or delightful as that of many other sights which might come before us without a whisper of the alarms of war. It is not so splendid or delightful as the sight of an ordinary householder showing himself in that magnificent uniform of purple and silver which should signalise the father of three children. It is not so splendid or delightful as the appearance of a young clerk in an insurance office decorated with those three long crimson plumes which are the well-known insignia of a gentleman who is just engaged to be married. Nor can it compare with the look of a man wearing the magnificent green and silver armour by which we know one who has induced an acquaintance to give up getting drunk, or the blue and gold which is only accorded to persons who have prevented fights in the street.

We belong to quite as many regiments as the German Kaiser. Our regiments are regiments that are embattled everywhere; they fight an unending fight against all that is hopeless and rapacious and of evil report. The only difference is that we have the regiments, but not the uniforms.

Only one obvious point occurs to me to add. If the Kaiser has more than any other man the sense of the poetry of the ancient things, the sword, the crown, the ship, the nation, he has the sense of the poetry of modern things also. He has one sense, and it is even a joke against him. He feels the poetry of one thing that is more poetic than sword or crown or ship or nation, the poetry of the telegram. No one ever sent a telegram who did not feel like a god. He is a god, for he is a minor poet; a minor poet, but a poet still.

TENNYSON

Mr. Morton Luce has written a short study of Tennyson which has considerable cultivation and suggestiveness, which will be sufficient to serve as a notebook for Tennyson’s admirers, but scarcely sufficient, perhaps, to serve as a pamphlet against his opponents. If a critic has, as he ought to have, any of the functions anciently attributed to a prophet, it ought not to be difficult for him to prophesy that Tennyson will pass through a period of facile condemnation and neglect before we arrive at the true appreciation of his work. The same thing has happened to the most vigorous of essayists, Macaulay, and the most vigorous of romancers, Dickens, because we live in a time when mere vigour is considered a vulgar thing. The same idle and frigid reaction will almost certainly discredit the stateliness and care of Tennyson, as it has discredited the recklessness and inventiveness of Dickens. It is only necessary to remember that no action can be discredited by a reaction.

The attempts which have been made to discredit the poetical position of Tennyson are in the main dictated by an entire misunderstanding of the nature of poetry. When critics like Matthew Arnold, for example, suggest that his poetry is deficient in elaborate thought, they only prove, as Matthew Arnold proved, that they themselves could never be great poets. It is no valid accusation against a poet that the sentiment he expresses is commonplace. Poetry is always commonplace; it is vulgar in the noblest sense of that noble word. Unless a man can make the same kind of ringing appeal to absolute and admitted sentiments that is made by a popular orator, he has lost touch with emotional literature. Unless he is to some extent a demagogue, he cannot be a poet. A man who expresses in poetry new and strange and undiscovered emotions is not a poet; he is a brain specialist. Tennyson can never be discredited before any serious tribunal of criticism because the sentiments and thoughts to which he dedicates himself are those sentiments and thoughts which occur to anyone. These are the peculiar province of poetry; poetry, like religion, is always a democratic thing, even if it pretends the contrary. The faults of Tennyson, so far as they existed, were not half so much in the common character of his sentiments as in the arrogant perfection of his workmanship. He was not by any means so wrong in his faults as he was in his perfections.

Men are very much too ready to speak of men’s work being ordinary, when we consider that, properly considered, every man is extraordinary. The average man is a tribal fable, like the Man-Wolf or the Wise Man of the Stoics. In every man’s heart there is a revolution; how much more in every poet’s? The supreme business of criticism is to discover that part of a man’s work which is his and to ignore that part which belongs to others. Why should any critic of poetry spend time and attention on that part of a man’s work which is unpoetical? Why should any man be interested in aspects which are uninteresting? The business of a critic is to discover the importance of men and not their crimes. It is true that the Greek word critic carries with it the meaning of a judge, and up to this point of history judges have had to do with the valuation of men’s sins, and not with the valuation of their virtues.

Tennyson’s work, disencumbered of all that uninteresting accretion which he had inherited or copied, resolves itself, like that of any other man of genius, into those things which he really inaugurated. Underneath all his exterior of polished and polite rectitude there was in him a genuine fire of novelty; only that, like all the able men of his period, he disguised revolution under the name of evolution. He is only a very shallow critic who cannot see an eternal rebel in the heart of the Conservative.

Tennyson had certain absolutely personal ideas, as much his own as the ideas of Browning or Meredith, though they were fewer in number. One of these, for example, was the fact that he was the first of all poets (and perhaps the last) to attempt to treat poetically that vast and monstrous vision of fact which science had recently revealed to mankind. Scientific discoveries seem commonly fables as fantastic in the ears of poets as poems in the ears of men of science. The poet is always a Ptolemaist; for him the sun still rises and the earth stands still. Tennyson really worked the essence of modern science into his poetical constitution, so that its appalling birds and frightful flowers were really part of his literary imagery. To him blind and brutal monsters, the products of the wild babyhood of the Universe, were as the daisies and the nightingales were to Keats; he absolutely realised the great literary paradox mentioned in the Book of Job: “He saw Behemoth, and he played with him as with a bird.”

Instances of this would not be difficult to find. But the tests of poetry are those instances in which this outrageous scientific phraseology becomes natural and unconscious. Tennyson wrote one of his own exquisite lyrics describing the exultation of a lover on the evening before his bridal day. This would be an occasion, if ever there was one, for falling back on those ancient and assured falsehoods of the domed heaven and the flat earth in which generations of poets have made us feel at home. We can imagine the poet in such a lyric saluting the setting sun and prophesying the sun's resurrection. There is something extraordinarily typical of Tennyson's scientific faith in the fact that this, one of the most sentimental and elemental of his poems, opens with the two lines:

"Move eastward, happy earth, and leave Yon orange sunset waning slow."

Rivers had often been commanded to flow by poets, and flowers to blossom in their season, and both were doubtless grateful for the permission. But the terrestrial globe of science has only twice, so far as we know, been encouraged in poetry to continue its course, one instance being that of this poem, and the other the incomparable "Address to the Terrestrial Globe" in the "Bab Ballads."

There was, again, another poetic element entirely peculiar to Tennyson, which his critics have, in many cases, ridiculously confused with a fault. This was the fact that Tennyson stood alone among modern poets in the attempt to give a poetic character to the conception of Liberal Conservatism, of splendid compromise. The carping critics who have abused Tennyson for this do not see that it was far more daring and original for a poet to defend conventionality than to defend a cart-load of revolutions. His really sound and essential conception of Liberty,

"Turning to scorn with lips divine The falsehood of extremes,"

is as good a definition of Liberalism as has been uttered in poetry in the Liberal century. Moderation is *not* a compromise; moderation is a passion; the passion of great judges. That Tennyson felt that lyrical enthusiasm could be devoted to established customs, to indefensible and ineradicable national constitutions, to the dignity of time and the empire of unutterable common sense, all this did not make him a tamer poet, but an infinitely more original one. Any poetaster can describe a thunderstorm; it requires a poet to describe the ancient and quiet sky.

I cannot, indeed, fall in with Mr. Morton Luce in his somewhat frigid and patrician theory of poetry. "Dialect," he says, "mostly falls below the dignity of art." I cannot feel myself that art has any dignity higher than the indwelling and divine dignity of human nature. Great poets like Burns were far more undignified when they clothed their thoughts in what Mr. Morton Luce calls “the seemly raiment of cultured speech” than when they clothed them in the headlong and flexible patois in which they thought and prayed and quarrelled and made love. If Tennyson failed (which I do not admit) in such poems as “The Northern Farmer,” it was not because he used too much of the spirit of the dialect, but because he used too little.

Tennyson belonged undoubtedly to a period from which we are divided; the period in which men had queer ideas of the antagonism of science and religion; the period in which the Missing Link was really missing. But his hold upon the old realities of existence never wavered; he was the apostle of the sanctity of laws, of the sanctity of customs; above all, like every poet, he was the apostle of the sanctity of words.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

The delightful new edition of Mrs. Browning's "Casa Guidi Windows" which Mr. John Lane has just issued ought certainly to serve as an opportunity for the serious criticism and inevitable admiration to which a great poet is entitled. For Mrs. Browning was a great poet, and not, as is idly and vulgarly supposed, only a great poetess. The word poetess is bad English, and it conveys a particularly bad compliment. Nothing is more remarkable about Mrs. Browning's work than the absence of that trite and namby-pamby elegance which the last two centuries demanded from lady writers. Wherever her verse is bad it is bad from some extravagance of imagery, some violence of comparison, some kind of debauch of cleverness. Her nonsense never arises from weakness, but from a confusion of powers. If the phrase explain itself, she is far more a great poet than she is a good one.

Mrs. Browning often appears more luscious and sentimental than many other literary women, but this was because she was stronger. It requires a certain amount of internal force to break down. A complete self-humiliation requires enormous strength, more strength than most of us possess. When she was writing the poetry of self-abandonment she really abandoned herself with the valour and decision of an anchorite abandoning the world. Such a couplet as:

"Our Euripides, the human, With his dropping of warm tears,"

gives to most of us a sickly and nauseous sensation. Nothing can be well conceived more ridiculous than Euripides going about dropping tears with a loud splash, and Mrs. Browning coming after him with a thermometer. But the one emphatic point about this idiotic couplet is that Mrs. Hemans would never have written it. She would have written something perfectly dignified, perfectly harmless, perfectly inconsiderable. Mrs. Browning was in a great and serious difficulty. She really meant something. She aimed at a vivid and curious image, and she missed it. She had that catastrophic and public failure which is, as much as a medal or a testimonial, the badge of the brave.

In spite of the tiresome half-truth that art is unmoral, the arts require a certain considerable number of moral qualities, and more especially all the arts require courage. The art of drawing, for example, requires even a kind of physical courage. Anyone who has tried to draw a straight line and failed knows that he fails chiefly in nerve, as he might fail to jump off a cliff. And similarly all great literary art involves the element of risk, and the greatest literary artists have commonly been those who have run the greatest risk of talking nonsense. Almost all great poets rant, from Shakespeare downwards. Mrs. Browning was Elizabethan in her luxuriance and her audacity, and the gigantic scale of her wit. We often feel with her as we feel with Shakespeare, that she would have done better with half as much talent. The great curse of the Elizabethans is upon her, that she cannot leave anything alone, she cannot write a single line without a conceit:

“And the eyes of the peacock fans Winked at the alien glory,”

she said of the Papal fans in the presence of the Italian tricolour:

“And a royal blood sends glances up her princely eye to trouble, And the shadow of a monarch’s crown is softened in her hair,”

is her description of a beautiful and aristocratic lady. The notion of peacock feathers winking like so many London urchins is perhaps one of her rather aggressive and outrageous figures of speech. The image of a woman’s hair as the softened shadow of a crown is a singularly vivid and perfect one. But both have the same quality of intellectual fancy and intellectual concentration. They are both instances of a sort of ethereal epigram. This is the great and dominant characteristic of Mrs. Browning, that she was significant alike in failure and success. Just as every marriage in the world, good or bad, is a marriage, dramatic, irrevocable, and big with coming events, so every one of her wild weddings between alien ideas is an accomplished fact which produces a certain effect on the imagination, which has for good or evil become part and parcel of our mental vision forever. She gives the reader the impression that she never declined a fancy, just as some gentlemen of the eighteenth century never declined a duel. When she fell it was always because she missed the foothold, never because she funked the leap.

“Casa Guidi Windows” is, in one aspect, a poem very typical of its author. Mrs. Browning may fairly be called the peculiar poet of Liberalism, of that great movement of the first half of the nineteenth century towards the emancipation of men from ancient institutions which had gradually changed their nature, from the houses of refuge which had turned into dungeons, and the mystic jewels which remained only as fetters. It was not what we ordinarily understand by revolt. It had no hatred in its heart for ancient and essentially human institutions. It had that deeply conservative belief in the most ancient of institutions, the average man, which goes by the name of democracy. It had none of the spirit of modern Imperialism which is kicking a man because he is down. But, on the other hand, it had none of the spirit of modern Anarchism and scepticism which is kicking a man merely because he is up. It was based fundamentally on a belief in the destiny of humanity, whether that belief took an irreligious form, as in Swinburne, or a religious form, as in Mrs. Browning. It had that rooted and natural conviction that the Millennium was coming to-morrow which has been the conviction of all iconoclasts and reformers, and for which some rationalists have been absurd enough to blame the early Christians. But they had none of that disposition to pin their whole faith to some black-and-white scientific system which afterwards became the curse of philosophical Radicalism. They were not like the sociologists who lay down a final rectification of things, amounting to nothing except an end of the world, a great deal more depressing than would be the case if it were knocked to pieces by a comet. Their ideal, like the ideal of all sensible people, was a chaotic and confused notion of goodness made up of English primroses and Greek statues, birds singing in April, and regiments being cut to pieces for a flag. They were neither Radicals nor Socialists, but Liberals, and a Liberal is a noble and indispensable lunatic who tries to make a cosmos of his own head.

Mrs. Browning and her husband were more liberal than most Liberals. Theirs was the hospitality of the intellect and the hospitality of the heart, which is the best definition of the term. They never fell into the habit of the idle revolutionists of supposing that the past was bad because the future was good, which amounted to asserting that because humanity had never made anything but mistakes it was now quite certain to be right. Browning possessed in a greater degree than any other man the power of realising that all conventions were only victorious revolutions. He could follow the mediæval logicians in all their sowing of the wind and reaping of the whirlwind with all that generous ardour which is due to abstract ideas. He could study the ancients with the young eyes of the Renaissance and read a Greek grammar like a book of love lyrics. This immense and almost confounding Liberalism of Browning doubtless had some effect upon his wife. In her vision of New Italy she went back to the image of Ancient Italy like an honest and true revolutionist; for does not the very word “revolution” mean a rolling backward. All true revolutions are reversions to the natural and the normal. A revolutionist who breaks with the past is a notion fit for an idiot. For how could a man even wish for something which he had never heard of? Mrs. Browning’s inexhaustible sympathy with all the ancient and essential passions of humanity was nowhere more in evidence than in her conception of patriotism. For some dark reason, which it is difficult indeed to fathom, belief in patriotism in our day is held to mean principally a belief in every other nation abandoning its patriotic feelings. In the case of no other passion does this weird contradiction exist. Men whose lives are mainly based upon friendship sympathise with the friendships of others. The interest of engaged couples in each other is a proverb, and like many other proverbs sometimes a nuisance. In patriotism alone it is considered correct just now to assume that the sentiment does not exist in other people. It was not so with the great Liberals of Mrs. Browning’s time. The Brownings had, so to speak, a disembodied talent for patriotism. They loved England and they loved Italy; yet they were the very reverse of cosmopolitans. They loved the two countries as countries, not as arbitrary divisions of the globe. They had hold of the root and essence of patriotism. They knew how certain flowers and birds and rivers pass into the mills of the brain and come out as wars and discoveries, and how some triumphant adventure or some staggering crime wrought in a remote continent may bear about it the colour of an Italian city or the soul of a silent village of Surrey.

CHARLES DICKENS

This celebrated biography was first published in 1906. Chesterton was largely responsible for creating a popular revival of Dickens’ work, as well as a serious reconsideration of his writing by scholars, at a time when Dickens’ novels were falling from favour.

Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

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PART ONE

CHAPTER I

THE DICKENS PERIOD

Much of our modern difficulty, in religion and other things, arises merely from this: that we confuse the word “indefinable” with the word “vague.” If some one speaks of a spiritual fact as “indefinable” we promptly picture something misty, a cloud with indeterminate edges. But this is an error even in commonplace logic. The thing that cannot be defined is the first thing; the primary fact. It is our arms and legs, our pots and pans, that are indefinable. The indefinable is the indisputable. The man next door is indefinable, because he is too actual to be defined. And there are some to whom spiritual things have the same fierce and practical proximity; some to whom God is too actual to be defined.

But there is a third class of primary terms. There are popular expressions which every one uses and no one can explain; which the wise man will accept and reverence, as he reverences desire or darkness or any elemental thing. The prigs of the debating club will demand that he should define his terms. And, being a wise man, he will flatly refuse. This first inexplicable term is the most important term of all. The word that has no definition is the word that has no substitute. If a man falls back again and again on some such word as “vulgar” or “manly,” do not suppose that the word means nothing because he cannot say what it means. If he could say what the word means he would say what it means instead of saying the word. When the Game Chicken (that fine thinker) kept on saying to Mr. Toots, “It’s mean. That’s what it is — it’s mean,” he was using language in the wisest possible way. For what else could he say? There is no word for mean except mean. A man must be very mean himself before he comes to defining meanness. Precisely because the word is indefinable, the word is indispensable.

In everyday talk, or in any of our journals, we may find the loose but important phrase, “Why have we no great men to-day? Why have we no great men like Thackeray, or Carlyle, or Dickens?” Do not let us dismiss this expression, because it appears loose or arbitrary. “Great” does mean something, and the test of its actuality is to be found by noting how instinctively and decisively we do apply it to some men and not to others; above all, how instinctively and decisively we do apply it to four or five men in the Victorian era, four or five men of whom Dickens was not the least. The term is found to fit a definite thing. Whatever the word “great” means, Dickens was what it means. Even the fastidious and unhappy who cannot read his books without a continuous critical exasperation, would use the word of him without stopping to think. They feel that Dickens is a great writer even if he is not a good writer. He is treated as a classic; that is, as a king who may now be deserted, but who cannot now be dethroned. The atmosphere of this word clings to him; and the curious thing is that we cannot get it to cling to any of the men of our own generation. “Great” is the first adjective which the most supercilious modern critic would apply to Dickens. And “great” is the last adjective that the most supercilious modern critic would apply to himself We dare not claim to be great men, even when we claim to be superior to them.

Is there, then, any vital meaning in this idea of “greatness” or in our laments over its absence in our own time? Some people say, indeed, that this sense of mass is but a mirage of distance, and that men always think dead men great and live men small. They seem to think that the law of perspective in the mental world is the precise opposite to the law of perspective in the physical world. They think that figures grow larger as they walk away. But this theory cannot be made to correspond with the facts. We do not lack great men in our own day because we decline to look for them in our own day; on the contrary, we are looking for them all day long. We are not, as a matter of fact, mere examples of those who stone the prophets and leave it to their posterity to build their sepulchres. If the world would only produce our perfect prophet, solemn, searching, universal, nothing would give us keener pleasure than to build his sepulchre. In our eagerness we might even bury him alive. Nor is it true that the great men of the Victorian era were not called great in their own time. By many they were called great from the first. Charlotte Brontë held this heroic language about Thackeray. Ruskin held it about Carlyle. A definite school regarded Dickens as a great man from the first days of his fame: Dickens certainly belonged to this school.

In reply to this question, “Why have we no great men to-day?” many modern explanations are offered. Advertisement, cigarette-smoking, the decay of religion, the decay of agriculture, too much humanitarianism, too little humanitarianism, the fact that people are educated insufficiently, the fact that they are educated at all, all these are reasons given. If I give my own explanation, it is not for its intrinsic value; it is because my answer to the question, “Why have we no great men?” is a short way of stating the deepest and most catastrophic difference between the age in which we live and the early nineteenth century; the age under the shadow of the French Revolution, the age in which Dickens was born.

The soundest of the Dickens critics, a man of genius, Mr. George Gissing, opens his criticism by remarking that the world in which Dickens grew up was a hard and cruel world. He notes its gross feeding, its fierce sports, its fighting and foul humour, and all this he summarises in the words hard and cruel. It is curious how different are the impressions of men. To me this old English world seems infinitely less hard and cruel than the world described in Gissing’s own novels. Coarse external customs are merely relative, and easily assimilated. A man soon learnt to harden his hands and harden his head. Faced with the world of Gissing, he can do little but harden his heart. But the fundamental difference between the beginning of the nineteenth century and the end of it is a difference simple but enormous. The first period was full of evil things, but it was full of hope. The second period, the *fin de siécle*, was even full (in some sense) of good things. But it was occupied in asking what was the good of good things. Joy itself became joyless; and the fighting of Cobbett was happier than the feasting of Walter Pater. The men of Cobbett’s day were sturdy enough to endure and inflict brutality; but they were also sturdy enough to alter it. This “hard and cruel” age was, after all, the age of reform. The gibbet stood up black above them; but it was black against the dawn.

This dawn, against which the gibbet and all the old cruelties stood out so black and clear, was the developing idea of liberalism, the French Revolution. It was a clear and a happy philosophy. And only against such philosophies do evils appear evident at all. The optimist is a better reformer than the pessimist; and the man who believes life to be excellent is the man who alters it most. It seems a paradox, yet the reason of it is very plain. The pessimist can be enraged at evil. But only the optimist can be surprised at it. From the reformer is required a simplicity of surprise. He must have the faculty of a violent and virgin astonishment. It is not enough that he should think injustice distressing; he must think injustice *absurd*, an anomaly in existence, a matter less for tears than for a shattering laughter. On the other hand, the pessimists at the end of the century could hardly curse even the blackest thing; for they could hardly see it against its black and eternal background. Nothing was bad, because everything was bad. Life in prison was infamous — like life anywhere else. The fires of persecution were vile — like the stars. We perpetually find this paradox of a contented discontent. Dr. Johnson takes too sad a view of humanity, but he is also too satisfied a Conservative. Rousseau takes too rosy a view of humanity, but he causes a revolution. Swift is angry, but a Tory. Shelley is happy, and a rebel. Dickens, the optimist, satirises the Fleet, and the Fleet is gone. Gissing, the pessimist, satirises Suburbia, and Suburbia remains.

Mr. Gissing's error, then, about the early Dickens period we may put thus: in calling it hard and cruel he omits the wind of hope and humanity that was blowing through it. It may have been full of inhuman institutions, but it was full of humanitarian people. And this humanitarianism was very much the better (in my view) because it was a rough and even rowdy humanitarianism. It was free from all the faults that cling to the name. It was, if you will, a coarse humanitarianism. It was a shouting, fighting, drinking philanthropy — a noble thing. But, in any case, this atmosphere was the atmosphere of the Revolution; and its main idea was the idea of human equality. I am not concerned here to defend the egalitarian idea against the solemn and babyish attacks made upon it by the rich and learned of to-day. I am merely concerned to state one of its practical consequences. One of the actual and certain consequences of the idea that all men are equal is immediately to produce very great men. I would say superior men, only that the hero thinks of himself as great, but not as superior. This has been hidden from us of late by a foolish worship of sinister and exceptional men, men without comrade-ship, or any infectious virtue. This type of Cæsar does exist. There is a great man who makes every man feel small. But the real great man is the man who makes every man feel great.

The spirit of the early century produced great men, because it believed that men were great. It made strong men by encouraging weak men. Its education, its public habits, its rhetoric, were all addressed towards encouraging the greatness in everybody. And by encouraging the greatness in everybody, it naturally encouraged superlative greatness in some. Superiority came out of the high rapture of equality. It is precisely in this sort of passionate unconsciousness and bewildering community of thought that men do become more than themselves. No man by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature; but a man may add many cubits to his stature by not taking thought. The best men of the Revolution were simply common men at their best. This is why our age can never understand Napoleon. Because he was something great and triumphant, we suppose that he must have been something extraordinary, something inhuman. Some say he was the Devil; some say he was the Superman. Was he a very, very bad man? Was he a good man with some greater moral code? We strive in vain to invent the mysteries behind that immortal mask of brass. The modern world with all its subtleness will never guess his strange secret; for his strange secret was that he was very like other people.

And almost without exception all the great men have come out of this atmosphere of equality. Great men may make despotisms; but democracies make great men. The other main factory of heroes besides a revolution is a religion. And a religion again, is a thing which, by its nature, does not think 6£ men as more or less valuable, but of men as all intensely and painfully valuable, a democracy of eternal danger. For religion all men are equal, as all pennies are equal, because the only value in any of them is that they bear the image of the King. This fact has been quite insufficiently observed in the study of religious heroes. Piety produces intellectual greatness precisely because piety in itself is quite indifferent to intellectual greatness. The strength of Cromwell was that he cared for religion. But the strength of religion was that it did not care for Cromwell; did not care for him, that is, any more than for anybody else. He and his footman were equally welcomed to warm places in the hospitality of hell. It has often been said, very truly, that religion is the thing that makes the ordinary man feel extraordinary; it is an equally important truth that religion is the thing that makes the extraordinary man feel ordinary.

Carlyle killed the heroes; there have been none since his time. He killed the heroic (which he sincerely loved) by forcing upon each man this question: “Am I strong or weak?” To which the answer from any honest man whatever (yes, from Cæsar or Bismarck) would “weak.” He asked for candidates for a definite aristocracy, for men who should hold themselves consciously above their fellows. He advertised for them, so to speak; he promised them glory; he promised them omnipotence. They have not appeared yet. They never will. For the real heroes of whom he wrote had appeared out of an ecstacy of the ordinary. I have already instanced such a case as Cromwell. But there is no need to go through all the great men of Carlyle. Carlyle himself was as great as any of them; and if ever there was a typical child of the French Revolution, it was he. He began with the wildest hopes from the Reform Bill, and although he soured afterwards, he had been made and moulded by those hopes. He was disappointed with Equality; but Equality was not disappointed with him. Equality is justified of all her children.

But we, in the post-Carlylean period, have be come fastidious about great men. Every man examines himself, every man examines his neighbours, to see whether they or he quite come up to the exact line of greatness. The answer is, naturally, “No.” And many a man calls himself contentedly “a minor poet” who would then have been inspired to be a major prophet. We are hard to please and of little faith. We can hardly believe that there is such a thing as a great man. They could hardly believe there was such a thing as a small one. But we are always praying that our eyes may behold greatness, instead of praying that our hearts may be filled with it. Thus, for instance, the Liberal party (to which I belong) was, in its period of exile, always saying, “0 for a Gladstone!” and such things. We were always asking that it might be strengthened from above, instead of ourselves strengthening it from below, with our hope and our anger and our youth. Every man was waiting for a leader. Every man ought to be waiting for a chance to lead. If a god does come upon the earth, he will descend at the sight of the brave. Our prostrations and litanies are of no avail; our new moons and our sabbaths are an abomination. The great man will come when all of us are feeling great, not when all of us are feeling small. He will ride in at some splendid moment when we all feel that we could do without him.

We are then able to answer in some manner the question, “Why have we no great men?” We have no great men chiefly because we are always looking for them. We are connoisseurs of greatness, and connoisseurs can never be great; we are fastidious, that is, we are small. When Diogenes went about with a lantern looking for an honest man, I am afraid he had very little time to be honest himself And when anybody goes about on his hands and knees looking for a great man to worship, he is making sure that one man at any rate shall not be great. Now, the error of Diogenes is evident. The error of Diogenes lay in the fact that he omitted to notice that every man is both an honest man and a dishonest man. Diogenes looked for his honest man inside every crypt and cavern; but he never thought of looking inside the thief And that is where the Founder of Christianity found the honest man; He found him on a gibbet and promised him Paradise. Just as Christianity looked for the honest man inside the thief, democracy looked for the wise man inside the fool. It encouraged the fool to be wise. We can call this thing sometimes optimism, sometimes equality; the nearest name for it is encouragement. It had its exaggerations — failure to understand original sin, notions that education would make all men good, the childlike yet pedantic philosophies of human perfectibility. But the whole was full of a faith in the infinity of human souls, which is in itself not only Christian but orthodox; and this we have lost amid the limitations of a pessimistic science. Christianity said that any man could be a saint if he chose; democracy, that any man could be a citizen if he chose. The note of the last few decades in art and ethics has been that a man is stamped with an irrevocable psychology, and is cramped for perpetuity in the prison of his skull. It was a world that expected everything of everybody. It was a world that encouraged anybody to be anything. And in England and literature its living expression was Dickens.

We shall consider Dickens in many other capacities, but let us put this one first. He was the voice in England of this humane intoxication and expansion, this encouraging of anybody to be anything. His best books are a carnival of liberty, and there is more of the real spirit of the French Revolution in “Nicholas Nickleby” than in “The Tale of Two Cities.” His work has the great glory of the Revolution, the bidding of every man to be himself; it has also the revolutionary deficiency: it seems to think that this mere emancipation is enough. No man *encouraged* his characters so much as Dickens. “I am an affectionate father,” he says, “to every child of my fancy.” He was not only an affectionate father, he was an over-indulgent father. The children of his fancy are spoilt children. They shake the house like heavy and shouting schoolboys; they smash the story to pieces like so much furniture. When we moderns write stories our characters are better controlled. But, alas! our characters are rather easier to control. We are in no danger from the gigantic gambols of creatures like Mantalini and Micawber. We are in no danger of giving our readers too much Weller or Wegg. We have not got it to give. When we experience the ungovernable sense of life which goes along with the old Dickens sense of liberty, we experience the best of the revolution. We are filled with the first of all democratic doctrines, that all men are interesting; Dickens tried to make some of his people appear dull people, but he could not keep them dull. He could not make a monotonous man. The bores in his books are brighter than the wits in other books.

I have put this position first for a defined reason. It is useless for us to attempt to imagine Dickens and his life unless we are able at least to imagine this old atmosphere of a democratic optimism — a confidence in common men. Dickens depends upon such a comprehension in a rather unusual manner, a manner worth explanation, or at least remark.

The disadvantage under which Dickens has fallen, both as an artist and a moralist, is very plain. His misfortune is that neither of the two last movements in literary criticism has done him any good. He has suffered alike from his enemies, and from the enemies of his enemies. The facts to which I refer are familiar. When the world first awoke from the mere hypnotism of Dickens, from the direct tyranny of his temperament, there was, of course, a reaction. At the head of it came the Realists, with their documents, like Miss Flite. They declared that scenes and types in Dickens were wholly impossible (in which they were perfectly right), and on this rather paradoxical ground objected to them as literature. They were not "like life," and there, they thought, was an end of the matter. The realist for a time prevailed. But Realists did not enjoy their victory (if they enjoyed anything) very long. A more symbolic school of criticism soon arose. Men saw that it was necessary to give a much deeper and more delicate meaning to the expression "like life." Streets are not life, cities and civilisations are not life, faces even and voices are not life itself Life is within, and no man hath seen it at any time. As for our meals, and our manners, and our daily dress, these are things exactly like sonnets; they are random symbols of the soul. One man tries to express himself in books, another in boots; both probably fail. Our solid houses and square meals are in the strict sense fiction. They are things made up to typify our thoughts. The coat a man wears may be wholly fictitious; the movement of his hands may be quite unlike life.

This much the intelligence of men soon perceived. And by this much Dickens's fame should have greatly profited. For Dickens is "like life" in the truer sense, in the sense that he is akin to the living principle in us and in the universe; he is like life, at least in this detail, that he is alive. His art is like life, because, like life, it cares for nothing outside itself, and goes on its way rejoicing. Both produce monsters with a kind of carelessness, like enormous by-products; life producing the rhinoceros, and art Mr. Bunsby. Art indeed copies life in not copying life, for life copies nothing. Dickens's art is like life because, like life, it is irresponsible, because, like life, it is incredible.

Yet the return of this realisation has not greatly profited Dickens, the return of romance has been almost useless to this great romantic. He has gained as little from the fall of the realists as from their triumph; there has been a revolution, there has been a counter revolution, there has been no restoration. And the reason of this brings us back to that atmosphere of popular optimism of which I spoke. And the shortest way of expressing the more recent neglect of Dickens is to say that for our time and taste he exaggerates the wrong thing.

Exaggeration is the definition of art. That both Dickens and the Moderns understood. Art is, in its inmost nature, fantastic. Time brings queer revenges, and while the realists were yet living, the art of Dickens was justified by Aubrey Beardsley. But men like Aubrey Beardsley were allowed to be fantastic, because the mood which they overstrained and overstated was a mood which their period understood. Dickens overstrains and overstates a mood our period does not understand. The truth he exaggerates is exactly this old Revolution sense of infinite opportunity and boisterous brotherhood. And we resent his undue sense of it, because we ourselves have not even a due sense of it. We feel troubled with too much where we have too little; we wish he would keep it within bounds. For we are all exact and scientific on the subjects we do not care about. We all immediately detect exaggeration in an exposition of Mormonism or a patriotic speech from Paraguay. We all require sobriety on the subject of the sea-serpent. But the moment we begin to believe a thing ourselves, that moment we begin easily to overstate it; and the moment our souls become serious, our words become a little wild. And certain moderns are thus placed towards exaggeration. They permit any writer to emphasise doubts for instance, for doubts are their religion, but they permit no man to emphasise dogmas. If a man be the mildest Christian, they smell “cant;” but he can be a raving windmill of pessimism, “and they call it ‘temperament.” If a moralist paints a wild picture of immorality, they doubt its truth, they say that devils are not so black as they are painted. But if a pessimist paints a wild picture of melancholy, they accept the whole horrible psychology, and they never ask if devils are as blue as they are painted.

It is evident, in short, why even those who admire exaggeration do not admire Dickens. He is exaggerating the wrong thing. They know what it is to feel a sadness so strange and deep that only impossible characters can express it: they do not know what it is to feel a joy so vital and violent that only impossible characters can express that. They know that the soul can be so sad as to dream naturally of the blue faces of the corpses of Baudelaire: they do not know that the soul can be so cheerful as to dream naturally of the blue face of Major Bagstock. They know that there is a point of depression at which one believes in Tintagiles: they do not know that there is a point of exhilaration at which one believes in Mr. Wegg. To them the impossibilities of Dickens seem much more impossible than they really are, because they are already attuned to the opposite impossibilities of Maeterlinck. For every mood there is an appropriate impossibility — a decent and tactful impossibility — fitted to the frame of mind. Every train of thought may end in an ecstasy, and all roads lead to Elfland. But few now walk far enough along the street of Dickens to find the place where the cockney villas grow so comic that they become poetical. People do not know how far mere good spirits will go. For instance, we never think (as the old folk-lore did) of good spirits reaching to the spiritual world. We see this in the complete absence from modern, popular supernaturalism of the old popular mirth. We hear plenty to-day of the wisdom of the spiritual world; but we do not hear, as our fathers did, of the folly of the spiritual world, of the tricks of the gods, and the jokes of the patron saints. Our popular tales tell us of a man who is so wise that he touches the supernatural, like Dr. Nikola; but they never tell us (like the popular tales of the past) of a man who was so silly that he touched the supernatural, like Bottom the Weaver. We do not understand the dark and transcendental sympathy between fairies and fools. We understand a devout occultism, an evil occultism, a tragic occultism, but a farcical occultism is beyond us. Yet a farcical occultism is the very essence of “The Midsummer Night’s Dream.” It is also the right and credible essence of “The Christmas Carol.” Whether we understand it depends upon whether we can understand that exhilaration is not a physical accident, but a mystical fact; that exhilaration can be infinite, like sorrow; that a joke can be so big that it breaks the roof of the stars. By simply going on being absurd, a thing can become godlike; there is but one step from the ridiculous to the sublime.

Dickens was great because he was immoderately possessed with all this; if we are to understand him at all we must also be moderately possessed with it. We must understand this old limitless hilarity and human confidence, at least enough to be able to endure it when it is pushed a great deal too far. For Dickens did push it too far; he did push the hilarity to the point of incredible character-drawing; he did push the human confidence to the point of an unconvincing sentimentalism. You can trace, if you will, the revolutionary joy till it reaches the incredible Sapsea epitaph; you can trace the revolutionary hope till it reaches the repentance of Dombey. There is plenty to carp at in this man if you are inclined to carp; you may easily find him vulgar if you cannot see that he is divine; and if you cannot laugh with Dickens, undoubtedly you can laugh at him.

I believe myself that this braver world of his will certainly return; for I believe that it is bound up with the realities, like morning and the spring. But for those who beyond remedy regard it as an error, I put this appeal before any other observations on Dickens. First let us sympathise, if only for an instant, with the hopes of the Dickens period, with that cheerful trouble of change. If democracy has disappointed you, do not think of it as a burst bubble, but at least as a broken heart, an old love-affair. Do not sneer at the time when the creed of humanity was on its honeymoon; treat it with the dreadful reverence that is due to youth. For you, perhaps, a drearier philosophy has covered and eclipsed the earth. The fierce poet of the Middle Ages wrote, “Abandon hope, all ye who enter here,” over the gates of the lower world. The emancipated poets of to-day have written it over the gates of this world. But if we are to understand the story which follows, we must erase that apocalyptic writing, if only for an hour. We must recreate the faith of our fathers, if only as an artistic atmosphere If, then, you are a pessimist, in reading this story, forego for a little the pleasures of pessimism. Dream for one mad moment that the grass is green. Unlearn that sinister learning that you think so clear; deny that deadly knowledge that you think you know. Surrender the very flower of your culture; give up the very jewel of your pride; abandon hopelessness, all ye who enter here.

CHAPTER II

THE BOYHOOD OF DICKENS

Charles Dickens was born at Landport, in Portsea, on February 7, 1812. His father was a clerk in the Navy Pay-office, and was temporarily on duty in the neighbourhood. Very soon after the birth of Charles Dickens, however, the family moved for a short period to Norfolk Street, Bloomsbury, and then for a long period to Chatham, which thus became the real home, and for all serious purposes, the native place of Dickens. The whole story of his life moves like a Canterbury pilgrimage along the great roads of Kent.

John Dickens, his father, was, as stated, a clerk; but such mere terms of trade tell us little of the tone or status of a family. Browning's father (to take an instance at random) would also be described as a clerk and a man of the middle class; but the Browning family and the Dickens family have the colour of two different civilisations. The difference cannot be conveyed merely by saying that Browning stood many strata above Dickens. It must also be conveyed that Browning belonged to that section of the middle class which tends (in the small social sense) to rise; the Dickenses to that section which tends in the same sense to fall. If Browning had not been a poet, he would have been a better clerk than his father, and his son probably a better and richer clerk than he. But if they had not been lifted in the air by the enormous accident of a man of genius, the Dickenses, I fancy, would have appeared in poorer and poorer places, as inventory clerks, as caretakers, as addressers of envelopes, until they melted into the masses of the poor.

Yet at the time of Dickens's birth and childhood this weakness in their worldly destiny was in no way apparent; especially it was not apparent to the little Charles himself. He was born and grew up in a paradise of small prosperity. He fell into the family, so to speak, during one of its comfortable periods, and he never in those early days thought of himself as anything but as a comfortable middle-class child, the son of a comfortable middle-class man. The father whom he found provided for him, was one from whom comfort drew forth his most pleasant and reassuring qualities, though not perhaps his most interesting and peculiar. John Dickens seemed, most probably, a hearty and kindly character, a little florid of speech, a little careless of duty in some details, notably in the detail of education. His neglect of his son’s mental training in later and more trying times was a piece of unconscious selfishness which remained a little acrimoniously in his son’s mind through life. But even in this earlier and easier period what records there are of John Dickens give out the air of a somewhat idle and irresponsible fatherhood. He exhibited towards his son that contradiction in conduct which is always shown by the too thoughtless parent to the too thoughtful child. He contrived at once to neglect his mind, and also to over-stimulate it.

There are many recorded tales and traits of the author’s infancy, but one small fact seems to me more than any other to strike the note and give the key to his whole strange character. His father found it more amusing to be an audience than to be an instructor; and instead of giving the child intellectual pleasure, called upon him, almost before he was out of petticoats, to provide it. Some of the earliest glimpses we have of Charles Dickens show him to us perched on some chair or table singing comic songs in an atmosphere of perpetual applause. So, almost as soon as he can toddle, he steps into the glare of the footlights. He never stepped out of it until he died. He was a good man, as men go in this bewildering world of ours, brave, transparent, tender-hearted, scrupulously independent and honourable; he was not a man whose weaknesses should be spoken of without some delicacy and doubt. But there did mingle with his merits all his life this theatrical quality, this atmosphere of being shown off — a sort of hilarious self-consciousness. His literary life was a triumphal procession; he died drunken with glory. And behind all this nine years’ wonder that filled the world, behind his gigantic tours and his ten thousand editions, the crowded lectures and the crashing brass, behind all the thing we really see is the flushed face of a little boy singing music-hall songs to a circle of aunts and uncles. And this precocious pleasure explains much, too, in the moral way. Dickens had all his life the faults of the little boy who is kept up too late at night. The boy in such a case exhibits a psychological paradox; he is a little too irritable because he is a little too happy. Dickens was always a little too irritable because he was a little too happy. Like the overwrought child in society, he was splendidly sociable, and yet suddenly quarrelsome. In all the practical relations of his life he was what the child is in the last hours of an evening party, genuinely delighted, genuinely delightful, genuinely affectionate and happy, and yet in some strange way fundamentally exasperated and dangerously close to tears.

There was another touch about the boy which made his case more peculiar, and perhaps his intelligence more fervid; the touch of ill-health. It could not be called more than a touch, for he suffered from no formidable malady and could always through life endure a great degree of exertion, even if it was only the exertion of walking violently all night. Still the streak of sickness was sufficient to take him out of the common unconscious life of the community of boys; and for good or evil that withdrawal is always a matter of deadly importance to the mind. He was thrown back perpetually upon the pleasures of the intelligence, and these began to burn in his head like a pent and painful furnace. In his own unvaryingly vivid way he has described how he crawled up into an unconsidered garret, and there found, in a dusty heap, the undying literature of England. The books he mentions chiefly are "Humphrey Clinker" and "Tom Jones." When he opened those two books in the garret he caught hold of the only past with which he is at all connected, the great comic writers of England of whom he was destined to be the last.

It must be remembered (as I have suggested before) that there was something about the county in which he lived, and the great roads along which he travelled that sympathised with and stimulated his pleasure in this old picaresque literature. The groups that came along the road, that passed through his town and out of it, were of the motley laughable type that tumbled into ditches or beat down the doors of taverns under the escort of Smollett and Fielding. In our time the main roads of Kent have upon them very often a perpetual procession of tramps and tinkers unknown on the quiet hills of Sussex; and it may have been so also in Dickens's boyhood. In his neighbourhood were definite memorials of yet older and yet greater English comedy. From the height of Gads-hill at which he stared unceasingly there looked down upon him the monstrous ghost of Falstaff, Falstaff who might well have been the spiritual father of all Dickens's adorable knaves, Falstaff the great mountain of English laughter and English sentimentalism, the great, healthy, humane English humbug, not to be matched among the nations.

At this eminence of Gads-hill Dickens used to stare even as a boy with the steady purpose of some day making it his own. It is characteristic of the consistency which underlies the superficially erratic career of Dickens that he actually did live to make it his own. The truth is that he was a precocious child, precocious not only on the more poetical but on the more prosaic side of life. He was ambitious as well as enthusiastic. No one can ever know what visions they were that crowded into the head of the clever little brat as he ran about the streets of Chatham or stood glowering at Gads-hill. But I think that quite mundane visions had a very considerable share in the matter. He longed to go to school (a strange wish), to go to college, to make a name, nor did he merely aspire to these things; the great number of them he also expected. He regarded himself as a child of good position just about to enter on a life of good luck. He thought his home and family a very good spring-board or jumping-off place from which to fling himself to the positions which he desired to reach. And almost as he was about to spring the whole structure broke under him, and he and all that belonged to him disappeared into a darkness far below.

Everything had been struck down as with the finality of a thunder-bolt. His lordly father was a bankrupt, and in the Marshalsea prison. His mother was in a mean home in the north of London, wildly proclaiming herself the principal of a girl’s school, a girl’s school to which nobody would go. And he himself, the conqueror of the world and the prospective purchaser of Gads-hill, passed some distracted and bewildering days in pawning the household necessities to Fagins in foul shops, and then found himself somehow or other one of a row of ragged boys in a great dreary factory, pasting the same kinds of labels on to the same kinds of blacking-bottles from morning till night.

Although it seemed sudden enough to him, the disintegration had, as a matter of fact, of course, been going on for a long time. He had only heard from his father dark and melodramatic allusions to a “deed” which, from the way it was mentioned, might have been a claim to the crown or a compact with the devil, but which was in truth an unsuccessful documentary attempt on the part of John Dickens to come to a composition with his creditors. And now, in the lurid light of his sunset, the character of John Dickens began to take on those purple colours which have made him under another name absurd and immortal. It required a tragedy to bring out this man’s comedy. So long as John Dickens was in easy circumstances, he seemed only an easy man, a little long and luxuriant in his phrases, a little careless in his business routine. He seemed only a wordy man, who lived on bread and beef like his neighbours; but as bread and beef were successively taken away from him, it was discovered that he lived on words. For him to be involved in a calamity only meant to be cast for the first part in a tragedy. For him blank ruin was only a subject for blank verse. Henceforth we feel scarcely inclined to call him John Dickens at all; we feel inclined to call him by the name through which his son celebrated this preposterous and sublime victory of the human spirit over circumstances. Dickens, in “David Copperfield,” called him Wilkins Micawber. In his personal correspondence he called him the Prodigal Father.

Young Charles had been hurriedly flung into the factory by the more or less careless good-nature of James Lamert, a relation of his mother’s; it was a blacking factory, supposed to be run as a rival to Warren’s by another and “original” Warren, both practically conducted by another of the Lamerts. It was situated near Hungerford Market. Dickens worked there drearily, like one stunned with disappointment. To a child excessively intellectualised, and at this time, I fear, excessively egotistical, the coarseness of the whole thing — the work, the rooms, the boys, the language — was a sort of bestial nightmare. Not only did he scarcely speak of it then, but he scarcely spoke of it afterwards. Years later, in the fulness of his fame, he heard from Forster that a man had spoken of knowing him. On hearing the name, he somewhat curtly acknowledged it, and spoke of having seen the man once. Forster, in his innocence, answered that the man said he had seen Dickens many times in a factory by Hungerford Market. Dickens was suddenly struck with a long and extraordinary silence. Then he invited Forster, as his best friend, to a particular interview, and, with every appearance of difficulty and distress, told him the whole story for the first and the last time. A long while after that he told the world some part of the matter in the account of Murdstone and Grinby’s in “David Copperfield.” He never spoke of the whole experience except once or twice, and he never spoke of it otherwise than as a man might speak of hell.

It need not be suggested, I think, that this agony m the child was exaggerated by the man. It is true that he was not incapable of the vice of exaggeration, if it be a vice. There was about him much vanity and a certain virulence in his version of many things. Upon the whole, indeed, it would hardly be too much to say that he would have exaggerated any sorrow he talked about. But this was a sorrow with a very strange position in Dickens’s life; it was a sorrow he did not talk about. Upon this particular dark spot he kept a sort of deadly silence for twenty years. An accident revealed part of the truth to the dearest of all his friends. He then told the whole truth to the dearest of all his friends. He never told anybody else. I do not think that this arose from any social sense of disgrace; if he had it slightly at the time, he was far too self-satisfied a man to have taken it seriously in after life. I really think that his pain at this time was so real and ugly that the thought of it filled him with that sort of impersonal but unbearable shame with which we are filled, for instance, by the notion of physical torture, of something that humiliates humanity. He felt that such agony was something obscene. Moreover there are two other good reasons for thinking that his sense of hopelessness was very genuine. First of all, this starless outlook is common in the calamities of boyhood. The bitterness of boyish distresses does not lie in the fact that they are large; it lies in the fact that we do not know that they are small. About any early disaster there is a dreadful finality; a lost child can suffer like a lost soul.

It is currently said that hope goes with youth, and lends to youth its wings of a butterfly; but I fancy that hope is the last gift given to man, and the only gift not given to youth. Youth is preeminently the period in which a man can be lyric, fanatical, poetic; but youth is the period in which a man can be hopeless. The end of every episode is the end of the world. But the power of hoping through everything, the knowledge that the soul survives its adventures, that great inspiration comes to the middle-aged; God has kept that good wine until now. It is from the backs of the elderly gentlemen that the wings of the butterfly should burst. There is nothing that so much mystifies the young as the consistent frivolity of the old. They have discovered their indestructibility. They are in their second and clearer childhood, and there is a meaning in the merriment of their eyes. They have seen the end of the End of the World.

First, then, the desolate finality of Dickens’s childish mood makes me think it was a real one. And there is another thing to be remembered. Dickens was not a saintly child, after the style of Little Dorrit or Little Nell. He had not, at this time at any rate, set his heart wholly upon higher things, even upon things such as personal tenderness or loyalty. He had been, and was, unless I am very much mistaken, sincerely, stubbornly, bitterly ambitious. He had, I fancy, a fairly clear idea previous to the downfall of all his family’s hopes of what he wanted to do in the world, and of the mark that he meant to make there. In no dishonourable sense, but still in a definite sense, he might, in early life, be called worldly; and the children of this world are in their generation infinitely more sensitive than the children of light. A saint after repentance will forgive himself for a sin; a man about town will never forgive himself for a *faux pas*. There are ways of getting absolved for murder; there are no ways of getting absolved for upsetting the soup. This thin-skinned quality in all very mundane people is a thing too little remembered; and it must not be wholly forgotten in connection with a clever, restless lad who dreamed of a destiny. That part of his distress which concerned himself and his social standing was among the other parts of it the least noble; but perhaps it was the most painful. For pride is not only, as the modern world fails to understand, a sin to be condemned; it is also (as it understands even less) a weakness to be very much commiserated. A very vitalising touch is given in one of his own reminiscences. His most unendurable moment did not come in any bullying in the factory or any famine in the streets. It came when he went to see his sister Fanny take a prize at the Royal Academy of Music. “I could not bear to think of myself — beyond the reach of all such honourable emulation and success. The tears ran down my face. I felt as if my heart were rent. I prayed when I went to bed that night to be lifted out of the humiliation and neglect in which I was. I never had suffered so much before. There was no envy in this.” I do not think that there was, though the poor little wretch could hardly have been blamed if there had been. There was only a furious sense of frustration; a spirit like a wild beast in a cage. It was only a small matter in the external and obvious sense; it was only Dickens prevented from being Dickens.

If we put these facts together, that the tragedy seemed final, and that the tragedy was concerned with the supersensitive matters of the ego and the gentleman, I think we can imagine a pretty genuine case of internal depression. And when we add to the case of internal depression the case of the external oppression, the case of the material circumstances by which he was surrounded, we have reached a sort of midnight. All day he worked on insufficient food at a factory. It is sufficient to say that it afterwards appeared in his works as Murdstone and Grinby’s. At night he returned disconsolately to a lodging-house for such lads, kept by an old lady. It is sufficient to say that she appeared afterwards as Mrs. Pipchin. Once a week only he saw anybody for whom he cared a straw; that was when he went to the Marshalsea prison, and that gave his juvenile pride, half manly and half snobbish, bitter annoyance of another kind. Add to this, finally, that physically he was always very weak and never very well. Once he was struck down in the middle of his work with sudden bodily pain. The boy who worked next to him, a coarse and heavy lad named Bob Fagin, who had often attacked Dickens on the not unreasonable ground of his being a “gentleman,” suddenly showed that enduring sanity of compassion which Dickens had destined to show so often in the characters of the common and unclean. Fagin made a bed for his sick companion out of the straw in the workroom, and filled empty blacking bottles with hot water all day. When the evening came, and Dickens was somewhat recovered, Bob Fagin insisted on escorting the boy home to his father. The situation was as poignant as a sort of tragic farce. Fagin in his wooden-headed chivalry would have died in order to take Dickens to his family; Dickens in his bitter gentility would have died rather than let Fagin know that his family were in the Marshalsea. So these two young idiots tramped the tedious streets, both stubborn, both suffering for an idea. The advantage certainly was with Fagin, who was suffering for a Christian compassion, while Dickens was suffering for a pagan pride. At last Dickens flung off his friend with desperate farewell and thanks, and dashed up the steps of a strange house on the Surrey side. He knocked and rang as Bob Fagin, his benefactor and his incubus, disappeared round the corner. And when the servant came to open the door, he asked, apparently with gravity, whether Mr. Robert Fagin lived there. It is a strange touch. The immortal Dickens woke in him for an instant in that last wild joke of that weary evening. Next morning, however, he was again well enough to make himself ill again, and the wheels of the great factory went on. They manufactured a number of bottles of Warren’s Blacking, and in the course of the process they manufactured also the greatest optimist of the nineteenth century.

This boy who dropped down groaning at his work, who was hungry four or five times a week, whose best feelings and worst feelings were alike flayed alive, was the man on whom two generations of comfortable critics have visited the complaint that his view of life was too rosy to be anything but unreal. Afterwards, and in its proper place, I shall speak of what is called the optimism of Dickens, and of whether it was really too cheerful or too smooth. But this boyhood of his may be recorded now as a mere fact. If he was too happy, this was where he learnt it. If his school of thought was a vulgar optimism, this is where he went to school. If he learnt to whitewash the universe, it was in a blacking factory that he learnt it.

As a fact, there is no shred of evidence to show that those who have had sad experiences tend to have a sad philosophy. There are numberless points upon which Dickens is spiritually at one with the poor, that is, with the great mass of mankind. But there is no point in which he is more perfectly at one with them than in showing that there is no kind of connection between a man being unhappy and a man being pessimistic. Sorrow and pessimism are indeed, in a sense, opposite things, since sorrow is founded on the value of something, and pessimism upon the value of nothing. And in practice we find that those poets or political leaders who come from the people, and whose experiences have really been searching and cruel, are the most sanguine people in the world. These men out of the old agony are always optimists; they are sometimes offensive optimists. A man like Robert Burns, whose father (like Dickens's father) goes bankrupt, whose whole life is a struggle against miserable external powers and internal weaknesses yet more miserable — a man whose life begins grey and ends black — Burns does not merely sing about the goodness of life, he positively rants and cants about it. Rousseau, whom all his friends and acquaintances treated almost as badly as he treated them — Rousseau does not grow merely eloquent, he grows gushing and sentimental, about the inherent goodness of human nature. Charles Dickens, who was most miserable at the receptive age when most people are most happy, is afterwards happy when all men weep. Circumstances break men's bones; it has never been shown that they break men's optimism. These great popular leaders do all kinds of desperate things under the immediate scourge of tragedy. They become drunkards; they become demagogues; they become morphomaniacs. They never become pessimists. Most unquestionably there are ragged and unhappy men whom we could easily understand being pessimists. But as a matter of fact they are not pessimists. Most unquestionably there are whole dim hordes of humanity whom we should promptly pardon if they cursed God. But they don't. The pessimists are aristocrats like Byron; the men who curse God are aristocrats like Swinburne. But when those who starve and suffer speak for a moment, they do not profess merely an optimism, they profess a cheap optimism; they are too poor to afford a dear one. They cannot indulge in any detailed or merely logical defence of life; that would be to delay the enjoyment of it. These higher optimists, of whom Dickens was one, do not approve of the universe; they do not even admire the universe; they fall in love with it. They embrace life too close to criticise or even to see it. Existence to such men has the wild beauty of a woman, and those love her with most intensity who love her with least cause.

CHAPTER III

THE YOUTH OF DICKENS

There are popular phrases so picturesque that even when they are intentionally funny they are unintentionally poetical. I remember, to take one instance out of many, hearing a heated Secularist in Hyde Park apply to some parson or other the exquisite expression, “a sky-pilot.” Subsequent inquiry has taught me that the term is intended to be comic and even contemptuous; but in the first freshness of it I went home repeating it to myself like a new poem. Few of the pious legends have conceived so strange and yet celestial a picture as this of a pilot in the sky, leaning on his helm above the empty heavens, and carrying his cargo of souls higher than the loneliest cloud. The phrase is like a lyric of Shelley. Or, to take another instance from another language, the French have an incomparable idiom for a boy playing truant; “Il fait l’école buissonnière” — he goes to the bushy school, or the school among the bushes. How admirably this accidental expression, “the bushy school” (not to be lightly confounded with the Art School at Bushey) — how admirably this “bushy school” expresses half the modern notions of a more natural education! The two words express the whole poetry of Wordsworth, the whole philosophy of Thoreau, and are quite as good literature as either.

Now, among a million of such scraps of inspired slang there is one which describes a certain side of Dickens better than pages of explanation. The phrase, appropriately enough, occurs at least once in his works, and that on a fitting occasion. When Job Trotter is sent by Sam on a wild chase after Mr. Perker, the solicitor, Mr. Perker’s clerk condoles with Job upon the lateness of the hour, and the fact that all habitable places are shut up. “My friend,” says Mr. Perker’s clerk, “you’ve got the key of the street.” Mr. Perker’s clerk, who was a flippant and scornful young man, may perhaps be pardoned if he used this expression in a flippant and scornful sense; but let us hope that Dickens did not. Let us hope that Dickens saw the strange, yet satisfying, imaginative justice of the words; for Dickens himself had, in the most sacred and serious sense of the term, the key of the street. When we shut ‘out anything, we are shut out of that thing. When we shut out the street, we are shut out of the street. Few of us understand the street. Even when we step into it, as into a house or room of strangers. Few of us see through the shining riddle of the street, the strange folk that belong to the street only — the street-walker or the street-arab, the nomads who, generation after generation, have kept their ancient secrets in the full blaze of the sun. Of the street at night many of us know even less. The street at night is a great house locked up. But Dickens had, if ever man had, the key of the street; his stars were the lamps of the street; his hero was the man in the street. He could open the inmost door of his house — the door that leads into that secret passage which is lined with houses and roofed with stars.

This silent transformation into a citizen of the street took place during those dark days of boyhood, when Dickens was drudging at the factory. When ever he had done drudging, he had no other resource but drifting, and he drifted over half London. He was a dreamy child, thinking mostly of his own dreary prospects. Yet he saw and remembered much of the streets and squares he passed. Indeed, as a matter of fact, he went the right way to work unconsciously to do so. He did not go in for "observation," a priggish habit; he did not look at Charing Cross to improve his mind or count the lamp-posts in Holborn to practise his arithmetic. But unconsciously he made all these places the scenes of the monstrous drama in his miserable little soul. He walked in darkness under the lamps of Holborn, and was crucified at Charing Cross. So for him ever afterwards these places had the beauty that only belongs to battlefields. For our memory never fixes the facts which we have merely observed. The only way to remember a place for ever is to live in the place for an hour; and the only way to live in the place for an hour is to forget the place for an hour. The undying scenes we can all see if we shut our eyes are not the scenes that we have stared at under the direction of guide-books; the scenes we see are the scenes at which we did not look at all — the scenes in which we walked when we were thinking about something else — about a sin, or a love affair, or some childish sorrow. We can see the background now because we did not see it then. So Dickens did not stamp these places on his mind ; he stamped his mind on these places. For him ever afterwards these streets were mortally romantic; they were dipped in the purple dyes of youth and its tragedy, and rich with irrevocable sunsets.

Herein is the whole secret of that eerie realism with which Dickens could always vitalise some dark or dull corner of London. There are details in the Dickens descriptions — a window, or a railing, or the keyhole of a door —

which he endows with demoniac life. The things seem more actual than things really are. Indeed, that degree of realism does not exist in reality; it is the unbearable realism of a dream. And this kind of realism can only be gained by walking dreamily in a place; it cannot be gained by walking observantly. Dickens himself has given a perfect instance of how these nightmare minutiæ grew upon him in his trance of abstraction. He mentions among the coffee-shops into which he crept in those wretched days one in St. Martin's Lane, "of which I only recollect it stood near the church, and that in the door there was an oval glass plate with 'COFFEE ROOM' painted on it, addressed towards the street. If I ever find myself in a very different kind of coffee-room now, but where there is an inscription on glass, and read it backwards on the wrong side, MOOR EEFFOC (as I often used to do then in a dismal reverie), a shock goes through my blood." That wild word, "Moor Eeffoc," is the motto of all effective realism; it is the masterpiece of the good realistic principle — the principle that the most fantastic thing of all is often the precise fact. And that elfish kind of realism Dickens adopted everywhere. His world was alive with inanimate object. The date on the door danced over Mr. Grewgious's, the knocker grinned at Mr. Scrooge, the Roman on the ceiling pointed down at Mr. Tulkinghorn, the elderly armchair leered at Tom Smart — these are all moor eeffocish things. A man sees them because he does not look at them.

And so the little Dickens Dickensised London. He prepared the way for all his personages. Into whatever cranny of our city his characters might crawl, Dickens had been there before them. However wild were the events he narrated as outside him, they could not be wilder than the things that had gone on within. However queer a character of Dickens might be, he could hardly be queerer than Dickens was. The whole secret of his after-writings is sealed up in those silent years of which no written word remains. Those years did him harm perhaps, as his biographer, Forster, has thoughtfully suggested, by sharpening a certain fierce individualism in him which once or twice during his genial life flashed like a half-hidden knife. He was always generous; but things had gone too hardly with him for him to be always easy-going. He was always kind-hearted; he was not always good-humoured. Those years may also, in their strange mixture of morbidity and reality, have increased in him his tendency to exaggeration. But we can scarcely lament this in a literary sense; exaggeration is almost the definition of art — and it is entirely the definition of Dickens's art. Those years may have given him many moral and mental wounds, from which he never recovered. But they gave him the key of the street.

There is a weird contradiction in the soul of the born optimist. He can be happy and unhappy at the same time. With Dickens the practical depression of his life at this time did nothing to prevent him from laying up those hilarious memories of which all his books are made. No doubt he was genuinely unhappy in the poor place where his mother kept school. Nevertheless it was there that he noticed the unfathomable quaintness of the little servant whom he made into the Marchioness. No doubt he was comfortless enough at the boarding-house of Mrs. Roylance; but he perceived with a dreadful joy that Mrs. Roylance's name was Pipchin. There seems to be no incompatibility between taking in tragedy and giving out comedy; they are able to run parallel in the same personality. One incident which he described in his unfinished "autobiography," and which he afterwards transferred almost verbatim to David Copperfield, was peculiarly rich and impressive. It was the inauguration of a petition to the King for a bounty, drawn up by a committee of the prisoners in the Marshalsea, a committee of which Dickens's father was the president, no doubt in virtue of his oratory, and also the scribe no doubt in virtue of his genuine love of literary flights.

"As many of the principal officers of this body as could be got into a small room without filling it up, supported him in front of the petition; and my old friend, Captain Porter (who had washed himself to do honour to so solemn an occasion), stationed himself close to it, to read it to all who were unacquainted with its contents. The door was then thrown open, and they began to come in in a long file; several waiting on the landing outside, while one entered, affixed his signature, and went out. To everybody in succession Captain Porter said, 'Would you like to hear it read?' If he weakly showed the least disposition to hear it, Captain Porter in a loud sonorous voice gave him every word of it. I remember a certain luscious roll he gave to such words as 'Majesty — Gracious Majesty — Your Gracious Majesty's unfortunate subjects — Your Majesty's well-known munificence,' as if the words were something real in his mouth and delicious to taste: my poor father meanwhile listening with a little of an author's vanity and contemplating (not severely) the spike on the opposite wall. Whatever was comical or pathetic in this scene, I sincerely believe I perceived in my corner, whether I demonstrated it or not, quite as well as I should perceive it now. I made out my own little character and story for every man who put his name to the sheet of paper."

Here we see very plainly that Dickens did not merely look back in after days and see that these humours had been delightful. He was delighted at the same moment that he was desperate. The two opposite things existed in him simultaneously, and each in its full strength. His soul was not a mixed colour like grey and purple, caused by no component colour being quite itself. His soul was like a shot silk of black and crimson, a shot silk of misery and joy.

Seen from the outside, his little pleasures and extravagances seem more pathetic than his grief. Once the solemn little figure went into a public-house in Parliament Street, and addressed the man behind the bar in the following terms— "What is your very best — the VERY *best* ale a glass?" The man replied, "Twopence." "Then," said the infant, "just draw me a glass of that, if you please, with a good head to it." "The landlord," says Dickens, in telling the story, "looked at me in return over the bar from head to foot with a strange smile on his face; and instead of drawing the beer looked round the screen and said something to his wife, who came out from behind it with her work in her hand and joined him in surveying me. . . . They asked me a good many questions as to what my name was, how old I was, where I lived, howl was employed, etc., etc. To all of which, that I might commit nobody, I invented appropriate answers. They served me with the ale, though I suspect it was not the strongest on the premises; and the landlord's wife, opening the little half-door, and bending down, gave me a kiss." Here he touches that other side of common life which he was chiefly to champion; he was to show that there is no ale like the ale of a poor man's festival, and no pleasures like the pleasures of the poor. At other places of refreshment he was yet more majestic. "I remember," he says, "tucking my own bread (which I had brought from home in the morning) under my arm, wrapt up in a piece of paper like a book, and going into the best dining-room in Johnson's Alamode Beef House in Clare Court, Drury Lane, and magnificently ordering a small plate of *à-la-mode* beef to eat with it. What the waiter thought of such a strange little apparition coming in all alone I don't know; but I can see him now staring at me as I ate my dinner, and bringing up the other waiter to look. I gave him a halfpenny, and I wish, now, that he hadn't taken it."

For the boy individually the prospect seemed to be growing drearier and drearier. This phrase indeed hardly expresses the fact; for, as he felt it, it was not so much a run of worsening luck as the closing in of a certain and quiet calamity like the coming on of twilight and dark. He felt that he would die and be buried in blacking. Through all this he does not seem to have said much to his parents of his distress. They who were in prison had certainly a much jollier time than he who was free. But of all the strange ways in which the human being proves that he is not a rational being, whatever else he is, no case is so mysterious and unaccountable as the secrecy of childhood. We learn of the cruelty of some school or child-factory from journalists; we learn it from inspectors, we learn it from doctors, we learn it even from shame-stricken schoolmasters and repentant sweaters; but we never learn it from the children; we never learn it from the victims. It would seem as if a living creature had to be taught, like an art of culture, the art of crying out when it is hurt. It would seem as if patience were the natural thing; it would seem as if impatience were an accomplishment like whist. However this may be, it is wholly certain that Dickens might have drudged and died drudging, and buried the unborn Pickwick, but for an external accident.

He was, as has been said, in the habit of visiting his father at the Marshalsea every week. The talks between the two must have been a comedy at once more cruel and more delicate than Dickens ever described. Meredith might picture the comparison between the child whose troubles were so childish, but who felt them like a damned spirit, and the middle-aged man whose trouble was final ruin, and who felt it no more than a baby. Once, it would appear, the boy broke down altogether — perhaps under the unbearable buoyancy of his oratorical papa — and implored to be freed from the factory — implored it, I fear, with a precocious and almost horrible eloquence. The old optimist was astounded — too much astounded to do anything in particular. Whether the incident had really anything to do with what followed cannot be decided, but ostensibly it had not. Ostensibly the cause of Charles's ultimate liberation was a quarrel between his father and Lamert, the head of the factory. Dickens the elder (who had at last left the Marshalsea) could no doubt conduct a quarrel with the magnificence of Micawber; the result of this talent, at any rate, was to leave Mr. Lamert in a towering rage. He had a stormy interview with Charles, in which he tried to be good-tempered to the boy, but could hardly master his tongue about the boy’s father. Finally he told him he must go, and with every observance the little creature was solemnly expelled from hell.

His mother, with a touch of strange harshness, was for patching up the quarrel and sending him back. Perhaps, with the fierce feminine responsibility, she felt that the first necessity was to keep the family out of debt. But old John Dickens put his foot down here — put his foot down with that ringing but very rare decision with which (once in ten years, and often on some trivial matter) the weakest man will overwhelm the strongest woman. The boy was miserable; the boy was clever; the boy should go to school. The boy went to school; he went to the Wellington House Academy, Mornington Place. It was an odd experience for anyone to go from the world to a school, instead of going from school to the world. Dickens, we may say, had his boyhood after his youth. He had seen life at its coarsest before he began his training for it, and knew the worst words in the English language probably before the best. This odd chronology, it will be remembered, he retained in his semi-autobiographical account of the adventures of David Copperfield, who went into the business of Murdstone and Grinby’s before he went to the school kept by Dr. Strong. David Copperfield, also, went to be carefully prepared for a world that he had seen already. Outside David Copperfield, the records of Dickens at this time reduce themselves to a few glimpses provided by accidental companions of his schooldays, and little can be deduced from them about his personality beyond a general impression of sharpness and, perhaps, of bravado, of bright eyes and bright speeches. Probably the young creature was recuperating himself for his misfortunes, was making the most of his liberty, was flapping the wings of that wild spirit that had just not been broken. We hear of things that sound suddenly juvenile after his maturer troubles, of a secret language sounding like mere gibberish, and of a small theatre, with paint and red fire; such as that which Stevenson loved. It was not an accident that Dickens and Stevenson loved it. It is a stage unsuited for psychological realism; the cardboard characters cannot analyze each other with any effect. But it is a stage almost divinely suited for making surroundings, for making that situation and background which belongs peculiarly to romance. A toy theatre, in fact, is the opposite of private theatricals. In the latter you can do anything with the people if you do not ask much from the scenery; in the former you can do anything in scenery if you do not ask much from the people. In a toy theatre you could hardly manage a modern dialogue on marriage, but the Day of Judgment would be quite easy.

After leaving school, Dickens found employment as a clerk to Mr. Blackmore, a solicitor, as one of those inconspicuous under-clerks whom he afterwards turned to many grotesque uses. Here, no doubt, he met Lowten and Swiveller, Chuckster and Wobbler, in so far as such sacred creatures ever had embodiments on this lower earth. But it is typical of him that he had no fancy at all to remain a solicitor's clerk. The resolution to rise which had glowed in him even as a dawdling boy, when he gazed at Gads-hill, which had been darkened but not quite destroyed by his fall into the factory routine, which had been released again by his return to normal boyhood and the boundaries of school, was not likely to content itself now with the copying out of agreements. He set to work, without any advice or help, to learn to be a reporter. He worked all day at law, and all night at shorthand. It is an art which can only be effected by time, and he had to effect it by overtime. But learning the thing under every disadvantage, without a teacher, without the possibility of concentration or complete mental force without ordinary human sleep, he made himself one of the most rapid reporters then alive. There is a curious contrast between the casualness of the mental training to which his parents and others subjected him and the savage seriousness of the training to which he subjected himself. Somebody once asked old John Dickens where his son Charles was educated. “Well, really,” said the great creature, in his spacious way, “he may be said — ah — to have educated himself.” He might indeed.

This practical intensity of Dickens is worth our dwelling on, because it illustrates an elementary antithesis in his character, or what appears as an antithesis in our modern popular psychology. We are always talking about strong men against weak men; but Dickens was not only both a weak man and a strong man, he was a very weak man and also a very strong man. He was everything that we currently call a weak man; he was a man hung on wires; he was a man who might at any moment cry like a child; he was so sensitive to criticism that one may say that he lacked a skin; he was so nervous that he allowed great tragedies in his life to arise only out of nerves. But in the matter where all ordinary strong men are miserably weak — in the matter of concentrated toil and clear purpose and unconquerable worldly courage — he was like a straight sword. Mrs. Carlyle, who in her human epithets often hit the right nail so that it rang, said of him once, “He has a face made of steel.” This was probably felt in a flash when she saw, in some social crowd, the clear, eager face of Dickens cutting through those near him like a knife. Any people who had met him from year to year would each year have found a man weakly troubled about his worldly decline; and each year they would have found him higher up in the world. His was a character very hard for any man of slow and placable temperament to understand; he was the character whom anybody can hurt and nobody can kill.

When he began to report in the House of Commons he was still only nineteen. His father, who had been released from his prison a short time before Charles had been released from his, had also become, among many other things, a reporter. But old John Dickens could enjoy doing anything without any particular aspiration after doing it well. But Charles was of a very different temper. He was, as I have said, consumed with an enduring and almost angry thirst to excel. He learnt shorthand with a dark self-devotion as if it were a sacred hieroglyph. Of this self-instruction, as of everything else, he has left humorous and illuminating phrases. He describes how, after he had learnt the whole exact alphabet, “there then appeared a procession of new horrors, called arbitrary characters — the most despotic characters I have ever known; who insisted for instance, that a thing like the beginning of a cobweb meant ‘expectation,’ and that a pen-and-ink sky rocket stood for ‘disadvantageous.’” He concludes, “It was almost heartbreaking.” But it is significant that somebody else, a colleague of his, concluded, “There never *was* such a shorthand writer.”

Dickens succeeded in becoming a shorthand writer; succeeded in becoming a reporter; succeeded ultimately in becoming a highly effective journalist. He was appointed as a reporter of the speeches in Parliament, first by *The True Son*, then by *The Mirror of Parliament,* and last by *The Morning Chronicle*. He reported the speeches very well, and if we must analyze his internal opinions, much better than they deserved. For it must be remembered that this lad went into the reporter’s gallery full of the triumphant Radicalism which was then the rising tide of the world. He was, it must be confessed, very little overpowered by the dignity of the Mother of Parliaments; he regarded the House of Commons much as he regarded the House of Lords, as a sort of venerable joke. It was, perhaps, while he watched, pale with weariness from the reporter’s gallery, that there sank into him a thing that never left him, his unfathomable contempt for the

British Constitution. Then perhaps he heard from the Government benches the immortal apologies of the Circumlocution Office. “Then would the noble lord or right honourable gentleman, in whose department it was to defend the Circumlocution Office, put an orange in his pocket, and make a regular field-day of the occasion. Then would he come down to that house with a slap upon the table and meet the honourable gentleman foot to foot. Then would he be there to tell that honourable gentleman that the Circumlocution Office was not only blameless in this matter, but was commendable in this matter, was extollable to the skies in this matter. Then would he be there to tell that honourable gentleman that although the Circumlocution Office was invariably right, and wholly right, it never was so right in this matter. Then would he be there to tell the honourable gentleman that it would have been more to his honour, more to his credit, more to his good taste, more to his good sense, more to half the dictionary of common places if he had left the Circumlocution Office alone and never approached this matter. Then would he keep one eye upon a coach or crammer from the Circumlocution Office below the bar, and smash the honourable gentleman with the Circumlocution Office account of this matter. And although one of two things always happened; namely, either that the Circumlocution Office had nothing to say, and said it, or that it had something to say of which the noble lord or right honourable gentleman blundered one half and forgot the other; the Circumlocution Office was always voted immaculate by an accommodating majority.” We are now generally told that Dickens has destroyed these abuses, and that this is no longer a true picture of public life. Such, at any rate; is the Circumlocution Office account of this matter. But Dickens as a good Radical would, I fancy, much prefer that we should continue his battle than that we should celebrate his triumph; especially when it has not come. England is still ruled by the great Barnacle family. Parliament is still ruled by the great Barnacle trinity — the solemn old Barnacle who knew that the Circumlocution Office was protection, the sprightly young Barnacle who knew that it was a fraud, and the bewildered young Barnacle who knew nothing about it. From these three types our Cabinets are still exclusively recruited. People talk of the tyrannies and anomalies which Dickens denounced as things of the past like the Star Chamber. They believe that the days of the old stupid optimism and the old brutal indifference are gone for ever. In truth, this very belief is only the countenance of the old stupid optimism and the old brutal indifference.

We believe in a free England and a pure England, because we still believe in the Circumlocution Office account of this matter. Undoubtedly our serenity is wide-spread. We believe that England is really reformed, we believe that England is really democratic, we believe that English politics are free from corruption. But this general satisfaction of ours does not show that Dickens has beaten the Barnacles. It only shows that the Barnacles have beaten Dickens.

It cannot be too often said, then, that we must read into young Dickens and his works this old Radical tone towards institutions. That tone was a sort of happy impatience. And when Dickens had to listen for hours to the speech of the noble lord in defence of the Circumlocution Office, when, that is, he had to listen to what he regarded as the last vapourings of a vanishing oligarchy, the impatience rather predominated over the happiness. His incurably restless nature found more pleasure in the wandering side of journalism. He went about wildly in post-chaises to report political meetings for the *Morning Chronicle*. “And what gentlemen they were to serve,” he exclaimed, “in such things at the old *Morning Chronicle*. Great or small it did not matter. I have had to charge for half a dozen breakdowns in half a dozen times as many miles. I have had to charge for the damage of a great-coat from the drippings of a blazing wax candle, in writing through the smallest hours of the night in a swift flying carriage and pair.” And again, “I have often transcribed for the printer from my shorthand notes important public speeches in which the strictest accuracy was required, and a mistake in which would have been to a young man severely compromising. writing on the palm of my hand, by the light of a dark lantern, in a post-chaise and four, galloping through a wild country and through the dead of the night, at the then surprising rate of fifteen miles an hour.” The whole of Dickens’s life goes with the throb of that nocturnal gallop. All its real wildness shot through with an imaginative wickedness he afterwards uttered in the drive of Jonas Chuzzlewit through the storm.

All this time, and indeed, from a time of which no measure can be taken, the creative part of his mind had been in a stir or even a fever. While still a small boy he had written for his own amusement some sketches of queer people he had met; notably, one of his uncle’s barber, whose principal hobby was pointing out what Napoleon ought to have done in the matter of military tactics. He had a note-book full of such sketches. He had sketches not only of persons, but of places, which were to him almost more personal than persons. In the December of 1833 he published one of these fragments in the *Old Monthly Magazine*. This was followed by nine others in the same paper, and when the paper (which was a romantically Radical venture, run by a veteran soldier of Bolivar) itself collapsed, Dickens continued the series in the *Evening Chronicle*, an offshoot of the morning paper of the same name. These were the pieces afterwards published and known as the "Sketches by Boz"; and with them Dickens enters literature. He also enters upon many things about this time; he enters manhood, and among other things marriage. A friend of his on the *Chronicle*, George Hogarth, had several daughters. With all of them Dickens appears to have been on terms of great affection. This sketch is wholly literary, and I do not feel it necessary to do more than touch upon such incidents as his marriage, just I shall do no more than touch upon the tragedy that ultimately overtook it. But it may be suggested here that the final misfortunes were in some degree due to the circumstances attending the original action. A very young man fighting his way, and excessively poor, with no memories for years past that were not monotonous and mean, and with his strongest and most personal memories quite ignominious and unendurable, was suddenly thrown into the society of a whole family of girls. I think it does not overstate his weakness, and I think it partly constitutes his excuse, to say that he fell in love with the chance of love. As sometimes happens in the undeveloped youth, an abstract femininity simply intoxicated him. In what came afterwards he was enormously to blame. But I do not think that his was a case of cold division from a woman whom he had once seriously and singly loved. He had been bewildered in a burning haze, I will not say even of first love, but of first flirtations. The whole family stimulated him before he fell in love with one of them; and it continued to stimulate him long after he had quarrelled with her for causes that did not even destroy his affection for her. This view is strikingly supported by all the details of his attitude towards all the other members of the sacred house of Hogarth. One of the sisters remained, of course, his dearest friend till death. Another who had died, he worshipped like a saint, and he always asked to be buried in her grave. He was married on April 2, 1836. Forster remarks that a few days before the announcement of their marriage in the *Times*, the same paper contained another announcement that on the 31st would be published the first number of a work called "The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club." It is the beginning of his career.

The “Sketches,” apart from splendid splashes of humour here and there, are not manifestations of the man of genius. We might almost say that this book is one of the few books by Dickens which would not, standing alone, have made his fame. And yet standing alone it did make his fame. His contemporaries could see a new spirit in it, where we, familiar with the larger fruits of that spirit, can only see a continuation of the prosaic and almost wooden wit of the comic books of that day. But in any case we should hardly look in the man’s first book for the fulness of his contribution to letters. Youth is almost everything else, but it is hardly ever original. We read of young men bursting on the old world with a new message. But youth in actual experience is the period of imitation and even of obedience. Subjectively its emotions may be furious and headlong; but its only external outcome is a furious imitation and a headlong obedience. As we grow older we learn the special thing we have to do. As a man goes on towards the grave he discovers gradually a philosophy he can really call fresh, a style he can really call his own, and as he becomes an older man he becomes a new writer. Ibsen, in his youth, wrote almost classic plays about vikings; it was in his old age that he began to break windows and throw fireworks. The only fault, it was said, of Browning’s first poems was that they had “too much beauty of imagery, and too little wealth of thought.” The only fault, that is, of Browning’s first poems, was that they were not Browning’s.

In one way, however, the “Sketches by Boz” do stand out very symbolically in the life of Dickens. They constitute in a manner the dedication of him to his especial task; the sympathetic and yet exaggerated painting of the poorer middle-class. He was to make men feel that this dull middle-class was actually a kind of elf-land. But here, again, the work is rude and undeveloped; and this is shown in the fact that it is a great deal more exaggerative than it is sympathetic. We are not, of course, concerned with the kind of people who say that they wish that Dickens was more refined. If those people are ever refined it will be by fire. But there is in this earliest work, an element which almost vanished in the later ones, an element which is typical of the middle-classes in England, and which is in a more real sense to be called vulgar. I mean that in these little farces there is a trace m the author as well as in the characters, of that petty sense of social precedence, that hubbub of little unheard-of oligarchies, which is the only serious sin of bourgeoisie of Britain. It may seem pragmatical, for example, to instance such rowdy farce as the story of Horatio Sparkins, which tells how a tuft-hunting family entertained a rhetorical youth thinking he was a lord, and found he was a draper's assistant. No doubt they were very snobbish in thinking that a lord must be eloquent; but we cannot help feeling that Dickens is almost equally snobbish in feeling it so very funny that a draper's assistant should be eloquent. A free man, one would think, would despise the family quite as much if Horatio had been a peer. Here, and here only, there is just a touch of the vulgarity, of the only vulgarity of the world out of which Dickens came. For the only element of lowness that there really is in our populace is exactly that they are full of superiorities and very conscious of class. Shades, imperceptible to the eyes of others, but as hard and haughty as a Brahmin caste, separate one kind of charwoman from another kind of charwoman. Dickens was destined to show with inspired symbolism all the immense virtues of the democracy. He was to show them as the most humorous part of our civilisation; which they certainly are. He was to show them as the most promptly and practically compassionate part of our civilisation; which they certainly are. The democracy has a hundred exuberant good qualities; the democracy has only one outstanding sin — it is not democratic.

CHAPTER IV

“THE PICKWICK PAPERS”

Round the birth of “Pickwick” broke one of those literary quarrels that were too common in the life of Dickens. Such quarrels indeed generally arose from some definite mistake or misdemeanour on the part of somebody else; but they were also made possible by an indefinite touchiness and susceptibility in Dickens himself. He was so sensitive on points of personal authorship that even his sacred sense of humour deserted him. He turned people into mortal enemies whom he might have turned very easily into immortal jokes. It was not that he was lawless; in a sense it was that he was too legal; but he did not understand the principle of *de minimis non curat lex*. Anybody could draw him; any fool could make a fool of him. Any obscure madman who chose to say that he had written the whole of “Martin Chuzzlewit”; any penny-a-liner who chose to say that Dickens wore no shirt-collar, could call forth the most passionate and public denials as of a man pleading “not guilty” to witchcraft or high treason. Hence the letters of Dickens are filled with a certain singular type of quarrels and complaints, quarrels and complaints in which one cannot say that he was on the wrong side, but that merely even in being on the right side he was in the wrong place. He was not only a generous man, he was even a just man; to have made against anybody a charge or claim which was unfair would have been insupportable to him. His weakness was that he found the unfair claim or charge, however small, equally insupportable when brought against himself. No one can say of him that he was often wrong; we can only say of him as of many pugnacious people, that he was too often right.

The incidents attending the inauguration of “The Pickwick Papers” are not, perhaps, a perfect example of this trait, because Dickens was here a hand-to-mouth journalist, and the blow might possibly have been more disabling than those struck at him in his days of triumph. But all through those days of triumph, and to the day of his death, Dickens took this old tea-cup tempest with the most terrible gravity, drew up declarations, called witnesses, preserved pulverising documents, and handed on to his children the forgotten folly as if it had been a Highland feud. Yet the unjust claim made on him was so much more ridiculous even than it was unjust, that it seems strange that he should have remembered it for a month except for his amusement. The facts are simple and familiar to most people. The publishers — Chapman & Hall — wished to produce some kind of serial with comic illustrations by a popular caricaturist named Seymour. This artist was chiefly famous for his rendering of the farcical side of sport, and to suit this speciality it was very vaguely suggested to Dickens by the publishers that he should write about a Nimrod Club, or some such thing, a club of amateur sportsmen, foredoomed to perpetual ignominies. Dickens objected in substance upon two very sensible grounds — first, that sporting sketches were stale; and second, that he knew nothing about sport. He changed the idea to that of a general club for travel and investigation, the Pickwick Club, and only retained one fated sportsman, Mr. Winkle, the melancholy remnant of the Nimrod Club that never was. The first seven pictures appeared with the signature of Seymour and the letter press of Dickens, and in them Winkle and his woes were fairly, but not extraordinarily prominent. Before the eighth picture appeared Seymour had blown his brains out. After a brief interval of the employment of a man named Buss, Dickens obtained the assistance of Hablot K. Browne, whom we all call “Phiz,” and may almost, in a certain sense, be said to have gone into partnership with him. They were as suited to each other and to the common creation of a unique thing as Gilbert and Sullivan. No other illustrator ever created the true Dickens characters with the precise and correct quantum of exaggeration. No other illustrator ever breathed the true Dickens atmosphere, in which clerks are clerks and yet at the same time elves.

To the tame mind the above affair does not seem to offer anything very promising in the way of a row. But Seymour’s widow managed to evolve out of it the proposition that somehow or other her husband had written “Pickwick,” or, at least, had been responsible for the genius and success of it. It does not appear that she had anything at all resembling a reason for this opinion except the unquestionable fact that the publishers had started with the idea of employing Seymour. This was quite true, and Dickens (who over and above his honesty was far too quarrelsome a man not to try and keep in the right, and who showed a sort of fierce carefulness in telling the truth in such cases) never denied it or attempted to conceal it. It was quite true, that at the beginning, instead of Seymour being employed to illustrate Dickens, Dickens may be said to have been employed to illustrate Seymour. But that

Seymour invented anything in the letterpress large or small, that he invented either the outline of Mr. Pickwick's character, or the number of Mr. Pickwick's cabman, that he invented either the story, or so much as a semi-colon in the story was not only never proved, but was never very lucidly alleged. Dickens fills his letters with all that there is to be said against Mrs. Seymour's idea; it is not very clear whether there was anything definitely said for it.

Upon the mere superficial fact and law of the affair, Dickens ought to have been superior to this silly business. But in a much deeper and a much more real sense he ought to have been superior to it. It did not really touch him or his greatness at all, even as an abstract allegation. If Seymour had started the story, had provided Dickens with his puppets, Tupman or Jingle, Dickens would still have been Dickens and Seymour only Seymour. As a matter of fact, it happened to be a contemptible lie, but it would have been an equally contemptible truth. For the fact is that the greatness of Dickens and especially the greatness of Pickwick is not of a kind that could be affected by somebody else suggesting the first idea. It could not be affected by somebody else writing the first chapter. If it could be shown that another man had suggested to Hawthorne (let us say) the primary conception of "The Scarlet Letter," Hawthorne who worked it out would still be an exquisite workman; but he would be by so much less a creator. But in a case like Pickwick there is a simple test. If Seymour gave Dickens the main idea of Pickwick, what was it? There is no primary conception of Pickwick for anyone to suggest. Dickens not only did not get the general plan from Seymour, he did not get it at all. In Pickwick, and, indeed, in Dickens, generally it is in the details that the author is creative, it is in the details that he is vast. The power of the book lies in the perpetual torrent of ingenious and inventive treatment; the theme (at least at the beginning) simply does not exist. The idea of Tupman, the fat lady-killer, is in itself quite dreary and vulgar; it is the detailed Tupman, as he is developed, who is unexpectedly amusing. The idea of Winkle, the clumsy sportsman, is in itself quite stale; it is as he goes on repeating himself that he becomes original. We hear of men whose imagination can touch with magic the dull facts of our life, but Dickens's yet more indomitable fancy could touch with magic even our dull fiction. Before we are half-way through the book the stock characters of dead and damned farces astonish us like splendid strangers.

Seymour's claim, then, viewed symbolically, was even a compliment. It was true in spirit that Dickens obtained (or might have obtained) the start of Pickwick from somebody else, from anybody else. For he had a more gigantic energy than the energy of the intense artist, the energy which is prepared to write something. He had the energy which is prepared to write anything. He could have finished any man's tale. He could have breathed a mad life into any man's characters. If it had been true that Seymour had planned out Pickwick, if Seymour had fixed the chapters and named and numbered the characters, his slave would have shown even in these shackles such a freedom as would have shaken the world. If Dickens had been forced to make his incidents out of a chapter in a child's reading-book, or the names in a scrap of newspaper, he would have turned them in ten pages into creatures of his own. Seymour, as I say, was in a manner right in spirit. Dickens would at this time get his materials from anywhere, in the sense that he cared little what materials they were. He would not have stolen; but if he had stolen he would never have imitated. The power which he proceeded at once to exhibit was the one power in letters which literally cannot be imitated, the primary inexhaustible creative energy, the enormous prodigality of genius which no one but another genius could parody. To claim to have originated an idea of Dickens is like claiming to have contributed one glass of water to Niagara. Wherever this stream or that stream started the colossal cataract of absurdity went roaring night and day. The volume of his invention overwhelmed all doubt of his inventiveness; Dickens was evidently a great man; unless he was a thousand men.

The actual circumstances of the writing and publishing of "Pickwick" shows that while Seymour's specific claim was absurd, Dickens's indignant exactitude about every jot and tittle of authorship was also inappropriate and misleading. "The Pickwick Papers," when all is said and done, did emerge out of a haze of suggestions and proposals in which more than one person was involved. The publishers failed to base the story on a Nimrod Club, but they succeeded in basing it on a club. Seymour, by virtue of his idiosyncrasy, if he did not create, brought about the creation of Mr. Winkle. Seymour sketched Mr. Pickwick as a tall, thin man. Mr. Chapman (apparently without any word from Dickens) boldly turned him into a short, fat man. Chapman took the type from a corpulent old dandy named Foster, who wore tights and gaiters and lived at Richmond. In this sense, were we affected by this idle aspect of the thing, we might call Chapman the real originator of “ Pickwick.” But as I have suggested, originating “Pickwick” is not the point. It was quite easy to originate “Pickwick.” The difficulty was to write it.

However such things may be, there can be no question of the result of this chaos. In “The Pickwick Papers” Dickens sprang suddenly from a comparatively low level to a very high one. To the level of “Sketches by Boz” he never afterwards descended. To the level of “The Pickwick Papers” it is doubtful if he ever afterwards rose. “Pickwick,” indeed, is not a good novel; but it is not a bad novel, for it is not a novel at all. In one sense, indeed, it is something nobler than a novel, for no novel with a plot and a proper termination could emit that sense of everlasting youth — a sense as of the gods gone wandering in England. This is not a novel, for all novels have an end; and “Pickwick,” properly speaking, has no end — he is equal unto the angels. The point at which, as a fact, we find the printed matter terminates is not an end in any artistic sense of the word. Even as a boy I believed there were some more pages that were torn out of my copy, and I am looking for them still. The book might have been cut short anywhere else. It might have been cut short after Mr. Pickwick was released by Mr. Nupkins, or after Mr. Pickwick was fished out of the water, or at a hundred other places. And we should still have known that this was not really the story’s end. We should have known that Mr. Pickwick was still having the same high adventures on the same high roads. As it happens the book ends after Mr. Pickwick has taken a house in the neighbourhood of Dulwich. But we know he did not stop there. We know he broke out, that he took again the road of the high adventures; we know that if we take it ourselves in any acre of England, we may come suddenly upon him in a lane.

But this relation of “Pickwick” to the strict form of fiction demands a further word, which should indeed be said in any case before the consideration of any or all of the Dickens tales. Dickens’s work is not to be reckoned in novels at all. Dickens’s work is to be reckoned always by characters, sometimes by groups, oftener by episodes, but never by novels. You cannot discuss whether “Nicholas Nickleby” is a good novel, or whether “Our Mutual Friend” is a bad novel. Strictly, there is no such novel as “Nicholas Nickleby.” There is no such novel as “Our Mutual Friend.” They are simply lengths cut from the flowing and mixed substance called Dickens — a substance of which any given length will be certain to contain a given proportion of brilliant and of bad stuff. You can say, according to your opinions, “the Crummles part is perfect,” or “the Boffins are a mistake,” just as a man watching a river go by him could count here a floating flower, and there a streak of scum. But you cannot artistically divide the output into books. The best of his work can be found in the worst of his works. “The Tale of Two Cities” is a good novel; “Little Dorrit” is not a good novel. But the description of “The Circumlocution Office” in “Little Dorrit” is quite as good as the description of “Tellson’s Bank” in “The Tale of Two Cities.” “The Old Curiosity Shop” is not so good as “David Copperfield,” but Swiveller is quite as good as Micawber. Nor is there any reason why these superb creatures, as a general rule, should be in one novel any more than another. There is no reason why Sam Weller, in the course of his wanderings, should not wander into “Nicholas Nickleby.” There is no reason why Major Bagstock, in his brisk way, should not walk straight out of “Dombey and Son” and straight into “Martin Chuzzlewit.” To this generalisation some modification should be added. “Pickwick” stands by itself, and has even a sort of unity in not pretending to unity. “David Copperfield,” in a less degree, stands by itself, as being the only book in which Dickens wrote of himself; and “The Tale of Two Cities” stands by itself as being the only book in which Dickens slightly altered himself. But as a whole, this should be firmly grasped, that the units of Dickens, the primary elements, are not the stories, but the characters who affect the stories — or, more often still, the characters who do not affect the stories.

This is a plain matter; but, unless it be stated and felt, Dickens may be greatly misunderstood and greatly underrated. For not only is his whole machinery directed to facilitating the self-display of certain characters, but something more deep and more unmodern still is also true of him. It is also true that all the *moving* machinery exists only to display entirely *static* character. Things in the Dickens story shift and change only in order to give us glimpses of great characters that do not change at all. If we had a sequel of Pickwick ten years afterwards, Pickwick would be exactly the same age. We know he would not have fallen into that strange and beautiful second childhood which soothed and simplified the end of Colonel Newcome. Newcome, throughout the book, is in an atmosphere of time: Pickwick, throughout the book, is not. This will probably be taken by most modern people as praise of Thackeray and dispraise of Dickens. But this only shows how few modern people understand Dickens. It also shows how few understand the faiths and the fables of mankind. The matter can only be roughly stated in one way. Dickens did not strictly make a literature; he made a mythology.

For a few years our corner of Western Europe has had a fancy for this thing we call fiction; that is, for writing down our own lives or similar lives in order to look at them. But though we call it fiction, it differs from older literatures chiefly in being less fictitious. It imitates not only life, but the limitations of life it not only reproduces life, it reproduces death. But outside us, in every other country, in every other age, there has been going on from the beginning a more fictitious kind of fiction. I mean the kind now called folklore, the literature of the people. Our modern novels, which deal with men as they are, are chiefly produced by a small and educated section of society. But this other literature deals with men greater than they are — with demi-gods and heroes; and that is far too important a matter to be trusted to the educated classes. The fashioning of these portents is a popular trade, like ploughing or bricklaying; the men who made hedges, the men who made ditches, were the men who made deities. Men could not elect their kings, but they could elect their gods. So we find ourselves faced with a fundamental contrast between what is called fiction and what is called folklore. The one exhibits an abnormal degree of dexterity operating within our daily limitations; the other exhibits quite normal desires extended beyond those limitations. Fiction means the common things as seen by the uncommon people. Fairy tales mean the uncommon things as seen by the common people.

As our world advances through history towards its present epoch, it becomes more specialist, less democratic, and folklore turns gradually into fiction. But it is only slowly that the old elfin fire fades into the light of common realism. For ages after our characters have dressed up in the clothes of mortals they betray the blood of the gods. Even our phraseology is full of relics of this. When a modern novel is devoted to the bewilderments of a weak young clerk who cannot decide which woman he wants to marry, or which new religion he believes in, we still give this knock-kneed cad the name of “the hero” — the name which is the crown of Achilles. The popular preference for a story with “a happy ending” is not, or at least was not, a mere sweet-stuff optimism; it is the remains of the old idea of the triumph of the dragon-slayer, the ultimate apotheosis of the man beloved of heaven.

But there is another and more intangible trace of this fading supernaturalism — a trace very vivid to the reader, but very elusive to the critic. It is a certain air of endlessness in the episodes, even in the shortest episodes — a sense that, although we leave them, they still go on. Our modern attraction to short stories is not an accident of form; it is the sign of a real sense of fleetingness and fragility; it means that existence is only an impression, and, perhaps, only an illusion. A short story of to-day has the air of a dream; it has the irrevocable beauty of a falsehood; we get a glimpse of grey streets of London or red plains of India, as in an opium vision; we see people — arresting people with fiery and appealing faces. But when the story is ended, the people are ended. We have no instinct of anything ultimate and enduring behind the episodes. The moderns, in a word, describe life in short stories because they are possessed with the sentiment that life itself is an uncommonly short story, and perhaps not a true one. But in this elder literature, even in the comic literature (indeed, especially in the comic literature), the reverse is true. The characters are felt to be fixed things of which we have fleeting glimpses; that is, they are felt to be divine. Uncle Toby is talking for ever, as the elves are dancing for ever. We feel that whenever we hammer on the house of Falstaff, Falstaff will be at home. We feel it as a Pagan would feel that, if a cry broke the silence after ages of unbelief, Apollo would still be listening in his temple. These writers may tell short stories, but we feel they are only parts of a long story. And herein lies the peculiar significance, the peculiar sacredness even, of penny dreadfuls and the common printed matter made for our errand-boys. Here in dim and desperate forms, under the ban of our base culture, stormed at by silly magistrates, sneered at by silly schoolmasters, — here is the old popular literature still popular; here is the unmistakable voluminousness, the thousand and one tales of Dick Deadshot, like the thousand and one tales of Robin Hood. Here is the splendid and static boy, the boy who remains a boy through a thousand volumes and a thousand years. Here in mean alleys and dim shops, shadowed and shamed by the police, mankind is still driving its dark trade in heroes. And elsewhere, and in all other ages, in braver fashion, under cleaner skies, the same eternal tale-telling goes on, and the whole mortal world is a factory of immortals.

Dickens was a mythologist rather than a novelist; he was the last of the mythologists, and perhaps the greatest. He did not always manage to make his characters men, but he always managed, at the least, to make them gods.

They are creatures like Punch or Father Christmas. They live statically, in a perpetual summer of being themselves. It was not the aim of Dickens to show the effect of time and circumstance upon a character; it was not even his aim to show the effect of a character on time and circumstance. It is worth remark, in passing, that whenever he tried to describe change in a character, he made a mess of it, as in the repentance of Dombey or the apparent deterioration of Boffin. It was his aim to show character hung in a kind of happy void, in a world apart from time — yes, and essentially apart from circumstance, though the phrase may seem odd in connection with the godlike horse-play of "Pickwick." But all the Pickwickian events, wild as they often are, were only designed to display the greater wildness of souls, or sometimes merely to bring the reader within touch, so to speak, of that wildness. The author would have fired Mr. Pickwick out of a can non to get him to Wardle's by Christmas; he would have taken the roof off to drop him into Bob Sawyer's party. But once put Pickwick at Wardle's, with his punch and a group of gorgeous personalities, and nothing will move him from his chair. Once he is at Sawyer's party, he forgets how he got there; he forgets Mrs. Bardell and all his story. For the story was but an incantation to call up a god, and the god (Mr. Jack Hopkins) is present in divine power. Once the great characters are face to face, the ladder by which they climbed is forgotten and falls down, the structure of the story drops to pieces, the plot is abandoned; the other characters deserted at every kind of crisis; the whole crowded thoroughfare of the tale is blocked by two or three talkers, who take their immortal ease as if they were already in Paradise. For they do not exist for the story; the story exists for them; and they know it.

To every man alive, one must hope, it has in some manner happened that he has talked with his more fascinating friends round a table on some night when all the numerous personalities unfolded themselves like great tropical flowers. All fell into their parts as in some delightful impromptu play. Every man was more himself than he had ever been in this vale of tears. Every man was a beautiful caricature of himself. The man who has known such nights will understand the exaggerations of "Pickwick." The man who has not known such nights will not enjoy "Pickwick" nor (I imagine) heaven. For, as I have said, Dickens is, in this matter, close to popular religion, which is the ultimate and reliable religion. He conceives an endless joy; he conceives creatures as permanent as Puck or Pan — creatures whose will to live æons upon æons cannot satisfy. He is not come, as a writer, that his creatures may copy life and copy its narrowness; he is come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. It is absurd indeed that Christians should be called the enemies of life because they wish life to last for ever; it is more absurd still to call the old comic writers dull because they wished their unchanging characters to last for ever. Both popular religion, with its endless joys, and the old comic story, with its endless jokes, have in our time faded together. We are too weak to desire that undying vigour. We believe that you can have too much of a good thing — a blasphemous belief, which at one blow wrecks all the heavens that men have hoped for. The grand old defiers of God were not afraid of an eternity of torment. We have come to be afraid of an eternity of joy. It is not my business here to take sides in this division between those who like life and long novels and those who like death and short stories; my only business is to point out that those who see in Dickens's unchanging characters and recurring catch-words a mere stiffness and lack of living movement miss the point and nature of his work. His tradition is another tradition altogether; his aim is another aim altogether to those of the modern novelists who trace the alchemy of experience and the autumn tints of character. He is there, like the common people of all ages, to make deities; he is there, as I have said, to exaggerate life in the direction of life. The spirit he at bottom celebrates is that of two friends drinking wine together and talking through the night. But for him they are two deathless friends talking through an endless night and pouring wine from an inexhaustible bottle.

This, then, is the first firm fact to grasp about "Pickwick" — about "Pickwick" more than about any of the other stories. It is, first and foremost, a supernatural story. Mr. Pickwick was a fairy. So was old Mr. Weller. This does not imply that they were suited to swing in a trapeze of gossamer; it merely implies that if they had fallen out of it on their heads they would not have died. But, to speak more strictly, Mr. Samuel Pickwick is not the fairy; he is the fairy prince; that is to say, he is the abstract wanderer and wonderer, the Ulysses of comedy; the half-human and half-elfin creature — human enough to wander, human enough to wonder, but still sustained with that merry fatalism that is natural to immortal beings — sustained by that hint of divinity which tells him in the darkest hour that he is doomed to live happily ever afterwards. He has set out walking to the end of the world, but he knows he will find an inn there.

And this brings us to the best and boldest element of originality in "Pickwick." It has not, I think, been observed, and it may be that Dickens did not observe it. Certainly he did not plan it; it grew gradually, perhaps out of the unconscious part of his soul, and warmed the whole story like a slow fire. Of course it transformed the whole story also; transformed it out of all likeness to itself. About this latter point was waged one of the numberless little wars of Dickens. It was a part of his pugnacious vanity that he refused to admit the truth of the mildest criticism. Moreover, he used his inexhaustible ingenuity to find an apologia that was generally an afterthought. Instead of laughingly admitting, in answer to criticism, the glorious improbability of Pecksniff, he retorted with a sneer, clever and very unjust, that he was not surprised that the Pecksniffs should deny the portrait of Pecksniff. When it was objected that the pride of old Paul Dombey breaks as abruptly as a stick, he tried to make out that there had been an absorbing psychological struggle going on in that gentleman all the time, which the reader was too stupid to perceive. Which is, I am afraid, rubbish. And so, in a similar vein, he answered those who pointed out to him the obvious and not very shocking fact that our sentiments about Pickwick are very different in the second part of the book from our sentiments in the first; that we find ourselves at the beginning setting out in the company of a farcical old fool, if not a farcical old humbug, and that we find ourselves at the end saying farewell to a fine old England merchant, a monument of genial sanity. Dickens answered with the same ingenious self-justification as in the other cases — that surely it often happened that a man met us first arrayed in his more grotesque qualities, and that fuller acquaintance unfolded his more serious merits. This, of course, is quite true; but I think any honest admirer of "Pickwick" will feel that it is not an answer. For the fault in "Pickwick" (if it be a fault) is a change not in the hero but in the whole atmosphere. The point is not that Pickwick turns into a different kind of man; it is that "The Pickwick Papers" turns into a different kind of book. And however artistic both parts may be, this combination must, in strict art, be called inartistic. A man is quite artistically justified in writing a tale in which a man as cowardly as Bob Acres becomes a man as brave as Hector. But a man is not artistically justified in writing a tale which begins in the style of "The Rivals" and ends in the style of the "Iliad." In other words, we do not mind the hero changing in the course of a book; but we are not prepared for the author changing in the course of the book. And the author did change in the course of this book. He made, in the midst of this book, a great discovery, which was the discovery of his destiny, or, what is more important, of his duty. That discovery turned him from the author of “Sketches by Boz” to the author of “David Copperfield.” And that discovery constituted the thing of which I have spoken — the outstanding and arresting original feature in “The Pickwick Papers.”

“Pickwick,” I have said, is a romance of adventure, and Samuel Pickwick is the romantic adventurer. So much is indeed obvious. But the strange and stirring discovery which Dickens made was this — that having chosen a fat old man of the middle classes as a good thing of which to make a butt, he found that a fat old man of the middle classes is the very best thing of which to make a romantic adventurer. “Pickwick” is supremely original in that it is the adventures of an old man. It is a fairy tale in which the victor is not the youngest of the three brothers, but one of the oldest of their uncles. The result is both noble and new and true. There is nothing which so much needs simplicity as adventure. And there is no one who so much possesses simplicity as an honest and elderly man of business. For romance he is better than a troop of young troubadours; for the swaggering young fellow anticipates his adventures, just as he anticipates his income. Hence both the adventures and the income, when he comes up to them, are not there. But a man in late middle-age has grown used to the plain necessities, and his first holiday is a second youth. A good man, as Thackeray said with such thorough and searching truth, grows simpler as he grows older. Samuel Pickwick in his youth was probably an insufferable young coxcomb. He knew then, or thought he knew, all about the confidence tricks of swindlers like Jingle. He knew then, or thought he knew, all about the amatory designs of sly ladies like Mrs. Bardell. But years and real life have relieved him of this idle and evil knowledge. He has had the high good luck in losing the follies of youth to lose the wisdom of youth also. Dickens has caught, in a manner at once wild and convincing, this queer innocence of the afternoon of life. The round, moonlike face, the round, moon-like spectacles of Samuel Pickwick move through the tale as emblems of a certain spherical simplicity. They are fixed in that grave surprise that may be seen in babies; that grave surprise which is the only real happiness that is possible to man. Pickwick’s round face is like a round and honourable mirror, in which are reflected all the fantasies of earthly existence; for surprise is, strictly speaking, the only kind of reflection. All this grew gradually on Dickens. It is odd to recall to our minds the original plan, the plan of the Nimrod Club, and the author who was to be wholly occupied in playing practical jokes on his characters. He had chosen (or somebody else had chosen) that corpulent old simpleton as a person peculiarly fitted to fall down trapdoors, to shoot over butter slides, to struggle with apple-pie beds, to be tipped out of carts and dipped into horse-ponds. But Dickens, and Dickens only, discovered as he went on how fitted the fat old man was to rescue ladies, to defy tyrants, to dance, to leap, to experiment with life, to be a *deus ex machinâ* and even a knight errant. Dickens made this discovery. Dickens went into the Pickwick Club to scoff, and Dickens remained to pray.

Molière and his marquises are very much amused when M. Jourdain, the fat old middle-class fellow, discovers with delight that he has been talking prose all his life. I have often wondered whether Molière saw how in this fact M. Jourdain towers above them all and touches the stars. He has the freshness to enjoy a fresh fact, the freshness to enjoy even an old one. He can feel that the common thing prose is an accomplishment like verse; and it is an accomplishment like verse; it is the miracle of language. He can feel the subtle taste of water, and roll it on his tongue like wine. His simple vanity and voracity, his innocent love of living, his ignorant love of learning, are things far fuller of romance than the weariness and foppishness of the sniggering cavaliers. When he consciously speaks prose, he unconsciously thinks poetry. It would be better for us all if we were as conscious that supper is supper or that life is life, as this true romantic was that prose is actually prose. M. Jourdain is here the type, Mr. Pickwick is elsewhere the type, of this true and neglected thing, the romance of the middle classes. It is the custom in our little epoch to sneer at the middle classes. Cockney artists profess to find the bourgeoisie dull , as if artists had any business to find anything dull. Decadents talk contemptuously of its conventions and its set tasks; it never occurs to them that conventions and set tasks are the very way to keep that greenness in the grass and that redness in the roses — which they have lost for ever. Stevenson, in his incomparable “Lantern Bearers,” describes the ecstasy of a schoolboy in the mere fact of buttoning a dark lantern under a dark great-coat. If you wish for that ecstasy of the schoolboy, you must have the boy; but you must also have the school. Strict opportunities and defined hours are the very outline of that enjoyment. A man like Mr. Pickwick has been at school all his life, and when he comes out he astonishes the youngsters. His heart, as that acute psychologist, Mr. Weller, points out, had been born later than his body. It will be remembered that Mr. Pickwick also, when on the escapade of Winkle and Miss Allen, took immoderate pleasure in the performances of a dark lantern which was not dark enough, and was nothing but a nuisance to everybody. His soul also was with Stevenson's boys on the grey sands of Haddington, talking in the dark by the sea. He also was of the league of the "Lantern Bearers." Stevenson, I remember, says that in the shops of that town they could purchase "penny Pickwicks (that remarkable cigar)." Let us hope they smoked them, and that the rotund ghost of Pickwick hovered over the rings of smoke.

Pickwick goes through life with that god-like gullibility which is the key to all adventures. The greenhorn is the ultimate victor in everything; it is he that gets the most out of life. Because Pickwick is led away by Jingle, he will be led to the White Hart Inn, and see the only Weller cleaning boots in the courtyard. Because he is bamboozled by Dodson and Fogg, he will enter the prison house like a paladin, and rescue the man and the woman who have wronged him most. His soul will never starve for exploits or excitements who is wise enough to be made a fool of. He will make himself happy in the traps that have been laid for him; he will roll in their nets and sleep. All doors will fly open to him who has a mildness more defiant than mere courage. The whole is unerringly expressed in one fortunate phrase — he will be always "taken in." To be taken in everywhere is to see the inside of everything. It is the hospitality of circumstance. With torches and trumpets, like a guest, the greenhorn is taken in by Life. And the sceptic is cast out by it.

CHAPTER V

THE GREAT POPULARITY

There is one aspect of Charles Dickens which must be of interest even to that subterranean race which does not admire his books. Even if we are not interested in Dickens as a great event in English literature, we must still be interested in him as a great event in English history. If he had not his place with Fielding and Thackeray, he would still have his place with Wat Tyler and Wilkes; for the man led a mob. He did what no English statesman, perhaps, has really done; he called out the people. He was popular in a sense of which we moderns have not even a notion. In that sense there is no popularity now. There are no popular authors to-day. We call such authors as Mr. Guy Boothby or Mr. William Le Queux popular authors. But this is popularity altogether in a weaker sense; not only in quantity, but in quality. The old popularity was positive; the new is negative. There is a great deal of difference between the eager man who wants to read a book, and the tired man who wants a book to read. A man reading a Le Queux mystery wants to get to the end of it. A man reading the Dickens novel wished that it might never end. Men read a Dickens story six times because they knew it so well. If a man can read a Le Queux story six times it is only because he can forget it six times. In short, the Dickens novel was popular not because it was an unreal world, but because it was a real world; a world in which the soul could live. The modern “shocker at its very best is an interlude in life. But in the days when Dickens’s work was coming out in serial, people talked as if real life were itself the interlude between one issue of “Pickwick” and another.

In reaching the period of the publication of “Pickwick,” we reach this sudden apotheosis of Dickens. Henceforward he filled the literary world in a way hard to imagine. Fragments of that huge fashion remain in our daily language; in the talk of every trade or public question are embedded the wrecks of that enormous religion. Men give out the airs of Dickens without even opening his books; just as Catholics can live in a tradition of Christianity without having looked at the New Testament. The man in the street has more memories of Dickens, whom he has not read, than of Marie Corelli, whom he has. There is nothing in any way parallel to this omnipresence and vitality in the great comic characters of Boz. There are no modern Bumbles and Pecksniffs, no modern Gamps and Micawbers. Mr. Rudyard Kipling (to take an author of a higher type than those before mentioned) is called, and called justly, a popular author; that is to say, he is widely read, greatly enjoyed, and highly remunerated; he has achieved the paradox of at once making poetry and making money. But let anyone who wishes to see the difference try the experiment of assuming the Kipling characters to be common property like the Dickens characters. Let anyone go into an average parlour and allude to Strickland as he would allude to Mr. Bumble, the Beadle. Let anyone say that somebody is “a perfect Learoyd,” as he would say “a perfect Pecksniff.” Let anyone write a comic paragraph for a halfpenny paper, and allude to Mrs. Hawksbee instead of to Mrs. Gamp. He will soon discover that the modern world has forgotten its own fiercest booms more completely than it has forgotten this formless tradition from its fathers. The mere dregs of it come to more than any contemporary excitement; the gleaning of the grapes of “Pickwick” is more than the whole vintage of “Soldiers Three.” There is one instance, and I think only one, of an exception to this generalisation; there is one figure in our popular literature which would really be recognised by the populace. Ordinary men would understand you if you referred currently to Sherlock Holmes. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle would no doubt be justified in rearing his head to the stars, remembering that Sherlock Holmes is the only really familiar figure in modern fiction. But let him droop that head again with a gentle sadness, remembering that if Sherlock Holmes is the only familiar figure in modern fiction Sherlock Holmes is also the only familiar figure in the Sherlock Holmes tales. Not many people could say offhand what was the name of the owner of Silver Blaze, or whether Mrs. Watson was dark or fair. But if Dickens had written the Sherlock Holmes stories, every character in them would have been equally arresting and memorable. A Sherlock Holmes would have cooked the dinner for Sherlock Holmes; a Sherlock Holmes would have driven his cab. If Dickens brought in a man merely to carry a letter, he had time for a touch or two, and made him a giant. Dickens not only conquered the world, he conquered it with minor characters. Mr. John Smauker, the servant of Mr. Cyrus Bantam, though he merely passes across the stage, is almost as vivid to us as Mr. Samuel Weller, the servant of Mr. Samuel Pickwick. The young man with the lumpy forehead, who only says “Esker” to Mr. Podsnap’s foreign gentleman, is as good as Mr. Podsnap himself. They appear only for a fragment of time, but they belong to eternity. We have them only for an instant, but they have us for ever.

In dealing with Dickens, then, we are dealing with a man whose public success was a marvel and almost a monstrosity. And here I perceive that my friend, the purely artistic critic, primed himself with Flaubert and Turgenev, can contain himself no longer. He leaps to his feet, upsetting his cup of cocoa, and asks contemptuously what all this has to do with criticism. “Why begin your study of an author,” he says, “with trash about popularity? Boothby is popular, and Le Queux is popular, and Mother Siegel is popular. If Dickens was even more popular, it may only mean that Dickens was even worse. The people like bad literature. If your object is to show that Dickens was good literature, you should rather apologise for his popularity, and try to explain it away. You should seek to show that Dickens’s work was good literature, although it was popular. Yes, that is your task, to prove that Dickens was admirable, although he was admired!”

I ask the artistic critic to be patient for a little and to believe that I have a serious reason for registering this historic popularity. To that we shall come presently. But as a manner of approach I may perhaps ask leave to examine this actual and fashionable statement, to which I have supposed him to have recourse — the statement that the people like bad literature, and even like literature because it is bad. This way of stating the thing is an error, and in that error lies matter of much import to Dickens and his destiny in letters. The public does not like bad literature. The public likes a certain kind of literature and likes that kind of literature even when it is bad better than another kind of literature even when it is good. Nor is this unreasonable; for the line between different types of literature is as real as the line between tears and laughter; and to tell people who can only get bad comedy that you have some first-class tragedy is as irrational as to offer a man who is shivering over weak warm coffee a really superior sort of ice.

Ordinary people dislike the delicate modern work, not because it is good or because it is bad, but because it is not the thing that they asked for. If, for instance, you find them pent in sterile streets and hungering for adventure and a violent secrecy, and if you then give them their choice between “A Study in Scarlet,” a good detective story, and “The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford,” a good psychological monologue, no doubt they will prefer “A Study in Scarlet.” But they will not do so because “The Autobiography of

Mark Rutherford” is a very good monologue, but because it is evidently a very poor detective story. They will be indifferent to “Les Aveugles,” not because it is good drama, but because it is bad melodrama. They do not like good introspective sonnets; but neither do they like bad introspective sonnets, of which there are many. When they walk behind the brass of the Salvation Army band, instead of listening to harmonies at Queen’s Hall, it is always assumed that they prefer bad music. But it may be merely that they prefer military music, music marching down the open street, and that if Dan Godfrey’s band could be smitten with salvation and lead them they would like that even better. And while they might easily get more satisfaction out of a screaming article in *The War Cry* than out of a page of Emerson about the Oversoul, this would not be because the page of Emerson is another and superior kind of literature. It would be because the page of Emerson is another (and inferior) kind of religion.

Dickens stands first as a defiant monument of what happens when a great literary genius has a literary taste akin to that of the community. For this kinship was deep and spiritual. Dickens was not like our ordinary demagogues and journalists. Dickens did not write what the people wanted. Dickens wanted what the people wanted. And with this was connected that other fact which must never be forgotten, and which I have more than once insisted on, that Dickens and his school had a hilarious faith in democracy and thought of the service of it as a sacred priesthood. Hence there was this vital point in his popularism, that there was no condescension in it. The belief that the rabble will only read rubbish can be read between the lines of all our contemporary writers, even of those writers whose rubbish the rabble reads. Mr. Fergus Hume has no more respect for the populace than Mr. George Moore. The only difference lies between those writers who will consent to talk down to the people, and those writers who will not consent to talk down to the people. But Dickens never talked down to the people. He talked up to the people. He approached the people like a deity and poured out his riches and his blood. This is what makes the immortal bond between him and the masses of men. He had not merely produced something they could understand, but he took it seriously, and toiled and agonised to produce it. They were not only enjoying one of the best writers, they were enjoying the best he could do. His raging and sleepless nights, his wild walks in the darkness, his note-books crowded, his nerves in rags, all this extraordinary output was but a fit sacrifice to the ordinary man. He climbed towards the lower classes. He panted upwards on weary wings to reach the heaven of the poor.

His power, then, lay in the fact that he expressed with an energy and brilliancy quite uncommon the things close to the common mind. But with this mere phrase, the common mind, we collide with a current error. Commonness and the common mind are now generally spoken of as meaning in some manner inferiority and the inferior mind; the mind of the mere mob. But the common mind means the mind of all the artists and heroes; or else it would not be common. Plato had the common mind; Dante had the common mind; or that mind was not common. Commonness means the quality common to the saint and the sinner, to the philosopher and the fool; and it was this that Dickens grasped and developed. In everybody there is a certain thing that loves babies, that fears death, that likes sunlight that thing enjoys Dickens. And everybody does not mean uneducated crowds; everybody means everybody: everybody means Mrs. Meynell. This lady, a cloistered and fastidious writer, has written one of the best eulogies of Dickens that exist, an essay in praise of his pungent perfection of epithet. And when I say that everybody understands Dickens I do not mean that he is suited to the untaught intelligence. I mean that he is so plain that even scholars can understand him.

The best expression of the fact, however, is to be found in noting the two things in which he is most triumphant. In order of artistic value, next after his humour, comes his horror. And both his humour and his horror are of a kind strictly to be called human; that is, they belong to the basic part of us, below the lowest roots of our variety. His horror for instance is a healthy churchyard horror, a fear of the grotesque defamation called death; and this every man has, even if he also has the more delicate and depraved fears that come of an evil spiritual outlook. We may be afraid of a fine shade with Henry James; that is, we may be afraid of the world. We may be afraid of a taut silence with Maeterlinck, that is, we may be afraid of our own souls. But every one will certainly be afraid of a Cock Lane Ghost, including Henry James and Maeterlinck. This latter is literally a mortal fear, a fear of death; it is not the immortal fear, or fear of damnation, which belongs to all the more refined intellects of our day. In a word, Dickens does, in the exact sense, make the flesh creep; he does not, like the decadents, make the soul crawl. And the creeping of the flesh on being reminded of its fleshly failure is a strictly universal thing which we can all feel, while some of us are as yet uninstructed in the art of spiritual crawling. In the same way the Dickens mirth is a part of man and universal. All men can laugh at broad humour, even the subtle humorists. Even the modern *flâneur*, who can smile at a particular combination of green and yellow, would laugh at Mr. Lammle's request for Mr. Fledgeby's nose. In a word — the common things are common — even to the uncommon people.

These two primary dispositions of Dickens, to make the flesh creep and to make the sides ache, were a sort of twins of his spirit; they were never far apart and the fact of their affinity is interestingly exhibited in the first two novels.

Generally he mixed the two up in a book and mixed a great many other things with them. As a rule he cared little if he kept six stories of quite different colours running in the same book. The effect was sometimes similar to that of playing six tunes at once. He does not mind the coarse tragic figure of Jonas Chuzzlewit crossing the mental stage which is full of the allegorical pantomime of Eden, Mr. Chollop and *The Watertoast Gazette*, a scene which is as much of a satire as "Gulliver," and nearly as much of a fairy tale. He does not mind binding up a rather pompous sketch of prostitution in the same book with an adorable impossibility like Bunsby. But "Pickwick" is so far a coherent thing that it is coherently comic and consistently rambling. And as a consequence his next book was, upon the whole, coherently and consistently horrible. As his natural turn for terrors was kept down in "Pickwick," so his natural turn for joy and laughter is kept down in "Oliver Twist." In "Oliver Twist" the smoke of the thieves' kitchen hangs over the whole tale, and the shadow of Fagin falls everywhere. The little lamp-lit rooms of Mr. Brownlow and Rose Maylie are to all appearance purposely kept subordinate, a mere foil to the foul darkness without. It was a strange and appropriate accident that Cruikshank and not "Phiz" should have illustrated this book. There was about Cruikshank's art a kind of cramped energy which is almost the definition of the criminal mind. His drawings have a dark strength: yet he does not only draw morbidly, he draws meanly. In the doubled-up figure and frightful eyes of Fagin in the condemned cell there is not only a baseness of subject; there is a kind of baseness in the very technique of it. It is not drawn with the free lines of a free man; it has the half-witted secrecies of a hunted thief. It does not look merely like a picture of Fagin; it looks like a picture by Fagin. Among these dark and detestable plates there is one which has, with a kind of black directness, the dreadful poetry that does inhere in the story, stumbling as it often is. It represents Oliver asleep at an open window in the house of one of his humaner patrons. And outside the window, but as big and close as if they were in the room, stand Fagin and the foul-laced Monks, staring at him with dark monstrous visages and great white wicked eyes, in the style of the simple devilry of the draughtsman. The very *naïveté* of the horror is horrifying: the very woodenness of the two wicked men seems to make them worse than mere men who are wicked. But this picture of big devils at the window-sill does express, as has been suggested above, the thread of poetry in the whole thing; the sense, that is, of the thieves as a kind of army of devils compassing earth and sky crying for Oliver's soul and besieging the house in which he is barred for safety. In this matter there is, I think, a difference between the author and the illustrator. In Cruikshank there was surely something morbid; but, sensitive and sentimental as Dickens was, there was nothing morbid in him. He had, as Stevenson had, more of the mere boy's love of suffocating stories of blood and darkness; of skulls, of gibbets, of all the things, in a word, that are sombre without being sad. There is a ghastly joy in remembering our boyish reading about Sikes and his flight; especially about the voice of that unbearable pedlar which went on in a monotonous and maddening sing-song, "will wash out grease-stains, mud-stains, blood-stains," until Sikes fled almost screaming. For this boyish mixture of appetite and repugnance there is a good popular phrase, "supping on horrors." Dickens supped on horrors as he supped on Christmas pudding. He supped on horrors because he was an optimist and could sup on anything. There was no saner or simpler schoolboy than Traddles, who covered all his books with skeletons.

"Oliver Twist "had begun in Bentley's *Miscellany*, which Dickens edited in 1837. It was interrupted by a blow that for the moment broke the author's spirit and seemed to have broken his heart. His wife's sister, Mary Hogarth, died suddenly. To Dickens his wife's family seems to have been like his own; his affections were heavily committed to the sisters, and of this one he was peculiarly fond. All his life, through much conceit and sometimes something bordering on selfishness, we can feel the redeeming note of an almost tragic tenderness; he was a man who could really have died of love or sorrow. He took up the work of "Oliver Twist" again later in the year, and finished it at the end of 1838. His work was incessant and almost bewildering. In 1838 he had already brought out the first number of

“Nicholas Nickleby.” But the great popularity went booming on; the whole world was roaring for books by Dickens, and more books by Dickens, and Dickens was labouring night and day like a factory. Among other things he edited the “Memoirs of Grimaldi,” The incident is only worth mentioning for the sake of one more example of the silly ease with which Dickens was drawn by criticism and the clever ease with which he managed, in these small squabbles, to defend himself. Somebody mildly suggested that, after all, Dickens had never known Grimaldi. Dickens was down on him like a thunderbolt, sardonically asking how close an intimacy Lord Braybrooke had with Mr. Samuel Pepys.

“Nicholas Nickleby” is the most typical perhaps of the tone of his earlier works. It is in form a very rambling, old-fashioned romance, the kind of romance in which the hero is only a convenience for the frustration of the villain. Nicholas is what is called in theatricals a stick. But any stick is good enough to beat a Squeers with. That strong thwack, that simplified energy is the whole object of such a story; and the whole of this tale is full of a kind of highly picturesque platitude. The wicked aristocrats, Sir Mulberry Hawk, Lord Verisopht and the rest are inadequate versions of the fashionable profligate. But this is not (as some suppose) because Dickens in his vulgarity could not comprehend the refinement of patrician vice. There is no idea more vulgar or more ignorant than the notion that a gentleman is generally what is called refined. The error of the Hawk conception is that, if anything, he is too refined. Real aristocratic blackguards do not swagger and rant so well. A real fast baronet would not have defied Nicholas in the tavern with so much oratorical dignity. A real fast baronet would probably have been choked with apoplectic embarrassment and said nothing at all. But Dickens read into this aristocracy a grandiloquence and a natural poetry which, like all melodrama, is really the precious jewel of the poor.

But the book contains something which is much more Dickensian. It is exquisitely characteristic of Dickens that the truly great achievement of the story is the person who delays the story. Mrs. Nickleby, with her beautiful mazes of memory, does her best to prevent the story of Nicholas Nickleby from being told. And she does well. There is no particular necessity that we should know what happens to Madeline Bray. There is a desperate and crying necessity that we should know Mrs. Nickleby once had a foot-boy who had a wart on his nose and a driver who had a green shade over his left eye. If Mrs. Nickleby is a fool, she is one of those fools who are wiser than the world. She stands for a great truth which we must not forget; the truth that experience is not in real life a saddening thing at all. The people who have had misfortunes are generally the people who love to talk about them. Experience is really one of the gaieties of old age, one of its dissipations. Mere memory becomes a kind of debauch. Experience may be disheartening to those who are foolish enough to try to co-ordinate it and to draw deductions from it. But to those happy souls, like Mrs. Nickleby, to whom relevancy is nothing, the whole of their past life is like an inexhaustible fairyland. Just as we take a rambling walk because we know that a whole district is beautiful, so they indulge a rambling mind because they know that a whole existence is interesting. A boy does not plunge into his future more romantically and at random, than they plunge into their past.

Another gleam in the book is Mr. Mantalini. Of him, as of all the really great comic characters of Dickens, it is impossible to speak with any critical adequacy. Perfect absurdity is a direct thing, like physical pain, or a strong smell. A joke is a fact. However indefensible it is it cannot be attacked. However defensible it is it cannot be defended. That Mr. Mantalini should say in praising the “outline” of his wife, “The two Countesses had no outlines, and the Dowager’s was a demd outline,” — this can only be called an unanswerable absurdity. You may try to analyze it, as Charles Lamb did the indefensible joke about the hare; you may dwell for a moment on the dark distinctions between the negative disqualification of the Countess and the positive disqualification of the Dowager, but you will not capture the violent beauty of it in any way. “She will be a lovely widow. I shall be a body. Some handsome women will cry; she will laugh demnebly.” This vision of demoniac heartlessness has the same defiant finality. I mention the matter here, but it has to be remembered in connection with all the comic masterpieces of Dickens. Dickens has greatly suffered with the critics precisely through this stunning simplicity in his best work. The critic is called upon to describe his sensations while enjoying Mantalini and Micawber, and he can no more describe them than he can describe a blow in the face, Thus Dickens, in this self-conscious, analytical and descriptive age, loses both ways. He is doubly unfitted for the best modern criticism, His bad work is below that criticism. His good work is above it.

But gigantic as were Dickens’s labours, gigantic as were the exactions from him, his own plans were more gigantic still. He had the type of mind that wishes to do every kind of work at once; to do everybody’s work as well as its own. There floated before him a vision of a monstrous magazine, entirely written by himself. It is true that when this scheme came to be discussed, ho suggested that other pens might be occasionally employed; but, reading between the lines, it is sufficiently evident that he thought of the thing as a kind of vast multiplication of himself, with Dickens as editor opening letters, Dickens as leader-writer writing leaders, Dickens as reporter reporting meetings, Dickens as reviewer reviewing books, Dickens, for all I know, as office-boy opening and shutting doors. This serial, of which he spoke to Messrs. Chapman & Hall, began and broke off and remains as a colossal fragment bound together under the title of “Master Humphrey’s Clock.” One characteristic thing he wished to have in the periodical. He suggested an Arabian Nights of London, in which Gog and Magog, the giants of the city, should give forth chronicles as enormous as themselves. He had a taste for these schemes or frameworks for many tales. He made and abandoned many; many he half-fulfilled. I strongly suspect that he meant Major Jackman, in “Mrs. Lirriper’s Lodgings” and “Mrs. Lirriper’s Legacy,” to start a series of studies of that lady’s lodgers, a kind of history of No. 81, Norfolk Street, Strand. “The Seven Poor Travellers” was planned for seven stories; we will not say seven poor stories. Dickens had meant, probably, to write a tale for each article of “Somebody’s Luggage”: he only got as far as the hat and the boots. This gigantesque scale of literary architecture, huge and yet curiously cosy, is characteristic of his spirit, fond of size and yet fond of comfort. He liked to have story within story, like room within room of some labyrinthine but comfortable castle. In this spirit he wished “Master Humphrey’s Clock” to begin, and to be a big frame or bookcase for numberless novels. The clock started; but the clock stopped.

In the prologue by Master Humphrey reappear Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller, and of that resurrection many things have been said, chiefly expressions of a reasonable regret. Doubtless they do not add much to their author’s reputation, but they add a great deal to their author’s pleasure. It was ingrained in him to wish to meet old friends. All his characters are, so to speak, designed to be old friends; in a sense every Dickens character is an old friend, even when he first appears. He comes to us mellow out of many implied interviews, and carries the firelight on his face. Dickens was simply pleased to meet Pickwick again, and being pleased, he made the old man too comfortable to be amusing.

But “Master Humphrey’s Clock” is now scarcely known except as the shell of one of the well-known novels. “The Old Curiosity Shop” was published in accordance with the original “Clock” scheme. Perhaps the most typical thing about it is the title. There seems no reason in particular, at the first and most literal glance, why the story should be called after the Old Curiosity Shop. Only two of the characters have anything to do with such a shop, and they leave it for ever in the first few pages. It is as if Thackeray had called the whole novel of “Vanity Fair” “Miss Pinkerton’s Academy.” It is as if Scott had given the whole story of “The Antiquary” the title of “The Hawes Inn.” But when we feel the situation with more fidelity we realise that this title is something in the nature of a key to the whole Dickens romance. His tales always started from some splendid hint in the streets. And shops, perhaps the most poetical of all things, often set off his fancy galloping. Every shop, in fact, was to him the door of romance. Among all the huge serial schemes of which we have spoken, it is a matter of wonder that he never started an endless periodical called “The Street,” and divided it into shops. He could have written an exquisite romance called “The Baker’s Shop”; another called “The Chemist’s Shop”; another called “The Oil Shop,” to keep company with “The Old Curiosity Shop.” Some incomparable baker he invented and forgot. Some gorgeous chemist might have been. Some more than mortal oil-man is lost to us for ever. This Old Curiosity Shop he did happen to linger by: its tale he did happen to tell.

Around “Little Nell,” of course, a controversy raged and rages; some implored Dickens not to kill her at the end of the story: some regret that he did not kill her at the beginning. To me the chief interest in this young person lies in the fact that she is an example, and the most celebrated example of what must have been, I think, a personal peculiarity, perhaps, a personal experience of Dickens. There is, of course, no paradox at all in saying that if we find in a good book a wildly impossible character it is very probable indeed that it was copied from a real person. This is one of the commonplaces of good art criticism. For although people talk of the restraints of fact and the freedom of fiction, the case for most artistic purposes is quite the other way. Nature is as free as air: art is forced to look probable. There may be a million things that do happen, and yet only one thing that convinces us is likely to happen. Out of a million possible things there may be only one appropriate thing. I fancy, therefore, that many stiff, unconvincing characters are copied from the wild freak-show of real life. And in many parts of Dickens's work there is evidence of some peculiar affection on his part for a strange sort of little girl; a little girl with a premature sense of responsibility and duty; a sort of saintly precocity. Did he know some little girl of this kind? Did she die, perhaps, and remain in his memory in colours too ethereal and pale? In any case there are a great number of them in his works. Little Dorrit was one of them, and Florence Dombey with her brother, and even Agnes in infancy; and, of course, Little Nell. And, in any case, one thing is evident; whatever charm these children may have they have not the charm of childhood. They are not little children: they are "little mothers." The beauty and divinity in a child lie in his not being worried, not being conscientious, not being like Little Nell. Little Nell has never any of the sacred bewilderment of a baby. She never wears that face, beautiful but almost half-witted, with which a real child half understands that there is evil in the universe.

As usual, however, little as the story has to do with the title, the splendid and satisfying pages have even less to do with the story. Dick Swiveller is perhaps the noblest of all the noble creations of Dickens. He has all the overwhelming absurdity of Mantalini, with the addition of being human and credible, for he knows he is absurd. His high-falutin is not done because he seriously thinks it right and proper, like that of Mr. Snodgrass, nor is it done because he thinks it will serve his turn, like that of Mr. Pecksniff, for both these beliefs are improbable; it is done because he really loves high-falutin, because he has a lonely literary pleasure in exaggerative language. Great draughts of words are to him like great draughts of wine — pungent and yet refreshing, light and yet leaving him in a glow. In unerring instinct for the perfect folly of a phrase he has no equal, even among the giants of Dickens. "I am sure," says Miss Wackles, when she had been flirting with Cheggs, the market-gardener, and reduced Mr. Swiveller to Byronic renunciation, "I am sure I'm very sorry if — —" "Sorry," said Mr. Swiveller, "sorry in the possession of a Cheggs!" The abyss of bitterness is unfathomable. Scarcely less precious is the poise of Mr. Swiveller when he imitates the stage brigand. After crying, "Some wine here! Ho!" he hands the flagon to himself with profound humility, and receives it haughtily. Perhaps the very best scene in the book is that between Mr. Swiveller and the single gentleman with whom he endeavours to remonstrate for having remained in bed all day: "We cannot have single gentlemen coming into the place and sleeping like double gentlemen without paying extra. . . . An equal amount of slumber was never got out of one bed, and if you want to sleep like that you must pay for a double-bedded room.” His relations with the Marchioness are at once purely romantic and purely genuine; there is nothing even of Dickens’s legitimate exaggerations about them. A shabby, larky, good-natured clerk would, as a matter of fact, spend hours in the society of a little servant girl if he found her about the house. It would arise partly from a dim kindliness, and partly from that mysterious instinct which is sometimes called, mistakenly, a love of low company — that mysterious instinct which makes so many men of pleasure find something soothing in the society of uneducated people, particularly uneducated women. It is the instinct which accounts for the otherwise unaccountable popularity of barmaids.

And still the pot of that huge popularity boiled. In 1841 another novel was demanded, and “Barnaby Rudge” supplied. It is chiefly of interest as an embodiment of that other element in Dickens, the picturesque or even the pictorial. Barnaby Rudge, the idiot with his rags and his feathers and his raven, the bestial hangman, the blind mob — all make a picture, though they hardly make a novel. One touch there is in it of the richer and more humorous Dickens, the boy-conspirator, Mr. Sim Tappertit. But he might have been treated with more sympathy — with as much sympathy, for instance, as Mr. Dick Swiveller; for he is only the romantic guttersnipe, the bright boy at the particular age when it is most fascinating to found a secret society and most difficult to keep a secret. And if ever there was a romantic guttersnipe on earth it was Charles Dickens. “Barnaby Rudge” is no more an historical novel than Sim’s secret league was a political movement; but they are both beautiful creations. When all is said, however, the main reason for mentioning the work here is that it is the next bubble in the pot, the next thing that burst out of that whirling, seething head. The tide of it rose and smoked and sang till it boiled over the pot of Britain and poured over all America. In the January of 1842 he set out for the United States.

CHAPTER VI

DICKENS AND AMERICA

The essential of Dickens's character was the conjunction of common sense with uncommon sensibility. The two things are not, indeed, in such an antithesis as is commonly imagined. Great English literary authorities, such as Jane Austen and Mr. Chamberlain, have put the word "sense" and the word "sensibility" in a kind of opposition to each other. But not only are they not opposite words: they are actually the same word. They both mean receptiveness or approachability by the facts outside us. To have a sense of colour is the same as to have a sensibility to colour. A person who realises that beef-steaks are appetising shows his sensibility. A person who realises that moonrise is romantic shows his sense. But it is not difficult to see the meaning and need of the popular distinction between sensibility and sense, particularly in the form called common sense. Common sense is a sensibility duly distributed in all normal directions; sensibility has come to mean a specialised sensibility in one. This is unfortunate, for it is not the sensibility that is bad, but the specialising; that is, the lack of sensibility to everything else. A young lady who stays out all night to look at the stars should not be blamed for her sensibility to starlight, but for her insensibility to other people. A poet who recites his own verses from ten to five with the tears rolling down his face should decidedly be rebuked for his lack of, sensibility — his lack of sensibility to those grand rhythms of the social harmony, crudely called manners. For all politeness is a long poem, since it is full of recurrences. This balance of all the sensibilities we call sense; and it is in this capacity that it becomes of great importance as an attribute of the character of Dickens.

Dickens, I repeat, had common sense and uncommon sensibility. That is to say, the proportion of interests in him was about the same as that of an ordinary man, but he felt all of them more excitedly. This is a distinction not easy for us to keep in mind, because we hear to-day chiefly of two types, the dull man who likes ordinary things mildly, and the extraordinary man who likes extraordinary things wildly. But Dickens liked quiet ordinary things; he merely made an extraordinary fuss about them. His excitement was sometimes like an epileptic fit; but it must not be confused with the fury of the man of one idea or one line of ideas. He had the excess of the eccentric, but not the defects, the narrowness. Even when he raved like a maniac he did not rave like a monomaniac. He had no particular spot of sensibility or spot of insensibility: he was merely a normal man minus a normal self-command. He had no special point of mental pain or repugnance, like Ruskin's horror of steam and iron, or Mr. Bernard Shaw's permanent irritation against romantic love. He was annoyed at the ordinary annoyances: only he was more annoyed than was necessary. He did not desire strange delights, blue wine or black women with Baudelaire, or cruel sights east of Suez with Mr. Kipling. He wanted what a healthy man wants, only he was ill with wanting it. To understand him, in a word, we must keep well in mind the medical distinction between delicacy and disease. Perhaps we shall comprehend it and him more clearly if we think of a woman rather than a man. There was much that was feminine about Dickens, and nothing more so than this abnormal normality. A woman is often, in comparison with a man, at once more sensitive and more sane.

This distinction must be especially remembered in all his quarrels. And it must be most especially remembered in what may be called his great quarrel with America, which we have now to approach. The whole incident is so typical of Dickens's attitude to everything and anything, and especially of Dickens's attitude to anything political, that I may ask permission to approach the matter by another, a somewhat long and curving avenue.

Common sense is a fairy thread, thin and faint, and as easily lost as gossamer. Dickens (in large matters) never lost it. Take, as an example, his political tone, or drift throughout his life. His views, of course, may have been right or wrong; the reforms he supported may have been successful or otherwise: that is not a matter for this book. But if we compare him with the other men that wanted the same things (or the other men that wanted the other things) we feel a startling absence of cant, a startling sense of humanity as it is and of the eternal weakness. He was a fierce democrat, but in his best vein he laughed at the cocksure Radical of common life, the red-faced man who said, "Prove it!" when anybody said anything. He fought for the right to elect: but he would not whitewash elections. He believed in Parliamentary government; but he did not, like our contemporary newspapers, pretend that Parliament is something much more heroic and imposing than it is. He fought for the rights of the grossly oppressed Nonconformists, but he spat out of his mouth the unction of that too easy seriousness with which they oiled everything, and held up to them like a horrible mirror the foul fat face of Chadband. He saw that Mr. Podsnap thought too little of places outside England. But he saw that Mrs. Jellaby thought too much of them. In the last book he wrote he gives us, in Mr. Honeythunder, a hateful and wholesome picture of all the Liberal catchwords pouring out of one illiberal man. But perhaps the best evidence of this steadiness and sanity is the fact that, dogmatic as he was, he never tied himself to any passing dogma: he never got into any *cul de sac* or civic or economic fanaticism: he went down the broad road of the Revolution. He never admitted that economically, we must make hells of workhouses, any more than Rousseau would have admitted it. He never said the State had no right to teach children or save their bones, any more than Danton would have said it. He was a fierce Radical; but he was never a Manchester Radical. He used the test of Utility, but he was never a Utilitarian. While economists were writing soft words he wrote "Hard Times," which Macaulay called "sullen Socialism," because it was not complacent Whiggism. But Dickens was never a Socialist any more than he was an Individualist; and, whatever else he was, he certainly was not sullen. He was not even a politician of any kind. He was simply a man of very clear, airy judgment on things that did not inflame his private temper, and he perceived that any theory that tried to run the living State entirely on one force and motive was probably nonsense. Whenever the Liberal philosophy had embedded in it something hard and heavy and lifeless, by an instinct he dropped it out. He was too romantic, perhaps, but he would have to do only with real things. He may have cared too much about Liberty. But he cared nothing about "*Laissez Faire*."

Now, among many interests of his contact with America this interest emerges as infinitely the largest and most striking, that it gave a final example of this queer, unexpected coolness and candour of his, this abrupt and sensational rationality. Apart altogether from any question of the accuracy of his picture of America, the American indignation was particularly natural and inevitable. For the large circumstances of the age must be taken into account. At the end of the previous epoch the whole of our Christian civilisation had been startled from its sleep by trumpets to take sides in a bewildering Armageddon, often with eyes still misty. Germany and Austria found themselves on the side of the old order, France and America on the side of the new. England, as at the Reformation, took up eventually a dark middle position, maddeningly difficult to define. She created a democracy, but she kept an aristocracy: she reformed the House of Commons, but left the magistracy (as it is still) a mere league of gentlemen against the world. But underneath all this doubt and compromise there was in England a great and perhaps growing mass of dogmatic democracy; certainly thousands, probably millions expected a Republic in fifty years. And for these the first instinct was obvious. The first instinct was to look across the Atlantic to where lay a part of ourselves already Rebublican, the van of the advancing English on the road to liberty. Nearly all the great Liberals of the nineteenth century enormously idealised America. On the other hand, to the Americans, fresh from their first epic of arms, the defeated mother country, with its coronets and county magistrates, was only a broken feudal keep.

So much is self-evident. But nearly half-way through the nineteenth century there came out of England the voice of a violent satirist. In its political quality it seemed like the half-choked cry of the frustrated republic. It had no patience with the pretence that England was already free, that we had gained all that was valuable from the Revolution. It poured a cataract of contempt on the so-called working compromises of England, on the oligarchic cabinets, on the two artificial parties, on the government offices, on the J.P.’s, on the vestries, on the voluntary charities. This satirist was Dickens, and it must be remembered that he was not only fierce, but uproariously readable. He really damaged the things he struck at, a very rare thing. He stepped up to the grave official of the vestry, really trusted by the rulers, really feared like a god by the poor, and he tied round his neck a name that choked him; never again now can he be anything but Bumble. He confronted the fine old English gentleman who gives his patriotic services for nothing as a local magistrate, and he nailed him up as Nupkins, an owl in open day. For to this satire there is literally no answer; it cannot be denied that a man like Nupkins can be and is a magistrate, so long as we adopt the amazing method of letting the rich man of a district actually be the judge in it. We can only avoid the vision of the fact by shutting our eyes, and imagining the nicest rich man we can think of; and that, of course, is what we do. But Dickens, in this matter, was merely realistic; he merely asked us to look on Nupkins, on the wild, strange thing that we had made. Thus Dickens seemed to see England not at all as the country where freedom slowly broadened down from precedent to precedent, but as a rubbish heap of seventeenth-century bad habits abandoned by everybody else. That is, he looked at England almost with the eyes of an American democrat.

And so, when the voice, swelling in volume, reached America and the Americans, the Americans said, “Here is a man who will hurry the old country along, and tip her kings and beadles into the sea. Let him come here, and we will show him a race of free men such as he dreams of, alive upon the ancient earth. Let him come here and tell the English of the divine democracy towards which he drives them. There he has a monarchy and an oligarchy to make game of. Here is a republic for him to praise.” It seemed, indeed, a very natural sequel, that having denounced undemocratic England as the wilderness, he should announce democratic America as the promised land. Any ordinary person would have prophesied that as he had pushed his rage at the old order almost to the edge of rant, he would push his encomium of the new order almost to the edge of cant. Amid a roar of republican idealism, compliments, hope, and anticipatory gratitude, the great democrat entered the great democracy. He looked about him; he saw a complete America, unquestionably progressive, unquestionably self-governing. Then, with a more than American coolness, and a more than American impudence, he sat down and wrote “Martin Chuzzlewit.” That tricky and perverse sanity of his had mutinied again. Common sense is a wild thing, savage, and beyond rules; and it had turned on them and rent them.

The main course of action was as follows; and it is right to record it before we speak of the justice of it. When I speak of his sitting down and writing “Martin Chuzzlewit,” I use, of course, an elliptical expression. He wrote the notes of the American part of “Martin Chuzzlewit” while he was still in America; but it was a later decision presumably that such impressions should go into a book, and it was little better than an afterthought that they should go into “Martin Chuzzlewit.” Dickens had an uncommonly bad habit (artistically speaking) of altering a story in the middle as he did in the case of “Our Mutual Friend.” And it is on record that he only sent young Martin to America because he did not know what else to do with him, and because (to say truth) the sales were falling off. But the first action, which Americans regarded as an equally hostile one, was the publication of “American Notes,” the history of which should first be given. His notion of visiting America had come to him as a very vague notion, even before the appearance of “The Old Curiosity Shop.” But it had grown in him through the whole ensuing period in the plaguing and persistent way that ideas did grow in him and live with him. He contended against the idea in a certain manner. He had much to induce him to contend against it. Dickens was by this time not only a husband, but a father, the father of several children, and their existence made a difficulty in itself. His wife, he said, cried whenever the project was mentioned. But it was a point in him that he could never, with any satisfaction, part with a project. He had that restless optimism, that kind of nervous optimism, which would always tend to say “Yes;” which is stricken with an immortal repentance, if ever it says “No.” The idea of seeing America might be doubtful, but the idea of not seeing America was dreadful. “To miss this opportunity would be a sad thing,” he says. “. . . God willing, I think it *must* be managed somehow!” It was managed somehow. First of all he wanted to take his children as well as his wife. Final obstacles to this fell upon him, but they did not frustrate him. A serious illness fell on him; but that did not frustrate him. He sailed for America in 1842.

He landed in America, and he liked it. As John Forster very truly says, it is due to him, as well as to the great country that welcomed him, that his first good impression should be recorded, and that it should be “considered independently of any modification it afterwards underwent.” But the modification it afterwards underwent was, as I have said above, simply a sudden kicking against cant, that is, against repetition. He was quite ready to believe that all Americans were free men. He would have believed it if they had not all told him so. He was quite prepared to be pleased with America. He would have been pleased with it if it had not been so much pleased with itself. The “modification” his views underwent did not arise from any modification of America as he first saw it. His admiration did not change because America changed. It changed because America did not change. The Yankees enraged him at last, not by saying different things, but by saying the same things. They were a republic; they were a new and vigorous nation; it seemed natural that they should say so to a famous foreigner first stepping on to their shore. But it seemed maddening that they should say so to each other in every car and drinking saloon from morning till night. It was not that the Americans in any way ceased from praising him. It was rather that they went on praising him. It was not merely that their praises of him sounded beautiful when he first heard them. Their praises of themselves sounded beautiful when he first heard them. That democracy was grand, and that Charles Dickens was a remarkable person, were two truths that he certainly never doubted to his dying day. But, as I say, it was a soulless repetition that stung his sense of humour out of sleep; it woke like a wild beast for hunting, the lion of his laughter. He had heard the truth once too often. He had heard the truth for the nine hundred and ninety-ninth time, and he suddenly saw that it was falsehood.

It is true that a particular circumstance sharpened and defined his disappointment. He felt very hotly, as he felt everything, whether selfish or unselfish, the injustice of the American piracies of English literature, resulting from the American copyright laws. He did not go to America with any idea of discussing this; when, some time afterwards, somebody said that he did, he violently rejected the view as only describable "in one of the shortest words in the English language." But his entry into America was almost triumphal; the rostrum or pulpit was ready for him; he felt strong enough to say anything. He had been most warmly entertained by many American men of letters, especially by Washington Irving, and in his consequent glow of confidence he stepped up to the dangerous question of American copyright. He made many speeches attacking the American law and theory of the matter as unjust to English writers and to American readers. The effect appears to have astounded him. "I believe there is no country," he writes, "on the face of the earth where there is less freedom of opinion on any subject in reference to which there is a broad difference of opinion than in this. There! I write the words with reluctance, disappointment, and sorrow; but I believe it from the bottom of my soul. . . . The notion that I, a man alone by myself in America, should venture to suggest to the Americans that there was one point on which they were neither just to their own countrymen nor to us, actually struck the boldest dumb! Washington Irving, Prescott, Hoffman, Bryant, Halleck, Dana, Washington Allston — every man who writes in this country is devoted to the question, and not one of them *dares* to raise his voice and complain of the atrocious state of the law. . . . The wonder is that a breathing man can be found with temerity enough to suggest to the Americans the possibility of their having done wrong. I wish you could have seen the faces that I saw down both sides of the table at Hartford when I began to talk about Scott. I wish you could have heard how I gave it out. My blood so boiled when I thought of the monstrous injustice that I felt as if I were twelve feet high when I thrust it down their throats."

That is almost a portrait of Dickens. We can almost see the erect little figure, its face and hair like a flame.

For such reasons, among others, Dickens was angry with America. But if America was angry with Dickens, there were also reasons for it. I do not think that the rage against his copyright speeches was, as he supposed, merely national insolence and self-satisfaction. America is a mystery to any good Englishman; but I think Dickens managed somehow to touch it on a queer nerve. There is one thing, at any rate, that must strike all Englishmen who have the good fortune to have American friends; that is, that while there is no materialism so crude or so material as American materialism, there is also no idealism so crude or so ideal as American idealism. America will always affect an Englishman as being soft in the wrong place and hard in the wrong place; coarse exactly where all civilised men are delicate, delicate exactly where all grown-up men are coarse. Some beautiful ideal runs through this people, but it runs aslant. The only existing picture in which the thing I mean has been embodied is in Stevenson's "Wrecker," in the blundering delicacy of Jim Pinkerton. America has a new delicacy, a coarse, rank refinement. But there is another way of embodying the idea, and that is to say this — that nothing is more likely than that the Americans thought it very shocking in Dickens, the divine author, to talk about being done out of money. Nothing would be more American than to expect a genius to be too high-toned for trade. It is certain that they deplored his selfishness in the matter; it is probable that they deplored his indelicacy. A beautiful young dreamer, with flowing brown hair, ought not to be even conscious of his copyrights. For it is quite unjust to say that the Americans worship the dollar. They really do worship intellect — another of the passing superstitions of our time.

If America had then this Pinkertonian propriety, this new, raw sensibility, Dickens was the man to rasp it. He was its precise opposite in every way. The decencies he did respect were old-fashioned and fundamental. On top of these he had that lounging liberty and comfort which can only be had on the basis of very old conventions, like the carelessness of gentlemen and the deliberation of rustics. He had no fancy for being strung up to that taut and quivering ideality demanded by American patriots and public speakers. And there was something else also, connected especially with the question of copyright and his own pecuniary claims. Dickens was not in the least desirous of being thought too “high-souled” to want his wages, nor was he in the least ashamed of asking for them. Deep in him (whether the modern reader likes the quality or no) was a sense very strong in the old Radicals — very strong especially in the old English Radical — a sense of personal *rights*, one’s own rights included, as something not merely useful but sacred. He did not think a claim any less just and solemn because it happened to be selfish; he did not divide claims into selfish and unselfish, but into right and wrong. It is significant that when he asked for his money, he never asked for it with that shamefaced cynicism, that sort of embarrassed brutality, with which the modern man of the world mutters something about business being business or looking after number one. He asked for his money in a valiant and ringing voice, like a man asking for his honour. While his American critics were moaning and sneering at his interested motives as a disqualification, he brandished his interested motives like a banner. “It is nothing to them,” he cries in astonishment, “that, of all men living, I am the greatest loser by it” (the Copyright Law). “It is nothing that I have a claim to speak and be heard.” The thing they set up as a barrier he actually presents as a passport. They think that he, of all men, ought not to speak because he is interested. He thinks that he, of all men, ought to speak because he is wronged.

But this particular disappointment with America in the matter of the tyranny of its public opinion was not merely the expression of the fact that Dickens was a typical Englishman; that is a man with a very sharp insistence upon individual freedom. It also worked back ultimately to that larger and vaguer disgust of which I have spoken — the disgust at the perpetual posturing of the people before a mirror. The tyranny was irritating, not so much because of the suffering it inflicted on the minority, but because of the awful glimpses that it gave of the huge and imbecile happiness of the majority. The very vastness of the vain race enraged him, its immensity, its unity, its peace. He was annoyed more with its contentment than with any of its discontents. The thought of that unthinkable mass of millions, every one of them saying that Washington was the greatest man on earth, and that the Queen lived in the Tower of London, rode his riotous fancy like a nightmare. But to the end he retained the outlines of his original republican ideal and lamented over America not as being too Liberal, but as not being Liberal enough. Among others, he used these somewhat remarkable words: “I tremble for a Radical coming here, unless he is a Radical on principle, by reason and reflection, and from the sense of right. I fear that if he were anything else he would return home a Tory. . . . I say no more on that head for two months from this time, save that I do fear that the heaviest blow ever dealt at liberty will be dealt by this country, in the failure of its example on the earth.”

We are still waiting to see if that prediction has been fulfilled; but nobody can say that it has been falsified.

He went west on the great canals; he went south and touched the region of slavery; he saw America superficially indeed, but as a whole. And the great mass of his experience was certainly pleasant, though he vibrated with anticipatory passion against slave-holders, though he swore he would accept no public tribute in the slave country (a resolve which he broke under the pressure of the politeness of the South), yet his actual collisions with slavery and its upholders were few and brief. In these he bore himself with his accustomed vivacity and fire, but it would be a great mistake to convey the impression that his mental reaction against America was chiefly, or even largely, due to his horror at the negro problem. Over and above the cant of which we have spoken; the weary rush of words, the chief complaint he made was a complaint against bad manners; and on a large view his anti-Americanism would seem to be more founded on spitting than on slavery. When, however, it did happen that the primary morality of man-owning came up for discussion, Dickens displayed an honourable impatience. One man, full of anti-abolitionist ardour, button-holed him and bombarded him with the well-known argument in defence of slavery, that it was not to the financial interest of a slave-owner to damage or weaken his own slaves. Dickens, in telling the story of this interview, writes as follows: “I told him quietly that it was not a man’s interest to get drunk, or to steal, or to game, or to indulge in any other vice; but he *did* indulge in it for all that. That cruelty and the abuse of irresponsible power were two of the bad passions of human nature, with the gratification of which considerations of interest or of ruin had nothing whatever to do. . . .” It is hardly possible to doubt that Dickens, in telling the man this, told him something sane and logical and unanswerable. But it is perhaps permissible to doubt whether he told it to him quietly.

He returned home in the spring of 1842, and in the later part of the year his “American Notes” appeared, and the cry against him that had begun over copyright swelled into a roar in his rear. Yet when we read the “Notes” we can find little offence in them, and, to say truth, less interest than usual. They are no true picture of America, or even of his vision of America, and this for two reasons. First, that he deliberately excluded from them all mention of that copyright question which had really given him his glimpse of how tyrannical a democracy can be. Second, that here he chiefly criticises America for faults which are not, after all, especially American. For example, he is indignant with the inadequate character of the prisons, and compares them unfavourably with those in England, controlled by Lieutenant Tracey, and by Captain Chesterton at Coldbath Fields, two reformers of prison discipline for whom he had a high regard. But it was a mere accident that American gaols were inferior to English. There was and is nothing in the American spirit to prevent their effecting all the reforms of Tracey and Chesterton, nothing to prevent their doing anything that money and energy and organisation can do. America might have (for all I know, does have) a prison system cleaner and more humane and more efficient than any other in the world. And the evil genius of America might still remain — everything might remain that makes Pogram or Chollop irritating or absurd. And against the evil genius of America Dickens was now to strike a second and a very different blow.

In January, 1843, appeared the first number of the novel called “Martin Chuzzlewit.” The earlier part of the book and the end, which have no connection with America or the American problem, in any case require a passing word. But except for the two gigantic grotesques on each side of the gateway of the tale, Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp, “Martin Chuzzlewit” will be chiefly admired for its American excursion. It is a good satire embedded in an indifferent novel. Mrs. Gamp is, indeed, a sumptuous study, laid on in those rich, oily, almost greasy colours that go to make the English comic characters, that make the very diction of Falstaff fat, and quaking with jolly degradation. Pecksniff also is almost perfect, and much too good to be true. The only other thing to be noticed about him is that here, as almost everywhere else in the novels, the best figures are at their best when they have least to do. Dickens’s characters are perfect as long as he can keep them out of his stories. Bumble is divine until a dark and practical secret is entrusted to him — as if anybody but a lunatic would entrust a secret to Bumble. Micawber is noble when he is doing nothing; but he is quite unconvincing when he is spying on Uriah Heep, for obviously neither

Micawber nor anyone else would employ Micawber as a private detective. Similarly, while Pecksniff is the best thing in the story, the story is the worst thing in Pecksniff. His plot against old Martin can only be described by saying that it is as silly as old Martin's plot against him. His fall at the end is one of the rare falls of Dickens. Surely it was not necessary to take Pecksniff so seriously. Pecksniff is a merely laughable character; he is so laughable that he is lovable. Why take such trouble to unmask a man whose mask you have made transparent? Why collect all the characters to witness the exposure of a man in whom none of the characters believe? Why toil and triumph to have the laugh of a man who was only made to be laughed at?

But it is the American part of "Martin Chuzzlewit" which is our concern, and which is memorable. It has the air of a great satire; but if it is only a great slander it is still great. His serious book on America was merely a squib, perhaps a damp squib. In any case, we all know that America will survive such serious books. But his fantastic book may survive America. It may survive America as "The Knights" has survived Athens. "Martin Chuzzlewit" has this quality of great satire that the critic forgets to ask whether the portrait is true to the original, because the portrait is so much more important than the original. Who cares whether Aristophanes correctly described Kleon, who is dead, when he so perfectly describes the demagogue, who cannot die? Just as little, it may be, will some future age care whether the ancient civilisation of the west, the lost cities of New York and St. Louis, were fairly depicted in the colossal monument of Elijah Pogram. For there is much more in the American episodes than their intoxicating absurdity; there is more than humour in the young man who made the speech about the British Lion, and said, "I taunt that lion. Alone I dare him;" or in the other man who told Martin that when he said that Queen Victoria did not live in the Tower of London he "fell into an error not uncommon among his countrymen." He has his finger on the nerve of an evil which was not only in his enemies, but in himself. The great democrat has hold of one of the dangers of democracy. The great optimist confronts a horrible nightmare of optimism. Above all, the genuine Englishman attacks a sin that is not merely American, but English also. The eternal, complacent iteration of patriotic half-truths; the perpetual buttering of one's self all over with the same stale butter; above all, the big defiances of small enemies, or the very urgent challenges to very distant enemies; the cowardice so habitual and unconscious that it wears the plumes of courage — all this is an English temptation as well as an American one. “Martin Chuzzlewit” may be a caricature of America. America may be a caricature of England. But in the gravest college, in the quietest country house of England, there is the seed of the same essential madness that fills Dickens’s book, like an asylum, with brawling Chollops and raving Jefferson Bricks. That essential madness is the idea that the good patriot is the man who feels at ease about his country. This notion of patriotism was unknown in the little pagan republics where our European patriotism began. It was unknown in the Middle Ages. In the eighteenth century, in the making of modern politics, a “patriot” meant a discontented man. It was opposed to the word “courtier,” which meant an upholder of present conditions. In all other modern countries, especially in countries like France and Ireland, where real difficulties have been faced, the word “patriot” means something like a political pessimist. This view and these countries have exaggerations and dangers of their own; but the exaggeration and danger of England is the same as the exaggeration and danger of *The Watertoast Gazette*. The thing which is rather foolishly called the Anglo-Saxon civilisation is at present soaked through with a weak pride. It uses great masses of men not to procure discussion but to procure the pleasure of unanimity; it uses masses like bolsters. It uses its organs of public opinion not to warn the public, but to soothe it. It really succeeds not only in ignoring the rest of the world, but actually in forgetting it. And when a civilisation really forgets the rest of the world — lets it fall as something obviously dim and barbaric — then there is only one adjective for the ultimate fate of that civilisation, and that adjective is “Chinese.”

Martin Chuzzlewit’s America is a mad-house: but it is a mad-house we are all on the road to. For completeness and even comfort are almost the definitions of insanity. The lunatic is the man who lives in a small world but thinks it is a large one: he is the man who lives in a tenth of the truth, and thinks it is the whole. The madman cannot conceive any cosmos outside a certain tale or conspiracy or vision. Hence the more clearly we see the world divided into Saxons and non-Saxons, into our splendid selves and the rest, the more certain we may be that we are slowly and quietly going mad. The more plain and satisfying our state appears, the more we may know that we are living in an unreal world. For the real world is not satisfying. The more clear become the colours and facts of Anglo-Saxon superiority, the more surely we may know we are in a dream. For the real world is not clear or plain. The real world is full of bracing bewilderments and brutal surprises. Comfort is the blessing and the curse of the English, and of Americans of the Pogram type also. With them it is a loud comfort, a wild comfort, a screaming and capering comfort; but comfort at bottom still. For there is but an inch of difference between the cushioned chamber and the padded cell.

PART TWO

CHAPTER VII

DICKENS AND CHRISTMAS

In the July of 1844 Dickens went on an Italian tour, which he afterwards summarised in the book called “Pictures from Italy.” They are, of course, very vivacious, but there is no great need to insist on them considered as Italian sketches; there is no need whatever to worry about them as a phase of the mind of Dickens when he travelled out of England. He never travelled out of England. There is no trace in all these amusing pages that he really felt the great foreign things which lie in wait for us in the south of Europe, the Latin civilisation, the Catholic Church, the art of the centre, the endless end of Rome. His travels are not travels in Italy, but travels in Dickensland. He sees amusing things; he describes them amusingly. But he would have seen things just as good in a street in Pimlico, and described them just as well. Few things were racier, even in his raciest novel, than his description of the marionette play of the death of Napoleon. Nothing could be more perfect than the figure of the doctor, which had something wrong with its wires, and hence “hovered about the couch and delivered medical opinions in the air.” Nothing could be better as a catching of the spirit of all popular drama than the colossal depravity of the wooden image of “Sir Uudson Low.” But there is nothing Italian about it. Dickens would have made just as good fun, indeed just the same fun, of a Punch and Judy show performing in Long Acre or Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

Dickens uttered just and sincere satire on Plornish and Podsnap; but Dickens was as English as any Podsnap or any Plornish. He had a hearty humanitarianism, and a hearty sense of justice to all nations so far as he understood it. But that very kind of humanitarianism, that very kind of justice, were English. He was the Englishman of the type that made Free Trade, the most English of all things, since it was at once calculating and optimistic. He respected catacombs and gondolas, but that very respect was English. He wondered at brigands and volcanoes, but that very wonder was English. The very conception that Italy consists of these things was an English conception. The root things he never understood, the Roman legend, the ancient life of the Mediterranean, the world-old civilisation of the vine and olive, the mystery of the immutable Church. He never understood these things, and I am glad he never understood them: he could only have understood them by ceasing to be the inspired cockney that he was, the rousing English Radical of the great Radical age in England. That spirit of his was one of the things that we have had which were truly national. All other forces we have borrowed, especially those which flatter us most. Imperialism is foreign, socialism is foreign, militarism is foreign, education is foreign, strictly even Liberalism is foreign. But Radicalism was our own; as English as the hedgerows.

Dickens abroad, then, was for all serious purposes simply the Englishman abroad; the Englishman man abroad is for all serious purposes simply the Englishman at home. Of this generalisation one modification must be made. Dickens did feel a direct pleasure in the bright and busy exterior of the French life, the clean caps, the coloured uniforms, the skies like blue enamel, the little green trees, the little white houses, the scene picked out in primary colours, like a child's picture — book. This he felt, and this he put (by a stroke of genius) into the mouth of Mrs. Lirriper, a London landlady on a holiday: for Dickens always knew that it is the simple and not the subtle who feel differences; and he saw all his colours through the clear eyes of the poor. And in thus taking to his heart the streets, as it were, rather than the spires of the Continent, he showed beyond question that combination of which we have spoken — of common sense with common sensibility. For it is for the sake of the streets and shops and the coats and hats, that we should go abroad; they are far better worth going to see than the castles and cathedrals and Roman camps. For the wonders of the world are the same all over the world, at least all over the European world. Castles that throw valleys in shadow, minsters that strike the sky, roads so old that they seem to have been made by the gods, these are in all Christian countries. The marvels of man are at all our doors. A labourer hoeing turnips in Sussex has no need to be ignorant that the bones of Europe are the Roman roads. A clerk living in Lambeth has no need not to know that there was a Christian art exuberant in the thirteenth century; for only across the river he can see the live stones of the Middle Ages surging together towards the stars. But exactly the things that do strike the traveller as extraordinary are the ordinary things, the food, the clothes, the vehicles; the strange things are cosmopolitan, the common things are national and peculiar. Cologne spire is lifted on the same arches as Canterbury; but the thing you cannot see out of Germany is a German beer-garden. There is no need for a Frenchman to go to look at Westminster Abbey as a piece of English architecture; it is not in the special sense a piece of English architecture. But a hansom cab is a piece of English architecture; a thing produced by the peculiar poetry of our cities, a symbol of a certain reckless comfort which is really English; a thing to draw a pilgrimage of the nations. The imaginative Englishman will be found all day in a *café*; the imaginative Frenchman in a hansom cab.

This sort of pleasure Dickens took in the Latin life; but no deeper kind. And the strongest of all possible indications of his fundamental detachment from it can be found in one fact. A great part of the time that he was in Italy he was engaged in writing “The Chimes,” and such Christmas tales, tales of Christmas in the English towns, tales full of fog and snow and hail and happiness.

Dickens could find in any street divergences between man and man deeper than the divisions of nations. His fault was to exaggerate differences. He could find types almost as distinct as separate tribes of animals in his own brain and his own city, those two homes of a magnificent chaos. The only two southerners introduced prominently into his novels, the two in “Little Dorrit,” are popular English foreigners, I had almost said stage foreigners. Villainy is, in English eyes, a southern trait, therefore one of the foreigners is villainous. Vivacity is, in English eyes, another southern trait, therefore the other foreigner is vivacious. But we can see from the outlines of both that Dickens did not have to go to Italy to get them. While poor panting millionaires, poor tired earls and poor God-forsaken American men of culture are plodding about Italy for literary inspiration, Charles Dickens made up the whole of that Italian romance (as I strongly suspect) from the faces of two London organ-grinders.

In the sunlight of the southern world, he was still dreaming of the firelight of the north. Among the palaces and the white campanili, he shut his eyes to see Marylebone and dreamed a lovely dream of chimney-pots. He was not happy, he said, without streets. The very foulness and smoke of London were lovable in his eyes and fill his Christmas tales with a vivid vapour. In the clear skies of the south he saw afar off the fog of London like a sunset cloud and longed to be in the core of it.

This Christmas tone of Dickens, in connection with his travels, is a matter that can only be expressed by a parallel with one of his other works. Much the same that has here been said of his “Pictures from Italy,” may be said about his “Child’s History of England;” with the difference that while the “Pictures from Italy” do in a sense add to his fame, the “History of England” in almost every sense detracts from it. But the nature of the limitation is the same. What Dickens was travelling in distant lands, that he was travelling in distant ages; a sturdy, sentimental English Radical with a large heart and a narrow mind. He could not help falling into that besetting sin or weakness of the modern progressive, the habit of regarding the contemporary questions as the eternal questions and the latest word as the last. He could not get out of his head the instinctive conception that the real problem before St. Dunstan was whether he should support Lord John Russell or Sir Robert Peel. He could not help seeing the remotest peaks lit up by the raging bonfire of his own passionate political crisis. He lived for the instant and its urgency; that is, he did what St. Dunstan did. He lived in an eternal present like all simple men. It is indeed “A Child’s History of England;” but the child is the writer and not the reader.

But Dickens in his cheapest cockney utilitarianism was not only English, but unconsciously historic. Upon him descended the real tradition of “Merry England,” and not upon the pallid mediævalists who thought they were reviving it. The Pre-Raphaelites, the Gothicists, the admirers of the Middle Ages, had in their subtlety and sadness the spirit of the present day. Dickens had in his buffoonery and bravery the spirit of the Middle Ages. He was much more mediæval in his attacks on mediævalism than they were in their defences of it. It was he who had the things of Chaucer, the love of large jokes and long stories and brown ale and all the white roads of England. Like Chaucer he loved story within story, every man telling a tale. Like Chaucer he saw something openly comic in men’s motley trades. Sam Weller would have been a great gain to the Canterbury Pilgrimage and told an admirable story. Rosetti’s Damozel would have been a great bore, regarded as too fast by the Prioress and too priggish by the Wife of Bath. It is said that in the somewhat sickly Victorian revival of feudalism which was called “Young England,” a nobleman hired a hermit to live in his grounds. It is also said that the hermit struck for more beer. Whether this anecdote be true or not, it is always told as showing a collapse from the ideal of the Middle Ages to the level of the present day. But in the mere act of striking for beer the holy man was very much more “medieval” than the fool who employed him.

It would be hard to find a better example of this than Dickens’s great defence of Christmas. In fighting for Christmas he was fighting for the old European festival. Pagan and Christian, for that trinity of eating, drinking and praying which to moderns appears irreverent, for the holy day which is really a holiday. He had himself the most babyish ideas about the past. He supposed the Middle Ages to have consisted of tournaments and torture-chambers, he supposed himself to be a brisk man of the manufacturing age, almost a Utilitarian. But for all that he defended the mediæval feast which was going out against the Utilitarianism which was coming in. He could only see all that was bad in mediævalism. But he fought for all that was good in it. And he was all the more really in sympathy with the old strength and simplicity because he only knew that it was good and did not know that it was old. He cared as little for mediævalism as the mediævals did. He cared as much as they did for lustiness and virile laughter and sad tales of good lovers and pleasant tales of good livers. He would have been very much bored by Ruskin and Walter Pater if they had explained to him the strange sunset tints of Lippi and Botticelli. He had no pleasure in looking on the dying Middle Ages. But he looked on the living Middle Ages, on a piece of the old uproarious superstition still unbroken; and he hailed it like a new religion. The Dickens character ate pudding to an extent at which the modern mediævalists turned pale. They would do every kind of honour to an old observance, except observing it. They would pay to a Church feast every sort of compliment except feasting.

And (as I have said) as were his unconscious relations to our European past, so were his unconscious relations to England. He imagined himself to be, if anything, a sort of cosmopolitan; at any rate to be a champion of the charms and merits of continental lands against the arrogance of our island. But he was in truth very much more a champion of the old and genuine England against that comparatively cosmopolitan England which we have all lived to see. And here again the supreme example is Christmas. Christmas is, as I have said, one of numberless old European feasts of which the essence is the combination of religion with merry-making. But among those feasts it is also especially and distinctively English in the style of its merry-making and even in the style of its religion. For the character of Christmas (as distinct, for instance, from the continental Easter) lies chiefly in two things; first on the terrestrial side the note of comfort rather than the note of brightness; and on the spiritual side, Christian charity rather than

Christian ecstasy. And comfort is, like charity, a very English instinct. Nay, comfort is, like charity, an English merit; though our comfort may and does degenerate into materialism, just as our charity may and does degenerate into laxity and make-believe.

This ideal of comfort belongs peculiarly to England; it belongs peculiarly to Christmas; above all, it belongs pre-eminently to Dickens. And it is astonishingly misunderstood. It is misunderstood by the continent of Europe; it is, if possible, still more misunderstood by the English of to-day. On the Continent the restaurateurs provide us with raw beef, as if we were savages; yet old English cooking takes as much care as French. And in England has arisen a parvenu patriotism which represents the English as everything but English; as a blend of Chinese stoicism, Latin militarism, Prussian rigidity, and American bad taste. And so England, whose fault is gentility and whose virtue is geniality, England with her tradition of the great gay gentlemen of Elizabeth, is represented to the four quarters of the world (as in Mr. Kipling’s religious poems) in the enormous image of a solemn cad. And because it is very difficult to be comfortable in the suburbs, the suburbs have voted that comfort is a gross and material thing. Comfort, especially this vision of Christmas comfort, is the reverse of a gross or material thing. It is far more poetical, properly speaking, than the Garden of Epicurus. It is far more artistic than the Palace of Art. It is more artistic because it is based upon a contrast, a contrast between the fire and wine within the house and the winter and the roaring rains without. It is far more poetical, because there is in it a note of defence, almost of war; a note of being besieged by the snow and hail; of making merry in the belly of a fort. The man who said that an Englishman’s house is his castle said much more than he meant. The Englishman thinks of his house as something fortified and provisioned, and his very surliness is at root romantic. And this sense would naturally be strongest in wild winter nights, when the lowered portcullis and the lifted drawbridge do not merely bar people out, but bar people in. The Englishman’s house is most sacred, not merely when the King cannot enter it, but when the Englishman cannot get out of it.

This comfort, then, is an abstract thing, a principle. The English poor shut all their doors and windows till their rooms reek like the Black Hole. They are suffering for an idea. Mere animal hedonism would not dream, as we English do, of winter feasts and little rooms, but of eating fruit in large and idle gardens. Mere sensuality would desire to please all its senses. But to our good dreams this dark and dangerous background is essential; the highest pleasure we can imagine is a defiant pleasure, a happiness that stands at bay. The word “comfort” is not indeed the right word, it conveys too much of the slander of mere sense; the true word is “cosiness,” a word not translatable. One, at least, of the essentials of it is smallness, smallness in preference to largeness, smallness for smallness’ sake. The merry-maker wants a pleasant parlour, he would not give twopence for a pleasant continent. In our difficult time, of course, a fight for mere space has become necessary. Instead of being greedy for ale and Christmas pudding we are greedy for mere air, an equally sensual appetite. In abnormal conditions this is wise; and the illimitable veldt is an excellent thing for nervous people. But our fathers were large and healthy enough to make a thing humane, and not worry about whether it was hygienic. They were big enough to get into small rooms.

Of this quite deliberate and artistic quality in the close Christmas chamber, the standing evidence is Dickens in Italy. He created these dim firelit tales like little dim red jewels, as an artistic necessity, in the centre of an endless summer. Amid the white cities of Tuscany he hungered for something romantic, and wrote about a rainy Christmas. Amid the pictures of the Uffizi he starved for something beautiful, and fed his memory on London fog. His feeling for the fog was especially poignant and typical. In the first of his Christmas tales, the popular “Christmas Carol,” he suggested the very soul of it in one simile, when he spoke of the dense air, suggesting that “Nature was brewing on a large scale.” This sense of the thick atmosphere as something to eat or drink, something not only solid but satisfactory, may seem almost insane, but it is no exaggeration of Dickens’s emotion. We speak of a fog “that you could cut with a knife.” Dickens would have liked the phrase as suggesting that the fog was a colossal cake. He liked even more his own phrase of the Titanic brewery, and no dream would have given him a wilder pleasure than to grope his way to some such tremendous vats and drink the ale of the giants.

There is a current prejudice against fogs, and Dickens, perhaps, is their only poet. Considered hygienically, no doubt this may be more or less excusable. But, considered poetically, fog is not undeserving, it has a real significance. We have in our great cities abolished the clean and sane darkness of the country. We have outlawed night and sent her wandering in wild meadows; we have lit eternal watch-fires against her return. We have made a new cosmos, and as a consequence our own sun and stars. And as a consequence also, and most justly, we have made our own darkness. Just as every lamp is a warm human moon, so every fog is a rich human nightfall. If it were not for this mystic accident we should never see darkness, and he who has never seen darkness has never seen the sun. Fog for us is the chief form of that outward pressure which compresses mere luxury into real comfort. It makes the world small, in the same spirit as in that common and happy cry that the world is small, meaning that it is full of friends. The first man that emerges out of the mist with a light, is for us Prometheus, a saviour bringing fire to men. He is that greatest and best of all men, greater than the heroes, better than the saints, Man Friday. Every rumble of a cart, every cry in the distance, marks the heart of humanity beating undaunted in the darkness. It is wholly human; man toiling in his own cloud. If real darkness is like the embrace of God, this is the dark embrace of man.

In such a sacred cloud the tale called “The Christmas Carol” begins, the first and most typical of all his Christmas tales. It is not irrelevant to dilate upon the geniality of this darkness, because it is characteristic of Dickens that his atmospheres are more important than his stories. The Christmas atmosphere is more important than Scrooge, or the ghosts either; in a sense, the background is more important than the figures. The same thing may be noticed in his dealings with that other atmosphere (besides that of good humour) which he excelled in creating, an atmosphere of mystery and wrong, such as that which gathers round Mrs. Clennam, rigid in her chair, or old Miss Havisham, ironically robed as a bride. Here again the atmosphere altogether eclipses the story, which often seems disappointing in comparison. The secrecy is sensational; the secret is tame. The surface of the thing seems more awful than the core of it. It seems almost as if these grisly figures, Mrs. Chadband and Mrs. Clennam, Miss Havisham, and Miss Flite, Nemo and Sally Brass, were keeping something back from the author as well as from the reader. When the book closes we do not know their real secret. They soothed the optimistic Dickens with something less terrible than the truth. The dark house of Arthur Clennam’s childhood really depresses us; it is a true glimpse into that quiet street in hell, where live the children of that unique dispensation which theologians call Calvinism and Christians devil-worship. But some stranger crime had really been done there, some more monstrous blasphemy or human sacrifice than the suppression of some silly document advantageous to the silly Dorrits.

Something worse than a common tale of jilting lay behind the masquerade and madness of the awful Miss Havisham. Something worse was whispered by the misshapen Quilp to the sinister Sally in that wild, wet summer-house by the river, something worse than the clumsy plot against the clumsy Kit. These dark pictures seem almost as if they were literally visions; things, that is, that Dickens saw but did not understand.

And as with his backgrounds of gloom, so with his backgrounds of good-will, in such tales as “The Christmas Carol.” The tone of the tale is kept throughout in a happy monotony, though the tale is everywhere irregular and in some places weak. It has the same kind of artistic unity that belongs to a dream. A dream may begin with the end of the world and end with a tea-party; but either the end of the world will em as trivial as a tea-party or that tea-party will be as terrible as the day of doom. The incidents change wildly; the story scarcely changes at all. “The Christmas Carol” is a kind of philanthropic dream, an enjoyable nightmare, in which the scenes shift bewilderingly and seem as miscellaneous as the pictures in a scrap-book, but in which there is one constant state of the soul, a state of rowdy benediction and a hunger for human faces. The beginning is bout a winter day and a miser; yet the beginning is in no way bleak. The author starts with a kind of happy howl; he bangs on our door like a drunken carol singer; his style is festive and popular; he compares the snow and hail to philanthropists who “come down handsomely;” he compares the fog to unlimited beer. Scrooge is not really inhuman at the beginning any more than he is at the end. There is a heartiness in his inhospitable sentiments that is akin to humour and therefore to humanity; he is only a crusty old bachelor, and had (I strongly suspect) given away turkeys secretly all his life. The beauty and the real blessing of the story do not lie in the mechanical plot of it, the repentance of Scrooge, probable or improbable; they lie in the great furnace of real happiness that glows through Scrooge and everything around him; that great furnace, the heart of Dickens. Whether the Christmas visions would or would not convert Scrooge, they convert us. Whether or no the visions were evoked by real Spirits of the Past, Present, and Future, they were evoked by that truly exalted order of angels who are correctly called High Spirits. They are impelled and sustained by a quality which our contemporary artists ignore or almost deny, but which in a life decently lived is as normal and attainable as sleep, positive, passionate, conscious joy. The story sings from end to end like a happy man going home; and, like a happy and good man, when it cannot sing it yells. It is lyric and exclamatory, from the first exclamatory words of it. It is strictly a Christmas carol.

Dickens, as has been said, went to Italy with this kindly cloud still about him, still meditating on Yule mysteries. Among the olives and the orange-trees he wrote his second great Christmas tale, “The Chimes,” at Genoa in 1844, a Christmas tale only differing from “The Christmas Carol” in being fuller of the grey rains of winter and the north. “The Chimes” is, like the “Carol,” an appeal for charity and mirth, but it is a stern and fighting appeal: if the other is a Christmas carol, this is a Christmas war-song. In it Dickens hurled himself with even more than his usual militant joy and scorn into an attack upon a cant, which he said made his blood boil. This cant was nothing more nor less than the whole tone taken by three-quarters of the political and economic world towards the poor. It was a vague and vulgar Benthamism with a rollicking Tory touch in it. It explained to the poor their duties with a cold and coarse philanthropy unendurable by any free man. It had also at its command a kind of brutal banter, a loud good humour which Dickens sketches savagely in Alderman Cute. He fell furiously on all their ideas: the cheap advice to live cheaply, the base advice to live basely, above all, the preposterous primary assumption that the rich are to advise the poor and not the poor the rich. There were and are hundreds of these benevolent bullies. Some say that the poor should give up having children, which means that they should give up their great virtue of sexual sanity. Some say that they should give up “treating” each other, which means that they should give up all that remains to them of the virtue of hospitality. Against all of this Dickens thundered very thoroughly in “The Chimes.” It may be remarked in passing that this affords another instance of a confusion already referred to, the confusion whereby Dickens supposed himself to be exalting the present over the past, whereas he was really dealing deadly blows at things strictly peculiar to the present. Embedded in this very book is a somewhat useless interview between Trotty Veck and the church bells, in which the latter lecture the former for having supposed (why, I don’t know) that they were expressing regret for the disappearance of the Middle Ages. There is no reason why Trotty Veck or anyone else should idealise the Middle Ages, but certainly he was the last man in the world to be asked to idealise the nineteenth century, seeing that the smug and stingy philosophy, which poisons his life through the book, was an exclusive creation of that century. But, as I have said before, the fieriest mediævalist may forgive Dickens for disliking the good things the Middle Ages took away, considering how he loved whatever good things the Middle Ages left behind. It matters very little that he hated old feudal castles when they were already old. It matters very much that he hated the New Poor Law while it was still new.

The moral of this matter in "The Chimes" is essential. Dickens had sympathy with the poor in the Greek and literal sense; he suffered with them mentally; for the things that irritated them were the things that irritated him. He did not pity the people, or even champion the people, or even merely love the people; in this matter he was the people. He alone in our literature is the voice not merely of the social substratum, but even of the subconsciousness of the substratum. He utters the secret anger of the humble. He says what the uneducated only think, or even only feel, about the educated. And in nothing is he so genuinely such a voice as in this fact of his fiercest mood being reserved for methods that are counted scientific and progressive. Pure and exalted atheists talk themselves into believing that the working-classes are turning with indignant scorn from the churches. The working-classes are not indignant against the churches in the least. The things the working-classes really are indignant against are the hospitals. The people has no definite disbelief in the temples of theology. The people has a very fiery and practical disbelief in the temples of physical science. The things the poor hate are the modern things, the rationalistic things — doctors, inspectors, poor law guardians, professional philanthropy. They never showed any reluctance to be helped by the old and corrupt monasteries. They will often die rather than be helped by the modern and efficient workhouse. Of all this anger, good or bad, Dickens is the voice of an accusing energy. When, in "The Christmas Carol," Scrooge refers to the surplus population, the Spirit tells him, very justly, not to speak till he knows what the surplus is and where it is. The implication is severe but sound. When a group of superciliously benevolent economists look down into the abyss for the surplus population, assuredly there is only one answer that should be given to them; and that is to say, "If there is a surplus, you are a surplus." And if anyone were ever cut off, they would be. If the barricades went up in our streets and the poor became masters, I think the priests would escape, I fear the gentlemen would; but I believe the gutters would be simply running with the blood of philanthropists.

Lastly, he was at one with the poor in this chief matter of Christmas, in the matter, that is, of special festivity. There is nothing on which the poor are more criticised than on the point of spending large sums on small feasts; and though there are material difficulties, there is nothing in which they are more right. It is said that a Boston paradox-monger said, “Give us the luxuries of life and we will dispense with the necessities.” But it is the whole human race that says it, from the first savage wearing feathers instead of clothes to the last costermonger having a treat instead of three meals.

The third of his Christmas stories, “The Cricket on the Hearth,” calls for no extensive comment, though it is very characteristic. It has all the qualities which we have called dominant qualities in his Christmas sentiment. It has cosiness, that is the comfort that depends upon a discomfort surrounding it. It has a sympathy with the poor, and especially with the extravagance of the poor; with what may be called the temporary wealth of the poor. It has the sentiment of the hearth, that is, the sentiment of the open fire being the red heart of the room. That open fire is the veritable flame of England, still kept burning in the midst of a mean civilisation of stoves. But everything that is valuable in “The Cricket on the Hearth” is perhaps as well expressed in the title as it is in the story. The tale itself, in spite of some of those inimitable things that Dickens never failed to say, is a little too comfortable to be quite convincing. “The Christmas Carol” is the conversion of an anti-Christmas character. “The Chimes” is a slaughter of anti-Christmas characters. “The Cricket,” perhaps, fails for lack of this crusading note. For everything has its weak side, and when full justice has been done to this neglected note of poetic comfort, we must remember that it has its very real weak side. The defect of it in the work of Dickens was that he tended sometimes to pile up the cushions until none of the characters could move. He is so much interested in effecting his state of static happiness that he forgets to make a story at all. His princes at the start of the story begin to live happily ever afterwards. We feel this strongly in “Master Humphrey’s Clock” and we feel it sometimes in these Christmas stories. He makes his characters so comfortable that his characters begin to dream and drivel. And he makes his reader so comfortable that his reader goes to sleep.

The actual tale of the carrier and his wife sounds somewhat sleepily in our ears; we cannot keep our attention fixed on it, though we are conscious of a kind of warmth from it as from a great wood fire. We know so well that everything will soon be all right that we do not suspect when the carrier suspects, and are not frightened when the gruff Tackleton growls. The sound of the festivities at the end come fainter on our ears than did the shout of the Cratchits or the bells of Trotty Veck. All the good figures that followed Scrooge when he came growling out of the fog fade into the fog again.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TIME OF TRANSITION

Dickens was back in London by the June of 1845. About this time he became the first editor of *The Daily News*, a paper which he had largely planned and suggested, and which, I trust, remembers its semi-divine origin. That his thoughts had been running, as suggested in the last chapter, somewhat monotonously on his Christmas domesticities, is again suggested by the rather singular fact that he originally wished *The Daily News* to be called *The Cricket*. Probably he was haunted again with his old vision of a homely, tale-telling periodical such as had broken off in “Master Humphrey’s Clock.” About this time, however, he was peculiarly unsettled. Almost as soon as he had taken the editorship he threw it up; and having only recently come back to England, he soon made up his mind to go back to the Continent. In the May of 1846 he ran over to Switzerland and tried to write “Dombey and Son” at Lausanne. Tried to, I say, because his letters are full of an angry impotence. He could not get on. He attributed this especially to his love of London and his loss of it, “the absence of streets and numbers of figures. . . . *My* figures seem disposed to stagnate without crowds about them.” But he also, with shrewdness, attributed it more generally to the laxer and more wandering life he had led for the last two years, the American tour, the Italian tour, diversified, generally speaking, only with slight literary productions. His ways were never punctual or healthy, but they were also never unconscientious as far as work was concerned. If he walked all night he could write all day. But in this strange exile or interregnum he did not seem able to fall into any habits, even bad habits. A restlessness beyond all his experience had fallen for a season upon the most restless of the children of men.

It may be a mere coincidence: but this break in his life very nearly coincided with the important break in his art. “Dombey and Son,” planned in all probability some time before, was destined to be the last of a quite definite series, the early novels of Dickens. The difference between the books from the beginning up to “Dombey,” and the books from “David Copperfield” to the end may be hard to state dogmatically, but is evident to every one with any literary sense. Very coarsely, the case may be put by saying that he diminished, in the story as a whole, the practice of pure caricature. Still more coarsely it may be put in the phrase that he began to practise realism. If we take Mr. Stiggins, say, as a clergyman depicted at the beginning of his literary career, and Mr. Crisparkle, say, as a clergyman depicted at the end of it, it is evident that the difference does not merely consist in the fact that the first is a less desirable clergyman than the second. It consists in the nature of our desire for either of them. The glory of Mr. Crisparkle partly consists in the fact that he might really exist anywhere, in any country town into which we may happen to stray. The glory of Mr. Stiggins wholly consists in the fact that he could not possibly exist anywhere except in the head of Dickens. Dickens has the secret recipe of that divine dish. In some sense, therefore, when we say that he became less of a caricaturist we mean that he became less of a creator. That original violent vision of all things which he had seen from his boyhood began to be mixed with other men’s milder visions and with the light of common day. He began to understand and practise other than his own mad merits; began to have some movement towards the merits of other writers, towards the mixed emotion of Thackeray, or the solidity of George Eliot. And this must be said for the process; that the fierce wine of Dickens could endure some dilution. On the whole, perhaps, his primal personalism was all the better when surging against some saner restraints. Perhaps a flavour of strong Stiggins goes a long way. Perhaps the colossal Crummles might be cut down into six or seven quite creditable characters. For my own part, for reasons which I shall afterwards mention, I am in real doubt about the advantage of this realistic education of Dickens. I am not sure that it made his books better; but I am sure it made them less bad. He made fewer mistakes undoubtedly; he succeeded in eliminating much of the mere rant or cant of his first books; he threw away much of the old padding, all the more annoying, perhaps, in a literary sense, because he did not mean it for padding, but for essential eloquence. But he did not produce anything actually better than Mr. Chuckster. But then there is nothing better than Mr. Chuckster. Certain works of art, such as the Venus of Milo, exhaust our aspiration. Upon the whole this may, perhaps, be safely said of the transition. Those who have any doubt about Dickens can have no doubt of the superiority of the later books. Beyond question they have less of what annoys us in Dickens. But do not, if you are in the company of any ardent adorers of Dickens (as I hope for your sake you are), do not insist too urgently and exclusively on the splendour of Dickens's last works, or they will discover that you do not like him.

"Dombey and Son" is the last novel in the first manner: "David Copperfield" is the first novel in the last. The increase in care and realism in the second of the two is almost startling. Yet even in "Dombey and Son" we can see the coming of a change, however faint, if we compare it with his first fantasies such as "Nicholas Nickleby" or "The Old Curiosity Shop." The central story is still melodrama, bat it is much more tactful and effective melodrama. Melodrama is a form of art, legitimate like any other, as noble as farce, almost as noble as pantomime. The essence of melodrama is that it appeals to the moral sense in a highly simplified state, just as farce appeals to the sense of humour in a highly simplified state. Farce creates people who are so intellectually simple as to hide in packing-cases or pretend to be their own aunts. Melodrama creates people so morally simple as to kill their enemies in Oxford Street, and repent on seeing their mother's photograph. The object of the simplification in farce and melodrama is the same, and quite artistically legitimate, the object of gaining a resounding rapidity of action which subtleties would obstruct. And this can be done well or ill. The simplified villain can be a spirited charcoal sketch or a mere black smudge. Carker is a spirited charcoal sketch: Ralph Nickleby is a mere black smudge. The tragedy of Edith Dombey teems with unlikelihood, but it teems with life. That Dombey should give his own wife censure through his own business manager is impossible, I will not say in a gentleman, but in a person of ordinary sane self-conceit. But once having got the inconceivable trio before the footlights, Dickens gives us good ringing dialogue very different from the mere rants in which Ralph Nickleby figures in the unimaginable character of a rhetorical money-lender. And there is another point of technical improvement in this book over such books as "Nicholas Nickleby." It has not only a basic idea, but a good basic idea. There is a real artistic opportunity in the conception of a solemn and selfish man of affairs, feeling for his male heir, his first and last emotion, mingled of a thin flame of tenderness and a strong flame of pride. But with all these possibilities, the serious episode of the Dombeys serves ultimately only to show how unfitted Dickens was for such things, how fitted he was for something opposite.

The incurable poetic character, the hopelessly non-realistic character of Dickens's essential genius could not have a better example than the story of the Dombeys. For the story itself is probable; it is the treatment that makes it unreal. In attempting to paint the dark pagan devotion of the father (as distant from the ecstatic and Christian devotion of the mother) Dickens was painting something that was really there. This is no wild theme, like the wanderings of Nell's grandfather, or the marriage of Gride. A man of Dombey's type would love his son as he loves Paul. He would neglect his daughter as he neglects Florence. And yet we feel the utter unreality of it all, while we feel the utter reality of monsters like Stiggins or Mantalini. Dickens could only work in his own way, and that way was the wild way. We may almost say this: that he could only make his characters probable if he was allowed to make them impossible. Give him licence to say and do anything, and he could create beings as vivid as our own aunts and uncles. Keep him to likelihood and he could not tell the plainest tale so as to make it seem likely. The story of "Pickwick" is credible, although it is not possible. The story of Florence Dombey is incredible although it is true.

An excellent example can be found in the same story. Major Bagstock is a grotesque, and yet he contains touch after touch of Dickens's quiet and sane observation of things as they are. He was always most accurate when he was most fantastic. Dombey and Florence are perfectly reasonable, but we simply know that they do not exist. The Major is mountainously exaggerated, but we all feel that we have met him at Brighton. Nor is the rationale of the paradox difficult to see; Dickens exaggerated when he had found a real truth to exaggerate. It is a deadly error (an error at the back of much of the false placidity of our politics) to suppose that lies are told with excess and luxuriance, and truths told with modesty and restraint. Some of the most frantic lies on the face of life are told with modesty and restraint; for the simple reason that only modesty and restraint will save them. Many official declarations are just as dignified as Mr. Dombey, because they are just as fictitious. On the other hand, the man who has found a truth dances about like a boy who has found a shilling; he breaks into extravagances, as the Christian churches broke into gargoyles. In one sense truth alone can be exaggerated; nothing else can stand the strain. The outrageous Bagstock is a glowing and glaring exaggeration of a thing we have all seen in life — the worst and most dangerous of all its hypocrisies. For the worst and most dangerous hypocrite is not he who affects unpopular virtue, but he who affects popular vice. The jolly fellow of the saloon bar and the racecourse is the real deceiver of mankind; he has misled more than any false prophet, and his victims cry to him out of hell. The excellence of the Bagstock conception can best be seen if we compare it with the much weaker and more improbable knavery of Pecksniff. It would not be worth a man's while, with any worldly object, to pretend to be a holy and high-minded architect. The world does not admire holy and high-minded architects. The world does admire rough and tough old army men who swear at waiters and wink at women. Major Bagstock is simply the perfect prophecy of that decadent jingoism which corrupted England of late years. England has been duped, not by the cant of goodness, but by the cant of badness. It has been fascinated by a quite fictitious cynicism, and reached that last and strangest of all impostures in which the mask is as repulsive as the face.

"Dombey and Son" provides us with yet another instance of this general fact in Dickens. He could only get to the most solemn emotions adequately if he got to them through the grotesque. He could only, so to speak, really get into the inner chamber by coming down the chimney, like his own most lovable lunatic in "Nicholas Nickleby." A good example is such a character as Toots. Toots is what none of Dickens's dignified characters are, in the most serious sense, a true lover. He is the twin of Romeo. He has passion, humility, self-knowledge, a mind lifted into all magnanimous thoughts, everything that goes with the best kind of romantic love. His excellence in the art of love can only be expressed by the somewhat violent expression that he is as good a lover as Walter Gay is a bad one. Florence surely deserved her father's scorn if she could prefer Gay to Toots. It is neither a joke nor any kind of exaggeration to say that in the vacillations of Toots, Dickens not only came nearer to the psychology of true love than he ever came elsewhere, but nearer than anyone else ever came. To ask for the loved one, and then not to dare to cross the threshold, to be invited by her, to long to accept, and then to lie in order to decline, these are the funny things that Mr. Toots did, and that every honest man who yells with laughter at him has done also. For the moment, however, I only mention this matter as a pendant case to the case of Major Bagstock, an example of the way in which Dickens had to be ridiculous in order to begin to be true. His characters that begin solemn end futile; his characters that begin frivolous end solemn in the best sense. His foolish figures are not only more entertaining than his serious figures, they are also much more serious. The Marchioness is not only much more laughable than Little Nell; she is also much more of all that Little Nell was meant to be; much more really devoted, pathetic, and brave. Dick Swiveller is not only a much funnier fellow than Kit, he is also a much more genuine fellow, being free from that slight stain of “meekness,” or the snobbishness of the respectable poor, which the wise and perfect Chuckster wisely and perfectly perceived in Kit. Susan Nipper is not only more of a comic character than Florence; she is more of a heroine than Florence any day of the week. In “Our Mutual Friend” we do not, for some reason or other, feel really very much excited about the fall or rescue of Lizzie Hexam. She seems too romantic to be really pathetic. But we do feel excited about the rescue of Miss Podsnap, because she is, like Toots, a holy fool; because her pink nose and pink elbows, and candid outcry and open indecent affections do convey to us a sense of innocence helpless among human dragons, of Andromeda tied naked to a rock. Dickens had to make a character humorous before he could make it human; it was the only way he knew, and he ought to have always adhered to it. Whether he knew it or not, the only two really touching figures in “Martin Chuzzlewit” are the Misses Pecksniff. Of the things he tried to treat unsmilingly and grandly we can all make game to our heart’s content. But when once he has laughed at a thing it is sacred for ever.

“Dombey,” however, means first and foremost the finale of the early Dickens. It is difficult to say exactly in what it is that we perceive that the old crudity ends here, and does not reappear in “David Copperfield” or in any of the novels after it. But so certainly it is. In detached scenes and characters, indeed, Dickens kept up his farcical note almost or quite to the end. But this is the last farce; this is the last work in which a farcical licence is tacitly claimed, a farcical note struck to start with. And in a sense his next novel may be called his first novel. But the growth of this great novel, “David Copperfield,” is a thing very interesting, but at the same time very dark, for it is a growth in the soul. We have seen that Dickens’s mind was in a stir of change; that he was dreaming of art and even of realism. Hugely delighted as he invariably was with his own books, he was humble enough to be ambitious. He was even humble enough to be envious. In the matter of art, for instance, in the narrower sense, of arrangement and proportion in fictitious things, he began to be conscious of his deficiency, and even, in a stormy sort of way, ashamed of it; he tried to gain completeness even while raging at anyone who called him incomplete. And in this manner of artistic construction, his ambition (and his success too) grew steadily up to the instant of his death. The end finds him attempting things that are at the opposite pole to the frank formlessness of “Pickwick.” His last book, “The Mystery of Edwin Drood,” depends entirely upon construction, even upon a centralised strategy. He staked everything upon a plot; he who had been the weakest of plotters, weaker than Sim Tappertit. He essayed a detective story, he who could never keep a secret; and he has kept it to this day. A new Dickens was really being born when Dickens died.

And as with art, so with reality. He wished to show that he could construct as well as anybody. He also wished to show that he could be as accurate as anybody. And in this connection (as in many others) we must recur constantly to the facts mentioned in connection with America and with his money-matters. We must recur, I mean, to the central fact that his desires were extravagant in quantity, but not in quality; that his wishes were excessive, but not eccentric. It must never be forgotten that sanity was his ideal, even when he seemed almost insane. It was thus with his literary aspirations. He was brilliant; but he wished sincerely to be solid. Nobody out of an asylum could deny that he was a genius and an unique writer; but he did not wish to be an unique writer, but an universal writer. Much of the manufactured pathos or rhetoric against which his enemies quite rightly rail, is really due to his desire to give all sides of life at once, to make his book a cosmos instead of a tale. He was sometimes really vulgar in his wish to be a literary Whiteley, an universal provider. Thus it was that he felt about realism and truth to live. Nothing is easier than to defend Dickens as Dickens, but Dickens wished to be everybody else. Nothing is easier than to defend Dickens’s world as a fairyland, of which he alone has the key; to defend him as one defends Maeterlinck, or any other original writer. But Dickens was not content with being original, he had a wild wish to be true. He loved truth so much in the abstract that he sacrificed to the shadow of it his own glory. He denied his own divine originality, and pretended that he had plagiarised from life. He disowned his own soul’s children, and said he had picked them up in the street.

And in this mixed and heated mood of anger and ambition, vanity and doubt, a new and great design was born. He loved to be romantic, yet he desired to be real. How if he wrote of a thing that was real and showed that it was romantic? He loved real life; but he also loved his own way. How if he wrote his own real life, but wrote it in his own way? How if he showed the carping critics who doubted the existence of his strange characters, his own yet stranger existence? How if he forced these pedants and unbelievers to admit that Weller and Pecksniff, Crummles and Swiveller, whom they thought so improbably wild and wonderful, were less wild and wonderful than Charles Dickens? What if he ended the quarrels about whether his romances could occur, by confessing that his romance had occurred?

For some time past, probably during the greater part of his life, he had made notes for an autobiography. I have already quoted an admirable passage from these notes, a passage reproduced in “David Copperfield,” with little more alteration than a change of proper names — the passage which describes Captain Porter and the debtor’s petition in the Marshalsea. But he probably perceived at last what a less keen intelligence must ultimately have perceived, that if an autobiography is really to be honest it must be turned into a work of fiction. If it is really to tell the truth, it must at all costs profess not to. No man dare say of himself, over his own name, how badly he has behaved. No man dare say of himself over his own name, how well he has behaved. Moreover, of course, a touch of fiction is almost always essential to the real conveying of fact, because fact, as experienced, has a fragmentariness which is bewildering at first hand and quite blinding at second hand. Facts have at least to be sorted into compartments and the proper head and tail given back to each. The perfection and pointedness of art are a sort of substitute for the pungency of actuality. Without this selection and completion our life seems a tangle of unfinished tales, a heap of novels, all volume one. Dickens determined to make one complete novel of it.

For though there are many other aspects of “David Copperfield,” this autobiographical aspect is, after all, the greatest. The point of the book is that, unlike all the other books of Dickens, it is concerned with quite common actualities, but it is concerned with them warmly and with the warlike sympathies. It is not only both realistic and romantic; it is realistic because it is romantic. It is human nature described with the human exaggeration. We all know the actual types in the book; they are not like the turgid and preternatural types elsewhere in Dickens. They are not purely poetic creations like Mr. Kenwigs or Mr. Bunsby. We all know that they exist. We all know the stiff-necked and humorous old-fashioned nurse, so conventional and yet so original, so dependent and yet so independent. We all know the intrusive stepfather, the abstract strange male, coarse, handsome, sulky, successful, a breaker-up of homes. We all know the erect and sardonic spinster, the spinster who is so mad in small things and so sane in great ones. We all know the cock of the school; we all know Steerforth, the creature whom the gods love and even the servants respect. We know his poor and aristocratic mother, so proud, so gratified, so desolate. We know the Rosa Dartle type, the lonely woman in whom affection itself has stagnated into a sort of poison.

But while these are real characters they are real characters lit up with the colours of youth and passion. They are real people romantically felt; that is to say, they are real people felt as real people feel them. They are exaggerated, like all Dickens's figures: but they are not exaggerated as personalities are exaggerated by an artist; they are exaggerated as personalities are exaggerated by their own friends and enemies. The strong souls are seen through the glorious haze of the emotions that strong souls really create. We have Murdstone as he would be to a boy who hated him; and rightly, for a boy would hate him. We have Steerforth as he would be to a boy who adored him; and rightly, for a boy would adore him. It may be that if these persons had a mere terrestrial existence, they appeared to other eyes more insignificant. It may be that Murdstone in common life was only a heavy business man with a human side that David was too sulky to find. It may be that Steerforth was only an inch or two taller than David, and only a shade or two above him in the lower middle classes; but this does not make the book less true. In cataloguing the facts of life the author must not omit that massive fact, illusion.

When we say the book is true to life we must stipulate that it is especially true to youth: even to boyhood. All the characters seem a little larger than they really were, for David is looking up at them. And the early pages of the book are in particular astonishingly vivid. Parts of it seem like fragments of our forgotten infancy. The dark house of childhood, the loneliness, the things half understood, the nurse with her inscrutable sulks and her more inscrutable tenderness, the sudden deportations to distant places, the seaside and its childish friendships, all this stirs in us when we read it, like something out of a previous existence. Above all, Dickens has excellently depicted the child enthroned in that humble circle which only in after years he perceives to have been humble. Modern and cultured persons, I believe, object to their children seeing kitchen company or being taught by a woman like Peggotty. But surely it is more important to be educated in a sense of human dignity and equality than in anything else in the world. And a child who has once had to respect a kind and capable woman of the lower classes will respect the lower classes for ever. The true way to overcome the evil in class distinction is not to denounce them as revolutionists denounce them, but to ignore them as children ignore them.

The early youth of David Copperfield is psychologically almost as good as his childhood. In one touch especially Dickens pierced the very core of the sensibility of boyhood; it was when he made David more afraid of a manservant than of anybody or anything else. The lowering Murdstone, the awful Mrs. Steerforth are not so alarming to him as Mr. Littimer, the unimpeachable gentleman’s gentleman. This is exquisitely true to the masculine emotions, especially in their undeveloped state. A youth of common courage does not fear anything violent, but he is in mortal fear of anything correct. This may or may not be the reason that so few female writers understand their male characters, but this fact remains that the more sincere and passionate and even headlong a lad is the more certain he is to be conventional. The bolder and freer he seems the more the traditions of the college or the rules of the club will hold him with their gyves of gossamer; and the less afraid he is of his enemies the more cravenly he will be afraid of his friends. Herein lies indeed the darkest period of our ethical doubt and chaos. The fear is that as morals become less urgent, manners will become more so; and men who have forgotten the fear of God will retain the fear of Littimer. We shall merely sink into a much meaner bondage. For when you break the great laws, you do not get liberty; you do not even get anarchy. You get the small laws.

The sting and strength of this piece of fiction, then, do (by a rare accident) lie in the circumstance that it was so largely founded on fact. “David Copperfield” is the great answer of a great romancer to the realists. David says in effect: “What! you say that the Dickens tales are too purple really to have happened! Why, this is what happened to me, and it seemed the most purple of all. You say that the Dickens heroes are too handsome and triumphant! Why, no prince or paladin in Ariosto was ever so handsome and triumphant as the Head Boy seemed to me walking before me in the sun. You say the Dickens villains are too black I Why, there was no ink in the devil’s inkstand black enough for my own step-father when I had to live in the same house with him. The facts are quite the other way to what you suppose. This life of grey studies and half-tones, the absence of which you regret in Dickens, is only life as it is looked at. This life of heroes and villains is life as it is lived. The life a man knows best is exactly the life he finds most full of fierce certainties and battles between good and ill — his own. Oh yes, the life we do not care about may easily be a psychological comedy. Other people's lives may easily be human documents. But a man's own life is always a melodrama."

There are other effective things in "David Copperfield;" they are not all autobiographical, but they nearly all have this new note of quietude and reality. Micawber is gigantic; an immense assertion of the truth that the way to live is to exaggerate everything. But of him I shall have to speak more fully in another connection. Mrs. Micawber, artistically speaking, is even better. She is very nearly the best thing in Dickens. Nothing could be more absurd, and at the same time more true, than her clear argumentative manner of speech as she sits smiling and expounding in the midst of ruin. What could be more lucid and logical and unanswerable than her statement of the prolegomena of the Medway problem, of which the first step must be to "see the Medway," or of the coal-trade, which required talent and capital. "Talent Mr. Micawber has. Capital Mr. Micawber has not." It seems as if something should have come at last out of so clear and scientific an arrangement of the ideas. Indeed if (as has been suggested) we regard "David Copperfield" as an unconscious defence of the poetic view of life, we might regard Mrs. Micawber as an unconscious satire on the logical view of life. She sits as a monument of the hopelessness and helplessness of reason in the face of this romantic and unreasonable world.

As I have taken "Dombey and Son" as the book before the transition, and "David Copperfield" as typical of the transition itself, I may perhaps take "Bleak House" as the book after the transition, and so complete the description. Bleak House has every characteristic of his new realistic culture. Dickens never now, as in his early books, revels in the parts he likes and scamps the parts he does not, after the manner of Scott. He does not, as in previous tales, leave his heroes and heroines mere walking gentlemen and ladies with nothing at all to do but walk: he expends upon them at least ingenuity. By the expedients (successful or not) of the self-revelation of Esther or the humorous inconsistencies of Rick, he makes his younger figures if not lovable at least readable. Everywhere we see this tighter and more careful grip. He does not, for instance, when he wishes to denounce a dark institution, sandwich it in as a mere episode in a rambling story of adventure, as the debtor's prison is embedded in the body of "Pickwick" or the low Yorkshire school in the body of "Nicholas Nickleby."

He puts the Court of Chancery in the centre of the stage, a sombre and sinister temple, and groups round it in artistic relation decaying and frantic figures, its offspring and its satirists, An old dipsomaniac keeps a rag and bone shop, type of futility and antiquity, and calls himself the Lord Chancellor. A little mad old maid hangs about the courts on a forgotten or imaginary lawsuit, and says with perfect and pungent irony, “I am expecting a judgment shortly. On the Day of Judgment.” Rick and Ada and Esther are not mere strollers who have strayed into the court of law, they are its children, its symbols, and its victims. The righteous indignation of the book is not at the red heat of anarchy, but at the white heat of art. Its anger is patient and plodding, like some historic revenge. Moreover, it slowly and carefully creates the real psychology of oppression. The endless formality, the endless unemotional urbanity, the endless hope deferred, these things make one feel the fact of injustice more than the madness of Nero. For it is not the activeness of tyranny that maddens, but its passiveness. We hate the deafness of the god more than his strength. Silence is the unbearable repartee.

Again we can see in this book strong traces of an increase in social experience. Dickens, as his fame carried him into more fashionable circles, began really to understand something of what is strong and what is weak in the English upper class. Sir Leicester Dedlock is a far more effective condemnation of oligarchy than the ugly swagger of Sir Mulberry Hawk, because pride stands out more plainly in all its impotence and insolence as the one weakness of a good man, than as one of the million weaknesses of a bad one. Dickens, like all young Radicals, had imagined in his youth that aristocracy rested upon the hardness of somebody; he found, as we all do, that it rests upon the softness of everybody. It is very hard not to like Sir Leicester Dedlock, not to applaud his silly old speeches, so foolish, so manly, so genuinely English, so disastrous to England. It is true that the English people love a lord, but it is not true that they fear him; rather, if anything, they pity him; there creeps into their love something of the feeling they have towards a baby or a black man. In their hearts they think it admirable that Sir Leicester Dedlock should be able to speak at all. And so a system, which no iron laws and no bloody battles could possibly force upon a people, is preserved from generation to generation by pure, weak good-nature.

In “Bleak House” occurs the character of Harold Skimpole, the character whose alleged likeness to Leigh Hunt has laid Dickens open to so much disapproval. Unjust disapproval, I think, as far as fundamental morals are concerned. In method he was a little clamorous and clumsy, as, indeed, he was apt to be. But when he said that it was possible to combine a certain tone of conversation taken from a particular man with other characteristics which were not meant to be his, he surely said what all men who write stories know. A work of fiction often consists in combining a pair of whiskers seen in one street with a crime seen in another. He may quite possibly have really meant only to make Leigh Hunt’s light philosophy the mask for a new kind of scamp, as a variant on the pious mask of Pecksniff or the candid mask of Bagstock. He may never once have had the unfriendly thought, “Suppose Hunt behaved like a rascal!” he may have only had the fanciful thought, “Suppose a rascal behaved like Hunt!”

But there is a good reason for mentioning Skimpole especially. In the character of Skimpole, Dickens displayed again a quality that was very admirable in him — I mean a disposition to see things sanely and to satirise even his own faults. He was commonly occupied in satirising the Gradgrinds, the economists, the men of Smiles and Self-Help. For him there was nothing poorer than their wealth, nothing more selfish than their self-denial. And against them he was in the habit of pitting the people of a more expansive habit — the happy Swivellers and Micawbers, who, if they were poor, were at least as rich as their last penny could make them. He loved that great Christian carelessness that seeks its meat from God. It was merely a kind of uncontrollable honesty that forced him into urging the other side. He could not disguise from himself or from the world that man who began by seeking his meat from his neighbour without apprising his neighbour of the fact. He had shown how good irresponsibility could be; he could not stoop to hide how bad it could be. He created Skimpole; and Skimpole is the dark underside of Micawber.

In attempting Skimpole he attempted something with a great and urgent meaning. He attempted it, I say; I do not assert that he carried it through. As has been remarked, he was never successful in describing psychological change; his characters are the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. And critics have complained very justly of the crude villainy of Skimpole’s action in the matter of Joe and Mr. Bucket. Certainly Skimpole had no need to commit a clumsy treachery to win a clumsy bribe; he had only to call on Mr. Jarndyce. He had lost his honour too long to need to sell it.

The effect is bad; but I repeat that the aim was great. Dickens wished, under the symbol of Skimpole, to point out a truth which is perhaps the most terrible in moral psychology. I mean the fact that it is by no means easy to draw the line between light and heavy offence. He desired to show that there are no faults, however kindly, that we can afford to flatter or to let alone; he meant that perhaps Skimpole had once been as good a man as Swiveller. If flattered or let alone, our kindliest fault can destroy our kindliest virtue. A thing may begin as a very human weakness and end as a very inhuman weakness. Skimpole means that the extremes of evil are much nearer than we think. A man may begin by being too generous to pay his debts, and end by being too mean to pay his debts. For the vices are very strangely in league, and encourage each other. A sober man may become a drunkard through being a coward. A brave man may become a coward through being a drunkard. That is the thing Dickens was darkly trying to convey in Skimpole — that a man might become a mountain of selfishness if he attended only to the Dickens virtues. There is nothing that can be neglected; there is no such thing (he meant) as a peccadillo.

I have dwelt on this consciousness of his because, alas, it had a very sharp edge for himself. Even while he was permitting a fault originally small to make a comedy of Skimpole, a fault originally small was making a tragedy of Charles Dickens. For Dickens also had a bad quality, not intrinsically very terrible, which he allowed to wreck his life. He also had a small weakness that could sometimes become stronger than all his strengths. His selfishness was not, it need hardly be said, the selfishness of Gradgrind; he was particularly compassionate and liberal. Nor was it in the least the selfishness of Skimpole. He was entirely self-dependent, industrious, and dignified. His selfishness was wholly a selfishness of the nerves. Whatever his whim or the temperature of the instant told him to do must be done. He was the type of man who would break a window if it would not open and give him air. And this weakness of his had, by the time of which we speak, led to a breach between himself and his wife which he was too exasperated and excited to heal in time. Everything must be put right, and put right at once, with him. If London bored him, he must go to the Continent at once; if the Continent bored him, he must come back to London at once. If the day was too noisy, the whole household must be quiet; if night was too quiet, the whole household must wake up. Above all, he had the supreme character of the domestic despot — that his good temper was, if possible, more despotic than his bad temper. When he was miserable (as he often was, poor fellow), they only had to listen to his railings. When he was happy they had to listen to his novels. All this, which was mainly mere excitability, did not seem to amount to much; it did not in the least mean that he had ceased to be a clean-living and kind-hearted and quiet honest man. But there was this evil about it — that he did not resist his little weakness at all; he pampered it as Skimpole pampered his. And it separated him and his wife. A mere silly trick of temperament did everything that the blackest misconduct could have done. A random sensibility, started about the shuffling of papers or the shutting of a window, ended by tearing two clean, Christian people from each other, like a blast of bigamy or adultery.

CHAPTER IX

LATER LIFE AND WORKS

I have deliberately in this book mentioned only such facts in the life of Dickens as were, I will not say significant (for all facts must be significant, including the million facts that can never be mentioned by anybody), but such facts as illustrated my own immediate meaning. I have observed this method consistently and without shame because I think that we can hardly make too evident a chasm between books which profess to be statements of all the ascertainable facts, and books which (like this one) profess only to contain a particular opinion or a summary deducible from the facts. Books like Forster's exhaustive work and others exist, and are as accessible as St. Paul's Cathedral; we have them in common as we have the facts of the physical universe; and it seems highly desirable that the function of making an exhaustive catalogue and that of making an individual generalisation should not be confused. No catalogue, of course, can contain all the facts even of five minutes; every catalogue, however long and learned, must be not only a bold, but, one may say, an audacious selection. Bat if a great many facts are given, the reader gains a blurred belief that all the facts are being given. In a professedly personal judgment it is therefore clearer and more honest to give only a few illustrative facts, leaving the other obtainable facts to balance them. For thus it is made quite clear that the thing is a sketch, an affair of a few lines.

It is as well, however, to make at this point a pause sufficient to indicate the main course of the later life of the novelist. And it is best to begin with the man himself, as he appeared in those last days of popularity and public distinction. Many are still alive who remember him in his after-dinner speeches, his lectures, and his many public activities; as I am not one of these, I cannot correct my notions with that flash of the living features without which a description may be subtly and entirely wrong. Once a man is dead, if it be only yesterday, the new-comer must piece him together from descriptions really as much at random as if he were describing Cæsar or Henry II. Allowing, however, for this inevitable falsity, a figure vivid and a little fantastic, does walk across the stage of Forster's "Life."

Dickens was of a middle size and his vivacity and relative physical insignificance probably gave rather the impression of small size; certainly of the absence of bulk. In early life he wore, even for that epoch, extravagant clusters of brown hair, and in later years a brown moustache and a fringe of brown beard (cut like a sort of broad and bushy imperial) sufficiently individual in shape to give him a faint air as of a foreigner. His face had a peculiar tint or quality which is hard to describe even after one has contrived to imagine it. It was the quality which Mrs. Carlyle felt to be, as it were metallic, and compared to clear steel. It was, I think, a sort of pale glitter and animation, very much alive and yet with something deathly about it, like a corpse galvanised by a god. His face (if this was so) was curiously a counterpart of his character. For the essence of all Dickens's character was that it was at once tremulous and yet hard and sharp, just as the bright blade of a sword is tremulous and yet hard and sharp. He vibrated at every touch and yet he was indestructible; you could bend him, but you could not break him. Brown of hair and beard, somewhat pale of visage (especially in his later days of excitement and ill-health), he had quite exceptionally bright and active eyes that were always darting about like brilliant birds to pick up all the tiny things of which he made more, perhaps, than any novelist has done; for he was a sort of poetical Sherlock Holmes. The mouth behind the brown beard was large and mobile, like the mouth of an actor; indeed he was an actor, in many things too much of an actor. In his lectures, in later years, he could turn his strange face into any of the innumerable mad masks that were the faces of his grotesque characters. He could make his face fall suddenly into the blank inanity of Mrs. Raddle's servant, or swell, as if to twice its size, into the apoplectic energy of Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz. But the outline of his face itself, from his youth upwards, was cut quite delicate and decisive and in repose, and in its own keen way, may even have looked effeminate.

The dress of the comfortable classes during the later years of Dickens was, compared with ours, somewhat slipshod and somewhat gaudy. It was the time of loose pegtop trousers of an almost Turkish oddity, of large ties, of loose short jackets and of loose long whiskers. Yet even this expansive period, it must be confessed, considered Dickens a little too flashy or, as some put it, too Frenchified in his dress. Such a man would wear velvet coats and wild waistcoats that were like incredible sunsets; he would wear those old white hats of an unnecessary and startling whiteness. He did not mind being seen in sensational dressing-gowns; it is said he had his portrait painted in one of them. All this is not meritorious; neither is it particularly discreditable; it is a characteristic only, but an important one. He was an absolutely independent and entirely self-respecting man. But he had none of that old lusty, half-dignified English feeling upon which Thackeray was so sensitive; I mean the desire to be regarded as a private gentleman, which means at bottom the desire to be left alone. This again is not a merit; it is only one of the milder aspects of aristocracy. But meritorious or not, Dickens did not possess it. He had no objection to being stared at, if he were also admired. He did not exactly pose in the oriental manner of Disraeli; his instincts were too clean for that; but he did pose somewhat in the French manner, of some leaders like Mirabeau and Gambetta. Nor had he the dull desire to “get on” which makes men die contented as inarticulate Under-Secretaries of State. He did not desire success so much as fame, the old human glory, the applause and wonder of the people. Such he was as he walked down the street in his Frenchified clothes, probably with a slight swagger.

His private life consisted of one tragedy and ten thousand comedies. By one tragedy I mean one real and rending moral tragedy — the failure of his marriage. He loved his children dearly, and more than one of them died; but in sorrows like these there is no violence and above all no shame. The end of life is not tragic like the end of love. And by the ten thousand comedies I mean the whole texture of his life, his letters, his conversation, which were one incessant carnival of insane and inspired improvisation So far as he could prevent it, he never permitted a day of his life to be ordinary. There was always some prank, some impetuous proposal, some practical joke, some sudden hospitality, some sudden disappearance. It is related of him (I give one anecdote out of a hundred) that in his last visit to America, when he was already reeling as it were under the blow that was to be mortal, he remarked quite casually to his companions that a row of painted cottages looked exactly like the painted shops in a pantomime. No sooner had the suggestion passed his lips than he leapt at the nearest doorway and in exact imitation of the clown in the harlequinade, beat conscientiously with his fist, not on the door (for that would have burst the canvas scenery of course), but on the side of the doorpost. Having done this he lay down ceremoniously across the doorstep for the owner to fall over him if he should come rushing out. He then got up gravely and went on his way. His whole life was full of such unexpected energies, precisely like those of the pantomime clown. Dickens had indeed a great and fundamental affinity with the landscape, or rather house-scape, of the harlequinade. He liked high houses, and sloping roofs, and deep areas. But he would have been really happy if some good fairy of the eternal pantomime had given him the power of flying off the roofs and pitching harmlessly down the height of the houses and bounding out of the areas like an indiarubber ball. The divine lunatic in "Nicholas Nickleby" comes nearest to his dream. I really think Dickens would rather have been that one of his characters than any of the others. With what excitement he would have struggled down the chimney. With what ecstatic energy he would have hurled the cucumbers over the garden wall.

His letters exhibit even more the same incessant creative force. His letters are as creative as any of his literary creation. His shortest postcard is often as good as his ablest novel; each one of them is spontaneous; each one of them is different. He varies even the form and shape of the letter as far as possible; now it is in absurd French; now it is from one of his characters; now it is an advertisement for himself as a stray dog. All of them are very funny; they are not only very funny, but they are quite as funny as his finished and published work. This is the ultimately amazing thing about Dickens; the amount there is of him. He wrote, at the very least, sixteen thick important books packed full of original creation. And if you had burnt them all he could have written sixteen more, as a man writes idle letters to his friend.

In connection with this exuberant part of his nature there is another thing to be noted, if we are to make a personal picture of him. Many modern people, chiefly women, have been heard to object to the Bacchic element in the books of Dickens, that celebration of social drinking as a supreme symbol of social living, which those books share with almost all the great literature of mankind, including the New Testament. Undoubtedly there is an abnormal amount of drinking in a page of Dickens, as there is an abnormal amount of fighting, say, in a page of Dumas. If you reckon up the beers and brandies of Mr. Bob Sawyer, with the care of an arithmetician and the deductions of a pathologist, they rise alarmingly like a rising tide at sea. Dickens did defend drink clamorously, praised it with passion, and described whole orgies of it with enormous gusto. Yet it is wonderfully typical of his prompt and impatient nature that he himself drank comparatively little. He was the type of man who could be so eager in praising the cup that he left the cup untasted. It was a part of his active and feverish temperament that he did not drink wine very much. But it was a part of his humane philosophy, of his religion, that he did drink wine. To healthy European philosophy wine is a symbol; to European religion it is a sacrament. Dickens approved it because it was a great human institution, one of the rites of civilisation, and this it certainly is. The teetotaller who stands outside it may have perfectly clear ethical reasons of his own, as a man may have who stands outside education or nationality, who refuses to go to a University or to serve in an Army. But he is neglecting one of the great social things that man has added to nature. The teetotaller has chosen a most unfortunate phrase for the drunkard when he says that the drunkard is making a beast of himself. The man who drinks ordinarily makes nothing but an ordinary man of himself. The man who drinks excessively makes a devil of himself. But nothing connected with a human and artistic thing like wine can bring one nearer to the brute life of nature. The only man who is, in the exact and literal sense of the words, making a beast of himself is the teetotaller.

The tone of Dickens towards religion, though like that of most of his contemporaries, philosophically disturbed and rather historically ignorant, had an element that was very characteristic of himself. He had all the prejudices of his time. He had, for instance, that dislike of defined dogmas, which really means a preference for unexamined dogmas. He had the usual vague notion that the whole of our human past was packed with nothing but insane Tories. He had, in a word, al the old Radical ignorances which went along with the old Radical acuteness and courage and public spirit. But this spirit tended, in almost all the others who held it, to a specific dislike of the Church of England; and a disposition to set the other sects against it, as truer types of inquiry, or of individualism. Dickens had a definite tenderness for the Church of England. He might have even called it a weakness for the Church of England, but he had it. Something in those placid services, something in that reticent and humane liturgy pleased him against all the tendencies of his time; pleased him in the best part of himself, his virile love of charity and peace. Once, in a puff of anger at the Church’s political stupidity (which is indeed profound), he left it for a week or two and went to an Unitarian Chapel; in a week or two he came back. This curious and sentimental hold of the English Church upon him increased with years. In the book he was at work on when he died he describes the Minor Canon, humble, chivalrous, tender-hearted, answering with indignant simplicity the froth and platform righteousness of the sectarian philanthropist. He upholds Canon Crisparkle and satirises Mr. Honeythunder. Almost every one of the other Radicals, his friends, would have upheld Mr. Honeythunder and satirised Canon Crisparkle.

I have mentioned this matter for a special reason. It brings us back to that apparent contradiction or dualism in Dickens to which, in one connection or another, I have often adverted, and which, in one shape or another, constitutes the whole crux of his character. I mean the union of a general wildness approaching lunacy, with a sort of secret moderation almost amounting to mediocrity. Dickens was, more or less, the man I have described — sensitive, theatrical, amazing, a bit of a dandy, a bit of a buffoon. Nor are such characteristics, whether weak or wild, entirely accidents or externals. He had some false theatrical tendencies integral in his nature. For instance, he had one most unfortunate habit, a habit that often put him in the wrong, even when he happened to be in the right. He had an incurable habit of explaining himself. This reduced his admirers to the mental condition of the authentic but hitherto uncelebrated little girl who said to her mother, "I think I should understand if only you wouldn't explain." Dickens always would explain. It was a part of that instinctive publicity of his which made him at once a splendid democrat and a little too much of an actor. He carried it to the craziest lengths. He actually printed, in *Household Words*, an apology for his own action in the matter of his marriage. That incident alone is enough to suggest that his external offers and proposals were sometimes like screams heard from Bedlam. Yet it remains true that he had in him a central part that was pleased only by the most decent and the most reposeful rites, by things of which the Anglican Prayer-book is very typical. It is certainly true that he was often extravagant. It is most certainly equally true that he detested and despised extravagance.

The best explanation can be found in his literary genius. His literary genius consisted in a contradictory capacity at once to entertain and to deride — very ridiculous ideas. If he is a buffoon, he is laughing at buffoonery. His books were in some ways the wildest on the face of the world. Rabelais did not introduce into Paphlagonia or the Kingdom of the Coqcigrues satiric figures more frantic and misshapen than Dickens made to walk about the Strand and Lincoln’s Inn. But for all that, you come, in the core of him, on a sudden quietude and good sense. Such, I think, was the core of Rabelais, such were all the far-stretching and violent satirists. This is a point essential to Dickens, though very little comprehended in our current tone of thought. Dickens was an immoderate jester, but a moderate thinker. He was an immoderate jester because he was a moderate thinker. What we moderns call the wildness of his imagination was actually created by what we moderns call the tameness of his thought. I mean that he felt the full insanity of all extreme tendencies, because he was himself so sane; he felt eccentricities, because he was in the centre. We are always, in these days, asking our violent prophets to write violent satires; but violent prophets can never possibly write violent satires. In order to write satire like that of Rabelais — satire that juggles with the stars and kicks the world about like a football — it is necessary to be one’s self temperate, and even mild. A modern man like Nietzsche, a modern man like Gorky, a modern man like d’Annunzio, could not possibly write real and riotous satire. They are themselves too much on the borderlands. They could not be a success as caricaturists, for they are already a great success as caricatures.

I have mentioned his religious preference merely as an instance of this interior moderation. To say, as some have done, that he attacked Nonconformity is quite a false way of putting it. It is clean across the whole trend of the man and his time to suppose that he could have felt bitterness against any theological body as a theological body; but anything like religious extravagance, whether Protestant or Catholic, moved him to an extravagance of satire. And he flung himself into the drunken energy of Stiggins, he piled up to the stars the “verbose flights of stairs” of Mr. Chadband, exactly because his own conception of religion was the quiet and impersonal Morning Prayer. It is typical of him that he had a peculiar hatred for speeches at the grave-side.

An even clearer case of what I mean can be found in his political attitude. He seemed to some an almost anarchic satirist. He made equal fun of the system which reformers made war on, and of the instruments on which reformers relied. He made no secret of his feeling that the average English premier was an accidental ass. In two superb sentences he summed up and swept away the whole British constitution: “England, for the last week, has been in an awful state. Lord Coodle would go out, Sir Thomas Doodle wouldn’t come in, and there being no people in England to speak of except Coodle and Doodle, the country has been without a government.” He lumped all cabinets and all government offices together, and made the same game of them all. He created his most staggering humbugs, his most adorable and incredible idiots, and set them in the highest thrones of our national system. To many moderate and progressive people, such a satirist seemed to be insulting heaven and earth, ready to wreck society for some mad alternative, prepared to pull down St. Paul’s, and on its ruins erect a gory guillotine. Yet as a matter of fact, this apparent wildness of his came from his being, if anything, a very moderate politician. It came, not at all from fanaticism, but from a rather rational detachment. He had the sense to see that the British Constitution was not democracy, but the British Constitution. It was an artificial system — like any other, good in some ways, bad in others. His satire of it sounded wild to those that worshipped it; but his satire of it arose not from his having any wild enthusiasm against it, but simply from his not having, like every one else, a wild enthusiasm for it. Alone, as far as I know, among all the great Englishmen of that age, he realised the thing that Frenchmen and Irishmen understand. I mean the fact that popular government is one thing, and representative government another. He realised that representative government has many minor disadvantages, one of them being that it is never representative. He speaks of his “hope to have made every man in England feel something of the contempt for the House of Commons that I have.” He says also these two things, both of which are wonderfully penetrating as coming from a good Radical in 1855, for they contain a perfect statement of the peril in which we now stand, and which may, if it please God, sting us into avoiding the long vista at the end of which one sees so closely the dignity and the decay of Venice —

“I am hourly strengthened,” he says, “in my old belief, that our political aristocracy and our tuft-hunting are the death of England. In all this business I don’t see a gleam of hope. As to the popular spirit, it has come to be so entirely separated from the Parliament and the Government, and so perfectly apathetic about them both, that I seriously think it a most portentous sign.” And he says also this: “I really am serious in thinking — and I have given as painful consideration to the subject as a man with children to live and suffer after him can possibly give it — that representative government is become altogether a failure with us, that the English gentilities and subserviences render the people more unfit for it, and the whole thing has broken down since the great seventeenth-century time, and has no hope in it.”

These are the words of a wise and perhaps melancholy man, but certainly not of an unduly excited one. It is worth noting, for instance, how much more directly Dickens goes to the point than Carlyle did, who noted many of the same evils. But Carlyle fancied that our modern English government was wordy and long-winded because it was democratic government. Dickens saw, what is certainly the fact, that it is wordy and long-winded because it is aristocratic government, the two most pleasant aristocratic qualities being a love of literature and an unconsciousness of time. But all this amounts to the same conclusion of the matter. Frantic figures like Stiggins and Chadband were created out of the quietude of his religious preference. Wild creations like the Barnacles and the Bounderbys were produced in a kind of ecstasy of the ordinary, of the obvious in political justice. His monsters were made out of his level and his moderation, as the old monsters were made out of the level sea.

Such was the man of genius we must try to imagine; violently emotional, yet with a good judgment; pugnacious, but only when he thought himself oppressed; prone to think himself oppressed, yet not cynical about human motives. He was a man remarkably hard to understand or to reanimate. He almost always had reasons for his action; his error was that he always expounded them. Sometimes his nerve snapped; and then he was mad. Unless it did so he was quite unusually sane.

Such a rough sketch at least must suffice us in order to summarise his later years. Those years were occupied, of course, in two main additions to his previous activities. The first was the series of public readings and lectures which he now began to give systematically. The second was his successive editorship of *Household Words* and of *All the Year Round*. He was of a type that enjoys every new function and opportunity. He had been so many things in his life, a reporter, an actor, a conjuror, a poet. As he had enjoyed them all, so he enjoyed being a lecturer, and enjoyed being an editor. It is certain that his audiences (who sometimes stacked themselves so thick that they lay flat on the platform all round him) enjoyed his being a lecturer. It is not so certain that the sub-editors enjoyed his being an editor. But in both connections the main matter of importance is the effect on the permanent work of Dickens himself. The readings were important for this reason, that they fixed, as if by some public and pontifical pronouncement, what was Dickens's interpretation of Dickens's work. Such a knowledge is mere tradition, but it is very forcible. My own family has handed on to me, and I shall probably hand on to the next generation, a definite memory of how Dickens made his face suddenly like the face of an idiot in impersonating Mrs. Raddle's servant, Betsy. This does serve one of the permanent purposes of tradition; it does make it a little more difficult for any ingenious person to prove that Betsy was meant to be a brilliant satire on the over-cultivation of the intellect.

As for his relation to his two magazines, it is chiefly important, first for the admirable things that he wrote m the magazines himself (one cannot forbear to mention the inimitable monologue of the waiter in "Somebody's Luggage"), and secondly for the fact that in his capacity of editor he made one valuable discovery. He discovered Wilkie Collins. Wilkie Collins was the one man of unmistakable genius who has a certain affinity with Dickens; an affinity in this respect, that they both combine in a curious way a modern and cockney and even commonplace opinion about things with a huge elemental sympathy with strange oracles and spirits and old night. There were no two men in Mid-Victorian England, with their top-hats and umbrellas, more typical of its rationality and dull reform; and there were no two men who could touch them at a ghost-story. No two men would have more contempt for superstitions; and no two men could so create the superstitious thrill. Indeed, our modern mystics make a mistake when they wear long hair or loose ties to attract the spirits. The elves and the old gods when they revisit the earth really go straight for a dull top-hat. For it means simplicity, which the gods love.

Meanwhile his books, appearing from time to time, while as brilliant as ever, bore witness to that increasing tendency to a more careful and responsible treatment which we have remarked in the transition which culminated in "Bleak House." His next important book, "Hard Times," strikes an almost unexpected note of severity. The characters are indeed exaggerated but they are bitterly and deliberately exaggerated; they are not exaggerated with the old unconscious high spirits of Nicholas Nickleby or Martin Chuzzlewit. Dickens exaggerates Bounderby because he really hates him. He exaggerated Pecksniff because he really loved him. "Hard Times" is not one of the greatest books of Dickens; but it is perhaps in a sense one of his greatest monuments. It stamps and records the reality of Dickens's emotion on a great many things that were then considered unphilosophical grumblings, but which since have swelled into the immense phenomena of the socialist philosophy. To call Dickens a Socialist is a wild exaggeration; but the truth and peculiarity of his position might be expressed thus: that even when everybody thought that Liberalism meant individualism he was emphatically a Liberal and emphatically not an individualist. Or the truth might be better still stated in this manner: that he saw that there was a secret thing, called humanity, to which both extreme socialism and extreme individualism were profoundly and inexpressibly indifferent, and that this permanent and presiding humanity was the thing he happened to understand; he knew that individualism is nothing and non-individualism is nothing but the keeping of the commandment of man. He felt, as a novelist should, that the question is too much discussed as to whether a man is in favour of this or that scientific philosophy; that there is another question, whether the scientific philosophy is in favour of the man. That is why such books as “Hard Times” will remain always a part of the power and tradition of Dickens. He saw that economic systems are not things like the stars, but things like the lamp-posts, manifestations of the human mind, and things to be judged by the human heart.

Thenceforward until the end his books grow consistently graver, and as it were, more responsible; he improves as an artist if not always as a creator. “Little Dorrit” (published in 1857) is at once in some ways so much more subtle and in every way so much more sad than the rest of his work that it bores Dickensians and especially pleases George Gissing. It is the only one of the Dickens tales which could please Gissing, not only by its genius, but also by its atmosphere. There is something a little modern and a little sad, something also out of tune with the main trend of Dickens’s moral feeling, about the description of the character of Dorrit as actually and finally weakened by his wasting experiences, as not lifting any cry above the conquered years. It is but a faint fleck of shadow. But the illimitable white light of human hopefulness, of which I spoke at the beginning, is ebbing away, the work of the revolution is growing weaker everywhere; and the night of necessitarianism cometh when no man can work. For the first time in a book by Dickens perhaps we really do feel that the hero is forty-five. Clennam is certainly very much older than Mr. Pickwick.

This was indeed only a fugitive grey cloud; he went on to breezier operations. But whatever they were, they still had the note of the later days. They’ have a more cautious craftsmanship; they have a more mellow and a more mixed human sentiment. Shadows fell upon his page from the other and sadder figures out of the Victorian decline. A good instance of this is his next book, “The Tale of Two Cities” (1859). In dignity and eloquence it almost stands alone among the books by Dickens. But it also stands alone among his books in this respect, that it is not entirely by Dickens. It owes its inspiration avowedly to the passionate and cloudy pages of Carlyle’s “French Revolution.” And there is something quite essentially inconsistent between Carlyle’s disturbed and half-sceptical transcendentalism and the original school and spirit to which Dickens belonged, the lucid and laughing decisiveness of the old convinced and contented Radicalism. Hence the genius of Dickens cannot save him, just as the great genius of Carlyle could not save him from making a picture of the French Revolution, which was delicately and yet deeply erroneous. Both tend too much to represent it as a mere elemental outbreak of hunger or vengeance; they do not see enough that it was a war for intellectual principles, even for intellectual platitudes. We, the modern English, cannot easily understand the French Revolution, because we cannot easily understand the idea of bloody battle for pure common sense; we cannot understand common sense in arms and conquering. In modern England common sense appears to mean putting up with existing conditions. For us a practical politician really means a man who can be thoroughly trusted to do nothing at all; that is where his practicality comes in. The French feeling — the feeling at the back of the Revolution — was that the more sensible a man was, the more you must look out for slaughter.

In all the imitators of Carlyle, including Dickens, there is an obscure sentiment that the thing for which the Frenchmen died must have been something new and queer, a paradox, a strange idolatry. But when such blood ran in the streets, it was for the sake of a truism; when those cities were shaken to their foundations, they were shaken to their foundations by a truism.

I have mentioned this historical matter because it illustrates these later and more mingled influences which at once improve and as it were perplex the later work of Dickens. For Dickens had in his original mental composition capacities for understanding this cheery and sensible element in the French Revolution far better than Carlyle. The French Revolution was, among other things, French, and, so far as that goes, could never have a precise counterpart in so jolly and autochthonous an Englishman as

Charles Dickens. But there was a great deal of the actual and unbroken tradition of the Revolution itself in his early radical indictments; in his denunciation of the Fleet Prison there was a great deal of the capture of the Bastille. There was, above all, a certain reasonable impatience which was the essence of the old Republican, and which is quite unknown to the Revolutionist in modern Europe. The old Radical did not feel exactly that he was “in revolt”; he felt if anything that a number of idiotic institutions had revolted against reason and against him. Dickens, I say, had the revolutionary idea, though an English form of it, by clear and conscious inheritance; Carlyle had to rediscover the Revolution by a violence of genius and vision. If Dickens, then, took from Carlyle (as he said he did) his image of the Revolution, it does certainly mean that he had forgotten something of his own youth and come under the more complex influences of the end of the nineteenth century. His old hilarious and sentimental view of human nature seems for a moment dimmed in “Little Dorrit.” His old political simplicity has been slightly disturbed by Carlyle.

I repeat that this graver note is varied, but it remains a graver note. We see it struck, I think, with particular and remarkable success in “Great Expectations” (1860-61). This fine story is told with a consistency and quietude of individuality which is rare in Dickens. But so far had he travelled along the road of a heavier reality, that he even intended to give the tale an unhappy ending, making Pip lose Estella for ever; and he was only dissuaded from it by the robust romanticism of Bulwer Lytton. But the best part of the tale — the account of the vacillations of the hero between the humble life to which he owes everything, and the gorgeous life from which he expects something, touches a very true and somewhat tragic part of morals; for the great paradox of morality (the paradox to which only the religions have given an adequate expression) is that the very vilest kind of fault is exactly the most easy kind. We read in books and ballads about the wild fellow who might kill a man or smoke opium, but who would never stoop to lying or cowardice or to “anything mean.” But for actual human beings opium and slaughter have only occasional charm; the permanent human temptation is the temptation to be mean. The one standing probability is the probability of becoming a cowardly hypocrite. The circle of the traitors is the lowest of the abyss, and it is also the easiest to fall into. That is one of the ringing realities of the Bible, that it does not make its great men commit grand sins; it makes its great men (such as David and St. Peter) commit small sins and behave like sneaks.

Dickens has dealt with this easy descent of desertion, this silent treason, with remarkable accuracy in the account of the indecisions of Pip. It contains a good suggestion of that weak romance which is the root of all snobbishness: that the mystery which belongs to patrician life excites us more than the open, even the indecent virtues of the humble. Pip is keener about Miss Havisham, who may mean well by him, than about Joe Gargery, who evidently does. All this is very strong and wholesome; but it is still a little stern. “Our Mutual Friend,” 1864, brings us back a little into his merrier and more normal manner; some of the satire, such as that upon Veneering’s election, is in the best of his old style, so airy and fanciful, yet hitting so suddenly and so hard. But even here we find the fuller and more serious treatment of psychology; notably in the two facts that he creates a really human villain, Bradley Headstone, and also one whom we might call a really human hero, Eugene, if it were not that he is much too human to be called a hero at all. It has been said (invariably by cads) that Dickens never described a gentleman; it is like saying that he never described a zebra. A gentleman is a very rare animal among human creatures, and to people like Dickens, interested in all humanity, not a supremely important one. But in Eugene Wrayburne he does, whether consciously or not, turn that accusation with a vengeance. For he not only describes a gentleman but describes the inner weakness and peril that belong to a gentleman, the devil that is always rending the entrails of an idle and agreeable man. In Eugene’s purposeless pursuit of Lizzie Hexam, in his yet more purposeless torturing of Bradley Headstone, the author has marvellously realised that singular empty obstinacy that drives the whims and pleasures of a leisured class. He sees that there is nothing that such a man more stubbornly adheres to, than the thing that he does not particularly want to do. We are still in serious psychology.

His last book represents yet another new departure, dividing him from the chaotic Dickens of days long before. His last book is not merely an attempt to improve his power of construction in a story: it is an attempt to rely entirely on that power of construction. It not only has a plot, it is a plot. “The Mystery of Edwin Drood,” 1870, was in such a sense, perhaps the most ambitious book that Dickens ever attempted. It is, as every one knows, a detective story, and certainly a very successful one, as is attested by the tumult of discussion as to its proper solution. In this, quite apart from its unfinished state, it stands, I think, alone among the author's works. Elsewhere, if he introduced a mystery, he seldom took the trouble to make it very mysterious. “Bleak House” is finished, but if it were only half finished I think anyone would guess that Lady Dedlock and Nemo had sinned in the past. “Edwin Drood” is not finished; for in the very middle of it Dickens died.

He had altogether overstrained himself in a last lecturing tour in America. He was a man in whom any serious malady would naturally make very rapid strides; for he had the temper of an irrational invalid. I have said before that there was in his curious character something that was feminine. Certainly there was nothing more entirely feminine than this, that he worked because he was tired. Fatigue bred in him a false and feverish industry, and his case increased, like the case of a man who drinks to cure the effects of drink. He died in 1870 and the whole nation mourned him as no public man has ever been mourned; for prime ministers and princes were private persons compared with Dickens. He had been a great popular king, like a king of some more primal age whom his people could come and see, giving judgment under an oak tree. He had in essence held great audiences of millions, and made proclamations to more than one of the nations of the earth. His obvious omnipresence in every part of public life was like the omnipresence of the sovereign. His secret omnipresence in every house and hut of private life was more like the omnipresence of a deity. Compared with that popular leadership all the fusses of the last forty years are diversions in idleness. Compared with such a case as his it may be said that we play with our politicians, and manage to endure our authors. We shall never have again such a popularity until we have again a people.

He left behind him this almost sombre fragment, “The Mystery of Edwin Drood.” As one turns it over the tragic element of its truncation mingles somewhat with an element of tragedy in the thing itself; the passionate and predestined Landless, or the half maniacal Jasper carving devils out of his own heart. The workmanship of it is very fine; the right hand has not only not lost, but is still gaining its cunning. But as we turn the now enigmatic pages the thought creeps into us again which I have suggested earlier, and which is never far off the mind of a true lover of Dickens. Had he lost or gained by the growth of technique and probability in his later work? His later characters were more like men; but were not his earlier characters more like immortals? He has become able to perform a social scene so that it is possible at any rate; but where is that Dickens who once performed the impossible? Where is that young poet who created such majors and architects as Nature will never dare to create? Dickens learnt to describe daily life as Thackeray and Jane Austen could describe it; but Thackeray could not have thought such a thought as Crummles; and it is painful to think of Miss Austen attempting to imagine Mantalini. After all, we feel there are many able novelists; but there is only one Dickens, and whither has he fled?

He was alive to the end. And in this last dark and secretive story of Edwin Drood he makes one splendid and staggering appearance, like a magician saying farewell to mankind. In the centre of this otherwise reasonable and rather melancholy book, this grey story of a good clergyman and the quiet Cloisterham Towers, Dickens has calmly inserted one entirely delightful and entirely insane passage. I mean the frantic and inconceivable epitaph of Mrs. Sapsea, that which describes her as “the reverential wife” of Thomas Sapsea, speaks of her consistency in “looking up to him,” and ends with the words, spaced out so admirably on the tombstone, “Stranger pause. And ask thyself this question, Canst thou do likewise? If not, with a blush retire.” Not the wildest tale in Pickwick contains such an impossibility as that; Dickens dare scarcely have introduced it, even as one of Jingle’s lies. In no human churchyard will you find that invaluable tombstone; indeed, you could scarcely find it in any world where there are churchyards. You could scarcely have such immortal folly as that in a world where there is also death. Mr. Sapsea is one of the golden things stored up for us in a better world.

Yes, there were many other Dickenses: a clever Dickens, an industrious Dickens, a public-spirited Dickens; but this was the great one. This last outbreak of insane humour reminds us wherein lay his power and his supremacy. The praise of such beatific buffoonery should be the final praise, the ultimate word in his honour. The wild epitaph of Mrs. Sapsea should be the serious epitaph of Dickens.

CHAPTER X

THE GREAT DICKENS CHARACTERS

All criticism tends too much to become criticism of criticism; and the reason is very evident. It is that criticism of creation is so very staggering a thing. We see this in the difficulty of criticising any artistic creation. We see it again in the difficulty of criticising that creation which is spelt with a capital C. The pessimists who attack the Universe are always under this disadvantage. They have an exhilarating consciousness that they could make the sun and moon better; but they also have the depressing consciousness that they could not make the sun and moon at all. A man looking at a hippopotamus may sometimes be tempted to regard a hippopotamus as an enormous mistake; but he is also bound to confess that a fortunate inferiority prevents him personally from making such mistakes. It is neither a blasphemy nor an exaggeration to say that we feel something of the same difficulty in judging of the very creative element in human literature. And this is the first and last dignity of Dickens; that he was a creator. He did not point out things, he made them. We may disapprove of Mr. Guppy, but we recognise him as a creation flung down like a miracle out of an upper sphere; we can pull him to pieces, but we could not have put him together. We can destroy Mrs. Gamp in our wrath, but we could not have made her in our joy. Under this disadvantage any book about Dickens must definitely labour. Real primary creation (such as the sun or the birth of a child) calls forth not criticism, not appreciation, but a kind of incoherent gratitude. This is why most hymns about God are bad; and this is why most eulogies on Dickens are bad. The eulogists of the divine and of the human creator are alike inclined to appear sentimentalists because they are talking about something as very real. In the same way love-letters always sound florid and artificial because they are about something real.

Any chapter such as this chapter must therefore in a sense be inadequate. There is no way of dealing properly with the ultimate greatness of Dickens, except by offering sacrifice to him as a god; and this is opposed to the etiquette of our time. But something can perhaps be done in the way of suggesting what was the quality of this creation. But even in considering its quality we ought to remember that quality is not the whole question. One of the godlike things about Dickens is his quantity, his quantity as such, the enormous output, the incredible fecundity of his invention, I have said a moment ago that not one of us could have invented Mr. Guppy. But even if we could have stolen Mr. Guppy from Dickens we have still to confront the fact that Dickens would have been able to invent another quite inconceivable character to take his place. Perhaps we could have created Mr. Guppy; but the effort would certainly have exhausted us; we should be ever afterwards wheeled about in a bath-chair at Bournemouth.

Nevertheless there is something that is worth saying about the quality of Dickens. At the very beginning of this review I remarked that the reader must be in a mood, at least, of democracy. To some it may have sounded irrelevant; but the Revolution was as much behind all the books of the nineteenth century as the Catholic religion (let us say) was behind all the colours and carving of the Middle Ages. Another great name of the nineteenth century will afford an evidence of this; and will also bring us most sharply to the problem of the literary quality of Dickens.

Of all these nineteenth-century writers there is none, in the noblest sense, more democratic than Walter Scott. As this may be disputed, and as it is relevant, I will expand the remark. There are two rooted spiritual realities out of which grow all kinds of democratic conception or sentiment of human equality. There are two things in which all men are manifestly and unmistakably equal. They are not equally clever or equally muscular or equally fat, as the sages of the modern reaction (with piercing insight) perceive. But this is a spiritual certainty, that all men are tragic. And this, again, is an equally sublime spiritual certainty, that all men are comic. No special and private sorrow can be so dreadful as the fact of having to die. And no freak or deformity can be so funny as the mere fact of having two legs. Every man is important if he loses his life; and every man is funny if he loses his hat, and has to run after it. And the universal test everywhere of whether a thing is popular, of the people, is whether it employs vigorously these extremes of the tragic and the comic. Shelley, for instance, was an aristocrat, if ever there was one in this world. He was a Republican, but he was not a democrat: in his poetry there is every perfect quality except this pungent and popular stab. For the tragic and the comic you must go, say, to Burns, a poor man. And all over the world, the folk literature, the popular literature, is the same. It consists of very dignified sorrow and very undignified fun. Its sad tales are of broken hearts; its happy tales are of broken heads.

These, I say, are two roots of democratic reality. But they have in more civilised literature, a more civilised embodiment of form. In literature such as that of the nineteenth century the two elements appear somewhat thus. Tragedy becomes a profound sense of human dignity. The other and jollier element becomes a delighted sense of human variety. The first supports equality by saying that all men are equally sublime. The second supports equality by observing that all men are equally interesting.

In this democratic aspect of the interest and variety of all men, there is, of course, no democrat so great as Dickens. But in the other matter, in the idea of the dignity of all men, I repeat that there is no democrat so great as Scott. This fact, which is the moral and enduring magnificence of Scott, has been astonishingly overlooked. His rich and dramatic effects are gained in almost every case by some grotesque or beggarly figure rising into a human pride and rhetoric. The common man, in the sense of the paltry man, becomes the common man in the sense of the universal man. He declares his humanity. For the meanest of all the modernities has been the notion that the heroic is an oddity or variation, and that the things that unite us are merely flat or foul. The common things are terrible and startling, death, for instance, and first love: the things that are common are the things that are not commonplace. Into such high and central passions the comic Scott character will suddenly rise. Remember the firm and almost stately answer of the preposterous Nicol Jarvie when Helen Macgregor seeks to browbeat him into condoning lawlessness and breaking his bourgeois decency. That speech is a great monument of the middle class. Molière made M. Jourdain talk prose; but Scott made him talk poetry. Think of the rising and rousing voice of the dull and gluttonous Athelstane when he answers and overwhelms De Bracy. Think of the proud appeal of the old beggar in the “Antiquary” when he rebukes the duellists. Scott was fond of describing kings in disguise. But all his characters are kings in disguise. He was, with all his errors, profoundly possessed with the old religious conception, the only possible democratic basis, the idea that man himself is a king in disguise.

In all this Scott, though a Royalist and a Tory, had in the strangest way, the heart of the Revolution. For instance, he regarded rhetoric, the art of the orator, as the immediate weapon of the oppressed. All his poor men make grand speeches, as they did in the Jacobin Club, which Scott would have so much detested. And it is odd to reflect that he was, as an author, giving free speech to fictitious rebels while he was, as a stupid politician, denying it to real ones. But the point for us here is this that all this popular sympathy of his rests on the graver basis, on the dark dignity of man. “Can you find no way?” asks Sir Arthur Wardour of the beggar when they are cut off by the tide. “I’ll give you a farm . . . I’ll make you rich.” . . . “Our riches will soon be equal,” says the beggar, and looks out across the advancing sea.

Now, I have dwelt on this strong point of Scott because it is the best illustration of the one weak point of Dickens. Dickens had little or none of this sense of the concealed sublimity of every separate man. Dickens’s sense of democracy was entirely of the other kind; it rested on the other of the two supports of which I have spoken. It rested on the sense that all men were wildly interesting and wildly varied. When a Dickens character becomes excited he becomes more and more himself. He does not, like the Scott beggar, turn more and more into man. As he rises he grows more and more into a gargoyle or grotesque. He does not, like the fine speaker in Scott, grow more classical as he grows more passionate, more universal as he grows more intense. The thing can only be illustrated by a special case. Dickens did more than once, of course, make one of his quaint or humble characters assert himself in a serious crisis or defy the powerful. There is, for instance, the quite admirable scene in which Susan Nipper (one of the greatest of Dickens’s achievements) faces and rebukes Mr. Dombey. But it is still true (and quite appropriate in its own place and manner) that Susan Nipper remains a purely comic character throughout her speech, and even grows more comic as she goes on. She is more serious than usual in her meaning, but not more serious in her style. Dickens keeps the natural diction of Nipper, but makes her grow more Nipperish as she grows more warm. But Scott keeps the natural diction of Baillie Jarvie, but insensibly sobers and uplifts the style until it reaches a plain and appropriate eloquence. This plain and appropriate eloquence was (except in a few places at the end of “Pickwick”) almost unknown to Dickens. Whenever he made comic characters talk sentiment comically, as in the instance of Susan, it was a success, but an avowedly extravagant success. Whenever he made comic characters talk sentiment seriously it was an extravagant failure. Humour was his medium; his only way of approaching emotion. Wherever you do not get humour, you get unconscious humour.

As I have said elsewhere in this book Dickens was deeply and radically English; the most English of our great writers. And there is something very English in this contentment with a grotesque democracy; and in this absence of the eloquence and elevation of Scott. The English democracy is the most humorous democracy in the world. The Scotch democracy is the most dignified, while the whole abandon and satiric genius of the English populace come from its being quite undignified in every way. A comparison of the two types might be found, for instance, by putting a Scotch Labour Leader like Mr. Keir Hardie alongside an English Labour Leader like Mr. Will Crooks. Both are good men, honest, and responsible and compassionate; but we can feel that the Scotchman carries himself seriously and universally, the Englishman personally and with an obstinate humour. Mr. Keir Hardie wishes to hold up his head as Man, Mr. Crooks wishes to follow his nose as Crooks. Mr. Keir Hardie is very like a poor man in Walter Scott. Mr. Crooks is very like a poor man in Dickens.

Dickens then had this English feeling of a grotesque democracy. By that is more properly meant a vastly varying democracy. The intoxicating variety of men — that was his vision and conception of human brotherhood. And certainly it is a great part of human brotherhood. In one sense things can only be equal if they are entirely different. Thus, for instance, people talk with a quite astonishing gravity about the inequality or equality of the sexes; as if there could possibly be any inequality between a lock and a key. Wherever there is no element of variety, wherever all the items literally have an identical aim, there is at once and of necessity inequality. A woman is only inferior to man in the matter of being not so manly; she is inferior in nothing else. Man is inferior to woman in so far as he is not a woman; there is no other reason. And the same applies in some degree to all genuine differences. It is a great mistake to suppose that love unites and unifies men. Love diversifies them, because love is directed towards individuality. The thing that really unites men and makes them like to each other is hatred. Thus, for instance, the more we love Germany the more pleased we shall be that Germany should be something different from ourselves, should keep her own ritual and conviviality and we ours. But the more we hate Germany the more we shall copy German guns and German fortifications in order to be armed against Germany. The more modern nations detest each other the more meekly they follow each other; for all competition is in its nature only a furious plagiarism. As competition means always similarity, it is equally true that similarity always means inequality. If everything is trying to be green, some things will be greener than others; but there is an immortal and indestructible equality between green and red. Something of the same kind of irrefutable equality exists between the violent and varying creations of such a writer as Dickens. They are all equally ecstatic fulfilments of a separate line of development. It would be hard to say that there could be any comparison or inequality, let us say between Mr. Sapsea and Mr. Elijah Pogram. They are both in the same difficulty; they can neither of them contrive to exist in this world; they are both too big for the gate of birth.

Of the high virtue of this variation I shall speak more adequately in a moment; but certainly this love of mere variation (which I have contrasted with the classicism of Scott) is the only intelligent statement of the common case against the exaggeration of Dickens. This is the meaning, the only sane or endurable meaning, which people have in their minds when they say that Dickens is a mere caricaturist. They do not mean merely that Uncle Pumblechook does not exist. A fictitious character ought not to be a person who exists; he ought to be an entirely new combination, an addition to the creatures already existing on the earth. They do not mean that Uncle Pumblechook could not exist; for on that obviously they can have no knowledge whatever. They do not mean that Uncle Pumblechook's utterances are selected and arranged so as to bring out his essential Pumblechookery; to say that is simply to say that he occurs in a work of art. But what they do really mean is this, and there is an element of truth in it. They mean that Dickens nowhere makes the reader feel that Pumblechook has any kind of fundamental human dignity at all. It is nowhere suggested that Pumblechook will some day die. He is felt rather as one of the idle and evil fairies, who are innocuous and yet malignant, and who live for ever because they never really live at all. This dehumanised vitality, this fantasy, this irresponsibility of creation, does in some sense truly belong to Dickens. It is the lower side of his hilarious human variety. But now we come to the higher side of his human variety, and it is far more difficult to state.

Mr. George Gissing, from the point of view of the passing intellectualism of our day, has made (among his many wise tributes to Dickens) a characteristic complaint about him. He has said that Dickens, with all his undoubted sympathy for the lower classes, never made a working man, a poor man, specifically and highly intellectual. An exception does exist, which he must at least have realised — a wit, a diplomatist, a great philosopher. I mean, of course, Mr. Weller. Broadly, however, the accusation has a truth, though it is a truth that Mr. Gissing did not grasp in its entirety. It is not only true that Dickens seldom made a poor character what we call intellectual; it is also true that he seldom made any character what we call intellectual. Intellectualism was not at all present to his imagination. What was present to his imagination was character — a thing which is not only more important than intellect, but is also much more entertaining. When some English moralists write about the importance of having character, they appear to mean only the importance of having a dull character. But character is brighter than wit, and much more complex than sophistry. The whole superiority of the democracy of Dickens over the democracy of such a man as Gissing lies exactly in the fact that Gissing would have liked to prove that poor men could instruct themselves and could instruct others. It was of final importance to Dickens that poor men could amuse themselves and could amuse him. He troubled little about the mere education of that life; he declared two essential things about it — that it was laughable, and that it was livable. The humble characters of Dickens do not amuse each other with epigrams; they amuse each other with themselves. The present that each man brings in hand is his own incredible personality. In the most sacred sense, and in the most literal sense of the phrase, he “gives himself away. Now, the man who gives himself away does the last act of generosity; he is like a martyr, a lover, or a monk. But he is also almost certainly what we commonly call a fool.

The key of the great characters of Dickens is that they are all great fools. There is the same difference between a great fool and a small fool as there is between a great poet and a small poet. The great fool is a being who is above wisdom rather than below it. That element of greatness of which I spoke at the beginning of this book is nowhere more clearly indicated than in such characters. A man can be entirely great while he is entirely foolish. We see this in the epic heroes, such as Achilles. Nay, a man can be entirely great because he is entirely foolish. We see this in all the great comic characters of all the great comic writers of whom Dickens was the last. Bottom the Weaver is great because he is foolish; Mr. Toots is great because he is foolish. The thing I mean can be observed, for instance, in innumerable actual characters. Which of us has not known, for instance, a great rustic? — a character so incurably characteristic that he seemed to break through all canons about cleverness or stupidity; we do not know whether he is an enormous idiot or an enormous philosopher; we know only that he is enormous, like a hill. These great, grotesque characters are almost entirely to be found where Dickens found them — among the poorer classes. The gentry only attain this greatness by going slightly mad. But who has not known an unfathomably personal old nurse? Who has not known an abysmal butler? The truth is that our public life consists almost exclusively of small men. Our public men are small because they have to prove that they are in the commonplace interpretation clever, because they have to pass examinations, to learn codes of manners, to imitate a fixed type. It is in private life that we find the great characters. They are too great to get into the public world. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a great man to enter into the kingdoms of the earth. The truly great and gorgeous personality, he who talks as no one else could talk and feels with an elementary fire, you will never find this man on any cabinet bench, in any literary circle, at any society dinner. Least of all will you find him in artistic society; he is utterly unknown in Bohemia. He is more than clever, he is amusing. He is more than successful, he is alive. You will find him stranded here and there in all sorts of unknown positions, almost always in unsuccessful positions. You will find him adrift as an impecunious commercial traveller like Micawber. You will find him but one of a batch of silly clerks, like Swiveller. You will find him as an unsuccessful actor, like Crummles. You will find him as an unsuccessful doctor, like Sawyer. But you will always find this rich and reeking personality where Dickens found it — among the poor. For the glory of this world is a very small and priggish affair, and these men are too large to get in line with it. They are too strong to conquer.

It is impossible to do justice to these figures because the essential of them is their multiplicity. The whole point of Dickens is that he not only made them, but made them by myriads; that he stamped his foot, and armies came out of the earth. But let us, for the sake of showing the true Dickens method, take one of them, a very sublime one, Toots. If affords a good example of the real work of Dickens, which was the revealing of a certain grotesque greatness inside an obscure and even unattractive type. It reveals the great paradox of all spiritual things; that the inside is always larger than the outside.

Toots is a type that we all know as well as we know chimney-pots. And of all conceivable human figures he is apparently the most futile and the most dull. He is the blockhead who hangs on at a private school, overgrown and under-developed. He is always backward in his lessons, but forward in certain cheap ways of the world; he can smoke before he can spell. Toots is a perfect and pungent picture of the wretched youth. Toots has, as this youth always has, a little money of his own; enough to waste in a semi-dissipation he does not enjoy, and in a gaping regard for sports in which he could not possibly excel. Toots has, as this youth always has, bits of surreptitious finery, in. his case the incomparable ring. In Toots, above all, is exactly rendered the central and most startling contradiction; the contrast between a jauntiness and a certain impudence of the attire, with the profound shame and sheepishness of the visage and the character. In him, too, is expressed the larger contrast between the external gaiety of such a lad's occupations, and the infinite, disconsolate sadness of his empty eyes. This is Toots;. we know him, we pity him, and we avoid him. Schoolmasters deal with him in despair or in a heart-breaking patience. His family is vague about him. His low-class hangers-on (like the Game Chicken) lead him by the nose. The very parasites that live on him despise him. But Dickens does not despise him. Without denying one of the dreary details which make us avoid the man, Dickens makes him a man whom we long to meet. He does not gloss over one of his dismal deficiencies, but he makes them seem suddenly like violent virtues that we would go to the world's end to see. Without altering one fact, he manages to alter the whole atmosphere, the whole universe of Toots. He makes us not only like, but love, not only love, but reverence this little dunce and cad. The power to do this is a power truly and literally to be called divine.

For this is the very wholesome point. Dickens does not alter Toots in any vital point. The thing he does alter is us. He makes us lively where we were bored, kind where we were cruel, and above all, free for an universal human laughter where we were cramped in a small competition about that sad and solemn tiling, the intellect. His enthusiasm fills us, as does the love of God, with a glorious shame; after all, he has only found in Toots what we might have found for ourselves. He has only made us as much interested in Toots as Toots is in himself. He does not alter the proportions of Toots; he alters only the scale; we seem as if we were staring at a rat risen to the stature of an elephant. Hitherto we have passed him by; now we feel that nothing could induce us to pass him by; that is the nearest way of putting the truth. He has not been whitewashed in the least; he has not been depicted as any cleverer than he is. He has been turned from a small fool into a great fool. We know Toots is not clever; but we are not inclined to quarrel with Toots because he is not clever. We are more likely to quarrel with cleverness because it is not Toots. All the examinations he could not pass, all the schools he could not enter, all the temporary tests of brain and culture which surrounded him shall pass, and Toots shall remain like a mountain.

It may be noticed that the great artists always choose great fools rather than great intellectuals to embody humanity. Hamlet does express the æsthetic dreams and the bewilderments of the intellect; but Bottom the Weaver expresses them much better. In the same manner Toots expresses certain permanent dignities in human nature more than any of Dickens's more dignified characters can do it. For instance, Toots expresses admirably the enduring fear, which is the very essence of falling in love. When Toots is invited by Florence to come in, when he longs to come in, but still stays out, he is embodying a sort of insane and perverse humility which is elementary in the lover.

There is an apostolic injunction to suffer fools gladly. We always lay the stress on the word "suffer," and interpret the passage as one urging resignation. It might be better, perhaps, to lay the stress upon the word "gladly," and make our familiarity with fools a delight, and almost a dissipation. Nor is it necessary that our pleasure in fools (or at least in great and godlike fools) should be merely satiric or cruel. The great fool is he in whom we cannot tell which is the conscious and which the unconscious humour; we laugh with him and laugh at him at the same time. An obvious instance is that of ordinary and happy marriage. A man and a woman cannot live together without having against each other a kind of everlasting joke. Each has discovered that the other is a fool, but a great fool. This largeness, this grossness and gorgeousness of folly is the thing which we all find about those with whom we are in intimate contact; and it is the one enduring basis of affection, and even of respect. When we know an individual named Tomkins, we know that he has succeeded where all others have failed; he has succeeded in being Tomkins. Just so Mr. Toots succeeded; he was defeated in all scholastic examinations, but he was the victor in that visionary battle in which unknown competitors vainly tried to be Toots.

If we are to look for lessons, here at least is the last and deepest lesson of Dickens. It is in our own daily life that we are to look for the portents and the prodigies. This is the truth, not merely of the fixed figures of our life;

the wife, the husband, the fool that fills the sky. It is true of the whole stream and substance of our daily experience; every instant we reject a great fool merely because he is foolish. Every day we neglect Tootses and Swivellers, Guppys and Joblings, Simmerys and Flashers. Every day we lose the last sight of Jobling and Chuckster, the Analytical Chemist, or the Marchioness. Every day we are missing a monster whom we might easily love, and an imbecile whom we should certainly admire.

This is the real gospel of Dickens; the inexhaustible opportunities offered by the liberty and the variety of man. Compared with this life, all public life, all fame, all wisdom, is by its nature cramped and cold and small. For on that defined and lighted public stage men are of necessity forced to profess one set of accomplishments, to rise to one rigid standard. It is the utterly unknown people who can grow in all directions like an exuberant tree. It is in our interior lives that we find that people are too much themselves. It is in our private life that we find them swelling into the enormous contours, and taking on the colours of caricature. Many of us live publicly with featureless public puppets, images of the small public abstractions. It is when we pass our own private gate, and open our own secret door, that we step into the land of the giants.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE ALLEGED OPTIMISM OF DICKENS

In one of the plays of the decadent period, an intellectual expressed the atmosphere of his epoch by referring to Dickens as “a vulgar optimist.” I have in a previous chapter suggested something of the real strangeness of such a term. After all, the main matter of astonishment (or rather of admiration) is that optimism should be vulgar. In a world in which physical distress is almost the common lot, we actually complain that happiness is too common. In a world in which the majority is physically miserable we actually complain of the sameness of praise; we are bored with the abundance of approval. When we consider what the conditions of the vulgar really are, it is difficult to imagine a stranger or more splendid tribute to humanity than such a phrase as vulgar optimism. It is as if one spoke of “vulgar martyrdom” or “common crucifixion.”

First, however, let it be said frankly that there is a foundation for the charge against Dickens which is implied in the phrase about vulgar optimism. It does not concern itself with Dickens’s confidence in the value of existence and the intrinsic victory of virtue; that is not optimism but religion. It is not concerned with his habit of making bright occasions bright, and happy stories happy; that is not optimism, but literature. Nor is it concerned even with his peculiar genius for the description of an almost bloated joviality; that is not optimism, it is simply Dickens. With all these higher variations of optimism I deal elsewhere. But over and above all these there is a real sense in which Dickens laid himself open to the accusation of a vulgar optimism, and I desire to put the admission of this first, before the discussion that follows. Dickens did have a disposition to make his characters at all costs happy, or, to speak more strictly, he had a disposition to make them comfortable rather than happy. He had a sort of literary hospitality; he too often treated his characters as if they were his guests. From a host is always expected, and always ought to be expected as long as human civilisation is healthy, a strictly physical benevolence, if you will, a kind of coarse benevolence. Food and fire and such things should always be the symbols of the man entertaining men; because they are things which all men beyond question have in common. But something more than this is needed from a man who is imagining and making men, the artist, the man who is not receiving men, but rather sending them forth.

As I shall remark in a moment in the matter of the Dickens villains, it is not true that he made every one thus at home. But he did do it to a certain wide class of incongruous characters, he did it to all who had been in any way unfortunate. It had needed its origin (a very beautiful origin) in his realisation of how much a little pleasure was to such people. He knew well that the greatest happiness that has been known since Eden is the happiness of the unhappy. So far he is admirable. And as long as he was describing the ecstasy of the poor, the borderland between pain and pleasure, he was at his highest. Nothing that has ever been written about human delights, no Earthly Paradise, no Utopia has ever come so near the quick nerve of happiness as his descriptions of the rare extravagances of the poor; such an admirable description, for instance, as that of Kit Nubbles taking his family to the theatre. For he seizes on the real source of the whole pleasure; a holy fear. Kit tells the waiter to bring the beer. And the waiter, instead of saying, “Did you address that language to me,” said, “Pot of beer, sir; yes, sir.” That internal and quivering humility of Kit is the only way to enjoy life or banquets; and the fear of the waiter is the beginning of dining. People in this mood “take their pleasures sadly”; which is the only way of taking them at all.

So far Dickens is supremely right. As long as he was dealing with such penury and such festivity his touch was almost invariably sure. But when he came to more difficult cases, to people who for one reason or another could not be cured with one good dinner, he did develop this other evil, this genuinely vulgar optimism of which I speak. And the mark of it is this: that he gave the characters a comfort that had no especial connection with themselves; he threw comfort at them like alms. There are cases at the end of his stories in which his kindness to his characters is a careless and insolent kindness. He loses his real charity and adopts the charity of the Charity Organisation Society; the charity that is not kind, the charity that is puffed up, and that does behave itself unseemly. At the end of some of his stories he deals out his characters a kind of out-door relief.

I will give two instances. The whole meaning of the character of Mr. Micawber is that a man can be always almost rich by constantly expecting riches. The lesson is a really important one in our sweeping modern sociology. We talk of the man whose life is a failure; but Micawber’s life never is a failure, because it is always a crisis. We think constantly of the man who if he looked back would see that his existence was unsuccessful; but Micawber never does look back; he always looks forward, because the bailiff is coming to-morrow. You cannot say he is defeated, for his absurd battle never ends; he cannot despair of life, for he is so much occupied in living. All this is of immense importance in the understanding of the poor; it is worth all the slum novelists that ever insulted democracy. But how did it happen that the man who created this Micawber could pension him off at the end of the story and make him a successful colonial mayor? Micawber never did succeed, never ought to succeed; his kingdom is not of this world. But this is an excellent instance of Dickens's disposition to make his characters grossly and incongruously comfortable. There is another instance in the same book. Dora, the first wife of David Copperfield, is a very genuine and amusing figure; she has certainly far more force of character than Agnes. She represents the infinite and divine irrationality of the human heart. What possessed Dickens to make her such a dehumanised prig as to recommend her husband to marry another woman? One could easily respect a husband who after time and development made such a marriage, but surely not a wife who desired it. If Dora had died hating Agnes we should know that everything was right, and that God would reconcile the irreconcilable. When Dora dies recommending Agnes we know that everything is wrong, at least if hypocrisy and artificiality and moral vulgarity are wrong. There, again, Dickens yields to a mere desire to give comfort. He wishes to pile up pillows round Dora; and he smothers her with them, like Othello.

This is the real vulgar optimism of Dickens: it does exist; and I have deliberately put it first. Let us admit that Dickens's mind was far too much filled with pictures of satisfaction and cosiness and repose. Let us admit that he thought principally of the pleasures of the oppressed classes; let us admit that it hardly cost him any artistic pang to make out human beings as much happier than they are. Let us admit all this, and a curious fact remains.

For it was this too easily contented Dickens, this man with cushions at his back and (it sometimes seems) cotton wool in his ears; it was this happy dreamer, this vulgar optimist who alone of modern writers did really destroy some of the wrongs he hated and bring about some of the reforms he desired. Dickens did help to pull down the debtors' prisons; and if he was too much of an optimist he was quite enough of a destroyer. Dickens did drive Squeers out of his Yorkshire den; and if Dickens was too contented, it was more than Squeers was. Dickens did leave his mark on parochialism, on nursing, on funerals, on public executions, on workhouses, on the Court of Chancery. These things were altered; they are different. It may be that such reforms are not adequate remedies; that is another question altogether. The next sociologists may think these old Radical reforms quite narrow or accidental. But such as they were, the old Radicals got them done; and the new sociologists cannot get anything done at all. And in the practical doing of them Dickens played a solid and quite demonstrable part; that is the plain matter that concerns us here. If Dickens was an optimist he was an uncommonly active and useful kind of optimist. If Dickens was a sentimentalist he was a very practical sentimentalist.

And the reason of this is one that goes deep into Dickens's social reform, and like every other real and desirable thing, involves a kind of mystical contradiction. If we are to save the oppressed, we must have two apparently antagonistic emotions in us at the same time. We must think the oppressed man intensely miserable, and at the same time intensely attractive and important. We must insist with violence upon his degradation; we must insist with the same violence upon his dignity. For if we relax by one inch the one assertion, men will say he does not need saving. And if we relax by one inch the other assertion, men will say he is not worth saving. The optimists will say that reform is needless. The pessimists will say that reform is hopeless. We must apply both simultaneously to the same oppressed man; we must say that he is a worm and a god; and we must thus lay ourselves open to the accusation (or the compliment) of transcendentalism. This is, indeed, the strongest argument for the religious conception of life. If the dignity of man is an earthly dignity we shall be tempted to deny his earthly degradation. If it is a heavenly dignity we can admit the earthly degradation with all the candour of Zola. If we are idealists about the other world we can be realists about this world. But that is not here the point. What is quite evident is that if a logical praise of the poor man is pushed too far, and if a logical distress about him is pushed too far, either will involve wreckage to the central paradox of reform. If the poor man is made too admirable he ceases to be pitiable; if the poor man is made too pitiable he becomes merely contemptible. There is a school of smug optimists who will deny that he is a poor man. There is a school of scientific pessimists who will deny that he is a man.

Out of this perennial contradiction arises the fact that there are always two types of the reformer. The first we may call for convenience the pessimistic, the second the optimistic reformer. One dwells upon the fact that souls are being lost; the other dwells upon the fact that they are worth saving. Both, of course, are (so far as that is concerned) quite right, but they naturally tend to a difference of method, and sometimes to a difference of perception. The pessimistic reformer points out the good elements that oppression has destroyed; the optimistic reformer, with an even fiercer joy, points out the good elements that it has not destroyed. It is the case for the first reformer that slavery has made men slavish. It is the case for the second reformer that slavery has not made men slavish. The first describes how bad men are under bad conditions. The second describes how good men are under bad conditions. Of the first class of writers, for instance, is Gorky. Of the second class of writers is Dickens.

But here we must register a real and somewhat startling fact. In the face of all apparent probability, it is certainly true that the optimistic reformer reforms much more completely than the pessimistic reformer. People produce violent changes by being contented, by being far too contented. The man who said that “revolutions are not made with rose-water” was obviously inexperienced in practical human affairs. Men like Rousseau and Shelley do make revolutions, and do make them with rose-water; that is, with a too rosy and sentimental view of human goodness. Figures that come before and create convulsion and change (for instance, the central figure of the New Testament) always have the air of walking in an unnatural sweetness and calm. They give us their peace ultimately in blood and battle and division; not as the world giveth give they unto us.

Nor is the real reason of the triumph of the too-contented reformer particularly difficult to define. He triumphs because he keeps alive in the human soul an invincible sense of the thing being worth doing, of the war being worth winning, of the people being worth their deliverance. I remember that Mr. William Archer, some time ago, published in one of his interesting series of interviews, an interview with Mr. Thomas Hardy. That powerful writer was represented as saying, in the course of the conversation, that he did not wish at the particular moment to define his opinion with regard to the ultimate problem of whether life itself was worth living. There are, he said, hundreds of remediable evils in this world. When we have remedied all these (such was his argument), it will be time enough to ask whether existence itself under its best possible conditions is valuable or desirable. Here we have presented, with a considerable element of what can only be called unconscious humour, the plain reason of the failure of the pessimist as a reformer. Mr. Hardy is asking us, I will not say to buy a pig in a poke; he is asking us to buy a poke on the remote chance of there being a pig in it. When we have for some few frantic centuries tortured ourselves to save mankind, it will then be “time enough” to discuss whether they can possibly be saved. When, in the case of infant mortality, for example, we have exhausted ourselves with the earthshaking efforts required to save the life of every individual baby, it will then be time enough to consider whether every individual baby would not have been happier dead. We are to remove mountains and bring the millennium, because then we can have a quiet moment to discuss whether the millennium is at all desirable. Here we have the low-water mark of the impotence of the sad reformer. And here we have the reason of the paradoxical triumph of the happy one. His triumph is a religious triumph; it rests upon his perpetual assertion of the value of the human soul and of human daily life. It rests upon his assertion that human life is enjoyable because it is human. And he will never admit, like so many compassionate pessimists, that human life ever ceases to be human. He does not merely pity the lowness of men; he feels an insult to their elevation. Brute pity should be given only to brutes. Cruelty to animals is cruelty and a vile thing; but cruelty to a man is not cruelty, it is treason. Tyranny over a man is not tyranny, it is rebellion, for man is royal. Now, the practical weakness of the vast mass of modern pity for the poor and the oppressed is precisely that it is merely pity; the pity is pitiful, but not respectful. Men feel that the cruelty to the poor is a kind of cruelty to animals. They never feel that it is justice to equals; nay, it is treachery to comrades. This dark scientific pity, this brutal pity, has an elemental sincerity of its own; but it is entirely useless for all ends of social reform. Democracy swept Europe with the sabre when it was founded upon the Rights of Man. It has done literally nothing at all since it has been founded only upon the wrongs of man. Or, more strictly speaking, its recent failure has been due to its not admitting the existence of any rights, or wrongs, or indeed of any humanity. Evolution (the sinister enemy of revolution) does not especially deny the existence of God; what it does deny is the existence of man. And all the despair about the poor, and the cold and repugnant pity for them, has been largely due to the vague sense that they have literally relapsed into the state of the lower animals.

A writer sufficiently typical of recent revolutionism — Gorky — has called one of his books by the eerie and effective title “Creatures that once were Men.” That title explains the whole failure of the Russian revolution. And the reason why the English writers, such as Dickens, did with all their limitations achieve so many of the actual things at which they aimed was that they could not possibly have put such a title upon a human hook. Dickens really helped the unfortunate in the matters to which he set himself. And the reason is that across all his books and sketches about the unfortunate might be written the common title, “Creatures that Still are Men.”

There does exist, then, this strange optimistic reformer; the man whose work begins with approval and ends with earthquake. Jesus Christ was destined to found a faith which made the rich poorer and the poor rich; but even when He was going to enrich them, He began with the phrase, “Blessed are the poor.” The Gissings and the Gorkys say, as an universal literary motto, “Cursed are the poor.” Among a million who have faintly followed Christ in this divine contradiction, Dickens stands out especially. He said, in all his reforming utterances, “Cure poverty;” but he said in all his actual descriptions, “Blessed are the poor.” He described their happiness, and men rushed to remove their sorrow. He described them as human, and men resented the insults to their humanity. It is not difficult to see why, as I said at an earlier stage of this book, Dickens’s denunciations have had so much more practical an effect than the denunciations of such a man as Gissing. Both agreed that the souls of the people were in a kind of prison. But Gissing said that the prison was full of dead souls. Dickens said that the prison was full of living souls. And the fiery cavalcade of rescuers felt that they had not come too late.

Of this general fact about Dickens’s descriptions of poverty there will not, I suppose, be any serious dispute. The dispute will only be about the truth of those descriptions. It is clear that whereas Gissing would say, “See how their poverty depresses the Smiths or the Browns,” Dickens says, “See how little, after all, their poverty can depress the Cratchits.” No one will deny that he made a special feature of the poor. We will come to the discussion of the veracity of these scenes in a moment. It is here sufficient to register in conclusion of our examination of the reforming optimist, that

Dickens certainly was such an optimist, and that he made it his business to insist upon what happiness there is in the lives of the unhappy. His poor man is always a Mark Tapley, a man the optimism of whose spirit increases if anything with the pessimism of his experience. It can also be registered as a fact equally solid and quite equally demonstrable that this optimistic Dickens did effect great reforms.

The reforms in which Dickens was instrumental were indeed, from the point of view of our sweeping social panaceas, special and limited. But perhaps, for that reason especially, they afford a compact and concrete instance of the psychological paradox of which we speak. Dickens did definitely destroy — or at the very least help to destroy — certain institutions; he destroyed those institutions simply by describing them. But the crux and peculiarity of the whole matter is this, that, in a sense, it can really be said that he described these things too optimistically. In a real sense, he described Dotheboys Hall as a better place than it is. In a real sense, he made out the workhouse as a pleasanter place than it can ever be. For the chief glory of Dickens is that he made these places interesting; and the chief infamy of England is that it has made these places dull. Dullness was the thing that Dickens's genius could never succeed in describing; his vitality was so violent that he could not introduce into his books the genuine impression even of a moment of monotony. If there is anywhere m his novels an instant of silence, we only hear more clearly the hero whispering with the heroine, the villain sharpening his dagger, or the creaking of the machinery that is to give out the god from the machine. He could splendidly describe gloomy places, but he could not describe dreary places. He could describe miserable marriages, but not monotonous marriages. It must have been genuinely entertaining to be married to Mr. Quilp. This sense of a still incessant excitement he spreads over every inch of his story, and over every dark tract of his landscape. His idea of a desolate place is a place where anything can happen, he has no idea of that desolate place where nothing can happen. This is a good thing for his soul, for the place where nothing can happen is hell. But still, it might reasonably be maintained by the modern mind that he is hampered in describing human evil and sorrow by this inability to imagine tedium, this dullness in the matter of dullness. For, after all, it is certainly true that the worst part of the lot of the unfortunate is the fact that they have long spaces in which to review the irrevocability of their doom. It is certainly true that the worst days of the oppressed man are the nine days out of ten in which he is not oppressed. This sense of sickness and sameness Dickens did certainly fail or refuse to give. When we read such a description as that excellent one — in detail — of Dotheboys Hall, we feel that, while everything else is accurate, the author does, in the words of the excellent Captain Nares in Stevenson's "Wrecker," "draw the dreariness rather mild." The boys at Dotheboys were, perhaps, less bullied, but they were certainly more bored. For, indeed, how could anyone be bored with the society of so sumptuous a creature as Mr. Squeers? Who would not put up with a few illogical floggings in order to enjoy the conversation of a man who could say, "She's a rum 'un is Natur'. . . . Natur' is more easier conceived than described." The same principle applies to the workhouse in "Oliver Twist." We feel vaguely that neither Oliver nor anyone else could be entirely unhappy in the presence of the purple personality of Mr. Bumble. The one thing he did not describe in any of the abuses he denounced was the soul-destroying potency of routine. He made out the bad school, the bad parochial system, the bad debtor's prison as very much jollier and more exciting than they may really have been. In a sense, then, he flattered them; but he destroyed them with the flattery. By making Mrs. Gamp delightful he made her impossible. He gave every one an interest in Mr. Bumble's existence; and by the same act gave every one an interest in his destruction. It would be difficult to find a stronger instance of the utility and energy of the method which we have, for the sake of argument, called the method of the optimistic reformer. As long as low Yorkshire schools were entirely colourless and dreary, they continued quietly tolerated by the public and quietly intolerable to the victims. So long as Squeers was dull as well as cruel he was permitted; the moment he became amusing as well as cruel he was destroyed. As long as Bumble was merely inhuman he was allowed. When he became human, humanity wiped him right out. For in order to do these great acts of justice we must always realise not only the humanity of the oppressed, but even the humanity of the oppressor. The satirist had, in a sense, to create the images in the mind before, as an iconoclast, he could destroy them. Dickens had to make Squeers live before be could make him die.

In connection with the accusation of vulgar optimism, which I have taken as a text for this chapter, there is another somewhat odd thing to notice. Nobody in the world was ever less optimistic than Dickens in his treatment of evil or the evil man. When I say optimist in this matter I mean optimism, in the modern sense, of an attempt to whitewash evil. Nobody ever made less attempt to whitewash evil than Dickens. Nobody black was ever less white than Dickens's black. He painted his villains and lost characters more black than they really are. He crowds his stories with a kind of villain rare in modern fiction — the villain really without any "redeeming point." There is no redeeming point in Squeers, or in Monks, or in Ralph Nickleby, or in Bill Sikes, or in Quilp, or in Brass, or in Mr. Chester, or in Mr. Pecksniff, or in Jonas Chuzzlewit, or in Carker, or in Uriah Heep, or in Blandois, or in a hundred more. So far as the balance of good and evil in human characters is concerned, Dickens certainly could not be called a vulgar optimist. His emphasis on evil was melodramatic. He might be called a vulgar pessimist.

Some will dismiss this lurid villainy as a detail of his artificial romance. I am not inclined to do so. He inherited, undoubtedly, this unqualified villain as he inherited so many other things, from the whole history of European literature. But he breathed into the blackguard a peculiar and vigorous life of his own. He did not show any tendency to modify his blackguardism in accordance with the increasing considerateness of the age; he did not seem to wish to make his villain less villainous; he did not wish to imitate the analysis of George Eliot, or the reverent scepticism of Thackeray. And all this works back, I think, to a real thing in him, that he wished to have an obstreperous and incalculable enemy. He wished to keep alive the idea of combat, which means, of necessity, a combat against something individual and alive. I do not know whether, in the kindly rationalism of his epoch, he kept any belief in a personal devil in his theology, but he certainly created a personal devil in every one of his books.

A good example of my meaning can be found, for instance, in such a character as Quilp. Dickens may, for all I know, have had originally some idea of describing Quilp as the bitter and unhappy cripple, a deformity whose mind is stunted along with his body. But if he had such an idea, he soon abandoned it. Quilp is not in the least unhappy. His whole picturesqueness consists in the fact that he has a kind of hellish happiness, an atrocious hilarity that makes him go bounding about like an indiarubber ball. Quilp is not in the least bitter; he has an unaffected gaiety, an expansiveness, an universality. He desires to hurt people in the same hearty way that a good-natured man desires to help them. He likes to poison people with the same kind of clamorous camaraderie with which an honest man likes to stand them drink. Quilp is not in the least stunted in mind; he is not in reality even stunted in body — his body, that is, does not in any way fall short of what he wants it to do. His smallness gives him rather the promptitude of a bird or the precipitance of a bullet. In a word, Quilp is precisely the devil of the Middle Ages; he belongs to that amazingly healthy period when even lost spirits were hilarious.

This heartiness and vivacity in the villains of Dickens is worthy of note because it is directly connected with his own cheerfulness. This is a truth little understood in our time, but it is a very essential one. If optimism means a general approval, it is certainly true that the more a man becomes an optimist the more he becomes a melancholy man. If he manages to praise everything, his praise will develop an alarming resemblance to a polite boredom. He will say that the marsh is as good as the garden; he will mean that the garden is as dull as the marsh. He may force himself to say that emptiness is good, but he will hardly prevent himself from asking what is the good of such good. This optimism does exist — this optimism which is more hopeless than pessimism — this optimism which is the very heart of hell.

Against such an aching vacuum of joyless approval there is only one antidote — a sudden and pugnacious belief in positive evil. This world can be made beautiful again by beholding it as a battlefield. When we have defined and isolated the evil thing, the colours come back into everything else. When evil things have become evil, good things, in a blazing apocalypse, become good. There are some men who are dreary because they do not believe in God; but there are many others who are dreary because they do not believe in the devil. The grass grows green again when we believe in the devil, the roses grow red again when we believe in the devil.

No man was more filled with the sense of this bellicose basis of all cheerfulness than Dickens. He knew very well the essential truth, that the true optimist can only continue an optimist so long as he is discontented. For the full value of this life can only be got by fighting; the violent take it by storm. And if we have accepted everything, we have missed something — war. This life of ours is a very enjoyable fight, but a very miserable truce. And it appears strange to me that so few critics of Dickens or of other romantic writers have noticed this philosophical meaning in the undiluted villain. The villain is not in the story to be a character; he is there to be a danger — a ceaseless, ruthless, and uncompromising menace, like that of wild beasts or the sea. For the full satisfaction of the sense of combat, which everywhere and always involves a sense of equality, it is necessary to make the evil thing a man; but it is not always necessary, it is not even always artistic, to make him a mixed and probable man. In any tale, the tone of which is at all symbolic, he may quite legitimately be made an aboriginal and infernal energy. He must be a man only in the sense that he must have a wit and will to be matched with the wit and will of the man chiefly fighting. The evil may be inhuman, but it must not be impersonal, which is almost exactly the position occupied by Satan in the theological scheme.

But when all is said, as I have remarked before, the chief fountain in Dickens of what I have called cheerfulness, and some prefer to call optimism, is something deeper than a verbal philosophy. It is, after all, an incomparable hunger and pleasure for the vitality and the variety, for the infinite eccentricity of existence. And this word "eccentricity" brings us, perhaps, nearer to the matter than any other. It is, perhaps, the strongest mark of the divinity of man that he talks of this world as "a strange world," though he has seen no other. We feel that all there is is eccentric, though we do not know what is the centre. This sentiment of the grotesqueness of the universe ran through Dickens's brain and body like the mad blood of the elves. He saw all his streets in fantastic perspectives, he saw all his cockney villas as top heavy and wild, he saw every man's nose twice as big as it was, and very man's eyes like saucers. And this was the basis of his gaiety — the only real basis of any philosophical gaiety. This world is not to be justified as it is justified by the mechanical optimists; it is not to be justified as the best of all possible worlds. Its merit is not that it is orderly and explicable; its merit is that it is wild and utterly unexplained. Its merit is precisely that none of us could have conceived such a thing, that we should have rejected the bare idea of it as miracle and unreason. It is the best of all impossible worlds.

CHAPTER XII

A NOTE ON THE FUTURE OF DICKENS

The hardest thing to remember about our own time, of course, is simply that it is a time; we all instinctively think of it as the Day of Judgment. But all the things in it which belong to it merely as this time will probably be rapidly turned upside down; all the things that can pass will pass. It is not merely true that all old things are already dead; it is also true that all new things are already dead; for the only undying things are the things that are neither new nor old. The more you are up with this year's fashion, the more (in a sense) you are already behind next year's. Consequently, in attempting to decide whether an author will, as it is cantly expressed, live, it is necessary to have very firm convictions about what part, if any part, of man is unchangeable. And it is very hard to have this if you have not a religion or, at least, a dogmatic philosophy.

The equality of men needs preaching quite as much as regards the ages as regards the classes of men. To feel infinitely superior to a man in the twelfth century is just precisely as snobbish as to feel infinitely superior to a man in the Old Kent Road. There are differences between the man and us, there may be superiorities in us over the man; but our sin in both cases consists in thinking of the small things wherein we differ when we ought to be confounded and intoxicated by the terrible and joyful matters in which we are at one. But here again the difficulty always is that the things near us seem larger than they are, and so seem to be a permanent part of mankind, when they may really be only one of its parting modes of expression. Few people, for instance, realise that a time may easily come when we shall see the great outburst of Science in the nineteenth century as something quite as splendid, brief, unique, and ultimately abandoned, as the outburst of Art at the Renascence. Few people realise that the general habit of fiction, of telling tales in prose, may fade, like the general habit of the ballad, of telling tales in verse, has for the time faded. Few people realise that reading and writing are only arbitrary, and perhaps temporary sciences, like heraldry.

The immortal mind will remain, and by that writers like Dickens will be securely judged. That Dickens will have a high place in permanent literature there is, I imagine, no prig surviving to deny. But though all prediction is in the dark, I would devote this chapter to suggesting that his place in nineteenth-century England will not only be high, but altogether the highest. At a certain period of his contemporary fame, an average Englishman would have said that there were at that moment in England about five or six able and equal novelists. He could have made a list, Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, perhaps more. Forty years or more have passed and some of them have slipped to a lower place. Some would now say that the highest platform is left to Thackeray and Dickens; some to Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot; some to Dickens, Thackeray, and Charlotte Brontë. I venture to offer the proposition that when more years have passed and more weeding has been effected, Dickens will dominate the whole England of the nineteenth century; he will be left on that platform alone.

I know that this is an almost impertinent thing to assert, and that its tendency is to bring in those disparaging discussions of other writers in which Mr. Swinburne brilliantly embroiled himself in his suggestive study of Dickens. But my disparagement of the other English Novelists is wholly relative and not in the least positive. It is certain that men will always return to such a writer as Thackeray, with his rich emotional autumn, his feeling that life is a sad but sacred retrospect in which at least we should forget nothing. It is not likely that wise men will forget him. So, for instance, wise and scholarly men do from time to time return to the lyrists of French Renascence, to the delicate poignancy of Du Bellay: so they will go back to Thackeray. But I mean that Dickens will bestride and dominate our time as the vast figure of Rabelais dominates Du Bellay, dominates the Renascence and the world.

Let me put a negative reason first. The particular things for which Dickens is condemned (and justly condemned) by his critics, are precisely those things which have never prevented a man from being immortal. The chief of them is the unquestionable fact that he wrote an enormous amount of bad work. This does lead to a man being put below his place in his own time: it does not affect his permanent place, to all appearance, at all. Shakespeare, for instance, and Wordsworth wrote not only an enormous amount of bad work, but an enormous amount of enormously bad work. Humanity edits such writers’ works for them. Virgil was mistaken in cutting out his inferior lines; we would have undertaken the job. Moreover in the particular case of Dickens there are special reasons for regarding his bad work, as I have previously suggested, under a kind of general ambition that had nothing to do with his special genius; an ambition to be a public provider of everything, a warehouse of all human emotions. He held a kind of literary day of judgment. He distributed bad characters as punishments and good characters as rewards. My meaning can be best conveyed by one instance out of many. The character of the kind old Jew in “Our Mutual Friend” (a needless and unconvincing character) was actually introduced because some Jewish correspondent complains that the bad old Jew in “Oliver Twist” conveyed the suggestion that all Jews were bad. The principle is so light-headedly absurd that it is hard to imagine any literary man submitting to it for an instant. If ever he invented a bad auctioneer he must immediately balance him with a good auctioneer; if he should have conceived an unkind philanthropist, he must on the spot, with whatever natural agony and toil, imagine a kind philanthropist. The complaint is frantic; yet Dickens, who tore people in pieces for much fairer complaints, liked this complaint of his Jewish correspondent. It pleased him to be mistaken for a public arbiter: it pleased him to be asked (in a double sense) to judge Israel. All this is so much another thing, a non-literary vanity, that there is much less difficulty than usual in separating it from his serious genius: and by his serious genius, I need hardly say, I mean his comic genius. Such irrelevant ambitions as this are easily passed over, like the sonnets of great statesmen. We feel that such things can be set aside, as the ignorant experiments of men otherwise great, like the politics of Professor Tyndall or the philosophy of Professor Haeckel. Hence, I think, posterity will not care that Dickens has done bad work, but will know that he has done good.

Again, the other chief accusation against Dickens was that his characters and their actions were exaggerated and impossible. But this only meant that they were exaggerated and impossible as compared with the modern world and with certain writers (like Thackeray or Trollope) who were making a very exact copy of the manners of the modern world. Some people, oddly enough, have suggested that Dickens has suffered or will suffer from the change of manners. Surely this is irrational. It is not the creators of the impossible who will suffer from the process of time: Mr. Bunsby can never be any more impossible than he was when Dickens made him. The writers who will obviously suffer from time will be the careful and realistic writers, the writers who have observed every detail of the fashion of this world which passeth away. It is surely obvious that there is nothing so fragile as a fact, that a fact flies away quicker than a fancy. A fancy will endure for two thousand years. For instance, we all have fancy for an entirely fearless man, a hero; and the Achilles of Homer still remains. But exactly the thing we do not know about Achilles is how far he was possible. The realistic narrators of the time are all forgotten (thank God), so we cannot tell whether Homer slightly exaggerated or wildly exaggerated or did not exaggerate at all, the personal activity of a Mycenæan captain in battle; for the fancy has survived the facts. So the fancy of Podsnap may survive the facts of English commerce: and no one will know whether Podsnap was possible, but only know that he is desirable, like Achilles.

The positive argument for the permanence of Dickens comes back to the thing that can only be stated and cannot be discussed: creation. He made things which nobody else could possibly make. He made Dick Swiveller in a very different sense from that in which Thackeray made Colonel Newcome. Thackeray’s creation was observation: Dickens’s was poetry, and is therefore permanent. But there is one other test that can be added. The immortal writer, I conceive, is commonly he who does something Universal in a special manner. I mean that he does something interesting to all men in a way in which only one man or one land can do. Other men in that land, who do only what other men in other lands are doing as well, tend to have a great reputation in their day and to sink slowly into a second or a third or a fourth place. A parallel from war will make the point clear. I cannot think that anyone will doubt that, although Wellington and Nelson were always bracketed, Nelson will steadily become more important and Wellington less. For the fame of Wellington rests upon the fact that he was a good soldier in the service of England, exactly as twenty similar men were good soldiers in the service of Austria or Prussia or France. But Nelson is the symbol of a special mode of attack, which is at once universal and yet especially English, the sea. Now Dickens is at once as universal as the sea and as English as Nelson. Thackeray and George Eliot and the other great figures of that great England, were comparable to Wellington in this, that the kind of thing they were doing, — realism, the acute study of intellectual things, numerous men in France, Germany and Italy were doing as well or better than they. But Dickens was really doing something universal, yet something that no one but an Englishman could do. This is attested by the fact that he and Byron are the men who, like pinnacles, strike the eye of the continent. The points would take long to study: yet they may take only a moment to indicate. No one but an Englishman could have filled his books at once with a furious caricature and with a positively furious kindness. In more central countries, full of cruel memories of political change, caricature is always inhumane. No one but an Englishman could have described the democracy as consisting of free men, but yet of funny men. In other countries where the democratic issue has been more bitterly fought, it is felt that unless you describe a man as dignified you are describing him as a slave. This is the only final greatness of a man; that he does for all the world what all the world cannot do for itself. Dickens, I believe, did it.

The hour of absinthe is over. We shall not be much further troubled with the little artists who found Dickens too sane for their sorrows and too clean for their delights. But we have a long way to travel before we get back to what Dickens meant: and the passage is along a rambling English road, a twisting road such as Mr. Pickwick travelled. But this at least is part of what he meant; that comradeship and serious joy are not interludes in our travel; but that rather our travels are interludes in comradeship and joy, which through God shall endure for ever. The inn does not point to the road; the road points to the inn. And all roads point at last to an ultimate inn, where we shall meet Dickens and all his characters: and when we drink again it shall be from the great flagons in the tavern at the end of the world.

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

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THE CASE FOR THE EPHEMERAL

I cannot understand the people who take literature seriously; but I can love them, and I do. Out of my love I warn them to keep clear of this book. It is a collection of crude and shapeless papers upon current or rather flying subjects; and they must be published pretty much as they stand. They were written, as a rule, at the last moment; they were handed in the moment before it was too late, and I do not think that our commonwealth would have been shaken to its foundations if they had been handed in the moment after. They must go out now, with all their imperfections on their head, or rather on mine; for their vices are too vital to be improved with a blue pencil, or with anything I can think of, except dynamite.

Their chief vice is that so many of them are very serious; because I had no time to make them flippant. It is so easy to be solemn; it is so hard to be frivolous. Let any honest reader shut his eyes for a few moments, and approaching the secret tribunal of his soul, ask himself whether he would really rather be asked in the next two hours to write the front page of the *Times,* which is full of long leading articles, or the front page of *Tit-Bits,* which is full of short jokes. If the reader is the fine conscientious fellow I take him for, he will at once reply that he would rather on the spur of the moment write ten *Times* articles than one *Tit-Bits* joke. Responsibility, a heavy and cautious responsibility of speech, is the easiest thing in the world; anybody can do it. That is why so many tired, elderly, and wealthy men go in for politics. They are responsible, because they have not the strength of mind left to be irresponsible. It is more dignified to sit still than to dance the Barn Dance. It is also easier. So in these easy pages I keep myself on the whole on the level of the *Times*: it is only occasionally that I leap upwards almost to the level of *Tit-Bits.*

I resume the defence of this indefensible book. These articles have another disadvantage arising from the scurry in which they were written; they are too long-winded and elaborate. One of the great disadvantages of hurry is that it takes such a long time. If I have to start for High-gate this day week, I may perhaps go the shortest way. If I have to start this minute, I shall almost certainly go the longest. In these essays (as I read them over) I feel frightfully annoyed with myself for not getting to the point more quickly; but I had not enough leisure to be quick. There are several maddening cases in which I took two or three pages in attempting to describe an attitude of which the essence could be expressed in an epigram; only there was no time for epigrams. I do not repent of one shade of opinion here expressed; but I feel that they might have been expressed so much more briefly and precisely. For instance, these pages contain a sort of recurring protest against the boast of certain writers that they are merely recent. They brag that their philosophy of the universe is the last philosophy or the new philosophy, or the advanced and progressive philosophy. I have said much against a mere modernism. When I use the word "modernism," I am not alluding specially to the current quarrel in the Roman Catholic Church, though I am certainly astonished at any intellectual group accepting so weak and unphilosophical a name. It is incomprehensible to me that any thinker can calmly call himself a modernist; he might as well call himself a Thursdayite. But apart altogether from that particular disturbance, I am conscious of a general irritation expressed against the people who boast of their advancement and modernity in the discussion of religion. But I never succeeded in saying the quite clear and obvious thing that is really the matter with modernism. The real objection to modernism is simply that it is a form of snobbishness. It is an attempt to crush a rational opponent not by reason, but by some mystery of superiority, by hinting that one is specially up to date or particularly "in the know." To flaunt the fact that we have had all the last books from Germany is simply vulgar; like flaunting the fact that we have had all the last bonnets from Paris. To introduce into philosophical discussions a sneer at a creed's antiquity is like introducing a sneer at a lady's age. It is caddish because it is irrelevant. The pure modernist is merely a snob; he cannot bear to be a month behind the fashion.

Similarly I find that I have tried in these pages to express the real objection to philanthropists and have not succeeded. I have not seen the quite simple objection to the causes advocated by certain wealthy idealists; causes of which the cause called teetotalism is the strongest case. I have used many abusive terms about the thing, calling it Puritanism, or superciliousness, or aristocracy; but I have not seen and stated the quite simple objection to philanthropy; which is that it is religious persecution. Religious persecution does not consist in thumbscrews or fires of Smithfield; the essence of religious persecution is this: that the man who happens to have material power in the State, either by wealth or by official position, should govern his fellow-citizens not according to their religion or philosophy, but according to his own. If, for instance, there is such a thing as a vegetarian nation; if there is a great united mass of men who wish to live by the vegetarian morality, then I say in the emphatic words of the arrogant French marquis before the French Revolution, “Let them eat grass.” Perhaps that French oligarch was a humanitarian; most oligarchs are. Perhaps when he told the peasants to eat grass he was recommending to them the hygienic simplicity of a vegetarian restaurant. But that is an irrelevant, though most fascinating, speculation. The point here is that if a nation is really vegetarian let its government force upon it the whole horrible weight of vegetarianism. Let its government give the national guests a State vegetarian banquet. Let its government, in the most literal and awful sense of the words, give them beans. That sort of tyranny is all very well; for it is the people tyrannising over all the persons. But “temperance reformers” are like a small group of vegetarians who should silently and systematically act on an ethical assumption entirely unfamiliar to the mass of the people. They would always be giving peerages to greengrocers. They would always be appointing Parliamentary Commissions to enquire into the private life of butchers. Whenever they found a man quite at their mercy, as a pauper or a convict or a lunatic, they would force him to add the final touch to his inhuman isolation by becoming a vegetarian. All the meals for school children will be vegetarian meals. All the State public houses will be vegetarian public houses. There is a very strong case for vegetarianism as compared with teetotalism. Drinking one glass of beer cannot by any philosophy be drunkenness; but killing one animal can, by this philosophy, be murder. The objection to both processes is not that the two creeds, teetotal and vegetarian, are not admissible; it is simply that they are not admitted. The thing is religious persecution because it is not based on the existing religion of the democracy. These people ask the poor to accept in practice what they know perfectly well that the poor would not accept in theory. That is the very definition of religious persecution. I was against the Tory attempt to force upon ordinary Englishmen a Catholic theology in which they do not believe. I am even more against the attempt to force upon them a Mohamedan morality which they actively deny.

Again, in the case of anonymous journalism I seem to have said a great deal without getting out the point very clearly. Anonymous journalism is dangerous, and is poisonous in our existing life simply because it is so rapidly becoming an anonymous life. That is the horrible thing about our contemporary atmosphere. Society is becoming a secret society. The modern tyrant is evil because of his elusiveness. He is more nameless than his slave. He is not more of a bully than the tyrants of the past; but he is more of a coward. The rich publisher may treat the poor poet better or worse than the old master workman treated the old apprentice. But the apprentice ran away and the master ran after him. Nowadays it is the poet who pursues and tries in vain to fix the fact of responsibility. It is the publisher who runs away. The clerk of Mr. Solomon gets the sack: the beautiful Greek slave of the Sultan Suliman also gets the sack; or the sack gets her. But though she is concealed under the black waves of the Bosphorus, at least her destroyer is not concealed. He goes behind golden trumpets riding on a white elephant. But in the case of the clerk it is almost as difficult to know where the dismissal comes from as to know where the clerk goes to. It may be Mr. Solomon or Mr. Solomon's manager, or Mr. Solomon's rich aunt in Cheltenham, or Mr. Soloman's rich creditor in Berlin. The elaborate machinery which was once used to make men responsible is now used solely in order to shift the responsibility. People talk about the pride of tyrants; but we in this age are not suffering from the pride of tyrants. We are suffering from the shyness of tyrants; from the shrinking modesty of tyrants. Therefore we must not encourage leader-writers to be shy; we must not inflame their already exaggerated modesty. Rather we must attempt to lure them to be vain and ostentatious; so that through ostentation they may at last find their way to honesty.

The last indictment against this book is the worst of all. It is simply this: that if all goes well this book will be unintelligible gibberish. For it is mostly concerned with attacking attitudes which are in their nature accidental and incapable of enduring. Brief as is the career of such a book as this, it may last just twenty minutes longer than most of the philosophies that it attacks. In the end it will not matter to us whether we wrote well or ill; whether we fought with flails or reeds. It will matter to us greatly on what side we fought.

COCKNEYS AND THEIR JOKES

A writer in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* is very angry indeed with my performances in this column. His precise terms of reproach are, “Mr. G. K. Chesterton is not a humourist: not even a Cockney humourist.” I do not mind his saying that I am not a humourist — in which (to tell the truth) I think he is quite right. But I do resent his saying that I am not a Cockney. That envenomed arrow, I admit, went home. If a French writer said of me, “He is no metaphysician: not even an English metaphysician,” I could swallow the insult to my metaphysics, but I should feel angry about the insult to my country. So I do not urge that I am a humourist; but I do insist that I am a Cockney. If I were a humourist, I should certainly be a Cockney humourist; if I were a saint, I should certainly be a Cockney saint. I need not recite the splendid catalogue of Cockney saints who have written their names on our noble old City churches. I need not trouble you with the long list of the Cockney humourists who have discharged their bills (or failed to discharge them) in our noble old City taverns. We can weep together over the pathos of the poor Yorkshireman, whose county has never produced some humour not intelligible to the rest of the world. And we can smile together when he says that somebody or other is “not even” a Cockney humourist like Samuel Johnson or Charles Lamb. It is surely sufficiently obvious that all the best humour that exists in our language is Cockney humour. Chaucer was a Cockney; he had his house close to the Abbey. Dickens was a Cockney; he said he could not think without the London streets. The London taverns heard always the quaintest conversation, whether it was Ben Johnson’s at the Mermaid or Sam Johnson’s at the Cock. Even in our own time it may be noted that the most vital and genuine humour is still written about London. Of this type is the mild and humane irony which marks Mr. Pett Ridge’s studies of the small grey streets. Of this type is the simple but smashing laughter of the best tales of Mr. W. W. Jacobs, telling of the smoke and sparkle of the Thames. No; I concede that I am not a Cockney humourist. No; I am not worthy to be. Some time, after sad and strenuous after-lives; some time, after fierce and apocalyptic incarnations; in some strange world beyond the stars, I may become at last a Cockney humourist. In that potential paradise I may walk among the Cockney humourists, if not an equal, at least a companion. I may feel for a moment on my shoulder the hearty hand of Dryden and thread the labyrinths of the sweet insanity of Lamb. But that could only be if I were not only much cleverer, but much better than I am. Before I reach that sphere I shall have left behind, perhaps, the sphere that is inhabited by angels, and even passed that which is appropriated exclusively to the use of Yorkshiremen.

No; London is in this matter attacked upon its strongest ground. London is the largest of the bloated modern cities; London is the smokiest; London is the dirtiest; London is, if you will, the most sombre; London is, if you will, the most miserable. But London is certainly the most amusing and the most amused. You may prove that we have the most tragedy; the fact remains that we have the most comedy, that we have the most farce. We have at the very worst a splendid hypocrisy of humour. We conceal our sorrow behind a screaming derision. You speak of people who laugh through their tears; it is our boast that we only weep through our laughter. There remains always this great boast, perhaps the greatest boast that is possible to human nature. I mean the great boast that the most unhappy part of our population is also the most hilarious part. The poor can forget that social problem which we (the moderately rich) ought never to forget. Blessed are the poor; for they alone have not the poor always with them. The honest poor can sometimes forget poverty. The honest rich can never forget it.

I believe firmly in the value of all vulgar notions, especially of vulgar jokes. When once you have got hold of a vulgar joke, you may be certain that you have got hold of a subtle and spiritual idea. The men who made the joke saw something deep which they could not express except by something silly and emphatic. They saw something delicate which they could only express by something indelicate. I remember that Mr. Max Beerbohm (who has every merit except democracy) attempted to analyse the jokes at which the mob laughs. He divided them into three sections: jokes about bodily humiliation, jokes about things alien, such as foreigners, and jokes about bad cheese. Mr. Max Beerbohm thought he understood the first two forms; but I am not sure that he did. In order to understand vulgar humour it is not enough to be humorous. One must also be vulgar, as I am. And in the first case it is surely obvious that it is not merely at the fact of something being hurt that we laugh (as I trust we do) when a Prime Minister sits down on his hat. If that were so we should laugh whenever we saw a funeral. We do not laugh at the mere fact of something falling down; there is nothing humorous about leaves falling or the sun going down. When our house falls down we do not laugh. All the birds of the air might drop around us in a perpetual shower like a hailstorm without arousing a smile. If you really ask yourself why we laugh at a man sitting down suddenly in the street you will discover that the reason is not only recondite, but ultimately religious. All the jokes about men sitting down on their hats are really theological jokes; they are concerned with the Dual Nature of Man. They refer to the primary paradox that man is superior to all the things around him and yet is at their mercy.

Quite equally subtle and spiritual is the idea at the back of laughing at foreigners. It concerns the almost torturing truth of a thing being like oneself and yet not like oneself. Nobody laughs at what is entirely foreign; nobody laughs at a palm tree. But it is funny to see the familiar image of God disguised behind the black beard of a Frenchman or the black face of a Negro. There is nothing funny in the sounds that are wholly inhuman, the howling of wild beasts or of the wind. But if a man begins to talk like oneself, but all the syllables come out different, then if one is a man one feels inclined to laugh, though if one is a gentleman one resists the inclination.

Mr. Max Beerbohm, I remember, professed to understand the first two forms of popular wit, but said that the third quite stumped him. He could not see why there should be anything funny about bad cheese. I can tell him at once. He has missed the idea because it is subtle and philosophical, and he was looking for something ignorant and foolish. Bad cheese is funny because it is (like the foreigner or the man fallen on the pavement) the type of the transition or transgression across a great mystical boundary. Bad cheese symbolises the change from the inorganic to the organic. Bad cheese symbolises the startling prodigy of matter taking on vitality. It symbolises the origin of life itself. And it is only about such solemn matters as the origin of life that the democracy condescends to joke. Thus, for instance, the democracy jokes about marriage, because marriage is a part of mankind. But the democracy would never deign to joke about Free Love, because Free Love is a piece of priggishness.

As a matter of fact, it will be generally found that the popular joke is not true to the letter, but is true to the spirit. The vulgar joke is generally in the oddest way the truth and yet not the fact. For instance, it is not in the least true that mothers-in-law are as a class oppressive and intolerable; most of them are both devoted and useful. All the mothers-in-law I have ever had were admirable. Yet the legend of the comic papers is profoundly true. It draws attention to the fact that it is much harder to be a nice mother-in-law than to be nice in any other conceivable relation of life. The caricatures have drawn the worst mother-in-law a monster, by way of expressing the fact that the best mother-in-law is a problem. The same is true of the perpetual jokes in comic papers about shrewish wives and henpecked husbands. It is all a frantic exaggeration, but it is an exaggeration of a truth; whereas all the modern mouthings about oppressed women are the exaggerations of a falsehood. If you read even the best of the intellectuals of to-day you will find them saying that in the mass of the democracy the woman is the chattel of her lord, like his bath or his bed. But if you read the comic literature of the democracy you will find that the lord hides under the bed to escape from the wrath of his chattel. This is not the fact, but it is much nearer the truth. Every man who is married knows quite well, not only that he does not regard his wife as a chattel, but that no man can conceivably ever have done so. The joke stands for an ultimate truth, and that is a subtle truth. It is one not very easy to state correctly. It can, perhaps, be most correctly stated by saying that, even if the man is the head of the house, he knows he is the figurehead.

But the vulgar comic papers are so subtle and true that they are even prophetic. If you really want to know what is going to happen to the future of our democracy, do not read the modern sociological prophecies, do not read even Mr. Wells's Utopias for this purpose, though you should certainly read them if you are fond of good honesty and good English. If you want to know what will happen, study the pages of *Snaps* or *Patchy Bits* as if they were the dark tablets graven with the oracles of the gods. For, mean and gross as they are, in all seriousness, they contain what is entirely absent from all Utopias and all the sociological conjectures of our time: they contain some hint of the actual habits and manifest desires of the English people. If we are really to find out what the democracy will ultimately do with itself, we shall surely find it, not in the literature which studies the people, but in the literature which the people studies.

I can give two chance cases in which the common or Cockney joke was a much better prophecy than the careful observations of the most cultured observer. When England was agitated, previous to the last General Election, about the existence of Chinese labour, there was a distinct difference between the tone of the politicians and the tone of the populace. The politicians who disapproved of Chinese labour were most careful to explain that they did not in any sense disapprove of Chinese. According to them, it was a pure question of legal propriety, of whether certain clauses in the contract of indenture were not inconsistent with our constitutional traditions: according to them, the case would have been the same if the people had been Kaffirs or Englishmen. It all sounded wonderfully enlightened and lucid; and in comparison the popular joke looked, of course, very poor. For the popular joke against the Chinese labourers was simply that they were Chinese; it was an objection to an alien type; the popular papers were full of gibes about pigtails and yellow faces. It seemed that the Liberal politicians were raising an intellectual objection to a doubtful document of State; while it seemed that the Radical populace were merely roaring with idiotic laughter at the sight of a Chinaman's clothes. But the popular instinct was justified, for the vices revealed were Chinese vices.

But there is another case more pleasant and more up to date. The popular papers always persisted in representing the New Woman or the Suffragette as an ugly woman, fat, in spectacles, with bulging clothes, and generally falling off a bicycle. As a matter of plain external fact, there was not a word of truth in this. The leaders of the movement of female emancipation are not at all ugly; most of them are extraordinarily good-looking. Nor are they at all indifferent to art or decorative costume; many of them are alarmingly attached to these things. Yet the popular instinct was right. For the popular instinct was that in this movement, rightly or wrongly, there was an element of indifference to female dignity, of a quite new willingness of women to be grotesque. These women did truly despise the pontifical quality of woman. And in our streets and around our Parliament we have seen the stately woman of art and culture turn into the comic woman of *Comic Bits*. And whether we think the exhibition justifiable or not, the prophecy of the comic papers is justified: the healthy and vulgar masses were conscious of a hidden enemy to their traditions who has now come out into the daylight, that the scriptures might be fulfilled. For the two things that a healthy person hates most between heaven and hell are a woman who is not dignified and a man who is.

THE FALLACY OF SUCCESS

There has appeared in our time a particular class of books and articles which I sincerely and solemnly think may be called the silliest ever known among men. They are much more wild than the wildest romances of chivalry and much more dull than the dullest religious tract. Moreover, the romances of chivalry were at least about chivalry; the religious tracts are about religion. But these things are about nothing; they are about what is called Success. On every bookstall, in every magazine, you may find works telling people how to succeed. They are books showing men how to succeed in everything; they are written by men who cannot even succeed in writing books. To begin with, of course, there is no such thing as Success. Or, if you like to put it so, there is nothing that is not successful. That a thing is successful merely means that it is; a millionaire is successful in being a millionaire and a donkey in being a donkey. Any live man has succeeded in living; any dead man may have succeeded in committing suicide. But, passing over the bad logic and bad philosophy in the phrase, we may take it, as these writers do, in the ordinary sense of success in obtaining money or worldly position. These writers profess to tell the ordinary man how he may succeed in his trade or speculation — how, if he is a builder, he may succeed as a builder; how, if he is a stockbroker, he may succeed as a stockbroker. They profess to show him how, if he is a grocer, he may become a sporting yachtsman; how, if he is a tenth-rate journalist, he may become a peer; and how, if he is a German Jew, he may become an Anglo-Saxon. This is a definite and business-like proposal, and I really think that the people who buy these books (if any people do buy them) have a moral, if not a legal, right to ask for their money back. Nobody would dare to publish a book about electricity which literally told one nothing about electricity; no one would dare to publish an article on botany which showed that the writer did not know which end of a plant grew in the earth. Yet our modern world is full of books about Success and successful people which literally contain no kind of idea, and scarcely any kind of verbal sense.

It is perfectly obvious that in any decent occupation (such as bricklaying or writing books) there are only two ways (in any special sense) of succeeding. One is by doing very good work, the other is by cheating. Both are much too simple to require any literary explanation. If you are in for the high jump, either jump higher than any one else, or manage somehow to pretend that you have done so. If you want to succeed at whist, either be a good whist-player, or play with marked cards. You may want a book about jumping; you may want a book about whist; you may want a book about cheating at whist. But you cannot want a book about Success. Especially you cannot want a book about Success such as those which you can now find scattered by the hundred about the book-market. You may want to jump or to play cards; but you do not want to read wandering statements to the effect that jumping is jumping, or that games are won by winners. If these writers, for instance, said anything about success in jumping it would be something like this: "The jumper must have a clear aim before him. He must desire definitely to jump higher than the other men who are in for the same competition. He must let no feeble feelings of mercy (sneaked from the sickening Little Englanders and Pro-Boers) prevent him from trying to *do his best*. He must remember that a competition in jumping is distinctly competitive, and that, as Darwin has gloriously demonstrated, THE WEAKEST GO TO THE WALL." That is the kind of thing the book would say, and very useful it would be, no doubt, if read out in a low and tense voice to a young man just about to take the high jump. Or suppose that in the course of his intellectual rambles the philosopher of Success dropped upon our other case, that of playing cards, his bracing advice would run—"In playing cards it is very necessary to avoid the mistake (commonly made by maudlin humanitarians and Free Traders) of permitting your opponent to win the game. You must have grit and snap and go *in to win*. The days of idealism and superstition are over. We live in a time of science and hard common sense, and it has now been definitely proved that in any game where two are playing IF ONE DOES NOT WIN THE OTHER WILL." It is all very stirring, of course; but I confess that if I were playing cards I would rather have some decent little book which told me the rules of the game. Beyond the rules of the game it is all a question either of talent or dishonesty; and I will undertake to provide either one or the other — which, it is not for me to say.

Turning over a popular magazine, I find a queer and amusing example. There is an article called "The Instinct that Makes People Rich." It is decorated in front with a formidable portrait of Lord Rothschild. There are many definite methods, honest and dishonest, which make people rich; the only “instinct” I know of which does it is that instinct which theological Christianity crudely describes as “the sin of avarice.” That, however, is beside the present point. I wish to quote the following exquisite paragraphs as a piece of typical advice as to how to succeed. It is so practical; it leaves so little doubt about what should be our next step —

“The name of Vanderbilt is synonymous with wealth gained by modern enterprise. ‘Cornelius,’ the founder of the family, was the first of the great American magnates of commerce. He started as the son of a poor farmer; he ended as a millionaire twenty times over.

“He had the money-making instinct. He seized his opportunities, the opportunities that were given by the application of the steam-engine to ocean traffic, and by the birth of railway locomotion in the wealthy but undeveloped United States of America, and consequently he amassed an immense fortune.

“Now it is, of course, obvious that we cannot all follow exactly in the footsteps of this great railway monarch. The precise opportunities that fell to him do not occur to us. Circumstances have changed. But, although this is so, still, in our own sphere and in our own circumstances, we *can* follow his general methods; we can seize those opportunities that are given us, and give ourselves a very fair chance of attaining riches.”

In such strange utterances we see quite clearly what is really at the bottom of all these articles and books. It is not mere business; it is not even mere cynicism. It is mysticism; the horrible mysticism of money. The writer of that passage did not really have the remotest notion of how Vanderbilt made his money, or of how anybody else is to make his. He does, indeed, conclude his remarks by advocating some scheme; but it has nothing in the world to do with Vanderbilt. He merely wished to prostrate himself before the mystery of a millionaire. For when we really worship anything, we love not only its clearness but its obscurity. We exult in its very invisibility. Thus, for instance, when a man is in love with a woman he takes special pleasure in the fact that a woman is unreasonable. Thus, again, the very pious poet, celebrating his Creator, takes pleasure in saying that God moves in a mysterious way. Now, the writer of the paragraph which I have quoted does not seem to have had anything to do with a god, and I should not think (judging by his extreme unpracticality) that he had ever been really in love with a woman. But the thing he does worship — Vanderbilt — he treats in exactly this mystical manner. He really revels in the fact his deity

Vanderbilt is keeping a secret from him. And it fills his soul with a sort of transport of cunning, an ecstasy of priestcraft, that he should pretend to be telling to the multitude that terrible secret which he does not know.

Speaking about the instinct that makes people rich, the same writer remarks — -

“In olden days its existence was fully understood. The Greeks enshrined it in the story of Midas, of the ‘Golden Touch.’ Here was a man who turned everything he laid his hands upon into gold. His life was a progress amidst riches. Out of everything that came in his way he created the precious metal. ‘A foolish legend,’ said the wiseacres of the Victorian age. ‘A truth,’ say we of to-day. We all know of such men. We are ever meeting or reading about such persons who turn everything they touch into gold. Success dogs their very footsteps. Their life’s pathway leads unerringly upwards. They cannot fail.”

Unfortunately, however, Midas could fail; he did. His path did not lead unerringly upward. He starved because whenever he touched a biscuit or a ham sandwich it turned to gold. That was the whole point of the story, though the writer has to suppress it delicately, writing so near to a portrait of Lord Rothschild. The old fables of mankind are, indeed, unfathomably wise; but we must not have them expurgated in the interests of Mr. Vanderbilt. We must not have King Midas represented as an example of success; he was a failure of an unusually painful kind. Also, he had the ears of an ass. Also (like most other prominent and wealthy persons) he endeavoured to conceal the fact. It was his barber (if I remember right) who had to be treated on a confidential footing with regard to this peculiarity; and his barber, instead of behaving like a go-ahead person of the Succeed-at-all-costs school and trying to blackmail King Midas, went away and whispered this splendid piece of society scandal to the reeds, who enjoyed it enormously. It is said that they also whispered it as the winds swayed them to and fro. I look reverently at the portrait of Lord Rothschild; I read reverently about the exploits of Mr. Vanderbilt. I know that I cannot turn everything I touch to gold; but then I also know that I have never tried, having a preference for other substances, such as grass, and good wine. I know that these people have certainly succeeded in something; that they have certainly overcome somebody; I know that they are kings in a sense that no men were ever kings before; that they create markets and bestride continents. Yet it always seems to me that there is some small domestic fact that they are hiding, and I have sometimes thought I heard upon the wind the laughter and whisper of the reeds.

At least, let us hope that we shall all live to see these absurd books about Success covered with a proper derision and neglect. They do not teach people to be successful, but they do teach people to be snobbish; they do spread a sort of evil poetry of worldliness. The Puritans are always denouncing books that inflame lust; what shall we say of books that inflame the viler passions of avarice and pride? A hundred years ago we had the ideal of the Industrious Apprentice; boys were told that by thrift and work they would all become Lord Mayors. This was fallacious, but it was manly, and had a minimum of moral truth. In our society, temperance will not help a poor man to enrich himself, but it may help him to respect himself. Good work will not make him a rich man, but good work may make him a good workman. The Industrious Apprentice rose by virtues few and narrow indeed, but still virtues. But what shall we say of the gospel preached to the new Industrious Apprentice; the Apprentice who rises not by his virtues, but avowedly by his vices?

ON RUNNING AFTER ONE’S HAT

I feel an almost savage envy on hearing that London has been flooded in my absence, while I am in the mere country. My own Battersea has been, I understand, particularly favoured as a meeting of the waters. Battersea was already, as I need hardly say, the most beautiful of human localities. Now that it has the additional splendour of great sheets of water, there must be something quite incomparable in the landscape (or waterscape) of my own romantic town. Battersea must be a vision of Venice. The boat that brought the meat from the butcher’s must have shot along those lanes of rippling silver with the strange smoothness of the gondola. The greengrocer who brought cabbages to the corner of the Latchmere Road must have leant upon the oar with the unearthly grace of the gondolier. There is nothing so perfectly poetical as an island; and when a district is flooded it becomes an archipelago.

Some consider such romantic views of flood or fire slightly lacking in reality. But really this romantic view of such inconveniences is quite as practical as the other. The true optimist who sees in such things an opportunity for enjoyment is quite as logical and much more sensible than the ordinary “Indignant Ratepayer” who sees in them an opportunity for grumbling. Real pain, as in the case of being burnt at Smithfield or having a toothache, is a positive thing; it can be supported, but scarcely enjoyed. But, after all, our toothaches are the exception, and as for being burnt at Smithfield, it only happens to us at the very longest intervals. And most of the inconveniences that make men swear or women cry are really sentimental or imaginative inconveniences — things altogether of the mind. For instance, we often hear grown-up people complaining of having to hang about a railway station and wait for a train. Did you ever hear a small boy complain of having to hang about a railway station and wait for a train? No; for to him to be inside a railway station is to be inside a cavern of wonder and a palace of poetical pleasures. Because to him the red light and the green light on the signal are like a new sun and a new moon. Because to him when the wooden arm of the signal falls down suddenly, it is as if a great king had thrown down his staff as a signal and started a shrieking tournament of trains. I myself am of little boys’ habit in this matter. They also serve who only stand and wait for the two fifteen. Their meditations may be full of rich and fruitful things. Many of the most purple hours of my life have been passed at Clapham Junction, which is now, I suppose, under water. I have been there in many moods so fixed and mystical that the water might well have come up to my waist before I noticed it particularly. But in the case of all such annoyances, as I have said, everything depends upon the emotional point of view. You can safely apply the test to almost every one of the things that are currently talked of as the typical nuisance of daily life.

For instance, there is a current impression that it is unpleasant to have to run after one's hat. Why should it be unpleasant to the well-ordered and pious mind? Not merely because it is running, and running exhausts one. The same people run much faster in games and sports. The same people run much more eagerly after an uninteresting little leather ball than they will after a nice silk hat. There is an idea that it is humiliating to run after one's hat; and when people say it is humiliating they mean that it is comic. It certainly is comic; but man is a very comic creature, and most of the things he does are comic — eating, for instance. And the most comic things of all are exactly the things that are most worth doing — such as making love. A man running after a hat is not half so ridiculous as a man running after a wife.

Now a man could, if he felt rightly in the matter, run after his hat with the manliest ardour and the most sacred joy. He might regard himself as a jolly huntsman pursuing a wild animal, for certainly no animal could be wilder. In fact, I am inclined to believe that hat-hunting on windy days will be the sport of the upper classes in the future. There will be a meet of ladies and gentlemen on some high ground on a gusty morning. They will be told that the professional attendants have started a hat in such-and-such a thicket, or whatever be the technical term. Notice that this employment will in the fullest degree combine sport with humanitarianism. The hunters would feel that they were not inflicting pain. Nay, they would feel that they were inflicting pleasure, rich, almost riotous pleasure, upon the people who were looking on. When last I saw an old gentleman running after his hat in Hyde Park, I told him that a heart so benevolent as his ought to be filled with peace and thanks at the thought of how much unaffected pleasure his every gesture and bodily attitude were at that moment giving to the crowd.

The same principle can be applied to every other typical domestic worry. A gentleman trying to get a fly out of the milk or a piece of cork out of his glass of wine often imagines himself to be irritated. Let him think for a moment of the patience of anglers sitting by dark pools, and let his soul be immediately irradiated with gratification and repose. Again, I have known some people of very modern views driven by their distress to the use of theological terms to which they attached no doctrinal significance, merely because a drawer was jammed tight and they could not pull it out. A friend of mine was particularly afflicted in this way. Every day his drawer was jammed, and every day in consequence it was something else that rhymes to it. But I pointed out to him that this sense of wrong was really subjective and relative; it rested entirely upon the assumption that the drawer could, should, and would come out easily. “But if,” I said, “you picture to yourself that you are pulling against some powerful and oppressive enemy, the struggle will become merely exciting and not exasperating. Imagine that you are tugging up a lifeboat out of the sea. Imagine that you are roping up a fellow-creature out of an Alpine crevass. Imagine even that you are a boy again and engaged in a tug-of-war between French and English.” Shortly after saying this I left him; but I have no doubt at all that my words bore the best possible fruit. I have no doubt that every day of his life he hangs on to the handle of that drawer with a flushed face and eyes bright with battle, uttering encouraging shouts to himself, and seeming to hear all round him the roar of an applauding ring.

So I do not think that it is altogether fanciful or incredible to suppose that even the floods in London may be accepted and enjoyed poetically. Nothing beyond inconvenience seems really to have been caused by them; and inconvenience, as I have said, is only one aspect, and that the most unimaginative and accidental aspect of a really romantic situation. An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered. An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered. The water that girdled the houses and shops of London must, if anything, have only increased their previous witchery and wonder. For as the Roman Catholic priest in the story said: “Wine is good with everything except water,” and on a similar principle, water is good with everything except wine.

THE VOTE AND THE HOUSE

Most of us will be canvassed soon, I suppose; some of us may even canvass. Upon which side, of course, nothing will induce me to state, beyond saying that by a remarkable coincidence it will in every case be the only side in which a high-minded, public-spirited, and patriotic citizen can take even a momentary interest. But the general question of canvassing itself, being a non-party question, is one which we may be permitted to approach. The rules for canvassers are fairly familiar to any one who has ever canvassed. They are printed on the little card which you carry about with you and lose. There is a statement, I think, that you must not offer a voter food or drink. However hospitable you may feel towards him in his own house, you must not carry his lunch about with you. You must not produce a veal cutlet from your tail-coat pocket. You must not conceal poached eggs about your person. You must not, like a kind of conjurer, produce baked potatoes from your hat. In short, the canvasser must not feed the voter in any way. Whether the voter is allowed to feed the canvasser, whether the voter may give the canvasser veal cutlets and baked potatoes, is a point of law on which I have never been able to inform myself. When I found myself canvassing a gentleman, I have sometimes felt tempted to ask him if there was any rule against his giving me food and drink; but the matter seemed a delicate one to approach. His attitude to me also sometimes suggested a doubt as to whether he would, even if he could. But there are voters who might find it worth while to discover if there is any law against bribing a canvasser. They might bribe him to go away.

The second veto for canvassers which was printed on the little card said that you must not persuade any one to personate a voter. I have no idea what it means. To dress up as an average voter seems a little vague. There is no well-recognised uniform, as far as I know, with civic waistcoat and patriotic whiskers. The enterprise resolves itself into one somewhat similar to the enterprise of a rich friend of mine who went to a fancy-dress ball dressed up as a gentleman. Perhaps it means that there is a practice of personating some individual voter. The canvasser creeps to the house of his fellow-conspirator carrying a make-up in a bag. He produces from it a pair of white moustaches and a single eyeglass, which are sufficient to give the most common-place person a startling resemblance to the Colonel at No. 80. Or he hurriedly affixes to his friend that large nose and that bald head which are all that is essential to an illusion of the presence of Professor Budger. I do not undertake to unravel these knots. I can only say that when I was a canvasser I was told by the little card, with every circumstance of seriousness and authority, that I was not to persuade anybody to personate a voter: and I can lay my hand upon my heart and affirm that I never did.

The third injunction on the card was one which seemed to me, if interpreted exactly and according to its words, to undermine the very foundations of our politics. It told me that I must not "threaten a voter with any consequence whatever." No doubt this was intended to apply to threats of a personal and illegitimate character; as, for instance, if a wealthy candidate were to threaten to raise all the rents, or to put up a statue of himself. But as verbally and grammatically expressed, it certainly would cover those general threats of disaster to the whole community which are the main matter of political discussion. When a canvasser says that if the opposition candidate gets in the country will be ruined, he is threatening the voters with certain consequences. When the Free Trader says that if Tariffs are adopted the people in Brompton or Bayswater will crawl about eating grass, he is threatening them with consequences. When the Tariff Reformer says that if Free Trade exists for another year St. Paul's Cathedral will be a ruin and Ludgate Hill as deserted as Stonehenge, he is also threatening. And what is the good of being a Tariff Reformer if you can't say that? What is the use of being a politician or a Parliamentary candidate at all if one cannot tell the people that if the other man gets in, England will be instantly invaded and enslaved, blood be pouring down the Strand, and all the English ladies carried off into harems. But these things are, after all, consequences, so to speak.

The majority of refined persons in our day may generally be heard abusing the practice of canvassing. In the same way the majority of refined persons (commonly the same refined persons) may be heard abusing the practice of interviewing celebrities. It seems a very singular thing to me that this refined world reserves all its indignation for the comparatively open and innocent element in both walks of life. There is really a vast amount of corruption and hypocrisy in our election politics; about the most honest thing in the whole mess is the canvassing. A man has not got a right to "nurse" a constituency with aggressive charities, to buy it with great presents of parks and libraries, to open vague vistas of future benevolence;

all this, which goes on unrebuked, is bribery and nothing else. But a man has got the right to go to another free man and ask him with civility whether he will vote for him. The information can be asked, granted, or refused without any loss of dignity on either side, which is more than can be said of a park. It is the same with the place of interviewing in journalism. In a trade where there are labyrinths of insincerity, interviewing is about the most simple and the most sincere thing there is. The canvasser, when he wants to know a man's opinions, goes and asks him. It may be a bore; but it is about as plain and straight a thing as he could do. So the interviewer, when he wants to know a man's opinions, goes and asks him. Again, it may be a bore; but again, it is about as plain and straight as anything could be. But all the other real and systematic cynicisms of our journalism pass without being vituperated and even without being known — the financial motives of policy, the misleading posters, the suppression of just letters of complaint. A statement about a man may be infamously untrue, but it is read calmly. But a statement by a man to an interviewer is felt as indefensibly vulgar. That the paper should misrepresent him is nothing; that he should represent himself is bad taste. The whole error in both cases lies in the fact that the refined persons are attacking politics and journalism on the ground of vulgarity. Of course, politics and journalism are, as it happens, very vulgar. But their vulgarity is not the worst thing about them. Things are so bad with both that by this time their vulgarity is the best thing about them. Their vulgarity is at least a noisy thing; and their great danger is that silence that always comes before decay. The conversational persuasion at elections is perfectly human and rational; it is the silent persuasions that are utterly damnable.

If it is true that the Commons' House will not hold all the Commons, it is a very good example of what we call the anomalies of the English Constitution. It is also, I think, a very good example of how highly undesirable those anomalies really are. Most Englishmen say that these anomalies do not matter; they are not ashamed of being illogical; they are proud of being illogical. Lord Macaulay (a very typical Englishman, romantic, prejudiced, poetical), Lord Macaulay said that he would not lift his hand to get rid of an anomaly that was not also a grievance. Many other sturdy romantic Englishmen say the same. They boast of our anomalies; they boast of our illogicality; they say it shows what a practical people we are. They are utterly wrong. Lord Macaulay was in this matter, as in a few others, utterly wrong. Anomalies do matter very much, and do a great deal of harm; abstract illogicalities do matter a great deal, and do a great deal of harm. And this for a reason that any one at all acquainted with human nature can see for himself. All injustice begins in the mind. And anomalies accustom the mind to the idea of unreason and untruth. Suppose I had by some prehistoric law the power of forcing every man in Battersea to nod his head three times before he got out of bed. The practical politicians might say that this power was a harmless anomaly; that it was not a grievance. It could do my subjects no harm; it could do me no good. The people of Battersea, they would say, might safely submit to it. But the people of Battersea could not safely submit to it, for all that. If I had nodded their heads for them for fifty years I could cut off their heads for them at the end of it with immeasurably greater ease. For there would have permanently sunk into every man's mind the notion that it was a natural thing for me to have a fantastic and irrational power. They would have grown accustomed to insanity.

For, in order that men should resist injustice, something more is necessary than that they should think injustice unpleasant. They must think injustice *absurd*; above all, they must think it startling. They must retain the violence of a virgin astonishment. That is the explanation of the singular fact which must have struck many people in the relations of philosophy and reform. It is the fact (I mean) that optimists are more practical reformers than pessimists. Superficially, one would imagine that the railer would be the reformer; that the man who thought that everything was wrong would be the man to put everything right. In historical practice the thing is quite the other way; curiously enough, it is the man who likes things as they are who really makes them better. The optimist Dickens has achieved more reforms than the pessimist Gissing. A man like Rousseau has far too rosy a theory of human nature; but he produces a revolution. A man like David Hume thinks that almost all things are depressing; but he is a Conservative, and wishes to keep them as they are. A man like Godwin believes existence to be kindly; but he is a rebel. A man like Carlyle believes existence to be cruel; but he is a Tory. Everywhere the man who alters things begins by liking things. And the real explanation of this success of the optimistic reformer, of this failure of the pessimistic reformer, is, after all, an explanation of sufficient simplicity. It is because the optimist can look at wrong not only with indignation, but with a startled indignation. When the pessimist looks at any infamy, it is to him, after all, only a repetition of the infamy of existence. The Court of Chancery is indefensible — like mankind. The Inquisition is abominable — like the universe. But the optimist sees injustice as something discordant and unexpected, and it stings him into action. The pessimist can be enraged at wrong; but only the optimist can be surprised at it.

And it is the same with the relations of an anomaly to the logical mind. The pessimist resents evil (like Lord Macaulay) solely because it is a grievance. The optimist resents it also, because it is an anomaly; a contradiction to his conception of the course of things. And it is not at all unimportant, but on the contrary most important, that this course of things in politics and elsewhere should be lucid, explicable and defensible. When people have got used to unreason they can no longer be startled at injustice. When people have grown familiar with an anomaly, they are prepared to that extent for a grievance; they may think the grievance grievous, but they can no longer think it strange. Take, if only as an excellent example, the very matter alluded to before; I mean the seats, or rather the lack of seats, in the House of Commons. Perhaps it is true that under the best conditions it would never happen that every member turned up. Perhaps a complete attendance would never actually be. But who can tell how much influence in keeping members away may have been exerted by this calm assumption that they would stop away? How can any man be expected to help to make a full attendance when he knows that a full attendance is actually forbidden? How can the men who make up the Chamber do their duty reasonably when the very men who built the House have not done theirs reasonably? If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle? And what if the remarks of the trumpet take this form, “I charge you as you love your King and country to come to this Council. And I know you won’t.”

CONCEIT AND CARICATURE

If a man must needs be conceited, it is certainly better that he should be conceited about some merits or talents that he does not really possess. For then his vanity remains more or less superficial; it remains a mere mistake of fact, like that of a man who thinks he inherits the royal blood or thinks he has an infallible system for Monte Carlo. Because the merit is an unreal merit, it does not corrupt or sophisticate his real merits. He is vain about the virtue he has not got; but he may be humble about the virtues that he has got. His truly honourable qualities remain in their primordial innocence; he cannot see them and he cannot spoil them. If a man's mind is erroneously possessed with the idea that he is a great violinist, that need not prevent his being a gentleman and an honest man. But if once his mind is possessed in any strong degree with the knowledge that he is a gentleman, he will soon cease to be one.

But there is a third kind of satisfaction of which I have noticed one or two examples lately — another kind of satisfaction which is neither a pleasure in the virtues that we do possess nor a pleasure in the virtues we do not possess. It is the pleasure which a man takes in the presence or absence of certain things in himself without ever adequately asking himself whether in his case they constitute virtues at all. A man will plume himself because he is not bad in some particular way, when the truth is that he is not good enough to be bad in that particular way. Some priggish little clerk will say, “I have reason to congratulate myself that I am a civilised person, and not so bloodthirsty as the Mad Mullah.” Somebody ought to say to him, “A really good man would be less bloodthirsty than the Mullah. But you are less bloodthirsty, not because you are more of a good man, but because you are a great deal less of a man. You are not bloodthirsty, not because you would spare your enemy, but because you would run away from him.” Or again, some Puritan with a sullen type of piety would say, “I have reason to congratulate myself that I do not worship graven images like the old heathen Greeks.” And again somebody ought to say to him, “The best religion may not worship graven images, because it may see beyond them. But if you do not worship graven images, it is only because you are mentally and morally quite incapable of graving them. True religion, perhaps, is above idolatry. But you are below idolatry. You are not holy enough yet to worship a lump of stone."

Mr. F. C. Gould, the brilliant and felicitous caricaturist, recently delivered a most interesting speech upon the nature and atmosphere of our modern English caricature. I think there is really very little to congratulate oneself about in the condition of English caricature. There are few causes for pride; probably the greatest cause for pride is Mr. F. C. Gould. But Mr. F. C. Gould, forbidden by modesty to adduce this excellent ground for optimism, fell back upon saying a thing which is said by numbers of other people, but has not perhaps been said lately with the full authority of an eminent cartoonist. He said that he thought "that they might congratulate themselves that the style of caricature which found acceptation nowadays was very different from the lampoon of the old days." Continuing, he said, according to the newspaper report, "On looking back to the political lampoons of Rowlandson's and Gilray's time they would find them coarse and brutal. In some countries abroad still, 'even in America,' the method of political caricature was of the bludgeon kind. The fact was we had passed the bludgeon stage. If they were brutal in attacking a man, even for political reasons, they roused sympathy for the man who was attacked. What they had to do was to rub in the point they wanted to emphasise as gently as they could." (Laughter and applause.)

Anybody reading these words, and anybody who heard them, will certainly feel that there is in them a great deal of truth, as well as a great deal of geniality. But along with that truth and with that geniality there is a streak of that erroneous type of optimism which is founded on the fallacy of which I have spoken above. Before we congratulate ourselves upon the absence of certain faults from our nation or society, we ought to ask ourselves why it is that these faults are absent. Are we without the fault because we have the opposite virtue? Or are we without the fault because we have the opposite fault? It is a good thing assuredly, to be innocent of any excess; but let us be sure that we are not innocent of excess merely by being guilty of defect. Is it really true that our English political satire is so moderate because it is so magnanimous, so forgiving, so saintly? Is it penetrated through and through with a mystical charity, with a psychological tenderness? Do we spare the feelings of the Cabinet Minister because we pierce through all his apparent crimes and follies down to the dark virtues of which his own soul is unaware? Do we temper the wind to the Leader of the Opposition because in our all-embracing heart we pity and cherish the struggling spirit of the Leader of the Opposition? Briefly, have we left off being brutal because we are too grand and generous to be brutal? Is it really true that we are *better* than brutality? Is it really true that we have *passed* the bludgeon stage?

I fear that there is, to say the least of it, another side to the matter. Is it not only too probable that the mildness of our political satire, when compared with the political satire of our fathers, arises simply from the profound unreality of our current politics? Rowlandson and Gilray did not fight merely because they were naturally pothouse pugilists; they fought because they had something to fight about. It is easy enough to be refined about things that do not matter; but men kicked and plunged a little in that portentous wrestle in which swung to and fro, alike dizzy with danger, the independence of England, the independence of Ireland, the independence of France. If we wish for a proof of this fact that the lack of refinement did not come from mere brutality, the proof is easy. The proof is that in that struggle no personalities were more brutal than the really refined personalities. None were more violent and intolerant than those who were by nature polished and sensitive. Nelson, for instance, had the nerves and good manners of a woman: nobody in his senses, I suppose, would call Nelson “brutal.” But when he was touched upon the national matter, there sprang out of him a spout of oaths, and he could only tell men to “Kill! kill! kill the d —— d Frenchmen.” It would be as easy to take examples on the other side. Camille Desmoulins was a man of much the same type, not only elegant and sweet in temper, but almost tremulously tender and humanitarian. But he was ready, he said, “to embrace Liberty upon a pile of corpses.” In Ireland there were even more instances. Robert Emmet was only one famous example of a whole family of men at once sensitive and savage. I think that Mr. F.C. Gould is altogether wrong in talking of this political ferocity as if it were some sort of survival from ruder conditions, like a flint axe or a hairy man. Cruelty is, perhaps, the worst kind of sin. Intellectual cruelty is certainly the worst kind of cruelty. But there is nothing in the least barbaric or ignorant about intellectual cruelty. The great Renaissance artists who mixed colours exquisitely mixed poisons equally exquisitely; the great Renaissance princes who designed instruments of music also designed instruments of torture. Barbarity, malignity, the desire to hurt men, are the evil things generated in atmospheres of intense reality when great nations or great causes are at war. We may, perhaps, be glad that we have not got them: but it is somewhat dangerous to be proud that we have not got them. Perhaps we are hardly great enough to have them. Perhaps some great virtues have to be generated, as in men like Nelson or Emmet, before we can have these vices at all, even as temptations. I, for one, believe that if our caricaturists do not hate their enemies, it is not because they are too big to hate them, but because their enemies are not big enough to hate. I do not think we have passed the bludgeon stage. I believe we have not come to the bludgeon stage. We must be better, braver, and purer men than we are before we come to the bludgeon stage.

Let us then, by all means, be proud of the virtues that we have not got; but let us not be too arrogant about the virtues that we cannot help having. It may be that a man living on a desert island has a right to congratulate himself upon the fact that he can meditate at his ease. But he must not congratulate himself on the fact that he is on a desert island, and at the same time congratulate himself on the self-restraint he shows in not going to a ball every night. Similarly our England may have a right to congratulate itself upon the fact that her politics are very quiet, amicable, and humdrum. But she must not congratulate herself upon that fact and also congratulate herself upon the self-restraint she shows in not tearing herself and her citizens into rags. Between two English Privy Councillors polite language is a mark of civilisation, but really not a mark of magnanimity.

Allied to this question is the kindred question on which we so often hear an innocent British boast — the fact that our statesmen are privately on very friendly relations, although in Parliament they sit on opposite sides of the House. Here, again, it is as well to have no illusions. Our statesmen are not monsters of mystical generosity or insane logic, who are really able to hate a man from three to twelve and to love him from twelve to three. If our social relations are more peaceful than those of France or America or the England of a hundred years ago, it is simply because our politics are more peaceful; not improbably because our politics are more fictitious. If our statesmen agree more in private, it is for the very simple reason that they agree more in public. And the reason they agree so much in both cases is really that they belong to one social class; and therefore the dining life is the real life. Tory and Liberal statesmen like each other, but it is not because they are both expansive; it is because they are both exclusive.

PATRIOTISM AND SPORT.

I notice that some papers, especially papers that call themselves patriotic, have fallen into quite a panic over the fact that we have been twice beaten in the world of sport, that a Frenchman has beaten us at golf, and that Belgians have beaten us at rowing. I suppose that the incidents are important to any people who ever believed in the self-satisfied English legend on this subject. I suppose that there are men who vaguely believe that we could never be beaten by a Frenchman, despite the fact that we have often been beaten by Frenchmen, and once by a Frenchwoman. In the old pictures in *Punch* you will find a recurring piece of satire. The English caricaturists always assumed that a Frenchman could not ride to hounds or enjoy English hunting. It did not seem to occur to them that all the people who founded English hunting were Frenchmen. All the Kings and nobles who originally rode to hounds spoke French. Large numbers of those Englishmen who still ride to hounds have French names. I suppose that the thing is important to any one who is ignorant of such evident matters as these. I suppose that if a man has ever believed that we English have some sacred and separate right to be athletic, such reverses do appear quite enormous and shocking. They feel as if, while the proper sun was rising in the east, some other and unexpected sun had begun to rise in the north-north-west by north. For the benefit, the moral and intellectual benefit of such people, it may be worth while to point out that the Anglo-Saxon has in these cases been defeated precisely by those competitors whom he has always regarded as being out of the running; by Latins, and by Latins of the most easy and unstrenuous type; not only by Frenchman, but by Belgians. All this, I say, is worth telling to any intelligent person who believes in the haughty theory of Anglo-Saxon superiority. But, then, no intelligent person does believe in the haughty theory of Anglo-Saxon superiority. No quite genuine Englishman ever did believe in it. And the genuine Englishman these defeats will in no respect dismay.

The genuine English patriot will know that the strength of England has never depended upon any of these things; that the glory of England has never had anything to do with them, except in the opinion of a large section of the rich and a loose section of the poor which copies the idleness of the rich. These people will, of course, think too much of our failure, just as they thought too much of our success. The typical Jingoes who have admired their countrymen too much for being conquerors will, doubtless, despise their countrymen too much for being conquered. But the Englishman with any feeling for England will know that athletic failures do not prove that England is weak, any more than athletic successes proved that England was strong. The truth is that athletics, like all other things, especially modern, are insanely individualistic. The Englishmen who win sporting prizes are exceptional among Englishmen, for the simple reason that they are exceptional even among men. English athletes represent England just about as much as Mr. Barnum's freaks represent America. There are so few of such people in the whole world that it is almost a toss-up whether they are found in this or that country.

If any one wants a simple proof of this, it is easy to find. When the great English athletes are not exceptional Englishmen they are generally not Englishmen at all. Nay, they are often representatives of races of which the average tone is specially incompatible with athletics. For instance, the English are supposed to rule the natives of India in virtue of their superior hardiness, superior activity, superior health of body and mind. The Hindus are supposed to be our subjects because they are less fond of action, less fond of openness and the open air. In a word, less fond of cricket. And, substantially, this is probably true, that the Indians are less fond of cricket. All the same, if you ask among Englishmen for the very best cricket-player, you will find that he is an Indian. Or, to take another case: it is, broadly speaking, true that the Jews are, as a race, pacific, intellectual, indifferent to war, like the Indians, or, perhaps, contemptuous of war, like the Chinese: nevertheless, of the very good prize-fighters, one or two have been Jews.

This is one of the strongest instances of the particular kind of evil that arises from our English form of the worship of athletics. It concentrates too much upon the success of individuals. It began, quite naturally and rightly, with wanting England to win. The second stage was that it wanted some Englishmen to win. The third stage was (in the ecstasy and agony of some special competition) that it wanted one particular Englishman to win. And the fourth stage was that when he had won, it discovered that he was not even an Englishman.

This is one of the points, I think, on which something might really be said for Lord Roberts and his rather vague ideas which vary between rifle clubs and conscription. Whatever may be the advantages or disadvantages otherwise of the idea, it is at least an idea of procuring equality and a sort of average in the athletic capacity of the people; it might conceivably act as a corrective to our mere tendency to see ourselves in certain exceptional athletes. As it is, there are millions of Englishmen who really think that they are a muscular race because C.B. Fry is an Englishman. And there are many of them who think vaguely that athletics must belong to England because Ranjitsinhji is an Indian.

But the real historic strength of England, physical and moral, has never had anything to do with this athletic specialism; it has been rather hindered by it. Somebody said that the Battle of Waterloo was won on Eton playing-fields. It was a particularly unfortunate remark, for the English contribution to the victory of Waterloo depended very much more than is common in victories upon the steadiness of the rank and file in an almost desperate situation. The Battle of Waterloo was won by the stubbornness of the common soldier — that is to say, it was won by the man who had never been to Eton. It was absurd to say that Waterloo was won on Eton cricket-fields. But it might have been fairly said that Waterloo was won on the village green, where clumsy boys played a very clumsy cricket. In a word, it was the average of the nation that was strong, and athletic glories do not indicate much about the average of a nation. Waterloo was not won by good cricket-players. But Waterloo was won by bad cricket-players, by a mass of men who had some minimum of athletic instincts and habits.

It is a good sign in a nation when such things are done badly. It shows that all the people are doing them. And it is a bad sign in a nation when such things are done very well, for it shows that only a few experts and eccentrics are doing them, and that the nation is merely looking on. Suppose that whenever we heard of walking in England it always meant walking forty-five miles a day without fatigue. We should be perfectly certain that only a few men were walking at all, and that all the other British subjects were being wheeled about in Bath-chairs. But if when we hear of walking it means slow walking, painful walking, and frequent fatigue, then we know that the mass of the nation still is walking. We know that England is still literally on its feet.

The difficulty is therefore that the actual raising of the standard of athletics has probably been bad for national athleticism. Instead of the tournament being a healthy *mêlée* into which any ordinary man would rush and take his chance, it has become a fenced and guarded tilting-yard for the collision of particular champions against whom no ordinary man would pit himself or even be permitted to pit himself. If Waterloo was won on Eton cricket-fields it was because Eton cricket was probably much more careless then than it is now. As long as the game was a game, everybody wanted to join in it. When it becomes an art, every one wants to look at it. When it was frivolous it may have won Waterloo: when it was serious and efficient it lost Magersfontein.

In the Waterloo period there was a general rough-and-tumble athleticism among average Englishmen. It cannot be re-created by cricket, or by conscription, or by any artificial means. It was a thing of the soul. It came out of laughter, religion, and the spirit of the place. But it was like the modern French duel in this — that it might happen to anybody. If I were a French journalist it might really happen that Monsieur Clemenceau might challenge me to meet him with pistols. But I do not think that it is at all likely that Mr. C. B. Fry will ever challenge me to meet him with cricket-bats.

AN ESSAY ON TWO CITIES.

A little while ago I fell out of England into the town of Paris. If a man fell out of the moon into the town of Paris he would know that it was the capital of a great nation. If, however, he fell (perhaps off some other side of the moon) so as to hit the city of London, he would not know so well that it was the capital of a great nation; at any rate, he would not know that the nation was so great as it is. This would be so even on the assumption that the man from the moon could not read our alphabet, as presumably he could not, unless elementary education in that planet has gone to rather unsuspected lengths. But it is true that a great part of the distinctive quality which separates Paris from London may be even seen in the names. Real democrats always insist that England is an aristocratic country. Real aristocrats always insist (for some mysterious reason) that it is a democratic country. But if any one has any real doubt about the matter let him consider simply the names of the streets. Nearly all the streets out of the Strand, for instance, are named after the first name, second name, third name, fourth, fifth, and sixth names of some particular noble family; after their relations, connections, or places of residence — Arundel Street, Norfolk Street, Villiers Street, Bedford Street, Southampton Street, and any number of others. The names are varied, so as to introduce the same family under all sorts of different surnames. Thus we have Arundel Street and also Norfolk Street; thus we have Buckingham Street and also Villiers Street. To say that this is not aristocracy is simply intellectual impudence. I am an ordinary citizen, and my name is Gilbert Keith Chesterton; and I confess that if I found three streets in a row in the Strand, the first called Gilbert Street, the second Keith Street, and the third Chesterton Street, I should consider that I had become a somewhat more important person in the commonwealth than was altogether good for its health. If Frenchmen ran London (which God forbid!), they would think it quite as ludicrous that those streets should be named after the Duke of Buckingham as that they should be named after me. They are streets out of one of the main thoroughfares of London. If French methods were adopted, one of them would be called Shakspere Street, another Cromwell Street, another Wordsworth Street; there would be statues of each of these persons at the end of each of these streets, and any streets left over would be named after the date on which the Reform Bill was passed or the Penny Postage established.

Suppose a man tried to find people in London by the names of the places. It would make a fine farce, illustrating our illogicality. Our hero having once realised that Buckingham Street was named after the Buckingham family, would naturally walk into Buckingham Palace in search of the Duke of Buckingham. To his astonishment he would meet somebody quite different. His simple lunar logic would lead him to suppose that if he wanted the Duke of Marlborough (which seems unlikely) he would find him at Marlborough House. He would find the Prince of Wales. When at last he understood that the Marlboroughs live at Blenheim, named after the great Marlborough's victory, he would, no doubt, go there. But he would again find himself in error if, acting upon this principle, he tried to find the Duke of Wellington, and told the cabman to drive to Waterloo. I wonder that no one has written a wild romance about the adventures of such an alien, seeking the great English aristocrats, and only guided by the names; looking for the Duke of Bedford in the town of that name, seeking for some trace of the Duke of Norfolk in Norfolk. He might sail for Wellington in New Zealand to find the ancient seat of the Wellingtons. The last scene might show him trying to learn Welsh in order to converse with the Prince of Wales.

But even if the imaginary traveller knew no alphabet of this earth at all, I think it would still be possible to suppose him seeing a difference between London and Paris, and, upon the whole, the real difference. He would not be able to read the words “Quai Voltaire;” but he would see the sneering statue and the hard, straight roads; without having heard of Voltaire he would understand that the city was Voltairean. He would not know that Fleet Street was named after the Fleet Prison. But the same national spirit which kept the Fleet Prison closed and narrow still keeps Fleet Street closed and narrow. Or, if you will, you may call Fleet Street cosy, and the Fleet Prison cosy. I think I could be more comfortable in the Fleet Prison, in an English way of comfort, than just under the statue of Voltaire. I think that the man from the moon would know France without knowing French; I think that he would know England without having heard the word. For in the last resort all men talk by signs. To talk by statues is to talk by signs; to talk by cities is to talk by signs. Pillars, palaces, cathedrals, temples, pyramids, are an enormous dumb alphabet: as if some giant held up his fingers of stone. The most important things at the last are always said by signs, even if, like the Cross on St. Paul’s, they are signs in heaven. If men do not understand signs, they will never understand words.

For my part, I should be inclined to suggest that the chief object of education should be to restore simplicity. If you like to put it so, the chief object of education is not to learn things; nay, the chief object of education is to unlearn things. The chief object of education is to unlearn all the weariness and wickedness of the world and to get back into that state of exhilaration we all instinctively celebrate when we write by preference of children and of boys. If I were an examiner appointed to examine all examiners (which does not at present appear probable), I would not only ask the teachers how much knowledge they had imparted; I would ask them how much splendid and scornful ignorance they had erected, like some royal tower in arms. But, in any case, I would insist that people should have so much simplicity as would enable them to see things suddenly and to see things as they are. I do not care so much whether they can read the names over the shops. I do care very much whether they can read the shops. I do not feel deeply troubled as to whether they can tell where London is on the map so long as they can tell where Brixton is on the way home. I do not even mind whether they can put two and two together in the mathematical sense; I am content if they can put two and two together in the metaphorical sense. But all this longer statement of an obvious view comes back to the metaphor I have employed. I do not care a dump whether they know the alphabet, so long as they know the dumb alphabet.

Unfortunately, I have noticed in many aspects of our popular education that this is not done at all. One teaches our London children to see London with abrupt and simple eyes. And London is far more difficult to see properly than any other place. London is a riddle. Paris is an explanation. The education of the Parisian child is something corresponding to the clear avenues and the exact squares of Paris. When the Parisian boy has done learning about the French reason and the Roman order he can go out and see the thing repeated in the shapes of many shining public places, in the angles of many streets. But when the English boy goes out, after learning about a vague progress and idealism, he cannot see it anywhere. He cannot see anything anywhere, except Sapolio and the *Daily Mail*. We must either alter London to suit the ideals of our education, or else alter our education to suit the great beauty of London.

FRENCH AND ENGLISH

It is obvious that there is a great deal of difference between being international and being cosmopolitan. All good men are international. Nearly all bad men are cosmopolitan. If we are to be international we must be national. And it is largely because those who call themselves the friends of peace have not dwelt sufficiently on this distinction that they do not impress the bulk of any of the nations to which they belong. International peace means a peace between nations, not a peace after the destruction of nations, like the Buddhist peace after the destruction of personality. The golden age of the good European is like the heaven of the Christian: it is a place where people will love each other; not like the heaven of the Hindu, a place where they will be each other. And in the case of national character this can be seen in a curious way. It will generally be found, I think, that the more a man really appreciates and admires the soul of another people the less he will attempt to imitate it; he will be conscious that there is something in it too deep and too unmanageable to imitate. The Englishman who has a fancy for France will try to be French; the Englishman who admires France will remain obstinately English. This is to be particularly noticed in the case of our relations with the French, because it is one of the outstanding peculiarities of the French that their vices are all on the surface, and their extraordinary virtues concealed. One might almost say that their vices are the flower of their virtues.

Thus their obscenity is the expression of their passionate love of dragging all things into the light. The avarice of their peasants means the independence of their peasants. What the English call their rudeness in the streets is a phase of their social equality. The worried look of their women is connected with the responsibility of their women; and a certain unconscious brutality of hurry and gesture in the men is related to their inexhaustible and extraordinary military courage. Of all countries, therefore, France is the worst country for a superficial fool to admire. Let a fool hate France: if the fool loves it he will soon be a knave. He will certainly admire it, not only for the things that are not creditable, but actually for the things that are not there. He will admire the grace and indolence of the most industrious people in the world. He will admire the romance and fantasy of the most determinedly respectable and commonplace people in the world. This mistake the Englishman will make if he admires France too hastily; but the mistake that he makes about France will be slight compared with the mistake that he makes about himself. An Englishman who professes really to like French realistic novels, really to be at home in a French modern theatre, really to experience no shock on first seeing the savage French caricatures, is making a mistake very dangerous for his own sincerity. He is admiring something he does not understand. He is reaping where he has not sown, and taking up where he has not laid down; he is trying to taste the fruit when he has never toiled over the tree. He is trying to pluck the exquisite fruit of French cynicism, when he has never tilled the rude but rich soil of French virtue.

The thing can only be made clear to Englishmen by turning it round. Suppose a Frenchman came out of democratic France to live in England, where the shadow of the great houses still falls everywhere, and where even freedom was, in its origin, aristocratic. If the Frenchman saw our aristocracy and liked it, if he saw our snobbishness and liked it, if he set himself to imitate it, we all know what we should feel. We all know that we should feel that that particular Frenchman was a repulsive little gnat. He would be imitating English aristocracy; he would be imitating the English vice. But he would not even understand the vice he plagiarised: especially he would not understand that the vice is partly a virtue. He would not understand those elements in the English which balance snobbishness and make it human: the great kindness of the English, their hospitality, their unconscious poetry, their sentimental conservatism, which really admires the gentry. The French Royalist sees that the English like their King. But he does not grasp that while it is base to worship a King, it is almost noble to worship a powerless King. The impotence of the Hanoverian Sovereigns has raised the English loyal subject almost to the chivalry and dignity of a Jacobite. The Frenchman sees that the English servant is respectful: he does not realise that he is also disrespectful; that there is an English legend of the humorous and faithful servant, who is as much a personality as his master; the Caleb Balderstone, the Sam Weller. He sees that the English do admire a nobleman; he does not allow for the fact that they admire a nobleman most when he does not behave like one. They like a noble to be unconscious and amiable: the slave may be humble, but the master must not be proud. The master is Life, as they would like to enjoy it; and among the joys they desire in him there is none which they desire more sincerely than that of generosity, of throwing money about among mankind, or, to use the noble mediæval word, largesse — the joy of largeness. That is why a cabman tells you are no gentleman if you give him his correct fare. Not only his pocket, but his soul is hurt. You have wounded his ideal. You have defaced his vision of the perfect aristocrat. All this is really very subtle and elusive; it is very difficult to separate what is mere slavishness from what is a sort of vicarious nobility in the English love of a lord. And no Frenchman could easily grasp it at all. He would think it was mere slavishness; and if he liked it, he would be a slave. So every Englishman must (at first) feel French candour to be mere brutality. And if he likes it, he is a brute. These national merits must not be understood so easily. It requires long years of plenitude and quiet, the slow growth of great parks, the seasoning of oaken beams, the dark enrichment of red wine in cellars and in inns, all the leisure and the life of England through many centuries, to produce at last the generous and genial fruit of English snobbishness. And it requires battery and barricade, songs in the streets, and ragged men dead for an idea, to produce and justify the terrible flower of French indecency.

When I was in Paris a short time ago, I went with an English friend of mine to an extremely brilliant and rapid succession of French plays, each occupying about twenty minutes. They were all astonishingly effective; but there was one of them which was so effective that my friend and I fought about it outside, and had almost to be separated by the police. It was intended to indicate how men really behaved in a wreck or naval disaster, how they break down, how they scream, how they fight each other without object and in a mere hatred of everything. And then there was added, with all that horrible irony which Voltaire began, a scene in which a great statesman made a speech over their bodies, saying that they were all heroes and had died in a fraternal embrace. My friend and I came out of this theatre, and as he had lived long in Paris, he said, like a Frenchman: “What admirable artistic arrangement! Is it not exquisite?” “No,” I replied, assuming as far as possible the traditional attitude of John Bull in the pictures in *Punch*— “No, it is not exquisite. Perhaps it is unmeaning; if it is unmeaning I do not mind. But if it has a meaning I know what the meaning is; it is that under all their pageant of chivalry men are not only beasts, but even hunted beasts. I do not know much of humanity, especially when humanity talks in French. But I know when a thing is meant to uplift the human soul, and when it is meant to depress it. I know that ‘Cyrano de

Bergerac' (where the actors talked even quicker) was meant to encourage man. And I know that this was meant to discourage him." "These sentimental and moral views of art," began my friend, but I broke into his words as a light broke into my mind. "Let me say to you," I said, "what Jaurès said to Liebknecht at the Socialist Conference: 'You have not died on the barricades'. You are an Englishman, as I am, and you ought to be as amiable as I am. These people have some right to be terrible in art, for they have been terrible in politics. They may endure mock tortures on the stage; they have seen real tortures in the streets. They have been hurt for the idea of Democracy. They have been hurt for the idea of Catholicism. It is not so utterly unnatural to them that they should be hurt for the idea of literature. But, by blazes, it is altogether unnatural to me! And the worst thing of all is that I, who am an Englishman, loving comfort, should find comfort in such things as this. The French do not seek comfort here, but rather unrest. This restless people seeks to keep itself in a perpetual agony of the revolutionary mood. Frenchmen, seeking revolution, may find the humiliation of humanity inspiring. But God forbid that two pleasure-seeking Englishmen should ever find it pleasant!"

THE ZOLA CONTROVERSY

The difference between two great nations can be illustrated by the coincidence that at this moment both France and England are engaged in discussing the memorial of a literary man. France is considering the celebration of the late Zola, England is considering that of the recently deceased Shakspere. There is some national significance, it may be, in the time that has elapsed. Some will find impatience and indelicacy in this early attack on Zola or deification of him; but the nation which has sat still for three hundred years after Shakspere's funeral may be considered, perhaps, to have carried delicacy too far. But much deeper things are involved than the mere matter of time. The point of the contrast is that the French are discussing whether there shall be any monument, while the English are discussing only what the monument shall be. In other words, the French are discussing a living question, while we are discussing a dead one. Or rather, not a dead one, but a settled one, which is quite a different thing.

When a thing of the intellect is settled it is not dead: rather it is immortal. The multiplication table is immortal, and so is the fame of Shakspere. But the fame of Zola is not dead or not immortal; it is at its crisis, it is in the balance; and may be found wanting. The French, therefore, are quite right in considering it a living question. It is still living as a question, because it is not yet solved. But Shakspere is not a living question: he is a living answer.

For my part, therefore, I think the French Zola controversy much more practical and exciting than the English Shakspere one. The admission of Zola to the Pantheon may be regarded as defining Zola's position. But nobody could say that a statue of Shakspere, even fifty feet high, on the top of St. Paul's Cathedral, could define Shakspere's position. It only defines our position towards Shakspere. It is he who is fixed; it is we who are unstable. The nearest approach to an English parallel to the Zola case would be furnished if it were proposed to put some savagely controversial and largely repulsive author among the ashes of the greatest English poets. Suppose, for instance, it were proposed to bury Mr. Rudyard Kipling in Westminster Abbey. I should be against burying him in Westminster Abbey; first, because he is still alive (and here I think even he himself might admit the justice of my protest); and second, because I should like to reserve that rapidly narrowing space for the great permanent examples, not for the interesting foreign interruptions, of English literature. I would not have either Mr. Kipling or Mr. George Moore in Westminster Abbey, though Mr. Kipling has certainly caught even more cleverly than Mr. Moore the lucid and cool cruelty of the French short story. I am very sure that Geoffrey Chaucer and Joseph Addison get on very well together in the Poets' Corner, despite the centuries that sunder them. But I feel that Mr. George Moore would be much happier in Pere-la-Chaise, with a riotous statue by Rodin on the top of him; and Mr. Kipling much happier under some huge Asiatic monument, carved with all the cruelties of the gods.

As to the affair of the English monument to Shakspere, every people has its own mode of commemoration, and I think there is a great deal to be said for ours. There is the French monumental style, which consists in erecting very pompous statues, very well done. There is the German monumental style, which consists in erecting very pompous statues, badly done. And there is the English monumental method, the great English way with statues, which consists in not erecting them at all. A statue may be dignified; but the absence of a statue is always dignified. For my part, I feel there is something national, something wholesomely symbolic, in the fact that there is no statue of Shakspere. There is, of course, one in Leicester Square; but the very place where it stands shows that it was put up by a foreigner for foreigners. There is surely something modest and manly about not attempting to express our greatest poet in the plastic arts in which we do not excel. We honour Shakspere as the Jews honour God — by not daring to make of him a graven image. Our sculpture, our statues, are good enough for bankers and philanthropists, who are our curse: not good enough for him, who is our benediction. Why should we celebrate the very art in which we triumph by the very art in which we fail?

England is most easily understood as the country of amateurs. It is especially the country of amateur soldiers (that is, of Volunteers), of amateur statesmen (that is, of aristocrats), and it is not unreasonable or out of keeping that it should be rather specially the country of a careless and lounging view of literature. Shakspere has no academic monument for the same reason that he had no academic education. He had small Latin and less Greek, and (in the same spirit) he has never been commemorated in Latin epitaphs or Greek marble. If there is nothing clear and fixed about the emblems of his fame, it is because there was nothing clear and fixed about the origins of it. Those great schools and Universities which watch a man in his youth may record him in his death; but Shakspere had no such unifying traditions. We can only say of him what we can say of Dickens. We can only say that he came from nowhere and that he went everywhere. For him a monument in any place is out of place. A cold statue in a certain square is unsuitable to him as it would be unsuitable to Dickens. If we put up a statue of Dickens in Portland Place to-morrow we should feel the stiffness as unnatural. We should fear that the statue might stroll about the street at night.

But in France the question of whether Zola shall go to the Panthéon when he is dead is quite as practicable as the question whether he should go to prison when he was alive. It is the problem of whether the nation shall take one turn of thought or another. In raising a monument to Zola they do not raise merely a trophy, but a finger-post. The question is one which will have to be settled in most European countries; but like all such questions, it has come first to a head in France; because France is the battlefield of Christendom. That question is, of course, roughly this: whether in that ill-defined area of verbal licence on certain dangerous topics it is an extenuation of indelicacy or an aggravation of it that the indelicacy was deliberate and solemn. Is indecency more indecent if it is grave, or more indecent if it is gay? For my part, I belong to an old school in this matter. When a book or a play strikes me as a crime, I am not disarmed by being told that it is a serious crime. If a man has written something vile, I am not comforted by the explanation that he quite meant to do it. I know all the evils of flippancy; I do not like the man who laughs at the sight of virtue. But I prefer him to the man who weeps at the sight of virtue and complains bitterly of there being any such thing. I am not reassured, when ethics are as wild as cannibalism, by the fact that they are also as grave and sincere as suicide. And I think there is an obvious fallacy in the bitter contrasts drawn by some moderns between the aversion to Ibsen's “Ghosts” and the popularity of some such joke as “Dear Old Charlie.” Surely there is nothing mysterious or unphilosophic in the popular preference. The joke of “Dear Old Charlie” is passed — because it is a joke. “Ghosts” are exorcised — because they are ghosts.

This is, of course, the whole question of Zola. I am grown up, and I do not worry myself much about Zola's immorality. The thing I cannot stand is his morality. If ever a man on this earth lived to embody the tremendous text, “But if the light in your body be darkness, how great is the darkness,” it was certainly he. Great men like Ariosto, Rabelais, and Shakspere fall in foul places, flounder in violent but venial sin, sprawl for pages, exposing their gigantic weakness, are dirty, are indefensible; and then they struggle up again and can still speak with a convincing kindness and an unbroken honour of the best things in the world: Rabelais, of the instruction of ardent and austere youth; Ariosto, of holy chivalry; Shakspere, of the splendid stillness of mercy. But in Zola even the ideals are undesirable; Zola’s mercy is colder than justice — nay, Zola’s mercy is more bitter in the mouth than injustice. When Zola shows us an ideal training he does not take us, like Rabelais, into the happy fields of humanist learning. He takes us into the schools of inhumanist learning, where there are neither books nor flowers, nor wine nor wisdom, but only deformities in glass bottles, and where the rule is taught from the exceptions. Zola’s truth answers the exact description of the skeleton in the cupboard; that is, it is something of which a domestic custom forbids the discovery, but which is quite dead, even when it is discovered. Macaulay said that the Puritans hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators. Of such substance also was this Puritan who had lost his God. A Puritan of this type is worse than the Puritan who hates pleasure because there is evil in it. This man actually hates evil because there is pleasure in it. Zola was worse than a pornographer, he was a pessimist. He did worse than encourage sin: he encouraged discouragement. He made lust loathsome because to him lust meant life.

OXFORD FROM WITHOUT

Some time ago I ventured to defend that race of hunted and persecuted outlaws, the Bishops; but until this week I had no idea of how much persecuted they were. For instance, the Bishop of Birmingham made some extremely sensible remarks in the House of Lords, to the effect that Oxford and Cambridge were (as everybody knows they are) far too much merely plutocratic playgrounds. One would have thought that an Anglican Bishop might be allowed to know something about the English University system, and even to have, if anything, some bias in its favour. But (as I pointed out) the rollicking Radicalism of Bishops has to be restrained. The man who writes the notes in the weekly paper called the *Outlook* feels that it is his business to restrain it. The passage has such simple sublimity that I must quote it —

"Dr. Gore talked unworthily of his reputation when he spoke of the older Universities as playgrounds for the rich and idle. In the first place, the rich men there are not idle. Some of the rich men are, and so are some of the poor men. On the whole, the sons of noble and wealthy families keep up the best traditions of academic life."

So far this seems all very nice. It is a part of the universal principle on which Englishmen have acted in recent years. As you will not try to make the best people the most powerful people, persuade yourselves that the most powerful people are the best people. Mad Frenchmen and Irishmen try to realise the ideal. To you belongs the nobler (and much easier) task of idealising the real. First give your Universities entirely into the power of the rich; then let the rich start traditions; and then congratulate yourselves on the fact that the sons of the rich keep up these traditions. All that is quite simple and jolly. But then this critic, who crushes Dr. Gore from the high throne of the *Outlook*, goes on in a way that is really perplexing. "It is distinctly advantageous," he says, "that rich and poor — *i. e.*, young men with a smooth path in life before them, and those who have to hew out a road for themselves — should be brought into association. Each class learns a great deal from the other. On the one side, social conceit and exclusiveness give way to the free spirit of competition amongst all classes; on the other side, angularities and prejudices are rubbed away." Even this I might have swallowed. But the paragraph concludes with this extraordinary sentence: “We get the net result in such careers as those of Lord Milner, Lord Curzon, and Mr. Asquith.”

Those three names lay my intellect prostrate. The rest of the argument I understand quite well. The social exclusiveness of aristocrats at Oxford and Cambridge gives way before the free spirit of competition amongst all classes. That is to say, there is at Oxford so hot and keen a struggle, consisting of coal-heavers, London clerks, gypsies, navvies, drapers’ assistants, grocers’ assistants — in short, all the classes that make up the bulk of England — there is such a fierce competition at Oxford among all these people that in its presence aristocratic exclusiveness gives way. That is all quite clear. I am not quite sure about the facts, but I quite understand the argument. But then, having been called upon to contemplate this bracing picture of a boisterous turmoil of all the classes of England, I am suddenly asked to accept as example of it, Lord Milner, Lord Curzon, and the present Chancellor of the Exchequer. What part do these gentlemen play in the mental process? Is Lord Curzon one of the rugged and ragged poor men whose angularities have been rubbed away? Or is he one of those whom Oxford immediately deprived of all kind of social exclusiveness? His Oxford reputation does not seem to bear out either account of him. To regard Lord Milner as a typical product of Oxford would surely be unfair. It would be to deprive the educational tradition of Germany of one of its most typical products. English aristocrats have their faults, but they are not at all like Lord Milner. What Mr. Asquith was meant to prove, whether he was a rich man who lost his exclusiveness, or a poor man who lost his angles, I am utterly unable to conceive.

There is, however, one mild but very evident truth that might perhaps be mentioned. And it is this: that none of those three excellent persons is, or ever has been, a poor man in the sense that that word is understood by the overwhelming majority of the English nation. There are no poor men at Oxford in the sense that the majority of men in the street are poor. The very fact that the writer in the *Outlook* can talk about such people as poor shows that he does not understand what the modern problem is. His kind of poor man rather reminds me of the Earl in the ballad by that great English satirist, Sir W.S. Gilbert, whose angles (very acute angles) had, I fear, never been rubbed down by an old English University. The reader will remember that when the Periwinkle-girl was adored by two Dukes, the poet added —

“A third adorer had the girl,
A man of lowly station;
A miserable grovelling Earl
Besought her approbation.”

Perhaps, indeed, some allusion to our University system, and to the universal clash in it of all the classes of the community, may be found in the verse a little farther on, which says —

“He’d had, it happily befell,
A decent education;
His views would have befitted well
A far superior station.”

Possibly there was as simple a chasm between Lord Curzon and Lord Milner. But I am afraid that the chasm will become almost imperceptible, a microscopic crack, if we compare it with the chasm that separates either or both of them from the people of this country.

Of course the truth is exactly as the Bishop of Birmingham put it. I am sure that he did not put it in any unkindly or contemptuous spirit towards those old English seats of learning, which whether they are or are not seats of learning, are, at any rate, old and English, and those are two very good things to be. The Old English University is a playground for the governing class. That does not prove that it is a bad thing; it might prove that it was a very good thing. Certainly if there is a governing class, let there be a playground for the governing class. I would much rather be ruled by men who know how to play than by men who do not know how to play. Granted that we are to be governed by a rich section of the community, it is certainly very important that that section should be kept tolerably genial and jolly. If the sensitive man on the *Outlook* does not like the phrase, “Playground of the rich,” I can suggest a phrase that describes such a place as Oxford perhaps with more precision. It is a place for humanising those who might otherwise be tyrants, or even experts.

To pretend that the aristocrat meets all classes at Oxford is too ludicrous to be worth discussion. But it may be true that he meets more different kinds of men than he would meet under a strictly aristocratic *regime* of private tutors and small schools. It all comes back to the fact that the

English, if they were resolved to have an aristocracy, were at least resolved to have a good-natured aristocracy. And it is due to them to say that almost alone among the peoples of the world, they have succeeded in getting one. One could almost tolerate the thing, if it were not for the praise of it. One might endure Oxford, but not the *Outlook*.

When the poor man at Oxford loses his angles (which means, I suppose, his independence), he may perhaps, even if his poverty is of that highly relative type possible at Oxford, gain a certain amount of worldly advantage from the surrender of those angles. I must confess, however, that I can imagine nothing nastier than to lose one's angles. It seems to me that a desire to retain some angles about one's person is a desire common to all those human beings who do not set their ultimate hopes upon looking like Humpty-Dumpty. Our angles are simply our shapes. I cannot imagine any phrase more full of the subtle and exquisite vileness which is poisoning and weakening our country than such a phrase as this, about the desirability of rubbing down the angularities of poor men. Reduced to permanent and practical human speech, it means nothing whatever except the corrupting of that first human sense of justice which is the critic of all human institutions.

It is not in any such spirit of facile and reckless reassurance that we should approach the really difficult problem of the delicate virtues and the deep dangers of our two historic seats of learning. A good son does not easily admit that his sick mother is dying; but neither does a good son cheerily assert that she is "all right." There are many good arguments for leaving the two historic Universities exactly as they are. There are many good arguments for smashing them or altering them entirely. But in either case the plain truth told by the Bishop of Birmingham remains. If these Universities were destroyed, they would not be destroyed as Universities. If they are preserved, they will not be preserved as Universities. They will be preserved strictly and literally as playgrounds; places valued for their hours of leisure more than for their hours of work. I do not say that this is unreasonable; as a matter of private temperament I find it attractive. It is not only possible to say a great deal in praise of play; it is really possible to say the highest things in praise of it. It might reasonably be maintained that the true object of all human life is play. Earth is a task garden; heaven is a playground. To be at last in such secure innocence that one can juggle with the universe and the stars, to be so good that one can treat everything as a joke — that may be, perhaps, the real end and final holiday of human souls.

When we are really holy we may regard the Universe as a lark; so perhaps it is not essentially wrong to regard the University as a lark. But the plain and present fact is that our upper classes do regard the University as a lark, and do not regard it as a University. It also happens very often that through some oversight they neglect to provide themselves with that extreme degree of holiness which I have postulated as a necessary preliminary to such indulgence in the higher frivolity.

Humanity, always dreaming of a happy race, free, fantastic, and at ease, has sometimes pictured them in some mystical island, sometimes in some celestial city, sometimes as fairies, gods, or citizens of Atlantis. But one method in which it has often indulged is to picture them as aristocrats, as a special human class that could actually be seen hunting in the woods or driving about the streets. And this never was (as some silly Germans say) a worship of pride and scorn; mankind never really admired pride; mankind never had any thing but a scorn for scorn. It was a worship of the spectacle of happiness; especially of the spectacle of youth. This is what the old Universities in their noblest aspect really are; and this is why there is always something to be said for keeping them as they are. Aristocracy is not a tyranny; it is not even merely a spell. It is a vision. It is a deliberate indulgence in a certain picture of pleasure painted for the purpose; every Duchess is (in an innocent sense) painted, like Gainsborough's "Duchess of Devonshire." She is only beautiful because, at the back of all, the English people wanted her to be beautiful. In the same way, the lads at Oxford and Cambridge are only larking because England, in the depths of its solemn soul, really wishes them to lark. All this is very human and pardonable, and would be even harmless if there were no such things in the world as danger and honour and intellectual responsibility. But if aristocracy is a vision, it is perhaps the most unpractical of all visions. It is not a working way of doing things to put all your happiest people on a lighted platform and stare only at them. It is not a working way of managing education to be entirely content with the mere fact that you have (to a degree unexampled in the world) given the luckiest boys the jolliest time. It would be easy enough, like the writer in the *Outlook*, to enjoy the pleasures and deny the perils. Oh what a happy place England would be to live in if only one did not love it!

WOMAN

A correspondent has written me an able and interesting letter in the matter of some allusions of mine to the subject of communal kitchens. He defends communal kitchens very lucidly from the standpoint of the calculating collectivist; but, like many of his school, he cannot apparently grasp that there is another test of the whole matter, with which such calculation has nothing at all to do. He knows it would be cheaper if a number of us ate at the same time, so as to use the same table. So it would. It would also be cheaper if a number of us slept at different times, so as to use the same pair of trousers. But the question is not how cheap are we buying a thing, but what are we buying? It is cheap to own a slave. And it is cheaper still to be a slave.

My correspondent also says that the habit of dining out in restaurants, etc., is growing. So, I believe, is the habit of committing suicide. I do not desire to connect the two facts together. It seems fairly clear that a man could not dine at a restaurant because he had just committed suicide; and it would be extreme, perhaps, to suggest that he commits suicide because he has just dined at a restaurant. But the two cases, when put side by side, are enough to indicate the falsity and poltroonery of this eternal modern argument from what is in fashion. The question for brave men is not whether a certain thing is increasing; the question is whether we are increasing it. I dine very often in restaurants because the nature of my trade makes it convenient: but if I thought that by dining in restaurants I was working for the creation of communal meals, I would never enter a restaurant again; I would carry bread and cheese in my pocket or eat chocolate out of automatic machines. For the personal element in some things is sacred. I heard Mr. Will Crooks put it perfectly the other day: “The most sacred thing is to be able to shut your own door.”

My correspondent says, “Would not our women be spared the drudgery of cooking and all its attendant worries, leaving them free for higher culture?” The first thing that occurs to me to say about this is very simple, and is, I imagine, a part of all our experience. If my correspondent can find any way of preventing women from worrying, he will indeed be a remarkable man. I think the matter is a much deeper one. First of all, my correspondent overlooks a distinction which is elementary in our human nature. Theoretically, I suppose, every one would like to be freed from worries. But nobody in the world would always like to be freed from worrying occupations. I should very much like (as far as my feelings at the moment go) to be free from the consuming nuisance of writing this article. But it does not follow that I should like to be free from the consuming nuisance of being a journalist. Because we are worried about a thing, it does not follow that we are not interested in it. The truth is the other way. If we are not interested, why on earth should we be worried? Women are worried about housekeeping, but those that are most interested are the most worried. Women are still more worried about their husbands and their children. And I suppose if we strangled the children and poleaxed the husbands it would leave women free for higher culture. That is, it would leave them free to begin to worry about that. For women would worry about higher culture as much as they worry about everything else.

I believe this way of talking about women and their higher culture is almost entirely a growth of the classes which (unlike the journalistic class to which I belong) have always a reasonable amount of money. One odd thing I specially notice. Those who write like this seem entirely to forget the existence of the working and wage-earning classes. They say eternally, like my correspondent, that the ordinary woman is always a drudge. And what, in the name of the Nine Gods, is the ordinary man? These people seem to think that the ordinary man is a Cabinet Minister. They are always talking about man going forth to wield power, to carve his own way, to stamp his individuality on the world, to command and to be obeyed. This may be true of a certain class. Dukes, perhaps, are not drudges; but, then, neither are Duchesses. The Ladies and Gentlemen of the Smart Set are quite free for the higher culture, which consists chiefly of motoring and Bridge. But the ordinary man who typifies and constitutes the millions that make up our civilisation is no more free for the higher culture than his wife is.

Indeed, he is not so free. Of the two sexes the woman is in the more powerful position. For the average woman is at the head of something with which she can do as she likes; the average man has to obey orders and do nothing else. He has to put one dull brick on another dull brick, and do nothing else; he has to add one dull figure to another dull figure, and do nothing else. The woman's world is a small one, perhaps, but she can alter it. The woman can tell the tradesman with whom she deals some realistic things about himself. The clerk who does this to the manager generally gets the sack, or shall we say (to avoid the vulgarism), finds himself free for higher culture. Above all, as I said in my previous article, the woman does work which is in some small degree creative and individual. She can put the flowers or the furniture in fancy arrangements of her own. I fear the bricklayer cannot put the bricks in fancy arrangements of his own, without disaster to himself and others. If the woman is only putting a patch into a carpet, she can choose the thing with regard to colour. I fear it would not do for the office boy dispatching a parcel to choose his stamps with a view to colour; to prefer the tender mauve of the sixpenny to the crude scarlet of the penny stamp. A woman cooking may not always cook artistically; still she can cook artistically. She can introduce a personal and imperceptible alteration into the composition of a soup. The clerk is not encouraged to introduce a personal and imperceptible alteration into the figures in a ledger.

The trouble is that the real question I raised is not discussed. It is argued as a problem in pennies, not as a problem in people. It is not the proposals of these reformers that I feel to be false so much as their temper and their arguments. I am not nearly so certain that communal kitchens are wrong as I am that the defenders of communal kitchens are wrong. Of course, for one thing, there is a vast difference between the communal kitchens of which I spoke and the communal meal (*monstrum horrendum, informe*) which the darker and wilder mind of my correspondent diabolically calls up. But in both the trouble is that their defenders will not defend them humanly as human institutions. They will not interest themselves in the staring psychological fact that there are some things that a man or a woman, as the case may be, wishes to do for himself or herself. He or she must do it inventively, creatively, artistically, individually — in a word, badly. Choosing your wife (say) is one of these things. Is choosing your husband’s dinner one of these things? That is the whole question: it is never asked.

And then the higher culture. I know that culture. I would not set any man free for it if I could help it. The effect of it on the rich men who are free for it is so horrible that it is worse than any of the other amusements of the millionaire — worse than gambling, worse even than philanthropy. It means thinking the smallest poet in Belgium greater than the greatest poet of England. It means losing every democratic sympathy. It means being unable to talk to a navvy about sport, or about beer, or about the Bible, or about the Derby, or about patriotism, or about anything whatever that he, the navvy, wants to talk about. It means taking literature seriously, a very amateurish thing to do. It means pardoning indecency only when it is gloomy indecency. Its disciples will call a spade a spade; but only when it is a grave-digger's spade. The higher culture is sad, cheap, impudent, unkind, without honesty and without ease. In short, it is "high." That abominable word (also applied to game) admirably describes it.

No; if you were setting women free for something else, I might be more melted. If you can assure me, privately and gravely, that you are setting women free to dance on the mountains like mænads, or to worship some monstrous goddess, I will make a note of your request. If you are quite sure that the ladies in Brixton, the moment they give up cooking, will beat great gongs and blow horns to Mumbo-Jumbo, then I will agree that the occupation is at least human and is more or less entertaining. Women have been set free to be Bacchantes; they have been set free to be Virgin Martyrs; they have been set free to be Witches. Do not ask them now to sink so low as the higher culture.

I have my own little notions of the possible emancipation of women; but I suppose I should not be taken very seriously if I propounded them. I should favour anything that would increase the present enormous authority of women and their creative action in their own homes. The average woman, as I have said, is a despot; the average man is a serf. I am for any scheme that any one can suggest that will make the average woman more of a despot. So far from wishing her to get her cooked meals from outside, I should like her to cook more wildly and at her own will than she does. So far from getting always the same meals from the same place, let her invent, if she likes, a new dish every day of her life. Let woman be more of a maker, not less. We are right to talk about "Woman;" only blackguards talk about women. Yet all men talk about men, and that is the whole difference. Men represent the deliberative and democratic element in life. Woman represents the despotic.

THE MODERN MARTYR

The incident of the Suffragettes who chained themselves with iron chains to the railings of Downing Street is a good ironical allegory of most modern martyrdom. It generally consists of a man chaining himself up and then complaining that he is not free. Some say that such larks retard the cause of female suffrage, others say that such larks alone can advance it; as a matter of fact, I do not believe that they have the smallest effect one way or the other.

The modern notion of impressing the public by a mere demonstration of unpopularity, by being thrown out of meetings or thrown into jail is largely a mistake. It rests on a fallacy touching the true popular value of martyrdom. People look at human history and see that it has often happened that persecutions have not only advertised but even advanced a persecuted creed, and given to its validity the public and dreadful witness of dying men. The paradox was pictorially expressed in Christian art, in which saints were shown brandishing as weapons the very tools that had slain them. And because his martyrdom is thus a power to the martyr, modern people think that any one who makes himself slightly uncomfortable in public will immediately be uproariously popular. This element of inadequate martyrdom is not true only of the Suffragettes; it is true of many movements I respect and some that I agree with. It was true, for instance, of the Passive Resisters, who had pieces of their furniture sold up. The assumption is that if you show your ordinary sincerity (or even your political ambition) by being a nuisance to yourself as well as to other people, you will have the strength of the great saints who passed through the fire. Any one who can be hustled in a hall for five minutes, or put in a cell for five days, has achieved what was meant by martyrdom, and has a halo in the Christian art of the future. Miss Pankhurst will be represented holding a policeman in each hand — the instruments of her martyrdom. The Passive Resister will be shown symbolically carrying the teapot that was torn from him by tyrannical auctioneers.

But there is a fallacy in this analogy of martyrdom. The truth is that the special impressiveness which does come from being persecuted only happens in the case of extreme persecution. For the fact that the modern enthusiast will undergo some inconvenience for the creed he holds only proves that he does hold it, which no one ever doubted. No one doubts that the Nonconformist minister cares more for Nonconformity than he does for his teapot. No one doubts that Miss Pankhurst wants a vote more than she wants a quiet afternoon and an armchair. All our ordinary intellectual opinions are worth a bit of a row: I remember during the Boer War fighting an Imperialist clerk outside the Queen's Hall, and giving and receiving a bloody nose; but I did not think it one of the incidents that produce the psychological effect of the Roman amphitheatre or the stake at Smithfield. For in that impression there is something more than the mere fact that a man is sincere enough to give his time or his comfort. Pagans were not impressed by the torture of Christians merely because it showed that they honestly held their opinion; they knew that millions of people honestly held all sorts of opinions. The point of such extreme martyrdom is much more subtle. It is that it gives an appearance of a man having something quite specially strong to back him up, of his drawing upon some power. And this can only be proved when all his physical contentment is destroyed; when all the current of his bodily being is reversed and turned to pain. If a man is seen to be roaring with laughter all the time that he is skinned alive, it would not be unreasonable to deduce that somewhere in the recesses of his mind he had thought of a rather good joke. Similarly, if men smiled and sang (as they did) while they were being boiled or torn in pieces, the spectators felt the presence of something more than mere mental honesty: they felt the presence of some new and unintelligible kind of pleasure, which, presumably, came from somewhere. It might be a strength of madness, or a lying spirit from Hell; but it was something quite positive and extraordinary; as positive as brandy and as extraordinary as conjuring. The Pagan said to himself: "If Christianity makes a man happy while his legs are being eaten by a lion, might it not make me happy while my legs are still attached to me and walking down the street?" The Secularists laboriously explain that martyrdoms do not prove a faith to be true, as if anybody was ever such a fool as to suppose that they did. What they did prove, or, rather, strongly suggest, was that something had entered human psychology which was stronger than strong pain. If a young girl, scourged and bleeding to death, saw nothing but a crown descending on her from God, the first mental step was not that her philosophy was correct, but that she was certainly feeding on something. But this particular point of psychology does not arise at all in the modern cases of mere public discomfort or inconvenience. The causes of Miss Pankhurst’s cheerfulness require no mystical explanations. If she were being burned alive as a witch, if she then looked up in unmixed rapture and saw a ballot-box descending out of heaven, then I should say that the incident, though not conclusive, was frightfully impressive. It would not prove logically that she ought to have the vote, or that anybody ought to have the vote. But it would prove this: that there was, for some reason, a sacramental reality in the vote, that the soul could take the vote and feed on it; that it was in itself a positive and overpowering pleasure, capable of being pitted against positive and overpowering pain.

I should advise modern agitators, therefore, to give up this particular method: the method of making very big efforts to get a very small punishment. It does not really go down at all; the punishment is too small, and the efforts are too obvious. It has not any of the effectiveness of the old savage martyrdom, because it does not leave the victim absolutely alone with his cause, so that his cause alone can support him. At the same time it has about it that element of the pantomimic and the absurd, which was the cruellest part of the slaying and the mocking of the real prophets. St. Peter was crucified upside down as a huge inhuman joke; but his human seriousness survived the inhuman joke, because, in whatever posture, he had died for his faith. The modern martyr of the Pankhurst type courts the absurdity without making the suffering strong enough to eclipse the absurdity. She is like a St. Peter who should deliberately stand on his head for ten seconds and then expect to be canonised for it.

Or, again, the matter might be put in this way. Modern martyrdoms fail even as demonstrations, because they do not prove even that the martyrs are completely serious. I think, as a fact, that the modern martyrs generally are serious, perhaps a trifle too serious. But their martyrdom does not prove it; and the public does not always believe it. Undoubtedly, as a fact, Dr. Clifford is quite honourably indignant with what he considers to be clericalism, but he does not prove it by having his teapot sold; for a man might easily have his teapot sold as an actress has her diamonds stolen — as a personal advertisement. As a matter of fact, Miss Pankhurst is quite in earnest about votes for women. But she does not prove it by being chucked out of meetings. A person might be chucked out of meetings just as young men are chucked out of music-halls — for fun. But no man has himself eaten by a lion as a personal advertisement. No woman is broiled on a gridiron for fun. That is where the testimony of St. Perpetua and St. Faith comes in. Doubtless it is no fault of these enthusiasts that they are not subjected to the old and searching penalties; very likely they would pass through them as triumphantly as St. Agatha. I am simply advising them upon a point of policy, things being as they are. And I say that the average man is not impressed with their sacrifices simply because they are not and cannot be more decisive than the sacrifices which the average man himself would make for mere fun if he were drunk. Drunkards would interrupt meetings and take the consequences. And as for selling a teapot, it is an act, I imagine, in which any properly constituted drunkard would take a positive pleasure. The advertisement is not good enough; it does not tell. If I were really martyred for an opinion (which is more improbable than words can say), it would certainly only be for one or two of my most central and sacred opinions. I might, perhaps, be shot for England, but certainly not for the British Empire. I might conceivably die for political freedom, but I certainly wouldn’t die for Free Trade. But as for kicking up the particular kind of shindy that the Suffragettes are kicking up, I would as soon do it for my shallowest opinion as for my deepest one. It never could be anything worse than an inconvenience; it never could be anything better than a spree. Hence the British public, and especially the working classes, regard the whole demonstration with fundamental indifference; for, while it is a demonstration that probably is adopted from the most fanatical motives, it is a demonstration which might be adopted from the most frivolous.

ON POLITICAL SECRECY

Generally, instinctively, in the absence of any special reason, humanity hates the idea of anything being hidden — that is, it hates the idea of anything being successfully hidden. Hide-and-seek is a popular pastime; but it assumes the truth of the text, “Seek and ye shall find.” Ordinary mankind (gigantic and unconquerable in its power of joy) can get a great deal of pleasure out of a game called “hide the thimble,” but that is only because it is really a game of “see the thimble.” Suppose that at the end of such a game the thimble had not been found at all; suppose its place was unknown for ever: the result on the players would not be playful, it would be tragic. That thimble would hag-ride all their dreams. They would all die in asylums. The pleasure is all in the poignant moment of passing from not knowing to knowing. Mystery stories are very popular, especially when sold at sixpence; but that is because the author of a mystery story reveals. He is enjoyed not because he creates mystery, but because he destroys mystery. Nobody would have the courage to publish a detective-story which left the problem exactly where it found it. That would rouse even the London public to revolution. No one dare publish a detective-story that did not detect.

There are three broad classes of the special things in which human wisdom does permit privacy. The first is the case I have mentioned — that of hide-and-seek, or the police novel, in which it permits privacy only in order to explode and smash privacy. The author makes first a fastidious secret of how the Bishop was murdered, only in order that he may at last declare, as from a high tower, to the whole democracy the great glad news that he was murdered by the governess. In that case, ignorance is only valued because being ignorant is the best and purest preparation for receiving the horrible revelations of high life. Somewhat in the same way being an agnostic is the best and purest preparation for receiving the happy revelations of St. John.

This first sort of secrecy we may dismiss, for its whole ultimate object is not to keep the secret, but to tell it. Then there is a second and far more important class of things which humanity does agree to hide. They are so important that they cannot possibly be discussed here. But every one will know the kind of things I mean. In connection with these, I wish to remark that though they are, in one sense, a secret, they are also always a “sécret de Polichinelle.” Upon sex and such matters we are in a human freemasonry; the freemasonry is disciplined, but the freemasonry is free. We are asked to be silent about these things, but we are not asked to be ignorant about them. On the contrary, the fundamental human argument is entirely the other way. It is the thing most common to humanity that is most veiled by humanity. It is exactly because we all know that it is there that we need not say that it is there.

Then there is a third class of things on which the best civilisation does permit privacy, does resent all inquiry or explanation. This is in the case of things which need not be explained, because they cannot be explained, things too airy, instinctive, or intangible — caprices, sudden impulses, and the more innocent kind of prejudice. A man must not be asked why he is talkative or silent, for the simple reason that he does not know. A man is not asked (even in Germany) why he walks slow or quick, simply because he could not answer. A man must take his own road through a wood, and make his own use of a holiday. And the reason is this: not because he has a strong reason, but actually because he has a weak reason; because he has a slight and fleeting feeling about the matter which he could not explain to a policeman, which perhaps the very appearance of a policeman out of the bushes might destroy. He must act on the impulse, because the impulse is unimportant, and he may never have the same impulse again. If you like to put it so he must act on the impulse because the impulse is not worth a moment’s thought. All these fancies men feel should be private; and even Fabians have never proposed to interfere with them.

Now, for the last fortnight the newspapers have been full of very varied comments upon the problem of the secrecy of certain parts of our political finance, and especially of the problem of the party funds. Some papers have failed entirely to understand what the quarrel is about. They have urged that Irish members and Labour members are also under the shadow, or, as some have said, even more under it. The ground of this frantic statement seems, when patiently considered, to be simply this: that Irish and Labour members receive money for what they do. All persons, as far as I know, on this earth receive money for what they do; the only difference is that some people, like the Irish members, do it.

I cannot imagine that any human being could think any other human being capable of maintaining the proposition that men ought not to receive money. The simple point is that, as we know that some money is given rightly and some wrongly, an elementary common-sense leads us to look with indifference at the money that is given in the middle of Ludgate Circus, and to look with particular suspicion at the money which a man will not give unless he is shut up in a box or a bathing-machine. In short, it is too silly to suppose that anybody could ever have discussed the desirability of funds. The only thing that even idiots could ever have discussed is the concealment of funds. Therefore, the whole question that we have to consider is whether the concealment of political money-transactions, the purchase of peerages, the payment of election expenses, is a kind of concealment that falls under any of the three classes I have mentioned as those in which human custom and instinct does permit us to conceal. I have suggested three kinds of secrecy which are human and defensible. Can this institution be defended by means of any of them?

Now the question is whether this political secrecy is of any of the kinds that can be called legitimate. We have roughly divided legitimate secrets into three classes. First comes the secret that is only kept in order to be revealed, as in the detective stories; secondly, the secret which is kept because everybody knows it, as in sex; and third, the secret which is kept because it is too delicate and vague to be explained at all, as in the choice of a country walk. Do any of these broad human divisions cover such a case as that of secrecy of the political and party finances? It would be absurd, and even delightfully absurd, to pretend that any of them did. It would be a wild and charming fancy to suggest that our politicians keep political secrets only that they may make political revelations. A modern peer only pretends that he has earned his peerage in order that he may more dramatically declare, with a scream of scorn and joy, that he really bought it. The Baronet pretends that he deserved his title only in order to make more exquisite and startling the grand historical fact that he did not deserve it. Surely this sounds improbable. Surely all our statesmen cannot be saving themselves up for the excitement of a death-bed repentance. The writer of detective tales makes a man a duke solely in order to blast him with a charge of burglary. But surely the Prime Minister does not make a man a duke solely in order to blast him with a charge of bribery. No; the detective-tale theory of the secrecy of political funds must (with a sigh) be given up.

Neither can we say that the thing is explained by that second case of human secrecy which is so secret that it is hard to discuss it in public. A decency is preserved about certain primary human matters precisely because every one knows all about them. But the decency touching contributions, purchases, and peerages is not kept up because most ordinary men know what is happening; it is kept up precisely because most ordinary men do not know what is happening. The ordinary curtain of decorum covers normal proceedings. But no one will say that being bribed is a normal proceeding.

And if we apply the third test to this problem of political secrecy, the case is even clearer and even more funny. Surely no one will say that the purchase of peerages and such things are kept secret because they are so light and impulsive and unimportant that they must be matters of individual fancy. A child sees a flower and for the first time feels inclined to pick it. But surely no one will say that a brewer sees a coronet and for the first time suddenly thinks that he would like to be a peer. The child’s impulse need not be explained to the police, for the simple reason that it could not be explained to anybody. But does any one believe that the laborious political ambitions of modern commercial men ever have this airy and incommunicable character? A man lying on the beach may throw stones into the sea without any particular reason. But does any one believe that the brewer throws bags of gold into the party funds without any particular reason? This theory of the secrecy of political money must also be regretfully abandoned; and with it the two other possible excuses as well. This secrecy is one which cannot be justified as a sensational joke nor as a common human freemasonry, nor as an indescribable personal whim. Strangely enough, indeed, it violates all three conditions and classes at once. It is not hidden in order to be revealed: it is hidden in order to be hidden. It is not kept secret because it is a common secret of mankind, but because mankind must not get hold of it. And it is not kept secret because it is too unimportant to be told, but because it is much too important to bear telling. In short, the thing we have is the real and perhaps rare political phenomenon of an occult government. We have an exoteric and an esoteric doctrine. England is really ruled by priestcraft, but not by priests. We have in this country all that has ever been alleged against the evil side of religion; the peculiar class with privileges, the sacred words that are unpronounceable; the important things known only to the few. In fact we lack nothing except the religion.

EDWARD VII. AND SCOTLAND

I have received a serious, and to me, at any rate, an impressive remonstrance from the Scottish Patriotic Association. It appears that I recently referred to Edward VII. of Great Britain and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, under the horrible description of the King of England. The Scottish Patriotic Association draws my attention to the fact that by the provisions of the Act of Union, and the tradition of nationality, the monarch should be referred to as the King of Britain. The blow thus struck at me is particularly wounding because it is particularly unjust. I believe in the reality of the independent nationalities under the British Crown much more passionately and positively than any other educated Englishman of my acquaintance believes in it. I am quite certain that Scotland is a nation; I am quite certain that nationality is the key of Scotland; I am quite certain that all our success with Scotland has been due to the fact that we have in spirit treated it as a nation. I am quite certain that Ireland is a nation; I am quite certain that nationality is the key to Ireland; I am quite certain that all our failure in Ireland arose from the fact that we would not in spirit treat it as a nation. It would be difficult to find, even among the innumerable examples that exist, a stronger example of the immensely superior importance of sentiment to what is called practicality than this case of the two sister nations. It is not that we have encouraged a Scotchman to be rich; it is not that we have encouraged a Scotchman to be active; it is not that we have encouraged a Scotchman to be free. It is that we have quite definitely encouraged a Scotchman to be Scotch.

A vague, but vivid impression was received from all our writers of history, philosophy, and rhetoric that the Scottish element was something really valuable in itself, was something which even Englishmen were forced to recognise and respect. If we ever admitted the beauty of Ireland, it was as something which might be loved by an Englishman but which could hardly be respected even by an Irishman. A Scotchman might be proud of Scotland; it was enough for an Irishman that he could be fond of Ireland. Our success with the two nations has been exactly proportioned to our encouragement of their independent national emotion; the one that we would not treat nationally has alone produced Nationalists. The one nation that we would not recognise as a nation in theory is the one that we have been forced to recognise as a nation in arms. The Scottish Patriotic Association has no need to draw my attention to the importance of the separate national sentiment or the need of keeping the Border as a sacred line. The case is quite sufficiently proved by the positive history of Scotland. The place of Scottish loyalty to England has been taken by English admiration of Scotland. They do not need to envy us our titular leadership, when we seem to envy them their separation.

I wish to make very clear my entire sympathy with the national sentiment of the Scottish Patriotic Association. But I wish also to make clear this very enlightening comparison between the fate of Scotch and of Irish patriotism. In life it is always the little facts that express the large emotions, and if the English once respected Ireland as they respect Scotland, it would come out in a hundred small ways. For instance, there are crack regiments in the British Army which wear the kilt — the kilt which, as Macaulay says with perfect truth, was regarded by nine Scotchmen out of ten as the dress of a thief. The Highland officers carry a silver-hilted version of the old barbarous Gaelic broadsword with a basket-hilt, which split the skulls of so many English soldiers at Killiecrankie and Prestonpans. When you have a regiment of men in the British Army carrying ornamental silver shillelaghs you will have done the same thing for Ireland, and not before — or when you mention Brian Boru with the same intonation as Bruce.

Let me be considered therefore to have made quite clear that I believe with a quite special intensity in the independent consideration of Scotland and Ireland as apart from England. I believe that, in the proper sense of the words, Scotland is an independent nation, even if Edward VII. is the King of Scotland. I believe that, in the proper sense of words, Ireland is an independent nation, even if Edward VII. is King of Ireland. But the fact is that I have an even bolder and wilder belief than either of these. I believe that England is an independent nation. I believe that England also has its independent colour and history, and meaning. I believe that England could produce costumes quite as queer as the kilt; I believe that England has heroes fully as untranslateable as Brian Boru, and consequently I believe that Edward VII. is, among his innumerable other functions, really King of England. If my Scotch friends insist, let us call it one of his quite obscure, unpopular, and minor titles; one of his relaxations. A little while ago he was Duke of Cornwall; but for a family accident he might still have been King of Hanover. Nor do I think that we should blame the simple Cornishmen if they spoke of him in a rhetorical moment by his Cornish title, nor the well-meaning Hanoverians if they classed him with Hanoverian Princes.

Now it so happens that in the passage complained of I said the King of England merely because I meant the King of England. I was speaking strictly and especially of English Kings, of Kings in the tradition of the old Kings of England. I wrote as an English nationalist keenly conscious of the sacred boundary of the Tweed that keeps (or used to keep) our ancient enemies at bay. I wrote as an English nationalist resolved for one wild moment to throw off the tyranny of the Scotch and Irish who govern and oppress my country. I felt that England was at least spiritually guarded against these surrounding nationalities. I dreamed that the Tweed was guarded by the ghosts of Scropes and Percys; I dreamed that St. George's Channel was guarded by St. George. And in this insular security I spoke deliberately and specifically of the King of England, of the representative of the Tudors and Plantagenets. It is true that the two Kings of England, of whom I especially spoke, Charles II. and George III., had both an alien origin, not very recent and not very remote. Charles II. came of a family originally Scotch. George III. came of a family originally German. But the same, so far as that goes, could be said of the English royal houses when England stood quite alone. The Plantagenets were originally a French family. The Tudors were originally a Welsh family. But I was not talking of the amount of English sentiment in the English Kings. I was talking of the amount of English sentiment in the English treatment and popularity of the English Kings. With that Ireland and Scotland have nothing whatever to do.

Charles II. may, for all I know, have not only been King of Scotland; he may, by virtue of his temper and ancestry, have been a Scotch King of Scotland. There was something Scotch about his combination of clear-headedness with sensuality. There was something Scotch about his combination of doing what he liked with knowing what he was doing. But I was not talking of the personality of Charles, which may have been Scotch. I was talking of the popularity of Charles, which was certainly English. One thing is quite certain: whether or no he ever ceased to be a Scotch man, he ceased as soon as he conveniently could to be a Scotch King. He had actually tried the experiment of being a national ruler north of the Tweed, and his people liked him as little as he liked them. Of Presbyterianism, of the Scottish religion, he left on record the exquisitely English judgment that it was “no religion for a gentleman.” His popularity then was purely English; his royalty was purely English; and I was using the words with the utmost narrowness and deliberation when I spoke of this particular popularity and royalty as the popularity and royalty of a King of England. I said of the English people specially that they like to pick up the King’s crown when he has dropped it. I do not feel at all sure that this does apply to the Scotch or the Irish. I think that the Irish would knock his crown off for him. I think that the Scotch would keep it for him after they had picked it up.

For my part, I should be inclined to adopt quite the opposite method of asserting nationality. Why should good Scotch nationalists call Edward VII. the King of Britain? They ought to call him King Edward I. of Scotland. What is Britain? Where is Britain? There is no such place. There never was a nation of Britain; there never was a King of Britain; unless perhaps Vortigern or Uther Pendragon had a taste for the title. If we are to develop our Monarchy, I should be altogether in favour of developing it along the line of local patriotism and of local proprietorship in the King. I think that the Londoners ought to call him the King of London, and the Liverpudlians ought to call him the King of Liverpool. I do not go so far as to say that the people of Birmingham ought to call Edward VII. the King of Birmingham; for that would be high treason to a holier and more established power. But I think we might read in the papers: “The King of Brighton left Brighton at half-past two this afternoon,” and then immediately afterwards, “The King of Worthing entered Worthing at ten minutes past three.” Or, “The people of Margate bade a reluctant farewell to the popular King of Margate this morning,” and then, “His Majesty the King of Ramsgate returned to his country and capital this afternoon after his long sojourn in strange lands.” It might be pointed out that by a curious coincidence the departure of the King of Oxford occurred a very short time before the triumphal arrival of the King of Reading. I cannot imagine any method which would more increase the kindly and normal relations between the Sovereign and his people. Nor do I think that such a method would be in any sense a depreciation of the royal dignity; for, as a matter of fact, it would put the King upon the same platform with the gods. The saints, the most exalted of human figures, were also the most local. It was exactly the men whom we most easily connected with heaven whom we also most easily connected with earth.

THOUGHTS AROUND KOEPENICK

A famous and epigrammatic author said that life copied literature; it seems clear that life really caricatures it. I suggested recently that the Germans submitted to, and even admired, a solemn and theatrical assertion of authority. A few hours after I had sent up my "copy," I saw the first announcement of the affair of the comic Captain at Koepenick. The most absurd part of this absurd fraud (at least, to English eyes) is one which, oddly enough, has received comparatively little comment. I mean the point at which the Mayor asked for a warrant, and the Captain pointed to the bayonets of his soldiery and said. "These are my authority." One would have thought any one would have known that no soldier would talk like that. The dupes were blamed for not knowing that the man wore the wrong cap or the wrong sash, or had his sword buckled on the wrong way; but these are technicalities which they might surely be excused for not knowing. I certainly should not know if a soldier's sash were on inside out or his cap on behind before. But I should know uncommonly well that genuine professional soldiers do not talk like Adelphi villains and utter theatrical epigrams in praise of abstract violence.

We can see this more clearly, perhaps, if we suppose it to be the case of any other dignified and clearly distinguishable profession. Suppose a Bishop called upon me. My great modesty and my rather distant reverence for the higher clergy might lead me certainly to a strong suspicion that any Bishop who called on me was a bogus Bishop. But if I wished to test his genuineness I should not dream of attempting to do so by examining the shape of his apron or the way his gaiters were done up. I have not the remotest idea of the way his gaiters ought to be done up. A very vague approximation to an apron would probably take me in; and if he behaved like an approximately Christian gentleman he would be safe enough from my detection. But suppose the Bishop, the moment he entered the room, fell on his knees on the mat, clasped his hands, and poured out a flood of passionate and somewhat hysterical extempore prayer, I should say at once and without the smallest hesitation, "Whatever else this man is, he is not an elderly and wealthy cleric of the Church of England. They don't do such things." Or suppose a man came to me pretending to be a qualified doctor, and flourished a stethoscope, or what he said was a stethoscope. I am glad to say that I have not even the remotest notion of what a stethoscope looks like; so that if he flourished a musical-box or a coffee-mill it would be all one to me. But I do think that I am not exaggerating my own sagacity if I say that I should begin to suspect the doctor if on entering my room he flung his legs and arms about, crying wildly, “Health! Health! priceless gift of Nature! I possess it! I overflow with it! I yearn to impart it! Oh, the sacred rapture of imparting health!” In that case I should suspect him of being rather in a position to receive than to offer medical superintendence.

Now, it is no exaggeration at all to say that any one who has ever known any soldiers (I can only answer for English and Irish and Scotch soldiers) would find it just as easy to believe that a real Bishop would grovel on the carpet in a religious ecstasy, or that a real doctor would dance about the drawing-room to show the invigorating effects of his own medicine, as to believe that a soldier, when asked for his authority, would point to a lot of shining weapons and declare symbolically that might was right. Of course, a real soldier would go rather red in the face and huskily repeat the proper formula, whatever it was, as that he came in the King’s name.

Soldiers have many faults, but they have one redeeming merit; they are never worshippers of force. Soldiers more than any other men are taught severely and systematically that might is not right. The fact is obvious. The might is in the hundred men who obey. The right (or what is held to be right) is in the one man who commands them. They learn to obey symbols, arbitrary things, stripes on an arm, buttons on a coat, a title, a flag. These may be artificial things; they may be unreasonable things; they may, if you will, be wicked things; but they are weak things. They are not Force, and they do not look like Force. They are parts of an idea: of the idea of discipline; if you will, of the idea of tyranny; but still an idea. No soldier could possibly say that his own bayonets were his authority. No soldier could possibly say that he came in the name of his own bayonets. It would be as absurd as if a postman said that he came inside his bag. I do not, as I have said, underrate the evils that really do arise from militarism and the military ethic. It tends to give people wooden faces and sometimes wooden heads. It tends moreover (both through its specialisation and through its constant obedience) to a certain loss of real independence and strength of character. This has almost always been found when people made the mistake of turning the soldier into a statesman, under the mistaken impression that he was a strong man. The Duke of Wellington, for instance, was a strong soldier and therefore a weak statesman. But the soldier is always, by the nature of things, loyal to something. And as long as one is loyal to something one can never be a worshipper of mere force. For mere force, violence in the abstract, is the enemy of anything we love. To love anything is to see it at once under lowering skies of danger. Loyalty implies loyalty in misfortune; and when a soldier has accepted any nation's uniform he has already accepted its defeat.

Nevertheless, it does appear to be possible in Germany for a man to point to fixed bayonets and say, "These are my authority," and yet to convince ordinarily sane men that he is a soldier. If this is so, it does really seem to point to some habit of high-falutin' in the German nation, such as that of which I spoke previously. It almost looks as if the advisers, and even the officials, of the German Army had become infected in some degree with the false and feeble doctrine that might is right. As this doctrine is invariably preached by physical weaklings like Nietzsche it is a very serious thing even to entertain the supposition that it is affecting men who have really to do military work. It would be the end of German soldiers to be affected by German philosophy. Energetic people use energy as a means, but only very tired people ever use energy as a reason. Athletes go in for games, because athletes desire glory. Invalids go in for calisthenics; for invalids (alone of all human beings) desire strength. So long as the German Army points to its heraldic eagle and says, "I come in the name of this fierce but fabulous animal," the German Army will be all right. If ever it says, "I come in the name of bayonets," the bayonets will break like glass, for only the weak exhibit strength without an aim.

At the same time, as I said before, do not let us forget our own faults. Do not let us forget them any the more easily because they are the opposite to the German faults. Modern England is too prone to present the spectacle of a person who is enormously delighted because he has not got the contrary disadvantages to his own. The Englishman is always saying "My house is not damp" at the moment when his house is on fire. The Englishman is always saying, "I have thrown off all traces of anæmia" in the middle of a fit of apoplexy. Let us always remember that if an Englishman wants to swindle English people, he does not dress up in the uniform of a soldier. If an Englishman wants to swindle English people he would as soon think of dressing up in the uniform of a messenger boy. Everything in England is done unofficially, casually, by conversations and cliques. The one

Parliament that really does rule England is a secret Parliament; the debates of which must not be published — the Cabinet. The debates of the Commons are sometimes important; but only the debates in the Lobby, never the debates in the House. Journalists do control public opinion; but it is not controlled by the arguments they publish — it is controlled by the arguments between the editor and sub-editor, which they do not publish. This casualness is our English vice. It is at once casual and secret. Our public life is conducted privately. Hence it follows that if an English swindler wished to impress us, the last thing he would think of doing would be to put on a uniform. He would put on a polite slouching air and a careless, expensive suit of clothes; he would stroll up to the Mayor, be so awfully sorry to disturb him, find he had forgotten his card-case, mention, as if he were ashamed of it, that he was the Duke of Mercia, and carry the whole thing through with the air of a man who could get two hundred witnesses and two thousand retainers, but who was too tired to call any of them. And if he did it very well I strongly suspect that he would be as successful as the indefensible Captain at Koepenick.

Our tendency for many centuries past has been, not so much towards creating an aristocracy (which may or may not be a good thing in itself), as towards substituting an aristocracy for everything else. In England we have an aristocracy instead of a religion. The nobility are to the English poor what the saints and the fairies are to the Irish poor, what the large devil with a black face was to the Scotch poor — the poetry of life. In the same way in England we have an aristocracy instead of a Government. We rely on a certain good humour and education in the upper class to interpret to us our contradictory Constitution. No educated man born of woman will be quite so absurd as the system that he has to administer. In short, we do not get good laws to restrain bad people. We get good people to restrain bad laws. And last of all we in England have an aristocracy instead of an Army. We have an Army of which the officers are proud of their families and ashamed of their uniforms. If I were a king of any country whatever, and one of my officers were ashamed of my uniform, I should be ashamed of my officer. Beware, then, of the really well-bred and apologetic gentleman whose clothes are at once quiet and fashionable, whose manner is at once diffident and frank. Beware how you admit him into your domestic secrets, for he may be a bogus Earl. Or, worse still, a real one.

THE BOY

I have no sympathy with international aggression when it is taken seriously, but I have a certain dark and wild sympathy with it when it is quite absurd. Raids are all wrong as practical politics, but they are human and imaginable as practical jokes. In fact, almost any act of ragging or violence can be forgiven on this strict condition — that it is of no use at all to anybody. If the aggressor gets anything out of it, then it is quite unpardonable. It is damned by the least hint of utility or profit. A man of spirit and breeding may brawl, but he does not steal. A gentleman knocks off his friend’s hat; but he does not annex his friend’s hat. For this reason (as Mr. Belloc has pointed out somewhere), the very militant French people have always returned after their immense raids — the raids of Godfrey the Crusader, the raids of Napoleon; “they are sucked back, having accomplished nothing but an epic.”

Sometimes I see small fragments of information in the newspapers which make my heart leap with an irrational patriotic sympathy. I have had the misfortune to be left comparatively cold by many of the enterprises and proclamations of my country in recent times. But the other day I found in the *Tribune* the following paragraph, which I may be permitted to set down as an example of the kind of international outrage with which I have by far the most instinctive sympathy. There is something attractive, too, in the austere simplicity with which the affair is set forth —

“Geneva, Oct. 31.

“The English schoolboy Allen, who was arrested at Lausanne railway station on Saturday, for having painted red the statue of General Jomini of Payerne, was liberated yesterday, after paying a fine of £24. Allen has proceeded to Germany, where he will continue his studies. The people of Payerne are indignant, and clamoured for his detention in prison.”

Now I have no doubt that ethics and social necessity require a contrary attitude, but I will freely confess that my first emotions on reading of this exploit were those of profound and elemental pleasure. There is something so large and simple about the operation of painting a whole stone General a bright red. Of course I can understand that the people of Payerne were indignant. They had passed to their homes at twilight through the streets of that beautiful city (or is it a province?), and they had seen against the silver ending of the sunset the grand grey figure of the hero of that land remaining to guard the town under the stars. It certainly must have been a shock to come out in the broad white morning and find a large vermilion General staring under the staring sun. I do not blame them at all for clamouring for the schoolboy's detention in prison; I dare say a little detention in prison would do him no harm. Still, I think the immense act has something about it human and excusable; and when I endeavour to analyse the reason of this feeling I find it to lie, not in the fact that the thing was big or bold or successful, but in the fact that the thing was perfectly useless to everybody, including the person who did it. The raid ends in itself; and so Master Allen is sucked back again, having accomplished nothing but an epic.

There is one thing which, in the presence of average modern journalism, is perhaps worth saying in connection with such an idle matter as this. The morals of a matter like this are exactly like the morals of anything else; they are concerned with mutual contract, or with the rights of independent human lives. But the whole modern world, or at any rate the whole modern Press, has a perpetual and consuming terror of plain morals. Men always attempt to avoid condemning a thing upon merely moral grounds. If I beat my grandmother to death to-morrow in the middle of Battersea Park, you may be perfectly certain that people will say everything about it except the simple and fairly obvious fact that it is wrong. Some will call it insane; that is, will accuse it of a deficiency of intelligence. This is not necessarily true at all. You could not tell whether the act was unintelligent or not unless you knew my grandmother. Some will call it vulgar, disgusting, and the rest of it; that is, they will accuse it of a lack of manners. Perhaps it does show a lack of manners; but this is scarcely its most serious disadvantage. Others will talk about the loathsome spectacle and the revolting scene; that is, they will accuse it of a deficiency of art, or æsthetic beauty. This again depends on the circumstances: in order to be quite certain that the appearance of the old lady has definitely deteriorated under the process of being beaten to death, it is necessary for the philosophical critic to be quite certain how ugly she was before. Another school of thinkers will say that the action is lacking in efficiency: that it is an uneconomic waste of a good grandmother. But that could only depend on the value, which is again an individual matter. The only real point that is worth mentioning is that the action is wicked, because your grandmother has a right not to be beaten to death. But of this simple moral explanation modern journalism has, as I say, a standing fear. It will call the action anything else — mad, bestial, vulgar, idiotic, rather than call it sinful.

One example can be found in such cases as that of the prank of the boy and the statue. When some trick of this sort is played, the newspapers opposed to it always describe it as “a senseless joke.” What is the good of saying that? Every joke is a senseless joke. A joke is by its nature a protest against sense. It is no good attacking nonsense for being successfully nonsensical. Of course it is nonsensical to paint a celebrated Italian General a bright red; it is as nonsensical as “Alice in Wonderland.” It is also, in my opinion, very nearly as funny. But the real answer to the affair is not to say that it is nonsensical or even to say that it is not funny, but to point out that it is wrong to spoil statues which belong to other people. If the modern world will not insist on having some sharp and definite moral law, capable of resisting the counter-attractions of art and humour, the modern world will simply be given over as a spoil to anybody who can manage to do a nasty thing in a nice way. Every murderer who can murder entertainingly will be allowed to murder. Every burglar who burgles in really humorous attitudes will burgle as much as he likes.

There is another case of the thing that I mean. Why on earth do the newspapers, in describing a dynamite outrage or any other political assassination, call it a “dastardly outrage” or a cowardly outrage? It is perfectly evident that it is not dastardly in the least. It is perfectly evident that it is about as cowardly as the Christians going to the lions. The man who does it exposes himself to the chance of being torn in pieces by two thousand people. What the thing is, is not cowardly, but profoundly and detestably wicked. The man who does it is very infamous and very brave. But, again, the explanation is that our modern Press would rather appeal to physical arrogance, or to anything, rather than appeal to right and wrong.

In most of the matters of modern England, the real difficulty is that there is a negative revolution without a positive revolution. Positive aristocracy is breaking up without any particular appearance of positive democracy taking its place. The polished class is becoming less polished without becoming less of a class; the nobleman who becomes a guinea-pig keeps all his privileges but loses some of his tradition; he becomes less of a gentleman without becoming less of a nobleman. In the same way (until some recent and happy revivals) it seemed highly probable that the Church of England would cease to be a religion long before it had ceased to be a Church. And in the same way, the vulgarisation of the old, simple middle class does not even have the advantage of doing away with class distinctions; the vulgar man is always the most distinguished, for the very desire to be distinguished is vulgar.

At the same time, it must be remembered that when a class has a morality it does not follow that it is an adequate morality. The middle-class ethic was inadequate for some purposes; so is the public-school ethic, the ethic of the upper classes. On this last matter of the public schools Dr. Spenser, the Head Master of University College School, has lately made some valuable observations. But even he, I think, overstates the claim of the public schools. "The strong point of the English public schools," he says, "has always lain in their efficiency as agencies for the formation of character and for the inculcation of the great notion of obligation which distinguishes a gentleman. On the physical and moral sides the public-school men of England are, I believe, unequalled." And he goes on to say that it is on the mental side that they are defective. But, as a matter of fact, the public-school training is in the strict sense defective upon the moral side also; it leaves out about half of morality. Its just claim is that, like the old middle class (and the Zulus), it trains some virtues and therefore suits some people for some situations. Put an old English merchant to serve in an army and he would have been irritated and clumsy. Put the men from English public schools to rule Ireland, and they make the greatest hash in human history.

Touching the morality of the public schools, I will take one point only, which is enough to prove the case. People have got into their heads an extraordinary idea that English public-school boys and English youth generally are taught to tell the truth. They are taught absolutely nothing of the kind. At no English public school is it even suggested, except by accident, that it is a man's duty to tell the truth. What is suggested is something entirely different: that it is a man's duty not to tell lies. So completely does this mistake soak through all civilisation that we hardly ever think even of the difference between the two things. When we say to a child, "You must tell the truth," we do merely mean that he must refrain from verbal inaccuracies. But the thing we never teach at all is the general duty of telling the truth, of giving a complete and fair picture of anything we are talking about, of not misrepresenting, not evading, not suppressing, not using plausible arguments that we know to be unfair, not selecting unscrupulously to prove an *ex parte* case, not telling all the nice stories about the Scotch, and all the nasty stories about the Irish, not pretending to be disinterested when you are really angry, not pretending to be angry when you are really only avaricious. The one thing that is never taught by any chance in the atmosphere of public schools is exactly that — that there is a whole truth of things, and that in knowing it and speaking it we are happy.

If any one has the smallest doubt of this neglect of truth in public schools he can kill his doubt with one plain question. Can any one on earth believe that if the seeing and telling of the whole truth were really one of the ideals of the English governing class, there could conceivably exist such a thing as the English party system? Why, the English party system is founded upon the principle that telling the whole truth does not matter. It is founded upon the principle that half a truth is better than no politics. Our system deliberately turns a crowd of men who might be impartial into irrational partisans. It teaches some of them to tell lies and all of them to believe lies. It gives every man an arbitrary brief that he has to work up as best he may and defend as best he can. It turns a room full of citizens into a room full of barristers. I know that it has many charms and virtues, fighting and good-fellowship; it has all the charms and virtues of a game. I only say that it would be a stark impossibility in a nation which believed in telling the truth.

LIMERICKS AND COUNSELS OF PERFECTION

It is customary to remark that modern problems cannot easily be attacked because they are so complex. In many cases I believe it is really because they are so simple. Nobody would believe in such simplicity of scoundrelism even if it were pointed out. People would say that the truth was a charge of mere melodramatic villainy; forgetting that nearly all villains really are melodramatic. Thus, for instance, we say that some good measures are frustrated or some bad officials kept in power by the press and confusion of public business; whereas very often the reason is simple healthy human bribery. And thus especially we say that the Yellow Press is exaggerative, over-emotional, illiterate, and anarchical, and a hundred other long words; whereas the only objection to it is that it tells lies. We waste our fine intellects in finding exquisite phraseology to fit a man, when in a well-ordered society we ought to be finding handcuffs to fit him.

This criticism of the modern type of righteous indignation must have come into many people's minds, I think, in reading Dr. Horton's eloquent expressions of disgust at the "corrupt Press," especially in connection with the Limerick craze. Upon the Limerick craze itself, I fear Dr. Horton will not have much effect; such fads perish before one has had time to kill them. But Dr. Horton's protest may really do good if it enables us to come to some clear understanding about what is really wrong with the popular Press, and which means it might be useful and which permissible to use for its reform. We do not want a censorship of the Press; but we are long past talking about that. At present it is not we that silence the Press; it is the Press that silences us. It is not a case of the Commonwealth settling how much the editors shall say; it is a case of the editors settling how much the Commonwealth shall know. If we attack the Press we shall be rebelling, not repressing. But shall we attack it?

Now it is just here that the chief difficulty occurs. It arises from the very rarity and rectitude of those minds which commonly inaugurate such crusades. I have the warmest respect for Dr. Horton's thirst after righteousness; but it has always seemed to me that his righteousness would be more effective without his refinement. The curse of the Nonconformists is their universal refinement. They dimly connect being good with being delicate, and even dapper; with not being grotesque or loud or violent; with not sitting down on one’s hat. Now it is always a pleasure to be loud and violent, and sometimes it is a duty. Certainly it has nothing to do with sin; a man can be loudly and violently virtuous — nay, he can be loudly and violently saintly, though that is not the type of saintliness that we recognise in Dr. Horton. And as for sitting on one’s hat, if it is done for any sublime object (as, for instance, to amuse the children), it is obviously an act of very beautiful self-sacrifice, the destruction and surrender of the symbol of personal dignity upon the shrine of public festivity. Now it will not do to attack the modern editor merely for being unrefined, like the great mass of mankind. We must be able to say that he is immoral, not that he is undignified or ridiculous. I do not mind the Yellow Press editor sitting on his hat. My only objection to him begins to dawn when he attempts to sit on my hat; or, indeed (as is at present the case), when he proceeds to sit on my head.

But in reading between the lines of Dr. Horton’s invective one continually feels that he is not only angry with the popular Press for being unscrupulous: he is partly angry with the popular Press for being popular. He is not only irritated with Limericks for causing a mean money-scramble; he is also partly irritated with Limericks for being Limericks. The enormous size of the levity gets on his nerves, like the glare and blare of Bank Holiday. Now this is a motive which, however human and natural, must be strictly kept out of the way. It takes all sorts to make a world; and it is not in the least necessary that everybody should have that love of subtle and unobtrusive perfections in the matter of manners or literature which does often go with the type of the ethical idealist. It is not in the least desirable that everybody should be earnest. It is highly desirable that everybody should be honest, but that is a thing that can go quite easily with a coarse and cheerful character. But the ineffectualness of most protests against the abuse of the Press has been very largely due to the instinct of democracy (and the instinct of democracy is like the instinct of one woman, wild but quite right) that the people who were trying to purify the Press were also trying to refine it; and to this the democracy very naturally and very justly objected. We are justified in enforcing good morals, for they belong to all mankind; but we are not justified in enforcing good manners, for good manners always mean our own manners. We have no right to purge the popular Press of all that we think vulgar or trivial. Dr. Horton may possibly loathe and detest Limericks just as I loathe and detest riddles; but I have no right to call them flippant and unprofitable; there are wild people in the world who like riddles. I am so afraid of this movement passing off into mere formless rhetoric and platform passion that I will even come close to the earth and lay down specifically some of the things that, in my opinion, could be, and ought to be, done to reform the Press.

First, I would make a law, if there is none such at present, by which an editor, proved to have published false news without reasonable verification, should simply go to prison. This is not a question of influences or atmospheres; the thing could be carried out as easily and as practically as the punishment of thieves and murderers. Of course there would be the usual statement that the guilt was that of a subordinate. Let the accused editor have the right of proving this if he can; if he does, let the subordinate be tried and go to prison. Two or three good rich editors and proprietors properly locked up would take the sting out of the Yellow Press better than centuries of Dr. Horton.

Second, it’s impossible to pass over altogether the most unpleasant, but the most important part of this problem. I will deal with it as distantly as possible. I do not believe there is any harm whatever in reading about murders; rather, if anything, good; for the thought of death operates very powerfully with the poor in the creation of brotherhood and a sense of human dignity. I do not believe there is a pennyworth of harm in the police news, as such. Even divorce news, though contemptible enough, can really in most cases be left to the discretion of grown people; and how far children get hold of such things is a problem for the home and not for the nation. But there is a certain class of evils which a healthy man or woman can actually go through life without knowing anything about at all. These, I say, should be stamped and blackened out of every newspaper with the thickest black of the Russian censor. Such cases should either be always tried *in camera* or reporting them should be a punishable offence. The common weakness of Nature and the sins that flesh is heir to we can leave people to find in newspapers. Men can safely see in the papers what they have already seen in the streets. They may safely find in their journals what they have already found in themselves. But we do not want the imaginations of rational and decent people clouded with the horrors of some obscene insanity which has no more to do with human life than the man in Bedlam who thinks he is a chicken. And, if this vile matter is admitted, let it be simply with a mention of the Latin or legal name of the crime, and with no details whatever. As it is, exactly the reverse is true. Papers are permitted to terrify and darken the fancy of the young with innumerable details, but not permitted to state in clean legal language what the thing is about. They are allowed to give any fact about the thing except the fact that it is a sin.

Third, I would do my best to introduce everywhere the practice of signed articles. Those who urge the advantages of anonymity are either people who do not realise the special peril of our time or they are people who are profiting by it. It is true, but futile, for instance, to say that there is something noble in being nameless when a whole corporate body is bent on a consistent aim: as in an army or men building a cathedral. The point of modern newspapers is that there is no such corporate body and common aim; but each man can use the authority of the paper to further his own private fads and his own private finances.

ANONYMITY AND FURTHER COUNSELS

The end of the article which I write is always cut off, and, unfortunately, I belong to that lower class of animals in whom the tail is important. It is not anybody's fault but my own; it arises from the fact that I take such a long time to get to the point. Somebody, the other day, very reasonably complained of my being employed to write prefaces. He was perfectly right, for I always write a preface to the preface, and then I am stopped; also quite justifiably.

In my last article I said that I favoured three things — first, the legal punishment of deliberately false information; secondly, a distinction, in the matter of reported immorality, between those sins which any healthy man can see in himself and those which he had better not see anywhere; and thirdly, an absolute insistence in the great majority of cases upon the signing of articles. It was at this point that I was cut short, I will not say by the law of space, but rather by my own lawlessness in the matter of space. In any case, there is something more that ought to be said.

It would be an exaggeration to say that I hope some day to see an anonymous article counted as dishonourable as an anonymous letter. For some time to come, the idea of the leading article, expressing the policy of the whole paper, must necessarily remain legitimate; at any rate, we have all written such leading articles, and should never think the worse of any one for writing one. But I should certainly say that writing anonymously ought to have some definite excuse, such as that of the leading article. Writing anonymously ought to be the exception; writing a signed article ought to be the rule. And anonymity ought to be not only an exception, but an accidental exception; a man ought always to be ready to say what anonymous article he had written. The journalistic habit of counting it something sacred to keep secret the origin of an article is simply part of the conspiracy which seeks to put us who are journalists in the position of a much worse sort of Jesuits or Freemasons.

As has often been said, anonymity would be all very well if one could for a moment imagine that it was established from good motives. Suppose, for instance, that we were all quite certain that the men on the *Thunderer* newspaper were a band of brave young idealists who were so eager to overthrow Socialism, Municipal and National, that they did not care to which of them especially was given the glory of striking it down. Unfortunately, however, we do not believe this. What we believe, or, rather, what we know, is that the attack on Socialism in the *Thunderer* arises from a chaos of inconsistent and mostly evil motives, any one of which would lose simply by being named. A jerry-builder whose houses have been condemned writes anonymously and becomes the *Thunderer*. A Socialist who has quarrelled with the other Socialists writes anonymously, and he becomes the *Thunderer*. A monopolist who has lost his monopoly, and a demagogue who has lost his mob, can both write anonymously and become the same newspaper. It is quite true that there is a young and beautiful fanaticism in which men do not care to reveal their names. But there is a more elderly and a much more common excitement in which men do not dare to reveal them.

Then there is another rule for making journalism honest on which I should like to insist absolutely. I should like it to be a fixed thing that the name of the proprietor as well as the editor should be printed upon every paper. If the paper is owned by shareholders, let there be a list of shareholders. If (as is far more common in this singularly undemocratic age) it is owned by one man, let that one man’s name be printed on the paper, if possible in large red letters. Then, if there are any obvious interests being served, we shall know that they are being served. My friends in Manchester are in a terrible state of excitement about the power of brewers and the dangers of admitting them to public office. But at least, if a man has controlled politics through beer, people generally know it: the subject of beer is too fascinating for any one to miss such personal peculiarities. But a man may control politics through journalism, and no ordinary English citizen know that he is controlling them at all. Again and again in the lists of Birthday Honours you and I have seen some Mr. Robinson suddenly elevated to the Peerage without any apparent reason. Even the Society papers (which we read with avidity) could tell us nothing about him except that he was a sportsman or a kind landlord, or interested in the breeding of badgers. Now I should like the name of that Mr. Robinson to be already familiar to the British public. I should like them to know already the public services for which they have to thank him. I should like them to have seen the name already on the outside of that organ of public opinion called *Tootsie’s Tips*, or *The Boy Blackmailer*, or *Nosey Knows*, that bright little financial paper which did so much for the Empire and which so narrowly escaped a criminal prosecution. If they had seen it thus, they would estimate more truly and tenderly the full value of the statement in the Society paper that he is a true gentleman and a sound Churchman.

Finally, it should be practically imposed by custom (it so happens that it could not possibly be imposed by law) that letters of definite and practical complaint should be necessarily inserted by any editor in any paper. Editors have grown very much too lax in this respect. The old editor used dimly to regard himself as an unofficial public servant for the transmitting of public news. If he suppressed anything, he was supposed to have some special reason for doing so; as that the material was actually libellous or literally indecent. But the modern editor regards himself far too much as a kind of original artist, who can select and suppress facts with the arbitrary ease of a poet or a caricaturist. He “makes up” the paper as man “makes up” a fairy tale, he considers his newspaper solely as a work of art, meant to give pleasure, not to give news. He puts in this one letter because he thinks it clever. He puts in these three or four letters because he thinks them silly. He suppresses this article because he thinks it wrong. He suppresses this other and more dangerous article because he thinks it right. The old idea that he is simply a mode of the expression of the public, an “organ” of opinion, seems to have entirely vanished from his mind. To-day the editor is not only the organ, but the man who plays on the organ. For in all our modern movements we move away from Democracy.

This is the whole danger of our time. There is a difference between the oppression which has been too common in the past and the oppression which seems only too probable in the future. Oppression in the past, has commonly been an individual matter. The oppressors were as simple as the oppressed, and as lonely. The aristocrat sometimes hated his inferiors; he always hated his equals. The plutocrat was an individualist. But in our time even the plutocrat has become a Socialist. They have science and combination, and may easily inaugurate a much greater tyranny than the world has ever seen.

ON THE CRYPTIC AND THE ELLIPTIC

Surely the art of reporting speeches is in a strange state of degeneration. We should not object, perhaps, to the reporter's making the speeches much shorter than they are; but we do object to his making all the speeches much worse than they are. And the method which he employs is one which is dangerously unjust. When a statesman or philosopher makes an important speech, there are several courses which the reporter might take without being unreasonable. Perhaps the most reasonable course of all would be not to report the speech at all. Let the world live and love, marry and give in marriage, without that particular speech, as they did (in some desperate way) in the days when there were no newspapers. A second course would be to report a small part of it; but to get that right. A third course, far better if you can do it, is to understand the main purpose and argument of the speech, and report that in clear and logical language of your own. In short, the three possible methods are, first, to leave the man's speech alone; second, to report what he says or some complete part of what he says; and third, to report what he means. But the present way of reporting speeches (mainly created, I think, by the scrappy methods of the *Daily Mail*) is something utterly different from both these ways, and quite senseless and misleading.

The present method is this: the reporter sits listening to a tide of words which he does not try to understand, and does not, generally speaking, even try to take down; he waits until something occurs in the speech which for some reason sounds funny, or memorable, or very exaggerated, or, perhaps, merely concrete; then he writes it down and waits for the next one. If the orator says that the Premier is like a porpoise in the sea under some special circumstances, the reporter gets in the porpoise even if he leaves out the Premier. If the orator begins by saying that Mr. Chamberlain is rather like a violoncello, the reporter does not even wait to hear why he is like a violoncello. He has got hold of something material, and so he is quite happy. The strong words are all put in; the chain of thought is left out. If the orator uses the word "donkey," down goes the word "donkey." If the orator uses the word "damnable," down goes the word "damnable." They follow each other so abruptly in the report that it is often hard to discover the fascinating fact as to what was damnable or who was being compared with a donkey. And the whole line of argument in which these things occurred is entirely lost. I have before me a newspaper report of a speech by Mr. Bernard Shaw, of which one complete and separate paragraph runs like this —

“Capital meant spare money over and above one’s needs. Their country was not really their country at all except in patriotic songs.”

I am well enough acquainted with the whole map of Mr. Bernard Shaw’s philosophy to know that those two statements might have been related to each other in a hundred ways. But I think that if they were read by an ordinary intelligent man, who happened not to know Mr. Shaw’s views, he would form no impression at all except that Mr. Shaw was a lunatic of more than usually abrupt conversation and disconnected mind. The other two methods would certainly have done Mr. Shaw more justice: the reporter should either have taken down verbatim what the speaker really said about Capital, or have given an outline of the way in which this idea was connected with the idea about patriotic songs.

But we have not the advantage of knowing what Mr. Shaw really did say, so we had better illustrate the different methods from something that we do know. Most of us, I suppose, know Mark Antony’s Funeral Speech in “Julius Cæsar.” Now Mark Antony would have no reason to complain if he were not reported at all; if the *Daily Pilum* or the *Morning Fasces*, or whatever it was, confined itself to saying, “Mr. Mark Antony also spoke,” or “Mr. Mark Antony, having addressed the audience, the meeting broke up in some confusion.” The next honest method, worthy of a noble Roman reporter, would be that since he could not report the whole of the speech, he should report some of the speech. He might say— “Mr. Mark Antony, in the course of his speech, said —

‘ When that the poor have cried Cæsar hath wept:
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.’”

In that case one good, solid argument of Mark Antony would be correctly reported. The third and far higher course for the Roman reporter would be to give a philosophical statement of the purport of the speech. As thus— “Mr. Mark Antony, in the course of a powerful speech, conceded the high motives of the Republican leaders, and disclaimed any intention of raising the people against them; he thought, however, that many instances could be quoted against the theory of Cæsar’s ambition, and he concluded by reading, at the request of the audience, the will of Cæsar, which proved that he had the most benevolent designs towards the Roman people.” That is (I admit) not quite so fine as Shakspere, but it is a statement of the man’s political position. But if a *Daily Mail* reporter were sent to take down Antony’s oration, he would simply wait for any expressions that struck him as odd and put them down one after another without any logical connection at all. It would turn out something like this: “Mr. Mark Antony wished for his audience’s ears. He had thrice offered Cæsar a crown. Cæsar was like a deer. If he were Brutus he would put a wound in every tongue. The stones of Rome would mutiny. See what a rent the envious Casca paid. Brutus was Cæsar’s angel. The right honourable gentleman concluded by saying that he and the audience had all fallen down.” That is the report of a political speech in a modern, progressive, or American manner, and I wonder whether the Romans would have put up with it.

The reports of the debates in the Houses of Parliament are constantly growing smaller and smaller in our newspapers. Perhaps this is partly because the speeches are growing duller and duller. I think in some degree the two things act and re-act on each other. For fear of the newspapers politicians are dull, and at last they are too dull even for the newspapers. The speeches in our time are more careful and elaborate, because they are meant to be read, and not to be heard. And exactly because they are more careful and elaborate, they are not so likely to be worthy of a careful and elaborate report. They are not interesting enough. So the moral cowardice of modern politicians has, after all, some punishment attached to it by the silent anger of heaven. Precisely because our political speeches are meant to be reported, they are not worth reporting. Precisely because they are carefully designed to be read, nobody reads them.

Thus we may concede that politicians have done something towards degrading journalism. It was not entirely done by us, the journalists. But most of it was. It was mostly the fruit of our first and most natural sin — the habit of regarding ourselves as conjurers rather than priests, for the definition is that a conjurer is apart from his audience, while a priest is a part of his. The conjurer despises his congregation; if the priest despises any one, it must be himself. The curse of all journalism, but especially of that yellow journalism which is the shame of our profession, is that we think ourselves cleverer than the people for whom we write, whereas, in fact, we are generally even stupider. But this insolence has its Nemesis; and that Nemesis is well illustrated in this matter of reporting.

For the journalist, having grown accustomed to talking down to the public, commonly talks too low at last, and becomes merely barbaric and unintelligible. By his very efforts to be obvious he becomes obscure. This just punishment may specially be noticed in the case of those staggering and staring headlines which American journalism introduced and which some English journalism imitates. I once saw a headline in a London paper which ran simply thus: “Dobbin’s Little Mary.” This was intended to be familiar and popular, and therefore, presumably, lucid. But it was some time before I realised, after reading about half the printed matter underneath, that it had something to do with the proper feeding of horses. At first sight, I took it, as the historical leader of the future will certainly take it, as containing some allusion to the little daughter who so monopolised the affections of the Major at the end of “Vanity Fair.” The Americans carry to an even wilder extreme this darkness by excess of light. You may find a column in an American paper headed “Poet Brown Off Orange-flowers,” or “Senator Robinson Shoehorns Hats Now,” and it may be quite a long time before the full meaning breaks upon you: it has not broken upon me yet.

And something of this intellectual vengeance pursues also those who adopt the modern method of reporting speeches. They also become mystical, simply by trying to be vulgar. They also are condemned to be always trying to write like George R. Sims, and succeeding, in spite of themselves, in writing like Maeterlinck. That combination of words which I have quoted from an alleged speech of Mr. Bernard Shaw’s was written down by the reporter with the idea that he was being particularly plain and democratic. But, as a matter of fact, if there is any connection between the two sentences, it must be something as dark as the deepest roots of Browning, or something as invisible as the most airy filaments of Meredith. To be simple and to be democratic are two very honourable and austere achievements; and it is not given to all the snobs and self-seekers to achieve them. High above even Maeterlinck or Meredith stand those, like Homer and Milton, whom no one can misunderstand. And Homer and Milton are not only better poets than Browning (great as he was), but they would also have been very much better journalists than the young men on the *Daily Mail*.

As it is, however, this misrepresentation of speeches is only a part of a vast journalistic misrepresentation of all life as it is. Journalism is popular, but it is popular mainly as fiction. Life is one world, and life seen in the newspapers another; the public enjoys both, but it is more or less conscious of the difference. People do not believe, for instance, that the debates in the House of Commons are as dramatic as they appear in the daily papers. If they did they would go, not to the daily paper, but to the House of Commons. The galleries would be crowded every night as they were in the French Revolution; for instead of seeing a printed story for a penny they would be seeing an acted drama for nothing. But the, people know in their hearts that journalism is a conventional art like any other, that it selects, heightens, and falsifies. Only its Nemesis is the same as that of other arts: if it loses all care for truth it loses all form likewise. The modern who paints too cleverly produces a picture of a cow which might be the earthquake at San Francisco. And the journalist who reports a speech too cleverly makes it mean nothing at all.

THE WORSHIP OF THE WEALTHY

There has crept, I notice, into our literature and journalism a new way of flattering the wealthy and the great. In more straightforward times flattery itself was more straightforward; falsehood itself was more true. A poor man wishing to please a rich man simply said that he was the wisest, bravest, tallest, strongest, most benevolent and most beautiful of mankind; and as even the rich man probably knew that he wasn't that, the thing did the less harm. When courtiers sang the praises of a King they attributed to him things that were entirely improbable, as that he resembled the sun at noonday, that they had to shade their eyes when he entered the room, that his people could not breathe without him, or that he had with his single sword conquered Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. The safety of this method was its artificiality; between the King and his public image there was really no relation. But the moderns have invented a much subtler and more poisonous kind of eulogy. The modern method is to take the prince or rich man, to give a credible picture of his type of personality, as that he is business-like, or a sportsman, or fond of art, or convivial, or reserved; and then enormously exaggerate the value and importance of these natural qualities. Those who praise Mr. Carnegie do not say that he is as wise as Solomon and as brave as Mars; I wish they did. It would be the next most honest thing to giving their real reason for praising him, which is simply that he has money. The journalists who write about Mr. Pierpont Morgan do not say that he is as beautiful as Apollo; I wish they did. What they do is to take the rich man's superficial life and manner, clothes, hobbies, love of cats, dislike of doctors, or what not; and then with the assistance of this realism make the man out to be a prophet and a saviour of his kind, whereas he is merely a private and stupid man who happens to like cats or to dislike doctors. The old flatterer took for granted that the King was an ordinary man, and set to work to make him out extraordinary. The newer and cleverer flatterer takes for granted that he is extraordinary, and that therefore even ordinary things about him will be of interest.

I have noticed one very amusing way in which this is done. I notice the method applied to about six of the wealthiest men in England in a book of interviews published by an able and well-known journalist. The flatterer contrives to combine strict truth of fact with a vast atmosphere of awe and mystery by the simple operation of dealing almost entirely in negatives. Suppose you are writing a sympathetic study of Mr. Pierpont Morgan. Perhaps there is not much to say about what he does think, or like, or admire; but you can suggest whole vistas of his taste and philosophy by talking a great deal about what he does not think, or like, or admire. You say of him— "But little attracted to the most recent schools of German philosophy, he stands almost as resolutely aloof from the tendencies of transcendental Pantheism as from the narrower ecstasies of Neo-Catholicism." Or suppose I am called upon to praise the charwoman who has just come into my house, and who certainly deserves it much more. I say— "It would be a mistake to class Mrs. Higgs among the followers of Loisy; her position is in many ways different; nor is she wholly to be identified with the concrete Hebraism of Harnack." It is a splendid method, as it gives the flatterer an opportunity of talking about something else besides the subject of the flattery, and it gives the subject of the flattery a rich, if somewhat bewildered, mental glow, as of one who has somehow gone through agonies of philosophical choice of which he was previously unaware. It is a splendid method; but I wish it were applied sometimes to charwomen rather than only to millionaires.

There is another way of flattering important people which has become very common, I notice, among writers in the newspapers and elsewhere. It consists in applying to them the phrases "simple," or "quiet," or "modest," without any sort of meaning or relation to the person to whom they are applied. To be simple is the best thing in the world; to be modest is the next best thing. I am not so sure about being quiet. I am rather inclined to think that really modest people make a great deal of noise. It is quite self-evident that really simple people make a great deal of noise. But simplicity and modesty, at least, are very rare and royal human virtues, not to be lightly talked about. Few human beings, and at rare intervals, have really risen into being modest; not one man in ten or in twenty has by long wars become simple, as an actual old soldier does by long wars become simple. These virtues are not things to fling about as mere flattery; many prophets and righteous men have desired to see these things and have not seen them. But in the description of the births, lives, and deaths of very luxurious men they are used incessantly and quite without thought. If a journalist has to describe a great politician or financier (the things are substantially the same) entering a room or walking down a thoroughfare, he always says, “Mr. Midas was quietly dressed in a black frock coat, a white waistcoat, and light grey trousers, with a plain green tie and simple flower in his button-hole.” As if any one would expect him to have a crimson frock coat or spangled trousers. As if any one would expect him to have a burning Catherine wheel in his button-hole.

But this process, which is absurd enough when applied to the ordinary and external lives of worldly people, becomes perfectly intolerable when it is applied, as it always is applied, to the one episode which is serious even in the lives of politicians. I mean their death. When we have been sufficiently bored with the account of the simple costume of the millionaire, which is generally about as complicated as any that he could assume without being simply thought mad; when we have been told about the modest home of the millionaire, a home which is generally much too immodest to be called a home at all; when we have followed him through all these unmeaning eulogies, we are always asked last of all to admire his quiet funeral. I do not know what else people think a funeral should be except quiet. Yet again and again, over the grave of every one of those sad rich men, for whom one should surely feel, first and last, a speechless pity — over the grave of Beit, over the grave of Whiteley — this sickening nonsense about modesty and simplicity has been poured out. I well remember that when Beit was buried, the papers said that the mourning-coaches contained everybody of importance, that the floral tributes were sumptuous, splendid, intoxicating; but, for all that, it was a simple and quiet funeral. What, in the name of Acheron, did they expect it to be? Did they think there would be human sacrifice — the immolation of Oriental slaves upon the tomb? Did they think that long rows of Oriental dancing-girls would sway hither and thither in an ecstasy of lament? Did they look for the funeral games of Patroclus? I fear they had no such splendid and pagan meaning. I fear they were only using the words “quiet” and “modest” as words to fill up a page — a mere piece of the automatic hypocrisy which does become too common among those who have to write rapidly and often. The word “modest” will soon become like the word “honourable,” which is said to be employed by the Japanese before any word that occurs in a polite sentence, as “Put honourable umbrella in honourable umbrella-stand;” or “condescend to clean honourable boots.” We shall read in the future that the modest King went out in his modest crown, clad from head to foot in modest gold and attended with his ten thousand modest earls, their swords modestly drawn. No! if we have to pay for splendour let us praise it as splendour, not as simplicity. When next I meet a rich man I intend to walk up to him in the street and address him with Oriental hyperbole. He will probably run away.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION

In these days we are accused of attacking science because we want it to be scientific. Surely there is not any undue disrespect to our doctor in saying that he is our doctor, not our priest, or our wife, or ourself. It is not the business of the doctor to say that we must go to a watering-place; it is his affair to say that certain results of health will follow if we do go to a watering-place. After that, obviously, it is for us to judge. Physical science is like simple addition: it is either infallible or it is false. To mix science up with philosophy is only to produce a philosophy that has lost all its ideal value and a science that has lost all its practical value. I want my private physician to tell me whether this or that food will kill me. It is for my private philosopher to tell me whether I ought to be killed. I apologise for stating all these truisms. But the truth is, that I have just been reading a thick pamphlet written by a mass of highly intelligent men who seem never to have heard of any of these truisms in their lives.

Those who detest the harmless writer of this column are generally reduced (in their final ecstasy of anger) to calling him “brilliant;” which has long ago in our journalism become a mere expression of contempt. But I am afraid that even this disdainful phrase does me too much honour. I am more and more convinced that I suffer, not from a shiny or showy impertinence, but from a simplicity that verges upon imbecility. I think more and more that I must be very dull, and that everybody else in the modern world must be very clever. I have just been reading this important compilation, sent to me in the name of a number of men for whom I have a high respect, and called “New Theology and Applied Religion.” And it is literally true that I have read through whole columns of the things without knowing what the people were talking about. Either they must be talking about some black and bestial religion in which they were brought up, and of which I never even heard, or else they must be talking about some blazing and blinding vision of God which they have found, which I have never found, and which by its very splendour confuses their logic and confounds their speech. But the best instance I can quote of the thing is in connection with this matter of the business of physical science on the earth, of which I have just spoken. The following words are written over the signature of a man whose intelligence I respect, and I cannot make head or tail of them —

"When modern science declared that the cosmic process knew nothing of a historical event corresponding to a Fall, but told, on the contrary, the story of an incessant rise in the scale of being, it was quite plain that the Pauline scheme — I mean the argumentative processes of Paul's scheme of salvation — had lost its very foundation; for was not that foundation the total depravity of the human race inherited from their first parents? ... But now there was no Fall; there was no total depravity, or imminent danger of endless doom; and, the basis gone, the superstructure followed."

It is written with earnestness and in excellent English; it must mean something. But what can it mean? How could physical science prove that man is not depraved? You do not cut a man open to find his sins. You do not boil him until he gives forth the unmistakable green fumes of depravity. How could physical science find any traces of a moral fall? What traces did the writer expect to find? Did he expect to find a fossil Eve with a fossil apple inside her? Did he suppose that the ages would have spared for him a complete skeleton of Adam attached to a slightly faded fig-leaf? The whole paragraph which I have quoted is simply a series of inconsequent sentences, all quite untrue in themselves and all quite irrelevant to each other. Science never said that there could have been no Fall. There might have been ten Falls, one on top of the other, and the thing would have been quite consistent with everything that we know from physical science. Humanity might have grown morally worse for millions of centuries, and the thing would in no way have contradicted the principle of Evolution. Men of science (not being raving lunatics) never said that there had been "an incessant rise in the scale of being;" for an incessant rise would mean a rise without any relapse or failure; and physical evolution is full of relapse and failure. There were certainly some physical Falls; there may have been any number of moral Falls. So that, as I have said, I am honestly bewildered as to the meaning of such passages as this, in which the advanced person writes that because geologists know nothing about the Fall, therefore any doctrine of depravity is untrue. Because science has not found something which obviously it could not find, therefore something entirely different — the psychological sense of evil — is untrue. You might sum up this writer's argument abruptly, but accurately, in some way like this— "We have not dug up the bones of the Archangel Gabriel, who presumably had none, therefore little boys, left to themselves, will not be selfish." To me it is all wild and whirling; as if a man said— “The plumber can find nothing wrong with our piano; so I suppose that my wife does love me.”

I am not going to enter here into the real doctrine of original sin, or into that probably false version of it which the New Theology writer calls the doctrine of depravity. But whatever else the worst doctrine of depravity may have been, it was a product of spiritual conviction; it had nothing to do with remote physical origins. Men thought mankind wicked because they felt wicked themselves. If a man feels wicked, I cannot see why he should suddenly feel good because somebody tells him that his ancestors once had tails. Man’s primary purity and innocence may have dropped off with his tail, for all anybody knows. The only thing we all know about that primary purity and innocence is that we have not got it. Nothing can be, in the strictest sense of the word, more comic than to set so shadowy a thing as the conjectures made by the vaguer anthropologists about primitive man against so solid a thing as the human sense of sin. By its nature the evidence of Eden is something that one cannot find. By its nature the evidence of sin is something that one cannot help finding.

Some statements I disagree with; others I do not understand. If a man says, “I think the human race would be better if it abstained totally from fermented liquor,” I quite understand what he means, and how his view could be defended. If a man says, “I wish to abolish beer because I am a temperance man,” his remark conveys no meaning to my mind. It is like saying, “I wish to abolish roads because I am a moderate walker.” If a man says, “I am not a Trinitarian,” I understand. But if he says (as a lady once said to me), “I believe in the Holy Ghost in a spiritual sense,” I go away dazed. In what other sense could one believe in the Holy Ghost? And I am sorry to say that this pamphlet of progressive religious views is full of baffling observations of that kind. What can people mean when they say that science has disturbed their view of sin? What sort of view of sin can they have had before science disturbed it? Did they think that it was something to eat? When people say that science has shaken their faith in immortality, what do they mean? Did they think that immortality was a gas?

Of course the real truth is that science has introduced no new principle into the matter at all. A man can be a Christian to the end of the world, for the simple reason that a man could have been an Atheist from the beginning of it. The materialism of things is on the face of things; it does not require any science to find it out. A man who has lived and loved falls down dead and the worms eat him. That is Materialism if you like. That is Atheism if you like. If mankind has believed in spite of that, it can believe in spite of anything. But why our human lot is made any more hopeless because we know the names of all the worms who eat him, or the names of all the parts of him that they eat, is to a thoughtful mind somewhat difficult to discover. My chief objection to these semi-scientific revolutionists is that they are not at all revolutionary. They are the party of platitude. They do not shake religion: rather religion seems to shake them. They can only answer the great paradox by repeating the truism.

THE METHUSELAHITE

I saw in a newspaper paragraph the other day the following entertaining and deeply philosophical incident. A man was enlisting as a soldier at Portsmouth, and some form was put before him to be filled up, common, I suppose, to all such cases, in which was, among other things, an inquiry about what was his religion. With an equal and ceremonial gravity the man wrote down the word "Methuselahite." Whoever looks over such papers must, I should imagine, have seen some rum religions in his time; unless the Army is going to the dogs. But with all his specialist knowledge he could not "place" Methuselahism among what Bossuet called the variations of Protestantism. He felt a fervid curiosity about the tenets and tendencies of the sect; and he asked the soldier what it meant. The soldier replied that it was his religion "to live as long as he could."

Now, considered as an incident in the religious history of Europe, that answer of that soldier was worth more than a hundred cartloads of quarterly and monthly and weekly and daily papers discussing religious problems and religious books. Every day the daily paper reviews some new philosopher who has some new religion; and there is not in the whole two thousand words of the whole two columns one word as witty as or wise as that word "Methuselahite." The whole meaning of literature is simply to cut a long story short; that is why our modern books of philosophy are never literature. That soldier had in him the very soul of literature; he was one of the great phrase-makers of modern thought, like Victor Hugo or Disraeli. He found one word that defines the paganism of to-day.

Henceforward, when the modern philosophers come to me with their new religions (and there is always a kind of queue of them waiting all the way down the street) I shall anticipate their circumlocutions and be able to cut them short with a single inspired word. One of them will begin, "The New Religion, which is based upon that Primordial Energy in Nature..." "Methuselahite," I shall say sharply; "good morning." "Human Life," another will say, "Human Life, the only ultimate sanctity, freed from creed and dogma..." "Methuselahite!" I shall yell. "Out you go!" "My religion is the Religion of Joy," a third will explain (a bald old man with a cough and tinted glasses), "the Religion of Physical Pride and Rapture, and my..." "Methuselahite!" I shall cry again, and I shall slap him boisterously on the back, and he will fall down. Then a pale young poet with serpentine hair will come and say to me (as one did only the other day): “Moods and impressions are the only realities, and these are constantly and wholly changing. I could hardly therefore define my religion...” “I can,” I should say, somewhat sternly. “Your religion is to live a long time; and if you stop here a moment longer you won’t fulfil it.”

A new philosophy generally means in practice the praise of some old vice. We have had the sophist who defends cruelty, and calls it masculinity. We have had the sophist who defends profligacy, and calls it the liberty of the emotions. We have had the sophist who defends idleness, and calls it art. It will almost certainly happen — it can almost certainly be prophesied — that in this saturnalia of sophistry there will at some time or other arise a sophist who desires to idealise cowardice. And when we are once in this unhealthy world of mere wild words, what a vast deal there would be to say for cowardice! “Is not life a lovely thing and worth saving?” the soldier would say as he ran away. “Should I not prolong the exquisite miracle of consciousness?” the householder would say as he hid under the table. “As long as there are roses and lilies on the earth shall I not remain here?” would come the voice of the citizen from under the bed. It would be quite as easy to defend the coward as a kind of poet and mystic as it has been, in many recent books, to defend the emotionalist as a kind of poet and mystic, or the tyrant as a kind of poet and mystic. When that last grand sophistry and morbidity is preached in a book or on a platform, you may depend upon it there will be a great stir in its favour, that is, a great stir among the little people who live among books and platforms. There will be a new great Religion, the Religion of Methuselahism: with pomps and priests and altars. Its devout crusaders will vow themselves in thousands with a great vow to live long. But there is one comfort: they won’t.

For, indeed, the weakness of this worship of mere natural life (which is a common enough creed to-day) is that it ignores the paradox of courage and fails in its own aim. As a matter of fact, no men would be killed quicker than the Methuselahites. The paradox of courage is that a man must be a little careless of his life even in order to keep it. And in the very case I have quoted we may see an example of how little the theory of Methuselahism really inspires our best life. For there is one riddle in that case which cannot easily be cleared up. If it was the man’s religion to live as long as he could, why on earth was he enlisting as a soldier?

SPIRITUALISM

I have received a letter from a gentleman who is very indignant at what he considers my flippancy in disregarding or degrading Spiritualism. I thought I was defending Spiritualism; but I am rather used to being accused of mocking the thing that I set out to justify. My fate in most controversies is rather pathetic. It is an almost invariable rule that the man with whom I don’t agree thinks I am making a fool of myself, and the man with whom I do agree thinks I am making a fool of him. There seems to be some sort of idea that you are not treating a subject properly if you eulogise it with fantastic terms or defend it by grotesque examples. Yet a truth is equally solemn whatever figure or example its exponent adopts. It is an equally awful truth that four and four make eight, whether you reckon the thing out in eight onions or eight angels, or eight bricks or eight bishops, or eight minor poets or eight pigs. Similarly, if it be true that God made all things, that grave fact can be asserted by pointing at a star or by waving an umbrella. But the case is stronger than this. There is a distinct philosophical advantage in using grotesque terms in a serious discussion.

I think seriously, on the whole, that the more serious is the discussion the more grotesque should be the terms. For this, as I say, there is an evident reason. For a subject is really solemn and important in so far as it applies to the whole cosmos, or to some great spheres and cycles of experience at least. So far as a thing is universal it is serious. And so far as a thing is universal it is full of comic things. If you take a small thing, it may be entirely serious: Napoleon, for instance, was a small thing, and he was serious: the same applies to microbes. If you isolate a thing, you may get the pure essence of gravity. But if you take a large thing (such as the Solar System) it *must* be comic, at least in parts. The germs are serious, because they kill you. But the stars are funny, because they give birth to life, and life gives birth to fun. If you have, let us say, a theory about man, and if you can only prove it by talking about Plato and George Washington, your theory may be a quite frivolous thing. But if you can prove it by talking about the butler or the postman, then it is serious, because it is universal. So far from it being irreverent to use silly metaphors on serious questions, it is one’s duty to use silly metaphors on serious questions. It is the test of one’s seriousness. It is the test of a responsible religion or theory whether it can take examples from pots and pans and boots and butter-tubs. It is the test of a good philosophy whether you can defend it grotesquely. It is the test of a good religion whether you can joke about it.

When I was a very young journalist I used to be irritated at a peculiar habit of printers, a habit which most persons of a tendency similar to mine have probably noticed also. It goes along with the fixed belief of printers that to be a Rationalist is the same thing as to be a Nationalist. I mean the printer's tendency to turn the word "cosmic" into the word "comic." It annoyed me at the time. But since then I have come to the conclusion that the printers were right. The democracy is always right. Whatever is cosmic is comic.

Moreover, there is another reason that makes it almost inevitable that we should defend grotesquely what we believe seriously. It is that all grotesqueness is itself intimately related to seriousness. Unless a thing is dignified, it cannot be undignified. Why is it funny that a man should sit down suddenly in the street? There is only one possible or intelligent reason: that man is the image of God. It is not funny that anything else should fall down; only that a man should fall down. No one sees anything funny in a tree falling down. No one sees a delicate absurdity in a stone falling down. No man stops in the road and roars with laughter at the sight of the snow coming down. The fall of thunderbolts is treated with some gravity. The fall of roofs and high buildings is taken seriously. It is only when a man tumbles down that we laugh. Why do we laugh? Because it is a grave religious matter: it is the Fall of Man. Only man can be absurd: for only man can be dignified.

The above, which occupies the great part of my article, is a parenthises. It is time that I returned to my choleric correspondent who rebuked me for being too frivolous about the problem of Spiritualism. My correspondent, who is evidently an intelligent man, is very angry with me indeed. He uses the strongest language. He says I remind him of a brother of his: which seems to open an abyss or vista of infamy. The main substance of his attack resolves itself into two propositions. First, he asks me what right I have to talk about Spiritualism at all, as I admit I have never been to a *séance*. This is all very well, but there are a good many things to which I have never been, but I have not the smallest intention of leaving off talking about them. I refuse (for instance) to leave off talking about the Siege of Troy. I decline to be mute in the matter of the French Revolution. I will not be silenced on the late indefensible assassination of Julius Cæsar. If nobody has any right to judge of Spiritualism except a man who has been to a *séance*, the results, logically speaking, are rather serious: it would almost seem as if nobody had any right to judge of Christianity who had not been to the first meeting at Pentecost. Which would be dreadful. I conceive myself capable of forming my opinion of Spiritualism without seeing spirits, just as I form my opinion of the Japanese War without seeing the Japanese, or my opinion of American millionaires without (thank God) seeing an American millionaire. Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed: a passage which some have considered as a prophecy of modern journalism.

But my correspondent's second objection is more important. He charges me with actually ignoring the value of communication (if it exists) between this world and the next. I do not ignore it. But I do say this — That a different principle attaches to investigation in this spiritual field from investigation in any other. If a man baits a line for fish, the fish will come, even if he declares there are no such things as fishes. If a man limes a twig for birds, the birds will be caught, even if he thinks it superstitious to believe in birds at all. But a man cannot bait a line for souls. A man cannot lime a twig to catch gods. All wise schools have agreed that this latter capture depends to some extent on the faith of the capturer. So it comes to this: If you have no faith in the spirits your appeal is in vain; and if you have — is it needed? If you do not believe, you cannot. If you do — you will not.

That is the real distinction between investigation in this department and investigation in any other. The priest calls to the goddess, for the same reason that a man calls to his wife, because he knows she is there. If a man kept on shouting out very loud the single word "Maria," merely with the object of discovering whether if he did it long enough some woman of that name would come and marry him, he would be more or less in the position of the modern spiritualist. The old religionist cried out for his God. The new religionist cries out for some god to be his. The whole point of religion as it has hitherto existed in the world was that you knew all about your gods, even before you saw them, if indeed you ever did. Spiritualism seems to me absolutely right on all its mystical side. The supernatural part of it seems to me quite natural. The incredible part of it seems to me obviously true. But I think it so far dangerous or unsatisfactory that it is in some degree scientific. It inquires whether its gods are worth inquiring into. A man (of a certain age) may look into the eyes of his lady-love to see that they are beautiful. But no normal lady will allow that young man to look into her eyes to see whether they are beautiful. The same vanity and idiosyncrasy has been generally observed in gods. Praise them; or leave them alone; but do not look for them unless you know they are there. Do not look for them unless you want them. It annoys them very much.

THE ERROR OF IMPARTIALITY

The refusal of the jurors in the Thaw trial to come to an agreement is certainly a somewhat amusing sequel to the frenzied and even fantastic caution with which they were selected. Jurymen were set aside for reasons which seem to have only the very wildest relation to the case — reasons which we cannot conceive as giving any human being a real bias. It may be questioned whether the exaggerated theory of impartiality in an arbiter or juryman may not be carried so far as to be more unjust than partiality itself. What people call impartiality may simply mean indifference, and what people call partiality may simply mean mental activity. It is sometimes made an objection, for instance, to a juror that he has formed some *primâ-facie* opinion upon a case: if he can be forced under sharp questioning to admit that he has formed such an opinion, he is regarded as manifestly unfit to conduct the inquiry. Surely this is unsound. If his bias is one of interest, of class, or creed, or notorious propaganda, then that fact certainly proves that he is not an impartial arbiter. But the mere fact that he did form some temporary impression from the first facts as far as he knew them — this does not prove that he is not an impartial arbiter — it only proves that he is not a cold-blooded fool.

If we walk down the street, taking all the jurymen who have not formed opinions and leaving all the jurymen who have formed opinions, it seems highly probable that we shall only succeed in taking all the stupid jurymen and leaving all the thoughtful ones. Provided that the opinion formed is really of this airy and abstract kind, provided that it has no suggestion of settled motive or prejudice, we might well regard it not merely as a promise of capacity, but literally as a promise of justice. The man who took the trouble to deduce from the police reports would probably be the man who would take the trouble to deduce further and different things from the evidence. The man who had the sense to form an opinion would be the man who would have the sense to alter it.

It is worth while to dwell for a moment on this minor aspect of the matter because the error about impartiality and justice is by no means confined to a criminal question. In much more serious matters it is assumed that the agnostic is impartial; whereas the agnostic is merely ignorant. The logical outcome of the fastidiousness about the Thaw jurors would be that the case ought to be tried by Esquimaux, or Hottentots, or savages from the Cannibal Islands — by some class of people who could have no conceivable interest in the parties, and moreover, no conceivable interest in the case. The pure and starry perfection of impartiality would be reached by people who not only had no opinion before they had heard the case, but who also had no opinion after they had heard it. In the same way, there is in modern discussions of religion and philosophy an absurd assumption that a man is in some way just and well-poised because he has come to no conclusion; and that a man is in some way knocked off the list of fair judges because he has come to a conclusion. It is assumed that the sceptic has no bias; whereas he has a very obvious bias in favour of scepticism. I remember once arguing with an honest young atheist, who was very much shocked at my disputing some of the assumptions which were absolute sanctities to him (such as the quite unproved proposition of the independence of matter and the quite improbable proposition of its power to originate mind), and he at length fell back upon this question, which he delivered with an honourable heat of defiance and indignation: “Well, can you tell me any man of intellect, great in science or philosophy, who accepted the miraculous?” I said, “With pleasure. Descartes, Dr. Johnson, Newton, Faraday, Newman, Gladstone, Pasteur, Browning, Brunetiere — as many more as you please.” To which that quite admirable and idealistic young man made this astonishing reply— “Oh, but of course they *had* to say that; they were Christians.” First he challenged me to find a black swan, and then he ruled out all my swans because they were black. The fact that all these great intellects had come to the Christian view was somehow or other a proof either that they were not great intellects or that they had not really come to that view. The argument thus stood in a charmingly convenient form: “All men that count have come to my conclusion; for if they come to your conclusion they do not count.”

It did not seem to occur to such controversialists that if Cardinal Newman was really a man of intellect, the fact that he adhered to dogmatic religion proved exactly as much as the fact that Professor Huxley, another man of intellect, found that he could not adhere to dogmatic religion; that is to say (as I cheerfully admit), it proved precious little either way. If there is one class of men whom history has proved especially and supremely capable of going quite wrong in all directions, it is the class of highly intellectual men. I would always prefer to go by the bulk of humanity; that is why I am a democrat. But whatever be the truth about exceptional intelligence and the masses, it is manifestly most unreasonable that intelligent men should be divided upon the absurd modern principle of regarding every clever man who cannot make up his mind as an impartial judge, and regarding every clever man who can make up his mind as a servile fanatic. As it is, we seem to regard it as a positive objection to a reasoner that he has taken one side or the other. We regard it (in other words) as a positive objection to a reasoner that he has contrived to reach the object of his reasoning. We call a man a bigot or a slave of dogma because he is a thinker who has thought thoroughly and to a definite end. We say that the juryman is not a juryman because he has brought in a verdict. We say that the judge is not a judge because he gives judgment. We say that the sincere believer has no right to vote, simply because he has voted.

PHONETIC SPELLING

A correspondent asks me to make more lucid my remarks about phonetic spelling. I have no detailed objection to items of spelling-reform; my objection is to a general principle; and it is this. It seems to me that what is really wrong with all modern and highly civilised language is that it does so largely consist of dead words. Half our speech consists of similes that remind us of no similarity; of pictorial phrases that call up no picture; of historical allusions the origin of which we have forgotten. Take any instance on which the eye happens to alight. I saw in the paper some days ago that the well-known leader of a certain religious party wrote to a supporter of his the following curious words: “I have not forgotten the talented way in which you held up the banner at Birkenhead.” Taking the ordinary vague meaning of the word “talented,” there is no coherency in the picture. The trumpets blow, the spears shake and glitter, and in the thick of the purple battle there stands a gentleman holding up a banner in a talented way. And when we come to the original force of the word “talent” the matter is worse: a talent is a Greek coin used in the New Testament as a symbol of the mental capital committed to an individual at birth. If the religious leader in question had really meant anything by his phrases, he would have been puzzled to know how a man could use a Greek coin to hold up a banner. But really he meant nothing by his phrases. “Holding up the banner” was to him a colourless term for doing the proper thing, and “talented” was a colourless term for doing it successfully.

Now my own fear touching anything in the way of phonetic spelling is that it would simply increase this tendency to use words as counters and not as coins. The original life in a word (as in the word “talent”) burns low as it is: sensible spelling might extinguish it altogether. Suppose any sentence you like: suppose a man says, “Republics generally encourage holidays.” It looks like the top line of a copy-book. Now, it is perfectly true that if you wrote that sentence exactly as it is pronounced, even by highly educated people, the sentence would run: “Ripubliks jenrally inkurrij hollidies.” It looks ugly: but I have not the smallest objection to ugliness. My objection is that these four words have each a history and hidden treasures in them: that this history and hidden treasure (which we tend to forget too much as it is) phonetic spelling tends to make us forget altogether. Republic does not mean merely a mode of political choice. Republic (as we see when we look at the structure of the word) means the Public Thing: the abstraction which is us all.

A Republican is not a man who wants a Constitution with a President. A Republican is a man who prefers to think of Government as impersonal; he is opposed to the Royalist, who prefers to think of Government as personal. Take the second word, “generally.” This is always used as meaning “in the majority of cases.” But, again, if we look at the shape and spelling of the word, we shall see that “generally” means something more like “generically,” and is akin to such words as “generation” or “regenerate.” “Pigs are generally dirty” does not mean that pigs are, in the majority of cases, dirty, but that pigs as a race or genus are dirty, that pigs as pigs are dirty — an important philosophical distinction. Take the third word, “encourage.” The word “encourage” is used in such modern sentences in the merely automatic sense of promote; to encourage poetry means merely to advance or assist poetry. But to encourage poetry means properly to put courage into poetry — a fine idea. Take the fourth word, “holidays.” As long as that word remains, it will always answer the ignorant slander which asserts that religion was opposed to human cheerfulness; that word will always assert that when a day is holy it should also be happy. Properly spelt, these words all tell a sublime story, like Westminster Abbey. Phonetically spelt, they might lose the last traces of any such story. “Generally” is an exalted metaphysical term; “jenrally” is not. If you “encourage” a man, you pour into him the chivalry of a hundred princes; this does not happen if you merely “inkurrij” him. “Republics,” if spelt phonetically, might actually forget to be public. “Holidays,” if spelt phonetically, might actually forget to be holy.

Here is a case that has just occurred. A certain magistrate told somebody whom he was examining in court that he or she “should always be polite to the police.” I do not know whether the magistrate noticed the circumstance, but the word “polite” and the word “police” have the same origin and meaning. Politeness means the atmosphere and ritual of the city, the symbol of human civilisation. The policeman means the representative and guardian of the city, the symbol of human civilisation. Yet it may be doubted whether the two ideas are commonly connected in the mind. It is probable that we often hear of politeness without thinking of a policeman; it is even possible that our eyes often alight upon a policeman without our thoughts instantly flying to the subject of politeness. Yet the idea of the sacred city is not only the link of them both, it is the only serious justification and the only serious corrective of them both. If politeness means too often a mere frippery, it is because it has not enough to do with serious patriotism and public dignity; if policemen are coarse or casual, it is because they are not sufficiently convinced that they are the servants of the beautiful city and the agents of sweetness and light. Politeness is not really a frippery. Politeness is not really even a thing merely suave and deprecating. Politeness is an armed guard, stern and splendid and vigilant, watching over all the ways of men; in other words, politeness is a policeman. A policeman is not merely a heavy man with a truncheon: a policeman is a machine for the smoothing and sweetening of the accidents of everyday existence. In other words, a policeman is politeness; a veiled image of politeness — sometimes impenetrably veiled. But my point is here that by losing the original idea of the city, which is the force and youth of both the words, both the things actually degenerate. Our politeness loses all manliness because we forget that politeness is only the Greek for patriotism. Our policemen lose all delicacy because we forget that a policeman is only the Greek for something civilised. A policeman should often have the functions of a knight-errant. A policeman should always have the elegance of a knight-errant. But I am not sure that he would succeed any the better in remembering this obligation of romantic grace if his name were spelt phonetically, supposing that it could be spelt phonetically. Some spelling-reformers, I am told, in the poorer parts of London do spell his name phonetically, very phonetically. They call him a “pleeceman.” Thus the whole romance of the ancient city disappears from the word, and the policeman’s reverent courtesy of demeanour deserts him quite suddenly. This does seem to me the case against any extreme revolution in spelling. If you spell a word wrong you have some temptation to think it wrong.

HUMANITARIANISM AND STRENGTH

Somebody writes complaining of something I said about progress. I have forgotten what I said, but I am quite certain that it was (like a certain Mr. Douglas in a poem which I have also forgotten) tender and true. In any case, what I say now is this. Human history is so rich and complicated that you can make out a case for any course of improvement or retrogression. I could make out that the world has been growing more democratic, for the English franchise has certainly grown more democratic. I could also make out that the world has been growing more aristocratic, for the English Public Schools have certainly grown more aristocratic. I could prove the decline of militarism by the decline of flogging; I could prove the increase of militarism by the increase of standing armies and conscription. But I can prove anything in this way. I can prove that the world has always been growing greener. Only lately men have invented absinthe and the *Westminster Gazette*. I could prove the world has grown less green. There are no more Robin Hood foresters, and fields are being covered with houses. I could show that the world was less red with khaki or more red with the new penny stamps. But in all cases progress means progress only in some particular thing. Have you ever noticed that strange line of Tennyson, in which he confesses, half consciously, how very *conventional* progress is? —

“Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing
grooves of change.”

Even in praising change, he takes for a simile the most unchanging thing. He calls our modern change a groove. And it is a groove; perhaps there was never anything so groovy.

Nothing would induce me in so idle a monologue as this to discuss adequately a great political matter like the question of the military punishments in Egypt. But I may suggest one broad reality to be observed by both sides, and which is, generally speaking, observed by neither. Whatever else is right, it is utterly wrong to employ the argument that we Europeans must do to savages and Asiatics whatever savages and Asiatics do to us. I have even seen some controversialists use the metaphor, “We must fight them with their own weapons.” Very well; let those controversialists take their metaphor, and take it literally. Let us fight the Soudanese with their own weapons. Their own weapons are large, very clumsy knives, with an occasional old-fashioned gun. Their own weapons are also torture and slavery. If we fight them with torture and slavery, we shall be fighting badly, precisely as if we fought them with clumsy knives and old guns. That is the whole strength of our Christian civilisation, that it does fight with its own weapons and not with other people’s. It is not true that superiority suggests a tit for tat. It is not true that if a small hooligan puts his tongue out at the Lord Chief Justice, the Lord Chief Justice immediately realises that his only chance of maintaining his position is to put his tongue out at the little hooligan. The hooligan may or may not have any respect at all for the Lord Chief Justice: that is a matter which we may contentedly leave as a solemn psychological mystery. But if the hooligan has any respect at all for the Lord Chief Justice, that respect is certainly extended to the Lord Chief Justice entirely because he does not put his tongue out.

Exactly in the same way the ruder or more sluggish races regard the civilisation of Christendom. If they have any respect for it, it is precisely because it does not use their own coarse and cruel expedients. According to some modern moralists whenever Zulus cut off the heads of dead Englishmen, Englishmen must cut off the heads of dead Zulus. Whenever Arabs or Egyptians constantly use the whip to their slaves, Englishmen must use the whip to their subjects. And on a similar principle (I suppose), whenever an English Admiral has to fight cannibals the English Admiral ought to eat them. However unattractive a menu consisting entirely of barbaric kings may appear to an English gentleman, he must try to sit down to it with an appetite. He must fight the Sandwich Islanders with their own weapons; and their own weapons are knives and forks. But the truth of the matter is, of course, that to do this kind of thing is to break the whole spell of our supremacy. All the mystery of the white man, all the fearful poetry of the white man, so far as it exists in the eyes of these savages, consists in the fact that we do not do such things. The Zulus point at us and say, “Observe the advent of these inexplicable demi-gods, these magicians, who do not cut off the noses of their enemies.” The Soudanese say to each other, “This hardy people never flogs its servants; it is superior to the simplest and most obvious human pleasures.” And the cannibals say, “The austere and terrible race, the race that denies itself even boiled missionary, is upon us: let us flee.”

Whether or no these details are a little conjectural, the general proposition I suggest is the plainest common sense. The elements that make Europe upon the whole the most humanitarian civilisation are precisely the elements that make it upon the whole the strongest. For the power which makes a man able to entertain a good impulse is the same as that which enables him to make a good gun; it is imagination. It is imagination that makes a man outwit his enemy, and it is imagination that makes him spare his enemy. It is precisely because this picturing of the other man’s point of view is in the main a thing in which Christians and Europeans specialise that Christians and Europeans, with all their faults, have carried to such perfection both the arts of peace and war.

They alone have invented machine-guns, and they alone have invented ambulances; they have invented ambulances (strange as it may sound) for the same reason for which they have invented machine-guns. Both involve a vivid calculation of remote events. It is precisely because the East, with all its wisdom, is cruel, that the East, with all its wisdom, is weak. And it is precisely because savages are pitiless that they are still — merely savages. If they could imagine their enemy’s sufferings they could also imagine his tactics. If Zulus did not cut off the Englishman’s head they might really borrow it. For if you do not understand a man you cannot crush him. And if you do understand him, very probably you will not.

When I was about seven years old I used to think that the chief modern danger was a danger of over-civilisation. I am inclined to think now that the chief modern danger is that of a slow return towards barbarism, just such a return towards barbarism as is indicated in the suggestions of barbaric retaliation of which I have just spoken. Civilisation in the best sense merely means the full authority of the human spirit over all externals. Barbarism means the worship of those externals in their crude and unconquered state.

Barbarism means the worship of Nature; and in recent poetry, science, and philosophy there has been too much of the worship of Nature. Wherever men begin to talk much and with great solemnity about the forces outside man, the note of it is barbaric. When men talk much about heredity and environment they are almost barbarians. The modern men of science are many of them almost barbarians. Mr. Blatchford is in great danger of becoming a barbarian. For barbarians (especially the truly squalid and unhappy barbarians) are always talking about these scientific subjects from morning till night. That is why they remain squalid and unhappy; that is why they remain barbarians. Hottentots are always talking about heredity, like Mr. Blatchford. Sandwich Islanders are always talking about environment, like Mr. Suthers. Savages — those that are truly stunted or depraved — dedicate nearly all their tales and sayings to the subject of physical kinship, of a curse on this or that tribe, of a taint in this or that family, of the invincible law of blood, of the unavoidable evil of places. The true savage is a slave, and is always talking about what he must do; the true civilised man is a free man and is always talking about what he may do. Hence all the Zola heredity and Ibsen heredity that has been written in our time affects me as not merely evil, but as essentially ignorant and retrogressive. This sort of science is almost the only thing that can with strict propriety be called reactionary. Scientific determinism is simply the primal twilight of all mankind; and some men seem to be returning to it.

Another savage trait of our time is the disposition to talk about material substances instead of about ideas. The old civilisation talked about the sin of gluttony or excess. We talk about the Problem of Drink — as if drink could be a problem. When people have come to call the problem of human intemperance the Problem of Drink, and to talk about curing it by attacking the drink traffic, they have reached quite a dim stage of barbarism. The thing is an inverted form of fetish worship; it is no sillier to say that a bottle is a god than to say that a bottle is a devil. The people who talk about the curse of drink will probably progress down that dark hill. In a little while we shall have them calling the practice of wife-beating the Problem of Pokers; the habit of housebreaking will be called the Problem of the Skeleton-Key Trade; and for all I know they may try to prevent forgery by shutting up all the stationers’ shops by Act of Parliament.

I cannot help thinking that there is some shadow of this uncivilised materialism lying at present upon a much more dignified and valuable cause. Every one is talking just now about the desirability of ingeminating peace and averting war. But even war and peace are physical states rather than moral states, and in talking about them only we have by no means got to the bottom of the matter. How, for instance, do we as a matter of fact create peace in one single community? We do not do it by vaguely telling every one to avoid fighting and to submit to anything that is done to him. We do it by definitely defining his rights and then undertaking to avenge his wrongs. We shall never have a common peace in Europe till we have a common principle in Europe. People talk of “The United States of Europe;” but they forget that it needed the very doctrinal “Declaration of Independence” to make the United States of America. You cannot agree about nothing any more than you can quarrel about nothing.

WINE WHEN IT IS RED

I suppose that there will be some wigs on the green in connection with the recent manifesto signed by a string of very eminent doctors on the subject of what is called “alcohol.” “Alcohol” is, to judge by the sound of it, an Arabic word, like “algebra” and “Alhambra,” those two other unpleasant things. The Alhambra in Spain I have never seen; I am told that it is a low and rambling building; I allude to the far more dignified erection in Leicester Square. If it is true, as I surmise, that “alcohol” is a word of the Arabs, it is interesting to realise that our general word for the essence of wine and beer and such things comes from a people which has made particular war upon them. I suppose that some aged Moslem chieftain sat one day at the opening of his tent and, brooding with black brows and cursing in his black beard over wine as the symbol of Christianity, racked his brains for some word ugly enough to express his racial and religious antipathy, and suddenly spat out the horrible word “alcohol.” The fact that the doctors had to use this word for the sake of scientific clearness was really a great disadvantage to them in fairly discussing the matter. For the word really involves one of those beggings of the question which make these moral matters so difficult. It is quite a mistake to suppose that, when a man desires an alcoholic drink, he necessarily desires alcohol.

Let a man walk ten miles steadily on a hot summer’s day along a dusty English road, and he will soon discover why beer was invented. The fact that beer has a very slight stimulating quality will be quite among the smallest reasons that induce him to ask for it. In short, he will not be in the least desiring alcohol; he will be desiring beer. But, of course, the question cannot be settled in such a simple way. The real difficulty which confronts everybody, and which especially confronts doctors, is that the extraordinary position of man in the physical universe makes it practically impossible to treat him in either one direction or the other in a purely physical way. Man is an exception, whatever else he is. If he is not the image of God, then he is a disease of the dust. If it is not true that a divine being fell, then we can only say that one of the animals went entirely off its head. In neither case can we really argue very much from the body of man simply considered as the body of an innocent and healthy animal. His body has got too much mixed up with his soul, as we see in the supreme instance of sex. It may be worth while uttering the warning to wealthy philanthropists and idealists that this argument from the animal should not be thoughtlessly used, even against the atrocious evils of excess; it is an argument that proves too little or too much.

Doubtless, it is unnatural to be drunk. But then in a real sense it is unnatural to be human. Doubtless, the intemperate workman wastes his tissues in drinking; but no one knows how much the sober workman wastes his tissues by working. No one knows how much the wealthy philanthropist wastes his tissues by talking; or, in much rarer conditions, by thinking. All the human things are more dangerous than anything that affects the beasts — sex, poetry, property, religion. The real case against drunkenness is not that it calls up the beast, but that it calls up the Devil. It does not call up the beast, and if it did it would not matter much, as a rule; the beast is a harmless and rather amiable creature, as anybody can see by watching cattle. There is nothing bestial about intoxication; and certainly there is nothing intoxicating or even particularly lively about beasts. Man is always something worse or something better than an animal; and a mere argument from animal perfection never touches him at all. Thus, in sex no animal is either chivalrous or obscene. And thus no animal ever invented anything so bad as drunkenness — or so good as drink.

The pronouncement of these particular doctors is very clear and uncompromising; in the modern atmosphere, indeed, it even deserves some credit for moral courage. The majority of modern people, of course, will probably agree with it in so far as it declares that alcoholic drinks are often of supreme value in emergencies of illness; but many people, I fear, will open their eyes at the emphatic terms in which they describe such drink as considered as a beverage; but they are not content with declaring that the drink is in moderation harmless: they distinctly declare that it is in moderation beneficial. But I fancy that, in saying this, the doctors had in mind a truth that runs somewhat counter to the common opinion. I fancy that it is the experience of most doctors that giving any alcohol for illness (though often necessary) is about the most morally dangerous way of giving it. Instead of giving it to a healthy person who has many other forms of life, you are giving it to a desperate person, to whom it is the only form of life. The invalid can hardly be blamed if by some accident of his erratic and overwrought condition he comes to remember the thing as the very water of vitality and to use it as such. For in so far as drinking is really a sin it is not because drinking is wild, but because drinking is tame; not in so far as it is anarchy, but in so far as it is slavery. Probably the worst way to drink is to drink medicinally. Certainly the safest way to drink is to drink carelessly; that is, without caring much for anything, and especially not caring for the drink.

The doctor, of course, ought to be able to do a great deal in the way of restraining those individual cases where there is plainly an evil thirst; and beyond that the only hope would seem to be in some increase, or, rather, some concentration of ordinary public opinion on the subject. I have always held consistently my own modest theory on the subject. I believe that if by some method the local public-house could be as definite and isolated a place as the local post-office or the local railway station, if all types of people passed through it for all types of refreshment, you would have the same safeguard against a man behaving in a disgusting way in a tavern that you have at present against his behaving in a disgusting way in a post-office: simply the presence of his ordinary sensible neighbours. In such a place the kind of lunatic who wants to drink an unlimited number of whiskies would be treated with the same severity with which the post office authorities would treat an amiable lunatic who had an appetite for licking an unlimited number of stamps. It is a small matter whether in either case a technical refusal would be officially employed. It is an essential matter that in both cases the authorities could rapidly communicate with the friends and family of the mentally afflicted person. At least, the postmistress would not dangle a strip of tempting sixpenny stamps before the enthusiast’s eyes as he was being dragged away with his tongue out. If we made drinking open and official we might be taking one step towards making it careless. In such things to be careless is to be sane: for neither drunkards nor Moslems can be careless about drink.

I once heard a man call this age the age of demagogues. Of this I can only say, in the admirably sensible words of the angry coachman in “Pickwick,” that “that remark’s political, or what is much the same, it ain’t true.” So far from being the age of demagogues, this is really and specially the age of mystagogues. So far from this being a time in which things are praised because they are popular, the truth is that this is the first time, perhaps, in the whole history of the world in which things can be praised because they are unpopular. The demagogue succeeds because he makes himself understood, even if he is not worth understanding. But the mystagogue succeeds because he gets himself misunderstood; although, as a rule, he is not even worth misunderstanding. Gladstone was a demagogue: Disraeli a mystagogue. But ours is specially the time when a man can advertise his wares not as a universality, but as what the tradesmen call “a speciality.” We all know this, for instance, about modern art. Michelangelo and Whistler were both fine artists; but one is obviously public, the other obviously private, or, rather, not obvious at all. Michelangelo’s frescoes are doubtless finer than the popular judgment, but they are plainly meant to strike the popular judgment. Whistler’s pictures seem often meant to escape the popular judgment; they even seem meant to escape the popular admiration. They are elusive, fugitive; they fly even from praise. Doubtless many artists in Michelangelo’s day declared themselves to be great artists, although they were unsuccessful. But they did not declare themselves great artists because they were unsuccessful: that is the peculiarity of our own time, which has a positive bias against the populace.

Another case of the same kind of thing can be found in the latest conceptions of humour. By the wholesome tradition of mankind, a joke was a thing meant to amuse men; a joke which did not amuse them was a failure, just as a fire which did not warm them was a failure. But we have seen the process of secrecy and aristocracy introduced even into jokes. If a joke falls flat, a small school of æsthetes only ask us to notice the wild grace of its falling and its perfect flatness after its fall. The old idea that the joke was not good enough for the company has been superseded by the new aristocratic idea that the company was not worthy of the joke. They have introduced an almost insane individualism into that one form of intercourse which is specially and uproariously communal. They have made even levities into secrets. They have made laughter lonelier than tears.

There is a third thing to which the mystagogues have recently been applying the methods of a secret society: I mean manners. Men who sought to rebuke rudeness used to represent manners as reasonable and ordinary; now they seek to represent them as private and peculiar. Instead of saying to a man who blocks up a street or the fireplace, “You ought to know better than that,” the moderns say, “You, of course, don’t know better than that.”

I have just been reading an amusing book by Lady Grove called “The Social Fetich,” which is a positive riot of this new specialism and mystification. It is due to Lady Grove to say that she has some of the freer and more honourable qualities of the old Whig aristocracy, as well as their wonderful worldliness and their strange faith in the passing fashion of our politics. For instance, she speaks of Jingo Imperialism with a healthy English contempt; and she perceives stray and striking truths, and records them justly — as, for instance, the greater democracy of the Southern and Catholic countries of Europe. But in her dealings with social formulæ here in England she is, it must frankly be said, a common mystagogue. She does not, like a decent demagogue, wish to make people understand; she wishes to make them painfully conscious of not understanding. Her favourite method is to terrify people from doing things that are quite harmless by telling them that if they do they are the kind of people who would do other things, equally harmless. If you ask after somebody’s mother (or whatever it is), you are the kind of person who would have a pillow-case, or would not have a pillow-case. I forget which it is; and so, I dare say, does she. If you assume the ordinary dignity of a decent citizen and say that you don’t see the harm of having a mother or a pillow-case, she would say that of course *you* wouldn’t. This is what I call being a mystagogue. It is more vulgar than being a demagogue; because it is much easier.

The primary point I meant to emphasise is that this sort of aristocracy is essentially a new sort. All the old despots were demagogues; at least, they were demagogues whenever they were really trying to please or impress the demos. If they poured out beer for their vassals it was because both they and their vassals had a taste for beer. If (in some slightly different mood) they poured melted lead on their vassals, it was because both they and their vassals had a strong distaste for melted lead. But they did not make any mystery about either of the two substances. They did not say, “You don’t like melted lead? ... Ah! no, of course, *you* wouldn’t; you are probably the kind of person who would prefer beer.... It is no good asking you even to imagine the curious undercurrent of psychological pleasure felt by a refined person under the seeming shock of melted lead.” Even tyrants when they tried to be popular, tried to give the people pleasure; they did not try to overawe the people by giving them something which they ought to regard as pleasure.

It was the same with the popular presentment of aristocracy. Aristocrats tried to impress humanity by the exhibition of qualities which humanity admires, such as courage, gaiety, or even mere splendour. The aristocracy might have more possession in these things, but the democracy had quite equal delight in them. It was much more sensible to offer yourself for admiration because you had drunk three bottles of port at a sitting, than to offer yourself for admiration (as Lady Grove does) because you think it right to say “port wine” while other people think it right to say “port.” Whether Lady Grove’s preference for port wine (I mean for the phrase port wine) is a piece of mere nonsense I do not know; but at least it is a very good example of the futility of such tests in the matter even of mere breeding. “Port wine” may happen to be the phrase used in certain good families; but numberless aristocrats say “port,” and all barmaids say “port wine.” The whole thing is rather more trivial than collecting tram-tickets; and I will not pursue Lady Grove’s further distinctions. I pass over the interesting theory that I ought to say to Jones (even apparently if he is my dearest friend), “How is Mrs. Jones?” instead of “How is your wife?” and I pass over an impassioned declamation about bedspreads (I think) which has failed to fire my blood.

The truth of the matter is really quite simple. An aristocracy is a secret society; and this is especially so when, as in the modern world, it is practically a plutocracy. The one idea of a secret society is to change the password. Lady Grove falls naturally into a pure perversity because she feels subconsciously that the people of England can be more effectively kept at a distance by a perpetual torrent of new tests than by the persistence of a few old ones. She knows that in the educated “middle class” there is an idea that it is vulgar to say port wine; therefore she reverses the idea — she says that the man who would say “port” is a man who would say, “How is your wife?” She says it because she knows both these remarks to be quite obvious and reasonable.

The only thing to be done or said in reply, I suppose, would be to apply the same principle of bold mystification on our own part. I do not see why I should not write a book called “Etiquette in Fleet Street,” and terrify every one else out of that thoroughfare by mysterious allusions to the mistakes that they generally make. I might say: “This is the kind of man who would wear a green tie when he went into a tobacconist’s,” or “You don’t see anything wrong in drinking a Benedictine on Thursday?... No, of course *you* wouldn’t.” I might asseverate with passionate disgust and disdain: “The man who is capable of writing sonnets as well as triolets is capable of climbing an omnibus while holding an umbrella.” It seems a simple method; if ever I should master it perhaps I may govern England.

THE “EATANSWILL GAZETTE.”

The other day some one presented me with a paper called the *Eatanswill Gazette*. I need hardly say that I could not have been more startled if I had seen a coach coming down the road with old Mr. Tony Weller on the box. But, indeed, the case is much more extraordinary than that would be. Old Mr. Weller was a good man, a specially and seriously good man, a proud father, a very patient husband, a sane moralist, and a reliable ally. One could not be so very much surprised if somebody pretended to be Tony Weller. But the *Eatanswill Gazette* is definitely depicted in “Pickwick” as a dirty and unscrupulous rag, soaked with slander and nonsense. It was really interesting to find a modern paper proud to take its name. The case cannot be compared to anything so simple as a resurrection of one of the “Pickwick” characters; yet a very good parallel could easily be found. It is almost exactly as if a firm of solicitors were to open their offices to-morrow under the name of Dodson and Fogg.

It was at once apparent, of course, that the thing was a joke. But what was not apparent, what only grew upon the mind with gradual wonder and terror, was the fact that it had its serious side. The paper is published in the well-known town of Sudbury, in Suffolk. And it seems that there is a standing quarrel between Sudbury and the county town of Ipswich as to which was the town described by Dickens in his celebrated sketch of an election. Each town proclaims with passion that it was Eatanswill. If each town proclaimed with passion that it was not Eatanswill, I might be able to understand it. Eatanswill, according to Dickens, was a town alive with loathsome corruption, hypocritical in all its public utterances, and venal in all its votes. Yet, two highly respectable towns compete for the honour of having been this particular cesspool, just as ten cities fought to be the birthplace of Homer. They claim to be its original as keenly as if they were claiming to be the original of More's "Utopia" or Morris's "Earthly Paradise." They grow seriously heated over the matter. The men of Ipswich say warmly, "It must have been our town; for Dickens says it was corrupt, and a more corrupt town than our town you couldn't have met in a month." The men of Sudbury reply with rising passion, "Permit us to tell you, gentlemen, that our town was quite as corrupt as your town any day of the week. Our town was a common nuisance; and we defy our enemies to question it." "Perhaps you will tell us," sneer the citizens of Ipswich, "that your politics were ever as thoroughly filthy as — —" "As filthy as anything," answer the Sudbury men, undauntedly. "Nothing in politics could be filthier. Dickens must have noticed how disgusting we were." "And could he have failed to notice," the others reason indignantly, "how disgusting we were? You could smell us a mile off. You Sudbury fellows may think yourselves very fine, but let me tell you that, compared to our city, Sudbury was an honest place." And so the controversy goes on. It seems to me to be a new and odd kind of controversy.

Naturally, an outsider feels inclined to ask why Eatanswill should be either one or the other. As a matter of fact, I fear Eatanswill was every town in the country. It is surely clear that when Dickens described the Eatanswill election he did not mean it as a satire on Sudbury or a satire on Ipswich; he meant it as a satire on England. The Eatanswill election is not a joke against Eatanswill; it is a joke against elections. If the satire is merely local, it practically loses its point; just as the "Circumlocution Office" would lose its point if it were not supposed to be a true sketch of all Government offices; just as the Lord Chancellor in "Bleak House" would lose his point if he were not supposed to be symbolic and representative of all Lord Chancellors. The whole moral meaning would vanish if we supposed that Oliver Twist had got by accident into an exceptionally bad workhouse, or that Mr. Dorrit was in the only debtors' prison that was not well managed. Dickens was making game, not of places, but of methods. He poured all his powerful genius into trying to make the people ashamed of the methods.

But he seems only to have succeeded in making people proud of the places. In any case, the controversy is conducted in a truly extraordinary way. No one seems to allow for the fact that, after all, Dickens was writing a novel, and a highly fantastic novel at that. Facts in support of Sudbury or Ipswich are quoted not only from the story itself, which is wild and wandering enough, but even from the yet wilder narratives which incidentally occur in the story, such as Sam Weller's description of how his father, on the way to Eatanswill, tipped all the voters into the canal. This may quite easily be (to begin with) an entertaining tarradiddle of Sam's own invention, told, like many other even more improbable stories, solely to amuse Mr. Pickwick. Yet the champions of these two towns positively ask each other to produce a canal, or to fail for ever in their attempt to prove themselves the most corrupt town in England. As far as I remember, Sam's story of the canal ends with Mr. Pickwick eagerly asking whether everybody was rescued, and Sam solemnly replying that one old gentleman's hat was found, but that he was not sure whether his head was in it. If the canal is to be taken as realistic, why not the hat and the head? If these critics ever find the canal I recommend them to drag it for the body of the old gentleman.

Both sides refuse to allow for the fact that the characters in the story are comic characters. For instance, Mr. Percy Fitzgerald, the eminent student of Dickens, writes to the *Eatanswill Gazette* to say that Sudbury, a small town, could not have been Eatanswill, because one of the candidates speaks of its great manufactures. But obviously one of the candidates would have spoken of its great manufactures if it had had nothing but a row of apple-stalls. One of the candidates might have said that the commerce of Eatanswill eclipsed Carthage, and covered every sea; it would have been quite in the style of Dickens. But when the champion of Sudbury answers him, he does not point out this plain mistake. He answers by making another mistake exactly of the same kind. He says that Eatanswill was not a busy, important place. And his odd reason is that Mrs. Pott said she was dull there. But obviously Mrs. Pott would have said she was dull anywhere. She was setting her cap at Mr. Winkle. Moreover, it was the whole point of her character in any case. Mrs. Pott was that kind of woman. If she had been in Ipswich she would have said that she ought to be in London. If she was in London she would have said that she ought to be in Paris. The first disputant proves Eatanswill grand because a servile candidate calls it grand. The second proves it dull because a discontented woman calls it dull.

The great part of the controversy seems to be conducted in the spirit of highly irrelevant realism. Sudbury cannot be Eatanswill, because there was a fancy-dress shop at Eatanswill, and there is no record of a fancy-dress shop at Sudbury. Sudbury must be Eatanswill because there were heavy roads outside Eatanswill, and there are heavy roads outside Sudbury. Ipswich cannot be Eatanswill, because Mrs. Leo Hunter's country seat would not be near a big town. Ipswich must be Eatanswill because Mrs. Leo Hunter's country seat would be near a large town. Really, Dickens might have been allowed to take liberties with such things as these, even if he had been mentioning the place by name. If I were writing a story about the town of Limerick, I should take the liberty of introducing a bun-shop without taking a journey to Limerick to see whether there was a bun-shop there. If I wrote a romance about Torquay, I should hold myself free to introduce a house with a green door without having studied a list of all the coloured doors in the town. But if, in order to make it particularly obvious that I had not meant the town for a photograph either of Torquay or Limerick, I had gone out of my way to give the place a wild, fictitious name of my own, I think that in that case I should be justified in tearing my hair with rage if the people of Limerick or Torquay began to argue about bun-shops and green doors. No reasonable man would expect Dickens to be so literal as all that even about Bath or Bury St. Edmunds, which do exist; far less need he be literal about Eatanswill, which didn't exist.

I must confess, however, that I incline to the Sudbury side of the argument. This does not only arise from the sympathy which all healthy people have for small places as against big ones; it arises from some really good qualities in this particular Sudbury publication. First of all, the champions of Sudbury seem to be more open to the sensible and humorous view of the book than the champions of Ipswich — at least, those that appear in this discussion. Even the Sudbury champion, bent on finding realistic clothes, rebels (to his eternal honour) when Mr. Percy Fitzgerald tries to show that Bob Sawyer's famous statement that he was neither Buff nor Blue, "but a sort of plaid," must have been copied from some silly man at Ipswich who said that his politics were "half and half." Anybody might have made either of the two jokes. But it was the whole glory and meaning of Dickens that he confined himself to making jokes that anybody might have made a little better than anybody would have made them.

FAIRY TALES

Some solemn and superficial people (for nearly all very superficial people are solemn) have declared that the fairy tales are immoral; they base this upon some accidental circumstances or regrettable incidents in the war between giants and boys, some cases in which the latter indulged in unsympathetic deceptions or even in practical jokes. The objection, however, is not only false, but very much the reverse of the facts. The fairy tales are at root not only moral in the sense of being innocent, but moral in the sense of being didactic, moral in the sense of being moralising. It is all very well to talk of the freedom of fairyland, but there was precious little freedom in fairyland by the best official accounts. Mr. W.B. Yeats and other sensitive modern souls, feeling that modern life is about as black a slavery as ever oppressed mankind (they are right enough there), have especially described elfland as a place of utter ease and abandonment — a place where the soul can turn every way at will like the wind. Science denounces the idea of a capricious God; but Mr. Yeats's school suggests that in that world every one is a capricious god. Mr. Yeats himself has said a hundred times in that sad and splendid literary style which makes him the first of all poets now writing in English (I will not say of all English poets, for Irishmen are familiar with the practice of physical assault), he has, I say, called up a hundred times the picture of the terrible freedom of the fairies, who typify the ultimate anarchy of art —

"Where nobody grows old or weary or wise,
Where nobody grows old or godly or grave."

But, after all (it is a shocking thing to say), I doubt whether Mr. Yeats really knows the real philosophy of the fairies. He is not simple enough; he is not stupid enough. Though I say it who should not, in good sound human stupidity I would knock Mr. Yeats out any day. The fairies like me better than Mr. Yeats; they can take me in more. And I have my doubts whether this feeling of the free, wild spirits on the crest of hill or wave is really the central and simple spirit of folk-lore. I think the poets have made a mistake: because the world of the fairy tales is a brighter and more varied world than ours, they have fancied it less moral; really it is brighter and more varied because it is more moral. Suppose a man could be born in a modern prison. It is impossible, of course, because nothing human can happen in a modern prison, though it could sometimes in an ancient dungeon. A modern prison is always inhuman, even when it is not inhumane. But suppose a man were born in a modern prison, and grew accustomed to the deadly silence and the disgusting indifference; and suppose he were then suddenly turned loose upon the life and laughter of Fleet Street. He would, of course, think that the literary men in Fleet Street were a free and happy race; yet how sadly, how ironically, is this the reverse of the case! And so again these toiling serfs in Fleet Street, when they catch a glimpse of the fairies, think the fairies are utterly free. But fairies are like journalists in this and many other respects. Fairies and journalists have an apparent gaiety and a delusive beauty. Fairies and journalists seem to be lovely and lawless; they seem to be both of them too exquisite to descend to the ugliness of everyday duty. But it is an illusion created by the sudden sweetness of their presence. Journalists live under law; and so in fact does fairyland.

If you really read the fairy tales, you will observe that one idea runs from one end of them to the other — the idea that peace and happiness can only exist on some condition. This idea, which is the core of ethics, is the core of the nursery-tales. The whole happiness of fairyland hangs upon a thread, upon one thread. Cinderella may have a dress woven on supernatural looms and blazing with unearthly brilliance; but she must be back when the clock strikes twelve. The king may invite fairies to the christening, but he must invite all the fairies or frightful results will follow. Bluebeard's wife may open all doors but one. A promise is broken to a cat, and the whole world goes wrong. A promise is broken to a yellow dwarf, and the whole world goes wrong. A girl may be the bride of the God of Love himself if she never tries to see him; she sees him, and he vanishes away. A girl is given a box on condition she does not open it; she opens it, and all the evils of this world rush out at her. A man and woman are put in a garden on condition that they do not eat one fruit: they eat it, and lose their joy in all the fruits of the earth.

This great idea, then, is the backbone of all folk-lore — the idea that all happiness hangs on one thin veto; all positive joy depends on one negative. Now, it is obvious that there are many philosophical and religious ideas akin to or symbolised by this; but it is not with them I wish to deal here. It is surely obvious that all ethics ought to be taught to this fairy tale tune;

that, if one does the thing forbidden, one imperils all the things provided. A man who breaks his promise to his wife ought to be reminded that, even if she is a cat, the case of the fairy-cat shows that such conduct may be incautious. A burglar just about to open some one else's safe should be playfully reminded that he is in the perilous posture of the beautiful Pandora: he is about to lift the forbidden lid and loosen evils unknown. The boy eating some one's apples in some one's apple tree should be a reminder that he has come to a mystical moment of his life, when one apple may rob him of all others. This is the profound morality of fairy tales; which, so far from being lawless, go to the root of all law. Instead of finding (like common books of ethics) a rationalistic basis for each Commandment, they find the great mystical basis for all Commandments. We are in this fairyland on sufferance; it is not for us to quarrel with the conditions under which we enjoy this wild vision of the world. The vetoes are indeed extraordinary, but then so are the concessions. The idea of property, the idea of some one else's apples, is a rum idea; but then the idea of there being any apples is a rum idea. It is strange and weird that I cannot with safety drink ten bottles of champagne; but then the champagne itself is strange and weird, if you come to that. If I have drunk of the fairies' drink it is but just I should drink by the fairies' rules. We may not see the direct logical connection between three beautiful silver spoons and a large ugly policeman; but then who in fairy tales ever could see the direct logical connection between three bears and a giant, or between a rose and a roaring beast? Not only can these fairy tales be enjoyed because they are moral, but morality can be enjoyed because it puts us in fairyland, in a world at once of wonder and of war.

TOM JONES AND MORALITY

The two hundredth anniversary of Henry Fielding is very justly celebrated, even if, as far as can be discovered, it is only celebrated by the newspapers. It would be too much to expect that any such merely chronological incident should induce the people who write about Fielding to read him; this kind of neglect is only another name for glory. A great classic means a man whom one can praise without having read. This is not in itself wholly unjust; it merely implies a certain respect for the realisation and fixed conclusions of the mass of mankind. I have never read Pindar (I mean I have never read the Greek Pindar; Peter Pindar I have read all right), but the mere fact that I have not read Pindar, I think, ought not to prevent me and certainly would not prevent me from talking of “the masterpieces of Pindar,” or of “great poets like Pindar or Æschylus.” The very learned men are angularly unenlightened on this as on many other subjects; and the position they take up is really quite unreasonable. If any ordinary journalist or man of general reading alludes to Villon or to Homer, they consider it a quite triumphant sneer to say to the man, “You cannot read mediæval French,” or “You cannot read Homeric Greek.” But it is not a triumphant sneer — or, indeed, a sneer at all. A man has got as much right to employ in his speech the established and traditional facts of human history as he has to employ any other piece of common human information. And it is as reasonable for a man who knows no French to assume that Villon was a good poet as it would be for a man who has no ear for music to assume that Beethoven was a good musician. Because he himself has no ear for music, that is no reason why he should assume that the human race has no ear for music. Because I am ignorant (as I am), it does not follow that I ought to assume that I am deceived. The man who would not praise Pindar unless he had read him would be a low, distrustful fellow, the worst kind of sceptic, who doubts not only God, but man. He would be like a man who could not call Mount Everest high unless he had climbed it. He would be like a man who would not admit that the North Pole was cold until he had been there.

But I think there is a limit, and a highly legitimate limit, to this process. I think a man may praise Pindar without knowing the top of a Greek letter from the bottom. But I think that if a man is going to abuse Pindar, if he is going to denounce, refute, and utterly expose Pindar, if he is going to show

Pindar up as the utter ignoramus and outrageous impostor that he is, then I think it will be just as well perhaps — I think, at any rate, it would do no harm — if he did know a little Greek, and even had read a little Pindar. And I think the same situation would be involved if the critic were concerned to point out that Pindar was scandalously immoral, pestilently cynical, or low and beastly in his views of life. When people brought such attacks against the morality of Pindar, I should regret that they could not read Greek; and when they bring such attacks against the morality of Fielding, I regret very much that they cannot read English.

There seems to be an extraordinary idea abroad that Fielding was in some way an immoral or offensive writer. I have been astounded by the number of the leading articles, literary articles, and other articles written about him just now in which there is a curious tone of apologising for the man. One critic says that after all he couldn't help it, because he lived in the eighteenth century; another says that we must allow for the change of manners and ideas; another says that he was not altogether without generous and humane feelings; another suggests that he clung feebly, after all, to a few of the less important virtues. What on earth does all this mean? Fielding described Tom Jones as going on in a certain way, in which, most unfortunately, a very large number of young men do go on. It is unnecessary to say that Henry Fielding knew that it was an unfortunate way of going on. Even Tom Jones knew that. He said in so many words that it was a very unfortunate way of going on; he said, one may almost say, that it had ruined his life; the passage is there for the benefit of any one who may take the trouble to read the book. There is ample evidence (though even this is of a mystical and indirect kind), there is ample evidence that Fielding probably thought that it was better to be Tom Jones than to be an utter coward and sneak. There is simply not one rag or thread or speck of evidence to show that Fielding thought that it was better to be Tom Jones than to be a good man. All that he is concerned with is the description of a definite and very real type of young man; the young man whose passions and whose selfish necessities sometimes seemed to be stronger than anything else in him.

The practical morality of Tom Jones is bad, though not so bad, *spiritually* speaking, as the practical morality of Arthur Pendennis or the practical morality of Pip, and certainly nothing like so bad as the profound practical immorality of Daniel Deronda. The practical morality of Tom Jones is bad; but I cannot see any proof that his theoretical morality was particularly bad. There is no need to tell the majority of modern young men even to live up to the theoretical ethics of Henry Fielding. They would suddenly spring into the stature of archangels if they lived up to the theoretic ethics of poor Tom Jones. Tom Jones is still alive, with all his good and all his evil; he is walking about the streets; we meet him every day. We meet with him, we drink with him, we smoke with him, we talk with him, we talk about him. The only difference is that we have no longer the intellectual courage to write about him. We split up the supreme and central human being, Tom Jones, into a number of separate aspects. We let Mr. J. M. Barrie write about him in his good moments, and make him out better than he is. We let Zola write about him in his bad moments, and make him out much worse than he is. We let Maeterlinck celebrate those moments of spiritual panic which he knows to be cowardly; we let Mr. Rudyard Kipling celebrate those moments of brutality which he knows to be far more cowardly. We let obscene writers write about the obscenities of this ordinary man. We let puritan writers write about the purities of this ordinary man. We look through one peephole that makes men out as devils, and we call it the new art. We look through another peephole that makes men out as angels, and we call it the New Theology. But if we pull down some dusty old books from the bookshelf, if we turn over some old mildewed leaves, and if in that obscurity and decay we find some faint traces of a tale about a complete man, such a man as is walking on the pavement outside, we suddenly pull a long face, and we call it the coarse morals of a bygone age.

The truth is that all these things mark a certain change in the general view of morals; not, I think, a change for the better. We have grown to associate morality in a book with a kind of optimism and prettiness; according to us, a moral book is a book about moral people. But the old idea was almost exactly the opposite; a moral book was a book about immoral people. A moral book was full of pictures like Hogarth’s “Gin Lane” or “Stages of Cruelty,” or it recorded, like the popular broadsheet, “God’s dreadful judgment” against some blasphemer or murderer. There is a philosophical reason for this change. The homeless scepticism of our time has reached a subconscious feeling that morality is somehow merely a matter of human taste — an accident of psychology. And if goodness only exists in certain human minds, a man wishing to praise goodness will naturally exaggerate the amount of it that there is in human minds or the number of human minds in which it is supreme. Every confession that man is vicious is a confession that virtue is visionary. Every book which admits that evil is real is felt in some vague way to be admitting that good is unreal. The modern instinct is that if the heart of man is evil, there is nothing that remains good. But the older feeling was that if the heart of man was ever so evil, there was something that remained good — goodness remained good. An actual avenging virtue existed outside the human race; to that men rose, or from that men fell away. Therefore, of course, this law itself was as much demonstrated in the breach as in the observance. If Tom Jones violated morality, so much the worse for Tom Jones. Fielding did not feel, as a melancholy modern would have done, that every sin of Tom Jones was in some way breaking the spell, or we may even say destroying the fiction of morality. Men spoke of the sinner breaking the law; but it was rather the law that broke him. And what modern people call the foulness and freedom of Fielding is generally the severity and moral stringency of Fielding. He would not have thought that he was serving morality at all if he had written a book all about nice people. Fielding would have considered Mr. Ian Maclaren extremely immoral; and there is something to be said for that view. Telling the truth about the terrible struggle of the human soul is surely a very elementary part of the ethics of honesty. If the characters are not wicked, the book is.

This older and firmer conception of right as existing outside human weakness and without reference to human error can be felt in the very lightest and loosest of the works of old English literature. It is commonly unmeaning enough to call Shakspere a great moralist; but in this particular way Shakspere is a very typical moralist. Whenever he alludes to right and wrong it is always with this old implication. Right is right, even if nobody does it. Wrong is wrong, even if everybody is wrong about it.

THE MAID OF ORLEANS

A considerable time ago (at far too early an age, in fact) I read Voltaire's "La Pucelle," a savage sarcasm on the traditional purity of Joan of Arc, very dirty, and very funny. I had not thought of it again for years, but it came back into my mind this morning because I began to turn over the leaves of the new "Jeanne d'Arc," by that great and graceful writer, Anatole France. It is written in a tone of tender sympathy, and a sort of sad reverence; it never loses touch with a noble tact and courtesy, like that of a gentleman escorting a peasant girl through the modern crowd. It is invariably respectful to Joan, and even respectful to her religion. And being myself a furious admirer of Joan the Maid, I have reflectively compared the two methods, and I come to the conclusion that I prefer Voltaire's.

When a man of Voltaire's school has to explode a saint or a great religious hero, he says that such a person is a common human fool, or a common human fraud. But when a man like Anatole France has to explode a saint, he explains a saint as somebody belonging to his particular fussy little literary set. Voltaire read human nature into Joan of Arc, though it was only the brutal part of human nature. At least it was not specially Voltaire's nature. But M. France read M. France's nature into Joan of Arc — all the cold kindness, all the homeless sentimental sin of the modern literary man. There is one book that it recalled to me with startling vividness, though I have not seen the matter mentioned anywhere; Renan's "Vie de Jésus." It has just the same general intention: that if you do not attack Christianity, you can at least patronise it. My own instinct, apart from my opinions, would be quite the other way. If I disbelieved in Christianity, I should be the loudest blasphemer in Hyde Park. Nothing ought to be too big for a brave man to attack; but there are some things too big for a man to patronise.

And I must say that the historical method seems to me excessively unreasonable. I have no knowledge of history, but I have as much knowledge of reason as Anatole France. And, if anything is irrational, it seems to me that the Renan-France way of dealing with miraculous stories is irrational. The Renan-France method is simply this: you explain supernatural stories that have some foundation simply by inventing natural stories that have no foundation. Suppose that you are confronted with the statement that Jack climbed up the beanstalk into the sky. It is perfectly philosophical to reply that you do not think that he did. It is (in my opinion) even more philosophical to reply that he may very probably have done so. But the Renan-France method is to write like this: “When we consider Jack’s curious and even perilous heredity, which no doubt was derived from a female greengrocer and a profligate priest, we can easily understand how the ideas of heaven and a beanstalk came to be combined in his mind. Moreover, there is little doubt that he must have met some wandering conjurer from India, who told him about the tricks of the mango plant, and how it is sent up to the sky. We can imagine these two friends, the old man and the young, wandering in the woods together at evening, looking at the red and level clouds, as on that night when the old man pointed to a small beanstalk, and told his too imaginative companion that this also might be made to scale the heavens. And then, when we remember the quite exceptional psychology of Jack, when we remember how there was in him a union of the prosaic, the love of plain vegetables, with an almost irrelevant eagerness for the unattainable, for invisibility and the void, we shall no longer wonder that it was to him especially that was sent this sweet, though merely symbolic, dream of the tree uniting earth and heaven.” That is the way that Renan and France write, only they do it better. But, really, a rationalist like myself becomes a little impatient and feels inclined to say, “But, hang it all, what do you know about the heredity of Jack or the psychology of Jack? You know nothing about Jack at all, except that some people say that he climbed up a beanstalk. Nobody would ever have thought of mentioning him if he hadn’t. You must interpret him in terms of the beanstalk religion; you cannot merely interpret religion in terms of him. We have the materials of this story, and we can believe them or not. But we have not got the materials to make another story.”

It is no exaggeration to say that this is the manner of M. Anatole France in dealing with Joan of Arc. Because her miracle is incredible to his somewhat old-fashioned materialism, he does not therefore dismiss it and her to fairyland with Jack and the Beanstalk. He tries to invent a real story, for which he can find no real evidence. He produces a scientific explanation which is quite destitute of any scientific proof. It is as if I (being entirely ignorant of botany and chemistry) said that the beanstalk grew to the sky because nitrogen and argon got into the subsidiary ducts of the corolla. To take the most obvious example, the principal character in M. France’s story is a person who never existed at all. All Joan’s wisdom and energy, it seems, came from a certain priest, of whom there is not the tiniest trace in all the multitudinous records of her life. The only foundation I can find for this fancy is the highly undemocratic idea that a peasant girl could not possibly have any ideas of her own. It is very hard for a freethinker to remain democratic. The writer seems altogether to forget what is meant by the moral atmosphere of a community. To say that Joan must have learnt her vision of a virgin overthrowing evil from *a* priest, is like saying that some modern girl in London, pitying the poor, must have learnt it from *a* Labour Member. She would learn it where the Labour Member learnt it — in the whole state of our society.

But that is the modern method: the method of the reverent sceptic. When you find a life entirely incredible and incomprehensible from the outside, you pretend that you understand the inside. As Renan, the rationalist, could not make any sense out of Christ’s most public acts, he proceeded to make an ingenious system out of His private thoughts. As Anatole France, on his own intellectual principle, cannot believe in what Joan of Arc did, he professes to be her dearest friend, and to know exactly what she meant. I cannot feel it to be a very rational manner of writing history; and sooner or later we shall have to find some more solid way of dealing with those spiritual phenomena with which all history is as closely spotted and spangled as the sky is with stars.

Joan of Arc is a wild and wonderful thing enough, but she is much saner than most of her critics and biographers. We shall not recover the common sense of Joan until we have recovered her mysticism. Our wars fail, because they begin with something sensible and obvious — such as getting to Pretoria by Christmas. But her war succeeded — because it began with something wild and perfect — the saints delivering France. She put her idealism in the right place, and her realism also in the right place: we moderns get both displaced. She put her dreams and her sentiment into her aims, where they ought to be; she put her practicality into her practice. In modern Imperial wars, the case is reversed. Our dreams, our aims are always, we insist, quite practical. It is our practice that is dreamy.

It is not for us to explain this flaming figure in terms of our tired and querulous culture. Rather we must try to explain ourselves by the blaze of such fixed stars. Those who called her a witch hot from hell were much more sensible than those who depict her as a silly sentimental maiden prompted by her parish priest. If I have to choose between the two schools of her scattered enemies, I could take my place with those subtle clerks who thought her divine mission devilish, rather than with those rustic aunts and uncles who thought it impossible.

A DEAD POET

With Francis Thompson we lose the greatest poetic energy since Browning. His energy was of somewhat the same kind. Browning was intellectually intricate because he was morally simple. He was too simple to explain himself; he was too humble to suppose that other people needed any explanation. But his real energy, and the real energy of Francis Thompson, was best expressed in the fact that both poets were at once fond of immensity and also fond of detail. Any common Imperialist can have large ideas so long as he is not called upon to have small ideas also. Any common scientific philosopher can have small ideas so long as he is not called upon to have large ideas as well. But great poets use the telescope and also the microscope. Great poets are obscure for two opposite reasons; now, because they are talking about something too large for any one to understand, and now again because they are talking about something too small for any one to see. Francis Thompson possessed both these infinities. He escaped by being too small, as the microbe escapes; or he escaped by being too large, as the universe escapes. Any one who knows Francis Thompson's poetry knows quite well the truth to which I refer. For the benefit of any person who does not know it, I may mention two cases taken from memory. I have not the book by me, so I can only render the poetical passages in a clumsy paraphrase. But there was one poem of which the image was so vast that it was literally difficult for a time to take it in; he was describing the evening earth with its mist and fume and fragrance, and represented the whole as rolling upwards like a smoke; then suddenly he called the whole ball of the earth a thurible, and said that some gigantic spirit swung it slowly before God. That is the case of the image too large for comprehension. Another instance sticks in my mind of the image which is too small. In one of his poems, he says that abyss between the known and the unknown is bridged by "Pontifical death." There are about ten historical and theological puns in that one word. That a priest means a pontiff, that a pontiff means a bridge-maker, that death is certainly a bridge, that death may turn out after all to be a reconciling priest, that at least priests and bridges both attest to the fact that one thing can get separated from another thing — these ideas, and twenty more, are all actually concentrated in the word "pontifical." In Francis Thompson's poetry, as in the poetry of the universe, you can work infinitely out and out, but yet infinitely in and in. These two infinities are the mark of greatness; and he was a great poet.

Beneath the tide of praise which was obviously due to the dead poet, there is an evident undercurrent of discussion about him; some charges of moral weakness were at least important enough to be authoritatively contradicted in the *Nation*; and, in connection with this and other things, there has been a continuous stir of comment upon his attraction to and gradual absorption in Catholic theological ideas. This question is so important that I think it ought to be considered and understood even at the present time. It is, of course, true that Francis Thompson devoted himself more and more to poems not only purely Catholic, but, one may say, purely ecclesiastical. And it is, moreover, true that (if things go on as they are going on at present) more and more good poets will do the same. Poets will tend towards Christian orthodoxy for a perfectly plain reason; because it is about the simplest and freest thing now left in the world. On this point it is very necessary to be clear. When people impute special vices to the Christian Church, they seem entirely to forget that the world (which is the only other thing there is) has these vices much more. The Church has been cruel; but the world has been much more cruel. The Church has plotted; but the world has plotted much more. The Church has been superstitious; but it has never been so superstitious as the world is when left to itself.

Now, poets in our epoch will tend towards ecclesiastical religion strictly because it is just a little more free than anything else. Take, for instance, the case of symbol and ritualism. All reasonable men believe in symbol; but some reasonable men do not believe in ritualism; by which they mean, I imagine, a symbolism too complex, elaborate, and mechanical. But whenever they talk of ritualism they always seem to mean the ritualism of the Church. Why should they not mean the ritual of the world? It is much more ritualistic. The ritual of the Army, the ritual of the Navy, the ritual of the Law Courts, the ritual of Parliament are much more ritualistic. The ritual of a dinner-party is much more ritualistic. Priests may put gold and great jewels on the chalice; but at least there is only one chalice to put them on. When you go to a dinner-party they put in front of you five different chalices, of five weird and heraldic shapes, to symbolise five different kinds of wine; an insane extension of ritual from which Mr. Percy Dearmer would fly shrieking. A bishop wears a mitre; but he is not thought more or less of a bishop according to whether you can see the very latest curves in his mitre.

But a swell is thought more or less of a swell according to whether you can see the very latest curves in his hat. There is more *fuss* about symbols in the world than in the Church.

And yet (strangely enough) though men fuss more about the worldly symbols, they mean less by them. It is the mark of religious forms that they declare something unknown. But it is the mark of worldly forms that they declare something which is known, and which is known to be untrue. When the Pope in an Encyclical calls himself your father, it is a matter of faith or of doubt. But when the Duke of Devonshire in a letter calls himself yours obediently, you know that he means the opposite of what he says. Religious forms are, at the worst, fables; they might be true. Secular forms are falsehoods; they are not true. Take a more topical case. The German Emperor has more uniforms than the Pope. But, moreover, the Pope's vestments all imply a claim to be something purely mystical and doubtful. Many of the German Emperor's uniforms imply a claim to be something which he certainly is not and which it would be highly disgusting if he were. The Pope may or may not be the Vicar of Christ. But the Kaiser certainly is not an English Colonel. If the thing were reality it would be treason. If it is mere ritual, it is by far the most unreal ritual on earth.

Now, poetical people like Francis Thompson will, as things stand, tend away from secular society and towards religion for the reason above described: that there are crowds of symbols in both, but that those of religion are simpler and mean more. To take an evident type, the Cross is more poetical than the Union Jack, because it is simpler. The more simple an idea is, the more it is fertile in variations. Francis Thompson could have written any number of good poems on the Cross, because it is a primary symbol. The number of poems which Mr. Rudyard Kipling could write on the Union Jack is, fortunately, limited, because the Union Jack is too complex to produce luxuriance. The same principle applies to any possible number of cases. A poet like Francis Thompson could deduce perpetually rich and branching meanings out of two plain facts like bread and wine; with bread and wine he can expand everything to everywhere. But with a French menu he cannot expand anything; except perhaps himself. Complicated ideas do not produce any more ideas. Mongrels do not breed. Religious ritual attracts because there is some sense in it. Religious imagery, so far from being subtle, is the only simple thing left for poets. So far from being merely superhuman, it is the only human thing left for human beings.

CHRISTMAS

There is no more dangerous or disgusting habit than that of celebrating Christmas before it comes, as I am doing in this article. It is the very essence of a festival that it breaks upon one brilliantly and abruptly, that at one moment the great day is not and the next moment the great day is. Up to a certain specific instant you are feeling ordinary and sad; for it is only Wednesday. At the next moment your heart leaps up and your soul and body dance together like lovers; for in one burst and blaze it has become Thursday. I am assuming (of course) that you are a worshipper of Thor, and that you celebrate his day once a week, possibly with human sacrifice. If, on the other hand, you are a modern Christian Englishman, you hail (of course) with the same explosion of gaiety the appearance of the English Sunday. But I say that whatever the day is that is to you festive or symbolic, it is essential that there should be a quite clear black line between it and the time going before. And all the old wholesome customs in connection with Christmas were to the effect that one should not touch or see or know or speak of something before the actual coming of Christmas Day. Thus, for instance, children were never given their presents until the actual coming of the appointed hour. The presents were kept tied up in brown-paper parcels, out of which an arm of a doll or the leg of a donkey sometimes accidentally stuck. I wish this principle were adopted in respect of modern Christmas ceremonies and publications. Especially it ought to be observed in connection with what are called the Christmas numbers of magazines. The editors of the magazines bring out their Christmas numbers so long before the time that the reader is more likely to be still lamenting for the turkey of last year than to have seriously settled down to a solid anticipation of the turkey which is to come. Christmas numbers of magazines ought to be tied up in brown paper and kept for Christmas Day. On consideration, I should favour the editors being tied up in brown paper. Whether the leg or arm of an editor should ever be allowed to protrude I leave to individual choice.

Of course, all this secrecy about Christmas is merely sentimental and ceremonial; if you do not like what is sentimental and ceremonial, do not celebrate Christmas at all. You will not be punished if you don’t; also, since we are no longer ruled by those sturdy Puritans who won for us civil and religious liberty, you will not even be punished if you do. But I cannot understand why any one should bother about a ceremonial except ceremonially. If a thing only exists in order to be graceful, do it gracefully or do not do it. If a thing only exists as something professing to be solemn, do it solemnly or do not do it. There is no sense in doing it slouchingly; nor is there even any liberty. I can understand the man who takes off his hat to a lady because it is the customary symbol. I can understand him, I say; in fact, I know him quite intimately. I can also understand the man who refuses to take off his hat to a lady, like the old Quakers, because he thinks that a symbol is superstition. But what point would there be in so performing an arbitrary form of respect that it was not a form of respect? We respect the gentleman who takes off his hat to the lady; we respect the fanatic who will not take off his hat to the lady. But what should we think of the man who kept his hands in his pockets and asked the lady to take his hat off for him because he felt tired?

This is combining insolence and superstition; and the modern world is full of the strange combination. There is no mark of the immense weak-mindedness of modernity that is more striking than this general disposition to keep up old forms, but to keep them up informally and feebly. Why take something which was only meant to be respectful and preserve it disrespectfully? Why take something which you could easily abolish as a superstition and carefully perpetuate it as a bore? There have been many instances of this half-witted compromise. Was it not true, for instance, that the other day some mad American was trying to buy Glastonbury Abbey and transfer it stone by stone to America? Such things are not only illogical, but idiotic. There is no particular reason why a pushing American financier should pay respect to Glastonbury Abbey at all. But if he is to pay respect to Glastonbury Abbey, he must pay respect to Glastonbury. If it is a matter of sentiment, why should he spoil the scene? If it is not a matter of sentiment, why should he ever have visited the scene? To call this kind of thing Vandalism is a very inadequate and unfair description. The Vandals were very sensible people. They did not believe in a religion, and so they insulted it; they did not see any use for certain buildings, and so they knocked them down. But they were not such fools as to encumber their march with the fragments of the edifice they had themselves spoilt. They were at least superior to the modern American mode of reasoning. They did not desecrate the stones because they held them sacred.

Another instance of the same illogicality I observed the other day at some kind of “At Home.” I saw what appeared to be a human being dressed in a black evening-coat, black dress-waistcoat, and black dress-trousers, but with a shirt-front made of Jaegar wool. What can be the sense of this sort of thing? If a man thinks hygiene more important than convention (a selfish and heathen view, for the beasts that perish are more hygienic than man, and man is only above them because he is more conventional), if, I say, a man thinks that hygiene is more important than convention, what on earth is there to oblige him to wear a shirt-front at all? But to take a costume of which the only conceivable cause or advantage is that it is a sort of uniform, and then not wear it in the uniform way — this is to be neither a Bohemian nor a gentleman. It is a foolish affectation, I think, in an English officer of the Life Guards never to wear his uniform if he can help it. But it would be more foolish still if he showed himself about town in a scarlet coat and a Jaeger breast-plate. It is the custom nowadays to have Ritual Commissions and Ritual Reports to make rather unmeaning compromises in the ceremonial of the Church of England. So perhaps we shall have an ecclesiastical compromise by which all the Bishops shall wear Jaeger copes and Jaeger mitres. Similarly the King might insist on having a Jaeger crown. But I do not think he will, for he understands the logic of the matter better than that. The modern monarch, like a reasonable fellow, wears his crown as seldom as he can; but if he does it at all, then the only point of a crown is that it is a crown. So let me assure the unknown gentleman in the woollen vesture that the only point of a white shirt-front is that it is a white shirt-front. Stiffness may be its impossible defect; but it is certainly its only possible merit.

Let us be consistent, therefore, about Christmas, and either keep customs or not keep them. If you do not like sentiment and symbolism, you do not like Christmas; go away and celebrate something else; I should suggest the birthday of Mr. McCabe. No doubt you could have a sort of scientific Christmas with a hygienic pudding and highly instructive presents stuffed into a Jaeger stocking; go and have it then. If you like those things, doubtless you are a good sort of fellow, and your intentions are excellent. I have no doubt that you are really interested in humanity; but I cannot think that humanity will ever be much interested in you. Humanity is unhygienic from its very nature and beginning. It is so much an exception in Nature that the laws of Nature really mean nothing to it. Now Christmas is attacked also on the humanitarian ground. Ouida called it a feast of slaughter and gluttony. Mr. Shaw suggested that it was invented by poulterers. That should be considered before it becomes more considerable.

I do not know whether an animal killed at Christmas has had a better or a worse time than it would have had if there had been no Christmas or no Christmas dinners. But I do know that the fighting and suffering brotherhood to which I belong and owe everything, Mankind, would have a much worse time if there were no such thing as Christmas or Christmas dinners. Whether the turkey which Scrooge gave to Bob Cratchit had experienced a lovelier or more melancholy career than that of less attractive turkeys is a subject upon which I cannot even conjecture. But that Scrooge was better for giving the turkey and Cratchit happier for getting it I know as two facts, as I know that I have two feet. What life and death may be to a turkey is not my business; but the soul of Scrooge and the body of Cratchit are my business. Nothing shall induce me to darken human homes, to destroy human festivities, to insult human gifts and human benefactions for the sake of some hypothetical knowledge which Nature curtained from our eyes. We men and women are all in the same boat, upon a stormy sea. We owe to each other a terrible and tragic loyalty. If we catch sharks for food, let them be killed most mercifully; let any one who likes love the sharks, and pet the sharks, and tie ribbons round their necks and give them sugar and teach them to dance. But if once a man suggests that a shark is to be valued against a sailor, or that the poor shark might be permitted to bite off a nigger’s leg occasionally; then I would court-martial the man — he is a traitor to the ship.

And while I take this view of humanitarianism of the anti-Christmas kind, it is cogent to say that I am a strong anti-vivisectionist. That is, if there is any vivisection, I am against it. I am against the cutting-up of conscious dogs for the same reason that I am in favour of the eating of dead turkeys. The connection may not be obvious; but that is because of the strangely unhealthy condition of modern thought. I am against cruel vivisection as I am against a cruel anti-Christmas asceticism, because they both involve the upsetting of existing fellowships and the shocking of normal good feelings for the sake of something that is intellectual, fanciful, and remote. It is not a human thing, it is not a humane thing, when you see a poor woman staring hungrily at a bloater, to think, not of the obvious feelings of the woman, but of the unimaginable feelings of the deceased bloater. Similarly, it is not human, it is not humane, when you look at a dog to think about what theoretic discoveries you might possibly make if you were allowed to bore a hole in his head. Both the humanitarians' fancy about the feelings concealed inside the bloater, and the vivisectionists' fancy about the knowledge concealed inside the dog, are unhealthy fancies, because they upset a human sanity that is certain for the sake of something that is of necessity uncertain. The vivisectionist, for the sake of doing something that may or may not be useful, does something that certainly is horrible. The anti-Christmas humanitarian, in seeking to have a sympathy with a turkey which no man can have with a turkey, loses the sympathy he has already with the happiness of millions of the poor.

It is not uncommon nowadays for the insane extremes in reality to meet. Thus I have always felt that brutal Imperialism and Tolstoian non-resistance were not only not opposite, but were the same thing. They are the same contemptible thought that conquest cannot be resisted, looked at from the two standpoints of the conqueror and the conquered. Thus again teetotalism and the really degraded gin-selling and dram-drinking have exactly the same moral philosophy. They are both based on the idea that fermented liquor is not a drink, but a drug. But I am specially certain that the extreme of vegetarian humanity is, as I have said, akin to the extreme of scientific cruelty — they both permit a dubious speculation to interfere with their ordinary charity. The sound moral rule in such matters as vivisection always presents itself to me in this way. There is no ethical necessity more essential and vital than this: that casuistical exceptions, though admitted, should be admitted as exceptions. And it follows from this, I think, that, though we may do a horrid thing in a horrid situation, we must be quite certain that we actually and already are in that situation. Thus, all sane moralists admit that one may sometimes tell a lie; but no sane moralist would approve of telling a little boy to practise telling lies, in case he might one day have to tell a justifiable one. Thus, morality has often justified shooting a robber or a burglar. But it would not justify going into the village Sunday school and shooting all the little boys who looked as if they might grow up into burglars. The need may arise; but the need must have arisen. It seems to me quite clear that if you step across this limit you step off a precipice.

Now, whether torturing an animal is or is not an immoral thing, it is, at least, a dreadful thing. It belongs to the order of exceptional and even desperate acts. Except for some extraordinary reason I would not grievously hurt an animal; with an extraordinary reason I would grievously hurt him. If (for example) a mad elephant were pursuing me and my family, and I could only shoot him so that he would die in agony, he would have to die in agony. But the elephant would be there. I would not do it to a hypothetical elephant. Now, it always seems to me that this is the weak point in the ordinary vivisectionist argument, “Suppose your wife were dying.” Vivisection is not done by a man whose wife is dying. If it were it might be lifted to the level of the moment, as would be lying or stealing bread, or any other ugly action. But this ugly action is done in cold blood, at leisure, by men who are not sure that it will be of any use to anybody — men of whom the most that can be said is that they may conceivably make the beginnings of some discovery which may perhaps save the life of some one else’s wife in some remote future. That is too cold and distant to rob an act of its immediate horror. That is like training the child to tell lies for the sake of some great dilemma that may never come to him. You are doing a cruel thing, but not with enough passion to make it a kindly one.

So much for why I am an anti-vivisectionist; and I should like to say, in conclusion, that all other anti-vivisectionists of my acquaintance weaken their case infinitely by forming this attack on a scientific speciality in which the human heart is commonly on their side, with attacks upon universal human customs in which the human heart is not at all on their side. I have heard humanitarians, for instance, speak of vivisection and field sports as if they were the same kind of thing. The difference seems to me simple and enormous. In sport a man goes into a wood and mixes with the existing life of that wood; becomes a destroyer only in the simple and healthy sense in which all the creatures are destroyers; becomes for one moment to them what they are to him — another animal. In vivisection a man takes a simpler creature and subjects it to subtleties which no one but man could inflict on him, and for which man is therefore gravely and terribly responsible.

Meanwhile, it remains true that I shall eat a great deal of turkey this Christmas; and it is not in the least true (as the vegetarians say) that I shall do it because I do not realise what I am doing, or because I do what I know is wrong, or that I do it with shame or doubt or a fundamental unrest of conscience. In one sense I know quite well what I am doing; in another sense I know quite well that I know not what I do. Scrooge and the Cratchits and I are, as I have said, all in one boat; the turkey and I are, to say the most of it, ships that pass in the night, and greet each other in passing. I wish him well; but it is really practically impossible to discover whether I treat him well. I can avoid, and I do avoid with horror, all special and artificial tormenting of him, sticking pins in him for fun or sticking knives in him for scientific investigation. But whether by feeding him slowly and killing him quickly for the needs of my brethren, I have improved in his own solemn eyes his own strange and separate destiny, whether I have made him in the sight of God a slave or a martyr, or one whom the gods love and who die young — that is far more removed from my possibilities of knowledge than the most abstruse intricacies of mysticism or theology. A turkey is more occult and awful than all the angels and archangels. In so far as God has partly revealed to us an angelic world, he has partly told us what an angel means. But God has never told us what a turkey means. And if you go and stare at a live turkey for an hour or two, you will find by the end of it that the enigma has rather increased than diminished.

TREMENDOUS TRIFLES

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PREFACE

These fleeting sketches are all republished by kind permission of the Editor of the DAILY NEWS, in which paper they appeared. They amount to no more than a sort of sporadic diary — a diary recording one day in twenty which happened to stick in the fancy — the only kind of diary the author has ever been able to keep. Even that diary he could only keep by keeping it in public, for bread and cheese. But trivial as are the topics they are not utterly without a connecting thread of motive. As the reader's eye strays, with hearty relief, from these pages, it probably alights on something, a bed-post or a lamp-post, a window blind or a wall. It is a thousand to one that the reader is looking at something that he has never seen: that is, never realised. He could not write an essay on such a post or wall: he does not know what the post or wall mean. He could not even write the synopsis of an essay; as "The Bed-Post; Its Significance — Security Essential to Idea of Sleep — Night Felt as Infinite — Need of Monumental Architecture," and so on. He could not sketch in outline his theoretic attitude towards window-blinds, even in the form of a summary. "The Window-Blind — Its Analogy to the Curtain and Veil — Is Modesty Natural? — Worship of and Avoidance of the Sun, etc., etc." None of us think enough of these things on which the eye rests. But don't let us let the eye rest. Why should the eye be so lazy? Let us exercise the eye until it learns to see startling facts that run across the landscape as plain as a painted fence. Let us be ocular athletes. Let us learn to write essays on a stray cat or a coloured cloud. I have attempted some such thing in what follows; but anyone else may do it better, if anyone else will only try.

I. Tremendous Trifles

Once upon a time there were two little boys who lived chiefly in the front garden, because their villa was a model one. The front garden was about the same size as the dinner table; it consisted of four strips of gravel, a square of turf with some mysterious pieces of cork standing up in the middle and one flower bed with a row of red daisies. One morning while they were at play in these romantic grounds, a passing individual, probably the milkman, leaned over the railing and engaged them in philosophical conversation. The boys, whom we will call Paul and Peter, were at least sharply interested in his remarks. For the milkman (who was, I need say, a fairy) did his duty in that state of life by offering them in the regulation manner anything that they chose to ask for. And Paul closed with the offer with a business-like abruptness, explaining that he had long wished to be a giant that he might stride across continents and oceans and visit Niagara or the Himalayas in an afternoon dinner stroll. The milkman producing a wand from his breast pocket, waved it in a hurried and perfunctory manner; and in an instant the model villa with its front garden was like a tiny doll's house at Paul's colossal feet. He went striding away with his head above the clouds to visit Niagara and the Himalayas. But when he came to the Himalayas, he found they were quite small and silly-looking, like the little cork rockery in the garden; and when he found Niagara it was no bigger than the tap turned on in the bathroom. He wandered round the world for several minutes trying to find something really large and finding everything small, till in sheer boredom he lay down on four or five prairies and fell asleep. Unfortunately his head was just outside the hut of an intellectual backwoodsman who came out of it at that moment with an axe in one hand and a book of Neo-Catholic Philosophy in the other. The man looked at the book and then at the giant, and then at the book again. And in the book it said, “It can be maintained that the evil of pride consists in being out of proportion to the universe.” So the backwoodsman put down his book, took his axe and, working eight hours a day for about a week, cut the giant's head off; and there was an end of him.

Such is the severe yet salutary history of Paul. But Peter, oddly enough, made exactly the opposite request; he said he had long wished to be a pigmy about half an inch high; and of course he immediately became one.

When the transformation was over he found himself in the midst of an immense plain, covered with a tall green jungle and above which, at intervals, rose strange trees each with a head like the sun in symbolic pictures, with gigantic rays of silver and a huge heart of gold. Toward the middle of this prairie stood up a mountain of such romantic and impossible shape, yet of such stony height and dominance, that it looked like some incident of the end of the world. And far away on the faint horizon he could see the line of another forest, taller and yet more mystical, of a terrible crimson colour, like a forest on fire for ever. He set out on his adventures across that coloured plain; and he has not come to the end of it yet.

Such is the story of Peter and Paul, which contains all the highest qualities of a modern fairy tale, including that of being wholly unfit for children; and indeed the motive with which I have introduced it is not childish, but rather full of subtlety and reaction. It is in fact the almost desperate motive of excusing or palliating the pages that follow. Peter and Paul are the two primary influences upon European literature to-day; and I may be permitted to put my own preference in its most favourable shape, even if I can only do it by what little girls call telling a story.

I need scarcely say that I am the pigmy. The only excuse for the scraps that follow is that they show what can be achieved with a commonplace existence and the sacred spectacles of exaggeration. The other great literary theory, that which is roughly represented in England by Mr. Rudyard Kipling, is that we moderns are to regain the primal zest by sprawling all over the world growing used to travel and geographical variety, being at home everywhere, that is being at home nowhere. Let it be granted that a man in a frock coat is a heartrending sight; and the two alternative methods still remain. Mr. Kipling’s school advises us to go to Central Africa in order to find a man without a frock coat. The school to which I belong suggests that we should stare steadily at the man until we see the man inside the frock coat. If we stare at him long enough he may even be moved to take off his coat to us; and that is a far greater compliment than his taking off his hat. In other words, we may, by fixing our attention almost fiercely on the facts actually before us, force them to turn into adventures; force them to give up their meaning and fulfil their mysterious purpose. The purpose of the Kipling literature is to show how many extraordinary things a man may see if he is active and strides from continent to continent like the giant in my tale. But the object of my school is to show how many extraordinary things even a lazy and ordinary man may see if he can spur himself to the single activity of seeing. For this purpose I have taken the laziest person of my acquaintance, that is myself; and made an idle diary of such odd things as I have fallen over by accident, in walking in a very limited area at a very indolent pace. If anyone says that these are very small affairs talked about in very big language, I can only gracefully compliment him upon seeing the joke. If anyone says that I am making mountains out of molehills, I confess with pride that it is so. I can imagine no more successful and productive form of manufacture than that of making mountains out of molehills. But I would add this not unimportant fact, that molehills are mountains; one has only to become a pigmy like Peter to discover that.

I have my doubts about all this real value in mountaineering, in getting to the top of everything and overlooking everything. Satan was the most celebrated of Alpine guides, when he took Jesus to the top of an exceeding high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth. But the joy of Satan in standing on a peak is not a joy in largeness, but a joy in beholding smallness, in the fact that all men look like insects at his feet. It is from the valley that things look large; it is from the level that things look high; I am a child of the level and have no need of that celebrated Alpine guide. I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help; but I will not lift up my carcass to the hills, unless it is absolutely necessary. Everything is in an attitude of mind; and at this moment I am in a comfortable attitude. I will sit still and let the marvels and the adventures settle on me like flies. There are plenty of them, I assure you. The world will never starve for want of wonders; but only for want of wonder.

II. A Piece of Chalk

I remember one splendid morning, all blue and silver, in the summer holidays when I reluctantly tore myself away from the task of doing nothing in particular, and put on a hat of some sort and picked up a walking-stick, and put six very bright-coloured chalks in my pocket. I then went into the kitchen (which, along with the rest of the house, belonged to a very square and sensible old woman in a Sussex village), and asked the owner and occupant of the kitchen if she had any brown paper. She had a great deal; in fact, she had too much; and she mistook the purpose and the rationale of the existence of brown paper. She seemed to have an idea that if a person wanted brown paper he must be wanting to tie up parcels; which was the last thing I wanted to do; indeed, it is a thing which I have found to be beyond my mental capacity. Hence she dwelt very much on the varying qualities of toughness and endurance in the material. I explained to her that I only wanted to draw pictures on it, and that I did not want them to endure in the least; and that from my point of view, therefore, it was a question, not of tough consistency, but of responsive surface, a thing comparatively irrelevant in a parcel. When she understood that I wanted to draw she offered to overwhelm me with note-paper, apparently supposing that I did my notes and correspondence on old brown paper wrappers from motives of economy.

I then tried to explain the rather delicate logical shade, that I not only liked brown paper, but liked the quality of brownness in paper, just as I liked the quality of brownness in October woods, or in beer, or in the peat-streams of the North. Brown paper represents the primal twilight of the first toil of creation, and with a bright-coloured chalk or two you can pick out points of fire in it, sparks of gold, and blood-red, and sea-green, like the first fierce stars that sprang out of divine darkness. All this I said (in an off-hand way) to the old woman; and I put the brown paper in my pocket along with the chalks, and possibly other things. I suppose every one must have reflected how primeval and how poetical are the things that one carries in one’s pocket; the pocket-knife, for instance, the type of all human tools, the infant of the sword. Once I planned to write a book of poems entirely about the things in my pockets. But I found it would be too long; and the age of the great epics is past.

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With my stick and my knife, my chalks and my brown paper, I went out on to the great downs. I crawled across those colossal contours that express the best quality of England, because they are at the same time soft and strong. The smoothness of them has the same meaning as the smoothness of great cart-horses, or the smoothness of the beech-tree; it declares in the teeth of our timid and cruel theories that the mighty are merciful. As my eye swept the landscape, the landscape was as kindly as any of its cottages, but for power it was like an earthquake. The villages in the immense valley were safe, one could see, for centuries; yet the lifting of the whole land was like the lifting of one enormous wave to wash them all away.

I crossed one swell of living turf after another, looking for a place to sit down and draw. Do not, for heaven’s sake, imagine I was going to sketch from Nature. I was going to draw devils and seraphim, and blind old gods that men worshipped before the dawn of right, and saints in robes of angry crimson, and seas of strange green, and all the sacred or monstrous symbols that look so well in bright colours on brown paper. They are much better worth drawing than Nature; also they are much easier to draw. When a cow came slouching by in the field next to me, a mere artist might have drawn it; but I always get wrong in the hind legs of quadrupeds. So I drew the soul of the cow; which I saw there plainly walking before me in the sunlight; and the soul was all purple and silver, and had seven horns and the mystery that belongs to all the beasts. But though I could not with a crayon get the best out of the landscape, it does not follow that the landscape was not getting the best out of me. And this, I think, is the mistake that people make about the old poets who lived before Wordsworth, and were supposed not to care very much about Nature because they did not describe it much.

They preferred writing about great men to writing about great hills; but they sat on the great hills to write it. They gave out much less about Nature, but they drank in, perhaps, much more. They painted the white robes of their holy virgins with the blinding snow, at which they had stared all day. They blazoned the shields of their paladins with the purple and gold of many heraldic sunsets. The greenness of a thousand green leaves clustered into the live green figure of Robin Hood. The blueness of a score of forgotten skies became the blue robes of the Virgin. The inspiration went in like sunbeams and came out like Apollo.

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But as I sat scrawling these silly figures on the brown paper, it began to dawn on me, to my great disgust, that I had left one chalk, and that a most exquisite and essential chalk, behind. I searched all my pockets, but I could not find any white chalk. Now, those who are acquainted with all the philosophy (nay, religion) which is typified in the art of drawing on brown paper, know that white is positive and essential. I cannot avoid remarking here upon a moral significance. One of the wise and awful truths which this brown-paper art reveals, is this, that white is a colour. It is not a mere absence of colour; it is a shining and affirmative thing, as fierce as red, as definite as black. When, so to speak, your pencil grows red-hot, it draws roses; when it grows white-hot, it draws stars. And one of the two or three defiant verities of the best religious morality, of real Christianity, for example, is exactly this same thing; the chief assertion of religious morality is that white is a colour. Virtue is not the absence of vices or the avoidance of moral dangers; virtue is a vivid and separate thing, like pain or a particular smell. Mercy does not mean not being cruel or sparing people revenge or punishment; it means a plain and positive thing like the sun, which one has either seen or not seen.

Chastity does not mean abstention from sexual wrong; it means something flaming, like Joan of Arc. In a word, God paints in many colours; but He never paints so gorgeously, I had almost said so gaudily, as when He paints in white. In a sense our age has realised this fact, and expressed it in our sullen costume. For if it were really true that white was a blank and colourless thing, negative and non-committal, then white would be used instead of black and grey for the funeral dress of this pessimistic period. We should see city gentlemen in frock coats of spotless silver linen, with top hats as white as wonderful arum lilies. Which is not the case.

Meanwhile, I could not find my chalk.

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I sat on the hill in a sort of despair. There was no town nearer than Chichester at which it was even remotely probable that there would be such a thing as an artist’s colourman. And yet, without white, my absurd little pictures would be as pointless as the world would be if there were no good people in it. I stared stupidly round, racking my brain for expedients. Then I suddenly stood up and roared with laughter, again and again, so that the cows stared at me and called a committee. Imagine a man in the Sahara regretting that he had no sand for his hour-glass. Imagine a gentleman in mid-ocean wishing that he had brought some salt water with him for his chemical experiments. I was sitting on an immense warehouse of white chalk. The landscape was made entirely out of white chalk. White chalk was piled more miles until it met the sky. I stooped and broke a piece off the rock I sat on; it did not mark so well as the shop chalks do; but it gave the effect. And I stood there in a trance of pleasure, realising that this Southern England is not only a grand peninsula, and a tradition and a civilisation; it is something even more admirable. It is a piece of chalk.

III. The Secret of a Train

All this talk of a railway mystery has sent my mind back to a loose memory. I will not merely say that this story is true: because, as you will soon see, it is all truth and no story. It has no explanation and no conclusion; it is, like most of the other things we encounter in life, a fragment of something else which would be intensely exciting if it were not too large to be seen. For the perplexity of life arises from there being too many interesting things in it for us to be interested properly in any of them; what we call its triviality is really the tag-ends of numberless tales; ordinary and unmeaning existence is like ten thousand thrilling detective stories mixed up with a spoon. My experience was a fragment of this nature, and it is, at any rate, not fictitious. Not only am I not making up the incidents (what there were of them), but I am not making up the atmosphere of the landscape, which were the whole horror of the thing. I remember them vividly, and they were as I shall now describe.

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About noon of an ashen autumn day some years ago I was standing outside the station at Oxford intending to take the train to London. And for some reason, out of idleness or the emptiness of my mind or the emptiness of the pale grey sky, or the cold, a kind of caprice fell upon me that I would not go by that train at all, but would step out on the road and walk at least some part of the way to London. I do not know if other people are made like me in this matter; but to me it is always dreary weather, what may be called useless weather, that slings into life a sense of action and romance. On bright blue days I do not want anything to happen; the world is complete and beautiful, a thing for contemplation. I no more ask for adventures under that turquoise dome than I ask for adventures in church. But when the background of man’s life is a grey background, then, in the name of man’s sacred supremacy, I desire to paint on it in fire and gore. When the heavens fail man refuses to fail; when the sky seems to have written on it, in letters of lead and pale silver, the decree that nothing shall happen, then the immortal soul, the prince of the creatures, rises up and decrees that something shall happen, if it be only the slaughter of a policeman. But this is a digressive way of stating what I have said already — that the bleak sky awoke in me a hunger for some change of plans, that the monotonous weather seemed to render unbearable the use of the monotonous train, and that I set out into the country lanes, out of the town of Oxford. It was, perhaps, at that moment that a strange curse came upon me out of the city and the sky, whereby it was decreed that years afterwards I should, in an article in the DAILY NEWS, talk about Sir George Trevelyan in connection with Oxford, when I knew perfectly well that he went to Cambridge.

As I crossed the country everything was ghostly and colourless. The fields that should have been green were as grey as the skies; the tree-tops that should have been green were as grey as the clouds and as cloudy. And when I had walked for some hours the evening was closing in. A sickly sunset clung weakly to the horizon, as if pale with reluctance to leave the world in the dark. And as it faded more and more the skies seemed to come closer and to threaten. The clouds which had been merely sullen became swollen; and then they loosened and let down the dark curtains of the rain. The rain was blinding and seemed to beat like blows from an enemy at close quarters; the skies seemed bending over and bawling in my ears. I walked on many more miles before I met a man, and in that distance my mind had been made up; and when I met him I asked him if anywhere in the neighbourhood I could pick up the train for Paddington. He directed me to a small silent station (I cannot even remember the name of it) which stood well away from the road and looked as lonely as a hut on the Andes. I do not think I have ever seen such a type of time and sadness and scepticism and everything devilish as that station was: it looked as if it had always been raining there ever since the creation of the world. The water streamed from the soaking wood of it as if it were not water at all, but some loathsome liquid corruption of the wood itself; as if the solid station were eternally falling to pieces and pouring away in filth. It took me nearly ten minutes to find a man in the station. When I did he was a dull one, and when I asked him if there was a train to Paddington his answer was sleepy and vague. As far as I understood him, he said there would be a train in half an hour. I sat down and lit a cigar and waited, watching the last tail of the tattered sunset and listening to the everlasting rain. It may have been in half an hour or less, but a train came rather slowly into the station. It was an unnaturally dark train; I could not see a light anywhere in the long black body of it; and I could not see any guard running beside it. I was reduced to walking up to the engine and calling out to the stoker to ask if the train was going to London. “Well — yes, sir,” he said, with an unaccountable kind of reluctance. “It is going to London; but — —” It was just starting, and I jumped into the first carriage; it was pitch dark. I sat there smoking and wondering, as we steamed through the continually darkening landscape, lined with desolate poplars, until we slowed down and stopped, irrationally, in the middle of a field. I heard a heavy noise as of some one clambering off the train, and a dark, ragged head suddenly put itself into my window. “Excuse me, sir,” said the stoker, “but I think, perhaps — well, perhaps you ought to know — there’s a dead man in this train.”

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Had I been a true artist, a person of exquisite susceptibilities and nothing else, I should have been bound, no doubt, to be finally overwhelmed with this sensational touch, and to have insisted on getting out and walking. As it was, I regret to say, I expressed myself politely, but firmly, to the effect that I didn’t care particularly if the train took me to Paddington. But when the train had started with its unknown burden I did do one thing, and do it quite instinctively, without stopping to think, or to think more than a flash. I threw away my cigar. Something that is as old as man and has to do with all mourning and ceremonial told me to do it. There was something unnecessarily horrible, it seemed to me, in the idea of there being only two men in that train, and one of them dead and the other smoking a cigar. And as the red and gold of the butt end of it faded like a funeral torch trampled out at some symbolic moment of a procession, I realised how immortal ritual is. I realised (what is the origin and essence of all ritual) that in the presence of those sacred riddles about which we can say nothing it is more decent merely to do something. And I realised that ritual will always mean throwing away something; DESTROYING our corn or wine upon the altar of our gods.

When the train panted at last into Paddington Station I sprang out of it with a suddenly released curiosity. There was a barrier and officials guarding the rear part of the train; no one was allowed to press towards it. They were guarding and hiding something; perhaps death in some too shocking form, perhaps something like the Merstham matter, so mixed up with human mystery and wickedness that the land has to give it a sort of sanctity; perhaps something worse than either. I went out gladly enough into the streets and saw the lamps shining on the laughing faces. Nor have I ever known from that day to this into what strange story I wandered or what frightful thing was my companion in the dark.

IV. The Perfect Game

We have all met the man who says that some odd things have happened to him, but that he does not really believe that they were supernatural. My own position is the opposite of this. I believe in the supernatural as a matter of intellect and reason, not as a matter of personal experience. I do not see ghosts; I only see their inherent probability. But it is entirely a matter of the mere intelligence, not even of the motions; my nerves and body are altogether of this earth, very earthy. But upon people of this temperament one weird incident will often leave a peculiar impression. And the weirdest circumstance that ever occurred to me occurred a little while ago. It consisted in nothing less than my playing a game, and playing it quite well for some seventeen consecutive minutes. The ghost of my grandfather would have astonished me less.

On one of these blue and burning afternoons I found myself, to my inexpressible astonishment, playing a game called croquet. I had imagined that it belonged to the epoch of Leach and Anthony Trollope, and I had neglected to provide myself with those very long and luxuriant side whiskers which are really essential to such a scene. I played it with a man whom we will call Parkinson, and with whom I had a semi-philosophical argument which lasted through the entire contest. It is deeply implanted in my mind that I had the best of the argument; but it is certain and beyond dispute that I had the worst of the game.

“Oh, Parkinson, Parkinson!” I cried, patting him affectionately on the head with a mallet, “how far you really are from the pure love of the sport — you who can play. It is only we who play badly who love the Game itself. You love glory; you love applause; you love the earthquake voice of victory; you do not love croquet. You do not love croquet until you love being beaten at croquet. It is we the bunglers who adore the occupation in the abstract. It is we to whom it is art for art’s sake. If we may see the face of Croquet herself (if I may so express myself) we are content to see her face turned upon us in anger. Our play is called amateurish; and we wear proudly the name of amateur, for amateurs is but the French for Lovers. We accept all adventures from our Lady, the most disastrous or the most dreary. We wait outside her iron gates (I allude to the hoops), vainly essaying to enter. Our devoted balls, impetuous and full of chivalry, will not be confined within the pedantic boundaries of the mere croquet ground. Our balls seek honour in the ends of the earth; they turn up in the flower-beds and the conservatory; they are to be found in the front garden and the next street. No, Parkinson! The good painter has skill. It is the bad painter who loves his art. The good musician loves being a musician, the bad musician loves music. With such a pure and hopeless passion do I worship croquet. I love the game itself. I love the parallelogram of grass marked out with chalk or tape, as if its limits were the frontiers of my sacred Fatherland, the four seas of Britain. I love the mere swing of the mallets, and the click of the balls is music. The four colours are to me sacramental and symbolic, like the red of martyrdom, or the white of Easter Day. You lose all this, my poor Parkinson. You have to solace yourself for the absence of this vision by the paltry consolation of being able to go through hoops and to hit the stick."

And I waved my mallet in the air with a graceful gaiety.

"Don't be too sorry for me," said Parkinson, with his simple sarcasm. "I shall get over it in time. But it seems to me that the more a man likes a game the better he would want to play it. Granted that the pleasure in the thing itself comes first, does not the pleasure of success come naturally and inevitably afterwards? Or, take your own simile of the Knight and his Lady-love. I admit the gentleman does first and foremost want to be in the lady's presence. But I never yet heard of a gentleman who wanted to look an utter ass when he was there."

"Perhaps not; though he generally looks it," I replied. "But the truth is that there is a fallacy in the simile, although it was my own. The happiness at which the lover is aiming is an infinite happiness, which can be extended without limit. The more he is loved, normally speaking, the jollier he will be. It is definitely true that the stronger the love of both lovers, the stronger will be the happiness. But it is not true that the stronger the play of both croquet players the stronger will be the game. It is logically possible — (follow me closely here, Parkinson!) — it is logically possible, to play croquet too well to enjoy it at all. If you could put this blue ball through that distant hoop as easily as you could pick it up with your hand, then you would not put it through that hoop any more than you pick it up with your hand; it would not be worth doing. If you could play unerringly you would not play at all. The moment the game is perfect the game disappears."

"I do not think, however," said Parkinson, "that you are in any immediate danger of effecting that sort of destruction. I do not think your croquet will vanish through its own faultless excellence. You are safe for the present.”

I again caressed him with the mallet, knocked a ball about, wired myself, and resumed the thread of my discourse.

The long, warm evening had been gradually closing in, and by this time it was almost twilight. By the time I had delivered four more fundamental principles, and my companion had gone through five more hoops, the dusk was verging upon dark.

“We shall have to give this up,” said Parkinson, as he missed a ball almost for the first time, “I can’t see a thing.”

“Nor can I,” I answered, “and it is a comfort to reflect that I could not hit anything if I saw it.”

With that I struck a ball smartly, and sent it away into the darkness towards where the shadowy figure of Parkinson moved in the hot haze. Parkinson immediately uttered a loud and dramatic cry. The situation, indeed, called for it. I had hit the right ball.

Stunned with astonishment, I crossed the gloomy ground, and hit my ball again. It went through a hoop. I could not see the hoop; but it was the right hoop. I shuddered from head to foot.

Words were wholly inadequate, so I slouched heavily after that impossible ball. Again I hit it away into the night, in what I supposed was the vague direction of the quite invisible stick. And in the dead silence I heard the stick rattle as the ball struck it heavily.

I threw down my mallet. “I can’t stand this,” I said. “My ball has gone right three times. These things are not of this world.”

“Pick your mallet up,” said Parkinson, “have another go.”

“I tell you I daren’t. If I made another hoop like that I should see all the devils dancing there on the blessed grass.”

“Why devils?” asked Parkinson; “they may be only fairies making fun of you. They are sending you the ‘Perfect Game,’ which is no game.”

I looked about me. The garden was full of a burning darkness, in which the faint glimmers had the look of fire. I stepped across the grass as if it burnt me, picked up the mallet, and hit the ball somewhere — somewhere where another ball might be. I heard the dull click of the balls touching, and ran into the house like one pursued.

V. The Extraordinary Cabman

From time to time I have introduced into this newspaper column the narration of incidents that have really occurred. I do not mean to insinuate that in this respect it stands alone among newspaper columns. I mean only that I have found that my meaning was better expressed by some practical parable out of daily life than by any other method; therefore I propose to narrate the incident of the extraordinary cabman, which occurred to me only three days ago, and which, slight as it apparently is, aroused in me a moment of genuine emotion bordering upon despair.

On the day that I met the strange cabman I had been lunching in a little restaurant in Soho in company with three or four of my best friends. My best friends are all either bottomless sceptics or quite uncontrollable believers, so our discussion at luncheon turned upon the most ultimate and terrible ideas. And the whole argument worked out ultimately to this: that the question is whether a man can be certain of anything at all. I think he can be certain, for if (as I said to my friend, furiously brandishing an empty bottle) it is impossible intellectually to entertain certainty, what is this certainty which it is impossible to entertain? If I have never experienced such a thing as certainty I cannot even say that a thing is not certain. Similarly, if I have never experienced such a thing as green I cannot even say that my nose is not green. It may be as green as possible for all I know, if I have really no experience of greenness. So we shouted at each other and shook the room; because metaphysics is the only thoroughly emotional thing. And the difference between us was very deep, because it was a difference as to the object of the whole thing called broad-mindedness or the opening of the intellect. For my friend said that he opened his intellect as the sun opens the fans of a palm tree, opening for opening’s sake, opening infinitely for ever. But I said that I opened my intellect as I opened my mouth, in order to shut it again on something solid. I was doing it at the moment. And as I truly pointed out, it would look uncommonly silly if I went on opening my mouth infinitely, for ever and ever.

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Now when this argument was over, or at least when it was cut short (for it will never be over), I went away with one of my companions, who in the confusion and comparative insanity of a General Election had somehow become a member of Parliament, and I drove with him in a cab from the corner of Leicester-square to the members' entrance of the House of Commons, where the police received me with a quite unusual tolerance. Whether they thought that he was my keeper or that I was his keeper is a discussion between us which still continues.

It is necessary in this narrative to preserve the utmost exactitude of detail. After leaving my friend at the House I took the cab on a few hundred yards to an office in Victoria-street which I had to visit. I then got out and offered him more than his fare. He looked at it, but not with the surly doubt and general disposition to try it on which is not unknown among normal cabmen. But this was no normal, perhaps, no human, cabman. He looked at it with a dull and infantile astonishment, clearly quite genuine. "Do you know, sir," he said, "you've only given me 1s.8d?" I remarked, with some surprise, that I did know it. "Now you know, sir," said he in a kindly, appealing, reasonable way, "you know that ain't the fare from Euston." "Euston," I repeated vaguely, for the phrase at that moment sounded to me like China or Arabia. "What on earth has Euston got to do with it?" "You hailed me just outside Euston Station," began the man with astonishing precision, "and then you said — —" "What in the name of Tartarus are you talking about?" I said with Christian forbearance; "I took you at the south-west corner of Leicester-square." "Leicester-square," he exclaimed, loosening a kind of cataract of scorn, "why we ain't been near Leicester-square to-day. You hailed me outside Euston Station, and you said — —" "Are you mad, or am I?" I asked with scientific calm.

I looked at the man. No ordinary dishonest cabman would think of creating so solid and colossal and creative a lie. And this man was not a dishonest cabman. If ever a human face was heavy and simple and humble, and with great big blue eyes protruding like a frog's, if ever (in short) a human face was all that a human face should be, it was the face of that resentful and respectful cabman. I looked up and down the street; an unusually dark twilight seemed to be coming on. And for one second the old nightmare of the sceptic put its finger on my nerve. What was certainty? Was anybody certain of anything? Heavens! to think of the dull rut of the sceptics who go on asking whether we possess a future life. The exciting question for real scepticism is whether we possess a past life. What is a minute ago, rationalistically considered, except a tradition and a picture? The darkness grew deeper from the road. The cabman calmly gave me the most elaborate details of the gesture, the words, the complex but consistent course of action which I had adopted since that remarkable occasion when I had hailed him outside Euston Station. How did I know (my sceptical friends would say) that I had not hailed him outside Euston. I was firm about my assertion; he was quite equally firm about his. He was obviously quite as honest a man as I, and a member of a much more respectable profession. In that moment the universe and the stars swung just a hair's breadth from their balance, and the foundations of the earth were moved. But for the same reason that I believe in Democracy, for the same reason that I believe in free will, for the same reason that I believe in fixed character of virtue, the reason that could only be expressed by saying that I do not choose to be a lunatic, I continued to believe that this honest cabman was wrong, and I repeated to him that I had really taken him at the corner of Leicester-square. He began with the same evident and ponderous sincerity, "You hailed me outside Euston Station, and you said — —"

And at this moment there came over his features a kind of frightful transfiguration of living astonishment, as if he had been lit up like a lamp from the inside. "Why, I beg your pardon, sir," he said. "I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon. You took me from Leicester-square. I remember now. I beg your pardon." And with that this astonishing man let out his whip with a sharp crack at his horse and went trundling away. The whole of which interview, before the banner of St. George I swear, is strictly true.

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I looked at the strange cabman as he lessened in the distance and the mists. I do not know whether I was right in fancying that although his face had seemed so honest there was something unearthly and demoniac about him when seen from behind. Perhaps he had been sent to tempt me from my adherence to those sanities and certainties which I had defended earlier in the day. In any case it gave me pleasure to remember that my sense of reality, though it had rocked for an instant, had remained erect.

VI. An Accident

Some time ago I wrote in these columns an article called “The Extraordinary Cabman.” I am now in a position to contribute my experience of a still more extraordinary cab. The extraordinary thing about the cab was that it did not like me; it threw me out violently in the middle of the Strand. If my friends who read the DAILY NEWS are as romantic (and as rich) as I take them to be, I presume that this experience is not uncommon. I suppose that they are all being thrown out of cabs, all over London. Still, as there are some people, virginal and remote from the world, who have not yet had this luxurious experience, I will give a short account of the psychology of myself when my hansom cab ran into the side of a motor omnibus, and I hope hurt it.

I do not need to dwell on the essential romance of the hansom cab — that one really noble modern thing which our age, when it is judged, will gravely put beside the Parthenon. It is really modern in that it is both secret and swift. My particular hansom cab was modern in these two respects; it was also very modern in the fact that it came to grief. But it is also English; it is not to be found abroad; it belongs to a beautiful, romantic country where nearly everybody is pretending to be richer than they are, and acting as if they were. It is comfortable, and yet it is reckless; and that combination is the very soul of England. But although I had always realised all these good qualities in a hansom cab, I had not experienced all the possibilities, or, as the moderns put it, all the aspects of that vehicle. My enunciation of the merits of a hansom cab had been always made when it was the right way up. Let me, therefore, explain how I felt when I fell out of a hansom cab for the first and, I am happy to believe, the last time. Polycrates threw one ring into the sea to propitiate the Fates. I have thrown one hansom cab into the sea (if you will excuse a rather violent metaphor) and the Fates are, I am quite sure, propitiated. Though I am told they do not like to be told so.

I was driving yesterday afternoon in a hansom cab down one of the sloping streets into the Strand, reading one of my own admirable articles with continual pleasure, and still more continual surprise, when the horse fell forward, scrambled a moment on the scraping stones, staggered to his feet again, and went forward. The horses in my cabs often do this, and I have learnt to enjoy my own articles at any angle of the vehicle. So I did not see anything at all odd about the way the horse went on again. But I saw it suddenly in the faces of all the people on the pavement. They were all turned towards me, and they were all struck with fear suddenly, as with a white flame out of the sky. And one man half ran out into the road with a movement of the elbow as if warding off a blow, and tried to stop the horse. Then I knew that the reins were lost, and the next moment the horse was like a living thunder-bolt. I try to describe things exactly as they seemed to me; many details I may have missed or mis-stated; many details may have, so to speak, gone mad in the race down the road. I remember that I once called one of my experiences narrated in this paper “A Fragment of Fact.” This is, at any rate, a fragment of fact. No fact could possibly be more fragmentary than the sort of fact that I expected to be at the bottom of that street.

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I believe in preaching to the converted; for I have generally found that the converted do not understand their own religion. Thus I have always urged in this paper that democracy has a deeper meaning than democrats understand; that is, that common and popular things, proverbs, and ordinary sayings always have something in them unrealised by most who repeat them. Here is one. We have all heard about the man who is in momentary danger, and who sees the whole of his life pass before him in a moment. In the cold, literal, and common sense of words, this is obviously a thundering lie. Nobody can pretend that in an accident or a mortal crisis he elaborately remembered all the tickets he had ever taken to Wimbledon, or all the times that he had ever passed the brown bread and butter.

But in those few moments, while my cab was tearing towards the traffic of the Strand, I discovered that there is a truth behind this phrase, as there is behind all popular phrases. I did really have, in that short and shrieking period, a rapid succession of a number of fundamental points of view. I had, so to speak, about five religions in almost as many seconds. My first religion was pure Paganism, which among sincere men is more shortly described as extreme fear. Then there succeeded a state of mind which is quite real, but for which no proper name has ever been found. The ancients called it Stoicism, and I think it must be what some German lunatics mean (if they mean anything) when they talk about Pessimism. It was an empty and open acceptance of the thing that happens — as if one had got beyond the value of it. And then, curiously enough, came a very strong contrary feeling — that things mattered very much indeed, and yet that they were something more than tragic. It was a feeling, not that life was unimportant, but that life was much too important ever to be anything but life. I hope that this was Christianity. At any rate, it occurred at the moment when we went crash into the omnibus.

It seemed to me that the hansom cab simply turned over on top of me, like an enormous hood or hat. I then found myself crawling out from underneath it in attitudes so undignified that they must have added enormously to that great cause to which the Anti-Puritan League and I have recently dedicated ourselves. I mean the cause of the pleasures of the people. As to my demeanour when I emerged, I have two confessions to make, and they are both made merely in the interests of mental science. The first is that whereas I had been in a quite pious frame of mind the moment before the collision, when I got to my feet and found I had got off with a cut or two I began (like St. Peter) to curse and to swear. A man offered me a newspaper or something that I had dropped. I can distinctly remember consigning the paper to a state of irremediable spiritual ruin. I am very sorry for this now, and I apologise both to the man and to the paper. I have not the least idea what was the meaning of this unnatural anger; I mention it as a psychological confession. It was immediately followed by extreme hilarity, and I made so many silly jokes to the policeman that he disgraced himself by continual laughter before all the little boys in the street, who had hitherto taken him seriously.

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There is one other odd thing about the matter which I also mention as a curiosity of the human brain or deficiency of brain. At intervals of about every three minutes I kept on reminding the policeman that I had not paid the cabman, and that I hoped he would not lose his money. He said it would be all right, and the man would appear. But it was not until about half an hour afterwards that it suddenly struck me with a shock intolerable that the man might conceivably have lost more than half a crown; that he had been in danger as well as I. I had instinctively regarded the cabman as something uplifted above accidents, a god. I immediately made inquiries, and I am happy to say that they seemed to have been unnecessary.

But henceforward I shall always understand with a darker and more delicate charity those who take tythe of mint, and anise, and cumin, and neglect the weightier matters of the law; I shall remember how I was once really tortured with owing half a crown to a man who might have been dead. Some admirable men in white coats at the Charing Cross Hospital tied up my small injury, and I went out again into the Strand. I felt upon me even a kind of unnatural youth; I hungered for something untried. So to open a new chapter in my life I got into a hansom cab.

VII. The Advantages of Having One Leg

A friend of mine who was visiting a poor woman in bereavement and casting about for some phrase of consolation that should not be either insolent or weak, said at last, “I think one can live through these great sorrows and even be the better. What wears one is the little worries.” “That’s quite right, mum,” answered the old woman with emphasis, “and I ought to know, seeing I’ve had ten of ‘em.” It is, perhaps, in this sense that it is most true that little worries are most wearing. In its vaguer significance the phrase, though it contains a truth, contains also some possibilities of self-deception and error. People who have both small troubles and big ones have the right to say that they find the small ones the most bitter; and it is undoubtedly true that the back which is bowed under loads incredible can feel a faint addition to those loads; a giant holding up the earth and all its animal creation might still find the grasshopper a burden. But I am afraid that the maxim that the smallest worries are the worst is sometimes used or abused by people, because they have nothing but the very smallest worries. The lady may excuse herself for reviling the crumpled rose leaf by reflecting with what extraordinary dignity she would wear the crown of thorns — if she had to. The gentleman may permit himself to curse the dinner and tell himself that he would behave much better if it were a mere matter of starvation. We need not deny that the grasshopper on man’s shoulder is a burden; but we need not pay much respect to the gentleman who is always calling out that he would rather have an elephant when he knows there are no elephants in the country. We may concede that a straw may break the camel’s back, but we like to know that it really is the last straw and not the first.

I grant that those who have serious wrongs have a real right to grumble, so long as they grumble about something else. It is a singular fact that if they are sane they almost always do grumble about something else. To talk quite reasonably about your own quite real wrongs is the quickest way to go off your head. But people with great troubles talk about little ones, and the man who complains of the crumpled rose leaf very often has his flesh full of the thorns. But if a man has commonly a very clear and happy daily life then I think we are justified in asking that he shall not make mountains out of molehills. I do no deny that molehills can sometimes be important. Small annoyances have this evil about them, that they can be more abrupt because they are more invisible; they cast no shadow before, they have no atmosphere. No one ever had a mystical premonition that he was going to tumble over a hassock. William III. died by falling over a molehill; I do not suppose that with all his varied abilities he could have managed to fall over a mountain. But when all this is allowed for, I repeat that we may ask a happy man (not William III.) to put up with pure inconveniences, and even make them part of his happiness. Of positive pain or positive poverty I do not here speak. I speak of those innumerable accidental limitations that are always falling across our path — bad weather, confinement to this or that house or room, failure of appointments or arrangements, waiting at railway stations, missing posts, finding unpunctuality when we want punctuality, or, what is worse, finding punctuality when we don't. It is of the poetic pleasures to be drawn from all these that I sing — I sing with confidence because I have recently been experimenting in the poetic pleasures which arise from having to sit in one chair with a sprained foot, with the only alternative course of standing on one leg like a stork — a stork is a poetic simile; therefore I eagerly adopted it.

To appreciate anything we must always isolate it, even if the thing itself symbolise something other than isolation. If we wish to see what a house is it must be a house in some uninhabited landscape. If we wish to depict what a man really is we must depict a man alone in a desert or on a dark sea sand. So long as he is a single figure he means all that humanity means; so long as he is solitary he means human society; so long as he is solitary he means sociability and comradeship. Add another figure and the picture is less human — not more so. One is company, two is none. If you wish to symbolise human building draw one dark tower on the horizon; if you wish to symbolise light let there be no star in the sky. Indeed, all through that strangely lit season which we call our day there is but one star in the sky — a large, fierce star which we call the sun. One sun is splendid; six suns would be only vulgar. One Tower Of Giotto is sublime; a row of Towers of Giotto would be only like a row of white posts. The poetry of art is in beholding the single tower; the poetry of nature in seeing the single tree; the poetry of love in following the single woman; the poetry of religion in worshipping the single star. And so, in the same pensive lucidity, I find the poetry of all human anatomy in standing on a single leg. To express complete and perfect leggishness the leg must stand in sublime isolation, like the tower in the wilderness. As Ibsen so finely says, the strongest leg is that which stands most alone.

This lonely leg on which I rest has all the simplicity of some Doric column. The students of architecture tell us that the only legitimate use of a column is to support weight. This column of mine fulfils its legitimate function. It supports weight. Being of an animal and organic consistency, it may even improve by the process, and during these few days that I am thus unequally balanced, the helplessness or dislocation of the one leg may find compensation in the astonishing strength and classic beauty of the other leg. Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson in Mr. George Meredith’s novel might pass by at any moment, and seeing me in the stork-like attitude would exclaim, with equal admiration and a more literal exactitude, “He has a leg.” Notice how this famous literary phrase supports my contention touching this isolation of any admirable thing. Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, wishing to make a clear and perfect picture of human grace, said that Sir Willoughby Patterne had a leg. She delicately glossed over and concealed the clumsy and offensive fact that he had really two legs. Two legs were superfluous and irrelevant, a reflection, and a confusion. Two legs would have confused Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson like two Monuments in London. That having had one good leg he should have another — this would be to use vain repetitions as the Gentiles do. She would have been as much bewildered by him as if he had been a centipede.

All pessimism has a secret optimism for its object. All surrender of life, all denial of pleasure, all darkness, all austerity, all desolation has for its real aim this separation of something so that it may be poignantly and perfectly enjoyed. I feel grateful for the slight sprain which has introduced this mysterious and fascinating division between one of my feet and the other. The way to love anything is to realise that it might be lost. In one of my feet I can feel how strong and splendid a foot is; in the other I can realise how very much otherwise it might have been. The moral of the thing is wholly exhilarating. This world and all our powers in it are far more awful and beautiful than even we know until some accident reminds us. If you wish to perceive that limitless felicity, limit yourself if only for a moment. If you wish to realise how fearfully and wonderfully God’s image is made, stand on one leg. If you want to realise the splendid vision of all visible things — wink the other eye.

VIII. The End of the World

For some time I had been wandering in quiet streets in the curious town of Besançon, which stands like a sort of peninsula in a horse-shoe of river. You may learn from the guide books that it was the birthplace of Victor Hugo, and that it is a military station with many forts, near the French frontier. But you will not learn from guide books that the very tiles on the roofs seem to be of some quainter and more delicate colour than the tiles of all the other towns of the world; that the tiles look like the little clouds of some strange sunset, or like the lustrous scales of some strange fish. They will not tell you that in this town the eye cannot rest on anything without finding it in some way attractive and even elvish, a carved face at a street corner, a gleam of green fields through a stunted arch, or some unexpected colour for the enamel of a spire or dome.

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Evening was coming on and in the light of it all these colours so simple and yet so subtle seemed more and more to fit together and make a fairy tale. I sat down for a little outside a café with a row of little toy trees in front of it, and presently the driver of a fly (as we should call it) came to the same place. He was one of those very large and dark Frenchmen, a type not common but yet typical of France; the Rabelaisian Frenchman, huge, swarthy, purple-faced, a walking wine-barrel; he was a sort of Southern Falstaff, if one can imagine Falstaff anything but English. And, indeed, there was a vital difference, typical of two nations. For while Falstaff would have been shaking with hilarity like a huge jelly, full of the broad farce of the London streets, this Frenchman was rather solemn and dignified than otherwise — as if pleasure were a kind of pagan religion. After some talk which was full of the admirable civility and equality of French civilisation, he suggested without either eagerness or embarrassment that he should take me in his fly for an hour's ride in the hills beyond the town. And though it was growing late I consented; for there was one long white road under an archway and round a hill that dragged me like a long white cord. We drove through the strong, squat gateway that was made by Romans, and I remember the coincidence like a sort of omen that as we passed out of the city I heard simultaneously the three sounds which are the trinity of France. They make what some poet calls "a tangled trinity," and I am not going to disentangle it. Whatever those three things mean, how or why they co-exist; whether they can be reconciled or perhaps are reconciled already; the three sounds I heard then by an accident all at once make up the French mystery. For the brass band in the Casino gardens behind me was playing with a sort of passionate levity some ramping tune from a Parisian comic opera, and while this was going on I heard also the bugles on the hills above, that told of terrible loyalties and men always arming in the gate of France; and I heard also, fainter than these sounds and through them all, the Angelus.

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After this coincidence of symbols I had a curious sense of having left France behind me, or, perhaps, even the civilised world. And, indeed, there was something in the landscape wild enough to encourage such a fancy. I have seen perhaps higher mountains, but I have never seen higher rocks; I have never seen height so near, so abrupt and sensational, splinters of rock that stood up like the spires of churches, cliffs that fell sudden and straight as Satan fell from heaven. There was also a quality in the ride which was not only astonishing, but rather bewildering; a quality which many must have noticed if they have driven or ridden rapidly up mountain roads. I mean a sense of gigantic gyration, as of the whole earth turning about one’s head. It is quite inadequate to say that the hills rose and fell like enormous waves. Rather the hills seemed to turn about me like the enormous sails of a windmill, a vast wheel of monstrous archangelic wings. As we drove on and up into the gathering purple of the sunset this dizziness increased, confounding things above with things below. Wide walls of wooded rock stood out above my head like a roof. I stared at them until I fancied that I was staring down at a wooded plain. Below me steeps of green swept down to the river. I stared at them until I fancied that they swept up to the sky. The purple darkened, night drew nearer; it seemed only to cut clearer the chasms and draw higher the spires of that nightmare landscape. Above me in the twilight was the huge black hulk of the driver, and his broad, blank back was as mysterious as the back of Death in Watts’ picture. I felt that I was growing too fantastic, and I sought to speak of ordinary things. I called out to the driver in French, “Where are you taking me?” and it is a literal and solemn fact that he answered me in the same language without turning around, “To the end of the world.”

I did not answer. I let him drag the vehicle up dark, steep ways, until I saw lights under a low roof of little trees and two children, one oddly beautiful, playing at ball. Then we found ourselves filling up the strict main street of a tiny hamlet, and across the wall of its inn was written in large letters, LE BOUT DU MONDE — the end of the world.

The driver and I sat down outside that inn without a word, as if all ceremonies were natural and understood in that ultimate place. I ordered bread for both of us, and red wine, that was good but had no name. On the other side of the road was a little plain church with a cross on top of it and a cock on top of the cross. This seemed to me a very good end of the world; if the story of the world ended here it ended well. Then I wondered whether I myself should really be content to end here, where most certainly there were the best things of Christendom — a church and children’s games and decent soil and a tavern for men to talk with men. But as I thought a singular doubt and desire grew slowly in me, and at last I started up.

“Are you not satisfied?” asked my companion. “No,” I said, “I am not satisfied even at the end of the world.”

Then, after a silence, I said, “Because you see there are two ends of the world. And this is the wrong end of the world; at least the wrong one for me. This is the French end of the world. I want the other end of the world. Drive me to the other end of the world.”

“The other end of the world?” he asked. “Where is that?”

“It is in Walham Green,” I whispered hoarsely. “You see it on the London omnibuses. ‘World’s End and Walham Green.’ Oh, I know how good this is; I love your vineyards and your free peasantry, but I want the English end of the world. I love you like a brother, but I want an English cabman, who will be funny and ask me what his fare ‘is.’ Your bugles stir my blood, but I want to see a London policeman. Take, oh, take me to see a London policeman.”

He stood quite dark and still against the end of the sunset, and I could not tell whether he understood or not. I got back into his carriage.

“You will understand,” I said, “if ever you are an exile even for pleasure. The child to his mother, the man to his country, as a countryman of yours once said. But since, perhaps, it is rather too long a drive to the English end of the world, we may as well drive back to Besançon.”

Only as the stars came out among those immortal hills I wept for Walham Green.

IX. In the Place de La Bastille

On the first of May I was sitting outside a café in the Place de la Bastille in Paris staring at the exultant column, crowned with a capering figure, which stands in the place where the people destroyed a prison and ended an age. The thing is a curious example of how symbolic is the great part of human history. As a matter of mere material fact, the Bastille when it was taken was not a horrible prison; it was hardly a prison at all. But it was a symbol, and the people always go by a sure instinct for symbols; for the Chinaman, for instance, at the last General Election, or for President Kruger’s hat in the election before; their poetic sense is perfect. The Chinaman with his pigtail is not an idle flippancy. He does typify with a compact precision exactly the thing the people resent in African policy, the alien and grotesque nature of the power of wealth, the fact that money has no roots, that it is not a natural and familiar power, but a sort of airy and evil magic calling monsters from the ends of the earth. The people hate the mine owner who can bring a Chinaman flying across the sea, exactly as the people hated the wizard who could fetch a flying dragon through the air. It was the same with Mr. Kruger’s hat. His hat (that admirable hat) was not merely a joke. It did symbolise, and symbolise extremely well, the exact thing which our people at that moment regarded with impatience and venom; the old-fashioned, dingy, Republican simplicity, the unbeautiful dignity of the bourgeois, and the heavier truisms of political morality. No; the people are sometimes wrong on the practical side of politics; they are never wrong on the artistic side.

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So it was, certainly, with the Bastille. The destruction of the Bastille was not a reform; it was something more important than a reform. It was an iconoclasm; it was the breaking of a stone image. The people saw the building like a giant looking at them with a score of eyes, and they struck at it as at a carved fact. For of all the shapes in which that immense illusion called materialism can terrify the soul, perhaps the most oppressive are big buildings. Man feels like a fly, an accident, in the thing he has himself made. It requires a violent effort of the spirit to remember that man made this confounding thing and man could unmake it. Therefore the mere act of the ragged people in the street taking and destroying a huge public building has a spiritual, a ritual meaning far beyond its immediate political results. It is a religious service. If, for instance, the Socialists were numerous or courageous enough to capture and smash up the Bank of England, you might argue for ever about the inutility of the act, and how it really did not touch the root of the economic problem in the correct manner. But mankind would never forget it. It would change the world.

Architecture is a very good test of the true strength of a society, for the most valuable things in a human state are the irrevocable things — marriage, for instance. And architecture approaches nearer than any other art to being irrevocable, because it is so difficult to get rid of. You can turn a picture with its face to the wall; it would be a nuisance to turn that Roman cathedral with its face to the wall. You can tear a poem to pieces; it is only in moments of very sincere emotion that you tear a town-hall to pieces. A building is akin to dogma; it is insolent, like a dogma. Whether or no it is permanent, it claims permanence like a dogma. People ask why we have no typical architecture of the modern world, like impressionism in painting. Surely it is obviously because we have not enough dogmas; we cannot bear to see anything in the sky that is solid and enduring, anything in the sky that does not change like the clouds of the sky. But along with this decision which is involved in creating a building, there goes a quite similar decision in the more delightful task of smashing one. The two of necessity go together. In few places have so many fine public buildings been set up as here in Paris, and in few places have so many been destroyed. When people have finally got into the horrible habit of preserving buildings, they have got out of the habit of building them. And in London one mingles, as it were, one’s tears because so few are pulled down.

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As I sat staring at the column of the Bastille, inscribed to Liberty and Glory, there came out of one corner of the square (which, like so many such squares, was at once crowded and quiet) a sudden and silent line of horsemen. Their dress was of a dull blue, plain and prosaic enough, but the sun set on fire the brass and steel of their helmets; and their helmets were carved like the helmets of the Romans. I had seen them by twos and threes often enough before. I had seen plenty of them in pictures toiling through the snows of Friedland or roaring round the squares at Waterloo. But now they came file after file, like an invasion, and something in their numbers, or in the evening light that lit up their faces and their crests, or something in the reverie into which they broke, made me inclined to spring to my feet and cry out, “The French soldiers!” There were the little men with the brown faces that had so often ridden through the capitals of Europe as coolly as they now rode through their own. And when I looked across the square I saw that the two other corners were choked with blue and red; held by little groups of infantry. The city was garrisoned as against a revolution.

Of course, I had heard all about the strike, chiefly from a baker. He said he was not going to “Chomer.” I said, “Qu’est-ce que c’est que le chome?” He said, “Ils ne veulent pas travailler.” I said, “Ni moi non plus,” and he thought I was a class-conscious collectivist proletarian. The whole thing was curious, and the true moral of it one not easy for us, as a nation, to grasp, because our own faults are so deeply and dangerously in the other direction. To me, as an Englishman (personally steeped in the English optimism and the English dislike of severity), the whole thing seemed a fuss about nothing. It looked like turning out one of the best armies in Europe against ordinary people walking about the street. The cavalry charged us once or twice, more or less harmlessly. But, of course, it is hard to say how far in such criticisms one is assuming the French populace to be (what it is not) as docile as the English. But the deeper truth of the matter tingled, so to speak, through the whole noisy night. This people has a natural faculty for feeling itself on the eve of something — of the Bartholomew or the Revolution or the Commune or the Day of Judgment. It is this sense of crisis that makes France eternally young. It is perpetually pulling down and building up, as it pulled down the prison and put up the column in the Place de La Bastille. France has always been at the point of dissolution. She has found the only method of immortality. She dies daily.

X. On Lying in Bed

Lying in bed would be an altogether perfect and supreme experience if only one had a coloured pencil long enough to draw on the ceiling. This, however, is not generally a part of the domestic apparatus on the premises. I think myself that the thing might be managed with several pails of Aspinall and a broom. Only if one worked in a really sweeping and masterly way, and laid on the colour in great washes, it might drip down again on one's face in floods of rich and mingled colour like some strange fairy rain; and that would have its disadvantages. I am afraid it would be necessary to stick to black and white in this form of artistic composition. To that purpose, indeed, the white ceiling would be of the greatest possible use; in fact, it is the only use I think of a white ceiling being put to.

But for the beautiful experiment of lying in bed I might never have discovered it. For years I have been looking for some blank spaces in a modern house to draw on. Paper is much too small for any really allegorical design; as Cyrano de Bergerac says, “Il me faut des géants.” But when I tried to find these fine clear spaces in the modern rooms such as we all live in I was continually disappointed. I found an endless pattern and complication of small objects hung like a curtain of fine links between me and my desire. I examined the walls; I found them to my surprise to be already covered with wallpaper, and I found the wallpaper to be already covered with uninteresting images, all bearing a ridiculous resemblance to each other. I could not understand why one arbitrary symbol (a symbol apparently entirely devoid of any religious or philosophical significance) should thus be sprinkled all over my nice walls like a sort of small-pox. The Bible must be referring to wallpapers, I think, when it says, “Use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do.” I found the Turkey carpet a mass of unmeaning colours, rather like the Turkish Empire, or like the sweetmeat called Turkish Delight. I do not exactly know what Turkish Delight really is; but I suppose it is Macedonian Massacres. Everywhere that I went forlornly, with my pencil or my paint brush, I found that others had unaccountably been before me, spoiling the walls, the curtains, and the furniture with their childish and barbaric designs.

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Nowhere did I find a really clear space for sketching until this occasion when I prolonged beyond the proper limit the process of lying on my back in bed. Then the light of that white heaven broke upon my vision, that breadth of mere white which is indeed almost the definition of Paradise, since it means purity and also means freedom. But alas! like all heavens, now that it is seen it is found to be unattainable; it looks more austere and more distant than the blue sky outside the window. For my proposal to paint on it with the bristly end of a broom has been discouraged — never mind by whom; by a person debarred from all political rights — and even my minor proposal to put the other end of the broom into the kitchen fire and turn it to charcoal has not been conceded. Yet I am certain that it was from persons in my position that all the original inspiration came for covering the ceilings of palaces and cathedrals with a riot of fallen angels or victorious gods. I am sure that it was only because Michael Angelo was engaged in the ancient and honourable occupation of lying in bed that he ever realized how the roof of the Sistine Chapel might be made into an awful imitation of a divine drama that could only be acted in the heavens.

The tone now commonly taken toward the practice of lying in bed is hypocritical and unhealthy. Of all the marks of modernity that seem to mean a kind of decadence, there is none more menacing and dangerous than the exultation of very small and secondary matters of conduct at the expense of very great and primary ones, at the expense of eternal ties and tragic human morality. If there is one thing worse than the modern weakening of major morals, it is the modern strengthening of minor morals. Thus it is considered more withering to accuse a man of bad taste than of bad ethics. Cleanliness is not next to godliness nowadays, for cleanliness is made essential and godliness is regarded as an offence. A playwright can attack the institution of marriage so long as he does not misrepresent the manners of society, and I have met Ibsenite pessimists who thought it wrong to take beer but right to take prussic acid. Especially this is so in matters of hygiene; notably such matters as lying in bed. Instead of being regarded, as it ought to be, as a matter of personal convenience and adjustment, it has come to be regarded by many as if it were a part of essential morals to get up early in the morning. It is upon the whole part of practical wisdom; but there is nothing good about it or bad about its opposite.

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Misers get up early in the morning; and burglars, I am informed, get up the night before. It is the great peril of our society that all its mechanisms may grow more fixed while its spirit grows more fickle. A man’s minor actions and arrangements ought to be free, flexible, creative; the things that should be unchangeable are his principles, his ideals. But with us the reverse is true; our views change constantly; but our lunch does not change. Now, I should like men to have strong and rooted conceptions, but as for their lunch, let them have it sometimes in the garden, sometimes in bed, sometimes on the roof, sometimes in the top of a tree. Let them argue from the same first principles, but let them do it in a bed, or a boat, or a balloon. This alarming growth of good habits really means a too great emphasis on those virtues which mere custom can ensure, it means too little emphasis on those virtues which custom can never quite ensure, sudden and splendid virtues of inspired pity or of inspired candour. If ever that abrupt appeal is made to us we may fail. A man can get use to getting up at five o’clock in the morning. A man cannot very well get used to being burnt for his opinions; the first experiment is commonly fatal. Let us pay a little more attention to these possibilities of the heroic and unexpected. I dare say that when I get out of this bed I shall do some deed of an almost terrible virtue.

For those who study the great art of lying in bed there is one emphatic caution to be added. Even for those who can do their work in bed (like journalists), still more for those whose work cannot be done in bed (as, for example, the professional harpooners of whales), it is obvious that the indulgence must be very occasional. But that is not the caution I mean. The caution is this: if you do lie in bed, be sure you do it without any reason or justification at all. I do not speak, of course, of the seriously sick. But if a healthy man lies in bed, let him do it without a rag of excuse; then he will get up a healthy man. If he does it for some secondary hygienic reason, if he has some scientific explanation, he may get up a hypochondriac.

XI. The Twelve Men

The other day, while I was meditating on morality and Mr. H. Pitt, I was, so to speak, snatched up and put into a jury box to try people. The snatching took some weeks, but to me it seemed something sudden and arbitrary. I was put into this box because I lived in Battersea, and my name began with a C. Looking round me, I saw that there were also summoned and in attendance in the court whole crowds and processions of men, all of whom lived in Battersea, and all of whose names began with a C.

It seems that they always summon jurymen in this sweeping alphabetical way. At one official blow, so to speak, Battersea is denuded of all its C's, and left to get on as best it can with the rest of the alphabet. A Cumberpatch is missing from one street — a Chizzolpop from another — three Chucksterfields from Chucksterfield House; the children are crying out for an absent Cadgerboy; the woman at the street corner is weeping for her Coffintop, and will not be comforted. We settle down with a rollicking ease into our seats (for we are a bold, devil-may-care race, the C's of Battersea), and an oath is administered to us in a totally inaudible manner by an individual resembling an Army surgeon in his second childhood. We understand, however, that we are to well and truly try the case between our sovereign lord the King and the prisoner at the bar, neither of whom has put in an appearance as yet.

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Just when I was wondering whether the King and the prisoner were, perhaps, coming to an amicable understanding in some adjoining public house, the prisoner's head appears above the barrier of the dock; he is accused of stealing bicycles, and he is the living image of a great friend of mine. We go into the matter of the stealing of the bicycles. We do well and truly try the case between the King and the prisoner in the affair of the bicycles. And we come to the conclusion, after a brief but reasonable discussion, that the King is not in any way implicated. Then we pass on to a woman who neglected her children, and who looks as if somebody or something had neglected her. And I am one of those who fancy that something had.

All the time that the eye took in these light appearances and the brain passed these light criticisms, there was in the heart a barbaric pity and fear which men have never been able to utter from the beginning, but which is the power behind half the poems of the world. The mood cannot even adequately be suggested, except faintly by this statement that tragedy is the highest expression of the infinite value of human life. Never had I stood so close to pain; and never so far away from pessimism. Ordinarily, I should not have spoken of these dark emotions at all, for speech about them is too difficult; but I mention them now for a specific and particular reason to the statement of which I will proceed at once. I speak these feelings because out of the furnace of them there came a curious realisation of a political or social truth. I saw with a queer and indescribable kind of clearness what a jury really is, and why we must never let it go.

The trend of our epoch up to this time has been consistently towards specialism and professionalism. We tend to have trained soldiers because they fight better, trained singers because they sing better, trained dancers because they dance better, specially instructed laughers because they laugh better, and so on and so on. The principle has been applied to law and politics by innumerable modern writers. Many Fabians have insisted that a greater part of our political work should be performed by experts. Many legalists have declared that the untrained jury should be altogether supplanted by the trained Judge.

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Now, if this world of ours were really what is called reasonable, I do not know that there would be any fault to find with this. But the true result of all experience and the true foundation of all religion is this. That the four or five things that it is most practically essential that a man should know, are all of them what people call paradoxes. That is to say, that though we all find them in life to be mere plain truths, yet we cannot easily state them in words without being guilty of seeming verbal contradictions. One of them, for instance, is the unimpeachable platitude that the man who finds most pleasure for himself is often the man who least hunts for it. Another is the paradox of courage; the fact that the way to avoid death is not to have too much aversion to it. Whoever is careless enough of his bones to climb some hopeful cliff above the tide may save his bones by that carelessness. Whoever will lose his life, the same shall save it; an entirely practical and prosaic statement.

Now, one of these four or five paradoxes which should be taught to every infant prattling at his mother’s knee is the following: That the more a man looks at a thing, the less he can see it, and the more a man learns a thing the less he knows it. The Fabian argument of the expert, that the man who is trained should be the man who is trusted would be absolutely unanswerable if it were really true that a man who studied a thing and practiced it every day went on seeing more and more of its significance. But he does not. He goes on seeing less and less of its significance. In the same way, alas! we all go on every day, unless we are continually goading ourselves into gratitude and humility, seeing less and less of the significance of the sky or the stones.

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Now it is a terrible business to mark a man out for the vengeance of men. But it is a thing to which a man can grow accustomed, as he can to other terrible things; he can even grow accustomed to the sun. And the horrible thing about all legal officials, even the best, about all judges, magistrates, barristers, detectives, and policemen, is not that they are wicked (some of them are good), not that they are stupid (several of them are quite intelligent), it is simply that they have got used to it.

Strictly they do not see the prisoner in the dock; all they see is the usual man in the usual place. They do not see the awful court of judgment; they only see their own workshop. Therefore, the instinct of Christian civilisation has most wisely declared that into their judgments there shall upon every occasion be infused fresh blood and fresh thoughts from the streets. Men shall come in who can see the court and the crowd, and coarse faces of the policeman and the professional criminals, the wasted faces of the wastrels, the unreal faces of the gesticulating counsel, and see it all as one sees a new picture or a play hitherto unvisited.

Our civilisation has decided, and very justly decided, that determining the guilt or innocence of men is a thing too important to be trusted to trained men. It wishes for light upon that awful matter, it asks men who know no more law than I know, but who can feel the things that I felt in the jury box. When it wants a library catalogued, or the solar system discovered, or any trifle of that kind, it uses up specialists. But when it wishes anything done which is really serious, it collects twelve of the ordinary men standing round. The same thing was done, if I remember right, by the Founder of Christianity.

XII. The Wind and the Trees

I am sitting under tall trees, with a great wind boiling like surf about the tops of them, so that their living load of leaves rocks and roars in something that is at once exultation and agony. I feel, in fact, as if I were actually sitting at the bottom of the sea among mere anchors and ropes, while over my head and over the green twilight of water sounded the everlasting rush of waves and the toil and crash and shipwreck of tremendous ships. The wind tugs at the trees as if it might pluck them root and all out of the earth like tufts of grass. Or, to try yet another desperate figure of speech for this unspeakable energy, the trees are straining and tearing and lashing as if they were a tribe of dragons each tied by the tail.

As I look at these top-heavy giants tortured by an invisible and violent witchcraft, a phrase comes back into my mind. I remember a little boy of my acquaintance who was once walking in Battersea Park under just such torn skies and tossing trees. He did not like the wind at all; it blew in his face too much; it made him shut his eyes; and it blew off his hat, of which he was very proud. He was, as far as I remember, about four. After complaining repeatedly of the atmospheric unrest, he said at last to his mother, “Well, why don’t you take away the trees, and then it wouldn’t wind.”

Nothing could be more intelligent or natural than this mistake. Any one looking for the first time at the trees might fancy that they were indeed vast and titanic fans, which by their mere waving agitated the air around them for miles. Nothing, I say, could be more human and excusable than the belief that it is the trees which make the wind. Indeed, the belief is so human and excusable that it is, as a matter of fact, the belief of about ninety-nine out of a hundred of the philosophers, reformers, sociologists, and politicians of the great age in which we live. My small friend was, in fact, very like the principal modern thinkers; only much nicer.

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In the little apologue or parable which he has thus the honour of inventing, the trees stand for all visible things and the wind for the invisible. The wind is the spirit which bloweth where it listeth; the trees are the material things of the world which are blown where the spirit lists. The wind is philosophy, religion, revolution; the trees are cities and civilisations.

We only know that there is a wind because the trees on some distant hill suddenly go mad. We only know that there is a real revolution because all the chimney-pots go mad on the whole skyline of the city.

Just as the ragged outline of a tree grows suddenly more ragged and rises into fantastic crests or tattered tails, so the human city rises under the wind of the spirit into toppling temples or sudden spires. No man has ever seen a revolution. Mobs pouring through the palaces, blood pouring down the gutters, the guillotine lifted higher than the throne, a prison in ruins, a people in arms — these things are not revolution, but the results of revolution.

You cannot see a wind; you can only see that there is a wind. So, also, you cannot see a revolution; you can only see that there is a revolution. And there never has been in the history of the world a real revolution, brutally active and decisive, which was not preceded by unrest and new dogma in the reign of invisible things. All revolutions began by being abstract. Most revolutions began by being quite pedantically abstract.

The wind is up above the world before a twig on the tree has moved. So there must always be a battle in the sky before there is a battle on the earth. Since it is lawful to pray for the coming of the kingdom, it is lawful also to pray for the coming of the revolution that shall restore the kingdom. It is lawful to hope to hear the wind of Heaven in the trees. It is lawful to pray "Thine anger come on earth as it is in Heaven."

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The great human dogma, then, is that the wind moves the trees. The great human heresy is that the trees move the wind. When people begin to say that the material circumstances have alone created the moral circumstances, then they have prevented all possibility of serious change. For if my circumstances have made me wholly stupid, how can I be certain even that I am right in altering those circumstances?

The man who represents all thought as an accident of environment is simply smashing and discrediting all his own thoughts — including that one. To treat the human mind as having an ultimate authority is necessary to any kind of thinking, even free thinking. And nothing will ever be reformed in this age or country unless we realise that the moral fact comes first.

For example, most of us, I suppose, have seen in print and heard in debating clubs an endless discussion that goes on between Socialists and total abstainers. The latter say that drink leads to poverty; the former say that poverty leads to drink. I can only wonder at their either of them being content with such simple physical explanations. Surely it is obvious that the thing which among the English proletariat leads to poverty is the same as the thing which leads to drink; the absence of strong civic dignity, the absence of an instinct that resists degradation.

When you have discovered why enormous English estates were not long ago cut up into small holdings like the land of France, you will have discovered why the Englishman is more drunken than the Frenchman. The Englishman, among his million delightful virtues, really has this quality, which may strictly be called “hand to mouth,” because under its influence a man’s hand automatically seeks his own mouth, instead of seeking (as it sometimes should do) his oppressor’s nose. And a man who says that the English inequality in land is due only to economic causes, or that the drunkenness of England is due only to economic causes, is saying something so absurd that he cannot really have thought what he was saying.

Yet things quite as preposterous as this are said and written under the influence of that great spectacle of babyish helplessness, the economic theory of history. We have people who represent that all great historic motives were economic, and then have to howl at the top of their voices in order to induce the modern democracy to act on economic motives. The extreme Marxian politicians in England exhibit themselves as a small, heroic minority, trying vainly to induce the world to do what, according to their theory, the world always does. The truth is, of course, that there will be a social revolution the moment the thing has ceased to be purely economic. You can never have a revolution in order to establish a democracy. You must have a democracy in order to have a revolution.

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I get up from under the trees, for the wind and the slight rain have ceased. The trees stand up like golden pillars in a clear sunlight. The tossing of the trees and the blowing of the wind have ceased simultaneously. So I suppose there are still modern philosophers who will maintain that the trees make the wind.

XIII. The Dickensian

He was a quiet man, dressed in dark clothes, with a large limp straw hat; with something almost military in his moustache and whiskers, but with a quite unmilitary stoop and very dreamy eyes. He was gazing with a rather gloomy interest at the cluster, one might almost say the tangle, of small shipping which grew thicker as our little pleasure boat crawled up into Yarmouth Harbour. A boat entering this harbour, as every one knows, does not enter in front of the town like a foreigner, but creeps round at the back like a traitor taking the town in the rear. The passage of the river seems almost too narrow for traffic, and in consequence the bigger ships look colossal. As we passed under a timber ship from Norway, which seemed to block up the heavens like a cathedral, the man in a straw hat pointed to an odd wooden figurehead carved like a woman, and said, like one continuing a conversation, “Now, why have they left off having them. They didn’t do any one any harm?”

I replied with some flippancy about the captain’s wife being jealous; but I knew in my heart that the man had struck a deep note. There has been something in our most recent civilisation which is mysteriously hostile to such healthy and humane symbols.

“They hate anything like that, which is human and pretty,” he continued, exactly echoing my thoughts. “I believe they broke up all the jolly old figureheads with hatchets and enjoyed doing it.”

“Like Mr. Quilp,” I answered, “when he battered the wooden Admiral with the poker.”

His whole face suddenly became alive, and for the first time he stood erect and stared at me.

“Do you come to Yarmouth for that?” he asked.

“For what?”

“For Dickens,” he answered, and drummed with his foot on the deck.

“No,” I answered; “I come for fun, though that is much the same thing.”

“I always come,” he answered quietly, “to find Peggotty’s boat. It isn’t here.”

And when he said that I understood him perfectly.

There are two Yarmouths; I daresay there are two hundred to the people who live there. I myself have never come to the end of the list of Batterseas.

But there are two to the stranger and tourist; the poor part, which is dignified, and the prosperous part, which is savagely vulgar. My new friend haunted the first of these like a ghost; to the latter he would only distantly allude.

“The place is very much spoilt now... trippers, you know,” he would say, not at all scornfully, but simply sadly. That was the nearest he would go to an admission of the monstrous watering place that lay along the front, outblazing the sun, and more deafening than the sea. But behind — out of earshot of this uproar — there are lanes so narrow that they seem like secret entrances to some hidden place of repose. There are squares so brimful of silence that to plunge into one of them is like plunging into a pool. In these places the man and I paced up and down talking about Dickens, or, rather, doing what all true Dickensians do, telling each other verbatim long passages which both of us knew quite well already. We were really in the atmosphere of the older England. Fishermen passed us who might well have been characters like Peggotty; we went into a musty curiosity shop and bought pipe-stoppers carved into figures from Pickwick. The evening was settling down between all the buildings with that slow gold that seems to soak everything when we went into the church.

In the growing darkness of the church, my eye caught the coloured windows which on that clear golden evening were flaming with all the passionate heraldry of the most fierce and ecstatic of Christian arts. At length I said to my companion:

“Do you see that angel over there? I think it must be meant for the angel at the sepulchre.”

He saw that I was somewhat singularly moved, and he raised his eyebrows.

“I daresay,” he said. “What is there odd about that?”

After a pause I said, “Do you remember what the angel at the sepulchre said?”

“Not particularly,” he answered; “but where are you off to in such a hurry?”

I walked him rapidly out of the still square, past the fishermen’s almshouses, towards the coast, he still inquiring indignantly where I was going.

“I am going,” I said, “to put pennies in automatic machines on the beach. I am going to listen to the niggers. I am going to have my photograph taken.

I am going to drink ginger-beer out of its original bottle. I will buy some picture postcards. I do want a boat. I am ready to listen to a concertina, and but for the defects of my education should be ready to play it. I am willing to ride on a donkey; that is, if the donkey is willing. I am willing to be a donkey; for all this was commanded me by the angel in the stained-glass window."

"I really think," said the Dickensian, "that I had better put you in charge of your relations."

"Sir," I answered, "there are certain writers to whom humanity owes much, whose talent is yet of so shy or delicate or retrospective a type that we do well to link it with certain quaint places or certain perishing associations. It would not be unnatural to look for the spirit of Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill, or even for the shade of Thackeray in Old Kensington. But let us have no antiquarianism about Dickens, for Dickens is not an antiquity. Dickens looks not backward, but forward; he might look at our modern mobs with satire, or with fury, but he would love to look at them. He might lash our democracy, but it would be because, like a democrat, he asked much from it. We will not have all his books bound up under the title of 'The Old Curiosity Shop.' Rather we will have them all bound up under the title of 'Great Expectations.' Wherever humanity is he would have us face it and make something of it, swallow it with a holy cannibalism, and assimilate it with the digestion of a giant. We must take these trippers as he would have taken them, and tear out of them their tragedy and their farce. Do you remember now what the angel said at the sepulchre? 'Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here; he is risen.'"

With that we came out suddenly on the wide stretch of the sands, which were black with the knobs and masses of our laughing and quite desperate democracy. And the sunset, which was now in its final glory, flung far over all of them a red flush and glitter like the gigantic firelight of Dickens. In that strange evening light every figure looked at once grotesque and attractive, as if he had a story to tell. I heard a little girl (who was being throttled by another little girl) say by way of self-vindication, "My sister-in-law 'as got four rings aside her weddin' ring!"

I stood and listened for more, but my friend went away.

XIV. In Topsy-Turvy Land

Last week, in an idle metaphor, I took the tumbling of trees and the secret energy of the wind as typical of the visible world moving under the violence of the invisible. I took this metaphor merely because I happened to be writing the article in a wood. Nevertheless, now that I return to Fleet Street (which seems to me, I confess, much better and more poetical than all the wild woods in the world), I am strangely haunted by this accidental comparison. The people's figures seem a forest and their soul a wind. All the human personalities which speak or signal to me seem to have this fantastic character of the fringe of the forest against the sky. That man that talks to me, what is he but an articulate tree? That driver of a van who waves his hands wildly at me to tell me to get out of the way, what is he but a bunch of branches stirred and swayed by a spiritual wind, a sylvan object that I can continue to contemplate with calm? That policeman who lifts his hand to warn three omnibuses of the peril that they run in encountering my person, what is he but a shrub shaken for a moment with that blast of human law which is a thing stronger than anarchy? Gradually this impression of the woods wears off. But this black-and-white contrast between the visible and invisible, this deep sense that the one essential belief is belief in the invisible as against the visible, is suddenly and sensationally brought back to my mind. Exactly at the moment when Fleet Street has grown most familiar (that is, most bewildering and bright), my eye catches a poster of vivid violet, on which I see written in large black letters these remarkable words: “Should Shop Assistants Marry?”

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When I saw those words everything might just as well have turned upside down. The men in Fleet Street might have been walking about on their hands. The cross of St. Paul's might have been hanging in the air upside down. For I realise that I have really come into a topsy-turvy country; I have come into the country where men do definitely believe that the waving of the trees makes the wind. That is to say, they believe that the material circumstances, however black and twisted, are more important than the spiritual realities, however powerful and pure. “Should Shop Assistants Marry?” I am puzzled to think what some periods and schools of human history would have made of such a question. The ascetics of the East or of some periods of the early Church would have thought that the question meant, “Are not shop assistants too saintly, too much of another world, even to feel the emotions of the sexes?” But I suppose that is not what the purple poster means. In some pagan cities it might have meant, “Shall slaves so vile as shop assistants even be allowed to propagate their abject race?” But I suppose that is not what the purple poster meant. We must face, I fear, the full insanity of what it does mean. It does really mean that a section of the human race is asking whether the primary relations of the two human sexes are particularly good for modern shops. The human race is asking whether Adam and Eve are entirely suitable for Marshall and Snelgrove. If this is not topsy-turvy I cannot imagine what would be. We ask whether the universal institution will improve our (please God) temporary institution. Yet I have known many such questions. For instance, I have known a man ask seriously, “Does Democracy help the Empire?” Which is like saying, “Is art favourable to frescoes?”

I say that there are many such questions asked. But if the world ever runs short of them, I can suggest a large number of questions of precisely the same kind, based on precisely the same principle.

“Do Feet Improve Boots?”— “Is Bread Better when Eaten?”— “Should Hats have Heads in them?”— “Do People Spoil a Town?”— “Do Walls Ruin Wall-papers?”— “Should Neckties enclose Necks?”— “Do Hands Hurt Walking-sticks?”— “Does Burning Destroy Firewood?”— “Is Cleanliness Good for Soap?”— “Can Cricket Really Improve Cricket-bats?”— “Shall We Take Brides with our Wedding Rings?” and a hundred others.

Not one of these questions differs at all in intellectual purport or in intellectual value from the question which I have quoted from the purple poster, or from any of the typical questions asked by half of the earnest economists of our times. All the questions they ask are of this character; they are all tinged with this same initial absurdity. They do not ask if the means is suited to the end; they all ask (with profound and penetrating scepticism) if the end is suited to the means. They do not ask whether the tail suits the dog. They all ask whether a dog is (by the highest artistic canons) the most ornamental appendage that can be put at the end of a tail. In short, instead of asking whether our modern arrangements, our streets, trades, bargains, laws, and concrete institutions are suited to the primal and permanent idea of a healthy human life, they never admit that healthy human life into the discussion at all, except suddenly and accidentally at odd moments; and then they only ask whether that healthy human life is suited to our streets and trades. Perfection may be attainable or unattainable as an end. It may or may not be possible to talk of imperfection as a means to perfection. But surely it passes toleration to talk of perfection as a means to imperfection. The New Jerusalem may be a reality. It may be a dream. But surely it is too outrageous to say that the New Jerusalem is a reality on the road to Birmingham.

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This is the most enormous and at the same time the most secret of the modern tyrannies of materialism. In theory the thing ought to be simple enough. A really human human being would always put the spiritual things first. A walking and speaking statue of God finds himself at one particular moment employed as a shop assistant. He has in himself a power of terrible love, a promise of paternity, a thirst for some loyalty that shall unify life, and in the ordinary course of things he asks himself, “How far do the existing conditions of those assisting in shops fit in with my evident and epic destiny in the matter of love and marriage?” But here, as I have said, comes in the quiet and crushing power of modern materialism. It prevents him rising in rebellion, as he would otherwise do. By perpetually talking about environment and visible things, by perpetually talking about economics and physical necessity, painting and keeping repainted a perpetual picture of iron machinery and merciless engines, of rails of steel, and of towers of stone, modern materialism at last produces this tremendous impression in which the truth is stated upside down. At last the result is achieved. The man does not say as he ought to have said, “Should married men endure being modern shop assistants?” The man says, “Should shop assistants marry?” Triumph has completed the immense illusion of materialism. The slave does not say, “Are these chains worthy of me?” The slave says scientifically and contentedly, “Am I even worthy of these chains?”

XV. What I Found in My Pocket

Once when I was very young I met one of those men who have made the Empire what it is — a man in an astracan coat, with an astracan moustache — a tight, black, curly moustache. Whether he put on the moustache with the coat or whether his Napoleonic will enabled him not only to grow a moustache in the usual place, but also to grow little moustaches all over his clothes, I do not know. I only remember that he said to me the following words: “A man can’t get on nowadays by hanging about with his hands in his pockets.” I made reply with the quite obvious flippancy that perhaps a man got on by having his hands in other people’s pockets; whereupon he began to argue about Moral Evolution, so I suppose what I said had some truth in it. But the incident now comes back to me, and connects itself with another incident — if you can call it an incident — which happened to me only the other day.

I have only once in my life picked a pocket, and then (perhaps through some absent-mindedness) I picked my own. My act can really with some reason be so described. For in taking things out of my own pocket I had at least one of the more tense and quivering emotions of the thief; I had a complete ignorance and a profound curiosity as to what I should find there. Perhaps it would be the exaggeration of eulogy to call me a tidy person. But I can always pretty satisfactorily account for all my possessions. I can always tell where they are, and what I have done with them, so long as I can keep them out of my pockets. If once anything slips into those unknown abysses, I wave it a sad Virgilian farewell. I suppose that the things that I have dropped into my pockets are still there; the same presumption applies to the things that I have dropped into the sea. But I regard the riches stored in both these bottomless chasms with the same reverent ignorance. They tell us that on the last day the sea will give up its dead; and I suppose that on the same occasion long strings of extraordinary things will come running out of my pockets. But I have quite forgotten what any of them are; and there is really nothing (excepting the money) that I shall be at all surprised at finding among them.

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Such at least has hitherto been my state of innocence. I here only wish briefly to recall the special, extraordinary, and hitherto unprecedented circumstances which led me in cold blood, and being of sound mind, to turn out my pockets. I was locked up in a third-class carriage for a rather long journey. The time was towards evening, but it might have been anything, for everything resembling earth or sky or light or shade was painted out as if with a great wet brush by an unshifting sheet of quite colourless rain. I had no books or newspapers. I had not even a pencil and a scrap of paper with which to write a religious epic. There were no advertisements on the walls of the carriage, otherwise I could have plunged into the study, for any collection of printed words is quite enough to suggest infinite complexities of mental ingenuity. When I find myself opposite the words "Sunlight Soap" I can exhaust all the aspects of Sun Worship, Apollo, and Summer poetry before I go on to the less congenial subject of soap. But there was no printed word or picture anywhere; there was nothing but blank wood inside the carriage and blank wet without. Now I deny most energetically that anything is, or can be, uninteresting. So I stared at the joints of the walls and seats, and began thinking hard on the fascinating subject of wood. Just as I had begun to realise why, perhaps, it was that Christ was a carpenter, rather than a bricklayer, or a baker, or anything else, I suddenly started upright, and remembered my pockets. I was carrying about with me an unknown treasury. I had a British Museum and a South Kensington collection of unknown curios hung all over me in different places. I began to take the things out.

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The first thing I came upon consisted of piles and heaps of Battersea tram tickets. There were enough to equip a paper chase. They shook down in showers like confetti. Primarily, of course, they touched my patriotic emotions, and brought tears to my eyes; also they provided me with the printed matter I required, for I found on the back of them some short but striking little scientific essays about some kind of pill. Comparatively speaking, in my then destitution, those tickets might be regarded as a small but well-chosen scientific library. Should my railway journey continue (which seemed likely at the time) for a few months longer, I could imagine myself throwing myself into the controversial aspects of the pill, composing replies and rejoinders pro and con upon the data furnished to me. But after all it was the symbolic quality of the tickets that moved me most. For as certainly as the cross of St. George means English patriotism, those scraps of paper meant all that municipal patriotism which is now, perhaps, the greatest hope of England.

The next thing that I took out was a pocket-knife. A pocket-knife, I need hardly say, would require a thick book full of moral meditations all to itself. A knife typifies one of the most primary of those practical origins upon which as upon low, thick pillows all our human civilisation reposes. Metals, the mystery of the thing called iron and of the thing called steel, led me off half-dazed into a kind of dream. I saw into the intrails of dim, damp wood, where the first man among all the common stones found the strange stone. I saw a vague and violent battle, in which stone axes broke and stone knives were splintered against something shining and new in the hand of one desperate man. I heard all the hammers on all the anvils of the earth. I saw all the swords of Feudal and all the weals of Industrial war. For the knife is only a short sword; and the pocket-knife is a secret sword. I opened it and looked at that brilliant and terrible tongue which we call a blade; and I thought that perhaps it was the symbol of the oldest of the needs of man. The next moment I knew that I was wrong; for the thing that came next out of my pocket was a box of matches. Then I saw fire, which is stronger even than steel, the old, fierce female thing, the thing we all love, but dare not touch.

The next thing I found was a piece of chalk; and I saw in it all the art and all the frescoes of the world. The next was a coin of a very modest value; and I saw in it not only the image and superscription of our own Caesar, but all government and order since the world began. But I have not space to say what were the items in the long and splendid procession of poetical symbols that came pouring out. I cannot tell you all the things that were in my pocket. I can tell you one thing, however, that I could not find in my pocket. I allude to my railway ticket.

XVI. The Dragon’s Grandmother

I met a man the other day who did not believe in fairy tales. I do not mean that he did not believe in the incidents narrated in them — that he did not believe that a pumpkin could turn into a coach. He did, indeed, entertain this curious disbelief. And, like all the other people I have ever met who entertained it, he was wholly unable to give me an intelligent reason for it. He tried the laws of nature, but he soon dropped that. Then he said that pumpkins were unalterable in ordinary experience, and that we all reckoned on their infinitely protracted pumpkinity. But I pointed out to him that this was not an attitude we adopt specially towards impossible marvels, but simply the attitude we adopt towards all unusual occurrences. If we were certain of miracles we should not count on them. Things that happen very seldom we all leave out of our calculations, whether they are miraculous or not. I do not expect a glass of water to be turned into wine; but neither do I expect a glass of water to be poisoned with prussic acid. I do not in ordinary business relations act on the assumption that the editor is a fairy; but neither do I act on the assumption that he is a Russian spy, or the lost heir of the Holy Roman Empire. What we assume in action is not that the natural order is unalterable, but simply that it is much safer to bet on uncommon incidents than on common ones. This does not touch the credibility of any attested tale about a Russian spy or a pumpkin turned into a coach. If I had seen a pumpkin turned into a Panhard motor-car with my own eyes that would not make me any more inclined to assume that the same thing would happen again. I should not invest largely in pumpkins with an eye to the motor trade. Cinderella got a ball dress from the fairy; but I do not suppose that she looked after her own clothes any the less after it.

But the view that fairy tales cannot really have happened, though crazy, is common. The man I speak of disbelieved in fairy tales in an even more amazing and perverted sense. He actually thought that fairy tales ought not to be told to children. That is (like a belief in slavery or annexation) one of those intellectual errors which lie very near to ordinary mortal sins. There are some refusals which, though they may be done what is called conscientiously, yet carry so much of their whole horror in the very act of them, that a man must in doing them not only harden but slightly corrupt his heart. One of them was the refusal of milk to young mothers when their husbands were in the field against us. Another is the refusal of fairy tales to children.

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The man had come to see me in connection with some silly society of which I am an enthusiastic member; he was a fresh-coloured, short-sighted young man, like a stray curate who was too helpless even to find his way to the Church of England. He had a curious green necktie and a very long neck; I am always meeting idealists with very long necks. Perhaps it is that their eternal aspiration slowly lifts their heads nearer and nearer to the stars. Or perhaps it has something to do with the fact that so many of them are vegetarians: perhaps they are slowly evolving the neck of the giraffe so that they can eat all the tops of the trees in Kensington Gardens. These things are in every sense above me. Such, anyhow, was the young man who did not believe in fairy tales; and by a curious coincidence he entered the room when I had just finished looking through a pile of contemporary fiction, and had begun to read "Grimm's Fairy tales" as a natural consequence.

The modern novels stood before me, however, in a stack; and you can imagine their titles for yourself. There was "Suburban Sue: A Tale of Psychology," and also "Psychological Sue: A Tale of Suburbia"; there was "Trixy: A Temperament," and "Man-Hate: A Monochrome," and all those nice things. I read them with real interest, but, curiously enough, I grew tired of them at last, and when I saw "Grimm's Fairy Tales" lying accidentally on the table, I gave a cry of indecent joy. Here at least, here at last, one could find a little common sense. I opened the book, and my eyes fell on these splendid and satisfying words, "The Dragon's Grandmother." That at least was reasonable; that at least was true. "The Dragon's Grandmother!" While I was rolling this first touch of ordinary human reality upon my tongue, I looked up suddenly and saw this monster with a green tie standing in the doorway.

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I listened to what he said about the society politely enough, I hope; but when he incidentally mentioned that he did not believe in fairy tales, I broke out beyond control. "Man," I said, "who are you that you should not believe in fairy tales? It is much easier to believe in Blue Beard than to believe in you. A blue beard is a misfortune; but there are green ties which are sins. It is far easier to believe in a million fairy tales than to believe in one man who does not like fairy tales. I would rather kiss Grimm instead of a Bible and swear to all his stories as if they were thirty-nine articles than say seriously and out of my heart that there can be such a man as you; that you are not some temptation of the devil or some delusion from the void. Look at these plain, homely, practical words. ‘The Dragon’s Grandmother,’ that is all right; that is rational almost to the verge of rationalism. If there was a dragon, he had a grandmother. But you — you had no grandmother! If you had known one, she would have taught you to love fairy tales. You had no father, you had no mother; no natural causes can explain you. You cannot be. I believe many things which I have not seen; but of such things as you it may be said, ‘Blessed is he that has seen and yet has disbelieved.’”

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It seemed to me that he did not follow me with sufficient delicacy, so I moderated my tone. “Can you not see,” I said, “that fairy tales in their essence are quite solid and straightforward; but that this everlasting fiction about modern life is in its nature essentially incredible? Folk-lore means that the soul is sane, but that the universe is wild and full of marvels. Realism means that the world is dull and full of routine, but that the soul is sick and screaming. The problem of the fairy tale is — what will a healthy man do with a fantastic world? The problem of the modern novel is — what will a madman do with a dull world? In the fairy tales the cosmos goes mad; but the hero does not go mad. In the modern novels the hero is mad before the book begins, and suffers from the harsh steadiness and cruel sanity of the cosmos. In the excellent tale of ‘The Dragon’s Grandmother,’ in all the other tales of Grimm, it is assumed that the young man setting out on his travels will have all substantial truths in him; that he will be brave, full of faith, reasonable, that he will respect his parents, keep his word, rescue one kind of people, defy another kind, ‘parcere subjectis et debellare,’ etc. Then, having assumed this centre of sanity, the writer entertains himself by fancying what would happen if the whole world went mad all round it, if the sun turned green and the moon blue, if horses had six legs and giants had two heads. But your modern literature takes insanity as its centre. Therefore, it loses the interest even of insanity. A lunatic is not startling to himself, because he is quite serious; that is what makes him a lunatic. A man who thinks he is a piece of glass is to himself as dull as a piece of glass. A man who thinks he is a chicken is to himself as common as a chicken. It is only sanity that can see even a wild poetry in insanity. Therefore, these wise old tales made the hero ordinary and the tale extraordinary. But you have made the hero extraordinary and the tale ordinary — so ordinary — oh, so very ordinary.”

I saw him still gazing at me fixedly. Some nerve snapped in me under the hypnotic stare. I leapt to my feet and cried, “In the name of God and Democracy and the Dragon’s grandmother — in the name of all good things — I charge you to avaunt and haunt this house no more.” Whether or no it was the result of the exorcism, there is no doubt that he definitely went away.

XVII. The Red Angel

I find that there really are human beings who think fairy tales bad for children. I do not speak of the man in the green tie, for him I can never count truly human. But a lady has written me an earnest letter saying that fairy tales ought not to be taught to children even if they are true. She says that it is cruel to tell children fairy tales, because it frightens them. You might just as well say that it is cruel to give girls sentimental novels because it makes them cry. All this kind of talk is based on that complete forgetting of what a child is like which has been the firm foundation of so many educational schemes. If you keep bogies and goblins away from children they would make them up for themselves. One small child in the dark can invent more hells than Swedenborg. One small child can imagine monsters too big and black to get into any picture, and give them names too unearthly and cacophonous to have occurred in the cries of any lunatic. The child, to begin with, commonly likes horrors, and he continues to indulge in them even when he does not like them. There is just as much difficulty in saying exactly where pure pain begins in his case, as there is in ours when we walk of our own free will into the torture-chamber of a great tragedy. The fear does not come from fairy tales; the fear comes from the universe of the soul.

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The timidity of the child or the savage is entirely reasonable; they are alarmed at this world, because this world is a very alarming place. They dislike being alone because it is verily and indeed an awful idea to be alone. Barbarians fear the unknown for the same reason that Agnostics worship it — because it is a fact. Fairy tales, then, are not responsible for producing in children fear, or any of the shapes of fear; fairy tales do not give the child the idea of the evil or the ugly; that is in the child already, because it is in the world already. Fairy tales do not give the child his first idea of bogey. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon.

Exactly what the fairy tale does is this: it accustoms him for a series of clear pictures to the idea that these limitless terrors had a limit, that these shapeless enemies have enemies in the knights of God, that there is something in the universe more mystical than darkness, and stronger than strong fear. When I was a child I have stared at the darkness until the whole black bulk of it turned into one negro giant taller than heaven. If there was one star in the sky it only made him a Cyclops. But fairy tales restored my mental health, for next day I read an authentic account of how a negro giant with one eye, of quite equal dimensions, had been baffled by a little boy like myself (of similar inexperience and even lower social status) by means of a sword, some bad riddles, and a brave heart. Sometimes the sea at night seemed as dreadful as any dragon. But then I was acquainted with many youngest sons and little sailors to whom a dragon or two was as simple as the sea.

Take the most horrible of Grimm's tales in incident and imagery, the excellent tale of the "Boy who Could not Shudder," and you will see what I mean. There are some living shocks in that tale. I remember specially a man's legs which fell down the chimney by themselves and walked about the room, until they were rejoined by the severed head and body which fell down the chimney after them. That is very good. But the point of the story and the point of the reader's feelings is not that these things are frightening, but the far more striking fact that the hero was not frightened at them. The most fearful of all these fearful wonders was his own absence of fear. He slapped the bogies on the back and asked the devils to drink wine with him; many a time in my youth, when stifled with some modern morbidity, I have prayed for a double portion of his spirit. If you have not read the end of his story, go and read it; it is the wisest thing in the world. The hero was at last taught to shudder by taking a wife, who threw a pail of cold water over him. In that one sentence there is more of the real meaning of marriage than in all the books about sex that cover Europe and America.

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At the four corners of a child's bed stand Perseus and Roland, Sigurd and St. George. If you withdraw the guard of heroes you are not making him rational; you are only leaving him to fight the devils alone. For the devils, alas, we have always believed in. The hopeful element in the universe has in modern times continually been denied and reasserted; but the hopeless element has never for a moment been denied. As I told "H. N. B." (whom I pause to wish a Happy Christmas in its most superstitious sense), the one thing modern people really do believe in is damnation. The greatest of purely modern poets summed up the really modern attitude in that fine Agnostic line —

“There may be Heaven; there must be Hell.”

The gloomy view of the universe has been a continuous tradition; and the new types of spiritual investigation or conjecture all begin by being gloomy. A little while ago men believed in no spirits. Now they are beginning rather slowly to believe in rather slow spirits.

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Some people objected to spiritualism, table rappings, and such things, because they were undignified, because the ghosts cracked jokes or waltzed with dinner-tables. I do not share this objection in the least. I wish the spirits were more farcical than they are. That they should make more jokes and better ones, would be my suggestion. For almost all the spiritualism of our time, in so far as it is new, is solemn and sad. Some Pagan gods were lawless, and some Christian saints were a little too serious; but the spirits of modern spiritualism are both lawless and serious — a disgusting combination. The specially contemporary spirits are not only devils, they are blue devils. This is, first and last, the real value of Christmas; in so far as the mythology remains at all it is a kind of happy mythology. Personally, of course, I believe in Santa Claus; but it is the season of forgiveness, and I will forgive others for not doing so. But if there is anyone who does not comprehend the defect in our world which I am civilising, I should recommend him, for instance, to read a story by Mr. Henry James, called “The Turn of the Screw.” It is one of the most powerful things ever written, and it is one of the things about which I doubt most whether it ought ever to have been written at all. It describes two innocent children gradually growing at once omniscient and half-witted under the influence of the foul ghosts of a groom and a governess. As I say, I doubt whether Mr. Henry James ought to have published it (no, it is not indecent, do not buy it; it is a spiritual matter), but I think the question so doubtful that I will give that truly great man a chance. I will approve the thing as well as admire it if he will write another tale just as powerful about two children and Santa Claus. If he will not, or cannot, then the conclusion is clear; we can deal strongly with gloomy mystery, but not with happy mystery; we are not rationalists, but diabolists.

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I have thought vaguely of all this staring at a great red fire that stands up in the room like a great red angel. But, perhaps, you have never heard of a red angel. But you have heard of a blue devil. That is exactly what I mean.

XVIII. The Tower

I have been standing where everybody has stood, opposite the great Belfry Tower of Bruges, and thinking, as every one has thought (though not, perhaps, said), that it is built in defiance of all decencies of architecture. It is made in deliberate disproportion to achieve the one startling effect of height. It is a church on stilts. But this sort of sublime deformity is characteristic of the whole fancy and energy of these Flemish cities. Flanders has the flattest and most prosaic landscapes, but the most violent and extravagant of buildings. Here Nature is tame; it is civilisation that is untamable. Here the fields are as flat as a paved square; but, on the other hand, the streets and roofs are as uproarious as a forest in a great wind. The waters of wood and meadow slide as smoothly and meekly as if they were in the London water-pipes. But the parish pump is carved with all the creatures out of the wilderness. Part of this is true, of course, of all art. We talk of wild animals, but the wildest animal is man. There are sounds in music that are more ancient and awful than the cry of the strangest beast at night. And so also there are buildings that are shapeless in their strength, seeming to lift themselves slowly like monsters from the primal mire, and there are spires that seem to fly up suddenly like a startled bird.

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This savagery even in stone is the expression of the special spirit in humanity. All the beasts of the field are respectable; it is only man who has broken loose. All animals are domestic animals; only man is ever undomestic. All animals are tame animals; it is only we who are wild. And doubtless, also, while this queer energy is common to all human art, it is also generally characteristic of Christian art among the arts of the world. This is what people really mean when they say that Christianity is barbaric, and arose in ignorance. As a matter of historic fact, it didn’t; it arose in the most equably civilised period the world has ever seen.

But it is true that there is something in it that breaks the outline of perfect and conventional beauty, something that dots with anger the blind eyes of the Apollo and lashes to a cavalry charge the horses of the Elgin Marbles. Christianity is savage, in the sense that it is primeval; there is in it a touch of the nigger hymn. I remember a debate in which I had praised militant music in ritual, and some one asked me if I could imagine Christ walking down the street before a brass band. I said I could imagine it with the greatest ease; for Christ definitely approved a natural noisiness at a great moment. When the street children shouted too loud, certain priggish disciples did begin to rebuke them in the name of good taste. He said: “If these were silent the very stones would cry out.” With these words He called up all the wealth of artistic creation that has been founded on this creed. With those words He founded Gothic architecture. For in a town like this, which seems to have grown Gothic as a wood grows leaves, anywhere and anyhow, any odd brick or moulding may be carved off into a shouting face. The front of vast buildings is thronged with open mouths, angels praising God, or devils defying Him. Rock itself is racked and twisted, until it seems to scream. The miracle is accomplished; the very stones cry out.

But though this furious fancy is certainly a specialty of men among creatures, and of Christian art among arts, it is still most notable in the art of Flanders. All Gothic buildings are full of extravagant things in detail; but this is an extravagant thing in design. All Christian temples worth talking about have gargoyles; but Bruges Belfry is a gargoyle. It is an unnaturally long-necked animal, like a giraffe. The same impression of exaggeration is forced on the mind at every corner of a Flemish town. And if any one asks, “Why did the people of these flat countries instinctively raise these riotous and towering monuments?” the only answer one can give is, “Because they were the people of these flat countries.” If any one asks, “Why the men of Bruges sacrificed architecture and everything to the sense of dizzy and divine heights?” we can only answer, “Because Nature gave them no encouragement to do so.”

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As I stare at the Belfry, I think with a sort of smile of some of my friends in London who are quite sure of how children will turn out if you give them what they call “the right environment.” It is a troublesome thing, environment, for it sometimes works positively and sometimes negatively, and more often between the two. A beautiful environment may make a child love beauty; it may make him bored with beauty; most likely the two effects will mix and neutralise each other. Most likely, that is, the environment will make hardly any difference at all. In the scientific style of history (which was recently fashionable, and is still conventional) we always had a list of countries that had owed their characteristics to their physical conditions.

The Spaniards (it was said) are passionate because their country is hot; Scandinavians adventurous because their country is cold; Englishmen naval because they are islanders; Switzers free because they are mountaineers. It is all very nice in its way. Only unfortunately I am quite certain that I could make up quite as long a list exactly contrary in its argument point-blank against the influence of their geographical environment. Thus Spaniards have discovered more continents than Scandinavians because their hot climate discouraged them from exertion. Thus Dutchmen have fought for their freedom quite as bravely as Switzers because the Dutch have no mountains. Thus Pagan Greece and Rome and many Mediterranean peoples have specially hated the sea because they had the nicest sea to deal with, the easiest sea to manage. I could extend the list for ever. But however long it was, two examples would certainly stand up in it as pre-eminent and unquestionable. The first is that the Swiss, who live under staggering precipices and spires of eternal snow, have produced no art or literature at all, and are by far the most mundane, sensible, and business-like people in Europe. The other is that the people of Belgium, who live in a country like a carpet, have, by an inner energy, desired to exalt their towers till they struck the stars.

As it is therefore quite doubtful whether a person will go specially with his environment or specially against his environment, I cannot comfort myself with the thought that the modern discussions about environment are of much practical value. But I think I will not write any more about these modern theories, but go on looking at the Belfry of Bruges. I would give them the greater attention if I were not pretty well convinced that the theories will have disappeared a long time before the Belfry.

XIX. How I Met the President

Several years ago, when there was a small war going on in South Africa and a great fuss going on in England, when it was by no means so popular and convenient to be a Pro-Boer as it is now, I remember making a bright suggestion to my Pro-Boer friends and allies, which was not, I regret to say, received with the seriousness it deserved. I suggested that a band of devoted and noble youths, including ourselves, should express our sense of the pathos of the President’s and the Republic’s fate by growing Kruger beards under our chins. I imagined how abruptly this decoration would alter the appearance of Mr. John Morley; how startling it would be as it emerged from under the chin of Mr. Lloyd-George. But the younger men, my own friends, on whom I more particularly urged it, men whose names are in many cases familiar to the readers of this paper — Mr. Masterman’s for instance, and Mr. Conrad Noel — they, I felt, being young and beautiful, would do even more justice to the Kruger beard, and when walking down the street with it could not fail to attract attention. The beard would have been a kind of counterblast to the Rhodes hat. An appropriate counterblast; for the Rhodesian power in Africa is only an external thing, placed upon the top like a hat; the Dutch power and tradition is a thing rooted and growing like a beard; we have shaved it, and it is growing again. The Kruger beard would represent time and the natural processes. You cannot grow a beard in a moment of passion.

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After making this proposal to my friends I hurriedly left town. I went down to a West Country place where there was shortly afterwards an election, at which I enjoyed myself very much canvassing for the Liberal candidate. The extraordinary thing was that he got in. I sometimes lie awake at night and meditate upon that mystery; but it must not detain us now. The rather singular incident which happened to me then, and which some recent events have recalled to me, happened while the canvassing was still going on. It was a burning blue day, and the warm sunshine, settling everywhere on the high hedges and the low hills, brought out into a kind of heavy bloom that HUMANE quality of the landscape which, as far as I know, only exists in England; that sense as if the bushes and the roads were human, and had kindness like men; as if the tree were a good giant with one wooden leg; as if the very line of palings were a row of good-tempered gnomes. On one side of the white, sprawling road a low hill or down showed but a little higher than the hedge, on the other the land tumbled down into a valley that opened towards the Mendip hills. The road was very erratic, for every true English road exists in order to lead one a dance; and what could be more beautiful and beneficent than a dance? At an abrupt turn of it I came upon a low white building, with dark doors and dark shuttered windows, evidently not inhabited and scarcely in the ordinary sense inhabitable — a thing more like a toolhouse than a house of any other kind. Made idle by the heat, I paused, and, taking a piece of red chalk out of my pocket, began drawing aimlessly on the back door — drawing goblins and Mr. Chamberlain, and finally the ideal Nationalist with the Kruger beard. The materials did not permit of any delicate rendering of his noble and national expansion of countenance (stoical and yet hopeful, full of tears for man, and yet of an element of humour); but the hat was finely handled. Just as I was adding the finishing touches to the Kruger fantasy, I was frozen to the spot with terror. The black door, which I thought no more of than the lid of an empty box, began slowly to open, impelled from within by a human hand. And President Kruger himself came out into the sunlight!

He was a shade milder of eye than he was in his portraits, and he did not wear that ceremonial scarf which was usually, in such pictures, slung across his ponderous form. But there was the hat which filled the Empire with so much alarm; there were the clumsy dark clothes, there was the heavy, powerful face; there, above all, was the Kruger beard which I had sought to evoke (if I may use the verb) from under the features of Mr. Masterman. Whether he had the umbrella or not I was too much emotionally shaken to observe; he had not the stone lions with him, or Mrs. Kruger; and what he was doing in that dark shed I cannot imagine, but I suppose he was oppressing an Outlander.

I was surprised, I must confess, to meet President Kruger in Somersetshire during the war. I had no idea that he was in the neighbourhood. But a yet more arresting surprise awaited me. Mr. Kruger regarded me for some moments with a dubious grey eye, and then addressed me with a strong Somersetshire accent. A curious cold shock went through me to hear that inappropriate voice coming out of that familiar form. It was as if you met a Chinaman, with pigtail and yellow jacket, and he began to talk broad Scotch. But the next moment, of course, I understood the situation. We had much underrated the Boers in supposing that the Boer education was incomplete. In pursuit of his ruthless plot against our island home, the terrible President had learnt not only English, but all the dialects at a moment's notice to win over a Lancashire merchant or seduce a Northumberland Fusilier. No doubt, if I asked him, this stout old gentleman could grind out Sussex, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, and so on, like the tunes in a barrel organ. I could not wonder if our plain, true-hearted German millionaires fell before a cunning so penetrated with culture as this.

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And now I come to the third and greatest surprise of all that this strange old man gave me. When he asked me, dryly enough, but not without a certain steady civility that belongs to old-fashioned country people, what I wanted and what I was doing, I told him the facts of the case, explaining my political mission and the almost angelic qualities of the Liberal candidate. Whereupon, this old man became suddenly transfigured in the sunlight into a devil of wrath. It was some time before I could understand a word he said, but the one word that kept on recurring was the word "Kruger," and it was invariably accompanied with a volley of violent terms. Was I for old Kruger, was I? Did I come to him and want him to help old Kruger? I ought to be ashamed, I was... and here he became once more obscure. The one thing that he made quite clear was that he wouldn't do anything for Kruger.

"But you ARE Kruger," burst from my lips, in a natural explosion of reasonableness. "You ARE Kruger, aren't you?"

After this innocent CRI DE COEUR of mine, I thought at first there would be a fight, and I remembered with regret that the President in early life had had a hobby of killing lions. But really I began to think that I had been mistaken, and that it was not the President after all. There was a confounding sincerity in the anger with which he declared that he was Farmer Bowles, and everybody knowed it. I appeased him eventually and parted from him at the door of his farmhouse, where he left me with a few tags of religion, which again raised my suspicions of his identity. In the coffee-room to which I returned there was an illustrated paper with a picture of President Kruger, and he and Farmer Bowles were as like as two peas. There was a picture also of a group of Outlander leaders, and the faces of them, leering and triumphant, were perhaps unduly darkened by the photograph, but they seemed to me like the faces of a distant and hostile people.

I saw the old man once again on the fierce night of the poll, when he drove down our Liberal lines in a little cart ablaze with the blue Tory ribbons, for he was a man who would carry his colours everywhere. It was evening, and the warm western light was on the grey hair and heavy massive features of that good old man. I knew as one knows a fact of sense that if Spanish and German stockbrokers had flooded his farm or country he would have fought them for ever, not fiercely like an Irishman, but with the ponderous courage and ponderous cunning of the Boer. I knew that without seeing it, as certainly as I knew without seeing it that when he went into the polling room he put his cross against the Conservative name. Then he came out again, having given his vote and looking more like Kruger than ever. And at the same hour on the same night thousands upon thousands of English Krugers gave the same vote. And thus Kruger was pulled down and the dark-faced men in the photograph reigned in his stead.

XX. The Giant

I sometimes fancy that every great city must have been built by night. At least, it is only at night that every part of a great city is great. All architecture is great architecture after sunset; perhaps architecture is really a nocturnal art, like the art of fireworks. At least, I think many people of those nobler trades that work by night (journalists, policemen, burglars, coffee-stall keepers, and such mistaken enthusiasts as refuse to go home till morning) must often have stood admiring some black bulk of building with a crown of battlements or a crest of spires and then burst into tears at daybreak to discover that it was only a haberdasher’s shop with huge gold letters across the face of it.

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I had a sensation of this sort the other day as I happened to be wandering in the Temple Gardens towards the end of twilight. I sat down on a bench with my back to the river, happening to choose such a place that a huge angle and façade of building jutting out from the Strand sat above me like an incubus. I dare say that if I took the same seat to-morrow by daylight I should find the impression entirely false. In sunlight the thing might seem almost distant; but in that half-darkness it seemed as if the walls were almost falling upon me. Never before have I had so strongly the sense which makes people pessimists in politics, the sense of the hopeless height of the high places of the earth. That pile of wealth and power, whatever was its name, went up above and beyond me like a cliff that no living thing could climb. I had an irrational sense that this thing had to be fought, that I had to fight it; and that I could offer nothing to the occasion but an indolent journalist with a walking-stick.

Almost as I had the thought, two windows were lit in that black, blind face. It was as if two eyes had opened in the huge face of a sleeping giant; the eyes were too close together, and gave it the suggestion of a bestial sneer. And either by accident of this light or of some other, I could now read the big letters which spaced themselves across the front; it was the Babylon Hotel. It was the perfect symbol of everything that I should like to pull down with my hands if I could. Reared by a detected robber, it is framed to be the fashionable and luxurious home of undetected robbers. In the house of man are many mansions; but there is a class of men who feel normal nowhere except in the Babylon Hotel or in Dartmoor Gaol. That big black face, which was staring at me with its flaming eyes too close together, that was indeed the giant of all epic and fairy tales. But, alas! I was not the giant-killer; the hour had come, but not the man. I sat down on the seat again (I had had one wild impulse to climb up the front of the hotel and fall in at one of the windows), and I tried to think, as all decent people are thinking, what one can really do. And all the time that oppressive wall went up in front of me, and took hold upon the heavens like a house of the gods.

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It is remarkable that in so many great wars it has been the defeated who have won. The people who were left worst at the end of the war were generally the people who were left best at the end of the whole business. For instance, the Crusades ended in the defeat of the Christians. But they did not end in the decline of the Christians; they ended in the decline of the Saracens. That huge prophetic wave of Moslem power which had hung in the very heavens above the towns of Christendom, that wave was broken, and never came on again. The Crusaders had saved Paris in the act of losing Jerusalem. The same applies to that epic of Republican war in the eighteenth century to which we Liberals owe our political creed. The French Revolution ended in defeat: the kings came back across a carpet of dead at Waterloo. The Revolution had lost its last battle; but it had gained its first object. It had cut a chasm. The world has never been the same since. No one after that has ever been able to treat the poor merely as a pavement.

These jewels of God, the poor, are still treated as mere stones of the street; but as stones that may sometimes fly. If it please God, you and I may see some of the stones flying again before we see death. But here I only remark the interesting fact that the conquered almost always conquer. Sparta killed Athens with a final blow, and she was born again. Sparta went away victorious, and died slowly of her own wounds. The Boers lost the South African War and gained South Africa.

And this is really all that we can do when we fight something really stronger than ourselves; we can deal it its death-wound one moment; it deals us death in the end. It is something if we can shock and jar the unthinking impetus and enormous innocence of evil; just as a pebble on a railway can stagger the Scotch express. It is enough for the great martyrs and criminals of the French revolution, that they have surprised for all time the secret weakness of the strong. They have awakened and set leaping and quivering in his crypt for ever the coward in the hearts of kings.

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When Jack the Giant-Killer really first saw the giant his experience was not such as has been generally supposed. If you care to hear it I will tell you the real story of Jack the Giant-Killer. To begin with, the most awful thing which Jack first felt about the giant was that he was not a giant. He came striding across an interminable wooded plain, and against its remote horizon the giant was quite a small figure, like a figure in a picture — he seemed merely a man walking across the grass. Then Jack was shocked by remembering that the grass which the man was treading down was one of the tallest forests upon that plain. The man came nearer and nearer, growing bigger and bigger, and at the instant when he passed the possible stature of humanity Jack almost screamed. The rest was an intolerable apocalypse.

The giant had the one frightful quality of a miracle; the more he became incredible the more he became solid. The less one could believe in him the more plainly one could see him. It was unbearable that so much of the sky should be occupied by one human face. His eyes, which had stood out like bow windows, became bigger yet, and there was no metaphor that could contain their bigness; yet still they were human eyes. Jack's intellect was utterly gone under that huge hypnotism of the face that filled the sky; his last hope was submerged, his five wits all still with terror.

But there stood up in him still a kind of cold chivalry, a dignity of dead honour that would not forget the small and futile sword in his hand. He rushed at one of the colossal feet of this human tower, and when he came quite close to it the ankle-bone arched over him like a cave. Then he planted the point of his sword against the foot and leant on it with all his weight, till it went up to the hilt and broke the hilt, and then snapped just under it. And it was plain that the giant felt a sort of prick, for he snatched up his great foot into his great hand for an instant; and then, putting it down again, he bent over and stared at the ground until he had seen his enemy.

Then he picked up Jack between a big finger and thumb and threw him away; and as Jack went through the air he felt as if he were flying from system to system through the universe of stars. But, as the giant had thrown him away carelessly, he did not strike a stone, but struck soft mire by the side of a distant river. There he lay insensible for several hours; but when he awoke again his horrible conqueror was still in sight. He was striding away across the void and wooded plain towards where it ended in the sea; and by this time he was only much higher than any of the hills. He grew less and less indeed; but only as a really high mountain grows at last less and less when we leave it in a railway train. Half an hour afterwards he was a bright blue colour, as are the distant hills; but his outline was still human and still gigantic. Then the big blue figure seemed to come to the brink of the big blue sea, and even as it did so it altered its attitude. Jack, stunned and bleeding, lifted himself laboriously upon one elbow to stare. The giant once more caught hold of his ankle, wavered twice as in a wind, and then went over into the great sea which washes the whole world, and which, alone of all things God has made, was big enough to drown him.

XXI. A Great Man

People accuse journalism of being too personal; but to me it has always seemed far too impersonal. It is charged with tearing away the veils from private life; but it seems to me to be always dropping diaphanous but blinding veils between men and men. The Yellow Press is abused for exposing facts which are private; I wish the Yellow Press did anything so valuable. It is exactly the decisive individual touches that it never gives; and a proof of this is that after one has met a man a million times in the newspapers it is always a complete shock and reversal to meet him in real life. The Yellow Pressman seems to have no power of catching the first fresh fact about a man that dominates all after impressions. For instance, before I met Bernard Shaw I heard that he spoke with a reckless desire for paradox or a sneering hatred of sentiment; but I never knew till he opened his mouth that he spoke with an Irish accent, which is more important than all the other criticisms put together.

Journalism is not personal enough. So far from digging out private personalities, it cannot even report the obvious personalities on the surface. Now there is one vivid and even bodily impression of this kind which we have all felt when we met great poets or politicians, but which never finds its way into the newspapers. I mean the impression that they are much older than we thought they were. We connect great men with their great triumphs, which generally happened some years ago, and many recruits enthusiastic for the thin Napoleon of Marengo must have found themselves in the presence of the fat Napoleon of Leipzic.

I remember reading a newspaper account of how a certain rising politician confronted the House of Lords with the enthusiasm almost of boyhood. It described how his “brave young voice” rang in the rafters. I also remember that I met him some days after, and he was considerably older than my own father. I mention this truth for only one purpose: all this generalisation leads up to only one fact — the fact that I once met a great man who was younger than I expected.

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I had come over the wooded wall from the villages about Epsom, and down a stumbling path between trees towards the valley in which Dorking lies. A warm sunlight was working its way through the leafage; a sunlight which though of saintless gold had taken on the quality of evening. It was such sunlight as reminds a man that the sun begins to set an instant after noon. It seemed to lessen as the wood strengthened and the road sank.

I had a sensation peculiar to such entangled descents; I felt that the treetops that closed above me were the fixed and real things, certain as the level of the sea; but that the solid earth was every instant failing under my feet. In a little while that splendid sunlight showed only in splashes, like flaming stars and suns in the dome of green sky. Around me in that emerald twilight were trunks of trees of every plain or twisted type; it was like a chapel supported on columns of every earthly and unearthly style of architecture.

Without intention my mind grew full of fancies on the nature of the forest; on the whole philosophy of mystery and force. For the meaning of woods is the combination of energy with complexity. A forest is not in the least rude or barbarous; it is only dense with delicacy. Unique shapes that an artist would copy or a philosopher watch for years if he found them in an open plain are here mingled and confounded; but it is not a darkness of deformity. It is a darkness of life; a darkness of perfection. And I began to think how much of the highest human obscurity is like this, and how much men have misunderstood it. People will tell you, for instance, that theology became elaborate because it was dead. Believe me, if it had been dead it would never have become elaborate; it is only the live tree that grows too many branches.

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These trees thinned and fell away from each other, and I came out into deep grass and a road. I remember being surprised that the evening was so far advanced; I had a fancy that this valley had a sunset all to itself. I went along that road according to directions that had been given me, and passed the gateway in a slight paling beyond which the wood changed only faintly to a garden. It was as if the curious courtesy and fineness of that character I was to meet went out from him upon the valley; for I felt on all these things the finger of that quality which the old English called “faërie”; it is the quality which those can never understand who think of the past as merely brutal; it is an ancient elegance such as there is in trees. I went through the garden and saw an old man sitting by a table, looking smallish in his big chair. He was already an invalid, and his hair and beard were both white; not like snow, for snow is cold and heavy, but like something feathery, or even fierce; rather they were white like the white thistledown. I came up quite close to him; he looked at me as he put out his frail hand, and I saw of a sudden that his eyes were startlingly young. He was the one great man of the old world whom I have met who was not a mere statue over his own grave.

He was deaf and he talked like a torrent. He did not talk about the books he had written; he was far too much alive for that. He talked about the books he had not written. He unrolled a purple bundle of romances which he had never had time to sell. He asked me to write one of the stories for him, as he would have asked the milkman, if he had been talking to the milkman. It was a splendid and frantic story, a sort of astronomical farce. It was all about a man who was rushing up to the Royal Society with the only possible way of avoiding an earth-destroying comet; and it showed how, even on this huge errand, the man was tripped up at every other minute by his own weakness and vanities; how he lost a train by trifling or was put in gaol for brawling. That is only one of them; there were ten or twenty more. Another, I dimly remember, was a version of the fall of Parnell; the idea that a quite honest man might be secret from a pure love of secrecy, of solitary self-control. I went out of that garden with a blurred sensation of the million possibilities of creative literature. The feeling increased as my way fell back into the wood; for a wood is a palace with a million corridors that cross each other everywhere. I really had the feeling that I had seen the creative quality; which is supernatural. I had seen what Virgil calls the Old Man of the Forest: I had seen an elf. The trees thronged behind my path; I have never seen him again; and now I shall not see him, because he died last Tuesday.

XXII. The Orthodox Barber

Those thinkers who cannot believe in any gods often assert that the love of humanity would be in itself sufficient for them; and so, perhaps, it would, if they had it. There is a very real thing which may be called the love of humanity; in our time it exists almost entirely among what are called uneducated people; and it does not exist at all among the people who talk about it.

A positive pleasure in being in the presence of any other human being is chiefly remarkable, for instance, in the masses on Bank Holiday; that is why they are so much nearer Heaven (despite appearances) than any other part of our population.

I remember seeing a crowd of factory girls getting into an empty train at a wayside country station. There were about twenty of them; they all got into one carriage; and they left all the rest of the train entirely empty. That is the real love of humanity. That is the definite pleasure in the immediate proximity of one’s own kind. Only this coarse, rank, real love of men seems to be entirely lacking in those who propose the love of humanity as a substitute for all other love; honourable, rationalistic idealists.

I can well remember the explosion of human joy which marked the sudden starting of that train; all the factory girls who could not find seats (and they must have been the majority) relieving their feelings by jumping up and down. Now I have never seen any rationalistic idealists do this. I have never seen twenty modern philosophers crowd into one third-class carriage for the mere pleasure of being together. I have never seen twenty Mr. McCabes all in one carriage and all jumping up and down.

Some people express a fear that vulgar trippers will overrun all beautiful places, such as Hampstead or Burnham Beeches. But their fear is unreasonable; because trippers always prefer to trip together; they pack as close as they can; they have a suffocating passion of philanthropy.

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But among the minor and milder aspects of the same principle, I have no hesitation in placing the problem of the colloquial barber. Before any modern man talks with authority about loving men, I insist (I insist with violence) that he shall always be very much pleased when his barber tries to talk to him. His barber is humanity: let him love that. If he is not pleased at this, I will not accept any substitute in the way of interest in the Congo or the future of Japan. If a man cannot love his barber whom he has seen, how shall he love the Japanese whom he has not seen?

It is urged against the barber that he begins by talking about the weather; so do all dukes and diplomatists, only that they talk about it with ostentatious fatigue and indifference, whereas the barber talks about it with an astonishing, nay incredible, freshness of interest. It is objected to him that he tells people that they are going bald. That is to say, his very virtues are cast up against him; he is blamed because, being a specialist, he is a sincere specialist, and because, being a tradesman, he is not entirely a slave. But the only proof of such things is by example; therefore I will prove the excellence of the conversation of barbers by a specific case. Lest any one should accuse me of attempting to prove it by fictitious means, I beg to say quite seriously that though I forget the exact language employed, the following conversation between me and a human (I trust), living barber really took place a few days ago.

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I had been invited to some At Home to meet the Colonial Premiers, and lest I should be mistaken for some partly reformed bush-ranger out of the interior of Australia I went into a shop in the Strand to get shaved. While I was undergoing the torture the man said to me:

“There seems to be a lot in the papers about this new shaving, sir. It seems you can shave yourself with anything — with a stick or a stone or a pole or a poker” (here I began for the first time to detect a sarcastic intonation) “or a shovel or a — —”

Here he hesitated for a word, and I, although I knew nothing about the matter, helped him out with suggestions in the same rhetorical vein.

“Or a button-hook,” I said, “or a blunderbuss or a battering-ram or a piston-rod — —”

He resumed, refreshed with this assistance, “Or a curtain rod or a candle-stick, or a — —”

“Cow-catcher,” I suggested eagerly, and we continued in this ecstatic duet for some time. Then I asked him what it was all about, and he told me. He explained the thing eloquently and at length.

“The funny part of it is,” he said, “that the thing isn’t new at all. It’s been talked about ever since I was a boy, and long before. There is always a notion that the razor might be done without somehow. But none of those schemes ever came to anything; and I don’t believe myself that this will.”

“Why, as to that,” I said, rising slowly from the chair and trying to put on my coat inside out, “I don’t know how it may be in the case of you and your new shaving. Shaving, with all respect to you, is a trivial and materialistic thing, and in such things startling inventions are sometimes made. But what you say reminds me in some dark and dreamy fashion of something else. I recall it especially when you tell me, with such evident experience and sincerity, that the new shaving is not really new. My friend, the human race is always trying this dodge of making everything entirely easy; but the difficulty which it shifts off one thing it shifts on to another. If one man has not the toil of preparing a man’s chin, I suppose that some other man has the toil of preparing something very curious to put on a man’s chin. It would be nice if we could be shaved without troubling anybody. It would be nicer still if we could go unshaved without annoying anybody —

“‘But, O wise friend, chief Barber of the Strand,
Brother, nor you nor I have made the world.’

“Whoever made it, who is wiser, and we hope better than we, made it under strange limitations, and with painful conditions of pleasure.

“In the first and darkest of its books it is fiercely written that a man shall not eat his cake and have it; and though all men talked until the stars were old it would still be true that a man who has lost his razor could not shave with it. But every now and then men jump up with the new something or other and say that everything can be had without sacrifice, that bad is good if you are only enlightened, and that there is no real difference between being shaved and not being shaved. The difference, they say, is only a difference of degree; everything is evolutionary and relative. Shavedness is immanent in man. Every ten-penny nail is a Potential Razor. The superstitious people of the past (they say) believed that a lot of black bristles standing out at right angles to one’s face was a positive affair. But the higher criticism teaches us better. Bristles are merely negative. They are a Shadow where Shaving should be.

“Well, it all goes on, and I suppose it all means something. But a baby is the Kingdom of God, and if you try to kiss a baby he will know whether you are shaved or not. Perhaps I am mixing up being shaved and being saved; my democratic sympathies have always led me to drop my ‘h’s.’ In another moment I may suggest that goats represent the lost because goats have long beards. This is growing altogether too allegorical.

“Nevertheless,” I added, as I paid the bill, “I have really been profoundly interested in what you told me about the New Shaving. Have you ever heard of a thing called the New theology?”

He smiled and said that he had not.

XXIII. The Toy Theatre

There is only one reason why all grown-up people do not play with toys; and it is a fair reason. The reason is that playing with toys takes so very much more time and trouble than anything else. Playing as children mean playing is the most serious thing in the world; and as soon as we have small duties or small sorrows we have to abandon to some extent so enormous and ambitious a plan of life. We have enough strength for politics and commerce and art and philosophy; we have not enough strength for play. This is a truth which every one will recognize who, as a child, has ever played with anything at all; any one who has played with bricks, any one who has played with dolls, any one who has played with tin soldiers. My journalistic work, which earns money, is not pursued with such awful persistency as that work which earned nothing.

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Take the case of bricks. If you publish a book to-morrow in twelve volumes (it would be just like you) on “The Theory and Practice of European Architecture,” your work may be laborious, but it is fundamentally frivolous. It is not serious as the work of a child piling one brick on the other is serious; for the simple reason that if your book is a bad book no one will ever be able ultimately and entirely to prove to you that it is a bad book. Whereas if his balance of bricks is a bad balance of bricks, it will simply tumble down. And if I know anything of children, he will set to work solemnly and sadly to build it up again. Whereas, if I know anything of authors, nothing would induce you to write your book again, or even to think of it again if you could help it.

Take the case of dolls. It is much easier to care for an educational cause than to care for a doll. It is as easy to write an article on education as to write an article on toffee or tramcars or anything else. But it is almost as difficult to look after a doll as to look after a child. The little girls that I meet in the little streets of Battersea worship their dolls in a way that reminds one not so much of play as idolatry. In some cases the love and care of the artistic symbol has actually become more important than the human reality which it was, I suppose, originally meant to symbolize.

I remember a Battersea little girl who wheeled her large baby sister stuffed into a doll’s perambulator. When questioned on this course of conduct, she replied: “I haven’t got a dolly, and Baby is pretending to be my dolly.” Nature was indeed imitating art. First a doll had been a substitute for a child; afterwards a child was a mere substitute for a doll. But that opens other matters; the point is here that such devotion takes up most of the brain and most of the life; much as if it were really the thing which it is supposed to symbolize. The point is that the man writing on motherhood is merely an educationalist; the child playing with a doll is a mother.

Take the case of soldiers. A man writing an article on military strategy is simply a man writing an article; a horrid sight. But a boy making a campaign with tin soldiers is like a General making a campaign with live soldiers. He must to the limit of his juvenile powers think about the thing; whereas the war correspondent need not think at all. I remember a war correspondent who remarked after the capture of Methuen: “This renewed activity on the part of Delarey is probably due to his being short of stores.” The same military critic had mentioned a few paragraphs before that Delarey was being hard pressed by a column which was pursuing him under the command of Methuen. Methuen chased Delarey; and Delarey’s activity was due to his being short of stores. Otherwise he would have stood quite still while he was chased. I run after Jones with a hatchet, and if he turns round and tries to get rid of me the only possible explanation is that he has a very small balance at his bankers. I cannot believe that any boy playing at soldiers would be as idiotic as this. But then any one playing at anything has to be serious. Whereas, as I have only too good reason to know, if you are writing an article you can say anything that comes into your head.

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Broadly, then, what keeps adults from joining in children’s games is, generally speaking, not that they have no pleasure in them; it is simply that they have no leisure for them. It is that they cannot afford the expenditure of toil and time and consideration for so grand and grave a scheme. I have been myself attempting for some time past to complete a play in a small toy theatre, the sort of toy theatre that used to be called Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured; only that I drew and coloured the figures and scenes myself. Hence I was free from the degrading obligation of having to pay either a penny or twopence; I only had to pay a shilling a sheet for good cardboard and a shilling a box for bad water colours. The kind of miniature stage I mean is probably familiar to every one; it is never more than a development of the stage which Skelt made and Stevenson celebrated.

But though I have worked much harder at the toy theatre than I ever worked at any tale or article, I cannot finish it; the work seems too heavy for me. I have to break off and betake myself to lighter employments; such as the biographies of great men. The play of “St. George and the Dragon,” over which I have burnt the midnight oil (you must colour the thing by lamplight because that is how it will be seen), still lacks most conspicuously, alas! two wings of the Sultan’s Palace, and also some comprehensible and workable way of getting up the curtain.

All this gives me a feeling touching the real meaning of immortality. In this world we cannot have pure pleasure. This is partly because pure pleasure would be dangerous to us and to our neighbours. But it is partly because pure pleasure is a great deal too much trouble. If I am ever in any other and better world, I hope that I shall have enough time to play with nothing but toy theatres; and I hope that I shall have enough divine and superhuman energy to act at least one play in them without a hitch.

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Meanwhile the philosophy of toy theatres is worth any one’s consideration. All the essential morals which modern men need to learn could be deduced from this toy. Artistically considered, it reminds us of the main principle of art, the principle which is in most danger of being forgotten in our time. I mean the fact that art consists of limitation; the fact that art is limitation. Art does not consist in expanding things. Art consists of cutting things down, as I cut down with a pair of scissors my very ugly figures of St. George and the Dragon. Plato, who liked definite ideas, would like my cardboard dragon; for though the creature has few other artistic merits he is at least dragonish. The modern philosopher, who likes infinity, is quite welcome to a sheet of the plain cardboard. The most artistic thing about the theatrical art is the fact that the spectator looks at the whole thing through a window. This is true even of theatres inferior to my own; even at the Court Theatre or His Majesty’s you are looking through a window; an unusually large window. But the advantage of the small theatre exactly is that you are looking through a small window. Has not every one noticed how sweet and startling any landscape looks when seen through an arch? This strong, square shape, this shutting off of everything else is not only an assistance to beauty; it is the essential of beauty. The most beautiful part of every picture is the frame.

This especially is true of the toy theatre; that, by reducing the scale of events it can introduce much larger events. Because it is small it could easily represent the earthquake in Jamaica. Because it is small it could easily represent the Day of Judgment. Exactly in so far as it is limited, so far it could play easily with falling cities or with falling stars. Meanwhile the big theatres are obliged to be economical because they are big. When we have understood this fact we shall have understood something of the reason why the world has always been first inspired by small nationalities. The vast Greek philosophy could fit easier into the small city of Athens than into the immense Empire of Persia. In the narrow streets of Florence Dante felt that there was room for Purgatory and Heaven and Hell. He would have been stifled by the British Empire. Great empires are necessarily prosaic; for it is beyond human power to act a great poem upon so great a scale. You can only represent very big ideas in very small spaces. My toy theatre is as philosophical as the drama of Athens.

XXIV. A Tragedy of Twopence

My relations with the readers of this page have been long and pleasant, but — perhaps for that very reason — I feel that the time has come when I ought to confess the one great crime of my life. It happened a long time ago; but it is not uncommon for a belated burst of remorse to reveal such dark episodes long after they have occurred. It has nothing to do with the orgies of the Anti-Puritan League. That body is so offensively respectable that a newspaper, in describing it the other day, referred to my friend Mr. Edgar Jepson as Canon Edgar Jepson; and it is believed that similar titles are intended for all of us. No; it is not by the conduct of Archbishop Crane, of Dean Chesterton, of the Rev. James Douglas, of Monsignor Bland, and even of that fine and virile old ecclesiastic, Cardinal Nesbit, that I wish (or rather, am driven by my conscience) to make this declaration. The crime was committed in solitude and without accomplices. Alone I did it. Let me, with the characteristic thirst of penitents to get the worst of the confession over, state it first of all in its most dreadful and indefensible form. There is at the present moment in a town in Germany (unless he has died of rage on discovering his wrong), a restaurant-keeper to whom I still owe twopence. I last left his open-air restaurant knowing that I owed him twopence. I carried it away under his nose, despite the fact that the nose was a decidedly Jewish one. I have never paid him, and it is highly improbable that I ever shall. How did this villainy come to occur in a life which has been, generally speaking, deficient in the dexterity necessary for fraud? The story is as follows — and it has a moral, though there may not be room for that.

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It is a fair general rule for those travelling on the Continent that the easiest way of talking in a foreign language is to talk philosophy. The most difficult kind of talking is to talk about common necessities. The reason is obvious. The names of common necessities vary completely with each nation and are generally somewhat odd and quaint. How, for instance, could a Frenchman suppose that a coalbox would be called a “scuttle”? If he has ever seen the word scuttle it has been in the Jingo Press, where the “policy of scuttle” is used whenever we give up something to a small Power like Liberals, instead of giving up everything to a great Power, like Imperialists. What Englishman in Germany would be poet enough to guess that the

Germans call a glove a “hand-shoe.” Nations name their necessities by nicknames, so to speak. They call their tubs and stools by quaint, elvish, and almost affectionate names, as if they were their own children! But any one can argue about abstract things in a foreign language who has ever got as far as Exercise IV. in a primer. For as soon as he can put a sentence together at all he finds that the words used in abstract or philosophical discussions are almost the same in all nations. They are the same, for the simple reason that they all come from the things that were the roots of our common civilisation. From Christianity, from the Roman Empire, from the mediaeval Church, or the French Revolution. “Nation,” “citizen,” “religion,” “philosophy,” “authority,” “the Republic,” words like these are nearly the same in all the countries in which we travel. Restrain, therefore, your exuberant admiration for the young man who can argue with six French atheists when he first lands at Dieppe. Even I can do that. But very likely the same young man does not know the French for a shoe-horn. But to this generalisation there are three great exceptions. (1) In the case of countries that are not European at all, and have never had our civic conceptions, or the old Latin scholarship. I do not pretend that the Patagonian phrase for “citizenship” at once leaps to the mind, or that a Dyak’s word for “the Republic” has been familiar to me from the nursery. (2) In the case of Germany, where, although the principle does apply to many words such as “nation” and “philosophy,” it does not apply so generally, because Germany has had a special and deliberate policy of encouraging the purely German part of its language. (3) In the case where one does not know any of the language at all, as is generally the case with me.

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Such at least was my situation on the dark day on which I committed my crime. Two of the exceptional conditions which I have mentioned were combined. I was walking about a German town, and I knew no German. I knew, however, two or three of those great and solemn words which hold our European civilisation together — one of which is “cigar.” As it was a hot and dreamy day, I sat down at a table in a sort of beer-garden, and ordered a cigar and a pot of lager. I drank the lager, and paid for it. I smoked the cigar, forgot to pay for it, and walked away, gazing rapturously at the royal outline of the Taunus mountains. After about ten minutes, I suddenly remembered that I had not paid for the cigar. I went back to the place of refreshment, and put down the money. But the proprietor also had forgotten the cigar, and he merely said guttural things in a tone of query, asking me, I suppose, what I wanted. I said “cigar,” and he gave me a cigar. I endeavoured while putting down the money to wave away the cigar with gestures of refusal. He thought that my rejection was of the nature of a condemnation of that particular cigar, and brought me another. I whirled my arms like a windmill, seeking to convey by the sweeping universality of my gesture that my rejection was a rejection of cigars in general, not of that particular article. He mistook this for the ordinary impatience of common men, and rushed forward, his hands filled with miscellaneous cigars, pressing them upon me. In desperation I tried other kinds of pantomime, but the more cigars I refused the more and more rare and precious cigars were brought out of the deeps and recesses of the establishment. I tried in vain to think of a way of conveying to him the fact that I had already had the cigar. I imitated the action of a citizen smoking, knocking off and throwing away a cigar. The watchful proprietor only thought I was rehearsing (as in an ecstasy of anticipation) the joys of the cigar he was going to give me. At last I retired baffled: he would not take the money and leave the cigars alone. So that this restaurant-keeper (in whose face a love of money shone like the sun at noonday) flatly and firmly refused to receive the twopence that I certainly owed him; and I took that twopence of his away with me and rioted on it for months. I hope that on the last day the angels will break the truth very gently to that unhappy man.

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This is the true and exact account of the Great Cigar Fraud, and the moral of it is this — that civilisation is founded upon abstractions. The idea of debt is one which cannot be conveyed by physical motions at all, because it is an abstract idea. And civilisation obviously would be nothing without debt. So when hard-headed fellows who study scientific sociology (which does not exist) come and tell you that civilisation is material or indifferent to the abstract, just ask yourselves how many of the things that make up our Society, the Law, or the Stocks and Shares, or the National Debt, you would be able to convey with your face and your ten fingers by grinning and gesticulating to a German innkeeper.

XXV. A Cab Ride Across Country

Sown somewhere far off in the shallow dales of Hertfordshire there lies a village of great beauty, and I doubt not of admirable virtue, but of eccentric and unbalanced literary taste, which asked the present writer to come down to it on Sunday afternoon and give an address.

Now it was very difficult to get down to it at all on Sunday afternoon, owing to the indescribable state into which our national laws and customs have fallen in connection with the seventh day. It is not Puritanism; it is simply anarchy. I should have some sympathy with the Jewish Sabbath, if it were a Jewish Sabbath, and that for three reasons; first, that religion is an intrinsically sympathetic thing; second, that I cannot conceive any religion worth calling a religion without a fixed and material observance; and third, that the particular observance of sitting still and doing no work is one that suits my temperament down to the ground.

But the absurdity of the modern English convention is that it does not let a man sit still; it only perpetually trips him up when it has forced him to walk about. Our Sabbatarianism does not forbid us to ask a man in Battersea to come and talk in Hertfordshire; it only prevents his getting there. I can understand that a deity might be worshipped with joys, with flowers, and fireworks in the old European style. I can understand that a deity might be worshipped with sorrows. But I cannot imagine any deity being worshipped with inconveniences. Let the good Moslem go to Mecca, or let him abide in his tent, according to his feelings for religious symbols. But surely Allah cannot see anything particularly dignified in his servant being misled by the time-table, finding that the old Mecca express is not running, missing his connection at Bagdad, or having to wait three hours in a small side station outside Damascus.

So it was with me on this occasion. I found there was no telegraph service at all to this place; I found there was only one weak thread of train-service. Now if this had been the authority of real English religion, I should have submitted to it at once. If I believed that the telegraph clerk could not send the telegram because he was at that moment rigid in an ecstasy of prayer, I should think all telegrams unimportant in comparison. If I could believe that railway porters when relieved from their duties rushed with passion to the nearest place of worship, I should say that all lectures and everything else ought to give way to such a consideration. I should not complain if the national faith forbade me to make any appointments of labour or self-expression on the Sabbath. But, as it is, it only tells me that I may very probably keep the Sabbath by not keeping the appointment.

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But I must resume the real details of my tale. I found that there was only one train in the whole of that Sunday by which I could even get within several hours or several miles of the time or place. I therefore went to the telephone, which is one of my favourite toys, and down which I have shouted many valuable, but prematurely arrested, monologues upon art and morals. I remember a mild shock of surprise when I discovered that one could use the telephone on Sunday; I did not expect it to be cut off, but I expected it to buzz more than on ordinary days, to the advancement of our national religion. Through this instrument, in fewer words than usual, and with a comparative economy of epigram, I ordered a taxi-cab to take me to the railway station. I have not a word to say in general either against telephones or taxi-cabs; they seem to me two of the purest and most poetic of the creations of modern scientific civilisation. Unfortunately, when the taxi-cab started, it did exactly what modern scientific civilisation has done — it broke down. The result of this was that when I arrived at King’s Cross my only train was gone; there was a Sabbath calm in the station, a calm in the eyes of the porters, and in my breast, if calm at all, if any calm, a calm despair.

There was not, however, very much calm of any sort in my breast on first making the discovery; and it was turned to blinding horror when I learnt that I could not even send a telegram to the organisers of the meeting. To leave my entertainers in the lurch was sufficiently exasperating; to leave them without any intimation was simply low. I reasoned with the official. I said: “Do you really mean to say that if my brother were dying and my mother in this place, I could not communicate with her?” He was a man of literal and laborious mind; he asked me if my brother was dying. I answered that he was in excellent and even offensive health, but that I was inquiring upon a question of principle. What would happen if England were invaded, or if I alone knew how to turn aside a comet or an earthquake. He waved away these hypotheses in the most irresponsible spirit, but he was quite certain that telegrams could not reach this particular village. Then something exploded in me; that element of the outrageous which is the mother of all adventures sprang up ungovernable, and I decided that I would not be a cad merely because some of my remote ancestors had been Calvinists. I would keep my appointment if I lost all my money and all my wits. I went out into the quiet London street, where my quiet London cab was still waiting for its fare in the cold misty morning. I placed myself comfortably in the London cab and told the London driver to drive me to the other end of Hertfordshire. And he did.

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I shall not forget that drive. It was doubtful weather, even in a motor-cab, the thing was possible with any consideration for the driver, not to speak of some slight consideration for the people in the road. I urged the driver to eat and drink something before he started, but he said (with I know not what pride of profession or delicate sense of adventure) that he would rather do it when we arrived — if we ever did. I was by no means so delicate; I bought a varied selection of pork-pies at a little shop that was open (why was that shop open? — it is all a mystery), and ate them as we went along. The beginning was sombre and irritating. I was annoyed, not with people, but with things, like a baby; with the motor for breaking down and with Sunday for being Sunday. And the sight of the northern slums expanded and ennobled, but did not decrease, my gloom: Whitechapel has an Oriental gaudiness in its squalor; Battersea and Camberwell have an indescribable bustle of democracy; but the poor parts of North London... well, perhaps I saw them wrongly under that ashen morning and on that foolish errand.

It was one of those days which more than once this year broke the retreat of winter; a winter day that began too late to be spring. We were already clear of the obstructing crowds and quickening our pace through a borderland of market gardens and isolated public-houses, when the grey showed golden patches and a good light began to glitter on everything. The cab went quicker and quicker. The open land whirled wider and wider; but I did not lose my sense of being battled with and thwarted that I had felt in the thronged slums. Rather the feeling increased, because of the great difficulty of space and time. The faster went the car, the fiercer and thicker I felt the fight.

The whole landscape seemed charging at me — and just missing me. The tall, shining grass went by like showers of arrows; the very trees seemed like lances hurled at my heart, and shaving it by a hair’s breadth. Across some vast, smooth valley I saw a beech-tree by the white road stand up little and defiant. It grew bigger and bigger with blinding rapidity. It charged me like a tilting knight, seemed to hack at my head, and pass by. Sometimes when we went round a curve of road, the effect was yet more awful. It seemed as if some tree or windmill swung round to smite like a boomerang. The sun by this time was a blazing fact; and I saw that all Nature is chivalrous and militant. We do wrong to seek peace in Nature; we should rather seek the nobler sort of war; and see all the trees as green banners.

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I gave my address, arriving just when everybody was deciding to leave. When my cab came reeling into the market-place they decided, with evident disappointment, to remain. Over the lecture I draw a veil. When I came back home I was called to the telephone, and a meek voice expressed regret for the failure of the motor-cab, and even said something about any reasonable payment. “Whom can I pay for my own superb experience? What is the usual charge for seeing the clouds shattered by the sun? What is the market price of a tree blue on the sky-line and then blinding white in the sun? Mention your price for that windmill that stood behind the hollyhocks in the garden. Let me pay you for...” Here it was, I think, that we were cut off.

XXVI. The Two Noises

For three days and three nights the sea had charged England as Napoleon charged her at Waterloo. The phrase is instinctive, because away to the last grey line of the sea there was only the look of galloping squadrons, impetuous, but with a common purpose. The sea came on like cavalry, and when it touched the shore it opened the blazing eyes and deafening tongues of the artillery. I saw the worst assault at night on a seaside parade where the sea smote on the doors of England with the hammers of earthquake, and a white smoke went up into the black heavens. There one could thoroughly realise what an awful thing a wave really is. I talk like other people about the rushing swiftness of a wave. But the horrible thing about a wave is its hideous slowness. It lifts its load of water laboriously: in that style at once slow and slippery in which a Titan might lift a load of rock and then let it slip at last to be shattered into shock of dust. In front of me that night the waves were not like water: they were like falling city walls. The breaker rose first as if it did not wish to attack the earth; it wished only to attack the stars. For a time it stood up in the air as naturally as a tower; then it went a little wrong in its outline, like a tower that might some day fall. When it fell it was as if a powder magazine blew up.

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I have never seen such a sea. All the time there blew across the land one of those stiff and throttling winds that one can lean up against like a wall. One expected anything to be blown out of shape at any instant; the lamp-post to be snapped like a green stalk, the tree to be whirled away like a straw. I myself should certainly have been blown out of shape if I had possessed any shape to be blown out of; for I walked along the edge of the stone embankment above the black and battering sea and could not rid myself of the idea that it was an invasion of England. But as I walked along this edge I was somewhat surprised to find that as I neared a certain spot another noise mingled with the ceaseless cannonade of the sea.

Somewhere at the back, in some pleasure ground or casino or place of entertainment, an undaunted brass band was playing against the cosmic uproar. I do not know what band it was. Judging from the boisterous British Imperialism of most of the airs it played, I should think it was a German band. But there was no doubt about its energy, and when I came quite close under it it really drowned the storm. It was playing such things as “Tommy Atkins” and “You Can Depend on Young Australia,” and many others of which I do not know the words, but I should think they would be “John, Pat, and Mac, With the Union Jack,” or that fine though unwritten poem, “Wait till the Bull Dog gets a bite of you.” Now, I for one detest Imperialism, but I have a great deal of sympathy with Jingoism. And there seemed something so touching about this unbroken and innocent bragging under the brutal menace of Nature that it made, if I may so put it, two tunes in my mind. It is so obvious and so jolly to be optimistic about England, especially when you are an optimist — and an Englishman. But through all that glorious brass came the voice of the invasion, the undertone of that awful sea. I did a foolish thing. As I could not express my meaning in an article, I tried to express it in a poem — a bad one. You can call it what you like. It might be called “Doubt,” or “Brighton.” It might be called “The Patriot,” or yet again “The German Band.” I would call it “The Two Voices,” but that title has been taken for a grossly inferior poem. This is how it began —

“They say the sun is on your knees
A lamp to light your lands from harm,
They say you turn the seven seas
To little brooks about your farm.
I hear the sea and the new song
that calls you empress all day long.

“(O fallen and fouled! O you that lie
Dying in swamps — you shall not die,
Your rich have secrets, and stronge lust,
Your poor are chased about like dust,
Emptied of anger and surprise —
And God has gone out of their eyes,
Your cohorts break — your captains lie,
I say to you, you shall not die.)”

Then I revived a little, remembering that after all there is an English country that the Imperialists have never found. The British Empire may annex what it likes, it will never annex England. It has not even discovered the island, let alone conquered it. I took up the two tunes again with a greater sympathy for the first —

“I know the bright baptismal rains,

I love your tender troubled skies,
I know your little climbing lanes,
Are peering into Paradise,
From open hearth to orchard cool,
How bountiful and beautiful.

“(O throttled and without a cry,
O strangled and stabbed, you shall not die,
The frightful word is on your walls,
The east sea to the west sea calls,
The stars are dying in the sky,
You shall not die; you shall not die.)”

Then the two great noises grew deafening together, the noise of the peril of England and the louder noise of the placidity of England. It is their fault if the last verse was written a little rudely and at random —

“I see you how you smile in state
Straight from the Peak to Plymouth Bar,
You need not tell me you are great,
I know how more than great you are.
I know what William Shakespeare was,
I have seen Gainsborough and the grass.

“(O given to believe a lie,
O my mad mother, do do not die,
Whose eyes turn all ways but within,
Whose sin is innocence of sin,
Whose eyes, blinded with beams at noon,
Can see the motes upon the moon,
You shall your lover still pursue.
To what last madhouse shelters you
I will uphold you, even I.
You that are dead. You shall not die.)”

But the sea would not stop for me any more than for Canute; and as for the German band, that would not stop for anybody.

XXVII. Some Policemen and a Moral

The other day I was nearly arrested by two excited policemen in a wood in Yorkshire. I was on a holiday, and was engaged in that rich and intricate mass of pleasures, duties, and discoveries which for the keeping off of the profane, we disguise by the exoteric name of Nothing. At the moment in question I was throwing a big Swedish knife at a tree, practising (alas, without success) that useful trick of knife-throwing by which men murder each other in Stevenson's romances.

Suddenly the forest was full of two policemen; there was something about their appearance in and relation to the greenwood that reminded me, I know not how, of some happy Elizabethan comedy. They asked what the knife was, who I was, why I was throwing it, what my address was, trade, religion, opinions on the Japanese war, name of favourite cat, and so on. They also said I was damaging the tree; which was, I am sorry to say, not true, because I could not hit it. The peculiar philosophical importance, however, of the incident was this. After some half-hour's animated conversation, the exhibition of an envelope, an unfinished poem, which was read with great care, and, I trust, with some profit, and one or two other subtle detective strokes, the elder of the two knights became convinced that I really was what I professed to be, that I was a journalist, that I was on the DAILY NEWS (this was the real stroke; they were shaken with a terror common to all tyrants), that I lived in a particular place as stated, and that I was stopping with particular people in Yorkshire, who happened to be wealthy and well-known in the neighbourhood.

In fact the leading constable became so genial and complimentary at last that he ended up by representing himself as a reader of my work. And when that was said, everything was settled. They acquitted me and let me pass.

“But,” I said, “what of this mangled tree? It was to the rescue of that Dryad, tethered to the earth, that you rushed like knight-errants. You, the higher humanitarians, are not deceived by the seeming stillness of the green things, a stillness like the stillness of the cataract, a headlong and crashing silence. You know that a tree is but a creature tied to the ground by one leg. You will not let assassins with their Swedish daggers shed the green blood of such a being. But if so, why am I not in custody; where are my gyves? Produce, from some portion of your persons, my mouldy straw and my grated window. The facts of which I have just convinced you, that my name is Chesterton, that I am a journalist, that I am living with the well-known and philanthropic Mr. Blank of Ilkley, cannot have anything to do with the question of whether I have been guilty of cruelty to vegetables. The tree is none the less damaged even though it may reflect with a dark pride that it was wounded by a gentleman connected with the Liberal press. Wounds in the bark do not more rapidly close up because they are inflicted by people who are stopping with Mr. Blank of Ilkley. That tree, the ruin of its former self, the wreck of what was once a giant of the forest, now splintered and laid low by the brute superiority of a Swedish knife, that tragedy, constable, cannot be wiped out even by stopping for several months more with some wealthy person. It is incredible that you have no legal claim to arrest even the most august and fashionable persons on this charge. For if so, why did you interfere with me at all?"

I made the later and larger part of this speech to the silent wood, for the two policemen had vanished almost as quickly as they came. It is very possible, of course, that they were fairies. In that case the somewhat illogical character of their view of crime, law, and personal responsibility would find a bright and elfish explanation; perhaps if I had lingered in the glade till moonrise I might have seen rings of tiny policemen dancing on the sward; or running about with glow-worm belts, arresting grasshoppers for damaging blades of grass. But taking the bolder hypothesis, that they really were policemen, I find myself in a certain difficulty. I was certainly accused of something which was either an offence or was not. I was let off because I proved I was a guest at a big house. The inference seems painfully clear; either it is not a proof of infamy to throw a knife about in a lonely wood, or else it is a proof of innocence to know a rich man. Suppose a very poor person, poorer even than a journalist, a navvy or unskilled labourer, tramping in search of work, often changing his lodgings, often, perhaps, failing in his rent. Suppose he had been intoxicated with the green gaiety of the ancient wood. Suppose he had thrown knives at trees and could give no description of a dwelling-place except that he had been fired out of the last. As I walked home through a cloudy and purple twilight I wondered how he would have got on.

Moral. We English are always boasting that we are very illogical; there is no great harm in that. There is no subtle spiritual evil in the fact that people always brag about their vices; it is when they begin to brag about their virtues that they become insufferable. But there is this to be said, that illogicality in your constitution or your legal methods may become very dangerous if there happens to be some great national vice or national temptation which many take advantage of the chaos. Similarly, a drunkard ought to have strict rules and hours; a temperate man may obey his instincts.

Take some absurd anomaly in the British law — the fact, for instance, that a man ceasing to be an M. P. has to become Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds, an office which I believe was intended originally to keep down some wild robbers near Chiltern, wherever that is. Obviously this kind of illogicality does not matter very much, for the simple reason that there is no great temptation to take advantage of it. Men retiring from Parliament do not have any furious impulse to hunt robbers in the hills. But if there were a real danger that wise, white-haired, venerable politicians taking leave of public life would desire to do this (if, for instance, there were any money in it), then clearly, if we went on saying that the illogicality did not matter, when (as a matter of fact) Sir Michael Hicks-Beach was hanging Chiltern shop-keepers every day and taking their property, we should be very silly. The illogicality would matter, for it would have become an excuse for indulgence. It is only the very good who can live riotous lives.

Now this is exactly what is present in cases of police investigation such as the one narrated above. There enters into such things a great national sin, a far greater sin than drink — the habit of respecting a gentleman. Snobbishness has, like drink, a kind of grand poetry. And snobbishness has this peculiar and devilish quality of evil, that it is rampant among very kindly people, with open hearts and houses. But it is our great English vice; to be watched more fiercely than small-pox. If a man wished to hear the worst and wickedest thing in England summed up in casual English words, he would not find it in any foul oaths or ribald quarrelling. He would find it in the fact that the best kind of working man, when he wishes to praise any one, calls him “a gentleman.” It never occurs to him that he might as well call him “a marquis,” or “a privy councillor” — that he is simply naming a rank or class, not a phrase for a good man. And this perennial temptation to a shameful admiration, must, and, I think, does, constantly come in and distort and poison our police methods.

In this case we must be logical and exact; for we have to keep watch upon ourselves. The power of wealth, and that power at its vilest, is increasing in the modern world. A very good and just people, without this temptation, might not need, perhaps, to make clear rules and systems to guard themselves against the power of our great financiers. But that is because a very just people would have shot them long ago, from mere native good feeling.

XXVIII. The Lion

In the town of Belfort I take a chair and I sit down in the street. We talk in a cant phrase of the Man in the Street, but the Frenchman is the man in the street. Things quite central for him are connected with these lamp-posts and pavements; everything from his meals to his martyrdoms. When first an Englishman looks at a French town or village his first feeling is simply that it is uglier than an English town or village; when he looks again he sees that this comparative absence of the picturesque is chiefly expressed in the plain, precipitous frontage of the houses standing up hard and flat out of the street like the cardboard houses in a pantomime — a hard angularity allied perhaps to the harshness of French logic. When he looks a third time he sees quite simply that it is all because the houses have no front gardens. The vague English spirit loves to have the entrance to its house softened by bushes and broken by steps. It likes to have a little anteroom of hedges half in the house and half out of it; a green room in a double sense. The Frenchman desires no such little pathetic ramparts or halting places, for the street itself is a thing natural and familiar to him.

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The French have no front gardens; but the street is every man's front garden. There are trees in the street, and sometimes fountains. The street is the Frenchman's tavern, for he drinks in the street. It is his dining-room, for he dines in the street. It is his British Museum, for the statues and monuments in French streets are not, as with us, of the worst, but of the best, art of the country, and they are often actually as historical as the Pyramids. The street again is the Frenchman's Parliament, for France has never taken its Chamber of Deputies so seriously as we take our House of Commons, and the quibbles of mere elected nonentities in an official room seem feeble to a people whose fathers have heard the voice of Desmoulins like a trumpet under open heaven, or Victor Hugo shouting from his carriage amid the wreck of the second Republic. And as the Frenchman drinks in the street and dines in the street so also he fights in the street and dies in the street, so that the street can never be commonplace to him.

Take, for instance, such a simple object as a lamp-post. In London a lamp-post is a comic thing. We think of the intoxicated gentleman embracing it, and recalling ancient friendship. But in Paris a lamp-post is a tragic thing. For we think of tyrants hanged on it, and of an end of the world. There is, or was, a bitter Republican paper in Paris called LA LANTERNE. How funny it would be if there were a Progressive paper in England called THE LAMP POST! We have said, then, that the Frenchman is the man in the street; that he can dine in the street, and die in the street. And if I ever pass through Paris and find him going to bed in the street, I shall say that he is still true to the genius of his civilisation. All that is good and all that is evil in France is alike connected with this open-air element. French democracy and French indecency are alike part of the desire to have everything out of doors. Compared to a café, a public-house is a private house.

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There were two reasons why all these fancies should float through the mind in the streets of this especial town of Belfort. First of all, it lies close upon the boundary of France and Germany, and boundaries are the most beautiful things in the world. To love anything is to love its boundaries; thus children will always play on the edge of anything. They build castles on the edge of the sea, and can only be restrained by public proclamation and private violence from walking on the edge of the grass. For when we have come to the end of a thing we have come to the beginning of it.

Hence this town seemed all the more French for being on the very margin of Germany, and although there were many German touches in the place — German names, larger pots of beer, and enormous theatrical barmaids dressed up in outrageous imitation of Alsatian peasants — yet the fixed French colour seemed all the stronger for these specks of something else. All day long and all night long troops of dusty, swarthy, scornful little soldiers went plodding through the streets with an air of stubborn disgust, for German soldiers look as if they despised you, but French soldiers as if they despised you and themselves even more than you. It is a part, I suppose, of the realism of the nation which has made it good at war and science and other things in which what is necessary is combined with what is nasty. And the soldiers and the civilians alike had most of them cropped hair, and that curious kind of head which to an Englishman looks almost brutal, the kind that we call a bullet-head. Indeed, we are speaking very appropriately when we call it a bullet-head, for in intellectual history the heads of Frenchmen have been bullets — yes, and explosive bullets.

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But there was a second reason why in this place one should think particularly of the open-air politics and the open-air art of the French. For this town of Belfort is famous for one of the most typical and powerful of the public monuments of France. From the café table at which I sit I can see the hill beyond the town on which hangs the high and flat-faced citadel, pierced with many windows, and warmed in the evening light. On the steep hill below it is a huge stone lion, itself as large as a hill. It is hacked out of the rock with a sort of gigantic impression. No trivial attempt has been made to make it like a common statue; no attempt to carve the mane into curls, or to distinguish the monster minutely from the earth out of which he rises, shaking the world. The face of the lion has something of the bold conventionality of Assyrian art. The mane of the lion is left like a shapeless cloud of tempest, as if it might literally be said of him that God had clothed his neck with thunder. Even at this distance the thing looks vast, and in some sense prehistoric. Yet it was carved only a little while ago. It commemorates the fact that this town was never taken by the Germans through all the terrible year, but only laid down its arms at last at the command of its own Government. But the spirit of it has been in this land from the beginning — the spirit of something defiant and almost defeated.

As I leave this place and take the railway into Germany the news comes thicker and thicker up the streets that Southern France is in a flame, and that there perhaps will be fought out finally the awful modern battle of the rich and poor. And as I pass into quieter places for the last sign of France on the sky-line, I see the Lion of Belfort stand at bay, the last sight of that great people which has never been at peace.

XXIX. Humanity: an Interlude

Except for some fine works of art, which seem to be there by accident, the City of Brussels is like a bad Paris, a Paris with everything noble cut out, and everything nasty left in. No one can understand Paris and its history who does not understand that its fierceness is the balance and justification of its frivolity. It is called a city of pleasure; but it may also very specially be called a city of pain. The crown of roses is also a crown of thorns. Its people are too prone to hurt others, but quite ready also to hurt themselves. They are martyrs for religion, they are martyrs for irreligion; they are even martyrs for immorality. For the indecency of many of their books and papers is not of the sort which charms and seduces, but of the sort that horrifies and hurts; they are torturing themselves. They lash their own patriotism into life with the same whips which most men use to lash foreigners to silence. The enemies of France can never give an account of her infamy or decay which does not seem insipid and even polite compared with the things which the Nationalists of France say about their own nation. They taunt and torment themselves; sometimes they even deliberately oppress themselves. Thus, when the mob of Paris could make a Government to please itself, it made a sort of sublime tyranny to order itself about. The spirit is the same from the Crusades or St. Bartholomew to the apotheosis of Zola. The old religionists tortured men physically for a moral truth. The new realists torture men morally for a physical truth.

Now Brussels is Paris without this constant purification of pain. Its indecencies are not regrettable incidents in an everlasting revolution. It has none of the things which make good Frenchmen love Paris; it has only the things which make unspeakable Englishmen love it. It has the part which is cosmopolitan — and narrows; not the part which is Parisian — and universal. You can find there (as commonly happens in modern centres) the worst things of all nations — the DAILY MAIL from England, the cheap philosophies from Germany, the loose novels of France, and the drinks of America. But there is no English broad fun, no German kindly ceremony, no American exhilaration, and, above all, no French tradition of fighting for an idea. Though all the boulevards look like Parisian boulevards, though all the shops look like Parisian shops, you cannot look at them steadily for two minutes without feeling the full distance between, let us say, King Leopold and fighters like Clemenceau and Deroulède.

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For all these reasons, and many more, when I had got into Brussels I began to make all necessary arrangements for getting out of it again; and I had impulsively got into a tram which seemed to be going out of the city. In this tram there were two men talking; one was a little man with a black French beard; the other was a baldish man with bushy whiskers, like the financial foreign count in a three-act farce. And about the time that we reached the suburb of the city, and the traffic grew thinner, and the noises more few, I began to hear what they were saying. Though they spoke French quickly, their words were fairly easy to follow, because they were all long words. Anybody can understand long words because they have in them all the lucidity of Latin.

The man with the black beard said: “It must that we have the Progress.”

The man with the whiskers parried this smartly by saying: “It must also that we have the Consolidation International.”

This is a sort of discussion which I like myself, so I listened with some care, and I think I picked up the thread of it. One of the Belgians was a Little Belgian, as we speak of a Little Englander. The other was a Belgian Imperialist, for though Belgium is not quite strong enough to be altogether a nation, she is quite strong enough to be an empire. Being a nation means standing up to your equals, whereas being an empire only means kicking your inferiors. The man with whiskers was the Imperialist, and he was saying: “The science, behold there the new guide of humanity.”

And the man with the beard answered him: “It does not suffice to have progress in the science; one must have it also in the sentiment of the human justice.”

This remark I applauded, as if at a public meeting, but they were much too keen on their argument to hear me. The views I have often heard in England, but never uttered so lucidly, and certainly never so fast. Though Belgian by nation they must both have been essentially French. Whiskers was great on education, which, it seems, is on the march. All the world goes to make itself instructed. It must that the more instructed enlighten the less instructed. Eh, well then, the European must impose upon the savage the science and the light. Also (apparently) he must impose himself on the savage while he is about it. To-day one travelled quickly. The science had changed all. For our fathers, they were religious, and (what was worse) dead. To-day humanity had electricity to the hand; the machines came from triumphing; all the lines and limits of the globe effaced themselves. Soon there would not be but the great Empires and confederations, guided by the science, always the science.

Here Whiskers stopped an instant for breath; and the man with the sentiment for human justice had “la parole” off him in a flash. Without doubt Humanity was on the march, but towards the sentiments, the ideal, the methods moral and pacific. Humanity directed itself towards Humanity. For your wars and empires on behalf of civilisation, what were they in effect? The war, was it not itself an affair of the barbarism? The Empires were they not things savage? The Humanity had passed all that; she was now intellectual. Tolstoy had refined all human souls with the sentiments the most delicate and just. Man was become a spirit; the wings pushed....

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At this important point of evolution the tram came to a jerky stoppage; and staring around I found, to my stunned consternation, that it was almost dark, that I was far away from Brussels, that I could not dream of getting back to dinner; in short, that through the clinging fascination of this great controversy on Humanity and its recent complete alteration by science or Tolstoy, I had landed myself Heaven knows where. I dropped hastily from the suburban tram and let it go on without me.

I was alone in the flat fields out of sight of the city. On one side of the road was one of those small, thin woods which are common in all countries, but of which, by a coincidence, the mystical painters of Flanders were very fond. The night was closing in with cloudy purple and grey; there was one ribbon of silver, the last rag of the sunset. Through the wood went one little path, and somehow it suggested that it might lead to some sign of life — there was no other sign of life on the horizon. I went along it, and soon sank into a sort of dancing twilight of all those tiny trees. There is something subtle and bewildering about that sort of frail and fantastic wood. A forest of big trees seems like a bodily barrier; but somehow that mist of thin lines seems like a spiritual barrier. It is as if one were caught in a fairy cloud or could not pass a phantom. When I had well lost the last gleam of the high road a curious and definite feeling came upon me. Now I suddenly felt something much more practical and extraordinary — the absence of humanity: inhuman loneliness. Of course, there was nothing really lost in my state; but the mood may hit one anywhere. I wanted men — any men; and I felt our awful alliance over all the globe. And at last, when I had walked for what seemed a long time, I saw a light too near the earth to mean anything except the image of God.

I came out on a clear space and a low, long cottage, the door of which was open, but was blocked by a big grey horse, who seemed to prefer to eat with his head inside the sitting-room. I got past him, and found he was being fed by a young man who was sitting down and drinking beer inside, and who saluted me with heavy rustic courtesy, but in a strange tongue. The room was full of staring faces like owls, and these I traced at length as belonging to about six small children. Their father was still working in the fields, but their mother rose when I entered. She smiled, but she and all the rest spoke some rude language, Flamand, I suppose; so that we had to be kind to each other by signs. She fetched me beer, and pointed out my way with her finger; and I drew a picture to please the children; and as it was a picture of two men hitting each other with swords, it pleased them very much. Then I gave a Belgian penny to each child, for as I said on chance in French, "It must be that we have the economic equality." But they had never heard of economic equality, while all Battersea workmen have heard of economic equality, though it is true that they haven't got it.

I found my way back to the city, and some time afterwards I actually saw in the street my two men talking, no doubt still saying, one that Science had changed all in Humanity, and the other that Humanity was now pushing the wings of the purely intellectual. But for me Humanity was hooked on to an accidental picture. I thought of a low and lonely house in the flats, behind a veil or film of slight trees, a man breaking the ground as men have broken from the first morning, and a huge grey horse champing his food within a foot of a child's head, as in the stable where Christ was born.

XXX. The Little Birds Who Won’t Sing

On my last morning on the Flemish coast, when I knew that in a few hours I should be in England, my eye fell upon one of the details of Gothic carving of which Flanders is full. I do not know whether the thing is old, though it was certainly knocked about and indecipherable, but at least it was certainly in the style and tradition of the early Middle Ages. It seemed to represent men bending themselves (not to say twisting themselves) to certain primary employments. Some seemed to be sailors tugging at ropes; others, I think, were reaping; others were energetically pouring something into something else. This is entirely characteristic of the pictures and carvings of the early thirteenth century, perhaps the most purely vigorous time in all history. The great Greeks preferred to carve their gods and heroes doing nothing. Splendid and philosophic as their composure is there is always about it something that marks the master of many slaves. But if there was one thing the early mediaevals liked it was representing people doing something — hunting or hawking, or rowing boats, or treading grapes, or making shoes, or cooking something in a pot. “Quicquid agunt homines, votum, timor, ira voluptas.” (I quote from memory.) The Middle Ages is full of that spirit in all its monuments and manuscripts. Chaucer retains it in his jolly insistence on everybody’s type of trade and toil. It was the earliest and youngest resurrection of Europe, the time when social order was strengthening, but had not yet become oppressive; the time when religious faiths were strong, but had not yet been exasperated. For this reason the whole effect of Greek and Gothic carving is different. The figures in the Elgin marbles, though often reining their steeds for an instant in the air, seem frozen for ever at that perfect instant. But a mass of mediaeval carving seems actually a sort of bustle or hubbub in stone. Sometimes one cannot help feeling that the groups actually move and mix, and the whole front of a great cathedral has the hum of a huge hive.

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But about these particular figures there was a peculiarity of which I could not be sure. Those of them that had any heads had very curious heads, and it seemed to me that they had their mouths open. Whether or no this really meant anything or was an accident of nascent art I do not know; but in the course of wondering I recalled to my mind the fact that singing was connected with many of the tasks there suggested, that there were songs for reapers and songs for sailors hauling ropes. I was still thinking about this small problem when I walked along the pier at Ostend; and I heard some sailors uttering a measured shout as they laboured, and I remembered that sailors still sing in chorus while they work, and even sing different songs according to what part of their work they are doing. And a little while afterwards, when my sea journey was over, the sight of men working in the English fields reminded me again that there are still songs for harvest and for many agricultural routines. And I suddenly wondered why if this were so it should be quite unknown, for any modern trade to have a ritual poetry. How did people come to chant rude poems while pulling certain ropes or gathering certain fruit, and why did nobody do anything of the kind while producing any of the modern things? Why is a modern newspaper never printed by people singing in chorus? Why do shopmen seldom, if ever, sing?

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If reapers sing while reaping, why should not auditors sing while auditing and bankers while banking? If there are songs for all the separate things that have to be done in a boat, why are there not songs for all the separate things that have to be done in a bank? As the train from Dover flew through the Kentish gardens, I tried to write a few songs suitable for commercial gentlemen. Thus, the work of bank clerks when casting up columns might begin with a thundering chorus in praise of Simple Addition.

“Up my lads and lift the ledgers, sleep and ease are o’er. Hear the Stars of Morning shouting: ‘Two and Two are four.’ Though the creeds and realms are reeling, though the sophists roar, Though we weep and pawn our watches, Two and Two are Four.”

“There’s a run upon the Bank — Stand away! For the Manager’s a crank and the Secretary drank, and the
Upper Tooting Bank
Turns to bay!
Stand close: there is a run
On the Bank.
Of our ship, our royal one, let the ringing legend run,
That she fired with every gun
Ere she sank.”

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And as I came into the cloud of London I met a friend of mine who actually is in a bank, and submitted these suggestions in rhyme to him for use among his colleagues. But he was not very hopeful about the matter. It was not (he assured me) that he underrated the verses, or in any sense lamented their lack of polish. No; it was rather, he felt, an indefinable something in the very atmosphere of the society in which we live that makes it spiritually difficult to sing in banks. And I think he must be right; though the matter is very mysterious. I may observe here that I think there must be some mistake in the calculations of the Socialists. They put down all our distress, not to a moral tone, but to the chaos of private enterprise. Now, banks are private; but post-offices are Socialistic: therefore I naturally expected that the post-office would fall into the collectivist idea of a chorus. Judge of my surprise when the lady in my local post-office (whom I urged to sing) dismissed the idea with far more coldness than the bank clerk had done. She seemed indeed, to be in a considerably greater state of depression than he. Should any one suppose that this was the effect of the verses themselves, it is only fair to say that the specimen verse of the Post-Office Hymn ran thus:

“O’er London our letters are shaken like snow,
Our wires o’er the world like the thunderbolts go.
The news that may marry a maiden in Sark,
Or kill an old lady in Finsbury Park.”

Chorus (with a swing of joy and energy):

“Or kill an old lady in Finsbury Park.”

And the more I thought about the matter the more painfully certain it seemed that the most important and typical modern things could not be done with a chorus. One could not, for instance, be a great financier and sing; because the essence of being a great financier is that you keep quiet. You could not even in many modern circles be a public man and sing; because in those circles the essence of being a public man is that you do nearly everything in private. Nobody would imagine a chorus of money-lenders. Every one knows the story of the solicitors’ corps of volunteers who, when the Colonel on the battlefield cried “Charge!” all said simultaneously, “Six-and-eightpence.” Men can sing while charging in a military, but hardly in a legal sense. And at the end of my reflections I had really got no further than the sub-conscious feeling of my friend the bank-clerk — that there is something spiritually suffocating about our life; not about our laws merely, but about our life. Bank-clerks are without songs, not because they are poor, but because they are sad. Sailors are much poorer. As I passed homewards I passed a little tin building of some religious sort, which was shaken with shouting as a trumpet is torn with its own tongue. THEY were singing anyhow; and I had for an instant a fancy I had often had before: that with us the super-human is the only place where you can find the human. Human nature is hunted and has fled into sanctuary.

XXXI. The Riddle of the Ivy

More than a month ago, when I was leaving London for a holiday, a friend walked into my flat in Battersea and found me surrounded with half-packed luggage.

“You seem to be off on your travels,” he said. “Where are you going?”

With a strap between my teeth I replied, “To Battersea.”

“The wit of your remark,” he said, “wholly escapes me.”

“I am going to Battersea,” I repeated, “to Battersea viâ Paris, Belfort, Heidelberg, and Frankfort. My remark contained no wit. It contained simply the truth. I am going to wander over the whole world until once more I find Battersea. Somewhere in the seas of sunset or of sunrise, somewhere in the ultimate archipelago of the earth, there is one little island which I wish to find: an island with low green hills and great white cliffs. Travellers tell me that it is called England (Scotch travellers tell me that it is called Britain), and there is a rumour that somewhere in the heart of it there is a beautiful place called Battersea.”

“I suppose it is unnecessary to tell you,” said my friend, with an air of intellectual comparison, “that this is Battersea?”

“It is quite unnecessary,” I said, “and it is spiritually untrue. I cannot see any Battersea here; I cannot see any London or any England. I cannot see that door. I cannot see that chair: because a cloud of sleep and custom has come across my eyes. The only way to get back to them is to go somewhere else; and that is the real object of travel and the real pleasure of holidays. Do you suppose that I go to France in order to see France? Do you suppose that I go to Germany in order to see Germany? I shall enjoy them both; but it is not them that I am seeking. I am seeking Battersea. The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one’s own country as a foreign land. Now I warn you that this Gladstone bag is compact and heavy, and that if you utter that word ‘paradox’ I shall hurl it at your head. I did not make the world, and I did not make it paradoxical. It is not my fault, it is the truth, that the only way to go to England is to go away from it.”

But when, after only a month’s travelling, I did come back to England, I was startled to find that I had told the exact truth. England did break on me at once beautifully new and beautifully old. To land at Dover is the right way to approach England (most things that are hackneyed are right), for then you see first the full, soft gardens of Kent, which are, perhaps, an exaggeration, but still a typical exaggeration, of the rich rusticity of England. As it happened, also, a fellow-traveller with whom I had fallen into conversation felt the same freshness, though for another cause. She was an American lady who had seen Europe, and had never yet seen England, and she expressed her enthusiasm in that simple and splendid way which is natural to Americans, who are the most idealistic people in the whole world. Their only danger is that the idealist can easily become the idolator. And the American has become so idealistic that he even idealises money. But (to quote a very able writer of American short stories) that is another story.

"I have never been in England before," said the American lady, "yet it is so pretty that I feel as if I have been away from it for a long time."

"So you have," I said; "you have been away for three hundred years."

"What a lot of ivy you have," she said. "It covers the churches and it buries the houses. We have ivy; but I have never seen it grow like that."

"I am interested to hear it," I replied, "for I am making a little list of all the things that are really better in England. Even a month on the Continent, combined with intelligence, will teach you that there are many things that are better abroad. All the things that the DAILY MAIL calls English are better abroad. But there are things entirely English and entirely good. Kippers, for instance, and Free Trade, and front gardens, and individual liberty, and the Elizabethan drama, and hansom cabs, and cricket, and Mr. Will Crooks. Above all, there is the happy and holy custom of eating a heavy breakfast. I cannot imagine that Shakespeare began the day with rolls and coffee, like a Frenchman or a German. Surely he began with bacon or bloaters. In fact, a light bursts upon me; for the first time I see the real meaning of Mrs. Gallup and the Great Cipher. It is merely a mistake in the matter of a capital letter. I withdraw my objections; I accept everything; bacon did write Shakespeare."

"I cannot look at anything but the ivy," she said, "it looks so comfortable."

While she looked at the ivy I opened for the first time for many weeks an English newspaper, and I read a speech of Mr. Balfour in which he said that the House of Lords ought to be preserved because it represented something in the nature of permanent public opinion of England, above the ebb and flow of the parties. Now Mr. Balfour is a perfectly sincere patriot, a man who, from his own point of view, thinks long and seriously about the public needs, and he is, moreover, a man of entirely exceptionable intellectual power. But alas, in spite of all this, when I had read that speech I thought with a heavy heart that there was one more thing that I had to add to the list of the specially English things, such as kippers and cricket; I had to add the specially English kind of humbug. In France things are attacked and defended for what they are. The Catholic Church is attacked because it is Catholic, and defended because it is Catholic. The Republic is defended because it is Republican, and attacked because it is Republican. But here is the ablest of English politicians consoling everybody by telling them that the House of Lords is not really the House of Lords, but something quite different, that the foolish accidental peers whom he meets every night are in some mysterious way experts upon the psychology of the democracy; that if you want to know what the very poor want you must ask the very rich, and that if you want the truth about Hoxton, you must ask for it at Hatfield. If the Conservative defender of the House of Lords were a logical French politician he would simply be a liar. But being an English politician he is simply a poet. The English love of believing that all is as it should be, the English optimism combined with the strong English imagination, is too much even for the obvious facts. In a cold, scientific sense, of course, Mr. Balfour knows that nearly all the Lords who are not Lords by accident are Lords by bribery. He knows, and (as Mr. Belloc excellently said) everybody in Parliament knows the very names of the peers who have purchased their peerages. But the glamour of comfort, the pleasure of reassuring himself and reassuring others, is too strong for this original knowledge; at last it fades from him, and he sincerely and earnestly calls on Englishmen to join with him in admiring an august and public-spirited Senate, having wholly forgotten that the Senate really consists of idiots whom he has himself despised; and adventurers whom he has himself ennobled.

“Your ivy is so beautifully soft and thick,” said the American lady, “it seems to cover almost everything. It must be the most poetical thing in England.”

“It is very beautiful,” I said, “and, as you say, it is very English. Charles Dickens, who was almost more English than England, wrote one of his rare poems about the beauty of ivy. Yes, by all means let us admire the ivy, so deep, so warm, so full of a genial gloom and a grotesque tenderness. Let us admire the ivy; and let us pray to God in His mercy that it may not kill the tree.”

XXXII. The Travellers in State

The other day, to my great astonishment, I caught a train; it was a train going into the Eastern Counties, and I only just caught it. And while I was running along the train (amid general admiration) I noticed that there were a quite peculiar and unusual number of carriages marked “Engaged.” On five, six, seven, eight, nine carriages was pasted the little notice: at five, six, seven, eight, nine windows were big bland men staring out in the conscious pride of possession. Their bodies seemed more than usually impenetrable, their faces more than usual placid. It could not be the Derby, if only for the minor reasons that it was the opposite direction and the wrong day. It could hardly be the King. It could hardly be the French President. For, though these distinguished persons naturally like to be private for three hours, they are at least public for three minutes. A crowd can gather to see them step into the train; and there was no crowd here, or any police ceremonial.

Who were those awful persons, who occupied more of the train than a bricklayer’s beanfeast, and yet were more fastidious and delicate than the King’s own suite? Who were these that were larger than a mob, yet more mysterious than a monarch? Was it possible that instead of our Royal House visiting the Tsar, he was really visiting us? Or does the House of Lords have a breakfast? I waited and wondered until the train slowed down at some station in the direction of Cambridge. Then the large, impenetrable men got out, and after them got out the distinguished holders of the engaged seats. They were all dressed decorously in one colour; they had neatly cropped hair; and they were chained together.

I looked across the carriage at its only other occupant, and our eyes met. He was a small, tired-looking man, and, as I afterwards learnt, a native of Cambridge; by the look of him, some working tradesman there, such as a journeyman tailor or a small clock-mender. In order to make conversation I said I wondered where the convicts were going. His mouth twitched with the instinctive irony of our poor, and he said: “I don’t s’pose they’re goin’ on an ‘oliday at the seaside with little spades and pails.” I was naturally delighted, and, pursuing the same vein of literary invention, I suggested that perhaps dons were taken down to Cambridge chained together like this. And as he lived in Cambridge, and had seen several dons, he was pleased with such a scheme. Then when we had ceased to laugh, we suddenly became quite silent; and the bleak, grey eyes of the little man grew sadder and emptier than an open sea. I knew what he was thinking, because I was thinking the same, because all modern sophists are only sophists, and there is such a thing as mankind. Then at last (and it fell in as exactly as the right last note of a tune one is trying to remember) he said: “Well, I s’pose we ‘ave to do it.” And in those three things, his first speech and his silence and his second speech, there were all the three great fundamental facts of the English democracy, its profound sense of humour, its profound sense of pathos, and its profound sense of helplessness.

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It cannot be too often repeated that all real democracy is an attempt (like that of a jolly hostess) to bring the shy people out. For every practical purpose of a political state, for every practical purpose of a tea-party, he that abaseth himself must be exalted. At a tea-party it is equally obvious that he that exalteth himself must be abased, if possible without bodily violence. Now people talk of democracy as being coarse and turbulent: it is a self-evident error in mere history. Aristocracy is the thing that is always coarse and turbulent: for it means appealing to the self-confident people. Democracy means appealing to the different people. Democracy means getting those people to vote who would never have the cheek to govern: and (according to Christian ethics) the precise people who ought to govern are the people who have not the cheek to do it. There is a strong example of this truth in my friend in the train. The only two types we hear of in this argument about crime and punishment are two very rare and abnormal types.

We hear of the stark sentimentalist, who talks as if there were no problem at all: as if physical kindness would cure everything: as if one need only pat Nero and stroke Ivan the Terrible. This mere belief in bodily humanitarianism is not sentimental; it is simply snobbish. For if comfort gives men virtue, the comfortable classes ought to be virtuous — which is absurd. Then, again, we do hear of the yet weaker and more watery type of sentimentalists: I mean the sentimentalist who says, with a sort of splutter, “Flog the brutes!” or who tells you with innocent obscenity “what he would do” with a certain man — always supposing the man’s hands were tied.

This is the more effeminate type of the two; but both are weak and unbalanced. And it is only these two types, the sentimental humanitarian and the sentimental brutalitarian, whom one hears in the modern babel. Yet you very rarely meet either of them in a train. You never meet anyone else in a controversy. The man you meet in a train is like this man that I met: he is emotionally decent, only he is intellectually doubtful. So far from luxuriating in the loathsome things that could be “done” to criminals, he feels bitterly how much better it would be if nothing need be done. But something must be done. “I s’pose we ‘ave to do it.” In short, he is simply a sane man, and of a sane man there is only one safe definition. He is a man who can have tragedy in his heart and comedy in his head.

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Now the real difficulty of discussing decently this problem of the proper treatment of criminals is that both parties discuss the matter without any direct human feeling. The denouncers of wrong are as cold as the organisers of wrong. Humanitarianism is as hard as inhumanity.

Let me take one practical instance. I think the flogging arranged in our modern prisons is a filthy torture; all its scientific paraphernalia, the photographing, the medical attendance, prove that it goes to the last foul limit of the boot and rack. The cat is simply the rack without any of its intellectual reasons. Holding this view strongly, I open the ordinary humanitarian books or papers and I find a phrase like this, “The lash is a relic of barbarism.” So is the plough. So is the fishing net. So is the horn or the staff or the fire lit in winter. What an inexpressibly feeble phrase for anything one wants to attack — a relic of barbarism! It is as if a man walked naked down the street to-morrow, and we said that his clothes were not quite in the latest fashion. There is nothing particularly nasty about being a relic of barbarism. Man is a relic of barbarism. Civilisation is a relic of barbarism.

But torture is not a relic of barbarism at all. In actuality it is simply a relic of sin; but in comparative history it may well be called a relic of civilisation. It has always been most artistic and elaborate when everything else was most artistic and elaborate. Thus it was detailed exquisite in the late Roman Empire, in the complex and gorgeous sixteenth century, in the centralised French monarchy a hundred years before the Revolution, and in the great Chinese civilisation to this day. This is, first and last, the frightful thing we must remember. In so far as we grow instructed and refined we are not (in any sense whatever) naturally moving away from torture. We may be moving towards torture. We must know what we are doing, if we are to avoid the enormous secret cruelty which has crowned every historic civilisation.

The train moves more swiftly through the sunny English fields. They have taken the prisoners away, and I do not know what they have done with them.

XXXIII. The Prehistoric Railway Station

A railway station is an admirable place, although Ruskin did not think so; he did not think so because he himself was even more modern than the railway station. He did not think so because he was himself feverish, irritable, and snorting like an engine. He could not value the ancient silence of the railway station.

“In a railway station,” he said, “you are in a hurry, and therefore, miserable”; but you need not be either unless you are as modern as Ruskin. The true philosopher does not think of coming just in time for his train except as a bet or a joke.

The only way of catching a train I have ever discovered is to be late for the one before. Do this, and you will find in a railway station much of the quietude and consolation of a cathedral. It has many of the characteristics of a great ecclesiastical building; it has vast arches, void spaces, coloured lights, and, above all, it has recurrence or ritual. It is dedicated to the celebration of water and fire the two prime elements of all human ceremonial. Lastly, a station resembles the old religions rather than the new religions in this point, that people go there. In connection with this it should also be remembered that all popular places, all sites, actually used by the people, tend to retain the best routine of antiquity very much more than any localities or machines used by any privileged class. Things are not altered so quickly or completely by common people as they are by fashionable people. Ruskin could have found more memories of the Middle Ages in the Underground Railway than in the grand hotels outside the stations. The great palaces of pleasure which the rich build in London all have brazen and vulgar names. Their names are either snobbish, like the Hotel Cecil, or (worse still) cosmopolitan like the Hotel Metropole. But when I go in a third-class carriage from the nearest circle station to Battersea to the nearest circle station to the DAILY NEWS, the names of the stations are one long litany of solemn and saintly memories. Leaving Victoria I come to a park belonging especially to St. James the Apostle; thence I go to Westminster Bridge, whose very name alludes to the awful Abbey; Charing Cross holds up the symbol of Christendom; the next station is called a Temple; and Blackfriars remembers the mediaeval dream of a Brotherhood.

If you wish to find the past preserved, follow the million feet of the crowd. At the worst the uneducated only wear down old things by sheer walking. But the educated kick them down out of sheer culture.

I feel all this profoundly as I wander about the empty railway station, where I have no business of any kind. I have extracted a vast number of chocolates from automatic machines; I have obtained cigarettes, toffee, scent, and other things that I dislike by the same machinery; I have weighed myself, with sublime results; and this sense, not only of the healthiness of popular things, but of their essential antiquity and permanence, is still in possession of my mind. I wander up to the bookstall, and my faith survives even the wild spectacle of modern literature and journalism. Even in the crudest and most clamorous aspects of the newspaper world I still prefer the popular to the proud and fastidious. If I had to choose between taking in the DAILY MAIL and taking in the TIMES (the dilemma reminds one of a nightmare), I should certainly cry out with the whole of my being for the DAILY MAIL. Even mere bigness preached in a frivolous way is not so irritating as mere meanness preached in a big and solemn way. People buy the DAILY MAIL, but they do not believe in it. They do believe in the TIMES, and (apparently) they do not buy it. But the more the output of paper upon the modern world is actually studied, the more it will be found to be in all its essentials ancient and human, like the name of Charing Cross. Linger for two or three hours at a station bookstall (as I am doing), and you will find that it gradually takes on the grandeur and historic allusiveness of the Vatican or Bodleian Library. The novelty is all superficial; the tradition is all interior and profound. The DAILY MAIL has new editions, but never a new idea. Everything in a newspaper that is not the old human love of altar or fatherland is the old human love of gossip. Modern writers have often made game of the old chronicles because they chiefly record accidents and prodigies; a church struck by lightning, or a calf with six legs. They do not seem to realise that this old barbaric history is the same as new democratic journalism. It is not that the savage chronicle has disappeared. It is merely that the savage chronicle now appears every morning.

As I moved thus mildly and vaguely in front of the bookstall, my eye caught a sudden and scarlet title that for the moment staggered me. On the outside of a book I saw written in large letters, “Get On or Get Out.” The title of the book recalled to me with a sudden revolt and reaction all that does seem unquestionably new and nasty; it reminded me that there was in the world of to-day that utterly idiotic thing, a worship of success; a thing that only means surpassing anybody in anything; a thing that may mean being the most successful person in running away from a battle; a thing that may mean being the most successfully sleepy of the whole row of sleeping men. When I saw those words the silence and sanctity of the railway station were for the moment shadowed. Here, I thought, there is at any rate something anarchic and violent and vile. This title, at any rate, means the most disgusting individualism of this individualistic world. In the fury of my bitterness and passion I actually bought the book, thereby ensuring that my enemy would get some of my money. I opened it prepared to find some brutality, some blasphemy, which would really be an exception to the general silence and sanctity of the railway station. I was prepared to find something in the book that was as infamous as its title.

I was disappointed. There was nothing at all corresponding to the furious decisiveness of the remarks on the cover. After reading it carefully I could not discover whether I was really to get on or to get out; but I had a vague feeling that I should prefer to get out. A considerable part of the book, particularly towards the end, was concerned with a detailed description of the life of Napoleon Bonaparte. Undoubtedly Napoleon got on. He also got out. But I could not discover in any way how the details of his life given here were supposed to help a person aiming at success. One anecdote described how Napoleon always wiped his pen on his knee-breeches. I suppose the moral is: always wipe your pen on your knee-breeches, and you will win the battle of Wagram. Another story told that he let loose a gazelle among the ladies of his Court. Clearly the brutal practical inference is — loose a gazelle among the ladies of your acquaintance, and you will be Emperor of the French. Get on with a gazelle or get out. The book entirely reconciled me to the soft twilight of the station. Then I suddenly saw that there was a symbolic division which might be paralleled from biology. Brave men are vertebrates; they have their softness on the surface and their toughness in the middle. But these modern cowards are all crustaceans; their hardness is all on the cover and their softness is inside. But the softness is there; everything in this twilight temple is soft.

XXXIV. The Diabolist

Every now and then I have introduced into my essays an element of truth. Things that really happened have been mentioned, such as meeting President Kruger or being thrown out of a cab. What I have now to relate really happened; yet there was no element in it of practical politics or of personal danger. It was simply a quiet conversation which I had with another man. But that quiet conversation was by far the most terrible thing that has ever happened to me in my life. It happened so long ago that I cannot be certain of the exact words of the dialogue, only of its main questions and answers; but there is one sentence in it for which I can answer absolutely and word for word. It was a sentence so awful that I could not forget it if I would. It was the last sentence spoken; and it was not spoken to me.

The thing befell me in the days when I was at an art school. An art school is different from almost all other schools or colleges in this respect: that, being of new and crude creation and of lax discipline, it presents a specially strong contrast between the industrious and the idle. People at an art school either do an atrocious amount of work or do no work at all. I belonged, along with other charming people, to the latter class; and this threw me often into the society of men who were very different from myself, and who were idle for reasons very different from mine. I was idle because I was very much occupied; I was engaged about that time in discovering, to my own extreme and lasting astonishment, that I was not an atheist. But there were others also at loose ends who were engaged in discovering what Carlyle called (I think with needless delicacy) the fact that ginger is hot in the mouth.

I value that time, in short, because it made me acquainted with a good representative number of blackguards. In this connection there are two very curious things which the critic of human life may observe. The first is the fact that there is one real difference between men and women; that women prefer to talk in twos, while men prefer to talk in threes. The second is that when you find (as you often do) three young cads and idiots going about together and getting drunk together every day you generally find that one of the three cads and idiots is (for some extraordinary reason) not a cad and not an idiot. In these small groups devoted to a drivelling dissipation there is almost always one man who seems to have condescended to his company; one man who, while he can talk a foul triviality with his fellows, can also talk politics with a Socialist, or philosophy with a Catholic.

It was just such a man whom I came to know well. It was strange, perhaps, that he liked his dirty, drunken society; it was stranger still, perhaps, that he liked my society. For hours of the day he would talk with me about Milton or Gothic architecture; for hours of the night he would go where I have no wish to follow him, even in speculation. He was a man with a long, ironical face, and close and red hair; he was by class a gentleman, and could walk like one, but preferred, for some reason, to walk like a groom carrying two pails. He looked like a sort of Super-jockey; as if some archangel had gone on the Turf. And I shall never forget the half-hour in which he and I argued about real things for the first and the last time.

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Along the front of the big building of which our school was a part ran a huge slope of stone steps, higher, I think, than those that lead up to St. Paul’s Cathedral. On a black wintry evening he and I were wandering on these cold heights, which seemed as dreary as a pyramid under the stars. The one thing visible below us in the blackness was a burning and blowing fire; for some gardener (I suppose) was burning something in the grounds, and from time to time the red sparks went whirling past us like a swarm of scarlet insects in the dark. Above us also it was gloom; but if one stared long enough at that upper darkness, one saw vertical stripes of grey in the black and then became conscious of the colossal façade of the Doric building, phantasmal, yet filling the sky, as if Heaven were still filled with the gigantic ghost of Paganism.

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The man asked me abruptly why I was becoming orthodox. Until he said it, I really had not known that I was; but the moment he had said it I knew it to be literally true. And the process had been so long and full that I answered him at once out of existing stores of explanation.

“I am becoming orthodox,” I said, “because I have come, rightly or wrongly, after stretching my brain till it bursts, to the old belief that heresy is worse even than sin. An error is more menacing than a crime, for an error begets crimes. An Imperialist is worse than a pirate. For an Imperialist keeps a school for pirates; he teaches piracy disinterestedly and without an adequate salary. A Free Lover is worse than a profligate. For a profligate is serious and reckless even in his shortest love; while a Free Lover is cautious and irresponsible even in his longest devotion. I hate modern doubt because it is dangerous."

"You mean dangerous to morality," he said in a voice of wonderful gentleness. "I expect you are right. But why do you care about morality?"

I glanced at his face quickly. He had thrust out his neck as he had a trick of doing; and so brought his face abruptly into the light of the bonfire from below, like a face in the footlights. His long chin and high cheek-bones were lit up infernally from underneath; so that he looked like a fiend staring down into the flaming pit. I had an unmeaning sense of being tempted in a wilderness; and even as I paused a burst of red sparks broke past.

"Aren't those sparks splendid?" I said.

"Yes," he replied.

"That is all that I ask you to admit," said I. "Give me those few red specks and I will deduce Christian morality. Once I thought like you, that one's pleasure in a flying spark was a thing that could come and go with that spark. Once I thought that the delight was as free as the fire. Once I thought that red star we see was alone in space. But now I know that the red star is only on the apex of an invisible pyramid of virtues. That red fire is only the flower on a stalk of living habits, which you cannot see. Only because your mother made you say 'Thank you' for a bun are you now able to thank Nature or chaos for those red stars of an instant or for the white stars of all time. Only because you were humble before fireworks on the fifth of November do you now enjoy any fireworks that you chance to see. You only like them being red because you were told about the blood of the martyrs; you only like them being bright because brightness is a glory. That flame flowered out of virtues, and it will fade with virtues. Seduce a woman, and that spark will be less bright. Shed blood, and that spark will be less red. Be really bad, and they will be to you like the spots on a wall-paper."

He had a horrible fairness of the intellect that made me despair of his soul. A common, harmless atheist would have denied that religion produced humility or humility a simple joy: but he admitted both. He only said, "But shall I not find in evil a life of its own? Granted that for every woman I ruin one of those red sparks will go out: will not the expanding pleasure of ruin..."

“Do you see that fire?” I asked. “If we had a real fighting democracy, some one would burn you in it; like the devil-worshipper that you are.”

“Perhaps,” he said, in his tired, fair way. “Only what you call evil I call good.”

He went down the great steps alone, and I felt as if I wanted the steps swept and cleaned. I followed later, and as I went to find my hat in the low, dark passage where it hung, I suddenly heard his voice again, but the words were inaudible. I stopped, startled: then I heard the voice of one of the vilest of his associates saying, “Nobody can possibly know.” And then I heard those two or three words which I remember in every syllable and cannot forget. I heard the Diabolist say, “I tell you I have done everything else. If I do that I shan’t know the difference between right and wrong.” I rushed out without daring to pause; and as I passed the fire I did not know whether it was hell or the furious love of God.

I have since heard that he died: it may be said, I think, that he committed suicide; though he did it with tools of pleasure, not with tools of pain. God help him, I know the road he went; but I have never known, or even dared to think, what was that place at which he stopped and refrained.

XXXV. A Glimpse of My Country

Whatever is it that we are all looking for? I fancy that it is really quite close. When I was a boy I had a fancy that Heaven or Fairyland or whatever I called it, was immediately behind my own back, and that this was why I could never manage to see it, however often I twisted and turned to take it by surprise. I had a notion of a man perpetually spinning round on one foot like a teetotum in the effort to find that world behind his back which continually fled from him. Perhaps this is why the world goes round. Perhaps the world is always trying to look over its shoulder and catch up the world which always escapes it, yet without which it cannot be itself.

In any case, as I have said, I think that we must always conceive of that which is the goal of all our endeavours as something which is in some strange way near. Science boasts of the distance of its stars; of the terrific remoteness of the things of which it has to speak. But poetry and religion always insist upon the proximity, the almost menacing closeness of the things with which they are concerned. Always the Kingdom of Heaven is "At Hand"; and Looking-glass Land is only through the looking-glass. So I for one should never be astonished if the next twist of a street led me to the heart of that maze in which all the mystics are lost. I should not be at all surprised if I turned one corner in Fleet Street and saw a yet queerer-looking lamp; I should not be surprised if I turned a third corner and found myself in Elfland.

I should not be surprised at this; but I was surprised the other day at something more surprising. I took a turn out of Fleet Street and found myself in England.

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The singular shock experienced perhaps requires explanation. In the darkest or the most inadequate moments of England there is one thing that should always be remembered about the very nature of our country. It may be shortly stated by saying that England is not such a fool as it looks. The types of England, the externals of England, always misrepresent the country. England is an oligarchical country, and it prefers that its oligarchy should be inferior to itself.

The speaking in the House of Commons, for instance, is not only worse than the speaking was, it is worse than the speaking is, in all or almost all other places in small debating clubs or casual dinners. Our countrymen probably prefer this solemn futility in the higher places of the national life. It may be a strange sight to see the blind leading the blind; but England provides a stranger. England shows us the blind leading the people who can see. And this again is an under-statement of the case. For the English political aristocrats not only speak worse than many other people; they speak worse than themselves. The ignorance of statesmen is like the ignorance of judges, an artificial and affected thing. If you have the good fortune really to talk with a statesman, you will be constantly startled with his saying quite intelligent things. It makes one nervous at first. And I have never been sufficiently intimate with such a man to ask him why it was a rule of his life in Parliament to appear sillier than he was.

It is the same with the voters. The average man votes below himself; he votes with half a mind or with a hundredth part of one. A man ought to vote with the whole of himself as he worships or gets married. A man ought to vote with his head and heart, his soul and stomach, his eye for faces and his ear for music; also (when sufficiently provoked) with his hands and feet. If he has ever seen a fine sunset, the crimson colour of it should creep into his vote. If he has ever heard splendid songs, they should be in his ears when he makes the mystical cross. But as it is, the difficulty with English democracy at all elections is that it is something less than itself. The question is not so much whether only a minority of the electorate votes. The point is that only a minority of the voter votes.

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This is the tragedy of England; you cannot judge it by its foremost men. Its types do not typify. And on the occasion of which I speak I found this to be so especially of that old intelligent middle class which I had imagined had almost vanished from the world. It seemed to me that all the main representatives of the middle class had gone off in one direction or in the other; they had either set out in pursuit of the Smart Set or they had set out in pursuit of the Simple Life. I cannot say which I dislike more myself; the people in question are welcome to have either of them, or, as is more likely, to have both, in hideous alternations of disease and cure. But all the prominent men who plainly represent the middle class have adopted either the single eye-glass of Mr Chamberlain or the single eye of Mr. Bernard Shaw.

The old class that I mean has no representative. Its food was plentiful; but it had no show. Its food was plain; but it had no fads. It was serious about politics; and when it spoke in public it committed the solecism of trying to speak well. I thought that this old earnest political England had practically disappeared. And as I say, I took one turn out of Fleet Street and I found a room full of it.

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At the top of the room was a chair in which Johnson had sat. The club was a club in which Wilkes had spoken, in a time when even the ne’er-do-weel was virile. But all these things by themselves might be merely archaism. The extraordinary thing was that this hall had all the hubbub, the sincerity, the anger, the oratory of the eighteenth century. The members of this club were of all shades of opinion, yet there was not one speech which gave me that jar of unreality which I often have in listening to the ablest men uttering my own opinion. The Toryism of this club was like the Toryism of Johnson, a Toryism that could use humour and appealed to humanity. The democracy of this club was like the democracy of Wilkes, a democracy that can speak epigrams and fight duels; a democracy that can face things out and endure slander; the democracy of Wilkes, or, rather, the democracy of Fox.

One thing especially filled my soul with the soul of my fathers. Each man speaking, whether he spoke well or ill, spoke as well as he could from sheer fury against the other man. This is the greatest of our modern descents, that nowadays a man does not become more rhetorical as he becomes more sincere. An eighteenth-century speaker, when he got really and honestly furious, looked for big words with which to crush his adversary. The new speaker looks for small words to crush him with. He looks for little facts and little sneers. In a modern speech the rhetoric is put into the merely formal part, the opening to which nobody listens. But when Mr. Chamberlain, or a Moderate, or one of the harder kind of Socialists, becomes really sincere, he becomes Cockney. “The destiny of the Empire,” or “The destiny of humanity,” do well enough for mere ornamental preliminaries, but when the man becomes angry and honest, then it is a snarl, “Where do we come in?” or “It’s your money they want.”

The men in this eighteenth-century club were entirely different; they were quite eighteenth century. Each one rose to his feet quivering with passion, and tried to destroy his opponent, not with sniggering, but actually with eloquence. I was arguing with them about Home Rule; at the end I told them why the English aristocracy really disliked an Irish Parliament; because it would be like their club.

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I came out again into Fleet Street at night, and by a dim lamp I saw pasted up some tawdry nonsense about Wastrels and how London was rising against something that London had hardly heard of. Then I suddenly saw, as in one obvious picture, that the modern world is an immense and tumultuous ocean, full of monstrous and living things. And I saw that across the top of it is spread a thin, a very thin, sheet of ice, of wicked wealth and of lying journalism.

And as I stood there in the darkness I could almost fancy that I heard it crack.

XXXVI. A Somewhat Improbable Story

I cannot remember whether this tale is true or not. If I read it through very carefully I have a suspicion that I should come to the conclusion that it is not. But, unfortunately, I cannot read it through very carefully, because, you see, it is not written yet. The image and the idea of it clung to me through a great part of my boyhood; I may have dreamt it before I could talk; or told it to myself before I could read; or read it before I could remember. On the whole, however, I am certain that I did not read it, for children have very clear memories about things like that; and of the books which I was really fond I can still remember, not only the shape and bulk and binding, but even the position of the printed words on many of the pages. On the whole, I incline to the opinion that it happened to me before I was born.

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At any rate, let us tell the story now with all the advantages of the atmosphere that has clung to it. You may suppose me, for the sake of argument, sitting at lunch in one of those quick-lunch restaurants in the City where men take their food so fast that it has none of the quality of food, and take their half-hour's vacation so fast that it has none of the qualities of leisure; to hurry through one's leisure is the most unbusiness-like of actions. They all wore tall shiny hats as if they could not lose an instant even to hang them on a peg, and they all had one eye a little off, hypnotised by the huge eye of the clock. In short, they were the slaves of the modern bondage, you could hear their fetters clanking. Each was, in fact, bound by a chain; the heaviest chain ever tied to a man — it is called a watch-chain.

Now, among these there entered and sat down opposite to me a man who almost immediately opened an uninterrupted monologue. He was like all the other men in dress, yet he was startlingly opposite to them in all manner. He wore a high shiny hat and a long frock coat, but he wore them as such solemn things were meant to be worn; he wore the silk hat as if it were a mitre, and the frock coat as if it were the ephod of a high priest. He not only hung his hat up on the peg, but he seemed (such was his stateliness) almost to ask permission of the hat for doing so, and to apologise to the peg for making use of it. When he had sat down on a wooden chair with the air of one considering its feelings and given a sort of slight stoop or bow to the wooden table itself, as if it were an altar, I could not help some comment springing to my lips. For the man was a big, sanguine-faced, prosperous-looking man, and yet he treated everything with a care that almost amounted to nervousness.

For the sake of saying something to express my interest I said, “This furniture is fairly solid; but, of course, people do treat it much too carelessly.”

As I looked up doubtfully my eye caught his, and was fixed as his was fixed in an apocalyptic stare. I had thought him ordinary as he entered, save for his strange, cautious manner; but if the other people had seen him then they would have screamed and emptied the room. They did not see him, and they went on making a clatter with their forks, and a murmur with their conversation. But the man’s face was the face of a maniac.

“Did you mean anything particular by that remark?” he asked at last, and the blood crawled back slowly into his face.

“Nothing whatever,” I answered. “One does not mean anything here; it spoils people’s digestions.”

He limped back and wiped his broad forehead with a big handkerchief; and yet there seemed to be a sort of regret in his relief.

“I thought perhaps,” he said in a low voice, “that another of them had gone wrong.”

“If you mean another digestion gone wrong,” I said, “I never heard of one here that went right. This is the heart of the Empire, and the other organs are in an equally bad way.”

“No, I mean another street gone wrong,” and he said heavily and quietly, “but as I suppose that doesn’t explain much to you, I think I shall have to tell you the story. I do so with all the less responsibility, because I know you won’t believe it. For forty years of my life I invariably left my office, which is in Leadenhall Street, at half-past five in the afternoon, taking with me an umbrella in the right hand and a bag in the left hand. For forty years two months and four days I passed out of the side office door, walked down the street on the left-hand side, took the first turning to the left and the third to the right, from where I bought an evening paper, followed the road on the right-hand side round two obtuse angles, and came out just outside a Metropolitan station, where I took a train home. For forty years two months and four days I fulfilled this course by accumulated habit: it was not a long street that I traversed, and it took me about four and a half minutes to do it. After forty years two months and four days, on the fifth day I went out in the same manner, with my umbrella in the right hand and my bag in the left, and I began to notice that walking along the familiar street tired me somewhat more than usual; and when I turned it I was convinced that I had turned down the wrong one. For now the street shot up quite a steep slant, such as one only sees in the hilly parts of London, and in this part there were no hills at all. Yet it was not the wrong street; the name written on it was the same; the shuttered shops were the same; the lamp-posts and the whole look of the perspective was the same; only it was tilted upwards like a lid. Forgetting any trouble about breathlessness or fatigue I ran furiously forward, and reached the second of my accustomed turnings, which ought to bring me almost within sight of the station. And as I turned that corner I nearly fell on the pavement. For now the street went up straight in front of my face like a steep staircase or the side of a pyramid. There was not for miles round that place so much as a slope like that of Ludgate Hill. And this was a slope like that of the Matterhorn. The whole street had lifted itself like a single wave, and yet every speck and detail of it was the same, and I saw in the high distance, as at the top of an Alpine pass, picked out in pink letters the name over my paper shop.

"I ran on and on blindly now, passing all the shops and coming to a part of the road where there was a long grey row of private houses. I had, I know not why, an irrational feeling that I was a long iron bridge in empty space. An impulse seized me, and I pulled up the iron trap of a coal-hole. Looking down through it I saw empty space and the stairs.

"When I looked up again a man was standing in his front garden, having apparently come out of his house; he was leaning over the railings and gazing at me. We were all alone on that nightmare road; his face was in shadow; his dress was dark and ordinary; but when I saw him standing so perfectly still I knew somehow that he was not of this world. And the stars behind his head were larger and fiercer than ought to be endured by the eyes of men.

"'If you are a kind angel,' I said, 'or a wise devil, or have anything in common with mankind, tell me what is this street possessed of devils.'

"After a long silence he said, 'What do you say that it is?'

"'It is Bumpton Street, of course,' I snapped. 'It goes to Oldgate Station.'

"'Yes,' he admitted gravely; 'it goes there sometimes. Just now, however, it is going to heaven.'

"'To heaven?' I said. 'Why?'

"'It is going to heaven for justice,' he replied. 'You must have treated it badly. Remember always that there is one thing that cannot be endured by anybody or anything. That one unendurable thing is to be overworked and also neglected. For instance, you can overwork women — everybody does. But you can't neglect women — I defy you to. At the same time, you can neglect tramps and gypsies and all the apparent refuse of the State so long as you do not overwork it. But no beast of the field, no horse, no dog can endure long to be asked to do more than his work and yet have less than his honour. It is the same with streets. You have worked this street to death, and yet you have never remembered its existence. If you had a healthy democracy, even of pagans, they would have hung this street with garlands and given it the name of a god. Then it would have gone quietly. But at last the street has grown tired of your tireless insolence; and it is bucking and rearing its head to heaven. Have you never sat on a bucking horse?'

"I looked at the long grey street, and for a moment it seemed to me to be exactly like the long grey neck of a horse flung up to heaven. But in a moment my sanity returned, and I said, 'But this is all nonsense. Streets go to the place they have to go. A street must always go to its end.'

"'Why do you think so of a street?' he asked, standing very still.

"'Because I have always seen it do the same thing,' I replied, in reasonable anger. 'Day after day, year after year, it has always gone to Oldgate Station; day after...'

"I stopped, for he had flung up his head with the fury of the road in revolt.

"'And you?' he cried terribly. 'What do you think the road thinks of you? Does the road think you are alive? Are you alive? Day after day, year after year, you have gone to Oldgate Station....' Since then I have respected the things called inanimate."

And bowing slightly to the mustard-pot, the man in the restaurant withdrew.

XXXVII. The Shop Of Ghosts

Nearly all the best and most precious things in the universe you can get for a halfpenny. I make an exception, of course, of the sun, the moon, the earth, people, stars, thunderstorms, and such trifles. You can get them for nothing. Also I make an exception of another thing, which I am not allowed to mention in this paper, and of which the lowest price is a penny halfpenny. But the general principle will be at once apparent. In the street behind me, for instance, you can now get a ride on an electric tram for a halfpenny. To be on an electric tram is to be on a flying castle in a fairy tale. You can get quite a large number of brightly coloured sweets for a halfpenny. Also you can get the chance of reading this article for a halfpenny; along, of course, with other and irrelevant matter.

But if you want to see what a vast and bewildering array of valuable things you can get at a halfpenny each you should do as I was doing last night. I was gluing my nose against the glass of a very small and dimly lit toy shop in one of the greyest and leanest of the streets of Battersea. But dim as was that square of light, it was filled (as a child once said to me) with all the colours God ever made. Those toys of the poor were like the children who buy them; they were all dirty; but they were all bright. For my part, I think brightness more important than cleanliness; since the first is of the soul, and the second of the body. You must excuse me; I am a democrat; I know I am out of fashion in the modern world.

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As I looked at that palace of pigmy wonders, at small green omnibuses, at small blue elephants, at small black dolls, and small red Noah’s arks, I must have fallen into some sort of unnatural trance. That lit shop-window became like the brilliantly lit stage when one is watching some highly coloured comedy. I forgot the grey houses and the grimy people behind me as one forgets the dark galleries and the dim crowds at a theatre. It seemed as if the little objects behind the glass were small, not because they were toys, but because they were objects far away. The green omnibus was really a green omnibus, a green Bayswater omnibus, passing across some huge desert on its ordinary way to Bayswater. The blue elephant was no longer blue with paint; he was blue with distance. The black doll was really a negro relieved against passionate tropic foliage in the land where every weed is flaming and only man is black. The red Noah’s ark was really the enormous ship of earthly salvation riding on the rain-swollen sea, red in the first morning of hope.

Every one, I suppose, knows such stunning instants of abstraction, such brilliant blanks in the mind. In such moments one can see the face of one’s own best friend as an unmeaning pattern of spectacles or moustaches. They are commonly marked by the two signs of the slowness of their growth and the suddenness of their termination. The return to real thinking is often as abrupt as bumping into a man. Very often indeed (in my case) it is bumping into a man. But in any case the awakening is always emphatic and, generally speaking, it is always complete. Now, in this case, I did come back with a shock of sanity to the consciousness that I was, after all, only staring into a dingy little toy-shop; but in some strange way the mental cure did not seem to be final. There was still in my mind an unmanageable something that told me that I had strayed into some odd atmosphere, or that I had already done some odd thing. I felt as if I had worked a miracle or committed a sin. It was as if I had at any rate, stepped across some border in the soul.

To shake off this dangerous and dreamy sense I went into the shop and tried to buy wooden soldiers. The man in the shop was very old and broken, with confused white hair covering his head and half his face, hair so startlingly white that it looked almost artificial. Yet though he was senile and even sick, there was nothing of suffering in his eyes; he looked rather as if he were gradually falling asleep in a not unkindly decay. He gave me the wooden soldiers, but when I put down the money he did not at first seem to see it; then he blinked at it feebly, and then he pushed it feebly away.

“No, no,” he said vaguely. “I never have. I never have. We are rather old-fashioned here.”

“Not taking money,” I replied, “seems to me more like an uncommonly new fashion than an old one.”

“I never have,” said the old man, blinking and blowing his nose; “I’ve always given presents. I’m too old to stop.”

“Good heavens!” I said. “What can you mean? Why, you might be Father Christmas.”

“I am Father Christmas,” he said apologetically, and blew his nose again.

The lamps could not have been lighted yet in the street outside. At any rate, I could see nothing against the darkness but the shining shop-window.

There were no sounds of steps or voices in the street; I might have strayed into some new and sunless world. But something had cut the chords of common sense, and I could not feel even surprise except sleepily. Something made me say, “You look ill, Father Christmas.”

“I am dying,” he said.

I did not speak, and it was he who spoke again.

“All the new people have left my shop. I cannot understand it. They seem to object to me on such curious and inconsistent sort of grounds, these scientific men, and these innovators. They say that I give people superstitions and make them too visionary; they say I give people sausages and make them too coarse. They say my heavenly parts are too heavenly; they say my earthly parts are too earthly; I don’t know what they want, I’m sure. How can heavenly things be too heavenly, or earthly things too earthly? How can one be too good, or too jolly? I don’t understand. But I understand one thing well enough. These modern people are living and I am dead.”

“You may be dead,” I replied. “You ought to know. But as for what they are doing, do not call it living.”

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A silence fell suddenly between us which I somehow expected to be unbroken. But it had not fallen for more than a few seconds when, in the utter stillness, I distinctly heard a very rapid step coming nearer and nearer along the street. The next moment a figure flung itself into the shop and stood framed in the doorway. He wore a large white hat tilted back as if in impatience; he had tight black old-fashioned pantaloons, a gaudy old-fashioned stock and waistcoat, and an old fantastic coat. He had large, wide-open, luminous eyes like those of an arresting actor; he had a pale, nervous face, and a fringe of beard. He took in the shop and the old man in a look that seemed literally a flash and uttered the exclamation of a man utterly staggered.

“Good lord!” he cried out; “it can’t be you! It isn’t you! I came to ask where your grave was.”

“I’m not dead yet, Mr. Dickens,” said the old gentleman, with a feeble smile; “but I’m dying,” he hastened to add reassuringly.

“But, dash it all, you were dying in my time,” said Mr. Charles Dickens with animation; “and you don’t look a day older.”

“I’ve felt like this for a long time,” said Father Christmas.

Mr. Dickens turned his back and put his head out of the door into the darkness.

“Dick,” he roared at the top of his voice; “he’s still alive.”

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Another shadow darkened the doorway, and a much larger and more full-blooded gentleman in an enormous periwig came in, fanning his flushed face with a military hat of the cut of Queen Anne. He carried his head well back like a soldier, and his hot face had even a look of arrogance, which was suddenly contradicted by his eyes, which were literally as humble as a dog’s. His sword made a great clatter, as if the shop were too small for it.

“Indeed,” said Sir Richard Steele, “’tis a most prodigious matter, for the man was dying when I wrote about Sir Roger de Coverley and his Christmas Day.”

My senses were growing dimmer and the room darker. It seemed to be filled with newcomers.

“It hath ever been understood,” said a burly man, who carried his head humorously and obstinately a little on one side — I think he was Ben Jonson— “It hath ever been understood, consule Jacobo, under our King James and her late Majesty, that such good and hearty customs were fallen sick, and like to pass from the world. This grey beard most surely was no lustier when I knew him than now.”

And I also thought I heard a green-clad man, like Robin Hood, say in some mixed Norman French, “But I saw the man dying.”

“I have felt like this a long time,” said Father Christmas, in his feeble way again.

Mr. Charles Dickens suddenly leant across to him.

“Since when?” he asked. “Since you were born?”

“Yes,” said the old man, and sank shaking into a chair. “I have been always dying.”

Mr. Dickens took off his hat with a flourish like a man calling a mob to rise.

“I understand it now,” he cried, “you will never die.”

XXXVIII. The Ballade of a Strange Town

My friend and I, in fooling about Flanders, fell into a fixed affection for the town of Mechlin or Malines. Our rest there was so restful that we almost felt it as a home, and hardly strayed out of it.

We sat day after day in the market-place, under little trees growing in wooden tubs, and looked up at the noble converging lines of the Cathedral tower, from which the three riders from Ghent, in the poem, heard the bell which told them they were not too late. But we took as much pleasure in the people, in the little boys with open, flat Flemish faces and fur collars round their necks, making them look like burgomasters; or the women, whose prim, oval faces, hair strained tightly off the temples, and mouths at once hard, meek, and humorous, exactly reproduced the late mediaeval faces in Memling and Van Eyck.

But one afternoon, as it happened, my friend rose from under his little tree, and pointing to a sort of toy train that was puffing smoke in one corner of the clear square, suggested that we should go by it. We got into the little train, which was meant really to take the peasants and their vegetables to and fro from their fields beyond the town, and the official came round to give us tickets. We asked him what place we should get to if we paid fivepence. The Belgians are not a romantic people, and he asked us (with a lamentable mixture of Flemish coarseness and French rationalism) where we wanted to go.

We explained that we wanted to go to fairyland, and the only question was whether we could get there for fivepence. At last, after a great deal of international misunderstanding (for he spoke French in the Flemish and we in the English manner), he told us that fivepence would take us to a place which I have never seen written down, but which when spoken sounded like the word “Waterloo” pronounced by an intoxicated patriot; I think it was Waerlowe.

We clasped our hands and said it was the place we had been seeking from boyhood, and when we had got there we descended with promptitude.

For a moment I had a horrible fear that it really was the field of Waterloo; but I was comforted by remembering that it was in quite a different part of Belgium. It was a cross-roads, with one cottage at the corner, a perspective of tall trees like Hobbema’s “Avenue,” and beyond only the infinite flat chess-board of the little fields. It was the scene of peace and prosperity; but I must confess that my friend's first action was to ask the man when there would be another train back to Mechlin. The man stated that there would be a train back in exactly one hour. We walked up the avenue, and when we were nearly half an hour's walk away it began to rain.

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We arrived back at the cross-roads sodden and dripping, and, finding the train waiting, climbed into it with some relief. The officer on this train could speak nothing but Flemish, but he understood the name Mechlin, and indicated that when we came to Mechlin Station he would put us down, which, after the right interval of time, he did.

We got down, under a steady downpour, evidently on the edge of Mechlin, though the features could not easily be recognised through the grey screen of the rain. I do not generally agree with those who find rain depressing. A shower-bath is not depressing; it is rather startling. And if it is exciting when a man throws a pail of water over you, why should it not also be exciting when the gods throw many pails? But on this soaking afternoon, whether it was the dull sky-line of the Netherlands or the fact that we were returning home without any adventure, I really did think things a trifle dreary. As soon as we could creep under the shelter of a street we turned into a little café, kept by one woman. She was incredibly old, and she spoke no French. There we drank black coffee and what was called "cognac fine." "Cognac fine" were the only two French words used in the establishment, and they were not true. At least, the fineness (perhaps by its very ethereal delicacy) escaped me. After a little my friend, who was more restless than I, got up and went out, to see if the rain had stopped and if we could at once stroll back to our hotel by the station. I sat finishing my coffee in a colourless mood, and listening to the unremitting rain.

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Suddenly the door burst open, and my friend appeared, transfigured and frantic.

"Get up!" he cried, waving his hands wildly. "Get up! We're in the wrong town! We're not in Mechlin at all. Mechlin is ten miles, twenty miles off — God knows what! We're somewhere near Antwerp."

"What!" I cried, leaping from my seat, and sending the furniture flying. "Then all is well, after all! Poetry only hid her face for an instant behind a cloud. Positively for a moment I was feeling depressed because we were in the right town. But if we are in the wrong town — why, we have our adventure after all! If we are in the wrong town, we are in the right place."

I rushed out into the rain, and my friend followed me somewhat more grimly. We discovered we were in a town called Lierre, which seemed to consist chiefly of bankrupt pastry cooks, who sold lemonade.

"This is the peak of our whole poetic progress!" I cried enthusiastically. "We must do something, something sacramental and commemorative! We cannot sacrifice an ox, and it would be a bore to build a temple. Let us write a poem."

With but slight encouragement, I took out an old envelope and one of those pencils that turn bright violet in water. There was plenty of water about, and the violet ran down the paper, symbolising the rich purple of that romantic hour. I began, choosing the form of an old French ballade; it is the easiest because it is the most restricted —

"Can Man to Mount Olympus rise,
And fancy Primrose Hill the scene?
Can a man walk in Paradise
And think he is in Turnham Green?
And could I take you for Malines,
Not knowing the nobler thing you were?
O Pearl of all the plain, and queen,
The lovely city of Lierre.

"Through memory's mist in glimmering guise
Shall shine your streets of sloppy sheen.
And wet shall grow my dreaming eyes,
To think how wet my boots have been
Now if I die or shoot a Dean — —"

Here I broke off to ask my friend whether he thought it expressed a more wild calamity to shoot a Dean or to be a Dean. But he only turned up his coat collar, and I felt that for him the muse had folded her wings. I rewrote —

"Now if I die a Rural Dean,
Or rob a bank I do not care,
Or turn a Tory. I have seen
The lovely city of Lierre."

“The next line,” I resumed, warming to it; but my friend interrupted me.

“The next line,” he said somewhat harshly, “will be a railway line. We can get back to Mechlin from here, I find, though we have to change twice. I dare say I should think this jolly romantic but for the weather. Adventure is the champagne of life, but I prefer my champagne and my adventures dry. Here is the station.”

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We did not speak again until we had left Lierre, in its sacred cloud of rain, and were coming to Mechlin, under a clearer sky, that even made one think of stars. Then I leant forward and said to my friend in a low voice—“I have found out everything. We have come to the wrong star.”

He stared his query, and I went on eagerly: “That is what makes life at once so splendid and so strange. We are in the wrong world. When I thought that was the right town, it bored me; when I knew it was wrong, I was happy. So the false optimism, the modern happiness, tires us because it tells us we fit into this world. The true happiness is that we don’t fit. We come from somewhere else. We have lost our way.”

He silently nodded, staring out of the window, but whether I had impressed or only fatigued him I could not tell. “This,” I added, “is suggested in the last verse of a fine poem you have grossly neglected —

“‘Happy is he and more than wise
Who sees with wondering eyes and clean
The world through all the grey disguise
Of sleep and custom in between.
Yes; we may pass the heavenly screen,
But shall we know when we are there?
Who know not what these dead stones mean,
The lovely city of Lierre.’”

Here the train stopped abruptly. And from Mechlin church steeple we heard the half-chime: and Joris broke silence with “No bally HORS D’OEUVRES for me: I shall get on to something solid at once.”

L’Envoy

Prince, wide your Empire spreads, I ween,
Yet happier is that moistened Mayor,
Who drinks her cognac far from fine,
The lovely city of Lierre.

XXXIX. The Mystery of a Pageant

Once upon a time, it seems centuries ago, I was prevailed on to take a small part in one of those historical processions or pageants which happened to be fashionable in or about the year 1909. And since I tend, like all who are growing old, to re-enter the remote past as a paradise or playground, I disinter a memory which may serve to stand among those memories of small but strange incidents with which I have sometimes filled this column. The thing has really some of the dark qualities of a detective-story; though I suppose that Sherlock Holmes himself could hardly unravel it now, when the scent is so old and cold and most of the actors, doubtless, long dead.

This old pageant included a series of figures from the eighteenth century, and I was told that I was just like Dr. Johnson. Seeing that Dr. Johnson was heavily seamed with small-pox, had a waistcoat all over gravy, snorted and rolled as he walked, and was probably the ugliest man in London, I mention this identification as a fact and not as a vaunt. I had nothing to do with the arrangement; and such fleeting suggestions as I made were not taken so seriously as they might have been. I requested that a row of posts be erected across the lawn, so that I might touch all of them but one, and then go back and touch that. Failing this, I felt that the least they could do was to have twenty-five cups of tea stationed at regular intervals along the course, each held by a Mrs. Thrale in full costume. My best constructive suggestion was the most harshly rejected of all. In front of me in the procession walked the great Bishop Berkeley, the man who turned the tables on the early materialists by maintaining that matter itself possibly does not exist. Dr. Johnson, you will remember, did not like such bottomless fancies as Berkeley’s, and kicked a stone with his foot, saying, “I refute him so!” Now (as I pointed out) kicking a stone would not make the metaphysical quarrel quite clear; besides, it would hurt. But how picturesque and perfect it would be if I moved across the ground in the symbolic attitude of kicking Bishop Berkeley! How complete an allegoric group; the great transcendentalist walking with his head among the stars, but behind him the avenging realist pede claudo, with uplifted foot. But I must not take up space with these forgotten frivolities; we old men grow too garrulous in talking of the distant past.

This story scarcely concerns me either in my real or my assumed character. Suffice it to say that the procession took place at night in a large garden and by torchlight (so remote is the date), that the garden was crowded with Puritans, monks, and men-at-arms, and especially with early Celtic saints smoking pipes, and with elegant Renaissance gentlemen talking Cockney. Suffice it to say, or rather it is needless to say, that I got lost. I wandered away into some dim corner of that dim shrubbery, where there was nothing to do except tumbling over tent ropes, and I began almost to feel like my prototype, and to share his horror of solitude and hatred of a country life.

In this detachment and dilemma I saw another man in a white wig advancing across this forsaken stretch of lawn; a tall, lean man, who stooped in his long black robes like a stooping eagle. When I thought he would pass me, he stopped before my face, and said, “Dr. Johnson, I think. I am Paley.”

“Sir,” I said, “you used to guide men to the beginnings of Christianity. If you can guide me now to wherever this infernal thing begins you will perform a yet higher and harder function.”

His costume and style were so perfect that for the instant I really thought he was a ghost. He took no notice of my flippancy, but, turning his black-robed back on me, led me through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways, until we came out into the glare of gaslight and laughing men in masquerade, and I could easily laugh at myself.

And there, you will say, was an end of the matter. I am (you will say) naturally obtuse, cowardly, and mentally deficient. I was, moreover, unused to pageants; I felt frightened in the dark and took a man for a spectre whom, in the light, I could recognise as a modern gentleman in a masquerade dress. No; far from it. That spectral person was my first introduction to a special incident which has never been explained and which still lays its finger on my nerve.

I mixed with the men of the eighteenth century; and we fooled as one does at a fancy-dress ball. There was Burke as large as life and a great deal better looking. There was Cowper much larger than life; he ought to have been a little man in a night-cap, with a cat under one arm and a spaniel under the other. As it was, he was a magnificent person, and looked more like the Master of Ballantrae than Cowper. I persuaded him at last to the night-cap, but never, alas, to the cat and dog. When I came the next night

Burke was still the same beautiful improvement upon himself; Cowper was still weeping for his dog and cat and would not be comforted; Bishop Berkeley was still waiting to be kicked in the interests of philosophy. In short, I met all my old friends but one. Where was Paley? I had been mystically moved by the man's presence; I was moved more by his absence. At last I saw advancing towards us across the twilight garden a little man with a large book and a bright attractive face. When he came near enough he said, in a small, clear voice, "I'm Paley." The thing was quite natural, of course; the man was ill and had sent a substitute. Yet somehow the contrast was a shock.

By the next night I had grown quite friendly with my four or five colleagues; I had discovered what is called a mutual friend with Berkeley and several points of difference with Burke. Cowper, I think it was, who introduced me to a friend of his, a fresh face, square and sturdy, framed in a white wig. "This," he explained, "is my friend So-and-So. He's Paley." I looked round at all the faces by this time fixed and familiar; I studied them; I counted them; then I bowed to the third Paley as one bows to necessity. So far the thing was all within the limits of coincidence. It certainly seemed odd that this one particular cleric should be so varying and elusive. It was singular that Paley, alone among men, should swell and shrink and alter like a phantom, while all else remained solid. But the thing was explicable; two men had been ill and there was an end of it; only I went again the next night, and a clear-coloured elegant youth with powdered hair bounded up to me, and told me with boyish excitement that he was Paley.

For the next twenty-four hours I remained in the mental condition of the modern world. I mean the condition in which all natural explanations have broken down and no supernatural explanation has been established. My bewilderment had reached to boredom when I found myself once more in the colour and clatter of the pageant, and I was all the more pleased because I met an old school-fellow, and we mutually recognised each other under our heavy clothes and hoary wigs. We talked about all those great things for which literature is too small and only life large enough; red-hot memories and those gigantic details which make up the characters of men. I heard all about the friends he had lost sight of and those he had kept in sight; I heard about his profession, and asked at last how he came into the pageant.

"The fact is," he said, "a friend of mine asked me, just for to-night, to act a chap called Paley; I don't know who he was...."

“No, by thunder!” I said, “nor does anyone.”

This was the last blow, and the next night passed like a dream. I scarcely noticed the slender, sprightly, and entirely new figure which fell into the ranks in the place of Paley, so many times deceased. What could it mean? Why was the giddy Paley unfaithful among the faithful found? Did these perpetual changes prove the popularity or the unpopularity of being Paley? Was it that no human being could support being Paley for one night and live till morning? Or was it that the gates were crowded with eager throngs of the British public thirsting to be Paley, who could only be let in one at a time? Or is there some ancient vendetta against Paley? Does some secret society of Deists still assassinate any one who adopts the name?

I cannot conjecture further about this true tale of mystery; and that for two reasons. First, the story is so true that I have had to put a lie into it. Every word of this narrative is veracious, except the one word Paley. And second, because I have got to go into the next room and dress up as Dr. Johnson.

ORTHODOXY

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I INTRODUCTION IN DEFENCE OF EVERYTHING ELSE

THE only possible excuse for this book is that it is an answer to a challenge. Even a bad shot is dignified when he accepts a duel. When some time ago I published a series of hasty but sincere papers, under the name of “Heretics,” several critics for whose intellect I have a warm respect (I may mention specially Mr. G.S.Street) said that it was all very well for me to tell everybody to affirm his cosmic theory, but that I had carefully avoided supporting my precepts with example. “I will begin to worry about my philosophy,” said Mr. Street, “when Mr. Chesterton has given us his.” It was perhaps an incautious suggestion to make to a person only too ready to write books upon the feeblest provocation. But after all, though Mr. Street has inspired and created this book, he need not read it. If he does read it, he will find that in its pages I have attempted in a vague and personal way, in a set of mental pictures rather than in a series of deductions, to state the philosophy in which I have come to believe. I will not call it my philosophy; for I did not make it. God and humanity made it; and it made me.

I have often had a fancy for writing a romance about an English yachtsman who slightly miscalculated his course and discovered England under the impression that it was a new island in the South Seas. I always find, however, that I am either too busy or too lazy to write this fine work, so I may as well give it away for the purposes of philosophical illustration. There will probably be a general impression that the man who landed (armed to the teeth and talking by signs) to plant the British flag on that barbaric temple which turned out to be the Pavilion at Brighton, felt rather a fool. I am not here concerned to deny that he looked a fool. But if you imagine that he felt a fool, or at any rate that the sense of folly was his sole or his dominant emotion, then you have not studied with sufficient delicacy the rich romantic nature of the hero of this tale. His mistake was really a most enviable mistake; and he knew it, if he was the man I take him for. What could be more delightful than to have in the same few minutes all the fascinating terrors of going abroad combined with all the humane security of coming home again? What could be better than to have all the fun of discovering South Africa without the disgusting necessity of landing there? What could be more glorious than to brace one’s self up to discover New

South Wales and then realize, with a gush of happy tears, that it was really old South Wales. This at least seems to me the main problem for philosophers, and is in a manner the main problem of this book. How can we contrive to be at once astonished at the world and yet at home in it? How can this queer cosmic town, with its many-legged citizens, with its monstrous and ancient lamps, how can this world give us at once the fascination of a strange town and the comfort and honour of being our own town?

To show that a faith or a philosophy is true from every standpoint would be too big an undertaking even for a much bigger book than this; it is necessary to follow one path of argument; and this is the path that I here propose to follow. I wish to set forth my faith as particularly answering this double spiritual need, the need for that mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar which Christendom has rightly named romance. For the very word “romance” has in it the mystery and ancient meaning of Rome. Any one setting out to dispute anything ought always to begin by saying what he does not dispute. Beyond stating what he proposes to prove he should always state what he does not propose to prove. The thing I do not propose to prove, the thing I propose to take as common ground between myself and any average reader, is this desirability of an active and imaginative life, picturesque and full of a poetical curiosity, a life such as western man at any rate always seems to have desired. If a man says that extinction is better than existence or blank existence better than variety and adventure, then he is not one of the ordinary people to whom I am talking. If a man prefers nothing I can give him nothing. But nearly all people I have ever met in this western society in which I live would agree to the general proposition that we need this life of practical romance; the combination of something that is strange with something that is secure. We need so to view the world as to combine an idea of wonder and an idea of welcome. We need to be happy in this wonderland without once being merely comfortable. It is THIS achievement of my creed that I shall chiefly pursue in these pages.

But I have a peculiar reason for mentioning the man in a yacht, who discovered England. For I am that man in a yacht. I discovered England. I do not see how this book can avoid being egotistical; and I do not quite see (to tell the truth) how it can avoid being dull. Dulness will, however, free me from the charge which I most lament; the charge of being flippant. Mere light sophistry is the thing that I happen to despise most of all things, and it is perhaps a wholesome fact that this is the thing of which I am generally accused. I know nothing so contemptible as a mere paradox; a mere ingenious defence of the indefensible. If it were true (as has been said) that Mr. Bernard Shaw lived upon paradox, then he ought to be a mere common millionaire; for a man of his mental activity could invent a sophistry every six minutes. It is as easy as lying; because it is lying. The truth is, of course, that Mr. Shaw is cruelly hampered by the fact that he cannot tell any lie unless he thinks it is the truth. I find myself under the same intolerable bondage. I never in my life said anything merely because I thought it funny; though of course, I have had ordinary human vainglory, and may have thought it funny because I had said it. It is one thing to describe an interview with a gorgon or a griffin, a creature who does not exist. It is another thing to discover that the rhinoceros does exist and then take pleasure in the fact that he looks as if he didn't. One searches for truth, but it may be that one pursues instinctively the more extraordinary truths. And I offer this book with the heartiest sentiments to all the jolly people who hate what I write, and regard it (very justly, for all I know), as a piece of poor clowning or a single tiresome joke.

For if this book is a joke it is a joke against me. I am the man who with the utmost daring discovered what had been discovered before. If there is an element of farce in what follows, the farce is at my own expense; for this book explains how I fancied I was the first to set foot in Brighton and then found I was the last. It recounts my elephantine adventures in pursuit of the obvious. No one can think my case more ludicrous than I think it myself; no reader can accuse me here of trying to make a fool of him: I am the fool of this story, and no rebel shall hurl me from my throne. I freely confess all the idiotic ambitions of the end of the nineteenth century. I did, like all other solemn little boys, try to be in advance of the age. Like them I tried to be some ten minutes in advance of the truth. And I found that I was eighteen hundred years behind it. I did strain my voice with a painfully juvenile exaggeration in uttering my truths. And I was punished in the fittest and funniest way, for I have kept my truths: but I have discovered, not that they were not truths, but simply that they were not mine. When I fancied that I stood alone I was really in the ridiculous position of being backed up by all Christendom. It may be, Heaven forgive me, that I did try to be original; but I only succeeded in inventing all by myself an inferior copy of the existing traditions of civilized religion. The man from the yacht thought he was the first to find England; I thought I was the first to find Europe. I did try to found a heresy of my own; and when I had put the last touches to it, I discovered that it was orthodoxy.

It may be that somebody will be entertained by the account of this happy fiasco. It might amuse a friend or an enemy to read how I gradually learnt from the truth of some stray legend or from the falsehood of some dominant philosophy, things that I might have learnt from my catechism — if I had ever learnt it. There may or may not be some entertainment in reading how I found at last in an anarchist club or a Babylonian temple what I might have found in the nearest parish church. If any one is entertained by learning how the flowers of the field or the phrases in an omnibus, the accidents of politics or the pains of youth came together in a certain order to produce a certain conviction of Christian orthodoxy, he may possibly read this book. But there is in everything a reasonable division of labour. I have written the book, and nothing on earth would induce me to read it.

I add one purely pedantic note which comes, as a note naturally should, at the beginning of the book. These essays are concerned only to discuss the actual fact that the central Christian theology (sufficiently summarized in the Apostles' Creed) is the best root of energy and sound ethics. They are not intended to discuss the very fascinating but quite different question of what is the present seat of authority for the proclamation of that creed. When the word "orthodoxy" is used here it means the Apostles' Creed, as understood by everybody calling himself Christian until a very short time ago and the general historic conduct of those who held such a creed. I have been forced by mere space to confine myself to what I have got from this creed; I do not touch the matter much disputed among modern Christians, of where we ourselves got it. This is not an ecclesiastical treatise but a sort of slovenly autobiography. But if any one wants my opinions about the actual nature of the authority, Mr. G.S.Street has only to throw me another challenge, and I will write him another book.

II THE MANIAC

Thoroughly worldly people never understand even the world; they rely altogether on a few cynical maxims which are not true. Once I remember walking with a prosperous publisher, who made a remark which I had often heard before; it is, indeed, almost a motto of the modern world. Yet I had heard it once too often, and I saw suddenly that there was nothing in it. The publisher said of somebody, “That man will get on; he believes in himself.” And I remember that as I lifted my head to listen, my eye caught an omnibus on which was written “Hanwell.” I said to him, “Shall I tell you where the men are who believe most in themselves? For I can tell you. I know of men who believe in themselves more colossally than Napoleon or Caesar. I know where flames the fixed star of certainty and success. I can guide you to the thrones of the Super-men. The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums.” He said mildly that there were a good many men after all who believed in themselves and who were not in lunatic asylums. “Yes, there are,” I retorted, “and you of all men ought to know them. That drunken poet from whom you would not take a dreary tragedy, he believed in himself. That elderly minister with an epic from whom you were hiding in a back room, he believed in himself. If you consulted your business experience instead of your ugly individualistic philosophy, you would know that believing in himself is one of the commonest signs of a rotter. Actors who can’t act believe in themselves; and debtors who won’t pay. It would be much truer to say that a man will certainly fail, because he believes in himself. Complete self-confidence is not merely a sin; complete self-confidence is a weakness. Believing utterly in one’s self is a hysterical and superstitious belief like believing in Joanna Southcote: the man who has it has `Hanwell’ written on his face as plain as it is written on that omnibus.” And to all this my friend the publisher made this very deep and effective reply, “Well, if a man is not to believe in himself, in what is he to believe?” After a long pause I replied, “I will go home and write a book in answer to that question.” This is the book that I have written in answer to it.

But I think this book may well start where our argument started — in the neighbourhood of the mad-house. Modern masters of science are much impressed with the need of beginning all inquiry with a fact. The ancient masters of religion were quite equally impressed with that necessity. They began with the fact of sin — a fact as practical as potatoes. Whether or no man could be washed in miraculous waters, there was no doubt at any rate that he wanted washing. But certain religious leaders in London, not mere materialists, have begun in our day not to deny the highly disputable water, but to deny the indisputable dirt. Certain new theologians dispute original sin, which is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved. Some followers of the Reverend R.J.Campbell, in their almost too fastidious spirituality, admit divine sinlessness, which they cannot see even in their dreams. But they essentially deny human sin, which they can see in the street. The strongest saints and the strongest sceptics alike took positive evil as the starting-point of their argument. If it be true (as it certainly is) that a man can feel exquisite happiness in skinning a cat, then the religious philosopher can only draw one of two deductions. He must either deny the existence of God, as all atheists do; or he must deny the present union between God and man, as all Christians do. The new theologians seem to think it a highly rationalistic solution to deny the cat.

In this remarkable situation it is plainly not now possible (with any hope of a universal appeal) to start, as our fathers did, with the fact of sin. This very fact which was to them (and is to me) as plain as a pikestaff, is the very fact that has been specially diluted or denied. But though moderns deny the existence of sin, I do not think that they have yet denied the existence of a lunatic asylum. We all agree still that there is a collapse of the intellect as unmistakable as a falling house. Men deny hell, but not, as yet, Hanwell. For the purpose of our primary argument the one may very well stand where the other stood. I mean that as all thoughts and theories were once judged by whether they tended to make a man lose his soul, so for our present purpose all modern thoughts and theories may be judged by whether they tend to make a man lose his wits.

It is true that some speak lightly and loosely of insanity as in itself attractive. But a moment’s thought will show that if disease is beautiful, it is generally some one else’s disease. A blind man may be picturesque; but it requires two eyes to see the picture. And similarly even the wildest poetry of insanity can only be enjoyed by the sane. To the insane man his insanity is quite prosaic, because it is quite true. A man who thinks himself a chicken is to himself as ordinary as a chicken. A man who thinks he is a bit of glass is to himself as dull as a bit of glass. It is the homogeneity of his mind which makes him dull, and which makes him mad. It is only because we see the irony of his idea that we think him even amusing; it is only because he does not see the irony of his idea that he is put in Hanwell at all. In short, oddities only strike ordinary people. Oddities do not strike odd people. This is why ordinary people have a much more exciting time; while odd people are always complaining of the dulness of life. This is also why the new novels die so quickly, and why the old fairy tales endure for ever. The old fairy tale makes the hero a normal human boy; it is his adventures that are startling; they startle him because he is normal. But in the modern psychological novel the hero is abnormal; the centre is not central. Hence the fiercest adventures fail to affect him adequately, and the book is monotonous. You can make a story out of a hero among dragons; but not out of a dragon among dragons. The fairy tale discusses what a sane man will do in a mad world. The sober realistic novel of to-day discusses what an essential lunatic will do in a dull world.

Let us begin, then, with the mad-house; from this evil and fantastic inn let us set forth on our intellectual journey. Now, if we are to glance at the philosophy of sanity, the first thing to do in the matter is to blot out one big and common mistake. There is a notion adrift everywhere that imagination, especially mystical imagination, is dangerous to man’s mental balance. Poets are commonly spoken of as psychologically unreliable; and generally there is a vague association between wreathing laurels in your hair and sticking straws in it. Facts and history utterly contradict this view. Most of the very great poets have been not only sane, but extremely business-like; and if Shakespeare ever really held horses, it was because he was much the safest man to hold them. Imagination does not breed insanity. Exactly what does breed insanity is reason. Poets do not go mad; but chess-players do. Mathematicians go mad, and cashiers; but creative artists very seldom. I am not, as will be seen, in any sense attacking logic: I only say that this danger does lie in logic, not in imagination. Artistic paternity is as wholesome as physical paternity. Moreover, it is worthy of remark that when a poet really was morbid it was commonly because he had some weak spot of rationality on his brain. Poe, for instance, really was morbid; not because he was poetical, but because he was specially analytical. Even chess was too poetical for him; he disliked chess because it was full of knights and castles, like a poem. He avowedly preferred the black discs of draughts, because they were more like the mere black dots on a diagram. Perhaps the strongest case of all is this: that only one great English poet went mad, Cowper. And he was definitely driven mad by logic, by the ugly and alien logic of predestination. Poetry was not the disease, but the medicine; poetry partly kept him in health. He could sometimes forget the red and thirsty hell to which his hideous necessitarianism dragged him among the wide waters and the white flat lilies of the Ouse. He was damned by John Calvin; he was almost saved by John Gilpin. Everywhere we see that men do not go mad by dreaming. Critics are much madder than poets. Homer is complete and calm enough; it is his critics who tear him into extravagant tatters. Shakespeare is quite himself; it is only some of his critics who have discovered that he was somebody else. And though St. John the Evangelist saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creature so wild as one of his own commentators. The general fact is simple. Poetry is sane because it floats easily in an infinite sea; reason seeks to cross the infinite sea, and so make it finite. The result is mental exhaustion, like the physical exhaustion of Mr. Holbein. To accept everything is an exercise, to understand everything a strain. The poet only desires exaltation and expansion, a world to stretch himself in. The poet only asks to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician who seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it is his head that splits.

It is a small matter, but not irrelevant, that this striking mistake is commonly supported by a striking misquotation. We have all heard people cite the celebrated line of Dryden as “Great genius is to madness near allied.” But Dryden did not say that great genius was to madness near allied. Dryden was a great genius himself, and knew better. It would have been hard to find a man more romantic than he, or more sensible. What Dryden said was this, “Great wits are oft to madness near allied”; and that is true. It is the pure promptitude of the intellect that is in peril of a breakdown. Also people might remember of what sort of man Dryden was talking. He was not talking of any unworldly visionary like Vaughan or George Herbert. He was talking of a cynical man of the world, a sceptic, a diplomatist, a great practical politician. Such men are indeed to madness near allied. Their incessant calculation of their own brains and other people’s brains is a dangerous trade. It is always perilous to the mind to reckon up the mind. A flippant person has asked why we say, “As mad as a hatter.” A more flippant person might answer that a hatter is mad because he has to measure the human head.

And if great reasoners are often maniacal, it is equally true that maniacs are commonly great reasoners. When I was engaged in a controversy with the CLARION on the matter of free will, that able writer Mr. R.B.Suthers said that free will was lunacy, because it meant causeless actions, and the actions of a lunatic would be causeless. I do not dwell here upon the disastrous lapse in determinist logic. Obviously if any actions, even a lunatic's, can be causeless, determinism is done for. If the chain of causation can be broken for a madman, it can be broken for a man. But my purpose is to point out something more practical. It was natural, perhaps, that a modern Marxian Socialist should not know anything about free will. But it was certainly remarkable that a modern Marxian Socialist should not know anything about lunatics. Mr. Suthers evidently did not know anything about lunatics. The last thing that can be said of a lunatic is that his actions are causeless. If any human acts may loosely be called causeless, they are the minor acts of a healthy man; whistling as he walks; slashing the grass with a stick; kicking his heels or rubbing his hands. It is the happy man who does the useless things; the sick man is not strong enough to be idle. It is exactly such careless and causeless actions that the madman could never understand; for the madman (like the determinist) generally sees too much cause in everything. The madman would read a conspiratorial significance into those empty activities. He would think that the lopping of the grass was an attack on private property. He would think that the kicking of the heels was a signal to an accomplice. If the madman could for an instant become careless, he would become sane. Every one who has had the misfortune to talk with people in the heart or on the edge of mental disorder, knows that their most sinister quality is a horrible clarity of detail; a connecting of one thing with another in a map more elaborate than a maze. If you argue with a madman, it is extremely probable that you will get the worst of it; for in many ways his mind moves all the quicker for not being delayed by the things that go with good judgment. He is not hampered by a sense of humour or by charity, or by the dumb certainties of experience. He is the more logical for losing certain sane affections. Indeed, the common phrase for insanity is in this respect a misleading one. The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason.

The madman's explanation of a thing is always complete, and often in a purely rational sense satisfactory. Or, to speak more strictly, the insane explanation, if not conclusive, is at least unanswerable; this may be observed specially in the two or three commonest kinds of madness. If a man says (for instance) that men have a conspiracy against him, you cannot dispute it except by saying that all the men deny that they are conspirators; which is exactly what conspirators would do. His explanation covers the facts as much as yours. Or if a man says that he is the rightful King of England, it is no complete answer to say that the existing authorities call him mad; for if he were King of England that might be the wisest thing for the existing authorities to do. Or if a man says that he is Jesus Christ, it is no answer to tell him that the world denies his divinity; for the world denied Christ's.

Nevertheless he is wrong. But if we attempt to trace his error in exact terms, we shall not find it quite so easy as we had supposed. Perhaps the nearest we can get to expressing it is to say this: that his mind moves in a perfect but narrow circle. A small circle is quite as infinite as a large circle; but, though it is quite as infinite, it is not so large. In the same way the insane explanation is quite as complete as the sane one, but it is not so large. A bullet is quite as round as the world, but it is not the world. There is such a thing as a narrow universality; there is such a thing as a small and cramped eternity; you may see it in many modern religions. Now, speaking quite externally and empirically, we may say that the strongest and most unmistakable MARK of madness is this combination between a logical completeness and a spiritual contraction. The lunatic's theory explains a large number of things, but it does not explain them in a large way. I mean that if you or I were dealing with a mind that was growing morbid, we should be chiefly concerned not so much to give it arguments as to give it air, to convince it that there was something cleaner and cooler outside the suffocation of a single argument. Suppose, for instance, it were the first case that I took as typical; suppose it were the case of a man who accused everybody of conspiring against him. If we could express our deepest feelings of protest and appeal against this obsession, I suppose we should say something like this: "Oh, I admit that you have your case and have it by heart, and that many things do fit into other things as you say. I admit that your explanation explains a great deal; but what a great deal it leaves out! Are there no other stories in the world except yours; and are all men busy with your business? Suppose we grant the details; perhaps when the man in the street did not seem to see you it was only his cunning; perhaps when the policeman asked you your name it was only because he knew it already. But how much happier you would be if you only knew that these people cared nothing about you! How much larger your life would be if your self could become smaller in it; if you could really look at other men with common curiosity and pleasure; if you could see them walking as they are in their sunny selfishness and their virile indifference! You would begin to be interested in them, because they were not interested in you. You would break out of this tiny and tawdry theatre in which your own little plot is always being played, and you would find yourself under a freer sky, in a street full of splendid strangers." Or suppose it were the second case of madness, that of a man who claims the crown, your impulse would be to answer, "All right! Perhaps you know that you are the King of England; but why do you care? Make one magnificent effort and you will be a human being and look down on all the kings of the earth." Or it might be the third case, of the madman who called himself Christ. If we said what we felt, we should say, "So you are the Creator and Redeemer of the world: but what a small world it must be! What a little heaven you must inhabit, with angels no bigger than butterflies! How sad it must be to be God; and an inadequate God! Is there really no life fuller and no love more marvellous than yours; and is it really in your small and painful pity that all flesh must put its faith? How much happier you would be, how much more of you there would be, if the hammer of a higher God could smash your small cosmos, scattering the stars like spangles, and leave you in the open, free like other men to look up as well as down!"

And it must be remembered that the most purely practical science does take this view of mental evil; it does not seek to argue with it like a heresy but simply to snap it like a spell. Neither modern science nor ancient religion believes in complete free thought. Theology rebukes certain thoughts by calling them blasphemous. Science rebukes certain thoughts by calling them morbid. For example, some religious societies discouraged men more or less from thinking about sex. The new scientific society definitely discourages men from thinking about death; it is a fact, but it is considered a morbid fact. And in dealing with those whose morbidity has a touch of mania, modern science cares far less for pure logic than a dancing Dervish. In these cases it is not enough that the unhappy man should desire truth; he must desire health. Nothing can save him but a blind hunger for normality, like that of a beast. A man cannot think himself out of mental evil; for it is actually the organ of thought that has become diseased, ungovernable, and, as it were, independent. He can only be saved by will or faith. The moment his mere reason moves, it moves in the old circular rut; he will go round and round his logical circle, just as a man in a third-class carriage on the Inner Circle will go round and round the Inner Circle unless he performs the voluntary, vigorous, and mystical act of getting out at Gower Street. Decision is the whole business here; a door must be shut for ever. Every remedy is a desperate remedy. Every cure is a miraculous cure. Curing a madman is not arguing with a philosopher; it is casting out a devil. And however quietly doctors and psychologists may go to work in the matter, their attitude is profoundly intolerant — as intolerant as Bloody Mary. Their attitude is really this: that the man must stop thinking, if he is to go on living. Their counsel is one of intellectual amputation. If thy HEAD offend thee, cut it off; for it is better, not merely to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as a child, but to enter it as an imbecile, rather than with your whole intellect to be cast into hell — or into Hanwell.

Such is the madman of experience; he is commonly a reasoner, frequently a successful reasoner. Doubtless he could be vanquished in mere reason, and the case against him put logically. But it can be put much more precisely in more general and even aesthetic terms. He is in the clean and well-lit prison of one idea: he is sharpened to one painful point. He is without healthy hesitation and healthy complexity. Now, as I explain in the introduction, I have determined in these early chapters to give not so much a diagram of a doctrine as some pictures of a point of view. And I have described at length my vision of the maniac for this reason: that just as I am affected by the maniac, so I am affected by most modern thinkers. That unmistakable mood or note that I hear from Hanwell, I hear also from half the chairs of science and seats of learning to-day; and most of the mad doctors are mad doctors in more senses than one. They all have exactly that combination we have noted: the combination of an expansive and exhaustive reason with a contracted common sense. They are universal only in the sense that they take one thin explanation and carry it very far. But a pattern can stretch for ever and still be a small pattern. They see a chess-board white on black, and if the universe is paved with it, it is still white on black. Like the lunatic, they cannot alter their standpoint; they cannot make a mental effort and suddenly see it black on white.

Take first the more obvious case of materialism. As an explanation of the world, materialism has a sort of insane simplicity. It has just the quality of the madman's argument; we have at once the sense of it covering everything and the sense of it leaving everything out. Contemplate some able and sincere materialist, as, for instance, Mr. McCabe, and you will have exactly this unique sensation. He understands everything, and everything does not seem worth understanding. His cosmos may be complete in every rivet and cog-wheel, but still his cosmos is smaller than our world. Somehow his scheme, like the lucid scheme of the madman, seems unconscious of the alien energies and the large indifference of the earth; it is not thinking of the real things of the earth, of fighting peoples or proud mothers, or first love or fear upon the sea. The earth is so very large, and the cosmos is so very small. The cosmos is about the smallest hole that a man can hide his head in.

It must be understood that I am not now discussing the relation of these creeds to truth; but, for the present, solely their relation to health. Later in the argument I hope to attack the question of objective verity; here I speak only of a phenomenon of psychology. I do not for the present attempt to prove to Haeckel that materialism is untrue, any more than I attempted to prove to the man who thought he was Christ that he was labouring under an error. I merely remark here on the fact that both cases have the same kind of completeness and the same kind of incompleteness. You can explain a man's detention at Hanwell by an indifferent public by saying that it is the crucifixion of a god of whom the world is not worthy. The explanation does explain. Similarly you may explain the order in the universe by saying that all things, even the souls of men, are leaves inevitably unfolding on an utterly unconscious tree — the blind destiny of matter. The explanation does explain, though not, of course, so completely as the madman's. But the point here is that the normal human mind not only objects to both, but feels to both the same objection. Its approximate statement is that if the man in Hanwell is the real God, he is not much of a god. And, similarly, if the cosmos of the materialist is the real cosmos, it is not much of a cosmos. The thing has shrunk. The deity is less divine than many men; and (according to Haeckel) the whole of life is something much more grey, narrow, and trivial than many separate aspects of it. The parts seem greater than the whole.

For we must remember that the materialist philosophy (whether true or not) is certainly much more limiting than any religion. In one sense, of course, all intelligent ideas are narrow. They cannot be broader than themselves. A Christian is only restricted in the same sense that an atheist is restricted. He cannot think Christianity false and continue to be a Christian; and the atheist cannot think atheism false and continue to be an atheist. But as it happens, there is a very special sense in which materialism has more restrictions than spiritualism. Mr. McCabe thinks me a slave because I am not allowed to believe in determinism. I think Mr. McCabe a slave because he is not allowed to believe in fairies. But if we examine the two vetoes we shall see that his is really much more of a pure veto than mine. The Christian is quite free to believe that there is a considerable amount of settled order and inevitable development in the universe. But the materialist is not allowed to admit into his spotless machine the slightest speck of spiritualism or miracle. Poor Mr. McCabe is not allowed to retain even the tiniest imp, though it might be hiding in a pimpernel. The Christian admits that the universe is manifold and even miscellaneous, just as a sane man knows that he is complex. The sane man knows that he has a touch of the beast, a touch of the devil, a touch of the saint, a touch of the citizen. Nay, the really sane man knows that he has a touch of the madman. But the materialist's world is quite simple and solid, just as the madman is quite sure he is sane. The materialist is sure that history has been simply and solely a chain of causation, just as the interesting person before mentioned is quite sure that he is simply and solely a chicken. Materialists and madmen never have doubts.

Spiritual doctrines do not actually limit the mind as do materialistic denials. Even if I believe in immortality I need not think about it. But if I disbelieve in immortality I must not think about it. In the first case the road is open and I can go as far as I like; in the second the road is shut. But the case is even stronger, and the parallel with madness is yet more strange. For it was our case against the exhaustive and logical theory of the lunatic that, right or wrong, it gradually destroyed his humanity. Now it is the charge against the main deductions of the materialist that, right or wrong, they gradually destroy his humanity; I do not mean only kindness, I mean hope, courage, poetry, initiative, all that is human. For instance, when materialism leads men to complete fatalism (as it generally does), it is quite idle to pretend that it is in any sense a liberating force. It is absurd to say that you are especially advancing freedom when you only use free thought to destroy free will. The determinists come to bind, not to loose. They may well call their law the “chain” of causation. It is the worst chain that ever fettered a human being. You may use the language of liberty, if you like, about materialistic teaching, but it is obvious that this is just as inapplicable to it as a whole as the same language when applied to a man locked up in a madhouse. You may say, if you like, that the man is free to think himself a poached egg. But it is surely a more massive and important fact that if he is a poached egg he is not free to eat, drink, sleep, walk, or smoke a cigarette. Similarly you may say, if you like, that the bold determinist speculator is free to disbelieve in the reality of the will. But it is a much more massive and important fact that he is not free to raise, to curse, to thank, to justify, to urge, to punish, to resist temptations, to incite mobs, to make New Year resolutions, to pardon sinners, to rebuke tyrants, or even to say “thank you” for the mustard.

In passing from this subject I may note that there is a queer fallacy to the effect that materialistic fatalism is in some way favourable to mercy, to the abolition of cruel punishments or punishments of any kind. This is startlingly the reverse of the truth. It is quite tenable that the doctrine of necessity makes no difference at all; that it leaves the flogger flogging and the kind friend exhorting as before. But obviously if it stops either of them it stops the kind exhortation. That the sins are inevitable does not prevent punishment; if it prevents anything it prevents persuasion. Determinism is quite as likely to lead to cruelty as it is certain to lead to cowardice. Determinism is not inconsistent with the cruel treatment of criminals. What it is (perhaps) inconsistent with is the generous treatment of criminals; with any appeal to their better feelings or encouragement in their moral struggle. The determinist does not believe in appealing to the will, but he does believe in changing the environment. He must not say to the sinner, “Go and sin no more,” because the sinner cannot help it. But he can put him in boiling oil; for boiling oil is an environment. Considered as a figure, therefore, the materialist has the fantastic outline of the figure of the madman. Both take up a position at once unanswerable and intolerable.

Of course it is not only of the materialist that all this is true. The same would apply to the other extreme of speculative logic. There is a sceptic far more terrible than he who believes that everything began in matter. It is possible to meet the sceptic who believes that everything began in himself. He doubts not the existence of angels or devils, but the existence of men and cows. For him his own friends are a mythology made up by himself. He created his own father and his own mother. This horrible fancy has in it something decidedly attractive to the somewhat mystical egoism of our day. That publisher who thought that men would get on if they believed in themselves, those seekers after the Superman who are always looking for him in the looking-glass, those writers who talk about impressing their personalities instead of creating life for the world, all these people have really only an inch between them and this awful emptiness. Then when this kindly world all round the man has been blackened out like a lie; when friends fade into ghosts, and the foundations of the world fail; then when the man, believing in nothing and in no man, is alone in his own nightmare, then the great individualistic motto shall be written over him in avenging irony. The stars will be only dots in the blackness of his own brain; his mother's face will be only a sketch from his own insane pencil on the walls of his cell. But over his cell shall be written, with dreadful truth, "He believes in himself."

All that concerns us here, however, is to note that this panegoistic extreme of thought exhibits the same paradox as the other extreme of materialism. It is equally complete in theory and equally crippling in practice. For the sake of simplicity, it is easier to state the notion by saying that a man can believe that he is always in a dream. Now, obviously there can be no positive proof given to him that he is not in a dream, for the simple reason that no proof can be offered that might not be offered in a dream. But if the man began to burn down London and say that his housekeeper would soon call him to breakfast, we should take him and put him with other logicians in a place which has often been alluded to in the course of this chapter. The man who cannot believe his senses, and the man who cannot believe anything else, are both insane, but their insanity is proved not by any error in their argument, but by the manifest mistake of their whole lives. They have both locked themselves up in two boxes, painted inside with the sun and stars; they are both unable to get out, the one into the health and happiness of heaven, the other even into the health and happiness of the earth. Their position is quite reasonable; nay, in a sense it is infinitely reasonable, just as a threepenny bit is infinitely circular. But there is such a thing as a mean infinity, a base and slavish eternity. It is amusing to notice that many of the moderns, whether sceptics or mystics, have taken as their sign a certain eastern symbol, which is the very symbol of this ultimate nullity. When they wish to represent eternity, they represent it by a serpent with his tail in his mouth. There is a startling sarcasm in the image of that very unsatisfactory meal. The eternity of the material fatalists, the eternity of the eastern pessimists, the eternity of the supercilious theosophists and higher scientists of to-day is, indeed, very well presented by a serpent eating his tail, a degraded animal who destroys even himself.

This chapter is purely practical and is concerned with what actually is the chief mark and element of insanity; we may say in summary that it is reason used without root, reason in the void. The man who begins to think without the proper first principles goes mad; he begins to think at the wrong end. And for the rest of these pages we have to try and discover what is the right end. But we may ask in conclusion, if this be what drives men mad, what is it that keeps them sane? By the end of this book I hope to give a definite, some will think a far too definite, answer. But for the moment it is possible in the same solely practical manner to give a general answer touching what in actual human history keeps men sane. Mysticism keeps men sane. As long as you have mystery you have health; when you destroy mystery you create morbidity. The ordinary man has always been sane because the ordinary man has always been a mystic. He has permitted the twilight. He has always had one foot in earth and the other in fairyland. He has always left himself free to doubt his gods; but (unlike the agnostic of to-day) free also to believe in them. He has always cared more for truth than for consistency. If he saw two truths that seemed to contradict each other, he would take the two truths and the contradiction along with them. His spiritual sight is stereoscopic, like his physical sight: he sees two different pictures at once and yet sees all the better for that. Thus he has always believed that there was such a thing as fate, but such a thing as free will also. Thus he believed that children were indeed the kingdom of heaven, but nevertheless ought to be obedient to the kingdom of earth. He admired youth because it was young and age because it was not. It is exactly this balance of apparent contradictions that has been the whole buoyancy of the healthy man. The whole secret of mysticism is this: that man can understand everything by the help of what he does not understand. The morbid logician seeks to make everything lucid, and succeeds in making everything mysterious. The mystic allows one thing to be mysterious, and everything else becomes lucid. The determinist makes the theory of causation quite clear, and then finds that he cannot say “if you please” to the housemaid. The Christian permits free will to remain a sacred mystery; but because of this his relations with the housemaid become of a sparkling and crystal clearness. He puts the seed of dogma in a central darkness; but it branches forth in all directions with abounding natural health. As we have taken the circle as the symbol of reason and madness, we may very well take the cross as the symbol at once of mystery and of health. Buddhism is centripetal, but Christianity is centrifugal: it breaks out. For the circle is perfect and infinite in its nature; but it is fixed for ever in its size; it can never be larger or smaller. But the cross, though it has at its heart a collision and a contradiction, can extend its four arms for ever without altering its shape. Because it has a paradox in its centre it can grow without changing. The circle returns upon itself and is bound. The cross opens its arms to the four winds; it is a signpost for free travellers.

Symbols alone are of even a cloudy value in speaking of this deep matter; and another symbol from physical nature will express sufficiently well the real place of mysticism before mankind. The one created thing which we cannot look at is the one thing in the light of which we look at everything. Like the sun at noonday, mysticism explains everything else by the blaze of its own victorious invisibility. Detached intellectualism is (in the exact sense of a popular phrase) all moonshine; for it is light without heat, and it is secondary light, reflected from a dead world. But the Greeks were right when they made Apollo the god both of imagination and of sanity; for he was both the patron of poetry and the patron of healing. Of necessary dogmas and a special creed I shall speak later. But that transcendentalism by which all men live has primarily much the position of the sun in the sky. We are conscious of it as of a kind of splendid confusion; it is something both shining and shapeless, at once a blaze and a blur. But the circle of the moon is as clear and unmistakable, as recurrent and inevitable, as the circle of Euclid on a blackboard. For the moon is utterly reasonable; and the moon is the mother of lunatics and has given to them all her name.

III THE SUICIDE OF THOUGHT

The phrases of the street are not only forcible but subtle: for a figure of speech can often get into a crack too small for a definition. Phrases like “put out” or “off colour” might have been coined by Mr. Henry James in an agony of verbal precision. And there is no more subtle truth than that of the everyday phrase about a man having “his heart in the right place.” It involves the idea of normal proportion; not only does a certain function exist, but it is rightly related to other functions. Indeed, the negation of this phrase would describe with peculiar accuracy the somewhat morbid mercy and perverse tenderness of the most representative moderns. If, for instance, I had to describe with fairness the character of Mr. Bernard Shaw, I could not express myself more exactly than by saying that he has a heroically large and generous heart; but not a heart in the right place. And this is so of the typical society of our time.

The modern world is not evil; in some ways the modern world is far too good. It is full of wild and wasted virtues. When a religious scheme is shattered (as Christianity was shattered at the Reformation), it is not merely the vices that are let loose. The vices are, indeed, let loose, and they wander and do damage. But the virtues are let loose also; and the virtues wander more wildly, and the virtues do more terrible damage. The modern world is full of the old Christian virtues gone mad. The virtues have gone mad because they have been isolated from each other and are wandering alone. Thus some scientists care for truth; and their truth is pitiless. Thus some humanitarians only care for pity; and their pity (I am sorry to say) is often untruthful. For example, Mr. Blatchford attacks Christianity because he is mad on one Christian virtue: the merely mystical and almost irrational virtue of charity. He has a strange idea that he will make it easier to forgive sins by saying that there are no sins to forgive. Mr. Blatchford is not only an early Christian, he is the only early Christian who ought really to have been eaten by lions. For in his case the pagan accusation is really true: his mercy would mean mere anarchy. He really is the enemy of the human race — because he is so human. As the other extreme, we may take the acrid realist, who has deliberately killed in himself all human pleasure in happy tales or in the healing of the heart. Torquemada tortured people physically for the sake of moral truth. Zola tortured people morally for the sake of physical truth. But in Torquemada’s time there was at least a system that could to some extent make righteousness and peace kiss each other. Now they do not even bow. But a much stronger case than these two of truth and pity can be found in the remarkable case of the dislocation of humility.

It is only with one aspect of humility that we are here concerned. Humility was largely meant as a restraint upon the arrogance and infinity of the appetite of man. He was always outstripping his mercies with his own newly invented needs. His very power of enjoyment destroyed half his joys. By asking for pleasure, he lost the chief pleasure; for the chief pleasure is surprise. Hence it became evident that if a man would make his world large, he must be always making himself small. Even the haughty visions, the tall cities, and the toppling pinnacles are the creations of humility. Giants that tread down forests like grass are the creations of humility. Towers that vanish upwards above the loneliest star are the creations of humility. For towers are not tall unless we look up at them; and giants are not giants unless they are larger than we. All this gigantesque imagination, which is, perhaps, the mightiest of the pleasures of man, is at bottom entirely humble. It is impossible without humility to enjoy anything — even pride.

But what we suffer from to-day is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert — himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt — the Divine Reason. Huxley preached a humility content to learn from Nature. But the new sceptic is so humble that he doubts if he can even learn. Thus we should be wrong if we had said hastily that there is no humility typical of our time. The truth is that there is a real humility typical of our time; but it so happens that it is practically a more poisonous humility than the wildest prostrations of the ascetic. The old humility was a spur that prevented a man from stopping; not a nail in his boot that prevented him from going on. For the old humility made a man doubtful about his efforts, which might make him work harder. But the new humility makes a man doubtful about his aims, which will make him stop working altogether.

At any street corner we may meet a man who utters the frantic and blasphemous statement that he may be wrong. Every day one comes across somebody who says that of course his view may not be the right one. Of course his view must be the right one, or it is not his view. We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table. We are in danger of seeing philosophers who doubt the law of gravity as being a mere fancy of their own. Scoffers of old time were too proud to be convinced; but these are too humble to be convinced. The meek do inherit the earth; but the modern sceptics are too meek even to claim their inheritance. It is exactly this intellectual helplessness which is our second problem.

The last chapter has been concerned only with a fact of observation: that what peril of morbidity there is for man comes rather from his reason than his imagination. It was not meant to attack the authority of reason; rather it is the ultimate purpose to defend it. For it needs defence. The whole modern world is at war with reason; and the tower already reels.

The sages, it is often said, can see no answer to the riddle of religion. But the trouble with our sages is not that they cannot see the answer; it is that they cannot even see the riddle. They are like children so stupid as to notice nothing paradoxical in the playful assertion that a door is not a door. The modern latitudinarians speak, for instance, about authority in religion not only as if there were no reason in it, but as if there had never been any reason for it. Apart from seeing its philosophical basis, they cannot even see its historical cause. Religious authority has often, doubtless, been oppressive or unreasonable; just as every legal system (and especially our present one) has been callous and full of a cruel apathy. It is rational to attack the police; nay, it is glorious. But the modern critics of religious authority are like men who should attack the police without ever having heard of burglars. For there is a great and possible peril to the human mind: a peril as practical as burglary. Against it religious authority was reared, rightly or wrongly, as a barrier. And against it something certainly must be reared as a barrier, if our race is to avoid ruin.

That peril is that the human intellect is free to destroy itself. Just as one generation could prevent the very existence of the next generation, by all entering a monastery or jumping into the sea, so one set of thinkers can in some degree prevent further thinking by teaching the next generation that there is no validity in any human thought. It is idle to talk always of the alternative of reason and faith. Reason is itself a matter of faith. It is an act of faith to assert that our thoughts have any relation to reality at all. If you are merely a sceptic, you must sooner or later ask yourself the question, “Why should ANYTHING go right; even observation and deduction? Why should not good logic be as misleading as bad logic? They are both movements in the brain of a bewildered ape?” The young sceptic says, “I have a right to think for myself.” But the old sceptic, the complete sceptic, says, “I have no right to think for myself. I have no right to think at all.”

There is a thought that stops thought. That is the only thought that ought to be stopped. That is the ultimate evil against which all religious authority was aimed. It only appears at the end of decadent ages like our own: and already Mr. H.G.Wells has raised its ruinous banner; he has written a delicate piece of scepticism called “Doubts of the Instrument.” In this he questions the brain itself, and endeavours to remove all reality from all his own assertions, past, present, and to come. But it was against this remote ruin that all the military systems in religion were originally ranked and ruled. The creeds and the crusades, the hierarchies and the horrible persecutions were not organized, as is ignorantly said, for the suppression of reason. They were organized for the difficult defence of reason. Man, by a blind instinct, knew that if once things were wildly questioned, reason could be questioned first. The authority of priests to absolve, the authority of popes to define the authority, even of inquisitors to terrify: these were all only dark defences erected round one central authority, more undemonstrable, more supernatural than all — the authority of a man to think. We know now that this is so; we have no excuse for not knowing it. For we can hear scepticism crashing through the old ring of authorities, and at the same moment we can see reason swaying upon her throne. In so far as religion is gone, reason is going. For they are both of the same primary and authoritative kind. They are both methods of proof which cannot themselves be proved. And in the act of destroying the idea of Divine authority we have largely destroyed the idea of that human authority by which we do a long-division sum. With a long and sustained tug we have attempted to pull the mitre off pontifical man; and his head has come off with it.

Lest this should be called loose assertion, it is perhaps desirable, though dull, to run rapidly through the chief modern fashions of thought which have this effect of stopping thought itself. Materialism and the view of everything as a personal illusion have some such effect; for if the mind is mechanical, thought cannot be very exciting, and if the cosmos is unreal, there is nothing to think about. But in these cases the effect is indirect and doubtful. In some cases it is direct and clear; notably in the case of what is generally called evolution.

Evolution is a good example of that modern intelligence which, if it destroys anything, destroys itself. Evolution is either an innocent scientific description of how certain earthly things came about; or, if it is anything more than this, it is an attack upon thought itself. If evolution destroys anything, it does not destroy religion but rationalism. If evolution simply means that a positive thing called an ape turned very slowly into a positive thing called a man, then it is stingless for the most orthodox; for a personal God might just as well do things slowly as quickly, especially if, like the Christian God, he were outside time. But if it means anything more, it means that there is no such thing as an ape to change, and no such thing as a man for him to change into. It means that there is no such thing as a thing. At best, there is only one thing, and that is a flux of everything and anything. This is an attack not upon the faith, but upon the mind; you cannot think if there are no things to think about. You cannot think if you are not separate from the subject of thought. Descartes said, “I think; therefore I am.” The philosophic evolutionist reverses and negatives the epigram. He says, “I am not; therefore I cannot think.”

Then there is the opposite attack on thought: that urged by Mr. H.G.Wells when he insists that every separate thing is “unique,” and there are no categories at all. This also is merely destructive. Thinking means connecting things, and stops if they cannot be connected. It need hardly be said that this scepticism forbidding thought necessarily forbids speech; a man cannot open his mouth without contradicting it. Thus when Mr. Wells says (as he did somewhere), “All chairs are quite different,” he utters not merely a misstatement, but a contradiction in terms. If all chairs were quite different, you could not call them “all chairs.”

Akin to these is the false theory of progress, which maintains that we alter the test instead of trying to pass the test. We often hear it said, for instance, “What is right in one age is wrong in another.” This is quite reasonable, if it means that there is a fixed aim, and that certain methods attain at certain times and not at other times. If women, say, desire to be elegant, it may be that they are improved at one time by growing fatter and at another time by growing thinner. But you cannot say that they are improved by ceasing to wish to be elegant and beginning to wish to be oblong. If the standard changes, how can there be improvement, which implies a standard? Nietzsche started a nonsensical idea that men had once sought as good what we now call evil; if it were so, we could not talk of surpassing or even falling short of them. How can you overtake Jones if you walk in the other direction? You cannot discuss whether one people has succeeded more in being miserable than another succeeded in being happy. It would be like discussing whether Milton was more puritanical than a pig is fat.

It is true that a man (a silly man) might make change itself his object or ideal. But as an ideal, change itself becomes unchangeable. If the change-worshipper wishes to estimate his own progress, he must be sternly loyal to the ideal of change; he must not begin to flirt gaily with the ideal of monotony. Progress itself cannot progress. It is worth remark, in passing, that when Tennyson, in a wild and rather weak manner, welcomed the idea of infinite alteration in society, he instinctively took a metaphor which suggests an imprisoned tedium. He wrote —

“Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.”

He thought of change itself as an unchangeable groove; and so it is. Change is about the narrowest and hardest groove that a man can get into.

The main point here, however, is that this idea of a fundamental alteration in the standard is one of the things that make thought about the past or future simply impossible. The theory of a complete change of standards in human history does not merely deprive us of the pleasure of honouring our fathers; it deprives us even of the more modern and aristocratic pleasure of despising them.

This bald summary of the thought-destroying forces of our time would not be complete without some reference to pragmatism; for though I have here used and should everywhere defend the pragmatist method as a preliminary guide to truth, there is an extreme application of it which involves the absence of all truth whatever. My meaning can be put shortly thus. I agree with the pragmatists that apparent objective truth is not the whole matter; that there is an authoritative need to believe the things that are necessary to the human mind. But I say that one of those necessities precisely is a belief in objective truth. The pragmatist tells a man to think what he must think and never mind the Absolute. But precisely one of the things that he must think is the Absolute. This philosophy, indeed, is a kind of verbal paradox. Pragmatism is a matter of human needs; and one of the first of human needs is to be something more than a pragmatist. Extreme pragmatism is just as inhuman as the determinism it so powerfully attacks. The determinist (who, to do him justice, does not pretend to be a human being) makes nonsense of the human sense of actual choice. The pragmatist, who professes to be specially human, makes nonsense of the human sense of actual fact.

To sum up our contention so far, we may say that the most characteristic current philosophies have not only a touch of mania, but a touch of suicidal mania. The mere questioner has knocked his head against the limits of human thought; and cracked it. This is what makes so futile the warnings of the orthodox and the boasts of the advanced about the dangerous boyhood of free thought. What we are looking at is not the boyhood of free thought; it is the old age and ultimate dissolution of free thought. It is vain for bishops and pious bigwigs to discuss what dreadful things will happen if wild scepticism runs its course. It has run its course. It is vain for eloquent atheists to talk of the great truths that will be revealed if once we see free thought begin. We have seen it end. It has no more questions to ask; it has questioned itself. You cannot call up any wilder vision than a city in which men ask themselves if they have any selves. You cannot fancy a more sceptical world than that in which men doubt if there is a world. It might certainly have reached its bankruptcy more quickly and cleanly if it had not been feebly hampered by the application of indefensible laws of blasphemy or by the absurd pretence that modern England is Christian. But it would have reached the bankruptcy anyhow. Militant atheists are still unjustly persecuted; but rather because they are an old minority than because they are a new one. Free thought has exhausted its own freedom. It is weary of its own success. If any eager freethinker now hails philosophic freedom as the dawn, he is only like the man in Mark Twain who came out wrapped in blankets to see the sun rise and was just in time to see it set. If any frightened curate still says that it will be awful if the darkness of free thought should spread, we can only answer him in the high and powerful words of Mr. Belloc, “Do not, I beseech you, be troubled about the increase of forces already in dissolution. You have mistaken the hour of the night: it is already morning.” We have no more questions left to ask. We have looked for questions in the darkest corners and on the wildest peaks. We have found all the questions that can be found. It is time we gave up looking for questions and began looking for answers.

But one more word must be added. At the beginning of this preliminary negative sketch I said that our mental ruin has been wrought by wild reason, not by wild imagination. A man does not go mad because he makes a statue a mile high, but he may go mad by thinking it out in square inches. Now, one school of thinkers has seen this and jumped at it as a way of renewing the pagan health of the world. They see that reason destroys; but Will, they say, creates. The ultimate authority, they say, is in will, not in reason. The supreme point is not why a man demands a thing, but the fact that he does demand it. I have no space to trace or expound this philosophy of Will. It came, I suppose, through Nietzsche, who preached something that is called egoism. That, indeed, was simpleminded enough; for Nietzsche denied egoism simply by preaching it. To preach anything is to give it away. First, the egoist calls life a war without mercy, and then he takes the greatest possible trouble to drill his enemies in war. To preach egoism is to practise altruism. But however it began, the view is common enough in current literature. The main defence of these thinkers is that they are not thinkers; they are makers. They say that choice is itself the divine thing. Thus Mr. Bernard Shaw has attacked the old idea that men's acts are to be judged by the standard of the desire of happiness. He says that a man does not act for his happiness, but from his will. He does not say, "Jam will make me happy," but "I want jam." And in all this others follow him with yet greater enthusiasm. Mr. John Davidson, a remarkable poet, is so passionately excited about it that he is obliged to write prose. He publishes a short play with several long prefaces. This is natural enough in Mr. Shaw, for all his plays are prefaces: Mr. Shaw is (I suspect) the only man on earth who has never written any poetry. But that Mr. Davidson (who can write excellent poetry) should write instead laborious metaphysics in defence of this doctrine of will, does show that the doctrine of will has taken hold of men. Even Mr. H.G.Wells has half spoken in its language; saying that one should test acts not like a thinker, but like an artist, saying, "I FEEL this curve is right," or "that line SHALL go thus." They are all excited; and well they may be. For by this doctrine of the divine authority of will, they think they can break out of the doomed fortress of rationalism. They think they can escape.

But they cannot escape. This pure praise of volition ends in the same break up and blank as the mere pursuit of logic. Exactly as complete free thought involves the doubting of thought itself, so the acceptation of mere “willing” really paralyzes the will. Mr. Bernard Shaw has not perceived the real difference between the old utilitarian test of pleasure (clumsy, of course, and easily misstated) and that which he propounds. The real difference between the test of happiness and the test of will is simply that the test of happiness is a test and the other isn’t. You can discuss whether a man’s act in jumping over a cliff was directed towards happiness; you cannot discuss whether it was derived from will. Of course it was. You can praise an action by saying that it is calculated to bring pleasure or pain to discover truth or to save the soul. But you cannot praise an action because it shows will; for to say that is merely to say that it is an action. By this praise of will you cannot really choose one course as better than another. And yet choosing one course as better than another is the very definition of the will you are praising.

The worship of will is the negation of will. To admire mere choice is to refuse to choose. If Mr. Bernard Shaw comes up to me and says, “Will something,” that is tantamount to saying, “I do not mind what you will,” and that is tantamount to saying, “I have no will in the matter.” You cannot admire will in general, because the essence of will is that it is particular. A brilliant anarchist like Mr. John Davidson feels an irritation against ordinary morality, and therefore he invokes will — will to anything. He only wants humanity to want something. But humanity does want something. It wants ordinary morality. He rebels against the law and tells us to will something or anything. But we have willed something. We have willed the law against which he rebels.

All the will-worshippers, from Nietzsche to Mr. Davidson, are really quite empty of volition. They cannot will, they can hardly wish. And if any one wants a proof of this, it can be found quite easily. It can be found in this fact: that they always talk of will as something that expands and breaks out. But it is quite the opposite. Every act of will is an act of self-limitation. To desire action is to desire limitation. In that sense every act is an act of self-sacrifice. When you choose anything, you reject everything else. That objection, which men of this school used to make to the act of marriage, is really an objection to every act. Every act is an irrevocable selection and exclusion. Just as when you marry one woman you give up all the others, so when you take one course of action you give up all the other courses. If you become King of England, you give up the post of Beadle in Brompton. If you go to Rome, you sacrifice a rich suggestive life in Wimbledon. It is the existence of this negative or limiting side of will that makes most of the talk of the anarchic will-worshippers little better than nonsense. For instance, Mr. John Davidson tells us to have nothing to do with “Thou shalt not”; but it is surely obvious that “Thou shalt not” is only one of the necessary corollaries of “I will.” “I will go to the Lord Mayor’s Show, and thou shalt not stop me.” Anarchism adjures us to be bold creative artists, and care for no laws or limits. But it is impossible to be an artist and not care for laws and limits. Art is limitation; the essence of every picture is the frame. If you draw a giraffe, you must draw him with a long neck. If, in your bold creative way, you hold yourself free to draw a giraffe with a short neck, you will really find that you are not free to draw a giraffe. The moment you step into the world of facts, you step into a world of limits. You can free things from alien or accidental laws, but not from the laws of their own nature. You may, if you like, free a tiger from his bars; but do not free him from his stripes. Do not free a camel of the burden of his hump: you may be freeing him from being a camel. Do not go about as a demagogue, encouraging triangles to break out of the prison of their three sides. If a triangle breaks out of its three sides, its life comes to a lamentable end. Somebody wrote a work called “The Loves of the Triangles”; I never read it, but I am sure that if triangles ever were loved, they were loved for being triangular. This is certainly the case with all artistic creation, which is in some ways the most decisive example of pure will. The artist loves his limitations: they constitute the THING he is doing. The painter is glad that the canvas is flat. The sculptor is glad that the clay is colourless.

In case the point is not clear, an historic example may illustrate it. The French Revolution was really an heroic and decisive thing, because the Jacobins willed something definite and limited. They desired the freedoms of democracy, but also all the vetoes of democracy. They wished to have votes and NOT to have titles. Republicanism had an ascetic side in Franklin or Robespierre as well as an expansive side in Danton or Wilkes. Therefore they have created something with a solid substance and shape, the square social equality and peasant wealth of France. But since then the revolutionary or speculative mind of Europe has been weakened by shrinking from any proposal because of the limits of that proposal. Liberalism has been degraded into liberality. Men have tried to turn “revolutionise” from a transitive to an intransitive verb. The Jacobin could tell you not only the system he would rebel against, but (what was more important) the system he would NOT rebel against, the system he would trust. But the new rebel is a Sceptic, and will not entirely trust anything. He has no loyalty; therefore he can never be really a revolutionist. And the fact that he doubts everything really gets in his way when he wants to denounce anything. For all denunciation implies a moral doctrine of some kind; and the modern revolutionist doubts not only the institution he denounces, but the doctrine by which he denounces it. Thus he writes one book complaining that imperial oppression insults the purity of women, and then he writes another book (about the sex problem) in which he insults it himself. He curses the Sultan because Christian girls lose their virginity, and then curses Mrs. Grundy because they keep it. As a politician, he will cry out that war is a waste of life, and then, as a philosopher, that all life is waste of time. A Russian pessimist will denounce a policeman for killing a peasant, and then prove by the highest philosophical principles that the peasant ought to have killed himself. A man denounces marriage as a lie, and then denounces aristocratic profligates for treating it as a lie. He calls a flag a bauble, and then blames the oppressors of Poland or Ireland because they take away that bauble. The man of this school goes first to a political meeting, where he complains that savages are treated as if they were beasts; then he takes his hat and umbrella and goes on to a scientific meeting, where he proves that they practically are beasts. In short, the modern revolutionist, being an infinite sceptic, is always engaged in undermining his own mines. In his book on politics he attacks men for trampling on morality; in his book on ethics he attacks morality for trampling on men. Therefore the modern man in revolt has become practically useless for all purposes of revolt. By rebelling against everything he has lost his right to rebel against anything.

It may be added that the same blank and bankruptcy can be observed in all fierce and terrible types of literature, especially in satire. Satire may be mad and anarchic, but it presupposes an admitted superiority in certain things over others; it presupposes a standard. When little boys in the street laugh at the fatness of some distinguished journalist, they are unconsciously assuming a standard of Greek sculpture. They are appealing to the marble Apollo. And the curious disappearance of satire from our literature is an instance of the fierce things fading for want of any principle to be fierce about. Nietzsche had some natural talent for sarcasm: he could sneer, though he could not laugh; but there is always something bodiless and without weight in his satire, simply because it has not any mass of common morality behind it. He is himself more preposterous than anything he denounces. But, indeed, Nietzsche will stand very well as the type of the whole of this failure of abstract violence. The softening of the brain which ultimately overtook him was not a physical accident. If Nietzsche had not ended in imbecility, Nietzscheism would end in imbecility. Thinking in isolation and with pride ends in being an idiot. Every man who will not have softening of the heart must at last have softening of the brain.

This last attempt to evade intellectualism ends in intellectualism, and therefore in death. The sortie has failed. The wild worship of lawlessness and the materialist worship of law end in the same void. Nietzsche scales staggering mountains, but he turns up ultimately in Tibet. He sits down beside Tolstoy in the land of nothing and Nirvana. They are both helpless — one because he must not grasp anything, and the other because he must not let go of anything. The Tolstoyan’s will is frozen by a Buddhist instinct that all special actions are evil. But the Nietzscheite’s will is quite equally frozen by his view that all special actions are good; for if all special actions are good, none of them are special. They stand at the crossroads, and one hates all the roads and the other likes all the roads. The result is — well, some things are not hard to calculate. They stand at the cross-roads.

Here I end (thank God) the first and dullest business of this book — the rough review of recent thought. After this I begin to sketch a view of life which may not interest my reader, but which, at any rate, interests me. In front of me, as I close this page, is a pile of modern books that I have been turning over for the purpose — a pile of ingenuity, a pile of futility. By the accident of my present detachment, I can see the inevitable smash of the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Tolstoy, Nietzsche and Shaw, as clearly as an inevitable railway smash could be seen from a balloon. They are all on the road to the emptiness of the asylum. For madness may be defined as using mental activity so as to reach mental helplessness; and they have nearly reached it. He who thinks he is made of glass, thinks to the destruction of thought; for glass cannot think. So he who wills to reject nothing, wills the destruction of will; for will is not only the choice of something, but the rejection of almost everything. And as I turn and tumble over the clever, wonderful, tiresome, and useless modern books, the title of one of them rivets my eye. It is called “Jeanne d’Arc,” by Anatole France. I have only glanced at it, but a glance was enough to remind me of Renan’s

“Vie de Jesus.” It has the same strange method of the reverent sceptic. It discredits supernatural stories that have some foundation, simply by telling natural stories that have no foundation. Because we cannot believe in what a saint did, we are to pretend that we know exactly what he felt. But I do not mention either book in order to criticise it, but because the accidental combination of the names called up two startling images of Sanity which blasted all the books before me. Joan of Arc was not stuck at the cross-roads, either by rejecting all the paths like Tolstoy, or by accepting them all like Nietzsche. She chose a path, and went down it like a thunderbolt. Yet Joan, when I came to think of her, had in her all that was true either in Tolstoy or Nietzsche, all that was even tolerable in either of them. I thought of all that is noble in Tolstoy, the pleasure in plain things, especially in plain pity, the actualities of the earth, the reverence for the poor, the dignity of the bowed back. Joan of Arc had all that and with this great addition, that she endured poverty as well as admiring it; whereas Tolstoy is only a typical aristocrat trying to find out its secret. And then I thought of all that was brave and proud and pathetic in poor Nietzsche, and his mutiny against the emptiness and timidity of our time. I thought of his cry for the ecstatic equilibrium of danger, his hunger for the rush of great horses, his cry to arms. Well, Joan of Arc had all that, and again with this difference, that she did not praise fighting, but fought. We KNOW that she was not afraid of an army, while Nietzsche, for all we know, was afraid of a cow. Tolstoy only praised the peasant; she was the peasant. Nietzsche only praised the warrior; she was the warrior. She beat them both at their own antagonistic ideals; she was more gentle than the one, more violent than the other. Yet she was a perfectly practical person who did something, while they are wild speculators who do nothing. It was impossible that the thought should not cross my mind that she and her faith had perhaps some secret of moral unity and utility that has been lost. And with that thought came a larger one, and the colossal figure of her Master had also crossed the theatre of my thoughts. The same modern difficulty which darkened the subject-matter of Anatole France also darkened that of Ernest Renan. Renan also divided his hero’s pity from his hero’s pugnacity. Renan even represented the righteous anger at Jerusalem as a mere nervous breakdown after the idyllic expectations of Galilee. As if there were any inconsistency between having a love for humanity and having a hatred for inhumanity! Altruists, with thin, weak voices, denounce Christ as an egoist. Egoists (with even thinner and weaker voices) denounce Him as an altruist. In our present atmosphere such cavils are comprehensible enough. The love of a hero is more terrible than the hatred of a tyrant. The hatred of a hero is more generous than the love of a philanthropist. There is a huge and heroic sanity of which moderns can only collect the fragments. There is a giant of whom we see only the lopped arms and legs walking about. They have torn the soul of Christ into silly strips, labelled egoism and altruism, and they are equally puzzled by His insane magnificence and His insane meekness. They have parted His garments among them, and for His vesture they have cast lots; though the coat was without seam woven from the top throughout.

IV THE ETHICS OF ELFLAND

When the business man rebukes the idealism of his office-boy, it is commonly in some such speech as this: “Ah, yes, when one is young, one has these ideals in the abstract and these castles in the air; but in middle age they all break up like clouds, and one comes down to a belief in practical politics, to using the machinery one has and getting on with the world as it is.” Thus, at least, venerable and philanthropic old men now in their honoured graves used to talk to me when I was a boy. But since then I have grown up and have discovered that these philanthropic old men were telling lies. What has really happened is exactly the opposite of what they said would happen. They said that I should lose my ideals and begin to believe in the methods of practical politicians. Now, I have not lost my ideals in the least; my faith in fundamentals is exactly what it always was. What I have lost is my old childlike faith in practical politics. I am still as much concerned as ever about the Battle of Armageddon; but I am not so much concerned about the General Election. As a babe I leapt up on my mother’s knee at the mere mention of it. No; the vision is always solid and reliable. The vision is always a fact. It is the reality that is often a fraud. As much as I ever did, more than I ever did, I believe in Liberalism. But there was a rosy time of innocence when I believed in Liberals.

I take this instance of one of the enduring faiths because, having now to trace the roots of my personal speculation, this may be counted, I think, as the only positive bias. I was brought up a Liberal, and have always believed in democracy, in the elementary liberal doctrine of a self-governing humanity. If any one finds the phrase vague or threadbare, I can only pause for a moment to explain that the principle of democracy, as I mean it, can be stated in two propositions. The first is this: that the things common to all men are more important than the things peculiar to any men. Ordinary things are more valuable than extraordinary things; nay, they are more extraordinary. Man is something more awful than men; something more strange. The sense of the miracle of humanity itself should be always more vivid to us than any marvels of power, intellect, art, or civilization. The mere man on two legs, as such, should be felt as something more heartbreaking than any music and more startling than any caricature. Death is more tragic even than death by starvation. Having a nose is more comic even than having a Norman nose.

This is the first principle of democracy: that the essential things in men are the things they hold in common, not the things they hold separately. And the second principle is merely this: that the political instinct or desire is one of these things which they hold in common. Falling in love is more poetical than dropping into poetry. The democratic contention is that government (helping to rule the tribe) is a thing like falling in love, and not a thing like dropping into poetry. It is not something analogous to playing the church organ, painting on vellum, discovering the North Pole (that insidious habit), looping the loop, being Astronomer Royal, and so on. For these things we do not wish a man to do at all unless he does them well. It is, on the contrary, a thing analogous to writing one's own love-letters or blowing one's own nose. These things we want a man to do for himself, even if he does them badly. I am not here arguing the truth of any of these conceptions; I know that some moderns are asking to have their wives chosen by scientists, and they may soon be asking, for all I know, to have their noses blown by nurses. I merely say that mankind does recognize these universal human functions, and that democracy classes government among them. In short, the democratic faith is this: that the most terribly important things must be left to ordinary men themselves — the mating of the sexes, the rearing of the young, the laws of the state. This is democracy; and in this I have always believed.

But there is one thing that I have never from my youth up been able to understand. I have never been able to understand where people got the idea that democracy was in some way opposed to tradition. It is obvious that tradition is only democracy extended through time. It is trusting to a consensus of common human voices rather than to some isolated or arbitrary record. The man who quotes some German historian against the tradition of the Catholic Church, for instance, is strictly appealing to aristocracy. He is appealing to the superiority of one expert against the awful authority of a mob. It is quite easy to see why a legend is treated, and ought to be treated, more respectfully than a book of history. The legend is generally made by the majority of people in the village, who are sane. The book is generally written by the one man in the village who is mad. Those who urge against tradition that men in the past were ignorant may go and urge it at the Carlton Club, along with the statement that voters in the slums are ignorant. It will not do for us. If we attach great importance to the opinion of ordinary men in great unanimity when we are dealing with daily matters, there is no reason why we should disregard it when we are dealing with history or fable. Tradition may be defined as an extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father. I, at any rate, cannot separate the two ideas of democracy and tradition; it seems evident to me that they are the same idea. We will have the dead at our councils. The ancient Greeks voted by stones; these shall vote by tombstones. It is all quite regular and official, for most tombstones, like most ballot papers, are marked with a cross.

I have first to say, therefore, that if I have had a bias, it was always a bias in favour of democracy, and therefore of tradition. Before we come to any theoretic or logical beginnings I am content to allow for that personal equation; I have always been more inclined to believe the ruck of hard-working people than to believe that special and troublesome literary class to which I belong. I prefer even the fancies and prejudices of the people who see life from the inside to the clearest demonstrations of the people who see life from the outside. I would always trust the old wives' fables against the old maids' facts. As long as wit is mother wit it can be as wild as it pleases.

Now, I have to put together a general position, and I pretend to no training in such things. I propose to do it, therefore, by writing down one after another the three or four fundamental ideas which I have found for myself, pretty much in the way that I found them. Then I shall roughly synthesise them, summing up my personal philosophy or natural religion; then I shall describe my startling discovery that the whole thing had been discovered before. It had been discovered by Christianity. But of these profound persuasions which I have to recount in order, the earliest was concerned with this element of popular tradition. And without the foregoing explanation touching tradition and democracy I could hardly make my mental experience clear. As it is, I do not know whether I can make it clear, but I now propose to try.

My first and last philosophy, that which I believe in with unbroken certainty, I learnt in the nursery. I generally learnt it from a nurse; that is, from the solemn and star-appointed priestess at once of democracy and tradition. The things I believed most then, the things I believe most now, are the things called fairy tales. They seem to me to be the entirely reasonable things. They are not fantasies: compared with them other things are fantastic. Compared with them religion and rationalism are both abnormal, though religion is abnormally right and rationalism abnormally wrong. Fairyland is nothing but the sunny country of common sense. It is not earth that judges heaven, but heaven that judges earth; so for me at least it was not earth that criticised elfland, but elfland that criticised the earth. I knew the magic beanstalk before I had tasted beans; I was sure of the Man in the Moon before I was certain of the moon. This was at one with all popular tradition. Modern minor poets are naturalists, and talk about the bush or the brook; but the singers of the old epics and fables were supernaturalists, and talked about the gods of brook and bush. That is what the moderns mean when they say that the ancients did not “appreciate Nature,” because they said that Nature was divine. Old nurses do not tell children about the grass, but about the fairies that dance on the grass; and the old Greeks could not see the trees for the dryads.

But I deal here with what ethic and philosophy come from being fed on fairy tales. If I were describing them in detail I could note many noble and healthy principles that arise from them. There is the chivalrous lesson of “Jack the Giant Killer”; that giants should be killed because they are gigantic. It is a manly mutiny against pride as such. For the rebel is older than all the kingdoms, and the Jacobin has more tradition than the Jacobite. There is the lesson of “Cinderella,” which is the same as that of the Magnificat — EXALTAVIT HUMILES. There is the great lesson of “Beauty and the Beast”; that a thing must be loved BEFORE it is loveable. There is the terrible allegory of the “Sleeping Beauty,” which tells how the human creature was blessed with all birthday gifts, yet cursed with death; and how death also may perhaps be softened to a sleep. But I am not concerned with any of the separate statutes of elfland, but with the whole spirit of its law, which I learnt before I could speak, and shall retain when I cannot write. I am concerned with a certain way of looking at life, which was created in me by the fairy tales, but has since been meekly ratified by the mere facts.

It might be stated this way. There are certain sequences or developments (cases of one thing following another), which are, in the true sense of the word, reasonable. They are, in the true sense of the word, necessary. Such are mathematical and merely logical sequences. We in fairyland (who are the most reasonable of all creatures) admit that reason and that necessity. For instance, if the Ugly Sisters are older than Cinderella, it is (in an iron and awful sense) NECESSARY that Cinderella is younger than the Ugly Sisters. There is no getting out of it. Haeckel may talk as much fatalism about that fact as he pleases: it really must be. If Jack is the son of a miller, a miller is the father of Jack. Cold reason decrees it from her awful throne: and we in fairyland submit. If the three brothers all ride horses, there are six animals and eighteen legs involved: that is true rationalism, and fairyland is full of it. But as I put my head over the hedge of the elves and began to take notice of the natural world, I observed an extraordinary thing. I observed that learned men in spectacles were talking of the actual things that happened — dawn and death and so on — as if THEY were rational and inevitable. They talked as if the fact that trees bear fruit were just as NECESSARY as the fact that two and one trees make three. But it is not. There is an enormous difference by the test of fairyland; which is the test of the imagination. You cannot IMAGINE two and one not making three. But you can easily imagine trees not growing fruit; you can imagine them growing golden candlesticks or tigers hanging on by the tail. These men in spectacles spoke much of a man named Newton, who was hit by an apple, and who discovered a law. But they could not be got to see the distinction between a true law, a law of reason, and the mere fact of apples falling. If the apple hit Newton's nose, Newton's nose hit the apple. That is a true necessity: because we cannot conceive the one occurring without the other. But we can quite well conceive the apple not falling on his nose; we can fancy it flying ardently through the air to hit some other nose, of which it had a more definite dislike. We have always in our fairy tales kept this sharp distinction between the science of mental relations, in which there really are laws, and the science of physical facts, in which there are no laws, but only weird repetitions. We believe in bodily miracles, but not in mental impossibilities. We believe that a Bean-stalk climbed up to Heaven; but that does not at all confuse our convictions on the philosophical question of how many beans make five.

Here is the peculiar perfection of tone and truth in the nursery tales. The man of science says, “Cut the stalk, and the apple will fall”; but he says it calmly, as if the one idea really led up to the other. The witch in the fairy tale says, “Blow the horn, and the ogre’s castle will fall”; but she does not say it as if it were something in which the effect obviously arose out of the cause. Doubtless she has given the advice to many champions, and has seen many castles fall, but she does not lose either her wonder or her reason. She does not muddle her head until it imagines a necessary mental connection between a horn and a falling tower. But the scientific men do muddle their heads, until they imagine a necessary mental connection between an apple leaving the tree and an apple reaching the ground. They do really talk as if they had found not only a set of marvellous facts, but a truth connecting those facts. They do talk as if the connection of two strange things physically connected them philosophically. They feel that because one incomprehensible thing constantly follows another incomprehensible thing the two together somehow make up a comprehensible thing. Two black riddles make a white answer.

In fairyland we avoid the word “law”; but in the land of science they are singularly fond of it. Thus they will call some interesting conjecture about how forgotten folks pronounced the alphabet, Grimm’s Law. But Grimm’s Law is far less intellectual than Grimm’s Fairy Tales. The tales are, at any rate, certainly tales; while the law is not a law. A law implies that we know the nature of the generalisation and enactment; not merely that we have noticed some of the effects. If there is a law that pick-pockets shall go to prison, it implies that there is an imaginable mental connection between the idea of prison and the idea of picking pockets. And we know what the idea is. We can say why we take liberty from a man who takes liberties. But we cannot say why an egg can turn into a chicken any more than we can say why a bear could turn into a fairy prince. As IDEAS, the egg and the chicken are further off from each other than the bear and the prince; for no egg in itself suggests a chicken, whereas some princes do suggest bears. Granted, then, that certain transformations do happen, it is essential that we should regard them in the philosophic manner of fairy tales, not in the unphilosophic manner of science and the “Laws of Nature.” When we are asked why eggs turn to birds or fruits fall in autumn, we must answer exactly as the fairy godmother would answer if Cinderella asked her why mice turned to horses or her clothes fell from her at twelve o’clock. We must answer that it is MAGIC. It is not a “law,” for we do not understand its general formula. It is not a necessity, for though we can count on it happening practically, we have no right to say that it must always happen. It is no argument for unalterable law (as Huxley fancied) that we count on the ordinary course of things. We do not count on it; we bet on it. We risk the remote possibility of a miracle as we do that of a poisoned pancake or a world-destroying comet. We leave it out of account, not because it is a miracle, and therefore an impossibility, but because it is a miracle, and therefore an exception. All the terms used in the science books, “law,” “necessity,” “order,” “tendency,” and so on, are really unintellectual, because they assume an inner synthesis, which we do not possess. The only words that ever satisfied me as describing Nature are the terms used in the fairy books, “charm,” “spell,” “enchantment.” They express the arbitrariness of the fact and its mystery. A tree grows fruit because it is a MAGIC tree. Water runs downhill because it is bewitched. The sun shines because it is bewitched.

I deny altogether that this is fantastic or even mystical. We may have some mysticism later on; but this fairy-tale language about things is simply rational and agnostic. It is the only way I can express in words my clear and definite perception that one thing is quite distinct from another; that there is no logical connection between flying and laying eggs. It is the man who talks about “a law” that he has never seen who is the mystic. Nay, the ordinary scientific man is strictly a sentimentalist. He is a sentimentalist in this essential sense, that he is soaked and swept away by mere associations. He has so often seen birds fly and lay eggs that he feels as if there must be some dreamy, tender connection between the two ideas, whereas there is none. A forlorn lover might be unable to dissociate the moon from lost love; so the materialist is unable to dissociate the moon from the tide. In both cases there is no connection, except that one has seen them together. A sentimentalist might shed tears at the smell of apple-blossom, because, by a dark association of his own, it reminded him of his boyhood. So the materialist professor (though he conceals his tears) is yet a sentimentalist, because, by a dark association of his own, apple-blossoms remind him of apples. But the cool rationalist from fairyland does not see why, in the abstract, the apple tree should not grow crimson tulips; it sometimes does in his country.

This elementary wonder, however, is not a mere fancy derived from the fairy tales; on the contrary, all the fire of the fairy tales is derived from this. Just as we all like love tales because there is an instinct of sex, we all like astonishing tales because they touch the nerve of the ancient instinct of astonishment. This is proved by the fact that when we are very young children we do not need fairy tales: we only need tales. Mere life is interesting enough. A child of seven is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door and saw a dragon. But a child of three is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door. Boys like romantic tales; but babies like realistic tales — because they find them romantic. In fact, a baby is about the only person, I should think, to whom a modern realistic novel could be read without boring him. This proves that even nursery tales only echo an almost pre-natal leap of interest and amazement. These tales say that apples were golden only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green. They make rivers run with wine only to make us remember, for one wild moment, that they run with water. I have said that this is wholly reasonable and even agnostic. And, indeed, on this point I am all for the higher agnosticism; its better name is Ignorance. We have all read in scientific books, and, indeed, in all romances, the story of the man who has forgotten his name. This man walks about the streets and can see and appreciate everything; only he cannot remember who he is. Well, every man is that man in the story. Every man has forgotten who he is. One may understand the cosmos, but never the ego; the self is more distant than any star. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God; but thou shalt not know thyself. We are all under the same mental calamity; we have all forgotten our names. We have all forgotten what we really are. All that we call common sense and rationality and practicality and positivism only means that for certain dead levels of our life we forget that we have forgotten. All that we call spirit and art and ecstasy only means that for one awful instant we remember that we forget.

But though (like the man without memory in the novel) we walk the streets with a sort of half-witted admiration, still it is admiration. It is admiration in English and not only admiration in Latin. The wonder has a positive element of praise. This is the next milestone to be definitely marked on our road through fairyland. I shall speak in the next chapter about optimists and pessimists in their intellectual aspect, so far as they have one. Here I am only trying to describe the enormous emotions which cannot be described. And the strongest emotion was that life was as precious as it was puzzling. It was an ecstasy because it was an adventure; it was an adventure because it was an opportunity. The goodness of the fairy tale was not affected by the fact that there might be more dragons than princesses; it was good to be in a fairy tale. The test of all happiness is gratitude; and I felt grateful, though I hardly knew to whom. Children are grateful when Santa Claus puts in their stockings gifts of toys or sweets. Could I not be grateful to Santa Claus when he put in my stockings the gift of two miraculous legs? We thank people for birthday presents of cigars and slippers. Can I thank no one for the birthday present of birth?

There were, then, these two first feelings, indefensible and indisputable. The world was a shock, but it was not merely shocking; existence was a surprise, but it was a pleasant surprise. In fact, all my first views were exactly uttered in a riddle that stuck in my brain from boyhood. The question was, “What did the first frog say?” And the answer was, “Lord, how you made me jump!” That says succinctly all that I am saying. God made the frog jump; but the frog prefers jumping. But when these things are settled there enters the second great principle of the fairy philosophy.

Any one can see it who will simply read “Grimm’s Fairy Tales” or the fine collections of Mr. Andrew Lang. For the pleasure of pedantry I will call it the Doctrine of Conditional Joy. Touchstone talked of much virtue in an “if”; according to elfin ethics all virtue is in an “if.” The note of the fairy utterance always is, “You may live in a palace of gold and sapphire, if you do not say the word `cow’”; or “You may live happily with the King’s daughter, if you do not show her an onion.” The vision always hangs upon a veto. All the dizzy and colossal things conceded depend upon one small thing withheld. All the wild and whirling things that are let loose depend upon one thing that is forbidden. Mr. W.B.Yeats, in his exquisite and piercing elfin poetry, describes the elves as lawless; they plunge in innocent anarchy on the unbridled horses of the air —

“Ride on the crest of the dishevelled tide, And dance upon the mountains like a flame.”

It is a dreadful thing to say that Mr. W.B.Yeats does not understand fairyland. But I do say it. He is an ironical Irishman, full of intellectual reactions. He is not stupid enough to understand fairyland. Fairies prefer people of the yokel type like myself; people who gape and grin and do as they are told. Mr. Yeats reads into elfland all the righteous insurrection of his own race. But the lawlessness of Ireland is a Christian lawlessness, founded on reason and justice. The Fenian is rebelling against something he understands only too well; but the true citizen of fairyland is obeying something that he does not understand at all. In the fairy tale an incomprehensible happiness rests upon an incomprehensible condition. A box is opened, and all evils fly out. A word is forgotten, and cities perish. A lamp is lit, and love flies away. A flower is plucked, and human lives are forfeited. An apple is eaten, and the hope of God is gone.

This is the tone of fairy tales, and it is certainly not lawlessness or even liberty, though men under a mean modern tyranny may think it liberty by comparison. People out of Portland Gaol might think Fleet Street free; but closer study will prove that both fairies and journalists are the slaves of duty. Fairy godmothers seem at least as strict as other godmothers. Cinderella received a coach out of Wonderland and a coachman out of nowhere, but she received a command — which might have come out of Brixton — that she should be back by twelve. Also, she had a glass slipper; and it cannot be a coincidence that glass is so common a substance in folk-lore. This princess lives in a glass castle, that princess on a glass hill; this one sees all things in a mirror; they may all live in glass houses if they will not throw stones. For this thin glitter of glass everywhere is the expression of the fact that the happiness is bright but brittle, like the substance most easily smashed by a housemaid or a cat. And this fairy-tale sentiment also sank into me and became my sentiment towards the whole world. I felt and feel that life itself is as bright as the diamond, but as brittle as the window-pane; and when the heavens were compared to the terrible crystal I can remember a shudder. I was afraid that God would drop the cosmos with a crash.

Remember, however, that to be breakable is not the same as to be perishable. Strike a glass, and it will not endure an instant; simply do not strike it, and it will endure a thousand years. Such, it seemed, was the joy of man, either in elfland or on earth; the happiness depended on NOT DOING SOMETHING which you could at any moment do and which, very often, it was not obvious why you should not do. Now, the point here is that to ME this did not seem unjust. If the miller's third son said to the fairy, "Explain why I must not stand on my head in the fairy palace," the other might fairly reply, "Well, if it comes to that, explain the fairy palace." If Cinderella says, "How is it that I must leave the ball at twelve?" her godmother might answer, “How is it that you are going there till twelve?” If I leave a man in my will ten talking elephants and a hundred winged horses, he cannot complain if the conditions partake of the slight eccentricity of the gift. He must not look a winged horse in the mouth. And it seemed to me that existence was itself so very eccentric a legacy that I could not complain of not understanding the limitations of the vision when I did not understand the vision they limited. The frame was no stranger than the picture. The veto might well be as wild as the vision; it might be as startling as the sun, as elusive as the waters, as fantastic and terrible as the towering trees.

For this reason (we may call it the fairy godmother philosophy) I never could join the young men of my time in feeling what they called the general sentiment of REVOLT. I should have resisted, let us hope, any rules that were evil, and with these and their definition I shall deal in another chapter. But I did not feel disposed to resist any rule merely because it was mysterious. Estates are sometimes held by foolish forms, the breaking of a stick or the payment of a peppercorn: I was willing to hold the huge estate of earth and heaven by any such feudal fantasy. It could not well be wilder than the fact that I was allowed to hold it at all. At this stage I give only one ethical instance to show my meaning. I could never mix in the common murmur of that rising generation against monogamy, because no restriction on sex seemed so odd and unexpected as sex itself. To be allowed, like Endymion, to make love to the moon and then to complain that Jupiter kept his own moons in a harem seemed to me (bred on fairy tales like Endymion’s) a vulgar anti-climax. Keeping to one woman is a small price for so much as seeing one woman. To complain that I could only be married once was like complaining that I had only been born once. It was incommensurate with the terrible excitement of which one was talking. It showed, not an exaggerated sensibility to sex, but a curious insensibility to it. A man is a fool who complains that he cannot enter Eden by five gates at once. Polygamy is a lack of the realization of sex; it is like a man plucking five pears in mere absence of mind. The aesthetes touched the last insane limits of language in their eulogy on lovely things. The thistledown made them weep; a burnished beetle brought them to their knees. Yet their emotion never impressed me for an instant, for this reason, that it never occurred to them to pay for their pleasure in any sort of symbolic sacrifice. Men (I felt) might fast forty days for the sake of hearing a blackbird sing. Men might go through fire to find a cowslip. Yet these lovers of beauty could not even keep sober for the blackbird. They would not go through common Christian marriage by way of recompense to the cowslip. Surely one might pay for extraordinary joy in ordinary morals. Oscar Wilde said that sunsets were not valued because we could not pay for sunsets. But Oscar Wilde was wrong; we can pay for sunsets. We can pay for them by not being Oscar Wilde.

Well, I left the fairy tales lying on the floor of the nursery, and I have not found any books so sensible since. I left the nurse guardian of tradition and democracy, and I have not found any modern type so sanely radical or so sanely conservative. But the matter for important comment was here: that when I first went out into the mental atmosphere of the modern world, I found that the modern world was positively opposed on two points to my nurse and to the nursery tales. It has taken me a long time to find out that the modern world is wrong and my nurse was right. The really curious thing was this: that modern thought contradicted this basic creed of my boyhood on its two most essential doctrines. I have explained that the fairy tales founded in me two convictions; first, that this world is a wild and startling place, which might have been quite different, but which is quite delightful; second, that before this wildness and delight one may well be modest and submit to the queerest limitations of so queer a kindness. But I found the whole modern world running like a high tide against both my tendernesses; and the shock of that collision created two sudden and spontaneous sentiments, which I have had ever since and which, crude as they were, have since hardened into convictions.

First, I found the whole modern world talking scientific fatalism; saying that everything is as it must always have been, being unfolded without fault from the beginning. The leaf on the tree is green because it could never have been anything else. Now, the fairy-tale philosopher is glad that the leaf is green precisely because it might have been scarlet. He feels as if it had turned green an instant before he looked at it. He is pleased that snow is white on the strictly reasonable ground that it might have been black. Every colour has in it a bold quality as of choice; the red of garden roses is not only decisive but dramatic, like suddenly spilt blood. He feels that something has been DONE. But the great determinists of the nineteenth century were strongly against this native feeling that something had happened an instant before. In fact, according to them, nothing ever really had happened since the beginning of the world. Nothing ever had happened since existence had happened; and even about the date of that they were not very sure.

The modern world as I found it was solid for modern Calvinism, for the necessity of things being as they are. But when I came to ask them I found they had really no proof of this unavoidable repetition in things except the fact that the things were repeated. Now, the mere repetition made the things to me rather more weird than more rational. It was as if, having seen a curiously shaped nose in the street and dismissed it as an accident, I had then seen six other noses of the same astonishing shape. I should have fancied for a moment that it must be some local secret society. So one elephant having a trunk was odd; but all elephants having trunks looked like a plot. I speak here only of an emotion, and of an emotion at once stubborn and subtle. But the repetition in Nature seemed sometimes to be an excited repetition, like that of an angry schoolmaster saying the same thing over and over again. The grass seemed signalling to me with all its fingers at once; the crowded stars seemed bent upon being understood. The sun would make me see him if he rose a thousand times. The recurrences of the universe rose to the maddening rhythm of an incantation, and I began to see an idea.

All the towering materialism which dominates the modern mind rests ultimately upon one assumption; a false assumption. It is supposed that if a thing goes on repeating itself it is probably dead; a piece of clockwork. People feel that if the universe was personal it would vary; if the sun were alive it would dance. This is a fallacy even in relation to known fact. For the variation in human affairs is generally brought into them, not by life, but by death; by the dying down or breaking off of their strength or desire. A man varies his movements because of some slight element of failure or fatigue. He gets into an omnibus because he is tired of walking; or he walks because he is tired of sitting still. But if his life and joy were so gigantic that he never tired of going to Islington, he might go to Islington as regularly as the Thames goes to Sheerness. The very speed and ecstasy of his life would have the stillness of death. The sun rises every morning. I do not rise every morning; but the variation is due not to my activity, but to my inaction. Now, to put the matter in a popular phrase, it might be true that the sun rises regularly because he never gets tired of rising. His routine might be due, not to a lifelessness, but to a rush of life. The thing I mean can be seen, for instance, in children, when they find some game or joke that they specially enjoy. A child kicks his legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, “Do it again”; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, “Do it again” to the sun; and every evening, “Do it again” to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we. The repetition in Nature may not be a mere recurrence; it may be a theatrical ENCORE. Heaven may ENCORE the bird who laid an egg. If the human being conceives and brings forth a human child instead of bringing forth a fish, or a bat, or a griffin, the reason may not be that we are fixed in an animal fate without life or purpose. It may be that our little tragedy has touched the gods, that they admire it from their starry galleries, and that at the end of every human drama man is called again and again before the curtain. Repetition may go on for millions of years, by mere choice, and at any instant it may stop. Man may stand on the earth generation after generation, and yet each birth be his positively last appearance.

This was my first conviction; made by the shock of my childish emotions meeting the modern creed in mid-career. I had always vaguely felt facts to be miracles in the sense that they are wonderful: now I began to think them miracles in the stricter sense that they were WILFUL. I mean that they were, or might be, repeated exercises of some will. In short, I had always believed that the world involved magic: now I thought that perhaps it involved a magician. And this pointed a profound emotion always present and sub-conscious; that this world of ours has some purpose; and if there is a purpose, there is a person. I had always felt life first as a story: and if there is a story there is a story-teller.

But modern thought also hit my second human tradition. It went against the fairy feeling about strict limits and conditions. The one thing it loved to talk about was expansion and largeness. Herbert Spencer would have been greatly annoyed if any one had called him an imperialist, and therefore it is highly regrettable that nobody did. But he was an imperialist of the lowest type. He popularized this contemptible notion that the size of the solar system ought to over-awe the spiritual dogma of man. Why should a man surrender his dignity to the solar system any more than to a whale? If mere size proves that man is not the image of God, then a whale may be the image of God; a somewhat formless image; what one might call an impressionist portrait. It is quite futile to argue that man is small compared to the cosmos; for man was always small compared to the nearest tree. But Herbert Spencer, in his headlong imperialism, would insist that we had in some way been conquered and annexed by the astronomical universe. He spoke about men and their ideals exactly as the most insolent Unionist talks about the Irish and their ideals. He turned mankind into a small nationality. And his evil influence can be seen even in the most spirited and honourable of later scientific authors; notably in the early romances of Mr. H.G.Wells. Many moralists have in an exaggerated way represented the earth as wicked. But Mr. Wells and his school made the heavens wicked. We should lift up our eyes to the stars from whence would come our ruin.

But the expansion of which I speak was much more evil than all this. I have remarked that the materialist, like the madman, is in prison; in the prison of one thought. These people seemed to think it singularly inspiring to keep on saying that the prison was very large. The size of this scientific universe gave one no novelty, no relief. The cosmos went on for ever, but not in its wildest constellation could there be anything really interesting; anything, for instance, such as forgiveness or free will. The grandeur or infinity of the secret of its cosmos added nothing to it. It was like telling a prisoner in Reading gaol that he would be glad to hear that the gaol now covered half the county. The warder would have nothing to show the man except more and more long corridors of stone lit by ghastly lights and empty of all that is human. So these expanders of the universe had nothing to show us except more and more infinite corridors of space lit by ghastly suns and empty of all that is divine.

In fairyland there had been a real law; a law that could be broken, for the definition of a law is something that can be broken. But the machinery of this cosmic prison was something that could not be broken; for we ourselves were only a part of its machinery. We were either unable to do things or we were destined to do them. The idea of the mystical condition quite disappeared; one can neither have the firmness of keeping laws nor the fun of breaking them. The largeness of this universe had nothing of that freshness and airy outbreak which we have praised in the universe of the poet. This modern universe is literally an empire; that is, it was vast, but it is not free. One went into larger and larger windowless rooms, rooms big with Babylonian perspective; but one never found the smallest window or a whisper of outer air.

Their infernal parallels seemed to expand with distance; but for me all good things come to a point, swords for instance. So finding the boast of the big cosmos so unsatisfactory to my emotions I began to argue about it a little; and I soon found that the whole attitude was even shallower than could have been expected. According to these people the cosmos was one thing since it had one unbroken rule. Only (they would say) while it is one thing, it is also the only thing there is. Why, then, should one worry particularly to call it large? There is nothing to compare it with. It would be just as sensible to call it small. A man may say, “I like this vast cosmos, with its throng of stars and its crowd of varied creatures.” But if it comes to that why should not a man say, “I like this cosy little cosmos, with its decent number of stars and as neat a provision of live stock as I wish to see”? One is as good as the other; they are both mere sentiments. It is mere sentiment to rejoice that the sun is larger than the earth; it is quite as sane a sentiment to rejoice that the sun is no larger than it is. A man chooses to have an emotion about the largeness of the world; why should he not choose to have an emotion about its smallness?

It happened that I had that emotion. When one is fond of anything one addresses it by diminutives, even if it is an elephant or a life-guardsman. The reason is, that anything, however huge, that can be conceived of as complete, can be conceived of as small. If military moustaches did not suggest a sword or tusks a tail, then the object would be vast because it would be immeasurable. But the moment you can imagine a guardsman you can imagine a small guardsman. The moment you really see an elephant you can call it “Tiny.” If you can make a statue of a thing you can make a statuette of it. These people professed that the universe was one coherent thing; but they were not fond of the universe. But I was frightfully fond of the universe and wanted to address it by a diminutive. I often did so; and it never seemed to mind. Actually and in truth I did feel that these dim dogmas of vitality were better expressed by calling the world small than by calling it large. For about infinity there was a sort of carelessness which was the reverse of the fierce and pious care which I felt touching the pricelessness and the peril of life. They showed only a dreary waste; but I felt a sort of sacred thrift. For economy is far more romantic than extravagance. To them stars were an unending income of halfpence; but I felt about the golden sun and the silver moon as a schoolboy feels if he has one sovereign and one shilling.

These subconscious convictions are best hit off by the colour and tone of certain tales. Thus I have said that stories of magic alone can express my sense that life is not only a pleasure but a kind of eccentric privilege. I may express this other feeling of cosmic cosiness by allusion to another book always read in boyhood, “Robinson Crusoe,” which I read about this time, and which owes its eternal vivacity to the fact that it celebrates the poetry of limits, nay, even the wild romance of prudence. Crusoe is a man on a small rock with a few comforts just snatched from the sea: the best thing in the book is simply the list of things saved from the wreck. The greatest of poems is an inventory. Every kitchen tool becomes ideal because Crusoe might have dropped it in the sea. It is a good exercise, in empty or ugly hours of the day, to look at anything, the coal-scuttle or the book-case, and think how happy one could be to have brought it out of the sinking ship on to the solitary island. But it is a better exercise still to remember how all things have had this hair-breadth escape: everything has been saved from a wreck. Every man has had one horrible adventure: as a hidden untimely birth he had not been, as infants that never see the light. Men spoke much in my boyhood of restricted or ruined men of genius: and it was common to say that many a man was a Great Might-Have-Been. To me it is a more solid and startling fact that any man in the street is a Great Might-Not-Have-Been.

But I really felt (the fancy may seem foolish) as if all the order and number of things were the romantic remnant of Crusoe’s ship. That there are two sexes and one sun, was like the fact that there were two guns and one axe. It was poignantly urgent that none should be lost; but somehow, it was rather fun that none could be added. The trees and the planets seemed like things saved from the wreck: and when I saw the Matterhorn I was glad that it had not been overlooked in the confusion. I felt economical about the stars as if they were sapphires (they are called so in Milton’s Eden): I hoarded the hills. For the universe is a single jewel, and while it is a natural cant to talk of a jewel as peerless and priceless, of this jewel it is literally true. This cosmos is indeed without peer and without price: for there cannot be another one.

Thus ends, in unavoidable inadequacy, the attempt to utter the unutterable things. These are my ultimate attitudes towards life; the soils for the seeds of doctrine. These in some dark way I thought before I could write, and felt before I could think: that we may proceed more easily afterwards, I will roughly recapitulate them now. I felt in my bones; first, that this world does not explain itself. It may be a miracle with a supernatural explanation; it may be a conjuring trick, with a natural explanation. But the explanation of the conjuring trick, if it is to satisfy me, will have to be better than the natural explanations I have heard. The thing is magic, true or false. Second, I came to feel as if magic must have a meaning, and meaning must have some one to mean it. There was something personal in the world, as in a work of art; whatever it meant it meant violently. Third, I thought this purpose beautiful in its old design, in spite of its defects, such as dragons. Fourth, that the proper form of thanks to it is some form of humility and restraint: we should thank God for beer and Burgundy by not drinking too much of them. We owed, also, an obedience to whatever made us. And last, and strangest, there had come into my mind a vague and vast impression that in some way all good was a remnant to be stored and held sacred out of some primordial ruin. Man had saved his good as Crusoe saved his goods: he had saved them from a wreck. All this I felt and the age gave me no encouragement to feel it. And all this time I had not even thought of Christian theology.

V THE FLAG OF THE WORLD

When I was a boy there were two curious men running about who were called the optimist and the pessimist. I constantly used the words myself, but I cheerfully confess that I never had any very special idea of what they meant. The only thing which might be considered evident was that they could not mean what they said; for the ordinary verbal explanation was that the optimist thought this world as good as it could be, while the pessimist thought it as bad as it could be. Both these statements being obviously raving nonsense, one had to cast about for other explanations. An optimist could not mean a man who thought everything right and nothing wrong. For that is meaningless; it is like calling everything right and nothing left. Upon the whole, I came to the conclusion that the optimist thought everything good except the pessimist, and that the pessimist thought everything bad, except himself. It would be unfair to omit altogether from the list the mysterious but suggestive definition said to have been given by a little girl, “An optimist is a man who looks after your eyes, and a pessimist is a man who looks after your feet.” I am not sure that this is not the best definition of all. There is even a sort of allegorical truth in it. For there might, perhaps, be a profitable distinction drawn between that more dreary thinker who thinks merely of our contact with the earth from moment to moment, and that happier thinker who considers rather our primary power of vision and of choice of road.

But this is a deep mistake in this alternative of the optimist and the pessimist. The assumption of it is that a man criticises this world as if he were house-hunting, as if he were being shown over a new suite of apartments. If a man came to this world from some other world in full possession of his powers he might discuss whether the advantage of midsummer woods made up for the disadvantage of mad dogs, just as a man looking for lodgings might balance the presence of a telephone against the absence of a sea view. But no man is in that position. A man belongs to this world before he begins to ask if it is nice to belong to it. He has fought for the flag, and often won heroic victories for the flag long before he has ever enlisted. To put shortly what seems the essential matter, he has a loyalty long before he has any admiration.

In the last chapter it has been said that the primary feeling that this world is strange and yet attractive is best expressed in fairy tales. The reader may, if he likes, put down the next stage to that bellicose and even jingo literature which commonly comes next in the history of a boy. We all owe much sound morality to the penny dreadfuls. Whatever the reason, it seemed and still seems to me that our attitude towards life can be better expressed in terms of a kind of military loyalty than in terms of criticism and approval. My acceptance of the universe is not optimism, it is more like patriotism. It is a matter of primary loyalty. The world is not a lodging-house at Brighton, which we are to leave because it is miserable. It is the fortress of our family, with the flag flying on the turret, and the more miserable it is the less we should leave it. The point is not that this world is too sad to love or too glad not to love; the point is that when you do love a thing, its gladness is a reason for loving it, and its sadness a reason for loving it more. All optimistic thoughts about England and all pessimistic thoughts about her are alike reasons for the English patriot. Similarly, optimism and pessimism are alike arguments for the cosmic patriot.

Let us suppose we are confronted with a desperate thing — say Pimlico. If we think what is really best for Pimlico we shall find the thread of thought leads to the throne or the mystic and the arbitrary. It is not enough for a man to disapprove of Pimlico: in that case he will merely cut his throat or move to Chelsea. Nor, certainly, is it enough for a man to approve of Pimlico: for then it will remain Pimlico, which would be awful. The only way out of it seems to be for somebody to love Pimlico: to love it with a transcendental tie and without any earthly reason. If there arose a man who loved Pimlico, then Pimlico would rise into ivory towers and golden pinnacles; Pimlico would attire herself as a woman does when she is loved. For decoration is not given to hide horrible things: but to decorate things already adorable. A mother does not give her child a blue bow because he is so ugly without it. A lover does not give a girl a necklace to hide her neck. If men loved Pimlico as mothers love children, arbitrarily, because it is THEIRS, Pimlico in a year or two might be fairer than Florence. Some readers will say that this is a mere fantasy. I answer that this is the actual history of mankind. This, as a fact, is how cities did grow great. Go back to the darkest roots of civilization and you will find them knotted round some sacred stone or encircling some sacred well. People first paid honour to a spot and afterwards gained glory for it. Men did not love Rome because she was great. She was great because they had loved her.

The eighteenth-century theories of the social contract have been exposed to much clumsy criticism in our time; in so far as they meant that there is at the back of all historic government an idea of content and co-operation, they were demonstrably right. But they really were wrong, in so far as they suggested that men had ever aimed at order or ethics directly by a conscious exchange of interests. Morality did not begin by one man saying to another, "I will not hit you if you do not hit me"; there is no trace of such a transaction. There IS a trace of both men having said, "We must not hit each other in the holy place." They gained their morality by guarding their religion. They did not cultivate courage. They fought for the shrine, and found they had become courageous. They did not cultivate cleanliness. They purified themselves for the altar, and found that they were clean. The history of the Jews is the only early document known to most Englishmen, and the facts can be judged sufficiently from that. The Ten Commandments which have been found substantially common to mankind were merely military commands; a code of regimental orders, issued to protect a certain ark across a certain desert. Anarchy was evil because it endangered the sanctity. And only when they made a holy day for God did they find they had made a holiday for men.

If it be granted that this primary devotion to a place or thing is a source of creative energy, we can pass on to a very peculiar fact. Let us reiterate for an instant that the only right optimism is a sort of universal patriotism. What is the matter with the pessimist? I think it can be stated by saying that he is the cosmic anti-patriot. And what is the matter with the anti-patriot? I think it can be stated, without undue bitterness, by saying that he is the candid friend. And what is the matter with the candid friend? There we strike the rock of real life and immutable human nature.

I venture to say that what is bad in the candid friend is simply that he is not candid. He is keeping something back — his own gloomy pleasure in saying unpleasant things. He has a secret desire to hurt, not merely to help. This is certainly, I think, what makes a certain sort of anti-patriot irritating to healthy citizens. I do not speak (of course) of the anti-patriotism which only irritates feverish stockbrokers and gushing actresses; that is only patriotism speaking plainly. A man who says that no patriot should attack the Boer War until it is over is not worth answering intelligently; he is saying that no good son should warn his mother off a cliff until she has fallen over it. But there is an anti-patriot who honestly angers honest men, and the explanation of him is, I think, what I have suggested: he is the uncandid candid friend; the man who says, “I am sorry to say we are ruined,” and is not sorry at all. And he may be said, without rhetoric, to be a traitor; for he is using that ugly knowledge which was allowed him to strengthen the army, to discourage people from joining it. Because he is allowed to be pessimistic as a military adviser he is being pessimistic as a recruiting sergeant. Just in the same way the pessimist (who is the cosmic anti-patriot) uses the freedom that life allows to her counsellors to lure away the people from her flag. Granted that he states only facts, it is still essential to know what are his emotions, what is his motive. It may be that twelve hundred men in Tottenham are down with smallpox; but we want to know whether this is stated by some great philosopher who wants to curse the gods, or only by some common clergyman who wants to help the men.

The evil of the pessimist is, then, not that he chastises gods and men, but that he does not love what he chastises — he has not this primary and supernatural loyalty to things. What is the evil of the man commonly called an optimist? Obviously, it is felt that the optimist, wishing to defend the honour of this world, will defend the indefensible. He is the jingo of the universe; he will say, “My cosmos, right or wrong.” He will be less inclined to the reform of things; more inclined to a sort of front-bench official answer to all attacks, soothing every one with assurances. He will not wash the world, but whitewash the world. All this (which is true of a type of optimist) leads us to the one really interesting point of psychology, which could not be explained without it.

We say there must be a primal loyalty to life: the only question is, shall it be a natural or a supernatural loyalty? If you like to put it so, shall it be a reasonable or an unreasonable loyalty? Now, the extraordinary thing is that the bad optimism (the whitewashing, the weak defence of everything) comes in with the reasonable optimism. Rational optimism leads to stagnation: it is irrational optimism that leads to reform. Let me explain by using once more the parallel of patriotism. The man who is most likely to ruin the place he loves is exactly the man who loves it with a reason. The man who will improve the place is the man who loves it without a reason. If a man loves some feature of Pimlico (which seems unlikely), he may find himself defending that feature against Pimlico itself. But if he simply loves

Pimlico itself, he may lay it waste and turn it into the New Jerusalem. I do not deny that reform may be excessive; I only say that it is the mystic patriot who reforms. Mere jingo self-contentment is commonest among those who have some pedantic reason for their patriotism. The worst jingoes do not love England, but a theory of England. If we love England for being an empire, we may overrate the success with which we rule the Hindoos. But if we love it only for being a nation, we can face all events: for it would be a nation even if the Hindoos ruled us. Thus also only those will permit their patriotism to falsify history whose patriotism depends on history. A man who loves England for being English will not mind how she arose. But a man who loves England for being Anglo-Saxon may go against all facts for his fancy. He may end (like Carlyle and Freeman) by maintaining that the Norman Conquest was a Saxon Conquest. He may end in utter unreason — because he has a reason. A man who loves France for being military will palliate the army of 1870. But a man who loves France for being France will improve the army of 1870. This is exactly what the French have done, and France is a good instance of the working paradox. Nowhere else is patriotism more purely abstract and arbitrary; and nowhere else is reform more drastic and sweeping. The more transcendental is your patriotism, the more practical are your politics.

Perhaps the most everyday instance of this point is in the case of women; and their strange and strong loyalty. Some stupid people started the idea that because women obviously back up their own people through everything, therefore women are blind and do not see anything. They can hardly have known any women. The same women who are ready to defend their men through thick and thin are (in their personal intercourse with the man) almost morbidly lucid about the thinness of his excuses or the thickness of his head. A man's friend likes him but leaves him as he is: his wife loves him and is always trying to turn him into somebody else. Women who are utter mystics in their creed are utter cynics in their criticism. Thackeray expressed this well when he made Pendennis' mother, who worshipped her son as a god, yet assume that he would go wrong as a man. She underrated his virtue, though she overrated his value. The devotee is entirely free to criticise; the fanatic can safely be a sceptic. Love is not blind; that is the last thing that it is. Love is bound; and the more it is bound the less it is blind.

This at least had come to be my position about all that was called optimism, pessimism, and improvement. Before any cosmic act of reform we must have a cosmic oath of allegiance. A man must be interested in life, then he could be disinterested in his views of it. “My son give me thy heart”; the heart must be fixed on the right thing: the moment we have a fixed heart we have a free hand. I must pause to anticipate an obvious criticism. It will be said that a rational person accepts the world as mixed of good and evil with a decent satisfaction and a decent endurance. But this is exactly the attitude which I maintain to be defective. It is, I know, very common in this age; it was perfectly put in those quiet lines of Matthew Arnold which are more piercingly blasphemous than the shrieks of Schopenhauer —

“Enough we live: — and if a life, With large results so little rife, Though bearable, seem hardly worth This pomp of worlds, this pain of birth.”

I know this feeling fills our epoch, and I think it freezes our epoch. For our Titanic purposes of faith and revolution, what we need is not the cold acceptance of the world as a compromise, but some way in which we can heartily hate and heartily love it. We do not want joy and anger to neutralize each other and produce a surly contentment; we want a fiercer delight and a fiercer discontent. We have to feel the universe at once as an ogre’s castle, to be stormed, and yet as our own cottage, to which we can return at evening.

No one doubts that an ordinary man can get on with this world: but we demand not strength enough to get on with it, but strength enough to get it on. Can he hate it enough to change it, and yet love it enough to think it worth changing? Can he look up at its colossal good without once feeling acquiescence? Can he look up at its colossal evil without once feeling despair? Can he, in short, be at once not only a pessimist and an optimist, but a fanatical pessimist and a fanatical optimist? Is he enough of a pagan to die for the world, and enough of a Christian to die to it? In this combination, I maintain, it is the rational optimist who fails, the irrational optimist who succeeds. He is ready to smash the whole universe for the sake of itself.

I put these things not in their mature logical sequence, but as they came: and this view was cleared and sharpened by an accident of the time. Under the lengthening shadow of Ibsen, an argument arose whether it was not a very nice thing to murder one’s self. Grave moderns told us that we must not even say “poor fellow,” of a man who had blown his brains out, since he was an enviable person, and had only blown them out because of their exceptional excellence. Mr. William Archer even suggested that in the golden age there would be penny-in-the-slot machines, by which a man could kill himself for a penny. In all this I found myself utterly hostile to many who called themselves liberal and humane. Not only is suicide a sin, it is the sin. It is the ultimate and absolute evil, the refusal to take an interest in existence; the refusal to take the oath of loyalty to life. The man who kills a man, kills a man. The man who kills himself, kills all men; as far as he is concerned he wipes out the world. His act is worse (symbolically considered) than any rape or dynamite outrage. For it destroys all buildings: it insults all women. The thief is satisfied with diamonds; but the suicide is not: that is his crime. He cannot be bribed, even by the blazing stones of the Celestial City. The thief compliments the things he steals, if not the owner of them. But the suicide insults everything on earth by not stealing it. He defiles every flower by refusing to live for its sake. There is not a tiny creature in the cosmos at whom his death is not a sneer. When a man hangs himself on a tree, the leaves might fall off in anger and the birds fly away in fury: for each has received a personal affront. Of course there may be pathetic emotional excuses for the act. There often are for rape, and there almost always are for dynamite. But if it comes to clear ideas and the intelligent meaning of things, then there is much more rational and philosophic truth in the burial at the cross-roads and the stake driven through the body, than in Mr. Archer's suicidal automatic machines. There is a meaning in burying the suicide apart. The man's crime is different from other crimes — for it makes even crimes impossible.

About the same time I read a solemn flippancy by some free thinker: he said that a suicide was only the same as a martyr. The open fallacy of this helped to clear the question. Obviously a suicide is the opposite of a martyr. A martyr is a man who cares so much for something outside him, that he forgets his own personal life. A suicide is a man who cares so little for anything outside him, that he wants to see the last of everything. One wants something to begin: the other wants everything to end. In other words, the martyr is noble, exactly because (however he renounces the world or execrates all humanity) he confesses this ultimate link with life; he sets his heart outside himself: he dies that something may live. The suicide is ignoble because he has not this link with being: he is a mere destroyer; spiritually, he destroys the universe. And then I remembered the stake and the cross-roads, and the queer fact that Christianity had shown this weird harshness to the suicide. For Christianity had shown a wild encouragement of the martyr. Historic Christianity was accused, not entirely without reason, of carrying martyrdom and asceticism to a point, desolate and pessimistic. The early Christian martyrs talked of death with a horrible happiness. They blasphemed the beautiful duties of the body: they smelt the grave afar off like a field of flowers. All this has seemed to many the very poetry of pessimism. Yet there is the stake at the crossroads to show what Christianity thought of the pessimist.

This was the first of the long train of enigmas with which Christianity entered the discussion. And there went with it a peculiarity of which I shall have to speak more markedly, as a note of all Christian notions, but which distinctly began in this one. The Christian attitude to the martyr and the suicide was not what is so often affirmed in modern morals. It was not a matter of degree. It was not that a line must be drawn somewhere, and that the self-slayer in exaltation fell within the line, the self-slayer in sadness just beyond it. The Christian feeling evidently was not merely that the suicide was carrying martyrdom too far. The Christian feeling was furiously for one and furiously against the other: these two things that looked so much alike were at opposite ends of heaven and hell. One man flung away his life; he was so good that his dry bones could heal cities in pestilence. Another man flung away life; he was so bad that his bones would pollute his brethren's. I am not saying this fierceness was right; but why was it so fierce?

Here it was that I first found that my wandering feet were in some beaten track. Christianity had also felt this opposition of the martyr to the suicide: had it perhaps felt it for the same reason? Had Christianity felt what I felt, but could not (and cannot) express — this need for a first loyalty to things, and then for a ruinous reform of things? Then I remembered that it was actually the charge against Christianity that it combined these two things which I was wildly trying to combine. Christianity was accused, at one and the same time, of being too optimistic about the universe and of being too pessimistic about the world. The coincidence made me suddenly stand still.

An imbecile habit has arisen in modern controversy of saying that such and such a creed can be held in one age but cannot be held in another. Some dogma, we are told, was credible in the twelfth century, but is not credible in the twentieth. You might as well say that a certain philosophy can be believed on Mondays, but cannot be believed on Tuesdays. You might as well say of a view of the cosmos that it was suitable to half-past three, but not suitable to half-past four. What a man can believe depends upon his philosophy, not upon the clock or the century. If a man believes in unalterable natural law, he cannot believe in any miracle in any age. If a man believes in a will behind law, he can believe in any miracle in any age. Suppose, for the sake of argument, we are concerned with a case of thaumaturgic healing. A materialist of the twelfth century could not believe it any more than a materialist of the twentieth century. But a Christian Scientist of the twentieth century can believe it as much as a Christian of the twelfth century. It is simply a matter of a man's theory of things. Therefore in dealing with any historical answer, the point is not whether it was given in our time, but whether it was given in answer to our question. And the more I thought about when and how Christianity had come into the world, the more I felt that it had actually come to answer this question.

It is commonly the loose and latitudinarian Christians who pay quite indefensible compliments to Christianity. They talk as if there had never been any piety or pity until Christianity came, a point on which any mediaeval would have been eager to correct them. They represent that the remarkable thing about Christianity was that it was the first to preach simplicity or self-restraint, or inwardness and sincerity. They will think me very narrow (whatever that means) if I say that the remarkable thing about Christianity was that it was the first to preach Christianity. Its peculiarity was that it was peculiar, and simplicity and sincerity are not peculiar, but obvious ideals for all mankind. Christianity was the answer to a riddle, not the last truism uttered after a long talk. Only the other day I saw in an excellent weekly paper of Puritan tone this remark, that Christianity when stripped of its armour of dogma (as who should speak of a man stripped of his armour of bones), turned out to be nothing but the Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light. Now, if I were to say that Christianity came into the world specially to destroy the doctrine of the Inner Light, that would be an exaggeration. But it would be very much nearer to the truth. The last Stoics, like Marcus Aurelius, were exactly the people who did believe in the Inner Light. Their dignity, their weariness, their sad external care for others, their incurable internal care for themselves, were all due to the Inner Light, and existed only by that dismal illumination. Notice that Marcus Aurelius insists, as such introspective moralists always do, upon small things done or undone; it is because he has not hate or love enough to make a moral revolution. He gets up early in the morning, just as our own aristocrats living the Simple Life get up early in the morning; because such altruism is much easier than stopping the games of the amphitheatre or giving the English people back their land. Marcus Aurelius is the most intolerable of human types. He is an unselfish egoist. An unselfish egoist is a man who has pride without the excuse of passion. Of all conceivable forms of enlightenment the worst is what these people call the Inner Light. Of all horrible religions the most horrible is the worship of the god within. Any one who knows any body knows how it would work; any one who knows any one from the Higher Thought Centre knows how it does work. That Jones shall worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones. Let Jones worship the sun or moon, anything rather than the Inner Light; let Jones worship cats or crocodiles, if he can find any in his street, but not the god within. Christianity came into the world firstly in order to assert with violence that a man had not only to look inwards, but to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine captain. The only fun of being a Christian was that a man was not left alone with the Inner Light, but definitely recognized an outer light, fair as the sun, clear as the moon, terrible as an army with banners.

All the same, it will be as well if Jones does not worship the sun and moon. If he does, there is a tendency for him to imitate them; to say, that because the sun burns insects alive, he may burn insects alive. He thinks that because the sun gives people sun-stroke, he may give his neighbour measles. He thinks that because the moon is said to drive men mad, he may drive his wife mad. This ugly side of mere external optimism had also shown itself in the ancient world. About the time when the Stoic idealism had begun to show the weaknesses of pessimism, the old nature worship of the ancients had begun to show the enormous weaknesses of optimism. Nature worship is natural enough while the society is young, or, in other words, Pantheism is all right as long as it is the worship of Pan. But Nature has another side which experience and sin are not slow in finding out, and it is no flippancy to say of the god Pan that he soon showed the cloven hoof. The only objection to Natural Religion is that somehow it always becomes unnatural. A man loves Nature in the morning for her innocence and amiability, and at nightfall, if he is loving her still, it is for her darkness and her cruelty. He washes at dawn in clear water as did the Wise Man of the

Stoics, yet, somehow at the dark end of the day, he is bathing in hot bull's blood, as did Julian the Apostate. The mere pursuit of health always leads to something unhealthy. Physical nature must not be made the direct object of obedience; it must be enjoyed, not worshipped. Stars and mountains must not be taken seriously. If they are, we end where the pagan nature worship ended. Because the earth is kind, we can imitate all her cruelties. Because sexuality is sane, we can all go mad about sexuality. Mere optimism had reached its insane and appropriate termination. The theory that everything was good had become an orgy of everything that was bad.

On the other side our idealist pessimists were represented by the old remnant of the Stoics. Marcus Aurelius and his friends had really given up the idea of any god in the universe and looked only to the god within. They had no hope of any virtue in nature, and hardly any hope of any virtue in society. They had not enough interest in the outer world really to wreck or revolutionise it. They did not love the city enough to set fire to it. Thus the ancient world was exactly in our own desolate dilemma. The only people who really enjoyed this world were busy breaking it up; and the virtuous people did not care enough about them to knock them down. In this dilemma (the same as ours) Christianity suddenly stepped in and offered a singular answer, which the world eventually accepted as THE answer. It was the answer then, and I think it is the answer now.

This answer was like the slash of a sword; it sundered; it did not in any sense sentimentally unite. Briefly, it divided God from the cosmos. That transcendence and distinctness of the deity which some Christians now want to remove from Christianity, was really the only reason why any one wanted to be a Christian. It was the whole point of the Christian answer to the unhappy pessimist and the still more unhappy optimist. As I am here only concerned with their particular problem, I shall indicate only briefly this great metaphysical suggestion. All descriptions of the creating or sustaining principle in things must be metaphorical, because they must be verbal. Thus the pantheist is forced to speak of God in all things as if he were in a box. Thus the evolutionist has, in his very name, the idea of being unrolled like a carpet. All terms, religious and irreligious, are open to this charge. The only question is whether all terms are useless, or whether one can, with such a phrase, cover a distinct IDEA about the origin of things. I think one can, and so evidently does the evolutionist, or he would not talk about evolution. And the root phrase for all Christian theism was this, that

God was a creator, as an artist is a creator. A poet is so separate from his poem that he himself speaks of it as a little thing he has “thrown off.” Even in giving it forth he has flung it away. This principle that all creation and procreation is a breaking off is at least as consistent through the cosmos as the evolutionary principle that all growth is a branching out. A woman loses a child even in having a child. All creation is separation. Birth is as solemn a parting as death.

It was the prime philosophic principle of Christianity that this divorce in the divine act of making (such as severs the poet from the poem or the mother from the new-born child) was the true description of the act whereby the absolute energy made the world. According to most philosophers, God in making the world enslaved it. According to Christianity, in making it, He set it free. God had written, not so much a poem, but rather a play; a play he had planned as perfect, but which had necessarily been left to human actors and stage-managers, who had since made a great mess of it. I will discuss the truth of this theorem later. Here I have only to point out with what a startling smoothness it passed the dilemma we have discussed in this chapter. In this way at least one could be both happy and indignant without degrading one’s self to be either a pessimist or an optimist. On this system one could fight all the forces of existence without deserting the flag of existence. One could be at peace with the universe and yet be at war with the world. St. George could still fight the dragon, however big the monster bulked in the cosmos, though he were bigger than the mighty cities or bigger than the everlasting hills. If he were as big as the world he could yet be killed in the name of the world. St. George had not to consider any obvious odds or proportions in the scale of things, but only the original secret of their design. He can shake his sword at the dragon, even if it is everything; even if the empty heavens over his head are only the huge arch of its open jaws.

And then followed an experience impossible to describe. It was as if I had been blundering about since my birth with two huge and unmanageable machines, of different shapes and without apparent connection — the world and the Christian tradition. I had found this hole in the world: the fact that one must somehow find a way of loving the world without trusting it; somehow one must love the world without being worldly. I found this projecting feature of Christian theology, like a sort of hard spike, the dogmatic insistence that God was personal, and had made a world separate from Himself. The spike of dogma fitted exactly into the hole in the world — it had evidently been meant to go there — and then the strange thing began to happen. When once these two parts of the two machines had come together, one after another, all the other parts fitted and fell in with an eerie exactitude. I could hear bolt after bolt over all the machinery falling into its place with a kind of click of relief. Having got one part right, all the other parts were repeating that rectitude, as clock after clock strikes noon. Instinct after instinct was answered by doctrine after doctrine. Or, to vary the metaphor, I was like one who had advanced into a hostile country to take one high fortress. And when that fort had fallen the whole country surrendered and turned solid behind me. The whole land was lit up, as it were, back to the first fields of my childhood. All those blind fancies of boyhood which in the fourth chapter I have tried in vain to trace on the darkness, became suddenly transparent and sane. I was right when I felt that roses were red by some sort of choice: it was the divine choice. I was right when I felt that I would almost rather say that grass was the wrong colour than say it must by necessity have been that colour: it might verily have been any other. My sense that happiness hung on the crazy thread of a condition did mean something when all was said: it meant the whole doctrine of the Fall. Even those dim and shapeless monsters of notions which I have not been able to describe, much less defend, stepped quietly into their places like colossal caryatides of the creed. The fancy that the cosmos was not vast and void, but small and cosy, had a fulfilled significance now, for anything that is a work of art must be small in the sight of the artist; to God the stars might be only small and dear, like diamonds. And my haunting instinct that somehow good was not merely a tool to be used, but a relic to be guarded, like the goods from Crusoe's ship — even that had been the wild whisper of something originally wise, for, according to Christianity, we were indeed the survivors of a wreck, the crew of a golden ship that had gone down before the beginning of the world.

But the important matter was this, that it entirely reversed the reason for optimism. And the instant the reversal was made it felt like the abrupt ease when a bone is put back in the socket. I had often called myself an optimist, to avoid the too evident blasphemy of pessimism. But all the optimism of the age had been false and disheartening for this reason, that it had always been trying to prove that we fit in to the world. The Christian optimism is based on the fact that we do NOT fit in to the world. I had tried to be happy by telling myself that man is an animal, like any other which sought its meat from God. But now I really was happy, for I had learnt that man is a monstrosity. I had been right in feeling all things as odd, for I myself was at once worse and better than all things. The optimist’s pleasure was prosaic, for it dwelt on the naturalness of everything; the Christian pleasure was poetic, for it dwelt on the unnaturalness of everything in the light of the supernatural. The modern philosopher had told me again and again that I was in the right place, and I had still felt depressed even in acquiescence. But I had heard that I was in the WRONG place, and my soul sang for joy, like a bird in spring. The knowledge found out and illuminated forgotten chambers in the dark house of infancy. I knew now why grass had always seemed to me as queer as the green beard of a giant, and why I could feel homesick at home.

VI THE PARADOXES OF CHRISTIANITY

The real trouble with this world of ours is not that it is an unreasonable world, nor even that it is a reasonable one. The commonest kind of trouble is that it is nearly reasonable, but not quite. Life is not an illogicality; yet it is a trap for logicians. It looks just a little more mathematical and regular than it is; its exactitude is obvious, but its inexactitude is hidden; its wildness lies in wait. I give one coarse instance of what I mean. Suppose some mathematical creature from the moon were to reckon up the human body; he would at once see that the essential thing about it was that it was duplicate. A man is two men, he on the right exactly resembling him on the left. Having noted that there was an arm on the right and one on the left, a leg on the right and one on the left, he might go further and still find on each side the same number of fingers, the same number of toes, twin eyes, twin ears, twin nostrils, and even twin lobes of the brain. At last he would take it as a law; and then, where he found a heart on one side, would deduce that there was another heart on the other. And just then, where he most felt he was right, he would be wrong.

It is this silent swerving from accuracy by an inch that is the uncanny element in everything. It seems a sort of secret treason in the universe. An apple or an orange is round enough to get itself called round, and yet is not round after all. The earth itself is shaped like an orange in order to lure some simple astronomer into calling it a globe. A blade of grass is called after the blade of a sword, because it comes to a point; but it doesn’t. Everywhere in things there is this element of the quiet and incalculable. It escapes the rationalists, but it never escapes till the last moment. From the grand curve of our earth it could easily be inferred that every inch of it was thus curved. It would seem rational that as a man has a brain on both sides, he should have a heart on both sides. Yet scientific men are still organizing expeditions to find the North Pole, because they are so fond of flat country. Scientific men are also still organizing expeditions to find a man’s heart; and when they try to find it, they generally get on the wrong side of him.

Now, actual insight or inspiration is best tested by whether it guesses these hidden malformations or surprises. If our mathematician from the moon saw the two arms and the two ears, he might deduce the two shoulder-blades and the two halves of the brain. But if he guessed that the man’s heart was in the right place, then I should call him something more than a mathematician. Now, this is exactly the claim which I have since come to propound for Christianity. Not merely that it deduces logical truths, but that when it suddenly becomes illogical, it has found, so to speak, an illogical truth. It not only goes right about things, but it goes wrong (if one may say so) exactly where the things go wrong. Its plan suits the secret irregularities, and expects the unexpected. It is simple about the simple truth; but it is stubborn about the subtle truth. It will admit that a man has two hands, it will not admit (though all the Modernists wail to it) the obvious deduction that he has two hearts. It is my only purpose in this chapter to point this out; to show that whenever we feel there is something odd in Christian theology, we shall generally find that there is something odd in the truth.

I have alluded to an unmeaning phrase to the effect that such and such a creed cannot be believed in our age. Of course, anything can be believed in any age. But, oddly enough, there really is a sense in which a creed, if it is believed at all, can be believed more fixedly in a complex society than in a simple one. If a man finds Christianity true in Birmingham, he has actually clearer reasons for faith than if he had found it true in Mercia. For the more complicated seems the coincidence, the less it can be a coincidence. If snowflakes fell in the shape, say, of the heart of Midlothian, it might be an accident. But if snowflakes fell in the exact shape of the maze at Hampton Court, I think one might call it a miracle. It is exactly as of such a miracle that I have since come to feel of the philosophy of Christianity. The complication of our modern world proves the truth of the creed more perfectly than any of the plain problems of the ages of faith. It was in Notting Hill and Battersea that I began to see that Christianity was true. This is why the faith has that elaboration of doctrines and details which so much distresses those who admire Christianity without believing in it. When once one believes in a creed, one is proud of its complexity, as scientists are proud of the complexity of science. It shows how rich it is in discoveries. If it is right at all, it is a compliment to say that it’s elaborately right. A stick might fit a hole or a stone a hollow by accident. But a key and a lock are both complex. And if a key fits a lock, you know it is the right key.

But this involved accuracy of the thing makes it very difficult to do what I now have to do, to describe this accumulation of truth. It is very hard for a man to defend anything of which he is entirely convinced. It is comparatively easy when he is only partially convinced. He is partially convinced because he has found this or that proof of the thing, and he can expound it. But a man is not really convinced of a philosophic theory when he finds that something proves it. He is only really convinced when he finds that everything proves it. And the more converging reasons he finds pointing to this conviction, the more bewildered he is if asked suddenly to sum them up. Thus, if one asked an ordinary intelligent man, on the spur of the moment, "Why do you prefer civilization to savagery?" he would look wildly round at object after object, and would only be able to answer vaguely, "Why, there is that bookcase . . . and the coals in the coal-scuttle . . . and pianos . . . and policemen." The whole case for civilization is that the case for it is complex. It has done so many things. But that very multiplicity of proof which ought to make reply overwhelming makes reply impossible.

There is, therefore, about all complete conviction a kind of huge helplessness. The belief is so big that it takes a long time to get it into action. And this hesitation chiefly arises, oddly enough, from an indifference about where one should begin. All roads lead to Rome; which is one reason why many people never get there. In the case of this defence of the Christian conviction I confess that I would as soon begin the argument with one thing as another; I would begin it with a turnip or a taximeter cab. But if I am to be at all careful about making my meaning clear, it will, I think, be wiser to continue the current arguments of the last chapter, which was concerned to urge the first of these mystical coincidences, or rather ratifications. All I had hitherto heard of Christian theology had alienated me from it. I was a pagan at the age of twelve, and a complete agnostic by the age of sixteen; and I cannot understand any one passing the age of seventeen without having asked himself so simple a question. I did, indeed, retain a cloudy reverence for a cosmic deity and a great historical interest in the Founder of Christianity. But I certainly regarded Him as a man; though perhaps I thought that, even in that point, He had an advantage over some of His modern critics. I read the scientific and sceptical literature of my time — all of it, at least, that I could find written in English and lying about; and I read nothing else; I mean I read nothing else on any other note of philosophy. The penny dreadfuls which I also read were indeed in a healthy and heroic tradition of Christianity; but I did not know this at the time. I never read a line of Christian apologetics. I read as little as I can of them now. It was Huxley and Herbert Spencer and Bradlaugh who brought me back to orthodox theology. They sowed in my mind my first wild doubts of doubt. Our grandmothers were quite right when they said that Tom Paine and the free-thinkers unsettled the mind. They do. They unsettled mine horribly. The rationalist made me question whether reason was of any use whatever; and when I had finished Herbert Spencer I had got as far as doubting (for the first time) whether evolution had occurred at all. As I laid down the last of Colonel Ingersoll's atheistic lectures the dreadful thought broke across my mind, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." I was in a desperate way.

This odd effect of the great agnostics in arousing doubts deeper than their own might be illustrated in many ways. I take only one. As I read and re-read all the non-Christian or anti-Christian accounts of the faith, from Huxley to Bradlaugh, a slow and awful impression grew gradually but graphically upon my mind — the impression that Christianity must be a most extraordinary thing. For not only (as I understood) had Christianity the most flaming vices, but it had apparently a mystical talent for combining vices which seemed inconsistent with each other. It was attacked on all sides and for all contradictory reasons. No sooner had one rationalist demonstrated that it was too far to the east than another demonstrated with equal clearness that it was much too far to the west. No sooner had my indignation died down at its angular and aggressive squareness than I was called up again to notice and condemn its enervating and sensual roundness. In case any reader has not come across the thing I mean, I will give such instances as I remember at random of this self-contradiction in the sceptical attack. I give four or five of them; there are fifty more.

Thus, for instance, I was much moved by the eloquent attack on Christianity as a thing of inhuman gloom; for I thought (and still think) sincere pessimism the unpardonable sin. Insincere pessimism is a social accomplishment, rather agreeable than otherwise; and fortunately nearly all pessimism is insincere. But if Christianity was, as these people said, a thing purely pessimistic and opposed to life, then I was quite prepared to blow up St. Paul's Cathedral. But the extraordinary thing is this. They did prove to me in Chapter I. (to my complete satisfaction) that Christianity was too pessimistic; and then, in Chapter II., they began to prove to me that it was a great deal too optimistic. One accusation against Christianity was that it prevented men, by morbid tears and terrors, from seeking joy and liberty in the bosom of Nature. But another accusation was that it comforted men with a fictitious providence, and put them in a pink-and-white nursery. One great agnostic asked why Nature was not beautiful enough, and why it was hard to be free. Another great agnostic objected that Christian optimism, “the garment of make-believe woven by pious hands,” hid from us the fact that Nature was ugly, and that it was impossible to be free. One rationalist had hardly done calling Christianity a nightmare before another began to call it a fool’s paradise. This puzzled me; the charges seemed inconsistent. Christianity could not at once be the black mask on a white world, and also the white mask on a black world. The state of the Christian could not be at once so comfortable that he was a coward to cling to it, and so uncomfortable that he was a fool to stand it. If it falsified human vision it must falsify it one way or another; it could not wear both green and rose-coloured spectacles. I rolled on my tongue with a terrible joy, as did all young men of that time, the taunts which Swinburne hurled at the dreariness of the creed —

“Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilaean, the world has grown gray with Thy breath.”

But when I read the same poet’s accounts of paganism (as in “Atalanta”), I gathered that the world was, if possible, more gray before the Galilean breathed on it than afterwards. The poet maintained, indeed, in the abstract, that life itself was pitch dark. And yet, somehow, Christianity had darkened it. The very man who denounced Christianity for pessimism was himself a pessimist. I thought there must be something wrong. And it did for one wild moment cross my mind that, perhaps, those might not be the very best judges of the relation of religion to happiness who, by their own account, had neither one nor the other.

It must be understood that I did not conclude hastily that the accusations were false or the accusers fools. I simply deduced that Christianity must be something even weirder and wickeder than they made out. A thing might have these two opposite vices; but it must be a rather queer thing if it did. A man might be too fat in one place and too thin in another; but he would be an odd shape. At this point my thoughts were only of the odd shape of the Christian religion; I did not allege any odd shape in the rationalistic mind.

Here is another case of the same kind. I felt that a strong case against Christianity lay in the charge that there is something timid, monkish, and unmanly about all that is called “Christian,” especially in its attitude towards resistance and fighting. The great sceptics of the nineteenth century were largely virile. Bradlaugh in an expansive way, Huxley, in a reticent way, were decidedly men. In comparison, it did seem tenable that there was something weak and over patient about Christian counsels. The Gospel paradox about the other cheek, the fact that priests never fought, a hundred things made plausible the accusation that Christianity was an attempt to make a man too like a sheep. I read it and believed it, and if I had read nothing different, I should have gone on believing it. But I read something very different. I turned the next page in my agnostic manual, and my brain turned up-side down. Now I found that I was to hate Christianity not for fighting too little, but for fighting too much. Christianity, it seemed, was the mother of wars. Christianity had deluged the world with blood. I had got thoroughly angry with the Christian, because he never was angry. And now I was told to be angry with him because his anger had been the most huge and horrible thing in human history; because his anger had soaked the earth and smoked to the sun. The very people who reproached Christianity with the meekness and non-resistance of the monasteries were the very people who reproached it also with the violence and valour of the Crusades. It was the fault of poor old Christianity (somehow or other) both that Edward the Confessor did not fight and that Richard Coeur de Leon did. The Quakers (we were told) were the only characteristic Christians; and yet the massacres of Cromwell and Alva were characteristic Christian crimes. What could it all mean? What was this Christianity which always forbade war and always produced wars? What could be the nature of the thing which one could abuse first because it would not fight, and second because it was always fighting? In what world of riddles was born this monstrous murder and this monstrous meekness? The shape of Christianity grew a queerer shape every instant.

I take a third case; the strangest of all, because it involves the one real objection to the faith. The one real objection to the Christian religion is simply that it is one religion. The world is a big place, full of very different kinds of people. Christianity (it may reasonably be said) is one thing confined to one kind of people; it began in Palestine, it has practically stopped with Europe. I was duly impressed with this argument in my youth, and I was much drawn towards the doctrine often preached in Ethical Societies — I mean the doctrine that there is one great unconscious church of all humanity founded on the omnipresence of the human conscience.

Creeds, it was said, divided men; but at least morals united them. The soul might seek the strangest and most remote lands and ages and still find essential ethical common sense. It might find Confucius under Eastern trees, and he would be writing “Thou shalt not steal.” It might decipher the darkest hieroglyphic on the most primeval desert, and the meaning when deciphered would be “Little boys should tell the truth.” I believed this doctrine of the brotherhood of all men in the possession of a moral sense, and I believe it still — with other things. And I was thoroughly annoyed with Christianity for suggesting (as I supposed) that whole ages and empires of men had utterly escaped this light of justice and reason. But then I found an astonishing thing. I found that the very people who said that mankind was one church from Plato to Emerson were the very people who said that morality had changed altogether, and that what was right in one age was wrong in another. If I asked, say, for an altar, I was told that we needed none, for men our brothers gave us clear oracles and one creed in their universal customs and ideals. But if I mildly pointed out that one of men’s universal customs was to have an altar, then my agnostic teachers turned clean round and told me that men had always been in darkness and the superstitions of savages. I found it was their daily taunt against Christianity that it was the light of one people and had left all others to die in the dark. But I also found that it was their special boast for themselves that science and progress were the discovery of one people, and that all other peoples had died in the dark. Their chief insult to Christianity was actually their chief compliment to themselves, and there seemed to be a strange unfairness about all their relative insistence on the two things. When considering some pagan or agnostic, we were to remember that all men had one religion; when considering some mystic or spiritualist, we were only to consider what absurd religions some men had. We could trust the ethics of Epictetus, because ethics had never changed. We must not trust the ethics of Bossuet, because ethics had changed. They changed in two hundred years, but not in two thousand.

This began to be alarming. It looked not so much as if Christianity was bad enough to include any vices, but rather as if any stick was good enough to beat Christianity with. What again could this astonishing thing be like which people were so anxious to contradict, that in doing so they did not mind contradicting themselves? I saw the same thing on every side. I can give no further space to this discussion of it in detail; but lest any one supposes that I have unfairly selected three accidental cases I will run briefly through a few others. Thus, certain sceptics wrote that the great crime of Christianity had been its attack on the family; it had dragged women to the loneliness and contemplation of the cloister, away from their homes and their children. But, then, other sceptics (slightly more advanced) said that the great crime of Christianity was forcing the family and marriage upon us; that it doomed women to the drudgery of their homes and children, and forbade them loneliness and contemplation. The charge was actually reversed. Or, again, certain phrases in the Epistles or the marriage service, were said by the anti-Christians to show contempt for woman's intellect. But I found that the anti-Christians themselves had a contempt for woman's intellect; for it was their great sneer at the Church on the Continent that "only women" went to it. Or again, Christianity was reproached with its naked and hungry habits; with its sackcloth and dried peas. But the next minute Christianity was being reproached with its pomp and its ritualism; its shrines of porphyry and its robes of gold. It was abused for being too plain and for being too coloured. Again Christianity had always been accused of restraining sexuality too much, when Bradlaugh the Malthusian discovered that it restrained it too little. It is often accused in the same breath of prim respectability and of religious extravagance. Between the covers of the same atheistic pamphlet I have found the faith rebuked for its disunion, "One thinks one thing, and one another," and rebuked also for its union, "It is difference of opinion that prevents the world from going to the dogs." In the same conversation a free-thinker, a friend of mine, blamed Christianity for despising Jews, and then despised it himself for being Jewish.

I wished to be quite fair then, and I wish to be quite fair now; and I did not conclude that the attack on Christianity was all wrong. I only concluded that if Christianity was wrong, it was very wrong indeed. Such hostile horrors might be combined in one thing, but that thing must be very strange and solitary. There are men who are misers, and also spendthrifts; but they are rare. There are men sensual and also ascetic; but they are rare. But if this mass of mad contradictions really existed, quakerish and bloodthirsty, too gorgeous and too thread-bare, austere, yet pandering preposterously to the lust of the eye, the enemy of women and their foolish refuge, a solemn pessimist and a silly optimist, if this evil existed, then there was in this evil something quite supreme and unique. For I found in my rationalist teachers no explanation of such exceptional corruption. Christianity (theoretically speaking) was in their eyes only one of the ordinary myths and errors of mortals. THEY gave me no key to this twisted and unnatural badness. Such a paradox of evil rose to the stature of the supernatural. It was, indeed, almost as supernatural as the infallibility of the Pope. An historic institution, which never went right, is really quite as much of a miracle as an institution that cannot go wrong. The only explanation which immediately occurred to my mind was that Christianity did not come from heaven, but from hell. Really, if Jesus of Nazareth was not Christ, He must have been Antichrist.

And then in a quiet hour a strange thought struck me like a still thunderbolt. There had suddenly come into my mind another explanation. Suppose we heard an unknown man spoken of by many men. Suppose we were puzzled to hear that some men said he was too tall and some too short; some objected to his fatness, some lamented his leanness; some thought him too dark, and some too fair. One explanation (as has been already admitted) would be that he might be an odd shape. But there is another explanation. He might be the right shape. Outrageously tall men might feel him to be short. Very short men might feel him to be tall. Old bucks who are growing stout might consider him insufficiently filled out; old beaux who were growing thin might feel that he expanded beyond the narrow lines of elegance. Perhaps Swedes (who have pale hair like tow) called him a dark man, while negroes considered him distinctly blonde. Perhaps (in short) this extraordinary thing is really the ordinary thing; at least the normal thing, the centre. Perhaps, after all, it is Christianity that is sane and all its critics that are mad — in various ways. I tested this idea by asking myself whether there was about any of the accusers anything morbid that might explain the accusation. I was startled to find that this key fitted a lock. For instance, it was certainly odd that the modern world charged Christianity at once with bodily austerity and with artistic pomp. But then it was also odd, very odd, that the modern world itself combined extreme bodily luxury with an extreme absence of artistic pomp. The modern man thought Becket’s robes too rich and his meals too poor. But then the modern man was really exceptional in history; no man before ever ate such elaborate dinners in such ugly clothes. The modern man found the church too simple exactly where modern life is too complex; he found the church too gorgeous exactly where modern life is too dingy. The man who disliked the plain fasts and feasts was mad on entrees. The man who disliked vestments wore a pair of preposterous trousers. And surely if there was any insanity involved in the matter at all it was in the trousers, not in the simply falling robe. If there was any insanity at all, it was in the extravagant entrees, not in the bread and wine.

I went over all the cases, and I found the key fitted so far. The fact that Swinburne was irritated at the unhappiness of Christians and yet more irritated at their happiness was easily explained. It was no longer a complication of diseases in Christianity, but a complication of diseases in Swinburne. The restraints of Christians saddened him simply because he was more hedonist than a healthy man should be. The faith of Christians angered him because he was more pessimist than a healthy man should be. In the same way the Malthusians by instinct attacked Christianity; not because there is anything especially anti-Malthusian about Christianity, but because there is something a little anti-human about Malthusianism.

Nevertheless it could not, I felt, be quite true that Christianity was merely sensible and stood in the middle. There was really an element in it of emphasis and even frenzy which had justified the secularists in their superficial criticism. It might be wise, I began more and more to think that it was wise, but it was not merely worldly wise; it was not merely temperate and respectable. Its fierce crusaders and meek saints might balance each other; still, the crusaders were very fierce and the saints were very meek, meek beyond all decency. Now, it was just at this point of the speculation that I remembered my thoughts about the martyr and the suicide. In that matter there had been this combination between two almost insane positions which yet somehow amounted to sanity. This was just such another contradiction; and this I had already found to be true. This was exactly one of the paradoxes in which sceptics found the creed wrong; and in this I had found it right. Madly as Christians might love the martyr or hate the suicide, they never felt these passions more madly than I had felt them long before I dreamed of Christianity. Then the most difficult and interesting part of the mental process opened, and I began to trace this idea darkly through all the enormous thoughts of our theology. The idea was that which I had outlined touching the optimist and the pessimist; that we want not an amalgam or compromise, but both things at the top of their energy; love and wrath both burning. Here I shall only trace it in relation to ethics. But I need not remind the reader that the idea of this combination is indeed central in orthodox theology. For orthodox theology has specially insisted that Christ was not a being apart from God and man, like an elf, nor yet a being half human and half not, like a centaur, but both things at once and both things thoroughly, very man and very God. Now let me trace this notion as I found it.

All sane men can see that sanity is some kind of equilibrium; that one may be mad and eat too much, or mad and eat too little. Some moderns have indeed appeared with vague versions of progress and evolution which seeks to destroy the MESON or balance of Aristotle. They seem to suggest that we are meant to starve progressively, or to go on eating larger and larger breakfasts every morning for ever. But the great truism of the MESON remains for all thinking men, and these people have not upset any balance except their own. But granted that we have all to keep a balance, the real interest comes in with the question of how that balance can be kept. That was the problem which Paganism tried to solve: that was the problem which I think Christianity solved and solved in a very strange way.

Paganism declared that virtue was in a balance; Christianity declared it was in a conflict: the collision of two passions apparently opposite. Of course they were not really inconsistent; but they were such that it was hard to hold simultaneously. Let us follow for a moment the clue of the martyr and the suicide; and take the case of courage. No quality has ever so much addled the brains and tangled the definitions of merely rational sages. Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die. “He that will lose his life, the same shall save it,” is not a piece of mysticism for saints and heroes. It is a piece of everyday advice for sailors or mountaineers. It might be printed in an Alpine guide or a drill book. This paradox is the whole principle of courage; even of quite earthly or quite brutal courage. A man cut off by the sea may save his life if he will risk it on the precipice.

He can only get away from death by continually stepping within an inch of it. A soldier surrounded by enemies, if he is to cut his way out, needs to combine a strong desire for living with a strange carelessness about dying. He must not merely cling to life, for then he will be a coward, and will not escape. He must not merely wait for death, for then he will be a suicide, and will not escape. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine. No philosopher, I fancy, has ever expressed this romantic riddle with adequate lucidity, and I certainly have not done so. But Christianity has done more: it has marked the limits of it in the awful graves of the suicide and the hero, showing the distance between him who dies for the sake of living and him who dies for the sake of dying. And it has held up ever since above the European lances the banner of the mystery of chivalry: the Christian courage, which is a disdain of death; not the Chinese courage, which is a disdain of life.

And now I began to find that this duplex passion was the Christian key to ethics everywhere. Everywhere the creed made a moderation out of the still crash of two impetuous emotions. Take, for instance, the matter of modesty, of the balance between mere pride and mere prostration. The average pagan, like the average agnostic, would merely say that he was content with himself, but not insolently self-satisfied, that there were many better and many worse, that his deserts were limited, but he would see that he got them. In short, he would walk with his head in the air; but not necessarily with his nose in the air. This is a manly and rational position, but it is open to the objection we noted against the compromise between optimism and pessimism — the “resignation” of Matthew Arnold. Being a mixture of two things, it is a dilution of two things; neither is present in its full strength or contributes its full colour. This proper pride does not lift the heart like the tongue of trumpets; you cannot go clad in crimson and gold for this. On the other hand, this mild rationalist modesty does not cleanse the soul with fire and make it clear like crystal; it does not (like a strict and searching humility) make a man as a little child, who can sit at the feet of the grass. It does not make him look up and see marvels; for Alice must grow small if she is to be Alice in Wonderland. Thus it loses both the poetry of being proud and the poetry of being humble. Christianity sought by this same strange expedient to save both of them.

It separated the two ideas and then exaggerated them both. In one way Man was to be haughtier than he had ever been before; in another way he was to be humbler than he had ever been before. In so far as I am Man I am the chief of creatures. In so far as I am a man I am the chief of sinners. All humility that had meant pessimism, that had meant man taking a vague or mean view of his whole destiny — all that was to go. We were to hear no more the wail of Ecclesiastes that humanity had no pre-eminence over the brute, or the awful cry of Homer that man was only the saddest of all the beasts of the field. Man was a statue of God walking about the garden. Man had pre-eminence over all the brutes; man was only sad because he was not a beast, but a broken god. The Greek had spoken of men creeping on the earth, as if clinging to it. Now Man was to tread on the earth as if to subdue it. Christianity thus held a thought of the dignity of man that could only be expressed in crowns rayed like the sun and fans of peacock plumage. Yet at the same time it could hold a thought about the abject smallness of man that could only be expressed in fasting and fantastic submission, in the gray ashes of St. Dominic and the white snows of St. Bernard. When one came to think of ONE'S SELF, there was vista and void enough for any amount of bleak abnegation and bitter truth. There the realistic gentleman could let himself go — as long as he let himself go at himself. There was an open playground for the happy pessimist. Let him say anything against himself short of blaspheming the original aim of his being; let him call himself a fool and even a damned fool (though that is Calvinistic); but he must not say that fools are not worth saving. He must not say that a man, QUA man, can be valueless. Here, again in short, Christianity got over the difficulty of combining furious opposites, by keeping them both, and keeping them both furious. The Church was positive on both points. One can hardly think too little of one's self. One can hardly think too much of one's soul.

Take another case: the complicated question of charity, which some highly uncharitable idealists seem to think quite easy. Charity is a paradox, like modesty and courage. Stated baldly, charity certainly means one of two things — pardoning unpardonable acts, or loving unlovable people. But if we ask ourselves (as we did in the case of pride) what a sensible pagan would feel about such a subject, we shall probably be beginning at the bottom of it. A sensible pagan would say that there were some people one could forgive, and some one couldn't: a slave who stole wine could be laughed at; a slave who betrayed his benefactor could be killed, and cursed even after he was killed. In so far as the act was pardonable, the man was pardonable. That again is rational, and even refreshing; but it is a dilution. It leaves no place for a pure horror of injustice, such as that which is a great beauty in the innocent. And it leaves no place for a mere tenderness for men as men, such as is the whole fascination of the charitable. Christianity came in here as before. It came in startlingly with a sword, and clove one thing from another. It divided the crime from the criminal. The criminal we must forgive unto seventy times seven. The crime we must not forgive at all. It was not enough that slaves who stole wine inspired partly anger and partly kindness. We must be much more angry with theft than before, and yet much kinder to thieves than before. There was room for wrath and love to run wild. And the more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it had established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild.

Mental and emotional liberty are not so simple as they look. Really they require almost as careful a balance of laws and conditions as do social and political liberty. The ordinary aesthetic anarchist who sets out to feel everything freely gets knotted at last in a paradox that prevents him feeling at all. He breaks away from home limits to follow poetry. But in ceasing to feel home limits he has ceased to feel the “Odyssey.” He is free from national prejudices and outside patriotism. But being outside patriotism he is outside “Henry V.” Such a literary man is simply outside all literature: he is more of a prisoner than any bigot. For if there is a wall between you and the world, it makes little difference whether you describe yourself as locked in or as locked out. What we want is not the universality that is outside all normal sentiments; we want the universality that is inside all normal sentiments. It is all the difference between being free from them, as a man is free from a prison, and being free of them as a man is free of a city. I am free from Windsor Castle (that is, I am not forcibly detained there), but I am by no means free of that building. How can man be approximately free of fine emotions, able to swing them in a clear space without breakage or wrong? THIS was the achievement of this Christian paradox of the parallel passions. Granted the primary dogma of the war between divine and diabolic, the revolt and ruin of the world, their optimism and pessimism, as pure poetry, could be loosened like cataracts.

St. Francis, in praising all good, could be a more shouting optimist than Walt Whitman. St. Jerome, in denouncing all evil, could paint the world blacker than Schopenhauer. Both passions were free because both were kept in their place. The optimist could pour out all the praise he liked on the gay music of the march, the golden trumpets, and the purple banners going into battle. But he must not call the fight needless. The pessimist might draw as darkly as he chose the sickening marches or the sanguine wounds. But he must not call the fight hopeless. So it was with all the other moral problems, with pride, with protest, and with compassion. By defining its main doctrine, the Church not only kept seemingly inconsistent things side by side, but, what was more, allowed them to break out in a sort of artistic violence otherwise possible only to anarchists. Meekness grew more dramatic than madness. Historic Christianity rose into a high and strange

COUP DE THEATRE of morality — things that are to virtue what the crimes of Nero are to vice. The spirits of indignation and of charity took terrible and attractive forms, ranging from that monkish fierceness that scourged like a dog the first and greatest of the Plantagenets, to the sublime pity of St. Catherine, who, in the official shambles, kissed the bloody head of the criminal. Poetry could be acted as well as composed. This heroic and monumental manner in ethics has entirely vanished with supernatural religion. They, being humble, could parade themselves: but we are too proud to be prominent. Our ethical teachers write reasonably for prison reform; but we are not likely to see Mr. Cadbury, or any eminent philanthropist, go into Reading Gaol and embrace the strangled corpse before it is cast into the quicklime. Our ethical teachers write mildly against the power of millionaires; but we are not likely to see Mr. Rockefeller, or any modern tyrant, publicly whipped in Westminster Abbey.

Thus, the double charges of the secularists, though throwing nothing but darkness and confusion on themselves, throw a real light on the faith. It is true that the historic Church has at once emphasised celibacy and emphasised the family; has at once (if one may put it so) been fiercely for having children and fiercely for not having children. It has kept them side by side like two strong colours, red and white, like the red and white upon the shield of St. George. It has always had a healthy hatred of pink. It hates that combination of two colours which is the feeble expedient of the philosophers. It hates that evolution of black into white which is tantamount to a dirty gray. In fact, the whole theory of the Church on virginity might be symbolized in the statement that white is a colour: not merely the absence of a colour. All that I am urging here can be expressed by saying that Christianity sought in most of these cases to keep two colours coexistent but pure. It is not a mixture like russet or purple; it is rather like a shot silk, for a shot silk is always at right angles, and is in the pattern of the cross.

So it is also, of course, with the contradictory charges of the anti-Christians about submission and slaughter. It IS true that the Church told some men to fight and others not to fight; and it IS true that those who fought were like thunderbolts and those who did not fight were like statues. All this simply means that the Church preferred to use its Supermen and to use its Tolstoyans. There must be SOME good in the life of battle, for so many good men have enjoyed being soldiers. There must be SOME good in the idea of non-resistance, for so many good men seem to enjoy being

Quakers. All that the Church did (so far as that goes) was to prevent either of these good things from ousting the other. They existed side by side. The Tolstoyans, having all the scruples of monks, simply became monks. The Quakers became a club instead of becoming a sect. Monks said all that Tolstoy says; they poured out lucid lamentations about the cruelty of battles and the vanity of revenge. But the Tolstoyans are not quite right enough to run the whole world; and in the ages of faith they were not allowed to run it. The world did not lose the last charge of Sir James Douglas or the banner of Joan the Maid. And sometimes this pure gentleness and this pure fierceness met and justified their juncture; the paradox of all the prophets was fulfilled, and, in the soul of St. Louis, the lion lay down with the lamb. But remember that this text is too lightly interpreted. It is constantly assured, especially in our Tolstoyan tendencies, that when the lion lies down with the lamb the lion becomes lamb-like. But that is brutal annexation and imperialism on the part of the lamb. That is simply the lamb absorbing the lion instead of the lion eating the lamb. The real problem is — Can the lion lie down with the lamb and still retain his royal ferocity? THAT is the problem the Church attempted; THAT is the miracle she achieved.

This is what I have called guessing the hidden eccentricities of life. This is knowing that a man’s heart is to the left and not in the middle. This is knowing not only that the earth is round, but knowing exactly where it is flat. Christian doctrine detected the oddities of life. It not only discovered the law, but it foresaw the exceptions. Those underrate Christianity who say that it discovered mercy; any one might discover mercy. In fact every one did. But to discover a plan for being merciful and also severe — THAT was to anticipate a strange need of human nature. For no one wants to be forgiven for a big sin as if it were a little one. Any one might say that we should be neither quite miserable nor quite happy. But to find out how far one MAY be quite miserable without making it impossible to be quite happy — that was a discovery in psychology. Any one might say, “Neither swagger nor grovel”; and it would have been a limit. But to say, “Here you can swagger and there you can grovel” — that was an emancipation.

This was the big fact about Christian ethics; the discovery of the new balance. Paganism had been like a pillar of marble, upright because proportioned with symmetry. Christianity was like a huge and ragged and romantic rock, which, though it sways on its pedestal at a touch, yet, because its exaggerated excrescences exactly balance each other, is enthroned there for a thousand years. In a Gothic cathedral the columns were all different, but they were all necessary. Every support seemed an accidental and fantastic support; every buttress was a flying buttress. So in Christendom apparent accidents balanced. Becket wore a hair shirt under his gold and crimson, and there is much to be said for the combination; for Becket got the benefit of the hair shirt while the people in the street got the benefit of the crimson and gold. It is at least better than the manner of the modern millionaire, who has the black and the drab outwardly for others, and the gold next his heart. But the balance was not always in one man's body as in Becket's; the balance was often distributed over the whole body of Christendom. Because a man prayed and fasted on the Northern snows, flowers could be flung at his festival in the Southern cities; and because fanatics drank water on the sands of Syria, men could still drink cider in the orchards of England. This is what makes Christendom at once so much more perplexing and so much more interesting than the Pagan empire; just as Amiens Cathedral is not better but more interesting than the Parthenon. If any one wants a modern proof of all this, let him consider the curious fact that, under Christianity, Europe (while remaining a unity) has broken up into individual nations. Patriotism is a perfect example of this deliberate balancing of one emphasis against another emphasis. The instinct of the Pagan empire would have said, "You shall all be Roman citizens, and grow alike; let the German grow less slow and reverent; the Frenchmen less experimental and swift." But the instinct of Christian Europe says, "Let the German remain slow and reverent, that the Frenchman may the more safely be swift and experimental. We will make an equipoise out of these excesses. The absurdity called Germany shall correct the insanity called France."

Last and most important, it is exactly this which explains what is so inexplicable to all the modern critics of the history of Christianity. I mean the monstrous wars about small points of theology, the earthquakes of emotion about a gesture or a word. It was only a matter of an inch; but an inch is everything when you are balancing. The Church could not afford to swerve a hair's breadth on some things if she was to continue her great and daring experiment of the irregular equilibrium. Once let one idea become less powerful and some other idea would become too powerful. It was no flock of sheep the Christian shepherd was leading, but a herd of bulls and tigers, of terrible ideals and devouring doctrines, each one of them strong enough to turn to a false religion and lay waste the world. Remember that the Church went in specifically for dangerous ideas; she was a lion tamer. The idea of birth through a Holy Spirit, of the death of a divine being, of the forgiveness of sins, or the fulfilment of prophecies, are ideas which, any one can see, need but a touch to turn them into something blasphemous or ferocious. The smallest link was let drop by the artificers of the Mediterranean, and the lion of ancestral pessimism burst his chain in the forgotten forests of the north. Of these theological equalisations I have to speak afterwards. Here it is enough to notice that if some small mistake were made in doctrine, huge blunders might be made in human happiness. A sentence phrased wrong about the nature of symbolism would have broken all the best statues in Europe. A slip in the definitions might stop all the dances; might wither all the Christmas trees or break all the Easter eggs. Doctrines had to be defined within strict limits, even in order that man might enjoy general human liberties. The Church had to be careful, if only that the world might be careless.

This is the thrilling romance of Orthodoxy. People have fallen into a foolish habit of speaking of orthodoxy as something heavy, humdrum, and safe. There never was anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy. It was sanity: and to be sane is more dramatic than to be mad. It was the equilibrium of a man behind madly rushing horses, seeming to stoop this way and to sway that, yet in every attitude having the grace of statuary and the accuracy of arithmetic. The Church in its early days went fierce and fast with any warhorse; yet it is utterly unhistoric to say that she merely went mad along one idea, like a vulgar fanaticism. She swerved to left and right, so exactly as to avoid enormous obstacles. She left on one hand the huge bulk of Arianism, buttressed by all the worldly powers to make Christianity too worldly. The next instant she was swerving to avoid an orientalism, which would have made it too unworldly. The orthodox Church never took the tame course or accepted the conventions; the orthodox Church was never respectable. It would have been easier to have accepted the earthly power of the Arians. It would have been easy, in the Calvinistic seventeenth century, to fall into the bottomless pit of predestination. It is easy to be a madman: it is easy to be a heretic. It is always easy to let the age have its head; the difficult thing is to keep one’s own. It is always easy to be a modernist; as it is easy to be a snob. To have fallen into any of those open traps of error and exaggeration which fashion after fashion and sect after sect set along the historic path of Christendom — that would indeed have been simple. It is always simple to fall; there are an infinity of angles at which one falls, only one at which one stands. To have fallen into any one of the fads from Gnosticism to Christian Science would indeed have been obvious and tame. But to have avoided them all has been one whirling adventure; and in my vision the heavenly chariot flies thundering through the ages, the dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect.

VII THE ETERNAL REVOLUTION

The following propositions have been urged: First, that some faith in our life is required even to improve it; second, that some dissatisfaction with things as they are is necessary even in order to be satisfied; third, that to have this necessary content and necessary discontent it is not sufficient to have the obvious equilibrium of the Stoic. For mere resignation has neither the gigantic levity of pleasure nor the superb intolerance of pain. There is a vital objection to the advice merely to grin and bear it. The objection is that if you merely bear it, you do not grin. Greek heroes do not grin: but gargoyles do — because they are Christian. And when a Christian is pleased, he is (in the most exact sense) frightfully pleased; his pleasure is frightful. Christ prophesied the whole of Gothic architecture in that hour when nervous and respectable people (such people as now object to barrel organs) objected to the shouting of the gutter-snipes of Jerusalem. He said, “If these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” Under the impulse of His spirit arose like a clamorous chorus the facades of the mediaeval cathedrals, thronged with shouting faces and open mouths. The prophecy has fulfilled itself: the very stones cry out.

If these things be conceded, though only for argument, we may take up where we left it the thread of the thought of the natural man, called by the Scotch (with regrettable familiarity), “The Old Man.” We can ask the next question so obviously in front of us. Some satisfaction is needed even to make things better. But what do we mean by making things better? Most modern talk on this matter is a mere argument in a circle — that circle which we have already made the symbol of madness and of mere rationalism. Evolution is only good if it produces good; good is only good if it helps evolution. The elephant stands on the tortoise, and the tortoise on the elephant.

Obviously, it will not do to take our ideal from the principle in nature; for the simple reason that (except for some human or divine theory), there is no principle in nature. For instance, the cheap anti-democrat of to-day will tell you solemnly that there is no equality in nature. He is right, but he does not see the logical addendum. There is no equality in nature; also there is no inequality in nature. Inequality, as much as equality, implies a standard of value. To read aristocracy into the anarchy of animals is just as sentimental as to read democracy into it. Both aristocracy and democracy are human ideals: the one saying that all men are valuable, the other that some men are more valuable. But nature does not say that cats are more valuable than mice; nature makes no remark on the subject. She does not even say that the cat is enviable or the mouse pitiable. We think the cat superior because we have (or most of us have) a particular philosophy to the effect that life is better than death. But if the mouse were a German pessimist mouse, he might not think that the cat had beaten him at all. He might think he had beaten the cat by getting to the grave first. Or he might feel that he had actually inflicted frightful punishment on the cat by keeping him alive. Just as a microbe might feel proud of spreading a pestilence, so the pessimistic mouse might exult to think that he was renewing in the cat the torture of conscious existence. It all depends on the philosophy of the mouse. You cannot even say that there is victory or superiority in nature unless you have some doctrine about what things are superior. You cannot even say that the cat scores unless there is a system of scoring. You cannot even say that the cat gets the best of it unless there is some best to be got.

We cannot, then, get the ideal itself from nature, and as we follow here the first and natural speculation, we will leave out (for the present) the idea of getting it from God. We must have our own vision. But the attempts of most moderns to express it are highly vague.

Some fall back simply on the clock: they talk as if mere passage through time brought some superiority; so that even a man of the first mental calibre carelessly uses the phrase that human morality is never up to date. How can anything be up to date? — a date has no character. How can one say that Christmas celebrations are not suitable to the twenty-fifth of a month? What the writer meant, of course, was that the majority is behind his favourite minority — or in front of it. Other vague modern people take refuge in material metaphors; in fact, this is the chief mark of vague modern people. Not daring to define their doctrine of what is good, they use physical figures of speech without stint or shame, and, what is worst of all, seem to think these cheap analogies are exquisitely spiritual and superior to the old morality. Thus they think it intellectual to talk about things being “high.” It is at least the reverse of intellectual; it is a mere phrase from a steeple or a weathercock. “Tommy was a good boy” is a pure philosophical statement, worthy of Plato or Aquinas. “Tommy lived the higher life” is a gross metaphor from a ten-foot rule.

This, incidentally, is almost the whole weakness of Nietzsche, whom some are representing as a bold and strong thinker. No one will deny that he was a poetical and suggestive thinker; but he was quite the reverse of strong. He was not at all bold. He never put his own meaning before himself in bald abstract words: as did Aristotle and Calvin, and even Karl Marx, the hard, fearless men of thought. Nietzsche always escaped a question by a physical metaphor, like a cheery minor poet. He said, “beyond good and evil,” because he had not the courage to say, “more good than good and evil,” or, “more evil than good and evil.” Had he faced his thought without metaphors, he would have seen that it was nonsense. So, when he describes his hero, he does not dare to say, “the purer man,” or “the happier man,” or “the sadder man,” for all these are ideas; and ideas are alarming. He says “the upper man,” or “over man,” a physical metaphor from acrobats or alpine climbers. Nietzsche is truly a very timid thinker. He does not really know in the least what sort of man he wants evolution to produce. And if he does not know, certainly the ordinary evolutionists, who talk about things being “higher,” do not know either.

Then again, some people fall back on sheer submission and sitting still. Nature is going to do something some day; nobody knows what, and nobody knows when. We have no reason for acting, and no reason for not acting. If anything happens it is right: if anything is prevented it was wrong. Again, some people try to anticipate nature by doing something, by doing anything. Because we may possibly grow wings they cut off their legs. Yet nature may be trying to make them centipedes for all they know.

Lastly, there is a fourth class of people who take whatever it is that they happen to want, and say that that is the ultimate aim of evolution. And these are the only sensible people. This is the only really healthy way with the word evolution, to work for what you want, and to call THAT evolution. The only intelligible sense that progress or advance can have among men, is that we have a definite vision, and that we wish to make the whole world like that vision. If you like to put it so, the essence of the doctrine is that what we have around us is the mere method and preparation for something that we have to create. This is not a world, but rather the material for a world. God has given us not so much the colours of a picture as the colours of a palette. But he has also given us a subject, a model, a fixed vision. We must be clear about what we want to paint. This adds a further principle to our previous list of principles. We have said we must be fond of this world, even in order to change it. We now add that we must be fond of another world (real or imaginary) in order to have something to change it to.

We need not debate about the mere words evolution or progress: personally I prefer to call it reform. For reform implies form. It implies that we are trying to shape the world in a particular image; to make it something that we see already in our minds. Evolution is a metaphor from mere automatic unrolling. Progress is a metaphor from merely walking along a road — very likely the wrong road. But reform is a metaphor for reasonable and determined men: it means that we see a certain thing out of shape and we mean to put it into shape. And we know what shape.

Now here comes in the whole collapse and huge blunder of our age. We have mixed up two different things, two opposite things. Progress should mean that we are always changing the world to suit the vision. Progress does mean (just now) that we are always changing the vision. It should mean that we are slow but sure in bringing justice and mercy among men: it does mean that we are very swift in doubting the desirability of justice and mercy: a wild page from any Prussian sophist makes men doubt it. Progress should mean that we are always walking towards the New Jerusalem. It does mean that the New Jerusalem is always walking away from us. We are not altering the real to suit the ideal. We are altering the ideal: it is easier.

Silly examples are always simpler; let us suppose a man wanted a particular kind of world; say, a blue world. He would have no cause to complain of the slightness or swiftness of his task; he might toil for a long time at the transformation; he could work away (in every sense) until all was blue. He could have heroic adventures; the putting of the last touches to a blue tiger. He could have fairy dreams; the dawn of a blue moon. But if he worked hard, that high-minded reformer would certainly (from his own point of view) leave the world better and bluer than he found it. If he altered a blade of grass to his favourite colour every day, he would get on slowly. But if he altered his favourite colour every day, he would not get on at all. If, after reading a fresh philosopher, he started to paint everything red or yellow, his work would be thrown away: there would be nothing to show except a few blue tigers walking about, specimens of his early bad manner. This is exactly the position of the average modern thinker. It will be said that this is avowedly a preposterous example. But it is literally the fact of recent history. The great and grave changes in our political civilization all belonged to the early nineteenth century, not to the later. They belonged to the black and white epoch when men believed fixedly in Toryism, in Protestantism, in Calvinism, in Reform, and not unfrequently in Revolution. And whatever each man believed in he hammered at steadily, without scepticism: and there was a time when the Established Church might have fallen, and the House of Lords nearly fell. It was because Radicals were wise enough to be constant and consistent; it was because Radicals were wise enough to be Conservative. But in the existing atmosphere there is not enough time and tradition in Radicalism to pull anything down. There is a great deal of truth in Lord Hugh Cecil's suggestion (made in a fine speech) that the era of change is over, and that ours is an era of conservation and repose. But probably it would pain Lord Hugh Cecil if he realized (what is certainly the case) that ours is only an age of conservation because it is an age of complete unbelief. Let beliefs fade fast and frequently, if you wish institutions to remain the same. The more the life of the mind is unhinged, the more the machinery of matter will be left to itself. The net result of all our political suggestions, Collectivism, Tolstoyanism, Neo-Feudalism, Communism, Anarchy, Scientific Bureaucracy — the plain fruit of all of them is that the Monarchy and the House of Lords will remain. The net result of all the new religions will be that the Church of England will not (for heaven knows how long) be disestablished. It was Karl Marx, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Cunninghame Grahame, Bernard Shaw and Auberon Herbert, who between them, with bowed gigantic backs, bore up the throne of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

We may say broadly that free thought is the best of all the safeguards against freedom. Managed in a modern style the emancipation of the slave's mind is the best way of preventing the emancipation of the slave. Teach him to worry about whether he wants to be free, and he will not free himself. Again, it may be said that this instance is remote or extreme. But, again, it is exactly true of the men in the streets around us. It is true that the negro slave, being a debased barbarian, will probably have either a human affection of loyalty, or a human affection for liberty. But the man we see every day — the worker in Mr. Gradgrind's factory, the little clerk in Mr. Gradgrind's office — he is too mentally worried to believe in freedom. He is kept quiet with revolutionary literature. He is calmed and kept in his place by a constant succession of wild philosophies. He is a Marxian one day, a Nietzscheite the next day, a Superman (probably) the next day; and a slave every day. The only thing that remains after all the philosophies is the factory. The only man who gains by all the philosophies is Gradgrind. It would be worth his while to keep his commercial helotry supplied with sceptical literature. And now I come to think of it, of course, Gradgrind is famous for giving libraries. He shows his sense. All modern books are on his side. As long as the vision of heaven is always changing, the vision of earth will be exactly the same. No ideal will remain long enough to be realized, or even partly realized. The modern young man will never change his environment; for he will always change his mind.

This, therefore, is our first requirement about the ideal towards which progress is directed; it must be fixed. Whistler used to make many rapid studies of a sitter; it did not matter if he tore up twenty portraits. But it would matter if he looked up twenty times, and each time saw a new person sitting placidly for his portrait. So it does not matter (comparatively speaking) how often humanity fails to imitate its ideal; for then all its old failures are fruitful. But it does frightfully matter how often humanity changes its ideal; for then all its old failures are fruitless. The question therefore becomes this: How can we keep the artist discontented with his pictures while preventing him from being vitally discontented with his art? How can we make a man always dissatisfied with his work, yet always satisfied with working? How can we make sure that the portrait painter will throw the portrait out of window instead of taking the natural and more human course of throwing the sitter out of window?

A strict rule is not only necessary for ruling; it is also necessary for rebelling. This fixed and familiar ideal is necessary to any sort of revolution. Man will sometimes act slowly upon new ideas; but he will only act swiftly upon old ideas. If I am merely to float or fade or evolve, it may be towards something anarchic; but if I am to riot, it must be for something respectable. This is the whole weakness of certain schools of progress and moral evolution. They suggest that there has been a slow movement towards morality, with an imperceptible ethical change in every year or at every instant. There is only one great disadvantage in this theory. It talks of a slow movement towards justice; but it does not permit a swift movement. A man is not allowed to leap up and declare a certain state of things to be intrinsically intolerable. To make the matter clear, it is better to take a specific example. Certain of the idealistic vegetarians, such as Mr. Salt, say that the time has now come for eating no meat; by implication they assume that at one time it was right to eat meat, and they suggest (in words that could be quoted) that some day it may be wrong to eat milk and eggs. I do not discuss here the question of what is justice to animals. I only say that whatever is justice ought, under given conditions, to be prompt justice. If an animal is wronged, we ought to be able to rush to his rescue. But how can we rush if we are, perhaps, in advance of our time? How can we rush to catch a train which may not arrive for a few centuries? How can I denounce a man for skinning cats, if he is only now what I may possibly become in drinking a glass of milk? A splendid and insane Russian sect ran about taking all the cattle out of all the carts. How can I pluck up courage to take the horse out of my hansom-cab, when I do not know whether my evolutionary watch is only a little fast or the cabman's a little slow? Suppose I say to a sweater, "Slavery suited one stage of evolution." And suppose he answers, "And sweating suits this stage of evolution." How can I answer if there is no eternal test? If sweaters can be behind the current morality, why should not philanthropists be in front of it? What on earth is the current morality, except in its literal sense — the morality that is always running away?

Thus we may say that a permanent ideal is as necessary to the innovator as to the conservative; it is necessary whether we wish the king's orders to be promptly executed or whether we only wish the king to be promptly executed. The guillotine has many sins, but to do it justice there is nothing evolutionary about it. The favourite evolutionary argument finds its best answer in the axe. The Evolutionist says, "Where do you draw the line?" the Revolutionist answers, "I draw it HERE: exactly between your head and body." There must at any given moment be an abstract right and wrong if any blow is to be struck; there must be something eternal if there is to be anything sudden. Therefore for all intelligible human purposes, for altering things or for keeping things as they are, for founding a system for ever, as in China, or for altering it every month as in the early French Revolution, it is equally necessary that the vision should be a fixed vision. This is our first requirement.

When I had written this down, I felt once again the presence of something else in the discussion: as a man hears a church bell above the sound of the street. Something seemed to be saying, "My ideal at least is fixed; for it was fixed before the foundations of the world. My vision of perfection assuredly cannot be altered; for it is called Eden. You may alter the place to which you are going; but you cannot alter the place from which you have come. To the orthodox there must always be a case for revolution; for in the hearts of men God has been put under the feet of Satan. In the upper world hell once rebelled against heaven. But in this world heaven is rebelling against hell. For the orthodox there can always be a revolution; for a revolution is a restoration. At any instant you may strike a blow for the perfection which no man has seen since Adam. No unchanging custom, no changing evolution can make the original good any thing but good. Man may have had concubines as long as cows have had horns: still they are not a part of him if they are sinful. Men may have been under oppression ever since fish were under water; still they ought not to be, if oppression is sinful. The chain may seem as natural to the slave, or the paint to the harlot, as does the plume to the bird or the burrow to the fox; still they are not, if they are sinful. I lift my prehistoric legend to defy all your history. Your vision is not merely a fixture: it is a fact." I paused to note the new coincidence of Christianity: but I passed on.

I passed on to the next necessity of any ideal of progress. Some people (as we have said) seem to believe in an automatic and impersonal progress in the nature of things. But it is clear that no political activity can be encouraged by saying that progress is natural and inevitable; that is not a reason for being active, but rather a reason for being lazy. If we are bound to improve, we need not trouble to improve. The pure doctrine of progress is the best of all reasons for not being a progressive. But it is to none of these obvious comments that I wish primarily to call attention.

The only arresting point is this: that if we suppose improvement to be natural, it must be fairly simple. The world might conceivably be working towards one consummation, but hardly towards any particular arrangement of many qualities. To take our original simile: Nature by herself may be growing more blue; that is, a process so simple that it might be impersonal. But Nature cannot be making a careful picture made of many picked colours, unless Nature is personal. If the end of the world were mere darkness or mere light it might come as slowly and inevitably as dusk or dawn. But if the end of the world is to be a piece of elaborate and artistic chiaroscuro, then there must be design in it, either human or divine. The world, through mere time, might grow black like an old picture, or white like an old coat; but if it is turned into a particular piece of black and white art — then there is an artist.

If the distinction be not evident, I give an ordinary instance. We constantly hear a particularly cosmic creed from the modern humanitarians;

I use the word humanitarian in the ordinary sense, as meaning one who upholds the claims of all creatures against those of humanity. They suggest that through the ages we have been growing more and more humane, that is to say, that one after another, groups or sections of beings, slaves, children, women, cows, or what not, have been gradually admitted to mercy or to justice. They say that we once thought it right to eat men (we didn't); but I am not here concerned with their history, which is highly unhistorical. As a fact, anthropophagy is certainly a decadent thing, not a primitive one. It is much more likely that modern men will eat human flesh out of affectation than that primitive man ever ate it out of ignorance. I am here only following the outlines of their argument, which consists in maintaining that man has been progressively more lenient, first to citizens, then to slaves, then to animals, and then (presumably) to plants. I think it wrong to sit on a man. Soon, I shall think it wrong to sit on a horse. Eventually (I suppose) I shall think it wrong to sit on a chair. That is the drive of the argument. And for this argument it can be said that it is possible to talk of it in terms of evolution or inevitable progress. A perpetual tendency to touch fewer and fewer things might — one feels, be a mere brute unconscious tendency, like that of a species to produce fewer and fewer children. This drift may be really evolutionary, because it is stupid.

Darwinism can be used to back up two mad moralities, but it cannot be used to back up a single sane one. The kinship and competition of all living creatures can be used as a reason for being insanely cruel or insanely sentimental; but not for a healthy love of animals. On the evolutionary basis you may be inhumane, or you may be absurdly humane; but you cannot be human. That you and a tiger are one may be a reason for being tender to a tiger. Or it may be a reason for being as cruel as the tiger. It is one way to train the tiger to imitate you, it is a shorter way to imitate the tiger. But in neither case does evolution tell you how to treat a tiger reasonably, that is, to admire his stripes while avoiding his claws.

If you want to treat a tiger reasonably, you must go back to the garden of Eden. For the obstinate reminder continued to recur: only the supernatural has taken a sane view of Nature. The essence of all pantheism, evolutionism, and modern cosmic religion is really in this proposition: that Nature is our mother. Unfortunately, if you regard Nature as a mother, you discover that she is a step-mother. The main point of Christianity was this: that Nature is not our mother: Nature is our sister. We can be proud of her beauty, since we have the same father; but she has no authority over us; we have to admire, but not to imitate. This gives to the typically Christian pleasure in this earth a strange touch of lightness that is almost frivolity. Nature was a solemn mother to the worshippers of Isis and Cybele. Nature was a solemn mother to Wordsworth or to Emerson. But Nature is not solemn to Francis of Assisi or to George Herbert. To St. Francis, Nature is a sister, and even a younger sister: a little, dancing sister, to be laughed at as well as loved.

This, however, is hardly our main point at present; I have admitted it only in order to show how constantly, and as it were accidentally, the key would fit the smallest doors. Our main point is here, that if there be a mere trend of impersonal improvement in Nature, it must presumably be a simple trend towards some simple triumph. One can imagine that some automatic tendency in biology might work for giving us longer and longer noses. But the question is, do we want to have longer and longer noses? I fancy not; I believe that we most of us want to say to our noses, “thus far, and no farther; and here shall thy proud point be stayed:” we require a nose of such length as may ensure an interesting face. But we cannot imagine a mere biological trend towards producing interesting faces; because an interesting face is one particular arrangement of eyes, nose, and mouth, in a most complex relation to each other. Proportion cannot be a drift: it is either an accident or a design. So with the ideal of human morality and its relation to the humanitarians and the anti-humanitarians. It is conceivable that we are going more and more to keep our hands off things: not to drive horses; not to pick flowers. We may eventually be bound not to disturb a man’s mind even by argument; not to disturb the sleep of birds even by coughing. The ultimate apotheosis would appear to be that of a man sitting quite still, nor daring to stir for fear of disturbing a fly, nor to eat for fear of incommoding a microbe. To so crude a consummation as that we might perhaps unconsciously drift. But do we want so crude a consummation? Similarly, we might unconsciously evolve along the opposite or Nietzschian line of development — superman crushing superman in one tower of tyrants until the universe is smashed up for fun. But do we want the universe smashed up for fun? Is it not quite clear that what we really hope for is one particular management and proposition of these two things; a certain amount of restraint and respect, a certain amount of energy and mastery? If our life is ever really as beautiful as a fairy-tale, we shall have to remember that all the beauty of a fairy-tale lies in this: that the prince has a wonder which just stops short of being fear. If he is afraid of the giant, there is an end of him; but also if he is not astonished at the giant, there is an end of the fairy-tale. The whole point depends upon his being at once humble enough to wonder, and haughty enough to defy. So our attitude to the giant of the world must not merely be increasing delicacy or increasing contempt: it must be one particular proportion of the two — which is exactly right. We must have in us enough reverence for all things outside us to make us tread fearfully on the grass. We must also have enough disdain for all things outside us, to make us, on due occasion, spit at the stars. Yet these two things (if we are to be good or happy) must be combined, not in any combination, but in one particular combination. The perfect happiness of men on the earth (if it ever comes) will not be a flat and solid thing, like the satisfaction of animals. It will be an exact and perilous balance; like that of a desperate romance. Man must have just enough faith in himself to have adventures, and just enough doubt of himself to enjoy them.

This, then, is our second requirement for the ideal of progress. First, it must be fixed; second, it must be composite. It must not (if it is to satisfy our souls) be the mere victory of some one thing swallowing up everything else, love or pride or peace or adventure; it must be a definite picture composed of these elements in their best proportion and relation. I am not concerned at this moment to deny that some such good culmination may be, by the constitution of things, reserved for the human race. I only point out that if this composite happiness is fixed for us it must be fixed by some mind; for only a mind can place the exact proportions of a composite happiness. If the beatification of the world is a mere work of nature, then it must be as simple as the freezing of the world, or the burning up of the world. But if the beatification of the world is not a work of nature but a work of art, then it involves an artist. And here again my contemplation was cloven by the ancient voice which said, “I could have told you all this a long time ago. If there is any certain progress it can only be my kind of progress, the progress towards a complete city of virtues and dominations where righteousness and peace contrive to kiss each other. An impersonal force might be leading you to a wilderness of perfect flatness or a peak of perfect height. But only a personal God can possibly be leading you (if, indeed, you are being led) to a city with just streets and architectural proportions, a city in which each of you can contribute exactly the right amount of your own colour to the many coloured coat of Joseph."

Twice again, therefore, Christianity had come in with the exact answer that I required. I had said, "The ideal must be fixed," and the Church had answered, "Mine is literally fixed, for it existed before anything else." I said secondly, "It must be artistically combined, like a picture"; and the Church answered, "Mine is quite literally a picture, for I know who painted it." Then I went on to the third thing, which, as it seemed to me, was needed for an Utopia or goal of progress. And of all the three it is infinitely the hardest to express. Perhaps it might be put thus: that we need watchfulness even in Utopia, lest we fall from Utopia as we fell from Eden.

We have remarked that one reason offered for being a progressive is that things naturally tend to grow better. But the only real reason for being a progressive is that things naturally tend to grow worse. The corruption in things is not only the best argument for being progressive; it is also the only argument against being conservative. The conservative theory would really be quite sweeping and unanswerable if it were not for this one fact. But all conservatism is based upon the idea that if you leave things alone you leave them as they are. But you do not. If you leave a thing alone you leave it to a torrent of change. If you leave a white post alone it will soon be a black post. If you particularly want it to be white you must be always painting it again; that is, you must be always having a revolution. Briefly, if you want the old white post you must have a new white post. But this which is true even of inanimate things is in a quite special and terrible sense true of all human things. An almost unnatural vigilance is really required of the citizen because of the horrible rapidity with which human institutions grow old. It is the custom in passing romance and journalism to talk of men suffering under old tyrannies. But, as a fact, men have almost always suffered under new tyrannies; under tyrannies that had been public liberties hardly twenty years before. Thus England went mad with joy over the patriotic monarchy of Elizabeth; and then (almost immediately afterwards) went mad with rage in the trap of the tyranny of Charles the First. So, again, in France the monarchy became intolerable, not just after it had been tolerated, but just after it had been adored. The son of Louis the well-beloved was Louis the guillotined. So in the same way in England in the nineteenth century the Radical manufacturer was entirely trusted as a mere tribune of the people, until suddenly we heard the cry of the Socialist that he was a tyrant eating the people like bread. So again, we have almost up to the last instant trusted the newspapers as organs of public opinion. Just recently some of us have seen (not slowly, but with a start) that they are obviously nothing of the kind. They are, by the nature of the case, the hobbies of a few rich men. We have not any need to rebel against antiquity; we have to rebel against novelty. It is the new rulers, the capitalist or the editor, who really hold up the modern world. There is no fear that a modern king will attempt to override the constitution; it is more likely that he will ignore the constitution and work behind its back; he will take no advantage of his kingly power; it is more likely that he will take advantage of his kingly powerlessness, of the fact that he is free from criticism and publicity. For the king is the most private person of our time. It will not be necessary for any one to fight again against the proposal of a censorship of the press. We do not need a censorship of the press. We have a censorship by the press.

This startling swiftness with which popular systems turn oppressive is the third fact for which we shall ask our perfect theory of progress to allow. It must always be on the look out for every privilege being abused, for every working right becoming a wrong. In this matter I am entirely on the side of the revolutionists. They are really right to be always suspecting human institutions; they are right not to put their trust in princes nor in any child of man. The chieftain chosen to be the friend of the people becomes the enemy of the people; the newspaper started to tell the truth now exists to prevent the truth being told. Here, I say, I felt that I was really at last on the side of the revolutionary. And then I caught my breath again: for I remembered that I was once again on the side of the orthodox.

Christianity spoke again and said: “I have always maintained that men were naturally backsliders; that human virtue tended of its own nature to rust or to rot; I have always said that human beings as such go wrong, especially happy human beings, especially proud and prosperous human beings. This eternal revolution, this suspicion sustained through centuries, you (being a vague modern) call the doctrine of progress. If you were a philosopher you would call it, as I do, the doctrine of original sin. You may call it the cosmic advance as much as you like; I call it what it is — the Fall.”

I have spoken of orthodoxy coming in like a sword; here I confess it came in like a battle-axe. For really (when I came to think of it) Christianity is the only thing left that has any real right to question the power of the well-nurtured or the well-bred. I have listened often enough to Socialists, or even to democrats, saying that the physical conditions of the poor must of necessity make them mentally and morally degraded. I have listened to scientific men (and there are still scientific men not opposed to democracy) saying that if we give the poor healthier conditions vice and wrong will disappear. I have listened to them with a horrible attention, with a hideous fascination. For it was like watching a man energetically sawing from the tree the branch he is sitting on. If these happy democrats could prove their case, they would strike democracy dead. If the poor are thus utterly demoralized, it may or may not be practical to raise them. But it is certainly quite practical to disfranchise them. If the man with a bad bedroom cannot give a good vote, then the first and swiftest deduction is that he shall give no vote. The governing class may not unreasonably say: “It may take us some time to reform his bedroom. But if he is the brute you say, it will take him very little time to ruin our country. Therefore we will take your hint and not give him the chance.” It fills me with horrible amusement to observe the way in which the earnest Socialist industriously lays the foundation of all aristocracy, expatiating blandly upon the evident unfitness of the poor to rule. It is like listening to somebody at an evening party apologising for entering without evening dress, and explaining that he had recently been intoxicated, had a personal habit of taking off his clothes in the street, and had, moreover, only just changed from prison uniform. At any moment, one feels, the host might say that really, if it was as bad as that, he need not come in at all. So it is when the ordinary Socialist, with a beaming face, proves that the poor, after their smashing experiences, cannot be really trustworthy. At any moment the rich may say, “Very well, then, we won’t trust them,” and bang the door in his face. On the basis of Mr. Blatchford’s view of heredity and environment, the case for the aristocracy is quite overwhelming. If clean homes and clean air make clean souls, why not give the power (for the present at any rate) to those who undoubtedly have the clean air? If better conditions will make the poor more fit to govern themselves, why should not better conditions already make the rich more fit to govern them? On the ordinary environment argument the matter is fairly manifest. The comfortable class must be merely our vanguard in Utopia.

Is there any answer to the proposition that those who have had the best opportunities will probably be our best guides? Is there any answer to the argument that those who have breathed clean air had better decide for those who have breathed foul? As far as I know, there is only one answer, and that answer is Christianity. Only the Christian Church can offer any rational objection to a complete confidence in the rich. For she has maintained from the beginning that the danger was not in man's environment, but in man. Further, she has maintained that if we come to talk of a dangerous environment, the most dangerous environment of all is the commodious environment. I know that the most modern manufacture has been really occupied in trying to produce an abnormally large needle. I know that the most recent biologists have been chiefly anxious to discover a very small camel. But if we diminish the camel to his smallest, or open the eye of the needle to its largest — if, in short, we assume the words of Christ to have meant the very least that they could mean, His words must at the very least mean this — that rich men are not very likely to be morally trustworthy. Christianity even when watered down is hot enough to boil all modern society to rags. The mere minimum of the Church would be a deadly ultimatum to the world. For the whole modern world is absolutely based on the assumption, not that the rich are necessary (which is tenable), but that the rich are trustworthy, which (for a Christian) is not tenable. You will hear everlastingly, in all discussions about newspapers, companies, aristocracies, or party politics, this argument that the rich man cannot be bribed. The fact is, of course, that the rich man is bribed; he has been bribed already. That is why he is a rich man. The whole case for Christianity is that a man who is dependent upon the luxuries of this life is a corrupt man, spiritually corrupt, politically corrupt, financially corrupt. There is one thing that Christ and all the Christian saints have said with a sort of savage monotony. They have said simply that to be rich is to be in peculiar danger of moral wreck. It is not demonstrably un-Christian to kill the rich as violators of definable justice. It is not demonstrably un-Christian to crown the rich as convenient rulers of society. It is not certainly un-Christian to rebel against the rich or to submit to the rich. But it is quite certainly un-Christian to trust the rich, to regard the rich as more morally safe than the poor. A Christian may consistently say, "I respect that man's rank, although he takes bribes." But a Christian cannot say, as all modern men are saying at lunch and breakfast, "a man of that rank would not take bribes." For it is a part of Christian dogma that any man in any rank may take bribes. It is a part of Christian dogma; it also happens by a curious coincidence that it is a part of obvious human history. When people say that a man “in that position” would be incorruptible, there is no need to bring Christianity into the discussion. Was Lord Bacon a bootblack? Was the Duke of Marlborough a crossing sweeper? In the best Utopia, I must be prepared for the moral fall of any man in any position at any moment; especially for my fall from my position at this moment.

Much vague and sentimental journalism has been poured out to the effect that Christianity is akin to democracy, and most of it is scarcely strong or clear enough to refute the fact that the two things have often quarrelled. The real ground upon which Christianity and democracy are one is very much deeper. The one specially and peculiarly un-Christian idea is the idea of Carlyle — the idea that the man should rule who feels that he can rule. Whatever else is Christian, this is heathen. If our faith comments on government at all, its comment must be this — that the man should rule who does NOT think that he can rule. Carlyle’s hero may say, “I will be king”; but the Christian saint must say “Nolo episcopari.” If the great paradox of Christianity means anything, it means this — that we must take the crown in our hands, and go hunting in dry places and dark corners of the earth until we find the one man who feels himself unfit to wear it. Carlyle was quite wrong; we have not got to crown the exceptional man who knows he can rule. Rather we must crown the much more exceptional man who knows he can’t.

Now, this is one of the two or three vital defences of working democracy. The mere machinery of voting is not democracy, though at present it is not easy to effect any simpler democratic method. But even the machinery of voting is profoundly Christian in this practical sense — that it is an attempt to get at the opinion of those who would be too modest to offer it. It is a mystical adventure; it is specially trusting those who do not trust themselves. That enigma is strictly peculiar to Christendom. There is nothing really humble about the abnegation of the Buddhist; the mild Hindoo is mild, but he is not meek. But there is something psychologically Christian about the idea of seeking for the opinion of the obscure rather than taking the obvious course of accepting the opinion of the prominent. To say that voting is particularly Christian may seem somewhat curious. To say that canvassing is Christian may seem quite crazy. But canvassing is very Christian in its primary idea. It is encouraging the humble; it is saying to the modest man, “Friend, go up higher.” Or if there is some slight defect in canvassing, that is in its perfect and rounded piety, it is only because it may possibly neglect to encourage the modesty of the canvasser.

Aristocracy is not an institution: aristocracy is a sin; generally a very venial one. It is merely the drift or slide of men into a sort of natural pomposity and praise of the powerful, which is the most easy and obvious affair in the world.

It is one of the hundred answers to the fugitive perversion of modern “force” that the promptest and boldest agencies are also the most fragile or full of sensibility. The swiftest things are the softest things. A bird is active, because a bird is soft. A stone is helpless, because a stone is hard. The stone must by its own nature go downwards, because hardness is weakness. The bird can of its nature go upwards, because fragility is force. In perfect force there is a kind of frivolity, an airiness that can maintain itself in the air. Modern investigators of miraculous history have solemnly admitted that a characteristic of the great saints is their power of “levitation.” They might go further; a characteristic of the great saints is their power of levity. Angels can fly because they can take themselves lightly. This has been always the instinct of Christendom, and especially the instinct of Christian art. Remember how Fra Angelico represented all his angels, not only as birds, but almost as butterflies. Remember how the most earnest mediaeval art was full of light and fluttering draperies, of quick and capering feet. It was the one thing that the modern Pre-raphaelites could not imitate in the real Pre-raphaelites. Burne-Jones could never recover the deep levity of the Middle Ages. In the old Christian pictures the sky over every figure is like a blue or gold parachute. Every figure seems ready to fly up and float about in the heavens. The tattered cloak of the beggar will bear him up like the rayed plumes of the angels. But the kings in their heavy gold and the proud in their robes of purple will all of their nature sink downwards, for pride cannot rise to levity or levitation. Pride is the downward drag of all things into an easy solemnity. One “settles down” into a sort of selfish seriousness; but one has to rise to a gay self-forgetfulness. A man “falls” into a brown study; he reaches up at a blue sky. Seriousness is not a virtue. It would be a heresy, but a much more sensible heresy, to say that seriousness is a vice. It is really a natural trend or lapse into taking one’s self gravely, because it is the easiest thing to do. It is much easier to write a good TIMES leading article than a good joke in PUNCH. For solemnity flows out of men naturally; but laughter is a leap. It is easy to be heavy: hard to be light. Satan fell by the force of gravity.

Now, it is the peculiar honour of Europe since it has been Christian that while it has had aristocracy it has always at the back of its heart treated aristocracy as a weakness — generally as a weakness that must be allowed for. If any one wishes to appreciate this point, let him go outside Christianity into some other philosophical atmosphere. Let him, for instance, compare the classes of Europe with the castes of India. There aristocracy is far more awful, because it is far more intellectual. It is seriously felt that the scale of classes is a scale of spiritual values; that the baker is better than the butcher in an invisible and sacred sense. But no Christianity, not even the most ignorant or perverse, ever suggested that a baronet was better than a butcher in that sacred sense. No Christianity, however ignorant or extravagant, ever suggested that a duke would not be damned. In pagan society there may have been (I do not know) some such serious division between the free man and the slave. But in Christian society we have always thought the gentleman a sort of joke, though I admit that in some great crusades and councils he earned the right to be called a practical joke. But we in Europe never really and at the root of our souls took aristocracy seriously. It is only an occasional non-European alien (such as Dr. Oscar Levy, the only intelligent Nietzscheite) who can even manage for a moment to take aristocracy seriously. It may be a mere patriotic bias, though I do not think so, but it seems to me that the English aristocracy is not only the type, but is the crown and flower of all actual aristocracies; it has all the oligarchical virtues as well as all the defects. It is casual, it is kind, it is courageous in obvious matters; but it has one great merit that overlaps even these. The great and very obvious merit of the English aristocracy is that nobody could possibly take it seriously.

In short, I had spelled out slowly, as usual, the need for an equal law in Utopia; and, as usual, I found that Christianity had been there before me. The whole history of my Utopia has the same amusing sadness. I was always rushing out of my architectural study with plans for a new turret only to find it sitting up there in the sunlight, shining, and a thousand years old. For me, in the ancient and partly in the modern sense, God answered the prayer, “Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings.” Without vanity, I really think there was a moment when I could have invented the marriage vow (as an institution) out of my own head; but I discovered, with a sigh, that it had been invented already. But, since it would be too long a business to show how, fact by fact and inch by inch, my own conception of Utopia was only answered in the New Jerusalem, I will take this one case of the matter of marriage as indicating the converging drift, I may say the converging crash of all the rest.

When the ordinary opponents of Socialism talk about impossibilities and alterations in human nature they always miss an important distinction. In modern ideal conceptions of society there are some desires that are possibly not attainable: but there are some desires that are not desirable. That all men should live in equally beautiful houses is a dream that may or may not be attained. But that all men should live in the same beautiful house is not a dream at all; it is a nightmare. That a man should love all old women is an ideal that may not be attainable. But that a man should regard all old women exactly as he regards his mother is not only an unattainable ideal, but an ideal which ought not to be attained. I do not know if the reader agrees with me in these examples; but I will add the example which has always affected me most. I could never conceive or tolerate any Utopia which did not leave to me the liberty for which I chiefly care, the liberty to bind myself. Complete anarchy would not merely make it impossible to have any discipline or fidelity; it would also make it impossible to have any fun. To take an obvious instance, it would not be worth while to bet if a bet were not binding. The dissolution of all contracts would not only ruin morality but spoil sport. Now betting and such sports are only the stunted and twisted shapes of the original instinct of man for adventure and romance, of which much has been said in these pages. And the perils, rewards, punishments, and fulfilments of an adventure must be real, or the adventure is only a shifting and heartless nightmare. If I bet I must be made to pay, or there is no poetry in betting. If I challenge I must be made to fight, or there is no poetry in challenging. If I vow to be faithful I must be cursed when I am unfaithful, or there is no fun in vowing. You could not even make a fairy tale from the experiences of a man who, when he was swallowed by a whale, might find himself at the top of the Eiffel Tower, or when he was turned into a frog might begin to behave like a flamingo. For the purpose even of the wildest romance results must be real; results must be irrevocable. Christian marriage is the great example of a real and irrevocable result; and that is why it is the chief subject and centre of all our romantic writing. And this is my last instance of the things that I should ask, and ask imperatively, of any social paradise; I should ask to be kept to my bargain, to have my oaths and engagements taken seriously; I should ask Utopia to avenge my honour on myself.

All my modern Utopian friends look at each other rather doubtfully, for their ultimate hope is the dissolution of all special ties. But again I seem to hear, like a kind of echo, an answer from beyond the world. “You will have real obligations, and therefore real adventures when you get to my Utopia. But the hardest obligation and the steepest adventure is to get there.”

VIII THE ROMANCE OF ORTHODOXY

It is customary to complain of the bustle and strenuousness of our epoch. But in truth the chief mark of our epoch is a profound laziness and fatigue; and the fact is that the real laziness is the cause of the apparent bustle. Take one quite external case; the streets are noisy with taxicabs and motorcars; but this is not due to human activity but to human repose. There would be less bustle if there were more activity, if people were simply walking about. Our world would be more silent if it were more strenuous. And this which is true of the apparent physical bustle is true also of the apparent bustle of the intellect. Most of the machinery of modern language is labour-saving machinery; and it saves mental labour very much more than it ought. Scientific phrases are used like scientific wheels and piston-rods to make swifter and smoother yet the path of the comfortable. Long words go rattling by us like long railway trains. We know they are carrying thousands who are too tired or too indolent to walk and think for themselves. It is a good exercise to try for once in a way to express any opinion one holds in words of one syllable. If you say "The social utility of the indeterminate sentence is recognized by all criminologists as a part of our sociological evolution towards a more humane and scientific view of punishment," you can go on talking like that for hours with hardly a movement of the gray matter inside your skull. But if you begin "I wish Jones to go to gaol and Brown to say when Jones shall come out," you will discover, with a thrill of horror, that you are obliged to think. The long words are not the hard words, it is the short words that are hard. There is much more metaphysical subtlety in the word "damn" than in the word "degeneration."

But these long comfortable words that save modern people the toil of reasoning have one particular aspect in which they are especially ruinous and confusing. This difficulty occurs when the same long word is used in different connections to mean quite different things. Thus, to take a well-known instance, the word "idealist" has one meaning as a piece of philosophy and quite another as a piece of moral rhetoric. In the same way the scientific materialists have had just reason to complain of people mixing up "materialist" as a term of cosmology with "materialist" as a moral taunt. So, to take a cheaper instance, the man who hates "progressives" in London always calls himself a "progressive" in South Africa.

A confusion quite as unmeaning as this has arisen in connection with the word “liberal” as applied to religion and as applied to politics and society. It is often suggested that all Liberals ought to be freethinkers, because they ought to love everything that is free. You might just as well say that all idealists ought to be High Churchmen, because they ought to love everything that is high. You might as well say that Low Churchmen ought to like Low Mass, or that Broad Churchmen ought to like broad jokes. The thing is a mere accident of words. In actual modern Europe a freethinker does not mean a man who thinks for himself. It means a man who, having thought for himself, has come to one particular class of conclusions, the material origin of phenomena, the impossibility of miracles, the improbability of personal immortality and so on. And none of these ideas are particularly liberal. Nay, indeed almost all these ideas are definitely illiberal, as it is the purpose of this chapter to show.

In the few following pages I propose to point out as rapidly as possible that on every single one of the matters most strongly insisted on by liberalisers of theology their effect upon social practice would be definitely illiberal. Almost every contemporary proposal to bring freedom into the church is simply a proposal to bring tyranny into the world. For freeing the church now does not even mean freeing it in all directions. It means freeing that peculiar set of dogmas loosely called scientific, dogmas of monism, of pantheism, or of Arianism, or of necessity. And every one of these (and we will take them one by one) can be shown to be the natural ally of oppression. In fact, it is a remarkable circumstance (indeed not so very remarkable when one comes to think of it) that most things are the allies of oppression. There is only one thing that can never go past a certain point in its alliance with oppression — and that is orthodoxy. I may, it is true, twist orthodoxy so as partly to justify a tyrant. But I can easily make up a German philosophy to justify him entirely.

Now let us take in order the innovations that are the notes of the new theology or the modernist church. We concluded the last chapter with the discovery of one of them. The very doctrine which is called the most old-fashioned was found to be the only safeguard of the new democracies of the earth. The doctrine seemingly most unpopular was found to be the only strength of the people. In short, we found that the only logical negation of oligarchy was in the affirmation of original sin. So it is, I maintain, in all the other cases.

I take the most obvious instance first, the case of miracles. For some extraordinary reason, there is a fixed notion that it is more liberal to disbelieve in miracles than to believe in them. Why, I cannot imagine, nor can anybody tell me. For some inconceivable cause a “broad” or “liberal” clergyman always means a man who wishes at least to diminish the number of miracles; it never means a man who wishes to increase that number. It always means a man who is free to disbelieve that Christ came out of His grave; it never means a man who is free to believe that his own aunt came out of her grave. It is common to find trouble in a parish because the parish priest cannot admit that St. Peter walked on water; yet how rarely do we find trouble in a parish because the clergyman says that his father walked on the Serpentine? And this is not because (as the swift secularist debater would immediately retort) miracles cannot be believed in our experience. It is not because “miracles do not happen,” as in the dogma which Matthew Arnold recited with simple faith. More supernatural things are ALLEGED to have happened in our time than would have been possible eighty years ago. Men of science believe in such marvels much more than they did: the most perplexing, and even horrible, prodigies of mind and spirit are always being unveiled in modern psychology. Things that the old science at least would frankly have rejected as miracles are hourly being asserted by the new science. The only thing which is still old-fashioned enough to reject miracles is the New Theology. But in truth this notion that it is “free” to deny miracles has nothing to do with the evidence for or against them. It is a lifeless verbal prejudice of which the original life and beginning was not in the freedom of thought, but simply in the dogma of materialism. The man of the nineteenth century did not disbelieve in the Resurrection because his liberal Christianity allowed him to doubt it. He disbelieved in it because his very strict materialism did not allow him to believe it. Tennyson, a very typical nineteenth century man, uttered one of the instinctive truisms of his contemporaries when he said that there was faith in their honest doubt. There was indeed. Those words have a profound and even a horrible truth. In their doubt of miracles there was a faith in a fixed and godless fate; a deep and sincere faith in the incurable routine of the cosmos. The doubts of the agnostic were only the dogmas of the monist.

Of the fact and evidence of the supernatural I will speak afterwards. Here we are only concerned with this clear point; that in so far as the liberal idea of freedom can be said to be on either side in the discussion about miracles, it is obviously on the side of miracles. Reform or (in the only tolerable sense) progress means simply the gradual control of matter by mind. A miracle simply means the swift control of matter by mind. If you wish to feed the people, you may think that feeding them miraculously in the wilderness is impossible — but you cannot think it illiberal. If you really want poor children to go to the seaside, you cannot think it illiberal that they should go there on flying dragons; you can only think it unlikely. A holiday, like Liberalism, only means the liberty of man. A miracle only means the liberty of God. You may conscientiously deny either of them, but you cannot call your denial a triumph of the liberal idea. The Catholic Church believed that man and God both had a sort of spiritual freedom. Calvinism took away the freedom from man, but left it to God. Scientific materialism binds the Creator Himself; it chains up God as the Apocalypse chained the devil. It leaves nothing free in the universe. And those who assist this process are called the "liberal theologians."

This, as I say, is the lightest and most evident case. The assumption that there is something in the doubt of miracles akin to liberality or reform is literally the opposite of the truth. If a man cannot believe in miracles there is an end of the matter; he is not particularly liberal, but he is perfectly honourable and logical, which are much better things. But if he can believe in miracles, he is certainly the more liberal for doing so; because they mean first, the freedom of the soul, and secondly, its control over the tyranny of circumstance. Sometimes this truth is ignored in a singularly naive way, even by the ablest men. For instance, Mr. Bernard Shaw speaks with hearty old-fashioned contempt for the idea of miracles, as if they were a sort of breach of faith on the part of nature: he seems strangely unconscious that miracles are only the final flowers of his own favourite tree, the doctrine of the omnipotence of will. Just in the same way he calls the desire for immortality a paltry selfishness, forgetting that he has just called the desire for life a healthy and heroic selfishness. How can it be noble to wish to make one's life infinite and yet mean to wish to make it immortal? No, if it is desirable that man should triumph over the cruelty of nature or custom, then miracles are certainly desirable; we will discuss afterwards whether they are possible.

But I must pass on to the larger cases of this curious error; the notion that the "liberalising" of religion in some way helps the liberation of the world. The second example of it can be found in the question of pantheism — or rather of a certain modern attitude which is often called immanentism, and which often is Buddhism. But this is so much more difficult a matter that I must approach it with rather more preparation.

The things said most confidently by advanced persons to crowded audiences are generally those quite opposite to the fact; it is actually our truisms that are untrue. Here is a case. There is a phrase of facile liberality uttered again and again at ethical societies and parliaments of religion: “the religions of the earth differ in rites and forms, but they are the same in what they teach.” It is false; it is the opposite of the fact. The religions of the earth do not greatly differ in rites and forms; they do greatly differ in what they teach. It is as if a man were to say, “Do not be misled by the fact that the CHURCH TIMES and the FREETHINKER look utterly different, that one is painted on vellum and the other carved on marble, that one is triangular and the other hectagonal; read them and you will see that they say the same thing.” The truth is, of course, that they are alike in everything except in the fact that they don’t say the same thing. An atheist stockbroker in Surbiton looks exactly like a Swedenborgian stockbroker in Wimbledon. You may walk round and round them and subject them to the most personal and offensive study without seeing anything Swedenborgian in the hat or anything particularly godless in the umbrella. It is exactly in their souls that they are divided. So the truth is that the difficulty of all the creeds of the earth is not as alleged in this cheap maxim: that they agree in meaning, but differ in machinery. It is exactly the opposite. They agree in machinery; almost every great religion on earth works with the same external methods, with priests, scriptures, altars, sworn brotherhoods, special feasts. They agree in the mode of teaching; what they differ about is the thing to be taught. Pagan optimists and Eastern pessimists would both have temples, just as Liberals and Tories would both have newspapers. Creeds that exist to destroy each other both have scriptures, just as armies that exist to destroy each other both have guns.

The great example of this alleged identity of all human religions is the alleged spiritual identity of Buddhism and Christianity. Those who adopt this theory generally avoid the ethics of most other creeds, except, indeed, Confucianism, which they like because it is not a creed. But they are cautious in their praises of Mahommedanism, generally confining themselves to imposing its morality only upon the refreshment of the lower classes. They seldom suggest the Mahommedan view of marriage (for which there is a great deal to be said), and towards Thugs and fetish worshippers their attitude may even be called cold. But in the case of the great religion of Gautama they feel sincerely a similarity.

Students of popular science, like Mr. Blatchford, are always insisting that Christianity and Buddhism are very much alike, especially Buddhism. This is generally believed, and I believed it myself until I read a book giving the reasons for it. The reasons were of two kinds: resemblances that meant nothing because they were common to all humanity, and resemblances which were not resemblances at all. The author solemnly explained that the two creeds were alike in things in which all creeds are alike, or else he described them as alike in some point in which they are quite obviously different. Thus, as a case of the first class, he said that both Christ and Buddha were called by the divine voice coming out of the sky, as if you would expect the divine voice to come out of the coal-cellar. Or, again, it was gravely urged that these two Eastern teachers, by a singular coincidence, both had to do with the washing of feet. You might as well say that it was a remarkable coincidence that they both had feet to wash. And the other class of similarities were those which simply were not similar. Thus this reconciler of the two religions draws earnest attention to the fact that at certain religious feasts the robe of the Lama is rent in pieces out of respect, and the remnants highly valued. But this is the reverse of a resemblance, for the garments of Christ were not rent in pieces out of respect, but out of derision; and the remnants were not highly valued except for what they would fetch in the rag shops. It is rather like alluding to the obvious connection between the two ceremonies of the sword: when it taps a man’s shoulder, and when it cuts off his head. It is not at all similar for the man. These scraps of puerile pedantry would indeed matter little if it were not also true that the alleged philosophical resemblances are also of these two kinds, either proving too much or not proving anything. That Buddhism approves of mercy or of self-restraint is not to say that it is specially like Christianity; it is only to say that it is not utterly unlike all human existence. Buddhists disapprove in theory of cruelty or excess because all sane human beings disapprove in theory of cruelty or excess. But to say that Buddhism and Christianity give the same philosophy of these things is simply false. All humanity does agree that we are in a net of sin. Most of humanity agrees that there is some way out. But as to what is the way out, I do not think that there are two institutions in the universe which contradict each other so flatly as Buddhism and Christianity.

Even when I thought, with most other well-informed, though unscholarly, people, that Buddhism and Christianity were alike, there was one thing about them that always perplexed me; I mean the startling difference in their type of religious art. I do not mean in its technical style of representation, but in the things that it was manifestly meant to represent. No two ideals could be more opposite than a Christian saint in a Gothic cathedral and a Buddhist saint in a Chinese temple. The opposition exists at every point; but perhaps the shortest statement of it is that the Buddhist saint always has his eyes shut, while the Christian saint always has them very wide open. The Buddhist saint has a sleek and harmonious body, but his eyes are heavy and sealed with sleep. The mediaeval saint's body is wasted to its crazy bones, but his eyes are frightfully alive. There cannot be any real community of spirit between forces that produced symbols so different as that. Granted that both images are extravagances, are perversions of the pure creed, it must be a real divergence which could produce such opposite extravagances. The Buddhist is looking with a peculiar intentness inwards. The Christian is staring with a frantic intentness outwards. If we follow that clue steadily we shall find some interesting things.

A short time ago Mrs. Besant, in an interesting essay, announced that there was only one religion in the world, that all faiths were only versions or perversions of it, and that she was quite prepared to say what it was. According to Mrs. Besant this universal Church is simply the universal self. It is the doctrine that we are really all one person; that there are no real walls of individuality between man and man. If I may put it so, she does not tell us to love our neighbours; she tells us to be our neighbours. That is Mrs. Besant's thoughtful and suggestive description of the religion in which all men must find themselves in agreement. And I never heard of any suggestion in my life with which I more violently disagree. I want to love my neighbour not because he is I, but precisely because he is not I. I want to adore the world, not as one likes a looking-glass, because it is one's self, but as one loves a woman, because she is entirely different. If souls are separate love is possible. If souls are united love is obviously impossible. A man may be said loosely to love himself, but he can hardly fall in love with himself, or, if he does, it must be a monotonous courtship. If the world is full of real selves, they can be really unselfish selves. But upon Mrs. Besant's principle the whole cosmos is only one enormously selfish person.

It is just here that Buddhism is on the side of modern pantheism and immanence. And it is just here that Christianity is on the side of humanity and liberty and love. Love desires personality; therefore love desires division. It is the instinct of Christianity to be glad that God has broken the universe into little pieces, because they are living pieces. It is her instinct to say "little children love one another" rather than to tell one large person to love himself. This is the intellectual abyss between Buddhism and Christianity; that for the Buddhist or Theosophist personality is the fall of man, for the Christian it is the purpose of God, the whole point of his cosmic idea. The world-soul of the Theosophists asks man to love it only in order that man may throw himself into it. But the divine centre of Christianity actually threw man out of it in order that he might love it. The oriental deity is like a giant who should have lost his leg or hand and be always seeking to find it; but the Christian power is like some giant who in a strange generosity should cut off his right hand, so that it might of its own accord shake hands with him. We come back to the same tireless note touching the nature of Christianity; all modern philosophies are chains which connect and fetter; Christianity is a sword which separates and sets free. No other philosophy makes God actually rejoice in the separation of the universe into living souls. But according to orthodox Christianity this separation between God and man is sacred, because this is eternal. That a man may love God it is necessary that there should be not only a God to be loved, but a man to love him. All those vague theosophical minds for whom the universe is an immense melting-pot are exactly the minds which shrink instinctively from that earthquake saying of our Gospels, which declare that the Son of God came not with peace but with a sundering sword. The saying rings entirely true even considered as what it obviously is; the statement that any man who preaches real love is bound to beget hate. It is as true of democratic fraternity as a divine love; sham love ends in compromise and common philosophy; but real love has always ended in bloodshed. Yet there is another and yet more awful truth behind the obvious meaning of this utterance of our Lord. According to Himself the Son was a sword separating brother and brother that they should for an aeon hate each other. But the Father also was a sword, which in the black beginning separated brother and brother, so that they should love each other at last.

This is the meaning of that almost insane happiness in the eyes of the mediaeval saint in the picture. This is the meaning of the sealed eyes of the superb Buddhist image. The Christian saint is happy because he has verily been cut off from the world; he is separate from things and is staring at them in astonishment. But why should the Buddhist saint be astonished at things? — since there is really only one thing, and that being impersonal can hardly be astonished at itself. There have been many pantheist poems suggesting wonder, but no really successful ones. The pantheist cannot wonder, for he cannot praise God or praise anything as really distinct from himself. Our immediate business here, however, is with the effect of this Christian admiration (which strikes outwards, towards a deity distinct from the worshipper) upon the general need for ethical activity and social reform. And surely its effect is sufficiently obvious. There is no real possibility of getting out of pantheism, any special impulse to moral action. For pantheism implies in its nature that one thing is as good as another; whereas action implies in its nature that one thing is greatly preferable to another. Swinburne in the high summer of his scepticism tried in vain to wrestle with this difficulty. In “Songs before Sunrise,” written under the inspiration of Garibaldi and the revolt of Italy he proclaimed the newer religion and the purer God which should wither up all the priests of the world:

“What doest thou now Looking Godward to cry I am I, thou art thou, I am low, thou art high, I am thou that thou seekest to find him, find thou but thyself, thou art I.”

Of which the immediate and evident deduction is that tyrants are as much the sons of God as Garibaldis; and that King Bomba of Naples having, with the utmost success, “found himself” is identical with the ultimate good in all things. The truth is that the western energy that dethrones tyrants has been directly due to the western theology that says “I am I, thou art thou.” The same spiritual separation which looked up and saw a good king in the universe looked up and saw a bad king in Naples. The worshippers of Bomba’s god dethroned Bomba. The worshippers of Swinburne’s god have covered Asia for centuries and have never dethroned a tyrant. The Indian saint may reasonably shut his eyes because he is looking at that which is I and Thou and We and They and It. It is a rational occupation: but it is not true in theory and not true in fact that it helps the Indian to keep an eye on Lord Curzon. That external vigilance which has always been the mark of Christianity (the command that we should WATCH and pray) has expressed itself both in typical western orthodoxy and in typical western politics: but both depend on the idea of a divinity transcendent, different from ourselves, a deity that disappears. Certainly the most sagacious creeds may suggest that we should pursue God into deeper and deeper rings of the labyrinth of our own ego. But only we of Christendom have said that we should hunt God like an eagle upon the mountains: and we have killed all monsters in the chase.

Here again, therefore, we find that in so far as we value democracy and the self-renewing energies of the west, we are much more likely to find them in the old theology than the new. If we want reform, we must adhere to orthodoxy: especially in this matter (so much disputed in the counsels of Mr. R.J.Campbell), the matter of insisting on the immanent or the transcendent deity. By insisting specially on the immanence of God we get introspection, self-isolation, quietism, social indifference — Tibet. By insisting specially on the transcendence of God we get wonder, curiosity, moral and political adventure, righteous indignation — Christendom. Insisting that God is inside man, man is always inside himself. By insisting that God transcends man, man has transcended himself.

If we take any other doctrine that has been called old-fashioned we shall find the case the same. It is the same, for instance, in the deep matter of the Trinity. Unitarians (a sect never to be mentioned without a special respect for their distinguished intellectual dignity and high intellectual honour) are often reformers by the accident that throws so many small sects into such an attitude. But there is nothing in the least liberal or akin to reform in the substitution of pure monotheism for the Trinity. The complex God of the Athanasian Creed may be an enigma for the intellect; but He is far less likely to gather the mystery and cruelty of a Sultan than the lonely god of Omar or Mahomet. The god who is a mere awful unity is not only a king but an Eastern king. The HEART of humanity, especially of European humanity, is certainly much more satisfied by the strange hints and symbols that gather round the Trinitarian idea, the image of a council at which mercy pleads as well as justice, the conception of a sort of liberty and variety existing even in the inmost chamber of the world. For Western religion has always felt keenly the idea “it is not well for man to be alone.” The social instinct asserted itself everywhere as when the Eastern idea of hermits was practically expelled by the Western idea of monks. So even asceticism became brotherly; and the Trappists were sociable even when they were silent. If this love of a living complexity be our test, it is certainly healthier to have the Trinitarian religion than the Unitarian. For to us Trinitarians (if I may say it with reverence) — to us God Himself is a society. It is indeed a fathomless mystery of theology, and even if I were theologian enough to deal with it directly, it would not be relevant to do so here. Suffice it to say here that this triple enigma is as comforting as wine and open as an English fireside; that this thing that bewilders the intellect utterly quiets the heart: but out of the desert, from the dry places and the dreadful suns, come the cruel children of the lonely God; the real Unitarians who with scimitar in hand have laid waste the world. For it is not well for God to be alone.

Again, the same is true of that difficult matter of the danger of the soul, which has unsettled so many just minds. To hope for all souls is imperative; and it is quite tenable that their salvation is inevitable. It is tenable, but it is not specially favourable to activity or progress. Our fighting and creative society ought rather to insist on the danger of everybody, on the fact that every man is hanging by a thread or clinging to a precipice. To say that all will be well anyhow is a comprehensible remark: but it cannot be called the blast of a trumpet. Europe ought rather to emphasize possible perdition; and Europe always has emphasized it. Here its highest religion is at one with all its cheapest romances. To the Buddhist or the eastern fatalist existence is a science or a plan, which must end up in a certain way. But to a Christian existence is a STORY, which may end up in any way. In a thrilling novel (that purely Christian product) the hero is not eaten by cannibals; but it is essential to the existence of the thrill that he MIGHT be eaten by cannibals. The hero must (so to speak) be an eatable hero. So Christian morals have always said to the man, not that he would lose his soul, but that he must take care that he didn't. In Christian morals, in short, it is wicked to call a man "damned": but it is strictly religious and philosophic to call him damnable.

All Christianity concentrates on the man at the cross-roads. The vast and shallow philosophies, the huge syntheses of humbug, all talk about ages and evolution and ultimate developments. The true philosophy is concerned with the instant. Will a man take this road or that? — that is the only thing to think about, if you enjoy thinking. The aeons are easy enough to think about, any one can think about them. The instant is really awful: and it is because our religion has intensely felt the instant, that it has in literature dealt much with battle and in theology dealt much with hell. It is full of

DANGER, like a boy's book: it is at an immortal crisis. There is a great deal of real similarity between popular fiction and the religion of the western people. If you say that popular fiction is vulgar and tawdry, you only say what the dreary and well-informed say also about the images in the Catholic churches. Life (according to the faith) is very like a serial story in a magazine: life ends with the promise (or menace) "to be continued in our next." Also, with a noble vulgarity, life imitates the serial and leaves off at the exciting moment. For death is distinctly an exciting moment.

But the point is that a story is exciting because it has in it so strong an element of will, of what theology calls free-will. You cannot finish a sum how you like. But you can finish a story how you like. When somebody discovered the Differential Calculus there was only one Differential Calculus he could discover. But when Shakespeare killed Romeo he might have married him to Juliet's old nurse if he had felt inclined. And Christendom has excelled in the narrative romance exactly because it has insisted on the theological free-will. It is a large matter and too much to one side of the road to be discussed adequately here; but this is the real objection to that torrent of modern talk about treating crime as disease, about making a prison merely a hygienic environment like a hospital, of healing sin by slow scientific methods. The fallacy of the whole thing is that evil is a matter of active choice whereas disease is not. If you say that you are going to cure a profligate as you cure an asthmatic, my cheap and obvious answer is, "Produce the people who want to be asthmatics as many people want to be profligates." A man may lie still and be cured of a malady. But he must not lie still if he wants to be cured of a sin; on the contrary, he must get up and jump about violently. The whole point indeed is perfectly expressed in the very word which we use for a man in hospital; "patient" is in the passive mood; "sinner" is in the active. If a man is to be saved from influenza, he may be a patient. But if he is to be saved from forging, he must be not a patient but an IMPATIENT. He must be personally impatient with forgery. All moral reform must start in the active not the passive will.

Here again we reach the same substantial conclusion. In so far as we desire the definite reconstructions and the dangerous revolutions which have distinguished European civilization, we shall not discourage the thought of possible ruin; we shall rather encourage it. If we want, like the Eastern saints, merely to contemplate how right things are, of course we shall only say that they must go right. But if we particularly want to MAKE them go right, we must insist that they may go wrong.

Lastly, this truth is yet again true in the case of the common modern attempts to diminish or to explain away the divinity of Christ. The thing may be true or not; that I shall deal with before I end. But if the divinity is true it is certainly terribly revolutionary. That a good man may have his back to the wall is no more than we knew already; but that God could have his back to the wall is a boast for all insurgents for ever. Christianity is the only religion on earth that has felt that omnipotence made God incomplete. Christianity alone has felt that God, to be wholly God, must have been a rebel as well as a king. Alone of all creeds, Christianity has added courage to the virtues of the Creator. For the only courage worth calling courage must necessarily mean that the soul passes a breaking point — and does not break. In this indeed I approach a matter more dark and awful than it is easy to discuss; and I apologise in advance if any of my phrases fall wrong or seem irreverent touching a matter which the greatest saints and thinkers have justly feared to approach. But in that terrific tale of the Passion there is a distinct emotional suggestion that the author of all things (in some unthinkable way) went not only through agony, but through doubt. It is written, “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” No; but the Lord thy God may tempt Himself; and it seems as if this was what happened in Gethsemane. In a garden Satan tempted man: and in a garden God tempted God. He passed in some superhuman manner through our human horror of pessimism. When the world shook and the sun was wiped out of heaven, it was not at the crucifixion, but at the cry from the cross: the cry which confessed that God was forsaken of God. And now let the revolutionists choose a creed from all the creeds and a god from all the gods of the world, carefully weighing all the gods of inevitable recurrence and of unalterable power. They will not find another god who has himself been in revolt. Nay, (the matter grows too difficult for human speech,) but let the atheists themselves choose a god. They will find only one divinity who ever uttered their isolation; only one religion in which God seemed for an instant to be an atheist.

These can be called the essentials of the old orthodoxy, of which the chief merit is that it is the natural fountain of revolution and reform; and of which the chief defect is that it is obviously only an abstract assertion. Its main advantage is that it is the most adventurous and manly of all theologies. Its chief disadvantage is simply that it is a theology. It can always be urged against it that it is in its nature arbitrary and in the air. But it is not so high in the air but that great archers spend their whole lives in shooting arrows at it — yes, and their last arrows; there are men who will ruin themselves and ruin their civilization if they may ruin also this old fantastic tale. This is the last and most astounding fact about this faith; that its enemies will use any weapon against it, the swords that cut their own fingers, and the firebrands that burn their own homes. Men who begin to fight the Church for the sake of freedom and humanity end by flinging away freedom and humanity if only they may fight the Church. This is no exaggeration; I could fill a book with the instances of it. Mr. Blatchford set out, as an ordinary Bible-smasher, to prove that Adam was guiltless of sin against God; in manoeuvring so as to maintain this he admitted, as a mere side issue, that all the tyrants, from Nero to King Leopold, were guiltless of any sin against humanity. I know a man who has such a passion for proving that he will have no personal existence after death that he falls back on the position that he has no personal existence now. He invokes Buddhism and says that all souls fade into each other; in order to prove that he cannot go to heaven he proves that he cannot go to Hartlepool. I have known people who protested against religious education with arguments against any education, saying that the child's mind must grow freely or that the old must not teach the young. I have known people who showed that there could be no divine judgment by showing that there can be no human judgment, even for practical purposes. They burned their own corn to set fire to the church; they smashed their own tools to smash it; any stick was good enough to beat it with, though it were the last stick of their own dismembered furniture. We do not admire, we hardly excuse, the fanatic who wrecks this world for love of the other. But what are we to say of the fanatic who wrecks this world out of hatred of the other? He sacrifices the very existence of humanity to the non-existence of God. He offers his victims not to the altar, but merely to assert the idleness of the altar and the emptiness of the throne. He is ready to ruin even that primary ethic by which all things live, for his strange and eternal vengeance upon some one who never lived at all.

And yet the thing hangs in the heavens unhurt. Its opponents only succeed in destroying all that they themselves justly hold dear. They do not destroy orthodoxy; they only destroy political and common courage sense. They do not prove that Adam was not responsible to God; how could they prove it? They only prove (from their premises) that the Czar is not responsible to Russia. They do not prove that Adam should not have been punished by God; they only prove that the nearest sweater should not be punished by men. With their oriental doubts about personality they do not make certain that we shall have no personal life hereafter; they only make certain that we shall not have a very jolly or complete one here. With their paralysing hints of all conclusions coming out wrong they do not tear the book of the Recording Angel; they only make it a little harder to keep the books of Marshall & Snelgrove. Not only is the faith the mother of all worldly energies, but its foes are the fathers of all worldly confusion. The secularists have not wrecked divine things; but the secularists have wrecked secular things, if that is any comfort to them. The Titans did not scale heaven; but they laid waste the world.

IX AUTHORITY AND THE ADVENTURER

The last chapter has been concerned with the contention that orthodoxy is not only (as is often urged) the only safe guardian of morality or order, but is also the only logical guardian of liberty, innovation and advance. If we wish to pull down the prosperous oppressor we cannot do it with the new doctrine of human perfectibility; we can do it with the old doctrine of Original Sin. If we want to uproot inherent cruelties or lift up lost populations we cannot do it with the scientific theory that matter precedes mind; we can do it with the supernatural theory that mind precedes matter. If we wish specially to awaken people to social vigilance and tireless pursuit of practise, we cannot help it much by insisting on the Immanent God and the Inner Light: for these are at best reasons for contentment; we can help it much by insisting on the transcendent God and the flying and escaping gleam; for that means divine discontent. If we wish particularly to assert the idea of a generous balance against that of a dreadful autocracy we shall instinctively be Trinitarian rather than Unitarian. If we desire European civilization to be a raid and a rescue, we shall insist rather that souls are in real peril than that their peril is ultimately unreal. And if we wish to exalt the outcast and the crucified, we shall rather wish to think that a veritable God was crucified, rather than a mere sage or hero. Above all, if we wish to protect the poor we shall be in favour of fixed rules and clear dogmas. The RULES of a club are occasionally in favour of the poor member. The drift of a club is always in favour of the rich one.

And now we come to the crucial question which truly concludes the whole matter. A reasonable agnostic, if he has happened to agree with me so far, may justly turn round and say, “You have found a practical philosophy in the doctrine of the Fall; very well. You have found a side of democracy now dangerously neglected wisely asserted in Original Sin; all right. You have found a truth in the doctrine of hell; I congratulate you. You are convinced that worshippers of a personal God look outwards and are progressive; I congratulate them. But even supposing that those doctrines do include those truths, why cannot you take the truths and leave the doctrines? Granted that all modern society is trusting the rich too much because it does not allow for human weakness; granted that orthodox ages have had a great advantage because (believing in the Fall) they did allow for human weakness, why cannot you simply allow for human weakness without believing in the Fall? If you have discovered that the idea of damnation represents a healthy idea of danger, why can you not simply take the idea of danger and leave the idea of damnation? If you see clearly the kernel of common-sense in the nut of Christian orthodoxy, why cannot you simply take the kernel and leave the nut? Why cannot you (to use that cant phrase of the newspapers which I, as a highly scholarly agnostic, am a little ashamed of using) why cannot you simply take what is good in Christianity, what you can define as valuable, what you can comprehend, and leave all the rest, all the absolute dogmas that are in their nature incomprehensible?" This is the real question; this is the last question; and it is a pleasure to try to answer it.

The first answer is simply to say that I am a rationalist. I like to have some intellectual justification for my intuitions. If I am treating man as a fallen being it is an intellectual convenience to me to believe that he fell; and I find, for some odd psychological reason, that I can deal better with a man's exercise of freewill if I believe that he has got it. But I am in this matter yet more definitely a rationalist. I do not propose to turn this book into one of ordinary Christian apologetics; I should be glad to meet at any other time the enemies of Christianity in that more obvious arena. Here I am only giving an account of my own growth in spiritual certainty. But I may pause to remark that the more I saw of the merely abstract arguments against the Christian cosmology the less I thought of them. I mean that having found the moral atmosphere of the Incarnation to be common sense, I then looked at the established intellectual arguments against the Incarnation and found them to be common nonsense. In case the argument should be thought to suffer from the absence of the ordinary apologetic I will here very briefly summarise my own arguments and conclusions on the purely objective or scientific truth of the matter.

If I am asked, as a purely intellectual question, why I believe in Christianity, I can only answer, "For the same reason that an intelligent agnostic disbelieves in Christianity." I believe in it quite rationally upon the evidence. But the evidence in my case, as in that of the intelligent agnostic, is not really in this or that alleged demonstration; it is in an enormous accumulation of small but unanimous facts. The secularist is not to be blamed because his objections to Christianity are miscellaneous and even scrappy; it is precisely such scrappy evidence that does convince the mind. I mean that a man may well be less convinced of a philosophy from four books, than from one book, one battle, one landscape, and one old friend. The very fact that the things are of different kinds increases the importance of the fact that they all point to one conclusion. Now, the non-Christianity of the average educated man to-day is almost always, to do him justice, made up of these loose but living experiences. I can only say that my evidences for Christianity are of the same vivid but varied kind as his evidences against it. For when I look at these various anti-Christian truths, I simply discover that none of them are true. I discover that the true tide and force of all the facts flows the other way. Let us take cases. Many a sensible modern man must have abandoned Christianity under the pressure of three such converging convictions as these: first, that men, with their shape, structure, and sexuality, are, after all, very much like beasts, a mere variety of the animal kingdom; second, that primeval religion arose in ignorance and fear; third, that priests have blighted societies with bitterness and gloom. Those three anti-Christian arguments are very different; but they are all quite logical and legitimate; and they all converge. The only objection to them (I discover) is that they are all untrue. If you leave off looking at books about beasts and men, if you begin to look at beasts and men then (if you have any humour or imagination, any sense of the frantic or the farcical) you will observe that the startling thing is not how like man is to the brutes, but how unlike he is. It is the monstrous scale of his divergence that requires an explanation. That man and brute are like is, in a sense, a truism; but that being so like they should then be so insanely unlike, that is the shock and the enigma. That an ape has hands is far less interesting to the philosopher than the fact that having hands he does next to nothing with them; does not play knuckle-bones or the violin; does not carve marble or carve mutton. People talk of barbaric architecture and debased art. But elephants do not build colossal temples of ivory even in a roccoco style; camels do not paint even bad pictures, though equipped with the material of many camel’s-hair brushes. Certain modern dreamers say that ants and bees have a society superior to ours. They have, indeed, a civilization; but that very truth only reminds us that it is an inferior civilization. Who ever found an ant-hill decorated with the statues of celebrated ants? Who has seen a bee-hive carved with the images of gorgeous queens of old? No; the chasm between man and other creatures may have a natural explanation, but it is a chasm. We talk of wild animals; but man is the only wild animal. It is man that has broken out. All other animals are tame animals; following the rugged respectability of the tribe or type. All other animals are domestic animals; man alone is ever undomestic, either as a profligate or a monk. So that this first superficial reason for materialism is, if anything, a reason for its opposite; it is exactly where biology leaves off that all religion begins.

It would be the same if I examined the second of the three chance rationalist arguments; the argument that all that we call divine began in some darkness and terror. When I did attempt to examine the foundations of this modern idea I simply found that there were none. Science knows nothing whatever about pre-historic man; for the excellent reason that he is pre-historic. A few professors choose to conjecture that such things as human sacrifice were once innocent and general and that they gradually dwindled; but there is no direct evidence of it, and the small amount of indirect evidence is very much the other way. In the earliest legends we have, such as the tales of Isaac and of Iphigenia, human sacrifice is not introduced as something old, but rather as something new; as a strange and frightful exception darkly demanded by the gods. History says nothing; and legends all say that the earth was kinder in its earliest time. There is no tradition of progress; but the whole human race has a tradition of the Fall. Amusingly enough, indeed, the very dissemination of this idea is used against its authenticity. Learned men literally say that this pre-historic calamity cannot be true because every race of mankind remembers it. I cannot keep pace with these paradoxes.

And if we took the third chance instance, it would be the same; the view that priests darken and embitter the world. I look at the world and simply discover that they don’t. Those countries in Europe which are still influenced by priests, are exactly the countries where there is still singing and dancing and coloured dresses and art in the open-air. Catholic doctrine and discipline may be walls; but they are the walls of a playground. Christianity is the only frame which has preserved the pleasure of Paganism. We might fancy some children playing on the flat grassy top of some tall island in the sea. So long as there was a wall round the cliff’s edge they could fling themselves into every frantic game and make the place the noisiest of nurseries. But the walls were knocked down, leaving the naked peril of the precipice. They did not fall over; but when their friends returned to them they were all huddled in terror in the centre of the island; and their song had ceased.

Thus these three facts of experience, such facts as go to make an agnostic, are, in this view, turned totally round. I am left saying, “Give me an explanation, first, of the towering eccentricity of man among the brutes; second, of the vast human tradition of some ancient happiness; third, of the partial perpetuation of such pagan joy in the countries of the Catholic Church.” One explanation, at any rate, covers all three: the theory that twice was the natural order interrupted by some explosion or revelation such as people now call “psychic.” Once Heaven came upon the earth with a power or seal called the image of God, whereby man took command of Nature; and once again (when in empire after empire men had been found wanting) Heaven came to save mankind in the awful shape of a man. This would explain why the mass of men always look backwards; and why the only corner where they in any sense look forwards is the little continent where Christ has His Church. I know it will be said that Japan has become progressive. But how can this be an answer when even in saying “Japan has become progressive,” we really only mean, “Japan has become European”? But I wish here not so much to insist on my own explanation as to insist on my original remark. I agree with the ordinary unbelieving man in the street in being guided by three or four odd facts all pointing to something; only when I came to look at the facts I always found they pointed to something else.

I have given an imaginary triad of such ordinary anti-Christian arguments; if that be too narrow a basis I will give on the spur of the moment another. These are the kind of thoughts which in combination create the impression that Christianity is something weak and diseased. First, for instance, that Jesus was a gentle creature, sheepish and unworldly, a mere ineffectual appeal to the world; second, that Christianity arose and flourished in the dark ages of ignorance, and that to these the Church would drag us back; third, that the people still strongly religious or (if you will) superstitious — such people as the Irish — are weak, unpractical, and behind the times. I only mention these ideas to affirm the same thing: that when I looked into them independently I found, not that the conclusions were unphilosophical, but simply that the facts were not facts. Instead of looking at books and pictures about the New Testament I looked at the New Testament. There I found an account, not in the least of a person with his hair parted in the middle or his hands clasped in appeal, but of an extraordinary being with lips of thunder and acts of lurid decision, flinging down tables, casting out devils, passing with the wild secrecy of the wind from mountain isolation to a sort of dreadful demagogy; a being who often acted like an angry god — and always like a god. Christ had even a literary style of his own, not to be found, I think, elsewhere; it consists of an almost furious use of the A FORTIORI. His “how much more” is piled one upon another like castle upon castle in the clouds. The diction used ABOUT Christ has been, and perhaps wisely, sweet and submissive. But the diction used by Christ is quite curiously gigantesque; it is full of camels leaping through needles and mountains hurled into the sea. Morally it is equally terrific; he called himself a sword of slaughter, and told men to buy swords if they sold their coats for them. That he used other even wilder words on the side of non-resistance greatly increases the mystery; but it also, if anything, rather increases the violence. We cannot even explain it by calling such a being insane; for insanity is usually along one consistent channel. The maniac is generally a monomaniac. Here we must remember the difficult definition of Christianity already given; Christianity is a superhuman paradox whereby two opposite passions may blaze beside each other. The one explanation of the Gospel language that does explain it, is that it is the survey of one who from some supernatural height beholds some more startling synthesis.

I take in order the next instance offered: the idea that Christianity belongs to the Dark Ages. Here I did not satisfy myself with reading modern generalisations; I read a little history. And in history I found that Christianity, so far from belonging to the Dark Ages, was the one path across the Dark Ages that was not dark. It was a shining bridge connecting two shining civilizations. If any one says that the faith arose in ignorance and savagery the answer is simple: it didn’t. It arose in the Mediterranean civilization in the full summer of the Roman Empire. The world was swarming with sceptics, and pantheism was as plain as the sun, when Constantine nailed the cross to the mast. It is perfectly true that afterwards the ship sank; but it is far more extraordinary that the ship came up again: repainted and glittering, with the cross still at the top. This is the amazing thing the religion did: it turned a sunken ship into a submarine. The ark lived under the load of waters; after being buried under the debris of dynasties and clans, we arose and remembered Rome. If our faith had been a mere fad of the fading empire, fad would have followed fad in the twilight, and if the civilization ever re-emerged (and many such have never re-emerged) it would have been under some new barbaric flag. But the Christian Church was the last life of the old society and was also the first life of the new. She took the people who were forgetting how to make an arch and she taught them to invent the Gothic arch. In a word, the most absurd thing that could be said of the Church is the thing we have all heard said of it. How can we say that the Church wishes to bring us back into the Dark Ages? The Church was the only thing that ever brought us out of them.

I added in this second trinity of objections an idle instance taken from those who feel such people as the Irish to be weakened or made stagnant by superstition. I only added it because this is a peculiar case of a statement of fact that turns out to be a statement of falsehood. It is constantly said of the Irish that they are impractical. But if we refrain for a moment from looking at what is said about them and look at what is DONE about them, we shall see that the Irish are not only practical, but quite painfully successful. The poverty of their country, the minority of their members are simply the conditions under which they were asked to work; but no other group in the British Empire has done so much with such conditions. The Nationalists were the only minority that ever succeeded in twisting the whole British Parliament sharply out of its path. The Irish peasants are the only poor men in these islands who have forced their masters to disgorge. These people, whom we call priest-ridden, are the only Britons who will not be squire-ridden. And when I came to look at the actual Irish character, the case was the same. Irishmen are best at the specially HARD professions — the trades of iron, the lawyer, and the soldier. In all these cases, therefore, I came back to the same conclusion: the sceptic was quite right to go by the facts, only he had not looked at the facts. The sceptic is too credulous; he believes in newspapers or even in encyclopedias. Again the three questions left me with three very antagonistic questions. The average sceptic wanted to know how I explained the namby-pamby note in the Gospel, the connection of the creed with mediaeval darkness and the political impracticability of the Celtic Christians. But I wanted to ask, and to ask with an earnestness amounting to urgency, “What is this incomparable energy which appears first in one walking the earth like a living judgment and this energy which can die with a dying civilization and yet force it to a resurrection from the dead; this energy which last of all can inflame a bankrupt peasantry with so fixed a faith in justice that they get what they ask, while others go empty away; so that the most helpless island of the Empire can actually help itself?”

There is an answer: it is an answer to say that the energy is truly from outside the world; that it is psychic, or at least one of the results of a real psychical disturbance. The highest gratitude and respect are due to the great human civilizations such as the old Egyptian or the existing Chinese. Nevertheless it is no injustice for them to say that only modern Europe has exhibited incessantly a power of self-renewal recurring often at the shortest intervals and descending to the smallest facts of building or costume. All other societies die finally and with dignity. We die daily. We are always being born again with almost indecent obstetrics. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that there is in historic Christendom a sort of unnatural life: it could be explained as a supernatural life. It could be explained as an awful galvanic life working in what would have been a corpse. For our civilization OUGHT to have died, by all parallels, by all sociological probability, in the Ragnorak of the end of Rome. That is the weird inspiration of our estate: you and I have no business to be here at all. We are all REVENANTS; all living Christians are dead pagans walking about. Just as Europe was about to be gathered in silence to Assyria and Babylon, something entered into its body. And Europe has had a strange life — it is not too much to say that it has had the JUMPS — ever since.

I have dealt at length with such typical triads of doubt in order to convey the main contention — that my own case for Christianity is rational; but it is not simple. It is an accumulation of varied facts, like the attitude of the ordinary agnostic. But the ordinary agnostic has got his facts all wrong. He is a non-believer for a multitude of reasons; but they are untrue reasons. He doubts because the Middle Ages were barbaric, but they weren’t; because Darwinism is demonstrated, but it isn’t; because miracles do not happen, but they do; because monks were lazy, but they were very industrious; because nuns are unhappy, but they are particularly cheerful; because Christian art was sad and pale, but it was picked out in peculiarly bright colours and gay with gold; because modern science is moving away from the supernatural, but it isn’t, it is moving towards the supernatural with the rapidity of a railway train.

But among these million facts all flowing one way there is, of course, one question sufficiently solid and separate to be treated briefly, but by itself; I mean the objective occurrence of the supernatural. In another chapter I have indicated the fallacy of the ordinary supposition that the world must be impersonal because it is orderly. A person is just as likely to desire an orderly thing as a disorderly thing. But my own positive conviction that personal creation is more conceivable than material fate, is, I admit, in a sense, undiscussable. I will not call it a faith or an intuition, for those words are mixed up with mere emotion, it is strictly an intellectual conviction; but it is a PRIMARY intellectual conviction like the certainty of self of the good of living. Any one who likes, therefore, may call my belief in God merely mystical; the phrase is not worth fighting about. But my belief that miracles have happened in human history is not a mystical belief at all; I believe in them upon human evidences as I do in the discovery of America. Upon this point there is a simple logical fact that only requires to be stated and cleared up. Somehow or other an extraordinary idea has arisen that the disbelievers in miracles consider them coldly and fairly, while believers in miracles accept them only in connection with some dogma. The fact is quite the other way. The believers in miracles accept them (rightly or wrongly) because they have evidence for them. The disbelievers in miracles deny them (rightly or wrongly) because they have a doctrine against them. The open, obvious, democratic thing is to believe an old apple-woman when she bears testimony to a miracle, just as you believe an old apple-woman when she bears testimony to a murder. The plain, popular course is to trust the peasant's word about the ghost exactly as far as you trust the peasant's word about the landlord. Being a peasant he will probably have a great deal of healthy agnosticism about both. Still you could fill the British Museum with evidence uttered by the peasant, and given in favour of the ghost. If it comes to human testimony there is a choking cataract of human testimony in favour of the supernatural. If you reject it, you can only mean one of two things. You reject the peasant's story about the ghost either because the man is a peasant or because the story is a ghost story. That is, you either deny the main principle of democracy, or you affirm the main principle of materialism — the abstract impossibility of miracle. You have a perfect right to do so; but in that case you are the dogmatist. It is we Christians who accept all actual evidence — it is you rationalists who refuse actual evidence being constrained to do so by your creed. But I am not constrained by any creed in the matter, and looking impartially into certain miracles of mediaeval and modern times, I have come to the conclusion that they occurred. All argument against these plain facts is always argument in a circle. If I say, “Mediaeval documents attest certain miracles as much as they attest certain battles,” they answer, “But mediaevals were superstitious”; if I want to know in what they were superstitious, the only ultimate answer is that they believed in the miracles. If I say “a peasant saw a ghost,” I am told, “But peasants are so credulous.” If I ask, “Why credulous?” the only answer is — that they see ghosts. Iceland is impossible because only stupid sailors have seen it; and the sailors are only stupid because they say they have seen Iceland. It is only fair to add that there is another argument that the unbeliever may rationally use against miracles, though he himself generally forgets to use it.

He may say that there has been in many miraculous stories a notion of spiritual preparation and acceptance: in short, that the miracle could only come to him who believed in it. It may be so, and if it is so how are we to test it? If we are inquiring whether certain results follow faith, it is useless to repeat wearily that (if they happen) they do follow faith. If faith is one of the conditions, those without faith have a most healthy right to laugh. But they have no right to judge. Being a believer may be, if you like, as bad as being drunk; still if we were extracting psychological facts from drunkards, it would be absurd to be always taunting them with having been drunk. Suppose we were investigating whether angry men really saw a red mist before their eyes. Suppose sixty excellent householders swore that when angry they had seen this crimson cloud: surely it would be absurd to answer “Oh, but you admit you were angry at the time.” They might reasonably rejoin (in a stentorian chorus), “How the blazes could we discover, without being angry, whether angry people see red?” So the saints and ascetics might rationally reply, “Suppose that the question is whether believers can see visions — even then, if you are interested in visions it is no point to object to believers.” You are still arguing in a circle — in that old mad circle with which this book began.

The question of whether miracles ever occur is a question of common sense and of ordinary historical imagination: not of any final physical experiment. One may here surely dismiss that quite brainless piece of pedantry which talks about the need for “scientific conditions” in connection with alleged spiritual phenomena. If we are asking whether a dead soul can communicate with a living it is ludicrous to insist that it shall be under conditions in which no two living souls in their senses would seriously communicate with each other. The fact that ghosts prefer darkness no more disproves the existence of ghosts than the fact that lovers prefer darkness disproves the existence of love. If you choose to say, “I will believe that Miss Brown called her fiance a periwinkle or, any other endearing term, if she will repeat the word before seventeen psychologists,” then I shall reply, “Very well, if those are your conditions, you will never get the truth, for she certainly will not say it.” It is just as unscientific as it is unphilosophical to be surprised that in an unsympathetic atmosphere certain extraordinary sympathies do not arise. It is as if I said that I could not tell if there was a fog because the air was not clear enough; or as if I insisted on perfect sunlight in order to see a solar eclipse.

As a common-sense conclusion, such as those to which we come about sex or about midnight (well knowing that many details must in their own nature be concealed) I conclude that miracles do happen. I am forced to it by a conspiracy of facts: the fact that the men who encounter elves or angels are not the mystics and the morbid dreamers, but fishermen, farmers, and all men at once coarse and cautious; the fact that we all know men who testify to spiritualistic incidents but are not spiritualists, the fact that science itself admits such things more and more every day. Science will even admit the Ascension if you call it Levitation, and will very likely admit the Resurrection when it has thought of another word for it. I suggest the Regalvanisation. But the strongest of all is the dilemma above mentioned, that these supernatural things are never denied except on the basis either of anti-democracy or of materialist dogmatism — I may say materialist mysticism. The sceptic always takes one of the two positions; either an ordinary man need not be believed, or an extraordinary event must not be believed. For I hope we may dismiss the argument against wonders attempted in the mere recapitulation of frauds, of swindling mediums or trick miracles. That is not an argument at all, good or bad. A false ghost disproves the reality of ghosts exactly as much as a forged banknote disproves the existence of the Bank of England — if anything, it proves its existence.

Given this conviction that the spiritual phenomena do occur (my evidence for which is complex but rational), we then collide with one of the worst mental evils of the age. The greatest disaster of the nineteenth century was this: that men began to use the word “spiritual” as the same as the word “good.” They thought that to grow in refinement and uncorporeality was to grow in virtue. When scientific evolution was announced, some feared that it would encourage mere animality. It did worse: it encouraged mere spirituality. It taught men to think that so long as they were passing from the ape they were going to the angel. But you can pass from the ape and go to the devil. A man of genius, very typical of that time of bewilderment, expressed it perfectly. Benjamin Disraeli was right when he said he was on the side of the angels. He was indeed; he was on the side of the fallen angels. He was not on the side of any mere appetite or animal brutality; but he was on the side of all the imperialism of the princes of the abyss; he was on the side of arrogance and mystery, and contempt of all obvious good. Between this sunken pride and the towering humilities of heaven there are, one must suppose, spirits of shapes and sizes. Man, in encountering them, must make much the same mistakes that he makes in encountering any other varied types in any other distant continent. It must be hard at first to know who is supreme and who is subordinate. If a shade arose from the under world, and stared at Piccadilly, that shade would not quite understand the idea of an ordinary closed carriage. He would suppose that the coachman on the box was a triumphant conqueror, dragging behind him a kicking and imprisoned captive. So, if we see spiritual facts for the first time, we may mistake who is uppermost. It is not enough to find the gods; they are obvious; we must find God, the real chief of the gods. We must have a long historic experience in supernatural phenomena — in order to discover which are really natural. In this light I find the history of Christianity, and even of its Hebrew origins, quite practical and clear. It does not trouble me to be told that the Hebrew god was one among many. I know he was, without any research to tell me so. Jehovah and Baal looked equally important, just as the sun and the moon looked the same size. It is only slowly that we learn that the sun is immeasurably our master, and the small moon only our satellite. Believing that there is a world of spirits, I shall walk in it as I do in the world of men, looking for the thing that I like and think good. Just as I should seek in a desert for clean water, or toil at the North Pole to make a comfortable fire, so I shall search the land of void and vision until I find something fresh like water, and comforting like fire; until I find some place in eternity, where I am literally at home. And there is only one such place to be found.

I have now said enough to show (to any one to whom such an explanation is essential) that I have in the ordinary arena of apologetics, a ground of belief. In pure records of experiment (if these be taken democratically without contempt or favour) there is evidence first, that miracles happen, and second that the nobler miracles belong to our tradition. But I will not pretend that this curt discussion is my real reason for accepting Christianity instead of taking the moral good of Christianity as I should take it out of Confucianism.

I have another far more solid and central ground for submitting to it as a faith, instead of merely picking up hints from it as a scheme. And that is this: that the Christian Church in its practical relation to my soul is a living teacher, not a dead one. It not only certainly taught me yesterday, but will almost certainly teach me to-morrow. Once I saw suddenly the meaning of the shape of the cross; some day I may see suddenly the meaning of the shape of the mitre. One fine morning I saw why windows were pointed; some fine morning I may see why priests were shaven. Plato has told you a truth; but Plato is dead. Shakespeare has startled you with an image; but Shakespeare will not startle you with any more. But imagine what it would be to live with such men still living, to know that Plato might break out with an original lecture to-morrow, or that at any moment Shakespeare might shatter everything with a single song. The man who lives in contact with what he believes to be a living Church is a man always expecting to meet Plato and Shakespeare to-morrow at breakfast. He is always expecting to see some truth that he has never seen before. There is one only other parallel to this position; and that is the parallel of the life in which we all began. When your father told you, walking about the garden, that bees stung or that roses smelt sweet, you did not talk of taking the best out of his philosophy. When the bees stung you, you did not call it an entertaining coincidence. When the rose smelt sweet you did not say “My father is a rude, barbaric symbol, enshrining (perhaps unconsciously) the deep delicate truths that flowers smell.” No: you believed your father, because you had found him to be a living fountain of facts, a thing that really knew more than you; a thing that would tell you truth to-morrow, as well as to-day. And if this was true of your father, it was even truer of your mother; at least it was true of mine, to whom this book is dedicated. Now, when society is in a rather futile fuss about the subjection of women, will no one say how much every man owes to the tyranny and privilege of women, to the fact that they alone rule education until education becomes futile: for a boy is only sent to be taught at school when it is too late to teach him anything. The real thing has been done already, and thank God it is nearly always done by women.

Every man is womanised, merely by being born. They talk of the masculine woman; but every man is a feminised man. And if ever men walk to Westminster to protest against this female privilege, I shall not join their procession.

For I remember with certainty this fixed psychological fact; that the very time when I was most under a woman's authority, I was most full of flame and adventure. Exactly because when my mother said that ants bit they did bite, and because snow did come in winter (as she said); therefore the whole world was to me a fairyland of wonderful fulfilments, and it was like living in some Hebraic age, when prophecy after prophecy came true. I went out as a child into the garden, and it was a terrible place to me, precisely because I had a clue to it: if I had held no clue it would not have been terrible, but tame. A mere unmeaning wilderness is not even impressive. But the garden of childhood was fascinating, exactly because everything had a fixed meaning which could be found out in its turn. Inch by inch I might discover what was the object of the ugly shape called a rake; or form some shadowy conjecture as to why my parents kept a cat.

So, since I have accepted Christendom as a mother and not merely as a chance example, I have found Europe and the world once more like the little garden where I stared at the symbolic shapes of cat and rake; I look at everything with the old elvish ignorance and expectancy. This or that rite or doctrine may look as ugly and extraordinary as a rake; but I have found by experience that such things end somehow in grass and flowers. A clergyman may be apparently as useless as a cat, but he is also as fascinating, for there must be some strange reason for his existence. I give one instance out of a hundred; I have not myself any instinctive kinship with that enthusiasm for physical virginity, which has certainly been a note of historic Christianity. But when I look not at myself but at the world, I perceive that this enthusiasm is not only a note of Christianity, but a note of Paganism, a note of high human nature in many spheres. The Greeks felt virginity when they carved Artemis, the Romans when they robed the vestals, the worst and wildest of the great Elizabethan playwrights clung to the literal purity of a woman as to the central pillar of the world. Above all, the modern world (even while mocking sexual innocence) has flung itself into a generous idolatry of sexual innocence — the great modern worship of children. For any man who loves children will agree that their peculiar beauty is hurt by a hint of physical sex. With all this human experience, allied with the Christian authority, I simply conclude that I am wrong, and the church right; or rather that I am defective, while the church is universal. It takes all sorts to make a church; she does not ask me to be celibate. But the fact that I have no appreciation of the celibates, I accept like the fact that I have no ear for music. The best human experience is against me, as it is on the subject of Bach. Celibacy is one flower in my father's garden, of which I have not been told the sweet or terrible name. But I may be told it any day.

This, therefore, is, in conclusion, my reason for accepting the religion and not merely the scattered and secular truths out of the religion. I do it because the thing has not merely told this truth or that truth, but has revealed itself as a truth-telling thing. All other philosophies say the things that plainly seem to be true; only this philosophy has again and again said the thing that does not seem to be true, but is true. Alone of all creeds it is convincing where it is not attractive; it turns out to be right, like my father in the garden. Theosophists for instance will preach an obviously attractive idea like re-incarnation; but if we wait for its logical results, they are spiritual superciliousness and the cruelty of caste. For if a man is a beggar by his own pre-natal sins, people will tend to despise the beggar. But Christianity preaches an obviously unattractive idea, such as original sin; but when we wait for its results, they are pathos and brotherhood, and a thunder of laughter and pity; for only with original sin we can at once pity the beggar and distrust the king. Men of science offer us health, an obvious benefit; it is only afterwards that we discover that by health, they mean bodily slavery and spiritual tedium. Orthodoxy makes us jump by the sudden brink of hell; it is only afterwards that we realise that jumping was an athletic exercise highly beneficial to our health. It is only afterwards that we realise that this danger is the root of all drama and romance. The strongest argument for the divine grace is simply its ungraciousness. The unpopular parts of Christianity turn out when examined to be the very props of the people. The outer ring of Christianity is a rigid guard of ethical abnegations and professional priests; but inside that inhuman guard you will find the old human life dancing like children, and drinking wine like men; for Christianity is the only frame for pagan freedom. But in the modern philosophy the case is opposite; it is its outer ring that is obviously artistic and emancipated; its despair is within.

And its despair is this, that it does not really believe that there is any meaning in the universe; therefore it cannot hope to find any romance; its romances will have no plots. A man cannot expect any adventures in the land of anarchy. But a man can expect any number of adventures if he goes travelling in the land of authority. One can find no meanings in a jungle of scepticism; but the man will find more and more meanings who walks through a forest of doctrine and design. Here everything has a story tied to its tail, like the tools or pictures in my father's house; for it is my father's house. I end where I began — at the right end. I have entered at last the gate of all good philosophy. I have come into my second childhood.

But this larger and more adventurous Christian universe has one final mark difficult to express; yet as a conclusion of the whole matter I will attempt to express it. All the real argument about religion turns on the question of whether a man who was born upside down can tell when he comes right way up. The primary paradox of Christianity is that the ordinary condition of man is not his sane or sensible condition; that the normal itself is an abnormality. That is the inmost philosophy of the Fall. In Sir Oliver Lodge's interesting new Catechism, the first two questions were: "What are you?" and "What, then, is the meaning of the Fall of Man?" I remember amusing myself by writing my own answers to the questions; but I soon found that they were very broken and agnostic answers. To the question, "What are you?" I could only answer, "God knows." And to the question, "What is meant by the Fall?" I could answer with complete sincerity, "That whatever I am, I am not myself." This is the prime paradox of our religion; something that we have never in any full sense known, is not only better than ourselves, but even more natural to us than ourselves. And there is really no test of this except the merely experimental one with which these pages began, the test of the padded cell and the open door. It is only since I have known orthodoxy that I have known mental emancipation. But, in conclusion, it has one special application to the ultimate idea of joy.

It is said that Paganism is a religion of joy and Christianity of sorrow; it would be just as easy to prove that Paganism is pure sorrow and Christianity pure joy. Such conflicts mean nothing and lead nowhere. Everything human must have in it both joy and sorrow; the only matter of interest is the manner in which the two things are balanced or divided. And the really interesting thing is this, that the pagan was (in the main) happier and happier as he approached the earth, but sadder and sadder as he approached the heavens. The gaiety of the best Paganism, as in the playfulness of Catullus or Theocritus, is, indeed, an eternal gaiety never to be forgotten by a grateful humanity. But it is all a gaiety about the facts of life, not about its origin. To the pagan the small things are as sweet as the small brooks breaking out of the mountain; but the broad things are as bitter as the sea. When the pagan looks at the very core of the cosmos he is struck cold. Behind the gods, who are merely despotic, sit the fates, who are deadly. Nay, the fates are worse than deadly; they are dead. And when rationalists say that the ancient world was more enlightened than the Christian, from their point of view they are right. For when they say "enlightened" they mean darkened with incurable despair. It is profoundly true that the ancient world was more modern than the Christian. The common bond is in the fact that ancients and moderns have both been miserable about existence, about everything, while mediaevals were happy about that at least. I freely grant that the pagans, like the moderns, were only miserable about everything — they were quite jolly about everything else. I concede that the Christians of the Middle Ages were only at peace about everything — they were at war about everything else. But if the question turn on the primary pivot of the cosmos, then there was more cosmic contentment in the narrow and bloody streets of Florence than in the theatre of Athens or the open garden of Epicurus. Giotto lived in a gloomier town than Euripides, but he lived in a gayer universe.

The mass of men have been forced to be gay about the little things, but sad about the big ones. Nevertheless (I offer my last dogma defiantly) it is not native to man to be so. Man is more himself, man is more manlike, when joy is the fundamental thing in him, and grief the superficial. Melancholy should be an innocent interlude, a tender and fugitive frame of mind; praise should be the permanent pulsation of the soul. Pessimism is at best an emotional half-holiday; joy is the uproarious labour by which all things live. Yet, according to the apparent estate of man as seen by the pagan or the agnostic, this primary need of human nature can never be fulfilled. Joy ought to be expansive; but for the agnostic it must be contracted, it must cling to one corner of the world. Grief ought to be a concentration; but for the agnostic its desolation is spread through an unthinkable eternity. This is what I call being born upside down. The sceptic may truly be said to be topsy-turvy; for his feet are dancing upwards in idle ecstasies, while his brain is in the abyss. To the modern man the heavens are actually below the earth. The explanation is simple; he is standing on his head; which is a very weak pedestal to stand on. But when he has found his feet again he knows it. Christianity satisfies suddenly and perfectly man's ancestral instinct for being the right way up; satisfies it supremely in this; that by its creed joy becomes something gigantic and sadness something special and small. The vault above us is not deaf because the universe is an idiot; the silence is not the heartless silence of an endless and aimless world. Rather the silence around us is a small and pitiful stillness like the prompt stillness in a sick-room. We are perhaps permitted tragedy as a sort of merciful comedy: because the frantic energy of divine things would knock us down like a drunken farce. We can take our own tears more lightly than we could take the tremendous levities of the angels. So we sit perhaps in a starry chamber of silence, while the laughter of the heavens is too loud for us to hear.

Joy, which was the small publicity of the pagan, is the gigantic secret of the Christian. And as I close this chaotic volume I open again the strange small book from which all Christianity came; and I am again haunted by a kind of confirmation. The tremendous figure which fills the Gospels towers in this respect, as in every other, above all the thinkers who ever thought themselves tall. His pathos was natural, almost casual. The Stoics, ancient and modern, were proud of concealing their tears. He never concealed His tears; He showed them plainly on His open face at any daily sight, such as the far sight of His native city. Yet He concealed something. Solemn supermen and imperial diplomatists are proud of restraining their anger. He never restrained His anger. He flung furniture down the front steps of the Temple, and asked men how they expected to escape the damnation of Hell. Yet He restrained something. I say it with reverence; there was in that shattering personality a thread that must be called shyness. There was something that He hid from all men when He went up a mountain to pray. There was something that He covered constantly by abrupt silence or impetuous isolation. There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked upon our earth; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth.

WHAT’S WRONG WITH THE WORLD

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DEDICATION

To C. F G. Masterman, M. P. My Dear Charles, I originally called this book "What is Wrong," and it would have satisfied your sardonic temper to note the number of social misunderstandings that arose from the use of the title. Many a mild lady visitor opened her eyes when I remarked casually, "I have been doing 'What is Wrong' all this morning." And one minister of religion moved quite sharply in his chair when I told him (as he understood it) that I had to run upstairs and do what was wrong, but should be down again in a minute. Exactly of what occult vice they silently accused me I cannot conjecture, but I know of what I accuse myself; and that is, of having written a very shapeless and inadequate book, and one quite unworthy to be dedicated to you. As far as literature goes, this book is what is wrong and no mistake.

It may seem a refinement of insolence to present so wild a composition to one who has recorded two or three of the really impressive visions of the moving millions of England. You are the only man alive who can make the map of England crawl with life; a most creepy and enviable accomplishment. Why then should I trouble you with a book which, even if it achieves its object (which is monstrously unlikely) can only be a thundering gallop of theory?

Well, I do it partly because I think you politicians are none the worse for a few inconvenient ideals; but more because you will recognise the many arguments we have had, those arguments which the most wonderful ladies in the world can never endure for very long. And, perhaps, you will agree with me that the thread of comradeship and conversation must be protected because it is so frivolous. It must be held sacred, it must not be snapped, because it is not worth tying together again. It is exactly because argument is idle that men (I mean males) must take it seriously; for when (we feel), until the crack of doom, shall we have so delightful a difference again? But most of all I offer it to you because there exists not only comradeship, but a very different thing, called friendship; an agreement under all the arguments and a thread which, please God, will never break.

Yours always,

G. K. Chesterton.

PART ONE. THE HOMELESSNESS OF MAN

I. THE MEDICAL MISTAKE

A book of modern social inquiry has a shape that is somewhat sharply defined. It begins as a rule with an analysis, with statistics, tables of population, decrease of crime among Congregationalists, growth of hysteria among policemen, and similar ascertained facts; it ends with a chapter that is generally called “The Remedy.” It is almost wholly due to this careful, solid, and scientific method that “The Remedy” is never found. For this scheme of medical question and answer is a blunder; the first great blunder of sociology. It is always called stating the disease before we find the cure. But it is the whole definition and dignity of man that in social matters we must actually find the cure before we find the disease.

The fallacy is one of the fifty fallacies that come from the modern madness for biological or bodily metaphors. It is convenient to speak of the Social Organism, just as it is convenient to speak of the British Lion. But Britain is no more an organism than Britain is a lion. The moment we begin to give a nation the unity and simplicity of an animal, we begin to think wildly. Because every man is a biped, fifty men are not a centipede. This has produced, for instance, the gaping absurdity of perpetually talking about “young nations” and “dying nations,” as if a nation had a fixed and physical span of life. Thus people will say that Spain has entered a final senility; they might as well say that Spain is losing all her teeth. Or people will say that Canada should soon produce a literature; which is like saying that Canada must soon grow a new moustache. Nations consist of people; the first generation may be decrepit, or the ten thousandth may be vigorous. Similar applications of the fallacy are made by those who see in the increasing size of national possessions, a simple increase in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. These people, indeed, even fall short in subtlety of the parallel of a human body. They do not even ask whether an empire is growing taller in its youth, or only growing fatter in its old age. But of all the instances of error arising from this physical fancy, the worst is that we have before us: the habit of exhaustively describing a social sickness, and then propounding a social drug.

Now we do talk first about the disease in cases of bodily breakdown; and that for an excellent reason. Because, though there may be doubt about the way in which the body broke down, there is no doubt at all about the shape in which it should be built up again. No doctor proposes to produce a new kind of man, with a new arrangement of eyes or limbs. The hospital, by necessity, may send a man home with one leg less: but it will not (in a creative rapture) send him home with one leg extra. Medical science is content with the normal human body, and only seeks to restore it.

But social science is by no means always content with the normal human soul; it has all sorts of fancy souls for sale. Man as a social idealist will say "I am tired of being a Puritan; I want to be a Pagan," or "Beyond this dark probation of Individualism I see the shining paradise of Collectivism." Now in bodily ills there is none of this difference about the ultimate ideal. The patient may or may not want quinine; but he certainly wants health. No one says "I am tired of this headache; I want some toothache," or "The only thing for this Russian influenza is a few German measles," or "Through this dark probation of catarrh I see the shining paradise of rheumatism." But exactly the whole difficulty in our public problems is that some men are aiming at cures which other men would regard as worse maladies; are offering ultimate conditions as states of health which others would uncompromisingly call states of disease. Mr. Belloc once said that he would no more part with the idea of property than with his teeth; yet to Mr. Bernard Shaw property is not a tooth, but a toothache. Lord Milner has sincerely attempted to introduce German efficiency; and many of us would as soon welcome German measles. Dr. Saleeby would honestly like to have Eugenics; but I would rather have rheumatics.

This is the arresting and dominant fact about modern social discussion; that the quarrel is not merely about the difficulties, but about the aim. We agree about the evil; it is about the good that we should tear each other's eyes out. We all admit that a lazy aristocracy is a bad thing. We should not by any means all admit that an active aristocracy would be a good thing. We all feel angry with an irreligious priesthood; but some of us would go mad with disgust at a really religious one. Everyone is indignant if our army is weak, including the people who would be even more indignant if it were strong. The social case is exactly the opposite of the medical case. We do not disagree, like doctors, about the precise nature of the illness, while agreeing about the nature of health. On the contrary, we all agree that England is unhealthy, but half of us would not look at her in what the other half would call blooming health. Public abuses are so prominent and pestilent that they sweep all generous people into a sort of fictitious unanimity. We forget that, while we agree about the abuses of things, we should differ very much about the uses of them. Mr. Cadbury and I would agree about the bad public house. It would be precisely in front of the good public-house that our painful personal fracas would occur.

I maintain, therefore, that the common sociological method is quite useless: that of first dissecting abject poverty or cataloguing prostitution. We all dislike abject poverty; but it might be another business if we began to discuss independent and dignified poverty. We all disapprove of prostitution; but we do not all approve of purity. The only way to discuss the social evil is to get at once to the social ideal. We can all see the national madness; but what is national sanity? I have called this book "What Is Wrong with the World?" and the upshot of the title can be easily and clearly stated. What is wrong is that we do not ask what is right.

II. WANTED, AN UNPRACTICAL MAN

There is a popular philosophical joke intended to typify the endless and useless arguments of philosophers; I mean the joke about which came first, the chicken or the egg? I am not sure that properly understood, it is so futile an inquiry after all. I am not concerned here to enter on those deep metaphysical and theological differences of which the chicken and egg debate is a frivolous, but a very felicitous, type. The evolutionary materialists are appropriately enough represented in the vision of all things coming from an egg, a dim and monstrous oval germ that had laid itself by accident. That other supernatural school of thought (to which I personally adhere) would be not unworthily typified in the fancy that this round world of ours is but an egg brooded upon by a sacred unbegotten bird; the mystic dove of the prophets. But it is to much humbler functions that I here call the awful power of such a distinction. Whether or no the living bird is at the beginning of our mental chain, it is absolutely necessary that it should be at the end of our mental chain. The bird is the thing to be aimed at — not with a gun, but a life-bestowing wand. What is essential to our right thinking is this: that the egg and the bird must not be thought of as equal cosmic occurrences recurring alternatively forever. They must not become a mere egg and bird pattern, like the egg and dart pattern. One is a means and the other an end; they are in different mental worlds. Leaving the complications of the human breakfast-table out of account, in an elemental sense, the egg only exists to produce the chicken. But the chicken does not exist only in order to produce another egg. He may also exist to amuse himself, to praise God, and even to suggest ideas to a French dramatist. Being a conscious life, he is, or may be, valuable in himself. Now our modern politics are full of a noisy forgetfulness; forgetfulness that the production of this happy and conscious life is after all the aim of all complexities and compromises. We talk of nothing but useful men and working institutions; that is, we only think of the chickens as things that will lay more eggs. Instead of seeking to breed our ideal bird, the eagle of Zeus or the Swan of Avon, or whatever we happen to want, we talk entirely in terms of the process and the embryo. The process itself, divorced from its divine object, becomes doubtful and even morbid; poison enters the embryo of everything; and our politics are rotten eggs.

Idealism is only considering everything in its practical essence. Idealism only means that we should consider a poker in reference to poking before we discuss its suitability for wife-beating; that we should ask if an egg is good enough for practical poultry-rearing before we decide that the egg is bad enough for practical politics. But I know that this primary pursuit of the theory (which is but pursuit of the aim) exposes one to the cheap charge of fiddling while Rome is burning. A school, of which Lord Rosebery is representative, has endeavored to substitute for the moral or social ideals which have hitherto been the motive of politics a general coherency or completeness in the social system which has gained the nick-name of "efficiency." I am not very certain of the secret doctrine of this sect in the matter. But, as far as I can make out, "efficiency" means that we ought to discover everything about a machine except what it is for. There has arisen in our time a most singular fancy: the fancy that when things go very wrong we need a practical man. It would be far truer to say, that when things go very wrong we need an unpractical man. Certainly, at least, we need a theorist. A practical man means a man accustomed to mere daily practice, to the way things commonly work. When things will not work, you must have the thinker, the man who has some doctrine about why they work at all. It is wrong to fiddle while Rome is burning; but it is quite right to study the theory of hydraulics while Rome is burning.

It is then necessary to drop one's daily agnosticism and attempt rerum cognoscere causas. If your aeroplane has a slight indisposition, a handy man may mend it. But, if it is seriously ill, it is all the more likely that some absent-minded old professor with wild white hair will have to be dragged out of a college or laboratory to analyze the evil. The more complicated the smash, the whiter-haired and more absent-minded will be the theorist who is needed to deal with it; and in some extreme cases, no one but the man (probably insane) who invented your flying-ship could possibly say what was the matter with it.

"Efficiency," of course, is futile for the same reason that strong men, will-power and the superman are futile. That is, it is futile because it only deals with actions after they have been performed. It has no philosophy for incidents before they happen; therefore it has no power of choice. An act can only be successful or unsuccessful when it is over; if it is to begin, it must be, in the abstract, right or wrong. There is no such thing as backing a winner; for he cannot be a winner when he is backed. There is no such thing as fighting on the winning side; one fights to find out which is the winning side. If any operation has occurred, that operation was efficient. If a man is murdered, the murder was efficient. A tropical sun is as efficient in making people lazy as a Lancashire foreman bully in making them energetic. Maeterlinck is as efficient in filling a man with strange spiritual tremors as Messrs. Crosse and Blackwell are in filling a man with jam. But it all depends on what you want to be filled with. Lord Rosebery, being a modern skeptic, probably prefers the spiritual tremors. I, being an orthodox Christian, prefer the jam. But both are efficient when they have been effected; and inefficient until they are effected. A man who thinks much about success must be the drowsiest sentimentalist; for he must be always looking back. If he only likes victory he must always come late for the battle. For the man of action there is nothing but idealism.

This definite ideal is a far more urgent and practical matter in our existing English trouble than any immediate plans or proposals. For the present chaos is due to a sort of general oblivion of all that men were originally aiming at. No man demands what he desires; each man demands what he fancies he can get. Soon people forget what the man really wanted first; and after a successful and vigorous political life, he forgets it himself. The whole is an extravagant riot of second bests, a pandemonium of pis-aller. Now this sort of pliability does not merely prevent any heroic consistency, it also prevents any really practical compromise. One can only find the middle distance between two points if the two points will stand still. We may make an arrangement between two litigants who cannot both get what they want; but not if they will not even tell us what they want. The keeper of a restaurant would much prefer that each customer should give his order smartly, though it were for stewed ibis or boiled elephant, rather than that each customer should sit holding his head in his hands, plunged in arithmetical calculations about how much food there can be on the premises. Most of us have suffered from a certain sort of ladies who, by their perverse unselfishness, give more trouble than the selfish; who almost clamor for the unpopular dish and scramble for the worst seat. Most of us have known parties or expeditions full of this seething fuss of self-effacement. From much meaner motives than those of such admirable women, our practical politicians keep things in the same confusion through the same doubt about their real demands. There is nothing that so much prevents a settlement as a tangle of small surrenders. We are bewildered on every side by politicians who are in favor of secular education, but think it hopeless to work for it; who desire total prohibition, but are certain they should not demand it; who regret compulsory education, but resignedly continue it; or who want peasant proprietorship and therefore vote for something else. It is this dazed and floundering opportunism that gets in the way of everything. If our statesmen were visionaries something practical might be done. If we ask for something in the abstract we might get something in the concrete. As it is, it is not only impossible to get what one wants, but it is impossible to get any part of it, because nobody can mark it out plainly like a map. That clear and even hard quality that there was in the old bargaining has wholly vanished. We forget that the word “compromise” contains, among other things, the rigid and ringing word “promise.” Moderation is not vague; it is as definite as perfection. The middle point is as fixed as the extreme point.

If I am made to walk the plank by a pirate, it is vain for me to offer, as a common-sense compromise, to walk along the plank for a reasonable distance. It is exactly about the reasonable distance that the pirate and I differ. There is an exquisite mathematical split second at which the plank tips up. My common-sense ends just before that instant; the pirate’s common-sense begins just beyond it. But the point itself is as hard as any geometrical diagram; as abstract as any theological dogma.

III. THE NEW HYPOCRITE

But this new cloudy political cowardice has rendered useless the old English compromise. People have begun to be terrified of an improvement merely because it is complete. They call it utopian and revolutionary that anyone should really have his own way, or anything be really done, and done with. Compromise used to mean that half a loaf was better than no bread. Among modern statesmen it really seems to mean that half a loaf is better than a whole loaf.

As an instance to sharpen the argument, I take the one case of our everlasting education bills. We have actually contrived to invent a new kind of hypocrite. The old hypocrite, Tartuffe or Pecksniff, was a man whose aims were really worldly and practical, while he pretended that they were religious. The new hypocrite is one whose aims are really religious, while he pretends that they are worldly and practical. The Rev. Brown, the Wesleyan minister, sturdily declares that he cares nothing for creeds, but only for education; meanwhile, in truth, the wildest Wesleyanism is tearing his soul. The Rev. Smith, of the Church of England, explains gracefully, with the Oxford manner, that the only question for him is the prosperity and efficiency of the schools; while in truth all the evil passions of a curate are roaring within him. It is a fight of creeds masquerading as policies. I think these reverend gentlemen do themselves wrong; I think they are more pious than they will admit. Theology is not (as some suppose) expunged as an error. It is merely concealed, like a sin. Dr. Clifford really wants a theological atmosphere as much as Lord Halifax; only it is a different one. If Dr. Clifford would ask plainly for Puritanism and Lord Halifax ask plainly for Catholicism, something might be done for them. We are all, one hopes, imaginative enough to recognize the dignity and distinctness of another religion, like Islam or the cult of Apollo. I am quite ready to respect another man's faith; but it is too much to ask that I should respect his doubt, his worldly hesitations and fictions, his political bargain and make-believe. Most Nonconformists with an instinct for English history could see something poetic and national about the Archbishop of Canterbury as an Archbishop of Canterbury. It is when he does the rational British statesman that they very justifiably get annoyed. Most Anglicans with an eye for pluck and simplicity could admire Dr. Clifford as a Baptist minister. It is when he says that he is simply a citizen that nobody can possibly believe him.

But indeed the case is yet more curious than this. The one argument that used to be urged for our creedless vagueness was that at least it saved us from fanaticism. But it does not even do that. On the contrary, it creates and renews fanaticism with a force quite peculiar to itself. This is at once so strange and so true that I will ask the reader's attention to it with a little more precision.

Some people do not like the word "dogma." Fortunately they are free, and there is an alternative for them. There are two things, and two things only, for the human mind, a dogma and a prejudice. The Middle Ages were a rational epoch, an age of doctrine. Our age is, at its best, a poetical epoch, an age of prejudice. A doctrine is a definite point; a prejudice is a direction. That an ox may be eaten, while a man should not be eaten, is a doctrine. That as little as possible of anything should be eaten is a prejudice; which is also sometimes called an ideal. Now a direction is always far more fantastic than a plan. I would rather have the most archaic map of the road to Brighton than a general recommendation to turn to the left. Straight lines that are not parallel must meet at last; but curves may recoil forever. A pair of lovers might walk along the frontier of France and Germany, one on the one side and one on the other, so long as they were not vaguely told to keep away from each other. And this is a strictly true parable of the effect of our modern vagueness in losing and separating men as in a mist.

It is not merely true that a creed unites men. Nay, a difference of creed unites men — so long as it is a clear difference. A boundary unites. Many a magnanimous Moslem and chivalrous Crusader must have been nearer to each other, because they were both dogmatists, than any two homeless agnostics in a pew of Mr. Campbell's chapel. "I say God is One," and "I say God is One but also Three," that is the beginning of a good quarrelsome, manly friendship. But our age would turn these creeds into tendencies. It would tell the Trinitarian to follow multiplicity as such (because it was his "temperament"), and he would turn up later with three hundred and thirty-three persons in the Trinity. Meanwhile, it would turn the Moslem into a Monist: a frightful intellectual fall. It would force that previously healthy person not only to admit that there was one God, but to admit that there was nobody else. When each had, for a long enough period, followed the gleam of his own nose (like the Dong) they would appear again; the Christian a

Polytheist, and the Moslem a Panegoist, both quite mad, and far more unfit to understand each other than before.

It is exactly the same with politics. Our political vagueness divides men, it does not fuse them. Men will walk along the edge of a chasm in clear weather, but they will edge miles away from it in a fog. So a Tory can walk up to the very edge of Socialism, if he knows what is Socialism. But if he is told that Socialism is a spirit, a sublime atmosphere, a noble, indefinable tendency, why, then he keeps out of its way; and quite right too. One can meet an assertion with argument; but healthy bigotry is the only way in which one can meet a tendency. I am told that the Japanese method of wrestling consists not of suddenly pressing, but of suddenly giving way. This is one of my many reasons for disliking the Japanese civilization. To use surrender as a weapon is the very worst spirit of the East. But certainly there is no force so hard to fight as the force which it is easy to conquer; the force that always yields and then returns. Such is the force of a great impersonal prejudice, such as possesses the modern world on so many points. Against this there is no weapon at all except a rigid and steely sanity, a resolution not to listen to fads, and not to be infected by diseases.

In short, the rational human faith must armor itself with prejudice in an age of prejudices, just as it armoured itself with logic in an age of logic. But the difference between the two mental methods is marked and unmistakable. The essential of the difference is this: that prejudices are divergent, whereas creeds are always in collision. Believers bump into each other; whereas bigots keep out of each other’s way. A creed is a collective thing, and even its sins are sociable. A prejudice is a private thing, and even its tolerance is misanthropic. So it is with our existing divisions. They keep out of each other’s way; the Tory paper and the Radical paper do not answer each other; they ignore each other. Genuine controversy, fair cut and thrust before a common audience, has become in our special epoch very rare. For the sincere controversialist is above all things a good listener. The really burning enthusiast never interrupts; he listens to the enemy’s arguments as eagerly as a spy would listen to the enemy’s arrangements. But if you attempt an actual argument with a modern paper of opposite politics, you will find that no medium is admitted between violence and evasion. You will have no answer except slanging or silence. A modern editor must not have that eager ear that goes with the honest tongue. He may be deaf and silent; and that is called dignity. Or he may be deaf and noisy; and that is called slashing journalism. In neither case is there any controversy; for the whole object of modern party combatants is to charge out of earshot.

The only logical cure for all this is the assertion of a human ideal. In dealing with this, I will try to be as little transcendental as is consistent with reason; it is enough to say that unless we have some doctrine of a divine man, all abuses may be excused, since evolution may turn them into uses. It will be easy for the scientific plutocrat to maintain that humanity will adapt itself to any conditions which we now consider evil. The old tyrants invoked the past; the new tyrants will invoke the future evolution has produced the snail and the owl; evolution can produce a workman who wants no more space than a snail, and no more light than an owl. The employer need not mind sending a Kaffir to work underground; he will soon become an underground animal, like a mole. He need not mind sending a diver to hold his breath in the deep seas; he will soon be a deep-sea animal. Men need not trouble to alter conditions, conditions will so soon alter men. The head can be beaten small enough to fit the hat. Do not knock the fetters off the slave; knock the slave until he forgets the fetters. To all this plausible modern argument for oppression, the only adequate answer is, that there is a permanent human ideal that must not be either confused or destroyed. The most important man on earth is the perfect man who is not there. The Christian religion has specially uttered the ultimate sanity of Man, says Scripture, who shall judge the incarnate and human truth. Our lives and laws are not judged by divine superiority, but simply by human perfection. It is man, says Aristotle, who is the measure. It is the Son of Man, says Scripture, who shall judge the quick and the dead.

Doctrine, therefore, does not cause dissensions; rather a doctrine alone can cure our dissensions. It is necessary to ask, however, roughly, what abstract and ideal shape in state or family would fulfil the human hunger; and this apart from whether we can completely obtain it or not. But when we come to ask what is the need of normal men, what is the desire of all nations, what is the ideal house, or road, or rule, or republic, or king, or priesthood, then we are confronted with a strange and irritating difficulty peculiar to the present time; and we must call a temporary halt and examine that obstacle.

IV. THE FEAR OF THE PAST

The last few decades have been marked by a special cultivation of the romance of the future. We seem to have made up our minds to misunderstand what has happened; and we turn, with a sort of relief, to stating what will happen — which is (apparently) much easier. The modern man no longer presents the memoirs of his great grandfather; but is engaged in writing a detailed and authoritative biography of his great-grandson. Instead of trembling before the specters of the dead, we shudder abjectly under the shadow of the babe unborn. This spirit is apparent everywhere, even to the creation of a form of futurist romance. Sir Walter Scott stands at the dawn of the nineteenth century for the novel of the past; Mr. H. G. Wells stands at the dawn of the twentieth century for the novel of the future. The old story, we know, was supposed to begin: “Late on a winter’s evening two horsemen might have been seen — .” The new story has to begin: “Late on a winter’s evening two aviators will be seen — .” The movement is not without its elements of charm; there is something spirited, if eccentric, in the sight of so many people fighting over again the fights that have not yet happened; of people still glowing with the memory of tomorrow morning. A man in advance of the age is a familiar phrase enough. An age in advance of the age is really rather odd.

But when full allowance has been made for this harmless element of poetry and pretty human perversity in the thing, I shall not hesitate to maintain here that this cult of the future is not only a weakness but a cowardice of the age. It is the peculiar evil of this epoch that even its pugnacity is fundamentally frightened; and the Jingo is contemptible not because he is impudent, but because he is timid. The reason why modern armaments do not inflame the imagination like the arms and emblazonments of the Crusades is a reason quite apart from optical ugliness or beauty. Some battleships are as beautiful as the sea; and many Norman nosepieces were as ugly as Norman noses. The atmospheric ugliness that surrounds our scientific war is an emanation from that evil panic which is at the heart of it. The charge of the Crusades was a charge; it was charging towards God, the wild consolation of the braver. The charge of the modern armaments is not a charge at all. It is a rout, a retreat, a flight from the devil, who will catch the hindmost. It is impossible to imagine a mediaeval knight talking of longer and longer French lances, with precisely the quivering employed about larger and larger German ships The man who called the Blue Water School the “Blue Funk School” uttered a psychological truth which that school itself would scarcely essentially deny. Even the two-power standard, if it be a necessity, is in a sense a degrading necessity. Nothing has more alienated many magnanimous minds from Imperial enterprises than the fact that they are always exhibited as stealthy or sudden defenses against a world of cold rapacity and fear. The Boer War, for instance, was colored not so much by the creed that we were doing something right, as by the creed that Boers and Germans were probably doing something wrong; driving us (as it was said) to the sea. Mr. Chamberlain, I think, said that the war was a feather in his cap and so it was: a white feather.

Now this same primary panic that I feel in our rush towards patriotic armaments I feel also in our rush towards future visions of society. The modern mind is forced towards the future by a certain sense of fatigue, not unmixed with terror, with which it regards the past. It is propelled towards the coming time; it is, in the exact words of the popular phrase, knocked into the middle of next week. And the goad which drives it on thus eagerly is not an affectation for futurity Futurity does not exist, because it is still future. Rather it is a fear of the past; a fear not merely of the evil in the past, but of the good in the past also. The brain breaks down under the unbearable virtue of mankind. There have been so many flaming faiths that we cannot hold; so many harsh heroisms that we cannot imitate; so many great efforts of monumental building or of military glory which seem to us at once sublime and pathetic. The future is a refuge from the fierce competition of our forefathers. The older generation, not the younger, is knocking at our door. It is agreeable to escape, as Henley said, into the Street of By-and-Bye, where stands the Hostelry of Never. It is pleasant to play with children, especially unborn children. The future is a blank wall on which every man can write his own name as large as he likes; the past I find already covered with illegible scribbles, such as Plato, Isaiah, Shakespeare, Michael Angelo, Napoleon. I can make the future as narrow as myself; the past is obliged to be as broad and turbulent as humanity. And the upshot of this modern attitude is really this: that men invent new ideals because they dare not attempt old ideals. They look forward with enthusiasm, because they are afraid to look back.

Now in history there is no Revolution that is not a Restoration. Among the many things that leave me doubtful about the modern habit of fixing eyes on the future, none is stronger than this: that all the men in history who have really done anything with the future have had their eyes fixed upon the past. I need not mention the Renaissance, the very word proves my case. The originality of Michael Angelo and Shakespeare began with the digging up of old vases and manuscripts. The mildness of poets absolutely arose out of the mildness of antiquaries. So the great mediaeval revival was a memory of the Roman Empire. So the Reformation looked back to the Bible and Bible times. So the modern Catholic movement has looked back to patristic times. But that modern movement which many would count the most anarchic of all is in this sense the most conservative of all. Never was the past more venerated by men than it was by the French Revolutionists. They invoked the little republics of antiquity with the complete confidence of one who invokes the gods. The Sans-culottes believed (as their name might imply) in a return to simplicity. They believed most piously in a remote past; some might call it a mythical past. For some strange reason man must always thus plant his fruit trees in a graveyard. Man can only find life among the dead. Man is a misshapen monster, with his feet set forward and his face turned back. He can make the future luxuriant and gigantic, so long as he is thinking about the past. When he tries to think about the future itself, his mind diminishes to a pin point with imbecility, which some call Nirvana. To-morrow is the Gorgon; a man must only see it mirrored in the shining shield of yesterday. If he sees it directly he is turned to stone. This has been the fate of all those who have really seen fate and futurity as clear and inevitable. The Calvinists, with their perfect creed of predestination, were turned to stone. The modern sociological scientists (with their excruciating Eugenics) are turned to stone. The only difference is that the Puritans make dignified, and the Eugenists somewhat amusing, statues.

But there is one feature in the past which more than all the rest defies and depresses the moderns and drives them towards this featureless future. I mean the presence in the past of huge ideals, unfulfilled and sometimes abandoned. The sight of these splendid failures is melancholy to a restless and rather morbid generation; and they maintain a strange silence about them — sometimes amounting to an unscrupulous silence. They keep them entirely out of their newspapers and almost entirely out of their history books. For example, they will often tell you (in their praises of the coming age) that we are moving on towards a United States of Europe. But they carefully omit to tell you that we are moving away from a United States of Europe, that such a thing existed literally in Roman and essentially in mediaeval times. They never admit that the international hatreds (which they call barbaric) are really very recent, the mere breakdown of the ideal of the Holy Roman Empire. Or again, they will tell you that there is going to be a social revolution, a great rising of the poor against the rich; but they never rub it in that France made that magnificent attempt, unaided, and that we and all the world allowed it to be trampled out and forgotten. I say decisively that nothing is so marked in modern writing as the prediction of such ideals in the future combined with the ignoring of them in the past. Anyone can test this for himself. Read any thirty or forty pages of pamphlets advocating peace in Europe and see how many of them praise the old Popes or Emperors for keeping the peace in Europe. Read any armful of essays and poems in praise of social democracy, and see how many of them praise the old Jacobins who created democracy and died for it. These colossal ruins are to the modern only enormous eyesores. He looks back along the valley of the past and sees a perspective of splendid but unfinished cities. They are unfinished, not always through enmity or accident, but often through fickleness, mental fatigue, and the lust for alien philosophies. We have not only left undone those things that we ought to have done, but we have even left undone those things that we wanted to do

It is very currently suggested that the modern man is the heir of all the ages, that he has got the good out of these successive human experiments. I know not what to say in answer to this, except to ask the reader to look at the modern man, as I have just looked at the modern man — in the looking-glass. Is it really true that you and I are two starry towers built up of all the most towering visions of the past? Have we really fulfilled all the great historic ideals one after the other, from our naked ancestor who was brave enough to kill a mammoth with a stone knife, through the Greek citizen and the Christian saint to our own grandfather or great-grandfather, who may have been sabred by the Manchester Yeomanry or shot in the ‘48? Are we still strong enough to spear mammoths, but now tender enough to spare them? Does the cosmos contain any mammoth that we have either speared or spared? When we decline (in a marked manner) to fly the red flag and fire across a barricade like our grandfathers, are we really declining in deference to sociologists — or to soldiers? Have we indeed outstripped the warrior and passed the ascetical saint? I fear we only outstrip the warrior in the sense that we should probably run away from him. And if we have passed the saint, I fear we have passed him without bowing.

This is, first and foremost, what I mean by the narrowness of the new ideas, the limiting effect of the future. Our modern prophetic idealism is narrow because it has undergone a persistent process of elimination. We must ask for new things because we are not allowed to ask for old things. The whole position is based on this idea that we have got all the good that can be got out of the ideas of the past. But we have not got all the good out of them, perhaps at this moment not any of the good out of them. And the need here is a need of complete freedom for restoration as well as revolution.

We often read nowadays of the valor or audacity with which some rebel attacks a hoary tyranny or an antiquated superstition. There is not really any courage at all in attacking hoary or antiquated things, any more than in offering to fight one’s grandmother. The really courageous man is he who defies tyrannies young as the morning and superstitions fresh as the first flowers. The only true free-thinker is he whose intellect is as much free from the future as from the past. He cares as little for what will be as for what has been; he cares only for what ought to be. And for my present purpose I specially insist on this abstract independence. If I am to discuss what is wrong, one of the first things that are wrong is this: the deep and silent modern assumption that past things have become impossible. There is one metaphor of which the moderns are very fond; they are always saying, “You can’t put the clock back.” The simple and obvious answer is “You can.” A clock, being a piece of human construction, can be restored by the human finger to any figure or hour. In the same way society, being a piece of human construction, can be reconstructed upon any plan that has ever existed.

There is another proverb, “As you have made your bed, so you must lie on it”; which again is simply a lie. If I have made my bed uncomfortable, please God I will make it again. We could restore the Heptarchy or the stage coaches if we chose. It might take some time to do, and it might be very inadvisable to do it; but certainly it is not impossible as bringing back last Friday is impossible. This is, as I say, the first freedom that I claim: the freedom to restore. I claim a right to propose as a solution the old patriarchal system of a Highland clan, if that should seem to eliminate the largest number of evils. It certainly would eliminate some evils; for instance, the unnatural sense of obeying cold and harsh strangers, mere bureaucrats and policemen. I claim the right to propose the complete independence of the small Greek or Italian towns, a sovereign city of Brixton or Brompton, if that seems the best way out of our troubles. It would be a way out of some of our troubles; we could not have in a small state, for instance, those enormous illusions about men or measures which are nourished by the great national or international newspapers. You could not persuade a city state that Mr. Beit was an Englishman, or Mr. Dillon a desperado, any more than you could persuade a Hampshire Village that the village drunkard was a teetotaller or the village idiot a statesman. Nevertheless, I do not as a fact propose that the Browns and the Smiths should be collected under separate tartans. Nor do I even propose that Clapham should declare its independence. I merely declare my independence. I merely claim my choice of all the tools in the universe; and I shall not admit that any of them are blunted merely because they have been used.

V. THE UNFINISHED TEMPLE

The task of modern idealists indeed is made much too easy for them by the fact that they are always taught that if a thing has been defeated it has been disproved. Logically, the case is quite clearly the other way. The lost causes are exactly those which might have saved the world. If a man says that the Young Pretender would have made England happy, it is hard to answer him. If anyone says that the Georges made England happy, I hope we all know what to answer. That which was prevented is always impregnable; and the only perfect King of England was he who was smothered. Exactly be cause Jacobitism failed we cannot call it a failure. Precisely because the Commune collapsed as a rebellion we cannot say that it collapsed as a system. But such outbursts were brief or incidental. Few people realize how many of the largest efforts, the facts that will fill history, were frustrated in their full design and come down to us as gigantic cripples. I have only space to allude to the two largest facts of modern history: the Catholic Church and that modern growth rooted in the French Revolution.

When four knights scattered the blood and brains of St. Thomas of Canterbury, it was not only a sign of anger but of a sort of black admiration. They wished for his blood, but they wished even more for his brains. Such a blow will remain forever unintelligible unless we realise what the brains of St. Thomas were thinking about just before they were distributed over the floor. They were thinking about the great mediaeval conception that the church is the judge of the world. Becket objected to a priest being tried even by the Lord Chief Justice. And his reason was simple: because the Lord Chief Justice was being tried by the priest. The judiciary was itself sub judice. The kings were themselves in the dock. The idea was to create an invisible kingdom, without armies or prisons, but with complete freedom to condemn publicly all the kingdoms of the earth. Whether such a supreme church would have cured society we cannot affirm definitely; because the church never was a supreme church. We only know that in England at any rate the princes conquered the saints. What the world wanted we see before us; and some of us call it a failure. But we cannot call what the church wanted a failure, simply because the church failed. Tracy struck a little too soon. England had not yet made the great Protestant discovery that the king can do no wrong. The king was whipped in the cathedral; a performance which I recommend to those who regret the unpopularity of church-going. But the discovery was made; and Henry VIII scattered Becket's bones as easily as Tracy had scattered his brains.

Of course, I mean that Catholicism was not tried; plenty of Catholics were tried, and found guilty. My point is that the world did not tire of the church's ideal, but of its reality. Monasteries were impugned not for the chastity of monks, but for the unchastity of monks. Christianity was unpopular not because of the humility, but of the arrogance of Christians. Certainly, if the church failed it was largely through the churchmen. But at the same time hostile elements had certainly begun to end it long before it could have done its work. In the nature of things it needed a common scheme of life and thought in Europe. Yet the mediaeval system began to be broken to pieces intellectually, long before it showed the slightest hint of falling to pieces morally. The huge early heresies, like the Albigenses, had not the faintest excuse in moral superiority. And it is actually true that the Reformation began to tear Europe apart before the Catholic Church had had time to pull it together. The Prussians, for instance, were not converted to Christianity at all until quite close to the Reformation. The poor creatures hardly had time to become Catholics before they were told to become Protestants. This explains a great deal of their subsequent conduct. But I have only taken this as the first and most evident case of the general truth: that the great ideals of the past failed not by being outlived (which must mean over-lived), but by not being lived enough. Mankind has not passed through the Middle Ages. Rather mankind has retreated from the Middle Ages in reaction and rout. The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.

It is, of course, the same in the case of the French Revolution. A great part of our present perplexity arises from the fact that the French Revolution has half succeeded and half failed. In one sense, Valmy was the decisive battle of the West, and in another Trafalgar. We have, indeed, destroyed the largest territorial tyrannies, and created a free peasantry in almost all Christian countries except England; of which we shall say more anon. But representative government, the one universal relic, is a very poor fragment of the full republican idea. The theory of the French Revolution presupposed two things in government, things which it achieved at the time, but which it has certainly not bequeathed to its imitators in England, Germany, and America. The first of these was the idea of honorable poverty; that a statesman must be something of a stoic; the second was the idea of extreme publicity. Many imaginative English writers, including Carlyle, seem quite unable to imagine how it was that men like Robespierre and Marat were ardently admired. The best answer is that they were admired for being poor — poor when they might have been rich.

No one will pretend that this ideal exists at all in the haute politique of this country. Our national claim to political incorruptibility is actually based on exactly the opposite argument; it is based on the theory that wealthy men in assured positions will have no temptation to financial trickery. Whether the history of the English aristocracy, from the spoliation of the monasteries to the annexation of the mines, entirely supports this theory I am not now inquiring; but certainly it is our theory, that wealth will be a protection against political corruption. The English statesman is bribed not to be bribed. He is born with a silver spoon in his mouth, so that he may never afterwards be found with the silver spoons in his pocket. So strong is our faith in this protection by plutocracy, that we are more and more trusting our empire in the hands of families which inherit wealth without either blood or manners. Some of our political houses are parvenue by pedigree; they hand on vulgarity like a coat of-arms. In the case of many a modern statesman to say that he is born with a silver spoon in his mouth, is at once inadequate and excessive. He is born with a silver knife in his mouth. But all this only illustrates the English theory that poverty is perilous for a politician.

It will be the same if we compare the conditions that have come about with the Revolution legend touching publicity. The old democratic doctrine was that the more light that was let in to all departments of State, the easier it was for a righteous indignation to move promptly against wrong. In other words, monarchs were to live in glass houses, that mobs might throw stones. Again, no admirer of existing English politics (if there is any admirer of existing English politics) will really pretend that this ideal of publicity is exhausted, or even attempted. Obviously public life grows more private every day. The French have, indeed, continued the tradition of revealing secrets and making scandals; hence they are more flagrant and palpable than we, not in sin but in the confession of sin. The first trial of Dreyfus might have happened in England; it is exactly the second trial that would have been legally impossible. But, indeed, if we wish to realise how far we fall short of the original republican outline, the sharpest way to test it is to note how far we fall short even of the republican element in the older regime. Not only are we less democratic than Danton and Condorcet, but we are in many ways less democratic than Choiseul and Marie Antoinette. The richest nobles before the revolt were needy middle-class people compared with our Rothschilds and Roseberys. And in the matter of publicity the old French monarchy was infinitely more democratic than any of the monarchies of today. Practically anybody who chose could walk into the palace and see the king playing with his children, or paring his nails. The people possessed the monarch, as the people possess Primrose Hill; that is, they cannot move it, but they can sprawl all over it. The old French monarchy was founded on the excellent principle that a cat may look at a king. But nowadays a cat may not look at a king; unless it is a very tame cat. Even where the press is free for criticism it is only used for adulation. The substantial difference comes to something uncommonly like this: Eighteenth century tyranny meant that you could say “The K *of Br*rd is a profligate.” Twentieth century liberty really means that you are allowed to say “The King of Brentford is a model family man.”

But we have delayed the main argument too long for the parenthetical purpose of showing that the great democratic dream, like the great mediaeval dream, has in a strict and practical sense been a dream unfulfilled. Whatever is the matter with modern England it is not that we have carried out too literally, or achieved with disappointing completeness, either the Catholicism of Becket or the equality of Marat. Now I have taken these two cases merely because they are typical of ten thousand other cases; the world is full of these unfulfilled ideas, these uncompleted temples. History does not consist of completed and crumbling ruins; rather it consists of half-built villas abandoned by a bankrupt-builder. This world is more like an unfinished suburb than a deserted cemetery.

VI. THE ENEMIES OF PROPERTY

But it is for this especial reason that such an explanation is necessary on the very threshold of the definition of ideals. For owing to that historic fallacy with which I have just dealt, numbers of readers will expect me, when I propound an ideal, to propound a new ideal. Now I have no notion at all of propounding a new ideal. There is no new ideal imaginable by the madness of modern sophists, which will be anything like so startling as fulfilling any one of the old ones. On the day that any copybook maxim is carried out there will be something like an earthquake on the earth. There is only one thing new that can be done under the sun; and that is to look at the sun. If you attempt it on a blue day in June, you will know why men do not look straight at their ideals. There is only one really startling thing to be done with the ideal, and that is to do it. It is to face the flaming logical fact, and its frightful consequences. Christ knew that it would be a more stunning thunderbolt to fulfil the law than to destroy it. It is true of both the cases I have quoted, and of every case. The pagans had always adored purity: Athena, Artemis, Vesta. It was when the virgin martyrs began defiantly to practice purity that they rent them with wild beasts, and rolled them on red-hot coals. The world had always loved the notion of the poor man uppermost; it can be proved by every legend from Cinderella to Whittington, by every poem from the Magnificat to the Marseillaise. The kings went mad against France not because she idealized this ideal, but because she realized it. Joseph of Austria and Catherine of Russia quite agreed that the people should rule; what horrified them was that the people did. The French Revolution, therefore, is the type of all true revolutions, because its ideal is as old as the Old Adam, but its fulfilment almost as fresh, as miraculous, and as new as the New Jerusalem.

But in the modern world we are primarily confronted with the extraordinary spectacle of people turning to new ideals because they have not tried the old. Men have not got tired of Christianity; they have never found enough Christianity to get tired of. Men have never wearied of political justice; they have wearied of waiting for it.

Now, for the purpose of this book, I propose to take only one of these old ideals; but one that is perhaps the oldest. I take the principle of domesticity: the ideal house; the happy family, the holy family of history. For the moment it is only necessary to remark that it is like the church and like the republic, now chiefly assailed by those who have never known it, or by those who have failed to fulfil it. Numberless modern women have rebelled against domesticity in theory because they have never known it in practice. Hosts of the poor are driven to the workhouse without ever having known the house. Generally speaking, the cultured class is shrieking to be let out of the decent home, just as the working class is shouting to be let into it.

Now if we take this house or home as a test, we may very generally lay the simple spiritual foundations of the idea. God is that which can make something out of nothing. Man (it may truly be said) is that which can make something out of anything. In other words, while the joy of God be unlimited creation, the special joy of man is limited creation, the combination of creation with limits. Man's pleasure, therefore, is to possess conditions, but also to be partly possessed by them; to be half-controlled by the flute he plays or by the field he digs. The excitement is to get the utmost out of given conditions; the conditions will stretch, but not indefinitely. A man can write an immortal sonnet on an old envelope, or hack a hero out of a lump of rock. But hacking a sonnet out of a rock would be a laborious business, and making a hero out of an envelope is almost out of the sphere of practical politics. This fruitful strife with limitations, when it concerns some airy entertainment of an educated class, goes by the name of Art. But the mass of men have neither time nor aptitude for the invention of invisible or abstract beauty. For the mass of men the idea of artistic creation can only be expressed by an idea unpopular in present discussions — the idea of property. The average man cannot cut clay into the shape of a man; but he can cut earth into the shape of a garden; and though he arranges it with red geraniums and blue potatoes in alternate straight lines, he is still an artist; because he has chosen. The average man cannot paint the sunset whose colors be admires; but he can paint his own house with what color he chooses, and though he paints it pea green with pink spots, he is still an artist; because that is his choice. Property is merely the art of the democracy. It means that every man should have something that he can shape in his own image, as he is shaped in the image of heaven. But because he is not God, but only a graven image of God, his self-expression must deal with limits; properly with limits that are strict and even small.

I am well aware that the word "property" has been defied in our time by the corruption of the great capitalists. One would think, to hear people talk, that the Rothchilds and the Rockefellers were on the side of property. But obviously they are the enemies of property; because they are enemies of their own limitations. They do not want their own land; but other people's. When they remove their neighbor's landmark, they also remove their own. A man who loves a little triangular field ought to love it because it is triangular; anyone who destroys the shape, by giving him more land, is a thief who has stolen a triangle. A man with the true poetry of possession wishes to see the wall where his garden meets Smith's garden; the hedge where his farm touches Brown's. He cannot see the shape of his own land unless he sees the edges of his neighbor's. It is the negation of property that the Duke of Sutherland should have all the farms in one estate; just as it would be the negation of marriage if he had all our wives in one harem.

VII. THE FREE FAMILY

As I have said, I propose to take only one central instance; I will take the institution called the private house or home; the shell and organ of the family. We will consider cosmic and political tendencies simply as they strike that ancient and unique roof. Very few words will suffice for all I have to say about the family itself. I leave alone the speculations about its animal origin and the details of its social reconstruction; I am concerned only with its palpable omnipresence. It is a necessity far mankind; it is (if you like to put it so) a trap for mankind. Only by the hypocritical ignoring of a huge fact can any one contrive to talk of “free love”; as if love were an episode like lighting a cigarette, or whistling a tune. Suppose whenever a man lit a cigarette, a towering genie arose from the rings of smoke and followed him everywhere as a huge slave. Suppose whenever a man whistled a tune he “drew an angel down” and had to walk about forever with a seraph on a string. These catastrophic images are but faint parallels to the earthquake consequences that Nature has attached to sex; and it is perfectly plain at the beginning that a man cannot be a free lover; he is either a traitor or a tied man. The second element that creates the family is that its consequences, though colossal, are gradual; the cigarette produces a baby giant, the song only an infant seraph. Thence arises the necessity for some prolonged system of co-operation; and thence arises the family in its full educational sense.

It may be said that this institution of the home is the one anarchist institution. That is to say, it is older than law, and stands outside the State. By its nature it is refreshed or corrupted by indefinable forces of custom or kinship. This is not to be understood as meaning that the State has no authority over families; that State authority is invoked and ought to be invoked in many abnormal cases. But in most normal cases of family joys and sorrows, the State has no mode of entry. It is not so much that the law should not interfere, as that the law cannot. Just as there are fields too far off for law, so there are fields too near; as a man may see the North Pole before he sees his own backbone. Small and near matters escape control at least as much as vast and remote ones; and the real pains and pleasures of the family form a strong instance of this. If a baby cries for the moon, the policeman cannot procure the moon — but neither can he stop the baby.

Creatures so close to each other as husband and wife, or a mother and children, have powers of making each other happy or miserable with which no public coercion can deal. If a marriage could be dissolved every morning it would not give back his night's rest to a man kept awake by a curtain lecture; and what is the good of giving a man a lot of power where he only wants a little peace? The child must depend on the most imperfect mother; the mother may be devoted to the most unworthy children; in such relations legal revenges are vain. Even in the abnormal cases where the law may operate, this difficulty is constantly found; as many a bewildered magistrate knows. He has to save children from starvation by taking away their breadwinner. And he often has to break a wife's heart because her husband has already broken her head. The State has no tool delicate enough to deracinate the rooted habits and tangled affections of the family; the two sexes, whether happy or unhappy, are glued together too tightly for us to get the blade of a legal penknife in between them. The man and the woman are one flesh — yes, even when they are not one spirit. Man is a quadruped. Upon this ancient and anarchic intimacy, types of government have little or no effect; it is happy or unhappy, by its own sexual wholesomeness and genial habit, under the republic of Switzerland or the despotism of Siam. Even a republic in Siam would not have done much towards freeing the Siamese Twins.

The problem is not in marriage, but in sex; and would be felt under the freest concubinage. Nevertheless, the overwhelming mass of mankind has not believed in freedom in this matter, but rather in a more or less lasting tie. Tribes and civilizations differ about the occasions on which we may loosen the bond, but they all agree that there is a bond to be loosened, not a mere universal detachment. For the purposes of this book I am not concerned to discuss that mystical view of marriage in which I myself believe: the great European tradition which has made marriage a sacrament. It is enough to say here that heathen and Christian alike have regarded marriage as a tie; a thing not normally to be sundered. Briefly, this human belief in a sexual bond rests on a principle of which the modern mind has made a very inadequate study. It is, perhaps, most nearly paralleled by the principle of the second wind in walking.

The principle is this: that in everything worth having, even in every pleasure, there is a point of pain or tedium that must be survived, so that the pleasure may revive and endure. The joy of battle comes after the first fear of death; the joy of reading Virgil comes after the bore of learning him; the glow of the sea-bather comes after the icy shock of the sea bath; and the success of the marriage comes after the failure of the honeymoon. All human vows, laws, and contracts are so many ways of surviving with success this breaking point, this instant of potential surrender.

In everything on this earth that is worth doing, there is a stage when no one would do it, except for necessity or honor. It is then that the Institution upholds a man and helps him on to the firmer ground ahead. Whether this solid fact of human nature is sufficient to justify the sublime dedication of Christian marriage is quite an other matter, it is amply sufficient to justify the general human feeling of marriage as a fixed thing, dissolution of which is a fault or, at least, an ignominy. The essential element is not so much duration as security. Two people must be tied together in order to do themselves justice; for twenty minutes at a dance, or for twenty years in a marriage In both cases the point is, that if a man is bored in the first five minutes he must go on and force himself to be happy. Coercion is a kind of encouragement; and anarchy (or what some call liberty) is essentially oppressive, because it is essentially discouraging. If we all floated in the air like bubbles, free to drift anywhere at any instant, the practical result would be that no one would have the courage to begin a conversation. It would be so embarrassing to start a sentence in a friendly whisper, and then have to shout the last half of it because the other party was floating away into the free and formless ether. The two must hold each other to do justice to each other. If Americans can be divorced for “incompatibility of temper” I cannot conceive why they are not all divorced. I have known many happy marriages, but never a compatible one. The whole aim of marriage is to fight through and survive the instant when incompatibility becomes unquestionable. For a man and a woman, as such, are incompatible.

VIII. THE WILDNESS OF DOMESTICITY

In the course of this crude study we shall have to touch on what is called the problem of poverty, especially the dehumanized poverty of modern industrialism. But in this primary matter of the ideal the difficulty is not the problem of poverty, but the problem of wealth. It is the special psychology of leisure and luxury that falsifies life. Some experience of modern movements of the sort called “advanced” has led me to the conviction that they generally repose upon some experience peculiar to the rich. It is so with that fallacy of free love of which I have already spoken; the idea of sexuality as a string of episodes. That implies a long holiday in which to get tired of one woman, and a motor car in which to wander looking for others; it also implies money for maintenances. An omnibus conductor has hardly time to love his own wife, let alone other people’s. And the success with which nuptial estrangements are depicted in modern “problem plays” is due to the fact that there is only one thing that a drama cannot depict — that is a hard day’s work. I could give many other instances of this plutocratic assumption behind progressive fads. For instance, there is a plutocratic assumption behind the phrase “Why should woman be economically dependent upon man?” The answer is that among poor and practical people she isn’t; except in the sense in which he is dependent upon her. A hunter has to tear his clothes; there must be somebody to mend them. A fisher has to catch fish; there must be somebody to cook them. It is surely quite clear that this modern notion that woman is a mere “pretty clinging parasite,” “a plaything,” etc., arose through the somber contemplation of some rich banking family, in which the banker, at least, went to the city and pretended to do something, while the banker’s wife went to the Park and did not pretend to do anything at all. A poor man and his wife are a business partnership. If one partner in a firm of publishers interviews the authors while the other interviews the clerks, is one of them economically dependent? Was Hodder a pretty parasite clinging to Stoughton? Was Marshall a mere plaything for Snelgrove?

But of all the modern notions generated by mere wealth the worst is this: the notion that domesticity is dull and tame. Inside the home (they say) is dead decorum and routine; outside is adventure and variety. This is indeed a rich man’s opinion. The rich man knows that his own house moves on vast and soundless wheels of wealth, is run by regiments of servants, by a swift and silent ritual. On the other hand, every sort of vagabondage of romance is open to him in the streets outside. He has plenty of money and can afford to be a tramp. His wildest adventure will end in a restaurant, while the yokel's tamest adventure may end in a police-court. If he smashes a window he can pay for it; if he smashes a man he can pension him. He can (like the millionaire in the story) buy an hotel to get a glass of gin. And because he, the luxurious man, dictates the tone of nearly all "advanced" and "progressive" thought, we have almost forgotten what a home really means to the overwhelming millions of mankind.

For the truth is, that to the moderately poor the home is the only place of liberty. Nay, it is the only place of anarchy. It is the only spot on the earth where a man can alter arrangements suddenly, make an experiment or indulge in a whim. Everywhere else he goes he must accept the strict rules of the shop, inn, club, or museum that he happens to enter. He can eat his meals on the floor in his own house if he likes. I often do it myself; it gives a curious, childish, poetic, picnic feeling. There would be considerable trouble if I tried to do it in an A.B.C. tea-shop. A man can wear a dressing gown and slippers in his house; while I am sure that this would not be permitted at the Savoy, though I never actually tested the point. If you go to a restaurant you must drink some of the wines on the wine list, all of them if you insist, but certainly some of them. But if you have a house and garden you can try to make hollyhock tea or convolvulus wine if you like. For a plain, hard-working man the home is not the one tame place in the world of adventure. It is the one wild place in the world of rules and set tasks. The home is the one place where he can put the carpet on the ceiling or the slates on the floor if he wants to. When a man spends every night staggering from bar to bar or from music-hall to music-hall, we say that he is living an irregular life. But he is not; he is living a highly regular life, under the dull, and often oppressive, laws of such places. Some times he is not allowed even to sit down in the bars; and frequently he is not allowed to sing in the music-halls. Hotels may be defined as places where you are forced to dress; and theaters may be defined as places where you are forbidden to smoke. A man can only picnic at home.

Now I take, as I have said, this small human omnipotence, this possession of a definite cell or chamber of liberty, as the working model for the present inquiry. Whether we can give every English man a free home of his own or not, at least we should desire it; and he desires it. For the moment we speak of what he wants, not of what he expects to get. He wants, for instance, a separate house; he does not want a semi-detached house. He may be forced in the commercial race to share one wall with another man. Similarly he might be forced in a three-legged race to share one leg with another man; but it is not so that he pictures himself in his dreams of elegance and liberty. Again, he does not desire a flat. He can eat and sleep and praise God in a flat; he can eat and sleep and praise God in a railway train. But a railway train is not a house, because it is a house on wheels. And a flat is not a house, because it is a house on stilts. An idea of earthy contact and foundation, as well as an idea of separation and independence, is a part of this instructive human picture.

I take, then, this one institution as a test. As every normal man desires a woman, and children born of a woman, every normal man desires a house of his own to put them into. He does not merely want a roof above him and a chair below him; he wants an objective and visible kingdom; a fire at which he can cook what food he likes, a door he can open to what friends he chooses. This is the normal appetite of men; I do not say there are not exceptions. There may be saints above the need and philanthropists below it. Opalstein, now he is a duke, may have got used to more than this; and when he was a convict may have got used to less. But the normality of the thing is enormous. To give nearly everybody ordinary houses would please nearly everybody; that is what I assert without apology. Now in modern England (as you eagerly point out) it is very difficult to give nearly everybody houses. Quite so; I merely set up the desideratum; and ask the reader to leave it standing there while he turns with me to a consideration of what really happens in the social wars of our time.

IX. HISTORY OF HUDGE AND GUDGE

There is, let us say, a certain filthy rookery in Hoxton, dripping with disease and honeycombed with crime and promiscuity. There are, let us say, two noble and courageous young men, of pure intentions and (if you prefer it) noble birth; let us call them Hudge and Gudge. Hudge, let us say, is of a bustling sort; he points out that the people must at all costs be got out of this den; he subscribes and collects money, but he finds (despite the large financial interests of the Hudges) that the thing will have to be done on the cheap if it is to be done on the spot. He therefore, runs up a row of tall bare tenements like beehives; and soon has all the poor people bundled into their little brick cells, which are certainly better than their old quarters, in so far as they are weather proof, well ventilated and supplied with clean water. But Gudge has a more delicate nature. He feels a nameless something lacking in the little brick boxes; he raises numberless objections; he even assails the celebrated Hudge Report, with the Gudge Minority Report; and by the end of a year or so has come to telling Hudge heatedly that the people were much happier where they were before. As the people preserve in both places precisely the same air of dazed amiability, it is very difficult to find out which is right. But at least one might safely say that no people ever liked stench or starvation as such, but only some peculiar pleasures en tangled with them. Not so feels the sensitive Gudge. Long before the final quarrel (Hudge v. Gudge and Another), Gudge has succeeded in persuading himself that slums and stinks are really very nice things; that the habit of sleeping fourteen in a room is what has made our England great; and that the smell of open drains is absolutely essential to the rearing of a viking breed.

But, meanwhile, has there been no degeneration in Hudge? Alas, I fear there has. Those maniacally ugly buildings which he originally put up as unpretentious sheds barely to shelter human life, grow every day more and more lovely to his deluded eye. Things he would never have dreamed of defending, except as crude necessities, things like common kitchens or infamous asbestos stoves, begin to shine quite sacredly before him, merely because they reflect the wrath of Gudge. He maintains, with the aid of eager little books by Socialists, that man is really happier in a hive than in a house. The practical difficulty of keeping total strangers out of your bedroom he describes as Brotherhood; and the necessity for climbing twenty-three flights of cold stone stairs, I dare say he calls Effort. The net result of their philanthropic adventure is this: that one has come to defending indefensible slums and still more indefensible slum-landlords, while the other has come to treating as divine the sheds and pipes which he only meant as desperate. Gudge is now a corrupt and apoplectic old Tory in the Carlton Club; if you mention poverty to him he roars at you in a thick, hoarse voice something that is conjectured to be "Do 'em good!" Nor is Hudge more happy; for he is a lean vegetarian with a gray, pointed beard and an unnaturally easy smile, who goes about telling everybody that at last we shall all sleep in one universal bedroom; and he lives in a Garden City, like one forgotten of God.

Such is the lamentable history of Hudge and Gudge; which I merely introduce as a type of an endless and exasperating misunderstanding which is always occurring in modern England. To get men out of a rookery men are put into a tenement; and at the beginning the healthy human soul loathes them both. A man's first desire is to get away as far as possible from the rookery, even should his mad course lead him to a model dwelling. The second desire is, naturally, to get away from the model dwelling, even if it should lead a man back to the rookery. But I am neither a Hudgian nor a Gudgian; and I think the mistakes of these two famous and fascinating persons arose from one simple fact. They arose from the fact that neither Hudge nor Gudge had ever thought for an instant what sort of house a man might probably like for himself. In short, they did not begin with the ideal; and, therefore, were not practical politicians.

We may now return to the purpose of our awkward parenthesis about the praise of the future and the failures of the past. A house of his own being the obvious ideal for every man, we may now ask (taking this need as typical of all such needs) why he hasn't got it; and whether it is in any philosophical sense his own fault. Now, I think that in some philosophical sense it is his own fault, I think in a yet more philosophical sense it is the fault of his philosophy. And this is what I have now to attempt to explain.

Burke, a fine rhetorician, who rarely faced realities, said, I think, that an Englishman's house is his castle. This is honestly entertaining; for as it happens the Englishman is almost the only man in Europe whose house is not his castle. Nearly everywhere else exists the assumption of peasant proprietorship; that a poor man may be a landlord, though he is only lord of his own land. Making the landlord and the tenant the same person has certain trivial advantages, as that the tenant pays no rent, while the landlord does a little work. But I am not concerned with the defense of small proprietorship, but merely with the fact that it exists almost everywhere except in England. It is also true, however, that this estate of small possession is attacked everywhere today; it has never existed among ourselves, and it may be destroyed among our neighbors. We have, therefore, to ask ourselves what it is in human affairs generally, and in this domestic ideal in particular, that has really ruined the natural human creation, especially in this country.

Man has always lost his way. He has been a tramp ever since Eden; but he always knew, or thought he knew, what he was looking for. Every man has a house somewhere in the elaborate cosmos; his house waits for him waist deep in slow Norfolk rivers or sunning itself upon Sussex downs. Man has always been looking for that home which is the subject matter of this book. But in the bleak and blinding hail of skepticism to which he has been now so long subjected, he has begun for the first time to be chilled, not merely in his hopes, but in his desires. For the first time in history he begins really to doubt the object of his wanderings on the earth. He has always lost his way; but now he has lost his address.

Under the pressure of certain upper-class philosophies (or in other words, under the pressure of Hudge and Gudge) the average man has really become bewildered about the goal of his efforts; and his efforts, therefore, grow feebler and feebler. His simple notion of having a home of his own is derided as bourgeois, as sentimental, or as despicably Christian. Under various verbal forms he is recommended to go on to the streets — which is called Individualism; or to the work-house — which is called Collectivism. We shall consider this process somewhat more carefully in a moment. But it may be said here that Hudge and Gudge, or the governing class generally, will never fail for lack of some modern phrase to cover their ancient predominance. The great lords will refuse the English peasant his three acres and a cow on advanced grounds, if they cannot refuse it longer on reactionary grounds. They will deny him the three acres on grounds of State Ownership. They will forbid him the cow on grounds of humanitarianism.

And this brings us to the ultimate analysis of this singular influence that has prevented doctrinal demands by the English people. There are, I believe, some who still deny that England is governed by an oligarchy. It is quite enough for me to know that a man might have gone to sleep some thirty years ago over the day’s newspaper and woke up last week over the later newspaper, and fancied he was reading about the same people. In one paper he would have found a Lord Robert Cecil, a Mr. Gladstone, a Mr. Lyttleton, a Churchill, a Chamberlain, a Trevelyan, an Acland. In the other paper he would find a Lord Robert Cecil, a Mr. Gladstone, a Mr. Lyttleton, a Churchill, a Chamberlain, a Trevelyan, an Acland. If this is not being governed by families I cannot imagine what it is. I suppose it is being governed by extraordinary democratic coincidences.

X. OPPRESSION BY OPTIMISM

But we are not here concerned with the nature and existence of the aristocracy, but with the origin of its peculiar power, why is it the last of the true oligarchies of Europe; and why does there seem no very immediate prospect of our seeing the end of it? The explanation is simple though it remains strangely unnoticed. The friends of aristocracy often praise it for preserving ancient and gracious traditions. The enemies of aristocracy often blame it for clinging to cruel or antiquated customs. Both its enemies and its friends are wrong. Generally speaking the aristocracy does not preserve either good or bad traditions; it does not preserve anything except game. Who would dream of looking among aristocrats anywhere for an old custom? One might as well look for an old costume! The god of the aristocrats is not tradition, but fashion, which is the opposite of tradition. If you wanted to find an old-world Norwegian head-dress, would you look for it in the Scandinavian Smart Set? No; the aristocrats never have customs; at the best they have habits, like the animals. Only the mob has customs.

The real power of the English aristocrats has lain in exactly the opposite of tradition. The simple key to the power of our upper classes is this: that they have always kept carefully on the side of what is called Progress. They have always been up to date, and this comes quite easy to an aristocracy. For the aristocracy are the supreme instances of that frame of mind of which we spoke just now. Novelty is to them a luxury verging on a necessity. They, above all, are so bored with the past and with the present, that they gape, with a horrible hunger, for the future.

But whatever else the great lords forgot they never forgot that it was their business to stand for the new things, for whatever was being most talked about among university dons or fussy financiers. Thus they were on the side of the Reformation against the Church, of the Whigs against the Stuarts, of the Baconian science against the old philosophy, of the manufacturing system against the operatives, and (to-day) of the increased power of the State against the old-fashioned individualists. In short, the rich are always modern; it is their business. But the immediate effect of this fact upon the question we are studying is somewhat singular.

In each of the separate holes or quandaries in which the ordinary Englishman has been placed, he has been told that his situation is, for some particular reason, all for the best. He woke up one fine morning and discovered that the public things, which for eight hundred years he had used at once as inns and sanctuaries, had all been suddenly and savagely abolished, to increase the private wealth of about six or seven men. One would think he might have been annoyed at that; in many places he was, and was put down by the soldiery. But it was not merely the army that kept him quiet. He was kept quiet by the sages as well as the soldiers; the six or seven men who took away the inns of the poor told him that they were not doing it for themselves, but for the religion of the future, the great dawn of Protestantism and truth. So whenever a seventeenth century noble was caught pulling down a peasant's fence and stealing his field, the noble pointed excitedly at the face of Charles I or James II (which at that moment, perhaps, wore a cross expression) and thus diverted the simple peasant's attention. The great Puritan lords created the Commonwealth, and destroyed the common land. They saved their poorer countrymen from the disgrace of paying Ship Money, by taking from them the plow money and spade money which they were doubtless too weak to guard. A fine old English rhyme has immortalized this easy aristocratic habit —

You prosecute the man or woman Who steals the goose from off the common, But leave the larger felon loose Who steals the common from the goose.

But here, as in the case of the monasteries, we confront the strange problem of submission. If they stole the common from the goose, one can only say that he was a great goose to stand it. The truth is that they reasoned with the goose; they explained to him that all this was needed to get the Stuart fox over seas. So in the nineteenth century the great nobles who became mine-owners and railway directors earnestly assured everybody that they did not do this from preference, but owing to a newly discovered Economic Law. So the prosperous politicians of our own generation introduce bills to prevent poor mothers from going about with their own babies; or they calmly forbid their tenants to drink beer in public inns. But this insolence is not (as you would suppose) howled at by everybody as outrageous feudalism. It is gently rebuked as Socialism. For an aristocracy is always progressive; it is a form of going the pace. Their parties grow later and later at night; for they are trying to live to-morrow.

XI. THE HOMELESSNESS OF JONES

Thus the Future of which we spoke at the beginning has (in England at least) always been the ally of tyranny. The ordinary Englishman has been duped out of his old possessions, such as they were, and always in the name of progress. The destroyers of the abbeys took away his bread and gave him a stone, assuring him that it was a precious stone, the white pebble of the Lord’s elect. They took away his maypole and his original rural life and promised him instead the Golden Age of Peace and Commerce inaugurated at the Crystal Palace. And now they are taking away the little that remains of his dignity as a householder and the head of a family, promising him instead Utopias which are called (appropriately enough) “Anticipations” or “News from Nowhere.” We come back, in fact, to the main feature which has already been mentioned. The past is communal: the future must be individualist. In the past are all the evils of democracy, variety and violence and doubt, but the future is pure despotism, for the future is pure caprice. Yesterday, I know I was a human fool, but to-morrow I can easily be the Superman.

The modern Englishman, however, is like a man who should be perpetually kept out, for one reason after another, from the house in which he had meant his married life to begin. This man (Jones let us call him) has always desired the divinely ordinary things; he has married for love, he has chosen or built a small house that fits like a coat; he is ready to be a great grandfather and a local god. And just as he is moving in, something goes wrong. Some tyranny, personal or political, suddenly debars him from the home; and he has to take his meals in the front garden. A passing philosopher (who is also, by a mere coincidence, the man who turned him out) pauses, and leaning elegantly on the railings, explains to him that he is now living that bold life upon the bounty of nature which will be the life of the sublime future. He finds life in the front garden more bold than bountiful, and has to move into mean lodgings in the next spring. The philosopher (who turned him out), happening to call at these lodgings, with the probable intention of raising the rent, stops to explain to him that he is now in the real life of mercantile endeavor; the economic struggle between him and the landlady is the only thing out of which, in the sublime future, the wealth of nations can come. He is defeated in the economic struggle, and goes to the workhouse. The philosopher who turned him out (happening at that very moment to be inspecting the workhouse) assures him that he is now at last in that golden republic which is the goal of mankind; he is in an equal, scientific, Socialistic commonwealth, owned by the State and ruled by public officers; in fact, the commonwealth of the sublime future.

Nevertheless, there are signs that the irrational Jones still dreams at night of this old idea of having an ordinary home. He asked for so little, and he has been offered so much. He has been offered bribes of worlds and systems; he has been offered Eden and Utopia and the New Jerusalem, and he only wanted a house; and that has been refused him.

Such an apologue is literally no exaggeration of the facts of English history. The rich did literally turn the poor out of the old guest house on to the road, briefly telling them that it was the road of progress. They did literally force them into factories and the modern wage-slavery, assuring them all the time that this was the only way to wealth and civilization. Just as they had dragged the rustic from the convent food and ale by saying that the streets of heaven were paved with gold, so now they dragged him from the village food and ale by telling him that the streets of London were paved with gold. As he entered the gloomy porch of Puritanism, so he entered the gloomy porch of Industrialism, being told that each of them was the gate of the future. Hitherto he has only gone from prison to prison, nay, into darkening prisons, for Calvinism opened one small window upon heaven. And now he is asked, in the same educated and authoritative tones, to enter another dark porch, at which he has to surrender, into unseen hands, his children, his small possessions and all the habits of his fathers.

Whether this last opening be in truth any more inviting than the old openings of Puritanism and Industrialism can be discussed later. But there can be little doubt, I think, that if some form of Collectivism is imposed upon England it will be imposed, as everything else has been, by an instructed political class upon a people partly apathetic and partly hypnotized. The aristocracy will be as ready to “administer” Collectivism as they were to administer Puritanism or Manchesterism; in some ways such a centralized political power is necessarily attractive to them. It will not be so hard as some innocent Socialists seem to suppose to induce the Honorable Tomnoddy to take over the milk supply as well as the stamp supply — at an increased salary. Mr. Bernard Shaw has remarked that rich men are better than poor men on parish councils because they are free from “financial timidity." Now, the English ruling class is quite free from financial timidity. The Duke of Sussex will be quite ready to be Administrator of Sussex at the same screw. Sir William Harcourt, that typical aristocrat, put it quite correctly. "We" (that is, the aristocracy) "are all Socialists now."

But this is not the essential note on which I desire to end. My main contention is that, whether necessary or not, both Industrialism and Collectivism have been accepted as necessities — not as naked ideals or desires. Nobody liked the Manchester School; it was endured as the only way of producing wealth. Nobody likes the Marxian school; it is endured as the only way of preventing poverty. Nobody's real heart is in the idea of preventing a free man from owning his own farm, or an old woman from cultivating her own garden, any more than anybody's real heart was in the heartless battle of the machines. The purpose of this chapter is sufficiently served in indicating that this proposal also is a pis aller, a desperate second best — like teetotalism. I do not propose to prove here that Socialism is a poison; it is enough if I maintain that it is a medicine and not a wine.

The idea of private property universal but private, the idea of families free but still families, of domesticity democratic but still domestic, of one man one house — this remains the real vision and magnet of mankind. The world may accept something more official and general, less human and intimate. But the world will be like a broken-hearted woman who makes a humdrum marriage because she may not make a happy one; Socialism may be the world's deliverance, but it is not the world's desire.

PART TWO. IMPERIALISM, OR THE MISTAKE ABOUT MAN

I. THE CHARM OF JINGOISM

I have cast about widely to find a title for this section; and I confess that the word “Imperialism” is a clumsy version of my meaning. But no other word came nearer; “Militarism” would have been even more misleading, and “The Superman” makes nonsense of any discussion that he enters. Perhaps, upon the whole, the word “Caesarism” would have been better; but I desire a popular word; and Imperialism (as the reader will perceive) does cover for the most part the men and theories that I mean to discuss.

This small confusion is increased, however, by the fact that I do also disbelieve in Imperialism in its popular sense, as a mode or theory of the patriotic sentiment of this country. But popular Imperialism in England has very little to do with the sort of Caesarean Imperialism I wish to sketch. I differ from the Colonial idealism of Rhodes’ and Kipling; but I do not think, as some of its opponents do, that it is an insolent creation of English harshness and rapacity. Imperialism, I think, is a fiction created, not by English hardness, but by English softness; nay, in a sense, even by English kindness.

The reasons for believing in Australia are mostly as sentimental as the most sentimental reasons for believing in heaven. New South Wales is quite literally regarded as a place where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest; that is, a paradise for uncles who have turned dishonest and for nephews who are born tired. British Columbia is in strict sense a fairyland, it is a world where a magic and irrational luck is supposed to attend the youngest sons. This strange optimism about the ends of the earth is an English weakness; but to show that it is not a coldness or a harshness it is quite sufficient to say that no one shared it more than that gigantic English sentimentalist — the great Charles Dickens. The end of “David Copperfield” is unreal not merely because it is an optimistic ending, but because it is an Imperialistic ending. The decorous British happiness planned out for David Copperfield and Agnes would be embarrassed by the perpetual presence of the hopeless tragedy of Emily, or the more hopeless farce of Micawber. Therefore, both Emily and Micawber are shipped off to a vague colony where changes come over them with no conceivable cause, except the climate. The tragic woman becomes contented and the comic man becomes responsible, solely as the result of a sea voyage and the first sight of a kangaroo.

To Imperialism in the light political sense, therefore, my only objection is that it is an illusion of comfort; that an Empire whose heart is failing should be specially proud of the extremities, is to me no more sublime a fact than that an old dandy whose brain is gone should still be proud of his legs. It consoles men for the evident ugliness and apathy of England with legends of fair youth and heroic strenuousness in distant continents and islands. A man can sit amid the squalor of Seven Dials and feel that life is innocent and godlike in the bush or on the veldt. Just so a man might sit in the squalor of Seven Dials and feel that life was innocent and godlike in Brixton and Surbiton. Brixton and Surbiton are “new”; they are expanding; they are “nearer to nature,” in the sense that they have eaten up nature mile by mile. The only objection is the objection of fact. The young men of Brixton are not young giants. The lovers of Surbiton are not all pagan poets, singing with the sweet energy of the spring. Nor are the people of the Colonies when you meet them young giants or pagan poets. They are mostly Cockneys who have lost their last music of real things by getting out of the sound of Bow Bells. Mr. Rudyard Kipling, a man of real though decadent genius, threw a theoretic glamour over them which is already fading. Mr. Kipling is, in a precise and rather startling sense, the exception that proves the rule. For he has imagination, of an oriental and cruel kind, but he has it, not because he grew up in a new country, but precisely because he grew up in the oldest country upon earth. He is rooted in a past — an Asiatic past. He might never have written “Kabul River” if he had been born in Melbourne.

I say frankly, therefore (lest there should be any air of evasion), that Imperialism in its common patriotic pretensions appears to me both weak and perilous. It is the attempt of a European country to create a kind of sham Europe which it can dominate, instead of the real Europe, which it can only share. It is a love of living with one’s inferiors. The notion of restoring the Roman Empire by oneself and for oneself is a dream that has haunted every Christian nation in a different shape and in almost every shape as a snare. The Spanish are a consistent and conservative people; therefore they embodied that attempt at Empire in long and lingering dynasties. The French are a violent people, and therefore they twice conquered that Empire by violence of arms. The English are above all a poetical and optimistic people; and therefore their Empire is something vague and yet sympathetic, something distant and yet dear. But this dream of theirs of being powerful in the uttermost places, though a native weakness, is still a weakness in them; much more of a weakness than gold was to Spain or glory to Napoleon. If ever we were in collision with our real brothers and rivals we should leave all this fancy out of account. We should no more dream of pitting Australian armies against German than of pitting Tasmanian sculpture against French. I have thus explained, lest anyone should accuse me of concealing an unpopular attitude, why I do not believe in Imperialism as commonly understood. I think it not merely an occasional wrong to other peoples, but a continuous feebleness, a running sore, in my own. But it is also true that I have dwelt on this Imperialism that is an amiable delusion partly in order to show how different it is from the deeper, more sinister and yet more persuasive thing that I have been forced to call Imperialism for the convenience of this chapter. In order to get to the root of this evil and quite un-English Imperialism we must cast back and begin anew with a more general discussion of the first needs of human intercourse.

II. WISDOM AND THE WEATHER

It is admitted, one may hope, that common things are never commonplace. Birth is covered with curtains precisely because it is a staggering and monstrous prodigy. Death and first love, though they happen to everybody, can stop one's heart with the very thought of them. But while this is granted, something further may be claimed. It is not merely true that these universal things are strange; it is moreover true that they are subtle. In the last analysis most common things will be found to be highly complicated. Some men of science do indeed get over the difficulty by dealing only with the easy part of it: thus, they will call first love the instinct of sex, and the awe of death the instinct of self-preservation. But this is only getting over the difficulty of describing peacock green by calling it blue. There is blue in it. That there is a strong physical element in both romance and the Memento Mori makes them if possible more baffling than if they had been wholly intellectual. No man could say exactly how much his sexuality was colored by a clean love of beauty, or by the mere boyish itch for irrevocable adventures, like running away to sea. No man could say how far his animal dread of the end was mixed up with mystical traditions touching morals and religion. It is exactly because these things are animal, but not quite animal, that the dance of all the difficulties begins. The materialists analyze the easy part, deny the hard part and go home to their tea.

It is complete error to suppose that because a thing is vulgar therefore it is not refined; that is, subtle and hard to define. A drawing-room song of my youth which began "In the gloaming, O, my darling," was vulgar enough as a song; but the connection between human passion and the twilight is none the less an exquisite and even inscrutable thing. Or to take another obvious instance: the jokes about a mother-in-law are scarcely delicate, but the problem of a mother-in-law is extremely delicate. A mother-in-law is subtle because she is a thing like the twilight. She is a mystical blend of two inconsistent things — law and a mother. The caricatures misrepresent her; but they arise out of a real human enigma. "Comic Cuts" deals with the difficulty wrongly, but it would need George Meredith at his best to deal with the difficulty rightly. The nearest statement of the problem perhaps is this: it is not that a mother-in-law must be nasty, but that she must be very nice.

But it is best perhaps to take in illustration some daily custom we have all heard despised as vulgar or trite. Take, for the sake of argument, the custom of talking about the weather. Stevenson calls it “the very nadir and scoff of good conversationalists.” Now there are very deep reasons for talking about the weather, reasons that are delicate as well as deep; they lie in layer upon layer of stratified sagacity. First of all it is a gesture of primeval worship. The sky must be invoked; and to begin everything with the weather is a sort of pagan way of beginning everything with prayer. Jones and Brown talk about the weather: but so do Milton and Shelley. Then it is an expression of that elementary idea in politeness — equality. For the very word politeness is only the Greek for citizenship. The word politeness is akin to the word policeman: a charming thought. Properly understood, the citizen should be more polite than the gentleman; perhaps the policeman should be the most courtly and elegant of the three. But all good manners must obviously begin with the sharing of something in a simple style. Two men should share an umbrella; if they have not got an umbrella, they should at least share the rain, with all its rich potentialities of wit and philosophy. “For He maketh His sun to shine....” This is the second element in the weather; its recognition of human equality in that we all have our hats under the dark blue spangled umbrella of the universe. Arising out of this is the third wholesome strain in the custom; I mean that it begins with the body and with our inevitable bodily brotherhood. All true friendliness begins with fire and food and drink and the recognition of rain or frost. Those who will not begin at the bodily end of things are already prigs and may soon be Christian Scientists. Each human soul has in a sense to enact for itself the gigantic humility of the Incarnation. Every man must descend into the flesh to meet mankind.

Briefly, in the mere observation “a fine day” there is the whole great human idea of comradeship. Now, pure comradeship is another of those broad and yet bewildering things. We all enjoy it; yet when we come to talk about it we almost always talk nonsense, chiefly because we suppose it to be a simpler affair than it is. It is simple to conduct; but it is by no means simple to analyze. Comradeship is at the most only one half of human life; the other half is Love, a thing so different that one might fancy it had been made for another universe. And I do not mean mere sex love; any kind of concentrated passion, maternal love, or even the fiercer kinds of friendship are in their nature alien to pure comradeship. Both sides are essential to life;

and both are known in differing degrees to everybody of every age or sex. But very broadly speaking it may still be said that women stand for the dignity of love and men for the dignity of comradeship. I mean that the institution would hardly be expected if the males of the tribe did not mount guard over it. The affections in which women excel have so much more authority and intensity that pure comradeship would be washed away if it were not rallied and guarded in clubs, corps, colleges, banquets and regiments. Most of us have heard the voice in which the hostess tells her husband not to sit too long over the cigars. It is the dreadful voice of Love, seeking to destroy Comradeship.

All true comradeship has in it those three elements which I have remarked in the ordinary exclamation about the weather. First, it has a sort of broad philosophy like the common sky, emphasizing that we are all under the same cosmic conditions. We are all in the same boat, the "winged rock" of Mr. Herbert Trench. Secondly, it recognizes this bond as the essential one; for comradeship is simply humanity seen in that one aspect in which men are really equal. The old writers were entirely wise when they talked of the equality of men; but they were also very wise in not mentioning women. Women are always authoritarian; they are always above or below; that is why marriage is a sort of poetical see-saw. There are only three things in the world that women do not understand; and they are Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. But men (a class little understood in the modern world) find these things the breath of their nostrils; and our most learned ladies will not even begin to understand them until they make allowance for this kind of cool camaraderie. Lastly, it contains the third quality of the weather, the insistence upon the body and its indispensable satisfaction. No one has even begun to understand comradeship who does not accept with it a certain hearty eagerness in eating, drinking, or smoking, an uproarious materialism which to many women appears only hoggish. You may call the thing an orgy or a sacrament; it is certainly an essential. It is at root a resistance to the superciliousness of the individual. Nay, its very swaggering and howling are humble. In the heart of its rowdiness there is a sort of mad modesty; a desire to melt the separate soul into the mass of unpretentious masculinity. It is a clamorous confession of the weakness of all flesh. No man must be superior to the things that are common to men. This sort of equality must be bodily and gross and comic. Not only are we all in the same boat, but we are all seasick.

The word comradeship just now promises to become as fatuous as the word “affinity.” There are clubs of a Socialist sort where all the members, men and women, call each other “Comrade.” I have no serious emotions, hostile or otherwise, about this particular habit: at the worst it is conventionality, and at the best flirtation. I am convinced here only to point out a rational principle. If you choose to lump all flowers together, lilies and dahlias and tulips and chrysanthemums and call them all daisies, you will find that you have spoiled the very fine word daisy. If you choose to call every human attachment comradeship, if you include under that name the respect of a youth for a venerable prophetess, the interest of a man in a beautiful woman who baffles him, the pleasure of a philosophical old fogy in a girl who is impudent and innocent, the end of the meanest quarrel or the beginning of the most mountainous love; if you are going to call all these comradeship, you will gain nothing, you will only lose a word. Daisies are obvious and universal and open; but they are only one kind of flower. Comradeship is obvious and universal and open; but it is only one kind of affection; it has characteristics that would destroy any other kind. Anyone who has known true comradeship in a club or in a regiment, knows that it is impersonal. There is a pedantic phrase used in debating clubs which is strictly true to the masculine emotion; they call it “speaking to the question.” Women speak to each other; men speak to the subject they are speaking about. Many an honest man has sat in a ring of his five best friends under heaven and forgotten who was in the room while he explained some system. This is not peculiar to intellectual men; men are all theoretical, whether they are talking about God or about golf. Men are all impersonal; that is to say, republican. No one remembers after a really good talk who has said the good things. Every man speaks to a visionary multitude; a mystical cloud, that is called the club.

It is obvious that this cool and careless quality which is essential to the collective affection of males involves disadvantages and dangers. It leads to spitting; it leads to coarse speech; it must lead to these things so long as it is honorable; comradeship must be in some degree ugly. The moment beauty is mentioned in male friendship, the nostrils are stopped with the smell of abominable things. Friendship must be physically dirty if it is to be morally clean. It must be in its shirt sleeves. The chaos of habits that always goes with males when left entirely to themselves has only one honorable cure; and that is the strict discipline of a monastery. Anyone who has seen our unhappy young idealists in East End Settlements losing their collars in the wash and living on tinned salmon will fully understand why it was decided by the wisdom of St. Bernard or St. Benedict, that if men were to live without women, they must not live without rules. Something of the same sort of artificial exactitude, of course, is obtained in an army; and an army also has to be in many ways monastic; only that it has celibacy without chastity. But these things do not apply to normal married men. These have a quite sufficient restraint on their instinctive anarchy in the savage common-sense of the other sex. There is only one very timid sort of man that is not afraid of women.

III. THE COMMON VISION

Now this masculine love of an open and level camaraderie is the life within all democracies and attempts to govern by debate; without it the republic would be a dead formula. Even as it is, of course, the spirit of democracy frequently differs widely from the letter, and a pothouse is often a better test than a Parliament. Democracy in its human sense is not arbitrament by the majority; it is not even arbitrament by everybody. It can be more nearly defined as arbitrament by anybody. I mean that it rests on that club habit of taking a total stranger for granted, of assuming certain things to be inevitably common to yourself and him. Only the things that anybody may be presumed to hold have the full authority of democracy. Look out of the window and notice the first man who walks by. The Liberals may have swept England with an over-whelming majority; but you would not stake a button that the man is a Liberal. The Bible may be read in all schools and respected in all law courts; but you would not bet a straw that he believes in the Bible. But you would bet your week's wages, let us say, that he believes in wearing clothes. You would bet that he believes that physical courage is a fine thing, or that parents have authority over children. Of course, he might be the millionth man who does not believe these things; if it comes to that, he might be the Bearded Lady dressed up as a man. But these prodigies are quite a different thing from any mere calculation of numbers. People who hold these views are not a minority, but a monstrosity. But of these universal dogmas that have full democratic authority the only test is this test of anybody. What you would observe before any newcomer in a tavern — that is the real English law. The first man you see from the window, he is the King of England.

The decay of taverns, which is but a part of the general decay of democracy, has undoubtedly weakened this masculine spirit of equality. I remember that a roomful of Socialists literally laughed when I told them that there were no two nobler words in all poetry than Public House. They thought it was a joke. Why they should think it a joke, since they want to make all houses public houses, I cannot imagine. But if anyone wishes to see the real rowdy egalitarianism which is necessary (to males, at least) he can find it as well as anywhere in the great old tavern disputes which come down to us in such books as Boswell's Johnson. It is worth while to mention that one name especially because the modern world in its morbidity has done it a strange injustice. The demeanor of Johnson, it is said, was “harsh and despotic.” It was occasionally harsh, but it was never despotic. Johnson was not in the least a despot; Johnson was a demagogue, he shouted against a shouting crowd. The very fact that he wrangled with other people is proof that other people were allowed to wrangle with him. His very brutality was based on the idea of an equal scrimmage, like that of football. It is strictly true that he bawled and banged the table because he was a modest man. He was honestly afraid of being overwhelmed or even overlooked. Addison had exquisite manners and was the king of his company; he was polite to everybody; but superior to everybody; therefore he has been handed down forever in the immortal insult of Pope —

“Like Cato, give his little Senate laws And sit attentive to his own applause.”

Johnson, so far from being king of his company, was a sort of Irish Member in his own Parliament. Addison was a courteous superior and was hated. Johnson was an insolent equal and therefore was loved by all who knew him, and handed down in a marvellous book, which is one of the mere miracles of love.

This doctrine of equality is essential to conversation; so much may be admitted by anyone who knows what conversation is. Once arguing at a table in a tavern the most famous man on earth would wish to be obscure, so that his brilliant remarks might blaze like the stars on the background of his obscurity. To anything worth calling a man nothing can be conceived more cold or cheerless than to be king of your company. But it may be said that in masculine sports and games, other than the great game of debate, there is definite emulation and eclipse. There is indeed emulation, but this is only an ardent sort of equality. Games are competitive, because that is the only way of making them exciting. But if anyone doubts that men must forever return to the ideal of equality, it is only necessary to answer that there is such a thing as a handicap. If men exulted in mere superiority, they would seek to see how far such superiority could go; they would be glad when one strong runner came in miles ahead of all the rest. But what men like is not the triumph of superiors, but the struggle of equals; and, therefore, they introduce even into their competitive sports an artificial equality. It is sad to think how few of those who arrange our sporting handicaps can be supposed with any probability to realize that they are abstract and even severe republicans.

No; the real objection to equality and self-rule has nothing to do with any of these free and festive aspects of mankind; all men are democrats when they are happy. The philosophic opponent of democracy would substantially sum up his position by saying that it “will not work.” Before going further, I will register in passing a protest against the assumption that working is the one test of humanity. Heaven does not work; it plays. Men are most themselves when they are free; and if I find that men are snobs in their work but democrats on their holidays, I shall take the liberty to believe their holidays. But it is this question of work which really perplexes the question of equality; and it is with that that we must now deal. Perhaps the truth can be put most pointedly thus: that democracy has one real enemy, and that is civilization. Those utilitarian miracles which science has made are anti-democratic, not so much in their perversion, or even in their practical result, as in their primary shape and purpose. The Frame-Breaking Rioters were right; not perhaps in thinking that machines would make fewer men workmen; but certainly in thinking that machines would make fewer men masters. More wheels do mean fewer handles; fewer handles do mean fewer hands. The machinery of science must be individualistic and isolated. A mob can shout round a palace; but a mob cannot shout down a telephone. The specialist appears and democracy is half spoiled at a stroke.

IV. THE INSANE NECESSITY

The common conception among the dregs of Darwinian culture is that men have slowly worked their way out of inequality into a state of comparative equality. The truth is, I fancy, almost exactly the opposite. All men have normally and naturally begun with the idea of equality; they have only abandoned it late and reluctantly, and always for some material reason of detail. They have never naturally felt that one class of men was superior to another; they have always been driven to assume it through certain practical limitations of space and time.

For example, there is one element which must always tend to oligarchy — or rather to despotism; I mean the element of hurry. If the house has caught fire a man must ring up the fire engines; a committee cannot ring them up. If a camp is surprised by night somebody must give the order to fire; there is no time to vote it. It is solely a question of the physical limitations of time and space; not at all of any mental limitations in the mass of men commanded. If all the people in the house were men of destiny it would still be better that they should not all talk into the telephone at once; nay, it would be better that the silliest man of all should speak uninterrupted. If an army actually consisted of nothing but Hanibals and Napoleons, it would still be better in the case of a surprise that they should not all give orders together. Nay, it would be better if the stupidest of them all gave the orders. Thus, we see that merely military subordination, so far from resting on the inequality of men, actually rests on the equality of men. Discipline does not involve the Carlylean notion that somebody is always right when everybody is wrong, and that we must discover and crown that somebody. On the contrary, discipline means that in certain frightfully rapid circumstances, one can trust anybody so long as he is not everybody. The military spirit does not mean (as Carlyle fancied) obeying the strongest and wisest man. On the contrary, the military spirit means, if anything, obeying the weakest and stupidest man, obeying him merely because he is a man, and not a thousand men. Submission to a weak man is discipline. Submission to a strong man is only servility.

Now it can be easily shown that the thing we call aristocracy in Europe is not in its origin and spirit an aristocracy at all. It is not a system of spiritual degrees and distinctions like, for example, the caste system of

India, or even like the old Greek distinction between free men and slaves. It is simply the remains of a military organization, framed partly to sustain the sinking Roman Empire, partly to break and avenge the awful onslaught of Islam. The word Duke simply means Colonel, just as the word Emperor simply means Commander-in-Chief. The whole story is told in the single title of Counts of the Holy Roman Empire, which merely means officers in the European army against the contemporary Yellow Peril. Now in an army nobody ever dreams of supposing that difference of rank represents a difference of moral reality. Nobody ever says about a regiment, “Your Major is very humorous and energetic; your Colonel, of course, must be even more humorous and yet more energetic.” No one ever says, in reporting a mess-room conversation, “Lieutenant Jones was very witty, but was naturally inferior to Captain Smith.” The essence of an army is the idea of official inequality, founded on unofficial equality. The Colonel is not obeyed because he is the best man, but because he is the Colonel. Such was probably the spirit of the system of dukes and counts when it first arose out of the military spirit and military necessities of Rome. With the decline of those necessities it has gradually ceased to have meaning as a military organization, and become honeycombed with unclean plutocracy. Even now it is not a spiritual aristocracy — it is not so bad as all that. It is simply an army without an enemy — billeted upon the people.

Man, therefore, has a specialist as well as comrade-like aspect; and the case of militarism is not the only case of such specialist submission. The tinker and tailor, as well as the soldier and sailor, require a certain rigidity of rapidity of action: at least, if the tinker is not organized that is largely why he does not tink on any large scale. The tinker and tailor often represent the two nomadic races in Europe: the Gipsy and the Jew; but the Jew alone has influence because he alone accepts some sort of discipline. Man, we say, has two sides, the specialist side where he must have subordination, and the social side where he must have equality. There is a truth in the saying that ten tailors go to make a man; but we must remember also that ten Poets Laureate or ten Astronomers Royal go to make a man, too. Ten million tradesmen go to make Man himself; but humanity consists of tradesmen when they are not talking shop. Now the peculiar peril of our time, which I call for argument’s sake Imperialism or Caesarism, is the complete eclipse of comradeship and equality by specialism and domination.

There are only two kinds of social structure conceivable — personal government and impersonal government. If my anarchic friends will not have rules — they will have rulers. Preferring personal government, with its tact and flexibility, is called Royalism. Preferring impersonal government, with its dogmas and definitions, is called Republicanism. Objecting broadmindedly both to kings and creeds is called Bosh; at least, I know no more philosophic word for it. You can be guided by the shrewdness or presence of mind of one ruler, or by the equality and ascertained justice of one rule; but you must have one or the other, or you are not a nation, but a nasty mess. Now men in their aspect of equality and debate adore the idea of rules; they develop and complicate them greatly to excess. A man finds far more regulations and definitions in his club, where there are rules, than in his home, where there is a ruler. A deliberate assembly, the House of Commons, for instance, carries this mummery to the point of a methodical madness. The whole system is stiff with rigid unreason; like the Royal Court in Lewis Carroll. You would think the Speaker would speak; therefore he is mostly silent. You would think a man would take off his hat to stop and put it on to go away; therefore he takes off his hat to walk out and puts it on to stop in. Names are forbidden, and a man must call his own father "my right honorable friend the member for West Birmingham." These are, perhaps, fantasies of decay: but fundamentally they answer a masculine appetite. Men feel that rules, even if irrational, are universal; men feel that law is equal, even when it is not equitable. There is a wild fairness in the thing — as there is in tossing up.

Again, it is gravely unfortunate that when critics do attack such cases as the Commons it is always on the points (perhaps the few points) where the Commons are right. They denounce the House as the Talking-Shop, and complain that it wastes time in wordy mazes. Now this is just one respect in which the Commons are actually like the Common People. If they love leisure and long debate, it is because all men love it; that they really represent England. There the Parliament does approach to the virile virtues of the pothouse.

The real truth is that adumbrated in the introductory section when we spoke of the sense of home and property, as now we speak of the sense of counsel and community. All men do naturally love the idea of leisure, laughter, loud and equal argument; but there stands a specter in our hall. We are conscious of the towering modern challenge that is called specialism or cut-throat competition — Business. Business will have nothing to do with leisure; business will have no truck with comradeship; business will pretend to no patience with all the legal fictions and fantastic handicaps by which comradeship protects its egalitarian ideal. The modern millionaire, when engaged in the agreeable and typical task of sacking his own father, will certainly not refer to him as the right honorable clerk from the Laburnum Road, Brixton. Therefore there has arisen in modern life a literary fashion devoting itself to the romance of business, to great demigods of greed and to fairyland of finance. This popular philosophy is utterly despotic and anti-democratic; this fashion is the flower of that Caesarism against which I am concerned to protest. The ideal millionaire is strong in the possession of a brain of steel. The fact that the real millionaire is rather more often strong in the possession of a head of wood, does not alter the spirit and trend of the idolatry. The essential argument is "Specialists must be despots; men must be specialists. You cannot have equality in a soap factory; so you cannot have it anywhere. You cannot have comradeship in a wheat corner; so you cannot have it at all. We must have commercial civilization; therefore we must destroy democracy." I know that plutocrats have seldom sufficient fancy to soar to such examples as soap or wheat. They generally confine themselves, with fine freshness of mind, to a comparison between the state and a ship. One anti-democratic writer remarked that he would not like to sail in a vessel in which the cabin-boy had an equal vote with the captain. It might easily be urged in answer that many a ship (the Victoria, for instance) was sunk because an admiral gave an order which a cabin-boy could see was wrong. But this is a debating reply; the essential fallacy is both deeper and simpler. The elementary fact is that we were all born in a state; we were not all born on a ship; like some of our great British bankers. A ship still remains a specialist experiment, like a diving-bell or a flying ship: in such peculiar perils the need for promptitude constitutes the need for autocracy. But we live and die in the vessel of the state; and if we cannot find freedom camaraderie and the popular element in the state, we cannot find it at all. And the modern doctrine of commercial despotism means that we shall not find it at all. Our specialist trades in their highly civilized state cannot (it says) be run without the whole brutal business of bossing and sacking, "too old at forty" and all the rest of the filth. And they must be run, and therefore we call on Caesar. Nobody but the Superman could descend to do such dirty work.

Now (to reiterate my title) this is what is wrong. This is the huge modern heresy of altering the human soul to fit its conditions, instead of altering human conditions to fit the human soul. If soap boiling is really inconsistent with brotherhood, so much the worst for soap-boiling, not for brotherhood. If civilization really cannot get on with democracy, so much the worse for civilization, not for democracy. Certainly, it would be far better to go back to village communes, if they really are communes. Certainly, it would be better to do without soap rather than to do without society. Certainly, we would sacrifice all our wires, wheels, systems, specialties, physical science and frenzied finance for one half-hour of happiness such as has often come to us with comrades in a common tavern. I do not say the sacrifice will be necessary; I only say it will be easy.

PART THREE. FEMINISM, OR THE MISTAKE ABOUT WOMAN

I. THE UNMILITARY SUFFRAGETTE

It will be better to adopt in this chapter the same process that appeared a piece of mental justice in the last. My general opinions on the feminine question are such as many suffragists would warmly approve; and it would be easy to state them without any open reference to the current controversy. But just as it seemed more decent to say first that I was not in favor of Imperialism even in its practical and popular sense, so it seems more decent to say the same of Female Suffrage, in its practical and popular sense. In other words, it is only fair to state, however hurriedly, the superficial objection to the Suffragettes before we go on to the really subtle questions behind the Suffrage.

Well, to get this honest but unpleasant business over, the objection to the Suffragettes is not that they are Militant Suffragettes. On the contrary, it is that they are not militant enough. A revolution is a military thing; it has all the military virtues; one of which is that it comes to an end. Two parties fight with deadly weapons, but under certain rules of arbitrary honor; the party that wins becomes the government and proceeds to govern. The aim of civil war, like the aim of all war, is peace. Now the Suffragettes cannot raise civil war in this soldierly and decisive sense; first, because they are women; and, secondly, because they are very few women. But they can raise something else; which is altogether another pair of shoes. They do not create revolution; what they do create is anarchy; and the difference between these is not a question of violence, but a question of fruitfulness and finality. Revolution of its nature produces government; anarchy only produces more anarchy. Men may have what opinions they please about the beheading of King Charles or King Louis, but they cannot deny that Bradshaw and Cromwell ruled, that Carnot and Napoleon governed. Someone conquered; something occurred. You can only knock off the King’s head once. But you can knock off the King’s hat any number of times. Destruction is finite, obstruction is infinite: so long as rebellion takes the form of mere disorder (instead of an attempt to enforce a new order) there is no logical end to it; it can feed on itself and renew itself forever. If Napoleon had not wanted to be a Consul, but only wanted to be a nuisance, he could, possibly, have prevented any government arising successfully out of the Revolution. But such a proceeding would not have deserved the dignified name of rebellion.

It is exactly this unmilitant quality in the Suffragettes that makes their superficial problem. The problem is that their action has none of the advantages of ultimate violence; it does not afford a test. War is a dreadful thing; but it does prove two points sharply and unanswerably — numbers, and an unnatural valor. One does discover the two urgent matters; how many rebels there are alive, and how many are ready to be dead. But a tiny minority, even an interested minority, may maintain mere disorder forever. There is also, of course, in the case of these women, the further falsity that is introduced by their sex. It is false to state the matter as a mere brutal question of strength. If his muscles give a man a vote, then his horse ought to have two votes and his elephant five votes. The truth is more subtle than that; it is that bodily outbreak is a man’s instinctive weapon, like the hoofs to the horse or the tusks to the elephant. All riot is a threat of war; but the woman is brandishing a weapon she can never use. There are many weapons that she could and does use. If (for example) all the women nagged for a vote they would get it in a month. But there again, one must remember, it would be necessary to get all the women to nag. And that brings us to the end of the political surface of the matter. The working objection to the Suffragette philosophy is simply that overmastering millions of women do not agree with it. I am aware that some maintain that women ought to have votes whether the majority wants them or not; but this is surely a strange and childish case of setting up formal democracy to the destruction of actual democracy. What should the mass of women decide if they do not decide their general place in the State? These people practically say that females may vote about everything except about Female Suffrage.

But having again cleared my conscience of my merely political and possibly unpopular opinion, I will again cast back and try to treat the matter in a slower and more sympathetic style; attempt to trace the real roots of woman’s position in the western state, and the causes of our existing traditions or perhaps prejudices upon the point. And for this purpose it is again necessary to travel far from the modern topic, the mere Suffragette of today, and to go back to subjects which, though much more old, are, I think, considerably more fresh.

II. THE UNIVERSAL STICK

Cast your eye round the room in which you sit, and select some three or four things that have been with man almost since his beginning; which at least we hear of early in the centuries and often among the tribes. Let me suppose that you see a knife on the table, a stick in the corner, or a fire on the hearth. About each of these you will notice one speciality; that not one of them is special. Each of these ancestral things is a universal thing; made to supply many different needs; and while tottering pedants nose about to find the cause and origin of some old custom, the truth is that it had fifty causes or a hundred origins. The knife is meant to cut wood, to cut cheese, to cut pencils, to cut throats; for a myriad ingenious or innocent human objects. The stick is meant partly to hold a man up, partly to knock a man down; partly to point with like a finger-post, partly to balance with like a balancing pole, partly to trifle with like a cigarette, partly to kill with like a club of a giant; it is a crutch and a cudgel; an elongated finger and an extra leg. The case is the same, of course, with the fire; about which the strangest modern views have arisen. A queer fancy seems to be current that a fire exists to warm people. It exists to warm people, to light their darkness, to raise their spirits, to toast their muffins, to air their rooms, to cook their chestnuts, to tell stories to their children, to make checkered shadows on their walls, to boil their hurried kettles, and to be the red heart of a man’s house and that hearth for which, as the great heathens said, a man should die.

Now it is the great mark of our modernity that people are always proposing substitutes for these old things; and these substitutes always answer one purpose where the old thing answered ten. The modern man will wave a cigarette instead of a stick; he will cut his pencil with a little screwing pencil-sharpener instead of a knife; and he will even boldly offer to be warmed by hot water pipes instead of a fire. I have my doubts about pencil-sharpeners even for sharpening pencils; and about hot water pipes even for heat. But when we think of all those other requirements that these institutions answered, there opens before us the whole horrible harlequinade of our civilization. We see as in a vision a world where a man tries to cut his throat with a pencil-sharpener; where a man must learn single-stick with a cigarette; where a man must try to toast muffins at electric lamps, and see red and golden castles in the surface of hot water pipes.

The principle of which I speak can be seen everywhere in a comparison between the ancient and universal things and the modern and specialist things. The object of a theodolite is to lie level; the object of a stick is to swing loose at any angle; to whirl like the very wheel of liberty. The object of a lancet is to lance; when used for slashing, gashing, ripping, lopping off heads and limbs, it is a disappointing instrument. The object of an electric light is merely to light (a despicable modesty); and the object of an asbestos stove... I wonder what is the object of an asbestos stove? If a man found a coil of rope in a desert he could at least think of all the things that can be done with a coil of rope; and some of them might even be practical. He could tow a boat or lasso a horse. He could play cat’s-cradle, or pick oakum. He could construct a rope-ladder for an eloping heiress, or cord her boxes for a travelling maiden aunt. He could learn to tie a bow, or he could hang himself. Far otherwise with the unfortunate traveller who should find a telephone in the desert. You can telephone with a telephone; you cannot do anything else with it. And though this is one of the wildest joys of life, it falls by one degree from its full delirium when there is nobody to answer you. The contention is, in brief, that you must pull up a hundred roots, and not one, before you uproot any of these hoary and simple expedients. It is only with great difficulty that a modern scientific sociologist can be got to see that any old method has a leg to stand on. But almost every old method has four or five legs to stand on. Almost all the old institutions are quadrupeds; and some of them are centipedes.

Consider these cases, old and new, and you will observe the operation of a general tendency. Everywhere there was one big thing that served six purposes; everywhere now there are six small things; or, rather (and there is the trouble), there are just five and a half. Nevertheless, we will not say that this separation and specialism is entirely useless or inexcusable. I have often thanked God for the telephone; I may any day thank God for the lancet; and there is none of these brilliant and narrow inventions (except, of course, the asbestos stove) which might not be at some moment necessary and lovely. But I do not think the most austere upholder of specialism will deny that there is in these old, many-sided institutions an element of unity and universality which may well be preserved in its due proportion and place. Spiritually, at least, it will be admitted that some all-round balance is needed to equalize the extravagance of experts. It would not be difficult to carry the parable of the knife and stick into higher regions. Religion, the immortal maiden, has been a maid-of-all-work as well as a servant of mankind. She provided men at once with the theoretic laws of an unalterable cosmos and also with the practical rules of the rapid and thrilling game of morality. She taught logic to the student and told fairy tales to the children; it was her business to confront the nameless gods whose fears are on all flesh, and also to see the streets were spotted with silver and scarlet, that there was a day for wearing ribbons or an hour for ringing bells. The large uses of religion have been broken up into lesser specialities, just as the uses of the hearth have been broken up into hot water pipes and electric bulbs. The romance of ritual and colored emblem has been taken over by that narrowest of all trades, modern art (the sort called art for art's sake), and men are in modern practice informed that they may use all symbols so long as they mean nothing by them. The romance of conscience has been dried up into the science of ethics; which may well be called decency for decency's sake, decency unborn of cosmic energies and barren of artistic flower. The cry to the dim gods, cut off from ethics and cosmology, has become mere Psychical Research. Everything has been sundered from everything else, and everything has grown cold. Soon we shall hear of specialists dividing the tune from the words of a song, on the ground that they spoil each other; and I did once meet a man who openly advocated the separation of almonds and raisins. This world is all one wild divorce court; nevertheless, there are many who still hear in their souls the thunder of authority of human habit; those whom Man hath joined let no man sunder.

This book must avoid religion, but there must (I say) be many, religious and irreligious, who will concede that this power of answering many purposes was a sort of strength which should not wholly die out of our lives. As a part of personal character, even the moderns will agree that many-sidedness is a merit and a merit that may easily be overlooked. This balance and universality has been the vision of many groups of men in many ages. It was the Liberal Education of Aristotle; the jack-of-all-trades artistry of Leonardo da Vinci and his friends; the august amateurishness of the Cavalier Person of Quality like Sir William Temple or the great Earl of Dorset. It has appeared in literature in our time in the most erratic and opposite shapes, set to almost inaudible music by Walter Pater and enunciated through a foghorn by Walt Whitman. But the great mass of men have always been unable to achieve this literal universality, because of the nature of their work in the world. Not, let it be noted, because of the existence of their work. Leonardo da Vinci must have worked pretty hard; on the other hand, many a government office clerk, village constable or elusive plumber may do (to all human appearance) no work at all, and yet show no signs of the Aristotelian universalism. What makes it difficult for the average man to be a universalist is that the average man has to be a specialist; he has not only to learn one trade, but to learn it so well as to uphold him in a more or less ruthless society. This is generally true of males from the first hunter to the last electrical engineer; each has not merely to act, but to excel. Nimrod has not only to be a mighty hunter before the Lord, but also a mighty hunter before the other hunters. The electrical engineer has to be a very electrical engineer, or he is outstripped by engineers yet more electrical. Those very miracles of the human mind on which the modern world prides itself, and rightly in the main, would be impossible without a certain concentration which disturbs the pure balance of reason more than does religious bigotry. No creed can be so limiting as that awful adjuration that the cobbler must not go beyond his last. So the largest and wildest shots of our world are but in one direction and with a defined trajectory: the gunner cannot go beyond his shot, and his shot so often falls short; the astronomer cannot go beyond his telescope and his telescope goes such a little way. All these are like men who have stood on the high peak of a mountain and seen the horizon like a single ring and who then descend down different paths towards different towns, traveling slow or fast. It is right; there must be people traveling to different towns; there must be specialists; but shall no one behold the horizon? Shall all mankind be specialist surgeons or peculiar plumbers; shall all humanity be monomaniac? Tradition has decided that only half of humanity shall be monomaniac. It has decided that in every home there shall be a tradesman and a Jack-of-all-trades. But it has also decided, among other things, that the Jack-of-all-trades shall be a Jill-of-all-trades. It has decided, rightly or wrongly, that this specialism and this universalism shall be divided between the sexes. Cleverness shall be left for men and wisdom for women. For cleverness kills wisdom; that is one of the few sad and certain things.

But for women this ideal of comprehensive capacity (or common-sense) must long ago have been washed away. It must have melted in the frightful furnaces of ambition and eager technicality. A man must be partly a one-idead man, because he is a one-weaponed man — and he is flung naked into the fight. The world's demand comes to him direct; to his wife indirectly. In short, he must (as the books on Success say) give "his best"; and what a small part of a man "his best" is! His second and third best are often much better. If he is the first violin he must fiddle for life; he must not remember that he is a fine fourth bagpipe, a fair fifteenth billiard-cue, a foil, a fountain pen, a hand at whist, a gun, and an image of God.

III. THE EMANCIPATION OF DOMESTICITY

And it should be remarked in passing that this force upon a man to develop one feature has nothing to do with what is commonly called our competitive system, but would equally exist under any rationally conceivable kind of Collectivism. Unless the Socialists are frankly ready for a fall in the standard of violins, telescopes and electric lights, they must somehow create a moral demand on the individual that he shall keep up his present concentration on these things. It was only by men being in some degree specialist that there ever were any telescopes; they must certainly be in some degree specialist in order to keep them going. It is not by making a man a State wage-earner that you can prevent him thinking principally about the very difficult way he earns his wages. There is only one way to preserve in the world that high levity and that more leisurely outlook which fulfils the old vision of universalism. That is, to permit the existence of a partly protected half of humanity; a half which the harassing industrial demand troubles indeed, but only troubles indirectly. In other words, there must be in every center of humanity one human being upon a larger plan; one who does not “give her best,” but gives her all.

Our old analogy of the fire remains the most workable one. The fire need not blaze like electricity nor boil like boiling water; its point is that it blazes more than water and warms more than light. The wife is like the fire, or to put things in their proper proportion, the fire is like the wife. Like the fire, the woman is expected to cook: not to excel in cooking, but to cook; to cook better than her husband who is earning the coke by lecturing on botany or breaking stones. Like the fire, the woman is expected to tell tales to the children, not original and artistic tales, but tales — better tales than would probably be told by a first-class cook. Like the fire, the woman is expected to illuminate and ventilate, not by the most startling revelations or the wildest winds of thought, but better than a man can do it after breaking stones or lecturing. But she cannot be expected to endure anything like this universal duty if she is also to endure the direct cruelty of competitive or bureaucratic toil. Woman must be a cook, but not a competitive cook; a school mistress, but not a competitive schoolmistress; a house-decorator but not a competitive house-decorator; a dressmaker, but not a competitive dressmaker. She should have not one trade but twenty hobbies; she, unlike the man, may develop all her second bests. This is what has been really aimed at from the first in what is called the seclusion, or even the oppression, of women. Women were not kept at home in order to keep them narrow; on the contrary, they were kept at home in order to keep them broad. The world outside the home was one mass of narrowness, a maze of cramped paths, a madhouse of monomaniacs. It was only by partly limiting and protecting the woman that she was enabled to play at five or six professions and so come almost as near to God as the child when he plays at a hundred trades. But the woman's professions, unlike the child's, were all truly and almost terribly fruitful; so tragically real that nothing but her universality and balance prevented them being merely morbid. This is the substance of the contention I offer about the historic female position. I do not deny that women have been wronged and even tortured; but I doubt if they were ever tortured so much as they are tortured now by the absurd modern attempt to make them domestic empresses and competitive clerks at the same time. I do not deny that even under the old tradition women had a harder time than men; that is why we take off our hats. I do not deny that all these various female functions were exasperating; but I say that there was some aim and meaning in keeping them various. I do not pause even to deny that woman was a servant; but at least she was a general servant.

The shortest way of summarizing the position is to say that woman stands for the idea of Sanity; that intellectual home to which the mind must return after every excursion on extravagance. The mind that finds its way to wild places is the poet's; but the mind that never finds its way back is the lunatic's. There must in every machine be a part that moves and a part that stands still; there must be in everything that changes a part that is unchangeable. And many of the phenomena which moderns hastily condemn are really parts of this position of the woman as the center and pillar of health. Much of what is called her subservience, and even her pliability, is merely the subservience and pliability of a universal remedy; she varies as medicines vary, with the disease. She has to be an optimist to the morbid husband, a salutary pessimist to the happy-go-lucky husband. She has to prevent the Quixote from being put upon, and the bully from putting upon others. The French King wrote —

> "Toujours femme varie Bien fol qui s'y fie,"

but the truth is that woman always varies, and that is exactly why we always trust her. To correct every adventure and extravagance with its antidote in common-sense is not (as the moderns seem to think) to be in the position of a spy or a slave. It is to be in the position of Aristotle or (at the lowest) Herbert Spencer, to be a universal morality, a complete system of thought. The slave flatters; the complete moralist rebukes. It is, in short, to be a Trimmer in the true sense of that honorable term; which for some reason or other is always used in a sense exactly opposite to its own. It seems really to be supposed that a Trimmer means a cowardly person who always goes over to the stronger side. It really means a highly chivalrous person who always goes over to the weaker side; like one who trims a boat by sitting where there are few people seated. Woman is a trimmer; and it is a generous, dangerous and romantic trade.

The final fact which fixes this is a sufficiently plain one. Supposing it to be conceded that humanity has acted at least not unnaturally in dividing itself into two halves, respectively typifying the ideals of special talent and of general sanity (since they are genuinely difficult to combine completely in one mind), it is not difficult to see why the line of cleavage has followed the line of sex, or why the female became the emblem of the universal and the male of the special and superior. Two gigantic facts of nature fixed it thus: first, that the woman who frequently fulfilled her functions literally could not be specially prominent in experiment and adventure; and second, that the same natural operation surrounded her with very young children, who require to be taught not so much anything as everything. Babies need not to be taught a trade, but to be introduced to a world. To put the matter shortly, woman is generally shut up in a house with a human being at the time when he asks all the questions that there are, and some that there aren’t. It would be odd if she retained any of the narrowness of a specialist. Now if anyone says that this duty of general enlightenment (even when freed from modern rules and hours, and exercised more spontaneously by a more protected person) is in itself too exacting and oppressive, I can understand the view. I can only answer that our race has thought it worth while to cast this burden on women in order to keep common-sense in the world. But when people begin to talk about this domestic duty as not merely difficult but trivial and dreary, I simply give up the question. For I cannot with the utmost energy of imagination conceive what they mean. When domesticity, for instance, is called drudgery, all the difficulty arises from a double meaning in the word. If drudgery only means dreadfully hard work, I admit the woman drudges in the home, as a man might drudge at the

Cathedral of Amiens or drudge behind a gun at Trafalgar. But if it means that the hard work is more heavy because it is trifling, colorless and of small import to the soul, then as I say, I give it up; I do not know what the words mean. To be Queen Elizabeth within a definite area, deciding sales, banquets, labors and holidays; to be Whiteley within a certain area, providing toys, boots, sheets, cakes and books, to be Aristotle within a certain area, teaching morals, manners, theology, and hygiene; I can understand how this might exhaust the mind, but I cannot imagine how it could narrow it. How can it be a large career to tell other people's children about the Rule of Three, and a small career to tell one's own children about the universe? How can it be broad to be the same thing to everyone, and narrow to be everything to someone? No; a woman's function is laborious, but because it is gigantic, not because it is minute. I will pity Mrs. Jones for the hugeness of her task; I will never pity her for its smallness.

But though the essential of the woman's task is universality, this does not, of course, prevent her from having one or two severe though largely wholesome prejudices. She has, on the whole, been more conscious than man that she is only one half of humanity; but she has expressed it (if one may say so of a lady) by getting her teeth into the two or three things which she thinks she stands for. I would observe here in parenthesis that much of the recent official trouble about women has arisen from the fact that they transfer to things of doubt and reason that sacred stubbornness only proper to the primary things which a woman was set to guard. One's own children, one's own altar, ought to be a matter of principle — or if you like, a matter of prejudice. On the other hand, who wrote Junius's Letters ought not to be a principle or a prejudice, it ought to be a matter of free and almost indifferent inquiry. But take an energetic modern girl secretary to a league to show that George III wrote Junius, and in three months she will believe it, too, out of mere loyalty to her employers. Modern women defend their office with all the fierceness of domesticity. They fight for desk and typewriter as for hearth and home, and develop a sort of wolfish wifehood on behalf of the invisible head of the firm. That is why they do office work so well; and that is why they ought not to do it.

IV. THE ROMANCE OF THRIFT

The larger part of womankind, however, have had to fight for things slightly more intoxicating to the eye than the desk or the typewriter; and it cannot be denied that in defending these, women have developed the quality called prejudice to a powerful and even menacing degree. But these prejudices will always be found to fortify the main position of the woman, that she is to remain a general overseer, an autocrat within small compass but on all sides. On the one or two points on which she really misunderstands the man's position, it is almost entirely in order to preserve her own. The two points on which woman, actually and of herself, is most tenacious may be roughly summarized as the ideal of thrift and the ideal of dignity.

Unfortunately for this book it is written by a male, and these two qualities, if not hateful to a man, are at least hateful in a man. But if we are to settle the sex question at all fairly, all males must make an imaginative attempt to enter into the attitude of all good women toward these two things. The difficulty exists especially, perhaps, in the thing called thrift; we men have so much encouraged each other in throwing money right and left, that there has come at last to be a sort of chivalrous and poetical air about losing sixpence. But on a broader and more candid consideration the case scarcely stands so.

Thrift is the really romantic thing; economy is more romantic than extravagance. Heaven knows I for one speak disinterestedly in the matter; for I cannot clearly remember saving a half-penny ever since I was born. But the thing is true; economy, properly understood, is the more poetic. Thrift is poetic because it is creative; waste is unpoetic because it is waste. It is prosaic to throw money away, because it is prosaic to throw anything away; it is negative; it is a confession of indifference, that is, it is a confession of failure. The most prosaic thing about the house is the dustbin, and the one great objection to the new fastidious and aesthetic homestead is simply that in such a moral menage the dustbin must be bigger than the house. If a man could undertake to make use of all things in his dustbin he would be a broader genius than Shakespeare. When science began to use by-products; when science found that colors could be made out of coaltar, she made her greatest and perhaps her only claim on the real respect of the human soul. Now the aim of the good woman is to use the by-products, or, in other words, to rummage in the dustbin.

A man can only fully comprehend it if he thinks of some sudden joke or expedient got up with such materials as may be found in a private house on a rainy day. A man's definite daily work is generally run with such rigid convenience of modern science that thrift, the picking up of potential helps here and there, has almost become unmeaning to him. He comes across it most (as I say) when he is playing some game within four walls; when in charades, a hearthrug will just do for a fur coat, or a tea-cozy just do for a cocked hat; when a toy theater needs timber and cardboard, and the house has just enough firewood and just enough bandboxes. This is the man's occasional glimpse and pleasing parody of thrift. But many a good housekeeper plays the same game every day with ends of cheese and scraps of silk, not because she is mean, but on the contrary, because she is magnanimous; because she wishes her creative mercy to be over all her works, that not one sardine should be destroyed, or cast as rubbish to the void, when she has made the pile complete.

The modern world must somehow be made to understand (in theology and other things) that a view may be vast, broad, universal, liberal and yet come into conflict with another view that is vast, broad, universal and liberal also. There is never a war between two sects, but only between two universal Catholic Churches. The only possible collision is the collision of one cosmos with another. So in a smaller way it must be first made clear that this female economic ideal is a part of that female variety of outlook and all-round art of life which we have already attributed to the sex: thrift is not a small or timid or provincial thing; it is part of that great idea of the woman watching on all sides out of all the windows of the soul and being answerable for everything. For in the average human house there is one hole by which money comes in and a hundred by which it goes out; man has to do with the one hole, woman with the hundred. But though the very stinginess of a woman is a part of her spiritual breadth, it is none the less true that it brings her into conflict with the special kind of spiritual breadth that belongs to the males of the tribe. It brings her into conflict with that shapeless cataract of Comradeship, of chaotic feasting and deafening debate, which we noted in the last section. The very touch of the eternal in the two sexual tastes brings them the more into antagonism; for one stands for a universal vigilance and the other for an almost infinite output. Partly through the nature of his moral weakness, and partly through the nature of his physical strength, the male is normally prone to expand things into a sort of eternity; he always thinks of a dinner party as lasting all night; and he always thinks of a night as lasting forever. When the working women in the poor districts come to the doors of the public houses and try to get their husbands home, simple minded "social workers" always imagine that every husband is a tragic drunkard and every wife a broken-hearted saint. It never occurs to them that the poor woman is only doing under coarser conventions exactly what every fashionable hostess does when she tries to get the men from arguing over the cigars to come and gossip over the teacups. These women are not exasperated merely at the amount of money that is wasted in beer; they are exasperated also at the amount of time that is wasted in talk. It is not merely what goeth into the mouth but what cometh out the mouth that, in their opinion, defileth a man. They will raise against an argument (like their sisters of all ranks) the ridiculous objection that nobody is convinced by it; as if a man wanted to make a body-slave of anybody with whom he had played single-stick. But the real female prejudice on this point is not without a basis; the real feeling is this, that the most masculine pleasures have a quality of the ephemeral. A duchess may ruin a duke for a diamond necklace; but there is the necklace. A coster may ruin his wife for a pot of beer; and where is the beer? The duchess quarrels with another duchess in order to crush her, to produce a result; the coster does not argue with another coster in order to convince him, but in order to enjoy at once the sound of his own voice, the clearness of his own opinions and the sense of masculine society. There is this element of a fine fruitlessness about the male enjoyments; wine is poured into a bottomless bucket; thought plunges into a bottomless abyss. All this has set woman against the Public House — that is, against the Parliament House. She is there to prevent waste; and the "pub" and the parliament are the very palaces of waste. In the upper classes the "pub" is called the club, but that makes no more difference to the reason than it does to the rhyme. High and low, the woman's objection to the Public House is perfectly definite and rational, it is that the Public House wastes the energies that could be used on the private house.

As it is about feminine thrift against masculine waste, so it is about feminine dignity against masculine rowdiness. The woman has a fixed and very well-founded idea that if she does not insist on good manners nobody else will. Babies are not always strong on the point of dignity, and grown-up men are quite unpresentable. It is true that there are many very polite men, but none that I ever heard of who were not either fascinating women or obeying them. But indeed the female ideal of dignity, like the female ideal of thrift, lies deeper and may easily be misunderstood. It rests ultimately on a strong idea of spiritual isolation; the same that makes women religious. They do not like being melted down; they dislike and avoid the mob. That anonymous quality we have remarked in the club conversation would be common impertinence in a case of ladies. I remember an artistic and eager lady asking me in her grand green drawing-room whether I believed in comradeship between the sexes, and why not. I was driven back on offering the obvious and sincere answer "Because if I were to treat you for two minutes like a comrade you would turn me out of the house." The only certain rule on this subject is always to deal with woman and never with women. "Women" is a profligate word; I have used it repeatedly in this chapter; but it always has a blackguard sound. It smells of oriental cynicism and hedonism. Every woman is a captive queen. But every crowd of women is only a harem broken loose.

I am not expressing my own views here, but those of nearly all the women I have known. It is quite unfair to say that a woman hates other women individually; but I think it would be quite true to say that she detests them in a confused heap. And this is not because she despises her own sex, but because she respects it; and respects especially that sanctity and separation of each item which is represented in manners by the idea of dignity and in morals by the idea of chastity.

V. THE COLDNESS OF CHLOE

We hear much of the human error which accepts what is sham and what is real. But it is worth while to remember that with unfamiliar things we often mistake what is real for what is sham. It is true that a very young man may think the wig of an actress is her hair. But it is equally true that a child yet younger may call the hair of a negro his wig. Just because the woolly savage is remote and barbaric he seems to be unnaturally neat and tidy. Everyone must have noticed the same thing in the fixed and almost offensive color of all unfamiliar things, tropic birds and tropic blossoms. Tropic birds look like staring toys out of a toy-shop. Tropic flowers simply look like artificial flowers, like things cut out of wax. This is a deep matter, and, I think, not unconnected with divinity; but anyhow it is the truth that when we see things for the first time we feel instantly that they are fictive creations; we feel the finger of God. It is only when we are thoroughly used to them and our five wits are wearied, that we see them as wild and objectless; like the shapeless tree-tops or the shifting cloud. It is the design in Nature that strikes us first; the sense of the crosses and confusions in that design only comes afterwards through experience and an almost eerie monotony. If a man saw the stars abruptly by accident he would think them as festive and as artificial as a firework. We talk of the folly of painting the lily; but if we saw the lily without warning we should think that it was painted. We talk of the devil not being so black as he is painted; but that very phrase is a testimony to the kinship between what is called vivid and what is called artificial. If the modern sage had only one glimpse of grass and sky, he would say that grass was not as green as it was painted; that sky was not as blue as it was painted. If one could see the whole universe suddenly, it would look like a bright-colored toy, just as the South American hornbill looks like a bright-colored toy. And so they are — both of them, I mean.

But it was not with this aspect of the startling air of artifice about all strange objects that I meant to deal. I mean merely, as a guide to history, that we should not be surprised if things wrought in fashions remote from ours seem artificial; we should convince ourselves that nine times out of ten these things are nakedly and almost indecently honest. You will hear men talk of the frosted classicism of Corneille or of the powdered pomposities of the eighteenth century, but all these phrases are very superficial. There never was an artificial epoch. There never was an age of reason. Men were always men and women women: and their two generous appetites always were the expression of passion and the telling of truth. We can see something stiff and quaint in their mode of expression, just as our descendants will see something stiff and quaint in our coarsest slum sketch or our most naked pathological play. But men have never talked about anything but important things; and the next force in femininity which we have to consider can be considered best perhaps in some dusty old volume of verses by a person of quality.

The eighteenth century is spoken of as the period of artificiality, in externals at least; but, indeed, there may be two words about that. In modern speech one uses artificiality as meaning indefinitely a sort of deceit; and the eighteenth century was far too artificial to deceive. It cultivated that completest art that does not conceal the art. Its fashions and costumes positively revealed nature by allowing artifice; as in that obvious instance of a barbering that frosted every head with the same silver. It would be fantastic to call this a quaint humility that concealed youth; but, at least, it was not one with the evil pride that conceals old age. Under the eighteenth century fashion people did not so much all pretend to be young, as all agree to be old. The same applies to the most odd and unnatural of their fashions; they were freakish, but they were not false. A lady may or may not be as red as she is painted, but plainly she was not so black as she was patched.

But I only introduce the reader into this atmosphere of the older and franker fictions that he may be induced to have patience for a moment with a certain element which is very common in the decoration and literature of that age and of the two centuries preceding it. It is necessary to mention it in such a connection because it is exactly one of those things that look as superficial as powder, and are really as rooted as hair.

In all the old flowery and pastoral love-songs, those of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries especially, you will find a perpetual reproach against woman in the matter of her coldness; ceaseless and stale similes that compare her eyes to northern stars, her heart to ice, or her bosom to snow. Now most of us have always supposed these old and iterant phrases to be a mere pattern of dead words, a thing like a cold wall-paper. Yet I think those old cavalier poets who wrote about the coldness of Chloe had hold of a psychological truth missed in nearly all the realistic novels of today. Our psychological romancers perpetually represent wives as striking terror into their husbands by rolling on the floor, gnashing their teeth, throwing about the furniture or poisoning the coffee; all this upon some strange fixed theory that women are what they call emotional. But in truth the old and frigid form is much nearer to the vital fact. Most men if they spoke with any sincerity would agree that the most terrible quality in women, whether in friendship, courtship or marriage, was not so much being emotional as being unemotional.

There is an awful armor of ice which may be the legitimate protection of a more delicate organism; but whatever be the psychological explanation there can surely be no question of the fact. The instinctive cry of the female in anger is noli me tangere. I take this as the most obvious and at the same time the least hackneyed instance of a fundamental quality in the female tradition, which has tended in our time to be almost immeasurably misunderstood, both by the cant of moralists and the cant of immoralists. The proper name for the thing is modesty; but as we live in an age of prejudice and must not call things by their right names, we will yield to a more modern nomenclature and call it dignity. Whatever else it is, it is the thing which a thousand poets and a million lovers have called the coldness of Chloe. It is akin to the classical, and is at least the opposite of the grotesque. And since we are talking here chiefly in types and symbols, perhaps as good an embodiment as any of the idea may be found in the mere fact of a woman wearing a skirt. It is highly typical of the rabid plagiarism which now passes everywhere for emancipation, that a little while ago it was common for an “advanced” woman to claim the right to wear trousers; a right about as grotesque as the right to wear a false nose. Whether female liberty is much advanced by the act of wearing a skirt on each leg I do not know; perhaps Turkish women might offer some information on the point. But if the western woman walks about (as it were) trailing the curtains of the harem with her, it is quite certain that the woven mansion is meant for a perambulating palace, not for a perambulating prison. It is quite certain that the skirt means female dignity, not female submission; it can be proved by the simplest of all tests. No ruler would deliberately dress up in the recognized fetters of a slave; no judge would appear covered with broad arrows. But when men wish to be safely impressive, as judges, priests or kings, they do wear skirts, the long, trailing robes of female dignity The whole world is under petticoat government; for even men wear petticoats when they wish to govern.

VI. THE PEDANT AND THE SAVAGE

We say then that the female holds up with two strong arms these two pillars of civilization; we say also that she could do neither, but for her position; her curious position of private omnipotence, universality on a small scale. The first element is thrift; not the destructive thrift of the miser, but the creative thrift of the peasant; the second element is dignity, which is but the expression of sacred personality and privacy. Now I know the question that will be abruptly and automatically asked by all that know the dull tricks and turns of the modern sexual quarrel. The advanced person will at once begin to argue about whether these instincts are inherent and inevitable in woman or whether they are merely prejudices produced by her history and education. Now I do not propose to discuss whether woman could now be educated out of her habits touching thrift and dignity; and that for two excellent reasons. First it is a question which cannot conceivably ever find any answer: that is why modern people are so fond of it. From the nature of the case it is obviously impossible to decide whether any of the peculiarities of civilized man have been strictly necessary to his civilization. It is not self-evident (for instance), that even the habit of standing upright was the only path of human progress. There might have been a quadrupedal civilization, in which a city gentleman put on four boots to go to the city every morning. Or there might have been a reptilian civilization, in which he rolled up to the office on his stomach; it is impossible to say that intelligence might not have developed in such creatures. All we can say is that man as he is walks upright; and that woman is something almost more upright than uprightness.

And the second point is this: that upon the whole we rather prefer women (nay, even men) to walk upright; so we do not waste much of our noble lives in inventing any other way for them to walk. In short, my second reason for not speculating upon whether woman might get rid of these peculiarities, is that I do not want her to get rid of them; nor does she. I will not exhaust my intelligence by inventing ways in which mankind might unlearn the violin or forget how to ride horses; and the art of domesticity seems to me as special and as valuable as all the ancient arts of our race. Nor do I propose to enter at all into those formless and floundering speculations about how woman was or is regarded in the primitive times that we cannot remember, or in the savage countries which we cannot understand. Even if these people segregated their women for low or barbaric reasons it would not make our reasons barbaric; and I am haunted with a tenacious suspicion that these people's feelings were really, under other forms, very much the same as ours. Some impatient trader, some superficial missionary, walks across an island and sees the squaw digging in the fields while the man is playing a flute; and immediately says that the man is a mere lord of creation and the woman a mere serf. He does not remember that he might see the same thing in half the back gardens in Brixton, merely because women are at once more conscientious and more impatient, while men are at once more quiescent and more greedy for pleasure. It may often be in Hawaii simply as it is in Hoxton. That is, the woman does not work because the man tells her to work and she obeys. On the contrary, the woman works because she has told the man to work and he hasn't obeyed. I do not affirm that this is the whole truth, but I do affirm that we have too little comprehension of the souls of savages to know how far it is untrue. It is the same with the relations of our hasty and surface science, with the problem of sexual dignity and modesty. Professors find all over the world fragmentary ceremonies in which the bride affects some sort of reluctance, hides from her husband, or runs away from him. The professor then pompously proclaims that this is a survival of Marriage by Capture. I wonder he never says that the veil thrown over the bride is really a net. I gravely doubt whether women ever were married by capture I think they pretended to be; as they do still.

It is equally obvious that these two necessary sanctities of thrift and dignity are bound to come into collision with the wordiness, the wastefulness, and the perpetual pleasure-seeking of masculine companionship. Wise women allow for the thing; foolish women try to crush it; but all women try to counteract it, and they do well. In many a home all round us at this moment, we know that the nursery rhyme is reversed. The queen is in the counting-house, counting out the money. The king is in the parlor, eating bread and honey. But it must be strictly understood that the king has captured the honey in some heroic wars. The quarrel can be found in moldering Gothic carvings and in crabbed Greek manuscripts. In every age, in every land, in every tribe and village, has been waged the great sexual war between the Private House and the Public House. I have seen a collection of mediaeval English poems, divided into sections such as “Religious Carols,” “Drinking Songs,” and so on; and the section headed, “Poems of Domestic Life” consisted entirely (literally, entirely) of the complaints of husbands who were bullied by their wives. Though the English was archaic, the words were in many cases precisely the same as those which I have heard in the streets and public houses of Battersea, protests on behalf of an extension of time and talk, protests against the nervous impatience and the devouring utilitarianism of the female. Such, I say, is the quarrel; it can never be anything but a quarrel; but the aim of all morals and all society is to keep it a lovers’ quarrel.

VII. THE MODERN SURRENDER OF WOMAN

But in this corner called England, at this end of the century, there has happened a strange and startling thing. Openly and to all appearance, this ancestral conflict has silently and abruptly ended; one of the two sexes has suddenly surrendered to the other. By the beginning of the twentieth century, within the last few years, the woman has in public surrendered to the man. She has seriously and officially owned that the man has been right all along; that the public house (or Parliament) is really more important than the private house; that politics are not (as woman had always maintained) an excuse for pots of beer, but are a sacred solemnity to which new female worshipers may kneel; that the talkative patriots in the tavern are not only admirable but enviable; that talk is not a waste of time, and therefore (as a consequence, surely) that taverns are not a waste of money. All we men had grown used to our wives and mothers, and grandmothers, and great aunts all pouring a chorus of contempt upon our hobbies of sport, drink and party politics. And now comes Miss Pankhurst with tears in her eyes, owning that all the women were wrong and all the men were right; humbly imploring to be admitted into so much as an outer court, from which she may catch a glimpse of those masculine merits which her erring sisters had so thoughtlessly scorned.

Now this development naturally perturbs and even paralyzes us. Males, like females, in the course of that old fight between the public and private house, had indulged in overstatement and extravagance, feeling that they must keep up their end of the see-saw. We told our wives that Parliament had sat late on most essential business; but it never crossed our minds that our wives would believe it. We said that everyone must have a vote in the country; similarly our wives said that no one must have a pipe in the drawing room. In both cases the idea was the same. “It does not matter much, but if you let those things slide there is chaos.” We said that Lord Huggins or Mr. Buggins was absolutely necessary to the country. We knew quite well that nothing is necessary to the country except that the men should be men and the women women. We knew this; we thought the women knew it even more clearly; and we thought the women would say it. Suddenly, without warning, the women have begun to say all the nonsense that we ourselves hardly believed when we said it. The solemnity of politics; the necessity of votes; the necessity of Huggins; the necessity of Buggins; all these flow in a pellucid stream from the lips of all the suffragette speakers. I suppose in every fight, however old, one has a vague aspiration to conquer; but we never wanted to conquer women so completely as this. We only expected that they might leave us a little more margin for our nonsense; we never expected that they would accept it seriously as sense. Therefore I am all at sea about the existing situation; I scarcely know whether to be relieved or enraged by this substitution of the feeble platform lecture for the forcible curtain-lecture. I am lost without the trenchant and candid Mrs. Caudle. I really do not know what to do with the prostrate and penitent Miss Pankhurst. This surrender of the modern woman has taken us all so much by surprise that it is desirable to pause a moment, and collect our wits about what she is really saying.

As I have already remarked, there is one very simple answer to all this; these are not the modern women, but about one in two thousand of the modern women. This fact is important to a democrat; but it is of very little importance to the typically modern mind. Both the characteristic modern parties believed in a government by the few; the only difference is whether it is the Conservative few or Progressive few. It might be put, somewhat coarsely perhaps, by saying that one believes in any minority that is rich and the other in any minority that is mad. But in this state of things the democratic argument obviously falls out for the moment; and we are bound to take the prominent minority, merely because it is prominent. Let us eliminate altogether from our minds the thousands of women who detest this cause, and the millions of women who have hardly heard of it. Let us concede that the English people itself is not and will not be for a very long time within the sphere of practical politics. Let us confine ourselves to saying that these particular women want a vote and to asking themselves what a vote is. If we ask these ladies ourselves what a vote is, we shall get a very vague reply. It is the only question, as a rule, for which they are not prepared. For the truth is that they go mainly by precedent; by the mere fact that men have votes already. So far from being a mutinous movement, it is really a very Conservative one; it is in the narrowest rut of the British Constitution. Let us take a little wider and freer sweep of thought and ask ourselves what is the ultimate point and meaning of this odd business called voting.

VIII. THE BRAND OF THE FLEUR-DE-LIS

Seemingly from the dawn of man all nations have had governments; and all nations have been ashamed of them. Nothing is more openly fallacious than to fancy that in ruder or simpler ages ruling, judging and punishing appeared perfectly innocent and dignified. These things were always regarded as the penalties of the Fall; as part of the humiliation of mankind, as bad in themselves. That the king can do no wrong was never anything but a legal fiction; and it is a legal fiction still. The doctrine of Divine Right was not a piece of idealism, but rather a piece of realism, a practical way of ruling amid the ruin of humanity; a very pragmatist piece of faith. The religious basis of government was not so much that people put their trust in princes, as that they did not put their trust in any child of man. It was so with all the ugly institutions which disfigure human history. Torture and slavery were never talked of as good things; they were always talked of as necessary evils. A pagan spoke of one man owning ten slaves just as a modern business man speaks of one merchant sacking ten clerks: “It’s very horrible; but how else can society be conducted?” A mediaeval scholastic regarded the possibility of a man being burned to death just as a modern business man regards the possibility of a man being starved to death: “It is a shocking torture; but can you organize a painless world?” It is possible that a future society may find a way of doing without the question by hunger as we have done without the question by fire. It is equally possible, for the matter of that, that a future society may reestablish legal torture with the whole apparatus of rack and fagot. The most modern of countries, America, has introduced with a vague savor of science, a method which it calls “the third degree.” This is simply the extortion of secrets by nervous fatigue; which is surely uncommonly close to their extortion by bodily pain. And this is legal and scientific in America. Amateur ordinary America, of course, simply burns people alive in broad daylight, as they did in the Reformation Wars. But though some punishments are more inhuman than others there is no such thing as humane punishment. As long as nineteen men claim the right in any sense or shape to take hold of the twentieth man and make him even mildly uncomfortable, so long the whole proceeding must be a humiliating one for all concerned. And the proof of how poignantly men have always felt this lies in the fact that the headsman and the hangman, the jailors and the torturers, were always regarded not merely with fear but with contempt; while all kinds of careless smiters, bankrupt knights and swashbucklers and outlaws, were regarded with indulgence or even admiration. To kill a man lawlessly was pardoned. To kill a man lawfully was unpardonable. The most bare-faced duelist might almost brandish his weapon. But the executioner was always masked.

This is the first essential element in government, coercion; a necessary but not a noble element. I may remark in passing that when people say that government rests on force they give an admirable instance of the foggy and muddled cynicism of modernity. Government does not rest on force. Government is force; it rests on consent or a conception of justice. A king or a community holding a certain thing to be abnormal, evil, uses the general strength to crush it out; the strength is his tool, but the belief is his only sanction. You might as well say that glass is the real reason for telescopes. But arising from whatever reason the act of government is coercive and is burdened with all the coarse and painful qualities of coercion. And if anyone asks what is the use of insisting on the ugliness of this task of state violence since all mankind is condemned to employ it, I have a simple answer to that. It would be useless to insist on it if all humanity were condemned to it. But it is not irrelevant to insist on its ugliness so long as half of humanity is kept out of it.

All government then is coercive; we happen to have created a government which is not only coercive; but collective. There are only two kinds of government, as I have already said, the despotic and the democratic. Aristocracy is not a government, it is a riot; that most effective kind of riot, a riot of the rich. The most intelligent apologists of aristocracy, sophists like Burke and Nietzsche, have never claimed for aristocracy any virtues but the virtues of a riot, the accidental virtues, courage, variety and adventure. There is no case anywhere of aristocracy having established a universal and applicable order, as despots and democracies have often done; as the last Caesars created the Roman law, as the last Jacobins created the Code Napoleon. With the first of these elementary forms of government, that of the king or chieftain, we are not in this matter of the sexes immediately concerned. We shall return to it later when we remark how differently mankind has dealt with female claims in the despotic as against the democratic field. But for the moment the essential point is that in self-governing countries this coercion of criminals is a collective coercion. The abnormal person is theoretically thumped by a million fists and kicked by a million feet. If a man is flogged we all flogged him; if a man is hanged, we all hanged him. That is the only possible meaning of democracy, which can give any meaning to the first two syllables and also to the last two. In this sense each citizen has the high responsibility of a rioter. Every statute is a declaration of war, to be backed by arms. Every tribunal is a revolutionary tribunal. In a republic all punishment is as sacred and solemn as lynching.

IX. SINCERITY AND THE GALLOWS

When, therefore, it is said that the tradition against Female Suffrage keeps women out of activity, social influence and citizenship, let us a little more soberly and strictly ask ourselves what it actually does keep her out of. It does definitely keep her out of the collective act of coercion; the act of punishment by a mob. The human tradition does say that, if twenty men hang a man from a tree or lamp-post, they shall be twenty men and not women. Now I do not think any reasonable Suffragist will deny that exclusion from this function, to say the least of it, might be maintained to be a protection as well as a veto. No candid person will wholly dismiss the proposition that the idea of having a Lord Chancellor but not a Lady Chancellor may at least be connected with the idea of having a headsman but not a headswoman, a hangman but not a hangwoman. Nor will it be adequate to answer (as is so often answered to this contention) that in modern civilization women would not really be required to capture, to sentence, or to slay; that all this is done indirectly, that specialists kill our criminals as they kill our cattle. To urge this is not to urge the reality of the vote, but to urge its unreality. Democracy was meant to be a more direct way of ruling, not a more indirect way; and if we do not feel that we are all jailers, so much the worse for us, and for the prisoners. If it is really an unwomanly thing to lock up a robber or a tyrant, it ought to be no softening of the situation that the woman does not feel as if she were doing the thing that she certainly is doing. It is bad enough that men can only associate on paper who could once associate in the street; it is bad enough that men have made a vote very much of a fiction. It is much worse that a great class should claim the vote be cause it is a fiction, who would be sickened by it if it were a fact. If votes for women do not mean mobs for women they do not mean what they were meant to mean. A woman can make a cross on a paper as well as a man; a child could do it as well as a woman; and a chimpanzee after a few lessons could do it as well as a child. But nobody ought to regard it merely as making a cross on paper; everyone ought to regard it as what it ultimately is, branding the fleur-de-lis, marking the broad arrow, signing the death warrant. Both men and women ought to face more fully the things they do or cause to be done; face them or leave off doing them.

On that disastrous day when public executions were abolished, private executions were renewed and ratified, perhaps forever. Things grossly unsuited to the moral sentiment of a society cannot be safely done in broad daylight; but I see no reason why we should not still be roasting heretics alive, in a private room. It is very likely (to speak in the manner foolishly called Irish) that if there were public executions there would be no executions. The old open-air punishments, the pillory and the gibbet, at least fixed responsibility upon the law; and in actual practice they gave the mob an opportunity of throwing roses as well as rotten eggs; of crying "Hosannah" as well as "Crucify." But I do not like the public executioner being turned into the private executioner. I think it is a crooked oriental, sinister sort of business, and smells of the harem and the divan rather than of the forum and the market place. In modern times the official has lost all the social honor and dignity of the common hangman. He is only the bearer of the bowstring.

Here, however, I suggest a plea for a brutal publicity only in order to emphasize the fact that it is this brutal publicity and nothing else from which women have been excluded. I also say it to emphasize the fact that the mere modern veiling of the brutality does not make the situation different, unless we openly say that we are giving the suffrage, not only because it is power but because it is not, or in other words, that women are not so much to vote as to play voting. No suffragist, I suppose, will take up that position; and a few suffragists will wholly deny that this human necessity of pains and penalties is an ugly, humiliating business, and that good motives as well as bad may have helped to keep women out of it. More than once I have remarked in these pages that female limitations may be the limits of a temple as well as of a prison, the disabilities of a priest and not of a pariah. I noted it, I think, in the case of the pontifical feminine dress. In the same way it is not evidently irrational, if men decided that a woman, like a priest, must not be a shedder of blood.

X. THE HIGHER ANARCHY

But there is a further fact; forgotten also because we moderns forget that there is a female point of view. The woman's wisdom stands partly, not only for a wholesome hesitation about punishment, but even for a wholesome hesitation about absolute rules. There was something feminine and perversely true in that phrase of Wilde's, that people should not be treated as the rule, but all of them as exceptions. Made by a man the remark was a little effeminate; for Wilde did lack the masculine power of dogma and of democratic cooperation. But if a woman had said it it would have been simply true; a woman does treat each person as a peculiar person. In other words, she stands for Anarchy; a very ancient and arguable philosophy; not anarchy in the sense of having no customs in one's life (which is inconceivable), but anarchy in the sense of having no rules for one's mind. To her, almost certainly, are due all those working traditions that cannot be found in books, especially those of education; it was she who first gave a child a stuffed stocking for being good or stood him in the corner for being naughty. This unclassified knowledge is sometimes called rule of thumb and sometimes motherwit. The last phrase suggests the whole truth, for none ever called it fatherwit.

Now anarchy is only tact when it works badly. Tact is only anarchy when it works well. And we ought to realize that in one half of the world — the private house — it does work well. We modern men are perpetually forgetting that the case for clear rules and crude penalties is not self-evident, that there is a great deal to be said for the benevolent lawlessness of the autocrat, especially on a small scale; in short, that government is only one side of life. The other half is called Society, in which women are admittedly dominant. And they have always been ready to maintain that their kingdom is better governed than ours, because (in the logical and legal sense) it is not governed at all. "Whenever you have a real difficulty," they say, "when a boy is bumptious or an aunt is stingy, when a silly girl will marry somebody, or a wicked man won't marry somebody, all your lumbering Roman Law and British Constitution come to a standstill. A snub from a duchess or a slanging from a fish-wife are much more likely to put things straight." So, at least, rang the ancient female challenge down the ages until the recent female capitulation. So streamed the red standard of the higher anarchy until Miss Pankhurst hoisted the white flag.

It must be remembered that the modern world has done deep treason to the eternal intellect by believing in the swing of the pendulum. A man must be dead before he swings. It has substituted an idea of fatalistic alternation for the mediaeval freedom of the soul seeking truth. All modern thinkers are reactionaries; for their thought is always a reaction from what went before. When you meet a modern man he is always coming from a place, not going to it. Thus, mankind has in nearly all places and periods seen that there is a soul and a body as plainly as that there is a sun and moon. But because a narrow Protestant sect called Materialists declared for a short time that there was no soul, another narrow Protestant sect called Christian Science is now maintaining that there is no body. Now just in the same way the unreasonable neglect of government by the Manchester School has produced, not a reasonable regard for government, but an unreasonable neglect of everything else. So that to hear people talk to-day one would fancy that every important human function must be organized and avenged by law; that all education must be state education, and all employment state employment; that everybody and everything must be brought to the foot of the august and prehistoric gibbet. But a somewhat more liberal and sympathetic examination of mankind will convince us that the cross is even older than the gibbet, that voluntary suffering was before and independent of compulsory; and in short that in most important matters a man has always been free to ruin himself if he chose. The huge fundamental function upon which all anthropology turns, that of sex and childbirth, has never been inside the political state, but always outside of it. The state concerned itself with the trivial question of killing people, but wisely left alone the whole business of getting them born. A Eugenist might indeed plausibly say that the government is an absent-minded and inconsistent person who occupies himself with providing for the old age of people who have never been infants. I will not deal here in any detail with the fact that some Eugenists have in our time made the maniacal answer that the police ought to control marriage and birth as they control labor and death. Except for this inhuman handful (with whom I regret to say I shall have to deal with later) all the Eugenists I know divide themselves into two sections: ingenious people who once meant this, and rather bewildered people who swear they never meant it — nor anything else. But if it be conceded (by a breezier estimate of men) that they do mostly desire marriage to remain free from government, it does not follow that they desire it to remain free from everything. If man does not control the marriage market by law, is it controlled at all? Surely the answer is broadly that man does not control the marriage market by law, but the woman does control it by sympathy and prejudice. There was until lately a law forbidding a man to marry his deceased wife’s sister; yet the thing happened constantly. There was no law forbidding a man to marry his deceased wife’s scullery-maid; yet it did not happen nearly so often. It did not happen because the marriage market is managed in the spirit and by the authority of women; and women are generally conservative where classes are concerned. It is the same with that system of exclusiveness by which ladies have so often contrived (as by a process of elimination) to prevent marriages that they did not want and even sometimes procure those they did. There is no need of the broad arrow and the fleur-de lis, the turnkey’s chains or the hangman’s halter. You need not strangle a man if you can silence him. The branded shoulder is less effective and final than the cold shoulder; and you need not trouble to lock a man in when you can lock him out.

The same, of course, is true of the colossal architecture which we call infant education: an architecture reared wholly by women. Nothing can ever overcome that one enormous sex superiority, that even the male child is born closer to his mother than to his father. No one, staring at that frightful female privilege, can quite believe in the equality of the sexes. Here and there we read of a girl brought up like a tom-boy; but every boy is brought up like a tame girl. The flesh and spirit of femininity surround him from the first like the four walls of a house; and even the vaguest or most brutal man has been womanized by being born. Man that is born of a woman has short days and full of misery; but nobody can picture the obscenity and bestial tragedy that would belong to such a monster as man that was born of a man.

XI. THE QUEEN AND THE SUFFRAGETTES

But, indeed, with this educational matter I must of necessity embroil myself later. The fourth section of discussion is supposed to be about the child, but I think it will be mostly about the mother. In this place I have systematically insisted on the large part of life that is governed, not by man with his vote, but by woman with her voice, or more often, with her horrible silence. Only one thing remains to be added. In a sprawling and explanatory style has been traced out the idea that government is ultimately coercion, that coercion must mean cold definitions as well as cruel consequences, and that therefore there is something to be said for the old human habit of keeping one-half of humanity out of so harsh and dirty a business. But the case is stronger still.

Voting is not only coercion, but collective coercion. I think Queen Victoria would have been yet more popular and satisfying if she had never signed a death warrant. I think Queen Elizabeth would have stood out as more solid and splendid in history if she had not earned (among those who happen to know her history) the nickname of Bloody Bess. I think, in short, that the great historic woman is more herself when she is persuasive rather than coercive. But I feel all mankind behind me when I say that if a woman has this power it should be despotic power — not democratic power. There is a much stronger historic argument for giving Miss Pankhurst a throne than for giving her a vote. She might have a crown, or at least a coronet, like so many of her supporters; for these old powers are purely personal and therefore female. Miss Pankhurst as a despot might be as virtuous as Queen Victoria, and she certainly would find it difficult to be as wicked as Queen Bess, but the point is that, good or bad, she would be irresponsible — she would not be governed by a rule and by a ruler. There are only two ways of governing: by a rule and by a ruler. And it is seriously true to say of a woman, in education and domesticity, that the freedom of the autocrat appears to be necessary to her. She is never responsible until she is irresponsible. In case this sounds like an idle contradiction, I confidently appeal to the cold facts of history. Almost every despotic or oligarchic state has admitted women to its privileges. Scarcely one democratic state has ever admitted them to its rights The reason is very simple: that something female is endangered much more by the violence of the crowd. In short, one

Pankhurst is an exception, but a thousand Pankhursts are a nightmare, a Bacchic orgie, a Witches Sabbath. For in all legends men have thought of women as sublime separately but horrible in a herd.

XII. THE MODERN SLAVE

Now I have only taken the test case of Female Suffrage because it is topical and concrete; it is not of great moment for me as a political proposal. I can quite imagine anyone substantially agreeing with my view of woman as universalist and autocrat in a limited area; and still thinking that she would be none the worse for a ballot paper. The real question is whether this old ideal of woman as the great amateur is admitted or not. There are many modern things which threaten it much more than suffragism; notably the increase of self-supporting women, even in the most severe or the most squalid employments. If there be something against nature in the idea of a horde of wild women governing, there is something truly intolerable in the idea of a herd of tame women being governed. And there are elements in human psychology that make this situation particularly poignant or ignominous. The ugly exactitudes of business, the bells and clocks the fixed hours and rigid departments, were all meant for the male: who, as a rule, can only do one thing and can only with the greatest difficulty be induced to do that. If clerks do not try to shirk their work, our whole great commercial system breaks down. It is breaking down, under the inroad of women who are adopting the unprecedented and impossible course of taking the system seriously and doing it well. Their very efficiency is the definition of their slavery. It is generally a very bad sign when one is trusted very much by one’s employers. And if the evasive clerks have a look of being blackguards, the earnest ladies are often something very like blacklegs. But the more immediate point is that the modern working woman bears a double burden, for she endures both the grinding officialism of the new office and the distracting scrupulosity of the old home. Few men understand what conscientiousness is. They understand duty, which generally means one duty; but conscientiousness is the duty of the universalist. It is limited by no work days or holidays; it is a lawless, limitless, devouring decorum. If women are to be subjected to the dull rule of commerce, we must find some way of emancipating them from the wild rule of conscience. But I rather fancy you will find it easier to leave the conscience and knock off the commerce. As it is, the modern clerk or secretary exhausts herself to put one thing straight in the ledger and then goes home to put everything straight in the house.

This condition (described by some as emancipated) is at least the reverse of my ideal. I would give woman, not more rights, but more privileges. Instead of sending her to seek such freedom as notoriously prevails in banks and factories, I would design specially a house in which she can be free. And with that we come to the last point of all; the point at which we can perceive the needs of women, like the rights of men, stopped and falsified by something which it is the object of this book to expose.

The Feminist (which means, I think, one who dislikes the chief feminine characteristics) has heard my loose monologue, bursting all the time with one pent-up protest. At this point he will break out and say, “But what are we to do? There is modern commerce and its clerks; there is the modern family with its unmarried daughters; specialism is expected everywhere; female thrift and conscientiousness are demanded and supplied. What does it matter whether we should in the abstract prefer the old human and housekeeping woman; we might prefer the Garden of Eden. But since women have trades they ought to have trades unions. Since women work in factories, they ought to vote on factory-acts. If they are unmarried they must be commercial; if they are commercial they must be political. We must have new rules for a new world — even if it be not a better one.” I said to a Feminist once: “The question is not whether women are good enough for votes: it is whether votes are good enough for women.” He only answered: “Ah, you go and say that to the women chain-makers on Cradley Heath.”

Now this is the attitude which I attack. It is the huge heresy of Precedent. It is the view that because we have got into a mess we must grow messier to suit it; that because we have taken a wrong turn some time ago we must go forward and not backwards; that because we have lost our way we must lose our map also; and because we have missed our ideal, we must forget it. “There are numbers of excellent people who do not think votes unfeminine; and there may be enthusiasts for our beautiful modern industry who do not think factories unfeminine.” But if these things are unfeminine it is no answer to say that they fit into each other. I am not satisfied with the statement that my daughter must have unwomanly powers because she has unwomanly wrongs. Industrial soot and political printer’s ink are two blacks which do not make a white. Most of the Feminists would probably agree with me that womanhood is under shameful tyranny in the shops and mills. But I want to destroy the tyranny. They want to destroy womanhood. That is the only difference.

Whether we can recover the clear vision of woman as a tower with many windows, the fixed eternal feminine from which her sons, the specialists, go forth; whether we can preserve the tradition of a central thing which is even more human than democracy and even more practical than politics; whether, in word, it is possible to re-establish the family, freed from the filthy cynicism and cruelty of the commercial epoch, I shall discuss in the last section of this book. But meanwhile do not talk to me about the poor chain-makers on Cradley Heath. I know all about them and what they are doing. They are engaged in a very wide-spread and flourishing industry of the present age. They are making chains.

PART FOUR. EDUCATION: OR THE MISTAKE ABOUT THE CHILD

I. THE CALVINISM OF TO-DAY

When I wrote a little volume on my friend Mr. Bernard Shaw, it is needless to say that he reviewed it. I naturally felt tempted to answer and to criticise the book from the same disinterested and impartial standpoint from which Mr. Shaw had criticised the subject of it. I was not withheld by any feeling that the joke was getting a little obvious; for an obvious joke is only a successful joke; it is only the unsuccessful clowns who comfort themselves with being subtle. The real reason why I did not answer Mr. Shaw's amusing attack was this: that one simple phrase in it surrendered to me all that I have ever wanted, or could want from him to all eternity. I told Mr. Shaw (in substance) that he was a charming and clever fellow, but a common Calvinist. He admitted that this was true, and there (so far as I am concerned) is an end of the matter. He said that, of course, Calvin was quite right in holding that "if once a man is born it is too late to damn or save him." That is the fundamental and subterranean secret; that is the last lie in hell.

The difference between Puritanism and Catholicism is not about whether some priestly word or gesture is significant and sacred. It is about whether any word or gesture is significant and sacred. To the Catholic every other daily act is dramatic dedication to the service of good or of evil. To the Calvinist no act can have that sort of solemnity, because the person doing it has been dedicated from eternity, and is merely filling up his time until the crack of doom. The difference is something subtler than plum-puddings or private theatricals; the difference is that to a Christian of my kind this short earthly life is intensely thrilling and precious; to a Calvinist like Mr. Shaw it is confessedly automatic and uninteresting. To me these threescore years and ten are the battle. To the Fabian Calvinist (by his own confession) they are only a long procession of the victors in laurels and the vanquished in chains. To me earthly life is the drama; to him it is the epilogue. Shavians think about the embryo; Spiritualists about the ghost; Christians about the man. It is as well to have these things clear.

Now all our sociology and eugenics and the rest of it are not so much materialist as confusedly Calvinist, they are chiefly occupied in educating the child before he exists. The whole movement is full of a singular depression about what one can do with the populace, combined with a strange disembodied gayety about what may be done with posterity. These essential Calvinists have, indeed, abolished some of the more liberal and universal parts of Calvinism, such as the belief in an intellectual design or an everlasting happiness. But though Mr. Shaw and his friends admit it is a superstition that a man is judged after death, they stick to their central doctrine, that he is judged before he is born.

In consequence of this atmosphere of Calvinism in the cultured world of to-day, it is apparently necessary to begin all arguments on education with some mention of obstetrics and the unknown world of the prenatal. All I shall have to say, however, on heredity will be very brief, because I shall confine myself to what is known about it, and that is very nearly nothing. It is by no means self-evident, but it is a current modern dogma, that nothing actually enters the body at birth except a life derived and compounded from the parents. There is at least quite as much to be said for the Christian theory that an element comes from God, or the Buddhist theory that such an element comes from previous existences. But this is not a religious work, and I must submit to those very narrow intellectual limits which the absence of theology always imposes. Leaving the soul on one side, let us suppose for the sake of argument that the human character in the first case comes wholly from parents; and then let us curtly state our knowledge rather than our ignorance.

II. THE TRIBAL TERROR

Popular science, like that of Mr. Blatchford, is in this matter as mild as old wives' tales. Mr. Blatchford, with colossal simplicity, explained to millions of clerks and workingmen that the mother is like a bottle of blue beads and the father is like a bottle of yellow beads; and so the child is like a bottle of mixed blue beads and yellow. He might just as well have said that if the father has two legs and the mother has two legs, the child will have four legs. Obviously it is not a question of simple addition or simple division of a number of hard detached "qualities," like beads. It is an organic crisis and transformation of the most mysterious sort; so that even if the result is unavoidable, it will still be unexpected. It is not like blue beads mixed with yellow beads; it is like blue mixed with yellow; the result of which is green, a totally novel and unique experience, a new emotion. A man might live in a complete cosmos of blue and yellow, like the "Edinburgh Review"; a man might never have seen anything but a golden cornfield and a sapphire sky; and still he might never have had so wild a fancy as green. If you paid a sovereign for a bluebell; if you spilled the mustard on the blue-books; if you married a canary to a blue baboon; there is nothing in any of these wild weddings that contains even a hint of green. Green is not a mental combination, like addition; it is a physical result like birth. So, apart from the fact that nobody ever really understands parents or children either, yet even if we could understand the parents, we could not make any conjecture about the children. Each time the force works in a different way; each time the constituent colors combine into a different spectacle. A girl may actually inherit her ugliness from her mother's good looks. A boy may actually get his weakness from his father's strength. Even if we admit it is really a fate, for us it must remain a fairy tale. Considered in regard to its causes, the Calvinists and materialists may be right or wrong; we leave them their dreary debate. But considered in regard to its results there is no doubt about it. The thing is always a new color; a strange star. Every birth is as lonely as a miracle. Every child is as uninvited as a monstrosity.

On all such subjects there is no science, but only a sort of ardent ignorance; and nobody has ever been able to offer any theories of moral heredity which justified themselves in the only scientific sense; that is that one could calculate on them beforehand. There are six cases, say, of a grandson having the same twitch of mouth or vice of character as his grandfather; or perhaps there are sixteen cases, or perhaps sixty. But there are not two cases, there is not one case, there are no cases at all, of anybody betting half a crown that the grandfather will have a grandson with the twitch or the vice. In short, we deal with heredity as we deal with omens, affinities and the fulfillment of dreams. The things do happen, and when they happen we record them; but not even a lunatic ever reckons on them. Indeed, heredity, like dreams and omens, is a barbaric notion; that is, not necessarily an untrue, but a dim, groping and unsystematized notion. A civilized man feels himself a little more free from his family. Before Christianity these tales of tribal doom occupied the savage north; and since the Reformation and the revolt against Christianity (which is the religion of a civilized freedom) savagery is slowly creeping back in the form of realistic novels and problem plays. The curse of Rougon-Macquart is as heathen and superstitious as the curse of Ravenswood; only not so well written. But in this twilight barbaric sense the feeling of a racial fate is not irrational, and may be allowed like a hundred other half emotions that make life whole. The only essential of tragedy is that one should take it lightly. But even when the barbarian deluge rose to its highest in the madder novels of Zola (such as that called “The Human Beast”, a gross libel on beasts as well as humanity), even then the application of the hereditary idea to practice is avowedly timid and fumbling. The students of heredity are savages in this vital sense; that they stare back at marvels, but they dare not stare forward to schemes. In practice no one is mad enough to legislate or educate upon dogmas of physical inheritance; and even the language of the thing is rarely used except for special modern purposes, such as the endowment of research or the oppression of the poor.

III. THE TRICKS OF ENVIRONMENT

After all the modern clatter of Calvinism, therefore, it is only with the born child that anybody dares to deal; and the question is not eugenics but education. Or again, to adopt that rather tiresome terminology of popular science, it is not a question of heredity but of environment. I will not needlessly complicate this question by urging at length that environment also is open to some of the objections and hesitations which paralyze the employment of heredity. I will merely suggest in passing that even about the effect of environment modern people talk much too cheerfully and cheaply. The idea that surroundings will mold a man is always mixed up with the totally different idea that they will mold him in one particular way. To take the broadest case, landscape no doubt affects the soul; but how it affects it is quite another matter. To be born among pine-trees might mean loving pine-trees. It might mean loathing pine-trees. It might quite seriously mean never having seen a pine-tree. Or it might mean any mixture of these or any degree of any of them. So that the scientific method here lacks a little in precision. I am not speaking without the book; on the contrary, I am speaking with the blue book, with the guide-book and the atlas. It may be that the Highlanders are poetical because they inhabit mountains; but are the Swiss prosaic because they inhabit mountains? It may be the Swiss have fought for freedom because they had hills; did the Dutch fight for freedom because they hadn’t? Personally I should think it quite likely. Environment might work negatively as well as positively. The Swiss may be sensible, not in spite of their wild skyline, but be cause of their wild skyline. The Flemings may be fantastic artists, not in spite of their dull skyline, but because of it.

I only pause on this parenthesis to show that, even in matters admittedly within its range, popular science goes a great deal too fast, and drops enormous links of logic. Nevertheless, it remains the working reality that what we have to deal with in the case of children is, for all practical purposes, environment; or, to use the older word, education. When all such deductions are made, education is at least a form of will-worship; not of cowardly fact-worship; it deals with a department that we can control; it does not merely darken us with the barbarian pessimism of Zola and the heredity-hunt. We shall certainly make fools of ourselves; that is what is meant by philosophy. But we shall not merely make beasts of ourselves; which is the nearest popular definition for merely following the laws of Nature and cowering under the vengeance of the flesh. Education contains much moonshine; but not of the sort that makes mere mooncalves and idiots the slaves of a silver magnet, the one eye of the world. In this decent arena there are fads, but not frenzies. Doubtless we shall often find a mare’s nest; but it will not always be the nightmare’s.

IV. THE TRUTH ABOUT EDUCATION

When a man is asked to write down what he really thinks on education, a certain gravity grips and stiffens his soul, which might be mistaken by the superficial for disgust. If it be really true that men sickened of sacred words and wearied of theology, if this largely unreasoning irritation against “dogma” did arise out of some ridiculous excess of such things among priests in the past, then I fancy we must be laying up a fine crop of cant for our descendants to grow tired of. Probably the word “education” will some day seem honestly as old and objectless as the word “justification” now seems in a Puritan folio. Gibbon thought it frightfully funny that people should have fought about the difference between the “Homoousion” and the “Homoiousion.” The time will come when somebody will laugh louder to think that men thundered against Sectarian Education and also against Secular Education; that men of prominence and position actually denounced the schools for teaching a creed and also for not teaching a faith. The two Greek words in Gibbon look rather alike; but they really mean quite different things. Faith and creed do not look alike, but they mean exactly the same thing. Creed happens to be the Latin for faith.

Now having read numberless newspaper articles on education, and even written a good many of them, and having heard deafening and indeterminate discussion going on all around me almost ever since I was born, about whether religion was part of education, about whether hygiene was an essential of education, about whether militarism was inconsistent with true education, I naturally pondered much on this recurring substantive, and I am ashamed to say that it was comparatively late in life that I saw the main fact about it.

Of course, the main fact about education is that there is no such thing. It does not exist, as theology or soldiering exist. Theology is a word like geology, soldiering is a word like soldering; these sciences may be healthy or no as hobbies; but they deal with stone and kettles, with definite things. But education is not a word like geology or kettles. Education is a word like “transmission” or “inheritance”; it is not an object, but a method. It must mean the conveying of certain facts, views or qualities, to the last baby born. They might be the most trivial facts or the most preposterous views or the most offensive qualities; but if they are handed on from one generation to another they are education. Education is not a thing like theology, it is not an inferior or superior thing; it is not a thing in the same category of terms. Theology and education are to each other like a love-letter to the General Post Office. Mr. Fagin was quite as educational as Dr. Strong; in practice probably more educational. It is giving something — perhaps poison. Education is tradition, and tradition (as its name implies) can be treason.

This first truth is frankly banal; but it is so perpetually ignored in our political prosing that it must be made plain. A little boy in a little house, son of a little tradesman, is taught to eat his breakfast, to take his medicine, to love his country, to say his prayers, and to wear his Sunday clothes. Obviously Fagin, if he found such a boy, would teach him to drink gin, to lie, to betray his country, to blaspheme and to wear false whiskers. But so also Mr. Salt the vegetarian would abolish the boy's breakfast; Mrs. Eddy would throw away his medicine; Count Tolstoi would rebuke him for loving his country; Mr. Blatchford would stop his prayers, and Mr. Edward Carpenter would theoretically denounce Sunday clothes, and perhaps all clothes. I do not defend any of these advanced views, not even Fagin's. But I do ask what, between the lot of them, has become of the abstract entity called education. It is not (as commonly supposed) that the tradesman teaches education plus Christianity; Mr. Salt, education plus vegetarianism; Fagin, education plus crime. The truth is, that there is nothing in common at all between these teachers, except that they teach. In short, the only thing they share is the one thing they profess to dislike: the general idea of authority. It is quaint that people talk of separating dogma from education. Dogma is actually the only thing that cannot be separated from education. It is education. A teacher who is not dogmatic is simply a teacher who is not teaching.

V. AN EVIL CRY

The fashionable fallacy is that by education we can give people something that we have not got. To hear people talk one would think it was some sort of magic chemistry, by which, out of a laborious hotchpotch of hygienic meals, baths, breathing exercises, fresh air and freehand drawing, we can produce something splendid by accident; we can create what we cannot conceive. These pages have, of course, no other general purpose than to point out that we cannot create anything good until we have conceived it. It is odd that these people, who in the matter of heredity are so sullenly attached to law, in the matter of environment seem almost to believe in miracle. They insist that nothing but what was in the bodies of the parents can go to make the bodies of the children. But they seem somehow to think that things can get into the heads of the children which were not in the heads of the parents, or, indeed, anywhere else.

There has arisen in this connection a foolish and wicked cry typical of the confusion. I mean the cry, "Save the children." It is, of course, part of that modern morbidity that insists on treating the State (which is the home of man) as a sort of desperate expedient in time of panic. This terrified opportunism is also the origin of the Socialist and other schemes. Just as they would collect and share all the food as men do in a famine, so they would divide the children from their fathers, as men do in a shipwreck. That a human community might conceivably not be in a condition of famine or shipwreck never seems to cross their minds. This cry of "Save the children" has in it the hateful implication that it is impossible to save the fathers; in other words, that many millions of grown-up, sane, responsible and self-supporting Europeans are to be treated as dirt or debris and swept away out of the discussion; called dipsomaniacs because they drink in public houses instead of private houses; called unemployables because nobody knows how to get them work; called dullards if they still adhere to conventions, and called loafers if they still love liberty. Now I am concerned, first and last, to maintain that unless you can save the fathers, you cannot save the children; that at present we cannot save others, for we cannot save ourselves. We cannot teach citizenship if we are not citizens; we cannot free others if we have forgotten the appetite of freedom. Education is only truth in a state of transmission; and how can we pass on truth if it has never come into our hand? Thus we find that education is of all the cases the clearest for our general purpose. It is vain to save children; for they cannot remain children. By hypothesis we are teaching them to be men; and how can it be so simple to teach an ideal manhood to others if it is so vain and hopeless to find one for ourselves?

I know that certain crazy pedants have attempted to counter this difficulty by maintaining that education is not instruction at all, does not teach by authority at all. They present the process as coming, not from the outside, from the teacher, but entirely from inside the boy. Education, they say, is the Latin for leading out or drawing out the dormant faculties of each person. Somewhere far down in the dim boyish soul is a primordial yearning to learn Greek accents or to wear clean collars; and the schoolmaster only gently and tenderly liberates this imprisoned purpose. Sealed up in the newborn babe are the intrinsic secrets of how to eat asparagus and what was the date of Bannockburn. The educator only draws out the child's own unapparent love of long division; only leads out the child's slightly veiled preference for milk pudding to tarts. I am not sure that I believe in the derivation; I have heard the disgraceful suggestion that "educator," if applied to a Roman schoolmaster, did not mean leading our young functions into freedom; but only meant taking out little boys for a walk. But I am much more certain that I do not agree with the doctrine; I think it would be about as sane to say that the baby's milk comes from the baby as to say that the baby's educational merits do. There is, indeed, in each living creature a collection of forces and functions; but education means producing these in particular shapes and training them to particular purposes, or it means nothing at all. Speaking is the most practical instance of the whole situation. You may indeed "draw out" squeals and grunts from the child by simply poking him and pulling him about, a pleasant but cruel pastime to which many psychologists are addicted. But you will wait and watch very patiently indeed before you draw the English language out of him. That you have got to put into him; and there is an end of the matter.

VI. AUTHORITY THE UNAVOIDABLE

But the important point here is only that you cannot anyhow get rid of authority in education; it is not so much (as poor Conservatives say) that parental authority ought to be preserved, as that it cannot be destroyed. Mr. Bernard Shaw once said that he hated the idea of forming a child's mind. In that case Mr. Bernard Shaw had better hang himself; for he hates something inseparable from human life. I only mentioned educere and the drawing out of the faculties in order to point out that even this mental trick does not avoid the inevitable idea of parental or scholastic authority. The educator drawing out is just as arbitrary and coercive as the instructor pouring in; for he draws out what he chooses. He decides what in the child shall be developed and what shall not be developed. He does not (I suppose) draw out the neglected faculty of forgery. He does not (so far at least) lead out, with timid steps, a shy talent for torture. The only result of all this pompous and precise distinction between the educator and the instructor is that the instructor pokes where he likes and the educator pulls where he likes. Exactly the same intellectual violence is done to the creature who is poked and pulled. Now we must all accept the responsibility of this intellectual violence. Education is violent; because it is creative. It is creative because it is human. It is as reckless as playing on the fiddle; as dogmatic as drawing a picture; as brutal as building a house. In short, it is what all human action is; it is an interference with life and growth. After that it is a trifling and even a jocular question whether we say of this tremendous tormentor, the artist Man, that he puts things into us like an apothecary, or draws things out of us, like a dentist.

The point is that Man does what he likes. He claims the right to take his mother Nature under his control; he claims the right to make his child the Superman, in his image. Once flinch from this creative authority of man, and the whole courageous raid which we call civilization wavers and falls to pieces. Now most modern freedom is at root fear. It is not so much that we are too bold to endure rules; it is rather that we are too timid to endure responsibilities. And Mr. Shaw and such people are especially shrinking from that awful and ancestral responsibility to which our fathers committed us when they took the wild step of becoming men. I mean the responsibility of affirming the truth of our human tradition and handing it on with a voice of authority, an unshaken voice. That is the one eternal education; to be sure enough that something is true that you dare to tell it to a child. From this high audacious duty the moderns are fleeing on every side; and the only excuse for them is, (of course,) that their modern philosophies are so half-baked and hypothetical that they cannot convince themselves enough to convince even a newborn babe. This, of course, is connected with the decay of democracy; and is somewhat of a separate subject. Suffice it to say here that when I say that we should instruct our children, I mean that we should do it, not that Mr. Sully or Professor Earl Barnes should do it. The trouble in too many of our modern schools is that the State, being controlled so specially by the few, allows cranks and experiments to go straight to the schoolroom when they have never passed through the Parliament, the public house, the private house, the church, or the marketplace. Obviously, it ought to be the oldest things that are taught to the youngest people; the assured and experienced truths that are put first to the baby. But in a school to-day the baby has to submit to a system that is younger than himself. The flopping infant of four actually has more experience, and has weathered the world longer, than the dogma to which he is made to submit. Many a school boasts of having the last ideas in education, when it has not even the first idea; for the first idea is that even innocence, divine as it is, may learn something from experience. But this, as I say, is all due to the mere fact that we are managed by a little oligarchy; my system presupposes that men who govern themselves will govern their children. To-day we all use Popular Education as meaning education of the people. I wish I could use it as meaning education by the people.

The urgent point at present is that these expansive educators do not avoid the violence of authority an inch more than the old school masters. Nay, it might be maintained that they avoid it less. The old village schoolmaster beat a boy for not learning grammar and sent him out into the playground to play anything he liked; or at nothing, if he liked that better. The modern scientific schoolmaster pursues him into the playground and makes him play at cricket, because exercise is so good for the health. The modern Dr. Busby is a doctor of medicine as well as a doctor of divinity. He may say that the good of exercise is self-evident; but he must say it, and say it with authority. It cannot really be self-evident or it never could have been compulsory. But this is in modern practice a very mild case. In modern practice the free educationists forbid far more things than the old-fashioned educationists. A person with a taste for paradox (if any such shameless creature could exist) might with some plausibility maintain concerning all our expansion since the failure of Luther’s frank paganism and its replacement by Calvin’s Puritanism, that all this expansion has not been an expansion, but the closing in of a prison, so that less and less beautiful and humane things have been permitted. The Puritans destroyed images; the Rationalists forbade fairy tales. Count Tostoi practically issued one of his papal encyclicals against music; and I have heard of modern educationists who forbid children to play with tin soldiers. I remember a meek little madman who came up to me at some Socialist soiree or other, and asked me to use my influence (have I any influence?) against adventure stories for boys. It seems they breed an appetite for blood. But never mind that; one must keep one’s temper in this madhouse. I need only insist here that these things, even if a just deprivation, are a deprivation. I do not deny that the old vetoes and punishments were often idiotic and cruel; though they are much more so in a country like England (where in practice only a rich man decrees the punishment and only a poor man receives it) than in countries with a clearer popular tradition — such as Russia. In Russia flogging is often inflicted by peasants on a peasant. In modern England flogging can only in practice be inflicted by a gentleman on a very poor man. Thus only a few days ago as I write a small boy (a son of the poor, of course) was sentenced to flogging and imprisonment for five years for having picked up a small piece of coal which the experts value at 5d. I am entirely on the side of such liberals and humanitarians as have protested against this almost bestial ignorance about boys. But I do think it a little unfair that these humanitarians, who excuse boys for being robbers, should denounce them for playing at robbers. I do think that those who understand a guttersnipe playing with a piece of coal might, by a sudden spurt of imagination, understand him playing with a tin soldier. To sum it up in one sentence: I think my meek little madman might have understood that there is many a boy who would rather be flogged, and unjustly flogged, than have his adventure story taken away.

VII. THE HUMILITY OF MRS. GRUNDY

In short, the new education is as harsh as the old, whether or no it is as high. The freest fad, as much as the strictest formula, is stiff with authority. It is because the humane father thinks soldiers wrong that they are forbidden; there is no pretense, there can be no pretense, that the boy would think so. The average boy's impression certainly would be simply this: "If your father is a Methodist you must not play with soldiers on Sunday. If your father is a Socialist you must not play with them even on week days." All educationists are utterly dogmatic and authoritarian. You cannot have free education; for if you left a child free you would not educate him at all. Is there, then, no distinction or difference between the most hide-bound conventionalists and the most brilliant and bizarre innovators? Is there no difference between the heaviest heavy father and the most reckless and speculative maiden aunt? Yes; there is. The difference is that the heavy father, in his heavy way, is a democrat. He does not urge a thing merely because to his fancy it should be done; but, because (in his own admirable republican formula) "Everybody does it." The conventional authority does claim some popular mandate; the unconventional authority does not. The Puritan who forbids soldiers on Sunday is at least expressing Puritan opinion; not merely his own opinion. He is not a despot; he is a democracy, a tyrannical democracy, a dingy and local democracy perhaps; but one that could do and has done the two ultimate virile things — fight and appeal to God. But the veto of the new educationist is like the veto of the House of Lords; it does not pretend to be representative. These innovators are always talking about the blushing modesty of Mrs. Grundy. I do not know whether Mrs. Grundy is more modest than they are; but I am sure she is more humble.

But there is a further complication. The more anarchic modern may again attempt to escape the dilemma by saying that education should only be an enlargement of the mind, an opening of all the organs of receptivity. Light (he says) should be brought into darkness; blinded and thwarted existences in all our ugly corners should merely be permitted to perceive and expand; in short, enlightenment should be shed over darkest London. Now here is just the trouble; that, in so far as this is involved, there is no darkest London. London is not dark at all; not even at night. We have said that if education is a solid substance, then there is none of it. We may now say that if education is an abstract expansion there is no lack of it. There is far too much of it. In fact, there is nothing else.

There are no uneducated people. Everybody in England is educated; only most people are educated wrong. The state schools were not the first schools, but among the last schools to be established; and London had been educating Londoners long before the London School Board. The error is a highly practical one. It is persistently assumed that unless a child is civilized by the established schools, he must remain a barbarian. I wish he did. Every child in London becomes a highly civilized person. But here are so many different civilizations, most of them born tired. Anyone will tell you that the trouble with the poor is not so much that the old are still foolish, but rather that the young are already wise. Without going to school at all, the gutter-boy would be educated. Without going to school at all, he would be over-educated. The real object of our schools should be not so much to suggest complexity as solely to restore simplicity. You will hear venerable idealists declare we must make war on the ignorance of the poor; but, indeed, we have rather to make war on their knowledge. Real educationists have to resist a kind of roaring cataract of culture. The truant is being taught all day. If the children do not look at the large letters in the spelling-book, they need only walk outside and look at the large letters on the poster. If they do not care for the colored maps provided by the school, they can gape at the colored maps provided by the Daily Mail. If they tire of electricity, they can take to electric trams. If they are unmoved by music, they can take to drink. If they will not work so as to get a prize from their school, they may work to get a prize from Prizy Bits. If they cannot learn enough about law and citizenship to please the teacher, they learn enough about them to avoid the policeman. If they will not learn history forwards from the right end in the history books, they will learn it backwards from the wrong end in the party newspapers. And this is the tragedy of the whole affair: that the London poor, a particularly quick-witted and civilized class, learn everything tail foremost, learn even what is right in the way of what is wrong. They do not see the first principles of law in a law book; they only see its last results in the police news. They do not see the truths of politics in a general survey. They only see the lies of politics, at a General Election.

But whatever be the pathos of the London poor, it has nothing to do with being uneducated. So far from being without guidance, they are guided constantly, earnestly, excitedly; only guided wrong. The poor are not at all neglected, they are merely oppressed; nay, rather they are persecuted. There are no people in London who are not appealed to by the rich; the appeals of the rich shriek from every hoarding and shout from every hustings. For it should always be remembered that the queer, abrupt ugliness of our streets and costumes are not the creation of democracy, but of aristocracy. The House of Lords objected to the Embankment being disfigured by trams. But most of the rich men who disfigure the street-walls with their wares are actually in the House of Lords. The peers make the country seats beautiful by making the town streets hideous. This, however, is parenthetical. The point is, that the poor in London are not left alone, but rather deafened and bewildered with raucous and despotic advice. They are not like sheep without a shepherd. They are more like one sheep whom twenty-seven shepherds are shouting at. All the newspapers, all the new advertisements, all the new medicines and new theologies, all the glare and blare of the gas and brass of modern times — it is against these that the national school must bear up if it can. I will not question that our elementary education is better than barbaric ignorance. But there is no barbaric ignorance. I do not doubt that our schools would be good for uninstructed boys. But there are no uninstructed boys. A modern London school ought not merely to be clearer, kindlier, more clever and more rapid than ignorance and darkness. It must also be clearer than a picture postcard, cleverer than a Limerick competition, quicker than the tram, and kindlier than the tavern. The school, in fact, has the responsibility of universal rivalry. We need not deny that everywhere there is a light that must conquer darkness. But here we demand a light that can conquer light.

VIII. THE BROKEN RAINBOW

I will take one case that will serve both as symbol and example: the case of color. We hear the realists (those sentimental fellows) talking about the gray streets and the gray lives of the poor. But whatever the poor streets are they are not gray; but motley, striped, spotted, piebald and patched like a quilt. Hoxton is not aesthetic enough to be monochrome; and there is nothing of the Celtic twilight about it. As a matter of fact, a London gutter-boy walks unscathed among furnaces of color. Watch him walk along a line of hoardings, and you will see him now against glowing green, like a traveler in a tropic forest; now black like a bird against the burning blue of the Midi; now passant across a field gules, like the golden leopards of England. He ought to understand the irrational rapture of that cry of Mr. Stephen Phillips about “that bluer blue, that greener green.” There is no blue much bluer than Reckitt’s Blue and no blacking blacker than Day and Martin’s; no more emphatic yellow than that of Colman’s Mustard. If, despite this chaos of color, like a shattered rainbow, the spirit of the small boy is not exactly intoxicated with art and culture, the cause certainly does not lie in universal grayness or the mere starving of his senses. It lies in the fact that the colors are presented in the wrong connection, on the wrong scale, and, above all, from the wrong motive. It is not colors he lacks, but a philosophy of colors. In short, there is nothing wrong with Reckitt’s Blue except that it is not Reckitt’s. Blue does not belong to Reckitt, but to the sky; black does not belong to Day and Martin, but to the abyss. Even the finest posters are only very little things on a very large scale. There is something specially irritant in this way about the iteration of advertisements of mustard: a condiment, a small luxury; a thing in its nature not to be taken in quantity. There is a special irony in these starving streets to see such a great deal of mustard to such very little meat. Yellow is a bright pigment; mustard is a pungent pleasure. But to look at these seas of yellow is to be like a man who should swallow gallons of mustard. He would either die, or lose the taste of mustard altogether.

Now suppose we compare these gigantic trivialities on the hoardings with those tiny and tremendous pictures in which the mediaevals recorded their dreams; little pictures where the blue sky is hardly longer than a single sapphire, and the fires of judgment only a pigmy patch of gold. The difference here is not merely that poster art is in its nature more hasty than illumination art; it is not even merely that the ancient artist was serving the Lord while the modern artist is serving the lords. It is that the old artist contrived to convey an impression that colors really were significant and precious things, like jewels and talismanic stones. The color was often arbitrary; but it was always authoritative. If a bird was blue, if a tree was golden, if a fish was silver, if a cloud was scarlet, the artist managed to convey that these colors were important and almost painfully intense; all the red red-hot and all the gold tried in the fire. Now that is the spirit touching color which the schools must recover and protect if they are really to give the children any imaginative appetite or pleasure in the thing. It is not so much an indulgence in color; it is rather, if anything, a sort of fiery thrift. It fenced in a green field in heraldry as straitly as a green field in peasant proprietorship. It would not fling away gold leaf any more than gold coin; it would not heedlessly pour out purple or crimson, any more than it would spill good wine or shed blameless blood. That is the hard task before educationists in this special matter; they have to teach people to relish colors like liquors. They have the heavy business of turning drunkards into wine tasters. If even the twentieth century succeeds in doing these things, it will almost catch up with the twelfth.

The principle covers, however, the whole of modern life. Morris and the merely aesthetic mediaevalists always indicated that a crowd in the time of Chaucer would have been brightly clad and glittering, compared with a crowd in the time of Queen Victoria. I am not so sure that the real distinction is here. There would be brown frocks of friars in the first scene as well as brown bowlers of clerks in the second. There would be purple plumes of factory girls in the second scene as well as purple lenten vestments in the first. There would be white waistcoats against white ermine; gold watch chains against gold lions. The real difference is this: that the brown earth-color of the monk’s coat was instinctively chosen to express labor and humility, whereas the brown color of the clerk’s hat was not chosen to express anything. The monk did mean to say that he robed himself in dust. I am sure the clerk does not mean to say that he crowns himself with clay. He is not putting dust on his head, as the only diadem of man. Purple, at once rich and somber, does suggest a triumph temporarily eclipsed by a tragedy. But the factory girl does not intend her hat to express a triumph temporarily eclipsed by a tragedy; far from it. White ermine was meant to express moral purity; white waistcoats were not. Gold lions do suggest a flaming magnanimity; gold watch chains do not. The point is not that we have lost the material hues, but that we have lost the trick of turning them to the best advantage. We are not like children who have lost their paint box and are left alone with a gray lead-pencil. We are like children who have mixed all the colors in the paint-box together and lost the paper of instructions. Even then (I do not deny) one has some fun.

Now this abundance of colors and loss of a color scheme is a pretty perfect parable of all that is wrong with our modern ideals and especially with our modern education. It is the same with ethical education, economic education, every sort of education. The growing London child will find no lack of highly controversial teachers who will teach him that geography means painting the map red; that economics means taxing the foreigner, that patriotism means the peculiarly un-English habit of flying a flag on Empire Day. In mentioning these examples specially I do not mean to imply that there are no similar crudities and popular fallacies upon the other political side. I mention them because they constitute a very special and arresting feature of the situation. I mean this, that there were always Radical revolutionists; but now there are Tory revolutionists also. The modern Conservative no longer conserves. He is avowedly an innovator. Thus all the current defenses of the House of Lords which describe it as a bulwark against the mob, are intellectually done for; the bottom has fallen out of them; because on five or six of the most turbulent topics of the day, the House of Lords is a mob itself; and exceedingly likely to behave like one.

IX. THE NEED FOR NARROWNESS

Through all this chaos, then we come back once more to our main conclusion. The true task of culture to-day is not a task of expansion, but very decidedly of selection — and rejection. The educationist must find a creed and teach it. Even if it be not a theological creed, it must still be as fastidious and as firm as theology. In short, it must be orthodox. The teacher may think it antiquated to have to decide precisely between the faith of Calvin and of Laud, the faith of Aquinas and of Swedenborg; but he still has to choose between the faith of Kipling and of Shaw, between the world of Blatchford and of General Booth. Call it, if you will, a narrow question whether your child shall be brought up by the vicar or the minister or the popish priest. You have still to face that larger, more liberal, more highly civilized question, of whether he shall be brought up by Harmsworth or by Pearson, by Mr. Eustace Miles with his Simple Life or Mr. Peter Keary with his Strenuous Life; whether he shall most eagerly read Miss Annie S. Swan or Mr. Bart Kennedy; in short, whether he shall end up in the mere violence of the S. D. F., or in the mere vulgarity of the Primrose League. They say that nowadays the creeds are crumbling; I doubt it, but at least the sects are increasing; and education must now be sectarian education, merely for practical purposes. Out of all this throng of theories it must somehow select a theory; out of all these thundering voices it must manage to hear a voice; out of all this awful and aching battle of blinding lights, without one shadow to give shape to them, it must manage somehow to trace and to track a star.

I have spoken so far of popular education, which began too vague and vast and which therefore has accomplished little. But as it happens there is in England something to compare it with. There is an institution, or class of institutions, which began with the same popular object, which has since followed a much narrower object, but which had the great advantage that it did follow some object, unlike our modern elementary schools.

In all these problems I should urge the solution which is positive, or, as silly people say, “optimistic.” I should set my face, that is, against most of the solutions that are solely negative and abolitionist. Most educators of the poor seem to think that they have to teach the poor man not to drink. I should be quite content if they teach him to drink; for it is mere ignorance about how to drink and when to drink that is accountable for most of his tragedies. I do not propose (like some of my revolutionary friends) that we should abolish the public schools. I propose the much more lurid and desperate experiment that we should make them public. I do not wish to make Parliament stop working, but rather to make it work; not to shut up churches, but rather to open them; not to put out the lamp of learning or destroy the hedge of property, but only to make some rude effort to make universities fairly universal and property decently proper.

In many cases, let it be remembered, such action is not merely going back to the old ideal, but is even going back to the old reality. It would be a great step forward for the gin shop to go back to the inn. It is incontrovertibly true that to mediaevalize the public schools would be to democratize the public schools. Parliament did once really mean (as its name seems to imply) a place where people were allowed to talk. It is only lately that the general increase of efficiency, that is, of the Speaker, has made it mostly a place where people are prevented from talking. The poor do not go to the modern church, but they went to the ancient church all right; and if the common man in the past had a grave respect for property, it may conceivably have been because he sometimes had some of his own. I therefore can claim that I have no vulgar itch of innovation in anything I say about any of these institutions. Certainly I have none in that particular one which I am now obliged to pick out of the list; a type of institution to which I have genuine and personal reasons for being friendly and grateful: I mean the great Tudor foundations, the public schools of England. They have been praised for a great many things, mostly, I am sorry to say, praised by themselves and their children. And yet for some reason no one has ever praised them the one really convincing reason.

X. THE CASE FOR THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The word success can of course be used in two senses. It may be used with reference to a thing serving its immediate and peculiar purpose, as of a wheel going around; or it can be used with reference to a thing adding to the general welfare, as of a wheel being a useful discovery. It is one thing to say that Smith's flying machine is a failure, and quite another to say that Smith has failed to make a flying machine. Now this is very broadly the difference between the old English public schools and the new democratic schools. Perhaps the old public schools are (as I personally think they are) ultimately weakening the country rather than strengthening it, and are therefore, in that ultimate sense, inefficient. But there is such a thing as being efficiently inefficient. You can make your flying ship so that it flies, even if you also make it so that it kills you. Now the public school system may not work satisfactorily, but it works; the public schools may not achieve what we want, but they achieve what they want. The popular elementary schools do not in that sense achieve anything at all. It is very difficult to point to any guttersnipe in the street and say that he embodies the ideal for which popular education has been working, in the sense that the fresh-faced, foolish boy in “Etons” does embody the ideal for which the headmasters of Harrow and Winchester have been working. The aristocratic educationists have the positive purpose of turning out gentlemen, and they do turn out gentlemen, even when they expel them. The popular educationists would say that they had the far nobler idea of turning out citizens. I concede that it is a much nobler idea, but where are the citizens? I know that the boy in “Etons” is stiff with a rather silly and sentimental stoicism, called being a man of the world. I do not fancy that the errand-boy is rigid with that republican stoicism that is called being a citizen. The schoolboy will really say with fresh and innocent hauteur, “I am an English gentleman.” I cannot so easily picture the errand-boy drawing up his head to the stars and answering, “Romanus civis sum.” Let it be granted that our elementary teachers are teaching the very broadest code of morals, while our great headmasters are teaching only the narrowest code of manners. Let it be granted that both these things are being taught. But only one of them is being learned.

It is always said that great reformers or masters of events can manage to bring about some specific and practical reforms, but that they never fulfill their visions or satisfy their souls. I believe there is a real sense in which this apparent platitude is quite untrue. By a strange inversion the political idealist often does not get what he asks for, but does get what he wants. The silent pressure of his ideal lasts much longer and reshapes the world much more than the actualities by which he attempted to suggest it. What perishes is the letter, which he thought so practical. What endures is the spirit, which he felt to be unattainable and even unutterable. It is exactly his schemes that are not fulfilled; it is exactly his vision that is fulfilled. Thus the ten or twelve paper constitutions of the French Revolution, which seemed so business-like to the framers of them, seem to us to have flown away on the wind as the wildest fancies. What has not flown away, what is a fixed fact in Europe, is the ideal and vision. The Republic, the idea of a land full of mere citizens all with some minimum of manners and minimum of wealth, the vision of the eighteenth century, the reality of the twentieth. So I think it will generally be with the creator of social things, desirable or undesirable. All his schemes will fail, all his tools break in his hands. His compromises will collapse, his concessions will be useless. He must brace himself to bear his fate; he shall have nothing but his heart’s desire.

Now if one may compare very small things with very great, one may say that the English aristocratic schools can claim something of the same sort of success and solid splendor as the French democratic politics. At least they can claim the same sort of superiority over the distracted and fumbling attempts of modern England to establish democratic education. Such success as has attended the public schoolboy throughout the Empire, a success exaggerated indeed by himself, but still positive and a fact of a certain indisputable shape and size, has been due to the central and supreme circumstance that the managers of our public schools did know what sort of boy they liked. They wanted something and they got something; instead of going to work in the broad-minded manner and wanting everything and getting nothing.

The only thing in question is the quality of the thing they got. There is something highly maddening in the circumstance that when modern people attack an institution that really does demand reform, they always attack it for the wrong reasons. Thus many opponents of our public schools, imagining themselves to be very democratic, have exhausted themselves in an unmeaning attack upon the study of Greek. I can understand how Greek may be regarded as useless, especially by those thirsting to throw themselves into the cut throat commerce which is the negation of citizenship; but I do not understand how it can be considered undemocratic. I quite understand why Mr. Carnegie has a hatred of Greek. It is obscurely founded on the firm and sound impression that in any self-governing Greek city he would have been killed. But I cannot comprehend why any chance democrat, say Mr. Quelch, or Mr. Will Crooks, I or Mr. John M. Robertson, should be opposed to people learning the Greek alphabet, which was the alphabet of liberty. Why should Radicals dislike Greek? In that language is written all the earliest and, Heaven knows, the most heroic history of the Radical party. Why should Greek disgust a democrat, when the very word democrat is Greek?

A similar mistake, though a less serious one, is merely attacking the athletics of public schools as something promoting animalism and brutality. Now brutality, in the only immoral sense, is not a vice of the English public schools. There is much moral bullying, owing to the general lack of moral courage in the public-school atmosphere. These schools do, upon the whole, encourage physical courage; but they do not merely discourage moral courage, they forbid it. The ultimate result of the thing is seen in the egregious English officer who cannot even endure to wear a bright uniform except when it is blurred and hidden in the smoke of battle. This, like all the affectations of our present plutocracy, is an entirely modern thing. It was unknown to the old aristocrats. The Black Prince would certainly have asked that any knight who had the courage to lift his crest among his enemies, should also have the courage to lift it among his friends. As regards moral courage, then it is not so much that the public schools support it feebly, as that they suppress it firmly. But physical courage they do, on the whole, support; and physical courage is a magnificent fundamental. The one great, wise Englishman of the eighteenth century said truly that if a man lost that virtue he could never be sure of keeping any other. Now it is one of the mean and morbid modern lies that physical courage is connected with cruelty. The Tolstoian and Kiplingite are nowhere more at one than in maintaining this. They have, I believe, some small sectarian quarrel with each other, the one saying that courage must be abandoned because it is connected with cruelty, and the other maintaining that cruelty is charming because it is a part of courage. But it is all, thank God, a lie. An energy and boldness of body may make a man stupid or reckless or dull or drunk or hungry, but it does not make him spiteful. And we may admit heartily (without joining in that perpetual praise which public-school men are always pouring upon themselves) that this does operate to the removal of mere evil cruelty in the public schools. English public school life is extremely like English public life, for which it is the preparatory school. It is like it specially in this, that things are either very open, common and conventional, or else are very secret indeed. Now there is cruelty in public schools, just as there is kleptomania and secret drinking and vices without a name. But these things do not flourish in the full daylight and common consciousness of the school, and no more does cruelty. A tiny trio of sullen-looking boys gather in corners and seem to have some ugly business always; it may be indecent literature, it may be the beginning of drink, it may occasionally be cruelty to little boys. But on this stage the bully is not a braggart. The proverb says that bullies are always cowardly, but these bullies are more than cowardly; they are shy.

As a third instance of the wrong form of revolt against the public schools, I may mention the habit of using the word aristocracy with a double implication. To put the plain truth as briefly as possible, if aristocracy means rule by a rich ring, England has aristocracy and the English public schools support it. If it means rule by ancient families or flawless blood, England has not got aristocracy, and the public schools systematically destroy it. In these circles real aristocracy, like real democracy, has become bad form. A modern fashionable host dare not praise his ancestry; it would so often be an insult to half the other oligarchs at table, who have no ancestry. We have said he has not the moral courage to wear his uniform; still less has he the moral courage to wear his coat-of-arms. The whole thing now is only a vague hotch-potch of nice and nasty gentlemen. The nice gentleman never refers to anyone else’s father, the nasty gentleman never refers to his own. That is the only difference, the rest is the public-school manner. But Eton and Harrow have to be aristocratic because they consist so largely of parvenues. The public school is not a sort of refuge for aristocrats, like an asylum, a place where they go in and never come out. It is a factory for aristocrats; they come out without ever having perceptibly gone in. The poor little private schools, in their old-world, sentimental, feudal style, used to stick up a notice, “For the Sons of Gentlemen only.” If the public schools stuck up a notice it ought to be inscribed, “For the Fathers of Gentlemen only.” In two generations they can do the trick.

XI. THE SCHOOL FOR HYPOCRITES

These are the false accusations; the accusation of classicism, the accusation of cruelty, and the accusation of an exclusiveness based on perfection of pedigree. English public-school boys are not pedants, they are not torturers; and they are not, in the vast majority of cases, people fiercely proud of their ancestry, or even people with any ancestry to be proud of. They are taught to be courteous, to be good tempered, to be brave in a bodily sense, to be clean in a bodily sense; they are generally kind to animals, generally civil to servants, and to anyone in any sense their equal, the jolliest companions on earth. Is there then anything wrong in the public-school ideal? I think we all feel there is something very wrong in it, but a blinding network of newspaper phraseology obscures and entangles us; so that it is hard to trace to its beginning, beyond all words and phrases, the faults in this great English achievement.

Surely, when all is said, the ultimate objection to the English public school is its utterly blatant and indecent disregard of the duty of telling the truth. I know there does still linger among maiden ladies in remote country houses a notion that English schoolboys are taught to tell the truth, but it cannot be maintained seriously for a moment. Very occasionally, very vaguely, English schoolboys are told not to tell lies, which is a totally different thing. I may silently support all the obscene fictions and forgeries in the universe, without once telling a lie. I may wear another man’s coat, steal another man’s wit, apostatize to another man’s creed, or poison another man’s coffee, all without ever telling a lie. But no English schoolboy is ever taught to tell the truth, for the very simple reason that he is never taught to desire the truth. From the very first he is taught to be totally careless about whether a fact is a fact; he is taught to care only whether the fact can be used on his “side” when he is engaged in “playing the game.” He takes sides in his Union debating society to settle whether Charles I ought to have been killed, with the same solemn and pompous frivolity with which he takes sides in the cricket field to decide whether Rugby or Westminster shall win. He is never allowed to admit the abstract notion of the truth, that the match is a matter of what may happen, but that Charles I is a matter of what did happen — or did not. He is Liberal or Tory at the general election exactly as he is Oxford or Cambridge at the boat race. He knows that sport deals with the unknown; he has not even a notion that politics should deal with the known. If anyone really doubts this self-evident proposition, that the public schools definitely discourage the love of truth, there is one fact which I should think would settle him. England is the country of the Party System, and it has always been chiefly run by public-school men. Is there anyone out of Hanwell who will maintain that the Party System, whatever its conveniences or inconveniences, could have been created by people particularly fond of truth?

The very English happiness on this point is itself a hypocrisy. When a man really tells the truth, the first truth he tells is that he himself is a liar. David said in his haste, that is, in his honesty, that all men are liars. It was afterwards, in some leisurely official explanation, that he said the Kings of Israel at least told the truth. When Lord Curzon was Viceroy he delivered a moral lecture to the Indians on their reputed indifference to veracity, to actuality and intellectual honor. A great many people indignantly discussed whether orientals deserved to receive this rebuke; whether Indians were indeed in a position to receive such severe admonition. No one seemed to ask, as I should venture to ask, whether Lord Curzon was in a position to give it. He is an ordinary party politician; a party politician means a politician who might have belonged to either party. Being such a person, he must again and again, at every twist and turn of party strategy, either have deceived others or grossly deceived himself. I do not know the East; nor do I like what I know. I am quite ready to believe that when Lord Curzon went out he found a very false atmosphere. I only say it must have been something startlingly and chokingly false if it was falser than that English atmosphere from which he came. The English Parliament actually cares for everything except veracity. The public-school man is kind, courageous, polite, clean, companionable; but, in the most awful sense of the words, the truth is not in him.

This weakness of untruthfulness in the English public schools, in the English political system, and to some extent in the English character, is a weakness which necessarily produces a curious crop of superstitions, of lying legends, of evident delusions clung to through low spiritual self-indulgence. There are so many of these public-school superstitions that I have here only space for one of them, which may be called the superstition of soap. It appears to have been shared by the ablutionary Pharisees, who resembled the English public-school aristocrats in so many respects: in their care about club rules and traditions, in their offensive optimism at the expense of other people, and above all in their unimaginative plodding patriotism in the worst interests of their country. Now the old human common sense about washing is that it is a great pleasure. Water (applied externally) is a splendid thing, like wine. Sybarites bathe in wine, and Nonconformists drink water; but we are not concerned with these frantic exceptions. Washing being a pleasure, it stands to reason that rich people can afford it more than poor people, and as long as this was recognized all was well; and it was very right that rich people should offer baths to poor people, as they might offer any other agreeable thing — a drink or a donkey ride. But one dreadful day, somewhere about the middle of the nineteenth century, somebody discovered (somebody pretty well off) the two great modern truths, that washing is a virtue in the rich and therefore a duty in the poor. For a duty is a virtue that one can't do. And a virtue is generally a duty that one can do quite easily; like the bodily cleanliness of the upper classes. But in the public-school tradition of public life, soap has become creditable simply because it is pleasant. Baths are represented as a part of the decay of the Roman Empire; but the same baths are represented as part of the energy and rejuvenation of the British Empire. There are distinguished public school men, bishops, dons, headmasters, and high politicians, who, in the course of the eulogies which from time to time they pass upon themselves, have actually identified physical cleanliness with moral purity. They say (if I remember rightly) that a public-school man is clean inside and out. As if everyone did not know that while saints can afford to be dirty, seducers have to be clean. As if everyone did not know that the harlot must be clean, because it is her business to captivate, while the good wife may be dirty, because it is her business to clean. As if we did not all know that whenever God's thunder cracks above us, it is very likely indeed to find the simplest man in a muck cart and the most complex blackguard in a bath.

There are other instances, of course, of this oily trick of turning the pleasures of a gentleman into the virtues of an Anglo-Saxon. Sport, like soap, is an admirable thing, but, like soap, it is an agreeable thing. And it does not sum up all mortal merits to be a sportsman playing the game in a world where it is so often necessary to be a workman doing the work. By all means let a gentleman congratulate himself that he has not lost his natural love of pleasure, as against the blase, and unchildlike. But when one has the childlike joy it is best to have also the childlike unconsciousness; and I do not think we should have special affection for the little boy who everlastingly explained that it was his duty to play Hide and Seek and one of his family virtues to be prominent in Puss in the Corner.

Another such irritating hypocrisy is the oligarchic attitude towards mendicity as against organized charity. Here again, as in the case of cleanliness and of athletics, the attitude would be perfectly human and intelligible if it were not maintained as a merit. Just as the obvious thing about soap is that it is a convenience, so the obvious thing about beggars is that they are an inconvenience. The rich would deserve very little blame if they simply said that they never dealt directly with beggars, because in modern urban civilization it is impossible to deal directly with beggars; or if not impossible, at least very difficult. But these people do not refuse money to beggars on the ground that such charity is difficult. They refuse it on the grossly hypocritical ground that such charity is easy. They say, with the most grotesque gravity, “Anyone can put his hand in his pocket and give a poor man a penny; but we, philanthropists, go home and brood and travail over the poor man’s troubles until we have discovered exactly what jail, reformatory, workhouse, or lunatic asylum it will really be best for him to go to.” This is all sheer lying. They do not brood about the man when they get home, and if they did it would not alter the original fact that their motive for discouraging beggars is the perfectly rational one that beggars are a bother. A man may easily be forgiven for not doing this or that incidental act of charity, especially when the question is as genuinely difficult as is the case of mendicity. But there is something quite pestilently Pecksniffian about shrinking from a hard task on the plea that it is not hard enough. If any man will really try talking to the ten beggars who come to his door he will soon find out whether it is really so much easier than the labor of writing a check for a hospital.

XII. THE STALENESS OF THE NEW SCHOOLS

For this deep and disabling reason therefore, its cynical and abandoned indifference to the truth, the English public school does not provide us with the ideal that we require. We can only ask its modern critics to remember that right or wrong the thing can be done; the factory is working, the wheels are going around, the gentlemen are being produced, with their soap, cricket and organized charity all complete. And in this, as we have said before, the public school really has an advantage over all the other educational schemes of our time. You can pick out a public-school man in any of the many companies into which they stray, from a Chinese opium den to a German Jewish dinner-party. But I doubt if you could tell which little match girl had been brought up by undenominational religion and which by secular education. The great English aristocracy which has ruled us since the Reformation is really, in this sense, a model to the moderns. It did have an ideal, and therefore it has produced a reality.

We may repeat here that these pages propose mainly to show one thing: that progress ought to be based on principle, while our modern progress is mostly based on precedent. We go, not by what may be affirmed in theory, but by what has been already admitted in practice. That is why the Jacobites are the last Tories in history with whom a high-spirited person can have much sympathy. They wanted a specific thing; they were ready to go forward for it, and so they were also ready to go back for it. But modern Tories have only the dullness of defending situations that they had not the excitement of creating. Revolutionists make a reform, Conservatives only conserve the reform. They never reform the reform, which is often very much wanted. Just as the rivalry of armaments is only a sort of sulky plagiarism, so the rivalry of parties is only a sort of sulky inheritance. Men have votes, so women must soon have votes; poor children are taught by force, so they must soon be fed by force; the police shut public houses by twelve o’clock, so soon they must shut them by eleven o’clock; children stop at school till they are fourteen, so soon they will stop till they are forty. No gleam of reason, no momentary return to first principles, no abstract asking of any obvious question, can interrupt this mad and monotonous gallop of mere progress by precedent. It is a good way to prevent real revolution. By this logic of events, the Radical gets as much into a rut as the

Conservative. We meet one hoary old lunatic who says his grandfather told him to stand by one stile. We meet another hoary old lunatic who says his grandfather told him only to walk along one lane.

I say we may repeat here this primary part of the argument, because we have just now come to the place where it is most startlingly and strongly shown. The final proof that our elementary schools have no definite ideal of their own is the fact that they so openly imitate the ideals of the public schools. In the elementary schools we have all the ethical prejudices and exaggerations of Eton and Harrow carefully copied for people to whom they do not even roughly apply. We have the same wildly disproportionate doctrine of the effect of physical cleanliness on moral character. Educators and educational politicians declare, amid warm cheers, that cleanliness is far more important than all the squabbles about moral and religious training. It would really seem that so long as a little boy washes his hands it does not matter whether he is washing off his mother's jam or his brother's gore. We have the same grossly insincere pretense that sport always encourages a sense of honor, when we know that it often ruins it. Above all, we have the same great upperclass assumption that things are done best by large institutions handling large sums of money and ordering everybody about; and that trivial and impulsive charity is in some way contemptible. As Mr. Blatchford says, "The world does not want piety, but soap — and Socialism." Piety is one of the popular virtues, whereas soap and Socialism are two hobbies of the upper middle class.

These "healthy" ideals, as they are called, which our politicians and schoolmasters have borrowed from the aristocratic schools and applied to the democratic, are by no means particularly appropriate to an impoverished democracy. A vague admiration for organized government and a vague distrust of individual aid cannot be made to fit in at all into the lives of people among whom kindness means lending a saucepan and honor means keeping out of the workhouse. It resolves itself either into discouraging that system of prompt and patchwork generosity which is a daily glory of the poor, or else into hazy advice to people who have no money not to give it recklessly away. Nor is the exaggerated glory of athletics, defensible enough in dealing with the rich who, if they did not romp and race, would eat and drink unwholesomely, by any means so much to the point when applied to people, most of whom will take a great deal of exercise anyhow, with spade or hammer, pickax or saw. And for the third case, of washing, it is obvious that the same sort of rhetoric about corporeal daintiness which is proper to an ornamental class cannot, merely as it stands, be applicable to a dustman. A gentleman is expected to be substantially spotless all the time. But it is no more discreditable for a scavenger to be dirty than for a deep-sea diver to be wet. A sweep is no more disgraced when he is covered with soot than Michael Angelo when he is covered with clay, or Bayard when he is covered with blood. Nor have these extenders of the public-school tradition done or suggested anything by way of a substitute for the present snobbish system which makes cleanliness almost impossible to the poor; I mean the general ritual of linen and the wearing of the cast-off clothes of the rich. One man moves into another man's clothes as he moves into another man's house. No wonder that our educationists are not horrified at a man picking up the aristocrat's second-hand trousers, when they themselves have only taken up the aristocrat's second-hand ideas.

XIII. THE OUTLAWED PARENT

There is one thing at least of which there is never so much as a whisper inside the popular schools; and that is the opinion of the people. The only persons who seem to have nothing to do with the education of the children are the parents. Yet the English poor have very definite traditions in many ways. They are hidden under embarrassment and irony; and those psychologists who have disentangled them talk of them as very strange, barbaric and secretive things. But, as a matter of fact, the traditions of the poor are mostly simply the traditions of humanity, a thing which many of us have not seen for some time. For instance, workingmen have a tradition that if one is talking about a vile thing it is better to talk of it in coarse language; one is the less likely to be seduced into excusing it. But mankind had this tradition also, until the Puritans and their children, the Ibsenites, started the opposite idea, that it does not matter what you say so long as you say it with long words and a long face. Or again, the educated classes have tabooed most jesting about personal appearance; but in doing this they taboo not only the humor of the slums, but more than half the healthy literature of the world; they put polite nose-bags on the noses of Punch and Bardolph, Stiggins and Cyrano de Bergerac. Again, the educated classes have adopted a hideous and heathen custom of considering death as too dreadful to talk about, and letting it remain a secret for each person, like some private malformation. The poor, on the contrary, make a great gossip and display about bereavement; and they are right. They have hold of a truth of psychology which is at the back of all the funeral customs of the children of men. The way to lessen sorrow is to make a lot of it. The way to endure a painful crisis is to insist very much that it is a crisis; to permit people who must feel sad at least to feel important. In this the poor are simply the priests of the universal civilization; and in their stuffy feasts and solemn chattering there is the smell of the baked meats of Hamlet and the dust and echo of the funeral games of Patroclus.

The things philanthropists barely excuse (or do not excuse) in the life of the laboring classes are simply the things we have to excuse in all the greatest monuments of man. It may be that the laborer is as gross as Shakespeare or as garrulous as Homer; that if he is religious he talks nearly as much about hell as Dante; that if he is worldly he talks nearly as much about drink as Dickens. Nor is the poor man without historic support if he thinks less of that ceremonial washing which Christ dismissed, and rather more of that ceremonial drinking which Christ specially sanctified. The only difference between the poor man of to-day and the saints and heroes of history is that which in all classes separates the common man who can feel things from the great man who can express them. What he feels is merely the heritage of man. Now nobody expects of course that the cabmen and coal-heavers can be complete instructors of their children any more than the squires and colonels and tea merchants are complete instructors of their children. There must be an educational specialist in loco parentis. But the master at Harrow is in loco parentis; the master in Hoxton is rather contra parentem. The vague politics of the squire, the vaguer virtues of the colonel, the soul and spiritual yearnings of a tea merchant, are, in veritable practice, conveyed to the children of these people at the English public schools. But I wish here to ask a very plain and emphatic question. Can anyone alive even pretend to point out any way in which these special virtues and traditions of the poor are reproduced in the education of the poor? I do not wish the coster's irony to appeal as coarsely in the school as it does in the tap room; but does it appear at all? Is the child taught to sympathize at all with his father's admirable cheerfulness and slang? I do not expect the pathetic, eager pietas of the mother, with her funeral clothes and funeral baked meats, to be exactly imitated in the educational system; but has it any influence at all on the educational system? Does any elementary schoolmaster accord it even an instant's consideration or respect? I do not expect the schoolmaster to hate hospitals and C.O.S. centers so much as the schoolboy's father; but does he hate them at all? Does he sympathize in the least with the poor man's point of honor against official institutions? Is it not quite certain that the ordinary elementary schoolmaster will think it not merely natural but simply conscientious to eradicate all these rugged legends of a laborious people, and on principle to preach soap and Socialism against beer and liberty? In the lower classes the school master does not work for the parent, but against the parent. Modern education means handing down the customs of the minority, and rooting out the customs of the majority. Instead of their Christlike charity, their Shakespearean laughter and their high Homeric reverence for the dead, the poor have imposed on them mere pedantic copies of the prejudices of the remote rich. They must think a bathroom a necessity because to the lucky it is a luxury; they must swing Swedish clubs because their masters are afraid of English cudgels; and they must get over their prejudice against being fed by the parish, because aristocrats feel no shame about being fed by the nation.

XIV. FOLLY AND FEMALE EDUCATION

It is the same in the case of girls. I am often solemnly asked what I think of the new ideas about female education. But there are no new ideas about female education. There is not, there never has been, even the vestige of a new idea. All the educational reformers did was to ask what was being done to boys and then go and do it to girls; just as they asked what was being taught to young squires and then taught it to young chimney sweeps. What they call new ideas are very old ideas in the wrong place. Boys play football, why shouldn’t girls play football; boys have school colors, why shouldn’t girls have school-colors; boys go in hundreds to day-schools, why shouldn’t girls go in hundreds to day-schools; boys go to Oxford, why shouldn’t girls go to Oxford — in short, boys grow mustaches, why shouldn’t girls grow mustaches — that is about their notion of a new idea. There is no brain-work in the thing at all; no root query of what sex is, of whether it alters this or that, and why, anymore than there is any imaginative grip of the humor and heart of the populace in the popular education. There is nothing but plodding, elaborate, elephantine imitation. And just as in the case of elementary teaching, the cases are of a cold and reckless inappropriateness. Even a savage could see that bodily things, at least, which are good for a man are very likely to be bad for a woman. Yet there is no boy’s game, however brutal, which these mild lunatics have not promoted among girls. To take a stronger case, they give girls very heavy home-work; never reflecting that all girls have home-work already in their homes. It is all a part of the same silly subjugation; there must be a hard stick-up collar round the neck of a woman, because it is already a nuisance round the neck of a man. Though a Saxon serf, if he wore that collar of cardboard, would ask for his collar of brass.

It will then be answered, not without a sneer, “And what would you prefer? Would you go back to the elegant early Victorian female, with ringlets and smelling-bottle, doing a little in water colors, dabbling a little in Italian, playing a little on the harp, writing in vulgar albums and painting on senseless screens? Do you prefer that?” To which I answer, “Emphatically, yes.” I solidly prefer it to the new female education, for this reason, that I can see in it an intellectual design, while there is none in the other. I am by no means sure that even in point of practical fact that elegant female would not have been more than a match for most of the inelegant females. I fancy Jane Austen was stronger, sharper and shrewder than Charlotte Bronte; I am quite certain she was stronger, sharper and shrewder than George Eliot. She could do one thing neither of them could do: she could coolly and sensibly describe a man. I am not sure that the old great lady who could only smatter Italian was not more vigorous than the new great lady who can only stammer American; nor am I certain that the bygone duchesses who were scarcely successful when they painted Melrose Abbey, were so much more weak-minded than the modern duchesses who paint only their own faces, and are bad at that. But that is not the point. What was the theory, what was the idea, in their old, weak water-colors and their shaky Italian? The idea was the same which in a ruder rank expressed itself in home-made wines and hereditary recipes; and which still, in a thousand unexpected ways, can be found clinging to the women of the poor. It was the idea I urged in the second part of this book: that the world must keep one great amateur, lest we all become artists and perish. Somebody must renounce all specialist conquests, that she may conquer all the conquerors. That she may be a queen of life, she must not be a private soldier in it. I do not think the elegant female with her bad Italian was a perfect product, any more than I think the slum woman talking gin and funerals is a perfect product; alas! there are few perfect products. But they come from a comprehensible idea; and the new woman comes from nothing and nowhere. It is right to have an ideal, it is right to have the right ideal, and these two have the right ideal. The slum mother with her funerals is the degenerate daughter of Antigone, the obstinate priestess of the household gods. The lady talking bad Italian was the decayed tenth cousin of Portia, the great and golden Italian lady, the Renascence amateur of life, who could be a barrister because she could be anything. Sunken and neglected in the sea of modern monotony and imitation, the types hold tightly to their original truths. Antigone, ugly, dirty and often drunken, will still bury her father. The elegant female, vapid and fading away to nothing, still feels faintly the fundamental difference between herself and her husband: that he must be Something in the City, that she may be everything in the country.

There was a time when you and I and all of us were all very close to God; so that even now the color of a pebble (or a paint), the smell of a flower (or a firework), comes to our hearts with a kind of authority and certainty; as if they were fragments of a muddled message, or features of a forgotten face. To pour that fiery simplicity upon the whole of life is the only real aim of education; and closest to the child comes the woman — she understands. To say what she understands is beyond me; save only this, that it is not a solemnity. Rather it is a towering levity, an uproarious amateurishness of the universe, such as we felt when we were little, and would as soon sing as garden, as soon paint as run. To smatter the tongues of men and angels, to dabble in the dreadful sciences, to juggle with pillars and pyramids and toss up the planets like balls, this is that inner audacity and indifference which the human soul, like a conjurer catching oranges, must keep up forever. This is that insanely frivolous thing we call sanity. And the elegant female, drooping her ringlets over her water-colors, knew it and acted on it. She was juggling with frantic and flaming suns. She was maintaining the bold equilibrium of inferiorities which is the most mysterious of superiorities and perhaps the most unattainable. She was maintaining the prime truth of woman, the universal mother: that if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.

PART FIVE. THE HOME OF MAN

I. THE EMPIRE OF THE INSECT

A cultivated Conservative friend of mine once exhibited great distress because in a gay moment I once called Edmund Burke an atheist. I need scarcely say that the remark lacked something of biographical precision; it was meant to. Burke was certainly not an atheist in his conscious cosmic theory, though he had not a special and flaming faith in God, like Robespierre. Nevertheless, the remark had reference to a truth which it is here relevant to repeat. I mean that in the quarrel over the French Revolution, Burke did stand for the atheistic attitude and mode of argument, as Robespierre stood for the theistic. The Revolution appealed to the idea of an abstract and eternal justice, beyond all local custom or convenience. If there are commands of God, then there must be rights of man. Here Burke made his brilliant diversion; he did not attack the Robespierre doctrine with the old mediaeval doctrine of jus divinum (which, like the Robespierre doctrine, was theistic), he attacked it with the modern argument of scientific relativity; in short, the argument of evolution. He suggested that humanity was everywhere molded by or fitted to its environment and institutions; in fact, that each people practically got, not only the tyrant it deserved, but the tyrant it ought to have. “I know nothing of the rights of men,” he said, “but I know something of the rights of Englishmen.” There you have the essential atheist. His argument is that we have got some protection by natural accident and growth; and why should we profess to think beyond it, for all the world as if we were the images of God! We are born under a House of Lords, as birds under a house of leaves; we live under a monarchy as niggers live under a tropic sun; it is not their fault if they are slaves, and it is not ours if we are snobs. Thus, long before Darwin struck his great blow at democracy, the essential of the Darwinian argument had been already urged against the French Revolution. Man, said Burke in effect, must adapt himself to everything, like an animal; he must not try to alter everything, like an angel. The last weak cry of the pious, pretty, half-artificial optimism and deism of the eighteenth century came in the voice of Sterne, saying, “God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.” And Burke, the iron evolutionist, essentially answered, “No; God tempers the shorn lamb to the wind.” It is the lamb that has to adapt himself. That is, he either dies or becomes a particular kind of lamb who likes standing in a draught.

The subconscious popular instinct against Darwinism was not a mere offense at the grotesque notion of visiting one’s grandfather in a cage in the Regent’s Park. Men go in for drink, practical jokes and many other grotesque things; they do not much mind making beasts of themselves, and would not much mind having beasts made of their forefathers. The real instinct was much deeper and much more valuable. It was this: that when once one begins to think of man as a shifting and alterable thing, it is always easy for the strong and crafty to twist him into new shapes for all kinds of unnatural purposes. The popular instinct sees in such developments the possibility of backs bowed and hunch-backed for their burden, or limbs twisted for their task. It has a very well-grounded guess that whatever is done swiftly and systematically will mostly be done by a successful class and almost solely in their interests. It has therefore a vision of inhuman hybrids and half-human experiments much in the style of Mr. Wells’s “Island of Dr. Moreau.” The rich man may come to breeding a tribe of dwarfs to be his jockeys, and a tribe of giants to be his hall-porters. Grooms might be born bow-legged and tailors born cross-legged; perfumers might have long, large noses and a crouching attitude, like hounds of scent; and professional wine-tasters might have the horrible expression of one tasting wine stamped upon their faces as infants. Whatever wild image one employs it cannot keep pace with the panic of the human fancy, when once it supposes that the fixed type called man could be changed. If some millionaire wanted arms, some porter must grow ten arms like an octopus; if he wants legs, some messenger-boy must go with a hundred trotting legs like a centipede. In the distorted mirror of hypothesis, that is, of the unknown, men can dimly see such monstrous and evil shapes; men run all to eye, or all to fingers, with nothing left but one nostril or one ear. That is the nightmare with which the mere notion of adaptation threatens us. That is the nightmare that is not so very far from the reality.

It will be said that not the wildest evolutionist really asks that we should become in any way unhuman or copy any other animal. Pardon me, that is exactly what not merely the wildest evolutionists urge, but some of the tamest evolutionists too. There has risen high in recent history an important cultus which bids fair to be the religion of the future — which means the religion of those few weak-minded people who live in the future. It is typical of our time that it has to look for its god through a microscope; and our time has marked a definite adoration of the insect. Like most things we call new, of course, it is not at all new as an idea; it is only new as an idolatry. Virgil takes bees seriously but I doubt if he would have kept bees as carefully as he wrote about them. The wise king told the sluggard to watch the ant, a charming occupation — for a sluggard. But in our own time has appeared a very different tone, and more than one great man, as well as numberless intelligent men, have in our time seriously suggested that we should study the insect because we are his inferiors. The old moralists merely took the virtues of man and distributed them quite decoratively and arbitrarily among the animals. The ant was an almost heraldic symbol of industry, as the lion was of courage, or, for the matter of that, the pelican of charity. But if the mediaevals had been convinced that a lion was not courageous, they would have dropped the lion and kept the courage; if the pelican is not charitable, they would say, so much the worse for the pelican. The old moralists, I say, permitted the ant to enforce and typify man's morality; they never allowed the ant to upset it. They used the ant for industry as the lark for punctuality; they looked up at the flapping birds and down at the crawling insects for a homely lesson. But we have lived to see a sect that does not look down at the insects, but looks up at the insects, that asks us essentially to bow down and worship beetles, like ancient Egyptians.

Maurice Maeterlinck is a man of unmistakable genius, and genius always carries a magnifying glass. In the terrible crystal of his lens we have seen the bees not as a little yellow swarm, but rather in golden armies and hierarchies of warriors and queens. Imagination perpetually peers and creeps further down the avenues and vistas in the tubes of science, and one fancies every frantic reversal of proportions; the earwig striding across the echoing plain like an elephant, or the grasshopper coming roaring above our roofs like a vast aeroplane, as he leaps from Hertfordshire to Surrey. One seems to enter in a dream a temple of enormous entomology, whose architecture is based on something wilder than arms or backbones; in which the ribbed columns have the half-crawling look of dim and monstrous caterpillars; or the dome is a starry spider hung horribly in the void. There is one of the modern works of engineering that gives one something of this nameless fear of the exaggerations of an underworld; and that is the curious curved architecture of the under ground railway, commonly called the Twopenny Tube. Those squat archways, without any upright line or pillar, look as if they had been tunneled by huge worms who have never learned to lift their heads. It is the very underground palace of the Serpent, the spirit of changing shape and color, that is the enemy of man.

But it is not merely by such strange aesthetic suggestions that writers like Maeterlinck have influenced us in the matter; there is also an ethical side to the business. The upshot of M. Maeterlinck's book on bees is an admiration, one might also say an envy, of their collective spirituality; of the fact that they live only for something which he calls the Soul of the Hive. And this admiration for the communal morality of insects is expressed in many other modern writers in various quarters and shapes; in Mr. Benjamin Kidd's theory of living only for the evolutionary future of our race, and in the great interest of some Socialists in ants, which they generally prefer to bees, I suppose, because they are not so brightly colored. Not least among the hundred evidences of this vague insectolatry are the floods of flattery poured by modern people on that energetic nation of the Far East of which it has been said that "Patriotism is its only religion"; or, in other words, that it lives only for the Soul of the Hive. When at long intervals of the centuries Christendom grows weak, morbid or skeptical, and mysterious Asia begins to move against us her dim populations and to pour them westward like a dark movement of matter, in such cases it has been very common to compare the invasion to a plague of lice or incessant armies of locusts. The Eastern armies were indeed like insects; in their blind, busy destructiveness, in their black nihilism of personal outlook, in their hateful indifference to individual life and love, in their base belief in mere numbers, in their pessimistic courage and their atheistic patriotism, the riders and raiders of the East are indeed like all the creeping things of the earth. But never before, I think, have Christians called a Turk a locust and meant it as a compliment. Now for the first time we worship as well as fear; and trace with adoration that enormous form advancing vast and vague out of Asia, faintly discernible amid the mystic clouds of winged creatures hung over the wasted lands, thronging the skies like thunder and discoloring the skies like rain; Beelzebub, the Lord of Flies.

In resisting this horrible theory of the Soul of the Hive, we of Christendom stand not for ourselves, but for all humanity; for the essential and distinctive human idea that one good and happy man is an end in himself, that a soul is worth saving. Nay, for those who like such biological fancies it might well be said that we stand as chiefs and champions of a whole section of nature, princes of the house whose cognizance is the backbone, standing for the milk of the individual mother and the courage of the wandering cub, representing the pathetic chivalry of the dog, the humor and perversity of cats, the affection of the tranquil horse, the loneliness of the lion. It is more to the point, however, to urge that this mere glorification of society as it is in the social insects is a transformation and a dissolution in one of the outlines which have been specially the symbols of man. In the cloud and confusion of the flies and bees is growing fainter and fainter, as is finally disappearing, the idea of the human family. The hive has become larger than the house, the bees are destroying their captors; what the locust hath left, the caterpillar hath eaten; and the little house and garden of our friend Jones is in a bad way.

II. THE FALLACY OF THE UMBRELLA STAND

When Lord Morley said that the House of Lords must be either mended or ended, he used a phrase which has caused some confusion; because it might seem to suggest that mending and ending are somewhat similar things. I wish specially to insist on the fact that mending and ending are opposite things. You mend a thing because you like it; you end a thing because you don't. To mend is to strengthen. I, for instance, disbelieve in oligarchy; so I would no more mend the House of Lords than I would mend a thumbscrew. On the other hand, I do believe in the family; therefore I would mend the family as I would mend a chair; and I will never deny for a moment that the modern family is a chair that wants mending. But here comes in the essential point about the mass of modern advanced sociologists. Here are two institutions that have always been fundamental with mankind, the family and the state. Anarchists, I believe, disbelieve in both. It is quite unfair to say that Socialists believe in the state, but do not believe in the family; thousands of Socialists believe more in the family than any Tory. But it is true to say that while anarchists would end both, Socialists are specially engaged in mending (that is, strengthening and renewing) the state; and they are not specially engaged in strengthening and renewing the family. They are not doing anything to define the functions of father, mother, and child, as such; they are not tightening the machine up again; they are not blackening in again the fading lines of the old drawing. With the state they are doing this; they are sharpening its machinery, they are blackening in its black dogmatic lines, they are making mere government in every way stronger and in some ways harsher than before. While they leave the home in ruins, they restore the hive, especially the stings. Indeed, some schemes of labor and Poor Law reform recently advanced by distinguished Socialists, amount to little more than putting the largest number of people in the despotic power of Mr. Bumble. Apparently, progress means being moved on — by the police.

The point it is my purpose to urge might perhaps be suggested thus: that Socialists and most social reformers of their color are vividly conscious of the line between the kind of things that belong to the state and the kind of things that belong to mere chaos or uncoercible nature; they may force children to go to school before the sun rises, but they will not try to force the sun to rise; they will not, like Canute, banish the sea, but only the sea-bathers. But inside the outline of the state their lines are confused, and entities melt into each other. They have no firm instinctive sense of one thing being in its nature private and another public, of one thing being necessarily bond and another free. That is why piece by piece, and quite silently, personal liberty is being stolen from Englishmen, as personal land has been silently stolen ever since the sixteenth century.

I can only put it sufficiently curtly in a careless simile. A Socialist means a man who thinks a walking-stick like an umbrella because they both go into the umbrella-stand. Yet they are as different as a battle-ax and a bootjack. The essential idea of an umbrella is breadth and protection. The essential idea of a stick is slenderness and, partly, attack. The stick is the sword, the umbrella is the shield, but it is a shield against another and more nameless enemy — the hostile but anonymous universe. More properly, therefore, the umbrella is the roof; it is a kind of collapsible house. But the vital difference goes far deeper than this; it branches off into two kingdoms of man's mind, with a chasm between. For the point is this: that the umbrella is a shield against an enemy so actual as to be a mere nuisance; whereas the stick is a sword against enemies so entirely imaginary as to be a pure pleasure. The stick is not merely a sword, but a court sword; it is a thing of purely ceremonial swagger. One cannot express the emotion in any way except by saying that a man feels more like a man with a stick in his hand, just as he feels more like a man with a sword at his side. But nobody ever had any swelling sentiments about an umbrella; it is a convenience, like a door scraper. An umbrella is a necessary evil. A walking-stick is a quite unnecessary good. This, I fancy, is the real explanation of the perpetual losing of umbrellas; one does not hear of people losing walking sticks. For a walking-stick is a pleasure, a piece of real personal property; it is missed even when it is not needed. When my right hand forgets its stick may it forget its cunning. But anybody may forget an umbrella, as anybody might forget a shed that he has stood up in out of the rain. Anybody can forget a necessary thing.

If I might pursue the figure of speech, I might briefly say that the whole Collectivist error consists in saying that because two men can share an umbrella, therefore two men can share a walking-stick. Umbrellas might possibly be replaced by some kind of common awnings covering certain streets from particular showers. But there is nothing but nonsense in the notion of swinging a communal stick; it is as if one spoke of twirling a communal mustache. It will be said that this is a frank fantasia and that no sociologists suggest such follies. Pardon me if they do. I will give a precise parallel to the case of confusion of sticks and umbrellas, a parallel from a perpetually reiterated suggestion of reform. At least sixty Socialists out of a hundred, when they have spoken of common laundries, will go on at once to speak of common kitchens. This is just as mechanical and unintelligent as the fanciful case I have quoted. Sticks and umbrellas are both stiff rods that go into holes in a stand in the hall. Kitchens and washhouses are both large rooms full of heat and damp and steam. But the soul and function of the two things are utterly opposite. There is only one way of washing a shirt; that is, there is only one right way. There is no taste and fancy in tattered shirts. Nobody says, “Tompkins likes five holes in his shirt, but I must say, give me the good old four holes.” Nobody says, “This washerwoman rips up the left leg of my pyjamas; now if there is one thing I insist on it is the right leg ripped up.” The ideal washing is simply to send a thing back washed. But it is by no means true that the ideal cooking is simply to send a thing back cooked. Cooking is an art; it has in it personality, and even perversity, for the definition of an art is that which must be personal and may be perverse. I know a man, not otherwise dainty, who cannot touch common sausages unless they are almost burned to a coal. He wants his sausages fried to rags, yet he does not insist on his shirts being boiled to rags. I do not say that such points of culinary delicacy are of high importance. I do not say that the communal ideal must give way to them. What I say is that the communal ideal is not conscious of their existence, and therefore goes wrong from the very start, mixing a wholly public thing with a highly individual one. Perhaps we ought to accept communal kitchens in the social crisis, just as we should accept communal cat’s-meat in a siege. But the cultured Socialist, quite at his ease, by no means in a siege, talks about communal kitchens as if they were the same kind of thing as communal laundries. This shows at the start that he misunderstands human nature. It is as different as three men singing the same chorus from three men playing three tunes on the same piano.

III. THE DREADFUL DUTY OF GUDGE

In the quarrel earlier alluded to between the energetic Progressive and the obstinate Conservative (or, to talk a tenderer language, between Hudge and Gudge), the state of cross-purposes is at the present moment acute. The Tory says he wants to preserve family life in Cindertown; the Socialist very reasonably points out to him that in Cindertown at present there isn't any family life to preserve. But Hudge, the Socialist, in his turn, is highly vague and mysterious about whether he would preserve the family life if there were any; or whether he will try to restore it where it has disappeared. It is all very confusing. The Tory sometimes talks as if he wanted to tighten the domestic bonds that do not exist; the Socialist as if he wanted to loosen the bonds that do not bind anybody. The question we all want to ask of both of them is the original ideal question, "Do you want to keep the family at all?" If Hudge, the Socialist, does want the family he must be prepared for the natural restraints, distinctions and divisions of labor in the family. He must brace himself up to bear the idea of the woman having a preference for the private house and a man for the public house. He must manage to endure somehow the idea of a woman being womanly, which does not mean soft and yielding, but handy, thrifty, rather hard, and very humorous. He must confront without a quiver the notion of a child who shall be childish, that is, full of energy, but without an idea of independence; fundamentally as eager for authority as for information and butter-scotch. If a man, a woman and a child live together any more in free and sovereign households, these ancient relations will recur; and Hudge must put up with it. He can only avoid it by destroying the family, driving both sexes into sexless hives and hordes, and bringing up all children as the children of the state — like Oliver Twist. But if these stern words must be addressed to Hudge, neither shall Gudge escape a somewhat severe admonition. For the plain truth to be told pretty sharply to the Tory is this, that if he wants the family to remain, if he wants to be strong enough to resist the rending forces of our essentially savage commerce, he must make some very big sacrifices and try to equalize property. The overwhelming mass of the English people at this particular instant are simply too poor to be domestic. They are as domestic as they can manage; they are much more domestic than the governing class; but they cannot get what good there was originally meant to be in this institution, simply because they have not got enough money. The man ought to stand for a certain magnanimity, quite lawfully expressed in throwing money away: but if under given circumstances he can only do it by throwing the week's food away, then he is not magnanimous, but mean. The woman ought to stand for a certain wisdom which is well expressed in valuing things rightly and guarding money sensibly; but how is she to guard money if there is no money to guard? The child ought to look on his mother as a fountain of natural fun and poetry; but how can he unless the fountain, like other fountains, is allowed to play? What chance have any of these ancient arts and functions in a house so hideously topsy-turvy; a house where the woman is out working and the man isn't; and the child is forced by law to think his schoolmaster's requirements more important than his mother's? No, Gudge and his friends in the House of Lords and the Carlton Club must make up their minds on this matter, and that very quickly. If they are content to have England turned into a beehive and an ant-hill, decorated here and there with a few faded butterflies playing at an old game called domesticity in the intervals of the divorce court, then let them have their empire of insects; they will find plenty of Socialists who will give it to them. But if they want a domestic England, they must "shell out," as the phrase goes, to a vastly greater extent than any Radical politician has yet dared to suggest; they must endure burdens much heavier than the Budget and strokes much deadlier than the death duties; for the thing to be done is nothing more nor less than the distribution of the great fortunes and the great estates. We can now only avoid Socialism by a change as vast as Socialism. If we are to save property, we must distribute property, almost as sternly and sweepingly as did the French Revolution. If we are to preserve the family we must revolutionize the nation.

IV. A LAST INSTANCE

And now, as this book is drawing to a close, I will whisper in the reader's ear a horrible suspicion that has sometimes haunted me: the suspicion that Hudge and Gudge are secretly in partnership. That the quarrel they keep up in public is very much of a put-up job, and that the way in which they perpetually play into each other's hands is not an everlasting coincidence. Gudge, the plutocrat, wants an anarchic industrialism; Hudge, the idealist, provides him with lyric praises of anarchy. Gudge wants women-workers because they are cheaper; Hudge calls the woman's work "freedom to live her own life." Gudge wants steady and obedient workmen, Hudge preaches teetotalism — to workmen, not to Gudge — Gudge wants a tame and timid population who will never take arms against tyranny; Hudge proves from Tolstoi that nobody must take arms against anything. Gudge is naturally a healthy and well-washed gentleman; Hudge earnestly preaches the perfection of Gudge's washing to people who can't practice it. Above all, Gudge rules by a coarse and cruel system of sacking and sweating and bi-sexual toil which is totally inconsistent with the free family and which is bound to destroy it; therefore Hudge, stretching out his arms to the universe with a prophetic smile, tells us that the family is something that we shall soon gloriously outgrow.

I do not know whether the partnership of Hudge and Gudge is conscious or unconscious. I only know that between them they still keep the common man homeless. I only know I still meet Jones walking the streets in the gray twilight, looking sadly at the poles and barriers and low red goblin lanterns which still guard the house which is none the less his because he has never been in it.

V. CONCLUSION

Here, it may be said, my book ends just where it ought to begin. I have said that the strong centers of modern English property must swiftly or slowly be broken up, if even the idea of property is to remain among Englishmen. There are two ways in which it could be done, a cold administration by quite detached officials, which is called Collectivism, or a personal distribution, so as to produce what is called Peasant Proprietorship. I think the latter solution the finer and more fully human, because it makes each man as somebody blamed somebody for saying of the Pope, a sort of small god. A man on his own turf tastes eternity or, in other words, will give ten minutes more work than is required. But I believe I am justified in shutting the door on this vista of argument, instead of opening it. For this book is not designed to prove the case for Peasant Proprietorship, but to prove the case against modern sages who turn reform to a routine. The whole of this book has been a rambling and elaborate urging of one purely ethical fact. And if by any chance it should happen that there are still some who do not quite see what that point is, I will end with one plain parable, which is none the worse for being also a fact.

A little while ago certain doctors and other persons permitted by modern law to dictate to their shabbier fellow-citizens, sent out an order that all little girls should have their hair cut short. I mean, of course, all little girls whose parents were poor. Many very unhealthy habits are common among rich little girls, but it will be long before any doctors interfere forcibly with them. Now, the case for this particular interference was this, that the poor are pressed down from above into such stinking and suffocating underworlds of squalor, that poor people must not be allowed to have hair, because in their case it must mean lice in the hair. Therefore, the doctors propose to abolish the hair. It never seems to have occurred to them to abolish the lice. Yet it could be done. As is common in most modern discussions the unmentionable thing is the pivot of the whole discussion. It is obvious to any Christian man (that is, to any man with a free soul) that any coercion applied to a cabman’s daughter ought, if possible, to be applied to a Cabinet Minister’s daughter. I will not ask why the doctors do not, as a matter of fact apply their rule to a Cabinet Minister’s daughter. I will not ask, because I know. They do not because they dare not. But what is the excuse they would urge, what is the plausible argument they would use, for thus cutting and clipping poor children and not rich? Their argument would be that the disease is more likely to be in the hair of poor people than of rich. And why? Because the poor children are forced (against all the instincts of the highly domestic working classes) to crowd together in close rooms under a wildly inefficient system of public instruction; and because in one out of the forty children there may be offense. And why? Because the poor man is so ground down by the great rents of the great ground landlords that his wife often has to work as well as he. Therefore she has no time to look after the children, therefore one in forty of them is dirty. Because the workingman has these two persons on top of him, the landlord sitting (literally) on his stomach, and the schoolmaster sitting (literally) on his head, the workingman must allow his little girl's hair, first to be neglected from poverty, next to be poisoned by promiscuity, and, lastly, to be abolished by hygiene. He, perhaps, was proud of his little girl's hair. But he does not count.

Upon this simple principle (or rather precedent) the sociological doctor drives gayly ahead. When a crapulous tyranny crushes men down into the dirt, so that their very hair is dirty, the scientific course is clear. It would be long and laborious to cut off the heads of the tyrants; it is easier to cut off the hair of the slaves. In the same way, if it should ever happen that poor children, screaming with toothache, disturbed any schoolmaster or artistic gentleman, it would be easy to pull out all the teeth of the poor; if their nails were disgustingly dirty, their nails could be plucked out; if their noses were indecently blown, their noses could be cut off. The appearance of our humbler fellow-citizen could be quite strikingly simplified before we had done with him. But all this is not a bit wilder than the brute fact that a doctor can walk into the house of a free man, whose daughter's hair may be as clean as spring flowers, and order him to cut it off. It never seems to strike these people that the lesson of lice in the slums is the wrongness of slums, not the wrongness of hair. Hair is, to say the least of it, a rooted thing. Its enemy (like the other insects and oriental armies of whom we have spoken) sweep upon us but seldom. In truth, it is only by eternal institutions like hair that we can test passing institutions like empires. If a house is so built as to knock a man's head off when he enters it, it is built wrong.

The mob can never rebel unless it is conservative, at least enough to have conserved some reasons for rebelling. It is the most awful thought in all our anarchy, that most of the ancient blows struck for freedom would not be struck at all to-day, because of the obscuration of the clean, popular customs from which they came. The insult that brought down the hammer of Wat Tyler might now be called a medical examination. That which Virginius loathed and avenged as foul slavery might now be praised as free love. The cruel taunt of Foulon, “Let them eat grass,” might now be represented as the dying cry of an idealistic vegetarian. Those great scissors of science that would snip off the curls of the poor little school children are ceaselessly snapping closer and closer to cut off all the corners and fringes of the arts and honors of the poor. Soon they will be twisting necks to suit clean collars, and hacking feet to fit new boots. It never seems to strike them that the body is more than raiment; that the Sabbath was made for man; that all institutions shall be judged and damned by whether they have fitted the normal flesh and spirit. It is the test of political sanity to keep your head. It is the test of artistic sanity to keep your hair on.

Now the whole parable and purpose of these last pages, and indeed of all these pages, is this: to assert that we must instantly begin all over again, and begin at the other end. I begin with a little girl’s hair. That I know is a good thing at any rate. Whatever else is evil, the pride of a good mother in the beauty of her daughter is good. It is one of those adamantine tendernesses which are the touchstones of every age and race. If other things are against it, other things must go down. If landlords and laws and sciences are against it, landlords and laws and sciences must go down. With the red hair of one she-urchin in the gutter I will set fire to all modern civilization. Because a girl should have long hair, she should have clean hair; because she should have clean hair, she should not have an unclean home: because she should not have an unclean home, she should have a free and leisured mother; because she should have a free mother, she should not have an usurious landlord; because there should not be an usurious landlord, there should be a redistribution of property; because there should be a redistribution of property, there shall be a revolution. That little urchin with the gold-red hair, whom I have just watched toddling past my house, she shall not be lopped and lamed and altered; her hair shall not be cut short like a convict’s; no, all the kingdoms of the earth shall be hacked about and mutilated to suit her. She is the human and sacred image; all around her the social fabric shall sway and split and fall; the pillars of society shall be shaken, and the roofs of ages come rushing down, and not one hair of her head shall be harmed.

THREE NOTES

I. ON FEMALE SUFFRAGE

Not wishing to overload this long essay with too many parentheses, apart from its thesis of progress and precedent, I append here three notes on points of detail that may possibly be misunderstood.

The first refers to the female controversy. It may seem to many that I dismiss too curtly the contention that all women should have votes, even if most women do not desire them. It is constantly said in this connection that males have received the vote (the agricultural laborers for instance) when only a minority of them were in favor of it. Mr. Galsworthy, one of the few fine fighting intellects of our time, has talked this language in the “Nation.” Now, broadly, I have only to answer here, as everywhere in this book, that history is not a toboggan slide, but a road to be reconsidered and even retraced. If we really forced General Elections upon free laborers who definitely disliked General Elections, then it was a thoroughly undemocratic thing to do; if we are democrats we ought to undo it. We want the will of the people, not the votes of the people; and to give a man a vote against his will is to make voting more valuable than the democracy it declares.

But this analogy is false, for a plain and particular reason. Many voteless women regard a vote as unwomanly. Nobody says that most voteless men regarded a vote as unmanly. Nobody says that any voteless men regarded it as unmanly. Not in the stillest hamlet or the most stagnant fen could you find a yokel or a tramp who thought he lost his sexual dignity by being part of a political mob. If he did not care about a vote it was solely because he did not know about a vote; he did not understand the word any better than Bimetallism. His opposition, if it existed, was merely negative. His indifference to a vote was really indifference.

But the female sentiment against the franchise, whatever its size, is positive. It is not negative; it is by no means indifferent. Such women as are opposed to the change regard it (rightly or wrongly) as unfeminine. That is, as insulting certain affirmative traditions to which they are attached. You may think such a view prejudiced; but I violently deny that any democrat has a right to override such prejudices, if they are popular and positive. Thus he would not have a right to make millions of Moslems vote with a cross if they had a prejudice in favor of voting with a crescent. Unless this is admitted, democracy is a farce we need scarcely keep up. If it is admitted, the Suffragists have not merely to awaken an indifferent, but to convert a hostile majority.

II. ON CLEANLINESS IN EDUCATION

On re-reading my protest, which I honestly think much needed, against our heathen idolatry of mere ablution, I see that it may possibly be misread. I hasten to say that I think washing a most important thing to be taught both to rich and poor. I do not attack the positive but the relative position of soap. Let it be insisted on even as much as now; but let other things be insisted on much more. I am even ready to admit that cleanliness is next to godliness; but the moderns will not even admit godliness to be next to cleanliness. In their talk about Thomas Becket and such saints and heroes they make soap more important than soul; they reject godliness whenever it is not cleanliness. If we resent this about remote saints and heroes, we should resent it more about the many saints and heroes of the slums, whose unclean hands cleanse the world. Dirt is evil chiefly as evidence of sloth; but the fact remains that the classes that wash most are those that work least. Concerning these, the practical course is simple; soap should be urged on them and advertised as what it is — a luxury. With regard to the poor also the practical course is not hard to harmonize with our thesis. If we want to give poor people soap we must set out deliberately to give them luxuries. If we will not make them rich enough to be clean, then emphatically we must do what we did with the saints. We must reverence them for being dirty.

III. ON PEASANT PROPRIETORSHIP

I have not dealt with any details touching distributed ownership, or its possibility in England, for the reason stated in the text. This book deals with what is wrong, wrong in our root of argument and effort. This wrong is, I say, that we will go forward because we dare not go back. Thus the Socialist says that property is already concentrated into Trusts and Stores: the only hope is to concentrate it further in the State. I say the only hope is to unconcentrate it; that is, to repent and return; the only step forward is the step backward.

But in connection with this distribution I have laid myself open to another potential mistake. In speaking of a sweeping redistribution, I speak of decision in the aim, not necessarily of abruptness in the means. It is not at all too late to restore an approximately rational state of English possessions without any mere confiscation. A policy of buying out landlordism, steadily adopted in England as it has already been adopted in Ireland (notably in Mr. Wyndham’s wise and fruitful Act), would in a very short time release the lower end of the see-saw and make the whole plank swing more level. The objection to this course is not at all that it would not do, only that it will not be done. If we leave things as they are, there will almost certainly be a crash of confiscation. If we hesitate, we shall soon have to hurry. But if we start doing it quickly we have still time to do it slowly.

This point, however, is not essential to my book. All I have to urge between these two boards is that I dislike the big Whiteley shop, and that I dislike Socialism because it will (according to Socialists) be so like that shop. It is its fulfilment, not its reversal. I do not object to Socialism because it will revolutionize our commerce, but because it will leave it so horribly the same.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

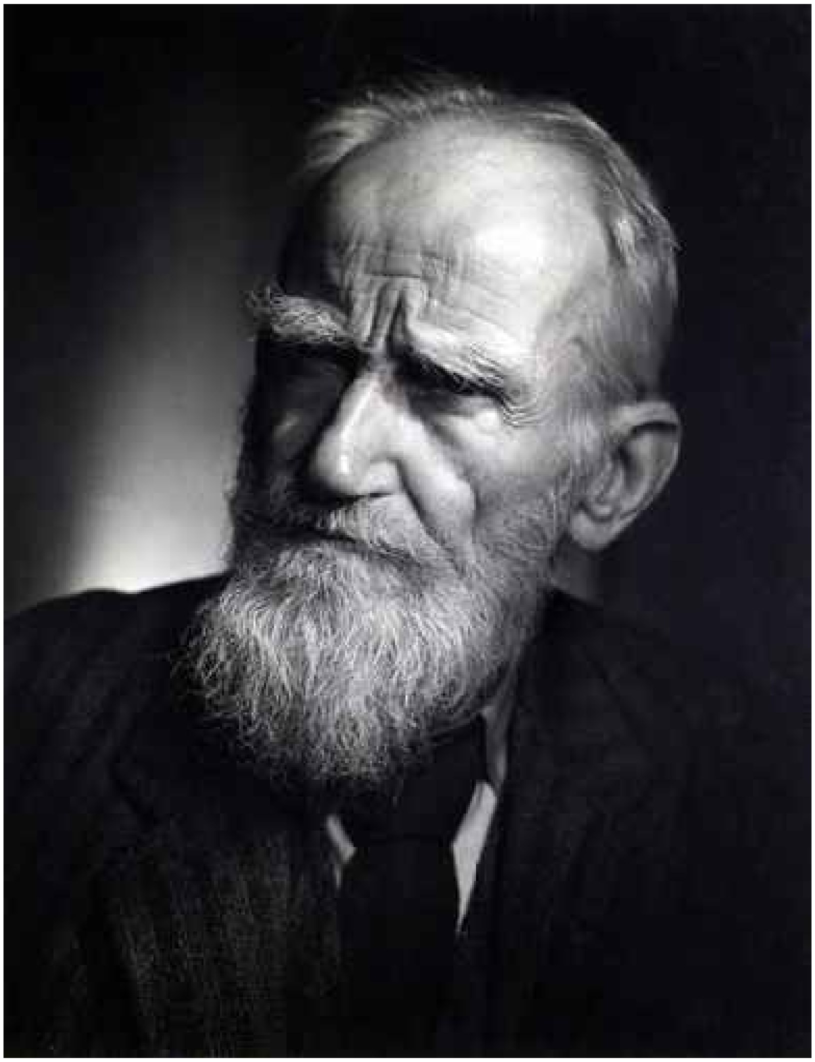

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Introduction to the First Edition

MOST people either say that they agree with Bernard Shaw or that they do not understand him. I am the only person who understands him, and I do not agree with him.

G. K. C.

The Problem of a Preface

A PECULIAR difficulty arrests the writer of this rough study at the very start. Many people know Mr. Bernard Shaw chiefly as a man who would write a very long preface even to a very short play. And there is truth in the idea; he is indeed a very prefatory sort of person. He always gives the explanation before the incident; but so, for the matter of that, does the Gospel of St. John. For Bernard Shaw, as for the mystics, Christian and heathen (and Shaw is best described as a heathen mystic), the philosophy of facts is anterior to the facts themselves. In due time we come to the fact, the incarnation; but in the beginning was the Word.

This produces upon many minds an impression of needless preparation and a kind of bustling prolixity. But the truth is that the very rapidity of such a man's mind makes him seem slow in getting to the point. It is positively because he is quick-witted that he is long-winded. A quick eye for ideas may actually make a writer slow in reaching his goal, just as a quick eye for landscapes might make a motorist slow in reaching Brighton. An original man has to pause at every allusion or simile to re-explain historical parallels, to re-shape distorted words. Any ordinary leader-writer (let us say) might write swiftly and smoothly something like this: "The element of religion in the Puritan rebellion, if hostile to art, yet saved the movement from some of the evils in which the French Revolution involved morality." Now a man like Mr. Shaw, who has his own views on everything, would be forced to make the sentence long and broken instead of swift and smooth. He would say something like: "The element of religion, as I explain religion, in the Puritan rebellion (which you wholly misunderstand) if hostile to art — that is what I mean by art — may have saved it from some evils (remember my definition of evil) in which the French Revolution — of which I have my own opinion — involved morality, which I will define for you in a minute." That is the worst of being a really universal sceptic and philosopher; it is such slow work. The very forest of the man's thoughts chokes up his thoroughfare. A man must be orthodox upon most things, or he will never even have time to preach his own heresy.

Now the same difficulty which affects the work of Bernard Shaw affects also any book about him. There is an unavoidable artistic necessity to put the preface before the play; that is, there is a necessity to say something of what Bernard Shaw's experience means before one even says what it was. We have to mention what he did when we have already explained why he did it. Viewed superficially, his life consists of fairly conventional incidents, and might easily fall under fairly conventional phrases. It might be the life of any Dublin clerk or Manchester Socialist or London author. If I touch on the man's life before his work, it will seem trivial; yet taken with his work it is most important. In short, one could scarcely know what Shaw's doings meant unless one knew what he meant by them. This difficulty in mere order and construction has puzzled me very much. I am going to overcome it, clumsily perhaps, but in the way which affects me as most sincere. Before I write even a slight suggestion of his relation to the stage, I am going to write of three soils or atmospheres out of which that relation grew. In other words, before I write of Shaw I will write of the three great influences upon Shaw. They were all three there before he was born, yet each one of them is himself and a very vivid portrait of him from one point of view. I have called these three traditions: "The Irishman," "The Puritan," and "The Progressive." I do not see how this prefatory theorising is to be avoided; for if I simply said, for instance, that Bernard Shaw was an Irishman, the impression produced on the reader might be remote from my thought and, what is more important, from Shaw's. People might think, for instance, that I meant that he was "irresponsible." That would throw out the whole plan of these pages, for if there is one thing that Shaw is not, it is irresponsible. The responsibility in him rings like steel. Or, again, if I simply called him a Puritan, it might mean something about nude statues or "prudes on the prowl." Or if I called him a Progressive, it might be supposed to mean that he votes for Progressives at the County Council election, which I very much doubt. I have no other course but this: of briefly explaining such matters as Shaw himself might explain them. Some fastidious persons may object to my thus putting the moral in front of the fable. Some may imagine in their innocence that they already understand the word Puritan or the yet more mysterious word Irishman. The only person, indeed, of whose approval I feel fairly certain is Mr. Bernard Shaw himself, the man of many introductions.

The Irishman

THE English public has commonly professed, with a kind of pride, that it cannot understand Mr. Bernard Shaw. There are many reasons for it which ought to be adequately considered in such a book as this. But the first and most obvious reason is the mere statement that George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin in 1856. At least one reason why Englishmen cannot understand Mr. Shaw is that Englishmen have never taken the trouble to understand Irishmen. They will sometimes be generous to Ireland; but never just to Ireland. They will speak to Ireland; they will speak for Ireland; but they will not hear Ireland speak. All the real amiability which most Englishmen undoubtedly feel towards Irishmen is lavished upon a class of Irishmen which unfortunately does not exist. The Irishman of the English farce, with his brogue, his buoyancy, and his tender-hearted irresponsibility, is a man who ought to have been thoroughly pampered with praise and sympathy, if he had only existed to receive them. Unfortunately, all the time that we were creating a comic Irishman in fiction, we were creating a tragic Irishman in fact. Never perhaps has there been a situation of such excruciating cross-purposes even in the three-act farce. The more we saw in the Irishman a sort of warm and weak fidelity, the more he regarded us with a sort of icy anger. The more the oppressor looked down with an amiable pity, the more did the oppressed look down with a somewhat unamiable contempt. But, indeed, it is needless to say that such comic cross-purposes could be put into a play; they have been put into a play. They have been put into what is perhaps the most real of Mr. Bernard Shaw's plays, *John Bull's Other Island.*

It is somewhat absurd to imagine that any one who has not read a play by Mr. Shaw will be reading a book about him. But if it comes to that it is (as I clearly perceive) absurd to be writing a book about Mr. Bernard Shaw at all. It is indefensibly foolish to attempt to explain a man whose whole object through life has been to explain himself. But even in nonsense there is a need for logic and consistency; therefore let us proceed on the assumption that when I say that all Mr. Shaw's blood and origin may be found in *John Bull's Other Island*, some reader may answer that he does not know the play. Besides, it is more important to put the reader right about England and Ireland even than to put him right about Shaw. If he reminds me that this is a book about Shaw, I can only assure him that I will reasonably, and at proper intervals, remember the fact.

Mr. Shaw himself said once, “I am a typical Irishman; my family came from Yorkshire.” Scarcely anyone but a typical Irishman could have made the remark. It is in fact a bull, a conscious bull. A bull is only a paradox which people are too stupid to understand. It is the rapid summary of something which is at once so true and so complex that the speaker who has the swift intelligence to perceive it, has not the slow patience to explain it. Mystical dogmas are much of this kind. Dogmas are often spoken of as if they were signs of the slowness or endurance of the human mind. As a matter of fact, they are marks of mental promptitude and lucid impatience. A man will put his meaning mystically because he cannot waste time in putting it rationally. Dogmas are not dark and mysterious; rather a dogma is like a flash of lightning — an instantaneous lucidity that opens across a whole landscape. Of the same nature are Irish bulls; they are summaries which are too true to be consistent. The Irish make Irish bulls for the same reason that they accept Papal bulls. It is because it is better to speak wisdom foolishly, like the Saints, rather than to speak folly wisely, like the Dons.

This is the truth about mystical dogmas and the truth about Irish bulls; it is also the truth about the paradoxes of Bernard Shaw. Each of them is an argument impatiently shortened into an epigram. Each of them represents a truth hammered and hardened, with an almost disdainful violence until it is compressed into a small space, until it is made brief and almost incomprehensible. The case of that curt remark about Ireland and Yorkshire is a very typical one. If Mr. Shaw had really attempted to set out all the sensible stages of his joke, the sentence would have run something like this: “That I am an Irishman is a fact of psychology which I can trace in many of the things that come out of me, my fastidiousness, my frigid fierceness and my distrust of mere pleasure. But the thing must be tested by what comes from me; do not try on me the dodge of asking where I came from, how many batches of three hundred and sixty-five days my family was in Ireland. Do not play any games on me about whether I am a Celt, a word that is dim to the anthropologist and utterly unmeaning to anybody else. Do not start any drivelling discussions about whether the word Shaw is German or Scandinavian or Iberian or Basque. You know you are human; I know I am Irish. I know I belong to a certain type and temper of society; and I know that all sorts of people of all sorts of blood live in that society and by that society; and are therefore Irish. You can take your books of anthropology to hell or to Oxford." Thus gently, elaborately and at length, Mr. Shaw would have explained his meaning, if he had thought it worth his while. As he did not he merely flung the symbolic, but very complete sentence, "I am a typical Irishman; my family came from Yorkshire."

What then is the colour of this Irish society of which Bernard Shaw, with all his individual oddity, is yet an essential type? One generalisation, I think, may at least be made. Ireland has in it a quality which caused it (in the most ascetic age of Christianity) to be called the "Land of Saints"; and which still might give it a claim to be called the Land of Virgins. An Irish Catholic priest once said to me, "There is in our people a fear of the passions which is older even than Christianity." Everyone who has read Shaw's play upon Ireland will remember the thing in the horror of the Irish girl at being kissed in the public streets. But anyone who knows Shaw's work will recognize it in Shaw himself. There exists by accident an early and beardless portrait of him which really suggests in the severity and purity of its lines some of the early ascetic pictures of the beardless Christ. However he may shout profanities or seek to shatter the shrines, there is always something about him which suggests that in a sweeter and more solid civilisation he would have been a great saint. He would have been a saint of a sternly ascetic, perhaps of a sternly negative type. But he has this strange note of the saint in him: that he is literally unworldly. Worldliness has no human magic for him; he is not bewitched by rank nor drawn on by conviviality at all. He could not understand the intellectual surrender of the snob. He is perhaps a defective character; but he is not a mixed one. All the virtues he has are heroic virtues. Shaw is like the Venus of Milo; all that there is of him is admirable.

But in any case this Irish innocence is peculiar and fundamental in him; and strange as it may sound, I think that his innocence has a great deal to do with his suggestions of sexual revolution. Such a man is comparatively audacious in theory because he is comparatively clean in thought. Powerful men who have powerful passions use much of their strength in forging chains for themselves; they alone know how strong the chains need to be. But there are other souls who walk the woods like Diana, with a sort of wild chastity. I confess I think that this Irish purity a little disables a critic in dealing, as Mr. Shaw has dealt, with the roots and reality of the marriage law. He forgets that those fierce and elementary functions which drive the universe have an impetus which goes beyond itself and cannot always easily be recovered. So the healthiest men may often erect a law to watch them, just as the healthiest sleepers may want an alarum clock to wake them up. However this may be, Bernard Shaw certainly has all the virtues and all the powers that go with this original quality in Ireland. One of them is a sort of awful elegance; a dangerous and somewhat inhuman daintiness of taste which sometimes seems to shrink from matter itself, as though it were mud. Of the many sincere things Mr. Shaw has said he never said a more sincere one than when he stated he was a vegetarian, not because eating meat was bad morality, but because it was bad taste. It would be fanciful to say that Mr. Shaw is a vegetarian because he comes of a race of vegetarians, of peasants who are compelled to accept the simple life in the shape of potatoes. But I am sure that his fierce fastidiousness in such matters is one of the allotropic forms of the Irish purity; it is to the virtue of Father Matthew what a coal is to a diamond. It has, of course, the quality common to all special and unbalanced types of virtue, that you never know where it will stop. I can feel what Mr. Shaw probably means when he says that it is disgusting to feast off dead bodies, or to cut lumps off what was once a living thing. But I can never know at what moment he may not feel in the same way that it is disgusting to mutilate a pear-tree, or to root out of the earth those miserable mandrakes which cannot even groan. There is no natural limit to this rush and riotous gallop of refinement.

But it is not this physical and fantastic purity which I should chiefly count among the legacies of the old Irish morality. A much more important gift is that which all the saints declared to be the reward of chastity: a queer clearness of the intellect, like the hard clearness of a crystal. This certainly Mr. Shaw possesses; in such degree that at certain times the hardness seems rather clearer than the clearness. But so it does in all the most typical Irish characters and Irish attitudes of mind. This is probably why Irishmen succeed so much in such professions as require a certain crystalline realism, especially about results. Such professions are the soldier and the lawyer; these give ample opportunity for crimes but not much for mere illusions. If you have composed a bad opera you may persuade yourself that it is a good one; if you have carved a bad statue you can think yourself better than Michael Angelo. But if you have lost a battle you cannot believe you have won it; if your client is hanged you cannot pretend that you have got him off.

There must be some sense in every popular prejudice, even about foreigners. And the English people certainly have somehow got an impression and a tradition that the Irishman is genial, unreasonable, and sentimental. This legend of the tender, irresponsible Paddy has two roots; there are two elements in the Irish which made the mistake possible. First, the very logic of the Irishman makes him regard war or revolution as extra-logical, an *ultima ratio* which is beyond reason. When fighting a powerful enemy he no more worries whether all his charges are exact or all his attitudes dignified than a soldier worries whether a cannon-ball is shapely or a plan of campaign picturesque. He is aggressive; he attacks. He seems merely to be rowdy in Ireland when he is really carrying the war into Africa — or England. A Dublin tradesman printed his name and trade in archaic Erse on his cart. He knew that hardly anybody could read it; he did it to annoy. In his position I think he was quite right. When one is oppressed it is a mark of chivalry to hurt oneself in order to hurt the oppressor. But the English (never having had a real revolution since the Middle Ages) find it very hard to understand this steady passion for being a nuisance, and mistake it for mere whimsical impulsiveness and folly. When an Irish member holds up the whole business of the House of Commons by talking of his bleeding country for five or six hours, the simple English members suppose that he is a sentimentalist. The truth is that he is a scornful realist who alone remains unaffected by the sentimentalism of the House of Commons. The Irishman is neither poet enough nor snob enough to be swept away by those smooth social and historical tides and tendencies which carry Radicals and Labour members comfortably off their feet. He goes on asking for a thing because he wants it; and he tries really to hurt his enemies because they are his enemies. This is the first of the queer confusions which make the hard Irishman look soft. He seems to us wild and unreasonable because he is really much too reasonable to be anything but fierce when he is fighting.

In all this it will not be difficult to see the Irishman in Bernard Shaw. Though personally one of the kindest men in the world, he has often written really in order to hurt; not because he hated any particular men (he is hardly hot and animal enough for that), but because he really hated certain ideas even unto slaying. He provokes; he will not let people alone. One might even say that he bullies, only that this would be unfair, because he always wishes the other man to hit back. At least he always challenges, like a true

Green Islander. An even stronger instance of this national trait can be found in another eminent Irishman, Oscar Wilde. His philosophy (which was vile) was a philosophy of ease, of acceptance, and luxurious illusion; yet, being Irish, he could not help putting it in pugnacious and propagandist epigrams. He preached his softness with hard decision; he praised pleasure in the words most calculated to give pain. This armed insolence, which was the noblest thing about him, was also the Irish thing; he challenged all comers. It is a good instance of how right popular tradition is even when it is most wrong, that the English have perceived and preserved this essential trait of Ireland in a proverbial phrase. It *is* true that the Irishman says, "Who will tread on the tail of my coat?"

But there is a second cause which creates the English fallacy that the Irish are weak and emotional. This again springs from the very fact that the Irish are lucid and logical. For being logical they strictly separate poetry from prose; and as in prose they are strictly prosaic, so in poetry they are purely poetical. In this, as in one or two other things, they resemble the French, who make their gardens beautiful because they are gardens, but their fields ugly because they are only fields. An Irishman may like romance, but he will say, to use a frequent Shavian phrase, that it is "only romance." A great part of the English energy in fiction arises from the very fact that their fiction half deceives them. If Rudyard Kipling, for instance, had written his short stories in France, they would have been praised as cool, clever little works of art, rather cruel, and very nervous and feminine; Kipling's short stories would have been appreciated like Maupassant's short stories. In England they were not appreciated but believed. They were taken seriously by a startled nation as a true picture of the empire and the universe. The English people made haste to abandon England in favour of Mr. Kipling and his imaginary colonies; they made haste to abandon Christianity in favour of Mr. Kipling's rather morbid version of Judaism. Such a moral boom of a book would be almost impossible in Ireland, because the Irish mind distinguishes between life and literature. Mr. Bernard Shaw himself summed this up as he sums up so many things in a compact sentence which he uttered in conversation with the present writer, "An Irishman has two eyes." He meant that with one eye an Irishman saw that a dream was inspiring, bewitching, or sublime, and with the other eye that after all it was a dream. Both the humour and the sentiment of an Englishman cause him to wink the other eye. Two other small examples will illustrate the English mistake. Take, for instance, that noble survival from a nobler age of politics — I mean Irish oratory. The English imagine that Irish politicians are so hot-headed and poetical that they have to pour out a torrent of burning words. The truth is that the Irish are so clear-headed and critical that they still regard rhetoric as a distinct art, as the ancients did. Thus a man makes a speech as a man plays a violin, not necessarily without feeling, but chiefly because he knows how to do it. Another instance of the same thing is that quality which is always called the Irish charm. The Irish are agreeable, not because they are particularly emotional, but because they are very highly civilised. Blarney is a ritual; as much of a ritual as kissing the Blarney Stone.

Lastly, there is one general truth about Ireland which may very well have influenced Bernard Shaw from the first; and almost certainly influenced him for good. Ireland is a country in which the political conflicts are at least genuine; they are about something. They are about patriotism, about religion, or about money: the three great realities. In other words, they are concerned with what commonwealth a man lives in or with what universe a man lives in or with how he is to manage to live in either. But they are not concerned with which of two wealthy cousins in the same governing class shall be allowed to bring in the same Parish Councils Bill; there is no party system in Ireland. The party system in England is an enormous and most efficient machine for preventing political conflicts. The party system is arranged on the same principle as a three-legged race: the principle that union is not always strength and is never activity. Nobody asks for what he really wants. But in Ireland the loyalist is just as ready to throw over the King as the Fenian to throw over Mr. Gladstone; each will throw over anything except the thing that he wants. Hence it happens that even the follies or the frauds of Irish politics are more genuine as symptoms and more honourable as symbols than the lumbering hypocrisies of the prosperous Parliamentarian. The very lies of Dublin and Belfast are truer than the truisms of Westminster. They have an object; they refer to a state of things. There was more honesty, in the sense of actuality, about Piggott’s letters than about the *Times’* leading articles on them. When Parnell said calmly before the Royal Commission that he had made a certain remark “in order to mislead the House” he proved himself to be one of the few truthful men of his time. An ordinary British statesman would never have made the confession, because he would have grown quite accustomed to committing the crime. The party system itself implies a habit of stating something other than the actual truth. A Leader of the House means a Misleader of the House.

Bernard Shaw was born outside all this; and he carries that freedom upon his face. Whether what he heard in boyhood was violent Nationalism or virulent Unionism, it was at least something which wanted a certain principle to be in force, not a certain clique to be in office. Of him the great Gilbertian generalisation is untrue; he was not born either a little Liberal or else a little Conservative. He did not, like most of us, pass through the stage of being a good party man on his way to the difficult business of being a good man. He came to stare at our general elections as a Red Indian might stare at the Oxford and Cambridge boat-race, blind to all its irrelevant sentimentalities and to some of its legitimate sentiments. Bernard Shaw entered England as an alien, as an invader, as a conqueror. In other words, he entered England as an Irishman.

The Puritan

IT has been said in the first section that Bernard Shaw draws from his own nation two unquestionable qualities, a kind of intellectual chastity, and the fighting spirit. He is so much of an idealist about his ideals that he can be a ruthless realist in his methods. His soul has (in short) the virginity and the violence of Ireland. But Bernard Shaw is not merely an Irishman; he is not even a typical one. He is a certain separated and peculiar kind of Irishman, which is not easy to describe. Some Nationalist Irishmen have referred to him contemptuously as a "West Briton." But this is really unfair; for whatever Mr. Shaw's mental faults may be, the easy adoption of an unmeaning phrase like "Briton" is certainly not one of them. It would be much nearer the truth to put the thing in the bold and bald terms of the old Irish song, and to call him "The anti-Irish Irishman." But it is only fair to say that the description is far less of a monstrosity than the anti-English Englishman would be; because the Irish are so much stronger in self-criticism. Compared with the constant self-flattery of the English, nearly every Irishman is an anti-Irish Irishman. But here again popular phraseology hits the right word. This fairly educated and fairly wealthy Protestant wedge which is driven into the country at Dublin and elsewhere is a thing not easy superficially to summarise in any term. It cannot be described merely as a minority; for a minority means the part of a nation which is conquered. But this thing means something that conquers, and is not entirely part of a nation. Nor can one even fall back on the phrase of aristocracy. For an aristocracy implies at least some chorus of snobbish enthusiasm; it implies that some at least are willingly led by the leaders, if only towards vulgarity and vice. There is only one word for the minority in Ireland, and that is the word that public phraseology has found; I mean the word "Garrison." The Irish are essentially right when they talk as if all Protestant Unionists lived inside "The Castle." They have all the virtues and limitations of a literal garrison in a fort. That is, they are valiant, consistent, reliable in an obvious public sense; but their curse is that they can only tread the flagstones of the courtyard or the cold rock of the ramparts; they have never so much as set their foot upon their native soil.

We have considered Bernard Shaw as an Irishman. The next step is to consider him as an exile from Ireland living in Ireland; that, some people would say, is a paradox after his own heart. But, indeed, such a complication is not really difficult to expound. The great religion and the great national tradition which have persisted for so many centuries in Ireland have encouraged these clean and cutting elements; but they have encouraged many other things which serve to balance them. The Irish peasant has these qualities which are somewhat peculiar to Ireland, a strange purity and a strange pugnacity. But the Irish peasant also has qualities which are common to all peasants, and his nation has qualities that are common to all healthy nations. I mean chiefly the things that most of us absorb in childhood; especially the sense of the supernatural and the sense of the natural; the love of the sky with its infinity of vision, and the love of the soil with its strict hedges and solid shapes of ownership. But here comes the paradox of Shaw; the greatest of all his paradoxes and the one of which he is unconscious. These one or two plain truths which quite stupid people learn at the beginning are exactly the one or two truths which Bernard Shaw may not learn even at the end. He is a daring pilgrim who has set out from the grave to find the cradle. He started from points of view which no one else was clever enough to discover, and he is at last discovering points of view which no one else was ever stupid enough to ignore. This absence of the red-hot truisms of boyhood; this sense that he is not rooted in the ancient sagacities of infancy, has, I think, a great deal to do with his position as a member of an alien minority in Ireland. He who has no real country can have no real home. The average autochthonous Irishman is close to patriotism because he is close to the earth; he is close to domesticity because he is close to the earth; he is close to doctrinal theology and elaborate ritual because he is close to the earth. In short, he is close to the heavens because he is close to the earth. But we must not expect any of these elemental and collective virtues in the man of the garrison. He cannot be expected to exhibit the virtues of a people, but only (as Ibsen would say) of an enemy of the people. Mr. Shaw has no living traditions, no schoolboy tricks, no college customs, to link him with other men. Nothing about him can be supposed to refer to a family feud or to a family joke. He does not drink toasts; he does not keep anniversaries; musical as he is I doubt if he would consent to sing. All this has something in it of a tree with its roots in the air. The best way to shorten winter is to prolong Christmas; and the only way to enjoy the sun of April is to be an April Fool. When people asked Bernard Shaw to attend the Stratford Tercentenary, he wrote back with characteristic contempt: “I do not keep my own birthday, and I cannot see why I should keep Shakespeare’s.” I think that if Mr. Shaw had always kept his own birthday he would be better able to understand Shakespeare’s birthday — and Shakespeare’s poetry.

In conjecturally referring this negative side of the man, his lack of the smaller charities of our common childhood, to his birth in the dominant Irish sect, I do not write without historic memory or reference to other cases. That minority of Protestant exiles which mainly represented Ireland to England during the eighteenth century did contain some specimens of the Irish lounger and even of the Irish blackguard; Sheridan and even Goldsmith suggest the type. Even in their irresponsibility these figures had a touch of Irish tartness and realism; but the type has been too much insisted on to the exclusion of others equally national and interesting. To one of these it is worth while to draw attention. At intervals during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there has appeared a peculiar kind of Irishman. He is so unlike the English image of Ireland that the English have actually fallen back on the pretence that he was not Irish at all. The type is commonly Protestant; and sometimes seems to be almost anti-national in its acrid instinct for judging itself. Its nationalism only appears when it flings itself with even bitterer pleasure into judging the foreigner or the invader. The first and greatest of such figures was Swift. Thackeray simply denied that Swift was an Irishman, because he was not a stage Irishman. He was not (in the English novelist’s opinion) winning and agreeable enough to be Irish. The truth is that Swift was much too harsh and disagreeable to be English. There is a great deal of Jonathan Swift in Bernard Shaw. Shaw is like Swift, for instance, in combining extravagant fancy with a curious sort of coldness. But he is most like Swift in that very quality which Thackeray said was impossible in an Irishman, benevolent bullying, a pity touched with contempt, and a habit of knocking men down for their own good. Characters in novels are often described as so amiable that they hate to be thanked. It is not an amiable quality, and it is an extremely rare one; but Swift possessed it. When Swift was buried the Dublin poor came in crowds and wept by the grave of the broadest and most freehanded of their benefactors. Swift deserved the public tribute; but he might have writhed and kicked in his grave at the thought of receiving it. There is in G. B. S. something of the same inhumane humanity. Irish history has offered a third instance of this particular type of educated and Protestant Irishman, sincere, unsympathetic, aggressive, alone. I mean Parnell; and with him also a bewildered England tried the desperate dodge of saying that he was not Irish at all. As if any thinkable sensible snobbish law-abiding Englishman would ever have defied all the drawing-rooms by disdaining the House of Commons! Despite the difference between taciturnity and a torrent of fluency there is much in common also between Shaw and Parnell; something in common even in the figures of the two men, in the bony bearded faces with their almost Satanic self-possession. It will not do to pretend that none of these three men belong to their own nation; but it is true that they belonged to one special, though recurring, type of that nation. And they all three have this peculiar mark, that while Nationalists in their various ways they all give to the more genial English one common impression; I mean the impression that they do not so much love Ireland as hate England.

I will not dogmatise upon the difficult question as to whether there is any religious significance in the fact that these three rather ruthless Irishmen were Protestant Irishmen. I incline to think myself that the Catholic Church has added charity and gentleness to the virtues of a people which would otherwise have been too keen and contemptuous, too aristocratic. But however this may be, there can surely be no question that Bernard Shaw's Protestant education in a Catholic country has made a great deal of difference to his mind. It has affected it in two ways, the first negative and the second positive. It has affected him by cutting him off (as we have said) from the fields and fountains of his real home and history; by making him an Orangeman. And it has affected him by the particular colour of the particular religion which he received; by making him a Puritan.

In one of his numerous prefaces he says, "I have always been on the side of the Puritans in the matter of Art"; and a closer study will, I think, reveal that he is on the side of the Puritans in almost everything. Puritanism was not a mere code of cruel regulations, though some of its regulations were more cruel than any that have disgraced Europe. Nor was Puritanism a mere nightmare, an evil shadow of eastern gloom and fatalism, though this element did enter it, and was as it were the symptom and punishment of its essential error. Something much nobler (even if almost equally mistaken) was the original energy in the Puritan creed. And it must be defined with a little more delicacy if we are really to understand the attitude of G. B. S., who is the greatest of the modern Puritans and perhaps the last.

I should roughly define the first spirit in Puritanism thus. It was a refusal to contemplate God or goodness with anything lighter or milder than the most fierce concentration of the intellect. A Puritan meant originally a man whose mind had no holidays. To use his own favourite phrase, he would let no living thing come between him and his God; an attitude which involved eternal torture for him and a cruel contempt for all the living things. It was better to worship in a barn than in a cathedral for the specific and specified reason that the cathedral was beautiful. Physical beauty was a false and sensual symbol coming in between the intellect and the object of its intellectual worship. The human brain ought to be at every instant a consuming fire which burns through all conventional images until they were as transparent as glass.

This is the essential Puritan idea, that God can only be praised by direct contemplation of Him. You must praise God only with your brain; it is wicked to praise Him with your passions or your physical habits or your gesture or instinct of beauty. Therefore it is wicked to worship by singing or dancing or drinking sacramental wines or building beautiful churches or saying prayers when you are half asleep. We must not worship by dancing, drinking, building or singing; we can only worship by thinking. Our heads can praise God, but never our hands and feet. That is the true and original impulse of the Puritans. There is a great deal to be said for it, and a great deal was said for it in Great Britain steadily for two hundred years. It has gradually decayed in England and Scotland, not because of the advance of modern thought (which means nothing), but because of the slow revival of the mediaeval energy and character in the two peoples. The English were always hearty and humane, and they have made up their minds to be hearty and humane in spite of the Puritans. The result is that Dickens and W. W. Jacobs have picked up the tradition of Chaucer and Robin Hood. The Scotch were always romantic, and they have made up their minds to be romantic in spite of the Puritans. The result is that Scott and Stevenson have picked up the tradition of Bruce, Blind Harry and the vagabond Scottish kings. England has become English again; Scotland has become Scottish again, in spite of the splendid incubus, the noble nightmare of Calvin. There is only one place in the British Islands where one may naturally expect to find still surviving in its fulness the fierce detachment of the true Puritan. That place is the Protestant part of Ireland. The Orange Calvinists can be disturbed by no national resurrection, for they have no nation. In them, if in any people, will be found the rectangular consistency of the Calvinist. The Irish Protestant rioters are at least immeasurably finer fellows than any of their brethren in England. They have the two enormous superiorities: first, that the Irish Protestant rioters really believe in Protestant theology; and second, that the Irish Protestant rioters do really riot. Among these people, if anywhere, should be found the cult of theological clarity combined with barbarous external simplicity. Among these people Bernard Shaw was born.

There is at least one outstanding fact about the man we are studying; Bernard Shaw is never frivolous. He never gives his opinions a holiday; he is never irresponsible even for an instant. He has no nonsensical second self which he can get into as one gets into a dressing-gown; that ridiculous disguise which is yet more real than the real person. That collapse and humorous confession of futility was much of the force in Charles Lamb and in Stevenson. There is nothing of this in Shaw; his wit is never a weakness; therefore it is never a sense of humour. For wit is always connected with the idea that truth is close and clear. Humour, on the other hand, is always connected with the idea that truth is tricky and mystical and easily mistaken. What Charles Lamb said of the Scotchman is far truer of this type of Puritan Irishman; he does not see things suddenly in a new light; all his brilliancy is a blindingly rapid calculation and deduction. Bernard Shaw never said an indefensible thing; that is, he never said a thing that he was not prepared brilliantly to defend. He never breaks out into that cry beyond reason and conviction, that cry of Lamb when he cried, “We would indict our dreams!” or of Stevenson, “Shall we never shed blood?” In short he is not a humorist, but a great wit, almost as great as Voltaire. Humour is akin to agnosticism, which is only the negative side of mysticism. But pure wit is akin to Puritanism; to the perfect and painful consciousness of the final fact in the universe. Very briefly, the man who sees the consistency in things is a wit — and a Calvinist. The man who sees the inconsistency in things is a humorist — and a Catholic. However this may be, Bernard Shaw exhibits all that is purest in the Puritan; the desire to see truth face to face even if it slay us, the high impatience with irrelevant sentiment or obstructive symbol; the constant effort to keep the soul at its highest pressure and speed. His instincts upon all social customs and questions are Puritan. His favourite author is Bunyan.

But along with what was inspiring and direct in Puritanism Bernard Shaw has inherited also some of the things that were cumbersome and traditional. If ever Shaw exhibits a prejudice it is always a Puritan prejudice. For Puritanism has not been able to sustain through three centuries that native ecstasy of the direct contemplation of truth; indeed it was the whole mistake of Puritanism to imagine for a moment that it could. One cannot be serious for three hundred years. In institutions built so as to endure for ages you must have relaxation, symbolic relativity and healthy routine. In eternal temples you must have frivolity. You must “be at ease in Zion” unless you are only paying it a flying visit.

By the middle of the nineteenth century this old austerity and actuality in the Puritan vision had fallen away into two principal lower forms. The first is a sort of idealistic garrulity upon which Bernard Shaw has made fierce and on the whole fruitful war. Perpetual talk about righteousness and unselfishness, about things that should elevate and things which cannot but degrade, about social purity and true Christian manhood, all poured out with fatal fluency and with very little reference to the real facts of anybody’s soul or salary — into this weak and lukewarm torrent has melted down much of that mountainous ice which sparkled in the seventeenth century, bleak indeed, but blazing. The hardest thing of the seventeenth century bids fair to be the softest thing of the twentieth.

Of all this sentimental and deliquescent Puritanism Bernard Shaw has always been the antagonist; and the only respect in which it has soiled him was that he believed for only too long that such sloppy idealism was the whole idealism of Christendom and so used “idealist” itself as a term of reproach. But there were other and negative effects of Puritanism which he did not escape so completely. I cannot think that he has wholly escaped that element in Puritanism which may fairly bear the title of the taboo. For it is a singular fact that although extreme Protestantism is dying in elaborate and over-refined civilisation, yet it is the barbaric patches of it that live longest and die last. Of the creed of John Knox the modern Protestant has abandoned the civilised part and retained only the savage part. He has given up that great and systematic philosophy of Calvinism which had much in common with modern science and strongly resembles ordinary and recurrent determinism. But he has retained the accidental veto upon cards or comic plays, which Knox only valued as mere proof of his people’s concentration on their theology. All the awful but sublime affirmations of Puritan theology are gone. Only savage negations remain; such as that by which in Scotland on every seventh day the creed of fear lays his finger on all hearts and makes an evil silence in the streets.

By the middle of the nineteenth century when Shaw was born this dim and barbaric element in Puritanism, being all that remained of it, had added another taboo to its philosophy of taboos; there had grown up a mystical horror of those fermented drinks which are part of the food of civilised mankind. Doubtless many persons take an extreme line on this matter solely because of some calculation of social harm; many, but not all and not even most. Many people think that paper money is a mistake and does much harm. But they do not shudder or snigger when they see a cheque-book. They do not whisper with unsavoury slyness that such and such a man was “seen” going into a bank. I am quite convinced that the English aristocracy is the curse of England, but I have not noticed either in myself or others any disposition to ostracise a man simply for accepting a peerage, as the modern Puritans would certainly ostracise him (from any of their positions of trust) for accepting a drink. The sentiment is certainly very largely a mystical one, like the sentiment about the seventh day. Like the Sabbath, it is defended with sociological reasons; but those reasons can be simply and sharply tested. If a Puritan tells you that all humanity should rest once a week, you have only to propose that they should rest on Wednesday. And if a Puritan tells you that he does not object to beer but to the tragedies of excess in beer, simply propose to him that in prisons and workhouses (where the amount can be absolutely regulated) the inmates should have three glasses of beer a day. The Puritan cannot call that excess; but he will find something to call it. For it is not the excess he objects to, but the beer. It is a transcendental taboo, and it is one of the two or three positive and painful prejudices with which Bernard Shaw began. A similar severity of outlook ran through all his earlier attitude towards the drama; especially towards the lighter or looser drama. His Puritan teachers could not prevent him from taking up theatricals, but they made him take theatricals seriously. All his plays were indeed “plays for Puritans.” All his criticisms quiver with a refined and almost tortured contempt for the indulgencies of ballet and burlesque, for the tights and the *double entente*. He can endure lawlessness but not levity. He is not repelled by the divorces and the adulteries as he is by the “splits.” And he has always been foremost among the fierce modern critics who ask indignantly, “Why do you object to a thing full of sincere philosophy like *The Wild Duck* while you tolerate a mere dirty joke like *The*

Spring Chicken?” I do not think he has ever understood what seems to me the very sensible answer of the man in the street, “I laugh at the dirty joke of *The Spring Chicken* because it is a joke. I criticise the philosophy of *The Wild Duck* because it is a philosophy.”

Shaw does not do justice to the democratic ease and sanity on this subject; but indeed, whatever else he is, he is not democratic. As an Irishman he is an aristocrat, as a Calvinist he is a soul apart; he drew the breath of his nostrils from a land of fallen principalities and proud gentility, and the breath of his spirit from a creed which made a wall of crystal around the elect. The two forces between them produced this potent and slender figure, swift, scornful, dainty and full of dry magnanimity; and it only needed the last touch of oligarchic mastery to be given by the overwhelming oligarchic atmosphere of our present age. Such was the Puritan Irishman who stepped out into the world. Into what kind of world did he step?

The Progressive

IT is now partly possible to justify the Shavian method of putting the explanations before the events. I can now give a fact or two with a partial certainty at least that the reader will give to the affairs of Bernard Shaw something of the same kind of significance which they have for Bernard Shaw himself. Thus, if I had simply said that Shaw was born in Dublin the average reader might exclaim, “Ah yes — a wild Irishman, gay, emotional and untrustworthy.” The wrong note would be struck at the start. I have attempted to give some idea of what being born in Ireland meant to the man who was really born there. Now therefore for the first time I may be permitted to confess that Bernard Shaw was, like other men, born. He was born in Dublin on the 26th of July, 1856.

Just as his birth can only be appreciated through some vision of Ireland, so his family can only be appreciated by some realisation of the Puritan. He was the youngest son of one George Carr Shaw, who had been a civil servant and was afterwards a somewhat unsuccessful business man. If I had merely said that his family was Protestant (which in Ireland means Puritan) it might have been passed over as a quite colourless detail. But if the reader will keep in mind what has been said about the degeneration of Calvinism into a few clumsy vetoes, he will see in its full and frightful significance such a sentence as this which comes from Shaw himself: “My father was in theory a vehement teetotaller, but in practice often a furtive drinker.” The two things of course rest upon exactly the same philosophy; the philosophy of the taboo. There is a mystical substance, and it can give monstrous pleasures or call down monstrous punishments. The dipsomaniac and the abstainer are not only both mistaken, but they both make the same mistake. They both regard wine as a drug and not as a drink. But if I had mentioned that fragment of family information without any ethical preface, people would have begun at once to talk nonsense about artistic heredity and Celtic weakness, and would have gained the general impression that Bernard Shaw was an Irish wastrel and the child of Irish wastrels. Whereas it is the whole point of the matter that Bernard Shaw comes of a Puritan middle-class family of the most solid respectability; and the only admission of error arises from the fact that one member of that Puritan family took a particularly Puritan view of strong drink. That is, he regarded it generally as a poison and sometimes as a medicine, if only a mental medicine. But a poison and a medicine are very closely akin, as the nearest chemist knows; and they are chiefly akin in this; that no one will drink either of them for fun. Moreover, medicine and a poison are also alike in this; that no one will by preference drink either of them in public. And this medical or poisonous view of alcohol is not confined to the one Puritan to whose failure I have referred, it is spread all over the whole of our dying Puritan civilisation. For instance, social reformers have fired a hundred shots against the public-house; but never one against its really shameful feature. The sign of decay is not in the public-house, but in the private bar; or rather the row of five or six private bars, into each of which a respectable dipsomaniac can go in solitude, and by indulging his own half-witted sin violate his own half-witted morality. Nearly all these places are equipped with an atrocious apparatus of ground-glass windows which can be so closed that they practically conceal the face of the buyer from the seller. Words cannot express the abysses of human infamy and hateful shame expressed by that elaborate piece of furniture. Whenever I go into a public-house, which happens fairly often, I always carefully open all these apertures and then leave the place, in every way refreshed.

In other ways also it is necessary to insist not only on the fact of an extreme Protestantism, but on that of the Protestantism of a garrison; a world where that religious force both grew and festered all the more for being at once isolated and protected. All the influences surrounding Bernard Shaw in boyhood were not only Puritan, but such that no non-Puritan force could possibly pierce or counteract. He belonged to that Irish group which, according to Catholicism, has hardened its heart, which, according to Protestantism has hardened its head, but which, as I fancy, has chiefly hardened its hide, lost its sensibility to the contact of the things around it. In reading about his youth, one forgets that it was passed in the island which is still one flame before the altar of St. Peter and St. Patrick. The whole thing might be happening in Wimbledon. He went to the Wesleyan Connexional School. He went to hear Moody and Sankey. “I was,” he writes, “wholly unmoved by their eloquence; and felt bound to inform the public that I was, on the whole, an atheist. My letter was solemnly printed in *Public Opinion,* to the extreme horror of my numerous aunts and uncles.” That is the philosophical atmosphere; those are the religious postulates. It could never cross the mind of a man of the Garrison that before becoming an atheist he might stroll into one of the churches of his own country, and learn something of the philosophy that had satisfied Dante and Bossuet, Pascal and Descartes.

In the same way I have to appeal to my theoretic preface at this third point of the drama of Shaw's career. On leaving school he stepped into a secure business position which he held steadily for four years and which he flung away almost in one day. He rushed even recklessly to London; where he was quite unsuccessful and practically starved for six years. If I had mentioned this act on the first page of this book it would have seemed to have either the simplicity of a mere fanatic or else to cover some ugly escapade of youth or some quite criminal looseness of temperament. But Bernard Shaw did not act thus because he was careless, but because he was ferociously careful, careful especially of the one thing needful. What was he thinking about when he threw away his last halfpence and went to a strange place; what was he thinking about when he endured hunger and small-pox in London almost without hope? He was thinking of what he has ever since thought of, the slow but sure surge of the social revolution; you must read into all those bald sentences and empty years what I shall attempt to sketch in the third section. You must read the revolutionary movement of the later nineteenth century, darkened indeed by materialism and made mutable by fear and free thought, but full of awful vistas of an escape from the curse of Adam.

Bernard Shaw happened to be born in an epoch, or rather at the end of an epoch, which was in its way unique in the ages of history. The nineteenth century was not unique in the success or rapidity of its reforms or in their ultimate cessation; but it was unique in the peculiar character of the failure which followed the success. The French Revolution was an enormous act of human realisation; it has altered the terms of every law and the shape of every town in Europe; but it was by no means the only example of a strong and swift period of reform. What was really peculiar about the Republican energy was this, that it left behind it, not an ordinary reaction but a kind of dreary, drawn out and utterly unmeaning hope. The strong and evident idea of reform sank lower and lower until it became the timid and feeble idea of progress. Towards the end of the nineteenth century there appeared its two incredible figures; they were the pure Conservative and the pure Progressive; two figures which would have been overwhelmed with laughter by any other intellectual commonwealth of history. There was hardly a human generation which could not have seen the folly of merely going forward or merely standing still; of mere progressing or mere conserving. In the coarsest Greek Comedy we might have a joke about a man who wanted to keep what he had, whether it was yellow gold or yellow fever. In the dullest mediaeval morality we might have a joke about a progressive gentleman who, having passed heaven and come to purgatory, decided to go further and fare worse. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were an age of quite impetuous progress; men made in one rush, roads, trades, synthetic philosophies, parliaments, university settlements, a law that could cover the world and such spires as had never struck the sky. But they would not have said that they wanted progress, but that they wanted the road, the parliaments, and the spires. In the same way the time from Richelieu to the Revolution was upon the whole a time of conservation, often of harsh and hideous conservation; it preserved tortures, legal quibbles, and despotism. But if you had asked the rulers they would not have said that they wanted conservation; but that they wanted the torture and the despotism. The old reformers and the old despots alike desired definite *things,* powers, licenses, payments, vetoes, and permissions. Only the modern progressive and the modern conservative have been content with two words.

Other periods of active improvement have died by stiffening at last into some routine. Thus the Gothic gaiety of the thirteenth century stiffening into the mere Gothic ugliness of the fifteenth. Thus the mighty wave of the Renaissance, whose crest was lifted to heaven, was touched by a wintry witchery of classicism and frozen for ever before it fell. Alone of all such movements the democratic movement of the last two centuries has not frozen, but loosened and liquefied. Instead of becoming more pedantic in its old age, it has grown more bewildered. By the analogy of healthy history we ought to have gone on worshipping the republic and calling each other citizen, with increasing seriousness until some other part of the truth broke into our republican temple. But in fact we have turned the freedom of democracy into a mere scepticism, destructive of everything, including democracy itself. It is none the less destructive because it is, so to speak, an optimistic scepticism — or, as I have said, a dreary hope. It was none the better because the destroyers were always talking about the new vistas and enlightenments which their new negations opened to us. The republican temple, like any other strong building, rested on certain definite limits and supports. But the modern man inside it went on indefinitely knocking holes in his own house and saying that they were windows. The result is not hard to calculate: the moral world was pretty well all windows and no house by the time that Bernard Shaw arrived on the scene.

Then there entered into full swing that great game of which he soon became the greatest master. A progressive or advanced person was now to mean not a man who wanted democracy, but a man who wanted something newer than democracy. A reformer was to be, not a man who wanted a parliament or a republic, but a man who wanted anything that he hadn't got. The emancipated man must cast a weird and suspicious eye round him at all the institutions of the world, wondering which of them was destined to die in the next few centuries. Each one of them was whispering to himself, "What can I alter?"

This quite vague and varied discontent probably did lead to the revelation of many incidental wrongs and to much humane hard work in certain holes and corners. It also gave birth to a great deal of quite futile and frantic speculation, which seemed destined to take away babies from women, or to give votes to tom-cats. But it had an evil in it much deeper and more psychologically poisonous than any superficial absurdities. There was in this thirst to be "progressive" a subtle sort of double-mindedness and falsity. A man was so eager to be in advance of his age that he pretended to be in advance of himself. Institutions that his wholesome nature and habit fully accepted he had to sneer at as old-fashioned, out of a servile and snobbish fear of the future. Out of the primal forests, through all the real progress of history, man had picked his way obeying his human instinct, or (in the excellent phrase) following his nose. But now he was trying, by violent athletic exertions, to get in front of his nose.

Into this riot of all imaginary innovations Shaw brought the sharp edge of the Irishman and the concentration of the Puritan, and thoroughly thrashed all competitors in the difficult art of being at once modern and intelligent. In twenty twopenny controversies he took the revolutionary side, I fear in most cases because it was called revolutionary. But the other revolutionists were abruptly startled by the presentation of quite rational and ingenious arguments on their own side. The dreary thing about most new causes is that they are praised in such very old terms. Every new religion bores us with the same stale rhetoric about closer fellowship and the higher life. No one ever approximately equalled Bernard Shaw in the power of finding really fresh and personal arguments for these recent schemes and creeds. No one ever came within a mile of him in the knack of actually producing a new argument for a new philosophy. I give two instances to cover the kind of thing I mean. Bernard Shaw (being honestly eager to put himself on the modern side in everything) put himself on the side of what is called the feminist movement; the proposal to give the two sexes not merely equal social privileges, but identical. To this it is often answered that women cannot be soldiers; and to this again the sensible feminists answer that women run their own kind of physical risk, while the silly feminists answer that war is an outworn barbaric thing which women would abolish. But Bernard Shaw took the line of saying that women had been soldiers, in all occasions of natural and unofficial war, as in the French Revolution. That has the great fighting value of being an unexpected argument; it takes the other pugilist's breath away for one important instant. To take the other case, Mr. Shaw has found himself, led by the same mad imp of modernity, on the side of the people who want to have phonetic spelling. The people who want phonetic spelling generally depress the world with tireless and tasteless explanations of how much easier it would be for children or foreign bagmen if "height" were spelt "hite." Now children would curse spelling whatever it was, and we are not going to permit foreign bagmen to improve Shakespeare. Bernard Shaw charged along quite a different line; he urged that Shakespeare himself believed in phonetic spelling, since he spelt his own name in six different ways. According to Shaw, phonetic spelling is merely a return to the freedom and flexibility of Elizabethan literature. That, again, is exactly the kind of blow the old speller does not expect. As a matter of fact there is an answer to both the ingenuities I have quoted. When women have fought in revolutions they have generally shown that it was not natural to them, by their hysterical cruelty and insolence; it was the men who fought in the Revolution; it was the women who tortured the prisoners and mutilated the dead. And because Shakespeare could sing better than he could spell, it does not follow that his spelling and ours ought to be abruptly altered by a race that has lost all instinct for singing. But I do not wish to discuss these points; I only quote them as examples of the startling ability which really brought Shaw to the front; the ability to brighten even our modern movements with original and suggestive thoughts.

But while Bernard Shaw pleasantly surprised innumerable cranks and revolutionists by finding quite rational arguments for them, he surprised them unpleasantly also by discovering something else. He discovered a turn of argument or trick of thought which has ever since been the plague of their lives, and given him in all assemblies of their kind, in the Fabian Society or in the whole Socialist movement, a fantastic but most formidable domination. This method may be approximately defined as that of revolutionising the revolutionists by turning their rationalism against their remaining sentimentalism. But definition leaves the matter dark unless we give one or two examples. Thus Bernard Shaw threw himself as thoroughly as any New Woman into the cause of the emancipation of women. But while the New Woman praised woman as a prophetess, the new man took the opportunity to curse her and kick her as a comrade. For the others sex equality meant the emancipation of women, which allowed them to be equal to men. For Shaw it mainly meant the emancipation of men, which allowed them to be rude to women. Indeed, almost every one of Bernard Shaw's earlier plays might be called an argument between a man and a woman, in which the woman is thumped and thrashed and outwitted until she admits that she is the equal of her conqueror. This is the first case of the Shavian trick of turning on the romantic rationalists with their own rationalism. He said in substance, "If we are democrats, let us have votes for women; but if we are democrats, why on earth should we have respect for women?" I take one other example out of many. Bernard Shaw was thrown early into what may be called the cosmopolitan club of revolution. The Socialists of the S. D. F. call it "L'Internationale," but the club covers more than Socialists. It covers many who consider themselves the champions of oppressed nationalities — Poland, Finland, and even Ireland; and thus a strong nationalist tendency exists in the revolutionary movement. Against this nationalist tendency Shaw set himself with sudden violence. If the flag of England was a piece of piratical humbug, was not the flag of Poland a piece of piratical humbug too? If we hated the jingoism of the existing armies and frontiers, why should we bring into existence new jingo armies and new jingo frontiers? All the other revolutionists fell in instinctively with Home Rule for Ireland. Shaw urged, in effect, that Home Rule was as bad as Home Influences and Home Cooking, and all the other degrading domesticities that began with the word "Home." His ultimate support of the South African war was largely created by his irritation against the other revolutionists for favouring a nationalist resistance. The ordinary Imperialists objected to Pro-Boers because they were anti-patriots. Bernard Shaw objected to Pro-Boers because they were pro-patriots.

But among these surprise attacks of G. B. S., these turnings of scepticism against the sceptics, there was one which has figured largely in his life; the most amusing and perhaps the most salutary of all these reactions. The "progressive" world being in revolt against religion had naturally felt itself allied to science; and against the authority of priests it would perpetually hurl the authority of scientific men. Shaw gazed for a few moments at this new authority, the veiled god of Huxley and Tyndall, and then with the greatest placidity and precision kicked it in the stomach. He declared to the astounded progressives around him that physical science was a mystical fake like sacerdotalism; that scientists, like priests, spoke with authority because they could not speak with proof or reason; that the very wonders of science were mostly lies, like the wonders of religion. "When astronomers tell me", he says somewhere, "that a star is so far off that its light takes a thousand years to reach us, the magnitude of the lie seems to me inartistic." The paralysing impudence of such remarks left everyone quite breathless; and even to this day this particular part of Shaw's satiric war has been far less followed up than it deserves. For there was present in it an element very marked in Shaw's controversies; I mean that his apparent exaggerations are generally much better backed up by knowledge than would appear from their nature. He can lure his enemy on with fantasies and then overwhelm him with facts. Thus the man of science, when he read some wild passage in which Shaw compared Huxley to a tribal soothsayer grubbing in the entrails of animals, supposed the writer to be a mere fantastic whom science could crush with one finger. He would therefore engage in a controversy with Shaw about (let us say) vivisection, and discover to his horror that Shaw really knew a great deal about the subject, and could pelt him with expert witnesses and hospital reports. Among the many singular contradictions in a singular character, there is none more interesting than this combination of exactitude and industry in the detail of opinions with audacity and a certain wildness in their outline.

This great game of catching revolutionists napping, of catching the unconventional people in conventional poses, of outmarching and outmanoeuvring progressives till they felt like conservatives, of undermining the mines of Nihilists till they felt like the House of Lords, this great game of dishing the anarchists continued for some time to be his most effective business. It would be untrue to say that he was a cynic; he was never a cynic, for that implies a certain corrupt fatigue about human affairs, whereas he was vibrating with virtue and energy. Nor would it be fair to call him even a sceptic, for that implies a dogma of hopelessness and definite belief in unbelief. But it would be strictly just to describe him at this time, at any rate, as a merely destructive person. He was one whose main business was, in his own view, the pricking of illusions, the stripping away of disguises, and even the destruction of ideals. He was a sort of anti-confectioner whose whole business it was to take the gilt off the gingerbread.

Now I have no particular objection to people who take the gilt off the gingerbread; if only for this excellent reason, that I am much fonder of gingerbread than I am of gilt. But there are some objections to this task when it becomes a crusade or an obsession. One of them is this: that people who have really scraped the gilt off gingerbread generally waste the rest of their lives in attempting to scrape the gilt off gigantic lumps of gold. Such has too often been the case of Shaw. He can, if he likes, scrape the romance off the armaments of Europe or the party system of Great Britain. But he cannot scrape the romance off love or military valour, because it is all romance, and three thousand miles thick. It cannot, I think, be denied that much of Bernard Shaw’s splendid mental energy has been wasted in this weary business of gnawing at the necessary pillars of all possible society. But it would be grossly unfair to indicate that even in his first and most destructive stage he uttered nothing except these accidental, if arresting, negations. He threw his whole genius heavily into the scale in favour of two positive projects or causes of the period. When we have stated these we have really stated the full intellectual equipment with which he started his literary life.

I have said that Shaw was on the insurgent side in everything; but in the case of these two important convictions he exercised a solid power of choice. When he first went to London he mixed with every kind of revolutionary society, and met every kind of person except the ordinary person. He knew everybody, so to speak, except everybody. He was more than once a momentary apparition among the respectable atheists. He knew Bradlaugh and spoke on the platforms of that Hall of Science in which very simple and sincere masses of men used to hail with shouts of joy the assurance that they were not immortal. He retains to this day something of the noise and narrowness of that room; as, for instance, when he says that it is contemptible to have a craving for eternal life. This prejudice remains in direct opposition to all his present opinions, which are all to the effect that it is glorious to desire power, consciousness, and vitality even for one's self. But this old secularist tag, that it is selfish to save one's soul, remains with him long after he has practically glorified selfishness. It is a relic of those chaotic early days. And just as he mingled with the atheists he mingled with the anarchists, who were in the eighties a much more formidable body than now, disputing with the Socialists on almost equal terms the claim to be the true heirs of the Revolution. Shaw still talks entertainingly about this group. As far as I can make out, it was almost entirely female. When a book came out called *A Girl among the Anarchists*, G. B. S. was provoked to a sort of explosive reminiscence. "A girl among the anarchists!" he exclaimed to his present biographer; "if they had said 'A man among the anarchists' it would have been more of an adventure." He is ready to tell other tales of this eccentric environment, most of which does not convey an impression of a very bracing atmosphere. That revolutionary society must have contained many high public ideals, but also a fair number of low private desires. And when people blame Bernard Shaw for his pitiless and prosaic coldness, his cutting refusal to reverence or admire, I think they should remember this riff-raff of lawless sentimentalism against which his common-sense had to strive, all the grandiloquent "comrades" and all the gushing "affinities," all the sweetstuff sensuality and senseless sulking against law. If Bernard Shaw became a little too fond of throwing cold water upon prophecies or ideals, remember that he must have passed much of his youth among cosmopolitan idealists who wanted a little cold water in every sense of the word.

Upon two of these modern crusades he concentrated, and, as I have said, he chose them well. The first was broadly what was called the Humanitarian cause. It did not mean the cause of humanity, but rather, if anything, the cause of everything else. At its noblest it meant a sort of mystical identification of our life with the whole life of nature. So a man might wince when a snail was crushed as if his toe were trodden on; so a man might shrink when a moth shrivelled as if his own hair had caught fire. Man might be a network of exquisite nerves running over the whole universe, a subtle spider's web of pity. This was a fine conception; though perhaps a somewhat severe enforcement of the theological conception of the special divinity of man. For the humanitarians certainly asked of humanity what can be asked of no other creature; no man ever required a dog to understand a cat or expected the cow to cry for the sorrows of the nightingale.

Hence this sense has been strongest in saints of a very mystical sort; such as St. Francis who spoke of Sister Sparrow and Brother Wolf. Shaw adopted this crusade of cosmic pity but adopted it very much in his own style, severe, explanatory, and even unsympathetic. He had no affectionate impulse to say "Brother Wolf"; at the best he would have said "Citizen Wolf," like a sound republican. In fact, he was full of healthy human compassion for the sufferings of animals; but in phraseology he loved to put the matter unemotionally and even harshly. I was once at a debating club at which Bernard Shaw said that he was not a humanitarian at all, but only an economist, that he merely hated to see life wasted by carelessness or cruelty. I felt inclined to get up and address to him the following lucid question: "If when you spare a herring you are only being oikonomikal, for what oikos are you being nomikal?" But in an average debating club I thought this question might not be quite clear; so I abandoned the idea. But certainly it is not plain for whom Bernard Shaw is economising if he rescues a rhinoceros from an early grave. But the truth is that Shaw only took this economic pose from his hatred of appearing sentimental. If Bernard Shaw killed a dragon and rescued a princess of romance, he would try to say "I have saved a princess" with exactly the same intonation as "I have saved a shilling." He tries to turn his own heroism into a sort of superhuman thrift. He would thoroughly sympathise with that passage in his favourite dramatic author in which the Button Moulder tells Peer Gynt that there is a sort of cosmic housekeeping; that God Himself is very economical, "and that is why He is so well to do."

This combination of the widest kindness and consideration with a consistent ungraciousness of tone runs through all Shaw's ethical utterance, and is nowhere more evident than in his attitude towards animals. He would waste himself to a white-haired shadow to save a shark in an aquarium from inconvenience or to add any little comforts to the life of a carrion-crow. He would defy any laws or lose any friends to show mercy to the humblest beast or the most hidden bird. Yet I cannot recall in the whole of his works or in the whole of his conversation a single word of any tenderness or intimacy with any bird or beast. It was under the influence of this high and almost superhuman sense of duty that he became a vegetarian; and I seem to remember that when he was lying sick and near to death at the end of his *Saturday Review* career he wrote a fine fantastic article, declaring that his hearse ought to be drawn by all the animals that he had not eaten. Whenever that evil day comes there will be no need to fall back on the ranks of the brute creation; there will be no lack of men and women who owe him so much as to be glad to take the place of the animals; and the present writer for one will be glad to express his gratitude as an elephant. There is no doubt about the essential manhood and decency of Bernard Shaw's instincts in such matters. And quite apart from the vegetarian controversy, I do not doubt that the beasts also owe him much. But when we come to positive things (and passions are the only truly positive things) that obstinate doubt remains which remains after all eulogies of Shaw. That fixed fancy sticks to the mind; that Bernard Shaw is a vegetarian more because he dislikes dead beasts than because he likes live ones.

It was the same with the other great cause to which Shaw more politically though not more publicly committed himself. The actual English people, without representation in Press or Parliament, but faintly expressed in public-houses and music-halls, would connect Shaw (so far as they have heard of him) with two ideas; they would say first that he was a vegetarian, and second that he was a Socialist. Like most of the impressions of the ignorant, these impressions would be on the whole very just. My only purpose here is to urge that Shaw's Socialism exemplifies the same trait of temperament as his vegetarianism. This book is not concerned with Bernard Shaw as a politician or a sociologist, but as a critic and creator of drama. I will therefore end in this chapter all that I have to say about Bernard Shaw as a politician or a political philosopher. I propose here to dismiss this aspect of Shaw: only let it be remembered, once and for all, that I am here dismissing the most important aspect of Shaw. It is as if one dismissed the sculpture of Michael Angelo and went on to his sonnets. Perhaps the highest and purest thing in him is simply that he cares more for politics than for anything else; more than for art or for philosophy. Socialism is the noblest thing for Bernard Shaw; and it is the noblest thing in him. He really desires less to win fame than to bear fruit. He is an absolute follower of that early sage who wished only to make two blades of grass grow instead of one. He is a loyal subject of Henri Quatre, who said that he only wanted every Frenchman to have a chicken in his pot on Sunday; except, of course, that he would call the repast cannibalism. But *caeteris paribu*s he thinks more of that chicken than of the eagle of the universal empire; and he is always ready to support the grass against the laurel.

Yet by the nature of this book the account of the most important Shaw, who is the Socialist, must be also the most brief. Socialism (which I am not here concerned either to attack or defend) is, as everyone knows, the proposal that all property should be nationally owned that it may be more decently distributed. It is a proposal resting upon two principles, unimpeachable as far as they go: first, that frightful human calamities call for immediate human aid; second, that such aid must almost always be collectively organised. If a ship is being wrecked, we organise a lifeboat; if a house is on fire, we organise a blanket; if half a nation is starving, we must organise work and food. That is the primary and powerful argument of the Socialist, and everything that he adds to it weakens it. The only possible line of protest is to suggest that it is rather shocking that we have to treat a normal nation as something exceptional, like a house on fire or a shipwreck. But of such things it may be necessary to speak later. The point here is that Shaw behaved towards Socialism just as he behaved towards vegetarianism; he offered every reason except the emotional reason, which was the real one. When taxed in a *Daily New*s discussion with being a Socialist for the obvious reason that poverty was cruel, he said this was quite wrong; it was only because poverty was wasteful. He practically professed that modern society annoyed him, not so much like an unrighteous kingdom, but rather like an untidy room. Everyone who knew him knew, of course, that he was full of a proper brotherly bitterness about the oppression of the poor. But here again he would not admit that he was anything but an Economist.

In thus setting his face like flint against sentimental methods of argument he undoubtedly did one great service to the causes for which he stood. Every vulgar anti-humanitarian, every snob who wants monkeys vivisected or beggars flogged has always fallen back upon stereotyped phrases like “maudlin” and “sentimental,” which indicated the humanitarian as a man in a weak condition of tears. The mere personality of Shaw has shattered those foolish phrases for ever. Shaw the humanitarian was like Voltaire the humanitarian, a man whose satire was like steel, the hardest and coolest of fighters, upon whose piercing point the wretched defenders of a masculine brutality wriggled like worms.

In this quarrel one cannot wish Shaw even an inch less contemptuous, for the people who call compassion "sentimentalism" deserve nothing but contempt. In this one does not even regret his coldness; it is an honourable contrast to the blundering emotionalism of the jingoes and flagellomaniacs. The truth is that the ordinary anti-humanitarian only manages to harden his heart by having already softened his head. It is the reverse of sentimental to insist that a nigger is being burned alive; for sentimentalism must be the clinging to pleasant thoughts. And no one, not even a Higher Evolutionist, can think a nigger burned alive a pleasant thought. The sentimental thing is to warm your hands at the fire while denying the existence of the nigger, and that is the ruling habit in England, as it has been the chief business of Bernard Shaw to show. And in this the brutalitarians hate him not because he is soft, but because he is hard, because he is not to be softened by conventional excuses; because he looks hard at a thing — and hits harder. Some foolish fellow of the Henley-Whibley reaction wrote that if we were to be conquerors we must be less tender and more ruthless. Shaw answered with really avenging irony, "What a light this principle throws on the defeat of the tender Dervish, the compassionate Zulu, and the morbidly humane Boxer at the hands of the hardy savages of England, France, and Germany." In that sentence an idiot is obliterated and the whole story of Europe told; but it is immensely stiffened by its ironic form. In the same way Shaw washed away for ever the idea that Socialists were weak dreamers, who said that things might be only because they wished them to be. G. B. S. in argument with an individualist showed himself, as a rule, much the better economist and much the worse rhetorician. In this atmosphere arose a celebrated Fabian Society, of which he is still the leading spirit — a society which answered all charges of impracticable idealism by pushing both its theoretic statements and its practical negotiations to the verge of cynicism. Bernard Shaw was the literary expert who wrote most of its pamphlets. In one of them, among such sections as *Fabian Temperance Reform, Fabian Education* and so on, there was an entry gravely headed "Fabian Natural Science," which stated that in the Socialist cause light was needed more than heat.

Thus the Irish detachment and the Puritan austerity did much good to the country and to the causes for which they were embattled. But there was one thing they did not do; they did nothing for Shaw himself in the matter of his primary mistakes and his real limitation. His great defect was and is the lack of democratic sentiment. And there was nothing democratic either in his humanitarianism or his Socialism. These new and refined faiths tended rather to make the Irishman yet more aristocratic, the Puritan yet more exclusive. To be a Socialist was to look down on all the peasant owners of the earth, especially on the peasant owners of his own island. To be a Vegetarian was to be a man with a strange and mysterious morality, a man who thought the good lord who roasted oxen for his vassals only less bad than the bad lord who roasted the vassals. None of these advanced views could the common people hear gladly; nor indeed was Shaw specially anxious to please the common people. It was his glory that he pitied animals like men; it was his defect that he pitied men only too much like animals. Foulon said of the democracy, “Let them eat grass.” Shaw said, “Let them eat greens.” He had more benevolence, but almost as much disdain. “I have never had any feelings about the English working classes,” he said elsewhere, “except a desire to abolish them and replace them by sensible people.” This is the unsympathetic side of the thing; but it had another and much nobler side, which must at least be seriously recognised before we pass on to much lighter things.

Bernard Shaw is not a democrat; but he is a splendid republican. The nuance of difference between those terms precisely depicts him. And there is after all a good deal of dim democracy in England, in the sense that there is much of a blind sense of brotherhood, and nowhere more than among old-fashioned and even reactionary people. But a republican is a rare bird, and a noble one. Shaw is a republican in the literal and Latin sense; he cares more for the Public Thing than for any private thing. The interest of the State is with him a sincere thirst of the soul, as it was in the little pagan cities. Now this public passion, this clean appetite for order and equity, had fallen to a lower ebb, had more nearly disappeared altogether, during Shaw’s earlier epoch than at any other time. Individualism of the worst type was on the top of the wave; I mean artistic individualism, which is so much crueller, so much blinder and so much more irrational even than commercial individualism. The decay of society was praised by artists as the decay of a corpse is praised by worms. The aesthete was all receptiveness, like the flea. His only affair in this world was to feed on its facts and colours, like a parasite upon blood. The ego was the all; and the praise of it was enunciated in madder and madder rhythms by poets whose Helicon was absinthe and whose Pegasus was the nightmare. This diseased pride was not even conscious of a public interest, and would have found all political terms utterly tasteless and insignificant. It was no longer a question of one man one vote, but of one man one universe.

I have in my time had my fling at the Fabian Society, at the pedantry of schemes, the arrogance of experts; nor do I regret it now. But when I remember that other world against which it reared its bourgeois banner of cleanliness and common sense, I will not end this chapter without doing it decent honour. Give me the drain pipes of the Fabians rather than the panpipes of the later poets; the drain pipes have a nicer smell. Give me even that businesslike benevolence that herded men like beasts rather than that exquisite art which isolated them like devils; give me even the suppression of “Zaeo” rather than the triumph of “Salome.” And if I feel such a confession to be due to those Fabians who could hardly have been anything but experts in any society, such as Mr. Sidney Webb or Mr. Edward Pease, it is due yet more strongly to the greatest of the Fabians. Here was a man who could have enjoyed art among the artists, who could have been the wittiest of all the *flâneurs*; who could have made epigrams like diamonds and drunk music like wine. He has instead laboured in a mill of statistics and crammed his mind with all the most dreary and the most filthy details, so that he can argue on the spur of the moment about sewing-machines or sewage, about typhus fever or twopenny tubes. The usual mean theory of motives will not cover the case; it is not ambition, for he could have been twenty times more prominent as a plausible and popular humorist. It is the real and ancient emotion of the *salus populi,* almost extinct in our oligarchical chaos; nor will I for one, as I pass on to many matters of argument or quarrel, neglect to salute a passion so implacable and so pure.

The Critic

IT appears a point of some mystery to the present writer that Bernard Shaw should have been so long unrecognised and almost in beggary. I should have thought his talent was of the ringing and arresting sort; such as even editors and publishers would have sense enough to seize. Yet it is quite certain that he almost starved in London for many years, writing occasional columns for an advertisement or words for a picture. And it is equally certain (it is proved by twenty anecdotes, but no one who knows Shaw needs any anecdotes to prove it) that in those days of desperation he again and again threw up chances and flung back good bargains which did not suit his unique and erratic sense of honour. The fame of having first offered Shaw to the public upon a platform worthy of him belongs, like many other public services, to Mr. William Archer.

I say it seems odd that such a writer should not be appreciated in a flash; but upon this point there is evidently a real difference of opinion, and it constitutes for me the strangest difficulty of the subject. I hear many people complain that Bernard Shaw deliberately mystifies them. I cannot imagine what they mean; it seems to me that he deliberately insults them. His language, especially on moral questions, is generally as straight and solid as that of a bargee and far less ornate and symbolic than that of a hansom-cabman. The prosperous English Philistine complains that Mr. Shaw is making a fool of him. Whereas Mr. Shaw is not in the least making a fool of him; Mr. Shaw is, with laborious lucidity, calling him a fool. G. B. S. calls a landlord a thief; and the landlord, instead of denying or resenting it, says, “Ah, that fellow hides his meaning so cleverly that one can never make out what he means, it is all so fine spun and fantastical.” G. B. S. calls a statesman a liar to his face, and the statesman cries in a kind of ecstasy, “Ah, what quaint, intricate and half-tangled trains of thought! Ah, what elusive and many-coloured mysteries of half-meaning!” I think it is always quite plain what Mr. Shaw means, even when he is joking, and it generally means that the people he is talking to ought to howl aloud for their sins. But the average representative of them undoubtedly treats the Shavian meaning as tricky and complex, when it is really direct and offensive. He always accuses Shaw of pulling his leg, at the exact moment when Shaw is pulling his nose.

This prompt and pungent style he learnt in the open, upon political tubs and platforms; and he is very legitimately proud of it. He boasts of being a demagogue; “The cart and the trumpet for me,” he says, with admirable good sense. Everyone will remember the effective appearance of Cyrano de Bergerac in the first act of the fine play of that name; when instead of leaping in by any hackneyed door or window, he suddenly springs upon a chair above the crowd that has so far kept him invisible; “les bras croisés, le feutre en bataille, la moustache herissée, le nez terrible.” I will not go so far as to say that when Bernard Shaw sprang upon a chair or tub in Trafalgar Square he had the hat in battle, or even that he had the nose terrible. But just as we see Cyrano best when he thus leaps above the crowd, I think we may take this moment of Shaw stepping on his little platform to see him clearly as he then was, and even as he has largely not ceased to be. I, at least, have only known him in his middle age; yet I think I can see him, younger yet only a little more alert, with hair more red but with face yet paler, as he first stood up upon some cart or barrow in the tossing glare of the gas.

The first fact that one realises about Shaw (independent of all one has read and often contradicting it) is his voice. Primarily it is the voice of an Irishman, and then something of the voice of a musician. It possibly explains much of his career; a man may be permitted to say so many impudent things with so pleasant an intonation. But the voice is not only Irish and agreeable, it is also frank and as it were inviting conference. This goes with a style and gesture which can only be described as at once very casual and very emphatic. He assumes that bodily supremacy which goes with oratory, but he assumes it with almost ostentatious carelessness; he throws back the head, but loosely and laughingly. He is at once swaggering and yet shrugging his shoulders, as if to drop from them the mantle of the orator which he has confidently assumed. Lastly, no man ever used voice or gesture better for the purpose of expressing certainty; no man can say “I tell Mr. Jones he is totally wrong” with more air of unforced and even casual conviction.

This particular play of feature or pitch of voice, at once didactic and yet not uncomrade-like, must be counted a very important fact, especially in connection with the period when that voice was first heard. It must be remembered that Shaw emerged as a wit in a sort of secondary age of wits; one of those stale interludes of prematurely old young men, which separate the serious epochs of history. Oscar Wilde was its god; but he was somewhat more mystical, not to say monstrous, than the average of its dried and decorous impudence. The *two survivals* of that time, as far as I know, are Mr. Max Beerbohm and Mr. Graham Robertson; two most charming people; but the air they had to live in was the devil. One of its notes was an artificial reticence of speech, which waited till it could plant the perfect epigram. Its typical products were far too conceited to lay down the law. Now when people heard that Bernard Shaw was witty, as he most certainly was, when they heard his *mots* repeated like those of Whistler or Wilde, when they heard things like “the Seven deadly Virtues” or “Who *was* Hall Caine?” they expected another of these silent sarcastic dandies who went about with one epigram, patient and poisonous, like a bee with his one sting. And when they saw and heard the new humorist they found no fixed sneer, no frock coat, no green carnation, no silent Savoy Restaurant good manners, no fear of looking a fool, no particular notion of looking a gentleman. They found a talkative Irishman with a kind voice and a brown coat; open gestures and an evident desire to make people really agree with him. He had his own kind of affectations no doubt, and his own kind of tricks of debate; but he broke, and, thank God, forever the spell of the little man with the single eye glass who had frozen both faith and fun at so many tea-tables. Shaw’s humane voice and hearty manner were so obviously more the things of a great man than the hard, gem-like brilliancy of Wilde or the careful ill-temper of Whistler. He brought in a breezier sort of insolence; the single eye-glass fled before the single eye.

Added to the effect of the amiable dogmatic voice and lean, loose swaggering figure, is that of the face with which so many caricaturists have fantastically delighted themselves, the Mephistophilean face with the fierce tufted eyebrows and forked red beard. Yet those caricaturists in their natural delight in coming upon so striking a face, have somewhat misrepresented it, making it merely Satanic; whereas its actual expression has quite as much benevolence as mockery. By this time his costume has become a part of his personality; one has come to think of the reddish brown Jaeger suit as if it were a sort of reddish brown fur, and were, like the hair and eyebrows, a part of the animal; yet there are those who claim to remember a Bernard Shaw of yet more awful aspect before Jaeger came to his assistance; a Bernard Shaw in a dilapidated frock-coat and some sort of straw hat. I can hardly believe it; the man is so much of a piece, and must always have dressed appropriately. In any case his brown woollen clothes, at once artistic and hygienic, completed the appeal for which he stood; which might be defined as an eccentric healthy-mindedness. But something of the vagueness and equivocation of his first fame is probably due to the different functions which he performed in the contemporary world of art.

He began by writing novels. They are not much read, and indeed not imperatively worth reading, with the one exception of the crude and magnificent *Cashel Byron's Profession.* Mr. William Archer, in the course of his kindly efforts on behalf of his young Irish friend, sent this book to Samoa, for the opinion of the most elvish and yet efficient of modern critics. Stevenson summed up much of Shaw even from that fragment when he spoke of a romantic griffin roaring with laughter at the nature of his own quest. He also added the not wholly unjustified post-script: “I say, Archer, — my God, what women!”

The fiction was largely dropped; but when he began work he felt his way by the avenues of three arts. He was an art critic, a dramatic critic, and a musical critic; and in all three, it need hardly be said, he fought for the newest style and the most revolutionary school. He wrote on all these as he would have written on anything; but it was, I fancy, about the music that he cared most.

It may often be remarked that mathematicians love and understand music more than they love or understand poetry. Bernard Shaw is in much the same condition; indeed, in attempting to do justice to Shakespeare's poetry, he always calls it “word music.” It is not difficult to explain this special attachment of the mere logician to music. The logician, like every other man on earth, must have sentiment and romance in his existence; in every man's life, indeed, which can be called a life at all, sentiment is the most solid thing. But if the extreme logician turns for his emotions to poetry, he is exasperated and bewildered by discovering that the words of his own trade are used in an entirely different meaning. He conceives that he understands the word “visible,” and then finds Milton applying it to darkness, in which nothing is visible. He supposes that he understands the word “hide,” and then finds Shelley talking of a poet hidden in the light. He has reason to believe that he understands the common word “hung”; and then William Shakespeare, Esquire, of Stratford-on-Avon, gravely assures him that the tops of the tall sea waves were hung with deafening clamours on the slippery clouds. That is why the common arithmetician prefers music to poetry. Words are his scientific instruments. It irritates him that they should be anyone else's musical instruments. He is willing to see men juggling, but not men juggling with his own private tools and possessions — his terms. It is then that he turns with an utter relief to music. Here are all the same fascination and inspiration, all the same purity and plunging force as in poetry; but not requiring any verbal confession that light conceals things or that darkness can be seen in the dark. Music is mere beauty; it is beauty in the abstract, beauty in solution. It is a shapeless and liquid element of beauty, in which a man may really float, not indeed affirming the truth, but not denying it. Bernard Shaw, as I have already said, is infinitely far above all such mere mathematicians and pedantic reasoners; still his feeling is partly the same. He adores music because it cannot deal with romantic terms either in their right or their wrong sense. Music can be romantic without reminding him of Shakespeare and Walter Scott, with whom he has had personal quarrels. Music can be Catholic without reminding him verbally of the Catholic Church, which he has never seen, and is sure he does not like. Bernard Shaw can agree with Wagner, the musician, because he speaks without words; if it had been Wagner the man he would certainly have had words with him. Therefore I would suggest that Shaw's love of music (which is so fundamental that it must be mentioned early, if not first, in his story) may itself be considered in the first case as the imaginative safety-valve of the rationalistic Irishman.

This much may be said conjecturally over the present signature; but more must not be said. Bernard Shaw understands music so much better than I do that it is just possible that he is, in that tongue and atmosphere, all that he is not elsewhere. While he is writing with a pen I know his limitations as much as I admire his genius; and I know it is true to say that he does not appreciate romance. But while he is playing on the piano he may be cocking a feather, drawing a sword or draining a flagon for all I know. While he is speaking I am sure that there are some things he does not understand. But while he is listening (at the Queen's Hall) he may understand everything, including God and me. Upon this part of him I am a reverent agnostic; it is well to have some such dark continent in the character of a man of whom one writes. It preserves two very important things — modesty in the biographer and mystery in the biography.

For the purpose of our present generalisation it is only necessary to say that Shaw, as a musical critic, summed himself up as "The Perfect

Wagnerite"; he threw himself into subtle and yet trenchant eulogy of that revolutionary voice in music. It was the same with the other arts. As he was a Perfect Wagnerite in music, so he was a Perfect Whistlerite in painting; so above all he was a Perfect Ibsenite in drama. And with this we enter that part of his career with which this book is more specially concerned. When Mr. William Archer got him established as dramatic critic of the *Saturday Review*, he became for the first time "a star of the stage"; a shooting star and sometimes a destroying comet.

On the day of that appointment opened one of the very few exhilarating and honest battles that broke the silence of the slow and cynical collapse of the nineteenth century. Bernard Shaw the demagogue had got his cart and his trumpet; and was resolved to make them like the car of destiny and the trumpet of judgment. He had not the servility of the ordinary rebel, who is content to go on rebelling against kings and priests, because such rebellion is as old and as established as any priests or kings. He cast about him for something to attack which was not merely powerful or placid, but was unattacked. After a little quite sincere reflection, he found it. He would not be content to be a common atheist; he wished to blaspheme something in which even atheists believed. He was not satisfied with being revolutionary; there were so many revolutionists. He wanted to pick out some prominent institution which had been irrationally and instinctively accepted by the most violent and profane; something of which Mr. Foote would speak as respectfully on the front page of the *Freethinker* as Mr. St. Loe Strachey on the front page of the *Spectator*. He found the thing; he found the great unassailed English institution — Shakespeare.

But Shaw's attack on Shakespeare, though exaggerated for the fun of the thing, was not by any means the mere folly or firework paradox that has been supposed. He meant what he said; what was called his levity was merely the laughter of a man who enjoyed saying what he meant — an occupation which is indeed one of the greatest larks in life. Moreover, it can honestly be said that Shaw did good by shaking the mere idolatry of Him of Avon. That idolatry was bad for England; it buttressed our perilous self-complacency by making us think that we alone had, not merely a great poet, but the one poet above criticism. It was bad for literature; it made a minute model out of work that was really a hasty and faulty masterpiece. And it was bad for religion and morals that there should be so huge a terrestrial idol, that we should put such utter and unreasoning trust in any child of man. It is true that it was largely through Shaw's own defects that he beheld the defects of Shakespeare. But it needed someone equally prosaic to resist what was perilous in the charm of such poetry; it may not be altogether a mistake to send a deaf man to destroy the rock of the sirens.

This attitude of Shaw illustrates of course all three of the divisions or aspects to which the reader's attention has been drawn. It was partly the attitude of the Irishman objecting to the Englishman turning his mere artistic taste into a religion; especially when it was a taste merely taught him by his aunts and uncles. In Shaw's opinion (one might say) the English do not really enjoy Shakespeare or even admire Shakespeare; one can only say, in the strong colloquialism, that they swear by Shakespeare. He is a mere god; a thing to be invoked. And Shaw's whole business was to set up the things which were to be sworn by as things to be sworn at. It was partly again the revolutionist in pursuit of pure novelty, hating primarily the oppression of the past, almost hating history itself. For Bernard Shaw the prophets were to be stoned after, and not before, men had built their sepulchres. There was a Yankee smartness in the man which was irritated at the idea of being dominated by a person dead for three hundred years; like Mark Twain, he wanted a fresher corpse.

These two motives there were, but they were small compared with the other. It was the third part of him, the Puritan, that was really at war with Shakespeare. He denounced that playwright almost exactly as any contemporary Puritan coming out of a conventicle in a steeple-crowned hat and stiff bands might have denounced the playwright coming out of the stage door of the old Globe Theatre. This is not a mere fancy; it is philosophically true. A legend has run round the newspapers that Bernard Shaw offered himself as a better writer than Shakespeare. This is false and quite unjust; Bernard Shaw never said anything of the kind. The writer whom he did say was better than Shakespeare was not himself, but Bunyan. And he justified it by attributing to Bunyan a virile acceptance of life as a high and harsh adventure, while in Shakespeare he saw nothing but profligate pessimism, the *vanitas vanitatum* of a disappointed voluptuary. According to this view Shakespeare was always saying, "Out, out, brief candle," because his was only a ballroom candle; while Bunyan was seeking to light such a candle as by God's grace should never be put out.

It is odd that Bernard Shaw's chief error or insensibility should have been the instrument of his noblest affirmation. The denunciation of

Shakespeare was a mere misunderstanding. But the denunciation of Shakespeare's pessimism was the most splendidly understanding of all his utterances. This is the greatest thing in Shaw, a serious optimism — even a tragic optimism. Life is a thing too glorious to be enjoyed. To be is an exacting and exhausting business; the trumpet though inspiring is terrible. Nothing that he ever wrote is so noble as his simple reference to the sturdy man who stepped up to the Keeper of the Book of Life and said, "Put down my name, Sir." It is true that Shaw called this heroic philosophy by wrong names and buttressed it with false metaphysics; that was the weakness of the age. The temporary decline of theology had involved the neglect of philosophy and all fine thinking; and Bernard Shaw had to find shaky justifications in Schopenhauer for the sons of God shouting for joy. He called it the Will to Live — a phrase invented by Prussian professors who would like to exist, but can't. Afterwards he asked people to worship the Life-Force; as if one could worship a hyphen. But though he covered it with crude new names (which are now fortunately crumbling everywhere like bad mortar) he was on the side of the good old cause; the oldest and the best of all causes, the cause of creation against destruction, the cause of yes against no, the cause of the seed against the stony earth and the star against the abyss.

His misunderstanding of Shakespeare arose largely from the fact that he is a Puritan, while Shakespeare was spiritually a Catholic. The former is always screwing himself up to see truth; the latter is often content that truth is there. The Puritan is only strong enough to stiffen; the Catholic is strong enough to relax. Shaw, I think, has entirely misunderstood the pessimistic passages of Shakespeare. They are flying moods which a man with a fixed faith can afford to entertain. That all is vanity, that life is dust and love is ashes, these are frivolities, these are jokes that a Catholic can afford to utter. He knows well enough that there is a life that is not dust and a love that is not ashes. But just as he may let himself go more than the Puritan in the matter of enjoyment, so he may let himself go more than the Puritan in the matter of melancholy. The sad exuberances of Hamlet are merely like the glad exuberances of Falstaff. This is not conjecture; it is the text of Shakespeare. In the very act of uttering his pessimism, Hamlet admits that it is a mood and not the truth. Heaven *is* a heavenly thing, only to him it seems a foul congregation of vapours. Man *is* the paragon of animals, only to him he seems a quintessence of dust. Hamlet is quite the reverse of a sceptic. He is a man whose strong intellect believes much more than his weak temperament can make vivid to him. But this power of knowing a thing without feeling it, this power of believing a thing without experiencing it, this is an old Catholic complexity, and the Puritan has never understood it. Shakespeare confesses his moods (mostly by the mouths of villains and failures), but he never sets up his moods against his mind. His cry of *vanitas vanitatum* is itself only a harmless vanity. Readers may not agree with my calling him Catholic with a big C; but they will hardly complain of my calling him catholic with a small one. And that is here the principal point. Shakespeare was not in any sense a pessimist; he was, if anything, an optimist so universal as to be able to enjoy even pessimism. And this is exactly where he differs from the Puritan. The true Puritan is not squeamish: the true Puritan is free to say "Damn it!" But the Catholic Elizabethan was free (on passing provocation) to say "Damn it all!"

It need hardly be explained that Bernard Shaw added to his negative case of a dramatist to be depreciated a corresponding affirmative case of a dramatist to be exalted and advanced. He was not content with so remote a comparison as that between Shakespeare and Bunyan. In his vivacious weekly articles in the *Saturday Review,* the real comparison upon which everything turned was the comparison between Shakespeare and Ibsen. He early threw himself with all possible eagerness into the public disputes about the great Scandinavian; and though there was no doubt whatever about which side he supported, there was much that was individual in the line he took. It is not our business here to explore that extinct volcano. You may say that anti-Ibsenism is dead, or you may say that Ibsen is dead; in any case, that controversy is dead, and death, as the Roman poet says, can alone confess of what small atoms we are made. The opponents of Ibsen largely exhibited the permanent qualities of the populace; that is, their instincts were right and their reasons wrong. They made the complete controversial mistake of calling Ibsen a pessimist; whereas, indeed, his chief weakness is a rather childish confidence in mere nature and freedom, and a blindness (either of experience or of culture) in the matter of original sin. In this sense Ibsen is not so much a pessimist as a highly crude kind of optimist. Nevertheless the man in the street was right in his fundamental instinct, as he always is. Ibsen, in his pale northern style, is an optimist; but for all that he is a depressing person. The optimism of Ibsen is less comforting than the pessimism of Dante; just as a Norwegian sunrise, however splendid, is colder than a southern night.

But on the side of those who fought for Ibsen there was also a disagreement, and perhaps also a mistake. The vague army of "the advanced" (an army which advances in all directions) were united in feeling that they ought to be the friends of Ibsen because he also was advancing somewhere somehow. But they were also seriously impressed by Flaubert, by Oscar Wilde and all the rest who told them that a work of art was in another universe from ethics and social good. Therefore many, I think most, of the Ibsenites praised the Ibsen plays merely as *choses vues*, aesthetic affirmations of what can be without any reference to what ought to be. Mr. William Archer himself inclined to this view, though his strong sagacity kept him in a haze of healthy doubt on the subject. Mr. Walkley certainly took this view. But this view Mr. George Bernard Shaw abruptly and violently refused to take.

With the full Puritan combination of passion and precision he informed everybody that Ibsen was not artistic, but moral; that his dramas were didactic, that all great art was didactic, that Ibsen was strongly on the side of some of his characters and strongly against others, that there was preaching and public spirit in the work of good dramatists; and that if this were not so, dramatists and all other artists would be mere panders of intellectual debauchery, to be locked up as the Puritans locked up the stage players. No one can understand Bernard Shaw who does not give full value to this early revolt of his on behalf of ethics against the ruling school of *l'art pour l'art*. It is interesting because it is connected with other ambitions in the man, especially with that which has made him somewhat vainer of being a Parish Councillor than of being one of the most popular dramatists in Europe. But its chief interest is again to be referred to our stratification of the psychology; it is the lover of true things rebelling for once against merely new things; it is the Puritan suddenly refusing to be the mere Progressive.

But this attitude obviously laid on the ethical lover of Ibsen a not inconsiderable obligation. If the new drama had an ethical purpose, what was it? and if Ibsen was a moral teacher, what the deuce was he teaching? Answers to this question, answers of manifold brilliancy and promise, were scattered through all the dramatic criticisms of those years on the *Saturday Review*. But even Bernard Shaw grew tired after a time of discussing Ibsen only in connection with the current pantomime or the latest musical comedy. It was felt that so much sincerity and fertility of explanation justified a concentrated attack; and in 1891 appeared the brilliant book called *The Quintessence of Ibsenism,* which some have declared to be merely the quintessence of Shaw. However this may be, it was in fact and profession the quintessence of Shaw's theory of the morality or propaganda of Ibsen.

The book itself is much longer than the book that I am writing; and as is only right in so spirited an apologist, every paragraph is provocative. I could write an essay on every sentence which I accept and three essays on every sentence which I deny. Bernard Shaw himself is a master of compression; he can put a conception more compactly than any other man alive. It is therefore rather difficult to compress his compression; one feels as if one were trying to extract a beef essence from Bovril. But the shortest form in which I can state the idea of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* is that it is the idea of distrusting ideals, which are universal, in comparison with facts, which are miscellaneous. The man whom he attacks throughout he calls "The Idealist"; that is the man who permits himself to be mainly moved by a moral generalisation. "Actions," he says, "are to be judged by their effect on happiness, and not by their conformity to any ideal." As we have already seen, there is a certain inconsistency here; for while Shaw had always chucked all ideals overboard the one he had chucked first was the ideal of happiness. Passing this however for the present, we may mark the above as the most satisfying summary. If I tell a lie I am not to blame myself for having violated the ideal of truth, but only for having perhaps got myself into a mess and made things worse than they were before. If I have broken my word I need not feel (as my fathers did) that I have broken something inside of me, as one who breaks a blood vessel. It all depends on whether I have broken up something outside me; as one who breaks up an evening party. If I shoot my father the only question is whether I have made him happy. I must not admit the idealistic conception that the mere shooting of my father might possibly make me unhappy. We are to judge of every individual case as it arises, apparently without any social summary or moral ready-reckoner at all. "The Golden Rule is that there is no Golden Rule." We must not say that it is right to keep promises, but that it may be right to keep this promise. Essentially it is anarchy; nor is it very easy to see how a state could be very comfortable which was Socialist in all its public morality and Anarchist in all its private. But if it is anarchy, it is anarchy without any of the abandon and exuberance of anarchy. It is a worried and conscientious anarchy; an anarchy of painful delicacy and even caution. For it refuses to trust in traditional experiments or plainly trodden tracks; every case must be considered anew from the beginning, and yet considered with the most wide-eyed care for human welfare; every man must act as if he were the first man made. Briefly, we must always be worrying about what is best for our children, and we must not take one hint or rule of thumb from our fathers. Some think that this anarchism would make a man tread down mighty cities in his madness. I think it would make a man walk down the street as if he were walking on egg-shells. I do not think this experiment in opportunism would end in frantic license; I think it would end in frozen timidity. If a man was forbidden to solve moral problems by moral science or the help of mankind, his course would be quite easy — he would not solve the problems. The world instead of being a knot so tangled as to need unravelling, would simply become a piece of clock-work too complicated to be touched. I cannot think that this untutored worry was what Ibsen meant; I have my doubts as to whether it was what Shaw meant; but I do not think that it can be substantially doubted that it was what he said.

In any case it can be asserted that the general aim of the work was to exalt the immediate conclusions of practice against the general conclusions of theory. Shaw objected to the solution of every problem in a play being by its nature a general solution, applicable to all other such problems. He disliked the entrance of a universal justice at the end of the last act; treading down all the personal ultimatums and all the varied certainties of men. He disliked the god from the machine — because he was from a machine. But even without the machine he tended to dislike the god; because a god is more general than a man. His enemies have accused Shaw of being anti-domestic, a shaker of the roof-tree. But in this sense Shaw may be called almost madly domestic. He wishes each private problem to be settled in private, without reference to sociological ethics. And the only objection to this kind of gigantic casuistry is that the theatre is really too small to discuss it. It would not be fair to play David and Goliath on a stage too small to admit Goliath. And it is not fair to discuss private morality on a stage too small to admit the enormous presence of public morality; that character which has not appeared in a play since the Middle Ages; whose name is Everyman and whose honour we have all in our keeping.

The Dramatist

NO one who was alive at the time and interested in such matters will ever forget the first acting of *Arms and the Man.* It was applauded by that indescribable element in all of us which rejoices to see the genuine thing prevail against the plausible; that element which rejoices that even its enemies are alive. Apart from the problems raised in the play, the very form of it was an attractive and forcible innovation. Classic plays which were wholly heroic, comic plays which were wholly and even heartlessly ironical, were common enough. Commonest of all in this particular time was the play that began playfully, with plenty of comic business, and was gradually sobered by sentiment until it ended on a note of romance or even of pathos. A commonplace little officer, the butt of the mess, becomes by the last act as high and hopeless a lover as Dante. Or a vulgar and violent pork-butcher remembers his own youth before the curtain goes down. The first thing that Bernard Shaw did when he stepped before the footlights was to reverse this process. He resolved to build a play not on pathos, but on bathos. The officer should be heroic first and then everyone should laugh at him; the curtain should go up on a man remembering his youth, and he should only reveal himself as a violent pork-butcher when someone interrupted him with an order for pork. This merely technical originality is indicated in the very title of the play. The *Arma Virumque* of Virgil is a mounting and ascending phrase, the man is more than his weapons. The Latin line suggests a superb procession which should bring on to the stage the brazen and resounding armour, the shield and shattering axe, but end with the hero himself, taller and more terrible because unarmed. The technical effect of Shaw’s scheme is like the same scene, in which a crowd should carry even more gigantic shapes of shield and helmet, but when the horns and howls were at their highest, should end with the figure of Little Tich. The name itself is meant to be a bathos; arms — and the man.

It is well to begin with the superficial; and this is the superficial effectiveness of Shaw; the brilliancy of bathos. But of course the vitality and value of his plays does not lie merely in this; any more than the value of Swinburne lies in alliteration or the value of Hood in puns. This is not his message; but it is his method; it is his style. The first taste we had of it was in this play of *Arms and the Man*; but even at the very first it was evident that there was much more in the play than that. Among other things there was one thing not unimportant; there was savage sincerity. Indeed, only a ferociously sincere person can produce such effective flippancies on a matter like war; just as only a strong man could juggle with cannon balls. It is all very well to use the word "fool" as synonymous with "jester"; but daily experience shows that it is generally the solemn and silent man who is the fool. It is all very well to accuse Mr. Shaw of standing on his head; but if you stand on your head you must have a hard and solid head to stand on. In *Arms and the Man* the bathos of form was strictly the incarnation of a strong satire in the idea. The play opens in an atmosphere of military melodrama; the dashing officer of cavalry going off to death in an attitude, the lovely heroine left in tearful rapture; the brass band, the noise of guns and the red fire. Into all this enters Bluntschli, the little sturdy crop-haired Swiss professional soldier, a man without a country but with a trade. He tells the army-adoring heroine frankly that she is a humbug; and she, after a moment's reflection, appears to agree with him. The play is like nearly all Shaw's plays, the dialogue of a conversion. By the end of it the young lady has lost all her military illusions and admires this mercenary soldier not because he faces guns, but because he faces facts.

This was a fitting entrance for Shaw to his didactic drama; because the commonplace courage which he respects in Bluntschli was the one virtue which he was destined to praise throughout. We can best see how the play symbolises and summarises Bernard Shaw if we compare it with some other attack by modern humanitarians upon war. Shaw has many of the actual opinions of Tolstoy. Like Tolstoy he tells men, with coarse innocence, that romantic war is only butchery and that romantic love is only lust. But Tolstoy objects to these things because they are real; he really wishes to abolish them. Shaw only objects to them in so far as they are ideal; that is in so far as they are idealised. Shaw objects not so much to war as to the attractiveness of war. He does not so much dislike love as the love of love. Before the temple of Mars, Tolstoy stands and thunders, "There shall be no wars"; Bernard Shaw merely murmurs, "Wars if you must; but for God's sake, not war songs." Before the temple of Venus, Tolstoy cries terribly, "Come out of it!"; Shaw is quite content to say, "Do not be taken in by it." Tolstoy seems really to propose that high passion and patriotic valour should be destroyed. Shaw is more moderate; and only asks that they should be desecrated. Upon this note, both about sex and conflict, he was destined to dwell through much of his work with the most wonderful variations of witty adventure and intellectual surprise. It may be doubted perhaps whether this realism in love and war is quite so sensible as it looks. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum*; the world is wiser than the moderns. The world has kept sentimentalities simply because they are the most practical things in the world. They alone make men do things. The world does not encourage a quite rational lover, simply because a perfectly rational lover would never get married. The world does not encourage a perfectly rational army, because a perfectly rational army would run away.

The brain of Bernard Shaw was like a wedge in the literal sense. Its sharpest end was always in front; and it split our society from end to end the moment it had entrance at all. As I have said he was long unheard of; but he had not the tragedy of many authors, who were heard of long before they were heard. When you had read any Shaw you read all Shaw. When you had seen one of his plays you waited for more. And when he brought them out in volume form, you did what is repugnant to any literary man — you bought a book.

The dramatic volume with which Shaw dazzled the public was called, *Plays, Pleasant and Unpleasant.* I think the most striking and typical thing about it was that he did not know very clearly which plays were unpleasant and which were pleasant. “Pleasant” is a word which is almost unmeaning to Bernard Shaw. Except, as I suppose, in music (where I cannot follow him), relish and receptivity are things that simply do not appear. He has the best of tongues and the worst of palates. With the possible exception of *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* (which was at least unpleasant in the sense of being forbidden) I can see no particular reason why any of the seven plays should be held specially to please or displease. First in fame and contemporary importance came the reprint of *Arms and the Man,* of which I have already spoken. Over all the rest towered unquestionably the two figures of Mrs. Warren and of Candida. They were neither of them pleasant, except as all good art is pleasant. They were neither of them really unpleasant except as all truth is unpleasant. But they did represent the author’s normal preference and his principal fear; and those two sculptured giantesses largely upheld his fame.

I fancy that the author rather dislikes *Candida* because it is so generally liked. I give my own feeling for what it is worth (a foolish phrase), but I think that there were only two moments when this powerful writer was truly, in the ancient and popular sense, inspired; that is, breathing from a bigger self and telling more truth than he knew. One is that scene in a later play where after the secrets and revenges of Egypt have rioted and rotted all round him, the colossal sanity of Caesar is suddenly acclaimed with swords. The other is that great last scene in *Candid*a where the wife, stung into final speech, declared her purpose of remaining with the strong man because he is the weak man. The wife is asked to decide between two men, one a strenuous self-confident popular preacher, her husband, the other a wild and weak young poet, logically futile and physically timid, her lover; and she chooses the former because he has more weakness and more need of her. Even among the plain and ringing paradoxes of the Shaw play this is one of the best reversals or turnovers ever effected. A paradoxical writer like Bernard Shaw is perpetually and tiresomely told that he stands on his head. But all romance and all religion consist in making the whole universe stand on its head. That reversal is the whole idea of virtue; that the last shall be first and the first last. Considered as a pure piece of Shaw therefore, the thing is of the best. But it is also something much better than Shaw. The writer touches certain realities commonly outside his scope; especially the reality of the normal wife’s attitude to the normal husband, an attitude which is not romantic but which is yet quite quixotic; which is insanely unselfish and yet quite cynically clear-sighted. It involves human sacrifice without in the least involving idolatry.

The truth is that in this place Bernard Shaw comes within an inch of expressing something that is not properly expressed anywhere else; the idea of marriage. Marriage is not a mere chain upon love as the anarchists say; nor is it a mere crown upon love as the sentimentalists say. Marriage is a fact, an actual human relation like that of motherhood which has certain human habits and loyalties, except in a few monstrous cases where it is turned to torture by special insanity and sin. A marriage is neither an ecstasy nor a slavery; it is a commonwealth; it is a separate working and fighting thing like a nation. Kings and diplomatists talk of “forming alliances” when they make weddings; but indeed every wedding is primarily an alliance. The family is a fact even when it is not an agreeable fact, and a man is part of his wife even when he wishes he wasn’t. The twain are one flesh — yes, even when they are not one spirit. Man is duplex. Man is a quadruped.

Of this ancient and essential relation there are certain emotional results, which are subtle, like all the growths of nature. And one of them is the attitude of the wife to the husband, whom she regards at once as the strongest and most helpless of human figures. She regards him in some strange fashion at once as a warrior who must make his way and as an infant who is sure to lose his way. The man has emotions which exactly correspond; sometimes looking down at his wife and sometimes up at her; for marriage is like a splendid game of see-saw. Whatever else it is, it is not comradeship. This living, ancestral bond (not of love or fear, but strictly of marriage) has been twice expressed splendidly in literature. The man's incurable sense of the mother in his lawful wife was uttered by Browning in one of his two or three truly shattering lines of genius, when he makes the execrable Guido fall back finally upon the fact of marriage and the wife whom he has trodden like mire:

"Christ! Maria! God, Pompilia, will you let them murder me?"

And the woman's witness to the same fact has been best expressed by Bernard Shaw in this great scene where she remains with the great stalwart successful public man because he is really too little to run alone.

There are one or two errors in the play; and they are all due to the primary error of despising the mental attitude of romance, which is the only key to real human conduct. For instance, the love making of the young poet is all wrong. He is supposed to be a romantic and amorous boy; and therefore the dramatist tries to make him talk turgidly, about seeking for "an archangel with purple wings" who shall be worthy of his lady. But a lad in love would never talk in this mock heroic style; there is no period at which the young male is more sensitive and serious and afraid of looking a fool. This is a blunder; but there is another much bigger and blacker. It is completely and disastrously false to the whole nature of falling in love to make the young Eugene complain of the cruelty which makes Candida defile her fair hands with domestic duties. No boy in love with a beautiful woman would ever feel disgusted when she peeled potatoes or trimmed lamps. He would like her to be domestic. He would simply feel that the potatoes had become poetical and the lamps gained an extra light. This may be irrational; but we are not talking of rationality, but of the psychology of first love. It may be very unfair to women that the toil and triviality of potato peeling should be seen through a glamour of romance; but the glamour is quite as certain a fact as the potatoes. It may be a bad thing in sociology that men should deify domesticity in girls as something dainty and magical; but all men do. Personally I do not think it a bad thing at all; but that is another argument. The argument here is that Bernard Shaw, in aiming at mere realism, makes a big mistake in reality. Misled by his great heresy of looking at emotions from the outside, he makes Eugene a cold-blooded prig at the very moment when he is trying, for his own dramatic purposes, to make him a hot-blooded lover. He makes the young lover an idealistic theoriser about the very things about which he really would have been a sort of mystical materialist. Here the romantic Irishman is much more right than the very rational one; and there is far more truth to life as it is in Lover's couplet —

"And envied the chicken That Peggy was pickin'."

than in Eugene's solemn, aesthetic protest against the potato-skins and the lamp-oil. For dramatic purposes, G. B. S., even if he despises romance, ought to comprehend it. But then, if once he comprehended romance, he would not despise it.

The series contained, besides its more substantial work, tragic and comic, a comparative frivolity called *The Man of Destiny.* It is a little comedy about Napoleon, and is chiefly interesting as a foreshadowing of his after sketches of heroes and strong men; it is a kind of parody of *Caesar and Cleopatr*a before it was written. In this connection the mere title of this Napoleonic play is of interest. All Shaw's generation and school of thought remembered Napoleon only by his late and corrupt title of "The Man of Destiny," a title only given to him when he was already fat and tired and destined to exile. They forgot that through all the really thrilling and creative part of his career he was not the man of destiny, but the man who defied destiny. Shaw's sketch is extraordinarily clever; but it is tinged with this unmilitary notion of an inevitable conquest; and this we must remember when we come to those larger canvases on which he painted his more serious heroes. As for the play, it is packed with good things, of which the last is perhaps the best. The long duologue between Bonaparte and the Irish lady ends with the General declaring that he will only be beaten when he meets an English army under an Irish general. It has always been one of Shaw's paradoxes that the English mind has the force to fulfil orders, while the Irish mind has the intelligence to give them, and it is among those of his paradoxes which contain a certain truth.

A far more important play is *The Philanderer,* an ironic comedy which is full of fine strokes and real satire; it is more especially the vehicle of some of Shaw's best satire upon physical science. Nothing could be cleverer than the picture of the young, strenuous doctor, in the utter innocence of his professional ambition, who has discovered a new disease, and is delighted when he finds people suffering from it and cast down to despair when he finds that it does not exist. The point is worth a pause, because it is a good, short way of stating Shaw's attitude, right or wrong, upon the whole of formal morality. What he dislikes in young Doctor Paramore is that he has interposed a secondary and false conscience between himself and the facts. When his disease is disproved, instead of seeing the escape of a human being who thought he was going to die of it, Paramore sees the downfall of a kind of flag or cause. This is the whole contention of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, put better than the book puts it; it is a really sharp exposition of the dangers of "idealism," the sacrifice of people to principles, and Shaw is even wiser in his suggestion that this excessive idealism exists nowhere so strongly as in the world of physical science. He shows that the scientist tends to be more concerned about the sickness than about the sick man; but it was certainly in his mind to suggest here also that the idealist is more concerned about the sin than about the sinner.

This business of Dr. Paramore's disease while it is the most farcical thing in the play is also the most philosophic and important. The rest of the figures, including the Philanderer himself, are in the full sense of those blasting and obliterating words "funny without being vulgar," that is, funny without being of any importance to the masses of men. It is a play about a dashing and advanced "Ibsen Club," and the squabble between the young Ibsenites and the old people who are not yet up to Ibsen. It would be hard to find a stronger example of Shaw's only essential error, modernity — which means the seeking for truth in terms of time. Only a few years have passed and already almost half the wit of that wonderful play is wasted, because it all turns on the newness of a fashion that is no longer new. Doubtless many people still think the Ibsen drama a great thing, like the French classical drama. But going to "The Philanderer" is like going among periwigs and rapiers and hearing that the young men are now all for Racine. What makes such work sound unreal is not the praise of Ibsen, but the praise of the novelty of Ibsen. Any advantage that Bernard Shaw had over Colonel Craven I have over Bernard Shaw; we who happen to be born last have the meaningless and paltry triumph in that meaningless and paltry war. We are the superiors by that silliest and most snobbish of all superiorities, the mere aristocracy of time. All works must become thus old and insipid which have ever tried to be "modern," which have consented to smell of time rather than of eternity. Only those who have stooped to be in advance of their time will ever find themselves behind it.

But it is irritating to think what diamonds, what dazzling silver of Shavian wit has been sunk in such an out-of-date warship. In *The Philanderer* there are five hundred excellent and about five magnificent things. The rattle of repartees between the doctor and the soldier about the humanity of their two trades is admirable. Or again, when the colonel tells Chartaris that "in his young days" he would have no more behaved like Chartaris than he would have cheated at cards. After a pause Chartaris says, "You're getting old, Craven, and you make a virtue of it as usual." And there is an altitude of aerial tragedy in the words of Grace, who has refused the man she loves, to Julia, who is marrying the man she doesn't, "This is what they call a happy ending — these men."

There is an acrid taste in *The Philanderer*; and certainly he might be considered a super-sensitive person who should find anything acrid in *You Never Can Tell*. This play is the nearest approach to frank and objectless exuberance in the whole of Shaw's work. *Punch*, with wisdom as well as wit, said that it might well be called not "You Never Can Tell" but "You Never Can be Shaw." And yet if anyone will read this blazing farce and then after it any of the romantic farces, such as *Pickwick* or even *The Wrong Box*, I do not think he will be disposed to erase or even to modify what I said at the beginning about the ingrained grimness and even inhumanity of Shaw's art. To take but one test: love, in an "extravaganza," may be light love or love in idleness, but it should be hearty and happy love if it is to add to the general hilarity. Such are the ludicrous but lucky love affairs of the sportsman Winkle and the Maestro Jimson. In Gloria's collapse before her bullying lover there is something at once cold and unclean; it calls up all the modern supermen with their cruel and fishy eyes. Such farces should begin in a friendly air, in a tavern. There is something very symbolic of Shaw in the fact that his farce begins in a dentist's.

The only one out of this brilliant batch of plays in which I think that the method adopted really fails, is the one called *Widower's Houses*. The best touch of Shaw is simply in the title. The simple substitution of widowers for widows contains almost the whole bitter and yet boisterous protest of Shaw; all his preference for undignified fact over dignified phrase; all his dislike of those subtle trends of sex or mystery which swing the logician off the straight line. We can imagine him crying, “Why in the name of death and conscience should it be tragic to be a widow but comic to be a widower?” But the rationalistic method is here applied quite wrong as regards the production of a drama. The most dramatic point in the affair is when the open and indecent rack-renter turns on the decent young man of means and proves to him that he is equally guilty, that he also can only grind his corn by grinding the faces of the poor. But even here the point is undramatic because it is indirect; it is indirect because it is merely sociological. It may be the truth that a young man living on an unexamined income which ultimately covers a great deal of house-property is as dangerous as any despot or thief. But it is a truth that you can no more put into a play than into a triolet. You can make a play out of one man robbing another man, but not out of one man robbing a million men; still less out of his robbing them unconsciously.

Of the plays collected in this book I have kept *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* to the last, because, fine as it is, it is even finer and more important because of its fate, which was to rouse a long and serious storm and to be vetoed by the Censor of Plays. I say that this drama is most important because of the quarrel that came out of it. If I were speaking of some mere artist this might be an insult. But there are high and heroic things in Bernard Shaw; and one of the highest and most heroic is this, that he certainly cares much more for a quarrel than for a play. And this quarrel about the censorship is one on which he feels so strongly that in a book embodying any sort of sympathy it would be much better to leave out Mrs. Warren than to leave out Mr. Redford. The veto was the pivot of so very personal a movement by the dramatist, of so very positive an assertion of his own attitude towards things, that it is only just and necessary to state what were the two essential parties to the dispute; the play and the official who prevented the play.

The play of *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* is concerned with a coarse mother and a cold daughter; the mother drives the ordinary and dirty trade of harlotry; the daughter does not know until the end the atrocious origin of all her own comfort and refinement. The daughter, when the discovery is made, freezes up into an iceberg of contempt; which is indeed a very womanly thing to do. The mother explodes into pulverising cynicism and practicality; which is also very womanly. The dialogue is drastic and sweeping; the daughter says the trade is loathsome; the mother answers that she loathes it herself; that every healthy person does loathe the trade by which she lives. And beyond question the general effect of the play is that the trade is loathsome; supposing anyone to be so insensible as to require to be told of the fact. Undoubtedly the upshot is that a brothel is a miserable business, and a brothel-keeper a miserable woman. The whole dramatic art of Shaw is in the literal sense of the word, tragi-comic; I mean that the comic part comes after the tragedy. But just as *You Never Can Tell* represents the nearest approach of Shaw to the purely comic, so *Mrs. Warren's Professio*n represents his only complete, or nearly complete, tragedy. There is no twopenny modernism in it, as in *The Philanderer*. Mrs. Warren is as old as the Old Testament; "for she hath cast down many wounded, yea, many strong men have been slain by her; her house is in the gates of hell, going down into the chamber of death." Here is no subtle ethics, as in *Widowers' Houses*; for even those moderns who think it noble that a woman should throw away her honour, surely cannot think it especially noble that she should sell it. Here is no lighting up by laughter, astonishment, and happy coincidence, as in *You Never Can Tell*. The play is a pure tragedy about a permanent and quite plain human problem; the problem is as plain and permanent, the tragedy is as proud and pure, as in *Oedipu*s or *Macbeth*. This play was presented in the ordinary way for public performance and was suddenly stopped by the Censor of Plays.

The Censor of Plays is a small and accidental eighteenth-century official. Like nearly all the powers which Englishmen now respect as ancient and rooted, he is very recent. Novels and newspapers still talk of the English aristocracy that came over with William the Conqueror. Little of our effective oligarchy is as old as the Reformation; and none of it came over with William the Conqueror. Some of the older English landlords came over with William of Orange; the rest have come by ordinary alien immigration. In the same way we always talk of the Victorian woman (with her smelling salts and sentiment) as the old-fashioned woman. But she really was a quite new-fashioned woman; she considered herself, and was, an advance in delicacy and civilisation upon the coarse and candid Elizabethan woman to whom we are now returning. We are never oppressed by old things; it is recent things that can really oppress. And in accordance with this principle modern England has accepted, as if it were a part of perennial morality, a tenth-rate job of Walpole's worst days called the Censorship of the Drama. Just as they have supposed the eighteenth-century parvenus to date from Hastings, just as they have supposed the eighteenth-century ladies to date from Eve, so they have supposed the eighteenth-century Censorship to date from Sinai. The origin of the thing was in truth purely political. Its first and principal achievement was to prevent Fielding from writing plays; not at all because the plays were coarse, but because they criticised the Government. Fielding was a free writer; but they did not resent his sexual freedom; the Censor would not have objected if he had torn away the most intimate curtains of decency or rent the last rag from private life. What the Censor disliked was his rending the curtain from public life. There is still much of that spirit in our country; there are no affairs which men seek so much to cover up as public affairs. But the thing was done somewhat more boldly and baldly in Walpole's day; and the Censorship of plays has its origin, not merely in tyranny, but in a quite trifling and temporary and partisan piece of tyranny; a thing in its nature far more ephemeral, far less essential, than Ship Money. Perhaps its brightest moment was when the office of censor was held by that filthy writer, Colman the younger; and when he gravely refused to license a work by the author of *Our Village*. Few funnier notions can ever have actually been facts than this notion that the restraint and chastity of George Colman saved the English public from the eroticism and obscenity of Miss Mitford.

Such was the play; and such was the power that stopped the play. A private man wrote it; another private man forbade it; nor was there any difference between Mr. Shaw's authority and Mr. Redford's, except that Mr. Shaw did defend his action on public grounds and Mr. Redford did not. The dramatist had simply been suppressed by a despot; and what was worse (because it was modern) by a silent and evasive despot; a despot in hiding. People talk about the pride of tyrants; but we at the present day suffer from the modesty of tyrants; from the shyness and the shrinking secrecy of the strong. Shaw's preface to *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was far more fit to be called a public document than the slovenly refusal of the individual official; it had more exactness, more universal application, more authority. Shaw on Redford was far more national and responsible than Redford on Shaw.

The dramatist found in the quarrel one of the important occasions of his life, because the crisis called out something in him which is in many ways his highest quality — righteous indignation. As a mere matter of the art of controversy of course he carried the war into the enemy's camp at once. He did not linger over loose excuses for licence; he declared at once that the Censor was licentious, while he, Bernard Shaw, was clean. He did not discuss whether a Censorship ought to make the drama moral. He declared that it made the drama immoral. With a fine strategic audacity he attacked the Censor quite as much for what he permitted as for what he prevented. He charged him with encouraging all plays that attracted men to vice and only stopping those which discouraged them from it. Nor was this attitude by any means an idle paradox. Many plays appear (as Shaw pointed out) in which the prostitute and the procuress are practically obvious, and in which they are represented as revelling in beautiful surroundings and basking in brilliant popularity. The crime of Shaw was not that he introduced the Gaiety Girl; that had been done, with little enough decorum, in a hundred musical comedies. The crime of Shaw was that he introduced the Gaiety Girl, but did not represent her life as all gaiety. The pleasures of vice were already flaunted before the playgoers. It was the perils of vice that were carefully concealed from them. The gay adventures, the gorgeous dresses, the champagne and oysters, the diamonds and motor-cars, dramatists were allowed to drag all these dazzling temptations before any silly housemaid in the gallery who was grumbling at her wages. But they were not allowed to warn her of the vulgarity and the nausea, the dreary deceptions and the blasting diseases of that life. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was not up to a sufficient standard of immorality; it was not spicy enough to pass the Censor. The acceptable and the accepted plays were those which made the fall of a woman fashionable and fascinating; for all the world as if the Censor's profession were the same as Mrs. Warren's profession.

Such was the angle of Shaw's energetic attack; and it is not to be denied that there was exaggeration in it, and what is so much worse, omission. The argument might easily be carried too far; it might end with a scene of screaming torture in the Inquisition as a corrective to the too amiable view of a clergyman in *The Private Secretary*. But the controversy is definitely worth recording, if only as an excellent example of the author's aggressive attitude and his love of turning the tables in debate. Moreover, though this point of view involves a potential overstatement, it also involves an important truth. One of the best points urged in the course of it was this, that though vice is punished in conventional drama, the punishment is not really impressive, because it is not inevitable or even probable. It does not arise out of the evil act. Years afterwards Bernard Shaw urged this argument again in connection with his friend Mr. Granville Barker's play of *Waste*, in which the woman dies from an illegal operation. Bernard Shaw said, truly enough, that if she had died from poison or a pistol shot it would have left everyone unmoved, for pistols do not in their nature follow female unchastity. Illegal operations very often do. The punishment was one which might follow the crime, not only in that case, but in many cases. Here, I think, the whole argument might be sufficiently cleared up by saying that the objection to such things on the stage is a purely artistic objection. There is nothing wrong in talking about an illegal operation; there are plenty of occasions when it would be very wrong not to talk about it. But it may easily be just a shade too ugly for the shape of any work of art. There is nothing wrong about being sick; but if Bernard Shaw wrote a play in which all the characters expressed their dislike of animal food by vomiting on the stage, I think we should be justified in saying that the thing was outside, not the laws of morality, but the framework of civilised literature. The instinctive movement of repulsion which everyone has when hearing of the operation in *Waste* is not an ethical repulsion at all. But it is an aesthetic repulsion, and a right one.

But I have only dwelt on this particular fighting phase because it leaves us facing the ultimate characteristics which I mentioned first. Bernard Shaw cares nothing for art; in comparison with morals, literally nothing. Bernard Shaw is a Puritan and his work is Puritan work. He has all the essentials of the old, virile and extinct Protestant type. In his work he is as ugly as a Puritan. He is as indecent as a Puritan. He is as full of gross words and sensual facts as a sermon of the seventeenth century. Up to this point of his life indeed hardly anyone would have dreamed of calling him a Puritan; he was called sometimes an anarchist, sometimes a buffoon, sometimes (by the more discerning stupid people) a prig. His attitude towards current problems was felt to be arresting and even indecent; I do not think that anyone thought of connecting it with the old Calvinistic morality. But Shaw, who knew better than the Shavians, was at this moment on the very eve of confessing his moral origin. The next book of plays he produced (including *The Devil's Disciple, Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, and *Caesar and Cleopatra*), actually bore the title of *Plays for Puritans*.

The play called *The Devil's Disciple* has great merits, but the merits are incidental. Some of its jokes are serious and important, but its general plan can only be called a joke. Almost alone among Bernard Shaw’s plays (except of course such things as *How he Lied to her Husband* and *The Admirable Bashville*) this drama does not turn on any very plain pivot of ethical or philosophical conviction. The artistic idea seems to be the notion of a melodrama in which all the conventional melodramatic situations shall suddenly take unconventional turns. Just where the melodramatic clergyman would show courage he appears to show cowardice; just where the melodramatic sinner would confess his love he confesses his indifference. This is a little too like the Shaw of the newspaper critics rather than the Shaw of reality. There are indeed present in the play two of the writer’s principal moral conceptions. The first is the idea of a great heroic action coming in a sense from nowhere; that is, not coming from any commonplace motive; being born in the soul in naked beauty, coming with its own authority and testifying only to itself. Shaw’s agent does not act towards something, but from something. The hero dies, not because he desires heroism, but because he has it. So in this particular play the Devil’s Disciple finds that his own nature will not permit him to put the rope around another man’s neck; he has no reasons of desire, affection, or even equity; his death is a sort of divine whim. And in connection with this the dramatist introduces another favourite moral; the objection to perpetual playing upon the motive of sex. He deliberately lures the onlooker into the net of Cupid in order to tell him with salutary decision that Cupid is not there at all. Millions of melodramatic dramatists have made a man face death for the woman he loves; Shaw makes him face death for the woman he does not love — merely in order to put woman in her place. He objects to that idolatry of sexualism which makes it the fountain of all forcible enthusiasms; he dislikes the amorous drama which makes the female the only key to the male. He is Feminist in politics, but Anti-feminist in emotion. His key to most problems is, “Ne cherchez pas la femme.”

As has been observed, the incidental felicities of the play are frequent and memorable, especially those connected with the character of General Burgoyne, the real full-blooded, free-thinking eighteenth century gentleman, who was much too much of an aristocrat not to be a liberal. One of the best thrusts in all the Shavian fencing matches is that which occurs when Richard Dudgeon, condemned to be hanged, asks rhetorically why he cannot be shot like a soldier. “Now there you speak like a civilian,” replies General Burgoyne. “Have you formed any conception of the condition of marksmanship in the British Army?” Excellent, too, is the passage in which his subordinate speaks of crushing the enemy in America, and Burgoyne asks him who will crush their enemies in England, snobbery and jobbery and incurable carelessness and sloth. And in one sentence towards the end, Shaw reaches a wider and more genial comprehension of mankind than he shows anywhere else; “it takes all sorts to make a world, saints as well as soldiers.” If Shaw had remembered that sentence on other occasions he would have avoided his mistake about Caesar and Brutus. It is not only true that it takes all sorts to make a world; but the world cannot succeed without its failures. Perhaps the most doubtful point of all in the play is why it is a play for Puritans; except the hideous picture of a Calvinistic home is meant to destroy Puritanism. And indeed in this connection it is constantly necessary to fall back upon the facts of which I have spoken at the beginning of this brief study; it is necessary especially to remember that Shaw could in all probability speak of Puritanism from the inside. In that domestic circle which took him to hear Moody and Sankey, in that domestic circle which was teetotal even when it was intoxicated, in that atmosphere and society Shaw might even have met the monstrous mother in *The Devil’s Disciple*, the horrible old woman who declares that she has hardened her heart to hate her children, because the heart of man is desperately wicked, the old ghoul who has made one of her children an imbecile and the other an outcast. Such types do occur in small societies drunk with the dismal wine of Puritan determinism. It is possible that there were among Irish Calvinists people who denied that charity was a Christian virtue. It is possible that among Puritans there were people who thought a heart was a kind of heart disease. But it is enough to make one tear one’s hair to think that a man of genius received his first impressions in so small a corner of Europe that he could for a long time suppose that this Puritanism was current among Christian men. The question, however, need not detain us, for the batch of plays contained two others about which it is easier to speak.

The third play in order in the series called *Plays for Puritans* is a very charming one; *Captain Brassbound’s Conversion*. This also turns, as does so much of the Caesar drama, on the idea of vanity of revenge — the idea that it is too slight and silly a thing for a man to allow to occupy and corrupt his consciousness. It is not, of course, the morality that is new here, but the touch of cold laughter in the core of the morality. Many saints and sages have denounced vengeance. But they treated vengeance as something too great for man. “Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord; I will repay.” Shaw treats vengeance as something too small for man — a monkey trick he ought to have outlived, a childish storm of tears which he ought to be able to control. In the story in question Captain Brassbound has nourished through his whole erratic existence, racketting about all the unsavoury parts of Africa — a mission of private punishment which appears to him as a mission of holy justice. His mother has died in consequence of a judge’s decision, and Brassbound roams and schemes until the judge falls into his hands. Then a pleasant society lady, Lady Cicely Waynefleet tells him in an easy conversational undertone — a rivulet of speech which ripples while she is mending his coat — that he is making a fool of himself, that his wrong is irrelevant, that his vengeance is objectless, that he would be much better if he flung his morbid fancy away for ever; in short, she tells him he is ruining himself for the sake of ruining a total stranger. Here again we have the note of the economist, the hatred of mere loss. Shaw (one might almost say) dislikes murder, not so much because it wastes the life of the corpse as because it wastes the time of the murderer. If he were endeavouring to persuade one of his moon-lighting fellow-countrymen not to shoot his landlord, I can imagine him explaining with benevolent emphasis that it was not so much a question of losing a life as of throwing away a bullet. But indeed the Irish comparison alone suggests a doubt which wriggles in the recesses of my mind about the complete reliability of the philosophy of Lady Cicely Waynefleet, the complete finality of the moral of *Captain Brassbound’s Conversion*. Of course, it was very natural in an aristocrat like Lady Cicely Waynefleet to wish to let sleeping dogs lie, especially those whom Mr. Blatchford calls under-dogs. Of course it was natural for her to wish everything to be smooth and sweet-tempered. But I have the obstinate question in the corner of my brain, whether if a few Captain Brassbounds did revenge themselves on judges, the quality of our judges might not materially improve.

When this doubt is once off one’s conscience one can lose oneself in the bottomless beatitude of Lady Cicely Waynefleet, one of the most living and laughing things that her maker has made. I do not know any stronger way of stating the beauty of the character than by saying that it was written specially for Ellen Terry, and that it is, with Beatrice, one of the very few characters in which the dramatist can claim some part of her triumph.

We may now pass to the more important of the plays. For some time Bernard Shaw would seem to have been brooding upon the soul of Julius Caesar. There must always be a strong human curiosity about the soul of Julius Caesar; and, among other things, about whether he had a soul. The conjunction of Shaw and Caesar has about it something smooth and inevitable; for this decisive reason, that Caesar is really the only great man of history to whom the Shaw theories apply. Caesar *was* a Shaw hero. Caesar was merciful without being in the least pitiful; his mercy was colder than justice. Caesar was a conqueror without being in any hearty sense a soldier; his courage was lonelier than fear. Caesar was a demagogue without being a democrat. In the same way Bernard Shaw is a demagogue without being a democrat. If he had tried to prove his principle from any of the other heroes or sages of mankind he would have found it much more difficult. Napoleon achieved more miraculous conquest; but during his most conquering epoch he was a burning boy suicidally in love with a woman far beyond his age. Joan of Arc achieved far more instant and incredible worldly success; but Joan of Arc achieved worldly success because she believed in another world. Nelson was a figure fully as fascinating and dramatically decisive; but Nelson was “romantic”; Nelson was a devoted patriot and a devoted lover. Alexander was passionate; Cromwell could shed tears; Bismarck had some suburban religion; Frederick was a poet; Charlemagne was fond of children. But Julius Caesar attracted Shaw not less by his positive than by his negative enormousness. Nobody can say with certainty that Caesar cared for anything. It is unjust to call Caesar an egoist; for there is no proof that he cared even for Caesar. He may not have been either an atheist or a pessimist. But he may have been; that is exactly the rub. He may have been an ordinary decently good man slightly deficient in spiritual expansiveness. On the other hand, he may have been the incarnation of paganism in the sense that Christ was the incarnation of Christianity. As Christ expressed how great a man can be humble and humane, Caesar may have expressed how great a man can be frigid and flippant. According to most legends Antichrist was to come soon after Christ. One has only to suppose that Antichrist came shortly before Christ; and Antichrist might very well be Caesar.

It is, I think, no injustice to Bernard Shaw to say that he does not attempt to make his Caesar superior except in this naked and negative sense. There is no suggestion, as there is in the Jehovah of the Old Testament, that the very cruelty of the higher being conceals some tremendous and even tortured love. Caesar is superior to other men not because he loves more, but because he hates less. Caesar is magnanimous not because he is warm-hearted enough to pardon, but because he is not warm-hearted enough to avenge. There is no suggestion anywhere in the play that he is hiding any great genial purpose or powerful tenderness towards men. In order to put this point beyond a doubt the dramatist has introduced a soliloquy of Caesar alone with the Sphinx. There if anywhere he would have broken out into ultimate brotherhood or burning pity for the people. But in that scene between the Sphinx and Caesar, Caesar is as cold and as lonely and as dead as the Sphinx.

But whether the Shavian Caesar is a sound ideal or no, there can be little doubt that he is a very fine reality. Shaw has done nothing greater as a piece of artistic creation. If the man is a little like a statue, it is a statue by a great sculptor; a statue of the best period. If his nobility is a little negative in its character, it is the negative darkness of the great dome of night; not as in some "new moralities" the mere mystery of the coal-hole. Indeed, this somewhat austere method of work is very suitable to Shaw when he is serious. There is nothing Gothic about his real genius; he could not build a mediaeval cathedral in which laughter and terror are twisted together in stone, molten by mystical passion. He can build, by way of amusement, a Chinese pagoda; but when he is in earnest, only a Roman temple. He has a keen eye for truth; but he is one of those people who like, as the saying goes, to put down the truth in black and white. He is always girding and jeering at romantics and idealists because they will not put down the truth in black and white. But black and white are not the only two colours in the world. The modern man of science who writes down a fact in black and white is not more but less accurate than the mediaeval monk who wrote it down in gold and scarlet, sea-green and turquoise. Nevertheless, it is a good thing that the more austere method should exist separately, and that some men should be specially good at it. Bernard Shaw is specially good at it; he is pre-eminently a black and white artist.

And as a study in black and white nothing could be better than this sketch of Julius Caesar. He is not so much represented as "bestriding the earth like a Colossus" (which is indeed a rather comic attitude for a hero to stand in), but rather walking the earth with a sort of stern levity, lightly touching the planet and yet spurning it away like a stone. He walks like a winged man who has chosen to fold his wings. There is something creepy even about his kindness; it makes the men in front of him feel as if they were made of glass. The nature of the Caesarian mercy is massively suggested. Caesar dislikes a massacre, not because it is a great sin, but because it is a small sin. It is felt that he classes it with a flirtation or a fit of the sulks; a senseless temporary subjugation of man's permanent purpose by his passing and trivial feelings. He will plunge into slaughter for a great purpose, just as he plunges into the sea. But to be stung into such action he deems as undignified as to be tipped off the pier. In a singularly fine passage Cleopatra, having hired assassins to stab an enemy, appeals to her wrongs as justifying her revenge, and says, "If you can find one man in all Africa who says that I did wrong, I will be crucified by my own slaves." "If you can find one man in all the world," replies Caesar, "who can see that you did wrong, he will either conquer the world as I have done or be crucified by it." That is the high water mark of this heathen sublimity; and we do not feel it inappropriate, or unlike Shaw, when a few minutes afterwards the hero is saluted with a blaze of swords.

As usually happens in the author's works, there is even more about Julius Caesar in the preface than there is in the play. But in the preface I think the portrait is less imaginative and more fanciful. He attempts to connect his somewhat chilly type of superman with the heroes of the old fairy tales. But Shaw should not talk about the fairy tales; for he does not feel them from the inside. As I have said, on all this side of historic and domestic traditions Bernard Shaw is weak and deficient. He does not approach them as fairy tales, as if he were four, but as "folk-lore" as if he were forty. And he makes a big mistake about them which he would never have made if he had kept his birthday and hung up his stocking, and generally kept alive inside him the firelight of a home. The point is so peculiarly characteristic of Bernard Shaw, and is indeed so much of a summary of his most interesting assertion and his most interesting error, that it deserves a word by itself, though it is a word which must be remembered in connection with nearly all the other plays.

His primary and defiant proposition is the Calvinistic proposition: that the elect do not earn virtue, but possess it. The goodness of a man does not consist in trying to be good, but in being good. Julius Caesar prevails over other people by possessing more *virtus* than they; not by having striven or suffered or bought his virtue; not because he has struggled heroically, but because he is a hero. So far Bernard Shaw is only what I have called him at the beginning; he is simply a seventeenth-century Calvinist. Caesar is not saved by works, or even by faith; he is saved because he is one of the elect. Unfortunately for himself, however, Bernard Shaw went back further than the seventeenth century; and professing his opinion to be yet more antiquated, invoked the original legends of mankind. He argued that when the fairy tales gave Jack the Giant Killer a coat of darkness or a magic sword it removed all credit from Jack in the "common moral" sense; he won as Caesar won only because he was superior. I will confess, in passing, to the conviction that Bernard Shaw in the course of his whole simple and strenuous life was never quite so near to hell as at the moment when he wrote down those words. But in this question of fairy tales my immediate point is, not how near he was to hell, but how very far off he was from fairyland. That notion about the hero with a magic sword being the superman with a magic superiority is the caprice of a pedant; no child, boy, or man ever felt it in the story of Jack the Giant Killer. Obviously the moral is all the other way. Jack's fairy sword and invisible coat are clumsy expedients for enabling him to fight at all with something which is by nature stronger. They are a rough, savage substitute for psychological descriptions of special valour or unwearied patience. But no one in his five wits can doubt that the idea of "Jack the Giant Killer" is exactly the opposite to Shaw's idea. If it were not a tale of effort and triumph hardly earned it would not be called "Jack the Giant Killer." If it were a tale of the victory of natural advantages it would be called "Giant the Jack Killer." If the teller of fairy tales had merely wanted to urge that some beings are born stronger than others he would not have fallen back on elaborate tricks of weapon and costume for conquering an ogre. He would simply have let the ogre conquer. I will not speak of my own emotions in connection with this incredibly caddish doctrine that the strength of the strong is admirable, but not the valour of the weak. It is enough to say that I have to summon up the physical presence of Shaw, his frank gestures, kind eyes, and exquisite Irish voice, to cure me of a mere sensation of contempt. But I do not dwell upon the point for any such purpose; but merely to show how we must be always casting back to those concrete foundations with which we began. Bernard Shaw, as I have said, was never national enough to be domestic; he was never a part of his past; hence when he tries to interpret tradition he comes a terrible cropper, as in this case. Bernard Shaw (I strongly suspect) began to disbelieve in Santa Claus at a discreditably early age. And by this time Santa Claus has avenged himself by taking away the key of all the prehistoric scriptures; so that a noble and honourable artist flounders about like any German professor. Here is a whole fairy literature which is almost exclusively devoted to the unexpected victory of the weak over the strong; and Bernard Shaw manages to make it mean the inevitable victory of the strong over the weak — which, among other things, would not make a story at all. It all comes of that mistake about not keeping his birthday. A man should be always tied to his mother's apron strings; he should always have a hold on his childhood, and be ready at intervals to start anew from a childish standpoint. Theologically the thing is best expressed by saying, "You must be born again." Secularly it is best expressed by saying, "You must keep your birthday." Even if you will not be born again, at least remind yourself occasionally that you were born once.

Some of the incidental wit in the Caesarian drama is excellent although it is upon the whole less spontaneous and perfect than in the previous plays. One of its jests may be mentioned in passing, not merely to draw attention to its failure (though Shaw is brilliant enough to afford many failures) but because it is the best opportunity for mentioning one of the writer's minor notions to which he obstinately adheres. He describes the Ancient Briton in Caesar's train as being exactly like a modern respectable Englishman. As a joke for a Christmas pantomime this would be all very well; but one expects the jokes of Bernard Shaw to have some intellectual root, however fantastic the flower. And obviously all historic common sense is against the idea that that dim Druid people, whoever they were, who dwelt in our land before it was lit up by Rome or loaded with varied invasions, were a precise facsimile of the commercial society of Birmingham or Brighton. But it is a part of the Puritan in Bernard Shaw, a part of the taut and high-strung quality of his mind, that he will never admit of any of his jokes that it was only a joke. When he has been most witty he will passionately deny his own wit; he will say something which Voltaire might envy and then declare that he has got it all out of a Blue book. And in connection with this eccentric type of self-denial, we may notice this mere detail about the Ancient Briton. Someone faintly hinted that a blue Briton when first found by Caesar might not be quite like Mr. Broadbent; at the touch Shaw poured forth a torrent of theory, explaining that climate was the only thing that affected nationality; and that whatever races came into the English or Irish climate would become like the English or Irish. Now the modern theory of race is certainly a piece of stupid materialism; it is an attempt to explain the things we are sure of, France, Scotland, Rome, Japan, by means of the things we are not sure of at all, prehistoric conjectures, Celts, Mongols, and Iberians. Of course there is a reality in race; but there is no reality in the theories of race offered by some ethnological professors. Blood, perhaps, is thicker than water; but brains are sometimes thicker than anything. But if there is one thing yet more thick and obscure and senseless than this theory of the omnipotence of race it is, I think, that to which Shaw has fled for refuge from it; this doctrine of the omnipotence of climate. Climate again is something; but if climate were everything, Anglo-Indians would grow more and more to look like Hindoos, which is far from being the case. Something in the evil spirit of our time forces people always to pretend to have found some material and mechanical explanation. Bernard Shaw has filled all his last days with affirmations about the divinity of the non-mechanical part of man, the sacred quality in creation and choice. Yet it never seems to have occurred to him that the true key to national differentiations is the key of the will and not of the environment. It never crosses the modern mind to fancy that perhaps a people is chiefly influenced by how that people has chosen to behave. If I have to choose between race and weather I prefer race; I would rather be imprisoned and compelled by ancestors who were once alive than by mud and mists which never were. But I do not propose to be controlled by either; to me my national history is a chain of multitudinous choices. It is neither blood nor rain that has made England, but hope, the thing that all those dead men have desired. France was not France because she was made to be by the skulls of the Celts or by the sun of Gaul. France was France because she chose.

I have stepped on one side from the immediate subject because this is as good an instance as any we are likely to come across of a certain almost extraneous fault which does deface the work of Bernard Shaw. It is a fault only to be mentioned when we have made the solidity of the merits quite clear. To say that Shaw is merely making game of people is demonstrably ridiculous; at least a fairly systematic philosophy can be traced through all his jokes, and one would not insist on such a unity in all the songs of Mr. Dan Leno. I have already pointed out that the genius of Shaw is really too harsh and earnest rather than too merry and irresponsible. I shall have occasion to point out later that Shaw is, in one very serious sense, the very opposite of paradoxical. In any case if any real student of Shaw says that Shaw is only making a fool of him, we can only say that of that student it is very superfluous for anyone to make a fool. But though the dramatist's jests are always serious and generally obvious, he is really affected from time to time by a certain spirit of which that climate theory is a case — a spirit that can only be called one of senseless ingenuity. I suppose it is a sort of nemesis of wit; the skidding of a wheel in the height of its speed. Perhaps it is connected with the nomadic nature of his mind. That lack of roots, this remoteness from ancient instincts and traditions is responsible for a certain bleak and heartless extravagance of statement on certain subjects which makes the author really unconvincing as well as exaggerative; satires that are *saugrenu*, jokes that are rather silly than wild, statements which even considered as lies have no symbolic relation to truth. They are exaggerations of something that does not exist. For instance, if a man called Christmas Day a mere hypocritical excuse for drunkenness and gluttony that would be false, but it would have a fact hidden in it somewhere. But when Bernard Shaw says that Christmas Day is only a conspiracy kept up by poulterers and wine merchants from strictly business motives, then he says something which is not so much false as startlingly and arrestingly foolish. He might as well say that the two sexes were invented by jewellers who wanted to sell wedding rings. Or again, take the case of nationality and the unit of patriotism. If a man said that all boundaries between clans, kingdoms, or empires were nonsensical or non-existent, that would be a fallacy, but a consistent and philosophical fallacy. But when Mr. Bernard Shaw says that England matters so little that the British Empire might very well give up these islands to Germany, he has not only got hold of the sow by the wrong ear but the wrong sow by the wrong ear; a mythical sow, a sow that is not there at all. If Britain is unreal, the British Empire must be a thousand times more unreal. It is as if one said, "I do not believe that Michael Scott ever had any existence; but I am convinced, in spite of the absurd legend, that he had a shadow."

As has been said already, there must be some truth in every popular impression. And the impression that Shaw, the most savagely serious man of his time, is a mere music-hall artist must have reference to such rare outbreaks as these. As a rule his speeches are full, not only of substance, but of substances, materials like pork, mahogany, lead, and leather. There is no man whose arguments cover a more Napoleonic map of detail. It is true that he jokes; but wherever he is he has topical jokes, one might almost say family jokes. If he talks to tailors he can allude to the last absurdity about buttons. If he talks to the soldiers he can see the exquisite and exact humour of the last gun-carriage. But when all his powerful practicality is allowed, there does run through him this erratic levity, an explosion of ineptitude. It is a queer quality in literature. It is a sort of cold extravagance; and it has made him all his enemies.

The Philosopher

I SHOULD suppose that *Caesar and Cleopatra* marks about the turning tide of Bernard Shaw's fortune and fame. Up to this time he had known glory, but never success. He had been wondered at as something brilliant and barren, like a meteor; but no one would accept him as a sun, for the test of a sun is that it can make something grow. Practically speaking the two qualities of a modern drama are, that it should play and that it should pay. It had been proved over and over again in weighty dramatic criticisms, in careful readers' reports, that the plays of Shaw could never play or pay; that the public did not want wit and the wars of intellect. And just about the time that this had been finally proved, the plays of Bernard Shaw promised to play like *Charley's Aunt* and to pay like Colman's Mustard. It is a fact in which we can all rejoice, not only because it redeems the reputation of Bernard Shaw, but because it redeems the character of the English people. All that is bravest in human nature, open challenge and unexpected wit and angry conviction, are not so very unpopular as the publishers and managers in their motor-cars have been in the habit of telling us. But exactly because we have come to a turning point in the man's career I propose to interrupt the mere catalogue of his plays and to treat his latest series rather as the proclamations of an acknowledged prophet. For the last plays, especially *Man and Superman*, are such that his whole position must be re-stated before attacking them seriously.

For two reasons I have called this concluding series of plays not again by the name of "The Dramatist," but by the general name of "The Philosopher." The first reason is that given above, that we have come to the time of his triumph and may therefore treat him as having gained complete possession of a pulpit of his own. But there is a second reason: that it was just about this time that he began to create not only a pulpit of his own, but a church and creed of his own. It is a very vast and universal religion; and it is not his fault that he is the only member of it. The plainer way of putting it is this: that here, in the hour of his earthly victory, there dies in him the old mere denier, the mere dynamiter of criticism. In the warmth of popularity he begins to wish to put his faith positively; to offer some solid key to all creation. Perhaps the irony in the situation is this: that all the crowds are acclaiming him as the blasting and hypercritical buffoon, while he himself is seriously rallying his synthetic power, and with a grave face telling himself that it is time he had a faith to preach. His final success as a sort of charlatan coincides with his first grand failures as a theologian.

For this reason I have deliberately called a halt in his dramatic career, in order to consider these two essential points: What did the mass of Englishmen, who had now learnt to admire him, imagine his point of view to be? and second, What did he imagine it to be? or, if the phrase be premature, What did he imagine it was going to be? In his latest work, especially in *Man and Superman*, Shaw has become a complete and colossal mystic. That mysticism does grow quite rationally out of his older arguments; but very few people ever troubled to trace the connection. In order to do so it is necessary to say what was, at the time of his first success, the public impression of Shaw's philosophy.

Now it is an irritating and pathetic thing that the three most popular phrases about Shaw are false. Modern criticism, like all weak things, is overloaded with words. In a healthy condition of language a man finds it very difficult to say the right thing, but at last says it. In this empire of journalese a man finds it so very easy to say the wrong thing that he never thinks of saying anything else. False or meaningless phrases lie so ready to his hand that it is easier to use them than not to use them. These wrong terms picked up through idleness are retained through habit, and so the man has begun to think wrong almost before he has begun to think at all. Such lumbering logomachy is always injurious and oppressive to men of spirit, imagination or intellectual honour, and it has dealt very recklessly and wrongly with Bernard Shaw. He has contrived to get about three newspaper phrases tied to his tail; and those newspaper phrases are all and separately wrong. The three superstitions about him, it will be conceded, are generally these: first that he desires "problem plays," second that he is "paradoxical," and third that in his dramas as elsewhere he is specially "a Socialist." And the interesting thing is that when we come to his philosophy, all these three phrases are quite peculiarly inapplicable.

To take the plays first, there is a general disposition to describe that type of intimate or defiant drama which he approves as "the problem play." Now the serious modern play is, as a rule, the very reverse of a problem play; for there can be no problem unless both points of view are equally and urgently presented. *Hamlet* really is a problem play because at the end of it one is really in doubt as to whether upon the author's showing Hamlet is something more than a man or something less. *Henry IV* and *Henry V* are really problem plays; in this sense, that the reader or spectator is really doubtful whether the high but harsh efficiency, valour, and ambition of Henry V are an improvement on his old blackguard camaraderie; and whether he was not a better man when he was a thief. This hearty and healthy doubt is very common in Shakespeare; I mean a doubt that exists in the writer as well as in the reader. But Bernard Shaw is far too much of a Puritan to tolerate such doubts about points which he counts essential. There is no sort of doubt that the young lady in *Arms and the Man* is improved by losing her ideals. There is no sort of doubt that Captain Brassbound is improved by giving up the object of his life. But a better case can be found in something that both dramatists have been concerned with; Shaw wrote *Caesar and Cleopatra*; Shakespeare wrote *Antony and Cleopatra* and also *Julius Caesar*. And exactly what annoys Bernard Shaw about Shakespeare's version is this: that Shakespeare has an open mind or, in other words, that Shakespeare has really written a problem play. Shakespeare sees quite as clearly as Shaw that Brutus is unpractical and ineffectual; but he also sees, what is quite as plain and practical a fact, that these ineffectual men do capture the hearts and influence the policies of mankind. Shaw would have nothing said in favour of Brutus; because Brutus is on the wrong side in politics. Of the actual problem of public and private morality, as it was presented to Brutus, he takes actually no notice at all. He can write the most energetic and outspoken of propaganda plays; but he cannot rise to a problem play. He cannot really divide his mind and let the two parts speak independently to each other. He has never, so to speak, actually split his head in two; though I daresay there are many other people who are willing to do it for him.

Sometimes, especially in his later plays, he allows his clear conviction to spoil even his admirable dialogue, making one side entirely weak, as in an Evangelical tract. I do not know whether in *Major Barbara* the young Greek professor was supposed to be a fool. As popular tradition (which I trust more than anything else) declared that he is drawn from a real Professor of my acquaintance, who is anything but a fool, I should imagine not. But in that case I am all the more mystified by the incredibly weak fight which he makes in the play in answer to the elephantine sophistries of Undershaft. It is really a disgraceful case, and almost the only case in Shaw of there being no fair fight between the two sides. For instance, the

Professor mentions pity. Mr. Undershaft says with melodramatic scorn, “Pity! the scavenger of the Universe!” Now if any gentleman had said this to me, I should have replied, “If I permit you to escape from the point by means of metaphors, will you tell me whether you disapprove of scavengers?” Instead of this obvious retort, the miserable Greek professor only says, “Well then, love,” to which Undershaft replies with unnecessary violence that he won’t have the Greek professor’s love, to which the obvious answer of course would be, “How the deuce can you prevent my loving you if I choose to do so?” Instead of this, as far as I remember, that abject Hellenist says nothing at all. I only mention this unfair dialogue, because it marks, I think, the recent hardening, for good or evil, of Shaw out of a dramatist into a mere philosopher, and whoever hardens into a philosopher may be hardening into a fanatic.

And just as there is nothing really problematic in Shaw’s mind, so there is nothing really paradoxical. The meaning of the word paradoxical may indeed be made the subject of argument. In Greek, of course, it simply means something which is against the received opinion; in that sense a missionary remonstrating with South Sea cannibals is paradoxical. But in the much more important world, where words are used and altered in the using, paradox does not mean merely this: it means at least something of which the antinomy or apparent inconsistency is sufficiently plain in the words used, and most commonly of all it means an idea expressed in a form which is verbally contradictory. Thus, for instance, the great saying, “He that shall lose his life, the same shall save it,” is an example of what modern people mean by a paradox. If any learned person should read this book (which seems immeasurably improbable) he can content himself with putting it this way, that the moderns mistakenly say paradox when they should say oxymoron. Ultimately, in any case, it may be agreed that we commonly mean by a paradox some kind of collision between what is seemingly and what is really true.

Now if by paradox we mean truth inherent in a contradiction, as in the saying of Christ that I have quoted, it is a very curious fact that Bernard Shaw is almost entirely without paradox. Moreover, he cannot even understand a paradox. And more than this, paradox is about the only thing in the world that he does not understand. All his splendid vistas and startling suggestions arise from carrying some one clear principle further than it has yet been carried. His madness is all consistency, not inconsistency. As the point can hardly be made clear without examples, let us take one example, the subject of education. Shaw has been all his life preaching to grownup people the profound truth that liberty and responsibility go together; that the reason why freedom is so often easily withheld, is simply that it is a terrible nuisance. This is true, though not the whole truth, of citizens; and so when Shaw comes to children he can only apply to them the same principle that he has already applied to citizens. He begins to play with the Herbert Spencer idea of teaching children by experience; perhaps the most fatuously silly idea that was ever gravely put down in print. On that there is no need to dwell; one has only to ask how the experimental method is to be applied to a precipice; and the theory no longer exists. But Shaw effected a further development, if possible more fantastic. He said that one should never tell a child anything without letting him hear the opposite opinion. That is to say, when you tell Tommy not to hit his sick sister on the temple, you must make sure of the presence of some Nietzscheite professor, who will explain to him that such a course might possibly serve to eliminate the unfit. When you are in the act of telling Susan not to drink out of the bottle labelled “poison,” you must telegraph for a Christian Scientist, who will be ready to maintain that without her own consent it cannot do her any harm. What would happen to a child brought up on Shaw’s principle I cannot conceive; I should think he would commit suicide in his bath. But that is not here the question. The point is that this proposition seems quite sufficiently wild and startling to ensure that its author, if he escapes Hanwell, would reach the front rank of journalists, demagogues, or public entertainers. It is a perfect paradox, if a paradox only means something that makes one jump. But it is not a paradox at all in the sense of a contradiction. It is not a contradiction, but an enormous and outrageous consistency, the one principle of free thought carried to a point to which no other sane man would consent to carry it. Exactly what Shaw does not understand is the paradox; the unavoidable paradox of childhood. Although this child is much better than I, yet I must teach it. Although this being has much purer passions than I, yet I must control it. Although Tommy is quite right to rush towards a precipice, yet he must be stood in the corner for doing it. This contradiction is the only possible condition of having to do with children at all; anyone who talks about a child without feeling this paradox might just as well be talking about a merman. He has never even seen the animal. But this paradox

Shaw in his intellectual simplicity cannot see; he cannot see it because it is a paradox. His only intellectual excitement is to carry one idea further and further across the world. It never occurs to him that it might meet another idea, and like the three winds in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, they might make a night of it. His only paradox is to pull out one thread or cord of truth longer and longer into waste and fantastic places. He does not allow for that deeper sort of paradox by which two opposite cords of truth become entangled in an inextricable knot. Still less can he be made to realise that it is often this knot which ties safely together the whole bundle of human life.

This blindness to paradox everywhere perplexes his outlook. He cannot understand marriage because he will not understand the paradox of marriage; that the woman is all the more the house for not being the head of it. He cannot understand patriotism, because he will not understand the paradox of patriotism; that one is all the more human for not merely loving humanity. He does not understand Christianity because he will not understand the paradox of Christianity; that we can only really understand all myths when we know that one of them is true. I do not under-rate him for this anti-paradoxical temper; I concede that much of his finest and keenest work in the way of intellectual purification would have been difficult or impossible without it. But I say that here lies the limitation of that lucid and compelling mind; he cannot quite understand life, because he will not accept its contradictions.

Nor is it by any means descriptive of Shaw to call him a Socialist; in so far as that word can be extended to cover an ethical attitude. He is the least social of all Socialists; and I pity the Socialist state that tries to manage him. This anarchism of his is not a question of thinking for himself; every decent man thinks for himself; it would be highly immodest to think for anybody else. Nor is it any instinctive licence or egoism; as I have said before, he is a man of peculiarly acute public conscience. The unmanageable part of him, the fact that he cannot be conceived as part of a crowd or as really and invisibly helping a movement, has reference to another thing in him, or rather to another thing not in him.

The great defect of that fine intelligence is a failure to grasp and enjoy the things commonly called convention and tradition; which are foods upon which all human creatures must feed frequently if they are to live. Very few modern people of course have any idea of what they are. “Convention” is very nearly the same word as “democracy.” It has again and again in history been used as an alternative word to Parliament. So far from suggesting anything stale or sober, the word convention rather conveys a hubbub; it is the coming together of men; every mob is a convention. In its secondary sense it means the common soul of such a crowd, its instinctive anger at the traitor or its instinctive salutation of the flag. Conventions may be cruel, they may be unsuitable, they may even be grossly superstitious or obscene; but there is one thing that they never are. Conventions are never dead. They are always full of accumulated emotions, the piled-up and passionate experiences of many generations asserting what they could not explain. To be inside any true convention, as the Chinese respect for parents or the European respect for children, is to be surrounded by something which whatever else it is is not leaden, lifeless or automatic, something which is taut and tingling with vitality at a hundred points, which is sensitive almost to madness and which is so much alive that it can kill. Now Bernard Shaw has always made this one immense mistake (arising out of that bad progressive education of his), the mistake of treating convention as a dead thing; treating it as if it were a mere physical environment like the pavement or the rain. Whereas it is a result of will; a rain of blessings and a pavement of good intentions. Let it be remembered that I am not discussing in what degree one should allow for tradition; I am saying that men like Shaw do not allow for it at all. If Shaw had found in early life that he was contradicted by *Bradshaw's Railway Guide* or even by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, he would have felt at least that he might be wrong. But if he had found himself contradicted by his father and mother, he would have thought it all the more probable that he was right. If the issue of the last evening paper contradicted him he might be troubled to investigate or explain. That the human tradition of two thousand years contradicted him did not trouble him for an instant. That Marx was not with him was important. That Man was not with him was an irrelevant prehistoric joke. People have talked far too much about the paradoxes of Bernard Shaw. Perhaps his only pure paradox is this almost unconscious one; that he has tended to think that because something has satisfied generations of men it must be untrue.

Shaw is wrong about nearly all the things one learns early in life and while one is still simple. Most human beings start with certain facts of psychology to which the rest of life must be somewhat related. For instance, every man falls in love; and no man falls into free love. When he falls into that he calls it lust, and is always ashamed of it even when he boasts of it.

That there is some connection between a love and a vow nearly every human being knows before he is eighteen. That there is a solid and instinctive connection between the idea of sexual ecstasy and the idea of some sort of almost suicidal constancy, this I say is simply the first fact in one’s own psychology; boys and girls know it almost before they know their own language. How far it can be trusted, how it can best be dealt with, all that is another matter. But lovers lust after constancy more than after happiness; if you are in any sense prepared to give them what they ask, then what they ask, beyond all question, is an oath of final fidelity. Lovers may be lunatics; lovers may be children; lovers may be unfit for citizenship and outside human argument; you can take up that position if you will. But lovers do not only desire love; they desire marriage. The root of legal monogamy does not lie (as Shaw and his friends are for ever drearily asserting) in the fact that the man is a mere tyrant and the woman a mere slave. It lies in the fact that if their love for each other is the noblest and freest love conceivable, it can only find its heroic expression in both becoming slaves. I only mention this matter here as a matter which most of us do not need to be taught; for it was the first lesson of life. In after years we may make up what code or compromise about sex we like; but we all know that constancy, jealousy, and the personal pledge are natural and inevitable in sex; we do not feel any surprise when we see them either in a murder or in a valentine. We may or may not see wisdom in early marriages; but we know quite well that wherever the thing is genuine at all, early loves will mean early marriages. But Shaw had not learnt about this tragedy of the sexes, what the rustic ballads of any country on earth would have taught him. He had not learnt, what universal common sense has put into all the folk-lore of the earth, that love cannot be thought of clearly for an instant except as monogamous. The old English ballads never sing the praises of “lovers.” They always sing the praises of “true lovers,” and that is the final philosophy of the question.

The same is true of Mr. Shaw’s refusal to understand the love of the land either in the form of patriotism or of private ownership. It is the attitude of an Irishman cut off from the soil of Ireland, retaining the audacity and even cynicism of the national type, but no longer fed from the roots with its pathos or its experience.

This broader and more brotherly rendering of convention must be applied particularly to the conventions of the drama; since that is necessarily the most democratic of all the arts. And it will be found generally that most of the theatrical conventions rest on a real artistic basis. The Greek Unities, for instance, were not proper objects of the meticulous and trivial imitation of Seneca or Gabriel Harvey. But still less were they the right objects for the equally trivial and far more vulgar impatience of men like Macaulay. That a tale should, if possible, be told of one place or one day or a manageable number of characters is an ideal plainly rooted in an aesthetic instinct. But if this be so with the classical drama, it is yet more certainly so with romantic drama, against the somewhat decayed dignity of which Bernard Shaw was largely in rebellion. There was one point in particular upon which the Ibsenites claimed to have reformed the romantic convention which is worthy of special allusion.

Shaw and all the other Ibsenites were fond of insisting that a defect in the romantic drama was its tendency to end with wedding-bells. Against this they set the modern drama of middle-age, the drama which described marriage itself instead of its poetic preliminaries. Now if Bernard Shaw had been more patient with popular tradition, more prone to think that there might be some sense in its survival, he might have seen this particular problem much more clearly. The old playwrights have left us plenty of plays of marriage and middle-age. *Othello* is as much about what follows the wedding-bells as *The Doll’s House*. *Macbeth* is about a middle-aged couple as much as *Little Eyolf*. But if we ask ourselves what is the real difference, we shall, I think, find that it can fairly be stated thus. The old tragedies of marriage, though not love stories, are like love stories in this, that they work up to some act or stroke which is irrevocable as marriage is irrevocable; to the fact of death or of adultery.

Now the reason why our fathers did not make marriage, in the middle-aged and static sense, the subject of their plays was a very simple one; it was that a play is a very bad place for discussing that topic. You cannot easily make a good drama out of the success or failure of a marriage, just as you could not make a good drama out of the growth of an oak tree or the decay of an empire. As Polonius very reasonably observed, it is too long. A happy love-affair will make a drama simply because it is dramatic; it depends on an ultimate yes or no. But a happy marriage is not dramatic; perhaps it would be less happy if it were. The essence of a romantic heroine is that she asks herself an intense question; but the essence of a sensible wife is that she is much too sensible to ask herself any questions at all. All the things that make monogamy a success are in their nature undramatic things, the silent growth of an instinctive confidence, the common wounds and victories, the accumulation of customs, the rich maturing of old jokes. Sane marriage is an untheatrical thing; it is therefore not surprising that most modern dramatists have devoted themselves to insane marriage.

To summarise; before touching the philosophy which Shaw has ultimately adopted, we must quit the notion that we know it already and that it is hit off in such journalistic terms as these three. Shaw does not wish to multiply problem plays or even problems. He has such scepticism as is the misfortune of his age; but he has this dignified and courageous quality, that he does not come to ask questions but to answer them. He is not a paradox-monger; he is a wild logician, far too simple even to be called a sophist. He understands everything in life except its paradoxes, especially that ultimate paradox that the very things that we cannot comprehend are the things that we have to take for granted. Lastly, he is not especially social or collectivist. On the contrary, he rather dislikes men in the mass, though he can appreciate them individually. He has no respect for collective humanity in its two great forms; either in that momentary form which we call a mob, or in that enduring form which we call a convention.

The general cosmic theory which can so far be traced through the earlier essays and plays of Bernard Shaw may be expressed in the image of Schopenhauer standing on his head. I cheerfully concede that Schopenhauer looks much nicer in that posture than in his original one, but I can hardly suppose that he feels more comfortable. The substance of the change is this. Roughly speaking, Schopenhauer maintained that life is unreasonable. The intellect, if it could be impartial, would tell us to cease; but a blind partiality, an instinct quite distinct from thought, drives us on to take desperate chances in an essentially bankrupt lottery. Shaw seems to accept this dingy estimate of the rational outlook, but adds a somewhat arresting comment. Schopenhauer had said, “Life is unreasonable; so much the worse for all living things.” Shaw said, “Life is unreasonable; so much the worse for reason.” Life is the higher call, life we must follow. It may be that there is some undetected fallacy in reason itself. Perhaps the whole man cannot get inside his own head any more than he can jump down his own throat. But there is about the need to live, to suffer, and to create that imperative quality which can truly be called supernatural, of whose voice it can indeed be said that it speaks with authority, and not as the scribes.

This is the first and finest item of the original Bernard Shaw creed: that if reason says that life is irrational, life must be content to reply that reason is lifeless; life is the primary thing, and if reason impedes it, then reason must be trodden down into the mire amid the most abject superstitions. In the ordinary sense it would be specially absurd to suggest that Shaw desires man to be a mere animal. For that is always associated with lust or incontinence; and Shaw's ideals are strict, hygienic, and even, one might say, old-maidish. But there is a mystical sense in which one may say literally that Shaw desires man to be an animal. That is, he desires him to cling first and last to life, to the spirit of animation, to the thing which is common to him and the birds and plants. Man should have the blind faith of a beast: he should be as mystically immutable as a cow, and as deaf to sophistries as a fish. Shaw does not wish him to be a philosopher or an artist; he does not even wish him to be a man, so much as he wishes him to be, in this holy sense, an animal. He must follow the flag of life as fiercely from conviction as all other creatures follow it from instinct.

But this Shavian worship of life is by no means lively. It has nothing in common either with the braver or the baser forms of what we commonly call optimism. It has none of the omnivorous exultation of Walt Whitman or the fiery pantheism of Shelley. Bernard Shaw wishes to show himself not so much as an optimist, but rather as a sort of faithful and contented pessimist. This contradiction is the key to nearly all his early and more obvious contradictions and to many which remain to the end. Whitman and many modern idealists have talked of taking even duty as a pleasure; it seems to me that Shaw takes even pleasure as a duty. In a queer way he seems to see existence as an illusion and yet as an obligation. To every man and woman, bird, beast, and flower, life is a love-call to be eagerly followed. To Bernard Shaw it is merely a military bugle to be obeyed. In short, he fails to feel that the command of Nature (if one must use the anthropomorphic fable of Nature instead of the philosophic term God) can be enjoyed as well as obeyed. He paints life at its darkest and then tells the babe unborn to take the leap in the dark. That is heroic; and to my instinct at least Schopenhauer looks like a pigmy beside his pupil. But it is the heroism of a morbid and almost asphyxiated age. It is awful to think that this world which so many poets have praised has even for a time been depicted as a man-trap into which we may just have the manhood to jump. Think of all those ages through which men have talked of having the courage to die. And then remember that we have actually fallen to talking about having the courage to live.

It is exactly this oddity or dilemma which may be said to culminate in the crowning work of his later and more constructive period, the work in which he certainly attempted, whether with success or not, to state his ultimate and cosmic vision; I mean the play called *Man and Superman*. In approaching this play we must keep well in mind the distinction recently drawn: that Shaw follows the banner of life, but austerely, not joyously. For him nature has authority, but hardly charm. But before we approach it it is necessary to deal with three things that lead up to it. First it is necessary to speak of what remained of his old critical and realistic method; and then it is necessary to speak of the two important influences which led up to his last and most important change of outlook.

First, since all our spiritual epochs overlap, and a man is often doing the old work while he is thinking of the new, we may deal first with what may be fairly called his last two plays of pure worldly criticism. These are *Major Barbar*a and *John Bull's Other Island*. *Major Barbara* indeed contains a strong religious element; but, when all is said, the whole point of the play is that the religious element is defeated. Moreover, the actual expressions of religion in the play are somewhat unsatisfactory as expressions of religion — or even of reason. I must frankly say that Bernard Shaw always seems to me to use the word God not only without any idea of what it means, but without one moment's thought about what it could possibly mean. He said to some atheist, "Never believe in a God that you cannot improve on." The atheist (being a sound theologian) naturally replied that one should not believe in a God whom one could improve on; as that would show that he was not God. In the same style in *Major Barbar*a the heroine ends by suggesting that she will serve God without personal hope, so that she may owe nothing to God and He owe everything to her. It does not seem to strike her that if God owes everything to her He is not God. These things affect me merely as tedious perversions of a phrase. It is as if you said, "I will never have a father unless I have begotten him."

But the real sting and substance of *Major Barbara* is much more practical and to the point. It expresses not the new spirituality but the old materialism of Bernard Shaw. Almost every one of Shaw's plays is an expanded epigram. But the epigram is not expanded (as with most people) into a hundred commonplaces. Rather the epigram is expanded into a hundred other epigrams; the work is at least as brilliant in detail as it is in design. But it is generally possible to discover the original and pivotal epigram which is the centre and purpose of the play. It is generally possible, even amid that blinding jewellery of a million jokes, to discover the grave, solemn and sacred joke for which the play itself was written.

The ultimate epigram of *Major Barbara* can be put thus. People say that poverty is no crime; Shaw says that poverty is a crime; that it is a crime to endure it, a crime to be content with it, that it is the mother of all crimes of brutality, corruption, and fear. If a man says to Shaw that he is born of poor but honest parents, Shaw tells him that the very word “but” shows that his parents were probably dishonest. In short, he maintains here what he had maintained elsewhere: that what the people at this moment require is not more patriotism or more art or more religion or more morality or more sociology, but simply more money. The evil is not ignorance or decadence or sin or pessimism; the evil is poverty. The point of this particular drama is that even the noblest enthusiasm of the girl who becomes a Salvation Army officer fails under the brute money power of her father who is a modern capitalist. When I have said this it will be clear why this play, fine and full of bitter sincerity as it is, must in a manner be cleared out of the way before we come to talk of Shaw’s final and serious faith. For his serious faith is in the sanctity of human will, in the divine capacity for creation and choice rising higher than environment and doom; and so far as that goes, *Major Barbar*a is not only apart from his faith but against his faith. *Major Barbar*a is an account of environment victorious over heroic will. There are a thousand answers to the ethic in *Major Barbar*a which I should be inclined to offer. I might point out that the rich do not so much buy honesty as curtains to cover dishonesty: that they do not so much buy health as cushions to comfort disease. And I might suggest that the doctrine that poverty degrades the poor is much more likely to be used as an argument for keeping them powerless than as an argument for making them rich. But there is no need to find such answers to the materialistic pessimism of *Major Barbara*. The best answer to it is in Shaw’s own best and crowning philosophy, with which we shall shortly be concerned.

John Bull’s Other Island represents a realism somewhat more tinged with the later transcendentalism of its author. In one sense, of course, it is a satire on the conventional Englishman, who is never so silly or sentimental as when he sees silliness and sentiment in the Irishman. Broadbent, whose mind is all fog and his morals all gush, is firmly persuaded that he is bringing reason and order among the Irish, whereas in truth they are all smiling at his illusions with the critical detachment of so many devils. There have been many plays depicting the absurd Paddy in a ring of Anglo-Saxons; the first purpose of this play is to depict the absurd Anglo-Saxon in a ring of ironical Paddies. But it has a second and more subtle purpose, which is very finely contrived. It is suggested that when all is said and done there is in this preposterous Englishman a certain creative power which comes from his simplicity and optimism, from his profound resolution rather to live life than to criticise it. I know no finer dialogue of philosophical cross-purposes than that in which Broadbent boasts of his common-sense, and his subtler Irish friend mystifies him by telling him that he, Broadbent, has no common-sense, but only inspiration. The Irishman admits in Broadbent a certain unconscious spiritual force even in his very stupidity. Lord Rosebery coined the very clever phrase "a practical mystic." Shaw is here maintaining that all practical men are practical mystics. And he is really maintaining also that the most practical of all the practical mystics is the one who is a fool.

There is something unexpected and fascinating about this reversal of the usual argument touching enterprise and the business man; this theory that success is created not by intelligence, but by a certain half-witted and yet magical instinct. For Bernard Shaw, apparently, the forests of factories and the mountains of money are not the creations of human wisdom or even of human cunning; they are rather manifestations of the sacred maxim which declares that God has chosen the foolish things of the earth to confound the wise. It is simplicity and even innocence that has made Manchester. As a philosophical fancy this is interesting or even suggestive; but it must be confessed that as a criticism of the relations of England to Ireland it is open to a strong historical objection. The one weak point in *John Bull's Other Islan*d is that it turns on the fact that Broadbent succeeds in Ireland. But as a matter of fact Broadbent has not succeeded in Ireland. If getting what one wants is the test and fruit of this mysterious strength, then the Irish peasants are certainly much stronger than the English merchants; for in spite of all the efforts of the merchants, the land has remained a land of peasants. No glorification of the English practicality as if it were a universal thing can ever get over the fact that we have failed in dealing with the one white people in our power who were markedly unlike ourselves. And the kindness of Broadbent has failed just as much as his common-sense; because he was dealing with a people whose desire and ideal were different from his own. He did not share the Irish passion for small possession in land or for the more pathetic virtues of Christianity. In fact the kindness of Broadbent has failed for the same reason that the gigantic kindness of Shaw has failed. The roots are different; it is like tying the tops of two trees together. Briefly, the philosophy of *John Bull's Other Island* is quite effective and satisfactory except for this incurable fault: the fact that John Bull's other island is not John Bull's.

This clearing off of his last critical plays we may classify as the first of the three facts which lead up to *Man and Superman*. The second of the three facts may be found, I think, in Shaw's discovery of Nietzsche. This eloquent sophist has an influence upon Shaw and his school which it would require a separate book adequately to study. By descent Nietzsche was a Pole, and probably a Polish noble; and to say that he was a Polish noble is to say that he was a frail, fastidious, and entirely useless anarchist. He had a wonderful poetic wit; and is one of the best rhetoricians of the modern world. He had a remarkable power of saying things that master the reason for a moment by their gigantic unreasonableness; as, for instance, "Your life is intolerable without immortality; but why should not your life be intolerable?" His whole work is shot through with the pangs and fevers of his physical life, which was one of extreme bad health; and in early middle age his brilliant brain broke down into impotence and darkness. All that was true in his teaching was this: that if a man looks fine on a horse it is so far irrelevant to tell him that he would be more economical on a donkey or more humane on a tricycle. In other words, the mere achievement of dignity, beauty, or triumph is strictly to be called a good thing. I do not know if Nietzsche ever used the illustration; but it seems to me that all that is creditable or sound in Nietzsche could be stated in the derivation of one word, the word "valour." Valour means *valeur*; it means a value; courage is itself a solid good; it is an ultimate virtue; valour is in itself *valid*. In so far as he maintained this Nietzsche was only taking part in that great Protestant game of see-saw which has been the amusement of northern Europe since the sixteenth century. Nietzsche imagined he was rebelling against ancient morality; as a matter of fact he was only rebelling against recent morality, against the half-baked impudence of the utilitarians and the materialists. He thought he was rebelling against Christianity; curiously enough he was rebelling solely against the special enemies of Christianity, against Herbert Spencer and Mr. Edward Clodd. Historic Christianity has always believed in the valour of St. Michael riding in front of the Church Militant; and in an ultimate and absolute pleasure, not indirect or utilitarian, the intoxication of the spirit, the wine of the blood of God.

There are indeed doctrines of Nietzsche that are not Christian, but then, by an entertaining coincidence, they are also not true. His hatred of pity is not Christian, but that was not his doctrine but his disease. Invalids are often hard on invalids. And there is another doctrine of his that is not Christianity, and also (by the same laughable accident) not common-sense; and it is a most pathetic circumstance that this was the one doctrine which caught the eye of Shaw and captured him. He was not influenced at all by the morbid attack on mercy. It would require more than ten thousand mad Polish professors to make Bernard Shaw anything but a generous and compassionate man. But it is certainly a nuisance that the one Nietzsche doctrine which attracted him was not the one Nietzsche doctrine that is human and rectifying. Nietzsche might really have done some good if he had taught Bernard Shaw to draw the sword, to drink wine, or even to dance. But he only succeeded in putting into his head a new superstition, which bids fair to be the chief superstition of the dark ages which are possibly in front of us — I mean the superstition of what is called the Superman.

In one of his least convincing phrases, Nietzsche had said that just as the ape ultimately produced the man, so should we ultimately produce something higher than the man. The immediate answer, of course, is sufficiently obvious: the ape did not worry about the man, so why should we worry about the Superman? If the Superman will come by natural selection, may we leave it to natural selection? If the Superman will come by human selection, what sort of Superman are we to select? If he is simply to be more just, more brave, or more merciful, then Zarathustra sinks into a Sunday-school teacher; the only way we can work for it is to be more just, more brave, and more merciful; sensible advice, but hardly startling. If he is to be anything else than this, why should we desire him, or what else are we to desire? These questions have been many times asked of the Nietzscheites, and none of the Nietzscheites have even attempted to answer them.

The keen intellect of Bernard Shaw would, I think, certainly have seen through this fallacy and verbiage had it not been that another important event about this time came to the help of Nietzsche and established the Superman on his pedestal. It is the third of the things which I have called stepping-stones to *Man and Superman*, and it is very important. It is nothing less than the break-down of one of the three intellectual supports upon which Bernard Shaw had reposed through all his confident career. At the beginning of this book I have described the three ultimate supports of Shaw as the Irishman, the Puritan, and the Progressive. They are the three legs of the tripod upon which the prophet sat to give the oracle; and one of them broke. Just about this time suddenly, by a mere shaft of illumination, Bernard Shaw ceased to believe in progress altogether.

It is generally implied that it was reading Plato that did it. That philosopher was very well qualified to convey the first shock of the ancient civilisation to Shaw, who had always thought instinctively of civilisation as modern. This is not due merely to the daring splendour of the speculations and the vivid picture of Athenian life, it is due also to something analogous in the personalities of that particular ancient Greek and this particular modern Irishman. Bernard Shaw has much affinity to Plato — in his instinctive elevation of temper, his courageous pursuit of ideas as far as they will go, his civic idealism; and also, it must be confessed, in his dislike of poets and a touch of delicate inhumanity. But whatever influence produced the change, the change had all the dramatic suddenness and completeness which belongs to the conversions of great men. It had been perpetually implied through all the earlier works not only that mankind is constantly improving, but that almost everything must be considered in the light of this fact. More than once he seemed to argue, in comparing the dramatists of the sixteenth with those of the nineteenth century, that the latter had a definite advantage merely because they were of the nineteenth century and not of the sixteenth. When accused of impertinence towards the greatest of the Elizabethans, Bernard Shaw had said, “Shakespeare is a much taller man than I. but I stand on his shoulders” — an epigram which sums up this doctrine with characteristic neatness. But Shaw fell off Shakespeare’s shoulders with a crash. This chronological theory that Shaw stood on Shakespeare’s shoulders logically involved the supposition that Shakespeare stood on Plato’s shoulders. And Bernard Shaw found Plato from his point of view so much more advanced than Shakespeare that he decided in desperation that all three were equal.

Such failure as has partially attended the idea of human equality is very largely due to the fact that no party in the modern state has heartily believed in it. Tories and Radicals have both assumed that one set of men were in essentials superior to mankind. The only difference was that the Tory superiority was a superiority of place; while the Radical superiority is a superiority of time. The great objection to Shaw being on Shakespeare's shoulders is a consideration for the sensations and personal dignity of Shakespeare. It is a democratic objection to anyone being on anyone else's shoulders. Eternal human nature refuses to submit to a man who rules merely by right of birth. To rule by right of century is to rule by right of birth. Shaw found his nearest kinsman in remote Athens, his remotest enemies in the closest historical proximity; and he began to see the enormous average and the vast level of mankind. If progress swung constantly between such extremes it could not be progress at all. The paradox was sharp but undeniable; if life had such continual ups and downs, it was upon the whole flat. With characteristic sincerity and love of sensation he had no sooner seen this than he hastened to declare it. In the teeth of all his previous pronouncements he emphasised and re-emphasised in print that man had not progressed at all; that ninety-nine hundredths of a man in a cave were the same as ninety-nine hundredths of a man in a suburban villa.

It is characteristic of him to say that he rushed into print with a frank confession of the failure of his old theory. But it is also characteristic of him that he rushed into print also with a new alternative theory, quite as definite, quite as confident, and, if one may put it so, quite as infallible as the old one. Progress had never happened hitherto, because it had been sought solely through education. Education was rubbish. "Fancy," said he, "trying to produce a greyhound or a racehorse by education!" The man of the future must not be taught; he must be bred. This notion of producing superior human beings by the methods of the stud-farm had often been urged, though its difficulties had never been cleared up. I mean its practical difficulties; its moral difficulties, or rather impossibilities, for any animal fit to be called a man need scarcely be discussed. But even as a scheme it had never been made clear. The first and most obvious objection to it of course is this: that if you are to breed men as pigs, you require some overseer who is as much more subtle than a man as a man is more subtle than a pig. Such an individual is not easy to find.

It was, however, in the heat of these three things, the decline of his merely destructive realism, the discovery of Nietzsche, and the abandonment of the idea of a progressive education of mankind, that he attempted what is not necessarily his best, but certainly his most important work. The two things are by no means necessarily the same. The most important work of Milton is *Paradise Lost*; his best work is *Lycidas*. There are other places in which Shaw's argument is more fascinating or his wit more startling than in *Man and Superman*; there are other plays that he has made more brilliant. But I am sure that there is no other play that he wished to make more brilliant. I will not say that he is in this case more serious than elsewhere; for the word serious is a double-meaning and double-dealing word, a traitor in the dictionary. It sometimes means solemn, and it sometimes means sincere. A very short experience of private and public life will be enough to prove that the most solemn people are generally the most insincere. A somewhat more delicate and detailed consideration will show also that the most sincere men are generally not solemn; and of these is Bernard Shaw. But if we use the word serious in the old and Latin sense of the word "grave," which means weighty or valid, full of substance, then we may say without any hesitation that this is the most serious play of the most serious man alive.

The outline of the play is, I suppose, by this time sufficiently well known. It has two main philosophic motives. The first is that what he calls the life-force (the old infidels called it Nature, which seems a neater word, and nobody knows the meaning of either of them) desires above all things to make suitable marriages, to produce a purer and prouder race, or eventually to produce a Superman. The second is that in this effecting of racial marriages the woman is a more conscious agent than the man. In short, that woman disposes a long time before man proposes. In this play, therefore, woman is made the pursuer and man the pursued. It cannot be denied, I think, that in this matter Shaw is handicapped by his habitual hardness of touch, by his lack of sympathy with the romance of which he writes, and to a certain extent even by his own integrity and right conscience. Whether the man hunts the woman or the woman the man, at least it should be a splendid pagan hunt; but Shaw is not a sporting man. Nor is he a pagan, but a Puritan. He cannot recover the impartiality of paganism which allowed Diana to propose to Endymion without thinking any the worse of her. The result is that while he makes Anne, the woman who marries his hero, a really powerful and convincing woman, he can only do it by making her a highly objectionable woman. She is a liar and a bully, not from sudden fear or excruciating dilemma; she is a liar and a bully in grain; she has no truth or magnanimity in her. The more we know that she is real, the more we know that she is vile. In short, Bernard Shaw is still haunted with his old impotence of the unromantic writer; he cannot imagine the main motives of human life from the inside. We are convinced successfully that Anne wishes to marry Tanner, but in the very process we lose all power of conceiving why Tanner should ever consent to marry Anne. A writer with a more romantic strain in him might have imagined a woman choosing her lover without shamelessness and magnetising him without fraud. Even if the first movement were feminine, it need hardly be a movement like this. In truth, of course, the two sexes have their two methods of attraction, and in some of the happiest cases they are almost simultaneous. But even on the most cynical showing they need not be mixed up. It is one thing to say that the mousetrap is not there by accident. It is another to say (in the face of ocular experience) that the mousetrap runs after the mouse.

But whenever Shaw shows the Puritan hardness or even the Puritan cheapness, he shows something also of the Puritan nobility, of the idea that sacrifice is really a frivolity in the face of a great purpose. The reasonableness of Calvin and his followers will by the mercy of heaven be at last washed away; but their unreasonableness will remain an eternal splendour. Long after we have let drop the fancy that Protestantism was rational it will be its glory that it was fanatical. So it is with Shaw. To make Anne a real woman, even a dangerous woman, he would need to be something stranger and softer than Bernard Shaw. But though I always argue with him whenever he argues, I confess that he always conquers me in the one or two moments when he is emotional.

There is one really noble moment when Anne offers for all her cynical husband-hunting the only defence that is really great enough to cover it. “It will not be all happiness for me. Perhaps death.” And the man rises also at that real crisis, saying, “Oh, that clutch holds and hurts. What have you grasped in me? Is there a father’s heart as well as a mother’s?” That seems to me actually great; I do not like either of the characters an atom more than formerly; but I can see shining and shaking through them at that instant the splendour of the God that made them and of the image of God who wrote their story.

A logician is like a liar in many respects, but chiefly in the fact that he should have a good memory. That cutting and inquisitive style which Bernard Shaw has always adopted carries with it an inevitable criticism. And it cannot be denied that this new theory of the supreme importance of sound sexual union, wrought by any means, is hard logically to reconcile with Shaw's old diatribes against sentimentalism and operatic romance. If Nature wishes primarily to entrap us into sexual union, then all the means of sexual attraction, even the most maudlin or theatrical, are justified at one stroke. The guitar of the troubadour is as practical as the plough-share of the husbandman. The waltz in the ballroom is as serious as the debate in the parish council. The justification of Anne, as the potential mother of Superman, is really the justification of all the humbugs and sentimentalists whom Shaw had been denouncing as a dramatic critic and as a dramatist since the beginning of his career. It was to no purpose that the earlier Bernard Shaw said that romance was all moonshine. The moonshine that ripens love is now as practical as the sunshine that ripens corn. It was vain to say that sexual chivalry was all rot; it might be as rotten as manure — and also as fertile. It is vain to call first love a fiction; it may be as fictitious as the ink of the cuttle or the doubling of the hare; as fictitious, as efficient, and as indispensable. It is vain to call it a self-deception; Schopenhauer said that all existence was a self-deception; and Shaw's only further comment seems to be that it is right to be deceived. To *Man and Superman*, as to all his plays, the author attaches a most fascinating preface at the beginning. But I really think that he ought also to attach a hearty apology at the end; an apology to all the minor dramatists or preposterous actors whom he had cursed for romanticism in his youth. Whenever he objected to an actress for ogling she might reasonably reply, "But this is how I support my friend Anne in her sublime evolutionary effort." Whenever he laughed at an old-fashioned actor for ranting, the actor might answer, "My exaggeration is not more absurd than the tail of a peacock or the swagger of a cock; it is the way I preach the great fruitful lie of the life-force that I am a very fine fellow." We have remarked the end of Shaw's campaign in favour of progress. This ought really to have been the end of his campaign against romance. All the tricks of love that he called artificial become natural;

because they become Nature. All the lies of love become truths; indeed they become the Truth.

The minor things of the play contain some thunderbolts of good thinking. Throughout this brief study I have deliberately not dwelt upon mere wit, because in anything of Shaw's that may be taken for granted. It is enough to say that this play which is full of his most serious quality is as full as any of his minor sort of success. In a more solid sense two important facts stand out: the first is the character of the young American; the other is the character of Straker, the chauffeur. In these Shaw has realised and made vivid two most important facts. First, that America is not intellectually a go-ahead country, but both for good and evil an old-fashioned one. It is full of stale culture and ancestral simplicity, just as Shaw's young millionaire quotes Macaulay and piously worships his wife. Second, he has pointed out in the character of Straker that there has arisen in our midst a new class that has education without breeding. Straker is the man who has ousted the hansom-cabman, having neither his coarseness nor his kindliness. Great sociological credit is due to the man who has first clearly observed that Straker has appeared. How anybody can profess for a moment to be glad that he has appeared, I do not attempt to conjecture.

Appended to the play is an entertaining though somewhat mysterious document called "The Revolutionist's Handbook." It contains many very sound remarks; this, for example, which I cannot too much applaud: "If you hit your child, be sure that you hit him in anger." If that principle had been properly understood, we should have had less of Shaw's sociological friends and their meddling with the habits and instincts of the poor. But among the fragments of advice also occurs the following suggestive and even alluring remark: "Every man over forty is a scoundrel." On the first personal opportunity I asked the author of this remarkable axiom what it meant. I gathered that what it really meant was something like this: that every man over forty had been all the essential use that he was likely to be, and was therefore in a manner a parasite. It is gratifying to reflect that Bernard Shaw has sufficiently answered his own epigram by continuing to pour out treasures both of truth and folly long after this allotted time. But if the epigram might be interpreted in a rather looser style as meaning that past a certain point a man's work takes on its final character and does not greatly change the nature of its merits, it may certainly be said that with *Man and Superman*, Shaw reaches that stage. The two plays that have followed it, though of very great interest in themselves, do not require any revaluation of, or indeed any addition to, our summary of his genius and success. They are both in a sense casts back to his primary energies; the first in a controversial and the second in a technical sense. Neither need prevent our saying that the moment when John Tanner and Anne agree that it is doom for him and death for her and life only for the thing unborn, is the peak of his utterance as a prophet.

The two important plays that he has since given us are *The Doctor's Dilemm*a and *Getting Married*. The first is as regards its most amusing and effective elements a throw-back to his old game of guying the men of science. It was a very good game, and he was an admirable player. The actual story of the *Doctor's Dilemm*a itself seems to me less poignant and important than the things with which Shaw had lately been dealing. First of all, as has been said, Shaw has neither the kind of justice nor the kind of weakness that goes to make a true problem. We cannot feel the Doctor's Dilemma, because we cannot really fancy Bernard Shaw being in a dilemma. His mind is both fond of abruptness and fond of finality; he always makes up his mind when he knows the facts and sometimes before. Moreover, this particular problem (though Shaw is certainly, as we shall see, nearer to pure doubt about it than about anything else) does not strike the critic as being such an exasperating problem after all. An artist of vast power and promise, who is also a scamp of vast profligacy and treachery, has a chance of life if specially treated for a special disease. The modern doctors (and even the modern dramatist) are in doubt whether he should be specially favoured because he is aesthetically important or specially disregarded because he is ethically anti-social. They see-saw between the two despicable modern doctrines, one that geniuses should be worshipped like idols and the other that criminals should be merely wiped out like germs. That both clever men and bad men ought to be treated like men does not seem to occur to them. As a matter of fact, in these affairs of life and death one never does think of such distinctions. Nobody does shout out at sea, "Bad citizen over-board!" I should recommend the doctor in his dilemma to do exactly what I am sure any decent doctor would do without any dilemma at all: to treat the man simply as a man, and give him no more and no less favour than he would to anybody else. In short, I am sure a practical physician would drop all these visionary, unworkable modern dreams about type and criminology and go back to the plain business-like facts of the French Revolution and the Rights of Man.

The other play, *Getting Married,* is a point in Shaw's career, but only as a play, not, as usual, as a heresy. It is nothing but a conversation about marriage and one cannot agree or disagree with the view of marriage, because all views are given which are held by anybody, and some (I should think) which are held by nobody. But its technical quality is of some importance in the life of its author. It is worth consideration as a play, because it is not a play at all. It marks the culmination and completeness of that victory of Bernard Shaw over the British public, or rather over their official representatives, of which I have spoken. Shaw had fought a long fight with business men, those incredible people, who assured him that it was useless to have wit without murders, and that a good joke, which is the most popular thing everywhere else, was quite unsalable in the theatrical world. In spite of this he had conquered by his wit and his good dialogue; and by the time of which we now speak he was victorious and secure. All his plays were being produced as a matter of course in England and as a matter of the fiercest fashion and enthusiasm in America and Germany. No one who knows the nature of the man will doubt that under such circumstances his first act would be to produce his wit naked and unashamed. He had been told that he could not support a slight play by mere dialogue. He therefore promptly produced mere dialogue without the slightest play for it to support. *Getting Marrie*d is no more a play than Cicero's dialogue *De Amictiâ*, and not half so much a play as Wilson's *Noctes Ambrosianae*. But though it is not a play, it was played, and played successfully. Everyone who went into the theatre felt that he was only eavesdropping at an accidental conversation. But the conversation was so sparkling and sensible that he went on eavesdropping. This, I think, as it is the final play of Shaw, is also, and fitly, his final triumph. He is a good dramatist and sometimes even a great dramatist. But the occasions when we get glimpses of him as really a great man are on these occasions when he is utterly undramatic.

From first to last Bernard Shaw has been nothing but a conversationalist. It is not a slur to say so; Socrates was one, and even Christ Himself. He differs from that divine and that human prototype in the fact that, like most modern people, he does to some extent talk in order to find out what he thinks; whereas they knew it beforehand. But he has the virtues that go with the talkative man; one of which is humility. You will hardly ever find a really proud man talkative; he is afraid of talking too much. Bernard Shaw offered himself to the world with only one great qualification, that he could talk honestly and well. He did not speak; he talked to a crowd. He did not write; he talked to a typewriter. He did not really construct a play; he talked through ten mouths or masks instead of through one. His literary power and progress began in casual conversations — and it seems to me supremely right that it should end in one great and casual conversation. His last play is nothing but garrulous talking, that great thing called gossip. And I am happy to say that the play has been as efficient and successful as talk and gossip have always been among the children of men.

Of his life in these later years I have made no pretence of telling even the little that there is to tell. Those who regard him as a mere self-advertising egotist may be surprised to hear that there is perhaps no man of whose private life less could be positively said by an outsider. Even those who know him can make little but a conjecture of what has lain behind this splendid stretch of intellectual self-expression; I only make my conjecture like the rest. I think that the first great turning-point in Shaw's life (after the early things of which I have spoken, the taint of drink in the teetotal home, or the first fight with poverty) was the deadly illness which fell upon him, at the end of his first flashing career as a Saturday Reviewer. I know it would goad Shaw to madness to suggest that sickness could have softened him. That is why I suggest it. But I say for his comfort that I think it hardened him also; if that can be called hardening which is only the strengthening of our souls to meet some dreadful reality. At least it is certain that the larger spiritual ambitions, the desire to find a faith and found a church, come after that time. I also mention it because there is hardly anything else to mention; his life is singularly free from landmarks, while his literature is so oddly full of surprises. His marriage to Miss Payne-Townsend, which occurred not long after his illness, was one of those quite successful things which are utterly silent. The placidity of his married life may be sufficiently indicated by saying that (as far as I can make out) the most important events in it were rows about the Executive of the Fabian Society. If such ripples do not express a still and lake-like life, I do not know what would. Honestly, the only thing in his later career that can be called an event is the stand made by Shaw at the Fabians against the sudden assault of Mr. H. G. Wells, which, after scenes of splendid exasperations, ended in Wells' resignation. There was another slight ruffling of the calm when Bernard Shaw said some quite sensible things about Sir Henry Irving. But on the whole we confront the composure of one who has come into his own.

The method of his life has remained mostly unchanged. And there is a great deal of method in his life; I can hear some people murmuring something about method in his madness. He is not only neat and business-like; but, unlike some literary men I know, does not conceal the fact. Having all the talents proper to an author, he delights to prove that he has also all the talents proper to a publisher; or even to a publisher's clerk. Though many looking at his light brown clothes would call him a Bohemian, he really hates and despises Bohemianism; in the sense that he hates and despises disorder and uncleanness and irresponsibility. All that part of him is peculiarly normal and efficient. He gives good advice; he always answers letters, and answers them in a decisive and very legible hand. He has said himself that the only educational art that he thinks important is that of being able to jump off tram-cars at the proper moment. Though a rigid vegetarian, he is quite regular and rational in his meals; and though he detests sport, he takes quite sufficient exercise. While he has always made a mock of science in theory, he is by nature prone to meddle with it in practice. He is fond of photographing, and even more fond of being photographed. He maintained (in one of his moments of mad modernity) that photography was a finer thing than portrait-painting, more exquisite and more imaginative; he urged the characteristic argument that none of his own photographs were like each other or like him. But he would certainly wash the chemicals off his hands the instant after an experiment; just as he would wash the blood off his hands the instant after a Socialist massacre. He cannot endure stains or accretions; he is of that temperament which feels tradition itself to be a coat of dust; whose temptation it is to feel nothing but a sort of foul accumulation or living disease even in the creeper upon the cottage or the moss upon the grave. So thoroughly are his tastes those of the civilised modern man that if it had not been for the fire in him of justice and anger he might have been the most trim and modern among the millions whom he shocks: and his bicycle and brown hat have been no menace in Brixton. But God sent among those suburbans one who was a prophet as well as a sanitary inspector. He had every qualification for living in a villa — except the necessary indifference to his brethren living in pigsties. But for the small fact that he hates with a sickening hatred the hypocrisy and class cruelty, he would really accept and admire the bathroom and the bicycle and asbestos-stove, having no memory of rivers or of roaring fires. In these things, like Mr. Straker, he is the New Man. But for his great soul he might have accepted modern civilisation; it was a wonderful escape. This man whom men so foolishly call crazy and anarchic has really a dangerous affinity to the fourth-rate perfections of our provincial and Protestant civilisation. He might even have been respectable if he had had less self-respect.

His fulfilled fame and this tone of repose and reason in his life, together with the large circle of his private kindness and the regard of his fellow-artists, should permit us to end the record in a tone of almost patriarchal quiet. If I wished to complete such a picture I could add many touches: that he has consented to wear evening dress; that he has supported the *Times* Book Club; and that his beard has turned grey; the last to his regret, as he wanted it to remain red till they had completed colour-photography. He can mix with the most conservative statesmen; his tone grows continuously more gentle in the matter of religion. It would be easy to end with the lion lying down with the lamb, the wild Irishman tamed or taming everybody, Shaw reconciled to the British public as the British public is certainly largely reconciled to Shaw.

But as I put these last papers together, having finished this rude study, I hear a piece of news. His latest play, *The Showing Up of Blanco Posnet*, has been forbidden by the Censor. As far as I can discover, it has been forbidden because one of the characters professes a belief in God and states his conviction that God has got him. This is wholesome; this is like one crack of thunder in a clear sky. Not so easily does the prince of this world forgive. Shaw's religious training and instinct is not mine, but in all honest religion there is something that is hateful to the prosperous compromise of our time. You are free in our time to say that God does not exist; you are free to say that He exists and is evil; you are free to say (like poor old Renan) that He would like to exist if He could. You may talk of God as a metaphor or a mystification; you may water Him down with gallons of long words, or boil Him to the rags of metaphysics; and it is not merely that nobody punishes, but nobody protests. But if you speak of God as a fact, as a thing like a tiger, as a reason for changing one's conduct, then the modern world will stop you somehow if it can. We are long past talking about whether an unbeliever should be punished for being irreverent. It is now thought irreverent to be a believer. I end where I began: it is the old Puritan in Shaw that jars the modern world like an electric shock. That vision with which I meant to end, that vision of culture and common-sense, of red brick and brown flannel, of the modern clerk broadened enough to embrace Shaw and Shaw softened enough to embrace the clerk, all that vision of a new London begins to fade and alter. The red brick begins to burn red-hot; and the smoke from all the chimneys has a strange smell. I find myself back in the fumes in which I started. . . . Perhaps I have been misled by small modernities. Perhaps what I have called fastidiousness is a divine fear. Perhaps what I have called coldness is a predestinate and ancient endurance. The vision of the Fabian villas grows fainter and fainter, until I see only a void place across which runs Bunyan's Pilgrim with his fingers in his ears.

Bernard Shaw has occupied much of his life in trying to elude his followers. The fox has enthusiastic followers, and Shaw seems to regard his in much the same way. This man whom men accuse of bidding for applause seems to me to shrink even from assent. If you agree with Shaw he is very likely to contradict you; I have contradicted Shaw throughout, that is why I come at last almost to agree with him. His critics have accused him of vulgar self-advertisement; in his relation to his followers he seems to me rather marked with a sort of mad modesty. He seems to wish to fly from agreement, to have as few followers as possible. All this reaches back, I think, to the three roots from which this meditation grew. It is partly the mere impatience and irony of the Irishman. It is partly the thought of the Calvinist that the host of God should be thinned rather than thronged; that Gideon must reject soldiers rather than recruit them. And it is partly, alas, the unhappy Progressive trying to be in front of his own religion, trying to destroy his own idol and even to desecrate his own tomb. But from whatever causes, this furious escape from popularity has involved Shaw in some perversities and refinements which are almost mere insincerities, and which make it necessary to disentangle the good he has done from the evil in this dazzling course. I will attempt some summary by stating the three things in which his influence seems to me thoroughly good and the three in which it seems bad. But for the pleasure of ending on the finer note I will speak first of those that seem bad.

The primary respect in which Shaw has been a bad influence is that he has encouraged fastidiousness. He has made men dainty about their moral meals. This is indeed the root of his whole objection to romance. Many people have objected to romance for being too airy and exquisite. Shaw objects to romance for being too rank and coarse. Many have despised romance because it is unreal; Shaw really hates it because it is a great deal too real. Shaw dislikes romance as he dislikes beef and beer, raw brandy or raw beefsteaks. Romance is too masculine for his taste. You will find throughout his criticisms, amid all their truth, their wild justice or pungent impartiality, a curious undercurrent of prejudice upon one point: the preference for the refined rather than the rude or ugly. Thus he will dislike a joke because it is coarse without asking if it is really immoral. He objects to a man sitting down on his hat, whereas the austere moralist should only object to his sitting down on someone else's hat. This sensibility is barren because it is universal. It is useless to object to man being made ridiculous. Man is born ridiculous, as can easily be seen if you look at him soon after he is born. It is grotesque to drink beer, but it is equally grotesque to drink soda-water; the grotesqueness lies in the act of filling yourself like a bottle through a hole. It is undignified to walk with a drunken stagger; but it is fairly undignified to walk at all, for all walking is a sort of balancing, and there is always in the human being something of a quadruped on its hind legs. I do not say he would be more dignified if he went on all fours; I do not know that he ever is dignified except when he is dead. We shall not be refined till we are refined into dust. Of course it is only because he is not wholly an animal that man sees he is a rum animal; and if man on his hind legs is in an artificial attitude, it is only because, like a dog, he is begging or saying thank you.

Everything important is in that sense absurd from the grave baby to the grinning skull; everything practical is a practical joke. But throughout Shaw's comedies, curiously enough, there is a certain kicking against this great doom of laughter. For instance, it is the first duty of a man who is in love to make a fool of himself; but Shaw's heroes always seem to flinch from this, and attempt, in airy, philosophic revenge, to make a fool of the woman first. The attempts of Valentine and Charteris to divide their perceptions from their desires, and tell the woman she is worthless even while trying to win her, are sometimes almost torturing to watch; it is like seeing a man trying to play a different tune with each hand. I fancy this agony is not only in the spectator, but in the dramatist as well. It is Bernard Shaw struggling with his reluctance to do anything so ridiculous as make a proposal. For there are two types of great humorist: those who love to see a man absurd and those who hate to see him absurd. Of the first kind are Rabelais and Dickens; of the second kind are Swift and Bernard Shaw.

So far as Shaw has spread or helped a certain modern reluctance or *mauvaise honte* in these grand and grotesque functions of man I think he has definitely done harm. He has much influence among the young men; but it is not an influence in the direction of keeping them young. One cannot imagine him inspiring any of his followers to write a war-song or a drinking-song or a love-song, the three forms of human utterance which come next in nobility to a prayer. It may seem odd to say that the net effect of a man so apparently impudent will be to make men shy. But it is certainly the truth. Shyness is always the sign of a divided soul; a man is shy because he somehow thinks his position at once despicable and important. If he were without humility he would not care; and if he were without pride he would not care. Now the main purpose of Shaw's theoretic teaching is to declare that we ought to fulfil these great functions of life, that we ought to eat and drink and love. But the main tendency of his habitual criticism is to suggest that all the sentiments, professions, and postures of these things are not only comic but even contemptibly comic, follies and almost frauds. The result would seem to be that a race of young men may arise who do all these things, but do them awkwardly. That which was of old a free and hilarious function becomes an important and embarrassing necessity. Let us endure all the pagan pleasures with a Christian patience. Let us eat, drink, and be serious.

The second of the two points on which I think Shaw has done definite harm is this: that he has (not always or even as a rule intentionally) increased that anarchy of thought which is always the destruction of thought. Much of his early writing has encouraged among the modern youth that most pestilent of all popular tricks and fallacies; what is called the argument of progress. I mean this kind of thing. Previous ages were often, alas, aristocratic in politics or clericalist in religion; but they were always democratic in philosophy; they appealed to man, not to particular men. And if most men were against an idea, that was so far against it. But nowadays that most men are against a thing is thought to be in its favour; it is vaguely supposed to show that some day most men will be for it. If a man says that cows are reptiles, or that Bacon wrote Shakespeare, he can always quote the contempt of his contemporaries as in some mysterious way proving the complete conversion of posterity. The objections to this theory scarcely need any elaborate indication. The final objection to it is that it amounts to this: say anything, however idiotic, and you are in advance of your age. This kind of stuff must be stopped. The sort of democrat who appeals to the babe unborn must be classed with the sort of aristocrat who appeals to his deceased great-grandfather. Both should be sharply reminded that they are appealing to individuals whom they well know to be at a disadvantage in the matter of prompt and witty reply. Now although Bernard Shaw has survived this simple confusion, he has in his time greatly contributed to it. If there is, for instance, one thing that is really rare in Shaw it is hesitation. He makes up his mind quicker than a calculating boy or a county magistrate. Yet on this subject of the next change in ethics he has felt hesitation, and being a strictly honest man has expressed it.

"I know no harder practical question than how much selfishness one ought to stand from a gifted person for the sake of his gifts or on the chance of his being right in the long run. The Superman will certainly come like a thief in the night, and be shot at accordingly; but we cannot leave our property wholly undefended on that account. On the other hand, we cannot ask the Superman simply to add a higher set of virtues to current respectable morals; for he is undoubtedly going to empty a good deal of respectable morality out like so much dirty water, and replace it by new and strange customs, shedding old obligations and accepting new and heavier ones. Every step of his progress must horrify conventional people; and if it were possible for even the most superior man to march ahead all the time, every pioneer of the march towards the Superman would be crucified."

When the most emphatic man alive, a man unmatched in violent precision of statement, speaks with such avowed vagueness and doubt as this, it is no wonder if all his more weak-minded followers are in a mere whirlpool of uncritical and unmeaning innovation. If the superior person will be apparently criminal, the most probable result is simply that the criminal person will think himself superior. A very slight knowledge of human nature is required in the matter. If the Superman may possibly be a thief, you may bet your boots that the next thief will be a Superman. But indeed the Supermen (of whom I have met many) have generally been more weak in the head than in the moral conduct; they have simply offered the first fancy which occupied their minds as the new morality. I fear that Shaw had a way of encouraging these follies. It is obvious from the passage I have quoted that he has no way of restraining them.

The truth is that all feeble spirits naturally live in the future, because it is featureless; it is a soft job; you can make it what you like. The next age is blank, and I can paint it freely with my favourite colour. It requires real courage to face the past, because the past is full of facts which cannot be got over; of men certainly wiser than we and of things done which we could not do. I know I cannot write a poem as good as *Lycidas*. But it is always easy to say that the particular sort of poetry I can write will be the poetry of the future.

This I call the second evil influence of Shaw: that he has encouraged many to throw themselves for justification upon the shapeless and the unknown. In this, though courageous himself, he has encouraged cowards, and though sincere himself, has helped a mean escape. The third evil in his influence can, I think, be much more shortly dealt with. He has to a very slight extent, but still perceptibly, encouraged a kind of charlatanism of utterance among those who possess his Irish impudence without his Irish virtue. For instance, his amusing trick of self-praise is perfectly hearty and humorous in him; nay, it is even humble; for to confess vanity is itself humble. All that is the matter with the proud is that they will not admit that they are vain. Therefore when Shaw says that he alone is able to write such and such admirable work, or that he has just utterly wiped out some celebrated opponent, I for one never feel anything offensive in the tone, but, indeed, only the unmistakable intonation of a friend’s voice. But I have noticed among younger, harder, and much shallower men a certain disposition to ape this insolent ease and certitude, and that without any fundamental frankness or mirth. So far the influence is bad. Egoism can be learnt as a lesson like any other “ism.” It is not so easy to learn an Irish accent or a good temper. In its lower forms the thing becomes a most unmilitary trick of announcing the victory before one has gained it.

When one has said those three things, one has said, I think, all that can be said by way of blaming Bernard Shaw. It is significant that he was never blamed for any of these things by the Censor. Such censures as the attitude of that official involves may be dismissed with a very light sort of disdain. To represent Shaw as profane or provocatively indecent is not a matter for discussion at all; it is a disgusting criminal libel upon a particularly respectable gentleman of the middle classes, of refined tastes and somewhat Puritanical views. But while the negative defence of Shaw is easy, the just praise of him is almost as complex as it is necessary; and I shall devote the last few pages of this book to a triad corresponding to the last one — to the three important elements in which the work of Shaw has been good as well as great.

In the first place, and quite apart from all particular theories, the world owes thanks to Bernard Shaw for having combined being intelligent with being intelligible. He has popularised philosophy, or rather he has re-popularised it, for philosophy is always popular, except in peculiarly corrupt and oligarchic ages like our own. We have passed the age of the demagogue, the man who has little to say and says it loud. We have come to the age of the mystagogue or don, the man who has nothing to say, but says it softly and impressively in an indistinct whisper. After all, short words must mean something, even if they mean filth or lies; but long words may sometimes mean literally nothing, especially if they are used (as they mostly are in modern books and magazine articles) to balance and modify each other. A plain figure 4, scrawled in chalk anywhere, must always mean something; it must always mean 2 + 2. But the most enormous and mysterious algebraic equation, full of letters, brackets, and fractions, may all cancel out at last and be equal to nothing. When a demagogue says to a mob, "There is the Bank of England, why shouldn't you have some of that money?" he says something which is at least as honest and intelligible as the figure 4. When a writer in the *Times* remarks, "We must raise the economic efficiency of the masses without diverting anything from those classes which represent the national prosperity and refinement," then his equation cancels out; in a literal and logical sense his remark amounts to nothing.

There are two kinds of charlatans or people called quacks to-day. The power of the first is that he advertises — and cures. The power of the second is that though he is not learned enough to cure he is much too learned to advertise. The former give away their dignity with a pound of tea; the latter are paid a pound of tea merely for being dignified. I think them the worse quacks of the two. Shaw is certainly of the other sort. Dickens, another man who was great enough to be a demagogue (and greater than Shaw because more heartily a demagogue), puts for ever the true difference between the demagogue and the mystagogue in *Dr. Marigold*: "Except that we're cheap-jacks and they're dear-jacks, I don't see any difference between us." Bernard Shaw is a great cheap-jack, with plenty of patter and I dare say plenty of nonsense, but with this also (which is not wholly unimportant), with goods to sell. People accuse such a man of self-advertisement. But at least the cheap-jack does advertise his wares, whereas the don or dear-jack advertises nothing except himself. His very silence, nay his very sterility, are supposed to be marks of the richness of his erudition. He is too learned to teach, and sometimes too wise even to talk. St. Thomas Aquinas said: "In auctore auctoritas." But there is more than one man at Oxford or Cambridge who is considered an authority because he has never been an author.

Against all this mystification both of silence and verbosity Shaw has been a splendid and smashing protest. He has stood up for the fact that philosophy is not the concern of those who pass through Divinity and Greats, but of those who pass through birth and death. Nearly all the most awful and abstruse statements can be put in words of one syllable, from "A child is born" to "A soul is damned." If the ordinary man may not discuss existence, why should he be asked to conduct it? About concrete matters indeed one naturally appeals to an oligarchy or select class. For information about Lapland I go to an aristocracy of Laplanders; for the ways of rabbits to an aristocracy of naturalists or, preferably, an aristocracy of poachers. But only mankind itself can bear witness to the abstract first principles of mankind, and in matters of theory I would always consult the mob. Only the mass of men, for instance, have authority to say whether life is good. Whether life is good is an especially mystical and delicate question, and, like all such questions, is asked in words of one syllable. It is also answered in words of one syllable, and Bernard Shaw (as also mankind) answers "yes."

This plain, pugnacious style of Shaw has greatly clarified all controversies. He has slain the polysyllable, that huge and slimy centipede which has sprawled over all the valleys of England like the "loathly worm" who was slain by the ancient knight. He does not think that difficult questions will be made simpler by using difficult words about them. He has achieved the admirable work, never to be mentioned without gratitude, of discussing Evolution without mentioning it. The good work is of course more evident in the case of philosophy than any other region; because the case of philosophy was a crying one. It was really preposterous that the things most carefully reserved for the study of two or three men should actually be the things common to all men. It was absurd that certain men should be experts on the special subject of everything. But he stood for much the same spirit and style in other matters; in economics, for example. There never has been a better popular economist; one more lucid, entertaining, consistent, and essentially exact. The very comicality of his examples makes them and their argument stick in the mind; as in the case I remember in which he said that the big shops had now to please everybody, and were not entirely dependent on the lady who sails in "to order four governesses and five grand pianos." He is always preaching collectivism; yet he does not very often name it. He does not talk about collectivism, but about cash; of which the populace feel a much more definite need. He talks about cheese, boots, perambulators, and how people are really to live. For him economics really means housekeeping, as it does in Greek. His difference from the orthodox economists, like most of his differences, is very different from the attacks made by the main body of Socialists. The old Manchester economists are generally attacked for being too gross and material. Shaw really attacks them for not being gross or material enough. He thinks that they hide themselves behind long words, remote hypotheses or unreal generalisations. When the orthodox economist begins with his correct and primary formula, "Suppose there is a Man on an Island—" Shaw is apt to interrupt him sharply, saying, "There is a Man in the Street."

The second phase of the man's really fruitful efficacy is in a sense the converse of this. He has improved philosophic discussions by making them more popular. But he has also improved popular amusements by making them more philosophic. And by more philosophic I do not mean duller, but funnier; that is more varied. All real fun is in cosmic contrasts, which involve a view of the cosmos. But I know that this second strength in Shaw is really difficult to state and must be approached by explanations and even by eliminations. Let me say at once that I think nothing of Shaw or anybody else merely for playing the daring sceptic. I do not think he has done any good or even achieved any effect simply by asking startling questions. It is possible that there have been ages so sluggish or automatic that anything that woke them up at all was a good thing. It is sufficient to be certain that ours is not such an age. We do not need waking up; rather we suffer from insomnia, with all its results of fear and exaggeration and frightful waking dreams. The modern mind is not a donkey which wants kicking to make it go on. The modern mind is more like a motor-car on a lonely road which two amateur motorists have been just clever enough to take to pieces, but are not quite clever enough to put together again. Under these circumstances kicking the car has never been found by the best experts to be effective. No one, therefore, does any good to our age merely by asking questions — unless he can answer the questions. Asking questions is already the fashionable and aristocratic sport which has brought most of us into the bankruptcy court. The note of our age is a note of interrogation. And the final point is so plain; no sceptical philosopher can ask any questions that may not equally be asked by a tired child on a hot afternoon. "Am I a boy? — Why am I a boy? — Why aren't I a chair? — What is a chair?" A child will sometimes ask questions of this sort for two hours. And the philosophers of Protestant Europe have asked them for two hundred years.

If that were all that I meant by Shaw making men more philosophic, I should put it not among his good influences but his bad. He did do that to some extent; and so far he is bad. But there is a much bigger and better sense in which he has been a philosopher. He has brought back into English drama all the streams of fact or tendency which are commonly called undramatic. They were there in Shakespeare's time; but they have scarcely been there since until Shaw. I mean that Shakespeare, being interested in everything, put everything into a play. If he had lately been thinking about the irony and even contradiction confronting us in self-preservation and suicide, he put it all into *Hamlet*. If he was annoyed by some passing boom in theatrical babies he put that into *Hamlet* too. He would put anything into *Hamlet* which he really thought was true, from his favourite nursery ballads to his personal (and perhaps unfashionable) conviction of the Catholic purgatory. There is no fact that strikes one, I think, about Shakespeare, except the fact of how dramatic he could be, so much as the fact of how undramatic he could be.

In this great sense Shaw has brought philosophy back into drama — philosophy in the sense of a certain freedom of the mind. This is not a freedom to think what one likes (which is absurd, for one can only think what one thinks); it is a freedom to think about what one likes, which is quite a different thing and the spring of all thought. Shakespeare (in a weak moment, I think) said that all the world is a stage. But Shakespeare acted on the much finer principle that a stage is all the world. So there are in all Bernard Shaw's plays patches of what people would call essentially undramatic stuff, which the dramatist puts in because he is honest and would rather prove his case than succeed with his play. Shaw has brought back into English drama that Shakespearian universality which, if you like, you can call Shakespearian irrelevance. Perhaps a better definition than either is a habit of thinking the truth worth telling even when you meet it by accident. In Shaw's plays one meets an incredible number of truths by accident.

To be up to date is a paltry ambition except in an almanac, and Shaw has sometimes talked this almanac philosophy. Nevertheless there is a real sense in which the phrase may be wisely used, and that is in cases where some stereotyped version of what is happening hides what is really happening from our eyes. Thus, for instance, newspapers are never up to date. The men who write leading articles are always behind the times, because they are in a hurry. They are forced to fall back on their old-fashioned view of things; they have no time to fashion a new one. Everything that is done in a hurry is certain to be antiquated; that is why modern industrial civilisation bears so curious a resemblance to barbarism. Thus when newspapers say that the *Times* is a solemn old Tory paper, they are out of date; their talk is behind the talk in Fleet Street. Thus when newspapers say that Christian dogmas are crumbling, they are out of date; their talk is behind the talk in public-houses. Now in this sense Shaw has kept in a really stirring sense up to date. He has introduced into the theatre the things that no one else had introduced into a theatre — the things in the street outside. The theatre is a sort of thing which proudly sends a hansom-cab across the stage as Realism, while everybody outside is whistling for motor-cabs.

Consider in this respect how many and fine have been Shaw's intrusions into the theatre with the things that were really going on. Daily papers and daily matinees were still gravely explaining how much modern war depended on gunpowder. *Arms and the Man* explained how much modern war depends on chocolate. Every play and paper described the Vicar who was a mild Conservative. *Candida* caught hold of the modern Vicar who is an advanced Socialist. Numberless magazine articles and society comedies describe the emancipated woman as new and wild. Only *You Never Can Tell* was young enough to see that the emancipated woman is already old and respectable. Every comic paper has caricatured the uneducated upstart. Only the author of *Man and Superman* knew enough about the modern world to caricature the educated upstart — the man Straker who can quote Beaumarchais, though he cannot pronounce him. This is the second real and great work of Shaw — the letting in of the world on to the stage, as the rivers were let in upon the Augean Stable. He has let a little of the Haymarket into the Haymarket Theatre. He has permitted some whispers of the Strand to enter the Strand Theatre. A variety of solutions in philosophy is as silly as it is in arithmetic, but one may be justly proud of a variety of materials for a solution. After Shaw, one may say, there is nothing that cannot be introduced into a play if one can make it decent, amusing, and relevant. The state of a man's health, the religion of his childhood, his ear for music, or his ignorance of cookery can all be made vivid if they have anything to do with the subject. A soldier may mention the commissariat as well as the cavalry; and, better still, a priest may mention theology as well as religion. That is being a philosopher; that is bringing the universe on the stage.

Lastly, he has obliterated the mere cynic. He has been so much more cynical than anyone else for the public good that no one has dared since to be really cynical for anything smaller. The Chinese crackers of the frivolous cynics fail to excite us after the dynamite of the serious and aspiring cynic. Bernard Shaw and I (who are growing grey together) can remember an epoch which many of his followers do not know: an epoch of real pessimism. The years from 1885 to 1898 were like the hours of afternoon in a rich house with large rooms; the hours before tea-time. They believed in nothing except good manners; and the essence of good manners is to conceal a yawn. A yawn may be defined as a silent yell. The power which the young pessimist of that time showed in this direction would have astonished anyone but him. He yawned so wide as to swallow the world. He swallowed the world like an unpleasant pill before retiring to an eternal rest. Now the last and best glory of Shaw is that in the circles where this creature was found, he is not. He has not been killed (I don't know exactly why), but he has actually turned into a Shaw idealist. This is no exaggeration. I meet men who, when I knew them in 1898, were just a little too lazy to destroy the universe. They are now conscious of not being quite worthy to abolish some prison regulations. This destruction and conversion seem to me the mark of something actually great. It is always great to destroy a type without destroying a man. The followers of Shaw are optimists; some of them are so simple as even to use the word. They are sometimes rather pallid optimists, frequently very worried optimists, occasionally, to tell the truth, rather cross optimists: but they not pessimists; they can exult though they cannot laugh. He has at least withered up among them the mere pose of impossibility. Like every great teacher, he has cursed the barren fig-tree. For nothing except that impossibility is really impossible.

I know it is all very strange. From the height of eight hundred years ago, or of eight hundred years hence, our age must look incredibly odd. We call the twelfth century ascetic. We call our own time hedonist and full of praise and pleasure. But in the ascetic age the love of life was evident and enormous, so that it had to be restrained. In an hedonist age pleasure has always sunk low, so that it has to be encouraged. How high the sea of human happiness rose in the Middle Ages, we now only know by the colossal walls that they built to keep it in bounds. How low human happiness sank in the twentieth century our children will only know by these extraordinary modern books, which tell people that it is a duty to be cheerful and that life is not so bad after all. Humanity never produces optimists till it has ceased to produce happy men. It is strange to be obliged to impose a holiday like a fast, and to drive men to a banquet with spears. But this shall be written of our time: that when the spirit who denies besieged the last citadel, blaspheming life itself, there were some, there was one especially, whose voice was heard and whose spear was never broken.

The Later Phases

SOMEBODY suggested that I should write a series with some such title as "Second Thoughts"; being a reconsideration of old controversies. Whether or no second thoughts are best, I fear they are not always brightest. It does not normally occur to us that the word "revision" contains the blazing word "vision." And it may be that a vision does not come twice, even if it be only the first impression of a poor little literary gent upon the (sometimes) depressing topic of the literature of his time. But if second thoughts are not always the brightest, it may be maintained that they are generally the broadest. And in making these notes on the later phases of Mr. Bernard Shaw, I know the necessity of breadth; because I have argued with him nearly all my life; and the campaign has always depended on the tactic of outflanking or encirclement, which means being broader than your enemy.

The first joy of conflict is to congratulate Mr. Bernard Shaw on the fact that he is still emphatically not only alive, but kicking. In some cases, as in that of Capitalism, I think he is kicking what thoroughly deserves to be kicked. In other cases, as in that of Catholicism, I think he is kicking against the pricks; like another very controversial person on the road to Damascus. But at least it is delightful, after this stretch of years, to offer oneself to be kicked by one still capable of that all too neglected gesture.

In the same way, I have been asked to add a postscript to my long, argumentative and even abusive book about my friend Mr. Bernard Shaw. I recoiled from it at first with horror; because it seemed to involve two especially terrible conditions. The first was that I should read all Mr. Bernard Shaw's later works. The second, and far more ghastly duty, was that I should read one of my own earlier works. I am not going to pretend that I have discharged either of these duties in detail. A liar must have a good memory, to remember what he has said; but a bigot, a fanatic, a man fixed in one dogmatic scheme of faith (like Bernard Shaw and myself) need not bother to remember what he has written. He knows that it was all true; because he has not altered his fundamental test of truth. Thus it will be found that politicians anxiously re-read their old speeches; but priests are buoyantly free from the burden of reading their old sermons. Mr. Shaw and I agree that agreement is more practical than appreciation. In other words, we agree that it is worth while to disagree. This is not what is meant by agreeing to differ; because it is agreeing to dispute.

Heaven knows how long ago it is that I wrote this rather crude and juvenile piece of controversy; which Mr. Bernard Shaw, in a typically handsome manner, described by saying, “This book is, as everyone expected it to be, the best critical study I have yet produced.” And the first fact to be hailed with a sort of abstract joy, by all who are interested in Life even if they do not trouble to call it a Life-Force, is the joyful energy and enthusiasm with which Bernard Shaw has taken that long stretch of time in his giant stride. He still achieves the noblest natural triumph of man; which is to find exuberance merely in existence. This is a victory which more than balances all that can be criticised on the merely theoretical side. Bernard Shaw is an old man who is still young; in an age when the young men are most of them very old. There is a real score for his negative eccentricities, when we can still see him making merry over cold water and cabbages, while men who might be his grandsons or great-grandsons are making themselves miserable over cocktails and champagne. In whatever sense we call him a sceptic, nobody could ever call him a pessimist; and he has lived to see a race of youths who are too pessimistic even to call themselves pessimists. That first fact alone must be affirmed to his great glory; whatever may be meant by being a Pacifist in the Great War, he has never been a Defeatist in the Holy War, which has been called the Battle of Life. Hope, hearty conviction, the fighting spirit — these are things not so abounding among the youth of our time, that we can fail to salute them in the chief literary veteran of the age.

The second great quality he always possessed, and has never lost, is this: and it is a paradox. He has largely defended what are called Modern Ideas; and yet he is not dull. The Modern Ideas in question are now nearly two hundred years old, when they are not merely as old as the world; and as they are expressed by everybody else, their dullness is devastating. Shaw has seldom allowed them to be dull; because he has cultivated a certain art or manœuvre, which may be called the Surprise Attack. He does besiege the old castle, whether of conventions or convictions, but he never scales it on the same side as its other enemies. An excellent example of this was the play of *St. Joan*. What a wilderness of wearisome plays might have littered the world, on the ordinary anti-clerical theme as developed by the ordinary anti-clerical denouncing the clerics who condemn the popular and patriotic heroine. And what a wind of refreshment, scattering all such waste paper, to find one anti-clerical who is clever enough to base his case on defending the clerics, instead of denouncing the clerics. Then he can draw the deduction that clericalism at its best was bound to condemn a heroine; because a heroine was bound to be a heretic. The new argument is quite as fallacious as the old argument; but how bracing a relief to find such a prodigy as a Modernist who really has a new argument! For outside this charming perversity of G. B. S., the Modernists have made the modern world a desert of dusty monotony and dull repetition. Shaw still talks a great deal of nonsense, and some of it I fear serious nonsense; but always something that awakens us with bravado and does not merely send us to sleep with familiarity. Never will you hear that amiable Irish voice saying, with a hundred voices on the platform or over the wireless, “The modern mind has surely outgrown creeds and dogmas as it has outgrown cannibalism and the tyranny of the Stuarts; and institutions not suited to our modern conditions. . . .” You will never hear it intoning those ancient and almost pathetic words, “When we remember that our ancestors burned witches, that they tolerated negro slavery, until the genius of John Brown and Abraham Lincoln. . . .” If Bernard Shaw did say anything about the Stuarts or the witches or the negroes, at least it would not be something that ten million men had said before.

As I have lightly and even irresponsibly hinted, I have not the slightest intention of following my hero’s later career step by step, in the manner of a good and faithful biographer. I am much too interested in what he really means to bother myself about everything that he merely says. Even in my old book the biographical and chronological sequence is sufficiently vague; and I shall not in this appendix deal in detail with each of the works which appeared after the date when my book was published. Shaw has done a vast amount of fine work, and had a vast amount of fun, since that date; but none of it seems to me to negative my general view of him, except for those who would disagree with me on the earlier work as much as on the later. In a play like *Getting Married* he demonstrated that drama can be dramatic, by dialogue rather than action. But that is only another way of saying that public debates are popular. And as mobs of men will go to hear party leaders discussing unreal differences on a platform it is not so strange that they will go to hear a man of genius expressing real differences on the old popular stage. He proved his talent in the trick I have mentioned, that of the surprise attack, by making an attack on marriage come, not from a mere free lover, but from a celibate priest. But he also proved his ignorance of the creed held by the celibate priests. *Fanny's First Play* had a certain freshness expressed in its title; but it was not Shaw's first play nor his last; nor does it mark any very fundamental transition or turning point in his work. The two plays which do represent something real in this way are *St. Joan* and *The Apple-Cart*.

The Apple-Cart is important as showing how many million miles he is still ahead of the Progressives; how much more Modern he is than the Modernists. He has realised that the really Modern thing is Monarchy. It does not in the least follow that because it is the modern thing, it is the right thing. I never accepted Democracy merely because it was Modern; and I shall not accept Monarchy for any such unreasonable reason. It may not be very important to be up-to-date; but at least Bernard Shaw in his old age is up-to-date. He understands the political change and challenge of our time. He horrified all the other Socialists by expressing approval of the Fascists. Indeed his last political phase seems to be largely a general loathing of anarchy; and a disposition to accept whatever can reduce it to rational order, whether it be Fascism or Bolshevism. But in *The Apple-Cart* he brings out many truths that his merely progressive critics were too conventional to see. They missed the fact that the play is a tragedy rather than a comedy The King scores by playing the one piece he really has; which is the King. He hits popular government in its one really weak spot; that it is not popular. But it is a shallow view to suppose that he ends with the vulgarity of victory. He ends fighting against the stars and fates and forces of the modern world like any of the tragic heroes; *sed victa Catoni*. But Cato fought against Cæsar and this King fought against some thing queer and very different. Here again, Shaw is admirable in seizing a real modern fact. Critics supposed that the Prime Minister was meant merely for a clumsy buffoon with a bad temper. They did not realise that his bad temper was good policy. The King represented the old dignified diplomacy, which was unruffled. The Prime Minister represented the much more secret diplomacy which is ruffled whenever it finds it convenient to be ruffled. That is the point of modern politics; that we are deceived by frankness, and swindled in a heart-to-heart talk. Emotions disguise motives.

I have already mentioned *St. Joan*, which any atheist might have made a eulogy on the Saint, but only Shaw would have made a defence of the

Inquisition. As to his pretence of finding a Protestant in Joan of Arc, I think it sufficient answer to ask him why he did not write about Joanna Southcott. The fact is that we do distinguish between Joan and Joanna; not by whether they used private judgment, but by whether they are judged by history and humanity to have been rightly related to a Last Judgment. If there is nothing external that can judge Joan or Joanna, why then Joanna is just as likely to be right as Joan. If our brightest Bolshie remembers Joan after five hundred years, and forgets Joanna after a hundred years, it is because there is something beyond private judgment; which is public judgment. It is the judgment of the world, if it is not the judgment of the Church. But, as a fact, in the case of St. Joan, the judgment of the Church put itself right centuries before the judgment of the world.

But I do not profess, as I have said, to be doing justice to these particular dramatic triumphs; though the two last mentioned certainly were dramatic triumphs. I am most concerned about works I have not yet mentioned; because I am interested in basic things like theology. And in practice every man is a theologian, even when he is not a theist. The great later work of Shaw is in *Back to Methuselah*; in which he says men must live three hundred years. And I say that if he did live three hundred years he would be a Catholic.

I see no reason to retract, or even revise, what may be called the basic thesis of this old piece of pre-war journalism; which was that whatever else Mr. Bernard Shaw is, he is an orphan. There is something in the image of that motherless child, his pale face turned pathetically to the moon amid the slow snow-flakes of a Victorian melodrama, which I know would appeal to him in a soothing manner. By this I do not mean to reflect at all on his actual origin in the Dublin middle class; which was highly respectable ; far, far too respectable. That is part of the point; that he was exiled from Ireland in the very act of being born in Ireland. It was precisely because he was born in the Ascendancy Party in Ireland that he was bound to join the Revolutionary Party in England. Where he was born, he was born to be a Unionist; he had to seek a strange land, a very strange land; in which he could be a Revolutionist without being a Nationalist. About the same time, I suppose, another middle-class Dublin man was born, and accepted his Imperial destiny and petered out under the name of “Northcliffe.” Bernard Shaw at least escaped the Calvinist predestination which has ended mostly in a sort of suburban Toryism. He escaped to England, the land of sportsmen, where even revolution has always been a sport. But the result was that he was not really *born* in either of the two countries. And I should now say more strongly, what I said much more stumblingly, in this old book of mine. He is so alive that we might fancy he would never die. But he still suffers, even down to his splendid old age, from the annoying omission of having never been born.

Never being born might be great fun, if we could really live in those bloodless extravagances, which Bernard Shaw meant to make attractive in *Back to Methuselah*, and a younger and more advanced writer obviously meant to make repulsive in *Brave New World*. But as things are in any known state, there is a fallacy in the universal notion of not being born any where. The lost child finds his limitations: only they are worse limitations. The child may forget the family; but the orphan remembers the orphanage. He is not free because he is lost; he is not a cherub surveying the world from the sky. He is either born in a house or in a workhouse; he is either born in a home or in a Home. So the Poor Exile of Erin (under which sentiment figure Mr. Shaw will instantly recognise himself) did in fact begin to accumulate first impressions; and many of them do in fact remain to the last. The trouble is that they were not old impressions of Ireland, but new impressions of England; or rather of the extraordinary gang of new international idealists, cranks and crooks from every country, who always found their favourite club in England. They also were uprooted people: in other words, the Communist Club was very like an orphanage. That, I still think, is the starting-point of Bernard Shaw; and the explanation of most things about him. He did not start from home, but from homelessness. By which I do not mean the homelessness of the poor, for the poor always remember the home they never had. If Mr. Shaw, instead of being the son of solid Protestant parents in the respectable quarter of Dublin, had been the son of peasants evicted from a cottage in Connaught, and sent tramping aimlessly across the whole world, he would have been the greatest of all champions of Domesticity and the Family.

Thus we can only sum up by a paradox or double statement. We may repeat that Bernard Shaw had no traditions; and yet it is traditions that have entangled him and entangle him still. Only they are not the traditions of merely old things. They are the traditions of those horrible old things, that were quite recently new. The lessons normally to be learnt at his mother’s knee he learnt at the knee of the Lady Anarchist, whom I have mentioned in the previous text. I mean seriously that the first things that counted with Bernard Shaw were negative and anarchic things; where for most men the first things at least are positive. We may lose those positive beliefs or affections, especially for a time, but we have had them and I do not believe that George Bernard Shaw ever had them. And the proof of it is that, being one of the most genial and generous men in the world, he still cannot understand them. That was the whole substance of my criticism of Shaw, even in this very crude early criticism; the things which Shaw did not, or apparently could not, understand.

Any Latin, or member of the living and permanent culture of Europe, would sum up all I say in one word; that Shaw has never had Piety. No one, I hope, will entertain the extraordinary idea that Piety means being pious; in the popular sense of religious. Piety is still practised by thousands of French and Italian atheists, and has been praised by great writers like Maurice Barres or even Clemenceau, who had no creed in particular or no creed at all. They had nothing except fathers and mothers. The cult of the land, the cult of the dead, the cult of that most living memory by which the dead are alive, the permanence of all that has made us, that is what the Latins meant by Pietas ; and that is what I meant by the thing from which an Irish Protestant of genius was so tragically cut off. Shaw had really a great deal of Religion in the sense of spirituality: he has Religion but no Piety.

He started with the Prejudices of Progress, so much more cramping than the prejudices of memory, because memory is mixed of a thousand things. The past is infinitely varied; and if we would not draw from one old inspiration, we can draw from another. But the Future is always atrociously simple. We can only *predict* along lines of mathematical fate; and there is there no liberty except in ignorance. Now, with all the sympathy I feel, I can never see Shaw except as trailing behind him the clanking fetters of certain traditions; which are everything except old. For instance, he cannot believe that a man can believe in a miracle. Why not? There has never been a philosophical answer to that question which really refers to any scheme of contemporary philosophy; and still less of contemporary science. If he really still believes in the Monism of the late Professor Haeckel, I would refer him to his friend Professor Einstein. The whole business of cause and effect, personality and impersonality, even reason and unreason, is all hung up just now, so far as scientific speculation goes, and very much in the old Scriptural sense in which He has hanged the world upon nothing.

We are solemnly reminded still that there are laws of nature, when there are no longer laws even of logic. A philosopher would believe in miracles long before be believed in mathematical contradictions. Only in Mr. Shaw’s youth there were no mathematical contradictions; but there were miracles to be contradicted. He therefore, like a good conservative, goes on contradicting them. The old notion that miracles are impossible was simply a part of the old notion that Materialism was inevitable; though it is no longer inevitable, and hardly even possible. But this sort of prejudice is not imposed on a man by any man older than himself. It is still imposed on him by a man younger than himself, by himself when he was young.

I should still justify, therefore, what I said about his being actually retarded by his revolutionary origins; and especially by having no other real origins. He still stands for all that an advanced young man was supposed to state in the ‘eighties and ‘nineties. And in these matters the advanced young man has not advanced. The other form of Piety, which we call Patriotism, still honestly bewilders him, though he has now seen about two-thirds of Europe reawaken, with much too wild an energy, to reassert the reality of that idea. In his youth, the world was supposed to have left behind all such drums and trumpets; the rising generation was supposed to have survived war like slavery (and equally untruly); yet it has gone beyond even drums and trumpets in that great scientific state which had so large a Socialist Party and has made so careful a study of Bernard Shaw. For all his Futurist generation, the test was the Future; and it is now the Present. In those old days he began by proclaiming Ibsen, and quoting the progressive proverb about the new generation knocking at the door. He hardly expected it to knock entirely with police-clubs and Prussian sabres.

The moral of all this is, I repeat, that he had a less direct vision of the Future for having no direct tradition of the Past. The lesson of Piety is the very simple one; that religion and romance and patriotism are not dead, or even dying; that they are not nonsense, and that nothing is nonsense except the notion that they will die. So far I should completely support the case I made in this book against Mr. Shaw’s depreciation of chivalry or the romantic tradition. There is a case for saying that romance will reappear in a damaging or dangerous form; there is no case at all for saying it will disappear. I mean that there is no case on the cold facts; which prove a perpetual rebirth of the hot fancies. Anybody of course is free to say that it ought to disappear; as I am free to say that the opposite heresy, the dull monomania of Marxism ought to disappear. I only say, as a fact, that the facts which do appear show the world going quite as wild in the romantic as in the realistic direction. This applies, curiously enough, even to many moral and domestic ideas Mr. Shaw would have called romantic. The Roman Matron of Mussolini, and even the German Woman (who does not smoke), is a daughter or granddaughter of Candida or Gloria. She is the real Rising Generation now knocking on the door — and demanding to be let into the Doll’s House.

I would never ask him to confess it, but I think it is true that he and his associates all assumed from the start that the world was sweeping forward on some great evolutionary or revolutionary curve to certain great simplifications, leaving behind already all that could really interrupt such a simplification; moving towards The International; Disarmament; Free Love; and in his case, as in many others, Prohibition and Vegetarianism. It is amusing by the way, that even in tracing this curve of Progress, they cut clean across the curve already made by the last and no less innocent innovators and friends of Progress. The age of Herbert Spencer demanded Free Trade and was horrified at Free Love; the age of Bernard Shaw demanded Free Love and vehemently vetoed Free Trade. Nor have I ever understood why laxity in sex should so often have been coupled with severity in diet. I do not see why a man should be restricted in the matter of his own liquor, and unrestricted in his loves which affected other people’s lives. But the point is that these notions or nostrums, however incongruous, were chained together; and Bernard Shaw, merely as a young Revolutionist, was chained to them; and he is still dragging the whole length of the chain. All these things were supposed to go together, or rather to come together, and they were to come together fairly soon.

In this sweeping social anticipation, there have been two great setbacks; which measure the history of Shaw since the period of which I wrote. One was the Great War, about which he uttered a great many of those splendid half-truths which are his speciality but largely gave a general impression of something that was simply not true. For instance, he said that British and German officers and aristocrats were all of the same sort. He ignored a fact, which all Europe and most of Germany had felt from the first; that the Junker is not merely an aristocrat; and not merely a soldier. He is a Prussian and a peculiar product of one place and time. If he meant that a British officer was as bad as a Prussian Officer, he had a right to his opinion and might in many cases be right. If he meant that a British officer was like a Prussian officer he was quite wrong. There was the same falsifying half-truth in his pose as the practical man, calling a scrap of paper a scrap of paper. In fact, to scrap every scrap of paper, in the way of contract or treaty, would be about the most unpractical action in the world.

But it was from the first the boast of Shaw to be an Opportunist; it was also his boast to be always inopportune. It was his sincere ambition to show that he was the only sensible man in the world; and he has very nobly and heroically earned, through that ambition, the reputation of being out of his senses. It may be worth while to say a word here upon this point of Opportunism, because it was the philosophy with which he actually started, and I noted it in my book in connection with one of his earliest books. With characteristic shyness and modesty, he called it Ibsenism. He also wrote a similar book called *The Perfect Wagnerite*, but I am sure it really described The Perfect Shavian. But it is a much more interesting point that he began with Opportunism, even while he was moving faster and faster towards Socialism; and it never seems to have struck him that Opportunism is a very extreme form of Individualism. It was the whole point of his Ibsenism that Ibsen could solve any private problem without reference to public or general ideals. A man must do what is best in the particular case; in the private problem. If so, there seems no mortal reason why he should not apply private property to the private problem. He must not bother about conforming to any general ideal. If so, there seems no reason why he should bother about conforming to the Socialist ideal. The fact is that men like Mr. Shaw, by abandoning an internal ideal, were driven to cling to a mere external rule; in the very definite sense of a rule ruling the State. He cast out contemptuously in his youth the idea of an ideal, in the sense of a conscience working from within; and has nothing left except compulsion working from without. That is how he became a State Socialist. As I have remarked elsewhere, he started by saying there is no Golden Rule, and ends by asserting that there must be an Iron Rule.

Here, however, apart from this parenthesis, we follow only a very interesting political career. In the great matter of the War, Shaw was upon one point absolutely and admirably right. He was wrong, as I think, in lumping England along with Prussia, or pretending that the English popular indignation was all hypocrisy; but he was right in one calculation about the English character. He was right in supposing that the popular anger would pass. For the English are a moody and a fickle people; contrasted in that with the Irish, who carry constancy to the point of a mortal sin; the sin of mere hatred. In a few years, all the tales told against the Germans had gone to join the tales told against the Russians in the Crimean War or the French in the Napoleonic War. A strong Pacifist reaction set in; and Shaw had all the benefit of the reaction. Shaw and Wells, in a sense, both treated the thing as The War That Would End War; but Wells because it was right and Shaw because it was wrong. That (I may remark in passing) happens to be an excellent proof of what I say about Shaw being without roots or origin. Wells in many ways is more Pacifist than Shaw; but Wells is English. He is not the son of a cricketer for nothing, nor a man without subconscious loyalties, such as are upheaved by an earthquake like 1914. Therefore he was a practical patriot even in being a theoretical pacifist; and Mr. Britling did make some attempts to see it through. Mr. Shaw was quite content with believing that he could see through it.

Anyhow, nearly everybody was a Pacifist soon after the War. We must forgive our enemies. We must forgive practically everybody except our friends — and especially our Allies. After all, it was just as easy to impute militarism to Frenchmen as to Germans, or to Eskimos for that matter; and it could be quaintly pretended that all French soldiers are black. Well, it seems almost cruel to insist on the sequel. Just when the World was really moving towards the World State, just when everybody agreed that Bernard Shaw had been right in denouncing that war or any war, just when the notion that Prussia is not England and that Junkers were really dangerous was completely covered with the contempt that it deserved — there suddenly appeared the great Second Setback to the huge humanitarian reunion, which would show that everybody was like everybody else, only more so. I remembered, with a melancholy smile, how Mr. Bernard Shaw had endeavoured to prove to my brother that Prussia did not really exist in history; that Frederick the Great and Louis the Fourteenth were very much alike, especially Louis the Fourteenth. And then came the shock that has changed all the politics of the West. Steel Helmets and Storm Troops swept a whole vast civilisation like a storm. The world resounded with the wildest praises of War as War such as have not been heard since barbarous times, if then. And where did this happen? Did it break out in the negro population of Paris ? Was it a feature of the ruthless militarism of Belgium, or of Britain and America and the other Allies? No, the second setback occurred exactly where my brother and I and all our group had always said that such things would occur: in the Prussianised countries that are an alien thing in Christendom. It happened in Germany, in spite of the widespread influence of Mr. Bernard Shaw's plays.

In short, in that great difference between Mr. Shaw and myself, which grew out of the Great War and developed after my book was written, I never felt any real doubt that I was right and he was wrong; and I feel even less doubt about it now. But I hope I always recognised that he was conspicuously courageous and splendidly sincere; and I often wished that I were in the minority with him, as, during the Boer War, he might well have wished to be in the minority with me. For there is no doubt that he likes being in a minority; and prefers, if possible, to be in a minority of one. I make no apology for having put first this matter of political philosophy and foreign policy. It is the great historical event on which many things will turn; possibly including the merely artistic, ethical and spiritual things, which I will now consider.

There have always been many who said that Shaw could not be taken seriously; that he was too frivolous; but my own instinct has always been that he was too serious. There is nothing Rabelaisian about his laughter; and even in being immoral, he would never be indecent. There is a certain Puritanism even in what many would call his lapses, theoretical or practical, into the philosophy of Nudism. He has given practical provocative expression to a vague but very widespread modern notion that nothing ought to be hidden; whether in the form of being photographed like an artist's model, or of publishing the love letters of an actress with whom the whole world was in love. These are acts of bad taste; but not of inconsistency and certainly not merely of levity. They are all part of the theory; and a very thin and insufficient theory it is. The Nudist feels the obligation of Nudism rather more earnestly than the normal man feels the obligation of wearing clothes. That is why I never could feel that Shaw's lapses in this manner were immoralities invalidating respect or friendship. But it is only right to say that his intellectual consistency was a good deal puffed up by vanity. It must be admitted that much of Shaw might be rewritten as Show; in the sense of showing off. The character would not be complete without this almost childish weakness; but again, it has a touch of a childish innocence. There is nothing vicious about Shaw, even when he happens to hold vicious theories about virtue. But I will here pass from the question of his morality to the more important question of his religion.

Shaw’s general creed, or view of the cosmos, he calls Creative Evolution; and it is first necessary to note the genuine value and controversial courage of this distinction. Primarily, he means to distinguish Creative Evolution from Darwinism; which may be called blind or blundering evolution. In the technical terms of the cheap encyclopædia, Shaw upholds Lamarck against Darwin. It is better to say (freeing ourselves for a moment from the modern scientific passion for invoking authority, or the mere names of authorities) that Shaw conceives of will as being an almost divinely directing power in evolution; even if it be not only the divine will, but the human will, or the animal or even vegetable will: some effort resembling will in the worm or even the weed. In this sense he is fully justified in calling his evolution creative; in a sense it would be creative even without a creator. He is also fully justified in calling it a flat contradiction of the involuntary and undetermined evolution of Darwin. For what is now called Determinism means the absence of determination. It does quite coldly and seriously mean that no god, angel, animal or vegetable ever determined to do anything. Darwin’s theory of Natural Selection is confessedly a chapter of accidents. The trouble is that, like something in the novels of his fellow-Victorians, it is also a chapter of coincidences. The hero happening to meet the heroine for the first time at the one moment when he can rescue her from robbers — the mother happening to speak to the one ragged tramp who turns out to be her son and the long-lost heir — these are quite moderate and probable coincidences compared with the coincidence which Darwin demands at every step of his argument; that animals should grow organs which are useful at the moment, while at the same moment they grow organs that will be useful centuries hence; that one accidental oddity should give a creature a complete triumph, when all its other oddities or ordinary qualities are just as likely as not to whelm it in defeat — these are coincidences fitted, not so much for the Victorian novel as for the Victorian melodrama. These facts are being more and more widely recognised in Europe; and the official defence of Darwinism is wearing very thin even in England. It had its most conspicuous collapse in the astonishing incident of the encounter between Sir Arthur Keith and Mr. Belloc. If our public opinion were enlightened about the latest scientific news, that encounter would be recognised as a decisive battle. Mr. Wells had suggested that there was no scientific reaction against Darwin. Mr. Belloc gave him more than a score of scientific names and quotations to the contrary; including one from Vialleton. Mr. Wells seemed to be sufficiently soothed by finding that the printer had misspelt the name of Vialleton on one particular page. He was easily pleased. Sir Arthur Keith did make some attempt to deal with the matter in dispute; and his contribution was a flat contradiction; he said that Vialleton had never said anything of the sort. It was then discovered, to the wonder of the world, that Mr. Belloc, that obscure amateur, was talking about the last and most important book by Vialleton, of which Sir Arthur Keith, that supreme specialist, had never even heard. Our specialists are very fortunate. Reputations are ruined for ever by that sort of thing, when it happens on the Continent.

This business about Creative Evolution, noted in my book under the name and topic of *Man and Superman*, has since taken a much longer stride in the work called *Back to Methuselah*. It is a very long stride indeed, for the play lasts for two or three nights, as if to prepare its audience for the practice of living for two or three hundred years. Some have questioned whether so large a slice, however, should be claimed by Mr. Shaw out of our present practical life of three-score years and ten. The play contains some excellent dialogue, as do all the other plays; but it is very unequal, and, what is worse, ultimately unequal to its task. For, with numberless passages of wit, and some passages of eloquence, Bernard Shaw does fail to do either of the two things he is supposed to do. He fails to explain why this unaccountably and ever lastingly unfolding universe, this nothing changing into everything for no reason in particular — he does fail to show why this changing world should be, or should be supposed to be, always changing for the better. And he does most definitely fail to make us feel that it is changing for the better. He may like the notion of a world governed by ghostly Tertiaries, of bloodless Struldbugs who kill people for purely sociological considerations; but as a prospect of improvement for the normally complete human being, there is not much to choose between the Paradise of Shaw and the Inferno of Swift. There is nothing at all to choose between the Paradise of Shaw and the Inferno of Aldous Huxley. But Aldous Huxley is a younger man and therefore not so progressive and revolutionary. As Mr. Arnold Lunn has truly remarked, “Progress is dead; and *Brave New World* is its epitaph.”

But there is a deeper difficulty than any difference of taste about the chilly charms of an Earthly Paradise apparently situated at the North Pole. It is involved in this whole idea of endless evolutionary change, and it can perhaps best be considered under the particular myth or symbol of the Superman. An intimate disciple of Shaw said to me at the time of the earlier play, “Nietzsche is at least right in one sentence: Man is a thing that has to be surpassed.’ “ I replied, “ In one sense the remark is most Christian and orthodox; but unless you have a permanent standard of good, how do you know when he has been surpassed?” The disciple had apparently never thought of this. Or, to put it shortly, suppose six Supermen appear at once and stand in a row, all quite different and departing from the human type in quite contrary directions. Suppose one is a giant, braver but more brutal than men; another a Hindu saint, milder but more ascetic than men ; another a great poet of pleasure, more joyous but more selfish than men ; and so on through any number of quite contrary examples of superior beings beyond the easy imitation of man. How does the Evolutionist know which of these superior beings is superior to the other superior being? How can he possibly know unless he already has a fixed and unalterable ideal of a superior being; and if he has, then the whole metaphysic of mutability falls to pieces. There is something from the beginning which survives all changes to the end; and it is not enough that there is always a beyond, for beyond it there is no beyond.

Finally, there is a fundamental connection between these stark imaginations of strange births and radiant monsters taking the place of men, and those first fads which remain as mere provincial prejudices; even fads as farcical as that of teetotalism. They are connected by a cosmic conception, perhaps so large as to be almost unconscious, which separates men like Mr. Shaw from the older Christian tradition; against which they think they have rebelled, but of which they have never really thought, and indeed, never really heard. Perhaps the shortest way of stating it is this. The older Christian theology stands out against any such newer theory, and indeed against most other religions, in this definite and defiant feature: that it is the one and only philosophy that has refused to despair of Man.

Now Mr. Shaw’s evolutionism, and nearly everybody else’s, is absolutely rooted in a despair about Man. That is what is picturesquely symbolised by a rather vague and evasive enthusiasm about the Superman. What is really meant by the consolation of the beyond, and the expectation of a superior organism? It is simply that the actual animal called Man is to be treated almost as an extinct animal. He is a fossil walking the streets; he is himself a sort of appendix of the cosmos; a superfluous organ. He is one of those remarkable things in evolution which only survive to prove that they have no survival value. “Man is a thing that has to be surpassed.” Now it follows from this view of the cosmic disease as a sort of astral appendicitis, that the process of improvement must be that particular sort of simplification to which we give the name of Amputation. Things that have always been a part of the human being may be, for all anybody knows, obstacles to the formation of the new and name less and simplified superhuman being. Certainly a man is not a complete man without a nose; but, for anything anybody knows about supermen, they may be better without noses. Noses may be nests for germs; or the noise of the blowing of noses may disturb the delicate nervous organism of that Strong Man of the future, who is to be the master of us all, it will be remembered that Aunt Jobiska, in the rhymes of the learned Mr. Lear, took this view and reasoned in this fashion, saying that “everyone knows that a Pobble is better with out his toes.” Aunt Jobiska is a model evolutionist of this school of thought. It consists in first inventing an unknown figure, about which nobody can even imagine anything, such as a Pobble or a Superman, and then saying arbitrarily that he will not need something which everybody we know of needs very much indeed.

Thus, in the Shavian atmosphere, the philosopher is not trying to get rid of the troubles of men, he is trying to get rid of men because they are the troubles of the philosopher. It is due to Mr. Shaw’s unmatched directness and controversial courage, to say that he very early accepted this reversal of the normal order of means and ends. He most emphatically does not think that the Sabbath was made for Man. He most emphatically does think that Man was made for the Sabbath. And Man having now irrevocably broken the Sabbath, the Superman must create some other sort of Sabbath, even if it be to our eyes as wild as a Witch’s Sabbath. I mean that he did begin very early to say boldly that if the Communist hat would not fit the human head, we must cut off the head and carefully preserve the hat. He did and does hold that if men must really have beef and beer, then we must all set to work to breed a race of gigantic chameleons that can live on light and air. The growth of these dragons is the chief theme of *Back to Methuselah*. But Mr. Shaw did really take this queer view long before he went back to

Methuselah. Where all normal socialists professed fraternity with the working classes, he wrote, “I have never had any feeling about the working-classes except a desire to abolish them, and replace them by sensible people.” It is needless to explain that sensible people are always people who prefer water to wine, cabbages to cutlets, materialism to miracles, and utter subjection to a centralised government to any traditions of human liberty.

Now against all this, as its chief enemy, though he may not know it, stands the old Catholic philosophy of Man. The first and last idea of it is Resurrection, that is the resurrection of the *whole* of man. It is, as I have said before, a mystical refusal to despair of the original prehistoric monster of that name. It is true that the older creed often demands amputation in the sense of asceticism, as in the text about cutting off the hand to enter Heaven. But the difference is instantly made vivid by the rest of the text, which declares that even such amputation is better than casting the whole body of man into Hell. But the Shavian evolutionist does really want to cast the whole body of man into Chaos. He wants to cast it into the melting-pot, and boil it to nothing, that a new and superior something may at last emerge. This is indeed much more than amputation, it is annihilation. At least it is so for those who still see a sanctity in Man as a potentially complete creature, even if we commonly see him as incomplete. I have concluded upon this point, because it is the crux of the controversy, in what I cannot pretend to be anything but a long series of controversies. Only I understand the crux better than when I began to controvert about it, *ave crux*, *spes unica*. We do not believe that man is a mass of mistakes that have to be shed until he has lost everything but shame in the very memory of his manhood. We think they are lower forms and fallen applications of his true powers and instincts, damaged by one great mystical mistake. We do not believe that all property is wrong, though we agree that much money-getting and all money-grabbing is wrong, because we believe that the primary human sense of individual and independent possession is perfectly right. We do not admit that all punishment is wrong, though we warmly agree that all tyranny and mere vindictiveness is wrong, because these are only low and morbid forms of something that is right, whether it be just expiation or even just indignation. We do not admit that all vows of constancy are wrong, though we fully admit that they may be treated wrongly, because we think that even the tragic tradition of them is the remains of the truth concerning a complete and triumphant human love. So the same clue runs through a hundred questions down to trivial questions like the mere forms of festivity or the mere externals of civilised habit. We do not want all fermented liquor abolished because some men are too drunken, any more than we want all clothes abolished because some women are too dressy. For we believe that all that is historic in humanity has its higher forms and its lower forms , and we refuse to prohibit the higher because we happen at some particular place or time to suffer from the lower. But this other school that calls itself Progressive is always Prohibitionist. Marriage must vanish for ever; property must vanish for everybody. The Prohibitionists hoped to produce a younger generation that had never tasted anything but water; the Nudists a generation that had never known any embarrassment in nakedness. For these thinkers there is never anything between abnormality and negation, between abomination and abolition. And it is in vain that we point out that the normal is not only possible but visible, and holds the centre of the stage; that in the central civilisations of the world the abnormalities and abominations have in fact been largely avoided. They are blind to the fact, staring them in the face, that the wine-drinking countries drink very little wine: that the beer-drinking countries drink a remarkably mild beer. For in their hearts they do not believe it is a question of turning human life from abuse to use; it is a question of finding a new use for human life; or rather making it useful to a life that is not human. They are not quite such lunatics as they look, or rather their lunacy is of a larger and more hopeful sort. They do not only want to cut off a man’s legs to cure him of lameness. They really believe that with the loss of his legs he will immediately grow wings — or possibly wheels. This is the great faith which stands facing the ancient faith in the Resurrection of Man, and this sketch is but a small skirmish in the great campaign between those two creeds.

We hear very much in these days of the true essence of true Christianity, and not only, though perhaps most often, from those who are not Christians. But if we really wish to know about it, there was something which is always essential to Christianity, and for a long time was even common to all forms of Christianity. If we will condescend to cast an eye backwards upon those words which are certainly old, and which many rather antiquated sceptics suppose to be antiquated — if we will look at the actual words Redemption and Resurrection and Salvation and the Image of God, we shall see in them quite simply staring us in the face, all that I have said here. It was religion that refused to despair of Man; it is scientific progress and evolution that are already despairing of him. And it is not the Superman but very truly and actually the Son of Man, Who comes in clouds of glory to judge the world.

THE END

APPRECIATIONS AND CRITICISMS OF THE WORKS OF CHARLES DICKENS

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INTRODUCTION

These papers were originally published as prefaces to the separate books of Dickens in one of the most extensive of those cheap libraries of the classics which are one of the real improvements of recent times. Thus they were harmless, being diluted by, or rather drowned in Dickens. My scrap of theory was a mere dry biscuit to be taken with the grand tawny port of great English comedy; and by most people it was not taken at all — like the biscuit. Nevertheless the essays were not in intention so aimless as they appear in fact. I had a general notion of what needed saying about Dickens to the new generation, though probably I did not say it. I will make another attempt to do so in this prologue, and, possibly fail again.

There was a painful moment (somewhere about the eighties) when we watched anxiously to see whether Dickens was fading from the modern world. We have watched a little longer, and with great relief we begin to realise that it is the modern world that is fading. All that universe of ranks and respectabilities in comparison with which Dickens was called a caricaturist, all that Victorian universe in which he seemed vulgar — all that is itself breaking up like a cloudland. And only the caricatures of Dickens remain like things carved in stone. This, of course, is an old story in the case of a man reproached with any excess of the poetic. Again and again when the man of visions was pinned by the sly dog who knows the world,

“The man recovered of the bite, The dog it was that died.”

To call Thackeray a cynic, which means a sly dog, was indeed absurd; but it is fair to say that in comparison with Dickens he felt himself a man of the world. Nevertheless, that world of which he was a man is coming to an end before our eyes; its aristocracy has grown corrupt, its middle class insecure, and things that he never thought of are walking about the drawing-rooms of both. Thackeray has described for ever the Anglo-Indian Colonel; but what on earth would he have done with an Australian Colonel? What can it matter whether Dickens’s clerks talked cockney now that half the duchesses talk American? What would Thackeray have made of an age in which a man in the position of Lord Kew may actually be the born brother of Mr. Moss of Wardour Street? Nor does this apply merely to Thackeray, but to all those Victorians who prided themselves on the realism or sobriety of their descriptions; it applies to Anthony Trollope and, as much as any one, to George Eliot. For we have not only survived that present which Thackeray described: we have even survived that future to which George Eliot looked forward. It is no longer adequate to say that Dickens did not understand that old world of gentility, of parliamentary politeness and the balance of the constitution. That world is rapidly ceasing to understand itself. It is vain to repeat the complaint of the old Quarterly Reviewers, that Dickens had not enjoyed a university education. What would the old Quarterly Reviewers themselves have thought of the Rhodes Scholarships? It is useless to repeat the old tag that Dickens could not describe a gentleman. A gentleman in our time has become something quite indescribable.

Now the interesting fact is this: That Dickens, whom so many considered to be at the best a vulgar enthusiast, saw the coming change in our society much more soberly and scientifically than did his better educated and more pretentious contemporaries. I give but one example out of many. Thackeray was a good Victorian radical, who seems to have gone to his grave quite contented with the early Victorian radical theory — the theory which Macaulay preached with unparalleled luminosity and completeness; the theory that true progress goes on so steadily through human history, that while reaction is indefensible, revolution is unnecessary. Thackeray seems to have been quite content to think that the world would grow more and more liberal in the limited sense; that Free Trade would get freer; that ballot boxes would grow more and more secret; that at last (as some satirist of Liberalism puts it) every man would have two votes instead of one. There is no trace in Thackeray of the slightest consciousness that progress could ever change its direction. There is in Dickens. The whole of *Hard Times* is the expression of just such a realisation. It is not true to say that Dickens was a Socialist, but it is not absurd to say so. And it would be simply absurd to say it of any of the great Individualist novelists of the Victorian time. Dickens saw far enough ahead to know that the time was coming when the people would be imploring the State to save them from mere freedom, as from some frightful foreign oppressor. He felt the society changing; and Thackeray never did.

As talking about Socialism and Individualism is one of the greatest bores ever endured among men, I will take another instance to illustrate my meaning, even though the instance be a queer and even a delicate one. Even if the reader does not agree with my deduction, I ask his attention to the fact itself, which I think a curiosity of literature. In the last important work of Dickens, that excellent book *Our Mutual Friend*, there is an odd thing about which I cannot make up my mind; I do not know whether it is unconscious observation or fiendish irony. But it is this. In *Our Mutual Friend* is an old patriarch named Aaron, who is a saintly Jew made to do the dirty work of an abominable Christian usurer. In an artistic sense I think the patriarch Aaron as much of a humbug as the patriarch Casby. In a moral sense there is no doubt at all that Dickens introduced the Jew with a philanthropic idea of doing justice to Judaism, which he was told he had affronted by the great gargoyle of Fagin. If this was his motive, it was morally a most worthy one. But it is certainly unfortunate for the Hebrew cause that the bad Jew should be so very much more convincing than the good one. Old Aaron is not an exaggeration of Jewish virtues; he is simply not Jewish, because he is not human. There is nothing about him that in any way suggests the nobler sort of Jew, such a man as Spinoza or Mr. Zangwill. He is simply a public apology, and like most public apologies, he is very stiff and not very convincing.

So far so good. Now we come to the funny part. To describe the high visionary and mystic Jew like Spinoza or Zangwill is a great and delicate task in which even Dickens might have failed. But most of us know something of the make and manners of the low Jew, who is generally the successful one. Most of us know the Jew who calls himself De Valancourt. Now to any one who knows a low Jew by sight or hearing, the story called *Our Mutual Friend* is literally full of Jews. Like all Dickens's best characters they are vivid; we know them. And we know them to be Hebrew. Mr. Veneering, the Man from Nowhere, dark, sphinx-like, smiling, with black curling hair, and a taste in florid vulgar furniture — of what stock was he? Mr. Lammle, with "too much nose in his face, too much ginger in his whiskers, too much sparkle in his studs and manners" — of what blood was he? Mr. Lammle's friends, coarse and thick-lipped, with fingers so covered with rings that they could hardly hold their gold pencils — do they remind us of anybody? Mr. Fledgeby, with his little ugly eyes and social flashiness and craven bodily servility — might not some fanatic like M. Drumont make interesting conjectures about him? The particular types that people hate in Jewry, the types that are the shame of all good Jews, absolutely run riot in this book, which is supposed to contain an apology to them. It looks at first sight as if Dickens's apology were one hideous sneer. It looks as if he put in one good Jew whom nobody could believe in, and then balanced him with ten bad Jews whom nobody could fail to recognise. It seems as if he had avenged himself for the doubt about Fagin by introducing five or six Fagins — triumphant Fagins, fashionable Fagins, Fagins who had changed their names. The impeccable old Aaron stands up in the middle of this ironic carnival with a peculiar solemnity and silliness. He looks like one particularly stupid Englishman pretending to be a Jew, amidst all that crowd of clever Jews who are pretending to be Englishmen.

But this notion of a sneer is not admissible. Dickens was far too frank and generous a writer to employ such an elaborate plot of silence. His satire was always intended to attack, never to entrap; moreover, he was far too vain a man not to wish the crowd to see all his jokes. Vanity is more divine than pride, because it is more democratic than pride. Third, and most important, Dickens was a good Liberal, and would have been horrified at the notion of making so venomous a vendetta against one race or creed. Nevertheless the fact is there, as I say, if only as a curiosity of literature. I defy any man to read through *Our Mutual Friend* after hearing this suggestion, and to get out of his head the conviction that Lammle is the wrong kind of Jew. The explanation lies, I think, in this, that Dickens was so wonderfully sensitive to that change that has come over our society, that he noticed the type of the oriental and cosmopolitan financier without even knowing that it was oriental or cosmopolitan. He had, in fact, fallen a victim to a very simple fallacy affecting this problem. Somebody said, with great wit and truth, that treason cannot prosper, because when it prospers it cannot be called treason. The same argument soothed all possible Anti-Semitism in men like Dickens. Jews cannot be sneaks and snobs, because when they are sneaks and snobs they do not admit that they are Jews.

I have taken this case of the growth of the cosmopolitan financier, because it is not so stale in discussion as its parallel, the growth of Socialism. But as regards Dickens, the same criticism applies to both. Dickens knew that Socialism was coming, though he did not know its name. Similarly, Dickens knew that the South African millionaire was coming, though he did not know the millionaire’s name. Nobody does. His was not a type of mind to disentangle either the abstract truths touching the Socialist, nor the highly personal truth about the millionaire. He was a man of impressions; he has never been equalled in the art of conveying what a man looks like at first sight — and he simply felt the two things as atmospheric facts. He felt that the mercantile power was oppressive, past all bearing by Christian men; and he felt that this power was no longer wholly in the hands even of heavy English merchants like Podsnap. It was largely in the hands of a feverish and unfamiliar type, like Lammle and Veneering. The fact that he felt these things is almost more impressive because he did not understand them.

Now for this reason Dickens must definitely be considered in the light of the changes which his soul foresaw. Thackeray has become classical; but Dickens has done more: he has remained modern. The grand retrospective spirit of Thackeray is by its nature attached to places and times; he belongs to Queen Victoria as much as Addison belongs to Queen Anne, and it is not only Queen Anne who is dead. But Dickens, in a dark prophetic kind of way, belongs to the developments. He belongs to the times since his death when Hard Times grew harder, and when Veneering became not only a Member of Parliament, but a Cabinet Minister; the times when the very soul and spirit of Fledgeby carried war into Africa. Dickens can be criticised as a contemporary of Bernard Shaw or Anatole France or C. F. G. Masterman. In talking of him one need no longer talk merely of the Manchester School or Puseyism or the Charge of the Light Brigade; his name comes to the tongue when we are talking of Christian Socialists or Mr. Roosevelt or County Council Steam Boats or Guilds of Play. He can be considered under new lights, some larger and some meaner than his own; and it is a very rough effort so to consider him which is the excuse of these pages. Of the essays in this book I desire to say as little as possible; I will discuss any other subject in preference with a readiness which reaches to avidity. But I may very curtly apply the explanation used above to the cases of two or three of them. Thus in the article on *David Copperfield* I have done far less than justice to that fine book considered in its relation to eternal literature; but I have dwelt at some length upon a particular element in it which has grown enormous in England after Dickens's death. Thus again, in introducing the *Sketches by Boz* I have felt chiefly that I am introducing them to a new generation insufficiently in sympathy with such palpable and unsophisticated fun. A Board School education, evolved since Dickens's day, has given to our people a queer and inadequate sort of refinement, one which prevents them from enjoying the raw jests of the *Sketches by Boz,* but leaves them easily open to that slight but poisonous sentimentalism which I note amid all the merits of David Copperfield. In the same way I shall speak of *Little Dorrit*, with reference to a school of pessimistic fiction which did not exist when it was written, of *Hard Times* in the light of the most modern crises of economics, and of *The Child's History of England* in the light of the most matured authority of history. In short, these criticisms are an intrinsically ephemeral comment from one generation upon work that will delight many more. Dickens was a very great man, and there are many ways of testing and stating the fact. But one permissible way is to say this, that he was an ignorant man, ill-read in the past, and often confused about the present. Yet he remains great and true, and even essentially reliable, if we suppose him to have known not only all that went before his lifetime, but also all that was to come after.

From this vanishing of the Victorian compromise (I might say the Victorian illusion) there begins to emerge a menacing and even monstrous thing — we may begin again to behold the English people. If that strange dawn ever comes, it will be the final vindication of Dickens. It will be proved that he is hardly even a caricaturist; that he is something very like a realist. Those comic monstrosities which the critics found incredible will be found to be the immense majority of the citizens of this country. We shall find that Sweedlepipe cuts our hair and Pumblechook sells our cereals; that Sam Weller blacks our boots and Tony Weller drives our omnibus. For the exaggerated notion of the exaggerations of Dickens (as was admirably pointed out by my old friend and enemy Mr. Blatchford in a *Clarion* review) is very largely due to our mixing with only one social class, whose conventions are very strict, and to whose affectations we are accustomed. In cabmen, in cobblers, in charwomen, individuality is often pushed to the edge of insanity. But as long as the Thackerayan platform of gentility stood firm all this was, comparatively speaking, concealed. For the English, of all nations, have the most uniform upper class and the most varied democracy. In France it is the peasants who are solid to uniformity; it is the marquises who are a little mad. But in England, while good form restrains and levels the universities and the army, the poor people are the most motley and amusing creatures in the world, full of humorous affections and prejudices and twists of irony. Frenchmen tend to be alike, because they are all soldiers; Prussians because they are all something else, probably policemen; even Americans are all something, though it is not easy to say what it is; it goes with hawk-like eyes and an irrational eagerness. Perhaps it is savages. But two English cabmen will be as grotesquely different as Mr. Weller and

Mr. Wegg. Nor is it true to say that I see this variety because it is in my own people. For I do not see the same degree of variety in my own class or in the class above it; there is more superficial resemblance between two Kensington doctors or two Highland dukes. No; the democracy is really composed of Dickens characters, for the simple reason that Dickens was himself one of the democracy.

There remains one thing to be added to this attempt to exhibit Dickens in the growing and changing lights of our time. God forbid that any one (especially any Dickensian) should dilute or discourage the great efforts towards social improvement. But I wish that social reformers would more often remember that they are imposing their rules not on dots and numbers, but on Bob Sawyer and Tim Linkinwater, on Mrs. Lirriper and Dr. Marigold. I wish Mr. Sidney Webb would shut his eyes until he *sees* Sam Weller.

A great many circumstances have led to the neglect in literature of these exuberant types which do actually exist in the ruder classes of society. Perhaps the principal cause is that since Dickens's time the study of the poor has ceased to be an art and become a sort of sham science. Dickens took the poor individually: all modern writing tends to take them collectively. It is said that the modern realist produces a photograph rather than a picture. But this is an inadequate objection. The real trouble with the realist is not that he produces a photograph, but that he produces a composite photograph. It is like all composite photographs, blurred; like all composite photographs, hideous; and like all composite photographs, unlike anything or anybody. The new sociological novels, which attempt to describe the abstract type of the working-classes, sin in practice against the first canon of literature, true when all others are subject to exception. Literature must always be a pointing out of what is interesting in life; but these books are duller than the life they represent. Even supposing that Dickens did exaggerate the degree to which one man differs from another — that was at least an exaggeration upon the side of literature; it was better than a mere attempt to reduce what is actually vivid and unmistakable to what is in comparison colourless or unnoticeable. Even the creditable and necessary efforts of our time in certain matters of social reform have discouraged the old distinctive Dickens treatment. People are so anxious to do something for the poor man that they have a sort of subconscious desire to think that there is only one kind of man to do it for. Thus while the old accounts were sometimes too steep and crazy, the new became too sweeping and flat. People write about the problem of drink, for instance, as if it were one problem. Dickens could have told them that there is the abyss between heaven and hell between the incongruous excesses of Mr. Pickwick and the fatalistic soaking of Mr. Wickfield. He could have shown that there was nothing in common between the brandy and water of Bob Sawyer and the rum and water of Mr. Stiggins. People talk of imprudent marriages among the poor, as if it were all one question. Dickens could have told them that it is one thing to marry without much money, like Stephen Blackpool, and quite another to marry without the smallest intention of ever trying to get any, like Harold Skimpole. People talk about husbands in the working-classes being kind or brutal to their wives, as if that was the one permanent problem and no other possibility need be considered. Dickens could have told them that there was the case (the by no means uncommon case) of the husband of Mrs. Gargery as well as of the wife of Mr. Quilp. In short, Dickens saw the problem of the poor not as a dead and definite business, but as a living and very complex one. In some ways he would be called much more conservative than the modern sociologists, in some ways much more revolutionary.

LITTLE DORRIT

In the time of the decline and death of Dickens, and even more strongly after it, there arose a school of criticism which substantially maintained that a man wrote better when he was ill. It was some such sentiment as this that made Mr. George Gissing, that able writer, come near to contending that *Little Dorrit* is Dickens's best book. It was the principle of his philosophy to maintain (I know not why) that a man was more likely to perceive the truth when in low spirits than when in high spirits.

The three articles on Sunday of which I speak are almost the last expression of an articulate sort in English literature of the ancient and existing morality of the English people. It is always asserted that Puritanism came in with the seventeenth century and thoroughly soaked and absorbed the English. We are now, it is constantly said, an incurably Puritanic people. Personally, I have my doubts about this. I shall not refuse to admit to the Puritans that they conquered and crushed the English people; but I do not think that they ever transformed it. My doubt is chiefly derived from three historical facts. First, that England was never so richly and recognisably English as in the Shakespearian age before the Puritan had appeared. Second, that ever since he did appear there has been a long unbroken line of brilliant and typical Englishmen who belonged to the Shakespearian and not the Puritanic tradition; Dryden, Johnson, Wilkes, Fox, Nelson, were hardly Puritans. And third, that the real rise of a new, cold, and illiberal morality in these matters seems to me to have occurred in the time of Queen Victoria, and not of Queen Elizabeth. All things considered, it is likely that future historians will say that the Puritans first really triumphed in the twentieth century, and that Dickens was the last cry of Merry England.

And about these additional, miscellaneous, and even inferior works of Dickens there is, moreover, another use and fascination which all Dickensians will understand; which, after a manner, is not for the profane. All who love Dickens have a strange sense that he is really inexhaustible. It is this fantastic infinity that divides him even from the strongest and healthiest romantic artists of a later day — from Stevenson, for example. I have read *Treasure Island* twenty times; nevertheless I know it. But I do not really feel as if I knew all *Pickwick*; I have not so much read it twenty times as read in it a million times; and it almost seemed as if I always read something new. We of the true faith look at each other and understand; yes, our master was a magician. I believe the books are alive; I believe that leaves still grow in them, as leaves grow on the trees. I believe that this fairy library flourishes and increases like a fairy forest: but the world is listening to us, and we will put our hand upon our mouth.

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

One thing at least seems certain. Dickens may or may not have been socialist in his tendencies; one might quote on the affirmative side his satire against Mr. Podsnap, who thought Centralisation “un-English”; one might quote in reply the fact that he satirised quite as unmercifully state and municipal officials of the most modern type. But there is one condition of affairs which Dickens would certainly have detested and denounced, and that is the condition in which we actually stand to-day. At this moment it is vain to discuss whether socialism will be a selling of men’s liberty for bread. The men have already sold the liberty; only they have not yet got the bread. A most incessant and exacting interference with the poor is already in operation; they are already ruled like slaves, only they are not fed like slaves. The children are forcibly provided with a school; only they are not provided with a house. Officials give the most detailed domestic directions about the fireguard; only they do not give the fireguard. Officials bring round the most stringent directions about the milk; only they do not bring round the milk. The situation is perhaps the most humorous in the whole history of oppression. We force the nigger to dig; but as a concession to him we do not give him a spade. We compel Sambo to cook; but we consult his dignity so far as to refuse him a fire.

This state of things at least cannot conceivably endure. We must either give the workers more property and liberty, or we must feed them properly as we work them properly. If we insist on sending the menu into them, they will naturally send the bill into us. This may possibly result (it is not my purpose here to prove that it will) in the drilling of the English people into hordes of humanely herded serfs; and this again may mean the fading from our consciousness of all those elves and giants, monsters and fantastics whom we are faintly beginning to feel and remember in the land. If this be so, the work of Dickens may be considered as a great vision — a vision, as Swinburne said, between a sleep and a sleep. It can be said that between the grey past of territorial depression and the grey future of economic routine the strange clouds lifted, and we beheld the land of the living.

Lastly, Dickens is even astonishingly right about Eugene Wrayburne. So far from reproaching him with not understanding a gentleman, the critic will be astonished at the accuracy with which he has really observed the worth and the weakness of the aristocrat. He is quite right when he suggests that such a man has intelligence enough to despise the invitations which he has not the energy to refuse. He is quite right when he makes Eugene (like Mr. Balfour) constantly right in argument even when he is obviously wrong in fact. Dickens is quite right when he describes Eugene as capable of cultivating a sort of secondary and false industry about anything that is not profitable; or pursuing with passion anything that is not his business. He is quite right in making Eugene honestly appreciative of essential goodness — in other people. He is quite right in making him really good at the graceful combination of satire and sentiment, both perfectly sincere. He is also right in indicating that the only cure for this intellectual condition is a violent blow on the head.

DAVID COPPERFIELD

The real achievement of the earlier part of *David Copperfield* lies in a certain impression of the little Copperfield living in a land of giants. It is at once Gargantuan in its fancy and grossly vivid in its facts; like Gulliver in the land of Brobdingnag when he describes mountainous hands and faces filling the sky, bristles as big as hedges, or moles as big as molehills. To him parents and guardians are not Olympians (as in Mr. Kenneth Grahame's clever book), mysterious and dignified, dwelling upon a cloudy hill. Rather they are all the more visible for being large. They come all the closer because they are colossal. Their queer features and weaknesses stand out large in a sort of gigantic domesticity, like the hairs and freckles of a Brobdingnagian. We feel the sombre Murdstone coming upon the house like a tall storm striding through the sky. We watch every pucker of Peggotty's peasant face in its moods of flinty prejudice or whimsical hesitation. We look up and feel that Aunt Betsey in her garden gloves was really terrible — especially her garden gloves. But one cannot avoid the impression that as the boy grows larger these figures grow smaller, and are not perhaps so completely satisfactory.

And there is doubtless a certain poetic unity and irony in gathering together three or four of the crudest and most cocksure of the modern theorists, with their shrill voices and metallic virtues, under the fulness and the sonorous sanity of Christian bells. But the figures satirised in *The Chimes* cross each other's path and spoil each other in some degree. The main purpose of the book was a protest against that impudent and hard-hearted utilitarianism which arranges the people only in rows of men or even in rows of figures. It is a flaming denunciation of that strange mathematical morality which was twisted often unfairly out of Bentham and Mill: a morality by which each citizen must regard himself as a fraction, and a very vulgar fraction. Though the particular form of this insolent patronage has changed, this revolt and rebuke is still of value, and may be wholesome for those who are teaching the poor to be provident. Doubtless it is a good idea to be provident, in the sense that Providence is provident, but that should mean being kind, and certainly not merely being cold.

The Cricket on the Hearth, though popular, I think, with many sections of the great army of Dickensians, cannot be spoken of in any such abstract or serious terms. It is a brief domestic glimpse; it is an interior. It must be remembered that Dickens was fond of interiors as such; he was like a romantic tramp who should go from window to window looking in at the parlours. He had that solid, indescribable delight in the mere solidity and neatness of funny little humanity in its funny little houses, like doll's houses. To him every house was a box, a Christmas box, in which a dancing human doll was tied up in bricks and slates instead of string and brown paper. He went from one gleaming window to another, looking in at the lamp-lit parlours. Thus he stood for a little while looking in at this cosy if commonplace interior of the carrier and his wife; but he did not stand there very long. He was on his way to quainter towns and villages. Already the plants were sprouting upon the balcony of Miss Tox; and the great wind was rising that flung Mr. Pecksniff against his own front door.

TALE OF TWO CITIES

It was well for him, at any rate, that the people rose in France. It was well for him, at any rate, that the guillotine was set up in the Place de la Concorde. Unconsciously, but not accidentally, Dickens was here working out the whole true comparison between swift revolutionism in Paris and slow evolutionism in London. Sidney Carton is one of those sublime ascetics whose head offends them, and who cut it off. For him at least it was better that the blood should flow in Paris than that the wine should flow any longer in London. And if I say that even now the guillotine might be the best cure for many a London lawyer, I ask you to believe that I am not merely flippant. But you will not believe it.

BARNABY RUDGE

It may be said that there is no comparison between that explosive opening of the intellect in Paris and an antiquated madman leading a knot of provincial Protestants. The Man of the Hill, says Victor Hugo somewhere, fights for an idea; the Man of the Forest for a prejudice. Nevertheless it remains true that the enemies of the red cap long attempted to represent it as a sham decoration in the style of Sim Tappertit. Long after the revolutionists had shown more than the qualities of men, it was common among lords and lacqueys to attribute to them the stagey and piratical pretentiousness of urchins. The kings called Napoleon’s pistol a toy pistol even while it was holding up their coach and mastering their money or their lives; they called his sword a stage sword even while they ran away from it. Something of the same senile inconsistency can be found in an English and American habit common until recently: that of painting the South Americans at once as ruffians wading in carnage, and also as poltroons playing at war. They blame them first for the cruelty of having a fight; and then for the weakness of having a sham fight. Such, however, since the French Revolution and before it, has been the fatuous attitude of certain Anglo-Saxons towards the whole revolutionary tradition. Sim Tappertit was a sort of answer to everything; and the young men were mocked as ‘prentices long after they were masters. The rising fortune of the South American republics to-day is symbolical and even menacing of many things; and it may be that the romance of riot will not be so much extinguished as extended; and nearer home we may have boys being boys again, and in London the cry of “clubs.”

THE UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER

The Uncommercial Traveller is a collection of Dickens's memories rather than of his literary purposes; but it is due to him to say that memory is often more startling in him than prophecy in anybody else. They have the character which belongs to all his vivid incidental writing: that they attach themselves always to some text which is a fact rather than an idea. He was one of those sons of Eve who are fonder of the Tree of Life than of the Tree of Knowledge — even of the knowledge of good and of evil. He was in this profoundest sense a realist. Critics have talked of an artist with his eye on the object. Dickens as an essayist always had his eye on an object before he had the faintest notion of a subject. All these works of his can best be considered as letters; they are notes of personal travel, scribbles in a diary about this or that that really happened. But Dickens was one of the few men who have the two talents that are the whole of literature — and have them both together. First, he could make a thing happen over again; and second, he could make it happen better. He can be called exaggerative; but mere exaggeration conveys nothing of his typical talent. Mere whirlwinds of words, mere melodramas of earth and heaven do not affect us as Dickens affects us, because they are exaggerations of nothing. If asked for an exaggeration of something, their inventors would be entirely dumb. They would not know how to exaggerate a broom-stick; for the life of them they could not exaggerate a tenpenny nail. Dickens always began with the nail or the broom-stick. He always began with a fact even when he was most fanciful; and even when he drew the long bow he was careful to hit the white.

This riotous realism of Dickens has its disadvantage — a disadvantage that comes out more clearly in these casual sketches than in his constructed romances. One grave defect in his greatness is that he was altogether too indifferent to theories. On large matters he went right by the very largeness of his mind; but in small matters he suffered from the lack of any logical test and ready reckoner. Hence his comment upon the details of civilisation or reform are sometimes apt to be jerky and jarring, and even grossly inconsistent. So long as a thing was heroic enough to admire, Dickens admired it; whenever it was absurd enough to laugh at he laughed at it: so far he was on sure ground. But about all the small human projects that lie between the extremes of the sublime and the ridiculous, his criticism was apt to have an accidental quality. As Matthew Arnold said of the remarks of the Young Man from the Country about the perambulator, they are felt not to be at the heart of the situation. On a great many occasions the Uncommercial Traveller seems, like other hasty travellers, to be criticising elements and institutions which he has quite inadequately understood; and once or twice the Uncommercial Traveller might almost as well be a Commercial Traveller for all he knows of the countryside.

An instance of what I mean may be found in the amusing article about the nightmares of the nursery. Superficially read it might almost be taken to mean that Dickens disapproved of ghost stories — disapproved of that old and genial horror which nurses can hardly supply fast enough for the children who want it. Dickens, one would have thought, should have been the last man in the world to object to horrible stories, having himself written some of the most horrible that exist in the world. The author of the Madman's Manuscript, of the disease of Monk and the death of Krook, cannot be considered fastidious in the matter of revolting realism or of revolting mysticism. If artistic horror is to be kept from the young, it is at least as necessary to keep little boys from reading *Pickwick* or *Bleak House* as to refrain from telling them the story of Captain Murderer or the terrible tale of Chips. If there was something appalling in the rhyme of Chips and pips and ships, it was nothing compared to that infernal refrain of "Mudstains, bloodstains" which Dickens himself, in one of his highest moments of hellish art, put into *Oliver Twist*.

I take this one instance of the excellent article called "Nurse's Stories" because it is quite typical of all the rest. Dickens (accused of superficiality by those who cannot grasp that there is foam upon deep seas) was really deep about human beings; that is, he was original and creative about them. But about ideas he did tend to be a little superficial. He judged them by whether they hit him, and not by what they were trying to hit. Thus in this book the great wizard of the Christmas ghosts seems almost the enemy of ghost stories; thus the almost melodramatic moralist who created Ralph Nickleby and Jonas Chuzzlewit cannot see the point in original sin; thus the great denouncer of official oppression in England may be found far too indulgent to the basest aspects of the modern police. His theories were less important than his creations, because he was a man of genius. But he himself thought his theories the more important, because he was a man.

SKETCHES BY BOZ

The greatest mystery about almost any great writer is why he was ever allowed to write at all. The first efforts of eminent men are always imitations; and very often they are bad imitations. The only question is whether the publisher had (as his name would seem to imply) some subconscious connection or sympathy with the public, and thus felt instinctively the presence of something that might ultimately tell; or whether the choice was merely a matter of chance and one Dickens was chosen and another Dickens left. The fact is almost unquestionable: most authors made their reputation by bad books and afterwards supported it by good ones. This is in some degree true even in the case of Dickens. The public continued to call him “Boz” long after the public had forgotten the *Sketches by Boz*. Numberless writers of the time speak of “Boz” as having written *Martin Chuzzlewit* and “Boz” as having written *David Copperfield*. Yet if they had gone back to the original book signed “Boz” they might even have felt that it was vulgar and flippant. This is indeed the chief tragedy of publishers: that they may easily refuse at the same moment the wrong manuscript and the right man. It is easy to see of Dickens now that he was the right man; but a man might have been very well excused if he had not realised that the *Sketches* was the right book. Dickens, I say, is a case for this primary query: whether there was in the first work any clear sign of his higher creative spirit. But Dickens is much less a case for this query than almost all the other great men of his period. The very earliest works of Thackeray are much more unimpressive than those of Dickens. Nay, they are much more vulgar than those of Dickens. And worst of all, they are much more numerous than those of Dickens. Thackeray came much nearer to being the ordinary literary failure than Dickens ever came. Read some of the earliest criticisms of Mr. Yellowplush or Michael Angelo Titmarsh and you will realise that at the very beginning there was more potential clumsiness and silliness in Thackeray than there ever was in Dickens. Nevertheless there was some potential clumsiness and silliness in Dickens; and what there is of it appears here and there in the admirable *Sketches by Boz*.

Perhaps we may put the matter this way: this is the only one of Dickens’s works of which it is ordinarily necessary to know the date. To a close and delicate comprehension it is indeed very important that *Nicholas Nickleby* was written at the beginning of Dickens's life, and *Our Mutual Friend* towards the end of it. Nevertheless anybody could understand or enjoy these books, whenever they were written. If *Our Mutual Friend* was written in the Latin of the Dark Ages we should still want it translated. If we thought that *Nicholas Nickleby* would not be written until thirty years hence we should all wait for it eagerly. The general impression produced by Dickens's work is the same as that produced by miraculous visions; it is the destruction of time. Thomas Aquinas said that there was no time in the sight of God; however this may be, there was no time in the sight of Dickens. As a general rule Dickens can be read in any order; not only in any order of books, but even in any order of chapters. In an average Dickens book every part is so amusing and alive that you can read the parts backwards; you can read the quarrel first and then the cause of the quarrel; you can fall in love with a woman in the tenth chapter and then turn back to the first chapter to find out who she is. This is not chaos; it is eternity. It means merely that Dickens instinctively felt all his figures to be immortal souls who existed whether he wrote of them or not, and whether the reader read of them or not. There is a peculiar quality as of celestial pre-existence about the Dickens characters. Not only did they exist before we heard of them, they existed also before Dickens heard of them. As a rule this unchangeable air in Dickens deprives any discussion about date of its point. But as I have said, this is the one Dickens work of which the date *is* essential. It is really an important part of the criticism of this book to say that it is his first book. Certain elements of clumsiness, of obviousness, of evident blunder, actually require the chronological explanation. It is biographically important that this is his first book, almost exactly in the same way that it is biographically important that *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* was his last book. Change or no change, *Edwin Drood* has this plain point of a last story about it: that it is not finished. But if the last book is unfinished, the first book is more unfinished still.

The *Sketches* divide themselves, of course, into two broad classes. One half consists of sketches that are truly and in the strict sense sketches. That is, they are things that have no story and in their outline none of the character of creation; they are merely facts from the street or the tavern or the town hall, noted down as they occurred by an intelligence of quite exceptional vivacity. The second class consists of purely creative things:

farces, romances, stories in any case with a non-natural perfection, or a poetical justice, to round them off. One class is admirably represented, for instance, by the sketch describing the Charity Dinner, the other by such a story as that of *Horatio Sparkins*. These things were almost certainly written by Dickens at very various periods of his youth; and early as the harvest is, no doubt it is a harvest and had ripened during a reasonably long time. Nevertheless it is with these two types of narrative that the young Charles Dickens first enters English literature; he enters it with a number of journalistic notes of such things as he has seen happen in streets or offices, and with a number of short stories which err on the side of the extravagant and even the superficial. Journalism had not then, indeed, sunk to the low level which it has since reached. His sketches of dirty London would not have been dirty enough for the modern Imperialist press. Still these first efforts of his are journalism, and sometimes vulgar journalism. It was as a journalist that he attacked the world, as a journalist that he conquered it.

The biographical circumstances will not, of course, be forgotten. The life of Dickens had been a curious one. Brought up in a family just poor enough to be painfully conscious of its prosperity and its respectability, he had been suddenly flung by a financial calamity into a social condition far below his own. For men on that exact edge of the educated class such a transition is really tragic. A duke may become a navvy for a joke, but a clerk cannot become a navvy for a joke. Dickens’s parents went to a debtors’ prison; Dickens himself went to a far more unpleasant place. The debtors’ prison had about it at least that element of amiable compromise and kindly decay which belonged (and belongs still) to all the official institutions of England. But Dickens was doomed to see the very blackest aspect of nineteenth-century England, something far blacker than any mere bad government. He went not to a prison but to a factory. In the musty traditionalism of the Marshalsea old John Dickens could easily remain optimistic. In the ferocious efficiency of the modern factory young Charles Dickens narrowly escaped being a pessimist. He did escape this danger; finally he even escaped the factory itself. His next step in life was, if possible, even more eccentric. He was sent to school; he was sent off like an innocent little boy in Eton collars to learn the rudiments of Latin grammar, without any reference to the fact that he had already taken his part in the horrible competition and actuality of the age of manufactures. It was like giving a sacked bank manager a satchel and sending him to a dame’s school. Nor was the third stage of this career unconnected with the oddity of the others. On leaving the school he was made a clerk in a lawyer's office, as if henceforward this child of ridiculous changes was to settle down into a silent assistant for a quiet solicitor. It was exactly at this moment that his fundamental rebellion began to seethe; it seethed more against the quiet finality of his legal occupation than it had seethed against the squalor and slavery of his days of poverty. There must have been in his mind, I think, a dim feeling: "Did all my dark crises mean only this; was I crucified only that I might become a solicitor's clerk?" Whatever be the truth about this conjecture there can be no question about the facts themselves. It was about this time that he began to burst and bubble over, to insist upon his own intellect, to claim a career. It was about this time that he put together a loose pile of papers, satires on institutions, pictures of private persons, fairy tales of the vulgarity of his world, odds and ends such as come out of the facility and the fierce vanity of youth. It was about this time at any rate that he decided to publish them, and gave them the name of *Sketches by Boz*.

They must, I think, be read in the light of this youthful explosion. In some psychological sense he had really been wronged. But he had only become conscious of his wrongs as his wrongs had been gradually righted. Similarly, it has often been found that a man who can patiently endure penal servitude through a judicial blunder will nevertheless, when once his cause is well asserted, quarrel about the amount of compensation or complain of small slights in his professional existence. These are the marks of the first literary action of Dickens. It has in it all the peculiar hardness of youth; a hardness which in those who have in any way been unfairly treated reaches even to impudence. It is a terrible thing for any man to find out that his elders are wrong. And this almost unkindly courage of youth must partly be held responsible for the smartness of Dickens, that almost offensive smartness which in these earlier books of his sometimes irritates us like the showy gibes in the tall talk of a school-boy. These first pages bear witness both to the energy of his genius and also to its unenlightenment; he seems more ignorant and more cocksure than so great a man should be. Dickens was never stupid, but he was sometimes silly; and he is occasionally silly here.

All this must be said to prepare the more fastidious modern for these papers, if he has never read them before. But when all this has been said there remains in them exactly what always remains in Dickens when you have taken away everything that can be taken away by the most fastidious modern who ever dissected his grandmother. There remains that *primum mobile* of which all the mystics have spoken: energy, the power to create. I will not call it "the will to live," for that is a priggish phrase of German professors. Even German professors, I suppose, have the will to live. But Dickens had exactly what German professors have not: he had the power to live. And indeed it is most valuable to have these early specimens of the Dickens work if only because they are specimens of his spirit apart from his matured intelligence. It is well to be able to realise that contact with the Dickens world is almost like a physical contact; it is like stepping suddenly into the hot smells of a greenhouse, or into the bleak smell of the sea. We know that we are there. Let any one read, for instance, one of the foolish but amusing farces in Dickens's first volume. Let him read, for instance, such a story as that of *Horatio Sparkins* or that of *The Tuggses at Ramsgate*. He will not find very much of that verbal felicity or fantastic irony that Dickens afterwards developed; the incidents are upon the plain lines of the stock comedy of the day: sharpers who entrap simpletons, spinsters who angle for husbands, youths who try to look Byronic and only look foolish. Yet there is something in these stories which there is not in the ordinary stock comedies of that day: an indefinable flavour of emphasis and richness, a hint as of infinity of fun. Doubtless, for instance, a million comic writers of that epoch had made game of the dark, romantic young man who pretended to abysses of philosophy and despair. And it is not easy to say exactly why we feel that the few metaphysical remarks of Mr. Horatio Sparkins are in some way really much funnier than any of those old stock jokes. It is in a certain quality of deep enjoyment in the writer as well as the reader; as if the few words written had been dipped in dark nonsense and were, as it were, reeking with derision. "Because if Effect be the result of Cause and Cause be the Precursor of Effect," said Mr. Horatio Sparkins, "I apprehend that you are wrong." Nobody can get at the real secret of sentences like that; sentences which were afterwards strewed with reckless liberality over the conversation of Dick Swiveller or Mr. Mantalini, Sim Tappertit or Mr. Pecksniff. Though the joke seems most superficial one has only to read it a certain number of times to see that it is most subtle. The joke does not lie in Mr. Sparkins merely using long words, any more than the joke lies merely in Mr. Swiveller drinking, or in Mr. Mantalini deceiving his wife. It is something in the arrangement of the words; something in a last inspired turn of absurdity given to a sentence. In spite of everything Horatio Sparkins is funny. We cannot tell why he is funny. When we know why he is funny we shall know why Dickens is great.

Standing as we do here upon the threshold, as it were, of the work of Dickens, it may be well perhaps to state this truth as being, after all, the most important one. This first work had, as I have said, the faults of first work and the special faults that arose from its author's accidental history; he was deprived of education, and therefore it was in some ways uneducated; he was confronted with the folly and failure of his natural superiors and guardians, and therefore it was in some ways pert and insolent. Nevertheless the main fact about the work is worth stating here for any reader who should follow the chronological order and read the *Sketches by Boz* before embarking on the stormy and splendid sea of *Pickwick*. For the sea of *Pickwick*, though splendid, does make some people seasick. The great point to be emphasised at such an initiation is this: that people, especially refined people, are not to judge of Dickens by what they would call the coarseness or commonplaceness of his subject. It is quite true that his jokes are often on the same *subjects* as the jokes in a halfpenny comic paper. Only they happen to be good jokes. He does make jokes about drunkenness, jokes about mothers-in-law, jokes about henpecked husbands, jokes (which is much more really unpardonable) about spinsters, jokes about physical cowardice, jokes about fatness, jokes about sitting down on one's hat. He does make fun of all these things; and the reason is not very far to seek. He makes fun of all these things because all these things, or nearly all of them, are really very funny. But a large number of those who might otherwise read and enjoy Dickens are undoubtedly "put off" (as the phrase goes) by the fact that he seems to be echoing a poor kind of claptrap in his choice of incidents and images. Partly, of course, he suffers from the very fact of his success; his play with these topics was so good that every one else has played with them increasingly since; he may indeed have copied the old jokes, but he certainly renewed them. For instance, "Ally Sloper" was certainly copied from Wilkins Micawber. To this day you may see (in the front page of that fine periodical) the bald head and the high shirt collar that betray the high original from which "Ally Sloper" is derived. But exactly because "Sloper" was stolen from Micawber, for that very reason the new generation feels as if Micawber were stolen from "Sloper." Many modern readers feel as if Dickens were copying the comic papers, whereas in truth the comic papers are still copying Dickens.

Dickens showed himself to be an original man by always accepting old and established topics. There is no clearer sign of the absence of originality among modern poets than their disposition to find new themes. Really original poets write poems about the spring. They are always fresh, just as the spring is always fresh. Men wholly without originality write poems about torture, or new religions, of some perversion of obscenity, hoping that the mere sting of the subject may speak for them. But we do not sufficiently realise that what is true of the classic ode is also true of the classic joke. A true poet writes about the spring being beautiful because (after a thousand springs) the spring really is beautiful. In the same way the true humourist writes about a man sitting down on his hat, because the act of sitting down on one’s hat (however often and however admirably performed) really is extremely funny. We must not dismiss a new poet because his poem is called *To a Skylark*; nor must we dismiss a humourist because his new farce is called *My Mother-in-law*. He may really have splendid and inspiring things to say upon an eternal problem. The whole question is whether he has.

Now this is exactly where Dickens, and the possible mistake about Dickens, both come in. Numbers of sensitive ladies, numbers of simple æsthetes, have had a vague shrinking from that element in Dickens which begins vaguely in *The Tuggses at Ramsgate* and culminates in *Pickwick*. They have a vague shrinking from the mere subject matter; from the mere fact that so much of the fun is about drinking or fighting, or falling down, or eloping with old ladies. It is to these that the first appeal must be made upon the threshold of Dickens criticism. Let them really read the thing and really see whether the humour is the gross and half-witted jeering which they imagine it to be. It is exactly here that the whole genius of Dickens is concerned. His subjects are indeed stock subjects; like the skylark of Shelley, or the autumn of Keats. But all the more because they are stock subjects the reader realises what a magician is at work. The notion of a clumsy fellow who falls off his horse is indeed a stock and stale subject. But Mr. Winkle is not a stock and stale subject. Nor is his horse a stock and stale subject; it is as immortal as the horses of Achilles. The notion of a fat old gentleman proud of his legs might easily be vulgar. But Mr. Pickwick proud of his legs is not vulgar; somehow we feel that they were legs to be proud of. And it is exactly this that we must look for in these *Sketches*. We must not leap to any cheap fancy that they are low farces. Rather we must see that they are not low farces; and see that nobody but Dickens could have prevented them from being so.

PICKWICK PAPERS

There are those who deny with enthusiasm the existence of a God and are happy in a hobby which they call the Mistakes of Moses. I have not studied their labours in detail, but it seems that the chief mistake of Moses was that he neglected to write the Pentateuch. The lesser errors, apparently, were not made by Moses, but by another person equally unknown. These controversialists cover the very widest field, and their attacks upon Scripture are varied to the point of wildness. They range from the proposition that the unexpurgated Bible is almost as unfit for an American girls' school as is an unexpurgated Shakespeare; they descend to the proposition that kissing the Book is almost as hygienically dangerous as kissing the babies of the poor. A superficial critic might well imagine that there was not one single sentence left of the Hebrew or Christian Scriptures which this school had not marked with some ingenious and uneducated comment. But there is one passage at least upon which they have never pounced, at least to my knowledge; and in pointing it out to them I feel that I am, or ought to be, providing material for quite a multitude of Hyde Park orations. I mean that singular arrangement in the mystical account of the Creation by which light is created first and all the luminous bodies afterwards. One could not imagine a process more open to the elephantine logic of the Bible-smasher than this: that the sun should be created after the sunlight. The conception that lies at the back of the phrase is indeed profoundly antagonistic to much of the modern point of view. To many modern people it would sound like saying that foliage existed before the first leaf; it would sound like saying that childhood existed before a baby was born. The idea is, as I have said, alien to most modern thought, and like many other ideas which are alien to most modern thought, it is a very subtle and a very sound idea. Whatever be the meaning of the passage in the actual primeval poem, there is a very real metaphysical meaning in the idea that light existed before the sun and stars. It is not barbaric; it is rather Platonic. The idea existed before any of the machinery which made manifest the idea. Justice existed when there was no need of judges, and mercy existed before any man was oppressed.

However this may be in the matter of religion and philosophy, it can be said with little exaggeration that this truth is the very key of literature. The whole difference between construction and creation is exactly this: that a thing constructed can only be loved after it is constructed; but a thing created is loved before it exists, as the mother can love the unborn child. In creative art the essence of a book exists before the book or before even the details or main features of the book; the author enjoys it and lives in it with a kind of prophetic rapture. He wishes to write a comic story before he has thought of a single comic incident. He desires to write a sad story before he has thought of anything sad. He knows the atmosphere before he knows anything. There is a low priggish maxim sometimes uttered by men so frivolous as to take humour seriously — a maxim that a man should not laugh at his own jokes. But the great artist not only laughs at his own jokes; he laughs at his own jokes before he has made them. In the case of a man really humorous we can see humour in his eye before he has thought of any amusing words at all. So the creative writer laughs at his comedy before he creates it, and he has tears for his tragedy before he knows what it is. When the symbols and the fulfilling facts do come to him, they come generally in a manner very fragmentary and inverted, mostly in irrational glimpses of crisis or consummation. The last page comes before the first; before his romance has begun, he knows that it has ended well. He sees the wedding before the wooing; he sees the death before the duel. But most of all he sees the colour and character of the whole story prior to any possible events in it. This is the real argument for art and style, only that the artists and the stylists have not the sense to use it. In one very real sense style is far more important than either character or narrative. For a man knows what style of book he wants to write when he knows nothing else about it.

Pickwick is in Dickens’s career the mere mass of light before the creation of sun or moon. It is the splendid, shapeless substance of which all his stars were ultimately made. You might split up *Pickwick* into innumerable novels as you could split up that primeval light into innumerable solar systems. The *Pickwick Papers* constitute first and foremost a kind of wild promise, a pre-natal vision of all the children of Dickens. He had not yet settled down into the plain, professional habit of picking out a plot and characters, of attending to one thing at a time, of writing a separate, sensible novel and sending it off to his publishers. He is still in the youthful whirl of the kind of world that he would like to create. He has not yet really settled what story he will write, but only what sort of story he will write. He tries to tell ten stories at once; he pours into the pot all the chaotic fancies and crude experiences of his boyhood; he sticks in irrelevant short stories shamelessly, as into a scrap-book; he adopts designs and abandons them, begins episodes and leaves them unfinished; but from the first page to the last there is a nameless and elemental ecstasy — that of the man who is doing the kind of thing that he can do. Dickens, like every other honest and effective writer, came at last to some degree of care and self-restraint. He learned how to make his *dramatis personæ* assist his drama; he learned how to write stories which were full of rambling and perversity, but which were stories. But before he wrote a single real story, he had a kind of vision. It was a vision of the Dickens world — a maze of white roads, a map full of fantastic towns, thundering coaches, clamorous market-places, uproarious inns, strange and swaggering figures. That vision was *Pickwick*.

It must be remembered that this is true even in connection with the man's contemporaneous biography. Apart from anything else about it, *Pickwick* was his first great chance. It was a big commission given in some sense to an untried man, that he might show what he could do. It was in a strict sense a sample. And just as a sample of leather can be only a piece of leather, or a sample of coal a lump of coal, so this book may most properly be regarded as simply a lump of Dickens. He was anxious to show all that was in him. He was more concerned to prove that he could write well than to prove that he could write this particular book well. And he did prove this, at any rate. No one ever sent such a sample as the sample of Dickens. His roll of leather blocked up the street; his lump of coal set the Thames on fire.

The book originated in the suggestion of a publisher; as many more good books have done than the arrogance of the man of letters is commonly inclined to admit. Very much is said in our time about Apollo and Admetus, and the impossibility of asking genius to work within prescribed limits or assist an alien design. But after all, as a matter of fact, some of the greatest geniuses have done it, from Shakespeare botching up bad comedies and dramatising bad novels down to Dickens writing a masterpiece as the mere framework for a Mr. Seymour's sketches. Nor is the true explanation irrelevant to the spirit and power of Dickens. Very delicate, slender, and *bizarre* talents are indeed incapable of being used for an outside purpose, whether of public good or of private gain. But about very great and rich talent there goes a certain disdainful generosity which can turn its hand to anything. Minor poets cannot write to order; but very great poets can write to order. The larger the man's mind, the wider his scope of vision, the more likely it will be that anything suggested to him will seem significant and promising; the more he has a grasp of everything the more ready he will be to write anything. It is very hard (if that is the question) to throw a brick at a man and ask him to write an epic; but the more he is a great man the more able he will be to write about the brick. It is very unjust (if that is all) to point to a hoarding of Colman's mustard and demand a flood of philosophical eloquence; but the greater the man is the more likely he will be to give it to you. So it was proved, not for the first time, in this great experiment of the early employment of Dickens. Messrs. Chapman and Hall came to him with a scheme for a string of sporting stories to serve as the context, and one might almost say the excuse, for a string of sketches by Seymour, the sporting artist. Dickens made some modifications in the plan, but he adopted its main feature; and its main feature was Mr. Winkle. To think of what Mr. Winkle might have been in the hands of a dull *farceur*, and then to think of what he is, is to experience the feeling that Dickens made a man out of rags and refuse. Dickens was to work splendidly and successfully in many fields, and to send forth many brilliant books and brave figures. He was destined to have the applause of continents like a statesman, and to dictate to his publishers like a despot; but perhaps he never worked again so supremely well as here, where he worked in chains. It may well be questioned whether his one hack book is not his masterpiece.

Of course it is true that as he went on his independence increased, and he kicked quite free of the influences that had suggested his story. So Shakespeare declared his independence of the original chronicle of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, eliminating altogether (with some wisdom) another uncle called Wiglerus. At the start the Nimrod Club of Chapman and Hall may have even had equal chances with the Pickwick Club of young Mr. Dickens; but the Pickwick Club became something much better than any publisher had dared to dream of. Some of the old links were indeed severed by accident or extraneous trouble; Seymour, for whose sake the whole had perhaps been planned, blew his brains out before he had drawn ten pictures. But such things were trifles compared to *Pickwick* itself. It mattered little now whether Seymour blew his brains out, so long as Charles Dickens blew his brains in. The work became systematically and progressively more powerful and masterly. Many critics have commented on the somewhat discordant and inartistic change between the earlier part of *Pickwick* and the later; they have pointed out, not without good sense, that the character of

Mr. Pickwick changes from that of a silly buffoon to that of a solid merchant. But the case, if these critics had noticed it, is much stronger in the minor characters of the great company. Mr. Winkle, who has been an idiot (even, perhaps, as Mr. Pickwick says, “an impostor”), suddenly becomes a romantic and even reckless lover, scaling a forbidden wall and planning a bold elopement. Mr. Snodgrass, who has behaved in a ridiculous manner in all serious positions, suddenly finds himself in a ridiculous position — that of a gentleman surprised in a secret love affair — and behaves in a manner perfectly manly, serious, and honourable. Mr. Tupman alone has no serious emotional development, and for this reason it is, presumably, that we hear less and less of Mr. Tupman towards the end of the book. Dickens has by this time got into a thoroughly serious mood — a mood expressed indeed by extravagant incidents, but none the less serious for that; and into this Winkle and Snodgrass, in the character of romantic lovers, could be made to fit. Mr. Tupman had to be left out of the love affairs; therefore Mr. Tupman is left out of the book.

Much of the change was due to the entrance of the greatest character in the story. It may seem strange at the first glance to say that Sam Weller helped to make the story serious. Nevertheless, this is strictly true. The introduction of Sam Weller had, to begin with, some merely accidental and superficial effects. When Samuel Weller had appeared, Samuel Pickwick was no longer the chief farcical character. Weller became the joker and Pickwick in some sense the butt of his jokes. Thus it was obvious that the more simple, solemn, and really respectable this butt could be made the better. Mr. Pickwick had been the figure capering before the footlights. But with the advent of Sam, Mr. Pickwick had become a sort of black background and had to behave as such. But this explanation, though true as far as it goes, is a mean and unsatisfactory one, leaving the great elements unexplained. For a much deeper and more righteous reason Sam Weller introduces the more serious tone of Pickwick. He introduces it because he introduces something which it was the chief business of Dickens to preach throughout his life — something which he never preached so well as when he preached it unconsciously. Sam Weller introduces the English people.

Sam Weller is the great symbol in English literature of the populace peculiar to England. His incessant stream of sane nonsense is a wonderful achievement of Dickens: but it is no great falsification of the incessant stream of sane nonsense as it really exists among the English poor. The

English poor live in an atmosphere of humour; they think in humour. Irony is the very air that they breathe. A joke comes suddenly from time to time into the head of a politician or a gentleman, and then as a rule he makes the most of it; but when a serious word comes into the mind of a coster it is almost as startling as a joke. The word “chaff” was, I suppose, originally applied to badinage to express its barren and unsustaining character; but to the English poor chaff is as sustaining as grain. The phrase that leaps to their lips is the ironical phrase. I remember once being driven in a hansom cab down a street that turned out to be a *cul de sac*, and brought us bang up against a wall. The driver and I simultaneously said something. But I said: “This’ll never do!” and he said: “This is all right!” Even in the act of pulling back his horse’s nose from a brick wall, that confirmed satirist thought in terms of his highly-trained and traditional satire; while I, belonging to a duller and simpler class, expressed my feelings in words as innocent and literal as those of a rustic or a child.

This eternal output of divine derision has never been so truly typified as by the character of Sam; he is a grotesque fountain which gushes the living waters for ever. Dickens is accused of exaggeration and he is often guilty of exaggeration; but here he does not exaggerate: he merely symbolises and sublimates like any other great artist. Sam Weller does not exaggerate the wit of the London street arab one atom more than Colonel Newcome, let us say, exaggerates the stateliness of an ordinary soldier and gentleman, or than Mr. Collins exaggerates the fatuity of a certain kind of country clergyman. And this breath from the boisterous brotherhood of the poor lent a special seriousness and smell of reality to the whole story. The unconscious follies of Winkle and Tupman are blown away like leaves before the solid and conscious folly of Sam Weller. Moreover, the relations between Pickwick and his servant Sam are in some ways new and valuable in literature. Many comic writers had described the clever rascal and his ridiculous dupe; but here, in a fresh and very human atmosphere, we have a clever servant who was not a rascal and a dupe who was not ridiculous. Sam Weller stands in some ways for a cheerful knowledge of the world; Mr. Pickwick stands for a still more cheerful ignorance of the world. And Dickens responded to a profound human sentiment (the sentiment that has made saints and the sanctity of children) when he made the gentler and less-travelled type — the type which moderates and controls. Knowledge and innocence are both excellent things, and they are both very funny. But it is right that knowledge should be the servant and innocence the master.

The sincerity of this study of Sam Weller has produced one particular effect in the book which I wonder that critics of Dickens have never noticed or discussed. Because it has no Dickens "pathos," certain parts of it are truly pathetic. Dickens, realising rightly that the whole tone of the book was fun, felt that he ought to keep out of it any great experiments in sadness and keep within limits those that he put in. He used this restraint in order not to spoil the humour; but (if he had known himself better) he might well have used it in order not to spoil the pathos. This is the one book in which Dickens was, as it were, forced to trample down his tender feelings; and for that very reason it is the one book where all the tenderness there is is quite unquestionably true. An admirable example of what I mean may be found in the scene in which Sam Weller goes down to see his bereaved father after the death of his step-mother. The most loyal admirer of Dickens can hardly prevent himself from giving a slight shudder when he thinks of what Dickens might have made of that scene in some of his more expansive and maudlin moments. For all I know old Mrs. Weller might have asked what the wild waves were saying; and for all I know old Mr. Weller might have told her. As it is, Dickens, being forced to keep the tale taut and humorous, gives a picture of humble respect and decency which is manly, dignified, and really sad. There is no attempt made by these simple and honest men, the father and son, to pretend that the dead woman was anything greatly other than she was; their respect is for death, and for the human weakness and mystery which it must finally cover. Old Tony Weller does not tell his shrewish wife that she is already a white-winged angel; he speaks to her with an admirable good nature and good sense:

"'Susan,' I says, 'you've been a wery good vife to me altogether: keep a good heart, my dear, and you'll live to see me punch that 'ere Stiggins's 'ead yet.' She smiled at this, Samivel ... but she died arter all."

That is perhaps the first and the last time that Dickens ever touched the extreme dignity of pathos. He is restraining his compassion, and afterwards he let it go. Now laughter is a thing that can be let go; laughter has in it a quality of liberty. But sorrow has in it by its very nature a quality of confinement; pathos by its very nature fights with itself. Humour is expansive; it bursts outwards; the fact is attested by the common expression, "holding one's sides." But sorrow is not expansive; and it was afterwards the mistake of Dickens that he tried to make it expansive. It is the one great weakness of Dickens as a great writer, that he did try to make that sudden sadness, that abrupt pity, which we call pathos, a thing quite obvious, infectious, public, as if it were journalism or the measles. It is pleasant to think that in this supreme masterpiece, done in the dawn of his career, there is not even this faint fleck upon the sun of his just splendour. Pickwick will always be remembered as the great example of everything that made Dickens great; of the solemn conviviality of great friendships, of the erratic adventures of old English roads, of the hospitality of old English inns, of the great fundamental kindliness and honour of old English manners. First of all, however, it will always be remembered for its laughter, or, if you will, for its folly. A good joke is the one ultimate and sacred thing which cannot be criticised. Our relations with a good joke are direct and even divine relations. We speak of “seeing” a joke just as we speak of “seeing” a ghost or a vision. If we have seen it, it is futile to argue with us; and we have seen the vision of *Pickwick*. *Pickwick* may be the top of Dickens’s humour; I think upon the whole it is. But the broad humour of *Pickwick* he broadened over many wonderful kingdoms; the narrow pathos of *Pickwick* he never found again.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Romance is perhaps the highest point of human expression, except indeed religion, to which it is closely allied. Romance resembles religion especially in this, that it is not only a simplification but a shortening of existence. Both romance and religion see everything as it were foreshortened; they see everything in an abrupt and fantastic perspective, coming to an apex. It is the whole essence of perspective that it comes to a point. Similarly, religion comes to a point — to the point. Thus religion is always insisting on the shortness of human life. But it does not insist on the shortness of human life as the pessimists insist on it. Pessimism insists on the shortness of human life in order to show that life is valueless. Religion insists on the shortness of human life in order to show that life is frightfully valuable — is almost horribly valuable. Pessimism says that life is so short that it gives nobody a chance; religion says that life is so short that it gives everybody his final chance. In the first case the word brevity means futility; in the second case, opportunity. But the case is even stronger than this. Religion shortens everything. Religion shortens even eternity. Where science, submitting to the false standard of time, sees evolution, which is slow, religion sees creation, which is sudden. Philosophically speaking, the process is neither slow nor quick since we have nothing to compare it with. Religion prefers to think of it as quick. For religion the flowers shoot up suddenly like rockets. For religion the mountains are lifted up suddenly like waves. Those who quote that fine passage which says that in God's sight a thousand years are as yesterday that is passed as a watch in the night, do not realise the full force of the meaning. To God a thousand years are not only a watch but an exciting watch. For God time goes at a gallop, as it does to a man reading a good tale.

All this is, in a humble manner, true for romance. Romance is a shortening and sharpening of the human difficulty. Where you and I have to vote against a man, or write (rather feebly) against a man, or sign illegible petitions against a man, romance does for him what we should really like to see done. It knocks him down; it shortens the slow process of historical justice. All romances consist of three characters. Other characters may be introduced; but those other characters are certainly mere scenery as far as the romance is concerned. They are bushes that wave rather excitedly; they are posts that stand up with a certain pride; they are correctly painted rocks that frown very correctly; but they are all landscape — they are all a background. In every pure romance there are three living and moving characters. For the sake of argument they may be called St. George and the Dragon and the Princess. In every romance there must be the twin elements of loving and fighting. In every romance there must be the three characters: there must be the Princess, who is a thing to be loved; there must be the Dragon, who is a thing to be fought; and there must be St. George, who is a thing that both loves and fights. There have been many symptoms of cynicism and decay in our modern civilisation. But of all the signs of modern feebleness, of lack of grasp on morals as they actually must be, there has been none quite so silly or so dangerous as this: that the philosophers of to-day have started to divide loving from fighting and to put them into opposite camps. There could be no worse sign than that a man, even Nietzsche, can be found to say that we should go in for fighting instead of loving. There can be no worse sign than that a man, even Tolstoi, can be found to tell us that we should go in for loving instead of fighting. The two things imply each other; they implied each other in the old romance and in the old religion, which were the two permanent things of humanity. You cannot love a thing without wanting to fight for it. You cannot fight without something to fight for. To love a thing without wishing to fight for it is not love at all; it is lust. It may be an airy, philosophical, and disinterested lust; it may be, so to speak, a virgin lust; but it is lust, because it is wholly self-indulgent and invites no attack. On the other hand, fighting for a thing without loving it is not even fighting; it can only be called a kind of horse-play that is occasionally fatal. Wherever human nature is human and unspoilt by any special sophistry, there exists this natural kinship between war and wooing, and that natural kinship is called romance. It comes upon a man especially in the great hour of youth; and every man who has ever been young at all has felt, if only for a moment, this ultimate and poetic paradox. He knows that loving the world is the same thing as fighting the world. It was at the very moment when he offered to like everybody he also offered to hit everybody. To almost every man that can be called a man this especial moment of the romantic culmination has come. In the first resort the man wished to live a romance. In the second resort, in the last and worst resort, he was content to write one.

Now there is a certain moment when this element enters independently into the life of Dickens. There is a particular time when we can see him suddenly realise that he wants to write a romance and nothing else. In reading his letters, in appreciating his character, this point emerges clearly enough. He was full of the afterglow of his marriage; he was still young and psychologically ignorant; above all, he was now, really for the first time, sure that he was going to be at least some kind of success. There is, I repeat, a certain point at which one feels that Dickens will either begin to write romances or go off on something different altogether. This crucial point in his life is marked by *Nicholas Nickleby*.

It must be remembered that before this issue of *Nicholas Nickleby* his work, successful as it was, had not been such as to dedicate him seriously or irrevocably to the writing of novels. He had already written three books; and at least two of them are classed among the novels under his name. But if we look at the actual origin and formation of these books we see that they came from another source and were really designed upon another plan. The three books were, of course, the *Sketches by Boz, the Pickwick Papers*, and *Oliver Twist*. It is, I suppose, sufficiently well understood that the *Sketches by Boz* are, as their name implies, only sketches. But surely it is quite equally clear that the *Pickwick Papers* are, as their name implies, merely papers. Nor is the case at all different in spirit and essence when we come to *Oliver Twist*. There is indeed a sort of romance in *Oliver Twist*, but it is such an uncommonly bad one that it can hardly be regarded as greatly interrupting the previous process; and if the reader chooses to pay very little attention to it, he cannot pay less attention to it than the author did. But in fact the case lies far deeper. *Oliver Twist* is so much apart from the ordinary track of Dickens, it is so gloomy, it is so much all in one atmosphere, that it can best be considered as an exception or a solitary excursus in his work. Perhaps it can best be considered as the extension of one of his old sketches, of some sketch that happened to be about a visit to a workhouse or a gaol. In the *Sketches by Boz* he might well have visited a workhouse where he saw Bumble; in the *Sketches by Boz* he might well have visited a prison where he saw Fagin. We are still in the realm of sketches and sketchiness. *The Pickwick Papers* may be called an extension of one of his bright sketches. *Oliver Twist* may be called an extension of one of his gloomy ones.

Had he continued along this line all his books might very well have been note-books. It would be very easy to split up all his subsequent books into scraps and episodes, such as those which make up the *Sketches by Boz*. It would be easy enough for Dickens, instead of publishing *Nicholas Nickleby*, to have published a book of sketches, one of which was called "A Yorkshire School," another called "A Provincial Theatre," and another called "Sir Mulberry Hawk or High Life Revealed," another called "Mrs. Nickleby or a Lady's Monologue." It would have been very easy to have thrown over the rather chaotic plan of the *Old Curiosity Shop*. He might have merely written short stories called "The Glorious Apollos," "Mrs. Quilp's Tea-Party," "Mrs. Jarley's Waxwork," "The Little Servant," and "The Death of a Dwarf." *Martin Chuzzlewit* might have been twenty stories instead of one story. *Dombey and Son* might have been twenty stories instead of one story. We might have lost all Dickens's novels; we might have lost altogether Dickens the novelist. We might have lost that steady love of a seminal and growing romance which grew on him steadily as the years advanced, and which gave us towards the end some of his greatest triumphs. All his books might have been *Sketches by Boz*. But he did turn away from this, and the turning-point is *Nicholas Nickleby*.

Everything has a supreme moment and is crucial; that is where our friends the evolutionists go wrong. I suppose that there is an instant of midsummer as there is an instant of midnight. If in the same way there is a supreme point of spring, *Nicholas Nickleby* is the supreme point of Dickens's spring. I do not mean that it is the best book that he wrote in his youth. *Pickwick* is a better book. I do not mean that it contains more striking characters than any of the other books in his youth. The *Old Curiosity Shop* contains at least two more striking characters. But I mean that this book coincided with his resolution to be a great novelist and his final belief that he could be one. Henceforward his books are novels, very commonly bad novels. Previously they have not really been novels at all. There are many indications of the change I mean. Here is one, for instance, which is more or less final. *Nicholas Nickleby* is Dickens's first romantic novel because it is his first novel with a proper and dignified romantic hero; which means, of course, a somewhat chivalrous young donkey. The hero of *Pickwick* is an old man. The hero of *Oliver Twist* is a child. Even after *Nicholas Nickleby* this non-romantic custom continued. The *Old Curiosity Shop* has no hero in particular. The hero of *Barnaby Rudge* is a lunatic. But Nicholas Nickleby is a proper, formal, and ceremonial hero. He has no psychology; he has not even any particular character; but he is made deliberately a hero — young, poor, brave, unimpeachable, and ultimately triumphant. He is, in short, the hero. Mr. Vincent Crummles had a colossal intellect; and I always have a fancy that under all his pomposity he saw things more keenly than he allowed others to see. The moment he saw Nicholas Nickleby, almost in rags and limping along the high road, he engaged him (you will remember) as first walking gentleman. He was right. Nobody could possibly be more of a first walking gentleman than Nicholas Nickleby was. He was the first walking gentleman before he went on to the boards of Mr. Vincent Crummles's theatre, and he remained the first walking gentleman after he had come off.

Now this romantic method involves a certain element of climax which to us appears crudity. Nicholas Nickleby, for instance, wanders through the world; he takes a situation as assistant to a Yorkshire schoolmaster; he sees an act of tyranny of which he strongly disapproves; he cries out "Stop!" in a voice that makes the rafters ring; he thrashes the schoolmaster within an inch of his life; he throws the schoolmaster away like an old cigar, and he goes away. The modern intellect is positively prostrated and flattened by this rapid and romantic way of righting wrongs. If a modern philanthropist came to Dotheboys Hall I fear he would not employ the simple, sacred, and truly Christian solution of beating Mr. Squeers with a stick. I fancy he would petition the Government to appoint a Royal Commission to inquire into Mr. Squeers. I think he would every now and then write letters to newspapers reminding people that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, there was a Royal Commission to inquire into Mr. Squeers. I agree that he might even go the length of calling a crowded meeting in St. James's Hall on the subject of the best policy with regard to Mr. Squeers. At this meeting some very heated and daring speakers might even go the length of alluding sternly to Mr. Squeers. Occasionally even hoarse voices from the back of the hall might ask (in vain) what was going to be done with Mr. Squeers. The Royal Commission would report about three years afterwards and would say that many things had happened which were certainly most regrettable; that Mr. Squeers was the victim of a bad system; that Mrs. Squeers was also the victim of a bad system; but that the man who sold Squeers his cane had really acted with great indiscretion and ought to be spoken to kindly. Something like this would be what, after four years, the

Royal Commission would have said; but it would not matter in the least what the Royal Commission had said, for by that time the philanthropists would be off on a new tack and the world would have forgotten all about Dotheboys Hall and everything connected with it. By that time the philanthropists would be petitioning Parliament for another Royal Commission; perhaps a Royal Commission to inquire into whether Mr. Mantalini was extravagant with his wife's money; perhaps a commission to inquire into whether Mr. Vincent Crummles kept the Infant Phenomenon short by means of gin.

If we wish to understand the spirit and the period of *Nicholas Nickleby* we must endeavour to comprehend and to appreciate the old more decisive remedies, or, if we prefer to put it so, the old more desperate remedies. Our fathers had a plain sort of pity; if you will, a gross and coarse pity. They had their own sort of sentimentalism. They were quite willing to weep over Smike. But it certainly never occurred to them to weep over Squeers. Even those who opposed the French war opposed it exactly in the same way as their enemies opposed the French soldiers. They fought with fighting. Charles Fox was full of horror at the bitterness and the useless bloodshed; but if any one had insulted him over the matter, he would have gone out and shot him in a duel as coolly as any of his contemporaries. All their interference was heroic interference. All their legislation was heroic legislation. All their remedies were heroic remedies. No doubt they were often narrow and often visionary. No doubt they often looked at a political formula when they should have looked at an elemental fact. No doubt they were pedantic in some of their principles and clumsy in some of their solutions. No doubt, in short, they were all very wrong; and no doubt we are the people, and wisdom shall die with us. But when they saw something which in their eyes, such as they were, really violated their morality, such as it was, then they did not cry "Investigate!" They did not cry "Educate!" They did not cry "Improve!" They did not cry "Evolve!" Like Nicholas Nickleby they cried "Stop!" And it did stop.

This is the first mark of the purely romantic method: the swiftness and simplicity with which St. George kills the dragon. The second mark of it is exhibited here as one of the weaknesses of *Nicholas Nickleby*. I mean the tendency in the purely romantic story to regard the heroine merely as something to be won; to regard the princess solely as something to be saved from the dragon. The father of Madeline Bray is really a very respectable dragon. His selfishness is suggested with much more psychological tact and truth than that of any other of the villains that Dickens described about this time. But his daughter is merely the young woman with whom Nicholas is in love. We do not care a rap about Madeline Bray. Personally I should have preferred Cecilia Bobster. Here is one real point where the Victorian romance falls below the Elizabethan romantic drama. Shakespeare always made his heroines heroic as well as his heroes.

In Dickens's actual literary career it is this romantic quality in *Nicholas Nickleby* that is most important. It is his first definite attempt to write a young and chivalrous novel. In this sense the comic characters and the comic scenes are secondary; and indeed the comic characters and the comic scenes, admirable as they are, could never be considered as in themselves superior to such characters and such scenes in many of the other books. But in themselves how unforgettable they are. Mr. Crummles and the whole of his theatrical business is an admirable case of that first and most splendid quality in Dickens — I mean the art of making something which in life we call pompous and dull, becoming in literature pompous and delightful. I have remarked before that nearly every one of the amusing characters of Dickens is in reality a great fool. But I might go further. Almost every one of his amusing characters is in reality a great bore. The very people that we fly to in Dickens are the very people that we fly from in life. And there is more in Crummles than the mere entertainment of his solemnity and his tedium. The enormous seriousness with which he takes his art is always an exact touch in regard to the unsuccessful artist. If an artist is successful, everything then depends upon a dilemma of his moral character. If he is a mean artist success will make him a society man. If he is a magnanimous artist, success will make him an ordinary man. But only as long as he is unsuccessful will he be an unfathomable and serious artist, like Mr. Crummles. Dickens was always particularly good at expressing thus the treasures that belong to those who do not succeed in this world. There are vast prospects and splendid songs in the point of view of the typically unsuccessful man; if all the used-up actors and spoilt journalists and broken clerks could give a chorus, it would be a wonderful chorus in praise of the world. But these unsuccessful men commonly cannot even speak. Dickens is the voice of them, and a very ringing voice; because he was perhaps the only one of these unsuccessful men that was ever successful.

OLIVER TWIST

In considering Dickens, as we almost always must consider him, as a man of rich originality, we may possibly miss the forces from which he drew even his original energy. It is not well for man to be alone. We, in the modern world, are ready enough to admit that when it is applied to some problem of monasticism or of an ecstatic life. But we will not admit that our modern artistic claim to absolute originality is really a claim to absolute unsociability; a claim to absolute loneliness. The anarchist is at least as solitary as the ascetic. And the men of very vivid vigour in literature, the men such as Dickens, have generally displayed a large sociability towards the society of letters, always expressed in the happy pursuit of pre-existent themes, sometimes expressed, as in the case of Molière or Sterne, in downright plagiarism. For even theft is a confession of our dependence on society. In Dickens, however, this element of the original foundations on which he worked is quite especially difficult to determine. This is partly due to the fact that for the present reading public he is practically the only one of his long line that is read at all. He sums up Smollett and Goldsmith, but he also destroys them. This one giant, being closest to us, cuts off from our view even the giants that begat him. But much more is this difficulty due to the fact that Dickens mixed up with the old material, materials so subtly modern, so made of the French Revolution, that the whole is transformed. If we want the best example of this, the best example is *Oliver Twist*.

Relatively to the other works of Dickens *Oliver Twist* is not of great value, but it is of great importance. Some parts of it are so crude and of so clumsy a melodrama, that one is almost tempted to say that Dickens would have been greater without it. But even if he had been greater without it he would still have been incomplete without it. With the exception of some gorgeous passages, both of humour and horror, the interest of the book lies not so much in its revelation of Dickens’s literary genius as in its revelation of those moral, personal, and political instincts which were the make-up of his character and the permanent support of that literary genius. It is by far the most depressing of all his books; it is in some ways the most irritating; yet its ugliness gives the last touch of honesty to all that spontaneous and splendid output. Without this one discordant note all his merriment might have seemed like levity.

Dickens had just appeared upon the stage and set the whole world laughing with his first great story *Pickwick*. *Oliver Twist* was his encore. It was the second opportunity given to him by those who had rolled about with laughter over Tupman and Jingle, Weller and Dowler. Under such circumstances a stagey reciter will sometimes take care to give a pathetic piece after his humorous one; and with all his many moral merits, there was much that was stagey about Dickens. But this explanation alone is altogether inadequate and unworthy. There was in Dickens this other kind of energy, horrible, uncanny, barbaric, capable in another age of coarseness, greedy for the emblems of established ugliness, the coffin, the gibbet, the bones, the bloody knife. Dickens liked these things and he was all the more of a man for liking them; especially he was all the more of a boy. We can all recall with pleasure the fact that Miss Petowker (afterwards Mrs. Lillyvick) was in the habit of reciting a poem called "The Blood Drinker's Burial." I cannot express my regret that the words of this poem are not given; for Dickens would have been quite as capable of writing "The Blood Drinker's Burial" as Miss Petowker was of reciting it. This strain existed in Dickens alongside of his happy laughter; both were allied to the same robust romance. Here as elsewhere Dickens is close to all the permanent human things. He is close to religion, which has never allowed the thousand devils on its churches to stop the dancing of its bells. He is allied to the people, to the real poor, who love nothing so much as to take a cheerful glass and to talk about funerals. The extremes of his gloom and gaiety are the mark of religion and democracy; they mark him off from the moderate happiness of philosophers, and from that stoicism which is the virtue and the creed of aristocrats. There is nothing odd in the fact that the same man who conceived the humane hospitalities of Pickwick should also have imagined the inhuman laughter of Fagin's den. They are both genuine and they are both exaggerated. And the whole human tradition has tied up together in a strange knot these strands of festivity and fear. It is over the cups of Christmas Eve that men have always competed in telling ghost stories.

This first element was present in Dickens, and it is very powerfully present in *Oliver Twist*. It had not been present with sufficient consistency or continuity in *Pickwick* to make it remain on the reader's memory at all, for the tale of "Gabriel Grubb" is grotesque rather than horrible, and the two gloomy stories of the "Madman" and the "Queer Client" are so utterly irrelevant to the tale, that even if the reader remember them he probably does not remember that they occur in *Pickwick*. Critics have complained of Shakespeare and others for putting comic episodes into a tragedy. It required a man with the courage and coarseness of Dickens actually to put tragic episodes into a farce. But they are not caught up into the story at all. In *Oliver Twist*, however, the thing broke out with an almost brutal inspiration, and those who had fallen in love with Dickens for his generous buffoonery may very likely have been startled at receiving such very different fare at the next helping. When you have bought a man's book because you like his writing about Mr. Wardle's punch-bowl and Mr. Winkle's skates, it may very well be surprising to open it and read about the sickening thuds that beat out the life of Nancy, or that mysterious villain whose face was blasted with disease.

As a nightmare, the work is really admirable. Characters which are not very clearly conceived as regards their own psychology are yet, at certain moments, managed so as to shake to its foundations our own psychology. Bill Sikes is not exactly a real man, but for all that he is a real murderer. Nancy is not really impressive as a living woman; but (as the phrase goes) she makes a lovely corpse. Something quite childish and eternal in us, something which is shocked with the mere simplicity of death, quivers when we read of those repeated blows or see Sikes cursing the tell-tale cur who will follow his bloody foot-prints. And this strange, sublime, vulgar melodrama, which is melodrama and yet is painfully real, reaches its hideous height in that fine scene of the death of Sikes, the besieged house, the boy screaming within, the crowd screaming without, the murderer turned almost a maniac and dragging his victim uselessly up and down the room, the escape over the roof, the rope swiftly running taut, and death sudden, startling and symbolic; a man hanged. There is in this and similar scenes something of the quality of Hogarth and many other English moralists of the early eighteenth century. It is not easy to define this Hogarthian quality in words, beyond saying that it is a sort of alphabetical realism, like the cruel candour of children. But it has about it these two special principles which separate it from all that we call realism in our time. First, that with us a moral story means a story about moral people; with them a moral story meant more often a story about immoral people. Second, that with us realism is always associated with some subtle view of morals; with them realism was always associated with some simple view of morals. The end of Bill Sikes exactly in the way that the law would have killed him

— this is a Hogarthian incident; it carries on that tradition of startling and shocking platitude.

All this element in the book was a sincere thing in the author, but none the less it came from old soils, from the graveyard and the gallows, and the lane where the ghost walked. Dickens was always attracted to such things, and (as Forster says with inimitable simplicity) "but for his strong sense might have fallen into the follies of spiritualism." As a matter of fact, like most of the men of strong sense in his tradition, Dickens was left with a half belief in spirits which became in practice a belief in bad spirits. The great disadvantage of those who have too much strong sense to believe in supernaturalism is that they keep last the low and little forms of the supernatural, such as omens, curses, spectres, and retributions, but find a high and happy supernaturalism quite incredible. Thus the Puritans denied the sacraments, but went on burning witches. This shadow does rest, to some extent, upon the rational English writers like Dickens; supernaturalism was dying, but its ugliest roots died last. Dickens would have found it easier to believe in a ghost than in a vision of the Virgin with angels. There, for good or evil, however, was the root of the old *diablerie* in Dickens, and there it is in *Oliver Twist*. But this was only the first of the new Dickens elements, which must have surprised those Dickensians who eagerly bought his second book. The second of the new Dickens elements is equally indisputable and separate. It swelled afterwards to enormous proportions in Dickens's work; but it really has its rise here. Again, as in the case of the element of *diablerie*, it would be possible to make technical exceptions in favour of *Pickwick*. Just as there were quite inappropriate scraps of the gruesome element in *Pickwick*, so there are quite inappropriate allusions to this other topic in *Pickwick*. But nobody by merely reading *Pickwick* would even remember this topic; no one by merely reading *Pickwick* would know what this topic is; this third great subject of Dickens; this second great subject of the Dickens of *Oliver Twist*.

This subject is social oppression. It is surely fair to say that no one could have gathered from *Pickwick* how this question boiled in the blood of the author of *Pickwick*. There are, indeed, passages, particularly in connection with Mr. Pickwick in the debtor's prison, which prove to us, looking back on a whole public career, that Dickens had been from the beginning bitter and inquisitive about the problem of our civilisation. No one could have imagined at the time that this bitterness ran in an unbroken river under all the surges of that superb gaiety and exuberance. With *Oliver Twist* this sterner side of Dickens was suddenly revealed. For the very first pages of *Oliver Twist* are stern even when they are funny. They amuse, but they cannot be enjoyed, as can the passages about the follies of Mr. Snodgrass or the humiliations of Mr. Winkle. The difference between the old easy humour and this new harsh humour is a difference not of degree but of kind. Dickens makes game of Mr. Bumble because he wants to kill Mr. Bumble; he made game of Mr. Winkle because he wanted him to live for ever. Dickens has taken the sword in hand; against what is he declaring war?

It is just here that the greatness of Dickens comes in; it is just here that the difference lies between the pedant and the poet. Dickens enters the social and political war, and the first stroke he deals is not only significant but even startling. Fully to see this we must appreciate the national situation. It was an age of reform, and even of radical reform; the world was full of radicals and reformers; but only too many of them took the line of attacking everything and anything that was opposed to some particular theory among the many political theories that possessed the end of the eighteenth century. Some had so much perfected the perfect theory of republicanism that they almost lay awake at night because Queen Victoria had a crown on her head. Others were so certain that mankind had hitherto been merely strangled in the bonds of the State that they saw truth only in the destruction of tariffs or of by-laws. The greater part of that generation held that clearness, economy, and a hard common-sense, would soon destroy the errors that had been erected by the superstitions and sentimentalities of the past. In pursuance of this idea many of the new men of the new century, quite confident that they were invigorating the new age, sought to destroy the old sentimental clericalism, the old sentimental feudalism, the old-world belief in priests, the old-world belief in patrons, and among other things the old-world belief in beggars. They sought among other things to clear away the old visionary kindliness on the subject of vagrants. Hence those reformers enacted not only a new reform bill but also a new poor law. In creating many other modern things they created the modern workhouse, and when Dickens came out to fight it was the first thing that he broke with his battle-axe.

This is where Dickens's social revolt is of more value than mere politics and avoids the vulgarity of the novel with a purpose. His revolt is not a revolt of the commercialist against the feudalist, of the Nonconformist against the Churchman, of the Free-trader against the Protectionist, of the Liberal against the Tory. If he were among us now his revolt would not be the revolt of the Socialist against the Individualist, or of the Anarchist against the Socialist. His revolt was simply and solely the eternal revolt; it was the revolt of the weak against the strong. He did not dislike this or that argument for oppression; he disliked oppression. He disliked a certain look on the face of a man when he looks down on another man. And that look on the face is, indeed, the only thing in the world that we have really to fight between here and the fires of Hell. That which pedants of that time and this time would have called the sentimentalism of Dickens was really simply the detached sanity of Dickens. He cared nothing for the fugitive explanations of the Constitutional Conservatives; he cared nothing for the fugitive explanations of the Manchester School. He would have cared quite as little for the fugitive explanations of the Fabian Society or of the modern scientific Socialist. He saw that under many forms there was one fact, the tyranny of man over man; and he struck at it when he saw it, whether it was old or new. When he found that footmen and rustics were too much afraid of Sir Leicester Dedlock, he attacked Sir Leicester Dedlock; he did not care whether Sir Leicester Dedlock said he was attacking England or whether Mr. Rouncewell, the Ironmaster, said he was attacking an effete oligarchy. In that case he pleased Mr. Rouncewell, the Iron-master, and displeased Sir Leicester Dedlock, the Aristocrat. But when he found that Mr. Rouncewell's workmen were much too frightened of Mr. Rouncewell, then he displeased Mr. Rouncewell in turn; he displeased Mr. Rouncewell very much by calling him Mr. Bounderby. When he imagined himself to be fighting old laws he gave a sort of vague and general approval to new laws. But when he came to the new laws they had a bad time. When Dickens found that after a hundred economic arguments and granting a hundred economic considerations, the fact remained that paupers in modern workhouses were much too afraid of the beadle, just as vassals in ancient castles were much too afraid of the Dedlocks, then he struck suddenly and at once. This is what makes the opening chapters of *Oliver Twist* so curious and important. The very fact of Dickens's distance from, and independence of, the elaborate financial arguments of his time, makes more definite and dazzling his sudden assertion that he sees the old human tyranny in front of him as plain as the sun at noon-day. Dickens attacks the modern workhouse with a sort of inspired simplicity as of a boy in a fairy tale who had wandered about, sword in hand, looking for ogres and who had found an indisputable ogre. All the other people of his time are attacking things because they are bad economics or because they are bad politics, or because they are bad science; he alone is attacking things because they are bad. All the others are Radicals with a large R; he alone is radical with a small one. He encounters evil with that beautiful surprise which, as it is the beginning of all real pleasure, is also the beginning of all righteous indignation. He enters the workhouse just as Oliver Twist enters it, as a little child.

This is the real power and pathos of that celebrated passage in the book which has passed into a proverb; but which has not lost its terrible humour even in being hackneyed. I mean, of course, the everlasting quotation about Oliver Twist asking for more. The real poignancy that there is in this idea is a very good study in that strong school of social criticism which Dickens represented. A modern realist describing the dreary workhouse would have made all the children utterly crushed, not daring to speak at all, not expecting anything, not hoping anything, past all possibility of affording even an ironical contrast or a protest of despair. A modern, in short, would have made all the boys in the workhouse pathetic by making them all pessimists. But Oliver Twist is not pathetic because he is a pessimist. Oliver Twist is pathetic because he is an optimist. The whole tragedy of that incident is in the fact that he does expect the universe to be kind to him, that he does believe that he is living in a just world. He comes before the Guardians as the ragged peasants of the French Revolution came before the Kings and Parliaments of Europe. That is to say, he comes, indeed, with gloomy experiences, but he comes with a happy philosophy. He knows that there are wrongs of man to be reviled; but he believes also that there are rights of man to be demanded. It has often been remarked as a singular fact that the French poor, who stand in historic tradition as typical of all the desperate men who have dragged down tyranny, were, as a matter of fact, by no means worse off than the poor of many other European countries before the Revolution. The truth is that the French were tragic because they were better off. The others had known the sorrowful experiences; but they alone had known the splendid expectation and the original claims. It was just here that Dickens was so true a child of them and of that happy theory so bitterly applied. They were the one oppressed people that simply asked for justice; they were the one Parish Boy who innocently asked for more.

OLD CURIOSITY SHOP

Nothing is important except the fate of the soul; and literature is only redeemed from an utter triviality, surpassing that of naughts and crosses, by the fact that it describes not the world around us or the things on the retina of the eye or the enormous irrelevancy of encyclopædias, but some condition to which the human spirit can come. All good writers express the state of their souls, even (as occurs in some cases of very good writers) if it is a state of damnation. The first thing that has to be realised about Dickens is this ultimate spiritual condition of the man, which lay behind all his creations. This Dickens state of mind is difficult to pick out in words as are all elementary states of mind; they cannot be described, not because they are too subtle for words, but because they are too simple for words. Perhaps the nearest approach to a statement of it would be this: that Dickens expresses an eager anticipation of everything that will happen in the motley affairs of men; he looks at the quiet crowd waiting for it to be picturesque and to play the fool; he expects everything; he is torn with a happy hunger. Thackeray is always looking back to yesterday; Dickens is always looking forward to to-morrow. Both are profoundly humorous, for there is a humour of the morning and a humour of the evening; but the first guesses at what it will get, at all the grotesqueness and variety which a day may bring forth; the second looks back on what the day has been and sees even its solemnities as slightly ironical. Nothing can be too extravagant for the laughter that looks forward; and nothing can be too dignified for the laughter that looks back. It is an idle but obvious thing, which many must have noticed, that we often find in the title of one of an author's books what might very well stand for a general description of all of them. Thus all Spenser's works might be called *A Hymn to Heavenly Beauty*; or all Mr. Bernard Shaw's bound books might be called *You Never Can Tell*. In the same way the whole substance and spirit of Thackeray might be gathered under the general title *Vanity Fair*. In the same way too the whole substance and spirit of Dickens might be gathered under the general title *Great Expectations*.

In a recent criticism on this position I saw it remarked that all this is reading into Dickens something that he did not mean; and I have been told that it would have greatly surprised Dickens to be informed that he "went down the broad road of the Revolution." Of course it would. Criticism does not exist to say about authors the things that they knew themselves. It exists to say the things about them which they did not know themselves. If a critic says that the *Iliad* has a pagan rather than a Christian pity, or that it is full of pictures made by one epithet, of course he does not mean that Homer could have said that. If Homer could have said that the critic would leave Homer to say it. The function of criticism, if it has a legitimate function at all, can only be one function — that of dealing with the subconscious part of the author's mind which only the critic can express, and not with the conscious part of the author's mind, which the author himself can express. Either criticism is no good at all (a very defensible position) or else criticism means saying about an author the very things that would have made him jump out of his boots.

Doubtless the name in this case *Great Expectations* is an empty coincidence; and indeed it is not in the books of the later Dickens period (the period of *Great Expectations*) that we should look for the best examples of this sanguine and expectant spirit which is the essential of the man's genius. There are plenty of good examples of it especially in the earlier works. But even in the earlier works there is no example of it more striking or more satisfactory than *The Old Curiosity Shop*. It is particularly noticeable in the fact that its opening and original framework express the idea of a random experience, a thing come across in the street; a single face in the crowd, followed until it tells its story. Though the thing ends in a novel it begins in a sketch; it begins as one of the *Sketches by Boz*. There is something unconsciously artistic in the very clumsiness of this opening. Master Humphrey starts to keep a scrap-book of all his adventures, and he finds that he can fill the whole scrap-book with the sequels and developments of one adventure; he goes out to notice everybody and he finds himself busily and variedly occupied only in watching somebody. In this there is a very profound truth about the true excitement and inexhaustible poetry of life. The truth is not so much that eternity is full of souls as that one soul can fill eternity. In strict art there is something quite lame and lumbering about the way in which the benevolent old story-teller starts to tell many stories and then drops away altogether, while one of his stories takes his place. But in a larger art, his collision with Little Nell and his complete eclipse by her personality and narrative have a real significance. They suggest the random richness of such meetings, and their uncalculated results. It makes the whole book a sort of splendid accident.

It is not true, as is commonly said, that the Dickens pathos as pathos is bad. It is not true, as is still more commonly said, that the whole business about Little Nell is bad. The case is more complex than that. Yet complex as it is it admits of one sufficiently clear distinction. Those who have written about the death of Little Nell, have generally noticed the crudities of the character itself; the little girl's unnatural and staring innocence, her constrained and awkward piety. But they have nearly all of them entirely failed to notice that there is in the death of Little Nell one quite definite and really artistic idea. It is not an artistic idea that a little child should die rhetorically on the stage like Paul Dombey; and Little Nell does not die rhetorically upon the stage like Paul Dombey. But it is an artistic idea that all the good powers and personalities in the story should set out in pursuit of one insignificant child, to repair an injustice to her, should track her from town to town over England with all the resources of wealth, intelligence, and travel, and should all — arrive too late. All the good fairies and all the kind magicians, all the just kings and all the gallant princes, with chariots and flying dragons and armies and navies go after one little child who had strayed into a wood, and find her dead. That is the conception which Dickens's artistic instinct was really aiming at when he finally condemned Little Nell to death, after keeping her, so to speak, so long with the rope round her neck. The death of Little Nell is open certainly to the particular denial which its enemies make about it. The death of Little Nell is not pathetic. It is perhaps tragic; it is in reality ironic. Here is a very good case of the injustice to Dickens on his purely literary side. It is not that I say that Dickens achieved what he designed; it is that the critics will not see what the design was. They go on talking of the death of Little Nell as if it were a mere example of maudlin description like the death of Little Paul. As a fact it is not described at all; so it cannot be objectionable. It is not the death of Little Nell, but the life of Little Nell, that I object to.

In this, in the actual picture of her personality, if you can call it a personality, Dickens did fall into some of his facile vices. The real objection to much of his pathos belongs really to another part of his character. It is connected with his vanity, his voracity for all kinds of praise, his restive experimentalism and even perhaps his envy. He strained himself to achieve pathos. His humour was inspiration; but his pathos was ambition. His laughter was lonely; he would have laughed on a desert island. But his grief was gregarious. He liked to move great masses of men, to melt them into tenderness, to play on the people as a great pianist plays on them; to make them mad or sad. His pathos was to him a way of showing his power; and for that reason it was really powerless. He could not help making people laugh; but he tried to make them cry. We come in this novel, as we often do come in his novels, upon hard lumps of unreality, upon a phrase that suddenly sickens. That is always due to his conscious despotism over the delicate feelings; that is always due to his love of fame as distinct from his love of fun. But it is not true that all Dickens's pathos is like this; it is not even true that all the passages about Little Nell are like this; there are two strands almost everywhere and they can be differentiated as the sincere and the deliberate. There is a great difference between Dickens thinking about the tears of his characters and Dickens thinking about the tears of his audience.

When all this is allowed, however, and the exaggerated contempt for the Dickens pathos is properly corrected, the broad fact remains: that to pass from the solemn characters in this book to the comic characters in this book, is to be like some Ulysses who should pass suddenly from the land of shadows to the mountain of the gods. Little Nell has her own position in careful and reasonable criticism: even that wobbling old ass, her grandfather, has his position in it; perhaps even the dissipated Fred (whom long acquaintance with Mr. Dick Swiveller has not made any less dismal in his dissipation) has a place in it also. But when we come to Swiveller and Sampson Brass and Quilp and Mrs. Jarley, then Fred and Nell and the grandfather simply do not exist. There are no such people in the story. The real hero and heroine of *The Old Curiosity Shop* are of course Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness. It is significant in a sense that these two sane, strong, living, and lovable human beings are the only two, or almost the only two, people in the story who do not run after Little Nell. They have something better to do than to go on that shadowy chase after that cheerless phantom. They have to build up between them a true romance; perhaps the one true romance in the whole of Dickens. Dick Swiveller really has all the half-heroic characteristics which make a man respected by a woman and which are the male contribution to virtue. He is brave, magnanimous, sincere about himself, amusing, absurdly hopeful; above all, he is both strong and weak. On the other hand the Marchioness really has all the characteristics, the entirely heroic characteristics which make a woman respected by a man. She is female: that is, she is at once incurably candid and incurably loyal, she is full of terrible common-sense, she expects little pleasure for herself and yet she can enjoy bursts of it; above all, she is physically timid and yet she can face anything. All this solid rocky romanticism is really implied in the speech and action of these two characters and can be felt behind them all the time. Because they are the two most absurd people in the book they are also the most vivid, human, and imaginable. There are two really fine love affairs in Dickens; and I almost think only two. One is the happy courtship of Swiveller and the Marchioness; the other is the tragic courtship of Toots and Florence Dombey. When Dick Swiveller wakes up in bed and sees the Marchioness playing cribbage he thinks that he and she are a prince and princess in a fairy tale. He thinks right.

I speak thus seriously of such characters with a deliberate purpose; for the frivolous characters of Dickens are taken much too frivolously. It has been quite insufficiently pointed out that all the serious moral ideas that Dickens did contrive to express he expressed altogether through this fantastic medium, in such figures as Swiveller and the little servant. The warmest upholder of Dickens would not go to the solemn or sentimental passages for anything fresh or suggestive in faith or philosophy. No one would pretend that the death of little Dombey (with its “What are the wild waves saying?”) told us anything new or real about death. A good Christian dying, one would imagine, not only would not know what the wild waves were saying, but would not care. No one would pretend that the repentance of old Paul Dombey throws any light on the psychology or philosophy of repentance. No doubt old Dombey, white-haired and amiable, was a great improvement on old Dombey brown-haired and unpleasant. But in his case the softening of the heart seems to bear too close a resemblance to softening of the brain. Whether these serious passages are as bad as the critical people or as good as the sentimental people find them, at least they do not convey anything in the way of an illuminating glimpse or a bold suggestion about men’s moral nature. The serious figures do not tell one anything about the human soul. The comic figures do. Take anything almost at random out of these admirable speeches of Dick Swiveller. Notice, for instance, how exquisitely Dickens has caught a certain very deep and delicate quality at the bottom of this idle kind of man. I mean that odd impersonal sort of intellectual justice, by which the frivolous fellow sees things as they are and even himself as he is; and is above irritation. Mr. Swiveller, you remember, asks the Marchioness whether the Brass family ever talk about him; she nods her head with vivacity. "'Complimentary?' inquired Mr. Swiveller. The motion of the little servant's head altered.... 'But she says,' continued the little servant, 'that you ain't to be trusted.' 'Well, do you know, Marchioness,' said Mr. Swiveller thoughtfully, 'many people, not exactly professional people, but tradesmen, have had the same idea. The excellent citizen from whom I ordered this beer inclines strongly to that opinion.'"

This philosophical freedom from all resentment, this strange love of truth which seems actually to come through carelessness, is a very real piece of spiritual observation. Even among liars there are two classes, one immeasurably better than another. The honest liar is the man who tells the truth about his old lies; who says on Wednesday, "I told a magnificent lie on Monday." He keeps the truth in circulation; no one version of things stagnates in him and becomes an evil secret. He does not have to live with old lies; a horrible domesticity. Mr. Swiveller may mislead the waiter about whether he has the money to pay; but he does not mislead his friend, and he does not mislead himself on the point. He is quite as well aware as any one can be of the accumulating falsity of the position of a gentleman who by his various debts has closed up all the streets into the Strand except one, and who is going to close that to-night with a pair of gloves. He shuts up the street with a pair of gloves, but he does not shut up his mind with a secret. The traffic of truth is still kept open through his soul.

It is exactly in these absurd characters, then, that we can find a mass of psychological and ethical suggestion. This cannot be found in the serious characters except indeed in some of the later experiments: there is a little of such psychological and ethical suggestion in figures like Gridley, like Jasper, like Bradley Headstone. But in these earlier books at least, such as *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the grave or moral figures throw no light upon morals. I should maintain this generalisation even in the presence of that apparent exception *The Christmas Carol* with its trio of didactic ghosts. Charity is certainly splendid, at once a luxury and a necessity; but Dickens is not most effective when he is preaching charity seriously; he is most effective when he is preaching it uproariously; when he is preaching it by means of massive personalities and vivid scenes. One might say that he is best not when he is preaching his human love, but when he is practising it.

In his grave pages he tells us to love men; but in his wild pages he creates men whom we can love. By his solemnity he commands us to love our neighbours. By his caricature he makes us love them.

There is an odd literary question which I wonder is not put more often in literature. How far can an author tell a truth without seeing it himself? Perhaps an actual example will express my meaning. I was once talking to a highly intelligent lady about Thackeray's *Newcomes*. We were speaking of the character of Mrs. Mackenzie, the Campaigner, and in the middle of the conversation the lady leaned across to me and said in a low, hoarse, but emphatic voice, "She drank. Thackeray didn't know it; but she drank." And it is really astonishing what a shaft of white light this sheds on the Campaigner, on her terrible temperament, on her agonised abusiveness and her almost more agonised urbanity, on her clamour which is nevertheless not open or explicable, on her temper which is not so much bad temper as insatiable, bloodthirsty, man-eating temper. How far can a writer thus indicate by accident a truth of which he is himself ignorant? If truth is a plan or pattern of things that really are, or in other words, if truth truly exists outside ourselves, or in other words, if truth exists at all, it must be often possible for a writer to uncover a corner of it which he happens not to understand, but which his reader does happen to understand. The author sees only two lines; the reader sees where they meet and what is the angle. The author sees only an arc or fragment of a curve; the reader sees the size of the circle. The last thing to say about Dickens, and especially about books like *The Old Curiosity Shop*, is that they are full of these unconscious truths. The careless reader may miss them. The careless author almost certainly did miss them. But from them can be gathered an impression of real truth to life which is for the grave critics of Dickens an almost unknown benefit, buried treasure. Here for instance is one of them out of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. I mean the passage in which (by a blazing stroke of genius) the dashing Mr. Chuckster, one of the Glorious Apollos of whom Mr. Swiveller was the Perpetual Grand, is made to entertain a hatred bordering upon frenzy for the stolid, patient, respectful, and laborious Kit. Now in the formal plan of the story Mr. Chuckster is a fool, and Kit is almost a hero; at least he is a noble boy. Yet unconsciously Dickens made the idiot Chuckster say something profoundly suggestive on the subject. In speaking of Kit Mr. Chuckster makes use of these two remarkable phrases; that Kit is "meek" and that he is "a snob." Now Kit is really a very fresh and manly picture of a boy, firm, sane, chivalrous, reasonable, full of those three great Roman virtues which Mr. Belloc has so often celebrated, *virtus* and *verecundia* and *pietas*. He is a sympathetic but still a straightforward study of the best type of that most respectable of all human classes, the respectable poor. All this is true; all that Dickens utters in praise of Kit is true; nevertheless the awful words of Chuckster remain written on the eternal skies. Kit is meek and Kit is a snob. His natural dignity does include and is partly marred by that instinctive subservience to the employing class which has been the comfortable weakness of the whole English democracy, which has prevented their making any revolution for the last two hundred years. Kit would not serve any wicked man for money, but he would serve any moderately good man and the money would give a certain dignity and decisiveness to the goodness. All this is the English popular evil which goes along with the English popular virtues of geniality, of homeliness, tolerance and strong humour, hope and an enormous appetite for a hand-to-mouth happiness. The scene in which Kit takes his family to the theatre is a monument of the massive qualities of old English enjoyment. If what we want is Merry England, our antiquarians ought not to revive the Maypole or the Morris Dancers; they ought to revive Astley's and Sadler's Wells and the old solemn Circus and the old stupid Pantomime, and all the sawdust and all the oranges. Of all this strength and joy in the poor, Kit is a splendid and final symbol. But amid all his masculine and English virtue, he has this weak touch of meekness, or acceptance of the powers that be. It is a sound touch; it is a real truth about Kit. But Dickens did not know it. Mr. Chuckster did.

Dickens's stories taken as a whole have more artistic unity than appears at the first glance. It is the immediate impulse of a modern critic to dismiss them as mere disorderly scrap-books with very brilliant scraps. But this is not quite so true as it looks. In one of Dickens's novels there is generally no particular unity of construction; but there is often a considerable unity of sentiment and atmosphere. Things are irrelevant, but not somehow inappropriate. The whole book is written carelessly; but the whole book is generally written in one mood. To take a rude parallel from the other arts, we may say that there is not much unity of form, but there is much unity of colour. In most of the novels this can be seen. *Nicholas Nickleby,* as I have remarked, is full of a certain freshness, a certain light and open-air curiosity, which irradiates from the image of the young man swinging along the

Yorkshire roads in the sun. Hence the comic characters with whom he falls in are comic characters in the same key; they are a band of strolling players, charlatans and poseurs, but too humane to be called humbugs. In the same way, the central story of *Oliver Twist* is sombre; and hence even its comic character is almost sombre; at least he is too ugly to be merely amusing. Mr. Bumble is in some ways a terrible grotesque; his apoplectic visage recalls the "fire-red Cherubimme's face," which added such horror to the height and stature of Chaucer's Sompnour. In both these cases even the riotous and absurd characters are a little touched with the tint of the whole story. But this neglected merit of Dickens can certainly be seen best in *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

The curiosity shop itself was a lumber of grotesque and sinister things, outlandish weapons, twisted and diabolic decorations. The comic characters in the book are all like images bought in an old curiosity shop. Quilp might be a gargoyle. He might be some sort of devilish door-knocker, dropped down and crawling about the pavement. The same applies to the sinister and really terrifying stiffness of Sally Brass. She is like some old staring figure cut out of wood. Sampson Brass, her brother, again is a grotesque in the same rather inhuman manner; he is especially himself when he comes in with the green shade over his eye. About all this group of bad figures in *The Old Curiosity Shop* there is a sort of *diablerie*. There is also within this atmosphere an extraordinary energy of irony and laughter. The scene in which Sampson Brass draws up the description of Quilp, supposing him to be dead, reaches a point of fiendish fun. "We will not say very bandy, Mrs. Jiniwin," he says of his friend's legs, "we will confine ourselves to bandy. He is gone, my friends, where his legs would never be called in question." They go on to the discussion of his nose, and Mrs. Jiniwin inclines to the view that it is flat. "Aquiline, you hag! Aquiline," cries Mr. Quilp, pushing in his head and striking his nose with his fist. There is nothing better in the whole brutal exuberance of the character than that gesture with which Quilp punches his own face with his own fist. It is indeed a perfect symbol; for Quilp is always fighting himself for want of anybody else. He is energy, and energy by itself is always suicidal; he is that primordial energy which tears and which destroys itself.

BARNABY RUDGE

Barnaby Rudge was written by Dickens in the spring and first flowing tide of his popularity; it came immediately after *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and only a short time after *Pickwick*. Dickens was one of those rare but often very sincere men in whom the high moment of success almost coincides with the high moment of youth. The calls upon him at this time were insistent and overwhelming; this necessarily happens at a certain stage of a successful writer's career. He was just successful enough to invite offers and not successful enough to reject them. At the beginning of his career he could throw himself into *Pickwick* because there was nothing else to throw himself into. At the end of his life he could throw himself into *A Tale of Two Cities*, because he refused to throw himself into anything else. But there was an intervening period, early in his life, when there was almost too much work for his imagination, and yet not quite enough work for his housekeeping. To this period *Barnaby Rudge* belongs. And it is a curious tribute to the quite curious greatness of Dickens that in this period of youthful strain we do not feel the strain but feel only the youth. His own amazing wish to write equalled or outstripped even his readers' amazing wish to read. Working too hard did not cure him of his abstract love of work. Unreasonable publishers asked him to write ten novels at once; but he wanted to write twenty novels at once. All this period is strangely full of his own sense at once of fertility and of futility; he did work which no one else could have done, and yet he could not be certain as yet that he was anybody.

Barnaby Rudge marks this epoch because it marks the fact that he is still confused about what kind of person he is going to be. He has already struck the note of the normal romance in *Nicholas Nickleby*; he has already created some of his highest comic characters in *Pickwick* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, but here he betrays the fact that it is still a question what ultimate guide he shall follow. *Barnaby Rudge* is a romantic, historical novel. Its design reminds us of Scott; some parts of its fulfilment remind us, alas! of Harrison Ainsworth. It is a very fine romantic historical novel; Scott would have been proud of it. But it is still so far different from the general work of Dickens that it is permissible to wonder how far Dickens was proud of it. The book, effective as it is, is almost entirely devoted to dealings with a certain artistic element, which (in its mere isolation) Dickens did not commonly affect; an element which many men of infinitely less genius have often seemed to affect more successfully; I mean the element of the picturesque.

It is the custom in many quarters to speak somewhat sneeringly of that element which is broadly called the picturesque. It is always felt to be an inferior, a vulgar, and even an artificial form of art. Yet two things may be remarked about it. The first is that, with few exceptions, the greatest literary artists have been not only particularly clever at the picturesque, but particularly fond of it. Shakespeare, for instance, delighted in certain merely pictorial contrasts which are quite distinct from, even when they are akin to, the spiritual view involved. For instance, there is admirable satire in the idea of Touchstone teaching worldly wisdom and worldly honour to the woodland yokels. There is excellent philosophy in the idea of the fool being the representative of civilisation in the forest. But quite apart from this deeper meaning in the incident, the mere figure of the jester, in his bright motley and his cap and bells, against the green background of the forest and the rude forms of the shepherds, is a strong example of the purely picturesque. There is excellent tragic irony in the confrontation of the melancholy philosopher among the tombs with the cheerful digger of the graves. It sums up the essential point, that dead bodies can be comic; it is only dead souls that can be tragic. But quite apart from such irony, the mere picture of the grotesque gravedigger, the black-clad prince, and the skull is a picture in the strongest sense picturesque. Caliban and the two shipwrecked drunkards are an admirable symbol; but they are also an admirable scene. Bottom, with the ass’s head, sitting in a ring of elves, is excellent moving comedy, but also excellent still life. Falstaff with his huge body, Bardolph with his burning nose, are masterpieces of the pen; but they would be fine sketches even for the pencil. King Lear, in the storm, is a landscape as well as a character study. There is something decorative even about the insistence on the swarthiness of Othello, or the deformity of Richard III. Shakespeare’s work is much more than picturesque; but it is picturesque. And the same which is said here of him by way of example is largely true of the highest class of literature. Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is supremely important as a philosophy; but it is important merely as a panorama. Spenser’s *Faery Queen* pleases us as an allegory; but it would please us even as a wall-paper. Stronger still is the case of Chaucer who loved the pure picturesque, which always includes something of what we commonly call the ugly. The huge stature and startling scarlet face of the Sompnour is in just the same spirit as Shakespeare's skulls and motley; the same spirit gave Chaucer's miller bagpipes, and clad his doctor in crimson. It is the spirit which, while making many other things, loves to make a picture.

Now the second thing to be remarked in apology for the picturesque is, that the very thing which makes it seem trivial ought really to make it seem important; I mean the fact that it consists necessarily of contrasts. It brings together types that stand out from their background, but are abruptly different from each other, like the clown among the fairies or the fool in the forest. And his audacious reconciliation is a mark not of frivolity but of extreme seriousness. A man who deals in harmonies, who only matches stars with angels or lambs with spring flowers, he indeed may be frivolous; for he is taking one mood at a time, and perhaps forgetting each mood as it passes. But a man who ventures to combine an angel and an octopus must have some serious view of the universe. The man who should write a dialogue between two early Christians might be a mere writer of dialogues. But a man who should write a dialogue between an early Christian and the Missing Link would have to be a philosopher. The more widely different the types talked of, the more serious and universal must be the philosophy which talks of them. The mark of the light and thoughtless writer is the harmony of his subject matter; the mark of the thoughtful writer is its apparent diversity. The most flippant lyric poet might write a pretty poem about lambs; but it requires something bolder and graver than a poet, it requires an ecstatic prophet, to talk about the lion lying down with the lamb.

Dickens, at any rate, strongly supports this conception: that great literary men as such do not despise the purely pictorial. No man's works have so much the quality of illustrating themselves. Few men's works have been more thoroughly and eagerly illustrated; few men's works can it have been better fun to illustrate. As a rule this fascinating quality in the mere fantastic figures of the tale was inseparable from their farcical quality in the tale. Stiggins's red nose is distinctly connected with the fact that he is a member of the Ebenezer Temperance Association; Quilp is little, because a little of him goes a long way. Mr. Carker smiles and smiles and is a villain; Mr. Chadband is fat because in his case to be fat is to be hated. The story is immeasurably more important than the picture; it is not mere indulgence in the picturesque. Generally it is an intellectual love of the comic; not a pure love of the grotesque.

But in one book Dickens suddenly confesses that he likes the grotesque even without the comic. In one case he makes clear that he enjoys pure pictures with a pure love of the picturesque. That place is *Barnaby Rudge*. There had indeed been hints of it in many episodes in his books; notably, for example, in that fine scene of the death of Quilp — a scene in which the dwarf remains fantastic long after he has ceased to be in any way funny. Still, the dwarf was meant to be funny. Humour of a horrible kind, but still humour, is the purpose of Quilp's existence and position in the book. Laughter is the object of all his oddities. But laughter is not the object of Barnaby Rudge's oddities. His idiot costume and his ugly raven are used for the purpose of the pure grotesque; solely to make a certain kind of Gothic sketch.

It is commonly this love of pictures that drives men back upon the historical novel. But it is very typical of Dickens's living interest in his own time, that though he wrote two historical novels they were neither of them of very ancient history. They were both, indeed, of very recent history; only they were those parts of recent history which were specially picturesque. I do not think that this was due to any mere consciousness on his part that he knew no history. Undoubtedly he knew no history; and he may or may not have been conscious of the fact. But the consciousness did not prevent him from writing a *History of England*. Nor did it prevent him from interlarding all or any of his works with tales of the pictorial past, such as the tale of the broken swords in *Master Humphrey's Clock*, or the indefensibly delightful nightmare of the lady in the stage-coach, which helps to soften the amiable end of Pickwick. Neither, worst of all, did it prevent him from dogmatising anywhere and everywhere about the past, of which he knew nothing; it did not prevent him from telling the bells to tell Trotty Veck that the Middle Ages were a failure, nor from solemnly declaring that the best thing that the mediæval monks ever did was to create the mean and snobbish quietude of a modern cathedral city. No, it was not historical reverence that held him back from dealing with the remote past; but rather something much better — a living interest in the living century in which he was born. He would have thought himself quite intellectually capable of writing a novel about the Council of Trent or the First Crusade. He would have thought himself quite equal to analysing the psychology of Abelard or giving a bright, satiric sketch of St. Augustine. It must frankly be confessed that it was not a sense of his own unworthiness that held him back; I fear it was rather a sense of St. Augustine's unworthiness. He could not see the point of any history before the first slow swell of the French Revolution. He could understand the revolutions of the eighteenth century; all the other revolutions of history (so many and so splendid) were unmeaning to him. But the revolutions of the eighteenth century he did understand; and to them therefore he went back, as all historical novelists go back, in search of the picturesque. And from this fact an important result follows.

The result that follows is this: that his only two historical novels are both tales of revolutions — of eighteenth-century revolutions. These two eighteenth-century revolutions may seem to differ, and perhaps do differ in everything except in being revolutions and of the eighteenth century. The French Revolution, which is the theme of *A Tale of Two Cities*, was a revolt in favour of all that is now called enlightenment and liberation. The great Gordon Riot, which is the theme of *Barnaby Rudge*, was a revolt in favour of something which would now be called mere ignorant and obscurantist Protestantism. Nevertheless both belonged more typically to the age out of which Dickens came — the great sceptical and yet creative eighteenth century of Europe. Whether the mob rose on the right side or the wrong they both belonged to the time in which a mob could rise, in which a mob could conquer. No growth of intellectual science or of moral cowardice had made it impossible to fight in the streets, whether for the republic or for the Bible. If we wish to know what was the real link, existing actually in ultimate truth, existing unconsciously in Dickens's mind, which connected the Gordon Riots with the French Revolution, the link may be defined though not with any great adequacy. The nearest and truest way of stating it is that neither of the two could possibly happen in Fleet Street to-morrow evening.

Another point of resemblance between the two books might be found in the fact that they both contain the sketch of the same kind of eighteenth-century aristocrat, if indeed that kind of aristocrat really existed in the eighteenth century. The diabolical dandy with the rapier and the sneer is at any rate a necessity of all normal plays and romances; hence Mr. Chester has a right to exist in this romance, and Foulon a right to exist in a page of history almost as cloudy and disputable as a romance. What Dickens and other romancers do probably omit from the picture of the eighteenth-century oligarch is probably his liberality. It must never be forgotten that even when he was a despot in practice he was generally a liberal in theory.

Dickens and romancers make the pre-revolution tyrant a sincere believer in tyranny; generally he was not. He was a sceptic about everything, even about his own position. The romantic Foulon says of the people, “Let them eat grass,” with bitter and deliberate contempt. The real Foulon (if he ever said it at all) probably said it as a sort of dreary joke because he couldn’t think of any other way out of the problem. Similarly Mr. Chester, a cynic as he is, believes seriously in the beauty of being a gentleman; a real man of that type probably disbelieved in that as in everything else. Dickens was too bracing, one may say too bouncing himself to understand the psychology of fatigue in a protected and leisured class. He could understand a tyrant like Quilp, a tyrant who is on his throne because he has climbed up into it, like a monkey. He could not understand a tyrant who is on his throne because he is too weary to get out of it. The old aristocrats were in a dead way quite good-natured. They were even humanitarians; which perhaps accounts for the extent to which they roused against themselves the healthy hatred of humanity. But they were tired humanitarians; tired with doing nothing. Figures like that of Mr. Chester, therefore, fail somewhat to give the true sense of something hopeless and helpless which led men to despair of the upper class. He has a boyish pleasure in play-acting; he has an interest in life; being a villain is his hobby. But the true man of that type had found all hobbies fail him. He had wearied of himself as he had wearied of a hundred women. He was graceful and could not even admire himself in the glass. He was witty and could not even laugh at his own jokes. Dickens could never understand tedium.

There is no mark more strange and perhaps sinister of the interesting and not very sane condition of our modern literature, than the fact that tedium has been admirably described in it. Our best modern writers are never so exciting as they are about dulness. Mr. Rudyard Kipling is never so powerful as when he is painting yawning deserts, aching silences, sleepless nights, or infernal isolation. The excitement in one of the stories of Mr. Henry James becomes tense, thrilling, and almost intolerable in all the half hours during which nothing whatever is said or done. We are entering again into the mind, into the real mind of Foulon and Mr. Chester. We begin to understand the deep despair of those tyrants whom our fathers pulled down. But Dickens could never have understood that despair; it was not in his soul. And it is an interesting coincidence that here, in this book of *Barnaby Rudge*, there is a character meant to be wholly grotesque, who, nevertheless, expresses much of that element in Dickens which prevented him from being a true interpreter of the tired and sceptical aristocrat.

Sim Tappertit is a fool, but a perfectly honourable fool. It requires some sincerity to pose. Posing means that one has not dried up in oneself all the youthful and innocent vanities with the slow paralysis of mere pride. Posing means that one is still fresh enough to enjoy the good opinion of one’s fellows. On the other hand, the true cynic has not enough truth in him to attempt affectation; he has never even seen the truth, far less tried to imitate it. Now we might very well take the type of Mr. Chester on the one hand, and of Sim Tappertit on the other, as marking the issue, the conflict, and the victory which really ushered in the nineteenth century. Dickens was very like Sim Tappertit. The Liberal Revolution was very like a Sim Tappertit revolution. It was vulgar, it was overdone, it was absurd, but it was alive. Dickens was vulgar, was absurd, overdid everything, but he was alive. The aristocrats were perfectly correct, but quite dead; dead long before they were guillotined. The classics and critics who lamented that Dickens was no gentleman were quite right, but quite dead. The revolution thought itself rational; but so did Sim Tappertit. It was really a huge revolt of romanticism against a reason which had grown sick even of itself. Sim Tappertit rose against Mr. Chester; and, thank God! he put his foot upon his neck.

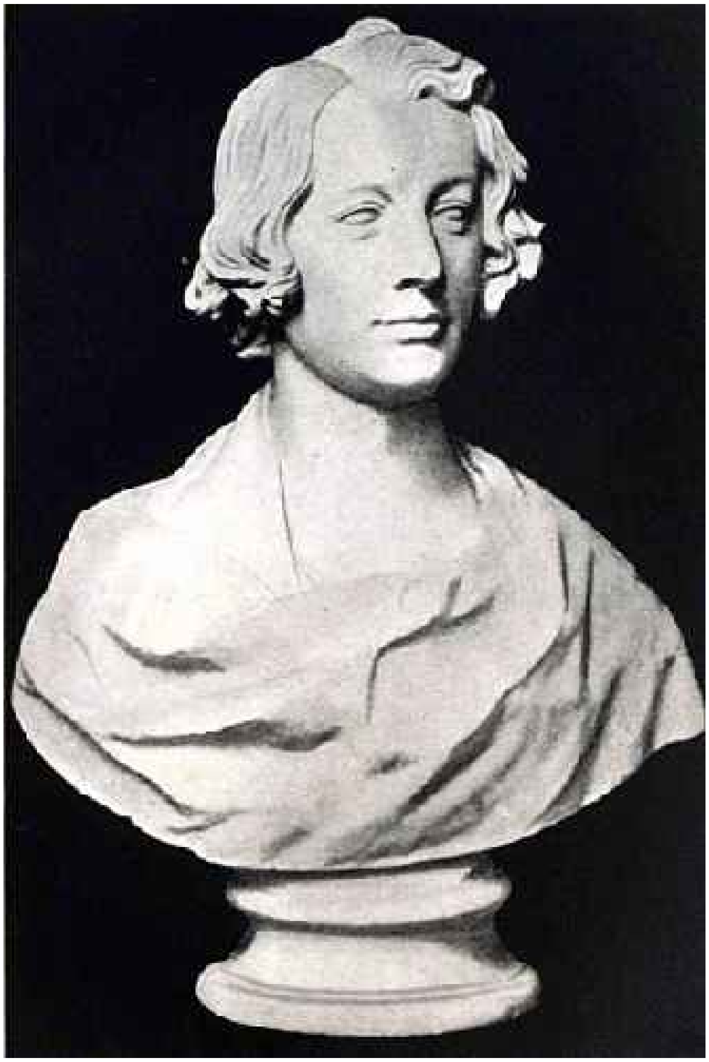

Charles Dickens, 1842
From a bust by H. Dexter, executed during Dickens's first visit to America.

AMERICAN NOTES

American Notes was written soon after Dickens had returned from his first visit to America. That visit had, of course, been a great epoch in his life; but how much of an epoch men did not truly realise until, some time after, in the middle of a quiet story about Salisbury and a ridiculous architect, his feelings flamed out and flared up to the stars in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The *American Notes* are, however, interesting, because in them he betrays his feelings when he does not know that he is betraying them. Dickens's first visit to America was, from his own point of view, and at the beginning, a happy and festive experiment. It is very characteristic of him that he went among the Americans, enjoyed them, even admired them, and then had a quarrel with them. Nothing was ever so unmistakable as his good-will, except his ill-will; and they were never far apart. And this was not, as some bloodless moderns have sneeringly insinuated, a mere repetition of the proximity between the benevolent stage and the quarrelsome stage of drink. It was a piece of pure optimism; he believed so readily that men were going to be good to him that an injury to him was something more than an injury: it was a shock. What was the exact nature of the American shock must, however, be more carefully stated.

The famous quarrel between Dickens and America, which finds its most elaborate expression in *American Notes*, though its most brilliant expression in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, is an incident about which a great deal remains to be said. But the thing which most specially remains to be said is this. This old Anglo-American quarrel was much more fundamentally friendly than most Anglo-American alliances. In Dickens's day each nation understood the other enough to argue. In our time neither nation understands itself even enough to quarrel. There was an English tradition, from Fox and eighteenth-century England; there was an American tradition from Franklin and eighteenth-century America; and they were still close enough together to discuss their differences with acrimony, perhaps, but with certain fundamental understandings. The eighteenth-century belief in a liberal civilisation was still a dogma; for dogma is the only thing that makes argument or reasoning possible. America, under all its swagger, did still really believe that Europe was its fountain and its mother, because Europe was more fully civilised. Dickens, under all his disgust, did still believe that

America was in advance of Europe, because it was more democratic. It was an age, in short, in which the word “progress” could still be used reasonably; because the whole world looked to one way of escape and there was only one kind of progress under discussion. Now, of course, “progress” is a useless word; for progress takes for granted an already defined direction; and it is exactly about the direction that we disagree. Do not let us therefore be misled into any mistaken optimism or special self-congratulation upon what many people would call the improved relations between England and America. The relations are improved because America has finally become a foreign country. And with foreign countries all sane men take care to exchange a certain consideration and courtesy. But even as late as the time of Dickens’s first visit to the United States, we English still felt America as a colony; an insolent, offensive, and even unintelligible colony sometimes, but still a colony; a part of our civilisation, a limb of our life. And America itself, as I have said, under all its bounce and independence, really regarded us as a mother country. This being the case it was possible for us to quarrel, like kinsmen. Now we only bow and smile, like strangers.

This tone, as a sort of family responsibility, can be felt quite specially all through the satires or suggestions of these *American Notes*. Dickens is cross with America because he is worried about America; as if he were its father. He explores its industrial, legal, and educational arrangements like a mother looking at the housekeeping of a married son; he makes suggestions with a certain acidity; he takes a strange pleasure in being pessimistic. He advises them to take note of how much better certain things are done in England. All this is very different from Dickens’s characteristic way of dealing with a foreign country. In countries really foreign, such as France, Switzerland, and Italy, he had two attitudes, neither of them in the least worried or paternal. When he found a thing in Europe which he did not understand, such as the Roman Catholic Church, he simply called it an old-world superstition, and sat looking at it like a moonlit ruin. When he found something that he did understand, such as luncheon baskets, he burst into carols of praise over the superior sense in our civilisation and good management to Continental methods. An example of the first attitude may be found in one of his letters, in which he describes the backwardness and idleness of Catholics who would not build a Birmingham in Italy. He seems quite unconscious of the obvious truth, that the backwardness of Catholics was simply the refusal of Bob Cratchit to enter the house of Gradgrind. An example of the second attitude can be found in the purple patches of fun in *Mugby Junction*; in which the English waitress denounces the profligate French habit of providing new bread and clean food for people travelling by rail. The point is, however, that in neither case has he the air of one suggesting improvements or sharing a problem with the people engaged on it. He does not go carefully with a notebook through Jesuit schools nor offer friendly suggestions to the governors of Parisian prisons. Or if he does, it is in a different spirit; it is in the spirit of an ordinary tourist being shown over the Coliseum or the Pyramids. But he visited America in the spirit of a Government inspector dealing with something it was his duty to inspect. This is never felt either in his praise or blame of Continental countries. When he did not leave a foreign country to decay like a dead dog, he merely watched it at play like a kitten. France he mistook for a kitten. Italy he mistook for a dead dog.

But with America he could feel — and fear. There he could hate, because he could love. There he could feel not the past alone nor the present, but the future also; and, like all brave men, when he saw the future he was a little afraid of it. For of all tests by which the good citizen and strong reformer can be distinguished from the vague faddist or the inhuman sceptic, I know no better test than this — that the unreal reformer sees in front of him one certain future, the future of his fad; while the real reformer sees before him ten or twenty futures among which his country must choose, and may, in some dreadful hour, choose the wrong one. The true patriot is always doubtful of victory; because he knows that he is dealing with a living thing; a thing with free will. To be certain of free will is to be uncertain of success.

The subject matter of the real difference of opinion between Dickens and the public of America can only be understood if it is thus treated as a dispute between brothers about the destiny of a common heritage. The point at issue might be stated like this. Dickens, on his side, did not in his heart doubt for a moment that England would eventually follow America along the road towards real political equality and purely republican institutions. He lived, it must be remembered, before the revival of aristocracy, which has since overwhelmed us — the revival of aristocracy worked through popular science and commercial dictatorship, and which has nowhere been more manifest than in America itself. He knew nothing of this; in his heart he conceded to the Yankees that not only was their revolution right but would ultimately be completed everywhere. But on the other hand, his whole point against the American experiment was this — that if it ignored certain ancient English contributions it would go to pieces for lack of them. Of these the first was good manners and the second individual liberty — liberty, that is, to speak and write against the trend of the majority. In these things he was much more serious and much more sensible than it is the fashion to think he was; he was indeed one of the most serious and sensible critics England ever had of current and present problems, though his criticism is useless to the point of nonentity about all things remote from him in style of civilisation or in time. His point about good manners is really important. All his grumblings through this book of *American Notes*, all his shrieking satire in *Martin Chuzzlewit* are expressions of a grave and reasonable fear he had touching the future of democracy. And remember again what has been already remarked — instinctively he paid America the compliment of looking at her as the future of democracy.

The mistake which he attacked still exists. I cannot imagine why it is that social equality is somehow supposed to mean social familiarity. Why should equality mean that all men are equally rude? Should it not rather mean that all men are equally polite? Might it not quite reasonably mean that all men should be equally ceremonious and stately and pontifical? What is there specially Equalitarian, for instance, in calling your political friends and even your political enemies by their Christian names in public? There is something very futile in the way in which certain Socialist leaders call each other Tom, Dick, and Harry; especially when Tom is accusing Harry of having basely imposed upon the well-known imbecility of Dick. There is something quite undemocratic in all men calling each other by the special and affectionate term “comrade”; especially when they say it with a sneer and smart inquiry about the funds. Democracy would be quite satisfied if every man called every other man “sir.” Democracy would have no conceivable reason to complain if every man called every other man “your excellency” or “your holiness” or “brother of the sun and moon.” The only democratic essential is that it should be a term of dignity and that it should be given to all. To abolish all terms of dignity is no more specially democratic than the Roman emperor’s wish to cut off everybody’s head at once was specially democratic. That involved equality certainly, but it was lacking in respect.

Dickens saw America as markedly the seat of this danger. He saw that there was a perilous possibility that republican ideals might be allied to a social anarchy good neither for them nor for any other ideals. Republican simplicity, which is difficult, might be quickly turned into Bohemian brutality, which is easy. Cincinnatus, instead of putting his hand to the plough, might put his feet on the tablecloth, and an impression prevail that it was all a part of the same rugged equality and freedom. Insolence might become a tradition. Bad manners might have all the sanctity of good manners. "There you are!" cries Martin Chuzzlewit indignantly, when the American has befouled the butter. "A man deliberately makes a hog of himself and *that* is an Institution." But the thread of thought which we must always keep in hand in this matter is that he would not thus have worried about the degradation of republican simplicity into general rudeness if he had not from first to last instinctively felt that America held human democracy in her hand, to exalt it or to let it fall. In one of his gloomier moments he wrote down his fear that the greatest blow ever struck at liberty would be struck by America in the failure of her mission upon the earth.

This brings us to the other ground of his alarm — the matter of liberty of speech. Here also he was much more reasonable and philosophic than has commonly been realised. The truth is that the lurid individualism of Carlyle has, with its violent colours, "killed" the tones of most criticism of his time; and just as we can often see a scheme of decoration better if we cover some flaming picture, so you can judge nineteenth-century England much better if you leave Carlyle out. He is important to moderns because he led that return to Toryism which has been the chief feature of modernity, but his judgments were often not only spiritually false, but really quite superficial. Dickens understood the danger of democracy far better than Carlyle; just as he understood the merits of democracy far better than Carlyle. And of this fact we can produce one plain evidence in the matter of which we speak. Carlyle, in his general dislike of the revolutionary movement, lumped liberty and democracy together and said that the chief objection to democracy was that it involved the excess and misuse of liberty; he called democracy "anarchy or no-rule." Dickens, with far more philosophical insight and spiritual delicacy, saw that the real danger of democracy is that it tends to the very opposite of anarchy; even to the very opposite of liberty. He lamented in America the freedom of manners. But he lamented even more the absence of freedom of opinion. "I believe there is no country on the face of the earth,” he says, “where there is less freedom of opinion on any subject in reference to which there is a broad difference of opinion than in this. There! I write the words with reluctance, disappointment, and sorrow; but I believe it from the bottom of my soul. The notion that I, a man alone by myself in America, should venture to suggest to the Americans that there was one point on which they were neither just to their own countrymen nor to us, actually struck the boldest dumb! Washington Irving, Prescott, Hoffman, Bryant, Halleck, Dana, Washington Allston — every man who writes in this country is devoted to the question, and not one of them *dares* to raise his voice and complain of the atrocious state of the law. The wonder is that a breathing man can be found with temerity enough to suggest to the Americans the possibility of their having done wrong. I wish you could have seen the faces that I saw down both sides of the table at Hartford when I began to talk about Scott. I wish you could have heard how I gave it out. My blood so boiled when I thought of the monstrous injustice that I felt as if I were twelve feet high when I thrust it down their throats.” Dickens knew no history, but he had all history behind him in feeling that a pure democracy does tend, when it goes wrong, to be too traditional and absolute. The truth is indeed a singular example of the unfair attack upon democracy in our own time. Everybody can repeat the platitude that the mob can be the greatest of all tyrants. But few realise or remember the corresponding truth which goes along with it — that the mob is the only permanent and unassailable high priest. Democracy drives its traditions too hard; but democracy is the only thing that keeps any traditions. An aristocracy must always be going after some new thing. The severity of democracy is far more of a virtue than its liberty. The decorum of a democracy is far more of a danger than its lawlessness. Dickens discovered this in his great quarrels about the copyright, when a whole nation acted on a small point of opinion as if it were going to lynch him. But, fortunately for the purpose of this argument, there is no need to go back to the forties for such a case. Another great literary man has of late visited America; and it is possible that Maxim Gorky may be in a position to state how far democracy is likely to err on the side of mere liberty and laxity. He may have found, like Dickens, some freedom of manners; he did not find much freedom of morals.

Along with such American criticism should really go his very characteristic summary of the question of the Red Indian. It marks the combination between the mental narrowness and the moral justice of the old Liberal. Dickens can see nothing in the Red Indian except that he is barbaric, retrograde, bellicose, uncleanly, and superstitious — in short, that he is not a member of the special civilisation of Birmingham or Brighton. It is curious to note the contrast between the cheery, nay Cockney, contempt with which Dickens speaks of the American Indian and that chivalrous and pathetic essay in which Washington Irving celebrates the virtues of the vanishing race. Between Washington Irving and his friend Charles Dickens there was always indeed this ironical comedy of inversion. It is amusing that the Englishman should have been the pushing and even pert modernist, and the American the stately antiquarian and lover of lost causes. But while a man of more mellow sympathies may well dislike Dickens’s dislike of savages, and even disdain his disdain, he ought to sharply remind himself of the admirable ethical fairness and equity which meet with that restricted outlook. In the very act of describing Red Indians as devils who, like so much dirt, it would pay us to sweep away, he pauses to deny emphatically that we have any right to sweep them away. We have no right to wrong the man, he means to say, even if he himself be a kind of wrong. Here we strike the ringing iron of the old conscience and sense of honour which marked the best men of his party and of his epoch. This rigid and even reluctant justice towers, at any rate, far above modern views of savages, above the sentimentalism of the mere humanitarian and the far weaker sentimentalism that pleads for brutality and a race war. Dickens was at least more of a man than the brutalitarian who claims to wrong people because they are nasty, or the humanitarian who cannot be just to them without pretending that they are nice.

PICTURES FROM ITALY

The *Pictures from Italy* are excellent in themselves and excellent as a foil to the *American Notes*. Here we have none of that air of giving a decision like a judge or sending in a report like an inspector; here we have only glimpses, light and even fantastic glimpses, of a world that is really alien to Dickens. It is so alien that he can almost entirely enjoy it. For no man can entirely enjoy that which he loves; contentment is always unpatriotic. The difference can indeed be put with approximate perfection in one phrase. In Italy he was on a holiday; in America he was on a tour. But indeed Dickens himself has quite sufficiently conveyed the difference in the two phrases that he did actually use for the titles of the two books. Dickens often told unconscious truths, especially in small matters. The *American Notes* really are notes, like the notes of a student or a professional witness. The *Pictures from Italy* are only pictures from Italy, like the miscellaneous pictures that all tourists bring from Italy.

To take another and perhaps closer figure of speech, almost all Dickens's works such as these may best be regarded as private letters addressed to the public. His private correspondence was quite as brilliant as his public works; and many of his public works are almost as formless and casual as his private correspondence. If he had been struck insensible for a year, I really think that his friends and family could have brought out one of his best books by themselves if they had happened to keep his letters. The homogeneity of his public and private work was indeed strange in many ways. On the one hand, there was little that was pompously and unmistakably public in the publications; on the other hand, there was very little that was private in the private letters. His hilarity had almost a kind of hardness about it; no man's letters, I should think, ever needed less expurgation on the ground of weakness or undue confession. The main part, and certainly the best part, of such a book as *Pictures from Italy* can certainly be criticised best as part of that perpetual torrent of entertaining autobiography which he flung at his children as if they were his readers and his readers as if they were his children. There are some brilliant patches of sense and nonsense in this book; but there is always something accidental in them; as if they might have occurred somewhere else. Perhaps the most attractive of them is the incomparable description of the Italian Marionette

Theatre in which they acted a play about the death of Napoleon in St. Helena. The description is better than that of Codlin and Short's Punch and Judy, and almost as good as that of Mrs. Jarley's Wax Works. Indeed the humour is similar; for Punch is supposed to be funny, but Napoleon (as Mrs. Jarley said when asked if her show was funnier than Punch) was not funny at all. The idea of a really tragic scene being enacted between tiny wooden dolls with large heads is delightfully dealt with by Dickens. We can almost imagine the scene in which the wooden Napoleon haughtily rebukes his wooden jailor for calling him General Bonaparte— "Sir Hudson Low, call me not thus; I am Napoleon, Emperor of the French." There is also something singularly gratifying about the scene of Napoleon's death, in which he lay in bed with his little wooden hands outside the counterpane and the doctor (who was hung on wires too short) "delivered medical opinions in the air." It may seem flippant to dwell on such flippancies in connection with a book which contains many romantic descriptions and many moral generalisations which Dickens probably valued highly. But it is not for such things that he is valued. In all his writings, from his most reasoned and sustained novel to his maddest private note, it is always this obstreperous instinct for farce which stands out as his in the highest sense. His wisdom is at the best talent, his foolishness is genius. Just that exuberant levity which we associate with a moment we associate in his case with immortality. It is said of certain old masonry that the mortar was so hard that it has survived the stones. So if Dickens could revisit the thing he built, he would be surprised to see all the work he thought solid and responsible wasted almost utterly away, but the shortest frivolities and the most momentary jokes remaining like colossal rocks for ever.

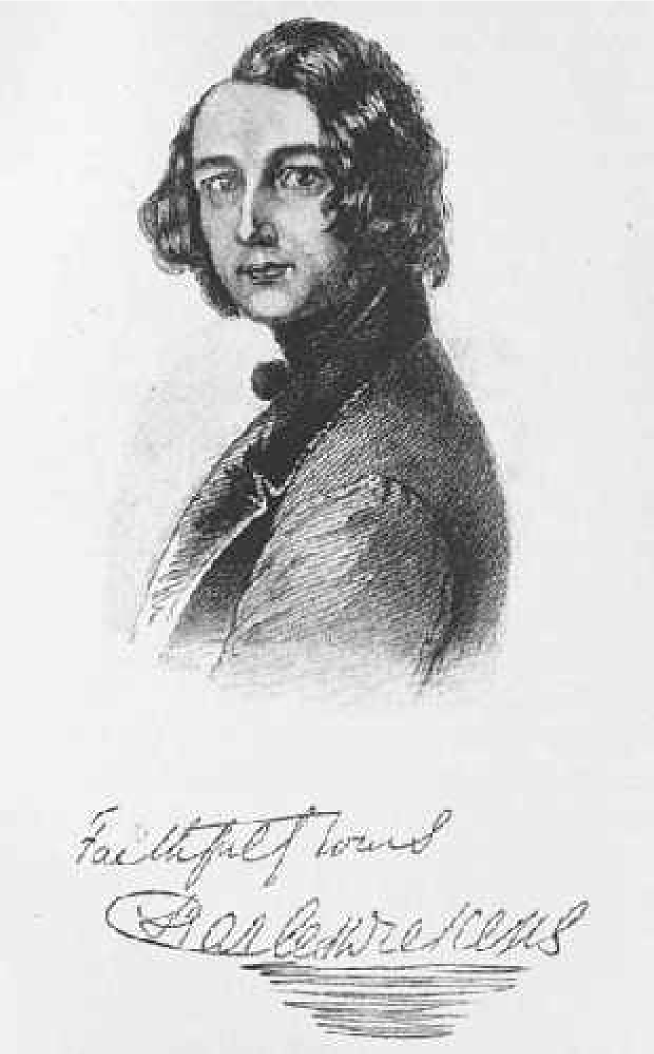
Faithfully Yours
Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens, 1844 From a miniature by Margaret Gillies.

MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT

There is a certain quality or element which broods over the whole of *Martin Chuzzlewit* to which it is difficult for either friends or foes to put a name. I think the reader who enjoys Dickens's other books has an impression that it is a kind of melancholy. There are grotesque figures of the most gorgeous kind; there are scenes that are farcical even by the standard of the farcical license of Dickens; there is humour both of the heaviest and of the lightest kind; there are two great comic personalities who run like a rich vein through the whole story, Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp; there is one blinding patch of brilliancy, the satire on American cant; there is Todgers's boarding-house; there is Bailey; there is Mr. Mould, the incomparable undertaker. But yet in spite of everything, in spite even of the undertaker, the book is sad. No one I think ever went to it in that mixed mood of a tired tenderness and a readiness to believe and laugh in which most of Dickens's novels are most enjoyed. We go for a particular novel to Dickens as we go for a particular inn. We go to the sign of the Pickwick Papers. We go to the sign of the Rudge and Raven. We go to the sign of the Old Curiosities. We go to the sign of the Two Cities. We go to each or all of them according to what kind of hospitality and what kind of happiness we require. But it is always some kind of hospitality and some kind of happiness that we require. And as in the case of inns we also remember that while there was shelter in all and food in all and some kind of fire and some kind of wine in all, yet one has left upon us an indescribable and unaccountable memory of mortality and decay, of dreariness in the rooms and even of tastelessness in the banquet. So any one who has enjoyed the stories of Dickens as they should be enjoyed has a nameless feeling that this one story is sad and almost sodden. Dickens himself had this feeling, though his breezy vanity forbade him to express it in so many words. In spite of Pecksniff, in spite of Mrs. Gamp, in spite of the yet greater Bailey, the story went lumberingly and even lifelessly; he found the sales falling off; he fancied his popularity waning, and by a sudden impulse most inartistic and yet most artistic, he dragged in the episode of Martin's visit to America, which is the blazing jewel and the sudden redemption of the book. He wrote it at an uneasy and unhappy period of his life; when he had ceased wandering in America, but could not cease wandering altogether; when he had lost his original routine of work which was violent but regular, and had not yet settled down to the full enjoyment of his success and his later years. He poured into this book genius that might make the mountains laugh, invention that juggled with the stars. But the book was sad; and he knew it.

The just reason for this is really interesting. Yet it is one that is not easy to state without guarding one's self on the one side or the other against great misunderstandings; and these stipulations or preliminary allowances must in such a case as this of necessity be made first. Dickens was among other things a satirist, a pure satirist. I have never been able to understand why this title is always specially and sacredly reserved for Thackeray. Thackeray was a novelist; in the strict and narrow sense at any rate, Thackeray was a far greater novelist than Dickens. But Dickens certainly was the satirist. The essence of satire is that it perceives some absurdity inherent in the logic of some position, and that it draws that absurdity out and isolates it, so that all can see it. Thus for instance when Dickens says, "Lord Coodle would go out; Sir Thomas Doodle wouldn't come in; and there being no people to speak of in England except Coodle and Doodle the country has been without a Government"; when Dickens says this he suddenly pounces on and plucks out the one inherent absurdity in the English party system which is hidden behind all its paraphernalia of Parliaments and Statutes, elections and ballot papers. When all the dignity and all the patriotism and all the public interest of the English constitutional party conflict have been fully allowed for, there does remain the bold, bleak question which Dickens in substance asks, "Suppose I want somebody else who is neither Coodle nor Doodle." This is the great quality called satire; it is a kind of taunting reasonableness; and it is inseparable from a certain insane logic which is often called exaggeration. Dickens was more of a satirist than Thackeray for this simple reason: that Thackeray carried a man's principles as far as that man carried them; Dickens carried a man's principles as far as a man's principles would go. Dickens in short (as people put it) exaggerated the man and his principles; that is to say he emphasised them. Dickens drew a man's absurdity out of him; Thackeray left a man's absurdity in him. Of this last fact we can take any example we like; take for instance the comparison between the city man as treated by Thackeray in the most satiric of his novels, with the city man as treated by Dickens in one of the mildest and maturest of his. Compare the character of old Mr. Osborne in *Vanity Fair* with the character of Mr. Podsnap in *Our Mutual Friend*. In the case of Mr.

Osborne there is nothing except the solid blocking in of a brutal dull convincing character. *Vanity Fair* is not a satire on the City except in so far as it happens to be true. *Vanity Fair* is not a satire on the City, in short, except in so far as the City is a satire on the City. But Mr. Podsnap is a pure satire; he is an extracting out of the City man of those purely intellectual qualities which happen to make that kind of City man a particularly exasperating fool. One might almost say that Mr. Podsnap is all Mr. Osborne's opinions separated from Mr. Osborne and turned into a character. In short the satirist is more purely philosophical than the novelist. The novelist may be only an observer; the satirist must be a thinker. He must be a thinker, he must be a philosophical thinker for this simple reason; that he exercises his philosophical thought in deciding what part of his subject he is to satirise. You may have the dullest possible intelligence and be a portrait painter; but a man must have a serious intellect in order to be a caricaturist. He has to select what thing he will caricature. True satire is always of this intellectual kind; true satire is always, so to speak, a variation or fantasia upon the air of pure logic. The satirist is the man who carries men's enthusiasm further than they carry it themselves. He outstrips the most extravagant fanatic. He is years ahead of the most audacious prophet. He sees where men's detached intellect will eventually lead them, and he tells them the name of the place — which is generally hell.

Now of this detached and rational use of satire there is one great example in this book. Even *Gulliver's Travels* is hardly more reasonable than Martin Chuzzlewit's travels in the incredible land of the Americans. Before considering the humour of this description in its more exhaustive and liberal aspects, it may be first remarked that in this American part of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Dickens quite specially sharpens up his own more controversial and political intelligence. There are more things here than anywhere else in Dickens that partake of the nature of pamphleteering, of positive challenge, of sudden repartee, of pugnacious and exasperating query, in a word of everything that belongs to the pure art of controversy as distinct not only from the pure art of fiction but even also from the pure art of satire. I am inclined to think (to put the matter not only shortly but clumsily) that Dickens was never in all his life so strictly clever as he is in the American part of *Martin Chuzzlewit*. There are places where he was more inspired, almost in the sense of being intoxicated, as, for instance, in the Micawber feasts of *David Copperfield*; there are places where he wrote more carefully and cunningly, as, for instance, in the mystery of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*; there are places where he wrote very much more humanly, more close to the ground and to growing things, as in the whole of that admirable book *Great Expectations*. But I do not think that his mere abstract acuteness and rapidity of thought were ever exercised with such startling exactitude as they are in this place in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. It is to be noted, for instance, that his American experience had actually worked him up to a heat and habit of argument. A slave-owner in the Southern States tells Dickens that slave-owners do not ill-treat their slaves, that it is not to the interest of slave-owners to ill-treat their slaves. Dickens flashes back that it is not to the interest of a man to get drunk, but he does get drunk. This pugnacious atmosphere of parry and riposte must first of all be allowed for and understood in all the satiric excursus of Martin in America. Dickens is arguing all the time; and, to do him justice, arguing very well. These chapters are full not merely of exuberant satire on America in the sense that Dotheboys Hall or Mr. Bumble's Workhouse are exuberant satires on England. They are full also of sharp argument with America as if the man who wrote expected retort and was prepared with rejoinder. The rest of the book, like the rest of Dickens's books, possesses humour. This part of the book, like hardly any of Dickens's books, possesses wit. The republican gentleman who receives Martin on landing is horrified on hearing an English servant speak of the employer as "the master." "There are no masters in America," says the gentleman. "All owners are they?" says Martin. This sort of verbal promptitude is out of the ordinary scope of Dickens; but we find it frequently in this particular part of *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Martin himself is constantly breaking out into a controversial lucidity, which is elsewhere not at all a part of his character. When they talk to him about the institutions of America he asks sarcastically whether bowie knives and swordsticks and revolvers are the institutions of America. All this (if I may summarise) is expressive of one main fact. Being a satirist means being a philosopher. Dickens was not always very philosophical; but he had this permanent quality of the philosopher about him, that he always remembered people by their opinions. Elijah Pogram was to him the man who said that "his boastful answer to the tyrant and the despot was that his bright home was the land of the settin' sun." Mr. Scadder and Mr. Jefferson Brick were to him the men who said (in cooperation) that "the libation of freedom must sometimes be quaffed in blood." And in these chapters more than anywhere else he falls into the extreme habit of satire, that of treating people as if there were nothing about them except their opinions. It is therefore difficult to accept these pages as pages in a novel, splendid as they are considered as pages in a parody. I do not dispute that men have said and do say that “the libation of freedom must sometimes be quaffed in blood,” that “their bright homes are the land of the settin’ sun,” that “they taunt that lion,” that “alone they dare him,” or “that softly sleeps the calm ideal in the whispering chambers of imagination.” I have read too much American journalism to deny that any of these sentences and any of these opinions may at some time or other have been uttered. I do not deny that there are such opinions. But I do deny that there are such people. Elijah Pogram had some other business in life besides defending defaulting postmasters; he must have been a son or a father or a husband or at least (admirable thought) a lover. Mr. Chollop had some moments in his existence when he was not threatening his fellow-creatures with his sword-stick and his revolver. Of all this human side of such American types Dickens does not really give any hint at all. He does not suggest that the bully Chollop had even such coarse good-humour as bullies almost always have. He does not suggest that the humbug Elijah Pogram had even as much greasy amiability as humbugs almost invariably have. He is not studying them as human beings, even as bad human beings; he is studying them as conceptions, as points of view, as symbols of a state of mind with which he is in violent disagreement. To put it roughly, he is not describing characters, he is satirising fads. To put it more exactly, he is not describing characters; he is persecuting heresies. There is one thing really to be said against his American satire; it is a serious thing to be said: it is an argument, and it is true. This can be said of Martin’s wanderings in America, that from the time he lands in America to the time he sets sail from it he never meets a living man. He has travelled in the land of Laputa. All the people he has met have been absurd opinions walking about. The whole art of Dickens in such passages as these consisted in one thing. It consisted in finding an opinion that had not a leg to stand on, and then giving it two legs to stand on.

So much may be allowed; it may be admitted that Dickens is in this sense the great satirist, in that he can imagine absurd opinions walking by themselves about the street. It may be admitted that Thackeray would not have allowed an absurd opinion to walk about the street without at least tying a man on to it for the sake of safety. But while this first truth may be evident, the second truth which is the complement of it may easily be forgotten. On the one hand there was no man who could so much enjoy mere intellectual satire apart from humanity as Dickens. On the other hand there was no man who, with another and more turbulent part of his nature, demanded humanity, and demanded its supremacy over intellect, more than Dickens. To put it shortly: there never was a man so much fitted for saying that everything was wrong; and there never was a man who was so desirous of saying that everything was right. Thus, when he met men with whom he violently disagreed, he described them as devils or lunatics; he could not bear to describe them as men. If they could not think with him on essentials he could not stand the idea that they were human souls; he cast them out; he forgot them; and if he could not forget them he caricatured them. He was too emotional to regard them as anything but enemies, if they were not friends. He was too humane not to hate them. Charles Lamb said with his inimitable sleek pungency that he could read all the books there were; he excluded books that obviously were not books, as cookery books, chessboards bound so as to look like books, and all the works of modern historians and philosophers. One might say in much the same style that Dickens loved all the men in the world; that is he loved all the men whom he was able to recognise as men; the rest he turned into griffins and chimeras without any serious semblance to humanity. Even in his books he never hates a human being. If he wishes to hate him he adopts the simple expedient of making him an inhuman being. Now of these two strands almost the whole of Dickens is made up; they are not only different strands, they are even antagonistic strands. I mean that the whole of Dickens is made up of the strand of satire and the strand of sentimentalism; and the strand of satire is quite unnecessarily merciless and hostile, and the strand of sentimentalism is quite unnecessarily humanitarian and even maudlin. On the proper interweaving of these two things depends the great part of Dickens’s success in a novel. And by the consideration of them we can probably best arrive at the solution of the particular emotional enigma of the novel called *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

Martin Chuzzlewit is, I think, vaguely unsatisfactory to the reader, vaguely sad and heavy even to the reader who loves Dickens, because in *Martin Chuzzlewit* more than anywhere else in Dickens’s works, more even than in *Oliver Twist*, there is a predominance of the harsh and hostile sort of humour over the hilarious and the humane. It is absurd to lay down any such little rules for the testing of literature. But this may be broadly said and yet with confidence: that Dickens is always at his best when he is laughing at the people whom he really admires. He is at his most humorous in writing of Mr. Pickwick, who represents passive virtue. He is at his most humorous in writing of Mr. Sam Weller, who represents active virtue. He is never so funny as when he is speaking of people in whom fun itself is a virtue, like the poor people in the Fleet or the Marshalsea. And in the stories that had immediately preceded *Martin Chuzzlewit* he had consistently concerned himself in the majority of cases with the study of such genial and honourable eccentrics; if they are lunatics they are amiable lunatics. In the last important novel before *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Barnaby Rudge*, the hero himself is an amiable lunatic. In the novel before that, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the two comic figures, Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness, are not only the most really entertaining, but also the most really sympathetic characters in the book. Before that came *Oliver Twist* (which is, I have said, an exception), and before that *Pickwick*, where the hero is, as Mr. Weller says, "an angel in gaiters." Hitherto, then, on the whole, the central Dickens character had been the man who gave to the poor many things, gold and wine and feasting and good advice; but among other things gave them a good laugh at himself. The jolly old English merchant of the Pickwick type was popular on both counts. People liked to see him throw his money in the gutter. They also liked to see him throw himself there occasionally. In both acts they recognised a common quality of virtue.

Now I think it is certainly the disadvantage of *Martin Chuzzlewit* that none of its absurd characters are thus sympathetic. There are in the book two celebrated characters who are both especially exuberant and amusing even for Dickens, and who are both especially heartless and abominable even for Dickens — I mean of course Mr. Pecksniff on the one hand and Mrs. Gamp on the other. The humour of both of them is gigantesque. Nobody will ever forget the first time he read the words "Now I should be very glad to see Mrs. Todgers's idea of a wooden leg." It is like remembering first love: there is still some sort of ancient sweetness and sting. I am afraid that, in spite of many criticisms to the contrary, I am still unable to take Mr. Pecksniff's hypocrisy seriously. He does not seem to me so much a hypocrite as a rhetorician; he reminds me of Serjeant Buzfuz. A very capable critic, Mr. Noyes, said that I was wrong when I suggested in another place that Dickens must have loved Pecksniff. Mr. Noyes thinks it clear that Dickens hated Pecksniff. I cannot believe it. Hatred does indeed linger round its object as much as love; but not in that way. Dickens is always making Pecksniff say things which have a wild poetical truth about them. Hatred allows no such outbursts of original innocence. But however that may be the broad fact remains — Dickens may or may not have loved Pecksniff comically, but he did not love him seriously; he did not respect him as he certainly respected Sam Weller. The same of course is true of Mrs. Gamp. To any one who appreciates her unctuous and sumptuous conversation it is difficult indeed not to feel that it would be almost better to be killed by Mrs. Gamp than to be saved by a better nurse. But the fact remains. In this book Dickens has not allowed us to love the most absurd people seriously, and absurd people ought to be loved seriously. Pecksniff has to be amusing all the time; the instant he ceases to be laughable he becomes detestable. Pickwick can take his ease at his inn; he can be leisurely, he can be spacious; he can fall into moods of gravity and even of dulness; he is not bound to be always funny or to forfeit the reader's concern, for he is a good man, and therefore even his dulness is beautiful, just as is the dulness of the animal. We can leave Pickwick a little while by the fire to think; for the thoughts of Pickwick, even if they were to go slowly, would be full of all the things that all men care for — old friends and old inns and memory and the goodness of God. But we dare not leave Pecksniff alone for a moment. We dare not leave him thinking by the fire, for the thoughts of Pecksniff would be too frightful.

CHRISTMAS BOOKS

The mystery of Christmas is in a manner identical with the mystery of Dickens. If ever we adequately explain the one we may adequately explain the other. And indeed, in the treatment of the two, the chronological or historical order must in some degree be remembered. Before we come to the question of what Dickens did for Christmas we must consider the question of what Christmas did for Dickens. How did it happen that this bustling, nineteenth-century man, full of the almost cock-sure common-sense of the utilitarian and liberal epoch, came to associate his name chiefly in literary history with the perpetuation of a half pagan and half Catholic festival which he would certainly have called an antiquity and might easily have called a superstition? Christmas has indeed been celebrated before in English literature; but it had, in the most noticeable cases, been celebrated in connection with that kind of feudalism with which Dickens would have severed his connection with an ignorant and even excessive scorn. Sir Roger de Coverley kept Christmas; but it was a feudal Christmas. Sir Walter Scott sang in praise of Christmas; but it was a feudal Christmas. And Dickens was not only indifferent to the dignity of the old country gentleman or to the genial archæology of Scott; he was even harshly and insolently hostile to it. If Dickens had lived in the neighbourhood of Sir Roger de Coverley he would undoubtedly, like Tom Touchy, have been always “having the law of him.” If Dickens had stumbled in among the old armour and quaint folios of Scott’s study he would certainly have read his brother novelist a lesson in no measured terms about the futility of thus fumbling in the dust-bins of old oppression and error. So far from Dickens being one of those who like a thing because it is old, he was one of those cruder kind of reformers, in theory at least, who actually dislike a thing because it is old. He was not merely the more righteous kind of Radical who tries to uproot abuses; he was partly also that more suicidal kind of Radical who tries to uproot himself. In theory at any rate, he had no adequate conception of the importance of human tradition; in his time it had been twisted and falsified into the form of an opposition to democracy. In truth, of course, tradition is the most democratic of all things, for tradition is merely a democracy of the dead as well as the living. But Dickens and his special group or generation had no grasp of this permanent position; they had been called to a special war for the righting of special wrongs. In so far as such an institution as Christmas was old, Dickens would even have tended to despise it. He could never have put the matter to himself in the correct way — that while there are some things whose antiquity does prove that they are dying, there are some other things whose antiquity only proves that they cannot die. If some Radical contemporary and friend of Dickens had happened to say to him that in defending the mince-pies and the mummeries of Christmas he was defending a piece of barbaric and brutal ritualism, doomed to disappear in the light of reason along with the Boy-Bishop and the Lord of Misrule, I am not sure that Dickens (though he was one of the readiest and most rapid masters of reply in history) would have found it very easy upon his own principles to answer. It was by a great ancestral instinct that he defended Christmas; by that sacred sub-consciousness which is called tradition, which some have called a dead thing, but which is really a thing far more living than the intellect. There is a dark kinship and brotherhood of all mankind which is much too deep to be called heredity or to be in any way explained in scientific formulæ; blood is thicker than water and is especially very much thicker than water on the brain. But this unconscious and even automatic quality in Dickens’s defence of the Christmas feast, this fact that his defence might almost be called animal rather than mental, though in proper language it should be called merely virile; all this brings us back to the fact that we must begin with the atmosphere of the subject itself. We must not ask Dickens what Christmas is, for with all his heat and eloquence he does not know. Rather we must ask Christmas what Dickens is — ask how this strange child of Christmas came to be born out of due time.

Dickens devoted his genius in a somewhat special sense to the description of happiness. No other literary man of his eminence has made this central human aim so specially his subject matter. Happiness is a mystery — generally a momentary mystery — which seldom stops long enough to submit itself to artistic observation, and which, even when it is habitual, has something about it which renders artistic description almost impossible. There are twenty tiny minor poets who can describe fairly impressively an eternity of agony; there are very few even of the eternal poets who can describe ten minutes of satisfaction. Nevertheless, mankind being half divine is always in love with the impossible, and numberless attempts have been made from the beginning of human literature to describe a real state of felicity. Upon the whole, I think, the most successful have been the most frankly physical and symbolic; the flowers of Eden or the jewels of the New Jerusalem. Many writers, for instance, have called the gold and chrysolite of the Holy City a vulgar lump of jewellery. But when these critics themselves attempt to describe their conceptions of future happiness, it is always some priggish nonsense about “planes,” about “cycles of fulfilment,” or “spirals of spiritual evolution.” Now a cycle is just as much a physical metaphor as a flower of Eden; a spiral is just as much a physical metaphor as a precious stone. But, after all, a garden is a beautiful thing; whereas this is by no means necessarily true of a cycle, as can be seen in the case of a bicycle. A jewel, after all, is a beautiful thing; but this is not necessarily so of a spiral, as can be seen in the case of a corkscrew. Nothing is gained by dropping the old material metaphors, which did hint at heavenly beauty, and adopting other material metaphors which do not even give a hint of earthly beauty. This modern or spiral method of describing indescribable happiness may, I think, be dismissed. Then there has been another method which has been adopted by many men of a very real poetical genius. It was the method of the old pastoral poets like Theocritus. It was in another way that adopted by the elegance and piety of Spenser. It was certainly expressed in the pictures of Watteau; and it had a very sympathetic and even manly expression in modern England in the decorative poetry of William Morris. These men of genius, from Theocritus to Morris, occupied themselves in endeavouring to describe happiness as a state of certain human beings, the atmosphere of a commonwealth, the enduring climate of certain cities or islands. They poured forth treasures of the truest kind of imagination upon describing the happy lives and landscapes of Utopia or Atlantis or the Earthly Paradise. They traced with the most tender accuracy the tracery of its fruit-trees or the glimmering garments of its women; they used every ingenuity of colour or intricate shape to suggest its infinite delight. And what they succeeded in suggesting was always its infinite melancholy. William Morris described the Earthly Paradise in such a way that the only strong emotional note left on the mind was the feeling of how homeless his travellers felt in that alien Elysium; and the reader sympathised with them, feeling that he would prefer not only Elizabethan England but even twentieth-century Camberwell to such a land of shining shadows. Thus literature has almost always failed in endeavouring to describe happiness as a state. Human tradition, human custom and folk-lore (though far more true and reliable than literature as a rule) have not often succeeded in giving quite the correct symbols for a real atmosphere of *camaraderie* and joy. But here and there the note has been struck with the sudden vibration of the *vox humana*. In human tradition it has been struck chiefly in the old celebrations of Christmas. In literature it has been struck chiefly in Dickens's Christmas tales.

In the historic celebration of Christmas as it remains from Catholic times in certain northern countries (and it is to be remembered that in Catholic times the northern countries were, if possible, more Catholic than anybody else), there are three qualities which explain, I think, its hold upon the human sense of happiness, especially in such men as Dickens. There are three notes of Christmas, so to speak, which are also notes of happiness, and which the pagans and the Utopians forget. If we state what they are in the case of Christmas, it will be quite sufficiently obvious how important they are in the case of Dickens.

The first quality is what may be called the dramatic quality. The happiness is not a state; it is a crisis. All the old customs surrounding the celebration of the birth of Christ are made by human instinct so as to insist and re-insist upon this crucial quality. Everything is so arranged that the whole household may feel, if possible, as a household does when a child is actually being born in it. The thing is a vigil and a vigil with a definite limit. People sit up at night until they hear the bells ring. Or they try to sleep at night in order to see their presents the next morning. Everywhere there is a limitation, a restraint; at one moment the door is shut, at the moment after it is opened. The hour has come or it has not come; the parcels are undone or they are not undone; there is no evolution of Christmas presents. This sharp and theatrical quality in pleasure, which human instinct and the mother wit of the world has wisely put into the popular celebrations of Christmas, is also a quality which is essential in such romantic literature as Dickens wrote. In romantic literature the hero and heroine must indeed be happy, but they must also be unexpectedly happy. This is the first connecting link between literature and the old religious feast; this is the first connecting link between Dickens and Christmas.

The second element to be found in all such festivity and all such romance is the element which is represented as well as it could be represented by the mere fact that Christmas occurs in the winter. It is the element not merely of contrast, but actually of antagonism. It preserves everything that was best in the merely primitive or pagan view of such ceremonies or such banquets. If we are carousing, at least we are warriors carousing. We hang above us, as it were, the shields and battle-axes with which we must do battle with the giants of the snow and hail. All comfort must be based on discomfort. Man chooses when he wishes to be most joyful the very moment when the whole material universe is most sad. It is this contradiction and mystical defiance which gives a quality of manliness and reality to the old winter feasts which is not characteristic of the sunny felicities of the Earthly Paradise. And this curious element has been carried out even in all the trivial jokes and tasks that have always surrounded such occasions as these. The object of the jovial customs was not to make everything artificially easy: on the contrary, it was rather to make everything artificially difficult. Idealism is not only expressed by shooting an arrow at the stars; the fundamental principle of idealism is also expressed by putting a leg of mutton at the top of a greasy pole. There is in all such observances a quality which can be called only the quality of divine obstruction. For instance, in the game of snapdragon (that admirable occupation) the conception is that raisins taste much nicer if they are brands saved from the burning. About all Christmas things there is something a little nobler, if only nobler in form and theory, than mere comfort; even holly is prickly. It is not hard to see the connection of this kind of historic instinct with a romantic writer like Dickens. The healthy novelist must always play snapdragon with his principal characters; he must always be snatching the hero and heroine like raisins out of the fire.

The third great Christmas element is the element of the grotesque. The grotesque is the natural expression of joy; and all the Utopias and new Edens of the poets fail to give a real impression of enjoyment, very largely because they leave out the grotesque. A man in most modern Utopias cannot really be happy; he is too dignified. A man in Morris’s Earthly Paradise cannot really be enjoying himself; he is too decorative. When real human beings have real delights they tend to express them entirely in grotesques — I might almost say entirely in goblins. On Christmas Eve one may talk about ghosts so long as they are turnip ghosts. But one would not be allowed (I hope, in any decent family) to talk on Christmas Eve about astral bodies. The boar’s head of old Yule-time was as grotesque as the donkey’s head of Bottom the Weaver. But there is only one set of goblins quite wild enough to express the wild goodwill of Christmas. Those goblins are the characters of Dickens.

Arcadian poets and Arcadian painters have striven to express happiness by means of beautiful figures. Dickens understood that happiness is best expressed by ugly figures. In beauty, perhaps, there is something allied to sadness; certainly there is something akin to joy in the grotesque, nay, in the uncouth. There is something mysteriously associated with happiness not only in the corpulence of Falstaff and the corpulence of Tony Weller, but even in the red nose of Bardolph or the red nose of Mr. Stiggins. A thing of beauty is an inspiration for ever — a matter of meditation for ever. It is rather a thing of ugliness that is strictly a joy for ever.

All Dickens's books are Christmas books. But this is still truest of his two or three famous Yuletide tales — The *Christmas Carol* and *The Chimes* and *The Cricket on the Hearth*. Of these *The Christmas Carol* is beyond comparison the best as well as the most popular. Indeed, Dickens is in so profound and spiritual a sense a popular author that in his case, unlike most others, it can generally be said that the best work is the most popular. It is for *Pickwick* that he is best known; and upon the whole it is for Pickwick that he is best worth knowing. In any case this superiority of *The Christmas Carol* makes it convenient for us to take it as an example of the generalisations already made. If we study the very real atmosphere of rejoicing and of riotous charity in *The Christmas Carol* we shall find that all the three marks I have mentioned are unmistakably visible. *The Christmas Carol* is a happy story first, because it describes an abrupt and dramatic change. It is not only the story of a conversion, but of a sudden conversion; as sudden as the conversion of a man at a Salvation Army meeting. Popular religion is quite right in insisting on the fact of a crisis in most things. It is true that the man at the Salvation Army meeting would probably be converted from the punch bowl; whereas Scrooge was converted to it. That only means that Scrooge and Dickens represented a higher and more historic Christianity.

Again, *The Christmas Carol* owes much of its hilarity to our second source — the fact of its being a tale of winter and of a very wintry winter. There is much about comfort in the story; yet the comfort is never enervating: it is saved from that by a tingle of something bitter and bracing in the weather. Lastly, the story exemplifies throughout the power of the third principle — the kinship between gaiety and the grotesque. Everybody is happy because nobody is dignified. We have a feeling somehow that Scrooge looked even uglier when he was kind than he had looked when he was cruel. The turkey that Scrooge bought was so fat, says Dickens, that it could never have stood upright. That top-heavy and monstrous bird is a good symbol of the top-heavy happiness of the stories.

It is less profitable to criticise the other two tales in detail because they represent variations on the theme in two directions; and variations that were not, upon the whole, improvements. *The Chimes* is a monument of Dickens’s honourable quality of pugnacity. He could not admire anything, even peace, without wanting to be warlike about it. That was all as it should be.

DOMBEY AND SON

In Dickens’s literary life *Dombey and Son* represents a break so important as to necessitate our casting back to a summary and a generalisation. In order fully to understand what this break is, we must say something of the previous character of Dickens’s novels, and even something of the general character of novels in themselves. How essential this is we shall see shortly.

It must first be remembered that the novel is the most typical of modern forms. It is typical of modern forms especially in this, that it is essentially formless. All the ancient modes or structures of literature were definite and severe. Any one composing them had to abide by their rules; they were what their name implied. Thus a tragedy might be a bad tragedy, but it was always a tragedy. Thus an epic might be a bad epic, but it was always an epic. Now in the sense in which there is such a thing as an epic, in that sense there is no such thing as a novel. We call any long fictitious narrative in prose a novel, just as we call any short piece of prose without any narrative an essay. Both these forms are really quite formless, and both of them are really quite new. The difference between a good epic by Mr. John Milton and a bad epic by Mr. John Smith was simply the difference between the same thing done well and the same thing done badly. But it was not (for instance) like the difference between *Clarissa Harlowe* and *The Time Machine*. If we class Richardson’s book with Mr. Wells’s book it is really only for convenience; if we say that they are both novels we shall certainly be puzzled in that case to say what on earth a novel is. But the note of our age, both for good and evil, is a highly poetical and largely illogical faith in liberty. Liberty is not a negation or a piece of nonsense, as the cheap reactionaries say; it is a belief in variety and growth. But it is a purely poetic and even a merely romantic belief. The nineteenth century was an age of romance as certainly as the Middle Ages was an age of reason. Mediævals liked to have everything defined and defensible; the modern world prefers to run some risks for the sake of spontaneity and diversity. Consequently the modern world is full of a phenomenon peculiar to itself — I mean the spectacle of small or originally small things swollen to enormous size and power. The modern world is like a world in which toadstools should be as big as trees, and insects should walk about in the sun as large as elephants. Thus, for instance, the shopkeeper, almost an unimportant figure in carefully ordered states, has in our time become the millionaire, and has more power than ten kings. Thus again a practical knowledge of nature, of the habits of animals or the properties of fire and water, was in the old ordered state either an almost servile labour or a sort of joke; it was left to old women and gamekeepers and boys who went birds'-nesting. In our time this commonplace daily knowledge has swollen into the enormous miracle of physical size, weighing the stars and talking under the sea. In short, our age is a sort of splendid jungle in which some of the most towering weeds and blossoms have come from the smallest seed.

And this is, generally speaking, the explanation of the novel. The novel is not so much the filling up of an artistic plan, however new or fantastic. It is a thing that has grown from some germ of suggestion, and has often turned out much larger than the author intended. And this, lastly, is the final result of these facts, that the critic can generally trace in a novel what was the original artistic type or shape of thought from which the whole matter started, and he will generally find that this is different in every case. In one novel he will find that the first impulse is a character. In another novel he will find that the first impulse is a landscape, the atmosphere of some special countryside. In another novel he will find that the first impulse is the last chapter. Or it may be a thrust with sword or dagger, it may be a theology, it may be a song. Somewhere embedded in every ordinary book are the five or six words for which really all the rest will be written. Some of our enterprising editors who set their readers to hunt for banknotes and missing ladies might start a competition for finding those words in every novel. But whether or no this is possible, there is no doubt that the principle in question is of great importance in the case of Dickens, and especially in the case of *Dombey and Son*.

In all the Dickens novels can be seen, so to speak, the original thing that they were before they were novels. The same may be observed, for the matter of that, in the great novels of most of the great modern novelists. For example, Sir Walter Scott wrote poetical romances before he wrote prose romances. Hence it follows that, with all their much greater merit, his novels may still be described as poetical romances in prose. While adding a new and powerful element of popular humours and observation, Scott still retains a certain purely poetical right — a right to make his heroes and outlaws and great kings speak at the great moments with a rhetoric so rhythmical that it partakes of the nature of song, the same quite metrical rhetoric which is used in the metrical speeches of Marmion or Roderick Dhu. In the same way, although *Don Quixote* is a modern novel in its irony and subtlety, we can see that it comes from the old long romances of chivalry. In the same way, although *Clarissa* is a modern novel in its intimacy and actuality, we can see that it comes from the old polite letter-writing and polite essays of the period of the *Spectator*. Any one can see that Scott formed in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* the style that he applied again and again afterwards, like the reappearances of a star taking leave of the stage. All his other romances were positively last appearances of the positively last Minstrel. Any one can see that Thackeray formed in fragmentary satires like *The Book of Snobs* or *The Yellowplush Papers* the style, the rather fragmentary style, in which he was to write *Vanity Fair*. In most modern cases, in short (until very lately, at any rate), the novel is an enormous outgrowth from something that was not a novel. And in Dickens this is very important. All his novels are outgrowths of the original notion of taking notes, splendid and inspired notes, of what happens in the street. Those in the modern world who cannot reconcile themselves to his method — those who feel that there is about his books something intolerably clumsy or superficial — have either no natural taste for strong literature at all, or else have fallen into their error by too persistently regarding Dickens as a modern novelist and expecting all his books to be modern novels. Dickens did not know at what exact point he really turned into a novelist. Nor do we. Dickens did not know, in his deepest soul, whether he ever really did turn into a novelist. Nor do we. The novel being a modern product is one of the few things to which we really can apply that disgusting method of thought — the method of evolution. But even in evolution there are great gaps, there are great breaks, there are great crises. I have said that the first of these breaks in Dickens may be placed at the point when he wrote *Nicholas Nickleby*. This was his first serious decision to be a novelist in any sense at all, to be anything except a maker of momentary farces. The second break, and that a far more important break, is in *Dombey and Son*. This marks his final resolution to be a novelist and nothing else, to be a serious constructor of fiction in the serious sense. Before *Dombey and Son* even his pathos had been really frivolous. After *Dombey and Son* even his absurdity was intentional and grave.

In case this transition is not understood, one or two tests may be taken at random. The episodes in *Dombey and Son*, the episodes in *David*

Copperfield, which came after it, are no longer episodes merely stuck into the middle of the story without any connection with it, like most of the episodes in *Nicholas Nickleby,* or most of the episodes even in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Take, for instance, by way of a mere coincidence, the fact that three schools for boys are described successively in *Nicholas Nickleby*, in *Dombey and Son*, and in *David Copperfield*. But the difference is enormous. Dotheboys Hall does not exist to tell us anything about Nicholas Nickleby. Rather Nicholas Nickleby exists entirely in order to tell us about Dotheboys Hall. It does not in any way affect his history or psychology; he enters Mr. Squeers's school and leaves Mr. Squeers's school with the same character, or rather absence of character. It is a mere episode, existing for itself. But when little Paul Dombey goes to an old-fashioned but kindly school, it is in a very different sense and for a very different reason from that for which Nicholas Nickleby goes to an old-fashioned and cruel school. The sending of little Paul to Dr. Blimber's is a real part of the history of little Paul, such as it is. Dickens deliberately invents all that elderly pedantry in order to show up Paul's childishness. Dickens deliberately invents all that rather heavy kindness in order to show up Paul's predestination and tragedy. Dotheboys Hall is not meant to show up anything except Dotheboys Hall. But although Dickens doubtless enjoyed Dr. Blimber quite as much as Mr. Squeers, it remains true that Dr. Blimber is really a very good foil to Paul; whereas Squeers is not a foil to Nicholas; Nicholas is merely a lame excuse for Squeers. The change can be seen continued in the school, or rather the two schools, to which David Copperfield goes. The whole idea of David Copperfield's life is that he had the dregs of life before the wine of it. He knew the worst of the world before he knew the best of it. His childhood at Dr. Strong's is a second childhood. Now for this purpose the two schools are perfectly well adapted. Mr. Creakle's school is not only, like Mr. Squeers's school, a bad school, it is a bad influence upon David Copperfield. Dr. Strong's school is not only a good school, it is a good influence upon David Copperfield. I have taken this case of the schools as a case casual but concrete. The same, however, can be seen in any of the groups or incidents of the novels on both sides of the boundary. Mr. Crummles's theatrical company is only a society that Nicholas happens to fall into. America is only a place to which Martin Chuzzlewit happens to go. These things are isolated sketches, and nothing else. Even Todgers's boarding-house is only a place where Mr. Pecksniff can be delightfully hypocritical. It is not a place which throws any new light on Mr. Pecksniff's hypocrisy. But the case is different with that more subtle hypocrite in *Dombey and Son* — I mean Major Bagstock. Dickens does mean it as a deliberate light on Mr. Dombey's character that he basks with a fatuous calm in the blazing sun of Major Bagstock's tropical and offensive flattery. Here, then, is the essence of the change. He not only wishes to write a novel; this he did as early as *Nicholas Nickleby*. He wishes to have as little as possible in the novel that does not really assist it as a novel. Previously he had asked with the assistance of what incidents could his hero wander farther and farther from the pathway. Now he has really begun to ask with the assistance of what incidents his hero can get nearer and nearer to the goal.

The change made Dickens a greater novelist. I am not sure that it made him a greater man. One good character by Dickens requires all eternity to stretch its legs in; and the characters in his later books are always being tripped up by some tiresome nonsense about the story. For instance, in *Dombey and Son*, Mrs. Skewton is really very funny. But nobody with a love of the real smell of Dickens would compare her for a moment, for instance, with Mrs. Nickleby. And the reason of Mrs. Skewton's inferiority is simply this, that she has something to do in the plot; she has to entrap or assist to entrap Mr. Dombey into marrying Edith. Mrs. Nickleby, on the other hand, has nothing at all to do in the story, except to get in everybody's way. The consequence is that we complain not of her for getting in everyone's way, but of everyone for getting in hers. What are suns and stars, what are times and seasons, what is the mere universe, that it should presume to interrupt Mrs. Nickleby? Mrs. Skewton (though supposed, of course, to be a much viler sort of woman) has something of the same quality of splendid and startling irrelevancy. In her also there is the same feeling of wild threads hung from world to world like the webs of gigantic spiders; of things connected that seem to have no connection save by this one adventurous filament of frail and daring folly. Nothing could be better than Mrs. Skewton when she finds herself, after convolutions of speech, somehow on the subject of Henry VIII., and pauses to mention with approval "his dear little peepy eyes and his benevolent chin." Nothing could be better than her attempt at Mahomedan resignation when she feels almost inclined to say "that there is no What's-his-name but Thingummy, and What-you-may-call-it is his prophet!" But she has not so much time as Mrs.

Nickleby to say these good things; also she has not sufficient human virtue to say them constantly. She is always intent upon her worldly plans, among other things upon the worldly plan of assisting Charles Dickens to get a story finished. She is always “advancing her shrivelled ear” to listen to what Dombey is saying to Edith. Worldliness is the most solemn thing in the world; it is far more solemn than other-worldliness. Mrs. Nickleby can afford to ramble as a child does in a field, or as a child does to laugh at nothing, for she is like a child, innocent. It is only the good who can afford to be frivolous.

Broadly speaking, what is said here of Mrs. Skewton applies to the great part of *Dombey and Son*, even to the comic part of it. It shows an advance in art and unity; it does not show an advance in genius and creation. In some cases, in fact, I cannot help feeling that it shows a falling off. It may be a personal idiosyncrasy, but there is only one comic character really prominent in Dickens, upon whom Dickens has really lavished the wealth of his invention, and who does not amuse me at all, and that character is Captain Cuttle. But three great exceptions must be made to any such disparagement of *Dombey and Son*. They are all three of that royal order in Dickens’s creation which can no more be described or criticised than strong wine. The first is Major Bagstock, the second is Cousin Feenix, the third is Toots. In Bagstock Dickens has blasted for ever that type which pretends to be sincere by the simple operation of being explosively obvious. He tells about a quarter of the truth, and then poses as truthful because a quarter of the truth is much simpler than the whole of it. He is the kind of man who goes about with posers for Bishops or for Socialists, with plain questions to which he wants a plain answer. His questions are plain only in the same sense that he himself is plain — in the sense of being uncommonly ugly. He is the man who always bursts with satisfaction because he can call a spade a spade, as if there were any kind of logical or philosophical use in merely saying the same word twice over. He is the man who wants things down in black and white, as if black and white were the only two colours; as if blue and green and red and gold were not facts of the universe. He is too selfish to tell the truth and too impatient even to hear it. He cannot endure the truth, because it is subtle. This man is almost always like Bagstock — a sycophant and a toad-eater. A man is not any the less a toad-eater because he eats his toads with a huge appetite and gobbles them up, as Bagstock did his breakfast, with the eyes starting out of his purple face. He flatters brutally. He cringes with a swagger. And men of the world like Dombey are always taken in by him, because men of the world are probably the simplest of all the children of Adam.

Cousin Feenix again is an exquisite suggestion, with his rickety chivalry and rambling compliments. It was about the period of *Dombey and Son* that Dickens began to be taken up by good society. (One can use only vulgar terms for an essentially vulgar process.) And his sketches of the man of good family in the books of this period show that he had had glimpses of what that singular world is like. The aristocrats in his earliest books are simply dragons and griffins for his heroes to fight with — monsters like Sir Mulberry Hawk or Lord Verisopht. They are merely created upon the old principle, that your scoundrel must be polite and powerful — a very sound principle. The villain must be not only a villain, but a tyrant. The giant must be larger than Jack. But in the books of the Dombey period we have many shrewd glimpses of the queer realities of English aristocracy. Of these Cousin Feenix is one of the best. Cousin Feenix is a much better sketch of the essentially decent and chivalrous aristocrat than Sir Leicester Dedlock. Both of the men are, if you will, fools, as both are honourable gentlemen. But if one may attempt a classification among fools, Sir Leicester Dedlock is a stupid fool, while Cousin Feenix is a silly fool — which is much better. The difference is that the silly fool has a folly which is always on the borderland of wit, and even of wisdom; his wandering wits come often upon undiscovered truths. The stupid fool is as consistent and as homogeneous as wood; he is as invincible as the ancestral darkness. Cousin Feenix is a good sketch of the sort of well-bred old ass who is so fundamentally genuine that he is always saying very true things by accident. His whole tone also, though exaggerated like everything in Dickens, is very true to the bewildered good nature which marks English aristocratic life. The statement that Dickens could not describe a gentleman is, like most popular animadversions against Dickens, so very thin and one-sided a truth as to be for serious purposes a falsehood. When people say that Dickens could not describe a gentleman, what they mean is this, and so far what they mean is true. They mean that Dickens could not describe a gentleman as gentlemen feel a gentleman. They mean that he could not take that atmosphere easily, accept it as the normal atmosphere, or describe that world from the inside. This is true. In Dickens’s time there was such a thing as the English people, and Dickens belonged to it. Because there is no such thing as an English people now, almost all literary men drift towards what is called Society; almost all literary men either are gentlemen or pretend to be. Hence, as I say, when we talk of describing a gentleman, we always mean describing a gentleman from the point of view of one who either belongs to, or is interested in perpetuating, that type. Dickens did not describe gentlemen in the way that gentlemen describe gentlemen. He described them in the way in which he described waiters, or railway guards, or men drawing with chalk on the pavement. He described them, in short (and this we may freely concede), from the outside, as he described any other oddity or special trade. But when it comes to saying that he did not describe them well, then that is quite another matter, and that I should emphatically deny. The things that are really odd about the English upper class he saw with startling promptitude and penetration, and if the English upper class does not see these odd things in itself, it is not because they are not there, but because we are all blind to our own oddities; it is for the same reason that tramps do not feel dirty, or that niggers do not feel black. I have often heard a dear old English oligarch say that Dickens could not describe a gentleman, while every note of his own voice and turn of his own hand recalled Sir Leicester Dedlock. I have often been told by some old buck that Dickens could not describe a gentleman, and been told so in the shaky voice and with all the vague allusiveness of Cousin Feenix.

Cousin Feenix has really many of the main points of the class that governs England. Take, for an instance, his hazy notion that he is in a world where everybody knows everybody; whenever he mentions a man, it is a man “with whom my friend Dombey is no doubt acquainted.” That pierces to the very helpless soul of aristocracy. Take again the stupendous gravity with which he leads up to a joke. That is the very soul of the House of Commons and the Cabinet, of the high-class English politics, where a joke is always enjoyed solemnly. Take his insistence upon the technique of Parliament, his regrets for the time when the rules of debate were perhaps better observed than they are now. Take that wonderful mixture in him (which is the real human virtue of our aristocracy) of a fair amount of personal modesty with an innocent assumption of rank. Of a man who saw all these genteel foibles so clearly it is absurd merely to say without further explanation that he could not describe a gentleman. Let us confine ourselves to saying that he did not describe a gentleman as gentlemen like to be described.

Lastly, there is the admirable study of Toots, who may be considered as being in some ways the masterpiece of Dickens. Nowhere else did Dickens express with such astonishing insight and truth his main contention, which is that to be good and idiotic is not a poor fate, but, on the contrary, an experience of primeval innocence, which wonders at all things. Dickens did not know, anymore than any great man ever knows, what was the particular thing that he had to preach. He did not know it; he only preached it. But the particular thing that he had to preach was this: That humility is the only possible basis of enjoyment; that if one has no other way of being humble except being poor, then it is better to be poor, and to enjoy; that if one has no other way of being humble except being imbecile, then it is better to be imbecile, and to enjoy. That is the deep unconscious truth in the character of Toots — that all his externals are flashy and false; all his internals unconscious, obscure, and true. He wears loud clothes, and he is silent inside them. His shirts and waistcoats are covered with bright spots of pink and purple, while his soul is always covered with the sacred shame. He always gets all the outside things of life wrong, and all the inside things right. He always admires the right Christian people, and gives them the wrong Christian names. Dimly connecting Captain Cuttle with the shop of Mr. Solomon Gills, he always addresses the astonished mariner as “Captain Gills.” He turns Mr. Walter Gay, by a most improving transformation, into “Lieutenant Walters.” But he always knows which people upon his own principles to admire. He forgets who they are, but he remembers what they are. With the clear eyes of humility he perceives the whole world as it is. He respects the Game Chicken for being strong, as even the Game Chicken ought to be respected for being strong. He respects Florence for being good, as even Florence ought to be respected for being good. And he has no doubt about which he admires most; he prefers goodness to strength, as do all masculine men. It is through the eyes of such characters as Toots that Dickens really sees the whole of his tales. For even if one calls him a half-wit, it still makes a difference that he keeps the right half of his wits. When we think of the unclean and craven spirit in which Toots might be treated in a psychological novel of to-day; how he might walk with a mooncalf face, and a brain of bestial darkness, the soul rises in real homage to Dickens for showing how much simple gratitude and happiness can remain in the lopped roots of the most simplified intelligence. If scientists must treat a man as a dog, it need not be always as a mad dog. They might grant him, like Toots, a little of the dog’s loyalty and the dog’s reward.

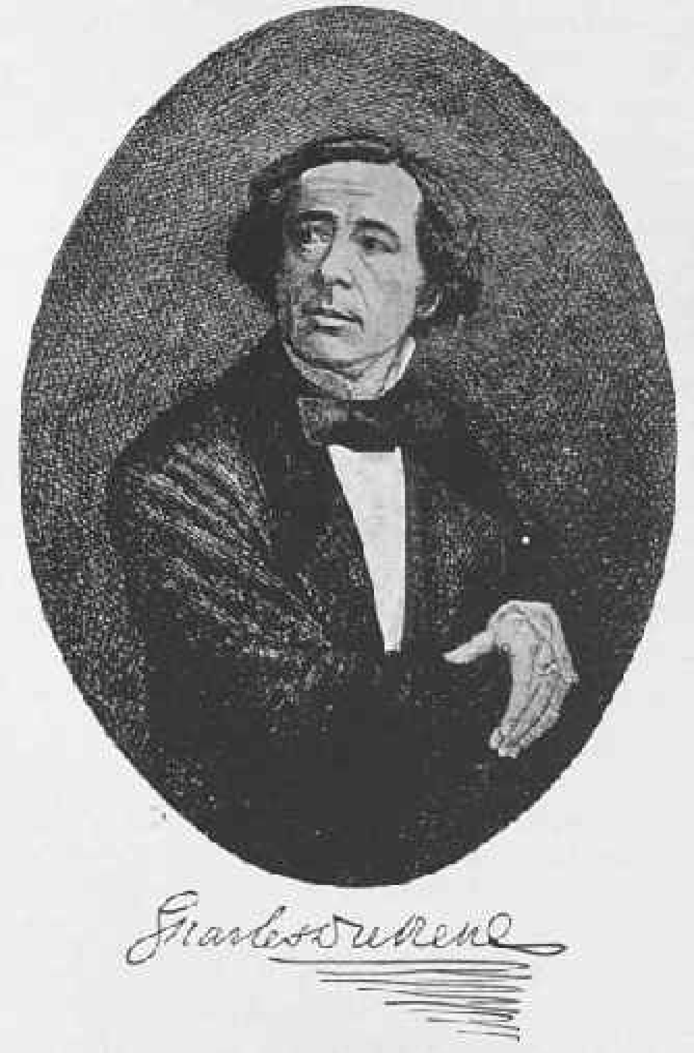

Charles Dickens, 1849
From a daguerreotype by Mayall.

DAVID COPPERFIELD

In this book Dickens is really trying to write a new kind of book, and the enterprise is almost as chivalrous as a cavalry charge. He is making a romantic attempt to be realistic. That is almost the definition of *David Copperfield*. In his last book, *Dombey and Son*, we see a certain maturity and even a certain mild exhaustion in his earlier farcical method. He never failed to have fine things in any of his books, and Toots is a very fine thing. Still, I could never find Captain Cuttle and Mr. Sol Gills very funny, and the whole Wooden Midshipman seems to me very wooden. In *David Copperfield* he suddenly unseals a new torrent of truth, the truth out of his own life. The impulse of the thing is autobiography; he is trying to tell all the absurd things that have happened to himself, and not the least absurd thing is himself. Yet though it is Dickens's ablest and clearest book, there is in it a falling away of a somewhat singular kind.

Generally speaking there was astonishingly little of fatigue in Dickens's books. He sometimes wrote bad work; he sometimes wrote even unimportant work; but he wrote hardly a line which is not full of his own fierce vitality and fancy. If he is dull it is hardly ever because he cannot think of anything; it is because, by some silly excitement or momentary lapse of judgment, he has thought of something that was not worth thinking of. If his joke is feeble, it is as an impromptu joke at an uproarious dinner-table may be feeble; it is no indication of any lack of vitality. The joke is feeble, but it is not a sign of feebleness. Broadly speaking, this is true of Dickens. If his writing is not amusing us, at least it is amusing him. Even when he is tiring he is not tired.

But in the case of *David Copperfield* there is a real reason for noting an air of fatigue. For although this is the best of all Dickens's books, it constantly disappoints the critical and intelligent reader. The reason is that Dickens began it under his sudden emotional impulse of telling the whole truth about himself and gradually allowed the whole truth to be more and more diluted, until towards the end of the book we are back in the old pedantic and decorative art of Dickens, an art which we justly admired in its own place and on its own terms, but which we resent when we feel it gradually returning through a tale pitched originally in a more practical and piercing key. Here, I say, is the one real example of the fatigue of Dickens.

He begins his story in a new style and then slips back into an old one. The earlier part is in his later manner. The later part is in his earlier manner.

There are many marks of something weak and shadowy in the end of *David Copperfield*. Here, for instance, is one of them which is not without its bearing on many tendencies of modern England. Why did Dickens at the end of this book give way to that typically English optimism about emigration? He seems to think that he can cure the souls of a whole cartload, or rather boatload, of his characters by sending them all to the Colonies. Peggotty is a desolate and insulted parent whose house has been desecrated and his pride laid low; therefore let him go to Australia. Emily is a woman whose heart is broken and whose honour is blasted; but she will be quite happy if she goes to Australia. Mr. Micawber is a man whose soul cannot be made to understand the tyranny of time or the limits of human hope; but he will understand all these things if he goes to Australia. For it must be noted that Dickens does not use this emigration merely as a mode of exit. He does not send these characters away on a ship merely as a symbol suggesting that they pass wholly out of his hearer’s life. He does definitely suggest that Australia is a sort of island Valley of Avalon, where the soul may heal it of its grievous wound. It is seriously suggested that Peggotty finds peace in Australia. It is really indicated that Emily regains her dignity in Australia. It is positively explained of Mr. Micawber not that he was happy in Australia (for he would be that anywhere), but that he was definitely prosperous and practically successful in Australia; and that he would certainly be nowhere. Colonising is not talked of merely as a coarse, economic expedient for going to a new market. It is really offered as something that will cure the hopeless tragedy of Peggotty; as something that will cure the still more hopeless comedy of Micawber.

I will not dwell here on the subsequent adventures of this very sentimental and extremely English illusion. It would be an exaggeration to say that Dickens in this matter is something of a forerunner of much modern imperialism. His political views were such that he would have regarded modern imperialism with horror and contempt. Nevertheless there is here something of that hazy sentimentalism which makes some Imperialists prefer to talk of the fringe of the empire of which they know nothing, rather than of the heart of the empire which they know is diseased. It is said that in the twilight and decline of Rome, close to the dark ages, the people in Gaul believed that Britain was a land of ghosts (perhaps it was foggy), and that the dead were ferried across to it from the northern coast of France. If (as is not entirely impossible) our own century appears to future ages as a time of temporary decay and twilight, it may be said that there was attached to England a blessed island called Australia to which the souls of the socially dead were ferried across to remain in bliss for ever.

This element which is represented by the colonial optimism at the end of *David Copperfield* is a moral element. The truth is that there is something a little mean about this sort of optimism. I do not like the notion of David Copperfield sitting down comfortably to his tea-table with Agnes, having got rid of all the inconvenient or distressing characters of the story by sending them to the other side of the world. The whole thing has too much about it of the selfishness of a family which sends a scapegrace to the Colonies to starve with its blessing. There is too much in the whole thing of that element which was satirised by an ironic interpretation of the epitaph "Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away." We should have thought more of David Copperfield (and also of Charles Dickens) if he had endeavoured for the rest of his life, by conversation and comfort, to bind up the wounds of his old friends from the seaside. We should have thought more of David Copperfield (and also of Charles Dickens) if he had faced the possibility of going on till his dying day lending money to Mr. Wilkins Micawber. We should have thought more of David Copperfield (and also of Charles Dickens) if he had not looked upon the marriage with Dora merely as a flirtation, an episode which he survived and ought to survive. And yet the truth is that there is nowhere in fiction where we feel so keenly the primary human instinct and principle that a marriage is a marriage and irrevocable, that such things do leave a wound and also a bond as in this case of David's short connection with his silly little wife. When all is said and done, when Dickens has done his best and his worst, when he has sentimentalised for pages and tried to tie up everything in the pink tape of optimism, the fact, in the psychology of the reader, still remains. The reader does still feel that David's marriage to Dora was a real marriage; and that his marriage to Agnes was nothing, a middle-aged compromise, a taking of the second best, a sort of spiritualised and sublimated marriage of convenience. For all the readers of Dickens Dora is thoroughly avenged. The modern world (intent on anarchy in everything, even in Government) refuses to perceive the permanent element of tragic constancy which inheres in all passion, and which is the origin of marriage. Marriage rests upon the fact that you cannot have your cake and eat it; that you cannot lose your heart and have it. But, as I have said, there is perhaps no place in literature where we feel more vividly the sense of this monogamous instinct in man than in David Copperfield. A man is monogamous even if he is only monogamous for a month; love is eternal even if it is only eternal for a month. It always leaves behind it the sense of something broken and betrayed.

But I have mentioned Dora in this connection only because she illustrates the same fact which Micawber illustrates; the fact that there is at the end of this book too much tendency to bless people and get rid of them. Micawber is a nuisance. Dickens the despot condemns him to exile. Dora is a nuisance. Dickens the despot condemns her to death. But it is the whole business of Dickens in the world to express the fact that such people are the spice and interest of life. It is the whole point of Dickens that there is nobody more worth living with than a strong, splendid, entertaining, immortal nuisance. Micawber interrupts practical life; but what is practical life that it should venture to interrupt Micawber? Dora confuses the housekeeping; but we are not angry with Dora because she confuses the housekeeping. We are angry with the housekeeping because it confuses Dora. I repeat, and it cannot be too much repeated that the whole lesson of Dickens is here. It is better to know Micawber than not to know the minor worries that arise out of knowing Micawber. It is better to have a bad debt and a good friend. In the same way it is better to marry a human and healthy personality which happens to attract you than to marry a mere housewife; for a mere housewife is a mere housekeeper. All this was what Dickens stood for; that the very people who are most irritating in small business circumstances are often the people who are most delightful in long stretches of experience of life. It is just the man who is maddening when he is ordering a cutlet or arranging an appointment who is probably the man in whose company it is worth while to journey steadily towards the grave. Distribute the dignified people and the capable people and the highly business-like people among all the situations which their ambition or their innate corruption may demand; but keep close to your heart, keep deep in your inner councils the absurd people. Let the clever people pretend to govern you, let the unimpeachable people pretend to advise you, but let the fools alone influence you; let the laughable people whose faults you see and understand be the only people who are really inside your life, who really come near you or accompany you on your lonely march towards the last impossibility. That is the whole meaning of Dickens; that we should keep the absurd people for our friends. And here at the end of *David Copperfield* he seems in some dim way to deny it. He seems to want to get rid of the preposterous people simply because they will always continue to be preposterous. I have a horrible feeling that David Copperfield will send even his aunt to Australia if she worries him too much about donkeys.

I repeat, then, that this wrong ending of *David Copperfield* is one of the very few examples in Dickens of a real symptom of fatigue. Having created splendid beings for whom alone life might be worth living, he cannot endure the thought of his hero living with them. Having given his hero superb and terrible friends, he is afraid of the awful and tempestuous vista of their friendship. He slips back into a more superficial kind of story and ends it in a more superficial way. He is afraid of the things he has made; of that terrible figure Micawber; of that yet more terrible figure Dora. He cannot make up his mind to see his hero perpetually entangled in the splendid tortures and sacred surprises that come from living with really individual and unmanageable people. He cannot endure the idea that his fairy prince will not have henceforward a perfectly peaceful time. But the wise old fairy tales (which are the wisest things in the world, at any rate the wisest things of worldly origin), the wise old fairy tales never were so silly as to say that the prince and the princess lived peacefully ever afterwards. The fairy tales said that the prince and princess lived happily ever afterwards: and so they did. They lived happily, although it is very likely that from time to time they threw the furniture at each other. Most marriages, I think, are happy marriages; but there is no such thing as a contented marriage. The whole pleasure of marriage is that it is a perpetual crisis. David Copperfield and Dora quarrelled over the cold mutton; and if they had gone on quarrelling to the end of their lives, they would have gone on loving each other to the end of their lives; it would have been a human marriage. But David Copperfield and Agnes would agree about the cold mutton. And that cold mutton would be very cold.

I have here endeavoured to suggest some of the main merits of Dickens within the framework of one of his faults. I have said that *David Copperfield* represents a rather sad transition from his strongest method to his weakest. Nobody would ever complain of Charles Dickens going on writing his own kind of novels, his old kind of novels. If there be anywhere a man who loves good books, that man wishes that there were four *Oliver Twists* and at least forty-four *Pickwicks*. If there be any one who loves laughter and creation, he would be glad to read a hundred of *Nicholas Nickleby* and two hundred of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. But while any one would have welcomed one of Dickens's own ordered and conventional novels, it was not in this spirit that they welcomed *David Copperfield*.

David Copperfield begins as if it were going to be a new kind of Dickens novel; then it gradually turns into an old kind of Dickens novel. It is here that many readers of this splendid book have been subtly and secretly irritated. Nicholas Nickleby is all very well; we accept him as something which is required to tie the whole affair together. Nicholas is a sort of string or clothes-line on which are hung the limp figure of Smike, the jumping-jack of Mr. Squeers and the twin dolls named Cheeryble. If we do not accept Nicholas Nickleby as the hero of the story, at least we accept him as the title of the story. But in *David Copperfield* Dickens begins something which looks for the moment fresh and startling. In the earlier chapters (the amazing earlier chapters of this book) he does seem to be going to tell the living truth about a living boy and man. It is melancholy to see that sudden fire fading. It is sad to see David Copperfield gradually turning into Nicholas Nickleby. Nicholas Nickleby does not exist at all; he is a quite colourless primary condition of the story. We look through Nicholas Nickleby at the story just as we look through a plain pane of glass at the street. But David Copperfield does begin by existing; it is only gradually that he gives up that exhausting habit.

Any fair critical account of Dickens must always make him out much smaller than he is. For any fair criticism of Dickens must take account of his evident errors, as I have taken account of one of the most evident of them during the last two or three pages. It would not even be loyal to conceal them. But no honest criticism, no criticism, though it spoke with the tongues of men and angels, could ever really talk about Dickens. In all this that I have said I have not been talking about Dickens at all. I say it with equanimity; I say it even with arrogance. I have been talking about the gaps of Dickens. I have been talking about the omissions of Dickens. I have been talking about the slumber of Dickens and the forgetfulness and unconsciousness of Dickens. In one word, I have been talking not about Dickens, but about the absence of Dickens. But when we come to him and his work itself, what is there to be said? What is there to be said about earthquake and the dawn? He has created, especially in this book of *David Copperfield*, he has created, creatures who cling to us and tyrannise over us, creatures whom we would not forget if we could, creatures whom we could not forget if we would, creatures who are more actual than the man who made them.

This is the excuse for all that indeterminate and rambling and sometimes sentimental criticism of which Dickens, more than any one else, is the victim, of which I fear that I for one have made him the victim in this place. When I was a boy I could not understand why the Dickensians worried so wearily about Dickens, about where he went to school and where he ate his dinners, about how he wore his trousers and when he cut his hair. I used to wonder why they did not write something that I could read about a man like Micawber. But I have come to the conclusion that this almost hysterical worship of the man, combined with a comparatively feeble criticism on his works, is just and natural. Dickens was a man like ourselves; we can see where he went wrong, and study him without being stunned or getting the sunstroke. But Micawber is not a man; Micawber is the superman. We can only walk round and round him wondering what we shall say. All the critics of Dickens, when all is said and done, have only walked round and round Micawber wondering what they should say. I am myself at this moment walking round and round Micawber wondering what I shall say. And I have not found out yet.

CHRISTMAS STORIES

The power of Dickens is shown even in the scraps of Dickens, just as the virtue of a saint is said to be shown in fragments of his property or rags from his robe. It is with such fragments that we are chiefly concerned in the *Christmas Stories*. Many of them are fragments in the literal sense; Dickens began them and then allowed some one else to carry them on; they are almost rejected notes. In all the other cases we have been considering the books that he wrote; here we have rather to consider the books that he might have written. And here we find the final evidence and the unconscious stamp of greatness, as we might find it in some broken bust or some rejected moulding in the studio of Michael Angelo.

These sketches or parts of sketches all belong to that period in his later life when he had undertaken the duties of an editor, the very heavy duties of a very popular editor. He was not by any means naturally fitted for that position. He was the best man in the world for founding papers; but many people wished that he could have been buried under the foundations, like the first builder in some pagan and prehistoric pile. He called the *Daily News* into existence, but when once it existed, it objected to him strongly. It is not easy, and perhaps it is not important, to state truly the cause of this incapacity. It was not in the least what is called the ordinary fault or weakness of the artist. It was not that he was careless; rather it was that he was too conscientious. It was not that he had the irresponsibility of genius; rather it was that he had the irritating responsibility of genius; he wanted everybody to see things as he saw them. But in spite of all this he certainly ran two great popular periodicals — *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* — with enormous popular success. And he certainly so far succeeded in throwing himself into the communism of journalism, into the nameless brotherhood of a big paper, that many earnest Dickensians are still engaged in picking out pieces of Dickens from the anonymous pages of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, and those parts which have been already beyond question picked out and proved are often fragmentary. The genuine writing of Dickens breaks off at a certain point, and the writing of some one else begins. But when the writing of Dickens breaks off, I fancy that we know it.

The singular thing is that some of the best work that Dickens ever did, better than the work in his best novels, can be found in these slight and composite scraps of journalism. For instance, the solemn and self-satisfied account of the duty and dignity of a waiter given in the opening chapter of *Somebody's Luggage* is quite as full and fine as anything done anywhere by its author in the same vein of sumptuous satire. It is as good as the account which Mr. Bumble gives of out-door relief, which, "properly understood, is the parochial safeguard. The great thing is to give the paupers what they don't want, and then they never come again." It is as good as Mr. Podsnap's description of the British Constitution, which was bestowed on him by Providence. None of these celebrated passages is more obviously Dickens at his best than this, the admirable description of "the true principles of waitering," or the account of how the waiter's father came back to his mother in broad daylight, "in itself an act of madness on the part of a waiter," and how he expired repeating continually "two and six is three and four is nine." That waiter's explanatory soliloquy might easily have opened an excellent novel, as *Martin Chuzzlewit* is opened by the clever nonsense about the genealogy of the Chuzzlewits, or as *Bleak House* is opened by a satiric account of the damp, dim life of a law court. Yet Dickens practically abandoned the scheme of *Somebody's Luggage*; he only wrote two sketches out of those obviously intended. He may almost be said to have only written a brilliant introduction to another man's book.

Yet it is exactly in such broken outbreaks that his greatness appears. If a man has flung away bad ideas he has shown his sense, but if he has flung away good ideas he has shown his genius. He has proved that he actually has that over-pressure of pure creativeness which we see in nature itself, "that of a hundred seeds, she often brings but one to bear." Dickens had to be Malthusian about his spiritual children. Critics have called Keats and others who died young "the great Might-have-beens of literary history." Dickens certainly was not merely a great Might-have-been. Dickens, to say the least of him, was a great Was. Yet this fails fully to express the richness of his talent; for the truth is that he was a great Was and also a great Might-have-been. He said what he had to say, and yet not all he had to say. Wild pictures, possible stories, tantalising and attractive trains of thought, perspectives of adventure, crowded so continually upon his mind that at the end there was a vast mass of them left over, ideas that he literally had not the opportunity to develop, tales that he literally had not the time to tell.

This is shown clearly in his private notes and letters, which are full of schemes singularly striking and suggestive, schemes which he never carried out. It is indicated even more clearly by these *Christmas Stories*, collected out of the chaotic opulence of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. He wrote short stories actually because he had not time to write long stories. He often put into the short story a deep and branching idea which would have done very well for a long story; many of his long stories, so to speak, broke off short. This is where he differs from most who are called the Might-have-beens of literature. Marlowe and Chatterton failed because of their weakness. Dickens failed because of his force.

Examine for example this case of the waiter in *Somebody's Luggage*. Dickens obviously knew enough about that waiter to have made him a running spring of joy throughout a whole novel; as the beadle is in *Oliver Twist*, or the undertaker in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Every touch of him tingles with truth, from the vague gallantry with which he asks, “Would'st thou know, fair reader (if of the adorable female sex)” to the official severity with which he takes the chambermaid down, “as many pegs as is desirable for the future comfort of all parties.” If Dickens had developed this character at full length in a book he would have preserved for ever in literature a type of great humour and great value, and a type which may only too soon be disappearing from English history. He would have eternalised the English waiter. He still exists in some sound old taverns and decent country inns, but there is no one left really capable of singing his praises. I know that Mr. Bernard Shaw has done something of the sort in the delightfully whimsical account of William in *You Never Can Tell*. But nothing will persuade me that Mr. Bernard Shaw can really understand the English waiter. He can never have ordered wine from him for instance. And though the English waiter is by the nature of things solemn about everything, he can never reach the true height and ecstasy of his solemnity except about wine. What the real English waiter would do or say if Mr. Shaw asked him for a vegetarian meal I cannot dare to predict. I rather think that for the first time in his life he would laugh — a horrible sight.

Dickens's waiter is described by one who is not merely witty, truthful, and observant, like Mr. Bernard Shaw, but one who really knew the atmosphere of inns, one who knew and even liked the smell of beef, and beer, and brandy. Hence there is a richness in Dickens's portrait which does not exist in Mr. Shaw's. Mr. Shaw's waiter is merely a man of tact;

Dickens's is a man of principle. Mr. Shaw's waiter is an opportunist, just as Mr. Shaw is an opportunist in politics. Dickens's waiter is ready to stand up seriously for "the true principles of waitering," just as Dickens was ready to stand up for the true principles of Liberalism. Mr. Shaw's waiter is agnostic; his motto is "You never can tell." Dickens's waiter is a dogmatist; his motto is "You can tell; I will tell you." And the true old-fashioned English waiter had really this grave and even moral attitude; he was the servant of the customers as a priest is the servant of the faithful, but scarcely in any less dignified sense. Surely it is not mere patriotic partiality that makes one lament the disappearance of this careful and honourable figure crowded out by meaner men at meaner wages, by the German waiter who has learnt five languages in the course of running away from his own, or the Italian waiter who regards those he serves with a darkling contempt which must certainly be that either of a dynamiter or an exiled prince. The human and hospitable English waiter is vanishing. And Dickens might perhaps have saved him, as he saved Christmas.

I have taken this case of the waiter in Dickens and his equally important counterpart in England as an example of the sincere and genial sketches scattered about these short stories. But there are many others, and one at least demands special mention; I mean Mrs. Lirriper, the London landlady. Not only did Dickens never do anything better in a literary sense, but he never performed more perfectly his main moral function, that of insisting through laughter and flippancy upon the virtue of Christian charity. There has been much broad farce against the lodging-house keeper: he alone could have written broad farce in her favour. It is fashionable to represent the landlady as a tyrant; it is too much forgotten that if she is one of the oppressors she is at least as much one of the oppressed. If she is bad-tempered it is often for the same reasons that make all women bad-tempered (I suppose the exasperating qualities of the other sex); if she is grasping it is often because when a husband makes generosity a vice it is often necessary that a wife should make avarice a virtue. All this Dickens suggested very soundly and in a few strokes in the more remote character of Miss Wozenham. But in Mrs. Lirriper he went further and did not fare worse. In Mrs. Lirriper he suggested quite truly how huge a mass of real good humour, of grand unconscious patience, of unfailing courtesy and constant and difficult benevolence is concealed behind many a lodging-house door and compact in the red-faced person of many a preposterous landlady. Any one could easily excuse the ill-humour of the poor. But great masses of the poor have not even any ill-humour to be excused. Their cheeriness is startling enough to be the foundation of a miracle play; and certainly is startling enough to be the foundation of a romance. Yet I do not know of any romance in which it is expressed except this one.

Of the landlady as of the waiter it may be said that Dickens left in a slight sketch what he might have developed through a long and strong novel. For Dickens had hold of one great truth, the neglect of which has, as it were, truncated and made meagre the work of many brilliant modern novelists. Modern novelists try to make long novels out of subtle characters. But a subtle character soon comes to an end, because it works in and in to its own centre and dies there. But a simple character goes on for ever in a fresh interest and energy, because it works out and out into the infinite universe. Mr. George Moore in France is not by any means so interesting as Mrs. Lirriper in France; for she is trying to find France and he is only trying to find George Moore. Mrs. Lirriper is the female equivalent of Mr. Pickwick. Unlike Mrs. Bardell (another and lesser landlady) she was fully worthy to be Mrs. Pickwick. For in both cases the essential truth is the same; that original innocence which alone deserves adventures and because it alone can appreciate them. We have had Mr. Pickwick in England and we can imagine him in France. We have had Mrs. Lirriper in France and we can imagine her in Mesopotamia or in heaven. The subtle character in the modern novels we cannot really imagine anywhere except in the suburbs or in Limbo.

BLEAK HOUSE

Bleak House is not certainly Dickens's best book; but perhaps it is his best novel. Such a distinction is not a mere verbal trick; it has to be remembered rather constantly in connection with his work. This particular story represents the highest point of his intellectual maturity. Maturity does not necessarily mean perfection. It is idle to say that a mature potato is perfect; some people like new potatoes. A mature potato is not perfect, but it is a mature potato; the mind of an intelligent epicure may find it less adapted to his particular purpose; but the mind of an intelligent potato would at once admit it as being, beyond all doubt, a genuine, fully developed specimen of his own particular species. The same is in some degree true even of literature. We can say more or less when a human being has come to his full mental growth, even if we go so far as to wish that he had never come to it. Children are very much nicer than grown-up people; but there is such a thing as growing up. When Dickens wrote *Bleak House* he had grown up.

Like Napoleon, he had made his army on the march. He had walked in front of his mob of aggressive characters as Napoleon did in front of the half-baked battalions of the Revolution. And, like Napoleon, he won battle after battle before he knew his own plan of campaign; like Napoleon, he put the enemies' forces to rout before he had put his own force into order. Like Napoleon, he had a victorious army almost before he had an army. After his decisive victories Napoleon began to put his house in order; after his decisive victories Dickens also began to put his house in order. The house, when he had put it in order, was *Bleak House*.

There was one thing common to nearly all the other Dickens tales, with the possible exception of *Dombey and Son*. They were all rambling tales; and they all had a perfect right to be. They were all rambling tales for the very simple reason that they were all about rambling people. They were novels of adventure; they were even diaries of travel. Since the hero strayed from place to place, it did not seem unreasonable that the story should stray from subject to subject. This is true of the bulk of the novels up to and including *David Copperfield*, up to the very brink or threshold of *Bleak House*. Mr. Pickwick wanders about on the white English roads, always looking for antiquities and always finding novelties. Poor Oliver Twist wanders along the same white roads to seek his fortune and to find his misfortune. Nicholas Nickleby goes walking across England because he is young and hopeful; Little Nell's grandfather does the same thing because he is old and silly. There is not much in common between Samuel Pickwick and Oliver Twist; there is not much in common between Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby; there is not much in common (let us hope) between Little Nell's grandfather and any other human being. But they all have this in common, that they may actually all have trodden in each other's footprints. They were all wanderers on the face of the same fair English land. *Martin Chuzzlewit* was only made popular by the travels of the hero in America. When we come to *Dombey and Son* we find, as I have said, an exception; but even here it is odd to note the fact that it was an exception almost by accident. In Dickens's original scheme of the story, much greater prominence was to have been given to the travels and trials of Walter Gay; in fact, the young man was to have had a deterioration of character which could only have been adequately detailed in him in his character of a vagabond and a wastrel. The most important point, however, is that when we come to *David Copperfield*, in some sense the summit of his serious literature, we find the thing still there. The hero still wanders from place to place, his genius is still gipsy. The adventures in the book are less violent and less improbable than those which wait for Pickwick and Nicholas Nickleby; but they are still adventures and not merely events; they are still things met on a road. The facts of the story fall away from David as such facts do fall away from a traveller walking fast. We are more likely perhaps, to pass by Mr. Creakle's school than to pass by Mrs. Jarley's wax-works. The only point is that we should pass by both of them. Up to this point in Dickens's development, his novel, however true, is still picaresque; his hero never really rests anywhere in the story. No one seems really to know where Mr. Pickwick lived. Here he has no abiding city.

When we come to *Bleak House*, we come to a change in artistic structure. The thing is no longer a string of incidents; it is a cycle of incidents. It returns upon itself; it has recurrent melody and poetic justice; it has artistic constancy and artistic revenge. It preserves the unities; even to some extent it preserves the unities of time and place. The story circles round two or three symbolic places; it does not go straggling irregularly all over England like one of Mr. Pickwick's coaches. People go from one place to another place; but not from one place to another place on the road to everywhere else. Mr. Jarndyce goes from Bleak House to visit Mr.

Boythorn; but he comes back to Bleak House. Miss Clare and Miss Summerson go from Bleak House to visit Mr. and Mrs. Bayham Badger; but they come back to Bleak House. The whole story strays from Bleak House and plunges into the foul fogs of Chancery and the autumn mists of Chesney Wold; but the whole story comes back to Bleak House. The domestic title is appropriate; it is a permanent address.

Dickens's openings are almost always good; but the opening of *Bleak House* is good in a quite new and striking sense. Nothing could be better, for instance, than the first foolish chapter about the genealogy of the Chuzzlewits; but it has nothing to do with the Chuzzlewits. Nothing could be better than the first chapter of *David Copperfield*; the breezy entrance and banging exit of Miss Betsy Trotwood. But if there is ultimately any crisis or serious subject-matter of *David Copperfield,* it is the marred marriage with Dora, the final return to Agnes; and all this is in no way involved in the highly-amusing fact that his aunt expected him to be a girl. We may repeat that the matter is picaresque. The story begins in one place and ends in another place, and there is no real connection between the beginning and the end except a biographical connection.

A picaresque novel is only a very eventful biography; but the opening of *Bleak House* is quite another business altogether. It is admirable in quite another way. The description of the fog in the first chapter of *Bleak House* is good in itself; but it is not merely good in itself, like the description of the wind in the opening of *Martin Chuzzlewit*; it is also good in the sense that Maeterlinck is good; it is what the modern people call an atmosphere. Dickens begins in the Chancery fog because he means to end in the Chancery fog. He did not begin in the Chuzzlewit wind because he meant to end in it; he began in it because it was a good beginning. This is perhaps the best short way of stating the peculiarity of the position of *Bleak House*. In this *Bleak House* beginning we have the feeling that it is not only a beginning; we have the feeling that the author sees the conclusion and the whole. The beginning is alpha and omega: the beginning and the end. He means that all the characters and all the events shall be read through the smoky colours of that sinister and unnatural vapour.

The same is true throughout the whole tale; the whole tale is symbolic and crowded with symbols. Miss Flite is a funny character, like Miss La Creevy, but Miss La Creevy means only Miss La Creevy. Miss Flite means Chancery. The rag-and-bone man, Krook, is a powerful grotesque; so is

Quilp; but in the story Quilp only means Quilp; Krook means Chancery. Rick Carstone is a kind and tragic figure, like Sidney Carton; but Sidney Carton only means the tragedy of human nature; Rick Carstone means the tragedy of Chancery. Little Jo dies pathetically like Little Paul; but for the death of Little Paul we can only blame Dickens; for the death of Little Jo we blame Chancery. Thus the artistic unity of the book, compared to all the author's earlier novels, is satisfying, almost suffocating. There is the *motif*, and again the *motif*. Almost everything is calculated to assert and re-assert the savage morality of Dickens's protest against a particular social evil. The whole theme is that which another Englishman as jovial as Dickens defined shortly and finally as the law's delay. The fog of the first chapter never lifts.

In this twilight he traced wonderful shapes. Those people who fancy that Dickens was a mere clown; that he could not describe anything delicate or deadly in the human character, — those who fancy this are mostly people whose position is explicable in many easy ways. The vast majority of the fastidious critics have, in the quite strict and solid sense of the words, never read Dickens at all; hence their opposition is due to and inspired by a hearty innocence which will certainly make them enthusiastic Dickensians if they ever, by some accident, happen to read him. In other cases it is due to a certain habit of reading books under the eye of a conventional critic, admiring what we expect to admire, regretting what we are told to regret, waiting for Mr. Bumble to admire him, waiting for Little Nell to despise her. Yet again, of course, it is sometimes due to that basest of all artistic indulgences (certainly far baser than the pleasure of absinthe or the pleasure of opium), the pleasure of appreciating works of art which ordinary men cannot appreciate. Surely the vilest point of human vanity is exactly that; to ask to be admired for admiring what your admirers do not admire. But whatever be the reason, whether rude or subtle, which has prevented any particular man from personally admiring Dickens, there is in connection with a book like *Bleak House* something that may be called a solid and impressive challenge. Let anyone who thinks that Dickens could not describe the semi-tones and the abrupt instincts of real human nature simply take the trouble to read the stretch of chapters which detail the way in which Carstone's mind grew gradually morbid about his chances in Chancery. Let him note the manner in which the mere masculinity of Carstone is caught; how as he grows more mad he grows more logical, nay, more rational. Good women who love him come to him, and point out the fact that

Jarndyce is a good man, a fact to them solid like an object of the senses. In answer he asks them to understand his position. He does not say this; he does not say that. He only urges that Jarndyce may have become cynical in the affair in the same sense that he himself may have become cynical in the affair. He is always a man; that is to say, he is always unanswerable, always wrong. The passionate certainty of the woman beats itself like battering waves against the thin smooth wall of his insane consistency. I repeat: let any one who thinks that Dickens was a gross and indelicate artist read that part of the book. If Dickens had been the clumsy journalist that such people represent, he never could have written such an episode at all. A clumsy journalist would have made Rick Carstone in his mad career cast off Esther and Ada and the others. The great artist knew better. He knew that even if all the good in a man is dying, the last sense that dies is the sense that knows a good woman from a bad; it is like the scent of a noble hound.

The clumsy journalist would have made Rick Carstone turn on John Jarndyce with an explosion of hatred, as of one who had made an exposure — who had found out what low people call “a false friend” in what they call “his true colours.” The great artist knew better; he knew that a good man going wrong tries to salve his soul to the last with the sense of generosity and intellectual justice. He will try to love his enemy if only out of mere love of himself. As the wolf dies fighting, the good man gone wrong dies arguing. This is what constitutes the true and real tragedy of Richard Carstone. It is strictly the one and only great tragedy that Dickens wrote. It is like the tragedy of Hamlet. The others are not tragedies because they deal almost with dead men. The tragedy of old Dorrit is merely the sad spectacle of a dotard dragged about Europe in his last childhood. The tragedy of Steerforth is only that of one who dies suddenly; the tragedy of old Dombey only that of one who was dead all the time. But Rick is a real tragedy, for he is still alive when the quicksand sucks him down.

It is impossible to avoid putting in the first place this pall of smoke which Dickens has deliberately spread over the story. It is quite true that the country underneath is clear enough to contain any number of unconscious comedians or of merry monsters such as he was in the custom of introducing into the carnival of his tales. But he meant us to take the smoky atmosphere seriously. Charles Dickens, who was, like all men who are really funny about funny things, horribly serious about serious things, certainly meant us to read this story in terms of his protest and his insurrection against the emptiness and arrogance of law, against the folly and the pride of judges. Everything else that there is in this story entered into it through the unconscious or accidental energy of his genius, which broke in at every gap. But it was the tragedy of Richard Carstone that he meant, not the comedy of Harold Skimpole. He could not help being amusing; but he meant to be depressing.

Another case might be taken as testing the greater seriousness of this tale. The passages about Mrs. Jellyby and her philanthropic schemes show Dickens at his best in his old and more familiar satiric manner. But in the midst of the Jellyby pandemonium, which is in itself described with the same *abandon* and irrelevance as the boarding-house of Mrs. Todgers or the travelling theatre of Mr. Crummles, the elder Dickens introduced another piece of pure truth and even tenderness. I mean the account of Caddy Jellyby. If Carstone is a truly masculine study of how a man goes wrong, Caddy is a perfectly feminine study of how a girl goes right. Nowhere else perhaps in fiction, and certainly nowhere else in Dickens, is the mere female paradox so well epitomised, the unjust use of words covering so much capacity for a justice of ultimate estimate; the seeming irresponsibility in language concealing such a fixed and pitiless sense of responsibility about things; the air of being always at daggers-drawn with her own kindred, yet the confession of incurable kinship implied in pride and shame; and, above all, that thirst for order and beauty as for something physical; that strange female power of hating ugliness and waste as good men can only hate sin and bad men virtue. Every touch in her is true, from her first bewildering outbursts of hating people because she likes them, down to the sudden quietude and good sense which announces that she has slipped into her natural place as a woman. Miss Clare is a figure-head, Miss Summerson in some ways a failure; but Miss Caddy Jellyby is by far the greatest, the most human, and the most really dignified of all the heroines of Dickens.

With one or two exceptions, all the effects in this story are of this somewhat quieter kind, though none of them are so subtly successful as Rick Carstone and Caddy. Harold Skimpole begins as a sketch drawn with a pencil almost as airy and fanciful as his own. The humour of the earlier scenes is delightful — the scenes in which Skimpole looks on at other people paying his debts with the air of a kindly outsider, and suggests in formless legal phraseology that they might “sign something” or “make over something,” or the scene in which he tries to explain the advantages of accepting everything to the apoplectic Mr. Boythorn. But it was one of the defects of Dickens as a novelist that his characters always became coarser and clumsier as they passed through the practical events of a story, and this would necessarily be so with Skimpole, whose position was conceivable even to himself only on the assumption that he was a mere spectator of life. Poor Skimpole only asked to be kept out of the business of this world, and Dickens ought to have kept him out of the business of *Bleak House*. By the end of the tale he has brought Skimpole to doing acts of mere low villainy. This altogether spoils the ironical daintiness of the original notion. Skimpole was meant to end with a note of interrogation. As it is, he ends with a big, black, unmistakable blot. Speaking purely artistically, we may say that this is as great a collapse or vulgarisation as if Richard Carstone had turned into a common blackguard and wife-beater, or Caddy Jellyby into a comic and illiterate landlady. Upon the whole it may, I think, be said that the character of Skimpole is rather a piece of brilliant moralising than of pure observation or creation. Dickens had a singularly just mind. He was wild in his caricatures, but very sane in his impressions. Many of his books were devoted, and this book is partly devoted, to a denunciation of aristocracy — of the idle class that lives easily upon the toil of nations. But he was fairer than many modern revolutionists, and he insisted on satirising also those who prey on society not in the name of rank or law, but in the name of intellect and beauty. Sir Leicester Dedlock and Mr. Harold Skimpole are alike in accepting with a royal unconsciousness the anomaly and evil of their position. But the idleness and insolence of the aristocrat is human and humble compared to the idleness and insolence of the artist.

With the exception of a few fine freaks, such as Turveydrop and Chadband, all the figures in this book are touched more delicately, even more faintly, than is common with Dickens. But if the figures are touched more faintly, it is partly because they are figures in a fog — the fog of Chancery. Dickens meant that twilight to be oppressive; for it was the symbol of oppression. Deliberately he did not dispel the darkness at the end of this book, as he does dispel it at the end of most of his books. Pickwick gets out of the Fleet Prison; Carstone never gets out of Chancery but by death. This tyranny, Dickens said, shall not be lifted by the light subterfuge of a fiction. This tyranny shall never be lifted till all Englishmen lift it together.

CHILD’S HISTORY OF ENGLAND

There are works of great authors manifestly inferior to their typical work which are yet necessary to their fame and their figure in the world. It is not difficult to recall examples of them. No one, for instance, would talk of Scott’s *Tales of a Grandfather* as indicating the power that produced *Kenilworth* and *Guy Mannering*. Nevertheless, without this chance minor compilation we should not really have the key of Scott. Without this one insignificant book we should not see his significance. For the truth was that Scott loved history more than romance, because he was so constituted as to find it more romantic than romance. He preferred the deeds of Wallace and Douglas to those of Marmion and Ivanhoe. Therefore his garrulous gossip of old times, his rambles in dead centuries, give us the real material and impulse of all his work; they represent the quarry in which he dug and the food on which he fed. Almost alone among novelists Scott actually preferred those parts of his historical novels which he had not invented himself. He exults when he can boast in an eager note that he has stolen some saying from history. Thus *The Tales of a Grandfather*, though small, is in some sense the frame of all the Waverley novels. We realise that all Scott’s novels are tales of a grandfather.

What has been said here about Scott might be said in a less degree about Thackeray’s *Four Georges*. Though standing higher among his works than *The Tales of a Grandfather* among Scott’s they are not his works of genius; yet they seem in some way to surround, supplement, and explain such works. Without the *Four Georges* we should know less of the link that bound Thackeray to the beginning and to the end of the eighteenth century; thence we should have known less of Colonel Esmond and also less of Lord Steyne. To these two examples I have given of the slight historical experiments of two novelists a third has to be added. The third great master of English fiction whose glory fills the nineteenth century also produced a small experiment in the popularisation of history. It is separated from the other two partly by a great difference of merit but partly also by an utter difference of tone and outlook. We seem to hear it suddenly as in the first words spoken by a new voice, a voice gay, colloquial, and impatient. Scott and Thackeray were tenderly attached to the past; Dickens (in his consciousness at any rate) was impatient with everything, but especially impatient with the past.

A collection of the works of Dickens would be incomplete in an essential as well as a literal sense without his *Child's History of England*. It may not be important as a contribution to history, but it is important as a contribution to biography; as a contribution to the character and the career of the man who wrote it, a typical man of his time. That he had made no personal historical researches, that he had no special historical learning, that he had not had, in truth, even anything that could be called a good education, all this only accentuates not the merit but at least the importance of the book. For here we may read in plain popular language, written by a man whose genius for popular exposition has never been surpassed among men, a brief account of the origin and meaning of England as it seemed to the average Englishman of that age. When subtler views of our history, some more false and some more true than his, have become popular, or at least well known, when in the near future Carlylean or Catholic or Marxian views of history have spread themselves among the reading public, this book will always remain as a bright and brisk summary of the cock-sure, healthy-minded, essentially manly and essentially ungentlemanly view of history which characterised the Radicals of that particular Radical era. The history tells us nothing about the periods that it talks about; but it tells us a great deal about the period that it does not talk about; the period in which it was written. It is in no sense a history of England from the Roman invasion; but it is certainly one of the documents which will contribute to a history of England in the nineteenth century.

Of the actual nature of its philosophical and technical limitations it is, I suppose, unnecessary to speak. They all resolve themselves into one fault common in the modern world, and certainly characteristic of historians much more learned and pretentious than Dickens. That fault consists simply in ignoring or underrating the variety of strange evils and unique dangers in the world. The Radicals of the nineteenth century were engaged, and most righteously engaged, in dealing with one particular problem of human civilisation; they were shifting and apportioning more equally a load of custom that had really become unmeaning, often accidental, and nearly always unfair. Thus, for instance, a fierce and fighting penal code, which had been perfectly natural when the robbers were as strong as the Government, had become in more ordered times nothing but a base and bloody habit. Thus again Church powers and dues, which had been human when every man felt the Church as the best part of himself, were mere mean privileges when the nation was full of sects and full of freethinkers. This clearing away of external symbols that no longer symbolised anything was an honourable and needful work; but it was so difficult that to the men engaged in it it blocked up the perspective and filled the sky, so that they slid into a very natural mental mistake which coloured all their views of history. They supposed that this particular problem on which they were engaged was the one problem upon which all mankind had always been engaged. They got it into their heads that breaking away from a dead past was the perpetual process of humanity. The truth is obviously that humanity has found itself in many difficulties very different from that. Sometimes the best business of an age is to resist some alien invasion; sometimes to preach practical self-control in a world too self-indulgent and diffused; sometimes to prevent the growth in the State of great new private enterprises that would poison or oppress it. Above all it may sometimes happen that the highest task of a thinking citizen may be to do the exact opposite of the work which the Radicals had to do. It may be his highest duty to cling on to every scrap of the past that he can find, if he feels that the ground is giving way beneath him and sinking into mere savagery and forgetfulness of all human culture. This was exactly the position of all thinking men in what we call the dark ages, say from the sixth to the tenth century. The cheap progressive view of history can never make head or tail of that epoch; it was an epoch upside down. We think of the old things as barbaric and the new things as enlightened. In that age all the enlightened things were old; all the barbaric and brutally ignorant things were new and up to date. Republicanism was a fading legend; despotism was a new and successful experiment. Christianity was not only better than the clans that rebelled against it; Christianity was more rationalistic than they were. When men looked back they saw progress and reason; when they looked forward they saw shapeless tradition and tribal terror. Touching such an age it is obvious that all our modern terms describing reform or conservation are foolish and beside the mark. The Conservative was then the only possible reformer. If a man did not strengthen the remains of Roman order and the root of Roman Christianity, he was simply helping the world to roll downhill into ruin and idiotcy. Remember all these evident historical truths and then turn to the account given by Charles Dickens of that great man, St. Dunstan. It is not that the pert cockney tone of the abuse is irritating to the nerves: it is that he has got the whole hang of the thing wrong. His head is full of the nineteenth-century situation; that a priest imposing discipline is a person somehow blocking the way to equality and light. Whereas the point about such a man as Dunstan was that nobody in the place except he cared a button about equality or light: and that he was defending what was left of them against the young and growing power of darkness and division and caste.

Nevertheless the case against such books as this is commonly stated wrong. The fault of Dickens is not (as is often said) that he "applies the same moral standard to all ages." Every sane man must do that: a moral standard must remain the same or it is not a moral standard. If we call St. Anthony of Padua a good man, we must mean what we mean when we call Huxley a good man, or else there is no sense in using the word "good." The fault of the Dickens school of popular history lies, not in the application of a plain rule of right and wrong to all circumstances, but in ignorance of the circumstances to which it was applied. It is not that they wrongly enforce the fixed principle that life should be saved; it is that they take a fire-engine to a shipwreck and a lifeboat to a house on fire. The business of a good man in Dickens's time was to bring justice up to date. The business of a good man in Dunstan's time was to toil to ensure the survival of any justice at all.

And Dickens, through being a living and fighting man of his own time, kept the health of his own heart, and so saw many truths with a single eye: truths that were spoilt for subtler eyes. He was much more really right than Carlyle; immeasurably more right than Froude. He was more right precisely because he applied plain human morals to all facts as he saw them. Carlyle really had a vague idea that in coarse and cruel times it was right to be coarse and cruel; that tyranny was excusable in the twelfth century: as if the twelfth century did not denounce tyrants as much or more than any other. Carlyle, in fact, fancied that Rufus was the right sort of man; a view which was not only not shared by Anselm, but was probably not shared by Rufus. In this connection, or rather in connection with the other case of Froude, it is worth while to take another figure from Dickens's history, which illustrates the other and better side of the facile and popular method. Sheer ignorance of the environment made him wrong about Dunstan. But sheer instinct and good moral tradition made him right, for instance, about Henry VIII.; right where Froude is wildly wrong. Dickens's imagination could not re-picture an age where learning and liberty were dying rather than being born: but Henry VIII. lived in a time of expanding knowledge and unrest; a time therefore somewhat like the Victorian. And Dickens in his childish but robust way does perceive the main point about him: that he was a wicked man. He misses all the fine shades, of course; he makes him every kind of wicked man at once. He leaves out the serious interests of the man: his strange but real concern for theology; his love of certain legal and moral forms; his half-unconscious patriotism. But he sees the solid bulk of definite badness simply because it was there; and Froude cannot see it at all; because Froude followed Carlyle and played tricks with the eternal conscience. Henry VIII. *was* "a blot of blood and grease upon the history of England." For he was the embodiment of the Devil in the Renascence, that wild worship of mere pleasure and scorn, which with its pictures and its palaces has enriched and ruined the world.

The time will soon come when the mere common-sense of Dickens, like the mere common-sense of Macaulay (though his was poisoned by learning and Whig politics), will appear to give a plainer and therefore truer picture of the mass of history than the mystical perversity of a man of genius writing only out of his own temperament, like Carlyle or Taine. If a man has a new theory of ethics there is one thing he must not be allowed to do. Let him give laws on Sinai, let him dictate a Bible, let him fill the world with cathedrals if he can. But he must not be allowed to write a history of England; or a history of any country. All history was conducted on ordinary morality: with his extraordinary morality he is certain to read it all askew. Thus Carlyle tries to write of the Middle Ages with a bias against humility and mercy; that is, with a bias against the whole theoretic morality of the Middle Ages. The result is that he turns into a mere turmoil of arrogant German savages what was really the most complete and logical, if not the highest, of human civilisations. Historically speaking, it is better to be Dickens than to be this; better to be ignorant, provincial, slap-dash, seeing only the passing moment, but in that moment, to be true to eternal things.

It must be remembered, of course, that Dickens deliberately offers this only as a "child's" history of England. That is, he only professes to be able to teach history as any father of a little boy of five professes to be able to teach him history. And although the history of England would certainly be taught very differently (as regards the actual criticism of events and men) in a family with a wider culture or with another religion, the general method would be the same. For the general method is quite right. This black-and-white history of heroes and villains; this history full of pugnacious ethics and of nothing else, is the right kind of history for children. I have often wondered how the scientific Marxians and the believers in “the materialist view of history” will ever manage to teach their dreary economic generalisations to children: but I suppose they will have no children. Dickens’s history will always be popular with the young; almost as popular as Dickens’s novels, and for the same reason: because it is full of moralising. Science and art without morality are not dangerous in the sense commonly supposed. They are not dangerous like a fire, but dangerous like a fog. A fire is dangerous in its brightness; a fog in its dulness; and thought without morals is merely dull, like a fog. The fog seems to be creeping up the street; putting out lamp after lamp. But this cockney lamp-post which the children love is still crowned with its flame; and when the fathers have forgotten ethics, their babies will turn and teach them.

HARD TIMES

I have heard that in some debating clubs there is a rule that the members may discuss anything except religion and politics. I cannot imagine what they do discuss; but it is quite evident that they have ruled out the only two subjects which are either important or amusing. The thing is a part of a certain modern tendency to avoid things because they lead to warmth; whereas, obviously, we ought, even in a social sense, to seek those things specially. The warmth of the discussion is as much a part of hospitality as the warmth of the fire. And it is singularly suggestive that in English literature the two things have died together. The very people who would blame Dickens for his sentimental hospitality are the very people who would also blame him for his narrow political conviction. The very people who would mock him for his narrow radicalism are those who would mock him for his broad fireside. Real conviction and real charity are much nearer than people suppose. Dickens was capable of loving all men; but he refused to love all opinions. The modern humanitarian can love all opinions, but he cannot love all men; he seems, sometimes, in the ecstasy of his humanitarianism, even to hate them all. He can love all opinions, including the opinion that men are unlovable.

In feeling Dickens as a lover we must never forget him as a fighter, and a fighter for a creed; but indeed there is no other kind of fighter. The geniality which he spread over all his creations was geniality spread from one centre, from one flaming peak. He was willing to excuse Mr. Micawber for being extravagant; but Dickens and Dickens's doctrine were strictly to decide how far he was to be excused. He was willing to like Mr. Twemlow in spite of his snobbishness, but Dickens and Dickens's doctrine were alone to be judges of how far he was snobbish. There was never a more didactic writer: hence there was never one more amusing. He had no mean modern notion of keeping the moral doubtful. He would have regarded this as a mere piece of slovenliness, like leaving the last page illegible.

Everywhere in Dickens's work these angles of his absolute opinion stood up out of the confusion of his general kindness, just as sharp and splintered peaks stand up out of the soft confusion of the forests. Dickens is always generous, he is generally kind-hearted, he is often sentimental, he is sometimes intolerably maudlin; but you never know when you will not come upon one of the convictions of Dickens; and when you do come upon it you do know it. It is as hard and as high as any precipice or peak of the mountains. The highest and hardest of these peaks is *Hard Times*.

It is here more than anywhere else that the sternness of Dickens emerges as separate from his softness; it is here, most obviously, so to speak, that his bones stick out. There are indeed many other books of his which are written better and written in a sadder tone. *Great Expectations* is melancholy in a sense; but it is doubtful of everything, even of its own melancholy. *The Tale of Two Cities* is a great tragedy, but it is still a sentimental tragedy. It is a great drama, but it is still a melodrama. But this tale of *Hard Times* is in some way harsher than all these. For it is the expression of a righteous indignation which cannot condescend to humour and which cannot even condescend to pathos. Twenty times we have taken Dickens's hand and it has been sometimes hot with revelry and sometimes weak with weariness; but this time we start a little, for it is inhumanly cold; and then we realise that we have touched his gauntlet of steel.

One cannot express the real value of this book without being irrelevant. It is true that one cannot express the real value of anything without being irrelevant. If we take a thing frivolously we can take it separately, but the moment we take a thing seriously, if it were only an old umbrella, it is obvious that that umbrella opens above us into the immensity of the whole universe. But there are rather particular reasons why the value of the book called *Hard Times* should be referred back to great historic and theoretic matters with which it may appear superficially to have little or nothing to do. The chief reason can perhaps be stated thus — that English politics had for more than a hundred years been getting into more and more of a hopeless tangle (a tangle which, of course, has since become even worse) and that Dickens did in some extraordinary way see what was wrong, even if he did not see what was right.

The Liberalism which Dickens and nearly all of his contemporaries professed had begun in the American and the French Revolutions. Almost all modern English criticism upon those revolutions has been vitiated by the assumption that those revolutions burst upon a world which was unprepared for their ideas — a world ignorant of the possibility of such ideas. Somewhat the same mistake is made by those who suggest that Christianity was adopted by a world incapable of criticising it; whereas obviously it was adopted by a world that was tired of criticising everything. The vital mistake that is made about the French Revolution is merely this — that everyone talks about it as the introduction of a new idea. It was not the introduction of a new idea; there are no new ideas. Or if there are new ideas, they would not cause the least irritation if they were introduced into political society; because the world having never got used to them there would be no mass of men ready to fight for them at a moment's notice. That which was irritating about the French Revolution was this — that it was not the introduction of a new ideal, but the practical fulfilment of an old one. From the time of the first fairy tales men had always believed ideally in equality; they had always thought that something ought to be done, if anything could be done, to redress the balance between Cinderella and the ugly sisters. The irritating thing about the French was not that they said this ought to be done; everybody said that. The irritating thing about the French was that they did it. They proposed to carry out into a positive scheme what had been the vision of humanity; and humanity was naturally annoyed. The kings of Europe did not make war upon the Revolution because it was a blasphemy, but because it was a copy-book maxim which had been just too accurately copied. It was a platitude which they had always held in theory unexpectedly put into practice. The tyrants did not hate democracy because it was a paradox; they hated it because it was a truism which seemed in some danger of coming true.

Now it happens to be hugely important to have this right view of the Revolution in considering its political effects upon England. For the English, being a deeply and indeed excessively romantic people, could never be quite content with this quality of cold and bald obviousness about the republican formula. The republican formula was merely this — that the State must consist of its citizens ruling equally, however unequally they may do anything else. In their capacity of members of the State they are all equally interested in its preservation. But the English soon began to be romantically restless about this eternal truism; they were perpetually trying to turn it into something else, into something more picturesque — progress perhaps, or anarchy. At last they turned it into the highly exciting and highly unsound system of politics, which was known as the Manchester School, and which was expressed with a sort of logical flightiness, more excusable in literature, by Mr. Herbert Spencer. Of course Danton or Washington or any of the original republicans would have thought these people were mad. They would never have admitted for a moment that the

State must not interfere with commerce or competition; they would merely have insisted that if the State did interfere, it must really be the State — that is, the whole people. But the distance between the common sense of Danton and the mere ecstasy of Herbert Spencer marks the English way of colouring and altering the revolutionary idea. The English people as a body went blind, as the saying is, for interpreting democracy entirely in terms of liberty. They said in substance that if they had more and more liberty it did not matter whether they had any equality or any fraternity. But this was violating the sacred trinity of true politics; they confounded the persons and they divided the substance.

Now the really odd thing about England in the nineteenth century is this — that there was one Englishman who happened to keep his head. The men who lost their heads lost highly scientific and philosophical heads; they were great cosmic systematisers like Spencer, great social philosophers like Bentham, great practical politicians like Bright, great political economists like Mill. The man who kept his head kept a head full of fantastic nonsense; he was a writer of rowdy farces, a demagogue of fiction, a man without education in any serious sense whatever, a man whose whole business was to turn ordinary cockneys into extraordinary caricatures. Yet when all these other children of the revolution went wrong he, by a mystical something in his bones, went right. He knew nothing of the Revolution; yet he struck the note of it. He returned to the original sentimental commonplace upon which it is forever founded, as the Church is founded on a rock. In an England gone mad about a minor theory he reasserted the original idea — the idea that no one in the State must be too weak to influence the State.

This man was Dickens. He did this work much more genuinely than it was done by Carlyle or Ruskin; for they were simply Tories making out a romantic case for the return of Toryism. But Dickens was a real Liberal demanding the return of real Liberalism. Dickens was there to remind people that England had rubbed out two words of the revolutionary motto, had left only Liberty and destroyed Equality and Fraternity. In this book, *Hard Times*, he specially champions equality. In all his books he champions fraternity.

The atmosphere of this book and what it stands for can be very adequately conveyed in the note on the book by Lord Macaulay, who may stand as a very good example of the spirit of England in those years of eager emancipation and expanding wealth — the years in which Liberalism was turned from an omnipotent truth to a weak scientific system. Macaulay's private comment on *Hard Times* runs, "One or two passages of exquisite pathos and the rest sullen Socialism." That is not an unfair and certainly not a specially hostile criticism, but it exactly shows how the book struck those people who were mad on political liberty and dead about everything else. Macaulay mistook for a new formula called Socialism what was, in truth, only the old formula called political democracy. He and his Whigs had so thoroughly mauled and modified the original idea of Rousseau or Jefferson that when they saw it again they positively thought that it was something quite new and eccentric. But the truth was that Dickens was not a Socialist, but an unspoilt Liberal; he was not sullen; nay, rather, he had remained strangely hopeful. They called him a sullen Socialist only to disguise their astonishment at finding still loose about the London streets a happy republican.

Dickens is the one living link between the old kindness and the new, between the good will of the past and the good works of the future. He links May Day with Bank Holiday, and he does it almost alone. All the men around him, great and good as they were, were in comparison puritanical, and never so puritanical as when they were also atheistic. He is a sort of solitary pipe down which pours to the twentieth century the original river of Merry England. And although this *Hard Times* is, as its name implies, the hardest of his works, although there is less in it perhaps than in any of the others of the *abandon* and the buffoonery of Dickens, this only emphasises the more clearly the fact that he stood almost alone for a more humane and hilarious view of democracy. None of his great and much more highly-educated contemporaries could help him in this. Carlyle was as gloomy on the one side as Herbert Spencer on the other. He protested against the commercial oppression simply and solely because it was not only an oppression but a depression. And this protest of his was made specially in the case of the book before us. It may be bitter, but it was a protest against bitterness. It may be dark, but it is the darkness of the subject and not of the author. He is by his own account dealing with hard times, but not with a hard eternity, not with a hard philosophy of the universe. Nevertheless, this is the one place in his work where he does not make us remember human happiness by example as well as by precept. This is, as I have said, not the saddest, but certainly the harshest of his stories. It is perhaps the only place where Dickens, in defending happiness, for a moment forgets to be happy.

He describes Bounderby and Gradgrind with a degree of grimness and sombre hatred very different from the half affectionate derision which he directed against the old tyrants or humbugs of the earlier nineteenth century — the pompous Dedlock or the fatuous Nupkins, the grotesque Bumble or the inane Tigg. In those old books his very abuse was benignant; in *Hard Times* even his sympathy is hard. And the reason is again to be found in the political facts of the century. Dickens could be half genial with the older generation of oppressors because it was a dying generation. It was evident, or at least it seemed evident then, that Nupkins could not go on much longer making up the law of England to suit himself; that Sir Leicester Dedlock could not go on much longer being kind to his tenants as if they were dogs and cats. And some of these evils the nineteenth century did really eliminate or improve. For the first half of the century Dickens and all his friends were justified in feeling that the chains were falling from mankind. At any rate, the chains did fall from Mr. Rouncewell the Iron-master. And when they fell from him he picked them up and put them upon the poor.

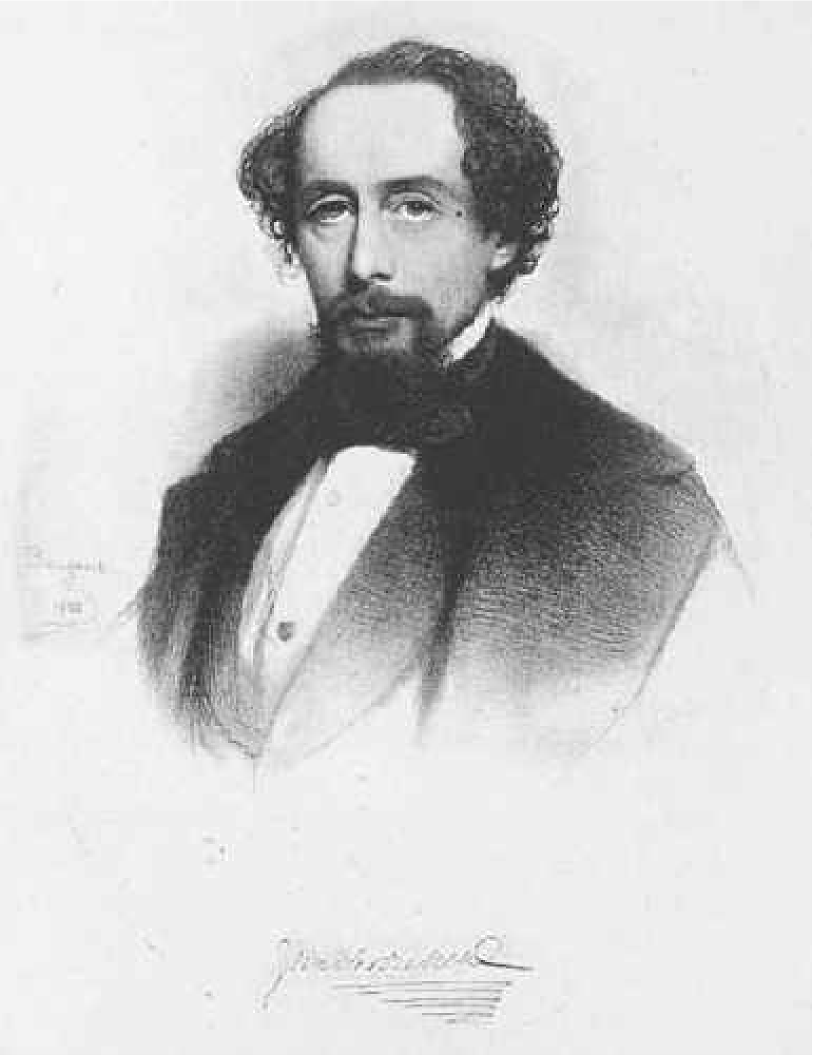

Charles Dickens, 1858
From a black and white drawing by Baughiet.

LITTLE DORRIT

Little Dorrit stands in Dickens's life chiefly as a signal of how far he went down the road of realism, of sadness, and of what is called modernity. True, it was by no means the best of the books of his later period; some even think it the worst. *Great Expectations* is certainly the best of the later novels; some even think it the best of all the novels. Nor is it the novel most concerned with strictly recent problems; that title must be given to *Hard Times*. Nor again is it the most finely finished or well constructed of the later books; that claim can be probably made for *Edwin Drood*. By a queer verbal paradox the most carefully finished of his later tales is the tale that is not finished at all. In form, indeed, the book bears a superficial resemblance to those earlier works by which the young Dickens had set the whole world laughing long ago. Much of the story refers to a remote time early in the nineteenth century; much of it was actually recalled and copied from the life of Dickens's father in the old Marshalsea prison. Also the narrative has something of the form, or rather absence of form, which belonged to *Nicholas Nickleby* or *Martin Chuzzlewit*. It has something of the old air of being a string of disconnected adventures, like a boy's book about bears and Indians. The Dorrits go wandering for no particular reason on the Continent of Europe, just as young Martin Chuzzlewit went wandering for no particular reason on the continent of America. The story of *Little Dorrit* stops and lingers at the doors of the Circumlocution Office much in the same way that the story of Samuel Pickwick stops and lingers in the political excitement of Eatanswill. The villain, Blandois, is a very stagey villain indeed; quite as stagey as Ralph Nickleby or the mysterious Monk. The secret of the dark house of Clennam is a very silly secret; quite as silly as the secret of Ralph Nickleby or the secret of Monk. Yet all these external similarities between *Little Dorrit* and the earliest books, all this loose, melodramatic quality, only serves to make more obvious and startling the fact that some change has come over the soul of Dickens. *Hard Times* is harsh; but then *Hard Times* is a social pamphlet; perhaps it is only harsh as a social pamphlet must be harsh. *Bleak House* is a little sombre; but then *Bleak House* is almost a detective story; perhaps it is only sombre in the sense that a detective story must be sombre. *A Tale of Two Cities* is a tragedy; but then *A Tale of Two Cities* is a tale of the French Revolution;

perhaps it is only a tragedy because the French Revolution was a tragedy. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is dark; but then the mystery of anybody must be dark. In all these other cases of the later books an artistic reason can be given — a reason of theme or of construction for the slight sadness that seems to cling to them. But exactly because *Little Dorrit* is a mere Dickens novel, it shows that something must somehow have happened to Dickens himself. Even in resuming his old liberty, he cannot resume his old hilarity. He can re-create the anarchy, but not the revelry.

It so happens that this strange difference between the new and the old mode of Dickens can be symbolised and stated in one separate and simple contrast. Dickens's father had been a prisoner in a debtors' prison, and Dickens's works contain two pictures partly suggested by the personality of that prisoner. Mr. Micawber is one picture of him. Mr. Dorrit is another. This truth is almost incredible, but it is the truth. The joyful Micawber, whose very despair was exultant, and the desolate Dorrit, whose very pride was pitiful, were the same man. The valiant Micawber and the nervous, shaking Dorrit were the same man. The defiant Micawber and the snobbish, essentially obsequious Dorrit were the same man. I do not mean of course that either of the pictures was an exact copy of anybody. The whole Dickens genius consisted of taking hints and turning them into human beings. As he took twenty real persons and turned them into one fictitious person, so he took one real person and turned him into twenty fictitious persons. This quality would suggest one character, that quality would suggest another. But in this case, at any rate, he did take one real person and turn him into two. And what is more, he turned him into two persons who seem to be quite opposite persons. To ordinary readers of Dickens, to say that Micawber and Dorrit had in any sense the same original, will appear unexpected and wild. No conceivable connection between the two would ever have occurred to anybody who had read Dickens with simple and superficial enjoyment, as all good literature ought to be read. It will seem to them just as silly as saying that the Fat Boy and Mr. Alfred Jingle were both copied from the same character. It will seem as insane as saying that the character of Smike and the character of Major Bagstock were both copied from Dickens's father. Yet it is an unquestionable historical fact that Micawber and Dorrit were both copied from Dickens's father, in the only sense that any figures in good literature are ever copied from anything or anybody. Dickens did get the main idea of Micawber from his father; and that idea is that a poor man is not conquered by the world. And Dickens did get the main idea of Dorrit from his father; and that idea is that a poor man may be conquered by the world. I shall take the opportunity of discussing, in a moment, which of these ideas is true. Doubtless old John Dickens included both the gay and the sad moral; most men do. My only purpose here is to point out that Dickens drew the gay moral in 1849, and the sad moral in 1857.

There must have been some real sadness at this time creeping like a cloud over Dickens himself. It is nothing that a man dwells on the darkness of dark things; all healthy men do that. It is when he dwells on the darkness of bright things that we have reason to fear some disease of the emotions. There must really have been some depression when a man can only see the sad side of flowers or the sad side of holidays or the sad side of wine. And there must be some depression of an uncommonly dark and genuine character when a man has reached such a point that he can see only the sad side of Mr. Wilkins Micawber.

Yet this is in reality what had happened to Dickens about this time. Staring at Wilkins Micawber he could see only the weakness and the tragedy that was made possible by his indifference, his indulgence, and his bravado. He had already indeed been slightly moved towards this study of the feebleness and ruin of the old epicurean type with which he had once sympathised, the type of Bob Sawyer or Dick Swiveller. He had already attacked the evil of it in *Bleak House* in the character of Harold Skimpole, with its essentially cowardly carelessness and its highly selfish communism. Nevertheless, as I have said before, it must have been no small degree of actual melancholia which led Dickens to look for a lesson of disaster and slavery in the very same career from which he had once taught lessons of continual recuperation and a kind of fantastic freedom. There must have been at this time some melancholy behind the writings. There must have existed on this earth at the time that portent and paradox — a somewhat depressed Dickens.

Perhaps it was a reminiscence of that metaphorical proverb which tells us that “truth lies at the bottom of a well.” Perhaps these people thought that the only way to find truth in the well was to drown oneself. But on whatever thin theoretic basis, the type and period of George Gissing did certainly consider that Dickens, so far as he went, was all the worse for the optimism of the story of Micawber; hence it is not unnatural that they should think him all the better for the comparative pessimism of the story of *Little*

Dorrit. The very things in the tale that would naturally displease the ordinary admirers of Dickens, are the things which would naturally please a man like George Gissing. There are many of these things, but one of them emerges pre-eminent and unmistakable. This is the fact that when all is said and done the main business of the story of *Little Dorrit* is to describe the victory of circumstances over a soul. The circumstances are the financial ruin and long imprisonment of Edward Dorrit; the soul is Edward Dorrit himself. Let it be granted that the circumstances are exceptional and oppressive, are denounced as exceptional and oppressive, are finally exploded and overthrown; still, they are circumstances. Let it be granted that the soul is that of a man perhaps weak in any case and retaining many merits to the last, still it is a soul. Let it be granted, above all, that the admission that such spiritual tragedies do occur does not decrease by so much as an iota our faith in the validity of any spiritual struggle. For example, Stevenson has made a study of the breakdown of a good man's character under a burden for which he is not to blame, in the tragedy of Henry Durie in *The Master of Ballantrae*. Yet he has added, in the mouth of Mackellar, the exact common sense and good theology of the matter, saying "It matters not a jot; for he that is to pass judgment upon the records of our life is the same that formed us in frailty." Let us concede then all this, and the fact remains that the study of the slow demoralisation of a man through mere misfortune was not a study congenial to Dickens, not in accordance with his original inspiration, not connected in any manner with the special thing that he had to say. In a word, the thing is not quite a part of himself; and he was not quite himself when he did it.

He was still quite a young man; his depression did not come from age. In fact, as far as I know, mere depression never does come from mere age. Age can pass into a beautiful reverie. Age can pass into a sort of beautiful idiocy. But I do not think that the actual decline and close of our ordinary vitality brings with it any particular heaviness of the spirits. The spirits of the old do not as a rule seem to become more and more ponderous until they sink into the earth. Rather the spirits of the old seem to grow lighter and lighter until they float away like thistledown. Wherever there is the definite phenomenon called depression, it commonly means that something else has been closer to us than so normal a thing as death. There has been disease, bodily or mental, or there has been sin, or there has been some struggle or effort, breaking past the ordinary boundaries of human custom.

In the case of Dickens there had been two things that are not of the routine of a wholesome human life; there had been the quarrel with his wife, and there had been the strain of incessant and exaggerated intellectual labour. He had not an easy time; and on top of that (or perhaps rather at the bottom of it) he had not an easy nature. Not only did his life necessitate work, but his character necessitated worry about work; and that combination is always one which is very dangerous to the temperament which is exposed to it. The only people who ought to be allowed to work are the people who are able to shirk. The only people who ought to be allowed to worry are the people who have nothing to worry about. When the two are combined, as they were in Dickens, you are very likely to have at least one collapse. *Little Dorrit* is a very interesting, sincere, and fascinating book. But for all that, I fancy it is the one collapse.

The complete proof of this depression may be difficult to advance; because it will be urged, and entirely with reason, that the actual examples of it are artistic and appropriate. Dickens, the Gissing school will say, was here pointing out certain sad truths of psychology; can any one say that he ought not to point them out? That may be; in any case, to explain depression is not to remove it. But the instances of this more sombre quality of which I have spoken are not very hard to find. The thing can easily be seen by comparing a book like *Little Dorrit* with a book like *David Copperfield*. David Copperfield and Arthur Clennam have both been brought up in unhappy homes, under bitter guardians and a black, disheartening religion. It is the whole point of David Copperfield that he has broken out of a Calvinistic tyranny which he cannot forgive. But it is the whole point of Arthur Clennam that he has not broken out of the Calvinistic tyranny, but is still under its shadow. Copperfield has come from a gloomy childhood; Clennam, though forty years old, is still in a gloomy childhood. When David meets the Murdstones again it is to defy them with the health and hilarious anger that go with his happy delirium about Dora. But when Clennam re-enters his sepulchral house there is a weight upon his soul which makes it impossible for him to answer, with any spirit, the morbidities of his mother, or even the grotesque interferences of Mr. Flintwinch. This is only another example of the same quality which makes the Dickens of *Little Dorrit* insist on the degradation of the debtor, while the Dickens of *David Copperfield* insisted on his splendid irresponsibility, his essential emancipation. Imprisonments passed over Micawber like summer clouds. But the imprisonment in *Little Dorrit* is like a complete natural climate and environment; it has positively modified the shapes and functions of the animals that dwell in it. A horrible thing has happened to Dickens; he has almost become an Evolutionist. Worse still, in studying the Calvinism of Mrs. Clennam's house, he has almost become a Calvinist. He half believes (as do some of the modern scientists) that there is really such a thing as "a child of wrath," that a man on whom such an early shadow had fallen could never shake it off. For ancient Calvinism and modern Evolutionism are essentially the same things. They are both ingenious logical blasphemies against the dignity and liberty of the human soul.

The workmanship of the book in detail is often extremely good. The one passage in the older and heartier Dickens manner (I mean the description of the Circumlocution Office) is beyond praise. It is a complete picture of the way England is actually governed at this moment. The very core of our politics is expressed in the light and easy young Barnacle who told Clennam with a kindly frankness that he, Clennam, would "never go on with it." Dickens hit the mark so that the bell rang when he made all the lower officials, who were cads, tell Clennam coldly that his claim was absurd, until the last official, who is a gentleman, tells him genially that the whole business is absurd. Even here, perhaps, there is something more than the old exuberant derision of Dickens; there is a touch of experience that verges on scepticism. Everywhere else, certainly, there is the note which I have called Calvinistic; especially in the predestined passion of Tattycoram or the incurable cruelty of Miss Wade. Even Little Dorrit herself had, we are told, one stain from her prison experience; and it is spoken of like a bodily stain; like something that cannot be washed away.

There is no denying that this is Dickens's dark moment. It adds enormously to the value of his general view of life that such a dark moment came. He did what all the heroes and all the really happy men have done; he descended into Hell. Nor is it irreverent to continue the quotation from the Creed, for in the next book he was to write he was to break out of all these dreams of fate and failure, and with his highest voice to speak of the triumph of the weak of this world. His next book was to leave us saying, as Sydney Carton mounted the scaffold, words which, splendid in themselves, have never been so splendidly quoted— "I am the Resurrection and the Life; whoso believeth in Me though he be dead yet he shall live." In Sydney Carton at least, Dickens shows none of that dreary submission to the environment of the irrevocable that had for an instant lain on him like a cloud. On this occasion he sees with the old heroic clearness that to be a failure may be one step to being a saint. On the third day he rose again from the dead.

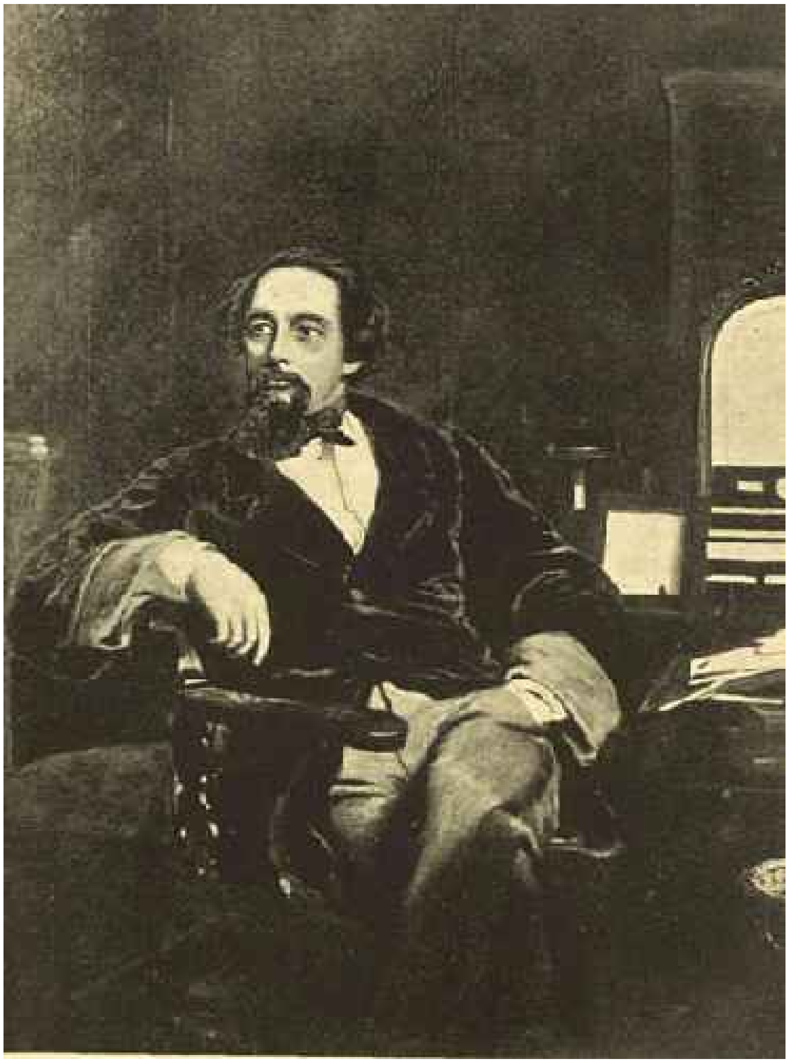

Charles Dickens, 1859 From an oil painting by W. P. Frith, R.A.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

As an example of Dickens's literary work, *A Tale of Two Cities* is not wrongly named. It is his most typical contact with the civic ideals of Europe. All his other tales have been tales of one city. He was in spirit a Cockney; though that title has been quite unreasonably twisted to mean a cad. By the old sound and proverbial test a Cockney was a man born within the sound of Bow bells. That is, he was a man born within the immediate appeal of high civilisation and of eternal religion. Shakespeare, in the heart of his fantastic forest, turns with a splendid suddenness to the Cockney ideal as being the true one after all. For a jest, for a reaction, for an idle summer love or still idler summer hatred, it is well to wander away into the bewildering forest of Arden. It is well that those who are sick with love or sick with the absence of love, those who weary of the folly of courts or weary yet more of their wisdom, it is natural that these should trail away into the twinkling twilight of the woods. Yet it is here that Shakespeare makes one of his most arresting and startling assertions of the truth. Here is one of those rare and tremendous moments of which one may say that there is a stage direction, "Enter Shakespeare." He has admitted that for men weary of courts, for men sick of cities, the wood is the wisest place, and he has praised it with his purest lyric ecstasy. But when a man enters suddenly upon that celestial picnic, a man who is not sick of cities, but sick of hunger, a man who is not weary of courts, but weary of walking, then Shakespeare lets through his own voice with a shattering sincerity and cries the praise of practical human civilisation:

If ever you have looked on better days, If ever you have sat at good men's feasts, If ever been where bells have knolled to church, If ever from your eyelids wiped a tear Or know what 'tis to pity and be pitied.

There is nothing finer even in Shakespeare than that conception of the circle of rich men all pretending to rough it in the country, and the one really hungry man entering, sword in hand, and praising the city. "If ever been where bells have knolled to church"; if you have ever been within sound of Bow bells; if you have ever been happy and haughty enough to call yourself a Cockney.

We must remember this distinction always in the case of Dickens. Dickens is the great Cockney, at once tragic and comic, who enters abruptly upon the Arcadian banquet of the æsthetics and says, “Forbear and eat no more,” and tells them that they shall not eat “until necessity be served.” If there was one thing he would have favoured instinctively it would have been the spreading of the town as meaning the spreading of civilisation. And we should (I hope) all favour the spreading of the town if it did mean the spreading of civilisation. The objection to the spreading of the modern Manchester or Birmingham suburb is simply that such a suburb is much more barbaric than any village in Europe could ever conceivably be. And again, if there is anything that Dickens would have definitely hated it is that general treatment of nature as a dramatic spectacle, a piece of scene-painting which has become the common mark of the culture of our wealthier classes. Despite many fine pictures of natural scenery, especially along the English roadsides, he was upon the whole emphatically on the side of the town. He was on the side of bricks and mortar. He was a citizen; and, after all, a citizen means a man of the city. His strength was, after all, in the fact that he was a man of the city. But, after all, his weakness, his calamitous weakness, was that he was a man of one city.

For all practical purposes he had never been outside such places as Chatham and London. He did indeed travel on the Continent; but surely no man’s travel was ever so superficial as his. He was more superficial than the smallest and commonest tourist. He went about Europe on stilts; he never touched the ground. There is one good test and one only of whether a man has travelled to any profit in Europe. An Englishman is, as such, a European, and as he approaches the central splendours of Europe he ought to feel that he is coming home. If he does not feel at home he had much better have stopped at home. England is a real home; London is a real home; and all the essential feelings of adventure or the picturesque can easily be gained by going out at night upon the flats of Essex or the cloven hills of Surrey. Your visit to Europe is useless unless it gives you the sense of an exile returning. Your first sight of Rome is futile unless you feel that you have seen it before. Thus useless and thus futile were the foreign experiments and the continental raids of Dickens. He enjoyed them as he would have enjoyed, as a boy, a scamper out of Chatham into some strange meadows, as he would have enjoyed, when a grown man, a steam in a police boat out into the fens to the far east of London. But he was the Cockney venturing far; he was not the European coming home. He is still the splendid Cockney Orlando of whom I spoke above; he cannot but suppose that any strange men, being happy in some pastoral way, are mysterious foreign scoundrels. Dickens's real speech to the lazy and laughing civilisation of Southern Europe would really have run in the Shakespearian words:

but whoe'er you be Who in this desert inaccessible, Under the shade of melancholy boughs Lose and neglect the creeping hours of time. If ever you have looked on better things, If ever been where bells have knolled to church.

If, in short, you have ever had the advantage of being born within the sound of Bow bells. Dickens could not really conceive that there was any other city but his own.

It is necessary thus to insist that Dickens never understood the Continent, because only thus can we appreciate the really remarkable thing he did in *A Tale of Two Cities*. It is necessary to feel, first of all, the fact that to him London was the centre of the universe. He did not understand at all the real sense in which Paris is the capital of Europe. He had never realised that all roads lead to Rome. He had never felt (as an Englishman can feel) that he was an Athenian before he was a Londoner. Yet with everything against him he did this astonishing thing. He wrote a book about two cities, one of which he understood; the other he did not understand. And his description of the city he did not know is almost better than his description of the city he did know. This is the entrance of the unquestionable thing about Dickens; the thing called genius; the thing which every one has to talk about directly and distinctly because no one knows what it is. For a plain word (as for instance the word fool) always covers an infinite mystery.

A Tale of Two Cities is one of the more tragic tints of the later life of Dickens. It might be said that he grew sadder as he grew older; but this would be false, for two reasons. First, a man never or hardly ever does grow sad as he grows old; on the contrary, the most melancholy young lovers can be found forty years afterwards chuckling over their port wine. And second, Dickens never did grow old, even in a physical sense. What weariness did appear in him appeared in the prime of life; it was due not to age but to overwork, and his exaggerative way of doing everything. To call Dickens a victim of elderly disenchantment would be as absurd as to say the same of Keats. Such fatigue as there was, was due not to the slowing down of his blood, but rather to its unremitting rapidity. He was not wearied by his age; rather he was wearied by his youth. And though *A Tale of Two Cities* is full of sadness, it is full also of enthusiasm; that pathos is a young pathos rather than an old one. Yet there is one circumstance which does render important the fact that *A Tale of Two Cities* is one of the later works of Dickens. This fact is the fact of his dependence upon another of the great writers of the Victorian era. And it is in connection with this that we can best see the truth of which I have been speaking; the truth that his actual ignorance of France went with amazing intuitive perception of the truth about it. It is here that he has most clearly the plain mark of the man of genius; that he can understand what he does not understand.

Dickens was inspired to the study of the French Revolution and to the writing of a romance about it by the example and influence of Carlyle. Thomas Carlyle undoubtedly rediscovered for Englishmen the revolution that was at the back of all their policies and reforms. It is an entertaining side joke that the French Revolution should have been discovered for Britons by the only British writer who did not really believe in it. Nevertheless, the most authoritative and the most recent critics on that great renaissance agree in considering Carlyle’s work one of the most searching and detailed power. Carlyle had read a great deal about the French Revolution. Dickens had read nothing at all, except Carlyle. Carlyle was a man who collected his ideas by the careful collation of documents and the verification of references. Dickens was a man who collected his ideas from loose hints in the streets, and those always the same streets; as I have said, he was the citizen of one city. Carlyle was in his way learned; Dickens was in every way ignorant. Dickens was an Englishman cut off from France; Carlyle was a Scotsman, historically connected with France. And yet, when all this is said and certified, Dickens is more right than Carlyle. Dickens’s French Revolution is probably more like the real French Revolution than Carlyle’s. It is difficult, if not impossible, to state the grounds of this strong conviction. One can only talk of it by employing that excellent method which Cardinal Newman employed when he spoke of the “notes” of Catholicism. There were certain “notes” of the Revolution. One note of the Revolution was the thing which silly people call optimism, and sensible people call high spirits. Carlyle could never quite get it, because with all his spiritual energy he had no high spirits. That is why he preferred prose to poetry. He could understand rhetoric; for rhetoric means singing with an object. But he could not understand lyrics; for the lyric means singing without an object; as every one does when he is happy. Now for all its blood and its black guillotines, the French Revolution was full of mere high spirits. Nay, it was full of happiness. This actual lilt and levity Carlyle never really found in the Revolution, because he could not find it in himself. Dickens knew less of the Revolution, but he had more of it. When Dickens attacked abuses, he battered them down with exactly that sort of cheery and quite one-sided satisfaction with which the French mob battered down the Bastille. Dickens utterly and innocently believed in certain things; he would, I think, have drawn the sword for them. Carlyle half believed in half a hundred things; he was at once more of a mystic and more of a sceptic. Carlyle was the perfect type of the grumbling servant; the old grumbling servant of the aristocratic comedies. He followed the aristocracy, but he growled as he followed. He was obedient without being servile, just as Caleb Balderstone was obedient without being servile. But Dickens was the type of the man who might really have rebelled instead of grumbling. He might have gone out into the street and fought, like the man who took the Bastille. It is somewhat nationally significant that when we talk of the man in the street it means a figure silent, slouching, and even feeble. When the French speak of the man in the street, it means danger in the street.

No one can fail to notice this deep difference between Dickens and the Carlyle whom he avowedly copied. Splendid and symbolic as are Carlyle’s scenes of the French Revolution, we have in reading them a curious sense that everything is happening at night. In Dickens even massacre happens by daylight. Carlyle always assumes that because things were tragedies therefore the men who did them felt tragic. Dickens knows that the man who works the worst tragedies is the man who feels comic; as for example, Mr. Quilp. The French Revolution was a much simpler world than Carlyle could understand; for Carlyle was subtle and not simple. Dickens could understand it, for he was simple and not subtle. He understood that plain rage against plain political injustice; he understood again that obvious vindictiveness and that obvious brutality which followed. “Cruelty and the abuse of absolute power,” he told an American slave-owner, “are two of the bad passions of human nature.” Carlyle was quite incapable of rising to the height of that uplifted common-sense. He must always find something mystical about the cruelty of the French Revolution. The effect was equally bad whether he found it mystically bad and called the thing anarchy, or whether he found it mystically good and called it the rule of the strong. In both cases he could not understand the common-sense justice or the common-sense vengeance of Dickens and the French Revolution.

Yet Dickens has in this book given a perfect and final touch to this whole conception of mere rebellion and mere human nature. Carlyle had written the story of the French Revolution and had made the story a mere tragedy. Dickens writes the story about the French Revolution, and does not make the Revolution itself the tragedy at all. Dickens knows that an outbreak is seldom a tragedy; generally it is the avoidance of a tragedy. All the real tragedies are silent. Men fight each other with furious cries, because men fight each other with chivalry and an unchangeable sense of brotherhood. But trees fight each other in utter stillness; because they fight each other cruelly and without quarter. In this book, as in history, the guillotine is not the calamity, but rather the solution of the calamity. The sin of Sydney Carton is a sin of habit, not of revolution. His gloom is the gloom of London, not the gloom of Paris.

Charles Dickens, Circa 1860
Photograph by J. & C. Watkins.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Great Expectations, which was written in the afternoon of Dickens’s life and fame, has a quality of serene irony and even sadness, which puts it quite alone among his other works. At no time could Dickens possibly be called cynical, he had too much vitality; but relatively to the other books this book is cynical; but it has the soft and gentle cynicism of old age, not the hard cynicism of youth. To be a young cynic is to be a young brute; but Dickens, who had been so perfectly romantic and sentimental in his youth, could afford to admit this touch of doubt into the mixed experience of his middle age. At no time could any books by Dickens have been called Thackerayan. Both of the two men were too great for that. But relatively to the other Dickensian productions this book may be called Thackerayan. It is a study in human weakness and the slow human surrender. It describes how easily a free lad of fresh and decent instincts can be made to care more for rank and pride and the degrees of our stratified society than for old affection and for honour. It is an extra chapter to *The Book of Snobs*.

The best way of stating the change which this book marks in Dickens can be put in one phrase. In this book for the first time the hero disappears. The hero had descended to Dickens by a long line which begins with the gods, nay, perhaps if one may say so, which begins with God. First comes Deity and then the image of Deity; first comes the god and then the demi-god, the Hercules who labours and conquers before he receives his heavenly crown. That idea, with continual mystery and modification, has continued behind all romantic tales; the demi-god became the hero of paganism; the hero of paganism became the knight-errant of Christianity; the knight-errant who wandered and was foiled before he triumphed became the hero of the later prose romance, the romance in which the hero had to fight a duel with the villain but always survived, in which the hero drove desperate horses through the night in order to rescue the heroine, but always rescued her.

This heroic modern hero, this demi-god in a top-hat, may be said to reach his supreme moment and typical example about the time when Dickens was writing that thundering and thrilling and highly unlikely scene in *Nicholas Nickleby*, the scene where Nicholas hopelessly denounces the atrocious Gride in his hour of grinning triumph, and a thud upon the floor above tells them that the heroine’s tyrannical father has died just in time to set her free. That is the apotheosis of the pure heroic as Dickens found it, and as Dickens in some sense continued it. It may be that it does not appear with quite so much unmistakable youth, beauty, valour, and virtue as it does in Nicholas Nickleby. Walter Gay is a simpler and more careless hero, but when he is doing any of the business of the story he is purely heroic. Kit Nubbles is a humbler hero, but he is a hero; when he is good he is very good. Even David Copperfield, who confesses to boyish tremors and boyish evasions in his account of his boyhood, acts the strict stiff part of the chivalrous gentleman in all the active and determining scenes of the tale. But *Great Expectations* may be called, like *Vanity Fair*, a novel without a hero. Almost all Thackeray's novels except Esmond are novels without a hero, but only one of Dickens's novels can be so described. I do not mean that it is a novel without a *jeune premier*, a young man to make love; *Pickwick* is that and *Oliver Twist*, and, perhaps, *The Old Curiosity Shop*. I mean that it is a novel without a hero in the same far deeper and more deadly sense in which *Pendennis* is also a novel without a hero. I mean that it is a novel which aims chiefly at showing that the hero is unheroic.

All such phrases as these must appear of course to overstate the case. Pip is a much more delightful person than Nicholas Nickleby. Or to take a stronger case for the purpose of our argument, Pip is a much more delightful person than Sydney Carton. Still the fact remains. Most of Nicholas Nickleby's personal actions are meant to show that he is heroic. Most of Pip's actions are meant to show that he is not heroic. The study of Sydney Carton is meant to indicate that with all his vices Sydney Carton was a hero. The study of Pip is meant to indicate that with all his virtues Pip was a snob. The motive of the literary explanation is different. Pip and Pendennis are meant to show how circumstances can corrupt men. Sam Weller and Hercules are meant to show how heroes can subdue circumstances.

This is the preliminary view of the book which is necessary if we are to regard it as a real and separate fact in the life of Dickens. Dickens had many moods because he was an artist; but he had one great mood, because he was a great artist. Any real difference therefore from the general drift, or rather (I apologise to Dickens) the general drive of his creation is very important. This is the one place in his work in which he does, I will not say feel like Thackeray, far less think like Thackeray, less still write like Thackeray, but this is the one of his works in which he understands Thackeray. He puts himself in some sense in the same place; he considers mankind at somewhat the same angle as mankind is considered in one of the sociable and sarcastic novels of Thackeray. When he deals with Pip he sets out not to show his strength like the strength of Hercules, but to show his weakness like the weakness of Pendennis. When he sets out to describe Pip's great expectation he does not set out, as in a fairytale, with the idea that these great expectations will be fulfilled; he sets out from the first with the idea that these great expectations will be disappointing. We might very well, as I have remarked elsewhere, apply to all Dickens's books the title *Great Expectations*. All his books are full of an airy and yet ardent expectation of everything; of the next person who shall happen to speak, of the next chimney that shall happen to smoke, of the next event, of the next ecstasy; of the next fulfilment of any eager human fancy. All his books might be called *Great Expectations*. But the only book to which he gave the name of *Great Expectations* was the only book in which the expectation was never realised. It was so with the whole of that splendid and unconscious generation to which he belonged. The whole glory of that old English middle class was that it was unconscious; its excellence was entirely in that, that it was the culture of the nation, and that it did not know it. If Dickens had ever known that he was optimistic, he would have ceased to be happy.

It is necessary to make this first point clear: that in *Great Expectations* Dickens was really trying to be a quiet, a detached, and even a cynical observer of human life. Dickens was trying to be Thackeray. And the final and startling triumph of Dickens is this: that even to this moderate and modern story, he gives an incomparable energy which is not moderate and which is not modern. He is trying to be reasonable; but in spite of himself he is inspired. He is trying to be detailed, but in spite of himself he is gigantic. Compared to the rest of Dickens this is Thackeray; but compared to the whole of Thackeray we can only say in supreme praise of it that it is Dickens.

Take, for example, the one question of snobbishness. Dickens has achieved admirably the description of the doubts and vanities of the wretched Pip as he walks down the street in his new gentlemanly clothes, the clothes of which he is so proud and so ashamed. Nothing could be so exquisitely human, nothing especially could be so exquisitely masculine as that combination of self-love and self-assertion and even insolence with a naked and helpless sensibility to the slightest breath of ridicule. Pip thinks himself better than every one else, and yet anybody can snub him; that is the everlasting male, and perhaps the everlasting gentleman. Dickens has described perfectly this quivering and defenceless dignity. Dickens has described perfectly how ill-armed it is against the coarse humour of real humanity — the real humanity which Dickens loved, but which idealists and philanthropists do not love, the humanity of cabmen and costermongers and men singing in a third-class carriage; the humanity of Trabb's boy. In describing Pip's weakness Dickens is as true and as delicate as Thackeray. But Thackeray might have been easily as true and as delicate as Dickens. This quick and quiet eye for the tremors of mankind is a thing which Dickens possessed, but which others possessed also. George Eliot or Thackeray could have described the weakness of Pip. Exactly what George Eliot and Thackeray could not have described was the vigour of Trabb's boy. There would have been admirable humour and observation in their accounts of that intolerable urchin. Thackeray would have given us little light touches of Trabb's boy, absolutely true to the quality and colour of the humour, just as in his novels of the eighteenth century, the glimpses of Steele or Bolingbroke or Doctor Johnson are exactly and perfectly true to the colour and quality of their humour. George Eliot in her earlier books would have given us shrewd authentic scraps of the real dialect of Trabb's boy, just as she gave us shrewd and authentic scraps of the real talk in a Midland country town. In her later books she would have given us highly rationalistic explanations of Trabb's boy; which we should not have read. But exactly what they could never have given, and exactly what Dickens does give, is the *bounce* of Trabb's boy. It is the real unconquerable rush and energy in a character which was the supreme and quite indescribable greatness of Dickens. He conquered by rushes; he attacked in masses; he carried things at the spear point in a charge of spears; he was the Rupert of Fiction. The thing about any figure of Dickens, about Sam Weller or Dick Swiveller, or Micawber, or Bagstock, or Trabb's boy, — the thing about each one of these persons is that he cannot be exhausted. A Dickens character hits you first on the nose and then in the waistcoat, and then in the eye and then in the waistcoat again, with the blinding rapidity of some battering engine. The scene in which Trabb's boy continually overtakes Pip in order to reel and stagger as at a first encounter is a thing quite within the real competence of such a character; it might have been suggested by Thackeray, or George Eliot, or any realist. But the point with Dickens is that there is a rush in the boy’s rushings; the writer and the reader rush with him. They start with him, they stare with him, they stagger with him, they share an inexpressible vitality in the air which emanates from this violent and capering satirist. Trabb’s boy is among other things a boy; he has a physical rapture in hurling himself like a boomerang and in bouncing to the sky like a ball. It is just exactly in describing this quality that Dickens is Dickens and that no one else comes near him. No one feels in his bones that Felix Holt was strong as he feels in his bones that little Quilp was strong. No one can feel that even Rawdon Crawley’s splendid smack across the face of Lord Steyne is quite so living and life-giving as the “kick after kick” which old Mr. Weller dealt the dancing and quivering Stiggins as he drove him towards the trough. This quality, whether expressed intellectually or physically, is the profoundly popular and eternal quality in Dickens; it is the thing that no one else could do. This quality is the quality which has always given its continuous power and poetry to the common people everywhere. It is life; it is the joy of life felt by those who have nothing else but life. It is the thing that all aristocrats have always hated and dreaded in the people. And it is the thing which poor Pip really hates and dreads in Trabb’s boy.

A great man of letters or any great artist is symbolic without knowing it. The things he describes are types because they are truths. Shakespeare may, or may not, have ever put it to himself that Richard the Second was a philosophical symbol; but all good criticism must necessarily see him so. It may be a reasonable question whether the artist should be allegorical. There can be no doubt among sane men that the critic should be allegorical. Spenser may have lost by being less realistic than Fielding. But any good criticism of *Tom Jones* must be as mystical as the *Faery Queen*. Hence it is unavoidable in speaking of a fine book like *Great Expectations* that we should give even to its unpretentious and realistic figures a certain massive mysticism. Pip is Pip, but he is also the well-meaning snob. And this is even more true of those two great figures in the tale which stand for the English democracy. For, indeed, the first and last word upon the English democracy is said in Joe Gargery and Trabb’s boy. The actual English populace, as distinct from the French populace or the Scotch or Irish populace, may be said to lie between those two types. The first is the poor man who does not assert himself at all, and the second is the poor man who asserts himself entirely with the weapon of sarcasm. The only way in which the English now ever rise in revolution is under the symbol and leadership of Trabb’s boy. What pikes and shillelahs were to the Irish populace, what guns and barricades were to the French populace, that chaff is to the English populace. It is their weapon, the use of which they really understand. It is the one way in which they can make a rich man feel uncomfortable, and they use it very justifiably for all it is worth. If they do not cut off the heads of tyrants at least they sometimes do their best to make the tyrants lose their heads. The gutter boys of the great towns carry the art of personal criticism to so rich and delicate a degree that some well-dressed persons when they walk past a file of them feel as if they were walking past a row of omniscient critics or judges with a power of life and death. Here and there only is some ordinary human custom, some natural human pleasure suppressed in deference to the fastidiousness of the rich. But all the rich tremble before the fastidiousness of the poor.

Of the other type of democracy it is far more difficult to speak. It is always hard to speak of good things or good people, for in satisfying the soul they take away a certain spur to speech. Dickens was often called a sentimentalist. In one sense he sometimes was a sentimentalist. But if sentimentalism be held to mean something artificial or theatrical, then in the core and reality of his character Dickens was the very reverse of a sentimentalist. He seriously and definitely loved goodness. To see sincerity and charity satisfied him like a meal. What some critics call his love of sweet stuff is really his love of plain beef and bread. Sometimes one is tempted to wish that in the long Dickens dinner the sweet courses could be left out; but this does not make the whole banquet other than a banquet singularly solid and simple. The critics complain of the sweet things, but not because they are so strong as to like simple things. They complain of the sweet things because they are so sophisticated as to like sour things; their tongues are tainted with the bitterness of absinthe. Yet because of the very simplicity of Dickens’s moral tastes it is impossible to speak adequately of them; and Joe Gargery must stand as he stands in the book, a thing too obvious to be understood. But this may be said of him in one of his minor aspects, that he stands for a certain long-suffering in the English poor, a certain weary patience and politeness which almost breaks the heart. One cannot help wondering whether that great mass of silent virtue will ever achieve anything on this earth.

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

Our Mutual Friend marks a happy return to the earlier manner of Dickens at the end of Dickens's life. One might call it a sort of Indian summer of his farce. Those who most truly love Dickens love the earlier Dickens; and any return to his farce must be welcomed, like a young man come back from the dead. In this book indeed he does not merely return to his farce; he returns in a manner to his vulgarity. It is the old democratic and even uneducated Dickens who is writing here. The very title is illiterate. Any priggish pupil teacher could tell Dickens that there is no such phrase in English as "our mutual friend." Any one could tell Dickens that "our mutual friend" means "our reciprocal friend," and that "our reciprocal friend" means nothing. If he had only had all the solemn advantages of academic learning (the absence of which in him was lamented by the *Quarterly Review*), he would have known better. He would have known that the correct phrase for a man known to two people is "our common friend." But if one calls one's friend a common friend, even that phrase is open to misunderstanding.

I dwell with a gloomy pleasure on this mistake in the very title of the book because I, for one, am not pleased to see Dickens gradually absorbed by modern culture and good manners. Dickens, by class and genius, belonged to the kind of people who do talk about a "mutual friend"; and for that class there is a very great deal to be said. These two things can at least be said — that this class does understand the meaning of the word "friend" and the meaning of the word "mutual." I know that for some long time before he had been slowly and subtly sucked into the whirlpool of the fashionable views of later England. I know that in *Bleak House* he treats the aristocracy far more tenderly than he treats them in *David Copperfield*. I know that in *A Tale of Two Cities*, having come under the influence of Carlyle, he treats revolution as strange and weird, whereas under the influence of Cobbett he would have treated it as obvious and reasonable. I know that in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* he not only praised the Minor Canon of Cloisterham at the expense of the dissenting demagogue, Honeythunder; I know that he even took the last and most disastrous step in the modern English reaction. While blaming the old Cloisterham monks (who were democratic), he praised the old-world peace that they had left behind them — an old-world peace which is simply one of the last amusements of aristocracy. The modern rich feel quite at home with the dead monks. They would have felt anything but comfortable with the live ones. I know, in short, how the simple democracy of Dickens was gradually dimmed by the decay and reaction of the middle of the nineteenth century. I know that he fell into some of the bad habits of aristocratic sentimentalism. I know that he used the word "gentleman" as meaning good man. But all this only adds to the unholy joy with which I realise that the very title of one of his best books was a vulgarism. It is pleasant to contemplate this last unconscious knock in the eye for the gentility with which Dickens was half impressed. Dickens is the old self-made man; you may take him or leave him. He has its disadvantages and its merits. No university man would have written the title; no university man could have written the book.

If it were a mere matter of the accident of a name it would not be worth while thus to dwell on it, even as a preface. But the title is in this respect typical of the tale. The novel called *Our Mutual Friend* is in many ways a real reaction towards the earlier Dickens manner. I have remarked that *Little Dorrit* was a reversion to the form of the first books, but not to their spirit; *Our Mutual Friend* is a reversion to the spirit as well as the form. Compare, for instance, the public figures that make a background in each book. Mr. Merdle is a commercial man having no great connection with the plot; similarly Mr. Podsnap is a commercial man having no great connection with the plot. This is altogether in the spirit of the earlier books; the whole point of an early Dickens novel was to have as many people as possible entirely unconnected with the plot. But exactly because both studies are irrelevant, the contrast between them can be more clearly perceived. Dickens goes out of his way to describe Merdle; and it is a gloomy description. But Dickens goes out of his way to describe Podsnap, and it is a happy and hilarious description. It recalls the days when he hunted great game; when he went out of his way to entrap such adorable monsters as Mr. Pecksniff or Mr. Vincent Crummles. With these wild beings we never bother about the cause of their coming. Such guests in a \ story may be uninvited, but they are never *de trop*. They earn their night's lodging in any tale by being so uproariously amusing; like little Tommy Tucker in the legend, they sing for their supper. This is really the marked truth about *Our Mutual Friend,* as a stage in the singular latter career of Dickens. It is like the leaping up and flaming of a slowly dying fire. The best things in the book are in the old best manner of the author. They have that great Dickens quality of being something which is pure farce and yet which is not superficial; an unfathomable farce — a farce that goes down to the roots of the universe. The highest compliment that can ever be paid to the humour of Dickens is paid when some lady says, with the sudden sincerity of her sex, that it is “too silly.” The phrase is really a perfectly sound and acute criticism. Humour does consist in being too silly, in passing the borderland, in breaking through the floor of sense and falling into some starry abyss of nonsense far below our ordinary human life. This “too silly” quality is really present in *Our Mutual Friend*. It is present in *Our Mutual Friend* just as it is present in *Pickwick*, or *Martin Chuzzlewit*; just as it is not present in *Little Dorrit* or in *Hard Times*. Many tests might be employed. One is the pleasure in purely physical jokes — jokes about the body. The general dislike which every one felt for Mr. Stiggins’s nose is of the same kind as the ardent desire which Mr. Lammle felt for Mr. Fledgeby’s nose. “Give me your nose, Sir,” said Mr. Lammle. That sentence alone would be enough to show that the young Dickens had never died.

The opening of a book goes for a great deal. The opening of *Our Mutual Friend* is much more instinctively energetic and light-hearted than that of any of the other novels of his concluding period. Dickens had always enough optimism to make his stories end well. He had not, in his later years, always enough optimism to make them begin well. Even *Great Expectations*, the saddest of his later books, ends well; it ends well in spite of himself, who had intended it to end badly. But if we leave the evident case of good endings and take the case of good beginnings, we see how much *Our Mutual Friend* stands out from among the other novels of the evening or the end of Dickens. The tale of *Little Dorrit* begins in a prison. One of the prisoners is a villain, and his villainy is as dreary as the prison; that might matter nothing. But the other prisoner is vivacious, and even his vivacity is dreary. The first note struck is sad. In the tale of *Edwin Drood* the first scene is in an opium den, suffocated with every sort of phantasy and falsehood. Nor is it true that these openings are merely accidental; they really cast their shadow over the tales. The people of *Little Dorrit* begin in prison; and it is the whole point of the book that people never get out of prison. The story of *Edwin Drood* begins amid the fumes of opium, and it never gets out of the fumes of opium. The darkness of that strange and horrible smoke is deliberately rolled over the whole story. Dickens, in his later years, permitted more and more his story to take the cue from its inception. All the more remarkable, therefore, is the real jerk and spurt of good spirits with which he opens *Our Mutual Friend*. It begins with a good piece of rowdy satire, wildly exaggerated and extremely true. It belongs to the same class as the first chapter of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, with its preposterous pedigree of the Chuzzlewit family, or even the first chapter of *Pickwick*, with its immortal imbecilities about the Theory of Tittlebats and Mr. Blotton of Aldgate. Doubtless the early satiric chapter in *Our Mutual Friend* is of a more strategic and ingenious kind of satire than can be found in these early and explosive parodies. Still, there is a quality common to both, and that quality is the whole of Dickens. It is a quality difficult to define — hence the whole difficulty of criticising Dickens. Perhaps it can be best stated in two separate statements or as two separate symptoms. The first is the mere fact that the reader rushes to read it. The second is the mere fact that the writer rushed to write it.

This beginning, which is like a burst of the old exuberant Dickens, is, of course, the Veneering dinner-party. In its own way it is as good as anything that Dickens ever did. There is the old faculty of managing a crowd, of making character clash with character, that had made Dickens not only the democrat but even the demagogue of fiction. For if it is hard to manage a mob, it is hardest of all to manage a swell mob. The particular kind of chaos that is created by the hospitality of a rich upstart has perhaps never been so accurately and outrageously described. Every touch about the thing is true; to this day any one can test it if he goes to a dinner of this particular kind. How admirable, for instance, is the description of the way in which all the guests ignored the host; how the host and hostess peered and gaped for some stray attention as if they had been a pair of poor relations. Again, how well, as a matter of social colour, the distinctions between the type and tone of the guests are made even in the matter of this unguestlike insolence. How well Dickens distinguishes the ill-bred indifference of Podsnap from the well-bred indifference of Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene Wrayburn. How well he distinguishes the bad manners of the merchant from the equally typical bad manners of the gentleman. Above all, how well he catches the character of the creature who is really the master of all these: the impenetrable male servant. Nowhere in literature is the truth about servants better told. For that truth is simply this: that the secret of aristocracy is hidden even from aristocrats. Servants, butlers, footmen, are the high priests who have the real dispensation; and even gentlemen are afraid of them.

Dickens was never more right than when he made the new people, the Veneerings, employ a butler who despised not only them but all their guests and acquaintances. The admirable person called the Analytical Chemist shows his perfection particularly in the fact that he regards all the sham gentlemen and all the real gentlemen with the same gloomy and incurable contempt. He offers wine to the offensive Podsnap or the shrieking Tippins with a melancholy sincerity and silence; but he offers his letter to the aristocratic and unconscious Mortimer with the same sincerity and with the same silence. It is a great pity that the Analytical Chemist only occurs in two or three scenes of this excellent story. As far as I know, he never really says a word from one end of the book to the other; but he is one of the best characters in Dickens.

Round the Veneering dinner-table are collected not indeed the best characters in Dickens, but certainly the best characters in *Our Mutual Friend*. Certainly one exception must be made. Fledgeby is unaccountably absent. There was really no reason why he should not have been present at a dinner-party given by the Veneerings and including the Lammles. His money was at least more genuine than theirs. If he had been present the party would really have included all that is important in *Our Mutual Friend*. For indeed, outside Mr. Fledgeby and the people at the dinner-party, there is something a little heavy and careless about the story. Mr. Silas Wegg is really funny; and he serves the purpose of a necessary villain in the plot. But his humour and his villainy seem to have no particular connection with each other; when he is not scheming he seems the last man likely to scheme. He is rather like one of Dickens's agreeable Bohemians, a pleasant companion, a quoter of fine verses. His villainy seems an artificial thing attached to him, like his wooden leg. For while his villainy is supposed to be of a dull, mean, and bitter sort (quite unlike, for instance, the uproarious villainy of Quilp), his humour is of the sincere, flowing and lyric character, like that of Dick Swiveller or Mr. Micawber. He tells Mr. Boffin that he will drop into poetry in a friendly way. He does drop into it in a friendly way; in much too really a friendly way to make him convincing as a mere calculating knave. He and Mr. Venus are such natural and genuine companions that one does not see why if Venus repents Wegg should not repent too. In short, Wegg is a convenience for a plot and not a very good plot at that. But if he is one of the blots on the business, he is not the principal one. If the real degradation of Wegg is not very convincing, it is at least immeasurably more convincing than the pretended degradation of Boffin. The passage in which Boffin appears as a sort of miser, and then afterwards explains that he only assumed the character for reasons of his own, has something about it highly jerky and unsatisfactory. The truth of the whole matter I think, almost certainly, is that Dickens did not originally mean Boffin's lapse to be fictitious. He originally meant Boffin really to be corrupted by wealth, slowly to degenerate and as slowly to repent. But the story went too quickly for this long, double, and difficult process; therefore Dickens at the last moment made a sudden recovery possible by representing that the whole business had been a trick. Consequently, this episode is not an error merely in the sense that we may find many errors in a great writer like Dickens; it is a mistake patched up with another mistake. It is a case of that ossification which occurs round the healing of an actual fracture; the story had broken down and been mended.

If Dickens had fulfilled what was probably his original design, and described the slow freezing of Boffin's soul in prosperity, I do not say that he would have done the thing well. He was not good at describing change in anybody, especially not good at describing a change for the worse. The tendency of all his characters is upwards, like bubbles, never downwards, like stones. But at least it would probably have been more credible than the story as it stands; for the story as it stands is actually less credible than any conceivable kind of moral ruin for Boffin. Such a character as his — rough, simple and lumberingly unconscious — might be more easily conceived as really sinking in self-respect and honour than as keeping up, month after month, so strained and inhuman a theatrical performance. To a good man (of that particular type) it would be easier to be bad than to pretend to be bad. It might have taken years to turn Noddy Boffin into a miser; but it would have taken centuries to turn him into an actor. This unreality in the later Boffin scenes makes the end of the story of John Harmon somewhat more unimpressive perhaps than it might otherwise have been. Upon no hypothesis, however, can he be made one of the more impressive figures of Dickens. It is true that it is an unfair criticism to object, as some have done, that Dickens does not succeed in disguising the identity of John Harmon with John Rokesmith. Dickens never intended to disguise it; the whole story would be mainly unintelligible and largely uninteresting if it had been successfully disguised. But though John Harmon or Rokesmith was never intended to be merely a man of mystery, it is not quite so easy to say what he was intended to be. Bella is a possible and pretty sketch. Mrs. Wilfer, her mother, is an entirely impossible and entirely delightful one. Miss Podsnap is not only excellent, she is to a healthy taste positively attractive; there is a real suggestion in her of the fact that humility is akin to truth, even when humility takes its more comic form of shyness. There is not in all literature a more human *cri de cœur* than that with which Georgiana Podsnap receives the information that a young man has professed himself to be attracted by her— "Oh what a Fool he must be!"

Two other figures require praise, though they are in the more tragic manner which Dickens touched from time to time in his later period. Bradley Headstone is really a successful villain; so successful that he fully captures our sympathies. Also there is something original in the very conception. It was a new notion to add to the villains of fiction, whose thoughts go quickly, this villain whose thoughts go slow but sure; and it was a new notion to combine a deadly criminality not with high life or the slums (the usual haunts for villains) but with the laborious respectability of the lower, middle classes. The other good conception is the boy, Bradley Headstone's pupil, with his dull, inexhaustible egoism, his pert, unconscious cruelty, and the strict decorum and incredible baseness of his views of life. It is singular that Dickens, who was not only a radical and a social reformer, but one who would have been particularly concerned to maintain the principle of modern popular education, should nevertheless have seen so clearly this potential evil in the mere educationalism of our time — the fact that merely educating the democracy may easily mean setting to work to despoil it of all the democratic virtues. It is better to be Lizzie Hexam and not know how to read and write than to be Charlie Hexam and not know how to appreciate Lizzie Hexam. It is not only necessary that the democracy should be taught; it is also necessary that the democracy should be taught democracy. Otherwise it will certainly fall a victim to that snobbishness and system of worldly standards which is the most natural and easy of all the forms of human corruption. This is one of the many dangers which Dickens saw before it existed. Dickens was really a prophet; far more of a prophet than Carlyle.

Charles Dickens, 1868
From a photograph by Gurney.

EDWIN DROOD

Pickwick was a work partly designed by others, but ultimately filled up by Dickens. *Edwin Drood*, the last book, was a book designed by Dickens, but ultimately filled up by others. The *Pickwick Papers* showed how much Dickens could make out of other people's suggestions; *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* shows how very little other people can make out of Dickens's suggestions.

Dickens was meant by Heaven to be the great melodramatist; so that even his literary end was melodramatic. Something more seems hinted at in the cutting short of *Edwin Drood* by Dickens than the mere cutting short of a good novel by a great man. It seems rather like the last taunt of some elf, leaving the world, that it should be this story which is not ended, this story which is only a story. The only one of Dickens's novels which he did not finish was the only one that really needed finishing. He never had but one thoroughly good plot to tell; and that he has only told in heaven. This is what separates the case in question from any parallel cases of novelists cut off in the act of creation. That great novelist, for instance, with whom Dickens is constantly compared, died also in the middle of *Denis Duval*. But any one can see in *Denis Duval* the qualities of the later work of Thackeray; the increasing discursiveness, the increasing retrospective poetry, which had been in part the charm and in part the failure of *Philip* and *The Virginians*. But to Dickens it was permitted to die at a dramatic moment and to leave a dramatic mystery. Any Thackerayan could have completed the plot of *Denis Duval*; except indeed that a really sympathetic Thackerayan might have had some doubt as to whether there was any plot to complete. But Dickens, having had far too little plot in his stories previously, had far too much plot in the story he never told. Dickens dies in the act of telling, not his tenth novel, but his first news of murder. He drops down dead as he is in the act of denouncing the assassin. It is permitted to Dickens, in short, to come to a literary end as strange as his literary beginning. He began by completing the old romance of travel. He ended by inventing the new detective story.

It is as a detective story first and last that we have to consider *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. This does not mean, of course, that the details are not often admirable in their swift and penetrating humour; to say that of the book would be to say that Dickens did not write it. Nothing could be truer, for instance, than the manner in which the dazed and drunken dignity of Durdles illustrates a certain bitterness at the bottom of the bewilderment of the poor. Nothing could be better than the way in which the haughty and allusive conversation between Miss Twinkleton and the landlady illustrates the maddening preference of some females for skating upon thin social ice. There is an even better example than these of the original humorous insight of Dickens; and one not very often remarked, because of its brevity and its unimportance in the narrative. But Dickens never did anything better than the short account of Mr. Grewgious's dinner being brought from the tavern by two waiters: "a stationary waiter," and "a flying waiter." The "flying waiter" brought the food and the "stationary waiter" quarrelled with him; the "flying waiter" brought glasses and the "stationary waiter" looked through them. Finally, it will be remembered the "stationary waiter" left the room, casting a glance which indicated "let it be understood that all emoluments are mine, and that Nil is the reward of this slave." Still, Dickens wrote the book as a detective story; he wrote it as *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. And alone, perhaps, among detective-story writers, he never lived to destroy his mystery. Here alone then among the Dickens novels it is necessary to speak of the plot and of the plot alone. And when we speak of the plot it becomes immediately necessary to speak of the two or three standing explanations which celebrated critics have given of the plot.

The story, so far as it was written by Dickens, can be read here. It describes, as will be seen, the disappearance of the young architect Edwin Drood after a night of festivity which was supposed to celebrate his reconciliation with a temporary enemy, Neville Landless, and was held at the house of his uncle John Jasper. Dickens continued the tale long enough to explain or explode the first and most obvious of his riddles. Long before the existing part terminates it has become evident that Drood has been put away, not by his obvious opponent, Landless, but by his uncle who professes for him an almost painful affection. The fact that we all know this, however, ought not in fairness to blind us to the fact that, considered as the first fraud in a detective story, it has been, with great skill, at once suggested and concealed. Nothing, for instance, could be cleverer as a piece of artistic mystery than the fact that Jasper, the uncle, always kept his eyes fixed on Drood's face with a dark and watchful tenderness; the thing is so told that at first we really take it as only indicating something morbid in the affection; it is only afterwards that the frightful fancy breaks upon us that it is not morbid affection but morbid antagonism. This first mystery (which is no longer a mystery) of Jasper's guilt, is only worth remarking because it shows that Dickens meant and felt himself able to mask all his batteries with real artistic strategy and artistic caution. The manner of the unmasking of Jasper marks the manner and tone in which the whole tale was to be told. Here we have not got to do with Dickens simply giving himself away, as he gave himself away in *Pickwick* or *The Christmas Carol*. Not that one complains of his giving himself away; there was no better gift.

What was the mystery of Edwin Drood from Dickens's point of view we shall never know, except perhaps from Dickens in heaven, and then he will very likely have forgotten. But the mystery of Edwin Drood from our point of view, from that of his critics, and those who have with some courage (after his death) attempted to be his collaborators, is simply this. There is no doubt that Jasper either murdered Drood or supposed that he had murdered him. This certainty we have from the fact that it is the whole point of a scene between Jasper and Drood's lawyer Grewgious in which Jasper is struck down with remorse when he realises that Drood has been killed (from his point of view) needlessly and without profit. The only question is whether Jasper's remorse was as needless as his murder. In other words the only question is whether, while he certainly thought he had murdered Drood, he had really done it. It need hardly be said that such a doubt would not have been raised for nothing; gentlemen like Jasper do not as a rule waste good remorse except upon successful crime. The origin of the doubt about the real death of Drood is this. Towards the latter end of the existing chapters there appears very abruptly, and with a quite ostentatious air of mystery, a character called Datchery. He appears for the purpose of spying upon Jasper and getting up some case against him; at any rate, if he has not this purpose in the story he has no other earthly purpose in it. He is an old gentleman of juvenile energy, with a habit of carrying his hat in his hand even in the open air; which some have interpreted as meaning that he feels the unaccustomed weight of a wig. Now there are one or two people in the story who this person might possibly be. Notably there is one person in the story who seems as if he were meant to be something, but who hitherto has certainly been nothing; I mean Bazzard, Mr. Grewgious's clerk, a sulky fellow interested in theatricals, of whom an unnecessary fuss is made. There is also Mr. Grewgious himself, and there is also another suggestion, so much more startling that I shall have to deal with it later.

For the moment, however, the point is this: That ingenious writer, Mr. Proctor, started the highly plausible theory that this Datchery was Drood himself, who had not really been killed. He adduced a most complex and complete scheme covering nearly all the details; but the strongest argument he had was rather one of general artistic effect. This argument has been quite perfectly summed up by Mr. Andrew Lang in one sentence: "If Edwin Drood is dead, there is not much mystery about him." This is quite true; Dickens, when writing in so deliberate, nay, dark and conspiratorial a manner, would surely have kept the death of Drood and the guilt of Jasper hidden a little longer if the only real mystery had been the guilt of Jasper and the death of Drood. It certainly seems artistically more likely that there was a further mystery of Edwin Drood; not the mystery that he was murdered, but the mystery that he was not murdered. It is true indeed that Mr. Cumming Walters has a theory of Datchery (to which I have already darkly alluded) a theory which is wild enough to be the centre not only of any novel but of any harlequinade. But the point is that even Mr. Cumming Walters's theory, though it makes the mystery more extraordinary, does not make it any more of a mystery of Edwin Drood. It should not have been called *The Mystery of Drood*, but *The Mystery of Datchery*. This is the strongest case for Proctor; if the story tells of Drood coming back as Datchery, the story does at any rate fulfil the title upon its title-page.

The principal objection to Proctor's theory is that there seems no adequate reason why Jasper should not have murdered his nephew if he wanted to. And there seems even less reason why Drood, if unsuccessfully murdered, should not have raised the alarm. Happy young architects, when nearly strangled by elderly organists, do not generally stroll away and come back some time afterwards in a wig and with a false name. Superficially it would seem almost as odd to find the murderer investigating the origin of the murder, as to find the corpse investigating it. To this problem two of the ablest literary critics of our time, Mr. Andrew Lang and Mr. William Archer (both of them persuaded generally of the Proctor theory) have especially addressed themselves. Both have come to the same substantial conclusion; and I suspect that they are right. They hold that Jasper (whose mania for opium is much insisted on in the tale) had some sort of fit, or trance, or other physical seizure as he was committing the crime so that he left it unfinished; and they also hold that he had drugged Drood, so that Drood, when he recovered from the attack, was doubtful about who had been his assailant. This might really explain, if a little fancifully, his coming back to the town in the character of a detective. He might think it due to his uncle (whom he last remembered in a kind of murderous vision) to make an independent investigation as to whether he was really guilty or not. He might say, as Hamlet said of a vision equally terrifying, "I'll have grounds more relative than this." In fairness it must be said that there is something vaguely shaky about this theory; chiefly, I think, in this respect; that there is a sort of farcical cheerfulness about Datchery which does not seem altogether appropriate to a lad who ought to be in an agony of doubt as to whether his best friend was or was not his assassin. Still there are many such incongruities in Dickens; and the explanation of Mr. Archer and Mr. Lang is an explanation. I do not believe that any explanation as good can be given to account for the tale being called *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, if the tale practically starts with his corpse.

If Drood is really dead one cannot help feeling the story ought to end where it does end, not by accident but by design. The murder is explained. Jasper is ready to be hanged, and every one else in a decent novel ought to be ready to be married. If there was to be much more of anything, it must have been of anticlimax. Nevertheless there are degrees of anticlimax. Some of the more obvious explanations of Datchery are quite reasonable, but they are distinctly tame. For instance, Datchery may be Bazzard; but it is not very exciting if he is; for we know nothing about Bazzard and care less. Again, he might be Grewgious; but there is something pointless about one grotesque character dressing up as another grotesque character actually less amusing than himself. Now, Mr. Cumming Walters has at least had the distinction of inventing a theory which makes the story at least an interesting story, even if it is not exactly the story that is promised on the cover of the book. The obvious enemy of Drood, on whom suspicion first falls, the swarthy and sulky Landless, has a sister even swarthier and, except for her queenly dignity, even sulkier than he. This barbaric princess is evidently meant to be (in a sombre way) in love with Crisparkle, the clergyman and muscular Christian who represents the breezy element in the emotions of the tale. Mr. Cumming Walters seriously maintains that it is this barbaric princess who puts on a wig and dresses up as Mr. Datchery. He urges his case with much ingenuity of detail. Helena Landless certainly had a motive; to save her brother, who was accused falsely, by accusing Jasper justly. She certainly had some of the faculties; it is elaborately stated in the earlier part of her story that she was accustomed as a child to dress up in male costume and run into the wildest adventures. There may be something in Mr. Cumming Walters's argument that the very flippancy of Datchery is the self-conscious flippancy of a strong woman in such an odd situation; certainly there is the same flippancy in Portia and in Rosalind. Nevertheless, I think, there is one final objection to the theory; and that is simply this, that it is comic. It is generally wrong to represent a great master of the grotesque as being grotesque exactly where he does not intend to be. And I am persuaded that if Dickens had really meant Helena to turn into Datchery, he would have made her from the first in some way more light, eccentric, and laughable; he would have made her at least as light and laughable as Rosa. As it is, there is something strangely stiff and incredible about the idea of a lady so dark and dignified dressing up as a swaggering old gentleman in a blue coat and grey trousers. We might almost as easily imagine Edith Dombey dressing up as Major Bagstock. We might almost as easily imagine Rebecca in *Ivanhoe* dressing up as Isaac of York.

Of course such a question can never really be settled precisely, because it is the question not merely of a mystery but of a puzzle. For here the detective novel differs from every other kind of novel. The ordinary novelist desires to keep his readers to the point; the detective novelist actually desires to keep his readers off the point. In the first case, every touch must help to tell the reader what he means; in the second case, most of the touches must conceal or even contradict what he means. You are supposed to see and appreciate the smallest gestures of a good actor; but you do not see all the gestures of a conjuror, if he is a good conjuror. Hence, into the critical estimate of such works as this, there is introduced a problem, an extra perplexity, which does not exist in other cases. I mean the problem of the things commonly called blinds. Some of the points which we pick out as suggestive may have been put in as deceptive. Thus the whole conflict between a critic with one theory, like Mr. Lang, and a critic with another theory, like Mr. Cumming Walters, becomes eternal and a trifle farcical. Mr. Walters says that all Mr. Lang's clues were blinds; Mr. Lang says that all Mr. Walters's clues were blinds. Mr. Walters can say that some passages seemed to show that Helena was Datchery; Mr. Lang can reply that those passages were only meant to deceive simple people like Mr.

Walters into supposing that she was Datchery. Similarly Mr. Lang can say that the return of Drood is foreshadowed; and Mr. Walters can reply that it was foreshadowed because it was never meant to come off. There seems no end to this insane process; anything that Dickens wrote may or may not mean the opposite of what it says. Upon this principle I should be very ready for one to declare that all the suggested Datcherys were really blinds; merely because they can naturally be suggested. I would undertake to maintain that Mr. Datchery is really Miss Twinkleton, who has a mercenary interest in keeping Rosa Budd at her school. This suggestion does not seem to me to be really much more humorous than Mr. Cumming Walters's theory. Yet either may certainly be true. Dickens is dead, and a number of splendid scenes and startling adventures have died with him. Even if we get the right solution we shall not know that it is right. The tale might have been, and yet it has not been.

And I think there is no thought so much calculated to make one doubt death itself, to feel that sublime doubt which has created all religion — the doubt that found death incredible. Edwin Drood may or may not have really died; but surely Dickens did not really die. Surely our real detective liveth and shall appear in the latter days of the earth. For a finished tale may give a man immortality in the light and literary sense; but an unfinished tale suggests another immortality, more essential and more strange.

MASTER HUMPHREY'S CLOCK

It is quite indispensable to include a criticism of *Master Humphrey's Clock* in any survey of Dickens, although it is not one of the books of which his admirers would chiefly boast; although perhaps it is almost the only one of which he would not have boasted himself. As a triumph of Dickens, at least, it is not of great importance. But as a sample of Dickens it happens to be of quite remarkable importance. The very fact that it is for the most part somewhat more level and even monotonous than most of his creations, makes us realise, as it were, against what level and monotony those creations commonly stand out. This book is the background of his mind. It is the basis and minimum of him which was always there. Alone, of all written things, this shows how he felt when he was not writing. Dickens might have written it in his sleep. That is to say, it is written by a sluggish Dickens, a half automatic Dickens, a dreaming and drifting Dickens; but still by the enduring Dickens.

But this truth can only be made evident by beginning nearer to the root of the matter. *Nicholas Nickleby* had just completed, or, to speak more strictly, confirmed, the popularity of the young author; wonderful as *Pickwick* was it might have been a nine days' wonder; *Oliver Twist* had been powerful but painful; it was *Nicholas Nickleby* that proved the man to be a great productive force of which one could ask more, of which one could ask all things. His publishers, Chapman and Hall, seem to have taken at about this point that step which sooner or later most publishers do take with regard to a half successful man who is becoming wholly successful. Instead of asking him for something, they asked him for anything. They made him, so to speak, the editor of his own works. And indeed it is literally as the editor of his own works that he next appears; for the next thing to which he proposes to put his name is not a novel, but for all practical purposes a magazine. Yet although it is a magazine, it is a magazine entirely written by himself; the publishers, in point of fact, wanted to create a kind of Dickens Miscellany, in a much more literal sense than that in which we speak of a Bentley Miscellany. Dickens was in no way disposed to dislike such a job; for the more miscellaneous he was the more he enjoyed himself. And indeed this early experiment of his bears a great deal of resemblance to those later experiences in which he was the editor of two popular periodicals. The editor of *Master Humphrey's Clock* was a kind of type or precursor of the editor of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. There was the same sense of absolute ease in an atmosphere of infinite gossip. There was the same great advantage gained by a man of genius who wrote best scrappily and by episodes. The omnipotence of the editor helped the eccentricities of the author. He could excuse himself for all his own shortcomings. He could begin a novel, get tired of it, and turn it into a short story. He could begin a short story, get fond of it, and turn it into a novel. Thus in the days of *Household Words* he could begin a big scheme of stories, such as *Somebody's Luggage*, or *Seven Poor Travellers*, and after writing a tale or two toss the rest to his colleagues. Thus, on the other hand, in the time of *Master Humphrey's Clock*, he could begin one small adventure of Master Humphrey and find himself unable to stop it. It is quite clear I think (though only from moral evidence, which some call reading between the lines) that he originally meant to tell many separate tales of Master Humphrey's wanderings in London, only one of which, and that a short one, was to have been concerned with a little girl going home. Fortunately for us that little girl had a grandfather, and that grandfather had a curiosity shop and also a nephew, and that nephew had an entirely irrelevant friend whom men and angels called Richard Swiveller. Once having come into the society of Swiveller it is not unnatural that Dickens stayed there for a whole book. The essential point for us here, however, is that *Master Humphrey's Clock* was stopped by the size and energy of the thing that had come of it. It died in childbirth.

There is, however, another circumstance which, even in ordinary public opinion, makes this miscellany important, besides the great novel that came out of it. I mean that the ordinary reader can remember one great thing about *Master Humphrey's Clock*, besides the fact that it was the frame-work of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. He remembers that Mr. Pickwick and the Wellers rise again from the dead. Dickens makes Samuel Pickwick become a member of Master Humphrey's Clock Society; and he institutes a parallel society in the kitchen under the name of Mr. Weller's Watch.

Before we consider the question of whether Dickens was wise when he did this, it is worth remarking how really odd it is that this is the only place where he did it. Dickens, one would have thought, was the one man who might naturally have introduced old characters into new stories. Dickens, as a matter of fact, was almost the one man who never did it. It would have seemed natural in him for a double reason; first, that his characters were very valuable to him, and second that they were not very valuable to his particular stories. They were dear to him, and they are dear to us; but they really might as well have turned up (within reason) in one environment as well as in another. We, I am sure, should be delighted to meet Mr. Mantalini in the story of *Dombey and Son*. And he certainly would not be much missed from the plot of Nicholas Nickleby. "I am an affectionate father," said Dickens, "to all the children of my fancy; but like many other parents I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child; and his name is David Copperfield." Yet although his heart must often have yearned backwards to the children of his fancy whose tale was already told, yet he never touched one of them again even with the point of his pen. The characters in *David Copperfield*, as in all the others, were dead for him after he had done the book; if he loved them as children, it was as dead and sanctified children. It is a curious test of the strength and even reticence that underlay the seeming exuberance of Dickens, that he never did yield at all to exactly that indiscretion or act of sentimentalism which would seem most natural to his emotions and his art. Or rather he never did yield to it except here in this one case; the case of *Master Humphrey's Clock*.

And it must be remembered that nearly everybody else did yield to it. Especially did those writers who are commonly counted Dickens's superiors in art and exactitude and closeness to connected reality. Thackeray wallowed in it; Anthony Trollope lived on it. Those modern artists who pride themselves most on the separation and unity of a work of art have indulged in it often; thus, for instance, Stevenson gave a glimpse of Alan Breck in *The Master of Ballantrae*, and meant to give a glimpse of the Master of Ballantrae in another unwritten tale called *The Rising Sun*. The habit of revising old characters is so strong in Thackeray that *Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis*, *The Newcomes*, and *Philip* are in one sense all one novel. Certainly the reader sometimes forgets which one of them he is reading. Afterwards he cannot remember whether the best description of Lord Steyne's red whiskers or Mr. Wagg's rude jokes occurred in *Vanity Fair*, or *Pendennis*; he cannot remember whether his favourite dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Pendennis occurred in *The Newcomes*, or in *Philip*. Whenever two Thackeray characters in two Thackeray novels could by any possibility have been contemporary, Thackeray delights to connect them. He makes Major Pendennis nod to Dr. Firmin, and Colonel Newcome ask Major

Dobbin to dinner. Whenever two characters could not possibly have been contemporary he goes out of his way to make one the remote ancestor of the other. Thus he created the great house of Warrington solely to connect a “blue-bearded” Bohemian journalist with the blood of Henry Esmond. It is quite impossible to conceive Dickens keeping up this elaborate connection between all his characters and all his books, especially across the ages. It would give us a kind of shock if we learnt from Dickens that Major Bagstock was the nephew of Mr. Chester. Still less can we imagine Dickens carrying on an almost systematic family chronicle as was in some sense done by Trollope. There must be some reason for such a paradox; for in itself it is a very curious one. The writers who wrote carefully were always putting, as it were, after-words and appendices to their already finished portraits; the man who did splendid and flamboyant but faulty portraits never attempted to touch them up. Or rather (we may say again) he attempted it once, and then he failed.

The reason lay, I think, in the very genius of Dickens’s creation. The child he bore of his soul quitted him when his term was passed like a veritable child born of the body. It was independent of him, as a child is of its parents. It had become dead to him even in becoming alive. When Thackeray studied Pendennis or Lord Steyne he was studying something outside himself, and therefore something that might come nearer and nearer. But when Dickens brought forth Sam Weller or Pickwick he was creating something that had once been inside himself and therefore when once created could only go further and further away. It may seem a strange thing to say of such laughable characters and of so lively an author, yet I say it quite seriously; I think it possible that there arose between Dickens and his characters that strange and almost supernatural shyness that arises often between parents and children; because they are too close to each other to be open with each other. Too much hot and high emotion had gone to the creation of one of his great figures for it to be possible for him without embarrassment ever to speak with it again. This is the thing which some fools call fickleness; but which is not the death of feeling, but rather its dreadful perpetuation; this shyness is the final seal of strong sentiment; this coldness is an eternal constancy.

This one case where Dickens broke through his rule was not such a success as to tempt him in any case to try the thing again.

There is weakness in the strict sense of the word in this particular reappearance of Samuel Pickwick and Samuel Weller. In the original *Pickwick Papers* Dickens had with quite remarkable delicacy and vividness contrived to suggest a certain fundamental sturdiness and spirit in that corpulent and complacent old gentleman. Mr. Pickwick was a mild man, a respectable man, a placid man; but he was very decidedly a man. He could denounce his enemies and fight for his nightcap. He was fat; but he had a backbone. In *Master Humphrey's Clock* the backbone seems somehow to be broken; his good nature seems limp instead of alert. He gushes out of his good heart; instead of taking a good heart for granted as a part of any decent gentleman's furniture as did the older and stronger Pickwick. The truth is, I think, that Mr. Pickwick in complete repose loses some part of the whole point of his existence. The quality which makes the *Pickwick Papers* one of the greatest of human fairy tales is a quality which all the great fairy tales possess, and which marks them out from most modern writing. A modern novelist generally endeavours to make his story interesting, by making his hero odd. The most typical modern books are those in which the central figure is himself or herself an exception, a cripple, a courtesan, a lunatic, a swindler, or a person of the most perverse temperament. Such stories, for instance, are *Sir Richard Calmady, Dodo, Quisante, La Bête Humaine,* even the *Egoist*. But in a fairy tale the boy sees all the wonders of fairyland because he is an ordinary boy. In the same way Mr. Samuel Pickwick sees an extraordinary England because he is an ordinary old gentleman. He does not see things through the rosy spectacles of the modern optimist or the green-smoked spectacles of the pessimist; he sees it through the crystal glasses of his own innocence. One must see the world clearly even in order to see its wildest poetry. One must see it sanely even in order to see that it is insane.

Mr. Pickwick, then, relieved against a background of heavy kindliness and quiet club life does not seem to be quite the same heroic figure as Mr. Pickwick relieved against a background of the fighting police constables at Ipswich or the roaring mobs of Eatanswill. Of the degeneration of the Wellers, though it has been commonly assumed by critics, I am not so sure. Some of the things said in the humorous assembly round Mr. Weller's Watch are really human and laughable and altogether in the old manner. Especially, I think, the vague and awful allusiveness of old Mr. Weller when he reminds his little grandson of his delinquencies under the trope or figure of their being those of another little boy, is really in the style both of the irony and the domesticity of the poorer classes. Sam also says one or two things really worthy of himself. We feel almost as if Sam were a living man, and could not appear for an instant without being amusing.

The other elements in the make-up of *Master Humphrey's Clock* come under the same paradox which I have applied to the whole work. Though not very important in literature they are somehow quite important in criticism. They show us better than anything else the whole unconscious trend of Dickens, the stuff of which his very dreams were made. If he had made up tales to amuse himself when half-awake (as I have no doubt he did) they would be just such tales as these. They would have been ghostly legends of the nooks and holes of London, echoes of old love and laughter from the taverns or the Inns of Court. In a sense also one may say that these tales are the great might-have-beens of Dickens. They are chiefly designs which he fills up here slightly and unsatisfactorily, but which he might have filled up with his own brightest and most incredible colours. Nothing, for instance, could have been nearer to the heart of Dickens than his great Gargantuan conception of Gog and Magog telling London legends to each other all through the night. Those two giants might have stood on either side of some new great city of his invention, swarming with fanciful figures and noisy with new events. But as it is, the two giants stand alone in a wilderness, guarding either side of a gate that leads nowhere.

Those abuses which are supposed to belong specially to religion belong to all human institutions. They are not the sins of supernaturalism, but the sins of nature. In this respect it is interesting to observe that all the evils which our Rationalist or Protestant tradition associates with the idolatrous veneration of sacred figures arises in the merely human atmosphere of literature and history. Every extravagance of hagiology can be found in hero-worship. Every folly alleged in the worship of saints can be found in the worship of poets. There are those who are honourably and intensely opposed to the atmosphere of religious symbolism or religious archæology. There are people who have a vague idea that the worship of saints is worse than the imitation of sinners. There are some, like a lady I once knew, who think that hagiology is the scientific study of hags. But these slightly prejudiced persons generally have idolatries and superstitions of their own, particularly idolatries and superstitions in connection with celebrated people. Mr. Stead preserves a pistol belonging to Oliver Cromwell in the office of the *Review of Reviews*; and I am sure he worships it in his rare moments of solitude and leisure. A man, who could not be induced to believe in God by all the arguments of all the philosophers, professed himself ready to believe if he could see it stated on a postcard in the handwriting of Mr. Gladstone. Persons not otherwise noted for their religious exercise have been known to procure and preserve portions of the hair of Paderewski. Nay, by this time blasphemy itself is a sacred tradition, and almost as much respect would be paid to the alleged relics of an atheist as to the alleged relics of a god. If any one has a fork that belonged to Voltaire, he could probably exchange it in the open market for a knife that belonged to St. Theresa.

Of all the instances of this there is none stranger than the case of Dickens. It should be pondered very carefully by those who reproach Christianity with having been easily corrupted into a system of superstitions. If ever there was a message full of what modern people call true Christianity, the direct appeal to the common heart, a faith that was simple, a hope that was infinite, and a charity that was omnivorous, if ever there came among men what they call the Christianity of Christ, it was in the message of Dickens. Christianity has been in the world nearly two thousand years, and it has not yet quite lost, its enemies being judges, its first fire and charity; but friends and enemies would agree that it was from the very first more detailed and doctrinal than the spirit of Dickens. The spirit of Dickens has been in the world about sixty years; and already it is a superstition. Already it is loaded with relics. Already it is stiff with antiquity.

Everything that can be said about the perversion of Christianity can be said about the perversion of Dickens. It is said that Christ's words are repeated by the very High Priests and Scribes whom He meant to denounce. It is just as true that the jokes in *Pickwick* are quoted with delight by the very bigwigs of bench and bar whom Dickens wished to make absurd and impossible. It is said that texts from Scripture are constantly taken in vain by Judas and Herod, by Caiaphas and Annas. It is just as true that texts from Dickens are rapturously quoted on all our platforms by Podsnap and Honeythunder, by Pardiggle and Veneering, by Tigg when he is forming a company, or Pott when he is founding a newspaper. People joke about Bumble in defence of Bumbledom; people allude playfully to Mrs. Jellyby while agitating for Borrioboola Gha. The very things which Dickens tried to destroy are preserved as relics of him. The very houses he wished to pull down are propped up as monuments of Dickens. We wish to preserve everything of him, except his perilous public spirit.

This antiquarian attitude towards Dickens has many manifestations, some of them somewhat ridiculous. I give one startling instance out of a hundred of the irony remarked upon above. In his first important book, Dickens lashed the loathsome corruption of our oligarchical politics, their blaring servility and dirty diplomacy of bribes, under the name of an imaginary town called Eatanswill. If Eatanswill, wherever it was, had been burned to the ground by its indignant neighbours the day after the exposure, it would have been not inappropriate. If it had been entirely deserted by its inhabitants, if they had fled to hide themselves in holes and caverns, one could have understood it. If it had been struck by a thunderbolt out of heaven or outlawed by the whole human race, all that would seem quite natural. What has really happened is this: that two respectable towns in Suffolk are still disputing for the honour of having been the original Eatanswill; as if two innocent hamlets each claimed to be Gomorrah. I make no comment; the thing is beyond speech.

But this strange sentimental and relic-hunting worship of Dickens has many more innocent manifestations. One of them is that which takes advantage of the fact that Dickens happened to be a journalist by trade. It occupies itself therefore with hunting through papers and magazines for unsigned articles which may possibly be proved to be his. Only a little time ago one of these enthusiasts ran up to me, rubbing his hands, and told me that he was sure he had found two and a half short paragraphs in *All the Year Round* which were certainly written by Dickens, whom he called (I regret to say) the Master. Something of this archæological weakness must cling to all mere reprints of his minor work. He was a great novelist; but he was also, among other things, a good journalist and a good man. It is often necessary for a good journalist to write bad literature. It is sometimes the first duty of a good man to write it. Pot-boilers to my feeling are sacred things; but they may well be secret as well as sacred, like the holy pot which it is their purpose to boil. In the collection called *Reprinted Pieces* there are some, I think, which demand or deserve this apology. There are many which fall below the level of his recognised books of fragments, such as *The Sketches by Boz*, and *The Uncommercial Traveller*. Two or three elements in the compilation, however, make it quite essential to any solid appreciation of the author.

Of these the first in importance is that which comes last in order. I mean the three remarkable pamphlets upon the English Sunday, called *Sunday under Three Heads*. Here, at least, we find the eternal Dickens, though not the eternal Dickens of fiction. His other political and sociological suggestions in this volume are so far unimportant that they are incidental, and even personal. Any man might have formed Dickens’s opinion about flogging for garrotters, and altered it afterwards. Any one might have come to Dickens’s conclusion about model prisons, or to any other conclusion equally reasonable and unimportant. These things have no colour of the great man’s character. But on the subject of the English Sunday he does stand for his own philosophy. He stands for a particular view, remote at present both from Liberals and Conservatives. He was, in a conscious sense, the first of its spokesmen. He was in every sense the last.

In his appeal for the pleasures of the people, Dickens has remained alone. The pleasures of the people have now no defender, Radical or Tory. The Tories despise the people. The Radicals despise the pleasures.

THE END

ALARMS AND DISCURSIONS

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The High Plains
The Chorus
A Romance of the Marshes

Introductory: On Gargoyles

Alone at some distance from the wasting walls of a disused abbey I found half sunken in the grass the grey and goggle-eyed visage of one of those graven monsters that made the ornamental water-spouts in the cathedrals of the Middle Ages. It lay there, scoured by ancient rains or striped by recent fungus, but still looking like the head of some huge dragon slain by a primeval hero. And as I looked at it, I thought of the meaning of the grotesque, and passed into some symbolic reverie of the three great stages of art.

I

Once upon a time there lived upon an island a merry and innocent people, mostly shepherds and tillers of the earth. They were republicans, like all primitive and simple souls; they talked over their affairs under a tree, and the nearest approach they had to a personal ruler was a sort of priest or white witch who said their prayers for them. They worshipped the sun, not idolatrously, but as the golden crown of the god whom all such infants see almost as plainly as the sun.

Now this priest was told by his people to build a great tower, pointing to the sky in salutation of the Sun-god; and he pondered long and heavily before he picked his materials. For he was resolved to use nothing that was not almost as clear and exquisite as sunshine itself; he would use nothing that was not washed as white as the rain can wash the heavens, nothing that did not sparkle as spotlessly as that crown of God. He would have nothing grotesque or obscure; he would not have even anything emphatic or even anything mysterious. He would have all the arches as light as laughter and as candid as logic. He built the temple in three concentric courts, which were cooler and more exquisite in substance each than the other. For the outer wall was a hedge of white lilies, ranked so thick that a green stalk was hardly to be seen; and the wall within that was of crystal, which smashed the sun into a million stars. And the wall within that, which was the tower itself, was a tower of pure water, forced up in an everlasting fountain; and upon the very tip and crest of that foaming spire was one big and blazing diamond, which the water tossed up eternally and caught again as a child catches a ball.

"Now," said the priest, "I have made a tower which is a little worthy of the sun."

II

But about this time the island was caught in a swarm of pirates; and the shepherds had to turn themselves into rude warriors and seamen; and at first they were utterly broken down in blood and shame; and the pirates might have taken the jewel flung up for ever from their sacred fount. And then, after years of horror and humiliation, they gained a little and began to conquer because they did not mind defeat. And the pride of the pirates went sick within them after a few unexpected foils; and at last the invasion rolled back into the empty seas and the island was delivered. And for some reason after this men began to talk quite differently about the temple and the sun. Some, indeed, said, "You must not touch the temple; it is classical; it is perfect, since it admits no imperfections." But the others answered, "In that it differs from the sun, that shines on the evil and the good and on mud and monsters everywhere. The temple is of the noon; it is made of white marble clouds and sapphire sky. But the sun is not always of the noon. The sun dies daily, every night he is crucified in blood and fire." Now the priest had taught and fought through all the war, and his hair had grown white, but his eyes had grown young. And he said, "I was wrong and they are right. The sun, the symbol of our father, gives life to all those earthly things that are full of ugliness and energy. All the exaggerations are right, if they exaggerate the right thing. Let us point to heaven with tusks and horns and fins and trunks and tails so long as they all point to heaven. The ugly animals praise God as much as the beautiful. The frog's eyes stand out of his head because he is staring at heaven. The giraffe's neck is long because he is stretching towards heaven. The donkey has ears to hear — let him hear."

And under the new inspiration they planned a gorgeous cathedral in the Gothic manner, with all the animals of the earth crawling over it, and all the possible ugly things making up one common beauty, because they all appealed to the god. The columns of the temple were carved like the necks of giraffes; the dome was like an ugly tortoise; and the highest pinnacle was a monkey standing on his head with his tail pointing at the sun. And yet the whole was beautiful, because it was lifted up in one living and religious gesture as a man lifts his hands in prayer.

III

But this great plan was never properly completed. The people had brought up on great wagons the heavy tortoise roof and the huge necks of stone, and all the thousand and one oddities that made up that unity, the owls and the efts and the crocodiles and the kangaroos, which hideous by themselves might have been magnificent if reared in one definite proportion and dedicated to the sun. For this was Gothic, this was romantic, this was Christian art; this was the whole advance of Shakespeare upon Sophocles. And that symbol which was to crown it all, the ape upside down, was really Christian; for man is the ape upside down.

But the rich, who had grown riotous in the long peace, obstructed the thing, and in some squabble a stone struck the priest on the head and he lost his memory. He saw piled in front of him frogs and elephants, monkeys and giraffes, toadstools and sharks, all the ugly things of the universe which he had collected to do honour to God. But he forgot why he had collected them. He could not remember the design or the object. He piled them all wildly into one heap fifty feet high; and when he had done it all the rich and influential went into a passion of applause and cried, “This is real art! This is Realism! This is things as they really are!”

That, I fancy, is the only true origin of Realism. Realism is simply Romanticism that has lost its reason. This is so not merely in the sense of insanity but of suicide. It has lost its reason; that is its reason for existing. The old Greeks summoned godlike things to worship their god. The medieval Christians summoned all things to worship theirs, dwarfs and pelicans, monkeys and madmen. The modern realists summon all these million creatures to worship their god; and then have no god for them to worship. Paganism was in art a pure beauty; that was the dawn. Christianity was a beauty created by controlling a million monsters of ugliness; and that in my belief was the zenith and the noon. Modern art and science practically mean having the million monsters and being unable to control them; and I will venture to call that the disruption and the decay. The finest lengths of the Elgin marbles consist splendid houses going to the temple of a virgin. Christianity, with its gargoyles and grotesques, really amounted to saying this: that a donkey could go before all the horses of the world when it was really going to the temple. Romance means a holy donkey going to the temple. Realism means a lost donkey going nowhere.

The fragments of futile journalism or fleeting impression which are here collected are very like the wrecks and riven blocks that were piled in a heap round my imaginary priest of the sun. They are very like that grey and gaping head of stone that I found overgrown with the grass. Yet I will venture to make even of these trivial fragments the high boast that I am a medievalist and not a modern. That is, I really have a notion of why I have collected all the nonsensical things there are. I have not the patience nor perhaps the constructive intelligence to state the connecting link between all these chaotic papers. But it could be stated. This row of shapeless and ungainly monsters which I now set before the reader does not consist of separate idols cut out capriciously in lonely valleys or various islands. These monsters are meant for the gargoyles of a definite cathedral. I have to carve the gargoyles, because I can carve nothing else; I leave to others the angels and the arches and the spires. But I am very sure of the style of the architecture, and of the consecration of the church.

The Surrender of a Cockney

Evert man, though he were born in the very belfry of Bow and spent his infancy climbing among chimneys, has waiting for him somewhere a country house which he has never seen; but which was built for him in the very shape of his soul. It stands patiently waiting to be found, knee-deep in orchards of Kent or mirrored in pools of Lincoln; and when the man sees it he remembers it, though he has never seen it before. Even I have been forced to confess this at last, who am a Cockney, if ever there was one, a Cockney not only on principle, but with savage pride. I have always maintained, quite seriously, that the Lord is not in the wind or thunder of the waste, but if anywhere in the still small voice of Fleet Street. I sincerely maintain that Nature-worship is more morally dangerous than the most vulgar man-worship of the cities; since it can easily be perverted into the worship of an impersonal mystery, carelessness, or cruelty. Thoreau would have been a jollier fellow if he had devoted himself to a greengrocer instead of to greens. Swinburne would have been a better moralist if he had worshipped a fishmonger instead of worshipping the sea. I prefer the philosophy of bricks and mortar to the philosophy of turnips. To call a man a turnip may be playful, but is seldom respectful. But when we wish to pay emphatic honour to a man, to praise the firmness of his nature, the squareness of his conduct, the strong humility with which he is interlocked with his equals in silent mutual support, then we invoke the nobler Cockney metaphor, and call him a brick.

But, despite all these theories, I have surrendered; I have struck my colours at sight; at a mere glimpse through the opening of a hedge. I shall come down to living in the country, like any common Socialist or Simple Lifer. I shall end my days in a village, in the character of the Village Idiot, and be a spectacle and a judgment to mankind. I have already learnt the rustic manner of leaning upon a gate; and I was thus gymnastically occupied at the moment when my eye caught the house that was made for me. It stood well back from the road, and was built of a good yellow brick; it was narrow for its height, like the tower of some Border robber; and over the front door was carved in large letters, “1908.” That last burst of sincerity, that superb scorn of antiquarian sentiment, overwhelmed me finally. I closed my eyes in a kind of ecstasy. My friend (who was helping me to lean on the gate) asked me with some curiosity what I was doing.

"My dear fellow," I said, with emotion, "I am bidding farewell to forty-three hansom cabmen."

"Well," he said, "I suppose they would think this county rather outside the radius."

"Oh, my friend," I cried brokenly, "how beautiful London is! Why do they only write poetry about the country? I could turn every lyric cry into Cockney.

"'My heart leaps up when I behold
A sky-sign in the sky,'

"as I observed in a volume which is too little read, founded on the older English poets. You never saw my 'Golden Treasury Regilded; or, The Classics Made Cockney' — it contained some fine lines.

"'O Wild West End, thou breath of London's being,'

"or the reminiscence of Keats, beginning

"'City of smuts and mellow fogfulness.';

"I have written many such lines on the beauty of London; yet I never realized that London was really beautiful till now. Do you ask me why? It is because I have left it for ever."

"If you will take my advice," said my friend, "you will humbly endeavour not to be a fool. What is the sense of this mad modern notion that every literary man must live in the country, with the pigs and the donkeys and the squires? Chaucer and Spenser and Milton and Dryden lived in London; Shakespeare and Dr. Johnson came to London because they had had quite enough of the country. And as for trumpery topical journalists like you, why, they would cut their throats in the country. You have confessed it yourself in your own last words. You hunger and thirst after the streets; you think London the finest place on the planet. And if by some miracle a Bayswater omnibus could come down this green country lane you would utter a yell of joy."

Then a light burst upon my brain, and I turned upon him with terrible sternness.

"Why, miserable aesthete," I said in a voice of thunder, "that is the true country spirit! That is how the real rustic feels. The real rustic does utter a yell of joy at the sight of a Bayswater omnibus. The real rustic does think London the finest place on the planet. In the few moments that I have stood by this stile, I have grown rooted here like an ancient tree; I have been here for ages. Petulant Suburban, I am the real rustic. I believe that the streets of London are paved with gold; and I mean to see it before I die."

The evening breeze freshened among the little tossing trees of that lane, and the purple evening clouds piled up and darkened behind my Country Seat, the house that belonged to me, making, by contrast, its yellow bricks gleam like gold. At last my friend said: "To cut it short, then, you mean that you will live in the country because you won't like it. What on earth will you do here; dig up the garden?"

"Dig!" I answered, in honourable scorn. "Dig! Do work at my Country Seat; no, thank you. When I find a Country Seat, I sit in it. And for your other objection, you are quite wrong. I do not dislike the country, but I like the town more. Therefore the art of happiness certainly suggests that I should live in the country and think about the town. Modern nature-worship is all upside down. Trees and fields ought to be the ordinary things; terraces and temples ought to be extraordinary. I am on the side of the man who lives in the country and wants to go to London. I abominate and abjure the man who lives in London and wants to go to the country; I do it with all the more heartiness because I am that sort of man myself. We must learn to love London again, as rustics love it. Therefore (I quote again from the great Cockney version of The Golden Treasury) —

"'Therefore, ye gas-pipes, ye asbestos? stoves,
Forbode not any severing of our loves.
I have relinquished but your earthly sight,
To hold you dear in a more distant way.
I'll love the 'buses lumbering through the wet,
Even more than when I lightly tripped as they.
The grimy colour of the London clay
Is lovely yet,'

"because I have found the house where I was really born; the tall and quiet house from which I can see London afar off, as the miracle of man that it is."

The Nightmare

A sunset of copper and gold had just broken down and gone to pieces in the west, and grey colours were crawling over everything in earth and heaven; also a wind was growing, a wind that laid a cold finger upon flesh and spirit. The bushes at the back of my garden began to whisper like conspirators; and then to wave like wild hands in signal. I was trying to read by the last light that died on the lawn a long poem of the decadent period, a poem about the old gods of Babylon and Egypt, about their blazing and obscene temples, their cruel and colossal faces.

“Or didst thou love the God of Flies who plagued
the Hebrews and was splashed
With wine unto the waist, or Pasht who had green
beryls for her eyes?”

I read this poem because I had to review it for the Daily News; still it was genuine poetry of its kind. It really gave out an atmosphere, a fragrant and suffocating smoke that seemed really to come from the Bondage of Egypt or the Burden of Tyre There is not much in common (thank God) between my garden with the grey-green English sky-line beyond it, and these mad visions of painted palaces huge, headless idols and monstrous solitudes of red or golden sand. Nevertheless (as I confessed to myself) I can fancy in such a stormy twilight some such smell of death and fear. The ruined sunset really looks like one of their ruined temples: a shattered heap of gold and green marble. A black flapping thing detaches itself from one of the sombre trees and flutters to another. I know not if it is owl or flittermouse; I could fancy it was a black cherub, an infernal cherub of darkness, not with the wings of a bird and the head of a baby, but with the head of a goblin and the wings of a bat. I think, if there were light enough, I could sit here and write some very creditable creepy tale, about how I went up the crooked road beyond the church and met Something — say a dog, a dog with one eye. Then I should meet a horse, perhaps, a horse without a rider, the horse also would have one eye. Then the inhuman silence would be broken; I should meet a man (need I say, a one-eyed man?) who would ask me the way to my own house. Or perhaps tell me that it was burnt to the ground. I could tell a very cosy little tale along some such lines. Or I might dream of climbing for ever the tall dark trees above me. They are so tall that

I feel as if I should find at their tops the nests of the angels; but in this mood they would be dark and dreadful angels; angels of death.

Only, you see, this mood is all bosh. I do not believe in it in the least. That one-eyed universe, with its one-eyed men and beasts, was only created with one universal wink. At the top of the tragic trees I should not find the Angel’s Nest. I should only find the Mare’s Nest; the dreamy and divine nest is not there. In the Mare’s Nest I shall discover that dim, enormous opalescent egg from which is hatched the Nightmare. For there is nothing so delightful as a nightmare — when you know it is a nightmare.

That is the essential. That is the stern condition laid upon all artists touching this luxury of fear. The terror must be fundamentally frivolous. Sanity may play with insanity; but insanity must not be allowed to play with sanity. Let such poets as the one I was reading in the garden, by all means, be free to imagine what outrageous deities and violent landscapes they like. By all means let them wander freely amid their opium pinnacles and perspectives. But these huge gods, these high cities, are toys; they must never for an instant be allowed to be anything else. Man, a gigantic child, must play with Babylon and Nineveh, with Isis and with Ashtaroth. By all means let him dream of the Bondage of Egypt, so long as he is free from it. By all means let him take up the Burden of Tyre, so long as he can take it lightly. But the old gods must be his dolls, not his idols. His central sanctities, his true possessions, should be Christian and simple. And just as a child would cherish most a wooden horse or a sword that is a mere cross of wood, so man, the great child, must cherish most the old plain things of poetry and piety; that horse of wood that was the epic end of Ilium, or that cross of wood that redeemed and conquered the world.

In one of Stevenson’s letters there is a characteristically humorous remark about the appalling impression produced on him in childhood by the beasts with many eyes in the Book of Revelations: “If that was heaven, what in the name of Davy Jones was hell like?” Now in sober truth there is a magnificent idea in these monsters of the Apocalypse. It is, I suppose, the idea that beings really more beautiful or more universal than we are might appear to us frightful and even confused. Especially they might seem to have senses at once more multiplex and more staring; an idea very imaginatively seized in the multitude of eyes. I like those monsters beneath the throne very much. But I like them beneath the throne. It is when one of them goes wandering in deserts and finds a throne for himself that evil faiths begin, and there is (literally) the devil to pay — to pay in dancing girls or human sacrifice. As long as those misshapen elemental powers are around the throne, remember that the thing that they worship is the likeness of the appearance of a man.

That is, I fancy, the true doctrine on the subject of Tales of Terror and such things, which unless a man of letters do well and truly believe, without doubt he will end by blowing his brains out or by writing badly. Man, the central pillar of the world must be upright and straight; around him all the trees and beasts and elements and devils may crook and curl like smoke if they choose. All really imaginative literature is only the contrast between the weird curves of Nature and the straightness of the soul. Man may behold what ugliness he likes if he is sure that he will not worship it; but there are some so weak that they will worship a thing only because it is ugly. These must be chained to the beautiful. It is not always wrong even to go, like Dante, to the brink of the lowest promontory and look down at hell. It is when you look up at hell that a serious miscalculation has probably been made.

Therefore I see no wrong in riding with the Nightmare to-night; she whinnies to me from the rocking tree-tops and the roaring wind; I will catch her and ride her through the awful air. Woods and weeds are alike tugging at the roots in the rising tempest, as if all wished to fly with us over the moon, like that wild amorous cow whose child was the Moon-Calf. We will rise to that mad infinite where there is neither up nor down, the high topsy-turveydom of the heavens. I will answer the call of chaos and old night. I will ride on the Nightmare; but she shall not ride on me.

The Telegraph Poles

My friend and I were walking in one of those wastes of pine-wood which make inland seas of solitude in every part of Western Europe; which have the true terror of a desert, since they are uniform, and so one may lose one’s way in them. Stiff, straight, and similar, stood up all around us the pines of the wood, like the pikes of a silent mutiny. There is a truth in talking of the variety of Nature; but I think that Nature often shows her chief strangeness in her sameness. There is a weird rhythm in this very repetition; it is as if the earth were resolved to repeat a single shape until the shape shall turn terrible.

Have you ever tried the experiment of saying some plain word, such as “dog,” thirty times? By the thirtieth time it has become a word like “snark” or “pobble.” It does not become tame, it becomes wild, by repetition. In the end a dog walks about as startling and undecipherable as Leviathan or Croquemitaine.

It may be that this explains the repetitions in Nature, it may be for this reason that there are so many million leaves and pebbles. Perhaps they are not repeated so that they may grow familiar. Perhaps they are repeated only in the hope that they may at last grow unfamiliar. Perhaps a man is not startled at the first cat he sees, but jumps into the air with surprise at the seventy-ninth cat. Perhaps he has to pass through thousands of pine trees before he finds the one that is really a pine tree. However this may be, there is something singularly thrilling, even something urgent and intolerant, about the endless forest repetitions; there is the hint of something like madness in that musical monotony of the pines.

I said something like this to my friend; and he answered with sardonic truth, “Ah, you wait till we come to a telegraph post.”

My friend was right, as he occasionally is in our discussions, especially upon points of fact. We had crossed the pine forest by one of its paths which happened to follow the wires of the provincial telegraphy; and though the poles occurred at long intervals they made a difference when they came. The instant we came to the straight pole we could see that the pines were not really straight. It was like a hundred straight lines drawn with schoolboy pencils all brought to judgment suddenly by one straight line drawn with a ruler. All the amateur lines seemed to reel to right and left. A moment before I could have sworn they stood as straight as lances; now I could see them curve and waver everywhere, like scimitars and yataghans. Compared with the telegraph post the pines were crooked — and alive. That lonely vertical rod at once deformed and enfranchised the forest. It tangled it all together and yet made it free, like any grotesque undergrowth of oak or holly.

“Yes,” said my gloomy friend, answering my thoughts. “You don’t know what a wicked shameful thing straightness is if you think these trees are straight. You never will know till your precious intellectual civilization builds a forty-mile forest of telegraph poles.”

We had started walking from our temporary home later in the day than we intended; and the long afternoon was already lengthening itself out into a yellow evening when we came out of the forest on to the hills above a strange town or village, of which the lights had already begun to glitter in the darkening valley. The change had already happened which is the test and definition of evening. I mean that while the sky seemed still as bright, the earth was growing blacker against it, especially at the edges, the hills and the pine-tops. This brought out yet more clearly the owlish secrecy of pine-woods; and my friend cast a regretful glance at them as he came out under the sky. Then he turned to the view in front; and, as it happened, one of the telegraph posts stood up in front of him in the last sunlight. It was no longer crossed and softened by the more delicate lines of pine wood; it stood up ugly, arbitrary, and angular as any crude figure in geometry. My friend stopped, pointing his stick at it, and all his anarchic philosophy rushed to his lips.

“Demon,” he said to me briefly, “behold your work. That palace of proud trees behind us is what the world was before you civilized men, Christians or democrats or the rest, came to make it dull with your dreary rules of morals and equality. In the silent fight of that forest, tree fights speechless against tree, branch against branch. And the upshot of that dumb battle is inequality — and beauty. Now lift up your eyes and look at equality and ugliness. See how regularly the white buttons are arranged on that black stick, and defend your dogmas if you dare.”

“Is that telegraph post so much a symbol of democracy?” I asked. “I fancy that while three men have made the telegraph to get dividends, about a thousand men have preserved the forest to cut wood. But if the telegraph pole is hideous (as I admit) it is not due to doctrine but rather to commercial anarchy. If any one had a doctrine about a telegraph pole it might be carved in ivory and decked with gold. Modern things are ugly, because modern men are careless, not because they are careful."

"No," answered my friend with his eye on the end of a splendid and sprawling sunset, "there is something intrinsically deadening about the very idea of a doctrine. A straight line is always ugly. Beauty is always crooked. These rigid posts at regular intervals are ugly because they are carrying across the world the real message of democracy."

"At this moment," I answered, "they are probably carrying across the world the message, 'Buy Bulgarian Rails.' They are probably the prompt communication between some two of the wealthiest and wickedest of His children with whom God has ever had patience. No; these telegraph poles are ugly and detestable, they are inhuman and indecent. But their baseness lies in their privacy, not in their publicity. That black stick with white buttons is not the creation of the soul of a multitude. It is the mad creation of the souls of two millionaires."

"At least you have to explain," answered my friend gravely, "how it is that the hard democratic doctrine and the hard telegraphic outline have appeared together; you have... But bless my soul, we must be getting home. I had no idea it was so late. Let me see, I think this is our way through the wood. Come, let us both curse the telegraph post for entirely different reasons and get home before it is dark."

We did not get home before it was dark. For one reason or another we had underestimated the swiftness of twilight and the suddenness of night, especially in the threading of thick woods. When my friend, after the first five minutes' march, had fallen over a log, and I, ten minutes after, had stuck nearly to the knees in mire, we began to have some suspicion of our direction. At last my friend said, in a low, husky voice:

"I'm afraid we're on the wrong path. It's pitch dark."

"I thought we went the right way," I said, tentatively.

"Well," he said; and then, after a long pause, "I can't see any telegraph poles. I've been looking for them."

"So have I," I said. "They're so straight."

We groped away for about two hours of darkness in the thick of the fringe of trees which seemed to dance round us in derision. Here and there, however, it was possible to trace the outline of something just too erect and rigid to be a pine tree. By these we finally felt our way home, arriving in a cold green twilight before dawn.

A Drama of Dolls

In a small grey town of stone in one of the great Yorkshire dales, which is full of history, I entered a hall and saw an old puppet-play exactly as our fathers saw it five hundred years ago. It was admirably translated from the old German, and was the original tale of Faust. The dolls were at once comic and convincing; but if you cannot at once laugh at a thing and believe in it, you have no business in the Middle Ages. Or in the world, for that matter.

The puppet-play in question belongs, I believe, to the fifteenth century; and indeed the whole legend of Dr. Faustus has the colour of that grotesque but somewhat gloomy time. It is very unfortunate that we so often know a thing that is past only by its tail end. We remember yesterday only by its sunsets. There are many instances. One is Napoleon. We always think of him as a fat old despot, ruling Europe with a ruthless military machine. But that, as Lord Rosebery would say, was only “The Last Phase”; or at least the last but one. During the strongest and most startling part of his career, the time that made him immortal, Napoleon was a sort of boy, and not a bad sort of boy either, bullet-headed and ambitious, but honestly in love with a woman, and honestly enthusiastic for a cause, the cause of French justice and equality.

Another instance is the Middle Ages, which we also remember only by the odour of their ultimate decay. We think of the life of the Middle Ages as a dance of death, full of devils and deadly sins, lepers and burning heretics. But this was not the life of the Middle Ages, but the death of the Middle Ages. It is the spirit of Louis XI and Richard III, not of Louis IX and Edward I.

This grim but not unwholesome fable of Dr. Faustus, with its rebuke to the mere arrogance of learning, is sound and stringent enough; but it is not a fair sample of the mediaeval soul at its happiest and sanest. The heart of the true Middle Ages might be found far better, for instance, in the noble tale of Tannhauser, in which the dead staff broke into leaf and flower to rebuke the pontiff who had declared even one human being beyond the strength of sorrow and pardon.

But there were in the play two great human ideas which the mediaeval mind never lost its grip on, through the heaviest nightmares of its dissolution. They were the two great jokes of mediaevalism, as they are the two eternal jokes of mankind. Wherever those two jokes exist there is a little health and hope; wherever they are absent, pride and insanity are present. The first is the idea that the poor man ought to get the better of the rich man. The other is the idea that the husband is afraid of the wife.

I have heard that there is a place under the knee which, when struck, should produce a sort of jump; and that if you do not jump, you are mad. I am sure that there are some such places in the soul. When the human spirit does not jump with joy at either of those two old jokes, the human spirit must be struck with incurable paralysis. There is hope for people who have gone down into the hells of greed and economic oppression (at least, I hope there is, for we are such a people ourselves), but there is no hope for a people that does not exult in the abstract idea of the peasant scoring off the prince. There is hope for the idle and the adulterous, for the men that desert their wives and the men that beat their wives. But there is no hope for men who do not boast that their wives bully them.

The first idea, the idea about the man at the bottom coming out on top, is expressed in this puppet-play in the person of Dr. Faustus’ servant, Caspar. Sentimental old Tones, regretting the feudal times, sometimes complain that in these days Jack is as good as his master. But most of the actual tales of the feudal times turn on the idea that Jack is much better than his master, and certainly it is so in the case of Caspar and Faust. The play ends with the damnation of the learned and illustrious doctor, followed by a cheerful and animated dance by Caspar, who has been made watchman of the city.

But there was a much keener stroke of mediaeval irony earlier in the play. The learned doctor has been ransacking all the libraries of the earth to find a certain rare formula, now almost unknown, by which he can control the infernal deities. At last he procures the one precious volume, opens it at the proper page, and leaves it on the table while he seeks some other part of his magic equipment. The servant comes in, reads off the formula, and immediately becomes an emperor of the elemental spirits. He gives them a horrible time. He summons and dismisses them alternately with the rapidity of a piston-rod working at high speed; he keeps them flying between the doctor’s house and their own more unmentionable residences till they faint with rage and fatigue. There is all the best of the Middle Ages in that; the idea of the great levellers, luck and laughter; the idea of a sense of humour defying and dominating hell.

One of the best points in the play as performed in this Yorkshire town was that the servant Caspar was made to talk Yorkshire, instead of the German rustic dialect which he talked in the original. That also smacks of the good air of that epoch. In those old pictures and poems they always made things living by making them local. Thus, queerly enough, the one touch that was not in the old mediaeval version was the most mediaeval touch of all.

That other ancient and Christian jest, that a wife is a holy terror, occurs in the last scene, where the doctor (who wears a fur coat throughout, to make him seem more offensively rich and refined) is attempting to escape from the avenging demons, and meets his old servant in the street. The servant obligingly points out a house with a blue door, and strongly recommends Dr. Faustus to take refuge in it. “My old woman lives there,” he says, “and the devils are more afraid of her than you are of them.” Faustus does not take this advice, but goes on meditating and reflecting (which had been his mistake all along) until the clock strikes twelve, and dreadful voices talk Latin in heaven. So Faustus, in his fur coat, is carried away by little black imps; and serve him right for being an Intellectual.

The Man and His Newspaper

At a little station, which I decline to specify, somewhere between Oxford and Guildford, I missed a connection or miscalculated a route in such manner that I was left stranded for rather more than an hour. I adore waiting at railway stations, but this was not a very sumptuous specimen. There was nothing on the platform except a chocolate automatic machine, which eagerly absorbed pennies but produced no corresponding chocolate, and a small paper-stall with a few remaining copies of a cheap imperial organ which we will call the Daily Wire. It does not matter which imperial organ it was, as they all say the same thing.

Though I knew it quite well already, I read it with gravity as I strolled out of the station and up the country road. It opened with the striking phrase that the Radicals were setting class against class. It went on to remark that nothing had contributed more to make our Empire happy and enviable, to create that obvious list of glories which you can supply for yourself, the prosperity of all classes in our great cities, our populous and growing villages, the success of our rule in Ireland, etc., etc., than the sound Anglo-Saxon readiness of all classes in the State “to work heartily hand-in-hand.” It was this alone, the paper assured me, that had saved us from the horrors of the French Revolution. “It is easy for the Radicals,” it went on very solemnly, “to make jokes about the dukes. Very few of these revolutionary gentlemen have given to the poor one half of the earnest thought, tireless unselfishness, and truly Christian patience that are given to them by the great landlords of this country. We are very sure that the English people, with their sturdy common sense, will prefer to be in the hands of English gentlemen rather than in the miry claws of Socialistic buccaneers.”

Just when I had reached this point I nearly ran into a man. Despite the populousness and growth of our villages, he appeared to be the only man for miles, but the road up which I had wandered turned and narrowed with equal abruptness, and I nearly knocked him off the gate on which he was leaning. I pulled up to apologize, and since he seemed ready for society, and even pathetically pleased with it, I tossed the Daily Wire over a hedge and fell into speech with him. He wore a wreck of respectable clothes, and his face had that plebeian refinement which one sees in small tailors and watchmakers, in poor men of sedentary trades. Behind him a twisted group of winter trees stood up as gaunt and tattered as himself, but I do not think that the tragedy that he symbolized was a mere fancy from the spectral wood. There was a fixed look in his face which told that he was one of those who in keeping body and soul together have difficulties not only with the body, but also with the soul.

He was a Cockney by birth, and retained the touching accent of those streets from which I am an exile; but he had lived nearly all his life in this countryside; and he began to tell me the affairs of it in that formless, tail-foremost way in which the poor gossip about their great neighbours. Names kept coming and going in the narrative like charms or spells, unaccompanied by any biographical explanation. In particular the name of somebody called Sir Joseph multiplied itself with the omnipresence of a deity. I took Sir Joseph to be the principal landowner of the district; and as the confused picture unfolded itself, I began to form a definite and by no means pleasing picture of Sir Joseph. He was spoken of in a strange way, frigid and yet familiar, as a child might speak of a stepmother or an unavoidable nurse; something intimate, but by no means tender; something that was waiting for you by your own bed and board; that told you to do this and forbade you to do that, with a caprice that was cold and yet somehow personal. It did not appear that Sir Joseph was popular, but he was "a household word." He was not so much a public man as a sort of private god or omnipotence. The particular man to whom I spoke said he had "been in trouble," and that Sir Joseph had been "pretty hard on him."

And under that grey and silver cloudland, with a background of those frost-bitten and wind-tortured trees, the little Londoner told me a tale which, true or false, was as heartrending as Romeo and Juliet.

He had slowly built up in the village a small business as a photographer, and he was engaged to a girl at one of the lodges, whom he loved with passion. "I'm the sort that 'ad better marry," he said; and for all his frail figure I knew what he meant. But Sir Joseph, and especially Sir Joseph's wife, did not want a photographer in the village; it made the girls vain, or perhaps they disliked this particular photographer. He worked and worked until he had just enough to marry on honestly; and almost on the eve of his wedding the lease expired, and Sir Joseph appeared in all his glory. He refused to renew the lease; and the man went wildly elsewhere. But Sir Joseph was ubiquitous; and the whole of that place was barred against him. In all that country he could not find a shed to which to bring home his bride.

The man appealed and explained; but he was disliked as a demagogue, as well as a photographer. Then it was as if a black cloud came across the winter sky; for I knew what was coming. I forget even in what words he told of Nature maddened and set free. But I still see, as in a photograph, the grey muscles of the winter trees standing out like tight ropes, as if all Nature were on the rack.

"She 'ad to go away," he said.

"Wouldn't her parents," I began, and hesitated on the word "forgive."

"Oh, her people forgave her," he said. "But Her Ladyship..."

"Her Ladyship made the sun and moon and stars," I said, impatiently. "So of course she can come between a mother and the child of her body."

"Well, it does seem a bit 'ard..." he began with a break in his voice.

"But, good Lord, man," I cried, "it isn't a matter of hardness! It's a matter of impious and indecent wickedness. If your Sir Joseph knew the passions he was playing with, he did you a wrong for which in many Christian countries he would have a knife in him."

The man continued to look across the frozen fields with a frown. He certainly told his tale with real resentment, whether it was true or false, or only exaggerated. He was certainly sullen and injured; but he did not seem to think of any avenue of escape. At last he said:

"Well, it's a bad world; let's 'ope there's a better one."

"Amen," I said. "But when I think of Sir Joseph, I understand how men have hoped there was a worse one."

Then we were silent for a long time and felt the cold of the day crawling up, and at last I said, abruptly:

"The other day at a Budget meeting, I heard."

He took his elbows off the stile and seemed to change from head to foot like a man coming out of sleep with a yawn. He said in a totally new voice, louder but much more careless, "Ah yes, sir,... this 'ere Budget... the Radicals are doing a lot of 'arm."

I listened intently, and he went on. He said with a sort of careful precision, "Settin' class against class; that's what I call it. Why, what's made our Empire except the readiness of all classes to work 'eartily 'and-in-'and."

He walked a little up and down the lane and stamped with the cold. Then he said, "What I say is, what else kept us from the 'errors of the French Revolution?"

My memory is good, and I waited in tense eagerness for the phrase that came next. “They may laugh at Dukes; I’d like to see them ‘alf as kind and Christian and patient as lots of the landlords are. Let me tell you, sir,” he said, facing round at me with the final air of one launching a paradox. “The English people ‘ave some common sense, and they’d rather be in the ‘ands of gentlemen than in the claws of a lot of Socialist thieves.”

I had an indescribable sense that I ought to applaud, as if I were a public meeting. The insane separation in the man’s soul between his experience and his ready-made theory was but a type of what covers a quarter of England. As he turned away, I saw the Daily Wire sticking out of his shabby pocket. He bade me farewell in quite a blaze of catchwords, and went stumping up the road. I saw his figure grow smaller and smaller in the great green landscape; even as the Free Man has grown smaller and smaller in the English countryside.

The Appetite of Earth

I was walking the other day in a kitchen garden, which I find has somehow got attached to my premises, and I was wondering why I liked it. After a prolonged spiritual self-analysis I came to the conclusion that I like a kitchen garden because it contains things to eat. I do not mean that a kitchen garden is ugly; a kitchen garden is often very beautiful. The mixture of green and purple on some monstrous cabbage is much subtler and grander than the mere freakish and theatrical splashing of yellow and violet on a pansy. Few of the flowers merely meant for ornament are so ethereal as a potato. A kitchen garden is as beautiful as an orchard; but why is it that the word “orchard” sounds as beautiful as the word “flower-garden,” and yet also sounds more satisfactory? I suggest again my extraordinarily dark and delicate discovery: that it contains things to eat.

The cabbage is a solid; it can be approached from all sides at once; it can be realized by all senses at once. Compared with that the sunflower, which can only be seen, is a mere pattern, a thing painted on a flat wall. Now, it is this sense of the solidity of things that can only be uttered by the metaphor of eating. To express the cubic content of a turnip, you must be all round it at once. The only way to get all round a turnip at once is to eat the turnip. I think any poetic mind that has loved solidity, the thickness of trees, the squareness of stones, the firmness of clay, must have sometimes wished that they were things to eat. If only brown peat tasted as good as it looks; if only white firwood were digestible! We talk rightly of giving stones for bread: but there are in the Geological Museum certain rich crimson marbles, certain split stones of blue and green, that make me wish my teeth were stronger.

Somebody staring into the sky with the same ethereal appetite declared that the moon was made of green cheese. I never could conscientiously accept the full doctrine. I am Modernist in this matter. That the moon is made of cheese I have believed from childhood; and in the course of every month a giant (of my acquaintance) bites a big round piece out of it. This seems to me a doctrine that is above reason, but not contrary to it. But that the cheese is green seems to be in some degree actually contradicted by the senses and the reason; first because if the moon were made of green cheese it would be inhabited; and second because if it were made of green cheese it would be green. A blue moon is said to be an unusual sight; but I cannot think that a green one is much more common. In fact, I think I have seen the moon looking like every other sort of cheese except a green cheese. I have seen it look exactly like a cream cheese: a circle of warm white upon a warm faint violet sky above a cornfield in Kent. I have seen it look very like a Dutch cheese, rising a dull red copper disk amid masts and dark waters at Honfleur. I have seen it look like an ordinary sensible Cheddar cheese in an ordinary sensible Prussian blue sky; and I have once seen it so naked and ruinous-looking, so strangely lit up, that it looked like a Gruyere cheese, that awful volcanic cheese that has horrible holes in it, as if it had come in boiling unnatural milk from mysterious and unearthly cattle. But I have never yet seen the lunar cheese green; and I incline to the opinion that the moon is not old enough. The moon, like everything else, will ripen by the end of the world; and in the last days we shall see it taking on those volcanic sunset colours, and leaping with that enormous and fantastic life.

But this is a parenthesis; and one perhaps slightly lacking in prosaic actuality. Whatever may be the value of the above speculations, the phrase about the moon and green cheese remains a good example of this imagery of eating and drinking on a large scale. The same huge fancy is in the phrase “if all the trees were bread and cheese,” which I have cited elsewhere in this connection; and in that noble nightmare of a Scandinavian legend, in which Thor drinks the deep sea nearly dry out of a horn. In an essay like the present (first intended as a paper to be read before the Royal Society) one cannot be too exact; and I will concede that my theory of the gradual vire-scence of our satellite is to be regarded rather as an alternative theory than as a law finally demonstrated and universally accepted by the scientific world. It is a hypothesis that holds the field, as the scientists say of a theory when there is no evidence for it so far.

But the reader need be under no apprehension that I have suddenly gone mad, and shall start biting large pieces out of the trunks of trees; or seriously altering (by large semicircular mouthfuls) the exquisite outline of the mountains. This feeling for expressing a fresh solidity by the image of eating is really a very old one. So far from being a paradox of perversity, it is one of the oldest commonplaces of religion. If any one wandering about wants to have a good trick or test for separating the wrong idealism from the right, I will give him one on the spot. It is a mark of false religion that it is always trying to express concrete facts as abstract; it calls sex affinity; it calls wine alcohol; it calls brute starvation the economic problem. The test of true religion is that its energy drives exactly the other way; it is always trying to make men feel truths as facts; always trying to make abstract things as plain and solid as concrete things; always trying to make men, not merely admit the truth, but see, smell, handle, hear, and devour the truth. All great spiritual scriptures are full of the invitation not to test, but to taste; not to examine, but to eat. Their phrases are full of living water and heavenly bread, mysterious manna and dreadful wine. Worldliness, and the polite society of the world, has despised this instinct of eating; but religion has never despised it. When we look at a firm, fat, white cliff of chalk at Dover, I do not suggest that we should desire to eat it; that would be highly abnormal. But I really mean that we should think it good to eat; good for some one else to eat. For, indeed, some one else is eating it; the grass that grows upon its top is devouring it silently, but, doubtless, with an uproarious appetite.

Simmons and the Social Tie

It is a platitude, and none the less true for that, that we need to have an ideal in our minds with which to test all realities. But it is equally true, and less noted, that we need a reality with which to test ideals. Thus I have selected Mrs. Buttons, a charwoman in Battersea, as the touchstone of all modern theories about the mass of women. Her name is not Buttons; she is not in the least a contemptible nor entirely a comic figure. She has a powerful stoop and an ugly, attractive face, a little like that of Huxley — without the whiskers, of course. The courage with which she supports the most brutal bad luck has something quite creepy about it. Her irony is incessant and inventive; her practical charity very large; and she is wholly unaware of the philosophical use to which I put her.

But when I hear the modern generalization about her sex on all sides I simply substitute her name, and see how the thing sounds then. When on the one side the mere sentimentalist says, “Let woman be content to be dainty and exquisite, a protected piece of social art and domestic ornament,” then I merely repeat it to myself in the “other form,” “Let Mrs. Buttons be content to be dainty and exquisite, a protected piece of social art, etc.” It is extraordinary what a difference the substitution seems to make. And on the other hand, when some of the Suffragettes say in their pamphlets and speeches, “Woman, leaping to life at the trumpet call of Ibsen and Shaw, drops her tawdry luxuries and demands to grasp the sceptre of empire and the firebrand of speculative thought” — in order to understand such a sentence I say it over again in the amended form: “Mrs. Buttons, leaping to life at the trumpet call of Ibsen and Shaw, drops her tawdry luxuries and demands to grasp the sceptre of empire and the firebrand of speculative thought.” Somehow it sounds quite different. And yet when you say Woman I suppose you mean the average woman; and if most women are as capable and critical and morally sound as Mrs. Buttons, it is as much as we can expect, and a great deal more than we deserve.

But this study is not about Mrs. Buttons; she would require many studies. I will take a less impressive case of my principle, the principle of keeping in the mind an actual personality when we are talking about types or tendencies or generalized ideals. Take, for example, the question of the education of boys. Almost every post brings me pamphlets expounding some advanced and suggestive scheme of education; the pupils are to be taught separate; the sexes are to be taught together; there should be no prizes; there should be no punishments; the master should lift the boys to his level; the master should descend to their level; we should encourage the heartiest comradeship among boys, and also the tenderest spiritual intimacy with masters; toil must be pleasant and holidays must be instructive; with all these things I am daily impressed and somewhat bewildered. But on the great Buttons' principle I keep in my mind and apply to all these ideals one still vivid fact; the face and character of a particular schoolboy whom I once knew. I am not taking a mere individual oddity, as you will hear. He was exceptional, and yet the reverse of eccentric; he was (in a quite sober and strict sense of the words) exceptionally average. He was the incarnation and the exaggeration of a certain spirit which is the common spirit of boys, but which nowhere else became so obvious and outrageous. And because he was an incarnation he was, in his way, a tragedy.

I will call him Simmons. He was a tall, healthy figure, strong, but a little slouching, and there was in his walk something between a slight swagger and a seaman's roll; he commonly had his hands in his pockets. His hair was dark, straight, and undistinguished; and his face, if one saw it after his figure, was something of a surprise. For while the form might be called big and braggart, the face might have been called weak, and was certainly worried. It was a hesitating face, which seemed to blink doubtfully in the daylight. He had even the look of one who has received a buffet that he cannot return. In all occupations he was the average boy; just sufficiently good at sports, just sufficiently bad at work to be universally satisfactory. But he was prominent in nothing, for prominence was to him a thing like bodily pain. He could not endure, without discomfort amounting to desperation, that any boy should be noticed or sensationally separated from the long line of boys; for him, to be distinguished was to be disgraced.

Those who interpret schoolboys as merely wooden and barbarous, unmoved by anything but a savage seriousness about tuck or cricket, make the mistake of forgetting how much of the schoolboy life is public and ceremonial, having reference to an ideal; or, if you like, to an affectation. Boys, like dogs, have a sort of romantic ritual which is not always their real selves. And this romantic ritual is generally the ritual of not being romantic; the pretence of being much more masculine and materialistic than they are. Boys in themselves are very sentimental. The most sentimental thing in the world is to hide your feelings; it is making too much of them. Stoicism is the direct product of sentimentalism; and schoolboys are sentimental individually, but stoical collectively.

For example, there were numbers of boys at my school besides myself who took a private pleasure in poetry; but red-hot iron would not have induced most of us to admit this to the masters, or to repeat poetry with the faintest inflection of rhythm or intelligence. That would have been anti-social egoism; we called it "showing off." I myself remember running to school (an extraordinary thing to do) with mere internal ecstasy in repeating lines of Walter Scott about the taunts of Marmion or the boasts of Roderick Dhu, and then repeating the same lines in class with the colourless decorum of a hurdy-gurdy. We all wished to be invisible in our uniformity; a mere pattern of Eton collars and coats.

But Simmons went even further. He felt it as an insult to brotherly equality if any task or knowledge out of the ordinary track was discovered even by accident. If a boy had learnt German in infancy; or if a boy knew some terms in music; or if a boy was forced to confess feebly that he had read "The Mill on the Floss" — then Simmons was in a perspiration of discomfort. He felt no personal anger, still less any petty jealousy, what he felt was an honourable and generous shame. He hated it as a lady hates coarseness in a pantomime; it made him want to hide himself. Just that feeling of impersonal ignominy which most of us have when some one betrays indecent ignorance, Simmons had when some one betrayed special knowledge. He writhed and went red in the face; he used to put up the lid of his desk to hide his blushes for human dignity, and from behind this barrier would whisper protests which had the hoarse emphasis of pain. "O, shut up, I say... O, I say, shut up.... O, shut it, can't you?" Once when a little boy admitted that he had heard of the Highland claymore, Simmons literally hid his head inside his desk and dropped the lid upon it in desperation; and when I was for a moment transferred from the bottom of the form for knowing the name of Cardinal Newman, I thought he would have rushed from the room.

His psychological eccentricity increased; if one can call that an eccentricity which was a wild worship of the ordinary. At last he grew so sensitive that he could not even bear any question answered correctly without grief. He felt there was a touch of disloyalty, of unfraternal individualism, even about knowing the right answer to a sum. If asked the date of the battle of Hastings, he considered it due to social tact and general good feeling to answer 1067. This chivalrous exaggeration led to bad feeling between him and the school authority, which ended in a rupture unexpectedly violent in the case of so good-humoured a creature. He fled from the school, and it was discovered upon inquiry that he had fled from his home also.

I never expected to see him again; yet it is one of the two or three odd coincidences of my life that I did see him. At some public sports or recreation ground I saw a group of rather objectless youths, one of whom was wearing the dashing uniform of a private in the Lancers. Inside that uniform was the tall figure, shy face, and dark, stiff hair of Simmons. He had gone to the one place where every one is dressed alike — a regiment. I know nothing more; perhaps he was killed in Africa. But when England was full of flags and false triumphs, when everybody was talking manly trash about the whelps of the lion and the brave boys in red, I often heard a voice echoing in the under-caverns of my memory, “Shut up... O, shut up... O, I say, shut it.”

Cheese

My forthcoming work in five volumes, “The Neglect of Cheese in European Literature” is a work of such unprecedented and laborious detail that it is doubtful if I shall live to finish it. Some overflowings from such a fountain of information may therefore be permitted to springle these pages. I cannot yet wholly explain the neglect to which I refer. Poets have been mysteriously silent on the subject of cheese. Virgil, if I remember right, refers to it several times, but with too much Roman restraint. He does not let himself go on cheese. The only other poet I can think of just now who seems to have had some sensibility on the point was the nameless author of the nursery rhyme which says: “If all the trees were bread and cheese” — which is, indeed a rich and gigantic vision of the higher gluttony. If all the trees were bread and cheese there would be considerable deforestation in any part of England where I was living. Wild and wide woodlands would reel and fade before me as rapidly as they ran after Orpheus. Except Virgil and this anonymous rhymer, I can recall no verse about cheese. Yet it has every quality which we require in exalted poetry. It is a short, strong word; it rhymes to “breeze” and “seas” (an essential point); that it is emphatic in sound is admitted even by the civilization of the modern cities. For their citizens, with no apparent intention except emphasis, will often say, “Cheese it!” or even “Quite the cheese.” The substance itself is imaginative. It is ancient — sometimes in the individual case, always in the type and custom. It is simple, being directly derived from milk, which is one of the ancestral drinks, not lightly to be corrupted with soda-water. You know, I hope (though I myself have only just thought of it), that the four rivers of Eden were milk, water, wine, and ale. Aerated waters only appeared after the Fall.

But cheese has another quality, which is also the very soul of song. Once in endeavouring to lecture in several places at once, I made an eccentric journey across England, a journey of so irregular and even illogical shape that it necessitated my having lunch on four successive days in four roadside inns in four different counties. In each inn they had nothing but bread and cheese; nor can I imagine why a man should want more than bread and cheese, if he can get enough of it. In each inn the cheese was good; and in each inn it was different. There was a noble Wensleydale cheese in Yorkshire, a Cheshire cheese in Cheshire, and so on. Now, it is just here that true poetic civilization differs from that paltry and mechanical civilization which holds us all in bondage. Bad customs are universal and rigid, like modern militarism. Good customs are universal and varied, like native chivalry and self-defence. Both the good and bad civilization cover us as with a canopy, and protect us from all that is outside. But a good civilization spreads over us freely like a tree, varying and yielding because it is alive. A bad civilization stands up and sticks out above us like an umbrella — artificial, mathematical in shape; not merely universal, but uniform. So it is with the contrast between the substances that vary and the substances that are the same wherever they penetrate. By a wise doom of heaven men were commanded to eat cheese, but not the same cheese. Being really universal it varies from valley to valley. But if, let us say, we compare cheese with soap (that vastly inferior substance), we shall see that soap tends more and more to be merely Smith’s Soap or Brown’s Soap, sent automatically all over the world. If the Red Indians have soap it is Smith’s Soap. If the Grand Lama has soap it is Brown’s soap. There is nothing subtly and strangely Buddhist, nothing tenderly Tibetan, about his soap. I fancy the Grand Lama does not eat cheese (he is not worthy), but if he does it is probably a local cheese, having some real relation to his life and outlook. Safety matches, tinned foods, patent medicines are sent all over the world; but they are not produced all over the world. Therefore there is in them a mere dead identity, never that soft play of slight variation which exists in things produced everywhere out of the soil, in the milk of the kine, or the fruits of the orchard. You can get a whisky and soda at every outpost of the Empire: that is why so many Empire-builders go mad. But you are not tasting or touching any environment, as in the cider of Devonshire or the grapes of the Rhine. You are not approaching Nature in one of her myriad tints of mood, as in the holy act of eating cheese.

When I had done my pilgrimage in the four wayside public-houses I reached one of the great northern cities, and there I proceeded, with great rapidity and complete inconsistency, to a large and elaborate restaurant, where I knew I could get many other things besides bread and cheese. I could get that also, however; or at least I expected to get it; but I was sharply reminded that I had entered Babylon, and left England behind. The waiter brought me cheese, indeed, but cheese cut up into contemptibly small pieces; and it is the awful fact that, instead of Christian bread, he brought me biscuits. Biscuits — to one who had eaten the cheese of four great countrysides! Biscuits — to one who had proved anew for himself the sanctity of the ancient wedding between cheese and bread! I addressed the waiter in warm and moving terms. I asked him who he was that he should put asunder those whom Humanity had joined. I asked him if he did not feel, as an artist, that a solid but yielding substance like cheese went naturally with a solid, yielding substance like bread; to eat it off biscuits is like eating it off slates. I asked him if, when he said his prayers, he was so supercilious as to pray for his daily biscuits. He gave me generally to understand that he was only obeying a custom of Modern Society. I have therefore resolved to raise my voice, not against the waiter, but against Modern Society, for this huge and unparalleled modern wrong.

The Red Town

When a man says that democracy is false because most people are stupid, there are several courses which the philosopher may pursue. The most obvious is to hit him smartly and with precision on the exact tip of the nose. But if you have scruples (moral or physical) about this course, you may proceed to employ Reason, which in this case has all the savage solidity of a blow with the fist. It is stupid to say that “most people” are stupid. It is like saying “most people are tall,” when it is obvious that “tall” can only mean taller than most people. It is absurd to denounce the majority of mankind as below the average of mankind.

Should the man have been hammered on the nose and brained with logic, and should he still remain cold, a third course opens: lead him by the hand (himself half-willing) towards some sunlit and yet secret meadow and ask him who made the names of the common wild flowers. They were ordinary people, so far as any one knows, who gave to one flower the name of the Star of Bethlehem and to another and much commoner flower the tremendous title of the Eye of Day. If you cling to the snobbish notion that common people are prosaic, ask any common person for the local names of the flowers, names which vary not only from county to county, but even from dale to dale.

But, curiously enough, the case is much stronger than this. It will be said that this poetry is peculiar to the country populace, and that the dim democracies of our modern towns at least have lost it. For some extraordinary reason they have not lost it. Ordinary London slang is full of witty things said by nobody in particular. True, the creed of our cruel cities is not so sane and just as the creed of the old countryside; but the people are just as clever in giving names to their sins in the city as in giving names to their joys in the wilderness. One could not better sum up Christianity than by calling a small white insignificant flower “The Star of Bethlehem.” But then, again, one could not better sum up the philosophy deduced from Darwinism than in the one verbal picture of “having your monkey up.”

Who first invented these violent felicities of language? Who first spoke of a man “being off his head”? The obvious comment on a lunatic is that his head is off him; yet the other phrase is far more fantastically exact. There is about every madman a singular sensation that his body has walked off and left the important part of him behind.

But the cases of this popular perfection in phrase are even stronger when they are more vulgar. What concentrated irony and imagination there is for instance, in the metaphor which describes a man doing a midnight flitting as “shooting the moon”? It expresses everything about the run away: his eccentric occupation, his improbable explanations, his furtive air as of a hunter, his constant glances at the blank clock in the sky.

No; the English democracy is weak enough about a number of things; for instance, it is weak in politics. But there is no doubt that democracy is wonderfully strong in literature. Very few books that the cultured class has produced of late have been such good literature as the expression “painting the town red.”

Oddly enough, this last Cockney epigram clings to my memory. For as I was walking a little while ago round a corner near Victoria I realized for the first time that a familiar lamp-post was painted all over with a bright vermilion just as if it were trying (in spite of the obvious bodily disqualification) to pretend that it was a pillar-box. I have since heard official explanations of these startling and scarlet objects. But my first fancy was that some dissipated gentleman on his way home at four o’clock in the morning had attempted to paint the town red and got only as far as one lamp-post.

I began to make a fairy tale about the man; and, indeed, this phrase contains both a fairy tale and a philosophy; it really states almost the whole truth about those pure outbreaks of pagan enjoyment to which all healthy men have often been tempted. It expresses the desire to have levity on a large scale which is the essence of such a mood. The rowdy young man is not content to paint his tutor’s door green: he would like to paint the whole city scarlet. The word which to us best recalls such gigantesque idiocy is the word “mafficking.” The slaves of that saturnalia were not only painting the town red; they thought that they were painting the map red — that they were painting the world red. But, indeed, this Imperial debauch has in it something worse than the mere larkiness which is my present topic; it has an element of real self-flattery and of sin. The Jingo who wants to admire himself is worse than the blackguard who only wants to enjoy himself. In a very old ninth-century illumination which I have seen, depicting the war of the rebel angels in heaven, Satan is represented as distributing to his followers peacock feathers — the symbols of an evil pride. Satan also distributed peacock feathers to his followers on Mafeking Night...

But taking the case of ordinary pagan recklessness and pleasure seeking, it is, as we have said, well expressed in this image. First, because it conveys this notion of filling the world with one private folly; and secondly, because of the profound idea involved in the choice of colour. Red is the most joyful and dreadful thing in the physical universe; it is the fiercest note, it is the highest light, it is the place where the walls of this world of ours wear thinnest and something beyond burns through. It glows in the blood which sustains and in the fire which destroys us, in the roses of our romance and in the awful cup of our religion. It stands for all passionate happiness, as in faith or in first love.

Now, the profligate is he who wishes to spread this crimson of conscious joy over everything; to have excitement at every moment; to paint everything red. He bursts a thousand barrels of wine to incarnadine the streets; and sometimes (in his last madness) he will butcher beasts and men to dip his gigantic brushes in their blood. For it marks the sacredness of red in nature, that it is secret even when it is ubiquitous, like blood in the human body, which is omnipresent, yet invisible. As long as blood lives it is hidden; it is only dead blood that we see. But the earlier parts of the rake’s progress are very natural and amusing. Painting the town red is a delightful thing until it is done. It would be splendid to see the cross of St. Paul’s as red as the cross of St. George, and the gallons of red paint running down the dome or dripping from the Nelson Column. But when it is done, when you have painted the town red, an extraordinary thing happens. You cannot see any red at all.

I can see, as in a sort of vision, the successful artist standing in the midst of that frightful city, hung on all sides with the scarlet of his shame. And then, when everything is red, he will long for a red rose in a green hedge and long in vain; he will dream of a red leaf and be unable even to imagine it. He has desecrated the divine colour, and he can no longer see it, though it is all around. I see him, a single black figure against the red-hot hell that he has kindled, where spires and turrets stand up like immobile flames: he is stiffened in a sort of agony of prayer. Then the mercy of Heaven is loosened, and I see one or two flakes of snow very slowly begin to fall.

The Furrows

As I see the corn grow green all about my neighbourhood, there rushes on me for no reason in particular a memory of the winter. I say "rushes," for that is the very word for the old sweeping lines of the ploughed fields. From some accidental turn of a train-journey or a walking tour, I saw suddenly the fierce rush of the furrows. The furrows are like arrows; they fly along an arc of sky. They are like leaping animals; they vault an inviolable hill and roll down the other side. They are like battering battalions; they rush over a hill with flying squadrons and carry it with a cavalry charge. They have all the air of Arabs sweeping a desert, of rockets sweeping the sky, of torrents sweeping a watercourse. Nothing ever seemed so living as those brown lines as they shot sheer from the height of a ridge down to their still whirl of the valley. They were swifter than arrows, fiercer than Arabs, more riotous and rejoicing than rockets. And yet they were only thin straight lines drawn with difficulty, like a diagram, by painful and patient men. The men that ploughed tried to plough straight; they had no notion of giving great sweeps and swirls to the eye. Those cataracts of cloven earth; they were done by the grace of God. I had always rejoiced in them; but I had never found any reason for my joy. There are some very clever people who cannot enjoy the joy unless they understand it. There are other and even cleverer people who say that they lose the joy the moment they do understand it. Thank God I was never clever, and I could always enjoy things when I understood them and when I didn't. I can enjoy the orthodox Tory, though I could never understand him. I can also enjoy the orthodox Liberal, though I understand him only too well.

But the splendour of furrowed fields is this: that like all brave things they are made straight, and therefore they bend. In everything that bows gracefully there must be an effort at stiffness. Bows arc beautiful when they bend only because they try to remain rigid; and sword-blades can curl like silver ribbons only because they are certain to spring straight again. But the same is true of every tough curve of the tree-trunk, of every strong-backed bend of the bough; there is hardly any such thing in Nature as a mere droop of weakness. Rigidity yielding a little, like justice swayed by mercy, is the whole beauty of the earth. The cosmos is a diagram just bent beautifully out of shape. Everything tries to be straight; and everything just fortunately fails.

The foil may curve in the lunge, but there is nothing beautiful about beginning the battle with a crooked foil. So the strict aim, the strong doctrine, may give a little in the actual fight with facts: but that is no reason for beginning with a weak doctrine or a twisted aim. Do not be an opportunist; try to be theoretic at all the opportunities; fate can be trusted to do all the opportunist part of it. Do not try to bend, any more than the trees try to bend. Try to grow straight, and life will bend you.

Alas! I am giving the moral before the fable; and yet I hardly think that otherwise you could see all that I mean in that enormous vision of the ploughed hills. These great furrowed slopes are the oldest architecture of man: the oldest astronomy was his guide, the oldest botany his object. And for geometry, the mere word proves my case.

But when I looked at those torrents of ploughed parallels, that great rush of rigid lines, I seemed to see the whole huge achievement of democracy, Here was mere equality: but equality seen in bulk is more superb than any supremacy. Equality free and flying, equality rushing over hill and dale, equality charging the world — that was the meaning of those military furrows, military in their identity, military in their energy. They sculptured hill and dale with strong curves merely because they did not mean to curve at all. They made the strong lines of landscape with their stiffly driven swords of the soil. It is not only nonsense, but blasphemy, to say that man has spoilt the country. Man has created the country; it was his business, as the image of God. No hill, covered with common scrub or patches of purple heath, could have been so sublimely hilly as that ridge up to which the ranked furrows rose like aspiring angels. No valley, confused with needless cottages and towns, can have been so utterly valleyish as that abyss into which the down-rushing furrows raged like demons into the swirling pit.

It is the hard lines of discipline and equality that mark out a landscape and give it all its mould and meaning. It is just because the lines of the furrow arc ugly and even that the landscape is living and superb. As I think I have remarked elsewhere, the Republic is founded on the plough.

The Philosophy of Sight-seeing

It would be really interesting to know exactly why an intelligent person — by which I mean a person with any sort of intelligence — can and does dislike sight-seeing. Why does the idea of a char-a-banc full of tourists going to see the birth-place of Nelson or the death-scene of Simon de Montfort strike a strange chill to the soul? I can tell quite easily what this dim aversion to tourists and their antiquities does not arise from — at least, in my case. Whatever my other vices (and they are, of course, of a lurid cast), I can lay my hand on my heart and say that it does not arise from a paltry contempt for the antiquities, nor yet from the still more paltry contempt for the tourists. If there is one thing more dwarfish and pitiful than irreverence for the past, it is irreverence for the present, for the passionate and many-coloured procession of life, which includes the char-a-banc among its many chariots and triumphal cars. I know nothing so vulgar as that contempt for vulgarity which sneers at the clerks on a Bank Holiday or the Cockneys on Margate sands. The man who notices nothing about the clerk except his Cockney accent would have noticed nothing about Simon de Montfort except his French accent. The man who jeers at Jones for having dropped an “h” might have jeered at Nelson for having dropped an arm. Scorn springs easily to the essentially vulgar-minded, and it is as easy to gibe at Montfort as a foreigner or at Nelson as a cripple, as to gibe at the struggling speech and the maimed bodies of the mass of our comic and tragic race. If I shrink faintly from this affair of tourists and tombs, it is certainly not because I am so profane as to think lightly either of the tombs or the tourists. I reverence those great men who had the courage to die; I reverence also these little men who have the courage to live.

Even if this be conceded, another suggestion may be made. It may be said that antiquities and commonplace crowds are indeed good things, like violets and geraniums; but they do not go together. A billycock is a beautiful object (it may be eagerly urged), but it is not in the same style of architecture as Ely Cathedral; it is a dome, a small rococo dome in the Renaissance manner, and does not go with the pointed arches that assault heaven like spears. A char-a-banc is lovely (it may be said) if placed upon a pedestal and worshipped for its own sweet sake; but it does not harmonize with the curve and outline of the old three-decker on which Nelson died; its beauty is quite of another sort. Therefore (we will suppose our sage to argue) antiquity and democracy should be kept separate, as inconsistent things. Things may be inconsistent in time and space which are by no means inconsistent in essential value and idea. Thus the Catholic Church has water for the new-born and oil for the dying: but she never mixes oil and water.

This explanation is plausible; but I do not find it adequate. The first objection is that the same smell of bathos haunts the soul in the case of all deliberate and elaborate visits to "beauty spots," even by persons of the most elegant position or the most protected privacy. Specially visiting the Coliseum by moonlight always struck me as being as vulgar as visiting it by limelight. One millionaire standing on the top of Mont Blanc, one millionaire standing in the desert by the Sphinx, one millionaire standing in the middle of Stonehenge, is just as comic as one millionaire is anywhere else; and that is saying a good deal. On the other hand, if the billycock had come privately and naturally into Ely Cathedral, no enthusiast for Gothic harmony would think of objecting to the billycock — so long, of course, as it was not worn on the head. But there is indeed a much deeper objection to this theory of the two incompatible excellences of antiquity and popularity. For the truth is that it has been almost entirely the antiquities that have normally interested the populace; and it has been almost entirely the populace who have systematically preserved the antiquities. The Oldest Inhabitant has always been a clodhopper; I have never heard of his being a gentleman. It is the peasants who preserve all traditions of the sites of battles or the building of churches. It is they who remember, so far as any one remembers, the glimpses of fairies or the graver wonders of saints. In the classes above them the supernatural has been slain by the supercilious. That is a true and tremendous text in Scripture which says that "where there is no vision the people perish." But it is equally true in practice that where there is no people the visions perish.

The idea must be abandoned, then, that this feeling of faint dislike towards popular sight-seeing is due to any inherent incompatibility between the idea of special shrines and trophies and the idea of large masses of ordinary men. On the contrary, these two elements of sanctity and democracy have been specially connected and allied throughout history. The shrines and trophies were often put up by ordinary men. They were always put up for ordinary men. To whatever things the fastidious modern artist may choose to apply his theory of specialist judgment, and an aristocracy of taste, he must necessarily find it difficult really to apply it to such historic and monumental art. Obviously, a public building is meant to impress the public. The most aristocratic tomb is a democratic tomb, because it exists to be seen; the only aristocratic thing is the decaying corpse, not the undecaying marble; and if the man wanted to be thoroughly aristocratic, he should be buried in his own back-garden. The chapel of the most narrow and exclusive sect is universal outside, even if it is limited inside, its walls and windows confront all points of the compass and all quarters of the cosmos. It may be small as a dwelling-place, but it is universal as a monument; if its sectarians had really wished to be private they should have met in a private house. Whenever and wherever we erect a national or municipal hall, pillar, or statue, we are speaking to the crowd like a demagogue.

The statue of every statesman offers itself for election as much as the statesman himself. Every epitaph on a church slab is put up for the mob as much as a placard in a General Election. And if we follow this track of reflection we shall, I think, really find why it is that modern sight-seeing jars on something in us, something that is not a caddish contempt for graves nor an equally caddish contempt for cads. For, after all, there is many a — churchyard which consists mostly of dead cads; but that does not make it less sacred or less sad.

The real explanation, I fancy, is this: that these cathedrals and columns of triumph were meant, not for people more cultured and self-conscious than modern tourists, but for people much rougher and more casual. Those leaps of live stone like frozen fountains, were so placed and poised as to catch the eye of ordinary inconsiderate men going about their daily business; and when they are so seen they are never forgotten. The true way of reviving the magic of our great minsters and historic sepulchres is not the one which Ruskin was always recommending. It is not to be more careful of historic buildings. Nay, it is rather to be more careless of them. Buy a bicycle in Maidstone to visit an aunt in Dover, and you will see Canterbury Cathedral as it was built to be seen. Go through London only as the shortest way between Croydon and Hampstead, and the Nelson Column will (for the first time in your life) remind you of Nelson. You will appreciate Hereford Cathedral if you have come for cider, not if you have come for architecture. You will really see the Place Vendome if you have come on business, not if you have come for art. For it was for the simple and laborious generations of men, practical, troubled about many things, that our fathers reared those portents. There is, indeed, another element, not unimportant: the fact that people have gone to cathedrals to pray. But in discussing modern artistic cathedral-lovers, we need not consider this.

A Criminal Head

When men of science (or, more often, men who talk about science) speak of studying history or human society scientifically they always forget that there are two quite distinct questions involved. It may be that certain facts of the body go with certain facts of the soul, but it by no means follows that a grasp of such facts of the body goes with a grasp of the things of the soul. A man may show very learnedly that certain mixtures of race make a happy community, but he may be quite wrong (he generally is) about what communities are happy. A man may explain scientifically how a certain physical type involves a really bad man, but he may be quite wrong (he generally is) about which sort of man is really bad. Thus his whole argument is useless, for he understands only one half of the equation.

The drearier kind of don may come to me and say, “Celts are unsuccessful; look at Irishmen, for instance.” To which I should reply, “You may know all about Celts; but it is obvious that you know nothing about Irishmen. The Irish are not in the least unsuccessful, unless it is unsuccessful to wander from their own country over a great part of the earth, in which case the English are unsuccessful too.” A man with a bumpy head may say to me (as a kind of New Year greeting), “Fools have microcephalous skulls,” or what not. To which I shall reply, “In order to be certain of that, you must be a good judge both of the physical and of the mental fact. It is not enough that you should know a microcephalous skull when you see it. It is also necessary that you should know a fool when you see him; and I have a suspicion that you do not know a fool when you see him, even after the most lifelong and intimate of all forms of acquaintanceship.”

The trouble with most sociologists, criminologists, etc., is that while their knowledge of their own details is exhaustive and subtle, their knowledge of man and society, to which these are to be applied, is quite exceptionally superficial and silly. They know everything about biology, but almost nothing about life. Their ideas of history, for instance, are simply cheap and uneducated. Thus some famous and foolish professor measured the skull of Charlotte Corday to ascertain the criminal type; he had not historical knowledge enough to know that if there is any “criminal type,” certainly Charlotte Corday had not got it. The skull, I believe, afterwards turned out not to be Charlotte Corday’s at all; but that is another story. The point is that the poor old man was trying to match Charlotte Corday’s mind with her skull without knowing anything whatever about her mind.

But I came yesterday upon a yet more crude and startling example.

In a popular magazine there is one of the usual articles about criminology; about whether wicked men could be made good if their heads were taken to pieces. As by far the wickedest men I know of are much too rich and powerful ever to submit to the process, the speculation leaves me cold. I always notice with pain, however, a curious absence of the portraits of living millionaires from such galleries of awful examples; most of the portraits in which we are called upon to remark the line of the nose or the curve of the forehead appear to be the portraits of ordinary sad men, who stole because they were hungry or killed because they were in a rage. The physical peculiarity seems to vary infinitely; sometimes it is the remarkable square head, sometimes it is the unmistakable round head; sometimes the learned draw attention to the abnormal development, sometimes to the striking deficiency of the back of the head. I have tried to discover what is the invariable factor, the one permanent mark of the scientific criminal type; after exhaustive classification I have to come to the conclusion that it consists in being poor.

But it was among the pictures in this article that I received the final shock; the enlightenment which has left me in lasting possession of the fact that criminologists are generally more ignorant than criminals. Among the starved and bitter, but quite human, faces was one head, neat but old-fashioned, with the powder of the 18th century and a certain almost pert primness in the dress which marked the conventions of the upper middle-class about 1790. The face was lean and lifted stiffly up, the eyes stared forward with a frightful sincerity, the lip was firm with a heroic firmness; all the more pathetic because of a certain delicacy and deficiency of male force, Without knowing who it was, one could have guessed that it was a man in the manner of Shakespeare’s Brutus, a man of piercingly pure intentions, prone to use government as a mere machine for morality, very sensitive to the charge of inconsistency and a little too proud of his own clean and honourable life. I say I should have known this almost from the face alone, even if I had not known who it was.

But I did know who it was. It was Robespierre. And underneath the portrait of this pale and too eager moralist were written these remarkable words: “Deficiency of ethical instincts,” followed by something to the effect that he knew no mercy (which is certainly untrue), and by some nonsense about a retreating forehead, a peculiarity which he shared with Louis XVI and with half the people of his time and ours.

Then it was that I measured the staggering distance between the knowledge and the ignorance of science. Then I knew that all criminology might be worse than worthless, because of its utter ignorance of that human material of which it is supposed to be speaking. The man who could say that Robespierre was deficient in ethical instincts is a man utterly to be disregarded in all calculations of ethics. He might as well say that John Bunyan was deficient in ethical instincts. You may say that Robespierre was morbid and unbalanced, and you may say the same of Bunyan. But if these two men were morbid and unbalanced they were morbid and unbalanced by feeling too much about morality, not by feeling too little. You may say if you like that Robespierre was (in a negative sort of way) mad. But if he was mad he was mad on ethics. He and a company of keen and pugnacious men, intellectually impatient of unreason and wrong, resolved that Europe should not be choked up in every channel by oligarchies and state secrets that already stank. The work was the greatest that was ever given to men to do except that which Christianity did in dragging Europe out of the abyss of barbarism after the Dark Ages. But they did it, and no one else could have done it.

Certainly we could not do it. We are not ready to fight all Europe on a point of justice. We are not ready to fling our most powerful class as mere refuse to the foreigner; we are not ready to shatter the great estates at a stroke; we are not ready to trust ourselves in an awful moment of utter dissolution in order to make all things seem intelligible and all men feel honourable henceforth. We are not strong enough to be as strong as Danton. We are not strong enough to be as weak as Robespierre. There is only one thing, it seems, that we can do. Like a mob of children, we can play games upon this ancient battlefield; we can pull up the bones and skulls of the tyrants and martyrs of that unimaginable war; and we can chatter to each other childishly and innocently about skulls that are imbecile and heads that are criminal. I do not know whose heads are criminal, but I think I know whose are imbecile.

The Wrath of the Roses

The position of the rose among flowers is like that of the dog among animals. It is so much that both are domesticated as that have some dim feeling that they were always domesticated. There are wild roses and there are wild dogs. I do not know the wild dogs; wild roses are very nice. But nobody ever thinks of either of them if the name is abruptly mentioned in a gossip or a poem. On the other hand, there are tame tigers and tame cobras, but if one says, “I have a cobra in my pocket,” or “There is a tiger in the music-room,” the adjective “tame” has to be somewhat hastily added. If one speaks of beasts one thinks first of wild beasts; if of flowers one thinks first of wild flowers.

But there are two great exceptions; caught so completely into the wheel of man’s civilization, entangled so unalterably with his ancient emotions and images, that the artificial product seems more natural than the natural. The dog is not a part of natural history, but of human history; and the real rose grows in a garden. All must regard the elephant as something tremendous, but tamed; and many, especially in our great cultured centres, regard every bull as presumably a mad bull. In the same way we think of most garden trees and plants as fierce creatures of the forest or morass taught at last to endure the curb.

But with the dog and the rose this instinctive principle is reversed. With them we think of the artificial as the archetype; the earth-born as the erratic exception. We think vaguely of the wild dog as if he had run away, like the stray cat. And we cannot help fancying that the wonderful wild rose of our hedges has escaped by jumping over the hedge. Perhaps they fled together, the dog and the rose: a singular and (on the whole) an imprudent elopement. Perhaps the treacherous dog crept from the kennel, and the rebellious rose from the flower-bed, and they fought their way out in company, one with teeth and the other with thorns. Possibly this is why my dog becomes a wild dog when he sees roses, and kicks them anywhere. Possibly this is why the wild rose is called a dog-rose. Possibly not.

But there is this degree of dim barbaric truth in the quaint old-world legend that I have just invented. That in these two cases the civilized product is felt to be the fiercer, nay, even the wilder. Nobody seems to be afraid of a wild dog: he is classed among the jackals and the servile beasts.

The terrible cave canem is written over man’s creation. When we read “Beware of the Dog,” it means beware of the tame dog: for it is the tame dog that is terrible. He is terrible in proportion as he is tame: it is his loyalty and his virtues that are awful to the stranger, even the stranger within your gates; still more to the stranger halfway over your gates. He is alarmed at such deafening and furious docility; he flees from that great monster of mildness.

Well, I have much the same feeling when I look at the roses ranked red and thick and resolute round a garden; they seem to me bold and even blustering. I hasten to say that I know even less about my own garden than about anybody else’s garden. I know nothing about roses, not even their names. I know only the name Rose; and Rose is (in every sense of the word) a Christian name. It is Christian in the one absolute and primordial sense of Christian — that it comes down from the age of pagans. The rose can be seen, and even smelt, in Greek, Latin, Provencal, Gothic, Renascence, and Puritan poems. Beyond this mere word Rose, which (like wine and other noble words) is the same in all the tongues of white men, I know literally nothing. I have heard the more evident and advertised names. I know there is a flower which calls itself the Glory of Dijon — which I had supposed to be its cathedral. In any case, to have produced a rose and a cathedral is to have produced not only two very glorious and humane things, but also (as I maintain) two very soldierly and defiant things. I also know there is a rose called Marechal Niel — note once more the military ring.

And when I was walking round my garden the other day I spoke to my gardener (an enterprise of no little valour) and asked him the name of a strange dark rose that had somehow oddly taken my fancy. It was almost as if it reminded me of some turbid element in history and the soul. Its red was not only swarthy, but smoky; there was something congested and wrathful about its colour. It was at once theatrical and sulky. The gardener told me it was called Victor Hugo.

Therefore it is that I feel all roses to have some secret power about them; even their names may mean something in connexion with themselves, in which they differ from nearly all the sons of men. But the rose itself is royal and dangerous; long as it has remained in the rich house of civilization, it has never laid off its armour. A rose always looks like a mediaeval gentleman of Italy, with a cloak of crimson and a sword: for the thorn is the sword of the rose.

And there is this real moral in the matter; that we have to remember that civilization as it goes on ought not perhaps to grow more fighting — but ought to grow more ready to fight. The more valuable and reposeful is the order we have to guard, the more vivid should be our ultimate sense of vigilance and potential violence. And when I walk round a summer garden, I can understand how those high mad lords at the end of the Middle Ages, just before their swords clashed, caught at roses for their instinctive emblems of empire and rivalry. For to me any such garden is full of the wars of the roses.

The Gold of Glastonbury

One silver morning I walked into a small grey town of stone, like twenty other grey western towns, which happened to be called Glastonbury; and saw the magic thorn of near two thousand years growing in the open air as casually as any bush in my garden.

In Glastonbury, as in all noble and humane things, the myth is more important than the history. One cannot say anything stronger of the strange old tale of St. Joseph and the Thorn than that it dwarfs St. Dunstan. Standing among the actual stones and shrubs one thinks of the first century and not of the tenth; one's mind goes back beyond the Saxons and beyond the greatest statesman of the Dark Ages. The tale that Joseph of Arimathea came to Britain is presumably a mere legend. But it is not by any means so incredible or preposterous a legend as many modern people suppose. The popular notion is that the thing is quite comic and inconceivable; as if one said that Wat Tyler went to Chicago, or that John Bunyan discovered the North Pole. We think of Palestine as little, localized and very private, of Christ's followers as poor folk, astricti globis, rooted to their towns or trades; and we think of vast routes of travel and constant world-communications as things of recent and scientific origin. But this is wrong; at least, the last part of it is. It is part of that large and placid lie that the rationalists tell when they say that Christianity arose in ignorance and barbarism. Christianity arose in the thick of a brilliant and bustling cosmopolitan civilization. Long sea-voyages were not so quick, but were quite as incessant as to-day; and though in the nature of things Christ had not many rich followers, it is not unnatural to suppose that He had some. And a Joseph of Arimathea may easily have been a Roman citizen with a yacht that could visit Britain. The same fallacy is employed with the same partisan motive in the case of the Gospel of St. John; which critics say could not have been written by one of the first few Christians because of its Greek transcendentalism and its Platonic tone. I am no judge of the philology, but every human being is a divinely appointed judge of the philosophy: and the Platonic tone seems to me to prove nothing at all. Palestine was not a secluded valley of barbarians; it was an open province of a polyglot empire, overrun with all sorts of people of all kinds of education. To take a rough parallel: suppose some great prophet arose among the Boers in South Africa. The prophet himself might be a simple or unlettered man. But no one who knows the modern world would be surprised if one of his closest followers were a Professor from Heidelberg or an M.A. from Oxford.

All this is not urged here with any notion of proving that the tale of the thorn is not a myth; as I have said, it probably is a myth. It is urged with the much more important object of pointing out the proper attitude towards such myths.. The proper attitude is one of doubt and hope and of a kind of light mystery. The tale is certainly not impossible; as it is certainly not certain. And through all the ages since the Roman Empire men have fed their healthy fancies and their historical imagination upon the very twilight condition of such tales. But to-day real agnosticism has declined along with real theology. People cannot leave a creed alone; though it is the essence of a creed to be clear. But neither can they leave a legend alone; though it is the essence of a legend to be vague. That sane half scepticism which was found in all rustics, in all ghost tales and fairy tales, seems to be a lost secret. Modern people must make scientifically certain that St. Joseph did or did not go to Glastonbury, despite the fact that it is now quite impossible to find out; and that it does not, in a religious sense, very much matter. But it is essential to feel that he may have gone to Glastonbury: all songs, arts, and dedications branching and blossoming like the thorn, are rooted in some such sacred doubt. Taken thus, not heavily like a problem but lightly like an old tale, the thing does lead one along the road of very strange realities, and the thorn is found growing in the heart of a very secret maze of the soul. Something is really present in the place; some closer contact with the thing which covers Europe but is still a secret. Somehow the grey town and the green bush touch across the world the strange small country of the garden and the grave; there is verily some communion between the thorn tree and the crown of thorns.

A man never knows what tiny thing will startle him to such ancestral and impersonal tears. Piles of superb masonry will often pass like a common panorama; and on this grey and silver morning the ruined towers of the cathedral stood about me somewhat vaguely like grey clouds. But down in a hollow where the local antiquaries are making a fruitful excavation, a magnificent old ruffian with a pickaxe (whom I believe to have been St. Joseph of Arimathea) showed me a fragment of the old vaulted roof which he had found in the earth; and on the whitish grey stone there was just a faint brush of gold. There seemed a piercing and swordlike pathos, an unexpected fragrance of all forgotten or desecrated things, in the bare survival of that poor little pigment upon the imperishable rock. To the strong shapes of the Roman and the Gothic I had grown accustomed; but that weak touch of colour was at once tawdry and tender, like some popular keepsake. Then I knew that all my fathers were men like me; for the columns and arches were grave, and told of the gravity of the builders; but here was one touch of their gaiety. I almost expected it to fade from the stone as I stared. It was as if men had been able to preserve a fragment of a sunset.

And then I remembered how the artistic critics have always praised the grave tints and the grim shadows of the crumbling cloisters and abbey towers, and how they themselves often dress up like Gothic ruins in the sombre tones of dim grey walls or dark green ivy. I remembered how they hated almost all primary things, but especially primary colours. I knew they were appreciating much more delicately and truly than I the sublime skeleton and the mighty fungoids of the dead Glastonbury. But I stood for an instant alive in the living Glastonbury, gay with gold and coloured like the toy-book of a child.

The Futurists

It was a warm golden evening, fit for October, and I was watching (with regret) a lot of little black pigs being turned out of my garden, when the postman handed to me, with a perfunctory haste which doubtless masked his emotion, the Declaration of Futurism. If you ask me what Futurism is, I cannot tell you; even the Futurists themselves seem a little doubtful; perhaps they are waiting for the future to find out. But if you ask me what its Declaration is, I answer eagerly; for I can tell you quite a lot about that. It is written by an Italian named Marinetti, in a magazine which is called Poesia. It is headed “Declaration of Futurism” in enormous letters; it is divided off with little numbers; and it starts straight away like this: “1. We intend to glorify the love of danger, the custom of energy, the strengt of daring. 2. The essential elements of our poetry will be courage, audacity, and revolt. 3. Literature having up to now glorified thoughtful immobility, ecstasy, and slumber, we wish to exalt the aggressive movement, the feverish insomnia, running, the perilous leap, the cuff and the blow.” While I am quite willing to exalt the cuff within reason, it scarcely seems such an entirely new subject for literature as the Futurists imagine. It seems to me that even through the slumber which fills the Siege of Troy, the Song of Roland, and the Orlando Furioso, and in spite of the thoughtful immobility which marks “Pantagruel,” “Henry V,” and the Ballad of Chevy Chase, there are occasional gleams of an admiration for courage, a readiness to glorify the love of danger, and even the “strengt of daring,” I seem to remember, slightly differently spelt, somewhere in literature.

The distinction, however, seems to be that the warriors of the past went in for tournaments, which were at least dangerous for themselves, while the Futurists go in for motor-cars, which are mainly alarming for other people. It is the Futurist in his motor who does the “aggressive movement,” but it is the pedestrians who go in for the “running” and the “perilous leap.” Section No. 4 says, “We declare that the splendour of the world has been enriched with a new form of beauty, the beauty of speed. A race-automobile adorned with great pipes like serpents with explosive breath.... A race-automobile which seems to rush over exploding powder is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.” It is also much easier, if you have the money. It is quite clear, however, that you cannot be a Futurist at all unless you are frightfully rich. Then follows this lucid and soul-stirring sentence: “5. We will sing the praises of man holding the flywheel of which the ideal steering-post traverses the earth impelled itself around the circuit of its own orbit.” What a jolly song it would be — so hearty, and with such a simple swing in it! I can imagine the Futurists round the fire in a tavern trolling out in chorus some ballad with that incomparable refrain; shouting over their swaying flagons some such words as these:

A notion came into my head as new as it was bright
That poems might be written on the subject of a fight;
No praise was given to Lancelot, Achilles, Nap or Corbett,
But we will sing the praises of man holding the flywheel of which the ideal
steering-post traverses the earth impelled itself around the circuit of
its own orbit.

Then lest it should be supposed that Futurism would be so weak as to permit any democratic restraints upon the violence and levity of the luxurious classes, there would be a special verse in honour of the motors also:

My fathers scaled the mountains in their pilgrimages far,
But I feel full of energy while sitting in a car;
And petrol is the perfect wine, I lick it and absorb it,
So we will sing the praises of man holding the flywheel of which the ideal
steering-post traverses the earth impelled itself around the circuit of
its own orbit.

Yes, it would be a rollicking catch. I wish there were space to finish the song, or to detail all the other sections in the Declaration. Suffice it to say that Futurism has a gratifying dislike both of Liberal politics and Christian morals; I say gratifying because, however unfortunately the cross and the cap of liberty have quarrelled, they are always united in the feeble hatred of such silly megalomaniacs as these. They will “glorify war — the only true hygiene of the world — militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of Anarchism, the beautiful ideas which kill, and the scorn of woman.” They will “destroy museums, libraries, and fight against moralism, feminism, and all utilitarian cowardice.” The proclamation ends with an extraordinary passage which I cannot understand at all, all about something that is going to happen to Mr. Marinetti when he is forty. As far as I can make out he will then be killed by other poets, who will be overwhelmed with love and admiration for him. “They will come against us from far away, from everywhere, leaping on the cadence of their first poems, clawing the air with crooked fingers and scenting at the Academy gates the good smell of our decaying minds.” Well, it is satisfactory to be told, however obscurely, that this sort of thing is coming to an end some day, to be replaced by some other tomfoolery. And though I commonly refrain from clawing the air with crooked fingers, I can assure Mr. Marinetti that this omission does not disqualify me, and that I scent the good smell of his decaying mind all right.

I think the only other point of Futurism is contained in this sentence: “It is in Italy that we hurl this overthrowing and inflammatory Declaration, with which to-day we found Futurism, for we will free Italy from her numberless museums which cover her with countless cemeteries.” I think that rather sums it up. The best way, one would think, of freeing oneself from a museum would be not to go there. Mr. Marinetti’s fathers and grandfathers freed Italy from prisons and torture chambers, places where people were held by force. They, being in the bondage of “moralism,” attacked Governments as unjust, real Governments, with real guns. Such was their utilitarian cowardice that they would die in hundreds upon the bayonets of Austria. I can well imagine why Mr. Marinetti in his motor-car does not wish to look back at the past. If there was one thing that could make him look smaller even than before it is that roll of dead men’s drums and that dream of Garibaldi going by. The old Radical ghosts go by, more real than the living men, to assault I know not what ramparted city in hell. And meanwhile the Futurist stands outside a museum in a warlike attitude, and defiantly tells the official at the turnstile that he will never, never come in.

There is a certain solid use in fools. It is not so much that they rush in where angels fear to tread, but rather that they let out what devils intend to do. Some perversion of folly will float about nameless and pervade a whole society; then some lunatic gives it a name, and henceforth it is harmless. With all really evil things, when the danger has appeared the danger is over. Now it may be hoped that the self-indulgent sprawlers of Poesia have put a name once and for all to their philosophy. In the case of their philosophy, to put a name to it is to put an end to it. Yet their philosophy has been very widespread in our time; it could hardly have been pointed and finished except by this perfect folly. The creed of which (please God) this is the flower and finish consists ultimately in this statement: that it is bold and spirited to appeal to the future. Now, it is entirely weak and half-witted to appeal to the future. A brave man ought to ask for what he wants, not for what he expects to get. A brave man who wants Atheism in the future calls himself an Atheist; a brave man who wants Socialism, a Socialist; a brave man who wants Catholicism, a Catholic. But a weak-minded man who does not know what he wants in the future calls himself a Futurist.

They have driven all the pigs away. Oh that they had driven away the prigs, and left the pigs! The sky begins to droop with darkness and all birds and blossoms to descend unfaltering into the healthy underworld where things slumber and grow. There was just one true phrase of Mr. Marinetti's about himself: "the feverish insomnia." The whole universe is pouring headlong to the happiness of the night. It is only the madman who has not the courage to sleep.

Dukes

The Duc de Chambertin-Pommard was a small but lively relic of a really aristocratic family, the members of which were nearly all Atheists up to the time of the French Revolution, but since that event (beneficial in such various ways) had been very devout. He was a Royalist, a Nationalist, and a perfectly sincere patriot in that particular style which consists of ceaselessly asserting that one’s country is not so much in danger as already destroyed. He wrote cheery little articles for the Royalist Press entitled “The End of France” or “The Last Cry,” or what not, and he gave the final touches to a picture of the Kaiser riding across a pavement of prostrate Parisians with a glow of patriotic exultation. He was quite poor, and even his relations had no money. He walked briskly to all his meals at a little open cafe, and he looked just like everybody else.

Living in a country where aristocracy does not exist, he had a high opinion of it. He would yearn for the swords and the stately manners of the Pommards before the Revolution — most of whom had been (in theory) Republicans. But he turned with a more practical eagerness to the one country in Europe where the tricolour has never flown and men have never been roughly equalized before the State. The beacon and comfort of his life was England, which all Europe sees clearly as the one pure aristocracy that remains. He had, moreover, a mild taste for sport and kept an English bulldog, and he believed the English to be a race of bulldogs, of heroic squires, and hearty yeomen vassals, because he read all this in English Conservative papers, written by exhausted little Levantine clerks. But his reading was naturally for the most part in the French Conservative papers (though he knew English well), and it was in these that he first heard of the horrible Budget. There he read of the confiscatory revolution planned by the Lord Chancellor of the Exchequer, the sinister Georges Lloyd. He also read how chivalrously Prince Arthur Balfour of Burleigh had defied that demagogue, assisted by Austen the Lord Chamberlain and the gay and witty Walter Lang. And being a brisk partisan and a capable journalist, he decided to pay England a special visit and report to his paper upon the struggle.

He drove for an eternity in an open fly through beautiful woods, with a letter of introduction in his pocket to one duke, who was to introduce him to another duke. The endless and numberless avenues of bewildering pine woods gave him a queer feeling that he was driving through the countless corridors of a dream. Yet the vast silence and freshness healed his irritation at modern ugliness and unrest. It seemed a background fit for the return of chivalry. In such a forest a king and all his court might lose themselves hunting or a knight errant might perish with no companion but God. The castle itself when he reached it was somewhat smaller than he had expected, but he was delighted with its romantic and castellated outline. He was just about to alight when somebody opened two enormous gates at the side and the vehicle drove briskly through.

“That is not the house?” he inquired politely of the driver.

“No, sir,” said the driver, controlling the corners of his mouth. “The lodge, sir.”

“Indeed,” said the Duc de Chambertin-Pommard, “that is where the Duke’s land begins?”

“Oh no, sir,” said the man, quite in distress. “We’ve been in his Grace’s land all day.”

The Frenchman thanked him and leant back in the carriage, feeling as if everything were incredibly huge and vast, like Gulliver in the country of the Brobdingnags.

He got out in front of a long facade of a somewhat severe building, and a little careless man in a shooting jacket and knickerbockers ran down the steps. He had a weak, fair moustache and dull, blue, babyish eyes; his features were insignificant, but his manner extremely pleasant and hospitable, This was the Duke of Aylesbury, perhaps the largest landowner in Europe, and known only as a horsebreeder until he began to write abrupt little letters about the Budget. He led the French Duke upstairs, talking trivialties in a hearty way, and there presented him to another and more important English oligarch, who got up from a writing-desk with a slightly senile jerk. He had a gleaming bald head and glasses; the lower part of his face was masked with a short, dark beard, which did not conceal a beaming smile, not unmixed with sharpness. He stooped a little as he ran, like some sedentary head clerk or cashier; and even without the cheque-book and papers on his desk would have given the impression of a merchant or man of business. He was dressed in a light grey check jacket. He was the Duke of Windsor, the great Unionist statesman. Between these two loose, amiable men, the little Gaul stood erect in his black frock coat, with the monstrous gravity of French ceremonial good manners. This stiffness led the Duke of

Windsor to put him at his ease (like a tenant), and he said, rubbing his hands:

“I was delighted with your letter... delighted. I shall be very pleased if I can give you — er — any details.”

“My visit,” said the Frenchman, “scarcely suffices for the scientific exhaustion of detail. I seek only the idea. The idea, that is always the immediate thing.”

“Quite so,” said the other rapidly; “quite so... the idea.”

Feeling somehow that it was his turn (the English Duke having done all that could be required of him) Pommard had to say: “I mean the idea of aristocracy. I regard this as the last great battle for the idea. Aristocracy, like any other thing, must justify itself to mankind. Aristocracy is good because it preserves a picture of human dignity in a world where that dignity is often obscured by servile necessities. Aristocracy alone can keep a certain high reticence of soul and body, a certain noble distance between the sexes.”

The Duke of Aylesbury, who had a clouded recollection of having squirted soda-water down the neck of a Countess on the previous evening, looked somewhat gloomy, as if lamenting the theoretic spirit of the Latin race. The elder Duke laughed heartily, and said: “Well, well, you know; we English are horribly practical. With us the great question is the land. Out here in the country ... do you know this part?”

“Yes, yes,” cried the Frenchmen eagerly. “I See what you mean. The country! the old rustic life of humanity! A holy war upon the bloated and filthy towns. What right have these anarchists to attack your busy and prosperous countrysides? Have they not thriven under your management? Are not the English villages always growing larger and gayer under the enthusiastic leadership of their encouraging squires? Have you not the Maypole? Have you not Merry England?”

The Duke of Aylesbury made a noise in his throat, and then said very indistinctly: “They all go to London.”

“All go to London?” repeated Pommard, with a blank stare. “Why?”

This time nobody answered, and Pommard had to attack again.

“The spirit of aristocracy is essentially opposed to the greed of the industrial cities. Yet in France there are actually one or two nobles so vile as to drive coal and gas trades, and drive them hard.” The Duke of Windsor looked at the carpet. The Duke of Aylesbury went and looked out of the window. At length the latter said: “That’s rather stiff, you know. One has to look after one’s own business in town as well.”

“Do not say it,” cried the little Frenchman, starting up. “I tell you all Europe is one fight between business and honour. If we do not fight for honour, who will? What other right have we poor two-legged sinners to titles and quartered shields except that we staggeringly support some idea of giving things which cannot be demanded and avoiding things which cannot be punished? Our only claim is to be a wall across Christendom against the Jew pedlars and pawnbrokers, against the Goldsteins and the—”

The Duke of Aylesbury swung round with his hands in his pockets.

“Oh, I say,” he said, “you’ve been readin’ Lloyd George. Nobody but dirty Radicals can say a word against Goldstein.”

“I certainly cannot permit,” said the elder Duke, rising rather shakily, “the respected name of Lord Goldstein—”

He intended to be impressive, but there was something in the Frenchman’s eye that is not so easily impressed; there shone there that steel which is the mind of France.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I think I have all the details now. You have ruled England for four hundred years. By your own account you have not made the countryside endurable to men. By your own account you have helped the victory of vulgarity and smoke. And by your own account you are hand and glove with those very money-grubbers and adventurers whom gentlemen have no other business but to keep at bay. I do not know what your people will do; but my people would kill you.”

Some seconds afterwards he had left the Duke’s house, and some hours afterwards the Duke’s estate.

The Glory of Grey

I suppose that, taking this summer as a whole, people will not call it an appropriate time for praising the English climate. But for my part I will praise the English climate till I die — even if I die of the English climate. There is no weather so good as English weather. Nay, in a real sense there is no weather at all anywhere but in England. In France you have much sun and some rain; in Italy you have hot winds and cold winds; in Scotland and Ireland you have rain, either thick or thin; in America you have hells of heat and cold, and in the Tropics you have sunstrokes varied by thunderbolts. But all these you have on a broad and brutal scale, and you settle down into contentment or despair. Only in our own romantic country do you have the strictly romantic thing called Weather; beautiful and changing as a woman. The great English landscape painters (neglected now like everything that is English) have this salient distinction: that the Weather is not the atmosphere of their pictures; it is the subject of their pictures. They paint portraits of the Weather. The Weather sat to Constable. The Weather posed for Turner, and a deuce of a pose it was. This cannot truly be said of the greatest of their continental models or rivals. Poussin and Claude painted objects, ancient cities or perfect Arcadian shepherds through a clear medium of the climate. But in the English painters Weather is the hero; with Turner an Adelphi hero, taunting, flashing and fighting, melodramatic but really magnificent. The English climate, a tall and terrible protagonist, robed in rain and thunder and snow and sunlight, fills the whole canvas and the whole foreground. I admit the superiority of many other French things besides French art. But I will not yield an inch on the superiority of English weather and weather-painting. Why, the French have not even got a word for Weather: and you must ask for the weather in French as if you were asking for the time in English.

Then, again, variety of climate should always go with stability of abode. The weather in the desert is monotonous; and as a natural consequence the Arabs wander about, hoping it may be different somewhere. But an Englishman’s house is not only his castle; it is his fairy castle. Clouds and colours of every varied dawn and eve are perpetually touching and turning it from clay to gold, or from gold to ivory. There is a line of woodland beyond a corner of my garden which is literally different on every one of the three hundred and sixty-five days. Sometimes it seems as near as a hedge, and sometimes as far as a faint and fiery evening cloud. The same principle (by the way) applies to the difficult problem of wives. Variability is one of the virtues of a woman. It avoids the crude requirement of polygamy. So long as you have one good wife you are sure to have a spiritual harem.

Now, among the heresies that are spoken in this matter is the habit of calling a grey day a “colourless” day. Grey is a colour, and can be a very powerful and pleasing colour. There is also an insulting style of speech about “one grey day just like another” You might as well talk about one green tree just like another. A grey clouded sky is indeed a canopy between us and the sun; so is a green tree, if it comes to that. But the grey umbrellas differ as much as the green in their style and shape, in their tint and tilt. One day may be grey like steel, and another grey like dove’s plumage. One may seem grey like the deathly frost, and another grey like the smoke of substantial kitchens. No things could seem further apart than the doubt of grey and the decision of scarlet. Yet grey and red can mingle, as they do in the morning clouds: and also in a sort of warm smoky stone of which they build the little towns in the west country. In those towns even the houses that are wholly grey have a glow in them; as if their secret firesides were such furnaces of hospitality as faintly to transfuse the walls like walls of cloud. And wandering in those westland parts I did once really find a sign-post pointing up a steep crooked path to a town that was called Clouds. I did not climb up to it; I feared that either the town would not be good enough for the name, or I should not be good enough for the town. Anyhow, the little hamlets of the warm grey stone have a geniality which is not achieved by all the artistic scarlet of the suburbs; as if it were better to warm one’s hands at the ashes of Glastonbury than at the painted flames of Croydon.

Again, the enemies of grey (those astute, daring and evil-minded men) are fond of bringing forward the argument that colours suffer in grey weather, and that strong sunlight is necessary to all the hues of heaven and earth. Here again there are two words to be said; and it is essential to distinguish. It is true that sun is needed to burnish and bring into bloom the tertiary and dubious colours; the colour of peat, pea-soup, Impressionist sketches, brown velvet coats, olives, grey and blue slates, the complexions of vegetarians, the tints of volcanic rock, chocolate, cocoa, mud, soot, slime, old boots; the delicate shades of these do need the sunlight to bring out the faint beauty that often clings to them. But if you have a healthy negro taste in colour, if you choke your garden with poppies and geraniums, if you paint your house sky-blue and scarlet, if you wear, let us say, a golden top-hat and a crimson frock-coat, you will not only be visible on the greyest day, but you will notice that your costume and environment produce a certain singular effect. You will find, I mean, that rich colours actually look more luminous on a grey day, because they are seen against a sombre background and seem to be burning with a lustre of their own. Against a dark sky all flowers look like fireworks. There is something strange about them, at once vivid and secret, like flowers traced in fire in the phantasmal garden of a witch. A bright blue sky is necessarily the high light of the picture; and its brightness kills all the bright blue flowers. But on a grey day the larkspur looks like fallen heaven; the red daisies are really the red lost eyes of day; and the sunflower is the vice-regent of the sun.

Lastly, there is this value about the colour that men call colourless; that it suggests in some way the mixed and troubled average of existence, especially in its quality of strife and expectation and promise. Grey is a colour that always seems on the eve of changing to some other colour; of brightening into blue or blanching into white or bursting into green and gold. So we may be perpetually reminded of the indefinite hope that is in doubt itself; and when there is grey weather in our hills or grey hairs in our heads, perhaps they may still remind us of the morning.

The Anarchist

I have now lived for about two months in the country, and have gathered the last rich autumnal fruit of a rural life, which is a strong desire to see London. Artists living in my neighbourhood talk rapturously of the rolling liberty of the landscape, the living peace of woods. But I say to them (with a slight Buckinghamshire accent), “Ah, that is how Cockneys feel. For us real old country people the country is reality; it is the town that is romance. Nature is as plain as one of her pigs, as commonplace, as comic, and as healthy. But civilization is full of poetry, even if it be sometimes an evil poetry. The streets of London are paved with gold; that is, with the very poetry of avarice.” With these typically bucolic words I touch my hat and go ambling away on a stick, with a stiffness of gait proper to the Oldest Inhabitant; while in my more animated moments I am taken for the Village Idiot. Exchanging heavy but courteous salutations with other gaffers, I reach the station, where I ask for a ticket for London where the king lives. Such a journey, mingled of provincial fascination and fear, did I successfully perform only a few days ago; and alone and helpless in the capital, found myself in the tangle of roads around the Marble Arch.

A faint prejudice may possess the mind that I have slightly exaggerated my rusticity and remoteness. And yet it is true as I came to that corner of the Park that, for some unreasonable reason of mood, I saw all London as a strange city and the civilization itself as one enormous whim. The Marble Arch itself, in its new insular position, with traffic turning dizzily all about it, struck me as a placid monstrosity. What could be wilder than to have a huge arched gateway, with people going everywhere except under it? If I took down my front door and stood it up all by itself in the middle of my back garden, my village neighbours (in their simplicity) would probably stare. Yet the Marble Arch is now precisely that; an elaborate entrance and the only place by which no one can enter. By the new arrangement its last weak pretence to be a gate has been taken away. The cabman still cannot drive through it, but he can have the delights of riding round it, and even (on foggy nights) the rapture of running into it. It has been raised from the rank of a fiction to the dignity of an obstacle.

As I began to walk across a corner of the Park, this sense of what is strange in cities began to mingle with some sense of what is stern as well as strange. It was one of those queer-coloured winter days when a watery sky changes to pink and grey and green, like an enormous opal. The trees stood up grey and angular, as if in attitudes of agony; and here and there on benches under the trees sat men as grey and angular as they. It was cold even for me, who had eaten a large breakfast and purposed to eat a perfectly Gargantuan lunch; it was colder for the men under the trees. And to eastward through the opalescent haze, the warmer whites and yellows of the houses in Park-lane shone as unsubstantially as if the clouds themselves had taken on the shape of mansions to mock the men who sat there in the cold. But the mansions were real — like the mockery.

No one worth calling a man allows his moods to change his convictions; but it is by moods that we understand other men's convictions. The bigot is not he who knows he is right; every sane man knows he is right. The bigot is he whose emotions and imagination are too cold and weak to feel how it is that other men go wrong. At that moment I felt vividly how men might go wrong, even unto dynamite. If one of those huddled men under the trees had stood up and asked for rivers of blood, it would have been erroneous — but not irrelevant. It would have been appropriate and in the picture; that lurid grey picture of insolence on one side and impotence on the other. It may be true (on the whole it is) that this social machine we have made is better than anarchy. Still, it is a machine; and we have made it. It does hold those poor men helpless: and it does lift those rich men high... and such men — good Lord! By the time I flung myself on a bench beside another man I was half inclined to try anarchy for a change.

The other was of more prosperous appearance than most of the men on such seats; still, he was not what one calls a gentleman, and had probably worked at some time like a human being. He was a small, sharp-faced man, with grave, staring eyes, and a beard somewhat foreign. His clothes were black; respectable and yet casual; those of a man who dressed conventionally because it was a bore to dress unconventionally — as it is. Attracted by this and other things, and wanting an outburst for my bitter social feelings, I tempted him into speech, first about the cold, and then about the General Election. To this the respectable man replied:

"Well, I don't belong to any party myself. I'm an Anarchist."

I looked up and almost expected fire from heaven. This coincidence was like the end of the world. I had sat down feeling that somehow or other Park-lane must be pulled down; and I had sat down beside the man who wanted to pull it down. I bowed in silence for an instant under the approaching apocalypse; and in that instant the man turned sharply and started talking like a torrent.

“Understand me,” he said. “Ordinary people think an Anarchist means a man with a bomb in his pocket. Herbert Spencer was an Anarchist. But for that fatal admission of his on page 793, he would be a complete Anarchist. Otherwise, he agrees wholly with Pidge.”

This was uttered with such blinding rapidity of syllabification as to be a better test of teetotalism than the Scotch one of saying “Biblical criticism” six times. I attempted to speak, but he began again with the same rippling rapidity.

“You will say that Pidge also admits government in that tenth chapter so easily misunderstood. Bolger has attacked Pidge on those lines. But Bolger has no scientific training. Bolger is a psychometrist, but no sociologist. To any one who has combined a study of Pidge with the earlier and better discoveries of Kruxy, the fallacy is quite clear. Bolger confounds social coercion with coercional social action.”

His rapid rattling mouth shut quite tight suddenly, and he looked steadily and triumphantly at me, with his head on one side. I opened my mouth, and the mere motion seemed to sting him to fresh verbal leaps.

“Yes,” he said, “that’s all very well. The Finland Group has accepted Bolger. But,” he said, suddenly lifting a long finger as if to stop me, “but — Pidge has replied. His pamphlet is published. He has proved that Potential Social Rebuke is not a weapon of the true Anarchist. He has shown that just as religious authority and political authority have gone, so must emotional authority and psychological authority. He has shown—”

I stood up in a sort of daze. “I think you remarked,” I said feebly, “that the mere common populace do not quite understand Anarchism”— “Quite so,” he said with burning swiftness; “as I said, they think any Anarchist is a man with a bomb, whereas—”

“But great heavens, man!” I said; “it’s the man with the bomb that I understand! I wish you had half his sense. What do I care how many German dons tie themselves in knots about how this society began? My only interest is about how soon it will end. Do you see those fat white houses over in Park-lane, where your masters live?”

He assented and muttered something about concentrations of capital.

“Well,” I said, “if the time ever comes when we all storm those houses, will you tell me one thing? Tell me how we shall do it without authority? Tell me how you will have an army of revolt without discipline?”

For the first instant he was doubtful; and I had bidden him farewell, and crossed the street again, when I saw him open his mouth and begin to run after me. He had remembered something out of Pidge.

I escaped, however, and as I leapt on an omnibus I saw again the enormous emblem of the Marble Arch. I saw that massive symbol of the modern mind: a door with no house to it; the gigantic gate of Nowhere.

How I found the Superman

Readers of Mr. Bernard Shaw and other modern writers may be interested to know that the Superman has been found. I found him; he lives in South Croydon. My success will be a great blow to Mr. Shaw, who has been following quite a false scent, and is now looking for the creature in Blackpool; and as for Mr. Wells's notion of generating him out of gases in a private laboratory, I always thought it doomed to failure. I assure Mr. Wells that the Superman at Croydon was born in the ordinary way, though he himself, of course, is anything but ordinary.

Nor are his parents unworthy of the wonderful being whom they have given to the world. The name of Lady Hypatia Smythe-Browne (now Lady Hypatia Hagg) will never be forgotten in the East End, where she did such splendid social work. Her constant cry of "Save the children!" referred to the cruel neglect of children's eyesight involved in allowing them to play with crudely painted toys. She quoted unanswerable statistics to prove that children allowed to look at violet and vermilion often suffered from failing eyesight in their extreme old age; and it was owing to her ceaseless crusade that the pestilence of the Monkey-on-the-Stick was almost swept from Hoxton. The devoted worker would tramp the streets untiringly, taking away the toys from all the poor children, who were often moved to tears by her kindness. Her good work was interrupted, partly by a new interest in the creed of Zoroaster, and partly by a savage blow from an umbrella. It was inflicted by a dissolute Irish apple-woman, who, on returning from some orgy to her ill-kept apartment, found Lady Hypatia in the bedroom taking down an oleograph, which, to say the least of it, could not really elevate the mind. At this the ignorant and partly intoxicated Celt dealt the social reformer a severe blow, adding to it an absurd accusation of theft. The lady's exquisitely balanced mind received a shock, and it was during a short mental illness that she married Dr. Hagg.

Of Dr. Hagg himself I hope there is no need to speak. Any one even slightly acquainted with those daring experiments in Neo-Individualist Eugenics, which are now the one absorbing interest of the English democracy, must know his name and often commend it to the personal protection of an impersonal power. Early in life he brought to bear that ruthless insight into the history of religions which he had gained in boyhood as an electrical engineer. Later he became one of our greatest geologists; and achieved that bold and bright outlook upon the future of Socialism which only geology can give. At first there seemed something like a rift, a faint, but perceptible, fissure, between his views and those of his aristocratic wife. For she was in favour (to use her own powerful epigram) of protecting the poor against themselves; while he declared pitilessly, in a new and striking metaphor, that the weakest must go to the wall. Eventually, however, the married pair perceived an essential union in the unmistakably modern character of both their views, and in this enlightening and intelligible formula their souls found peace. The result is that this union of the two highest types of our civilization, the fashionable lady and the all but vulgar medical man, has been blessed by the birth of the Superman, that being whom all the labourers in Battersea are so eagerly expecting night and day.

I found the house of Dr. and Lady Hypatia Hagg without much difficulty; it is situated in one of the last straggling streets of Croydon, and overlooked by a line of poplars. I reached the door towards the twilight, and it was natural that I should fancifully see something dark and monstrous in the dim bulk of that house which contained the creature who was more marvellous than the children of men. When I entered the house I was received with exquisite courtesy by Lady Hypatia and her husband; but I found much greater difficulty in actually seeing the Superman, who is now about fifteen years old, and is kept by himself in a quiet room. Even my conversation with the father and mother did not quite clear up the character of this mysterious being. Lady Hypatia, who has a pale and poignant face, and is clad in those impalpable and pathetic greys and greens with which she has brightened so many homes in Hoxton, did not appear to talk of her offspring with any of the vulgar vanity of an ordinary human mother. I took a bold step and asked if the Superman was nice looking.

“He creates his own standard, you see,” she replied, with a slight sigh. “Upon that plane he is more than Apollo. Seen from our lower plane, of course—” And she sighed again.

I had a horrible impulse, and said suddenly, “Has he got any hair?”

There was a long and painful silence, and then Dr. Hagg said smoothly: “Everything upon that plane is different; what he has got is not... well, not, of course, what we call hair... but—”

“Don’t you think,” said his wife, very softly, “don’t you think that really, for the sake of argument, when talking to the mere public, one might call it hair?”

“Perhaps you are right,” said the doctor after a few moments’ reflection. “In connexion with hair like that one must speak in parables.”

“Well, what on earth is it,” I asked in some irritation, “if it isn’t hair? Is it feathers?”

“Not feathers, as we understand feathers,” answered Hagg in an awful voice.

I got up in some irritation. “Can I see him, at any rate?” I asked. “I am a journalist, and have no earthly motives except curiosity and personal vanity. I should like to say that I had shaken hands with the Superman.”

The husband and wife had both got heavily to their feet, and stood, embarrassed. “Well, of course, you know,” said Lady Hypatia, with the really charming smile of the aristocratic hostess. “You know he can’t exactly shake hands... not hands, you know.... The structure, of course—”

I broke out of all social bounds, and rushed at the door of the room which I thought to contain the incredible creature. I burst it open; the room was pitch dark. But from in front of me came a small sad yelp, and from behind me a double shriek.

“You have done it, now!” cried Dr. Hagg, burying his bald brow in his hands. “You have let in a draught on him; and he is dead.”

As I walked away from Croydon that night I saw men in black carrying out a coffin that was not of any human shape. The wind wailed above me, whirling the poplars, so that they drooped and nodded like the plumes of some cosmic funeral. “It is, indeed,” said Dr. Hagg, “the whole universe weeping over the frustration of its most magnificent birth.” But I thought that there was a hoot of laughter in the high wail of the wind.

The New House

Within a stone's throw of my house they are building another house. I am glad they are building it, and I am glad it is within a stone's throw; quite well within it, with a good catapult. Nevertheless, I have not yet cast the first stone at the new house — not being, strictly speaking, guiltless myself in the matter of new houses. And, indeed, in such cases there is a strong protest to be made. The whole curse of the last century has been what is called the Swing of the Pendulum; that is the idea that Man must go alternately from one extreme to the other. It is a shameful and even shocking fancy; it is the denial of the whole dignity of mankind. When Man is alive he stands still. It is only when he is dead that he swings. But whenever one meets modern thinkers (as one often does) progressing towards a madhouse, one always finds, on inquiry, that they have just had a splendid escape from another madhouse. Thus, hundreds of people become Socialists, not because they have tried Socialism and found it nice, but because they have tried Individualism and found it particularly nasty. Thus, many embrace Christian Science solely because they are quite sick of heathen science; they are so tired of believing that everything is matter that they will even take refuge in the revolting fable that everything is mind. Man ought to march somewhere. But modern man (in his sick reaction) is ready to march nowhere — so long as it is the Other End of Nowhere.

The case of building houses is a strong instance of this. Early in the nineteenth century our civilization chose to abandon the Greek and medieval idea of a town, with walls, limited and defined, with a temple for faith and a market-place for politics; and it chose to let the city grow like a jungle with blind cruelty and bestial unconsciousness; so that London and Liverpool are the great cities we now see. Well, people have reacted against that; they have grown tired of living in a city which is as dark and barbaric as a forest only not as beautiful, and there has been an exodus into the country of those who could afford it, and some I could name who can't. Now, as soon as this quite rational recoil occurred, it flew at once to the opposite extreme. People went about with beaming faces, boasting that they were twenty-three miles from a station. Rubbing their hands, they exclaimed in rollicking asides that their butcher only called once a month, and that their baker started out with fresh hot loaves which were quite stale before they reached the table. A man would praise his little house in a quiet valley, but gloomily admit (with a slight shake of the head) that a human habitation on the distant horizon was faintly discernible on a clear day. Rival ruralists would quarrel about which had the most completely inconvenient postal service; and there were many jealous heartburnings if one friend found out any uncomfortable situation which the other friend had thoughtlessly overlooked.

In the feverish summer of this fanaticism there arose the phrase that this or that part of England is being "built over." Now, there is not the slightest objection, in itself, to England being built over by men, any more than there is to its being (as it is already) built over by birds, or by squirrels, or by spiders. But if birds' nests were so thick on a tree that one could see nothing but nests and no leaves at all, I should say that bird civilization was becoming a bit decadent. If whenever I tried to walk down the road I found the whole thoroughfare one crawling carpet of spiders, closely interlocked, I should feel a distress verging on distaste. If one were at every turn crowded, elbowed, overlooked, overcharged, sweated, rack-rented, swindled, and sold up by avaricious and arrogant squirrels, one might at last remonstrate. But the great towns have grown intolerable solely because of such suffocating vulgarities and tyrannies. It is not humanity that disgusts us in the huge cities; it is inhumanity. It is not that there are human beings; but that they are not treated as such. We do not, I hope, dislike men and women; we only dislike their being made into a sort of jam: crushed together so that they are not merely powerless but shapeless. It is not the presence of people that makes London appalling. It is merely the absence of The People.

Therefore, I dance with joy to think that my part of England is being built over, so long as it is being built over in a human way at human intervals and in a human proportion. So long, in short, as I am not myself built over, like a pagan slave buried in the foundations of a temple, or an American clerk in a star-striking pagoda of flats, I am delighted to see the faces and the homes of a race of bipeds, to which I am not only attracted by a strange affection, but to which also (by a touching coincidence) I actually happen to belong. I am not one desiring deserts. I am not Timon of Athens; if my town were Athens I would stay in it. I am not Simeon Stylites; except in the mournful sense that every Saturday I find myself on the top of a newspaper column. I am not in the desert repenting of some monstrous sins; at least, I am repenting of them all right, but not in the desert. I do not want the nearest human house to be too distant to see; that is my objection to the wilderness. But neither do I want the nearest human house to be too close to see; that is my objection to the modern city. I love my fellow-man; I do not want him so far off that I can only observe anything of him through a telescope, nor do I want him so close that I can examine parts of him with a microscope. I want him within a stone's throw of me; so that whenever it is really necessary, I may throw the stone.

Perhaps, after all, it may not be a stone. Perhaps, after all, it may be a bouquet, or a snowball, or a firework, or a Free Trade Loaf; perhaps they will ask for a stone and I shall give them bread. But it is essential that they should be within reach: how can I love my neighbour as myself if he gets out of range for snowballs? There should be no institution out of the reach of an indignant or admiring humanity. I could hit the nearest house quite well with the catapult; but the truth is that the catapult belongs to a little boy I know, and, with characteristic youthful 'selfishness, he has taken it away.

The Wings of Stone

The preceding essay is about a half-built house upon my private horizon; I wrote it sitting in a garden-chair; and as, though it was a week ago, I have scarcely moved since then (to speak of), I do not see why I should not go on writing about it. Strictly speaking, I have moved; I have even walked across a field — a field of turf all fiery in our early summer sunlight — and studied the early angular red skeleton which has turned golden in the sun. It is odd that the skeleton of a house is cheerful when the skeleton of a man is mournful, since we only see it after the man is destroyed. At least, we think the skeleton is mournful; the skeleton himself does not seem to think so. Anyhow, there is something strangely primary and poetic about this sight of the scaffolding and main lines of a human building; it is a pity there is no scaffolding round a human baby. One seems to see domestic life as the daring and ambitious thing that it is, when one looks at those open staircases and empty chambers, those spirals of wind and open halls of sky. Ibsen said that the art of domestic drama was merely to knock one wall out of the four walls of a drawing-room. I find the drawing-room even more impressive when all four walls are knocked out.

I have never understood what people mean by domesticity being tame; it seems to me one of the wildest of adventures. But if you wish to see how high and harsh and fantastic an adventure it is, consider only the actual structure of a house itself. A man may march up in a rather bored way to bed; but at least he is mounting to a height from which he could kill himself. Every rich, silent, padded staircase, with banisters of oak, stair-rods of brass, and busts and settees on every landing, every such staircase is truly only an awful and naked ladder running up into the Infinite to a deadly height. The millionaire who stumps up inside the house is really doing the same thing as the tiler or roof-mender who climbs up outside the house; they are both mounting up into the void. They are both making an escalade of the intense inane. Each is a sort of domestic mountaineer; he is reaching a point from which mere idle falling will kill a man; and life is always worth living while men feel that they may die.

I cannot understand people at present making such a fuss about flying ships and aviation, when men ever since Stonehenge and the Pyramids have done something so much more wild than flying. A grasshopper can go astonishingly high up in the air, his biological limitation and weakness is that he cannot stop there. Hosts of unclean birds and crapulous insects can pass through the sky, but they cannot pass any communication between it and the earth. But the army of man has advanced vertically into infinity, and not been cut off. It can establish outposts in the ether, and yet keep open behind it its erect and insolent road. It would be grand (as in Jules Verne) to fire a cannon-ball at the moon; but would it not be grander to build a railway to the moon? Yet every building of brick or wood is a hint of that high railroad; every chimney points to some star, and every tower is a Tower of Babel. Man rising on these awful and unbroken wings of stone seems to me more majestic and more mystic than man fluttering for an instant on wings of canvas and sticks of steel. How sublime and, indeed, almost dizzy is the thought of these veiled ladders on which we all live, like climbing monkeys! Many a black-coated clerk in a flat may comfort himself for his sombre garb by reflecting that he is like some lonely rook in an immemorial elm. Many a wealthy bachelor on the top floor of a pile of mansions should look forth at morning and try (if possible) to feel like an eagle whose nest just clings to the edge of some awful cliff. How sad that the word "giddy" is used to imply wantonness or levity! It should be a high compliment to a man's exalted spirituality and the imagination to say he is a little giddy.

I strolled slowly back across the stretch of turf by the sunset, a field of the cloth of gold. As I drew near my own house, its huge size began to horrify me; and when I came to the porch of it I discovered with an incredulity as strong as despair that my house was actually bigger than myself. A minute or two before there might well have seemed to be a monstrous and mythical competition about which of the two should swallow the other. But I was Jonah; my house was the huge and hungry fish; and even as its jaws darkened and closed about me I had again this dreadful fancy touching the dizzy altitude of all the works of man. I climbed the stairs stubbornly, planting each foot with savage care, as if ascending a glacier. When I got to a landing I was wildly relieved, and waved my hat. The very word "landing" has about it the wild sound of some one washed up by the sea. I climbed each flight like a ladder in naked sky. The walls all round me failed and faded into infinity; I went up the ladder to my bedroom as Montrose went up the ladder to the gallows; sic itur ad astro. Do you think this is a little fantastic — even a little fearful and nervous? Believe me, it is only one of the wild and wonderful things that one can learn by stopping at home.

The Three Kinds of Men

Roughly speaking, there are three kinds of people in this world. The first kind of people are People; they are the largest and probably the most valuable class. We owe to this class the chairs we sit down on, the clothes we wear, the houses we live in; and, indeed (when we come to think of it), we probably belong to this class ourselves. The second class may be called for convenience the Poets; they are often a nuisance to their families, but, generally speaking, a blessing to mankind. The third class is that of the Professors or Intellectuals; sometimes described as the thoughtful people; and these are a blight and a desolation both to their families and also to mankind. Of course, the classification sometimes overlaps, like all classification. Some good people are almost poets and some bad poets are almost professors. But the division follows lines of real psychological cleavage. I do not offer it lightly. It has been the fruit of more than eighteen minutes of earnest reflection and research.

The class called People (to which you and I, with no little pride, attach ourselves) has certain casual, yet profound, assumptions, which are called "commonplaces," as that children are charming, or that twilight is sad and sentimental, or that one man fighting three is a fine sight. Now, these feelings are not crude; they are not even simple. The charm of children is very subtle; it is even complex, to the extent of being almost contradictory. It is, at its very plainest, mingled of a regard for hilarity and a regard for helplessness. The sentiment of twilight, in the vulgarest drawing-room song or the coarsest pair of sweethearts, is, so far as it goes, a subtle sentiment. It is strangely balanced between pain and pleasure; it might also be called pleasure tempting pain. The plunge of impatient chivalry by which we all admire a man fighting odds is not at all easy to define separately, it means many things, pity, dramatic surprise, a desire for justice, a delight in experiment and the indeterminate. The ideas of the mob are really very subtle ideas; but the mob does not express them subtly. In fact, it does not express them at all, except on those occasions (now only too rare) when it indulges in insurrection and massacre.

Now, this accounts for the otherwise unreasonable fact of the existence of Poets. Poets are those who share these popular sentiments, but can so express them that they prove themselves the strange and delicate things that they really are. Poets draw out the shy refinement of the rabble. Where the common man covers the queerest emotions by saying, “Rum little kid,” Victor Hugo will write “L’art d’etre grand-pere”; where the stockbroker will only say abruptly, “Evenings closing in now,” Mr. Yeats will write “Into the twilight”; where the navvy can only mutter something about pluck and being “precious game,” Homer will show you the hero in rags in his own hall defying the princes at their banquet. The Poets carry the popular sentiments to a keener and more splendid pitch; but let it always be remembered that it is the popular sentiments that they are carrying. No man ever wrote any good poetry to show that childhood was shocking, or that twilight was gay and farcical, or that a man was contemptible because he had crossed his single sword with three. The people who maintain this are the Professors, or Prigs.

The Poets are those who rise above the people by understanding them. Of course, most of the Poets wrote in prose — Rabelais, for instance, and Dickens. The Prigs rise above the people by refusing to understand them: by saying that all their dim, strange preferences are prejudices and superstitions. The Prigs make the people feel stupid; the Poets make the people feel wiser than they could have imagined that they were. There are many weird elements in this situation. The oddest of all perhaps is the fate of the two factors in practical politics. The Poets who embrace and admire the people are often pelted with stones and crucified. The Prigs who despise the people are often loaded with lands and crowned. In the House of Commons, for instance, there are quite a number of prigs, but comparatively few poets. There are no People there at all.

By poets, as I have said, I do not mean people who write poetry, or indeed people who write anything. I mean such people as, having culture and imagination, use them to understand and share the feelings of their fellows; as against those who use them to rise to what they call a higher plane. Crudely, the poet differs from the mob by his sensibility; the professor differs from the mob by his insensibility. He has not sufficient finesse and sensitiveness to sympathize with the mob. His only notion is coarsely to contradict it, to cut across it, in accordance with some egotistical plan of his own; to tell himself that, whatever the ignorant say, they are probably wrong. He forgets that ignorance often has the exquisite intuitions of innocence.

Let me take one example which may mark out the outline of the contention. Open the nearest comic paper and let your eye rest lovingly upon a joke about a mother-in-law. Now, the joke, as presented for the populace, will probably be a simple joke; the old lady will be tall and stout, the hen-pecked husband will be small and cowering. But for all that, a mother-in-law is not a simple idea. She is a very subtle idea. The problem is not that she is big and arrogant; she is frequently little and quite extraordinarily nice. The problem of the mother-in-law is that she is like the twilight: half one thing and half another. Now, this twilight truth, this fine and even tender embarrassment, might be rendered, as it really is, by a poet, only here the poet would have to be some very penetrating and sincere novelist, like George Meredith, or Mr. H. G. Wells, whose “Ann Veronica” I have just been reading with delight. I would trust the fine poets and novelists because they follow the fairy clue given them in Comic Cuts. But suppose the Professor appears, and suppose he says (as he almost certainly will), “A mother-in-law is merely a fellow-citizen. Considerations of sex should not interfere with comradeship. Regard for age should not influence the intellect. A mother-in-law is merely Another Mind. We should free ourselves from these tribal hierarchies and degrees.” Now, when the Professor says this (as he always does), I say to him, “Sir, you are coarser than Comic Cuts. You are more vulgar and blundering than the most elephantine music-hall artiste. You are blinder and grosser than the mob. These vulgar knockabouts have, at least, got hold of a social shade and real mental distinction, though they can only express it clumsily. You are so clumsy that you cannot get hold of it at all. If you really cannot see that the bridegroom’s mother and the bride have any reason for constraint or diffidence, then you are neither polite nor humane: you have no sympathy in you for the deep and doubtful hearts of human folk.” It is better even to put the difficulty as the vulgar put it than to be pertly unconscious of the difficulty altogether.

The same question might be considered well enough in the old proverb that two is company and three is none. This proverb is the truth put popularly: that is, it is the truth put wrong. Certainly it is untrue that three is no company. Three is splendid company: three is the ideal number for pure comradeship: as in the Three Musketeers. But if you reject the proverb altogether; if you say that two and three are the same sort of company; if you cannot see that there is a wider abyss between two and three than between three and three million — then I regret to inform you that you belong to the Third Class of human beings; that you shall have no company either of two or three, but shall be alone in a howling desert till you die.

The Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds

The other day on a stray spur of the Chiltern Hills I climbed up upon one of those high, abrupt, windy churchyards from which the dead seem to look down upon all the living. It was a mountain of ghosts as Olympus was a mountain of gods. In that church lay the bones of great Puritan lords, of a time when most of the power of England was Puritan, even of the Established Church. And below these uplifted bones lay the huge and hollow valleys of the English countryside, where the motors went by every now and then like meteors, where stood out in white squares and oblongs in the chequered forest many of the country seats even of those same families now dulled with wealth or decayed with Toryism. And looking over that deep green prospect on that luminous yellow evening, a lovely and austere thought came into my mind, a thought as beautiful as the green wood and as grave as the tombs. The thought was this: that I should like to go into Parliament, quarrel with my party, accept the Stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds, and then refuse to give it up.

We are so proud in England of our crazy constitutional anomalies that I fancy that very few readers indeed will need to be told about the Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds. But in case there should be here or there one happy man who has never heard of such twisted tomfooleries, I will rapidly remind you what this legal fiction is. As it is quite a voluntary, sometimes even an eager, affair to get into Parliament, you would naturally suppose that it would be also a voluntary matter to get out again. You would think your fellow-members would be indifferent, or even relieved to see you go; especially as (by another exercise of the shrewd, illogical old English common sense) they have carefully built the room too small for the people who have to sit in it. But not so, my pippins, as it says in the “Iliad.” If you are merely a member of Parliament (Lord knows why) you can’t resign. But if you are a Minister of the Crown (Lord knows why) you can. It is necessary to get into the Ministry in order to get out of the House; and they have to give you some office that doesn’t exist or that nobody else wants and thus unlock the door. So you go to the Prime Minister, concealing your air of fatigue, and say, “It has been the ambition of my life to be Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds.” The Prime Minister then replies, “I can imagine no man more fitted both morally and mentally for that high office.” He then gives it you, and you hurriedly leave, reflecting how the republics of the Continent reel anarchically to and fro for lack of a little solid English directness and simplicity.

Now, the thought that struck me like a thunderbolt as I sat on the Chiltern slope was that I would like to get the Prime Minister to give me the Chiltern Hundreds, and then startle and disturb him by showing the utmost interest in my work. I should profess a general knowledge of my duties, but wish to be instructed in the details. I should ask to see the Under-Steward and the Under-Under-Steward, and all the fine staff of experienced permanent officials who are the glory of this department. And, indeed, my enthusiasm would not be wholly unreal. For as far as I can recollect the original duties of a Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds were to put down the outlaws and brigands in that part of the world. Well, there are a great many outlaws and brigands in that part of the world still, and though their methods have so largely altered as to require a corresponding alteration in the tactics of the Steward, I do not see why an energetic and public-spirited Steward should not nab them yet.

For the robbers have not vanished from the old high forests to the west of the great city. The thieves have not vanished; they have grown so large that they are invisible. You do not see the word “Asia” written across a map of that neighbourhood; nor do you see the word “Thief” written across the countrysides of England; though it is really written in equally large letters. I know men governing despotically great stretches of that country, whose every step in life has been such that a slip would have sent them to Dartmoor; but they trod along the high hard wall between right and wrong, the wall as sharp as a swordedge, as softly and craftily and lightly as a cat. The vastness of their silent violence itself obscured what they were at; if they seem to stand for the rights of property it is really because they have so often invaded them. And if they do not break the laws, it is only because they make them.

But after all we only need a Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds who really understands cats and thieves. Men hunt one animal differently from another; and the rich could catch swindlers as dexterously as they catch otters or antlered deer if they were really at all keen upon doing it. But then they never have an uncle with antlers; nor a personal friend who is an otter. When some of the great lords that lie in the churchyard behind me went out against their foes in those deep woods beneath I wager that they had bows against the bows of the outlaws, and spears against the spears of the robber knights. They knew what they were about; they fought the evildoers of their age with the weapons of their age. If the same common sense were applied to commercial law, in forty-eight hours it would be all over with the American Trusts and the African forward finance. But it will not be done: for the governing class either does not care, or cares very much, for the criminals, and as for me, I had a delusive opportunity of being Constable of Beaconsfield (with grossly inadequate powers), but I fear I shall never really be Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds.

The Field of Blood

In my daily paper this morning I read the following interesting paragraphs, which take my mind back to an England which I do not remember and which, therefore (perhaps), I admire.

"Nearly sixty years ago — on 4 September, 1850 — the Austrian General Haynau, who had gained an unenviable fame throughout the world by his ferocious methods in suppressing the Hungarian revolution in 1849, while on a visit to this country, was belaboured in the streets of London by the draymen of Messrs. Barclay, Perkins and Co., whose brewery he had just inspected in company of an adjutant. Popular delight was so great that the Government of the time did not dare to prosecute the assailants, and the General — the 'women-flogger,' as he was called by the people — had to leave these shores without remedy.

"He returned to his own country and settled upon his estate at Szekeres, which is close to the commune above-mentioned. By his will the estate passed to his daughter, after whose death it was to be presented to the commune. This daughter has just died, but the Communal Council, after much deliberation, has declined to accept the gift, and ordered that the estate should be left to fall out of cultivation, and be called the 'Bloody Meadow.'"

Now that is an example of how things happen under an honest democratical impulse. I do not dwell specially on the earlier part of the story, though the earlier part of the story is astonishingly interesting. It recalls the days when Englishmen were potential lighters; that is, potential rebels. It is not for lack of agonies of intellectual anger: the Sultan and the late King Leopold have been denounced as heartily as General Haynau. But I doubt if they would have been physically thrashed in the London streets.

It is not the tyrants that are lacking, but the draymen. Nevertheless, it is not upon the historic heroes of Barclay, Perkins and Co. that I build all my hope. Fine as it was, it was not a full and perfect revolution. A brewer's drayman beating an eminent European General with a stick, though a singularly bright and pleasing vision, is not a complete one. Only when the brewer's drayman beats the brewer with a stick shall we see the clear and radiant sunrise of British self-government. The fun will really start when we begin to thump the oppressors of England as well as the oppressors of

Hungary. It is, however, a definite decline in the spiritual character of draymen that now they can thump neither one nor the other.

But, as I have already suggested, my real quarrel is not about the first part of the extract, but about the second. Whether or no the draymen of Barclay and Perkins have degenerated, the Commune which includes Szekeres has not degenerated. By the way, the Commune which includes Szekeres is called Kissekeres; I trust that this frank avowal will excuse me from the necessity of mentioning either of these places again by name. The Commune is still capable of performing direct democratic actions, if necessary, with a stick.

I say with a stick, not with sticks, for that is the whole argument about democracy. A people is a soul; and if you want to know what a soul is, I can only answer that it is something that can sin and that can sacrifice itself. A people can commit theft; a people can confess theft; a people can repent of theft. That is the idea of the republic. Now, most modern people have got into their heads the idea that democracies are dull, drifting things, a mere black swarm or slide of clerks to their accustomed doom. In most modern novels and essays it is insisted (by way of contrast) that a walking gentleman may have ad-ventures as he walks. It is insisted that an aristocrat can commit crimes, because an aristocrat always cultivates liberty. But, in truth, a people can have adventures, as Israel did crawling through the desert to the promised land. A people can do heroic deeds; a people can commit crimes; the French people did both in the Revolution; the Irish people have done both in their much purer and more honourable progress.

But the real answer to this aristocratic argument which seeks to identify democracy with a drab utilitarianism may be found in action such as that of the Hungarian Commune — whose name I decline to repeat. This Commune did just one of those acts that prove that a separate people has a separate personality; it threw something away. A man can throw a bank note into the fire. A man can fling a sack of corn into the river. The bank-note may be burnt as a satisfaction of some scruple; the corn may be destroyed as a sacrifice to some god. But whenever there is sacrifice we know there is a single will. Men may be disputatious and doubtful, may divide by very narrow majorities in their debate about how to gain wealth. But men have to be uncommonly unanimous in order to refuse wealth. It wants a very complete committee to burn a bank note in the office grate. It needs a highly religious tribe really to throw corn into the river. This self-denial is the test and definition of self-government.

I wish I could feel certain that any English County Council or Parish Council would be single enough to make that strong gesture of a romantic refusal; could say, “No rents shall be raised from this spot; no grain shall grow in this spot; no good shall come of this spot; it shall remain sterile for a sign.” But I am afraid they might answer, like the eminent sociologist in the story, that it was “wiste of spice.”

The Strangeness of Luxury

It is an English misfortune that what is called “public spirit” is so often a very private spirit; the legitimate but strictly individual ideals of this or that person who happens to have the power to carry them out. When these private principles are held by very rich people, the result is often the blackest and most repulsive kind of despotism, which is benevolent despotism. Obviously it is the public which ought to have public spirit. But in this country and at this epoch this is exactly what it has not got. We shall have a public washhouse and a public kitchen long before we have a public spirit; in fact, if we had a public spirit we might very probably do without the other things. But if England were properly and naturally governed by the English, one of the first results would probably be this: that our standard of excess or defect in property would be changed from that of the plutocrat to that of the moderately needy man. That is, that while property might be strictly respected, everything that is necessary to a clerk would be felt and considered on quite a different plane from anything which is a very great luxury to a clerk. This sane distinction of sentiment is not instinctive at present, because our standard of life is that of the governing class, which is eternally turning luxuries into necessities as fast as pork is turned into sausages; and which cannot remember the beginning of its needs and cannot get to the end of its novelties.

Take, for the sake of argument, the case of the motor. Doubtless the duke now feels it as necessary to have a motor as to have a roof, and in a little while he may feel it equally necessary to have a flying ship. But this does not prove (as the reactionary sceptics always argue) that a motor really is just as necessary as a roof. It only proves that a man can get used to an artificial life: it does not prove that there is no natural life for him to get used to. In the broad bird’s-eye view of common sense there abides a huge disproportion between the need for a roof and the need for an aeroplane; and no rush of inventions can ever alter it. The only difference is that things are now judged by the abnormal needs, when they might be judged merely by the normal needs. The best aristocrat sees the situation from an aeroplane. The good citizen, in his loftiest moments, goes no further than seeing it from the roof.

It is not true that luxury is merely relative. It is not true that it is only an expensive novelty which we may afterwards come to think a necessity. Luxury has a firm philosophical meaning; and where there is a real public spirit luxury is generally allowed for, sometimes rebuked, but always recognized instantly. To the healthy soul there is something in the very nature of certain pleasures which warns us that they are exceptions, and that if they become rules they will become very tyrannical rules.

Take a harassed seamstress out of the Harrow Road and give her one lightning hour in a motorcar, and she will probably feel it as splendid, but strange, rare, and even terrible. But this is not (as the relativists say) merely because she has never been in a car before. She has never been in the middle of a Somerset cowslip meadow before; but if you put her there she does not think it terrifying or extraordinary, but merely pleasant and free and a little lonely. She does not think the motor monstrous because it is new. She thinks it monstrous because she has eyes in her head; she thinks it monstrous because it is monstrous. That is, her mothers and grandmothers, and the whole race by whose life she lives, have had, as a matter of fact, a roughly recognizable mode of living; sitting in a green field was a part of it; travelling as quick as a cannon ball was not. And we should not look down on the seamstress because she mechanically emits a short sharp scream whenever the motor begins to move. On the contrary, we ought to look up to the seamstress, and regard her cry as a kind of mystic omen or revelation of nature, as the old Goths used to consider the howls emitted by chance females when annoyed. For that ritual yell is really a mark of moral health — of swift response to the stimulations and changes of life. The seamstress is wiser than all the learned ladies, precisely because she can still feel that a motor is a different sort of thing from a meadow. By the accident of her economic imprisonment it is even possible that she may have seen more of the former than the latter. But this has not shaken her cyclopean sagacity as to which is the natural thing and which the artificial. If not for her, at least for humanity as a whole, there is little doubt about which is the more normally attainable. It is considerably cheaper to sit in a meadow and see motors go by than to sit in a motor and see meadows go by.

To me personally, at least, it would never seem needful to own a motor, any more than to own an avalanche. An avalanche, if you have luck, I am told, is a very swift, successful, and thrilling way of coming down a hill. It is distinctly more stirring, say, than a glacier, which moves an inch in a hundred years. But I do not divide these pleasures either by excitement or convenience, but by the nature of the thing itself. It seems human to have a horse or bicycle, because it seems human to potter about; and men cannot work horses, nor can bicycles work men, enormously far afield of their ordinary haunts and affairs.

But about motoring there is something magical, like going to the moon; and I say the thing should be kept exceptional and felt as something breathless and bizarre. My ideal hero would own his horse, but would have the moral courage to hire his motor. Fairy tales are the only sound guidebooks to life; I like the Fairy Prince to ride on a white pony out of his father's stables, which are of ivory and gold. But if in the course of his adventures he finds it necessary to travel on a flaming dragon, I think he ought to give the dragon back to the witch at the end of the story. It is a mistake to have dragons about the place.

For there is truly an air of something weird about luxury; and it is by this that healthy human nature has always smelt and suspected it. All romances that deal in extreme luxury, from the "Arabian Nights" to the novels of Ouida and Disraeli, have, it may be noted, a singular air of dream and occasionally of nightmare. In such imaginative debauches there is something as occasional as intoxication; if that is still counted occasional. Life in those preposterous palaces would be an agony of dullness; it is clear we are meant to visit them only as in a flying vision. And what is true of the old freaks of wealth, flavour and fierce colour and smell, I would say also of the new freak of wealth, which is speed. I should say to the duke, when I entered his house at the head of an armed mob, "I do not object to your having exceptional pleasures, if you have them exceptionally. I do not mind your enjoying the strange and alien energies of science, if you feel them strange and alien, and not your own. But in condemning you (under the Seventeenth Section of the Eighth Decree of the Republic) to hire a motor-car twice a year at Margate, I am not the enemy of your luxuries, but, rather, the protector of them."

That is what I should say to the duke. As to what the duke would say to me, that is another matter, and may well be deferred.

The Triumph of the Donkey

Doubtless the unsympathetic might state my doctrine that one should not own a motor like a horse, but rather use it like a flying dragon in the simpler form that I will always go motoring in somebody else's car. My favourite modern philosopher (Mr. W. W. Jacobs) describes a similar case of spiritual delicacy misunderstood. I have not the book at hand, but I think that Job Brown was reproaching Bill Chambers for wasteful drunkenness, and Henery Walker spoke up for Bill, and said he scarcely ever had a glass but what somebody else paid for it, and there was "unpleasantness all round then."

Being less sensitive than Bill Chambers (or whoever it was) I will risk this rude perversion of my meaning, and concede that I was in a motor-car yesterday, and the motor-car most certainly was not my own, and the journey, though it contained nothing that is specially unusual on such journeys, had running through it a strain of the grotesque which was at once wholesome and humiliating. The symbol of that influence was that ancient symbol of the humble and humorous — a donkey.

When first I saw the donkey I saw him in the sunlight as the unearthly gargoyle that he is. My friend had met me in his car (I repeat firmly, in his car) at the little painted station in the middle of the warm wet woods and hop-fields of that western country. He proposed to drive me first to his house beyond the village before starting for a longer spin of adventure, and we rattled through those rich green lanes which have in them something singularly analogous to fairy tales: whether the lanes produced the fairies or (as I believe) the fairies produced the lanes. All around in the glimmering hop-yards stood those little hop-kilns like stunted and slanting spires. They look like dwarfish churches — in fact, rather like many modern churches I could mention, churches all of them small and each of them a little crooked. In this elfin atmosphere we swung round a sharp corner and half-way up a steep, white hill, and saw what looked at first like a tall, black monster against the sun. It appeared to be a dark and dreadful woman walking on wheels and waving long ears like a bat's. A second glance told me that she was not the local witch in a state of transition; she was only one of the million tricks of perspective. She stood up in a small wheeled cart drawn by a donkey; the donkey’s ears were just set behind her head, and the whole was black against the light.

Perspective is really the comic element in everything. It has a pompous Latin name, but it is incurably Gothic and grotesque. One simple proof of this is that it is always left out of all dignified and decorative art. There is no perspective in the Elgin Marbles, and even the essentially angular angels in mediaeval stained glass almost always (as it says in “Patience”) contrive to look both angular and flat. There is something intrinsically disproportionate and outrageous in the idea of the distant objects dwindling and growing dwarfish, the closer objects swelling enormous and intolerable. There is something frantic in the notion that one’s own father by walking a little way can be changed by a blast of magic to a pigmy. There is something farcical in the fancy that Nature keeps one’s uncle in an infinite number of sizes, according to where he is to stand. All soldiers in retreat turn into tin soldiers; all bears in rout into toy bears; as if on the ultimate horizon of the world everything was sardonically doomed to stand up laughable and little against heaven.

It was for this reason that the old woman and her donkey struck us first when seen from behind as one black grotesque. I afterwards had the chance of seeing the old woman, the cart, and the donkey fairly, in flank and in all their length. I saw the old woman and the donkey PASSANT, as they might have appeared heraldically on the shield of some heroic family. I saw the old woman and the donkey dignified, decorative, and flat, as they might have marched across the Elgin Marbles. Seen thus under an equal light, there was nothing specially ugly about them; the cart was long and sufficiently comfortable; the donkey was stolid and sufficiently respectable; the old woman was lean but sufficiently strong, and even smiling in a sour, rustic manner. But seen from behind they looked like one black monstrous animal; the dark donkey cars seemed like dreadful wings, and the tall dark back of the woman, erect like a tree, seemed to grow taller and taller until one could almost scream.

Then we went by her with a blasting roar like a railway train, and fled far from her over the brow of the hill to my friend’s home.

There we paused only for my friend to stock the car with some kind of picnic paraphernalia, and so started again, as it happened, by the way we had come. Thus it fell that we went shattering down that short, sharp hill again before the poor old woman and her donkey had managed to crawl to the top of it; and seeing them under a different light, I saw them very differently. Black against the sun, they had seemed comic; but bright against greenwood and grey cloud, they were not comic but tragic; for there are not a few things that seem fantastic in the twilight, and in the sunlight are sad. I saw that she had a grand, gaunt mask of ancient honour and endurance, and wide eyes sharpened to two shining points, as if looking for that small hope on the horizon of human life. I also saw that her cart contained carrots.

"Don't you feel, broadly speaking, a beast," I asked my friend, "when you go so easily and so fast?" For we had crashed by so that the crazy cart must have thrilled in every stick of it.

My friend was a good man, and said, "Yes. But I don't think it would do her any good if I went slower."

"No," I assented after reflection. "Perhaps the only pleasure we can give to her or any one else is to get out of their sight very soon."

My friend availed himself of this advice in no niggard spirit; I felt as if we were fleeing for our lives in throttling fear after some frightful atrocity. In truth, there is only one difference left between the secrecy of the two social classes: the poor hide themselves in darkness and the rich hide themselves in distance. They both hide.

As we shot like a lost boat over a cataract down into a whirlpool of white roads far below, I saw afar a black dot crawling like an insect. I looked again: I could hardly believe it. There was the slow old woman, with her slow old donkey, still toiling along the main road. I asked my friend to slacken, but when he said of the car, "She's wanting to go," I knew it was all up with him. For when you have called a thing female you have yielded to it utterly. We passed the old woman with a shock that must have shaken the earth: if her head did not reel and her heart quail, I know not what they were made of. And when we had fled perilously on in the gathering dark, spurning hamlets behind us, I suddenly called out, "Why, what asses we are! Why, it's She that is brave — she and the donkey. We are safe enough; we are artillery and plate-armour: and she stands up to us with matchwood and a snail! If you had grown old in a quiet valley, and people began firing cannon-balls as big as cabs at you in your seventieth year, wouldn't you jump — and she never moved an eyelid. Oh! we go very fast and very far, no doubt—"

As I spoke came a curious noise, and my friend, instead of going fast, began to go very slow; then he stopped; then he got out. Then he said, "And

I left the Stepney behind."

The grey moths came out of the wood and the yellow stars came out to crown it, as my friend, with the lucidity of despair, explained to me (on the soundest scientific principles, of course) that nothing would be any good at all. We must sleep the night in the lane, except in the very unlikely event of some one coming by to carry a message to some town. Twice I thought I heard some tiny sound of such approach, and it died away like wind in the trees, and the motorist was already asleep when I heard it renewed and realized. Something certainly was approaching. I ran up the road — and there it was. Yes, It — and She. Thrice had she come, once comic and once tragic and once heroic. And when she came again it was as if in pardon on a pure errand of prosaic pity and relief. I am quite serious. I do not want you to laugh. It is not the first time a donkey has been received seriously, nor one riding a donkey with respect.

The Wheel

In a quiet and rustic though fairly famous church in my neighbourhood there is a window supposed to represent an Angel on a Bicycle. It does definitely and indisputably represent a nude youth sitting on a wheel; but there is enough complication in the wheel and sanctity (I suppose) in the youth to warrant this working description. It is a thing of florid Renascence outline, and belongs to the highly pagan period which introduced all sorts of objects into ornament: personally I can believe in the bicycle more than in the angel. Men, they say, are now imitating angels; in their flying-machines, that is: not in any other respect that I have heard of. So perhaps the angel on the bicycle (if he is an angel and if it is a bicycle) was avenging himself by imitating man. If so, he showed that high order of intellect which is attributed to angels in the mediaeval books, though not always (perhaps) in the mediaeval pictures.

For wheels are the mark of a man quite as much as wings are the mark of an angel. Wheels are the things that are as old as mankind and yet are strictly peculiar to man, that are prehistoric but not pre-human.

A distinguished psychologist, who is well acquainted with physiology, has told me that parts of himself are certainly levers, while other parts are probably pulleys, but that after feeling himself carefully all over, he cannot find a wheel anywhere. The wheel, as a mode of movement, is a purely human thing. On the ancient escutcheon of Adam (which, like much of the rest of his costume, has not yet been discovered) the heraldic emblem was a wheel — passant. As a mode of progress, I say, it is unique. Many modern philosophers, like my friend before mentioned, are ready to find links between man and beast, and to show that man has been in all things the blind slave of his mother earth. Some, of a very different kind, are even eager to show it; especially if it can be twisted to the discredit of religion. But even the most eager scientists have often admitted in my hearing that they would be surprised if some kind of cow approached them moving solemnly on four wheels. Wings, fins, flappers, claws, hoofs, webs, trotters, with all these the fantastic families of the earth come against us and close around us, fluttering and flapping and rustling and galloping and lumbering and thundering; but there is no sound of wheels.

I remember dimly, if, indeed, I remember aright, that in some of those dark prophetic pages of Scripture, that seem of cloudy purple and dusky gold, there is a passage in which the seer beholds a violent dream of wheels. Perhaps this was indeed the symbolic declaration of the spiritual supremacy of man. Whatever the birds may do above or the fishes beneath his ship, man is the only thing to steer; the only thing to be conceived as steering. He may make the birds his friends, if he can. He may make the fishes his gods, if he chooses. But most certainly he will not believe a bird at the masthead; and it is hardly likely that he will even permit a fish at the helm. He is, as Swinburne says, helmsman and chief: he is literally the Man at the Wheel.

The wheel is an animal that is always standing on its head; only "it does it so rapidly that no philosopher has ever found out which is its head." Or if the phrase be felt as more exact, it is an animal that is always turning head over heels and progressing by this principle. Some fish, I think, turn head over heels (supposing them, for the sake of argument, to have heels); I have a dog who nearly did it; and I did it once myself when I was very small. It was an accident, and, as delightful novelist, Mr. De Morgan, would say, it never can happen again. Since then no one has accused me of being upside down except mentally: and I rather think that there is something to be said for that; especially as typified by the rotary symbol. A wheel is the sublime paradox; one part of it is always going forward and the other part always going back. Now this, as it happens, is highly similar to the proper condition of any human soul or any political state. Every sane soul or state looks at once backwards and forwards; and even goes backwards to come on.

For those interested in revolt (as I am) I only say meekly that one cannot have a Revolution without revolving. The wheel, being a logical thing, has reference to what is behind as well as what is before. It has (as every society should have) a part that perpetually leaps helplessly at the sky and a part that perpetually bows down its head into the dust. Why should people be so scornful of us who stand on our heads? Bowing down one's head in the dust is a very good thing, the humble beginning of all happiness. When we have bowed our heads in the dust for a little time the happiness comes; and then (leaving our heads' in the humble and reverent position) we kick up our heels behind in the air. That is the true origin of standing on one's head; and the ultimate defence of paradox. The wheel humbles itself to be exalted; only it does it a little quicker than I do.

Five Hundred and Fifty-five

Life is full of a ceaseless shower of small coincidences: too small to be worth mentioning except for a special purpose, often too trifling even to be noticed, any more than we notice one snowflake falling on another. It is this that lends a frightful plausibility to all false doctrines and evil fads. There are always such crowds of accidental arguments for anything. If I said suddenly that historical truth is generally told by red-haired men, I have no doubt that ten minutes' reflection (in which I decline to indulge) would provide me with a handsome list of instances in support of it. I remember a riotous argument about Bacon and Shakespeare in which I offered quite at random to show that Lord Rosebery had written the works of Mr. W. B. Yeats. No sooner had I said the words than a torrent of coincidences rushed upon my mind. I pointed out, for instance, that Mr. Yeats's chief work was "The Secret Rose." This may easily be paraphrased as "The Quiet or Modest Rose"; and so, of course, as the Primrose. A second after I saw the same suggestion in the combination of "rose" and "bury." If I had pursued the matter, who knows but I might have been a raving maniac by this time.

We trip over these trivial repetitions and exactitudes at every turn, only they are too trivial even for conversation. A man named Williams did walk into a strange house and murder a man named Williamson; it sounds like a sort of infanticide. A journalist of my acquaintance did move quite unconsciously from a place called Overstrand to a place called Overroads. When he had made this escape he was very properly pursued by a voting card from Battersea, on which a political agent named Burn asked him to vote for a political candidate named Burns. And when he did so another coincidence happened to him: rather a spiritual than a material coincidence; a mystical thing, a matter of a magic number.

For a sufficient number of reasons, the man I know went up to vote in Battersea in a drifting and even dubious frame of mind. As the train slid through swampy woods and sullen skies there came into his empty mind those idle and yet awful questions which come when the mind is empty. Fools make cosmic systems out of them; knaves make profane poems out of them; men try to crush them like an ugly lust. Religion is only the responsible reinforcement of common courage and common sense. Religion only sets up the normal mood of health against the hundred moods of disease.

But there is this about such ghastly empty enigmas, that they always have an answer to the obvious answer, the reply offered by daily reason. Suppose a man's children have gone swimming; suppose he is suddenly throttled by the senseless — fear that they are drowned. The obvious answer is, "Only one man in a thousand has his children drowned." But a deeper voice (deeper, being as deep as hell) answers, "And why should not you — be the thousandth man?" What is true of tragic doubt is true also of trivial doubt. The voter's guardian devil said to him, "If you don't vote to-day you can do fifteen things which will quite certainly do some good somewhere, please a friend, please a child, please a maddened publisher. And what good do you expect to do by voting? You don't think your man will get in by one vote, do you?" To this he knew the answer of common sense, "But if everybody said that, nobody would get in at all." And then there came that deeper voice from Hades, "But you are not settling what everybody shall do, but what one person on one occasion shall do. If this afternoon you went your way about more solid things, how would it matter and who would ever know?" Yet somehow the voter drove on blindly through the blackening London roads, and found somewhere a tedious polling station and recorded his tiny vote.

The politician for whom the voter had voted got in by five hundred and fifty-five votes. The voter read this next morning at breakfast, being in a more cheery and expansive mood, and found something very fascinating not merely in the fact of the majority, but even in the form of it. There was something symbolic about the three exact figures; one felt it might be a sort of motto or cipher. In the great book of seals and cloudy symbols there is just such a thundering repetition. Six hundred and sixty-six was the Mark of the Beast. Five hundred and fifty-five is the Mark of the Man; the triumphant tribune and citizen. A number so symmetrical as that really rises out of the region of science into the region of art. It is a pattern, like the egg-and-dart ornament or the Greek key. One might edge a wall-paper or fringe a robe with a recurring decimal. And while the voter luxuriated in this light exactitude of the numbers, a thought crossed his mind and he almost leapt to his feet. "Why, good heavens!" he cried. "I won that election; and it was won by one vote! But for me it would have been the despicable, broken-backed, disjointed, inharmonious figure five hundred and fifty-four. The whole artistic point would have vanished. The Mark of the Man would have disappeared from history. It was I who with a masterful hand seized the chisel and carved the hieroglyph — complete and perfect. I clutched the trembling hand of Destiny when it was about to make a dull square four and forced it to make a nice curly five. Why, but for me the Cosmos would have lost a coincidence!” After this outburst the voter sat down and finished his breakfast.

Ethandune

Perhaps you do not know where Ethandune is. Nor do I; nor does anybody. That is where the somewhat sombre fun begins. I cannot even tell you for certain whether it is the name of a forest or a town or a hill. I can only say that in any case it is of the kind that floats and is unfixed. If it is a forest, it is one of those forests that march with a million legs, like the walking trees that were the doom of Macbeth. If it is a town, it is one of those towns that vanish, like a city of tents. If it is a hill, it is a flying hill, like the mountain to which faith lends wings. Over a vast dim region of England this dark name of Ethandune floats like an eagle doubtful where to swoop and strike, and, indeed, there were birds of prey enough over Ethandune, wherever it was. But now Ethandune itself has grown as dark and drifting as the black drifts of the birds.

And yet without this word that you cannot fit with a meaning and hardly with a memory, you would be sitting in a very different chair at this moment and looking at a very different tablecloth. As a practical modern phrase I do not commend it; if my private critics and correspondents in whom I delight should happen to address me "G. K. Chesterton, Poste Restante, Ethandune," I fear their letters would not come to hand. If two hurried commercial travellers should agree to discuss a business matter at Ethandune from 5 to 5.15, I am afraid they would grow old in the district as white-haired wanderers. To put it plainly, Ethandune is anywhere and nowhere in the western hills; it is an English mirage. And yet but for this doubtful thing you would have probably no Daily News on Saturday and certainly no church on Sunday. I do not say that either of these two things is a benefit; but I do say that they are customs, and that you would not possess them except through this mystery. You would not have Christmas puddings, nor (probably) any puddings; you would not have Easter eggs, probably not poached eggs, I strongly suspect not scrambled eggs, and the best historians are decidedly doubtful about curried eggs. To cut a long story short (the longest of all stories), you would not have any civilization, far less any Christian civilization. And if in some moment of gentle curiosity you wish to know why you are the polished sparkling, rounded, and wholly satisfactory citizen which you obviously are, then I can give you no more definite answer geographical or historical; but only toll in your ears the tone of the uncaptured name — Ethandune.

I will try to state quite sensibly why it is as important as it is. And yet even that is not easy. If I were to state the mere fact from the history books, numbers of people would think it equally trivial and remote, like some war of the Picts and Scots. The points perhaps might be put in this way. There is a certain spirit in the world which breaks everything off short. There may be magnificence in the smashing; but the thing is smashed. There may be a certain splendour; but the splendour is sterile: it abolishes all future splendours. I mean (to take a working example), York Minster covered with flames might happen to be quite as beautiful as York Minster covered with carvings. But the carvings produce more carvings. The flames produce nothing but a little black heap. When any act has this cul-de-sac quality it matters little whether it is done by a book or a sword, by a clumsy battle-axe or a chemical bomb. The case is the same with ideas. The pessimist may be a proud figure when he curses all the stars; the optimist may be an even prouder figure when he blesses them all. But the real test is not in the energy, but in the effect. When the optimist has said, “All things are interesting,” we are left free; we can be interested as much or as little as we please. But when the pessimist says, “No things are interesting,” it may be a very witty remark: but it is the last witty remark that can be made on the subject. He has burnt his cathedral; he has had his blaze and the rest is ashes. The sceptics, like bees, give their one sting and die. The pessimist must be wrong, because he says the last word.

Now, this spirit that denies and that destroys had at one period of history a dreadful epoch of military superiority. They did burn York Minster, or at least, places of the same kind. Roughly speaking, from the seventh century to the tenth, a dense tide of darkness, of chaos and brainless cruelty, poured on these islands and on the western coasts of the Continent, which well-nigh cut them off from all the white man’s culture for ever. And this is the final human test; that the varied chiefs of that vague age were remembered or forgotten according to how they had resisted this almost cosmic raid. Nobody thought of the modern nonsense about races; everybody thought of the human race and its highest achievements. Arthur was a Celt, and may have been a fabulous Celt; but he was a fable on the right side. Charlemagne may have been a Gaul or a Goth, but he was not a barbarian; he fought for the tradition against the barbarians, the nihilists. And for this reason also, for this reason, in the last resort, only, we call the saddest and in some ways the least successful of the Wessex kings by the title of Alfred the Great. Alfred was defeated by the barbarians again and again, he defeated the barbarians again and again; but his victories were almost as vain as his defeats. Fortunately he did not believe in the Time Spirit or the Trend of Things or any such modern rubbish, and therefore kept pegging away. But while his failures and his fruitless successes have names still in use (such as Wilton, Basing, and Ashdown), that last epic battle which really broke the barbarian has remained without a modern place or name. Except that it was near Chippenham, where the Danes gave up their swords and were baptized, no one can pick out certainly the place where you and I were saved from being savages for ever.

But the other day under a wild sunset and moonrise I passed the place which is best reputed as Ethandune, a high, grim upland, partly bare and partly shaggy; like that savage and sacred spot in those great imaginative lines about the demon lover and the waning moon. The darkness, the red wreck of sunset, the yellow and lurid moon, the long fantastic shadows, actually created that sense of monstrous incident which is the dramatic side of landscape. The bare grey slopes seemed to rush downhill like routed hosts; the dark clouds drove across like riven banners; and the moon was like a golden dragon, like the Golden Dragon of Wessex.

As we crossed a tilt of the torn heath I saw suddenly between myself and the moon a black shapeless pile higher than a house. The atmosphere was so intense that I really thought of a pile of dead Danes, with some phantom conqueror on the top of it. Fortunately I was crossing these wastes with a friend who knew more history than I; and he told me that this was a barrow older than Alfred, older than the Romans, older perhaps than the Britons; and no man knew whether it was a wall or a trophy or a tomb. Ethandune is still a drifting name; but it gave me a queer emotion to think that, sword in hand, as the Danes poured with the torrents of their blood down to Chippenham, the great king may have lifted up his head and looked at that oppressive shape, suggestive of something and yet suggestive of nothing; may have looked at it as we did, and understood it as little as we.

The Flat Freak

Some time ago a Sub-Tropical Dinner was given by some South African millionaire. I forget his name; and so, very likely, does he. The humour of this was so subtle and haunting that it has been imitated by another millionaire, who has given a North Pole Dinner in a grand hotel, on which he managed to spend gigantic sums of money. I do not know how he did it; perhaps they had silver for snow and great sapphires for lumps of ice. Anyhow, it seems to have cost rather more to bring the Pole to London than to take Peary to the Pole. All this, one would say, does not concern us. We do not want to go to the Pole — or to the hotel. I, for one, cannot imagine which would be the more dreary and disgusting — the real North Pole or the sham one. But as a mere matter of psychology (that merry pastime) there is a question that is not unentertaining.

Why is it that all this scheme of ice and snow leaves us cold? Why is it that you and I feel that we would (on the whole) rather spend the evening with two or three stable boys in a pot-house than take part in that pallid and Arctic joke? Why does the modern millionaire’s jest — bore a man to death with the mere thought of it? That it does bore a man to death I take for granted, and shall do so until somebody writes to me in cold ink and tells me that he really thinks it funny.

Now, it is not a sufficient explanation to say that the joke is silly. All jokes are silly; that is what they are for. If you ask some sincere and elemental person, a woman, for instance, what she thinks of a good sentence from Dickens, she will say that it is “too silly.” When Mr. Weller, senior, assured Mr. Weller, junior, that “circumvented” was “a more tenderer word” than “circumscribed,” the remark was at least as silly as it was sublime. It is vain, then, to object to “senseless jokes.” The very definition of a joke is that it need have no sense; except that one wild and supernatural sense which we call the sense of humour. Humour is meant, in a literal sense, to make game of man; that is, to dethrone him from his official dignity and hunt him like game. It is meant to remind us human beings that we have things about us as ungainly and ludicrous as the nose of the elephant or the neck of the giraffe. If laughter does not touch a sort of fundamental folly, it does not do its duty in bringing us back to an enormous and original simplicity. Nothing has been worse than the modern notion that a clever man can make a joke without taking part in it; without sharing in the general absurdity that such a situation creates. It is unpardonable conceit not to laugh at your own jokes. Joking is undignified; that is why it is so good for one's soul. Do not fancy you can be a detached wit and avoid being a buffoon; you cannot. If you are the Court Jester you must be the Court Fool.

Whatever it is, therefore, that wearies us in these wealthy jokes (like the North Pole Dinner) it is not merely that men make fools of themselves. When Dickens described Mr. Chuckster, Dickens was, strictly speaking, making a fool of himself; for he was making a fool out of himself. And every kind of real lark, from acting a charade to making a pun, does consist in restraining one's nine hundred and ninety-nine serious selves and letting the fool loose. The dullness of the millionaire joke is much deeper. It is not silly at all; it is solely stupid. It does not consist of ingenuity limited, but merely of inanity expanded. There is considerable difference between a wit making a fool of himself and a fool making a wit of himself.

The true explanation, I fancy, may be stated thus. We can all remember it in the case of the really inspiriting parties and fooleries of our youth. The only real fun is to have limited materials and a good idea. This explains the perennial popularity of impromptu private theatricals. These fascinate because they give such a scope for invention and variety with the most domestic restriction of machinery. A tea-cosy may have to do for an Admiral's cocked hat; it all depends on whether the amateur actor can swear like an Admiral. A hearth-rug may have to do for a bear's fur; it all depends on whether the wearer is a polished and versatile man of the world and can grunt like a bear. A clergyman's hat (to my own private and certain knowledge) can be punched and thumped into the exact shape of a policeman's helmet; it all depends on the clergyman. I mean it depends on his permission; his imprimatur; his nihil obstat. Clergymen can be policemen; rugs can rage like wild animals; tea-cosies can smell of the sea; if only there is at the back of them all one bright and amusing idea. What is really funny about Christmas charades in any average home is that there is a contrast between commonplace resources and one comic idea. What is deadly dull about the millionaire-banquets is that there is a contrast between colossal resources and no idea.

That is the abyss of inanity in such feasts — it may be literally called a yawning abyss. The abyss is the vast chasm between the money power employed and the thing it is employed on. To make a big joke out of a broomstick, a barrow and an old hat — that is great. But to make a small joke out of mountains of emeralds and tons of gold — surely that is humiliating! The North Pole is not a very good joke to start with. An icicle hanging on one's nose is a simple sort of humour in any case. If a set of spontaneous mummers got the effect cleverly with cut crystals from the early Victorian chandelier there might really be something suddenly funny in it. But what should we say of hanging diamonds on a hundred human noses merely to make that precious joke about icicles?

What can be more abject than the union of elaborate and recherche arrangements with an old and obvious point? The clown with the red-hot poker and the string of sausages is all very well in his way. But think of a string of pate de foie gras sausages at a guinea a piece! Think of a red-hot poker cut out of a single ruby! Imagine such fantasticalities of expense with such a tameness and staleness of design.

We may even admit the practical joke if it is domestic and simple. We may concede that apple-pie beds and butter-slides are sometimes useful things for the education of pompous persons living the Higher Life. But imagine a man making a butter-slide and telling everybody it was made with the most expensive butter. Picture an apple-pie bed of purple and cloth of gold. It is not hard to see that such schemes would lead simultaneously to a double boredom; weariness of the costly and complex method and of the meagre and trivial thought. This is the true analysis, I think of that chill of tedium that strikes to the soul of any intelligent man when he hears of such elephantine pranks. That is why we feel that Freak Dinners would not even be freakish. That is why we feel that expensive Arctic feasts would probably be a frost.

If it be said that such things do no harm, I hasten, in one sense, at least, to agree. Far from it; they do good. They do good in the most vital matter of modern times; for they prove and print in huge letters the truth which our society must learn or perish. They prove that wealth in society as now constituted does not tend to get into the hands of the thrifty or the capable, but actually tends to get into the hands of wastrels and imbeciles. And it proves that the wealthy class of to-day is quite as ignorant about how to enjoy itself as about how to rule other people. That it cannot make its government govern or its education educate we may take as a trifling weakness of oligarchy; but pleasure we do look to see in such a class; and it has surely come to its decrepitude when it cannot make its pleasures please.

The Garden of the Sea

One sometimes hears from persons of the chillier type of culture the remark that plain country people do not appreciate the beauty of the country. This is an error rooted in the intellectual pride of mediocrity; and is one of the many examples of a truth in the idea that extremes meet. Thus, to appreciate the virtues of the mob one must either be on a level with it (as I am) or be really high up, like the saints. It is roughly the same with aesthetics; slang and rude dialect can be relished by a really literary taste, but not by a merely bookish taste. And when these cultivated cranks say that rustics do not talk of Nature in an appreciative way, they really mean that they do not talk in a bookish way. They do not talk bookishly about clouds or stones, or pigs or slugs, or horses or anything you please. They talk piggishly about pigs; and sluggishly, I suppose, about slugs; and are refreshingly horsy about horses. They speak in a stony way of stones; they speak in a cloudy way of clouds; and this is surely the right way. And if by any chance a simple intelligent person from the country comes in contact with any aspect of Nature unfamiliar and arresting, such a person's comment is always worth remark. It is sometimes an epigram, and at worst it is never a quotation.

Consider, for instance, what wastes of wordy imitation and ambiguity the ordinary educated person in the big towns could pour out on the subject of the sea. A country girl I know in the county of Buckingham had never seen the sea in her life until the other day. When she was asked what she thought of it she said it was like cauliflowers. Now that is a piece of pure literature — vivid, entirely independent and original, and perfectly true. I had always been haunted with an analogous kinship which I could never locate; cabbages always remind me of the sea and the sea always reminds me of cabbages. It is partly, perhaps, the veined mingling of violet and green, as in the sea a purple that is almost dark red may mix with a green that is almost yellow, and still be the blue sea as a whole. But it is more the grand curves of the cabbage that curl over cavernously like waves, and it is partly again that dreamy repetition, as of a pattern, that made two great poets, Eschylus and Shakespeare, use a word like "multitudinous" of the ocean. But just where my fancy halted the Buckinghamshire young woman rushed (so to speak) to my imaginative rescue. Cauliflowers are twenty times better than cabbages, for they show the wave breaking as well as curling, and the efflorescence of the branching foam, blind bubbling, and opaque. Moreover, the strong lines of life are suggested; the arches of the rushing waves have all the rigid energy of green stalks, as if the whole sea were one great green plant with one immense white flower rooted in the abyss.

Now, a large number of delicate and superior persons would refuse to see the force in that kitchen garden comparison, because it is not connected with any of the ordinary maritime sentiments as stated in books and songs. The aesthetic amateur would say that he knew what large and philosophical thoughts he ought to have by the boundless deep. He would say that he was not a greengrocer who would think first of greens. To which I should reply, like Hamlet, apropos of a parallel profession, "I would you were so honest a man." The mention of "Hamlet" reminds me, by the way, that besides the girl who had never seen the sea, I knew a girl who had never seen a stage-play. She was taken to "Hamlet," and she said it was very sad. There is another case of going to the primordial point which is overlaid by learning and secondary impressions. We are so used to thinking of "Hamlet" as a problem that we sometimes quite forget that it is a tragedy, just as we are so used to thinking of the sea as vast and vague, that we scarcely notice when it is white and green.

But there is another quarrel involved in which the young gentleman of culture comes into violent collision with the young lady of the cauliflowers. The first essential of the merely bookish view of the sea is that it is boundless, and gives a sentiment of infinity. Now it is quite certain, I think, that the cauliflower simile was partly created by exactly the opposite impression, the impression of boundary and of barrier. The girl thought of it as a field of vegetables, even as a yard of vegetables. The girl was right. The ocean only suggests infinity when you cannot see it; a sea mist may seem endless, but not a sea. So far from being vague and vanishing, the sea is the one hard straight line in Nature. It is the one plain limit; the only thing that God has made that really looks like a wall. Compared to the sea, not only sun and cloud are chaotic and doubtful, but solid mountains and standing forests may be said to melt and fade and flee in the presence of that lonely iron line. The old naval phrase, that the seas are England's bulwarks, is not a frigid and artificial metaphor; it came into the head of some genuine sea-dog, when he was genuinely looking at the sea. For the edge of the sea is like the edge of a sword; it is sharp, military, and decisive;

it really looks like a bolt or bar, and not like a mere expansion. It hangs in heaven, grey, or green, or blue, changing in colour, but changeless in form, behind all the slippery contours of the land and all the savage softness of the forests, like the scales of God held even. It hangs, a perpetual reminder of that divine reason and justice which abides behind all compromises and all legitimate variety; the one straight line; the limit of the intellect; the dark and ultimate dogma of the world.

The Sentimentalist

“Sentimentalism is the most broken reed on which righteousness can lean”; these were, I think, the exact words of a distinguished American visitor at the Guildhall, and may Heaven forgive me if I do him a wrong. It was spoken in illustration of the folly of supporting Egyptian and other Oriental nationalism, and it has tempted me to some reflections on the first word of the sentence.

The Sentimentalist, roughly speaking, is the man who wants to eat his cake and have it. He has no sense of honour about ideas; he will not see that one must pay for an idea as for anything else. He will not see that any worthy idea, like any honest woman, can only be won on its own terms, and with its logical chain of loyalty. One idea attracts him; another idea really inspires him; a third idea flatters him; a fourth idea pays him. He will have them all at once in one wild intellectual harem, no matter how much they quarrel and contradict each other. The Sentimentalist is a philosophic profligate, who tries to capture every mental beauty without reference to its rival beauties; who will not even be off with the old love before he is on with the new. Thus if a man were to say, “I love this woman, but I may some day find my affinity in some other woman,” he would be a Sentimentalist. He would be saying, “I will eat my wedding-cake and keep it.” Or if a man should say, “I am a Republican, believing in the equality of citizens; but when the Government has given me my peerage I can do infinite good as a kind landlord and a wise legislator”; then that man would be a Sentimentalist. He would be trying to keep at the same time the classic austerity of equality and also the vulgar excitement of an aristocrat. Or if a man should say, “I am in favour of religious equality; but I must preserve the Protestant Succession,” he would be a Sentimentalist of a grosser and more improbable kind.

This is the essence of the Sentimentalist: that he seeks to enjoy every idea without its sequence, and every pleasure without its consequence.

Now it would really be hard to find a worse case of this inconsequent sentimentalism than the theory of the British Empire advanced by Mr. Roosevelt himself in his attack on Sentimentalists. For the Imperial theory, the Roosevelt and Kipling theory, of our relation to Eastern races is simply one of eating the Oriental cake (I suppose a Sultana Cake) and at the same time leaving it alone.

Now there are two sane attitudes of a European statesman towards Eastern peoples, and there are only two.

First, he may simply say that the less we have to do with them the better; that whether they are lower than us or higher they are so catastrophically different that the more we go our way and they go theirs the better for all parties concerned. I will confess to some tenderness for this view. There is much to be said for letting that calm immemorial life of slave and sultan, temple and palm tree flow on as it has always flowed. The best reason of all, the reason that affects me most finally, is that if we left the rest of the world alone we might have some time for attending to our own affairs, which are urgent to the point of excruciation. All history points to this; that intensive cultivation in the long run triumphs over the widest extensive cultivation; or, in other words, that making one’s own field superior is far more effective than reducing other people’s fields to inferiority. If you cultivate your own garden and grow a specially large cabbage, people will probably come to see it. Whereas the life of one selling small cabbages round the whole district is often forlorn.

Now, the Imperial Pioneer is essentially a commercial traveller; and a commercial traveller is essentially a person who goes to see people because they don’t want to see him. As long as empires go about urging their ideas on others, I always have a notion that the ideas are no good. If they were really so splendid, they would make the country preaching them a wonder of the world. That is the true ideal; a great nation ought not to be a hammer, but a magnet. Men went to the mediaeval Sorbonne because it was worth going to. Men went to old Japan because only there could they find the unique and exquisite old Japanese art. Nobody will ever go to modern Japan (nobody worth bothering about, I mean), because modern Japan has made the huge mistake of going to the other people: becoming a common empire. The mountain has condescended to Mahomet; and henceforth Mahomet will whistle for it when he wants it.

That is my political theory: that we should make England worth copying instead of telling everybody to copy her.

But it is not the only possible theory. There is another view of our relations to such places as Egypt and India which is entirely tenable. It may be said, “We Europeans are the heirs of the Roman Empire; when all is said we have the largest freedom, the most exact science, the most solid romance. We have a deep though undefined obligation to give as we have received from God; because the tribes of men are truly thirsting for these things as for water. All men really want clear laws: we can give clear laws. All men really want hygiene: we can give hygiene. We are not merely imposing Western ideas. We are simply fulfilling human ideas — for the first time.”

On this line, I think, it is possible to justify the forts of Africa and the railroads of Asia; but on this line we must go much further. If it is our duty to give our best, there can be no doubt about what is our best. The greatest thing our Europe has made is the Citizen: the idea of the average man, free and full of honour, voluntarily invoking on his own sin the just vengeance of his city. All else we have done is mere machinery for that: railways exist only to carry the Citizen; forts only to defend him; electricity only to light him, medicine only to heal him. Popularism, the idea of the people alive and patiently feeding history, that we cannot give; for it exists everywhere, East and West. But democracy, the idea of the people fighting and governing — that is the only thing we have to give.

Those are the two roads. But between them weakly wavers the Sentimentalist — that is, the Imperialist of the Roosevelt school. He wants to have it both ways, to have the splendours of success without the perils. Europe may enslave Asia, because it is flattering: but Europe must not free Asia, because that is responsible. It tickles his Imperial taste that Hindoos should have European hats: it is too dangerous if they have European heads. He cannot leave Asia Asiatic: yet he dare not contemplate Asia as European. Therefore he proposes to have in Egypt railway signals, but not flags; despatch boxes, but not ballot boxes.

In short, the Sentimentalist decides to spread the body of Europe without the soul.

The White Horses

It is within my experience, which is very brief and occasional in this matter, that it is not really at all easy to talk in a motor-car. This is fortunate; first, because, as a whole, it prevents me from motoring; and second because, at any given moment, it prevents me from talking. The difficulty is not wholly due to the physical conditions, though these are distinctly unconversational. FitzGerald’s Omar, being a pessimist, was probably rich, and being a lazy fellow, was almost certainly a motorist. If any doubt could exist on the point, it is enough to say that, in speaking of the foolish profits, Omar has defined the difficulties of colloquial motoring with a precision which cannot be accidental. “Their words to wind are scattered; and their mouths are stopped with dust.” From this follows not (as many of the cut-and-dried philosophers would say) a savage silence and mutual hostility, but rather one of those rich silences that make the mass and bulk of all friendship; the silence of men rowing the same boat or fighting in the same battle-line.

It happened that the other day I hired a motor-car, because I wanted to visit in very rapid succession the battle-places and hiding-places of Alfred the Great; and for a thing of this sort a motor is really appropriate. It is not by any means the best way of seeing the beauty of the country; you see beauty better by walking, and best of all by sitting still. But it is a good method in any enterprise that involves a parody of the military or governmental quality — anything which needs to know quickly the whole contour of a county or the rough, relative position of men and towns. On such a journey, like jagged lightning, I sat from morning till night by the side of the chauffeur; and we scarcely exchanged a word to the hour. But by the time the yellow stars came out in the villages and the white stars in the skies, I think I understood his character; and I fear he understood mine.

He was a Cheshire man with a sour, patient, and humorous face; he was modest, though a north countryman, and genial, though an expert. He spoke (when he spoke at all) with a strong northland accent; and he evidently was new to the beautiful south country, as was clear both from his approval and his complaints. But though he came from the north he was agricultural and not commercial in origin; he looked at the land rather than the towns, even if he looked at it with a somewhat more sharp and utilitarian eye. His first remark for some hours was uttered when we were crossing the more coarse and desolate heights of Salisbury Plain. He remarked that he had always thought that Salisbury Plain was a plain. This alone showed that he was new to the vicinity. But he also said, with a critical frown, “A lot of this land ought to be good land enough. Why don’t they use it?” He was then silent for some more hours.

At an abrupt angle of the slopes that lead down from what is called (with no little humour) Salisbury Plain, I saw suddenly, as by accident, something I was looking for — that is, something I did not expect to see. We are all supposed to be trying to walk into heaven; but we should be uncommonly astonished if we suddenly walked into it. As I was leaving Salisbury Plain (to put it roughly) I lifted up my eyes and saw the White Horse of Britain.

One or two truly fine poets of the Tory and Protestant type, such as Swinburne and Mr. Rudyard Kipling, have eulogized England under the image of white horses, meaning the white-maned breakers of the Channel. This is right and natural enough. The true philosophical Tory goes back to ancient things because he thinks they will be anarchic things. It would startle him very much to be told that there are white horses of artifice in England that may be older than those wild white horses of the elements. Yet it is truly so. Nobody knows how old are those strange green and white hieroglyphics, those straggling quadrupeds of chalk, that stand out on the sides of so many of the Southern Downs. They are possibly older than Saxon and older than Roman times. They may well be older than British, older than any recorded times. They may go back, for all we know, to the first faint seeds of human life on this planet. Men may have picked a horse out of the grass long before they scratched a horse on a vase or pot, or messed and massed any horse out of clay. This may be the oldest human art — before building or graving. And if so, it may have first happened in another geological age, before the sea burst through the narrow Straits of Dover. The White Horse may have begun in Berkshire when there were no white horses at Folkestone or Newhaven. That rude but evident white outline that I saw across the valley may have been begun when Britain was not an island. We forget that there are many places where art is older than nature.

We took a long detour through somewhat easier roads, till we came to a breach or chasm in the valley, from which we saw our friend the White Horse once more. At least, we thought it was our friend the White Horse; but after a little inquiry we discovered to our astonishment that it was another friend and another horse. Along the leaning flanks of the same fair valley there was (it seemed) another white horse; as rude and as clean, as ancient and as modern, as the first. This, at least, I thought must be the aboriginal White Horse of Alfred, which I had always heard associated with his name. And yet before we had driven into Wantage and seen King Alfred's quaint grey statue in the sun, we had seen yet a third white horse. And the third white horse was so hopelessly unlike a horse that we were sure that it was genuine. The final and original white horse, the white horse of the White Horse Vale, has that big, babyish quality that truly belongs to our remotest ancestors. It really has the prehistoric, preposterous quality of Zulu or New Zealand native drawings. This at least was surely made by our fathers when they were barely men; long before they were civilized men.

But why was it made? Why did barbarians take so much trouble to make a horse nearly as big as a hamlet; a horse who could bear no hunter, who could drag no load? What was this titanic, sub-conscious instinct for spoiling a beautiful green slope with a very ugly white quadruped? What (for the matter of that) is this whole hazardous fancy of humanity ruling the earth, which may have begun with white horses, which may by no means end with twenty horse-power cars? As I rolled away out of that country, I was still cloudily considering how ordinary men ever came to want to make such strange chalk horses, when my chauffeur startled me by speaking for the first time for nearly two hours. He suddenly let go one of the handles and pointed at a gross green bulk of down that happened to swell above us. "That would be a good place," he said.

Naturally I referred to his last speech of some hours before; and supposed he meant that it would be promising for agriculture. As a fact, it was quite unpromising; and this made me suddenly understand the quiet ardour in his eye. All of a sudden I saw what he really meant. He really meant that this would be a splendid place to pick out another white horse. He knew no more than I did why it was done; but he was in some unthinkable prehistoric tradition, because he wanted to do it. He became so acute in sensibility that he could not bear to pass any broad breezy hill of grass on which there was not a white horse. He could hardly keep his hands off the hills. He could hardly leave any of the living grass alone.

Then I left off wondering why the primitive man made so many white horses. I left off troubling in what sense the ordinary eternal man had sought to scar or deface the hills. I was content to know that he did want it; for I had seen him wanting it.

The Long Bow

I find myself still sitting in front of the last book by Mr. H. G. Wells, I say stunned with admiration, my family says sleepy with fatigue. I still feel vaguely all the things in Mr. Wells's book which I agree with; and I still feel vividly the one thing that I deny. I deny that biology can destroy the sense of truth, which alone can even desire biology. No truth which I find can deny that I am seeking the truth. My mind cannot find anything which denies my mind... But what is all this? This is no sort of talk for a genial essay. Let us change the subject; let us have a romance or a fable or a fairy tale.

Come, let us tell each other stories. There was once a king who was very fond of listening to stories, like the king in the Arabian Nights. The only difference was that, unlike that cynical Oriental, this king believed all the stories that he heard. It is hardly necessary to add that he lived in England. His face had not the swarthy secrecy of the tyrant of the thousand tales; on the contrary, his eyes were as big and innocent as two blue moons; and when his yellow beard turned totally white he seemed to be growing younger. Above him hung still his heavy sword and horn, to remind men that he had been a tall hunter and warrior in his time: indeed, with that rusted sword he had wrecked armies. But he was one of those who will never know the world, even when they conquer it. Besides his love of this old Chaucerian pastime of the telling of tales, he was, like many old English kings, specially interested in the art of the bow. He gathered round him great archers of the stature of Ulysses and Robin Hood, and to four of these he gave the whole government of his kingdom. They did not mind governing his kingdom; but they were sometimes a little bored with the necessity of telling him stories. None of their stories were true; but the king believed all of them, and this became very depressing. They created the most preposterous romances; and could not get the credit of creating them. Their true ambition was sent empty away. They were praised as archers; but they desired to be praised as poets. They were trusted as men, but they would rather have been admired as literary men.

At last, in an hour of desperation, they formed themselves into a club or conspiracy with the object of inventing some story which even the king could not swallow. They called it The League of the Long Bow; thus attaching themselves by a double bond to their motherland of England, which has been steadily celebrated since the Norman Conquest for its heroic archery and for the extraordinary credulity of its people.

At last it seemed to the four archers that their hour had come. The king commonly sat in a green curtained chamber, which opened by four doors, and was surmounted by four turrets. Summoning his champions to him on an April evening, he sent out each of them by a separate door, telling him to return at morning with the tale of his journey. Every champion bowed low, and, girding on great armour as for awful adventures, retired to some part of the garden to think of a lie. They did not want to think of a lie which would deceive the king; any lie would do that. They wanted to think of a lie so outrageous that it would not deceive him, and that was a serious matter.

The first archer who returned was a dark, quiet, clever fellow, very dexterous in small matters of mechanics. He was more interested in the science of the bow than in the sport of it. Also he would only shoot at a mark, for he thought it cruel to kill beasts and birds, and atrocious to kill men. When he left the king he had gone out into the wood and tried all sorts of tiresome experiments about the bending of branches and the impact of arrows; when even he found it tiresome he returned to the house of the four turrets and narrated his adventure. “Well,” said the king, “what have you been shooting?” “Arrows,” answered the archer. “So I suppose,” said the king smiling; “but I mean, I mean what wild things have you shot?” “I have shot nothing but arrows,” answered the bowman obstinately. “When I went out on to the plain I saw in a crescent the black army of the Tartars, the terrible archers whose bows are of bended steel, and their bolts as big as javelins. They spied me afar off, and the shower of their arrows shut out the sun and made a rattling roof above me. You know, I think it wrong to kill a bird, or worm, or even a Tartar. But such is the precision and rapidity of perfect science that, with my own arrows, I split every arrow as it came against me. I struck every flying shaft as if it were a flying bird. Therefore, Sire, I may say truly, that I shot nothing but arrows.” The king said, “I know how clever you engineers are with your fingers.” The archer said, “Oh,” and went out.

The second archer, who had curly hair and was pale, poetical, and rather effeminate, had merely gone out into the garden and stared at the moon. When the moon had become too wide, blank, and watery, even for his own wide, blank, and watery eyes, he came in again. And when the king said

“What have you been shooting?” he answered with great volubility, “I have shot a man; not a man from Tartary, not a man from Europe, Asia, Africa, or America; not a man on this earth at all. I have shot the Man in the Moon.” “Shot the Man in the Moon?” repeated the king with something like a mild surprise. “It is easy to prove it,” said the archer with hysterical haste. “Examine the moon through this particularly powerful telescope, and you will no longer find any traces of a man there.” The king glued his big blue idiotic eye to the telescope for about ten minutes, and then said, “You are right: as you have often pointed out, scientific truth can only be tested by the senses. I believe you.” And the second archer went out, and being of a more emotional temperament burst into tears.

The third archer was a savage, brooding sort of man with tangled hair and dreamy eyes, and he came in without any preface, saying, “I have lost all my arrows. They have turned into birds.” Then as he saw that they all stared at him, he said “Well, you know everything changes on the earth; mud turns into marigolds, eggs turn into chickens; one can even breed dogs into quite different shapes. Well, I shot my arrows at the awful eagles that clash their wings round the Himalayas; great golden eagles as big as elephants, which snap the tall trees by perching on them. My arrows fled so far over mountain and valley that they turned slowly into fowls in their flight. See here,” and he threw down a dead bird and laid an arrow beside it. “Can’t you see they are the same structure. The straight shaft is the backbone; the sharp point is the beak; the feather is the rudimentary plumage. It is merely modification and evolution.” After a silence the king nodded gravely and said, “Yes; of course everything is evolution.” At this the third archer suddenly and violently left the room, and was heard in some distant part of the building making extraordinary noises either of sorrow or of mirth.

The fourth archer was a stunted man with a face as dead as wood, but with wicked little eyes close together, and very much alive. His comrades dissuaded him from going in because they said that they had soared up into the seventh heaven of living lies, and that there was literally nothing which the old man would not believe. The face of the little archer became a little more wooden as he forced his way in, and when he was inside he looked round with blinking bewilderment. “Ha, the last,” said the king heartily, “welcome back again!” There was a long pause, and then the stunted archer said, “What do you mean by ‘again’? I have never been here before.” The king stared for a few seconds, and said, “I sent you out from this room with the four doors last night.” After another pause the little man slowly shook his head. “I never saw you before,” he said simply; “you never sent me out from anywhere. I only saw your four turrets in the distance, and strayed in here by accident. I was born in an island in the Greek Archipelago; I am by profession an auctioneer, and my name is Punk.” The king sat on his throne for seven long instants like a statue; and then there awoke in his mild and ancient eyes an awful thing; the complete conviction of untruth. Every one has felt it who has found a child obstinately false. He rose to his height and took down the heavy sword above him, plucked it out naked, and then spoke. “I will believe your mad tales about the exact machinery of arrows; for that is science. I will believe your mad tales about traces of life in the moon; for that is science. I will believe your mad tales about jellyfish turning into gentlemen, and everything turning into anything; for that is science. But I will not believe you when you tell me what I know to be untrue. I will not believe you when you say that you did not all set forth under my authority and out of my house. The other three may conceivably have told the truth; but this last man has certainly lied. Therefore I will kill him.” And with that the old and gentle king ran at the man with uplifted sword; but he was arrested by the roar of happy laughter, which told the world that there is, after all, something which an Englishman will not swallow.

The Modern Scrooge

Mr. Vernon-Smith, of Trinity, and the Social Settlement, Tooting, author of “A Higher London” and “The Boyg System at Work,” came to the conclusion, after looking through his select and even severe library, that Dickens’s “Christmas Carol” was a very suitable thing to be read to charwomen. Had they been men they would have been forcibly subjected to Browning’s “Christmas Eve” with exposition, but chivalry spared the charwomen, and Dickens was funny, and could do no harm. His fellow worker Wimpole would read things like “Three Men in a Boat” to the poor; but Vernon-Smith regarded this as a sacrifice of principle, or (what was the same thing to him) of dignity. He would not encourage them in their vulgarity; they should have nothing from him that was not literature. Still Dickens was literature after all; not literature of a high order, of course, not thoughtful or purposeful literature, but literature quite fitted for charwomen on Christmas Eve.

He did not, however, let them absorb Dickens without due antidotes of warning and criticism. He explained that Dickens was not a writer of the first rank, since he lacked the high seriousness of Matthew Arnold. He also feared that they would find the characters of Dickens terribly exaggerated. But they did not, possibly because they were meeting them every day. For among the poor there are still exaggerated characters; they do not go to the Universities to be universified. He told the charwomen, with progressive brightness, that a mad wicked old miser like Scrooge would be really quite impossible now; but as each of the charwomen had an uncle or a grandfather or a father-in-law who was exactly like Scrooge, his cheerfulness was not shared. Indeed, the lecture as a whole lacked something of his firm and elastic touch, and towards the end he found himself rambling, and in a sort of abstraction, talking to them as if they were his fellows. He caught himself saying quite mystically that a spiritual plane (by which he meant his plane) always looked to those on the sensual or Dickens plane, not merely austere, but desolate. He said, quoting Bernard Shaw, that we could all go to heaven just as we can all go to a classical concert, but if we did it would bore us. Realizing that he was taking his flock far out of their depth, he ended somewhat hurriedly, and was soon receiving that generous applause which is a part of the profound ceremonialism of the working classes. As he made his way to the door three people stopped him, and he answered them heartily enough, but with an air of hurry which he would not have dreamed of showing to people of his own class. One was a little schoolmistress who told him with a sort of feverish meekness that she was troubled because an Ethical Lecturer had said that Dickens was not really Progressive; but she thought he was Progressive; and surely he was Progressive. Of what being Progressive was she had no more notion than a whale. The second person implored him for a subscription to some soup kitchen or cheap meal; and his refined features sharpened; for this, like literature, was a matter of principle with him. “Quite the wrong method,” he said, shaking his head and pushing past. “Nothing any good but the Boyg system.” The third stranger, who was male, caught him on the step as he came out into the snow and starlight; and asked him point blank for money. It was a part of Vernon-Smith’s principles that all such persons are prosperous impostors; and like a true mystic he held to his principles in defiance of his five senses, which told him that the night was freezing and the man very thin and weak. “If you come to the Settlement between four and five on Friday week,” he said, “inquiries will be made.” The man stepped back into the snow with a not ungraceful gesture as of apology; he had frosty silver hair, and his lean face, though in shadow, seemed to wear something like a smile. As Vernon-Smith stepped briskly into the street, the man stooped down as if to do up his bootlace. He was, however, guiltless of any such dandyism; and as the young philanthropist stood pulling on his gloves with some particularity, a heavy snowball was suddenly smashed into his face. He was blind for a black instant; then as some of the snow fell, saw faintly, as in a dim mirror of ice or dreamy crystal, the lean man bowing with the elegance of a dancing master, and saying amiably, “A Christmas box.” When he had quite cleared his face of snow the man had vanished.

For three burning minutes Cyril Vernon-Smith was nearer to the people and more their brother than he had been in his whole high-stepping pedantic existence; for if he did not love a poor man, he hated one. And you never really regard a labourer as your equal until you can quarrel with him. “Dirty cad!” he muttered. “Filthy fool! Mucking with snow like a beastly baby! When will they be civilized? Why, the very state of the street is a disgrace and a temptation to such tomfools. Why isn’t all this snow cleared away and the street made decent?”

To the eye of efficiency, there was, indeed, something to complain of in the condition of the road. Snow was banked up on both sides in white walls and towards the other and darker end of the street even rose into a chaos of low colourless hills. By the time he reached them he was nearly knee deep, and was in a far from philanthropic frame of mind. The solitude of the little streets was as strange as their white obstruction, and before he had ploughed his way much further he was convinced that he had taken a wrong turning, and fallen upon some formless suburb unvisited before. There was no light in any of the low, dark houses; no light in anything but the blank emphatic snow. He was modern and morbid; hellish isolation hit and held him suddenly; anything human would have relieved the strain, if it had been only the leap of a garotter. Then the tender human touch came indeed; for another snowball struck him, and made a star on his back. He turned with fierce joy, and ran after a boy escaping; ran with dizzy and violent speed, he knew not for how long. He wanted the boy; he did not know whether he loved or hated him. He wanted humanity; he did not know whether he loved or hated it.

As he ran he realized that the landscape around him was changing in shape though not in colour. The houses seemed to dwindle and disappear in hills of snow as if buried; the snow seemed to rise in tattered outlines of crag and cliff and crest, but he thought nothing of all these impossibilities until the boy turned to bay. When he did he saw the child was queerly beautiful, with gold red hair, and a face as serious as complete happiness. And when he spoke to the boy his own question surprised him, for he said for the first time in his life, “What am I doing here?” And the little boy, with very grave eyes, answered, “I suppose you are dead.”

He had (also for the first time) a doubt of his spiritual destiny. He looked round on a towering landscape of frozen peaks and plains, and said, “Is this hell?” And as the child stared, but did not answer, he knew it was heaven.

All over that colossal country, white as the world round the Pole, little boys were playing, rolling each other down dreadful slopes, crushing each other under falling cliffs; for heaven is a place where one can fight for ever without hurting. Smith suddenly remembered how happy he had been as a child, rolling about on the safe sandhills around Conway.

Right above Smith’s head, higher than the cross of St. Paul’s, but curving over him like the hanging blossom of a harebell, was a cavernous crag of snow. A hundred feet below him, like a landscape seen from a balloon, lay snowy flats as white and as far away. He saw a little boy stagger, with many catastrophic slides, to that toppling peak; and seizing another little boy by the leg, send him flying away down to the distant silver plains. There he sank and vanished in the snow as if in the sea; but coming up again like a diver rushed madly up the steep once more, rolling before him a great gathering snowball, gigantic at last, which he hurled back at the mountain crest, and brought both the boy and the mountain down in one avalanche to the level of the vale. The other boy also sank like a stone, and also rose again like a bird, but Smith had no leisure to concern himself with this. For the collapse of that celestial crest had left him standing solitary in the sky on a peak like a church spire.

He could see the tiny figures of the boys in the valley below, and he knew by their attitudes that they were eagerly telling him to jump. Then for the first time he knew the nature of faith, as he had just known the fierce nature of charity. Or rather for the second time, for he remembered one moment when he had known faith before. It was n when his father had taught him to swim, and he had believed he could float on water not only against reason, but (what is so much harder) against instinct. Then he had trusted water; now he must trust air.

He jumped. He went through air and then through snow with the same blinding swiftness. But as he buried himself in solid snow like a bullet he seemed to learn a million things and to learn them all too fast. He knew that the whole world is a snowball, and that all the stars are snowballs. He knew that no man will be fit for heaven till he loves solid whiteness as a little boy loves a ball of snow.

He sank and sank and sank... and then, as usually happens in such cases, woke up, with a start — in the street. True, he was taken up for a common drunk, but (if you properly appreciate his conversion) you will realize that he did not mind; since the crime of drunkenness is infinitely less than that of spiritual pride, of which he had really been guilty.

The High Plains

By high plains I do not mean table-lands; table-lands do not interest one very much. They seem to involve the bore of a climb without the pleasure of a peak. Also they arc vaguely associated with Asia and those enormous armies that eat up everything like locusts, as did the army of Xerxes; with emperors from nowhere spreading their battalions everywhere; with the white elephants and the painted horses, the dark engines and the dreadful mounted bowmen of the moving empires of the East, with all that evil insolence in short that rolled into Europe in the youth of Nero, and after having been battered about and abandoned by one Christian nation after another, turned up in England with Disraeli and was christened (or rather paganed) Imperialism.

Also (it may be necessary to explain) I do not mean "high planes" such as the Theosophists and the Higher Thought Centres talk about. They spell theirs differently; but I will not have theirs in any spelling. They, I know, are always expounding how this or that person is on a lower plane, while they (the speakers) are on a higher plane: sometimes they will almost tell you what plane, as "5994" or "Plane F, sub-plane 304." I do not mean this sort of height either. My religion says nothing about such planes except that all men are on one plane and that by no means a high one. There are saints indeed in my religion: but a saint only means a man who really knows he is a sinner.

Why then should I talk of the plains as high? I do it for a rather singular reason, which I will illustrate by a parallel. When I was at school learning all the Greek I have ever forgotten, I was puzzled by the phrase OINON MELAN that is "black wine," which continually occurred. I asked what it meant, and many most interesting and convincing answers were given. It was pointed out that we know little of the actual liquid drunk by the Greeks; that the analogy of modern Greek wines may suggest that it was dark and sticky, perhaps a sort of syrup always taken with water; that archaic language about colour is always a little dubious, as where Homer speaks of the "wine-dark sea" and so on. I was very properly satisfied, and never thought of the matter again; until one day, having a decanter of claret in front of me, I happened to look at it. I then perceived that they called wine black because it is black. Very thin, diluted, or held-up abruptly against a flame, red wine is red; but seen in body in most normal shades and semi-lights red wine is black, and therefore was called so.

On the same principles I call the plains high because the plains always are high; they are always as high as we are. We talk of climbing a mountain crest and looking down at the plain; but the phrase is an illusion of our arrogance. It is impossible even to look down at the plain. For the plain itself rises as we rise. It is not merely true that the higher we climb the wider and wider is spread out below us the wealth of the world; it is not merely that the devil or some other respectable guide for tourists takes us to the top of an exceeding high mountain and shows us all the kingdoms of the earth. It is more than that, in our real feeling of it. It is that in a sense the whole world rises with us roaring, and accompanies us to the crest like some clanging chorus of eagles. The plains rise higher and higher like swift grey walls piled up against invisible invaders. And however high a peak you climb, the plain is still as high as the peak.

The mountain tops are only noble because from them we are privileged to behold the plains. So the only value in any man being superior is that he may have a superior admiration for the level and the common. If there is any profit in a place craggy and precipitous it is only because from the vale it is not easy to see all the beauty of the vale; because when actually in the flats one cannot see their sublime and satisfying flatness. If there is any value in being educated or eminent (which is doubtful enough) it is only because the best instructed man may feel most swiftly and certainly the splendour of the ignorant and the simple: the full magnificence of that mighty human army in the plains. The general goes up to the hill to look at his soldiers, not to look down at his soldiers. He withdraws himself not because his regiment is too small to be touched, but because it is too mighty to be seen. The chief climbs with submission and goes higher with great humility; since in order to take a bird’s eye view of everything, he must become small and distant like a bird.

The most marvellous of those mystical cavaliers who wrote intricate and exquisite verse in England in the seventeenth century, I mean Henry Vaughan, put the matter in one line, intrinsically immortal and practically forgotten —

“Oh holy hope and high humility.”

That adjective “high” is not only one of the sudden and stunning inspirations of literature; it is also one of the greatest and gravest definitions of moral science. However far aloft a man may go, he is still looking up, not only at God (which is obvious), but in a manner at men also: seeing more and more all that is towering and mysterious in the dignity and destiny of the lonely house of Adam. I wrote some part of these rambling remarks on a high ridge of rock and turf overlooking a stretch of the central counties; the rise was slight enough in reality, but the immediate ascent had been so steep and sudden that one could not avoid the fancy that on reaching the summit one would look down at the stars. But one did not look down at the stars, but rather up at the cities; seeing as high in heaven the palace town of Alfred like a lit sunset cloud, and away in the void spaces, like a planet in eclipse, Salisbury. So, it may be hoped, until we die you and I will always look up rather than down at the labours and the habitations of our race; we will lift up our eyes to the valleys from whence cometh our help. For from every special eminence and beyond every sublime landmark, it is good for our souls to see only vaster and vaster visions of that dizzy and divine level; and to behold from our crumbling turrets the tall plains of equality.

The Chorus

One of the most marked instances of the decline of true popular sympathy is the gradual disappearance in our time of the habit of singing in chorus. Even when it is done nowadays it is done tentatively and sometimes inaudibly; apparently upon some preposterous principle (which I have never clearly grasped) that singing is an art. In the new aristocracy of the drawing-room a lady is actually asked whether she sings. In the old democracy of the dinner table a man was simply told to sing, and he had to do it. I like the atmosphere of those old banquets. I like to think of my ancestors, middle-aged or venerable gentlemen, all sitting round a table and explaining that they would never forget old days or friends with a rumpty-iddity-iddity, or letting it be known that they would die for England's glory with their tooral ooral, etc. Even the vices of that society (which 'sometimes, I fear, rendered the narrative portions of the song almost as cryptic and inarticulate as the chorus) were displayed with a more human softening than the same vices in the saloon bars of our own time. I greatly prefer Mr. Richard Swiveller to Mr. Stanley Ortheris. I prefer the man who exceeded in rosy wine in order that the wing of friendship might never moult a feather to the man who exceeds quite as much in whiskies and sodas, but declares all the time that he's for number one, and that you don't catch him paying for other men's drinks. The old men of pleasure (with their tooral ooral) got at least some social and communal virtue out of pleasure. The new men of pleasure (without the slightest vestige of a tooral ooral) are simply hermits of irreligion instead of religion, anchorites of atheism, and they might as well be drugging themselves with hashish or opium in a wilderness.

But the chorus of the old songs had another use besides this obvious one of asserting the popular element in the arts. The chorus of a song, even of a comic song, has the same purpose as the chorus in a Greek tragedy. It reconciles men to the gods. It connects this one particular tale with the cosmos and the philosophy of common things, Thus we constantly find in the old ballads, especially the pathetic ballads, some refrain about the grass growing green, or the birds singing, or the woods being merry in spring. These are windows opened in the house of tragedy; momentary glimpses of larger and quieter scenes, of more ancient and enduring landscapes. Many of the country songs describing crime and death have refrains of a startling joviality like cock crow, just as if the whole company were coming in with a shout of protest against so sombre a view of existence. There is a long and gruesome ballad called “The Berkshire Tragedy,” about a murder committed by a jealous sister, for the consummation of which a wicked miller is hanged, and the chorus (which should come in a kind of burst) runs:

“And I’ll be true to my love
If my love’ll be true to me.”

The very reasonable arrangement here suggested is introduced, I think, as a kind of throw back to the normal, a reminder that even “The Berkshire Tragedy” does not fill the whole of Berkshire. The poor young lady is drowned, and the wicked miller (to whom we may have been affectionately attached) is hanged; but still a ruby kindles in the vine, and many a garden by the water blows. Not that Omar’s type of hedonistic resignation is at all the same as the breezy impatience of the Berkshire refrain; but they are alike in so far as they gaze out beyond the particular complication to more open plains of peace. The chorus of the ballad looks past the drowning maiden and the miller’s gibbet, and sees the lanes full of lovers.

This use of the chorus to humanize and dilute a dark story is strongly opposed to the modern view of art. Modern art has to be what is called “intense.” It is not easy to define being intense; but, roughly speaking, it means saying only one thing at a time, and saying it wrong. Modern tragic writers have to write short stories; if they wrote long stories (as the man said of philosophy) cheerfulness would creep in. Such stories are like stings; brief, but purely painful. And doubtless they bore some resemblance to some lives lived under our successful scientific civilization; lives which tend in any case to be painful, and in many cases to be brief. But when the artistic people passed beyond the poignant anecdote and began to write long books full of poignancy, then the reading public began to rebel and to demand the recall of romance. The long books about the black poverty of cities became quite insupportable. The Berkshire tragedy had a chorus; but the London tragedy has no chorus. Therefore people welcomed the return of adventurous novels about alien places and times, the trenchant and swordlike stories of Stevenson. But I am not narrowly on the side of the romantics. I think that glimpses of the gloom of our civilization ought to be recorded. I think that the bewilderments of the solitary and sceptical soul ought to be preserved, if it be only for the pity (yes, and the admiration) of a happier time. But I wish that there were some way in which the chorus could enter. I wish that at the end of each chapter of stiff agony or insane terror the choir of humanity could come in with a crash of music and tell both the reader and the author that this is not the whole of human experience. Let them go on recording hard scenes or hideous questions, but let there be a jolly refrain.

Thus we might read: “As Honoria laid down the volume of Ibsen and went wearily to her window, she realized that life must be to her not only harsher, but colder than it was to the comfortable and the weak. With her tooral ooral, etc.;” or, again: “The young curate smiled grimly as he listened to his great-grandmother’s last words. He knew only too well that since Phogg’s discovery of the hereditary hairiness of goats religion stood on a very different basis from that which it had occupied in his childhood. With his rumpty-iddity, rumpty-iddity;” and so on. Or we might read: “Uriel Maybloom stared gloomily down at his sandals, as he realized for the first time how senseless and anti-social are all ties between man and woman; how each must go his or her way without any attempt to arrest the headlong separation of their souls.” And then would come in one deafening chorus of everlasting humanity “But I’ll be true to my love, if my love’ll be true to me.”

In the records of the first majestic and yet fantastic developments of the foundation of St. Francis of Assisi is an account of a certain Blessed Brother Giles. I have forgotten most of it, but I remember one fact: that certain students of theology came to ask him whether he believed in free will, and, if so, how he could reconcile it with necessity. On hearing the question St. Francis’s follower reflected a little while and then seized a fiddle and began capering and dancing about the garden, playing a wild tune and generally expressing a violent and invigorating indifference. The tune is not recorded, but it is the eternal chorus of mankind, that modifies all the arts and mocks all the individualisms, like the laughter and thunder of some distant sea.

A Romance of the Marshes

In books as a whole marshes are described as desolate and colourless, great fields of clay or sedge, vast horizons of drab or grey. But this, like many other literary associations, is a piece of poetical injustice. Monotony has nothing to do with a place; monotony, either in its sensation or its infliction, is simply the quality of a person. There are no dreary sights; there are only dreary sightseers. It is a matter of taste, that is of personality, whether marshes are monotonous; but it is a matter of fact and science that they are not monochrome. The tops of high mountains (I am told) are all white; the depths of primeval caverns (I am also told) are all dark. The sea will be grey or blue for weeks together; and the desert, I have been led to believe, is the colour of sand. The North Pole (if we found it) would be white with cracks of blue; and Endless Space (if we went there) would, I suppose, be black with white spots. If any of these were counted of a monotonous colour I could well understand it; but on the contrary, they are always spoken of as if they had the gorgeous and chaotic colours of a cosmic kaleidoscope. Now exactly where you can find colours like those of a tulip garden or a stained-glass window, is in those sunken and sodden lands which are always called dreary. Of course the great tulip gardens did arise in Holland; which is simply one immense marsh. There is nothing in Europe so truly tropical as marshes. Also, now I come to think of it, there are few places so agreeably marshy as tropics. At any rate swamp and fenlands in England are always especially rich in gay grasses or gorgeous fungoids; and seem sometimes as glorious as a transformation scene; but also as unsubstantial. In these splendid scenes it is always very easy to put your foot through the scenery. You may sink up to your armpits; but you will sink up to your armpits in flowers. I do not deny that I myself am of a sort that sinks — except in the matter of spirits. I saw in the west counties recently a swampy field of great richness and promise. If I had stepped on it I have no doubt at all that I should have vanished; that aeons hence the complete fossil of a fat Fleet Street journalist would be found in that compressed clay. I only claim that it would be found in some attitude of energy, or even of joy. But the last point is the most important of all, for as I imagined myself sinking up to the neck in what looked like a solid green field, I suddenly remembered that this very thing must have happened to certain interesting pirates quite a thousand years ago.

For, as it happened, the flat fenland in which I so nearly sunk was the fenland round the Island of Athelney, which is now an island in the fields and no longer in the waters. But on the abrupt hillock a stone still stands to say that this was that embattled islet in the Parrett where King Alfred held his last fort against the foreign invaders, in that war that nearly washed us as far from civilization as the Solomon Islands. Here he defended the island called Athelney as he afterwards did his best to defend the island called England. For the hero always defends an island, a thing beleaguered and surrounded, like the Troy of Hector. And the highest and largest humanitarian can only rise to defending the tiny island called the earth.

One approaches the island of Athelney along a low long road like an interminable white string stretched across the flats, and lined with those dwarfish trees that are elvish in their very dullness. At one point of the journey (I cannot conceive why) one is arrested by a toll gate at which one has to pay threepence. Perhaps it is a distorted tradition of those dark ages. Perhaps Alfred, with the superior science of comparative civilization, had calculated the economics of Denmark down to a halfpenny. Perhaps a Dane sometimes came with twopence, sometimes even with twopence-halfpenny, after the sack of many cities even with twopence three farthings; but never with threepence. Whether or no it was a permanent barrier to the barbarians it was only a temporary barrier to me. I discovered three large and complete coppers in various parts of my person, and I passed on along that strangely monotonous and strangely fascinating path. It is not merely fanciful to feel that the place expresses itself appropriately as the place where the great Christian King hid himself from the heathen. Though a marshland is always open it is still curiously secret. Fens, like deserts, are large things very apt to be mislaid. These flats feared to be overlooked in a double sense; the small trees crouched and the whole plain seemed lying on its face, as men do when shells burst. The little path ran fearlessly forward; but it seemed to run on all fours. Everything in that strange countryside seemed to be lying low, as if to avoid the incessant and rattling rain of the Danish arrows. There were indeed hills of no inconsiderable height quite within call; but those pools and flats of the old Parrett seemed to separate themselves like a central and secret sea; and in the midst of them stood up the rock of Athelney as isolate as it was to Alfred. And all across this recumbent and almost crawling country there ran the glory of the low wet lands; grass lustrous and living like the plumage of some universal bird; the flowers as gorgeous as bonfires and the weeds more beautiful than the flowers. One stooped to stroke the grass, as if the earth were all one kind beast that could feel.

Why does no decent person write an historical novel about Alfred and his fort in Athelney, in the marshes of the Parrett? Not a very historical novel. Not about his Truth-telling (please) or his founding the British Empire, or the British Navy, or the Navy League, or whichever it was he founded. Not about the Treaty of Wedmore and whether it ought (as an eminent historian says) to be called the Pact of Chippenham. But an aboriginal romance for boys about the bare, bald, beatific fact that a great hero held his fort in an island in a river. An island is fine enough, in all conscience or piratic unconscientiousness, but an island in a river sounds like the beginning of the greatest adventure story on earth. “Robinson Crusoe” is really a great tale, but think of Robinson Crusoe’s feelings if he could have actually seen England and Spain from his inaccessible isle! “Treasure Island” is a spirit of genius: but what treasure could an island contain to compare with Alfred? And then consider the further elements of juvenile romance in an island that was more of an island than it looked. Athelney was masked with marshes; many a heavy harnessed Viking may have started bounding across a meadow only to find himself submerged in a sea. I feel the full fictitious splendour spreading round me; I see glimpses of a great romance that will never be written. I see a sudden shaft quivering in one of the short trees. I see a red-haired man wading madly among the tall gold flowers of the marsh, leaping onward and lurching lower. I see another shaft stand quivering in his throat. I cannot see any more, because, as I have delicately suggested, I am a heavy man. This mysterious marshland does not sustain me, and I sink into its depths with a bubbling groan.

A MISCELLANY OF MEN

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THE SUFFRAGIST

Rightly or wrongly, it is certain that a man both liberal and chivalric, can and very often does feel a dis-ease and distrust touching those political women we call Suffragettes. Like most other popular sentiments, it is generally wrongly stated even when it is rightly felt. One part of it can be put most shortly thus: that when a woman puts up her fists to a man she is putting herself in the only posture in which he is not afraid of her. He can be afraid of her speech and still more of her silence; but force reminds him of a rusted but very real weapon of which he has grown ashamed. But these crude summaries are never quite accurate in any matter of the instincts. For the things which are the simplest so long as they are undisputed invariably become the subtlest when once they are disputed: which was what Joubert meant, I suppose, when he said, “It is not hard to believe in God if one does not define Him.” When the evil instincts of old Foulon made him say of the poor, “Let them eat grass,” the good and Christian instincts of the poor made them hang him on a lamppost with his mouth stuffed full of that vegetation. But if a modern vegetarian aristocrat were to say to the poor, “But why don’t you like grass?” their intelligences would be much more taxed to find such an appropriate repartee. And this matter of the functions of the sexes is primarily a matter of the instincts; sex and breathing are about the only two things that generally work best when they are least worried about. That, I suppose, is why the same sophisticated age that has poisoned the world with Feminism is also polluting it with Breathing Exercises. We plunge at once into a forest of false analogies and bad blundering history; while almost any man or woman left to themselves would know at least that sex is quite different from anything else in the world.

There is no kind of comparison possible between a quarrel of man and woman (however right the woman may be) and the other quarrels of slave and master, of rich and poor, or of patriot and invader, with which the Suffragists deluge us every day. The difference is as plain as noon; these other alien groups never came into contact until they came into collision. Races and ranks began with battle, even if they afterwards melted into amity. But the very first fact about the sexes is that they like each other. They seek each other: and awful as are the sins and sorrows that often come of their mating, it was not such things that made them meet. It is utterly astounding to note the way in which modern writers and talkers miss this plain, wide, and overwhelming fact: one would suppose woman a victim and nothing else. By this account ideal, emancipated woman has, age after age, been knocked silly with a stone axe. But really there is no fact to show that ideal, emancipated woman was ever knocked silly; except the fact that she is silly. And that might have arisen in so many other ways. Real responsible woman has never been silly; and any one wishing to knock her would be wise (like the streetboys) to knock and run away. It is ultimately idiotic to compare this prehistoric participation with any royalties or rebellions. Genuine royalties wish to crush rebellions. Genuine rebels wish to destroy kings. The sexes cannot wish to abolish each other; and if we allow them any sort of permanent opposition it will sink into something as base as a party system.

As marriage, therefore, is rooted in an aboriginal unity of instincts, you cannot compare it, even in its quarrels, with any of the mere collisions of separate institutions. You could compare it with the emancipation of negroes from planters — if it were true that a white man in early youth always dreamed of the abstract beauty of a black man. You could compare it with the revolt of tenants against a landlord — if it were true that young landlords wrote sonnets to invisible tenants. You could compare it to the fighting policy of the Fenians — if it were true that every normal Irishman wanted an Englishman to come and live with him. But as we know there are no instincts in any of these directions, these analogies are not only false but false on the cardinal fact. I do not speak of the comparative comfort or merit of these different things: I say they are different. It may be that love turned to hate is terribly common in sexual matters: it may be that hate turned to love is not uncommon in the rivalries of race or class. But any philosophy about the sexes that begins with anything but the mutual attraction of the sexes, begins with a fallacy; and all its historical comparisons are as irrelevant and impertinent as puns.

But to expose such cold negation of the instincts is easy: to express or even half express the instincts is very hard. The instincts are very much concerned with what literary people call “style” in letters or more vulgar people call “style” in dress. They are much concerned with how a thing is done, as well as whether one may do it: and the deepest elements in their attraction or aversion can often only be conveyed by stray examples or sudden images. When Danton was defending himself before the Jacobin tribunal he spoke so loud that his voice was heard across the Seine, in quite remote streets on the other side of the river. He must have bellowed like a bull of Bashan. Yet none of us would think of that prodigy except as something poetical and appropriate. None of us would instinctively feel that Danton was less of a man or even less of a gentleman, for speaking so in such an hour. But suppose we heard that Marie Antoinette, when tried before the same tribunal, had howled so that she could be heard in the Faubourg St. Germain — well, I leave it to the instincts, if there are any left. It is not wrong to howl. Neither is it right. It is simply a question of the instant impression on the artistic and even animal parts of humanity, if the noise were heard suddenly like a gun.

Perhaps the nearest verbal analysis of the instinct may be found in the gestures of the orator addressing a crowd. For the true orator must always be a demagogue: even if the mob be a small mob, like the French committee or the English House of Lords. And “demagogue,” in the good Greek meaning, does not mean one who pleases the populace, but one who leads it: and if you will notice, you will see that all the instinctive gestures of oratory are gestures of military leadership; pointing the people to a path or waving them on to an advance. Notice that long sweep of the arm across the body and outward, which great orators use naturally and cheap orators artificially. It is almost the exact gesture of the drawing of a sword.

The point is not that women are unworthy of votes; it is not even that votes are unworthy of women. It is that votes are unworthy of men, so long as they are merely votes; and have nothing in them of this ancient militarism of democracy. The only crowd worth talking to is the crowd that is ready to go somewhere and do something; the only demagogue worth hearing is he who can point at something to be done: and, if he points with a sword, will only feel it familiar and useful like an elongated finger. Now, except in some mystical exceptions which prove the rule, these are not the gestures, and therefore not the instincts, of women. No honest man dislikes the public woman. He can only dislike the political woman; an entirely different thing. The instinct has nothing to do with any desire to keep women curtained or captive: if such a desire exists. A husband would be pleased if his wife wore a gold crown and proclaimed laws from a throne of marble; or if she uttered oracles from the tripod of a priestess; or if she could walk in mystical motherhood before the procession of some great religious order. But that she should stand on a platform in the exact altitude in which he stands; leaning forward a little more than is graceful and holding her mouth open a little longer and wider than is dignified — well, I only write here of the facts of natural history; and the fact is that it is this, and not publicity or importance, that hurts. It is for the modern world to judge whether such instincts are indeed danger signals; and whether the hurting of moral as of material nerves is a tocsin and a warning of nature.

THE POET AND THE CHEESE

There is something creepy in the flat Eastern Counties; a brush of the white feather. There is a stillness, which is rather of the mind than of the bodily senses. Rapid changes and sudden revelations of scenery, even when they are soundless, have something in them analogous to a movement of music, to a crash or a cry. Mountain hamlets spring out on us with a shout like mountain brigands. Comfortable valleys accept us with open arms and warm words, like comfortable innkeepers. But travelling in the great level lands has a curiously still and lonely quality; lonely even when there are plenty of people on the road and in the market-place. One's voice seems to break an almost elvish silence, and something unreasonably weird in the phrase of the nursery tales, "And he went a little farther and came to another place," comes back into the mind.

In some such mood I came along a lean, pale road south of the fens, and found myself in a large, quiet, and seemingly forgotten village. It was one of those places that instantly produce a frame of mind which, it may be, one afterwards decks out with unreal details. I dare say that grass did not really grow in the streets, but I came away with a curious impression that it did. I dare say the marketplace was not literally lonely and without sign of life, but it left the vague impression of being so. The place was large and even loose in design, yet it had the air of something hidden away and always overlooked. It seemed shy, like a big yokel; the low roofs seemed to be ducking behind the hedges and railings; and the chimneys holding their breath. I came into it in that dead hour of the afternoon which is neither after lunch nor before tea, nor anything else even on a half-holiday; and I had a fantastic feeling that I had strayed into a lost and extra hour that is not numbered in the twenty-four.

I entered an inn which stood openly in the market-place yet was almost as private as a private house. Those who talk of "public-houses" as if they were all one problem would have been both puzzled and pleased with such a place. In the front window a stout old lady in black with an elaborate cap sat doing a large piece of needlework. She had a kind of comfortable Puritanism about her; and might have been (perhaps she was) the original Mrs. Grundy. A little more withdrawn into the parlour sat a tall, strong, and serious girl, with a face of beautiful honesty and a pair of scissors stuck in her belt, doing a small piece of needlework. Two feet behind them sat a hulking labourer with a humorous face like wood painted scarlet, with a huge mug of mild beer which he had not touched, and probably would not touch for hours. On the hearthrug there was an equally motionless cat; and on the table a copy of ‘Household Words’.

I was conscious of some atmosphere, still and yet bracing, that I had met somewhere in literature. There was poetry in it as well as piety; and yet it was not poetry after my particular taste. It was somehow at once solid and airy. Then I remembered that it was the atmosphere in some of Wordsworth’s rural poems; which are full of genuine freshness and wonder, and yet are in some incurable way commonplace. This was curious; for Wordsworth’s men were of the rocks and fells, and not of the fenlands or flats. But perhaps it is the clearness of still water and the mirrored skies of meres and pools that produces this crystalline virtue. Perhaps that is why Wordsworth is called a Lake Poet instead of a mountain poet. Perhaps it is the water that does it. Certainly the whole of that town was like a cup of water given at morning.

After a few sentences exchanged at long intervals in the manner of rustic courtesy, I inquired casually what was the name of the town. The old lady answered that its name was Stilton, and composedly continued her needlework. But I had paused with my mug in air, and was gazing at her with a suddenly arrested concern. “I suppose,” I said, “that it has nothing to do with the cheese of that name.” “Oh, yes,” she answered, with a staggering indifference, “they used to make it here.”

I put down my mug with a gravity far greater than her own. “But this place is a Shrine!” I said. “Pilgrims should be pouring into it from wherever the English legend has endured alive. There ought to be a colossal statue in the market-place of the man who invented Stilton cheese. There ought to be another colossal statue of the first cow who provided the foundations of it. There should be a burnished tablet let into the ground on the spot where some courageous man first ate Stilton cheese, and survived. On the top of a neighbouring hill (if there are any neighbouring hills) there should be a huge model of a Stilton cheese, made of some rich green marble and engraven with some haughty motto: I suggest something like ‘Ver non semper viret; sed Stiltonia semper virescit.’” The old lady said, “Yes, sir,” and continued her domestic occupations.

After a strained and emotional silence, I said, “If I take a meal here tonight can you give me any Stilton?”

“No, sir; I’m afraid we haven’t got any Stilton,” said the immovable one, speaking as if it were something thousands of miles away.

“This is awful,” I said: for it seemed to me a strange allegory of England as she is now; this little town that had lost its glory; and forgotten, so to speak, the meaning of its own name. And I thought it yet more symbolic because from all that old and full and virile life, the great cheese was gone; and only the beer remained. And even that will be stolen by the Liberals or adulterated by the Conservatives. Politely disengaging myself, I made my way as quickly as possible to the nearest large, noisy, and nasty town in that neighbourhood, where I sought out the nearest vulgar, tawdry, and avaricious restaurant.

There (after trifling with beef, mutton, puddings, pies, and so on) I got a Stilton cheese. I was so much moved by my memories that I wrote a sonnet to the cheese. Some critical friends have hinted to me that my sonnet is not strictly new; that it contains “echoes” (as they express it) of some other poem that they have read somewhere. Here, at least, are the lines I wrote:

SONNET TO A STILTON CHEESE

Stilton, thou shouldst be living at this hour
And so thou art. Nor losest grace thereby;
England has need of thee, and so have I —
She is a Fen. Far as the eye can scour,
League after grassy league from Lincoln tower
To Stilton in the fields, she is a Fen.
Yet this high cheese, by choice of fenland men,
Like a tall green volcano rose in power.

Plain living and long drinking are no more,
And pure religion reading ‘Household Words’,
And sturdy manhood sitting still all day
Shrink, like this cheese that crumbles to its core;
While my digestion, like the House of Lords,
The heaviest burdens on herself doth lay.

I confess I feel myself as if some literary influence, something that has haunted me, were present in this otherwise original poem; but it is hopeless to disentangle it now.

THE THING

The wind awoke last night with so noble a violence that it was like the war in heaven; and I thought for a moment that the Thing had broken free. For wind never seems like empty air. Wind always sounds full and physical, like the big body of something; and I fancied that the Thing itself was walking gigantic along the great roads between the forests of beech.

Let me explain. The vitality and recurrent victory of Christendom have been due to the power of the Thing to break out from time to time from its enveloping words and symbols. Without this power all civilisations tend to perish under a load of language and ritual. One instance of this we hear much in modern discussion: the separation of the form from the spirit of religion. But we hear too little of numberless other cases of the same stiffening and falsification; we are far too seldom reminded that just as church-going is not religion, so reading and writing are not knowledge, and voting is not self-government. It would be easy to find people in the big cities who can read and write quickly enough to be clerks, but who are actually ignorant of the daily movements of the sun and moon.

The case of self-government is even more curious, especially as one watches it for the first time in a country district. Self-government arose among men (probably among the primitive men, certainly among the ancients) out of an idea which seems now too simple to be understood. The notion of self-government was not (as many modern friends and foes of it seem to think) the notion that the ordinary citizen is to be consulted as one consults an Encyclopaedia. He is not there to be asked a lot of fancy questions, to see how he answers them. He and his fellows are to be, within reasonable human limits, masters of their own lives. They shall decide whether they shall be men of the oar or the wheel, of the spade or the spear. The men of the valley shall settle whether the valley shall be devastated for coal or covered with corn and vines; the men of the town shall decide whether it shall be hoary with thatches or splendid with spires. Of their own nature and instinct they shall gather under a patriarchal chief or debate in a political market-place. And in case the word “man” be misunderstood, I may remark that in this moral atmosphere, this original soul of self-government, the women always have quite as much influence as the men. But in modern England neither the men nor the women have any influence at all. In this primary matter, the moulding of the landscape, the creation of a mode of life, the people are utterly impotent. They stand and stare at imperial and economic processes going on, as they might stare at the Lord Mayor's Show.

Round about where I live, for instance, two changes are taking place which really affect the land and all things that live on it, whether for good or evil. The first is that the urban civilisation (or whatever it is) is advancing; that the clerks come out in black swarms and the villas advance in red battalions. The other is that the vast estates into which England has long been divided are passing out of the hands of the English gentry into the hands of men who are always upstarts and often actually foreigners.

Now, these are just the sort of things with which self-government was really supposed to grapple. People were supposed to be able to indicate whether they wished to live in town or country, to be represented by a gentleman or a cad. I do not presume to prejudge their decision; perhaps they would prefer the cad; perhaps he is really preferable. I say that the filling of a man's native sky with smoke or the selling of his roof over his head illustrate the sort of things he ought to have some say in, if he is supposed to be governing himself. But owing to the strange trend of recent society, these enormous earthquakes he has to pass over and treat as private trivialities. In theory the building of a villa is as incidental as the buying of a hat. In reality it is as if all Lancashire were laid waste for deer forests; or as if all Belgium were flooded by the sea. In theory the sale of a squire's land to a moneylender is a minor and exceptional necessity. In reality it is a thing like a German invasion. Sometimes it is a German invasion.

Upon this helpless populace, gazing at these prodigies and fates, comes round about every five years a thing called a General Election. It is believed by antiquarians to be the remains of some system of self-government; but it consists solely in asking the citizen questions about everything except what he understands. The examination paper of the Election generally consists of some such queries as these: "I. Are the green biscuits eaten by the peasants of Eastern Lithuania in your opinion fit for human food? II. Are the religious professions of the President of the Orange Free State hypocritical or sincere? III. Do you think that the savages in Prusso-Portuguese East Bunyipland are as happy and hygienic as the fortunate savages in Franco-British West Bunyipland? IV. Did the lost Latin Charter said to have been exacted from Henry III reserve the right of the Crown to create peers? V.

What do you think of what America thinks of what Mr. Roosevelt thinks of what Sir Eldon Gorst thinks of the state of the Nile? VI. Detect some difference between the two persons in frock-coats placed before you at this election.”

Now, it never was supposed in any natural theory of self-government that the ordinary man in my neighbourhood need answer fantastic questions like these. He is a citizen of South Bucks, not an editor of ‘Notes and Queries’. He would be, I seriously believe, the best judge of whether farmsteads or factory chimneys should adorn his own sky-line, of whether stupid squires or clever usurers should govern his own village. But these are precisely the things which the oligarchs will not allow him to touch with his finger. Instead, they allow him an Imperial destiny and divine mission to alter, under their guidance, all the things that he knows nothing about. The name of self-government is noisy everywhere: the Thing is throttled.

The wind sang and split the sky like thunder all the night through; in scraps of sleep it filled my dreams with the divine discordances of martyrdom and revolt; I heard the horn of Roland and the drums of Napoleon and all the tongues of terror with which the Thing has gone forth: the spirit of our race alive. But when I came down in the morning only a branch or two was broken off the tree in my garden; and none of the great country houses in the neighbourhood were blown down, as would have happened if the Thing had really been abroad.

THE MAN WHO THINKS BACKWARDS

The man who thinks backwards is a very powerful person to-day: indeed, if he is not omnipotent, he is at least omnipresent. It is he who writes nearly all the learned books and articles, especially of the scientific or skeptical sort; all the articles on Eugenics and Social Evolution and Prison Reform and the Higher Criticism and all the rest of it. But especially it is this strange and tortuous being who does most of the writing about female emancipation and the reconsidering of marriage. For the man who thinks backwards is very frequently a woman.

Thinking backwards is not quite easy to define abstractedly; and, perhaps, the simplest method is to take some object, as plain as possible, and from it illustrate the two modes of thought: the right mode in which all real results have been rooted; the wrong mode, which is confusing all our current discussions, especially our discussions about the relations of the sexes. Casting my eye round the room, I notice an object which is often mentioned in the higher and subtler of these debates about the sexes: I mean a poker. I will take a poker and think about it; first forwards and then backwards; and so, perhaps, show what I mean.

The sage desiring to think well and wisely about a poker will begin somewhat as follows: Among the live creatures that crawl about this star the queerest is the thing called Man. This plucked and plumeless bird, comic and forlorn, is the butt of all the philosophies. He is the only naked animal; and this quality, once, it is said, his glory, is now his shame. He has to go outside himself for everything that he wants. He might almost be considered as an absent-minded person who had gone bathing and left his clothes everywhere, so that he has hung his hat upon the beaver and his coat upon the sheep. The rabbit has white warmth for a waistcoat, and the glow-worm has a lantern for a head. But man has no heat in his hide, and the light in his body is darkness; and he must look for light and warmth in the wild, cold universe in which he is cast. This is equally true of his soul and of his body; he is the one creature that has lost his heart as much as he has lost his hide. In a spiritual sense he has taken leave of his senses; and even in a literal sense he has been unable to keep his hair on. And just as this external need of his has lit in his dark brain the dreadful star called religion, so it has lit in his hand the only adequate symbol of it: I mean the red flower called Fire.

Fire, the most magic and startling of all material things, is a thing known only to man and the expression of his sublime externalism. It embodies all that is human in his hearths and all that is divine on his altars. It is the most human thing in the world; seen across wastes of marsh or medleys of forest, it is veritably the purple and golden flag of the sons of Eve. But there is about this generous and rejoicing thing an alien and awful quality: the quality of torture. Its presence is life; its touch is death. Therefore, it is always necessary to have an intermediary between ourselves and this dreadful deity; to have a priest to intercede for us with the god of life and death; to send an ambassador to the fire. That priest is the poker. Made of a material more merciless and warlike than the other instruments of domesticity, hammered on the anvil and born itself in the flame, the poker is strong enough to enter the burning fiery furnace, and, like the holy children, not be consumed. In this heroic service it is often battered and twisted, but is the more honourable for it, like any other soldier who has been under fire.

Now all this may sound very fanciful and mystical, but it is the right view of pokers, and no one who takes it will ever go in for any wrong view of pokers, such as using them to beat one’s wife or torture one’s children, or even (though that is more excusable) to make a policeman jump, as the clown does in the pantomime. He who has thus gone back to the beginning, and seen everything as quaint and new, will always see things in their right order, the one depending on the other in degree of purpose and importance: the poker for the fire and the fire for the man and the man for the glory of God.

This is thinking forwards. Now our modern discussions about everything, Imperialism, Socialism, or Votes for Women, are all entangled in an opposite train of thought, which runs as follows: — A modern intellectual comes in and sees a poker. He is a positivist; he will not begin with any dogmas about the nature of man, or any day-dreams about the mystery of fire. He will begin with what he can see, the poker; and the first thing he sees about the poker is that it is crooked. He says, “Poor poker; it’s crooked.” Then he asks how it came to be crooked; and is told that there is a thing in the world (with which his temperament has hitherto left him unacquainted) — a thing called fire. He points out, very kindly and clearly, how silly it is of people, if they want a straight poker, to put it into a chemical combustion which will very probably heat and warp it. “Let us abolish fire,” he says, “and then we shall have perfectly straight pokers.

Why should you want a fire at all?” They explain to him that a creature called Man wants a fire, because he has no fur or feathers. He gazes dreamily at the embers for a few seconds, and then shakes his head. “I doubt if such an animal is worth preserving,” he says. “He must eventually go under in the cosmic struggle when pitted against well-armoured and warmly protected species, who have wings and trunks and spires and scales and horns and shaggy hair. If Man cannot live without these luxuries, you had better abolish Man.” At this point, as a rule, the crowd is convinced; it heaves up all its clubs and axes, and abolishes him. At least, one of him.

Before we begin discussing our various new plans for the people’s welfare, let us make a kind of agreement that we will argue in a straightforward way, and not in a tail-foremost way. The typical modern movements may be right; but let them be defended because they are right, not because they are typical modern movements. Let us begin with the actual woman or man in the street, who is cold; like mankind before the finding of fire. Do not let us begin with the end of the last red-hot discussion — like the end of a red hot poker. Imperialism may be right. But if it is right, it is right because England has some divine authority like Israel, or some human authority like Rome; not because we have saddled ourselves with South Africa, and don’t know how to get rid of it. Socialism may be true. But if it is true, it is true because the tribe or the city can really declare all land to be common land, not because Harrod’s Stores exist and the commonwealth must copy them. Female suffrage may be just. But if it is just, it is just because women are women, not because women are sweated workers and white slaves and all sorts of things that they ought never to have been. Let not the Imperialist accept a colony because it is there, nor the Suffragist seize a vote because it is lying about, nor the Socialist buy up an industry merely because it is for sale.

Let us ask ourselves first what we really do want, not what recent legal decisions have told us to want, or recent logical philosophies proved that we must want, or recent social prophecies predicted that we shall some day want. If there must be a British Empire, let it be British, and not, in mere panic, American or Prussian. If there ought to be female suffrage, let it be female, and not a mere imitation as coarse as the male blackguard or as dull as the male clerk. If there is to be Socialism, let it be social; that is, as different as possible from all the big commercial departments of to-day. The really good journeyman tailor does not cut his coat according to his cloth;

he asks for more cloth. The really practical statesman does not fit himself to existing conditions, he denounces the conditions as unfit. History is like some deeply planted tree which, though gigantic in girth, tapers away at last into tiny twigs; and we are in the topmost branches. Each of us is trying to bend the tree by a twig: to alter England through a distant colony, or to capture the State through a small State department, or to destroy all voting through a vote. In all such bewilderment he is wise who resists this temptation of trivial triumph or surrender, and happy (in an echo of the Roman poet) who remembers the roots of things.

THE NAMELESS MAN

There are only two forms of government the monarchy or personal government, and the republic or impersonal government. England is not a government; England is an anarchy, because there are so many kings. But there is one real advantage (among many real disadvantages) in the method of abstract democracy, and that is this: that under impersonal government politics are so much more personal. In France and America, where the State is an abstraction, political argument is quite full of human details — some might even say of inhuman details. But in England, precisely because we are ruled by personages, these personages do not permit personalities. In England names are honoured, and therefore names are suppressed. But in the republics, in France especially, a man can put his enemies' names into his article and his own name at the end of it.

This is the essential condition of such candour. If we merely made our anonymous articles more violent, we should be baser than we are now. We should only be arming masked men with daggers instead of cudgels. And I, for one, have always believed in the more general signing of articles, and have signed my own articles on many occasions when, heaven knows, I had little reason to be vain of them. I have heard many arguments for anonymity; but they all seem to amount to the statement that anonymity is safe, which is just what I complain of. In matters of truth the fact that you don't want to publish something is, nine times out of ten, a proof that you ought to publish it.

But there is one answer to my perpetual plea for a man putting his name to his writing. There is one answer, and there is only one answer, and it is never given. It is that in the modern complexity very often a man's name is almost as false as his pseudonym. The prominent person today is eternally trying to lose a name, and to get a title. For instance, we all read with earnestness and patience the pages of the 'Daily Mail', and there are times when we feel moved to cry, "Bring to us the man who thought these strange thoughts! Pursue him, capture him, take great care of him. Bring him back to us tenderly, like some precious bale of silk, that we may look upon the face of the man who desires such things to be printed. Let us know his name; his social and medical pedigree." But in the modern muddle (it might be said) how little should we gain if those frankly fatuous sheets were indeed subscribed by the man who had inspired them. Suppose that after every article stating that the Premier is a piratical Socialist there were printed the simple word “Northcliffe.” What does that simple word suggest to the simple soul? To my simple soul (uninstructed otherwise) it suggests a lofty and lonely crag somewhere in the wintry seas towards the Orkheys or Norway; and barely clinging to the top of this crag the fortress of some forgotten chieftain. As it happens, of course, I know that the word does not mean this; it means another Fleet Street journalist like myself or only different from myself in so far as he has sought to secure money while I have sought to secure a jolly time.

A title does not now even serve as a distinction: it does not distinguish. A coronet is not merely an extinguisher: it is a hiding-place.

But the really odd thing is this. This false quality in titles does not merely apply to the new and vulgar titles, but to the old and historic titles also. For hundreds of years titles in England have been essentially unmeaning; void of that very weak and very human instinct in which titles originated. In essential nonsense of application there is nothing to choose between Northcliffe and Norfolk. The Duke of Norfolk means (as my exquisite and laborious knowledge of Latin informs me) the Leader of Norfolk. It is idle to talk against representative government or for it. All government is representative government until it begins to decay. Unfortunately (as is also evident) all government begins to decay the instant it begins to govern. All aristocrats were first meant as envoys of democracy; and most envoys of democracy lose no time in becoming aristocrats. By the old essential human notion, the Duke of Norfolk ought simply to be the first or most manifest of Norfolk men.

I see growing and filling out before me the image of an actual Duke of Norfolk. For instance, Norfolk men all make their voices run up very high at the end of a sentence. The Duke of Norfolk’s voice, therefore, ought to end in a perfect shriek. They often (I am told) end sentences with the word “together”; entirely irrespective of its meaning. Thus I shall expect the Duke of Norfolk to say: “I beg to second the motion together”; or “This is a great constitutional question together.” I shall expect him to know much about the Broads and the sluggish rivers above them; to know about the shooting of water-fowl, and not to know too much about anything else. Of mountains he must be wildly and ludicrously ignorant. He must have the freshness of Norfolk; nay, even the flatness of Norfolk. He must remind me of the watery expanses, the great square church towers and the long level sunsets of East England. If he does not do this, I decline to know him.

I need not multiply such cases; the principle applies everywhere. Thus I lose all interest in the Duke of Devonshire unless he can assure me that his soul is filled with that strange warm Puritanism, Puritanism shot with romance, which colours the West Country. He must eat nothing but clotted cream, drink nothing but cider, reading nothing but ‘Lorna Doone’, and be unacquainted with any town larger than Plymouth, which he must regard with some awe, as the Central Babylon of the world. Again, I should expect the Prince of Wales always to be full of the mysticism and dreamy ardour of the Celtic fringe.

Perhaps it may be thought that these demands are a little extreme; and that our fancy is running away with us. Nevertheless, it is not my Duke of Devonshire who is funny; but the real Duke of Devonshire. The point is that the scheme of titles is a misfit throughout: hardly anywhere do we find a modern man whose name and rank represent in any way his type, his locality, or his mode of life. As a mere matter of social comedy, the thing is worth noticing. You will meet a man whose name suggests a gouty admiral, and you will find him exactly like a timid organist: you will hear announced the name of a haughty and almost heathen grande dame, and behold the entrance of a nice, smiling Christian cook. These are light complications of the central fact of the falsification of all names and ranks. Our peers are like a party of mediaeval knights who should have exchanged shields, crests, and pennons. For the present rule seems to be that the Duke of Sussex may lawfully own the whole of Essex; and that the Marquis of Cornwall may own all the hills and valleys so long as they are not Cornish.

The clue to all this tangle is as simple as it is terrible. If England is an aristocracy, England is dying. If this system IS the country, as some say, the country is stiffening into more than the pomp and paralysis of China. It is the final sign of imbecility in a people that it calls cats dogs and describes the sun as the moon — and is very particular about the preciseness of these pseudonyms. To be wrong, and to be carefully wrong, that is the definition of decadence. The disease called aphasia, in which people begin by saying tea when they mean coffee, commonly ends in their silence. Silence of this stiff sort is the chief mark of the powerful parts of modern society. They all seem straining to keep things in rather than to let things out. For the kings of finance speechlessness is counted a way of being strong, though it should rather be counted a way of being sly. By this time the Parliament does not parley any more than the Speaker speaks. Even the newspaper editors and proprietors are more despotic and dangerous by what they do not utter than by what they do. We have all heard the expression “golden silence.” The expression “brazen silence” is the only adequate phrase for our editors. If we wake out of this throttled, gaping, and wordless nightmare, we must awake with a yell. The Revolution that releases England from the fixed falsity of its present position will be not less noisy than other revolutions. It will contain, I fear, a great deal of that rude accomplishment described among little boys as “calling names”; but that will not matter much so long as they are the right names.

THE GARDENER AND THE GUINEA

Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as an English Peasant. Indeed, the type can only exist in community, so much does it depend on cooperation and common laws. One must not think primarily of a French Peasant; any more than of a German Measle. The plural of the word is its proper form; you cannot have a Peasant till you have a peasantry. The essence of the Peasant ideal is equality; and you cannot be equal all by yourself.

Nevertheless, because human nature always craves and half creates the things necessary to its happiness, there are approximations and suggestions of the possibility of such a race even here. The nearest approach I know to the temper of a Peasant in England is that of the country gardener; not, of course, the great scientific gardener attached to the great houses; he is a rich man’s servant like any other. I mean the small jobbing gardener who works for two or three moderate-sized gardens; who works on his own; who sometimes even owns his house; and who frequently owns his tools. This kind of man has really some of the characteristics of the true Peasant — especially the characteristics that people don’t like. He has none of that irresponsible mirth which is the consolation of most poor men in England. The gardener is even disliked sometimes by the owners of the shrubs and flowers; because (like Micaiah) he prophesies not good concerning them, but evil. The English gardener is grim, critical, self-respecting; sometimes even economical. Nor is this (as the reader’s lightning wit will flash back at me) merely because the English gardener is always a Scotch gardener. The type does exist in pure South England blood and speech; I have spoken to the type. I was speaking to the type only the other evening, when a rather odd little incident occurred.

It was one of those wonderful evenings in which the sky was warm and radiant while the earth was still comparatively cold and wet. But it is of the essence of Spring to be unexpected; as in that heroic and hackneyed line about coming “before the swallow dares.” Spring never is Spring unless it comes too soon. And on a day like that one might pray, without any profanity, that Spring might come on earth as it was in heaven. The gardener was gardening. I was not gardening. It is needless to explain the causes of this difference; it would be to tell the tremendous history of two souls. It is needless because there is a more immediate explanation of the case: the gardener and I, if not equal in agreement, were at least equal in difference. It is quite certain that he would not have allowed me to touch the garden if I had gone down on my knees to him. And it is by no means certain that I should have consented to touch the garden if he had gone down on his knees to me. His activity and my idleness, therefore, went on steadily side by side through the long sunset hours.

And all the time I was thinking what a shame it was that he was not sticking his spade into his own garden, instead of mine: he knew about the earth and the underworld of seeds, the resurrection of Spring and the flowers that appear in order like a procession marshalled by a herald. He possessed the garden intellectually and spiritually, while I only possessed it politically. I know more about flowers than coal-owners know about coal; for at least I pay them honour when they are brought above the surface of the earth. I know more about gardens than railway shareholders seem to know about railways: for at least I know that it needs a man to make a garden; a man whose name is Adam. But as I walked on that grass my ignorance overwhelmed me — and yet that phrase is false, because it suggests something like a storm from the sky above. It is truer to say that my ignorance exploded underneath me, like a mine dug long before; and indeed it was dug before the beginning of the ages. Green bombs of bulbs and seeds were bursting underneath me everywhere; and, so far as my knowledge went, they had been laid by a conspirator. I trod quite uneasily on this uprush of the earth; the Spring is always only a fruitful earthquake. With the land all alive under me I began to wonder more and more why this man, who had made the garden, did not own the garden. If I stuck a spade into the ground, I should be astonished at what I found there...and just as I thought this I saw that the gardener was astonished too.

Just as I was wondering why the man who used the spade did not profit by the spade, he brought me something he had found actually in my soil. It was a thin worn gold piece of the Georges, of the sort which are called, I believe, Spade Guineas. Anyhow, a piece of gold.

If you do not see the parable as I saw it just then, I doubt if I can explain it just now. He could make a hundred other round yellow fruits: and this flat yellow one is the only sort that I can make. How it came there I have not a notion — unless Edmund Burke dropped it in his hurry to get back to Butler’s Court. But there it was: this is a cold recital of facts. There may be a whole pirate’s treasure lying under the earth there, for all I know or care;

for there is no interest in a treasure without a Treasure Island to sail to. If there is a treasure it will never be found, for I am not interested in wealth beyond the dreams of avarice since I know that avarice has no dreams, but only insomnia. And, for the other party, my gardener would never consent to dig up the garden.

Nevertheless, I was overwhelmed with intellectual emotions when I saw that answer to my question; the question of why the garden did not belong to the gardener. No better epigram could be put in reply than simply putting the Spade Guinea beside the Spade. This was the only underground seed that I could understand. Only by having a little more of that dull, battered yellow substance could I manage to be idle while he was active. I am not altogether idle myself; but the fact remains that the power is in the thin slip of metal we call the Spade Guinea, not in the strong square and curve of metal which we call the Spade. And then I suddenly remembered that as I had found gold on my ground by accident, so richer men in the north and west counties had found coal in their ground, also by accident.

I told the gardener that as he had found the thing he ought to keep it, but that if he cared to sell it to me it could be valued properly, and then sold. He said at first, with characteristic independence, that he would like to keep it. He said it would make a brooch for his wife. But a little later he brought it back to me without explanation. I could not get a ray of light on the reason of his refusal; but he looked lowering and unhappy. Had he some mystical instinct that it is just such accidental and irrational wealth that is the doom of all peasantries? Perhaps he dimly felt that the boy’s pirate tales are true; and that buried treasure is a thing for robbers and not for producers. Perhaps he thought there was a curse on such capital: on the coal of the coal-owners, on the gold of the gold-seekers. Perhaps there is.

THE VOTER AND THE TWO VOICES

The real evil of our Party System is commonly stated wrong. It was stated wrong by Lord Rosebery, when he said that it prevented the best men from devoting themselves to politics, and that it encouraged a fanatical conflict. I doubt whether the best men ever would devote themselves to politics. The best men devote themselves to pigs and babies and things like that. And as for the fanatical conflict in party politics, I wish there was more of it. The real danger of the two parties with their two policies is that they unduly limit the outlook of the ordinary citizen. They make him barren instead of creative, because he is never allowed to do anything except prefer one existing policy to another. We have not got real Democracy when the decision depends upon the people. We shall have real Democracy when the problem depends upon the people. The ordinary man will decide not only how he will vote, but what he is going to vote about.

It is this which involves some weakness in many current aspirations towards the extension of the suffrage; I mean that, apart from all questions of abstract justice, it is not the smallness or largeness of the suffrage that is at present the difficulty of Democracy. It is not the quantity of voters, but the quality of the thing they are voting about. A certain alternative is put before them by the powerful houses and the highest political class. Two roads are opened to them; but they must go down one or the other. They cannot have what they choose, but only which they choose. To follow the process in practice we may put it thus. The Suffragettes — if one may judge by their frequent ringing of his bell — want to do something to Mr. Asquith. I have no notion what it is. Let us say (for the sake of argument) that they want to paint him green. We will suppose that it is entirely for that simple purpose that they are always seeking to have private interviews with him; it seems as profitable as any other end that I can imagine to such an interview. Now, it is possible that the Government of the day might go in for a positive policy of painting Mr. Asquith green; might give that reform a prominent place in their programme. Then the party in opposition would adopt another policy, not a policy of leaving Mr. Asquith alone (which would be considered dangerously revolutionary), but some alternative course of action, as, for instance, painting him red. Then both sides would fling themselves on the people, they would both cry that the appeal was now to the Caesar of Democracy. A dark and dramatic air of conflict and real crisis would arise on both sides; arrows of satire would fly and swords of eloquence flame. The Greens would say that Socialists and free lovers might well want to paint Mr. Asquith red; they wanted to paint the whole town red. Socialists would indignantly reply that Socialism was the reverse of disorder, and that they only wanted to paint Mr. Asquith red so that he might resemble the red pillar-boxes which typified State control. The Greens would passionately deny the charge so often brought against them by the Reds; they would deny that they wished Mr. Asquith green in order that he might be invisible on the green benches of the Commons, as certain terrified animals take the colour of their environment.

There would be fights in the street perhaps, and abundance of ribbons, flags, and badges, of the two colours. One crowd would sing, “Keep the Red Flag Flying,” and the other, “The Wearing of the Green.” But when the last effort had been made and the last moment come, when two crowds were waiting in the dark outside the public building to hear the declaration of the poll, then both sides alike would say that it was now for democracy to do exactly what it chose. England herself, lifting her head in awful loneliness and liberty, must speak and pronounce judgment. Yet this might not be exactly true. England herself, lifting her head in awful loneliness and liberty, might really wish Mr. Asquith to be pale blue. The democracy of England in the abstract, if it had been allowed to make up a policy for itself, might have desired him to be black with pink spots. It might even have liked him as he is now. But a huge apparatus of wealth, power, and printed matter has made it practically impossible for them to bring home these other proposals, even if they would really prefer them. No candidates will stand in the spotted interest; for candidates commonly have to produce money either from their own pockets or the party’s; and in such circles spots are not worn. No man in the social position of a Cabinet Minister, perhaps, will commit himself to the pale-blue theory of Mr. Asquith; therefore it cannot be a Government measure, therefore it cannot pass.

Nearly all the great newspapers, both pompous and frivolous, will declare dogmatically day after day, until every one half believes it, that red and green are the only two colours in the paint-box. THE OBSERVER will say: “No one who knows the solid framework of politics or the emphatic first principles of an Imperial people can suppose for a moment that there is any possible compromise to be made in such a matter; we must either fulfil our manifest racial destiny and crown the edifice of ages with the august figure of a Green Premier, or we must abandon our heritage, break our promise to the Empire, fling ourselves into final anarchy, and allow the flaming and demoniac image of a Red Premier to hover over our dissolution and our doom." The DAILY MAIL would say: "There is no halfway house in this matter; it must be green or red. We wish to see every honest Englishman one colour or the other." And then some funny man in the popular Press would star the sentence with a pun, and say that the DAILY MAIL liked its readers to be green and its paper to be read. But no one would even dare to whisper that there is such a thing as yellow.

For the purposes of pure logic it is clearer to argue with silly examples than with sensible ones: because silly examples are simple. But I could give many grave and concrete cases of the kind of thing to which I refer. In the later part of the Boer War both parties perpetually insisted in every speech and pamphlet that annexation was inevitable and that it was only a question whether Liberals or Tories should do it. It was not inevitable in the least; it would have been perfectly easy to make peace with the Boers as Christian nations commonly make peace with their conquered enemies. Personally I think that it would have been better for us in the most selfish sense, better for our pocket and prestige, if we had never effected the annexation at all; but that is a matter of opinion. What is plain is that it was not inevitable; it was not, as was said, the only possible course; there were plenty of other courses; there were plenty of other colours in the box. Again, in the discussion about Socialism, it is repeatedly rubbed into the public mind that we must choose between Socialism and some horrible thing that they call Individualism. I don't know what it means, but it seems to mean that anybody who happens to pull out a plum is to adopt the moral philosophy of the young Horner — and say what a good boy he is for helping himself.

It is calmly assumed that the only two possible types of society are a Collectivist type of society and the present society that exists at this moment and is rather like an animated muck-heap. It is quite unnecessary to say that I should prefer Socialism to the present state of things. I should prefer anarchism to the present state of things. But it is simply not the fact that Collectivism is the only other scheme for a more equal order. A Collectivist has a perfect right to think it the only sound scheme; but it is not the only plausible or possible scheme. We might have peasant proprietorship; we might have the compromise of Henry George; we might have a number of tiny communes; we might have co-operation; we might have Anarchist Communism; we might have a hundred things. I am not saying that any of these are right, though I cannot imagine that any of them could be worse than the present social madhouse, with its top-heavy rich and its tortured poor; but I say that it is an evidence of the stiff and narrow alternative offered to the civic mind, that the civic mind is not, generally speaking, conscious of these other possibilities. The civic mind is not free or alert enough to feel how much it has the world before it. There are at least ten solutions of the Education question, and no one knows which Englishmen really want. For Englishmen are only allowed to vote about the two which are at that moment offered by the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition. There are ten solutions of the drink question; and no one knows which the democracy wants; for the democracy is only allowed to fight about one Licensing Bill at a time.

So that the situation comes to this: The democracy has a right to answer questions, but it has no right to ask them. It is still the political aristocracy that asks the questions. And we shall not be unreasonably cynical if we suppose that the political aristocracy will always be rather careful what questions it asks. And if the dangerous comfort and self-flattery of modern England continues much longer there will be less democratic value in an English election than in a Roman saturnalia of slaves. For the powerful class will choose two courses of action, both of them safe for itself, and then give the democracy the gratification of taking one course or the other. The lord will take two things so much alike that he would not mind choosing from them blindfold — and then for a great jest he will allow the slaves to choose.

THE MAD OFFICIAL

Going mad is the slowest and dullest business in the world. I have very nearly done it more than once in my boyhood, and so have nearly all my friends, born under the general doom of mortals, but especially of moderns; I mean the doom that makes a man come almost to the end of thinking before he comes to the first chance of living.

But the process of going mad is dull, for the simple reason that a man does not know that it is going on. Routine and literalism and a certain dry-throated earnestness and mental thirst, these are the very atmosphere of morbidity. If once the man could become conscious of his madness, he would cease to be man. He studies certain texts in Daniel or cryptograms in Shakespeare through monstrously magnifying spectacles, which are on his nose night and day. If once he could take off the spectacles he would smash them. He deduces all his fantasies about the Sixth Seal or the Anglo-Saxon Race from one unexamined and invisible first principle. If he could once see the first principle, he would see that it is not there.

This slow and awful self-hypnotism of error is a process that can occur not only with individuals, but also with whole societies. It is hard to pick out and prove; that is why it is hard to cure. But this mental degeneration may be brought to one test, which I truly believe to be a real test. A nation is not going mad when it does extravagant things, so long as it does them in an extravagant spirit. Crusaders not cutting their beards till they found Jerusalem, Jacobins calling each other Harmodius and Epaminondas when their names were Jacques and Jules, these are wild things, but they were done in wild spirits at a wild moment.

But whenever we see things done wildly, but taken tamely, then the State is growing insane. For instance, I have a gun license. For all I know, this would logically allow me to fire off fifty-nine enormous field-guns day and night in my back garden. I should not be surprised at a man doing it; for it would be great fun. But I should be surprised at the neighbours putting up with it, and regarding it as an ordinary thing merely because it might happen to fulfill the letter of my license.

Or, again, I have a dog license; and I may have the right (for all I know) to turn ten thousand wild dogs loose in Buckinghamshire. I should not be surprised if the law were like that; because in modern England there is practically no law to be surprised at. I should not be surprised even at the man who did it; for a certain kind of man, if he lived long under the English landlord system, might do anything. But I should be surprised at the people who consented to stand it. I should, in other words, think the world a little mad if the incident, were received in silence.

Now things every bit as wild as this are being received in silence every day. All strokes slip on the smoothness of a polished wall. All blows fall soundless on the softness of a padded cell. For madness is a passive as well as an active state: it is a paralysis, a refusal of the nerves to respond to the normal stimuli, as well as an unnatural stimulation. There are commonwealths, plainly to be distinguished here and there in history, which pass from prosperity to squalor, or from glory to insignificance, or from freedom to slavery, not only in silence, but with serenity. The face still smiles while the limbs, literally and loathsomely, are dropping from the body. These are peoples that have lost the power of astonishment at their own actions. When they give birth to a fantastic fashion or a foolish law, they do not start or stare at the monster they have brought forth. They have grown used to their own unreason; chaos is their cosmos; and the whirlwind is the breath of their nostrils. These nations are really in danger of going off their heads en masse; of becoming one vast vision of imbecility, with toppling cities and crazy country-sides, all dotted with industrious lunatics. One of these countries is modern England.

Now here is an actual instance, a small case of how our social conscience really works: tame in spirit, wild in result, blank in realisation; a thing without the light of mind in it. I take this paragraph from a daily paper:— “At Epping, yesterday, Thomas Woolbourne, a Lambourne labourer, and his wife were summoned for neglecting their five children. Dr. Alpin said he was invited by the inspector of the N.S.P.C.C. to visit defendants’ cottage. Both the cottage and the children were dirty. The children looked exceedingly well in health, but the conditions would be serious in case of illness. Defendants were stated to be sober. The man was discharged. The woman, who said she was hampered by the cottage having no water supply and that she was ill, was sentenced to six weeks’ imprisonment. The sentence caused surprise, and the woman was removed crying, ‘Lord save me!’”

I know no name for this but Chinese. It calls up the mental picture of some archaic and changeless Eastern Court, in which men with dried faces and stiff ceremonial costumes perform some atrocious cruelty to the accompaniment of formal proverbs and sentences of which the very meaning has been forgotten. In both cases the only thing in the whole farrago that can be called real is the wrong. If we apply the lightest touch of reason to the whole Epping prosecution it dissolves into nothing.

I here challenge any person in his five wits to tell me what that woman was sent to prison for. Either it was for being poor, or it was for being ill. Nobody could suggest, nobody will suggest, nobody, as a matter of fact, did suggest, that she had committed any other crime. The doctor was called in by a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Was this woman guilty of cruelty to children? Not in the least. Did the doctor say she was guilty of cruelty to children? Not in the least. Was these any evidence even remotely bearing on the sin of cruelty? Not a rap. The worse that the doctor could work himself up to saying was that though the children were "exceedingly" well, the conditions would be serious in case of illness. If the doctor will tell me any conditions that would be comic in case of illness, I shall attach more weight to his argument.

Now this is the worst effect of modern worry. The mad doctor has gone mad. He is literally and practically mad; and still he is quite literally and practically a doctor. The only question is the old one, Quis docebit ipsum doctorem? Now cruelty to children is an utterly unnatural thing; instinctively accursed of earth and heaven. But neglect of children is a natural thing; like neglect of any other duty, it is a mere difference of degree that divides extending arms and legs in calisthenics and extending them on the rack. It is a mere difference of degree that separates any operation from any torture. The thumb-screw can easily be called Manicure. Being pulled about by wild horses can easily be called Massage. The modern problem is not so much what people will endure as what they will not endure. But I fear I interrupt.... The boiling oil is boiling; and the Tenth Mandarin is already reciting the "Seventeen Serious Principles and the Fifty-three Virtues of the Sacred Emperor."

THE ENCHANTED MAN

When I arrived to see the performance of the Buckinghamshire Players, who acted Miss Gertrude Robins’s POT LUCK at Naphill a short time ago, it is the distressing, if scarcely surprising, truth that I entered very late. This would have mattered little, I hope, to any one, but that late comers had to be forced into front seats. For a real popular English audience always insists on crowding in the back part of the hall; and (as I have found in many an election) will endure the most unendurable taunts rather than come forward. The English are a modest people; that is why they are entirely ruled and run by the few of them that happen to be immodest. In theatrical affairs the fact is strangely notable; and in most playhouses we find the bored people in front and the eager people behind.

As far as the performance went I was quite the reverse of a bored person; but I may have been a boring person, especially as I was thus required to sit in the seats of the scornful. It will be a happy day in the dramatic world when all ladies have to take off their hats and all critics have to take off their heads. The people behind will have a chance then. And as it happens, in this case, I had not so much taken off my head as lost it. I had lost it on the road; on that strange journey that was the cause of my coming in late. I have a troubled recollection of having seen a very good play and made a very bad speech; I have a cloudy recollection of talking to all sorts of nice people afterwards, but talking to them jerkily and with half a head, as a man talks when he has one eye on a clock.

And the truth is that I had one eye on an ancient and timeless clock, hung uselessly in heaven; whose very name has passed into a figure for such bemused folly. In the true sense of an ancient phrase, I was moonstruck. A lunar landscape a scene of winter moonlight had inexplicably got in between me and all other scenes. If any one had asked me I could not have said what it was; I cannot say now. Nothing had occurred to me; except the breakdown of a hired motor on the ridge of a hill. It was not an adventure; it was a vision.

I had started in wintry twilight from my own door; and hired a small car that found its way across the hills towards Naphill. But as night blackened and frost brightened and hardened it I found the way increasingly difficult;

especially as the way was an incessant ascent. Whenever we topped a road like a staircase it was only to turn into a yet steeper road like a ladder.

At last, when I began to fancy that I was spirally climbing the Tower of Babel in a dream, I was brought to fact by alarming noises, stoppage, and the driver saying that "it couldn't be done." I got out of the car and suddenly forgot that I had ever been in it.

From the edge of that abrupt steep I saw something indescribable, which I am now going to describe. When Mr. Joseph Chamberlain delivered his great patriotic speech on the inferiority of England to the Dutch parts of South Africa, he made use of the expression "the illimitable veldt." The word "veldt" is Dutch, and the word "illimitable" is Double Dutch. But the meditative statesman probably meant that the new plains gave him a sense of largeness and dreariness which he had never found in England. Well, if he never found it in England it was because he never looked for it in England. In England there is an illimitable number of illimitable veldts. I saw six or seven separate eternities in cresting as many different hills. One cannot find anything more infinite than a finite horizon, free and lonely and innocent. The Dutch veldt may be a little more desolate than Birmingham. But I am sure it is not so desolate as that English hill was, almost within a cannon-shot of High Wycombe.

I looked across a vast and voiceless valley straight at the moon, as if at a round mirror. It may have been the blue moon of the proverb; for on that freezing night the very moon seemed blue with cold. A deathly frost fastened every branch and blade to its place. The sinking and softening forests, powdered with a gray frost, fell away underneath me into an abyss which seemed unfathomable. One fancied the world was soundless only because it was bottomless: it seemed as if all songs and cries had been swallowed in some unresisting stillness under the roots of the hills. I could fancy that if I shouted there would be no echo; that if I hurled huge stones there would be no noise of reply. A dumb devil had bewitched the landscape: but that again does not express the best or worst of it. All those hoary and frosted forests expressed something so inhuman that it has no human name. A horror of unconsciousness lay on them; that is the nearest phrase I know. It was as if one were looking at the back of the world; and the world did not know it. I had taken the universe in the rear. I was behind the scenes. I was eavesdropping upon an unconscious creation.

I shall not express what the place expressed. I am not even sure that it is a thing that ought to be expressed. There was something heathen about its union of beauty and death; sorrow seemed to glitter, as it does in some of the great pagan poems. I understood one of the thousand poetical phrases of the populace, “a God-forsaken place.” Yet something was present there; and I could not yet find the key to my fixed impression. Then suddenly I remembered the right word. It was an enchanted place. It had been put to sleep. In a flash I remembered all the fairy-tales about princes turned to marble and princesses changed to snow. We were in a land where none could strive or cry out; a white nightmare. The moon looked at me across the valley like the enormous eye of a hypnotist; the one white eye of the world.

There was never a better play than POT LUCK; for it tells a tale with a point and a tale that might happen any day among English peasants. There were never better actors than the local Buckinghamshire Players: for they were acting their own life with just that rise into exaggeration which is the transition from life to art. But all the time I was mesmerised by the moon; I saw all these men and women as enchanted things. The poacher shot pheasants; the policeman tracked pheasants; the wife hid pheasants; they were all (especially the policeman) as true as death. But there was something more true to death than true to life about it all: the figures were frozen with a magic frost of sleep or fear or custom such as does not cramp the movements of the poor men of other lands. I looked at the poacher and the policeman and the gun; then at the gun and the policeman and the poacher; and I could find no name for the fancy that haunted and escaped me. The poacher believed in the Game Laws as much as the policeman. The poacher’s wife not only believed in the Game Laws, but protected them as well as him. She got a promise from her husband that he would never shoot another pheasant. Whether he kept it I doubt; I fancy he sometimes shot a pheasant even after that. But I am sure he never shot a policeman. For we live in an enchanted land.

THE SUN WORSHIPPER

There is a shrewd warning to be given to all people who are in revolt. And in the present state of things, I think all men are revolting in that sense; except a few who are revolting in the other sense. But the warning to Socialists and other revolutionaries is this: that as sure as fate, if they use any argument which is atheist or materialistic, that argument will always be turned against them at last by the tyrant and the slave. To-day I saw one too common Socialist argument turned Tory, so to speak, in a manner quite startling and insane. I mean that modern doctrine, taught, I believe, by most followers of Karl Marx, which is called the materialist theory of history. The theory is, roughly, this: that all the important things in history are rooted in an economic motive. In short, history is a science; a science of the search for food.

Now I desire, in passing only, to point out that this is not merely untrue, but actually the reverse of the truth. It is putting it too feebly to say that the history of man is not only economic. Man would not have any history if he were only economic. The need for food is certainly universal, so universal that it is not even human. Cows have an economic motive, and apparently (I dare not say what ethereal delicacies may be in a cow) only an economic motive. The cow eats grass anywhere and never eats anything else. In short, the cow does fulfill the materialist theory of history: that is why the cow has no history. “A History of Cows” would be one of the simplest and briefest of standard works. But if some cows thought it wicked to eat long grass and persecuted all who did so; if the cow with the crumpled horn were worshipped by some cows and gored to death by others; if cows began to have obvious moral preferences over and above a desire for grass, then cows would begin to have a history. They would also begin to have a highly unpleasant time, which is perhaps the same thing.

The economic motive is not merely not inside all history; it is actually outside all history. It belongs to Biology or the Science of Life; that is, it concerns things like cows, that are not so very much alive. Men are far too much alive to get into the science of anything; for them we have made the art of history. To say that human actions have depended on economic support is like saying that they have depended on having two legs. It accounts for action, but not for such varied action; it is a condition, but not a motive; it is too universal to be useful. Certainly a soldier wins the Victoria Cross on two legs; he also runs away on two legs. But if our object is to discover whether he will become a V.C. or a coward the most careful inspection of his legs will yield us little or no information. In the same way a man will want food if he is a dreamy romantic tramp, and will want food if he is a toiling and sweating millionaire. A man must be supported on food as he must be supported on legs. But cows (who have no history) are not only furnished more generously in the matter of legs, but can see their food on a much grander and more imaginative scale. A cow can lift up her eyes to the hills and see uplands and peaks of pure food. Yet we never see the horizon broken by crags of cake or happy hills of cheese.

So far the cow (who has no history) seems to have every other advantage. But history — the whole point of history — precisely is that some two legged soldiers ran away while others, of similar anatomical structure, did not. The whole point of history precisely is: some people (like poets and tramps) chance getting money by disregarding it, while others (such as millionaires) will absolutely lose money for the fun of bothering about it. There would be no history if there were only economic history. All the historical events have been due to the twists and turns given to the economic instinct by forces that were not economic. For instance, this theory traces the French war of Edward III to a quarrel about the French wines. Any one who has even smelt the Middle Ages must feel fifty answers spring to his lips; but in this case one will suffice. There would have been no such war, then, if we all drank water like cows. But when one is a man one enters the world of historic choice. The act of drinking wine is one that requires explanation. So is the act of not drinking wine.

But the capitalist can get much more fun out of the doctrine.

When strikes were splitting England right and left a little while ago, an ingenious writer, humorously describing himself as a Liberal, said that they were entirely due to the hot weather. The suggestion was eagerly taken up by other creatures of the same kind, and I really do not see why it was not carried farther and applied to other lamentable uprisings in history. Thus, it is a remarkable fact that the weather is generally rather warm in Egypt; and this cannot but throw a light on the sudden and mysterious impulse of the Israelites to escape from captivity. The English strikers used some barren republican formula (arid as the definitions of the medieval schoolmen), some academic shibboleth about being free men and not being forced to work except for a wage accepted by them. Just in the same way the Israelites in Egypt employed some dry scholastic quibble about the extreme difficulty of making bricks with nothing to make them of. But whatever fantastic intellectual excuses they may have put forward for their strange and unnatural conduct in walking out when the prison door was open, there can be no doubt that the real cause was the warm weather. Such a climate notoriously also produces delusions and horrible fancies, such as Mr. Kipling describes. And it was while their brains were disordered by the heat that the Jews fancied that they were founding a nation, that they were led by a prophet, and, in short, that they were going to be of some importance in the affairs of the world.

Nor can the historical student fail to note that the French monarchy was pulled down in August; and that August is a month in summer.

In spite of all this, however, I have some little difficulty myself in accepting so simple a form of the Materialist Theory of History (at these words all Marxian Socialists will please bow their heads three times), and I rather think that exceptions might be found to the principle. Yet it is not chiefly such exceptions that embarrass my belief in it.

No; my difficulty is rather in accounting for the strange coincidence by which the shafts of Apollo split us exclusively along certain lines of class and of economics. I cannot understand why all solicitors did not leave off soliciting, all doctors leave off doctoring, all judges leave off judging, all benevolent bankers leave off lending money at high interest, and all rising politicians leave off having nothing to add to what their right honourable friend told the House about eight years ago. The quaint theoretic plea of the workers, that they were striking because they were ill paid, seems to receive a sort of wild and hazy confirmation from the fact that, throughout the hottest weather, judges and other persons who are particularly well paid showed no disposition to strike. I have to fall back therefore on metaphysical fancies of my own; and I continue to believe that the anger of the English poor (to steal a phrase from Sir Thomas Browne) came from something in man that is other than the elements and that owes no homage unto the sun.

When comfortable people come to talking stuff of that sort, it is really time that the comfortable classes made a short summary and confession of what they have really done with the very poor Englishman. The dawn of the mediaeval civilisation found him a serf; which is a different thing from a slave. He had security; although the man belonged to the land rather than the land to the man. He could not be evicted; his rent could not be raised. In practice, it came to something like this: that if the lord rode down his cabbages he had not much chance of redress; but he had the chance of growing more cabbages. He had direct access to the means of production.

Since then the centuries in England have achieved something different; and something which, fortunately, is perfectly easy to state. There is no doubt about what we have done. We have kept the inequality, but we have destroyed the security. The man is not tied to the land, as in serfdom; nor is the land tied to the man, as in a peasantry. The rich man has entered into an absolute ownership of farms and fields; and (in the modern industrial phrase) he has locked out the English people. They can only find an acre to dig or a house to sleep in by accepting such competitive and cruel terms as he chooses to impose.

Well, what would happen then, over the larger parts of the planet, parts inhabited by savages? Savages, of course, would hunt and fish. That retreat for the English poor was perceived; and that retreat was cut off. Game laws were made to extend over districts like the Arctic snows or the Sahara. The rich man had property over animals he had no more dreamed of than a governor of Roman Africa had dreamed of a giraffe. He owned all the birds that passed over his land: he might as well have owned all the clouds that passed over it. If a rabbit ran from Smith’s land to Brown’s land, it belonged to Brown, as if it were his pet dog. The logical answer to this would be simple: Any one stung on Brown’s land ought to be able to prosecute Brown for keeping a dangerous wasp without a muzzle.

Thus the poor man was forced to be a tramp along the roads and to sleep in the open. That retreat was perceived; and that retreat was cut off. A landless man in England can be punished for behaving in the only way that a landless man can behave: for sleeping under a hedge in Surrey or on a seat on the Embankment. His sin is described (with a hideous sense of fun) as that of having no visible means of subsistence.

The last possibility, of course, is that upon which all human beings would fall back if they were sinking in a swamp or impaled on a spike or deserted on an island. It is that of calling out for pity to the passerby. That retreat was perceived; and that retreat was cut off. A man in England can be sent to prison for asking another man for help in the name of God.

You have done all these things, and by so doing you have forced the poor to serve the rich, and to serve them on the terms of the rich. They have still one weapon left against the extremes of insult and unfairness: that weapon is their numbers and the necessity of those numbers to the working of that vast and slavish machine. And because they still had this last retreat (which we call the Strike), because this retreat was also perceived, there was talk of this retreat being also cut off. Whereupon the workmen became suddenly and violently angry; and struck at your Boards and Committees here, there, and wherever they could. And you opened on them the eyes of owls, and said, “It must be the sunshine.” You could only go on saying, “The sun, the sun.” That was what the man in Ibsen said, when he had lost his wits.

THE WRONG INCENDIARY

I stood looking at the Coronation Procession — I mean the one in Beaconsfield; not the rather elephantine imitation of it which, I believe, had some success in London — and I was seriously impressed. Most of my life is passed in discovering with a deathly surprise that I was quite right. Never before have I realised how right I was in maintaining that the small area expresses the real patriotism: the smaller the field the taller the tower. There were things in our local procession that did not (one might even reverently say, could not) occur in the London procession. One of the most prominent citizens in our procession (for instance) had his face blacked. Another rode on a pony which wore pink and blue trousers. I was not present at the Metropolitan affair, and therefore my assertion is subject to such correction as the eyewitness may always offer to the absentee. But I believe with some firmness that no such features occurred in the London pageant.

But it is not of the local celebration that I would speak, but of something that occurred before it. In the field beyond the end of my garden the materials for a bonfire had been heaped; a hill of every kind of rubbish and refuse and things that nobody wants; broken chairs, dead trees, rags, shavings, newspapers, new religions, in pamphlet form, reports of the Eugenic Congress, and so on. All this refuse, material and mental, it was our purpose to purify and change to holy flame on the day when the King was crowned. The following is an account of the rather strange thing that really happened. I do not know whether it was any sort of symbol; but I narrate it just as it befell.

In the middle of the night I woke up slowly and listened to what I supposed to be the heavy crunching of a cart-wheel along a road of loose stones. Then it grew louder, and I thought somebody was shooting out cartloads of stones; then it seemed as if the shock was breaking big stones into pieces. Then I realised that under this sound there was also a strange, sleepy, almost inaudible roar; and that on top of it every now and then came pigmy pops like a battle of penny pistols. Then I knew what it was. I went to the window; and a great firelight flung across two meadows smote me where I stood. “Oh, my holy aunt,” I thought, “they’ve mistaken the Coronation Day.”

And yet when I eyed the transfigured scene it did not seem exactly like a bonfire or any ritual illumination. It was too chaotic, and too close to the houses of the town. All one side of a cottage was painted pink with the giant brush of flame; the next side, by contrast, was painted as black as tar. Along the front of this ran a blackening rim or rampart edged with a restless red ribbon that danced and doubled and devoured like a scarlet snake; and beyond it was nothing but a deathly fulness of light.

I put on some clothes and went down the road; all the dull or startling noises in that din of burning growing louder and louder as I walked. The heaviest sound was that of an incessant cracking and crunching, as if some giant with teeth of stone was breaking up the bones of the world. I had not yet come within sight of the real heart and habitat of the fire; but the strong red light, like an unnatural midnight sunset, powdered the grayest grass with gold and flushed the few tall trees up to the last fingers of their foliage. Behind them the night was black and cavernous; and one could only trace faintly the ashen horizon beyond the dark and magic Wilton Woods. As I went, a workman on a bicycle shot a rood past me; then staggered from his machine and shouted to me to tell him where the fire was. I answered that I was going to see, but thought it was the cottages by the wood-yard. He said, “My God!” and vanished.

A little farther on I found grass and pavement soaking and flooded, and the red and yellow flames repainted in pools and puddles. Beyond were dim huddles of people and a small distant voice shouting out orders. The fire-engines were at work. I went on among the red reflections, which seemed like subterranean fires; I had a singular sensation of being in a very important dream. Oddly enough, this was increased when I found that most of my friends and neighbours were entangled in the crowd. Only in dreams do we see familiar faces so vividly against a black background of midnight. I was glad to find (for the workman cyclist’s sake) that the fire was not in the houses by the wood-yard, but in the wood-yard itself. There was no fear for human life, and the thing was seemingly accidental; though there were the usual ugly whispers about rivalry and revenge. But for all that I could not shake off my dream-drugged soul a swollen, tragic, portentous sort of sensation, that it all had something to do with the crowning of the English King, and the glory or the end of England. It was not till I saw the puddles and the ashes in broad daylight next morning that I was fundamentally certain that my midnight adventure had not happened outside this world.

But I was more arrogant than the ancient Emperors Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar; for I attempted to interpret my own dream. The fire was feeding upon solid stacks of unused beech or pine, gray and white piles of virgin wood. It was an orgy of mere waste; thousands of good things were being killed before they had ever existed. Doors, tables, walking-sticks, wheelbarrows, wooden swords for boys, Dutch dolls for girls I could hear the cry of each uncreated thing as it expired in the flames. And then I thought of that other noble tower of needless things that stood in the field beyond my garden; the bonfire, the mountain of vanities, that is meant for burning; and how it stood dark and lonely in the meadow, and the birds hopped on its corners and the dew touched and spangled its twigs. And I remembered that there are two kinds of fires, the Bad Fire and the Good Fire the last must surely be the meaning of Bonfire. And the paradox is that the Good Fire is made of bad things, of things that we do not want; but the Bad Fire is made of good things, of things that we do want; like all that wealth of wood that might have made dolls and chairs and tables, but was only making a hueless ash.

And then I saw, in my vision, that just as there are two fires, so there are two revolutions. And I saw that the whole mad modern world is a race between them. Which will happen first — the revolution in which bad things shall perish, or that other revolution, in which good things shall perish also? One is the riot that all good men, even the most conservative, really dream of, when the sneer shall be struck from the face of the well-fed; when the wine of honour shall be poured down the throat of despair; when we shall, so far as to the sons of flesh is possible, take tyranny and usury and public treason and bind them into bundles and burn them. And the other is the disruption that may come prematurely, negatively, and suddenly in the night; like the fire in my little town.

It may come because the mere strain of modern life is unbearable; and in it even the things that men do desire may break down; marriage and fair ownership and worship and the mysterious worth of man. The two revolutions, white and black, are racing each other like two railway trains; I cannot guess the issue...but even as I thought of it, the tallest turret of the timber stooped and faltered and came down in a cataract of noises. And the fire, finding passage, went up with a spout like a fountain. It stood far up among the stars for an instant, a blazing pillar of brass fit for a pagan conqueror, so high that one could fancy it visible away among the goblin trees of Burnham or along the terraces of the Chiltern Hills.

THE FREE MAN

The idea of liberty has ultimately a religious root; that is why men find it so easy to die for and so difficult to define. It refers finally to the fact that, while the oyster and the palm tree have to save their lives by law, man has to save his soul by choice. Ruskin rebuked Coleridge for praising freedom, and said that no man would wish the sun to be free. It seems enough to answer that no man would wish to be the sun. Speaking as a Liberal, I have much more sympathy with the idea of Joshua stopping the sun in heaven than with the idea of Ruskin trotting his daily round in imitation of its regularity. Joshua was a Radical, and his astronomical act was distinctly revolutionary. For all revolution is the mastering of matter by the spirit of man, the emergence of that human authority within us which, in the noble words of Sir Thomas Browne, “owes no homage unto the sun.”

Generally, the moral substance of liberty is this: that man is not meant merely to receive good laws, good food or good conditions, like a tree in a garden, but is meant to take a certain princely pleasure in selecting and shaping like the gardener. Perhaps that is the meaning of the trade of Adam. And the best popular words for rendering the real idea of liberty are those which speak of man as a creator. We use the word “make” about most of the things in which freedom is essential, as a country walk or a friendship or a love affair. When a man “makes his way” through a wood he has really created, he has built a road, like the Romans. When a man “makes a friend,” he makes a man. And in the third case we talk of a man “making love,” as if he were (as, indeed, he is) creating new masses and colours of that flaming material an awful form of manufacture. In its primary spiritual sense, liberty is the god in man, or, if you like the word, the artist.

In its secondary political sense liberty is the living influence of the citizen on the State in the direction of moulding or deflecting it. Men are the only creatures that evidently possess it. On the one hand, the eagle has no liberty; he only has loneliness. On the other hand, ants, bees, and beavers exhibit the highest miracle of the State influencing the citizen; but no perceptible trace of the citizen influencing the State. You may, if you like, call the ants a democracy as you may call the bees a despotism. But I fancy that the architectural ant who attempted to introduce an art nouveau style of ant-hill would have a career as curt and fruitless as the celebrated bee who wanted to swarm alone. The isolation of this idea in humanity is akin to its religious character; but it is not even in humanity by any means equally distributed. The idea that the State should not only be supported by its children, like the ant-hill, but should be constantly criticised and reconstructed by them, is an idea stronger in Christendom than any other part of the planet; stronger in Western than Eastern Europe. And touching the pure idea of the individual being free to speak and act within limits, the assertion of this idea, we may fairly say, has been the peculiar honour of our own country. For my part I greatly prefer the Jingoism of Rule Britannia to the Imperialism of The Recessional. I have no objection to Britannia ruling the waves. I draw the line when she begins to rule the dry land — and such damnably dry land too — as in Africa. And there was a real old English sincerity in the vulgar chorus that "Britons never shall be slaves." We had no equality and hardly any justice; but freedom we were really fond of. And I think just now it is worth while to draw attention to the old optimistic prophecy that "Britons never shall be slaves."

The mere love of liberty has never been at a lower ebb in England than it has been for the last twenty years. Never before has it been so easy to slip small Bills through Parliament for the purpose of locking people up. Never was it so easy to silence awkward questions, or to protect high-placed officials. Two hundred years ago we turned out the Stuarts rather than endanger the Habeas Corpus Act. Two years ago we abolished the Habeas Corpus Act rather than turn out the Home Secretary. We passed a law (which is now in force) that an Englishman's punishment shall not depend upon judge and jury, but upon the governors and jailers who have got hold of him. But this is not the only case. The scorn of liberty is in the air. A newspaper is seized by the police in Trafalgar Square without a word of accusation or explanation. The Home Secretary says that in his opinion the police are very nice people, and there is an end of the matter. A Member of Parliament attempts to criticise a peerage. The Speaker says he must not criticise a peerage, and there the matter drops.

Political liberty, let us repeat, consists in the power of criticising those flexible parts of the State which constantly require reconsideration, not the basis, but the machinery. In plainer words, it means the power of saying the sort of things that a decent but discontented citizen wants to say. He does not want to spit on the Bible, or to run about without clothes, or to read the worst page in Zola from the pulpit of St. Paul's. Therefore the forbidding of these things (whether just or not) is only tyranny in a secondary and special sense. It restrains the abnormal, not the normal man. But the normal man, the decent discontented citizen, does want to protest against unfair law courts. He does want to expose brutalities of the police. He does want to make game of a vulgar pawnbroker who is made a Peer. He does want publicly to warn people against unscrupulous capitalists and suspicious finance. If he is run in for doing this (as he will be) he does want to proclaim the character or known prejudices of the magistrate who tries him. If he is sent to prison (as he will be) he does want to have a clear and civilised sentence, telling him when he will come out. And these are literally and exactly the things that he now cannot get. That is the almost cloying humour of the present situation. I can say abnormal things in modern magazines. It is the normal things that I am not allowed to say. I can write in some solemn quarterly an elaborate article explaining that God is the devil; I can write in some cultured weekly an aesthetic fancy describing how I should like to eat boiled baby. The thing I must not write is rational criticism of the men and institutions of my country.

The present condition of England is briefly this: That no Englishman can say in public a twentieth part of what he says in private. One cannot say, for instance, that — But I am afraid I must leave out that instance, because one cannot say it. I cannot prove my case — because it is so true.

THE HYPOTHETICAL HOUSEHOLDER

We have read of some celebrated philosopher who was so absent-minded that he paid a call at his own house. My own absent-mindedness is extreme, and my philosophy, of course, is the marvel of men and angels. But I never quite managed to be so absent-minded as that. Some yards at least from my own door, something vaguely familiar has always caught my eye; and thus the joke has been spoiled. Of course I have quite constantly walked into another man's house, thinking it was my own house; my visits became almost monotonous. But walking into my own house and thinking it was another man's house is a flight of poetic detachment still beyond me. Something of the sensations that such an absent-minded man must feel I really felt the other day; and very pleasant sensations they were. The best parts of every proper romance are the first chapter and the last chapter; and to knock at a strange door and find a nice wife would be to concentrate the beginning and end of all romance.

Mine was a milder and slighter experience, but its thrill was of the same kind. For I strolled through a place I had imagined quite virgin and unvisited (as far as I was concerned), and I suddenly found I was treading in my own footprints, and the footprints were nearly twenty years old.

It was one of those stretches of country which always suggests an almost unnatural decay; thickets and heaths that have grown out of what were once great gardens. Garden flowers still grow there as wild flowers, as it says in some good poetic couplet which I forget; and there is something singularly romantic and disastrous about seeing things that were so long a human property and care fighting for their own hand in the thicket. One almost expects to find a decayed dog-kennel; with the dog evolved into a wolf.

This desolate garden-land had been even in my youth scrappily planned out for building. The half-built or empty houses had appeared quite threateningly on the edge of this heath even when I walked over it years ago and almost as a boy. I was astonished that the building had gone no farther; I suppose somebody went bankrupt and somebody else disliked building. But I remember, especially along one side of this tangle or coppice, that there had once been a row of half-built houses. The brick of which they were built was a sort of plain pink; everything else was a blinding white; the houses smoked with white dust and white sawdust; and on many of the windows were rubbed those round rough disks of white which always delighted me as a child. They looked like the white eyes of some blind giant.

I could see the crude, parched pink-and-white villas still; though I had not thought at all of them for a quarter of my life; and had not thought much of them even when I saw them. Then I was an idle, but eager youth walking out from London; now I was a most reluctantly busy middle-aged person, coming in from the country. Youth, I think, seems farther off than childhood, for it made itself more of a secret. Like a prenatal picture, distant, tiny, and quite distinct, I saw this heath on which I stood; and I looked around for the string of bright, half-baked villas. They still stood there; but they were quite russet and weather-stained, as if they had stood for centuries.

I remembered exactly what I had done on that day long ago. I had half slid on a miry descent; it was still there; a little lower I had knocked off the top of a thistle; the thistles had not been discouraged, but were still growing. I recalled it because I had wondered why one knocks off the tops of thistles; and then I had thought of Tarquin; and then I had recited most of Macaulay’s VIRGINIA to myself, for I was young. And then I came to a tattered edge where the very tuft had whitened with the sawdust and brick-dust from the new row of houses; and two or three green stars of dock and thistle grew spasmodically about the blinding road.

I remembered how I had walked up this new one-sided street all those years ago; and I remembered what I had thought. I thought that this red and white glaring terrace at noon was really more creepy and more lonesome than a glimmering churchyard at midnight. The churchyard could only be full of the ghosts of the dead; but these houses were full of the ghosts of the unborn. And a man can never find a home in the future as he can find it in the past. I was always fascinated by that mediaeval notion of erecting a rudely carpentered stage in the street, and acting on it a miracle play of the Holy Family or the Last Judgment. And I thought to myself that each of these glaring, gaping, new jerry-built boxes was indeed a rickety stage erected for the acting of a real miracle play; that human family that is almost the holy one, and that human death that is near to the last judgment.

For some foolish reason the last house but one in that imperfect row especially haunted me with its hollow grin and empty window-eyes. Something in the shape of this brick-and-mortar skeleton was attractive; and there being no workmen about, I strolled into it for curiosity and solitude. I gave, with all the sky-deep gravity of youth, a benediction upon the man who was going to live there. I even remember that for the convenience of meditation I called him James Harrogate.

As I reflected it crawled back into my memory that I had mildly played the fool in that house on that distant day. I had some red chalk in my pocket, I think, and I wrote things on the unpapered plaster walls; things addressed to Mr. Harrogate. A dim memory told me that I had written up in what I supposed to be the dining-room:

James Harrogate, thank God for meat,
Then eat and eat and eat and eat,

or something of that kind. I faintly feel that some longer lyric was scrawled on the walls of what looked like a bedroom, something beginning:

When laying what you call your head,
O Harrogate, upon your bed,

and there all my memory dislimns and decays. But I could still see quite vividly the plain plastered walls and the rude, irregular writing, and the places where the red chalk broke. I could see them, I mean, in memory; for when I came down that road again after a sixth of a century the house was very different.

I had seen it before at noon, and now I found it in the dusk. But its windows glowed with lights of many artificial sorts; one of its low square windows stood open; from this there escaped up the road a stream of lamplight and a stream of singing. Some sort of girl, at least, was standing at some sort of piano, and singing a song of healthy sentimentalism in that house where long ago my blessing had died on the wind and my poems been covered up by the wallpaper. I stood outside that lamplit house at dusk full of those thoughts that I shall never express if I live to be a million any better than I expressed them in red chalk upon the wall. But after I had hovered a little, and was about to withdraw, a mad impulse seized me. I rang the bell. I said in distinct accents to a very smart suburban maid, “Does Mr. James Harrogate live here?”

She said he didn’t; but that she would inquire, in case I was looking for him in the neighbourhood; but I excused her from such exertion. I had one moment’s impulse to look for him all over the world; and then decided not to look for him at all.

THE PRIEST OF SPRING

The sun has strengthened and the air softened just before Easter Day. But it is a troubled brightness which has a breath not only of novelty but of revolution, There are two great armies of the human intellect who will fight till the end on this vital point, whether Easter is to be congratulated on fitting in with the Spring — or the Spring on fitting in with Easter.

The only two things that can satisfy the soul are a person and a story; and even a story must be about a person. There are indeed very voluptuous appetites and enjoyments in mere abstractions like mathematics, logic, or chess. But these mere pleasures of the mind are like mere pleasures of the body. That is, they are mere pleasures, though they may be gigantic pleasures; they can never by a mere increase of themselves amount to happiness. A man just about to be hanged may enjoy his breakfast; especially if it be his favourite breakfast; and in the same way he may enjoy an argument with the chaplain about heresy, especially if it is his favourite heresy. But whether he can enjoy either of them does not depend on either of them; it depends upon his spiritual attitude towards a subsequent event. And that event is really interesting to the soul; because it is the end of a story and (as some hold) the end of a person.

Now it is this simple truth which, like many others, is too simple for our scientists to see. This is where they go wrong, not only about true religion, but about false religions too; so that their account of mythology is more mythical than the myth itself. I do not confine myself to saying that they are quite incorrect when they state (for instance) that Christ was a legend of dying and reviving vegetation, like Adonis or Persephone. I say that even if Adonis was a god of vegetation, they have got the whole notion of him wrong. Nobody, to begin with, is sufficiently interested in decaying vegetables, as such, to make any particular mystery or disguise about them; and certainly not enough to disguise them under the image of a very handsome young man, which is a vastly more interesting thing. If Adonis was connected with the fall of leaves in autumn and the return of flowers in spring, the process of thought was quite different. It is a process of thought which springs up spontaneously in all children and young artists; it springs up spontaneously in all healthy societies. It is very difficult to explain in a diseased society.

The brain of man is subject to short and strange snatches of sleep. A cloud seals the city of reason or rests upon the sea of imagination; a dream that darkens as much, whether it is a nightmare of atheism or a daydream of idolatry. And just as we have all sprung from sleep with a start and found ourselves saying some sentence that has no meaning, save in the mad tongues of the midnight; so the human mind starts from its trances of stupidity with some complete phrase upon its lips; a complete phrase which is a complete folly. Unfortunately it is not like the dream sentence, generally forgotten in the putting on of boots or the putting in of breakfast. This senseless aphorism, invented when man's mind was asleep, still hangs on his tongue and entangles all his relations to rational and daylight things. All our controversies are confused by certain kinds of phrases which are not merely untrue, but were always unmeaning; which are not merely inapplicable, but were always intrinsically useless. We recognise them wherever a man talks of "the survival of the fittest," meaning only the survival of the survivors; or wherever a man says that the rich "have a stake in the country," as if the poor could not suffer from misgovernment or military defeat; or where a man talks about "going on towards Progress," which only means going on towards going on; or when a man talks about "government by the wise few," as if they could be picked out by their pantaloons. "The wise few" must mean either the few whom the foolish think wise or the very foolish who think themselves wise.

There is one piece of nonsense that modern people still find themselves saying, even after they are more or less awake, by which I am particularly irritated. It arose in the popularised science of the nineteenth century, especially in connection with the study of myths and religions. The fragment of gibberish to which I refer generally takes the form of saying "This god or hero really represents the sun." Or "Apollo killing the Python MEANS that the summer drives out the winter." Or "The King dying in a western battle is a SYMBOL of the sun setting in the west." Now I should really have thought that even the skeptical professors, whose skulls are as shallow as frying-pans, might have reflected that human beings never think or feel like this. Consider what is involved in this supposition. It presumes that primitive man went out for a walk and saw with great interest a big burning spot on the sky. He then said to primitive woman, "My dear, we had better keep this quiet. We mustn't let it get about. The children and the slaves are so very sharp. They might discover the sun any day, unless we are very careful. So we won’t call it ‘the sun,’ but I will draw a picture of a man killing a snake; and whenever I do that you will know what I mean. The sun doesn’t look at all like a man killing a snake; so nobody can possibly know. It will be a little secret between us; and while the slaves and the children fancy I am quite excited with a grand tale of a writhing dragon and a wrestling demigod, I shall really MEAN this delicious little discovery, that there is a round yellow disc up in the air.” One does not need to know much mythology to know that this is a myth. It is commonly called the Solar Myth.

Quite plainly, of course, the case was just the other way. The god was never a symbol or hieroglyph representing the sun. The sun was a hieroglyph representing the god. Primitive man (with whom my friend Dombey is no doubt well acquainted) went out with his head full of gods and heroes, because that is the chief use of having a head. Then he saw the sun in some glorious crisis of the dominance of noon on the distress of nightfall, and he said, “That is how the face of the god would shine when he had slain the dragon,” or “That is how the whole world would bleed to westward, if the god were slain at last.”

No human being was ever really so unnatural as to worship Nature. No man, however indulgent (as I am) to corpulency, ever worshipped a man as round as the sun or a woman as round as the moon. No man, however attracted to an artistic attenuation, ever really believed that the Dryad was as lean and stiff as the tree. We human beings have never worshipped Nature; and indeed, the reason is very simple. It is that all human beings are superhuman beings. We have printed our own image upon Nature, as God has printed His image upon us. We have told the enormous sun to stand still; we have fixed him on our shields, caring no more for a star than for a starfish. And when there were powers of Nature we could not for the time control, we have conceived great beings in human shape controlling them. Jupiter does not mean thunder. Thunder means the march and victory of Jupiter. Neptune does not mean the sea; the sea is his, and he made it. In other words, what the savage really said about the sea was, “Only my fetish Mumbo could raise such mountains out of mere water.” What the savage really said about the sun was, “Only my great great-grandfather Jumbo could deserve such a blazing crown.”

About all these myths my own position is utterly and even sadly simple. I say you cannot really understand any myths till you have found that one of them is not a myth. Turnip ghosts mean nothing if there are no real ghosts. Forged bank-notes mean nothing if there are no real bank-notes. Heathen gods mean nothing, and must always mean nothing, to those of us that deny the Christian God. When once a god is admitted, even a false god, the Cosmos begins to know its place: which is the second place. When once it is the real God the Cosmos falls down before Him, offering flowers in spring as flames in winter. “My love is like a red, red rose” does not mean that the poet is praising roses under the allegory of a young lady. “My love is an arbutus” does not mean that the author was a botanist so pleased with a particular arbutus tree that he said he loved it. “Who art the moon and regent of my sky” does not mean that Juliet invented Romeo to account for the roundness of the moon. “Christ is the Sun of Easter” does not mean that the worshipper is praising the sun under the emblem of Christ. Goddess or god can clothe themselves with the spring or summer; but the body is more than raiment. Religion takes almost disdainfully the dress of Nature; and indeed Christianity has done as well with the snows of Christmas as with the snow-drops of spring. And when I look across the sun-struck fields, I know in my inmost bones that my joy is not solely in the spring, for spring alone, being always returning, would be always sad. There is somebody or something walking there, to be crowned with flowers: and my pleasure is in some promise yet possible and in the resurrection of the dead.

THE REAL JOURNALIST

Our age which has boasted of realism will fail chiefly through lack of reality. Never, I fancy, has there been so grave and startling a divorce between the real way a thing is done and the look of it when it is done. I take the nearest and most topical instance to hand a newspaper. Nothing looks more neat and regular than a newspaper, with its parallel columns, its mechanical printing, its detailed facts and figures, its responsible, polysyllabic leading articles. Nothing, as a matter of fact, goes every night through more agonies of adventure, more hairbreadth escapes, desperate expedients, crucial councils, random compromises, or barely averted catastrophes. Seen from the outside, it seems to come round as automatically as the clock and as silently as the dawn. Seen from the inside, it gives all its organisers a gasp of relief every morning to see that it has come out at all; that it has come out without the leading article upside down or the Pope congratulated on discovering the North Pole.

I will give an instance (merely to illustrate my thesis of unreality) from the paper that I know best. Here is a simple story, a little episode in the life of a journalist, which may be amusing and instructive: the tale of how I made a great mistake in quotation. There are really two stories: the story as seen from the outside, by a man reading the paper; and the story seen from the inside, by the journalists shouting and telephoning and taking notes in shorthand through the night.

This is the outside story; and it reads like a dreadful quarrel. The notorious G. K. Chesterton, a reactionary Torquemada whose one gloomy pleasure was in the defence of orthodoxy and the pursuit of heretics, long calculated and at last launched a denunciation of a brilliant leader of the New Theology which he hated with all the furnace of his fanatic soul. In this document Chesterton darkly, deliberately, and not having the fear of God before his eyes, asserted that Shakespeare wrote the line “that wreathes its old fantastic roots so high.” This he said because he had been kept in ignorance by Priests; or, perhaps, because he thought craftily that none of his dupes could discover a curious and forgotten rhyme called ‘Elegy in a Country Churchyard’. Anyhow, that orthodox gentleman made a howling error; and received some twenty-five letters and post-cards from kind correspondents who pointed out the mistake.

But the odd thing is that scarcely any of them could conceive that it was a mistake. The first wrote in the tone of one wearied of epigrams, and cried, “What is the joke NOW?” Another professed (and practised, for all I know, God help him) that he had read through all Shakespeare and failed to find the line. A third wrote in a sort of moral distress, asking, as in confidence, if Gray was really a plagiarist. They were a noble collection; but they all subtly assumed an element of leisure and exactitude in the recipient’s profession and character which is far from the truth. Let us pass on to the next act of the external tragedy.

In Monday’s issue of the same paper appeared a letter from the same culprit. He ingenuously confessed that the line did not belong to Shakespeare, but to a poet whom he called Grey. Which was another cropper — or whopper. This strange and illiterate outbreak was printed by the editor with the justly scornful title, “Mr. Chesterton ‘Explains’?” Any man reading the paper at breakfast saw at once the meaning of the sarcastic quotation marks. They meant, of course, “Here is a man who doesn’t know Gray from Shakespeare; he tries to patch it up and he can’t even spell Gray. And that is what he calls an Explanation.” That is the perfectly natural inference of the reader from the letter, the mistake, and the headline — as seen from the outside. The falsehood was serious; the editorial rebuke was serious. The stern editor and the sombre, baffled contributor confront each other as the curtain falls.

And now I will tell you exactly what really happened. It is honestly rather amusing; it is a story of what journals and journalists really are. A monstrously lazy man lives in South Bucks partly by writing a column in the Saturday Daily News. At the time he usually writes it (which is always at the last moment) his house is unexpectedly invaded by infants of all shapes and sizes. His Secretary is called away; and he has to cope with the invading pigmies. Playing with children is a glorious thing; but the journalist in question has never understood why it was considered a soothing or idyllic one. It reminds him, not of watering little budding flowers, but of wrestling for hours with gigantic angels and devils. Moral problems of the most monstrous complexity besiege him incessantly. He has to decide before the awful eyes of innocence, whether, when a sister has knocked down a brother’s bricks, in revenge for the brother having taken two sweets out of his turn, it is endurable that the brother should retaliate by scribbling on the sister's picture book, and whether such conduct does not justify the sister in blowing out the brother's unlawfully lighted match.

Just as he is solving this problem upon principles of the highest morality, it occurs to him suddenly that he has not written his Saturday article; and that there is only about an hour to do it in. He wildly calls to somebody (probably the gardener) to telephone to somewhere for a messenger; he barricades himself in another room and tears his hair, wondering what on earth he shall write about. A drumming of fists on the door outside and a cheerful bellowing encourage and clarify his thoughts; and he is able to observe some newspapers and circulars in wrappers lying on the table. One is a dingy book catalogue; the second is a shiny pamphlet about petrol; the third is a paper called The Christian Commonwealth. He opens it anyhow, and sees in the middle of a page a sentence with which he honestly disagrees. It says that the sense of beauty in Nature is a new thing, hardly felt before Wordsworth. A stream of images and pictures pour through his head, like skies chasing each other or forests running by. "Not felt before Wordsworth!" he thinks. "Oh, but this won't do... bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang... night's candles are burnt out... glowed with living sapphires... leaving their moon-loved maze... antique roots fantastic... antique roots wreathed high... what is it in *As You Like It*?"

He sits down desperately; the messenger rings at the bell; the children drum on the door; the servants run up from time to time to say the messenger is getting bored; and the pencil staggers along, making the world a present of fifteen hundred unimportant words, and making Shakespeare a present of a portion of Gray's Elegy; putting "fantastic roots wreathed high" instead of "antique roots peep out." Then the journalist sends off his copy and turns his attention to the enigma of whether a brother should commandeer a sister's necklace because the sister pinched him at Littlehampton. That is the first scene; that is how an article is really written.

The scene now changes to the newspaper office. The writer of the article has discovered his mistake and wants to correct it by the next day: but the next day is Sunday. He cannot post a letter, so he rings up the paper and dictates a letter by telephone. He leaves the title to his friends at the other end; he knows that they can spell "Gray," as no doubt they can: but the letter is put down by journalistic custom in a pencil scribble and the vowel may well be doubtful. The friend writes at the top of the letter "'G. K. C.' Explains," putting the initials in quotation marks. The next man passing it for press is bored with these initials (I am with him there) and crosses them out, substituting with austere civility, “Mr. Chesterton Explains.” But and now he hears the iron laughter of the Fates, for the blind bolt is about to fall — but he neglects to cross out the second “quote” (as we call it) and it goes up to press with a “quote” between the last words. Another quotation mark at the end of “explains” was the work of one merry moment for the printers upstairs. So the inverted commas were lifted entirely off one word on to the other and a totally innocent title suddenly turned into a blasting sneer. But that would have mattered nothing so far, for there was nothing to sneer at. In the same dark hour, however, there was a printer who was (I suppose) so devoted to this Government that he could think of no Gray but Sir Edward Grey. He spelt it “Grey” by a mere misprint, and the whole tale was complete: first blunder, second blunder, and final condemnation.

That is a little tale of journalism as it is; if you call it egotistic and ask what is the use of it I think I could tell you. You might remember it when next some ordinary young workman is going to be hanged by the neck on circumstantial evidence.

THE SENTIMENTAL SCOT

Of all the great nations of Christendom, the Scotch are by far the most romantic. I have just enough Scotch experience and just enough Scotch blood to know this in the only way in which a thing can really be known; that is, when the outer world and the inner world are at one. I know it is always said that the Scotch are practical, prosaic, and puritan; that they have an eye to business. I like that phrase "an eye" to business.

Polyphemus had an eye for business; it was in the middle of his forehead. It served him admirably for the only two duties which are demanded in a modern financier and captain of industry: the two duties of counting sheep and of eating men. But when that one eye was put out he was done for. But the Scotch are not one-eyed practical men, though their best friends must admit that they are occasionally business-like. They are, quite fundamentally, romantic and sentimental, and this is proved by the very economic argument that is used to prove their harshness and hunger for the material. The mass of Scots have accepted the industrial civilisation, with its factory chimneys and its famine prices, with its steam and smoke and steel — and strikes. The mass of the Irish have not accepted it. The mass of the Irish have clung to agriculture with claws of iron; and have succeeded in keeping it. That is because the Irish, though far inferior to the Scotch in art and literature, are hugely superior to them in practical politics. You do need to be very romantic to accept the industrial civilisation. It does really require all the old Gaelic glamour to make men think that Glasgow is a grand place. Yet the miracle is achieved; and while I was in Glasgow I shared the illusion. I have never had the faintest illusion about Leeds or Birmingham. The industrial dream suited the Scots. Here was a really romantic vista, suited to a romantic people; a vision of higher and higher chimneys taking hold upon the heavens, of fiercer and fiercer fires in which adamant could evaporate like dew. Here were taller and taller engines that began already to shriek and gesticulate like giants. Here were thunderbolts of communication which already flashed to and fro like thoughts. It was unreasonable to expect the rapt, dreamy, romantic Scot to stand still in such a whirl of wizardry to ask whether he, the ordinary Scot, would be any the richer.

He, the ordinary Scot, is very much the poorer. Glasgow is not a rich city. It is a particularly poor city ruled by a few particularly rich men. It is not, perhaps, quite so poor a city as Liverpool, London, Manchester, Birmingham, or Bolton. It is vastly poorer than Rome, Rouen, Munich, or Cologne. A certain civic vitality notable in Glasgow may, perhaps, be due to the fact that the high poetic patriotism of the Scots has there been reinforced by the cutting common sense and independence of the Irish. In any case, I think there can be no doubt of the main historical fact. The Scotch were tempted by the enormous but unequal opportunities of industrialism, because the Scotch are romantic. The Irish refused those enormous and unequal opportunities, because the Irish are clear-sighted. They would not need very clear sight by this time to see that in England and Scotland the temptation has been a betrayal. The industrial system has failed.

I was coming the other day along a great valley road that strikes out of the westland counties about Glasgow, more or less towards the east and the widening of the Forth. It may, for all I know (I amused myself with the fancy), be the way along which Wallace came with his crude army, when he gave battle before Stirling Brig; and, in the midst of mediaeval diplomacies, made a new nation possible. Anyhow, the romantic quality of Scotland rolled all about me, as much in the last reek of Glasgow as in the first rain upon the hills. The tall factory chimneys seemed trying to be taller than the mountain peaks; as if this landscape were full (as its history has been full) of the very madness of ambition. The wageslavery we live in is a wicked thing. But there is nothing in which the Scotch are more piercing and poetical, I might say more perfect, than in their Scotch wickedness. It is what makes the Master of Ballantrae the most thrilling of all fictitious villains. It is what makes the Master of Lovat the most thrilling of all historical villains. It is poetry. It is an intensity which is on the edge of madness or (what is worse) magic. Well, the Scotch have managed to apply something of this fierce romanticism even to the lowest of all lordships and serfdoms; the proletarian inequality of today. You do meet now and then, in Scotland, the man you never meet anywhere else but in novels; I mean the self-made man; the hard, insatiable man, merciless to himself as well as to others. It is not “enterprise”; it is kleptomania. He is quite mad, and a much more obvious public pest than any other kind of kleptomaniac; but though he is a cheat, he is not an illusion. He does exist; I have met quite two of him. Him alone among modern merchants we do not weakly flatter when we call him a bandit. Something of the irresponsibility of the true dark ages really clings about him. Our scientific civilisation is not a civilisation; it is a smoke nuisance. Like smoke it is choking us; like smoke it will pass away. Only of one or two Scotsmen, in my experience, was it true that where there is smoke there is fire.

But there are other kinds of fire; and better. The one great advantage of this strange national temper is that, from the beginning of all chronicles, it has provided resistance as well as cruelty. In Scotland nearly everything has always been in revolt — especially loyalty. If these people are capable of making Glasgow, they are also capable of wrecking it; and the thought of my many good friends in that city makes me really doubtful about which would figure in human memories as the more huge calamity of the two. In Scotland there are many rich men so weak as to call themselves strong. But there are not so many poor men weak enough to believe them.

As I came out of Glasgow I saw men standing about the road. They had little lanterns tied to the fronts of their caps, like the fairies who used to dance in the old fairy pantomimes. They were not, however, strictly speaking, fairies. They might have been called gnomes, since they worked in the chasms of those purple and chaotic hills. They worked in the mines from whence comes the fuel of our fires. Just at the moment when I saw them, moreover, they were not dancing; nor were they working. They were doing nothing. Which, in my opinion (and I trust yours), was the finest thing they could do.

THE SECTARIAN OF SOCIETY

A fixed creed is absolutely indispensable to freedom. For while men are and should be various, there must be some communication between them if they are to get any pleasure out of their variety. And an intellectual formula is the only thing that can create a communication that does not depend on mere blood, class, or capricious sympathy. If we all start with the agreement that the sun and moon exist, we can talk about our different visions of them. The strong-eyed man can boast that he sees the sun as a perfect circle. The shortsighted man may say (or if he is an impressionist, boast) that he sees the moon as a silver blur. The colour-blind man may rejoice in the fairy-trick which enables him to live under a green sun and a blue moon. But if once it be held that there is nothing but a silver blur in one man's eye or a bright circle (like a monocle) in the other man's, then neither is free, for each is shut up in the cell of a separate universe.

But, indeed, an even worse fate, practically considered, follows from the denim of the original intellectual formula. Not only does the individual become narrow, but he spreads narrowness across the world like a cloud; he causes narrowness to increase and multiply like a weed. For what happens is this: that all the shortsighted people come together and build a city called Myopia, where they take short-sightedness for granted and paint short-sighted pictures and pursue very short-sighted policies. Meanwhile all the men who can stare at the sun get together on Salisbury Plain and do nothing but stare at the sun; and all the men who see a blue moon band themselves together and assert the blue moon, not once in a blue moon, but incessantly. So that instead of a small and varied group, you have enormous monotonous groups. Instead of the liberty of dogma, you have the tyranny of taste.

Allegory apart, instances of what I mean will occur to every one; perhaps the most obvious is Socialism. Socialism means the ownership by the organ of government (whatever it is) of all things necessary to production. If a man claims to be a Socialist in that sense he can be any kind of man he likes in any other sense — a bookie, a Mahatma, a man about town, an archbishop, a Margate nigger. Without recalling at the moment clear-headed Socialists in all of these capacities, it is obvious that a clear-headed Socialist (that is, a Socialist with a creed) can be a soldier, like Mr. Blatchford, or a

Don, like Mr. Ball, or a Bathchairman like Mr. Meeke, or a clergyman like Mr. Conrad Noel, or an artistic tradesman like the late Mr. William Morris.

But some people call themselves Socialists, and will not be bound by what they call a narrow dogma; they say that Socialism means far, far more than this; all that is high, all that is free, all that is, etc., etc. Now mark their dreadful fate; for they become totally unfit to be tradesmen, or soldiers, or clergymen, or any other stricken human thing, but become a particular sort of person who is always the same. When once it has been discovered that Socialism does not mean a narrow economic formula, it is also discovered that Socialism does mean wearing one particular kind of clothes, reading one particular kind of books, hanging up one particular kind of pictures, and in the majority of cases even eating one particular kind of food. For men must recognise each other somehow. These men will not know each other by a principle, like fellow citizens. They cannot know each other by a smell, like dogs. So they have to fall back on general colouring; on the fact that a man of their sort will have a wife in pale green and Walter Crane’s “Triumph of Labour” hanging in the hall.

There are, of course, many other instances; for modern society is almost made up of these large monochrome patches. Thus I, for one, regret the supersession of the old Puritan unity, founded on theology, but embracing all types from Milton to the grocer, by that newer Puritan unity which is founded rather on certain social habits, certain common notions, both permissive and prohibitive, in connection with Particular social pleasures.

Thus I, for one, regret that (if you are going to have an aristocracy) it did not remain a logical one founded on the science of heraldry; a thing asserting and defending the quite defensible theory that physical genealogy is the test; instead of being, as it is now, a mere machine of Eton and Oxford for varnishing anybody rich enough with one monotonous varnish.

And it is supremely so in the case of religion. As long as you have a creed, which every one in a certain group believes or is supposed to believe, then that group will consist of the old recurring figures of religious history, who can be appealed to by the creed and judged by it; the saint, the hypocrite, the brawler, the weak brother. These people do each other good; or they all join together to do the hypocrite good, with heavy and repeated blows. But once break the bond of doctrine which alone holds these people together and each will gravitate to his own kind outside the group. The hypocrites will all get together and call each other saints; the saints will get lost in a desert and call themselves weak brethren; the weak brethren will get weaker and weaker in a general atmosphere of imbecility; and the brawler will go off looking for somebody else with whom to brawl.

This has very largely happened to modern English religion; I have been in many churches, chapels, and halls where a confident pride in having got beyond creeds was coupled with quite a paralysed incapacity to get beyond catchwords. But wherever the falsity appears it comes from neglect of the same truth: that men should agree on a principle, that they may differ on everything else; that God gave men a law that they might turn it into liberties.

There was hugely more sense in the old people who said that a wife and husband ought to have the same religion than there is in all the contemporary gushing about sister souls and kindred spirits and auras of identical colour. As a matter of fact, the more the sexes are in violent contrast the less likely they are to be in violent collision. The more incompatible their tempers are the better. Obviously a wife’s soul cannot possibly be a sister soul. It is very seldom so much as a first cousin. There are very few marriages of identical taste and temperament; they are generally unhappy. But to have the same fundamental theory, to think the same thing a virtue, whether you practise or neglect it, to think the same thing a sin, whether you punish or pardon or laugh at it, in the last extremity to call the same thing duty and the same thing disgrace — this really is necessary to a tolerably happy marriage; and it is much better represented by a common religion than it is by affinities and auras. And what applies to the family applies to the nation. A nation with a root religion will be tolerant. A nation with no religion will be bigoted. Lastly, the worst effect of all is this: that when men come together to profess a creed, they come courageously, though it is to hide in catacombs and caves. But when they come together in a clique they come sneakishly, eschewing all change or disagreement, though it is to dine to a brass band in a big London hotel. For birds of a feather flock together, but birds of the white feather most of all.

THE FOOL

For many years I had sought him, and at last I found him in a club. I had been told that he was everywhere; but I had almost begun to think that he was nowhere. I had been assured that there were millions of him; but before my late discovery I inclined to think that there were none of him. After my late discovery I am sure that there is one; and I incline to think that there are several, say, a few hundreds; but unfortunately most of them occupying important positions. When I say “him,” I mean the entire idiot.

I have never been able to discover that “stupid public” of which so many literary men complain. The people one actually meets in trains or at tea parties seem to me quite bright and interesting; certainly quite enough so to call for the full exertion of one’s own wits. And even when I have heard brilliant “conversationalists” conversing with other people, the conversation had much more equality and give and take than this age of intellectual snobs will admit. I have sometimes felt tired, like other people; but rather tired with men’s talk and variety than with their stolidity or sameness; therefore it was that I sometimes longed to find the refreshment of a single fool.

But it was denied me. Turn where I would I found this monotonous brilliancy of the general intelligence, this ruthless, ceaseless sparkle of humour and good sense. The “mostly fools” theory has been used in an anti-democratic sense; but when I found at last my priceless ass, I did not find him in what is commonly called the democracy; nor in the aristocracy either. The man of the democracy generally talks quite rationally, sometimes on the anti-democratic side, but always with an idea of giving reasons for what he says and referring to the realities of his experience. Nor is it the aristocracy that is stupid; at least, not that section of the aristocracy which represents it in politics. They are often cynical, especially about money, but even their boredom tends to make them a little eager for any real information or originality. If a man like Mr. Winston Churchill or Mr. Wyndham made up his mind for any reason to attack Syndicalism he would find out what it was first. Not so the man I found in the club.

He was very well dressed; he had a heavy but handsome face; his black clothes suggested the City and his gray moustaches the Army; but the whole suggested that he did not really belong to either, but was one of those who dabble in shares and who play at soldiers. There was some third element about him that was neither mercantile nor military. His manners were a shade too gentlemanly to be quite those of a gentleman. They involved an unction and over-emphasis of the club-man: then I suddenly remembered feeling the same thing in some old actors or old playgoers who had modelled themselves on actors. As I came in he said, “If I was the Government,” and then put a cigar in his mouth which he lit carefully with long intakes of breath. Then he took the cigar out of his mouth again and said, “I’d give it ‘em,” as if it were quite a separate sentence. But even while his mouth was stopped with the cigar his companion or interlocutor leaped to his feet and said with great heartiness, snatching up a hat, “Well, I must be off. Tuesday!”. I dislike these dark suspicions, but I certainly fancied I recognised the sudden geniality with which one takes leave of a bore.

When, therefore, he removed the narcotic stopper from his mouth it was to me that he addressed the belated epigram. “I’d give it ‘em.”

“What would you give them,” I asked, “the minimum wage?”

“I’d give them beans,” he said. “I’d shoot ’em down shoot ’em down, every man Jack of them. I lost my best train yesterday, and here’s the whole country paralysed, and here’s a handful of obstinate fellows standing between the country and coal. I’d shoot ’em down!”

“That would surely be a little harsh,” I pleaded. “After all, they are not under martial law, though I suppose two or three of them have commissions in the Yeomanry.”

“Commissions in the Yeomanry!” he repeated, and his eyes and face, which became startling and separate, like those of a boiled lobster, made me feel sure that he had something of the kind himself.

“Besides,” I continued, “wouldn’t it be quite enough to confiscate their money?”

“Well, I’d send them all to penal servitude, anyhow,” he said, “and I’d confiscate their funds as well.”

“The policy is daring and full of difficulty,” I replied, “but I do not say that it is wholly outside the extreme rights of the republic. But you must remember that though the facts of property have become quite fantastic, yet the sentiment of property still exists. These coal-owners, though they have not earned the mines, though they could not work the mines, do quite honestly feel that they own the mines. Hence your suggestion of shooting them down, or even of confiscating their property, raises very—"

"What do you mean?" asked the man with the cigar, with a bullying eye. "Who yer talking about?"

"I'm talking about what you were talking about," I replied; "as you put it so perfectly, about the handful of obstinate fellows who are standing between the country and the coal. I mean the men who are selling their own coal for fancy prices, and who, as long as they can get those prices, care as little for national starvation as most merchant princes and pirates have cared for the provinces that were wasted or the peoples that were enslaved just before their ships came home. But though I am a bit of a revolutionist myself, I cannot quite go with you in the extreme violence you suggest. You say—"

"I say," he cried, bursting through my speech with a really splendid energy like that of some noble beast, "I say I'd take all these blasted miners and—"

I had risen slowly to my feet, for I was profoundly moved; and I stood staring at that mental monster.

"Oh," I said, "so it is the miners who are all to be sent to penal servitude, so that we may get more coal. It is the miners who are to be shot dead, every man Jack of them; for if once they are all shot dead they will start mining again...You must forgive me, sir; I know I seem somewhat moved. The fact is, I have just found something. Something I have been looking for for years."

"Well," he asked, with no unfriendly stare, "and what have you found?"

"No," I answered, shaking my head sadly, "I do not think it would be quite kind to tell you what I have found."

He had a hundred virtues, including the capital virtue of good humour, and we had no difficulty in changing the subject and forgetting the disagreement. He talked about society, his town friends and his country sports, and I discovered in the course of it that he was a county magistrate, a Member of Parliament, and a director of several important companies. He was also that other thing, which I did not tell him.

The moral is that a certain sort of person does exist, to whose glory this article is dedicated. He is not the ordinary man. He is not the miner, who is sharp enough to ask for the necessities of existence. He is not the mine-owner, who is sharp enough to get a great deal more, by selling his coal at the best possible moment. He is not the aristocratic politician, who has a cynical but a fair sympathy with both economic opportunities. But he is the man who appears in scores of public places open to the upper middle class or (that less known but more powerful section) the lower upper class. Men like this all over the country are really saying whatever comes into their heads in their capacities of justice of the peace, candidate for Parliament, Colonel of the Yeomanry, old family doctor, Poor Law guardian, coroner, or above all, arbiter in trade disputes. He suffers, in the literal sense, from softening of the brain; he has softened it by always taking the view of everything most comfortable for his country, his class, and his private personality. He is a deadly public danger. But as I have given him his name at the beginning of this article there is no need for me to repeat it at the end.

THE CONSCRIPT AND THE CRISIS

Very few of us ever see the history of our own time happening. And I think the best service a modern journalist can do to society is to record as plainly as ever he can exactly what impression was produced on his mind by anything he has actually seen and heard on the outskirts of any modern problem or campaign. Though all he saw of a railway strike was a flat meadow in Essex in which a train was becalmed for an hour or two, he will probably throw more light on the strike by describing this which he has seen than by describing the steely kings of commerce and the bloody leaders of the mob whom he has never seen — nor any one else either. If he comes a day too late for the battle of Waterloo (as happened to a friend of my grandfather) he should still remember that a true account of the day after Waterloo would be a most valuable thing to have. Though he was on the wrong side of the door when Rizzio was being murdered, we should still like to have the wrong side described in the right way. Upon this principle I, who know nothing of diplomacy or military arrangements, and have only held my breath like the rest of the world while France and Germany were bargaining, will tell quite truthfully of a small scene I saw, one of the thousand scenes that were, so to speak, the anterooms of that inmost chamber of debate.

In the course of a certain morning I came into one of the quiet squares of a small French town and found its cathedral. It was one of those gray and rainy days which rather suit the Gothic. The clouds were leaden, like the solid blue-gray lead of the spires and the jewelled windows; the sloping roofs and high-shouldered arches looked like cloaks drooping with damp; and the stiff gargoyles that stood out round the walls were scoured with old rains and new. I went into the round, deep porch with many doors and found two grubby children playing there out of the rain. I also found a notice of services, etc., and among these I found the announcement that at 11.30 (that is about half an hour later) there would be a special service for the Conscripts, that is to say, the draft of young men who were being taken from their homes in that little town and sent to serve in the French Army; sent (as it happened) at an awful moment, when the French Army was encamped at a parting of the ways. There were already a great many people there when I entered, not only of all kinds, but in all attitudes, kneeling, sitting, or standing about. And there was that general sense that strikes every man from a Protestant country, whether he dislikes the Catholic atmosphere or likes it; I mean, the general sense that the thing was “going on all the time”; that it was not an occasion, but a perpetual process, as if it were a sort of mystical inn.

Several tricolours were hung quite near to the altar, and the young men, when they came in, filed up the church and sat right at the front. They were, of course, of every imaginable social grade; for the French conscription is really strict and universal. Some looked like young criminals, some like young priests, some like both. Some were so obviously prosperous and polished that a barrack-room must seem to them like hell; others (by the look of them) had hardly ever been in so decent a place. But it was not so much the mere class variety that most sharply caught an Englishman’s eye. It was the presence of just those one or two kinds of men who would never have become soldiers in any other way.

There are many reasons for becoming a soldier. It may be a matter of hereditary luck or abject hunger or heroic virtue or fugitive vice; it may be an interest in the work or a lack of interest in any other work. But there would always be two or three kinds of people who would never tend to soldiering; all those kinds of people were there. A lad with red hair, large ears, and very careful clothing, somehow conveyed across the church that he had always taken care of his health, not even from thinking about it, but simply because he was told, and that he was one of those who pass from childhood to manhood without any shock of being a man. In the row in front of him there was a very slight and vivid little Jew, of the sort that is a tailor and a Socialist. By one of those accidents that make real life so unlike anything else, he was the one of the company who seemed especially devout. Behind these stiff or sensitive boys were ranged the ranks of their mothers and fathers, with knots and bunches of their little brothers and sisters.

The children kicked their little legs, wriggled about the seats, and gaped at the arched roof while their mothers were on their knees praying their own prayers, and here and there crying. The gray clouds of rain outside gathered, I suppose, more and more; for the deep church continuously darkened. The lads in front began to sing a military hymn in odd, rather strained voices; I could not disentangle the words, but only one perpetual refrain; so that it sounded like

Sacrarterumbrrar pour la patrie,
Valdarkararump pour la patrie.

Then this ceased; and silence continued, the coloured windows growing gloomier and gloomier with the clouds. In the dead stillness a child started crying suddenly and incoherently. In a city far to the north a French diplomatist and a German aristocrat were talking.

I will not make any commentary on the thing that could blur the outline of its almost cruel actuality. I will not talk nor allow any one else to talk about “clericalism” and “militarism.” Those who talk like that are made of the same mud as those who call all the angers of the unfortunate “Socialism.” The women who were calling in the gloom around me on God and the Mother of God were not “clericalists”; or, if they were, they had forgotten it. And I will bet my boots the young men were not “militarists” — quite the other way just then. The priest made a short speech; he did not utter any priestly dogmas (whatever they are), he uttered platitudes. In such circumstances platitudes are the only possible things to say; because they are true. He began by saying that he supposed a large number of them would be uncommonly glad not to go. They seemed to assent to this particular priestly dogma with even more than their alleged superstitious credulity. He said that war was hateful, and that we all hated it; but that “in all things reasonable” the law of one’s own commonwealth was the voice of God. He spoke about Joan of Arc; and how she had managed to be a bold and successful soldier while still preserving her virtue and practising her religion; then he gave them each a little paper book. To which they replied (after a brief interval for reflection):

Pongprongperesklang pour la patrie,
Tambraugtararronc pour la patrie.

which I feel sure was the best and most pointed reply.

While all this was happening feelings quite indescribable crowded about my own darkening brain, as the clouds crowded above the darkening church. They were so entirely of the elements and the passions that I cannot utter them in an idea, but only in an image. It seemed to me that we were barricaded in this church, but we could not tell what was happening outside the church. The monstrous and terrible jewels of the windows darkened or glistened under moving shadow or light, but the nature of that light and the shapes of those shadows we did not know and hardly dared to guess. The dream began, I think, with a dim fancy that enemies were already in the town, and that the enormous oaken doors were groaning under their hammers. Then I seemed to suppose that the town itself had been destroyed by fire, and effaced, as it may be thousands of years hence, and that if I opened the door I should come out on a wilderness as flat and sterile as the sea. Then the vision behind the veil of stone and slate grew wilder with earthquakes. I seemed to see chasms cloven to the foundations of all things, and letting up an infernal dawn. Huge things happily hidden from us had climbed out of the abyss, and were striding about taller than the clouds. And when the darkness crept from the sapphires of Mary to the sanguine garments of St. John I fancied that some hideous giant was walking round the church and looking in at each window in turn.

Sometimes, again, I thought of that church with coloured windows as a ship carrying many lanterns struggling in a high sea at night. Sometimes I thought of it as a great coloured lantern itself, hung on an iron chain out of heaven and tossed and swung to and fro by strong wings, the wings of the princes of the air. But I never thought of it or the young men inside it save as something precious and in peril, or of the things outside but as something barbaric and enormous.

I know there are some who cannot sympathise with such sentiments of limitation; I know there are some who would feel no touch of the heroic tenderness if some day a young man, with red hair, large ears, and his mother’s lozenges in his pocket, were found dead in uniform in the passes of the Vosges. But on this subject I have heard many philosophies and thought a good deal for myself; and the conclusion I have come to is Sacrarterumbrrar pour la Pattie, and it is not likely that I shall alter it now.

But when I came out of the church there were none of these things, but only a lot of Shops, including a paper-shop, on which the posters announced that the negotiations were proceeding satisfactorily.

THE MISER AND HIS FRIENDS

It is a sign of sharp sickness in a society when it is actually led by some special sort of lunatic. A mild touch of madness may even keep a man sane; for it may keep him modest. So some exaggerations in the State may remind it of its own normal. But it is bad when the head is cracked; when the roof of the commonwealth has a tile loose.

The two or three cases of this that occur in history have always been gibbeted gigantically. Thus Nero has become a black proverb, not merely because he was an oppressor, but because he was also an aesthete — that is, an erotomaniac. He not only tortured other people's bodies; he tortured his own soul into the same red revolting shapes. Though he came quite early in Roman Imperial history and was followed by many austere and noble emperors, yet for us the Roman Empire was never quite cleansed of that memory of the sexual madman. The populace or barbarians from whom we come could not forget the hour when they came to the highest place of the earth, saw the huge pedestal of the earthly omnipotence, read on it Divus Caesar, and looked up and saw a statue without a head.

It is the same with that ugly entanglement before the Renaissance, from which, alas, most memories of the Middle Ages are derived. Louis XI was a very patient and practical man of the world; but (like many good business men) he was mad. The morbidity of the intriguer and the torturer clung about everything he did, even when it was right. And just as the great Empire of Antoninus and Aurelius never wiped out Nero, so even the silver splendour of the latter saints, such as Vincent de Paul, has never painted out for the British public the crooked shadow of Louis XI. Whenever the unhealthy man has been on top, he has left a horrible savour that humanity finds still in its nostrils. Now in our time the unhealthy man is on top; but he is not the man mad on sex, like Nero; or mad on statecraft, like Louis XI; he is simply the man mad on money. Our tyrant is not the satyr or the torturer; but the miser.

The modern miser has changed much from the miser of legend and anecdote; but only because he has grown yet more insane. The old miser had some touch of the human artist about him in so far that he collected gold — a substance that can really be admired for itself, like ivory or old oak. An old man who picked up yellow pieces had something of the simple ardour, something of the mystical materialism, of a child who picks out yellow flowers. Gold is but one kind of coloured clay, but coloured clay can be very beautiful. The modern idolater of riches is content with far less genuine things. The glitter of guineas is like the glitter of buttercups, the chink of pelf is like the chime of bells, compared with the dreary papers and dead calculations which make the hobby of the modern miser.

The modern millionaire loves nothing so lovable as a coin. He is content sometimes with the dead crackle of notes; but far more often with the mere repetition of noughts in a ledger, all as like each other as eggs to eggs. And as for comfort, the old miser could be comfortable, as many tramps and savages are, when he was once used to being unclean. A man could find some comfort in an unswept attic or an unwashed shirt. But the Yankee millionaire can find no comfort with five telephones at his bed-head and ten minutes for his lunch. The round coins in the miser's stocking were safe in some sense. The round noughts in the millionaire's ledger are safe in no sense; the same fluctuation which excites him with their increase depresses him with their diminution. The miser at least collects coins; his hobby is numismatics. The man who collects noughts collects nothings.

It may be admitted that the man amassing millions is a bit of an idiot; but it may be asked in what sense does he rule the modern world. The answer to this is very important and rather curious. The evil enigma for us here is not the rich, but the Very Rich. The distinction is important; because this special problem is separate from the old general quarrel about rich and poor that runs through the Bible and all strong books, old and new. The special problem to-day is that certain powers and privileges have grown so world-wide and unwieldy that they are out of the power of the moderately rich as well as of the moderately poor. They are out of the power of everybody except a few millionaires — that is, misers. In the old normal friction of normal wealth and poverty I am myself on the Radical side. I think that a Berkshire squire has too much power over his tenants; that a Brompton builder has too much power over his workmen; that a West London doctor has too much power over the poor patients in the West London Hospital.

But a Berkshire squire has no power over cosmopolitan finance, for instance. A Brompton builder has not money enough to run a Newspaper Trust. A West End doctor could not make a corner in quinine and freeze everybody out. The merely rich are not rich enough to rule the modern market. The things that change modern history, the big national and international loans, the big educational and philanthropic foundations, the purchase of numberless newspapers, the big prices paid for peerages, the big expenses often incurred in elections — these are getting too big for everybody except the misers; the men with the largest of earthly fortunes and the smallest of earthly aims.

There are two other odd and rather important things to be said about them. The first is this: that with this aristocracy we do not have the chance of a lucky variety in types which belongs to larger and looser aristocracies. The moderately rich include all kinds of people even good people. Even priests are sometimes saints; and even soldiers are sometimes heroes. Some doctors have really grown wealthy by curing their patients and not by flattering them; some brewers have been known to sell beer. But among the Very Rich you will never find a really generous man, even by accident. They may give their money away, but they will never give themselves away; they are egoistic, secretive, dry as old bones. To be smart enough to get all that money you must be dull enough to want it.

Lastly, the most serious point about them is this: that the new miser is flattered for his meanness and the old one never was. It was never called self-denial in the old miser that he lived on bones. It is called self-denial in the new millionaire if he lives on beans. A man like Dancer was never praised as a Christian saint for going in rags. A man like Rockefeller is praised as a sort of pagan stoic for his early rising or his unassuming dress. His “simple” meals, his “simple” clothes, his “simple” funeral, are all extolled as if they were creditable to him. They are disgraceful to him: exactly as disgraceful as the tatters and vermin of the old miser were disgraceful to him. To be in rags for charity would be the condition of a saint; to be in rags for money was that of a filthy old fool. Precisely in the same way, to be “simple” for charity is the state of a saint; to be “simple” for money is that of a filthy old fool. Of the two I have more respect for the old miser, gnawing bones in an attic: if he was not nearer to God, he was at least a little nearer to men. His simple life was a little more like the life of the real poor.

THE MYSTAGOGUE

Whenever you hear much of things being unutterable and indefinable and impalpable and unnamable and subtly indescribable, then elevate your aristocratic nose towards heaven and snuff up the smell of decay. It is perfectly true that there is something in all good things that is beyond all speech or figure of speech. But it is also true that there is in all good things a perpetual desire for expression and concrete embodiment; and though the attempt to embody it is always inadequate, the attempt is always made. If the idea does not seek to be the word, the chances are that it is an evil idea. If the word is not made flesh it is a bad word.

Thus Giotto or Fra Angelico would have at once admitted theologically that God was too good to be painted; but they would always try to paint Him. And they felt (very rightly) that representing Him as a rather quaint old man with a gold crown and a white beard, like a king of the elves, was less profane than resisting the sacred impulse to express Him in some way. That is why the Christian world is full of gaudy pictures and twisted statues which seem, to many refined persons, more blasphemous than the secret volumes of an atheist. The trend of good is always towards Incarnation. But, on the other hand, those refined thinkers who worship the Devil, whether in the swamps of Jamaica or the salons of Paris, always insist upon the shapelessness, the wordlessness, the unutterable character of the abomination. They call him "horror of emptiness," as did the black witch in Stevenson's Dynamiter; they worship him as the unspeakable name; as the unbearable silence. They think of him as the void in the heart of the whirlwind; the cloud on the brain of the maniac; the toppling turrets of vertigo or the endless corridors of nightmare. It was the Christians who gave the Devil a grotesque and energetic outline, with sharp horns and spiked tail. It was the saints who drew Satan as comic and even lively. The Satanists never drew him at all.

And as it is with moral good and evil, so it is also with mental clarity and mental confusion. There is one very valid test by which we may separate genuine, if perverse and unbalanced, originality and revolt from mere impudent innovation and bluff. The man who really thinks he has an idea will always try to explain that idea. The charlatan who has no idea will always confine himself to explaining that it is much too subtle to be explained. The first idea may really be very outree or specialist; it may really be very difficult to express to ordinary people. But because the man is trying to express it, it is most probable that there is something in it, after all. The honest man is he who is always trying to utter the unutterable, to describe the indescribable; but the quack lives not by plunging into mystery, but by refusing to come out of it.

Perhaps this distinction is most comically plain in the case of the thing called Art, and the people called Art Critics. It is obvious that an attractive landscape or a living face can only half express the holy cunning that has made them what they are. It is equally obvious that a landscape painter expresses only half of the landscape; a portrait painter only half of the person; they are lucky if they express so much. And again it is yet more obvious that any literary description of the pictures can only express half of them, and that the less important half. Still, it does express something; the thread is not broken that connects God With Nature, or Nature with men, or men with critics. The “Mona Lisa” was in some respects (not all, I fancy) what God meant her to be. Leonardo’s picture was, in some respects, like the lady. And Walter Pater’s rich description was, in some respects, like the picture. Thus we come to the consoling reflection that even literature, in the last resort, can express something other than its own unhappy self.

Now the modern critic is a humbug, because he professes to be entirely inarticulate. Speech is his whole business; and he boasts of being speechless. Before Botticelli he is mute. But if there is any good in Botticelli (there is much good, and much evil too) it is emphatically the critic’s business to explain it: to translate it from terms of painting into terms of diction. Of course, the rendering will be inadequate — but so is Botticelli. It is a fact he would be the first to admit. But anything which has been intelligently received can at least be intelligently suggested. Pater does suggest an intelligent cause for the cadaverous colour of Botticelli’s “Venus Rising from the Sea.” Ruskin does suggest an intelligent motive for Turner destroying forests and falsifying landscapes. These two great critics were far too fastidious for my taste; they urged to excess the idea that a sense of art was a sort of secret; to be patiently taught and slowly learnt. Still, they thought it could be taught: they thought it could be learnt. They constrained themselves, with considerable creative fatigue, to find the exact adjectives which might parallel in English prose what has been clone in Italian painting. The same is true of Whistler and R. A. M. Stevenson and many others in the exposition of Velasquez. They had something to say about the pictures; they knew it was unworthy of the pictures, but they said it.

Now the eulogists of the latest artistic insanities (Cubism and Post Impressionism and Mr. Picasso) are eulogists and nothing else. They are not critics; least of all creative critics. They do not attempt to translate beauty into language; they merely tell you that it is untranslatable — that is, unutterable, indefinable, indescribable, impalpable, ineffable, and all the rest of it. The cloud is their banner; they cry to chaos and old night. They circulate a piece of paper on which Mr. Picasso has had the misfortune to upset the ink and tried to dry it with his boots, and they seek to terrify democracy by the good old anti-democratic muddlements: that "the public" does not understand these things; that "the likes of us" cannot dare to question the dark decisions of our lords.

I venture to suggest that we resist all this rubbish by the very simple test mentioned above. If there were anything intelligent in such art, something of it at least could be made intelligible in literature. Man is made with one head, not with two or three. No criticism of Rembrandt is as good as Rembrandt; but it can be so written as to make a man go back and look at his pictures. If there is a curious and fantastic art, it is the business of the art critics to create a curious and fantastic literary expression for it; inferior to it, doubtless, but still akin to it. If they cannot do this, as they cannot; if there is nothing in their eulogies, as there is nothing except eulogy — then they are quacks or the high-priests of the unutterable. If the art critics can say nothing about the artists except that they are good it is because the artists are bad. They can explain nothing because they have found nothing; and they have found nothing because there is nothing to be found.

THE RED REACTIONARY

The one case for Revolution is that it is the only quite clean and complete road to anything — even to restoration. Revolution alone can be not merely a revolt of the living, but also a resurrection of the dead.

A friend of mine (one, in fact, who writes prominently on this paper) was once walking down the street in a town of Western France, situated in that area that used to be called La Vendee; which in that great creative crisis about 1790 formed a separate and mystical soul of its own, and made a revolution against a revolution. As my friend went down this street he whistled an old French air which he had found, like Mr. Gandish, "in his researches into 'istry," and which had somehow taken his fancy; the song to which those last sincere loyalists went into battle. I think the words ran:

Monsieur de Charette.
Dit au gens d'ici.
Le roi va remettre.
Le fleur de lys.

My friend was (and is) a Radical, but he was (and is) an Englishman, and it never occurred to him that there could be any harm in singing archaic lyrics out of remote centuries; that one had to be a Catholic to enjoy the "Dies Irae," or a Protestant to remember "Lillibullero." Yet he was stopped and gravely warned that things so politically provocative might get him at least into temporary trouble.

A little time after I was helping King George V to get crowned, by walking round a local bonfire and listening to a local band. Just as a bonfire cannot be too big, so (by my theory of music) a band cannot be too loud, and this band was so loud, emphatic, and obvious, that I actually recognised one or two of the tunes. And I noticed that quite a formidable proportion of them were Jacobite tunes; that is, tunes that had been primarily meant to keep George V out of his throne for ever. Some of the real airs of the old Scottish rebellion were played, such as "Charlie is My Darling," or "What's a' the steer, kimmer?" songs that men had sung while marching to destroy and drive out the monarchy under which we live. They were songs in which the very kinsmen of the present King were swept aside as usurpers. They were songs in which the actual words "King George" occurred as a curse and a derision. Yet they were played to celebrate his very Coronation;

played as promptly and innocently as if they had been “Grandfather’s Clock” or “Rule Britannia” or “The Honeysuckle and the Bee.”

That contrast is the measure, not only between two nations, but between two modes of historical construction and development. For there is not really very much difference, as European history goes, in the time that has elapsed between us and the Jacobite and between us and the Jacobin. When George III was crowned the gauntlet of the King’s Champion was picked up by a partisan of the Stuarts. When George III was still on the throne the Bourbons were driven out of France as the Stuarts had been driven out of England. Yet the French are just sufficiently aware that the Bourbons might possibly return that they will take a little trouble to discourage it; whereas we are so certain that the Stuarts will never return that we actually play their most passionate tunes as a compliment to their rivals. And we do not even do it tauntingly. I examined the faces of all the bandsmen; and I am sure they were devoid of irony: indeed, it is difficult to blow a wind instrument ironically. We do it quite unconsciously; because we have a huge fundamental dogma, which the French have not. We really believe that the past is past. It is a very doubtful point.

Now the great gift of a revolution (as in France) is that it makes men free in the past as well as free in the future. Those who have cleared away everything could, if they liked, put back everything. But we who have preserved everything — we cannot restore anything. Take, for the sake of argument, the complex and many coloured ritual of the Coronation recently completed. That rite is stratified with the separate centuries; from the first rude need of discipline to the last fine shade of culture or corruption, there is nothing that cannot be detected or even dated. The fierce and childish vow of the lords to serve their lord “against all manner of folk” obviously comes from the real Dark Ages; no longer confused, even by the ignorant, with the Middle Ages. It comes from some chaos of Europe, when there was one old Roman road across four of our counties; and when hostile “folk” might live in the next village. The sacramental separation of one man to be the friend of the fatherless and the nameless belongs to the true Middle Ages; with their great attempt to make a moral and invisible Roman Empire; or (as the Coronation Service says) to set the cross for ever above the ball. Elaborate local tomfooleries, such as that by which the Lord of the Manor of Work-sop is alone allowed to do something or other, these probably belong to the decay of the Middle Ages, when that great civilisation died out in grotesque literalism and entangled heraldry. Things like the presentation of the Bible bear witness to the intellectual outburst at the Reformation; things like the Declaration against the Mass bear witness to the great wars of the Puritans; and things like the allegiance of the Bishops bear witness to the wordy and parenthetical political compromises which (to my deep regret) ended the wars of religion.

But my purpose here is only to point out one particular thing. In all that long list of variations there must be, and there are, things which energetic modern minds would really wish, with the reasonable modification, to restore. Dr. Clifford would probably be glad to see again the great Puritan idealism that forced the Bible into an antique and almost frozen formality. Dr. Horton probably really regrets the old passion that excommunicated Rome. In the same way Mr. Belloc would really prefer the Middle Ages; as Lord Rosebery would prefer the Erastian oligarchy of the eighteenth century. The Dark Ages would probably be disputed (from widely different motives) by Mr. Rudyard Kipling and Mr. Cunninghame Graham. But Mr. Cunninghame Graham would win.

But the black case against Conservative (or Evolutionary) politics is that none of these sincere men can win. Dr. Clifford cannot get back to the Puritans; Mr. Belloc cannot get back to the mediaevals; because (alas) there has been no Revolution to leave them a clear space for building or rebuilding. Frenchmen have all the ages behind them, and can wander back and pick and choose. But Englishmen have all the ages on top of them, and can only lie groaning under that imposing tower, without being able to take so much as a brick out of it. If the French decide that their Republic is bad they can get rid of it; but if we decide that a Republic was good, we should have much more difficulty. If the French democracy actually desired every detail of the mediaeval monarchy, they could have it. I do not think they will or should, but they could. If another Dauphin were actually crowned at Rheims; if another Joan of Arc actually bore a miraculous banner before him; if mediaeval swords shook and blazed in every gauntlet; if the golden lilies glowed from every tapestry; if this were really proved to be the will of France and the purpose of Providence — such a scene would still be the lasting and final justification of the French Revolution.

For no such scene could conceivably have happened under Louis XVI.

THE SEPARATIST AND SACRED THINGS

In the very laudable and fascinating extensions of our interest in Asiatic arts or faiths, there are two incidental injustices which we tend nowadays to do to our own records and our own religion. The first is a tendency to talk as if certain things were not only present in the higher Orientals, but were peculiar to them. Thus our magazines will fall into a habit of wondering praise of Bushido, the Japanese chivalry, as if no Western knights had ever vowed noble vows, or as if no Eastern knights had ever broken them. Or again, our drawing-rooms will be full of the praises of Indian renunciation and Indian unworldliness, as if no Christians had been saints, or as if all Buddhists had been. But if the first injustice is to think of human virtues as peculiarly Eastern, the other injustice is a failure to appreciate what really is peculiarly Eastern. It is too much taken for granted that the Eastern sort of idealism is certainly superior and convincing; whereas in truth it is only separate and peculiar. All that is richest, deepest, and subtlest in the East is rooted in Pantheism; but all that is richest, deepest, and subtlest in us is concerned with denying passionately that Pantheism is either the highest or the purest religion.

Thus, in turning over some excellent books recently written on the spirit of Indian or Chinese art and decoration, I found it quietly and curiously assumed that the artist must be at his best if he flows with the full stream of Nature; and identifies himself with all things; so that the stars are his sleepless eyes and the forests his far-flung arms. Now in this way of talking both the two injustices will be found. In so far as what is claimed is a strong sense of the divine in all things, the Eastern artists have no more monopoly of it than they have of hunger and thirst.

I have no doubt that the painters and poets of the Far East do exhibit this; but I rebel at being asked to admit that we must go to the Far East to find it. Traces of such sentiments can be found, I fancy, even in other painters and poets. I do not question that the poet Wo Wo (that ornament of the eighth dynasty) may have written the words: “Even the most undignified vegetable is for this person capable of producing meditations not to be exhibited by much weeping.” But, I do not therefore admit that a Western gentleman named Wordsworth (who made a somewhat similar remark) had plagiarised from Wo Wo, or was a mere Occidental fable and travesty of that celebrated figure. I do not deny that Tinishona wrote that exquisite example of the short Japanese poem entitled “Honourable Chrysanthemum in Honourable Hole in Wall.” But I do not therefore admit that Tennyson’s little verse about the flower in the cranny was not original and even sincere.

It is recorded (for all I know) of the philanthropic Emperor Bo, that when engaged in cutting his garden lawn with a mower made of alabaster and chrysoberyl, he chanced to cut down a small flower; whereupon, being much affected, he commanded his wise men immediately to take down upon tablets of ivory the lines beginning: “Small and unobtrusive blossom with ruby extremities.” But this incident, touching as it is, does not shake my belief in the incident of Robert Burns and the daisy; and I am left with an impression that poets are pretty much the same everywhere in their poetry — and in their prose.

I have tried to convey my sympathy and admiration for Eastern art and its admirers, and if I have not conveyed them I must give it up and go on to more general considerations. I therefore proceed to say — with the utmost respect, that it is Cheek, a rarefied and etherealised form of Cheek, for this school to speak in this way about the mother that bore them, the great civilisation of the West. The West also has its magic landscapes, only through our incurable materialism they look like landscapes as well as like magic. The West also has its symbolic figures, only they look like men as well as symbols. It will be answered (and most justly) that Oriental art ought to be free to follow its own instinct and tradition; that its artists are concerned to suggest one thing and our artists another; that both should be admired in their difference. Profoundly true; but what is the difference? It is certainly not as the Orientalisers assert, that we must go to the Far East for a sympathetic and transcendental interpretation of Nature. We have paid a long enough toll of mystics and even of madmen to be quit of that disability.

Yet there is a difference, and it is just what I suggested. The Eastern mysticism is an ecstasy of unity; the Christian mysticism is an ecstasy of creation, that is of separation and mutual surprise. The latter says, like St. Francis, “My brother fire and my sister water”; the former says, “Myself fire and myself water.” Whether you call the Eastern attitude an extension of oneself into everything or a contraction of oneself into nothing is a matter of metaphysical definition. The effect is the same, an effect which lives and throbs throughout all the exquisite arts of the East. This effect is the Sing called rhythm, a pulsation of pattern, or of ritual, or of colours, or of cosmic theory, but always suggesting the unification of the individual with the world. But there is quite another kind of sympathy the sympathy with a thing because it is different. No one will say that Rembrandt did not sympathise with an old woman; but no one will say that Rembrandt painted like an old woman. No one will say that Reynolds did not appreciate children; but no one will say he did it childishly. The supreme instance of this divine division is sex, and that explains (what I could never understand in my youth) why Christendom called the soul the bride of God. For real love is an intense realisation of the "separateness" of all our souls. The most heroic and human love-poetry of the world is never mere passion; precisely because mere passion really is a melting back into Nature, a meeting of the waters. And water is plunging and powerful; but it is only powerful downhill. The high and human love-poetry is all about division rather than identity; and in the great love-poems even the man as he embraces the woman sees her, in the same instant, afar off; a virgin and a stranger.

For the first injustice, of which we have spoken, still recurs; and if we grant that the East has a right to its difference, it is not realised in what we differ. That nursery tale from nowhere about St. George and the Dragon really expresses best the relation between the West and the East. There were many other differences, calculated to arrest even the superficial eye, between a saint and a dragon. But the essential difference was simply this: that the Dragon did want to eat St. George; whereas St. George would have felt a strong distaste for eating the Dragon. In most of the stories he killed the Dragon. In many of the stories he not only spared, but baptised it. But in neither case did the Christian have any appetite for cold dragon. The Dragon, however, really has an appetite for cold Christian — and especially for cold Christianity. This blind intention to absorb, to change the shape of everything and digest it in the darkness of a dragon's stomach; this is what is really meant by the Pantheism and Cosmic Unity of the East. The Cosmos as such is cannibal; as old Time ate his children. The Eastern saints were saints because they wanted to be swallowed up. The Western saint, like St. George, was sainted by the Western Church precisely because he refused to be swallowed. The same process of thought that has prevented nationalities disappearing in Christendom has prevented the complete appearance of Pantheism. All Christian men instinctively resist the idea of being absorbed into an Empire; an Austrian, a Spanish, a British, or a

Turkish Empire. But there is one empire, much larger and much more tyrannical, which free men will resist with even stronger passion. The free man violently resists being absorbed into the empire which is called the Universe. He demands Home Rule for his nationality, but still more Home Rule for his home. Most of all he demands Home Rule for himself. He claims the right to be saved, in spite of Moslem fatalism. He claims the right to be damned in spite of theosophical optimism. He refuses to be the Cosmos; because he refuses to forget it.

THE MUMMER

The night before Christmas Eve I heard a burst of musical voices so close that they might as well have been inside the house instead of just outside; so I asked them inside, hoping that they might then seem farther away. Then I realised that they were the Christmas Mummers, who come every year in country parts to enact the rather rigid fragments of the old Christmas play of St. George, the Turkish Knight, and the Very Venal Doctor. I will not describe it; it is indescribable; but I will describe my parallel sentiments as it passed.

One could see something of that half-failure that haunts our artistic revivals of mediaeval dances, carols, or Bethlehem Plays. There are elements in all that has come to us from the more morally simple society of the Middle Ages: elements which moderns, even when they are mediaevalists, find it hard to understand and harder to imitate. The first is the primary idea of Mummery itself. If you will observe a child just able to walk, you will see that his first idea is not to dress up as anybody — but to dress up. Afterwards, of course, the idea of being the King or Uncle William will leap to his lips. But it is generally suggested by the hat he has already let fall over his nose, from far deeper motives. Tommy does not assume the hat primarily because it is Uncle William’s hat, but because it is not Tommy’s hat. It is a ritual investiture; and is akin to those Gorgon masks that stiffened the dances of Greece or those towering mitres that came from the mysteries of Persia. For the essence of such ritual is a profound paradox: the concealment of the personality combined with the exaggeration of the person. The man performing a rite seeks to be at once invisible and conspicuous. It is part of that divine madness which all other creatures wonder at in Man, that he alone parades this pomp of obliteration and anonymity. Man is not, perhaps, the only creature who dresses himself, but he is the only creature who disguises himself. Beasts and birds do indeed take the colours of their environment; but that is not in order to be watched, but in order not to be watched; it is not the formalism of rejoicing, but the formlessness of fear. It is not so with men, whose nature is the unnatural. Ancient Britons did not stain themselves blue because they lived in blue forests; nor did Georgian beaux and belles powder their hair to match an Arctic landscape; the Britons were not dressing up as kingfishers nor the beaux pretending to be polar bears. Nay, even when modern ladies paint their faces a bright mauve, it is doubted by some naturalists whether they do it with the idea of escaping notice. So merry-makers (or Mummers) adopt their costume to heighten and exaggerate their own bodily presence and identity; not to sink it, primarily speaking, in another identity. It is not Acting — that comparatively low profession-comparatively I mean. It is Mummery; and, as Mr. Kensit would truly say, all elaborate religious ritual is Mummery. That is, it is the noble conception of making Man something other and more than himself when he stands at the limit of human things. It is only careful faddists and feeble German philosophers who want to wear no clothes; and be "natural" in their Dionysian revels. Natural men, really vigorous and exultant men, want to wear more and more clothes when they are revelling. They want worlds of waistcoats and forests of trousers and pagodas of tall hats toppling up to the stars.

Thus it is with the lingering Mummers at Christmas in the country. If our more refined revivers of Miracle Plays or Morrice Dances tried to reconstruct the old Mummers' Play of St. George and the Turkish Knight (I do not know why they do not) they would think at once of picturesque and appropriate dresses. St. George's panoply would be pictured from the best books of armour and blazonry: the Turkish Knight's arms and ornaments would be traced from the finest Saracenic arabesques. When my garden door opened on Christmas Eve and St. George of England entered, the appearance of that champion was slightly different. His face was energetically blacked all over with soot, above which he wore an aged and very tall top hat; he wore his shirt outside his coat like a surplice, and he flourished a thick umbrella. Now do not, I beg you, talk about "ignorance"; or suppose that the Mummer in question (he is a very pleasant Ratcatcher, with a tenor voice) did this because he knew no better. Try to realise that even a Ratcatcher knows St. George of England was not black, and did not kill the Dragon with an umbrella. The Rat-catcher is not under this delusion; any more than Paul Veronese thought that very good men have luminous rings round their heads; any more than the Pope thinks that Christ washed the feet of the twelve in a Cathedral; any more than the Duke of Norfolk thinks the lions on a tabard are like the lions at the Zoo. These things are denaturalised because they are symbols; because the extraordinary occasion must hide or even disfigure the ordinary people. Black faces were to mediaeval mummeries what carved masks were to

Greek plays: it was called being “vizarded.” My Rat-catcher is not sufficiently arrogant to suppose for a moment that he looks like St. George. But he is sufficiently humble to be convinced that if he looks as little like himself as he can, he will be on the right road.

This is the soul of Mumming; the ostentatious secrecy of men in disguise. There are, of course, other mediaeval elements in it which are also difficult to explain to the fastidious mediaevalists of to-day. There is, for instance, a certain output of violence into the void. It can best be defined as a raging thirst to knock men down without the faintest desire to hurt them. All the rhymes with the old ring have the trick of turning on everything in which the rhymsters most sincerely believed, merely for the pleasure of blowing off steam in startling yet careless phrases. When Tennyson says that King Arthur “drew all the petty princedoms under him,” and “made a realm and ruled,” his grave Royalism is quite modern. Many mediaevals, outside the mediaeval republics, believed in monarchy as solemnly as Tennyson. But that older verse

When good King Arthur ruled this land
He was a goodly King —
He stole three pecks of barley-meal
To make a bag-pudding.

is far more Arthurian than anything in The Idylls of the King. There are other elements; especially that sacred thing that can perhaps be called Anachronism. All that to us is Anachronism was to mediaevals merely Eternity. But the main excellence of the Mumming Play lies still, I think, in its uproarious secrecy. If we cannot hide our hearts in healthy darkness, at least we can hide our faces in healthy blacking. If you cannot escape like a philosopher into a forest, at least you can carry the forest with you, like a Jack-in-the-Green. It is well to walk under universal ensigns; and there is an old tale of a tyrant to whom a walking forest was the witness of doom. That, indeed, is the very intensity of the notion: a masked man is ominous; but who shall face a mob of masks?

THE ARISTOCRATIC ‘ARRY

The Cheap Tripper, pursued by the curses of the aesthetes and the antiquaries, really is, I suppose, a symptom of the strange and almost unearthly ugliness of our diseased society. The costumes and customs of a hundred peasantries are there to prove that such ugliness does not necessarily follow from mere poverty, or mere democracy, or mere unlettered simplicity of mind.

But though the tripper, artistically considered, is a sign of our decadence, he is not one of its worst signs, but relatively one of its best; one of its most innocent and most sincere. Compared with many of the philosophers and artists who denounce him; he looks like a God fearing fisher or a noble mountaineer. His antics with donkeys and concertinas, crowded charabancs, and exchanged hats, though clumsy, are not so vicious or even so fundamentally vulgar as many of the amusements of the overeducated. People are not more crowded on a char-a-banc than they are at a political “At Home,” or even an artistic soiree; and if the female trippers are overdressed, at least they are not overdressed and underdressed at the same time. It is better to ride a donkey than to be a donkey. It is better to deal with the Cockney festival which asks men and women to change hats, rather than with the modern Utopia that wants them to change heads.

But the truth is that such small, but real, element of vulgarity as there is indeed in the tripper, is part of a certain folly and falsity which is characteristic of much modernity, and especially of the very people who persecute the poor tripper most. There is something in the whole society, and even especially in the cultured part of it, that does things in a clumsy and unbeautiful way.

A case occurs to me in the matter of Stonehenge, which I happened to visit yesterday. Now to a person really capable of feeling the poetry of Stonehenge it is almost a secondary matter whether he sees Stonehenge at all. The vast void roll of the empty land towards Salisbury, the gray tablelands like primeval altars, the trailing rain-clouds, the vapour of primeval sacrifices, would all tell him of a very ancient and very lonely Britain. It would not spoil his Druidic mood if he missed Stonehenge. But it does spoil his mood to find Stonehenge — surrounded by a brand-new fence of barbed wire, with a policeman and a little shop selling picture post-cards.

Now if you protest against this, educated people will instantly answer you, “Oh, it was done to prevent the vulgar trippers who chip stones and carve names and spoil the look of Stonehenge.” It does not seem to occur to them that barbed wire and a policeman rather spoil the look of Stonehenge. The scratching of a name, particularly when performed with blunt penknife or pencil by a person of imperfect School Board education, can be trusted in a little while to be indistinguishable from the grayest hieroglyphic by the grandest Druid of old. But nobody could get a modern policeman into the same picture with a Druid. This really vital piece of vandalism was done by the educated, not the uneducated; it was done by the influence of the artists or antiquaries who wanted to preserve the antique beauty of Stonehenge. It seems to me curious to preserve your lady’s beauty from freckles by blacking her face all over; or to protect the pure whiteness of your wedding garment by dyeing it green.

And if you ask, “But what else could any one have done, what could the most artistic age have done to save the monument?” I reply, “There are hundreds of things that Greeks or Mediaevals might have done; and I have no notion what they would have chosen; but I say that by an instinct in their whole society they would have done something that was decent and serious and suitable to the place. Perhaps some family of knights or warriors would have the hereditary duty of guarding such a place. If so their armour would be appropriate; their tents would be appropriate; not deliberately — they would grow like that. Perhaps some religious order such as normally employ nocturnal watches and the relieving of guard would protect such a place. Perhaps it would be protected by all sorts of rituals, consecrations, or curses, which would seem to you mere raving superstition and silliness. But they do not seem to me one twentieth part so silly, from a purely rationalist point of view, as calmly making a spot hideous in order to keep it beautiful.”

The thing that is really vulgar, the thing that is really vile, is to live in a good place Without living by its life. Any one who settles down in a place without becoming part of it is (barring peculiar personal cases, of course) a tripper or wandering cad. For instance, the Jew is a genuine peculiar case. The Wandering Jew is not a wandering cad. He is a highly civilised man in a highly difficult position; the world being divided, and his own nation being divided, about whether he can do anything else except wander.

The best example of the cultured, but common, tripper is the educated Englishman on the Continent. We can no longer explain the quarrel by calling Englishmen rude and foreigners polite. Hundreds of Englishmen are extremely polite, and thousands of foreigners are extremely rude. The truth of the matter is that foreigners do not resent the rude Englishman. What they do resent, what they do most justly resent, is the polite Englishman. He visits Italy for Botticellis or Flanders for Rembrandts, and he treats the great nations that made these things courteously — as he would treat the custodians of any museum. It does not seem to strike him that the Italian is not the custodian of the pictures, but the creator of them. He can afford to look down on such nations — when he can paint such pictures.

That is, in matters of art and travel, the psychology of the cad. If, living in Italy, you admire Italian art while distrusting Italian character, you are a tourist, or cad. If, living in Italy, you admire Italian art while despising Italian religion, you are a tourist, or cad. It does not matter how many years you have lived there. Tourists will often live a long time in hotels without discovering the nationality of the waiters. Englishmen will often live a long time in Italy without discovering the nationality of the Italians. But the test is simple. If you admire what Italians did without admiring Italians — you are a cheap tripper.

The same, of course, applies much nearer home. I have remarked elsewhere that country shopkeepers are justly offended by London people, who, coming among them, continue to order all their goods from London. It is caddish to wink and squint at the colour of a man’s wine, like a wine taster; and then refuse to drink it. It is equally caddish to wink and squint at the colour of a man’s orchard, like a landscape painter; and then refuse to buy the apples. It is always an insult to admire a thing and not use it. But the main point is that one has no right to see Stonehenge without Salisbury Plain and Salisbury: One has no right to respect the dead Italians without respecting the live ones. One has no right to visit a Christian society like a diver visiting the deep-sea fishes — fed along a lengthy tube by another atmosphere, and seeing the sights without breathing the air. It is very real bad manners.

THE NEW THEOLOGIAN

It is an old story that names do not fit things; it is an old story that the oldest forest is called the New Forest, and that Irish stew is almost peculiar to England. But these are traditional titles that tend, of their nature, to stiffen; it is the tragedy of to-day that even phrases invented for to-day do not fit it. The forest has remained new while it is nearly a thousand years old; but our fashions have grown old while they were still new.

The extreme example of this is that when modern wrongs are attacked, they are almost always attacked wrongly. People seem to have a positive inspiration for finding the inappropriate phrase to apply to an offender; they are always accusing a man of theft when he has been convicted of murder. They must accuse Sir Edward Carson of outrageous rebellion, when his offence has really been a sleek submission to the powers that be. They must describe Mr. Lloyd George as using his eloquence to rouse the mob, whereas he has really shown considerable cleverness in damping it down. It was probably under the same impulse towards a mysterious misfit of names that people denounced Dr. Inge as "the Gloomy Dean."

Now there is nothing whatever wrong about being a Dean; nor is there anything wrong about being gloomy. The only question is what dark but sincere motives have made you gloomy. What dark but sincere motives have made you a Dean. Now the address of Dr. Inge which gained him this erroneous title was mostly concerned with a defence of the modern capitalists against the modern strikers, from whose protest he appeared to anticipate appalling results. Now if we look at the facts about that gentleman's depression and also about his Deanery, we shall find a very curious state of things.

When Dr. Inge was called "the Gloomy Dean" a great injustice was done him. He had appeared as the champion of our capitalist community against the forces of revolt; and any one who does that exceeds in optimism rather than pessimism. A man who really thinks that strikers have suffered no wrong, or that employers have done no wrong — such a man is not a Gloomy Dean, but a quite wildly and dangerously happy Dean. A man who can feel satisfied with modern industrialism must be a man with a mysterious fountain of high spirits. And the actual occasion is not less curious; because, as far as I can make out, his title to gloom reposes on his having said that our worker's demand high wages, while the placid people of the Far East will quite cheerfully work for less.

This is true enough, of course, and there does not seem to be much difficulty about the matter. Men of the Far East will submit to very low wages for the same reason that they will submit to "the punishment known as Li, or Slicing"; for the same reason that they will praise polygamy and suicide; for the same reason that they subject the wife utterly to the husband or his parents; for the same reason that they serve their temples with prostitutes for priests; for the same reason that they sometimes seem to make no distinction between sexual passion and sexual perversion. They do it, that is, because they are Heathens; men with traditions different from ours about the limits of endurance and the gestures of self-respect. They may be very much better than we are in hundreds of other ways; and I can quite understand a man (though hardly a Dean) really preferring their historic virtues to those of Christendom. A man may perhaps feel more comfortable among his Asiatic coolies than among his European comrades: and as we are to allow the Broadest Thought in the Church, Dr. Inge has as much right to his heresy as anybody else. It is true that, as Dr. Inge says, there are numberless Orientals who will do a great deal of work for very little money; and it is most undoubtedly true that there are several high-placed and prosperous Europeans who like to get work done and pay as little as possible for it.

But I cannot make out why, with his enthusiasm for heathen habits and traditions, the Dean should wish to spread in the East the ideas which he has found so dreadfully unsettling in the West. If some thousands of years of paganism have produced the patience and industry that Dean Inge admires, and if some thousand years of Christianity have produced the sentimentality and sensationalism which he regrets, the obvious deduction is that Dean Inge would be much happier if he were a heathen Chinese. Instead of supporting Christian missions to Korea or Japan, he ought to be at the head of a great mission in London for converting the English to Taoism or Buddhism. There his passion for the moral beauties of paganism would have free and natural play; his style would improve; his mind would begin slowly to clear; and he would be free from all sorts of little irritating scrupulosities which must hamper even the most Conservative Christian in his full praise of sweating and the sack.

In Christendom he will never find rest. The perpetual public criticism and public change which is the note of all our history springs from a certain spirit far too deep to be defined. It is deeper than democracy; nay, it may often appear to be non-democratic; for it may often be the special defence of a minority or an individual. It will often leave the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost. It will often risk the State itself to right a single wrong; and do justice though the heavens fall. Its highest expression is not even in the formula of the great gentlemen of the French Revolution who said that all men were free and equal. Its highest expression is rather in the formula of the peasant who said that a man’s a man for a’ that. If there were but one slave in England, and he did all the work while the rest of us made merry, this spirit that is in us would still cry aloud to God night and day. Whether or no this spirit was produced by, it clearly works with, a creed which postulates a humanised God and a vividly personal immortality. Men must not be busy merely like a swarm, or even happy merely like a herd; for it is not a question of men, but of a man. A man’s meals may be poor, but they must not be bestial; there must always be that about the meal which permits of its comparison to the sacrament. A man’s bed may be hard, but it must not be abject or unclean: there must always be about the bed something of the decency of the death-bed.

This is the spirit which makes the Christian poor begin their terrible murmur whenever there is a turn of prices or a deadlock of toil that threatens them with vagabondage or pauperisation; and we cannot encourage the Dean with any hope that this spirit can be cast out. Christendom will continue to suffer all the disadvantages of being Christian: it is the Dean who must be gently but firmly altered. He had absent-mindedly strayed into the wrong continent and the wrong creed. I advise him to chuck it.

But the case is more curious still. To connect the Dean with Confucian temples or traditions may have appeared fantastic; but it is not. Dr. Inge is not a stupid old Tory Rector, strict both on Church and State. Such a man might talk nonsense about the Christian Socialists being “court chaplains of King Demos” or about his own superb valour in defying the democracy that rages in the front pews of Anglican churches. We should not expect a mere old-fashioned country clergyman to know that Demos has never been king in England and precious seldom anywhere else; we should not expect him to realise that if King Demos had any chaplains they would be uncommonly poorly paid. But Dr. Inge is not old-fashioned; he considers himself highly progressive and advanced. He is a New Theologian; that is, he is liberal in theology — and nothing else. He is apparently in sober fact, and not as in any fantasy, in sympathy with those who would soften the superior claim of our creed by urging the rival creeds of the East; with those who would absorb the virtues of Buddhism or of Islam. He holds a high seat in that modern Parliament of Religions where all believers respect each other's unbelief.

Now this has a very sharp moral for modern religious reformers. When next you hear the "liberal" Christian say that we should take what is best in Oriental faiths, make quite sure what are the things that people like Dr. Inge call best; what are the things that people like Dr. Inge propose to take. You will not find them imitating the military valour of the Moslem. You will not find them imitating the miraculous ecstasy of the Hindoo. The more you study the "broad" movement of today, the more you will find that these people want something much less like Chinese metaphysics, and something much more like Chinese Labour. You will find the levelling of creeds quite unexpectedly close to the lowering of wages. Dr. Inge is the typical latitudinarian of to-day; and was never more so than when he appeared not as the apostle of the blacks, but as the apostle of the blacklegs. Preached, as it is, almost entirely among the prosperous and polite, our brotherhood with Buddhism or Mohammedanism practically means this — that the poor must be as meek as Buddhists, while the rich may be as ruthless as Mohammedans. That is what they call the reunion of all religions.

THE ROMANTIC IN THE RAIN

The middle classes of modern England are quite fanatically fond of washing; and are often enthusiastic for teetotalism. I cannot therefore comprehend why it is that they exhibit a mysterious dislike of rain. Rain, that inspiring and delightful thing, surely combines the qualities of these two ideals with quite a curious perfection. Our philanthropists are eager to establish public baths everywhere. Rain surely is a public bath; it might almost be called mixed bathing. The appearance of persons coming fresh from this great natural lustration is not perhaps polished or dignified; but for the matter of that, few people are dignified when coming out of a bath. But the scheme of rain in itself is one of an enormous purification. It realises the dream of some insane hygienist: it scrubs the sky. Its giant brooms and mops seem to reach the starry rafters and Starless corners of the cosmos; it is a cosmic spring cleaning.

If the Englishman is really fond of cold baths, he ought not to grumble at the English climate for being a cold bath. In these days we are constantly told that we should leave our little special possessions and join in the enjoyment of common social institutions and a common social machinery. I offer the rain as a thoroughly Socialistic institution. It disregards that degraded delicacy which has hitherto led each gentleman to take his shower-bath in private. It is a better shower-bath, because it is public and communal; and, best of all, because somebody else pulls the string.

As for the fascination of rain for the water drinker, it is a fact the neglect of which I simply cannot comprehend. The enthusiastic water drinker must regard a rainstorm as a sort of universal banquet and debauch of his own favourite beverage. Think of the imaginative intoxication of the wine drinker if the crimson clouds sent down claret or the golden clouds hock. Paint upon primitive darkness some such scenes of apocalypse, towering and gorgeous skyscapes in which champagne falls like fire from heaven or the dark skies grow purple and tawny with the terrible colours of port. All this must the wild abstainer feel, as he rolls in the long soaking grass, kicks his ecstatic heels to heaven, and listens to the roaring rain. It is he, the water drinker, who ought to be the true bacchanal of the forests; for all the forests are drinking water. Moreover, the forests are apparently enjoying it: the trees rave and reel to and fro like drunken giants; they clash boughs as revellers clash cups; they roar undying thirst and howl the health of the world.

All around me as I write is a noise of Nature drinking: and Nature makes a noise when she is drinking, being by no means refined. If I count it Christian mercy to give a cup of cold water to a sufferer, shall I complain of these multitudinous cups of cold water handed round to all living things; a cup of water for every shrub; a cup of water for every weed? I would be ashamed to grumble at it. As Sir Philip Sidney said, their need is greater than mine — especially for water.

There is a wild garment that still carries nobly the name of a wild Highland clan: a elan come from those hills where rain is not so much an incident as an atmosphere. Surely every man of imagination must feel a tempestuous flame of Celtic romance spring up within him whenever he puts on a mackintosh. I could never reconcile myself to carrying all umbrella; it is a pompous Eastern business, carried over the heads of despots in the dry, hot lands. Shut up, an umbrella is an unmanageable walking stick; open, it is an inadequate tent. For my part, I have no taste for pretending to be a walking pavilion; I think nothing of my hat, and precious little of my head. If I am to be protected against wet, it must be by some closer and more careless protection, something that I can forget altogether. It might be a Highland plaid. It might be that yet more Highland thing, a mackintosh.

And there is really something in the mackintosh of the military qualities of the Highlander. The proper cheap mackintosh has a blue and white sheen as of steel or iron; it gleams like armour. I like to think of it as the uniform of that ancient clan in some of its old and misty raids. I like to think of all the Macintoshes, in their mackintoshes, descending on some doomed Lowland village, their wet waterproofs flashing in the sun or moon. For indeed this is one of the real beauties of rainy weather, that while the amount of original and direct light is commonly lessened, the number of things that reflect light is unquestionably increased. There is less sunshine; but there are more shiny things; such beautifully shiny things as pools and puddles and mackintoshes. It is like moving in a world of mirrors.

And indeed this is the last and not the least gracious of the casual works of magic wrought by rain: that while it decreases light, yet it doubles it. If it dims the sky, it brightens the earth. It gives the roads (to the sympathetic eye) something of the beauty of Venice. Shallow lakes of water reiterate every detail of earth and sky; we dwell in a double universe. Sometimes walking upon bare and lustrous pavements, wet under numerous lamps, a man seems a black blot on all that golden looking-glass, and could fancy he was flying in a yellow sky. But wherever trees and towns hang head downwards in a pigmy puddle, the sense of Celestial topsy-turvydom is the same. This bright, wet, dazzling confusion of shape and shadow, of reality and reflection, will appeal strongly to any one with the transcendental instinct about this dreamy and dual life of ours. It will always give a man the strange sense of looking down at the skies.

THE FALSE PHOTOGRAPHER

When, as lately, events have happened that seem (to the fancy, at least) to test if not stagger the force of official government, it is amusing to ask oneself what is the real weakness of civilisation, ours especially, when it contends with the one lawless man. I was reminded of one weakness this morning in turning over an old drawerful of pictures.

This weakness in civilisation is best expressed by saying that it cares more for science than for truth. It prides itself on its “methods” more than its results; it is satisfied with precision, discipline, good communications, rather than with the sense of reality. But there are precise falsehoods as well as precise facts. Discipline may only mean a hundred men making the same mistake at the same minute. And good communications may in practice be very like those evil communications which are said to corrupt good manners. Broadly, we have reached a “scientific age,” which wants to know whether the train is in the timetable, but not whether the train is in the station. I take one instance in our police inquiries that I happen to have come across: the case of photography.

Some years ago a poet of considerable genius tragically disappeared, and the authorities or the newspapers circulated a photograph of him, so that he might be identified. The photograph, as I remember it, depicted or suggested a handsome, haughty, and somewhat pallid man with his head thrown back, with long distinguished features, colourless thin hair and slight moustache, and though conveyed merely by the head and shoulders, a definite impression of height. If I had gone by that photograph I should have gone about looking for a long soldierly but listless man, with a profile rather like the Duke of Connaught’s.

Only, as it happened, I knew the poet personally; I had seen him a great many times, and he had an appearance that nobody could possibly forget, if seen only once. He had the mark of those dark and passionate Westland Scotch, who before Burns and after have given many such dark eyes and dark emotions to the world. But in him the unmistakable strain, Gaelic or whatever it is, was accentuated almost to oddity; and he looked like some swarthy elf. He was small, with a big head and a crescent of coal-black hair round the back of a vast dome of baldness. Immediately under his eyes his cheekbones had so high a colour that they might have been painted scarlet;

three black tufts, two on the upper lip and one under the lower, seemed to touch up the face with the fierce moustaches of Mephistopheles. His eyes had that “dancing madness” in them which Stevenson saw in the Gaelic eyes of Alan Breck; but he sometimes distorted the expression by screwing a monstrous monocle into one of them. A man more unmistakable would have been hard to find. You could have picked him out in any crowd — so long as you had not seen his photograph.

But in this scientific picture of him twenty causes, accidental and conventional, had combined to obliterate him altogether. The limits of photography forbade the strong and almost melodramatic colouring of cheek and eyebrow. The accident of the lighting took nearly all the darkness out of the hair and made him look almost like a fair man. The framing and limitation of the shoulders made him look like a big man; and the devastating bore of being photographed when you want to write poetry made him look like a lazy man. Holding his head back, as people do when they are being photographed (or shot), but as he certainly never held it normally, accidentally concealed the bald dome that dominated his slight figure. Here we have a clockwork picture, begun and finished by a button and a box of chemicals, from which every projecting feature has been more delicately and dexterously omitted than they could have been by the most namby-pamby flatterer, painting in the weakest water-colours, on the smoothest ivory.

I happen to possess a book of Mr. Max Beerbohm’s caricatures, one of which depicts the unfortunate poet in question. To say it represents an utterly incredible hobgoblin is to express in faint and inadequate language the license of its sprawling lines. The authorities thought it strictly safe and scientific to circulate the poet’s photograph. They would have clapped me in an asylum if I had asked them to circulate Max’s caricature. But the caricature would have been far more likely to find the man.

This is a small but exact symbol of the failure of scientific civilisation. It is so satisfied in knowing it has a photograph of a man that it never asks whether it has a likeness of him. Thus declarations, seemingly most detailed, have flashed along the wires of the world ever since I was a boy. We were told that in some row Boer policemen had shot an Englishman, a British subject, an English citizen. A long time afterwards we were quite casually informed that the English citizen was quite black. Well, it makes no difference to the moral question; black men should be shot on the same ethical principles as white men. But it makes one distrust scientific communications which permitted so startling an alteration of the photograph. I am sorry we got hold of a photographic negative in which a black man came out white. Later we were told that an Englishman had fought for the Boers against his own flag, which would have been a disgusting thing to do. Later, it was admitted that he was an Irishman; which is exactly as different as if he had been a Pole. Common sense, with all the facts before it, does see that black is not white, and that a nation that has never submitted has a right to moral independence. But why does it so seldom have all the facts before it? Why are the big aggressive features, such as blackness or the Celtic wrath, always left out in such official communications, as they were left out in the photograph? My friend the poet had hair as black as an African and eyes as fierce as an Irishman; why does our civilisation drop all four of the facts? Its error is to omit the arresting thing — which might really arrest the criminal. It strikes first the chilling note of science, demanding a man “above the middle height, chin shaven, with gray moustache,” etc., which might mean Mr. Balfour or Sir Redvers Buller. It does not seize the first fact of impression, as that a man is obviously a sailor or a Jew or a drunkard or a gentleman or a nigger or an albino or a prize-fighter or an imbecile or an American. These are the realities by which the people really recognise each other. They are almost always left out of the inquiry.

THE SULTAN

There is one deep defect in our extension of cosmopolitan and Imperial cultures. That is, that in most human things if you spread your butter far you spread it thin. But there is an odder fact yet: rooted in something dark and irrational in human nature. That is, that when you find your butter thin, you begin to spread it. And it is just when you find your ideas wearing thin in your own mind that you begin to spread them among your fellow-creatures. It is a paradox; but not my paradox. There are numerous cases in history; but I think the strongest case is this. That we have Imperialism in all our clubs at the very time when we have Orientalism in all our drawing-rooms.

I mean that the colonial ideal of such men as Cecil Rhodes did not arise out of any fresh creative idea of the Western genius, it was a fad, and like most fads an imitation. For what was wrong with Rhodes was not that, like Cromwell or Hildebrand, he made huge mistakes, nor even that he committed great crimes. It was that he committed these crimes and errors in order to spread certain ideas. And when one asked for the ideas they could not be found. Cromwell stood for Calvinism, Hildebrand for Catholicism: but Rhodes had no principles whatever to give to the world. He had only a hasty but elaborate machinery for spreading the principles that he hadn’t got. What he called his ideals were the dregs of a Darwinism which had already grown not only stagnant, but poisonous. That the fittest must survive, and that any one like himself must be the fittest; that the weakest must go to the wall, and that any one he could not understand must be the weakest; that was the philosophy which he lumberingly believed through life, like many another agnostic old bachelor of the Victorian era. All his views on religion (reverently quoted in the Review of Reviews) were simply the stalest ideas of his time. It was not his fault, poor fellow, that he called a high hill somewhere in South Africa “his church.” It was not his fault, I mean, that he could not see that a church all to oneself is not a church at all. It is a madman’s cell. It was not his fault that he “figured out that God meant as much of the planet to be Anglo-Saxon as possible.” Many evolutionists much wiser had “figured out” things even more babyish. He was an honest and humble recipient of the plodding popular science of his time; he spread no ideas that any cockney clerk in Streatham could not have spread for him. But it was exactly because he had no ideas to spread that he invoked slaughter, violated justice, and ruined republics to spread them.

But the case is even stronger and stranger. Fashionable Imperialism not only has no ideas of its own to extend; but such ideas as it has are actually borrowed from the brown and black peoples to whom it seeks to extend them. The Crusading kings and knights might be represented as seeking to spread Western ideas in the East. But all that our Imperialist aristocrats could do would be to spread Eastern ideas in the East. For that very governing class which urges Occidental Imperialism has been deeply discoloured with Oriental mysticism and Cosmology.

The same society lady who expects the Hindoos to accept her view of politics has herself accepted their view of religion. She wants first to steal their earth, and then to share their heaven. The same Imperial cynic who wishes the Turks to submit to English science has himself submitted to Turkish philosophy, to a wholly Turkish view of despotism and destiny.

There is an obvious and amusing proof of this in a recent life of Rhodes. The writer admits with proper Imperial gloom the fact that Africa is still chiefly inhabited by Africans. He suggests Rhodes in the South confronting savages and Kitchener in the North facing Turks, Arabs, and Soudanese, and then he quotes this remark of Cecil Rhodes: “It is inevitable fate that all this should be changed; and I should like to be the agent of fate.” That was Cecil Rhodes’s one small genuine idea; and it is an Oriental idea.

Here we have evident all the ultimate idiocy of the present Imperial position. Rhodes and Kitchener are to conquer Moslem bedouins and barbarians, in order to teach them to believe only in inevitable fate. We are to wreck provinces and pour blood like Niagara, all in order to teach a Turk to say “Kismet”; which he has said since his cradle. We are to deny Christian justice and destroy international equality, all in order to teach an Arab to believe he is “an agent of fate,” when he has never believed anything else. If Cecil Rhodes’s vision could come true (which fortunately is increasingly improbable), such countries as Persia or Arabia would simply be filled with ugly and vulgar fatalists in billycocks, instead of with graceful and dignified fatalists in turbans. The best Western idea, the idea of spiritual liberty and danger, of a doubtful and romantic future in which all things may happen — this essential Western idea Cecil Rhodes could not spread, because (as he says himself) he did not believe in it.

It was an Oriental who gave to Queen Victoria the crown of an Empress in addition to that of a Queen. He did not understand that the title of King is higher than that of Emperor. For in the East titles are meant to be vast and wild; to be extravagant poems: the Brother of the Sun and Moon, the Caliph who lives for ever. But a King of England (at least in the days of real kings) did not bear a merely poetical title; but rather a religious one. He belonged to his people and not merely they to him. He was not merely a conqueror, but a father — yes, even when he was a bad father. But this sort of solid sanctity always goes with local affections and limits: and the Cecil Rhodes Imperialism set up not the King, but the Sultan; with all the typically Eastern ideas of the magic of money, of luxury without uproar; of prostrate provinces and a chosen race. Indeed Cecil Rhodes illustrated almost every quality essential to the Sultan, from the love of diamonds to the scorn of woman.

THE ARCHITECT OF SPEARS

The other day, in the town of Lincoln, I suffered an optical illusion which accidentally revealed to me the strange greatness of the Gothic architecture. Its secret is not, I think, satisfactorily explained in most of the discussions on the subject. It is said that the Gothic eclipses the classical by a certain richness and complexity, at once lively and mysterious. This is true; but Oriental decoration is equally rich and complex, yet it awakens a widely different sentiment. No man ever got out of a Turkey carpet the emotions that he got from a cathedral tower. Over all the exquisite ornament of Arabia and India there is the presence of something stiff and heartless, of something tortured and silent. Dwarfed trees and crooked serpents, heavy flowers and hunchbacked birds accentuate by the very splendour and contrast of their colour the servility and monotony of their shapes. It is like the vision of a sneering sage, who sees the whole universe as a pattern. Certainly no one ever felt like this about Gothic, even if he happens to dislike it. Or, again, some will say that it is the liberty of the Middle Ages in the use of the comic or even the coarse that makes the Gothic more interesting than the Greek. There is more truth in this; indeed, there is real truth in it. Few of the old Christian cathedrals would have passed the Censor of Plays. We talk of the inimitable grandeur of the old cathedrals; but indeed it is rather their gaiety that we do not dare to imitate. We should be rather surprised if a chorister suddenly began singing “Bill Bailey” in church. Yet that would be only doing in music what the mediaevals did in sculpture. They put into a Miserere seat the very scenes that we put into a music hall song: comic domestic scenes similar to the spilling of the beer and the hanging out of the washing. But though the gaiety of Gothic is one of its features, it also is not the secret of its unique effect. We see a domestic topsy-turvydom in many Japanese sketches. But delightful as these are, with their fairy tree-tops, paper houses, and toddling, infantile inhabitants, the pleasure they give is of a kind quite different from the joy and energy of the gargoyles. Some have even been so shallow and illiterate as to maintain that our pleasure in medieval building is a mere pleasure in what is barbaric, in what is rough, shapeless, or crumbling like the rocks. This can be dismissed after the same fashion; South Sea idols, with painted eyes and radiating bristles, are a delight to the eye; but they do not affect it in at all the same way as Westminster Abbey. Some again (going to another and almost equally foolish extreme) ignore the coarse and comic in mediaevalism; and praise the pointed arch only for its utter purity and simplicity, as of a saint with his hands joined in prayer. Here, again, the uniqueness is missed. There are Renaissance things (such as the ethereal silvery drawings of Raphael), there are even pagan things (such as the Praying Boy) which express as fresh and austere a piety. None of these explanations explain. And I never saw what was the real point about Gothic till I came into the town of Lincoln, and saw it behind a row of furniture-vans.

I did not know they were furniture-vans; at the first glance and in the smoky distance I thought they were a row of cottages. A low stone wall cut off the wheels, and the vans were somewhat of the same colour as the yellowish clay or stone of the buildings around them. I had come across that interminable Eastern plain which is like the open sea, and all the more so because the one small hill and tower of Lincoln stands up in it like a lighthouse. I had climbed the sharp, crooked streets up to this ecclesiastical citadel; just in front of me was a flourishing and richly coloured kitchen garden; beyond that was the low stone wall; beyond that the row of vans that looked like houses; and beyond and above that, straight and swift and dark, light as a flight of birds, and terrible as the Tower of Babel, Lincoln Cathedral seemed to rise out of human sight.

As I looked at it I asked myself the questions that I have asked here; what was the soul in all those stones? They were varied, but it was not variety; they were solemn, but it was not solemnity; they were farcical, but it was not farce. What is it in them that thrills and soothes a man of our blood and history, that is not there in an Egyptian pyramid or an Indian temple or a Chinese pagoda? All of a sudden the vans I had mistaken for cottages began to move away to the left. In the start this gave to my eye and mind I really fancied that the Cathedral was moving towards the right. The two huge towers seemed to start striding across the plain like the two legs of some giant whose body was covered with the clouds. Then I saw what it was.

The truth about Gothic is, first, that it is alive, and second, that it is on the march. It is the Church Militant; it is the only fighting architecture. All its spires are spears at rest; and all its stones are stones asleep in a catapult. In that instant of illusion, I could hear the arches clash like swords as they crossed each other. The mighty and numberless columns seemed to go swinging by like the huge feet of imperial elephants. The graven foliage wreathed and blew like banners going into battle; the silence was deafening with all the mingled noises of a military march; the great bell shook down, as the organ shook up its thunder. The thirsty-throated gargoyles shouted like trumpets from all the roofs and pinnacles as they passed; and from the lectern in the core of the cathedral the eagle of the awful evangelist clashed his wings of brass.

And amid all the noises I seemed to hear the voice of a man shouting in the midst like one ordering regiments hither and thither in the fight; the voice of the great half-military master-builder; the architect of spears. I could almost fancy he wore armour while he made that church; and I knew indeed that, under a scriptural figure, he had borne in either hand the trowel and the sword.

I could imagine for the moment that the whole of that house of life had marched out of the sacred East, alive and interlocked, like an army. Some Eastern nomad had found it solid and silent in the red circle of the desert. He had slept by it as by a world-forgotten pyramid; and been woke at midnight by the wings of stone and brass, the tramping of the tall pillars, the trumpets of the waterspouts. On such a night every snake or sea-beast must have turned and twisted in every crypt or corner of the architecture. And the fiercely coloured saints marching eternally in the flamboyant windows would have carried their glorioles like torches across dark lands and distant seas; till the whole mountain of music and darkness and lights descended roaring on the lonely Lincoln hill. So for some hundred and sixty seconds I saw the battle-beauty of the Gothic; then the last furniture-van shifted itself away; and I saw only a church tower in a quiet English town, round which the English birds were floating.

THE MAN ON TOP

There is a fact at the root of all realities to-day which cannot be stated too simply. It is that the powers of this world are now not trusted simply because they are not trustworthy. This can be quite clearly seen and said without any reference to our several passions or partisanships. It does not follow that we think such a distrust a wise sentiment to express; it does not even follow that we think it a good sentiment to entertain. But such is the sentiment, simply because such is the fact. The distinction can be quite easily defined in an example. I do not think that private workers owe an indefinite loyalty to their employer. But I do think that patriotic soldiers owe a more or less indefinite loyalty to their leader in battle. But even if they ought to trust their captain, the fact remains that they often do not trust him; and the fact remains that he often is not fit to be trusted.

Most of the employers and many of the Socialists seem to have got a very muddled ethic about the basis of such loyalty; and perpetually try to put employers and officers upon the same disciplinary plane. I should have thought myself that the difference was alphabetical enough. It has nothing to do with the idealising of war or the materialising of trade; it is a distinction in the primary purpose. There might be much more elegance and poetry in a shop under William Morris than in a regiment under Lord Kitchener. But the difference is not in the persons or the atmosphere, but in the aim. The British Army does not exist in order to pay Lord Kitchener. William Morris's shop, however artistic and philanthropic, did exist to pay William Morris. If it did not pay the shopkeeper it failed as a shop; but Lord Kitchener does not fail if he is underpaid, but only if he is defeated. The object of the Army is the safety of the nation from one particular class of perils; therefore, since all citizens owe loyalty to the nation, all citizens who are soldiers owe loyalty to the Army. But nobody has any obligation to make some particular rich man richer. A man is bound, of course, to consider the indirect results of his action in a strike; but he is bound to consider that in a swing, or a giddy-go-round, or a smoking concert; in his wildest holiday or his most private conversation. But direct responsibility like that of a soldier he has none. He need not aim solely and directly at the good of the shop; for the simple reason that the shop is not aiming solely and directly at the good of the nation. The shopman is, under decent restraints, let us hope, trying to get what he can out of the nation; the shop assistant may, under the same decent restraints, get what he can out of the shopkeeper. All this distinction is very obvious. At least I should have thought so.

But the primary point which I mean is this. That even if we do take the military view of mercantile service, even if we do call the rebellious shop assistant “disloyal” — that leaves exactly where it was the question of whether he is, in point of fact, in a good or bad shop. Granted that all Mr. Poole’s employees are bound to follow for ever the cloven pennon of the Perfect Pair of Trousers, it is all the more true that the pennon may, in point of fact, become imperfect. Granted that all Barney Barnato’s workers ought to have followed him to death or glory, it is still a Perfectly legitimate question to ask which he was likely to lead them to. Granted that Dr. Sawyer’s boy ought to die for his master’s medicines, we may still hold an inquest to find out if he died of them. While we forbid the soldier to shoot the general, we may still wish the general were shot.

The fundamental fact of our time is the failure of the successful man. Somehow we have so arranged the rules of the game that the winners are worthless for other purposes; they can secure nothing except the prize. The very rich are neither aristocrats nor self-made men; they are accidents — or rather calamities. All revolutionary language is a generation behind the times in talking of their futility. A revolutionist would say (with perfect truth) that coal-owners know next to nothing about coal-mining. But we are past that point. Coal-owners know next to nothing about coal-owning. They do not develop and defend the nature of their own monopoly with any consistent and courageous policy, however wicked, as did the old aristocrats with the monopoly of land. They have not the virtues nor even the vices of tyrants; they have only their powers. It is the same with all the powerful of to-day; it is the same, for instance, with the high-placed and high-paid official. Not only is the judge not judicial, but the arbiter is not even arbitrary. The arbiter decides, not by some gust of justice or injustice in his soul like the old despot dooming men under a tree, but by the permanent climate of the class to which he happens to belong. The ancient wig of the judge is often indistinguishable from the old wig of the flunkey.

To judge about success or failure one must see things very simply; one must see them in masses, as the artist, half closing his eyes against details, sees light and shade. That is the only way in which a just judgment can be formed as to whether any departure or development, such as Islam or the American Republic, has been a benefit upon the whole. Seen close, such great erections always abound in ingenious detail and impressive solidity; it is only by seeing them afar off that one can tell if the Tower leans.

Now if we thus take in the whole tilt or posture of our modern state, we shall simply see this fact: that those classes who have on the whole governed, have on the whole failed. If you go to a factory you will see some very wonderful wheels going round; you will be told that the employer often comes there early in the morning; that he has great organising power; that if he works over the colossal accumulation of wealth he also works over its wise distribution. All this may be true of many employers, and it is practically said of all.

But if we shade our eyes from all this dazzle of detail; if we simply ask what has been the main feature, the upshot, the final fruit of the capitalist system, there is no doubt about the answer. The special and solid result of the reign of the employers has been — unemployment. Unemployment not only increasing, but becoming at last the very pivot upon which the whole process turns.

Or, again, if you visit the villages that depend on one of the great squires, you will hear praises, often just, of the landlord’s good sense or good nature; you will hear of whole systems of pensions or of care for the sick, like those of a small and separate nation; you will see much cleanliness, order, and business habits in the offices and accounts of the estate. But if you ask again what has been the upshot, what has been the actual result of the reign of landlords, again the answer is plain. At the end of the reign of landlords men will not live on the land. The practical effect of having landlords is not having tenants. The practical effect of having employers is that men are not employed. The unrest of the populace is therefore more than a murmur against tyranny; it is against a sort of treason. It is the suspicion that even at the top of the tree, even in the seats of the mighty, our very success is unsuccessful.

THE OTHER KIND OF MAN

There are some who are conciliated by Conciliation Boards. There are some who, when they hear of Royal Commissions, breathe again — or snore again. There are those who look forward to Compulsory Arbitration Courts as to the islands of the blest. These men do not understand the day that they look upon or the sights that their eyes have seen.

The almost sacramental idea of representation, by which the few may incarnate the many, arose in the Middle Ages, and has done great things for justice and liberty. It has had its real hours of triumph, as when the States General met to renew France's youth like the eagle's; or when all the virtues of the Republic fought and ruled in the figure of Washington. It is not having one of its hours of triumph now. The real democratic unrest at this moment is not an extension of the representative process, but rather a revolt against it. It is no good giving those now in revolt more boards and committees and compulsory regulations. It is against these very things that they are revolting. Men are not only rising against their oppressors, but against their representatives or, as they would say, their misrepresentatives. The inner and actual spirit of workaday England is coming out not in applause, but in anger, as a god who should come out of his tabernacle to rebuke and confound his priests.

There is a certain kind of man whom we see many times in a day, but whom we do not, in general, bother very much about. He is the kind of man of whom his wife says that a better husband when he's sober you couldn't have. She sometimes adds that he never is sober; but this is in anger and exaggeration. Really he drinks much less and works much more than the modern legend supposes. But it is quite true that he has not the horror of bodily outbreak, natural to the classes that contain ladies; and it is quite true that he never has that alert and inventive sort of industry natural to the classes from which men can climb into great wealth. He has grown, partly by necessity, but partly also by temper, accustomed to have dirty clothes and dirty hands normally and without discomfort. He regards cleanliness as a kind of separate and special costume; to be put on for great festivals. He has several really curious characteristics, which would attract the eyes of sociologists, if they had any eyes. For instance, his vocabulary is coarse and abusive, in marked contrast to his actual spirit, which is generally patient and civil. He has an odd way of using certain words of really horrible meaning, but using them quite innocently and without the most distant taint of the evils to which they allude. He is rather sentimental; and, like most sentimental people, not devoid of snobbishness. At the same time, he believes the ordinary manly commonplaces of freedom and fraternity as he believes most of the decent traditions of Christian men: he finds it very difficult to act according to them, but this difficulty is not confined to him. He has a strong and individual sense of humour, and not much power of corporate or militant action. He is not a Socialist. Finally, he bears no more resemblance to a Labour Member than he does to a City Alderman or a Die-Hard Duke. This is the Common Labourer of England; and it is he who is on the march at last.

See this man in your mind as you see him in the street, realise that it is his open mind we wish to influence or his empty stomach we wish to cure, and then consider seriously (if you can) the five men, including two of his own alleged oppressors, who were summoned as a Royal Commission to consider his claims when he or his sort went out on strike upon the railways. I knew nothing against, indeed I knew nothing about, any of the gentlemen then summoned, beyond a bare introduction to Mr. Henderson, whom I liked, but whose identity I was in no danger of confusing with that of a railway-porter. I do not think that any old gentleman, however absent-minded, would be likely on arriving at Euston, let us say, to hand his Gladstone-bag to Mr. Henderson or to attempt to reward that politician with twopence. Of the others I can only judge by the facts about their status as set forth in the public Press. The Chairman, Sir David Harrell, appeared to be an ex-official distinguished in (of all things in the world) the Irish Constabulary. I have no earthly reason to doubt that the Chairman meant to be fair; but I am not talking about what men mean to be, but about what they are. The police in Ireland are practically an army of occupation; a man serving in them or directing them is practically a soldier; and, of course, he must do his duty as such. But it seems truly extraordinary to select as one likely to sympathise with the democracy of England a man whose whole business in life it has been to govern against its will the democracy of Ireland. What should we say if Russian strikers were offered the sympathetic arbitration of the head of the Russian Police in Finland or Poland? And if we do not know that the whole civilised world sees Ireland with Poland as a typical oppressed nation, it is time we did. The Chairman, whatever his personal virtues, must be by instinct and habit akin to the capitalists in the dispute. Two more of the Commissioners actually were the capitalists in the dispute. Then came Mr. Henderson (pushing his trolley and cheerily crying, “By your leave.”), and then another less known gentleman who had “corresponded” with the Board of Trade, and had thus gained some strange claim to represent the very poor.

Now people like this might quite possibly produce a rational enough report, and in this or that respect even improve things. Men of that kind are tolerably kind, tolerably patriotic, and tolerably business-like. But if any one supposes that men of that kind can conceivably quiet any real ‘quarrel with the Man of the Other Kind, the man whom I first described, it is frantic. The common worker is angry exactly because he has found out that all these boards consist of the same well-dressed Kind of Man, whether they are called Governmental or Capitalist. If any one hopes that he will reconcile the poor, I say, as I said at the beginning, that such a one has not looked on the light of day or dwelt in the land of the living.

But I do not criticise such a Commission except for one most practical and urgent purpose. It will be answered to me that the first Kind of Man of whom I spoke could not really be on boards and committees, as modern England is managed. His dirt, though necessary and honourable, would be offensive: his speech, though rich and figurative, would be almost incomprehensible. Let us grant, for the moment, that this is so. This Kind of Man, with his sooty hair or sanguinary adjectives, cannot be represented at our committees of arbitration. Therefore, the other Kind of Man, fairly prosperous, fairly plausible, at home at least with the middle class, capable at least of reaching and touching the upper class, he must remain the only Kind of Man for such councils.

Very well. If then, you give at any future time any kind of compulsory powers to such councils to prevent strikes, you will be driving the first Kind of Man to work for a particular master as much as if you drove him with a whip.

THE MEDIAEVAL VILLAIN

I see that there have been more attempts at the whitewashing of King John.

But the gentleman who wrote has a further interest in the matter; for he believes that King John was innocent, not only on this point, but as a whole. He thinks King John has been very badly treated; though I am not sure whether he would attribute to that Plantagenet a saintly merit or merely a humdrum respectability.

I sympathise with the whitewashing of King John, merely because it is a protest against our waxwork style of history. Everybody is in a particular attitude, with particular moral attributes; Rufus is always hunting and Coeur-de-Lion always crusading; Henry VIII always marrying, and Charles I always having his head cut off; Alfred rapidly and in rotation making his people's clocks and spoiling their cakes; and King John pulling out Jews' teeth with the celerity and industry of an American dentist. Anything is good that shakes all this stiff simplification, and makes us remember that these men were once alive; that is, mixed, free, flippant, and inconsistent. It gives the mind a healthy kick to know that Alfred had fits, that Charles I prevented enclosures, that Rufus was really interested in architecture, that Henry VIII was really interested in theology.

And as these scraps of reality can startle us into more solid imagination of events, so can even errors and exaggerations if they are on the right side. It does some good to call Alfred a prig, Charles I a Puritan, and John a jolly good fellow; if this makes us feel that they were people whom we might have liked or disliked. I do not myself think that John was a nice gentleman; but for all that the popular picture of him is all wrong. Whether he had any generous qualities or not, he had what commonly makes them possible, dare-devil courage, for instance, and hotheaded decision. But, above all, he had a morality which he broke, but which we misunderstand.

The mediaeval mind turned centrally upon the pivot of Free Will. In their social system the mediaevals were too much PARTI-PER-PALE, as their heralds would say, too rigidly cut up by fences and quarterings of guild or degree. But in their moral philosophy they always thought of man as standing free and doubtful at the cross-roads in a forest. While they clad and bound the body and (to some extent) the mind too stiffly and quaintly for our taste, they had a much stronger sense than we have of the freedom of the soul. For them the soul always hung poised like an eagle in the heavens of liberty. Many of the things that strike a modern as most fantastic came from their keen sense of the power of choice.

For instance, the greatest of the Schoolmen devotes folios to the minute description of what the world would have been like if Adam had refused the apple; what kings, laws, babies, animals, planets would have been in an unfallen world. So intensely does he feel that Adam might have decided the other way that he sees a complete and complex vision of another world, a world that now can never be.

This sense of the stream of life in a man that may turn either way can be felt through all their popular ethics in legend, chronicle, and ballad. It is a feeling which has been weakened among us by two heavy intellectual forces. The Calvinism of the seventeenth century and the physical science of the nineteenth, whatever other truths they may have taught, have darkened this liberty with a sense of doom. We think of bad men as something like black men, a separate and incurable kind of people. The Byronic spirit was really a sort of operatic Calvinism. It brought the villain upon the stage; the lost soul; the modern version of King John. But the contemporaries of King John did not feel like that about him, even when they detested him. They instinctively felt him to be a man of mixed passions like themselves, who was allowing his evil passions to have much too good a time of it. They might have spoken of him as a man in considerable danger of going to hell; but they would have not talked of him as if he had come from there. In the ballads of Percy or Robin Hood it frequently happens that the King comes upon the scene, and his ultimate decision makes the climax of the tale. But we do not feel, as we do in the Byronic or modern romance, that there is a definite stage direction “Enter Tyrant.” Nor do we behold a deus ex machina who is certain to do all that is mild and just. The King in the ballad is in a state of virile indecision. Sometimes he will pass from a towering passion to the most sweeping magnanimity and friendliness; sometimes he will begin an act of vengeance and be turned from it by a jest. Yet this august levity is not moral indifference; it is moral freedom. It is the strong sense in the writer that the King, being the type of man with power, will probably sometimes use it badly and sometimes well. In this sense John is certainly misrepresented, for he is pictured as something that none of his own friends or enemies saw. In that sense he was certainly not so black as he is painted, for he lived in a world where every one was piebald.

King John would be represented in a modern play or novel as a kind of degenerate; a shifty-eyed moral maniac with a twist in his soul's backbone and green blood in his veins. The mediaevals were quite capable of boiling him in melted lead, but they would have been quite incapable of despairing of his soul in the modern fashion. A striking a fortiori case is that of the strange mediaeval legend of Robert the Devil. Robert was represented as a monstrous birth sent to an embittered woman actually in answer to prayers to Satan, and his earlier actions are simply those of the infernal fire let loose upon earth. Yet though he can be called almost literally a child of hell, yet the climax of the story is his repentance at Rome and his great reparation. That is the paradox of mediaeval morals: as it must appear to the moderns. We must try to conceive a race of men who hated John, and sought his blood, and believed every abomination about him, who would have been quite capable of assassinating or torturing him in the extremity of their anger. And yet we must admit that they would not really have been fundamentally surprised if he had shaved his head in humiliation, given all his goods to the poor, embraced the lepers in a lazar-house, and been canonised as a saint in heaven. So strongly did they hold that the pivot of Will should turn freely, which now is rusted, and sticks.

For we, whatever our political opinions, certainly never think of our public men like that. If we hold the opinion that Mr. Lloyd George is a noble tribune of the populace and protector of the poor, we do not admit that he can ever have paltered with the truth or bargained with the powerful. If we hold the equally idiotic opinion that he is a red and rabid Socialist, maddening mobs into mutiny and theft, then we expect him to go on maddening them — and us. We do not expect him, let us say, suddenly to go into a monastery. We have lost the idea of repentance; especially in public things; that is why we cannot really get rid of our great national abuses of economic tyranny and aristocratic avarice. Progress in the modern sense is a very dismal drudge; and mostly consists of being moved on by the police. We move on because we are not allowed to move back. But the really ragged prophets, the real revolutionists who held high language in the palaces of kings, they did not confine themselves to saying, "Onward, Christian soldiers," still less, "Onward, Futurist soldiers"; what they said to high emperors and to whole empires was, “Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?”

THE DIVINE DETECTIVE

Every person of sound education enjoys detective stories, and there are even several points on which they have a hearty superiority to most modern books. A detective story generally describes six living men discussing how it is that a man is dead. A modern philosophic story generally describes six dead men discussing how any man can possibly be alive. But those who have enjoyed the roman policier must have noted one thing, that when the murderer is caught he is hardly ever hanged. “That,” says Sherlock Holmes, “is the advantage of being a private detective”; after he has caught he can set free. The Christian Church can best be defined as an enormous private detective, correcting that official detective — the State. This, indeed, is one of the injustices done to historic Christianity; injustices which arise from looking at complex exceptions and not at the large and simple fact. We are constantly being told that theologians used racks and thumbscrews, and so they did. Theologians used racks and thumbscrews just as they used thimbles and three-legged stools, because everybody else used them. Christianity no more created the mediaeval tortures than it did the Chinese tortures; it inherited them from any empire as heathen as the Chinese.

The Church did, in an evil hour, consent to imitate the commonwealth and employ cruelty. But if we open our eyes and take in the whole picture, if we look at the general shape and colour of the thing, the real difference between the Church and the State is huge and plain. The State, in all lands and ages, has created a machinery of punishment, more bloody and brutal in some places than others, but bloody and brutal everywhere. The Church is the only institution that ever attempted to create a machinery of pardon. The Church is the only thing that ever attempted by system to pursue and discover crimes, not in order to avenge, but in order to forgive them. The stake and rack were merely the weaknesses of the religion; its snobberies, its surrenders to the world. Its speciality — or, if you like, its oddity — was this merciless mercy; the unrelenting sleuthhound who seeks to save and not slay.

I can best illustrate what I mean by referring to two popular plays on somewhat parallel topics, which have been successful here and in America. The Passing of the Third Floor Back is a humane and reverent experiment, dealing with the influence of one unknown but divine figure as he passes through a group of Squalid characters. I have no desire to make cheap fun of the extremely abrupt conversions of all these people; that is a point of art, not of morals; and, after all, many conversions have been abrupt. This saviour’s method of making people good is to tell them how good they are already; and in the case of suicidal outcasts, whose moral backs are broken, and who are soaked with sincere self-contempt, I can imagine that this might be quite the right way. I should not deliver this message to authors or members of Parliament, because they would so heartily agree with it.

Still, it is not altogether here that I differ from the moral of Mr. Jerome’s play. I differ vitally from his story because it is not a detective story. There is in it none of this great Christian idea of tearing their evil out of men; it lacks the realism of the saints. Redemption should bring truth as well as peace; and truth is a fine thing, though the materialists did go mad about it. Things must be faced, even in order to be forgiven; the great objection to “letting sleeping dogs lie” is that they lie in more senses than one. But in Mr. Jerome’s Passing of the Third Floor Back the redeemer is not a divine detective, pitiless in his resolve to know and pardon. Rather he is a sort of divine dupe, who does not pardon at all, because he does not see anything that is going on. It may, or may not, be true to say, “Tout comprendre est tout pardonner.” But it is much more evidently true to say, “Rien comprendre est rien Pardonner,” and the “Third Floor Back” does not seem to comprehend anything. He might, after all, be a quite selfish sentimentalist, who found it comforting to think well of his neighbours. There is nothing very heroic in loving after you have been deceived. The heroic business is to love after you have been undeceived.

When I saw this play it was natural to compare it with another play which I had not seen, but which I have read in its printed version. I mean Mr. Rann Kennedy’s Servant in the House, the success of which sprawls over so many of the American newspapers. This also is concerned with a dim, yet evidently divine, figure changing the destinies of a whole group of persons. It is a better play structurally than the other; in fact, it is a very fine play indeed; but there is nothing aesthetic or fastidious about it. It is as much or more than the other sensational, democratic, and (I use the word in a sound and good sense) Salvationist.

But the difference lies precisely in this — that the Christ of Mr. Kennedy’s play insists on really knowing all the souls that he loves; he declines to conquer by a kind of supernatural stupidity. He pardons evil, but he will not ignore it. In other words, he is a Christian, and not a Christian Scientist. The distinction doubtless is partly explained by the problems severally selected. Mr. Jerome practically supposes Christ to be trying to save disreputable people; and that, of course, is naturally a simple business. Mr. Kennedy supposes Him to be trying to save the reputable people, which is a much larger affair. The chief characters in The Servant in the House are a popular and strenuous vicar, universally respected, and his fashionable and forcible wife. It would have been no good to tell these people they had some good in them — for that was what they were telling themselves all day long. They had to be reminded that they had some bad in them — instinctive idolatries and silent treasons which they always tried to forget. It is in connection with these crimes of wealth and culture that we face the real problem of positive evil. The whole of Mr. Blatchford's controversy about sin was vitiated throughout by one's consciousness that whenever he wrote the word "sinner" he thought of a man in rags. But here, again, we can find truth merely by referring to vulgar literature — its unfailing fountain. Whoever read a detective story about poor people? The poor have crimes; but the poor have no secrets. And it is because the proud have secrets that they need to be detected before they are forgiven.

THE ELF OF JAPAN

There are things in this world of which I can say seriously that I love them but I do not like them. The point is not merely verbal, but psychologically quite valid. Cats are the first things that occur to me as examples of the principle. Cats are so beautiful that a creature from another star might fall in love with them, and so incalculable that he might kill them. Some of my friends take quite a high moral line about cats. Some, like Mr. Titterton, I think, admire a cat for its moral independence and readiness to scratch anybody “if he does not behave himself.” Others, like Mr. Belloe, regard the cat as cruel and secret, a fit friend for witches; one who will devour everything, except, indeed, poisoned food, “so utterly lacking is it in Christian simplicity and humility.” For my part, I have neither of these feelings. I admire cats as I admire catkins; those little fluffy things that hang on trees. They are both pretty and both furry, and both declare the glory of God. And this abstract exultation in all living things is truly to be called Love; for it is a higher feeling than mere affectional convenience; it is a vision. It is heroic, and even saintly, in this: that it asks for nothing in return. I love all the eats in the street as St. Francis of Assisi loved all the birds in the wood or all the fishes in the sea; not so much, of course, but then I am not a saint. But he did not wish to bridle a bird and ride on its back, as one bridles and rides on a horse. He did not wish to put a collar round a fish’s neck, marked with the name “Francis,” and the address “Assisi” — as one does with a dog. He did not wish them to belong to him or himself to belong to them; in fact, it would be a very awkward experience to belong to a lot of fishes. But a man does belong to his dog, in another but an equally real sense with that in which the dog belongs to him. The two bonds of obedience and responsibility vary very much with the dogs and the men; but they are both bonds. In other words, a man does not merely love a dog; as he might (in a mystical moment) love any sparrow that perched on his windowsill or any rabbit that ran across his path. A man likes a dog; and that is a serious matter.

To me, unfortunately perhaps (for I speak merely of individual taste), a cat is a wild animal. A cat is Nature personified. Like Nature, it is so mysterious that one cannot quite repose even in its beauty. But like Nature again, it is so beautiful that one cannot believe that it is really cruel. Perhaps it isn’t; and there again it is like Nature. Men of old time worshipped cats as they worshipped crocodiles; and those magnificent old mystics knew what they were about. The moment in which one really loves cats is the same as that in which one (moderately and within reason) loves crocodiles. It is that divine instant when a man feels himself — no, not absorbed into the unity of all things (a loathsome fancy) — but delighting in the difference of all things. At the moment when a man really knows he is a man he will feel, however faintly, a kind of fairy-tale pleasure in the fact that a crocodile is a crocodile. All the more will he exult in the things that are more evidently beautiful than crocodiles, such as flowers and birds and cats — which are more beautiful than either. But it does not follow that he will wish to pick all the flowers or to cage all the birds or to own all the cats.

No one who still believes in democracy and the rights of man will admit that any division between men and men can be anything but a fanciful analogy to the division between men and animals. But in the sphere of such fanciful analogy there are even human beings whom I feel to be like cats in this respect: that I can love them without liking them. I feel it about certain quaint and alien societies, especially about the Japanese. The exquisite old Japanese draughtsmanship (of which we shall see no more, now Japan has gone in for Progress and Imperialism) had a quality that was infinitely attractive and intangible. Japanese pictures were really rather like pictures made by cats. They were full of feathery softness and of sudden and spirited scratches. If any one will wander in some gallery fortunate enough to have a fine collection of those slight water-colour sketches on rice paper which come from the remote East, he will observe many elements in them which a fanciful person might consider feline. There is, for instance, that odd enjoyment of the tops of trees; those airy traceries of forks and fading twigs, up to which certainly no artist, but only a cat could climb. There is that elvish love of the full moon, as large and lucid as a Chinese lantern, hung in these tenuous branches. That moon is so large and luminous that one can imagine a hundred cats howling under it. Then there is the exhaustive treatment of the anatomy of birds and fish; subjects in which cats are said to be interested. Then there is the slanting cat-like eye of all these Eastern gods and men — but this is getting altogether too coincident. We shall have another racial theory in no time (beginning “Are the Japs Cats?”), and though I shall not believe in my theory, somebody else might. There are people among my esteemed correspondents who might believe anything. It is enough for me to say here that in this small respect Japs affect me like cats. I mean that I love them. I love their quaint and native poetry, their instinct of easy civilisation, their unique unreplaceable art, the testimony they bear to the bustling, irrepressible activities of nature and man. If I were a real mystic looking down on them from a real mountain, I am sure I should love them more even than the strong winged and unwearied birds or the fruitful, ever multiplying fish. But, as for liking them, as one likes a dog — that is quite another matter. That would mean trusting them.

In the old English and Scotch ballads the fairies are regarded very much in the way that I feel inclined to regard Japs and cats. They are not specially spoken of as evil; they are enjoyed as witching and wonderful; but they are not trusted as good. You do not say the wrong words or give the wrong gifts to them; and there is a curious silence about what would happen to you if you did. Now to me, Japan, the Japan of Art, was always a fairyland. What trees as gay as flowers and peaks as white as wedding cakes; what lanterns as large as houses and houses as frail as lanterns!… but... but... the missionary explained (I read in the paper) that the assertion and denial about the Japanese use of torture was a mere matter of verbal translation. “The Japanese would not call twisting the thumbs back ‘torture.’”

THE CHARTERED LIBERTINE

I find myself in agreement with Mr. Robert Lynd for his most just remark in connection with the Malatesta case, that the police are becoming a peril to society. I have no attraction to that sort of atheist asceticism to which the purer types of Anarchism tend; but both an atheist and an ascetic are better men than a spy; and it is ignominious to see one's country thus losing her special point of honour about asylum and liberty. It will be quite a new departure if we begin to protect and whitewash foreign policemen. I always understood it was only English policemen who were absolutely spotless. A good many of us, however, have begun to feel with Mr. Lynd, and on all sides authorities and officials are being questioned. But there is one most graphic and extraordinary fact, which it did not lie in Mr. Lynd's way to touch upon, but which somebody really must seize and emphasise. It is this: that at the very time when we are all beginning to doubt these authorities, we are letting laws pass to increase their most capricious powers. All our commissions, petitions, and letters to the papers are asking whether these authorities can give an account of their stewardship. And at the same moment all our laws are decreeing that they shall not give any account of their stewardship, but shall become yet more irresponsible stewards. Bills like the Feeble-Minded Bill and the Inebriate Bill (very appropriate names for them) actually arm with scorpions the hand that has chastised the Malatestas and Maleckas with whips. The inspector, the doctor, the police sergeant, the well-paid person who writes certificates and "passes" this, that, or the other; this sort of man is being trusted with more authority, apparently because he is being doubted with more reason. In one room we are asking why the Government and the great experts between them cannot sail a ship. In another room we are deciding that the Government and experts shall be allowed, without trial or discussion, to immure any one's body, damn any one's soul, and dispose of unborn generations with the levity of a pagan god. We are putting the official on the throne while he is still in the dock.

The mere meaning of words is now strangely forgotten and falsified; as when people talk of an author's "message," without thinking whom it is from; and I have noted in these connections the strange misuse of another word. It is the excellent mediaeval word "charter." I remember the Act that sought to save gutter-boys from cigarettes was called “The Children’s Charter.” Similarly the Act which seeks to lock up as lunatics people who are not lunatics was actually called a “charter” of the feeble-minded. Now this terminology is insanely wrong, even if the Bills are right. Even were they right in theory they would be applied only to the poor, like many better rules about education and cruelty. A woman was lately punished for cruelty because her children were not washed when it was proved that she had no water. From that it will be an easy step in Advanced Thought to punishing a man for wine-bibbing when it is proved that he had no wine. Rifts in right reason widen down the ages. And when we have begun by shutting up a confessedly kind person for cruelty, we may yet come to shutting up Mr. Tom Mann for feeblemindedness.

But even if such laws do good to children or idiots, it is wrong to use the word “charter.” A charter does not mean a thing that does good to people. It means a thing that grants people more rights and liberties. It may be a good thing for gutter-boys to be deprived of their cigarettes: it might be a good thing for aldermen to be deprived of their cigars. But I think the Goldsmiths’ Company would be very much surprised if the King granted them a new charter (in place of their mediaeval charter), and it only meant that policemen might pull the cigars out of their mouths. It may be a good thing that all drunkards should be locked up: and many acute statesmen (King John, for instance) would certainly have thought it a good thing if all aristocrats could be locked up. But even that somewhat cynical prince would scarcely have granted to the barons a thing called “the Great Charter” and then locked them all up on the strength of it. If he had, this interpretation of the word “charter” would have struck the barons with considerable surprise. I doubt if their narrow mediaeval minds could have taken it in.

The roots of the real England are in the early Middle Ages, and no Englishman will ever understand his own language (or even his own conscience) till he understands them. And he will never understand them till he understands this word “charter.” I will attempt in a moment to state in older, more suitable terms, what a charter was. In modern, practical, and political terms, it is quite easy to state what a charter was. A charter was the thing that the railway workers wanted last Christmas and did not get; and apparently will never get. It is called in the current jargon “recognition”; the acknowledgment in so many words by society of the immunities or freedoms of a certain set of men. If there had been railways in the Middle Ages there would probably have been a railwaymen’s guild; and it would have had a charter from the King, defining their rights. A charter is the expression of an idea still true and then almost universal: that authority is necessary for nothing so much as for the granting of liberties. Like everything mediaeval, it ramified back to a root in religion; and was a sort of small copy of the Christian idea of man’s creation. Man was free, not because there was no God, but because it needed a God to set him free. By authority he was free. By authority the craftsmen of the guilds were free. Many other great philosophers took and take the other view: the Lucretian pagans, the Moslem fatalists, the modern monists and determinists, all roughly confine themselves to saying that God gave man a law. The mediaeval Christian insisted that God gave man a charter. Modern feeling may not sympathise with its list of liberties, which included the liberty to be damned; but that has nothing to do with the fact that it was a gift of liberties and not of laws. This was mirrored, however dimly, in the whole system. There was a great deal of gross inequality; and in other aspects absolute equality was taken for granted. But the point is that equality and inequality were ranks — or rights. There were not only things one was forbidden to do; but things one was forbidden to forbid. A man was not only definitely responsible, but definitely irresponsible. The holidays of his soul were immovable feasts. All a charter really meant lingers alive in that poetic phrase that calls the wind a “chartered” libertine.

Lie awake at night and hear the wind blowing; hear it knock at every man’s door and shout down every man’s chimney. Feel how it takes liberties with everything, having taken primary liberty for itself; feel that the wind is always a vagabond and sometimes almost a housebreaker. But remember that in the days when free men had charters, they held that the wind itself was wild by authority; and was only free because it had a father.

THE CONTENTED MAN

The word content is not inspiring nowadays; rather it is irritating because it is dull. It prepares the mind for a little sermon in the style of the Vicar of Wakefield about how you and I should be satisfied with our countrified innocence and our simple village sports. The word, however, has two meanings, somewhat singularly connected; the “sweet content” of the poet and the “cubic content” of the mathematician. Some distinguish these by stressing the different syllables. Thus, it might happen to any of us, at some social juncture, to remark gaily, “Of the content of the King of the Cannibal Islands’ Stewpot I am content to be ignorant”; or “Not content with measuring the cubic content of my safe, you are stealing the spoons.” And there really is an analogy between the mathematical and the moral use of the term, for lack of the observation of which the latter has been much weakened and misused.

The preaching of contentment is in disrepute, well deserved in so far that the moral is really quite inapplicable to the anarchy and insane peril of our tall and toppling cities. Content suggests some kind of security; and it is not strange that our workers should often think about rising above their position, since they have so continually to think about sinking below it. The philanthropist who urges the poor to saving and simple pleasures deserves all the derision that he gets. To advise people to be content with what they have got may or may not be sound moral philosophy.

But to urge people to be content with what they haven’t got is a piece of impudence hard for even the English poor to pardon. But though the creed of content is unsuited to certain special riddles and wrongs, it remains true for the normal of mortal life. We speak of divine discontent; discontent may sometimes be a divine thing, but content must always be the human thing. It may be true that a particular man, in his relation to his master or his neighbour, to his country or his enemies, will do well to be fiercely unsatisfied or thirsting for an angry justice. But it is not true, no sane person can call it true, that man as a whole in his general attitude towards the world, in his posture towards death or green fields, towards the weather or the baby, will be wise to cultivate dissatisfaction. In a broad estimate of our earthly experience, the great truism on the tablet remains: he must not covet his neighbour’s ox nor his ass nor anything that is his. In highly complex and scientific civilisations he may sometimes find himself forced into an exceptional vigilance. But, then, in highly complex and scientific civilisations, nine times out of ten, he only wants his own ass back.

But I wish to urge the case for cubic content; in which (even more than in moral content) I take a personal interest. Now, moral content has been undervalued and neglected because of its separation from the other meaning. It has become a negative rather than a positive thing. In some accounts of contentment it seems to be little more than a meek despair.

But this is not the true meaning of the term; it should stand for the idea of a positive and thorough appreciation of the content of anything; for feeling the substance and not merely the surface of experience. “Content” ought to mean in English, as it does in French, being pleased; placidly, perhaps, but still positively pleased. Being contented with bread and cheese ought not to mean not caring what you eat. It ought to mean caring for bread and cheese; handling and enjoying the cubic content of the bread and cheese and adding it to your own. Being content with an attic ought not to mean being unable to move from it and resigned to living in it. It ought to mean appreciating what there is to appreciate in such a position; such as the quaint and elvish slope of the ceiling or the sublime aerial view of the opposite chimney-pots. And in this sense contentment is a real and even an active virtue; it is not only affirmative, but creative. The poet in the attic does not forget the attic in poetic musings; he remembers whatever the attic has of poetry; he realises how high, how starry, how cool, how unadorned and simple — in short, how Attic is the attic.

True contentment is a thing as active as agriculture. It is the power of getting out of any situation all that there is in it. It is arduous and it is rare. The absence of this digestive talent is what makes so cold and incredible the tales of so many people who say they have been “through” things; when it is evident that they have come out on the other side quite unchanged. A man might have gone “through” a plum pudding as a bullet might go through a plum pudding; it depends on the size of the pudding — and the man. But the awful and sacred question is “Has the pudding been through him?” Has he tasted, appreciated, and absorbed the solid pudding, with its three dimensions and its three thousand tastes and smells? Can he offer himself to the eyes of men as one who has cubically conquered and contained a pudding?

In the same way we may ask of those who profess to have passed through trivial or tragic experiences whether they have absorbed the content of them; whether they licked up such living water as there was. It is a pertinent question in connection with many modern problems.

Thus the young genius says, “I have lived in my dreary and squalid village before I found success in Paris or Vienna.” The sound philosopher will answer, “You have never lived in your village, or you would not call it dreary and squalid.”

Thus the Imperialist, the Colonial idealist (who commonly speaks and always thinks with a Yankee accent) will say, “I’ve been right away from these little muddy islands, and seen God’s great seas and prairies.” The sound philosopher will reply, “You have never been in these islands; you have never seen the weald of Sussex or the plain of Salisbury; otherwise you could never have called them either muddy or little.”

Thus the Suffragette will say, “I have passed through the paltry duties of pots and pans, the drudgery of the vulgar kitchen; but I have come out to intellectual liberty.” The sound philosopher will answer, “You have never passed through the kitchen, or you never would call it vulgar. Wiser and stronger women than you have really seen a poetry in pots and pans; naturally, because there is a poetry in them.” It is right for the village violinist to climb into fame in Paris or Vienna; it is right for the stray Englishman to climb across the high shoulder of the world; it is right for the woman to climb into whatever cathedrae or high places she can allow to her sexual dignity. But it is wrong that any of these climbers should kick the ladder by which they have climbed. But indeed these bitter people who record their experiences really record their lack of experiences. It is the countryman who has not succeeded in being a countryman who comes up to London. It is the clerk who has not succeeded in being a clerk who tries (on vegetarian principles) to be a countryman. And the woman with a past is generally a woman angry about the past she never had.

When you have really exhausted an experience you always reverence and love it. The two things that nearly all of us have thoroughly and really been through are childhood and youth. And though we would not have them back again on any account, we feel that they are both beautiful, because we have drunk them dry.

THE ANGRY AUTHOR: HIS FAREWELL

I have republished all these old articles of mine because they cover a very controversial period, in which I was in nearly all the controversies, whether I was visible there or no. And I wish to gather up into this last article a valedictory violence about all such things; and then pass to where, beyond these voices, there is peace — or in other words, to the writing of Penny Dreadfuls; a noble and much-needed work. But before I finally desert the illusions of rationalism for the actualities of romance, I should very much like to write one last roaring, raging book telling all the rationalists not to be so utterly irrational. The book would be simply a string of violent vetoes, like the Ten Commandments. I would call it “Don’ts for Dogmatists; or Things I am Tired Of.”

This book of intellectual etiquette, like most books of etiquette, would begin with superficial things; but there would be, I fancy, a wailing imprecation in the words that could not be called artificial; it might begin thus: —

(1) Don’t use a noun and then an adjective that crosses out the noun. An adjective qualifies, it cannot contradict. Don’t say, “Give me a patriotism that is free from all boundaries.” It is like saying, “Give me a pork pie with no pork in it.” Don’t say, “I look forward to that larger religion that shall have no special dogmas.” It is like saying, “I look forward to that larger quadruped who shall have no feet.” A quadruped means something with four feet; and a religion means something that commits a man to some doctrine about the universe. Don’t let the meek substantive be absolutely murdered by the joyful, exuberant adjective.

(2) Don’t say you are not going to say a thing, and then say it. This practice is very flourishing and successful with public speakers. The trick consists of first repudiating a certain view in unfavourable terms, and then repeating the same view in favourable terms. Perhaps the simplest form of it may be found in a landlord of my neighbourhood, who said to his tenants in an election speech, “Of course I’m not going to threaten you, but if this Budget passes the rents will go up.” The thing can be done in many forms besides this. “I am the last man to mention party politics; but when I see the Empire rent in pieces by irresponsible Radicals,” etc. “In this hall we welcome all creeds. We have no hostility against any honest belief; but only

against that black priestcraft and superstition which can accept such a doctrine as," etc. "I would not say one word that could ruffle our relations with Germany. But this I will say; that when I see ceaseless and unscrupulous armament," etc. Please don't do it. Decide to make a remark or not to make a remark. But don't fancy that you have somehow softened the saying of a thing by having just promised not to say it.

(3) Don't use secondary words as primary words. "Happiness" (let us say) is a primary word. You know when you have the thing, and you jolly well know when you haven't. "Progress" is a secondary word; it means the degree of one's approach to happiness, or to some such solid ideal. But modern controversies constantly turn on asking, "Does Happiness help Progress?" Thus, I see in the New Age this week a letter from Mr. Egerton Swann, in which he warns the world against me and my friend Mr. Belloc, on the ground that our democracy is "spasmodic" (whatever that means); while our "reactionism is settled and permanent." It never strikes Mr. Swann that democracy means something in itself; while "reactionism" means nothing — except in connection with democracy. You cannot react except from something. If Mr. Swann thinks I have ever reacted from the doctrine that the people should rule, I wish he would give me the reference.

(4) Don't say, "There is no true creed; for each creed believes itself right and the others wrong." Probably one of the creeds is right and the others are wrong. Diversity does show that most of the views must be wrong. It does not by the faintest logic show that they all must be wrong. I suppose there is no subject on which opinions differ with more desperate sincerity than about which horse will win the Derby. These are certainly solemn convictions; men risk ruin for them. The man who puts his shirt on Potosi must believe in that animal, and each of the other men putting their last garments upon other quadrupeds must believe in them quite as sincerely. They are all serious, and most of them are wrong. But one of them is right. One of the faiths is justified; one of the horses does win; not always even the dark horse which might stand for Agnosticism, but often the obvious and popular horse of Orthodoxy. Democracy has its occasional victories; and even the Favourite has been known to come in first. But the point here is that something comes in first. That there were many beliefs does not destroy the fact that there was one well-founded belief. I believe (merely upon authority) that the world is round. That there may be tribes who believe it to be triangular or oblong does not alter the fact that it is certainly

some shape, and therefore not any other shape. Therefore I repeat, with the wail of imprecation, don’t say that the variety of creeds prevents you from accepting any creed. It is an unintelligent remark.

(5) Don’t (if any one calls your doctrine mad, which is likely enough), don’t answer that madmen are only the minority and the sane only the majority. The sane are sane because they are the corporate substance of mankind; the insane are not a minority because they are not a mob. The man who thinks himself a man thinks the next man a man; he reckons his neighbour as himself. But the man who thinks he is a chicken does not try to look through the man who thinks he is glass. The man who thinks himself Jesus Christ does not quarrel with the man who thinks himself Rockefeller; as would certainly happen if the two had ever met. But madmen never meet. It is the only thing they cannot do. They can talk, they can inspire, they can fight, they can found religions; but they cannot meet. Maniacs can never be the majority; for the simple reason that they can never be even a minority. If two madmen had ever agreed they might have conquered the world.

(6) Don’t say that the idea of human equality is absurd, because some men are tall and some short, some clever and some stupid. At the height of the French Revolution it was noticed that Danton was tall and Murat short. In the wildest popular excitement of America it is known that Rockefeller is stupid and that Bryan is clever. The doctrine of human equality reposes upon this: That there is no man really clever who has not found that he is stupid. That there is no big man who has not felt small. Some men never feel small; but these are the few men who are.

(7) Don’t say (O don’t say) that Primitive Man knocked down a woman with a club and carried her away. Why on earth should he? Does the male sparrow knock down the female sparrow with a twig? Does the male giraffe knock down the female giraffe with a palm tree? Why should the male have had to use any violence at any time in order to make the female a female? Why should the woman roll herself in the mire lower than the sow or the she-bear; and profess to have been a slave where all these creatures were creators; where all these beasts were gods? Do not talk such bosh. I implore you, I supplicate you not to talk such bosh. Utterly and absolutely abolish all such bosh — and we may yet begin to discuss these public questions properly. But I fear my list of protests grows too long; and I know it could

grow longer for ever. The reader must forgive my elongations and elaborations. I fancied for the moment that I was writing a book.

THE VICTORIAN AGE IN LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION

A section of a long and splendid literature can be most conveniently treated in one of two ways. It can be divided as one cuts a currant cake or a Gruyère cheese, taking the currants (or the holes) as they come. Or it can be divided as one cuts wood — along the grain: if one thinks that there is a grain. But the two are never the same: the names never come in the same order in actual time as they come in any serious study of a spirit or a tendency. The critic who wishes to move onward with the life of an epoch, must be always running backwards and forwards among its mere dates; just as a branch bends back and forth continually; yet the grain in the branch runs true like an unbroken river.

Mere chronological order, indeed, is almost as arbitrary as alphabetical order. To deal with Darwin, Dickens, Browning, in the sequence of the birthday book would be to forge about as real a chain as the "Tacitus, Tolstoy, Tupper" of a biographical dictionary. It might lend itself more, perhaps, to accuracy: and it might satisfy that school of critics who hold that every artist should be treated as a solitary craftsman, indifferent to the commonwealth and unconcerned about moral things. To write on that principle in the present case, however, would involve all those delicate difficulties, known to politicians, which beset the public defence of a doctrine which one heartily disbelieves. It is quite needless here to go into the old "art for art's sake" — business, or explain at length why individual artists cannot be reviewed without reference to their traditions and creeds. It is enough to say that with other creeds they would have been, for literary purposes, other individuals. Their views do not, of course, make the brains in their heads any more than the ink in their pens. But it is equally evident that mere brain-power, without attributes or aims, a wheel revolving in the void, would be a subject about as entertaining as ink. The moment we differentiate the minds, we must differentiate by doctrines and moral sentiments. A mere sympathy for democratic merry-making and mourning will not make a man a writer like Dickens. But without that sympathy Dickens would not be a writer like Dickens; and probably not a writer at all. A mere conviction that Catholic thought is the clearest as well as the best disciplined, will not make a man a writer like Newman. But without that conviction Newman would not be a writer like Newman; and probably not a writer at all. It is useless for the æsthete (or any other anarchist) to urge the isolated individuality of the artist, apart from his attitude to his age. His attitude to his age is his individuality: men are never individual when alone.

It only remains for me, therefore, to take the more delicate and entangled task; and deal with the great Victorians, not only by dates and names, but rather by schools and streams of thought. It is a task for which I feel myself wholly incompetent; but as that applies to every other literary enterprise I ever went in for, the sensation is not wholly novel: indeed, it is rather reassuring than otherwise to realise that I am now doing something that nobody could do properly. The chief peril of the process, however, will be an inevitable tendency to make the spiritual landscape too large for the figures. I must ask for indulgence if such criticism traces too far back into politics or ethics the roots of which great books were the blossoms; makes Utilitarianism more important than *Liberty* or talks more of the Oxford Movement than of *The Christian Year*. I can only answer in the very temper of the age of which I write: for I also was born a Victorian; and sympathise not a little with the serious Victorian spirit. I can only answer, I shall not make religion more important than it was to Keble, or politics more sacred than they were to Mill.

CHAPTER I

THE VICTORIAN COMPROMISE AND ITS ENEMIES

The previous literary life of this country had left vigorous many old forces in the Victorian time, as in our time. Roman Britain and Mediæval England are still not only alive but lively; for real development is not leaving things behind, as on a road, but drawing life from them, as from a root. Even when we improve we never progress. For progress, the metaphor from the road, implies a man leaving his home behind him: but improvement means a man exalting the towers or extending the gardens of his home. The ancient English literature was like all the several literatures of Christendom, alike in its likeness, alike in its very unlikeness. Like all European cultures, it was European; like all European cultures, it was something more than European. A most marked and unmanageable national temperament is plain in Chaucer and the ballads of Robin Hood; in spite of deep and sometimes disastrous changes of national policy, that note is still unmistakable in Shakespeare, in Johnson and his friends, in Cobbett, in Dickens. It is vain to dream of defining such vivid things; a national soul is as indefinable as a smell, and as unmistakable. I remember a friend who tried impatiently to explain the word “mistletoe” to a German, and cried at last, despairing, “Well, you know holly — mistletoe’s the opposite!” I do not commend this logical method in the comparison of plants or nations. But if he had said to the Teuton, “Well, you know Germany — England’s the opposite” — the definition, though fallacious, would not have been wholly false. England, like all Christian countries, absorbed valuable elements from the forests and the rude romanticism of the North; but, like all Christian countries, it drank its longest literary draughts from the classic fountains of the ancients: nor was this (as is so often loosely thought) a matter of the mere “Renaissance.” The English tongue and talent of speech did not merely flower suddenly into the gargantuan polysyllables of the great Elizabethans; it had always been full of the popular Latin of the Middle Ages. But whatever balance of blood and racial idiom one allows, it is really true that the only suggestion that gets near the Englishman is to hint how far he is from the German. The Germans, like the Welsh, can sing perfectly serious songs perfectly seriously in chorus: can with clear eyes and clear voices join together in words of innocent and beautiful personal passion, for a false maiden or a dead child. The nearest one can get to defining the poetic temper of Englishmen is to say that they couldn't do this even for beer. They can sing in chorus, and louder than other Christians: but they must have in their songs something, I know not what, that is at once shamefaced and rowdy. If the matter be emotional, it must somehow be also broad, common and comic, as "Wapping Old Stairs" and "Sally in Our Alley." If it be patriotic, it must somehow be openly bombastic and, as it were, indefensible, like "Rule Britannia" or like that superb song (I never knew its name, if it has one) that records the number of leagues from Ushant to the Scilly Isles. Also there is a tender love-lyric called "O Tarry Trousers" which is even more English than the heart of *The Midsummer Night's Dream*. But our greatest bards and sages have often shown a tendency to rant it and roar it like true British sailors; to employ an extravagance that is half conscious and therefore half humorous. Compare, for example, the rants of Shakespeare with the rants of Victor Hugo. A piece of Hugo's eloquence is either a serious triumph or a serious collapse: one feels the poet is offended at a smile. But Shakespeare seems rather proud of talking nonsense: I never can read that rousing and mounting description of the storm, where it comes to —

"Who take the ruffian billows by the top, Curling their monstrous heads, and *hanging* them With deafening clamour in the slippery clouds."

without seeing an immense balloon rising from the ground, with Shakespeare grinning over the edge of the car, and saying, "You can't stop me: I am above reason now." That is the nearest we can get to the general national spirit, which we have now to follow through one brief and curious but very national episode.

Three years before the young queen was crowned, William Cobbett was buried at Farnham. It may seem strange to begin with this great neglected name, rather than the old age of Wordsworth or the young death of Shelley. But to any one who feels literature as human, the empty chair of Cobbett is more solemn and significant than the throne. With him died the sort of democracy that was a return to Nature, and which only poets and mobs can understand. After him Radicalism is urban — and Toryism suburban. Going through green Warwickshire, Cobbett might have thought of the crops and Shelley of the clouds. But Shelley would have called Birmingham what Cobbett called it — a hell-hole. Cobbett was one with after Liberals in the ideal of Man under an equal law, a citizen of no mean city. He differed from after Liberals in strongly affirming that Liverpool and Leeds are mean cities.

It is no idle Hibernianism to say that towards the end of the eighteenth century the most important event in English history happened in France. It would seem still more perverse, yet it would be still more precise, to say that the most important event in English history was the event that never happened at all — the English Revolution on the lines of the French Revolution. Its failure was not due to any lack of fervour or even ferocity in those who would have brought it about: from the time when the first shout went up for Wilkes to the time when the last Luddite fires were quenched in a cold rain of rationalism, the spirit of Cobbett, of rural republicanism, of English and patriotic democracy, burned like a beacon. The revolution failed because it was foiled by another revolution; an aristocratic revolution, a victory of the rich over the poor. It was about this time that the common lands were finally enclosed; that the more cruel game laws were first established; that England became finally a land of landlords instead of common land-owners. I will not call it a Tory reaction; for much of the worst of it (especially of the land-grabbing) was done by Whigs; but we may certainly call it Anti-Jacobin. Now this fact, though political, is not only relevant but essential to everything that concerned literature. The upshot was that though England was full of the revolutionary ideas, nevertheless there was no revolution. And the effect of this in turn was that from the middle of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth the spirit of revolt in England took a wholly literary form. In France it was what people did that was wild and elemental; in England it was what people wrote. It is a quaint comment on the notion that the English are practical and the French merely visionary, that we were rebels in arts while they were rebels in arms.

It has been well and wittily said (as illustrating the mildness of English and the violence of French developments) that the same Gospel of Rousseau which in France produced the Terror, in England produced *Sandford and Merton*. But people forget that in literature the English were by no means restrained by Mr. Barlow; and that if we turn from politics to art, we shall find the two parts peculiarly reversed. It would be equally true to say that the same eighteenth-century emancipation which in France produced the pictures of David, in England produced the pictures of Blake.

There never were, I think, men who gave to the imagination so much of the sense of having broken out into the very borderlands of being, as did the great English poets of the romantic or revolutionary period; than Coleridge in the secret sunlight of the Antarctic, where the waters were like witches' oils; than Keats looking out of those extreme mysterious casements upon that ultimate sea. The heroes and criminals of the great French crisis would have been quite as incapable of such imaginative independence as Keats and Coleridge would have been incapable of winning the battle of Wattignies. In Paris the tree of liberty was a garden tree, clipped very correctly; and Robespierre used the razor more regularly than the guillotine. Danton, who knew and admired English literature, would have cursed freely over *Kubla Khan*; and if the Committee of Public Safety had not already executed Shelley as an aristocrat, they would certainly have locked him up for a madman. Even Hébert (the one really vile Revolutionist), had he been reproached by English poets with worshipping the Goddess of Reason, might legitimately have retorted that it was rather the Goddess of Unreason that they set up to be worshipped. Verbally considered, Carlyle's *French Revolution* was more revolutionary than the real French Revolution: and if Carrier, in an exaggerative phrase, empurpled the Loire with carnage, Turner almost literally set the Thames on fire.

This trend of the English Romantics to carry out the revolutionary idea not savagely in works, but very wildly indeed in words, had several results; the most important of which was this. It started English literature after the Revolution with a sort of bent towards independence and eccentricity, which in the brighter wits became individuality, and in the duller ones, Individualism. English Romantics, English Liberals, were not public men making a republic, but poets, each seeing a vision. The lonelier version of liberty was a sort of aristocratic anarchism in Byron and Shelley; but though in Victorian times it faded into much milder prejudices and much more *bourgeois* crotchets, England retained from that twist a certain odd separation and privacy. England became much more of an island than she had ever been before. There fell from her about this time, not only the understanding of France or Germany, but to her own long and yet lingering disaster, the understanding of Ireland. She had not joined in the attempt to create European democracy; nor did she, save in the first glow of Waterloo, join in the counter-attempt to destroy it. The life in her literature was still, to a large extent, the romantic liberalism of Rousseau, the free and humane truisms that had refreshed the other nations, the return to Nature and to natural rights. But that which in Rousseau was a creed, became in Hazlitt a taste and in Lamb little more than a whim. These latter and their like form a group at the beginning of the nineteenth century of those we may call the Eccentrics: they gather round Coleridge and his decaying dreams or linger in the tracks of Keats and Shelley and Godwin; Lamb with his bibliomania and creed of pure caprice, the most unique of all geniuses; Leigh Hunt with his Bohemian impecuniosity; Landor with his tempestuous temper, throwing plates on the floor; Hazlitt with his bitterness and his low love affair; even that healthier and happier Bohemian, Peacock. With these, in one sense at least, goes De Quincey. He was, unlike most of these embers of the revolutionary age in letters, a Tory; and was attached to the political army which is best represented in letters by the virile laughter and leisure of Wilson's *Noctes Ambrosianæ*. But he had nothing in common with that environment. It remained for some time as a Tory tradition, which balanced the cold and brilliant aristocracy of the Whigs. It lived on the legend of Trafalgar; the sense that insularity was independence; the sense that anomalies are as jolly as family jokes; the general sense that old salts are the salt of the earth. It still lives in some old songs about Nelson or Waterloo, which are vastly more pompous and vastly more sincere than the cockney cocksureness of later Jingo lyrics. But it is hard to connect De Quincey with it; or, indeed, with anything else. De Quincey would certainly have been a happier man, and almost certainly a better man, if he had got drunk on toddy with Wilson, instead of getting calm and clear (as he himself describes) on opium, and with no company but a book of German metaphysics. But he would hardly have revealed those wonderful vistas and perspectives of prose, which permit one to call him the first and most powerful of the decadents: those sentences that lengthen out like nightmare corridors, or rise higher and higher like impossible eastern pagodas. He was a morbid fellow, and far less moral than Burns; for when Burns confessed excess he did not defend it. But he has cast a gigantic shadow on our literature, and was as certainly a genius as Poe. Also he had humour, which Poe had not. And if any one still smarting from the pinpricks of Wilde or Whistler, wants to convict them of plagiarism in their "art for art" epigrams — he will find most of what they said said better in *Murder as One of the Fine Arts*.

One great man remains of this elder group, who did their last work only under Victoria; he knew most of the members of it, yet he did not belong to it in any corporate sense. He was a poor man and an invalid, with Scotch blood and a strong, though perhaps only inherited, quarrel with the old Calvinism; by name Thomas Hood. Poverty and illness forced him to the toils of an incessant jester; and the revolt against gloomy religion made him turn his wit, whenever he could, in the direction of a defence of happier and humaner views. In the long great roll that includes Homer and Shakespeare, he was the last great man who really employed the pun. His puns were not all good (nor were Shakespeare's), but the best of them were a strong and fresh form of art. The pun is said to be a thing of two meanings; but with Hood there were three meanings, for there was also the abstract truth that would have been there with no pun at all. The pun of Hood is underrated, like the "wit" of Voltaire, by those who forget that the words of Voltaire were not pins, but swords. In Hood at his best the verbal neatness only gives to the satire or the scorn a ring of finality such as is given by rhyme. For rhyme does go with reason, since the aim of both is to bring things to an end. The tragic necessity of puns tautened and hardened Hood's genius; so that there is always a sort of shadow of that sharpness across all his serious poems, falling like the shadow of a sword. "Sewing at once with a double thread a shroud as well as a shirt"— "We thought her dying when she slept, and sleeping when she died"— "Oh God, that bread should be so dear and flesh and blood so cheap" — none can fail to note in these a certain fighting discipline of phrase, a compactness and point which was well trained in lines like "A cannon-ball took off his legs, so he laid down his arms." In France he would have been a great epigrammatist, like Hugo. In England he is a punster.

There was nothing at least in this group I have loosely called the Eccentrics that disturbs the general sense that all their generation was part of the sunset of the great revolutionary poets. This fading glamour affected England in a sentimental and, to some extent, a snobbish direction; making men feel that great lords with long curls and whiskers were naturally the wits that led the world. But it affected England also negatively and by reaction; for it associated such men as Byron with superiority, but not with success. The English middle classes were led to distrust poetry almost as much as they admired it. They could not believe that either vision at the one end or violence at the other could ever be practical. They were deaf to that great warning of Hugo: “You say the poet is in the clouds; but so is the thunderbolt.” Ideals exhausted themselves in the void; Victorian England, very unwisely, would have no more to do with idealists in politics. And this, chiefly, because there had been about these great poets a young and splendid sterility; since the pantheist Shelley was in fact washed under by the wave of the world, or Byron sank in death as he drew the sword for Hellas.

The chief turn of nineteenth-century England was taken about the time when a footman at Holland House opened a door and announced “Mr. Macaulay.” Macaulay’s literary popularity was representative and it was deserved; but his presence among the great Whig families marks an epoch. He was the son of one of the first “friends of the negro,” whose honest industry and philanthropy were darkened by a religion of sombre smugness, which almost makes one fancy they loved the negro for his colour, and would have turned away from red or yellow men as needlessly gaudy. But his wit and his politics (combined with that dropping of the Puritan tenets but retention of the Puritan tone which marked his class and generation), lifted him into a sphere which was utterly opposite to that from which he came. This Whig world was exclusive; but it was not narrow. It was very difficult for an outsider to get into it; but if he did get into it he was in a much freer atmosphere than any other in England. Of those aristocrats, the Old Guard of the eighteenth century, many denied God, many defended Bonaparte, and nearly all sneered at the Royal Family. Nor did wealth or birth make any barriers for those once within this singular Whig world. The platform was high, but it was level. Moreover the upstart nowadays pushes himself by wealth: but the Whigs could choose their upstarts. In that world Macaulay found Rogers, with his phosphorescent and corpse-like brilliancy; there he found Sydney Smith, bursting with crackers of common sense, an admirable old heathen; there he found Tom Moore, the romantic of the Regency, a shortened shadow of Lord Byron. That he reached this platform and remained on it is, I say, typical of a turning-point in the century. For the fundamental fact of early Victorian history was this: the decision of the middle classes to employ their new wealth in backing up a sort of aristocratical compromise, and not (like the middle class in the French Revolution) insisting on a clean sweep and a clear democratic programme. It went along with the decision of the aristocracy to recruit itself more freely from the middle class. It was then also that Victorian “prudery” began: the great lords yielded on this as on Free Trade. These two decisions have made the doubtful England of to-day; and Macaulay is typical of them; he is the *bourgeois* in Belgravia. The alliance is marked by his great speeches for Lord Grey's Reform Bill: it is marked even more significantly in his speech against the Chartists. Cobbett was dead.

Macaulay makes the foundation of the Victorian age in all its very English and unique elements: its praise of Puritan politics and abandonment of Puritan theology; its belief in a cautious but perpetual patching up of the Constitution; its admiration for industrial wealth. But above all he typifies the two things that really make the Victorian Age itself, the cheapness and narrowness of its conscious formulæ; the richness and humanity of its unconscious tradition. There were two Macaulays, a rational Macaulay who was generally wrong, and a romantic Macaulay who was almost invariably right. All that was small in him derives from the dull parliamentarism of men like Sir James Mackintosh; but all that was great in him has much more kinship with the festive antiquarianism of Sir Walter Scott.

As a philosopher he had only two thoughts; and neither of them is true. The first was that politics, as an experimental science, must go on improving, along with clocks, pistols or penknives, by the mere accumulation of experiment and variety. He was, indeed, far too strong-minded a man to accept the hazy modern notion that the soul in its highest sense can change: he seems to have held that religion can never get any better and that poetry rather tends to get worse. But he did not see the flaw in his political theory; which is that unless the soul improves with time there is no guarantee that the accumulations of experience will be adequately used. Figures do not add themselves up; birds do not label or stuff themselves; comets do not calculate their own courses; these things are done by the soul of man. And if the soul of man is subject to other laws, is liable to sin, to sleep, to anarchism or to suicide, then all sciences including politics may fall as sterile and lie as fallow as before man's reason was made. Macaulay seemed sometimes to talk as if clocks produced clocks, or guns had families of little pistols, or a penknife littered like a pig. The other view he held was the more or less utilitarian theory of toleration; that we should get the best butcher whether he was a Baptist or a Muggletonian, and the best soldier whether he was a Wesleyan or an Irvingite. The compromise worked well enough in an England Protestant in bulk; but Macaulay ought to have seen that it has its limitations. A good butcher might be a Baptist; he is not very likely to be a Buddhist. A good soldier might be a Wesleyan; he would hardly be a Quaker. For the rest, Macaulay was concerned to interpret the seventeenth century in terms of the triumph of the Whigs as champions of public rights; and he upheld this one-sidedly but not malig nantly in a style of rounded and ringing sentences, which at its best is like steel and at its worst like tin.

This was the small conscious Macaulay; the great unconscious Macaulay was very different. His noble enduring quality in our literature is this: that he truly had an abstract passion for history; a warm, poetic and sincere enthusiasm for great things as such; an ardour and appetite for great books, great battles, great cities, great men. He felt and used names like trumpets. The reader's greatest joy is in the writer's own joy, when he can let his last phrase fall like a hammer on some resounding name like Hildebrand or Charlemagne, on the eagles of Rome or the pillars of Hercules. As with Walter Scott, some of the best things in his prose and poetry are the surnames that he did not make. And it is remarkable to notice that this romance of history, so far from making him more partial or untrustworthy, was the only thing that made him moderately just. His reason was entirely one-sided and fanatical. It was his imagination that was well-balanced and broad. He was monotonously certain that only Whigs were right; but it was necessary that Tories should at least be great, that his heroes might have foemen worthy of their steel. If there was one thing in the world he hated it was a High Church Royalist parson; yet when Jeremy Collier the Jacobite priest raises a real banner, all Macaulay's blood warms with the mere prospect of a fight. "It is inspiriting to see how gallantly the solitary outlaw advances to attack enemies formidable separately, and, it might have been thought, irresistible when combined; distributes his swashing blows right and left among Wycherley, Congreve and Vanbrugh, treads the wretched D'Urfey down in the dirt beneath his feet; and strikes with all his strength full at the towering crest of Dryden." That is exactly where Macaulay is great; because he is almost Homeric. The whole triumph turns upon mere names; but men are commanded by names. So his poem on the Armada is really a good geography book gone mad; one sees the map of England come alive and march and mix under the eye.

The chief tragedy in the trend of later literature may be expressed by saying that the smaller Macaulay conquered the larger. Later men had less and less of that hot love of history he had inherited from Scott. They had more and more of that cold science of self-interests which he had learnt from Bentham.

The name of this great man, though it belongs to a period before the Victorian, is, like the name of Cobbett, very important to it. In substance Macaulay accepted the conclusions of Bentham; though he offered brilliant objections to all his arguments. In any case the soul of Bentham (if he had one) went marching on, like John Brown; and in the central Victorian movement it was certainly he who won. John Stuart Mill was the final flower of that growth. He was himself fresh and delicate and pure; but that is the business of a flower. Though he had to preach a hard rationalism in religion, a hard competition in economics, a hard egoism in ethics, his own soul had all that silvery sensitiveness that can be seen in his fine portrait by Watts. He boasted none of that brutal optimism with which his friends and followers of the Manchester School expounded their cheery negations. There was about Mill even a sort of embarrassment; he exhibited all the wheels of his iron universe rather reluctantly, like a gentleman in trade showing ladies over his factory. There shone in him a beautiful reverence for women, which is all the more touching because, in his department, as it were, he could only offer them so dry a gift as the Victorian Parliamentary Franchise.

Now in trying to describe how the Victorian writers stood to each other, we must recur to the very real difficulty noted at the beginning: the difficulty of keeping the moral order parallel with the chronological order. For the mind moves by instincts, associations, premonitions and not by fixed dates or completed processes. Action and reaction will occur simultaneously: or the cause actually be found after the effect. Errors will be resisted before they have been properly promulgated: notions will be first defined long after they are dead. It is no good getting the almanac to look up moonshine; and most literature in this sense is moonshine. Thus Wordsworth shrank back into Toryism, as it were, from a Shelleyan extreme of pantheism as yet disembodied. Thus Newman took down the iron sword of dogma to parry a blow not yet delivered, that was coming from the club of Darwin. For this reason no one can understand tradition, or even history, who has not some tenderness for anachronism.

Now for the great part of the Victorian era the utilitarian tradition which reached its highest in Mill held the centre of the field; it was the philosophy in office, so to speak. It sustained its march of codification and inquiry until it had made possible the great victories of Darwin and Huxley and Wallace. If we take Macaulay at the beginning of the epoch and Huxley at the end of it, we shall find that they had much in common. They were both square-jawed, simple men, greedy of controversy but scornful of sophistry, dead to mysticism but very much alive to morality; and they were both very much more under the influence of their own admirable rhetoric than they knew. Huxley, especially, was much more a literary than a scientific man. It is amusing to note that when Huxley was charged with being rhetorical, he expressed his horror of “plastering the fair face of truth with that pestilent cosmetic, rhetoric,” which is itself about as well-plastered a piece of rhetoric as Ruskin himself could have managed. The difference that the period had developed can best be seen if we consider this: that while neither was of a spiritual sort, Macaulay took it for granted that common sense required some kind of theology, while Huxley took it for granted that common sense meant having none. Macaulay, it is said, never talked about his religion: but Huxley was always talking about the religion he hadn’t got.

But though this simple Victorian rationalism held the centre, and in a certain sense *was* the Victorian era, it was assailed on many sides, and had been assailed even before the beginning of that era. The rest of the intellectual history of the time is a series of reactions against it, which come wave after wave. They have succeeded in shaking it, but not in dislodging it from the modern mind. The first of these was the Oxford Movement; a bow that broke when it had let loose the flashing arrow that was Newman. The second reaction was one man; without teachers or pupils — Dickens. The third reaction was a group that tried to create a sort of new romantic Protestantism, to pit against both Reason and Rome — Carlyle, Ruskin, Kingsley, Maurice — perhaps Tennyson. Browning also was at once romantic and Puritan; but he belonged to no group, and worked against materialism in a manner entirely his own. Though as a boy he bought eagerly Shelley’s revolutionary poems, he did not think of becoming a revolutionary poet. He concentrated on the special souls of men; seeking God in a series of private interviews. Hence Browning, great as he is, is rather one of the Victorian novelists than wholly of the Victorian poets. From Ruskin, again, descend those who may be called the Pre-Raphaelites of prose and poetry.

It is really with this rationalism triumphant, and with the romance of these various attacks on it, that the study of Victorian literature begins and proceeds. Bentham was already the prophet of a powerful sect; Macaulay was already the historian of an historic party, before the true Victorian epoch began. The middle classes were emerging in a state of damaged Puritanism. The upper classes were utterly pagan. Their clear and courageous testimony remains in those immortal words of Lord Melbourne, who had led the young queen to the throne and long stood there as her protector. “No one has more respect for the Christian religion than I have; but really, when it comes to intruding it into private life — —” What was pure paganism in the politics of Melbourne became a sort of mystical cynicism in the politics of Disraeli; and is well mirrored in his novels — for he was a man who felt at home in mirrors. With every allowance for aliens and eccentrics and all the accidents that must always eat the edges of any systematic circumference, it may still be said that the Utilitarians held the fort.

Of the Oxford Movement what remains most strongly in the Victorian Epoch centres round the challenge of Newman, its one great literary man. But the movement as a whole had been of great significance in the very genesis and make up of the society: yet that significance is not quite easy immediately to define. It was certainly not æsthetic ritualism; scarcely one of the Oxford High Churchmen was what we should call a Ritualist. It was certainly not a conscious reaching out towards Rome: except on a Roman Catholic theory which might explain all our unrests by that dim desire. It knew little of Europe, it knew nothing of Ireland, to which any merely Roman Catholic revulsion would obviously have turned. In the first instance, I think, the more it is studied, the more it would appear that it was a movement of mere religion as such. It was not so much a taste for Catholic dogma, but simply a hunger for dogma. For dogma means the serious satisfaction of the mind. Dogma does not mean the absence of thought, but the end of thought. It was a revolt against the Victorian spirit in one particular aspect of it; which may roughly be called (in a cosy and domestic Victorian metaphor) having your cake and eating it too. It saw that the solid and serious Victorians were fundamentally frivo lous — because they were fundamentally inconsistent.

A man making the confession of any creed worth ten minutes’ intelligent talk, is always a man who gains something and gives up something. So long as he does both he can create: for he is making an outline and a shape. Mahomet created, when he forbade wine but allowed five wives: he created a very big thing, which we have still to deal with. The first French Republic created, when it affirmed property and abolished peerages; France still stands like a square, four-sided building which Europe has besieged in vain. The men of the Oxford Movement would have been horrified at being compared either with Moslems or Jacobins. But their sub-conscious thirst was for something that Moslems and Jacobins had and ordinary Anglicans had not: the exalted excitement of consistency. If you were a Moslem you were not a Bacchanal. If you were a Republican you were not a peer. And so the Oxford men, even in their first and dimmest stages, felt that if you were a Churchman you were not a Dissenter. The Oxford Movement was, out of the very roots of its being, a rational movement; almost a rationalist movement. In that it differed sharply from the other reactions that shook the Utilitarian compromise; the blinding mysticism of Carlyle, the mere manly emotionalism of Dickens. It was an appeal to reason: reason said that if a Christian had a feast day he must have a fast day too. Otherwise, all days ought to be alike; and this was that very Utilitarianism against which their Oxford Movement was the first and most rational assault.

This idea, even by reason of its reason, narrowed into a sort of sharp spear, of which the spear blade was Newman. It did forget many of the other forces that were fighting on its side. But the movement could boast, first and last, many men who had this eager dogmatic quality: Keble, who spoilt a poem in order to recognise a doctrine; Faber, who told the rich, almost with taunts, that God sent the poor as eagles to strip them; Froude, who with Newman announced his return in the arrogant motto of Achilles. But the greater part of all this happened before what is properly our period; and in that period Newman, and perhaps Newman alone, is the expression and summary of the whole school. It was certainly in the Victorian Age, and after his passage to Rome, that Newman claimed his complete right to be in any book on modern English literature. This is no place for estimating his theology: but one point about it does clearly emerge. Whatever else is right, the theory that Newman went over to Rome to find peace and an end of argument, is quite unquestionably wrong. He had far more quarrels after he had gone over to Rome. But, though he had far more quarrels, he had far fewer compromises: and he was of that temper which is tortured more by compromise than by quarrel. He was a man at once of abnormal energy and abnormal sensibility: nobody without that combination could have written the *Apologia*. If he sometimes seemed to skin his enemies alive, it was because he himself lacked a skin. In this sense his *Apologia* is a triumph far beyond the ephemeral charge on which it was founded; in this sense he does indeed (to use his own expression) vanquish not his accuser but his judges. Many men would shrink from recording all their cold fits and hesitations and prolonged inconsistencies: I am sure it was the breath of life to Newman to confess them, now that he had done with them for ever. His *Lectures on the Present Position of English Catholics*, practically preached against a raging mob, rise not only higher but happier, as his instant unpopularity increases. There is something grander than humour, there is fun, in the very first lecture about the British Constitution as explained to a meeting of Russians. But always his triumphs are the triumphs of a highly sensitive man: a man must feel insults before he can so insultingly and splendidly avenge them. He is a naked man, who carries a naked sword. The quality of his literary style is so successful that it succeeds in escaping definition. The quality of his logic is that of a long but passionate patience, which waits until he has fixed all corners of an iron trap. But the quality of his moral comment on the age remains what I have said: a protest of the rationality of religion as against the increasing irrationality of mere Victorian comfort and compromise. So far as the present purpose is concerned, his protest died with him: he left few imitators and (it may easily be conceived) no successful imitators. The suggestion of him lingers on in the exquisite Elizabethan perversity of Coventry Patmore; and has later flamed out from the shy volcano of Francis Thompson. Otherwise (as we shall see in the parallel case of Ruskin's Socialism) he has no followers in his own age: but very many in ours.

The next group of reactionaries or romantics or whatever we elect to call them, gathers roughly around one great name. Scotland, from which had come so many of those harsh economists who made the first Radical philosophies of the Victorian Age, was destined also to fling forth (I had almost said to spit forth) their fiercest and most extraordinary enemy. The two primary things in Thomas Carlyle were his early Scotch education and his later German culture. The first was in almost all respects his strength; the latter in some respects his weakness. As an ordinary lowland peasant, he inherited the really valuable historic property of the Scots, their independence, their fighting spirit, and their instinctive philosophic consideration of men merely as men. But he was not an ordinary peasant. If he had laboured obscurely in his village till death, he would have been yet locally a marked man; a man with a wild eye, a man with an air of silent anger; perhaps a man at whom stones were sometimes thrown. A strain of disease and suffering ran athwart both his body and his soul. In spite of his praise of silence, it was only through his gift of utterance that he escaped madness. But while his fellow-peasants would have seen this in him and perhaps mocked it, they would also have seen something which they always expect in such men, and they would have got it: vision, a power in the mind akin to second sight. Like many ungainly or otherwise unattractive Scotchmen, he was a seer. By which I do not mean to refer so much to his transcendental rhapsodies about the World-soul or the Nature-garment or the Mysteries and Eternities generally, these seem to me to belong more to his German side and to be less sincere and vital. I mean a real power of seeing things suddenly, not apparently reached by any process; a grand power of guessing. He *saw* the crowd of the new States General, Danton with his "rude flattened face," Robespierre peering mistily through his spectacles. He *saw* the English charge at Dunbar. He *guessed* that Mirabeau, however dissipated and diseased, had something sturdy inside him. He *guessed* that Lafayette, however brave and victorious, had nothing inside him. He supported the lawlessness of Cromwell, because across two centuries he almost physically *felt* the feebleness and hopelessness of the moderate Parliamentarians. He said a word of sympathy for the universally vituperated Jacobins of the Mountain, because through thick veils of national prejudice and misrepresentation, he felt the impossibility of the Gironde. He was wrong in denying to Scott the power of being inside his characters: but he really had a good deal of that power himself. It was one of his innumerable and rather provincial crotchets to encourage prose as against poetry. But, as a matter of fact, he himself was much greater considered as a kind of poet than considered as anything else; and the central idea of poetry is the idea of guessing right, like a child.

He first emerged, as it were, as a student and disciple of Goethe. The connection was not wholly fortunate. With much of what Goethe really stood for he was not really in sympathy; but in his own obstinate way, he tried to knock his idol into shape instead of choosing another. He pushed further and further the extravagances of a vivid but very unbalanced and barbaric style, in the praise of a poet who really represented the calmest classicism and the attempt to restore a Hellenic equilibrium in the mind. It is like watching a shaggy Scandinavian decorating a Greek statue washed up by chance on his shores. And while the strength of Goethe was a strength of completion and serenity, which Carlyle not only never found but never even sought, the weaknesses of Goethe were of a sort that did not draw the best out of Carlyle. The one civilised element that the German classicists forgot to put into their beautiful balance was a sense of humour. And great poet as Goethe was, there is to the last something faintly fatuous about his half sceptical, half sentimental self-importance; a Lord Chamberlain of teacup politics; an earnest and elderly flirt; a German of the Germans. Now Carlyle had humour; he had it in his very style, but it never got into his philosophy. His philosophy largely remained a heavy Teutonic idealism, absurdly unaware of the complexity of things; as when he perpetually repeated (as with a kind of flat-footed stamping) that people ought to tell the truth; apparently supposing, to quote Stevenson's phrase, that telling the truth is as easy as blind hookey. Yet, though his general honesty is unquestionable, he was by no means one of those who will give up a fancy under the shock of a fact. If by sheer genius he frequently guessed right, he was not the kind of man to admit easily that he had guessed wrong. His version of Cromwell's filthy cruelties in Ireland, or his impatient slurring over of the most sinister riddle in the morality of Frederick the Great — these passages are, one must frankly say, dis ingenuous. But it is, so to speak, a generous disingenuousness; the heat and momentum of sincere admirations, not the shuffling fear and flattery of the constitutional or patriotic historian. It bears most resemblance to the incurable prejudices of a woman.

For the rest there hovered behind all this transcendental haze a certain presence of old northern paganism; he really had some sympathy with the vast vague gods of that moody but not unmanly Nature-worship which seems to have filled the darkness of the North before the coming of the Roman Eagle or the Christian Cross. This he combined, allowing for certain sceptical omissions, with the grisly Old Testament God he had heard about in the black Sabbaths of his childhood; and so promulgated (against both Rationalists and Catholics) a sort of heathen Puritanism: Protestantism purged of its evidences of Christianity.

His great and real work was the attack on Utilitarianism: which did real good, though there was much that was muddled and dangerous in the historical philosophy which he preached as an alternative. It is his real glory that he was the first to see clearly and say plainly the great truth of our time;

that the wealth of the state is not the prosperity of the people. Macaulay and the Mills and all the regular run of the Early Victorians, took it for granted that if Manchester was getting richer, we had got hold of the key to comfort and progress. Carlyle pointed out (with stronger sagacity and humour than he showed on any other question) that it was just as true to say that Manchester was getting poorer as that it was getting richer: or, in other words, that Manchester was not getting richer at all, but only some of the less pleasing people in Manchester. In this matter he is to be noted in connection with national developments much later; for he thus became the first prophet of the Socialists. *Sartor Resartus* is an admirable fantasia; *The French Revolution* is, with all its faults, a really fine piece of history; the lectures on Heroes contain some masterly sketches of personalities. But I think it is in *Past and Present*, and the essay on *Chartism*, that Carlyle achieves the work he was chosen by gods and men to achieve; which possibly might not have been achieved by a happier or more healthy-minded man. He never rose to more deadly irony than in such *macabre* descriptions as that of the poor woman proving her sisterhood with the rich by giving them all typhoid fever; or that perfect piece of *badinage* about "Overproduction of Shirts"; in which he imagines the aristocrats claiming to be quite clear of this offence. "Will you bandy accusations, will you accuse *us* of overproduction? We take the Heavens and the Earth to witness that we have produced nothing at all.... He that accuses us of producing, let him show himself. Let him say what and when." And he never wrote so sternly and justly as when he compared the "divine sorrow" of Dante with the "undivine sorrow" of Utilitarianism, which had already come down to talking about the breeding of the poor and to hinting at infanticide. This is a representative quarrel; for if the Utilitarian spirit reached its highest point in Mill, it certainly reached its lowest point in Malthus.

One last element in the influence of Carlyle ought to be mentioned; because it very strongly dominated his disciples — especially Kingsley, and to some extent Tennyson and Ruskin. Because he frowned at the cockney cheerfulness of the cheaper economists, they and others represented him as a pessimist, and reduced all his azure infinities to a fit of the blues. But Carlyle's philosophy, more carefully considered, will be found to be dangerously optimist rather than pessimist. As a thinker Carlyle is not sad, but recklessly and rather unscrupulously satisfied. For he seems to have held the theory that good could not be definitely defeated in this world; and that everything in the long run finds its right level. It began with what we may call the "Bible of History" idea: that all affairs and politics were a clouded but unbroken revelation of the divine. Thus any enormous and unaltered human settlement — as the Norman Conquest or the secession of America — we must suppose to be the will of God. It lent itself to picturesque treatment; and Carlyle and the Carlyleans were above all things picturesque. It gave them at first a rhetorical advantage over the Catholic and other older schools. They could boast that their Creator was still creating; that he was in Man and Nature, and was not hedged round in a Paradise or imprisoned in a pyx. They could say their God had not grown too old for war: that He was present at Gettysburg and Gravelotte as much as at Gibeon and Gilboa. I do not mean that they literally said these particular things: they are what I should have said had I been bribed to defend their position. But they said things to the same effect: that what manages finally to happen, happens for a higher purpose. Car lyle said the French Revolution was a thing settled in the eternal councils to be; and therefore (and not because it was right) attacking it was "fighting against God." And Kingsley even carried the principle so far as to tell a lady she should remain in the Church of England mainly because God had put her there. But in spite of its superficial spirituality and encouragement, it is not hard to see how such a doctrine could be abused. It practically comes to saying that God is on the side of the big battalions — or at least, of the victorious ones. Thus a creed which set out to create conquerors would only corrupt soldiers; corrupt them with a craven and unsoldierly worship of success: and that which began as the philosophy of courage ends as the philosophy of cowardice. If, indeed, Carlyle were right in saying that right is only "rightly articulated" might, men would never articulate or move in any way. For no act can have might before it is done: if there is no right, it cannot rationally be done at all. This element, like the Anti-Utilitarian element, is to be kept in mind in connection with after developments: for in this Carlyle is the first cry of Imperialism, as (in the other case) of Socialism: and the two babes unborn who stir at the trumpet are Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. Rudyard Kipling. Kipling also carries on from Carlyle the concentration on the purely Hebraic parts of the Bible. The fallacy of this whole philosophy is that if God is indeed present at a modern battle, He may be present not as on Gilboa but Golgotha.

Carlyle’s direct historical worship of strength and the rest of it was fortunately not very fruitful; and perhaps lingered only in Froude the historian. Even he is more an interruption than a continuity. Froude develops rather the harsher and more impatient moral counsels of his master than like Ruskin the more romantic and sympathetic. He carries on the tradition of Hero Worship: but carries far beyond Carlyle the practice of worshipping people who cannot rationally be called heroes. In this matter that eccentric eye of the seer certainly helped Carlyle: in Cromwell and Frederick the Great there was at least something self-begotten, original or mystical; if they were not heroes they were at least demigods or perhaps demons. But Froude set himself to the praise of the Tudors, a much lower class of people; ill-conditioned prosperous people who merely waxed fat and kicked. Such strength as Henry VIII had was the strength of a badly trained horse that bolts, not of any clear or courageous rider who controls him. There is a sort of strong man mentioned in Scripture who, because he masters himself, is more than he that takes a city. There is another kind of strong man (known to the medical profession) who cannot master himself; and whom it may take half a city to take alive. But for all that he is a low lunatic, and not a hero; and of that sort were too many of the heroes whom Froude attempted to praise. A kind of instinct kept Carlyle from over-praising Henry VIII; or that highly cultivated and complicated liar, Queen Elizabeth. Here, the only importance of this is that one of Carlyle’s followers carried further that “strength” which was the real weakness of Carlyle. I have heard that Froude’s life of Carlyle was unsympathetic; but if it was so it was a sort of parricide. For the rest, like Macaulay, he was a picturesque and partisan historian: but, like Macaulay (and unlike the craven scientific historians of to-day) he was not ashamed of being partisan or of being picturesque. Such studies as he wrote on the Elizabethan seamen and adventurers, represent very triumphantly the sort of romance of England that all this school was attempting to establish; and link him up with Kingsley and the rest.

Ruskin may be very roughly regarded as the young lieutenant of Carlyle in his war on Utilitarian Radicalism: but as an individual he presents many and curious divergences. In the matter of style, he enriched English without disordering it. And in the matter of religion (which was the key of this age as of every other) he did not, like Carlyle, set up the romance of the great Puritans as a rival to the romance of the Catholic Church. Rather he set up and worshipped all the arts and trophies of the Catholic Church as a rival to the Church itself. None need dispute that he held a perfectly tenable position if he chose to associate early Florentine art with a Christianity still comparatively pure, and such sensualities as the Renaissance bred with the corruption of a Papacy. But this does not alter, as a merely artistic fact, the strange air of ill-ease and irritation with which Ruskin seems to tear down the gargoyles of Amiens or the marbles of Venice, as things of which Europe is not worthy; and take them away with him to a really careful museum, situated dangerously near Clapham. Many of the great men of that generation, indeed, had a sort of divided mind; an ethical headache which was literally a "splitting headache"; for there was a schism in the sympathies. When these men looked at some historic object, like the Catholic Church or the French Revolution, they did not know whether they loved or hated it most. Carlyle's two eyes were out of focus, as one may say, when he looked at democracy: he had one eye on Valmy and the other on Sedan. In the same way, Ruskin had a strong right hand that wrote of the great mediæval minsters in tall harmonies and traceries as splendid as their own; and also, so to speak, a weak and feverish left hand that was always fidgeting and trying to take the pen away — and write an evangelical tract about the immorality of foreigners. Many of their contemporaries were the same. The sea of Tennyson's mind was troubled under its serene surface. The incessant excitement of Kingsley, though romantic and attractive in many ways, was a great deal more like Nervous Christianity than Muscular Christianity. It would be quite unfair to say of Ruskin that there was any major inconsistency between his mediæ val tastes and his very unmediæval temper: and minor inconsistencies do not matter in anybody. But it is not quite unfair to say of him that he seemed to want all parts of the Cathedral except the altar.

As an artist in prose he is one of the most miraculous products of the extremely poetical genius of England. The length of a Ruskin sentence is like that length in the long arrow that was boasted of by the drawers of the long bow. He draws, not a cloth-yard shaft but a long lance to his ear: he shoots a spear. But the whole goes light as a bird and straight as a bullet. There is no Victorian writer before him to whom he even suggests a comparison, technically considered, except perhaps De Quincey; who also employed the long rich rolling sentence that, like a rocket, bursts into stars at the end. But De Quincey's sentences, as I have said, have always a dreamy and insecure sense about them, like the turret on toppling turret of some mad sultan's pagoda. Ruskin's sentence branches into brackets and relative clauses as a straight strong tree branches into boughs and bifurcations, rather shaking off its burden than merely adding to it. It is interesting to remember that Ruskin wrote some of the best of these sentences in the attempt to show that he did understand the growth of trees, and that nobody else did — except Turner, of course. It is also (to those acquainted with his perverse and wild rhetorical prejudices) even more amusing to remember that if a Ruskin sentence (occupying one or two pages of small print) does not remind us of the growth of a tree, the only other thing it does remind of is the triumphant passage of a railway train.

Ruskin left behind him in his turn two quite separate streams of inspiration. The first and more practical was concerned, like Carlyle's *Chartism*, with a challenge to the social conclusions of the orthodox economists. He was not so great a man as Carlyle, but he was a much more clear-headed man; and the point and stab of his challenge still really stands and sticks, like a dagger in a dead man. He answered the theory that we must always get the cheapest labour we can, by pointing out that we never do get the cheapest labour we can, in any matter about which we really care twopence. We do not get the cheapest doctor. We either get a doctor who charges nothing or a doctor who charges a recognised and respectable fee. We do not trust the cheapest bishop. We do not allow admirals to compete. We do not tell generals to undercut each other on the eve of a war. We either employ none of them or we employ all of them at an official rate of pay. All this was set out in the strongest and least sentimental of his books, *Unto this Last*; but many suggestions of it are scattered through *Sesame and Lilies*, *The Political Economy of Art*, and even *Modern Painters*. On this side of his soul Ruskin became the second founder of Socialism. The argument was not by any means a complete or unconquerable weapon, but I think it knocked out what little re mained of the brains of the early Victorian rationalists. It is entirely nonsensical to speak of Ruskin as a lounging æsthete, who strolled into economics, and talked sentimentalism. In plain fact, Ruskin was seldom so sensible and logical (right or wrong) as when he was talking about economics. He constantly talked the most glorious nonsense about landscape and natural history, which it was his business to understand. Within his own limits, he talked the most cold common sense about political economy, which was no business of his at all.

On the other side of his literary soul, his mere unwrapping of the wealth and wonder of European art, he set going another influence, earlier and vaguer than his influence on Socialism. He represented what was at first the Pre-Raphaelite School in painting, but afterwards a much larger and looser Pre-Raphaelite School in poetry and prose. The word "looser" will not be found unfair if we remember how Swinburne and all the wildest friends of the Rossettis carried this movement forward. They used the mediæval imagery to blaspheme the mediæval religion. Ruskin's dark and doubtful decision to accept Catholic art but not Catholic ethics had borne rapid or even flagrant fruit by the time that Swinburne, writing about a harlot, composed a learned and sympathetic and indecent parody on the Litany of the Blessed Virgin.

With the poets I deal in another part of this book; but the influence of Ruskin's great prose touching art criticism can best be expressed in the name of the next great prose writer on such subjects. That name is Walter Pater: and the name is the full measure of the extent to which Ruskin's vague but vast influence had escaped from his hands. Pater eventually joined the Church of Rome (which would not have pleased Ruskin at all), but it is surely fair to say of the mass of his work that its moral tone is neither Puritan nor Catholic, but strictly and splendidly Pagan. In Pater we have Ruskin without the prejudices, that is, without the funny parts. I may be wrong, but I cannot recall at this moment a single passage in which Pater's style takes a holiday or in which his wisdom plays the fool. Newman and Ruskin were as careful and graceful stylists as he. Newman and Ruskin were as serious, elaborate, and even academic thinkers as he. But Ruskin let himself go about railways. Newman let himself go about Kingsley. Pater cannot let himself go for the excellent reason that he wants to stay: to stay at the point where all the keenest emotions meet, as he explains in the splendid peroration of *The Renaissance*. The only objection to being where all the keenest emotions meet is that you feel none of them.

In this sense Pater may well stand for a substantial summary of the æsthetes, apart from the purely poetical merits of men like Rossetti and Swinburne. Like Swinburne and others he first attempted to use mediæval tradition without trusting it. These people wanted to see Paganism *through* Christianity: because it involved the incidental amusement of seeing through Christianity itself. They not only tried to be in all ages at once (which is a very reasonable ambition, though not often realised), but they wanted to be on all sides at once: which is nonsense. Swinburne tries to question the philosophy of Christianity in the metres of a Christmas carol: and Dante Rossetti tries to write as if he were Christina Rossetti. Certainly the almost successful summit of all this attempt is Pater's superb passage on the Mona Lisa; in which he seeks to make her at once a mystery of good and a mystery of evil. The philosophy is false; even evidently false, for it bears no fruit to-day. There never was a woman, not Eve herself in the instant of temptation, who could smile the same smile as the mother of Helen and the mother of Mary. But it is the high-water mark of that vast attempt at an impartiality reached through art: and no other mere artist ever rose so high again.

Apart from this Ruskinian offshoot through Pre-Raphaelitism into what was called Æstheticism, the remains of the inspiration of Carlyle fill a very large part in the Victorian life, but not strictly so large a part in the Victorian literature. Charles Kingsley was a great publicist; a popular preacher; a popular novelist; and (in two cases at least) a very good novelist. His *Water Babies* is really a breezy and roaring freak; like a holiday at the seaside — a holiday where one talks natural history without taking it seriously. Some of the songs in this and other of his works are very real songs: notably, "When all the World is Young, Lad," which comes very near to being the only true defence of marriage in the controversies of the nineteenth century. But when all this is allowed, no one will seriously rank Kingsley, in the really literary sense, on the level of Carlyle or Ruskin, Tennyson or Browning, Dickens or Thackeray: and if such a place cannot be given to him, it can be given even less to his lusty and pleasant friend, Tom Hughes, whose personality floats towards the frankness of the *Boy's Own Paper*; or to his deep, suggestive metaphysical friend Maurice, who floats rather towards *The Hibbert Journal*. The moral and social influence of these things is not to be forgotten: but they leave the domain of letters. The voice of Carlyle is not heard again in letters till the coming of Kipling and Henley.

One other name of great importance should appear here, because it cannot appear very appropriately anywhere else: the man hardly belonged to the same school as Ruskin and Carlyle, but fought many of their battles, and was even more concentrated on their main task — the task of convicting liberal *bourgeois* England of priggishness and provinciality. I mean, of course, Matthew Arnold. Against Mill's "liberty" and Carlyle's "strength" and Ruskin's "nature," he set up a new presence and entity which he called “culture,” the disinterested play of the mind through the sifting of the best books and authorities. Though a little dandified in phrase, he was undoubtedly serious and public-spirited in intention. He sometimes talked of culture almost as if it were a man, or at least a church (for a church has a sort of personality): some may suspect that culture was a man, whose name was Matthew Arnold. But Arnold was not only right but highly valuable. If we have said that Carlyle was a man that saw things, we may add that Arnold was chiefly valuable as a man who knew things. Well as he was endowed intellectually, his power came more from information than intellect. He simply happened to know certain things, that Carlyle didn’t know, that Kingsley didn’t know, that Huxley and Herbert Spencer didn’t know: that England didn’t know. He knew that England was a part of Europe: and not so important a part as it had been the morning after Waterloo. He knew that England was then (as it is now) an oligarchical State, and that many great nations are not. He knew that a real democracy need not live and does not live in that perpetual panic about using the powers of the State, which possessed men like Spencer and Cobden. He knew a rational minimum of culture and common courtesy could exist and did exist throughout large democracies. He knew the Catholic Church had been in history “the Church of the multitude”: he knew it was not a sect. He knew that great landlords are no more a part of the economic law than nigger-drivers: he knew that small owners could and did prosper. He was not so much the philosopher as the man of the world: he reminded us that Europe was a society while Ruskin was treating it as a picture gallery. He was a sort of Heaven-sent courier. His frontal attack on the vulgar and sullen optimism of Victorian utility may be summoned up in the admirable sentence, in which he asked the English what was the use of a train taking them quickly from Islington to Camberwell, if it only took them “from a dismal and illiberal life in Islington to a dismal and illiberal life in Camberwell?”

His attitude to that great religious enigma round which all these great men were grouped as in a ring, was individual and decidedly curious. He seems to have believed that a “Historic Church,” that is, some established organisation with ceremonies and sacred books, etc., could be perpetually preserved as a sort of vessel to contain the spiritual ideas of the age, whatever those ideas might happen to be. He clearly seems to have contemplated a melting away of the doctrines of the Church and even of the meaning of the words: but he thought a certain need in man would always be best satisfied by public worship and especially by the great religious literatures of the past. He would embalm the body that it might often be revisited by the soul — or souls. Something of the sort has been suggested by Dr. Coit and others of the ethical societies in our own time. But while Arnold would loosen the theological bonds of the Church, he would not loosen the official bonds of the State. You must not disestablish the Church: you must not even leave the Church: you must stop inside it and think what you choose. Enemies might say that he was simply trying to establish and endow Agnosticism. It is fairer and truer to say that unconsciously he was trying to restore Paganism: for this State Ritualism without theology, and without much belief, actually was the practice of the ancient world. Arnold may have thought that he was building an altar to the Unknown God; but he was really building it to Divus Cæsar.

As a critic he was chiefly concerned to preserve criticism itself; to set a measure to praise and blame and support the classics against the fashions. It is here that it is specially true of him, if of no writer else, that the style was the man. The most vital thing he invented was a new style: founded on the patient unravelling of the tangled Victorian ideas, as if they were matted hair under a comb. He did not mind how elaborately long he made a sentence, so long as he made it clear. He would constantly repeat whole phrases word for word in the same sentence, rather than risk ambiguity by abbreviation. His genius showed itself in turning this method of a laborious lucidity into a peculiarly exasperating form of satire and controversy. Newman’s strength was in a sort of stifled passion, a dangerous patience of polite logic and then: “Cowards! if I advanced a step you would run away: it is not you I fear. *Di me terrent, et Jupiter hostis.*” If Newman seemed suddenly to fly into a temper, Carlyle seemed never to fly out of one. But Arnold kept a smile of heart-broken forbearance, as of the teacher in an idiot school, that was enormously insulting. One trick he often tried with success. If his opponent had said something foolish, like “the destiny of England is in the great heart of England,” Arnold would repeat the phrase again and again until it looked more foolish than it really was. Thus he recurs again and again to “the British College of Health in the New Road” till the reader wants to rush out and burn the place down. Arnold’s great error was that he sometimes thus wearied us of his own phrases, as well as of his enemies’.

These names are roughly representative of the long series of protests against the cold commercial rationalism which held Parliament and the schools through the earlier Victorian time, in so far as those protests were made in the name of neglected intellect, insulted art, forgotten heroism and desecrated religion. But already the Utilitarian citadel had been more heavily bombarded on the other side by one lonely and unlettered man of genius.

The rise of Dickens is like the rising of a vast mob. This is not only because his tales are indeed as crowded and populous as towns: for truly it was not so much that Dickens appeared as that a hundred Dickens characters appeared. It is also because he was the sort of man who has the impersonal impetus of a mob: what Poe meant when he truly said that popular rumour, if really spontaneous, was like the intuition of the individual man of genius. Those who speak scornfully of the ignorance of the mob do not err as to the fact itself; their error is in not seeing that just as a crowd is comparatively ignorant, so a crowd is comparatively innocent. It will have the old and human faults; but it is not likely to specialise in the special faults of that particular society: because the effort of the strong and successful in all ages is to keep the poor out of society. If the higher castes have developed some special moral beauty or grace, as they occasionally do (for instance, mediæval chivalry), it is likely enough, of course, that the mass of men will miss it. But if they have developed some perversion or over-emphasis, as they much more often do (for instance, the Renaissance poisoning), then it will be the tendency of the mass of men to miss that too. The point might be put in many ways; you may say if you will that the poor are always at the tail of the procession, and that whether they are morally worse or better depends on whether humanity as a whole is proceeding towards heaven or hell. When humanity is going to hell, the poor are always nearest to heaven.

Dickens was a mob — and a mob in revolt; he fought by the light of nature; he had not a theory, but a thirst. If any one chooses to offer the cheap sarcasm that his thirst was largely a thirst for milk-punch, I am content to reply with complete gravity and entire contempt that in a sense this is perfectly true. His thirst was for things as humble, as human, as laughable as that daily bread for which we cry to God. He had no particular plan of reform; or, when he had, it was startlingly petty and parochial compared with the deep, confused clamour of comradeship and insurrection that fills all his narrative. It would not be gravely unjust to him to compare him to his own heroine, Arabella Allen, who "didn't know what she did like," but who (when confronted with Mr. Bob Sawyer) "did know what she didn't like." Dickens did know what he didn't like. He didn't like the Unrivalled Happiness which Mr. Roebuck praised; the economic laws that were working so faultlessly in Fever Alley; the wealth that was accumulating so rapidly in Bleeding Heart Yard. But, above all, he didn't like the *mean* side of the Manchester philosophy: the preaching of an impossible thrift and an intolerable temperance. He hated the implication that because a man was a miser in Latin he must also be a miser in English. And this meanness of the Utilitarians had gone very far — infecting many finer minds who had fought the Utilitarians. In the *Edinburgh Review*, a thing like Malthus could be championed by a man like Macaulay.

The twin root facts of the revolution called Dickens are these: first, that he attacked the cold Victorian compromise; second, that he attacked it without knowing he was doing it — certainly without knowing that other people were doing it. He was attacking something which we will call Mr. Gradgrind. He was utterly unaware (in any essential sense) that any one else had attacked Mr. Gradgrind. All the other attacks had come from positions of learning or cultured eccentricity of which he was entirely ignorant, and to which, therefore (like a spirited fellow), he felt a furious hostility. Thus, for instance, he hated that Little Bethel to which Kit's mother went: he hated it simply as Kit hated it. Newman could have told him it was hateful, because it had no root in religious history; it was not even a sapling sprung of the seed of some great human and heathen tree: it was a monstrous mushroom that grows in the moonshine and dies in the dawn. Dickens knew no more of religious history than Kit; he simply smelt the fungus, and it stank. Thus, again, he hated that insolent luxury of a class counting itself a comfortable exception to all mankind; he hated it as Kate Nickleby hated Sir Mulberry Hawke — by instinct. Carlyle could have told him that all the world was full of that anger against the impudent fatness of the few. But when Dickens wrote about Kate Nickleby, he knew about as much of the world — as Kate Nickleby. He did write *The Tale of Two Cities* long afterwards; but that was when he *had* been instructed by Carlyle. His first revolutionism was as private and internal as feeling sea-sick. Thus, once more, he wrote against Mr. Gradgrind long before he created him. In *The Chimes*, conceived in quite his casual and charitable season, with the *Christmas Carol* and the

Cricket on the Hearth, he hit hard at the economists. Ruskin, in the same fashion, would have told him that the worst thing about the economists was that they were not economists: that they missed many essential things even in economics. But Dickens did not know whether they were economists or not: he only knew that they wanted hitting. Thus, to take a last case out of many, Dickens travelled in a French railway train, and noticed that this eccentric nation provided him with wine that he could drink and sandwiches he could eat, and manners he could tolerate. And remembering the ghastly sawdust-eating waiting-rooms of the North English railways, he wrote that rich chapter in *Mugby Junction*. Matthew Arnold could have told him that this was but a part of the general thinning down of European civilisation in these islands at the edge of it; that for two or three thousand years the Latin society has learnt how to drink wine, and how not to drink too much of it. Dickens did not in the least understand the Latin society: but he did understand the wine. If (to prolong an idle but not entirely false metaphor) we have called Carlyle a man who saw and Arnold a man who knew, we might truly call Dickens a man who tasted, that is, a man who really felt. In spite of all the silly talk about his vulgarity, he really had, in the strict and serious sense, good taste. All real good taste is gusto — the power of appreciating the presence — or the absence — of a particular and positive pleasure. He had no learning; he was not misled by the label on the bottle — for that is what learning largely meant in his time. He opened his mouth and shut his eyes and saw what the Age of Reason would give him. And, having tasted it, he spat it out.

I am constrained to consider Dickens here among the fighters; though I ought (on the pure principles of Art) to be considering him in the chapter which I have allotted to the story-tellers. But we should get the whole Victorian perspective wrong, in my opinion at least, if we did not see that Dickens was primarily the most successful of all the onslaughts on the solid scientific school; because he did not attack from the standpoint of extraordinary faith, like Newman; or the standpoint of extraordinary inspiration, like Carlyle; or the standpoint of extraordinary detachment or serenity, like Arnold; but from the standpoint of quite ordinary and quite hearty dislike. To give but one instance more, Matthew Arnold, trying to carry into England constructive educational schemes which he could see spread like a clear railway map all over the Continent, was much badgered about what he really thought was *wrong* with English middle-class education. Despairing of explaining to the English middle class the idea of high and central public instruction, as distinct from coarse and hole-and-corner private instruction, he invoked the aid of Dickens. He said the English middle-class school was the sort of school where Mr. Creakle sat, with his buttered toast and his cane. Now Dickens had probably never seen any other kind of school — certainly he had never understood the systematic State Schools in which Arnold had learnt his lesson. But he saw the cane and the buttered toast, and he *knew* that it was all wrong. In this sense, Dickens, the great romanticist, is truly the great realist also. For he had no abstractions: he had nothing except realities out of which to make a romance.

With Dickens, then, re-arises that reality with which I began and which (curtly, but I think not falsely) I have called Cobbett. In dealing with fiction as such, I shall have occasion to say wherein Dickens is weaker and stronger than that England of the eighteenth century: here it is sufficient to say that he represents the return of Cobbett in this vital sense; that he is proud of being the ordinary man. No one can understand the thousand caricatures by Dickens who does not understand that he is comparing them all with his own common sense. Dickens, in the bulk, liked the things that Cobbett had liked; what is perhaps more to the point, he hated the things that Cobbett had hated; the Tudors, the lawyers, the leisurely oppression of the poor. Cobbett's fine fighting journalism had been what is nowadays called "personal," that is, it supposed human beings to be human. But Cobbett was also personal in the less satisfactory sense; he could only multiply monsters who were exaggerations of his enemies or exaggerations of himself. Dickens was personal in a more godlike sense; he could multiply persons. He could create all the farce and tragedy of his age over again, with creatures unborn to sin and creatures unborn to suffer. That which had not been achieved by the fierce facts of Cobbett, the burning dreams of Carlyle, the white-hot proofs of Newman, was really or very nearly achieved by a crowd of impossible people. In the centre stood that citadel of atheist industrialism: and if indeed it has ever been taken, it was taken by the rush of that unreal army.

CHAPTER II

THE GREAT VICTORIAN NOVELISTS

The Victorian novel was a thing entirely Victorian; quite unique and suited to a sort of cosiness in that country and that age. But the novel itself, though not merely Victorian, is mainly modern. No clear-headed person wastes his time over definitions, except where he thinks his own definition would probably be in dispute. I merely say, therefore, that when I say “novel,” I mean a fictitious narrative (almost invariably, but not necessarily, in prose) of which the essential is that the story is not told for the sake of its naked pointedness as an anecdote, or for the sake of the irrelevant landscapes and visions that can be caught up in it, but for the sake of some study of the difference between human beings. There are several things that make this mode of art unique. One of the most conspicuous is that it is the art in which the conquests of woman are quite beyond controversy. The proposition that Victorian women have done well in politics and philosophy is not necessarily an untrue proposition; but it is a partisan proposition. I never heard that many women, let alone men, shared the views of Mary Wollstonecraft; I never heard that millions of believers flocked to the religion tentatively founded by Miss Frances Power Cobbe. They did, undoubtedly, flock to Mrs. Eddy; but it will not be unfair to that lady to call her following a sect, and not altogether unreasonable to say that such insane exceptions prove the rule. Nor can I at this moment think of a single modern woman writing on politics or abstract things, whose work is of undisputed importance; except perhaps Mrs. Sidney Webb, who settles things by the simple process of ordering about the citizens of a state, as she might the servants in a kitchen. There has been, at any rate, no writer on moral or political theory that can be mentioned, without seeming comic, in the same breath with the great female novelists. But when we come to the novelists, the women have, on the whole, equality; and certainly, in some points, superiority. Jane Austen is as strong in her own way as Scott is in his. But she is, for all practical purposes, never weak in her own way — and Scott very often is. Charlotte Brontë dedicated *Jane Eyre* to the author of *Vanity Fair*. I should hesitate to say that Charlotte Brontë’s is a better book than Thackeray’s, but I think it might well be maintained that it is a better story. All sorts of inquiring asses (equally ignorant of the old nature of woman and the new nature of the novel) whispered wisely that George Eliot's novels were really written by George Lewes. I will cheerfully answer for the fact that, if they had been written by George Lewes, no one would ever have read them. Those who have read his book on Robespierre will have no doubt about my meaning. I am no idolater of George Eliot; but a man who could concoct such a crushing opiate about the most exciting occasion in history certainly did not write *The Mill on the Floss*. This is the first fact about the novel, that it is the introduction of a new and rather curious kind of art; and it has been found to be peculiarly feminine, from the first good novel by Fanny Burney to the last good novel by Miss May Sinclair. The truth is, I think, that the modern novel is a new thing; not new in its essence (for that is a philosophy for fools), but new in the sense that it lets loose many of the things that are old. It is a hearty and exhaustive overhauling of that part of human existence which has always been the woman's province, or rather kingdom; the play of personalities in private, the real difference between Tommy and Joe. It is right that womanhood should specialise in individuals, and be praised for doing so; just as in the Middle Ages she specialised in dignity and was praised for doing so. People put the matter wrong when they say that the novel is a study of human nature. Human nature is a thing that even men can understand. Human nature is born of the pain of a woman; human nature plays at peep-bo when it is two and at cricket when it is twelve; human nature earns its living and desires the other sex and dies. What the novel deals with is what women have to deal with; the differentiations, the twists and turns of this eternal river. The key of this new form of art, which we call fiction, is sympathy. And sympathy does not mean so much feeling with all who feel, but rather suffering with all who suffer. And it was inevitable, under such an inspiration, that more attention should be given to the awkward corners of life than to its even flow. The very promising domestic channel dug by the Victorian women, in books like *Cranford*, by Mrs. Gaskell, would have got to the sea, if they had been left alone to dig it. They might have made domesticity a fairyland. Unfortunately another idea, the idea of imitating men's cuffs and collars and documents, cut across this purely female discovery and destroyed it.

It may seem mere praise of the novel to say it is the art of sympathy and the study of human variations. But indeed, though this is a good thing, it is not universally good. We have gained in sympathy; but we have lost in brotherhood. Old quarrels had more equality than modern exonerations. Two peasants in the Middle Ages quarrelled about their two fields. But they went to the same church, served in the same semi-feudal militia, and had the same morality, which ever might happen to be breaking it at the moment. The very cause of their quarrel was the cause of their fraternity; they both liked land. But suppose one of them a teetotaler who desired the abolition of hops on both farms; suppose the other a vegetarian who desired the abolition of chickens on both farms: and it is at once apparent that a quarrel of quite a different kind would begin; and that in that quarrel it would not be a question of farmer against farmer, but of individual against individual. This fundamental sense of human fraternity can only exist in the presence of positive religion. Man is merely man only when he is seen against the sky. If he is seen against any landscape, he is only a man of that land. If he is seen against any house, he is only a householder. Only where death and eternity are intensely present can human beings fully feel their fellowship. Once the divine darkness against which we stand is really dismissed from the mind (as it was very nearly dismissed in the Victorian time) the differences between human beings become overpoweringly plain; whether they are expressed in the high caricatures of Dickens or the low lunacies of Zola.

This can be seen in a sort of picture in the Prologue of the *Canterbury Tales*; which is already pregnant with the promise of the English novel. The characters there are at once graphically and delicately differentiated; the Doctor with his rich cloak, his careful meals, his coldness to religion; the Franklin, whose white beard was so fresh that it recalled the daisies, and in whose house it snowed meat and drink; the Summoner, from whose fearful face, like a red cherub's, the children fled, and who wore a garland like a hoop; the Miller with his short red hair and bagpipes and brutal head, with which he could break down a door; the Lover who was as sleepless as a nightingale; the Knight, the Cook, the Clerk of Oxford. Pendennis or the Cook, M. Mirabolant, is nowhere so vividly varied by a few merely verbal strokes. But the great difference is deeper and more striking. It is simply that Pendennis would never have gone riding with a cook at all. Chaucer's knight rode with a cook quite naturally; because the thing they were all seeking together was as much above knighthood as it was above cookery. Soldiers and swindlers and bullies and outcasts, they were all going to the shrine of a distant saint. To what sort of distant saint would Pendennis and Colonel Newcome and Mr. Moss and Captain Costigan and Ridley the butler and Bayham and Sir Barnes Newcome and Laura and the Duchess d’Ivry and Warrington and Captain Blackball and Lady Kew travel, laughing and telling tales together?

The growth of the novel, therefore, must not be too easily called an increase in the interest in humanity. It is an increase in the interest in the things in which men differ; much fuller and finer work had been done before about the things in which they agree. And this intense interest in variety had its bad side as well as its good; it has rather increased social distinctions in a serious and spiritual sense. Most of the oblivion of democracy is due to the oblivion of death. But in its own manner and measure, it was a real advance and experiment of the European mind, like the public art of the Renaissance or the fairyland of physical science explored in the nineteenth century. It was a more unquestionable benefit than these: and in that development women played a peculiar part, English women especially, and Victorian women most of all.

It is perhaps partly, though certainly not entirely, this influence of the great women writers that explains another very arresting and important fact about the emergence of genuinely Victorian fiction. It had been by this time decided, by the powers that had influence (and by public opinion also, at least in the middle-class sense), that certain verbal limits must be set to such literature. The novel must be what some would call pure and others would call prudish; but what is not, properly considered, either one or the other: it is rather a more or less business proposal (right or wrong) that every writer shall draw the line at literal physical description of things socially concealed. It was originally merely verbal; it had not, primarily, any dream of purifying the topic or the moral tone. Dickens and Thackeray claimed very properly the right to deal with shameful passions and suggest their shameful culminations; Scott sometimes dealt with ideas positively horrible — as in that grand Glenallan tragedy which is as appalling as the *Œdipus* or *The Cenci*. None of these great men would have tolerated for a moment being talked to (as the muddle-headed amateur censors talk to artists to-day) about “wholesome” topics and suggestions “that cannot elevate.” They had to describe the great battle of good and evil and they described both; but they accepted a working Victorian compromise about what should happen behind the scenes and what on the stage. Dickens did not claim the license of diction Fielding might have claimed in repeating the senile ecstasies of Gride (let us say) over his purchased bride: but Dickens does not leave the reader in the faintest doubt about what sort of feelings they were; nor is there any reason why he should. Thackeray would not have described the toilet details of the secret balls of Lord Steyne: he left that to Lady Cardigan. But no one who had read Thackeray's version would be surprised at Lady Cardigan's. But though the great Victorian novelists would not have permitted the impudence of the suggestion that every part of their problem must be wholesome and innocent in itself, it is still tenable (I do not say it is certain) that by yielding to the Philistines on this verbal compromise, they have in the long run worked for impurity rather than purity. In one point I do certainly think that Victorian Bowdlerism did pure harm. This is the simple point that, nine times out of ten, the coarse word is the word that condemns an evil and the refined word the word that excuses it. A common evasion, for instance, substitutes for the word that brands self-sale as the essential sin, a word which weakly suggests that it is no more wicked than walking down the street. The great peril of such soft mystifications is that extreme evils (they that are abnormal even by the standard of evil) have a very long start. Where ordinary wrong is made unintelligible, extraordinary wrong can count on remaining more unintelligible still; especially among those who live in such an atmosphere of long words. It is a cruel comment on the purity of the Victorian Age, that the age ended (save for the bursting of a single scandal) in a thing being everywhere called "Art," "The Greek Spirit," "The Platonic Ideal" and so on — which any navvy mending the road outside would have stamped with a word as vile and as vulgar as it deserved.

This reticence, right or wrong, may have been connected with the participation of women with men in the matter of fiction. It is an important point: the sexes can only be coarse separately. It was certainly also due, as I have already suggested, to the treaty between the rich *bourgeoisie* and the old aristocracy, which both had to make, for the common and congenial purpose of keeping the English people down. But it was due much more than this to a general moral atmosphere in the Victorian Age. It is impossible to express that spirit except by the electric bell of a name. It was latitudinarian, and yet it was limited. It could be content with nothing less than the whole cosmos: yet the cosmos with which it was content was small. It is false to say it was without humour: yet there was something by instinct unsmiling in it. It was always saying solidly that things were "enough"; and proving by that sharpness (as of the shutting of a door) that they were not enough. It took, I will not say its pleasures, but even its emancipations, sadly. Definitions seem to escape this way and that in the attempt to locate it as an idea. But every one will understand me if I call it George Eliot.

I begin with this great woman of letters for both the two reasons already mentioned. She represents the rationalism of the old Victorian Age at its highest. She and Mill are like two great mountains at the end of that long, hard chain which is the watershed of the Early Victorian time. They alone rise high enough to be confused among the clouds — or perhaps confused among the stars. They certainly were seeking truth, as Newman and Carlyle were; the slow slope of the later Victorian vulgarity does not lower their precipice and pinnacle. But I begin with this name also because it emphasises the idea of modern fiction as a fresh and largely a female thing. The novel of the nineteenth century was female; as fully as the novel of the eighteenth century was male. It is quite certain that no woman could have written *Roderick Random*. It is not quite so certain that no woman could have written *Esmond*. The strength and subtlety of woman had certainly sunk deep into English letters when George Eliot began to write.

Her originals and even her contemporaries had shown the feminine power in fiction as well or better than she. Charlotte Brontë, understood along her own instincts, was as great; Jane Austen was greater. The latter comes into our present consideration only as that most exasperating thing, an ideal unachieved. It is like leaving an unconquered fortress in the rear. No woman later has captured the complete common sense of Jane Austen. She could keep her head, while all the after women went about looking for their brains. She could describe a man coolly; which neither George Eliot nor Charlotte Brontë could do. She knew what she knew, like a sound dogmatist: she did not know what she did not know — like a sound agnostic. But she belongs to a vanished world before the great progressive age of which I write.

One of the characteristics of the central Victorian spirit was a tendency to substitute a certain more or less satisfied seriousness for the extremes of tragedy and comedy. This is marked by a certain change in George Eliot; as it is marked by a certain limitation or moderation in Dickens. Dickens was the People, as it was in the eighteenth century and still largely is, in spite of all the talk for and against Board School Education: comic, tragic, realistic, free-spoken, far looser in words than in deeds. It marks the silent strength and pressure of the spirit of the Victorian middle class that even to Dickens it never occurred to revive the verbal coarseness of Smollett or Swift. The other proof of the same pressure is the change in George Eliot. She was not a genius in the elemental sense of Dickens; she could never have been either so strong or so soft. But she did originally represent some of the same popular realities: and her first books (at least as compared with her latest) were full of sound fun and bitter pathos. Mr. Max Beerbohm has remarked (in his glorious essay called *Ichabod*, I think), that Silas Marner would not have forgotten his miserliness if George Eliot had written of him in her maturity. I have a great regard for Mr. Beerbohm's literary judgments; and it may be so. But if literature means anything more than a cold calculation of the chances, if there is in it, as I believe, any deeper idea of detaching the spirit of life from the dull obstacles of life, of permitting human nature really to reveal itself as human, if (to put it shortly) literature has anything on earth to do with being *interesting* — then I think we would rather have a few more Marners than that rich maturity that gave us the analysed dust-heaps of *Daniel Deronda*.

In her best novels there is real humour, of a cool sparkling sort; there is a strong sense of substantial character that has not yet degenerated into psychology; there is a great deal of wisdom, chiefly about women; indeed there is almost every element of literature except a certain indescribable thing called *glamour*; which was the whole stock-in-trade of the Brontës, which we feel in Dickens when Quilp clambers amid rotten wood by the desolate river; and even in Thackeray when Esmond with his melancholy eyes wanders like some swarthy crow about the dismal avenues of Castlewood. Of this quality (which some have called, but hastily, the essential of literature) George Eliot had not little but nothing. Her air is bright and intellectually even exciting; but it is like the air of a cloudless day on the parade at Brighton. She sees people clearly, but not through an atmosphere. And she can conjure up storms in the conscious, but not in the subconscious mind.

It is true (though the idea should not be exaggerated) that this deficiency was largely due to her being cut off from all those conceptions that had made the fiction of a Muse; the deep idea that there are really demons and angels behind men. Certainly the increasing atheism of her school spoilt her own particular imaginative talent: she was far less free when she thought like Ladislaw than when she thought like Casaubon. It also betrayed her on a matter specially requiring common sense; I mean sex. There is nothing that is so profoundly false as rationalist flirtation. Each sex is trying to be both sexes at once; and the result is a confusion more untruthful than any conventions. This can easily be seen by comparing her with a greater woman who died before the beginning of our present problem. Jane Austen was born before those bonds which (we are told) protected woman from truth, were burst by the Brontës or elaborately untied by George Eliot. Yet the fact remains that Jane Austen knew much more about men than either of them. Jane Austen may have been protected from truth: but it was precious little of truth that was protected from her. When Darcy, in finally confessing his faults, says, "I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice *though not in theory,*" he gets nearer to a complete confession of the intelligent male than ever was even hinted by the Byronic lapses of the Brontës' heroes or the elaborate exculpations of George Eliot's. Jane Austen, of course, covered an infinitely smaller field than any of her later rivals; but I have always believed in the victory of small nationalities.

The Brontës suggest themselves here; because their superficial qualities, the qualities that can be seized upon in satire, were in this an exaggeration of what was, in George Eliot, hardly more than an omission. There was perhaps a time when Mr. Rawjester was more widely known than Mr. Rochester. And certainly Mr. Rochester (to adopt the diction of that other eminent country gentleman, Mr. Darcy) was simply individualistic not only in practice, but in theory. Now any one may be so in practice: but a man who is simply individualistic in theory must merely be an ass. Undoubtedly the Brontës exposed themselves to some misunderstanding by thus perpetually making the masculine creature much more masculine than he wants to be. Thackeray (a man of strong though sleepy virility) asked in his exquisite plaintive way: "Why do our lady novelists make the men bully the women?" It is, I think, unquestionably true that the Brontës treated the male as an almost anarchic thing coming in from outside nature; much as people on this planet regard a comet. Even the really delicate and sustained comedy of Paul Emanuel is not quite free from this air of studying something alien. The reply may be made that the women in men's novels are equally fallacious. The reply is probably just.

What the Brontës really brought into fiction was exactly what Carlyle brought into history; the blast of the mysticism of the North. They were of Irish blood settled on the windy heights of Yorkshire; in that country where Catholicism lingered latest, but in a superstitious form; where modern industrialism came earliest and was more superstitious still. The strong winds and sterile places, the old tyranny of barons and the new and blacker tyranny of manufacturers, has made and left that country a land of barbarians. All Charlotte Brontë's earlier work is full of that sullen and unmanageable world; moss-troopers turned hurriedly into miners; the last of the old world forced into supporting the very first crudities of the new. In this way Charlotte Brontë represents the Victorian settlement in a special way. The Early Victorian Industrialism is to George Eliot and to Charlotte Brontë, rather as the Late Victorian Imperialism would have been to Mrs. Humphry Ward in the centre of the empire and to Miss Olive Schreiner at the edge of it. The real strength there is in characters like Robert Moore, when he is dealing with anything except women, is the romance of industry in its first advance: a romance that has not remained. On such fighting frontiers people always exaggerate the strong qualities the masculine sex does possess, and always add a great many strong qualities that it does not possess. That is, briefly, all the reason in the Brontës on this special subject: the rest is stark unreason. It can be most clearly seen in that sister of Charlotte Brontë's who has achieved the real feat of remaining as a great woman rather than a great writer. There is really, in a narrow but intense way, a tradition of Emily Brontë: as there is a tradition of St. Peter or Dr. Johnson. People talk as if they had known her, apart from her works. She must have been something more than an original person; perhaps an origin. But so far as her written works go she enters English letters only as an original person — and rather a narrow one. Her imagination was sometimes superhuman — always inhuman. *Wuthering Heights* might have been written by an eagle. She is the strongest instance of these strong imaginations that made the other sex a monster: for Heathcliffe fails as a man as catastrophically as he succeeds as a demon. I think Emily Brontë was further narrowed by the broadness of her religious views; but never, of course, so much as George Eliot.

In any case, it is Charlotte Brontë who enters Victorian literature. The shortest way of stating her strong contribution is, I think, this: that she reached the highest romance through the lowest realism. She did not set out with Amadis of Gaul in a forest or with Mr. Pickwick in a comic club. She set out with herself, with her own dingy clothes, and accidental ugliness, and flat, coarse, provincial household; and forcibly fused all such muddy materials into a spirited fairy-tale. If the first chapters on the home and school had not proved how heavy and hateful *sanity* can be, there would really be less point in the insanity of Mr. Rochester's wife — or the not much milder insanity of Mrs. Rochester's husband. She discovered the secret of hiding the sensational in the commonplace: and *Jane Eyre* remains the best of her books (better even than *Villette*) because while it is a human document written in blood, it is also one of the best blood-and-thunder detective stories in the world.

But while Emily Brontë was as unsociable as a storm at midnight, and while Charlotte Brontë was at best like that warmer and more domestic thing, a house on fire — they do connect themselves with the calm of George Eliot, as the forerunners of many later developments of the feminine advance. Many forerunners (if it comes to that) would have felt rather ill if they had seen the things they foreran. This notion of a hazy anticipation of after history has been absurdly overdone: as when men connect Chaucer with the Reformation; which is like connecting Homer with the Syracusan Expedition. But it is to some extent true that all these great Victorian women had a sort of unrest in their souls. And the proof of it is that (after what I will claim to call the healthier time of Dickens and Thackeray) it began to be admitted by the great Victorian men. If there had not been something in that irritation, we should hardly have had to speak in these pages of *Diana of the Crossways* or of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. To what this strange and very local sex war has been due I shall not ask, because I have no answer. That it was due to votes or even little legal inequalities about marriage, I feel myself here too close to realities even to discuss. My own guess is that it has been due to the great neglect of the military spirit by the male Victorians. The woman felt obscurely that she was still running her mortal risk, while the man was not still running his. But I know nothing about it; nor does anybody else.

In so short a book on so vast, complex and living a subject, it is impossible to drop even into the second rank of good authors, whose name is legion; but it is impossible to leave that considerable female force in fiction which has so largely made the very nature of the modern novel, without mentioning two names which almost brought that second rank up to the first rank. They were at utterly opposite poles. The one succeeded by being a much mellower and more Christian George Eliot; the other succeeded by being a much more mad and unchristian Emily Brontë. But Mrs. Oliphant and the author calling herself "Ouida" both forced themselves well within the frontier of fine literature. *The Beleaguered City* is literature in its highest sense; the other works of its author tend to fall into fiction in its best working sense. Mrs. Oliphant was infinitely saner in that city of ghosts than the cosmopolitan Ouida ever was in any of the cities of men. Mrs. Oliphant would never have dared to discover, either in heaven or hell, such a thing as a hairbrush with its back encrusted with diamonds. But though Ouida was violent and weak where Mrs. Oliphant might have been mild and strong, her own triumphs were her own. She had a real power of expressing the senses through her style; of conveying the very heat of blue skies or the bursting of palpable pomegranates. And just as Mrs. Oliphant transfused her more timid Victorian tales with a true and intense faith in the Christian mystery — so Ouida, with infinite fury and infinite confusion of thought, did fill her books with Byron and the remains of the French Revolution. In the track of such genius there has been quite an accumulation of true talent as in the children's tales of Mrs. Ewing, the historical tales of Miss Yonge, the tales of Mrs. Molesworth, and so on. On a general review I do not think I have been wrong in taking the female novelists first. I think they gave its special shape, its temporary twist, to the Victorian novel.

Nevertheless it is a shock (I almost dare to call it a relief) to come back to the males. It is the more abrupt because the first name that must be mentioned derives directly from the mere maleness of the Sterne and Smollett novel. I have already spoken of Dickens as the most homely and instinctive, and therefore probably the heaviest, of all the onslaughts made on the central Victorian satisfaction. There is therefore the less to say of him here, where we consider him only as a novelist; but there is still much more to say than can even conceivably be said. Dickens, as we have stated, inherited the old comic, rambling novel from Smollett and the rest. Dickens, as we have also stated, consented to expurgate that novel. But when all origins and all restraints have been defined and allowed for, the creature that came out was such as we shall not see again. Smollett was coarse; but Smollett was also cruel. Dickens was frequently horrible; he was never cruel. The art of Dickens was the most exquisite of arts: it was the art of enjoying everybody. Dickens, being a very human writer, had to be a very human being; he had his faults and sensibilities in a strong degree; and I do not for a moment maintain that he enjoyed everybody in his daily life. But he enjoyed everybody in his books: and everybody has enjoyed everybody in those books even till to-day. His books are full of baffled villains stalking out or cowardly bullies kicked downstairs. But the villains and the cowards are such delightful people that the reader always hopes the villain will put his head through a side window and make a last remark; or that the bully will say one thing more, even from the bottom of the stairs. The reader really hopes this; and he cannot get rid of the fancy that the author hopes so too. I cannot at the moment recall that Dickens ever killed a comic villain, except Quilp, who was deliberately made even more villainous than comic. There can be no serious fears for the life of Mr. Wegg in the muckcart; though Mr. Pecksniff fell to be a borrower of money, and Mr. Mantalini to turning a mangle, the human race has the comfort of thinking they are still alive: and one might have the rapture of receiving a begging letter from Mr. Pecksniff, or even of catching Mr. Mantalini collecting the washing, if one always lurked about on Monday mornings. This sentiment (the true artist will be relieved to hear) is entirely unmoral. Mrs. Wilfer deserved death much more than Mr. Quilp, for she had succeeded in poisoning family life persistently, while he was (to say the least of it) intermittent in his domesticity. But who can honestly say he does not hope Mrs. Wilfer is still talking like Mrs. Wilfer — especially if it is only in a book? This is the artistic greatness of Dickens, before and after which there is really nothing to be said. He had the power of creating people, both possible and impossible, who were simply precious and priceless people; and anything subtler added to that truth really only weakens it.

The mention of Mrs. Wilfer (whom the heart is loth to leave) reminds one of the only elementary ethical truth that is essential in the study of Dickens. That is that he had broad or universal sympathies in a sense totally unknown to the social reformers who wallow in such phrases. Dickens (unlike the social reformers) really did sympathise with every sort of victim of every sort of tyrant. He did truly pray for *all* who are desolate and oppressed. If you try to tie him to any cause narrower than that Prayer Book definition, you will find you have shut out half his best work. If, in your sympathy for Mrs. Quilp, you call Dickens the champion of downtrodden woman, you will suddenly remember Mr. Wilfer, and find yourself unable to deny the existence of downtrodden man. If in your sympathy for Mr. Rouncewell you call Dickens the champion of a manly middle-class Liberalism against Chesney Wold, you will suddenly remember Stephen Blackpool — and find yourself unable to deny that Mr. Rouncewell might be a pretty insupportable cock on his own dung-hill. If in your sympathy for Stephen Blackpool you call Dickens a Socialist (as does Mr. Pugh), and think of him as merely heralding the great Collectivist revolt against Victorian Individualism and Capitalism, which seemed so clearly to be the crisis at the end of this epoch — you will suddenly remember the agreeable young Barnacle at the Circumlocution Office: and you will be unable, for very shame, to assert that Dickens would have trusted the poor to a State Department. Dickens did not merely believe in the brotherhood of men in the weak modern way; he was the brotherhood of men, and knew it was a brotherhood in sin as well as in aspiration. And he was not only larger than the old factions he satirised; he was larger than any of our great social schools that have gone forward since he died.

The seemingly quaint custom of comparing Dickens and Thackeray existed in their own time, and no one will dismiss it with entire disdain who remembers that the Victorian tradition was domestic and genuine, even when it was hoodwinked and unworldly. There must have been some reason for making this imaginary duel between two quite separate and quite amiable acquaintances. And there is, after all, some reason for it. It is not, as was once cheaply said, that Thackeray went in for truth, and Dickens for mere caricature. There is a huge accumulation of truth, down to the smallest detail, in Dickens: he seems sometimes a mere mountain of facts. Thackeray, in comparison, often seems quite careless and elusive; almost as if he did not quite know where all his characters were. There is a truth behind the popular distinction; but it lies much deeper. Perhaps the best way of stating it is this: that Dickens used reality, while aiming at an effect of romance; while Thackeray used the loose language and ordinary approaches of romance, while aiming at an effect of reality. It was the special and splendid business of Dickens to introduce us to people who would have been quite incredible if he had not told us so much truth about them. It was the special and not less splendid task of Thackeray to introduce us to people whom we knew already. Paradoxically, but very practically, it followed that his introductions were the longer of the two. When we hear of Aunt Betsy Trotwood, we vividly envisage everything about her, from her gardening gloves to her seaside residence, from her hard, handsome face to her tame lunatic laughing at the bedroom window. It is all so minutely true that she must be true also. We only feel inclined to walk round the English coast until we find that particular garden and that particular aunt. But when we turn from the aunt of Copperfield to the uncle of Pendennis, we are more likely to run round the coast trying to find a watering-place where he isn't than one where he is. The moment one sees Major Pendennis, one sees a hundred Major Pendennises. It is not a matter of mere realism. Miss Trotwood's bonnet and gardening tools and cupboard full of old-fashioned bottles are quite as true in the materialistic way as the Major's cuffs and corner table and toast and newspaper. Both writers are realistic: but Dickens writes realism in order to make the incredible credible. Thackeray writes it in order to make us recognise an old friend. Whether we shall be pleased to meet the old friend is quite another matter: I think we should be better pleased to meet Miss Trotwood, and find, as David Copperfield did, a new friend, a new world. But we recognise Major Pendennis even when we avoid him. Henceforth Thackeray can count on our seeing him from his wig to his well-blacked boots whenever he chooses to say "Major Pendennis paid a call." Dickens, on the other hand, had to keep up an incessant excitement about his characters; and no man on earth but he could have kept it up.

It may be said, in approximate summary, that Thackeray is the novelist of memory — of our memories as well as his own. Dickens seems to expect all his characters, like amusing strangers arriving at lunch: as if they gave him not only pleasure, but surprise. But Thackeray is everybody's past — is everybody's youth. Forgotten friends flit about the passages of dreamy colleges and unremembered clubs; we hear fragments of unfinished conversations, we see faces without names for an instant, fixed for ever in some trivial grimace: we smell the strong smell of social cliques now quite incongruous to us; and there stir in all the little rooms at once the hundred ghosts of oneself.

For this purpose Thackeray was equipped with a singularly easy and sympathetic style, carved in slow soft curves where Dickens hacked out his images with a hatchet. There was a sort of avuncular indulgence about his attitude; what he called his "preaching" was at worst a sort of grumbling, ending with the sentiment that boys will be boys and that there's nothing new under the sun. He was not really either a cynic or a *censor morum*; but (in another sense than Chaucer's) a gentle pardoner: having seen the weaknesses he is sometimes almost weak about them. He really comes nearer to exculpating Pendennis or Ethel Newcome than any other author, who saw what he saw, would have been. The rare wrath of such men is all the more effective; and there are passages in *Vanity Fair* and still more in *The Book of Snobs*, where he does make the dance of wealth and fashion look stiff and monstrous, like a Babylonian masquerade. But he never quite did it in such a way as to turn the course of the Victorian Age.

It may seem strange to say that Thackeray did not know enough of the world; yet this was the truth about him in large matters of the philosophy of life, and especially of his own time. He did not know the way things were going: he was too Victorian to understand the Victorian epoch. He did not know enough ignorant people to have heard the news. In one of his delightful asides he imagines two little clerks commenting erroneously on the appearance of Lady Kew or Sir Brian Newcome in the Park, and says: "How should Jones and Brown, who are not, *vous comprenez*, *du monde*, understand these mysteries?" But I think Thackeray knew quite as little about Jones and Brown as they knew about Newcome and Kew; his world was *le monde*. Hence he seemed to take it for granted that the Victorian compromise would last; while Dickens (who knew his Jones and Brown) had already guessed that it would not. Thackeray did not realise that the Victorian platform was a moving platform. To take but one instance, he was a Radical like Dickens; all really representative Victorians, except perhaps Tennyson, were Radicals. But he seems to have thought of all reform as simple and straightforward and all of a piece; as if Catholic Emancipation, the New Poor Law, Free Trade and the Factory Acts and Popular Education were all parts of one almost self-evident evolution of enlightenment. Dickens, being in touch with the democracy, had already discovered that the country had come to a dark place of divided ways and divided counsels. In *Hard Times* he realised Democracy at war with Radicalism; and became, with so incompatible an ally as Ruskin, not indeed a Socialist, but certainly an anti-Individualist. In *Our Mutual Friend* he felt the strength of the new rich, and knew they had begun to transform the aristocracy, instead of the aristocracy transforming them. He knew that Veneering had carried off Twemlow in triumph. He very nearly knew what we all know to-day: that, so far from it being possible to plod along the progressive road with more votes and more Free Trade, England must either sharply become very much more democratic or as rapidly become very much less so.

There gathers round these two great novelists a considerable group of good novelists, who more or less mirror their mid-Victorian mood. Wilkie Collins may be said to be in this way a lesser Dickens and Anthony Trollope a lesser Thackeray. Wilkie Collins is chiefly typical of his time in this respect: that while his moral and religious conceptions were as mechanical as his carefully constructed fictitious conspiracies, he nevertheless informed the latter with a sort of involuntary mysticism which dealt wholly with the darker side of the soul. For this was one of the most peculiar of the problems of the Victorian mind. The idea of the supernatural was perhaps at as low an ebb as it had ever been — certainly much lower than it is now. But in spite of this, and in spite of a certain ethical cheeriness that was almost *de rigueur* — the strange fact remains that the only sort of supernaturalism the Victorians allowed to their imaginations was a sad supernaturalism. They might have ghost stories, but not saints' stories. They could trifle with the curse or unpardoning prophecy of a witch, but not with the pardon of a priest. They seem to have held (I believe erroneously) that the supernatural was safest when it came from below. When we think (for example) of the uncountable riches of religious art, imagery, ritual and popular legend that has clustered round Christmas through all the Christian ages, it is a truly extraordinary thing to reflect that Dickens (wishing to have in *The Christmas Carol* a little happy supernaturalism by way of a change) actually had to make up a mythology for himself. Here was one of the rare cases where Dickens, in a real and human sense, did suffer from the lack of culture. For the rest, Wilkie Collins is these two elements: the mechanical and the mystical; both very good of their kind. He is one of the few novelists in whose case it is proper and literal to speak of his "plots." He was a plotter; he went about to slay Godfrey Ablewhite as coldly and craftily as the Indians did. But he also had a sound though sinister note of true magic; as in the repetition of the two white dresses in *The Woman in White*; or of the dreams with their double explanations in *Armadale*. His ghosts do walk. They are alive; and walk as softly as Count Fosco, but as solidly. Finally, *The Moonstone* is probably the best detective tale in the world.

Anthony Trollope, a clear and very capable realist, represents rather another side of the Victorian spirit of comfort; its leisureliness, its love of detail, especially of domestic detail; its love of following characters and kindred from book to book and from generation to generation. Dickens very seldom tried this latter experiment, and then (as in *Master Humphrey's Clock*) unsuccessfully; those magnesium blazes of his were too brilliant and glaring to be indefinitely prolonged. But Thackeray was full of it; and we often feel that the characters in *The Newcomes* or *Philip* might legitimately complain that their talk and tale are being perpetually interrupted and pestered by people out of other books. Within his narrower limits, Trollope was a more strict and masterly realist than Thackeray, and even those who would call his personages "types" would admit that they are as vivid as characters. It was a bustling but a quiet world that he described: politics before the coming of the Irish and the Socialists; the Church in the lull between the Oxford Movement and the modern High Anglican energy. And it is notable in the Victorian spirit once more that though his clergymen are all of them real men and many of them good men, it never really occurs to us to think of them as the priests of a religion.

Charles Reade may be said to go along with these; and Disraeli and even Kingsley; not because these three very different persons had anything particular in common, but because they all fell short of the first rank in about the same degree. Charles Reade had a kind of cold coarseness about him, not morally but artistically, which keeps him out of the best literature as such: but he is of importance to the Victorian development in another way; because he has the harsher and more tragic note that has come later in the study of our social problems. He is the first of the angry realists. Kingsley's best books may be called boys' books. There is a real though a juvenile poetry in *Westward Ho!* and though that narrative, historically considered, is very much of a lie, it is a good, thundering honest lie. There are also genuinely eloquent things in *Hypatia*, and a certain electric atmosphere of sectarian excitement that Kingsley kept himself in, and did know how to convey. He said he wrote the book in his heart's blood. This is an exaggeration, but there is a truth in it; and one does feel that he may have relieved his feelings by writing it in red ink. As for Disraeli, his novels are able and interesting considered as everything except novels, and are an important contribution precisely because they are written by an alien who did not take our politics so seriously as Trollope did. They are important again as showing those later Victorian changes which men like Thackeray missed. Disraeli did do something towards revealing the dishonesty of our politics — even if he had done a good deal towards bringing it about.

Between this group and the next there hovers a figure very hard to place; not higher in letters than these, yet not easy to class with them; I mean Bulwer Lytton. He was no greater than they were; yet somehow he seems to take up more space. He did not, in the ultimate reckoning, do anything in particular: but he was a figure; rather as Oscar Wilde was later a figure. You could not have the Victorian Age without him. And this was not due to wholly superficial things like his dandyism, his dark, sinister good looks and a great deal of the mere polished melodrama that he wrote. There was something in his all-round interests; in the variety of things he tried; in his half-aristocratic swagger as poet and politician, that made him in some ways a real touchstone of the time. It is noticeable about him that he is always turning up everywhere and that he brings other people out, generally in a hostile spirit. His Byronic and almost Oriental ostentation was used by the young Thackeray as something on which to sharpen his new razor of Victorian common sense. His pose as a dilettante satirist inflamed the execrable temper of Tennyson, and led to those lively comparisons to a bandbox and a lion in curlpapers. He interposed the glove of warning and the tear of sensibility between us and the proper ending of *Great Expectations*. Of his own books, by far the best are the really charming comedies about *The Caxtons* and *Kenelm Chillingly*; none of his other works have a high literary importance now, with the possible exception of *A Strange Story*; but his *Coming Race* is historically interesting as foreshadowing those novels of the future which were afterwards such a weapon of the Socialists. Lastly, there was an element indefinable about Lytton, which often is in adventurers; which amounts to a suspicion that there was something in him after all. It rang out of him when he said to the hesitating Crimean Parliament: “Destroy your Government and save your army.”

With the next phase of Victorian fiction we enter a new world; the later, more revolutionary, more continental, freer but in some ways weaker world in which we live to-day. The subtle and sad change that was passing like twilight across the English brain at this time is very well expressed in the fact that men have come to mention the great name of Meredith in the same breath as Mr. Thomas Hardy. Both writers, doubtless, disagreed with the orthodox religion of the ordinary English village. Most of us have disagreed with that religion until we made the simple discovery that it does not exist. But in any age where ideas could be even feebly disentangled from each other, it would have been evident at once that Meredith and Hardy were, intellectually speaking, mortal enemies. They were much more opposed to each other than Newman was to Kingsley; or than Abelard was to St. Bernard. But then they collided in a sceptical age, which is like colliding in a London fog. There can never be any clear controversy in a sceptical age.

Nevertheless both Hardy and Meredith did mean something; and they did mean diametrically opposite things. Meredith was perhaps the only man in the modern world who has almost had the high honour of rising out of the low estate of a Pantheist into the high estate of a Pagan. A Pagan is a person who can do what hardly any person for the last two thousand years could do: a person who can take Nature naturally. It is due to Meredith to say that no one outside a few of the great Greeks has ever taken Nature so naturally as he did. And it is also due to him to say that no one outside Colney Hatch ever took Nature so unnaturally as it was taken in what Mr. Hardy has had the blasphemy to call Wessex Tales. This division between the two points of view is vital; because the turn of the nineteenth century was a very sharp one; by it we have reached the rapids in which we find ourselves to-day.

Meredith really is a Pantheist. You can express it by saying that God is the great All: you can express it much more intelligently by saying that Pan is the great god. But there is some sense in it, and the sense is this: that some people believe that this world is sufficiently good at bottom for us to trust ourselves to it without very much knowing why. It is the whole point in most of Meredith’s tales that there is something behind us that often saves us when we understand neither it nor ourselves. He sometimes talked mere intellectualism about women: but that is because the most brilliant brains can get tired. Meredith’s brain was quite tired when it wrote some of its most quoted and least interesting epigrams: like that about passing Seraglio Point, but not doubling Cape Turk. Those who can see Meredith’s mind in that are with those who can see Dickens’ mind in Little Nell. Both were chivalrous pronouncements on behalf of oppressed females: neither has any earthly meaning as ideas.

But what Meredith did do for women was not to emancipate them (which means nothing) but to express them, which means a great deal. And he often expressed them right, even when he expressed himself wrong.

Take, for instance, that phrase so often quoted: “Woman will be the last thing civilised by man.” Intellectually it is something worse than false; it is the opposite of what he was always attempting to say. So far from admitting any equality in the sexes, it logically admits that a man may use against a woman any chains or whips he has been in the habit of using against a tiger or a bear. He stood as the special champion of female dignity: but I cannot remember any author, Eastern or Western, who has so calmly assumed that man is the master and woman merely the material, as Meredith really does in this phrase. Any one who knows a free woman (she is generally a married woman) will immediately be inclined to ask two simple and catastrophic questions, first: “Why should woman be civilised?” and, second: “Why, if she is to be civilised, should she be civilised by man?” In the mere intellectualism of the matter, Meredith seems to be talking the most brutal sex mastery: he, at any rate, has not doubled Cape Turk, nor even passed Seraglio Point. Now why is it that we all really feel that this Meredithian passage is not so insolently masculine as in mere logic it would seem? I think it is for this simple reason: that there is something about Meredith making us feel that it is not woman he disbelieves in, but civilisation. It is a dark undemonstrated feeling that Meredith would really be rather sorry if woman were civilised by man — or by anything else. When we have got that, we have got the real Pagan — the man that does believe in Pan.

It is proper to put this philosophic matter first, before the æsthetic appreciation of Meredith, because with Meredith a sort of passing bell has rung and the Victorian orthodoxy is certainly no longer safe. Dickens and Carlyle, as we have said, rebelled against the orthodox compromise: but Meredith has escaped from it. Cosmopolitanism, Socialism, Feminism are already in the air; and Queen Victoria has begun to look like Mrs. Grundy. But to escape from a city is one thing: to choose a road is another. The free-thinker who found himself outside the Victorian city, found himself also in the fork of two very different naturalistic paths. One of them went upwards through a tangled but living forest to lonely but healthy hills: the other went down to a swamp. Hardy went down to botanise in the swamp, while Meredith climbed towards the sun. Meredith became, at his best, a sort of daintily dressed Walt Whitman: Hardy became a sort of village atheist brooding and blaspheming over the village idiot. It is largely because the free-thinkers, as a school, have hardly made up their minds whether they want to be more optimist or more pessimist than Christianity that their small but sincere movement has failed.

For the duel is deadly; and any agnostic who wishes to be anything more than a Nihilist must sympathise with one version of nature or the other. The God of Meredith is impersonal; but he is often more healthy and kindly than any of the persons. That of Thomas Hardy is almost made personal by the intense feeling that he is poisonous. Nature is always coming in to save Meredith's women; Nature is always coming in to betray and ruin Hardy's. It has been said that if God had not existed it would have been necessary to invent Him. But it is not often, as in Mr. Hardy's case, that it is necessary to invent Him in order to prove how unnecessary (and undesirable) He is. But Mr. Hardy is anthropomorphic out of sheer atheism. He personifies the universe in order to give it a piece of his mind. But the fight is unequal for the old philosophical reason: that the universe had already given Mr. Hardy a piece of *its* mind to fight with. One curious result of this divergence in the two types of sceptic is this: that when these two brilliant novelists break down or blow up or otherwise lose for a moment their artistic self-command, they are both equally wild, but wild in opposite directions. Meredith shows an extravagance in comedy which, if it were not so complicated, every one would call broad farce. But Mr. Hardy has the honour of inventing a new sort of game, which may be called the extravagance of depression. The placing of the weak lover and his new love in such a place that they actually see the black flag announcing that Tess has been hanged is utterly inexcusable in art and probability; it is a cruel practical joke. But it is a practical joke at which even its author cannot brighten up enough to laugh.

But it is when we consider the great artistic power of these two writers, with all their eccentricities, that we see even more clearly that free-thought was, as it were, a fight between finger-posts. For it is the remarkable fact that it was the man who had the healthy and manly outlook who had the crabbed and perverse style; it was the man who had the crabbed and perverse outlook who had the healthy and manly style. The reader may well have complained of paradox when I observed above that Meredith, unlike most neo-Pagans, did in his way take Nature naturally. It may be suggested, in tones of some remonstrance, that things like "though pierced by the cruel acerb," or "thy fleetingness is bigger in the ghost," or "her gabbling grey she eyes askant," or "sheer film of the surface awag" are not taking Nature naturally. And this is true of Meredith's style, but it is not true of his spirit; nor even, apparently, of his serious opinions. In one of the poems I have quoted he actually says of those who live nearest to that Nature he was always praising —

"Have they but held her laws and nature dear, They mouth no sentence of inverted wit";

which certainly was what Meredith himself was doing most of the time. But a similar paradox of the combination of plain tastes with twisted phrases can also be seen in Browning. Something of the same can be seen in many of the cavalier poets. I do not understand it: it may be that the fertility of a cheerful mind crowds everything, so that the tree is entangled in its own branches; or it may be that the cheerful mind cares less whether it is understood or not; as a man is less articulate when he is humming than when he is calling for help.

Certainly Meredith suffers from applying a complex method to men and things he does not mean to be complex; nay, honestly admires for being simple. The conversations between Diana and Redworth fail of their full contrast because Meredith can afford the twopence for Diana coloured, but cannot afford the penny for Redworth plain. Meredith's ideals were neither sceptical nor finicky: but they can be called insufficient. He had, perhaps, over and above his honest Pantheism two convictions profound enough to be called prejudices. He was probably of Welsh blood, certainly of Celtic sympathies, and he set himself more swiftly though more subtly than Ruskin or Swinburne to undermining the enormous complacency of John Bull. He also had a sincere hope in the strength of womanhood, and may be said, almost without hyperbole, to have begotten gigantic daughters. He may yet suffer for his chivalric interference as many champions do. I have little doubt that when St. George had killed the dragon he was heartily afraid of the princess. But certainly neither of these two vital enthusiasms touched the Victorian trouble. The disaster of the modern English is not that they are not Celtic, but that they are not English. The tragedy of the modern woman is not that she is not allowed to follow man, but that she follows him far too slavishly. This conscious and theorising Meredith did not get very near his problem and is certainly miles away from ours. But the other Meredith was a creator; which means a god. That is true of him which is true of so different a man as Dickens, that all one can say of him is that he is full of good things. A reader opening one of his books feels like a schoolboy opening a hamper which he knows to have somehow cost a hundred pounds. He may be more bewildered by it than by an ordinary hamper; but he gets the impression of a real richness of thought; and that is what one really gets from such riots of felicity as *Evan Harrington* or *Harry Richmond*. His philosophy may be barren, but he was not. And the chief feeling among those that enjoy him is a mere wish that more people could enjoy him too.

I end here upon Hardy and Meredith; because this parting of the ways to open optimism and open pessimism really was the end of the Victorian peace. There are many other men, very nearly as great, on whom I might delight to linger: on Shorthouse, for instance, who in one way goes with Mrs. Browning or Coventry Patmore. I mean that he has a wide culture, which is called by some a narrow religion. When we think what even the best novels about cavaliers have been (written by men like Scott or Stevenson) it is a wonderful thing that the author of *John Inglesant* could write a cavalier romance in which he forgot Cromwell but remembered Hobbes. But Shorthouse is outside the period in fiction in the same sort of way in which Francis Thompson is outside it in poetry. He did not accept the Victorian basis. He knew too much.

There is one more matter that may best be considered here, though briefly: it illustrates the extreme difficulty of dealing with the Victorian English in a book like this, because of their eccentricity; not of opinions, but of character and artistic form. There are several great Victorians who will not fit into any of the obvious categories I employ; because they will not fit into anything, hardly into the world itself. Where Germany or Italy would relieve the monotony of mankind by paying serious respect to an artist, or a scholar, or a patriotic warrior, or a priest — it was always the instinct of the English to do it by pointing out a Character. Dr. Johnson has faded as a poet or a critic, but he survives as a Character. Cobbett is neglected (unfortunately) as a publicist and pamphleteer, but he is remembered as a Character. Now these people continued to crop up through the Victorian time; and each stands so much by himself that I shall end these pages with a profound suspicion that I have forgotten to mention a Character of gigantic dimensions. Perhaps the best example of such eccentrics is George Borrow; who sympathised with unsuccessful nomads like the gipsies while every one else sympathised with successful nomads like the Jews; who had a genius like the west wind for the awakening of wild and casual friendships and the drag and attraction of the roads. But whether George Borrow ought to go into the section devoted to philosophers, or the section devoted to novelists, or the section de voted to liars, nobody else has ever known, even if he did.

But the strongest case of this Victorian power of being abruptly original in a corner can be found in two things: the literature meant merely for children and the literature meant merely for fun. It is true that these two very Victorian things often melted into each other (as was the way of Victorian things), but not sufficiently to make it safe to mass them together without distinction. Thus there was George Macdonald, a Scot of genius as genuine as Carlyle's; he could write fairy-tales that made all experience a fairy-tale. He could give the real sense that every one had the end of an elfin thread that must at last lead them into Paradise. It was a sort of optimist Calvinism. But such really significant fairy-tales were accidents of genius. Of the Victorian Age as a whole it is true to say that it did discover a new thing; a thing called Nonsense. It may be doubted whether this thing was really invented to please children. Rather it was invented by old people trying to prove their first childhood, and sometimes succeeding only in proving their second. But whatever else the thing was, it was English and it was individual. Lewis Carroll gave mathematics a holiday: he carried logic into the wild lands of illogicality. Edward Lear, a richer, more romantic and therefore more truly Victorian buffoon, improved the experiment. But the more we study it, the more we shall, I think, conclude that it reposed on something more real and profound in the Victorians than even their just and exquisite appreciation of children. It came from the deep Victorian sense of humour.

It may appear, because I have used from time to time the only possible phrases for the case, that I mean the Victorian Englishman to appear as a blockhead, which means an unconscious buffoon. To all this there is a final answer: that he was also a conscious buffoon — and a successful one. He was a humorist; and one of the best humorists in Europe. That which Goethe had never taught the Germans, Byron did manage to teach the English — the duty of not taking him seriously. The strong and shrewd Victorian humour appears in every slash of the pencil of Charles Keene; in every undergraduate inspiration of Calverley or “Q.” or J. K. S. They had largely forgotten both art and arms: but the gods had left them laughter.

But the final proof that the Victorians were alive by this laughter, can be found in the fact they could manage and master for a moment even the cosmopolitan modern theatre. They could contrive to put “The Bab Ballads” on the stage. To turn a private name into a public epithet is a thing given to few: but the word “Gilbertian” will probably last longer than the name Gilbert.

It meant a real Victorian talent; that of exploding unexpectedly and almost, as it seemed, unintentionally. Gilbert made good jokes by the thousand; but he never (in his best days) made the joke that could possibly have been expected of him. This is the last essential of the Victorian. Laugh at him as a limited man, a moralist, conventionalist, an opportunist, a formalist. But remember also that he was really a humorist; and may still be laughing at you.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT VICTORIAN POETS

What was really unsatisfactory in Victorian literature is something much easier to feel than to state. It was not so much a superiority in the men of other ages to the Victorian men. It was a superiority of Victorian men to themselves. The individual was unequal. Perhaps that is why the society became unequal: I cannot say. They were lame giants; the strongest of them walked on one leg a little shorter than the other. A great man in any age must be a common man, and also an uncommon man. Those that are only uncommon men are perverts and sowers of pestilence. But somehow the great Victorian man was more and less than this. He was at once a giant and a dwarf. When he has been sweeping the sky in circles infinitely great, he suddenly shrivels into something indescribably small. There is a moment when Carlyle turns suddenly from a high creative mystic to a common Calvinist. There are moments when George Eliot turns from a prophetess into a governess. There are also moments when Ruskin turns into a governess, without even the excuse of sex. But in all these cases the alteration comes as a thing quite abrupt and unreasonable. We do not feel this acute angle anywhere in Homer or in Virgil or in Chaucer or in Shakespeare or in Dryden; such things as they knew they knew. It is no disgrace to Homer that he had not discovered Britain; or to Virgil that he had not discovered America; or to Chaucer that he had not discovered the solar system; or to Dryden that he had not discovered the steam-engine. But we do most frequently feel, with the Victorians, that the very vastness of the number of things they know illustrates the abrupt abyss of the things they do not know. We feel, in a sort of way, that it *is* a disgrace to a man like Carlyle when he asks the Irish why they do not bestir themselves and re-forest their country: saying not a word about the soaking up of every sort of profit by the landlords which made that and every other Irish improvement impossible. We feel that it *is* a disgrace to a man like Ruskin when he says, with a solemn visage, that building in iron is ugly and unreal, but that the weightiest objection is that there is no mention of it in the Bible; we feel as if he had just said he could find no hair-brushes in Habakkuk. We feel that it *is* a disgrace to a man like Thackeray when he proposes that people should be forcibly prevented from being nuns, merely because he has no fixed intention of becoming a nun himself. We feel that it *is* a disgrace to a man like Tennyson, when he talks of the French revolutions, the huge crusades that had recreated the whole of his civilisation, as being "no graver than a schoolboy's barring out." We feel that it *is* a disgrace to a man like Browning to make spluttering and spiteful puns about the names Newman, Wiseman, and Manning. We feel that it *is* a disgrace to a man like Newman when he confesses that for some time he felt as if he couldn't come in to the Catholic Church, because of that dreadful Mr. Daniel O'Connell, who had the vulgarity to fight for his own country. We feel that it *is* a disgrace to a man like Dickens, when he makes a blind brute and savage out of a man like St. Dunstan; it sounds as if it were not Dickens talking but Dombey. We feel it *is* a disgrace to a man like Swinburne, when he has a Jingo fit and calls the Boer children in the concentration camps "Whelps of treacherous dams whom none save we have spared to starve and slay": we feel that Swinburne, for the first time, really has become an immoral and indecent writer. All this is a certain odd provincialism peculiar to the English in that great century: they were in a kind of pocket; they appealed to too narrow a public opinion; I am certain that no French or German men of the same genius made such remarks. Renan was the enemy of the Catholic Church; but who can imagine Renan writing of it as Kingsley or Dickens did? Taine was the enemy of the French Revolution; but who can imagine Taine talking about it as Tennyson or Newman talked? Even Matthew Arnold, though he saw this peril and prided himself on escaping it, did not altogether escape it. There must be (to use an Irishism) something shallow in the depths of any man who talks about the *Zeitgeist* as if it were a living thing.

But this defect is very specially the key to the case of the two great Victorian poets, Tennyson and Browning; the two spirited or beautiful tunes, so to speak, to which the other events marched or danced. It was especially so of Tennyson, for a reason which raises some of the most real problems about his poetry. Tennyson, of course, owed a great deal to Virgil. There is no question of plagiarism here; a debt to Virgil is like a debt to Nature. But Tennyson was a provincial Virgil. In such passages as that about the schoolboy's barring out he might be called a suburban Virgil. I mean that he tried to have the universal balance of all the ideas at which the great Roman had aimed: but he hadn't got hold of all the ideas to balance.

Hence his work was not a balance of truths, like the universe. It was a balance of whims; like the British Constitution. It is intensely typical of Tennyson's philosophical temper that he was almost the only Poet Laureate who was not ludicrous. It is not absurd to think of Tennyson as tuning his harp in praise of Queen Victoria: that is, it is not absurd in the same sense as Chaucer's harp hallowed by dedication to Richard II or Wordsworth's harp hallowed by dedication to George IV is absurd. Richard's court could not properly appreciate either Chaucer's daisies or his "devotion." George IV would not have gone pottering about Helvellyn in search of purity and the simple annals of the poor. But Tennyson did sincerely believe in the Victorian compromise; and sincerity is never undignified. He really did hold a great many of the same views as Queen Victoria, though he was gifted with a more fortunate literary style. If Dickens is Cobbett's democracy stirring in its grave, Tennyson is the exquisitely ornamental extinguisher on the flame of the first revolutionary poets. England has settled down; England has become Victorian. The compromise was interesting, it was national and for a long time it was successful: there is still a great deal to be said for it. But it was as freakish and unphilosophic, as arbitrary and untranslatable, as a beggar's patched coat or a child's secret language. Now it is here that Browning had a certain odd advantage over Tennyson; which has, perhaps, somewhat exaggerated his intellectual superiority to him. Browning's eccentric style was more suitable to the poetry of a nation of eccentrics; of people for the time being removed far from the centre of intellectual interests. The hearty and pleasant task of expressing one's intense dislike of something one doesn't understand is much more poetically achieved by saying, in a general way "Grrr — you swine!" than it is by laboured lines such as "the red fool-fury of the Seine." We all feel that there is more of the man in Browning here; more of Dr. Johnson or Cobbett. Browning is the Englishman taking himself wilfully, following his nose like a bull-dog, going by his own likes and dislikes. We cannot help feeling that Tennyson is the Englishman taking himself seriously — an awful sight. One's memory flutters unhappily over a certain letter about the Papal Guards written by Sir Willoughby Patterne. It is here chiefly that Tennyson suffers by that very Virgilian loveliness and dignity of diction which he put to the service of such a small and anomalous national scheme. Virgil had the best news to tell as well as the best words to tell it in. His world might be sad; but it was the largest world one could live in before the coming of Christianity. If he told the Romans to spare the vanquished and to war down the mighty, at least he was more or less well informed about who *were* mighty and who *were* vanquished. But when Tennyson wrote verses like —

“Of freedom in her regal seat, Of England; not the schoolboy heat, The blind hysterics of the Celt”

he quite literally did not know one word of what he was talking about; he did not know what Celts are, or what hysterics are, or what freedom was, or what regal was or even of what England was — in the living Europe of that time.

His religious range was very much wider and wiser than his political; but here also he suffered from treating as true universality a thing that was only a sort of lukewarm local patriotism. Here also he suffered by the very splendour and perfection of his poetical powers. He was quite the opposite of the man who cannot express himself; the inarticulate singer who dies with all his music in him. He had a great deal to say; but he had much more power of expression than was wanted for anything he had to express. He could not think up to the height of his own towering style.

For whatever else Tennyson was, he was a great poet; no mind that feels itself free, that is, above the ebb and flow of fashion, can feel anything but contempt for the later effort to discredit him in that respect. It is true that, like Browning and almost every other Victorian poet, he was really two poets. But it is just to him to insist that in his case (unlike Browning’s) both the poets were good. The first is more or less like Stevenson in metre; it is a magical luck or skill in the mere choice of words. “Wet sands marbled with moon and cloud”— “Flits by the sea-blue bird of March”— “Leafless ribs and iron horns”— “When the long dun wolds are ribbed with snow” — in all these cases one word is the keystone of an arch which would fall into ruin without it. But there are other strong phrases that recall not Stevenson but rather their common master, Virgil— “Tears from the depths of some divine despair”— “There is fallen a splendid tear from the passion-flower at the gate”— “Was a great water; and the moon was full”— “God made Himself an awful rose of dawn.” These do not depend on a word but on an idea: they might even be translated. It is also true, I think, that he was first and last a lyric poet. He was always best when he expressed himself shortly. In long poems he had an unfortunate habit of eventually saying very nearly the opposite of what he meant to say. I will take only two instances of what

I mean. In the *Idylls of the King*, and in *In Memoriam* (his two sustained and ambitious efforts), particular phrases are always flashing out the whole fire of the truth; the truth that Tennyson meant. But owing to his English indolence, his English aristocratic irresponsibility, his English vagueness in thought, he always managed to make the main poem mean exactly what he did not mean. Thus, these two lines which simply say that

"Lancelot was the first in tournament, But Arthur mightiest in the battle-field"

do really express what he meant to express about Arthur being after all "the highest, yet most human too; not Lancelot, nor another." But as his hero is actually developed, we have exactly the opposite impression; that poor old Lancelot, with all his faults, was much more of a man than Arthur. He was a Victorian in the bad as well as the good sense; he could not keep priggishness out of long poems. Or again, take the case of *In Memoriam*. I will quote one verse (probably incorrectly) which has always seemed to me splendid, and which does express what the whole poem should express — but hardly does.

"That we may lift from out the dust, A voice as unto him that hears A cry above the conquered years Of one that ever works, and trust."

The poem should have been a cry above the conquered years. It might well have been that if the poet could have said sharply at the end of it, as a pure piece of dogma, "I've forgotten every feature of the man's face: I know God holds him alive." But under the influence of the mere leisurely length of the thing, the reader *does* rather receive the impression that the wound has been healed only by time; and that the victor hours *can* boast that this is the man that loved and lost, but all he was is overworn. This is not the truth; and Tennyson did not intend it for the truth. It is simply the result of the lack of something militant, dogmatic and structural in him: whereby he could not be trusted with the trail of a very long literary process without entangling himself like a kitten playing cat's-cradle.

Browning, as above suggested, got on much better with eccentric and secluded England because he treated it as eccentric and secluded; a place where one could do what one liked. To a considerable extent he did do what he liked; arousing not a few complaints; and many doubts and conjectures as to why on earth he liked it. Many comparatively sympathetic persons pondered upon what pleasure it could give any man to write *Sordello* or rhyme "end-knot" to "offend not." Nevertheless he was no anarchist and no mystagogue; and even where he was defective, his defect has commonly been stated wrongly. The two chief charges against him were a contempt for form unworthy of an artist, and a poor pride in obscurity. The obscurity is true, though not, I think, the pride in it; but the truth about this charge rather rises out of the truth about the other. The other charge is not true. Browning cared very much for form; he cared very much for style. You may not happen to like his style; but he did. To say that he had not enough mastery over form to express himself perfectly like Tennyson or Swinburne is like criticising the griffin of a mediæval gargoyle without even knowing that it is a griffin; treating it as an infantile and unsuccessful attempt at a classical angel. A poet indifferent to form ought to mean a poet who did not care what form he used as long as he expressed his thoughts. He might be a rather entertaining sort of poet; telling a smoking-room story in blank verse or writing a hunting-song in the Spenserian stanza; giving a realistic analysis of infanticide in a series of triolets; or proving the truth of Immortality in a long string of limericks. Browning certainly had no such indifference. Almost every poem of Browning, especially the shortest and most successful ones, was moulded or graven in some special style, generally grotesque, but invariably deliberate. In most cases whenever he wrote a new song he wrote a new kind of song. The new lyric is not only of a different metre, but of a different shape. No one, not even Browning, ever wrote a poem in the same style as that horrible one beginning “John, Master of the Temple of God,” with its weird choruses and creepy prose directions. No one, not even Browning, ever wrote a poem in the same style as *Pisgah-sights*. No one, not even Browning, ever wrote a poem in the same style as *Time’s Revenges*. No one, not even Browning, ever wrote a poem in the same style as *Meeting at Night* and *Parting at Morning*. No one, not even Browning, ever wrote a poem in the same style as *The Flight of the Duchess*, or in the same style as *The Grammarian’s Funeral*, or in the same style as *A Star*, or in the same style as that astounding lyric which begins abruptly “Some people hang pictures up.” These metres and manners were not accidental; they really do suit the sort of spiritual experiment Browning was making in each case. Browning, then, was not chaotic; he was deliberately grotesque. But there certainly was, over and above this grotesqueness, a perversity and irrationality about the man which led him to play the fool in the middle of his own poems; to leave off carving gargoyles and simply begin throwing stones. His curious complicated puns are an example of this: Hood had used the pun to make a sentence or a sentiment especially pointed and clear. In Browning the word with two meanings seems to mean rather less, if anything, than the word with one. It also applies to his trick of setting himself to cope with impossible rhymes. It may be fun, though it is not poetry, to try rhyming to ranunculus; but even the fun presupposes that you *do* rhyme to it; and I will affirm, and hold under persecution, that "Tommy-make-room-for-your-uncle-us" does not rhyme to it.

The obscurity, to which he must in a large degree plead guilty, was, curiously enough, the result rather of the gay artist in him than the deep thinker. It is patience in the Browning students; in Browning it was only impatience. He wanted to say something comic and energetic and he wanted to say it quick. And, between his artistic skill in the fantastic and his temperamental turn for the abrupt, the idea sometimes flashed past unseen. But it is quite an error to suppose that these are the dark mines containing his treasure. The two or three great and true things he really had to say he generally managed to say quite simply. Thus he really did want to say that God had indeed made man and woman one flesh; that the sex relation was religious in this real sense that even in our sin and despair we take it for granted and expect a sort of virtue in it. The feelings of the bad husband about the good wife, for instance, are about as subtle and entangled as any matter on this earth; and Browning really had something to say about them. But he said it in some of the plainest and most unmistakable words in all literature; as lucid as a flash of lightning. "Pompilia, will you let them murder me?" Or again, he did really want to say that death and such moral terrors were best taken in a military spirit; he could not have said it more simply than: "I was ever a fighter; one fight more, the best and the last." He did really wish to say that human life was unworkable unless immortality were implied in it every other moment; he could not have said it more simply: "leave now to dogs and apes; Man has for ever." The obscurities were not merely superficial, but often covered quite superficial ideas. He was as likely as not to be most unintelligible of all in writing a compliment in a lady's album. I remember in my boyhood (when Browning kept us awake like coffee) a friend reading out the poem about the portrait to which I have already referred, reading it in that rapid dramatic way in which this poet must be read. And I was profoundly puzzled at the passage where it seemed to say that the cousin dis paraged the picture, "while John scorns ale." I could not think what this sudden teetotalism on the part of John had to do with the affair, but I forgot to ask at the time and it was only years afterwards that, looking at the book, I found it was "John's corns ail," a very Browningesque way of saying he winced. Most of Browning's obscurity is of that sort — the mistakes are almost as quaint as misprints — and the Browning student, in that sense, is more a proof reader than a disciple. For the rest his real religion was of the most manly, even the most boyish sort. He is called an optimist; but the word suggests a calculated contentment which was not in the least one of his vices. What he really was was a romantic. He offered the cosmos as an adventure rather than a scheme. He did not explain evil, far less explain it away; he enjoyed defying it. He was a troubadour even in theology and metaphysics: like the *Jongleurs de Dieu* of St. Francis. He may be said to have serenaded heaven with a guitar, and even, so to speak, tried to climb there with a rope ladder. Thus his most vivid things are the red-hot little love lyrics, or rather, little love dramas. He did one really original and admirable thing: he managed the real details of modern love affairs in verse, and love is the most realistic thing in the world. He substituted the street with the green blind for the faded garden of Watteau, and the "blue spirt of a lighted match" for the monotony of the evening star.

Before leaving him it should be added that he was fitted to deepen the Victorian mind, but not to broaden it. With all his Italian sympathies and Italian residence, he was not the man to get Victorian England out of its provincial rut: on many things Kingsley himself was not so narrow. His celebrated wife was wider and wiser than he in this sense; for she was, however one-sidedly, involved in the emotions of central European politics. She defended Louis Napoleon and Victor Emmanuel; and intelligently, as one con scious of the case against them both. As to why it now seems simple to defend the first Italian King, but absurd to defend the last French Emperor — well, the reason is sad and simple. It is concerned with certain curious things called success and failure, and I ought to have considered it under the heading of *The Book of Snobs*. But Elizabeth Barrett, at least, was no snob: her political poems have rather an impatient air, as if they were written, and even published, rather prematurely — just before the fall of her idol. These old political poems of hers are too little read to-day; they are amongst the most sincere documents on the history of the times, and many modern blunders could be corrected by the reading of them. And Elizabeth

Barrett had a strength really rare among women poets; the strength of the phrase. She excelled in her sex, in epigram, almost as much as Voltaire in his. Pointed phrases like: “Martyrs by the pang without the palm” — or “Incense to sweeten a crime and myrrh to embitter a curse,” these expressions, which are witty after the old fashion of the conceit, came quite freshly and spontaneously to her quite modern mind. But the first fact is this, that these epigrams of hers were never so true as when they turned on one of the two or three pivots on which contemporary Europe was really turning. She is by far the most European of all the English poets of that age; all of them, even her own much greater husband, look local beside her. Tennyson and the rest are nowhere. Take any positive political fact, such as the final fall of Napoleon. Tennyson wrote these profoundly foolish lines —

“He thought to quell the stubborn hearts of oak Madman!”

as if the defeat of an English regiment were a violation of the laws of Nature. Mrs. Browning knew no more facts about Napoleon, perhaps, than Tennyson did; but she knew the truth. Her epigram on Napoleon’s fall is in one line

“And kings crept out again to feel the sun.”

Talleyrand would have clapped his horrible old hands at that. Her instinct about the statesman and the soldier was very like Jane Austen’s instinct for the gentleman and the man. It is not unnoticeable that as Miss Austen spent most of her life in a village, Miss Barrett spent most of her life on a sofa. The godlike power of guessing seems (for some reason I do not understand) to grow under such conditions. Unfortunately Mrs. Browning was like all the other Victorians in going a little lame, as I have roughly called it, having one leg shorter than the other. But her case was, in one sense, extreme. She exaggerated both ways. She was too strong and too weak, or (as a false sex philosophy would express it) too masculine and too feminine. I mean that she hit the centre of weakness with almost the same emphatic precision with which she hit the centre of strength. She could write finally of the factory wheels “grinding life down from its mark,” a strong and strictly true observation. Unfortunately she could also write of Euripides “with his droppings of warm tears.” She could write in *A Drama of Exile,* a really fine exposition, touching the later relation of Adam and the animals: unfortunately the tears were again turned on at the wrong moment at the main; and the stage direction commands a silence, only broken by the dropping of angel’s tears. How much noise is made by angel’s tears? Is it a sound of emptied buckets, or of garden hose, or of mountain cataracts? That is the sort of question which Elizabeth Barrett's extreme love of the extreme was always tempting people to ask. Yet the question, as asked, does her a heavy historical injustice; we remember all the lines in her work which were weak enough to be called "womanly," we forget the multitude of strong lines that are strong enough to be called "manly"; lines that Kingsley or Henley would have jumped for joy to print in proof of their manliness. She had one of the peculiar talents of true rhetoric, that of a powerful concentration. As to the critic who thinks her poetry owed anything to the great poet who was her husband, he can go and live in the same hotel with the man who can believe that George Eliot owed anything to the extravagant imagination of Mr. George Henry Lewes. So far from Browning inspiring or interfering, he did not in one sense interfere enough. Her real inferiority to him in literature is that he was consciously while she was unconsciously absurd.

It is natural, in the matter of Victorian moral change, to take Swinburne as the next name here. He is the only poet who was also, in the European sense, on the spot; even if, in the sense of the Gilbertian song, the spot was barred. He also knew that something rather crucial was happening to Christendom; he thought it was getting unchristened. It is even a little amusing, indeed, that these two Pro-Italian poets almost conducted a political correspondence in rhyme. Mrs. Browning sternly reproached those who had ever doubted the good faith of the King of Sardinia, whom she acclaimed as being truly a king. Swinburne, lyrically alluding to her as "Sea-eagle of English feather," broadly hinted that the chief blunder of that wild fowl had been her support of an autocratic adventurer: "calling a crowned man royal, that was no more than a king." But it is not fair, even in this important connection, to judge Swinburne by *Songs Before Sunrise*. They were songs before a sunrise that has never turned up. Their dogmatic assertions have for a long time past stared starkly at us as nonsense. As, for instance, the phrase "Glory to Man in the Highest, for man is the master of things"; after which there is evidently nothing to be said, except that it is not true. But even where Swinburne had his greater grip, as in that grave and partly just poem *Before a Crucifix*, Swinburne, the most Latin, the most learned, the most largely travelled of the Victorians, still knows far less of the facts than even Mrs. Browning. The whole of the poem, *Before a Crucifix*, breaks down by one mere mistake. It imagines that the French or

Italian peasants who fell on their knees before the Crucifix did so because they were slaves. They fell on their knees because they were free men, probably owning their own farms. Swinburne could have found round about Putney plenty of slaves who had no crucifixes: but only crucifixions.

When we come to ethics and philosophy, doubtless we find Swinburne in full revolt, not only against the temperate idealism of Tennyson, but against the genuine piety and moral enthusiasm of people like Mrs. Browning. But here again Swinburne is very English, nay, he is very Victorian, for his revolt is illogical. For the purposes of intelligent insurrection against priests and kings, Swinburne ought to have described the natural life of man, free and beautiful, and proved from this both the noxiousness and the needlessness of such chains. Unfortunately Swinburne rebelled against Nature first and then tried to rebel against religion for doing exactly the same thing that he had done. His songs of joy are not really immoral; but his songs of sorrow are. But when he merely hurls at the priest the assertion that flesh is grass and life is sorrow, he really lays himself open to the restrained answer, "So I have ventured, on various occasions, to remark." When he went forth, as it were, as the champion of pagan change and pleasure, he heard uplifted the grand choruses of his own *Atalanta*, in his rear, refusing hope.

The splendid diction that blazes through the whole of that drama, that still dances exquisitely in the more lyrical *Poems and Ballads*, makes some marvellous appear ances in *Songs Before Sunrise*, and then mainly falters and fades away, is, of course, the chief thing about Swinburne. The style is the man; and some will add that it does not, thus unsupported, amount to much of a man. But the style itself suffers some injustice from those who would speak thus. The views expressed are often quite foolish and often quite insincere; but the style itself is a manlier and more natural thing than is commonly made out. It is not in the least languorous or luxurious or merely musical and sensuous, as one would gather from both the eulogies and the satires, from the conscious and the unconscious imitations. On the contrary, it is a sort of fighting and profane parody of the Old Testament; and its lines are made of short English words like the short Roman swords. The first line of one of his finest poems, for instance, runs, "I have lived long enough to have seen one thing, that love hath an end." In that sentence only one small "e" gets outside the monosyllable. Through all his interminable tragedies, he was fondest of lines like —

“If ever I leave off to honour you God give me shame; I were the worst churl born.”

The dramas were far from being short and dramatic; but the words really were. Nor was his verse merely smooth; except his very bad verse, like “the lilies and languors of virtue, to the raptures and roses of vice,” which both, in cheapness of form and foolishness of sentiment, may be called the worst couplet in the world’s literature. In his real poetry (even in the same poem) his rhythm and rhyme are as original and ambitious as Browning; and the only difference between him and Browning is, not that he is smooth and without ridges, but that he always crests the ridge triumphantly and Browning often does not —

“On thy bosom though many a kiss be, There are none such as knew it of old. Was it Alciphron once or Arisbe, Male ringlets or feminine gold, That thy lips met with under the statue Whence a look shot out sharp after thieves From the eyes of the garden-god at you Across the fig-leaves.”

Look at the rhymes in that verse, and you will see they are as stiff a task as Browning’s: only they are successful. That is the real strength of Swinburne — a style. It was a style that nobody could really imitate; and least of all Swinburne himself, though he made the attempt all through his later years. He was, if ever there was one, an inspired poet. I do not think it the highest sort of poet. And you never discover who is an inspired poet until the inspiration goes.

With Swinburne we step into the circle of that later Victorian influence which was very vaguely called Æsthetic. Like all human things, but especially Victorian things, it was not only complex but confused. Things in it that were at one on the emotional side were flatly at war on the intellectual. In the section of the painters, it was the allies or pupils of Ruskin, pious, almost painfully exact, and copying mediæval details rather for their truth than their beauty. In the section of the poets it was pretty loose, Swinburne being the leader of the revels. But there was one great man who was in both sections, a painter and a poet, who may be said to bestride the chasm like a giant. It is in an odd and literal sense true that the name of Rossetti is important here, for the name implies the nationality. I have loosely called Carlyle and the Brontës the romance from the North; the nearest to a general definition of the Æsthetic movement is to call it the romance from the South. It is that warm wind that had never blown so strong since Chaucer, standing in his cold English April, had smelt the spring in Provence. The Englishman has always found it easier to get inspiration from the Italians than from the French; they call to each other across that unconquered castle of reason. Browning's *Englishman in Italy*, Browning's *Italian in England*, were both happier than either would have been in France. Rossetti was the Italian in England, as Browning was the Englishman in Italy; and the first broad fact about the artistic revolution Rossetti wrought is written when we have written his name. But if the South lets in warmth or heat, it also lets in hardness. The more the orange tree is luxuriant in growth, the less it is loose in outline. And it is exactly where the sea is slightly warmer than marble that it looks slightly harder. This, I think, is the one universal power behind the Æsthetic and Pre-Raphaelite movements, which all agreed in two things at least: strictness in the line and strength, nay violence, in the colour.

Rossetti was a remarkable man in more ways than one; he did not succeed in any art; if he had he would probably never have been heard of. It was his happy knack of half failing in both the arts that has made him a success. If he had been as good a poet as Tennyson, he would have been a poet who painted pictures. If he had been as good a painter as Burne-Jones, he would have been a painter who wrote poems. It is odd to note on the very threshold of the extreme art movement that this great artist largely succeeded by not defining his art. His poems were too pictorial. His pictures were too poetical. That is why they really conquered the cold satisfaction of the Victorians, because they did mean something, even if it was a small artistic thing.

Rossetti was one with Ruskin, on the one hand, and Swinburne on the other, in reviving the decorative instinct of the Middle Ages. While Ruskin, in letters only, praised that decoration Rossetti and his friends repeated it. They almost made patterns of their poems. That frequent return of the refrain which was foolishly discussed by Professor Nordau was, in Rossetti's case, of such sadness as sometimes to amount to sameness. The criticism on him, from a mediæval point of view, is not that he insisted on a chorus, but that he could not insist on a jolly chorus. Many of his poems were truly mediæval, but they would have been even more mediæval if he could ever have written such a refrain as "Tally Ho!" or even "Tooral-ooral" instead of "Tall Troy's on fire." With Rossetti goes, of course, his sister, a real poet, though she also illustrated that Pre-Raphaelite's conflict of views that covered their coincidence of taste. Both used the angular outlines, the burning transparencies, the fixed but still unfathomable symbols of the great mediæval civilisation; but Rossetti used the religious imagery (on the whole) irreligiously, Christina Rossetti used it religiously but (on the whole) so to make it seem a narrower religion.

One poet, or, to speak more strictly, one poem, belongs to the same general atmosphere and impulse as Swinburne; the free but languid atmosphere of later Victorian art. But this time the wind blew from hotter and heavier gardens than the gardens of Italy. Edward Fitzgerald, a cultured eccentric, a friend of Tennyson, produced what professed to be a translation of the Persian poet Omar, who wrote quatrains about wine and roses and things in general. Whether the Persian original, in its own Persian way, was greater or less than this version I must not discuss here, and could not discuss anywhere. But it is quite clear that Fitzgerald's work is much too good to be a good translation. It is as personal and creative a thing as ever was written; and the best expression of a bad mood, a mood that may, for all I know, be permanent in Persia, but was certainly at this time particularly fashionable in England. In the technical sense of literature it is one of the most remarkable achievements of that age; as poetical as Swinburne and far more perfect. In this verbal sense its most arresting quality is a combination of something haunting and harmonious that flows by like a river or a song, with something else that is compact and pregnant like a pithy saying picked out in rock by the chisel of some pagan philosopher. It is at once a tune that escapes and an inscription that remains. Thus, alone among the reckless and romantic verses that first rose in Coleridge or Keats, it preserves something also of the wit and civilisation of the eighteenth century. Lines like "a Muezzin from the tower of darkness cries," or "Their mouths are stopped with dust" are successful in the same sense as "Pinnacled dim in the intense inane" or "Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways." But —

"Indeed, indeed, repentance oft before I swore; but was I sober when I swore?"

is equally successful in the same sense as —

"Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer And without sneering teach the rest to sneer."

It thus earned a right to be considered the complete expression of that scepticism and sensual sadness into which later Victorian literature was more and more falling away: a sort of bible of unbelief. For a cold fit had followed the hot fit of Swinburne, which was of a feverish sort: he had set out to break down without having, or even thinking he had, the rudiments of rebuilding in him; and he effected nothing national even in the way of destruction. The Tennysonians still walked past him as primly as a young ladies' school — the Browningites still inked their eyebrows and minds in looking for the lost syntax of Browning; while Browning himself was away looking for God, rather in the spirit of a truant boy from their school looking for birds' nests. The nineteenth-century sceptics did not really shake the respectable world and alter it, as the eighteenth-century sceptics had done; but that was because the eighteenth-century sceptics were something more than sceptics, and believed in Greek tragedies, in Roman laws, in the Republic. The Swinburnian sceptics had nothing to fight for but a frame of mind; and when ordinary English people listened to it, they came to the conclusion that it was a frame of mind they would rather hear about than experience. But these later poets did, so to speak, spread their soul in all the empty spaces; weaker brethren, disappointed artists, unattached individuals, very young people, were sapped or swept away by these songs; which, so far as any particular sense in them goes, were almost songs without words. It is because there is something which is after all indescribably manly, intellectual, firm about Fitzgerald's way of phrasing the pessimism that he towers above the slope that was tumbling down to the decadents. But it is still pessimism, a thing unfit for a white man; a thing like opium, that may often be a poison and sometimes a medicine, but never a food for us, who are driven by an inner command not only to think but to live, not only to live but to grow, and not only to grow but to build.

And, indeed, we see the insufficiency of such sad extremes even in the next name among the major poets; we see the Swinburnian parody of mediævalism, the inverted Catholicism of the decadents, struggling to get back somehow on its feet. The æsthetic school had, not quite unjustly, the name of mere dilettanti. But it is fair to say that in the next of them, a workman and a tradesman, we already feel something of that return to real issues leading up to the real revolts that broke up Victorianism at last. In the mere art of words, indeed, William Morris carried much further than Swinburne or Rossetti the mere imitation of stiff mediæval ornament. The other mediævalists had their modern moments; which were (if they had only known it) much more mediæval than their mediæval moments. Swinburne could write —

”We shall see Buonaparte the bastard Kick heels with his throat in a rope.”

One has an uneasy feeling that William Morris would have written something like —

“And the kin of the ill king Bonaparte Hath a high gallows for all his part.”

Rossetti could, for once in a way, write poetry about a real woman and call her “Jenny.” One has a disturbed suspicion that Morris would have called her “Jehanne.”

But all that seems at first more archaic and decorative about Morris really arose from the fact that he was more virile and real than either Swinburne or Rossetti. It arose from the fact that he really was, what he so often called himself, a craftsman. He had enough masculine strength to be tidy: that is, after the masculine manner, tidy about his own trade. If his poems were too like wallpapers, it was because he really could make wall papers. He knew that lines of poetry ought to be in a row, as palings ought to be in a row; and he knew that neither palings nor poetry looks any the worse for being simple or even severe. In a sense Morris was all the more creative because he felt the hard limits of creation as he would have felt them if he were not working in words but in wood; and if he was unduly dominated by the mere conventions of the mediævals, it was largely because they were (whatever else they were) the very finest fraternity of free workmen the world is ever likely to see.

The very things that were urged against Morris are in this sense part of his ethical importance; part of the more promising and wholesome turn he was half unconsciously giving to the movement of modern art. His hazier fellow-Socialists blamed him because he made money; but this was at least in some degree because he made other things to make money: it was part of the real and refreshing fact that at last an æsthete had appeared who could make something. If he was a capitalist, at least he was what later capitalists cannot or will not be — something higher than a capitalist, a tradesman. As compared with aristocrats like Swinburne or aliens like Rossetti, he was vitally English and vitally Victorian. He inherits some of that paradoxical glory which Napoleon gave reluctantly to a nation of shopkeepers. He was the last of that nation; he did not go out golfing: like that founder of the artistic shopman, Samuel Richardson, “he kept his shop, and his shop kept him.” The importance of his Socialism can easily be exaggerated. Among other lesser points, he was not a Socialist; he was a sort of Dickensian anarchist. His instinct for titles was always exquisite. It is part of his instinct of decoration: for on a page the title always looks important and the printed mass of matter a mere dado under it. And no one had ever nobler titles than *The Roots of the Mountains* or *The Wood at the End of the World*. The reader feels he hardly need read the fairy-tale because the title is so suggestive. But, when all is said, he never chose a better title than that of his social Utopia, *News from Nowhere*. He wrote it while the last Victorians were already embarked on their bold task of fixing the future — of narrating to-day what has happened to-morrow. They named their books by cold titles suggesting straight corridors of marble — titles like *Looking Backward*. But Morris was an artist as well as an anarchist. *News from Nowhere* is an irresponsible title; and it is an irresponsible book. It does not describe the problem solved; it does not describe wealth either wielded by the State or divided equally among the citizens. It simply describes an undiscovered country where every one feels good-natured all day. That he could even dream so is his true dignity as a poet. He was the first of the Æsthetes to smell mediævalism as a smell of the morning; and not as a mere scent of decay.

With him the poetry that had been pecul iarly Victorian practically ends; and, on the whole, it is a happy ending. There are many other minor names of major importance; but for one reason or other they do not derive from the schools that had dominated this epoch as such. Thus Thompson, the author of *The City of Dreadful Night*, was a fine poet; but his pessimism combined with a close pugnacity does not follow any of the large but loose lines of the Swinburnian age. But he was a great person — he knew how to be democratic in the dark. Thus Coventry Patmore was a much greater person. He was bursting with ideas, like Browning — and truer ideas as a rule. He was as eccentric and florid and Elizabethan as Browning; and often in moods and metres that even Browning was never wild enough to think of. No one will ever forget the first time he read Patmore’s hint that the cosmos is a thing that God made huge only “to make dirt cheap”; just as nobody will ever forget the sudden shout he uttered when he first heard Mrs. Todgers asked for the rough outline of a wooden leg. These things are not jokes, but discoveries. But the very fact that Patmore was, as it were, the Catholic Browning, keeps him out of the Victorian atmosphere as such. The Victorian English simply thought him an indecent sentimentalist, as they did all the hot and humble religious diarists of Italy or Spain. Something of the same fate followed the most powerful of that last Victorian group who were called “Minor Poets.” They numbered many other fine artists: notably Mr. William Watson, who is truly Victorian in that he made a manly attempt to tread down the decadents and return to the right reason of Wordsworth —

“I have not paid the world The evil and the insolent courtesy Of offering it my baseness as a gift.”

But none of them were able even to understand Francis Thompson; his sky-scraping humility, his mountains of mystical detail, his occasional and unashamed weakness, his sudden and sacred blasphemies. Perhaps the shortest definition of the Victorian Age is that he stood outside it.

CHAPTER IV

THE BREAK-UP OF THE COMPROMISE

If it be curiously and carefully considered it will, I think, appear more and more true that the struggle between the old spiritual theory and the new material theory in England ended simply in a deadlock; and a deadlock that has endured. It is still impossible to say absolutely that England is a Christian country or a heathen country; almost exactly as it was impossible when Herbert Spencer began to write. Separate elements of both sorts are alive, and even increasingly alive. But neither the believer nor the unbeliever has the impudence to call himself the Englishman. Certainly the great Victorian rationalism has succeeded in doing a damage to religion. It has done what is perhaps the worst of all damages to religion. It has driven it entirely into the power of the religious people. Men like Newman, men like Coventry Patmore, men who would have been mystics in any case, were driven back upon being much more extravagantly religious than they would have been in a religious country. Men like Huxley, men like Kingsley, men like most Victorian men, were equally driven back on being irreligious; that is, on doubting things which men's normal imagination does not necessarily doubt. But certainly the most final and forcible fact is that this war ended like the battle of Sheriffmuir, as the poet says; they both did fight, and both did beat, and both did run away. They have left to their descendants a treaty that has become a dull torture. Men may believe in immortality, and none of the men know why. Men may not believe in miracles, and none of the men know why. The Christian Church had been just strong enough to check the conquest of her chief citadels. The rationalist movement had been just strong enough to conquer some of her outposts, as it seemed, for ever. Neither was strong enough to expel the other; and Victorian England was in a state which some call liberty and some call lockjaw.

But the situation can be stated another way. There came a time, roughly somewhere about 1880, when the two great positive enthusiasms of Western Europe had for the time exhausted each other — Christianity and the French Revolution. About that time there used to be a sad and not unsympathetic jest going about to the effect that Queen Victoria might very well live longer than the Prince of Wales. Somewhat in the same way, though the republican impulse was hardly a hundred years old and the religious impulse nearly two thousand, yet as far as England was concerned, the old wave and the new seemed to be spent at the same time. On the one hand Darwin, especially through the strong journalistic genius of Huxley, had won a very wide spread though an exceedingly vague victory. I do not mean that Darwin's own doctrine was vague; his was merely one particular hypothesis about how animal variety might have arisen; and that particular hypothesis, though it will always be interesting, is now very much the reverse of secure. But it is only in the strictly scientific world and among strictly scientific men that Darwin's detailed suggestion has largely broken down. The general public impression that he had entirely proved his case (whatever it was) was early arrived at, and still remains. It was and is hazily associated with the negation of religion. But (and this is the important point) it was also associated with the negation of democracy. The same Mid-Victorian muddle-headedness that made people think that "evolution" meant that we need not admit the supremacy of God, also made them think that "survival" meant that we must admit the supremacy of men. Huxley had no hand in spreading these fallacies; he was a fair fighter; and he told his own followers, who spoke thus, most emphatically not to play the fool. He said most strongly that his or any theory of evolution left the old philosophical arguments for a creator, right or wrong, exactly where they were before. He also said most emphatically that any one who used the argument of Nature against the ideal of justice or an equal law, was as senseless as a gardener who should fight on the side of the ill weeds merely because they grew apace. I wish, indeed, that in such a rude summary as this, I had space to do justice to Huxley as a literary man and a moralist. He had a live taste and talent for the English tongue, which he devoted to the task of keeping Victorian rationalism rational. He did not succeed. As so often happens when a rather unhealthy doubt is in the atmosphere, the strongest words of their great captain could not keep the growing crowds of agnostics back from the most hopeless and inhuman extremes of destructive thought. Nonsense not yet quite dead about the folly of allowing the unfit to survive began to be more and more wildly whispered. Such helpless specimens of "advanced thought" are, of course, quite as inconsistent with Darwinism as they are with democracy or with any other intelligent proposition ever offered. But these unintelligent propositions were offered;

and the ultimate result was this rather important one: that the harshness of Utilitarianism began to turn into downright tyranny. That beautiful faith in human nature and in freedom which had made delicate the dry air of John Stuart Mill; that robust, romantic sense of justice which had redeemed even the injustices of Macaulay — all that seemed slowly and sadly to be drying up. Under the shock of Darwinism all that was good in the Victorian rationalism shook and dissolved like dust. All that was bad in it abode and clung like clay. The magnificent emancipation evaporated; the mean calculation remained. One could still calculate in clear statistical tables, how many men lived, how many men died. One must not ask how they lived; for that is politics. One must not ask how they died; for that is religion. And religion and politics were ruled out of all the Later Victorian debating clubs; even including the debating club at Westminster. What third thing they were discussing, which was neither religion nor politics, I do not know. I have tried the experiment of reading solidly through a vast number of their records and reviews and discussions; and still I do not know. The only third thing I can think of to balance religion and politics is art; and no one well acquainted with the debates at St. Stephen's will imagine that the art of extreme eloquence was the cause of the confusion. None will maintain that our political masters are removed from us by an infinite artistic superiority in the choice of words. The politicians know nothing of politics, which is their own affair: they know nothing of religion, which is certainly not their affair: it may legitimately be said that they have to do with nothing; they have reached that low and last level where a man knows as little about his own claim, as he does about his enemies'. In any case there can be no doubt about the effect of this particular situation on the problem of ethics and science. The duty of dragging truth out by the tail or the hind leg or any other corner one can possibly get hold of, a perfectly sound duty in itself, had somehow come into collision with the older and larger duty of knowing something about the organism and ends of a creature; or, in the everyday phrase, being able to make head or tail of it. This paradox pursued and tormented the Victorians. They could not or would not see that humanity repels or welcomes the railway-train, simply according to what people come by it. They could not see that one welcomes or smashes the telephone, according to what words one hears in it. They really seem to have felt that the train could be a substitute for its own passengers; or the telephone a substitute for its own voice.

In any case it is clear that a change had begun to pass over scientific inquiry, of which we have seen the culmination in our own day. There had begun that easy automatic habit, of science as an oiled and smooth-running machine, that habit of treating things as obviously unquestionable, when, indeed, they are obviously questionable. This began with vaccination in the Early Victorian Age; it extended to the early licence of vivisection in its later age; it has found a sort of fitting foolscap, or crown of crime and folly, in the thing called Eugenics. In all three cases the point was not so much that the pioneers had not proved their case; it was rather that, by an unexpressed rule of respectability, they were not required to prove it. This rather abrupt twist of the rationalistic mind in the direction of arbitrary power, certainly weakened the Liberal movement from within. And meanwhile it was being weakened by heavy blows from without.

There is a week that is the turn of the year; there was a year that was the turn of the century. About 1870 the force of the French Revolution faltered and fell: the year that was everywhere the death of Liberal ideas: the year when Paris fell: the year when Dickens died. While the new foes of freedom, the sceptics and scientists, were damaging democracy in ideas, the old foes of freedom, the emperors and the kings, were damaging her more heavily in arms. For a moment it almost seemed that the old Tory ring of iron, the Holy Alliance, had recombined against France. But there was just this difference: that the Holy Alliance was now not arguably, but almost avowedly, an Unholy Alliance. It was an alliance between those who still thought they could deny the dignity of man and those who had recently begun to have a bright hope of denying even the dignity of God. Eighteenth-century Prussia was Protestant and probably religious. Nineteenth-century Prussia was almost utterly atheist. Thus the old spirit of liberty felt itself shut up at both ends, that which was called progressive and that which was called reactionary: barricaded by Bismarck with blood and iron and by Darwin by blood and bones. The enormous depression which infects many excellent people born about this time, probably has this cause.

It was a great calamity that the freedom of Wilkes and the faith of Dr. Johnson fought each other. But it was an even worse calamity that they practically killed each other. They killed each other almost simultaneously, like Herminius and Mamilius. Liberalism (in Newman’s sense) really did strike Christianity through headpiece and through head; that is, it did daze and stun the ignorant and ill-prepared intellect of the English Christian. And

Christianity did smite Liberalism through breastplate and through breast; that is, it did succeed, through arms and all sorts of awful accidents, in piercing more or less to the heart of the Utilitarian — and finding that he had none. Victorian Protestantism had not head enough for the business; Victorian Radicalism had not heart enough for the business. Down fell they dead together, exactly as Macaulay's Lay says, and still stood all who saw them fall almost until the hour at which I write.

This coincident collapse of both religious and political idealism produced a curious cold air of emptiness and real subconscious agnosticism such as is extremely unusual in the history of mankind. It is what Mr. Wells, with his usual verbal delicacy and accuracy, spoke of as that ironical silence that follows a great controversy. It is what people less intelligent than Mr. Wells meant by calling themselves *fin de siècle*; though, of course, rationally speaking, there is no more reason for being sad towards the end of a hundred years than towards the end of five hundred fortnights. There was no arithmetical autumn, but there was a spiritual one. And it came from the fact suggested in the para graphs above; the sense that man's two great inspirations had failed him together. The Christian religion was much more dead in the eighteenth century than it was in the nineteenth century. But the republican enthusiasm was also much more alive. If their scepticism was cold, and their faith even colder, their practical politics were wildly idealistic; and if they doubted the kingdom of heaven, they were gloriously credulous about the chances of it coming on earth. In the same way the old pagan republican feeling was much more dead in the feudal darkness of the eleventh or twelfth centuries, than it was even a century later; but if creative politics were at their lowest, creative theology was almost at its highest point of energy.

The modern world, in fact, had fallen between two stools. It had fallen between that austere old three-legged stool which was the tripod of the cold priestess of Apollo; and that other mystical and mediæval stool that may well be called the Stool of Repentance. It kept neither of the two values as intensely valuable. It could not believe in the bonds that bound men; but, then, neither could it believe in the men they bound. It was always restrained in its hatred of slavery by a half remembrance of its yet greater hatred of liberty. They were almost alone, I think, in thus carrying to its extreme the negative attitude already noted in Miss Arabella Allen. Anselm would have despised a civic crown, but he would not have despised a relic.

Voltaire would have despised a relic; but he would not have despised a vote. We hardly find them both despised till we come to the age of Oscar Wilde.

These years that followed on that double disillusionment were like one long afternoon in a rich house on a rainy day. It was not merely that everybody believed that nothing would happen; it was also that everybody believed that anything happening was even duller than nothing happening. It was in this stale atmosphere that a few flickers of the old Swinburnian flame survived; and were called Art. The great men of the older artistic movement did not live in this time; rather they lived through it. But this time did produce an interregnum of art that had a truth of its own; though that truth was near to being only a consistent lie.

The movement of those called Æsthetes (as satirised in *Patience*) and the movement of those afterwards called Decadents (satirised in Mr. Street's delightful *Autobiography of a Boy*) had the same captain; or at any rate the same bandmaster. Oscar Wilde walked in front of the first procession wearing a sunflower, and in front of the second procession wearing a green carnation. With the æsthetic movement and its more serious elements, I deal elsewhere; but the second appearance of Wilde is also connected with real intellectual influences, largely negative, indeed, but subtle and influential. The mark in most of the arts of this time was a certain quality which those who like it would call "uniqueness of aspect," and those who do not like it "not quite coming off." I mean the thing meant something from one standpoint; but its mark was that the *smallest* change of standpoint made it unmeaning and unthinkable — a foolish joke. A beggar painted by Rembrandt is as solid as a statue, however roughly he is sketched in; the soul can walk all round him like a public monument. We see he would have other aspects; and that they would all be the aspects of a beggar. Even if one did not admit the extraordinary qualities in the painting, one would have to admit the ordinary qualities in the sitter. If it is not a masterpiece it is a man. But a nocturne by Whistler of mist on the Thames is either a masterpiece or it is nothing; it is either a nocturne or a nightmare of childish nonsense. Made in a certain mood, viewed through a certain temperament, conceived under certain conventions, it may be, it often is, an unreplaceable poem, a vision that may never be seen again. But the moment it ceases to be a splendid picture it ceases to be a picture at all. Or, again, if *Hamlet* is not a great tragedy it is an uncommonly good tale. The people and the posture of affairs would still be there even if one thought that Shakespeare's moral attitude was wrong. Just as one could imagine all the other sides of Rembrandt's beggar, so, with the mind's eye (Horatio), one can see all four sides of the castle of Elsinore. One might tell the tale from the point of view of Laërtes or Claudius or Polonius or the gravedigger; and it would still be a good tale and the same tale. But if we take a play like *Pelléas and Mélisande*, we shall find that unless we grasp the particular fairy thread of thought the poet rather hazily flings to us, we cannot grasp anything whatever. Except from one extreme poetic point of view, the thing is not a play; it is not a bad play, it is a mass of clotted nonsense. One whole act describes the lovers going to look for a ring in a distant cave when they both know they have dropped it down a well. Seen from some secret window on some special side of the soul's turret, this might convey a sense of faerie futility in our human life. But it is quite obvious that unless it called forth that one kind of sympathy, it would call forth nothing but laughter and rotten eggs. In the same play the husband chases his wife with a drawn sword, the wife remarking at intervals "I am not gay." Now there may really be an idea in this; the idea of human misfortune coming most cruelly upon the optimism of innocence; that the lonely human heart says, like a child at a party, "I am not enjoying myself as I thought I should." But it is plain that unless one thinks of this idea (and of this idea only) the expression is not in the least unsuccessful pathos; it is very broad and highly successful farce. Maeterlinck and the decadents, in short, may fairly boast of being subtle; but they must not mind if they are called narrow.

This is the spirit of Wilde's work and of most of the literary work done in that time and fashion. It is, as Mr. Arthur Symons said, an attitude; but it is an attitude in the flat, not in the round; not a statue, but the cardboard king in a toy-theatre, which can only be looked at from the front. In Wilde's own poetry we have particularly a perpetually toppling possibility of the absurd; a sense of just falling too short or just going too far. "Plant lilies at my head" has something wrong about it; something silly that is not there in—

"And put a grey stone at my head"

in the old ballad. But even where Wilde was right, he had a way of being right with this excessive strain on the reader's sympathy (and gravity) which was the mark of all these men with a "point of view." There is a very sound sonnet of his in which he begins by lamenting mere anarchy, as hostile to the art and civilisation that were his only gods; but ends by saying —

"And yet These Christs that die upon the barricades God knows that I am with them — in some ways."

Now that is really very true; that is the way a man of wide reading and worldly experience, but not ungenerous impulses, does feel about the mere fanatic, who is at once a nuisance to humanity and an honour to human nature. Yet who can read that last line without feeling that Wilde is poised on the edge of a precipice of bathos; that the phrase comes very near to being quite startlingly silly. It is as in the case of Maeterlinck, let the reader move his standpoint one inch nearer the popular standpoint, and there is nothing for the thing but harsh, hostile, unconquerable mirth. Somehow the image of Wilde lolling like an elegant leviathan on a sofa, and saying between the whiffs of a scented cigarette that martyrdom is martyrdom in some respects, has seized on and mastered all more delicate considerations in the mind. It is unwise in a poet to goad the sleeping lion of laughter.

In less dexterous hands the decadent idea, what there was of it, went entirely to pieces, which nobody has troubled to pick up. Oddly enough (unless this be always the Nemesis of excess) it began to be insupportable in the very ways in which it claimed specially to be subtle and tactful; in the feeling for different art-forms, in the welding of subject and style, in the appropriateness of the epithet and the unity of the mood. Wilde himself wrote some things that were not immorality, but merely bad taste; not the bad taste of the conservative suburbs, which merely means anything violent or shocking, but real bad taste; as in a stern subject treated in a florid style; an over-dressed woman at a supper of old friends; or a bad joke that nobody had time to laugh at. This mixture of sensibility and coarseness in the man was very curious; and I for one cannot endure (for example) his sensual way of speaking of dead substances, satin or marble or velvet, as if he were stroking a lot of dogs and cats. But there was a sort of power — or at least weight — in his coarseness. His lapses were those proper to the one good thing he really was, an Irish swashbuckler — a fighter. Some of the Roman Emperors might have had the same luxuriousness and yet the same courage. But the later decadents were far worse, especially the decadent critics, the decadent illustrators — there were even decadent publishers. And they utterly lost the light and reason of their existence: they were masters of the clumsy and the incongruous. I will take only one example. Aubrey

Beardsley may be admired as an artist or no; he does not enter into the scope of this book. But it is true that there is a certain brief mood, a certain narrow aspect of life, which he renders to the imagination rightly. It is mostly felt under white, deathly lights in Piccadilly, with the black hollow of heaven behind shiny hats or painted faces: a horrible impression that all mankind are masks. This being the thing Beardsley could express (and the only thing he could express), it is the solemn and awful fact that he was set down to illustrate Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. There is no need to say more; taste, in the artist's sense, must have been utterly dead. They might as well have employed Burne-Jones to illustrate *Martin Chuzzlewit*. It would not have been more ludicrous than putting this portrayer of evil puppets, with their thin lines like wire and their small faces like perverted children's, to trace against the grand barbaric forests the sin and the sorrow of Lancelot.

To return to the chief of the decadents, I will not speak of the end of the individual story: there was horror and there was expiation. And, as my conscience goes at least, no man should say one word that could weaken the horror — or the pardon. But there is one literary consequence of the thing which must be mentioned, because it bears us on to that much breezier movement which first began to break in upon all this ghastly idleness — I mean the Socialist Movement. I do not mean "*De Profundis*"; I do not think he had got to the real depths when he wrote that book. I mean the one real thing he ever wrote: *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*; in which we hear a cry for common justice and brotherhood very much deeper, more democratic and more true to the real trend of the populace to-day, than anything the Socialists ever uttered even in the boldest pages of Bernard Shaw.

Before we pass on to the two expansive movements in which the Victorian Age really ended, the accident of a distinguished artist is available for estimating this somewhat cool and sad afternoon of the epoch at its purest; not in lounging pessimism or luxurious aberrations, but in earnest skill and a high devotion to letters. This change that had come, like the change from a golden sunset to a grey twilight, can be very adequately measured if we compare the insight and intricacy of Meredith with the insight and intricacy of Mr. Henry James. The characters of both are delicate and indisputable; but we must all have had a feeling that the characters in Meredith are gods, but that the characters in Henry James are ghosts. I do not mean that they are unreal: I believe in ghosts. So does Mr. Henry James; he has written some of his very finest literature about the little habits of these creatures. He is in the deep sense of a dishonoured word, a Spiritualist if ever there was one. But Meredith was a materialist as well. The difference is that a ghost is a disembodied spirit; while a god (to be worth worrying about) must be an embodied spirit. The presence of soul and substance together involves one of the two or three things which most of the Victorians did not understand — the thing called a sacrament. It is because he had a natural affinity for this mystical materialism that Meredith, in spite of his affectations, is a poet: and, in spite of his Victorian Agnosticism (or ignorance) is a pious Pagan and not a mere Pantheist. Mr. Henry James is at the other extreme. His thrill is not so much in symbol or mysterious emblem as in the absence of interventions and protections between mind and mind. It is not mystery: it is rather a sort of terror at knowing too much. He lives in glass houses; he is akin to Maeterlinck in a feeling of the nakedness of souls. None of the Meredithian things, wind or wine or sex or stark nonsense, ever gets between Mr. James and his prey. But the thing is a deficiency as well as a talent: we cannot but admire the figures that walk about in his afternoon drawing-rooms; but we have a certain sense that they are figures that have no faces.

For the rest, he is most widely known, or perhaps only most widely chaffed, because of a literary style that lends itself to parody and is a glorious feast for Mr. Max Beerbohm. It may be called The Hampered, or Obstacle Race Style, in which one continually trips over commas and relative clauses; and where the sense has to be perpetually qualified lest it should mean too much. But such satire, however friendly, is in some sense unfair to him; because it leaves out his sense of general artistic design, which is not only high, but bold. This appears, I think, most strongly in his short stories; in his long novels the reader (or at least one reader) does get rather tired of everybody treating everybody else in a manner which in real life would be an impossible intellectual strain. But in his short studies there is the unanswerable thing called real originality; especially in the very shape and point of the tale. It may sound odd to compare him to Mr. Rudyard Kipling: but he is like Kipling and also like Wells in this practical sense: that no one ever wrote a story at all like the *Mark of the Beast*; no one ever wrote a story at all like *A Kink in Space*: and in the same sense no one ever wrote a story like *The Great Good Place*. It is alone in order and species; and it is masterly. He struck his deepest note in that terrible story, *The Turn of the Screw*; and though there is in the heart of that horror a truth of repentance and religion, it is again notable of the Victorian writers that the only supernatural note they can strike assuredly is the tragic and almost the diabolic. Only Mr. Max Beerbohm has been able to imagine Mr. Henry James writing about Christmas.

Now upon this interregnum, this cold and brilliant waiting-room which was Henry James at its highest and Wilde at its worst, there broke in two positive movements, largely honest though essentially unhistoric and profane, which were destined to crack up the old Victorian solidity past repair. The first was Bernard Shaw and the Socialists: the second was Rudyard Kipling and the Imperialists. I take the Socialists first not because they necessarily came so in order of time, but because they were less the note upon which the epoch actually ended.

William Morris, of whom we have already spoken, may be said to introduce the Socialists, but rather in a social sense than a philosophical. He was their friend, and in a sort of political way, their father; but he was not their founder, for he would not have believed a word of what they ultimately came to say. Nor is this the conventional notion of the old man not keeping pace with the audacity of the young. Morris would have been disgusted not with the wildness, but the tameness of our tidy Fabians. He was not a Socialist, but he was a Revolutionist; he didn’t know much more about what he was; but he knew that. In this way, being a full-blooded fellow, he rather repeats the genial sulkiness of Dickens. And if we take this fact about him first, we shall find it a key to the whole movement of this time. For the one dominating truth which overshadows everything else at this point is a political and economic one. The Industrial System, run by a small class of Capitalists on a theory of competitive contract, had been quite honestly established by the early Victorians and was one of the primary beliefs of Victorianism. The Industrial System, so run, had become another name for hell. By Morris’s time and ever since, England has been divided into three classes: Knaves, Fools, and Revolutionists.

History is full of forgotten controversies; and those who speak of Socialism now have nearly all forgotten that for some time it was an almost equal fight between Socialism and Anarchism for the leadership of the exodus from Capitalism. It is here that Herbert Spencer comes in logically, though not chronologically; also that much more interesting man, Auberon Herbert. Spencer has no special place as a man of letters; and a vastly exaggerated place as a philosopher. His real importance was that he was very nearly an Anarchist. The indefinable greatness there is about him after all, in spite of the silliest and smuggest limitations, is in a certain consistency and completeness from his own point of view. There is something mediæval, and therefore manful, about writing a book about everything in the world. Now this simplicity expressed itself in politics in carrying the Victorian worship of liberty to the most ridiculous lengths; almost to the length of voluntary taxes and voluntary insurance against murder. He tried, in short, to solve the problem of the State by eliminating the State from it. He was resisted in this by the powerful good sense of Huxley; but his books became sacred books for a rising generation of rather bewildered rebels, who thought we might perhaps get out of the mess if everybody did as he liked.

Thus the Anarchists and Socialists fought a battle over the death-bed of Victorian Industrialism; in which the Socialists (that is, those who stood for increasing instead of diminishing the power of Government) won a complete victory and have almost exterminated their enemy. The Anarchist one meets here and there nowadays is a sad sight; he is disappointed with the future, as well as with the past.

This victory of the Socialists was largely a literary victory; because it was effected and popularised not only by a wit, but by a sincere wit; and one who had the same sort of militant lucidity that Huxley had shown in the last generation and Voltaire in the last century. A young Irish journalist, impatient of the impoverished Protestantism and Liberalism to which he had been bred, came out as the champion of Socialism not as a matter of sentiment, but as a matter of common sense. The primary position of Bernard Shaw towards the Victorian Age may be roughly summarised thus: the typical Victorian said coolly: “Our system may not be a perfect system, but it works.” Bernard Shaw replied, even more coolly: “It may be a perfect system, for all I know or care. But it does not work.” He and a society called the Fabians, which once exercised considerable influence, followed this shrewd and sound strategic hint to avoid mere emotional attack on the cruelty of Capitalism; and to concentrate on its clumsiness, its ludicrous incapacity to do its own work. This campaign succeeded, in the sense that while (in the educated world) it was the Socialist who looked the fool at the beginning of that campaign, it is the Anti-Socialist who looks the fool at the end of it. But while it won the educated classes it lost the populace for ever. It dried up those springs of blood and tears out of which all revolt must come if it is to be anything but bureaucratic readjustment. We began this book with the fires of the French Revolution still burning, but burning low. Bernard Shaw was honestly in revolt in his own way: but it was Bernard Shaw who trod out the last ember of the Great Revolution. Bernard Shaw proceeded to apply to many other things the same sort of hilarious realism which he thus successfully applied to the industrial problem. He also enjoyed giving people a piece of his mind; but a piece of his mind was a more appetising and less raw-looking object than a piece of Hardy's. There were many modes of revolt growing all around him; Shaw supported them — and supplanted them. Many were pitting the realism of war against the romance of war: they succeeded in making the fight dreary and repulsive, but the book dreary and repulsive too. Shaw, in *Arms and the Man*, did manage to make war funny as well as frightful. Many were questioning the right of revenge or punishment; but they wrote their books in such a way that the reader was ready to release all mankind if he might revenge himself on the author. Shaw, in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, really showed at its best the merry mercy of the pagan; that beautiful human nature that can neither rise to penance nor sink to revenge. Many had proved that even the most independent incomes drank blood out of the veins of the oppressed: but they wrote it in such a style that their readers knew more about depression than oppression. In *Widowers' Houses* Shaw very nearly (but not quite) succeeded in making a farce out of statistics. And the ultimate utility of his brilliant interruption can best be expressed in the very title of that play. When ages of essential European ethics have said "widows' houses," it suddenly occurs to him to say "but what about widowers' houses?" There is a sort of insane equity about it which was what Bernard Shaw had the power to give, and gave.

Out of the same social ferment arose a man of equally unquestionable genius, Mr. H. G. Wells. His first importance was that he wrote great adventure stories in the new world the men of science had discovered. He walked on a round slippery world as boldly as Ulysses or Tom Jones had worked on a flat one. Cyrano de Bergerac or Baron Munchausen, or other typical men of science, had treated the moon as a mere flat silver mirror in which Man saw his own image — the Man in the Moon. Wells treated the moon as a globe, like our own; bringing forth monsters as moonish as we are earthy. The exquisitely penetrating political and social satire he afterwards wrote belongs to an age later than the Victorian. But because, even from the beginning, his whole trend was Socialist, it is right to place him here.

While the old Victorian ideas were being disturbed by an increasing torture at home, they were also intoxicated by a new romance from abroad. It did not come from Italy with Rossetti and Browning, or from Persia with Fitzgerald: but it came from countries as remote, countries which were (as the simple phrase of that period ran) “painted red” on the map. It was an attempt to reform England through the newer nations; by the criticism of the forgotten colonies, rather than of the forgotten classes. Both Socialism and Imperialism were utterly alien to the Victorian idea. From the point of view of a Victorian aristocrat like Palmerston, Socialism would be the cheek of gutter snipes; Imperialism would be the intrusion of cads. But cads are not alone concerned.

Broadly, the phase in which the Victorian epoch closed was what can only be called the Imperialist phase. Between that and us stands a very individual artist who must nevertheless be connected with that phase. As I said at the beginning, Macaulay (or, rather, the mind Macaulay shared with most of his powerful middle class) remains as a sort of pavement or flat foundation under all the Victorians. They discussed the dogmas rather than denied them. Now one of the dogmas of Macaulay was the dogma of progress. A fair statement of the truth in it is not really so hard. Investigation of anything naturally takes some little time. It takes some time to sort letters so as to find a letter: it takes some time to test a gas-bracket so as to find the leak; it takes some time to sift evidence so as to find the truth. Now the curse that fell on the later Victorians was this: that they began to value the time more than the truth. One felt so secretarial when sorting letters that one never found the letter; one felt so scientific in explaining gas that one never found the leak; and one felt so judicial, so impartial, in weighing evidence that one had to be bribed to come to any conclusion at all. This was the last note of the Victorians: procrastination was called progress.

Now if we look for the worst fruits of this fallacy we shall find them in historical criticism. There is a curious habit of treating any one who comes before a strong movement as the “forerunner” of that movement. That is, he is treated as a sort of slave running in advance of a great army. Obviously, the analogy really arises from St. John the Baptist, for whom the phrase “forerunner” was rather peculiarly invented. Equally obviously, such a phrase only applies to an alleged or real divine event: otherwise the forerunner would be a founder. Unless Jesus had been the Baptist's God, He would simply have been his disciple.

Nevertheless the fallacy of the "forerunner" has been largely used in literature. Thus men will call a universal satirist like Langland a "morning star of the Reformation," or some such rubbish; whereas the Reformation was not larger, but much smaller than Langland. It was simply the victory of one class of his foes, the greedy merchants, over another class of his foes, the lazy abbots. In real history this constantly occurs; that some small movement happens to favour one of the million things suggested by some great man; whereupon the great man is turned into the running slave of the small movement. Thus certain sectarian movements borrowed the sensationalism without the sacramentalism of Wesley. Thus certain groups of decadents found it easier to imitate De Quincey's opium than his eloquence. Unless we grasp this plain common sense (that you or I are not responsible for what some ridiculous sect a hundred years hence may choose to do with what we say) the peculiar position of Stevenson in later Victorian letters cannot begin to be understood. For he was a very universal man; and talked some sense not only on every subject, but, so far as it is logically possible, in every sense. But the glaring deficiencies of the Victorian compromise had by that time begun to gape so wide that he was forced, by mere freedom of philosophy and fancy, to urge the neglected things. And yet this very urgency certainly brought on an opposite fever, which he would not have liked if he had lived to understand it. He liked Kipling, though with many healthy hesitations; but he would not have liked the triumph of Kipling: which was the success of the politician and the failure of the poet. Yet when we look back up the false perspective of time, Stevenson does seem in a sense to have prepared that imperial and downward path.

I shall not talk here, any more than anywhere else in this book, about the "sedulous ape" business. No man ever wrote as well as Stevenson who cared only about writing. Yet there is a sense, though a misleading one, in which his original inspirations were artistic rather than purely philosophical. To put the point in that curt covenanting way which he himself could sometimes command, he thought it immoral to neglect romance. The whole of his real position was expressed in that phrase of one of his letters "our civilisation is a dingy ungentlemanly business: it drops so much out of a man.” On the whole he concluded that what had been dropped out of the man was the boy. He pursued pirates as Defoe would have fled from them; and summed up his simplest emotions in that touching *cri de cœur* “shall we never shed blood?” He did for the penny dreadful what Coleridge had done for the penny ballad. He proved that, because it was really human, it could really rise as near to heaven as human nature could take it. If Thackeray is our youth, Stevenson is our boyhood: and though this is not the most artistic thing in him, it is the most important thing in the history of Victorian art. All the other fine things he did were, for curious reasons, remote from the current of his age. For instance, he had the good as well as the bad of coming from a Scotch Calvinist’s house. No man in that age had so healthy an instinct for the actuality of positive evil. In *The Master of Ballantrae* he did prove with a pen of steel, that the Devil is a gentleman — but is none the less the Devil. It is also characteristic of him (and of the revolt from Victorian respectability in general) that his most blood-and-thunder sensational tale is also that which contains his most intimate and bitter truth. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is a double triumph; it has the outside excitement that belongs to Conan Doyle with the inside excitement that belongs to Henry James. Alas, it is equally characteristic of the Victorian time that while nearly every Englishman has enjoyed the anecdote, hardly one Englishman has seen the joke — I mean the point. You will find twenty allusions to Jekyll and Hyde in a day’s newspaper reading. You will also find that all such allusions suppose the two personalities to be equal, neither caring for the other. Or more roughly, they think the book means that man can be cloven into two creatures, good and evil. The whole stab of the story is that man *can’t*: because while evil does not care for good, good must care for evil. Or, in other words, man cannot escape from God, because good is the God in man; and insists on omniscience. This point, which is good psychology and also good theology and also good art, has missed its main intention merely because it was also good story-telling.

If the rather vague Victorian public did not appreciate the deep and even tragic ethics with which Stevenson was concerned, still less were they of a sort to appreciate the French finish and fastidiousness of his style; in which he seemed to pick the right word up on the point of his pen, like a man playing spillikins. But that style also had a quality that could be felt; it had a military edge to it, an *acies*; and there was a kind of swordsmanship about it. Thus all the circumstances led, not so much to the narrowing of

Stevenson to the romance of the fighting spirit; but the narrowing of his influence to that romance. He had a great many other things to say; but this was what we were willing to hear: a reaction against the gross contempt for soldiering which had really given a certain Chinese deadness to the Victorians. Yet another circumstance thrust him down the same path; and in a manner not wholly fortunate. The fact that he was a sick man immeasurably increases the credit to his manhood in preaching a sane levity and pugnacious optimism. But it also forbade him full familiarity with the actualities of sport, war, or comradeship: and here and there his note is false in these matters, and reminds one (though very remotely) of the mere provincial bully that Henley sometimes sank to be.

For Stevenson had at his elbow a friend, an invalid like himself, a man of courage and stoicism like himself; but a man in whom everything that Stevenson made delicate and rational became unbalanced and blind. The difference is, moreover, that Stevenson was quite right in claiming that he could treat his limitation as an accident; that his medicines "did not colour his life." His life was really coloured out of a shilling paint-box, like his toy-theatre: such high spirits as he had are the key to him: his sufferings are not the key to him. But Henley's sufferings are the key to Henley; much must be excused him, and there is much to be excused. The result was that while there was always a certain dainty equity about Stevenson's judgments, even when he was wrong, Henley seemed to think that on the right side the wronger you were the better. There was much that was feminine in him; and he is most understandable when surprised in those little solitary poems which speak of emotions mellowed, of sunset and a quiet end. Henley hurled himself into the new fashion of praising Colonial adventure at the expense both of the Christian and the republican traditions; but the sentiment did not spread widely until the note was struck outside England in one of the conquered countries; and a writer of Anglo-Indian short stories showed the stamp of the thing called genius; that indefinable, dangerous and often temporary thing.

For it is really impossible to criticise Rudyard Kipling as part of Victorian literature, because he is the end of such literature. He has many other powerful elements; an Indian element, which makes him exquisitely sympathetic with the Indian; a vague Jingo influence which makes him sympathetic with the man that crushes the Indian; a vague journalistic sympathy with the men that misrepresent everything that has happened to the Indian; but of the Victorian virtues, nothing.

All that was right or wrong in Kipling was expressed in the final convulsion that he almost in person managed to achieve. The nearest that any honest man can come to the thing called "impartiality" is to confess that he is partial. I therefore confess that I think this last turn of the Victorian Age was an unfortunate turn; much on the other side can be said, and I hope will be said. But about the facts there can be no question. The Imperialism of Kipling was equally remote from the Victorian caution and the Victorian idealism: and our subject does quite seriously end here. The world was full of the trampling of totally new forces, gold was sighted from far in a sort of cynical romanticism: the guns opened across Africa; and the great queen died.

Of what will now be the future of so separate and almost secretive an adventure of the English, the present writer will not permit himself, even for an instant, to prophesy. The Victorian Age made one or two mistakes, but they were mistakes that were really useful; that is, mistakes that were really mistaken. They thought that commerce outside a country must extend peace: it has certainly often extended war. They thought that commerce inside a country must certainly promote prosperity; it has largely promoted poverty. But for them these were experiments; for us they ought to be lessons. If *we* continue the capitalist use of the populace — if *we* continue the capitalist use of external arms, it will lie heavy on the living. The dishonour will not be on the dead.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

After having surveyed the immense field presented in such a volume as Mr. George Mair's *Modern English Literature* in this series, or, more fully, in the *Cambridge History of Modern Literature*, the later volume of Chambers' *English Literature*, Mr. Gosse's *History of Modern English Literature*, or Henry Morley's *English Literature in the Reign of Victoria*, the wise reader will choose some portion for closer study, and will go straight to the originals before he has any further traffic with critics or commentators, however able.

He will then need the aid of fuller biographies. Some Victorian *Lives* are already classic, or nearly so, among them Sir G. Trevelyan's *Macaulay*, Forster's *Dickens*, Mrs. Gaskell's *Charlotte Brontë*, Froude's *Carlyle*, and Sir E. T. Cook's *Ruskin*. With these may be ranged the great *Dictionary of National Biography*. The "English Men of Letters" Series includes H. D. Traill's *Coleridge*, Ainger's *Lamb*, Trollope's *Thackeray*, Leslie Stephen's *George Eliot*, Herbert Paul's *Matthew Arnold*, Sir A. Lyall's *Tennyson*, G. K. Chesterton's *Robert Browning*, and A. C. Benson's *Fitzgerald*. At least two autobiographies must be named, those of Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill, and, as antidote to Newman's *Apologia*, the gay self-revelations of Borrow, and Jefferies' *Story of My Heart*. Other considerable volumes are W. J. Cross's *George Eliot*, Lionel Johnson's *Art of Thomas Hardy*, Mr. W. M. Rossetti's *Dante G. Rossetti*, Colvin's *R. L. Stevenson*, J. W. Mackail's *William Morris*, Holman Hunt's *Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, Sir Leslie Stephen's *The Utilitarians*, Buxton Forman's *Our Living Poets*, Edward Thomas's *Swinburne*, Monypenny's *Disraeli*, Dawson's *Victorian Novelists*, and Stedman's *Victorian Poets*. The "Everyman" *Short Biographical Dictionary of English Literature* is useful for dates.

The latter half of the second volume of Mr. F. A. Mumby's *Letters of Literary Men* is devoted to the Victorian Age. There are fuller collections of the *Letters* of Leigh Hunt, Thackeray, Dickens, the Brownings, Fitzgerald, Charles Kingsley, Matthew Arnold, and more recently the *Letters of George Meredith*, edited by his son.

Among the important critical writers of the period, Matthew Arnold (*Essays in Criticism*, *Study of Celtic Literature*, etc.) stands easily first. Others are John, now Lord, Morley (*Studies in Literature*, etc.), Augustine Birrell (*Obiter Dicta*, *Essays*), W. E. Henley (*Views and Reviews*), J. Addington Symonds (*Essays*), J. Churton Collins, Richard Garnett, Stopford A. Brooke, George E. B. Saintsbury (*History of Criticism*), R. H. Hutton (*Contemporary Thought*), J. M. Robertson (*Modern Humanists*, *Buckle*, etc.), Frederic Harrison (*The Choice of Books*, etc.), Andrew Lang, Walter Bagehot, Edmund Gosse, Prof. Dowden, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Sir A. T. Quiller Couch.

THE APPETITE OF TYRANNY

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THE FACTS OF THE CASE

Unless we are all mad, there is at the back of the most bewildering business a story: and if we are all mad, there is no such thing as madness. If I set a house on fire, it is quite true that I may illuminate many other people’s weaknesses as well as my own. It may be that the master of the house was burned because he was drunk; it may be that the mistress of the house was burned because she was stingy, and perished arguing about the expense of the fire-escape. It is, nevertheless, broadly true that they both were burned because I set fire to their house. That is the story of the thing. The mere facts of the story about the present European conflagration are quite as easy to tell.

Before we go on to the deeper things which make this war the most sincere war of human history, it is easy to answer the question of why England came to be in it at all, as one asks how a man fell down a coal-hole, or failed to keep an appointment. Facts are not the whole truth. But facts are facts, and in this case the facts are few and simple. Prussia, France, and England had all promised not to invade Belgium. Prussia proposed to invade Belgium, because it was the safest way of invading France. But Prussia promised that if she might break in, through her own broken promise and ours, she would break in and not steal. In other words, we were offered at the same instant a promise of faith in the future and a proposal of perjury in the present. Those interested in human origin may refer to an old Victorian writer of English, who, in the last and most restrained of his historical essays, wrote of Frederick the Great, the founder of this unchanging Prussian policy. After describing how Frederick broke the guarantee he had signed on behalf of Maria Theresa, he then describes how Frederick sought to put things straight by a promise that was an insult. “If she would but let him have Silesia, he would, he said, stand by her against any power which should try to deprive her of her other dominions, as if he was not already bound to stand by her, or as if his new promise could be of more value than the old one.” That passage was written by Macaulay, but so far as the mere contemporary facts are concerned, it might have been written by me.

Upon the immediate logical and legal origin of the English interest there can be no rational debate. There are some things so simple that one can almost prove them with plans and diagrams, as in Euclid. One could make a kind of comic calendar of what would have happened to the English diplomatist if he had been silenced every time by Prussian diplomacy. Suppose we arrange it in the form of a kind of diary.

July 24. Germany invades Belgium.

July 25. England declares war.

July 26. Germany promises not to annex Belgium.

July 27. England withdraws from the war.

July 28. Germany annexes Belgium. England declares war.

July 29. Germany promises not to annex France. England withdraws from the war.

July 30. Germany annexes France. England declares war.

July 31. Germany promises not to annex England.

Aug. 1. England withdraws from the war. Germany invades England…

How long is anybody expected to go with that sort of game, or keep peace at that illimitable price? How long must we pursue a road in which promises are all fetishes in front of us and all fragments behind us? No: upon the cold facts of the final negotiations, as told by any of the diplomatists in any of the documents, there is no doubt about the story. And no doubt about the villain of the story.

These are the last facts — the facts which involved England. It is equally easy to state the first facts — the facts which involved Europe. The Prince who practically ruled Austria was shot by certain persons whom the Austrian Government believed to be conspirators from Servia. The Austrian Government piled up arms and armies, but said not a word either to Servia their suspect or Italy their ally. From the documents it would seem that Austria kept everybody in the dark, except Prussia. It is probably nearer the truth to say that Prussia kept everybody in the dark, including Austria. But all that is what is called opinion, belief, conviction or common-sense, and we are not dealing with it here. The objective fact is that Austria told Servia to permit Servian officers to be suspended by the authority of Austrian officers, and told Servia to submit to this within forty-eight hours. In other words, the sovereign of Servia was practically told to take off not only the laurels of two great campaigns but his own lawful and national crown, and to do it in a time in which no respectable citizen is expected to discharge an hotel bill. Servia asked for time, for arbitration — in short, for peace. But

Prussia had already begun to mobilise; and Prussia, presuming that Servia might thus be rescued, declared war.

Between these two ends of fact, the ultimatum to Servia, the ultimatum to Belgium, any one so inclined can of course talk as if everything were relative. If any one ask why the Czar should rush to the support of Servia, it is as easy to ask why the Kaiser should rush to the support of Austria. If any one say that the French would attack the Germans, it is sufficient to answer that the Germans did attack the French. There remain, however, two attitudes to consider, even perhaps two arguments to counter, which can best be considered and countered under this general head of facts. First of all, there is a curious, cloudy sort of argument, much affected by the professional rhetoricians of Prussia, who are sent out to instruct and correct the minds of Americans or Scandinavians. It consists of going into convulsions of incredulity and scorn at the mention of Russia's responsibility for Servia or England's responsibility for Belgium; and suggesting that, treaty or no treaty, frontier or no frontier, Russia would be out to slay Teutons or England to steal colonies. Here, as elsewhere, I think the professors dotted all over the Baltic plain fail in lucidity, and in the power of distinguishing ideas. Of course it is quite true that England has material interests to defend, and will probably use the opportunity to defend them: or, in other words, of course England, like everybody else, would be more comfortable if Prussia were less predominant. The fact remains that we did not do what the Germans did. We did not invade Holland to seize a naval and commercial advantage: and whether they say that we wished to do it in our greed, or feared to do it in our cowardice, the fact remains that we did not do it. Unless this common-sense principle be kept in view, I cannot conceive how any quarrel can possibly be judged. A contract may be made between two persons solely for material advantage on each side: but the moral advantage is still generally supposed to lie with the person who keeps the contract. Surely it cannot be dishonest to be honest — even if honesty is the best policy. Imagine the most complex maze of indirect motives; and still the man who keeps faith for money cannot possibly be worse than the man who breaks faith for money. It will be noted that this ultimate test applies in the same way to Servia as to Belgium and Britain. The Servians may not be a very peaceful people; but, on the occasion under discussion, it was certainly they who wanted peace. You may choose to think the Serb a sort of born robber: but on this occasion it was certainly the

Austrian who was trying to rob. Similarly, you may call England perfidious as a sort of historical summary; and declare your private belief that Mr. Asquith was vowed from infancy to the ruin of the German Empire, a Hannibal and hater of the eagles. But, when all is said, it is nonsense to call a man perfidious because he keeps his promise. It is absurd to complain of the sudden treachery of a business man in turning up punctually to his appointment: or the unfair shock given to a creditor by the debtor paying his debts.

Lastly, there is an attitude not unknown in the crisis against which I should particularly like to protest. I should address my protest especially to those lovers and pursuers of Peace who, very short-sightedly, have occasionally adopted it. I mean the attitude which is impatient of these preliminary details about who did this or that, and whether it was right or wrong. They are satisfied with saying that an enormous calamity, called War, has been begun by some or all of us; and should be ended by some or all of us. To these people this preliminary chapter about the precise happenings must appear not only dry (and it must of necessity be the driest part of the task) but essentially needless and barren. I wish to tell these people that they are wrong; that they are wrong upon all principles of human justice and historic continuity: but that they are specially and supremely wrong upon their own principles of arbitration and international peace.

These sincere and high-minded peace-lovers are always telling us that citizens no longer settle their quarrels by private violence; and that nations should no longer settle theirs by public violence. They are always telling us that we no longer fight duels; and need no longer wage wars. In short, they perpetually base their peace proposals on the fact that an ordinary citizen no longer avenges himself with an axe. But how is he prevented from revenging himself with an axe? If he hits his neighbour on the head with the kitchen chopper, what do we do? Do we all join hands, like children playing Mulberry Bush, and say “We are all responsible for this; but let us hope it will not spread. Let us hope for the happy day when he shall leave off chopping at the man’s head; and when nobody shall ever chop anything for ever and ever.” Do we say “Let byegones be byegones; why go back to all the dull details with which the business began; who can tell with what sinister motives the man was standing there within reach of the hatchet?” We do not. We keep the peace in private life by asking for the facts of provocation, and the proper object of punishment. We do go into the dull details; we do enquire into the origins; we do emphatically enquire who it was that hit first. In short we do what I have done very briefly in this place.

Given this, it is indeed true that behind these facts there are truths; truths of a terrible, of a spiritual sort. In mere fact, the Germanic power has been wrong about Servia, wrong about Russia, wrong about Belgium, wrong about England, wrong about Italy. But there was a reason for its being wrong everywhere; and of that root reason, which has moved half the world against it, I shall speak later. For that is something too omnipresent to be proved, too indisputable to be helped by detail. It is nothing less than the locating, after more than a hundred years of recriminations and wrong explanations, of the modern European evil: the finding of the fountain from which poison has flowed upon all the nations of the earth.

THE WAR ON THE WORD

It will hardly be denied that there is one lingering doubt in many, who recognise unavoidable self-defence in the instant parry of the English sword, and who have no great love for the sweeping sabre of Sadowa and Sedan. That doubt is the doubt whether Russia, as compared with Prussia, is sufficiently decent and democratic to be the ally of liberal and civilised powers. I take first, therefore, this matter of civilisation.

It is vital in a discussion like this, that we should make sure we are going by meanings and not by mere words. It is not necessary in any argument to settle what a word means or ought to mean. But it is necessary in every argument to settle what we propose to mean by the word. So long as our opponent understands what is the *thing* of which we are talking, it does not matter to the argument whether the word is or is not the one he would have chosen. A soldier does not say “We were ordered to go to Mechlin; but I would rather go to Malines.” He may discuss the etymology and archæology of the difference on the march; but the point is that he knows where to go. So long as we know what a given word is to mean in a given discussion, it does not even matter if it means something else in some other and quite distinct discussion. We have a perfect right to say that the width of a window comes to four feet; even if we instantly and cheerfully change the subject to the larger mammals; and say that an elephant has four feet. The identity of the words does not matter, because there is no doubt at all about the meanings; because nobody is likely to think of an elephant as four foot long, or of a window as having tusks and a curly trunk.

It is essential to emphasise this consciousness of the *thing* under discussion in connection with two or three words that are, as it were, the key-words of this war. One of them is the word “barbarian.” The Prussians apply it to the Russians: the Russians apply it to the Prussians. Both, I think, really mean something that really exists, name or no name. Both mean different things. And if we ask what these different things are, we shall understand why England and France prefer Russia; and consider Prussia the really dangerous barbarian of the two. To begin with, it goes so much deeper even than atrocities; of which, in the past at least, all the three Empires of Central Europe have partaken pretty equally, as they partook of Poland. An English writer, seeking to avert the war by warnings against

Russian influence, said that the flogged backs of Polish women stood between us and the Alliance. But not long before, the flogging of women by an Austrian general led to that officer being thrashed in the streets of London by Barclay and Perkins' draymen. And as for the third power, the Prussians, it seems clear that they have treated Belgian women in a style compared with which flogging might be called an official formality. But, as I say, something much deeper than any such recrimination lies behind the use of the word on either side. When the German Emperor complains of our allying ourselves with a barbaric and half-oriental power he is not (I assure you) shedding tears over the grave of Kosciusko. And when I say (as I do most heartily) that the German Emperor is a barbarian, I am not merely expressing any prejudices I may have against the profanation of churches or of children. My countrymen and I mean a certain and intelligible thing when we call the Prussians barbarians. It is quite different from the thing attributed to Russians; and it could not possibly be attributed to Russians. It is very important that the neutral world should understand what this thing is.

If the German calls the Russian barbarous he presumably means imperfectly civilised. There is a certain path along which Western nations have proceeded in recent times; and it is tenable that Russia has not proceeded so far as the others: that she has less of the special modern system in science, commerce, machinery, travel or political constitution. The Russ ploughs with an old plough; he wears a wild beard; he adores relics; his life is as rude and hard as that of a subject of Alfred the Great. Therefore he is, in the German sense, a barbarian. Poor fellows like Gorky and Dostoieffsky have to form their own reflections on the scenery, without the assistance of large quotations from Schiller on garden seats; or inscriptions directing them to pause and thank the All-Father for the finest view in Hesse-Pumpernickel. The Russians, having nothing but their faith, their fields, their great courage, and their self-governing communes, are quite cut off from what is called (in the fashionable street in Frankfort) The True, The Beautiful and The Good. There is a real sense in which one can call such backwardness barbaric; by comparison with the Kaiserstrasse; and in that sense it is true of Russia.

Now we, the French and English, do not mean this when we call the Prussians barbarians. If their cities soared higher than their flying ships, if their trains travelled faster than their bullets, we should still call them barbarians. We should know exactly what we meant by it; and we should know that it is true. For we do not mean anything that is an imperfect civilisation by accident. We mean something that is the enemy of civilisation by design. We mean something that is wilfully at war with the principles by which human society has been made possible hitherto. Of course it must be partly civilised even to destroy civilisation. Such ruin could not be wrought by the savages that are merely undeveloped or inert. You could not have even Huns without horses; or horses without horsemanship. You could not have even Danish pirates without ships, or ships without seamanship. This person, whom I may call the Positive Barbarian, must be rather more superficially up-to-date than what I may call the Negative Barbarian. Alaric was an officer in the Roman legions: but for all that he destroyed Rome. Nobody supposes that Eskimos could have done it at all neatly. But (in our meaning) barbarism is not a matter of methods but of aims. We say that these veneered vandals have the perfectly serious aim of destroying certain ideas which, as they think, the world has outgrown; without which, as we think, the world will die.

It is essential that this perilous peculiarity in the Pruss, or Positive Barbarian, should be seized. He has what he fancies is a new idea; and he is going to apply it to everybody. As a fact it is simply a false generalisation; but he is really trying to make it general. This does not apply to the Negative Barbarian: it does not apply to the Russian or the Servian, even if they are barbarians. If a Russian peasant does beat his wife, he does it because his fathers did it before him: he is likely to beat less rather than more as the past fades away. He does not think, as the Prussian would, that he has made a new discovery in physiology in finding that a woman is weaker than a man. If a Servian does knife his rival without a word, he does it because other Servians have done it. He may regard it even as piety, but certainly not as progress. He does not think, as the Prussian does, that he founds a new school of horology by starting before the word “Go.” He does not think he is in advance of the world in militarism, merely because he is behind it in morals. No; the danger of the Pruss is that he is prepared to fight for old errors as if they were new truths. He has somehow heard of certain shallow simplifications; and imagines that we have never heard of them. And, as I have said, his limited but very sincere lunacy concentrates chiefly in a desire to destroy two ideas, the twin root ideas of rational society. The first is the idea of record and promise: the second is the idea of reciprocity.

It is plain that the promise, or extension of responsibility through time, is what chiefly distinguishes us, I will not say from savages, but from brutes and reptiles. This was noted by the shrewdness of the Old Testament, when it summed up the dark irresponsible enormity of Leviathan in the words "Will he make a pact with thee?" The promise, like the wheel, is unknown in Nature: and is the first mark of man. Referring only to human civilisation it may be said with seriousness, that in the beginning was the Word. The vow is to the man what the song is to the bird, or the bark to the dog; his voice, whereby he is known. Just as a man who cannot keep an appointment is not fit even to fight a duel, so the man who cannot keep an appointment with himself is not sane enough even for suicide. It is not easy to mention anything on which the enormous apparatus of human life can be said to depend. But if it depends on anything, it is on this frail cord, flung from the forgotten hills of yesterday to the invisible mountains of to-morrow. On that solitary string hangs everything from Armageddon to an almanac, from a successful revolution to a return ticket. On that solitary string the Barbarian is hacking heavily, with a sabre which is fortunately blunt.

Any one can see this well enough, merely by reading the last negotiations between London and Berlin. The Prussians had made a new discovery in international politics: that it may often be convenient to make a promise; and yet curiously inconvenient to keep it. They were charmed, in their simple way, with this scientific discovery, and desired to communicate it to the world. They therefore promised England a promise, on condition that she broke a promise, and on the implied condition that the new promise might be broken as easily as the old one. To the profound astonishment of Prussia, this reasonable offer was refused! I believe that the astonishment of Prussia was quite sincere. That is what I mean when I say that the Barbarian is trying to cut away that cord of honesty and clear record, on which hangs all that men have made.

The friends of the German cause have complained that Asiatics and Africans upon the very verge of savagery have been brought against them from India and Algiers. And, in ordinary circumstances, I should sympathise with such a complaint made by a European people. But the circumstances are not ordinary. Here, again, the quite unique barbarism of Prussia goes deeper than what we call barbarities. About mere barbarities, it is true, the Turco and the Sikh would have a very good reply to the superior Teuton. The general and just reason for not using non-European tribes against Europeans is that given by Chatham against the use of the Red Indian: that such allies might do very diabolical things. But the poor Turco might not unreasonably ask, after a weekend in Belgium, what more diabolical things he *could* do than the highly cultured Germans were doing themselves. Nevertheless, as I say, the justification of any extra-European aid goes deeper than any such details. It rests upon the fact that even other civilisations, even much lower civilisations, even remote and repulsive civilisations, depend as much as our own on this primary principle on which the super-morality of Potsdam declares open War. Even savages promise things; and respect those who keep their promises. Even Orientals write things down: and though they write them from right to left, they know the importance of a scrap of paper. Many merchants will tell you that the word of the sinister and almost unhuman Chinaman is often as good as his bond: and it was amid palm trees and Syrian pavilions that the great utterance opened the tabernacle, to him that sweareth to his hurt and changeth not. There is doubtless a dense labyrinth of duplicity in the East, and perhaps more guile in the individual Asiatic than in the individual German. But we are not talking of the violations of human morality in various parts of the world. We are talking about a new and inhuman morality, which denies altogether the day of obligation. The Prussians have been told by their literary men that everything depends upon Mood: and by their politicians that all arrangements dissolve before “necessity.” That is the importance of the German Chancellor’s phrase. He did not allege some special excuse in the case of Belgium, which might make it seem an exception that proved the rule. He distinctly argued, as on a principle applicable to other cases, that victory was a necessity and honour was a scrap of paper. And it is evident that the half-educated Prussian imagination really cannot get any further than this. It cannot see that if everybody’s action were entirely incalculable from hour to hour, it would not only be the end of all promises, but the end of all projects. In not being able to see that, the Berlin philosopher is really on a lower mental level than the Arab who respects the salt, or the Brahmin who preserves the caste. And in this quarrel we have a right to come with scimitars as well as sabres, with bows as well as rifles, with assegai and tomahawk and boomerang, because there is in all these at least a seed of civilisation that these intellectual anarchists would kill. And if they should find us in our last stand girt with such strange swords and following unfamiliar ensigns, and ask us for what we fight in so singular a company, we shall know what to reply: “We fight for the trust and for the tryst; for fixed memories and the possible meeting of men; for all that makes life anything but an uncontrollable nightmare. We fight for the long arm of honour and remembrance; for all that can lift a man above the quicksands of his moods, and give him the mastery of time.”

THE REFUSAL OF RECIPROCITY

In the last summary I suggested that Barbarism, as we mean it, is not mere ignorance or even mere cruelty. It has a more precise sense, and means militant hostility to certain necessary human ideas. I took the case of the vow or the contract, which Prussian intellectualism would destroy. I urged that the Prussian is a spiritual Barbarian, because he is not bound by his own past, any more than a man in a dream. He avows that when he promised to respect a frontier on Monday, he did not foresee what he calls “the necessity” of not respecting it on Tuesday. In short, he is like a child, who at the end of all reasonable explanations and reminders of admitted arrangements, has no answer except “But I *want* to.”

There is another idea in human arrangements so fundamental as to be forgotten; but now for the first time denied. It may be called the idea of reciprocity; or, in better English, of give and take. The Prussian appears to be quite intellectually incapable of this thought. He cannot, I think, conceive the idea that is the foundation of all comedy; that, in the eyes of the other man, he is only the other man. And if we carry this clue through the institutions of Prussianised Germany, we shall find how curiously his mind has been limited in the matter. The German differs from other patriots in the inability to understand patriotism. Other European peoples pity the Poles or the Welsh for their violated borders; but Germans pity only themselves. They might take forcible possession of the Severn or the Danube, of the Thames or the Tiber, of the Garry or the Garonne — and they would still be singing sadly about how fast and true stands the watch on Rhine; and what a shame it would be if any one took their own little river away from them. That is what I mean by not being reciprocal: and you will find it in all that they do: as in all that is done by savages.

Here, again, it is very necessary to avoid confusing this soul of the savage with mere savagery in the sense of brutality or butchery; in which the Greeks, the French and all the most civilised nations have indulged in hours of abnormal panic or revenge. Accusations of cruelty are generally mutual. But it is the point about the Prussian that with him nothing is mutual. The definition of the true savage does not concern itself even with how much more he hurts strangers or captives than do the other tribes of men. The definition of the true savage is that he laughs when he hurts you;

and howls when you hurt him. This extraordinary inequality in the mind is in every act and word that comes from Berlin. For instance, no man of the world believes all he sees in the newspapers; and no journalist believes a quarter of it. We should, therefore, be quite ready in the ordinary way to take a great deal off the tales of German atrocities; to doubt this story or deny that. But there is one thing that we cannot doubt or deny: the seal and authority of the Emperor. In the Imperial proclamation the fact that certain "frightful" things have been done is admitted; and justified on the ground of their frightfulness. It was a military necessity to terrify the peaceful populations with something that was not civilised, something that was hardly human. Very well. That is an intelligible policy: and in that sense an intelligible argument. An army endangered by foreigners may do the most frightful things. But then we turn the next page of the Kaiser's public diary, and we find him writing to the President of the United States, to complain that the English are using Dum-dum bullets and violating various regulations of the Hague Conference. I pass for the present the question of whether there is a word of truth in these charges. I am content to gaze rapturously at the blinking eyes of the True, or Positive, Barbarian. I suppose he would be quite puzzled if we said that violating the Hague Conference was "a military necessity" to us; or that the rules of the Conference were only a scrap of paper. He would be quite pained if we said that Dum-dum bullets, "by their very frightfulness," would be very useful to keep conquered Germans in order. Do what he will, he cannot get outside the idea that he, because he is he and not you, is free to break the law; and also to appeal to the law. It is said that the Prussian officers play at a game called Kriegsspiel, or the War Game. But in truth they could not play at any game; for the essence of every game is that the rules are the same on both sides.

But taking every German institution in turn, the case is the same; and it is not a case of mere bloodshed or military bravado. The duel, for example, can legitimately be called a barbaric thing; but the word is here used in another sense. There are duels in Germany; but so there are in France, Italy, Belgium, and Spain; indeed, there are duels wherever there are dentists, newspapers, Turkish baths, time-tables, and all the curses of civilisation; except in England and a corner of America. You may happen to regard the duel as a historic relic of the more barbaric States on which these modern States were built. It might equally well be maintained that the duel is everywhere the sign of high civilisation; being the sign of its more delicate sense of honour, its more vulnerable vanity, or its greater dread of social disrepute. But whichever of the two views you take, you must concede that the essence of the duel is an armed equality. I should not, therefore, apply the word barbaric, as I am using it, to the duels of German officers, or even to the broadsword combats that are conventional among the German students. I do not see why a young Prussian should not have scars all over his face if he likes them; nay, they are often the redeeming points of interest on an otherwise somewhat unenlightening countenance. The duel may be defended; the sham duel may be defended.

What cannot be defended is something really peculiar to Prussia, of which we hear numberless stories, some of them certainly true. It might be called the one-sided duel. I mean the idea that there is some sort of dignity in drawing the sword upon a man who has not got a sword; a waiter, or a shop assistant, or even a schoolboy. One of the officers of the Kaiser in the affair at Saberne was found industriously hacking at a cripple. In all these matters I would avoid sentiment. We must not lose our tempers at the mere cruelty of the thing; but pursue the strict psychological distinction. Others besides German soldiers have slain the defenceless, for loot or lust or private malice, like any other murderer. The point is that nowhere else but in Prussian Germany is any theory of honour mixed up with such things; any more than with poisoning or picking pockets. No French, English, Italian or American gentleman would think he had in some way cleared his own character by sticking his sabre through some ridiculous greengrocer who had nothing in his hand but a cucumber. It would seem as if the word which is translated from the German as “honour” must really mean something quite different in German. It seems to mean something more like what we should call “prestige.”

The fundamental fact, however, is the absence of the reciprocal idea. The Prussian is not sufficiently civilised for the duel. Even when he crosses swords with us his thoughts are not as our thoughts; when we both glorify war, we are glorifying different things. Our medals are wrought like his, but they do not mean the same thing; our regiments are cheered as his are, but the thought in the heart is not the same; the Iron Cross is on the bosom of his king, but it is not the sign of our God. For we, alas, follow our God with many relapses and self-contradictions, but he follows his very consistently. Through all the things that we have examined, the view of national boundaries, the view of military methods, the view of personal honour and self-defence, there runs in their case something of an atrocious simplicity; something too simple for us to understand: the idea that glory consists in holding the steel, and not in facing it.

If further examples were necessary, it would be easy to give hundreds of them. Let us leave, for the moment, the relation between man and man in the thing called the duel. Let us take the relation between man and woman, in that immortal duel which we call a marriage. Here again we shall find that other Christian civilisations aim at some kind of equality; even if the balance be irrational or dangerous. Thus, the two extremes of the treatment of women might be represented by what are called the respectable classes in America and in France. In America they choose the risk of comradeship; in France the compensation of courtesy. In America it is practically possible for any young gentleman to take any young lady for what he calls (I deeply regret to say) a joy-ride; but at least the man goes with the woman as much as the woman with the man. In France the young woman is protected like a nun while she is unmarried; but when she is a mother she is really a holy woman; and when she is a grandmother she is a holy terror. By both extremes the woman gets something back out of life. There is only one place where she gets little or nothing back; and that is the north of Germany. France and America aim alike at equality; America by similarity; France by dissimilarity. But North Germany does definitely aim at inequality. The woman stands up, with no more irritation than a butler; the man sits down, with no more embarrassment than a guest. This is the cool affirmation of inferiority, as in the case of the sabre and the tradesman. “Thou goest with women; forget not thy whip,” said Nietzsche. It will be observed that he does not say “poker”; which might come more naturally to the mind of a more common or Christian wife-beater. But then a poker is a part of domesticity; and might be used by the wife as well as the husband. In fact, it often is. The sword and the whip are the weapons of a privileged caste.

Pass from the closest of all differences, that between husband and wife, to the most distant of all differences, that of the remote and unrelated races who have seldom seen each other’s faces, and never been tinged with each other’s blood. Here we still find the same unvarying Prussian principle. Any European might feel a genuine fear of the Yellow Peril; and many Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Russians have felt and expressed it. Many might say, and have said, that the Heathen Chinee is very heathen indeed; that if he ever advances against us he will trample and torture and utterly destroy, in a way that Eastern people do, but Western people do not. Nor do I doubt the German Emperor’s sincerity when he sought to point out to us how abnormal and abominable such a nightmare campaign would be, supposing that it could ever come. But now comes the comic irony; which never fails to follow on the attempt of the Prussian to be philosophic. For the Kaiser, after explaining to his troops how important it was to avoid Eastern Barbarism, instantly commanded them to become Eastern Barbarians. He told them, in so many words, to be Huns: and leave nothing living or standing behind them. In fact, he frankly offered a new army corps of aboriginal Tartars to the Far East, within such time as it may take a bewildered Hanoverian to turn into a Tartar. Any one who has the painful habit of personal thought, will perceive here at once the non-reciprocal principle again. Boiled down to its bones of logic, it means simply this: “I am a German and you are a Chinaman. Therefore I, being a German, have a right to be a Chinaman. But you have no right to be a Chinaman; because you are only a Chinaman.” This is probably the highest point to which the German culture has risen.

The principle here neglected, which may be called Mutuality by those who misunderstand and dislike the word Equality, does not offer so clear a distinction between the Prussian and the other peoples as did the first Prussian principle of an infinite and destructive opportunism; or, in other words, the principle of being unprincipled. Nor upon this second can one take up so obvious a position touching the other civilisations or semi-civilisations of the world. Some idea of oath and bond there is in the rudest tribes, in the darkest continents. But it might be maintained, of the more delicate and imaginative element of reciprocity, that a cannibal in Borneo understands it almost as little as a professor in Berlin. A narrow and one-sided seriousness is the fault of barbarians all over the world. This may have been the meaning, for aught I know, of the one eye of the Cyclops: that the Barbarian cannot see round things or look at them from two points of view; and thus becomes a blind beast and an eater of men. Certainly there can be no better summary of the savage than this, which as we have seen, unfits him for the duel. He is the man who cannot love — no, nor even hate — his neighbour as himself.

But this quality in Prussia does have one effect which has reference to the same question of the lower civilisations. It disposes once and for all at least of the civilising mission of Germany. Evidently the Germans are the last people in the world to be trusted with the task. They are as shortsighted morally as physically. What is their sophism of “necessity” but an inability to imagine to-morrow morning? What is their non-reciprocity but an inability to imagine, not a god or devil, but merely another man? Are these to judge mankind? Men of two tribes in Africa not only know that they are all men, but can understand that they are all black men. In this they are quite seriously in advance of the intellectual Prussian; who cannot be got to see that we are all white men. The ordinary eye is unable to perceive in the North-East Teuton anything that marks him out especially from the more colourless classes of the rest of Aryan mankind. He is simply a white man, with a tendency to the grey or the drab. Yet he will explain, in serious official documents, that the difference between him and us is a difference between “the master-race and the inferior-race.” The collapse of German philosophy always occurs at the beginning rather than the end of an argument; and the difficulty here is that there is no way of testing which is a master-race except by asking which is your own race. If you cannot find out (as is usually the case) you fall back on the absurd occupation of writing history about pre-historic times. But I suggest quite seriously that if the Germans can give their philosophy to the Hottentots, there is no reason why they should not give their sense of superiority to the Hottentots. If they can see such fine shades between the Goth and the Gaul, there is no reason why similar shades should not lift the savage above other savages; why any Ojibway should not discover that he is one tint redder than the Dacotahs; or any nigger in the Cameroons say he is not so black as he is painted. For this principle of a quite unproved racial supremacy is the last and worst of the refusals of reciprocity. The Prussian calls all men to admire the beauty of his large blue eyes. If they do, it is because they have inferior eyes: if they don’t, it is because they have no eyes.

Wherever the most miserable remnant of our race, astray and dried up in deserts, or buried forever under the fall of bad civilisations, has some feeble memory that men are men, that bargains are bargains, that there are two sides to a question, or even that it takes two to make a quarrel — that remnant has the right to resist the New Culture, to the knife and club and the splintered stone. For the Prussian begins all his culture by that act which is the destruction of all creative thought and constructive action. He breaks that mirror in the mind, in which a man can see the face of his friend or foe.

THE APPETITE OF TYRANNY

The German Emperor has reproached this country with allying itself with “barbaric and semi-oriental power.” We have already considered in what sense we use the word barbaric: it is in the sense of one who is hostile to civilisation, not one who is insufficient in it. But when we pass from the idea of the barbaric to the idea of the oriental, the case is even more curious. There is nothing particularly Tartar in Russian affairs, except the fact that Russia expelled the Tartars. The Eastern invader occupied and crushed the country for many years; but that is equally true of Greece, of Spain and even of Austria. If Russia has suffered from the East she has suffered in order to resist it: and it is rather hard that the very miracle of her escape should make a mystery about her origin. Jonah may or may not have been three days inside a fish, but that does not make him a merman. And in all the other cases of European nations who escaped the monstrous captivity, we do admit the purity and continuity of the European type. We consider the old Eastern rule as a wound, but not as a stain. Copper-coloured men out of Africa overruled for centuries the religion and patriotism of Spaniards. Yet I have never heard that Don Quixote was an African fable on the lines of Uncle Remus. I have never heard that the heavy black in the pictures of Velasquez was due to a negro ancestry. In the case of Spain, which is close to us, we can recognise the resurrection of a Christian and cultured nation after its age of bondage. But Russia is rather remote; and those to whom nations are but names in newspapers can really fancy, like Mr. Baring’s friend, that all Russian churches are “mosques.” Yet the land of Turgenev is not a wilderness of fakirs; and even the fanatical Russian is as proud of being different from the Mongol, as the fanatical Spaniard was proud of being different from the Moor.

The town of Reading, as it exists, offers few opportunities for piracy on the high seas: yet it was the camp of the pirates in Alfred’s day. I should think it hard to call the people of Berkshire half-Danish, merely because they drove out the Danes. In short, some temporary submergence under the savage flood was the fate of many of the most civilised states of Christendom; and it is quite ridiculous to argue that Russia, which wrestled hardest, must have recovered least. Everywhere, doubtless, the East spread a sort of enamel over the conquered countries, but everywhere the enamel cracked. Actual history, in fact, is exactly opposite to the cheap proverb invented against the Muscovite. It is not true to say “Scratch a Russian and you find a Tartar.” In the darkest hour of the barbaric dominion it was truer to say, “Scratch a Tartar and you find a Russian.” It was the civilisation that survived under all the barbarism. This vital romance of Russia, this revolution against Asia, can be proved in pure fact: not only from the almost superhuman activity of Russia during the struggle, but also (which is much rarer as human history goes) by her quite consistent conduct since. She is the only great nation which has really expelled the Mongol from her country, and continued to protest against the presence of the Mongol in her continent. Knowing what he had been in Russia, she knew what he would be in Europe. In this she pursued a logical line of thought which was, if anything, too unsympathetic with the energies and religions of the East. Every other country, one may say, has been an ally of the Turk; that is, of the Mongol and the Moslem. The French played them as pieces against Austria; the English warmly supported them under the Palmerston régime; even the young Italians sent troops to the Crimea; and of Prussia and her Austrian vassal it is nowadays needless to speak. For good or evil, it is the fact of history that Russia is the only Power in Europe that has never supported the Crescent against the Cross.

That, doubtless, will appear an unimportant matter; but it may become important under certain peculiar conditions. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that there were a powerful prince in Europe who had gone ostentatiously out of his way to pay reverence to the remains of the Tartar, Mongol and Moslem, left as an outpost in Europe. Suppose there were a Christian Emperor who could not even go to the tomb of the Crucified, without pausing to congratulate the last and living crucifier. If there were an Emperor who gave guns and guides and maps and drill instructors to defend the remains of the Mongol in Christendom, what should we say to him? I think at least we might ask him what he meant by his impudence, when he talked about supporting a semi-oriental power. That we support a semi-oriental power, we deny. That he has supported an entirely oriental power cannot be denied — no, not even by the man who did it.

But here is to be noted the essential difference between Russia and Prussia; especially by those who use the ordinary Liberal arguments against the latter. Russia has a policy which she pursues, if you will, through evil and good; but at least so as to produce good as well as evil. Let it be granted that the policy has made her oppressive to the Finns and the Poles — though the Russian Poles feel far less oppressed than do the Prussian Poles. But it is a mere historic fact, that if Russia has been a despot to some small nations, she has been a deliverer to others. She did, so far as in her lay, emancipate the Servians or the Montenegrins. But whom did Prussia ever emancipate — even by accident? It is indeed somewhat extraordinary that in the perpetual permutations of international politics the Hohenzollerns have never gone astray into the path of enlightenment. They have been in alliance with almost everybody off and on; with France, with England, with Austria, with Russia. Can any one candidly say that they have left on any one of these people the faintest impress of progress or liberation? Prussia was the enemy of the French Monarchy; but a worse enemy of the French Revolution. Prussia had been an enemy of the Czar; but she was a worse enemy of the Duma. Prussia totally disregarded Austrian rights; but she is to-day quite ready to inflict Austrian wrongs. This is the strong particular difference between the one empire and the other. Russia is pursuing certain intelligible and sincere ends, which to her at least are ideals, and for which, therefore, she will make sacrifices and will protect the weak. But the North German soldier is a sort of abstract tyrant, everywhere and always on the side of materialistic tyranny. This Teuton in uniform has been found in strange places; shooting farmers before Saratoga and flogging soldiers in Surrey, hanging niggers in Africa and raping girls in Wicklow; but never, by some mysterious fatality, lending a hand to the freeing of a single city or the independence of one solitary flag. Wherever scorn and prosperous oppression are, there is the Prussian; unconsciously consistent, instinctively restrictive, innocently evil; “following darkness like a dream.”

Suppose we heard of a person (gifted with some longevity) who had helped Alva to persecute Dutch Protestants, then helped Cromwell to persecute Irish Catholics, and then helped Claverhouse to persecute Scotch Puritans, we should find it rather easier to call him a persecutor than to call him a Protestant or a Catholic. Curiously enough this is actually the position in which the Prussian stands in Europe. No argument can alter the fact that in three converging and conclusive cases he has been on the side of three distinct rulers of different religions, who had nothing whatever in common except that they were ruling oppressively. In these three Governments, taken separately, one can see something excusable or at least human. When the Kaiser encouraged the Russian rulers to crush the Revolution, the

Russian rulers undoubtedly believed they were wrestling with an inferno of atheism and anarchy. A Socialist of the ordinary English kind cried out upon me when I spoke of Stolypin, and said he was chiefly known by the halter called “Stolypin’s Necktie.” As a fact, there were many other things interesting about Stolypin besides his necktie: his policy of peasant proprietorship, his extraordinary personal courage, and certainly none more interesting than that movement in his death agony, when he made the sign of the cross towards the Czar, as the crown and captain of his Christianity. But the Kaiser does not regard the Czar as the captain of Christianity. Far from it. What he supported in Stolypin was the necktie and nothing but the necktie: the gallows and not the cross. The Russian ruler did believe that the Orthodox Church was orthodox. The Austrian Archduke did really desire to make the Catholic Church catholic. He did really believe that he was being Pro-Catholic in being Pro-Austrian. But the Kaiser cannot be Pro-Catholic, and therefore cannot have been really Pro-Austrian, he was simply and solely Anti-Servian. Nay, even in the cruel and sterile strength of Turkey, any one with imagination can see something of the tragedy and therefore of the tenderness of true belief. The worst that can be said of the Moslems is, as the poet put it, they offered to man the choice of the Koran or the sword. The best that can be said for the German is that he does not care about the Koran, but is satisfied if he can have the sword. And for me, I confess, even the sins of these three other striving empires take on, in comparison, something that is sorrowful and dignified: and I feel they do not deserve that this little Lutheran lounger should patronise all that is evil in them, while ignoring all that is good. He is not Catholic, he is not Orthodox, he is not Mahomedan. He is merely an old gentleman who wishes to share the crime though he cannot share the creed. He desires to be a persecutor by the pang without the palm. So strongly do all the instincts of the Prussian drive against liberty, that he would rather oppress other people’s subjects than think of anybody going without the benefits of oppression. He is a sort of disinterested despot. He is as disinterested as the devil who is ready to do any one’s dirty work.

This would seem obviously fantastic were it not supported by solid facts which cannot be explained otherwise. Indeed it would be inconceivable if we were thinking of a whole people, consisting of free and varied individuals. But in Prussia the governing class is really a governing class: and a very few people are needed to think along these lines to make all the other people act along them. And the paradox of Prussia is this: that while its princes and nobles have no other aim on this earth but to destroy democracy wherever it shows itself, they have contrived to get themselves trusted, not as wardens of the past but as forerunners of the future. Even they cannot believe that their theory is popular, but they do believe that it is progressive. Here again we find the spiritual chasm between the two monarchies in question. The Russian institutions are, in many cases, really left in the rear of the Russian people, and many of the Russian people know it. But the Prussian institutions are supposed to be in advance of the Prussian people, and most of the Prussian people believe it. It is thus much easier for the warlords to go everywhere and impose a hopeless slavery upon every one, for they have already imposed a sort of hopeful slavery on their own simple race.

And when men shall speak to us of the hoary iniquities of Russia and of how antiquated is the Russian system, we shall answer "Yes; that is the superiority of Russia." Their institutions are part of their history, whether as relics or fossils. Their abuses have really been uses: that is to say, they have been used up. If they have old engines of terror or torment, they may fall to pieces from mere rust, like an old coat of armour. But in the case of the Prussian tyranny, if it be tyranny at all, it is the whole point of its claim that it is not antiquated, but just going to begin, like the showman. Prussia has a whole thriving factory of thumbscrews, a whole humming workshop of wheels and racks, of the newest and neatest pattern, with which to win back Europe to the Reaction … *infandum renovare dolorem*. And if we wish to test the truth of this, it can be done by the same method which showed us that Russia, if her race or religion could sometimes make her an invader and an oppressor, could also be made an emancipator and a knight errant. In the same way, if the Russian institutions are old-fashioned, they honestly exhibit the good as well as the bad that can be found in old-fashioned things. In their police system they have an inequality which is against our ideas of law. But in their commune system they have an equality that is older than law itself. Even when they flogged each other like barbarians, they called upon each other by their Christian names like children. At their worst they retained all the best of a rude society. At their best, they are simply good, like good children or good nuns. But in Prussia all that is best in the civilised machinery is put at the service of all that is worst in the barbaric mind. Here again the Prussian has no accidental merits, none of those lucky survivals, none of those late repentances, which make the patchwork glory of Russia. Here all is sharpened to a point and pointed to a purpose and that purpose, if words and acts have any meaning at all, is the destruction of liberty throughout the world.

THE ESCAPE OF FOLLY

In considering the Prussian point of view we have been considering what seems to be mainly a mental limitation: a kind of knot in the brain. Towards the problem of Slav population, of English colonisation, of French armies and reinforcements, it shows the same strange philosophic sulks. So far as I can follow it, it seems to amount to saying “It is very wrong that you should be superior to me, because I am superior to you.” The spokesmen of this system seem to have a curious capacity for concentrating this entanglement or contradiction, sometimes into a single paragraph, or even a single sentence. I have already referred to the German Emperor’s celebrated suggestion that in order to avert the peril of Hunnishness we should all become Huns. A much stronger instance is his more recent order to his troops touching the war in Northern France. As most people know, his words ran “It is my Royal and Imperial command that you concentrate your energies, for the immediate present, upon one single purpose, and that is that you address all your skill and all the valour of my soldiers to exterminate first the treacherous English and to walk over General French’s contemptible little Army.” The rudeness of the remark an Englishman can afford to pass over; what I am interested in is the mentality; the train of thought that can manage to entangle itself even in so brief a space. If French’s little Army is contemptible, it would seem clear that all the skill and valour of the German Army had better not be concentrated on it, but on the larger and less contemptible allies. If all the skill and valour of the German Army are concentrated on it, it is not being treated as contemptible. But the Prussian rhetorician had two incompatible sentiments in his mind; and he insisted on saying them both at once. He wanted to think of an English Army as a small thing; but he also wanted to think of an English defeat as a big thing. He wanted to exult, at the same moment, in the utter weakness of the British in their attack; and the supreme skill and valour of the Germans in repelling such an attack. Somehow it must be made a common and obvious collapse for England; and yet a daring and unexpected triumph for Germany. In trying to express these contradictory conceptions simultaneously, he got rather mixed. Therefore he bade Germania fill all her vales and mountains with the dying agonies of this almost invisible earwig; and let the impure blood of this cockroach redden the Rhine down to the sea.

But it would be unfair to base the criticism on the utterance of any accidental and hereditary prince: and it is quite equally clear in the case of the philosophers who have been held up to us, even in England, as the very prophets of progress. And in nothing is it shown more sharply than in the curious confused talk about Race and especially about the Teutonic Race. Professor Harnack and similar people are reproaching us, I understand, for having broken “the bond of Teutonism”: a bond which the Prussians have strictly observed both in breach and observance. We note it in their open annexation of lands wholly inhabited by negroes, such as Denmark. We note it equally in their instant and joyful recognition of the flaxen hair and light blue eyes of the Turks. But it is still the abstract principle of Professor Harnack which interests me most; and in following it I have the same complexity of enquiry, but the same simplicity of result. Comparing the Professor’s concern about “Teutonism” with his unconcern about Belgium, I can only reach the following result: “A man need not keep a promise he has made. But a man must keep a promise he has not made.” There certainly was a treaty binding Britain to Belgium; if it was only a scrap of paper. If there was any treaty binding Britain to Teutonism it is, to say the least of it, a lost scrap of paper: almost what one might call a scrap of waste-paper. Here again the pendants under consideration exhibit the illogical perversity that makes the brain reel. There is obligation and there is no obligation: sometimes it appears that Germany and England must keep faith with each other; sometimes that Germany need not keep faith with anybody and anything; sometimes that we alone among European peoples are almost entitled to be Germans; sometimes that beside us Russians and Frenchmen almost rise to a Germanic loveliness of character. But through all there is, hazy but not hypocritical, this sense of some common Teutonism.

Professor Haeckel, another of the witnesses raised up against us, attained to some celebrity at one time through proving the remarkable resemblance between two different things by printing duplicate pictures of the same thing. Professor Haeckel’s contribution to biology, in this case, was exactly like Professor Harnack’s contribution to ethnology. Professor Harnack knows what a German is like. When he wants to imagine what an Englishman is like, he simply photographs the same German over again. In both cases there is probably sincerity as well as simplicity. Haeckel was so certain that the species illustrated in embryo really are closely related and linked up, that it seemed to him a small thing to simplify it by mere repetition. Harnack is so certain that the German and Englishman are almost alike, that he really risks the generalisation that they are exactly alike. He photographs, so to speak, the same fair and foolish face twice over; and calls it a remarkable resemblance between cousins. Thus he can prove the existence of Teutonism just about as conclusively as Haeckel has proved the more tenable proposition of the non-existence of God. Now the German and the Englishman are not in the least alike — except in the sense that neither of them are negroes. They are, in everything good and evil, more unlike than any other two men we can take at random from the great European family. They are opposite from the roots of their history, nay, of their geography. It is an understatement to call Britain insular. Britain is not only an island, but an island slashed by the sea till it nearly splits into three islands; and even the Midlands can almost smell the salt. Germany is a powerful, beautiful and fertile inland country, which can only find the sea by one or two twisted and narrow paths, as people find a subterranean lake. Thus the British Navy is really national because it is natural; it has co-hered out of hundreds of accidental adventures of ships and shipmen before Chaucer's time and after it. But the German Navy is an artificial thing; as artificial as a constructed Alp would be in England. William II has simply copied the British Navy as Frederick II copied the French Army: and this Japanese or anti-like assiduity in imitation is one of the hundred qualities which the Germans have and the English markedly have not. There are other German superiorities which are very much superior. The one or two really jolly things that the Germans have got are precisely the things which the English haven't got: notably a real habit of popular music and of the ancient songs of the people, not merely spreading from the towns or caught from the professionals. In this the Germans rather resemble the Welsh: though heaven knows what becomes of Teutonism if they do. But the difference between the Germans and the English goes deeper than all these signs of it; they differ more than any other two Europeans in the normal posture of the mind. Above all, they differ in what is the most English of all English traits; that shame which the French may be right in calling "the bad shame"; for it is certainly mixed up with pride and suspicion, the upshot of which we call shyness. Even an Englishman's rudeness is often rooted in his being embarrassed. But a German’s rudeness is rooted in his never being embarrassed. He eats and makes love noisily. He never feels a speech or a song or a sermon or a large meal to be what the English call “out of place” in particular circumstances. When Germans are patriotic and religious they have no reactions against patriotism and religion as have the English and the French. Nay, the mistake of Germany in the modern disaster largely arose from the facts that she thought England was simple when England is very subtle. She thought that because our politics have become largely financial that they had become wholly financial; that because our aristocrats had become pretty cynical that they had become entirely corrupt. They could not seize the subtlety by which a rather used-up English gentleman might sell a coronet when he would not sell a fortress; might lower the public standards and yet refuse to lower the flag. In short, the Germans are quite sure that they understand us entirely, because they do not understand us at all. Possibly if they began to understand us they might hate us even more: but I would rather be hated for some small but real reason than pursued with love on account of all kinds of qualities which I do not possess and which I do not desire. And when the Germans get their first genuine glimpse of what modern England is like they will discover that England has a very broken, belated and inadequate sense of having an obligation to Europe, but no sort of sense whatever of having any obligation to Teutonism.

This is the last and strongest of the Prussian qualities we have here considered. There is in stupidity of this sort a strange slippery strength: because it can be not only outside rules but outside reason. The man who really cannot see that he is contradicting himself has a great advantage in controversy; though the advantage breaks down when he tries to reduce it to simple addition, to chess, or to the game called war. It is the same about the stupidity of the one-sided kinship. The drunkard who is quite certain that a total stranger is his long-lost brother, has a greater advantage until it comes to matters of detail. “We must have chaos within” said Nietzsche, “that we may give birth to a dancing star.”

In these slight notes I have suggested the principal strong points of the Prussian character. A failure in honour which almost amounts to a failure in memory: an egomania that is honestly blind to the fact that the other party is an ego; and, above all, an actual itch for tyranny and interference, the devil which everywhere torments the idle and the proud. To these must be added a certain mental shapelessness which can expand or contract without reference to reason or record; a potential infinity of excuses. If the English had been on the German side, the German professors would have noted what irresistible energies had evolved the Teutons. As the English are on the other side, the German professors will say that these Teutons were not sufficiently evolved. Or they will say that they were just sufficiently evolved to show that they were not Teutons. Probably they will say both. But the truth is that all that they call evolution should rather be called evasion. They tell us they are opening windows of enlightenment and doors of progress. The truth is that they are breaking up the whole house of the human intellect, that they may abscond in any direction. There is an ominous and almost monstrous parallel between the position of their over-rated philosophers and of their comparatively under-rated soldiers. For what their professors call roads of progress are really routes of escape.

LETTERS TO AN OLD GARIBALDIAN

Italy, twice hast thou spoken; and time is athirst
for the third. — SWINBURNE.

My Dear —— —

It is a long time since we met; and I fear these letters may never reach you. But in these violent times I remember with a curious vividness how you brandished a paintbrush about your easel when I was a boy; and how it thrilled me to think that you had so brandished a bayonet against the Teutons — I hope with the same precision and happy results. Round about that period, the very pigments seemed to have some sort of picturesque connection with your national story. There seemed to be something gorgeous and terrible about Venetian Red; and something quite catastrophic about Burnt Sienna. But somehow or other, when I saw in the street yesterday the colours on your flag, it reminded me of the colours on your palette.

You need not fear that I shall try to entangle you or your countrymen in the matters which it is for Italians alone to decide. You know the perils of either course much better than I do. Italy, most assuredly, has no need to prove her courage. She has risked everything in standing out that she could risk by coming in. The proclamations and press of Germany make it plain that the Germans have risen to a height of sensibility hardly to be distinguished from madness. Supposing the nightmare of a Prussian victory, they will revenge themselves on things more remote than the Triple Alliance. There was a promise of peace between them and Belgium; there was none between them and England. The promise to Belgium they broke. The promise of England they invented. It is called the Treaty of Teutonism. No one ever heard of it in this country; but it seems well known in academic circles in Germany. It seems to be something, connected with the colour of one’s hair. But I repeat that I am not concerned to interfere with your decision, save in so far as I may provide some materials for it by describing our own.

For I think the first, perhaps the only, fruitful work an Englishman can do now for the formation of foreign opinion is to talk about what he really understands, the condition of British opinion. It is as simple as it is solid.

For the first time, perhaps, what we call the United Kingdom entirely deserves its name. There has been nothing like such unanimity within an Englishman's recollection. The Irish and even the Welsh were largely pro-Boers, so were some of the most English of the English. No one could have been more English than Fox, yet he denounced the war with Napoleon. No one could be more English than Cobden, but he denounced the war in the Crimea. It is really extraordinary to find a united England. Indeed, until lately, it was extraordinary to find a united Englishman. Those of us who, like the present writer, repudiated the South African war from its beginnings, had yet a divided heart in the matter, and felt certain aspects of it as glorious as well as infamous. The first fact I can offer you is the unquestionable fact that all these doubts and divisions have ceased. Nor have they ceased by any compromise; but by a universal flash of faith — or, if you will, of suspicion. Nor were our internal conflicts lightly abandoned; nor our reconciliations an easy matter. I am, as you are, a democrat and a citizen of Europe; and my friends and I had grown to loathe the plutocracy and privilege which sat in the high places of our country with a loathing which we thought no love could cast out. Of these rich men I will not speak here; with your permission, I will not think of them. War is a terrible business in any case; and to some intellectual temperaments this is the most terrible part of it. That war takes the young; that war sunders the lovers; that all over Europe brides and bridegrooms are parting at the church door: all that is only a commonplace to commonplace people. To give up one's love for one's country is very great. But to give up one's hate for one's country, this may also have in it something of pride and something of purification.

What is it that has made the British peoples thus defer not only their artificial parade of party politics but their real social and moral complaints and demands? What is it that has united all of us against the Prussian, as against a mad dog? It is the presence of a certain spirit, as unmistakable as a pungent smell, which we feel is capable of withering all the good things in this world. The burglary of Belgium, the bribe to betray France, these are not excuses; they are facts. But they are only the facts by which we came to know of the presence of the spirit. They do not suffice to define the whole spirit itself. A good rough summary is to say that it is the spirit of barbarism; but indeed it is something worse. It is the spirit of second-rate civilisation; and the distinction involves the most important differences. Granted that it could exist, pure barbarism could not last long; as pure babyhood cannot last long. Of his own nature the baby is interested in the ticking of a watch; and the time will come when you will have to tell him, if you only tell him the wrong time. And that is exactly what the second-rate civilisation does.

But the vital point is here. The abstract barbarian would copy. The cockney and incomplete civilisation always sets itself up to be copied. And in the case here considered, the German thinks that it is not only his business to spread education, but to spread compulsory education. “Science combined with organisation,” says Professor Ostwald of Berlin University, “makes us terrible to our opponents and ensures a German future for Europe.” That is, as shortly as it can be put, what we are fighting about. We are fighting to prevent a German future for Europe. We think it would be narrower, nastier, less sane, less capable of liberty and of laughter, than any of the worst parts of the European past. And when I cast about for a form in which to explain shortly why we think so, I thought of you. For this is a matter so large that I know not how to express it except in terms of artists like you, in the service of beauty and the faith in freedom. Prussia, at least cannot help me; Lord Palmerston, I believe, called it a country of damned professors. Lord Palmerston, I fear, used the word “damned” more or less flippantly. I use it reverently.

Rome, at her very weakest, has always been a river that wanders and widens and that waters many fields. Berlin, at its strongest, will never be anything but a whirlpool, which seeks its own centre, and is sucked down. It would only narrow all the rest of Europe, as it has already narrowed all the rest of Germany. There is a spirit of diseased egoism, which at last makes all things spin upon one pin-point in the brain. It is a spirit expressed more often in the slangs than in the tongues of men. The English call it a fad. I do not know what the Italians call it; the Prussians call it philosophy.

Here is the sort of instance that made me think of you. What would you feel first, let us say, if I mentioned Michael Angelo? For the first moment, perhaps, boredom: such as I feel when Americans ask me about Stratford-on-Avon. But, supposing that just fear quieted, you would feel what I and every one else can feel. It might be the sense of the majestic hands of Man upon the locks of the last doors of life; large and terrible hands, like those of that youth who poises the stone above Florence, and looks out upon the circle of the hills. It might be that huge heave of flank and chest and throat in “The Slave,” which is like an earthquake lifting a whole landscape; it might be that tremendous Madonna, whose charity is more strong than death. Anyhow, your thoughts would be something worthy of the man's terrible paganism and his more terrible Christianity. Who but God could have graven Michael Angelo; who came so near to graving the Mother of God?

German culture deals with the matter as follows:— "Michelangelo Buonarotti (1475-1564). — (=Bernhard) ancestor of the family, lived in Florence about 1210. He had two sons, Berlinghieri and Buonarrota. By this name recurring frequently in later generations, the family came to be called. It is a German name, compounded of Bona (=Bohn) and Hrodo, Roto (=Rohde, Rothe) Bona and Rotto are cited as Lombard names. Buonarotti is perhaps the old Lombard Beonrad, corresponding to the word Bonroth. Corresponding names are Mackrodt, Osterroth, Leonard." And so on, and so on, and so on. "In his face he has always been well-coloured…the eyes might be called small rather than large, of the colour of horn, but variable with 'flecks' of yellow and blue. Hair and beard are black. These particulars are confirmed by the portraits. First and foremost take the portrait of Bugiardini in Museo Buonarotti. Here comes to view the 'flecked' appearance of the iris, especially in the right eye. The left may be described as almost wholly blue." And so on, and so on, and so on. "In the Museo Civico at Pavia, is a fresco likeness by an unknown hand, in which this fresh red is distinctly recognisable on the face. Taking all these bodily characteristics into consideration, it must be said from an anthropological point of view that though originally of German family he was a hybrid between the North and West brunette race."

Would you take the trouble to prove that Michael Angelo was an Italian that this man takes to prove that he was a German? Of course not. The only impression this man (who is a recognised Prussian historian) produces on your mind or mine is that he does not care about Michael Angelo. For you, being an Italian, are therefore something more than an Italian; and I being an Englishman, something more than an Englishman. But this poor fellow really cannot be anything more than a Prussian. He digs and digs to find dead Prussians, in the catacombs of Rome or under the ruins of Troy. If he can find one blue eye lying about somewhere, he is satisfied. He has no philosophy. He has a hobby, which is collecting Germans. It would probably be vain for you and me to point out that we could prove anything by the sort of ingenuity which finds the German "rothe" in Buonarotti. We could have great fun depriving Germany of all her geniuses in that style. We could say that Moltke must have been an Italian, from the old Latin root *mol* — indicating the sweetness of that general's disposition. We might say Bismarck was a Frenchman, since his name begins with the popular theatrical cry of "Bis!" We might say Goethe was an Englishman, because his name begins with the popular sporting cry "Go!" But the ultimate difference between us and the Prussian professor is simply that we are not mad.

The father of Frederick the Great, the founder of the more modern Hohenzollerns, was mad. His madness consisted of stealing giants; like an unscrupulous travelling showman. Any man much over six foot high, whether he were called the Russian Giant or the Irish Giant or the Chinese Giant or the Hottentot Giant, was in danger of being kidnapped and imprisoned in a Prussian uniform. It is the same mean sort of madness that is working in Prussian professors such as the one I have quoted. They can get no further than the notion of stealing giants. I will not bore you now with all the other giants they have tried to steal; it is enough to say that St. Paul, Leonardo da Vinci, and Shakespeare himself are among the monstrosities exhibited at Frederick-William fair — on grounds as good as those quoted above. But I have put this particular case before you, as an artist rather than an Italian, to show what I mean when I object to a "German future for Europe." I object to something which believes very much in itself, and in which I do not in the least believe. I object to something which is conceited and small-minded; but which also has that kind of pertinacity which always belongs to lunatics. It wants to be able to congratulate itself on Michael Angelo; never to congratulate the world. It is the spirit that can be seen in those who go bald trying to trace a genealogy; or go bankrupt trying to make out a claim to some remote estate. The Prussian has the inconsistency of the *parvenu*; he will labour to prove that he is related to some gentleman of the Renaissance, even while he boasts of being able to "buy him up." If the Italians were really great, why — they were really Germans; and if they weren't really Germans, well then, they weren't really great. It is an occupation for an old maid.

Three or four hundred years ago, in the sad silence that had followed the comparative failure of the noble effort of the Middle Ages, there came upon all Europe a storm out of the south. Its tumult is of many tongues; one can hear in it the laughter of Rabelais, or, for that matter, the lyrics of

Shakespeare; but the dark heart of the storm was indeed more austral and volcanic; a noise of thunderous wings and the name of Michael the Archangel. And when it had shocked and purified the world and passed, a Prussian professor found a feather fallen to earth; and proved (in several volumes) that it could only have come from a Prussian Eagle. He had seen one — in a cage.

Yours —— — ,
G. K. CHESTERTON.

My Dear —— —

The facts before all Europeans to-day are so fundamental that I still find it easier to talk about them to you as to an old friend, rather than put it in the shape of a pamphlet. In my last letter I pointed out two facts which are pivots. The first is that, to any really cultured person, Prussia is second-rate. The second is that to almost any Prussian, Prussia is really first-rate; and is prepared, quite literally, to police the rest of the world.

For the first matter, the comparative inferiority of German culture cannot be doubted by people like you. One of the German papers pathetically said that, though the mangling of Malines and Rheims was very sad, it was a comfort to think that yet nobler works of art would spring up wherever the German culture had passed in triumph. From the point of view of humour, it is really rather sad that they never will. The German Emperor’s idea of a Gothic cathedral is as provocative to the fancy as Mrs. Todgers’ idea of a wooden leg. But I think it perfectly probable that they really intended to set up such beautiful buildings as they could. Having been blasphemous enough to ruin such things, they might well be blasphemous enough to replace them. Even if the Prussian attempt on Paris had not wholly collapsed as it has, I doubt whether the Prussians would have destroyed everything. I doubt whether they would even have destroyed the Venus de Milo. More probably they would have put a pair of arms on it, designed by some rising German artist — the Emperor or somebody. And the two arms thus added would look at once like the arms of a woman at a wash-tub. The destroyers of the tower of Rheims are quite capable of destroying the Tower of Giotto. But they are equally capable of the greater crime of completing it. And if they put on a spire, what a spire it would be! What an extinguisher for that clear and almost transparent Christian candle! Have you read some of the German explanations of Hamlet? Did I tell you that Leonardo's hair must have been German hair, because so many of his contemporaries said it was beautiful? This is what I call being second-rate. All the German excitement about the colonies of England is only a half understanding of what was once heroic and is now largely caddish. The German Emperor's naval vision is a bad copy of Nelson, as certainly as Frederick the Great's verses were a bad copy of Voltaire.

But the second point was even more important; that weak as the thing is mentally it is strong materially; and will impose itself materially if we permit it. The Prussians have failed in everything else; but they have not failed in getting their subject thousands to do as they are told. They cannot put up black and white towers in Florence; but they can really put up black and white posts in Alsace. They have failed in diplomacy. I suppose it might be called a failure in diplomacy to come into the fight with two enemies extra and one ally the less. If the Germans, instead of sending spies to study the Belgian soil, had sent spies to consider the Belgian soul, they would have been saved hard work for a week or two. They have failed in controversy. I suppose it might be called a failure in controversy to say that England may be keeping her word for some wicked purpose; while Germany may be breaking her word for some noble purpose. And that is practically all that the Germans can manage to say. They say that we are an insatiable, unscrupulous, piratical power; and this wild spirit whirled us into the mad course of respecting a treaty we had signed. They can find in us no treason except that we keep our treaties: failing to do this I call failing in controversy. They have failed in popular persuasion. They have had a very good opportunity. The British Empire does contain many people who have been badly treated in various ways: the Irish, the Boers; nay, the Americans themselves, whose national existence began with being badly treated. With these the Prussians have done comparatively little; and with Europeans of your sort nothing. They have never once really sympathised with the feeling of a Switzer for Switzerland; the feeling of a Norwegian for Norway; the feeling of a Tuscan for Tuscany. Even when nations are neutral, Prussia can hardly bear them to be patriotic. Even when they are courting every one else they can praise no one but themselves. They fail in diplomacy, they fail in debate, they fail even in demagogy. They have stupid plots, stupid explanations, and even stupid apologies. But there is one thing they really do not fail in. They do not fail in finding people stupid enough to carry them out.

Now, it is this question I would ask you to consider; you, as a good middle type of the Latins, a Liberal but a Catholic, an artist but a soldier. The danger to the whole civilisation of which Rome was the fountain lies in this. That the more this strange Pruss people fail in all the other things, the more they will fall back on this mere fact of a brutal obedience. They will give orders; they have nothing else to give. I say that this is the question for you; I do not say, I do not dream of saying, that the answer is for me. It is for you to weigh the chance that their very failures in the arts of peace will drive them back upon the arts of war. They could not, and they did not, dupe your people in diplomacy. They did the most undiplomatic thing that can be done; they concealed a breach of partnership without even concealing the concealment. They instigated the intrigue in Austria in such a way that Italy could honestly claim all the freedom of past ignorance, combined with all the disillusionment of present knowledge. They so ran the Triple Alliance that they had to admit your grievance, at the very moment when they claimed your aid. The English are stupider and less sensitive than you are; but even the English found the German Chancellor’s diplomacy not insinuating but simply insulting; I swear I would be a better diplomatist myself. In the same way, there is no danger of people like you being corrupted in controversy. There is no fear that the professors who pullulate all over the Baltic Plain will overcome the Latins in logic. Some of them even claim to be super-logical; and say they are too big for syllogisms; generally having found even one syllogism too big for them. If they complain either of your abstention from their cause or your adhesion to any other, you have an unanswerable answer. You will say, as you did say, that you did not break the Triple Alliance, even for the sake of peace. It was they who broke it for the sake of war. You, obviously, had as much right to be consulted about Servia as Austria had; and on the mere chess-board of argument it is mate in one move. Nor are they in the least fitted to make an appeal to the popular sentiment of your people. The English, I dare say, and the French, have talked an amazing amount of nonsense about you; but they understand a little better. They do not write exactly like this, which is from the most public and accepted Prussian political philosopher (Chamberlain). “Who can live in Italy to-day and mix with its amiable and highly gifted inhabitants without feeling with pain that here a great nation is lost, irredeemably lost, because it lacks the inner driving power," etc., which has brought Von Kluck so triumphantly through Paris. Even a half-educated Englishman, who has heard of no Italian poet except Dante, knows that he was something more than amiable. Even a positively illiterate Frenchman, who has heard of no Italian warrior except Napoleon, knows that it was not in "inner driving force" that the artilleryman in question was deficient. "Who can live in Italy to-day?" Evidently the Prussian philosopher can't. His impressions are taken from Italian operas; not from Italian streets; certainly not from Italian fields. As a matter of fact such images of Italy as burn in the memories of most open-minded Northerners who have been there, are of exactly the other kind. I for one should be inclined to say, "Who can live in Italy to-day without feeling that a woman feeding children, or a man chopping wood, may almost touch him with fear with the fulness of their humanity: so that he can almost smell blood, as one smells burning?" Italians often look lazy; that is, they look as if they would not move; but not as if they could not move, as many Germans do. But even though this formula fitted the Italians, it seems scarcely calculated to please them. For the Prussians, then, with the failure of their diplomacy, the failure of their philosophy, we may also place the failure of their appeals to a foreign people. The Prussian writer may continue his attempts to soothe and charm you by telling you that you are irredeemably lost, and that all great Italians must have been something else. But the method seems to me ill adapted to popular propaganda; and I cannot but say that on this third point of persuasion, the German attempt is not striking.

Now all this is important for this reason. If you consider it carefully you will see why Europe must, at whatever cost, break Germany in battle: and put an end to her military and material power to *do* things. If we all have to fight for it, if we all have to die for it, it must be done. If we find allies in the dwarfs of Greenland or the giants of Patagonia, it must be done. And the reason is that unless it is literally and materially done, other things will be literally and materially done; and horrify the heavens. They will be silly things; they will be benighted and limited and laughable things; but they will be accomplished things. Nothing could be more ridiculous, if that is all, than the moral position of the Prussian in Poland; where a magnificent officer, making a vast parade of "ruling," tries to cheat poor peasants out of their fields (and gets cheated) and then takes refuge in beating little boys for saying their prayers in their native tongue. All who remember anything of dignity, of irony, in short of Rome and reason, can see why an officer need not, should not, had better not, and generally does not, beat little boys. But an officer *can* beat little boys: and a Prussian officer will go on doing it until you take away the stick. Nothing could be more comic, if that is all, than the position of Prussians in Alsace: which they declare to be purely German and admit to be furiously French; so that they have to terrorise it by sabring anybody, including cripples. Again, any of us can see why an officer need not, should not, had better not, and generally does not, sabre a cripple. But an officer *can* sabre a cripple; and a Prussian officer will go on doing it until you take away the sabre. It is this insane and rigid realism that makes their case peculiar: like that of a Chinaman copying something, or a half-witted servant taking a message. If they had the power to put black and white posts round the grave of Virgil, or dig up Dante to see if he had yellow hair, the mere *doing* of it which for some of us would be the most unlikely, would for them be the least unlikely thing. They do not hear the laughter of the ages. If they had the power to treat the English or Italian Premier quite literally as a traitor, and shoot him against a wall, they are quite capable of turning such hysterical rhetoric into reality: and scattering his brains before they had collected their own. They do not feel atmospheres. They are all a little deaf; as they are all a little short-sighted. They are annoyed when their enemies, after such experiences as those of Belgium, accuse them of breaking their promises. And in one sense they are right; for there are some sorts of promises they probably would keep. If they have promised to respect a free country, or an old friend, to observe a sworn partnership, or to spare a harmless population, they will find such restrictions chilling and irksome. They will ask some professor on what principle they are discarding it. But if they have promised to shoot the cross off a church spire, or empty the inkpot into somebody’s beer, or bring home somebody’s ears in their pocket for the pleasure of their families, I think in these cases they would feel a sort of a shadow of what civilised men feel in the fulfilment of a promise, as distinct from the making of it. And, in consideration of such cases, I cannot go the whole length of those severe critics who say that a Prussian will never keep his promise.

Unfortunately, it is precisely this sort of actuality and fulfilment that makes it urgent that Europe should put forth her whole energy to drag down these antique demoniacs; these idiots filled with force as by fiends. They *will* do things, as a maniac will, until he cannot do them. To me it seemed that some things could not be said and done. I thought a man would have been ashamed to bribe a new enemy like England to betray an old enemy like France. I thought a man would have been ashamed to punish the pure self-defence of folk so offenceless as the Belgians. These hopes must go from us, my friend. There is only one thing of which the Prussian would be ashamed; and of that, we have sworn to God, he shall taste before the end.

My Dear —— —

The Prussianised German, of whatever blend of races he may be, has one quality which may perhaps be racially simple; but which is, at any rate, very plain. Chamberlain, the German philosopher or historian (I know not which to call him or how to call him either) remarks somewhere that purebred races possess fidelity; he instances the negro and the dog — and, I suppose, the German. Anyhow, it is true that there is a recognisable and real thing which might be called fidelity (or perhaps monotony) which exists in Germans in about the same style as in dogs and niggers. The North Teuton really has in this respect the simplicities of the savage and the lower animals; that he has no reactions. He does not laugh at himself. He does not want to kick himself. He does not, like most of us, repent — or occasionally even repent of repenting. He does not read his own works and find them much worse or much better than he had expected. He does not feel a faint irrational sense of debauch, after even divine pleasures of this life. Watch him at a German restaurant, and you will satisfy yourself that he does not. In short, both in the most scientific and in the most casual sense of the word, he does not know what it is to have a *temper*. He does not bend and fly back like steel; he sticks out, like wood. In this he differs from any nation I have known, from your nation and mine, from the French, the Spanish, the Scotch, the Welsh and the Irish. Bad luck never braces him as it does us. Good luck never frightens him as it does us. It can be seen in what the French call Chauvinism and we call Jingoism. For us it is fireworks; for him it is daylight. On Mafeking Night, celebrating a small but picturesque success against the Boers, nearly everybody in London came out waving little flags. Nearly everybody in London is now heartily ashamed of it. But it would never occur to the Prussians not to ride their high horses with the freshest insolence for the far-off victory of Sedan; though on that very anniversary the star of their fate had turned scornful in the sky, and Von Kluck was in retreat from Paris. Above all, the Prussian does not feel annoyed, as I do, when foreigners praise his country for all the wrong reasons. The Prussian will allow you to praise him for any reasons, for any length of time, for any eternity of folly; he is there to be praised. Probably he is proud of this; probably he thinks he has a good digestion, because the poison of praise does not make him sick. He thinks the absence of such doubt, or self-knowledge, makes for composure, grandeur, a colossal calm, a superior race — in short, the whole claim of the Teutons to be the highest spiritual product of Nature and Evolution. But as I have noticed a calm unity even more complete, not only in dogs and negroes, but in slugs, slow-worms, mangoldwurzels, moss, mud and bits of stone, I am a sceptic about this test for the marshalling in rank of all the children of God. Now I point this out to you here for a very practical reason. The Prussian will never understand revolutions — which are generally reactions. He regards them, not only with dislike, but with a mysterious kind of pity. Throughout his confused popular histories, there runs a strange suggestion that civic populations have failed hitherto, and failed because they were always fighting. The population of Berlin does not fight, or can't; and therefore Berlin will succeed where Greece and Rome have failed. Hitherto it is plain enough that Berlin has succeeded in nothing except in bad copies of Greece and Rome; and Prussians would be wiser to discuss the details of the Greek and Roman past, which we can follow, rather than the details of their own future, about which we are naturally not so well informed. Well, every dome they build, every pillar they put upright, every pedestal for epitaph or panel for decoration, every type of church, Catholic or Protestant, every kind of street, large or small, they have copied from the old Pagan or Catholic cities; and those cities, when they made those things, were boiling with revolutions. I remember a German professor saying to me, “I should have no scruple about extinguishing such republics as Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua; they are perpetually rioting for one thing or another.” I said I supposed he would have had no scruple in extinguishing Athens, Rome, Florence and Paris; for they were always rioting for one thing or another. His reply indicated, I thought, that he felt about Cæsar or Rienzi very much as the Scotch Presbyterian Minister felt about Christ, when he was reminded of the corn-plucking on the Sabbath, and said, “Weel, I dinna think the better of him.” In other words he was quite positive, like all his countrymen, that he could impose a sort of Pax Germanica, which would satisfy all the needs of order and of freedom forever; leaving no need for revolutions or reactions. I am myself of a different opinion. When I was a child, when the toy-trade of Germany had begun to flood this country, there was a priggish British couplet, engraven on the minds of governesses, which ran —

What the German children delight to make
The English children delight to break.

I can answer for the delight of the English children; a just and godlike delight. I am not so sure about the delight of the German children, when they were caught in the infernal wheels of the modern civilisation of factories. But, for the present, I am only concerned to say that I do not accept this line of historical division. I do not think history supports the view that those who could break things could not make them.

This is the least intrusive approach by which I can touch on a topic that must of necessity be a delicate one; yet which may well be a difficulty among Latins like yourself. Against this preposterous Prussian upstart we have not only to protect our unity; we have even to protect our quarrels. And the deepest of the reactions or revolts of which I have spoken is the quarrel which (very tragically as I think) has for some hundred years cloven the Christian from the Liberal ideal. It would ill become me, in whose country there is neither such clear doctrine nor such combative democracy, to suppose it can be easy for any of you to close up such sacred wounds. There must still be Catholics who feel they can never forgive a Jacobin. There must still be old Republicans who feel that they could never endure a priest. And yet there is something, the mere sight of which should lock them both in an instant alliance. They have only to look northward and hold the third thing, which thinks itself superior to either: the enormous turnip-face of *ce type là*, as the French say, who conceives that he can make them both like himself and yet remain superior to both.

I implore you to keep out of the hands of this Fool the quarrel of the great saints and of the great blasphemers. He will do to religion what he will do to art; mix up all the colours on your palette into the colour of mud: and then say that only the purified eyes of Teutons can see that it is pure white. The other day the Director of Museums in Berlin was said to be setting about the creation of a new kind of Art: German Art. Philosophers and men of science were at the same time directed to meet round the table and found a new Religion: German Religion. How can such people appreciate art; how can they appreciate religion — nay, how can they appreciate irreligion? How does one invent a message? How does one create a Creator? Is it not the plain meaning of the Gospel that it is good news? And is it not the plain meaning of good news that it must come from outside oneself? Otherwise I could make myself happy this moment, by inventing an enormous victory in Flanders. And I suppose (now I come to think of it) that the Germans do.

By the fulness of your faith and even the fulness of your despair, you that remember Rome, have earned a right to prevent all our quarrels being quenched in such cold water from the north. But it is not too much to say that neither religion at its worst nor republicanism at its worst ever offered the coarse insult to all mankind that is offered by this new and nakedly universal monarchy.

There has always been something common to civilised men, whether they called it being merely a citizen; or being merely a sinner. There has always been something which your ancestors called *Verecundia*; which is at once humility and dignity. Whatever our faults, we do not do exactly as the Prussians do. We do not bellow day and night to draw attention to our own stern silence. We do not praise ourselves solely because nobody else will praise us. I, for one, say at the end of these letters, as I said at the beginning; that in these international matters I have often differed from my countrymen; I have often differed from myself. I shall not claim the completeness of this silly creature we discuss. I shall not answer his boasts with boasts; but with blows.

My front-door is beaten in and broken down suddenly. I see nothing outside, except a sort of smiling, straw-haired commercial traveller with a notebook open, who says, “Excuse me, I am a faultless being, I have persuaded Poland; I can count on my respectful Allies in Alsace. I am simply loved in Lorraine. *Quae reggio in terris* … What place is there on earth where the name of Prussia is not the signal for hopeful prayers and joyful dances? I am that German who has civilised Belgium; and delicately trimmed the frontiers of Denmark. And I may tell you, with the fulness of conviction, that I have never failed, and shall never fail in anything. Permit me, therefore, to bless your house by the passage of my beautiful boots; that I may burgle the house next door.”

And then something European that is prouder than pride will rise up in me; and I shall answer: —

“I am that Englishman who has tortured Ireland, who has been tortured by South Africa; who knows all his mistakes, who is heavy with all his sins. And he tells you, Faultless Being, with a truth as deep as his own guilt, and as deathless as his own remembrance, that you shall not pass this way.”

THE CRIMES OF ENGLAND

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I — Some Words to Professor Whirlwind

DEAR PROFESSOR WHIRLWIND,
Your name in the original German is too much for me; and this is the nearest I propose to get to it: but under the majestic image of pure wind marching in a movement wholly circular I seem to see, as in a vision, something of your mind. But the grand isolation of your thoughts leads you to express them in such words as are gratifying to yourself, and have an inconspicuous or even an unfortunate effect upon others. If anything were really to be made of your moral campaign against the English nation, it was clearly necessary that somebody, if it were only an Englishman, should show you how to leave off professing philosophy and begin to practise it. I have therefore sold myself into the Prussian service, and in return for a cast-off suit of the Emperor’s clothes (the uniform of an English midshipman), a German hausfrau’s recipe for poison gas, two penny cigars, and twenty-five Iron Crosses, I have consented to instruct you in the rudiments of international controversy. Of this part of my task I have here little to say that is not covered by a general adjuration to you to observe certain elementary rules. They are, roughly speaking, as follows: —

First, stick to one excuse. Thus if a tradesman, with whom your social relations are slight, should chance to find you toying with the coppers in his till, you may possibly explain that you are interested in Numismatics and are a Collector of Coins; and he may possibly believe you. But if you tell him afterwards that you pitied him for being overloaded with unwieldy copper discs, and were in the act of replacing them by a silver sixpence of your own, this further explanation, so far from increasing his confidence in your motives, will (strangely enough) actually decrease it. And if you are so unwise as to be struck by yet another brilliant idea, and tell him that the pennies were all bad pennies, which you were concealing to save him from a police prosecution for coining, the tradesman may even be so wayward as to institute a police prosecution himself. Now this is not in any way an exaggeration of the way in which you have knocked the bottom out of any case you may ever conceivably have had in such matters as the sinking of the *Lusitania*. With my own eyes I have seen the following explanations, apparently proceeding from your pen, (i) that the ship was a troop-ship carrying soldiers from Canada; (ii) that if it wasn’t, it was a merchant-ship unlawfully carrying munitions for the soldiers in France; (iii) that, as the passengers on the ship had been warned in an advertisement, Germany was justified in blowing them to the moon; (iv) that there were guns, and the ship had to be torpedoed because the English captain was just going to fire them off; (v) that the English or American authorities, by throwing the *Lusitania* at the heads of the German commanders, subjected them to an insupportable temptation; which was apparently somehow demonstrated or intensified by the fact that the ship came up to schedule time, there being some mysterious principle by which having tea at tea-time justifies poisoning the tea; (vi) that the ship was not sunk by the Germans at all but by the English, the English captain having deliberately tried to drown himself and some thousand of his own countrymen in order to cause an exchange of stiff notes between Mr. Wilson and the Kaiser. If this interesting story be true, I can only say that such frantic and suicidal devotion to the most remote interests of his country almost earns the captain pardon for the crime. But do you not see, my dear Professor, that the very richness and variety of your inventive genius throws a doubt upon each explanation when considered in itself? We who read you in England reach a condition of mind in which it no longer very much matters what explanation you offer, or whether you offer any at all. We are prepared to hear that you sank the *Lusitania* because the sea-born sons of England would live more happily as deep-sea fishes, or that every person on board was coming home to be hanged. You have explained yourself so completely, in this clear way, to the Italians that they have declared war on you, and if you go on explaining yourself so clearly to the Americans they may quite possibly do the same.

Second, when telling such lies as may seem necessary to your international standing, do not tell the lies to the people who know the truth. Do not tell the Eskimos that snow is bright green; nor tell the negroes in Africa that the sun never shines in that Dark Continent. Rather tell the Eskimos that the sun never shines in Africa; and then, turning to the tropical Africans, see if they will believe that snow is green. Similarly, the course indicated for you is to slander the Russians to the English and the English to the Russians; and there are hundreds of good old reliable slanders which can still be used against both of them. There are probably still Russians who believe that every English gentleman puts a rope round his wife’s neck and sells her in Smithfield. There are certainly still Englishmen who believe that every Russian gentleman takes a rope to his wife's back and whips her every day. But these stories, picturesque and useful as they are, have a limit to their use like everything else; and the limit consists in the fact that they are not *true,* and that there necessarily exists a group of persons who know they are not true. It is so with matters of fact about which you asseverate so positively to us, as if they were matters of opinion. Scarborough might be a fortress; but it is not. I happen to know it is not. Mr. Morel may deserve to be universally admired in England; but he is not universally admired in England. Tell the Russians that he is by all means; but do not tell us. We have seen him; we have also seen Scarborough. You should think of this before you speak.

Third, don't perpetually boast that you are cultured in language which proves that you are not. You claim to thrust yourself upon everybody on the ground that you are stuffed with wit and wisdom, and have enough for the whole world. But people who have wit enough for the whole world, have wit enough for a whole newspaper paragraph. And you can seldom get through even a whole paragraph without being monotonous, or irrelevant, or unintelligible, or self-contradictory, or broken-minded generally. If you have something to teach us, teach it to us now. If you propose to convert us after you have conquered us, why not convert us before you have conquered us? As it is, we cannot believe what you say about your superior education because of the way in which you say it. If an Englishman says, "I don't make no mistakes in English, not me," we can understand his remark; but we cannot endorse it. To say, "Je parler le Frenche language, non demi," is comprehensible, but not convincing. And when you say, as you did in a recent appeal to the Americans, that the Germanic Powers have sacrificed a great deal of "red fluid" in defence of their culture, we point out to you that cultured people do not employ such a literary style. Or when you say that the Belgians were so ignorant as to think they were being butchered when they weren't, we only wonder whether *you* are so ignorant as to think you are being believed when you aren't. Thus, for instance, when you brag about burning Venice to express your contempt for "tourists," we cannot think much of the culture, as culture, which supposes St. Mark's to be a thing for tourists instead of historians. This, however, would be the least part of our unfavourable judgment. That judgment is complete when we have read such a paragraph as this, prominently displayed in a paper in which you specially spread yourself: "That the Italians have a perfect knowledge of the fact that this city of antiquities and tourists is subject, and rightly subject, to attack and bombardment, is proved by the measures they took at the beginning of the war to remove some of their greatest art treasures." Now culture may or may not include the power to admire antiquities, and to restrain oneself from the pleasure of breaking them like toys. But culture does, presumably, include the power to think. For less laborious intellects than your own it is generally sufficient to think once. But if you will think twice or twenty times, it cannot but dawn on you that there is something wrong in the reasoning by which the placing of diamonds in a safe proves that they are "rightly subject" to a burglar. The incessant assertion of such things can do little to spread your superior culture; and if you say them too often people may even begin to doubt whether you have any superior culture after all. The earnest friend now advising you cannot but grieve at such incautious garrulity. If you confined yourself to single words, uttered at intervals of about a month or so, no one could possibly raise any rational objection, or subject them to any rational criticism. In time you might come to use whole sentences without revealing the real state of things.

Through neglect of these maxims, my dear Professor, every one of your attacks upon England has gone wide. In pure fact they have not touched the spot, which the real critics of England know to be a very vulnerable spot. We have a real critic of England in Mr. Bernard Shaw, whose name you parade but apparently cannot spell; for in the paper to which I have referred he is called Mr. Bernhard Shaw. Perhaps you think he and Bernhardi are the same man. But if you quoted Mr. Bernard Shaw's statement instead of misquoting his name, you would find that his criticism of England is exactly the opposite of your own; and naturally, for it is a rational criticism. He does not blame England for being against Germany. He does most definitely blame England for not being sufficiently firmly and emphatically on the side of Russia. He is not such a fool as to accuse Sir Edward Grey of being a fiendish Machiavelli plotting against Germany; he accuses him of being an amiable aristocratic stick who failed to frighten the Junkers from their plan of war. Now, it is not in the least a question of whether we happen to like this quality or that: Mr. Shaw, I rather fancy, would dislike such verbose compromise more than downright plotting. It is simply the fact that Englishmen like Grey are open to Mr. Shaw's attack and are not open to yours. It is not true that the English were sufficiently clearheaded or self-controlled to conspire for the destruction of Germany. Any man who knows England, any man who hates England as one hates a living thing, will tell you it is not true. The English may be snobs, they may be plutocrats, they may be hypocrites, but they are not, as a fact, plotters; and I gravely doubt whether they could be if they wanted to. The mass of the people are perfectly incapable of plotting at all, and if the small ring of rich people who finance our politics were plotting for anything, it was for peace at almost any price. Any Londoner who knows the London streets and newspapers as he knows the Nelson column or the Inner Circle, knows that there were men in the governing class and in the Cabinet who were literally thirsting to defend Germany until Germany, by her own act, became indefensible. If they said nothing in support of the tearing up of the promise of peace to Belgium, it is simply because there was nothing to be said.

You were the first people to talk about World-Politics; and the first people to disregard them altogether. Even your foreign policy is domestic policy. It does not even apply to any people who are not Germans; and of your wild guesses about some twenty other peoples, not one has gone right even by accident. Your two or three shots at my own not immaculate land have been such that you would have been much nearer the truth if you had tried to invade England by crossing the Caucasus, or to discover England among the South Sea Islands. With your first delusion, that our courage was calculated and malignant when in truth our very corruption was timid and confused, I have already dealt. The case is the same with your second favourite phrase; that the British army is mercenary. You learnt it in books and not in battlefields; and I should like to be present at a scene in which you tried to bribe the most miserable little loafer in Hammersmith as if he were a cynical condottiere selling his spear to some foreign city. It is not the fact, my dear sir. You have been misinformed. The British Army is not at this moment a hireling army any more than it is a conscript army. It is a volunteer army in the strict sense of the word; nor do I object to your calling it an amateur army. There is no compulsion, and there is next to no pay. It is at this moment drawn from every class of the community, and there are very few classes which would not earn a little more money in their ordinary trades. It numbers very nearly as many men as it would if it were a conscript army; that is with the necessary margin of men unable to serve or needed to serve otherwise. Ours is a country in which that democratic spirit which is common to Christendom is rather unusually sluggish and far below the surface. And the most genuine and purely popular movement that we have had since the Chartists has been the enlistment for this war. By all means say that such vague and sentimental volunteering is valueless in war if you think so; or even if you don't think so. By all means say that Germany is unconquerable and that we cannot really kill you. But if you say that we do not really want to kill you, you do us an injustice. You do indeed.

I need not consider the yet crazier things that some of you have said; as that the English intend to keep Calais and fight France as well as Germany for the privilege of purchasing a frontier and the need to keep a conscript army. That, also, is out of books, and pretty mouldy old books at that. It was said, I suppose, to gain sympathy among the French, and is therefore not my immediate business, as they are eminently capable of looking after themselves. I merely drop one word in passing, lest you waste your powerful intellect on such projects. The English may some day forgive you; the French never will. You Teutons are too light and fickle to understand the Latin seriousness. My only concern is to point out that about England, at least, you are invariably and miraculously wrong.

Now speaking seriously, my dear Professor, it will not do. It could be easy to fence with you for ever and parry every point you attempt to make, until English people began to think there was nothing wrong with England at all. But I refuse to play for safety in this way. There is a very great deal that is really wrong with England, and it ought not to be forgotten even in the full blaze of your marvellous mistakes. I cannot have my countrymen tempted to those pleasures of intellectual pride which are the result of comparing themselves with you. The deep collapse and yawning chasm of your ineptitude leaves me upon a perilous spiritual elevation. Your mistakes are matters of fact; but to enumerate them does not exhaust the truth. For instance, the learned man who rendered the phrase in an English advertisement "cut you dead" as "hack you to death," was in error; but to say that many such advertisements are vulgar is not an error. Again, it is true that the English poor are harried and insecure, with insufficient instinct for armed revolt, though you will be wrong if you say that they are occupied literally in shooting the moon. It is true that the average Englishman is too much attracted by aristocratic society; though you will be in error if you quote dining with Duke Humphrey as an example of it. In more ways than one you forget what is meant by idiom.

I have therefore thought it advisable to provide you with a catalogue of the real crimes of England; and I have selected them on a principle which cannot fail to interest and please you. On many occasions we have been very wrong indeed. We were very wrong indeed when we took part in preventing Europe from putting a term to the impious piracies of Frederick the Great. We were very wrong indeed when we allowed the triumph over Napoleon to be soiled with the mire and blood of Blucher’s sullen savages. We were very wrong indeed when we allowed the peaceful King of Denmark to be robbed in broad daylight by a brigand named Bismarck; and when we allowed the Prussian swashbucklers to enslave and silence the French provinces which they could neither govern nor persuade. We were very wrong indeed when we flung to such hungry adventurers a position so important as Heligoland. We were very wrong indeed when we praised the soulless Prussian education and copied the soulless Prussian laws. Knowing that you will mingle your tears with mine over this record of English wrong-doing, I dedicate it to you, and I remain,

Yours reverently,

G. K. CHESTERTON

II — The Protestant Hero

A question is current in our looser English journalism touching what should be done with the German Emperor after a victory of the Allies. Our more feminine advisers incline to the view that he should be shot. This is to make a mistake about the very nature of hereditary monarchy. Assuredly the Emperor William at his worst would be entitled to say to his amiable Crown Prince what Charles II. said when his brother warned him of the plots of assassins: “They will never kill me to make you king.” Others, of greater monstrosity of mind, have suggested that he should be sent to St. Helena. So far as an estimate of his historical importance goes, he might as well be sent to Mount Calvary. What we have to deal with is an elderly, nervous, not unintelligent person who happens to be a Hohenzollern; and who, to do him justice, does think more of the Hohenzollerns as a sacred caste than of his own particular place in it. In such families the old boast and motto of hereditary kingship has a horrible and degenerate truth. The king never dies; he only decays for ever.

If it were a matter of the smallest importance what happened to the Emperor William when once his house had been disarmed, I should satisfy my fancy with another picture of his declining years; a conclusion that would be peaceful, humane, harmonious, and forgiving.

In various parts of the lanes and villages of South England the pedestrian will come upon an old and quiet public-house, decorated with a dark and faded portrait in a cocked hat and the singular inscription, “The King of Prussia.” These inn signs probably commemorate the visit of the Allies after 1815, though a great part of the English middle classes may well have connected them with the time when Frederick II. was earning his title of the Great, along with a number of other territorial titles to which he had considerably less claim. Sincere and simple-hearted Dissenting ministers would dismount before that sign (for in those days Dissenters drank beer like Christians, and indeed manufactured most of it) and would pledge the old valour and the old victory of him whom they called the Protestant Hero. We should be using every word with literal exactitude if we said that he was really something devilish like a hero. Whether he was a Protestant hero or not can be decided best by those who have read the correspondence of a writer calling himself Voltaire, who was quite shocked at Frederick’s utter lack of religion of any kind. But the little Dissenter drank his beer in all innocence and rode on. And the great blasphemer of Potsdam would have laughed had he known; it was a jest after his own heart. Such was the jest he made when he called upon the emperors to come to communion, and partake of the eucharistic body of Poland. Had he been such a Bible reader as the Dissenter doubtless thought him, he might haply have foreseen the vengeance of humanity upon his house. He might have known what Poland was and was yet to be; he might have known that he ate and drank to his damnation, discerning not the body of God.

Whether the placing of the present German Emperor in charge of one of these wayside public-houses would be a jest after *his* own heart possibly remains to be seen. But it would be much more melodious and fitting an end than any of the sublime euthanasias which his enemies provide for him. That old sign creaking above him as he sat on the bench outside his home of exile would be a much more genuine memory of the real greatness of his race than the modern and almost gimcrack stars and garters that were pulled in Windsor Chapel. From modern knighthood has departed all shadow of chivalry; how far we have travelled from it can easily be tested by the mere suggestion that Sir Thomas Lipton, let us say, should wear his lady’s sleeve round his hat or should watch his armour in the Chapel of St. Thomas of Canterbury. The giving and receiving of the Garter among despots and diplomatists is now only part of that sort of pottering mutual politeness which keeps the peace in an insecure and insincere state of society. But that old blackened wooden sign is at least and after all the sign of something; the sign of the time when one solitary Hohenzollern did not only set fire to fields and cities, but did truly set on fire the minds of men, even though it were fire from hell.

Everything was young once, even Frederick the Great. It was an appropriate preface to the terrible epic of Prussia that it began with an unnatural tragedy of the loss of youth. That blind and narrow savage who was the boy’s father had just sufficient difficulty in stamping out every trace of decency in him, to show that some such traces must have been there. If the younger and greater Frederick ever had a heart, it was a broken heart; broken by the same blow that broke his flute. When his only friend was executed before his eyes, there were two corpses to be borne away; and one to be borne on a high war-horse through victory after victory: but with a small bottle of poison in the pocket. It is not irrelevant thus to pause upon the high and dark house of his childhood. For the peculiar quality which marks out Prussian arms and ambitions from all others of the kind consists in this wrinkled and premature antiquity. There is something comparatively boyish about the triumphs of all the other tyrants. There was something better than ambition in the beauty and ardour of the young Napoleon. He was at least a lover; and his first campaign was like a love-story. All that was pagan in him worshipped the Republic as men worship a woman, and all that was Catholic in him understood the paradox of Our Lady of Victories. Henry VIII., a far less reputable person, was in his early days a good knight of the later and more florid school of chivalry; we might almost say that he was a fine old English gentleman so long as he was young. Even Nero was loved in his first days: and there must have been some cause to make that Christian maiden cast flowers on his dishonourable grave. But the spirit of the great Hohenzollern smelt from the first of the charnel. He came out to his first victory like one broken by defeats; his strength was stripped to the bone and fearful as a fleshless resurrection; for the worst of what could come had already befallen him. The very construction of his kingship was built upon the destruction of his manhood. He had known the final shame; his soul had surrendered to force. He could not redress that wrong; he could only repeat it and repay it. He could make the souls of his soldiers surrender to his gibbet and his whipping-post; he could ‘make the souls of the nations surrender to his soldiers. He could only break men in as he had been broken; while he could break in, he could never break out. He could not slay in anger, nor even sin with simplicity. Thus he stands alone among the conquerors of their kind; his madness was not due to a mere misdirection of courage. Before the whisper of war had come to him the foundations of his audacity had been laid in fear.

Of the work he did in this world there need be no considerable debate. It was romantic, if it be romantic that the dragon should swallow St. George. He turned a small country into a great one: he made a new diplomacy by the fulness and far-flung daring of his lies: he took away from criminality all reproach of carelessness and incompleteness. He achieved an amiable combination of thrift and theft. He undoubtedly gave to stark plunder something of the solidity of property. He protected whatever he stole as simpler men protect whatever they have earned or inherited. He turned his hollow eyes with a sort of loathsome affection upon the territories which had most reluctantly become his: at the end of the Seven Years’ War men knew as little how he was to be turned out of Silesia as they knew why he had ever been allowed in it. In Poland, like a devil in possession, he tore asunder the body he inhabited; but it was long before any man dreamed that such disjected limbs could live again. Nor were the effects of his break from Christian tradition confined to Christendom; Macaulay's world-wide generalisation is very true though very Macaulayese. But though, in a long view, he scattered the seeds of war all over the world, his own last days were passed in a long and comparatively prosperous peace; a peace which received and perhaps deserved a certain praise: a peace with which many European peoples were content. For though he did not understand justice, he could understand moderation. He was the most genuine and the most wicked of pacifists. He did not want any more wars. He had tortured and beggared all his neighbours; but he bore them no malice for it.

The immediate cause of that spirited disaster, the intervention of England on behalf of the new Hohenzollern throne, was due, of course, to the national policy of the first William Pitt. He was the kind of man whose vanity and simplicity are too easily overwhelmed by the obvious. He saw nothing in a European crisis except a war with France; and nothing in a war with France except a repetition of the rather fruitless glories of Agincourt and Malplaquet. He was of the Erastian Whigs, sceptical but still healthy-minded, and neither good enough nor bad enough to understand that even the war of that irreligious age was ultimately a religious war. He had not a shade of irony in his whole being; and beside Frederick, already as old as sin, he was like a rather brilliant schoolboy.

But the direct causes were not the only causes, nor the true ones. The true causes were connected with the triumph of one of the two traditions which had long been struggling in England. And it is pathetic to record that the foreign tradition was then represented by two of the ablest men of that age, Frederick of Prussia and Pitt; while what was really the old English tradition was represented by two of the stupidest men that mankind ever tolerated in any age, George III. and Lord Bute. Bute was the figurehead of a group of Tories who set about fulfilling the fine if fanciful scheme for a democratic monarchy sketched by Bolingbroke in "The Patriot King." It was bent in all sincerity on bringing men's minds back to what are called domestic affairs, affairs as domestic as George III. It might have arrested the advancing corruption of Parliaments and enclosure of country-sides, by turning men's minds from the foreign glories of the great Whigs like

Churchill and Chatham; and one of its first acts was to terminate the alliance with Prussia. Unfortunately, whatever was picturesque in the piracy of Potsdam was beyond the imagination of Windsor. But whatever was prosaic in Potsdam was already established at Windsor; the economy of cold mutton, the heavy-handed taste in the arts, and the strange northern blend of boorishness with etiquette. If Bolingbroke's ideas had been applied by a spirited person, by a Stuart, for example, or even by Queen Elizabeth (who had real spirit along with her extraordinary vulgarity), the national soul might have broken free from its new northern chains. But it was the irony of the situation that the King to whom Tories appealed as a refuge from Germanism was himself a German.

We have thus to refer the origins of the German influence in England back to the beginning of the Hanoverian Succession; and thence back to the quarrel between the King and the lawyers which had issue at Naseby; and thence again to the angry exit of Henry VIII. from the mediaeval council of Europe. It is easy to exaggerate the part played in the matter by that great and human, though very pagan person, Martin Luther. Henry VIII. was sincere in his hatred for the heresies of the German monk, for in speculative opinions Henry was wholly Catholic; and the two wrote against each other innumerable pages, largely consisting of terms of abuse, which were pretty well deserved on both sides. But Luther was not a Lutheran. He was a sign of the break-up of Catholicism; but he was not a builder of Protestantism. The countries which became corporately and democratically Protestant, Scotland, for instance, and Holland, followed Calvin and not Luther. And Calvin was a Frenchman; an unpleasant Frenchman, it is true, but one full of that French capacity for creating official entities which can really act, and have a kind of impersonal personality, such as the French Monarchy or the Terror. Luther was an anarchist, and therefore a dreamer. He made that which is, perhaps, in the long run, the fullest and most shining manifestation of failure; he made a name. Calvin made an active, governing, persecuting thing, called the Kirk. There is something expressive of him in the fact that he called even his work of abstract theology "The Institutes."

In England, however, there were elements of chaos more akin to Luther than to Calvin. And we may thus explain many things which appear rather puzzling in our history, notably the victory of Cromwell not only over the English Royalists but over the Scotch Covenanters. It was the victory of that more happy-go-lucky sort of Protestantism, which had in it much of aristocracy but much also of liberty, over that logical ambition of the Kirk which would have made Protestantism, if possible, as constructive as Catholicism had been. It might be called the victory of Individualist Puritanism over Socialist Puritanism. It was what Milton meant when he said that the new presbyter was an exaggeration of the old priest; it was his *office* that acted, and acted very harshly. The enemies of the Presbyterians were not without a meaning when they called themselves Independents. To this day no one can understand Scotland who does not realise that it retains much of its mediæval sympathy with France, the French equality, the French pronunciation of Latin, and, strange as it may sound, is in nothing so French as in its Presbyterianism.

In this loose and negative sense only it may be said that the great modern mistakes of England can be traced to Luther. It is true only in this, that both in Germany and England a Protestantism softer and less abstract than Calvinism was found useful to the compromises of courtiers and aristocrats; for every abstract creed does something for human equality. Lutheranism in Germany rapidly became what it is to-day — a religion of court chaplains. The reformed church in England became something better; it became a profession for the younger sons of squires. But these parallel tendencies, in all their strength and weakness, reached, as it were, symbolic culmination when the mediæval monarchy was extinguished, and the English squires gave to what was little more than a German squire the damaged and diminished crown.

It must be remembered that the Germanics were at that time used as a sort of breeding-ground for princes. There is a strange process in history by which things that decay turn into the very opposite of themselves. Thus in England Puritanism began as the hardest of creeds, but has ended as the softest; soft-hearted and not unfrequently soft-headed. Of old the Puritan in war was certainly the Puritan at his best; it was the Puritan in peace whom no Christian could be expected to stand. Yet those Englishmen to-day who claim descent from the great militarists of 1649 express the utmost horror of militarism. An inversion of an opposite kind has taken place in Germany. Out of the country that was once valued as providing a perpetual supply of kings small enough to be stop-gaps, has come the modern menace of the one great king who would swallow the kingdoms of the earth. But the old German kingdoms preserved, and were encouraged to preserve, the good things that go with small interests and strict boundaries, music, etiquette, a dreamy philosophy, and so on. They were small enough to be universal. Their outlook could afford to be in some degree broad and many-sided. They had the impartiality of impotence. All this has been utterly reversed, and we find ourselves at war with a Germany whose powers are the widest and whose outlook is the narrowest in the world.

It is true, of course, that the English squires put themselves over the new German prince rather than under him. They put the crown on him as an extinguisher. It was part of the plan that the new-comer, though royal, should be almost rustic. Hanover must be one of England's possessions and not England one of Hanover's. But the fact that the court became a German court prepared the soil, so to speak; English politics were already subconsciously committed to two centuries of the belittlement of France and the gross exaggeration of Germany. The period can be symbolically marked out by Carteret, proud of talking German at the beginning of the period, and Lord Haldane, proud of talking German at the end of it. Culture is already almost beginning to be spelt with a k. But all such pacific and only slowly growing Teutonism was brought to a crisis and a decision when the voice of Pitt called us, like a trumpet, to the rescue of the Protestant Hero.

Among all the monarchs of that faithless age, the nearest to a man was a woman. Maria Theresa of Austria was a German of the more generous sort, limited in a domestic rather than a national sense, firm in the ancient faith at which all her own courtiers were sneering, and as brave as a young lioness. Frederick hated her as he hated everything German and everything good. He sets forth in his own memoirs, with that clearness which adds something almost superhuman to the mysterious vileness of his character, how he calculated on her youth, her inexperience and her lack of friends as proof that she could be despoiled with safety. He invaded Silesia in advance of his own declaration of war (as if he had run on ahead to say it was coming) and this new anarchic trick, combined with the corruptibility of nearly all the other courts, left him after the two Silesian wars in possession of the stolen goods. But Maria Theresa had refused to submit to the immorality of nine points of the law. By appeals and concessions to France, Russia, and other powers, she contrived to create something which, against the atheist innovator even in that atheist age, stood up for an instant like a spectre of the Crusades. Had that Crusade been universal and whole-hearted, the great new precedent of mere force and fraud would have been broken; and the whole appalling judgment which is fallen upon Christendom would have passed us by. But the other Crusaders were only half in earnest for Europe; Frederick was quite in earnest for Prussia; and he sought for allies, by whose aid this weak revival of good might be stamped out, and his adamantine impudence endure for ever. The allies he found were the English. It is not pleasant for an Englishman to have to write the words.

This was the first act of the tragedy, and with it we may leave Frederick, for we are done with the fellow though not with his work. It is enough to add that if we call all his after actions satanic, it is not a term of abuse, but of theology. He was a Tempter. He dragged the other kings to “partake of the body of Poland,” and learn the meaning of the Black Mass. Poland lay prostrate before three giants in armour, and her name passed into a synonym for failure. The Prussians, with their fine magnanimity, gave lectures on the hereditary maladies of the man they had murdered. They could not conceive of life in those limbs; and the time was far off when they should be undeceived. In that day five nations were to partake not of the body, but of the spirit of Poland; and the trumpet of the resurrection of the peoples should be blown from Warsaw to the western isles.

III — The Enigma of Waterloo

That great Englishman Charles Fox, who was as national as Nelson, went to his death with the firm conviction that England had made Napoleon. He did not mean, of course, that any other Italian gunner would have done just as well; but he did mean that by forcing the French back on their guns, as it were, we had made their chief gunner necessarily their chief citizen. Had the French Republic been left alone, it would probably have followed the example of most other ideal experiments; and praised peace along with progress and equality. It would almost certainly have eyed with the coldest suspicion any adventurer who appeared likely to substitute his personality for the pure impersonality of the Sovereign People; and would have considered it the very flower of republican chastity to provide a Brutus for such a Caesar. But if it was undesirable that equality should be threatened by a citizen, it was intolerable that it should be simply forbidden by a foreigner. If France could not put up with French soldiers she would very soon have to put up with Austrian soldiers; and it would be absurd if, having decided to rely on soldiering, she had hampered the best French soldier even on the ground that he was not French. So that whether we regard Napoleon as a hero rushing to the country's help, or a tyrant profiting by the country's extremity, it is equally clear that those who made the war made the war-lord; and those who tried to destroy the Republic were those who created the Empire. So, at least, Fox argued against that much less English prig who would have called him unpatriotic; and he threw the blame upon Pitt's Government for having joined the anti-French alliance, and so tipped up the scale in favour of a military France. But whether he was right or no, he would have been the readiest to admit that England was not the first to fly at the throat of the young Republic. Something in Europe much vaster and vaguer had from the first stirred against it. What was it then that first made war — and made Napoleon? There is only one possible answer: the Germans. This is the second act of our drama of the degradation of England to the level of Germany. And it has this very important development; that Germany means by this time *all* the Germans, just as it does to-day. The savagery of Prussia and the stupidity of Austria are now combined. Mercilessness and muddleheadedness are met together; unrighteousness and unreasonableness have kissed each other; and the tempter and the tempted are agreed. The great and good Maria Theresa was already old. She had a son who was a philosopher of the school of Frederick; also a daughter who was more fortunate, for she was guillotined. It was natural, no doubt, that her brother and relatives should disapprove of the incident; but it occurred long after the whole Germanic power had been hurled against the new Republic. Louis XVI. himself was still alive and nominally ruling when the first pressure came from Prussia and Austria, demanding that the trend of the French emancipation should be reversed. It is impossible to deny, therefore, that what the united Germanics were resolved to destroy was the reform and not even the Revolution. The part which Joseph of Austria played in the matter is symbolic. For he was what is called an enlightened despot, which is the worst kind of despot. He was as irreligious as Frederick the Great, but not so disgusting or amusing. The old and kindly Austrian family, of which Maria Theresa was the affectionate mother, and Marie Antoinette the rather uneducated daughter, was already superseded and summed up by a rather dried-up young man self-schooled to a Prussian efficiency. The needle is already veering northward. Prussia is already beginning to be the captain of the Germanics "in shining armour." Austria is already becoming a loyal *sekundant*.

But there still remains one great difference between Austria and Prussia which developed more and more as the energy of the young Napoleon was driven like a wedge between them. The difference can be most shortly stated by saying that Austria did, in some blundering and barbaric way, care for Europe; but Prussia cared for nothing but Prussia. Austria is not a nation; you cannot really find Austria on the map. But Austria is a kind of Empire; a Holy Roman Empire that never came, an expanding and contracting-dream. It does feel itself, in a vague patriarchal way, the leader, not of a nation, but of nations. It is like some dying Emperor of Rome in the decline; who should admit that the legions had been withdrawn from Britain or from Parthia, but would feel it as fundamentally natural that they should have been there, as in Sicily or Southern Gaul. I would not assert that the aged Francis Joseph imagines that he is Emperor of Scotland or of Denmark; but I should guess that he retains some notion that if he did rule both the Scots and the Danes, it would not be more incongruous than his ruling both the Hungarians and the Poles. This cosmopolitanism of Austria has in it a kind of shadow of responsibility for Christendom. And it was this that made the difference between its proceedings and those of the purely selfish adventurer from the north, the wild dog of Pomerania.

It may be believed, as Fox himself came at last to believe, that Napoleon in his latest years was really an enemy to freedom, in the sense that he was an enemy to that very special and occidental form of freedom which we call Nationalism. The resistance of the Spaniards, for instance, was certainly a popular resistance. It had that peculiar, belated, almost secretive strength with which war is made by the people. It was quite easy for a conqueror to get into Spain; his great difficulty was to get out again. It was one of the paradoxes of history that he who had turned the mob into an army, in defence of its rights against the princes, should at last have his army worn down, not by princes but by mobs. It is equally certain that at the other end of Europe, in burning Moscow and on the bridge of the Beresina, he had found the common soul, even as he had found the common sky, his enemy. But all this does not affect the first great lines of the quarrel, which had begun before horsemen in Germanic uniform had waited vainly upon the road to Varennes or had failed upon the miry slope up to the windmill of Valmy. And that duel, on which depended all that our Europe has since become, had great Russia and gallant Spain and our own glorious island only as subordinates or seconds. That duel, first, last, and for ever, was a duel between the Frenchman and the German; that is, between the citizen and the barbarian.

It is not necessary nowadays to defend the French Revolution, it is not necessary to defend even Napoleon, its child and champion, from criticisms in the style of Southey and Alison, which even at the time had more of the atmosphere of Bath and Cheltenham than of Turcoing and Talavera. The French Revolution was attacked because it was democratic and defended because it was democratic; and Napoleon was not feared as the last of the iron despots, but as the first of the iron democrats. What France set out to prove France has proved; not that common men are all angels, or all diplomatists, or all gentlemen (for these inane aristocratic illusions were no part of the Jacobin theory), but that common men can all be citizens and can all be soldiers; that common men can fight and can rule. There is no need to confuse the question with any of those escapades of a floundering modernism which have made nonsense of this civic common-sense. Some Free Traders have seemed to leave a man no country to fight for; some Free Lovers seem to leave a man no household to rule. But these things have not established themselves either in France or anywhere else. What has been established is not Free Trade or Free Love, but Freedom; and it is nowhere so patriotic or so domestic as in the country from which it came. The poor men of France have not loved the land less because they have shared it. Even the patricians are patriots; and if some honest Royalists or aristocrats are still saying that democracy cannot organise and cannot obey, they are none the less organised by it and obeying it, nobly living or splendidly dead for it, along the line from Switzerland to the sea.

But for Austria, and even more for Russia, there was this to be said; that the French Republican ideal was incomplete, and that they possessed, in a corrupt but still positive and often popular sense, what was needed to complete it. The Czar was not democratic, but he was humanitarian. He was a Christian Pacifist; there is something of the Tolstoyan in every Russian. It is not wholly fanciful to talk of the White Czar: for Russia even destruction has a deathly softness as of snow. Her ideas are often innocent and even childish; like the idea of Peace. The phrase Holy Alliance was a beautiful truth for the Czar, though only a blasphemous jest for his rascally allies, Metternich and Castlereagh. Austria, though she had lately fallen to a somewhat treasonable toying with heathens and heretics of Turkey and Prussia, still retained something of the old Catholic comfort for the soul. Priests still bore witness to that mighty mediaeval institution which even its enemies concede to be a noble nightmare. All their hoary political iniquities had not deprived them of that dignity. If they darkened the sun in heaven, they clothed it with the strong colours of sunrise in garment or gloriole; if they had given men stones for bread, the stones were carved with kindly faces and fascinating tales. If justice counted on their shameful gibbets hundreds of the innocent dead, they could still say that for them death was more hopeful than life for the heathen. If the new daylight discovered their vile tortures, there had lingered in the darkness some dim memory that they were tortures of Purgatory and not, like those which Parisian and Prussian diabolists showed shameless in the sunshine, of naked hell. They claimed a truth not yet disentangled from human nature; for indeed earth is not even earth without heaven, as a landscape is not a landscape without the sky. And in, a universe without God there is not room enough for a man.

It may be held, therefore, that there must in any case have come a conflict between the old world and the new; if only because the old are often broad, while the young are always narrow. The Church had learnt, not at the end but at the beginning of her centuries, that the funeral of God is always a premature burial. If the bugles of Bonaparte raised the living populace of the passing hour, she could blow that yet more revolutionary trumpet that shall raise all the democracy of the dead. But if we concede that collision was inevitable between the new Republic on the one hand and Holy Russia and the Holy Roman Empire on the other, there remain two great European forces which, in different attitudes and from very different motives, determined the ultimate combination. Neither of them had any tincture of Catholic mysticism. Neither of them had any tincture of Jacobin idealism. Neither of them, therefore, had any real moral reason for being in the war at all. The first was England, and the second was Prussia.

It is very arguable that England must, in any case, have fought to keep her influence on the ports of the North Sea. It is quite equally arguable that if she had been as heartily on the side of the French Revolution as she was at last against it, she could have claimed the same concessions from the other side. It is certain that England had no necessary communion with the arms and tortures of the Continental tyrannies, and that she stood at the parting of the ways. England was indeed an aristocracy, but a liberal one; and the ideas growing in the middle classes were those which had already made America, and were remaking France. The fiercest Jacobins, such as Danton, were deep in the liberal literature of England. The people had no religion to fight for, as in Russia or La Vendée. The parson was no longer a priest, and had long been a small squire. Already that one great blank in our land had made snobbishness the only religion of South England; and turned rich men into a mythology. The effect can be well summed up in that decorous abbreviation by which our rustics speak of “Lady’s Bedstraw,” where they once spoke of “Our Lady’s Bedstraw.” We have dropped the comparatively democratic adjective, and kept the aristocratic noun. South England is still, as it was called in the Middle Ages, a garden; but it is the kind where grow the plants called “lords and ladies.”

We became more and more insular even about our continental conquests; we stood upon our island as if on an anchored ship. We never thought of Nelson at Naples, but only eternally at Trafalgar; and even that Spanish name we managed to pronounce wrong. But even if we regard the first attack upon Napoleon as a national necessity, the general trend remains true. It only changes the tale from a tragedy of choice to a tragedy of chance. And the tragedy was that, for a second time, we were at one with the Germans.

But if England had nothing to fight for but a compromise, Prussia had nothing to fight for but a negation. She was and is, in the supreme sense, the spirit that denies. It is as certain that she was fighting against liberty in Napoleon as it is that she was fighting against religion in Maria Theresa. What she was fighting for she would have found it quite impossible to tell you. At the best, it was for Prussia; if it was anything else, it was tyranny. She cringed to Napoleon when he beat her, and only joined in the chase when braver people had beaten him. She professed to restore the Bourbons, and tried to rob them while she was restoring them. For her own hand she would have wrecked the Restoration with the Revolution. Alone in all that agony of peoples, she had not the star of one solitary ideal to light the night of her nihilism.

The French Revolution has a quality which all men feel; and which may be called a sudden antiquity. Its classicalism was not altogether a cant. When it had happened it seemed to have happened thousands of years ago. It spoke in parables; in the hammering of spears and the awful cap of Phrygia. To some it seemed to pass like a vision; and yet it seemed eternal as a group of statuary. One almost thought of its most strenuous figures as naked. It is always with a shock of comicality that we remember that its date was so recent that umbrellas were fashionable and top-hats beginning to be tried. And it is a curious fact, giving a kind of completeness to this sense of the thing as something that happened outside the world, that its first great act of arms and also its last were both primarily symbols; and but for this visionary character, were in a manner vain. It began with the taking of the old and almost empty prison called the Bastille; and we always think of it as the beginning of the Revolution, though the real Revolution did not come till some time after. And it ended when Wellington and Blucher met in 1815; and we always think of it as the end of Napoleon; though Napoleon had really fallen before. And the popular imagery is right, as it generally is in such things: for the mob is an artist, though not a man of science. The riot of the 14th of July did not specially deliver prisoners inside the Bastille, but it did deliver the prisoners outside. Napoleon when he returned was indeed a *revenant*, that is, a ghost. But Waterloo was all the more final in that it was a spectral resurrection and a second death. And in this second case there were other elements that were yet more strangely symbolic. That doubtful and double battle before Waterloo was like the dual personality in a dream. It corresponded curiously to the double mind of the Englishman. We connect Quatre Bras with things romantically English to the verge of sentimentalism, with Byron and “The Black Brunswicker.” We naturally sympathise with Wellington against Ney. We do not sympathise, and even then we did not really sympathise, with Blucher against Napoleon. Germany has complained that we passed over lightly the presence of Prussians at the decisive action. And well we might. Even at the time our sentiment was not solely jealousy, but very largely shame. Wellington, the grimmest and even the most unamiable of Tories, with no French sympathies and not enough human ones, has recorded his opinion of his Prussian allies in terms of curt disgust. Peel, the primmest and most snobbish Tory that ever praised “our gallant Allies” in a frigid official speech, could not contain himself about the conduct of Blucher’s men. Our middle classes did well to adorn their parlours with the picture of the “Meeting of Wellington and Blucher.” They should have hung up a companion piece of Pilate and Herod shaking hands. Then, after that meeting amid the ashes of Hougomont, where they dreamed they had trodden out the embers of all democracy, the Prussians rode on before, doing after their kind. After them went that ironical aristocrat out of embittered Ireland, with what thoughts we know; and Blucher, with what thoughts we care not; and his soldiers entered Paris, and stole the sword of Joan of Arc.

IV — The Coming of the Janissaries

The late Lord Salisbury, a sad and humorous man, made many public and serious remarks that have been proved false and perilous, and many private and frivolous remarks which were valuable and ought to be immortal. He struck dead the stiff and false psychology of “social reform,” with its suggestion that the number of public-houses made people drunk, by saying that there were a number of bedrooms at Hatfield, but they never made him sleepy. Because of this it is possible to forgive him for having talked about “living and dying nations”: though it is of such sayings that living nations die. In the same spirit he included the nation of Ireland in the “Celtic fringe” upon the west of England. It seems sufficient to remark that the fringe is considerably broader than the garment. But the fearful satire of time has very sufficiently avenged the Irish nation upon him, largely by the instrumentality of another fragment of the British robe which he cast away almost contemptuously in the North Sea. The name of it is Heligoland; and he gave it to the Germans.

The subsequent history of the two islands on either side of England has been sufficiently ironical. If Lord Salisbury had foreseen exactly what would happen to Heligoland, as well as to Ireland, he might well have found no sleep at Hatfield in one bedroom or a hundred. In the eastern isle he was strengthening a fortress that would one day be called upon to destroy us. In the western isle he was weakening a fortress that would one day be called upon to save us. In that day his trusted ally, William Hohenzollern, was to batter our ships and boats from the Bight of Heligoland; and in that day his old and once-imprisoned enemy, John Redmond, was to rise in the hour of English jeopardy, and be thanked in thunder for the free offer of the Irish sword. All that Robert Cecil thought valueless has been our loss, and all that he thought feeble our stay. Among those of his political class or creed who accepted and welcomed the Irish leader’s alliance, there were some who knew the real past relations between England and Ireland, and some who first felt them in that hour. All knew that England could no longer be a mere mistress; many knew that she was now in some sense a suppliant. Some knew that she deserved to be a suppliant. These were they who knew a little of the thing called history; and if they thought at all of such dead catchwords as the “Celtic fringe” for a description of Ireland, it was to doubt whether we were worthy to kiss the hem of her garment. If there be still any Englishman who thinks such language extravagant, this chapter is written to enlighten him.

In the last two chapters I have sketched in outline the way in which England, partly by historical accident, but partly also by false philosophy, was drawn into the orbit of Germany, the centre of whose circle was already at Berlin. I need not recapitulate the causes at all fully here. Luther was hardly a heresiarch for England, though a hobby for Henry VIII. But the negative Germanism of the Reformation, its drag towards the north, its quarantine against Latin culture, was in a sense the beginning of the business. It is well represented in two facts; the barbaric refusal of the new astronomical calendar merely because it was invented by a Pope, and the singular decision to pronounce Latin as if it were something else, making it not a dead language but a new language. Later, the part played by particular royalties is complex and accidental; “the furious German” came and passed; the much less interesting Germans came and stayed. Their influence was negative but not negligible; they kept England out of that current of European life into which the Gallophil Stuarts might have carried her. Only one of the Hanoverians was actively German; so German that he actually gloried in the name of Briton, and spelt it wrong. Incidentally, he lost America. It is notable that all those eminent among the real Britons, who spelt it right, respected and would parley with the American Revolution, however jingo or legitimist they were; the romantic conservative Burke, the earth-devouring Imperialist Chatham, even, in reality, the jog-trot Tory North. The intractability was in the Elector of Hanover more than in the King of England; in the narrow and petty German prince who was bored by Shakespeare and approximately inspired by Handel. What really clinched the unlucky companionship of England and Germany was the first and second alliance with Prussia; the first in which we prevented the hardening tradition of Frederick the Great being broken up by the Seven Years’ War; the second in which we prevented it being broken up by the French Revolution and Napoleon. In the first we helped Prussia to escape like a young brigand; in the second we helped the brigand to adjudicate as a respectable magistrate. Having aided his lawlessness, we defended his legitimacy. We helped to give the Bourbon prince his crown, though our allies the Prussians (in their cheery way) tried to pick a few jewels out of it before he got it. Through the whole of that period, so important in history, it must be said that we were to be reckoned on for the support of unreformed laws and the rule of unwilling subjects. There is, as it were, an ugly echo even to the name of Nelson in the name of Naples. But whatever is to be said of the cause, the work which we did in it, with steel and gold, was so able and strenuous that an Englishman can still be proud of it. We never performed a greater task than that in which we, in a sense, saved Germany, save that in which a hundred years later, we have now, in a sense, to destroy her. History tends to be a facade of faded picturesqueness for most of those who have not specially studied it: a more or less monochrome background for the drama of their own day. To these it may well seem that it matters little whether we were on one side or the other in a fight in which all the figures are antiquated; Bonaparte and Blucher are both in old cocked hats; French kings and French regicides are both not only dead men but dead foreigners; the whole is a tapestry as decorative and as arbitrary as the Wars of the Roses. It was not so: we fought for something real when we fought for the old world against the new. If we want to know painfully and precisely what it was, we must open an old and sealed and very awful door, on a scene which was called Ireland, but which then might well have been called hell.

Having chosen our part and made war upon the new world, we were soon made to understand what such spiritual infanticide involved; and were committed to a kind of Massacre of the Innocents. In Ireland the young world was represented by young men, who shared the democratic dream of the Continent, and were resolved to foil the plot of Pitt; who was working a huge machine of corruption to its utmost to absorb Ireland into the Anti-Jacobin scheme of England. There was present every coincidence that could make the British rulers feel they were mere abbots of misrule. The stiff and self-conscious figure of Pitt has remained standing incongruously purse in hand; while his manlier rivals were stretching out their hands for the sword, the only possible resort of men who cannot be bought and refuse to be sold. A rebellion broke out and was repressed; and the government that repressed it was ten times more lawless than the rebellion. Fate for once seemed to pick out a situation in plain black and white like an allegory; a tragedy of appalling platitudes. The heroes were really heroes; and the villains were nothing but villains. The common tangle of life, in which good men do evil by mistake and bad men do good by accident, seemed suspended for us as for a judgment. We had to do things that not only were vile, but felt vile. We had to destroy men who not only were noble, but looked noble. They were men like Wolfe Tone, a statesman in the grand style who was not suffered to found a state; and Robert Emmet, lover of his land and of a woman, in whose very appearance men saw something of the eagle grace of the young Napoleon. But he was luckier than the young Napoleon; for he has remained young. He was hanged; not before he had uttered one of those phrases that are the hinges of history. He made an epitaph of the refusal of an epitaph: and with a gesture has hung his tomb in heaven like Mahomet's coffin. Against such Irishmen we could only produce Castlereagh; one of the few men in human records who seem to have been made famous solely that they might be infamous. He sold his own country, he oppressed ours; for the rest he mixed his metaphors, and has saddled two separate and sensible nations with the horrible mixed metaphor called the Union. Here there is no possible see-saw of sympathies as there can be between Brutus and Caesar or between Cromwell and Charles I.: there is simply nobody who supposes that Emmet was out for worldly gain, or that Castlereagh was out for anything else. Even the incidental resemblances between the two sides only served to sharpen the contrast and the complete superiority of the nationalists. Thus, Castlereagh and Lord Edward Fitzgerald were both aristocrats. But Castlereagh was the corrupt gentleman at the Court, Fitzgerald the generous gentleman upon the land; some portion of whose blood, along with some portion of his spirit, descended to that great gentleman, who — in the midst of the emetic immoralism of our modern politics — gave back that land to the Irish peasantry. Thus again, all such eighteenth-century aristocrats (like aristocrats almost anywhere) stood apart from the popular mysticism and the shrines of the poor; they were theoretically Protestants, but practically pagans. But Tone was the type of pagan who refuses to persecute, like Gallio: Pitt was the type of pagan who consents to persecute; and his place is with Pilate. He was an intolerant indifferentist; ready to enfranchise the Papists, but more ready to massacre them. Thus, once more, the two pagans, Tone and Castlereagh, found a pagan end in suicide. But the circumstances were such that any man, of any party, felt that Tone had died like Cato and Castlereagh had died like Judas.

The march of Pitt's policy went on; and the chasm between light and darkness deepened. Order was restored; and wherever order spread, there spread an anarchy more awful than the sun has ever looked on. Torture came out of the crypts of the Inquisition and walked in the sunlight of the streets and fields. A village vicar was slain with inconceivable stripes, and his corpse set on fire with frightful jests about a roasted priest. Rape became a mode of government. The violation of virgins became a standing order of police. Stamped still with the same terrible symbolism, the work of the English Government and the English settlers seemed to resolve itself into animal atrocities against the wives and daughters of a race distinguished for a rare and detached purity, and of a religion which makes of innocence the Mother of God. In its bodily aspects it became like a war of devils upon angels; as if England could produce nothing but torturers, and Ireland nothing but martyrs. Such was a part of the price paid by the Irish body and the English soul, for the privilege of patching up a Prussian after the sabre-stroke of Jena.

But Germany was not merely present in the spirit: Germany was present in the flesh. Without any desire to underrate the exploits of the English or the Orangemen, I can safely say that the finest touches were added by soldiers trained in a tradition inherited from the horrors of the Thirty Years' War, and of what the old ballad called "the cruel wars of High Germanie." An Irishman I know, whose brother is a soldier, and who has relatives in many distinguished posts of the British army, told me that in his childhood the legend (or rather the truth) of '98 was so frightfully alive that his own mother would not have the word "soldier" spoken in her house. Wherever we thus find the tradition alive we find that the hateful soldier means especially the German soldier. When the Irish say, as some of them do say, that the German mercenary was worse than the Orangemen, they say as much as human mouth can utter. Beyond that there is nothing but the curse of God, which shall be uttered in an unknown tongue.

The practice of using German soldiers, and even whole German regiments, in the make-up of the British army, came in with our German princes, and reappeared on many important occasions in our eighteenth-century history. They were probably among those who encamped triumphantly upon Drumossie Moor, and also (which is a more gratifying thought) among those who ran away with great rapidity at Prestonpans. When that very typical German, George III., narrow, serious, of a stunted culture and coarse in his very domesticity, quarrelled with all that was spirited, not only in the democracy of America but in the aristocracy of England, German troops were very fitted to be his ambassadors beyond the Atlantic. With their well-drilled formations they followed Burgoyne in that woodland march that failed at Saratoga; and with their wooden faces beheld our downfall. Their presence had long had its effect in various ways. In one way, curiously enough, their very militarism helped England to be less military; and especially to be more mercantile. It began to be felt, faintly of course and never consciously, that fighting was a thing that foreigners had to do. It vaguely increased the prestige of the Germans as the military people, to the disadvantage of the French, whom it was the interest of our vanity to underrate. The mere mixture of their uniforms with ours made a background of pageantry in which it seemed more and more natural that English and German potentates should salute each other like cousins, and, in a sense, live in each other's countries. Thus in 1908 the German Emperor was already regarded as something of a menace by the English politicians, and as nothing but a madman by the English people. Yet it did not seem in any way disgusting or dangerous that Edward VII. should appear upon occasion in a Prussian uniform. Edward VII. was himself a friend to France, and worked for the French Alliance. Yet his appearance in the red trousers of a French soldier would have struck many people as funny; as funny as if he had dressed up as a Chinaman.

But the German hirelings or allies had another character which (by that same strain of evil coincidence which we are tracing in this book) encouraged all that was worst in the English conservatism and inequality, while discouraging all that was best in it. It is true that the ideal Englishman was too much of a squire; but it is just to add that the ideal squire was a good squire. The best squire I know in fiction is Duke Theseus in "The Midsummer Night's Dream," who is kind to his people and proud of his dogs; and would be a perfect human being if he were not just a little bit prone to be kind to both of them in the same way. But such natural and even pagan good-nature is consonant with the warm wet woods and comfortable clouds of South England; it never had any place among the harsh and thrifty squires in the plains of East Prussia, the land of the East Wind. They were peevish as well as proud, and everything they created, but especially their army, was made coherent by sheer brutality. Discipline was cruel enough in all the eighteenth-century armies, created long after the decay of any faith or hope that could hold men together. But the state that was first in Germany was first in ferocity. Frederick the Great had to forbid his English admirers to follow his regiments during the campaign, lest they should discover that the most enlightened of kings had only excluded torture from law to impose it without law. This influence, as we have seen, left on Ireland a fearful mark which will never be effaced. English rule in Ireland had been bad before; but in the broadening light of the revolutionary century I doubt whether it could have continued as bad, if we had not taken a side that forced us to flatter barbarian tyranny in Europe. We should hardly have seen such a nightmare as the Anglicising of Ireland if we had not already seen the Germanising of England. But even in England it was not without its effects; and one of its effects was to rouse a man who is, perhaps, the best English witness to the effect on the England of that time of the Alliance with Germany. With that man I shall deal in the chapter that follows.

V — The Lost England

Telling the truth about Ireland is not very pleasant to a patriotic Englishman; but it is very patriotic. It is the truth and nothing but the truth which I have but touched on in the last chapter. Several times, and especially at the beginning of this war, we narrowly escaped ruin because we neglected that truth, and would insist on treating our crimes of the ‘98 and after as very distant; while in Irish feeling, and in fact, they are very near. Repentance of this remote sort is not at all appropriate to the case, and will not do. It may be a good thing to forget and forgive; but it is altogether too easy a trick to forget and be forgiven.

The truth about Ireland is simply this: that the relations between England and Ireland are the relations between two men who have to travel together, one of whom tried to stab the other at the last stopping-place or to poison the other at the last inn. Conversation may be courteous, but it will be occasionally forced. The topic of attempted murder, its examples in history and fiction, may be tactfully avoided in the sallies; but it will be occasionally present in the thoughts. Silences, not devoid of strain, will fall from time to time. The partially murdered person may even think an assault unlikely to recur; but it is asking too much, perhaps, to expect him to find it impossible to imagine. And even if, as God grant, the predominant partner is really sorry for his former manner of predominating, and proves it in some unmistakable manner — as by saving the other from robbers at great personal risk — the victim may still be unable to repress an abstract psychological wonder about when his companion first began to feel like that. Now this is not in the least an exaggerated parable of the position of England towards Ireland, not only in ‘98, but far back from the treason that broke the Treaty of Limerick and far onwards through the Great Famine and after. The conduct of the English towards the Irish after the Rebellion was quite simply the conduct of one man who traps and binds another, and then calmly cuts him about with a knife. The conduct during the Famine was quite simply the conduct of the first man if he entertained the later moments of the second man, by remarking in a chatty manner on the very hopeful chances of his bleeding to death. The British Prime Minister publicly refused to stop the Famine by the use of English ships. The British Prime Minister positively spread the Famine, by making the half-starved populations of Ireland pay for the starved ones. The common verdict of a coroner's jury upon some emaciated wretch was "Wilful murder by Lord John Russell": and that verdict was not only the verdict of Irish public opinion, but is the verdict of history. But there were those in influential positions in England who were not content with publicly approving the act, but publicly proclaimed the motive. The *Times*, which had then a national authority and respectability which gave its words a weight unknown in modern journalism, openly exulted in the prospect of a Golden Age when the kind of Irishman native to Ireland would be "as rare on the banks of the Liffey as a red man on the banks of the Manhattan." It seems sufficiently frantic that such a thing should have been said by one European of another, or even of a Red Indian, if Red Indians had occupied anything like the place of the Irish then and since; if there were to be a Red Indian Lord Chief Justice and a Red Indian Commander-in-Chief, if the Red Indian Party in Congress, containing first-rate orators and fashionable novelists, could have turned Presidents in and out; if half the best troops of the country were trained with the tomahawk and half the best journalism of the capital written in picture-writing, if later, by general consent, the Chief known as Pine in the Twilight, was the best living poet, or the Chief Thin Red Fox, the ablest living dramatist. If that were realised, the English critic probably would not say anything scornful of red men; or certainly would be sorry he said it. But the extraordinary avowal does mark what was most peculiar in the position. This has not been the common case of misgovernment. It is not merely that the institutions we set up were indefensible; though the curious mark of them is that they were literally indefensible; from Wood's Halfpence to the Irish Church Establishment. There can be no more excuse for the method used by Pitt than for the method used by Pigott. But it differs further from ordinary misrule in the vital matter of its object. The coercion was not imposed that the people might live quietly, but that the people might die quietly. And then we sit in an owlish innocence of our sin, and debate whether the Irish might conceivably succeed in saving Ireland. We, as a matter of fact, have not even failed to save Ireland. We have simply failed to destroy her.

It is not possible to reverse this judgment or to take away a single count from it. Is there, then, anything whatever to be said for the English in the matter? There is: though the English never by any chance say it. Nor do the Irish say it; though it is in a sense a weakness as well as a defence. One would think the Irish had reason to say anything that can be said against the English ruling class, but they have not said, indeed they have hardly discovered, one quite simple fact — that it rules England. They are right in asking that the Irish should have a say in the Irish government, but they are quite wrong in supposing that the English have any particular say in English government. And I seriously believe I am not deceived by any national bias, when I say that the common Englishman would be quite incapable of the cruelties that were committed in his name. But, most important of all, it is the historical fact that there was another England, an England consisting of common Englishmen, which not only certainly would have done better, but actually did make some considerable attempt to do better. If anyone asks for the evidence, the answer is that the evidence has been destroyed, or at least deliberately boycotted: but can be found in the unfashionable corners of literature; and, when found, is final. If anyone asks for the great men of such a potential democratic England, the answer is that the great men are labelled small men, or not labelled at all; have been successfully belittled as the emancipation of which they dreamed has dwindled. The greatest of them is now little more than a name; he is criticised to be underrated and not to be understood; but he presented all that alternative and more liberal Englishry; and was enormously popular because he presented it. In taking him as the type of it we may tell most shortly the whole of this forgotten tale. And, even when I begin to tell it, I find myself in the presence of that ubiquitous evil which is the subject of this book. It is a fact, and I think it is not a coincidence, that in standing for a moment where this Englishman stood, I again find myself confronted by the German soldier.

The son of a small Surrey farmer, a respectable Tory and churchman, ventured to plead against certain extraordinary cruelties being inflicted on Englishmen whose hands were tied, by the whips of German superiors; who were then parading in English fields their stiff foreign uniforms and their sanguinary foreign discipline. In the countries from which they came, of course, such torments were the one monotonous means of driving men on to perish in the dead dynastic quarrels of the north; but to poor Will Cobbett, in his provincial island, knowing little but the low hills and hedges around the little church where he now lies buried, the incident seemed odd — nay, unpleasing. He knew, of course, that there was then flogging in the British army also; but the German standard was notoriously severe in such things, and was something of an acquired taste. Added to which he had all sorts of old grandmotherly prejudices about Englishmen being punished by Englishmen, and notions of that sort. He protested, not only in speech, but actually in print. He was soon made to learn the perils of meddling in the high politics of the High Dutch militarists. The fine feelings of the foreign mercenaries were soothed by Cobbett being flung into Newgate for two years and beggared by a fine of £1000. That small incident is a small transparent picture of the Holy Alliance; of what was really meant by a country, once half liberalised, taking up the cause of the foreign kings. This, and not "The Meeting of Wellington and Blucher," should be engraved as the great scene of the war. From this intemperate Fenians should learn that the Teutonic mercenaries did not confine themselves solely to torturing Irishmen. They were equally ready to torture Englishmen: for mercenaries are mostly unprejudiced. To Cobbett's eye we were suffering from allies exactly as we should suffer from invaders. Boney was a bogey; but the German was a nightmare, a thing actually sitting on top of us. In Ireland the Alliance meant the ruin of anything and everything Irish, from the creed of St. Patrick to the mere colour green. But in England also it meant the ruin of anything and everything English, from the Habeas Corpus Act to Cobbett.

After this affair of the scourging, he wielded his pen like a scourge until he died. This terrible pamphleteer was one of those men who exist to prove the distinction between a biography and a life. From his biographies you will learn that he was a Radical who had once been a Tory. From his life, if there were one, you would learn that he was always a Radical because he was always a Tory. Few men changed less; it was round him that the politicians like Pitt chopped and changed, like fakirs dancing round a sacred rock. His secret is buried with him; it is that he really cared about the English people. He was conservative because he cared for their past, and liberal because he cared for their future. But he was much more than this. He had two forms of moral manhood very rare in our time: he was ready to uproot ancient successes, and he was ready to defy oncoming doom. Burke said that few are the partisans of a tyranny that has departed: he might have added that fewer still are the critics of a tyranny that has remained. Burke certainly was not one of them. While lashing himself into a lunacy against the French Revolution, which only very incidentally destroyed the property of the rich, he never criticised (to do him justice, perhaps never saw) the English Revolution, which began with the sack of convents, and ended with the fencing in of enclosures; a revolution which sweepingly and systematically destroyed the property of the poor. While rhetorically putting the Englishman in a castle, politically he would not allow him on a common. Cobbett, a much more historical thinker, saw the beginning of Capitalism in the Tudor pillage and deplored it; he saw the triumph of Capitalism in the industrial cities and defied it. The paradox he was maintaining really amounted to the assertion that Westminster Abbey is rather more national than Welbeck Abbey. The same paradox would have led him to maintain that a Warwickshire man had more reason to be proud of Stratford-on-Avon than of Birmingham. He would no more have thought of looking for England in Birmingham than of looking for Ireland in Belfast.

The prestige of Cobbett's excellent literary style has survived the persecution of his equally excellent opinions. But that style also is underrated through the loss of the real English tradition. More cautious schools have missed the fact that the very genius of the English tongue tends not only to vigour, but specially to violence. The Englishman of the leading articles is calm, moderate, and restrained; but then the Englishman of the leading articles is a Prussian. The mere English consonants are full of Cobbett. Dr. Johnson was our great man of letters when he said "stinks," not when he said "putrefaction." Take some common phrase like "raining cats and dogs," and note not only the extravagance of imagery (though that is very Shakespearean), but a jagged energy in the very spelling. Say "chats" and "chiens" and it is not the same. Perhaps the old national genius has survived the urban enslavement most spiritedly in our comic songs, admired by all men of travel and continental culture, by Mr. George Moore as by Mr. Belloc. One (to which I am much attached) had a chorus —

”O wind from the South
Blow mud in the mouth
Of Jane, Jane, Jane."

Note, again, not only the tremendous vision of clinging soils carried skywards in the tornado, but also the suitability of the mere sounds. Say "bone" and "bouche" for mud and mouth and it is not the same. Cobbett was a wind from the South; and if he occasionally seemed to stop his enemies' mouths with mud, it was the real soil of South England.

And as his seemingly mad language is very literary, so his seemingly mad meaning is very historical. Modern people do not understand him because they do not understand the difference between exaggerating a truth and exaggerating a lie. He did exaggerate, but what he knew, not what he did not know. He only appears paradoxical because he upheld tradition against fashion. A paradox is a fantastic thing that is said once: a fashion is a more fantastic thing that is said a sufficient number of times. I could give numberless examples in Cobbett's case, but I will give only one. Anyone who finds himself full in the central path of Cobbett's fury sometimes has something like a physical shock. No one who has read "The History of the Reformation" will ever forget the passage (I forget the precise words) in which he says the mere thought of such a person as Cranmer makes the brain reel, and, for an instant, doubt the goodness of God; but that peace and faith flow back into the soul when we remember that he was burned alive. Now this is extravagant. It takes the breath away; and it was meant to. But what I wish to point out is that a much more extravagant view of Cranmer was, in Cobbett's day, the accepted view of Cranmer; not as a momentary image, but as an immovable historical monument. Thousands of parsons and penmen dutifully set down Cranmer among the saints and martyrs; and there are many respectable people who would do so still. This is not an exaggerated truth, but an established lie. Cranmer was not such a monstrosity of meanness as Cobbett implies; but he was mean. But there is no question of his being less saintly than the parsonages believed; he was not a saint at all; and not very attractive even as a sinner. He was no more a martyr for being burned than Crippen for being hanged.

Cobbett was defeated because the English people was defeated. After the frame-breaking riots, men, as men, were beaten: and machines, as machines, had beaten them. Peterloo was as much the defeat of the English as Waterloo was the defeat of the French. Ireland did not get Home Rule because England did not get it. Cobbett would not forcibly incorporate Ireland, least of all the corpse of Ireland. But before his defeat Cobbett had an enormous following; his "Register" was what the serial novels of Dickens were afterwards to be. Dickens, by the way, inherited the same instinct for abrupt diction, and probably enjoyed writing "gas and gaiters" more than any two other words in his works. But Dickens was narrower than Cobbett, not by any fault of his own, but because in the intervening epoch of the triumph of Scrooge and Gradgrind the link with our Christian past had been lost, save in the single matter of Christmas, which Dickens rescued romantically and by a hair's-breadth escape. Cobbett was a yeoman; that is, a man free and farming a small estate. By Dickens's time, yeomen seemed as antiquated as bowmen. Cobbett was mediaeval; that is, he was in almost every way the opposite of what that word means to-day. He was as egalitarian as St. Francis, and as independent as Robin Hood. Like that other yeoman in the ballad, he bore in hand a mighty bow; what some of his enemies would have called a long bow. But though he sometimes overshot the mark of truth, he never shot away from it, like Froude. His account of that sixteenth century in which the mediaeval civilisation ended, is not more and not less picturesque than Froude's: the difference is in the dull detail of truth. That crisis was *not* the foundling of a strong Tudor monarchy, for the monarchy almost immediately perished; it *was* the founding of a strong class holding all the capital and land, for it holds them to this day. Cobbett would have asked nothing better than to bend his mediaeval bow to the cry of "St. George for Merry England," for though he pointed to the other and uglier side of the Waterloo medal, he was patriotic; and his premonitions were rather against Blucher than Wellington. But if we take that old war-cry as his final word (and he would have accepted it) we must note how every term in it points away from what the modern plutocrats call either progress or empire. It involves the invocation of saints, the most popular and the most forbidden form of mediævalism. The modern Imperialist no more thinks of St. George in England than he thinks of St. John in St. John's Wood. It is nationalist in the narrowest sense; and no one knows the beauty and simplicity of the Middle Ages who has not seen St. George's Cross separate, as it was at Creçy or Flodden, and noticed how much finer a flag it is than the Union Jack. And the word "merry" bears witness to an England famous for its music and dancing before the coming of the Puritans, the last traces of which have been stamped out by a social discipline utterly un-English. Not for two years, but for ten decades Cobbett has been in prison; and his enemy, the "efficient" foreigner, has walked about in the sunlight, magnificent, and a model for men. I do not think that even the Prussians ever boasted about "Merry Prussia."

VI — Hamlet and the Danes

In the one classic and perfect literary product that ever came out of Germany — I do not mean “Faust,” but Grimm’s Fairy Tales — there is a gorgeous story about a boy who went through a number of experiences without learning how to shudder. In one of them, I remember, he was sitting by the fireside and a pair of live legs fell down the chimney and walked about the room by themselves. Afterwards the rest fell down and joined up; but this was almost an anti-climax. Now that is very charming, and full of the best German domesticity. It suggests truly what wild adventures the traveller can find by stopping at home. But it also illustrates in various ways how that great German influence on England, which is the matter of these essays, began in good things and gradually turned to bad. It began as a literary influence, in the lurid tales of Hoffmann, the tale of “Sintram,” and so on; the revisualising of the dark background of forest behind our European cities. That old German darkness was immeasurably livelier than the new German light. The devils of Germany were much better than the angels. Look at the Teutonic pictures of “The Three Huntsmen” and observe that while the wicked huntsman is effective in his own way, the good huntsman is weak in every way, a sort of sexless woman with a face like a teaspoon. But there is more in these first forest tales, these homely horrors. In the earlier stages they have exactly this salt of salvation, that the boy does *not* shudder. They are made fearful that he may be fearless, not that he may fear. As long as that limit is kept, the barbaric dreamland is decent; and though individuals like Coleridge and De Quincey mixed it with worse things (such as opium), they kept that romantic rudiment upon the whole. But the one disadvantage of a forest is that one may lose one’s way in it. And the one danger is not that we may meet devils, but that we may worship them. In other words, the danger is one always associated, by the instinct of folk-lore, with forests; it is *enchantment*, or the fixed loss of oneself in some unnatural captivity or spiritual servitude. And in the evolution of Germanism, from Hoffmann to Hauptmann, we do see this growing tendency to take horror seriously, which is diabolism. The German begins to have an eerie abstract sympathy with the force and fear he describes, as distinct from their objective. The German is no longer sympathising with the boy against the goblin, but rather with the goblin against the boy. There goes with it, as always goes with idolatry, a dehumanised seriousness; the men of the forest are already building upon a mountain the empty throne of the Superman. Now it is just at this point that I for one, and most men who love truth as well as tales, begin to lose interest. I am all for "going out into the world to seek my fortune," but I do not want to find it — and find it is only being chained for ever among the frozen figures of the Sieges Allees. I do not want to be an idolator, still less an idol. I am all for going to fairyland, but I am also all for coming back. That is, I will admire, but I will not be magnetised, either by mysticism or militarism. I am all for German fantasy, but I will resist German earnestness till I die. I am all for Grimm's Fairy Tales; but if there is such a thing as Grimm's Law, I would break it, if I knew what it was. I like the Prussian's legs (in their beautiful boots) to fall down the chimney and walk about my room. But when he procures a head and begins to talk, I feel a little bored. The Germans cannot really be deep because they will not consent to be superficial. They are bewitched by art, and stare at it, and cannot see round it. They will not believe that art is a light and slight thing — a feather, even if it be from an angelic wing. Only the slime is at the bottom of a pool; the sky is on the surface. We see this in that very typical process, the Germanising of Shakespeare. I do not complain of the Germans forgetting that Shakespeare was an Englishman. I complain of their forgetting that Shakespeare was a man; that he had moods, that he made mistakes, and, above all, that he knew his art was an art and not an attribute of deity. That is what is the matter with the Germans; they cannot "ring fancy's knell"; their knells have no gaiety. The phrase of Hamlet about "holding the mirror up to nature" is always quoted by such earnest critics as meaning that art is nothing if not realistic. But it really means (or at least its author really thought) that art is nothing if not artificial. Realists, like other barbarians, really *believe* the mirror; and therefore break the mirror. Also they leave out the phrase "as 'twere," which must be read into every remark of Shakespeare, and especially every remark of Hamlet. What I mean by believing the mirror, and breaking it, can be recorded in one case I remember; in which a realistic critic quoted German authorities to prove that Hamlet had a particular psycho-pathological abnormality, which is admittedly nowhere mentioned in the play. The critic was bewitched; he was thinking of Hamlet as a real man, with a background behind him three dimensions deep — which does not exist in a looking-glass. "The best in this kind are but shadows.” No German commentator has ever made an adequate note on that. Nevertheless, Shakespeare was an Englishman; he was nowhere more English than in his blunders; but he was nowhere more successful than in the description of very English types of character. And if anything is to be said about Hamlet, beyond what Shakespeare has said about him, I should say that Hamlet was an Englishman too. He was as much an Englishman as he was a gentleman, and he had the very grave weaknesses of both characters. The chief English fault, especially in the nineteenth century, has been lack of decision, not only lack of decision in action, but lack of the equally essential decision in thought — which some call dogma. And in the politics of the last century, this English Hamlet, as we shall see, played a great part, or rather refused to play it.

There were, then, two elements in the German influence; a sort of pretty playing with terror and a solemn recognition of terrorism. The first pointed to elfland, and the second to — shall we say, Prussia. And by that unconscious symbolism with which all this story develops, it was soon to be dramatically tested, by a definite political query, whether what we really respected was the Teutonic fantasy or the Teutonic fear.

The Germanisation of England, its transition and turning-point, was well typified by the genius of Carlyle. The original charm of Germany had been the charm of the child. The Teutons were never so great as when they were childish; in their religious art and popular imagery the Christ-Child is really a child, though the Christ is hardly a man. The self-conscious fuss of their pedagogy is half-redeemed by the unconscious grace which called a school not a seed-plot of citizens, but merely a garden of children. All the first and best forest-spirit is infancy, its wonder, its wilfulness, even its still innocent fear. Carlyle marks exactly the moment when the German child becomes the spoilt child. The wonder turns to mere mysticism; and mere mysticism always turns to mere immoralism. The wilfulness is no longer liked, but is actually obeyed. The fear becomes a philosophy. Panic hardens into pessimism; or else, what is often equally depressing, optimism.

Carlyle, the most influential English writer of that time, marks all this by the mental interval between his “French Revolution” and his “Frederick the Great.” In both he was Germanic. Carlyle was really as sentimental as Goethe; and Goethe was really as sentimental as Werther. Carlyle understood everything about the French Revolution, except that it was a French revolution. He could not conceive that cold anger that comes from a love of insulted truth. It seemed to him absurd that a man should die, or do murder, for the First Proposition of Euclid; should relish an egalitarian state like an equilateral triangle; or should defend the Pons Asinorum as Codes defended the Tiber bridge. But anyone who does not understand that does not understand the French Revolution — nor, for that matter, the American Revolution. "We hold these truths to be self-evident": it was the fanaticism of truism. But though Carlyle had no real respect for liberty, he had a real reverence for anarchy. He admired elemental energy. The violence which repelled most men from the Revolution was the one thing that attracted him to it. While a Whig like Macaulay respected the Girondists but deplored the Mountain, a Tory like Carlyle rather liked the Mountain and quite unduly despised the Girondists. This appetite for formless force belongs, of course, to the forests, to Germany. But when Carlyle got there, there fell upon him a sort of spell which is his tragedy and the English tragedy, and, in no small degree, the German tragedy too. The real romance of the Teutons was largely a romance of the Southern Teutons, with their castles, which are almost literally castles in the air, and their river which is walled with vineyards and rhymes so naturally to wine. But as Carlyle's was rootedly a romance of conquest, he had to prove that the thing which conquered in Germany was really more poetical than anything else in Germany. Now the thing that conquered in Germany was about the most prosaic thing of which the world ever grew weary. There is a great deal more poetry in Brixton than in Berlin. Stella said that Swift could write charmingly about a broomstick; and poor Carlyle had to write romantically about a ramrod. Compare him with Heine, who had also a detached taste in the mystical grotesques of Germany, but who saw what was their enemy: and offered to nail up the Prussian eagle like an old crow as a target for the archers of the Rhine. Its prosaic essence is not proved by the fact that it did not produce poets: it is proved by the more deadly fact that it did. The actual written poetry of Frederick the Great, for instance, was not even German or barbaric, but simply feeble — and French. Thus Carlyle became continually gloomier as his fit of the blues deepened into Prussian blues; nor can there be any wonder. His philosophy had brought out the result that the Prussian was the first of Germans, and, therefore, the first of men. No wonder he looked at the rest of us with little hope.

But a stronger test was coming both for Carlyle and England. Prussia, plodding, policing, as materialist as mud, went on solidifying and strengthening after unconquered Russia and unconquered England had rescued her where she lay prostrate under Napoleon. In this interval the two most important events were the Polish national revival, with which Russia was half inclined to be sympathetic, but Prussia was implacably coercionist; and the positive refusal of the crown of a united Germany by the King of Prussia, simply because it was constitutionally offered by a free German Convention. Prussia did not want to lead the Germans: she wanted to conquer the Germans. And she wanted to conquer other people first. She had already found her brutal, if humorous, embodiment in Bismarck; and he began with a scheme full of brutality and not without humour. He took up, or rather pretended to take up, the claim of the Prince of Augustenberg to duchies which were a quite lawful part of the land of Denmark. In support of this small pretender he enlisted two large things, the Germanic body called the Bund and the Austrian Empire. It is possibly needless to say that after he had seized the disputed provinces by pure Prussian violence, he kicked out the Prince of Augustenberg, kicked out the German Bund, and finally kicked out the Austrian Empire too, in the sudden campaign of Sadowa. He was a good husband and a good father; he did not paint in water colours; and of such is the Kingdom of Heaven. But the symbolic intensity of the incident was this. The Danes expected protection from England; and if there had been any sincerity in the ideal side of our Teutonism they ought to have had it. They ought to have had it even by the pedantries of the time, which already talked of Latin inferiority: and were never weary of explaining that the country of Richelieu could not rule and the country of Napoleon could not fight. But if it was necessary for whosoever would be saved to be a Teuton, the Danes were more Teuton than the Prussians. If it be a matter of vital importance to be descended from Vikings, the Danes really were descended from Vikings, while the Prussians were descended from mongrel Slavonic savages. If Protestantism be progress, the Danes were Protestant; while they had attained quite peculiar success and wealth in that small ownership and intensive cultivation which is very commonly a boast of Catholic lands. They had in a quite arresting degree what was claimed for the Germanics as against Latin revolutionism: quiet freedom, quiet prosperity, a simple love of fields and of the sea. But, moreover, by that coincidence which dogs this drama, the English of that Victorian epoch had found their freshest impression of the northern spirit of infancy and wonder in the works of a Danish man of genius, whose stories and sketches were so popular in England as almost to have become English. Good as Grimm's Fairy Tales were, they had been collected and not created by the modern German; they were a museum of things older than any nation, of the dateless age of once-upon-a-time. When the English romantics wanted to find the folk-tale spirit still alive, they found it in the small country of one of those small kings, with whom the folk-tales are almost comically crowded. There they found what we call an original writer, who was nevertheless the image of the origins. They found a whole fairyland in one head and under one nineteenth-century top hat. Those of the English who were then children owe to Hans Andersen more than to any of their own writers, that essential educational emotion which feels that domesticity is not dull but rather fantastic; that sense of the fairyland of furniture, and the travel and adventure of the farmyard. His treatment of inanimate things as animate was not a cold and awkward allegory: it was a true sense of a dumb divinity in things that are. Through him a child did feel that the chair he sat on was something like a wooden horse. Through him children and the happier kind of men did feel themselves covered by a roof as by the folded wings of some vast domestic fowl; and feel common doors like great mouths that opened to utter welcome. In the story of "The Fir Tree" he transplanted to England a living bush that can still blossom into candles. And in his tale of "The Tin Soldier" he uttered the true defence of romantic militarism against the prigs who would forbid it even as a toy for the nursery. He suggested, in the true tradition of the folk-tales, that the dignity of the fighter is not in his largeness but rather in his smallness, in his stiff loyalty and heroic helplessness in the hands of larger and lower things. These things, alas, were an allegory. When Prussia, finding her crimes unpunished, afterwards carried them into France as well as Denmark, Carlyle and his school made some effort to justify their Germanism, by pitting what they called the piety and simplicity of Germany against what they called the cynicism and ribaldry of France. But nobody could possibly pretend that Bismarck was more pious and simple than Hans Andersen; yet the Carlyleans looked on with silence or approval while the innocent toy kingdom was broken like a toy. Here again, it is enormously probable that England would have struck upon the right side, if the English people had been the English Government. Among other coincidences, the Danish princess who had married the English heir was something very like a fairy princess to the English crowd.

The national poet had hailed her as a daughter of the sea-kings; and she was, and indeed still is, the most popular royal figure in England. But whatever our people may have been like, our politicians were on the very tamest level of timidity and the fear of force to which they have ever sunk. The Tin Soldier of the Danish army and the paper boat of the Danish navy, as in the story, were swept away down the great gutter, down that colossal *cloaca* that leads to the vast cesspool of Berlin.

Why, as a fact, did not England interpose? There were a great many reasons given, but I think they were all various inferences from one reason; indirect results and sometimes quite illogical results, of what we have called the Germanisation of England. First, the very insularity on which we insisted was barbaric, in its refusal of a seat in the central senate of the nations. What we called our splendid isolation became a rather ignominious sleeping-partnership with Prussia. Next, we were largely trained in irresponsibility by our contemporary historians, Freeman and Green, teaching us to be proud of a possible descent from King Arthur's nameless enemies and not from King Arthur. King Arthur might not be historical, but at least he was legendary. Hengist and Horsa were not even legendary, for they left no legend. Anybody could see what was obligatory on the representative of Arthur; he was bound to be chivalrous, that is, to be European. But nobody could imagine what was obligatory on the representative of Horsa, unless it were to be horsy. That was perhaps the only part of the Anglo-Saxon programme that the contemporary English really carried out. Then, in the very real decline from Cobbett to Cobden (that is, from a broad to a narrow manliness and good sense) there had grown up the cult of a very curious kind of peace, to be spread all over the world not by pilgrims, but by pedlars. Mystics from the beginning had made vows of peace — but they added to them vows of poverty. Vows of poverty were not in the Cobdenite's line. Then, again, there was the positive praise of Prussia, to which steadily worsening case the Carlyleans were already committed. But beyond these, there was something else, a spirit which had more infected us as a whole. That spirit was the spirit of Hamlet. We gave the grand name of "evolution" to a notion that things do themselves. Our wealth, our insularity, our gradual loss of faith, had so dazed us that the old Christian England haunted us like a ghost in whom we could not quite believe. An aristocrat like Palmerston, loving freedom and hating the upstart despotism, must have looked on at its cold brutality not without that ugly question which Hamlet asked himself — am I a coward?

It cannot be
But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall
To make oppression bitter; or ‘ere this
I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave’s offal.

We made dumb our anger and our honour; but it has not brought us peace.

VII — The Midnight of Europe

Among the minor crimes of England may be classed the shallow criticism and easy abandonment of Napoleon III. The Victorian English had a very bad habit of being influenced by words and at the same time pretending to despise them. They would build their whole historical philosophy upon two or three titles, and then refuse to get even the titles right. The solid Victorian Englishman, with his whiskers and his Parliamentary vote, was quite content to say that Louis Napoleon and William of Prussia both became Emperors — by which he meant autocrats. His whiskers would have bristled with rage and he would have stormed at you for hair-splitting and "lingo," if you had answered that William was German Emperor, while Napoleon was not French Emperor, but only Emperor of the French. What could such mere order of the words matter? Yet the same Victorian would have been even more indignant if he had been asked to be satisfied with an Art Master, when he had advertised for a Master of Arts. His irritation would have increased if the Art Master had promised him a sea-piece and had brought him a piece of the sea; or if, during the decoration of his house, the same aesthetic humourist had undertaken to procure some Indian Red and had produced a Red Indian.

The Englishman would not see that if there was only a verbal difference between the French Emperor and the Emperor of the French, so, if it came to that, it was a verbal difference between the Emperor and the Republic, or even between a Parliament and no Parliament. For him an Emperor meant merely despotism; he had not yet learned that a Parliament may mean merely oligarchy. He did not know that the English people would soon be made impotent, not by the disfranchising of their constituents, but simply by the silencing of their members; and that the governing class of England did not now depend upon rotten boroughs, but upon rotten representatives. Therefore he did not understand Bonapartism. He did not understand that French democracy became more democratic, not less, when it turned all France into one constituency which elected one member. He did not understand that many dragged down the Republic because it was not republican, but purely senatorial. He was yet to learn how quite corruptly senatorial a great representative assembly can become. Yet in England to-day we hear "the decline of Parliament" talked about and taken for granted by the best Parliamentarians — Mr. Balfour, for instance — and we hear the one partly French and wholly Jacobin historian of the French Revolution recommending for the English evil a revival of the power of the Crown. It seems that so far from having left Louis Napoleon far behind in the grey dust of the dead despotisms, it is not at all improbable that our most extreme revolutionary developments may end where Louis Napoleon began.

In other words, the Victorian Englishman did not understand the words "Emperor of the French." The type of title was deliberately chosen to express the idea of an elective and popular origin; as against such a phrase as "the German Emperor," which expresses an almost transcendental tribal patriarchate, or such a phrase as "King of Prussia," which suggests personal ownership of a whole territory. To treat the *Coup d'état* as unpardonable is to justify riot against despotism, but forbid any riot against aristocracy. Yet the idea expressed in "The Emperor of the French" is not dead, but rather risen from the dead. It is the idea that while a government may pretend to be a popular government, only a person can be really popular. Indeed, the idea is still the crown of American democracy, as it was for a time the crown of French democracy. The very powerful official who makes the choice of that great people for peace or war, might very well be called, not the President of the United States, but the President of the Americans. In Italy we have seen the King and the mob prevail over the conservatism of the Parliament, and in Russia the new popular policy sacramentally symbolised by the Czar riding at the head of the new armies. But in one place, at least, the actual form of words exists; and the actual form of words has been splendidly justified. One man among the sons of men has been permitted to fulfil a courtly formula with awful and disastrous fidelity. Political and geographical ruin have written one last royal title across the sky; the loss of palace and capital and territory have but isolated and made evident the people that has not been lost; not laws but the love of exiles, not soil but the souls of men, still make certain that five true words shall yet be written in the corrupt and fanciful chronicles of mankind: "The King of the Belgians."

It is a common phrase, recurring constantly in the real if rabid eloquence of Victor Hugo, that Napoleon III. was a mere ape of Napoleon I. That is, that he had, as the politician says, in "L'Aiglon," "le petit chapeau, mais pas la tête"; that he was merely a bad imitation. This is extravagantly exaggerative; and those who say it, moreover, often miss the two or three points of resemblance which really exist in the exaggeration. One resemblance there certainly was. In both Napoleons it has been suggested that the glory was not so great as it seemed; but in both it can be emphatically added that the eclipse was not so great as it seemed either. Both succeeded at first and failed at last. But both succeeded at last, even after the failure. If at this moment we owe thanks to Napoleon Bonaparte for the armies of united France, we also owe some thanks to Louis Bonaparte for the armies of united Italy. That great movement to a freer and more chivalrous Europe which we call to-day the Cause of the Allies, had its forerunners and first victories before our time; and it not only won at Arcola, but also at Solferino. Men who remembered Louis Napoleon when he mooned about the Blessington *salon*, and was supposed to be almost mentally deficient, used to say he deceived Europe twice; once when he made men think him an imbecile, and once when he made them think him a statesman. But he deceived them a third time; when he made them think he was dead; and had done nothing.

In spite of the unbridled verse of Hugo and the even more unbridled prose of Kinglake, Napoleon III. is really and solely discredited in history because of the catastrophe of 1870. Hugo hurled any amount of lightning on Louis Napoleon; but he threw very little light on him. Some passages in the “Châtiments” are really caricatures carved in eternal marble. They will always be valuable in reminding generations too vague and soft, as were the Victorians, of the great truth that hatred is beautiful, when it is hatred of the ugliness of the soul. But most of them could have been written about Haman, or Heliogabalus, or King John, or Queen Elizabeth, as much as about poor Louis Napoleon; they bear no trace of any comprehension of his quite interesting aims, and his quite comprehensible contempt for the fat-souled senatorial politicians. And if a real revolutionist like Hugo did not do justice to the revolutionary element in Cæsarism, it need hardly be said that a rather Primrose League Tory like Tennyson did not. Kinglake’s curiously acrid insistence upon the *Coup d’état* is, I fear, only an indulgence in one of the least pleasing pleasures of our national pen and press, and one which afterwards altogether ran away with us over the Dreyfus case. It is an unfortunate habit of publicly repenting for other people’s sins. If this came easy to an Englishman like Kinglake, it came, of course, still easier to a German like Queen Victoria’s husband and even to Queen Victoria herself, who was naturally influenced by him. But in so far as the sensible masses of the English nation took any interest in the matter, it is probable that they sympathised with Palmerston, who was as popular as the Prince Consort was unpopular. The black mark against Louis Napoleon's name until now, has simply been Sedan; and it is our whole purpose to-day to turn Sedan into an interlude. If it is not an interlude, it will be the end of the world. But we have sworn to make an end of that ending: warring on until, if only by a purgatory of the nations and the mountainous annihilation of men, the story of the world ends well.

There are, as it were, valleys of history quite close to us, but hidden by the closer hills. One, as we have seen, is that fold in the soft Surrey hills where Cobbett sleeps with his still-born English Revolution. Another is under that height called The Spy of Italy, where a new Napoleon brought back the golden eagles against the black eagles of Austria. Yet that French adventure in support of the Italian insurrection was very important; we are only beginning to understand its importance. It was a defiance to the German Reaction and 1870 was a sort of revenge for it, just as the Balkan victory was a defiance to the German Reaction and 1914 was the attempted revenge for it. It is true that the French liberation of Italy was incomplete, the problem of the Papal States, for instance, being untouched by the Peace of Villafranca. The volcanic but fruitful spirit of Italy had already produced that wonderful, wandering, and almost omnipresent personality whose red shirt was to be a walking flag: Garibaldi. And many English Liberals sympathised with him and his extremists as against the peace. Palmerston called it "the peace that passeth all understanding": but the profanity of that hilarious old heathen was nearer the mark than he knew: there were really present some of those deep things which he did not understand. To quarrel with the Pope, but to compromise with him, was an instinct with the Bonapartes; an instinct no Anglo-Saxon could be expected to understand. They knew the truth; that Anti-Clericalism is not a Protestant movement, but a Catholic mood. And after all the English Liberals could not get their own Government to risk what the French Government had risked; and Napoleon III. might well have retorted on Palmerston, his rival in international Liberalism, that half a war was better than no fighting. Swinburne called Villafranca "The Halt before Rome," and expressed a rhythmic impatience for the time when the world

”Shall ring to the roar of the lion
Proclaiming Republican Rome.”

But he might have remembered, after all, that it was not the British lion, that a British poet should have the right to say so imperiously, “Let him roar again. Let him roar again.”

It is true that there was no clear call to England from Italy, as there certainly was from Denmark. The great powers were not bound to help Italy to become a nation, as they were bound to support the unquestioned fact that Denmark was one. Indeed the great Italian patriot was to experience both extremes of the English paradox, and, curiously enough, in connection with both the two national and anti-German causes. For Italy he gained the support of the English, but not the support of England. Not a few of our countrymen followed the red shirt; but not in the red coat. And when he came to England, not to plead the cause of Italy but the cause of Denmark, the Italian found he was more popular with the English than any Englishman. He made his way through a forest of salutations, which would willingly have turned itself into a forest of swords. But those who kept the sword kept it sheathed. For the ruling class the valour of the Italian hero, like the beauty of the Danish Princess, was a thing to be admired, that is enjoyed, like a novel — or a newspaper. Palmerston was the very type of Pacifism, because he was the very type of Jingoism. In spirit as restless as Garibaldi, he was in practice as cautious as Cobden. England had the most prudent aristocracy, but the most reckless democracy in the world. It was, and is, the English contradiction, which has so much misrepresented us, especially to the Irish. Our national captains were carpet knights; our knights errant were among the dismounted rabble. When an Austrian general who had flogged women in the conquered provinces appeared in the London streets, some common draymen off a cart behaved with the direct quixotry of Sir Lancelot or Sir Galahad. He had beaten women and they beat him. They regarded themselves simply as avengers of ladies in distress, breaking the bloody whip of a German bully; just as Cobbett had sought to break it when it was wielded over the men of England. The boorishness was in the Germanic or half-Germanic rulers who wore crosses and spurs: the gallantry was in the gutter. English draymen had more chivalry than Teuton aristocrats — or English ones.

I have dwelt a little on this Italian experiment because it lights up Louis Napoleon as what he really was before the eclipse, a politician — perhaps an unscrupulous politician — but certainly a democratic politician. A power seldom falls being wholly faultless; and it is true that the Second Empire became contaminated with cosmopolitan spies and swindlers, justly reviled by such democrats as Rochefort as well as Hugo. But there was no French inefficiency that weighed a hair in the balance compared with the huge and hostile efficiency of Prussia; the tall machine that had struck down Denmark and Austria, and now stood ready to strike again, extinguishing the lamp of the world. There was a hitch before the hammer stroke, and Bismarck adjusted it, as with his finger, by a forgery — for he had many minor accomplishments. France fell: and what fell with her was freedom, and what reigned in her stead only tyrants and the ancient terror. The crowning of the first modern Kaiser in the very palace of the old French kings was an allegory; like an allegory on those Versailles walls. For it was at once the lifting of the old despotic diadem and its descent on the low brow of a barbarian. Louis XI. had returned, and not Louis IX.; and Europe was to know that sceptre on which there is no dove.

The instant evidence that Europe was in the grip of the savage was as simple as it was sinister. The invaders behaved with an innocent impiety and bestiality that had never been known in those lands since Clovis was signed with the cross. To the naked pride of the new men nations simply were not. The struggling populations of two vast provinces were simply carried away like slaves into captivity, as after the sacking of some prehistoric town. France was fined for having pretended to be a nation; and the fine was planned to ruin her forever. Under the pressure of such impossible injustice France cried out to the Christian nations, one after another, and by name. Her last cry ended in a stillness like that which had encircled Denmark.

One man answered; one who had quarrelled with the French and their Emperor; but who knew it was not an emperor that had fallen. Garibaldi, not always wise but to his end a hero, took his station, sword in hand, under the darkening sky of Christendom, and shared the last fate of France. A curious record remains, in which a German commander testifies to the energy and effect of the last strokes of the wounded lion of Aspromonte. But England went away sorrowful, for she had great possessions.

VIII — The Wrong Horse

In another chapter I mentioned some of the late Lord Salisbury’s remarks with regret, but I trust with respect; for in certain matters he deserved all the respect that can be given to him. His critics said that he “thought aloud”; which is perhaps the noblest thing that can be said of a man. He was jeered at for it by journalists and politicians who had not the capacity to think or the courage to tell their thoughts. And he had one yet finer quality which redeems a hundred lapses of anarchic cynicism. He could change his mind upon the platform: he could repent in public. He could not only think aloud; he could “think better” aloud. And one of the turning-points of Europe had come in the hour when he avowed his conversion from the un-Christian and un-European policy into which his dexterous Oriental master, Disraeli, had dragged him; and declared that England had “put her money on the wrong horse.” When he said it, he referred to the backing we gave to the Turk under a fallacious fear of Russia. But I cannot but think that if he had lived much longer, he would have come to feel the same disgust for his long diplomatic support of the Turk’s great ally in the North. He did not live, as we have lived, to feel that horse run away with us, and rush on through wilder and wilder places, until we knew that we were riding on the nightmare.

What was this thing to which we trusted? And how may we most quickly explain its development from a dream to a nightmare, and the hair’s-breadth escape by which it did not hurl us to destruction, as it seems to be hurling the Turk? It is a certain spirit; and we must not ask for too logical a definition of it, for the people whom it possesses disown logic; and the whole thing is not so much a theory as a confusion of thought. Its widest and most elementary character is adumbrated in the word Teutonism or Pan-Germanism; and with this (which was what appeared to win in 1870) we had better begin. The nature of Pan-Germanism may be allegorised and abbreviated somewhat thus:

The horse asserts that all other creatures are morally bound to sacrifice their interests to his, on the specific ground that he possesses all noble and necessary qualities, and is an end in himself. It is pointed out in answer that when climbing a tree the horse is less graceful than the cat; that lovers and poets seldom urge the horse to make a noise all night like the nightingale;

that when submerged for some long time under water, he is less happy than the haddock; and that when he is cut open pearls are less often found in him than in an oyster. He is not content to answer (though, being a muddle-headed horse, he does use this answer also) that having an undivided hoof is more than pearls or oceans or all ascension or song. He reflects for a few years on the subject of cats; and at last discovers in the cat "the characteristic equine quality of caudality, or a tail"; so that cats *are* horses, and wave on every tree-top the tail which is the equine banner. Nightingales are found to have legs, which explains their power of song. Haddocks are vertebrates; and therefore are sea-horses. And though the oyster outwardly presents dissimilarities which seem to divide him from the horse, he is by the all-filling nature-might of the same horse-moving energy sustained.

Now this horse is intellectually the wrong horse. It is not perhaps going too far to say that this horse is a donkey. For it is obviously within even the intellectual resources of a haddock to answer, "But if a haddock is a horse, why should I yield to you any more than you to me? Why should that singing horse commonly called the nightingale, or that climbing horse hitherto known as the cat, fall down and worship you because of your horsehood? If all our native faculties are the accomplishments of a horse — why then you are only another horse without any accomplishments." When thus gently reasoned with, the horse flings up his heels, kicks the cat, crushes the oyster, eats the haddock and pursues the nightingale, and that is how the war began.

This apologue is not in the least more fantastic than the facts of the Teutonic claim. The Germans do really say that Englishmen are only Sea-Germans, as our haddocks were only sea-horses. They do really say that the nightingales of Tuscany or the pearls of Hellas must somehow be German birds or German jewels. They do maintain that the Italian Renaissance was really the German Renaissance, pure Germans having Italian names when they were painters, as cockneys sometimes have when they are hair-dressers. They suggest that Jesus and the great Jews were Teutonic. One Teutonist I read actually explained the fresh energy of the French Revolution and the stale privileges of its German enemies by saying that the Germanic soul awoke in France and attacked the Latin influence in Germany. On the advantages of this method I need not dwell: if you are annoyed at Jack Johnson knocking out an English prize-fighter, you have only to say that it was the whiteness of the black man that won and the blackness of the white man that was beaten. But about the Italian Renaissance they are less general and will go into detail. They will discover (in their researches into ‘istry, as Mr. Gandish said) that Michael Angelo’s surname was Buonarotti; and they will point out that the word “roth” is very like the word “rot.” Which, in one sense, is true enough. Most Englishmen will be content to say it is all rot and pass on. It is all of a piece with the preposterous Prussian history, which talks, for instance, about the “perfect religious tolerance of the Goths”; which is like talking about the legal impartiality of chicken-pox. He will decline to believe that the Jews were Germans; though he may perhaps have met some Germans who were Jews. But deeper than any such practical reply, lies the deep inconsistency of the parable. It is simply this; that if Teutonism be used for comprehension it cannot be used for conquest. If all intelligent peoples are Germans, then Prussians are only the least intelligent Germans. If the men of Flanders are as German as the men of Frankfort, we can only say that in saving Belgium we are helping the Germans who are in the right against the Germans who are in the wrong. Thus in Alsace the conquerors are forced into the comic posture of annexing the people for being German and then persecuting them for being French. The French Teutons who built Rheims must surrender it to the South German Teutons who have partly built Cologne; and these in turn surrender Cologne to the North German Teutons, who never built anything, except the wooden Aunt Sally of old Hindenburg. Every Teuton must fall on his face before an inferior Teuton; until they all find, in the foul marshes towards the Baltic, the very lowest of all possible Teutons, and worship him — and find he is a Slav. So much for Pan-Germanism.

But though Teutonism is indefinable, or at least is by the Teutons undefined, it is not unreal. A vague but genuine soul does possess all peoples who boast of Teutonism; and has possessed ourselves, in so far as we have been touched by that folly. Not a race, but rather a religion, the thing exists; and in 1870 its sun was at noon. We can most briefly describe it under three heads.

The victory of the German arms meant before Leipzic, and means now, the overthrow of a certain idea. That idea is the idea of the Citizen. This is true in a quite abstract and courteous sense; and is not meant as a loose charge of oppression. Its truth is quite compatible with a view that the Germans are better governed than the French. In many ways the Germans are very well governed. But they might be governed ten thousand times better than they are, or than anybody ever can be, and still be as far as ever from governing. The idea of the Citizen is that his individual human nature shall be constantly and creatively active in *altering* the State. The Germans are right in regarding the idea as dangerously revolutionary. Every Citizen *is* a revolution. That is, he destroys, devours and adapts his environment to the extent of his own thought and conscience. This is what separates the human social effort from the non-human; the bee creates the honey-comb, but he does not criticise it. The German ruler really does feed and train the German as carefully as a gardener waters a flower. But if the flower suddenly began to water the gardener, he would be much surprised. So in Germany the people really are educated; but in France the people educates. The French not only make up the State, but make the State; not only make it, but remake it. In Germany the ruler is the artist, always painting the happy German like a portrait; in France the Frenchman is the artist, always painting and repainting France like a house. No state of social good that does not mean the Citizen *choosing* good, as well as getting it, has the idea of the Citizen at all. To say the Germanies are naturally at war with this idea is merely to respect them and take them seriously: otherwise their war on the French Revolution would be only an ignorant feud. It is this, to them, risky and fanciful notion of the critical and creative Citizen, which in 1870 lay prostrate under United Germany — under the undivided hoof.

Nevertheless, when the German says he has or loves freedom, what he says is not false. He means something; and what he means is the second principle, which I may summarise as the Irresponsibility of Thought. Within the iron framework of the fixed State, the German has not only liberty but anarchy. Anything can be said although, or rather because, nothing can be done. Philosophy is really free. But this practically means only that the prisoner's cell has become the madman's cell: that it is scrawled all over inside with stars and systems, so that it looks like eternity. This is the contradiction remarked by Dr. Sarolea, in his brilliant book, between the wildness of German theory and the tameness of German practice. The Germans *sterilise* thought, making it active with a wild virginity; which can bear no fruit.

But though there are so many mad theories, most of them have one root; and depend upon one assumption. It matters little whether we call it, with the German Socialists, "the Materialist Theory of History"; or, with Bismarck, "blood and iron." It can be put most fairly thus: that all *important* events of history are biological, like a change of pasture or the communism of a pack of wolves. Professors are still tearing their hair in the effort to prove somehow that the Crusaders were migrating for food like swallows; or that the French Revolutionists were somehow only swarming like bees. This works in two ways often accounted opposite; and explains both the German Socialist and the Junker. For, first, it fits in with Teutonic Imperialism; making the “blonde beasts” of Germania into lions whose nature it is to eat such lambs as the French. The highest success of this notion in Europe is marked by praise given to a race famous for its physical firmness and fighting breed, but which has frankly pillaged and scarcely pretended to rule; the Turk, whom some Tories called “the gentleman of Europe.” The Kaiser paused to adore the Crescent on his way to patronise the Cross. It was corporately embodied when Greece attempted a solitary adventure against Turkey and was quickly crushed. That English guns helped to impose the mainly Germanic policy of the Concert upon Crete, cannot be left out of mind while we are making appeals to Greece — or considering the crimes of England.

But the same principle serves to keep the internal politics of the Germans quiet, and prevent Socialism being the practical hope or peril it has been in so many other countries. It operates in two ways; first, by a curious fallacy about “the time not being ripe” — as if *time* could ever be ripe. The same savage superstition from the forests had infected Matthew Arnold pretty badly when he made a personality out of the Zeitgeist — perhaps the only ghost that was ever entirely fabulous. It is tricked by a biological parallel, by which the chicken always comes out of the egg “at the right time.” He does not; he comes out when he comes out. The Marxian Socialist will not strike till the clock strikes; and the clock is made in Germany, and never strikes. Moreover, the theory of all history as a search for food makes the masses content with having food and physic, but not freedom. The best working model in the matter is the system of Compulsory Insurance; which was a total failure and dead letter in France but has been, in the German sense, a great success in Germany. It treats employed persons as a fixed, separate, and lower caste, who must not themselves dispose of the margin of their small wages. In 1911 it was introduced into England by Mr. Lloyd George, who had studied its operations in Germany, and, by the Prussian prestige in “social reform,” was passed.

These three tendencies cohere, or are cohering, in an institution which is not without a great historical basis and not without great modern conveniences. And as France was the standard-bearer of citizenship in 1798, Germany is the standard-bearer of this alternative solution in 1915. The institution which our fathers called Slavery fits in with, or rather logically flows from, all the three spirits of which I have spoken, and promises great advantages to each of them. It can give the individual worker everything except the power to alter the State — that is, his own status. Finality (or what certain eleutheromaniacs would call hopelessness) of status is the soul of Slavery — and of Compulsory Insurance. Then again, Germany gives the individual exactly the liberty that has always been given to a slave — the liberty to think, the liberty to dream, the liberty to rage; the liberty to indulge in any intellectual hypotheses about the unalterable world and state — such as have always been free to slaves, from the stoical maxims of Epictetus to the skylarking fairy tales of Uncle Remus. And it has been truly urged by all defenders of slavery that, if history has merely a material test, the material condition of the subordinate under slavery tends to be good rather than bad. When I once pointed out how precisely the “model village” of a great employer reproduces the safety and seclusion of an old slave estate, the employer thought it quite enough to answer indignantly that he had provided baths, playing-grounds, a theatre, etc., for his workers. He would probably have thought it odd to hear a planter in South Carolina boast that he had provided banjos, hymn-books, and places suitable for the cake-walk. Yet the planter must have provided the banjos, for a slave cannot own property. And if this Germanic sociology is indeed to prevail among us, I think some of the broad-minded thinkers who concur in its prevalence owe something like an apology to many gallant gentlemen whose graves lie where the last battle was fought in the Wilderness; men who had the courage to fight for it, the courage to die for it and, above all, the courage to call it by its name.

With the acceptance by England of the German Insurance Act, I bring this sketch of the past relations of the two countries to an end. I have written this book because I wish, once and for all, to be done with my friend Professor Whirlwind of Prussia, who has long despaired of really defending his own country, and has fallen back upon abusing mine. He has dropped, amid general derision, his attempt to call a thing right when even the Chancellor who did it called it wrong. But he has an idea that if he can show that somebody from England somewhere did another wrong, the two wrongs may make a right. Against the cry of the Roman Catholic Poles the Prussian has never done, or even pretended to do, anything but harden his heart; but he has (such are the lovable inconsistencies of human nature) a warm corner in his heart for the Roman Catholic Irish. He has not a word to say for himself about the campaign in Belgium, but he still has many wise, reproachful words to utter about the campaign in South Africa. I propose to take those words out of his mouth. I will have nothing to do with the fatuous front-bench pretensions that our governors always govern well, that our statesmen are never whitewashed and never in need of whitewash. The only moral superiority I claim is that of not defending the indefensible. I most earnestly urge my countrymen not to hide behind thin official excuses, which the sister kingdoms and the subject races can easily see through. We can confess that our crimes have been as mountains, and still not be afraid of the present comparison. There may be, in the eyes of some, a risk in dwelling in this dark hour on our failures in the past: I believe profoundly that the risk is all the other way. I believe that the most deadly danger to our arms to-day lies in any whiff of that self-praise, any flavour of that moral cowardice, any glimpse of that impudent and ultimate impenitence, that may make one Boer or Scot or Welshman or Irishman or Indian feel that he is only smoothing the path for a second Prussia. I have passed the great part of my life in criticising and condemning the existing rulers and institutions of my country: I think it is infinitely the most patriotic thing that a man can do. I have no illusions either about our past or our present. *I* think our whole history in Ireland has been a vulgar and ignorant hatred of the crucifix, expressed by a crucifixion. I think the South African War was a dirty work which we did under the whips of moneylenders. I think Mitchelstown was a disgrace; I think Denshawi was a devilry.

Yet there is one part of life and history in which I would assert the absolute spotlessness of England. In one department we wear a robe of white and a halo of innocence. Long and weary as may be the records of our wickedness, in one direction we have done nothing but good. Whoever we may have wronged, we have never wronged Germany. Again and again we have dragged her from under the just vengeance of her enemies, from the holy anger of Maria Teresa, from the impatient and contemptuous common sense of Napoleon. We have kept a ring fence around the Germans while they sacked Denmark and dismembered France. And if we had served our

God as we have served *their* kings, there would not be to-day one remnant of them in our path, either to slander or to slay us.

IX — The Awakening of England

In October 1912 silent and seemingly uninhabited crags and chasms in the high western region of the Balkans echoed and re-echoed with a single shot. It was fired by the hand of a king — real king, who sat listening to his people in front of his own house (for it was hardly a palace), and who, in consequence of his listening to the people, not unfrequently imprisoned the politicians. It is said of him that his great respect for Gladstone as the western advocate of Balkan freedom was slightly shadowed by the fact that Gladstone did not succeed in effecting the bodily capture of Jack the Ripper. This simple monarch knew that if a malefactor were the terror of the mountain hamlets, his subjects would expect him personally to take arms and pursue the ruffian; and if he refused to do so, would very probably experiment with another king. And the same primitive conception of a king being kept for some kind of purpose, led them also to expect him to lead in a foreign campaign, and it was with his own hand that he fired the first shot of the war which brought down into the dust the ancient empire of the Grand Turk.

His kingdom was little more than the black mountain after which it was named: we commonly refer to it under its Italian translation of Montenegro. It is worth while to pause for a moment upon his picturesque and peculiar community, because it is perhaps the simplest working model of all that stood in the path of the great Germanic social machine I have described in the last chapter — stood in its path and was soon to be very nearly destroyed by its onset. It was a branch of the Serbian stock which had climbed into this almost inaccessible eyrie, and thence, for many hundred years, had mocked at the predatory empire of the Turks. The Serbians in their turn were but one branch of the peasant Slavs, millions of whom are spread over Russia and subject on many sides to empires with which they have less sympathy; and the Slavs again, in the broad features which are important here, are not merely Slavonic but simply European. But a particular picture is generally more pointed and intelligible than tendencies which elsewhere are mingled with subtler tendencies; and of this unmixed European simplicity Montenegro is an excellent model.

Moreover, the instance of one small Christian State will serve to emphasise that this is not a quarrel between England and Germany, but between Europe and Germany. It is my whole purpose in these pages not to spare my own country where it is open to criticism; and I freely admit that Montenegro, morally and politically speaking, is almost as much in advance of England as it is of Germany. In Montenegro there are no millionaires — and therefore next to no Socialists. As to why there are no millionaires, it is a mystery, and best studied among the mysteries of the Middle Ages. By some of the dark ingenuities of that age of priestcraft a curious thing was discovered — that if you kill every usurer, every forestaller, every adulterater, every user of false weights, every fixer of false boundaries, every land-thief, every water-thief, you afterwards discover by a strange indirect miracle, or disconnected truth from heaven, that you have no millionaires. Without dwelling further on this dark matter, we may say that this great gap in the Montenegrin experience explains the other great gap — the lack of Socialists. The Class-conscious Proletarian of All Lands is curiously absent from this land. The reason (I have sometimes fancied) is that the Proletarian is class-conscious, not because he is a Proletarian of All Lands, but because he is a Proletarian with no lands. The poor people in Montenegro have lands — not landlords. They have roots; for the peasant is the root of the priest, the poet, and the warrior. And *this*, and not a mere recrimination about acts of violence, is the ground of the age-long Balkan bitterness against the Turkish conqueror. Montenegrins are patriotic for Montenegro; but Turks are not patriotic for Turkey. They never heard of it, in fact. They are Bedouins, as homeless as the desert. The “wrong horse” of Lord Salisbury was an Arab steed, only stabled in Byzantium. It is hard enough to rule vagabond people, like the gypsies. To be ruled by them is impossible.

Nevertheless what was called the nineteenth century, and named with a sort of transcendental faith (as in a Pythagorean worship of number), was wearing to its close with reaction everywhere, and the Turk, the great type of reaction, stronger than ever in the saddle. The most civilised of the Christian nations overshadowed by the Crescent dared to attack it and was overwhelmed in a catastrophe that seemed as unanswerable as Hittin. In England Gladstone and Gladstonism were dead; and Mr. Kipling, a less mystical Carlyle, was expending a type of praise upon the British Army which would have been even more appropriate to the Prussian Army. The Prussian Army ruled Prussia; Prussia ruled Germany; Germany ruled the Concert of Europe. She was planting everywhere the appliances of that new servile machinery which was her secret; the absolute identification of national subordination with business employment; so that Krupp could count on Kaiser and Kaiser on Krupp. Every other commercial traveller was pathetically proud of being both a slave and a spy. The old and the new tyrants had taken hands. The "sack" of the boss was as silent and fatal as the sack of the Bosphorus. And the dream of the citizen was at an end.

It was under a sky so leaden and on a road so strewn with bones that the little mountain democracy with its patriarchal prince went out, first and before all its friends, on the last and seemingly the most hopeless of the rebellions against the Ottoman Empire. Only one of the omens seemed other than disastrous; and even that was doubtful. For the successful Mediterranean attack on Tripoli while proving the gallantry of the Italians (if that ever needed proving) could be taken in two ways, and was seen by many, and probably most, sincere liberals as a mere extension of the Imperialist reaction of Bosnia and Paardeberg, and not as the promise of newer things. Italy, it must be remembered, was still supposed to be the partner of Prussia and the Hapsburgs. For days that seemed like months the microscopic state seemed to be attempting alone what the Crusades had failed to accomplish. And for days Europe and the great powers were thunderstruck, again and yet again, by the news of Turkish forts falling, Turkish cohorts collapsing, the unconquerable Crescent going down in blood. The Serbians, the Bulgarians, the Greeks had gathered and risen from their lairs; and men knew that these peasants had done what all the politicians had long despaired of doing, and that the spirit of the first Christian Emperor was already standing over the city that is named after his name.

For Germany this quite unexpected rush was a reversal of the whole tide of the world. It was as if the Rhine itself had returned from the ocean and retired into the Alps. For a long time past every important political process in Europe had been produced or permitted by Prussia. She had pulled down ministers in France and arrested reforms in Russia. Her ruler was acclaimed by Englishmen like Rhodes, and Americans like Roosevelt, as the great prince of the age. One of the most famous and brilliant of our journalists called him "the Lord Chief Justice of Europe." He was the strongest man in Christendom; and he had confirmed and consecrated the Crescent. And when he had consecrated it a few hill tribes had risen and trampled it like mire. One or two other things about the same time, less important in themselves, struck in the Prussian’s ear the same new note of warning and doubt. He sought to obtain a small advantage on the north-west coast of Africa; and England seemed to show a certain strange stiffness in insisting on its abandonment. In the councils over Morocco, England agreed with France with what did not seem altogether an accidental agreement. But we shall not be wrong if we put the crucial point of the German surprise and anger at the attack from the Balkans and the fall of Adrianople. Not only did it menace the key of Asia and the whole Eastern dream of German commerce; not only did it offer the picture of one army trained by France and victorious, and another army trained by Germany and beaten. There was more than the material victory of the Creusot over the Krupp gun. It was also the victory of the peasant’s field over the Krupp factory. By this time there was in the North German brain an awful inversion of all the legends and heroic lives that the human race has loved. Prussia *hated* romance. Chivalry was not a thing she neglected; it was a thing that tormented her as any bully is tormented by an unanswered challenge. That weird process was completed of which I have spoken on an earlier page, whereby the soul of this strange people was everywhere on the side of the dragon against the knight, of the giant against the hero. Anything unexpected — the forlorn hopes, the eleventh-hour inspirations, by which the weak can elude the strong, and which take the hearts of happier men like trumpets — filled the Prussian with a cold fury, as of a frustrated fate. The Prussian felt as a Chicago pork butcher would feel if the pigs not only refused to pass through his machine, but turned into romantic wild boars, raging and rending, calling for the old hunting of princes and fit to be the crests of kings.

The Prussian saw these things and his mind was made up. He was silent; but he laboured: laboured for three long years without intermission at the making of a military machine that should cut out of the world for ever such romantic accident or random adventure; a machine that should cure the human pigs for ever of any illusion that they had wings. That he did so plot and prepare for an attack that should come from him, anticipating and overwhelming any resistance, is now, even in the documents he has himself published, a fact of common sense. Suppose a man sells all his lands except a small yard containing a well; suppose in the division of the effects of an old friend he particularly asks for his razors; suppose when a corded trunk is sent him he sends back the trunk, but keeps the cord. And then suppose we hear that a rival of his has been lassoed with a rope, his throat then cut, apparently with a razor, and his body hidden in a well, we do not call in Sherlock Holmes to project a preliminary suspicion about the guilty party. In the discussions held by the Prussian Government with Lord Haldane and Sir Edward Grey we can now see quite as plainly the meaning of the things that were granted and the things that were withheld, the things that would have satisfied the Prussian plotter and the things that did not satisfy him. The German Chancellor refused an English promise not to be aggressive and asked instead for an English promise to be neutral. There is no meaning in the distinction, except in the mind of an aggressor. Germany proposed a pacific arrangement which forbade England to form a fighting alliance with France, but permitted Germany to retain her old fighting alliance with Austria. When the hour of war came she used Austria, used the old fighting alliance and tried to use the new idea of English neutrality. That is to say, she used the rope, the razor, and the well.

But it was either by accident or by individual diplomatic skill that England at the end of the three years even had her own hands free to help in frustrating the German plot. The mass of the English people had no notion of such a plot; and indeed regarded the occasional suggestion of it as absurd. Nor did even the people who knew best know very much better. Thanks and even apologies are doubtless due to those who in the deepest lull of our sleeping partnership with Prussia saw her not as a partner but a potential enemy; such men as Mr. Blatchford, Mr. Bart Kennedy, or the late Emil Reich. But there is a distinction to be made. Few even of these, with the admirable and indeed almost magical exception of Dr. Sarolea, saw Germany as she was; occupied mainly with Europe and only incidentally with England; indeed, in the first stages, not occupied with England at all. Even the Anti-Germans were too insular. Even those who saw most of Germany’s plan saw too much of England’s part in it. They saw it almost wholly as a commercial and colonial quarrel; and saw its issue under the image of an invasion of England, which is even now not very probable. This fear of Germany was indeed a very German fear of Germany. This also conceived the English as Sea-Germans. It conceived Germany as at war with something like itself — practical, prosaic, capitalist, competitive Germany, prepared to cut us up in battle as she cut us out in business. The time of our larger vision was not yet, when we should realise that Germany was more deeply at war with things quite unlike herself, things from which we also had sadly strayed. Then we should remember what we were and see whence we also had come; and far and high upon that mountain from which the Crescent was cast down, behold what was everywhere the real enemy of the Iron Cross — the peasant's cross, which is of wood.

Even our very slight ripples of panic, therefore, were provincial, and even shallow; and for the most part we were possessed and convinced of peace. That peace was not a noble one. We had indeed reached one of the lowest and flattest levels of all our undulating history; and it must be admitted that the contemptuous calculation with which Germany counted on our submission and abstention was not altogether unfounded, though it was, thank God, unfulfilled. The full fruition of our alliances against freedom had come. The meek acceptance of Kultur in our books and schools had stiffened what was once a free country with a German formalism and a German fear. By a queer irony, even the same popular writer who had already warned us against the Prussians, had sought to preach among the populace a very Prussian fatalism, pivoted upon the importance of the charlatan Haeckel. The wrestle of the two great parties had long slackened into an embrace. The fact was faintly denied, and a pretence was still made that no pact: existed beyond a common patriotism. But the pretence failed altogether; for it was evident that the leaders on either side, so far from leading in divergent directions, were much closer to each other than to their own followers. The power of these leaders had enormously increased; but the distance between them had diminished, or, rather, disappeared. It was said about 1800, in derision of the Foxite rump, that the Whig Party came down to Parliament in a four-wheeler. It might literally be said in 1900 that the Whig Party and the Tory Party came to Parliament in a hansom cab. It was not a case of two towers rising into different roofs or spires, but founded in the same soil. It was rather the case of an arch, of which the foundation-stones on either side might fancy they were two buildings; but the stones nearest the keystone would know there was only one. This "two-handed engine" still stood ready to strike, not, indeed, the other part of itself, but anyone who ventured to deny that it was doing so. We were ruled, as it were, by a Wonderland king and queen, who cut off our heads, not for saying they quarrelled but for saying they didn't. The libel law was now used, not to crush lies about private life, but to crush truths about public life. Representation had become mere misrepresentation; a maze of loopholes. This was mainly due to the monstrous presence of certain secret moneys, on which alone many men could win the ruinous elections of the age, and which were contributed and distributed with less check or record than is tolerated in the lowest trade or club. Only one or two people attacked these funds; nobody defended them. Through them the great capitalists had the handle of politics, as of everything else. The poor were struggling hopelessly against rising prices; and their attempts at collective bargaining, by the collective refusal of badly-paid work, were discussed in the press, Liberal and Tory, as attacks upon the State. And so they were; upon the Servile State.

Such was the condition of England in 1914, when Prussia, now at last armed to the teeth and secure of triumph, stood up before the world, and solemnly, like one taking a sacrament, consecrated her campaign with a crime. She entered by a forbidden door, one which she had herself forbidden — marching upon France through neutralised Belgium, where every step was on her broken word. Her neutralised neighbours resisted, as indeed they, like ourselves, were pledged to do. Instantly the whole invasion was lit up with a flame of moral lunacy, that turned the watching nations white who had never known the Prussian. The statistics of non-combatants killed and tortured by this time only stun the imagination. But two friends of my own have been in villages sacked by the Prussian march. One saw a tabernacle containing the Sacrament patiently picked out in pattern by shot after shot. The other saw a rocking-horse and the wooden toys in a nursery laboriously hacked to pieces. Those two facts together will be enough to satisfy some of us of the name of the Spirit that had passed.

And then a strange thing happened. England, that had not in the modern sense any army at all, was justified of all her children. Respected institutions and reputations did indeed waver and collapse on many sides: though the chief of the states replied worthily to a bribe from the foreign bully, many other politicians were sufficiently wild and weak, though doubtless patriotic in intention. One was set to restrain the journalists, and had to be restrained himself, for being more sensational than any of them. Another scolded the working-classes in the style of an intoxicated temperance lecturer. But England was saved by a forgotten thing — the English. Simple men with simple motives, the chief one a hate of injustice which grows simpler the longer we stare at it, came out of their dreary tenements and their tidy shops, their fields and their suburbs and their factories and their rookeries, and asked for the arms of men. In a throng that was at last three million men, the islanders went forth from their island, as simply as the mountaineers had gone forth from their mountain, with their faces to the dawn.

X — The Battle of the Marne

The impression produced by the first week of war was that the British contingent had come just in time for the end of the world. Or rather, for any sensitive and civilised man, touched by the modern doubt but by the equally modern mysticism, that old theocratic vision fell far short of the sickening terror of the time. For it was a day of judgment in which upon the throne in heaven and above the cherubim, sat not God, but another.

The British had been posted at the extreme western end of the allied line in the north. The other end rested on the secure city and fortress of Namur; their end rested upon nothing. It is not wholly a sentimental fancy to say that there was something forlorn in the position of that loose end in a strange land, with only the sad fields of Northern France between them and the sea. For it was really round that loose end that the foe would probably fling the lasso of his charge; it was here that death might soon be present upon every side. It must be remembered that many critics, including many Englishmen, doubted whether a rust had not eaten into this as into other parts of the national life, feared that England had too long neglected both the ethic and the technique of war, and would prove a weak link in the chain. The enemy was absolutely certain that it was so. To these men, standing disconsolately amid the hedgeless plains and poplars, came the news that Namur was gone, which was to their captains one of the four corners of the earth. The two armies had touched; and instantly the weaker took an electric shock which told of electric energy, deep into deep Germany, battery behind battery of abysmal force. In the instant it was discovered that the enemy was more numerous than they had dreamed. He was actually more numerous even than they discovered. Every oncoming horseman doubled as in a drunkard’s vision; and they were soon striving without speech in a nightmare of numbers. Then all the allied forces at the front were overthrown in the tragic battle of Mons; and began that black retreat, in which so many of our young men knew war first and at its worst in this terrible world; and so many never returned.

In that blackness began to grow strange emotions, long unfamiliar to our blood. Those six dark days are as full of legends as the six centuries of the Dark Ages. Many of these may be exaggerated fancies, one was certainly an avowed fiction, others are quite different from it and more difficult to dissipate into the daylight. But one curious fact remains about them if they were all lies, or even if they were all deliberate works of art. Not one of them referred to those close, crowded, and stirring three centuries which are nearest to us, and which alone are covered in this sketch, the centuries during which the Teutonic influence had expanded itself over our islands. Ghosts were there perhaps, but they were the ghosts of forgotten ancestors. Nobody saw Cromwell or even Wellington; nobody so much as thought about Cecil Rhodes. Things were either seen or said among the British which linked them up, in matters deeper than any alliance, with the French, who spoke of Joan of Arc in heaven above the fated city; or the Russians who dreamed of the Mother of God with her hand pointing to the west. They were the visions or the inventions of a mediæval army; and a prose poet was in line with many popular rumours when he told of ghostly archers crying "Array, Array," as in that long-disbanded yeomanry in which I have fancied Cobbett as carrying a bow. Other tales, true or only symptomatic, told of one on a great white horse who was not the victor of Blenheim or even the Black Prince, but a faint figure out of far-off martyrologies — St. George. One soldier is asserted to have claimed to identify the saint because he was "on every quid." On the coins, St. George is a Roman soldier.

But these fancies, if they were fancies, might well seem the last sickly flickerings of an old-world order now finally wounded to the death. That which was coming on, with the whole weight of a new world, was something that had never been numbered among the Seven Champions of Christendom. Now, in more doubtful and more hopeful days, it is almost impossible to repicture what was, for those who understood, the gigantic finality of the first German strides. It seemed as if the forces of the ancient valour fell away to right and left; and there opened a grand, smooth granite road right to the gate of Paris, down which the great Germania moved like a tall, unanswerable sphinx, whose pride could destroy all things and survive them. In her train moved, like moving mountains, Cyclopean guns that had never been seen among men, before which walled cities melted like wax, their mouths set insolently upwards as if threatening to besiege the sun. Nor is it fantastic to speak so of the new and abnormal armaments; for the soul of Germany was really expressed in colossal wheels and cylinders; and her guns were more symbolic than her flags. Then and now, and in every place and time, it is to be noted that the German superiority has been in a certain thing and of a certain kind. It is *not* unity; it is not, in the moral sense, discipline. Nothing can be more united in a moral sense than a French, British, or Russian regiment. Nothing, for that matter, could be more united than a Highland clan at Killiecrankie or a rush of religious fanatics in the Soudan. What such engines, in such size and multiplicity, really meant was this: they meant a type of life naturally intolerable to happier and more healthy-minded men, conducted on a larger scale and consuming larger populations than had ever been known before. They meant cities growing larger than provinces, factories growing larger than cities; they meant the empire of the slum. They meant a degree of detailed repetition and dehumanised division of labour, to which no man born would surrender his brief span in the sunshine, if he could hope to beat his ploughshare into a sword. The nations of the earth were not to surrender to the Kaiser; they were to surrender to Krupp, his master and theirs; the French, the British, the Russians were to surrender to Krupp as the Germans themselves, after a few swiftly broken strikes, had already surrendered to Krupp. Through every cogwheel in that incomparable machinery, through every link in that iron and unending chain, ran the mastery and the skill of a certain kind of artist; an artist whose hands are never idle through dreaming or drawn back in disgust or lifted in wonder or in wrath; but sure and tireless in their touch upon the thousand little things that make the invisible machinery of life. That artist was there in triumph; but he had no name. The ancient world called him the Slave.

From this advancing machine of millions, the slighter array of the Allies, and especially the British at their ultimate outpost, saved themselves by a succession of hair’s-breadth escapes and what must have seemed to the soldiers the heartrending luck of a mouse before a cat. Again and again Von Kluck’s cavalry, supported by artillery and infantry, clawed round the end of the British force, which eluded it as by leaping back again and again. Sometimes the pursuer was, so to speak, so much on top of his prey that it could not even give way to him; but had to hit such blows as it could in the hope of checking him for the instant needed for escape. Sometimes the oncoming wave was so close that a small individual accident, the capture of one man, would mean the washing out of a whole battalion. For day after day this living death endured. And day after day a certain dark truth began to be revealed, bit by bit, certainly to the incredulous wonder of the Prussians, quite possibly to the surprise of the French, and quite as possibly to the surprise of themselves; that there was something singular about the

British soldiers. That singular thing may be expressed in a variety of ways; but it would be almost certainly expressed insufficiently by anyone who had not had the moral courage to face the facts about his country in the last decades before the war. It may perhaps be best expressed by saying that some thousands of Englishmen were dead: and that England was not.

The fortress of Maubeuge had gaped, so to speak, offering a refuge for the unresting and tormented retreat; the British Generals had refused it and continued to fight a losing fight in the open for the sake of the common plan. At night an enormous multitude of Germans had come unexpectedly through the forest and caught a smaller body of the British in Landrecies; failed to dislodge them and lost a whole battalion in that battle of the darkness. At the extreme end of the line Smith-Dorrien’s division, who seemed to be nearly caught or cut off, had fought with one gun against four, and so hammered the Germans that they were forced to let go their hold; and the British were again free. When the blowing up of a bridge announced that they had crossed the last river, something other than that battered remnant was saved; it was the honour of the thing by which we live.

The driven and defeated line stood at last almost under the walls of Paris; and the world waited for the doom of the city. The gates seemed to stand open; and the Prussian was to ride into it for the third and the last time: for the end of its long epic of liberty and equality was come. And still the very able and very French individual on whom rested the last hope of the seemingly hopeless Alliance stood unruffled as a rock, in every angle of his sky-blue jacket and his bulldog figure. He had called his bewildered soldiers back when they had broken the invasion at Guise; he had silently digested the responsibility of dragging on the retreat, as in despair, to the last desperate leagues before the capital; and he stood and watched. And even as he watched the whole huge invasion swerved.

Out through Paris and out and around beyond Paris, other men in dim blue coats swung out in long lines upon the plain, slowly folding upon Von Kluck like blue wings. Von Kluck stood an instant; and then, flinging a few secondary forces to delay the wing that was swinging round on him, dashed across the Allies’ line at a desperate angle, to smash it in the centre as with a hammer. It was less desperate than it seemed; for he counted, and might well count, on the moral and physical bankruptcy of the British line and the end of the French line immediately in front of him, which for six days and nights he had chased before him like autumn leaves before a whirlwind. Not unlike autumn leaves, red-stained, dust-hued, and tattered, they lay there as if swept into a corner. But even as their conquerors wheeled eastwards, their bugles blew the charge; and the English went forward through the wood that is called Creçy, and stamped it with their seal for the second time, in the highest moment of all the secular history of man.

But it was not now the Creçy in which English and French knights had met in a more coloured age, in a battle that was rather a tournament. It was a league of all knights for the remains of all knighthood, of all brotherhood in arms or in arts, against that which is and has been radically unknightly and radically unbrotherly from the beginning. Much was to happen after — murder and flaming folly and madness in earth and sea and sky; but all men knew in their hearts that the third Prussian thrust had failed, and Christendom was delivered once more. The empire of blood and iron rolled slowly back towards the darkness of the northern forests; and the great nations of the West went forward; where side by side as after a long lover's quarrel, went the ensigns of St. Denys and St. George.

NOTE ON THE WORD "ENGLISH"

The words "England" and "English" as used here require a word of explanation, if only to anticipate the ire of the inevitable Scot. To begin with, the word "British" involves a similar awkwardness. I have tried to use it in the one or two cases that referred to such things as military glory and unity: though I am sure I have failed of full consistency in so complex a matter. The difficulty is that this sense of glory and unity, which should certainly cover the Scotch, should also cover the Irish. And while it is fairly safe to call a Scotsman a North Briton (despite the just protest of Stevenson), it is very unsafe indeed to call an Irishman a West Briton. But there is a deeper difficulty. I can assure the Scot that I say "England," not because I deny Scottish nationality, but because I affirm it. And I can say, further, that I could not here include Scots in the thesis, simply because I could not include them in the condemnation. This book is a study, not of a disease but rather of a weakness, which has only been predominant in the predominant partner. It would not be true, for instance, to say either of Ireland or Scotland that the populace lacked a religion; but I do think that

British policy as a whole has suffered from the English lack of one, with its inevitable result of plutocracy and class contempt.

LORD KITCHENER

LORD KITCHENER

Horatio Herbert Kitchener was Irish by birth but English by extraction, being born in County Kerry, the son of an English colonel. The fanciful might see in this first and accidental fact the presence of this simple and practical man amid the more mystical western problems and dreams which were very distant from his mind, an element which clings to all his career and gives it an unconscious poetry. He had many qualities of the epic hero, and especially this — that he was the last man in the world to be the epic poet. There is something almost provocative to superstition in the way in which he stands at every turn as the symbol of the special trials and the modern transfiguration of England; from this moment when he was born among the peasants of Ireland to the moment when he died upon the sea, seeking at the other end of the world the other great peasant civilisation of Russia. Yet at each of these symbolic moments he is, if not as unconscious as a symbol, then as silent as a symbol; he is speechless and supremely significant, like an ensign or a flag. The superficial picturesqueness of his life, at least, lies very much in this — that he was like a hero condemned by fate to act an allegory.

We find this, for instance, in one of the very first and perhaps one of the most picturesque of all the facts that are recorded or reported of him. As a youth, tall, very shy and quiet, he was only notable for intellectual interests of the soberest and most methodical sort, especially for the close study of mathematics. This also, incidentally, was typical enough, for his work in Egypt and the Soudan, by which his fame was established, was based wholly upon such calculations. It was not merely mathematical but literally geometrical. His work bore the same relation to Gordon’s that a rigid mathematical diagram bears to a rough pencil sketch on which it is based. Yet the student thus bent on the strictest side of his profession, studying it at Woolwich and entering the Engineers as the most severely scientific branch of the army, had as a first experience of war something so romantic that it has been counted incredible, yet something so relevant to the great reality of to-day that it might have been made up centuries after his death, as a myth is made up about a god. He happened to be in France in the most tragic hour that France has ever known or, please God, will ever know. She was bearing alone the weight of that alien tyranny, of that hopeless and almost lifeless violence, which the other nations have since found to be the worst of all the terrors which God tolerates in this world. She trod that winepress alone; and of the peoples there were none to help her. In 1870 the Prussian had already encircled Paris, and General Chanzy was fighting against enormous odds to push northwards to its relief, when his army was joined by the young and silent traveller from England. All that was in Kitchener's mind or motives will perhaps never be known. France was still something of an ideal of civilisation for many of the more generous English gentry. Prussia was never really an ideal for anybody, even the Prussians, and mere success, which could not make her an ideal, had not yet calamitously made her a model. There was in it also, no doubt, a touch of the schoolboy who runs away to sea — that touch of the schoolboy without the sense of which the staidest Englishman will always be inexplicable. But considered historically there is something strangely moving about the incident — the fact that Kitchener was a French soldier almost before he was an English one. As Hannibal was dedicated in boyhood to war against the eagles of Rome, Kitchener was dedicated, almost in boyhood, to war against the eagles of Germany. Romance came to this realist, whether by impulse or by accident, like a wind from without, as first love will come to the woman-hater. He was already, both by fate and choice, something more than he had meant to be. The mathematician, we might almost say the calculating boy, was already gambling in the highest lottery which led to the highest and most historic loss. The engineer devoted to discipline was already a free lance, because already a knight-errant.

He returned to England to continue his comparatively humdrum order of advancement; and the next call that came to him was of a strangely different and yet also of a strangely significant kind. The Palestine Exploration Fund sent him with another officer to conduct topographical and antiquarian investigations in a country where practical exertions are always relieved against a curiously incongruous background — as if they were setting up telegraph-posts through the Garden of Eden or opening a railway station at the New Jerusalem. But the contrast between antiquity and modernity was not the only one; there was still the sort of contrast that can be a collision. Kitchener was almost immediately to come in contact with what was to be, in various aspects, the problem of his life — the modern fanaticisms of the Near East. There is an English proverb which asks whether the mountain goes to Mahomet or he to the mountain, and it may be a question whether his religion be the cause or the effect of a certain spirit, vivid and yet strangely negative, which dwells in such deserts. Walking among the olives of Gaza or looking on the Philistine plain, such travellers may well feel that they are treading on cold volcanoes, as empty as the mountains of the moon. But the mountain of Mahomet is not yet an extinct volcano.

Kitchener, in these first days of seemingly mild and minute duties, was early aware of it. At Safed, in the Galilean hills, his small party had found itself surrounded by an Arab mob, stricken suddenly mad with emotions unintelligible to the political mobs of the West. He was himself wounded, but, defending himself as best he could with a walking-stick, not only saved his own life but that of his fellow-officer, Lieutenant Conder, who had been beaten to the earth with an Arab club. He continued his work indeed with prosaic pertinacity, and developed in the survey of the Holy Land all that almost secretive enthusiasm for detail which lasted all his life. Of the most famous English guide-book he made the characteristic remark, “Where Murray has seven names I have a hundred and sixteen.” Most men, in speaking or writing of such a thing, would certainly have said “a hundred.” It is characteristic of his type that he did not even think in round numbers. But there was in him, parallel to this almost arithmetical passion, another quality which is, in a double sense, the secret of his life. For it was the cause of at least half his success; and yet he very successfully concealed it — especially from his admirers.

The paradox of all this part of his life lies in this — that, destined as he was to be the greatest enemy of Mahomedanism, he was quite exceptionally a friend of Mahomedans. He had been first received in that land, so to speak, with a blow on the head with a club; he was destined to break the sword of the last Arab conqueror, to wreck his holy city and treat all the religious traditions of it with a deliberate desecration which has often been held oppressive and was undoubtedly ruthless. Yet with the individual Moslem he had a sort of natural brotherhood which has never been explained. Had it been shown by a soldier of the Crusades, it would have been called witchcraft. In this, as in many other cases, the advance of a larger enlightenment prevents us from calling it anything. There was mixed with it, no doubt, the deep Moslem admiration for mere masculinity, which has probably by its exaggeration permitted the Moslem subordination of women. But Kitchener (who was himself accused, rightly or wrongly, of a disdain for women) must have himself contributed some other element to the strangest of international sympathies. Whatever it was, it must be constantly kept in mind as running parallel to his scientific industry and particularity; for it was these two powers, used systematically for many years before the event, that prepared the ground for the overthrow of that wild papacy and wandering empire which so long hung in the desert, like a mirage to mislead and to destroy.

Kitchener was called away in 1878 to similar surveying duties in Cyprus, and afterwards in Anatolia, where the same faculty obtained him a *firman*, making him safe in all the Holy Cities of Islam. He also dealt much with the Turkish fugitives fleeing from the Russian guns to Erzerum — whither, so long after, the guns were to follow. But it is with his later summons to Egypt that we feel he has returned to the theatre of the great things of his life. It is not necessary in this rough sketch to discuss the rights and wrongs or the general international origin of the British occupation of Egypt; the degree of praise or blame to be given to the Khedive, who was the nominal ruler, or to Arabi, the Nationalist leader, who for a time seized the chief power in his place. Kitchener's services in the operations by which Arabi was defeated were confined to some reconnaissance work immediately preceding the bombardment of Alexandria; and the problem with which his own personality became identified was not that of the Government of Egypt, but of the more barbaric power beyond, by which Egypt, and any powers ruling it, came to be increasingly imperilled. And what advanced him rapidly to posts of real responsibility in the new politics of the country was the knowledge he already had of wilder men and more mysterious forces than could be found in Egyptian courts or even Egyptian camps. It was the combination, of which we have already spoken, of detailed experience and almost eccentric sympathy. In practice it was his knowledge of Arabic, and still more his knowledge of Arabs.

There is in Islam a paradox which is perhaps a permanent menace. The great creed born in the desert creates a kind of ecstasy out of the very emptiness of its own land, and even, one may say, out of the emptiness of its own theology. It affirms, with no little sublimity, something that is not merely the singleness but rather the solitude of God. There is the same extreme simplification in the solitary figure of the Prophet; and yet this isolation perpetually reacts into its own opposite. A void is made in the heart of Islam which has to be filled up again and again by a mere repetition of the revolution that founded it. There are no sacraments; the only thing that can happen is a sort of apocalypse, as unique as the end of the world; so the apocalypse can only be repeated and the world end again and again. There are no priests; and yet this equality can only breed a multitude of lawless prophets almost as numerous as priests. The very dogma that there is only one Mahomet produces an endless procession of Mahomets. Of these the mightiest in modern times were the man whose name was Ahmed, and whose more famous title was the Mahdi; and his more ferocious successor Abdullahi, who was generally known as the Khalifa. These great fanatics, or great creators of fanaticism, succeeded in making a militarism almost as famous and formidable as that of the Turkish Empire on whose frontiers it hovered, and in spreading a reign of terror such as can seldom be organised except by civilisation. With Napoleonic suddenness and success the Mahdist hordes had fallen on the army of Hicks Pasha, when it left its camp at Omdurman, on the Nile opposite Khartoum, and had cut it to pieces in a fashion incredible. They had established at Omdurman their Holy City, the Rome of their nomadic Roman Empire. Towards that terrible place many adventurous men, like poor Hicks, had gone and were destined to go. The sands that encircled it were like that entrance to the lion’s cavern in the fable, towards which many footprints pointed, and from which none returned.

The last of these was Gordon, that romantic and even eccentric figure of whom so much might be said. Perhaps the most essential thing to say of him here is that fortune once again played the artist in sending such a man, at once as the leader and the herald of a man like Kitchener; to show the way and to make the occasion; to be a sacrifice and a signal for vengeance. Whatever else there was about Gordon, there was about him the air not only of a hero, but of the hero of a tragedy. Something Oriental in his own mysticism, something most of his countrymen would have called moonshine, something perverse in his courage, something childish and beautiful in that perversity, marked him out as the man who walks to doom — the man who in a hundred poems or fables goes up to a city to be crucified. He had gone to Khartoum to arrange the withdrawal of the troops from the Soudan, the Government having decided, if possible, to live at peace with the new Mahdist dictatorship; and he went through the deserts almost as solitary as a bird, on a journey as lonely as his end. He was cut off and besieged in Khartoum by the Mahdist armies, and fell with the falling city. Long before his end he had been in touch with Kitchener, now of the

Egyptian Intelligence Department, and weaving very carefully a vast net of diplomacy and strategy in which the slayers of Gordon were to be taken at last.

A well-known English journalist, Bennet Burleigh, wandering near Dongola, fell into conversation with an Arab who spoke excellent English, and who, with a hospitality highly improper in a Moslem, produced two bottles of claret for his entertainment. The name of this Arab was Kitchener; and the two bottles were all he had. The journalist obtained, along with the claret, his first glimpse of the great and extraordinary schemes with which Kitchener was already working to avenge the comrade who had fallen in Khartoum. This part of the work was as personal as that of a private detective plotting against a private murderer in a modern detective story. Kitchener had learned to speak the Arab tongue not only freely but sociably. He wore the Arab dress and fell into the Arab type of courtesy so effectively that even his blue northern eyes did not betray him. Above all, he sympathised with the Arab character; and in a thousand places sprinkled over the map of North-East Africa he made friends for himself and therefore enemies for the Mahdi. This was the first and superficially the most individual of the converging plans which were to checkmate the desert empire; and its effects were very far-reaching. Again and again, in subsequent years, when the missionaries of the Mahdist religion pushed northward, they found themselves entangled among tribes which the English power had not so much conquered as converted. The legend of the great Prophet encountered something more elusive than laws or military plans; it encountered another legend — an influence which also carried the echoes of the voice of a man. The Ababdeh Arabs, it was said, made a chain across the desert, which the new and awful faith could not pass. The Mudir of Dongola was on the point of joining the ever-victorious Prophet of Omdurman. Kitchener, clad as an Arab, went out almost alone to speak with him. What passed, perhaps, we can never tell; but before his guest had even left him the Mudir flew to arms, fell upon the Prophet’s hosts at Korti, and drove them before him.

The second and superficially more solid process of preparation is much better known. It was the education of the native Egyptian army. It is not necessary to swallow all the natural jingoism of English journalism in order to see something truly historic about the English officer’s work with the Fellaheen, or native race of Egypt. For centuries they had lain as level as the slime of the Nile, and all the conquerors in the chronicles of men had passed over them like a pavement. Though professing the challenging creed of the Moslems, they seem to have reached something like the pessimist patience of the Hindoos. To have turned this slime once more into a human river, to have lifted this pavement once more into a human rampart or barricade, is not a small thing, nor a thing that could possibly be done even by mere power, still less by mere money — and this Kitchener and his English companions certainly did. There must have been something much more than a mere cynical severity in “organisation” in the man who did it. There must be something more than a mere commercial common-sense in the nation in whose name it was done. It is easy enough, with sufficient dulness and greed of detail, to “organise” anything or anybody. It is easy enough to make people obey a bugle (or a factory hooter) as the Prussian soldiers obey a bugle. But it is no such trumpet that makes possible the resurrection of the dead.

The success of this second of the three converging designs of Kitchener, the making of a new Egyptian army, was soon seen in the expedition against Dongola. It had been foreshadowed in a successful defence of Suakin, in which Kitchener was wounded; a defence against Osman Digna, perhaps the first of the Mahdist generals whose own strongholds were eventually stormed at Gemaizeh; and in the victory at Toski, where fell the great warrior Wad el Njume, whose strategy had struck down both Hicks and Gordon. But the turn of the tide was Dongola. In 1892 General, now Lord Grenfell, who had been Sirdar, or Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Army, and ordered the advance at Toski, retired and left his post vacant. The great public servant known latterly as Lord Cromer had long had his eye on Kitchener and the part he had played, even as a young lieutenant, in the new military formation of the Fellaheen. He was now put at the head of the whole new army; and the first work that fell to him was leading the new expedition. In three days after the order was received the force started at nightfall and marched southward into the night. The detail is something more than picturesque; for on all accounts of that formidable attack on the Mahdi’s power a quality of darkness rests like a kind of cloud. It was, for one thing, a surprise attack and a very secret one, so that the cloud was as practical as a cloak; but it was also the re-entrance of a territory which an instinct has led the English to call the Dark Continent even under its blazing noon. There vast distances alone made a veil like that of darkness, and there the lives of Gordon and Hicks and hundreds more had been swallowed up in an ancient silence. Perhaps we cannot guess to-day, after the colder completion of Kitchener's work, what it meant for those who went on that nocturnal march; who crept up in two lines, one along the river and the other along an abandoned railway track, moving through the black night; and in the black night encamped, and waited for the rising of the moon. Anyhow, the tale told of it strikes this note, especially in one touch of what can only be called a terrible triviality. I mean the reference to the new noise heard just before day-break, revealing the nearness of the enemy: the dreadful drum of Islam, calling for prayer to an awful God — a God not to be worshipped by the changing and sometimes cheerful notes of harp or organ, but only by the drum that maddens by mere repetition.

But the third of Kitchener's lines of approach remains to consider. The surprise attack, which captured the riverside village of Firket, had eventually led, in spite of storms that warred on the advance like armies, and in one place practically wiped out a brigade, to the fall of Dongola itself. But Dongola was not the high place of the enemy; it was not there that Gordon died or that Abdullahi was still alive. Far away up the dark river were the twin cities of the tragedy, the city of the murder and the city of the murderer. It was in relation to this fixed point of fact that Kitchener's next proceeding is seen to be supremely characteristic. He was so anxious to do one thing that he was cautious about doing it. He was more concerned to obtain a success than to appear to deserve it; he did not want a moral victory, but a mathematical certainty. So far from following up the dash in the dark, upon Firket or Dongola, with more romantic risks, he decided not to advance on the Mahdi's host a minute faster than men could follow him building a railway. He created behind him a colossal causeway of communications, going out alone into wastes where there was and had been no other mortal trace or track. The engineering genius of Girouard, a Canadian, designed and developed it with what was, considering the nature of the task, brilliant rapidity; but by the standards of desert warfare it must have seemed that Kitchener and his English made war as slowly as grass grows or orchards bear fruit. The horsemen of Araby, darting to and fro like swallows, must have felt as if they were menaced by the advance of a giant snail. But it was a snail that left a shining track unknown to those sands; for the first time since Rome decayed something was being made there that could remain. The effect of this growing road, one might almost say this living road, began to be felt. Mahmoud, the Mahdist military leader, fell back from Berber, and gathered his hosts more closely round the sacred city on the Nile. Kitchener, making another night march up the Atbara river, stormed the Arab camp and took Mahmoud prisoner. Then at last he moved finally up the western bank of the Nile and came in sight of Omdurman. It is somewhat of a disproportion to dwell on the fight that followed and the fall of the great city. The fighting had been done already, and more than half of it was working; fighting a long fight against the centuries, against ages of sloth and the great sleep of the desert, where there had been nothing but visions, and against a racial decline that men had accepted as a doom. On the following Sunday a memorial service for Charles Gordon was held in the place where he was slain.

The fact that Kitchener fought with rails as much as with guns rather fixed from this time forward the fashionable view of his character. He was talked of as if he were himself made of metal, with a head filled not only with calculations but with clockwork. This is symbolically true, in so far as it means that he was by temper what he was by trade, an engineer. He had conquered the Mahdi, where many had failed to do so. But what he had chiefly conquered was the desert — a great and greedy giant. He brought Cairo to Khartoum; we might say that he brought London or Liverpool with him to the gates of the strange city of Omdurman. Some parts of his action supported, even regrettably, the reputation of rigidity. But if any admirer had, in this hour of triumph, been staring at him as at a stone sphinx of inflexible fate, that admirer would have been very much puzzled by the next passage of his life. Kitchener was something much more than a machine; for in the mind, as much as in the body, flexibility is far more masculine than inflexibility.

A situation developed almost instantly after his victory in which he was to show that he was a diplomatist as well as a soldier. At Fashoda, a little farther up the Nile, he found something more surprising, and perhaps more romantic, than the wildest dervish of the desert solitudes. A French officer, and one of the most valiant and distinguished of French officers, Major Marchand, had penetrated to the place with the pertinacity of a great explorer, and seemed prepared to hold it with all the unselfish arrogance of a patriot. It is said that the Frenchman not only welcomed Kitchener in the name of France, but invited him, with courteous irony, to partake of vegetables grown on the spot, a symbol of stable occupation. The story, if it be true, is admirably French; for it reveals at once the wit and the peasant. But the humour of the Englishman was worthily equal to the wit of the Frenchman; and it was humour of that sane sort which we call good humour. Political papers in pacific England and France raved and ranted over the crisis, responsible journals howled with jingoism; but through it all, until the moment when the French agreed to retire, the two most placable and even sociable figures were the two grim tropical travellers and soldiers who faced each other on the burning sands of Fashoda. As we see them facing each other, we have again the vague sense of a sign or a parable which runs through this story. For they were to meet again long afterwards as allies, when both were leading their countrymen against the great enemy in the Great War.

Something of the same shadow of prophecy is perhaps the deepest memory left by the last war of Kitchener before the greatest. After further activities in Egypt and the Soudan, of which the attempt to educate the Fellaheen by the Gordon Memorial College was the most remarkable, he was abruptly summoned to South Africa to be the right hand of Lord Roberts in the war then being waged against the Boers. He conducted the opening of the determining battle of Paardeberg, and was typically systematic in covering the half-conquered country with a system of block-houses and enclosures like a diagram of geometry. But to-day, and for many reasons, Englishmen will think first of the last scene of that war. When Botha and the Boer Generals surrendered to Kitchener, there was the same goodwill among the soldiers to contrast with the ill-will of the journalists. Botha also became almost a friend; and Botha also was to be in the far future an ally, smiting the German in Africa as Kitchener smote him in Europe. There was the same hint of prophecy about the war that ended at Vereeniging as about that other war that so nearly began at Fashoda. It seemed almost as if God were pitting his heroes against each other in tournament, before they all rode together against the heathen pouring upon them out of Germany.

It is with that name of Germany that this mere skeleton of the facts must end. After the South African War Kitchener had been made Commander-in-Chief in India, where he effected several vital changes, notably the emancipation of that office from the veto of the Military Member of the Council of the Viceroy, and where he showed once more, in his dealings with the Sepoys, that obscure yet powerful sympathy with the mysterious intellect of the East. Thence he had been again shifted to Egypt; but the next summons that came to him swallowed up all these things. A short time after war broke out with Germany he was made Minister of War, and held that post until the dark season when he set out on a mission to Russia, which never reached its goal. But when his ship went down he had already done a work and registered a change in England, with some words about which this sketch may well conclude. Journalistic attacks were indeed made upon him, but in writing for a foreign reader I pass them by. In such a place I will not say even of the meanest of Englishmen what they were not ashamed to say of one of the greatest. In his new work he was not only a very great man, but one dealing with very great things; and perhaps his most historic moment was when he broke his customary silence about the deeper emotions of life, and became the mouthpiece of the national horror at the German fashion of fighting, which he declared to have left a stain upon the whole profession of arms. For, by a movement unusually and unconsciously dramatic, he chose that moment to salute across the long stretch of years the comparative chivalry and nobility of his dead enemies of the Soudan, and to announce that in the heart of Europe, in learned academies and ordered government offices, there had appeared a lunacy so cruel and unclean that the maddest dervish dead in the desert had a right to disdain it where he lay.

Kitchener, like other Englishmen of his type, made his name outside England and even outside Europe. But it was in England, and after his return to England, that he did what will perhaps make his name most permanent in history. That return to England was indeed as symbolic as his last and tragic journey to Russia. Both will stand as symbols of the deepest things which are moving mankind in the Great War. In truth the whole of that great European movement which we call the cause of the Allies is in itself a homeward journey. It is a return to native and historic ideals, after an exile in the howling wilderness of the political pessimism and cynicism of Prussia. After his great adventures in Africa and Asia, the Englishman has re-discovered Europe; and in the very act of discovering Europe, the Englishman has at last discovered England. The revelation of the forces still really to be found in England itself, when all is said that can possibly or plausibly be said against English commercialism and selfishness, was the last work of Lord Kitchener. He was the embodiment of an enormous experience which has passed through Imperialism and reached patriotism. He had been the supreme figure of that strange and sprawling England which lies beyond England; which carries the habits of English clubs and hotels into the solitudes of the Nile or up the passes of the Himalayas, and is infinitely ignorant of things infinitely nearer home. For this type of Englishman Cairo was nearer than Calais. Yet the typical figure which we associated with such places as Cairo was destined before he died to open again the ancient gate of Calais and lead in a new and noble fashion the return of England to Europe. The great change for which his countrymen will probably remember him longest was what we should call in England the revolution of the New Armies.

It is almost impossible to express how great a revolution it was so as to convey its dimensions to the citizens of any other great European country where military service has long been the rule and not the exception, where the people itself is only the army in mufti. In its mere aspect to the eye it was something like an invasion by a strange race. The English professional soldier of our youth had been conspicuous not only by his red coat but by his rarity. When rare things become common they do not become commonplace. The memory of their singularity is still strong enough to give them rather the appearance of a prodigy, as anyone can realise by imagining an army of hunchbacks or a city of one-eyed men. The English soldier had indeed been respected as a patriotic symbol, but rather as a priest or a prince can be a symbol, as being the exception and not the rule. A child was taken to see the soldier outside Buckingham Palace almost as he was taken to see the King driving out of Buckingham Palace. Hence the first effect of the enlargement of the armies was something almost like a fairy-tale — almost as if the streets were crowded with kings, walking about and wearing crowns of gold. This merely optical vision of the revolution was but the first impression of a reality equally vast and new. The first levies which came to be called popularly Kitchener’s Army, because of the energy and inspiration with which he set himself to their organisation, consisted entirely of volunteers. It was not till long after the whole face of England had been transformed by this mobilisation that the Government resorted to compulsion to bring in a mere margin of men. Save for the personality of Kitchener, the new militarism of England came wholly and freely from the English. While it was as universal as a tax, it was as spontaneous as a riot. But it is obvious that to produce so large and novel an effect out of the mere psychology of a nation, apart from its organisation, was something which required tact as well as decision: and it is this which illustrated a side of the

English general’s character without which he may be, and indeed has been, wholly misunderstood.

It is of the nature of national heroes of Kitchener’s type that their admirers are unjust to them. They would have been better appreciated if they had been less praised. When a soldier is turned into an idol there seems an unfortunate tendency to turn him into a wooden idol, like the wooden figure of Hindenburg erected by the ridiculous authorities of Berlin. In a more moderate and metaphorical sense there has been an unfortunate tendency to represent Kitchener as strong by merely representing him as stiff — to suggest that he was made of wood and not of steel. There are two maxims, which have been, I believe, the mottoes of two English families, both of which are boasts but each the contrary of the other. The first runs, “You can break me, but you cannot bend me”; and the second, “You can bend me, but you cannot break me.” With all respect to whoever may have borne it, the first is the boast of the barbarian and therefore of the Prussian; the second is the boast of the Christian and the civilised man — that he is free and flexible, yet always returns to his true position, like a tempered sword. Now too much of the eulogy on a man like Kitchener tended to praise him not as a sword but as a poker. He happened to rise into his first fame at a time when much of the English Press and governing class was still entirely duped by Germany, and to some extent judged everything by a Bismarckian test of blood and iron. It tended to neglect the very real disadvantages, even in practical life, which lie upon the man of blood and iron, as compared with the man of blood and bone. It is one grave disadvantage, for instance, that if a man made of iron were to break his bones, they would not heal. In other words, the Prussian Empire, with all its perfections and efficiencies, has one notable defect — that it is a dead thing. It does not draw its life from any primary human religion or poetry; it does not grow again from within. And being a dead thing, it suffers also from having no nerves to give warning or reaction; it reads no danger signals; it has no premonitions; about its own spiritual doom its sentinels are deaf and all its spies are blind. On the other hand, the British Empire, with all its blunders and bad anomalies, to which I am the last person to be blind, has one noticeable advantage — that it is a living thing. It is not that it makes no mistakes, but it knows it has made them, as the living hand knows when it has touched hot iron. That is exactly what a hand of iron would not know; and that is exactly the error in the German ideal of a hand of iron. No candid critic of England can read its history fairly and fail to see a certain flexibility and self-modification; illiberal policies followed by liberal ones; men failing in something and succeeding in something else; men sent to do one thing and being wise enough to do another; the human power of the living hand to draw back. As it happens, Kitchener was extraordinarily English in this lively and vital moderation. And it is to be feared that the more German idealisation of him, in the largely unenlightened England before the war, has already done some harm to his reputation, and in missing what was particularly English has missed what was particularly interesting.

Lord Kitchener was personally a somewhat silent man; and his social conventions were those of the ordinary English officer, especially the officer who has lived among Orientals — conventions which in any case tend in the direction of silence. He also really had, and to an extent of which some people complained, a certain English embarrassment about making all his purposes clear, especially before they were clear to himself. He probably liked to think a thing out in his own way and therefore at his own time, which was not always the time at which people thought they had a right to question him. In this way it is true of him, as of such another strong man as the Irish patriot Parnell, that his very simplicity had an effect of secrecy. But it is a complete error about him, as it was a complete error about Parnell, to suppose that he took the Prussian pose of disdaining and disregarding everybody; that he settled everything in solitary egoism; that he was a Superman too self-sufficing to listen to friends and too philosophical to listen to reason. It will be noted that every crisis of his life that is lit up by history contradicts the colours of this picture. He could not only take counsel with his friends, but he was abnormally successful in taking counsel with his foes. It is notable that whenever he came in personal contact with a great captain actually or potentially in arms against him, the result was not a mere collision but a mutual comprehension. He established the friendliest relations with the chivalrous and adventurous Marchand, standing on the deadly debatable land of Fashoda. He established equally friendly relations with the Boer generals, gathered under the dark cloud of national disappointment and defeat. In all such instances, so far as his individuality could count, it is clear that he acted as a moderate and, in the universal sense, as a liberal. The results and the records of those who met him in such hours are quite sufficient to prove that he did not leave the impression of a

Prussian arrogance. If he was silent, his silence must have been more friendly, I had almost said more convivial, than many men’s conversation. But on the larger platform of the European War, this quiet but unique gift of open-mindedness and intellectual hospitality was destined to do two very decisive things, which may profoundly affect history. In the first he dealt with the more democratic and even revolutionary elements in England; and in the second he represents a very real change that has passed over the English traditions about Russia.

Personally, as has already been noted, Lord Kitchener never was and never pretended to be anything more or less than the good military man, and by the time of the Great War he was already an elderly military man. The type has much the same standards and traditions in all European countries; but in England it is, if anything, a little more traditional, for the very reason that the army has been something separate, professional, and relatively small — a sort of club. The military man was all the more military because the nation was not military. Such a man is inevitably conservative in his views, conventional in his manners, and simplifies the problem of patriotism to a single-eyed obedience. When he took over the business of raising the first levies for the present war he was confronted with the problem of the English Trades Unions — the very last problem in the world which one could reasonably expect such a man to understand. And yet he did understand it; he was perhaps the only person in the governing class who did. If it be hard to explain to the richer classes in England, it is almost impossible to explain to any classes in any other country, because the English situation is largely unique. There is the same difficulty as we have already found in describing how vast and even violent a transformation scene the growth of the great army appeared; it has been almost impossible to describe it to the chief conscript countries, which take a great army for granted. The key to the parallel problem of the Trades Unions is simply this — that England is the only European country that is practically industrial and nothing else. Trades Unions can never play such a part in countries where the masses live on the land; such masses always have some status and support — yes, even if they are serfs. The status of the English workman is not in the earth; it is, so to speak, in the air — in a scaffolding of artificial abstractions, a framework of rules and rights, of verbal bargains or paper resolutions. If he loses this, he becomes nothing so human or homely as a slave. Rather he becomes a wild beast, a sort of wandering vermin with no place in the state at all. It would be necessary to explain this, and a great deal more which cannot possibly be explained here, before we could measure the enormity of the enigma facing the British official who had to propose to the English the practical suspension of the Trades Unions. To this must be added the fact that the Unions, already national institutions, had just lately been in a ferment with new and violent doctrines: Syndicalists had invoked them as the future seats of government; historical speculators had seen in them the return to the great Christian Guilds of the Middle Ages; a more revolutionary Press had appeared to champion them; gigantic strikes had split the country in every direction. Anyone would have said that under these circumstances the very virtues and attainments of Kitchener would at least make it fairly certain that he would quarrel with the Trades Unions. It soon became apparent that the one man who was not going to quarrel with the Trades Unions was Kitchener. Politicians and parliamentary leaders, supposed actually to be elected by the working classes, were regarded, rightly or wrongly, with implacable suspicion. The elderly and old-fashioned Anglo-Egyptian militarist, with his doctrine and discipline of the barrack-room and the drumhead court-martial, was never regarded by the workers with a shade of suspicion. They simply took him at his word, and the leader of the most turbulent Trades Union element paid to him after his death the simplest tribute in the plainest and most popular language— “He was a straight man.” I am so antiquated as to think it a better epitaph than the fashionable phrase about a strong man. Some silent indescribable geniality of fairness in the man once more prevailed against the possibility of passionate misunderstandings, as it had prevailed against the international nervousness of the atmosphere of Fashoda or the tragic border feud of the Boers. I suspect that it lay largely in the fact that this great Englishman was sufficiently English to guess one thing missed by many more sophisticated people — that the English Trades Unions are very English. For good or evil, they are national; they have very little in common with the more international Socialism of the Continent, and nothing whatever in common with the pedantic Socialism of Prussia. Understanding his countrymen by instinct, he did not make a parade of efficiency; for the English dislike the symbols of dictatorship much more than dictatorship. They hate the crown and sceptre of the tyrant much more than his tyranny. They have a national tradition which allows of far too much inequality so long as it is softened with a certain camaraderie, and in which even snobs only remember the coronet of a nobleman on condition that he shall himself seem to forget it.

The other matter is much more important. Though the reverse of vivacious, Kitchener was very vital; and he had one unique mark of vitality — that he had not stopped growing. “An oak should not be transplanted at sixty,” said the great orator Grattan when he was transferred from the Parliament of Dublin to the Parliament of Westminster. Kitchener was sixty-four when he turned his face westward to the problem of his own country. There clung to him already all the traditional attributes of the oak — its toughness, its angularity, its closeness of grain and ruggedness of outline — when he was uprooted from the Arabian sands and replanted in the remote western island. Yet the oak not only grew green again and put forth new leaves; it was almost as if, as in a legend, it could put forth a new kind of leaves. Kitchener, with all his taciturnity, really began to put forth a new order of ideas. If a change of opinions is unusual in an elderly man, it is almost unknown in an elderly military man. If the hardening of time was felt even by the poetic and emotional Grattan, it would not have been strange if the hardening had been quite hopeless in the rigid and reticent Kitchener. Yet it was not hopeless; and the fact became the spring of much of the national hope. The grizzled martinet from India and Egypt showed a certain power which is in nearly all great men, but of which St. Paul has become the traditional type — the power of being a great convert as well as a great crusader. It is the real power of re-forming an opinion, which is the very opposite of that mere formlessness which we call fickleness. Nor is the comparison to such an example as St. Paul altogether historically disproportionate; for the point upon which this very typical Englishman changed his mind was a point which is now the pivot of the whole future and perhaps of the very existence of Christendom. For many such Englishmen it might almost be called the discovery of Christendom. It can be called with greater precision, and indeed with almost complete precision, the discovery of Russia.

Military bureaucratic systems everywhere have too much tendency to work upon one idea, and there was a time when the military and bureaucratic system of the British in the East worked on the idea of the fear of Russia. It is needless here to explain that sentiment, and useless to explain it away. It was partly a mere tradition from the natural jingoism of the Crimean War; it was partly in itself a tribute to the epic majesty of the

Russian march across mysterious Asia to the legendary Chinese Wall. The point here is that it existed; and where there exists such an idea in such military rulers, they very seldom alter their idea. But Kitchener did alter his idea. Not in mere military obedience, but in genuine human reasonableness, he came late in life to see the Russian as the friend and the Prussian as the enemy. In the inevitable division of British ministerial councils about the distribution of British aid and attention he was the one man who stood most enthusiastically, one might say stubbornly, for the supreme importance of munitioning the magnificent Russian defence. He mystified all the English pessimists, in what seemed to them the blackest hour of pessimism, by announcing that Germany had “shot her bolt”; that she had already lost her chance, not by any of the Allied attacks, but by the stupendous skill and valour of that Russian retreat, which was more triumphant than any attack. It is this discovery that marks an epoch; for that great deliverance was not only the victory of Russia, but very specially the victory of the Russians. Never before was there such a war of men against guns — as awful and inspiring to watch as a war of men against demons. Perhaps the duel of a man with a modern gun is more like that between a man and an enormous dragon; nor is there anything on the weaker side save the ultimate and almost metaphysical truth, that a man can make a gun and a gun cannot make a man. It is the man — the Russian soldier and peasant himself — who has emerged like the hero of an epic, and who is now secure for ever from the sophisticated scandal-mongering and the cultured ignorance of the West.

And it is this that lends an epic and almost primeval symbolism to the tragedy of Kitchener’s end. Somehow the very fact that it was incomplete as an action makes it more complete as an allegory. English in his very limitations, English in his late emancipation from them, he was setting forth on an eastward journey different indeed from the many eastward journeys of his life. There are many such noble tragedies of travel in the records of his country; it was so, silently without a trace, that the track of Franklin faded in the polar snows or the track of Gordon in the desert sands. But this was an adventure new for such adventurous men — the finding not of strange foes but of friends yet stranger. Many men of his blood and type — simple, strenuous, somewhat prosaic — had threaded their way through some dark continent to add some treasure or territory to the English name. He was seeking what for us his countrymen has long been a dark continent

— but which contains a much more noble treasure. The glory of a great people, long hidden from the English by accidents and by lies, lay before him at his journey’s end. That journey was never ended. It remains like a mighty bridge, the mightier for being broken, pointing across a chasm, and promising a mightier thoroughfare between the east and west. In that waste of seas beyond the last northern islets where his ship went down one might fancy his spirit standing, a figure frustrated yet prophetic and pointing to the East, whence are the light of the world and the reunion of Christian men.

UTOPIA OF USURERS AND OTHER ESSAYS

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A SONG OF SWORDS

“A drove of cattle came into a village called Swords; and was stopped by the rioters.” — Daily Paper.

In the place called Swords on the Irish road
It is told for a new renown
How we held the horns of the cattle, and how
We will hold the horns of the devils now
Ere the lord of hell with the horn on his brow
Is crowned in Dublin town.

Light in the East and light in the West,
And light on the cruel lords,
On the souls that suddenly all men knew,
And the green flag flew and the red flag flew,
And many a wheel of the world stopped, too,
When the cattle were stopped at Swords.

Be they sinners or less than saints
That smite in the street for rage,
We know where the shame shines bright; we know
You that they smite at, you their foe,
Lords of the lawless wage and low,
This is your lawful wage.

You pinched a child to a torture price
That you dared not name in words;
So black a jest was the silver bit
That your own speech shook for the shame of it,
And the coward was plain as a cow they hit
When the cattle have strayed at Swords.

The wheel of the torrent of wives went round
To break men’s brotherhood;
You gave the good Irish blood to grease
The clubs of your country’s enemies;

you saw the brave man beat to the knees:
And you saw that it was good.

The rope of the rich is long and long —
The longest of hangmen’s cords;
But the kings and crowds are holding their breath,
In a giant shadow o’er all beneath
Where God stands holding the scales of Death
Between the cattle and Swords.

Haply the lords that hire and lend
The lowest of all men’s lords,
Who sell their kind like kine at a fair,
Will find no head of their cattle there;
But faces of men where cattle were:
Faces of men — and Swords.

UTOPIA OF USURERS

I. Art and Advertisement

I propose, subject to the patience of the reader, to devote two or three articles to prophecy. Like all healthy-minded prophets, sacred and profane, I can only prophesy when I am in a rage and think things look ugly for everybody. And like all healthy-minded prophets, I prophesy in the hope that my prophecy may not come true. For the prediction made by the true soothsayer is like the warning given by a good doctor. And the doctor has really triumphed when the patient he condemned to death has revived to life. The threat is justified at the very moment when it is falsified. Now I have said again and again (and I shall continue to say again and again on all the most inappropriate occasions) that we must hit Capitalism, and hit it hard, for the plain and definite reason that it is growing stronger. Most of the excuses which serve the capitalists as masks are, of course, the excuses of hypocrites. They lie when they claim philanthropy; they no more feel any particular love of men than Albu felt an affection for Chinamen. They lie when they say they have reached their position through their own organising ability. They generally have to pay men to organise the mine, exactly as they pay men to go down it. They often lie about the present wealth, as they generally lie about their past poverty. But when they say that they are going in for a "constructive social policy," they do not lie. They really are going in for a constructive social policy. And we must go in for an equally destructive social policy; and destroy, while it is still half-constructed, the accursed thing which they construct.

The Example of the Arts

Now I propose to take, one after another, certain aspects and departments of modern life, and describe what I think they will be like in this paradise of plutocrats, this Utopia of gold and brass in which the great story of England seems so likely to end. I propose to say what I think our new masters, the mere millionaires, will do with certain human interests and institutions, such as art, science, jurisprudence, or religion — unless we strike soon enough to prevent them. And for the sake of argument I will take in this article the example of the arts.

Most people have seen a picture called “Bubbles,” which is used for the advertisement of a celebrated soap, a small cake of which is introduced into the pictorial design. And anybody with an instinct for design (the caricaturist of the Daily Herald, for instance), will guess that it was not originally a part of the design. He will see that the cake of soap destroys the picture as a picture; as much as if the cake of soap had been used to Scrub off the paint. Small as it is, it breaks and confuses the whole balance of objects in the composition. I offer no judgment here upon Millais’s action in the matter; in fact, I do not know what it was. The important point for me at the moment is that the picture was not painted for the soap, but the soap added to the picture. And the spirit of the corrupting change which has separated us from that Victorian epoch can be best seen in this: that the Victorian atmosphere, with all its faults, did not permit such a style of patronage to pass as a matter of course. Michael Angelo may have been proud to have helped an emperor or a pope; though, indeed, I think he was prouder than they were on his own account. I do not believe Sir John Millais was proud of having helped a soap-boiler. I do not say he thought it wrong; but he was not proud of it. And that marks precisely the change from his time to our own. Our merchants have really adopted the style of merchant princes. They have begun openly to dominate the civilisation of the State, as the emperors and popes openly dominated in Italy. In Millais’s time, broadly speaking, art was supposed to mean good art; advertisement was supposed to mean inferior art. The head of a black man, painted to advertise somebody’s blacking, could be a rough symbol, like an inn sign. The black man had only to be black enough. An artist exhibiting the picture of a negro was expected to know that a black man is not so black as he is painted. He was expected to render a thousand tints of grey and brown and violet: for there is no such thing as a black man just as there is no such thing as a white man. A fairly clear line separated advertisement from art.

The First Effect

I should say the first effect of the triumph of the capitalist (if we allow him to triumph) will be that that line of demarcation will entirely disappear. There will be no art that might not just as well be advertisement. I do not necessarily mean that there will be no good art; much of it might be, much of it already is, very good art. You may put it, if you please, in the form that there has been a vast improvement in advertisements. Certainly there would be nothing surprising if the head of a negro advertising Somebody’s

Blacking now adays were finished with as careful and subtle colours as one of the old and superstitious painters would have wasted on the negro king who brought gifts to Christ. But the improvement of advertisements is the degradation of artists. It is their degradation for this clear and vital reason: that the artist will work, not only to please the rich, but only to increase their riches; which is a considerable step lower. After all, it was as a human being that a pope took pleasure in a cartoon of Raphael or a prince took pleasure in a statuette of Cellini. The prince paid for the statuette; but he did not expect the statuette to pay him. It is my impression that no cake of soap can be found anywhere in the cartoons which the Pope ordered of Raphael. And no one who knows the small-minded cynicism of our plutocracy, its secrecy, its gambling spirit, its contempt of conscience, can doubt that the artist-advertiser will often be assisting enterprises over which he will have no moral control, and of which he could feel no moral approval. He will be working to spread quack medicines, queer investments; and will work for Marconi instead of Medici. And to this base ingenuity he will have to bend the proudest and purest of the virtues of the intellect, the power to attract his brethren, and the noble duty of praise. For that picture by Millais is a very allegorical picture. It is almost a prophecy of what uses are awaiting the beauty of the child unborn. The praise will be of a kind that may correctly be called soap; and the enterprises of a kind that may truly be described as Bubbles.

II. Letters and the New Laureates

In these articles I only take two or three examples of the first and fundamental fact of our time. I mean the fact that the capitalists of our community are becoming quite openly the kings of it. In my last (and first) article, I took the case of Art and advertisement. I pointed out that Art must be growing worse — merely because advertisement is growing better. In those days Millais condescended to Pears' soap. In these days I really think it would be Pears who condescended to Millais. But here I turn to an art I know more about, that of journalism. Only in my ease the art verges on artlessness.

The great difficulty with the English lies in the absence of something one may call democratic imagination. We find it easy to realise an individual, but very hard to realise that the great masses consist of individuals. Our system has been aristocratic: in the special sense of there being only a few actors on the stage. And the back scene is kept quite dark, though it is really a throng of faces. Home Rule tended to be not so much the Irish as the Grand Old Man. The Boer War tended not to be so much South Africa as simply "Joe." And it is the amusing but distressing fact that every class of political leadership, as it comes to the front in its turn, catches the rays of this isolating lime-light; and becomes a small aristocracy. Certainly no one has the aristocratic complaint so badly as the Labour Party. At the recent Congress, the real difference between Larkin and the English Labour leaders was not so much in anything right or wrong in what he said, as in something elemental and even mystical in the way he suggested a mob. But it must be plain, even to those who agree with the more official policy, that for Mr. Havelock Wilson the principal question was Mr. Havelock Wilson; and that Mr. Sexton was mainly considering the dignity and fine feelings of Mr. Sexton. You may say they were as sensitive as aristocrats, or as sulky as babies; the point is that the feeling was personal. But Larkin, like Danton, not only talks like ten thousand men talking, but he also has some of the carelessness of the colossus of Arcis; "Que mon nom soit fletri, que la France soit libre."

A Dance of Degradation

It is needless to say that this respecting of persons has led all the other parties a dance of degradation. We ruin South Africa because it would be a slight on Lord Gladstone to save South Africa. We have a bad army, because it would be a snub to Lord Haldane to have a good army. And no Tory is allowed to say “Marconi” for fear Mr. George should say “Kynoch.” But this curious personal element, with its appalling lack of patriotism, has appeared in a new and curious form in another department of life; the department of literature, especially periodical literature. And the form it takes is the next example I shall give of the way in which the capitalists are now appearing, more and more openly, as the masters and princes of the community.

I will take a Victorian instance to mark the change; as I did in the case of the advertisement of “Bubbles.” It was said in my childhood, by the more apoplectic and elderly sort of Tory, that W. E. Gladstone was only a Free Trader because he had a partnership in Gilbey’s foreign wines. This was, no doubt, nonsense; but it had a dim symbolic, or mainly prophetic, truth in it. It was true, to some extent even then, and it has been increasingly true since, that the statesman was often an ally of the salesman; and represented not only a nation of shopkeepers, but one particular shop. But in Gladstone’s time, even if this was true, it was never the whole truth; and no one would have endured it being the admitted truth. The politician was not solely an eloquent and persuasive bagman travelling for certain business men; he was bound to mix even his corruption with some intelligible ideals and rules of policy. And the proof of it is this: that at least it was the statesman who bulked large in the public eye; and his financial backer was entirely in the background. Old gentlemen might choke over their port, with the moral certainty that the Prime Minister had shares in a wine merchant’s. But the old gentleman would have died on the spot if the wine merchant had really been made as important as the Prime Minister. If it had been Sir Walter Gilbey whom Disraeli denounced, or Punch caricatured; if Sir Walter Gilbey’s favourite collars (with the design of which I am unacquainted) had grown as large as the wings of an archangel; if Sir Walter Gilbey had been credited with successfully eliminating the British Oak with his little hatchet; if, near the Temple and the Courts of Justice, our sight was struck by a majestic statue of a wine merchant; or if the earnest Conservative lady who threw a gingerbread-nut at the Premier had directed it towards the wine merchant instead, the shock to Victorian England would have been very great indeed.

Haloes for Employers

Now something very like that is happening; the mere wealthy employer is beginning to have not only the power but some of the glory. I have seen in several magazines lately, and magazines of a high class, the appearance of a new kind of article. Literary men are being employed to praise a big business man personally, as men used to praise a king. They not only find political reasons for the commercial schemes — that they have done for some time past — they also find moral defences for the commercial schemers. They describe the capitalist’s brain of steel and heart of gold in a way that Englishmen hitherto have been at least in the habit of reserving for romantic figures like Garibaldi or Gordon. In one excellent magazine Mr. T. P. O’Connor, who, when he likes, can write on letters like a man of letters, has some purple pages of praise of Sir Joseph Lyons — the man who runs those teashop places. He incidentally brought in a delightful passage about the beautiful souls possessed by some people called Salmon and Gluckstein. I think I like best the passage where he said that Lyons’s charming social acaccomplishments included a talent for “imitating a Jew.” The article is accompanied with a large and somewhat leering portrait of that shopkeeper, which makes the parlour-trick in question particularly astonishing. Another literary man, who certainly ought to know better, wrote in another paper a piece of hero-worship about Mr. Selfridge. No doubt the fashion will spread, and the art of words, as polished and pointed by Ruskin or Meredith, will be perfected yet further to explore the labyrinthine heart of Harrod; or compare the simple stoicism of Marshall with the saintly charm of Snelgrove.

Any man can be praised — and rightly praised. If he only stands on two legs he does something a cow cannot do. If a rich man can manage to stand on two legs for a reasonable time, it is called self-control. If he has only one leg, it is called (with some truth) self-sacrifice. I could say something nice (and true) about every man I have ever met. Therefore, I do not doubt I could find something nice about Lyons or Selfridge if I searched for it. But I shall not. The nearest postman or cab-man will provide me with just the same brain of steel and heart of gold as these unlucky lucky men. But I do resent the whole age of patronage being revived under such absurd patrons; and all poets becoming court poets, under kings that have taken no oath, nor led us into any battle.

III. Unbusinesslike Business

The fairy tales we were all taught did not, like the history we were all taught, consist entirely of lies. Parts of the tale of “Puss in Boots” or “Jack and the Beanstalk” may strike the realistic eye as a little unlikely and out of the common way, so to speak; but they contain some very solid and very practical truths. For instance, it may be noted that both in “Puss in Boots” and “Jack and the Beanstalk” if I remember aright, the ogre was not only an ogre but also a magician. And it will generally be found that in all such popular narratives, the king, if he is a wicked king, is generally also a wizard. Now there is a very vital human truth enshrined in this. Bad government, like good government, is a spiritual thing. Even the tyrant never rules by force alone; but mostly by fairy tales. And so it is with the modern tyrant, the great employer. The sight of a millionaire is seldom, in the ordinary sense, an enchanting sight: nevertheless, he is in his way an enchanter. As they say in the gushing articles about him in the magazines, he is a fascinating personality. So is a snake. At least he is fascinating to rabbits; and so is the millionaire to the rabbit-witted sort of people that ladies and gentlemen have allowed themselves to become. He does, in a manner, cast a spell, such as that which imprisoned princes and princesses under the shapes of falcons or stags. He has truly turned men into sheep, as Circe turned them into swine.

Now, the chief of the fairy tales, by which he gains this glory and glamour, is a certain hazy association he has managed to create between the idea of bigness and the idea of practicality. Numbers of the rabbit-witted ladies and gentlemen do really think, in spite of themselves and their experience, that so long as a shop has hundreds of different doors and a great many hot and unhealthy underground departments (they must be hot; this is very important), and more people than would be needed for a man-of-war, or crowded cathedral, to say: “This way, madam,” and “The next article, sir,” it follows that the goods are good. In short, they hold that the big businesses are businesslike. They are not. Any housekeeper in a truthful mood, that is to say, any housekeeper in a bad temper, will tell you that they are not. But housekeepers, too, are human, and therefore inconsistent and complex; and they do not always stick to truth and bad temper. They are also affected by this queer idolatry of the enormous and elaborate; and cannot help feeling that anything so complicated must go like clockwork. But complexity is no guarantee of accuracy — in clockwork or in anything else. A clock can be as wrong as the human head; and a clock can stop, as suddenly as the human heart.

But this strange poetry of plutocracy prevails over people against their very senses. You write to one of the great London stores or emporia, asking, let us say, for an umbrella. A month or two afterwards you receive a very elaborately constructed parcel, containing a broken parasol. You are very pleased. You are gratified to reflect on what a vast number of assistants and employees had combined to break that parasol. You luxuriate in the memory of all those long rooms and departments and wonder in which of them the parasol that you never ordered was broken. Or you want a toy elephant for your child on Christmas Day; as children, like all nice and healthy people, are very ritualistic. Some week or so after Twelfth Night, let us say, you have the pleasure of removing three layers of pasteboards, five layers of brown paper, and fifteen layers of tissue paper and discovering the fragments of an artificial crocodile. You smile in an expansive spirit. You feel that your soul has been broadened by the vision of incompetence conducted on so large a scale. You admire all the more the colossal and Omnipresent Brain of the Organiser of Industry, who amid all his multitudinous cares did not disdain to remember his duty of smashing even the smallest toy of the smallest child. Or, supposing you have asked him to send you some two rolls of cocoa-nut matting: and supposing (after a due interval for reflection) he duly delivers to you the five rolls of wire netting. You take pleasure in the consideration of a mystery: which coarse minds might have called a mistake. It consoles you to know how big the business is: and what an enormous number of people were needed to make such a mistake.

That is the romance that has been told about the big shops; in the literature and art which they have bought, and which (as I said in my recent articles) will soon be quite indistinguishable from their ordinary advertisements. The literature is commercial; and it is only fair to say that the commerce is often really literary. It is no romance, but only rubbish.

The big commercial concerns of to-day are quite exceptionally incompetent. They will be even more incompetent when they are omnipotent. Indeed, that is, and always has been, the whole point of a monopoly; the old and sound argument against a monopoly. It is only because it is incompetent that it has to be omnipotent. When one large shop occupies the whole of one side of a street (or sometimes both sides), it does so in order that men may be unable to get what they want; and may be forced to buy what they don’t want. That the rapidly approaching kingdom of the Capitalists will ruin art and letters, I have already said. I say here that in the only sense that can be called human, it will ruin trade, too.

I will not let Christmas go by, even when writing for a revolutionary paper necessarily appealing to many with none of my religious sympathies, without appealing to those sympathies. I knew a man who sent to a great rich shop for a figure for a group of Bethlehem. It arrived broken. I think that is exactly all that business men have now the sense to do.

IV. The War on Holidays

The general proposition, not always easy to define exhaustively, that the reign of the capitalist will be the reign of the cad — that is, of the unlicked type that is neither the citizen nor the gentleman — can be excellently studied in its attitude towards holidays. The special emblematic Employer of to-day, especially the Model Employer (who is the worst sort) has in his starved and evil heart a sincere hatred of holidays. I do not mean that he necessarily wants all his workmen to work until they drop; that only occurs when he happens to be stupid as well as wicked. I do not mean to say that he is necessarily unwilling to grant what he would call "decent hours of labour." He may treat men like dirt; but if you want to make money, even out of dirt, you must let it lie fallow by some rotation of rest. He may treat men as dogs, but unless he is a lunatic he will for certain periods let sleeping dogs lie.

But humane and reasonable hours for labour have nothing whatever to do with the idea of holidays. It is not even a question of tenhours day and eight-hours day; it is not a question of cutting down leisure to the space necessary for food, sleep and exercise. If the modern employer came to the conclusion, for some reason or other, that he could get most out of his men by working them hard for only two hours a day, his whole mental attitude would still be foreign and hostile to holidays. For his whole mental attitude is that the passive time and the active time are alike useful for him and his business. All is, indeed, grist that comes to his mill, including the millers. His slaves still serve him in unconsciousness, as dogs still hunt in slumber. His grist is ground not only by the sounding wheels of iron, but by the soundless wheel of blood and brain. His sacks are still filling silently when the doors are shut on the streets and the sound of the grinding is low.

The Great Holiday

Now a holiday has no connection with using a man either by beating or feeding him. When you give a man a holiday you give him back his body and soul. It is quite possible you may be doing him an injury (though he seldom thinks so), but that does not affect the question for those to whom a holiday is holy. Immortality is the great holiday; and a holiday, like the immortality in the old theologies, is a double-edged privilege. But wherever it is genuine it is simply the restoration and completion of the man. If people ever looked at the printed word under their eye, the word “recreation” would be like the word “resurrection,” the blast of a trumpet.

A man, being merely useful, is necessarily incomplete, especially if he be a modern man and means by being useful being “utilitarian.” A man going into a modern club gives up his hat; a man going into a modern factory gives up his head. He then goes in and works loyally for the old firm to build up the great fabric of commerce (which can be done without a head), but when he has done work he goes to the cloak-room, like the man at the club, and gets his head back again; that is the germ of the holiday. It may be urged that the club man who leaves his hat often goes away with another hat; and perhaps it may be the same with the factory hand who has left his head. A hand that has lost its head may affect the fastidious as a mixed metaphor; but, God pardon us all, what an unmixed truth! We could almost prove the whole ease from the habit of calling human beings merely “hands” while they are working; as if the hand were horribly cut off, like the hand that has offended; as if, while the sinner entered heaven maimed, his unhappy hand still laboured laying up riches for the lords of hell. But to return to the man whom we found waiting for his head in the cloak-room. It may be urged, we say, that he might take the wrong head, like the wrong hat; but here the similarity ceases. For it has been observed by benevolent onlookers at life’s drama that the hat taken away by mistake is frequently better than the real hat; whereas the head taken away after the hours of toil is certainly worse: stained with the cobwebs and dust of this dustbin of all the centuries.

The Supreme Adventure

All the words dedicated to places of eating and drinking are pure and poetic words. Even the word “hotel” is the word hospital. And St. Julien, whose claret I drank this Christmas, was the patron saint of innkeepers, because (as far as I can make out) he was hospitable to lepers. Now I do not say that the ordinary hotel-keeper in Piccadilly or the Avenue de l’Opera would embrace a leper, slap him on the back, and ask him to order what he liked; but I do say that hospitality is his trade virtue. And I do also say it is well to keep before our eyes the supreme adventure of a virtue. If you are brave, think of the man who was braver than you. If you are kind, think of the man who was kinder than you.

That is what was meant by having a patron saint. That is the link between the poor saint who received bodily lepers and the great hotel proprietor who (as a rule) receives spiritual lepers. But a word yet weaker than “hotel” illustrates the same point — the word “restaurant.” There again you have the admission that there is a definite building or statue to “restore”; that ineffaceable image of man that some call the image of God. And that is the holiday; it is the restaurant or restoring thing that, by a blast of magic, turns a man into himself.

This complete and reconstructed man is the nightmare of the modern capitalist. His whole scheme would crack across like a mirror of Shallot, if once a plain man were ready for his two plain duties — ready to live and ready to die. And that horror of holidays which marks the modern capitalist is very largely a horror of the vision of a whole human being: something that is not a “hand” or a “head for figutes.” But an awful creature who has met himself in the wilderness. The employers will give time to eat, time to sleep; they are in terror of a time to think.

To anyone who knows any history it is wholly needless to say that holidays have been destroyed. As Mr. Belloc, who knows much more history than you or I, recently pointed out in the “Pall Mall Magazine,” Shakespeare’s title of “Twelfth Night: or What You Will” simply meant that a winter carnival for everybody went on wildly till the twelfth night after Christmas. Those of my readers who work for modern offices or factories might ask their employers for twelve days’ holidays after Christmas. And they might let me know the reply.

V. THE CHURCH OF THE SERVILE STATE

I confess I cannot see why mere blasphemy by itself should be an excuse for tyranny and treason; or how the mere isolated fact of a man not believing in God should be a reason for my believing in Him.

But the rather spinsterish flutter among some of the old Freethinkers has put one tiny ripple of truth in it; and that affects the idea which I wish to emphasise even to monotony in these pages. I mean the idea that the new community which the capitalists are now constructing will be a very complete and absolute community; and one which will tolerate nothing really independent of itself. Now, it is true that any positive creed, true or false, would tend to be independent of itself. It might be Roman Catholicism or Mahomedanism or Materialism; but, if strongly held, it would be a thorn in the side of the Servile State. The Moslem thinks all men immortal: the Materialist thinks all men mortal. But the Moslem does not think the rich Sinbad will live forever; but the poor Sinbad will die on his deathbed. The Materialist does not think that Mr. Haeckel will go to heaven, while all the peasants will go to pot, like their chickens. In every serious doctrine of the destiny of men, there is some trace of the doctrine of the equality of men. But the capitalist really depends on some religion of inequality. The capitalist must somehow distinguish himself from human kind; he must be obviously above it — or he would be obviously below it. Take even the least attractive and popular side of the larger religions to-day; take the mere vetoes imposed by Islam on Atheism or Catholicism. The Moslem veto upon intoxicants cuts across all classes. But it is absolutely necessary for the capitalist (who presides at a Licensing Committee, and also at a large dinner), it is absolutely necessary for him, to make a distinction between gin and champagne. The Atheist veto upon all miracles cuts across all classes. But it is absolutely necessary for the capitalist to make a distinction between his wife (who is an aristocrat and consults crystal gazers and star gazers in the West End), and vulgar miracles claimed by gipsies or travelling showmen. The Catholic veto upon usury, as defined in dogmatic councils, cuts across all classes. But it is absolutely necessary to the capitalist to distinguish more delicately between two kinds of usury; the kind he finds useful and the kind he does not find useful. The religion of the Servile State must have no dogmas or definitions. It cannot afford to have any definitions. For definitions are very dreadful things: they do the two things that most men, especially comfortable men, cannot endure. They fight; and they fight fair.

Every religion, apart from open devil worship, must appeal to a virtue or the pretence of a virtue. But a virtue, generally speaking, does some good to everybody. It is therefore necessary to distinguish among the people it was meant to benefit those whom it does benefit. Modern broad-mindedness benefits the rich; and benefits nobody else. It was meant to benefit the rich; and meant to benefit nobody else. And if you think this unwarranted, I will put before you one plain question. There are some pleasures of the poor that may also mean profits for the rich: there are other pleasures of the poor which cannot mean profits for the rich? Watch this one contrast, and you will watch the whole creation of a careful slavery.

In the last resort the two things called Beer and Soap end only in a froth. They are both below the high notice of a real religion. But there is just this difference: that the soap makes the factory more satisfactory, while the beer only makes the workman more satisfied. Wait and see if the Soap does not increase and the Beer decrease. Wait and see whether the religion of the Servile State is not in every case what I say: the encouragement of small virtues supporting capitalism, the discouragement of the huge virtues that defy it. Many great religions, Pagan and Christian, have insisted on wine. Only one, I think, has insisted on Soap. You will find it in the New Testament attributed to the Pharisees.

VI. SCIENCE AND THE EUGENISTS

The key fact in the new development of plutocracy is that it will use its own blunder as an excuse for further crimes. Everywhere the very completeness of the impoverishment will be made a reason for the enslavement; though the men who impoverished were the same who enslaved. It is as if a highwayman not only took away a gentleman’s horse and all his money, but then handed him over to the police for tramping without visible means of subsistence. And the most monstrous feature in this enormous meanness may be noted in the plutocratic appeal to science, or, rather, to the pseudo-science that they call Eugenics.

The Eugenists get the ear of the humane but rather hazy cliques by saying that the present “conditions” under which people work and breed are bad for the race; but the modern mind will not generally stretch beyond one step of reasoning, and the consequence which appears to follow on the consideration of these “conditions” is by no means what would originally have been expected. If somebody says: “A rickety cradle may mean a rickety baby,” the natural deduction, one would think, would be to give the people a good cradle, or give them money enough to buy one. But that means higher wages and greater equalisation of wealth; and the plutocratic scientist, with a slightly troubled expression, turns his eyes and pince-nez in another direction. Reduced to brutal terms of truth, his difficulty is this and simply this: More food, leisure, and money for the workman would mean a better workman, better even from the point of view of anyone for whom he worked. But more food, leisure, and money would also mean a more independent workman. A house with a decent fire and a full pantry would be a better house to make a chair or mend a clock in, even from the customer’s point of view, than a hovel with a leaky roof and a cold hearth. But a house with a decent fire and a full pantry would also be a better house in which to refuse to make a chair or mend a clock — a much better house to do nothing in — and doing nothing is sometimes one of the highest of the duties of man. All but the hard-hearted must be torn with pity for this pathetic dilemma of the rich man, who has to keep the poor man just stout enough to do the work and just thin enough to have to do it. As he stood gazing at the leaky roof and the rickety cradle in a pensive manner, there one day came into his mind a new and curious idea — one of the most strange, simple, and horrible ideas that have ever risen from the deep pit of original sin.

The roof could not be mended, or, at least, it could not be mended much, without upsetting the capitalist balance, or, rather, disproportion in society; for a man with a roof is a man with a house, and to that extent his house is his castle. The cradle could not be made to rock easier, or, at least, not much easier, without strengthening the hands of the poor household, for the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world — to that extent. But it occurred to the capitalist that there was one sort of furniture in the house that could be altered. The husband and wife could be altered. Birth costs nothing, except in pain and valour and such old-fashioned things; and the merchant need pay no more for mating a strong miner to a healthy fishwife than he pays when the miner mates himself with a less robust female whom he has the sentimentality to prefer. Thus it might be possible, by keeping on certain broad lines of heredity, to have some physical improvement without any moral, political, or social improvement. It might be possible to keep a supply of strong and healthy slaves without coddling them with decent conditions. As the mill-owners use the wind and the water to drive their mills, they would use this natural force as something even cheaper; and turn their wheels by diverting from its channel the blood of a man in his youth. That is what Eugenics means; and that is all that it means.

Of the moral state of those who think of such things it does not become us to speak. The practical question is rather the intellectual one: of whether their calculations are well founded, and whether the men of science can or will guarantee them any such physical certainties. Fortunately, it becomes clearer every day that they are, scientifically speaking, building on the shifting sand. The theory of breeding slaves breaks down through what a democrat calls the equality of men, but which even an oligarchist will find himself forced to call the similarity of men. That is, that though it is not true that all men are normal, it is overwhelmingly certain that most men are normal. All the common Eugenic arguments are drawn from extreme cases, which, even if human honour and laughter allowed of their being eliminated, would not by their elimination greatly affect the mass. For the rest, there remains the enormous weakness in Eugenics, that if ordinary men’s judgment or liberty is to be discounted in relation to heredity, the judgment of the judges must be discounted in relation to their heredity. The Eugenic professor may or may not succeed in choosing a baby’s parents; it is quite certain that he cannot succeed in choosing his own parents. All his thoughts, including his Eugenic thoughts, are, by the very principle of those thoughts, flowing from a doubtful or tainted source. In short, we should need a perfectly Wise Man to do the thing at all. And if he were a Wise Man he would not do it.

VII. THE EVOLUTION OF THE PRISON

I have never understood why it is that those who talk most about evolution, and talk it in the very age of fashionable evolutionism, do not see the one way in which evolution really does apply to our modern difficulty. There is, of course, an element of evolutionism in the universe; and I know no religion or philosophy that ever entirely ignored it. Evolution, popularly speaking, is that which happens to unconscious things. They grow unconsciously; or fade unconsciously; or rather, some parts of them grow and some parts of them fade; and at any given moment there is almost always some presence of thc fading thing, and some incompleteness in the growing one. Thus, if I went to sleep for a hundred years, like the Sleeping Beauty (I wish I could), I should grow a beard — unlike the Sleeping Beauty. And just as I should grow hair if I were asleep, I should grow grass if I were dead. Those whose religion it was that God was asleep were perpetually impressed and affected by the fact that he had a long beard. And those whose philosophy it is that the universe is dead from the beginning (being the grave of nobody in particular) think that is the way that grass can grow. In any case, these developments only occur with dead or dreaming things. What happens when everyone is asleep is called Evolution. What happens when everyone is awake is called Revolution.

There was once an honest man, whose name I never knew, but whose face I can almost see (it is framed in Victorian whiskers and fixed in a Victorian neck-cloth), who was balancing the achievements of France and England in civilisation and social efficiencies. And when he came to the religious aspect he said that there were more stone and brick churches used in France; but, on the other hand, there are more sects in England. Whether such a lively disintegration is a proof of vitality in any valuable sense I have always doubted. The sun may breed maggots in a dead dog; but it is essential for such a liberation of life that the dog should be unconscious or (to say the least of it) absent-minded. Broadly speaking, you may call the thing corruption, if you happen to like dogs. You may call it evolution, if you happen to like maggots. In either case, it is what happens to things if you leave them alone.

The Evolutionists’ Error

Now, the modern Evolutionists have made no real use of the idea of evolution, especially in the matter of social prediction. They always fall into what is (from their logical point of view) the error of supposing that evolution knows what it is doing. They predict the State of the future as a fruit rounded and polished. But the whole point of evolution (the only point there is in it) is that no State will ever be rounded and polished, because it will always contain some organs that outlived their use, and some that have not yet fully found theirs. If we wish to prophesy what will happen, we must imagine things now moderate grown enormous; things now local grown universal; things now promising grown triumphant; primroses bigger than sunflowers, and sparrows stalking about like flamingoes.

In other words, we must ask what modern institution has a future before it? What modern institution may have swollen to six times its present size in the social heat and growth of the future? I do not think the Garden City will grow: but of that I may speak in my next and last article of this series. I do not think even the ordinary Elementary School, with its compulsory education, will grow. Too many unlettered people hate the teacher for teaching; and too many lettered people hate the teacher for not teaching. The Garden City will not bear much blossom; the young idea will not shoot, unless it shoots the teacher. But the one flowering tree on the estate, the one natural expansion which I think will expand, is the institution we call the Prison.

Prisons for All

If the capitalists are allowed to erect their constructive capitalist community, I speak quite seriously when I say that I think Prison will become an almost universal experience. It will not necessarily be a cruel or shameful experience: on these points (I concede certainly for the present purpose of debate) it may be a vastly improved experience. The conditions in the prison, very possibly, will be made more humane. But the prison will be made more humane only in order to contain more of humanity. I think little of the judgment and sense of humour of any man who can have watched recent police trials without realising that it is no longer a question of whether the law has been broken by a crime; but, now, solely a question of whether the situation could be mended by an imprisonment. It was so with Tom Mann; it was so with Larkin; it was so with the poor atheist who was kept in gaol for saying something he had been acquitted of saying: it is so in such cases day by day. We no longer lock a man up for doing something; we lock him up in the hope of his doing nothing. Given this principle, it is evidently possible to make the mere conditions of punishment more moderate, or — (more probably) more secret. There may really be more mercy in the Prison, on condition that there is less justice in the Court. I should not be surprised if, before we are done with all this, a man was allowed to smoke in prison, on condition, of course, that he had been put in prison for smoking.

Now that is the process which, in the absence of democratic protest, will certainly proceed, will increase and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it. Prison may even lose its disgrace for a little time: it will be difficult to make it disgraceful when men like Larkin can be imprisoned for no reason at all, just as his celebrated ancestor was hanged for no reason at all. But capitalist society, which naturally does not know the meaning of honour, cannot know the meaning of disgrace: and it will still go on imprisoning for no reason at all. Or rather for that rather simple reason that makes a cat spring or a rat run away.

It matters little whether our masters stoop to state the matter in the form that every prison should be a school; or in the more candid form that every school should be a prison. They have already fulfilled their servile principle in the case of the schools. Everyone goes to the Elementary Schools except the few people who tell them to go there. I prophesy that (unless our revolt succeeds) nearly everyone will be going to Prison, with a precisely similar patience.

VIII. THE LASH FOR LABOUR

If I were to prophesy that two hundred years hence a grocer would have the right and habit of beating the grocer’s assistant with a stick, or that shop girls might be flogged, as they already can be fined, many would regard it as rather a rash remark. It would be a rash remark. Prophecy is always unreliable; unless we except the kind which is avowedly irrational, mystical and supernatural prophecy. But relatively to nearly all the other prophecies that are being made around me to-day, I should say my prediction stood an exceptionally good chance. In short, I think the grocer with the stick is a figure we are far more likely to see than the Superman or the Samurai, or the True Model Employer, or the Perfect Fabian Official, or the citizen of the Collectivist State. And it is best for us to see the full ugliness of the transformation which is passing over our Society in some such abrupt and even grotesque image at the end of it. The beginnings of a decline, in every age of history, have always had the appearance of being reforms. Nero not only fiddled while Rome was burning, but he probably really paid more attention to the fiddle than to the fire. The Roi Soleil, like many other soleils, was most splendid to all appearance a little before sunset. And if I ask myself what will be the ultimate and final fruit of all our social reforms, garden cities, model employers, insurances, exchanges, arbitration courts, and so on, then, I say, quite seriously, “I think it will be labour under the lash.”

The Sultan and the Sack

Let us arrange in some order a number of converging considerations that all point in this direction. (1) It is broadly true, no doubt, that the weapon of the employer has hitherto been the threat of dismissal, that is, the threat of enforced starvation. He is a Sultan who need not order the bastinado, so long as he can order the sack. But there are not a few signs that this weapon is not quite so convenient and flexible a one as his increasing rapacities require. The fact of the introduction of fines, secretly or openly, in many shops and factories, proves that it is convenient for the capitalists to have some temporary and adjustable form of punishment besides the final punishment of pure ruin. Nor is it difficult to see the commonsense of this from their wholly inhuman point of view. The act of sacking a man is attended with the same disadvantages as the act of shooting a man: one of which is that you can get no more out of him. It is, I am told, distinctly annoying to blow a fellow creature’s brains out with a revolver and then suddenly remember that he was the only person who knew where to get the best Russian cigarettes. So our Sultan, who is the orderer of the sack, is also the bearer of the bow-string. A school in which there was no punishment, except expulsion, would be a school in which it would be very difficult to keep proper discipline; and the sort of discipline on which the reformed capitalism will insist will be all of the type which in free nations is imposed only on children. Such a school would probably be in a chronic condition of breaking up for the holidays. And the reasons for the insufficiency of this extreme instrument are also varied and evident. The materialistic Sociologists, who talk about the survival of the fittest and the weakest going to the wall (and whose way of looking at the world is to put on the latest and most powerful scientific spectacles, and then shut their eyes), frequently talk as if a workman were simply efficient or non-efficient, as if a criminal were reclaimable or irreclaimable. The employers have sense enough at least to know better than that. They can see that a servant may be useful in one way and exasperating in another; that he may be bad in one part of his work and good in another; that he may be occasionally drunk and yet generally indispensable. Just as a practical school-master would know that a schoolboy can be at once the plague and the pride of the school. Under these circumstances small and varying penalties are obviously the most convenient things for the person keeping order; an underling can be punished for coming late, and yet do useful work when he comes. It will be possible to give a rap over the knuckles without wholly cutting off the right hand that has offended. Under these circumstances the employers have naturally resorted to fines. But there is a further ground for believing that the process will go beyond fines before it is completed.

(2) The fine is based on the old European idea that everybody possesses private property in some reasonable degree; but not only is this not true to-day, but it is not being made any truer, even by those who honestly believe that they are mending matters. The great employers will often do something towards improving what they call the “conditions” of their workers; but a worker might have his conditions as carefully arranged as a racehorse has, and still have no more personal property than a racehorse. If you take an average poor seamstress or factory girl, you will find that the power of chastising her through her property has very considerable limits; it is almost

as hard for the employer of labour to tax her for punishment as it is for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to tax her for revenue. The next most obvious thing to think of, of course, would be imprisonment, and that might be effective enough under simpler conditions. An old-fashioned shopkeeper might have locked up his apprentice in his coal-cellar; but his coal-cellar would be a real, pitch dark coal-cellar, and the rest of his house would be a real human house. Everybody (especially the apprentice) would see a most perceptible difference between the two. But, as I pointed out in the article before this, the whole tendency of the capitalist legislation and experiment is to make imprisonment much more general and automatic, while making it, or professing to make it, more humane. In other words, the hygienic prison and the servile factory will become so uncommonly like each other that the poor man will hardly know or care whether he is at the moment expiating an offence or merely swelling a dividend. In both places there will be the same sort of shiny tiles. In neither place will there be any cell so unwholesome as a coal-cellar or so wholesome as a home. The weapon of the prison, therefore, like the weapon of the fine, will be found to have considerable limitations to its effectiveness when employed against the wretched reduced citizen of our day. Whether it be property or liberty you cannot take from him what he has not got. You cannot imprison a slave, because you cannot enslave a slave.

The Barbarous Revival

(3) Most people, on hearing the suggestion that it may come to corporal punishment at last (as it did in every slave system I ever heard of, including some that were generally kindly, and even successful), will merely be struck with horror and incredulity, and feel that such a barbarous revival is unthinkable in the modern atmosphere. How far it will be, or need be, a revival of the actual images and methods of ruder times I will discuss in a moment. But first, as another of the converging lines tending to corporal punishment, consider this: that for some reason or other the old full-blooded and masculine humanitarianism in this matter has weakened and fallen silent; it has weakened and fallen silent in a very curious manner, the precise reason for which I do not altogether understand. I knew the average Liberal, the average Nonconformist minister, the average Labour Member, the average middle-class Socialist, were, with all their good qualities, very deficient in what I consider a respect for the human soul. But I did imagine that they had the ordinary modern respect for the human body. The fact,

however, is clear and incontrovertible. In spite of the horror of all humane people, in spite of the hesitation even of our corrupt and panic-stricken Parliament, measures can now be triumphantly passed for spreading or increasing the use of physical torture, and for applying it to the newest and vaguest categories of crime. Thirty or forty years ago, nay, twenty years ago, when Mr. F. Hugh O'Donnell and others forced a Liberal Government to drop the cat-o-nine-tails like a scorpion, we could have counted on a mass of honest hatred of such things. We cannot count on it now.

(4) But lastly, it is not necessary that in the factories of the future the institution of physical punishment should actually remind people of the jambok or the knout. It could easily be developed out of the many forms of physical discipline which are already used by employers on the excuses of education or hygiene. Already in some factories girls are obliged to swim whether they like it or not, or do gymnastics whether they like it or not. By a simple extension of hours or complication of exercises a pair of Swedish clubs could easily be so used as to leave their victim as exhausted as one who had come off the rack. I think it extremely likely that they will be.

IX. THE MASK OF SOCIALISM

The chief aim of all honest Socialists just now is to prevent the coming of Socialism. I do not say it as a sneer, but, on the contrary, as a compliment; a compliment to their political instinct and public spirit. I admit it may be called an exaggeration; but there really is a sort of sham Socialism that the modern politicians may quite possibly agree to set up; if they do succeed in setting it up, the battle for the poor is lost.

We must note, first of all, a general truth about the curious time we live in. It will not be so difficult as some people may suppose to make the Servile State look rather like Socialism, especially to the more pedantic kind of Socialist. The reason is this. The old lucid and trenchant expounder of Socialism, such as Blatchford or Fred Henderson, always describes the economic power of the plutocrats as consisting in private property. Of course, in a sense, this is quite true; though they too often miss the point that private property, as such, is not the same as property confined to the few. But the truth is that the situation has grown much more subtle; perhaps too subtle, not to say too insane, for straight-thinking theorists like Blatchford. The rich man to-day does not only rule by using private property; he also rules by treating public property as if it were private property. A man like Lord Murray pulled the strings, especially the pursestrings; but the whole point of his position was that all sorts of strings had got entangled. The secret strength of the money he held did not lie merely in the fact that it was his money. It lay precisely in the fact that nobody had any clear idea of whether it was his money, or his successor's money, or his brother's money, or the Marconi Company's money, or the Liberal Party's money, or the English Nation's money. It was buried treasure; but it was not private property. It was the acme of plutocracy because it was not private property. Now, by following this precedent, this unprincipled vagueness about official and unofficial moneys by the cheerful habit of always mixing up the money in the pocket with the money in the till, it would be quite possible to keep the rich as rich as ever in practice, though they might have suffered confiscation in theory. Mr. Lloyd George has four hundred a year as an M. P.; but he not only gets much more as a Minister, but he might at any time get immeasurably more by speculating on State secrets that are necessarily known to him. Some say that he has even attempted something of the kind. Now, it would be quite possible to cut Mr. George down, not to four hundred a year, but to fourpence a day; and still leave him all these other and enormous financial superiorities. It must be remembered that a Socialist State, in any way resembling a modern State, must, however egalitarian it may be, have the handling of huge sums, and the enjoyment of large conveniences; it is not improbable that the same men will handle and enjoy in much the same manner, though in theory they are doing it as instruments, and not as individuals. For instance, the Prime Minister has a private house, which is also (I grieve to inform that eminent Puritan) a public house. It is supposed to be a sort of Government office; though people do not generally give children's parties, or go to bed in a Government office. I do not know where Mr. Herbert Samuel lives; but I have no doubt he does himself well in the matter of decoration and furniture. On the existing official parallel there is no need to move any of these things in order to Socialise them. There is no need to withdraw one diamond-headed nail from the carpet; or one golden teaspoon from the tray. It is only necessary to call it an official residence, like 10 Downing-street. I think it is not at all improbable that this Plutocracy, pretending to be a Bureaucracy, will be attempted or achieved. Our wealthy rulers will be in the position which grumblers in the world of sport sometimes attribute to some of the "gentlemen" players. They assert that some of these are paid like any professional; only their pay is called their expenses. This system might run side by side with a theory of equal wages, as absolute as that once laid down by Mr. Bernard Shaw. By the theory of the State, Mr. Herbert Samuel and Mr. Lloyd George might be humble citizens, drudging for their fourpence a day; and no better off than porters and coal-heavers. If there were presented to our mere senses what appeared to be the form of Mr. Herbert Samuel in an astrakhan coat and a motor-car, we should find the record of the expenditure (if we could find it at all) under the heading of "Speed Limit Extension Enquiry Commission." If it fell to our lot to behold (with the eye of flesh) what seemed to be Mr. Lloyd George lying in a hammock and smoking a costly cigar, we should know that the expenditure would be divided between the "Condition of Rope and Netting Investigation Department," and the "State of Cuban Tobacco Trade: Imperial Inspector's Report."

Such is the society I think they will build unless we can knock it down as fast as they build it. Everything in it, tolerable or intolerable, will have but one use; and that use what our ancestors used to call usance or usury. Its art may be good or bad, but it will be an advertisement for usurers; its literature may be good or bad, but it will appeal to the patronage of usurers; its scientific selection will select according to the needs of usurers; its religion will be just charitable enough to pardon usurers; its penal system will be just cruel enough to crush all the critics of usurers: the truth of it will be Slavery: and the title of it may quite possibly be Socialism.

THE ESCAPE

We watched you building, stone by stone,
The well-washed cells and well-washed graves
We shall inhabit but not own
When Britons ever shall be slaves;
The water’s waiting in the trough,
The tame oats sown are portioned free,
There is Enough, and just Enough,
And all is ready now but we.

But you have not caught us yet, my lords,
You have us still to get.
A sorry army you’d have got,
Its flags are rags that float and rot,
Its drums are empty pan and pot,
Its baggage is — an empty cot;
But you have not caught us yet.

A little; and we might have slipped
When came your rumours and your sales
And the foiled rich men, feeble-lipped,
Said and unsaid their sorry tales;
Great God! It needs a bolder brow
To keep ten sheep inside a pen,
And we are sheep no longer now;
You are but Masters. We are Men.

We give you all good thanks, my lords,
We buy at easy price;
Thanks for the thousands that you stole,
The bribes by wire, the bets on coal,
The knowledge of that naked whole
That hath delivered our flesh and soul
Out of your Paradise.

We had held safe your parks; but when
Men taunted you with bribe and fee,
We only saw the Lord of Men
Grin like an Ape and climb a tree;
And humbly had we stood without
Your princely barns; did we not see
In pointed faces peering out
What Rats now own the granary.

It is too late, too late, my lords,
We give you back your grace:
You cannot with all cajoling
Make the wet ditch, or winds that sting,
Lost pride, or the pawned wedding rings,
Or drink or Death a blacker thing
Than a smile upon your face.

THE NEW RAID

The two kinds of social reform, one of which might conceivably free us at last while the other would certainly enslave us forever, are exhibited in an easy working model in the two efforts that have been made for the soldiers' wives — I mean the effort to increase their allowance and the effort to curtail their alleged drinking. In the preliminary consideration, at any rate, we must see the second question as quite detached from our own sympathies on the special subject of fermented liquor. It could be applied to any other pleasure or ornament of life; it will be applied to every other pleasure and ornament of life if the Capitalist campaign can succeed. The argument we know; but it cannot be too often made clear. An employer, let us say, pays a seamstress twopence a day, and she does not seem to thrive on it. So little, perhaps, does she thrive on it that the employer has even some difficulty in thriving upon her. There are only two things that he can do, and the distinction between them cuts the whole social and political world in two. It is a touchstone by which we can — not sometimes, but always — distinguish economic equality from servile social reform. He can give the girl some magnificent sum, such as sixpence a day, to do as she likes with, and trust that her improved health and temper will work for the benefit of his business. Or he may keep her to the original sum of a shilling a week, but earmark each of the pennies to be used or not to be used for a particular purpose. If she must not spend this penny on a bunch of violets, or that penny on a novelette, or the other penny on a toy for some baby, it is possible that she will concentrate her expenditure more upon physical necessities, and so become, from the employer's point of view, a more efficient person. Without the trouble of adding twopence to her wages, he has added twopenny-worth to her food. In short, she has the holy satisfaction of being worth more without being paid more.

This Capitalist is an ingenious person, and has many polished characteristics; but I think the most singular thing about him is his staggering lack of shame. Neither the hour of death nor the day of reckoning, neither the tent of exile nor the house of mourning, neither chivalry nor patriotism, neither womanhood nor widowhood, is safe at this supreme moment from his dirty little expedient of dieting the slave. As similar bullies, when they collect the slum rents, put a foot in the open door, these are always ready to push in a muddy wedge wherever there is a slit in a sundered household or a crack in a broken heart. To a man of any manhood nothing can be conceived more loathsome and sacrilegious than even so much as asking whether a woman who has given up all she loved to death and the fatherland has or has not shown some weakness in her seeking for self-comfort. I know not in which of the two cases I should count myself the baser for inquiring — a case where the charge was false or a case where it was true. But the philanthropic employer of the sort I describe is not a man of any manhood; in a sense he is not a man at all. He shows some consciousness of the fact when he calls his workers “men” as distinct from masters. He cannot comprehend the gallantry of costermongers or the delicacy that is quite common among cabmen. He finds this social reform by half-rations on the whole to his mercantile profit, and it will be hard to get him to think of anything else.

But there are people assisting him, people like the Duchess of Marlborough, who know not their right hand from their left, and to these we may legitimately address our remonstrance and a resume of some of the facts they do not know. The Duchess of Marlborough is, I believe, an American, and this separates her from the problem in a special way, because the drink question in America is entirely different from the drink question in England. But I wish the Duchess of Marlborough would pin up in her private study, side by side with the Declaration of Independence, a document recording the following simple truths: (1) Beer, which is largely drunk in public-houses, is not a spirit or a grog or a cocktail or a drug. It is the common English liquid for quenching the thirst; it is so still among innumerable gentlemen, and, until very lately, was so among innumerable ladies. Most of us remember dames of the last generation whose manners were fit for Versailles, and who drank ale or Stout as a matter of course. Schoolboys drank ale as a matter of course, and their schoolmasters gave it to them as a matter of course. To tell a poor woman that she must not have any until half the day is over is simply cracked, like telling a dog or a child that he must not have water. (2) The public-house is not a secret rendezvous of bad characters. It is the open and obvious place for a certain purpose, which all men used for that purpose until the rich began to be snobs and the poor to become slaves. One might as well warn people against Willesden Junction. (3) Many poor people live in houses where they cannot, without great preparation, offer hospitality. (4) The climate of these picturesque islands does not favour conducting long conversations with one’s oldest friends on an iron seat in the park. (5) Halfpast eleven a.m. is not early in the day for a woman who gets up before six. (6) The bodies and minds of these women belong to God and to themselves.

THE NEW NAME

Something has come into our community, which is strong enough to save our community; but which has not yet got a name. Let no one fancy I confess any unreality when I confess the namelessness. The morality called Puritanism, the tendency called Liberalism, the reaction called Tory Democracy, had not only long been powerful, but had practically done most of their work, before these actual names were attached to them. Nevertheless, I think it would be a good thing to have some portable and practicable way of referring to those who think as we do in our main concern. Which is, that men in England are ruled, at this minute by the clock, by brutes who refuse them bread, by liars who refuse them news, and by fools who cannot govern, and therefore wish to enslave.

Let me explain first why I am not satisfied with the word commonly used, which I have often used myself; and which, in some contexts, is quite the right word to use. I mean the word “rebel.” Passing over the fact that many who understand the justice of our cause (as a great many at the Universities) would still use the word “rebel” in its old and strict sense as meaning only a disturber of just rule. I pass to a much more practical point. The word “rebel” understates our cause. It is much too mild; it lets our enemies off much too easily. There is a tradition in all western life and letters of Prometheus defying the stars, of man at war with the Universe, and dreaming what nature had never dared to dream. All this is valuable in its place and proportion. But it has nothing whatever to do with our ease; or rather it very much weakens it. The plutocrats will be only too pleased if we profess to preach a new morality; for they know jolly well that they have broken the old one. They will be only too pleased to be able to say that we, by our own confession, are merely restless and negative; that we are only what we call rebels and they call cranks. But it is not true; and we must not concede it to them for a moment. The model millionaire is more of a crank than the Socialists; just as Nero was more of a crank than the Christians. And avarice has gone mad in the governing class to-day, just as lust went mad in the circle of Nero. By all the working and orthodox standards of sanity, capitalism is insane. I should not say to Mr. Rockefeller “I am a rebel.” I should say “I am a respectable man: and you are not.”

Our Lawless Enemies

But the vital point is that the confession of mere rebellion softens the startling lawlessness of our enemies. Suppose a publisher’s clerk politely asked his employer for a rise in his salary; and, on being refused, said he must leave the employment? Suppose the employer knocked him down with a ruler, tied him up as a brown paper parcel, addressed him (in a fine business hand) to the Governor of Rio Janeiro and then asked the policeman to promise never to arrest him for what he had done? That is a precise copy, in every legal and moral principle, of the “deportation of the strikers.” They were assaulted and kidnapped for not accepting a contract, and for nothing else; and the act was so avowedly criminal that the law had to be altered afterwards to cover the crime. Now suppose some postal official, between here and Rio Janeiro, had noticed a faint kicking inside the brown paper parcel, and had attempted to ascertain the cause. And suppose the clerk could only explain, in a muffled voice through the brown paper, that he was by constitution and temperament a Rebel. Don’t you see that he would be rather understating his case? Don’t you see he would be bearing his injuries much too meekly? They might take him out of the parcel; but they would very possibly put him into a mad-house instead. Symbolically speaking, that is what they would like to do with us. Symbolically speaking, the dirty misers who rule us will put us in a mad-house — unless we can put them there.

Or suppose a bank cashier were admittedly allowed to take the money out of the till, and put it loose in his pocket, more or less mixed up with his own money; afterwards laying some of both (at different odds) on “Blue Murder” for the Derby. Suppose when some depositor asked mildly what day the accountants came, he smote that astonished inquirer on the nose, crying: “Slanderer! Mud-slinger!” and suppose he then resigned his position. Suppose no books were shown. Suppose when the new cashier came to be initiated into his duties, the old cashier did not tell him about the money, but confided it to the honour and delicacy of his own maiden aunt at Cricklewood. Suppose he then went off in a yacht to visit the whale fisheries of the North Sea. Well, in every moral and legal principle, that is a precise account of the dealings with the Party Funds. But what would the banker say? What would the clients say? One thing, I think, I can venture to promise; the banker would not march up and down the office exclaiming in rapture, “I’m a rebel! That’s what I am, a rebel!” And if he said to the first indignant depositor “You are a rebel,” I fear the depositor might answer, "You are a robber." We have no need to elaborate arguments for breaking the law. The capitalists have broken the law. We have no need of further moralities. They have broken their own morality. It is as if you were to run down the street shouting, "Communism! Communism! Share! Share!" after a man who had run away with your watch.

We want a term that will tell everybody that there is, by the common standard, frank fraud and cruelty pushed to their fierce extreme; and that we are fighting THEM. We are not in a state of "divine discontent"; we are in an entirely human and entirely reasonable rage. We say we have been swindled and oppressed, and we are quite ready and able to prove it before any tribunal that allows us to call a swindler a swindler. It is the protection of the present system that most of its tribunals do not. I cannot at the moment think of any party name that would particularly distinguish us from our more powerful and prosperous opponents, unless it were the name the old Jacobites gave themselves; the Honest Party.

Captured Our Standards

I think it is plain that for the purpose of facing these new and infamous modern facts, we cannot, with any safety, depend on any of the old nineteenth century names; Socialist, or Communist, or Radical, or Liberal, or Labour. They are all honourable names; they all stand, or stood, for things in which we may still believe; we can still apply them to other problems; but not to this one. We have no longer a monopoly of these names. Let it be understood that I am not speaking here of the philosophical problem of their meaning, but of the practical problem of their use. When I called myself a Radical I knew Mr. Balfour would not call himself a Radical; therefore there was some use in the word. When I called myself a Socialist I knew Lord Penrhyn would not call himself a Socialist; therefore there was some use in the word. But the capitalists, in that aggressive march which is the main fact of our time, have captured our standards, both in the military and philosophic sense of the word. And it is useless for us to march under colours which they can carry as well as we.

Do you believe in Democracy? The devils also believe and tremble. Do you believe in Trades Unionism? The Labour Members also believe; and tremble like a falling teetotum. Do you believe in the State? The Samuels also believe, and grin. Do you believe in the centralisation of Empire? So did Beit. Do you believe in the decentralisation of Empire? So does Albu. Do you believe in the brotherhood of men: and do you, dear brethren, believe that Brother Arthur Henderson does not? Do you cry, “The world for the workers!” and do you imagine Philip Snowden would not? What we need is a name that shall declare, not that the modern treason and tyranny are bad, but that they are quite literally, intolerable: and that we mean to act accordingly. I really think “the Limits” would be as good a name as any. But, anyhow, something is born among us that is as strong as an infant Hercules: and it is part of my prejudices to want it christened. I advertise for godfathers and godmothers.

A WORKMAN’S HISTORY OF ENGLAND

A thing which does not exist and which is very much wanted is “A Working-Man’s History of England.” I do not mean a history written for working men (there are whole dustbins of them), I mean a history, written by working men or from the working men’s standpoint. I wish five generations of a fisher’s or a miner’s family could incarnate themselves in one man and tell the story.

It is impossible to ignore altogether any comment coming from so eminent a literary artist as Mr. Laurence Housman, but I do not deal here so specially with his well known conviction about Votes for Women, as with another idea which is, I think, rather at the back of it, if not with him at least with others; and which concerns this matter of the true story of England. For the true story is so entirely different from the false official story that the official classes tell that by this time the working class itself has largely forgotten its own experience. Either story can be quite logically linked up with Female Suffrage, which, therefore, I leave where it is for the moment; merely confessing that, so long as we get hold of the right story and not the wrong story, it seems to me a matter of secondary importance whether we link it up with Female Suffrage or not.

Now the ordinary version of recent English history that most moderately educated people have absorbed from childhood is something like this. That we emerged slowly from a semi-barbarism in which all the power and wealth were in the hands of Kings and a few nobles; that the King’s power was broken first and then in due time that of the nobles, that this piece-meal improvement was brought about by one class after another waking up to a sense of citizenship and demanding a place in the national councils, frequently by riot or violence; and that in consequence of such menacing popular action, the franchise was granted to one class after another and used more and more to improve the social conditions of those classes, until we practically became a democracy, save for such exceptions as that of the women. I do not think anyone will deny that something like that is the general idea of the educated man who reads a newspaper and of the newspaper that he reads. That is the view current at public schools and colleges; it is part of the culture of all the classes that count for much in government; and there is not one word of truth in it from beginning to end.

That Great Reform Bill

Wealth and political power were very much more popularly distributed in the Middle Ages than they are now; but we will pass all that and consider recent history. The franchise has never been largely and liberally granted in England; half the males have no vote and are not likely to get one. It was *never* granted in reply to pressure from awakened sections of the democracy; in every case there was a perfectly clear motive for granting it solely for the convenience of the aristocrats. The Great Reform Bill was not passed in response to such riots as that which destroyed a Castle; nor did the men who destroyed the Castle get any advantage whatever out of the Great Reform Bill. The Great Reform Bill was passed in order to seal an alliance between the landed aristocrats and the rich manufacturers of the north (an alliance that rules us still); and the chief object of that alliance was to *prevent* the English populace getting any political power in the general excitement after the French Revolution. No one can read Macaulay’s speech on the Chartists, for instance, and not see that this is so. Disraeli’s further extension of the suffrage was not effected by the intellectual vivacity and pure republican theory of the mid-Victorian agricultural labourer; it was effected by a politician who saw an opportunity to dish the Whigs, and guessed that certain orthodoxies in the more prosperous artisan might yet give him a balance against the commercial Radicals. And while this very thin game of wire-pulling with the mere abstraction of the vote was being worked entirely by the oligarchs and entirely in their interests, the solid and real thing that was going on was the steady despoiling of the poor of all power or wealth, until they find themselves to-day upon the threshold of slavery. That is The Working Man’s History of England.

Now, as I have said, I care comparatively little what is done with the mere voting part of the matter, so long as it is not claimed in such a way as to allow the plutocrat to escape his responsibility for his crimes, by pretending to be much more progressive, or much more susceptible to popular protest, than he ever has been. And there is this danger in many of those who have answered me. One of them, for instance, says that women have been forced into their present industrial situations by the same iron economic laws that have compelled men. I say that men have not been compelled by iron economic laws, but in the main by the coarse and Christless cynicism of other men. But, of course, this way of talking is exactly in accordance with the fashionable and official version of English history. Thus, you will read that the monasteries, places where men of the poorest origin could be powerful, grew corrupt and gradually decayed. Or you will read that the mediaeval guilds of free workmen yielded at last to an inevitable economic law. You will read this; and you will be reading lies. They might as well say that Julius Caesar gradually decayed at the foot of Pompey's statue. You might as well say that Abraham Lincoln yielded at last to an inevitable economic law. The free mediaeval guilds did not decay; they were murdered. Solid men with solid guns and halberds, armed with lawful warrants from living statesmen broke up their corporations and took away their hard cash from them. In the same way the people in Cradley Heath are no more victims of a necessary economic law than the people in Putumayo. They are victims of a very terrible creature, of whose sins much has been said since the beginning of the world; and of whom it was said of old, "Let us fall into the hands of God, for His mercies are great; but let us not fall into the hands of Man."

The Capitalist Is in the Dock

Now it is this offering of a false economic excuse for the sweater that is the danger in perpetually saying that the poor woman will use the vote and that the poor man has not used it. The poor man is prevented from using it; prevented by the rich man, and the poor woman would be prevented in exactly the same gross and stringent style. I do not deny, of course, that there is something in the English temperament, and in the heritage of the last few centuries that makes the English workman more tolerant of wrong than most foreign workmen would be. But this only slightly modifies the main fact of the moral responsibility. To take an imperfect parallel, if we said that negro slaves would have rebelled if negroes had been more intelligent, we should be saying what is reasonable. But if we were to say that it could by any possibility be represented as being the negro's fault that he was at that moment in America and not in Africa, we should be saying what is frankly unreasonable. It is every bit as unreasonable to say the mere supineness of the English workmen has put them in the capitalist slave-yard. The capitalist has put them in the capitalist slaveyard; and very cunning smiths have hammered the chains. It is just this creative criminality in the authors of the system that we must not allow to be slurred over. The capitalist is in the dock to-day; and so far as I at least can prevent him, he shall not get out of it.

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE IRISH

It will be long before the poison of the Party System is worked out of the body politic. Some of its most indirect effects are the most dangerous. One that is very dangerous just now is this: that for most Englishmen the Party System falsifies history, and especially the history of revolutions. It falsifies history because it simplifies history. It paints everything either Blue or Buff in the style of its own silly circus politics: while a real revolution has as many colours as the sunrise — or the end of the world. And if we do not get rid of this error we shall make very bad blunders about the real revolution which seems to grow more and more probable, especially among the Irish. And any human familiarity with history will teach a man this first of all: that Party practically does not exist in a real revolution. It is a game for quiet times.

If you take a boy who has been to one of those big private schools which are falsely called the Public Schools, and another boy who has been to one of those large public schools which are falsely called the Board Schools, you will find some differences between the two, chiefly a difference in the management of the voice. But you will find they are both English in a special way, and that their education has been essentially the same. They are ignorant on the same subjects. They have never heard of the same plain facts. They have been taught the wrong answer to the same confusing question. There is one fundamental element in the attitude of the Eton master talking about “playing the game,” and the elementary teacher training gutter-snipes to sing, “What is the Meaning of Empire Day?” And the name of that element is “unhistoric.” It knows nothing really about England, still less about Ireland or France, and, least of all, of course, about anything like the French Revolution.

Revolution by Snap Division

Now what general notion does the ordinary English boy, thus taught to utter one ignorance in one of two accents, get and keep through life about the French Revolution? It is the notion of the English House of Commons with an enormous Radical majority on one side of the table and a small Tory minority on the other; the majority voting solid for a Republic, the minority voting solid for a Monarchy; two teams tramping through two lobbies with no difference between their methods and ours, except that (owing to some habit peculiar to Gaul) the brief intervals were brightened by a riot or a massacre, instead of by a whisky and soda and a Marconi tip. Novels are much more reliable than histories in such matters. For though an English novel about France does not tell the truth about France, it does tell the truth about England; and more than half the histories never tell the truth about anything. And popular fiction, I think, bears witness to the general English impression. The French Revolution is a snap division with an unusual turnover of votes. On the one side stand a king and queen who are good but weak, surrounded by nobles with rapiers drawn; some of whom are good, many of whom are wicked, all of whom are good-looking. Against these there is a formless mob of human beings, wearing red caps and seemingly insane, who all blindly follow ruffians who are also rhetoricians; some of whom die repentant and others unrepentant towards the end of the fourth act. The leaders of this boiling mass of all men melted into one are called Mirabeau, Robespierre, Danton, Marat, and so on. And it is conceded that their united frenzy may have been forced on them by the evils of the old regime.

That, I think, is the commonest English view of the French Revolution; and it will not survive the reading of two pages of any real speech or letter of the period. These human beings were human; varied, complex and inconsistent. But the rich Englishman, ignorant of revolutions, would hardly believe you if you told him some of the common human subtleties of the case. Tell him that Robespierre threw the red cap in the dirt in disgust, while the king had worn it with a broad grin, so to speak; tell him that Danton, the fierce founder of the Republic of the Terror, said quite sincerely to a noble, “I am more monarchist than you;” tell him that the Terror really seems to have been brought to an end chiefly by the efforts of people who particularly wanted to go on with it — and he will not believe these things. He will not believe them because he has no humility, and therefore no realism. He has never been inside himself; and so could never be inside another man. The truth is that in the French affair everybody occupied an individual position. Every man talked sincerely, if not because he was sincere, then because he was angry. Robespierre talked even more about God than about the Republic because he cared even more about God than about the Republic. Danton talked even more about France than about the Republic because he cared even more about France than about the Republic. Marat talked more about Humanity than either, because that physician (though himself somewhat needing a physician) really cared about it. The nobles were divided, each man from the next. The attitude of the king was quite different from the attitude of the queen; certainly much more different than any differences between our Liberals and Tories for the last twenty years. And it will sadden *some* of my friends to remember that it was the king who was the Liberal and the queen who was the Tory. There were not two people, I think, in that most practical crisis who stood in precisely the same attitude towards the situation. And that is why, between them, they saved Europe. It is when you really perceive the unity of mankind that you really perceive its variety. It is not a flippancy, it is a very sacred truth, to say that when men really understand that they are brothers they instantly begin to fight.

The Revival of Reality

Now these things are repeating themselves with an enormous reality in the Irish Revolution. You will not be able to make a Party System out of the matter. Everybody is in revolt; therefore everybody is telling the truth. The Nationalists will go on caring most for the nation, as Danton and the defenders of the frontier went on caring most for the nation. The priests will go on caring most for religion, as Robespierre went on caring most for religion. The Socialists will go on caring most for the cure of physical suffering, as Marat went on caring most for it. It is out of these real differences that real things can be made, such as the modern French democracy. For by such tenacity everyone sees at last that there is something in the other person’s position. And those drilled in party discipline see nothing either past or present. And where there is nothing there is Satan.

For a long time past in our politics there has not only been no real battle, but no real bargain. No two men have bargained as Gladstone and Parnell bargained — each knowing the other to be a power. But in real revolutions men discover that no one man can really agree with another man until he has disagreed with him.

LIBERALISM: A SAMPLE

There is a certain daily paper in England towards which I feel very much as Tom Pinch felt towards Mr. Pecksniff immediately after he had found him out. The war upon Dickens was part of the general war on all democrats, about the eighties and nineties, which ushered in the brazen plutocracy of to-day. And one of the things that it was fashionable to say of Dickens in drawing-rooms was that he had no subtlety, and could not describe a complex frame of mind. Like most other things that are said in drawing-rooms, it was a lie. Dickens was a very unequal writer, and his successes alternate with his failures; but his successes are subtle quite as often as they are simple. Thus, to take “Martin Chuzzlewit” alone, I should call the joke about the Lord No-zoo a simple joke: but I should call the joke about Mrs. Todgers’s vision of a wooden leg a subtle joke. And no frame of mind was ever so selfcontradictory and yet so realistic as that which Dickens describes when he says, in effect, that, though Pinch knew now that there had never been such a person as Pecksniff, in his ideal sense, he could not bring himself to insult the very face and form that had contained the legend. The parallel with Liberal journalism is not perfect; because it was once honest; and Pecksniff presumably never was. And even when I come to feel a final incompatibility of temper, Pecksniff was not so Pecksniffian as he has since become. But the comparison is complete in so far as I share all the reluctance of Mr. Pinch. Some old heathen king was advised by one of the Celtic saints, I think, to burn what he had adored and adore what he had burnt. I am quite ready, if anyone will prove I was wrong, to adore what I have burnt; but I do really feel an unwillingness verging upon weakness to burning what I have adored. I think it is a weakness to be overcome in times as bad as these, when (as Mr. Orage wrote with something like splendid common sense the other day) there is such a lot to do and so few people who will do it. So I will devote this article to considering one case of the astounding baseness to which Liberal journalism has sunk.

Mental Breakdown in Fleet Street

One of the two or three streaks of light on our horizon can be perceived in this: that the moral breakdown of these papers has been accompanied by a mental breakdown also. The contemporary official paper, like the “Daily News” or the “Daily Chronicle” (I mean in so far as it deals with politics), simply cannot argue; and simply does not pretend to argue. It considers the solution which it imagines that wealthy people want, and it signifies the same in the usual manner; which is not by holding up its hand, but by falling on its face. But there is no more curious quality in its degradation than a sort of carelessness, at once of hurry and fatigue, with which it flings down its argument — or rather its refusal to argue. It does not even write sophistry: it writes anything. It does not so much poison the reader's mind as simply assume that the reader hasn't got one. For instance, one of these papers printed an article on Sir Stuart Samuel, who, having broken the great Liberal statute against corruption, will actually, perhaps, be asked to pay his own fine — in spite of the fact that he can well afford to do so. The article says, if I remember aright, that the decision will cause general surprise and some indignation. That any modern Government making a very rich capitalist obey the law will cause general surprise, may be true. Whether it will cause general indignation rather depends on whether our social intercourse is entirely confined to Park Lane, or any such pigsties built of gold. But the journalist proceeds to say, his neck rising higher and higher out of his collar, and his hair rising higher and higher on his head, in short, his resemblance to the Dickens' original increasing every instant, that he does not mean that the law against corruption should be less stringent, but that the burden should be borne by the whole community. This may mean that whenever a rich man breaks the law, all the poor men ought to be made to pay his fine. But I will suppose a slightly less insane meaning. I will suppose it means that the whole power of the commonwealth should be used to prosecute an offender of this kind. That, of course, can only mean that the matter will be decided by that instrument which still pretends to represent the whole power of the commonwealth. In other words, the Government will judge the Government.

Now this is a perfectly plain piece of brute logic. We need not go into the other delicious things in the article, as when it says that "in old times Parliament had to be protected against Royal invasion by the man in the street." Parliament has to be protected now against the man in the street. Parliament is simply the most detested and the most detestable of all our national institutions: all that is evident enough. What is interesting is the blank and staring fallacy of the attempted reply.

When the Journalist Is Ruined

A long while ago, before all the Liberals died, a Liberal introduced a Bill to prevent Parliament being merely packed with the slaves of financial interests. For that purpose he established the excellent democratic principle that the private citizen, as such, might protest against public corruption. He was called the Common Informer. I believe the miserable party papers are really reduced to playing on the degradation of the two words in modern language. Now the word "comnon" in "Common Informer" means exactly what it means in "common sense" or "Book of Common Prayer," or (above all) in "House of Commons." It does not mean anything low or vulgar; any more than they do. The only difference is that the House of Commons really is low and vulgar; and the Common Informer isn't. It is just the same with the word "Informer." It does not mean spy or sneak. It means one who gives information. It means what "journalist" ought to mean. The only difference is that the Common Informer may be paid if he tells the truth. The common journalist will be ruined if he does.

Now the quite plain point before the party journalist is this: If he really means that a corrupt bargain between a Government and a contractor ought to be judged by public opinion, he must (nowadays) mean Parliament; that is, the caucus that controls Parliament. And he must decide between one of two views. Either he means that there can be no such thing as a corrupt Government. Or he means that it is one of the characteristic qualities of a corrupt Government to denounce its own corruption. I laugh; and I leave him his choice.

THE FATIGUE OF FLEET STREET

Why is the modern party political journalism so bad? It is worse even than it intends to be. It praises its preposterous party leaders through thick and thin; but it somehow succeeds in making them look greater fools than they are. This clumsiness clings even to the photographs of public men, as they are snapshotted at public meetings. A sensitive politician (if there is such a thing) would, I should think, want to murder the man who snapshots him at those moments. For our general impression of a man's gesture or play of feature is made up of a series of vanishing instants, at any one of which he may look worse than our general impression records. Mr. Augustine Birrell may have made quite a sensible and amusing speech, in the course of which his audience would hardly have noticed that he resettled his necktie. Snapshot him, and he appears as convulsively clutching his throat in the agonies of strangulation, and with his head twisted on one side as if he had been hanged. Sir Edward Carson might make a perfectly good speech, which no one thought wearisome, but might himself be just tired enough to shift from one leg to the other. Snapshot him, and he appears as holding one leg stiffly in the air and yawning enough to swallow the audience. But it is in the prose narratives of the Press that we find most manifestations of this strange ineptitude; this knack of exhibiting your own favourites in an unlucky light. It is not so much that the party journalists do not tell the truth as that they tell just enough of it to make it clear that they are telling lies. One of their favourite blunders is an amazing sort of bathos. They begin by telling you that some statesman said something brilliant in style or biting in wit, at which his hearers thrilled with terror or thundered with applause. And then they tell you what it was that he said. Silly asses!

Insane Exaggeration

Here is an example from a leading Liberal paper touching the debates on Home Rule. I am a Home Ruler; so my sympathies would be, if anything, on the side of the Liberal paper upon that point. I merely quote it as an example of this ridiculous way of writing, which, by insane exaggeration, actually makes its hero look smaller than he is.

This was strange language to use about the “hypocritical sham,” and Mr. Asquith, knowing that the biggest battle of his career was upon him, hit back without mercy. “I should like first to know,” said he, with a glance at his supporters, “whether my proposals are accepted?”

That’s all. And I really do not see why poor Mr. Asquith should be represented as having violated the Christian virtue of mercy by saying that. I myself could compose a great many paragraphs upon the same model, each containing its stinging and perhaps unscrupulous epigram. As, for example:— “The Archbishop of Canterbury, realising that his choice now lay between denying God and earning the crown of martyrdom by dying in torments, spoke with a frenzy of religious passion that might have seemed fanatical under circumstances less intense. ‘The Children’s Service,’ he said firmly, with his face to the congregation, ‘will be held at half-past four this afternoon as usual.’”

Or, we might have:— “Lord Roberts, recognising that he had now to face Armageddon, and that if he lost this last battle against overwhelming odds the independence of England would be extinguished forever, addressed to his soldiers (looking at them and not falling off his horse) a speech which brought their national passions to boiling point, and might well have seemed blood-thirsty in quieter times. It ended with the celebrated declaration that it was a fine day.”

Or we might have the much greater excitement of reading something like this:— “The Astronomer Royal, having realised that the earth would certainly be smashed to pieces by a comet unless his requests in connection with wireless telegraphy were seriously considered, gave an address at the Royal Society which, under other circumstances, would have seemed unduly dogmatic and emotional and deficient in scientific agnosticism. This address (which he delivered without any attempt to stand on his head) included a fierce and even ferocious declaration that it is generally easier to see the stars by night than by day.”

Now, I cannot see, on my conscience and reason, that any one of my imaginary paragraphs is more ridiculous than the real one. Nobody can believe that Mr. Asquith regards these belated and careful compromises about Home Rule as “the biggest battle of his career.” It is only justice to him to say that he has had bigger battles than that. Nobody can believe that any body of men, bodily present, either thundered or thrilled at a man merely saying that he would like to know whether his proposals were accepted. No; it would be far better for Parliament if its doors were shut again, and reporters were excluded. In that case, the outer public did hear genuine rumours of almost gigantic eloquence; such as that which has perpetuated Pitt’s reply against the charge of youth, or Fox’s bludgeoning of the idea of war as a compromise. It would be much better to follow the old fashion and let in no reporters at all than to follow the new fashion and select the stupidest reporters you can find.

Their Load of Lies

Now, why do people in Fleet-street talk such tosh? People in Fleet-street are not fools. Most of them have realised reality through work; some through starvation; some through damnation, or something damnably like it. I think it is simply and seriously true that they are tired of their job. As the general said in M. Rostand’s play, “la fatigue!”

I do really believe that this is one of the ways in which God (don’t get flurried, Nature if you like) is unexpectedly avenged on things infamous and unreasonable. And this method is that men’s moral and even physical tenacity actually give out under such a load of lies. They go on writing their leading articles and their Parliamentary reports. They go on doing it as a convict goes on picking oakum. But the point is not that we are bored with their articles; the point is that they are. The work is done worse because it is done weakly and without human enthusiasm. And it is done weakly because of the truth we have told so many times in this book: that it is not done for monarchy, for which men will die; or for democracy, for which men will die; or even for aristocracy, for which many men have died. It is done for a thing called Capitalism: which stands out quite clearly in history in many curious ways. But the most curious thing about it is that no man has loved it; and no man died for it.

THE AMNESTY FOR AGGRESSION

If there is to rise out of all this red ruin something like a republic of justice, it is essential that our views should be real views; that is, glimpses of lives and landscapes outside ourselves. It is essential that they should not be mere opium visions that begin and end in smoke — and so often in cannon smoke. I make no apology, therefore, for returning to the purely practical and realistic point I urged last week: the fact that we shall lose everything we might have gained if we lose the idea that the responsible person is responsible.

For instance, it is almost specially so with the one or two things in which the British Government, or the British public, really are behaving badly. The first, and worst of them, is the non-extension of the Moratorium, or truce of debtor and creditor, to the very world where there are the poorest debtors and the cruellest creditors. This is infamous: and should be, if possible, more infamous to those who think the war right than to those who think it wrong. Everyone knows that the people who can least pay their debts are the people who are always trying to. Among the poor a payment may be as rash as a speculation. Among the rich a bankruptcy may be as safe as a bank. Considering the class from which private soldiers are taken, there is an atrocious meanness in the idea of buying their blood abroad, while we sell their sticks at home. The English language, by the way, is full of delicate paradoxes. We talk of the private soldiers because they are really public soldiers; and we talk of the public schools because they are really private schools. Anyhow, the wrong is of the sort that ought to be resisted, as much in war as in peace.

Ought to Be Hammered

But as long as we speak of it as a cloudy conclusion, come to by an anonymous club called Parliament, or a masked tribunal called the Cabinet, we shall never get such a wrong righted. Somebody is officially responsible for the unfairness; and that somebody ought to be hammered. The other example, less important but more ludicrous, is the silly boycott of Germans in England, extending even to German music. I do not believe for a moment that the English people feel any such insane fastidiousness. Are the English artists who practise the particularly English art of water-colour to be forbidden to use Prussian blue? Are all old ladies to shoot their Pomeranian dogs? But though England would laugh at this, she will get the credit of it, and will continue: until we ask who the actual persons are who feel sure that we should shudder at a ballad of the Rhine. It is certain that we should find they are capitalists. It is very probable that we should find they are foreigners.

Some days ago the Official Council of the Independent Labour Party, or the Independent Council of the Official Labour Party, or the Independent and Official Council of the Labour Party (I have got quite nervous about these names and distinctions; but they all seem to say the same thing) began their manifesto by saying it would be difficult to assign the degrees of responsibility which each nation had for the outbreak of the war. Afterwards, a writer in the “Christian Commonwealth,” lamenting war in the name of Labour, but in the language of my own romantic middle-class, said that all the nations must share the responsibility for this great calamity of war. Now exactly as long as we go on talking like that we shall have war after war, and calamity after calamity, until the crack of doom. It simply amounts to a promise of pardon to any person who will start a quarrel. It is an amnesty for assassins. The moment any man assaults any other man he makes all the other men as bad as himself. He has only to stab, and to vanish in a fog of forgetfulness. The real eagles of iron, the predatory Empires, will be delighted with this doctrine. They will applaud the Labour Concert or Committee, or whatever it is called. They will willingly take all the crime, with only a quarter of the conscience: they will be as ready to share the memory as they are to share the spoil. The Powers will divide responsibility as calmly as they divided Poland.

The Whole Loathsome Load

But I still stubbornly and meekly submit my point: that you cannot end war without asking who began it. If you think somebody else, not Germany, began it, then blame that somebody else: do not blame everybody and nobody. Perhaps you think that a small sovereign people, fresh from two triumphant wars, ought to discrown itself before sunrise; because the nephew of a neighbouring Emperor has been shot by his own subjects. Very well. Then blame Servia; and, to the extent of your influence, you may be preventing small kingdoms being obstinate or even princes being shot. Perhaps you think the whole thing was a huge conspiracy of Russia, with France as a dupe and Servia as a pretext. Very well. Then blame Russia; and, to the extent of your influence, you may be preventing great Empires from making racial excuses for a raid. Perhaps you think France wrong for feeling what you call “revenge,” and I should call recovery of stolen goods. Perhaps you blame Belgium for being sentimental about her frontier; or England for being sentimental about her word. If so, blame them; or whichever of them you think is to blame. Or again, it is barely possible that you may think, as I do, that the whole loathsome load has been laid upon us by the monarchy which I have not named; still less wasted time in abusing. But if there be in Europe a military State which has not the religion of Russia, yet has helped Russia to tyrannise over the Poles, that State cares not for religion, but for tyranny. If there be a State in Europe which has not the religion of the Austrians, but has helped Austria to bully the Servians, that State cares not for belief, but for bullying. If there be in Europe any people or principality which respects neither republics nor religions, to which the political ideal of Paris is as much a myth as the mystical ideal of Moscow, then blame that: and do more than blame. In the healthy and highly theological words of Robert Blatchford, drive it back to the Hell from which it came.

Crying Over Spilt Blood

But whatever you do, do not blame everybody for what was certainly done by somebody. It may be it is no good crying over spilt blood, any more than over spilt milk. But we do not find the culprit any more by spilling the milk over everybody; or by daubing everybody with blood. Still less do we improve matters by watering the milk with our tears, nor the blood either. To say that everybody is responsible means that nobody is responsible. If in the future we see Russia annexing Rutland (as part of the old Kingdom of Muscovy), if we see Bavaria taking a sudden fancy to the Bank of England, or the King of the Cannibal Islands suddenly demanding a tribute of edible boys and girls from England and America, we may be quite certain also that the Leader of the Labour Party will rise, with a slight cough, and say: “It would be a difficult task to apportion the blame between the various claims which…”

REVIVE THE COURT JESTER

I hope the Government will not think just now about appointing a Poet Laureate. I hardly think they can be altogether in the right mood. The business just now before the country makes a very good detective story; but as a national epic it is a little depressing. Jingo literature always weakens a nation; but even healthy patriotic literature has its proper time and occasion. For instance, Mr. Newbolt (who has been suggested for the post) is a very fine poet; but I think his patriotic lyrics would just now rather jar upon a patriot. We are rather too much concerned about our practical seamanship to feel quite confident that Drake will return and “drum them up the Channel as he drummed them long ago.” On the contrary, we have an uncomfortable feeling that Drake’s ship might suddenly go to the bottom, because the capitalists have made Lloyd George abolish the Plimsoll Line. One could not, without being understood ironically, adjure the two party teams to-day to “play up, play up and play the game,” or to “love the game more than the prize.” And there is no national hero at this moment in the soldiering line — unless, perhaps, it is Major Archer-Shee — of whom anyone would be likely to say: “Sed miles; sed pro patria.” There is, indeed, one beautiful poem of Mr. Newbolt’s which may mingle faintly with one’s thoughts in such times, but that, alas, is to a very different tune. I mean that one in which he echoes Turner’s conception of the old wooden ship vanishing with all the valiant memories of the English:

There’s a far bell ringing
At the setting of the sun,
And a phantom voice is singing
Of the great days done.
There’s a far bell ringing,
And a phantom voice is singing
Of a fame forever clinging
To the great days done.
For the sunset breezes shiver,
Temeraire, Temeraire,
And she’s fading down the river….

Well, well, neither you nor I know whether she is fading down the river or not. It is quite enough for us to know, as King Alfred did, that a great many pirates have landed on both banks of the Thames.

Praise and Prophecy Impossible

At this moment that is the only kind of patriotic poem that could satisfy the emotions of a patriotic person. But it certainly is not the sort of poem that is expected from a Poet Laureate, either on the highest or the lowest theory of his office. He is either a great minstrel singing the victories of a great king, or he is a common Court official like the Groom of the Powder Closet. In the first case his praises should be true; in the second case they will nearly always be false; but in either case he must praise. And what there is for him to praise just now it would be precious hard to say. And if there is no great hope of a real poet, there is still less hope of a real prophet. What Newman called, I think, “The Prophetical Office,” that is, the institution of an inspired protest even against an inspired religion, certainly would not do in modern England. The Court is not likely to keep a tame prophet in order to encourage him to be wild. It is not likely to pay a man to say that wolves shall howl in Downing-street and vultures build their nests in Buckingham Palace. So vast has been the progress of humanity that these two things are quite impossible. We cannot have a great poet praising kings. We cannot have a great prophet denouncing kings. So I have to fall back on a third suggestion.

The Field for a Fool

Instead of reviving the Court Poet, why not revive the Court Fool? He is the only person who could do any good at this moment either to the Royal or the judicial Courts. The present political situation is utterly unsuitable for the purposes of a great poet. But it is particularly suitable for the purposes of a great buffoon. The old jester was under certain privileges: you could not resent the jokes of a fool, just as you cannot resent the sermons of a curate. Now, what the present Government of England wants is neither serious praise nor serious denunciation; what it wants is satire. What it wants, in other words, is realism given with gusto. When King Louis the Eleventh unexpectedly visited his enemy, the Duke of Burgundy, with a small escort, the Duke’s jester said he would give the King his fool’s cap, for he was the fool now. And when the Duke replied with dignity, “And suppose I treat him with all proper respect?” the fool answered, “Then I will give it to you.” That is the kind of thing that somebody ought to be free to say now. But if you say it now you will be fined a hundred pounds at the least.

Carson's Dilemma

For the things that have been happening lately are not merely things that one could joke about. They are themselves, truly and intrinsically, jokes. I mean that there is a sort of epigram of unreason in the situation itself, as there was in the situation where there was jam yesterday and jam to-morrow but never jam to-day. Take, for instance, the extraordinary case of Sir Edward Carson. The point is not whether we regard his attitude in Belfast as the defiance of a sincere and dogmatic rebel, or as the bluff of a party hack and mountebank. The point is not whether we regard his defence of the Government at the Old Bailey as a chivalrous and reluctant duty done as an advocate or a friend, or as a mere case of a lawyer selling his soul for a fat brief. The point is that whichever of the two actions we approve, and whichever of the four explanations we adopt, Sir Edward's position is still raving nonsense. On any argument, he cannot escape from his dilemma. It may be argued that laws and customs should be obeyed whatever our private feelings; and that it is an established custom to accept a brief in such a case. But then it is a somewhat more established custom to obey an Act of Parliament and to keep the peace. It may be argued that extreme misgovernment justifies men in Ulster or elsewhere in refusing to obey the law. But then it would justify them even more in refusing to appear professionally in a law court. Etiquette cannot be at once so unimportant that Carson may shoot at the King's uniform, and yet so important that he must always be ready to put on his own. The Government cannot be so disreputable that Carson need not lay down his gun, and yet so respectable that he is bound to put on his wig. Carson cannot at once be so fierce that he can kill in what he considers a good cause, and yet so meek that he must argue in what he considers a bad cause. Obedience or disobedience, conventional or unconventional, a solicitor's letter cannot be more sacred than the King's writ; a blue bag cannot be more rational than the British flag. The thing is rubbish read anyway, and the only difficulty is to get a joke good enough to express it. It is a case for the Court Jester. The phantasy of it could only be expressed by some huge ceremonial hoax. Carson ought to be crowned with the shamrocks and emeralds and followed by green-clad minstrels of the Clan-na-Gael, playing "The Wearing of the Green."

Belated Chattiness by Wireless

But all the recent events are like that. They are practical jokes. The jokes do not need to be made: they only need to be pointed out. You and I do not talk and act as the Isaacs brothers talked and acted, by their own most favourable account of themselves; and even their account of themselves was by no means favourable. You and I do not talk of meeting our own born brother "at a family function" as if he were some infinitely distant cousin whom we only met at Christmas. You and I, when we suddenly feel inclined for a chat with the same brother about his dinner and the Coal Strike, do not generally select either wireless telegraphy or the Atlantic Cable as the most obvious and economical channel for that outburst of belated chattiness. You and I do not talk, if it is proposed to start a railway between Catsville and Dogtown, as if the putting up of a station at Dogtown could have no kind of economic effect on the putting up of a station at Catsville. You and I do not think it candid to say that when we are at one end of a telephone we have no sort of connection with the other end. These things have got into the region of farce; and should be dealt with farcically, not even ferociously.

A Fool Who Shall Be Free

In the Roman Republic there was a Tribune of the People, whose person was inviolable like an ambassador's. There was much the same idea in Becket's attempt to remove the Priest, who was then the popular champion, from the ordinary courts. We shall have no Tribune; for we have no republic. We shall have no Priest; for we have no religion. The best we deserve or can expect is a Fool who shall be free; and who shall deliver us with laughter.

THE ART OF MISSING THE POINT

Missing the point is a very fine art; and has been carried to something like perfection by politicians and Pressmen to-day. For the point is generally a very sharp point; and is, moreover, sharp at both ends. That is to say that both parties would probably impale themselves in an uncomfortable manner if they did not manage to avoid it altogether. I have just been looking at the election address of the official Liberal candidate for the part of the country in which I live; and though it is, if anything, rather more logical and free from cant than most other documents of the sort it is an excellent example of missing the point. The candidate has to go boring on about Free Trade and Land Reform and Education; and nobody reading it could possibly imagine that in the town of Wycombe, where the poll will be declared, the capital of the Wycombe division of Bucks which the candidate is contesting, centre of the important and vital trade on which it has thriven, a savage struggle about justice has been raging for months past between the poor and rich, as real as the French Revolution. The man offering himself at Wycombe as representative of the Wycombe division simply says nothing about it at all. It is as if a man at the crisis of the French Terror had offered himself as a deputy for the town of Paris, and had said nothing about the Monarchy, nothing about the Republic, nothing about the massacres, nothing about the war; but had explained with great clearness his views on the suppression of the Jansenists, the literary style of Racine, the suitability of Turenae for the post of commander-in-chief, and the religious reflections of Madame de Maintenon. For, at their best, the candidate’s topics are not topical. Home Rule is a very good thing, and modern education is a very bad thing; but neither of them are things that anybody is talking about in High Wycombe. This is the first and simplest way of missing the point: deliberately to avoid and ignore it.

The Candid Candidate

It would be an amusing experiment, by the way, to go to the point instead of avoiding it. What fun it would be to stand as a strict Party candidate, but issue a perfectly frank and cynical Election Address. Mr. Mosley’s address begins, “Gentlemen, — Sir Alfred Cripps having been chosen for a high judicial position and a seat in the House of Lords, a by-election now becomes necessary, and the electors of South Bucks are charged with the responsible duty of electing, etc., etc.” But suppose there were another candidate whose election address opened in a plain, manly style, like this: “Gentlemen, — In the sincere hope of being myself chosen for a high judicial position or a seat in the House of Lords, or considerably increasing my private fortune by some Government appointment, or, at least, inside information about the financial prospects, I have decided that it is worth my while to disburse large sums of money to you on various pretexts, and, with even more reluctance to endure the bad speaking and bad ventilation of the Commons’ House of Parliament, so help me God. I have very pronounced convictions on various political questions; but I will not trouble my fellow-citizens with them, since I have quite made up my mind to abandon any or all of them if requested to do so by the upper classes. The electors are therefore charged with the entirely irresponsible duty of electing a Member; or, in other words, I ask my neighbours round about this part, who know I am not a bad chap in many ways, to do me a good turn in my business, just as I might ask them to change a sovereign. My election will have no conceivable kind of effect on anything or anybody except myself; so I ask, as man to man, the Electors of the Southern or Wycombe Division of the County of Buckingham to accept a ride in one of my motor-cars; and poll early to please a pal — God Save the King.” I do not know whether you or I would be elected if we presented ourselves with an election address of that kind; but we should have had our fun and (comparatively speaking) saved our souls; and I have a strong suspicion that we should be elected or rejected on a mechanical majority like anybody else; nobody having dreamed of reading an election address any more than an advertisement of a hair restorer.

Tyranny and Head-Dress

But there is another and more subtle way in which we may miss the point; and that is, not by keeping a dead silence about it, but by being just witty enough to state it wrong. Thus, some of the Liberal official papers have almost screwed up their courage to the sticking-point about the bestial coup d’etat in South Africa. They have screwed up their courage to the sticking-point; and it has stuck. It cannot get any further; because it has missed the main point. The modern Liberals make their feeble attempts to attack the introduction of slavery into South Africa by the Dutch and the Jews, by a very typical evasion of the vital fact. The vital fact is simply slavery. Most of these Dutchmen have always felt like slave-owners. Most of these Jews have always felt like slaves. Now that they are on top, they have a particular and curious kind of impudence, which is only known among slaves. But the Liberal journalists will do their best to suggest that the South African wrong consisted in what they call Martial Law. That is, that there is something specially wicked about men doing an act of cruelty in khaki or in vermilion, but not if it is done in dark blue with pewter buttons. The tyrant who wears a busby or a forage cap is abominable; the tyrant who wears a horsehair wig is excusable. To be judged by soldiers is hell; but to be judged by lawyers is paradise.

Now the point must not be missed in this way. What is wrong with the tyranny in Africa is not that it is run by soldiers. It would be quite as bad, or worse, if it were run by policemen. What is wrong is that, for the first time since Pagan times, private men are being forced to work for a private man. Men are being punished by imprisonment or exile for refusing to accept a job. The fact that Botha can ride on a horse, or fire off a gun, makes him better rather than worse than any man like Sidney Webb or Philip Snowden, who attempt the same slavery by much less manly methods. The Liberal Party will try to divert the whole discussion to one about what they call militarism. But the very terms of modern politics contradict it. For when we talk of real rebels against the present system we call them Militants. And there will be none in the Servile State.

THE SERVILE STATE AGAIN

I read the other day, in a quotation from a German newspaper, the highly characteristic remark that Germany having annexed Belgium would soon re-establish its commerce and prosperity, and that, in particular, arrangements were already being made for introducing into the new province the German laws for the protection of workmen.

I am quite content with that paragraph for the purpose of any controversy about what is called German atrocity. If men I know had not told me they had themselves seen the bayoneting of a baby; if the most respectable refugees did not bring with them stories of burning cottages — yes, and of burning cottagers as well; if doctors did not report what they do report of the condition of girls in the hospitals; if there were no facts; if there were no photographs, that one phrase I have quoted would be quite sufficient to satisfy me that the Prussians are tyrants; tyrants in a peculiar and almost insane sense which makes them pre-eminent among the evil princes of the earth. The first and most striking feature is a stupidity that rises into a sort of ghastly innocence. The protection of workmen! Some workmen, perhaps, might have a fancy for being protected from shrapnel; some might be glad to put up an umbrella that would ward off things dropping from the gentle Zeppelin in heaven upon the place beneath. Some of these discontented proletarians have taken the same view as Vandervelde their leader, and are now energetically engaged in protecting themselves along the line of the Yser; I am glad to say not altogether without success. It is probable that nearly all of the Belgian workers would, on the whole, prefer to be protected against bombs, sabres, burning cities, starvation, torture, and the treason of wicked kings. In short, it is probable — it is at least possible, impious as is the idea — that they would prefer to be protected against Germans and all they represent. But if a Belgian workman is told that he is not to be protected against Germans, but actually to be protected by Germans, I think he may be excused for staring. His first impulse, I imagine, will be to ask, “Against whom? Are there any worse people to come along?”

But apart from the hellish irony of this humanitarian idea, the question it raises is really one of solid importance for people whose politics are more or less like ours. There is a very urgent point in that question, “Against whom would the Belgian workmen be protected by the German laws?” And if we pursue it, we shall be enabled to analyse something of that poison — very largely a Prussian poison — which has long been working in our own commonwealth, to the enslavement of the weak and the secret strengthening of the strong. For the Prussian armies are, pre-eminently, the advance guard of the Servile State. I say this scientifically, and quite apart from passion or even from preference. I have no illusions about either Belgium or England. Both have been stained with the soot of Capitalism and blinded with the smoke of mere Colonial ambition; both have been caught at a disadvantage in such modern dirt and disorder; both have come out much better than I should have expected countries so modern and so industrial to do. But in England and Belgium there is Capitalism mixed up with a great many other things, strong things and things that pursue other aims; Clericalism, for instance, and militant Socialism in Belgium; Trades Unionism and sport and the remains of real aristocracy in England. But Prussia is Capitalism; that is, a gradually solidifying slavery; and that majestic unity with which she moves, dragging all the dumb Germanies after her, is due to the fact that her Servile State is complete, while ours is incomplete. There are not mutinies; there are not even mockeries; the voice of national self-criticism has been extinguished forever. For this people is already permanently cloven into a higher and a lower class: in its industry as much as its army. Its employers are, in the strictest and most sinister sense, captains of industry. Its proletariat is, in the truest and most pitiable sense, an army of labour. In that atmosphere masters bear upon them the signs that they are more than men; and to insult an officer is death.

If anyone ask how this extreme and unmistakable subordination of the employed to the employers is brought about, we all know the answer. It is brought about by hunger and hardness of heart, accelerated by a certain kind of legislation, of which we have had a good deal lately in England, but which was almost invariably borrowed from Prussia. Mr. Herbert Samuel’s suggestion that the poor should be able to put their money in little boxes and not be able to get it out again is a sort of standing symbol of all the rest. I have forgotten how the poor were going to benefit eventually by what is for them indistinguishable from dropping sixpence down a drain. Perhaps they were going to get it back some day; perhaps when they could produce a hundred coupons out of the Daily Citizen; perhaps when they got their hair cut; perhaps when they consented to be inoculated, or trepanned, or circumcised, or something. Germany is full of this sort of legislation; and if you asked an innocent German, who honestly believed in it, what it was, he would answer that it was for the protection of workmen.

And if you asked again “Their protection from what?” you would have the whole plan and problem of the Servile State plain in front of you. Whatever notion there is, there is no notion whatever of protecting the employed person *from his employer*. Much less is there any idea of his ever being anywhere except under an employer. Whatever the Capitalist wants he gets. He may have the sense to want washed and well-fed labourers rather than dirty and feeble ones, and the restrictions may happen to exist in the form of laws from the Kaiser or by-laws from the Krupps. But the Kaiser will not offend the Krupps, and the Krupps will not offend the Kaiser. Laws of this kind, then, do not attempt to protect workmen against the injustice of the Capitalist as the English Trade Unions did. They do not attempt to protect workmen against the injustice of the State as the mediaeval guilds did. Obviously they cannot protect workmen against the foreign invader — especially when (as in the comic case of Belgium) they are imposed by the foreign invader. What then are such laws designed to protect workmen against? Tigers, rattlesnakes, hyenas?

Oh, my young friends; oh, my Christian brethren, they are designed to protect this poor person from something which to those of established rank is more horrid than many hyenas. They are designed, my friends, to protect a man from himself — from something that the masters of the earth fear more than famine or war, and which Prussia especially fears as everything fears that which would certainly be its end. They are meant to protect a man against himself — that is, they are meant to protect a man against his manhood.

And if anyone reminds me that there is a Socialist Party in Germany, I reply that there isn’t.

THE EMPIRE OF THE IGNORANT

That anarchic future which the more timid Tories professed to fear has already fallen upon us. We are ruled by ignorant people. But the most ignorant people in modern Britain are to be found in the upper class, the middle class, and especially the upper middle class. I do not say it with the smallest petulance or even distaste; these classes are often really beneficent in their breeding or their hospitality, or their humanity to animals.

There is still no better company than the young at the two Universities, or the best of the old in the Army or some of the other services. Also, of course, there are exceptions in the matter of learning; real scholars like Professor Gilbert Murray or Professor Phillimore are not ignorant, though they *are* gentlemen. But when one looks up at any mass of the wealthier and more powerful classes, at the Grand Stand at Epsom, at the windows of Park-lane, at the people at a full-dress debate or a fashionable wedding, we shall be safe in saying that they are, for the most part, the most ill-taught, or untaught, creatures in these islands.

Literally Illiterate

It is indeed their feeble boast that they are not literally illiterate. They are always saying the ancient barons could not sign their own names — for they know less of history perhaps than of anything else. The modern barons, however, can sign their own names — or someone else’s for a change. They can sign their own names; and that is about all they can do. They cannot face a fact, or follow an argument, or feel a tradition; but, least of all, can they, upon any persuasion, read through a plain impartial book, English or foreign, that is not specially written to soothe their panic or to please their pride. Looking up at these seats of the mighty I can only say, with something of despair, what Robert Lowe said of the enfranchised workmen: “We must educate our masters.”

I do not mean this as paradoxical, or even as symbolical; it is simply tame and true. The modern English rich know nothing about things, not even about the things to which they appeal. Compared with them, the poor are pretty sure to get some enlightenment, even if they cannot get liberty; they must at least be technical. An old apprentice learnt a trade, even if his master came like any Turk and banged him most severely. The old housewife knew which side her bread was buttered, even if it were so thin as to be almost imperceptible. The old sailor knew the ropes; even if he knew the rope’s end. Consequently, when any of these revolted, they were concerned with things they knew, pains, practical impossibilities, or the personal record.

But They Know

The apprentice cried “Clubs?” and cracked his neighbours’ heads with the precision and fineness of touch which only manual craftsmanship can give. The housewives who flatly refused to cook the hot dinner knew how much or how little, cold meat there was in the house. The sailor who defied discipline by mutinying at the Nore did not defy discipline in the sense of falling off the rigging or letting the water into the hold. Similarly the modern proletariat, however little it may know, knows what it is talking about.

But the curious thing about the educated class is that exactly what it does not know is what it is talking about. I mean that it is startlingly ignorant of those special things which it is supposed to invoke and keep inviolate. The things that workmen invoke may be uglier, more acrid, more sordid; but they know all about them. They know enough arithmetic to know that prices have risen; the kind Levantine gentleman is always there to make them fully understand the meaning of an interest sum; and the landlord will define Rent as rigidly as Ricardo. The doctors can always tell them the Latin for an empty stomach; and when the poor man is treated for the time with some human respect (by the Coronet) it almost seems a pity he is not alive to hear how legally he died.

Against this bitter shrewdness and bleak realism in the suffering classes it is commonly supposed that the more leisured classes stand for certain legitimate ideas which also have their place in life; such as history, reverence, the love of the land. Well, it might be no bad thing to have something, even if it were something narrow, that testified to the truths of religion or patriotism. But such narrow things in the past have always at least known their own history; the bigot knew his catechism; the patriot knew his way home. The astonishing thing about the modern rich is their real and sincere ignorance — especially of the things they like.

No!

Take the most topical case you can find in any drawing-room: Belfast. Ulster is most assuredly a matter of history; and there is a sense in which Orange resistance is a matter of religion. But go and ask any of the five hundred fluttering ladies at a garden party (who find Carson so splendid and Belfast so thrilling) what it is all about, when it began, where it came from, what it really maintains? What was the history of Ulster? What is the religion of Belfast? Do any of them know where Ulstermen were in Grattan’s time; do any of them know what was the “Protestantism” that came from Scotland to that isle; could any of them tell what part of the old Catholic system it really denied?

It was generally something that the fluttering ladies find in their own Anglican churches every Sunday. It were vain to ask them to state the doctrines of the Calvinist creed; they could not state the doctrines of their own creed. It were vain to tell them to read the history of Ireland; they have never read the history of England. It would matter as little that they do not know these things, as that I do not know German; but then German is not the only thing I am supposed to know. History and ritual are the only things aristocrats are supposed to know; and they don’t know them.

Smile and Smile

I am not fed on turtle soup and Tokay because of my exquisite intimacy with the style and idiom of Heine and Richter. The English governing class is fed on turtle soup and Tokay to represent the past, of which it is literally ignorant, as I am of German irregular verbs; and to represent the religious traditions of the State, when it does not know three words of theology, as I do not know three words of German.

This is the last insult offered by the proud to the humble. They rule them by the smiling terror of an ancient secret. They smile and smile; but they have forgotten the secret.

THE SYMBOLISM OF KRUPP

The curious position of the Krupp firm in the awful story developing around us is not quite sufficiently grasped. There is a kind of academic clarity of definition which does not see the proportions of things for which everything falls within a definition, and nothing ever breaks beyond it. To this type of mind (which is valuable when set to its special and narrow work) there is no such thing as an exception that proves the rule. If I vote for confiscating some usurer’s millions I am doing, they say, precisely what I should be doing if I took pennies out of a blind man’s hat. They are both denials of the principle of private property, and are equally right and equally wrong, according to our view of that principle. I should find a great many distinctions to draw in such a matter. First, I should say that taking a usurer’s money by proper authority is not robbery, but recovery of stolen goods. Second, I should say that even if there were no such thing as personal property, there would still be such a thing as personal dignity, and different modes of robbery would diminish it in very different ways. Similarly, there is a truth, but only a half-truth, in the saying that all modern Powers alike rely on the Capitalist and make war on the lines of Capitalism. It is true, and it is disgraceful. But it is *not* equally true and equally disgraceful. It is not true that Montenegro is as much ruled by financiers as Prussia, just as it is not true that as many men in the Kaiserstrasse, in Berlin, wear long knives in their belts as wear them in the neighbourhood of the Black Mountain. It is not true that every peasant from one of the old Russian communes is the immediate servant of a rich man, as is every employee of Mr. Rockefeller. It is as false as the statement that no poor people in America can read or write. There is an element of Capitalism in all modern countries, as there is an element of illiteracy in all modern countries. There are some who think that the number of our fellow-citizens who can sign their names ought to comfort us for the extreme fewness of those who have anything in the bank to sign it for, but I am not one of these.

In any case, the position of Krupp has certain interesting aspects. When we talk of Army contractors as among the base but active actualities of war, we commonly mean that while the contractor benefits by the war, the war, on the whole, rather suffers by the contractor. We regard this unsoldierly middleman with disgust, or great anger, or contemptuous acquiescence, or commercial dread and silence, according to our personal position and character. But we nowhere think of him as having anything to do with fighting in the final sense. Those worthy and wealthy persons who employ women’s labour at a few shillings a week do not do it to obtain the best clothes for the soldiers, but to make a sufficient profit on the worst. The only argument is whether such clothes are just good enough for the soldiers, or are too bad for anybody or anything. We tolerate the contractor, or we do not tolerate him; but no one admires him especially, and certainly no one gives him any credit for any success in the war. Confessedly or unconfessedly we knock his profits, not only off what goes to the taxpayer, but what goes to the soldier. We know the Army will not fight any better, at least, because the clothes they wear were stitched by wretched women who could hardly see; or because their boots were made by harassed helots, who never had time to think. In war-time it is very widely confessed that Capitalism is not a good way of ruling a patriotic or self-respecting people, and all sorts of other things, from strict State organisation to quite casual personal charity, are hastily substituted for it. It is recognised that the “great employer,” nine times out of ten, is no more than the schoolboy or the page who pilfers tarts and sweets from the dishes as they go up and down. How angry one is with him depends on temperament, on the stage of the dinner — also on the number of tarts.

Now here comes in the real and sinister significance of Krupps. There are many capitalists in Europe as rich, as vulgar, as selfish, as rootedly opposed to any fellowship of the fortunate and unfortunate. But there is no other capitalist who claims, or can pretend to claim, that he has very appreciably *helped* the activities of his people in war. I will suppose that Lipton did not deserve the very severe criticisms made on his firm by Mr. Justice Darling; but, however blameless he was, nobody can suppose that British soldiers would charge better with the bayonet because they had some particular kind of groceries inside them. But Krupp can make a plausible claim that the huge infernal machines to which his country owes nearly all of its successes could only have been produced under the equally infernal conditions of the modern factory and the urban and proletarian civilisation. That is why the victory of Germany would be simply the victory of Krupp, and the victory of Krupp would be simply the victory of Capitalism. There, and there alone, Capitalism would be able to point to something done successfully for a whole nation — done (as it would certainly maintain) better than small free States or natural democracies could have done it. I confess I think the modern Germans morally second-rate, and I think that even war, when it is conducted most successfully by machinery, is second-rate war. But this second-rate war will become not only the first but the only brand, if the cannon of Krupp should conquer; and, what is very much worse, it will be the only intelligent answer that any capitalist has yet given against our case that Capitalism is as wasteful and as weak as it is certainly wicked. I do not fear any such finality, for I happen to believe in the kind of men who fight best with bayonets and whose fathers hammered their own pikes for the French Revolution.

THE TOWER OF BEBEL

Among the cloudy and symbolic stories in the beginning of the Bible there is one about a tower built with such vertical energy as to take a hold on heaven, but ruined and resulting only in a confusion of tongues. The story might be interpreted in many ways — religiously, as meaning that spiritual insolence starts all human separations; irreligiously, as meaning that the inhuman heavens grudge man his magnificent dream; or merely satirically as suggesting that all attempts to reach a higher agreement always end in more disagreement than there was before. It might be taken by the partially intelligent Kensitite as a judgment on Latin Christians for talking Latin. It might be taken by the somewhat less intelligent Professor Harnack as a final proof that all prehistoric humanity talked German. But when all was said, the symbol would remain that a plain tower, as straight as a sword, as simple as a lily, did nevertheless produce the deepest divisions that have been known among men. In any case we of the world in revolt — Syndicalists, Socialists, Guild Socialists, or whatever we call ourselves — have no need to worry about the scripture or the allegory. We have the reality. For whatever reason, what is said to have happened to the people of Shinak has precisely and practically happened to us.

None of us who have known Socialists (or rather, to speak more truthfully, none of us who have been Socialists) can entertain the faintest doubt that a fine intellectual sincerity lay behind what was called “L’Internationale.” It was really felt that Socialism was universal like arithmetic. It was too true for idiom or turn of phrase. In the formula of Karl Marx men could find that frigid fellowship which they find when they agree that two and two make four. It was almost as broadminded as a religious dogma.

Yet this universal language has not succeeded, at a moment of crisis, in imposing itself on the whole world. Nay, it has not, at the moment of crisis, succeeded in imposing itself on its own principal champions. Herve is not talking Economic Esperanto; he is talking French. Bebel is not talking Economic Esperanto; he is talking German. Blatchford is not talking Economic Esperanto; he is talking English, and jolly good English, too. I do not know whether French or Flemish was Vandervelde’s nursery speech, but I am quite certain he will know more of it after this struggle than he knew before. In short, whether or no there be a new union of hearts, there has really and truly been a new division of tongues.

How are we to explain this singular truth, even if we deplore it? I dismiss with fitting disdain the notion that it is a mere result of military terrorism or snobbish social pressure. The Socialist leaders of modern Europe are among the most sincere men in history; and their Nationalist note in this affair has had the ring of their sincerity. I will not waste time on the speculation that Vandervelde is bullied by Belgian priests; or that Blatchford is frightened of the horse-guards outside Whitehall. These great men support the enthusiasm of their conventional countrymen because they share it; and they share it because there is (though perhaps only at certain great moments) such a thing as pure democracy.

Timour the Tartar, I think, celebrated some victory with a tower built entirely out of human skulls; perhaps he thought *that* would reach to heaven. But there is no cement in such building; the veins and ligaments that hold humanity together have long fallen away; the skulls will roll impotently at a touch; and ten thousand more such trophies could only make the tower taller and crazier. I think the modern official apparatus of "votes" is very like that tottering monument. I think the Tartar "counted heads," like an electioneering agent. Sometimes when I have seen from the platform of some paltry party meeting the rows and rows of grinning upturned faces, I have felt inclined to say, as the poet does in the "The Vision of Sin"—"Welcome fellow-citizens, Hollow hearts and empty heads."

Not that the people were personally hollow or empty, but they had come on a hollow and empty business: to help the good Mr. Binks to strengthen the Insurance Act against the wicked Mr. Jinks who would only promise to fortify the Insurance Act. That night it did not blow the democratic gale. Yet it can blow on these as on others; and when it does blow men learn many things. I, for one, am not above learning them.

The Marxian dogma which simplifies all conflicts to the Class War is so much nobler a thing than the nose-counting of the parliaments that one must apologise for the comparison. And yet there is a comparison. When we used to say that there were so many thousands of Socialists in Germany, we were counting by skulls. When we said that the majority consisting of Proletarians would be everywhere opposed to the minority, consisting of Capitalists, we were counting by skulls. Why, yes; if all men's heads had been cut off from the rest of them, as they were by the good sense and foresight of Timour the Tartar; if they had no hearts or bellies to be moved; no hand that flies up to ward off a weapon, no foot that can feel a familiar soil — if things were so the Marxian calculation would be not only complete but correct. As we know to-day, the Marxian calculation is complete, but it is not correct.

Now, this is the answer to the questions of some kind critics, whose actual words I have not within reach at the moment, about whether my democracy meant the rule of the majority over the minority. It means the rule of the rule — the rule of the rule over the exception. When a nation finds a soul it clothes it with a body, and does verily act like one living thing. There is nothing to be said about those who are out of it, except that they are out of it. After talking about it in the abstract for decades, this is Democracy, and it is marvellous in our eyes. It is not the difference between ninetynine persons and a hundred persons; it is one person — the people. I do not know or care how many or how few of the Belgians like or dislike the pictures of Wiertz. They could not be either justified or condemned by a mere majority of Belgians. But I am very certain that the defiance to Prussia did not come from a majority of Belgians. It came from Belgium one and indivisible — atheists, priests, princes of the blood, Frenchified shopkeepers, Flemish boors, men, women, and children, and the sooner we understand that this sort of thing can happen the better for us. For it is this spontaneous spiritual fellowship of communities under certain conditions to which the four or five most independent minds of Europe willingly bear witness to-day.

But is there no exception: is there no one faithful among the unfaithful found? Is no great Socialist politician still untouched by the patriotism of the vulgar? Why, yes; the rugged Ramsay MacDonald, scarred with a hundred savage fights against the capitalist parties, still lifts up his horny hand for peace. What further need have we of witnesses? I, for my part, am quite satisfied, and do not doubt that Mr. MacDonald will be as industrious in damping down democracy in this form as in every other.

A REAL DANGER

Heaven forbid that I should once more wade in those swamps of logomachy and tautology in which the old guard of the Determinists still seem to be floundering. The question of Fate and Free Will can never attain to a conclusion, though it may attain to a conviction. The shortest philosophic summary is that both cause and choice are ultimate ideas within us, and that if one man denies choice because it seems contrary to cause, the other man has quite as much right to deny cause because it seems contrary to choice. The shortest ethical summary is that Determinism either affects conduct or it does not. If it does not, it is morally not worth preaching; if it does, it must affect conduct in the direction of impotence and submission. A writer in the "Clarion" says that the reformer cannot help trying to reform, nor the Conservative help his Conservatism. But suppose the reformer tries to reform the Conservative and turn him into another reformer? Either he can, in which case Determinism has made no difference at all, or he can't, in which case it can only have made reformers more hopeless and Conservatives more obstinate. And the shortest practical and political summary is that working men, most probably, will soon be much too busy using their Free Will to stop to prove that they have got it. Nevertheless, I like to watch the Determinist in the "Clarion" Cockpit every week, as busy as a squirrel — in a cage. But being myself a squirrel (leaping lightly from bough to bough) and preferring the form of activity which occasionally ends in nuts, I should not intervene in the matter even indirectly, except upon a practical point. And the point I have in mind is practical to the extent of deadly peril. It is another of the numerous new ways in which the restless rich, now walking the world with an awful insomnia, may manage to catch us napping.

Must Be a Mystery

There are two letters in the "Clarion" this week which in various ways interest me very much. One is concerned to defend Darwin against the scientific revolt against him that was led by Samuel Butler, and among other things it calls Bernard Shaw a back number. Well, most certainly "The Origin of Species" is a back number, in so far as any honest and interesting book ever can be; but in pure philosophy nothing can be out of date, since the universe must be a mystery even to the believer. There is, however, one condition of things in which I do call it relevant to describe somebody as behind the times. That is when the man in question, thinking of some state of affairs that has passed away, is really helping the very things he would like to hinder. The principles cannot alter, but the problems can. Thus, I should call a man behind the times who, in the year 1872, pleaded for the peaceful German peasants against the triumphant militarism of Napoleon. Or I should call a man out of date who, in the year 1892, wished for a stronger Navy to compete with the Navy of Holland, because it had once swept the sea and sailed up the Thames. And I certainly call a man or a movement out of date that, in the year 1914, when we few are fighting a giant machine, strengthened with all material wealth and worked with all the material sciences, thinks that our chief danger is from an excess of moral and religious responsibility. He reminds me of Mr. Snodgrass, who had the presence of mind to call out “Fire!” when Mr. Pickwick fell through the ice.

The other letter consists of the usual wiredrawn argument for fatalism. Man cannot imagine the universe being created, and therefore is “compelled by his reason” to think the universe without beginning or end, which (I may remark) he cannot imagine either. But the letter ends with something much more ominous than bad metaphysics. Here, in the middle of the “Clarion,” in the centre of a clean and combative democratic sheet, I meet again my deplorable old acquaintance, the scientific criminologist. “The so-called evil-doer should not be punished for his acts, but restrained.” In forty-eight hours I could probably get a petition to that effect signed by millionaires. A short time ago a Bill was introduced to hold irresponsible and “restrain” a whole new class of people, who were “incapable of managing their affairs with prudence.” Read the supporters’ names on the back of that Bill, and see what sort of democrats they were.

Now, clearing our heads of what is called popular science (which means going to sleep to a lullaby of long words), let us use our own brains a little, and ask ourselves what is the real difference between punishing a man and restraining him. The material difference may be any or none; for punishment may be very mild, and restraint may be very ruthless. The man, of course, must dislike one as much as the other, or it would not be necessary to restrain him at all. And I assure you he will get no great glow of comfort out of your calling him irresponsible after you have made him impotent. A man does not necessarily feel more free and easy in a straight waistcoat than in a stone cell. The moral difference is that a man can be punished for a crime because he is born a citizen; while he can be constrained because he is born a slave. But one arresting and tremendous difference towers over all these doubtful or arguable differences. There is one respect, vital to all our liberties and all our lives, in which the new restraint would be different from the old punishment. It is of this that the plutocrats will take advantage.

The Plain Difference

The perfectly plain difference is this. All punishment, even the most horrible, proceeds upon the assumption that the extent of the evil is known, and that a certain amount of expiation goes with it. Even if you hang the man, you cannot hang him twice. Even if you burn him, you cannot burn him for a month. And in the case of all ordinary imprisonments, the whole aim of free institutions from the beginning of the world has been to insist that a man shall be convicted of a definite crime and confined for a definite period. But the moment you admit this notion of medical restraint, you must in fairness admit that it may go on as long as the authorities choose to think (or say) that it ought to go on. The man's punishment refers to the past, which is supposed to have been investigated, and which, in some degree at least, has been investigated. But his restraint refers to the future, which his doctors, keepers, and wardens have yet to investigate. The simple result will be that, in the scientific Utopia of the "Clarion," men like Mann or Syme or Larkin will not be put in prison because of what they have done. They will be kept in prison because of what they might do. Indeed, the builders of the new tyranny have already come very near to avowing this scientific and futurist method. When the lawyers tried to stop the "Suffragette" from appearing at all, they practically said: "We do not know your next week's crime, because it isn't committed yet; but we are scientifically certain you have the criminal type. And by the sublime and unalterable laws of heredity, all your poor little papers will inherit it."

This is a purely practical question; and that is why I insist on it, even in such strenuous times. The writers on the "Clarion" have a perfect right to think Christianity is the foe of freedom, or even that the stupidity and tyranny of the present Government is due to the monkish mysticism of Lord Morley and Mr. John M. Robertson. They have a right to think the theory of Determinism as true as Calvin thought it. But I do not like seeing them walk straight into the enormous iron trap set open by the Capitalists, who find it convenient to make our law even more lawless than it is. The rich men want a scientist to write them a *lettre de cachet* as a doctor writes a prescription. And so they wish to seal up in a public gaol the scandals of a private asylum. Yes; the writers on the “Clarion” are indeed claiming irresponsibility for human beings. But it is the governments that will be irresponsible, not the governed.

But I will tell them one small secret in conclusion. There is nothing whatever wrong in the ancient and universal idea of Punishment — except that we are not punishing the right people.

THE DREGS OF PURITANISM

One peculiarity of the genuine kind of enemy of the people is that his slightest phrase is clamorous with all his sins. Pride, vain-glory, and hypocrisy seem present in his very grammar; in his very verbs or adverbs or prepositions, as well as in what he says, which is generally bad enough. Thus I see that a Nonconformist pastor in Bromley has been talking about the pathetic little presents of tobacco sent to the common soldiers. This is how he talks about it. He is reported as having said, “By the help of God, they wanted this cigarette business stopped.” How one could write a volume on that sentence, a great thick volume called “The Decline of the English Middle Class.” In taste, in style, in philosophy, in feeling, in political project, the horrors of it are as unfathomable as hell.

First, to begin with the trifle, note something slipshod and vague in the mere verbiage, typical of those who prefer a catchword to a creed. “This cigarette business” might mean anything. It might mean Messrs. Salmon and Gluckstein’s business. But the pastor at Bromley will not interfere with that, for the indignation of his school of thought, even when it is sincere, always instinctively and unconsciously swerves aside from anything that is rich and powerful like the partners in a big business, and strikes instead something that is poor and nameless like the soldiers in a trench. Nor does the expression make clear who “they” are — whether the inhabitants of Britain or the inhabitants of Bromley, or the inhabitants of this one crazy tabernacle in Bromley; nor is it evident how it is going to be stopped or who is being asked to stop it. All these things are trifles compared to the more terrible offences of the phrase; but they are not without their social and historical interest. About the beginning of the nineteenth century the wealthy Puritan class, generally the class of the employers of labour, took a line of argument which was narrow, but not nonsensical. They saw the relation of rich and poor quite coldly as a contract, but they saw that a contract holds both ways. The Puritans of the middle class, in short, did in some sense start talking and thinking for themselves. They are still talking. They have long ago left off thinking. They talk about the loyalty of workmen to their employers, and God knows what rubbish; and the first small certainty about the reverend gentleman whose sentence I have quoted is that his brain stopped working as a clock stops, years and years ago.

Second, consider the quality of the religious literature! These people are always telling us that the English translated Bible is sufficient training for anyone in noble and appropriate diction; and so it is. Why, then, are they not trained? They are always telling us that Bunyan, the rude Midland tinker, is as much worth reading as Chaucer or Spenser; and so he is. Why, then, have they not read him? I cannot believe that anyone who had seen, even in a nightmare of the nursery, Apollyon straddling over the whole breadth of the way could really write like that about a cigarette. By the help of God, they wanted this cigarette business stopped. Therefore, with angels and archangels and the whole company of Heaven, with St. Michael, smiter of Satan and Captain of the Chivalry of God, with all the ardour of the seraphs and the flaming patience of the saints, we will have this cigarette business stopped. Where has all the tradition of the great religious literatures gone to that a man should come on such a bathos with such a bump?

Thirdly, of course, there is the lack of imaginative proportion, which rises into a sort of towering blasphemy. An enormous number of live young men are being hurt by shells, hurt by bullets, hurt by fever and hunger and horror of hope deferred; hurt by lance blades and sword blades and bayonet blades breaking into the bloody house of life. But Mr. Price (I think that’s his name) is still anxious that they should not be hurt by cigarettes. That is the sort of maniacal isolation that can be found in the deserts of Bromley. That cigarettes are bad for the health is a very tenable opinion to which the minister is quite entitled. If he happens to think that the youth of Bromley smoke too many cigarettes, and that he has any influence in urging on them the unhealthiness of the habit, I should not blame him if he gave sermons or lectures about it (with magic-lantern slides), so long as it was in Bromley and about Bromley. Cigarettes may be bad for the health: bombs and bayonets and even barbed wire are not good for the health. I never met a doctor who recommended any of them. But the trouble with this sort of man is that he cannot adjust himself to the scale of things. He would do very good service if he would go among the rich aristocratic ladies and tell them not to take drugs in a chronic sense, as people take opium in China. But he would be doing very bad service if he were to go among the doctors and nurses on the field and tell them not to give drugs, as they give morphia in a hospital. But it is the whole hypothesis of war, it is its very nature and first principle, that the man in the trench is almost as much a suffering and abnormal person as the man in the hospital. Hit or unhit, conqueror or conquered, he is, by nature of the case, having less pleasure than is proper and natural to a man.

Fourth (for I need not dwell here on the mere diabolical idiocy that can regard beer or tobacco as in some way evil and unseemly in themselves), there is the most important element in this strange outbreak; at least, the most dangerous and the most important for us. There is that main feature in the degradation of the old middle class: the utter disappearance of its old appetite for liberty. Here there is no question of whether the men are to smoke cigarettes, or the women choose to send cigarettes, or even that the officers or doctors choose to allow cigarettes. The thing is to cease, and we may note one of the most recurrent ideas of the servile State: it is mentioned in the passive mood. It must be stopped, and we must not even ask who has stopped it!

THE TYRANNY OF BAD JOURNALISM

The amazing decision of the Government to employ methods quite alien to England, and rather belonging to the police of the Continent, probably arises from the appearance of papers which are lucid and fighting, like the papers of the Continent. The business may be put in many ways. But one way of putting it is simply to say that a monopoly of bad journalism is resisting the possibility of good journalism. Journalism is not the same thing as literature; but there is good and bad journalism, as there is good and bad literature, as there is good and bad football. For the last twenty years or so the plutocrats who govern England have allowed the English nothing but bad journalism. Very bad journalism, simply considered as journalism.

It always takes a considerable time to see the simple and central fact about anything. All sorts of things have been said about the modern Press, especially the Yellow Press; that it is Jingo or Philistine or sensational or wrongly inquisitive or vulgar or indecent or trivial; but none of these have anything really to do with the point.

The point about the Press is that it is not what it is called. It is not the “popular Press.” It is not the public Press. It is not an organ of public opinion. It is a conspiracy of a very few millionaires, all sufficiently similar in type to agree on the limits of what this great nation (to which we belong) may know about itself and its friends and enemies. The ring is not quite complete; there are old-fashioned and honest papers: but it is sufficiently near to completion to produce on the ordinary purchaser of news the practical effects of a corner and a monopoly. He receives all his political information and all his political marching orders from what is by this time a sort of half-conscious secret society, with very few members, but a great deal of money.

This enormous and essential fact is concealed for us by a number of legends that have passed into common speech. There is the notion that the Press is flashy or trivial *because* it is popular. In other words, an attempt is made to discredit democracy by representing journalism as the natural literature of democracy. All this is cold rubbish. The democracy has no more to do with the papers than it has with the peerages. The millionaire newspapers are vulgar and silly because the millionaires are vulgar and silly. It is the proprietor, not the editor, not the sub-editor, least of all the reader, who is pleased with this monotonous prairie of printed words. The same slander on democracy can be noticed in the case of advertisements. There is many a tender old Tory imagination that vaguely feels that our streets would be hung with escutcheons and tapestries, if only the profane vulgar had not hung them with advertisements of Sapolio and Sunlight Soap. But advertisement does not come from the unlettered many. It comes from the refined few. Did you ever hear of a mob rising to placard the Town Hall with proclamations in favour of Sapolio? Did you ever see a poor, ragged man laboriously drawing and painting a picture on the wall in favour of Sunlight Soap — simply as a labour of love? It is nonsense; those who hang our public walls with ugly pictures are the same select few who hang their private walls with exquisite and expensive pictures. The vulgarisation of modern life has come from the governing class; from the highly educated class. Most of the people who have posters in Camberwell have peerages at Westminster. But the strongest instance of all is that which has been unbroken until lately, and still largely prevails; the ghastly monotony of the Press.

Then comes that other legend; the notion that men like the masters of the Newspaper Trusts "give the people what they want." Why, it is the whole aim and definition of a Trust that it gives the people what it chooses. In the old days, when Parliaments were free in England, it was discovered that one courtier was allowed to sell all the silk, and another to sell all the sweet wine. A member of the House of Commons humorously asked who was allowed to sell all the bread. I really tremble to think what that sarcastic legislator would have said if he had been put off with the modern nonsense about "gauging the public taste." Suppose the first courtier had said that, by his shrewd, self-made sense, he had detected that people had a vague desire for silk; and even a deep, dim human desire to pay so much a yard for it! Suppose the second courtier said that he had, by his own rugged intellect, discovered a general desire for wine: and that people bought his wine at his price — when they could buy no other! Suppose a third courtier had jumped up and said that people always bought his bread when they could get none anywhere else.

Well, that is a perfect parallel. "After bread, the need of the people is knowledge," said Danton. Knowledge is now a monopoly, and comes through to the citizens in thin and selected streams, exactly as bread might come through to a besieged city. Men must wish to know what is happening, whoever has the privilege of telling them. They must listen to the messenger, even if he is a liar. They must listen to the liar, even if he is a bore. The official journalist for some time past has been both a bore and a liar; but it was impossible until lately to neglect his sheets of news altogether. Lately the capitalist Press really has begun to be neglected; because its bad journalism was overpowering and appalling. Lately we have really begun to find out that capitalism cannot write, just as it cannot fight, or pray, or marry, or make a joke, or do any other stricken human thing. But this discovery has been quite recent. The capitalist newspaper was never actually unread until it was actually unreadable.

If you retain the servile superstition that the Press, as run by the capitalists, is popular (in any sense except that in which dirty water in a desert is popular), consider the case of the solemn articles in praise of the men who own newspapers — men of the type of Cadbury or Harmsworth, men of the type of the small club of millionaires. Did you ever hear a plain man in a tramcar or train talking about Carnegie’s bright genial smile or Rothschild’s simple, easy hospitality? Did you ever hear an ordinary citizen ask what was the opinion of Sir Joseph Lyons about the hopes and fears of this, our native land? These few small-minded men publish, papers to praise themselves. You could no more get an intelligent poor man to praise a millionaire’s soul, except for hire, than you could get him to sell a millionaire’s soap, except for hire. And I repeat that, though there are other aspects of the matter of the new plutocratic raid, one of the most important is mere journalistic jealousy. The Yellow Press is bad journalism: and wishes to stop the appearance of good journalism.

There is no average member of the public who would not prefer to have Lloyd George discussed as what he is, a Welshman of genius and ideals, strangely fascinated by bad fashion and bad finance, rather than discussed as what neither he nor anyone else ever was, a perfect democrat or an utterly detestable demagogue. There is no reader of a daily paper who would not feel more concern — and more respect — for Sir Rufus Isaacs as a man who has been a stockbroker, than as a man who happens to be Attorney-General. There is no man in the street who is not more interested in Lloyd George’s investments than in his Land Campaign. There is no man in the street who could not understand (and like) Rufus Isaacs as a Jew better than he can possibly like him as a British statesman. There is no sane journalist alive who would say that the official account of Marconis would be better “copy” than the true account that such papers as this have dragged out. We have committed one crime against the newspaper proprietor which he will never forgive. We point out that his papers are dull. And we propose to print some papers that are interesting.

THE POETRY OF THE REVOLUTION

Everyone but a consistent and contented capitalist, who must be something pretty near to a Satanist, must rejoice at the spirit and success of the Battle of the Buses. But one thing about it which happens to please me particularly was that it was fought, in one aspect at least, on a point such as the plutocratic fool calls unpractical. It was fought about a symbol, a badge, a thing attended with no kind of practical results, like the flags for which men allow themselves to fall down dead, or the shrines for which men will walk some hundreds of miles from their homes. When a man has an eye for business, all that goes on on this earth in that style is simply invisible to him. But let us be charitable to the eye for business; the eye has been pretty well blacked this time.

But I wish to insist here that it is exactly what is called the unpractical part of the thing that is really the practical. The chief difference between men and the animals is that all men are artists; though the overwhelming majority of us are bad artists. As the old fable truly says, lions do not make statues; even the cunning of the fox can go no further than the accomplishment of leaving an exact model of the vulpine paw: and even that is an accomplishment which he wishes he hadn't got. There are Chryselephantine statues, but no purely elephantine ones. And, though we speak in a general way of an elephant trumpeting, it is only by human blandishments that he can be induced to play the drum. But man, savage or civilised, simple or complex always desires to see his own soul outside himself; in some material embodiment. He always wishes to point to a table in a temple, or a cloth on a stick, or a word on a scroll, or a badge on a coat, and say: "This is the best part of me. If need be, it shall be the rest of me that shall perish." This is the method which seems so unbusinesslike to the men with an eye to business. This is also the method by which battles are won.

The Symbolism of the Badge

The badge on a Trade Unionist's coat is a piece of poetry in the genuine, lucid, and logical sense in which Milton defined poetry (and he ought to know) when he said that it was simple, sensuous, and passionate. It is simple, because many understand the word "badge," who might not even understand the word "recognition." It is sensuous, because it is visible and tangible; it is incarnate, as all the good Gods have been; and it is passionate in this perfectly practical sense, which the man with an eye to business may some day learn more thoroughly than he likes, that there are men who will allow you to cross a word out in a theoretical document, but who will not allow you to pull a big button off their bodily clothing, merely because you have more money than they have. Now I think it is this sensuousness, this passion, and, above all, this simplicity that are most wanted in this promising revolt of our time. For this simplicity is perhaps the only thing in which the best type of recent revolutionists have failed. It has been our sorrow lately to salute the sunset of one of the very few clean and incorruptible careers in the most corruptible phase of Christendom. The death of Quelch naturally turns one's thoughts to those extreme Marxian theorists, who, whatever we may hold about their philosophy, have certainly held their honour like iron. And yet, even in this instant of instinctive reverence, I cannot feel that they were poetical enough, that is childish enough, to make a revolution. They had all the audacity needed for speaking to the despot; but not the simplicity needed for speaking to the democracy. They were always accused of being too bitter against the capitalist. But it always seemed to me that they were (quite unconsciously, of course) much too kind to him. They had a fatal habit of using long words, even on occasions when he might with propriety have been described in very short words. They called him a Capitalist when almost anybody in Christendom would have called him a cad. And "cad" is a word from the poetic vocabulary indicating rather a general and powerful reaction of the emotions than a status that could be defined in a work of economics. The capitalist, asleep in the sun, let such long words crawl all over him, like so many long, soft, furry caterpillars. Caterpillars cannot sting like wasps. And, in repeating that the old Marxians have been, perhaps, the best and bravest men of our time, I say also that they would have been better and braver still if they had never used a scientific word, and never read anything but fairy tales.

The Beastly Individualist

Suppose I go on to a ship, and the ship sinks almost immediately; but I (like the people in the Bab Ballads), by reason of my clinging to a mast, upon a desert island am eventually cast. Or rather, suppose I am not cast on it, but am kept bobbing about in the water, because the only man on the island is what some call an Individualist, and will not throw me a rope;

though coils of rope of the most annoying elaboration and neatness are conspicuous beside him as he stands upon the shore. Now, it seems to me, that if, in my efforts to shout at this fellow-creature across the crashing breakers, I call his position the “insularistic position,” and my position “the semi-amphibian position,” much valuable time may be lost. I am not an amphibian. I am a drowning man. He is not an insularist, or an individualist. He is a beast. Or rather, he is worse than any beast can be. And if, instead of letting me drown, he makes me promise, while I am drowning, that if I come on shore it shall be as his bodily slave, having no human claims henceforward forever, then, by the whole theory and practice of capitalism, he becomes a capitalist, he also becomes a cad.

Now, the language of poetry is simpler than that of prose; as anyone can see who has read what the old-fashioned protestant used to call confidently “his” Bible. And, being simpler, it is also truer; and, being truer, it is also fiercer. And, for most of the infamies of our time, there is really nothing plain enough, except the plain language of poetry. Take, let us say, the ease of the recent railway disaster, and the acquittal of the capitalists’ interest. It is not a scientific problem for us to investigate. It is a crime committed before our eyes; committed, perhaps, by blind men or maniacs, or men hypnotised, or men in some other ways unconscious; but committed in broad daylight, so that the corpse is bleeding on our door-step. Good lives were lost, because good lives do not pay; and bad coals do pay. It seems simply impossible to get any other meaning out of the matter except that. And, if in human history there be anything simple and anything horrible, it seems to have been present in this matter. If, even after some study and understanding of the old religious passions which were the resurrection of Europe, we cannot endure the extreme infamy of witches and heretics literally burned alive — well, the people in this affair were quite as literally burned alive. If, when we have really tried to extend our charity beyond the borders of personal sympathy, to all the complexities of class and creed, we still feel something insolent about the triumphant and acquitted man who is in the wrong, here the men who are in the wrong are triumphant and acquitted. It is no subject for science. It is a subject for poetry. But for poetry of a terrible sort.

A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLAND

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I

INTRODUCTION

It will be very reasonably asked why I should consent, though upon a sort of challenge, to write even a popular essay in English history, who make no pretence to particular scholarship and am merely a member of the public. The answer is that I know just enough to know one thing: that a history from the standpoint of a member of the public has not been written. What we call the popular histories should rather be called the anti-popular histories. They are all, nearly without exception, written against the people; and in them the populace is either ignored or elaborately proved to have been wrong. It is true that Green called his book “A Short History of the English People”; but he seems to have thought it too short for the people to be properly mentioned. For instance, he calls one very large part of his story “Puritan England.” But England never was Puritan. It would have been almost as unfair to call the rise of Henry of Navarre “Puritan France.” And some of our extreme Whig historians would have been pretty nearly capable of calling the campaign of Wexford and Drogheda “Puritan Ireland.”

But it is especially in the matter of the Middle Ages that the popular histories trample upon the popular traditions. In this respect there is an almost comic contrast between the general information provided about England in the last two or three centuries, in which its present industrial system was being built up, and the general information given about the preceding centuries, which we call broadly mediæval. Of the sort of waxwork history which is thought sufficient for the side-show of the age of abbots and crusaders, a small instance will be sufficient. A popular Encyclopædia appeared some years ago, professing among other things to teach English History to the masses; and in this I came upon a series of pictures of the English kings. No one could expect them to be all authentic; but the interest attached to those that were necessarily imaginary. There is much vivid material in contemporary literature for portraits of men like Henry II. or Edward I.; but this did not seem to have been found, or even sought. And wandering to the image that stood for Stephen of Blois, my eye was staggered by a gentleman with one of those helmets with steel brims curved like a crescent, which went with the age of ruffs and trunk-hose. I am tempted to suspect that the head was that of a halberdier at some such scene as the execution of Mary Queen of Scots. But he had a helmet; and helmets were mediæval; and any old helmet was good enough for Stephen.

Now suppose the readers of that work of reference had looked for the portrait of Charles I. and found the head of a policeman. Suppose it had been taken, modern helmet and all, out of some snapshot in the *Daily Sketch* of the arrest of Mrs. Pankhurst. I think we may go so far as to say that the readers would have refused to accept it as a lifelike portrait of Charles I. They would have formed the opinion that there must be some mistake. Yet the time that elapsed between Stephen and Mary was much longer than the time that has elapsed between Charles and ourselves. The revolution in human society between the first of the Crusades and the last of the Tudors was immeasurably more colossal and complete than any change between Charles and ourselves. And, above all, that revolution should be the first thing and the final thing in anything calling itself a popular history. For it is the story of how our populace gained great things, but to-day has lost everything.

Now I will modestly maintain that I know more about English history than this; and that I have as much right to make a popular summary of it as the gentleman who made the crusader and the halberdier change hats. But the curious and arresting thing about the neglect, one might say the omission, of mediæval civilization in such histories as this, lies in the fact I have already noted. It is exactly the popular story that is left out of the popular history. For instance, even a working man, a carpenter or cooper or bricklayer, has been taught about the Great Charter, as something like the Great Auk, save that its almost monstrous solitude came from being before its time instead of after. He was not taught that the whole stuff of the Middle Ages was stiff with the parchment of charters; that society was once a system of charters, and of a kind much more interesting to him. The carpenter heard of one charter given to barons, and chiefly in the interest of barons; the carpenter did not hear of any of the charters given to carpenters, to coopers, to all the people like himself. Or, to take another instance, the boy and girl reading the stock simplified histories of the schools practically never heard of such a thing as a burgher, until he appears in a shirt with a noose round his neck. They certainly do not imagine anything of what he meant in the Middle Ages. And Victorian shopkeepers did not conceive themselves as taking part in any such romance as the adventure of Courtrai, where the mediæval shopkeepers more than won their spurs — for they won the spurs of their enemies.

I have a very simple motive and excuse for telling the little I know of this true tale. I have met in my wanderings a man brought up in the lower quarters of a great house, fed mainly on its leavings and burdened mostly with its labours. I know that his complaints are stilled, and his status justified, by a story that is told to him. It is about how his grandfather was a chimpanzee and his father a wild man of the woods, caught by hunters and tamed into something like intelligence. In the light of this, he may well be thankful for the almost human life that he enjoys; and may be content with the hope of leaving behind him a yet more evolved animal. Strangely enough, the calling of this story by the sacred name of Progress ceased to satisfy me when I began to suspect (and to discover) that it is not true. I know by now enough at least of his origin to know that he was not evolved, but simply disinherited. His family tree is not a monkey tree, save in the sense that no monkey could have climbed it; rather it is like that tree torn up by the roots and named “Dedischado,” on the shield of the unknown knight.

II

THE PROVINCE OF BRITAIN

The land on which we live once had the highly poetic privilege of being the end of the world. Its extremity was *ultima Thule*, the other end of nowhere. When these islands, lost in a night of northern seas, were lit up at last by the long searchlights of Rome, it was felt that the remotest remnant of things had been touched; and more for pride than possession.

The sentiment was not unsuitable, even in geography. About these realms upon the edge of everything there was really something that can only be called edgy. Britain is not so much an island as an archipelago; it is at least a labyrinth of peninsulas. In few of the kindred countries can one so easily and so strangely find sea in the fields or fields in the sea. The great rivers seem not only to meet in the ocean, but barely to miss each other in the hills: the whole land, though low as a whole, leans towards the west in shouldering mountains; and a prehistoric tradition has taught it to look towards the sunset for islands yet dreamier than its own. The islanders are of a kind with their islands. Different as are the nations into which they are now divided, the Scots, the English, the Irish, the Welsh of the western uplands, have something altogether different from the humdrum docility of the inland Germans, or from the *bon sens français* which can be at will trenchant or trite. There is something common to all the Britons, which even Acts of Union have not torn asunder. The nearest name for it is insecurity, something fitting in men walking on cliffs and the verge of things. Adventure, a lonely taste in liberty, a humour without wit, perplex their critics and perplex themselves. Their souls are fretted like their coasts. They have an embarrassment, noted by all foreigners: it is expressed, perhaps, in the Irish by a confusion of speech and in the English by a confusion of thought. For the Irish bull is a license with the symbol of language. But Bull’s own bull, the English bull, is “a dumb ox of thought”; a standing mystification in the mind. There is something double in the thoughts as of the soul mirrored in many waters. Of all peoples they are least attached to the purely classical; the imperial plainness which the French do finely and the Germans coarsely, but the Britons hardly at all. They are constantly colonists and emigrants; they have the name of being at home in every country. But they are in exile in their own country. They are torn between love of home and love of something else; of which the sea may be the explanation or may be only the symbol. It is also found in a nameless nursery rhyme which is the finest line in English literature and the dumb refrain of all English poems— “Over the hills and far away.”

The great rationalist hero who first conquered Britain, whether or no he was the detached demigod of “Cæsar and Cleopatra,” was certainly a Latin of the Latins, and described these islands when he found them with all the curt positivism of his pen of steel. But even Julius Cæsar’s brief account of the Britons leaves on us something of this mystery, which is more than ignorance of fact. They were apparently ruled by that terrible thing, a pagan priesthood. Stones now shapeless yet arranged in symbolic shapes bear witness to the order and labour of those that lifted them. Their worship was probably Nature-worship; and while such a basis may count for something in the elemental quality that has always soaked the island arts, the collision between it and the tolerant Empire suggests the presence of something which generally grows out of Nature-worship — I mean the unnatural. But upon nearly all the matters of modern controversy Cæsar is silent. He is silent about whether the language was “Celtic”; and some of the place-names have even given rise to a suggestion that, in parts at least, it was already Teutonic. I am not capable of pronouncing upon the truth of such speculations, but I am of pronouncing upon their importance; at least, to my own very simple purpose. And indeed their importance has been very much exaggerated. Cæsar professed to give no more than the glimpse of a traveller; but when, some considerable time after, the Romans returned and turned Britain into a Roman province, they continued to display a singular indifference to questions that have excited so many professors. What they cared about was getting and giving in Britain what they had got and given in Gaul. We do not know whether the Britons then, or for that matter the Britons now, were Iberian or Cymric or Teutonic. We do know that in a short time they were Roman.

Every now and then there is discovered in modern England some fragment such as a Roman pavement. Such Roman antiquities rather diminish than increase the Roman reality. They make something seem distant which is still very near, and something seem dead that is still alive. It is like writing a man’s epitaph on his front door. The epitaph would probably be a compliment, but hardly a personal introduction. The important thing about France and England is not that they have Roman remains. They are Roman remains. In truth they are not so much remains as relics; for they are still working miracles. A row of poplars is a more Roman relic than a row of pillars. Nearly all that we call the works of nature have but grown like fungoids upon this original work of man; and our woods are mosses on the bones of a giant. Under the seed of our harvests and the roots of our trees is a foundation of which the fragments of tile and brick are but emblems; and under the colours of our wildest flowers are the colours of a Roman pavement.

Britain was directly Roman for fully four hundred years; longer than she has been Protestant, and very much longer than she has been industrial. What was meant by being Roman it is necessary in a few lines to say, or no sense can be made of what happened after, especially of what happened immediately after. Being Roman did *not* mean being subject, in the sense that one savage tribe will enslave another, or in the sense that the cynical politicians of recent times watched with a horrible hopefulness for the evanescence of the Irish. Both conquerors and conquered were heathen, and both had the institutions which seem to us to give an inhumanity to heathenism: the triumph, the slave-market, the lack of all the sensitive nationalism of modern history. But the Roman Empire did not destroy nations; if anything, it created them. Britons were not originally proud of being Britons; but they were proud of being Romans. The Roman steel was at least as much a magnet as a sword. In truth it was rather a round mirror of steel, in which every people came to see itself. For Rome as Rome the very smallness of the civic origin was a warrant for the largeness of the civic experiment. Rome itself obviously could not rule the world, any more than Rutland. I mean it could not rule the other races as the Spartans ruled the Helots or the Americans ruled the negroes. A machine so huge had to be human; it had to have a handle that fitted any man’s hand. The Roman Empire necessarily became less Roman as it became more of an Empire; until not very long after Rome gave conquerors to Britain, Britain was giving emperors to Rome. Out of Britain, as the Britons boasted, came at length the great Empress Helena, who was the mother of Constantine. And it was Constantine, as all men know, who first nailed up that proclamation which all after generations have in truth been struggling either to protect or to tear down.

About that revolution no man has ever been able to be impartial. The present writer will make no idle pretence of being so. That it was the most revolutionary of all revolutions, since it identified the dead body on a servile gibbet with the fatherhood in the skies, has long been a commonplace without ceasing to be a paradox. But there is another historic element that must also be realized. Without saying anything more of its tremendous essence, it is very necessary to note why even pre-Christian Rome was regarded as something mystical for long afterwards by all European men. The extreme view of it was held, perhaps, by Dante; but it pervaded mediævalism, and therefore still haunts modernity. Rome was regarded as Man, mighty, though fallen, because it was the utmost that Man had done. It was divinely necessary that the Roman Empire should succeed — if only that it might fail. Hence the school of Dante implied the paradox that the Roman soldiers killed Christ, not only by right, but even by divine right. That mere law might fail at its highest test it had to be real law, and not mere military lawlessness. Therefore God worked by Pilate as by Peter. Therefore the mediæval poet is eager to show that Roman government was simply good government, and not a usurpation. For it was the whole point of the Christian revolution to maintain that in this, good government was as bad as bad. Even good government was not good enough to know God among the thieves. This is not only generally important as involving a colossal change in the conscience; the loss of the whole heathen repose in the complete sufficiency of the city or the state. It made a sort of eternal rule enclosing an eternal rebellion. It must be incessantly remembered through the first half of English history; for it is the whole meaning in the quarrel of the priests and kings.

The double rule of the civilization and the religion in one sense remained for centuries; and before its first misfortunes came it must be conceived as substantially the same everywhere. And however it began it largely ended in equality. Slavery certainly existed, as it had in the most democratic states of ancient times. Harsh officialism certainly existed, as it exists in the most democratic states of modern times. But there was nothing of what we mean in modern times by aristocracy, still less of what we mean by racial domination. In so far as any change was passing over that society with its two levels of equal citizens and equal slaves, it was only the slow growth of the power of the Church at the expense of the power of the Empire. Now it is important to grasp that the great exception to equality, the institution of

Slavery, was slowly modified by both causes. It was weakened both by the weakening of the Empire and by the strengthening of the Church.

Slavery was for the Church not a difficulty of doctrine, but a strain on the imagination. Aristotle and the pagan sages who had defined the servile or “useful” arts, had regarded the slave as a tool, an axe to cut wood or whatever wanted cutting. The Church did not denounce the cutting; but she felt as if she was cutting glass with a diamond. She was haunted by the memory that the diamond is so much more precious than the glass. So Christianity could not settle down into the pagan simplicity that the man was made for the work, when the work was so much less immortally momentous than the man. At about this stage of a history of England there is generally told the anecdote of a pun of Gregory the Great; and this is perhaps the true point of it. By the Roman theory the barbarian bondmen were meant to be useful. The saint’s mysticism was moved at finding them ornamental; and “Non Angli sed Angeli” meant more nearly “Not slaves, but souls.” It is to the point, in passing, to note that in the modern country most collectively Christian, Russia, the serfs were always referred to as “souls.” The great Pope’s phrase, hackneyed as it is, is perhaps the first glimpse of the golden halos in the best Christian Art. Thus the Church, with whatever other faults, worked of her own nature towards greater social equality; and it is a historical error to suppose that the Church hierarchy worked with aristocracies, or was of a kind with them. It was an inversion of aristocracy; in the ideal of it, at least, the last were to be first. The Irish bull that “One man is as good as another and a great deal better” contains a truth, like many contradictions; a truth that was the link between Christianity and citizenship. Alone of all superiors, the saint does not depress the human dignity of others. He is not conscious of his superiority to them; but only more conscious of his inferiority than they are.

But while a million little priests and monks like mice were already nibbling at the bonds of the ancient servitude, another process was going on, which has here been called the weakening of the Empire. It is a process which is to this day very difficult to explain. But it affected all the institutions of all the provinces, especially the institution of Slavery. But of all the provinces its effect was heaviest in Britain, which lay on or beyond the borders. The case of Britain, however, cannot possibly be considered alone. The first half of English history has been made quite unmeaning in the schools by the attempt to tell it without reference to that corporate

Christendom in which it took part and pride. I fully accept the truth in Mr. Kipling’s question of “What can they know of England who only England know?” and merely differ from the view that they will best broaden their minds by the study of Wagga-Wagga and Timbuctoo. It is therefore necessary, though very difficult, to frame in few words some idea of what happened to the whole European race.

Rome itself, which had made all that strong world, was the weakest thing in it. The centre had been growing fainter and fainter, and now the centre disappeared. Rome had as much freed the world as ruled it, and now she could rule no more. Save for the presence of the Pope and his constantly increasing supernatural prestige, the eternal city became like one of her own provincial towns. A loose localism was the result rather than any conscious intellectual mutiny. There was anarchy, but there was no rebellion. For rebellion must have a principle, and therefore (for those who can think) an authority. Gibbon called his great pageant of prose “The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.” The Empire did decline, but it did not fall. It remains to this hour.

By a process very much more indirect even than that of the Church, this decentralization and drift also worked against the slave-state of antiquity. The localism did indeed produce that choice of territorial chieftains which came to be called Feudalism, and of which we shall speak later. But the direct possession of man by man the same localism tended to destroy; though this negative influence upon it bears no kind of proportion to the positive influence of the Catholic Church. The later pagan slavery, like our own industrial labour which increasingly resembles it, was worked on a larger and larger scale; and it was at last too large to control. The bondman found the visible Lord more distant than the new invisible one. The slave became the serf; that is, he could be shut in, but not shut out. When once he belonged to the land, it could not be long before the land belonged to him. Even in the old and rather fictitious language of chattel slavery, there is here a difference. It is the difference between a man being a chair and a man being a house. Canute might call for his throne; but if he wanted his throne-room he must go and get it himself. Similarly, he could tell his slave to run, but he could only tell his serf to stay. Thus the two slow changes of the time both tended to transform the tool into a man. His status began to have roots; and whatever has roots will have rights.

What the decline did involve everywhere was decivilization; the loss of letters, of laws, of roads and means of communication, the exaggeration of local colour into caprice. But on the edges of the Empire this decivilization became a definite barbarism, owing to the nearness of wild neighbours who were ready to destroy as deafly and blindly as things are destroyed by fire. Save for the lurid and apocalyptic locust-flight of the Huns, it is perhaps an exaggeration to talk, even in those darkest ages, of a deluge of the barbarians; at least when we are speaking of the old civilization as a whole. But a deluge of barbarians is not entirely an exaggeration of what happened on some of the borders of the Empire; of such edges of the known world as we began by describing in these pages. And on the extreme edge of the world lay Britain.

It may be true, though there is little proof of it, that the Roman civilization itself was thinner in Britain than in the other provinces; but it was a very civilized civilization. It gathered round the great cities like York and Chester and London; for the cities are older than the counties, and indeed older even than the countries. These were connected by a skeleton of great roads which were and are the bones of Britain. But with the weakening of Rome the bones began to break under barbarian pressure, coming at first from the north; from the Picts who lay beyond Agricola’s boundary in what is now the Scotch Lowlands. The whole of this bewildering time is full of temporary tribal alliances, generally mercenary; of barbarians paid to come on or barbarians paid to go away. It seems certain that in this welter Roman Britain bought help from ruder races living about that neck of Denmark where is now the duchy of Schleswig. Having been chosen only to fight somebody they naturally fought anybody; and a century of fighting followed, under the trampling of which the Roman pavement was broken into yet smaller pieces. It is perhaps permissible to disagree with the historian Green when he says that no spot should be more sacred to modern Englishmen than the neighbourhood of Ramsgate, where the Schleswig people are supposed to have landed; or when he suggests that their appearance is the real beginning of our island story. It would be rather more true to say that it was nearly, though prematurely, the end of it.

III

THE AGE OF LEGENDS

We should be startled if we were quietly reading a prosaic modern novel, and somewhere in the middle it turned without warning into a fairy tale. We should be surprised if one of the spinsters in *Cranford*, after tidily sweeping the room with a broom, were to fly away on a broomstick. Our attention would be arrested if one of Jane Austen’s young ladies who had just met a dragoon were to walk a little further and meet a dragon. Yet something very like this extraordinary transition takes place in British history at the end of the purely Roman period. We have to do with rational and almost mechanical accounts of encampment and engineering, of a busy bureaucracy and occasional frontier wars, quite modern in their efficiency and inefficiency; and then all of a sudden we are reading of wandering bells and wizard lances, of wars against men as tall as trees or as short as toadstools. The soldier of civilization is no longer fighting with Goths but with goblins; the land becomes a labyrinth of faërie towns unknown to history; and scholars can suggest but cannot explain how a Roman ruler or a Welsh chieftain towers up in the twilight as the awful and unbegotten Arthur. The scientific age comes first and the mythological age after it. One working example, the echoes of which lingered till very late in English literature, may serve to sum up the contrast. The British state which was found by Cæsar was long believed to have been founded by Brutus. The contrast between the one very dry discovery and the other very fantastic foundation has something decidedly comic about it; as if Cæsar’s “Et tu, Brute,” might be translated, “What, *you* here?” But in one respect the fable is quite as important as the fact. They both testify to the reality of the Roman foundation of our insular society, and show that even the stories that seem prehistoric are seldom pre-Roman. When England is Elfland, the elves are not the Angles. All the phrases that can be used as clues through that tangle of traditions are more or less Latin phrases. And in all our speech there was no word more Roman than “romance.”

The Roman legions left Britain in the fourth century. This did not mean that the Roman civilization left it; but it did mean that the civilization lay far more open both to admixture and attack. Christianity had almost certainly come to Britain, not indeed otherwise than by the routes established by Rome, but certainly long before the official Roman mission of Gregory the Great. It had certainly been largely swamped by later heathen invasions of the undefended coasts. It may then rationally be urged that the hold both of the Empire and its new religion were here weaker than elsewhere, and that the description of the general civilization in the last chapter is proportionately irrelevant. This, however, is not the chief truth of the matter.

There is one fundamental fact which must be understood of the whole of this period. Yet a modern man must very nearly turn his mind upside down to understand it. Almost every modern man has in his head an association between freedom and the future. The whole culture of our time has been full of the notion of "A Good Time Coming." Now the whole culture of the Dark Ages was full of the notion of "A Good Time Going." They looked backwards to old enlightenment and forwards to new prejudices. In our time there has come a quarrel between faith and hope — which perhaps must be healed by charity. But they were situated otherwise. They hoped — but it may be said that they hoped for yesterday. All the motives that make a man a progressive now made a man a conservative then. The more he could keep of the past the more he had of a fair law and a free state; the more he gave way to the future the more he must endure of ignorance and privilege. All we call reason was one with all we call reaction. And this is the clue which we must carry with us through the lives of all the great men of the Dark Ages; of Alfred, of Bede, of Dunstan. If the most extreme modern Republican were put back in that period he would be an equally extreme Papist or even Imperialist. For the Pope was what was left of the Empire; and the Empire what was left of the Republic.

We may compare the man of that time, therefore, to one who has left free cities and even free fields behind him, and is forced to advance towards a forest. And the forest is the fittest metaphor, not only because it was really that wild European growth cloven here and there by the Roman roads, but also because there has always been associated with forests another idea which increased as the Roman order decayed. The idea of the forests was the idea of enchantment. There was a notion of things being double or different from themselves, of beasts behaving like men and not merely, as modern wits would say, of men behaving like beasts. But it is precisely here that it is most necessary to remember that an age of reason had preceded the age of magic. The central pillar which has sustained the storied house of our imagination ever since has been the idea of the civilized knight amid the savage enchantments; the adventures of a man still sane in a world gone mad.

The next thing to note in the matter is this: that in this barbaric time none of the *heroes* are barbaric. They are only heroes if they are anti-barbaric. Men real or mythical, or more probably both, became omnipresent like gods among the people, and forced themselves into the faintest memory and the shortest record, exactly in proportion as they had mastered the heathen madness of the time and preserved the Christian rationality that had come from Rome. Arthur has his name because he killed the heathen; the heathen who killed him have no names at all. Englishmen who know nothing of English history, but less than nothing of Irish history, have heard somehow or other of Brian Boru, though they spell it Boroo and seem to be under the impression that it is a joke. It is a joke the subtlety of which they would never have been able to enjoy, if King Brian had not broken the heathen in Ireland at the great Battle of Clontarf. The ordinary English reader would never have heard of Olaf of Norway if he had not “preached the Gospel with his sword”; or of the Cid if he had not fought against the Crescent. And though Alfred the Great seems to have deserved his title even as a personality, he was not so great as the work he had to do.

But the paradox remains that Arthur is more real than Alfred. For the age is the age of legends. Towards these legends most men adopt by instinct a sane attitude; and, of the two, credulity is certainly much more sane than incredulity. It does not much matter whether most of the stories are true; and (as in such cases as Bacon and Shakespeare) to realize that the question does not matter is the first step towards answering it correctly. But before the reader dismisses anything like an attempt to tell the earlier history of the country by its legends, he will do well to keep two principles in mind, both of them tending to correct the crude and very thoughtless scepticism which has made this part of the story so sterile. The nineteenth-century historians went on the curious principle of dismissing all people of whom tales are told, and concentrating upon people of whom nothing is told. Thus, Arthur is made utterly impersonal because all legends are lies, but somebody of the type of Hengist is made quite an important personality, merely because nobody thought him important enough to lie about. Now this is to reverse all common sense. A great many witty sayings are attributed to Talleyrand which were really said by somebody else. But they would not be so attributed if Talleyrand had been a fool, still less if he had been a fable. That fictitious stories are told about a person is, nine times out of ten, extremely good evidence that there was somebody to tell them about. Indeed some allow that marvellous things were done, and that there may have been a man named Arthur at the time in which they were done; but here, so far as I am concerned, the distinction becomes rather dim. I do not understand the attitude which holds that there was an Ark and a man named Noah, but cannot believe in the existence of Noah's Ark.

The other fact to be remembered is that scientific research for the last few years has worked steadily in the direction of confirming and not dissipating the legends of the populace. To take only the obvious instance, modern excavators with modern spades have found a solid stone labyrinth in Crete, like that associated with the Minataur, which was conceived as being as cloudy a fable as the Chimera. To most people this would have seemed quite as frantic as finding the roots of Jack's Beanstalk or the skeletons in Bluebeard's cupboard, yet it is simply the fact. Finally, a truth is to be remembered which scarcely ever is remembered in estimating the past. It is the paradox that the past is always present: yet it is not what was, but whatever seems to have been; for all the past is a part of faith. What did they believe of their fathers? In this matter new discoveries are useless because they are new. We may find men wrong in what they thought they were, but we cannot find them wrong in what they thought they thought. It is therefore very practical to put in a few words, if possible, something of what a man of these islands in the Dark Ages would have said about his ancestors and his inheritance. I will attempt here to put some of the simpler things in their order of importance as he would have seen them; and if we are to understand our fathers who first made this country anything like itself, it is most important that we should remember that if this was not their real past, it was their real memory.

After that blessed crime, as the wit of mystics called it, which was for these men hardly second to the creation of the world, St. Joseph of Arimathea, one of the few followers of the new religion who seem to have been wealthy, set sail as a missionary, and after long voyages came to that litter of little islands which seemed to the men of the Mediterranean something like the last clouds of the sunset. He came up upon the western and wilder side of that wild and western land, and made his way to a valley which through all the oldest records is called Avalon. Something of rich rains and warmth in its westland meadows, or something in some lost pagan traditions about it, made it persistently regarded as a kind of Earthly Paradise. Arthur, after being slain at Lyonesse, is carried here, as if to heaven. Here the pilgrim planted his staff in the soil; and it took root as a tree that blossoms on Christmas Day.

A mystical materialism marked Christianity from its birth; the very soul of it was a body. Among the stoical philosophies and oriental negations that were its first foes it fought fiercely and particularly for a supernatural freedom to cure concrete maladies by concrete substances. Hence the scattering of relics was everywhere like the scattering of seed. All who took their mission from the divine tragedy bore tangible fragments which became the germs of churches and cities. St. Joseph carried the cup which held the wine of the Last Supper and the blood of the Crucifixion to that shrine in Avalon which we now call Glastonbury; and it became the heart of a whole universe of legends and romances, not only for Britain but for Europe. Throughout this tremendous and branching tradition it is called the Holy Grail. The vision of it was especially the reward of that ring of powerful paladins whom King Arthur feasted at a Round Table, a symbol of heroic comradeship such as was afterwards imitated or invented by mediæval knighthood. Both the cup and the table are of vast importance emblematically in the psychology of the chivalric experiment. The idea of a round table is not merely universality but equality. It has in it, modified of course, by other tendencies to differentiation, the same idea that exists in the very word “peers,” as given to the knights of Charlemagne. In this the Round Table is as Roman as the round arch, which might also serve as a type; for instead of being one barbaric rock merely rolled on the others, the king was rather the keystone of an arch. But to this tradition of a level of dignity was added something unearthly that was from Rome, but not of it; the privilege that inverted all privileges; the glimpse of heaven which seemed almost as capricious as fairyland; the flying chalice which was veiled from the highest of all the heroes, and which appeared to one knight who was hardly more than a child.

Rightly or wrongly, this romance established Britain for after centuries as a country with a chivalrous past. Britain had been a mirror of universal knighthood. This fact, or fancy, is of colossal import in all ensuing affairs, especially the affairs of barbarians. These and numberless other local legends are indeed for us buried by the forests of popular fancies that have grown out of them. It is all the harder for the serious modern mind because our fathers felt at home with these tales, and therefore took liberties with them. Probably the rhyme which runs,

“When good King Arthur ruled this land
He was a noble king,
He stole three pecks of barley meal,”

is much nearer the true mediæval note than the aristocratic stateliness of Tennyson. But about all these grotesques of the popular fancy there is one last thing to be remembered. It must especially be remembered by those who would dwell exclusively on documents, and take no note of tradition at all. Wild as would be the results of credulity concerning all the old wives’ tales, it would not be so wild as the errors that can arise from trusting to written evidence when there is not enough of it. Now the whole written evidence for the first parts of our history would go into a small book. A very few details are mentioned, and none are explained. A fact thus standing alone, without the key of contemporary thought, may be very much more misleading than any fable. To know what word an archaic scribe wrote without being sure of what thing he meant, may produce a result that is literally mad. Thus, for instance, it would be unwise to accept literally the tale that St. Helena was not only a native of Colchester, but was a daughter of Old King Cole. But it would not be very unwise; not so unwise as some things that are deduced from documents. The natives of Colchester certainly did honour to St. Helena, and might have had a king named Cole. According to the more serious story, the saint’s father was an innkeeper; and the only recorded action of Cole is well within the resources of that calling. It would not be nearly so unwise as to deduce from the written word, as some critic of the future may do, that the natives of Colchester were oysters.

IV

THE DEFEAT OF THE BARBARIANS

It is a quaint accident that we employ the word “short-sighted” as a condemnation; but not the word “long-sighted,” which we should probably use, if at all, as a compliment. Yet the one is as much a malady of vision as the other. We rightly say, in rebuke of a small-minded modernity, that it is very short-sighted to be indifferent to all that is historic. But it is as disastrously long-sighted to be interested only in what is prehistoric. And this disaster has befallen a large proportion of the learned who grope in the darkness of unrecorded epochs for the roots of their favourite race or races. The wars, the enslavements, the primitive marriage customs, the colossal migrations and massacres upon which their theories repose, are no part of history or even of legend. And rather than trust with entire simplicity to these it would be infinitely wiser to trust to legend of the loosest and most local sort. In any case, it is as well to record even so simple a conclusion as that what is prehistoric is unhistorical.

But there is another way in which common sense can be brought to the criticism of some prodigious racial theories. To employ the same figure, suppose the scientific historians explain the historic centuries in terms of a prehistoric division between short-sighted and long-sighted men. They could cite their instances and illustrations. They would certainly explain the curiosity of language I mentioned first, as showing that the short-sighted were the conquered race, and their name therefore a term of contempt. They could give us very graphic pictures of the rude tribal war. They could show how the long-sighted people were always cut to pieces in hand-to-hand struggles with axe and knife; until, with the invention of bows and arrows, the advantage veered to the long-sighted, and their enemies were shot down in droves. I could easily write a ruthless romance about it, and still more easily a ruthless anthropological theory. According to that thesis which refers all moral to material changes, they could explain the tradition that old people grow conservative in politics by the well-known fact that old people grow more long-sighted. But I think there might be one thing about this theory which would stump us, and might even, if it be possible, stump them. Suppose it were pointed out that through all the three thousand years of recorded history, abounding in literature of every conceivable kind, there was not so much as a mention of the oculist question for which all had been dared and done. Suppose not one of the living or dead languages of mankind had so much as a word for “long-sighted” or “short-sighted.” Suppose, in short, the question that had torn the whole world in two was never even asked at all, until some spectacle-maker suggested it somewhere about 1750. In that case I think we should find it hard to believe that this physical difference had really played so fundamental a part in human history. And that is exactly the case with the physical difference between the Celts, the Teutons and the Latins.

I know of no way in which fair-haired people can be prevented from falling in love with dark-haired people; and I do not believe that whether a man was long-headed or round-headed ever made much difference to any one who felt inclined to break his head. To all mortal appearance, in all mortal records and experience, people seem to have killed or spared, married or refrained from marriage, made kings or made slaves, with reference to almost any other consideration except this one. There was the love of a valley or a village, a site or a family; there were enthusiasms for a prince and his hereditary office; there were passions rooted in locality, special emotions about sea-folk or mountain-folk; there were historic memories of a cause or an alliance; there was, more than all, the tremendous test of religion. But of a cause like that of the Celts or Teutons, covering half the earth, there was little or nothing. Race was not only never at any given moment a motive, but it was never even an excuse. The Teutons never had a creed; they never had a cause; and it was only a few years ago that they began even to have a cant.

The orthodox modern historian, notably Green, remarks on the singularity of Britain in being alone of all Roman provinces wholly cleared and repeopled by a Germanic race. He does not entertain, as an escape from the singularity of this event, the possibility that it never happened. In the same spirit he deals with the little that can be quoted of the Teutonic society. His ideal picture of it is completed in small touches which even an amateur can detect as dubious. Thus he will touch on the Teuton with a phrase like “the basis of their society was the free man”; and on the Roman with a phrase like “the mines, if worked by forced labour, must have been a source of endless oppression.” The simple fact being that the Roman and the Teuton both had slaves, he treats the Teuton free man as the only thing to be considered, not only then but now; and then goes out of his way to say that if the Roman treated his slaves badly, the slaves were badly treated. He expresses a “strange disappointment” that Gildas, the only British chronicler, does not describe the great Teutonic system. In the opinion of Gildas, a modification of that of Gregory, it was a case of *non Angli sed diaboli*. The modern Teutonist is “disappointed” that the contemporary authority saw nothing in his Teutons except wolves, dogs, and whelps from the kennel of barbarism. But it is at least faintly tenable that there was nothing else to be seen.

In any case when St. Augustine came to the largely barbarized land, with what may be called the second of the three great southern visitations which civilized these islands, he did not see any ethnological problems, whatever there may have been to be seen. With him or his converts the chain of literary testimony is taken up again; and we must look at the world as they saw it. He found a king ruling in Kent, beyond whose borders lay other kingdoms of about the same size, the kings of which were all apparently heathen. The names of these kings were mostly what we call Teutonic names; but those who write the almost entirely hagiological records did not say, and apparently did not ask, whether the populations were in this sense of unmixed blood. It is at least possible that, as on the Continent, the kings and courts were almost the only Teutonic element. The Christians found converts, they found patrons, they found persecutors; but they did not find Ancient Britons because they did not look for them; and if they moved among pure Anglo-Saxons they had not the gratification of knowing it. There was, indeed, what all history attests, a marked change of feeling towards the marches of Wales. But all history also attests that this is always found, apart from any difference in race, in the transition from the lowlands to the mountain country. But of all the things they found the thing that counts most in English history is this: that some of the kingdoms at least did correspond to genuine human divisions, which not only existed then but which exist now. Northumbria is still a truer thing than Northumberland. Sussex is still Sussex; Essex is still Essex. And that third Saxon kingdom whose name is not even to be found upon the map, the kingdom of Wessex, is called the West Country and is to-day the most real of them all.

The last of the heathen kingdoms to accept the cross was Mercia, which corresponds very roughly to what we call the Midlands. The unbaptized king, Penda, has even achieved a certain picturesqueness through this fact, and through the forays and furious ambitions which constituted the rest of his reputation; so much so that the other day one of those mystics who will believe anything but Christianity proposed to "continue the work of Penda" in Ealing: fortunately not on any large scale. What that prince believed or disbelieved it is now impossible and perhaps unnecessary to discover; but this last stand of his central kingdom is not insignificant. The isolation of the Mercian was perhaps due to the fact that Christianity grew from the eastern and western coasts. The eastern growth was, of course, the Augustinian mission, which had already made Canterbury the spiritual capital of the island. The western grew from whatever was left of the British Christianity. The two clashed, not in creed but in customs; and the Augustinians ultimately prevailed. But the work from the west had already been enormous. It is possible that some prestige went with the possession of Glastonbury, which was like a piece of the Holy Land; but behind Glastonbury there was an even grander and more impressive power. There irradiated to all Europe at that time the glory of the golden age of Ireland. There the Celts were the classics of Christian art, opened in the Book of Kels four hundred years before its time. There the baptism of the whole people had been a spontaneous popular festival which reads almost like a picnic; and thence came crowds of enthusiasts for the Gospel almost literally like men running with good news. This must be remembered through the development of that dark dual destiny that has bound us to Ireland: for doubts have been thrown on a national unity which was not from the first a political unity. But if Ireland was not one kingdom it was in reality one bishopric. Ireland was not converted but created by Christianity, as a stone church is created; and all its elements were gathered as under a garment, under the genius of St. Patrick. It was the more individual because the religion was mere religion, without the secular conveniences. Ireland was never Roman, and it was always Romanist.

But indeed this is, in a lesser degree, true of our more immediate subject. It is the paradox of this time that only the unworldly things had any worldly success. The politics are a nightmare; the kings are unstable and the kingdoms shifting; and we are really never on solid ground except on consecrated ground. The material ambitions are not only always unfruitful but nearly always unfulfilled. The castles are all castles in the air; it is only the churches that are built on the ground. The visionaries are the only practical men, as in that extraordinary thing, the monastery, which was, in many ways, to be the key of our history. The time was to come when it was to be rooted out of our country with a curious and careful violence; and the modern English reader has therefore a very feeble idea of it and hence of the ages in which it worked. Even in these pages a word or two about its primary nature is therefore quite indispensable.

In the tremendous testament of our religion there are present certain ideals that seem wilder than impieties, which have in later times produced wild sects professing an almost inhuman perfection on certain points; as in the Quakers who renounce the right of self-defence, or the Communists who refuse any personal possessions. Rightly or wrongly, the Christian Church had from the first dealt with these visions as being special spiritual adventures which were to the adventurous. She reconciled them with natural human life by calling them specially good, without admitting that the neglect of them was necessarily bad. She took the view that it takes all sorts to make a world, even the religious world; and used the man who chose to go without arms, family, or property as a sort of exception that proved the rule. Now the interesting fact is that he really did prove it. This madman who would not mind his own business becomes the business man of the age. The very word “monk” is a revolution, for it means solitude and came to mean community — one might call it sociability. What happened was that this communal life became a sort of reserve and refuge behind the individual life; a hospital for every kind of hospitality. We shall see later how this same function of the common life was given to the common land. It is hard to find an image for it in individualist times; but in private life we most of us know the friend of the family who helps it by being outside, like a fairy godmother. It is not merely flippant to say that monks and nuns stood to mankind as a sort of sanctified league of aunts and uncles. It is a commonplace that they did everything that nobody else would do; that the abbeys kept the world’s diary, faced the plagues of all flesh, taught the first technical arts, preserved the pagan literature, and above all, by a perpetual patchwork of charity, kept the poor from the most distant sight of their modern despair. We still find it necessary to have a reserve of philanthropists, but we trust it to men who have made themselves rich, not to men who have made themselves poor. Finally, the abbots and abbesses were elective. They introduced representative government, unknown to ancient democracy, and in itself a semi-sacramental idea. If we could look from the outside at our own institutions, we should see that the very notion of turning a thousand men into one large man walking to Westminster is not only an act or faith, but a fairy tale. The fruitful and effective history of Anglo-Saxon England would be almost entirely a history of its monasteries. Mile by mile, and almost man by man, they taught and enriched the land. And then, about the beginning of the ninth century, there came a turn, as of the twinkling of an eye, and it seemed that all their work was in vain.

That outer world of universal anarchy that lay beyond Christendom heaved another of its colossal and almost cosmic waves and swept everything away. Through all the eastern gates, left open, as it were, by the first barbarian auxiliaries, burst a plague of seafaring savages from Denmark and Scandinavia; and the recently baptized barbarians were again flooded by the unbaptized. All this time, it must be remembered, the actual central mechanism of Roman government had been running down like a clock. It was really a race between the driving energy of the missionaries on the edges of the Empire and the galloping paralysis of the city at the centre. In the ninth century the heart had stopped before the hands could bring help to it. All the monastic civilization which had grown up in Britain under a vague Roman protection perished unprotected. The toy kingdoms of the quarrelling Saxons were smashed like sticks; Guthrum, the pirate chief, slew St. Edmund, assumed the crown of East England, took tribute from the panic of Mercia, and towered in menace over Wessex, the last of the Christian lands. The story that follows, page after page, is only the story of its despair and its destruction. The story is a string of Christian defeats alternated with victories so vain as to be more desolate than defeats. It is only in one of these, the fine but fruitless victory at Ashdown, that we first see in the dim struggle, in a desperate and secondary part, the figure who has given his title to the ultimate turning of the tide. For the victor was not then the king, but only the king’s younger brother. There is, from the first, something humble and even accidental about Alfred. He was a great understudy. The interest of his early life lies in this: that he combined an almost commonplace coolness, and readiness for the ceaseless small bargains and shifting combinations of all that period, with the flaming patience of saints in times of persecution. While he would dare anything for the faith, he would bargain in anything except the faith. He was a conqueror, with no ambition; an author only too glad to be a translator; a simple, concentrated, wary man, watching the fortunes of one thing, which he piloted both boldly and cautiously, and which he saved at last.

He had disappeared after what appeared to be the final heathen triumph and settlement, and is supposed to have lurked like an outlaw in a lonely islet in the impenetrable marshlands of the Parret; towards those wild western lands to which aboriginal races are held to have been driven by fate itself. But Alfred, as he himself wrote in words that are his challenge to the period, held that a Christian man was unconcerned with fate. He began once more to draw to him the bows and spears of the broken levies of the western shires, especially the men of Somerset; and in the spring of 878 he flung them at the lines before the fenced camp of the victorious Danes at Ethandune. His sudden assault was as successful as that at Ashdown, and it was followed by a siege which was successful in a different and very definite sense. Guthrum, the conqueror of England, and all his important supports, were here penned behind their palisades, and when at last they surrendered the Danish conquest had come to an end. Guthrum was baptized, and the Treaty of Wedmore secured the clearance of Wessex. The modern reader will smile at the baptism, and turn with greater interest to the terms of the treaty. In this acute attitude the modern reader will be vitally and hopelessly wrong. He must support the tedium of frequent references to the religious element in this part of English history, for without it there would never have been any English history at all. And nothing could clinch this truth more than the case of the Danes. In all the facts that followed, the baptism of Guthrum is really much more important than the Treaty of Wedmore. The treaty itself was a compromise, and even as such did not endure; a century afterwards a Danish king like Canute was really ruling in England. But though the Dane got the crown, he did not get rid of the cross. It was precisely Alfred’s religious exaction that remained unalterable. And Canute himself is actually now only remembered by men as a witness to the futility of merely pagan power; as the king who put his own crown upon the image of Christ, and solemnly surrendered to heaven the Scandinavian empire of the sea.

V

ST. EDWARD AND THE NORMAN KINGS

The reader may be surprised at the disproportionate importance given to the name which stands first in the title of this chapter. I put it there as the best way of emphasizing, at the beginning of what we may call the practical part of our history, an elusive and rather strange thing. It can only be described as the strength of the weak kings.

It is sometimes valuable to have enough imagination to unlearn as well as to learn. I would ask the reader to forget his reading and everything that he learnt at school, and consider the English monarchy as it would then appear to him. Let him suppose that his acquaintance with the ancient kings has only come to him as it came to most men in simpler times, from nursery tales, from the names of places, from the dedications of churches and charities, from the tales in the tavern, and the tombs in the churchyard. Let us suppose such a person going upon some open and ordinary English way, such as the Thames valley to Windsor, or visiting some old seats of culture, such as Oxford or Cambridge. One of the first things, for instance, he would find would be Eton, a place transformed, indeed, by modern aristocracy, but still enjoying its mediæval wealth and remembering its mediæval origin. If he asked about that origin, it is probable that even a public schoolboy would know enough history to tell him that it was founded by Henry VI. If he went to Cambridge and looked with his own eyes for the college chapel which artistically towers above all others like a cathedral, he would probably ask about it, and be told it was King's College. If he asked which king, he would again be told Henry VI. If he then went into the library and looked up Henry VI. in an encyclopædia, he would find that the legendary giant, who had left these gigantic works behind him, was in history an almost invisible pigmy. Amid the varying and contending numbers of a great national quarrel, he is the only cipher. The contending factions carry him about like a bale of goods. His desires do not seem to be even ascertained, far less satisfied. And yet his real desires are satisfied in stone and marble, in oak and gold, and remain through all the maddest revolutions of modern England, while all the ambitions of those who dictated to him have gone away like dust upon the wind.

Edward the Confessor, like Henry VI., was not only an invalid but almost an idiot. It is said that he was wan like an albino, and that the awe men had of him was partly that which is felt for a monster of mental deficiency. His Christian charity was of the kind that borders on anarchism, and the stories about him recall the Christian fools in the great anarchic novels of Russia. Thus he is reported to have covered the retreat of a common thief upon the naked plea that the thief needed things more than he did. Such a story is in strange contrast to the claims made for other kings, that theft was impossible in their dominions. Yet the two types of king are afterwards praised by the same people; and the really arresting fact is that the incompetent king is praised the more highly of the two. And exactly as in the case of the last Lancastrian, we find that the praise has really a very practical meaning in the long run. When we turn from the destructive to the constructive side of the Middle Ages we find that the village idiot is the inspiration of cities and civic systems. We find his seal upon the sacred foundations of Westminster Abbey. We find the Norman victors in the hour of victory bowing before his very ghost. In the Tapestry of Bayeux, woven by Norman hands to justify the Norman cause and glorify the Norman triumph, nothing is claimed for the Conqueror beyond his conquest and the plain personal tale that excuses it, and the story abruptly ends with the breaking of the Saxon line at Battle. But over the bier of the decrepit zany, who died without striking a blow, over this and this alone, is shown a hand coming out of heaven, and declaring the true approval of the power that rules the world.

The Confessor, therefore, is a paradox in many ways, and in none more than in the false reputation of the “English” of that day. As I have indicated, there is some unreality in talking about the Anglo-Saxon at all. The Anglo-Saxon is a mythical and straddling giant, who has presumably left one footprint in England and the other in Saxony. But there was a community, or rather group of communities, living in Britain before the Conquest under what we call Saxon names, and of a blood probably more Germanic and certainly less French than the same communities after the Conquest. And they have a modern reputation which is exactly the reverse of their real one. The value of the Anglo-Saxon is exaggerated, and yet his virtues are ignored. Our Anglo-Saxon blood is supposed to be the practical part of us; but as a fact the Anglo-Saxons were more hopelessly unpractical than any

Celt. Their racial influence is supposed to be healthy, or, what many think the same thing, heathen. But as a fact these “Teutons” were the mystics. The Anglo-Saxons did one thing, and one thing only, thoroughly well, as they were fitted to do it thoroughly well. They christened England. Indeed, they christened it before it was born. The one thing the Angles obviously and certainly could not manage to do was to become English. But they did become Christians, and indeed showed a particular disposition to become monks. Moderns who talk vaguely of them as our hardy ancestors never do justice to the real good they did us, by thus opening our history, as it were, with the fable of an age of innocence, and beginning all our chronicles, as so many chronicles began, with the golden initial of a saint. By becoming monks they served us in many very valuable and special capacities, but not notably, perhaps, in the capacity of ancestors.

Along the northern coast of France, where the Confessor had passed his early life, lay the lands of one of the most powerful of the French king’s vassals, the Duke of Normandy. He and his people, who constitute one of the most picturesque and curious elements in European history, are confused for most of us by irrelevant controversies which would have been entirely unintelligible to them. The worst of these is the inane fiction which gives the name of Norman to the English aristocracy during its great period of the last three hundred years. Tennyson informed a lady of the name of Vere de Vere that simple faith was more valuable than Norman blood. But the historical student who can believe in Lady Clara as the possessor of the Norman blood must be himself a large possessor of the simple faith. As a matter of fact, as we shall see also when we come to the political scheme of the Normans, the notion is the negation of their real importance in history. The fashionable fancy misses what was best in the Normans, exactly as we have found it missing what was best in the Saxons. One does not know whether to thank the Normans more for appearing or for disappearing. Few philanthropists ever became so rapidly anonymous. It is the great glory of the Norman adventurer that he threw himself heartily into his chance position; and had faith not only in his comrades, but in his subjects, and even in his enemies. He was loyal to the kingdom he had not yet made. Thus the Norman Bruce becomes a Scot; thus the descendant of the Norman Strongbow becomes an Irishman. No men less than Normans can be conceived as remaining as a superior caste until the present time. But this alien and adventurous loyalty in the Norman, which appears in these other national histories, appears most strongly of all in the history we have here to follow. The Duke of Normandy does become a real King of England; his claim through the Confessor, his election by the Council, even his symbolic handfuls of the soil of Sussex, these are not altogether empty forms. And though both phrases would be inaccurate, it is very much nearer the truth to call William the first of the English than to call Harold the last of them.

An indeterminate debate touching the dim races that mixed without record in that dim epoch, has made much of the fact that the Norman edges of France, like the East Anglian edges of England, were deeply penetrated by the Norse invasions of the ninth century; and that the ducal house of Normandy, with what other families we know not, can be traced back to a Scandinavian seed. The unquestionable power of captaincy and creative legislation which belonged to the Normans, whoever they were, may be connected reasonably enough with some infusion of fresh blood. But if the racial theorists press the point to a comparison of races, it can obviously only be answered by a study of the two types in separation. And it must surely be manifest that more civilizing power has since been shown by the French when untouched by Scandinavian blood than by the Scandinavians when untouched by French blood. As much fighting (and more ruling) was done by the Crusaders who were never Vikings as by the Vikings who were never Crusaders. But in truth there is no need of such invidious analysis; we may willingly allow a real value to the Scandinavian contribution to the French as to the English nationality, so long as we firmly understand the ultimate historic fact that the duchy of Normandy was about as Scandinavian as the town of Norwich. But the debate has another danger, in that it tends to exaggerate even the personal importance of the Norman. Many as were his talents as a master, he is in history the servant of other and wider things. The landing of Lanfranc is perhaps more of a date than the landing of William. And Lanfranc was an Italian — like Julius Cæsar. The Norman is not in history a mere wall, the rather brutal boundary of a mere empire. The Norman is a gate. He is like one of those gates which still remain as he made them, with round arch and rude pattern and stout supporting columns; and what entered by that gate was civilization. William of Falaise has in history a title much higher than that of Duke of Normandy or King of England. He was what Julius Cæsar was, and what St. Augustine was: he was the ambassador of Europe to Britain.

William asserted that the Confessor, in the course of that connection which followed naturally from his Norman education, had promised the English crown to the holder of the Norman dukedom. Whether he did or not we shall probably never know: it is not intrinsically impossible or even improbable. To blame the promise as unpatriotic, even if it was given, is to read duties defined at a much later date into the first feudal chaos; to make such blame positive and personal is like expecting the Ancient Britons to sing “Rule Britannia.” William further clinched his case by declaring that Harold, the principal Saxon noble and the most probable Saxon claimant, had, while enjoying the Duke’s hospitality after a shipwreck, sworn upon sacred relics not to dispute the Duke’s claim. About this episode also we must agree that we do not know; yet we shall be quite out of touch with the time if we say that we do not care. The element of sacrilege in the alleged perjury of Harold probably affected the Pope when he blessed a banner for William’s army; but it did not affect the Pope much more than it would have affected the people; and Harold’s people quite as much as William’s. Harold’s people presumably denied the fact; and their denial is probably the motive of the very marked and almost eager emphasis with which the Bayeux Tapestry asserts and reasserts the reality of the personal betrayal. There is here a rather arresting fact to be noted. A great part of this celebrated pictorial record is not concerned at all with the well-known historical events which we have only to note rapidly here. It does, indeed, dwell a little on the death of Edward; it depicts the difficulties of William’s enterprise in the felling of forests for shipbuilding, in the crossing of the Channel, and especially in the charge up the hill at Hastings, in which full justice is done to the destructive resistance of Harold’s army. But it was really after Duke William had disembarked and defeated Harold on the Sussex coast, that he did what is historically worthy to be called the Conquest. It is not until these later operations that we have the note of the new and scientific militarism from the Continent. Instead of marching upon London he marched round it; and crossing the Thames at Wallingford cut off the city from the rest of the country and compelled its surrender. He had himself elected king with all the forms that would have accompanied a peaceful succession to the Confessor, and after a brief return to Normandy took up the work of war again to bring all England under his crown. Marching through the snow, he laid waste the northern counties, seized Chester, and made rather than won a kingdom. These things are the foundations of historical England; but of these things the pictures woven in honour of his house tell us nothing. The Bayeux Tapestry may almost be said to stop before the Norman Conquest. But it tells in great detail the tale of some trivial raid into Brittany solely that Harold and William may appear as brothers in arms; and especially that William may be depicted in the very act of giving arms to Harold. And here again there is much more significance than a modern reader may fancy, in its bearing upon the new birth of that time and the ancient symbolism of arms. I have said that Duke William was a vassal of the King of France; and that phrase in its use and abuse is the key to the secular side of this epoch. William was indeed a most mutinous vassal, and a vein of such mutiny runs through his family fortunes: his sons Rufus and Henry I. disturbed him with internal ambitions antagonistic to his own. But it would be a blunder to allow such personal broils to obscure the system, which had indeed existed here before the Conquest, which clarified and confirmed it. That system we call Feudalism.

That Feudalism was the main mark of the Middle Ages is a commonplace of fashionable information; but it is of the sort that seeks the past rather in Wardour Street than Watling Street. For that matter, the very term “mediæval” is used for almost anything from Early English to Early Victorian. An eminent Socialist applied it to our armaments, which is like applying it to our aeroplanes. Similarly the just description of Feudalism, and of how far it was a part and how far rather an impediment in the main mediæval movement, is confused by current debates about quite modern things — especially that modern thing, the English squirearchy. Feudalism was very nearly the opposite of squirearchy. For it is the whole point of the squire that his ownership is absolute and is pacific. And it is the very definition of Feudalism that it was a tenure, and a tenure by military service. Men paid their rent in steel instead of gold, in spears and arrows against the enemies of their landlord. But even these landlords were not landlords in the modern sense; every one was practically as well as theoretically a tenant of the King; and even he often fell into a feudal inferiority to a Pope or an Emperor. To call it mere tenure by soldiering may seem a simplification; but indeed it is precisely here that it was not so simple as it seems. It is precisely a certain knot or enigma in the nature of Feudalism which makes half the struggle of European history, but especially English history.

There was a certain unique type of state and culture which we call mediæval, for want of a better word, which we see in the Gothic or the great Schoolmen. This thing in itself was above all things logical. Its very cult of authority was a thing of reason, as all men who can reason themselves instantly recognize, even if, like Huxley, they deny its premises or dislike its fruits. Being logical, it was very exact about who had the authority. Now Feudalism was not quite logical, and was never quite exact about who had the authority. Feudalism already flourished before the mediæval renascence began. It was, if not the forest the mediævals had to clear, at least the rude timber with which they had to build. Feudalism was a fighting growth of the Dark Ages before the Middle Ages; the age of barbarians resisted by semi-barbarians. I do not say this in disparagement of it. Feudalism was mostly a very human thing; the nearest contemporary name for it was homage, a word which almost means humanity. On the other hand, mediæval logic, never quite reconciled to it, could become in its extremes inhuman. It was often mere prejudice that protected men, and pure reason that burned them. The feudal units grew through the lively localism of the Dark Ages, when hills without roads shut in a valley like a garrison. Patriotism had to be parochial; for men had no country, but only a countryside. In such cases the lord grew larger than the king; but it bred not only a local lordship but a kind of local liberty. And it would be very inadvisable to ignore the freer element in Feudalism in English history. For it is the one kind of freedom that the English have had and held.

The knot in the system was something like this. In theory the King owned everything, like an earthly providence; and that made for despotism and “divine right,” which meant in substance a natural authority. In one aspect the King was simply the one lord anointed by the Church, that is recognized by the ethics of the age. But while there was more royalty in theory, there could be more rebellion in practice. Fighting was much more equal than in our age of munitions, and the various groups could arm almost instantly with bows from the forest or spears from the smith. Where men are military there is no militarism. But it is more vital that while the kingdom was in this sense one territorial army, the regiments of it were also kingdoms. The sub-units were also sub-loyalties. Hence the loyalist to his lord might be a rebel to his king; or the king be a demagogue delivering him from the lord. This tangle is responsible for the tragic passions about betrayal, as in the case of William and Harold; the alleged traitor who is always found to be recurrent, yet always felt to be exceptional. To break the tie was at once easy and terrible. Treason in the sense of rebellion was then really felt as treason in the sense of treachery, since it was desertion on a perpetual battlefield. Now, there was even more of this civil war in English than in other history, and the more local and less logical energy on the whole prevailed. Whether there was something in those island idiosyncracies, shapeless as sea-mists, with which this story began, or whether the Roman imprint had really been lighter than in Gaul, the feudal undergrowth prevented even a full attempt to build the *Civitas Dei*, or ideal mediæval state. What emerged was a compromise, which men long afterwards amused themselves by calling a constitution.

There are paradoxes permissible for the redressing of a bad balance in criticism, and which may safely even be emphasized so long as they are not isolated. One of these I have called at the beginning of this chapter the strength of the weak kings. And there is a complement of it, even in this crisis of the Norman mastery, which might well be called the weakness of the strong kings. William of Normandy succeeded immediately, he did not quite succeed ultimately; there was in his huge success a secret of failure that only bore fruit long after his death. It was certainly his single aim to simplify England into a popular autocracy, like that growing up in France; with that aim he scattered the feudal holdings in scraps, demanded a direct vow from the sub-vassals to himself, and used any tool against the barony, from the highest culture of the foreign ecclesiastics to the rudest relics of Saxon custom. But the very parallel of France makes the paradox startlingly apparent. It is a proverb that the first French kings were puppets; that the mayor of the palace was quite insolently the king of the king. Yet it is certain that the puppet became an idol; a popular idol of unparalleled power, before which all mayors and nobles bent or were broken. In France arose absolute government, the more because it was not precisely personal government. The King was already a thing — like the Republic. Indeed the mediæval Republics were rigid with divine right. In Norman England, perhaps, the government was too personal to be absolute. Anyhow, there is a real though recondite sense in which William the Conqueror was William the Conquered. When his two sons were dead, the whole country fell into a feudal chaos almost like that before the Conquest. In France the princes who had been slaves became something exceptional like priests; and one of them became a saint. But somehow our greatest kings were still barons; and by that very energy our barons became our kings.

VI

THE AGE OF THE CRUSADES

The last chapter began, in an apparent irrelevance, with the name of St. Edward; and this one might very well begin with the name of St. George. His first appearance, it is said, as a patron of our people, occurred at the instance of Richard Cœur de Lion during his campaign in Palestine; and this, as we shall see, really stands for a new England which might well have a new saint. But the Confessor is a character in English history; whereas St. George, apart from his place in martyrology as a Roman soldier, can hardly be said to be a character in any history. And if we wish to understand the noblest and most neglected of human revolutions, we can hardly get closer to it than by considering this paradox, of how much progress and enlightenment was represented by thus passing from a chronicle to a romance.

In any intellectual corner of modernity can be found such a phrase as I have just read in a newspaper controversy: “Salvation, like other good things, must not come from outside.” To call a spiritual thing external and not internal is the chief mode of modernist excommunication. But if our subject of study is mediæval and not modern, we must pit against this apparent platitude the very opposite idea. We must put ourselves in the posture of men who thought that almost every good thing came from outside — like good news. I confess that I am not impartial in my sympathies here; and that the newspaper phrase I quoted strikes me as a blunder about the very nature of life. I do not, in my private capacity, believe that a baby gets his best physical food by sucking his thumb; nor that a man gets his best moral food by sucking his soul, and denying its dependence on God or other good things. I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought; and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder. But this faith in receptiveness, and in respect for things outside oneself, need here do no more than help me in explaining what any version of this epoch ought in any case to explain. In nothing is the modern German more modern, or more mad, than in his dream of finding a German name for everything; eating his language, or in other words biting his tongue. And in nothing were the mediævals more free and sane than in their acceptance of names and emblems from outside their most beloved limits. The monastery would often not only take in the stranger but almost canonize him. A mere adventurer like Bruce was enthroned and thanked as if he had really come as a knight errant. And a passionately patriotic community more often than not had a foreigner for a patron saint. Thus crowds of saints were Irishmen, but St. Patrick was not an Irishman. Thus as the English gradually became a nation, they left the numberless Saxon saints in a sense behind them, passed over by comparison not only the sanctity of Edward but the solid fame of Alfred, and invoked a half mythical hero, striving in an eastern desert against an impossible monster.

That transition and that symbol stand for the Crusades. In their romance and reality they were the first English experience of learning, not only from the external, but the remote. England, like every Christian thing, had thriven on outer things without shame. From the roads of Cæsar to the churches of Lanfranc, it had sought its meat from God. But now the eagles were on the wing, scenting a more distant slaughter; they were seeking the strange things instead of receiving them. The English had stepped from acceptance to adventure, and the epic of their ships had begun. The scope of the great religious movement which swept England along with all the West would distend a book like this into huge disproportion, yet it would be much better to do so than to dismiss it in the distant and frigid fashion common in such short summaries. The inadequacy of our insular method in popular history is perfectly shown in the treatment of Richard Cœur de Lion. His tale is told with the implication that his departure for the Crusade was something like the escapade of a schoolboy running away to sea. It was, in this view, a pardonable or lovable prank; whereas in truth it was more like a responsible Englishman now going to the Front. Christendom was nearly one nation, and the Front was the Holy Land. That Richard himself was of an adventurous and even romantic temper is true, though it is not unreasonably romantic for a born soldier to do the work he does best. But the point of the argument against insular history is particularly illustrated here by the absence of a continental comparison. In this case we have only to step across the Straits of Dover to find the fallacy. Philip Augustus, Richard’s contemporary in France, had the name of a particularly cautious and coldly public-spirited statesman; yet Philip Augustus went on the same Crusade. The reason was, of course, that the Crusades were, for all thoughtful Europeans, things of the highest statesmanship and the purest public spirit.

Some six hundred years after Christianity sprang up in the East and swept westwards, another great faith arose in almost the same eastern lands and followed it like its gigantic shadow. Like a shadow, it was at once a copy and a contrary. We call it Islam, or the creed of the Moslems; and perhaps its most explanatory description is that it was the final flaming up of the accumulated Orientalisms, perhaps of the accumulated Hebraisms, gradually rejected as the Church grew more European, or as Christianity turned into Christendom. Its highest motive was a hatred of idols, and in its view Incarnation was itself an idolatry. The two things it persecuted were the idea of God being made flesh and of His being afterwards made wood or stone. A study of the questions smouldering in the track of the prairie fire of the Christian conversion favours the suggestion that this fanaticism against art or mythology was at once a development and a reaction from that conversion, a sort of minority report of the Hebraists. In this sense Islam was something like a Christian heresy. The early heresies had been full of mad reversals and evasions of the Incarnation, rescuing their Jesus from the reality of his body even at the expense of the sincerity of his soul. And the Greek Iconoclasts had poured into Italy, breaking the popular statues and denouncing the idolatry of the Pope, until routed, in a style sufficiently symbolic, by the sword of the father of Charlemagne. It was all these disappointed negations that took fire from the genius of Mahomet, and launched out of the burning lands a cavalry charge that nearly conquered the world. And if it be suggested that a note on such Oriental origins is rather remote from a history of England, the answer is that this book may, alas! contain many digressions, but that this is not a digression. It is quite peculiarly necessary to keep in mind that this Semite god haunted Christianity like a ghost; to remember it in every European corner, but especially in our corner. If any one doubts the necessity, let him take a walk to all the parish churches in England within a radius of thirty miles, and ask why this stone virgin is headless or that coloured glass is gone. He will soon learn that it was lately, and in his own lanes and homesteads, that the ecstasy of the deserts returned, and his bleak northern island was filled with the fury of the Iconoclasts.

It was an element in this sublime and yet sinister simplicity of Islam that it knew no boundaries. Its very home was homeless. For it was born in a sandy waste among nomads, and it went everywhere because it came from nowhere. But in the Saracens of the early Middle Ages this nomadic quality in Islam was masked by a high civilization, more scientific if less creatively artistic than that of contemporary Christendom. The Moslem monotheism was, or appeared to be, the more rationalist religion of the two. This rootless refinement was characteristically advanced in abstract things, of which a memory remains in the very name of algebra. In comparison the Christian civilization was still largely instinctive, but its instincts were very strong and very much the other way. It was full of local affections, which found form in that system of *fences* which runs like a pattern through everything mediæval, from heraldry to the holding of land. There was a shape and colour in all their customs and statutes which can be seen in all their tabards and escutcheons; something at once strict and gay. This is not a departure from the interest in external things, but rather a part of it. The very welcome they would often give to a stranger from beyond the wall was a recognition of the wall. Those who think their own life all-sufficient do not see its limit as a wall, but as the end of the world. The Chinese called the white man "a sky-breaker." The mediæval spirit loved its part in life as a part, not a whole; its charter for it came from something else. There is a joke about a Benedictine monk who used the common grace of *Benedictus benedicat*, whereupon the unlettered Franciscan triumphantly retorted *Franciscus Franciscat*. It is something of a parable of mediæval history; for if there were a verb Franciscare it would be an approximate description of what St. Francis afterwards did. But that more individual mysticism was only approaching its birth, and *Benedictus benedicat* is very precisely the motto of the earliest mediævalism. I mean that everything is blessed from beyond, by something which has in its turn been blessed from beyond again; only the blessed bless. But the point which is the clue to the Crusades is this: that for them the beyond was not the infinite, as in a modern religion. Every beyond was a place. The mystery of locality, with all its hold on the human heart, was as much present in the most ethereal things of Christendom as it was absent from the most practical things of Islam. England would derive a thing from France, France from Italy, Italy from Greece, Greece from Palestine, Palestine from Paradise. It was not merely that a yeoman of Kent would have his house hallowed by the priest of the parish church, which was confirmed by Canterbury, which was confirmed by Rome. Rome herself did not worship herself, as in the pagan age. Rome herself looked eastward to the mysterious cradle of her creed, to a land of which the very earth was called holy. And when she looked eastward for it she saw the face of Mahound. She saw standing in the place that was her earthly heaven a devouring giant out of the deserts, to whom all places were the same.

It has been necessary thus to pause upon the inner emotions of the Crusade, because the modern English reader is widely cut off from these particular feelings of his fathers; and the real quarrel of Christendom and Islam, the fire-baptism of the young nations, could not otherwise be seized in its unique character. It was nothing so simple as a quarrel between two men who both wanted Jerusalem. It was the much deadlier quarrel between one man who wanted it and another man who could not see why it was wanted. The Moslem, of course, had his own holy places; but he has never felt about them as Westerns can feel about a field or a roof-tree; he thought of the holiness as holy, not of the places as places. The austerity which forbade him imagery, the wandering war that forbade him rest, shut him off from all that was breaking out and blossoming in our local patriotisms; just as it has given the Turks an empire without ever giving them a nation.

Now, the effect of this adventure against a mighty and mysterious enemy was simply enormous in the transformation of England, as of all the nations that were developing side by side with England. Firstly, we learnt enormously from what the Saracen did. Secondly, we learnt yet more enormously from what the Saracen did not do. Touching some of the good things which we lacked, we were fortunately able to follow him. But in all the good things which he lacked, we were confirmed like adamant to defy him. It may be said that Christians never knew how right they were till they went to war with Moslems. At once the most obvious and the most representative reaction was the reaction which produced the best of what we call Christian Art; and especially those grotesques of Gothic architecture, which are not only alive but kicking. The East as an environment, as an impersonal glamour, certainly stimulated the Western mind, but stimulated it rather to break the Moslem commandment than to keep it. It was as if the Christian were impelled, like a caricaturist, to cover all that faceless ornament with faces; to give heads to all those headless serpents and birds to all these lifeless trees. Statuary quickened and came to life under the veto of the enemy as under a benediction. The image, merely because it was called an idol, became not only an ensign but a weapon. A hundredfold host of stone sprang up all over the shrines and streets of Europe. The Iconoclasts made more statues than they destroyed.

The place of Cœur de Lion in popular fable and gossip is far more like his place in true history than the place of the mere denationalized ne’er-do-weel given him in our utilitarian school books. Indeed the vulgar rumour is nearly always much nearer the historical truth than the “educated” opinion of to-day; for tradition is truer than fashion. King Richard, as the typical Crusader, did make a momentous difference to England by gaining glory in the East, instead of devoting himself conscientiously to domestic politics in the exemplary manner of King John. The accident of his military genius and prestige gave England something which it kept for four hundred years, and without which it is incomprehensible throughout that period — the reputation of being in the very vanguard of chivalry. The great romances of the Round Table, the attachment of knighthood to the name of a British king, belong to this period. Richard was not only a knight but a troubadour; and culture and courtesy were linked up with the idea of English valour. The mediæval Englishman was even proud of being polite; which is at least no worse than being proud of money and bad manners, which is what many Englishmen in our later centuries have meant by their common sense.

Chivalry might be called the baptism of Feudalism. It was an attempt to bring the justice and even the logic of the Catholic creed into a military system which already existed; to turn its discipline into an initiation and its inequalities into a hierarchy. To the comparative grace of the new period belongs, of course, that considerable cultus of the dignity of woman, to which the word “chivalry” is often narrowed, or perhaps exalted. This also was a revolt against one of the worst gaps in the more polished civilization of the Saracens. Moslems denied even souls to women; perhaps from the same instinct which recoiled from the sacred birth, with its inevitable glorification of the mother; perhaps merely because, having originally had tents rather than houses, they had slaves rather than housewives. It is false to say that the chivalric view of women was merely an affectation, except in the sense in which there must always be an affectation where there is an ideal. It is the worst sort of superficiality not to see the pressure of a general sentiment merely because it is always broken up by events; the Crusade itself, for example, is more present and potent as a dream even than as a reality. From the first Plantagenet to the last Lancastrian it haunts the minds of English kings, giving as a background to their battles a mirage of Palestine. So a devotion like that of Edward I. to his queen was quite a real motive in the lives of multitudes of his contemporaries. When crowds of enlightened tourists, setting forth to sneer at the superstitions of the continent, are taking tickets and labelling luggage at the large railway station at the west end of the Strand, I do not know whether they all speak to their wives with a more flowing courtesy than their fathers in Edward’s time, or whether they pause to meditate on the legend of a husband’s sorrow, to be found in the very name of Charing Cross.

But it is a huge historical error to suppose that the Crusades concerned only that crust of society for which heraldry was an art and chivalry an etiquette. The direct contrary is the fact. The First Crusade especially was much more an unanimous popular rising than most that are called riots and revolutions. The Guilds, the great democratic systems of the time, often owed their increasing power to corporate fighting for the Cross; but I shall deal with such things later. Often it was not so much a levy of men as a trek of whole families, like new gipsies moving eastwards. And it has passed into a proverb that children by themselves often organized a crusade as they now organize a charade. But we shall best realize the fact by fancying every Crusade as a Children’s Crusade. They were full of all that the modern world worships in children, because it has crushed it out of men. Their lives were full, as the rudest remains of their vulgarest arts are full, of something that we all saw out of the nursery window. It can best be seen later, for instance, in the lanced and latticed interiors of Memling, but it is ubiquitous in the older and more unconscious contemporary art; something that domesticated distant lands and made the horizon at home. They fitted into the corners of small houses the ends of the earth and the edges of the sky. Their perspective is rude and crazy, but it is perspective; it is not the decorative flatness of orientalism. In a word, their world, like a child’s, is full of foreshortening, as of a short cut to fairyland. Their maps are more provocative than pictures. Their half-fabulous animals are monsters, and yet are pets. It is impossible to state verbally this very vivid atmosphere; but it was an atmosphere as well as an adventure. It was precisely these outlandish visions that truly came home to everybody; it was the royal councils and feudal quarrels that were comparatively remote. The Holy Land was much nearer to a plain man’s house than Westminster, and immeasurably nearer than Runymede. To give a list of English kings and parliaments, without pausing for a moment upon this prodigious presence of a religious transfiguration in common life, is something the folly of which can but faintly be conveyed by a more modern parallel, with secularity and religion reversed. It is as if some Clericalist or Royalist writer should give a list of the Archbishops of Paris from 1750 to 1850, noting how one died of small-pox, another of old age, another by a curious accident of decapitation, and throughout all his record should never once mention the nature, or even the name, of the French Revolution.

VII

THE PROBLEM OF THE PLANTAGENETS

It is a point of prestige with what is called the Higher Criticism in all branches to proclaim that certain popular texts and authorities are “late,” and therefore apparently worthless. Two similar events are always the same event, and the later alone is even credible. This fanaticism is often in mere fact mistaken; it ignores the most common coincidences of human life: and some future critic will probably say that the tale of the Tower of Babel cannot be older than the Eiffel Tower, because there was certainly a confusion of tongues at the Paris Exhibition. Most of the mediæval remains familiar to the modern reader are necessarily “late,” such as Chaucer or the Robin Hood ballads; but they are none the less, to a wiser criticism, worthy of attention and even trust. That which lingers after an epoch is generally that which lived most luxuriantly in it. It is an excellent habit to read history backwards. It is far wiser for a modern man to read the Middle Ages backwards from Shakespeare, whom he can judge for himself, and who yet is crammed with the Middle Ages, than to attempt to read them forwards from Cædmon, of whom he can know nothing, and of whom even the authorities he must trust know very little. If this be true of Shakespeare, it is even truer, of course, of Chaucer. If we really want to know what was strongest in the twelfth century, it is no bad way to ask what remained of it in the fourteenth. When the average reader turns to the “Canterbury Tales,” which are still as amusing as Dickens yet as mediæval as Durham Cathedral, what is the very first question to be asked? Why, for instance, are they called Canterbury Tales; and what were the pilgrims doing on the road to Canterbury? They were, of course, taking part in a popular festival like a modern public holiday, though much more genial and leisurely. Nor are we, perhaps, prepared to accept it as a self-evident step in progress that their holidays were derived from saints, while ours are dictated by bankers.

It is almost necessary to say nowadays that a saint means a very good man. The notion of an eminence merely moral, consistent with complete stupidity or unsuccess, is a revolutionary image grown unfamiliar by its very familiarity, and needing, as do so many things of this older society, some almost preposterous modern parallel to give its original freshness and point. If we entered a foreign town and found a pillar like the Nelson Column, we should be surprised to learn that the hero on the top of it had been famous for his politeness and hilarity during a chronic toothache. If a procession came down the street with a brass band and a hero on a white horse, we should think it odd to be told that he had been very patient with a half-witted maiden aunt. Yet some such pantomime impossibility is the only measure of the innovation of the Christian idea of a popular and recognized saint. It must especially be realized that while this kind of glory was the highest, it was also in a sense the lowest. The materials of it were almost the same as those of labour and domesticity: it did not need the sword or sceptre, but rather the staff or spade. It was the ambition of poverty. All this must be approximately visualized before we catch a glimpse of the great effects of the story which lay behind the Canterbury Pilgrimage.

The first few lines of Chaucer's poem, to say nothing of thousands in the course of it, make it instantly plain that it was no case of secular revels still linked by a slight ritual to the name of some forgotten god, as may have happened in the pagan decline. Chaucer and his friends did think about St. Thomas, at least more frequently than a clerk at Margate thinks about St. Lubbock. They did definitely believe in the bodily cures wrought for them through St. Thomas, at least as firmly as the most enlightened and progressive modern can believe in those of Mrs. Eddy. Who was St. Thomas, to whose shrine the whole of that society is thus seen in the act of moving; and why was he so important? If there be a streak of sincerity in the claim to teach social and democratic history, instead of a string of kings and battles, this is the obvious and open gate by which to approach the figure which disputed England with the first Plantagenet. A real popular history should think more of his popularity even than his policy. And unquestionably thousands of ploughmen, carpenters, cooks, and yeomen, as in the motley crowd of Chaucer, knew a great deal about St. Thomas when they had never even heard of Becket.

It would be easy to detail what followed the Conquest as the feudal tangle that it was, till a prince from Anjou repeated the unifying effort of the Conqueror. It is found equally easy to write of the Red King's hunting instead of his building, which has lasted longer, and which he probably loved much more. It is easy to catalogue the questions he disputed with Anselm — leaving out the question Anselm cared most about, and which he asked with explosive simplicity, as, "Why was God a man?" All this is as simple as saying that a king died of eating lampreys, from which, however, there is little to learn nowadays, unless it be that when a modern monarch perishes of gluttony the newspapers seldom say so. But if we want to know what really happened to England in this dim epoch, I think it can be dimly but truly traced in the story of St. Thomas of Canterbury.

Henry of Anjou, who brought fresh French blood into the monarchy, brought also a refreshment of the idea for which the French have always stood: the idea in the Roman Law of something impersonal and omnipresent. It is the thing we smile at even in a small French detective story; when Justice opens a handbag or Justice runs after a cab. Henry II. really produced this impression of being a police force in person; a contemporary priest compared his restless vigilance to the bird and the fish of scripture whose way no man knoweth. Kinghood, however, meant law and not caprice; its ideal at least was a justice cheap and obvious as daylight, an atmosphere which lingers only in popular phrases about the King’s English or the King’s highway. But though it tended to be egalitarian it did not, of itself, tend to be humanitarian. In modern France, as in ancient Rome, the other name of Justice has sometimes been Terror. The Frenchman especially is always a Revolutionist — and never an Anarchist. Now this effort of kings like Henry II. to rebuild on a plan like that of the Roman Law was not only, of course, crossed and entangled by countless feudal fancies and feelings in themselves as well as others, it was also conditioned by what was the corner-stone of the whole civilization. It had to happen not only with but within the Church. For a Church was to these men rather a world they lived in than a building to which they went. Without the Church the Middle Ages would have had no law, as without the Church the Reformation would have had no Bible. Many priests expounded and embellished the Roman Law, and many priests supported Henry II. And yet there was another element in the Church, stored in its first foundations like dynamite, and destined in every age to destroy and renew the world. An idealism akin to impossibilism ran down the ages parallel to all its political compromises. Monasticism itself was the throwing off of innumerable Utopias, without posterity yet with perpetuity. It had, as was proved recurrently after corrupt epochs, a strange secret of getting poor quickly; a mushroom magnificence of destitution. This wind of revolution in the crusading time caught Francis in Assissi and stripped him of his rich garments in the street. The same wind of revolution suddenly smote

Thomas Becket, King Henry’s brilliant and luxurious Chancellor, and drove him on to an unearthly glory and a bloody end.

Becket was a type of those historic times in which it is really very practical to be impracticable. The quarrel which tore him from his friend’s side cannot be appreciated in the light of those legal and constitutional debates which the misfortunes of the seventeenth century have made so much of in more recent history. To convict St. Thomas of illegality and clerical intrigue, when he set the law of the Church against that of the State, is about as adequate as to convict St. Francis of bad heraldry when he said he was the brother of the sun and moon. There may have been heralds stupid enough to say so even in that much more logical age, but it is no sufficient way of dealing with visions or with revolutions. St. Thomas of Canterbury was a great visionary and a great revolutionist, but so far as England was concerned his revolution failed and his vision was not fulfilled. We are therefore told in the text-books little more than that he wrangled with the King about certain regulations; the most crucial being whether “criminous clerks” should be punished by the State or the Church. And this was indeed the chief text of the dispute; but to realise it we must reiterate what is hardest for modern England to understand — the nature of the Catholic Church when it was itself a government, and the permanent sense in which it was itself a revolution.

It is always the first fact that escapes notice; and the first fact about the Church was that it created a machinery of pardon, where the State could only work with a machinery of punishment. It claimed to be a divine detective who helped the criminal to escape by a plea of guilty. It was, therefore, in the very nature of the institution, that when it did punish materially it punished more lightly. If any modern man were put back in the Becket quarrel, his sympathies would certainly be torn in two; for if the King’s scheme was the more rational, the Archbishop’s was the more humane. And despite the horrors that darkened religious disputes long afterwards, this character was certainly in the bulk the historic character of Church government. It is admitted, for instance, that things like eviction, or the harsh treatment of tenants, was practically unknown wherever the Church was landlord. The principle lingered into more evil days in the form by which the Church authorities handed over culprits to the secular arm to be killed, even for religious offences. In modern romances this is treated as a mere hypocrisy; but the man who treats every human inconsistency as a hypocrisy is himself a hypocrite about his own inconsistencies.

Our world, then, cannot understand St. Thomas, any more than St. Francis, without accepting very simply a flaming and even fantastic charity, by which the great Archbishop undoubtedly stands for the victims of this world, where the wheel of fortune grinds the faces of the poor. He may well have been too idealistic; he wished to protect the Church as a sort of earthly paradise, of which the rules might seem to him as paternal as those of heaven, but might well seem to the King as capricious as those of fairyland. But if the priest was too idealistic, the King was really too practical; it is intrinsically true to say he was too practical to succeed in practice. There re-enters here, and runs, I think, through all English history, the rather indescribable truth I have suggested about the Conqueror; that perhaps he was hardly impersonal enough for a pure despot. The real moral of our mediæval story is, I think, subtly contrary to Carlyle's vision of a stormy strong man to hammer and weld the state like a smith. Our strong men were too strong for us, and too strong for themselves. They were too strong for their own aim of a just and equal monarchy. The smith broke upon the anvil the sword of state that he was hammering for himself. Whether or no this will serve as a key to the very complicated story of our kings and barons, it is the exact posture of Henry II. to his rival. He became lawless out of sheer love of law. He also stood, though in a colder and more remote manner, for the whole people against feudal oppression; and if his policy had succeeded in its purity, it would at least have made impossible the privilege and capitalism of later times. But that bodily restlessness which stamped and spurned the furniture was a symbol of him; it was some such thing that prevented him and his heirs from sitting as quietly on their throne as the heirs of St. Louis. He thrust again and again at the tough intangibility of the priests' Utopianism like a man fighting a ghost; he answered transcendental defiances with baser material persecutions; and at last, on a dark and, I think, decisive day in English history, his word sent four feudal murderers into the cloisters of Canterbury, who went there to destroy a traitor and who created a saint.

At the grave of the dead man broke forth what can only be called an epidemic of healing. For miracles so narrated there is the same evidence as for half the facts of history; and any one denying them must deny them upon a dogma. But something followed which would seem to modern civilization even more monstrous than a miracle. If the reader can imagine Mr. Cecil Rhodes submitting to be horsewhipped by a Boer in St. Paul’s Cathedral, as an apology for some indefensible death incidental to the Jameson Raid, he will form but a faint idea of what was meant when Henry II. was beaten by monks at the tomb of his vassal and enemy. The modern parallel called up is comic, but the truth is that mediæval actualities have a violence that does seem comic to our conventions. The Catholics of that age were driven by two dominant thoughts: the all-importance of penitence as an answer to sin, and the all-importance of vivid and evident external acts as a proof of penitence. Extravagant humiliation after extravagant pride for them restored the balance of sanity. The point is worth stressing, because without it moderns make neither head nor tail of the period. Green gravely suggests, for instance, of Henry’s ancestor Fulk of Anjou, that his tyrannies and frauds were further blackened by “low superstition,” which led him to be dragged in a halter round a shrine, scourged and screaming for the mercy of God. Mediævals would simply have said that such a man might well scream for it, but his scream was the only logical comment he could make. But they would have quite refused to see why the scream should be added to the sins and not subtracted from them. They would have thought it simply muddle-headed to have the same horror at a man for being horribly sinful and for being horribly sorry.

But it may be suggested, I think, though with the doubt proper to ignorance, that the Angevin ideal of the King’s justice lost more by the death of St. Thomas than was instantly apparent in the horror of Christendom, the canonization of the victim and the public penance of the tyrant. These things indeed were in a sense temporary; the King recovered the power to judge clerics, and many later kings and justiciars continued the monarchical plan. But I would suggest, as a possible clue to puzzling after events, that here and by this murderous stroke the crown lost what should have been the silent and massive support of its whole policy. I mean that it lost the people.

It need not be repeated that the case for despotism is democratic. As a rule its cruelty to the strong is kindness to the weak. An autocrat cannot be judged as a historical character by his relations with other historical characters. His true applause comes not from the few actors on the lighted stage of aristocracy, but from that enormous audience which must always sit in darkness throughout the drama. The king who helps numberless helps nameless men, and when he flings his widest largesse he is a Christian doing good by stealth. This sort of monarchy was certainly a mediæval ideal, nor need it necessarily fail as a reality. French kings were never so merciful to the people as when they were merciless to the peers; and it is probably true that a Czar who was a great lord to his intimates was often a little father in innumerable little homes. It is overwhelmingly probable that such a central power, though it might at last have deserved destruction in England as in France, would in England as in France have prevented the few from seizing and holding all the wealth and power to this day. But in England it broke off short, through something of which the slaying of St. Thomas may well have been the supreme example. It was something overstrained and startling and against the instincts of the people. And of what was meant in the Middle Ages by that very powerful and rather peculiar thing, the people, I shall speak in the next chapter.

In any case this conjecture finds support in the ensuing events. It is not merely that, just as the great but personal plan of the Conqueror collapsed after all into the chaos of the Stephen transition, so the great but personal plan of the first Plantagenet collapsed into the chaos of the Barons' Wars. When all allowance is made for constitutional fictions and afterthoughts, it does seem likely that here for the first time some moral strength deserted the monarchy. The character of Henry's second son John (for Richard belongs rather to the last chapter) stamped it with something accidental and yet symbolic. It was not that John was a mere black blot on the pure gold of the Plantagenets, the texture was much more mixed and continuous; but he really was a discredited Plantagenet, and as it were a damaged Plantagenet. It was not that he was much more of a bad man than many opposed to him, but he was the kind of bad man whom bad men and good do combine to oppose. In a sense subtler than that of the legal and parliamentary logic-chopping invented long afterwards, he certainly managed to put the Crown in the wrong. Nobody suggested that the barons of Stephen's time starved men in dungeons to promote political liberty, or hung them up by the heels as a symbolic request for a free parliament. In the reign of John and his son it was still the barons, and not in the least the people, who seized the power; but there did begin to appear a *case* for their seizing it, for contemporaries as well as constitutional historians afterwards. John, in one of his diplomatic doublings, had put England into the papal care, as an estate is put in Chancery. And unluckily the Pope, whose counsels had generally been mild and liberal, was then in his death-grapple with the Germanic Emperor and wanted every penny he could get to win. His winning was a blessing to Europe, but a curse to England, for he used the island as a mere treasury for this foreign war. In this and other matters the baronial party began to have something like a principle, which is the backbone of a policy. Much conventional history that connects their councils with a thing like our House of Commons is as far-fetched as it would be to say that the Speaker wields a Mace like those which the barons brandished in battle. Simon de Montfort was not an enthusiast for the Whig theory of the British Constitution, but he was an enthusiast for something. He founded a parliament in a fit of considerable absence of mind; but it was with true presence of mind, in the responsible and even religious sense which had made his father so savage a Crusader against heretics, that he laid about him with his great sword before he fell at Evesham.

Magna Carta was not a step towards democracy, but it was a step away from despotism. If we hold that double truth firmly, we have something like a key to the rest of English history. A rather loose aristocracy not only gained but often deserved the name of liberty. And the history of the English can be most briefly summarized by taking the French motto of “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity,” and noting that the English have sincerely loved the first and lost the other two.

In the contemporary complication much could be urged both for the Crown and the new and more national rally of the nobility. But it was a complication, whereas a miracle is a plain matter that any man can understand. The possibilities or impossibilities of St. Thomas Becket were left a riddle for history; the white flame of his audacious theocracy was frustrated, and his work cut short like a fairy tale left untold. But his memory passed into the care of the common people, and with them he was more active dead than alive — yes, even more busy. In the next chapter we shall consider what was meant in the Middle Ages by the common people, and how uncommon we should think it to-day. And in the last chapter we have already seen how in the Crusading age the strangest things grew homely, and men fed on travellers’ tales when there were no national newspapers. A many-coloured pageant of martyrology on numberless walls and windows had familiarized the most ignorant with alien cruelties in many climes; with a bishop flayed by Danes or a virgin burned by Saracens, with one saint stoned by Jews and another hewn in pieces by negroes. I cannot think it was a small matter that among these images one of the most magnificent had met his death but lately at the hands of an English monarch. There was at least something akin to the primitive and epical romances of that period in the tale of those two mighty friends, one of whom struck too hard and slew the other. It may even have been so early as this that something was judged in silence; and for the multitude rested on the Crown a mysterious seal of insecurity like that of Cain, and of exile on the English kings.

VIII

THE MEANING OF MERRY ENGLAND

The mental trick by which the first half of English history has been wholly dwarfed and dehumanized is a very simple one. It consists in telling only the story of the professional destroyers and then complaining that the whole story is one of destruction. A king is at the best a sort of crowned executioner; all government is an ugly necessity; and if it was then uglier it was for the most part merely because it was more difficult. What we call the Judges' circuits were first rather the King's raids. For a time the criminal class was so strong that ordinary civil government was conducted by a sort of civil war. When the social enemy was caught at all he was killed or savagely maimed. The King could not take Pentonville Prison about with him on wheels. I am far from denying that there was a real element of cruelty in the Middle Ages; but the point here is that it was concerned with one side of life, which is cruel at the best; and that this involved more cruelty for the same reason that it involved more courage. When we think of our ancestors as the men who inflicted tortures, we ought sometimes to think of them as the men who defied them. But the modern critic of mediævalism commonly looks only at these crooked shadows and not at the common daylight of the Middle Ages. When he has got over his indignant astonishment at the fact that fighters fought and that hangmen hanged, he assumes that any other ideas there may have been were ineffectual and fruitless. He despises the monk for avoiding the very same activities which he despises the warrior for cultivating. And he insists that the arts of war were sterile, without even admitting the possibility that the arts of peace were productive. But the truth is that it is precisely in the arts of peace, and in the type of production, that the Middle Ages stand singular and unique. This is not eulogy but history; an informed man must recognize this productive peculiarity even if he happens to hate it. The melodramatic things currently called mediæval are much older and more universal; such as the sport of tournament or the use of torture. The tournament was indeed a Christian and liberal advance on the gladiatorial show, since the lords risked themselves and not merely their slaves. Torture, so far from being peculiarly mediæval, was copied from pagan Rome and its most rationalist political science; and its application to others besides slaves was really part of the slow mediæval extinction of slavery. Torture, indeed, is a logical thing common in states innocent of fanaticism, as in the great agnostic empire of China. What was really arresting and remarkable about the Middle Ages, as the Spartan discipline was peculiar to Sparta, or the Russian communes typical of Russia, was precisely its positive social scheme of production, of the making, building and growing of all the good things of life.

For the tale told in a book like this cannot really touch on mediæval England at all. The dynasties and the parliaments passed like a changing cloud and across a stable and fruitful landscape. The institutions which affected the masses can be compared to corn or fruit trees in one practical sense at least, that they grew upwards from below. There may have been better societies, and assuredly we have not to look far for worse; but it is doubtful if there was ever so spontaneous a society. We cannot do justice, for instance, to the local government of that epoch, even where it was very faulty and fragmentary, by any comparisons with the plans of local government laid down to-day. Modern local government always comes from above; it is at best granted; it is more often merely imposed. The modern English oligarchy, the modern German Empire, are necessarily more efficient in making municipalities upon a plan, or rather a pattern. The mediævals not only had self-government, but their self-government was self-made. They did indeed, as the central powers of the national monarchies grew stronger, seek and procure the stamp of state approval; but it was approval of a popular fact already in existence. Men banded together in guilds and parishes long before Local Government Acts were dreamed of. Like charity, which was worked in the same way, their Home Rule began at home. The reactions of recent centuries have left most educated men bankrupt of the corporate imagination required even to imagine this. They only think of a mob as a thing that breaks things — even if they admit it is right to break them. But the mob made these things. An artist mocked as many-headed, an artist with many eyes and hands, created these masterpieces. And if the modern sceptic, in his detestation of the democratic ideal, complains of my calling them masterpieces, a simple answer will for the moment serve. It is enough to reply that the very word “masterpiece” is borrowed from the terminology of the mediæval craftsmen. But such points in the Guild System can be considered a little later; here we are only concerned with the quite spontaneous springing upwards of all these social institutions, such as they were. They rose in the streets like a silent rebellion; like a still and statuesque riot. In modern constitutional countries there are practically no political institutions thus given by the people; all are received by the people. There is only one thing that stands in our midst, attenuated and threatened, but enthroned in some power like a ghost of the Middle Ages: the Trades Unions.

In agriculture, what had happened to the land was like a universal landslide. But by a prodigy beyond the catastrophes of geology it may be said that the land had slid uphill. Rural civilization was on a wholly new and much higher level; yet there was no great social convulsions or apparently even great social campaigns to explain it. It is possibly a solitary instance in history of men thus falling upwards; at least of outcasts falling on their feet or vagrants straying into the promised land. Such a thing could not be and was not a mere accident; yet, if we go by conscious political plans, it was something like a miracle. There had appeared, like a subterranean race cast up to the sun, something unknown to the august civilization of the Roman Empire — a peasantry. At the beginning of the Dark Ages the great pagan cosmopolitan society now grown Christian was as much a slave state as old South Carolina. By the fourteenth century it was almost as much a state of peasant proprietors as modern France. No laws had been passed against slavery; no dogmas even had condemned it by definition; no war had been waged against it, no new race or ruling caste had repudiated it; but it was gone. This startling and silent transformation is perhaps the best measure of the pressure of popular life in the Middle Ages, of how fast it was making new things in its spiritual factory. Like everything else in the mediæval revolution, from its cathedrals to its ballads, it was as anonymous as it was enormous. It is admitted that the conscious and active emancipators everywhere were the parish priests and the religious brotherhoods; but no name among them has survived and no man of them has reaped his reward in this world. Countless Clarksons and innumerable Wilberforces, without political machinery or public fame, worked at death-beds and confessionals in all the villages of Europe; and the vast system of slavery vanished. It was probably the widest work ever done which was voluntary on both sides; and the Middle Ages was in this and other things the age of volunteers. It is possible enough to state roughly the stages through which the thing passed; but such a statement does not explain the loosening of the grip of the great slave-owners; and it cannot be explained except psychologically. The Catholic type of Christianity was not merely an element, it was a climate; and in that climate the slave would not grow. I have already suggested, touching that transformation of the Roman Empire which was the background of all these centuries, how a mystical view of man's dignity must have this effect. A table that walked and talked, or a stool that flew with wings out of window, would be about as workable a thing as an immortal chattel. But though here as everywhere the spirit explains the processes, and the processes cannot even plausibly explain the spirit, these processes involve two very practical points, without which we cannot understand how this great popular civilization was created — or how it was destroyed.

What we call the manors were originally the *villae* of the pagan lords, each with its population of slaves. Under this process, however it be explained, what had occurred was the diminishment of the lords' claim to the whole profit of a slave estate, by which it became a claim to the profit of part of it, and dwindled at last to certain dues or customary payments to the lord, having paid which the slave could enjoy not only the use of the land but the profit of it. It must be remembered that over a great part, and especially very important parts, of the whole territory, the lords were abbots, magistrates elected by a mystical communism and themselves often of peasant birth. Men not only obtained a fair amount of justice under their care, but a fair amount of freedom even from their carelessness. But two details of the development are very vital. First, as has been hinted elsewhere, the slave was long in the intermediate status of a serf. This meant that while the land was entitled to the services of the man, he was equally entitled to the support of the land. He could not be evicted; he could not even, in the modern fashion, have his rent raised. At the beginning it was merely that the slave was owned, but at least he could not be disowned. At the end he had really become a small landlord, merely because it was not the lord that owned him, but the land. It is hardly unsafe to suggest that in this (by one of the paradoxes of this extraordinary period) the very fixity of serfdom was a service to freedom. The new peasant inherited something of the stability of the slave. He did not come to life in a competitive scramble where everybody was trying to snatch his freedom from him. He found himself among neighbours who already regarded his presence as normal and his frontiers as natural frontiers, and among whom all-powerful customs crushed all experiments in competition. By a trick or overturn no romancer has dared to put in a tale, this prisoner had become the governor of his own prison. For a little time it was almost true that an Englishman’s house was his castle, because it had been built strong enough to be his dungeon.

The other notable element was this: that when the produce of the land began by custom to be cut up and only partially transmitted to the lord, the remainder was generally subdivided into two types of property. One the serfs enjoyed severally, in private patches, while the other they enjoyed in common, and generally in common with the lord. Thus arose the momentously important mediæval institutions of the Common Land, owned side by side with private land. It was an alternative and a refuge. The mediævals, except when they were monks, were none of them Communists; but they were all, as it were, potential Communists. It is typical of the dark and dehumanized picture now drawn of the period that our romances constantly describe a broken man as falling back on the forests and the outlaw’s den, but never describe him as falling back on the common land, which was a much more common incident. Mediævalism believed in mending its broken men; and as the idea existed in the communal life for monks, it existed in the communal land for peasants. It was their great green hospital, their free and airy workhouse. A Common was not a naked and negative thing like the scrub or heath we call a Common on the edges of the suburbs. It was a reserve of wealth like a reserve of grain in a barn; it was deliberately kept back as a balance, as we talk of a balance at the bank. Now these provisions for a healthier distribution of property would by themselves show any man of imagination that a real moral effort had been made towards social justice; that it could not have been mere evolutionary accident that slowly turned the slave into a serf, and the serf into a peasant proprietor. But if anybody still thinks that mere blind luck, without any groping for the light, had somehow brought about the peasant condition in place of the agrarian slave estate, he has only to turn to what was happening in all the other callings and affairs of humanity. Then he will cease to doubt. For he will find the same mediæval men busy upon a social scheme which points as plainly in effect to pity and a craving for equality. And it is a system which could no more be produced by accident than one of their cathedrals could be built by an earthquake.

Most work beyond the primary work of agriculture was guarded by the egalitarian vigilance of the Guilds. It is hard to find any term to measure the distance between this system and modern society; one can only approach it first by the faint traces it has left. Our daily life is littered with a debris of the Middle Ages, especially of dead words which no longer carry their meaning. I have already suggested one example. We hardly call up the picture of a return to Christian Communism whenever we mention Wimbledon Common. This truth descends to such trifles as the titles which we write on letters and postcards. The puzzling and truncated monosyllable "Esq." is a pathetic relic of a remote evolution from chivalry to snobbery. No two historic things could well be more different than an esquire and a squire. The first was above all things an incomplete and probationary position — the tadpole of knighthood; the second is above all things a complete and assured position — the status of the owners and rulers of rural England throughout recent centuries. Our esquires did not win their estates till they had given up any particular fancy for winning their spurs. Esquire does not mean squire, and esq. does not mean anything. But it remains on our letters a little wriggle in pen and ink and an indecipherable hieroglyph twisted by the strange turns of our history, which have turned a military discipline into a pacific oligarchy, and that into a mere plutocracy at last. And there are similar historic riddles to be unpicked in the similar forms of social address. There is something singularly forlorn about the modern word "Mister." Even in sound it has a simpering feebleness which marks the shrivelling of the strong word from which it came. Nor, indeed, is the symbol of the mere sound inaccurate. I remember seeing a German story of Samson in which he bore the unassuming name of Simson, which surely shows Samson very much shorn. There is something of the same dismal *diminuendo* in the evolution of a Master into a Mister.

The very vital importance of the word "Master" is this. A Guild was, very broadly speaking, a Trade Union in which every man was his own employer. That is, a man could not work at any trade unless he would join the league and accept the laws of that trade; but he worked in his own shop with his own tools, and the whole profit went to himself. But the word "employer" marks a modern deficiency which makes the modern use of the word "master" quite inexact. A master meant something quite other and greater than a "boss." It meant a master of the work, where it now means only a master of the workmen. It is an elementary character of Capitalism that a shipowner need not know the right end of a ship, or a landowner have even seen the landscape, that the owner of a goldmine may be interested in nothing but old pewter, or the owner of a railway travel exclusively in balloons. He may be a more successful capitalist if he has a hobby of his own business; he is often a more successful capitalist if he has the sense to leave it to a manager; but economically he can control the business because he is a capitalist, not because he has any kind of hobby or any kind of sense. The highest grade in the Guild system was a Master, and it meant a mastery of the business. To take the term created by the colleges in the same epoch, all the mediæval bosses were Masters of Arts. The other grades were the journeyman and the apprentice; but like the corresponding degrees at the universities, they were grades through which every common man could pass. They were not social classes; they were degrees and not castes. This is the whole point of the recurrent romance about the apprentice marrying his master’s daughter. The master would not be surprised at such a thing, any more than an M.A. would swell with aristocratic indignation when his daughter married a B.A.

When we pass from the strictly educational hierarchy to the strictly egalitarian ideal, we find again that the remains of the thing to-day are so distorted and disconnected as to be comic. There are City Companies which inherit the coats of arms and the immense relative wealth of the old Guilds, and inherit nothing else. Even what is good about them is not what was good about the Guilds. In one case we shall find something like a Worshipful Company of Bricklayers, in which, it is unnecessary to say, there is not a single bricklayer or anybody who has ever known a bricklayer, but in which the senior partners of a few big businesses in the City, with a few faded military men with a taste in cookery, tell each other in after-dinner speeches that it has been the glory of their lives to make allegorical bricks without straw. In another case we shall find a Worshipful Company of Whitewashers who do deserve their name, in the sense that many of them employ a large number of other people to whitewash. These Companies support large charities and often doubtless very valuable charities; but their object is quite different from that of the old charities of the Guilds. The aim of the Guild charities was the same as the aim of the Common Land. It was to resist inequality — or, as some earnest old gentlemen of the last generation would probably put it, to resist evolution. It was to ensure, not only that bricklaying should survive and succeed, but that every bricklayer should survive and succeed. It sought to rebuild the ruins of any bricklayer, and to give any faded whitewasher a new white coat. It was the whole aim of the Guilds to cobble their cobblers like their shoes and clout their clothiers with their clothes; to strengthen the weakest link, or go after the hundredth sheep; in short, to keep the row of little shops unbroken like a line of battle. It resisted the growth of a big shop like the growth of a dragon. Now even the whitewashers of the Whitewashers Company will not pretend that it exists to prevent a small shop being swallowed by a big shop, or that it has done anything whatever to prevent it. At the best the kindness it would show to a bankrupt whitewasher would be a kind of compensation; it would not be reinstatement; it would not be the restoration of status in an industrial system. So careful of the type it seems, so careless of the single life; and by that very modern evolutionary philosophy the type itself has been destroyed. The old Guilds, with the same object of equality, of course, insisted peremptorily upon the same level system of payment and treatment which is a point of complaint against the modern Trades Unions. But they insisted also, as the Trades Unions cannot do, upon a high standard of craftsmanship, which still astonishes the world in the corners of perishing buildings or the colours of broken glass. There is no artist or art critic who will not concede, however distant his own style from the Gothic school, that there was in this time a nameless but universal artistic touch in the moulding of the very tools of life. Accident has preserved the rudest sticks and stools and pots and pans which have suggestive shapes as if they were possessed not by devils but by elves. For they were, indeed, as compared with subsequent systems, produced in the incredible fairyland of a free country.

That the most mediæval of modern institutions, the Trades Unions, do not fight for the same ideal of æsthetic finish is true and certainly tragic; but to make it a matter of blame is wholly to misunderstand the tragedy. The Trades Unions are confederations of men without property, seeking to balance its absence by numbers and the necessary character of their labour. The Guilds were confederations of men with property, seeking to ensure each man in the possession of that property. This is, of course, the only condition of affairs in which property can properly be said to exist at all. We should not speak of a negro community in which most men were white, but the rare negroes were giants. We should not conceive a married community in which most men were bachelors, and three men had harems. A married community means a community where most people are married; not a community where one or two people are very much married. A propertied community means a community where most people have property; not a community where there are a few capitalists. But in fact the Guildsmen (as also, for that matter, the serfs, semi-serfs and peasants) were much richer than can be realized even from the fact that the Guilds protected the possession of houses, tools, and just payment. The surplus is self-evident upon any just study of the prices of the period, when all deductions have been made, of course, for the different value of the actual coinage. When a man could get a goose or a gallon of ale for one or two of the smallest and commonest coins, the matter is in no way affected by the name of those coins. Even where the individual wealth was severely limited, the collective wealth was very large — the wealth of the Guilds, of the parishes, and especially of the monastic estates. It is important to remember this fact in the subsequent history of England.

The next fact to note is that the local government grew out of things like the Guild system, and not the system from the government. In sketching the sound principles of this lost society, I shall not, of course, be supposed by any sane person to be describing a moral paradise, or to be implying that it was free from the faults and fights and sorrows that harass human life in all times, and certainly not least in our own time. There was a fair amount of rioting and fighting in connection with the Guilds; and there was especially for some time a combative rivalry between the guilds of merchants who sold things and those of craftsmen who made them, a conflict in which the craftsmen on the whole prevailed. But whichever party may have been predominant, it was the heads of the Guild who became the heads of the town, and not vice versâ. The stiff survivals of this once very spontaneous uprising can again be seen in the now anomalous constitution of the Lord Mayor and the Livery of the City of London. We are told so monotonously that the government of our fathers reposed upon arms, that it is valid to insist that this, their most intimate and everyday sort of government, was wholly based upon tools; a government in which the workman’s tool became the sceptre. Blake, in one of his symbolic fantasies, suggests that in the Golden Age the gold and gems should be taken from the hilt of the sword and put upon the handle of the plough. But something very like this did happen in the interlude of this mediæval democracy, fermenting under the crust of mediæval monarchy and aristocracy; where productive implements often took on the pomp of heraldry. The Guilds often exhibited emblems and pageantry so compact of their most prosaic uses, that we can only parallel them by imagining armorial tabards, or even religious vestments, woven out of a navvy's corderoys or a coster's pearl buttons.

Two more points must be briefly added; and the rough sketch of this now foreign and even fantastic state will be as complete as it can be made here. Both refer to the links between this popular life and the politics which are conventially the whole of history. The first, and for that age the most evident, is the Charter. To recur once more to the parallel of Trades Unions, as convenient for the casual reader of to-day, the Charter of a Guild roughly corresponded to that "recognition" for which the railwaymen and other trades unionists asked some years ago, without success. By this they had the authority of the King, the central or national government; and this was of great moral weight with mediævals, who always conceived of freedom as a positive status, not as a negative escape: they had none of the modern romanticism which makes liberty akin to loneliness. Their view remains in the phrase about giving a man the freedom of a city: they had no desire to give him the freedom of a wilderness. To say that they had also the authority of the Church is something of an understatement; for religion ran like a rich thread through the rude tapestry of these popular things while they were still merely popular; and many a trade society must have had a patron saint long before it had a royal seal. The other point is that it was from these municipal groups already in existence that the first men were chosen for the largest and perhaps the last of the great mediæval experiments: the Parliament.

We have all read at school that Simon de Montfort and Edward I., when they first summoned Commons to council, chiefly as advisers on local taxation, called "two burgesses" from every town. If we had read a little more closely, those simple words would have given away the whole secret of the lost mediæval civilization. We had only to ask what burgesses were, and whether they grew on trees. We should immediately have discovered that England was full of little parliaments, out of which the great parliament was made. And if it be a matter of wonder that the great council (still called in quaint archaism by its old title of the House of Commons) is the only one of these popular or elective corporations of which we hear much in our books of history, the explanation, I fear, is simple and a little sad. It is that the Parliament was the one among these mediæval creations which ultimately consented to betray and to destroy the rest.

IX

NATIONALITY AND THE FRENCH WARS

If any one wishes to know what we mean when we say that Christendom was and is one culture, or one civilization, there is a rough but plain way of putting it. It is by asking what is the most common, or rather the most commonplace, of all the uses of the word “Christian.” There is, of course, the highest use of all; but it has nowadays many other uses. Sometimes a Christian means an Evangelical. Sometimes, and more recently, a Christian means a Quaker. Sometimes a Christian means a modest person who believes that he bears a resemblance to Christ. But it has long had one meaning in casual speech among common people, and it means a culture or a civilization. Ben Gunn on Treasure Island did not actually say to Jim Hawkins, “I feel myself out of touch with a certain type of civilization”; but he did say, “I haven’t tasted Christian food.” The old wives in a village looking at a lady with short hair and trousers do not indeed say, “We perceive a divergence between her culture and our own”; but they do say, “Why can’t she dress like a Christian?” That the sentiment has thus soaked down to the simplest and even stupidest daily talk is but one evidence that Christendom was a very real thing. But it was also, as we have seen, a very localized thing, especially in the Middle Ages. And that very lively localism the Christian faith and affections encouraged led at last to an excessive and exclusive parochialism. There were rival shrines of the same saint, and a sort of duel between two statues of the same divinity. By a process it is now our difficult duty to follow, a real estrangement between European peoples began. Men began to feel that foreigners did not eat or drink like Christians, and even, when the philosophic schism came, to doubt if they were Christians.

There was, indeed, much more than this involved. While the internal structure of mediævalism was thus parochial and largely popular, in the greater affairs, and especially the external affairs, such as peace and war, most (though by no means all) of what was mediæval was monarchical. To see what the kings came to mean we must glance back at the great background, as of darkness and daybreak, against which the first figures of our history have already appeared. That background was the war with the barbarians. While it lasted Christendom was not only one nation but more like one city — and a besieged city. Wessex was but one wall or Paris one tower of it; and in one tongue and spirit Bede might have chronicled the siege of Paris or Abbo sung the song of Alfred. What followed was a conquest and a conversion; all the end of the Dark Ages and the dawn of mediævalism is full of the evangelizing of barbarism. And it is the paradox of the Crusades that though the Saracen was superficially more civilized than the Christian, it was a sound instinct which saw him also to be in spirit a destroyer. In the simpler case of northern heathenry the civilization spread with a simplier progress. But it was not till the end of the Middle Ages, and close on the Reformation, that the people of Prussia, the wild land lying beyond Germany, were baptized at all. A flippant person, if he permitted himself a profane confusion with vaccination, might almost be inclined to suggest that for some reason it didn't "take" even then.

The barbarian peril was thus brought under bit by bit, and even in the case of Islam the alien power which could not be crushed was evidently curbed. The Crusades became hopeless, but they also became needless. As these fears faded the princes of Europe, who had come together to face them, were left facing each other. They had more leisure to find that their own captaincies clashed; but this would easily have been overruled, or would have produced a petty riot, had not the true creative spontaneity, of which we have spoken in the local life, tended to real variety. Royalties found they were representatives almost without knowing it; and many a king insisting on a genealogical tree or a title-deed found he spoke for the forests and the songs of a whole country-side. In England especially the transition is typified in the accident which raised to the throne one of the noblest men of the Middle Ages.

Edward I. came clad in all the splendours of his epoch. He had taken the Cross and fought the Saracens; he had been the only worthy foe of Simon de Montfort in those baronial wars which, as we have seen, were the first sign (however faint) of a serious theory that England should be ruled by its barons rather than its kings. He proceeded, like Simon de Montfort, and more solidly, to develop the great mediæval institution of a parliament. As has been said, it was superimposed on the existing parish democracies, and was first merely the summoning of local representatives to advise on local taxation. Indeed its rise was one with the rise of what we now call taxation; and there is thus a thread of theory leading to its latter claims to have the sole right of taxing. But in the beginning it was an instrument of the most equitable kings, and notably an instrument of Edward I. He often quarrelled with his parliaments and may sometimes have displeased his people (which has never been at all the same thing), but on the whole he was supremely the representative sovereign. In this connection one curious and difficult question may be considered here, though it marks the end of a story that began with the Norman Conquest. It is pretty certain that he was never more truly a representative king, one might say a republican king, than in the fact that he expelled the Jews. The problem is so much misunderstood and mixed with notions of a stupid spite against a gifted and historic race as such, that we must pause for a paragraph upon it.

The Jews in the Middle Ages were as powerful as they were unpopular. They were the capitalists of the age, the men with wealth banked ready for use. It is very tenable that in this way they were useful; it is certain that in this way they were used. It is also quite fair to say that in this way they were ill-used. The ill-usage was not indeed that suggested at random in romances, which mostly revolve on the one idea that their teeth were pulled out. Those who know this as a story about King John generally do not know the rather important fact that it was a story against King John. It is probably doubtful; it was only insisted on as exceptional; and it was, by that very insistence, obviously regarded as disreputable. But the real unfairness of the Jews' position was deeper and more distressing to a sensitive and highly civilized people. They might reasonably say that Christian kings and nobles, and even Christian popes and bishops, used for Christian purposes (such as the Crusades and the cathedrals) the money that could only be accumulated in such mountains by a usury they inconsistently denounced as unchristian; and then, when worse times came, gave up the Jew to the fury of the poor, whom that useful usury had ruined. That was the real case for the Jew; and no doubt he really felt himself oppressed. Unfortunately it was the case for the Christians that they, with at least equal reason, felt him as the oppressor; and that *mutual* charge of tyranny is the Semitic trouble in all times. It is certain that in popular sentiment, this Anti-Semitism was not excused as uncharitableness, but simply regarded as charity. Chaucer puts his curse on Hebrew cruelty into the mouth of the soft-hearted prioress, who wept when she saw a mouse in a trap; and it was when Edward, breaking the rule by which the rulers had hitherto fostered their bankers' wealth, flung the alien financiers out of the land, that his people probably saw him most plainly at once as a knight errant and a tender father of his people.

Whatever the merits of this question, such a portrait of Edward was far from false. He was the most just and conscientious type of mediæval monarch; and it is exactly this fact that brings into relief the new force which was to cross his path and in strife with which he died. While he was just, he was also eminently legal. And it must be remembered, if we would not merely read back ourselves into the past, that much of the dispute of the time was legal; the adjustment of dynastic and feudal differences not yet felt to be anything else. In this spirit Edward was asked to arbitrate by the rival claimants to the Scottish crown; and in this sense he seems to have arbitrated quite honestly. But his legal, or, as some would say, pedantic mind made the proviso that the Scottish king as such was already under his suzerainty, and he probably never understood the spirit he called up against him; for that spirit had as yet no name. We call it to-day Nationalism. Scotland resisted; and the adventures of an outlawed knight named Wallace soon furnished it with one of those legends which are more important than history. In a way that was then at least equally practical, the Catholic priests of Scotland became especially the patriotic and Anti-English party; as indeed they remained even throughout the Reformation. Wallace was defeated and executed; but the heather was already on fire; and the espousal of the new national cause by one of Edward's own knights named Bruce, seemed to the old king a mere betrayal of feudal equity. He died in a final fury at the head of a new invasion upon the very border of Scotland. With his last words the great king commanded that his bones should be borne in front of the battle; and the bones, which were of gigantic size, were eventually buried with the epitaph, "Here lies Edward the Tall, who was the hammer of the Scots." It was a true epitaph, but in a sense exactly opposite to its intention. He was their hammer, but he did not break but make them; for he smote them on an anvil and he forged them into a sword.

That coincidence or course of events, which must often be remarked in this story, by which (for whatever reason) our most powerful kings did not somehow leave their power secure, showed itself in the next reign, when the baronial quarrels were resumed and the northern kingdom, under Bruce, cut itself finally free by the stroke of Bannockburn. Otherwise the reign is a mere interlude, and it is with the succeeding one that we find the new national tendency yet further developed. The great French wars, in which

England won so much glory, were opened by Edward III., and grew more and more nationalist. But even to feel the transition of the time we must first realize that the third Edward made as strictly legal and dynastic a claim to France as the first Edward had made to Scotland; the claim was far weaker in substance, but it was equally conventional in form. He thought, or said, he had a claim on a kingdom as a squire might say he had a claim on an estate; superficially it was an affair for the English and French lawyers. To read into this that the people were sheep bought and sold is to misunderstand all mediæval history; sheep have no trade union. The English arms owed much of their force to the class of the free yeomen; and the success of the infantry, especially of the archery, largely stood for that popular element which had already unhorsed the high French chivalry at Courtrai. But the point is this; that while the lawyers were talking about the Salic Law, the soldiers, who would once have been talking about guild law or glebe law, were already talking about English law and French law. The French were first in this tendency to see something outside the township, the trade brotherhood, the feudal dues, or the village common. The whole history of the change can be seen in the fact that the French had early begun to call the nation the Greater Land. France was the first of nations and has remained the norm of nations, the only one which is a nation and nothing else. But in the collision the English grew equally corporate; and a true patriotic applause probably hailed the victories of Crecy and Poitiers, as it certainly hailed the later victory of Agincourt. The latter did not indeed occur until after an interval of internal revolutions in England, which will be considered on a later page; but as regards the growth of nationalism, the French wars were continuous. And the English tradition that followed after Agincourt was continuous also. It is embodied in rude and spirited ballads before the great Elizabethans. The Henry V. of Shakespeare is not indeed the Henry V. of history; yet he is more historic. He is not only a saner and more genial but a more important person. For the tradition of the whole adventure was not that of Henry, but of the populace who turned Henry into Harry. There were a thousand Harries in the army at Agincourt, and not one. For the figure that Shakespeare framed out of the legends of the great victory is largely the figure that all men saw as the Englishman of the Middle Ages. He did not really talk in poetry, like Shakespeare’s hero, but he would have liked to. Not being able to do so, he sang; and the English people principally appear in contemporary impressions as the singing people. They were evidently not only expansive but exaggerative; and perhaps it was not only in battle that they drew the long bow. That fine farcical imagery, which has descended to the comic songs and common speech of the English poor even to-day, had its happy infancy when England thus became a nation; though the modern poor, under the pressure of economic progress, have partly lost the gaiety and kept only the humour. But in that early April of patriotism the new unity of the State still sat lightly upon them; and a cobbler in Henry's army, who would at home have thought first that it was the day of St. Crispin of the Cobblers, might truly as well as sincerely have hailed the splintering of the French lances in a storm of arrows, and cried, "St. George for Merry England."

Human things are uncomfortably complex, and while it was the April of patriotism it was the Autumn of mediæval society. In the next chapter I shall try to trace the forces that were disintegrating the civilization; and even here, after the first victories, it is necessary to insist on the bitterness and barren ambition that showed itself more and more in the later stages, as the long French wars dragged on. France was at the time far less happy than England — wasted by the treason of its nobles and the weakness of its kings almost as much as by the invasion of the islanders. And yet it was this very despair and humiliation that seemed at last to rend the sky, and let in the light of what it is hard for the coldest historian to call anything but a miracle.

It may be this apparent miracle that has apparently made Nationalism eternal. It may be conjectured, though the question is too difficult to be developed here, that there was something in the great moral change which turned the Roman Empire into Christendom, by which each great thing, to which it afterwards gave birth, was baptized into a promise, or at least into a hope of permanence. It may be that each of its ideas was, as it were, mixed with immortality. Certainly something of this kind can be seen in the conception which turned marriage from a contract into a sacrament. But whatever the cause, it is certain that even for the most secular types of our own time their relation to their native land has become not contractual but sacramental. We may say that flags are rags, that frontiers are fictions, but the very men who have said it for half their lives are dying for a rag, and being rent in pieces for a fiction even as I write. When the battle-trumpet blew in 1914 modern humanity had grouped itself into nations almost before it knew what it had done. If the same sound is heard a thousand years hence, there is no sign in the world to suggest to any rational man that humanity will not do exactly the same thing. But even if this great and strange development be not enduring, the point is that it is felt as enduring. It is hard to give a definition of loyalty, but perhaps we come near it if we call it the thing which operates where an obligation is felt to be unlimited. And the minimum of duty or even decency asked of a patriot is the maximum that is asked by the most miraculous view of marriage. The recognized reality of patriotism is not mere citizenship. The recognized reality of patriotism is for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, in national growth and glory and in national disgrace and decline; it is not to travel in the ship of state as a passenger, but if need be to go down with the ship.

It is needless to tell here again the tale of that earthquake episode in which a clearance in the earth and sky, above the confusion and abasement of the crowns, showed the commanding figure of a woman of the people. She was, in her own living loneliness, a French Revolution. She was the proof that a certain power was not in the French kings or in the French knights, but in the French. But the fact that she saw something above her that was other than the sky, the fact that she lived the life of a saint and died the death of a martyr, probably stamped the new national sentiment with a sacred seal. And the fact that she fought for a defeated country, and, even though it was victorious, was herself ultimately defeated, defines that darker element of devotion of which I spoke above, which makes even pessimism consistent with patriotism. It is more appropriate in this place to consider the ultimate reaction of this sacrifice upon the romance and the realities of England.

I have never counted it a patriotic part to plaster my own country with conventional and unconvincing compliments; but no one can understand England who does not understand that such an episode as this, in which she was so clearly in the wrong, has yet been ultimately linked up with a curious quality in which she is rather unusually in the right. No one candidly comparing us with other countries can say we have specially failed to build the sepulchres of the prophets we stoned, or even the prophets who stoned us. The English historical tradition has at least a loose large-mindedness which always finally falls into the praise not only of great foreigners but great foes. Often along with much injustice it has an illogical generosity; and while it will dismiss a great people with mere ignorance, it treats a great personality with hearty hero-worship. There are more examples than one even in this chapter, for our books may well make out Wallace a better man than he was, as they afterwards assigned to Washington an even better cause than he had. Thackeray smiled at Miss Jane Porter's picture of Wallace, going into war weeping with a cambric pocket-handkerchief; but her attitude was more English and not less accurate. For her idealization was, if anything, nearer the truth than Thackeray's own notion of a mediævalism of hypocritical hogs-in-armour. Edward, who figures as a tyrant, could weep with compassion; and it is probable enough that Wallace wept, with or without a pocket-handkerchief. Moreover, her romance was a reality, the reality of nationalism; and she knew much more about the Scottish patriots ages before her time than Thackeray did about the Irish patriots immediately under his nose. Thackeray was a great man; but in that matter he was a very small man, and indeed an invisible one. The cases of Wallace and Washington and many others are here only mentioned, however, to suggest an eccentric magnanimity which surely balances some of our prejudices. We have done many foolish things, but we have at least done one fine thing; we have whitewashed our worst enemies. If we have done this for a bold Scottish raider and a vigorous Virginian slave-holder, it may at least show that we are not likely to fail in our final appreciation of the one white figure in the motley processions of war. I believe there to be in modern England something like a universal enthusiasm on this subject. We have seen a great English critic write a book about this heroine, in opposition to a great French critic, solely in order to blame him for not having praised her enough. And I do not believe there lives an Englishman now, who if he had the offer of being an Englishman then, would not discard his chance of riding as the crowned conqueror at the head of all the spears of Agincourt, if he could be that English common soldier of whom tradition tells that he broke his spear asunder to bind it into a cross for Joan of Arc.

X

THE WAR OF THE USURPERS

The poet Pope, though a friend of the greatest of Tory Democrats, Bolingbroke, necessarily lived in a world in which even Toryism was Whiggish. And the Whig as a wit never expressed his political point more clearly than in Pope's line which ran: "The right divine of kings to govern wrong." It will be apparent, when I deal with that period, that I do not palliate the real unreason in divine right as Filmer and some of the pedantic cavaliers construed it. They professed the impossible ideal of "non-resistance" to any national and legitimate power; though I cannot see that even that was so servile and superstitious as the more modern ideal of "non-resistance" even to a foreign and lawless power. But the seventeenth century was an age of sects, that is of fads; and the Filmerites made a fad of divine right. Its roots were older, equally religious but much more realistic; and though tangled with many other and even opposite things of the Middle Ages, ramify through all the changes we have now to consider. The connection can hardly be stated better than by taking Pope's easy epigram and pointing out that it is, after all, very weak in philosophy. "The right divine of kings to govern wrong," considered as a sneer, really evades all that we mean by "a right." To have a right to do a thing is not at all the same as to be right in doing it. What Pope says satirically about a divine right is what we all say quite seriously about a human right. If a man has a right to vote, has he not a right to vote wrong? If a man has a right to choose his wife, has he not a right to choose wrong? I have a right to express the opinion which I am now setting down; but I should hesitate to make the controversial claim that this proves the opinion to be right.

Now mediæval monarchy, though only one aspect of mediæval rule, was roughly represented in the idea that the ruler had a right to rule as a voter has a right to vote. He might govern wrong, but unless he governed horribly and extravagantly wrong, he retained his position of right; as a private man retains his right to marriage and locomotion unless he goes horribly and extravagantly off his head. It was not really even so simple as this; for the Middle Ages were not, as it is often the fashion to fancy, under a single and steely discipline. They were very controversial and therefore very complex;

and it is easy, by isolating items whether about *jus divinum* or *primus inter pares*, to maintain that the mediævals were almost anything; it has been seriously maintained that they were all Germans. But it is true that the influence of the Church, though by no means of all the great churchmen, encouraged the sense of a sort of sacrament of government, which was meant to make the monarch terrible and therefore often made the man tyrannical. The disadvantage of such despotism is obvious enough. The precise nature of its advantage must be better understood than it is, not for its own sake so much as for the story we have now to tell.

The advantage of "divine right," or irremovable legitimacy, is this; that there is a limit to the ambitions of the rich. "*Roi ne puis*"; the royal power, whether it was or was not the power of heaven, was in one respect like the power of heaven. It was not for sale. Constitutional moralists have often implied that a tyrant and a rabble have the same vices. It has perhaps been less noticed that a tyrant and a rabble most emphatically have the same virtues. And one virtue which they very markedly share is that neither tyrants nor rabbles are snobs; they do not care a button what they do to wealthy people. It is true that tyranny was sometimes treated as coming from the heavens almost in the lesser and more literal sense of coming from the sky; a man no more expected to be the king than to be the west wind or the morning star. But at least no wicked miller can chain the wind to turn only his own mill; no pedantic scholar can trim the morning star to be his own reading-lamp. Yet something very like this is what really happened to England in the later Middle Ages; and the first sign of it, I fancy, was the fall of Richard II.

Shakespeare's historical plays are something truer than historical; they are traditional; the living memory of many things lingered, though the memory of others was lost. He is right in making Richard II. incarnate the claim to divine right; and Bolingbroke the baronial ambition which ultimately broke up the old mediæval order. But divine right had become at once drier and more fantastic by the time of the Tudors. Shakespeare could not recover the fresh and popular part of the thing; for he came at a later stage in a process of stiffening which is the main thing to be studied in later mediævalism. Richard himself was possibly a wayward and exasperating prince; it might well be the weak link that snapped in the strong chain of the Plantagenets. There may have been a real case against the *coup d'état* which he effected in 1397, and his kinsman Henry of Bolingbroke may have had strong sections of disappointed opinion on his side when he effected in 1399 the first true usurpation in English history. But if we wish to understand that larger tradition which even Shakespeare had lost, we must glance back at something which befell Richard even in the first years of his reign. It was certainly the greatest event of his reign; and it was possibly the greatest event of all the reigns which are rapidly considered in this book. The real English people, the men who work with their hands, lifted their hands to strike their masters, probably for the first and certainly for the last time in history.

Pagan slavery had slowly perished, not so much by decaying as by developing into something better. In one sense it did not die, but rather came to life. The slave-owner was like a man who should set up a row of sticks for a fence, and then find they had struck root and were budding into small trees. They would be at once more valuable and less manageable, especially less portable; and such a difference between a stick and a tree was precisely the difference between a slave and a serf — or even the free peasant which the serf seemed rapidly tending to become. It was, in the best sense of a battered phrase, a social evolution, and it had the great evil of one. The evil was that while it was essentially orderly, it was still literally lawless. That is, the emancipation of the commons had already advanced very far, but it had not yet advanced far enough to be embodied in a law. The custom was “unwritten,” like the British Constitution, and (like that evolutionary, not to say evasive entity) could always be overridden by the rich, who now drive their great coaches through Acts of Parliament. The new peasant was still legally a slave, and was to learn it by one of those turns of fortune which confound a foolish faith in the common sense of unwritten constitutions. The French Wars gradually grew to be almost as much of a scourge to England as they were to France. England was despoiled by her own victories; luxury and poverty increased at the extremes of society; and, by a process more proper to an ensuing chapter, the balance of the better mediævalism was lost. Finally, a furious plague, called the Black Death, burst like a blast on the land, thinning the population and throwing the work of the world into ruin. There was a shortage of labour; a difficulty of getting luxuries; and the great lords did what one would expect them to do. They became lawyers, and upholders of the letter of the law. They appealed to a rule already nearly obsolete, to drive the serf back to the more direct servitude of the Dark Ages. They announced their decision to the people, and the people rose in arms.

The two dramatic stories which connect Wat Tyler, doubtfully with the beginning, and definitely with the end of the revolt, are far from unimportant, despite the desire of our present prosaic historians to pretend that all dramatic stories are unimportant. The tale of Tyler's first blow is significant in the sense that it is not only dramatic but domestic. It avenged an insult to the family, and made the legend of the whole riot, whatever its incidental indecencies, a sort of demonstration on behalf of decency. This is important; for the dignity of the poor is almost unmeaning in modern debates; and an inspector need only bring a printed form and a few long words to do the same thing without having his head broken. The occasion of the protest, and the form which the feudal reaction had first taken, was a Poll Tax; but this was but a part of a general process of pressing the population to servile labour, which fully explains the ferocious language held by the government after the rising had failed; the language in which it threatened to make the state of the serf more servile than before. The facts attending the failure in question are less in dispute. The mediæval populace showed considerable military energy and co-operation, stormed its way to London, and was met outside the city by a company containing the King and the Lord Mayor, who were forced to consent to a parley. The treacherous stabbing of Tyler by the Mayor gave the signal for battle and massacre on the spot. The peasants closed in roaring, "They have killed our leader"; when a strange thing happened; something which gives us a fleeting and a final glimpse of the crowned sacramental man of the Middle Ages. For one wild moment divine right was divine.

The King was no more than a boy; his very voice must have rung out to that multitude almost like the voice of a child. But the power of his fathers and the great Christendom from which he came fell in some strange fashion upon him; and riding out alone before the people, he cried out, "I am your leader"; and himself promised to grant them all they asked. That promise was afterwards broken; but those who see in the breach of it the mere fickleness of the young and frivolous king, are not only shallow but utterly ignorant interpreters of the whole trend of that time. The point that must be seized, if subsequent things are to be seen as they are, is that Parliament certainly encouraged, and Parliament almost certainly obliged, the King to repudiate the people. For when, after the rejoicing revolutionists had disarmed and were betrayed, the King urged a humane compromise on the Parliament, the Parliament furiously refused it. Already Parliament is not merely a governing body but a governing class. Parliament was as contemptuous of the peasants in the fourteenth as of the Chartists in the nineteenth century. This council, first summoned by the king like juries and many other things, to get from plain men rather reluctant evidence about taxation, has already become an object of ambition, and is, therefore, an aristocracy. There is already war, in this case literally to the knife, between the Commons with a large C and the commons with a small one. Talking about the knife, it is notable that the murderer of Tyler was not a mere noble but an elective magistrate of the mercantile oligarchy of London; though there is probably no truth in the tale that his blood-stained dagger figures on the arms of the City of London. The mediæval Londoners were quite capable of assassinating a man, but not of sticking so dirty a knife into the neighbourhood of the cross of their Redeemer, in the place which is really occupied by the sword of St. Paul.

It is remarked above that Parliament was now an aristocracy, being an object of ambition. The truth is, perhaps, more subtle than this; but if ever men yearn to serve on juries we may probably guess that juries are no longer popular. Anyhow, this must be kept in mind, as against the opposite idea of the *jus divinum* or fixed authority, if we would appreciate the fall of Richard. If the thing which dethroned him was a rebellion, it was a rebellion of the parliament, of the thing that had just proved much more pitiless than he towards a rebellion of the people. But this is not the main point. The point is that by the removal of Richard, a step above the parliament became possible for the first time. The transition was tremendous; the crown became an object of ambition. That which one could snatch another could snatch from him; that which the House of Lancaster held merely by force the House of York could take from it by force. The spell of an undethronable thing seated out of reach was broken, and for three unhappy generations adventurers strove and stumbled on a stairway slippery with blood, above which was something new in the mediæval imagination; an empty throne.

It is obvious that the insecurity of the Lancastrian usurper, largely because he was a usurper, is the clue to many things, some of which we should now call good, some bad, all of which we should probably call good or bad with the excessive facility with which we dismiss distant things. It led the Lancastrian House to lean on Parliament, which was the mixed matter we have already seen. It may have been in some ways good for the monarchy, to be checked and challenged by an institution which at least kept something of the old freshness and freedom of speech. It was almost certainly bad for the parliament, making it yet more the ally of the mere ambitious noble, of which we shall see much later. It also led the Lancastrian House to lean on patriotism, which was perhaps more popular; to make English the tongue of the court for the first time, and to reopen the French wars with the fine flag-waving of Agincourt. It led it again to lean on the Church, or rather, perhaps, on the higher clergy, and that in the least worthy aspect of clericalism. A certain morbidity which more and more darkened the end of mediævalism showed itself in new and more careful cruelties against the last crop of heresies. A slight knowledge of the philosophy of these heresies will lend little support to the notion that they were in themselves prophetic of the Reformation. It is hard to see how anybody can call Wycliffe a Protestant unless he calls Palagius or Arius a Protestant; and if John Ball was a Reformer, Latimer was not a Reformer. But though the new heresies did not even hint at the beginning of English Protestantism, they did, perhaps, hint at the end of English Catholicism. Cobham did not light a candle to be handed on to Nonconformist chapels; but Arundel did light a torch, and put it to his own church. Such real unpopularity as did in time attach to the old religious system, and which afterwards became a true national tradition against Mary, was doubtless started by the diseased energy of these fifteenth-century bishops. Persecution can be a philosophy, and a defensible philosophy, but with some of these men persecution was rather a perversion. Across the channel, one of them was presiding at the trial of Joan of Arc.

But this perversion, this diseased energy, is the power in all the epoch that follows the fall of Richard II., and especially in those feuds that found so ironic an imagery in English roses — and thorns. The foreshortening of such a backward glance as this book can alone claim to be, forbids any entrance into the military mazes of the wars of York and Lancaster, or any attempt to follow the thrilling recoveries and revenges which filled the lives of Warwick the Kingmaker and the warlike widow of Henry V. The rivals were not, indeed, as is sometimes exaggeratively implied, fighting for nothing, or even (like the lion and the unicorn) merely fighting for the crown. The shadow of a moral difference can still be traced even in that stormy twilight of a heroic time. But when we have said that Lancaster stood, on the whole, for the new notion of a king propped by parliaments and powerful bishops, and York, on the whole, for the remains of the older idea of a king who permits nothing to come between him and his people, we have said everything of permanent political interest that could be traced by counting all the bows of Barnet or all the lances of Tewkesbury. But this truth, that there was something which can only vaguely be called Tory about the Yorkists, has at least one interest, that it lends a justifiable romance to the last and most remarkable figure of the fighting House of York, with whose fall the Wars of the Roses ended.

If we desire at all to catch the strange colours of the sunset of the Middle Ages, to see what had changed yet not wholly killed chivalry, there is no better study than the riddle of Richard III. Of course, scarcely a line of him was like the caricature with which his much meaner successor placarded the world when he was dead. He was not even a hunchback; he had one shoulder slightly higher than the other, probably the effect of his furious swordsmanship on a naturally slender and sensitive frame. Yet his soul, if not his body, haunts us somehow as the crooked shadow of a straight knight of better days. He was not an ogre shedding rivers of blood; some of the men he executed deserved it as much as any men of that wicked time; and even the tale of his murdered nephews is not certain, and is told by those who also tell us he was born with tusks and was originally covered with hair. Yet a crimson cloud cannot be dispelled from his memory, and, so tainted is the very air of that time with carnage, that we cannot say he was incapable even of the things of which he may have been innocent. Whether or no he was a good man, he was apparently a good king and even a popular one; yet we think of him vaguely, and not, I fancy, untruly, as on sufferance. He anticipated the Renascence in an abnormal enthusiasm for art and music, and he seems to have held to the old paths of religion and charity. He did not pluck perpetually at his sword and dagger because his only pleasure was in cutting throats; he probably did it because he was nervous. It was the age of our first portrait-painting, and a fine contemporary portrait of him throws a more plausible light on this particular detail. For it shows him touching, and probably twisting, a ring on his finger, the very act of a high-strung personality who would also fidget with a dagger. And in his face, as there painted, we can study all that has made it worth while to pause so long upon his name; an atmosphere very different from everything before and after. The face has a remarkable intellectual beauty; but there is something else on the face that is hardly in itself either good or evil, and that thing is death; the death of an epoch, the death of a great civilization, the death of something which once sang to the sun in the canticle of St. Francis and sailed to the ends of the earth in the ships of the First Crusade, but which in peace wearied and turned its weapons inwards, wounded its own brethren, broke its own loyalties, gambled for the crown, and grew feverish even about the creed, and has this one grace among its dying virtues, that its valour is the last to die.

But whatever else may have been bad or good about Richard of Gloucester, there was a touch about him which makes him truly the last of the mediæval kings. It is expressed in the one word which he cried aloud as he struck down foe after foe in the last charge at Bosworth — treason. For him, as for the first Norman kings, treason was the same as treachery; and in this case at least it was the same as treachery. When his nobles deserted him before the battle, he did not regard it as a new political combination, but as the sin of false friends and faithless servants. Using his own voice like the trumpet of a herald, he challenged his rival to a fight as personal as that of two paladins of Charlemagne. His rival did not reply, and was not likely to reply. The modern world had begun. The call echoed unanswered down the ages; for since that day no English king has fought after that fashion. Having slain many, he was himself slain and his diminished force destroyed. So ended the war of the usurpers; and the last and most doubtful of all the usurpers, a wanderer from the Welsh marches, a knight from nowhere, found the crown of England under a bush of thorn.

XI

THE REBELLION OF THE RICH

Sir Thomas More, apart from any arguments about the more mystical meshes in which he was ultimately caught and killed, will be hailed by all as a hero of the New Learning; that great dawn of a more rational daylight which for so many made mediævalism seem a mere darkness. Whatever we think of his appreciation of the Reformation, there will be no dispute about his appreciation of the Renascence. He was above all things a Humanist and a very human one. He was even in many ways very modern, which some rather erroneously suppose to be the same as being human; he was also humane, in the sense of humanitarian. He sketched an ideal, or rather perhaps a fanciful social system, with something of the ingenuity of Mr. H. G. Wells, but essentially with much more than the flippancy attributed to Mr. Bernard Shaw. It is not fair to charge the Utopian notions upon his morality; but their subjects and suggestions mark what (for want of a better word) we can only call his modernism. Thus the immortality of animals is the sort of transcendentalism which savours of evolution; and the grosser jest about the preliminaries of marriage might be taken quite seriously by the students of Eugenics. He suggested a sort of pacifism — though the Utopians had a quaint way of achieving it. In short, while he was, with his friend Erasmus, a satirist of mediæval abuses, few would now deny that Protestantism would be too narrow rather than too broad for him. If he was obviously not a Protestant, there are few Protestants who would deny him the name of a Reformer. But he was an innovator in things more alluring to modern minds than theology; he was partly what we should call a Neo-Pagan. His friend Colet summed up that escape from mediævalism which might be called the passage from bad Latin to good Greek. In our loose modern debates they are lumped together; but Greek learning was the growth of this time; there had always been a popular Latin, if a dog-Latin. It would be nearer the truth to call the mediævals bi-lingual than to call their Latin a dead language. Greek never, of course, became so general a possession; but for the man who got it, it is not too much to say that he felt as if he were in the open air for the first time. Much of this Greek spirit was reflected in More; its universality, its urbanity, its balance of buoyant reason and cool curiosity. It is even probable that he shared some of the excesses and errors of taste which inevitably infected the splendid intellectualism of the reaction against the Middle Ages; we can imagine him thinking gargoyles Gothic, in the sense of barbaric, or even failing to be stirred, as Sydney was, by the trumpet of “Chevy Chase.” The wealth of the ancient heathen world, in wit, loveliness, and civic heroism, had so recently been revealed to that generation in its dazzling profusion and perfection, that it might seem a trifle if they did here and there an injustice to the relics of the Dark Ages. When, therefore, we look at the world with the eyes of More we are looking from the widest windows of that time; looking over an English landscape seen for the first time very equally, in the level light of the sun at morning. For what he saw was England of the Renascence; England passing from the mediæval to the modern. Thus he looked forth, and saw many things and said many things; they were all worthy and many witty; but he noted one thing which is at once a horrible fancy and a homely and practical fact. He who looked over that landscape said: “Sheep are eating men.”

This singular summary of the great epoch of our emancipation and enlightenment is not the fact usually put first in such very curt historical accounts of it. It has nothing to do with the translation of the Bible, or the character of Henry VIII., or the characters of Henry VIII.’s wives, or the triangular debates between Henry and Luther and the Pope. It was not Popish sheep who were eating Protestant men, or *vice versa*; nor did Henry, at any period of his own brief and rather bewildering papacy, have martyrs eaten by lambs as the heathen had them eaten by lions. What was meant, of course, by this picturesque expression, was that an intensive type of agriculture was giving way to a very extensive type of pasture. Great spaces of England which had hitherto been cut up into the commonwealth of a number of farmers were being laid under the sovereignty of a solitary shepherd. The point has been put, by a touch of epigram rather in the manner of More himself, by Mr. J. Stephen, in a striking essay now, I think, only to be found in the back files of *The New Witness*. He enunciated the paradox that the very much admired individual, who made two blades of grass grow instead of one, was a murderer. In the same article, Mr. Stephen traced the true moral origins of this movement, which led to the growing of so much grass and the murder, or at any rate the destruction, of so much humanity. He traced it, and every true record of that transformation traces it, to the growth of a new refinement, in a sense a more rational refinement, in the governing class. The mediæval lord had been, by comparison, a coarse fellow; he had merely lived in the largest kind of farm-house after the fashion of the largest kind of farmer. He drank wine when he could, but he was quite ready to drink ale; and science had not yet smoothed his paths with petrol. At a time later than this, one of the greatest ladies of England writes to her husband that she cannot come to him because her carriage horses are pulling the plough. In the true Middle Ages the greatest men were even more rudely hampered, but in the time of Henry VIII. the transformation was beginning. In the next generation a phrase was common which is one of the keys of the time, and is very much the key to these more ambitious territorial schemes. This or that great lord was said to be "Italianate." It meant subtler shapes of beauty, delicate and ductile glass, gold and silver not treated as barbaric stones but rather as stems and wreaths of molten metal, mirrors, cards and such trinkets bearing a load of beauty; it meant the perfection of trifles. It was not, as in popular Gothic craftsmanship, the almost unconscious touch of art upon all necessary things: rather it was the pouring of the whole soul of passionately conscious art especially into unnecessary things. Luxury was made alive with a soul. We must remember this real thirst for beauty; for it is an explanation — and an excuse.

The old barony had indeed been thinned by the civil wars that closed at Bosworth, and curtailed by the economical and crafty policy of that unkingly king, Henry VII. He was himself a "new man," and we shall see the barons largely give place to a whole nobility of new men. But even the older families already had their faces set in the newer direction. Some of them, the Howards, for instance, may be said to have figured both as old and new families. In any case the spirit of the whole upper class can be described as increasingly new. The English aristocracy, which is the chief creation of the Reformation, is undeniably entitled to a certain praise, which is now almost universally regarded as very high praise. It was always progressive. Aristocrats are accused of being proud of their ancestors; it can truly be said that English aristocrats have rather been proud of their descendants. For their descendants they planned huge foundations and piled mountains of wealth; for their descendants they fought for a higher and higher place in the government of the state; for their descendants, above all, they nourished every new science or scheme of social philosophy. They seized the vast economic chances of pasturage; but they also drained the fens. They swept away the priests, but they condescended to the philosophers. As the new Tudor house passes through its generations a new and more rationalist civilization is being made; scholars are criticizing authentic texts; sceptics are discrediting not only popish saints but pagan philosophers; specialists are analyzing and rationalizing traditions, and sheep are eating men.

We have seen that in the fourteenth century in England there was a real revolution of the poor. It very nearly succeeded; and I need not conceal the conviction that it would have been the best possible thing for all of us if it had entirely succeeded. If Richard II. had really sprung into the saddle of Wat Tyler, or rather if his parliament had not unhorsed him when he had got there, if he had confirmed the fact of the new peasant freedom by some form of royal authority, as it was already common to confirm the fact of the Trade Unions by the form of a royal charter, our country would probably have had as happy a history as is possible to human nature. The Renascence, when it came, would have come as popular education and not the culture of a club of æsthetics. The New Learning might have been as democratic as the old learning in the old days of mediæval Paris and Oxford. The exquisite artistry of the school of Cellini might have been but the highest grade of the craft of a guild. The Shakespearean drama might have been acted by workmen on wooden stages set up in the street like Punch and Judy, the finer fulfilment of the miracle play as it was acted by a guild. The players need not have been “the king’s servants,” but their own masters. The great Renascence might have been liberal with its liberal education. If this be a fancy, it is at least one that cannot be disproved; the mediæval revolution was too unsuccessful at the beginning for any one to show that it need have been unsuccessful in the end. The feudal parliament prevailed, and pushed back the peasants at least into their dubious and half-developed status. More than this it would be exaggerative to say, and a mere anticipation of the really decisive events afterwards. When Henry VIII. came to the throne the guilds were perhaps checked but apparently unchanged, and even the peasants had probably regained ground; many were still theoretically serfs, but largely under the easy landlordism of the abbots; the mediæval system still stood. It might, for all we know, have begun to grow again; but all such speculations are swamped in new and very strange things. The failure of the revolution of the poor was ultimately followed by a counter-revolution; a successful revolution of the rich.

The apparent pivot of it was in certain events, political and even personal. They roughly resolve themselves into two: the marriages of Henry VIII. and the affair of the monasteries. The marriages of Henry VIII. have long been a popular and even a stale joke; and there is a truth of tradition in the joke, as there is in almost any joke if it is sufficiently popular, and indeed if it is sufficiently stale. A jocular thing never lives to be stale unless it is also serious. Henry was popular in his first days, and even foreign contemporaries give us quite a glorious picture of a young prince of the Renascence, radiant with all the new accomplishments. In his last days he was something very like a maniac; he no longer inspired love, and even when he inspired fear, it was rather the fear of a mad dog than of a watch-dog. In this change doubtless the inconsistency and even ignominy of his Bluebeard weddings played a great part. And it is but just to him to say that, perhaps with the exception of the first and the last, he was almost as unlucky in his wives as they were in their husband. But it was undoubtedly the affair of the first divorce that broke the back of his honour, and incidentally broke a very large number of other more valuable and universal things. To feel the meaning of his fury we must realize that he did not regard himself as the enemy but rather as the friend of the Pope; there is a shadow of the old story of Becket. He had defended the Pope in diplomacy and the Church in controversy; and when he wearied of his queen and took a passionate fancy to one of her ladies, Anne Boleyn, he vaguely felt that a rather cynical concession, in that age of cynical concessions, might very well be made to him by a friend. But it is part of that high inconsistency which is the fate of the Christian faith in human hands, that no man knows when the higher side of it will really be uppermost, if only for an instant; and that the worst ages of the Church will not do or say something, as if by accident, that is worthy of the best. Anyhow, for whatever reason, Henry sought to lean upon the cushions of Leo and found he had struck his arm upon the rock of Peter. The Pope denied the new marriage; and Henry, in a storm and darkness of anger, dissolved all the old relations with the Papacy. It is probable that he did not clearly know how much he was doing then; and it is very tenable that we do not know it now. He certainly did not think he was Anti-Catholic; and, in one rather ridiculous sense, we can hardly say that he thought he was anti-papal, since he apparently thought he was a pope. From this day really dates something that played a certain part in history, the more modern doctrine of the divine right of kings, widely different from the mediæval one. It is a matter which further embarrasses the open question about the continuity of Catholic things in Anglicanism, for it was a new note and yet one struck by the older party. The supremacy of the King over the English national church was not, unfortunately, merely a fad of the King, but became partly, and for one period, a fad of the church. But apart from all controverted questions, there is at least a human and historic sense in which the continuity of our past is broken perilously at this point. Henry not only cut off England from Europe, but what was even more important, he cuts off England from England.

The great divorce brought down Wolsey, the mighty minister who had held the scales between the Empire and the French Monarchy, and made the modern balance of power in Europe. He is often described under the dictum of *Ego et Rex Meus*; but he marks a stage in the English story rather because he suffered for it than because he said it. *Ego et Rex Meus* might be the motto of any modern Prime Minister; for we have forgotten the very fact that the word minister merely means servant. Wolsey was the last great servant who could be, and was, simply dismissed; the mark of a monarchy still absolute; the English were amazed at it in modern Germany, when Bismarck was turned away like a butler. A more awful act proved the new force was already inhuman; it struck down the noblest of the Humanists. Thomas More, who seemed sometimes like an Epicurean under Augustus, died the death of a saint under Diocletian. He died gloriously jesting; and the death has naturally drawn out for us rather the sacred savours of his soul; his tenderness and his trust in the truth of God. But for Humanism it must have seemed a monstrous sacrifice; it was somehow as if Montaigne were a martyr. And that is indeed the note; something truly to be called unnatural had already entered the naturalism of the Renascence; and the soul of the great Christian rose against it. He pointed to the sun, saying “I shall be above that fellow” with Franciscan familiarity, which can love nature because it will not worship her. So he left to his king the sun, which for so many weary days and years was to go down only on his wrath.

But the more impersonal process which More himself had observed (as noted at the beginning of this chapter) is more clearly defined, and less clouded with controversies, in the second of the two parts of Henry’s policy. There is indeed a controversy about the monasteries; but it is one that is clarifying and settling every day. Now it is true that the Church, by the Renascence period, had reached a considerable corruption; but the real proofs of it are utterly different both from the contemporary despotic pretence and from the common Protestant story. It is wildly unfair, for instance, to quote the letters of bishops and such authorities denouncing the sins of monastic life, violent as they often are. They cannot possibly be more violent than the letters of St. Paul to the purest and most primitive churches; the apostle was there writing to those Early Christians whom all churches idealize; and he talks to them as to cut-throats and thieves. The explanation, for those concerned for such subtleties, may possibly be found in the fact that Christianity is not a creed for good men, but for men. Such letters had been written in all centuries; and even in the sixteenth century they do not prove so much that there were bad abbots as that there were good bishops. Moreover, even those who profess that the monks were profligates dare not profess that they were oppressors; there is truth in Cobbett's point that where monks were landlords, they did not become rack-renting landlords, and could not become absentee landlords. Nevertheless, there was a weakness in the good institutions as well as a mere strength in the bad ones; and that weakness partakes of the worst element of the time. In the fall of good things there is almost always a touch of betrayal from within; and the abbots were destroyed more easily because they did not stand together. They did not stand together because the spirit of the age (which is very often the worst enemy of the age) was the increasing division between rich and poor; and it had partly divided even the rich and poor clergy. And the betrayal came, as it nearly always comes, from that servant of Christ who holds the bag.

To take a modern attack on liberty, on a much lower plane, we are familiar with the picture of a politician going to the great brewers, or even the great hotel proprietors, and pointing out the uselessness of a litter of little public-houses. That is what the Tudor politicians did first with the monasteries. They went to the heads of the great houses and proposed the extinction of the small ones. The great monastic lords did not resist, or, at any rate, did not resist enough; and the sack of the religious houses began. But if the lord abbots acted for a moment as lords, that could not excuse them, in the eyes of much greater lords, for having frequently acted as abbots. A momentary rally to the cause of the rich did not wipe out the disgrace of a thousand petty interferences which had told only to the advantage of the poor; and they were soon to learn that it was no epoch for their easy rule and their careless hospitality. The great houses, now isolated, were themselves brought down one by one; and the beggar, whom the monastery had served as a sort of sacred tavern, came to it at evening and found it a ruin. For a new and wide philosophy was in the world, which still rules our society. By this creed most of the mystical virtues of the old monks have simply been turned into great sins; and the greatest of these is charity.

But the populace which had risen under Richard II. was not yet disarmed. It was trained in the rude discipline of bow and bill, and organized into local groups of town and guild and manor. Over half the counties of England the people rose, and fought one final battle for the vision of the Middle Ages. The chief tool of the new tyranny, a dirty fellow named Thomas Cromwell, was specially singled out as the tyrant, and he was indeed rapidly turning all government into a nightmare. The popular movement was put down partly by force; and there is the new note of modern militarism in the fact that it was put down by cynical professional troops, actually brought in from foreign countries, who destroyed English religion for hire. But, like the old popular rising, it was even more put down by fraud. Like the old rising, it was sufficiently triumphant to force the government to a parley; and the government had to resort to the simple expedient of calming the people with promises, and then proceeding to break first the promises and then the people, after the fashion made familiar to us by the modern politicians in their attitude towards the great strikes. The revolt bore the name of the Pilgrimage of Grace, and its programme was practically the restoration of the old religion. In connection with the fancy about the fate of England if Tyler had triumphed, it proves, I think, one thing; that his triumph, while it might or might not have led to something that could be called a reform, would have rendered quite impossible everything that we now know as the Reformation.

The reign of terror established by Thomas Cromwell became an Inquisition of the blackest and most unbearable sort. Historians, who have no shadow of sympathy with the old religion, are agreed that it was uprooted by means more horrible than have ever, perhaps, been employed in England before or since. It was a government by torturers rendered ubiquitous by spies. The spoliation of the monasteries especially was carried out, not only with a violence which recalled barbarism, but with a minuteness for which there is no other word but meanness. It was as if the Dane had returned in the character of a detective. The inconsistency of the

King’s personal attitude to Catholicism did indeed complicate the conspiracy with new brutalities towards Protestants; but such reaction as there was in this was wholly theological. Cromwell lost that fitful favour and was executed, but the terrorism went on the more terribly for being simplified to the single vision of the wrath of the King. It culminated in a strange act which rounds off symbolically the story told on an earlier page. For the despot revenged himself on a rebel whose defiance seemed to him to ring down three centuries. He laid waste the most popular shrine of the English, the shrine to which Chaucer had once ridden singing, because it was also the shrine where King Henry had knelt to repent. For three centuries the Church and the people had called Becket a saint, when Henry Tudor arose and called him a traitor. This might well be thought the topmost point of autocracy; and yet it was not really so.

For then rose to its supreme height of self-revelation that still stranger something of which we have, perhaps fancifully, found hints before in this history. The strong king was weak. He was immeasurably weaker than the strong kings of the Middle Ages; and whether or no his failure had been foreshadowed, he failed. The breach he had made in the dyke of the ancient doctrines let in a flood that may almost be said to have washed him away. In a sense he disappeared before he died; for the drama that filled his last days is no longer the drama of his own character. We may put the matter most practically by saying that it is unpractical to discuss whether Froude finds any justification for Henry’s crimes in the desire to create a strong national monarchy. For whether or no it was desired, it was not created. Least of all our princes did the Tudors leave behind them a secure central government, and the time when monarchy was at its worst comes only one or two generations before the time when it was weakest. But a few years afterwards, as history goes, the relations of the Crown and its new servants were to be reversed on a high stage so as to horrify the world; and the axe which had been sanctified with the blood of More and soiled with the blood of Cromwell was, at the signal of one of that slave’s own descendants, to fall and to kill an English king.

The tide which thus burst through the breach and overwhelmed the King as well as the Church was the revolt of the rich, and especially of the new rich. They used the King’s name, and could not have prevailed without his power, but the ultimate effect was rather as if they had plundered the King after he had plundered the monasteries. Amazingly little of the wealth, considering the name and theory of the thing, actually remained in royal hands. The chaos was increased, no doubt, by the fact that Edward VI. succeeded to the throne as a mere boy, but the deeper truth can be seen in the difficulty of drawing any real line between the two reigns. By marrying into the Seymour family, and thus providing himself with a son, Henry had also provided the country with the very type of powerful family which was to rule merely by pillage. An enormous and unnatural tragedy, the execution of one of the Seymours by his own brother, was enacted during the impotence of the childish king, and the successful Seymour figured as Lord Protector, though even he would have found it hard to say what he was protecting, since it was not even his own family. Anyhow, it is hardly too much to say that every human thing was left unprotected from the greed of such cannibal protectors. We talk of the dissolution of the monasteries, but what occurred was the dissolution of the whole of the old civilization. Lawyers and lackeys and money-lenders, the meanest of lucky men, looted the art and economics of the Middle Ages like thieves robbing a church. Their names (when they did not change them) became the names of the great dukes and marquises of our own day. But if we look back and forth in our history, perhaps the most fundamental act of destruction occurred when the armed men of the Seymours and their sort passed from the sacking of the Monasteries to the sacking of the Guilds. The mediæval Trade Unions were struck down, their buildings broken into by the soldiery, and their funds seized by the new nobility. And this simple incident takes all its common meaning out of the assertion (in itself plausible enough) that the Guilds, like everything else at that time, were probably not at their best. Proportion is the only practical thing; and it may be true that Cæsar was not feeling well on the morning of the Ides of March. But simply to say that the Guilds declined, is about as true as saying that Cæsar quietly decayed from purely natural causes at the foot of the statue of Pompey.

XII

SPAIN AND THE SCHISM OF NATIONS

The revolution that arose out of what is called the Renascence, and ended in some countries in what is called the Reformation, did in the internal politics of England one drastic and definite thing. That thing was destroying the institutions of the poor. It was not the only thing it did, but it was much the most practical. It was the basis of all the problems now connected with Capital and Labour. How much the theological theories of the time had to do with it is a perfectly fair matter for difference of opinion. But neither party, if educated about the facts, will deny that the same time and temper which produced the religious schism also produced this new lawlessness in the rich. The most extreme Protestant will probably be content to say that Protestantism was not the motive, but the mask. The most extreme Catholic will probably be content to admit that Protestantism was not the sin, but rather the punishment. The most sweeping and shameless part of the process was not complete, indeed, until the end of the eighteenth century, when Protestantism was already passing into scepticism. Indeed a very decent case could be made out for the paradox that Puritanism was first and last a veneer on Paganism; that the thing began in the inordinate thirst for new things in the *noblesse* of the Renascence and ended in the Hell-Fire Club. Anyhow, what was first founded at the Reformation was a new and abnormally powerful aristocracy, and what was destroyed, in an ever-increasing degree, was everything that could be held, directly or indirectly, by the people *in spite of* such an aristocracy. This fact has filled all the subsequent history of our country; but the next particular point in that history concerns the position of the Crown. The King, in reality, had already been elbowed aside by the courtiers who had crowded behind him just before the bursting of the door. The King is left behind in the rush for wealth, and already can do nothing alone. And of this fact the next reign, after the chaos of Edward VI.’s, affords a very arresting proof.

Mary Tudor, daughter of the divorced Queen Katherine, has a bad name even in popular history; and popular prejudice is generally more worthy of study than scholarly sophistry. Her enemies were indeed largely wrong about her character, but they were not wrong about her effect. She was, in the limited sense, a good woman, convinced, conscientious, rather morbid. But it is true that she was a bad queen; bad for many things, but especially bad for her own most beloved cause. It is true, when all is said, that she set herself to burn out “No Popery” and managed to burn it in. The concentration of her fanaticism into cruelty, especially its concentration in particular places and in a short time, did remain like something red-hot in the public memory. It was the first of the series of great historical accidents that separated a real, if not universal, public opinion from the old *régime*. It has been summarized in the death by fire of the three famous martyrs at Oxford; for one of them at least, Latimer, was a reformer of the more robust and human type, though another of them, Cranmer, had been so smooth a snob and coward in the councils of Henry VIII. as to make Thomas Cromwell seem by comparison a man. But of what may be called the Latimer tradition, the saner and more genuine Protestantism, I shall speak later. At the time even the Oxford Martyrs probably produced less pity and revulsion than the massacre in the flames of many more obscure enthusiasts, whose very ignorance and poverty made their cause seem more popular than it really was. But this last ugly feature was brought into sharper relief, and produced more conscious or unconscious bitterness, because of that other great fact of which I spoke above, which is the determining test of this time of transition.

What made all the difference was this: that even in this Catholic reign the property of the Catholic Church could not be restored. The very fact that Mary was a fanatic, and yet this act of justice was beyond the wildest dreams of fanaticism — that is the point. The very fact that she was angry enough to commit wrongs for the Church, and yet not bold enough to ask for the rights of the Church — that is the test of the time. She was allowed to deprive small men of their lives, she was not allowed to deprive great men of their property — or rather of other people’s property. She could punish heresy, she could not punish sacrilege. She was forced into the false position of killing men who had not gone to church, and sparing men who had gone there to steal the church ornaments. What forced her into it? Not certainly her own religious attitude, which was almost maniacally sincere; not public opinion, which had naturally much more sympathy for the religious humanities which she did not restore than for the religious inhumanities which she did. The force came, of course, from the new nobility and the new wealth they refused to surrender; and the success of this early pressure proves that the nobility was already stronger than the Crown. The sceptre had only been used as a crowbar to break open the door of a treasure-house, and was itself broken, or at least bent, with the blow.

There is a truth also in the popular insistence on the story of Mary having “Calais” written on her heart, when the last relic of the mediæval conquests reverted to France. Mary had the solitary and heroic half-virtue of the Tudors: she was a patriot. But patriots are often pathetically behind the times; for the very fact that they dwell on old enemies often blinds them to new ones. In a later generation Cromwell exhibited the same error reversed, and continued to keep a hostile eye on Spain when he should have kept it on France. In our own time the Jingoes of Fashoda kept it on France when they ought already to have had it on Germany. With no particular anti-national intention, Mary nevertheless got herself into an anti-national position towards the most tremendous international problem of her people. It is the second of the coincidences that confirmed the sixteenth-century change, and the name of it was Spain. The daughter of a Spanish queen, she married a Spanish prince, and probably saw no more in such an alliance than her father had done. But by the time she was succeeded by her sister Elizabeth, who was more cut off from the old religion (though very tenuously attached to the new one), and by the time the project of a similar Spanish marriage for Elizabeth herself had fallen through, something had matured which was wider and mightier than the plots of princes. The Englishman, standing on his little island as on a lonely boat, had already felt falling across him the shadow of a tall ship.

Wooden *clichés* about the birth of the British Empire and the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth have not merely obscured but contradicted the crucial truth. From such phrases one would fancy that England, in some imperial fashion, now first realized that she was great. It would be far truer to say that she now first realized that she was small. The great poet of the spacious days does not praise her as spacious, but only as small, like a jewel. The vision of universal expansion was wholly veiled until the eighteenth century; and even when it came it was far less vivid and vital than what came in the sixteenth. What came then was not Imperialism; it was Anti-Imperialism. England achieved, at the beginning of her modern history, that one thing human imagination will always find heroic — the story of a small nationality. The business of the Armada was to her what Bannockburn was to the Scots, or Majuba to the Boers — a victory that astonished even the victors. What was opposed to them was Imperialism in its complete and colossal sense, a thing unthinkable since Rome. It was, in no overstrained sense, civilization itself. It was the greatness of Spain that was the glory of England. It is only when we realize that the English were, by comparison, as dingy, as undeveloped, as petty and provincial as Boers, that we can appreciate the height of their defiance or the splendour of their escape. We can only grasp it by grasping that for a great part of Europe the cause of the Armada had almost the cosmopolitan common sense of a crusade. The Pope had declared Elizabeth illegitimate — logically, it is hard to see what else he could say, having declared her mother's marriage invalid; but the fact was another and perhaps a final stroke sundering England from the elder world. Meanwhile those picturesque English privateers who had plagued the Spanish Empire of the New World were spoken of in the South simply as pirates, and technically the description was true; only technical assaults by the weaker party are in retrospect rightly judged with some generous weakness. Then, as if to stamp the contrast in an imperishable image, Spain, or rather the empire with Spain for its centre, put forth all its strength, and seemed to cover the sea with a navy like the legendary navy of Xerxes. It bore down on the doomed island with the weight and solemnity of a day of judgment; sailors or pirates struck at it with small ships staggering under large cannon, fought it with mere masses of flaming rubbish, and in that last hour of grapple a great storm arose out of the sea and swept round the island, and the gigantic fleet was seen no more. The uncanny completeness and abrupt silence that swallowed this prodigy touched a nerve that has never ceased to vibrate. The hope of England dates from that hopeless hour, for there is no real hope that has not once been a forlorn hope. The breaking of that vast naval net remained like a sign that the small thing which escaped would survive the greatness. And yet there is truly a sense in which we may never be so small or so great again.

For the splendour of the Elizabethan age, which is always spoken of as a sunrise, was in many ways a sunset. Whether we regard it as the end of the Renascence or the end of the old mediæval civilization, no candid critic can deny that its chief glories ended with it. Let the reader ask himself what strikes him specially in the Elizabethan magnificence, and he will generally find it is something of which there were at least traces in mediæval times, and far fewer traces in modern times. The Elizabethan drama is like one of its own tragedies — its tempestuous torch was soon to be trodden out by the Puritans. It is needless to say that the chief tragedy was the cutting short of the comedy; for the comedy that came to England after the Restoration was by comparison both foreign and frigid. At the best it is comedy in the sense of being humorous, but not in the sense of being happy. It may be noted that the givers of good news and good luck in the Shakespearian love-stories nearly all belong to a world which was passing, whether they are friars or fairies. It is the same with the chief Elizabethan ideals, often embodied in the Elizabethan drama. The national devotion to the Virgin Queen must not be wholly discredited by its incongruity with the coarse and crafty character of the historical Elizabeth. Her critics might indeed reasonably say that in replacing the Virgin Mary by the Virgin Queen, the English reformers merely exchanged a true virgin for a false one. But this truth does not dispose of a true, though limited, contemporary cult. Whatever we think of that particular Virgin Queen, the tragic heroines of the time offer us a whole procession of virgin queens. And it is certain that the mediævals would have understood much better than the moderns the martyrdom of *Measure for Measure*. And as with the title of Virgin, so with the title of Queen. The mystical monarchy glorified in *Richard II.* was soon to be dethroned much more ruinously than in *Richard II.* The same Puritans who tore off the pasteboard crowns of the stage players were also to tear off the real crowns of the kings whose parts they played. All mummery was to be forbidden, and all monarchy to be called mummery.

Shakespeare died upon St. George’s Day, and much of what St. George had meant died with him. I do not mean that the patriotism of Shakespeare or of England died; that remained and even rose steadily, to be the noblest pride of the coming times. But much more than patriotism had been involved in that image of St. George to whom the Lion Heart had dedicated England long ago in the deserts of Palestine. The conception of a patron saint had carried from the Middle Ages one very unique and as yet unreplaced idea. It was the idea of variation without antagonism. The Seven Champions of Christendom were multiplied by seventy times seven in the patrons of towns, trades and social types; but the very idea that they were all saints excluded the possibility of ultimate rivalry in the fact that they were all patrons. The Guild of the Shoemakers and the Guild of the Skinners, carrying the badges of St. Crispin and St. Bartholomew, might fight each other in the streets; but they did not believe that St. Crispin and

St. Bartholomew were fighting each other in the skies. Similarly the English would cry in battle on St. George and the French on St. Denis; but they did not seriously believe that St. George hated St. Denis or even those who cried upon St. Denis. Joan of Arc, who was on the point of patriotism what many modern people would call very fanatical, was yet upon this point what most modern people would call very enlightened. Now, with the religious schism, it cannot be denied, a deeper and more inhuman division appeared. It was no longer a scrap between the followers of saints who were themselves at peace, but a war between the followers of gods who were themselves at war. That the great Spanish ships were named after St. Francis or St. Philip was already beginning to mean little to the new England; soon it was to mean something almost cosmically conflicting, as if they were named after Baal or Thor. These are indeed mere symbols; but the process of which they are symbols was very practical and must be seriously followed. There entered with the religious wars the idea which modern science applies to racial wars; the idea of *natural* wars, not arising from a special quarrel but from the nature of the people quarrelling. The shadow of racial fatalism first fell across our path, and far away in distance and darkness something moved that men had almost forgotten.

Beyond the frontiers of the fading Empire lay that outer land, as loose and drifting as a sea, which had boiled over in the barbarian wars. Most of it was now formally Christian, but barely civilized; a faint awe of the culture of the south and west lay on its wild forces like a light frost. This semi-civilized world had long been asleep; but it had begun to dream. In the generation before Elizabeth a great man who, with all his violence, was vitally a dreamer, Martin Luther, had cried out in his sleep in a voice like thunder, partly against the place of bad customs, but largely also against the place of good works in the Christian scheme. In the generation after Elizabeth the spread of the new wild doctrines in the old wild lands had sucked Central Europe into a cyclic war of creeds. In this the house which stood for the legend of the Holy Roman Empire, Austria, the Germanic partner of Spain, fought for the old religion against a league of other Germans fighting for the new. The continental conditions were indeed complicated, and grew more and more complicated as the dream of restoring religious unity receded. They were complicated by the firm determination of France to be a nation in the full modern sense; to stand free and foursquare from all combinations; a purpose which led her, while hating her own Protestants at home, to give diplomatic support to many Protestants abroad, simply because it preserved the balance of power against the gigantic confederation of Spaniards and Austrians. It is complicated by the rise of a Calvinistic and commercial power in the Netherlands, logical, defiant, defending its own independence valiantly against Spain. But on the whole we shall be right if we see the first throes of the modern international problems in what is called the Thirty Years' War; whether we call it the revolt of half-heathens against the Holy Roman Empire, or whether we call it the coming of new sciences, new philosophies, and new ethics from the north. Sweden took a hand in the struggle, and sent a military hero to the help of the newer Germany. But the sort of military heroism everywhere exhibited offered a strange combination of more and more complex strategic science with the most naked and cannibal cruelty. Other forces besides Sweden found a career in the carnage. Far away to the north-east, in a sterile land of fens, a small ambitious family of money-lenders who had become squires, vigilant, thrifty, thoroughly selfish, rather thinly adopted the theories of Luther, and began to lend their almost savage hinds as soldiers on the Protestant side. They were well paid for it by step after step of promotion; but at this time their principality was only the old Mark of Brandenburg. Their own name was Hohenzollern.

XIII

THE AGE OF THE PURITANS

We should be very much bored if we had to read an account of the most exciting argument or string of adventures in which unmeaning words such as “snark” or “boojum” were systematically substituted for the names of the chief characters or objects in dispute; if we were told that a king was given the alternative of becoming a snark or finally surrendering the boojum, or that a mob was roused to fury by the public exhibition of a boojum, which was inevitably regarded as a gross reflection on the snark. Yet something very like this situation is created by most modern attempts to tell the tale of the theological troubles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while deferring to the fashionable distaste for theology in this generation — or rather in the last generation. Thus the Puritans, as their name implies, were primarily enthusiastic for what they thought was pure religion; frequently they wanted to impose it on others; sometimes they only wanted to be free to practise it themselves; but in no case can justice be done to what was finest in their characters, as well as first in their thoughts, if we never by any chance ask what “it” was that they wanted to impose or to practise. Now, there was a great deal that was very fine about many of the Puritans, which is almost entirely missed by the modern admirers of the Puritans. They are praised for things which they either regarded with indifference or more often detested with frenzy — such as religious liberty. And yet they are quite insufficiently understood, and are even undervalued, in their logical case for the things they really did care about — such as Calvinism. We make the Puritans picturesque in a way they would violently repudiate, in novels and plays they would have publicly burnt. We are interested in everything about them, except the only thing in which they were interested at all.

We have seen that in the first instance the new doctrines in England were simply an excuse for a plutocratic pillage, and that is the only truth to be told about the matter. But it was far otherwise with the individuals a generation or two after, to whom the wreck of the Armada was already a legend of national deliverance from Popery, as miraculous and almost as remote as the deliverances of which they read so realistically in the Hebrew

Books now laid open to them. The august accident of that Spanish defeat may perhaps have coincided only too well with their concentration on the non-Christian parts of Scripture. It may have satisfied a certain Old Testament sentiment of the election of the English being announced in the stormy oracles of air and sea, which was easily turned into that heresy of a tribal pride that took even heavier hold upon the Germans. It is by such things that a civilized state may fall from being a Christian nation to being a Chosen People. But even if their nationalism was of a kind that has ultimately proved perilous to the comity of nations, it still was nationalism. From first to last the Puritans were patriots, a point in which they had a marked superiority over the French Huguenots. Politically, they were indeed at first but one wing of the new wealthy class which had despoiled the Church and were proceeding to despoil the Crown. But while they were all merely the creatures of the great spoliation, many of them were the unconscious creatures of it. They were strongly represented in the aristocracy, but a great number were of the middle classes, though almost wholly the middle classes of the towns. By the poor agricultural population, which was still by far the largest part of the population, they were simply derided and detested. It may be noted, for instance, that, while they led the nation in many of its higher departments, they could produce nothing having the atmosphere of what is rather priggishly called folklore. All the popular tradition there is, as in songs, toasts, rhymes, or proverbs, is all Royalist. About the Puritans we can find no great legend. We must put up as best we can with great literature.

All these things, however, are simply things that other people might have noticed about them; they are not the most important things, and certainly not the things they thought about themselves. The soul of the movement was in two conceptions, or rather in two steps, the first being the moral process by which they arrived at their chief conclusion, and the second the chief conclusion they arrived at. We will begin with the first, especially as it was this which determined all that external social attitude which struck the eye of contemporaries. The honest Puritan, growing up in youth in a world swept bare by the great pillage, possessed himself of a first principle which is one of the three or four alternative first principles which are possible to the mind of man. It was the principle that the mind of man can alone directly deal with the mind of God. It may shortly be called the anti-sacramental principle; but it really applies, and he really applied it, to many things besides the sacraments of the Church. It equally applies, and he equally applied it, to art, to letters, to the love of locality, to music, and even to good manners. The phrase about no priest coming between a man and his Creator is but an impoverished fragment of the full philosophic doctrine; the true Puritan was equally clear that no singer or story-teller or fiddler must translate the voice of God to him into the tongues of terrestrial beauty. It is notable that the one Puritan man of genius in modern times, Tolstoy, did accept this full conclusion; denounced all music as a mere drug, and forbade his own admirers to read his own admirable novels. Now, the English Puritans were not only Puritans but Englishmen, and therefore did not always shine in clearness of head; as we shall see, true Puritanism was rather a Scotch than an English thing. But this was the driving power and the direction; and the doctrine is quite tenable if a trifle insane. Intellectual truth was the only tribute fit for the highest truth of the universe; and the next step in such a study is to observe what the Puritan thought was the truth about that truth. His individual reason, cut loose from instinct as well as tradition, taught him a concept of the omnipotence of God which meant simply the impotence of man. In Luther, the earlier and milder form of the Protestant process only went so far as to say that nothing a man did could help him except his confession of Christ; with Calvin it took the last logical step and said that even this could not help him, since Omnipotence must have disposed of all his destiny beforehand; that men must be created to be lost and saved. In the purer types of whom I speak this logic was white-hot, and we must read the formula into all their parliamentary and legal formulæ. When we read, “The Puritan party demanded reforms in the church,” we must understand, “The Puritan party demanded fuller and clearer affirmation that men are created to be lost and saved.” When we read, “The Army selected persons for their godliness,” we must understand, “The Army selected those persons who seemed most convinced that men are created to be lost and saved.” It should be added that this terrible trend was not confined even to Protestant countries; some great Romanists doubtfully followed it until stopped by Rome. It was the spirit of the age, and should be a permanent warning against mistaking the spirit of the age for the immortal spirit of man. For there are now few Christians or non-Christians who can look back at the Calvinism which nearly captured Canterbury and even Rome by the genius and heroism of Pascal or Milton, without crying out, like the lady in Mr. Bernard Shaw’s play, “How splendid! How glorious!... and oh what an escape!”

The next thing to note is that their conception of church-government was in a true sense self-government; and yet, for a particular reason, turned out to be a rather selfish self-government. It was equal and yet it was exclusive. Internally the synod or conventicle tended to be a small republic, but unfortunately to be a very small republic. In relation to the street outside the conventicle was not a republic but an aristocracy. It was the most awful of all aristocracies, that of the elect; for it was not a right of birth but a right before birth, and alone of all nobilities it was not laid level in the dust. Hence we have, on the one hand, in the simpler Puritans a ring of real republican virtue; a defiance of tyrants, an assertion of human dignity, but above all an appeal to that first of all republican virtues — publicity. One of the Regicides, on trial for his life, struck the note which all the unnaturalness of his school cannot deprive of nobility: “This thing was not done in a corner.” But their most drastic idealism did nothing to recover a ray of the light that at once lightened every man that came into the world, the assumption of a brotherhood in all baptized people. They were, indeed, very like that dreadful scaffold at which the Regicide was not afraid to point. They were certainly public, they may have been public-spirited, they were never popular; and it seems never to have crossed their minds that there was any need to be popular. England was never so little of a democracy as during the short time when she was a republic.

The struggle with the Stuarts, which is the next passage in our history, arose from an alliance, which some may think an accidental alliance, between two things. The first was this intellectual fashion of Calvinism which affected the cultured world as did our recent intellectual fashion of Collectivism. The second was the older thing which had made that creed and perhaps that cultured world possible — the aristocratic revolt under the last Tudors. It was, we might say, the story of a father and a son dragging down the same golden image, but the younger really from hatred of idolatry, and the older solely from love of gold. It is at once the tragedy and the paradox of England that it was the eternal passion that passed, and the transient or terrestrial passion that remained. This was true of England; it was far less true of Scotland; and that is the meaning of the Scotch and English war that ended at Worcester. The first change had indeed been much the same materialist matter in both countries — a mere brigandage of barons; and even John Knox, though he has become a national hero, was an extremely anti-national politician. The patriot party in Scotland was that of Cardinal Beaton and Mary Stuart. Nevertheless, the new creed did become popular in the Lowlands in a positive sense, not even yet known in our own land. Hence in Scotland Puritanism was the main thing, and was mixed with Parliamentary and other oligarchies. In England Parliamentary oligarchy was the main thing, and was mixed with Puritanism. When the storm began to rise against Charles I., after the more or less transitional time of his father, the Scotch successor of Elizabeth, the instances commonly cited mark all the difference between democratic religion and aristocratic politics. The Scotch legend is that of Jenny Geddes, the poor woman who threw a stool at the priest. The English legend is that of John Hampden, the great squire who raised a county against the King. The Parliamentary movement in England was, indeed, almost wholly a thing of squires, with their new allies the merchants. They were squires who may well have regarded themselves as the real and natural leaders of the English; but they were leaders who allowed no mutiny among their followers. There was certainly no Village Hampden in Hampden Village.

The Stuarts, it may be suspected, brought from Scotland a more mediæval and therefore more logical view of their own function; for the note of their nation was logic. It is a proverb that James I. was a Scot and a pedant; it is hardly sufficiently noted that Charles I. also was not a little of a pedant, being very much of a Scot. He had also the virtues of a Scot, courage, and a quite natural dignity and an appetite for the things of the mind. Being somewhat Scottish, he was very un-English, and could not manage a compromise: he tried instead to split hairs, and seemed merely to break promises. Yet he might safely have been far more inconsistent if he had been a little hearty and hazy; but he was of the sort that sees everything in black and white; and it is therefore remembered — especially the black. From the first he fenced with his Parliament as with a mere foe; perhaps he almost felt it as a foreigner. The issue is familiar, and we need not be so careful as the gentleman who wished to finish the chapter in order to find out what happened to Charles I. His minister, the great Strafford, was foiled in an attempt to make him strong in the fashion of a French king, and perished on the scaffold, a frustrated Richelieu. The Parliament claiming the power of the purse, Charles appealed to the power of the sword, and at first carried all before him; but success passed to the wealth of the Parliamentary class, the discipline of the new army, and the patience and genius of Cromwell; and Charles died the same death as his great servant.

Historically, the quarrel resolved itself, through ramifications generally followed perhaps in more detail than they deserve, into the great modern query of whether a King can raise taxes without the consent of his Parliament. The test case was that of Hampden, the great Buckinghamshire magnate, who challenged the legality of a tax which Charles imposed, professedly for a national navy. As even innovators always of necessity seek for sanctity in the past, the Puritan squires made a legend of the mediæval Magna Carta; and they were so far in a true tradition that the concession of John had really been, as we have already noted, anti-despotic without being democratic. These two truths cover two parts of the problem of the Stuart fall, which are of very different certainty, and should be considered separately.

For the first point about democracy, no candid person, in face of the facts, can really consider it at all. It is quite possible to hold that the seventeenth-century Parliament was fighting for the truth; it is not possible to hold that it was fighting for the populace. After the autumn of the Middle Ages Parliament was always actively aristocratic and actively anti-popular. The institution which forbade Charles I. to raise Ship Money was the same institution which previously forbade Richard II. to free the serfs. The group which claimed coal and minerals from Charles I. was the same which afterward claimed the common lands from the village communities. It was the same institution which only two generations before had eagerly helped to destroy, not merely things of popular sentiment like the monasteries, but all the things of popular utility like the guilds and parishes, the local governments of towns and trades. The work of the great lords may have had, indeed it certainly had, another more patriotic and creative side; but it was exclusively the work of the great lords that was done by Parliament. The House of Commons has itself been a House of Lords.

But when we turn to the other or anti-despotic aspect of the campaign against the Stuarts, we come to something much more difficult to dismiss and much more easy to justify. While the stupidest things are said against the Stuarts, the real contemporary case for their enemies is little realized; for it is connected with what our insular history most neglects, the condition of the Continent. It should be remembered that though the Stuarts failed in England they fought for things that succeeded in Europe. These were roughly, first, the effects of the Counter-Reformation, which made the sincere Protestant see Stuart Catholicism not at all as the last flicker of an old flame, but as the spread of a conflagration. Charles II., for instance, was a man of strong, sceptical, and almost irritably humorous intellect, and he was quite certainly, and even reluctantly, convinced of Catholicism as a philosophy. The other and more important matter here was the almost awful autocracy that was being built up in France like a Bastille. It was more logical, and in many ways more equal and even equitable than the English oligarchy, but it really became a tyranny in case of rebellion or even resistance. There were none of the rough English safeguards of juries and good customs of the old common law; there was *lettre de cachet* as unanswerable as magic. The English who defied the law were better off than the French; a French satirist would probably have retorted that it was the English who obeyed the law who were worse off than the French. The ordering of men’s normal lives was with the squire; but he was, if anything, more limited when he was the magistrate. He was stronger as master of the village, but actually weaker as agent of the King. In defending this state of things, in short, the Whigs were certainly not defending democracy, but they were in a real sense defending liberty. They were even defending some remains of mediæval liberty, though not the best; the jury though not the guild. Even feudalism had involved a localism not without liberal elements, which lingered in the aristocratic system. Those who loved such things might well be alarmed at the Leviathan of the State, which for Hobbes was a single monster and for France a single man.

As to the mere facts, it must be said again that in so far as Puritanism was pure, it was unfortunately passing. And the very type of the transition by which it passed can be found in that extraordinary man who is popularly credited with making it predominate. Oliver Cromwell is in history much less the leader of Puritanism than the tamer of Puritanism. He was undoubtedly possessed, certainly in his youth, possibly all his life, by the rather sombre religious passions of his period; but as he emerges into importance, he stands more and more for the Positivism of the English as compared with the Puritanism of the Scotch. He is one of the Puritan squires; but he is steadily more of the squire and less of the Puritan; and he points to the process by which the squirearchy became at last merely pagan. This is the key to most of what is praised and most of what is blamed in him; the key to the comparative sanity, toleration and modern efficiency of many of his departures; the key to the comparative coarseness, earthiness, cynicism, and lack of sympathy in many others. He was the reverse of an idealist; and he cannot without absurdity be held up as an ideal; but he was, like most of the squires, a type genuinely English; not without public spirit, certainly not without patriotism. His seizure of personal power, which destroyed an impersonal and ideal government, had something English in its very unreason. The act of killing the King, I fancy, was not primarily his, and certainly not characteristically his. It was a concession to the high inhuman ideals of the tiny group of true Puritans, with whom he had to compromise but with whom he afterwards collided. It was logic rather than cruelty in the act that was not Cromwellian; for he treated with bestial cruelty the native Irish, whom the new spiritual exclusiveness regarded as beasts — or as the modern euphemism would put it, as aborigines. But his practical temper was more akin to such human slaughter on what seemed to him the edges of civilization, than to a sort of human sacrifice in the very centre and forum of it; he is not a representative regicide. In a sense that piece of headsmanship was rather above his head. The real regicides did it in a sort of trance or vision; and he was not troubled with visions. But the true collision between the religious and rational sides of the seventeenth-century movement came symbolically on that day of driving storm at Dunbar, when the raving Scotch preachers overruled Leslie and forced him down into the valley to be the victim of the Cromwellian common sense. Cromwell said that God had delivered them into his hand; but it was their own God who delivered them, the dark unnatural God of the Calvinist dreams, as overpowering as a nightmare — and as passing.

It was the Whig rather than the Puritan that triumphed on that day; it was the Englishman with his aristocratic compromise; and even what followed Cromwell’s death, the Restoration, was an aristocratic compromise, and even a Whig compromise. The mob might cheer as for a mediæval king; but the Protectorate and the Restoration were more of a piece than the mob understood. Even in the superficial things where there seemed to be a rescue it was ultimately a respite. Thus the Puritan régime had risen chiefly by one thing unknown to mediævalism — militarism. Picked professional troops, harshly drilled but highly paid, were the new and alien instrument by which the Puritans became masters. These were disbanded and their return resisted by Tories and Whigs; but their return seemed always imminent, because it was in the spirit of the new stern world of the Thirty

Years' War. A discovery is an incurable disease; and it had been discovered that a crowd could be turned into an iron centipede, crushing larger and looser crowds. Similarly the remains of Christmas were rescued from the Puritans; but they had eventually to be rescued again by Dickens from the Utilitarians, and may yet have to be rescued by somebody from the vegetarians and teetotallers. The strange army passed and vanished almost like a Moslem invasion; but it had made the difference that armed valour and victory always make, if it was but a negative difference. It was the final break in our history; it was a breaker of many things, and perhaps of popular rebellion in our land. It is something of a verbal symbol that these men founded New England in America, for indeed they tried to found it here. By a paradox, there was something prehistoric in the very nakedness of their novelty. Even the old and savage things they invoked became more savage in becoming more new. In observing what is called their Jewish Sabbath, they would have had to stone the strictest Jew. And they (and indeed their age generally) turned witch-burning from an episode to an epidemic. The destroyers and the things destroyed disappeared together; but they remain as something nobler than the nibbling legalism of some of the Whig cynics who continued their work. They were above all things anti-historic, like the Futurists in Italy; and there was this unconscious greatness about them, that their very sacrilege was public and solemn like a sacrament; and they were ritualists even as iconoclasts. It was, properly considered, but a very secondary example of their strange and violent simplicity that one of them, before a mighty mob at Whitehall, cut off the anointed head of the sacramental man of the Middle Ages. For another, far away in the western shires, cut down the thorn of Glastonbury, from which had grown the whole story of Britain.

XIV

THE TRIUMPH OF THE WHIGS

Whether or no we believe that the Reformation really reformed, there can be little doubt that the Restoration did not really restore. Charles II. was never in the old sense a King; he was a Leader of the Opposition to his own Ministers. Because he was a clever politician he kept his official post, and because his brother and successor was an incredibly stupid politician, he lost it; but the throne was already only one of the official posts. In some ways, indeed, Charles II. was fitted for the more modern world then beginning; he was rather an eighteenth-century than a seventeenth-century man. He was as witty as a character in a comedy; and it was already the comedy of Sheridan and not of Shakespeare. He was more modern yet when he enjoyed the pure experimentalism of the Royal Society, and bent eagerly over the toys that were to grow into the terrible engines of science. He and his brother, however, had two links with what was in England the losing side; and by the strain on these their dynastic cause was lost. The first, which lessened in its practical pressure as time passed, was, of course, the hatred felt for their religion. The second, which grew as it neared the next century, was their tie with the French Monarchy. We will deal with the religious quarrel before passing on to a much more irreligious age; but the truth about it is tangled and far from easy to trace.

The Tudors had begun to persecute the old religion before they had ceased to belong to it. That is one of the transitional complexities that can only be conveyed by such contradictions. A person of the type and time of Elizabeth would feel fundamentally, and even fiercely, that priests should be celibate, while racking and rending anybody caught talking to the only celibate priests. This mystery, which may be very variously explained, covered the Church of England, and in a great degree the people of England. Whether it be called the Catholic continuity of Anglicanism or merely the slow extirpation of Catholicism, there can be no doubt that a parson like Herrick, for instance, as late as the Civil War, was stuffed with “superstitions” which were Catholic in the extreme sense we should now call Continental. Yet many similar parsons had already a parallel and opposite passion, and thought of Continental Catholicism not even as the errant Church of Christ, but as the consistent Church of Antichrist. It is, therefore, very hard now to guess the proportion of Protestantism; but there is no doubt about its presence, especially its presence in centres of importance like London. By the time of Charles II., after the purge of the Puritan Terror, it had become something at least more inherent and human than the mere exclusiveness of Calvinist creeds or the craft of Tudor nobles. The Monmouth rebellion showed that it had a popular, though an insufficiently popular, backing. The "No Popery" force became the crowd if it never became the people. It was, perhaps, increasingly an urban crowd, and was subject to those epidemics of detailed delusion with which sensational journalism plays on the urban crowds of to-day. One of these scares and scoops (not to add the less technical name of lies) was the Popish Plot, a storm weathered warily by Charles II. Another was the Tale of the Warming Pan, or the bogus heir to the throne, a storm that finally swept away James II.

The last blow, however, could hardly have fallen but for one of those illogical but almost lovable localisms to which the English temperament is prone. The debate about the Church of England, then and now, differs from most debates in one vital point. It is not a debate about what an institution ought to do, or whether that institution ought to alter, but about what that institution actually is. One party, then as now, only cared for it because it was Catholic, and the other only cared for it because it was Protestant. Now, something had certainly happened to the English quite inconceivable to the Scotch or the Irish. Masses of common people loved the Church of England without having even decided what it was. It had a hold different indeed from that of the mediæval Church, but also very different from the barren prestige of gentility which clung to it in the succeeding century. Macaulay, with a widely different purpose in mind, devotes some pages to proving that an Anglican clergyman was socially a mere upper servant in the seventeenth century. He is probably right; but he does not guess that this was but the degenerate continuity of the more democratic priesthood of the Middle Ages. A priest was not treated as a gentleman; but a peasant was treated as a priest. And in England then, as in Europe now, many entertained the fancy that priesthood was a higher thing than gentility. In short, the national church was then at least really national, in a fashion that was emotionally vivid though intellectually vague. When, therefore, James II. seemed to menace this practising communion, he aroused something at least more popular than the mere priggishness of the Whig lords. To this must be added a fact generally forgotten. I mean the fact that the influence then called Popish was then in a real sense regarded as revolutionary. The Jesuit seemed to the English not merely a conspirator but a sort of anarchist. There is something appalling about abstract speculations to many Englishmen; and the abstract speculations of Jesuits like Suarez dealt with extreme democracy and things undreamed of here. The last Stuart proposals for toleration seemed thus to many as vast and empty as atheism. The only seventeenth-century Englishmen who had something of this transcendental abstraction were the Quakers; and the cosy English compromise shuddered when the two things shook hands. For it was something much more than a Stuart intrigue which made these philosophical extremes meet, merely because they were philosophical; and which brought the weary but humorous mind of Charles II. into alliance with the subtle and detached spirit of William Penn.

Much of England, then, was really alarmed at the Stuart scheme of toleration, sincere or insincere, because it seemed theoretical and therefore fanciful. It was in advance of its age or (to use a more intelligent language) too thin and ethereal for its atmosphere. And to this affection for the actual in the English moderates must be added (in what proportion we know not) a persecuting hatred of Popery almost maniacal but quite sincere. The State had long, as we have seen, been turned to an engine of torture against priests and the friends of priests. Men talk of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes; but the English persecutors never had so tolerant an edict to revoke. But at least by this time the English, like the French, persecutors were oppressing a minority. Unfortunately there was another province of government in which they were still more madly persecuting the majority. For it was here that came to its climax and took on its terrific character that lingering crime that was called the government of Ireland. It would take too long to detail the close network of unnatural laws by which that country was covered till towards the end of the eighteenth century; it is enough to say here that the whole attitude to the Irish was tragically typified, and tied up with our expulsion of the Stuarts, in one of those acts that are remembered for ever. James II., fleeing from the opinion of London, perhaps of England, eventually found refuge in Ireland, which took arms in his favour. The Prince of Orange, whom the aristocracy had summoned to the throne, landed in that country with an English and Dutch army, won the

Battle of the Boyne, but saw his army successfully arrested before Limerick by the military genius of Patrick Sarsfield. The check was so complete that peace could only be restored by promising complete religious liberty to the Irish, in return for the surrender of Limerick. The new English Government occupied the town and immediately broke the promise. It is not a matter on which there is much more to be said. It was a tragic necessity that the Irish should remember it; but it was far more tragic that the English forgot it. For he who has forgotten his sin is repeating it incessantly for ever.

But here again the Stuart position was much more vulnerable on the side of secular policy, and especially of foreign policy. The aristocrats to whom power passed finally at the Revolution were already ceasing to have any supernatural faith in Protestantism as against Catholicism; but they had a very natural faith in England as against France; and even, in a certain sense, in English institutions as against French institutions. And just as these men, the most unmediæval of mankind, could yet boast about some mediæval liberties, Magna Carta, the Parliament and the Jury, so they could appeal to a true mediæval legend in the matter of a war with France. A typical eighteenth-century oligarch like Horace Walpole could complain that the cicerone in an old church troubled him with traces of an irrelevant person named St. Somebody, when he was looking for the remains of John of Gaunt. He could say it with all the *naïveté* of scepticism, and never dream how far away from John of Gaunt he was really wandering in saying so. But though their notion of mediæval history was a mere masquerade ball, it was one in which men fighting the French could still, in an ornamental way, put on the armour of the Black Prince or the crown of Henry of Monmouth. In this matter, in short, it is probable enough that the aristocrats were popular as patriots will always be popular. It is true that the last Stuarts were themselves far from unpatriotic; and James II. in particular may well be called the founder of the British Navy. But their sympathies were with France, among other foreign countries; they took refuge in France, the elder before and the younger after his period of rule; and France aided the later Jacobite efforts to restore their line. And for the new England, especially the new English nobility, France was the enemy.

The transformation through which the external relations of England passed at the end of the seventeenth century is symbolized by two very separate and definite steps; the first the accession of a Dutch king and the second the accession of a German king. In the first were present all the features that can partially make an unnatural thing natural. In the second we have the condition in which even those effecting it can hardly call it natural, but only call it necessary. William of Orange was like a gun dragged into the breach of a wall; a foreign gun indeed, and one fired in a quarrel more foreign than English, but still a quarrel in which the English, and especially the English aristocrats, could play a great part. George of Hanover was simply something stuffed into a hole in the wall by English aristocrats, who practically admitted that they were simply stopping it with rubbish. In many ways William, cynical as he was, carried on the legend of the greater and grimmer Puritanism. He was in private conviction a Calvinist; and nobody knew or cared what George was except that he was not a Catholic. He was at home the partly republican magistrate of what had once been a purely republican experiment, and among the cleaner if colder ideals of the seventeenth century. George was when he was at home pretty much what the King of the Cannibal Islands was when he was at home — a savage personal ruler scarcely logical enough to be called a despot. William was a man of acute if narrow intelligence; George was a man of no intelligence. Above all, touching the immediate effect produced, William was married to a Stuart, and ascended the throne hand-in-hand with a Stuart; he was a familiar figure, and already a part of our royal family. With George there entered England something that had scarcely been seen there before; something hardly mentioned in mediæval or Renascence writing, except as one mentions a Hottentot — the barbarian from beyond the Rhine.

The reign of Queen Anne, which covers the period between these two foreign kings, is therefore the true time of transition. It is the bridge between the time when the aristocrats were at least weak enough to call in a strong man to help them, and the time when they were strong enough deliberately to call in a weak man who would allow them to help themselves. To symbolize is always to simplify, and to simplify too much; but the whole may be well symbolized as the struggle of two great figures, both gentlemen and men of genius, both courageous and clear about their own aims, and in everything else a violent contrast at every point. One of them was Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke; the other was John Churchill, the famous and infamous Duke of Marlborough. The story of Churchill is primarily the story of the Revolution and how it succeeded; the story of Bolingbroke is the story of the Counter-Revolution and how it failed.

Churchill is a type of the extraordinary time in this, that he combines the presence of glory with the absence of honour. When the new aristocracy had become normal to the nation, in the next few generations, it produced personal types not only of aristocracy but of chivalry. The Revolution reduced us to a country wholly governed by gentlemen; the popular universities and schools of the Middle Ages, like their guilds and abbeys, had been seized and turned into what they are — factories of gentlemen, when they are not merely factories of snobs. It is hard now to realize that what we call the Public Schools were once undoubtedly public. By the Revolution they were already becoming as private as they are now. But at least in the eighteenth century there were great gentlemen in the generous, perhaps too generous, sense now given to the title. Types not merely honest, but rash and romantic in their honesty, remain in the record with the names of Nelson or of Fox. We have already seen that the later reformers defaced from fanaticism the churches which the first reformers had defaced simply from avarice. Rather in the same way the eighteenth-century Whigs often praised, in a spirit of pure magnanimity, what the seventeenth-century Whigs had done in a spirit of pure meanness. How mean was that meanness can only be estimated by realizing that a great military hero had not even the ordinary military virtues of loyalty to his flag or obedience to his superior officers, that he picked his way through campaigns that have made him immortal with the watchful spirit of a thieving camp-follower. When William landed at Torbay on the invitation of the other Whig nobles, Churchill, as if to add something ideal to his imitation of Iscariot, went to James with wanton professions of love and loyalty, went forth in arms as if to defend the country from invasion, and then calmly handed the army over to the invader. To the finish of this work of art but few could aspire, but in their degree all the politicians of the Revolution were upon this ethical pattern. While they surrounded the throne of James, there was scarcely one of them who was not in correspondence with William. When they afterwards surrounded the throne of William, there was not one of them who was not still in correspondence with James. It was such men who defeated Irish Jacobitism by the treason of Limerick; it was such men who defeated Scotch Jacobitism by the treason of Glencoe.

Thus the strange yet splendid story of eighteenth-century England is one of greatness founded on smallness, a pyramid standing on a point. Or, to vary the metaphor, the new mercantile oligarchy might be symbolized even in the externals of its great sister, the mercantile oligarchy of Venice. The solidity was all in the superstructure; the fluctuation had been all in the foundations. The great temple of Chatham and Warren Hastings was reared in its origins on things as unstable as water and as fugitive as foam. It is only a fancy, of course, to connect the unstable element with something restless and even shifty in the lords of the sea. But there was certainly in the genesis, if not in the later generations of our mercantile aristocracy, a thing only too mercantile; something which had also been urged against a yet older example of that polity, something called *Punica fides*. The great Royalist Strafford, going disillusioned to death, had said, “Put not your trust in princes.” The great Royalist Bolingbroke may well be said to have retorted, “And least of all in merchant princes.”

Bolingbroke stands for a whole body of conviction which bulked very big in English history, but which with the recent winding of the course of history has gone out of sight. Yet without grasping it we cannot understand our past, nor, I will add, our future. Curiously enough, the best English books of the eighteenth century are crammed with it, yet modern culture cannot see it when it is there. Dr. Johnson is full of it; it is what he meant when he denounced minority rule in Ireland, as well as when he said that the devil was the first Whig. Goldsmith is full of it; it is the whole point of that fine poem “The Deserted Village,” and is set out theoretically with great lucidity and spirit in “The Vicar of Wakefield.” Swift is full of it; and found in it an intellectual brotherhood-in-arms with Bolingbroke himself. In the time of Queen Anne it was probably the opinion of the majority of people in England. But it was not only in Ireland that the minority had begun to rule.

This conviction, as brilliantly expounded by Bolingbroke, had many aspects; perhaps the most practical was the point that one of the virtues of a despot is distance. It is “the little tyrant of the fields” that poisons human life. The thesis involved the truism that a good king is not only a good thing, but perhaps the best thing. But it also involved the paradox that even a bad king is a good king, for his oppression weakens the nobility and relieves the pressure on the populace. If he is a tyrant he chiefly tortures the torturers; and though Nero’s murder of his own mother was hardly perhaps a gain to his soul, it was no great loss to his empire. Bolingbroke had thus a wholly rationalistic theory of Jacobitism. He was, in other respects, a fine and typical eighteenth-century intellect, a free-thinking Deist, a clear and classic writer of English. But he was also a man of adventurous spirit and splendid political courage, and he made one last throw for the Stuarts. It was defeated by the great Whig nobles who formed the committee of the new régime of the gentry. And considering who it was who defeated it, it is almost unnecessary to say that it was defeated by a trick.

The small German prince ascended the throne, or rather was hoisted into it like a dummy, and the great English Royalist went into exile. Twenty years afterwards he reappears and reasserts his living and logical faith in a popular monarchy. But it is typical of the whole detachment and distinction of his mind that for this abstract ideal he was willing to strengthen the heir of the king whom he had tried to exclude. He was always a Royalist, but never a Jacobite. What he cared for was not a royal family, but a royal office. He celebrated it in his great book "The Patriot King," written in exile; and when he thought that George's great-grandson was enough of a patriot, he only wished that he might be more of a king. He made in his old age yet another attempt, with such unpromising instruments as George III. and Lord Bute; and when these broke in his hand he died with all the dignity of the *sed victa Catoni*. The great commercial aristocracy grew on to its full stature. But if we wish to realize the good and ill of its growth, there is no better summary than this section from the first to the last of the foiled *coups d'état* of Bolingbroke. In the first his policy made peace with France, and broke the connection with Austria. In the second his policy again made peace with France, and broke the connection with Prussia. For in that interval the seed of the money-lending squires of Brandenburg had waxed mighty, and had already become that prodigy which has become so enormous a problem in Europe. By the end of this epoch Chatham, who incarnated and even created, at least in a representative sense, all that we call the British Empire, was at the height of his own and his country's glory. He summarized the new England of the Revolution in everything, especially in everything in which that movement seems to many to be intrinsically contradictory and yet was most corporately consistent. Thus he was a Whig, and even in some ways what we should call a Liberal, like his son after him; but he was also an Imperialist and what we should call a Jingo; and the Whig party was consistently the Jingo party. He was an aristocrat, in the sense that all our public men were then aristocrats; but he was very emphatically what may be called a commercialist — one might almost say Carthaginian. In this connection he has the characteristic which perhaps humanized but was not allowed to hamper the aristocratic plan; I mean that he could use the middle classes. It was a young soldier of middle rank, James Wolfe, who fell gloriously driving the French out of Quebec; it was a young clerk of the East India Company, Robert Clive, who threw open to the English the golden gates of India. But it was precisely one of the strong points of this eighteenth-century aristocracy that it wielded without friction the wealthier *bourgeoisie*; it was not there that the social cleavage was to come. He was an eloquent parliamentary orator, and though Parliament was as narrow as a senate, it was one of great senators. The very word recalls the roll of those noble Roman phrases they often used, which we are right in calling classic, but wrong in calling cold. In some ways nothing could be further from all this fine if florid scholarship, all this princely and patrician geniality, all this air of freedom and adventure on the sea, than the little inland state of the stingy drill-sergeants of Potsdam, hammering mere savages into mere soldiers. And yet the great chief of these was in some ways like a shadow of Chatham flung across the world — the sort of shadow that is at once an enlargement and a caricature. The English lords, whose paganism was ennobled by patriotism, saw here something drawn out long and thin out of their own theories. What was paganism in Chatham was atheism in Frederick the Great. And what was in the first patriotism was in the second something with no name but Prussianism. The cannibal theory of a commonwealth, that it can of its nature eat other commonwealths, had entered Christendom. Its autocracy and our own aristocracy drew indirectly nearer together, and seemed for a time to be wedded; but not before the great Bolingbroke had made a dying gesture, as if to forbid the banns.

XV

THE WAR WITH THE GREAT REPUBLICS

We cannot understand the eighteenth century so long as we suppose that rhetoric is artificial because it is artistic. We do not fall into this folly about any of the other arts. We talk of a man picking out notes arranged in ivory on a wooden piano "with much feeling," or of his pouring out his soul by scraping on cat-gut after a training as careful as an acrobat's. But we are still haunted with a prejudice that verbal form and verbal effect must somehow be hypocritical when they are the link between things so living as a man and a mob. We doubt the feeling of the old-fashioned orator, because his periods are so rounded and pointed as to convey his feeling. Now before any criticism of the eighteenth-century worthies must be put the proviso of their perfect artistic sincerity. Their oratory was unrhymed poetry, and it had the humanity of poetry. It was not even unmetrical poetry; that century is full of great phrases, often spoken on the spur of great moments, which have in them the throb and recurrence of song, as of a man thinking to a tune. Nelson's "In honour I gained them, in honour I will die with them," has more rhythm than much that is called *vers libres*. Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death" might be a great line in Walt Whitman.

It is one of the many quaint perversities of the English to pretend to be bad speakers; but in fact the most English eighteenth-century epoch blazed with brilliant speakers. There may have been finer writing in France; there was no such fine speaking as in England. The Parliament had faults enough, but it was sincere enough to be rhetorical. The Parliament was corrupt, as it is now; though the examples of corruption were then often really made examples, in the sense of warnings, where they are now examples only in the sense of patterns. The Parliament was indifferent to the constituencies, as it is now; though perhaps the constituencies were less indifferent to the Parliament. The Parliament was snobbish, as it is now, though perhaps more respectful to mere rank and less to mere wealth. But the Parliament was a Parliament; it did fulfil its name and duty by talking, and trying to talk well. It did not merely do things because they do not bear talking about — as it does now. It was then, to the eternal glory of our country, a great "talking-shop," not a mere buying and selling shop for financial tips and official places. And as with any other artist, the care the eighteenth-century man expended on oratory is a proof of his sincerity, not a disproof of it. An enthusiastic eulogium by Burke is as rich and elaborate as a lover’s sonnet; but it is because Burke is really enthusiastic, like the lover. An angry sentence by Junius is as carefully compounded as a Renascence poison; but it is because Junius is really angry — like the poisoner. Now, nobody who has realized this psychological truth can doubt for a moment that many of the English aristocrats of the eighteenth century had a real enthusiasm for liberty; their voices lift like trumpets upon the very word. Whatever their immediate forbears may have meant, these men meant what they said when they talked of the high memory of Hampden or the majesty of Magna Carta. Those Patriots whom Walpole called the Boys included many who really were patriots — or better still, who really were boys. If we prefer to put it so, among the Whig aristocrats were many who really were Whigs; Whigs by all the ideal definitions which identified the party with a defence of law against tyrants and courtiers. But if anybody deduces, from the fact that the Whig aristocrats were Whigs, any doubt about whether the Whig aristocrats were aristocrats, there is one practical test and reply. It might be tested in many ways: by the game laws and enclosure laws they passed, or by the strict code of the duel and the definition of honour on which they all insisted. But if it be really questioned whether I am right in calling their whole world an aristocracy, and the very reverse of it a democracy, the true historical test is this: that when republicanism really entered the world, they instantly waged two great wars with it — or (if the view be preferred) it instantly waged two great wars with them. America and France revealed the real nature of the English Parliament. Ice may sparkle, but a real spark will show it is only ice. So when the red fire of the Revolution touched the frosty splendours of the Whigs, there was instantly a hissing and a strife; a strife of the flame to melt the ice, of the water to quench the flame.

It has been noted that one of the virtues of the aristocrats was liberty, especially liberty among themselves. It might even be said that one of the virtues of the aristocrats was cynicism. They were not stuffed with our fashionable fiction, with its stiff and wooden figures of a good man named Washington and a bad man named Boney. They at least were aware that Washington’s cause was not so obviously white nor Napoleon’s so obviously black as most books in general circulation would indicate. They had a natural admiration for the military genius of Washington and

Napoleon; they had the most unmixed contempt for the German Royal Family. But they were, as a class, not only against both Washington and Napoleon, but against them both for the same reason. And it was that they both stood for democracy.

Great injustice is done to the English aristocratic government of the time through a failure to realize this fundamental difference, especially in the case of America. There is a wrong-headed humour about the English which appears especially in this, that while they often (as in the case of Ireland) make themselves out right where they were entirely wrong, they are easily persuaded (as in the case of America) to make themselves out entirely wrong where there is at least a case for their having been more or less right. George III.'s Government laid certain taxes on the colonial community on the eastern seaboard of America. It was certainly not self-evident, in the sense of law and precedent, that the imperial government could not lay taxes on such colonists. Nor were the taxes themselves of that practically oppressive sort which rightly raise everywhere the common casuistry of revolution. The Whig oligarchs had their faults, but utter lack of sympathy with liberty, especially local liberty, and with their adventurous kindred beyond the seas, was by no means one of their faults. Chatham, the great chief of the new and very national *noblesse,* was typical of them in being free from the faintest illiberality and irritation against the colonies as such. He would have made them free and even favoured colonies, if only he could have kept them as colonies. Burke, who was then the eloquent voice of Whiggism, and was destined later to show how wholly it was a voice of aristocracy, went of course even further. Even North compromised; and though George III., being a fool, might himself have refused to compromise, he had already failed to effect the Bolingbroke scheme of the restitution of the royal power. The case for the Americans, the real reason for calling them right in the quarrel, was something much deeper than the quarrel. They were at issue, not with a dead monarchy, but with a living aristocracy; they declared war on something much finer and more formidable than poor old George. Nevertheless, the popular tradition, especially in America, has pictured it primarily as a duel of George III. and George Washington; and, as we have noticed more than once, such pictures though figurative are seldom false. King George's head was not much more useful on the throne than it was on the sign-board of a tavern; nevertheless, the sign-board was really a sign, and a sign of the times. It stood for a tavern that sold not English but German beer. It stood for that side of the Whig policy which Chatham showed when he was tolerant to America alone, but intolerant of America when allied with France. That very wooden sign stood, in short, for the same thing as the juncture with Frederick the Great; it stood for that Anglo-German alliance which, at a very much later time in history, was to turn into the world-old Teutonic Race.

Roughly and frankly speaking, we may say that America forced the quarrel. She wished to be separate, which was to her but another phrase for wishing to be free. She was not thinking of her wrongs as a colony, but already of her rights as a republic. The negative effect of so small a difference could never have changed the world, without the positive effect of a great ideal, one may say of a great new religion. The real case for the colonists is that they felt they could be something, which they also felt, and justly, that England would not help them to be. England would probably have allowed the colonists all sorts of concessions and constitutional privileges; but England could not allow the colonists equality: I do not mean equality with her, but even with each other. Chatham might have compromised with Washington, because Washington was a gentleman; but Chatham could hardly have conceived a country not governed by gentlemen. Burke was apparently ready to grant everything to America; but he would not have been ready to grant what America eventually gained. If he had seen American democracy, he would have been as much appalled by it as he was by French democracy, and would always have been by any democracy. In a word, the Whigs were liberal and even generous aristocrats, but they were aristocrats; that is why their concessions were as vain as their conquests. We talk, with a humiliation too rare with us, about our dubious part in the secession of America. Whether it increase or decrease the humiliation I do not know; but I strongly suspect that we had very little to do with it. I believe we counted for uncommonly little in the case. We did not really drive away the American colonists, nor were they driven. They were led on by a light that went before.

That light came from France, like the armies of Lafayette that came to the help of Washington. France was already in travail with the tremendous spiritual revolution which was soon to reshape the world. Her doctrine, disruptive and creative, was widely misunderstood at the time, and is much misunderstood still, despite the splendid clarity of style in which it was stated by Rousseau in the “Contrat Social,” and by Jefferson in The Declaration of Independence. Say the very word “equality” in many modern countries, and four hundred fools will leap to their feet at once to explain that some men can be found, on careful examination, to be taller or handsomer than others. As if Danton had not noticed that he was taller than Robespierre, or as if Washington was not well aware that he was handsomer than Franklin. This is no place to expound a philosophy; it will be enough to say in passing, by way of a parable, that when we say that all pennies are equal, we do not mean that they all look exactly the same. We mean that they are absolutely equal in their one absolute character, in the most important thing about them. It may be put practically by saying that they are coins of a certain value, twelve of which go to a shilling. It may be put symbolically, and even mystically, by saying that they all bear the image of the King. And, though the most mystical, it is also the most practical summary of equality that all men bear the image of the King of Kings. Indeed, it is of course true that this idea had long underlain all Christianity, even in institutions less popular in form than were, for instance, the mob of mediæval republics in Italy. A dogma of equal duties implies that of equal rights. I know of no Christian authority that would not admit that it is as wicked to murder a poor man as a rich man, or as bad to burgle an inelegantly furnished house as a tastefully furnished one. But the world had wandered further and further from these truisms, and nobody in the world was further from them than the group of the great English aristocrats. The idea of the equality of men is in substance simply the idea of the importance of man. But it was precisely the notion of the importance of a mere man which seemed startling and indecent to a society whose whole romance and religion now consisted of the importance of a gentleman. It was as if a man had walked naked into Parliament. There is not space here to develop the moral issue in full, but this will suffice to show that the critics concerned about the difference in human types or talents are considerably wasting their time. If they can understand how two coins can count the same though one is bright and the other brown, they might perhaps understand how two men can vote the same though one is bright and the other dull. If, however, they are still satisfied with their solid objection that some men are dull, I can only gravely agree with them, that some men are very dull.

But a few years after Lafayette had returned from helping to found a republic in America he was flung over his own frontiers for resisting the foundation of a republic in France. So furious was the onward stride of this new spirit that the republican of the new world lived to be the reactionary of the old. For when France passed from theory to practice, the question was put to the world in a way not thinkable in connection with the prefatory experiment of a thin population on a colonial coast. The mightiest of human monarchies, like some monstrous immeasurable idol of iron, was melted down in a furnace barely bigger than itself, and recast in a size equally colossal, but in a shape men could not understand. Many, at least, could not understand it, and least of all the liberal aristocracy of England. There were, of course, practical reasons for a continuous foreign policy against France, whether royal or republican. There was primarily the desire to keep any foreigner from menacing us from the Flemish coast; there was, to a much lesser extent, the colonial rivalry in which so much English glory had been gained by the statesmanship of Chatham and the arms of Wolfe and of Clive. The former reason has returned on us with a singular irony; for in order to keep the French out of Flanders we flung ourselves with increasing enthusiasm into a fraternity with the Germans. We purposely fed and pampered the power which was destined in the future to devour Belgium as France would never have devoured it, and threaten us across the sea with terrors of which no Frenchman would ever dream. But indeed much deeper things unified our attitude towards France before and after the Revolution. It is but one stride from despotism to democracy, in logic as well as in history; and oligarchy is equally remote from both. The Bastille fell, and it seemed to an Englishman merely that a despot had turned into a demos. The young Bonaparte rose, and it seemed to an Englishman merely that a demos had once more turned into a despot. He was not wrong in thinking these allotropic forms of the same alien thing; and that thing was equality. For when millions are equally subject to one law, it makes little difference if they are also subject to one lawgiver; the general social life is a level. The one thing that the English have never understood about Napoleon, in all their myriad studies of his mysterious personality, is how impersonal he was. I had almost said how unimportant he was. He said himself, “I shall go down to history with my code in my hand;” but in practical effects, as distinct from mere name and renown, it would be even truer to say that his code will go down to history with his hand set to it in signature — somewhat illegibly. Thus his testamentary law has broken up big estates and encouraged contented peasants in places where his name is cursed, in places where his name is almost unknown. In his lifetime, of course, it was natural that the annihilating splendour of his military strokes should rivet the eye like flashes of lightning; but his rain fell more silently, and its refreshment remained. It is needless to repeat here that after bursting one world-coalition after another by battles that are the masterpieces of the military art, he was finally worn down by two comparatively popular causes, the resistance of Russia and the resistance of Spain. The former was largely, like so much that is Russian, religious; but in the latter appeared most conspicuously that which concerns us here, the valour, vigilance and high national spirit of England in the eighteenth century. The long Spanish campaign tried and made triumphant the great Irish soldier, afterwards known as Wellington; who has become all the more symbolic since he was finally confronted with Napoleon in the last defeat of the latter at Waterloo. Wellington, though too logical to be at all English, was in many ways typical of the aristocracy; he had irony and independence of mind. But if we wish to realize how rigidly such men remained limited by their class, how little they really knew what was happening in their time, it is enough to note that Wellington seems to have thought he had dismissed Napoleon by saying he was not really a gentleman. If an acute and experienced Chinaman were to say of Chinese Gordon, “He is not actually a Mandarin,” we should think that the Chinese system deserved its reputation for being both rigid and remote.

But the very name of Wellington is enough to suggest another, and with it the reminder that this, though true, is inadequate. There was some truth in the idea that the Englishman was never so English as when he was outside England, and never smacked so much of the soil as when he was on the sea. There has run through the national psychology something that has never had a name except the eccentric and indeed extraordinary name of Robinson Crusoe; which is all the more English for being quite undiscoverable in England. It may be doubted if a French or German boy especially wishes that his cornland or vineland were a desert; but many an English boy has wished that his island were a desert island. But we might even say that the Englishman was too insular for an island. He awoke most to life when his island was sundered from the foundations of the world, when it hung like a planet and flew like a bird. And, by a contradiction, the real British army was in the navy; the boldest of the islanders were scattered over the moving archipelago of a great fleet. There still lay on it, like an increasing light, the legend of the Armada; it was a great fleet full of the glory of having once been a small one. Long before Wellington ever saw Waterloo the ships had done their work, and shattered the French navy in the Spanish seas, leaving like a light upon the sea the life and death of Nelson, who died with his stars on his bosom and his heart upon his sleeve. There is no word for the memory of Nelson except to call him mythical. The very hour of his death, the very name of his ship, are touched with that epic completeness which critics call the long arm of coincidence and prophets the hand of God. His very faults and failures were heroic, not in a loose but in a classic sense; in that he fell only like the legendary heroes, weakened by a woman, not foiled by any foe among men. And he remains the incarnation of a spirit in the English that is purely poetic; so poetic that it fancies itself a thousand things, and sometimes even fancies itself prosaic. At a recent date, in an age of reason, in a country already calling itself dull and business-like, with top-hats and factory chimneys already beginning to rise like towers of funereal efficiency, this country clergyman’s son moved to the last in a luminous cloud, and acted a fairy tale. He shall remain as a lesson to those who do not understand England, and a mystery to those who think they do. In outward action he led his ships to victory and died upon a foreign sea; but symbolically he established something indescribable and intimate, something that sounds like a native proverb; he was the man who burnt his ships, and who for ever set the Thames on fire.

XVI

ARISTOCRACY AND THE DISCONTENTS

It is the pathos of many hackneyed things that they are intrinsically delicate and are only mechanically made dull. Any one who has seen the first white light, when it comes in by a window, knows that daylight is not only as beautiful but as mysterious as moonlight. It is the subtlety of the colour of sunshine that seems to be colourless. So patriotism, and especially English patriotism, which is vulgarized with volumes of verbal fog and gas, is still in itself something as tenuous and tender as a climate. The name of Nelson, with which the last chapter ended, might very well summarize the matter; for his name is banged and beaten about like an old tin can, while his soul had something in it of a fine and fragile eighteenth-century vase. And it will be found that the most threadbare things contemporary and connected with him have a real truth to the tone and meaning of his life and time, though for us they have too often degenerated into dead jokes. The expression "hearts of oak," for instance, is no unhappy phrase for the finer side of that England of which he was the best expression. Even as a material metaphor it covers much of what I mean; oak was by no means only made into bludgeons, nor even only into battle-ships; and the English gentry did not think it business-like to pretend to be mere brutes. The mere name of oak calls back like a dream those dark but genial interiors of colleges and country houses, in which great gentlemen, not degenerate, almost made Latin an English language and port an English wine. Some part of that world at least will not perish; for its autumnal glow passed into the brush of the great English portrait-painters, who, more than any other men, were given the power to commemorate the large humanity of their own land; immortalizing a mood as broad and soft as their own brush-work. Come naturally, at the right emotional angle, upon a canvass of Gainsborough, who painted ladies like landscapes, as great and as unconscious with repose, and you will note how subtly the artist gives to a dress flowing in the foreground something of the divine quality of distance. Then you will understand another faded phrase and words spoken far away upon the sea; there will rise up quite fresh before you and be borne upon a bar of music, like words you have never heard before: "For England, home, and beauty."

When I think of these things, I have no temptation to mere grumbling at the great gentry that waged the great war of our fathers. But indeed the difficulty about it was something much deeper than could be dealt with by any grumbling. It was an exclusive class, but not an exclusive life; it was interested in all things, though not for all men. Or rather those things it failed to include, through the limitations of this rationalist interval between mediæval and modern mysticism, were at least not of the sort to shock us with superficial inhumanity. The greatest gap in their souls, for those who think it a gap, was their complete and complacent paganism. All their very decencies assumed that the old faith was dead; those who held it still, like the great Johnson, were considered eccentrics. The French Revolution was a riot that broke up the very formal funeral of Christianity; and was followed by various other complications, including the corpse coming to life. But the scepticism was no mere oligarchic orgy; it was not confined to the Hell-Fire Club; which might in virtue of its vivid name be regarded as relatively orthodox. It is present in the mildest middle-class atmosphere; as in the middle-class masterpiece about “Northanger Abbey,” where we actually remember it is an antiquity, without ever remembering it is an abbey. Indeed there is no clearer case of it than what can only be called the atheism of Jane Austen.

Unfortunately it could truly be said of the English gentleman, as of another gallant and gracious individual, that his honour stood rooted in dishonour. He was, indeed, somewhat in the position of such an aristocrat in a romance, whose splendour has the dark spot of a secret and a sort of blackmail. There was, to begin with, an uncomfortable paradox in the tale of his pedigree. Many heroes have claimed to be descended from the gods, from beings greater than themselves; but he himself was far more heroic than his ancestors. His glory did not come from the Crusades but from the Great Pillage. His fathers had not come over with William the Conqueror, but only assisted, in a somewhat shuffling manner, at the coming over of William of Orange. His own exploits were often really romantic, in the cities of the Indian sultans or the war of the wooden ships; it was the exploits of the far-off founders of his family that were painfully realistic. In this the great gentry were more in the position of Napoleonic marshals than of Norman knights, but their position was worse; for the marshals might be descended from peasants and shopkeepers; but the oligarchs were descended from usurers and thieves. That, for good or evil, was the paradox of England; the typical aristocrat was the typical upstart.

But the secret was worse; not only was such a family founded on stealing, but the family was stealing still. It is a grim truth that all through the eighteenth century, all through the great Whig speeches about liberty, all through the great Tory speeches about patriotism, through the period of Wandewash and Plassy, through the period of Trafalgar and Waterloo, one process was steadily going on in the central senate of the nation. Parliament was passing bill after bill for the enclosure, by the great landlords, of such of the common lands as had survived out of the great communal system of the Middle Ages. It is much more than a pun, it is the prime political irony of our history, that the Commons were destroying the commons. The very word "common," as we have before noted, lost its great moral meaning, and became a mere topographical term for some remaining scrap of scrub or heath that was not worth stealing. In the eighteenth century these last and lingering commons were connected only with stories about highwaymen, which still linger in our literature. The romance of them was a romance of robbers; but not of the real robbers.

This was the mysterious sin of the English squires, that they remained human, and yet ruined humanity all around them. Their own ideal, nay their own reality of life, was really more generous and genial than the stiff savagery of Puritan captains and Prussian nobles; but the land withered under their smile as under an alien frown. Being still at least English, they were still in their way good-natured; but their position was false, and a false position forces the good-natured into brutality. The French Revolution was the challenge that really revealed to the Whigs that they must make up their minds to be really democrats or admit that they were really aristocrats. They decided, as in the case of their philosophic exponent Burke, to be really aristocrats; and the result was the White Terror, the period of Anti-Jacobin repression which revealed the real side of their sympathies more than any stricken fields in foreign lands. Cobbett, the last and greatest of the yeomen, of the small farming class which the great estates were devouring daily, was thrown into prison merely for protesting against the flogging of English soldiers by German mercenaries. In that savage dispersal of a peaceful meeting which was called the Massacre of Peterloo, English soldiers were indeed employed, though much more in the spirit of German ones. And it is one of the bitter satires that cling to the very continuity of our history, that such suppression of the old yeoman spirit was the work of soldiers who still bore the title of the Yeomanry.

The name of Cobbett is very important here; indeed it is generally ignored because it is important. Cobbett was the one man who saw the tendency of the time as a whole, and challenged it as a whole; consequently he went without support. It is a mark of our whole modern history that the masses are kept quiet with a fight. They are kept quiet by the fight because it is a sham-fight; thus most of us know by this time that the Party System has been popular only in the same sense that a football match is popular. The division in Cobbett's time was slightly more sincere, but almost as superficial; it was a difference of sentiment about externals which divided the old agricultural gentry of the eighteenth century from the new mercantile gentry of the nineteenth. Through the first half of the nineteenth century there were some real disputes between the squire and the merchant. The merchant became converted to the important economic thesis of Free Trade, and accused the squire of starving the poor by dear bread to keep up his agrarian privilege. Later the squire retorted not ineffectively by accusing the merchant of brutalizing the poor by overworking them in his factories to keep up his commercial success. The passing of the Factory Acts was a confession of the cruelty that underlay the new industrial experiments, just as the Repeal of the Corn Laws was a confession of the comparative weakness and unpopularity of the squires, who had destroyed the last remnants of any peasantry that might have defended the field against the factory. These relatively real disputes would bring us to the middle of the Victorian era. But long before the beginning of the Victorian era, Cobbett had seen and said that the disputes were only relatively real. Or rather he would have said, in his more robust fashion, that they were not real at all. He would have said that the agricultural pot and the industrial kettle were calling each other black, when they had both been blackened in the same kitchen. And he would have been substantially right; for the great industrial disciple of the kettle, James Watt (who learnt from it the lesson of the steam engine), was typical of the age in this, that he found the old Trade Guilds too fallen, unfashionable and out of touch with the times to help his discovery, so that he had recourse to the rich minority which had warred on and weakened those Guilds since the Reformation. There was no prosperous peasant's pot, such as Henry of Navarre invoked, to enter into alliance with the kettle. In other words, there was in the strict sense of the word no commonwealth, because wealth, though more and more wealthy, was less and less common. Whether it be a credit or discredit, industrial science and enterprise were in bulk a new experiment of the old oligarchy; and the old oligarchy had always been ready for new experiments — beginning with the Reformation. And it is characteristic of the clear mind which was hidden from many by the hot temper of Cobbett, that he did see the Reformation as the root of both squirearchy and industrialism, and called on the people to break away from both. The people made more effort to do so than is commonly realized. There are many silences in our somewhat snobbish history; and when the educated class can easily suppress a revolt, they can still more easily suppress the record of it. It was so with some of the chief features of that great mediæval revolution the failure of which, or rather the betrayal of which, was the real turning-point of our history. It was so with the revolts against the religious policy of Henry VIII.; and it was so with the rick-burning and frame-breaking riots of Cobbett's epoch. The real mob reappeared for a moment in our history, for just long enough to show one of the immortal marks of the real mob — ritualism. There is nothing that strikes the undemocratic doctrinaire so sharply about direct democratic action as the vanity or mummery of the things done seriously in the daylight; they astonish him by being as unpractical as a poem or a prayer. The French Revolutionists stormed an empty prison merely because it was large and solid and difficult to storm, and therefore symbolic of the mighty monarchical machinery of which it had been but the shed. The English rioters laboriously broke in pieces a parish grindstone, merely because it was large and solid and difficult to break, and therefore symbolic of the mighty oligarchical machinery which perpetually ground the faces of the poor. They also put the oppressive agent of some landlord in a cart and escorted him round the county, merely to exhibit his horrible personality to heaven and earth. Afterwards they let him go, which marks perhaps, for good or evil, a certain national modification of the movement. There is something very typical of an English revolution in having the tumbril without the guillotine.

Anyhow, these embers of the revolutionary epoch were trodden out very brutally; the grindstone continued (and continues) to grind in the scriptural fashion above referred to, and, in most political crises since, it is the crowd that has found itself in the cart. But, of course, both the riot and repression in England were but shadows of the awful revolt and vengeance which crowned the parallel process in Ireland. Here the terrorism, which was but a temporary and desperate tool of the aristocrats in England (not being, to do them justice, at all consonant to their temperament, which had neither the cruelty and morbidity nor the logic and fixity of terrorism), became in a more spiritual atmosphere a flaming sword of religious and racial insanity. Pitt, the son of Chatham, was quite unfit to fill his father’s place, unfit indeed (I cannot but think) to fill the place commonly given him in history. But if he was wholly worthy of his immortality, his Irish expedients, even if considered as immediately defensible, have not been worthy of *their* immortality. He was sincerely convinced of the national need to raise coalition after coalition against Napoleon, by pouring the commercial wealth then rather peculiar to England upon her poorer Allies, and he did this with indubitable talent and pertinacity. He was at the same time faced with a hostile Irish rebellion and a partly or potentially hostile Irish Parliament. He broke the latter by the most indecent bribery and the former by the most indecent brutality, but he may well have thought himself entitled to the tyrant’s plea. But not only were his expedients those of panic, or at any rate of peril, but (what is less clearly realized) it is the only real defence of them that they were those of panic and peril. He was ready to emancipate Catholics as such, for religious bigotry was not the vice of the oligarchy; but he was not ready to emancipate Irishmen as such. He did not really want to enlist Ireland like a recruit, but simply to disarm Ireland like an enemy. Hence his settlement was from the first in a false position for settling anything. The Union may have been a necessity, but the Union was not a Union. It was not intended to be one, and nobody has ever treated it as one. We have not only never succeeded in making Ireland English, as Burgundy has been made French, but we have never tried. Burgundy could boast of Corneille, though Corneille was a Norman, but we should smile if Ireland boasted of Shakespeare. Our vanity has involved us in a mere contradiction; we have tried to combine identification with superiority. It is simply weak-minded to sneer at an Irishman if he figures as an Englishman, and rail at him if he figures as an Irishman. So the Union has never even applied English laws to Ireland, but only coercions and concessions both specially designed for Ireland. From Pitt’s time to our own this tottering alternation has continued; from the time when the great O’Connell, with his monster meetings, forced our government to listen to Catholic Emancipation to the time when the great Parnell, with his obstruction, forced it to listen to Home Rule, our staggering equilibrium has been maintained by blows from without. In the later nineteenth century the better sort of special treatment began on the whole to increase. Gladstone, an idealistic though inconsistent Liberal, rather belatedly realized that the freedom he loved in Greece and Italy had its rights nearer home, and may be said to have found a second youth in the gateway of the grave, in the eloquence and emphasis of his conversion. And a statesman wearing the opposite label (for what that is worth) had the spiritual insight to see that Ireland, if resolved to be a nation, was even more resolved to be a peasantry. George Wyndham, generous, imaginative, a man among politicians, insisted that the agrarian agony of evictions, shootings, and rack-rentings should end with the individual Irish getting, as Parnell had put it, a grip on their farms. In more ways than one his work rounds off almost romantically the tragedy of the rebellion against Pitt, for Wyndham himself was of the blood of the leader of the rebels, and he wrought the only reparation yet made for all the blood, shamefully shed, that flowed around the fall of FitzGerald.

The effect on England was less tragic; indeed, in a sense it was comic. Wellington, himself an Irishman though of the narrower party, was preeminently a realist, and, like many Irishmen, was especially a realist about Englishmen. He said the army he commanded was the scum of the earth; and the remark is none the less valuable because that army proved itself useful enough to be called the salt of the earth. But in truth it was in this something of a national symbol and the guardian, as it were, of a national secret. There is a paradox about the English, even as distinct from the Irish or the Scotch, which makes any formal version of their plans and principles inevitably unjust to them. England not only makes her ramparts out of rubbish, but she finds ramparts in what she has herself cast away as rubbish. If it be a tribute to a thing to say that even its failures have been successes, there is truth in that tribute. Some of the best colonies were convict settlements, and might be called abandoned convict settlements. The army was largely an army of gaol-birds, raised by gaol-delivery; but it was a good army of bad men; nay, it was a gay army of unfortunate men. This is the colour and the character that has run through the realities of English history, and it can hardly be put in a book, least of all a historical book. It has its flashes in our fantastic fiction and in the songs of the street, but its true medium is conversation. It has no name but incongruity. An illogical laughter survives everything in the English soul. It survived, perhaps, with only too much patience, the time of terrorism in which the more serious Irish rose in revolt. That time was full of a quite topsy-turvey tyranny, and the English humorist stood on his head to suit it. Indeed, he often receives a quite irrational sentence in a police court by saying he will do it on his head. So, under Pitt's coercionist régime, a man was sent to prison for saying that George IV. was fat; but we feel he must have been partly sustained in prison by the artistic contemplation of how fat he was. That sort of liberty, that sort of humanity, and it is no mean sort, did indeed survive all the drift and downward eddy of an evil economic system, as well as the dragooning of a reactionary epoch and the drearier menace of materialistic social science, as embodied in the new Puritans, who have purified themselves even of religion. Under this long process, the worst that can be said is that the English humorist has been slowly driven downwards in the social scale. Falstaff was a knight, Sam Weller was a gentleman's servant, and some of our recent restrictions seem designed to drive Sam Weller to the status of the Artful Dodger. But well it was for us that some such trampled tradition and dark memory of Merry England survived; well for us, as we shall see, that all our social science failed and all our statesmanship broke down before it. For there was to come the noise of a trumpet and a dreadful day of visitation, in which all the daily workers of a dull civilization were to be called out of their houses and their holes like a resurrection of the dead, and left naked under a strange sun with no religion but a sense of humour. And men might know of what nation Shakespeare was, who broke into puns and practical jokes in the darkest passion of his tragedies, if they had only heard those boys in France and Flanders who called out "Early Doors!" themselves in a theatrical memory, as they went so early in their youth to break down the doors of death.

XVII

THE RETURN OF THE BARBARIAN

The only way to write a popular history, as we have already remarked, would be to write it backwards. It would be to take common objects of our own street and tell the tale of how each of them came to be in the street at all. And for my immediate purpose it is really convenient to take two objects we have known all our lives, as features of fashion or respectability. One, which has grown rarer recently, is what we call a top-hat; the other, which is still a customary formality, is a pair of trousers. The history of these humorous objects really does give a clue to what has happened in England for the last hundred years. It is not necessary to be an æsthete in order to regard both objects as the reverse of beautiful, as tested by what may be called the rational side of beauty. The lines of human limbs can be beautiful, and so can the lines of loose drapery, but not cylinders too loose to be the first and too tight to be the second. Nor is a subtle sense of harmony needed to see that while there are hundreds of differently proportioned hats, a hat that actually grows larger towards the top is somewhat top-heavy. But what is largely forgotten is this, that these two fantastic objects, which now strike the eye as unconscious freaks, were originally conscious freaks. Our ancestors, to do them justice, did not think them casual or commonplace; they thought them, if not ridiculous, at least rococo. The top-hat was the topmost point of a riot of Regency dandyism, and bucks wore trousers while business men were still wearing knee-breeches. It will not be fanciful to see a certain oriental touch in trousers, which the later Romans also regarded as effeminately oriental; it was an oriental touch found in many florid things of the time — in Byron’s poems or Brighton Pavilion. Now, the interesting point is that for a whole serious century these instantaneous fantasies have remained like fossils. In the carnival of the Regency a few fools got into fancy dress, and we have all remained in fancy dress. At least, we have remained in the dress, though we have lost the fancy.

I say this is typical of the most important thing that happened in the Victorian time. For the most important thing was that nothing happened. The very fuss that was made about minor modifications brings into relief the rigidity with which the main lines of social life were left as they were at the French Revolution. We talk of the French Revolution as something that changed the world; but its most important relation to England is that it did not change England. A student of our history is concerned rather with the effect it did not have than the effect it did. If it be a splendid fate to have survived the Flood, the English oligarchy had that added splendour. But even for the countries in which the Revolution was a convulsion, it was the last convulsion — until that which shakes the world to-day. It gave their character to all the commonwealths, which all talked about progress, and were occupied in marking time. Frenchmen, under all superficial reactions, remained republican in spirit, as they had been when they first wore top-hats. Englishmen, under all superficial reforms, remained oligarchical in spirit, as they had been when they first wore trousers. Only one power might be said to be growing, and that in a plodding and prosaic fashion — the power in the North-East whose name was Prussia. And the English were more and more learning that this growth need cause them no alarm, since the North Germans were their cousins in blood and their brothers in spirit.

The first thing to note, then, about the nineteenth century is that Europe remained herself as compared with the Europe of the great war, and that England especially remained herself as compared even with the rest of Europe. Granted this, we may give their proper importance to the cautious internal changes in this country, the small conscious and the large unconscious changes. Most of the conscious ones were much upon the model of an early one, the great Reform Bill of 1832, and can be considered in the light of it. First, from the standpoint of most real reformers, the chief thing about the Reform Bill was that it did not reform. It had a huge tide of popular enthusiasm behind it, which wholly disappeared when the people found themselves in front of it. It enfranchised large masses of the middle classes; it disfranchised very definite bodies of the working classes; and it so struck the balance between the conservative and the dangerous elements in the commonwealth that the governing class was rather stronger than before. The date, however, is important, not at all because it was the beginning of democracy, but because it was the beginning of the best way ever discovered of evading and postponing democracy. Here enters the homœopathic treatment of revolution, since so often successful. Well into the next generation Disraeli, the brilliant Jewish adventurer who was the symbol of the English aristocracy being no longer genuine, extended the franchise to the artisans, partly, indeed, as a party move against his great rival, Gladstone, but more as the method by which the old popular pressure was first tired out and then toned down. The politicians said the working-class was now strong enough to be allowed votes. It would be truer to say it was now weak enough to be allowed votes. So in more recent times Payment of Members, which would once have been regarded (and resisted) as an inrush of popular forces, was passed quietly and without resistance, and regarded merely as an extension of parliamentary privileges. The truth is that the old parliamentary oligarchy abandoned their first line of trenches because they had by that time constructed a second line of defence. It consisted in the concentration of colossal political funds in the private and irresponsible power of the politicians, collected by the sale of peerages and more important things, and expended on the jerrymandering of the enormously expensive elections. In the presence of this inner obstacle a vote became about as valuable as a railway ticket when there is a permanent block on the line. The façade and outward form of this new secret government is the merely mechanical application of what is called the Party System. The Party System does not consist, as some suppose, of two parties, but of one. If there were two real parties, there could be no system.

But if this was the evolution of parliamentary reform, as represented by the first Reform Bill, we can see the other side of it in the social reform attacked immediately after the first Reform Bill. It is a truth that should be a tower and a landmark, that one of the first things done by the Reform Parliament was to establish those harsh and dehumanised workhouses which both honest Radicals and honest Tories branded with the black title of the New Bastille. This bitter name lingers in our literature, and can be found by the curious in the works of Carlyle and Hood, but it is doubtless interesting rather as a note of contemporary indignation than as a correct comparison. It is easy to imagine the logicians and legal orators of the parliamentary school of progress finding many points of differentiation and even of contrast. The Bastille was one central institution; the workhouses have been many, and have everywhere transformed local life with whatever they have to give of social sympathy and inspiration. Men of high rank and great wealth were frequently sent to the Bastille; but no such mistake has ever been made by the more business administration of the workhouse. Over the most capricious operations of the *lettres de cachet* there still hovered some hazy traditional idea that a man is put in prison to punish him for something. It was the discovery of a later social science that men who cannot be punished can still be imprisoned. But the deepest and most decisive difference lies in the better fortune of the New Bastille; for no mob has ever dared to storm it, and it never fell.

The New Poor Law was indeed not wholly new in the sense that it was the culmination and clear enunciation of a principle foreshadowed in the earlier Poor Law of Elizabeth, which was one of the many anti-popular effects of the Great Pillage. When the monasteries were swept away and the mediæval system of hospitality destroyed, tramps and beggars became a problem, the solution of which has always tended towards slavery, even when the question of slavery has been cleared of the irrelevant question of cruelty. It is obvious that a desperate man might find Mr. Bumble and the Board of Guardians less cruel than cold weather and the bare ground — even if he were allowed to sleep on the ground, which (by a veritable nightmare of nonsense and injustice) he is not. He is actually punished for sleeping under a bush on the specific and stated ground that he cannot afford a bed. It is obvious, however, that he may find his best physical good by going into the workhouse, as he often found it in pagan times by selling himself into slavery. The point is that the solution remains servile, even when Mr. Bumble and the Board of Guardians ceased to be in a common sense cruel. The pagan might have the luck to sell himself to a kind master. The principle of the New Poor Law, which has so far proved permanent in our society, is that the man lost all his civic rights and lost them solely through poverty. There is a touch of irony, though hardly of mere hypocrisy, in the fact that the Parliament which effected this reform had just been abolishing black slavery by buying out the slave-owners in the British colonies. The slave-owners were bought out at a price big enough to be called blackmail; but it would be misunderstanding the national mentality to deny the sincerity of the sentiment. Wilberforce represented in this the real wave of Wesleyan religion which had made a humane reaction against Calvinism, and was in no mean sense philanthropic. But there is something romantic in the English mind which can always see what is remote. It is the strongest example of what men lose by being long-sighted. It is fair to say that they gain many things also, the poems that are like adventures and the adventures that are like poems. It is a national savour, and therefore in itself neither good nor evil; and it depends on the application whether we find a scriptural text for it in the wish to take the wings of the morning and abide in the uttermost parts of the sea, or merely in the saying that the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.

Anyhow, the unconscious nineteenth-century movement, so slow that it seems stationary, was altogether in this direction, of which workhouse philanthropy is the type. Nevertheless, it had one national institution to combat and overcome; one institution all the more intensely national because it was not official, and in a sense not even political. The modern Trade Union was the inspiration and creation of the English; it is still largely known throughout Europe by its English name. It was the English expression of the European effort to resist the tendency of Capitalism to reach its natural culmination in slavery. In this it has an almost weird psychological interest, for it is a return to the past by men ignorant of the past, like the subconscious action of some man who has lost his memory. We say that history repeats itself, and it is even more interesting when it unconsciously repeats itself. No man on earth is kept so ignorant of the Middle Ages as the British workman, except perhaps the British business man who employs him. Yet all who know even a little of the Middle Ages can see that the modern Trade Union is a groping for the ancient Guild. It is true that those who look to the Trade Union, and even those clear-sighted enough to call it the Guild, are often without the faintest tinge of mediæval mysticism, or even of mediæval morality. But this fact is itself the most striking and even staggering tribute to mediæval morality. It has all the clinching logic of coincidence. If large numbers of the most hard-headed atheists had evolved, out of their own inner consciousness, the notion that a number of bachelors or spinsters ought to live together in celibate groups for the good of the poor, or the observation of certain hours and offices, it would be a very strong point in favour of the monasteries. It would be all the stronger if the atheists had never heard of monasteries; it would be strongest of all if they hated the very name of monasteries. And it is all the stronger because the man who puts his trust in Trades Unions does not call himself a Catholic or even a Christian, if he does call himself a Guild Socialist.

The Trade Union movement passed through many perils, including a ludicrous attempt of certain lawyers to condemn as a criminal conspiracy that Trade Union solidarity, of which their own profession is the strongest and most startling example in the world. The struggle culminated in gigantic strikes which split the country in every direction in the earlier part of the twentieth century. But another process, with much more power at its back, was also in operation. The principle represented by the New Poor Law proceeded on its course, and in one important respect altered its course, though it can hardly be said to have altered its object. It can most correctly be stated by saying that the employers themselves, who already organized business, began to organize social reform. It was more picturesquely expressed by a cynical aristocrat in Parliament who said, “We are all Socialists now.” The Socialists, a body of completely sincere men led by several conspicuously brilliant men, had long hammered into men’s heads the hopeless sterility of mere non-interference in exchange. The Socialists proposed that the State should not merely interfere in business but should take over the business, and pay all men as equal wage-earners, or at any rate as wage-earners. The employers were not willing to surrender their own position to the State, and this project has largely faded from politics. But the wiser of them were willing to pay better wages, and they were specially willing to bestow various other benefits so long as they were bestowed after the manner of wages. Thus we had a series of social reforms which, for good or evil, all tended in the same direction; the permission to employees to claim certain advantages as employees, and as something permanently different from employers. Of these the obvious examples were Employers’ Liability, Old Age Pensions, and, as marking another and more decisive stride in the process, the Insurance Act.

The latter in particular, and the whole plan of the social reform in general, were modelled upon Germany. Indeed the whole English life of this period was overshadowed by Germany. We had now reached, for good or evil, the final fulfilment of that gathering influence which began to grow on us in the seventeenth century, which was solidified by the military alliances of the eighteenth century, and which in the nineteenth century had been turned into a philosophy — not to say a mythology. German metaphysics had thinned our theology, so that many a man’s most solemn conviction about Good Friday was that Friday was named after Freya. German history had simply annexed English history, so that it was almost counted the duty of any patriotic Englishman to be proud of being a German. The genius of Carlyle, the culture preached by Matthew Arnold, would not, persuasive as they were, have alone produced this effect but for an external phenomenon of great force. Our internal policy was transformed by our foreign policy; and foreign policy was dominated by the more and more drastic steps which the Prussian, now clearly the prince of all the German tribes, was taking to extend the German influence in the world. Denmark was robbed of two provinces; France was robbed of two provinces; and though the fall of Paris was felt almost everywhere as the fall of the capital of civilization, a thing like the sacking of Rome by the Goths, many of the most influential people in England still saw nothing in it but the solid success of our kinsmen and old allies of Waterloo. The moral methods which achieved it, the juggling with the Augustenburg claim, the forgery of the Ems telegram, were either successfully concealed or were but cloudily appreciated. The Higher Criticism had entered into our ethics as well as our theology. Our view of Europe was also distorted and made disproportionate by the accident of a natural concern for Constantinople and our route to India, which led Palmerston and later Premiers to support the Turk and see Russia as the only enemy. This somewhat cynical reaction was summed up in the strange figure of Disraeli, who made a pro-Turkish settlement full of his native indifference to the Christian subjects of Turkey, and sealed it at Berlin in the presence of Bismarck. Disraeli was not without insight into the inconsistencies and illusions of the English; he said many sagacious things about them, and one especially when he told the Manchester School that their motto was “Peace and Plenty, amid a starving people, and with the world in arms.” But what he said about Peace and Plenty might well be parodied as a comment on what he himself said about Peace with Honour. Returning from that Berlin Conference he should have said, “I bring you Peace with Honour; peace with the seeds of the most horrible war of history; and honour as the dupes and victims of the old bully in Berlin.”

But it was, as we have seen, especially in social reform that Germany was believed to be leading the way, and to have found the secret of dealing with the economic evil. In the case of Insurance, which was the test case, she was applauded for obliging all her workmen to set apart a portion of their wages for any time of sickness; and numerous other provisions, both in Germany and England, pursued the same ideal, which was that of protecting the poor against themselves. It everywhere involved an external power having a finger in the family pie; but little attention was paid to any friction thus caused, for all prejudices against the process were supposed to be the growth of ignorance. And that ignorance was already being attacked by what was called education — an enterprise also inspired largely by the example, and partly by the commercial competition of Germany. It was pointed out that in Germany governments and great employers thought it well worth their while to apply the grandest scale of organization and the minutest inquisition of detail to the instruction of the whole German race. The government was the stronger for training its scholars as it trained its soldiers; the big businesses were the stronger for manufacturing mind as they manufactured material. English education was made compulsory; it was made free; many good, earnest, and enthusiastic men laboured to create a ladder of standards and examinations, which would connect the cleverest of the poor with the culture of the English universities and the current teaching in history or philosophy. But it cannot be said that the connection was very complete, or the achievement so thorough as the German achievement. For whatever reason, the poor Englishman remained in many things much as his fathers had been, and seemed to think the Higher Criticism too high for him even to criticize.

And then a day came, and if we were wise, we thanked God that we had failed. Education, if it had ever really been in question, would doubtless have been a noble gift; education in the sense of the central tradition of history, with its freedom, its family honour, its chivalry which is the flower of Christendom. But what would our populace, in our epoch, have actually learned if they had learned all that our schools and universities had to teach? That England was but a little branch on a large Teutonic tree; that an unfathomable spiritual sympathy, all-encircling like the sea, had always made us the natural allies of the great folk by the flowing Rhine; that all light came from Luther and Lutheran Germany, whose science was still purging Christianity of its Greek and Roman accretions; that Germany was a forest fated to grow; that France was a dung-heap fated to decay — a dung-heap with a crowing cock on it. What would the ladder of education have led to, except a platform on which a posturing professor proved that a cousin german was the same as a German cousin? What would the guttersnipe have learnt as a graduate, except to embrace a Saxon because he was the other half of an Anglo-Saxon? The day came, and the ignorant fellow found he had other things to learn. And he was quicker than his educated countrymen, for he had nothing to unlearn.

He in whose honour all had been said and sung stirred, and stepped across the border of Belgium. Then were spread out before men's eyes all the beauties of his culture and all the benefits of his organization; then we beheld under a lifting daybreak what light we had followed and after what image we had laboured to refashion ourselves. Nor in any story of mankind has the irony of God chosen the foolish things so catastrophically to confound the wise. For the common crowd of poor and ignorant Englishmen, because they only knew that they were Englishmen, burst through the filthy cobwebs of four hundred years and stood where their fathers stood when they knew that they were Christian men. The English poor, broken in every revolt, bullied by every fashion, long despoiled of property, and now being despoiled of liberty, entered history with a noise of trumpets, and turned themselves in two years into one of the iron armies of the world. And when the critic of politics and literature, feeling that this war is after all heroic, looks around him to find the hero, he can point to nothing but a mob.

XVIII

CONCLUSION

In so small a book on so large a matter, finished hastily enough amid the necessities of an enormous national crisis, it would be absurd to pretend to have achieved proportion; but I will confess to some attempt to correct a disproportion. We talk of historical perspective, but I rather fancy there is too much perspective in history; for perspective makes a giant a pigmy and a pigmy a giant. The past is a giant foreshortened with his feet towards us; and sometimes the feet are of clay. We see too much merely the sunset of the Middle Ages, even when we admire its colours; and the study of a man like Napoleon is too often that of “The Last Phase.” So there is a spirit that thinks it reasonable to deal in detail with Old Sarum, and would think it ridiculous to deal in detail with the Use of Sarum; or which erects in Kensington Gardens a golden monument to Albert larger than anybody has ever erected to Alfred. English history is misread especially, I think, because the crisis is missed. It is usually put about the period of the Stuarts; and many of the memorials of our past seem to suffer from the same visitation as the memorial of Mr. Dick. But though the story of the Stuarts was a tragedy, I think it was also an epilogue.

I make the guess, for it can be no more, that the change really came with the fall of Richard II., following on his failure to use mediæval despotism in the interests of mediæval democracy. England, like the other nations of Christendom, had been created not so much by the death of the ancient civilization as by its escape from death, or by its refusal to die. Mediæval civilization had arisen out of the resistance to the barbarians, to the naked barbarism from the North and the more subtle barbarism from the East. It increased in liberties and local government under kings who controlled the wider things of war and taxation; and in the peasant war of the fourteenth century in England, the king and the populace came for a moment into conscious alliance. They both found that a third thing was already too strong for them. That third thing was the aristocracy; and it captured and called itself the Parliament. The House of Commons, as its name implies, had primarily consisted of plain men summoned by the King like jurymen; but it soon became a very special jury. It became, for good or evil, a great organ of government, surviving the Church, the monarchy and the mob; it did many great and not a few good things. It created what we call the British Empire; it created something which was really far more valuable, a new and natural sort of aristocracy, more humane and even humanitarian than most of the aristocracies of the world. It had sufficient sense of the instincts of the people, at least until lately, to respect the liberty and especially the laughter that had become almost the religion of the race. But in doing all this, it deliberately did two other things, which it thought a natural part of its policy; it took the side of the Protestants, and then (partly as a consequence) it took the side of the Germans. Until very lately most intelligent Englishmen were quite honestly convinced that in both it was taking the side of progress against decay. The question which many of them are now inevitably asking themselves, and would ask whether I asked it or no, is whether it did not rather take the side of barbarism against civilization.

At least, if there be anything valid in my own vision of these things, we have returned to an origin and we are back in the war with the barbarians. It falls as naturally for me that the Englishman and the Frenchman should be on the same side as that Alfred and Abbo should be on the same side, in that black century when the barbarians wasted Wessex and besieged Paris. But there are now, perhaps, less certain tests of the spiritual as distinct from the material victory of civilization. Ideas are more mixed, are complicated by fine shades or covered by fine names. And whether the retreating savage leaves behind him the soul of savagery, like a sickness in the air, I myself should judge primarily by one political and moral test. The soul of savagery is slavery. Under all its mask of machinery and instruction, the German regimentation of the poor was the relapse of barbarians into slavery. I can see no escape from it for ourselves in the ruts of our present reforms, but only by doing what the mediævals did after the other barbarian defeat: beginning, by guilds and small independent groups, gradually to restore the personal property of the poor and the personal freedom of the family. If the English really attempt that, the English have at least shown in the war, to any one who doubted it, that they have not lost the courage and capacity of their fathers, and can carry it through if they will. If they do not do so, if they continue to move only with the dead momentum of the social discipline which we learnt from Germany, there is nothing before us but what Mr. Belloc, the discoverer of this great sociological drift, has called the Servile State. And there are moods in which a man, considering that conclusion of our story, is half inclined to wish that the wave of Teutonic barbarism had washed out us and our armies together; and that the world should never know anything more of the last of the English, except that they died for liberty.

THE END

IRISH IMPRESSIONS

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I — Two Stones in a Square

WHEN I had for the first time crossed St. George’s Channel, and for the first time stepped out of a Dublin hotel on to St. Stephen’s Green, the first of all my impressions was that of a particular statue, or rather portion of a statue. I left many traditional mysteries already in my track, but they did not trouble me as did this random glimpse or vision. I have never understood why the Channel is called St. George’s Channel; it would seem more natural to call it St. Patrick’s Channel since the great missionary did almost certainly cross that unquiet sea and look up at those mysterious mountains. And though I should be enchanted, in an abstract artistic sense, to imagine St. George sailing towards the sunset, flying the silver and scarlet colours of his cross, I cannot in fact regard that journey as the most fortunate of the adventures of that flag. Nor, for that matter, do I know why the Green should be called St. Stephen’s Green, nor why the parliamentary enclosure at Westminster is also connected with the first of the martyrs; unless it be because St. Stephen was killed with stones. The stones piled together to make modern political buildings, might perhaps be regarded as a cairn, or heap of missiles, marking the place of the murder of a witness to the truth. And while it seems unlikely that St. Stephen was pelted with statues as well as stones, there are undoubtedly statues that might well kill a Christian at sight. Among these graven stones, from which the saints suffer, I should certainly include some of those figures in frock coats standing opposite St. Stephen’s, Westminster. There are many such statues in Dublin also; but the one with which I am concerned was at first partially veiled from me. And the veil was at least as symbolic as the vision.

I saw what seemed the crooked hind legs of a horse on a pedestal and deduced an equestrian statue, in the somewhat bloated fashion of the early eighteenth century equestrian statues. But the figure, from where I stood, was wholly hidden in the tops of trees growing round it in a ring; masking it with leafy curtains or draping it with leafy banners. But they were green banners, that waved and glittered all about it in the sunlight; and the face they hid was the face of an English king. Or rather, to speak more correctly, a German king.

When laws can stay . . . it was impossible that an old rhyme should not run in my head, and words that appealed to the everlasting revolt of the green things of the earth. . . . “And when the leaves in summer time their colour dare not show.” The rhyme seemed to reach me out of remote times and find arresting fulfilment, like a prophecy; it was impossible not to feel that I had seen an omen. I was conscious vaguely of a vision of green garlands hung on gray stone; and the wreaths were living and growing, and the stone was dead. Something in the simple substances and elemental colours, in the white sunlight, and the sombre and even secret image, held the mind for a moment in the midst of all the moving city, like a sign given in a dream. I was told that the figure was that of one of the first Georges; but indeed I seemed to know already that it was the White Horse of Hanover that had thus grown gray with Irish weather or green with Irish foliage. I knew only too well, already, that the George who had really crossed the Channel was not the saint. This was one of those German princes whom the English aristocracy used when it made the English domestic polity aristocratic and the English foreign policy German. Those Englishmen who think the Irish are pro-German, or those Irishmen who think the Irish ought to be pro-German, would presumably expect the Dublin populace to have hung the statue of this German deliverer with national flowers and nationalist flags. For some reason, however, I found no traces of Irish tributes round the pedestal of the Teutonic horseman. I wondered how many people in the last fifty years have ever cared about it, or even been conscious of their own carelessness. I wonder how many have ever troubled to look at it, or even trouble not to look at it. If it fell down, I wonder whether anybody would put it up again. I do not know; I only know that Irish gardeners, or some such Irish humorists, had planted trees in a ring round that prancing equestrian figure; trees that had, so to speak, sprung up and choked him, making him more unrecognisable than a Jack-in-the-Green. Jack or George had vanished; but the Green remained.

About a stone’s-throw from this calamity in stone there stood, at the corner of a gorgeously coloured flower-walk, a bust evidently by a modern sculptor with modern symbolic ornament surmounted by the fine falcon face of the poet Mangan; who dreamed and drank and died, a thoughtless and thriftless outcast, in the darkest of the Dublin streets around that place. This individual Irishman really was what we were told that all Irishmen were, hopeless, heedless, irresponsible, impossible, a tragedy of failure. And yet it seemed to be his head that was lifted and not hidden; the gay flowers only showed up this graven image as the green leaves shut out the other; everything around him seemed bright and busy, and told rather of a new time. It was clear that modern men did stop to look at him; indeed modern men had stayed there long enough to make him a monument. It was almost certain that if his monument fell down, it really would be put up again. I think it very likely there would be competition among advanced modern artistic schools of admitted crankiness and unimpeachable lunacy; that somebody would want to cut out a Cubist Mangan in a style less of stone than of bricks; or to set up a Vorticist Mangan, like a frozen whirlpool, to terrify the children playing in that flowery lane. For when I afterwards went into the Dublin Art Club, or mixed generally in the stimulating society of the intellectuals of the Irish capital, I found a multitude of things which moved both my admiration and amusement. Perhaps the best thing of all was that it was the one society that I have seen where the intellectuals were intellectual. But nothing pleased me more than the fact that even Irish art was taken with a certain Irish pugnacity; as if there could be street fights about aesthetics as there once were about theology. I could almost imagine an appeal for pikes to settle a point about art needlework, or a suggestion of dying on the barricades for a difference about bookbinding. And I could still more easily imagine a sort of ultra-civilised civil war round the half-restored bust of poor Mangan. But it was in a yet plainer and more popular sense that I felt that bust to be the sign of a new world, where the statue of Royal George was only the ruin of an old one. And though I have since seen many much more complex, and many decidedly contradictory things in Ireland, the allegory of those two stone images in that public garden has remained in my memory, and has not been reversed. The Glorious Revolution, the great Protestant Deliverer, the Hanoverian Succession, these things were the very pageant and apotheosis of success. The Whig aristocrat was not merely victorious; it was as a victor that he asked for victory. The thing was fully expressed in all the florid and insolent statuary of the period, in all those tumid horsemen in Roman uniform and Rococo periwigs shown as prancing in perpetual motion down shouting streets to their triumphs; only to-day the streets are empty and silent, and the horse stands still. Of such a kind was the imperial figure round which the ring of trees had risen, like great green fans to soothe a sultan, or great green curtains to guard him. But it was in a sort of mockery that his pavilion was thus painted with the colour of his conquered enemies. For the king was dead behind his curtains, his voice will be heard no more, and no man will even wish to hear it, while the world endures. The dynastic eighteenth century is dead if anything is dead; and these idols at least are only stones. But only a few yards away, the stone that the builders rejected is really the head of a corner, standing at the corner of a new pathway, coloured and crowded with children and with flowers.

That, I suspect, is the paradox of Ireland in the modern world. Everything that was thought progressive, as a prancing horse, has come to a standstill. Everything that was thought decadent, as a dying drunkard, has risen from the dead. All that seemed to have reached a *cul de sac* has turned the corner, and stands at the opening of a new road. All that thought itself on a pedestal has found itself up a tree. And that is why those two chance stones seem to me to stand like graven images on either side of the gateway by which a man enters Ireland. And yet I had not left the same small enclosure till I had seen one other sight which was even more symbolic than the flowers near the foot of the poet's pedestal. A few yards beyond the Mangan bust was a model plot of vegetables, like a kitchen garden with no kitchen or house attached to it, planted out in a patchwork of potatoes, cabbages, and turnips, to prove how much could be done with an acre. And I realised as in a vision that all over the new Ireland that patch is repeated like a pattern; and where there is a real kitchen garden there is also a real kitchen; and it is not a communal kitchen. It is more typical even than the poet and the flowers; for these flowers are also food, and this poetry is also property; property which, when properly distributed, is the poetry of the average man. It was only afterwards that I could realise all the realities to which this accident corresponded; but even this little public experiment, at the first glance, had something of the meaning of a public monument. It was this which the earth itself had reared against the monstrous image of the German monarch; and I might have called this chapter Cabbages and Kings.

My life is passed in making bad jokes and seeing them turn into true prophecies. In the little town in South Bucks, where I live, I remember some talk of appropriate ceremonies in connection with the work of sending vegetables to the Fleet. There was a suggestion that these proceedings should end with "God Save the King," an amendment by some one (of a more naval turn of mind) to substitute "Rule Britannia;" and the opposition of one individual, claiming to be of Irish extraction, who loudly refused to lend a voice to either. Whatever I retain, in such rural scenes, of the frivolity of Fleet Street led me to suggest that we could all join in singing "The Wearing of the Greens." But I have since discovered that this remark, like other typical utterances of the village idiot, was in truth inspired; and was a revelation and a vision from across the sea, a vision of what was really being done, not by the village idiots but by the village wise men. For the whole miracle of modern Ireland might well be summed up in the simple change from the word "green" to the word "greens." Nor would it be true to say that the first is poetical and the second practical. For a green tree is quite as poetical as a green flag; and no one in touch with history doubts that the waving of the green flag has been very useful to the growing of the green tree. But I shall have to touch upon all such controversial topics later, for those to whom such statements are still controversial. Here I would only begin by recording a first impression as vividly coloured and patchy as a modernist picture; a square of green things growing where they are least expected; the new vision of Ireland. The discovery, for most Englishmen, will be like touching the trees of a faded tapestry, and finding the forest alive and full of birds. It will be as if, on some dry urn or dreary column, figures which had already begun to crumble magically began to move and dance. For culture as well as mere caddishness assumed the decay of these Celtic or Catholic things; there were artists sketching the ruins as well as trippers picnicking in them; and it was not only evidence that a final silence had fallen on the harp of Tara, that it did not play "Tararaboomdeay." Englishmen believed in Irish decay even when they were large-minded enough to lament it. It might be said that even those who were penitent because the thing was murdered, were quite convinced that it was killed. The meaning of these green and solid things before me is that it is not a ghost that has risen from the grave. A flower, like a flag, might be little more than a ghost; but a fruit has that sacramental solidity which in all mythologies belongs not to a ghost but to a god. This sight of things sustaining, and a beauty that nourishes and does not merely charm, is the premonition of practicality in the miracle of modern Ireland. It is a miracle more marvellous than the resurrection of the dead. It is the resurrection of the body.

II — The Root of Reality

THE only excuse of literature is to make things new; and the chief misfortune of journalism is that it has to make them old. What is hurried has to be hackneyed. Suppose a man has to write on a particular subject, let us say America; if he has a day to do it in, it is possible that, in the last afterglow of sunset, he may have discovered at least one thing which he himself really thinks about America. It is conceivable that somewhere under the evening star he may have a new idea, even about the new world. If he has only half an hour in which to write, he will just have time to consult an encyclopaedia and vaguely remember the latest leading articles. The encyclopaedia will be only about a decade out of date; the leading articles will be aeons out of date — having been written under similar conditions of modern rush. If he has only a quarter of an hour in which to write about America, he may be driven in mere delirium and madness to call her his Gigantic Daughter in the west, to talk of the feasibility of Hands Across the Sea, or even to call himself an Anglo-Saxon, when he might as well call himself a Jute. But whatever debasing banality be the effect of business scurry in criticism, it is but one example of a truth that can be tested in twenty fields of experience. If a man must get to Brighton as quickly as possible, he can get there quickest by travelling on rigid rails on a recognised route. If he has time and money for motoring, he will still use public roads; but he will be surprised to find how many public roads look as new and quiet as private roads. If he has time enough to walk, he may find for himself a string of fresh footpaths, each one a fairy-tale. This law of the leisure needed for the awakening of wonder applies, indeed, to things superficially familiar as well as to things superficially fresh. The chief case for old enclosures and boundaries is that they enclose a space in which new things can always be found later, like live fish within the four corners of a net. The chief charm of having a home that is secure is having leisure to feel it as strange.

I have often done the little I could to correct the stale trick of taking things for granted: all the more because it is not even taking them for granted. It is taking them without gratitude; that is, emphatically as not granted. Even one’s own front door, released by one’s own latchkey, should not only open inward on things familiar, but outward on things unknown.

Even one's own domestic fireside should be wild as well as domesticated; for nothing could be wilder than fire. But if this light of the higher ignorance should shine even on familiar places, it should naturally shine most clearly on the roads of a strange land. It would be well if a man could enter Ireland really knowing that he knows nothing about Ireland; if possible, not even the name of Ireland. The misfortune is that most men know the name too well, and the thing too little. This book would probably be a better book, as well as a better joke, if I were to call the island throughout by some name like Atlantis, and only reveal on the last page that I was referring to Ireland. Englishmen would see a situation of great interest, objects with which they could feel considerable sympathy, and opportunities of which they might take considerable advantage, if only they would really look at the place plain and straight, as they would at some entirely new island, with an entirely new name, discovered by that seafaring adventure which is the real romance of England. In short, he might do something with it, if he would only treat it as an object in front of him, and not as a subject or story left behind him. There will be occasion later to say all that should be said of the need of studying the Irish story. But the Irish story is one thing, and what is called the Irish Question quite another; and in a purely practical sense the best thing the stranger can do is to forget the Irish Question and look at the Irish. If he looked at them simply and steadily, as he would look at the natives of an entirely new nation with a new name, he would become conscious of a very strange but entirely solid fact. He would become conscious of it, as a man in a fairy tale might become conscious that he had crossed the border of fairyland, by such a trifle, as a talking cow or a haystack walking about on legs.

For the Irish Question has never been discussed in England. Men have discussed Home Rule; but those who advocated it most warmly, and as I think wisely, did not even know what the Irish meant by Home. Men have talked about Unionism; but they have never even dared to propose Union. A Unionist ought to mean a man who is not even conscious of the boundary of the two countries; who can walk across the frontier of fairyland, and not even notice the walking haystack. As a fact, the Unionist always shoots at the haystack; though he never hits it. But the limitation is not limited to Unionists; as I have already said, the English Radicals have been quite as incapable of going to the root of the matter. Half the case for Home Rule was that Ireland could not be trusted to the English Home Rulers. They also, to recur to the parable, have been unable to take the talking cow by the horns; for I need hardly say that the talking cow is an Irish bull. What has been the matter with their Irish politics was simply that they were English politics. They discussed the Irish Question; but they never seriously contemplated the Irish Answer. That is, the Liberal was content with the negative truth, that the Irish should not be prevented from having the sort of law they liked. But the Liberal seldom faced the positive truth, about what sort of law they would like. He instinctively avoided the very imagination of this; for the simple reason that the law the Irish would like is as remote from what is called Liberal as from what is called Unionist. Nor has the Liberal ever embraced it in his broadest liberality, nor the Unionist ever absorbed it into his most complete unification. It remains outside us altogether, a thing to be stared at like a fairy cow; and by far the wisest English visitor is he who will simply stare at it. Sooner or later he will see what it means; which is simply this: that whether it be a case for coercion or emancipation (and it might be used either way) the fact is that a free Ireland would not only *not* be what we call lawless, but might not even be what we call free. So far from being an anarchy, it would be an orderly and even conservative civilisation — like the Chinese. But it would be a civilisation so fundamentally different from our own, that our own liberals would differ from it as much as our own conservatives. The fair question for an Englishman is whether that fundamental difference would make division dangerous; it has already made union impossible. Now in turning over these notes of so brief a visit, suffering from all the stale scurry of my journalistic trade, I have been in doubt between a chronological and a logical order of events. But I have decided in favour of logic, of the high light that really revealed the picture, and by which I firmly believe that everything else should be seen. And if any one were to ask me what was the sight that struck me most in Ireland, both as strange and as significant, I should know what to reply. I saw it long after I had seen the Irish cities, had felt something of the brilliant bitterness of Dublin and the stagnant optimism of Belfast; but I put it first here because I am certain that without it all the rest is meaningless; that it lies behind all politics, enormous and silent, as the great hills lie beyond Dublin.

I was moving in a hired motor down a road in the North-West, towards the middle of that rainy autumn. I was not moving very fast; because the progress was slowed down to a solemn procession by crowds of families with their cattle and live stock going to the market beyond; which things also are an allegory. But what struck my mind and stuck in it was this: that all down one side of the road, as far as we went, the harvest was gathered in neatly and safely; and all down the other side of the road it was rotting in the rain. Now the side where it was safe was a string of small plots worked by peasant proprietors, as petty by our standards as a row of the cheapest villas. The land on which all the harvest was wasted was the land of a large modern estate. I asked why the landlord was later with his harvesting than the peasants; and I was told rather vaguely that there had been strikes and similar labour troubles. I did not go into the rights of the matter; but the point here is that, whatever they were, the moral is the same. You may curse the cruel Capitalist landlord or you may rave at the ruffianly Bolshevist strikers; but you must admit that between them they had produced a stoppage, which the peasant proprietorship a few yards off did not produce. You might support either where they conflicted, but you could not deny the sense in which they had combined, and combined to prevent what a few rustics across the road could combine to produce. For all that we in England agree about and disagree about, all for which we fight and all from which we differ, our darkness and our light, our heaven and hell, were there on the left side of the road. On the right side of the road lay something so different that we do not even differ from it. It may be that Trusts are rising like towers of gold and iron, overshadowing the earth and shutting out the sun; but they are only rising on the left side of the road. It may be that Trades Unions are laying labyrinths of international insurrection, cellars stored with the dynamite of a merely destructive democracy; but all that international maze lies to the left side of the road. Employment and unemployment are there; Marx and the Manchester School are there. The left side of the road may even go through amazing transformations of its own; its story may stride across abysses of anarchy; but it will never step across the road. The landlord’s estate may become a sort of Morris Utopia, organised communally by Socialists, or more probably by Guild Socialists. It may (as I fear is much more likely) pass through the stage of an employer’s model village to the condition of an old pagan slave-state. But the peasants across the road would not only refuse the Servile State, but would quite as resolutely refuse the Utopia. Europe may seem to be rent from end to end by the blast of a Bolshevist trumpet, sundering the bourgeois from the proletarian; but the peasant across the road is neither a bourgeois nor a proletarian. England may seem to be rent by an irreconcilable rivalry between Capital and Labour; but the peasant across the road is both a capitalist and a labourer. He is several other curious things; including the man who got his crops in first; who was literally first in the field.

To an Englishman, especially a Londoner, this was like walking to the corner of a London street and finding the policeman in rags, with a patch on his trousers and a smudge on his face; but the crossing-sweeper wearing, a single eyeglass and a suit fresh from a West End tailor. In fact, it was nearly as surprising as a walking haystack or a talking cow. What was generally dingy, dilatory, and down-at-heels was here comparatively tidy and timely; what was orderly and organised was belated and broken down. For it must be sharply realised that the peasant proprietors succeeded here, not only because they were really proprietors, but because they were only peasants. It was *because* they were on a small scale that they were a great success. It was because they were too poor to have servants that they grew rich in spite of strikers. It was, so far as it went, the flattest possible contradiction to all that is said in England, both by Collectivists and Capitalists, about the efficiency of the great organisation. For in so far as it had failed, it had actually failed, not only through being great, but through being organised. On the left side of the road the big machine had stopped working, *because* it was a big machine. The small men were still working, because they were not machines. Such were the strange relations of the two things, that the stars in their courses fought against Capitalism; that the very clouds rolling over that rocky valley warred for its pigmies against its giants. The rain falls alike on the just and the unjust; yet here it had not fallen alike on the rich and poor, It had fallen to the destruction of the rich.

Now I do, as a point of personal opinion, believe that the right side of the road was really the right side of the road. That is, I believe it represented the right side of the question; that these little pottering peasants had got hold of the true secret, which is missed both by Capitalism and Collectivism. But I am not here urging my own preferences on my own countrymen; and I am not concerned primarily to point out that this is an argument against Capitalism and Collectivism. What I do point out is that it is the fundamental argument against Unionism. Perhaps it is, on that ultimate level, the only argument against Unionism; which is probably why it is never used against Unionists. I mean, of course, that it was never really used against English Unionists by English Home Rulers, in the recriminations of that Irish Question which was really an English Question. The essential demanded of that question was merely that it should be an open question; a thing rather like an open wound. Modern industrial society is fond of problems, and therefore not at all fond of solutions. A consideration of those who really have understood this fundamental fact will be sufficient to show how confusing and useless are the mere party labels in the matter. George Wyndham was a Unionist who was deposed because he was a Home Ruler. Sir Horace Plunkett is a Unionist who is trusted because he is a Home Ruler. By far the most revolutionary piece of Nationalism that was ever really effected for Ireland was effected by Wyndham, who was an English Tory squire. And by far the most brutal and brainless piece of Unionism that was ever imposed on Ireland was imposed in the name of the Radical theory of Free Trade, when the Irish juries brought in verdicts of wilful murder against Lord John Russell. I say this to show that my sense of a reality is quite apart from the personal accident that I have myself always been a Radical in English politics, as well as a Home Ruler in Irish politics. But I say it even more in order to reaffirm that the English have first to forget all their old formula and look at a new fact. It is not a new fact; but it is new to them.

To realise it, we must not only go outside the British parties but outside the British Empire, outside the very universe of the ordinary Briton. The real question can be easily stated, for it is as simple as it is large. What is going to happen to the peasantries of Europe, or for that matter of the whole world? It would be far better, as I have already suggested, if we could consider it as a new case of some peasantry in Europe, or somewhere else in the world. It would be far better if we ceased to talk of Ireland and Scotland, and began to talk of Ireland and Serbia. Let us, for the sake of our own mental composure, call this unfortunate people Slovenes. But let us realise that these remote Slovenes are, by the testimony of every truthful traveller, rooted in the habit of private property, and now ripening into a considerable private prosperity. It will often be necessary to remember that the Slovenes are Roman Catholics; and that, with that impatient pugnacity which marks the Slovene temperament, they have often employed violence, but always for the restoration of what they regarded as a reasonable system of private property. Now in a hundred determining districts, of which France is the most famous, this system has prospered. It has its own faults as well as its own merits; but it has prospered. What is going to happen to it? I will here confine myself to saying with the most solid confidence what is not going to happen to it. It is not going to be *really* ruled by Socialists; and it is not going to be really ruled by merchant princes, like those who ruled Venice or like those who rule England.

It is not so much that England ought not to rule Ireland as that England cannot. It is not so much that Englishmen cannot rule Irishmen, as that merchants cannot rule peasants. It is not so much merely that we have dealt benefits to England and blows to Ireland. It is that our benefits for England would be blows to Ireland. And this we already began to admit in practice, before we had even dimly begun to conceive it in theory. We do not merely admit it in special laws against Ireland like the Coercion Acts, or special laws in favour of Ireland like the Land Acts; it is admitted even more by specially exempting Ireland than by specially studying Ireland. In other words, whatever else the Unionists want, they do not want to unite; they are not quite so mad as that. I cannot myself conceive any purpose in having one parliament except to pass one law; and one law for England and Ireland is simply something that becomes more insanely impossible every day. If the two societies were stationary, they would be sufficiently separate; but they are both moving rapidly in opposite directions. England may be moving towards a condition which some call Socialism, and I call Slavery; but whatever it is, Ireland is speeding farther and farther from it. Whatever it is, the men who manage it will no more be able to manage a European peasantry than the peasants in these mud cabins could manage the Stock Exchange. All attempts, whether imperial or international, to lump these peasants along with some large and shapeless thing called Labour, are part of a cosmopolitan illusion which sees mankind as a map. The world of the International is a pill, as round and as small. It is true that all men want health; but it is certainly not true that all men want the same medicine. Let us allow the cosmopolitan to survey the world from China to Peru; but do not let us allow the chemist to identify Chinese opium and Peruvian bark.

My parallel about the Slovenes was only a fancy; yet I can give a real parallel from the Slavs which is a fact. It was a fact from my own experience in Ireland; and it exactly illustrates the real international sympathies of peasants. Their internationalism has nothing to do with the International. I had not been in Ireland many hours when several people mentioned to me with considerable excitement some news from the

Continent. They were not, strange as it may seem, dancing with joy over the disaster of Caporetto, or glowing with admiration of the Crown Prince. Few really rejoiced in English defeats; and none really rejoiced in German victories. It was news about the Bolshevists; but it was not the news of how nobly they had given votes to the Russian women, nor of how savagely they had fired bullets into the Russian princesses. It was the news of a check to the Bolshevists; but it was not a glorification of Kerensky or Korniloff, or any of the newspaper heroes who seem to have satisfied us all, so long as their names began with K and nobody knew anything about them. In short, it was nothing that could be found in all our myriad newspaper articles on the subject. I would give an educated Englishman a hundred guesses about what it was; but even if he knew it, he would not know what it meant.

It had appeared in the little paper about peasant produce so successfully conducted by Mr. George Russell, the celebrated "A. E.," and it was told me eagerly by the poet himself, by a learned and brilliant Jesuit, and by several other people, as the great news from Europe. It was simply the news that the Jewish Socialists of the Bolshevist Government had been attempting to confiscate the peasants' savings in the co-operative banks; and had been forced to desist. And they spoke of it as of a great battle won on the Danube or the Rhine. That is what I mean when I say that these people are of a pattern and belong to a system which cuts across all our own political divisions. They felt themselves fighting the Socialists as fiercely as any Capitalist can feel it; but they not only knew what they were fighting against, but what they were fighting for; which is more than the Capitalist does. I do not know how far modern Europe really shows a menace of Bolshevism, or how far merely a panic of Capitalism. But I know that if any honest resistance has to be offered to mere robbery, the resistance of Ireland will be the most honest, and probably the most important. It may be that international Israel will launch against us out of the East an insane simplification of the unity of Man, as Islam once launched out of the East an insane simplification of the unity of God. If it be so, it is where property is well distributed that it will be well defended. The post of honour will be with those who fight in very truth for their own land. If ever there came such a drive of wild dervishes against us, it would be the chariots and elephants of plutocracy that would roll in confusion and rout; and the squares of the peasant infantry would stand.

Anyhow, the first fact to realise is that we are dealing with a European peasantry; and it would be really better, as I say, to think of it first as a Continental peasantry. There are numberless important inferences from this fact; but there is one point, politically topical and urgent, on which I may well touch here. It will be well to understand about this peasantry something that we generally misunderstand, even about a Continental peasantry. English tourists in France or Italy commonly make the mistake of supposing that the people cheat, because the people bargain, or attempt to bargain. When a peasant asks tenpence for something that is worth fourpence, the tourist misunderstands the whole problem. He commonly solves it by calling the man a thief and paying the tenpence. There are ten thousand errors in this, beginning with the primary error of an oligarchy, of treating a man as a servant when he feels more like a small squire. The peasant does not choose to receive insults; but he never expected to receive tenpence. A man who understood him would simply suggest twopence, in a calm and courteous manner; and the two would eventually meet in the middle at a perfectly just price. There would not be what we call a fixed price at the beginning, but there would be a very firmly fixed price at the end: that is, the bargain once made would be a sacredly sealed contract. The peasant, so far from cheating, has his own horror of cheating; and certainly his own fury at being cheated. Now in the political bargain with the English, the Irish simply think they have been cheated. They think Home Rule was stolen from them *after* the contract was sealed; and it will be hard for any one to contradict them. If "*le Roi le veult*" is not a sacred seal on a contract, what is? The sentiment is stronger because the contract was a compromise. Home Rule was the fourpence and not the tenpence; and, in perfect loyalty to the peasant's code of honour, they have now reverted to the tenpence. The Irish have now returned in a reaction of anger to their most extreme demands; *not* because we denied what they demanded, but because we denied what we accepted. As I shall have occasion to note, there are other and wilder elements in the quarrel; but the first fact to remember is that the quarrel began with a bargain, that it will probably have to end with another bargain; and that it will be a bargain with peasants. On the whole, in spite of abominable blunders and bad faith, I think there is still a chance of bargaining, but we must see that there is no chance of cheating. We may haggle like peasants, and remember that their first offer is not necessarily their last. But we must be as honest as peasants; and that is very hard for politicians. The great Parnell, a squire who had many of the qualities of a peasant (qualities the English so wildly misunderstood as to think them English, when they were really very Irish), converted his people from a Fenianism fiercer than Sinn Fein to a Home Rule more moderate than that which sane statesmanship could now offer to Ireland. But the peasants trusted Parnell, not because they thought he was asking for it, but because they thought he could get it. Whatever we decide to give to Ireland, we must give it; it is now worse than useless to promise it. I will say here, once and for all, the hardest thing that an Englishman has to say of his impressions of another great European people: that over all those hills and valleys our word is wind, and our bond is waste paper.

But, in any case, the peasantry remains: and the whole weight of the matter is that it will remain. It is much more certain to remain than any of the commercial or colonial systems that will have to bargain with it. We may honestly think that the British Empire is both more liberal and more lasting than the Austrian Empire, or other large political combinations. But a combination like the Austrian Empire could go to pieces, and ten such combinations could go to pieces, before people like the Serbians ceased to desire to be peasants, and to demand to be free peasants. And the British combination, precisely because it is a combination and not a community, is in its nature more lax and liable to real schism than this sort of community, which might almost be called a communion. Any attack on it is like an attempt to abolish grass; which is not only the symbol of it in the old national song, but it is a very true symbol of it in any new philosophic history; a symbol of its equality, its ubiquity, its multiplicity, and its mighty power to return. To fight against grass is to fight against God; we can only so mismanage our own city and our own citizenship that the grass grows in our own streets. And even then it is our streets that will be dead; and the grass will still be alive.

III — The Family and the Feud

THERE was an old joke of my childhood, to the effect that men might be grouped together with reference to their Christian names. I have forgotten the cases then under consideration; but contemporary examples would be sufficiently suggestive to-day. A ceremonial brotherhood-in-arms between Father Bernard Vaughan and Mr. Bernard Shaw seems full of possibilities. I am faintly pleased with the fancy of Mr. Arnold Bennett endeavouring to extract the larger humanities of fiction from the political differences of Mr. Arnold White and Mr. Arnold Lupton. I should pass my own days in the exclusive society of Professor Gilbert Murray and Sir Gilbert Parker; whom I can conceive as differing on some points from each other, and on some points from me. Now there is one odd thing to notice about this old joke; that it might have been taken in a more serious spirit, though in a saner style, in a yet older period. This fantasy of the Victorian Age might easily have been a fact of the Middle Ages. There would have been nothing abnormal in the moral atmosphere of mediaevalism in some feast or pageant celebrating the fellowship of men who had the same patron saint. It seems mad and meaningless now, because the meaning of Christian names has been lost. They have fallen into a kind of chaos and oblivion which is highly typical of our time. I mean that there are still fashions in them, but no longer reasons for them. For a fashion is a custom without a cause. A fashion is a custom to which men cannot get accustomed; simply because it is without a cause. That is why our industrial societies, touching every topic from the cosmos to the coat-collars, are merely swept by a succession of modes which are merely moods. They are customs that fail to be customary. And so, amid all our fashions in Christian names, we have forgotten all that was meant by the custom of Christian names. We have forgotten all the original facts about a Christian name; but, above all, the fact that it was Christian.

Now if we note this process going on in the world of London or Liverpool, we shall see that it has already gone even farther and fared even worse. The surname also is losing its root and therefore its reason. The surname has become as solitary as a nickname. For it might be argued that the first name is meant to be an individual and even isolated thing; but the last name is certainly meant, by all logic and history, to link a man with his human origins, habits, or habitation. Historically, it was a word taken from the town he lived in or the trade guild to which he belonged; legally it is still the word on which all questions of legitimacy, succession, and testamentary arrangements turn. It is meant to be the corporate name; in that sense it is meant to be the impersonal name, as the other is meant to be the personal name. Yet in the modern mode of industrialism, it is more and more taken in a manner at once lonely and light. Any corporate social system built upon it would seem as much of a joke as the joke about Christian names with which I began. If it would seem odd to require a Thomas to make friends with any other Thomas, it would appear almost as perplexing to insist that any Thompson must love any other Thompson. It may be that Sir Edward Henry, late of the Police Force, does not wish to be confined to the society of Mr. Edward Clodd. But would Sir Edward Henry necessarily have sought the society of Mr. O. Henry, entertaining as that society would have been? Sir John Barker, founder of the great Kensington emporium, need not specially seek out and embrace Mr. John Masefield; but need he, any more swiftly, precipitate himself into the arms of Mr. Granville Barker? This vista of varieties would lead us far; but it is enough to notice, nonsense apart, that the most ordinary English surnames have become unique in their social significance; they stand for the man rather than the race or the origins. Even when they are most common they are not communal. What we call the family name is not now primarily the name of the family. The family itself, as a corporate conception, has already faded into the background, and is in danger of fading from the background. In short, our Christian names are not the only Christian things that we may lose.

Now the second solid fact which struck me in Ireland (after the success of small property and the *failure* of large organisation) was the fact that the family was in a flatly contrary position. All I have said above, in current language, about the whole trend of the modern world, is directly opposite to the whole trend of the modern Irish world. Not only is the Christian name a Christian name; but (what seems still more paradoxical and even pantomimic) the family name is really a family name. Touching the first of the two, it would be easy to trace out some very interesting truths about it, if they did not divert us from the main truth of this chapter: the second great truth about Ireland. People contrasting the “education” of the two countries, or seeking to extend to the one the thing which is called education in the other, might indeed do worse than study the simple problem of the meaning of Christian names. It might dawn at last, even on educationists, that there is a value in the content as well as the extent of culture; or (in other words), that knowing nine hundred words is not always more important than knowing what some of them mean. It is strictly and soberly true that any peasant, in a mud cabin in County Clare, when he names his child Michael, may really have a sense of the presence that smote down Satan, the arms and plumage of the paladin of Paradise. I doubt whether it is so overwhelmingly probable that any clerk in any villa on Clapham Common, when he names his son John, has a vision of the holy eagle of the Apocalypse, or even of the mystical cup of the disciple whom Jesus loved. In the face of that simple fact, I have no doubt about which is the more educated man; and even a knowledge of the *Daily Mail* does not redress the balance. It is often said, and possibly truly, that the peasant named Michael cannot write his own name. But it is quite equally true that the clerk named John cannot read his own name. He cannot read it because it is in a foreign language, and he has never been made to realise what it stands for. He does not know that John means John, as the other man does know that Michael means Michael. In that rigidly realistic sense, the pupil of industrial intellectualism does not even know his own name.

But this is a parenthesis; because the point here is that the man in the street (as distinct from the man in the field) has been separated not only from his private but from his more public description. He has not only forgotten his name, but forgotten his address. In my own view, he is like one of those unfortunate people who wake up with their minds a blank, and therefore cannot find their way home. But whether or no we take this view of the state of things in an industrial society like the English, we must realise firmly that a totally opposite state of things exists in an agricultural society like the Irish. We may put it, if we like, in the form of an unfamiliar and even unfriendly fancy. We may say that the house is greater than the man; that the house is an amiable ogre that runs after and recaptures the man. But the fact is there, familiar or unfamiliar, friendly or unfriendly; and the fact is the family. The family pride is prodigious; though it generally goes along with glowing masses of individual humility. And this family sentiment does attach itself to the family name; so that the very language in which men think is made up of family names. In this the atmosphere is singularly unlike that of England though much more like that of Scotland.

Indeed, it will illustrate the impartial recognition of this, apart from any partisan deductions, that it is equally apparent in the place where Ireland and Scotland are supposed to meet. It is equally apparent in Ulster, and even in the Protestant corner of Ulster.

In all the Ulster propaganda I came across, I think the thing that struck me most sharply was one phrase in one Unionist leading article. It was something that might fairly be called Scottish; something which was really even more Irish; but something which could not in the wildest mood be called English, and therefore could not with any rational meaning be called Unionist. Yet it was part of a passionately sincere, and indeed truly human and historic outburst of the politics of the northeast corner, against the politics of the rest of Ireland. Most of us remember that Sir Edward Carson put into the Government a legal friend of his named Campbell; it was at the beginning of the war, and few of us thought anything of the matter except that it was stupid to give posts to Carsonites at the most delicate crisis of the cause in Ireland. Since then, as we also know, the same Campbell has shown himself a sensible man, which I should translate as a practical Home Ruler; but which is anyhow something more than what is generally meant by a Carsonite. I entertain myself, a profound suspicion that Carson also would very much like to be something more than a Carsonite. But however this may be, his legal friend of whom I speak made an excellent speech, containing some concession to Irish popular sentiment. As might have been expected, there were furious denunciations of him in the press of the Orange party; but not more furious than might have been found in the *Morning Post* or the Saturday Review. *Nevertheless, there was one phrase that I certainly never saw in the* Morning Post *or the* Saturday Review; one phrase I should never expect to see in any English paper, though I might very probably see it in a Scotch paper. It was this sentence, that was read to me from the leading article of a paper in Belfast: “There never was treason yet but a Campbell was at the bottom of it.”

Let anybody imagine an Englishman saying, about some business quarrel, “How like an Atkins!” or “What could you expect of a Wilkinson?” A moment’s reflection will show that it would be even more impossible touching public men in public quarrels. No English Liberal ever connected the earlier exploits of the present Lord Birkenhead with atavistic influences, or the totem of the wide and wandering tribe of Smith. No English patriot traced back the family tree of any English pacifist; or said there was never treason yet but a Pringle was at the bottom of it. It is the indefinite article that is here the definite distinction. It is the expression “a Campbell” which suddenly transforms the scene, and covers the robes of one lawyer with the ten thousand tartans of a whole clan. Now that phrase is the phrase that meets the traveller everywhere in Ireland. Perhaps the next most arresting thing I remember, after the agrarian revolution, was the way in which one poor Irishman happened to speak to me about Sir Roger Casement. He did not praise him as a deliverer of Ireland; he did not abuse him as a disgrace to Ireland; he did not say anything of the twenty things one might expect him to say. He merely referred to the rumour that Casement meant to become a Catholic just before his execution, and expressed a sort of distant interest in it. He added: “He’s always been a Black Protestant. All the Casements are Black Protestants.” I confess that, at the moment of that morbid story, there seemed to me to be something unearthly about the very idea of there being other Casements. If ever a man seemed solitary, if ever a man seemed unique to the point of being unnatural, it was that man on the two or three occasions when I have seen his sombre handsome face and his wild eyes; a tall, dark figure walking already in the shadow of a dreadful doom. I do not know if he was a Black Protestant; but he was a black something; in the sad if not the bad sense of the symbol. I fancy, in truth, he stood rather for the third of Browning’s famous triad of rhyming monosyllables. A distinguished Nationalist Member, who happened to have had a medical training, said to me, “I was quite certain when I first clapped eyes on him; the man was mad.” Anyhow the man was so unusual, that it would never have occurred to me or any of my countrymen to talk as if there were a class or clan of such men. I could almost have imagined he had been born without father or mother. But for the Irish, his father and mother were really more important than he was. There is said to be a historical mystery about whether Parnell made a pun, when he said that the name of Kettle was a household word in Ireland. Few symbols could now be more contrary than the name of Kettle and the name of Casement (save for the courage they had in common); for the younger Kettle, who died so gloriously in France, was a Nationalist as broad as the other was cramped, and as sane as the other was crazy. But if the fancy of a punster, following his own delightful vein of nonsense, should see something quaint in the image of a hundred such Kettles singing as he sang by a hundred hearths, a more bitter jester, reading that black and obscure story of the capture on the coast, might utter a similar flippancy about other Casements, opening on the foam of such very perilous seas, in a land so truly forlorn. But even if we were not annoyed at the pun, we should be surprised at the plural. And our surprise would be the measure of the deepest difference between England and Ireland. To express it in the same idle imagery it would be the fact that even a casement is a part of a house, as a kettle is a part of a household. Every word in Irish is a household word.

The English would no more have thought of a plural for the word Gladstone than for the word God. They would never have imagined Disraeli compassed about with a great cloud of Disraelis; it would have seemed to them altogether too Apocalyptic, and exaggeration of being on the side of the angels. To this day in England, as I have reason to know, it is regarded as a rabid and insane form of religious persecution to suggest that a Jew very probably comes of a Jewish family. In short, the modern English, while their rulers are willing to give due consideration to Eugenics as a reasonable opportunity for various forms of polygamy and infanticide, are drifting farther and farther from the only consideration of Eugenics that could possibly be fit for Christian men, the consideration of it as an accomplished fact. I have spoken of infanticide; but indeed the ethic involved is rather that of parricide and matricide. To my own taste, the present tendency of social reform would seem to consist of destroying all traces of the parents, in order to study the heredity of the children. But I do not here ask the reader to accept my own tastes or even opinions about these things; I only bear witness to an objective fact about a foreign country. It can be summed up by saying that Parnell is the Parnell for the English; but a Parnell for the Irish.

This is what I mean when I say that English Home Rulers do not know what the Irish mean by home. And this is also what I mean when I say that the society does not fit into any of our social classifications, liberal or conservative. To many Radicals this sense of lineage will appear rank reactionary aristocracy. And it is aristocratic, if we mean by this a pride of pedigree; but it is not aristocratic in the practical and political sense. Strange as it may sound, its practical effect is democratic. It is not aristocratic in the sense of creating an aristocracy. On the contrary, it is perhaps the one force that permanently prevents the creation of an aristocracy, in the manner of the English squirearchy. The reason of this apparent paradox can be put plainly enough in one sentence. If you are *really* concerned about your relations, you have to be concerned about your poor relations. You soon discover that a considerable number of your second cousins exhibit a strong social tendency to be chimney-sweeps and tinkers. You soon learn the lesson of human equality if you try honestly and consistently to learn any other lesson, even the lesson of heraldry and genealogy. For good or evil, a real working aristocracy has to forget about three-quarters of its aristocrats. It has to discard the poor who have the genteel blood, and welcome the rich who can live the genteel life. If a man is interesting because he is a McCarthy, it is, so far, as he is interesting because he is a man; that is, he is interesting whether he is a duke or a dustman. But if he is interesting because he is Lord FitzArthur and lives at FitzArthur House, then he is interesting when he has merely bought the house, or when he has merely bought the title. To maintain a squirearchy, it is necessary to admire the new squire; and therefore to forget the old squire. The sense of family is like a dog and follows the family; the sense of oligarchy is like a cat and continues to haunt the house. I am not arguing against aristocracy if the English choose to preserve it in England; I am only making clear the terms on which they hold it, and warning them that a people with a strong family sense will not hold it on any terms. Aristocracy, as it has flourished in England since the Reformation, with not a little national glory and commercial success, is in its very nature built up of broken and desecrated homes. It has to destroy a hundred poor relations to keep up a family. It has to destroy a hundred families to keep up a class.

But if this family spirit is incompatible with what we mean by aristocracy, it is quite as incompatible with three-quarters of what many men praise and preach as democracy. The whole trend of what has been regarded as liberal legislation in England, necessary or unnecessary, defensible and indefensible, has for good or evil been at the expense of the independence of the family, especially of the poor family. From the first most reasonable restraints of the Factory Acts to the last most maniacal antics of interference with other people’s nursery games or Christmas dinners, the whole process has turned sometimes on the pivot of the state, more often on the pivot of the employer, but never on the pivot of the home. All this may be an emancipation; I only point out that Ireland really asked for Home Rule chiefly to be emancipated from this emancipation. But indeed the English politicians, to do them justice, show their consciousness of this by the increasing number of cases in which the other nation is exempted. We may have harried this unhappy people with our persecutions; but at least we spare them our reforms. We have smitten them with plagues; but at least we dare not scourge them with our remedies. The real case against the Union is not merely a case against the Unionists; it is a far stronger case against the Universalists. It is this strange and ironic truth; that a man stands up holding a charter of charity and peace for all mankind; that he lays down a law of enlightened justice for all the nations of the earth, that he claims to behold man from the beginnings of his evolution equal, without any difference between the most distant creeds and colours; that he stands as the orator of the human race whose statute only declares all humanity to be human; and then slightly drops his voice and says, “This Act shall not apply to Ireland.”

IV — The Paradox of Labour

MY first general and visual impression of the green island was that it was not green but brown; that it was positively brown with khaki. This is one of those experiences that cannot be confused with expectations; the sort of small thing that is seen but not foreseen in the verbal visions of books and newspapers. I knew, of course, that we had a garrison in Dublin, but I had no notion that it was so obvious all over Dublin. I had no notion that it had been considered necessary to occupy the country in such force, or with so much parade of force. And the first thought that flashed through my mind found words in the single sentence: "How useful these men would have been in the breach at St. Quentin."

For I went to Dublin towards the end of 1918 and not long after those awful days which led up to the end of the war, and seemed more like the end of the world. There hung still in the imagination, as above a void of horror, that line that was the last chain of the world's chivalry; and the memory of the day when it seemed that our name and our greatness and our glory went down before the annihilation from the north. Ireland is hardly to blame if she has never known how noble an England was in peril in that hour; or for what beyond any empire we were troubled, when, under a cloud of thick darkness, we almost felt her ancient foundations move upon the floor of the sea. But I, as an Englishman at least, knew it; and it was for England and not for Ireland that I felt this first impatience and tragic irony. I had always doubted the military policy that culminated in Irish conscription, and merely on military grounds. If any policy of the English could deserve to be called in the proverbial sense Irish, I think it was this one. It was wasting troops in Ireland because we wanted them in France. I had the same purely patriotic and even pugnacious sense of annoyance, mingling with my sense of pathos, in the sight of the devastation of the great Dublin street, which had been bombarded by the British troops during the Easter Rebellion. I was distressed that such a cannonade had ever been aimed at the Irish; but even more distressed that it had not been aimed at the Germans. The question of the necessity of the heavy attack, like the question of the necessity of the large army of occupation, is of course bound up with the history of the Easter Rebellion itself. That strange and dramatic event, which came quite as unexpectedly to Nationalist Ireland as to

Unionist England, is no part of my own experiences, and I will not dogmatise on so dark a problem. But I will say in passing that I suspect a certain misunderstanding of its very nature to be common on both sides. Everything seems to point to the paradox that the rebels needed the less to be conquered, because they were actually aiming at being conquered, rather than at being conquerors. In the moral sense they were certainly heroes, but I doubt if they expected to be conquering heroes. They desired to be in the Greek and literal sense martyrs; they wished not so much to win as to witness. They thought that nothing but their dead bodies could really prove that Ireland was not dead. How far this sublime and suicidal ideal was really useful in reviving national enthusiasm, it is for Irishmen to judge; I should have said that the enthusiasm was there anyhow. But if any such action is based on international hopes, as they affect England or a great part of America, it seems to me it is founded on a fallacy about the facts. I shall have occasion to note many English errors about the Irish; and this seems to me a very notable Irish error about the English. If we are often utterly mistaken about their mentality, they were quite equally mistaken about our mistake. And curiously enough, they failed through not knowing the one compliment that we had really always paid them. Their act presupposed that Irish courage needed proof; and it never did. I have heard all the most horrible nonsense talked against Ireland before the war; and I never heard Englishmen doubt Irish military valour. What they did doubt was Irish political sanity. It will be seen at once that the Easter action could only disprove the prejudice they hadn’t got; and actually confirmed the prejudice they had got. The charge against the Irishman was not a lack of boldness, but rather an excess of it. Men were right in thinking him brave, and they could not be more right. But they were wrong in thinking him mad, and they had an excellent opportunity to be more wrong. Then, when the attempt to fight against England developed by its own logic into a refusal to fight for England, men took away the number they first thought of; and were irritated into denying what they had originally never dreamed of doubting. In any case, this was, I think, the temper in which the minority of the true Sinn Feiners sought martyrdom. I for one will never sneer at such a motive; but it would hardly have amounted to so great a movement but for another force that happened to ally itself with them. It is for the sake of this that I have here begun with the Easter tragedy itself; for with the consideration of this we come to the paradox of Irish Labour.

Some of my remarks on the stability and even repose of a peasant society may seem exaggerated in the light of a Labour agitation that breaks out in Ireland as elsewhere. But I have particular and even personal reasons for regarding that agitation as the exception that proves the rule. It was the background of the peasant landscape that made the Dublin strike the peculiar sort of drama that it was; and this operated in two ways: first, by isolating the industrial capitalist as something exceptional and almost fanatical; and second, by reinforcing the proletariat with a vague tradition of property. My own sympathies were all with Larkin and Connolly as against the late Mr. Murphy; but it is curious to note that even Mr. Murphy was quite a different kind of man from the Lord Something who is the head of a commercial combine in England. He was much more like some morbid prince of the fifteenth century, full of cold anger, not without perverted piety. But the first few words I heard about him in Ireland were full of that vast, vague fact which I have tried to put first among my impressions. I have called it the family; but it covers many cognate things: youth and old friendships, not to mention old quarrels. It might be more fully defined as a realism about origins. The first things I heard about Murphy were facts of his forgotten youth, or a youth that would in England have been forgotten. They were tales about friends of his poorer days, with whom he had set out to push some more or less sentimental vendetta against somebody. Suppose whenever we talked of Harrod’s Stores we heard first about the boyish day-dreams of Harrod. Suppose the mention of Bradshaw’s Railway Guide brought up tales of feud and first love in the early life of Mr. Bradshaw, or even of Mrs. Bradshaw. That is the atmosphere, to be felt rather than described, that a stranger in Ireland feels around him. English journalism and gossip, dealing with English business men, are often precise about the present and prophetic about the future, but seldom communicative about the past; et pour cause. They will tell us where the capitalist is going to, as to the House of Lords, or to Monte Carlo, or inferentially to heaven; but they say as little as possible about where he comes from. In Ireland a man carries the family mansion about with him like a snail; and his father’s ghost follows him like his shadow. Everything good and bad that could be said was said, not only about Murphy but about Murphys. An anecdote of the old Irish Parliament describes an orator as gracefully alluding to the presence of an opponent’s sister in the Ladies’ Gallery, by praying that wrath overtake the whole accursed generation “from the toothless old hag who is grinning in the gallery to the white-livered poltroon who is shivering on the floor." The story is commonly told as suggesting the rather wild disunion of Irish parties; but it is quite as serious a suggestion of the union of Irish families.

As a matter of fact, the great Dublin Strike, a conflagration of which the embers were still glowing at the time of my visit, involved another episode which illustrates once again this recurrent principle of the reality of the family in Ireland. Some English Socialists, it may be remembered, moved by an honourable pity for the poor families starving during the strike, made a proposal for taking the children away and feeding them properly in England. I should have thought the more natural course would have been to give money or food to the parents. But the philanthropists, being English and being Socialists, probably had a trust in what is called organisation and a distrust of what is called charity. It is supposed that charity makes a man dependent; though in fact charity makes him independent, as compared with the dreary dependence usually produced by organisation. Charity gives property, and therefore liberty. There is manifestly much more emancipation in giving a beggar a shilling to spend, than in sending an official after him to spend it for him. The Socialists, however, had placidly arranged for the deportation of all the poor children, when they found themselves, to their astonishment, confronted with the red-hot reality called the religion of Ireland. The priests and the families of the faithful organised themselves for a furious agitation, on the ground that the faith would be lost in foreign and heretical homes. They were not satisfied with the assurance, which some of the Socialists earnestly offered, that the faith would not be tampered with; and as a matter of clear thinking, I think they were quite right. Those who offer such a reassurance have never thought about what a religion is. They entertain the extraordinary idea that religion is a topic. They think religion is a thing like radishes, which can be avoided throughout a particular conversation with a particular person, whom the mention of a radish may convulse with anger or agony. But a religion is simply the world a man inhabits. In practice, a Socialist living in Liverpool would not know when he was, or was not tampering with the religion of a child born in Louth. If I were given the complete control of an infant Parsee (which is fortunately unlikely) I should not have the remotest notion of when I was most vitally reflecting on the Parsee system. But common sense, and a comprehension of the meaning of a coherent philosophy, would lead me to suspect that I was reflecting on it every other minute. But I mention the matter here, not in order to enter into any of these disputes, but to give yet another example of the way in which the essentially domestic organisation of Ireland will always rise in rebellion against any other organisation. There is something of a parable in the tales of the old evictions, in which the whole family was besieged and resisted together and the mothers emptied boiling kettles on the besiegers; for any official who interferes with them will certainly get into hot water. We cannot separate mothers and children in that strange land; we can only return to some of our older historical methods, and massacre them together.

A small incident within my own short experience, however, illustrated the main point involved here; the sense of a peasant base, even of the proletarian attack. And this was exemplified not in any check to Labour, but rather in a success for Labour, in so far as the issue of a friendly and informal debate may be classed with its more solid successes. The business originally began with a sort of loose-jointed literary lecture which I gave in the Dublin Theatre, in connection with which I only mention two incidents in passing, because they both struck me as peculiarly native and national. One concerned only the title of my address, which was “Poetry and Property.” An educated English gentleman, who happened to speak to me before the meeting, said with the air of one who foresees that such jokes will be the death of him, “Well, I have simply given up puzzling about what you can possibly mean, by talking about poetry as something to do with property.” He probably regarded the combination of words as a mere alliterative fantasy, like Peacocks and Paddington, or Polygamy and Potatoes; if indeed he did not regard it as a mere combination of incompatible contrasts, like Popery and Protestants, or Patriotism and Politicians. On the same day an Irishman of similar social standing remarked quite carelessly, “I’ve just seen your subject for to-morrow. I suppose the Socialists won’t agree with you,” or words to that effect. The two terms told him at once, not about the lecture (which was literary if it was anything), but about the whole philosophy underlying the lecture; the whole of that philosophy which the lumbering elephant called by Mr. Shaw the Chester-Belloc laboriously toils to explain in England, under the ponderous title of Distributivism. As Mr. Hugh Law once said, equally truly, about our pitting of patriotism against imperialism, “What is a paradox in England is a commonplace in Ireland.” My actual monologue, however, dealt merely with the witness of poetry to a certain dignity in man's sense of private possessions, which is certainly not either vulgar ostentation or vulgar greed. The French poet of the Pleiade remembers the slates on his own roof almost as if he could count them; and Mr. W. B. Yeats, in the very wildest vision of a loneliness remote and irresponsible, is careful to make it clear that he knows how many bean-rows make nine. Of course there were people of all parties in the theatre, wild Sinn Feiners and conventional Unionists, but they all listened to my remarks as naturally as they might have all listened to an equally incompetent lecture on Monkeys or on the Mountains of the Moon. There was not a word of politics, least of all party politics, in that particular speech; it was concerned with a tradition in art, or at the most, in abstract ethics. But the one amusing thing which makes me recall the whole incident was this; that when I had finished, a stalwart, hearty, heavy sort of legal gentleman, a well-known Irish judge I understand, was kind enough to move a vote of thanks to me. And what amused me about him was this: that while I, who am a Radical in sympathy with the revolutionary legend, had delivered a mild essay on minor poets to a placid if bored audience, the judge, who was a pillar of the Castle and a Conservative sworn to law and order, proceeded with the utmost energy and joy to raise a riot. He taunted the Sinn Feiners and dared them to come out; he trailed his coat if ever a man trailed it in this world; he glorified England; not the Allies, but England; splendid England, sublime England (all in the broadest brogue), just, wise, and merciful England, and so on, flourishing what was not even the flag of his own country, and a thing that had not the remotest connection with the subject in hand, any more than the Great Wall of China. I need not say that the theatre was soon in a roar of protests and repartees; which I suppose was what he wanted. He was a jolly old gentleman; and I liked him. But what interested me about him was this; and it is of some importance in the understanding of his nationality. That sort of man exists in England; I know and like scores of him. Often he is a major; often a squire; sometimes a judge; very occasionally a dean. Such a man talks the most ridiculous reactionary nonsense in an apoplectic fashion over his own port wine; and occasionally in a somewhat gasping manner at an avowedly political meeting. But precisely what the English gentleman would not do, and the Irish gentleman did do, would be to make a scene on a non-political occasion; when all he had to do was to move a formal vote of thanks to a total stranger who was talking about Ithaca and Innisfree. An

English Conservative would be less likely to do it than an English Radical. The same thing that makes him conventionally political would make him conventionally non-political. He would hate to make too serious a speech on too social an occasion, as he would hate to be in morning-dress when every one else was in evening-dress. And whatever coat he wore he certainly would not trail it solely in order to make a disturbance, as did that jolly Irish judge. He taught me that the Irishman is never so Irish, as when he is English. He was very like some of the Sinn Feiners who shouted him down; and he would be pleased to know that he helped me to understand them with a greater sympathy.

I have wandered from the subject in speaking of this trifle, thinking it worth while to note the positive and provocative quality of all Irish opinion; but it was my purpose only to mention this small dispute as leading up to another. I had some further talk about poetry and property with Mr. Yeats at the Dublin Arts Club; and here again I am tempted to irrelevant, but for me interesting matters. For I am conscious throughout of saying less than I could wish of a thousand things, my omission of which is not altogether thoughtless, far less thankless. There have been and will be better sketches than mine of all that attractive society, the paradox of an intelligentsia that is intelligent. I could write a great deal, not only about those I value as my own friends, like Katherine Tynan or Stephen Gwynn, but about men with whom my meeting was all too momentary; about the elvish energy conveyed by Mr. James Stephens; the social greatness of Dr. Gogarty, who was like a literary legend of the eighteenth century; of the unique universalism of A. E., who has something of the presence of William Morris, and a more transcendental type of the spiritual hospitality of Walt Whitman. But I am not in this rough sketch trying to tell Irishmen what they know already, but trying to tell Englishmen some of the large and simple things that they do not know. The large matter concerned here is Labour; and I have only paused upon the other points because they were the steps which accidentally led up to my first meeting with this great force. And it was none the less a fact in support of my argument, because it was something of a joke against myself.

On the occasion I have mentioned, a most exhilarating evening at the Arts Club, Mr. Yeats asked me to open a debate at the Abbey Theatre, defending property on its more purely political side. My opponent was one of the ablest of the leaders of Liberty Hall, the famous stronghold of Labour politics in Dublin, Mr. Johnson, an Englishman like myself, but one deservedly popular with the proletarian Irish. He made a most admirable speech, to which I mean no disparagement when I say that I think his personal popularity had even more weight than his personal eloquence. My own argument was confined to the particular value of small property as a weapon of militant democracy; and was based on the idea that the citizen resisting injustice could find no substitute for private property, for every other impersonal power, however democratic in theory, must be bureaucratic in form. I said, as a flippant figure of speech, that committing property to any officials, even guild officials, was like having to leave one's legs in the cloakroom along with one's stick or umbrella. The point is that a man may want his legs at any minute, to kick a man or to dance with a lady; and recovering them may be postponed by any hitch, from the loss of the ticket to the criminal flight of the official. So in a social crisis, such as a strike, a man must be ready to act without officials who may hamper or betray him; and I asked whether many more strikes would not have been successful, if each striker had owned so much as a kitchen garden to help him to live. My opponent replied that he had always been in favour of such a reserve of proletarian property, but preferred it to be communal rather than individual; which seems to me to leave my argument where it was; for what is communal must be official, unless it is to be chaotic. Two minor jokes, somewhat at my expense, remain in my memory; I appear to have caused some amusement by cutting a pencil with a very large Spanish knife, which I value (as it happens) as the gift of an Irish priest who is a friend of mine, and which may therefore also be regarded as a symbolic weapon, a sort of sword of the spirit. Whether the audience thought I was about to amputate my own legs in illustration of my own metaphor, or that I was going to cut Mr. Johnson's throat in fury at finding no reply to his arguments, I do not know. The other thing which struck me as funny was an excellent retort by Mr. Johnson himself, who had said something about the waste of property on guns, and who interrupted my remark that there would never be a good revolution without guns, by humorously calling out, "Treason." As I told him afterwards, few scenes would be more artistic than that of an Englishman, sent over to recruit for the British army, being collared and given up to justice (or injustice) by a Pacifist from Liberty Hall. But all throughout the proceedings I was conscious, as I say, of a very real popular feeling supporting the mere personality of my opponent; as in the ovation he received before he spoke at all, or the applause given to a number of his topical asides, allusions which I could not always understand. After the meeting a distinguished Southern Unionist, who happens to own land outside Dublin, said to me, “Of course, Johnson has just had a huge success in his work here. Liberty Hall has just done something that has really never been done before in the whole Trade Union movement. He has really managed to start a Trade Union for agricultural labourers. I know, because I’ve had to meet their demands. You know how utterly impossible it has always been really to found a union of agricultural labourers in England.” I did know it; and I also knew why it had been possible to found one in Ireland. It had been possible for the very reason I had been urging all the evening; that behind the Irish proletariat there had been the tradition of an Irish peasantry. In their families, if not in themselves, there had been some memory of the personal love of the land. But it seemed to me an interesting irony that even my own defeat was an example of my own doctrine; and that the truth on my side was proved by the popularity of the other side. The agricultural guild was due to a wind of freedom that came into that dark city from very distant fields; and the truth that even these rolling stones of homeless proletarianism had been so lately loosened from the very roots of the mountains.

In Ireland even the industrialism is not industrial. That is what I mean by saying that Irish Labour is the exception that proves the rule. That is why it does not contradict my former generalisation that our capitalist crisis is on the English side of the road. The Irish agricultural labourers can become guildsman because they would like to become peasants. They think of rich and poor in the manner that is as old as the world; the manner of Ahab and Naboth. It matters little in a peasant society whether Ahab takes the vineyard privately as Ahab or officially as King of Israel. It will matter as little in the long run, even in the other kind of society, whether Naboth has a wage to work in the vineyard, or a vote that is supposed in some way to affect the vineyard. What he desires to have is the vineyard; and not in apologetic cynicism or vulgar evasions that business is business, but in thunder, as from a secret throne comes the awful voice out of the vineyard; the voice of this manner of man in every age and nation: “The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.”

V — The Englishman in Ireland

WITH no desire to decorate my travels with too tall a traveller's tale, I must record the fact that I found one point upon which all Irishmen were agreed. It was the fact that, for some reason or other, there had been a very hopeful beginning of Irish volunteering at the beginning of the war; and that, for some reason or other, this had failed in the course of the war. The reasons alleged differed widely with the moods of men; some had regarded the beginnings with hope and some with suspicion; some had lived to regard the failure with a bitter pleasure, and some with a generous pain. The different factions gave different explanations of why the thing had stopped; but they all agreed that it had begun. The Sinn Feiner said that the people soon found they had been lured into a Saxon trap, set for them by smooth, subservient Saxons like Mr. Devlin and Mr. Tim Healy. The Belfast citizen suggested that the Popish priest had terrorised the peasants when they tried to enlist, producing a thumbscrew from his pocket and a portable rack from his handbag. The Parliamentary Nationalist blamed both Sinn Fein and the persecution of Sinn Fein. The British Government officials, if they did not exactly blame themselves, at least blamed each other. The ordinary Southern Unionist (who played many parts of a more or less sensible sort, including that of a Home Ruler) generally agreed with the ordinary Nationalist that the Government's recruiting methods had been as bad as its cause was good. But it is manifest that multitudes at the beginning of the war thought it really had a very good cause; and moreover a very good chance.

The extraordinary story of how that chance was lost may find mention on a later page. I will begin by touching on the first incident that befell me personally in connection with the same enterprise. I went to Ireland at the request of Irish friends who were working warmly for the Allied cause, and who conceived (I fear in far too flattering a spirit) that I might at least be useful as an Englishman who had always sympathised as warmly with the Irish cause. I am under no illusions that I should ever be efficient at such work in any case; and under the circumstances I had no great hopes of doing much, where men like Sir Horace Plunkett and Captain Stephen Gwynne, far more competent, more self-sacrificing, and more well-informed than I, could already do comparatively little. It was too late. A hundredth part of the brilliant constancy and tragic labours of these men might easily, at the beginning of the war, have given us a great Irish army. I need not explain the motives that made me do the little I could do; they were the same that at that moment made millions of better men do masses of better work. Physical accident prevented my being useful in France, and a sort of psychological accident seemed to suggest that I might possibly be useful in Ireland; but I did not see myself as a very serious figure in either field. Nothing could be serious in such a case except perhaps a conviction; and at least my conviction about the great war has never wavered by a hair. *Delenda est* — and it is typical of the power of Berlin that one must break off for want of a Latin name for it. Being an Englishman, I hoped primarily to help England; but not being a congenital idiot, I did not primarily ask an Irishman to help England. There was obviously something much more reasonable to ask him to do. I hope I should in any case have done my best for my own country. But the cause was more than any country; in a sense it was too good for any country. The Allies were more right than they realised. Nay, they hardly had a right to be so right as they were. The modern Babylon of capitalistic states was hardly worthy to go on such a crusade against the heathen; as perhaps decadent Byzantium was hardly worthy to defend the Cross against the Crescent. But we are glad that it did defend the Cross against the Crescent. Nobody is sorry that Sobieski relieved Vienna; nobody wishes that Alfred had not won in Wessex. The cause that conquered is the only cause that survived. We see now that its enemy was not a cause but a chaos; and that is what history will say of the strange and recent boiling up of barbaric imperialism, a whirlpool whose hollow centre was Berlin. This is where the extreme Irish were really wrong; perhaps really wrong for the first time. I entirely sympathise with their being in revolt against the British Government. I am in revolt in most ways against the British Government myself. But politics are a fugitive thing in the face of history. Does anybody want to be fixed for ever on the wrong side at the Battle of Marathon, through a quarrel with some Archon whose very name is forgotten? Does anybody want to be remembered as a friend of Attila, through a breach of friendship with Aetius? In any case, it was with a profound conviction that if Prussia won, Europe must perish, and that if Europe perished England and Ireland must perish together, that I went to Dublin in those dark days of the last year of the war; and it so happened that the first occasion when I was called upon for any expression of opinion was at a very pleasant luncheon party given to the representatives of the British Dominions, who were then on an official tour in the country inspecting its conditions. What I said is of no importance except as leading up to later events; but it may be noted that though I was speaking perhaps indirectly to Irishmen, I was speaking directly, if not to Englishmen, at least to men in the more English tradition of the majority of the Colonies. I was speaking, if not to Unionists, at least largely to Imperialists.

Now I have forgotten, I am happy to say, the particular speech that I made, but I can repeat the upshot of it here, not only as part of the argument, but as part of the story. The line I took generally in Ireland was an appeal to the Irish principle, yet the reverse of a mere approval of the Irish action, or inaction. It postulated that while the English had missed a great opportunity of justifying themselves to the Irish, the Irish had also missed a similar opportunity of justifying themselves to the English. But it specially emphasised this; that what had been lost was not primarily a justification against England, but a joke against England. I pointed out that an Irishman missing a joke against an Englishman was a tragedy, like a lost battle. And there was one thing, and one thing only, which had stopped the Irishman from laughing, and saved the Englishman from being laughable. The one and only thing that rescued England from ridicule was Sinn Fein. Or, at any rate, that element in Sinn Fein which was pro-German, or refused to be anti-German. Nothing imaginable under the stars *except* a pro-German Irishman could at that moment have saved the face of a (very recently) pro-German Englishman.

The reason for this is obvious enough. England in 1914 encountered or discovered a colossal crime of Prussianised Germany. But England could not discover the German crime without discovering the English blunder. The blunder was, of course, a perfectly plain historical fact; that England made Prussia. England was the historic, highly civilised western state, with Roman foundations and chivalric memories; Prussia was originally a petty and boorish principality used by England and Austria in the long struggle against the greatness of France. Now in that long struggle Ireland had always been on the side of France. She had only to go on being on the side of France, and the Latin tradition generally, to behold her own truth triumph over her own enemies. In a word, it was not a question of whether Ireland should become anti-German, but merely of whether she should *continue* to be anti-German. It was a question of whether she should suddenly become pro-German, at the moment when most other pro-Germans were discovering that she had been justified all along. But England, at the beginning of her last and most lamentable quarrel with Ireland, was by no means in so strong a controversial position. England was right; but she could only prove she was right by proving she was wrong. In one sense, and with all respect to her right action in the matter, she had to be ridiculous in order to be right.

But the joke against the English was even more obvious and topical. And as mine was only meant for a light speech after a friendly lunch, I took the joke in its lightest and most fanciful form, and touched chiefly on the fantastic theory of the Teuton as the master of the Celt. For the supreme joke was this: that the Englishman has not only boasted of being an Englishman; he has actually boasted of being a German. As the modern mind began to doubt the superiority of Calvinism to Catholicism, all English books, papers, and speeches were filled more and more with a Teutonism which substituted a racial for a religious superiority. It was felt to be a more modern and even a more progressive principle of distinction, to insist on ethnology rather than theology; for ethnology was supposed to be a science. Unionism was simply founded on Teutonism. Hence the ordinary honest, patriotic Unionist was in a highly humorous fix, when he had suddenly to begin denouncing Teutonism as mere terrorism. If all superiority belonged to the Teuton, the supreme superiority must clearly belong to the most Teutonic Teuton. If I claim the right to kick Mr. Bernard Shaw on the specific ground that I am fatter than he is, it is obvious that I look rather a fool if I am suddenly kicked by somebody who is fatter still. When the earth shakes under the advancing form of one coming against me out of the east who is fatter than I (for I called upon the Irish imagination to embrace so monstrous a vision), it is clear that whatever my relations to the rest of the world, in my relations to Mr. Bernard Shaw I am rather at a disadvantage. Mr. Shaw, at any rate, is rather in a position to make game of me; of which it is not inconceivable that he might avail himself. I might have accumulated a vast mass of learned sophistries and journalistic catchwords, which had always seemed to me to justify the connection between waxing fat and kicking. I might have proved from history that the leaders had always been fat men, like William the Conqueror, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Charles Fox. I might have proved from physiology that fatness is a proof of the power of organic assimilation and digestion; or from comparative zoology that the elephant is the wisest of the beasts. In short, I might be able to adduce many arguments in favour of my position. Only, unfortunately, they would now all become arguments against my position. Everything I had ever urged against my old enemy could be urged much more forcibly against me by my new enemy. And my position touching the great adipose theory would be exactly like England's position touching the equally sensible Teutonic theory. If Teutonism was creative culture, then on our own showing the German was better than the Englishman. If Teutonism was barbarism, then on our own showing the Englishman was more barbaric than the Irishman. The real answer, of course, is that we were not Teutons but only the dupes of Teutonism; but some were so wholly duped that they would do anything rather than own themselves dupes. These unfortunates, while they are already ashamed of being Teutons, are still proud of not being Celts.

There is only one thing that could save my dignity in such an undignified fix as I have fancied here. It is that Mr. Bernard Shaw himself should come to my rescue. It is that Mr. Bernard Shaw himself should declare in favour of the corpulent conqueror from the east; that *he* should take seriously all the fads and fallacies of that fat-headed superman. That, and that alone, would ensure all my own fads and fallacies being not only forgotten but forgiven. There is present to my imagination, I regret to say, a wild possibility that this is what Mr. Bernard Shaw might really do. Anyhow, this is what a certain number of his countrymen really did. It will be apparent, I think, from these pages that I do not believe in the stage Irishman. I am under no delusion that the Irishman is soft-headed and sentimental, or even illogical and inconsequent. Nine times out of ten, the Irishman is not only more clear-headed, but even more cool-headed than the Englishman. But I think it is true, as Mr. Max Beerbohm once suggested to me in connection with Mr. Shaw himself, that there is a residual perversity in the Irishman, which comes after and not before the analysis of a question. There is at the last moment a cold impatience in the intellect, an irony which returns on itself and rends itself; the subtlety of a suicide. However this may be, some of the lean men, instead of making a fool of the fat man, did begin almost to make a hero of the fatter man; to admire his vast curves as almost cosmic lines of development. I have seen Irish-American pamphlets which took quite seriously (or, I prefer to think, pretended to take quite seriously) the ridiculous romance about the Teutonic tribes having revived and refreshed civilisation after the fall of the Roman Empire. They revived civilisation very much as they restored Louvain or reconstructed the Lusitania. It was a romance which the English for a short time adopted as a convenience, but from which the Irish have continually suffered as from a curse. It was a suicidal perversity that they themselves, in their turn, should perpetuate their permanent curse as a temporary convenience. That was the worst error of the Irish, or of some of the best of the Irish. That is why the Easter Rising was really a black and insane blunder. It was not because it involved the Irish in a military defeat; it was because it lost the Irish a great controversial victory. The rebel deliberately let the tyrant out of a trap; out of the grinning jaws of the gigantic trap of a joke.

Many of the most extreme Nationalists knew this well; it was what Kettle probably meant when he suggested an Anglo-Irish history called “The Two Fools”; and of course I do not mean that. I said all this in my very casual and rambling speech. But it was based on this idea, that men had missed the joke against England, and that now unfortunately the joke was rather against Ireland. It was Ireland that was now missing a great historical opportunity for lack of humour and imagination, as England had missed it a moment before. If the Irish would laugh at the English and help the English, they would win all along the line. In the real history of the German problem, they would inherit all the advantages of having been right from the first. It was now not so much a question of Ireland consenting to follow England’s lead as of England being obliged to follow Ireland’s lead. These are the principles, which I thought, and still think, the only possible principles to form the basis of a recruiting appeal in Ireland. But on the particular occasion in question I naturally took the matter much more lightly; hoping that the two jokes might, as it were, cancel out, and leave the two countries quits and in a better humour. And I devoted nearly all my remarks to testifying that the English had really, in the mass, shed the cruder Teutonism that had excused the cruelties of the past. I said that Englishmen were anything but proud of the past government of Ireland; that the mass of men of all parties were far more modest and humane in their view of Ireland than most Irishmen seem to suppose. And I ended with words which I only quote here from memory, because they happen to be the text of the curious incident which followed: “This is no place for us to boast. We stand here in the valley of our humiliation, where the flag we love has done very little that was not evil; and where its victories have been far more disastrous than defeats;" and I concluded with some general expression of the hope (which I still entertain) that two lands so much loved, by those who know them best, are not meant to hate each other for ever.

A day or two afterwards a distinguished historian who is a professor at Trinity College, Mr. Alison Phillips, wrote an indignant letter to the Irish Times. He announced that he was not in the valley of humiliation; and warmly contradicted the report that he was, as he expressed it, "sitting in sackcloth and ashes." He remarked, if I remember right, that I was middle-class, which is profoundly true; and he generally resented my suggestions as a shameful attack upon my fellow Englishmen. This both amused and puzzled me; for of course I had not been attacking Englishmen, but defending them; I had merely been assuring the Irish that the English were not so black, or so red, as they were painted in the vision of "England's cruel red." I had not said there what I have said here, about the anomaly and absurdity of England in Ireland; I had only said that Ireland had suffered rather from the Teutonic theory than the English temper; and that the English temper, experienced at close quarters, was really quite ready for a reconciliation with Ireland. Nor indeed did Mr. Alison Phillips really complain especially of my denouncing the English, but rather of my way of defending them. He did not so much mind being charged with the vice of arrogance. What he could not bear was being charged with the virtue of humility. What worried him was not so much the supposition of our doing wrong, as that anybody should conceive it possible that we were sorry for doing wrong. After all, he probably reasoned, it may not be easy for an eminent historical scholar actually to deny that certain tortures have taken place, or certain perjuries been proved; but there is really no reason why he should admit that the memory of using torture or perjury has so morbid an effect on the mind. Therefore he naturally desired to correct any impression that might arise, to the effect that he had been seen in the valley of humiliation, like a man called Christian.

But there was one fancy that lingered in the mind over and above the fun of the thing; and threw a sort of random ray of conjecture upon all that long international misunderstanding which it is so hard to understand. Was it possible, I thought, that this had happened before, and that I was caught in the treadmill of recurrence? It may be that whenever, throughout the centuries, a roughly representative and fairly good-humoured Englishman has spoken to the Irish as thousands of such Englishmen feel about them, some other Englishman on the spot has hastened to explain that the English are not going in for sackcloth and ashes, but only for phylacteries and the blowing of their own trumpets before them. Perhaps whenever one Englishman said that the English were not so black as they were painted in the past, another Englishman always rushed forward to prove that the English were not so white as they were painted on the present occasion. And after all it was only Englishman against Englishman, one word against another; and there were many superiorities on the side which refused to believe in English sympathy or self-criticism. And very few of the Irish, I fear, understood the simple fact of the matter, or the real spiritual excuses of the party thus praising spiritual pride. Few understood that I represented large numbers of amiable Englishmen in England, while Mr. Phillips necessarily represented a small number of naturally irritable Englishmen in Ireland. Few, I fancy, sympathised with him so much as I do; for I know very well that he was not merely feeling as an Englishman, but as an exile.

VI — The Mistake of England

I MET one hearty Unionist, not to say Coercionist in Ireland, in such a manner as to talk to him at some length; one quite genial and genuine Irish gentleman, who was solidly on the side of the system of British government in Ireland. This gentleman had been shot through the body by the British troops in their efforts to suppress the Easter Rebellion. The matter just missed being tragic; but since it did, I cannot help feeling it as slightly comic. He assured me with great earnestness that the rebels had been guilty of the most calculated cruelties; and that they must have done their bloody deeds in the coldest blood. But since he is himself a solid and (I am happy to say) a living demonstration that the firing even on his own side must have been rather wild, I am inclined to give the benefit of the doubt also to the less elaborately educated marksmen. When disciplined troops destroy people so much at random, it would seem unreasonable to deny that rioters may possibly have been riotous. I hardly think he was, or even professed to be, a person of judicial impartiality; and it is entirely to his honour that he was, on principle, so much more indignant with the rioters who did not shoot him than with the other rioters who did. But I venture to introduce him here not so much as an individual as an allegory. The incident seems to me to set forth, in a pointed, lucid, and picturesque form, exactly what the British military government really succeeded in doing in Ireland. It succeeded in half-killing its friends, and affording an intelligent but somewhat inhumane amusement to all its enemies. The fire-eater held his fire-arm in so contorted a posture as to give the wondering spectator a simple impression of suicide.

Let it be understood that I speak here, not of tyranny thwarting Irish desires, but solely of our own stupidity in thwarting our own desires. I shall discuss elsewhere the alleged presence or absence of practical oppression in Ireland; here I am only continuing from the last chapter my experiences of the recruiting campaign. I am concerned now, as I was concerned then, with the simple business matter of getting a big levy of soldiers from Ireland. I think it was Sir Francis Vane, one of the few really valuable public servants in the matter (I need not say he was dismissed for having been proved right), who said that the mere sight of some representative Belgian priests and nuns might have produced something like a crusade. The matter seems to have been mostly left to elderly English landlords; and it would be cruel to record their adventures. It will be enough that I found, for a positive fact, that these unhappy gentlemen had displayed throughout Ireland a poster consisting only of the Union Jack and the appeal, "Is not this your flag? Come and fight for it!" It faintly recalls something we all learnt in the Latin grammar about questions that expect the answer no. These remarkable recruiting-sergeants did not realise, I suppose, what an extraordinary thing this was, not merely in Irish opinion, but generally in international opinion. Over a great part of the globe, it would sound like a story that the Turks had placarded Armenia with the Crescent of Islam, and asked all the Christians who were not yet massacred whether they did not love the flag. I really do not believe that the Turks would be so stupid as to do it. Of course it may be said that such an impression or association is mere slander and sedition, that there is no reason to be tender to such treasonable emotions at all, that men ought to do their duty to that flag whatever is put upon that poster; in short, that it is the duty of an Irishman to be a patriotic Englishman, or whatever it is that he is expected to be. But this view, however logical and clear, can only be used logically and clearly as an argument for conscription. It is simply muddle-headed to apply it to any appeal for volunteers anywhere, in Ireland or England. The whole object of a recruiting poster, or any poster, is to be attractive; it is picked out in words or colours to be picturesquely and pointedly attractive. If it lowers you to make an attractive offer, do not make it; but do not deliberately make it, and deliberately make it repulsive. If a certain medicine is so mortally necessary and so mortally nasty, that it must be forced on everybody by the policeman, call the policeman. But do not call an advertisement agent to push it like a patent medicine, solely by means of "publicity" and "suggestion," and then confine him strictly to telling the public how nasty it is.

But the British blunder in Ireland was a much deeper and more destructive thing. It can be summed up in one sentence; that whether or no we were as black as we were painted, we actually painted ourselves much blacker than we were. Bad as we were, we managed to look much worse than we were. In a horrible unconsciousness we re-enacted history through sheer ignorance of history. We were foolish enough to dress up, and to play up, to the part of a villain in a very old tragedy. We clothed ourselves almost carelessly in fire and sword; and if the fire had been literally stage-fire or the sword a wooden sword, the merely artistic blunder would have been quite as bad. For instance, I soon came on the traces of a quarrel about some silly veto in the schools, against Irish children wearing green rosettes. Anybody with a streak of historical imagination would have avoided a quarrel in that particular case about that particular colour. It is touching the talisman, it is naming the name, it is striking the note of another relation in which we were in the wrong, to the confusion of a new relation in which we were in the right. Anybody of common sense, considering any other case, can see the almost magic force of these material coincidences. If the English armies in France in 1914 considered themselves justified for some reason in executing some Frenchwoman, they would perhaps be indiscreet if they killed her (however logically) tied to a stake in the market-place of Rouen. If the people of Paris rose in the most righteous revolt against the most corrupt conspiracy of some group of the wealthy French Protestants, I should strongly advise them not to fix the date for the vigil of St. Bartholomew, or to go to work with white scarfs tied round their arms. Many of us hope to see a Jewish commonwealth reconstituted in Palestine; and we could easily imagine some quarrel in which the government of Jerusalem was impelled to punish some Greek or Latin pilgrim or monk. The Jews might even be right in the quarrel and the Christian wrong. But it may be hinted that the Jews would be ill-advised if they actually crowned him with thorns, and killed him on a hill just outside Jerusalem. Now we must know by this time, or the sooner we know it the better, that the whole mind of that European society which we have helped to save, and in which we have henceforth a part right of control, regards the Anglo-Irish story as one of these black and white stories in a history book. It sees the tragedy of Ireland as simply and clearly as the tragedy of Christ or Joan of Arc. There may have been more to be said on the coercive side than the culture of the Continent understands. So there was a great deal more than is usually admitted, to be said on the side of the patriotic democracy which condemned Socrates; and a very great deal to be said on the side of the imperial aristocracy which would have crushed Washington. But these disputes will not take Socrates from his niche among the pagan saints, or Washington from his pedestal among the republican heroes. After a certain testing time, substantial justice is always done to the men who stood in some unmistakable manner for liberty and light, against contemporary caprice and fashionable force and brutality. In this intellectual sense, in the only competent intellectual courts, there is already justice to Ireland. In the wide daylight of this world-wide fact, we or our representatives must get into a quarrel with children, of all people, and about the colour green, of all things in the world. It is an exact working model of the mistake I mean. It is the more brutal because it is not strictly cruel; and yet instantly revives the memories of cruelty. There need be nothing wrong with it in the abstract, or in a less tragic atmosphere where the symbols were not talismans. A schoolmaster in the prosperous and enlightened town of Eatanswill might not unpardonably protest against the school-children parading in class the Buff and Blue favours of Mr. Simpkin and Mr. Slumkey. But who but a madman would not see that to say that word, or make that sign, in Ireland, was like giving a signal for keening, and the lament over lost justice that is lifted in the burden of the noblest of national songs; that to point to that rag of that colour was to bring back all the responsibilities and realities of that reign of terror when we were, quite literally, hanging men and women too for wearing of the green? We were not literally hanging these children. As a matter of mere utility, we should have been more sensible if we had been.

But the same fact took an even more fantastic form. We not only dressed up as our ancestors, but we actually dressed up as our enemies. I need hardly state my own conviction that the Pacifist trick of lumping the abuses of one side along with the abominations of the other, was a shallow pedantry come of sheer ignorance of the history of Europe and the barbarians. It was quite false that the English evil was exactly the same as the German. It was quite false; but the English in Ireland laboured long and devotedly to prove it was quite true. They were not content with borrowing old uniforms from the Hessians of 1798, they borrowed the newest and neatest uniforms from the Prussians of 1914. I will give only one story that I was told, out of many, to show what I mean. There was a sort of village musical festival at a place called Cullen in County Cork, at which there were naturally national songs and very possibly national speeches. That there was a sort of social atmosphere, which its critics would call Sinn Fein, is exceedingly likely; for that now exists all over Ireland, and especially that part of Ireland. If we wish to prevent it being expressed at all, we must not only forbid all public meetings, but all private meetings, and even the meeting of husband and wife in their own house. Still there might have been a case, on coercionist lines, for forbidding this public meeting. There might be a case, on coercionist lines, for imprisoning all the people who attended it; or a still clearer case, on those lines, for imprisoning all the people in Ireland. But the coercionist authorities did not merely forbid the meeting; which would mean something. They did not arrest the people at the meeting; which would mean something. They did not blow the whole meeting to hell with big guns; which would also mean something. What they did was this. They caused a military aeroplane to jerk itself backwards and forwards in a staggering fashion just over the heads of the people, making as much noise as possible to drown the music, and dropping flare rockets and fire in various somewhat dangerous forms in the neighbourhood of any men, women, and children who happened to be listening to the music. The reader will note with what exquisite art, and fine fastidious selection, the strategist has here contrived to look as Prussian as possible without securing any of the advantages of Prussianism. There was a certain amount of real danger to the children; but not very much. There was about as much as there generally has been when boys have been flogged for playing the fool with fireworks. But by laboriously climbing hundreds of feet into the air, in an enormous military machine, these ingenious people managed to make themselves a meteor in heaven and a spectacle to all the earth; the English raining fire on women and children just as the Germans did. I repeat that they did not actually destroy children, though they did endanger them; for playing with fireworks is always playing with fire. And I repeat that, as a mere matter of business, it would have been more sensible if they had destroyed children. That would at least have had the human meaning that has run through a hundred massacres: “wolf-cubs who would grow into wolves.” It might at least have the execrable excuse of decreasing the number of rebels. What they did would quite certainly increase it.

An artless Member of Parliament, whose name I forget, attempted an apology for this half-witted performance. He interposed in the Unionist interests, when the Nationalists were asking questions about the matter; and said with much heat, “May I ask whether honest and loyal subjects have anything to fear from British aeroplanes?” I have often wondered what he meant. It seems possible that he was in the mood of that mediaeval fanatic who cried, “God will know his own”; and that he himself would fling any sort of flaming bolts about anywhere, believing that they would always be miraculously directed towards the heads harbouring, at that moment, the most incorrect political opinions. Or perhaps he meant that loyal subjects are so superbly loyal that they do not mind being accidentally burnt alive, so long as they are assured that the fire was dropped on them by government officials out of a government apparatus. But my purpose here is not to fathom such a mystery, but merely to fix the dominant fact of the whole situation; that the government copied the theatricality of Potsdam even more than the tyranny of Potsdam. In that incident, the English laboriously reproduced all the artificial accessories of the most notorious crimes of Germany; the flying men, the flame, the selection of a mixed crowd, the selection of a popular festival. They had every part of it, except the point of it. It was as if the whole British army in Ireland had dressed up in spiked helmets and spectacles, merely that they might *look* like Prussians. It was even more as if a man had walked across Ireland on three gigantic stilts, taller than the trees and visible from the most distant village, solely that he might look like one of those unhuman monsters from Mars, striding about on their iron tripods in the great nightmare of Mr. Wells. Such was our educational efficiency, that, before the end, multitudes of simple Irish people really had about the English invasion the same particular psychological reaction that multitudes of simple English people had about the German invasion. I mean that it seemed to come not only from outside the nation, but from outside the world. It was unearthly in the strict sense in which a comet is unearthly. It was the more appallingly alien for coming close; it was the more outlandish the farther it went inland. These Christian peasants have seen coming westward out of England what we saw coming westward out of Germany. They saw science in arms; which turns the very heavens into hells.

I have purposely put these fragmentary and secondary impressions before any general survey of Anglo-Irish policy in the war. I do so, first, because I think a record of the real things, that seemed to bulk biggest to any real observer at any real moment, is often more useful than the setting forth of theories he may have made up before he saw any realities at all. But I do it in the second place because the more general summaries of our statesmanship, or lack of statesmanship, are so much more likely to be found elsewhere. But if we wish to comprehend the queer cross-purposes, it will be well to keep always in mind a historical fact I have mentioned already; the reality of the old Franco-Irish Entente. It lingers alive in Ireland; and especially the most Irish parts of Ireland. In the fiercely Fenian city of Cork, walking round the Young Ireland monument that seems to give revolt the majesty of an institution, a man told me that German bands had been hooted and pelted in those streets out of an indignant memory of 1870. And an eminent scholar in the same town, referring to the events of the same “terrible year,” said to me: “In 1870 Ireland sympathised with France and England with Germany; and as usual, Ireland was right!” But if they were right when we were wrong, they only began to be wrong when we were right. A sort of play or parable might be written to show that this apparent paradox is a very genuine piece of human psychology. Suppose there are two partners named John and James; that James has always been urging the establishment of a branch of the business in Paris. Long ago John quarrelled with this furiously as a foreign fad; but he has since forgotten all about it; for the letters from James bored him so much that he has not opened any of them for years. One fine day John, finding himself in Paris, conceives the original idea of a Paris branch; but he is conscious in a confused way of having quarrelled with his partner, and vaguely feels that his partner would be an obstacle to anything. John remembers that James was always cantankerous, and forgets that he was cantankerous in favour of this project, and not against it. John therefore sends James a telegram, of a brevity amounting to brutality, simply telling him to come in with no nonsense about it; and when he has no instant reply, sends a solicitor’s letter to be followed by a writ. How James will take it depends very much on James. How he will hail this happy confirmation of his own early opinions will depend on whether James is an unusually patient and charitable person. And James is not. He is unfortunately the very man, of all men in the world, to drop his own original agreement and everything else into the black abyss of disdain, which now divides him from the man who has the impudence to agree with him. He is the very man to say he will have nothing to do with his own original notion, because it is now the belated notion of a fool. Such a character could easily be analysed in any good novel; such conduct would readily be believed in any good play. It could not be believed when it happened in real life. And it did happen in real life; the Paris project was the sense of the safety of Paris as the pivot of human history; the abrupt telegram was the recruiting campaign, and the writ was conscription.

As to what Irish conscription was, or rather would have been, I cannot understand any visitor in Ireland having the faintest doubt, unless (as is often the case) his tour was so carefully planned as to permit him to visit everything in Ireland except the Irish. Irish conscription was a piece of rank raving madness which was fortunately stopped, with other bad things, by the blow of Foch at the second battle of the Marne. It could not possibly produce at the last moment allies on whom we could depend; and it would have lost us the whole sympathy of the allies on whom we at that moment depended. I do not mean that American soldiers would have mutinied; though Irish soldiers might have done so; I mean something much worse. I mean that the whole mood of America would have altered, and there would have been some kind of compromise with German tyranny, in sheer disgust at a long exhibition of English tyranny. Things would have happened in Ireland, week after week, and month after month, such as the modern imagination has not seen except where Prussia has established hell. We should have butchered women and children; they would have *made us* butcher them. We should have killed priests, and probably the best priests. It could not be better stated than in the words of an Irishman, as he stood with me in a high terraced garden outside Dublin, looking towards that unhappy city, who shook his head and said sadly, “They will shoot the wrong bishop.”

Of the meaning of this huge furnace of defiance I shall write when I write of the national idea itself. I am concerned here not for their nation but for mine; and especially with its peril from Prussia and its help from America. And it is simply a question of considering what these real things are really like. Remember that the American Republic is practically founded on the fact, or fancy, that England is a tyrant. Remember that it was being ceaselessly swept with new waves of immigrant Irishry telling tales (too many of them true, though not all,) of the particular cases in which England had been a tyrant. It would be hard to find a parallel to explain to Englishmen the effect of awakening traditions so truly American by a prolonged display of England as the tyrant in Ireland. A faint approximation might be found if we imagined the survivors of Victorian England, steeped in the tradition of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, watching the American troops march through London. Suppose they noted that the negro troops alone had to march in chains, with a white man in a broad-brimmed hat walking beside them and flourishing a whip. Scenes far worse than that would have followed Irish conscription; but the only purpose of this chapter is to show that scenes quite as stupid marked every stage of Irish recruitment. For it certainly would not have reassured the traditional sympathisers with Uncle Tom to be told that the chains were only a part of the uniform, or that the niggers moved not at the touch of the whip, but only at the crack of it.

Such was our practical policy; and the single and sufficient comment on it can be found in a horrible whisper which can scarcely now be stilled. It is said, with a dreadful plausibility, that the Unionists were deliberately trying to prevent a large Irish recruitment, which would certainly have meant reconciliation and reform. In plain words, it is said, that they were willing to be traitors to England, if they could only still be tyrants to Ireland. Only too many facts can be made to fit in with this; but for me it is still too hideous to be easily believed. But whatever our motives in doing it, there is simply no doubt whatever about what we did, in this matter of the Pro-Germans in Ireland. We did not crush the Pro-Germans; we did not convert them or coerce them; or educate them or exterminate them or massacre them. We manufactured them; we turned them out patiently, steadily, and systematically as if from a factory; we made them exactly as we made munitions. It needed no little social science to produce in any kind of Irishman, any kind of sympathy with Prussia; but we were equal to the task. What concerns me here, however, is that we were busy at the same work among the Irish-Americans, and ultimately among all the Americans. And that would have meant, as I have already noted, the thing that I always feared; the dilution of the policy of the Allies. Anything that looked like a prolonged Prussianism in Ireland would have meant a compromise; that is, a perpetuated Prussianism in Europe. I know that some who agree with me in other matters disagree with me in this; but I should indeed be ashamed if, having to say so often where I think my country was wrong, I did not say as plainly where I think she was right. The notion of a compromise was founded on the coincidence of recent national wars which were only about the terms of peace, not about the type of civilisation. But there do recur, at longer historic intervals, universal wars of religion, not concerned with what one nation shall do, but with what all nations shall be. They recommence until they are finished, in things like the fall of Carthage or the rout of Attila. It is quite true that history is for the most part a plain road, which the tribes of men must travel side by side, bargaining at the same markets or worshipping at the same shrines, fighting and making friends again; and wisely making friends quickly. But we need only see the road stretch but a little farther, from a hill but a little higher, to see that sooner or later it comes always to another place, where stands a winged image of Victory; and the ways divide.

VII — The Mistake of Ireland

THERE is one phrase which certain Irishmen sometimes use in conversation, which indicates the real mistake that they sometimes make in controversy. When the more bitter sort of Irishman is at last convinced of the existence of the less bitter sort of Englishman, who does realise that he ought not to rule a Christian people by alternations of broken heads and broken promises, the Irishman has sometimes a way of saying, “I am sure you must have Irish blood in your veins.” Several people told me so when I denounced Irish conscription, a thing ruinous to the whole cause of the Alliance. Some told me so even when I re-called the vile story of ‘98; a thing damned by the whole opinion of the world. I assured them in vain that I did not need to have Irish blood in my veins in order to object to having Irish blood on my hands. So far as I know, I have not one single drop of Irish blood in my veins. I have some Scottish blood; and some which, judging merely by a name in the family, must once have been French blood. But the determining part of it is purely English, and I believe East Anglian, at the flattest and farthest extreme from the Celtic fringe. But I am here concerned, not with whether it is true, but with why they should want to prove it is true. One would think they would want to prove precisely the opposite. Even if they were exaggerative and unscrupulous, they should surely seek to show that an Englishman was forced to condemn England, rather than that an Irishman was inclined to support Ireland. As it is, they are labouring to destroy the impartiality and even the independence of their own witness. It does not support, but rather surrenders Irish rights, to say that only the Irish can see that there are Irish wrongs. It is confessing that Ireland is a Celtic dream and delusion, a cloud of sunset mistaken for an island. It is admitting that such a nation is only a notion, and a nonsensical notion; but in reality it is this notion about Irish blood that is nonsensical. Ireland is not an illusion; and her wrongs are not the subjective fancies of the Irish. Irishmen did not dream that they were evicted out of house and home by the ruthless application of a land law no man now dares to defend. It was not a nightmare that dragged them from their beds; nor were they sleepwalkers when they wandered as far as America. Skeffington did not have a delusion that he was being shot for keeping the peace; the shooting was objective, as the Prussian professors would say; as objective as the

Prussian militarists could desire. The delusions were admittedly peculiar to the British official whom the British Government selected to direct operations on so important an occasion. I could understand it if the Imperialists took refuge in the Celtic cloud, conceived Colthurst as full of a mystic frenzy like the chieftain who fought with the sea, pleaded that Piggott was a poet whose pen ran away with him, or that Sergeant Sheridan romanced like a real stage Irishman. I could understand it if they declared that it was merely in the elvish ecstasy described by Mr. Yeats that Sir Edward Carson, that famous First Lord of the Admiralty, rode on the top of the dishevelled wave; and Mr. Walter Long, that great Agricultural Minister, danced upon the mountains like a flame. It is far more absurd to suggest that no man can see the green flag unless he has some green in his eye. In truth this association between an Irish sympathy and an Irish ancestry, is just as insulting as the old jibe of Buckingham, about an Irish interest or an Irish understanding.

It may seem fanciful to say of the Irish nationalists that they are sometimes too Irish to be national. Yet this is really the case in those who would turn nationality from a sanctity to a secret. That is, they are turning it from something which every one else ought to respect, to something which no one else can understand. Nationalism is a nobler thing even than patriotism; for nationalism appeals to a law of nations; it implies that a nation is a normal thing, and therefore one of a number of normal things. It is impossible to have a nation without Christendom; as it is impossible to have a citizen without a city. Now normally speaking this is better understood in Ireland than in England; but the Irish have an opposite exaggeration and error; and tend in some cases to the cult of real insularity. In this sense it is true to say that the error is indicated in the very name of Sinn Fein. But I think it is even more encouraged, in a cloudier and therefore more perilous fashion, by much that is otherwise valuable in the cult of the Celts and the study of the old Irish language. It is a great mistake for a man to defend himself as a Celt when he might defend himself as an Irishman. For the former defence will turn on some tricky question of temperament, while the latter will turn on the central pivot of morals. Celticism, by itself, might lead to all the racial extravagances which have lately led more barbaric races a dance. Celts also might come to claim, not that their nation is a normal thing, but that their race is a unique thing. Celts also might end by arguing not for an equality founded on the respect for boundaries, but for an aristocracy founded on the ramification of blood. Celts also might come to pitting the prehistoric against the historic, the heathen against the Christian, and in that sense the barbaric against the civilised. In that sense I confess I do not care about Celts; they are too like Teutons.

Now of course every one knows that there is practically no such danger of Celtic Imperialism. Mr. Lloyd George will not attempt to annex Brittany as a natural part of Britain. No Tories, however antiquated, will extend their empire in the name of the Buff and Blue of the Ancient Britons. Nor is there the least likelihood that the Irish will overrun Scotland on the plea of an Irish origin for the old name of the Scots; or that they will set up an Irish capital at Stratford-on-Avon merely because *avon* is the Celtic word for water. That is the sort of thing that Teutonic ethnologists do; but Celts are not quite so stupid as that, even when they are ethnologists. It may be suggested that this is because even prehistoric Celts seem to have been rather more civilised than historic Teutons. And indeed I have seen ornaments and utensils in the admirable Dublin museum, suggestive of a society of immense antiquity, and much more advanced in the arts of life than the Prussians were, only a few centuries ago. For instance, there was actually what appeared to be a safety razor. I doubt if the godlike Goths had much use for a razor; or if they had, if it was altogether safe. Nor am I so dull as not to be stirred to an imaginative sympathy with the instinct of modern Irish poetry to praise this primordial and mysterious order, even as a sort of pagan paradise; and that not as regarding a legend as a sort of lie, but a tradition as a sort of truth. It is but another hint of a suggestion, huge, yet hidden; that civilisation is older than barbarism; and that the further we go back into pagan origins, the nearer we come to the great Christian origin of the Fall. But whatever credit or sympathy be due to the cult of Celtic origins in its proper place, it is none of these things that really prevents Celticism from being a barbarous imperialism like Teutonism. The thing that prevents imperialism is nationalism. It was exactly because Germany was not a nation that it desired more and more to be an empire. For a patriot is a sort of lover, and a lover is a sort of artist; and the artist will always love a shape too much to wish it to grow shapeless, even in order to grow large. A group of Teutonic tribes will not care how many other tribes they destroy or absorb; and Celtic tribes when they were heathen may have acted, for all I know, in the same way. But the civilised Irish nation, a part and product of Christendom, has certainly no desire to be entangled with other tribes or to have its outlines blurred with great blots like Liverpool and Glasgow, as well as Belfast. In that sense it is far too self-conscious to be selfish. Its individuality may, as I shall suggest, make it too insular; it will not make it too imperial. This is a merit in nationalism too little noted; that even what is called its narrowness is not merely a barrier to invasion, but a barrier to expansion. Therefore, with all respect to the prehistoric Celts, I feel more at home with the good if sometimes mad Christian gentleman of the Young Ireland movement, or even the Easter Rebellion. I should feel more safe with Meagher of the Sword than with the primitive Celt of the safety razor. The microscopic meanness of the Mid-Victorian English writers, when they wrote about Irish patriots, could see nothing but a very small joke in modern rebels thinking themselves worthy to take the titles of antique kings; but the only doubt I should have, if I had any, is whether the heathen kings were worthy of the Christian rebels. I am much more sure of the heroism of the modern Fenians than of the ancient ones.

Of the artistic side of the cult of the Celts I do not especially speak here. And indeed its importance, especially to the Irish, may easily be exaggerated. Mr. W. B. Yeats long ago dissociated himself from a merely racial theory of Irish poetry; and Mr. W. B. Yeats thinks as hard as he talks. I often entirely disagree with him; but I disagree far more with the people who find him a poetical opiate, where I always find him a logical stimulant. For the rest, Celticism in some aspects is largely a conspiracy for leading the Englishman a dance, if it be a fairy dance. I suspect that many names and announcements are printed in Gaelic, not because Irishmen can read them, but because Englishmen can’t. The other great modern mystic in Dublin, “A. E.,” entertained us first by telling an English lady present that she would never resist the Celtic atmosphere, struggle how she might, but would soon be wandering in the mountain mists with a fillet round her head; which fate had apparently overtaken the son or nephew of an Anglican bishop who had strayed into those parts. The English lady, whom I happen to know rather well, made the characteristic announcement that she would go to Paris when she felt it coming on. But it seemed to me that such drastic action was hardly necessary, and that there was comparatively little cause for alarm; seeing that the mountain mists certainly had not had that effect on the people who happen to live in the mountains. I knew that A. E. knew, even better than I did, that Irish peasants do not wander about in fillets, or indeed wander about at all, having plenty of much better work to do. And since the Celtic atmosphere had no perceptible effect on the Celts, I felt no alarm about its effect on the Saxons. But the only thing involved, by way of an effect on the Saxons, was a practical joke on the Saxons; which may, however, have lasted longer in the case of the bishop's nephew than it did in mine. Anyhow, I continued to move about (like Atalanta in Calydon) with unchapleted hair, with unfilleted cheek; and found a sufficient number of Irish people in the same condition to prevent me from feeling shy. In a word, all that sort of thing is simply Mr. Russell's humour, especially his good humour, which is of a golden and godlike sort. And a man would be very much misled by the practical joke if he does not realise that the joker is a practical man. On the desk in front of him as he spoke were business papers of reports and statistics, much more concerned with fillets of veal than fillets of vision. That is the essential fact about all this side of such men in Ireland. We may think the Celtic ghost a turnip ghost; but we can only doubt the reality of the ghost; there is no doubt of the reality of the turnip.

But if the Celtic pose be a piece of the Celtic ornament, the spirit that produced it does also produce some more serious tendencies to the segregation of Ireland, one might almost say the secretion of Ireland.

In this sense, it is true that there is too much separatism in Ireland. I do not speak of separation from England; which, as I have said, happened long ago in the only serious sense, and is a condition to be assumed, not a conclusion to be avoided. Nor do I mean separation from a federation of free states unfortunately known as the British Empire; for that is a conclusion that could still be avoided with a little common sense and common honesty in our own politics. I mean separation from Europe, from the common Christian civilisation by whose law the nations live. I would be understood as speaking here of exceptions rather than the rule; for the rule is rather the other way. The Catholic religion, the most fundamental fact in Ireland, is itself a permanent communication with the Continent. So, as I have said, is the free peasantry which is so often the economic expression of the same faith. Mr. James Stephens, himself a spiritually detached man of genius, told me with great humour a story which is also at least a symbol. A Catholic priest, after a convivial conversation and plenty of good wine, said to him confidentially: "You ought to be a Catholic. You can be saved without being a Catholic; but you can’t be Irish without being a Catholic.”

Nevertheless, the exceptions are large enough to be dangers; and twice lately, I think, they have brought Ireland into danger. This is the age of minorities; of groups that rule rather than represent. And the two largest parties in Ireland, though more representative than most parties in England, were too much affected, I fancy, by the modern fashion, expressed in the world of fads by being Celtic rather than Catholic. They were just a little too insular to accept the old unconscious wave of Christendom; the Crusade. But the case was more extraordinary than that. They were even too insular to appreciate, not so much their own international needs, as their own international importance. It may seem a strange paradox to say that both nationalist parties underrated Ireland as a nation. It may seem a more startling paradox to say that in this the most nationalist was the least national. Yet I think I can explain, however roughly, what I mean by saying that this is so.

It is primarily Sinn Fein, or the extreme national party, which thus relatively failed to realise that Ireland is a nation. At least it failed in nationalism exactly so far as it failed to intervene in the war of the nations against Prussian imperialism. For its argument involved, unconsciously, the proposition that Ireland is not a nation; that Ireland is a tribe or a settlement, or a chance sprinkling of aborigines. If the Irish were savages oppressed by the British Empire, they might well be indifferent to the fate of the British Empire; but as they were civilised men, they could not be indifferent to the fate of civilisation. The Kaffirs might conceivably be better off if the whole system of white colonisation, Boer and British, broke down and disappeared altogether. The Irish might sympathise with the Kaffirs; but they would not like to be classed with the Kaffirs. Hottentots might have a sort of Hottentot happiness if the last European city had fallen in ruins, or the last European had died in torments. But the Irish would never be Hottentots, even if they were Pro-Hottentots. In other words, if the Irish were what Cromwell thought they were, they might well confine their attention to Hell and Connaught; and have no sympathy to spare for France. But if the Irish are what Wolfe Tone thought they were, they must be interested in France, as he was interested in France. In short, if the Irish are barbarians, they need not trouble about other barbarians sacking the cities of the world; but if they are citizens, they must trouble about the cities that are sacked. This is the deep and real reason why their alienation from the Allied cause was a disaster for their own national cause. It was not because it gave fools a chance of complaining that they were Anti-English. It was because it gave much cleverer people the chance of complaining that they were Anti-European. I entirely agree that the alienation was chiefly the fault of the English Government; I even agree that it required an abnormal imaginative magnanimity for an Irishman to do his duty to Ireland, in spite of being so insolently told to do it. But it is none the less true that Ireland to-day would be ten thousand miles nearer her deliverance if the Irishman could have made that effort; if he had realised that the thing ought to be done, not because such rulers wanted it, but rather although they wanted it.

But the much more curious fact is this. There were any number of Irishmen, and those among the most Irish, who did realise this; who realised it with so sublime a sincerity as to fight for their own enemies against the world's enemies; and consent at once to be insulted by the English and killed by the Germans. The Redmonds and the old Nationalist party, if they have indeed failed, have the right to be reckoned among the most heroic of all the heroic failures of Ireland. If theirs is a lost cause, it is wholly worthy of a land where lost causes are never lost. But the old guard of Redmond did also in its time, I fancy, fall into the same particular and curious error; but in a more subtle way and on a seemingly remote subject. They also, whose motives like those of the Sinn Feiners were entirely noble, did in one sense fail to be national, in the sense of appreciating the international importance of a nation. In their case it was a matter of English and not European politics; and as their case was much more complicated, I speak with much less confidence about it. But I think there was a highly determining time in politics when certain Irishmen got on to the wrong side in English politics, as other Irishmen afterwards got on to the wrong side in European politics. And by the wrong side, in both cases, I not only mean the side that was not consistent with the truth, but the side that was not really congenial to the Irish. A man may act against the body, even the main body, of his nation; but if he acts against the soul of his nation, even to save it, he and his nation suffer.

I can best explain what I mean by reaffirming the reality which an English visitor really found in Irish politics, towards the end of the war. It may seem odd to say that the most hopeful fact I found, for Anglo-Irish relations, was the fury with which the Irish were all accusing the English of perjury and treason. Yet this was my solid and sincere impression; the happiest omen was the hatred aroused by the disappointment over Home Rule. For men are not furious unless they are disappointed of something they really want; and men are not disappointed except about something they were really ready to accept. If Ireland had been entirely in favour of entire separation, the loss of Home Rule would not be felt as a loss, but if anything as an escape. But it is felt bitterly and savagely as a loss; to that at least I can testify with entire certainty. I may or may not be right in the belief I build on it; but I believe it would still be felt as a gain; that Dominion Home Rule would in the long run satisfy Ireland. But it would satisfy her if it were given to her, not if it were promised to her. As it is, the Irish regard our government simply as a liar who has broken his word; I cannot express how big and black that simple idea bulks in the landscape and blocks up the road. And without professing to regard it as quite so simple, I regard it as substantially true. It is, upon any argument, an astounding thing the King, Lords, and Commons of a great nation should record on its statute-book that a law exists, and then illegally reverse it in answer to the pressure of private persons. It is, and must be, for the people benefited by the law, an act of treason. The Irish were not wrong in thinking it an act of treason, even in the sense of treachery and trickery. Where they were wrong, I regret to say, was in talking of it as if it were the one supreme solitary example of such trickery; when the whole of our politics were full of such tricks. In short, the loss of justice for Ireland was simply a part of the loss of justice in England; the loss of all moral authority in government, the loss of the popularity of Parliament, the secret plutocracy which makes it easy to take a bribe or break a pledge, the corruption that can pass unpopular laws or promote discredited men. The lawgiver cannot enforce his law because, whether or no the law be popular, the lawgiver is wholly unpopular, and is perpetually passing wholly unpopular laws. Intrigue has been substituted for government; and the public man cannot appeal to the public because all the most important part of his policy is conducted in private. The modern politician conducts his public life in private. He sometimes condescends to make up for it by affecting to conduct his private life in public. He will put his baby or his birthday book into the illustrated papers; it is his dealings with the colossal millions of the cosmopolitan millionaires that he puts in his pocket or his private safe. We are allowed to know all about his dogs and cats; but not about those larger and more dangerous animals, his bulls and bears.

Now there was a moment when England had an opportunity of breaking down this Parliamentary evil, as Europe afterwards had an opportunity (which it fortunately took) of breaking down the Prussian evil. The corruption was common to both parties; but the chance of exposing it happened to occur under the rule of a Home Rule party; which the Nationalists supported solely for the sake of Home Rule. In the Marconi Case they consented to whitewash the tricks of Jew jobbers whom they must have despised; just as some of the Sinn Feiners afterwards consented to whitewash the wickedness of Prussian bullies whom they also must have despised. In both cases the motive was wholly disinterested and even idealistic. It was the practicality that was unpractical. I was one of a small group which protested against the hushing up of the Marconi affair, but we always did justice to the patriotic intentions of the Irish who allowed it. But we based our criticism of their strategy on the principle of falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus. The man who will cheat you about one thing will cheat you about another. The men who will lie to you about Marconi, will lie to you about Home Rule. The political conventions that allow of dealing in Marconis at one price for the party, and another price for oneself, are conventions that also allow of telling one story to Mr. John Redmond and another to Sir Edward Carson. The man who will imply one state of things when talking at large in Parliament, and another state of things when put into a witness-box in court, is the same sort of man who will promise an Irish settlement in the hope that it may fail; and then withdraw it for fear it should succeed. Among the many muddle-headed modern attempts to coerce the Christian poor to the Moslem dogma about wine and beer, one was concerned with abuse by loafers or tipplers of the privilege of the Sunday traveller. It was suggested that the travellers' claims were in every sense travellers' tales. It was therefore proposed that the limit of three miles should be extended to six; as if it were any harder for a liar to say he had walked six miles than three. The politicians might be as ready to promise to walk the six miles to an Irish Republic as the three miles to an Irish Parliament. But Sinn Fein is mistaken in supposing that any change of theoretic claim meets the problem of corruption. Those who would break their word to Redmond would certainly break it to De Valera. We urged all these things on the Nationalists whose national cause we supported; we asked them to follow their larger popular instincts, break down a corrupt oligarchy, and let a real popular parliament in England give a real popular parliament to Ireland. With entirely honourable motives, they adhered to the narrower conception of their national duty. They sacrificed everything for Home Rule; even their own profoundly national emotion of contempt. For the sake of Home Rule, or the solemn promise of Home Rule, they kept such men in power; and for their reward they found that such men were still in power; and Home Rule was gone.

What I mean about the Nationalist Party, and what may be called its prophetic shadow of the Sinn Fein mistake, may well be symbolised in one of the noblest figures of that party or any party. An Irish poet, talking to me about the pointed diction of the Irish peasant, said he had recently rejoiced in the society of a drunken Kerry farmer, whose conversation was a litany of questions about everything in heaven and earth, each ending with a sort of chorus of "Will ye tell me that now?" And at the end of all he said abruptly, "Did ye know Tom Kettle?" and on my friend the poet assenting, the farmer said, as if in triumph, "And why are so many people alive that ought to be dead, and so many people dead that ought to be alive? Will ye tell me that now?" That is not unworthy of an old heroic poem, and therefore not unworthy of the hero and poet of whom it was spoken. "Patroclus died, who was a better man than you." Thomas Michael Kettle was perhaps the greatest example of that greatness of spirit which was so ill rewarded on both sides of the channel and of the quarrel, which marked Redmond's brother and so many of Redmond's followers. He was a wit, a scholar, an orator, a man ambitious in all the arts of peace; and he fell fighting the barbarians because he was too good a European to use the barbarians against England, as England a hundred years before had used the barbarians against Ireland. There is nothing to be said of such things except what the drunken farmer said, unless it be a verse from a familiar ballad on a very remote topic, which happens to express my own most immediate feelings about politics and reconstruction after the decimation of the great war.

"The many men so beautiful   And they all dead did lie   And a thousand thousand slimy things   Lived on, and so did I."

It is not a reflection that adds any inordinate self-satisfaction to the fact of one's own survival.

In turning over a collection of Kettle's extraordinary varied and vigorous writings, which contain some of the most pointed and piercing criticisms of materialism, of modern capitalism and mental and moral anarchism generally, I came on a very interesting criticism of myself and my friends in our Marconi agitation; a suggestion, on a note of genial cynicism, that we were asking for an impossible political purity; a suggestion which, knowing it to be patriotic, I will venture to call pathetic. I will not now return on such disagreements, a man with whom I so universally agree; but it will not be unfair to find here an exact illustration of what I mean by saying that the national leaders, so far from merely failing as wild Irishmen, only failed when they were not instinctive enough, that is, not Irish enough. Kettle was a patriot whose impulse was practical and whose policy was impolitic. Here also the Nationalist underrated the importance of the intervention of his own nationality. Kettle left a fine and even terrible poem, asking if his sacrifices were in vain, and whether he and his people were again being betrayed. I think nobody can deny that he was betrayed; and it was not by the English soldiers with whom he marched to war, but by those very English politicians with whom he sacrificed so much to remain at peace. No man will ever dare to say his death in battle was in vain, not only because in the highest sense it could never be, but because even in the lowest sense it was not. He hated the icy insolence of Prussia; and that ice is broken, and already as weak as water. As Carlyle said of a far lesser thing, that at least will never through unending ages insult the face of the sun any more. The point is here that if any part of his fine work was in vain, it was certainly not the reckless romantic part; it was precisely the plodding parliamentary part. None can say that the weary marching and counter-marching in France was a thing thrown away; not only in the sense which consecrates all footprints along such a *via crucis,* or highway of the army of martyrs; but also in the perfectly practical sense, that the army was going somewhere, and that it got there. But it might possibly be said that the weary marching and counter-marching at Westminster, in and out of a division lobby, belonged to what the French call the salle des pas perdus. If anything was practical it was the visionary adventure; if anything was unpractical it was the practical compromise. He and his friends were betrayed by the men whose corruptions they had contemptuously condoned, far more than by the men whose bigotries they had indignantly denounced. There darkened about them treason and disappointment, and he that was the happiest died in battle; and one who knew and loved him spoke to me for a million others in saying: “And now we will not give you a dead dog until you keep your word.”

VIII — An Example and a Question

WE all had occasion to rejoice at the return of Sherlock Holmes when he was supposed to be dead; and I presume we may soon rejoice in his return even when he is really dead. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in his widespread new campaign in favour of Spiritualism, ought at least to delight us with the comedy of Holmes as a control and Watson as a medium. But I have for the moment a use for the great detective not concerned with the psychical side of the question. Of that I will only say, in passing, that in this as in many other cases, I find myself in agreement with an authority about where the line is drawn between good and bad, but have the misfortune to think his good bad, and his bad good. Sir Arthur explains that he would lift Spiritualism to a graver and more elevated plane of idealism; and that he quite agrees with his critics that the mere tricks with tables and chairs are grotesque and vulgar. I think this quite true if turned upside down, like the table. I do not mind the grotesque and vulgar part of Spiritualism; what I object to is the grave and elevating part. After all, a miracle is a miracle and means something; it means that Materialism is nonsense. But it is not true that a message is always a message; and it sometimes only means that Spiritualism is also nonsense. If the table at which I am now writing takes to itself wings and flies out of the window, perhaps carrying me along with it, the incident will arouse in me a real intelligent interest, verging on surprise. But if the pen with which I am writing begins to scrawl all by itself, the sort of things I have seen in spirit writing; if it begins to say that all things are aspects of universal purity and peace, and so on, why, then I shall not only be annoyed, but also bored. If a great man like the late Sir William Crookes says a table went walking upstairs, I am impressed by the news; but not by news from nowhere to the effect that all men are perpetually going upstairs, up a spiritual staircase which seems to be as mechanical and labour-saving as a moving staircase at Charing Cross. Moreover, even a benevolent spirit might conceivably throw the furniture about merely for fun; whereas I doubt if anything but a devil from hell would say that all things are aspects of purity and peace.

But I am here taking from the Spiritualistic articles a text that has nothing to do with Spiritualism. In a recent contribution to Nash's Magazine, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle remarks very truly that the modern world is weary and wicked and in need of a religion; and he gives examples of its more typical and terrible corruptions. It is perhaps natural that he should revert to the case of the Congo, and talk of it in the torrid fashion which recalls the days when Morel and Casement had some credit in English politics. We have since had an opportunity of judging the real attitude of a man like Morel in the plainest case of black and white injustice that the world has ever seen. It was at once a replica and a reversal of the position expressed in the Pious Editor's Creed; and might roughly be rendered in similar language.

"I do believe in Freedom's cause Ez fur away ez tropics are; But Belgians caught in Prussia's claws To me less tempting topics are. It's wal agin a foreign king To rouse the chapel's rigours; But Liberty's a kind of thing We only owe to niggers."

He had of course a lurid denunciation of the late King Leopold, of which I will only say that, uttered by a Belgian about the Belgian king in his own land and lifetime, it would be highly courageous and largely correct; but that the parallel test is how much truth was told by British journalists about British Kings in their own land and lifetime; and that until we can pass that test, such denunciations do us very little good. But what interests me in the matter at the moment is this. Sir Arthur feels it right to say something about British corruptions, and passes from the Congo to Putumayo, touching a little more lightly; for even the most honest Britons have an unconscious trick of touching more lightly on the case of British capitalists. He says that our capitalists were not guilty of direct cruelty, but of an attitude careless and even callous. But what strikes me is that Sir Arthur, with his taste for such protests and inquiries, need not have wandered quite so far from his own home as the forests of South America.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is an Irishman; and in his own country, within my own memory there occurred a staggering and almost incredible crime, or series of crimes, which were worthier than anything in the world of the attention of Sherlock Holmes in fiction, or Conan Doyle in reality. It always will be a tribute to the author of *Sherlock Holmes* that he did, about the same time, do such good work in reality. He made an admirable plea for Adolf Beck and Oscar Slater; he was also connected, I remember, with the reversal of a miscarriage of justice in a case of cattle-mutilation. And all this, while altogether to his credit, makes it seem all the more strange that his talents could not be used for, and in, his own home and native country, in a mystery that had the dimensions of a monstrosity, and which did involve, if I remember right, a question of cattle-maiming. Anyhow, it was concerned with moonlighters and the charges made against them, such as the common one of cutting off the tails of cows. I can imagine Sherlock Holmes on such a quest, keen-eyed and relentless, finding the cloven hoof of some sinister and suspected cow. I can imagine Dr. Watson, like the cow's tail, always behind. I can imagine Sherlock Holmes remarking, in a light allusive fashion, that he himself had written a little monograph on the subject of cows' tails; with diagrams and tables solving the great traditional problem of how many cows' tails would reach the moon; a subject of extraordinary interest to moonlighters. And I can still more easily imagine him saying afterwards, having resumed the pipe and dressing-gown of Baker Street, "A remarkable little problem, Watson. In some of its features it was perhaps more singular than any you have been good enough to report. I do not think that even the Tooting Trouser-Stretching Mystery, or the singular little affair of the Radium Toothpick, offered more strange and sensational developments." For if the celebrated pair had really tracked out the Irish crime I have in mind, they would have found a story which, considered merely as a detective story, is by far the most dramatic and dreadful of modern times. Like nearly all such sensational stories, it traced the crime to somebody far higher in station and responsibility than any of those suspected. Like many of the most sensational of them, it actually traced the crime to the detective who was investigating it. For if they had really crawled about with a magnifying glass, studying the supposed footprints of the peasants incriminated, they would have found they were made by the boots of the policeman. And the boots of a policeman, one feels, are things that even Watson might recognise.

I have told the astounding story of Sergeant Sheridan before; and I shall often tell it again. Hardly any English people know it; and I shall go on telling it in the hope that all English people may know it some day. It ought to be first in every collection of *causes celebres,* in every book about criminals, in every book of historical mysteries; and on its merits it would be. It is not in any of them. It is not there because there is a motive, in all modern British plutocracy, against finding the big British miscarriages of justice where they are really to be found; and that is a great deal nearer than Putumayo. It is a place far more appropriate to the exploits of the family of the Doyles. It is called Ireland; and in that place a powerful British official named Sheridan had been highly successful in the imperial service by convicting a series of poor Irishmen of agrarian crimes. It was afterwards discovered that the British official had carefully committed every one of the crimes himself; and then, with equal foresight, perjured himself to imprison innocent men, one of whom lost his reason. Any one who does not know the story will naturally ask what punishment was held adequate for such a Neronian monster; I will tell him. He was bowed out of the country like a distinguished stranger, his expenses politely paid; as if he had been delivering a series of instructive lectures; and he is now probably smoking a cigar in an American hotel, and much more comfortable than any poor policeman who has done his duty. I defy anybody to deny him a place in our literature about great criminals. Charles Peace escaped many times before conviction; Sheridan escaped altogether after conviction. Jack the Ripper was safe because he was undiscovered; Sheridan was discovered and was still safe. But I only repeat the matter here for two reasons. First, we may call our rule in Ireland what we like; we may call it the Union when there is no union; we may call it Protestant ascendancy when we are no longer Protestants; or Teutonic lordship when we could only be ashamed of being Teutons. But this is what it is; and everything else is waste of words. And second, because an Irish investigator of cattle-maiming, so oblivious of the Irish cow, is in some danger of figuring as an Irish bull.

Anyhow, that is the real and remarkable story of Sergeant Sheridan, and I put it first because it is the most practical test of the practical question of whether Ireland is misgoverned. It is strictly a fair test; for it is a test by the minimum and an argument a fortiori. A British official in Ireland can run a career of crime, punishing innocent people for his own felonies; and when he is found out, he is found to be above the law. This may seem like putting things at the worst, but it is really putting them at the best. This story was not told us on the word of a wild Irish Fenian, or even a responsible Irish Nationalist. It was told, word for word as I have told it, by the Unionist Minister in charge of the matter and reporting it, with regret and shame, to Parliament. He was not one of the worst Irish Secretaries, who might be responsible for the worst regime; on the contrary, he was by far the best. If even he could only partially restrain or reveal such things, there can be no deduction in common sense except that in the ordinary way such things go on gaily in the dark, with nobody to reveal and nobody to restrain them. It was not something done in those dark days of torture and terrorism, which happened in Ireland a hundred years ago; and which Englishmen talk of as having happened a million years ago. It was something that happened quite recently, in my own mature manhood, about the time that the better things like the Land Acts were already before the world. I remember writing to the *Westminster Gazette* to emphasise it when it occurred; but it seems to have passed out of memory in an almost half-witted fashion. But that peephole into hell has afforded me, ever since a horrible amusement, when I hear the Irish softly rebuked for remembering old unhappy, far-off things and wrongs done in the Dark Ages. Thus I was especially amused to find the Rev. R. J. Campbell saying that "Ireland has been petted and coddled more than any other part of the British Isles"; because Mr. Campbell was chiefly famous for a comfortable creed himself, for saying that evil is only "a shadow where light should be"; and there is no doubt here of his throwing a very black shadow where light is very much required. I will conceive the policeman at the corner of the street in which Mr. Campbell resides, as in the habit of killing a crossing-sweeper every now and then for his private entertainment, burgling the houses of Mr. Campbell's neighbours, cutting off the tails of their carriage horses, and otherwise disporting himself by moonlight a fairy. It is his custom to visit the consequences of each of these crimes upon the Rev. R. J. Campbell, whom he arrests at intervals, successfully convicts by perjury, and proceeds to coddle in penal servitude. But I have another reason for mentioning Mr. Campbell, a gentleman whom I heartily respect in many other aspects; and the reason is connected with his name, as it occurs in another connection on another page. It shows how in anything, but especially in anything coming from Ireland, the old facts of family and faith outweigh a million modern philosophies. The words in Who's Who?— "Ulster Protestant of Scottish ancestry" — give the really Irish and the really honourable reason for Mr. Campbell's extraordinary remark. A man may preach for years, with radiant universalism, that many waters cannot quench love; but Boyne Water can. Mr. Campbell appears very promptly with what Kettle called "a bucketful of Boyne, to put the sunrise out." I will not take the opportunity of saying, like the Ulsterman, that there never was treason yet but a Campbell was at the bottom of it. But I will say that there never was Modernism yet, but a Calvinist was at the bottom of it. The Old Theology is much livelier than the New Theology.

Many other such true tales could be told; but what we need here is a sort of test. This tale is a test; because it is the best that could be said, about the best that could be done, by the best Englishman ruling Ireland, in face of the English system established there; and it is the best, or at any rate the most, that we can know about that system. Another truth which might also serve as a test, is this: to note among the responsible English not only their testimony against each other, but their testimony against themselves. I mean the consideration of how very rapidly we realise that our own conduct in Ireland has been infamous, not in the remote past, but in the very recent past. I have lived just long enough to see the wheel come full circle inside one generation; when I was a schoolboy, the sort of Kensington middle class, to which I belong, was nearly solidly resisting, not only the first Home Rule Bill, but any suggestion that the Land League had a leg to stand on, or that the landlords need do anything but get their rents or kick out their tenants. The whole Unionist Press, which was three-quarters of the Press, simply supported Clanricarde, and charged any one who did not do so with supporting the Clan-na-Gael. Mr. Balfour was simply admired for enforcing the system, which it is his real apologia to have tried to end, or at least to have allowed Wyndham to end. I am not yet far gone in senile decay; but already I have lived to hear my countrymen talk about their own blind policy in the time of the Land League, exactly as they talked before of their blind policy in the time of the Limerick Treaty. The shadow on our past shifts forward as we advance into the future; and always seems to end just behind us. I was told in my youth that the age-long misgovernment of Ireland lasted down to about 1870; it is now agreed among all intelligent people that it lasted at least down to about 1890. A little common sense, after a hint like the Sheridan Case, will lead one to suspect the simple explanation that it is going on still.

Now I heard scores of such stories as the Sheridan story in Ireland, many of which I mention elsewhere; but I do not mention them here because they cannot be publicly tested; and that for a very simple reason. We must accept all the advantages and disadvantages of a rule of absolute and iron militarism. We cannot impose silence and then sift stories; we cannot forbid argument and then ask for proof; we cannot destroy rights and then discover wrongs. I say this quite impartially in the matter of militarism itself. I am far from certain that soldiers are worse rulers than lawyers and merchants; and I am quite certain that a nation has a right to give abnormal power to its soldiers in time of war. I only say that a soldier, if he is a sensible soldier, will know what he is doing and therefore what he cannot do; that he cannot gag a man and then cross-examine him, any more than he can blow out his brains and then convince his intelligence. There may be — humanly speaking, there must be — a mass of injustices in the militaristic government of Ireland. The militarism itself may be the least of them; but it must involve the concealment of all the rest.

It has been remarked above that establishing militarism is a thing which a nation had a right to do, and (what is not at all the same thing) which it may be right in doing. But with that very phrase "a nation," we collide of course with the whole real question; the alleged abstract wrong about which the Irish talk much more than about their concrete wrongs. I have put first the matters mentioned above, because I wish to make clear, as a matter of common sense, the impression of any reasonable outsider that they certainly have concrete wrongs. But even those who doubt it, and say that the Irish have no concrete grievance but only a sentiment of Nationalism, fall into a final and very serious error about the nature of the thing called Nationalism, and even the meaning of the word "concrete." For the truth is that, in dealing with a nation, the grievance which is most abstract of all is also the one which is most concrete of all.

Not only is patriotism a part of practical politics, but it is more practical than any politics. To neglect it, and ask only for grievances, is like counting the clouds and forgetting the climate. To neglect it, and think only of laws, is like seeing the landmarks and never seeing the landscape.

It will be found that the denial of nationality is much more of a daily nuisance than the denial of votes or the denial of juries. Nationality is the most practical thing, because so many things are national without being political, or without being legal. A man in a conquered country feels it when he goes to market or even goes to church, which may be more often than he goes to law; and the harvest is more general than the General Election. Altering the flag on the roof is like altering the sun in the sky; the very chimney-pots and lamp-posts look different. Nay, after a certain interval of occupation, they are different. As a man would know he was in a land of strangers before he knew it was a land of savages, so he knows a rule is alien long before he knows it is oppressive. It is not necessary for it to add injury to insult.

For instance, when I first walked about Dublin, I was disposed to smile at the names of the streets being gravely inscribed in Gaelic as well as English. I will not here discuss the question of what is called the Irish language, the only arguable case against which is that it is not the Irish language. But at any rate it is not the English language, and I have come to appreciate more imaginatively the importance of that fact. It may be used rather as a weapon than a tool; but it is a national weapon if it is not a national tool. I see the significance of having something which the eye commonly encounters, as it does a chimney-pot or a lamp-post; but which is like a chimney reared above an Irish hearth or a lamp to light an Irish road. I see the point of having a solid object in the street to remind an Irishman that he is in Ireland, as a red pillar-box reminds an Englishman that he is in England. But there must be a thousand things as practical as pillar-boxes which remind an Irishman that, if he is in his country, it is not yet a free country; everything connected with the principal seat of government reminds him of it perpetually. It may not be easy for an Englishman to imagine how many of such daily details there are. But there is, after all, one very simple effort of the fancy, which would fix the fact for him for ever. He has only to imagine that the Germans have conquered London.

A brilliant writer who has earned the name of a Pacifist, and even a Pro-German, once propounded to me his highly personal and even perverse type of internationalism by saying, as a sort of unanswerable challenge, “Wouldn’t you rather be ruled by Goethe than by Walter Long?” I replied that words could not express the wild love and loyalty I should feel for Mr. Walter Long, if the only alternative were Goethe. I could not have put my own national case in a clearer or more compact form. I might occasionally feel inclined to kill Mr. Long; but under the approaching shadow of Goethe, I should feel more inclined to kill myself. That is the deathly element in denationalisation; that it poisons life, itself, the most real of all realities. But perhaps the best way of putting the point conversationally is to say that Goethe would certainly put up a monument to Shakespeare. I would sooner die than walk past it every day of my life. And in the other case of the street inscriptions, it is well to remember that these things, which we also walk past every day, are exactly the sort of things that always have, in a nameless fashion, the national note. If the Germans conquered London, they would not need to massacre me or even enslave me, in order to annoy me; it would be quite enough that their notices were in a German style, if not in a

German language. Suppose I looked up in an English railway carriage, and saw these words written in English exactly as I have seen them in a German railway carriage written in German: "The outleaning of the body from the window of the carriage is because of the therewith bound up life's danger strictly prohibited." It is not rude. It would certainly be impossible to complain that it is curt. I should not be annoyed by its brutality and brevity; but on the contrary by its elaborateness and even its laxity. But if it does not exactly shine in lucidity, it gives a reason; which after all is a very reasonable thing to do. By every cosmopolitan test, it is more polite than the sentence I have read in my childhood: "Wait until the train stops." This is curt; this might be called rude; but it never annoyed me in the least. The nearest I can get to defining my sentiment is to say that I can sympathise with the Englishman who wrote the English notice. Having a rude thing to write, he wrote it as quickly as he could, and went home to his tea; or preferably to his beer. But what is too much for me, an overpowering vision, is the thought of that German calmly sitting down to compose that sentence like a sort of essay. It is the thought of him serenely waving away the one important word till the very end of the sentence, like the Day of Judgment to the end of the world. It is perhaps the mere thought that he did not break down in the middle of it, but endured to the end; or that he could afterwards calmly review it, and see that sentence go marching by, like the whole German army. In short, I do not object to it because it is dictatorial or despotic or bureaucratic or anything of the kind; but simply because it is German.

Because it is German I do not object to it in Germany. Because it is German I should violently revolt against it in England. I do not revolt against the command to wait until the train stops, not because it is less rude, but because it is the kind of rudeness I can understand. The official may be treating me casually, but at least he is not treating himself seriously. And so, in return, I can treat him and his notice not seriously but casually. I can neglect to wait until the train stops, and fall down on the platform; as I did on the platform of Wolverhampton, to the permanent damage of that fine structure. I can, by a stroke of satiric genius, truly national and traditional, the dexterous elimination of a single letter, alter the maxim to "Wait until the rain stops." It is a jest as profoundly English as the weather to which it refers. Nobody would be tempted to take such a liberty with the German sentence; not only because he would be instantly imprisoned in a fortress, but because he would not know at which end to begin.

Now this is the truth which is expressed, though perhaps very imperfectly, in things like the Gaelic lettering on streets in Dublin. It will be wholesome for us who are English to realise that there is almost certainly an English way of putting things, even the most harmless things, which appears to an Irishman quite as ungainly, unnatural, and ludicrous as that German sentence appears to me. As the famous Frenchman did not know when he was talking prose, the official Englishman does not know when he is talking English. He unconsciously assumes that he is talking Esperanto. Imperialism is not an insanity of patriotism; it is merely an illusion of cosmopolitanism.

For the national note of the Irish language is not peculiar to what used to be called the Erse language. The whole nation used the tongue common to both nations with a difference far beyond a dialect. It is not a difference of accent, but a difference of style; which is generally a difference of soul. The emphasis, the elision, the short cuts and sharp endings of speech, show a variety which may be almost unnoticeable but is none the less untranslatable. It may be only a little more weight on a word, or an inversion allowable in English but abounding in Irish; but we can no more copy it than copy the compactness of the French *on* or the Latin ablative absolute. The commonest case of what I mean, for instance, is the locution that lingers in my mind with an agreeable phrase from one of Mr. Yeats’s stories: “Whom I shall yet see upon the hob of hell, and them screeching.” It is an idiom that gives the effect of a pointed postscript, a parting kick or sting in the tail of the sentence, which is unfathomably national. It is noteworthy and even curious that quite a crowd of Irishmen, who quoted to me with just admiration the noble ending of Kathleen-na-Hulahan, where the newcomer is asked if he has seen the old woman who is the tragic type of Ireland going out, quoted his answer in that form, “I did not. But I saw a young woman; and she walking like a queen.” I say it is curious; because I have since been told that in the actual book (which I cannot lay my hand on at the moment) a more classic English idiom is used. It would generally be most unwise to alter the diction of such a master of style as Mr. Yeats: though indeed it is possible that he altered it himself, as he has sometimes done, and not always, I think, for the better. But whether this form came from himself or from his countrymen, it was very redolent of his country.

And there was something inspiring in thus seeing, as it were before one's eyes, literature becoming legend. But a hundred other examples could be given, even from my own short experience, of such fine turns of language, nor are the finest necessarily to be found in literature. It is perfectly true, though prigs may overwork and snobs underrate the truth, that in a country like this the peasants can talk like poets. When I was on the wild coast of Donegal, an old unhappy woman who had starved through the famines and the evictions, was telling a lady the tales of those times; and she mentioned quite naturally one that might have come straight out of times so mystical that we should call them mythical; that some travellers had met a poor wandering woman with a baby in those great gray rocky wastes, and asked her who she was. And she answered, "I am the Mother of God, and this is Himself; and He is the boy you will all be wanting at the last."

There is more in that story than can be put into any book, even on a matter in which its meaning plays so deep a part; and it seems almost profane to analyse it however sympathetically. But if any one wishes to know what I mean by the untranslatable truth which makes a language national, it will be worth while to look at the mere diction of that speech, and note how its whole effect turns on certain phrases and customs which happen to be peculiar to the nation. It is well known that in Ireland the husband or head of the house is always called "himself"; nor is it peculiar to the peasantry, but adopted, if partly in jest, by the gentry. A distinguished Dublin publicist, a landlord and leader among the more national aristocracy, always called me "himself" when he was talking to my wife. It will be noted how a sort of shadow of that common meaning mingles with the more shining significance of its position in a sentence where it is also strictly logical, in the sense of theological. All literary style, especially national style, is made up of such coincidences; which are a spiritual sort of puns. That is why style is untranslatable; because it is possible to render the meaning, but not the double meaning. There is even a faint differentiation in the half-humorous possibilities of the word "boy"; another wholly national nuance. Say instead, "And He is the child" and it is something perhaps stiffer, and certainly quite different. Take away, "This is Himself" and simply substitute "This is He"; and it is a piece of pedantry ten thousand miles from the original. But above all it has lost its note of something national, because it has lost its note of something domestic. All roads in Ireland, of fact or folk-lore, of theology or grammar, lead us back to that door and hearth of the household, that fortress of the family which is the key-fortress of the whole strategy of the island. The Irish Catholics, like other Christians, admit a mystery in the Holy Trinity, but they may almost be said to admit an experience in the Holy Family. Their historical experience, alas, has made it seem to them not unnatural that the Holy Family should be a homeless family. They also have found that there was no room for them at the inn, or anywhere but in the jail; they also have dragged their new-born babes out of their cradles, and trailed in despair along the road to Egypt, or at least along the road to exile. They also have heard in the dark and the distance behind them, the noise of the horsemen of Herod.

Now it is this sensation of stemming a stream, of ten thousand things all pouring one way, labels, titles, monuments, metaphors, modes of address, assumptions in controversy, that make an Englishman in Ireland know that he is in a strange land. Nor is he merely bewildered, as among a medley of strange things. On the contrary, if he has any sense, he soon finds them unified and simplified to a single impression; as if he were talking to a strange person. He cannot define it because nobody can define a person; and nobody can define a nation. He can only see it, smell it, hear it, handle it, bump into it, fall over it, kill it, be killed for it, or be damned for doing it wrong. He must be content with these mere hints of its existence; but he cannot define it, because it is like a person; and no book of logic will undertake to define Aunt Jane or Uncle William. We can only say, with more or less mournful conviction, that if Aunt Jane is not a person, there is no such thing as a person, and I say with equal conviction that if Ireland is not a nation, there is no such thing as a nation. France is not a nation, England is not a nation; there is no such thing as patriotism on this planet. Any Englishman, of any party, with any proposal, may well clear his mind of cant about that preliminary question. If we free Ireland, we must free it to be a nation; if we go on repressing Ireland, we are repressing a nation; if we are right to repress Ireland, we are right to repress a nation. After that we may consider what can be done, according to our opinions about the respect due to patriotism, the reality of cosmopolitan and imperial alternatives, and so on. I will debate with the man who does not want mankind divided into nations at all; I can imagine a case for the man who wants specially to restrain one particular nation, as I would restrain anti-national Prussia. But I will not argue with a man about whether Ireland is a nation, or about the yet more awful question of whether it is an island. I know there is a sceptical philosophy which suggests that all ultimate ideas are only penultimate ideas; and therefore perhaps that all islands are really peninsulars. But I will claim to know what I mean by an island and what I mean by an individual; and when I think suddenly of my experience in the island in question, the impression is a single one; the voices mingle in a human voice which I should know if I heard it again, calling in the distance; the crowds dwindle into a single figure whom I have seen long ago upon a strange hill-side, and she walking like a queen.

IX — Belfast and the Religious Problem

OF that cloud of dream which seems to drift over so many Irish poems and impressions, I felt very little in Ireland. There is a real meaning in this suggestion of a mystic sleep; but it does not mean what most of us imagine, and is not to be found where we expect it. On the contrary, I think the most vivid impression the nation left on me, was that it was almost unnaturally wide awake. I might almost say that Ireland suffers from insomnia. This is not only literally true, of those tremendous talks, the prolonged activities of rich and restless intellects, that can burn up the nights from darkness to daybreak. It is true on the doubtful as well as the delightful side; and the temperament has something of the morbid vigilance and even of the irritability of insomnia. Its lucidity is not only superhuman, but it is sometimes in the true sense inhuman. Its intellectual clarity cannot resist the temptation to intellectual cruelty. If I had to sum up in a sentence the one fault really to be found with the Irish, I could do it simply enough. I should say it saddened me that I liked them all so much better than they liked each other. But it is our supreme stupidity that this is always taken as meaning that Ireland is a sort of Donnybrook Fair. It is really quite the reverse of a merely rowdy and irresponsible quarrel. So far from fighting with shillelaghs, they fight far too much with rapiers; their temptation is in the very nicety and even delicacy of the thrust. Of course there are multitudes who make no such deadly use of the national irony; but it is sufficiently common for even these to suffer from it; and after a time I began to understand a little that burden about bitterness of speech, which recurs so often in the songs of Mr. Yeats and other Irish poets.

“Though hope fall from you and love decay Burning in fires of a slanderous tongue.”

But there is nothing dreamy about the bitterness; the worst part of it is the fact that the criticisms always have a very lucid and logical touch of truth. It is not for us to lecture the Irish about forgiveness, who have given them so much to forgive. But if some one who had not lost the right to preach to them, if St. Patrick were to return to preach, he would find that nothing had failed, through all those ages of agony, of faith and honour and endurance; but I think he might possibly say, what I have no right to say, a word about charity.

There is indeed one decisive sense in which the Irish are very poetical; in that of giving a special and serious social recognition to poetry. I have sometimes expressed the fancy that men in the Golden Age might spontaneously talk in verse; and it is really true that half the Irish talk is in verse. Quotation becomes recitation. But it is much too rhythmic to resemble our own theatrical recitations. This is one of my own strongest and most sympathetic memories, and one of my most definable reasons for having felt extraordinarily happy in Dublin. It was a paradise of poets, in which a man who may feel inclined to mention a book or two of *Paradise Lost,* or illustrate his meaning with the complete ballad of the *Ancient Mariner,* feels he will be better understood than elsewhere. But the more this very national quality is noted, the less it will be mistaken for anything merely irresponsible, or even merely emotional. The shortest way of stating the truth is to say that poetry plays the part of music. It is in every sense of the phrase a social function. A poetical evening is as natural as a musical evening; and being as natural it becomes what is called artificial. As in some circles "Do you play?" is rather "Don't you play?" these Irish circles would be surprised because a man did not recite rather than because he did. A hostile critic, especially an Irish critic, might possibly say that the Irish are poetical because they are not sufficiently musical. I can imagine Mr. Bernard Shaw saying something of the sort. But it might well be retorted that they are not merely musical because they will not consent to be merely emotional. It is far truer to say that they give a reasonable place to poetry, than that they permit any particular poetic interference with reason. "But I, whose virtues are the definitions of the analytical mind," says Mr. Yeats, and any one who has been in the atmosphere will know what he means. In so far as such things stray from reason, they tend rather to ritual than to riot. Poetry is in Ireland what humour is in America; it is an institution. The Englishman, who is always for good and evil the amateur, takes both in a more occasional and even accidental fashion. It must always be remembered here that the ancient Irish civilisation had a high order of poetry, which was not merely mystical, but rather mathematical. Like Celtic ornament, Celtic verse tended too much to geometrical patterns. If this was irrational, it was not by excess of emotion. It might rather be described as irrational by excess of reason. The antique hierarchy of minstrels, each grade with its own complicated metre, suggests that there was something Chinese about a thing so unhumanly civilised. Yet all this vanished etiquette is somehow in the air in Ireland; and men and women move to it, as to the steps of a lost dance.

Thus, whether we consider the sense in which the Irish are really quarrelsome, or the sense in which they are really poetical, we find that both lead us back to a condition of clarity which seems the very reverse of a mere dream. In both cases Ireland is critical, and even self-critical. The bitterness I have ventured to lament is not Irish bitterness against the English; that I should assume as not only inevitable, but substantially justifiable. It is Irish bitterness against the Irish; the remarks of one honest Nationalist about another honest Nationalist. Similarly, while they are fond of poetry, they are not always fond of poets; and there is plenty of satire in their conversation on the subject. I have said that half the talk may consist of poetry; I might almost say that the other half may consist of parody. All these things amount to an excess of vigilance and realism; the mass of the people watch and pray, but even those who never pray never cease to watch. If they idealise sleep, it is as the sleepless do; it might almost be said that they can only dream of dreaming. If a dream haunts them, it is rather as something that escapes them; and indeed some of their finest poetry is rather about seeking fairyland than about finding it. Granted all this, I may say that there was one place in Ireland where I did seem to find it, and not merely to seek it. There was one spot where I seemed to see the dream itself in possession; as one might see from afar a cloud resting on a single hill. There a dream, at once a desire and a delusion, brooded above a whole city. That place was Belfast.

The description could be justified even literally and in detail. A man told me in northeast Ulster that he had heard a mother warning her children away from some pond, or similar place of danger, by saying, “Don’t you go there; there are wee popes there.” A country where that could be said is like Elfland as compared to England. If not exactly a land of fairies, it is at least a land of goblins. There is something charming in the fancy of a pool full of these peculiar elves, like so many efts, each with his tiny triple crown or crossed keys complete. That is the difference between this manufacturing district and an English manufacturing district, like that of Manchester. There are numbers of sturdy Nonconformists in Manchester; and doubtless they direct some of their educational warnings against the system represented by the Archbishop of Canterbury. But nobody in Manchester, however Nonconformist, tells even a child that a puddle is a sort of breeding place for Archbishops of Canterbury, little goblins in gaiters and aprons. It may be said that it is a very stagnant pool that breeds that sort of efts. But whatever view we take of it, it remains true, to begin with, that the paradox could be proved merely from superficial things like superstitions. Protestant Ulster reeks of superstition; it is the strong smell that really comes like a blast out of Belfast, as distinct from Birmingham or Brixton. But to me there is always something human and almost humanising about superstition; and I really think that such lingering legends about the Pope, as a being as distant and dehumanised as the King of the Cannibal Islands, have served as a sort of negative folk-lore. And the same may be said, in so far as it is true that the commercial province has retained a theology as well as a mythology. Wherever men are still theological there is still some chance of their being logical. And in this the Calvinist Ulsterman may be more of a Catholic Irishman than is commonly realised, especially by himself.

Attacks and apologies abound about the matter of Belfast bigotry; but bigotry is by no means the worst thing in Belfast. I rather think it is the best. Nor is it the strongest example of what I mean, when I say that Belfast does really live in a dream. The other and more remarkable fault of the society has indeed a religious root; for nearly everything in history has a religious root, and especially nearly everything in Irish history. Of that theoretical origin in theology I may say something in a moment; it will be enough to say here that what has produced the more prominent and practical evil is ultimately the theology itself, but not the habit of being theological. It is the creed; but not the faith. In so far as the Ulster Protestant really has a faith, he is really a fine fellow; though perhaps not quite so fine a fellow as he thinks himself. And that is the chasm; and can be most shortly stated as I have often stated it in such debates, by saying that the Protestant generally says, “I am a good Protestant,” while the Catholic always says, “I am a bad Catholic.”

When I say that Belfast is dominated by a dream, I mean it in the strict psychological sense; that something inside the mind is stronger than everything outside it. Nonsense is not only stronger than sense, but stronger than the senses. The idea in a man’s head can eclipse the eyes in his head. Very worthy and kindly merchants told me there was no poverty in Belfast. They did not say there was less poverty than was commonly alleged, or less poverty than there had been, or less than there was in similar places elsewhere. They said there was none. As a remark about the Earthly Paradise or the New Jerusalem, it would be arresting. As a remark about the streets, through which they and I had both passed a few moments before, it was simply a triumph of the sheer madness of the imagination of man. These eminent citizens of Belfast received me in the kindest and most courteous fashion; and I would not willingly say anything in criticism of them beyond what is necessary for the practical needs of their country and mine. But indeed I think the greatest criticism of them is that they would not understand what the criticism means. I will therefore clothe it in a parable, which is none the worse for having also been a real incident. When told there was no poverty in Belfast, I had remarked mildly that the people must have a singular taste in dress. I was gravely assured that they had indeed a most singular taste in dress. I was left with the general impression that wearing shirts or trousers decorated with large holes at irregular intervals was a pardonable form of foppery or fashionable extravagance. And it will always be a deep indwelling delight, in the memories of my life, that just as these city fathers and I came out on to the steps of the hotel, there appeared before us one of the raggedest of the ragged little boys I had seen, asking for a penny. I gave him a penny, whereon this group of merchants was suddenly transfigured into a sort of mob, vociferating, “Against the law! Against the law!” and bundled him away. I hope it is not unamiable to be so much entertained by that vision of a mob of magistrates, so earnestly shooing away a solitary child like a cat. Anyhow, they knew not what they did; and, what is worse, knew not that they knew not. And they would not understand, if I told them, what legend might have been made about that child, in the Christian ages of the world.

The point is here that the evil in the delusion does not consist in bigotry, but in vanity. It is not that such a Belfast man thinks he is right; for any honest man has a right to think he is right. It is that he does think he is good, not to say great; and no honest man can reach that comfortable conviction without a course of intellectual dishonesty. What cuts this spirit off from Christian common sense is the fact that the delusion, like most insane delusions, is merely egotistical. It is simply the pleasure of thinking extravagantly well of oneself; and unlimited indulgence in that pleasure is far more weakening than any indulgence in drink or dissipation. But so completely does it construct an unreal cosmos round the ego, that the criticism of the world cannot be felt even for worldly purposes. I could give many examples of this element in Belfast, as compared even with Birmingham or Manchester. The Lord Mayor of Manchester may not happen to know much about pictures; but he knows men who know about them. But the Belfast authorities will exhibit a maniacally bad picture as a masterpiece, merely because it glorifies Belfast. No man dare put up such a picture in Manchester, within a stone's-throw of Mr. Charles Rowley. I care comparatively little about the case of aesthetics; but the case is even clearer in ethics. So wholly are these people sundered from more Christian traditions that their very boasts lower them; and. they abase themselves when they mean to exalt themselves. It never occurs to them that their strange inside standards do not always impress outsiders. A great employer introduced me to several of his very intelligent employees; and I can readily bear witness to the sincerity of the great Belfast delusion even among many of the poorer men of Belfast. But the sincere efforts of them and their master, to convince me that a union with the Catholic majority under Home Rule was intolerable to them, all went to one tune, which recurred with a kind of chorus, "We won't have the likes of them making laws for the likes of us." It never seemed to cross their minds that this is not a high example of any human morality; that judged by pagan *verecundia* or Christian humility or modern democratic brotherhood, it is simply the remark of a snob. The man in question is quite innocent of all this; he has no notion of modesty, or even of mock modesty; he is not only superior, but he thinks it a superiority to claim superiority.

It is here that we cannot avoid theology, because, we cannot avoid theory. For the point is that even in theory the one religious atmosphere now differs from the other. That the difference had historically a religious root is really unquestionable; but anyhow it is very deeply rooted. The essence of Calvinism was certainty about salvation; the essence of Catholicism is uncertainty about salvation. The modern and materialised form of that certainty is superiority; the belief of a man in a fixed moral aristocracy of men like himself. But the truth concerned here is that, by this time at any rate, the superiority has become a doctrine as well as an indulgence. I doubt if this extreme school of Protestants believe in Christian humility even as an ideal. I doubt whether the more honest of them would even profess to believe in it. This can be clearly seen by comparing it with other Christian virtues; of which this decayed Calvinism offers at least a version, even to those who think it a perversion. Puritanism is a version of purity; if we think it a parody of purity. Philanthropy is a version of charity; if we think it a parody of charity. But in all this commercial Protestantism there is no version of humility; there is not even a parody of humility. Humility is not an ideal. Humility is not even a hypocrisy. There is no institution, no commandment, no common form of words, no popular pattern or traditional tale, to tell anybody in any fashion that there is any such thing as a peril of spiritual pride. In short, there is here a school of thought and sentiment that does definitely regard self-satisfaction as a strength; as against the strong Christian tradition in the rest of the country that does as definitely regard it as a weakness. That is the real moral issue in the modern struggle in Ireland; nor is it confined to Ireland. England has been deeply infected with this pharisaical weakness; but as I have said, England takes things vaguely where Ireland takes them vividly. The men of Belfast offer that city as something supreme, unique and unrivalled; and they are very nearly right. There is nothing exactly like it in the industrialism of this country; but for all that, the fight against its religion of arrogance has been fought out elsewhere and on a larger field. There is another centre and citadel from which this theory, of strength in a self-hypnotised superiority, has despised Christendom. There has been a rival city to Belfast; and its name was Berlin.

Historians of all religions and no religion may yet come to regard it as a historical fact, I fancy, that the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century (at least in the form it actually took) was a barbaric breakdown, like that Prussianism which was the ultimate product of the Protestantism. But however this may be, historians will always be interested to note that it produced certain curious and characteristic things; which are worth studying whether we like or dislike them. And one of its features, I fancy, has been this; that it has had the power of producing certain institutions which progressed very rapidly to great wealth and power; which the world regarded at a certain moment as invincible; and which the world, at the next moment, suddenly discovered to be intolerable. It was so with the whole of that Calvinist theology, of which Belfast is now left as the lonely missionary. It was so, even in our own time, with the whole of that industrial capitalism of which Belfast is now the besieged and almost deserted outpost. And it was so with Berlin as it was with Belfast; and a subtle Prussian might almost complain of a kind of treachery, in the abruptness with which the world woke up and found it wanting; in the suddenness of the reaction that struck it impotent, so soon after it had been counted on omnipotent. These things seem to hold all the future; and in one flash they are things of the past.

Belfast is an antiquated novelty. Such a thing is still being excused for seeming *parvenu* when it is discovered to be passe. For instance, it is only by coming in touch with some of the controversies surrounding the Convention, that an Englishman could realise how much the mentality of the Belfast leader is not so much that of a remote seventeenth century Whig, as that of a recent nineteenth century Radical. His conventionality seemed to be that of a Victorian rather than a Williamite; and to be less limited by the Orange Brotherhood than by the Cobden Club. This is a fact most successfully painted and pasted over by the big brushes of our own Party System, which has the art of hiding so many glaring facts. This Unionist Party in Ireland is very largely concerned to resist the main reform advocated by the Unionist Party in England. A political humorist, who understood the Cobden tradition of Belfast and the Chamberlain tradition of Birmingham, could have a huge amount of fun appealing from one to the other; congratulating Belfast on the bold Protectionist doctrines prevalent in Ireland; adjuring Mr. Bonar Law and the Tariff Reformers never to forget the fight made by Belfast for the sacred principles of Free Trade. But the fact that the Belfast school is merely the Manchester school is only one aspect of this general truth about the abrupt collapse into antiquity; a sudden superannuation. The whole march of that Manchester industrialism is not only halted but turned; the whole position is outflanked by new forces coming from new directions; the wealth of the peasantries blocks the road in front of it; the general strike has risen menacing its rear. That strange cloud of self-protecting vanity may still permit Belfast to believe in Belfast, but Britain does not really believe in Belfast. Philosophical forces far wider and deeper than politics have undermined the conception of progressive Protestantism in Ireland. I should say myself that mere English ascendancy in that island became intellectually impossible on the day when Shaftesbury introduced the first Factory Act, and on the day when Newman published the first pages of the Apologia. Both men were certainly Tories and probably Unionists.

Neither were connected with the subject or with each other; the one hated the Pope and the other the Liberator. But industrialism was never again self-evidently superior after the first event, or Protestantism self-evidently superior after the other. And it needed a towering and self-evident superiority to excuse the English rule in Ireland. It is only on the ground of unquestionably doing good that men can do so much evil as that.

Some Orangemen before the war indulged in a fine rhetorical comparison between William of Prussia and William of Orange; and openly suggested that the new Protestant Deliverer from the north would come from North Germany. I was assured by my more moderate hosts in Belfast that such Orangemen could not be regarded as representative or even responsible. On that I cannot pronounce. The Orangemen may not have been representative; they may not have been responsible; but I am quite sure they were right. I am quite sure those poor fanatics were far nearer the nerve of historical truth than professional politicians like Sir Edward Carson or industrial capitalists like Sir George Clark. If ever there was a natural alliance in the world, it would have been the alliance between Belfast and Berlin. The fanatics may be fools, but they have here the light by which the foolish things can confound the wise. It is the brightest spot in Belfast, bigotry, for if the light in its body be darkness, it is still brighter than the darkness. By the vision that goes everywhere with the virility and greatness of religion, these men have indeed pierced to the Protestant secret and the meaning of four hundred years. Their Protestantism is Prussianism, not as a term of abuse, but as a term of abstract and impartial ethical science. Belfast and Berlin are on the same side in the deepest of all the spiritual issues involved in the war. And that is the simple issue of whether pride is a sin, and therefore a weakness. Modern mentality, or great masses of it, has seriously advanced the view that it is a weakness to disarm criticism by self-criticism, and a strength to disdain criticism through self-confidence. That is the thesis for which Berlin gave battle to the older civilisation in Europe; and that for which Belfast gave battle to the older civilisation in Ireland. It may be, as I suggested, that such Protestant pride is the old Calvinism, with its fixed election of the few. It may be that the Protestantism is merely Paganism, with its brutish gods and giants lingering in corners of the more savage north. It may be that the Calvinism was itself a recurrence of the Paganism. But in any case, I am sure that this superiority, which can master men like a nightmare, can also vanish like a nightmare. And I strongly suspect that in this matter also, as in the matter of property as viewed by a peasantry, the older civilisation will prove to be the real civilisation; and that a healthier society will return to regarding pride as a pestilence, as the Socialists have already returned to regarding avarice as a pestilence. The old tradition of Christendom was that the highest form of faith was a doubt. It was the doubt of a man about his soul. It was admirably expressed to me by Mr. Yeats, who is now champion of Catholic orthodoxy, in stating his preference for mediaeval Catholicism as compared with modern humanitarianism; “Men were thinking then about their own sins, and now they are always thinking about other people’s.” And even by the Protestant test of progress, pride is seen to be arrested by a premature paralysis. Progress is superiority to oneself; and it is stopped dead by superiority to others. The case is even clearer by the test of poetry, which is much more solid and permanent than progress. The Superman may have been a sort of poem; but he could never be any sort of poet. The more we attempt to analyse that strange element of wonder, which is the soul of all the arts, the more we shall see that it must depend on some subordination of the self to a glory existing beyond it, and even in spite of it. Man always feels as a creature when he acts as a creator. When he carves a cathedral it is to make a monster that can swallow him. But the Nietzschean nightmare of swallowing the world is only a sort of yawning. When the evolutionary anarch has broken all links and laws and is at last free to speak, he finds he has nothing to say. So German songs under the imperial eagle fell silent like songbirds under a hawk; and it is but rarely, and here and there, that a Belfast merchant liberates his soul in a lyric. He has to get Mr. Kipling to write a Belfast poem, in a style technically attuned to the Belfast pictures. There is the true Tara of the silent harp, and the throne and habitation of the dream; and it is there that the Celtic pessimists should weep in silence for the end of song. Blowing one’s own trumpet has not proved a good musical education.

In logic a wise man will always put the cart before the horse. That is to say, he will always put the end before the means; when he is considering the question as a whole. He does not construct a cart in order to exercise a horse. He employs a horse to draw a cart, and whatever is in the cart. In all modern reasoning there is a tendency to make the mere political beast of burden more important than the chariot of man it is meant to draw. This had led to a dismissal of all such spiritual questions in favour of what are called social questions; and this to a too facile treatment of things like the religious question in Belfast. There is a religious question; and it will not have an irreligious answer. It will not be met by the limitation of Christian faith, but rather by the extension of Christian charity. But if a man says that there is no difference between a Protestant and a Catholic, and that both can act in an identical fashion everywhere but in a church or chapel, he is madly driving the cart-horse when he has forgotten the cart. A religion is not the church a man goes to but the cosmos he lives in; and if any sceptic forgets it, the maddest fanatic beating an Orange drum about the Battle of the Boyne is a better philosopher than he.

Many uneducated and some educated people in Belfast, quite sincerely believe that Roman priests are fiends, only waiting to rekindle the fires of the Inquisition. For two simple reasons, however, I declined to take this fact as evidence of anything except their sincerity. First, because the stories, when reduced to their rudiment of truth, generally resolved themselves into the riddle of poor Roman Catholics giving money to their own religion; and seemed to deplore not so much a dependence on priests as an independence of employers. And second for a reason drawn from my own experience, as well as common knowledge, concerning the Protestant gentry in the south of Ireland. The southern Unionists spoke quite without this special horror of Catholic priests or peasants. They grumbled at them or laughed at them as a man grumbles or laughs at his neighbours; but obviously they no more dreamed that the priest would burn them than that he would eat them. If the priests were as black as the black Protestants painted them, they would be at their worst where they are with the majority; and would be known at their worst by the minority. It was clear that Belfast held the more bigoted tradition, not because it knew more of priests, but because it knew less of them; not because it was on the spot, but because the spot was barred. An even more general delusion was the idea that all the southern Irish dreamed and did no work. I pointed out that this also was inconsistent with concrete experience; since all over the world a man who makes a small farm pay has to work very hard indeed. In historic fact, the old notion that the Irish peasant did no work, but only dreamed, had a simple explanation. It merely meant that he did no work for a capitalist’s profit; but dreamed of some day doing work for his own profit. But there may also have been this distorted truth in the tradition; that a free peasant, while he extends his own work, creates his own holidays. He is not idle all day, but he may be idle at any time of the day; he does not dream whenever he feels inclined, but he does dream whenever he chooses. A famous Belfast manufacturer, a man of capacity, but one who shook his head over the unaccountable prevalence of priests, assured me that he had seen peasants in the south doing nothing, at all sorts of odd times; and this is doubtless the difference between the farm and the factory. The same gentleman showed me over the colossal shipping of the great harbour, with all machinery and transport leading up to it. No man of any imagination would be insensible to such titanic experiments of his race; or deny the dark poetry of those furnaces fit for Vulcan or those hammers worthy of Thor. But as I stood on the dock I said to my guide: "Have you ever asked what all this is for?" He was an intelligent man, an exile from metaphysical Scotland, and he knew what I meant. "I don't know," he said, "perhaps we are only insects building a coral reef. I don't know what is the good of the coral reef." "Perhaps," I said, "that is what the peasant dreams about, and, why he listens to the priest."

For there seems to be a fashionable fallacy to the effect that religious equality is something to be done and done with, that we may go on to the real matter of political equality. In philosophy it is the flat contrary that is true. Political equality is something to be done and done with, that we may go on to the much more real matter of religion. At the Abbey Theatre I saw a forcible play by Mr. St. John Ervine, called The Mixed Marriage; which I should remember if it were only for the beautiful acting of Miss Maire O'Neill. But the play moved me very much as a play; yet I felt that the presence of this fallacy falsified it in some measure. The dramatist seemed to resent a schism merely because it interfered with a strike. But the only object of striking is liberty; and the only object of liberty is life: a thing wholly spiritual. It is economic liberty that should be dismissed as these people dismiss theology. We only get it, to forget it. It is right that men should have houses, right that they should have land, right that they should have laws to protect the land; but all these things are only machinery to make leisure for the labouring soul. The house is only a stage set up by stage carpenters for the acting of what Mr. J. B. Yeats has called "the drama of the home." All the most dramatic things happen at home, from being born to being dead. What a man thinks about these things is his life; and to substitute for them a bustle of electioneering and legislation is to wander about among screens and pulleys on the wrong side of pasteboard scenery; and never to act the play. And that play is always a miracle play; and the name of its hero is Everyman.

When I came back from the desolate splendour of the Donegal sea and shore, and saw again the square garden and the statue outside the Dublin hotel, I did not know I was returning to something that might well be called more desolate. For it was when I entered the hotel that I first found that it was full of the awful tragedy of the Leinster. I had often seen death in a home, but never death decimating a vast hostelry; and there was something strangely shocking about the empty seats of men and women with whom I had talked so idly a few days before. It was almost as if there was more tragedy in the cutting short of such trivial talk than in the sundering of life-long ties. But there was all the dignity as well as the tragedy of man; and I was glad, before I left Ireland, to have seen the nobler side of the Anglo-Irish garrison; and to have known men of my own blood, however mistaken, so enduring the end of things. With the bad news from the sea came better news from the war; Mangin had struck the sensational blow that cut off the Germans as they marched upon Chalons; and with all the emotions of an exile, however temporary, I knew that my own land was secure. Somehow, the bad and good news together turned my mind more and more towards England; and all the inner humour and insular geniality which even the Irish may some day be allowed to understand. As I went homewards on the next boat that started from the Irish port, and the Wicklow hills receded in a rainy and broken sunlight, it was with all the simplest of those ancient appetites with which a man should come back to his own country. Only there clung to me, not to be denied, one sentiment about Ireland, one sentiment that I could not transfer to England; which called me like an elfland of so many happy figures, from Puck to Pickwick. As I looked at those rainy hills, I knew at least that I was looking, perhaps for the last time, on something rooted in the Christian faith. There at least the Christian ideal was something more than an ideal; it was in a special sense real. It was so real that it appeared even in statistics. It was so self-evident as to be seen even by sociologists. It was a land where our religion had made even its vision visible. It had made even its unpopular virtues popular. It must be, in the times to come, a final testing-place, of whether a people that will take that name seriously, and even solidly, is fated to suffer or to succeed.

As the long line of the mountain coast unfolded before me I had an optical illusion; it may be that many have had it before. As new lengths of coast and lines of heights were unfolded, I had the fancy that the whole land was not receding but advancing, like something spreading out its arms to the world. A chance shred of sunshine rested, like a riven banner, on the hill which I believe is called in Irish the Mountain of the Golden Spears; and I could have imagined that the spears and the banner were coming on. And in that flash I remembered that the men of this island had once gone forth, not the torches of conquerors or destroyers; but as missionaries in the very midnight of the Dark Ages, like a multitude of moving candles, that were the light of the world.

THE END

THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The earlier part of this book appeared in the form of five articles which came out in the “New Witness” at the crisis of the recent controversy in the Press on the subject of divorce. Crude and sketchy as they confessedly were, they had a certain rude plan of their own, which I find it very difficult to recast even in order to expand. I have therefore decided to reprint the original articles as they stood, save for a few introductory words; and then, at the risk of repetition, to add a few further chapters, explaining more fully any conceptions that may seem to have been too crudely assumed or dismissed. I have set forth the original matter as it appeared, under a general heading, without dividing it into chapters.

G. K.C.

I

THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE (1)

It is futile to talk of reform without reference to form. To take a case from my own taste and fancy, there is nothing I feel to be so beautiful and wonderful as a window. All casements are magic casements, whether they open on the foam or the front-garden; they lie close to the ultimate mystery and paradox of limitation and liberty. But if I followed my instinct towards an infinite number of windows, it would end in having no walls. It would also (it may be added incidentally) end in having no windows either; for a window makes a picture by making a picture-frame. But there is a simpler way of stating my more simple and fatal error. It is that I have wanted a window, without considering whether I wanted a house. Now many appeals are being made to us to-day on behalf of that light and liberty that might well be symbolised by windows; especially as so many of them concern the enlightenment and liberation of the house, in the sense of the home. Many quite disinterested people urge many quite reasonable considerations in the case of divorce, as a type of domestic liberation; but in the journalistic and general discussion of the matter there is far too much of the mind that works backwards and at random, in the manner of all windows and no walls. Such people say they want divorce, without asking themselves whether they want marriage. Even in order to be divorced it has generally been found necessary to go through the preliminary formality of being married; and unless the nature of this initial act be considered, we might as well be discussing haircutting for the bald or spectacles for the blind. To be divorced is to be in the literal sense unmarried; and there is no sense in a thing being undone when we do not know if it is done.

There is perhaps no worse advice, nine times out of ten, than the advice to do the work that’s nearest. It is especially bad when it means, as it generally does, removing the obstacle that’s nearest. It means that men are not to behave like men but like mice; who nibble at the thing that’s nearest. The man, like the mouse, undermines what he cannot understand. Because he himself bumps into a thing, he calls it the nearest obstacle; though the obstacle may happen to be the pillar that holds up the whole roof over his head. He industriously removes the obstacle; and in return, the obstacle removes him, and much more valuable things than he. This opportunism is perhaps the most unpractical thing in this highly unpractical world. People talk vaguely against destructive criticism; but what is the matter with this criticism is not that it destroys, but that it does not criticise. It is destruction without design. It is taking a complex machine to pieces bit by bit, in any order, without even knowing what the machine is for. And if a man deals with a deadly dynamic machine on the principle of touching the knob that's nearest, he will find out the defects of that cheery philosophy. Now leaving many sincere and serious critics of modern marriage on one side for the moment, great masses of modern men and women, who write and talk about marriage, are thus nibbling blindly at it like an army of mice. When the reformers propose, for instance, that divorce should be obtainable after an absence of three years (the absence actually taken for granted in the first military arrangements of the late European War) their readers and supporters could seldom give any sort of logical reason for the period being three years, and not three months or three minutes. They are like people who should say "Give me three feet of dog"; and not care where the cut came. Such persons fail to see a dog as an organic entity; in other words, they cannot make head or tail of it. And the chief thing to say about such reformers of marriage is that they cannot make head or tail of it. They do not know what it is, or what it is meant to be, or what its supporters suppose it to be; they never look at it, even when they are inside it. They do the work that's nearest; which is poking holes in the bottom of a boat under the impression that they are digging in a garden. This question of what a thing is, and whether it is a garden or a boat, appears to them abstract and academic. They have no notion of how large is the idea they attack; or how relatively small appear the holes that they pick in it.

Thus, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, an intelligent man in other matters, says that there is only a "theological" opposition to divorce, and that it is entirely founded on "certain texts" in the Bible about marriages. This is exactly as if he said that a belief in the brotherhood of men was only founded on certain texts in the Bible, about all men being the children of Adam and Eve. Millions of peasants and plain people all over the world assume marriage to be static, without having ever clapped eyes on any text. Numbers of more modern people, especially after the recent experiments in America, think divorce is a social disease, without having ever bothered about any text. It may be maintained that even in these, or in any one, the idea of marriage is ultimately mystical; and the same may be maintained about the idea of brotherhood. It is obvious that a husband and wife are not visibly one flesh, in the sense of being one quadruped. It is equally obvious that Paderewski and Jack Johnson are not twins, and probably have not played together at their mother's knee. There is indeed a very important admission, or addition, to be realised here. What is true is this: that if the nonsense of Nietzsche or some such sophist submerged current culture, so that it was the fashion to deny the duties of fraternity; then indeed it might be found that the group which still affirmed fraternity was the original group in whose sacred books was the text about Adam and Eve. Suppose some Prussian professor has opportunely discovered that Germans and lesser men are respectively descended from two such very different monkeys that they are in no sense brothers, but barely cousins (German) any number of times removed. And suppose he proceeds to remove them even further with a hatchet, suppose he bases on this a repetition of the conduct of Cain, saying not so much "Am I my brother's keeper?" as "Is he really my brother?" And suppose this higher philosophy of the hatchet becomes prevalent in colleges and cultivated circles, as even more foolish philosophies have done. Then I agree it probably will be the Christian, the man who preserves the text about Cain, who will continue to assert that he is still the professor's brother; that he is still the professor's keeper. He may possibly add that, in his opinion, the professor seems to require a keeper.

And that is doubtless the situation in the controversies about divorce and marriage to-day. It is the Christian church which continues to hold strongly, when the world for some reason has weakened on it, what many others hold at other times. But even then it is barely picking up the shreds and scraps of the subject to talk about a reliance on texts. The vital point in the comparison is this: that human brotherhood means a whole view of life, held in the light of life, and defended, rightly or wrongly, by constant appeals to every aspect of life. The religion that holds it most strongly will hold it when nobody else holds it; that is quite true, and that some of us may be so perverse as to think a point in favour of the religion. But anybody who holds it at all will hold it as a philosophy, not hung on one text but on a hundred truths. Fraternity may be a sentimental metaphor; I may be suffering a delusion when I hail a Montenegrin peasant as my long lost brother. As a fact, I have my own suspicions about which of us it is that has got lost. But my delusion is not a deduction from one text, or from twenty;

it is the expression of a relation that to me at least seems a reality. And what I should say about the idea of a brother, I should say about the idea of a wife.

It is supposed to be very unbusinesslike to begin at the beginning. It is called "abstract and academic principles with which we English, etc., etc." It is still in some strange way considered unpractical to open up inquiries about anything by asking what it is. I happen to have, however, a fairly complete contempt for that sort of practicality; for I know that it is not even practical. My ideal business man would not be one who planked down fifty pounds and said "Here is hard cash; I am a plain man; it is quite indifferent to me whether I am paying a debt, or giving alms to a beggar, or buying a wild bull or a bathing machine." Despite the infectious heartiness of his tone, I should still, in considering the hard cash, say (like a cabman) "What's this?" I should continue to insist, priggishly, that it was a highly practical point what the money was; what it was supposed to stand for, to aim at or to declare; what was the nature of the transaction; or, in short, what the devil the man supposed he was doing. I shall therefore begin by asking, in an equally mystical manner, what in the name of God and the angels a man getting married supposes he is doing. I shall begin by asking what marriage is; and the mere question will probably reveal that the act itself, good or bad, wise or foolish, is of a certain kind; that it is not an inquiry or an experiment or an accident; it may probably dawn on us that it is a promise. It can be more fully defined by saying it is a vow.

Many will immediately answer that it is a rash vow. I am content for the moment to reply that all vows are rash vows. I am not now defending but defining vows; I am pointing out that this is a discussion about vows; first, of whether there ought to be vows; and second, of what vows ought to be. Ought a man to break a promise? Ought a man to make a promise? These are philosophic questions; but the philosophic peculiarity of divorce and re-marriage, as compared with free love and no marriage, is that a man breaks and makes a promise at the same moment. It is a highly German philosophy; and recalls the way in which the enemy wishes to celebrate his successful destruction of all treaties by signing some more. If I were breaking a promise, I would do it without promises. But I am very far from minimising the momentous and disputable nature of the vow itself. I shall try to show, in a further article, that this rash and romantic operation is the only furnace from which can come the plain hardware of humanity, the cast-iron resistance of citizenship or the cold steel of common sense; but I am not denying that the furnace is a fire. The vow is a violent and unique thing; though there have been many besides the marriage vow; vows of chivalry, vows of poverty, vows of celibacy, pagan as well as Christian. But modern fashion has rather fallen out of the habit; and men miss the type for the lack of the parallels. The shortest way of putting the problem is to ask whether being free includes being free to bind oneself. For the vow is a tryst with oneself.

I may be misunderstood if I say, for brevity, that marriage is an affair of honour. The sceptic will be delighted to assent, by saying it is a fight. And so it is, if only with oneself; but the point here is that it necessarily has the touch of the heroic, in which virtue can be translated by virtus. Now about fighting, in its nature, there is an implied infinity or at least a potential infinity. I mean that loyalty in war is loyalty in defeat or even disgrace; it is due to the flag precisely at the moment when the flag nearly falls. We do already apply this to the flag of the nation; and the question is whether it is wise or unwise to apply it to the flag of the family. Of course, it is tenable that we should apply it to neither; that misgovernment in the nation or misery in the citizen would make the desertion of the flag an act of reason and not treason. I will only say here that, if this were really the limit of national loyalty, some of us would have deserted our nation long ago.

II

THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE (2)

To the two or three articles appearing here on this subject I have given the title of the Superstition of Divorce; and the title is not taken at random. While free love seems to me a heresy, divorce does really seem to me a superstition. It is not only more of a superstition than free love, but much more of a superstition than strict sacramental marriage; and this point can hardly be made too plain. It is the partisans of divorce, not the defenders of marriage, who attach a stiff and senseless sanctity to a mere ceremony, apart from the meaning of the ceremony. It is our opponents, and not we, who hope to be saved by the letter of ritual, instead of the spirit of reality. It is they who hold that vow or violation, loyalty or disloyalty, can all be disposed of by a mysterious and magic rite, performed first in a law-court and then in a church or a registry office. There is little difference between the two parts of the ritual; except that the law court is much more ritualistic. But the plainest parallels will show anybody that all this is sheer barbarous credulity. It may or may not be superstition for a man to believe he must kiss the Bible to show he is telling the truth. It is certainly the most grovelling superstition for him to believe that, if he kisses the Bible, anything he says will come true. It would surely be the blackest and most benighted Bible-worship to suggest that the mere kiss on the mere book alters the moral quality of perjury. Yet this is precisely what is implied in saying that formal re-marriage alters the moral quality of conjugal infidelity. It may have been a mark of the Dark Ages that Harold should swear on a relic, though he were afterwards forsworn. But surely those ages would have been at their darkest, if he had been content to be sworn on a relic and forsworn on another relic. Yet this is the new altar these reformers would erect for us, out of the mouldy and meaningless relics of their dead law and their dying religion.

Now we, at any rate, are talking about an idea, a thing of the intellect and the soul; which we feel to be unalterable by legal antics. We are talking about the idea of loyalty; perhaps a fantastic, perhaps only an unfashionable idea, but one we can explain and defend as an idea. Now I have already pointed out that most sane men do admit our ideal in such a case as patriotism or public spirit; the necessity of saving the state to which we belong. The patriot may revile but must not renounce his country; he must curse it to cure it, but not to wither it up. The old pagan citizens felt thus about the city; and modern nationalists feel thus about the nation. But even mere modern internationalists feel it about something; if it is only the nation of mankind. Even the humanitarian does not become a misanthrope and live in a monkey-house. Even a disappointed Collectivist or Communist does not retire into the exclusive society of beavers, because beavers are all communists of the most class-conscious solidarity. He admits the necessity of clinging to his fellow creatures, and begging them to abandon the use of the possessive pronoun; heart-breaking as his efforts must seem to him after a time. Even a Pacifist does not prefer rats to men, on the ground that the rat community is so pure from the taint of Jingoism as always to leave the sinking ship. In short, everybody recognises that there is some ship, large and small, which he ought not to leave, even when he thinks it is sinking.

We may take it then that there are institutions to which we are attached finally; just as there are others to which we are attached temporarily. We go from shop to shop trying to get what we want; but we do not go from nation to nation doing this; unless we belong to a certain group now heading very straight for Pogroms. In the first case it is the threat that we shall withdraw our custom; in the second it is the threat that we shall never withdraw ourselves; that we shall be part of the institution to the last. The time when the shop loses its customers is the time when the city needs its citizens; but it needs them as critics who will always remain to criticise. I need not now emphasise the deadly need of this double energy of internal reform and external defence; the whole towering tragedy which has eclipsed our earth in our time is but one terrific illustration of it. The hammer-strokes are coming thick and fast now; and filling the world with infernal thunders; and there is still the iron sound of something unbreakable deeper and louder than all the things that break. We may curse the kings, we may distrust the captains, we may murmur at the very existence of the armies; but we know that in the darkest days that may come to us, no man will desert the flag.

Now when we pass from loyalty to the nation to loyalty to the family, there can be no doubt about the first and plainest difference. The difference is that the family is a thing far more free. The vow is a voluntary loyalty; and the marriage vow is marked among ordinary oaths of allegiance by the fact that the allegiance is also a choice. The man is not only a citizen of the city, but also the founder and builder of the city. He is not only a soldier serving the colours, but he has himself artistically selected and combined the colours, like the colours of an individual dress. If it be admissible to ask him to be true to the commonwealth that has made him, it is at least not more illiberal to ask him to be true to the commonwealth he has himself made. If civic fidelity be, as it is, a necessity, it is also in a special sense a constraint. The old joke against patriotism, the Gilbertian irony, congratulated the Englishman on his fine and fastidious taste in being born in England. It made a plausible point in saying "For he might have been a Russian"; though indeed we have lived to see some persons who seemed to think they could be Russians when the fancy took them. If commonsense considers even such involuntary loyalty natural, we can hardly wonder if it thinks voluntary loyalty still more natural. And the small state founded on the sexes is at once the most voluntary and the most natural of all self-governing states. It is not true of Mr. Brown that he might have been a Russian; but it may be true of Mrs. Brown that she might have been a Robinson.

Now it is not at all hard to see why this small community, so specially free touching its cause, should yet be specially bound touching its effects. It is not hard to see why the vow made most freely is the vow kept most firmly. There are attached to it, by the nature of things, consequences so tremendous that no contract can offer any comparison. There is no contract, unless it be that said to be signed in blood, that can call spirits from the vastly deep, or bring cherubs (or goblins) to inhabit a small modern villa. There is no stroke of the pen which creates real bodies and souls, or makes the characters in a novel come to life. The institution that puzzles intellectuals so much can be explained by the mere material fact (perceptible even to intellectuals) that children are, generally speaking, younger than their parents. "Till death do us part" is not an irrational formula, for those will almost certainly die before they see more than half of the amazing (or alarming) thing they have done.

Such is, in a curt and crude outline, this obvious thing for those to whom it is not obvious. Now I know there are thinking men among those who would tamper with it; and I shall expect some of these to reply to my questions. But for the moment I only ask this question: whether the parliamentary and journalistic divorce movement shows even a shadowy trace of these fundamental truths, regarded as tests. Does it even discuss the nature of a vow, the limits and objects of loyalty, the survival of the family as a small and free state? The writers are content to say that Mr. Brown is uncomfortable with Mrs. Brown, and the last emancipation, for separated couples, seems only to mean that he is still uncomfortable without Mrs. Brown. These are not days in which being uncomfortable is felt as the final test of public action. For the rest, the reformers show statistically that families are in fact so scattered in our industrial anarchy, that they may as well abandon hope of finding their way home again. I am acquainted with that argument for making bad worse and I see it everywhere leading to slavery. Because London Bridge is broken down, we must assume that bridges are not meant to bridge. Because London commercialism and capitalism have copied hell, we are to continue to copy them. Anyhow, some will retain the conviction that the ancient bridge built between the two towers of sex is the worthiest of the great works of the earth.

It is exceedingly characteristic of the dreary decades before the War that the forms of freedom in which they seemed to specialise were suicide and divorce. I am not at the moment pronouncing on the moral problem of either; I am merely noting, as signs of those times, those two true or false counsels of despair; the end of life and the end of love. Other forms of freedom were being increasingly curtailed. Freedom indeed was the one thing that progressives and conservatives alike contemned. Socialists were largely concerned to prevent strikes, by State arbitration; that is, by adding another rich man to give the casting vote between rich and poor. Even in claiming what they called the right to work they tacitly surrendered the right to leave off working. Tories were preaching conscription, not so much to defend the independence of England as to destroy the independence of Englishmen. Liberals, of course, were chiefly interested in eliminating liberty, especially touching beer and betting. It was wicked to fight, and unsafe even to argue; for citing any certain and contemporary fact might land one in a libel action. As all these doors were successfully shut in our faces along the chilly and cheerless corridor of progress (with its glazed tiles) the doors of death and divorce alone stood open, or rather opened wider and wider. I do not expect the exponents of divorce to admit any similarity in the two things; yet the passing parallel is not irrelevant. It may enable them to realise the limits within which our moral instincts can, even for the sake of argument, treat this desperate remedy as a normal object of desire. Divorce is for us at best a failure, of which we are more concerned to find and cure the cause than to complete the effects; and we regard a system that produces many divorces as we do a system that drives men to drown and shoot themselves. For instance, it is perhaps the commonest complaint against the existing law that the poor cannot afford to avail themselves of it. It is an argument to which normally I should listen with special sympathy. But while I should condemn the law being a luxury, my first thought will naturally be that divorce and death are only luxuries in a rather rare sense. I should not primarily condole with the poor man on the high price of prussic acid; or on the fact that all precipices of suitable suicidal height were the private property of the landlords. There are other high prices and high precipices I should attack first. I should admit in the abstract that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander; that what is good for the rich is good for the poor; but my first and strongest impression would be that prussic acid sauce is not good for anybody. I fear I should, on the impulse of the moment, pull a poor clerk or artisan back by the coat-tails, if he were jumping over Shakespeare's Cliff, even if Dover sands were strewn with the remains of the dukes and bankers who had already taken the plunge.

But in one respect, I will heartily concede, the cult of divorce has differed from the mere cult of death. The cult of death is dead. Those I knew in my youth as young pessimists are now aged optimists. And, what is more to the point at present, even when it was living it was limited; it was a thing of one clique in one class. We know the rule in the old comedy, that when the heroine went mad in white satin, the confidante went mad in white muslin. But when, in some tragedy of the artistic temperament, the painter committed suicide in velvet, it was never implied that the plumber must commit suicide in corduroy. It was never held that Hedda Gabler's housemaid must die in torments on the carpet (trying as her term of service may have been); or that Mrs. Tanqueray's butler must play the Roman fool and die on his own carving knife. That particular form of playing the fool, Roman or otherwise, was an oligarchic privilege in the decadent epoch; and even as such has largely passed with that epoch. Pessimism, which was never popular, is no longer even fashionable. A far different fate has awaited the other fashion; the other somewhat dismal form of freedom. If divorce is a disease, it is no longer to be a fashionable disease like appendicitis; it is to be made an epidemic like small-pox. As we have already seen papers and public men to-day make a vast parade of the necessity of setting the poor man free to get a divorce. Now why are they so mortally anxious that he should be free to get a divorce, and not in the least anxious that he should be free to get anything else? Why are the same people happy, nay almost hilarious, when he gets a divorce, who are horrified when he gets a drink? What becomes of his money, what becomes of his children, where he works, when he ceases to work, are less and less under his personal control. Labour Exchanges, Insurance Cards, Welfare Work, and a hundred forms of police inspection and supervision have combined for good or evil to fix him more and more strictly to a certain place in society. He is less and less allowed to go to look for a new job; why is he allowed to go to look for a new wife? He is more and more compelled to recognise a Moslem code about liquor; why is it made so easy for him to escape from his old Christian code about sex? What is the meaning of this mysterious immunity, this special permit for adultery; and why is running away with his neighbour's wife to be the only exhilaration still left open to him? Why must he love as he pleases; when he may not even live as he pleases?

The answer is, I regret to say, that this social campaign, in most though by no means all of its most prominent campaigners, relies in this matter on a very smug and pestilent piece of cant. There are some advocates of democratic divorce who are really advocates of general democratic freedom; but they are the exceptions; I might say, with all respect, that they are the dupes. The omnipresence of the thing in the press and in political society is due to a motive precisely opposite to the motive professed. The modern rulers, who are simply the rich men, are really quite consistent in their attitude to the poor man. It is the same spirit which takes away his children under the pretence of order, which takes away his wife under the pretence of liberty. That which wishes, in the words of the comic song, to break up the happy home, is primarily anxious not to break up the much more unhappy factory. Capitalism, of course, is at war with the family, for the same reason which has led to its being at war with the Trade Union. This indeed is the only sense in which it is true that capitalism is connected with individualism. Capitalism believes in collectivism for itself and individualism for its enemies. It desires its victims to be individuals, or (in other words) to be atoms. For the word atom, in its clearest meaning (which is none too clear) might be translated as "individual." If there be any bond, if there be any brotherhood, if there be any class loyalty or domestic discipline, by which the poor can help the poor, these emancipators will certainly strive to loosen that bond or lift that discipline in the most liberal fashion. If there be such a brotherhood, these individualists will redistribute it in the form of individuals; or in other words smash it to atoms.

The masters of modern plutocracy know what they are about. They are making no mistake; they can be cleared of the slander of inconsistency. A very profound and precise instinct has let them to single out the human household as the chief obstacle to their inhuman progress. Without the family we are helpless before the State, which in our modern case is the Servile State. To use a military metaphor, the family is the only formation in which the charge of the rich can be repulsed. It is a force that forms twos as soldiers form fours; and, in every peasant country, has stood in the square house or the square plot of land as infantry have stood in squares against cavalry. How this force operates this, and why, I will try to explain in the last of these articles. But it is when it is most nearly ridden down by the horsemen of pride and privilege, as in Poland or Ireland, when the battle grows most desperate and the hope most dark, that men begin to understand why that wild oath in its beginnings was flung beyond the bonds of the world; and what would seem as passing as a vision is made permanent as a vow.

III

THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE (3)

There has long been a curiously consistent attempt to conceal the fact that France is a Christian country. There have been Frenchmen in the plot, no doubt, and no doubt there have been Frenchmen — though I have myself only found Englishmen — in the derivative attempt to conceal the fact that Balzac was a Christian writer. I began to read Balzac long after I had read the admirers of Balzac; and they had never given me a hint of this truth. I had read that his books were bound in yellow and "quite impudently French"; though I may have been cloudy about why being French should be impudent in a Frenchman. I had read the truer description of "the grimy wizard of the Comedie Humaine," and have lived to learn the truth of it; Balzac certainly is a genius of the type of that artist he himself describes, who could draw a broomstick so that one knew it had swept the room after a murder. The furniture of Balzac is more alive than the figures of many dramas. For this I was prepared; but not for a certain spiritual assumption which I recognised at once as a historical phenomenon. The morality of a great writer is not the morality he teaches, but the morality he takes for granted. The Catholic type of Christian ethics runs through Balzac's books, exactly as the Puritan type of Christian ethics runs through Bunyan's books. What his professed opinions were I do not know, any more than I know Shakespeare's; but I know that both those great creators of a multitudinous world made it, as compared with other and later writers, on the same fundamental moral plan as the universe of Dante. There can be no doubt about it for any one who can apply as a test the truth I have mentioned; that the fundamental things in a man are not the things he explains, but rather the things he forgets to explain. But here and there Balzac does explain; and with that intellectual concentration Mr. George Moore has acutely observed in that novelist when he is a theorist. And the other day I found in one of Balzac's novels this passage; which, whether or no it would precisely hit Mr. George Moore's mood at this moment, strikes me as a perfect prophecy of this epoch, and might also be a motto for this book: "With the solidarity of the family society has lost that elemental force which Montesquieu defined and called ‘honour.’ Society has isolated its members the better to govern them, and has divided in order to weaken.”

Throughout our youth and the years before the War, the current criticism followed Ibsen in describing the domestic system as a doll’s house and the domestic woman as a doll. Mr. Bernard Shaw varied the metaphor by saying that mere custom kept the woman in the home as it keeps the parrot in the cage; and the plays and tales of the period made vivid sketches of a woman who also resembled a parrot in other particulars, rich in raiment, shrill in accent and addicted to saying over and over again what she had been taught to say. Mr. Granville Barker, the spiritual child of Mr. Bernard Shaw, commented in his clever play of “The Voysey Inheritance” on tyranny, hypocrisy and boredom, as the constituent elements of a “happy English home.” Leaving the truth of this aside for the moment, it will be well to insist that the conventionality thus criticised would be even more characteristic of a happy French home. It is not the Englishman’s house, but the Frenchman’s house that is his castle. It might be further added, touching the essential ethical view of the sexes at least, that the Irishman’s house is his castle; though it has been for some centuries a besieged castle. Anyhow, those conventions which were remarked as making domesticity dull, narrow and unnaturally meek and submissive, are particularly powerful among the Irish and the French. From this it will surely be easy, for any lucid and logical thinker, to deduce the fact that the French are dull and narrow, and that the Irish are unnaturally meek and submissive. Mr. Bernard Shaw, being an Irishman who lives among English men, may be conveniently taken as the type of the difference; and it will no doubt be found that the political friends of Mr. Shaw, among Englishmen, will be of a wilder revolutionary type than those whom he would have found among Irishmen. We are in a position to compare the meekness of the Fenians with the fury of the Fabians. This deadening monogamic ideal may even, in a larger sense define and distinguish all the flat subserviency of Clare from all the flaming revolt of Clapham. Nor need we now look far to understand why revolutions have been unknown in the history of France; or why they happen so persistently in the vaguer politics of England. This rigidity and respectability must surely be the explanation of all that incapacity for any civil experiment or explosion, which has always marked that sleepy hamlet of very private houses which we call the city of Paris. But the same things are true not only of Parisians but of peasants; they are even true of other peasants in the great Alliance. Students of Serbian traditions tell us that the peasant literature lays a special and singular curse on the violation of marriage; and this may well explain the prim and sheepish pacifism complained of in that people.

In plain words, there is clearly something wrong in the calculation by which it was proved that a housewife must be as much a servant as a housemaid; or which exhibited the domesticated man as being as gentle as the primrose or as conservative as the Primrose League. It is precisely those who have been conservative about the family who have been revolutionary about the state. Those who are blamed for the bigotry or bourgeois smugness of their marriage conventions are actually those blamed for the restlessness and violence of their political reforms. Nor is there seriously any difficulty in discovering the cause of this. It is simply that in such a society the government, in dealing with the family, deals with something almost as permanent and self-renewing as itself. There can be a continuous family policy, like a continuous foreign policy. In peasant countries the family fights, it may almost be said that the farm fights. I do not mean merely that it riots in evil and exceptional times; though this is not unimportant. It was a savage but a sane feature when, in the Irish evictions, the women poured hot water from the windows; it was part of a final falling back on private tools as public weapons. That sort of thing is not only war to the knife, but almost war to the fork and spoon. It was in this grim sense perhaps that Parnell, in that mysterious pun, said that Kettle was a household word in Ireland (it certainly ought to be after its subsequent glories), and in a more general sense it is certain that meddling with the housewife will ultimately mean getting into hot water. But it is not of such crises of bodily struggle that I speak, but of a steady and peaceful pressure from below of a thousand families upon the framework of government. For this a certain spirit of defence and enclosure is essential; and even feudalism was right in feeling that any such affair of honour must be a family affair. It was a true artistic instinct that pictured the pedigree on a coat that protects the body. The free peasant has arms if he has not armorial bearings. He has not an escutcheon; but he has a shield. Nor do I see why, in a freer and happier society than the present, or even the past, it should not be a blazoned shield. For that is true of pedigree which is true of property; the wrong is not in its being imposed on men, but rather in its being denied to them. Too much capitalism does not mean too many capitalists, but too few capitalists; and so aristocracy sins not in planting a family tree, but in not planting a family forest.

Anyhow, it is found in practice that the domestic citizen can stand a siege, even by the State; because he has those who will stand by him through thick and thin — especially thin. Now those who hold that the State can be made fit to own all and administer all, can consistently disregard this argument; but it may be said with all respect that the world is more and more disregarding them. If we could find a perfect machine, and a perfect man to work it, it might be a good argument for State Socialism, though an equally good argument for personal despotism. But most of us, I fancy, are now agreed that something of that social pressure from below which we call freedom is vital to the health of the State; and this it is which cannot be fully exercised by individuals, but only by groups and traditions. Such groups have been many; there have been monasteries; there may be guilds; but there is only one type among them which all human beings have a spontaneous and omnipresent inspiration to build for themselves; and this type is the family.

I had intended this article to be the last of those outlining the elements of this debate; but I shall have to add a short concluding section on the way in which all this is missed in the practical (or rather unpractical) proposals about divorce. Here I will only say that they suffer from the modern and morbid weaknesses of always sacrificing the normal to the abnormal. As a fact the "tyranny, hypocrisy and boredom" complained of are not domesticity, but the decay of domesticity. The case of that particular complaint, in Mr. Granville Barker's play, is itself a proof. The whole point of "The Voysey Inheritance" was that there was no Voysey inheritance. The only heritage of that family was a highly dishonourable debt. Naturally their family affections had decayed when their whole ideal of property and probity had decayed; and there was little love as well as little honour among thieves. It has yet to be proved that they would have been as much bored if they had had a positive and not a negative heritage; and had worked a farm instead of a fraud. And the experience of mankind points the other way.

IV

THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE (4)

I have touched before now on a famous or infamous Royalist who suggested that the people should eat grass; an unfortunate remark perhaps for a Royalist to make; since the regimen is only recorded of a Royal Personage. But there was certainly a simplicity in the solution worthy of a sultan or even a savage chief; and it is this touch of autocratic innocence on which I have mainly insisted touching the social reforms of our day, and especially the social reform known as divorce. I am primarily more concerned with the arbitrary method than with the anarchic result. Very much as the old tyrant would turn any number of men out to grass, so the new tyrant would turn any number of women into grass-widows. Anyhow, to vary the legendary symbolism, it never seems to occur to the king in this fairy tale that the gold crown on his head is a less, and not a more, sacred and settled ornament than the gold ring on the woman’s finger. This change is being achieved by the summary and even secret government which we now suffer; and this would be the first point against it, even if it were really an emancipation; and it is only in form an emancipation. I will not anticipate the details of its defence, which can be offered by others, but I will here conclude for the present by roughly suggesting the practical defences of divorce, as generally given just at present, under four heads. And I will only ask the reader to note that they all have one thing in common; the fact that each argument is also used for all that social reform which plain men are already calling slavery.

First, it is very typical of the latest practical proposals that they are concerned with the case of those who are already separated, and the steps they must take to be divorced. There is a spirit penetrating all our society to-day by which the exception is allowed to alter the rule; the exile to deflect patriotism, the orphan to depose parenthood, and even the widow or, in this case as we have seen the grass widow, to destroy the position of the wife. There is a sort of symbol of this tendency in that mysterious and unfortunate nomadic nation which has been allowed to alter so many things, from a crusade in Russia to a cottage in South Bucks. We have been told to treat the wandering Jew as a pilgrim, while we still treat the wandering

Christian as a vagabond. And yet the latter is at least trying to get home, like Ulysses; whereas the former is, if anything, rather fleeing from home, like Cain. He who is detached, disgruntled, non descript, intermediate is everywhere made the excuse for altering what is common, corporate, traditional and popular. And the alteration is always for the worse. The mermaid never becomes more womanly, but only more fishy. The centaur never becomes more manly, but only more horsy. The Jew cannot really internationalise Christendom; he can only denationalise Christendom. The proletarian does not find it easy to become a small proprietor; he is finding it far easier to become a slave. So the unfortunate man, who cannot tolerate the woman he has chosen from all the women in the world, is not encouraged to return to her and tolerate her, but encouraged to choose another woman whom he may in due course refuse to tolerate. And in all these cases the argument is the same; that the man in the intermediate state is unhappy. Probably he is unhappy, since he is abnormal; but the point is that he is permitted to loosen the universal bond which has kept millions of others normal. Because he has himself got into a hole, he is allowed to burrow in it like a rabbit and undermine a whole countryside.

Next we have, as we always have touching such crude experiments, an argument from the example of other countries, and especially of new countries. Thus the Eugenists tell me solemnly that there have been very successful Eugenic experiments in America. And they rigidly retain their solemnity (while refusing with many rebukes to believe in mine) when I tell them that one of the Eugenic experiments in America is a chemical experiment; which consists of changing a black man into the allotropic form of white ashes. It is really an exceedingly Eugenic experiment; since its chief object is to discourage an inter-racial mixture of blood which is not desired. But I do not like this American experiment, however American; and I trust and believe that it is not typically American at all. It represents, I conceive, only one element in the complexity of the great democracy; and goes along with other evil elements; so that I am not at all surprised that the same strange social sections, which permit a human being to be burned alive, also permit the exalted science of Eugenics. It is the same in the milder matter of liquor laws; and we are told that certain rather crude colonials have established prohibition Laws, which they try to evade; just as we are told they have established divorce laws, which they are now trying to repeal. For in this case of divorce, at least, the argument from distant precedents has recoiled crushingly upon itself. There is already an agitation for less divorce in America, even while there is an agitation for more divorce in England.

Again, when an argument is based on a need of population, it will be well if those supporting it realise where it may carry them. It is exceedingly doubtful whether population is one of the advantages of divorce; but there is no doubt that it is one of the advantages of polygamy. It is already used in Germany as an argument for polygamy. But the very word will teach us to look even beyond Germany for something yet more remote and repulsive. Mere population, along with a sort of polygamous anarchy, will not appear even as a practical ideal to any one who considers, for instance, how consistently Europe has held the headship of the human race, in face of the chaotic myriads of Asia. If population were the chief test of progress and efficiency, China would long ago have proved itself the most progressive and efficient state. De Quincey summed up the whole of that enormous situation in a sentence which is perhaps more impressive and even appalling than all the perspectives of orient architecture and vistas of opium vision in the midst of which it comes. "Man is a weed in those regions." Many Europeans, fearing for the garden of the world, have fancied that in some future fatality those weeds may spring up and choke it. But no Europeans have really wished that the flowers should become like the weeds. Even if it were true, therefore, that the loosening of the tie necessarily increased the population; even if this were not contradicted, as it is, by the facts of many countries, we should have strong historical grounds for not accepting the deduction. We should still be suspicious of the paradox that we may encourage large families by abolishing the family.

Lastly, I believe it is part of the defence of the new proposal that even its defenders have found its principle a little too crude. I hear they have added provisions which modify the principle; and which seem to be in substance, first, that a man shall be made responsible for a money payment to the wife he deserts, and second, that the matter shall once again be submitted in some fashion to some magistrate. For my purpose here, it is enough to note that there is something of the unmistakable savour of the sociology we resist, in these two touching acts of faith, in a cheque-book and in a lawyer. Most of the fashionable reformers of marriage would be faintly shocked at any suggestion that a poor old charwoman might possibly refuse such money, or that a good kind magistrate might not have the right to give such advice. For the reformers of marriage are very respectable people, with some honourable exceptions; and nothing could fit more smoothly into the rather greasy groove of their respectability than the suggestion that treason is best treated with the damages, gentlemen, heavy damages, of Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz; or that tragedy is best treated by the spiritual arbitrament of Mr. Nupkins.

One word should be added to this hasty sketch of the elements of the case. I have deliberately left out the loftiest aspect and argument, that which sees marriage as a divine institution; and that for the logical reason that those who believe in this would not believe in divorce; and I am arguing with those who do believe in divorce. I do not ask them to assume the worth of my creed or any creed; and I could wish they did not so often ask me to assume the worth of their worthless, poisonous plutocratic modern society. But if it could be shown, as I think it can, that a long historical view and a patient political experience can at last accumulate solid scientific evidence of the vital need of such a vow, then I can conceive no more tremendous tribute than this, to any faith, which made a flaming affirmation from the darkest beginnings, of what the latest enlightenment can only slowly discover in the end.

V

THE STORY OF THE FAMILY

The most ancient of human institutions has an authority that may seem as wild as anarchy. Alone among all such institutions it begins with a spontaneous attraction; and may be said strictly and not sentimentally to be founded on love instead of fear. The attempt to compare it with coercive institutions complicating later history has led to infinite illogicality in later times. It is as unique as it is universal. There is nothing in any other social relations in any way parallel to the mutual attraction of the sexes. By missing this simple point, the modern world has fallen into a hundred follies. The idea of a general revolt of women against men has been proclaimed with flags and processions, like a revolt of vassals against their lords, of niggers against nigger-drivers, of Poles against Prussians or Irishmen against Englishmen; for all the world as if we really believed in the fabulous nation of the Amazons. The equally philosophical idea of a general revolt of men against women has been put into a romance by Sir Walter Besant, and into a sociological book by Mr. Belfort Bax. But at the first touch of this truth of an aboriginal attraction, all such comparisons collapse and are seen to be comic. A Prussian does not feel from the first that he can only be happy if he spends his days and nights with a Pole. An Englishman does not think his house empty and cheerless unless it happens to contain an Irishman. A white man does not in his romantic youth dream of the perfect beauty of a black man. A railway magnate seldom writes poems about the personal fascination of a railway porter. All the other revolts against all the other relations are reasonable and even inevitable, because those relations are originally only founded upon force or self interest. Force can abolish what force can establish; self-interest can terminate a contract when self-interest has dictated the contract. But the love of man and woman is not an institution that can be abolished, or a contract that can be terminated. It is something older than all institutions or contracts, and something that is certain to outlast them all. All the other revolts are real, because there remains a possibility that the things may be destroyed, or at least divided. You can abolish capitalists; but you cannot abolish males. Prussians can go out of Poland or negroes can be repatriated to Africa; but a man and a woman must remain together in one way or another; and must learn to put up with each other somehow.

These are very simple truths; that is why nobody nowadays seems to take any particular notice of them; and the truth that follows next is equally obvious. There is no dispute about the purpose of Nature in creating such an attraction. It would be more intelligent to call it the purpose of God; for Nature can have no purpose unless God is behind it. To talk of the purpose of Nature is to make a vain attempt to avoid being anthropomorphic, merely by being feminist. It is believing in a goddess because you are too sceptical to believe in a god. But this is a controversy which can be kept apart from the question, if we content ourselves with saying that the vital value ultimately found in this attraction is, of course, the renewal of the race itself. The child is an explanation of the father and mother and the fact that it is a human child is the explanation of the ancient human ties connecting the father and mother. The more human, that is the less bestial, is the child, the more lawful and lasting are the ties. So far from any progress in culture or the sciences tending to loosen the bond, any such progress must logically tend to tighten it. The more things there are for the child to learn, the longer he must remain at the natural school for learning them; and the longer his teachers must at least postpone the dissolution of their partnership. This elementary truth is hidden to-day in vast masses of vicarious, indirect and artificial work, with the fundamental fallacy of which I shall deal in a moment. Here I speak of the primary position of the human group, as it has stood through unthinkable ages of waxing and waning civilisations; often unable to delegate any of its work, always unable to delegate all of it. In this, I repeat, it will always be necessary for the two teachers to remain together, in proportion as they have anything to teach. One of the shapeless sea-beasts, that merely detaches itself from its offspring and floats away, could float away to a submarine divorce court, or an advanced club founded on free-love for fishes. The sea-beast might do this, precisely because the sea beast’s offspring need do nothing; because it has not got to learn the polka or the multiplication table. All these are truisms but they are also truths, and truths that will return; for the present tangle of semi-official substitutes is not only a stop-gap, but one that is not big enough to stop the gap. If people cannot mind their own business, it cannot possibly be made economical to pay them to mind each other’s business; and still less to mind each other’s babies. It is simply throwing away a natural force and then paying for an artificial force; as if a man were to water a plant with a hose while holding up an umbrella to protect it from the rain. The whole really rests on a plutocratic illusion of an infinite supply of servants. When we offer any other system as a "career for women," we are really proposing that an infinite number of them should become servants, of a plutocratic or bureaucratic sort. Ultimately, we are arguing that a woman should not be a mother to her own baby, but a nursemaid to somebody else's baby. But it will not work, even on paper. We cannot all live by taking in each other's washing, especially in the form of pinafores. In the last resort, the only people who either can or will give individual care, to each of the individual children, are their individual parents. The expression as applied to those dealing with changing crowds of children is a graceful and legitimate flourish of speech.

This triangle of truisms, of father, mother and child, cannot be destroyed; it can only destroy those civilisations which disregard it. Most modern reformers are merely bottomless sceptics, and have no basis on which to rebuild; and it is well that such reformers should realise that there is something they cannot reform. You can put down the mighty from their seat; you can turn the world upside down, and there is much to be said for the view that it may then be the right way up. But you cannot create a world in which the baby carries the mother. You cannot create a world in which the mother has not authority over the baby. You can waste your time in trying, by giving votes to babies or proclaiming a republic of infants in arms. You can say, as an educationist said the other day, that small children should "criticise, question authority and suspend their judgment." I do not know why he did not go on to say that they should earn their own living, pay income tax to the state, and die in battle for the fatherland; for the proposal evidently is that children shall have no childhood. But you can, if you find entertainment in such games, organise "representative government" among little boys and girls, and tell them to take their legal and constitutional responsibilities as seriously as possible. In short, you can be crazy; but you cannot be consistent. You cannot really carry your own principle back to the aboriginal group, and really apply it to the mother and the baby. You will not act on your own theory in the simplest and most practical of all possible cases. You are not quite so mad as that.

This nucleus of natural authority has always existed in the midst of more artificial authorities. It has always been regarded as something in the literal sense individual; that is, as an absolute that could not really be divided. A baby was not even a baby apart from its mother; it was something else, most probably a corpse. It was always recognised as standing in a peculiar relation to government; simply because it was one of the few things that had not been made by government; and could to some extent come into existence with out the support of government. Indeed the case for it is too strong to be stated. For the case for it is that there is nothing like it; and we can only find faint parallels to it in those more elaborate and painful powers and institutions that are its inferiors. Thus the only way of conveying it is to compare it to a nation; although, compared to it, national divisions are as modern and formal as national anthems. Thus I may often use the metaphor of a city; though in its presence a citizen is as recent as a city clerk. It is enough to note here that everybody does know by intuition and admit by implication that a family is a solid fact, having a character and colour like a nation. The truth can be tested by the most modern and most daily experiences. A man does say "That is the sort of thing the Browns will like"; however tangled and interminable a psychological novel he might compose on the shades of difference between Mr. and Mrs. Brown. A woman does say "I don't like Jemima seeing so much of the Robinsons"; and she does not always, in the scurry of her social or domestic duties, pause to distinguish the optimistic materialism of Mrs. Robinson from the more acid cynicism which tinges the hedonism of Mr. Robinson. There is a colour of the household inside, as conspicuous as the colour of the house outside. That colour is a blend, and if any tint in it predominate it is generally that preferred by Mrs. Robinson. But, like all composite colours, it is a separate colour; as separate as green is from blue and yellow. Every marriage is a sort of wild balance; and in every case the compromise is as unique as an eccentricity. Philanthropists walking in the slums often see the compromise in the street, and mistake it for a fight. When they interfere, they are thoroughly thumped by both parties; and serve them right, for not respecting the very institution that brought them into the world.

The first thing to see is that this enormous normality is like a mountain; and one that is capable of being a volcano. Every abnormality that is now opposed to it is like a mole-hill; and the earnest sociological organisers of it are exceedingly like moles. But the mountain is a volcano in another sense also; as suggested in that tradition of the southern fields fertilised by lava. It has a creative as well as a destructive side; and it only remains, in this part of the analysis, to note the political effect of this extra-political institution, and the political ideals of which it has been the champion; and perhaps the only permanent champion.

The ideal for which it stands in the state is liberty. It stands for liberty for the very simple reason with which this rough analysis started. It is the only one of these institutions that is at once necessary and voluntary. It is the only check on the state that is bound to renew itself as eternally as the state, and more naturally than the state. Every sane man recognises that unlimited liberty is, anarchy, or rather is nonentity. The civic idea of liberty is to give the citizen a province of liberty; a limitation within which a citizen is a king. This is the only way in which truth can ever find refuge from public persecution, and the good man survive the bad government. But the good man by himself is no match for the city. There must be balanced against it another ideal institution, and in that sense an immortal institution. So long as the state is the only ideal institution the state will call on the citizen to sacrifice himself, and therefore will not have the smallest scruple in sacrificing the citizen. The state consists of coercion; and must always be justified from its own point of view in extending the bounds of coercion; as, for instance, in the case of conscription. The only thing that can be set up to check or challenge this authority is a voluntary law and a voluntary loyalty. That loyalty is the protection of liberty, in the only sphere where liberty can fully dwell. It is a principle of the constitution that the King never dies. It is the whole principle of the family that the citizen never dies. There must be a heraldry and heredity of freedom; a tradition of resistance to tyranny. A man must be not only free, but free-born.

Indeed, there is something in the family that might loosely be called anarchist; and more correctly called amateur. As there seems something almost vague about its voluntary origin, so there seems something vague about its voluntary organisation. The most vital function it performs, perhaps the most vital function that anything can perform, is that of education; but its type of early education is far too essential to be mistaken for instruction. In a thousand things it works rather by rule of thumb than rule of theory. To take a commonplace and even comic example, I doubt if any text-book or code of rules has ever contained any directions about standing a child in a corner. Doubtless when the modern process is complete, and the coercive principle of the state has entirely extinguished the voluntary element of the family, there will be some exact regulation or restriction about the matter. Possibly it will say that the corner must be an angle of at least ninety-five degrees. Possibly it will say that the converging line of any ordinary corner tends to make a child squint. In fact I am certain that if I said casually, at a sufficient number of tea-tables, that corners made children squint, it would rapidly become a universally received dogma of popular science. For the modern world will accept no dogmas upon any authority; but it will accept any dogmas on no authority. Say that a thing is so, according to the Pope or the Bible, and it will be dismissed as a superstition without examination. But preface your remark merely with “they say” or “don’t you know that?” or try (and fail) to remember the name of some professor mentioned in some newspaper; and the keen rationalism of the modern mind will accept every word you say. This parenthesis is not so irrelevant as it may appear, for it will be well to remember that when a rigid officialism breaks in upon the voluntary compromises of the home, that officialism itself will be only rigid in its action and will be exceedingly limp in its thought. Intellectually it will be at least as vague as the amateur arrangements of the home, and the only difference is that the domestic arrangements are in the only real sense practical, that is, they are founded on experiences that have been suffered. The others are what is now generally called scientific; that is, they are founded on experiments that have not yet been made. As a matter of fact, instead of invading the family with the blundering bureaucracy that mismanages the public services, it would be far more philosophical to work the reform the other way round. It would be really quite as reasonable to alter the laws of the nation so as to resemble the laws of the nursery. The punishments would be far less horrible, far more humorous, and far more really calculated to make men feel they had made fools of themselves. It would be a pleasant change if a judge, instead of putting on the black cap, had to put on the dunce’s cap; or if we could stand a financier in his own corner.

Of course this opinion is rare, and reactionary — whatever that may mean. Modern education is founded on the principle that a parent is more likely to be cruel than anybody else. It passes over the obvious fact that he is less likely to be cruel than anybody else. Anybody may happen to be cruel; but the first chances of cruelty come with the whole colourless and indifferent crowd of total strangers and mechanical mercenaries, whom it is now the custom to call in as infallible agents of improvement; policemen, doctors, detectives, inspectors, instructors, and so on. They are automatically given arbitrary power because there are here and there such things as criminal parents; as if there were no such things as criminal doctors or criminal school-masters. A mother is not always judicious about her child's diet, so it is given into the control of Dr. Crippen. A father is thought not to teach his sons the purest morality; so they are put under the tutorship of Eugene Aram. These celebrated criminals are no more rare in their respective professions than the cruel parents are in the profession of parenthood. But indeed the case is far stronger than this; and there is no need to rely on the case of such criminals at all. The ordinary weaknesses of human nature will explain all the weaknesses of bureaucracy and business government all over the world. The official need only be an ordinary man to be more indifferent to other people's children than to his own; and even to sacrifice other people's family prosperity to his own. He may be bored; he may be bribed; he may be brutal, for any one of the thousand reasons that ever made a man a brute. All this elementary common sense is entirely left out of account in our educational and social systems of today. It is assumed that the hireling will not flee, and that solely because he is a hireling. It is denied that the shepherd will lay down his life for the sheep; or for that matter, even that the she-wolf will fight for the cubs. We are to believe that mothers are inhuman; but not that officials are human. There are unnatural parents, but there are no natural passions; at least, there are none where the fury of King Lear dared to find them — in the beadle. Such is the latest light on the education of the young; and the same principle that is applied to the child is applied to the husband and wife. Just as it assumes that a child will certainly be loved by anybody except his mother, so it assumes that a man can be happy with anybody except the one woman he has himself chosen for his wife.

Thus the coercive spirit of the state prevails over the free promise of the family, in the shape of formal officialism. But this is not the most coercive of the coercive elements in the modern commonwealth. An even more rigid and ruthless external power is that of industrial employment and unemployment. An even more ferocious enemy of the family is the factory. Between these modern mechanical things the ancient natural institution is not being reformed or modified or even cut down; it is being torn in pieces. It is not only being torn in pieces in the sense of a true metaphor, like a living thing caught in a hideous clockwork of manufacture. It is being literally torn in pieces, in that the husband may go to one factory, the wife to another, and the child to a third. Each will become the servant of a separate financial group, which is more and more gaining the political power of a feudal group. But whereas feudalism received the loyalty of families, the lords of the new servile state will receive only the loyalty of individuals; that is, of lonely men and even of lost children.

It is sometimes said that Socialism attacks the family; which is founded on little beyond the accident that some Socialists believe in free-love. I have been a Socialist, and I am no longer a Socialist, and at no time did I believe in free-love. It is true, I think in a large and unconscious sense, that State Socialism encourages the general coercive claim I have been considering. But if it be true that Socialism attacks the family in theory, it is far more certain that Capitalism attacks it in practice. It is a paradox, but a plain fact, that men never notice a thing as long as it exists in practice. Men who will note a heresy will ignore an abuse. Let any one who doubts the paradox imagine the newspapers formally printing along with the Honours' List a price list, for peerages and knighthoods; though everybody knows they are bought and sold. So the factory is destroying the family in fact; and need depend on no poor mad theorist who dreams of destroying it in fancy. And what is destroying it is nothing so plausible as free love; but something rather to be described as an enforced fear. It is economic punishment more terrible than legal punishment, which may yet land us in slavery as the only safety.

From its first days in the forest this human group had to fight against wild monsters; and so it is now fighting against these wild machines. It only managed to survive then, and it will only manage to survive now, by a strong internal sanctity; a tacit oath or dedication deeper than that of the city or the tribe. But though this silent promise was always present, it took at a certain turning point of our history a special form which I shall try to sketch in the next chapter. That turning point was the creation of Christendom by the religion which created it. Nothing will destroy the sacred triangle; and even the Christian faith, the most amazing revolution that ever took place in the mind, served only in a sense to turn that triangle upside down. It held up a mystical mirror in which the order of the three things was reversed; and added a holy family of child, mother and father to the human family of father, mother and child.

VI

THE STORY OF THE VOW

Charles Lamb, with his fine fantastic instinct for combinations that are also contrasts, has noted somewhere a contrast between St. Valentine and valentines. There seems a comic incongruity in such lively and frivolous flirtations still depending on the date and title of an ascetic and celibate bishop of the Dark Ages. The paradox lends itself to his treatment, and there is a truth in his view of it. Perhaps it may seem even more of a paradox to say there is no paradox. In such cases unification appears more provocative than division; and it may seem idly contradictory to deny the contradiction. And yet in truth there is no contradiction. In the deepest sense there is a very real similarity, which puts St. Valentine and his valentines on one side, and most of the modern world on the other. I should hesitate to ask even a German professor to collect, collate and study carefully all the valentines in the world, with the object of tracing a philosophical principle running through them. But if he did, I have no doubt about the philosophic principle he would find. However trivial, however imbecile, however vulgar or vapid or stereotyped the imagery of such things might be, it would always involve one idea, the same idea that makes lovers laboriously chip their initials on a tree or a rock, in a sort of monogram of monogamy. It may be a cockney trick to tie one's love on a tree; though Orlando did it, and would now doubtless be arrested by the police for breaking the byelaws of the Forest of Arden. I am not here concerned especially to commend the habit of cutting one's own name and private address in large letters on the front of the Parthenon, across the face of the Sphinx, or in any other nook or corner where it may chance to arrest the sentimental interest of posterity. But like many other popular things, of the sort that can generally be found in Shakespeare, there is a meaning in it that would probably be missed by a less popular poet, like Shelley. There is a very permanent truth in the fact that two free persons deliberately tie themselves to a log of wood. And it is the idea of tying oneself to something that runs through all this old amorous allegory like a pattern of fetters. There is always the notion of hearts chained together, or skewered together, or in some manner secured; there is a security that can only be called captivity. That it frequently fails to secure itself has nothing to do with the present point. The point is that every philosophy of sex must fail, which does not account for its ambition of fixity, as well as for its experience of failure. There is nothing to make Orlando commit himself on the sworn evidence of the nearest tree. He is not bound to be bound; he is under constraint, but nobody constrains him to be under constraint. In short, Orlando took a vow to marry precisely as Valentine took a vow not to marry. Nor could any ascetic, without being a heretic, have asserted in the wildest reactions of asceticism, that the vow of Orlando was not lawful as well as the vow of Valentine. But it is a notable fact that even when it was not lawful, it was still a vow. Through all that mediaeval culture, which has left us the legend of romance, there ran this pattern of a chain, which was felt as binding even where it ought not to bind. The lawless loves of mediaeval legends all have their own law, and especially their own loyalty, as in the tales of Tristram or Lancelot. In this sense we might say that mediaeval profligacy was more fixed than modern marriage. I am not here discussing either modern or mediaeval ethics, in the matter of what they did say or ought to say of such things. I am only noting as a historical fact the insistence of the mediaeval imagination, even at its wildest, upon one particular idea. That idea is the idea of the vow. It might be the vow which St. Valentine took; it might be a lesser vow which he regarded as lawful; it might be a wild vow which he regarded as quite lawless. But the whole society which made such festivals and bequeathed to us such traditions was full of the idea of vows; and we must recognise this notion, even if we think it nonsensical, as the note of the whole civilisation. And Valentine and the valentine both express it for us; even more if we feel them both as exaggerated, or even as exaggerating opposites. Those extremes meet; and they meet in the same place. Their trysting place is by the tree on which the lover hung his love-letters. And even if the lover hung himself on the tree, instead of his literary compositions, even that act had about it also an indefinable flavour of finality.

It is often said by the critics of Christian origins that certain ritual feasts, processions or dances are really of pagan origin. They might as well say that our legs are of pagan origin. Nobody ever disputed that humanity was human before it was Christian; and no Church manufactured the legs with which men walked or danced, either in a pilgrimage or a ballet. What can really be maintained, so as to carry not a little conviction, is this: that where such a Church has existed it has preserved not only the processions but the dances; not only the cathedral but the carnival. One of the chief claims of Christian civilisation is to have preserved things of pagan origin. In short, in the old religious countries men continue to dance; while in the new scientific cities they are often content to drudge.

But when this saner view of history is realised, there does remain something more mystical and difficult to define. Even heathen things are Christian when they have been preserved by Christianity. Chivalry is something recognisably different even from the virtus of Virgil. Charity is something exceedingly different from the plain pity of Homer. Even our patriotism is something more subtle than the undivided love of the city; and the change is felt in the most permanent things, such as the love of landscape or the love of woman. To define the differentiation in all these things will always be hopelessly difficult. But I would here suggest one element in the change which is perhaps too much neglected; which at any rate ought not to be neglected; the nature of a vow. I might express it by saying that pagan antiquity was the age of status; that Christian mediaevalism was the age of vows; and that sceptical modernity has been the age of contracts; or rather has tried to be, and has failed.

The outstanding example of status was slavery. Needless to say slavery does not mean tyranny; indeed it need only be regarded relatively to other things to be regarded as charity. The idea of slavery is that large numbers of men are meant and made to do the heavy work of the world, and that others, while taking the margin of profits, must nevertheless support them while they do it. The point is not whether the work is excessive or moderate, or whether the condition is comfortable or uncomfortable. The point is that his work is chosen for the man, his status fixed for the man; and this status is forced on him by law. As Mr. Balfour said about Socialism, that is slavery and nothing else is slavery. The slave might well be, and often was, far more comfortable than the average free labourer, and certainly far more lazy than the average peasant. He was a slave because he had not reached his position by choice, or promise, or bargain, but merely by status.

It is admitted that when Christianity had been for some time at work in the world, this ancient servile status began in some mysterious manner to disappear. I suggest here that one of the forms which the new spirit took was the importance of the vow. Feudalism, for instance, differed from slavery chiefly because feudalism was a vow. The vassal put his hands in those of his lord, and vowed to be his man; but there was an accent on the noun substantive as well as on the possessive pronoun. By swearing to be his man, he proved he was not his chattel. Nobody exacts a promise from a pickaxe, or expects a poker to swear everlasting friendship with the tongs. Nobody takes the word of a spade; and nobody ever took the word of a slave. It marks at least a special stage of transition that the form of freedom was essential to the fact of service, or even of servitude. In this way it is not a coincidence that the word homage actually means manhood. And if there was vow instead of status even in the static parts of Feudalism, it is needless to say that there was a wilder luxuriance of vows in the more adventurous part of it. The whole of what we call chivalry was one great vow. Vows of chivalry varied infinitely from the most solid to the most fantastic; from a vow to give all the spoils of conquest to the poor to a vow to refrain from shaving until the first glimpse of Jerusalem. As I have remarked, this rule of loyalty, even in the unruly exceptions which proved the rule, ran through all the romances and songs of the troubadours; and there were always vows even when they were very far from being marriage vows. The idea is as much present in what they called the Gay Science, of love, as in what they called the Divine Science, of theology. The modern reader will smile at the mention of these things as sciences; and will turn to the study of sociology, ethnology and psycho-analysis; for if these are sciences (about which I would not divulge a doubt) at least nobody would insult them by calling them either gay or divine.

I mean here to emphasise the presence, and not even to settle the proportion, of this new notion in the middle ages. But the critic will be quite wrong if he thinks it enough to answer that all these things affected only a cultured class, not corresponding to the servile class of antiquity. When we come to workmen and small tradesmen, we find the same vague yet vivid presence of the spirit that can only be called the vow. In this sense there was a chivalry of trades as well as a chivalry of orders of knighthood; just as there was a heraldry of shop-signs as well as a heraldry of shields. Only it happens that in the enlightenment and liberation of the sixteenth century, the heraldry of the rich was preserved, and the heraldry of the poor destroyed. And there is a sinister symbolism in the fact that almost the only emblem still hung above a shop is that of the three balls of Lombardy. Of all those democratic glories nothing can now glitter in the sun; except the sign of the golden usury that has devoured them all. The point here, however, is that the trade or craft had not only something like the crest, but something like the vow of knighthood. There was in the position of the guildsman the same basic notion that belonged to knights and even to monks. It was the notion of the free choice of a fixed estate. We can realise the moral atmosphere if we compare the system of the Christian guilds, not only with the status of the Greek and Roman slaves, but with such a scheme as that of the Indian castes. The oriental caste has some of the qualities of the occidental guild; especially the valuable quality of tradition and the accumulation of culture. Men might be proud of their castes, as they were proud of their guilds. But they had never chosen their castes, as they have chosen their guilds. They had never, within historic memory, even collectively created their castes, as they collectively created their guilds. Like the slave system, the caste system was older than history. The heathens of modern Asia, as much as the heathens of ancient Europe, lived by the very spirit of status. Status in a trade has been accepted like status in a tribe; and that in a tribe of beasts and birds rather than men. The fisherman continued to be a fisherman as the fish continued to be a fish; and the hunter would no more turn into a cook than his dog would try its luck as a cat. Certainly his dog would not be found prostrated before the mysterious altar of Pasht, barking or whining a wild, lonely, and individual vow that he at all costs would become a cat. Yet that was the vital revolt and innovation of vows, as compared with castes or slavery; as when a man vowed to be a monk, or the son of a cobbler saluted the shrine of St. Joseph, the patron saint of carpenters. When he had entered the guild of the carpenters he did indeed find himself responsible for a very real loyalty and discipline; but the whole social atmosphere surrounding his entrance was full of the sense of a separate and personal decision. There is one place where we can still find this sentiment; the sentiment of something at once free and final. We can feel it, if the service is properly understood, before and after the marriage vows at any ordinary wedding in any ordinary church.

Such, in very vague outline, has been the historical nature of vows; and the unique part they played in that mediaeval civilisation out of which modern civilisation rose — or fell. We can now consider, a little less cloudily than it is generally considered nowadays, whether we really think vows are good things; whether they ought to be broken; and (as would naturally follow) whether they ought to be made. But we can never judge it fairly till we face, as I have tried to suggest, this main fact of history; that the personal pledge, feudal or civic or monastic, was the way in which the world did escape from the system of slavery in the past. For the modern breakdown of mere contract leaves it still doubtful if there be any other way of escaping it in the future.

The idea, or at any rate the ideal, of the thing called a vow is fairly obvious. It is to combine the fixity that goes with finality with the self-respect that only goes with freedom. The man is a slave who is his own master, and a king who is his own ancestor. For all kinds of social purposes he has the calculable orbit of the man in the caste or the servile state; but in the story of his own soul he is still pursuing, at great peril, his own adventure. As seen by his neighbours, he is as safe as if immured in a fortress; but as seen by himself he may be forever careering through the sky or crashing towards the earth in a flying-ship. What is socially humdrum is produced by what is individually heroic; and a city is made not merely of citizens but knight-errants. It is needless to point out the part played by the monastery in civilising Europe in its most barbaric interregnum; and even those who still denounce the monasteries will be found denouncing them for these two extreme and apparently opposite eccentricities. They are blamed for the rigid character of their collective routine; and also for the fantastic character of their individual fanaticism. For the purposes of this part of the argument, it would not matter if the marriage vow produced the most austere discomforts of the monastic vow. The point for the present is that it was sustained by a sense of free will; and the feeling that its evils were not accepted but chosen. The same spirit ran through all the guilds and popular arts and spontaneous social systems of the whole civilisation. It had all the discipline of an army; but it was an army of volunteers.

The civilisation of vows was broken up when Henry the Eighth broke his own vow of marriage. Or rather, it was broken up by a new cynicism in the ruling powers of Europe, of which that was the almost accidental expression in England. The monasteries, that had been built by vows, were destroyed. The guilds, that had been regiments of volunteers were dispersed. The sacramental nature of marriage was denied; and many of the greatest intellects of the new movement, like Milton, already indulged in a very modern idealisation of divorce. The progress of this sort of emancipation advanced step by step with the progress of that aristocratic ascendancy which has made the history of modern England; with all its sympathy with personal liberty, and all its utter lack of sympathy with popular life.

Marriage not only became less of a sacrament but less of a sanctity. It threatened to become not only a contract, but a contract that could not be kept. For this one question has retained a strange symbolic supremacy amid all the similar questions, which seems to perpetuate the coincidence of the origin. It began with divorce for a king; and it is now ending in divorces for a whole kingdom.

The modern era that followed can be called the era of contract; but it can still more truly be called the era of leonine contract. The nobles of the new time first robbed the people, and then offered to bargain with them. It would not be an exaggeration to say that they first robbed the people, and then offered to cheat them. For their rents were competitive rents, their economics competitive economics, their ethics competitive ethics; they applied not only legality but pettifogging. No more was heard of the customary rents of the mediaeval estates; just as no more was heard of the standard wages of the mediaeval guilds. The object of the whole process was to isolate the individual poor man in his dealings with the individual rich man; and then offer to buy and sell with him, though it must necessarily be himself that was bought and sold. In the matter of labour, that is, though a man was supposed to be in the position of a seller, he was more and more really in the possession of a slave. Unless the tendency be reversed, he will probably become admittedly a slave. That is to say, the word slave will never be used; for it is always easy to find an inoffensive word; but he will be admittedly a man legally bound to certain social service, in return for economic security. In other words, the modern experiment of mere contract has broken down. Trusts as well as Trades' Unions express the fact that it has broken down. Social reform, Socialism, Guild Socialism, Syndicalism, even organised philanthropy, are so many ways of saying that it has broken down. The substitute for it may be the old one of status; but it must be something having some of the stability of status. So far history has found only one way of combining that sort of stability with any sort of liberty. In this sense there is a meaning in the much misused phrase about the army of industry. But the army must be stiffened either by the discipline of conscripts or by the vows of volunteers.

If we may extend the doubtful metaphor of an army of industry to cover the yet weaker phrase about captains of industry, there is no doubt about what those captains at present command. They work for a centralised discipline in every department. They erect a vast apparatus of supervision and inspection; they support all the modern restrictions touching drink and hygiene. They may be called the friends of temperance or even of happiness; but even their friends would not call them the friends of freedom. There is only one form of freedom which they tolerate; and that is the sort of sexual freedom which is covered by the legal fiction of divorce. If we ask why this liberty is alone left, when so many liberties are lost, we shall find the answer in the summary of this chapter. They are trying to break the vow of the knight as they broke the vow of the monk. They recognise the vow as the vital antithesis to servile status, the alternative and therefore the antagonist. Marriage makes a small state within the state, which resists all such regimentation. That bond breaks all other bonds; that law is found stronger than all later and lesser laws. They desire the democracy to be sexually fluid, because the making of small nuclei is like the making of small nations. Like small nations, they are a nuisance to the mind of imperial scope. In short, what they fear, in the most literal sense, is home rule.

Men can always be blind to a thing so long as it is big enough. It is so difficult to see the world in which we live, that I know that many will see all I have said here of slavery as a nonsensical nightmare. But if my association of divorce with slavery seems only a far-fetched and theoretical paradox, I should have no difficulty in replacing it by a concrete and familiar picture. Let them merely remember the time when they read “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” and ask themselves whether the oldest and simplest of the charges against slavery has not always been the breaking up of families.

VII

THE TRAGEDIES OF MARRIAGE

There is one view very common among the liberal-minded which is exceedingly fatiguing to the clear-headed. It is symbolised in the sort of man who says, “These ruthless bigots will refuse to bury me in consecrated ground, because I have always refused to be baptised.” A clear-headed person can easily conceive his point of view, in so far as he happens to think that baptism does not matter. But the clear-headed will be completely puzzled when they ask themselves why, if he thinks that baptism does not matter, he should think that burial does matter. If it is in no way imprudent for a man to keep himself from a consecrated font, how can it be inhuman for other people to keep him from a consecrated field? It is surely much nearer to mere superstition to attach importance to what is done to a dead body than to a live baby. I can understand a man thinking both superstitious, or both sacred; but I cannot see why he should grumble that other people do not give him as sanctities what he regards as superstitions. He is merely complaining of being treated as what he declares himself to be. It is as if a man were to say, “My persecutors still refuse to make me king, out of mere malice because I am a strict republican.” Or it is as if he said, “These heartless brutes are so prejudiced against a teetotaler, that they won’t even give him a glass of brandy.”

The fashion of divorce would not be a modern fashion if it were not full of this touching fallacy. A great deal of it might be summed up as a most illogical and fanatical appetite for getting married in churches. It is as if a man should practice polygamy out of sheer greed for wedding cake. Or it is as if he provided his household with new shoes, entirely by having them thrown after the wedding carriage when he went off with a new wife. There are other ways of procuring cake or purchasing shoes; and there are other ways of setting up a human establishment. What is unreasonable is the request which the modern man really makes of the religious institutions of his fathers The modern man wants to buy one shoe without the other; to obtain one half of a supernatural revelation without the other. The modern man wants to eat his wedding cake and have it, too.

I am not basing this book on the religious argument, and therefore I will not pause to inquire why the old Catholic institutions of Christianity seem to be especially made the objects of these unreasonable complaints. As a matter of fact nobody does propose that some ferocious Anti-Semite like M. Drumont should be buried as a Jew with all the rites of the Synagogue. But the broad-minded were furious because Tolstoi, who had denounced Russian orthodoxy quite as ferociously, was not buried as orthodox, with all the rites of the Russian Church. Nobody does insist that a man who wishes to have fifty wives when Mahomet allowed him five must have his fifty with the full approval of Mahomet's religion. But the broad-minded are extremely bitter because a Christian who wishes to have several wives when his own promise bound him to one, is not allowed to violate his vow at the same altar at which he made it. Nobody does insist on Baptists totally immersing people who totally deny the advantages of being totally immersed. Nobody ever did expect Mormons to receive the open mockers of the Book of Mormon, nor Christian Scientists to let their churches be used for exposing Mrs. Eddy as an old fraud. It is only of the forms of Christianity making the Catholic claim that such inconsistent claims are made. And even the inconsistency is, I fancy, a tribute to the acceptance of the Catholic idea in a catholic fashion. It may be that men have an obscure sense that nobody need belong to the Mormon religion and every one does ultimately belong to the Church; and though he may have made a few dozen Mormon marriages in a wandering and entertaining life, he will really have nowhere to go to if he does not somehow find his way back to the churchyard. But all this concerns the general theological question and not the matter involved here, which is merely historical and social. The point here is that it is at least superficially inconsistent to ask institutions for a formal approval, which they can only give by inconsistency.

I have put first the question of what is marriage. And we are now in a position to ask more clearly what is divorce. It is not merely the negation or neglect of marriage; for any one can always neglect marriage. It is not the dissolution of the legal obligation of marriage, or even the legal obligation of monogamy; for the simple reason that no such obligation exists. Any man in modern London may have a hundred wives if he does not call them wives; or rather, if he does not go through certain more or less mystical ceremonies in order to assert that they are wives. He might create a certain social coolness round his household, a certain fading of his general popularity. But that is not created by law, and could not be prevented by law. As the late Lord Salisbury very sensibly observed about boycotting in Ireland, “How can you make a law to prevent people going out of the room when somebody they don’t like comes into it?” We cannot be forcibly introduced to a polygamist by a policeman. It would not be an assertion of social liberty, but a denial of social liberty, if we found ourselves practically obliged to associate with all the profligates in society. But divorce is not in this sense mere anarchy. On the contrary divorce is in this sense respectability; and even a rigid excess of respectability. Divorce in this sense might indeed be not unfairly called snobbery. The definition of divorce, which concerns us here, is that it is the attempt to give respectability, and not liberty. It is the attempt to give a certain social status, and not a legal status. It is indeed supposed that this can be done by the alteration of certain legal forms; and this will be more or less true according to the extent to which law as such overawed public opinion, or was valued as a true expression of public opinion. If a man divorced in the large-minded fashion of Henry the Eighth pleaded his legal title among the peasantry of Ireland, for instance, I think he would find a difference still existing between respectability and religion. But the peculiar point here is that many are claiming the sanction of religion as well as of respectability. They would attach to their very natural and sometimes very pardonable experiments a certain atmosphere, and even glamour, which has undoubtedly belonged to the status of marriage in historic Christendom. But before they make this attempt, it would be well to ask why such a dignity ever appeared or in what it consisted. And I fancy we shall find ourselves confronted with the very simple truth, that the dignity arose wholly and entirely out of the fidelity; and that the glamour merely came from the vow. People were regarded as having a certain dignity because they were dedicated in a certain way; as bound to certain duties and, if it be preferred, to certain discomforts. It may be irrational to endure these discomforts; it may even be irrational to respect them. But it is certainly much more irrational to respect them, and then artificially transfer the same respect to the absence of them. It is as if we were to expect uniforms to be saluted when armies were disbanded; and ask people to cheer a soldier’s coat when it did not contain a soldier. If you think you can abolish war, abolish it; but do not suppose that when there are no wars to be waged, there will still be warriors to be worshipped. If it was a good thing that the monasteries were dissolved, let us say so and dismiss them. But the nobles who dissolved the monasteries did not shave their heads, and ask to be regarded as saints solely on account of that ceremony. The nobles did not dress up as abbots and ask to be credited with a potential talent for working miracles, because of the austerity of their vows of poverty and chastity. They got inside the houses, but not the hoods, and still less the haloes. They at least knew that it is not the habit that makes the monk. They were not so superstitious as those moderns, who think it is the veil that makes the bride.

What is respected, in short, is the fidelity to the ancient flag of the family, and a readiness to fight for what I have noted as its unique type of freedom. I say readiness to fight, for fortunately the fight itself is the exception rather than the rule. The soldier is not respected because he is doomed to death, but because he is ready for death; and even ready for defeat. The married man or woman is not doomed to evil, sickness or poverty; but is respected for taking a certain step for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness or in health. But there is one result of this line of argument which should correct a danger in some arguments on the same side.

It is very essential that a stricture on divorce, which is in fact simply a defence of marriage, should be independent of sentimentalism, especially in the form called optimism. A man justifying a fight for national independence or civic freedom is neither sentimental nor optimistic. He explains the sacrifice, but he does not explain it away. He does not say that bayonet wounds are pin-pricks, or mere scratches of the thorns on a rose of pleasure. He does not say that the whole display of firearms is a festive display of fireworks. On the contrary, when he praises it most, he praises it as pain rather than pleasure. He increases the praise with the pain; it is his whole boast that militarism, and even modern science, can produce no instrument of torture to tame the soul of man. It is idle, in speaking of war, to pit the realistic against the romantic, in the sense of the heroic; for all possible realism can only increase the heroism; and therefore, in the highest sense, increase the romance. Now I do not compare marriage with war, but I do compare marriage with law or liberty or patriotism or popular government, or any of the human ideals which have often to be defended by war. Even the wildest of those ideals, which seem to escape from all the discipline of peace, do not escape from the discipline of war. The Bolshevists may have aimed at pure peace and liberty; but they have been compelled, for their own purpose, first to raise armies and then to rule armies. In a word, how ever beautiful you may think your own visions of beatitude, men must suffer to be beautiful, and even suffer a considerable interval of being ugly. And I have no notion of denying that mankind suffers much from the maintenance of the standard of marriage; as it suffers much from the necessity of criminal law or the recurrence of crusades and revolutions. The only question here is whether marriage is indeed, as I maintain, an ideal and an institution making for popular freedom; I do not need to be told that anything making for popular freedom has to be paid for in vigilance and pain, and a whole army of martyrs.

Hence I am far indeed from denying the hard cases which exist here, as in all matters involving the idea of honour. For indeed I could not deny them without denying the whole parallel of militant morality on which my argument rests. But this being first understood, it will be well to discuss in a little more detail what are described as the tragedies of marriage. And the first thing to note about the most tragic of them is that they are not tragedies of marriage at all They are tragedies of sex; and might easily occur in a highly modern romance in which marriage was not mentioned at all. It is generally summarised by saying that the tragic element is the absence of love. But it is often forgotten that another tragic element is often the presence of love. The doctors of divorce, with an air of the frank and friendly realism of men of the world, are always recommending and rejoicing in a sensible separation by mutual consent. But if we are really to dismiss our dreams of dignity and honour, if we are really to fall back on the frank realism of our experience as men of the world, then the very first thing that our experience will tell us is that it very seldom is a separation by mutual consent; that is, that the consent very seldom is sincerely and spontaneously mutual. By far the commonest problem in such cases is that in which one party wishes to end the partnership and the other does not. And of that emotional situation you can make nothing but a tragedy, whichever way you turn it. With or without marriage, with or without divorce, with or without any arrangements that anybody can suggest or imagine, it remains a tragedy. The only difference is that by the doctrine of marriage it remains both a noble and a fruitful tragedy; like that of a man who falls fighting for his country, or dies testifying to the truth. But the truth is that the innovators have as much sham optimism about divorce as any romanticist can have had about marriage. They regard their story, when it ends in the divorce court, through as rosy a mist of sentimentalism as anybody ever regarded a story ending with wedding bells. Such a reformer is quite sure that when once the prince and princess are divorced by the fairy godmother, they will live happily ever after. I enjoy romance, but I like it to be rooted in reality; and any one with a touch of reality knows that nine couples out of ten, when they are divorced, are left in an exceedingly different state. It will be safe to say in most cases that one partner will fail to find happiness in an infatuation, and the other will from the first accept a tragedy. In the realm of reality and not romance, it is commonly a case of breaking hearts as well as breaking promises; and even dishonour is not always a remedy for remorse.

The next limitation to be laid down in the matter affects certain practical forms of discomforts on a level rather lower than love or hatred. The cases most commonly quoted concern what is called "drink" and what is called "cruelty." They are always talked about as matters of fact; though in practice they are very decidedly matters of opinion. It is not a flippancy, but a fact, that the misfortune of the woman who has married a drunkard may have to be balanced against the misfortune of the man who has married a teetotaler. For the very definition of drunkenness may depend on the dogma of teetotalism. Drunkenness, it has been very truly observed, "may mean anything from delirium tremens to having a stronger head than the official appointed to conduct the examination." Mr Bernard Shaw once professed, apparently seriously, that any man drinking wine or beer at all was incapacitated from managing a motorcar; and still more, therefore, one would suppose, from managing a wife. The scales are weighted here, of course, with all those false weights of snobbishness which are the curse of justice in this country. The working class is forced to conduct almost in public a normal and varying festive habit, which the upper class can afford to conduct in private; and a certain section of the middle class, that which happens to concern itself most with local politics and social reforms, really has or affects a standard quite abnormal and even alien. They might go any lengths of injustice in dealing with the working man or working woman accused of too hearty a taste in beer. To mention but one matter out of a thousand, the middle class reformers are obviously quite ignorant of the hours at which working people begin to work. Because they themselves, at eleven o'clock in the morning, have only recently finished breakfast and the full moral digestion of the Daily Mail, they think a char-woman drinking beer at that hour is one of those arising early in the morning to follow after strong drink. Most of them really do not know that she has already done more than half a heavy day's work, and is partaking of a very reasonable luncheon. The whole problem of proletarian drink is entangled in a network of these misunderstandings; and there is no doubt whatever that, when judged by these generalisations, the poor will be taken in a net of injustices. And this truth is as certain in the case of what is called cruelty as of what is called drink. Nine times out of ten the judgment on a navvy for hitting a woman is about as just as a judgment on him for not taking off his hat to a lady. It is a class test; it may be a class superiority; but it is not an act of equal justice between the classes. It leaves out a thousand things; the provocation, the atmosphere, the harassing restrictions of space, the nagging which Dickens described as the terrors of "temper in a cart," the absence of certain taboos of social training, the tradition of greater roughness even in the gestures of affection. To make all marriage or divorce, in the case of such a man, turn upon a blow is like blasting the whole life of a gentleman because he has slammed the door. Often a poor man cannot slam the door; partly because the model villa might fall down; but more because he has nowhere to go to; the smoking-room, the billiard room and the peacock music-room not being yet attached to his premises.

I say this in passing, to point out that while I do not dream of suggesting that there are only happy marriages, there will quite certainly, as things work nowadays, be a very large number of unhappy and unjust divorces. They will be cases in which the innocent partner will receive the real punishment of the guilty partner, through being in fact and feeling the faithful partner. For instance, it is insisted that a married person must at least find release from the society of a lunatic; but it is also true that the scientific reformers, with their fuss about "the feeble-minded," are continually giving larger and looser definitions of lunacy. The process might begin by releasing somebody from a homicidal maniac, and end by dealing in the same way with a rather dull conversationalist. But in fact nobody does deny that a person should be allowed some sort of release from a homicidal maniac. The most extreme school of orthodoxy only maintains that anybody who has had that experience should be content with that release. In other words, it says he should be content with that experience of matrimony, and not seek another. It was put very wittily, I think, by a Roman Catholic friend of mine, who said he approved of release so long as it was not spelt with a hyphen.

To put it roughly, we are prepared in some cases to listen to the man who complains of having a wife. But we are not prepared to listen, at such length, to the same man when he comes back and complains that he has not got a wife. Now in practice at this moment the great mass of the complaints are precisely of this kind. The reformers insist particularly on the pathos of a man's position when he has obtained a separation without a divorce. Their most tragic figure is that of the man who is already free of all those ills he had, and is only asking to be allowed to fly to others that he knows not of. I should be the last to deny that, in certain emotional circumstances, his tragedy may be very tragic indeed. But his tragedy is of the emotional kind which can never be entirely eliminated; and which he has himself, in all probability, inflicted on the partner he has left. We may call it the price of maintaining an ideal or the price of making a mistake; but anyhow it is the point of our whole distinction in the matter; it is here that we draw the line, and I have nowhere denied that it is a line of battle. The battle joins on the debatable ground, not of the man's doubtful past but of his still more doubtful future. In a word, the divorce controversy is not really a controversy about divorce. It is a controversy about re-marriage; or rather about whether it is marriage at all.

And with that we can only return to the point of honour which I have compared here to a point of patriotism; since it is both the smallest and the greatest kind of patriotism. Men have died in torments during the last five years for points of patriotism far more dubious and fugitive. Men like the Poles or the Serbians, through long periods of their history, may be said rather to have lived in torments. I will never admit that the vital need of the freedom of the family, as I have tried to sketch it here, is not a cause as valuable as the freedom of any frontier. But I do willingly admit that the cause would be a dark and terrible one, if it really asked these men to suffer torments. As I have stated it, on its most extreme terms, it only asks them to suffer abnegations. And those negative sufferings I do think they may honourably be called upon to bear, for the glory of their own oath and the great things by which the nations live. In relation to their own nation most normal men will feel that this distinction between release and "re-lease" is neither fanciful nor harsh, but very rational and human. A patriot may be an exile in another country; but he will not be a patriot of another country. He will be as cheerful as he can in an abnormal position; he may or may not sing his country’s songs in a strange land; but he will not sing the strange songs as his own. And such may fairly be also the attitude of the citizen who has gone into exile from the oldest of earthly cities.

VIII

THE VISTA OF DIVORCE

The case for divorce combines all the advantages of having it both ways; and of drawing the same deduction from right or left, and from black or white. Whichever way the programme works in practice, it can still be justified in theory. If there are few examples of divorce, it shows how little divorce need be dreaded; if there are many, it shows how much it is required. The rarity of divorce is an argument in favour of divorce; and the multiplicity of divorce is an argument against marriage. Now, in truth, if we were confined to considering this alternative in a speculative manner, if there were no concrete facts but only abstract probabilities, we should have no difficulty in arguing our case. The abstract liberty allowed by the reformers is as near as possible to anarchy, and gives no logical or legal guarantee worth discussing. The advantages of their reform do not accrue to the innocent party, but to the guilty party; especially if he be sufficiently guilty. A man has only to commit the crime of desertion to obtain the reward of divorce. And if they are entitled to take as typical the most horrible hypothetical cases of the abuse of the marriage laws, surely we are entitled to take equally extreme possibilities in the abuse of their own divorce laws. If they, when looking about for a husband, so often hit upon a homicidal maniac, surely we may politely introduce them to the far more human figure of the gentleman who marries as many women as he likes and gets rid of them as often as he pleases. But in fact there is no necessity for us to argue thus in the abstract; for the amiable gentleman in question undoubtedly exists in the concrete. Of course, he is no new figure; he is a very recurrent type of rascal; his name has been Lothario or Don Juan; and he has often been represented as a rather romantic rascal. The point of divorce reform, it cannot be too often repeated, is that the rascal should not only be regarded as romantic, but regarded as respectable. He is not to sow his wild oats and settle down; he is merely to settle down to sowing his wild oats. They are to be regarded as tame and inoffensive oats; almost, if one may say so, as Quaker oats. But there is no need, as I say, to speculate about whether the looser view of divorce might prevail; for it is already prevailing. The newspapers are full of an astonishing hilarity about the rapidity with which hundreds or thousands of human families are being broken up by the lawyers; and about the undisguised haste of the "hustling judges" who carry on the work. It is a form of hilarity which would seem to recall the gaiety of a grave-digger in a city swept by a pestilence. But a few details occasionally flash by in the happy dance; from time to time the court is moved by a momentary curiosity about the causes of the general violation of oaths and promises; as if there might, here and there, be a hint of some sort of reason for ruining the fundamental institution of society. And nobody who notes those details, or considers those faint hints of reason, can doubt for a moment that masses of these men and women are now simply using divorce in the spirit of free-love. They are very seldom the sort of people who have once fallen tragically into the wrong place, and have now found their way triumphantly to the right place. They are almost always people who are obviously wandering from one place to another, and will probably leave their last shelter exactly as they have left their first. But it seems to amuse them to make again, if possible in a church, a promise they have already broken in practice and almost avowedly disbelieve in principle.

In face of this headlong fashion, it is really reasonable to ask the divorce reformers what is their attitude towards the old monogamous ethic of our civilisation; and whether they wish to retain it in general, or to retain it at all. Unfortunately even the sincerest and most lucid of them use language which leaves the matter a little doubtful. Mr. E. S. P. Haynes is one of the most brilliant and most fair-minded controversialists on that side; and he has said, for instance, that he agrees with me in supporting the ideal of indissoluble or, at least, of undissolved marriage. Mr. Haynes is one of the few friends of divorce who are also real friends of democracy; and I am sure that in practice this stands for a real sympathy with the home, especially the poor home. Unfortunately, on the theoretic side, the word "ideal" is far from being an exact term, and is open to two almost opposite interpretations. For many would say that marriage is an ideal as some would say that monasticism is an ideal, in the sense of a counsel of perfection. Now certainly we might preserve a conjugal ideal in this way. A man might be reverently pointed out in the street as a sort of saint, merely because he was married. A man might wear a medal for monogamy; or have letters after his name similar to V.C. or D.D.; let us say L.W. for "Lives With His Wife," or N.D.Y. for "Not Divorced Yet." We might, on entering some strange city, be struck by a stately column erected to the memory of a wife who never ran away with a soldier, or the shrine and image of a historical character, who had resisted the example of the man in the "New Witness" ballade in bolting with the children's nurse. Such high artistic hagiology would be quite consistent with Mr. Haynes' divorce reform; with re-marriage after three years, or three hours. It would also be quite consistent with Mr. Haynes' phrase about preserving an ideal of marriage. What it would not be consistent with is the perfectly plain, solid, secular and social usefulness which I have here attributed to marriage. It does not create or preserve a natural institution, normal to the whole community, to balance the more artificial and even more arbitrary institution of the state; which is less natural even if it is equally necessary. It does not defend a voluntary association, but leaves the only claim on life, death and loyalty with a more coercive institution. It does not stand, in the sense I have tried to explain, for the principle of liberty. In short, it does not do any of the things which Mr. Haynes himself would especially desire to see done. For humanity to be thus spontaneously organised from below, it is necessary that the organisation should be almost as universal as the official organisation from above. The tyrant must find not one family but many families defying his power; he must find mankind not a dust of atoms, but fixed in solid blocks of fidelity. And those human groups must support not only themselves but each other. In this sense what some call individualism is as corporate as communism. It is a thing of volunteers; but volunteers must be soldiers. It is a defence of private persons; but we might say that the private persons must be private soldiers. The family must be recognised as well as real; above all, the family must be recognised by the families. To expect individuals to suffer successfully for a home apart from the home, that is for something which is an incident but not an institution, is really a confusion between two ideas; it is a verbal sophistry almost in the nature of a pun. Similarly, for instance, we cannot prove the moral force of a peasantry by pointing to one peasant; we might almost as well reveal the military force of infantry by pointing to one infant.

I take it, however, that the advocates of divorce do not mean that marriage is to remain ideal only in the sense of being almost impossible. They do not mean that a faithful husband is only to be admired as a fanatic. The reasonable men among them do really mean that a divorced person shall be tolerated as something unusually unfortunate, not merely that a married person shall be admired as some thing unusually blessed and inspired. But whatever they desire, it is as well that they should realise exactly what they do; and in this case I should like to hear their criticisms in the matter of what they see. They must surely see that in England at present, as in many parts of America in the past, the new liberty is being taken in the spirit of licence as if the exception were to be the rule, or, rather, perhaps the absence of rule. This will especially be made manifest if we consider that the effect of the process is accumulative like a snowball, and returns on itself like a snowball. The obvious effect of frivolous divorce will be frivolous marriage. If people can be separated for no reason they will feel it all the easier to be united for no reason. A man might quite clearly foresee that a sensual infatuation would be fleeting, and console himself with the knowledge that the connection could be equally fleeting. There seems no particular reason why he should not elaborately calculate that he could stand a particular lady's temper for ten months; or reckon that he would have enjoyed and exhausted her repertoire of drawing-room songs in two years. The old joke about choosing the wife to fit the furniture or the fashions might quite logically return, not as an old joke but as a new solemnity; indeed, it will be found that a new religion is generally the return of an old joke. A man might quite consistently see a woman as suited to the period of the hobble skirt, and as less suited to the threatened recurrence of the crinoline. These fancies are fantastic enough, but they are not a shade more fantastic than the facts of many a divorce controversy as urged in the divorce courts. And this is to leave out altogether the most fantastic fact of all: the winking at widespread and conspicuous collusion. Collusion has become not so much an illegal evasion as a legal fiction, and even a legal institution, as it is admirably satirised in Mr. Somerset Maugham's brilliant play of "Home and Beauty." The fact was very frankly brought before the public, by a man who was eminently calculated to disarm satire by sincerity. Colonel Wedgewood is a man who can never be too much honoured, by all who have any hope of popular liberties still finding champions in the midst of parliamentary corruption. He is one of the very few men alive who have shown both military and political courage; the courage of the camp and the courage of the forum. And doubtless he showed a third type of social courage, in avowing the absurd expedient which so many others are content merely to accept and employ. It is admittedly a frantic and farcical thing that a good man should find or think it necessary to pretend to commit a sin.

Some of the divorce moralists seem to deduce from this that he ought really to commit the sin. They may possibly be aware, however, that there are some who do not agree with them.

For this latter fact is the next step in the speculative progress of the new morality. The divorce advocates must be well aware that modern civilisation still contains strong elements, not the least intelligent and certainly not the least vigorous, which will not accept the new respectability as a substitute for the old religious vow. The Roman Catholic Church, the Anglo-Catholic school, the conservative peasantries, and a large section of the popular life everywhere, will regard the riot of divorce and re-marriage as they would any other riot of irresponsibility. The consequence would appear to be that two different standards will appear in ordinary morality, and even in ordinary society. Instead of the old social distinction between those who are married and those who are unmarried, there will be a distinction between those who are married and those who are really married. Society might even become divided into two societies, which is perilously approximate to Disraeli's famous exaggeration about England divided into two nations. But whether England be actually so divided or not, this note of the two nations is the real note of warning in the matter. It is in this connection perhaps, that we have to consider most gravely and doubtfully the future of our own country.

Anarchy cannot last, but anarchic communities cannot last either. Mere lawlessness cannot live, but it can destroy life. The nations of the earth always return to sanity and solidarity; but the nations which return to it first are the nations which survive. We in England cannot afford to allow our social institutions to go to pieces, as if this ancient and noble country were an ephemeral colony. We cannot afford it comparatively, even if we could afford it positively. We are surrounded by vigorous nations mainly rooted in the peasant or permanent ideals; notably in the case of France and Ireland. I know that the detested and detestably undemocratic parliamentary clique, which corrupts France as it does England, was persuaded or bribed by a Jew named Naquet to pass a crude and recent divorce law, which was full of the hatred of Christianity. But only a very superficial critic of France can be unaware that French parliamentarism is superficial. The French nation as a whole, the most rigidly respectable nation in the world, will certainly go on living by the old standards of domesticity. When Frenchmen are not Christians they are heathens; the heathens who worshipped the household gods. It might seem strange to say, for instance, that an atheist like M. Clemenceau has for his chief ideal a thing called piety. But to understand this it is only necessary to know a little Latin — and a little French.

A short time ago, as I am well aware, it would have sounded very strange to represent the old religious and peasant communities either as a model or a menace. It was counted a queer thing to say, in the days when my friends and I first said it; in the days of my youth when the republic of France and the religion of Ireland were regarded as alike ridiculous and decadent. But many things have happened since then; and it will not now be so easy to persuade even newspaper readers that Foch is a fool, either because he is a Frenchman or because he is a Catholic. The older tradition, even in the most unfashionable forms, has found champions in the most unexpected quarters. Only the other day Dr. Saleeby, a distinguished scientific critic who had made himself the special advocate of all the instruction and organisation that is called social science, startled his friends and foes alike by saying that the peasant families in the West of Ireland were far more satisfactory and successful than those brooded over by all the benevolent sociology of Bradford. He gave his testimony from an entirely rationalistic and even materialistic point of view; indeed, he carried rationalism so far as to give the preference to Roscommon because the women are still mammals. To a mind of the more traditional type it might seem sufficient to say they are still mothers. To a memory that lingers over the legends and lyrical movements of mankind, it might seem no great improvement to imagine a song that ran "My mammal bids me bind my hair," or "I'm to be Queen of the May, mammal, I'm to be Queen of the May." But indeed the truth to which he testified is all the more arresting, because for him it was materialistic and not mystical. The brute biological advantage, as well as other advantages, was with those for whom that truth was a truth; and it was all the more instinctive and automatic where that truth was a tradition. The sort of place where mothers are still something more than mammals is the only sort of place where they still are mammals. There the people are still healthy animals; healthy enough to hit you if you call them animals. I also have, on this merely controversial occasion, used throughout the rationalistic and not the religious appeal. But it is not unreasonable to note that the materialistic advantages are really found among those who most repudiate materialism. This one stray testimony is but a type of a thousand things of the same kind, which will convince any one with the sense of social atmospheres that the day of the peasantries is not passing but rather arriving. It is the more complex types of society that are now entangled in their own complexities. Those who tell us, with a monotonous metaphor, that we cannot put the clock back, seem to be curiously unconscious of the fact that their own clock has stopped. And there is nothing so hopeless as clockwork when it stops. A machine cannot mend itself; it requires a man to mend it; and the future lies with those who can make living laws for men and not merely dead laws for machinery. Those living laws are not to be found in the scatter-brained scepticism which is busy in the great cities, dissolving what it cannot analyse. The primary laws of man are to be found in the permanent life of man; in those things that have been common to it in every time and land, though in the highest civilisation they have reached an enrichment like that of the divine romance of Cana in Galilee. We know that many critics of such a story say that its elements are not permanent; but indeed it is the critics who are not permanent. A hundred mad dogs of heresy have worried man from the beginning; but it was always the dog that died. We know there is a school of prigs who disapprove of the wine; and there may now be a school of prigs who disapprove of the wedding. For in such a case as the story of Cana, it may be remarked that the pedants are prejudiced against the earthly elements as much as, or more than, the heavenly elements. It is not the supernatural that disgusts them, so much as the natural. And those of us who have seen all the normal rules and relations of humanity uprooted by random speculators, as if they were abnormal abuses and almost accidents, will understand why men have sought for something divine if they wished to preserve anything human. They will know why common sense, cast out from some academy of fads and fashions conducted on the lines of a luxurious madhouse, has age after age sought refuge in the high sanity of a sacrament.

IX

CONCLUSION

This is a pamphlet and not a book; and the writer of a pamphlet not only deals with passing things, but generally with things which he hopes will pass. In that sense it is the object of a pamphlet to be out of date as soon as possible. It can only survive when it does not succeed. The successful pamphlets are necessarily dull; and though I have no great hopes of this being successful, I dare say it is dull enough for all that. It is designed merely to note certain fugitive proposals of the moment, and compare them with certain recurrent necessities of the race; but especially the necessity for some spontaneous social formation freer than that of the state. If it were more in the nature of a work of literature, with anything like an ambition of endurance, I might go deeper into the matter, and give some suggestions about the philosophy or religion of marriage, and the philosophy or religion of all these rather random departures from it. Some day perhaps I may try to write something about the spiritual or psychological quarrel between faith and fads. Here I will only say, in conclusion, that I believe the universal fallacy here is a fallacy of being universal. There is a sense in which it is really a human if heroic possibility to love everybody; and the young student will not find it a bad preliminary exercise to love somebody. But the fallacy I mean is that of a man who is not even content to love everybody, but really wishes to be everybody. He wishes to walk down a hundred roads at once; to sleep in a hundred houses at once; to live a hundred lives at once. To do something like this in the imagination is one of the occasional visions of art and poetry, to attempt it in the art of life is not only anarchy but inaction. Even in the arts it can only be the first hint and not the final fulfillment; a man cannot work at once in bronze and marble, or play the organ and the violin at the same time. The universal vision of being such a Briareus is a nightmare of nonsense even in the merely imaginative world; and ends in mere nihilism in the social world. If a man had a hundred houses, there would still be more houses than he had days in which to dream of them; if a man had a hundred wives, there would still be more women than he could ever know. He would be an insane sultan jealous of the whole human race, and even of the dead and the unborn. I believe that behind the art and philosophy of our time there is a considerable element of this bottomless ambition and this unnatural hunger; and since in these last words I am touching only lightly on things that would need much larger treatment, I will admit that the rending of the ancient roof of man is probably only a part of such an endless and empty expansion. I asked in the last chapter what those most wildly engaged in the mere dance of divorce, as fantastic as the dance of death, really expected for themselves or for their children. And in the deepest sense I think this is the answer; that they expect the impossible, that is the universal. They are not crying for the moon, which is a definite and therefore a defensible desire. They are crying for the world; and when they had it, they would want another one. In the last resort they would like to try every situation, not in fancy but in fact, but they cannot refuse any and therefore cannot resolve on any. In so far as this is the modern mood, it is a thing so deadly as to be already dead. What is vitally needed everywhere, in art as much as in ethics, in poetry as much as in politics, is choice; a creative power in the will as well as in the mind. Without that self-limitation of somebody, nothing living will ever see the light.

THE NEW JERUSALEM

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PREFACE

This book is only an uncomfortably large note-book; and it has the disadvantages, whether or no it has the advantages, of notes that were taken on the spot. Owing to the unexpected distraction of other duties, the notes were published in a newspaper as they were made on the spot; and are now reproduced in a book as they were published in the newspaper. The only exception refers to the last chapter on Zionism; and even there the book only reverts to the original note-book. A difference of opinion, which divided the writer of the book from the politics of the newspaper, prevented the complete publication of that chapter in that place. I recognise that any expurgated form of it would have falsified the proportions of my attempt to do justice in a very difficult problem; but on re-reading even my own attempt in extenso, I am far from satisfied that the proper proportions are kept. I wrote these first impressions in Palestine, where everybody recognises the Jew as something quite distinct from the Englishman or the European; and where his unpopularity even moved me in the direction of his defence. But I admit it was something of a shock to return to a conventional atmosphere, in which that unpopularity is still actually denied or described as mere persecution. It was more of a shock to realise that this most obscurantist of all types of obscurantism is still sometimes regarded as a sort of liberalism. To talk of the Jews always as the oppressed and never as the oppressors is simply absurd; it is as if men pleaded for reasonable help for exiled French aristocrats or ruined Irish landlords, and forgot that the French and Irish peasants had any wrongs at all. Moreover, the Jews in the West do not seem so much concerned to ask, as I have done however tentatively here, whether a larger and less local colonial development might really transfer the bulk of Israel to a more independent basis, as simply to demand that Jews shall continue to control other nations as well as their own. It might be worth while for England to take risks to settle the Jewish problem; but not to take risks merely to unsettle the Arab problem, and leave the Jewish problem unsolved.

For the rest, there must under the circumstances be only too many mistakes; the historical conjectures, for they can be no more, are founded on authorities sufficiently recognised for me to be permitted to trust them; but I have never pretended to the knowledge necessary to check them. I am aware that there are many disputed points; as for instance the connection of Gerard, the fiery Templar, with the English town of Bideford. I am also aware that some are sensitive about the spelling of words; and the very proof-readers will sometimes revolt and turn Mahomet into Mohammed. Upon this point, however, I am unrepentant; for I never could see the point of altering a form with historic and even heroic fame in our own language, for the sake of reproducing by an arrangement of our letters something that is really written in quite different letters, and probably pronounced with quite a different accent. In speaking of the great prophet I am therefore resolved to call him Mahomet; and am prepared, on further provocation, to call him Mahound.

G. K. C.

CHAPTER I

THE WAY OF THE CITIES

It was in the season of Christmas that I came out of my little garden in that “field of the beeches” between the Chilterns and the Thames, and began to walk backwards through history to the place from which Christmas came. For it is often necessary to walk backwards, as a man on the wrong road goes back to a sign-post to find the right road. The modern man is more like a traveller who has forgotten the name of his destination, and has to go back whence he came, even to find out where he is going. That the world has lost its way few will now deny; and it did seem to me that I found at last a sort of sign-post, of a singular and significant shape, and saw for a moment in my mind the true map of the modern wanderings; but whether I shall be able to say anything of what I saw, this story must show.

I had said farewell to all my friends, or all those with my own limited number of legs; and nothing living remained but a dog and a donkey. The reader will learn with surprise that my first feeling of fellowship went out to the dog; I am well aware that I lay open my guard to a lunge of wit. The dog is rather like a donkey, or a small caricature of one, with a large black head and long black ears; but in the mood of the moment there was rather a moral contrast than a pictorial parallel. For the dog did indeed seem to stand for home and everything I was leaving behind me, with reluctance, especially that season of the year. For one thing, he is named after Mr. Winkle, the Christmas guest of Mr. Wardle; and there is indeed something Dickensian in his union of domesticity with exuberance. He jumped about me, barking like a small battery, under the impression that I was going for a walk; but I could not, alas, take him with me on a stroll to Palestine. Incidentally, he would have been out of place; for dogs have not their due honour in the East; and this seemed to sharpen my sense of my own domestic sentinel as a sort of symbol of the West. On the other hand, the East is full of donkeys, often very dignified donkeys; and when I turned my attention to the other grotesque quadruped, with an even larger head and even longer ears, he seemed to take on a deep shade of oriental mystery. I know not why these two absurd creatures tangled themselves up so much in my train of thought, like dragons in an illuminated text; or ramped like gargoyles on either side of the gateway of my adventure. But in truth they were in some sense symbols of the West and the East after all. The dog's very lawlessness is but an extravagance of loyalty; he will go mad with joy three times on the same day, at going out for a walk down the same road. The modern world is full of fantastic forms of animal worship; a religion generally accompanied with human sacrifice. Yet we hear strangely little of the real merits of animals; and one of them surely is this innocence of all boredom; perhaps such simplicity is the absence of sin. I have some sense myself of the sacred duty of surprise; and the need of seeing the old road as a new road. But I cannot claim that whenever I go out for a walk with my family and friends, I rush in front of them volleying vociferous shouts of happiness; or even leap up round them attempting to lick their faces. It is in this power of beginning again with energy upon familiar and homely things that the dog is really the eternal type of the Western civilisation. And the donkey is really as different as is the Eastern civilisation. His very anarchy is a sort of secrecy; his very revolt is a secret. He does not leap up because he wishes to share my walk, but to follow his own way, as lonely as the wild ass of Scripture. My own beast of burden supports the authority of Scripture by being a very wild ass. I have given him the name of Trotsky, because he seldom trots, but either scampers or stands still. He scampers all over the field when it is necessary to catch him, and stands still when it is really urgent to drive him. He also breaks fences, eats vegetables, and fulfills other functions; between delays and destructions he could ruin a really poor man in a day. I wish this fact were more often remembered, in judging whether really poor men have really been cruel to donkeys. But I assure the reader that I am not cruel to my donkey; the cruelty is all the other way. He kicks the people who try to catch him; and again I am haunted by a dim human parallel. For it seems to me that many of us, in just detestation of the dirty trick of cruelty to animals, have really a great deal of patience with animals; more patience, I fear, than many of us have with human beings. Suppose I had to go out and catch my secretary in a field every morning; and suppose my secretary always kicked me by way of beginning the day's work; I wonder whether that day's work would resume its normal course as if nothing had happened. Nothing graver than these grotesque images and groping speculations would come into my conscious mind just then, though at the back of it there was an indescribable sense of regret and parting. All through my wanderings the dog remained in my memory as a Dickensian and domestic emblem of England; and if it is difficult to take a donkey seriously, it ought to be easiest, at least, for a man who is going to Jerusalem.

There was a cloud of Christmas weather on the great grey beech-woods and the silver cross of the cross-roads. For the four roads that meet in the market-place of my little town make one of the largest and simplest of such outlines on the map of England; and the shape as it shines on that wooded chart always affects me in a singular fashion. The sight of the cross-roads is in a true sense the sign of the cross. For it is the sign of a truly Christian thing; that sharp combination of liberty and limitation which we call choice. A man is entirely free to choose between right and left, or between right and wrong. As I looked for the last time at the pale roads under the load of cloud, I knew that our civilisation had indeed come to the cross-roads. As the paths grew fainter, fading under the gathering shadow, I felt rather as if it had lost its way in a forest.

It was at the time when people were talking about some menace of the end of the world, not apocalyptic but astronomical; and the cloud that covered the little town of Beaconsfield might have fitted in with such a fancy. It faded, however, as I left the place further behind; and in London the weather, though wet, was comparatively clear. It was almost as if Beaconsfield had a domestic day of judgment, and an end of the world all to itself. In a sense Beaconsfield has four ends of the world, for its four corners are named “ends” after the four nearest towns. But I was concerned only with the one called London End; and the very name of it was like a vision of some vain thing at once ultimate and infinite. The very title of London End sounds like the other end of nowhere, or (what is worse) of everywhere. It suggests a sort of derisive riddle; where does London End? As I came up through the vast vague suburbs, it was this sense of London as a shapeless and endless muddle that chiefly filled my mind. I seemed still to carry the cloud with me; and when I looked up, I almost expected to see the chimney-pots as tangled as the trees.

And in truth if there was now no material fog, there was any amount of mental and moral fog. The whole industrial world symbolised by London had reached a curious complication and confusion, not easy to parallel in human history. It is not a question of controversies, but rather of cross-purposes. As I went by Charing Cross my eye caught a poster about Labour politics, with something about the threat of Direct Action and a demand for

Nationalisation. And quite apart from the merits of the case, it struck me that after all the direct action is very indirect, and the thing demanded is many steps away from the thing desired. It is all part of a sort of tangle, in which terms and things cut across each other. The employers talk about "private enterprise," as if there were anything private about modern enterprise. Its combines are as big as many commonwealths; and things advertised in large letters on the sky cannot plead the shy privileges of privacy. Meanwhile the Labour men talk about the need to "nationalise" the mines or the land, as if it were not the great difficulty in a plutocracy to nationalise the Government, or even to nationalise the nation. The Capitalists praise competition while they create monopoly; the Socialists urge a strike to turn workmen into soldiers and state officials; which is logically a strike against strikes. I merely mention it as an example of the bewildering inconsistency, and for no controversial purpose. My own sympathies are with the Socialists; in so far that there is something to be said for Socialism, and nothing to be said for Capitalism. But the point is that when there is something to be said for one thing, it is now commonly said in support of the opposite thing. Never since the mob called out, "Less bread! More taxes!" in the nonsense story, has there been so truly nonsensical a situation as that in which the strikers demand Government control and the Government denounces its own control as anarchy. The mob howls before the palace gates, "Hateful tyrant, we demand that you assume more despotic powers"; and the tyrant thunders from the balcony, "Vile rebels, do you dare to suggest that my powers should be extended?" There seems to be a little misunderstanding somewhere.

In truth everything I saw told me that there was a large misunderstanding everywhere; a misunderstanding amounting to a mess. And as this was the last impression that London left on me, so it was the impression I carried with me about the whole modern problem of Western civilisation, as a riddle to be read or a knot to be untied. To untie it it is necessary to get hold of the right end of it, and especially the other end of it. We must begin at the beginning; we must return to our first origins in history, as we must return to our first principles in philosophy. We must consider how we came to be doing what we do, and even saying what we say. As it is, the very terms we use are either meaningless or something more than meaningless, inconsistent even with themselves. This applies, for instance, to the talk of both sides in that Labour controversy, which I merely took in passing, because it was the current controversy in London when I left. The Capitalists say Bolshevism as one might say Boojum. It is merely a mystical and imaginative word suggesting horror. But it might mean many things; including some just and rational things. On the other hand, there could never be any meaning at all in the phrase “the dictatorship of the proletariat.” It is like saying, “the omnipotence of omnibus-conductors.” It is fairly obvious that if an omnibus-conductor were omnipotent, he would probably prefer to conduct something else besides an omnibus. Whatever its exponents mean, it is clearly something different from what they say; and even this verbal inconsistency, this mere welter of words, is a sign of the common confusion of thought. It is this sort of thing that made London seem like a limbo of lost words, and possibly of lost wits. And it is here we find the value of what I have called walking backwards through history.

It is one of the rare merits of modern mechanical travel that it enables us to compare widely different cities in rapid succession. The stages of my own progress were the chief cities of separate countries; and though more is lost in missing the countries, something is gained in so sharply contrasting the capitals. And again it was one of the advantages of my own progress that it was a progress backwards; that it happened, as I have said, to retrace the course of history to older and older things; to Paris and to Rome and to Egypt, and almost, as it were, to Eden. And finally it is one of the advantages of such a return that it did really begin to clarify the confusion of names and notions in modern society. I first became conscious of this when I went out of the Gare de Lyon and walked along a row of cafes, until I saw again a distant column crowned with a dancing figure; the freedom that danced over the fall of the Bastille. Here at least, I thought, is an origin and a standard, such as I missed in the mere muddle of industrial opportunism. The modern industrial world is not in the least democratic; but it is supposed to be democratic, or supposed to be trying to be democratic. The ninth century, the time of the Norse invasions, was not saintly in the sense of being filled with saints; it was filled with pirates and petty tyrants, and the first feudal anarchy. But sanctity was the only ideal those barbarians had, when they had any at all. And democracy is the only ideal the industrial millions have, when they have any at all. Sanctity was the light of the Dark Ages, or if you will the dream of the Dark Ages. And democracy is the dream of the dark age of industrialism; if it be very much of a dream. It is this which prophets promise to achieve, and politicians pretend to achieve, and poets sometimes desire to achieve, and sometimes only desire to desire. In a word, an equal citizenship is quite the reverse of the reality in the modern world; but it is still the ideal in the modern world. At any rate it has no other ideal. If the figure that has alighted on the column in the Place de la Bastille be indeed the spirit of liberty, it must see a million growths in a modern city to make it wish to fly back again into heaven. But our secular society would not know what goddess to put on the pillar in its place.

As I looked at that sculptured goddess on that classical column, my mind went back another historic stage, and I asked myself where this classic and republican ideal came from, and the answer was equally clear. The place from which it had come was the place to which I was going; Rome. And it was not until I had reached Rome that I adequately realised the next great reality that simplified the whole story, and even this particular part of the story. I know nothing more abruptly arresting than that sudden steepness, as of streets scaling the sky, where stands, now cased in tile and brick and stone, that small rock that rose and overshadowed the whole earth; the Capitol. Here in the grey dawn of our history sat the strong Republic that set her foot upon the necks of kings; and it was from here assuredly that the spirit of the Republic flew like an eagle to alight on that far-off pillar in the country of the Gauls. For it ought to be remembered (and it is too often forgotten) that if Paris inherited what may be called the authority of Rome, it is equally true that Rome anticipated all that is sometimes called the anarchy of Paris. The expansion of the Roman Empire was accompanied by a sort of permanent Roman Revolution, fully as furious as the French Revolution. So long as the Roman system was really strong, it was full of riots and mobs and democratic divisions; and any number of Bastilles fell as the temple of the victories rose. But though I had but a hurried glance at such things, there were among them some that further aided the solution of the problem. I saw the larger achievements of the later Romans; and the lesson that was still lacking was plainly there. I saw the Coliseum, a monument of that love of looking on at athletic sports, which is noted as a sign of decadence in the Roman Empire and of energy in the British Empire. I saw the Baths of Caracalla, witnessing to a cult of cleanliness, adduced also to prove the luxury of Ancient Romans and the simplicity of Anglo-Saxons. All it really proves either way is a love of washing on a large scale; which might merely indicate that Caracalla, like other Emperors, was a lunatic. But indeed what such things do indicate, if only indirectly, is something which is here much more important. They indicate not only a sincerity in the public spirit, but a certain smoothness in the public services. In a word, while there were many revolutions, there were no strikes. The citizens were often rebels; but there were men who were not rebels, because they were not citizens. The ancient world forced a number of people to do the work of the world first, before it allowed more privileged people to fight about the government of the world. The truth is trite enough, of course; it is in the single word Slavery, which is not the name of a crime like Simony, but rather of a scheme like Socialism. Sometimes very like Socialism.

Only standing idly on one of those grassy mounds under one of those broken arches, I suddenly saw the Labour problem of London, as I could not see it in London. I do not mean that I saw which side was right, or what solution was reliable, or any partisan points or repartees, or any practical details about practical difficulties. I mean that I saw what it was; the thing itself and the whole thing. The Labour problem of to-day stood up quite simply, like a peak at which a man looks back and sees single and solid, though when he was walking over it it was a wilderness of rocks. The Labour problem is the attempt to have the democracy of Paris without the slavery of Rome. Between the Roman Republic and the French Republic something had happened. Whatever else it was, it was the abandonment of the ancient and fundamental human habit of slavery; the numbering of men for necessary labour as the normal foundation of society, even a society in which citizens were free and equal. When the idea of equal citizenship returned to the world, it found that world changed by a much more mysterious version of equality. So that London, handing on the lamp from Paris as well as Rome, is faced with a new problem touching the old practice of getting the work of the world done somehow. We have now to assume not only that all citizens are equal, but that all men are citizens. Capitalism attempted it by combining political equality with economic inequality; it assumed the rich could always hire the poor. But Capitalism seems to me to have collapsed; to be not only a discredited ethic but a bankrupt business. Whether we shall return to pagan slavery, or to small property, or by guilds or otherwise get to work in a new way, is not the question here. The question here was the one I asked myself standing on that green mound beside the yellow river; and the answer to it lay ahead of me, along the road that ran towards the rising sun.

What made the difference? What was it that had happened between the rise of the Roman Republic and the rise of the French Republic? Why did the equal citizens of the first take it for granted that there would be slaves? Why did the equal citizens of the second take it for granted that there would not be slaves? How had this immemorial institution disappeared in the interval, so that nobody even dreamed of it or suggested it? How was it that when equality returned, it was no longer the equality of citizens, and had to be the equality of men? The answer is that this equality of men is in more senses than one a mystery. It is a mystery which I pondered as I stood in the corridor of the train going south from Rome. It was at daybreak, and (as it happened) before any one else had risen, that I looked out of the long row of windows across a great landscape grey with olives and still dark against the dawn. The dawn itself looked rather like a row of wonderful windows; a line of low casements unshuttered and shining under the eaves of cloud. There was a curious clarity about the sunrise; as if its sun might be made of glass rather than gold. It was the first time I had seen so closely and covering such a landscape the grey convolutions and hoary foliage of the olive; and all those twisted trees went by like a dance of dragons in a dream. The rocking railway-train and the vanishing railway-line seemed to be going due east, as if disappearing into the sun; and save for the noise of the train there was no sound in all that grey and silver solitude; not even the sound of a bird. Yet the plantations were mostly marked out in private plots and bore every trace of the care of private owners. It is seldom, I confess, that I so catch the world asleep, nor do I know why my answer should have come to me thus when I was myself only half-awake. It is common in such a case to see some new signal or landmark; but in my experience it is rather the things already grown familiar that suddenly grow strange and significant. A million olives must have flashed by before I saw the first olive; the first, so to speak, which really waved the olive branch. For I remembered at last to what land I was going; and I knew the name of the magic which had made all those peasants out of pagan slaves, and has presented to the modern world a new problem of labour and liberty. It was as if I already saw against the clouds of daybreak that mountain which takes its title from the olive: and standing half visible upon it, a figure at which I did not look. *Ex oriente lux*; and I knew what dawn had broken over the ruins of Rome.

I have taken but this one text or label, out of a hundred such, the matter of labour and liberty; and thought it worth while to trace it from one blatant and bewildering yellow poster in the London streets to its high places in history. But it is only one example of the way in which a thousand things grouped themselves and fell into perspective as I passed farther and farther from them, and drew near the central origins of civilisation. I do not say that I saw the solution; but I saw the problem. In the litter of journalism and the chatter of politics, it is too much of a puzzle even to be a problem. For instance, a friend of mine described his book, *The Path to Rome*, as a journey through all Europe that the Faith had saved; and I might very well describe my own journey as one through all Europe that the War has saved. The trail of the actual fighting, of course, was awfully apparent everywhere; the plantations of pale crosses seemed to crop up on every side like growing things; and the first French villages through which I passed had heard in the distance, day and night, the guns of the long battle-line, like the breaking of an endless exterior sea of night upon the very borderland of the world. I felt it most as we passed the noble towers of Amiens, so near the high-water mark of the high tide of barbarism, in that night of terror just before the turning of the tide. For the truth which thus grew clearer with travel is rightly represented by the metaphor of the artillery, as the thunder and surf of a sea beyond the world. Whatever else the war was, it was like the resistance of something as solid as land, and sometimes as patient and inert as land, against something as unstable as water, as weak as water; but also as *strong* as water, as strong as water is in a cataract or a flood. It was the resistance of form to formlessness; that version or vision of it seemed to clarify itself more and more as I went on. It was the defence of that same ancient enclosure in which stood the broken columns of the Roman forum and the column in the Paris square, and of all other such enclosures down to the domestic enclosures of my own dog and donkey. All had the same design, the marking out of a square for the experiment of liberty; of the old civic liberty or the later universal liberty. I knew, to take the domestic metaphor, that the watchdog of the West had again proved too strong for the wild dogs of the Orient. For the foes of such creative limits are chaos and old night, whether they are the Northern barbarism that pitted tribal pride and brutal drill against the civic ideal of Paris, or the Eastern barbarism that brought brigands out of the wilds of Asia to sit on the throne of Byzantium. And as in the other case, what I saw was something simpler and larger than all the disputed details about the war and the peace. A man may think it extraordinary, as I do, that the natural dissolution of the artificial German Empire into smaller states should have actually been prevented by its enemies, when it was already accepted in despair by its friends. For we are now trying hard to hold the Prussian system together, having hammered hard for four mortal years to burst it asunder. Or he may think exactly the opposite; it makes no difference to the larger fact I have in mind. A man may think it simply topsy-turvy, as I do, that we should clear the Turks out of Turkey, but leave them in Constantinople. For that is driving the barbarians from their own rude tillage and pasturage, and giving up to them our own European and Christian city; it is as if the Romans annexed Parthia but surrendered Rome. But he may think exactly the opposite; and the larger and simpler truth will still be there. It was that the weeds and wild things had been everywhere breaking into our boundaries, climbing over the northern wall or crawling through the eastern gate, so that the city would soon have been swallowed in the jungle. And whether the lines had been redrawn logically or loosely, or particular things cleared with consistency or caprice, a line has been drawn somewhere and a clearance has been made somehow. The ancient plan of our city has been saved; a city at least capable of containing citizens. I felt this in the chance relics of the war itself; I felt it twenty times more in those older relics which even the war had never touched at all; I felt the change as much in the changeless East as in the ever-changing West. I felt it when I crossed another great square in Paris to look at a certain statue, which I had last seen hung with crape and such garlands as we give the dead; but on whose plain pedestal nothing now is left but the single word “Strasbourg.” I felt it when I saw words merely scribbled with a pencil on a wall in a poor street in Brindisi; *Italia vittoriosa*. But I felt it as much or even more in things infinitely more ancient and remote; in those monuments like mountains that still seem to look down upon all modern things. For these things were more than a trophy that had been raised, they were a palladium that had been rescued. These were the things that had again been saved from chaos, as they were saved at Salamis and Lepanto; and I knew what had saved them or at least in what formation they had been saved. I knew that these scattered splendours of antiquity would hardly have descended to us at all, to be endangered or delivered, if all that pagan world had not crystallised into Christendom.

Crossing seas as smooth as pavements inlaid with turquoise and lapis lazuli, and relieved with marble mountains as clear and famous as marble statues, it was easy to feel all that had been pure and radiant even in the long evening of paganism; but that did not make me forget what strong stars had comforted the inevitable night. The historical moral was the same whether these marble outlines were merely “the isles” seen afar off like sunset clouds by the Hebrew prophets, or were felt indeed as Hellas, the great archipelago of arts and arms praised by the Greek poets; the historic heritage of both descended only to the Greek Fathers. In those wild times and places, the thing that preserved both was the only thing that would have permanently preserved either. It was but part of the same story when we passed the hoary hills that held the primeval culture of Crete, and remembered that it may well have been the first home of the Philistines. It mattered the less by now whether the pagans were best represented by Poseidon the deity or by Dagon the demon. It mattered the less what gods had blessed the Greeks in their youth and liberty; for I knew what god had blessed them in their despair. I knew by what sign they had survived the long slavery under Ottoman orientalism; and upon what name they had called in the darkness, when there was no light but the horned moon of Mahound. If the glory of Greece has survived in some sense, I knew why it had ever survived in any sense. Nor did this feeling of our fixed formation fail me when I came to the very gates of Asia and of Africa; when there rose out of the same blue seas the great harbour of Alexandria; where had shone the Pharos like the star of Hellas, and where men had heard from the lips of Hypatia the last words of Plato. I know the Christians tore Hypatia in pieces; but they did not tear Plato in pieces. The wild men that rode behind Omar the Arab would have thought nothing of tearing every page of Plato in pieces. For it is the nature of all this outer nomadic anarchy that it is capable sooner or later of tearing anything and everything in pieces; it has no instinct of preservation or of the permanent needs of men. Where it has passed the ruins remain ruins and are not renewed; where it has been resisted and rolled back, the links of our long history are never lost. As I went forward the vision of our own civilisation, in the form in which it finally found unity, grew clearer and clearer; nor did I ever know it more certainly than when I had left it behind.

For the vision was that of a shape appearing and reappearing among shapeless things; and it was a shape I knew. The imagination was forced to rise into altitudes infinitely ancient and dizzy with distance, as if into the cold colours of primeval dawns, or into the upper strata and dead spaces of a daylight older than the sun and moon. But the character of that central clearance still became clearer and clearer. And my memory turned again homewards; and I thought it was like the vision of a man flying from Northolt, over that little market-place beside my own door; who can see nothing below him but a waste as of grey forests, and the pale pattern of a cross.

CHAPTER II

THE WAY OF THE DESERT

It may truly be said, touching the type of culture at least, that Egypt has an Egyptian lower class, a French middle class and an English governing class. Anyhow it is true that the civilisations are stratified in this formation, or superimposed in this order. It is the first impression produced by the darkness and density of the bazaars, the line of the lighted cafes and the blaze of the big hotels. But it contains a much deeper truth in all three cases, and especially in the case of the French influence. It is indeed one of the first examples of what I mean by the divisions of the West becoming clearer in the ancient centres of the East. It is often said that we can only appreciate the work of England in a place like India. In so far as this is true, it is quite equally true that we can only appreciate the work of France in a place like Egypt. But this work is of a peculiar and even paradoxical kind. It is too practical to be prominent, and so universal that it is unnoticed.

The French view of the Rights of Man is called visionary; but in practice it is very solid and even prosaic. The French have a unique and successful trick by which French things are not accepted as French. They are accepted as human. However many foreigners played football, they would still consider football an English thing. But they do not consider fencing a French thing, though all the terms of it are still French. If a Frenchman were to label his hostelry an inn or a public house (probably written publicouse) we should think him a victim of rather advanced Anglomania. But when an Englishman calls it an hotel, we feel no special dread of him either as a dangerous foreigner or a dangerous lunatic. We need not recognise less readily the value of this because our own distinction is different; especially as our own distinction is being more distinguished. The spirit of the English is adventure; and it is the essence of adventure that the adventurer does remain different from the strange tribes or strange cities, which he studies because of their strangeness. He does not become like them, as did some of the Germans, or persuade them to become like him, as do most of the French. But whether we like or dislike this French capacity, or merely appreciate it properly in its place, there can be no doubt about the cause of that capacity. The cause is in the spirit that is so often regarded as wildly

Utopian and unreal. The cause is in the abstract creed of equality and citizenship; in the possession of a political philosophy that appeals to all men. In truth men have never looked low enough for the success of the French Revolution. They have assumed that it claims to be a sort of divine and distant thing, and therefore have not noticed it in the nearest and most materialistic things. They have watched its wavering in the senate and never seen it walking in the streets; though it can be seen in the streets of Cairo as in the streets of Paris.

In Cairo a man thinks it English to go into a tea-shop; but he does not think it French to go into a cafe. And the people who go to the tea-shop, the English officers and officials, are stamped as English and also stamped as official. They are generally genial, they are generally generous, but they have the detachment of a governing group and even a garrison. They cannot be mistaken for human beings. The people going to a cafe are simply human beings going to it because it is a human place. They have forgotten how much is French and how much Egyptian in their civilisation; they simply think of it as civilisation. Now this character of the older French culture must be grasped because it is the clue to many things in the mystery of the modern East. I call it an old culture because as a matter of fact it runs back to the Roman culture. In this respect the Gauls really continue the work of the Romans, in making something official which comes at last to be regarded as ordinary. And the great fundamental fact which is incessantly forgotten and ought to be incessantly remembered, about these cities and provinces of the near East, is that they were once as Roman as Gaul.

There is a frivolous and fanciful debate I have often had with a friend, about whether it is better to find one’s way or to lose it, to remember the road or to forget it. I am so constituted as to be capable of losing my way in my own village and almost in my own house. And I am prepared to maintain the privilege to be a poetic one. In truth I am prepared to maintain that both attitudes are valuable, and should exist side by side. And so my friend and I walk side by side along the ways of the world, he being full of a rich and humane sentiment, because he remembers passing that way a few hundred times since his childhood; while to me existence is a perpetual fairy-tale, because I have forgotten all about it. The lamp-post which moves him to a tear of reminiscence wrings from me a cry of astonishment; and the wall which to him is as historic as a pyramid is to me as arresting and revolutionary as a barricade. Now in this, I am glad to say, my temperament is very English; and the difference is very typical of the two functions of the English and the French. But in practical politics the French have a certain advantage in knowing where they are, and knowing it is where they have been before. It is in the Roman Empire.

The position of the English in Egypt or even in Palestine is something of a paradox. The real English claim is never heard in England and never uttered by Englishmen. We do indeed hear a number of false English claims, and other English claims that are rather irrelevant than false. We hear pompous and hypocritical suggestions, full of that which so often accompanies the sin of pride, the weakness of provinciality. We hear suggestions that the English alone can establish anywhere a reign of law, justice, mercy, purity and all the rest of it. We also hear franker and fairer suggestions that the English have after all (as indeed they have) embarked on a spirited and stirring adventure; and that there has been a real romance in the extending of the British Empire in strange lands. But the real case for these semi-eastern occupations is not that of extending the British Empire in strange lands. Rather it is restoring the Roman Empire in familiar lands. It is not merely breaking out of Europe in the search for something non-European. It would be much truer to call it putting Europe together again after it had been broken. It may almost be said of the Britons, considered as the most western of Europeans, that they have so completely forgotten their own history that they have forgotten even their own rights. At any rate they have forgotten the claims that could reasonably be made for them, but which they never think of making for themselves. They have not the faintest notion, for instance, of why hundreds of years ago an English saint was taken from Egypt, or why an English king was fighting in Palestine. They merely have a vague idea that George of Cappadocia was naturalised much in the same way as George of Hanover. They almost certainly suppose that Coeur de Lion in his wanderings happened to meet the King of Egypt, as Captain Cook might happen to meet the King of the Cannibal Islands. To understand the past connection of England with the near East, it is necessary to understand something that lies behind Europe and even behind the Roman Empire; something that can only be conveyed by the name of the Mediterranean. When people talk, for instance, as if the Crusades were nothing more than an aggressive raid against Islam, they seem to forget in the strangest way that Islam itself was only an aggressive raid against the old and ordered civilisation in these parts. I do not say it in mere hostility to the religion of Mahomet; as will be apparent later, I am fully conscious of many values and virtues in it; but certainly it was Islam that was the invasion and Christendom that was the thing invaded. An Arabian gentleman found riding on the road to Paris or hammering on the gates of Vienna can hardly complain that we have sought him out in his simple tent in the desert. The conqueror of Sicily and Spain cannot reasonably express surprise at being an object of morbid curiosity to the people of Italy and France. In the city of Cairo the stranger feels many of the Moslem merits, but he certainly feels the militaristic character of the Moslem glories. The crown of the city is the citadel, built by the great Saladin but of the spoils of ancient Egyptian architecture; and that fact is in its turn very symbolical. The man was a great conqueror, but he certainly behaved like an invader; he spoiled the Egyptians. He broke the old temples and tombs and built his own out of fragments. Nor is this the only respect in which the citadel of Cairo is set high like a sign in heaven. The sign is also significant because from this superb height the traveller first beholds the desert, out of which the great conquest came.

Every one has heard the great story of the Greeks who cried aloud in triumph when they saw the sea afar off; but it is a stranger experience to see the earth afar off. And few of us, strictly speaking, have ever seen the earth at all. In cultivated countries it is always clad, as it were, in green garments. The first sight of the desert is like the sight of a naked giant in the distance. The image is all the more natural because of the particular formation which it takes, at least as it borders upon the fields of Egypt, and as it is seen from the high places of Cairo. Those who have seen the desert only in pictures generally think of it as entirely flat. But this edge of it at least stands up on the horizon, as a line of wrinkled and hollow hills like the scalps of bald men; or worse, of bald women. For it is impossible not to think of such repulsive images, in spite of real sublimity of the call to the imagination. There is something curiously hostile and inhuman about the first appearance of the motionless surges of that dry and dreadful sea. Afterwards, if the traveller has happened to linger here and there in the outposts of the desert, has seen the British camp at Kantara or the graceful French garden town of Ismalia, he comes to take the desert as a background, and sometimes a beautiful background; a mirror of mighty reflections and changing colours almost as strange as the colours of the sea. But when it is first seen abutting, and as it were, advancing, upon the fields and gardens of humanity, then it looks indeed like an enemy, or a long line of enemies; like a line of tawny wild beasts thus halted with their heads lifted. It is the feeling that such vain and sterile sand can yet make itself into something like a mountain range; and the traveller remembers all the tragedies of the desert, when he lifts up his eyes to those accursed hills, from whence no help can come.

But this is only a first glimpse from a city set among green fields; and is concerned rather with what the desert has been in its relation to men than with what the desert is in itself. When the mind has grown used to its monotony, a curious change takes place which I have never seen noted or explained by the students of mental science. It may sound strange to say that monotony of its nature becomes novelty. But if any one will try the common experiment of saying some ordinary word such as “moon” or “man” about fifty times, he will find that the expression has become extraordinary by sheer repetition. A man has become a strange animal with a name as queer as that of the gnu; and the moon something monstrous like the moon-calf. Something of this magic of monotony is effected by the monotony of deserts; and the traveller feels as if he had entered into a secret, and was looking at everything from another side. Something of this simplification appears, I think, in the religions of the desert, especially in the religion of Islam. It explains something of the super-human hopes that fill the desert prophets concerning the future; it explains something also about their barbarous indifference to the past.

We think of the desert and its stones as old; but in one sense they are unnaturally new. They are unused, and perhaps unusable. They might be the raw material of a world; only they are so raw as to be rejected. It is not easy to define this quality of something primitive, something not mature enough to be fruitful. Indeed there is a hard simplicity about many Eastern things that is as much crude as archaic. A palm-tree is very like a tree drawn by a child — or by a very futurist artist. Even a pyramid is like a mathematical figure drawn by a schoolmaster teaching children; and its very impressiveness is that of an ultimate Platonic abstraction. There is something curiously simple about the shape in which these colossal crystals of the ancient sands have been cast. It is only when we have felt something of this element, not only of simplicity, but of crudity, and even in a sense of novelty, that we can begin to understand both the immensity and the insufficiency of that power that came out of the desert, the great religion of Mahomet.

In the red circle of the desert, in the dark and secret place, the prophet discovers the obvious things. I do not say it merely as a sneer, for obvious things are very easily forgotten; and indeed every high civilisation decays by forgetting obvious things. But it is true that in such a solitude men tend to take very simple ideas as if they were entirely new ideas. There is a love of concentration which comes from the lack of comparison. The lonely man looking at the lonely palm-tree does see the elementary truths about the palm-tree; and the elementary truths are very essential. Thus he does see that though the palm-tree may be a very simple design, it was not he who designed it. It may look like a tree drawn by a child, but he is not the child who could draw it. He has not command of that magic slate on which the pictures can come to life, or of that magic green chalk of which the green lines can grow. He sees at once that a power is at work in whose presence he and the palm-tree are alike little children. In other words, he is intelligent enough to believe in God; and the Moslem, the man of the desert, is intelligent enough to believe in God. But his belief is lacking in that humane complexity that comes from comparison. The man looking at the palm-tree does realise the simple fact that God made it; while the man looking at the lamp-post in a large modern city can be persuaded by a hundred sophistical circumlocutions that he made it himself. But the man in the desert cannot compare the palm-tree with the lamp-post, or even with all the other trees which may be better worth looking at than the lamp-post. Hence his religion, though true as far as it goes, has not the variety and vitality of the churches that were designed by men walking in the woods and orchards. I speak here of the Moslem type of religion and not of the oriental type of ornament, which is much older than the Moslem type of religion. But even the oriental type of ornament, admirable as it often is, is to the ornament of a gothic cathedral what a fossil forest is to a forest full of birds. In short, the man of the desert tends to simplify too much, and to take his first truth for the last truth. And as it is with religion so it is with morality. He who believes in the existence of God believes in the equality of man. And it has been one of the merits of the Moslem faith that it felt men as men, and was not incapable of welcoming men of many different races. But here again it was so hard and crude that its very equality was like a desert rather than a field. Its very humanity was inhuman.

But though this human sentiment is rather rudimentary it is very real. When a man in the desert meets another man, he is really a man; the proverbial two-legged fowl without feathers. He is an absolute and elementary shape, like the palm-tree or the pyramid. The discoverer does not pause to consider through what gradations he may have been evolved from a camel. When the man is a mere dot in the distance, the other man does not shout at him and ask whether he had a university education, or whether he is quite sure he is purely Teutonic and not Celtic or Iberian. A man is a man; and a man is a very important thing. One thing redeems the Moslem morality which can be set over against a mountain of crimes; a considerable deposit of common sense. And the first fact of common sense is the common bond of men. There is indeed in the Moslem character also a deep and most dangerous potentiality of fanaticism of the menace of which something may be said later. Fanaticism sounds like the flat contrary of common sense; yet curiously enough they are both sides of the same thing. The fanatic of the desert is dangerous precisely because he does take his faith as a fact, and not even as a truth in our more transcendental sense. When he does take up a mystical idea he takes it as he takes the man or the palm-tree; that is, quite literally. When he does distinguish somebody not as a man but as a Moslem, then he divides the Moslem from the non-Moslem exactly as he divides the man from the camel. But even then he recognises the equality of men in the sense of the equality of Moslems. He does not, for instance, complicate his conscience with any sham science about races. In this he has something like an intellectual advantage over the Jew, who is generally so much his intellectual superior; and even in some ways his spiritual superior. The Jew has far more moral imagination and sympathy with the subtler ideals of the soul. For instance, it is said that many Jews disbelieve in a future life; but if they did believe in a future life, it would be something more worthy of the genius of Isaiah and Spinoza. The Moslem Paradise is a very Earthly Paradise. But with all their fine apprehensions, the Jews suffer from one heavy calamity; that of being a Chosen Race. It is the vice of any patriotism or religion depending on race that the individual is himself the thing to be worshipped; the individual is his own ideal, and even his own idol. This fancy was fatal to the Germans; it is fatal to the Anglo-Saxons, whenever any of them forswear the glorious name of Englishmen and Americans to fall into that forlorn description. This is not so when the nation is felt as a noble abstraction, of which the individual is proud in the abstract. A Frenchman is proud of France, and therefore may think himself unworthy of France. But a German is proud of being a

German; and he cannot be too unworthy to be a German when he is a German. In short, mere family pride flatters every member of the family; it produced the arrogance of the Germans, and it is capable of producing a much subtler kind of arrogance in the Jews. From this particular sort of self-deception the more savage man of the desert is free. If he is not considering somebody as a Moslem, he will consider him as a man. At the price of something like barbarism, he has at least been saved from ethnology.

But here again the obvious is a limit as well as a light to him. It does not permit, for instance, anything fine or subtle in the sentiment of sex. Islam asserts admirably the equality of men; but it is the equality of males. No one can deny that a noble dignity is possible even to the poorest, who has seen the Arabs coming in from the desert to the cities of Palestine or Egypt. No one can deny that men whose rags are dropping off their backs can bear themselves in a way befitting kings or prophets in the great stories of Scripture. No one can be surprised that so many fine artists have delighted to draw such models on the spot, and to make realistic studies for illustrations to the Old and New Testaments. On the road to Cairo one may see twenty groups exactly like that of the Holy Family in the pictures of the Flight into Egypt; with only one difference. The man is riding on the ass.

In the East it is the male who is dignified and even ceremonial. Possibly that is why he wears skirts. I pointed out long ago that petticoats, which some regard as a garb of humiliation for women are really regarded as the only garb of magnificence for men, when they wish to be something more than men. They are worn by kings, by priests, and by judges. The male Moslem, especially in his own family, is the king and the priest and the judge. I do not mean merely that he is the master, as many would say of the male in many Western societies, especially simple and self-governing societies. I mean something more; I mean that he has not only the kingdom and the power but the glory, and even as it were the glamour. I mean he has not only the rough leadership that we often give to the man, but the special sort of social beauty and stateliness that we generally expect only of the woman. What we mean when we say that an ambitious man wants to have a fine woman at the head of the dinner-table, that the Moslem world really means when it expects to see a fine man at the head of the house. Even in the street he is the peacock, coloured much more splendidly than the peahen. Even when clad in comparatively sober and partly European costume, as outside the cafes of Cairo and the great cities, he exhibits this indefinable character not merely of dignity but of pomp. It can be traced even in the tarbouch, the minimum of Turkish attire worn by all the commercial classes; the thing more commonly called in England a fez. The fez is not a sort of smoking cap. It is a tower of scarlet often tall enough to be the head-dress of a priest. And it is a hat one cannot take off to a lady.

This fact is familiar enough in talk about Moslem and oriental life generally; but I only repeat it in order to refer it back to the same simplification which is the advantage and disadvantage of the philosophy of the desert. Chivalry is not an obvious idea. It is not as plain as a pike-staff or as a palm-tree. It is a delicate balance between the sexes which gives the rarest and most poetic kind of pleasure to those who can strike it. But it is not self-evident to a savage merely because he is also a sane man. It often seems to him as much a part of his own coarse common sense that all the fame and fun should go to the sex that is stronger and less tied, as that all the authority should go to the parents rather than the children. Pity for weakness he can understand; and the Moslem is quite capable of giving royal alms to a cripple or an orphan. But reverence for weakness is to him simply meaningless. It is a mystical idea that is to him no more than a mystery. But the same is true touching what may be called the lighter side of the more civilised sentiment. This hard and literal view of life gives no place for that slight element of a magnanimous sort of play-acting, which has run through all our tales of true lovers in the West. Wherever there is chivalry there is courtesy; and wherever there is courtesy there is comedy. There is no comedy in the desert.

Another quite logical and consistent element, in the very logical and consistent creed we call Mahometanism, is the element that we call Vandalism. Since such few and obvious things alone are vital, and since a half-artistic half-antiquarian affection is not one of these things, and cannot be called obvious, it is largely left out. It is very difficult to say in a few well-chosen words exactly what is now the use of the Pyramids. Therefore Saladin, the great Saracen warrior, simply stripped the Pyramids to build a military fortress on the heights of Cairo. It is a little difficult to define exactly what is a man’s duty to the Sphinx; and therefore the Mamelukes used it entirely as a target. There was little in them of that double feeling, full of pathos and irony, which divided the hearts of the primitive Christians in presence of the great pagan literature and art. This is not concerned with brutal outbreaks of revenge which may be found on both sides, or with chivalrous caprices of toleration, which may also be found on both sides; it is concerned with the inmost mentality of the two religions, which must be understood in order to do justice to either. The Moslem mind never tended to that mystical mode of “loving yet leaving” with which Augustine cried aloud upon the ancient beauty, or Dante said farewell to Virgil when he left him in the limbo of the pagans. The Moslem traditions, unlike the medieval legends, do not suggest the image of a knight who kissed Venus before he killed her. We see in all the Christian ages this combination which is not a compromise, but rather a complexity made by two contrary enthusiasms; as when the Dark Ages copied out the pagan poems while denying the pagan legends; or when the popes of the Renascence imitated the Greek temples while denying the Greek gods. This high inconsistency is inconsistent with Islam. Islam, as I have said, takes everything literally, and does not know how to play with anything. And the cause of the contrast is the historical cause of which we must be conscious in all studies of this kind. The Christian Church had from a very early date the idea of reconstructing a whole civilisation, and even a complex civilisation. It was the attempt to make a new balance, which differed from the old balance of the stoics of Rome; but which could not afford to lose its balance any more than they. It differed because the old system was one of many religions under one government, while the new was one of many governments under one religion. But the idea of variety in unity remained though it was in a sense reversed. A historical instinct made the men of the new Europe try hard to find a place for everything in the system, however much might be denied to the individual. Christians might lose everything, but Christendom, if possible, must not lose anything. The very nature of Islam, even at its best, was quite different from this. Nobody supposed, even subconsciously, that Mahomet meant to restore ancient Babylon as medievalism vaguely sought to restore ancient Rome. Nobody thought that the builders of the Mosque of Omar had looked at the Pyramids as the builders of St. Peter’s might have looked at the Parthenon. Islam began at the beginning; it was content with the idea that it had a great truth; as indeed it had a colossal truth. It was so huge a truth that it was hard to see it was a half-truth.

Islam was a movement; that is why it has ceased to move. For a movement can only be a mood. It may be a very necessary movement arising from a very noble mood, but sooner or later it must find its level in a larger philosophy, and be balanced against other things. Islam was a reaction towards simplicity; it was a violent simplification, which turned out to be an over-simplification. Stevenson has somewhere one of his perfectly picked phrases for an empty-minded man; that he has not one thought to rub against another while he waits for a train. The Moslem had one thought, and that a most vital one; the greatness of God which levels all men. But the Moslem had not one thought to rub against another, because he really had not another. It is the friction of two spiritual things, of tradition and invention, or of substance and symbol, from which the mind takes fire. The creeds condemned as complex have something like the secret of sex; they can breed thoughts.

An idealistic intellectual remarked recently that there were a great many things in the creed for which he had no use. He might just as well have said that there were a great many things in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* for which he had no use. It would probably have occurred to him that the work in question was meant for humanity and not for him. But even in the case of the *Encyclopedia*, it will often be found a stimulating exercise to read two articles on two widely different subjects and note where they touch. In fact there is really a great deal to be said for the man in *Pickwick* who read first about China and then about metaphysics and combined his information. But however this may be in the famous case of Chinese metaphysics, it is this which is chiefly lacking in Arabian metaphysics. They suffer, as I have said of the palm-tree in the desert, from a lack of the vitality that comes from complexity, and of the complexity that comes from comparison. They suffer from having been in a single movement in a single direction; from having begun as a mood and ended rather as a mode, that is a mere custom or fashion. But any modern Christian thus criticising the Moslem movement will do well to criticise himself and his world at the same time. For in truth most modern things are mere movements in the same sense as the Moslem movement. They are at best fashions, in which one thing is exaggerated because it has been neglected. They are at worst mere monomanias, in which everything is neglected that one thing may be exaggerated. Good or bad, they are alike movements which in their nature can only move for a certain distance and then stop. Feminism, for instance, is in its nature a movement, and one that must stop somewhere. But the Suffragettes no more established a philosophy of the sexes by their feminism than the Arabs did by their anti-feminism. A woman can find her home on the hustings even less than in the harem; but such movements do not really attempt to find a final home for anybody or anything. Bolshevism is a movement; and in my opinion a very natural and just movement considered as a revolt against the crude cruelty of Capitalism. But when we find the Bolshevists making a rule that the drama “must encourage the proletarian spirit,” it is obvious that those who say so are not only maniacs but, what is more to the point here, are monomaniacs. Imagine having to apply that principle, let us say, to “Charley’s Aunt.” None of these things seek to establish a complete philosophy such as Aquinas founded on Aristotle. The only two modern men who attempted it were Comte and Herbert Spencer. Spencer, I think, was too small a man to do it at all; and Comte was a great enough man to show how difficult it is to do it in modern times. None of these movements can do anything but move; they have not discovered where to rest.

And this fact brings us back to the man of the desert, who moves and does not rest; but who has many superiorities to the restless races of the industrial city. Men who have been in the Manchester movement in 1860 and the Fabian movement in 1880 cannot sneer at a religious mood that lasted for eight hundred years. And those who tolerate the degraded homelessness of the slums cannot despise the much more dignified homelessness of the desert. Nevertheless, the thing is a homelessness and not a home; and there runs through it all the note of the nomad. The Moslem takes literally, as he takes everything, the truth that here we have no abiding city. He can see no meaning in the mysticism of materialism, the sacramental idea that a French poet expressed so nobly, when he said that our earthly city is the body of the city of God. He has no true notion of building a house, or in our Western sense of recognising the kindred points of heaven and home. Even the exception to this rule is an exception at once terrible and touching. There is one house that the Moslem does build like a house and even a home, often with walls and roof and door; as square as a cottage, as solid as a fort. And that is his grave. A Moslem cemetery is literally like a little village. It is a village, as the saying goes, that one would not care to walk through at night. There is something singularly creepy about so strange a street of houses, each with a door that might be opened by a dead man. But in a less fanciful sense, there is about it something profoundly pathetic and human. Here indeed is the sailor home from sea, in the only port he will consent to call his home; here at last the nomad confesses the common need of men. But even about this there broods the presence of the desert and its dry bones of reason. He will accept nothing between a tent and a tomb.

The philosophy of the desert can only begin over again. It cannot grow; it cannot have what Protestants call progress and Catholics call development. There is death and hell in the desert when it does begin over again. There is always the possibility that a new prophet will rediscover the old truth; will find again written on the red sands the secret of the obvious. But it will always be the same secret, for which thousands of these simple and serious and splendidly valiant men will die. The highest message of Mahomet is a piece of divine tautology. The very cry that God is God is a repetition of words, like the repetitions of wide sands and rolling skies. The very phrase is like an everlasting echo, that can never cease to say the same sacred word; and when I saw afterwards the mightiest and most magnificent of all the mosques of that land, I found that its inscriptions had the same character of a deliberate and defiant sameness. The ancient Arabic alphabet and script is itself at once so elegant and so exact that it can be used as a fixed ornament, like the egg and dart pattern or the Greek key. It is as if we could make a heraldry of handwriting, or cover a wall-paper with signatures. But the literary style is as recurrent as the decorative style; perhaps that is why it can be used as a decorative style. Phrases are repeated again and again like ornamental stars or flowers. Many modern people, for example, imagine that the Athanasian Creed is full of vain repetitions; but that is because people are too lazy to listen to it, or not lucid enough to understand it. The same terms are used throughout, as they are in a proposition of Euclid. But the steps are all as differentiated and progressive as in a proposition of Euclid. But in the inscriptions of the Mosque whole sentences seem to occur, not like the steps of an argument, but rather like the chorus of a song. This is the impression everywhere produced by this spirit of the sandy wastes; this is the voice of the desert, though the muezzin cries from the high turrets of the city. Indeed one is driven to repeating oneself about the repetition, so overpowering is the impression of the tall horizons of those tremendous plains, brooding upon the soul with all the solemn weight of the self-evident.

There is indeed another aspect of the desert, yet more ancient and momentous, of which I may speak; but here I only deal with its effect on this great religion of simplicity. For it is through the atmosphere of that religion that a man makes his way, as so many pilgrims have done, to the goal of this pilgrimage. Also this particular aspect remained the more sharply in my memory because of the suddenness with which I escaped from it. I had not expected the contrast; and it may have coloured all my after experiences. I descended from the desert train at Ludd, which had all the look of a large camp in the desert; appropriately enough perhaps, for it is the traditional birthplace of the soldier St. George. At the moment, however, there was nothing rousing or romantic about its appearance. It was perhaps unusually dreary; for heavy rain had fallen; and the water stood about in what it is easier to call large puddles than anything so poetic as small pools. A motor car sent by friends had halted beside the platform; I got into it with a not unusual vagueness about where I was going; and it wound its way up miry paths to a more rolling stretch of country with patches of cactus here and there. And then with a curious abruptness I became conscious that the whole huge desert had vanished, and I was in a new land. The dark red plains had rolled away like an enormous nightmare; and I found myself in a fresh and exceedingly pleasant dream.

I know it will seem fanciful; but for a moment I really felt as if I had come home; or rather to that home behind home for which we are all homesick. The lost memory of it is the life at once of faith and of fairy-tale. Groves glowing with oranges rose behind hedges of grotesque cactus or prickly pear; which really looked like green dragons guarding the golden apples of the Hesperides. On each side of the road were such flowers as I had never seen before under the sun; for indeed they seemed to have the sun in them rather than the sun on them. Clusters and crowds of crimson anemones were of a red not to be symbolised in blood or wine; but rather in the red glass that glows in the window dedicated to a martyr. Only in a wild Eastern tale could one picture a pilgrim or traveller finding such a garden in the desert; and I thought of the oldest tale of all and the garden from which we came. But there was something in it yet more subtle; which there must be in the impression of any earthly paradise. It is vital to such a dream that things familiar should be mixed with things fantastic; as when an actual dream is filled with the faces of old friends. Sparrows, which seem to be the same all over the world, were darting hither and thither among the flowers; and I had the fancy that they were the souls of the town-sparrows of London and the smoky cities, and now gone wherever the good sparrows go. And a little way up the road before me, on the hill between the cactus hedges, I saw a grey donkey trotting; and I could almost have sworn that it was the donkey I had left at home.

He was trotting on ahead of me, and the outline of his erect and elfish ears was dark against the sky. He was evidently going somewhere with great determination; and I thought I knew to what appropriate place he was going, and that it was my fate to follow him like a moving omen. I lost sight of him later, for I had to complete the journey by train; but the train followed the same direction, which was up steeper and steeper hills. I began to realise more clearly where I was; and to know that the garden in the desert that had bloomed so suddenly about me had borne for many desert wanderers the name of the promised land. As the rocks rose higher and higher on every side, and hung over us like terrible and tangible clouds, I saw in the dim grass of the slopes below them something I had never seen before. It was a rainbow fallen upon the earth, with no part of it against the sky, but only the grasses and the flowers shining through its fine shades of fiery colour. I thought this also was like an omen; and in such a mood of idle mysticism there fell on me another accident which I was content to count for a third. For when the train stopped at last in the rain, and there was no other vehicle for the last lap of the journey, a very courteous officer, an army surgeon, gave me a seat in an ambulance wagon; and it was under the shield of the red cross that I entered Jerusalem.

For suddenly, between a post of the wagon and a wrack of rainy cloud I saw it, uplifted and withdrawn under all the arching heavens of its history, alone with its benediction and its blasphemy, the city that is set upon a hill, and cannot be hid.

CHAPTER III

THE GATES OF THE CITY

The men I met coming from Jerusalem reported all sorts of contradictory impressions; and yet my own impression contradicted them all. Their impressions were doubtless as true as mine; but I describe my own because it is true, and because I think it points to a neglected truth about the real Jerusalem. I need not say I did not expect the real Jerusalem to be the New Jerusalem; a city of charity and peace, any more than a city of chrysolite and pearl. I might more reasonably have expected an austere and ascetic place, oppressed with the weight of its destiny, with no inns except monasteries, and these sealed with the terrible silence of the Trappists; an awful city where men speak by signs in the street. I did not need the numberless jokes about Jerusalem to-day, to warn me against expecting this; anyhow I did not expect it, and certainly I did not find it. But neither did I find what I was much more inclined to expect; something at the other extreme. Many reports had led me to look for a truly cosmopolitan town, that is a truly conquered town. I looked for a place like Cairo, containing indeed old and interesting things, but open on every side to new and vulgar things; full of the touts who seem only created for the tourists and the tourists who seem only created for the touts. There may be more of this in the place than pleases those who would idealise it. But I fancy there is much less of it than is commonly supposed in the reaction from such an ideal. It does not, like Cairo, offer the exciting experience of twenty guides fighting for one traveller; of young Turks drinking American cocktails as a protest against Christian wine. The town is quite inconvenient enough to make it a decent place for pilgrims. Or a stranger might have imagined a place even less Western than Cairo, one of those villages of Palestine described in dusty old books of Biblical research. He might remember drawings like diagrams representing a well or a wine-press, rather a dry well, so to speak, and a wine-press very difficult to associate with wine. These hard colourless outlines never did justice to the colour of the East, but even to give it the colour of the East would not do justice to Jerusalem. If I had anticipated the Bagdad of all our dreams, a maze of bazaars glowing with gorgeous wares, I should have been wrong again. There is quite enough of this vivid and varied colour in Jerusalem, but it is not the first fact that arrests the attention, and certainly not the first that arrested mine. I give my own first impression as a fact, for what it is worth and exactly as it came. I did not expect it, and it was some time before I even understood it. As soon as I was walking inside the walls of Jerusalem, I had an overwhelming impression that I was walking in the town of Rye, where it looks across the flat sea-meadows towards Winchelsea.

As I tried to explain this eccentric sentiment to myself, I was conscious of another which at once completed and contradicted it. It was not only like a memory of Rye, it was mixed with a memory of the Mount St. Michael, which stands among the sands of Normandy on the other side of the narrow seas. The first part of the sensation is that the traveller, as he walks the stony streets between the walls, feels that he is inside a fortress. But it is the paradox of such a place that, while he feels in a sense that he is in a prison, he also feels that he is on a precipice. The sense of being uplifted, and set on a high place, comes to him through the smallest cranny, or most accidental crack in rock or stone; it comes to him especially through those long narrow windows in the walls of the old fortifications; those slits in the stone through which the medieval archers used their bows and the medieval artists used their eyes, with even greater success. Those green glimpses of fields far below or of flats far away, which delight us and yet make us dizzy (by being both near and far) when seen through the windows of Memling, can often be seen from the walls of Jerusalem. Then I remembered that in the same strips of medieval landscape could be seen always, here and there, a steep hill crowned with a city of towers. And I knew I had the mystical and double pleasure of seeing such a hill and standing on it. A city that is set upon a hill cannot be hid; but it is more strange when the hill cannot anywhere be hid, even from the citizen in the city.

Then indeed I knew that what I saw was Jerusalem of the Crusaders; or at least Jerusalem of the Crusades. It was a medieval town, with walls and gates and a citadel, and built upon a hill to be defended by bowmen. The greater part of the actual walls now standing were built by Moslems late in the Middle Ages; but they are almost exactly like the walls that were being built by the Christians at or before that time. The Crusader Edward, afterwards Edward the First, reared such battlements far away among the rainy hills of Wales. I do not know what elements were originally Gothic or what originally Saracenic. The Crusaders and the Saracens constantly copied each other while they combated each other; indeed it is a fact always to be found in such combats. It is one of the arguments against war that are really human, and therefore are never used by humanitarians. The curse of war is that it does lead to more international imitation; while in peace and freedom men can afford to have national variety. But some things in this country were certainly copied from the Christian invaders, and even if they are not Christian they are in many ways strangely European. The wall and gates which now stand, whatever stood before them and whatever comes after them, carry a memory of those men from the West who came here upon that wild adventure, who climbed this rock and clung to it so perilously from the victory of Godfrey to the victory of Saladin; and that is why this momentary Eastern exile reminded me so strangely of the hill of Rye and of home.

I do not forget, of course, that all these visible walls and towers are but the battlements and pinnacles of a buried city, or of many buried cities. I do not forget that such buildings have foundations that are to us almost like fossils; the gigantic fossils of some other geological epoch. Something may be said later of those lost empires whose very masterpieces are to us like petrified monsters. From this height, after long histories unrecorded, fell the forgotten idol of the Jebusites, on that day when David's javelin-men scaled the citadel and carried through it, in darkness behind his coloured curtains, the god whose image had never been made by man. Here was waged that endless war between the graven gods of the plain and the invisible god of the mountain; from here the hosts carrying the sacred fish of the Philistines were driven back to the sea from which their worship came. Those who worshipped on this hill had come out of bondage in Egypt and went into bondage in Babylon; small as was their country, there passed before them almost the whole pageant of the old pagan world. All its strange shapes and strong almost cruel colours remain in the records of their prophets; whose lightest phrase seems heavier than the pyramids of Egypt; and whose very words are like winged bulls walking. All this historic or pre-historic interest may be touched on in its turn; but I am not dealing here with the historic secrets unearthed by the study of the place, but with the historic associations aroused by the sight of it. The traveller is in the position of that famous fantastic who tied his horse to a wayside cross in the snow, and afterward saw it dangling from the church-spire of what had been a buried city. But here the cross does not stand as it does on the top of a spire; but as it does on the top of an Egyptian obelisk in Rome, — where the priests have put a cross on the top of the heathen monument; for fear it should walk. I entirely sympathise with their sentiment; and I shall try to suggest later why I think that symbol the logical culmination of heathen as well as Christian things. The traveller in the traveller's tale looked up at last and saw, from the streets far below, the spire and cross dominating a Gothic city. If I looked up in a vision and saw it dominating a Babylonian city, that blocked the heavens with monstrous palaces and temples, I should still think it natural that it should dominate. But the point here is that what I saw above ground was rather the Gothic town than the Babylonian; and that it reminded me, if not specially of the cross, at least of the soldiers who took the cross.

Nor do I forget the long centuries that have passed over the place since these medieval walls were built, any more than the far more interesting centuries that passed before they were built. But any one taking exception to the description on that ground may well realise, on consideration, that it is an exception that proves the rule. There is something very negative about Turkish rule; and the best and worst of it is in the word neglect. Everything that lived under the vague empire of Constantinople remained in a state of suspended animation like something frozen rather than decayed, like something sleeping rather than dead. It was a sort of Arabian spell, like that which turned princes and princesses into marble statues in the *Arabian Nights*. All that part of the history of the place is a kind of sleep; and that of a sleeper who hardly knows if he has slept an hour or a hundred years. When I first found myself in the Jaffa Gate of Jerusalem, my eye happened to fall on something that might be seen anywhere, but which seemed somehow to have a curious significance there. Most people are conscious of some common object which still strikes them as uncommon; as if it were the first fantastic sketch in the sketch-book of nature. I myself can never overcome the sense of something almost unearthly about grass growing upon human buildings. There is in it a wild and even horrible fancy, as if houses could grow hair. When I saw that green hair on the huge stone blocks of the citadel, though I had seen the same thing on any number of ruins, it came to me like an omen or a vision, a curious vision at once of chaos and of sleep. It is said that the grass will not grow where the Turk sets his foot; but it is the other side of the same truth to say that it would grow anywhere but where it ought to grow. And though in this case it was but an accident and a symbol, it was a very true symbol. We talk of the green banner of the Turk having been planted on this or that citadel; and certainly it was so planted with splendid valour and sensational victory. But this is the green banner that he plants on all his high cities in the end.

Therefore my immediate impression of the walls and gates was not contradicted by my consciousness of what came before and what came after that medieval period. It remained primarily a thing of walls and gates; a thing which the modern world does not perhaps understand so well as the medieval world. There is involved in it all that idea of definition which those who do not like it are fond of describing as dogma. A wall is like rule; and the gates are like the exceptions that prove the rule. The man making it has to decide where his rule will run and where his exception shall stand. He cannot have a city that is all gates any more than a house that is all windows; nor is it possible to have a law that consists entirely of liberties. The ancient races and religions that contended for this city agreed with each other in this, when they differed about everything else. It was true of practically all of them that when they built a city they built a citadel. That is, whatever strange thing they may have made, they regarded it as something to be defined and to be defended.

And from this standpoint the holy city was a happy city; it had no suburbs. That is to say, there are all sorts of buildings outside the wall; but they are outside the wall. Everybody is conscious of being inside or outside a boundary; but it is the whole character of the true suburbs which grow round our great industrial towns that they grow, as it were, unconsciously and blindly, like grass that covers up a boundary line traced on the earth. This indefinite expansion is controlled neither by the soul of the city from within, nor by the resistance of the lands round about. It destroys at once the dignity of a town and the freedom of a countryside. The citizens are too new and numerous for citizenship; yet they never learn what there is to be learned of the ancient traditions of agriculture. The first sight of the sharp outline of Jerusalem is like a memory of the older types of limitation and liberty. Happy is the city that has a wall; and happier still if it is a precipice.

Again, Jerusalem might be called a city of staircases. Many streets are steep and most actually cut into steps. It is, I believe, an element in the controversy about the cave at Bethlehem traditionally connected with the Nativity that the sceptics doubt whether any beasts of burden could have entered a stable that has to be reached by such steps. And indeed to any one in a modern city like London or Liverpool it may well appear odd, like a cab-horse climbing a ladder. But as a matter of fact, if the asses and goats of Jerusalem could not go up and downstairs, they could not go anywhere. However this may be, I mention the matter here merely as adding another touch to that angular profile which is the impression involved here. Strangely enough, there is something that leads up to this impression even in the labyrinth of mountains through which the road winds its way to the city. The hills round Jerusalem are themselves often hewn out in terraces, like a huge stairway. This is mostly for the practical and indeed profitable purpose of vineyards; and serves for a reminder that this ancient seat of civilisation has not lost the tradition of the mercy and the glory of the vine. But in outline such a mountain looks much like the mountain of Purgatory that Dante saw in his vision, lifted in terraces, like titanic steps up to God. And indeed this shape also is symbolic; as symbolic as the pointed profile of the Holy City. For a creed is like a ladder, while an evolution is only like a slope. A spiritual and social evolution is generally a pretty slippery slope; a miry slope where it is very easy to slide down again.

Such is something like the sharp and even abrupt impression produced by this mountain city; and especially by its wall with gates like a house with windows. A gate, like a window, is primarily a picture-frame. The pictures that are found within the frame are indeed very various and sometimes very alien. Within this frame-work are indeed to be found things entirely Asiatic, or entirely Moslem, or even entirely nomadic. But Jerusalem itself is not nomadic. Nothing could be less like a mere camp of tents pitched by Arabs. Nothing could be less like the mere chaos of colour in a temporary and tawdry bazaar. The Arabs are there and the colours are there, and they make a glorious picture; but the picture is in a Gothic frame, and is seen so to speak through a Gothic window. And the meaning of all this is the meaning of all windows, and especially of Gothic windows. It is that even light itself is most divine within limits; and that even the shining one is most shining, when he takes upon himself a shape.

Such a system of walls and gates, like many other things thought rude and primitive, is really very rationalistic. It turns the town, as it were, into a plan of itself, and even into a guide to itself. This is especially true, as may be suggested in a moment, regarding the direction of the roads leading out of it. But anyhow, a man must decide which way he will leave the city; he cannot merely drift out of the city as he drifts out of the modern cities through a litter of slums. And there is no better way to get a preliminary plan of the city than to follow the wall and fix the gates in the memory. Suppose, for instance, that a man begins in the south with the Zion Gate, which bears the ancient name of Jerusalem. This, to begin with, will sharpen the medieval and even the Western impression first because it is here that he has the strongest sentiment of threading the narrow passages of a great castle; but also because the very name of the gate was given to this south-western hill by Godfrey and Tancred during the period of the Latin kingdom. I believe it is one of the problems of the scholars why the Latin conquerors called this hill the Zion Hill, when the other is obviously the sacred hill. Jerusalem is traditionally divided into four hills, but for practical purposes into two; the lower eastern hill where stood the Temple, and now stands the great Mosque, and the western where is the citadel and the Zion Gate to the south of it. I know nothing of such questions; and I attach no importance to the notion that has crossed my own mind, and which I only mention in passing, for I have no doubt there are a hundred objections to it. But it is known that Zion or Sion was the old name of the place before it was stormed by David; and even afterwards the Jebusites remained on this western hill, and some compromise seems to have been made with them. Is it conceivable, I wonder, that even in the twelfth century there lingered some local memory of what had once been a way of distinguishing Sion of the Jebusites from Salem of the Jews? The Zion Gate, however, is only a starting-point here; if we go south-eastward from it we descend a steep and rocky path, from which can be caught the first and finest vision of what stands on the other hill to the east. The great Mosque of Omar stands up like a peacock, lustrous with mosaics that are like plumes of blue and green.

Scholars, I may say here, object to calling it the Mosque of Omar; on the petty and pedantic ground that it is not a mosque and was not built by Omar. But it is my fixed intention to call it the Mosque of Omar, and with ever renewed pertinacity to continue calling it the Mosque of Omar. I possess a special permit from the Grand Mufti to call it the Mosque of Omar. He is the head of the whole Moslem religion, and if he does not know, who does? He told me, in the beautiful French which matches his beautiful manners, that it really is not so ridiculous after all to call the place the Mosque of Omar, since the great Caliph desired and even designed such a building, though he did not build it. I suppose it is rather as if Solomon’s Temple had been called David’s Temple. Omar was a great man and the Mosque was a great work, and the two were telescoped together by the excellent common sense of vulgar tradition. There could not be a better example of that great truth for all travellers; that popular tradition is never so right as when it is wrong; and that pedantry is never so wrong as when it is right. And as for the other objection, that the Dome of the Rock (to give it its other name) is not actually used as a Mosque, I answer that Westminster Abbey is not used as an Abbey. But modern Englishmen would be much surprised if I were to refer to it as Westminster Church; to say nothing of the many modern Englishmen for whom it would be more suitable to call it Westminster Museum. And for whatever purposes the Moslems may actually use their great and glorious sanctuary, at least they have not allowed it to become the private house of a particular rich man. And that is what we have suffered to happen, if not to Westminster Abbey, at least to Welbeck Abbey.

The Mosque of Omar (I repeat firmly) stands on the great eastern plateau in place of the Temple; and the wall that runs round to it on the south side of the city contains only the Dung Gate, on which the fancy need not linger. All along outside this wall the ground falls away into the southern valley; and upon the dreary and stony steep opposite is the place called Acaldama. Wall and valley turn together round the corner of the great temple platform, and confronting the eastern wall, across the ravine, is the mighty wall of the Mount of Olives. On this side there are several gates now blocked up, of which the most famous, the Golden Gate, carries in its very uselessness a testimony to the fallen warriors of the cross. For there is a strange Moslem legend that through this gate, so solemnly sealed up, shall ride the Christian King who shall again rule in Jerusalem. In the middle of the square enclosure rises the great dark Dome of the Rock; and standing near it, a man may see for the first time in the distance, another dome. It lies away to the west, but a little to the north; and it is surmounted, not by a crescent but a cross. Many heroes and holy kings have desired to see this thing, and have not seen it.

It is very characteristic of the city, with its medieval medley and huddle of houses, that a man may first see the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which is in the west, by going as far as possible to the east. All the sights are glimpses; and things far can be visible and things near invisible. The traveller comes on the Moslem dome round a corner; and he finds the Christian dome, as it were, behind his own back. But if he goes on round the wall to the north-east corner of the Court of the Temple, he will find the next entrance; the Gate of St. Stephen. On the slope outside, by a strange and suitable coincidence, the loose stones which lie on every side of the mountain city seemed to be heaped higher; and across the valley on the skirts of the Mount of Olives is the great grey olive of Gethsemane.

On the northern side the valley turns to an artificial trench, for the ground here is higher; and the next or northern gate bears the name of Herod; though it might well bear the name either of Godfrey or Saladin. For just outside it stands a pine-tree, and beside it a rude bulk of stone; where stood these great captains in turn, before they took Jerusalem. Then the wall runs on till it comes to the great Damascus Gate, graven I know not why with great roses in a style wholly heraldic and occidental, and in no way likely to remind us of the rich roses of Damascus; though their name has passed into our own English tongue and tradition, along with another word for the delicate decoration of the sword. But at the first glance, at any rate, it is hard to believe that the roses on the walls are not the Western roses of York or Lancaster, or that the swords which guarded them were not the straight swords of England or of France. Doubtless a deeper and more solemn memory ought to return immediately to the mind where that gate looks down the great highway; as if one could see, hung over it in the sky for ever, the cloud concealing the sunburst that broods upon the road to Damascus. But I am here only confessing the facts or fancies of my first impression; and again the fancy that came to me first was not of any such alien or awful things. I did not think of damask or damascene or the great Arabian city or even the conversion of St. Paul. I thought of my own little house in Buckinghamshire, and how the edge of the country town where it stands is called Aylesbury End, merely because it is the corner nearest to Aylesbury. That is what I mean by saying that these ancient customs are more rational and even utilitarian than the fashions of modernity. When a street in a new suburb is called Pretoria Avenue, the clerk living there does not set out from his villa with the cheerful hope of finding the road lead him to Pretoria. But the man leaving Aylesbury End does know it would lead him to Aylesbury; and the man going out at the Damascus Gate did know it would lead him to Damascus. And the same is true of the next and last of the old entrances, the Jaffa Gate in the east; but when I saw that I saw something else as well.

I have heard that there is a low doorway at the entrance to a famous shrine which is called the Gate of Humility; but indeed in this sense all gates are gates of humility, and especially gates of this kind. Any one who has ever looked at a landscape under an archway will know what I mean, when I say that it sharpens a pleasure with a strange sentiment of privilege. It adds to the grace of distance something that makes it not only a grace but a gift. Such are the visions of remote places that appear in the low gateways of a Gothic town; as if each gateway led into a separate world; and almost as if each dome of sky were a different chamber. But he who walks round the walls of this city in this spirit will come suddenly upon an exception which will surprise him like an earthquake. It looks indeed rather like something done by an earthquake; an earthquake with a half-witted sense of humour. Immediately at the side of one of these humble and human gateways there is a great gap in the wall, with a wide road running through it. There is something of unreason in the sight which affects the eye as well as the reason. It recalls some crazy tale about the great works of the Wise Men of Gotham. It suggests the old joke about the man who made a small hole for the kitten as well as a large hole for the cat. Everybody has read about it by this time; but the immediate impression of it is not merely an effect of reading or even of reasoning. It looks lop-sided; like something done by a one-eyed giant. But it was done by the last prince of the great Prussian imperial system, in what was probably the proudest moment in all his life of pride.

What is true has a way of sounding trite; and what is trite has a way of sounding false. We shall now probably weary the world with calling the Germans barbaric, just as we very recently wearied the world with calling them cultured and progressive and scientific. But the thing is true though we say it a thousand times. And any one who wishes to understand the sense in which it is true has only to contemplate that fantasy and fallacy in stone; a gate with an open road beside it. The quality I mean, however, is not merely in that particular contrast; as of a front door standing by itself in an open field. It is also in the origin, the occasion and the whole story of the thing. There is above all this supreme stamp of the barbarian; the sacrifice of the permanent to the temporary. When the walls of the Holy City were overthrown for the glory of the German Emperor, it was hardly even for that everlasting glory which has been the vision and the temptation of great men. It was for the glory of a single day. It was something rather in the nature of a holiday than anything that could be even in the most vainglorious sense a heritage. It did not in the ordinary sense make a monument, or even a trophy. It destroyed a monument to make a procession. We might almost say that it destroyed a trophy to make a triumph. There is the true barbaric touch in this oblivion of what Jerusalem would look like a century after, or a year after, or even the day after. It is this which distinguishes the savage tribe on the march after a victory from the civilised army establishing a government, even if it be a tyranny. Hence the very effect of it, like the effect of the whole Prussian adventure in history, remains something negative and even nihilistic. The Christians made the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Moslems made the Mosque of Omar; but this is what the most scientific culture made at the end of the great century of science. It made an enormous hole. The only positive contribution of the nineteenth century to the spot is an unnaturally ugly clock, at the top of an ornamental tower, or a tower that was meant to be ornamental. It was erected, I believe, to commemorate the reign of Abdul Hamid; and it seems perfectly adapted to its purpose, like one of Sir William Watson’s sonnets on the same subject. But this object only adds a touch of triviality to the much more tremendous negative effect of the gap by the gate. That remains a parable as well as a puzzle, under all the changing skies of day and night; with the shadows that gather tinder the narrow Gate of Humility; and beside it, blank as daybreak and abrupt as an abyss, the broad road that has led already to destruction.

The gap remains like a gash, a sort of wound in the walls; but it only strengthens by contrast the general sense of their continuity. Save this one angle where the nineteenth century has entered, the vague impression of the thirteenth or fourteenth century rather deepens than dies away. It is supported more than many would suppose even by the figures that appear in the gateways or pass in procession under the walls. The brown Franciscans and the white Dominicans would alone give some colour to a memory of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem; and there are other examples and effects which are less easily imagined in the West. Thus as I look down the street, I see coming out from under an archway a woman wearing a high white head-dress very like those we have all seen in a hundred pictures of tournaments or hunting parties, or the Canterbury Pilgrimage or the Court of Louis XI. She is as white as a woman of the North; and it is not, I think, entirely fanciful to trace a certain freedom and dignity in her movement, which is quite different at least from the shuffling walk of the shrouded Moslem women. She is a woman of Bethlehem, where a tradition, it is said, still claims as a heroic heritage the blood of the Latin knights of the cross. This is, of course, but one aspect of the city; but it is one which may be early noted, yet one which is generally neglected. As I have said, I had expected many things of Jerusalem, but I had not expected this. I had expected to be disappointed with it as a place utterly profaned and fallen below its mission. I had expected to be awed by it; indeed I had expected to be frightened of it, as a place dedicated and even doomed by its mission. But I had never fancied that it would be possible to be fond of it; as one might be fond of a little walled town among the orchards of Normandy or the hop-fields of Kent.

And just then there happened a coincidence that was also something like a catastrophe. I was idly watching, as it moved down the narrow street to one of the dark doorways, the head-dress, like a tower of white drapery, belonging to the Christian woman from the place where Christ was born. After she had disappeared into the darkness of the porch I continued to look vaguely at the porch, and thought how easily it might have been a small Gothic gate in some old corner of Rouen, or even Canterbury. In twenty such places in the town one may see the details that appeal to the same associations, so different and so distant. One may see that angular dogtooth ornament that makes the round Norman gateways look like the gaping mouths of sharks. One may see the pointed niches in the walls, shaped like windows and serving somewhat the purpose of brackets, on which were to stand sacred images possibly removed by the Moslems. One may come upon a small court planted with ornamental trees with some monument in the centre, which makes the precise impression of something in a small French town. There are no Gothic spires, but there are numberless Gothic doors and windows; and he who first strikes the place at this angle, as it were, may well feel the Northern element as native and the Eastern element as intrusive. While I was thinking all these things, something happened which in that place was almost a portent.

It was very cold; and there were curious colours in the sky. There had been chilly rains from time to time; and the whole air seemed to have taken on something sharper than a chill. It was as if a door had been opened in the northern corner of the heavens; letting in something that changed all the face of the earth. Great grey clouds with haloes of lurid pearl and pale-green were coming up from the plains or the sea and spreading over the towers of the city. In the middle of the moving mass of grey vapours was a splash of paler vapour; a wan white cloud whose white seemed somehow more ominous than gloom. It went over the high citadel like a white wild goose flying; and a few white feathers fell.

It was the snow; and it snowed day and night until that Eastern city was sealed up like a village in Norway or Northern Scotland. It rose in the streets till men might almost have been drowned in it like a sea of solid foam. And the people of the place told me there had been no such thing seen in it in all recent records, or perhaps in the records of all its four thousand years.

All this came later; but for me at the moment, looking at the scene in so dreamy a fashion, it seemed merely like a dramatic conclusion to my dream. It was but an accident confirming what was but an aspect. But it confirmed it with a strange and almost supernatural completeness. The white light out of the window in the north lay on all the roofs and turrets of the mountain town; for there is an aspect in which snow looks less like frozen water than like solidified light. As the snow accumulated there accumulated also everywhere those fantastic effects of frost which seem to fit in with the fantastic qualities of medieval architecture; and which make an icicle seem like the mere extension of a gargoyle. It was the atmosphere that has led so many romancers to make medieval Paris a mere black and white study of night and snow. Something had redrawn in silver all things from the rude ornament on the old gateways to the wrinkles on the ancient hills of Moab. Fields of white still spotted with green swept down into the valleys between us and the hills; and high above them the Holy City lifted her head into the thunder-clouded heavens, wearing a white head-dress like a daughter of the Crusaders.

CHAPTER IV

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SIGHT-SEEING

Various cultivated critics told me that I should find Jerusalem disappointing; and I fear it will disappoint them that I am not disappointed. Of the city as a city I shall try to say something elsewhere; but the things which these critics have especially in mind are at once more general and more internal. They concern something tawdry, squalid or superstitious about the shrines and those who use them. Now the mistake of critics is not that they criticise the world; it is that they never criticise themselves. They compare the alien with the ideal; but they do not at the same time compare themselves with the ideal; rather they identify themselves with the ideal. I have met a tourist who had seen the great Pyramid, and who told me that the Pyramid looked small. Believe me, the tourist looked much smaller. There is indeed another type of traveller, who is not at all small in the moral mental sense, who will confess such disappointments quite honestly, as a piece of realism about his own sensations. In that case he generally suffers from the defect of most realists; that of not being realistic enough. He does not really think out his own impressions thoroughly; or he would generally find they are not so disappointing after all. A humorous soldier told me that he came from Derbyshire, and that he did not think much of the Pyramid because it was not so tall as the Peak. I pointed out to him that he was really offering the tallest possible tribute to a work of man in comparing it to a mountain; even if he thought it was a rather small mountain. I suggested that it was a rather large tombstone. I appealed to those with whom I debated in that district, as to whether they would not be faintly surprised to find such a monument during their quiet rambles in a country churchyard. I asked whether each one of them, if he had such a tombstone in the family, would not feel it natural, if hardly necessary, to point it out; and that with a certain pride. The same principle of the higher realism applies to those who are disappointed with the sight of the Sphinx. The Sphinx really exceeds expectations because it escapes expectations. Monuments commonly look impressive when they are high and often when they are distant. The Sphinx is really unexpected, because it is found suddenly in a hollow, and unnaturally near. Its face is turned away; and the effect is as creepy as coming into a room apparently empty, and finding somebody as still as the furniture. Or it is as if one found a lion couchant in that hole in the sand; as indeed the buried part of the monster is in the form of a couchant lion. If it was a real lion it would hardly be less arresting merely because it was near; nor could the first emotion of the traveller be adequately described as disappointment. In such cases there is generally some profit in looking at the monument a second time, or even at our own sensations a second time. So I reasoned, striving with wild critics in the wilderness; but the only part of the debate which is relevant here can be expressed in the statement that I do think the Pyramid big, for the deep and simple reason that it is bigger than I am. I delicately suggested to those who were disappointed in the Sphinx that it was just possible that the Sphinx was disappointed in them. The Sphinx has seen Julius Caesar; it has very probably seen St. Francis, when he brought his flaming charity to Egypt; it has certainly looked, in the first high days of the revolutionary victories, on the face of the young Napoleon. Is it not barely possible, I hinted to my friends and fellow-tourists, that after these experiences, it might be a little depressed at the sight of you and me? But as I say, I only reintroduce my remarks in connection with a greater matter than these dead things of the desert; in connection with a tomb to which even the Pyramids are but titanic lumber, and a presence greater than the Sphinx, since it is not only a riddle but an answer.

Before I go on to deeper defences of any such cult or culture, I wish first to note a sort of test for the first impressions of an ordinary tourist like myself, to whom much that is really full of an archaic strength may seem merely stiff, or much that really deals with a deep devotional psychology may seem merely distorted. In short I would put myself in the position of the educated Englishman who does quite honestly receive a mere impression of idolatry. Incidentally, I may remark, it is the educated Englishman who is the idolater. It is he who only reverences the place, and does not reverence the reverence for the place. It is he who is supremely concerned about whether a mere object is old or new, or whether a mere ornament is gold or gilt. In other words, it is he who values the visible things rather than the invisible; for no sane man can doubt that invisible things are vivid to the priests and pilgrims of these shrines.

In the midst of emotions that have moved the whole world out of its course, girt about with crowds who will die or do murder for a definition, the educated English gentleman in his blindness bows down to wood and stone. For the only thing wrong about that admirable man is that he is blind about himself.

No man will really attempt to describe his feelings, when he first stood at the gateway of the grave of Christ. The only record relevant here is that I did not feel the reaction, not to say repulsion, that many seem to have felt about its formal surroundings.

Either I was particularly fortunate or others are particularly fastidious. The guide who showed me the Sepulchre was not particularly noisy or profane or palpably mercenary; he was rather more than less sympathetic than the same sort of man who might have shown me Westminster Abbey or Stratford-on-Avon. He was a small, solemn, owlish old man, a Roman Catholic in religion; but so far from deserving the charge of not knowing the Bible, he deserved rather a gentle remonstrance against his assumption that nobody else knew it. If there was anything to smile at, in associations so sacred, it was the elaborate simplicity with which he told the first facts of the Gospel story, as if he were evangelising a savage. Anyhow, he did not talk like a cheap-jack at a stall; but rather like a teacher in an infant school. He made it very clear that Jesus Christ was crucified in case any one should suppose he was beheaded; and often stopped in his narrative to repeat that the hero of these events was Jesus Christ, lest we should fancy it was Nebuchadnezzar or the Duke of Wellington. I do not in the least mind being amused at this; but I have no reason whatever for doubting that he may have been a better man than I. I gave him what I should have given a similar guide in my own country; I parted from him as politely as from one of my own countrymen. I also, of course, gave money, as is the custom, to the various monastic custodians of the shrines; but I see nothing surprising about that. I am not quite so ignorant as not to know that without the monastic brotherhoods, supported by such charity, there would not by this time be anything to see in Jerusalem at all. There was only one class of men whose consistent concern was to watch these things, from the age of heathens and heresies to the age of Turks and tourists; and I am certainly not going to sneer at them for doing no practical work, and then refuse to pay them for the practical work they do. For the rest, even the architectural defacement is overstated, the church was burned down and rebuilt in a bad and modern period; but the older parts, especially the Crusaders’ porch, are as grand as the men who made them. The incongruities there are, are those of local colour. In connection, by the way, with what I said about beasts of burden, I mounted a series of steep staircases to the roof of the convent beside the Holy Sepulchre. When I got to the top I found myself in the placid presence of two camels. It would be curious to meet two cows on the roof of a village church. Nevertheless it is the only moral of the chapter interpolated here, that we can meet things quite as curious in our own country.

When the critic says that Jerusalem is disappointing he generally means that the popular worship there is weak and degraded, and especially that the religious art is gaudy and grotesque. In so far as there is any kind of truth in this, it is still true that the critic seldom sees the whole truth. What is wrong with the critic is that he does not criticise himself. He does not honestly compare what is weak, in this particular world of ideas, with what is weak in his own world of ideas. I will take an example from my own experience, and in a manner at my own expense. If I have a native heath it is certainly Kensington High Street, off which stands the house of my childhood. I grew up in that thorough-fare which Mr. Max Beerbohm, with his usual easy exactitude of phrase, has described as “dapper, with a leaning to the fine arts.” Dapper was never perhaps a descriptive term for myself; but it is quite true that I owe a certain taste for the arts to the sort of people among whom I was brought up. It is also true that such a taste, in various forms and degrees, was fairly common in the world which may be symbolised as Kensington High Street. And whether or no it is a tribute, it is certainly a truth that most people with an artistic turn in Kensington High Street would have been very much shocked, in their sense of propriety, if they had seen the popular shrines of Jerusalem; the sham gold, the garish colours, the fantastic tales and the feverish tumult. But what I want such people to do, and what they never do, is to turn this truth round. I want them to imagine, not a Kensington aesthete walking down David Street to the Holy Sepulchre, but a Greek monk or a Russian pilgrim walking down Kensington High Street to Kensington Gardens. I will not insist here on all the hundred plagues of plutocracy that would really surprise such a Christian peasant; especially that curse of an irreligious society (unknown in religious societies, Moslem as well as Christian) the detestable denial of all dignity to the poor. I am not speaking now of moral but of artistic things; of the concrete arts and crafts used in popular worship. Well, my imaginary pilgrim would walk past Kensington Gardens till his sight was blasted by a prodigy. He would either fall on his knees as before a shrine, or cover his face as from a sacrilege. He would have seen the Albert Memorial. There is nothing so conspicuous in Jerusalem. There is nothing so gilded and gaudy in Jerusalem. Above all, there is nothing in Jerusalem that is on so large a scale and at the same time in so gay and glittering a style. My simple Eastern Christian would almost certainly be driven to cry aloud, "To what superhuman God was this enormous temple erected? I hope it is Christ; but I fear it is Antichrist." Such, he would think, might well be the great and golden image of the Prince of the World, set up in this great open space to receive the heathen prayers and heathen sacrifices of a lost humanity. I fancy he would feel a desire to be at home again amid the humble shrines of Zion. I really cannot imagine *what* he would feel, if he were told that the gilded idol was neither a god nor a demon, but a petty German prince who had some slight influence in turning us into the tools of Prussia.

Now I myself, I cheerfully admit, feel that enormity in Kensington Gardens as something quite natural. I feel it so because I have been brought up, so to speak, under its shadow; and stared at the graven images of Raphael and Shakespeare almost before I knew their names; and long before I saw anything funny in their figures being carved, on a smaller scale, under the feet of Prince Albert. I even took a certain childish pleasure in the gilding of the canopy and spire, as if in the golden palace of what was, to Peter Pan and all children, something of a fairy garden. So do the Christians of Jerusalem take pleasure, and possibly a childish pleasure, in the gilding of a better palace, besides a nobler garden, ornamented with a somewhat worthier aim. But the point is that the people of Kensington, whatever they might think about the Holy Sepulchre, do not think anything at all about the Albert Memorial. They are quite unconscious of how strange a thing it is; and that simply because they are used to it. The religious groups in Jerusalem are also accustomed to their coloured background; and they are surely none the worse if they still feel rather more of the meaning of the colours. It may be said that they retain their childish illusion about *their* Albert Memorial. I confess I cannot manage to regard Palestine as a place where a special curse was laid on those who can become like little children. And I never could understand why such critics who agree that the kingdom of heaven is for children, should forbid it to be the only sort of kingdom that children would really like; a kingdom with real crowns of gold or even of tinsel. But that is another question, which I shall discuss in another place; the point is for the moment that such people would be quite as much surprised at the place of tinsel in our lives as we are at its place in theirs. If we are critical of the petty things they do to glorify great things, they would find quite as much to criticise (as in Kensington Gardens) in the great things we do to glorify petty things. And if we wonder at the way in which they seem to gild the lily, they would wonder quite as much at the way we gild the weed.

There are countless other examples of course of this principle of self-criticism, as the necessary condition of all criticism. It applies quite as much, for instance, to the other great complaint which my Kensington friend would make after the complaint about paltry ornament; the complaint about what is commonly called backsheesh. Here again there is really something to complain of; though much of the fault is not due to Jerusalem, but rather to London and New York. The worst superstition of Jerusalem, like the worst profligacy of Paris, is a thing so much invented for Anglo-Saxons that it might be called an Anglo-Saxon institution. But here again the critic could only really judge fairly if he realised with what abuses at home he ought really to compare this particular abuse abroad. He ought to imagine, for example, the feelings of a religious Russian peasant if he really understood all the highly-coloured advertisements covering High Street Kensington Station. It is really not so repulsive to see the poor asking for money as to see the rich asking for more money. And advertisement is the rich asking for more money. A man would be annoyed if he found himself in a mob of millionaires, all holding out their silk hats for a penny; or all shouting with one voice, “Give me money.” Yet advertisement does really assault the eye very much as such a shout would assault the ear. “Budge’s Boots are the Best” simply means “Give me money”; “Use Seraphic Soap” simply means “Give me money.” It is a complete mistake to suppose that common people make our towns commonplace, with unsightly things like advertisements. Most of those whose wares are thus placarded everywhere are very wealthy gentlemen with coronets and country seats, men who are probably very particular about the artistic adornment of their own homes. They disfigure their towns in order to decorate their houses. To see such men crowding and clamouring for more wealth would really be a more unworthy sight than a scramble of poor guides; yet this is what would be conveyed by all the glare of gaudy advertisement to anybody who saw and understood it for the first time. Yet for us who are familiar with it all that gaudy advertisement fades into a background, just as the gaudy oriental patterns fade into a background for those oriental priests and pilgrims. Just as the innocent Kensington gentleman is wholly unaware that his black top hat is relieved against a background, or encircled as by a halo, of a yellow hoarding about mustard, so is the poor guide sometimes unaware that his small doings are dark against the fainter and more fading gold in which are traced only the humbler haloes of the Twelve Apostles.

But all these misunderstandings are merely convenient illustrations and introductions, leading up to the great fact of the main misunderstanding. It is a misunderstanding of the whole history and philosophy of the position; that is the whole of the story and the whole moral of the story. The critic of the Christianity of Jerusalem emphatically manages to miss the point. The lesson he ought to learn from it is one which the Western and modern man needs most, and does not even know that he needs. It is the lesson of constancy. These people may decorate their temples with gold or with tinsel; but their tinsel has lasted longer than our gold. They may build things as costly and ugly as the Albert Memorial; but the thing remains a memorial, a thing of immortal memory. They do not build it for a passing fashion and then forget it, or try hard to forget it. They may paint a picture of a saint as gaudy as any advertisement of a soap; but one saint does not drive out another saint as one soap drives out another soap. They do not forget their recent idolatries, as the educated English are now trying to forget their very recent idolatry of everything German. These Christian bodies have been in Jerusalem for at least fifteen hundred years. Save for a few years after the time of Constantine and a few years after the First Crusade, they have been practically persecuted all the time. At least they have been under heathen masters whose attitude towards Christendom was hatred and whose type of government was despotism. No man living in the West can form the faintest conception of what it must have been to live in the very heart of the East through the long and seemingly everlasting epoch of Moslem power. A man in Jerusalem was in the centre of the Turkish Empire as a man in Rome was in the centre of the Roman Empire. The imperial power of Islam stretched away to the sunrise and the sunset; westward to the mountains of Spain and eastward towards the wall of China. It must have seemed as if the whole earth belonged to Mahomet to those who in this rocky city renewed their hopeless witness to Christ. What we have to ask ourselves is not whether we happen in all respects to agree with them, but whether we in the same condition should even have the courage to agree with ourselves. It is not a question of how much of their religion is superstition, but of how much of our religion is convention; how much is custom and how much a compromise even with custom; how much a thing made facile by the security of our own society or the success of our own state. These are powerful supports; and the enlightened Englishman, from a cathedral town or a suburban chapel, walks these wild Eastern places with a certain sense of assurance and stability. Even after centuries of Turkish supremacy, such a man feels, he would not have descended to such a credulity. He would not be fighting for the Holy Fire or wrangling with beggars in the Holy Sepulchre. He would not be hanging fantastic lamps on a pillar peculiar to the Armenians, or peering into the gilded cage that contains the brown Madonna of the Copts. He would not be the dupe of such degenerate fables; God forbid. He would not be grovelling at such grotesque shrines; no indeed. He would be many hundred yards away, decorously bowing towards a more distant city; where, above the only formal and official open place in Jerusalem, the mighty mosaics of the Mosque of Omar proclaim across the valleys the victory and the glory of Mahomet.

That is the real lesson that the enlightened traveller should learn; the lesson about himself. That is the test that should really be put to those who say that the Christianity of Jerusalem is degraded. After a thousand years of Turkish tyranny, the religion of a London fashionable preacher would not be degraded. It would be destroyed. It would not be there at all, to be jeered at by every prosperous tourist out of a *train de luxe*. It is worth while to pause upon the point; for nothing has been so wholly missed in our modern religious ideals as the ideal of tenacity. Fashion is called progress. Every new fashion is called a new faith. Every faith is a faith which offers everything except faithfulness. It was never so necessary to insist that most of the really vital and valuable ideas in the world, including Christianity, would never have survived at all if they had not survived their own death, even in the sense of dying daily. The ideal was out of date almost from the first day; that is why it is eternal; for whatever is dated is doomed. As for our own society, if it proceeds at its present rate of progress and improvement, no trace or memory of it will be left at all. Some think that this would be an improvement in itself. We have come to live morally, as the Japs live literally, in houses of paper. But they are pavilions made of the morning papers, which have to be burned on the appearance of the evening editions. Well, a thousand years hence the Japs may be ruling in Jerusalem; the modern Japs who no longer live in paper houses, but in sweated factories and slums. They and the Chinese (that much more dignified and democratic people) seem to be about the only people of importance who have not yet ruled Jerusalem. But though we may think the Christian chapels as thin as Japanese tea-houses, they will still be Christian; though we may think the sacred lamps as cheap as Chinese lanterns, they will still be burning before a crucified creator of the world.

But besides this need of making strange cults the test not of themselves but ourselves, the sights of Jerusalem also illustrate the other suggestion about the philosophy of sight-seeing. It is true, as I have suggested, that after all the Sphinx is larger than I am; and on the same principle the painted saints are saintlier than I am, and the patient pilgrims more constant than I am. But it is also true, as in the lesser matter before mentioned, that even those who think the Sphinx small generally do not notice the small things about it. They do not even discover what is interesting about their own disappointment. And similarly even those who are truly irritated by the unfamiliar fashions of worship in a place like Jerusalem, do not know how to discover what is interesting in the very existence of what is irritating. For instance, they talk of Byzantine decay or barbaric delusion, and they generally go away with an impression that the ritual and symbolism is something dating from the Dark Ages. But if they would really note the details of their surroundings, or even of their sensations, they would observe a rather curious fact about such ornament of such places as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as may really be counted unworthy of them. They would realise that what they would most instinctively reject as superstitious does not date from what they would regard as the ages of superstition. There really are bad pictures but they are not barbaric pictures; they are florid pictures in the last faded realism of the Renascence. There really is stiff and ungainly decoration, but it is not the harsh or ascetic decoration of a Spanish cloister; it is much more like the pompous yet frivolous decorations of a Parisian hotel. In short, in so far as the shrine has really been defaced it has not been defaced by the Dark Ages, but rather if anything by the Age of Reason. It is the enlightened eighteenth century, which regarded itself as the very noonday of natural culture and common sense, that has really though indirectly laid its disfiguring finger on the dark but dignified Byzantine temple. I do not particularly mind it myself; for in such great matters I do not think taste is the test. But if taste is to be made the test, there is matter for momentary reflection in this fact; for it is another example of the weakness of what may be called fashion. Voltaire, I believe, erected a sort of temple to God in his own garden; and we may be sure that it was in the most exquisite taste of the time. Nothing would have surprised him more than to learn that, fifty years after the success of the French Revolution, almost every freethinker of any artistic taste would think his temple far less artistically admirable than the nearest gargoyle on Notre Dame. Thus it is progress that must be blamed for most of these things: and we ought not to turn away in contempt from something antiquated, but rather recognise with respect and even alarm a sort of permanent man-trap in the idea of being modern. So that the moral of this matter is the same as that of the other; that these things should raise in us, not merely the question of whether we like them, but of whether there is anything very infallible or imperishable about what we like. At least the essentials of these things endure; and if they seem to have remained fixed as effigies, at least they have not faded like fashion-plates.

It has seemed worth while to insert here this note on the philosophy of sight-seeing, however dilatory or disproportionate it may seem. For I am particularly and positively convinced that unless these things can somehow or other be seen in the right historical perspective and philosophical proportion, they are not worth seeing at all. And let me say in conclusion that I can not only respect the sincerity, but understand the sentiments, of a man who says they are not worth seeing at all. Sight-seeing is a far more difficult and disputable matter than many seem to suppose; and a man refusing it altogether might be a man of sense and even a man of imagination. It was the great Wordsworth who refused to revisit Yarrow; it was only the small Wordsworth who revisited it after all. I remember the first great sight in my own entrance to the Near East, when I looked by accident out of the train going to Cairo, and saw far away across the luminous flats a faint triangular shape; the Pyramids. I could understand a man who had seen it turning his back and retracing his whole journey to his own country and his own home, saying, “I will go no further; for I have seen afar off the last houses of the kings.” I can understand a man who had only seen in the distance Jerusalem sitting on the hill going no further and keeping that vision for ever. It would, of course, be said that it was absurd to come at all, and to see so little. To which I answer that in that sense it is absurd to come at all. It is no more fantastic to turn back for such a fancy than it was to come for a similar fancy. A man cannot eat the Pyramids; he cannot buy or sell the Holy City; there can be no practical aspect either of his coming or going. If he has not come for a poetic mood he has come for nothing; if he has come for such a mood, he is not a fool to obey that mood. The way to be really a fool is to try to be practical about unpractical things. It is to try to collect clouds or preserve moonshine like money. Now there is much to be said for the view that to search for a mood is in its nature moonshine. It may be said that this is especially true in the crowded and commonplace conditions in which most sight-seeing has to be done. It may be said that thirty tourists going together to see a tombstone is really as ridiculous as thirty poets going together to write poems about the nightingale. There would be something rather depressing about a crowd of travellers, walking over hill and dale after the celebrated cloud of Wordsworth; especially if the crowd is like the cloud, and moveth all together if it move at all. A vast mob assembled on Salisbury Plain to listen to Shelley’s skylark would probably (after an hour or two) consider it a rather subdued sort of skylarking. It may be argued that it is just as illogical to hope to fix beforehand the elusive effects of the works of man as of the works of nature. It may be called a contradiction in terms to expect the unexpected. It may be counted mere madness to anticipate astonishment, or go in search of a surprise. To all of which there is only one answer; that such anticipation is absurd, and such realisation will be disappointing, that images will seem to be idols and idols will seem to be dolls, unless there be some rudiment of such a habit of mind as I have tried to suggest in this chapter. No great works will seem great, and no wonders of the world will seem wonderful, unless the angle from which they are seen is that of historical humility.

One more word may be added of a more practical sort. The place where the most passionate convictions on this planet are concentrated is not one where it will always be wise, even from a political standpoint, to air our plutocratic patronage and our sceptical superiority. Strange scenes have already been enacted round that fane where the Holy Fire bursts forth to declare that Christ is risen; and whether or no we think the thing holy there is no doubt about it being fiery. Whether or no the superior person is right to expect the unexpected, it is possible that something may be revealed to him that he really does not expect. And whatever he may think about the philosophy of sight-seeing, it is not unlikely that he may see some sights.

CHAPTER V

THE STREETS OF THE CITY

When Jerusalem had been half buried in snow for two or three days, I remarked to a friend that I was prepared henceforward to justify all the Christmas cards. The cards that spangle Bethlehem with frost are generally regarded by the learned merely as vulgar lies. At best they are regarded as popular fictions, like that which made the shepherds in the Nativity Play talk a broad dialect of Somerset. In the deepest sense of course this democratic tradition is truer than most history. But even in the cruder and more concrete sense the tradition about the December snow is not quite so false as is suggested. It is not a mere local illusion for Englishmen to picture the Holy Child in a snowstorm, as it would be for the Londoners to picture him in a London fog. There can be snow in Jerusalem, and there might be snow in Bethlehem; and when we penetrate to the idea behind the image, we find it is not only possible but probable. In Palestine, at least in these mountainous parts of Palestine, men have the same general sentiment about the seasons as in the West or the North. Snow is a rarity, but winter is a reality. Whether we regard it as the divine purpose of a mystery or the human purpose of a myth, the purpose of putting such a feast in winter would be just the same in Bethlehem as it would be in Balham. Any one thinking of the Holy Child as born in December would mean by it exactly what we mean by it; that Christ is not merely a summer sun of the prosperous but a winter fire for the unfortunate.

In other words, the semi-tropical nature of the place, like its vulgarity and desecration, can be, and are, enormously exaggerated. But it is always hard to correct the exaggeration without exaggerating the correction. It would be absurd seriously to deny that Jerusalem is an Eastern town; but we may say it was Westernised without being modernised. Anyhow, it was medievalised before it was modernised. And in the same way it would be absurd to deny that Jerusalem is a Southern town, in the sense of being normally out of the way of snowstorms, but the truth can be suggested by saying that it has always known the quality of snow, but not the quantity. And the quantity of snow that fell on this occasion would have been something striking and even sensational in Sussex or Kent. And yet another way of putting the proportions of the thing would be to say that Jerusalem has been besieged more often and by more different kinds of people than any town upon the globe; that it has been besieged by Jews and Assyrians, Egyptians and Babylonians, Greeks and Romans, Persians and Saracens, Frenchmen and Englishmen; but perhaps never before in all its agony of ages has it ever really been besieged by winter. In this case it was not only snowed on, it was snowed up.

For some days the city was really in a state of siege. If the snow had held for a sufficient number of days it might have been in a state of famine. The railway failed between Jerusalem and the nearest station. The roads were impassable between Jerusalem and the nearest village, or even the nearest suburb. In some places the snow drifted deep enough to bury a man, and in some places, alas, it did actually bury little children; poor little Arabs whose bodies were stiff where they had fallen. Many mules were overwhelmed as if by floods, and countless trees struck down as if by lightning. Even when the snow began at last to melt it only threatened to turn the besieged fortress into a sort of island. A river that men could not ford flowed between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. Even a man walking about the ordinary streets could easily step up to his knees or up to his waist. Snow stood about like a new system of natural barricades reared in some new type of revolution. I have already remarked that what struck me most about the city was the city wall; but now a new white wall stood all round the city; and one that neither friend nor foe could pass.

But a state of siege, whatever its inconveniences, is exceedingly convenient for a critic and observer of the town. It concentrated all that impression of being something compact and what, with less tragic attendant circumstances, one might call cosy. It fixed the whole picture in a frame even more absolute than the city wall; and it turned the eyes of all spectators inwards. Above all, by its very abnormality it accentuated the normal divisions and differences of the place; and made it more possible to distinguish and describe them like *dramatis personae*. The parts they played in the crisis of the snow were very like the parts they played in the general crisis of the state. And the very cut and colour of the figures, turban and tarbouch, khaki and burnous and gabardine, seemed to stand out more sharply against that blank background of white.

The first fact of course was a fact of contrast. When I said that the city struck me in its historic aspect as being at least as much a memory of the

Crusaders as of the Saracens, I did not of course mean to deny the incidental contrasts between this Southern civilisation and the civilisation of Europe, especially northern Europe. The immediate difference was obvious enough when the gold and the gaudy vegetation of so comparatively Asiatic a city were struck by this strange blast out of the North. It was a queer spectacle to see a great green palm bowed down under a white load of snow; and it was a stranger and sadder spectacle to see the people accustomed to live under such palm-trees bowed down under such unearthly storms. Yet the very manner in which they bore it is perhaps the first fact to be noted among all the facts that make up the puzzling problem of Jerusalem. Odd as it may sound you can see that the true Orientals are not familiar with snow by the very fact that they accept it. They accept it as we should accept being swallowed by an earthquake; because we do not know the answer to an earthquake. The men from the desert do not know the answer to the snow, it seems to them unanswerable. But Christians fight with snow in a double sense; they fight with snow as they fight with snowballs. A Moslem left to himself would no more play with a snowball than make a toy of a thunderbolt. And this is really a type of the true problem that was raised by the very presence of the English soldier in the street, even if he was only shovelling away the snow.

It would be far from a bad thing, I fancy, if the rights and wrongs of these Bible countries could occasionally be translated into Bible language. And I suggest this here, not in the least because it is a religious language, but merely because it is a simple language. It may be a good thing, and in many ways it certainly is a good thing, that the races native to the Near East, to Egypt or Arabia, should come in contact with Western culture; but it will be unfortunate if this only means coming in contact with Western pedantry and even Western hypocrisy. As it is there is only too much danger that the local complaints against the government may be exactly like the official explanations of the government; that is, mere strings of long words with very little meaning involved. In short, if people are to learn to talk English it will be a refreshing finishing touch to their culture if they learn to talk plain English. Of this it would be hard to find a better working model than what may be called scriptural English. It would be a very good thing for everybody concerned if any really unjust or unpopular official were described only in terms taken from the denunciations of Jezebel and Herod. It would especially be a good thing for the official. If it were true it would be appropriate, and if it were untrue it would be absurd. When people are really oppressed, their condition can generally be described in very plain terms connected with very plain things; with bread, with land, with taxes and children and churches. If imperialists and capitalists do thus oppress them, as they most certainly often do, then the condition of those more powerful persons can also be described in few and simple words; such as crime and sin and death and hell. But when complaints are made, as they are sometimes in Palestine and still more in Egypt, in the elaborate and long-winded style of a leading article, the sympathetic European is apt to remember how very little confidence he has ever felt in his own leading articles. If an Arab comes to me and says, "The stranger from across the sea has taxed me, and taken the corn-sheaves from the field of my fathers," I do really feel that he towers over me and my perishing industrial civilisation with a terrible appeal to eternal things. I feel he is a figure more enduring than a statue, like the figure of Naboth or of Nathan. But when that simple son of the desert opens his mouth and says, "The self-determination of proletarian class-conscious solidarity as it functions for international reconstruction," and so on, why then I must confess to the weakness of feeling my sympathies instantly and strangely chilled. I merely feel inclined to tell him that I can talk that sort of pidgin English better than he can. If he modelled himself on the great rebels and revolutionists of the Bible, it would at least be a considerable improvement in his literary style. But as a matter of fact something much more solid is involved than literary style. There is a logic and justice in the distinction, even in the world of ideas. That most people with much more education than the Arab, and therefore much less excuse than the Arab, entirely ignore that distinction, is merely a result of their ignoring ideas, and being satisfied with long words. They like democracy because it is a long word; that is the only thing they do like about it.

People are entitled to self-government; that is, to such government as is self-made. They are not necessarily entitled to a special and elaborate machinery that somebody else has made. It is their right to make it for themselves, but it is also their duty to think of it for themselves. Self-government of a simple kind has existed in numberless simple societies, and I shall always think it a horrible responsibility to interfere with it. But representative government, or theoretically representative government, of an exceedingly complicated kind, may exist in certain complicated societies without their being bound to transfer it to others, or even to admire it for themselves. At any rate, for good or evil, they have invented it themselves. And there is a moral distinction, which is perfectly rational and democratic, between such inventions and the self-evident rights which no man can claim to have invented. If the Arab says to me, “I don’t care a curse for Europe; I demand bread,” the reproach is to me both true and terrible. But if he says, “I don’t care a curse for Europe; I demand French cookery, Italian confectionery, English audit ale,” and so on, I think he is rather an unreasonable Arab. After all, we invented these things; in *auctore auctoritas*.

And of this problem there is a sort of working model in the presence of the snow in Palestine, especially in the light of the old proverb about the impossibility of snow in Egypt. Palestine is wilder, less wealthy and modernised, more religious and therefore more realistic. The issue between the things only a European can do, and the things no European has the right to do, is much sharper and clearer than the confusions of verbosity. On the one hand the things the English can do are more real things, like clearing away the snow; for the very reason that the English are not here, so to speak, building on a French pavement but on the bare rocks of the Eastern wilds, the contact with Islam and Israel is more simple and direct. And on the other side the discontents and revolts are more real. So far from intending to suggest that the Egyptians have no complaints, I am very far from meaning that they have no wrongs. But curiously enough the wrongs seem to me more real than the complaints. The real case against our Egyptian adventure was stated long ago by Randolph Churchill, when he denounced “a bondholder’s war”; it is in the whole business of collecting debts due to cosmopolitan finance. But a stranger in Egypt hears little denunciation of cosmopolitan finance, and a great deal of drivel in the way of cosmopolitan idealism. When the Palestinians say that usurers menace their land they mean the land they dig; an old actuality and not a new abstraction. Their revolt may be right or wrong, but it is real; and what applies to their revolt applies to their religion. There may well be doubts about whether Egypt is a nation, but there is no doubt that Jerusalem is a city, and the nations have come to its light.

The problem of the snow proved indeed the text for a tale touching the practical politics of the city. The English soldiers cleared the snow away; the Arabs sat down satisfied or stoical with the snow blocking their own doors or loading their own roofs. But the Jews, as the story went, were at length persuaded to clear away the snow in front of them, and then demanded a handsome salary for having recovered the use of their own front doors. The story is not quite fair; and yet it is not so unfair as it seems. Any rational Anti-Semite will agree that such tales, even when they are true, do not always signify an avaricious tradition in Semitism, but sometimes the healthier and more human suggestion of Bolshevism. The Jews do demand high wages, but it is not always because they are in the old sense money-grabbers, but rather in the new sense money-grabbers (as an enemy would put it) men sincerely and bitterly convinced of their right to the surplus of capitalism. There is the same problem in the Jewish colonies in the country districts; in the Jewish explanation of the employment of Arab and Syrian labour. The Jews argue that this occurs, not because they wish to remain idle capitalists, but because they insist on being properly paid proletarians. With all this I shall deal, however, when I treat of the Jewish problem itself. The point for the moment is that the episode of the snow did in a superficial way suggest the parts played by the three parties and the tales told about them. To begin with, it is right to say that the English do a great many things, as they clear away the snow, simply because nobody else would do them. They did save the oriental inhabitants from some of the worst consequences of the calamity. Probably they sometimes save the inhabitants from something which the inhabitants do not regard as a calamity. It is the danger of all such foreign efficiency that it often saves men who do not want to be saved. But they do in many cases do things from which Moslems profit, but which Moslems by themselves would not propose, let alone perform. And this has a general significance even in our first survey, for it suggests a truth easy to abuse, but I think impossible to ignore. I mean that there is something non-political about Moslem morality. Perverse as it may appear, I suspect that most of their political movements result from their non-political morality. They become politicians because they know they are not political; and feel their simple and more or less healthy life is at a disadvantage, in face of the political supremacy of the English and the political subtlety of the Jews.

For instance, the tradition of Turkish rule is simply a joke. All the stories about it are jokes, and often very good jokes. My own favourite incident is that which is still commemorated in the English cathedral by an enormous hole in the floor. The Turks dug up the pavement looking for concealed

English artillery; because they had been told that the bishop had given his blessing to two canons. The bishop had indeed recently appointed two canons to the service of the Church, but he had not secreted them under the floor of the chancel. There was another agreeable incident when the Turkish authorities, by an impulsive movement of religious toleration, sent for a Greek priest to bury Greek soldiers, and told him to take his choice in a heap of corpses of all creeds and colours. But at once the most curious and the most common touch of comedy is the perpetual social introduction to solid and smiling citizens who have been nearly hanged by the Turks. The fortunate gentleman seems still to be regarding his escape with a broad grin. If you were introduced to a polite Frenchman who had come straight from the guillotine, or to an affable American who had only just vacated the electrical chair, you would feel a faint curiosity about the whole story. If a friend introduced somebody, saying, “My friend Robinson; his sentence has been commuted to penal servitude,” or “My Uncle William, just come from Dartmoor Prison,” your mind and perhaps your lips would faintly form the syllables “What for?” But evidently, under Turkish rule, being hanged was like being knocked down by a cab; it might happen to anybody. This is a parenthesis, since I am only dealing here with the superficial experience of the streets, especially in the snow. But it will be well to safeguard it by saying that this unpolitical carelessness and comprehensiveness of the indiscriminate Turk had its tragic as well as its comic side. It was by no means everybody that escaped hanging; and there was a tree growing outside the Jaffa Gate at which men might still shudder as they pass it in the sunlight. It was what a modern revolutionary poet has called bitterly the Tree of Man’s Making; and what a medieval revolutionary poet called the fruit tree in the orchard of the king. It was the gibbet; and lives have dropped from it like leaves from a tree in autumn. Yet even on the sterner side, we can trace the truth about the Moslem fatalism which seems so alien to political actuality. There was a popular legend or proverb that this terrible tree was in some way bound up with the power of the Turk, and perhaps the Moslem over a great part of the earth. There is nothing more strange about that Moslem fatalism than a certain gloomy magnanimity which can invoke omens and oracles against itself. It is astonishing how often the Turks seem to have accepted a legend or prophecy about their own ultimate failure. De Quincey mentions one of them in the blow that half broke the Palladium of Byzantium. It is said that the Moslems themselves predict the entry of a

Christian king of Jerusalem through the Golden Gate. Perhaps that is why they have blocked up the fatal gate; but in any case they dealt in that fashion with the fatal tree. They elaborately bound and riveted it with iron, as if accepting the popular prophecy which declared that so long as it stood the Turkish Empire would stand. It was as if the wicked man of Scripture had daily watered a green bay-tree, to make sure that it should flourish.

In the last chapter I have attempted to suggest a background of the battlemented walls with the low gates and narrow windows which seem to relieve the liveliest of the coloured groups against the neutral tints of the North, and how this was intensified when the neutral tints were touched with the positive hue of snow. In the same merely impressionist spirit I would here attempt to sketch some of the externals of the actors in such a scene, though it is hard to do justice to such a picture even in the superficial matter of the picturesque. Indeed it is hard to be sufficiently superficial; for in the East nearly every external is a symbol. The greater part of it is the gorgeous rag-heap of Arabian humanity, and even about that one could lecture on almost every coloured rag. We hear much of the gaudy colours of the East; but the most striking thing about them is that they are delicate colours. It is rare to see a red that is merely like a pillar-box, or a blue that is Reckitt’s blue; the red is sure to have the enrichment of tawny wine or blood oranges, and the blue of peacocks or the sea. In short these people are artistic in the sense that used to be called aesthetic; and it is a nameless instinct that preserves these nameless tints. Like all such instincts, it can be blunted by a bullying rationalism; like all such children, these people do not know why they prefer the better, and can therefore be persuaded by sophists that they prefer the worst. But there are other elements emerging from the coloured crowd, which are more significant, and therefore more stubborn. A stranger entirely ignorant of that world would feel something like a chill to the blood when he first saw the black figures of the veiled Moslem women, sinister figures without faces. It is as if in that world every woman were a widow. When he realised that these were not the masked mutes at a very grisly funeral, but merely ladies literally obeying a convention of wearing veils in public, he would probably have a reaction of laughter. He would be disposed to say flippantly that it must be, a dull life, not only for the women but the men; and that a man might well want five wives if he had to marry them before he could even look at them. But he will be wise not to be satisfied with such flippancy, for the complete veiling of the Moslem women of Jerusalem, though not a finer thing than the freedom of the Christian woman of Bethlehem, is almost certainly a finer thing than the more coquettish compromise of the other Moslem women of Cairo. It simply means that the Moslem religion is here more sincerely observed; and this in turn is part of something that a sympathetic person will soon feel in Jerusalem, if he has come from these more commercial cities of the East; a spiritual tone decidedly more delicate and dignified, like the clear air about the mountain city. Whatever the human vices involved, it is not altogether for nothing that this is the holy town of three great religions. When all is said, he will feel that there are some tricks that could not be played, some trades that could not be plied, some shops that could not be opened, within a stone’s throw of the Sepulchre. This indefinable seriousness has its own fantasies of fanaticism or formalism; but if these are vices they are not vulgarities. There is no stronger example of this than the real Jews of Jerusalem, especially those from the ghettoes of eastern Europe. They can be immediately picked out by the peculiar wisps of hair worn on each side of the face, like something between curls and whiskers. Sometimes they look strangely effeminate, like some rococo burlesque of the ringlets of an Early Victorian woman. Sometimes they look considerably more like the horns of a devil; and one need not be an Anti-Semite to say that the face is often made to match. But though they may be ugly, or even horrible, they are not vulgar like the Jews at Brighton; they trail behind them too many primeval traditions and laborious loyalties, along with their grand though often greasy robes of bronze or purple velvet. They often wear on their heads that odd turban of fur worn by the Rabbis in the pictures of Rembrandt. And indeed that great name is not irrelevant; for the whole truth at the back of Zionism is in the difference between the picture of a Jew by Rembrandt and a picture of a Jew by Sargent. For Rembrandt the Rabbi was, in a special and double sense, a distinguished figure. He was something distinct from the world of the artist, who drew a Rabbi as he would a Brahmin. But Sargent had to treat his sitters as solid citizens of England or America; and consequently his pictures are direct provocations to a pogrom. But the light that Rembrandt loved falls not irreverently on the strange hairy haloes that can still be seen on the shaven heads of the Jews of Jerusalem. And I should be sorry for any pogrom that brought down any of their grey wisps or whiskers in sorrow to the grave.

The whole scene indeed, seriousness apart, might be regarded as a fantasia for barbers; for the different ways of dressing the hair would alone serve as symbols of different races and religions. Thus the Greek priests of the Orthodox Church, bearded and robed in black with black towers upon their heads, have for some strange reason their hair bound up behind like a woman’s. In any case they have in their pomp a touch of the bearded bulls of Assyrian sculpture; and this strange fashion of curling if not oiling the Assyrian bull gives the newcomer an indescribable and illogical impression of the unnatural sublimity of archaic art. In the Apocalypse somewhere there is an inspiringly unintelligible allusion to men coming on the earth, whose hair is like the hair of women and their teeth like the teeth of lions. I have never been bitten by an Orthodox clergyman, and cannot say whether his teeth are at all leonine; though I have seen seven of them together enjoying their lunch at an hotel with decorum and dispatch. But the twisting of the hair in the womanish fashion does for us touch that note of the abnormal which the mystic meant to convey in his poetry, and which others feel rather as a recoil into humour. The best and last touch to this topsy-turvydom was given when a lady, observing one of these reverend gentlemen who for some reason did not carry this curious coiffure, exclaimed, in a tone of heartrending surprise and distress, “Oh, he’s bobbed his hair!”

Here again of course even a superficial glance at the pageant of the street should not be content with its comedy. There is an intellectual interest in the external pomp and air of placid power in these ordinary Orthodox parish priests; especially if we compare them with the comparatively prosaic and jog-trot good nature of the Roman monks, called in this country the Latins. Mingling in the same crowd with these black-robed pontiffs can be seen shaven men in brown habits who seem in comparison to be both busy and obscure. These are the sons of St. Francis, who came to the East with a grand simplicity and thought to finish the Crusades with a smile. The spectator will be wise to accept this first contrast that strikes the eye with an impartial intellectual interest; it has nothing to do with personal character, of course, and many Greek priests are as simple in their tastes as they are charming in their manners; while any Roman priests can find as much ritual as they may happen to want in other aspects of their own religion. But it is broadly true that Roman and Greek Catholicism are contrasted in this way in this country; and the contrast is the flat contrary to all our customary associations in the West. In the East it is Roman Catholicism that stands for much that we associate with Protestantism. It is Roman Catholicism that is by comparison plain and practical and scornful of superstition and concerned for social work. It is Greek Catholicism that is stiff with gold and gorgeous with ceremonial, with its hold on ancient history and its inheritance of imperial tradition. In the cant of our own society, we may say it is the Roman who rationalises and the Greek who Romanises. It is the Roman Catholic who is impatient with Russian and Greek childishness, and perpetually appealing for common sense. It is the Greek who defends such childishness as childlike faith and would rebuke such common sense as common scepticism. I do not speak of the theological tenets or even the deeper emotions involved, but only, as I have said, of contrasts visible even in the street. And the whole difference is sufficiently suggested in two phrases I heard within a few days. A distinguished Anglo-Catholic, who has himself much sympathy with the Greek Orthodox traditions, said to me, “After all, the Romans were the first Puritans.” And I heard that a Franciscan, being told that this Englishman and perhaps the English generally were disposed to make an alliance with the Greek Church, had only said by way of comment, “And a good thing too, the Greeks might do something at last.”

Anyhow the first impression is that the Greek is more gorgeous in black than the Roman in colours. But the Greek of course can also appear in colours, especially in those eternal forms of frozen yet fiery colours which we call jewels. I have seen the Greek Patriarch, that magnificent old gentleman, walking down the street like an emperor in the *Arabian Nights*, hung all over with historic jewels as thick as beads or buttons, with a gigantic cross of solid emeralds that might have been given him by the green genii of the sea, if any of the genii are Christians. These things are toys, but I am entirely in favour of toys; and rubies and emeralds are almost as intoxicating as that sort of lustrous coloured paper they put inside Christmas crackers. This beauty has been best achieved in the North in the glory of coloured glass; and I have seen great Gothic windows in which one could really believe that the robes of martyrs were giant rubies or the starry sky a single enormous sapphire. But the colours of the West are transparent, the colours of the East opaque. I have spoken of the *Arabian Nights*, and there is really a touch of them even in the Christian churches, perhaps increased with a tradition of early Christian secrecy. There are glimpses of gorgeously tiled walls, of blue curtains and green doors and golden inner chambers, that are just like the entrance to an Eastern tale. The Orthodox are at least more oriental in the sense of being more ornamental; more flat and decorative. The Romans are more Western, I might even say more modern, in the sense of having more realism even in their ritualism. The Greek cross is a cross; the Roman cross is a crucifix.

But these are deeper matters; I am only trying to suggest a sort of silhouette of the crowd like the similar silhouette of the city, a profile or outline of the heads and hats, like the profile of the towers and spires. The tower that makes the Greek priest look like a walking catafalque is by no means alone among the horns thus fantastically exalted. There is the peaked hood of the Armenian priest, for instance; the stately survival of that strange Monophysite heresy which perpetuated itself in pomp and pride mainly through the sublime accident of the Crusades. That black cone also rises above the crowd with something of the immemorial majesty of a pyramid; and rightly so, for it is typical of the prehistoric poetry by which these places live that some say it is a surviving memory of Ararat and the Ark.

Again the high white headgear of the Bethlehem women, or to speak more strictly of the Bethlehem wives, has already been noted in another connection; but it is well to remark it again among the colours of the crowd, because this at least has a significance essential to all criticism of such a crowd. Most travellers from the West regard such an Eastern city far too much as a Moslem city, like the lady whom Mr. Maurice Baring met who travelled all over Russia, and thought all the churches were mosques. But in truth it is very hard to generalise about Jerusalem, precisely because it contains everything, and its contrasts are real contrasts. And anybody who doubts that its Christianity is Christian, a thing fighting for our own culture and morals on the borders of Asia, need only consider the concrete fact of these women of Bethlehem and their costume. There is no need to sneer in any unsympathetic fashion at all the domestic institutions of Islam; the sexes are never quite so stupid as some feminists represent; and I dare say a woman often has her own way in a harem as well as in a household. But the broad difference does remain. And if there be one thing, I think, that can safely be said about all Asia and all oriental tribes, it is this; that if a married woman wears any distinctive mark, it is always meant to prevent her from receiving the admiration or even the notice of strange men. Often it is only made to disguise her; sometimes it is made to disfigure her. It may be the masking of the face as among the Moslems; it may be the shaving of the head as among the Jews; it may, I believe, be the blackening of the teeth and other queer expedients among the people of the Far East. But is never meant to make her look magnificent in public; and the Bethlehem wife is made to look magnificent in public. She not only shows all the beauty of her face; and she is often very beautiful. She also wears a towering erection which is as unmistakably meant to give her consequence as the triple tiara of the Pope. A woman wearing such a crown, and wearing it without a veil, does stand, and can only conceivably stand, for what we call the Western view of women, but should rather call the Christian view of women. This is the sort of dignity which must of necessity come from some vague memory of chivalry. The woman may or may not be, as the legend says, a lineal descendant of a Crusader. But whether or no she is his daughter, she is certainly his heiress.

She may be put last among the local figures I have here described, for the special reason that her case has this rather deeper significance. For it is not possible to remain content with the fact that the crowd offers such varied shapes and colours to the eye, when it also offers much deeper divisions and even dilemmas to the intelligence. The black dress of the Moslem woman and the white dress of the Christian woman are in sober truth as different as black and white. They stand for real principles in a real opposition; and the black and white will not easily disappear in the dull grey of our own compromises. The one tradition will defend what it regards as modesty, and the other what it regards as dignity, with passions far deeper than most of our paltry political appetites. Nor do I see how we can deny such a right of defence, even in the case we consider the less enlightened. It is made all the more difficult by the fact that those who consider themselves the pioneers of enlightenment generally also consider themselves the protectors of native races and aboriginal rights. Whatever view we take of the Moslem Arab, we must at least admit that the greater includes the less. It is manifestly absurd to say we have no right to interfere in his country, but have a right to interfere in his home.

It is the intense interest of Jerusalem that there can thus be two universes in the same street. Indeed there are ten rather than two; and it is a proverb that the fight is not only between Christian and Moslem, but between Christian and Christian. At this moment, it must be admitted, it is almost entirely a fight of Christian and Moslem allied against Jew. But of that I shall have to speak later; the point for the moment is that the varied colours of the streets are a true symbol of the varied colours of the souls. It is perhaps the only modern place where the war waged between ideas has such a visible and vivid heraldry.

And that fact alone may well leave the spectator with one final reflection; for it is a matter in which the modern world may well have to learn something from the motley rabble of this remote Eastern town.

It may be an odd thing to suggest that a crowd in Bond Street or Piccadilly should model itself on this masquerade of religions. It would be facile and fascinating to turn it into a satire or an extravaganza. Every good and innocent mind would be gratified with the image of a bowler hat in the precise proportions of the Dome of St. Paul’s, and surmounted with a little ball and cross, symbolising the loyalty of some Anglican to his mother church. It might even be pleasing to see the street dominated with a more graceful top-hat modelled on the Eiffel Tower, and signifying the wearer’s faith in scientific enterprise, or perhaps in its frequent concomitant of political corruption. These would be fair Western parallels to the head-dresses of Jerusalem; modelled on Mount Ararat or Solomon’s Temple, and some may insinuate that we are not very likely ever to meet them in the Strand. A man wearing whiskers is not even compelled to plead some sort of excuse or authority for wearing whiskers, as the Jew can for wearing ringlets; and though the Anglican clergyman may indeed be very loyal to his mother church, there might be considerable hesitation if his mother bade him bind his hair. Nevertheless a more historical view of the London and Jerusalem crowds will show as far from impossible to domesticate such symbols; that some day a lady’s jewels might mean something like the sacred jewels of the Patriarch, or a lady’s furs mean something like the furred turban of the Rabbi. History indeed will show us that we are not so much superior to them as inferior to ourselves.

When the Crusaders came to Palestine, and came riding up that road from Jaffa where the orange plantations glow on either side, they came with motives which may have been mixed and are certainly disputed. There may have been different theories among the Crusaders; there are certainly different theories among the critics of the Crusaders. Many sought God, some gold, some perhaps black magic. But whatever else they were in search of, they were not in search of the picturesque. They were not drawn from a drab civilisation by that mere thirst for colour that draws so many modern artists to the bazaars of the East. In those days there were colours in the West as well as in the East; and a glow in the sunset as well as in the sunrise. Many of the men who rode up that road were dressed to match the most glorious orange garden and to rival the most magnificent oriental king. King Richard cannot have been considered dowdy, even by comparison, when he rode on that high red saddle graven with golden lions, with his great scarlet hat and his vest of silver crescents. That squire of the comparatively unobtrusive household of Joinville, who was clad in scarlet striped with yellow, must surely have been capable (if I may be allowed the expression) of knocking them in the most magnificent Asiatic bazaar. Nor were these external symbols less significant, but rather more significant than the corresponding symbols of the Eastern civilisation. It is true that heraldry began beautifully as an art and afterwards degenerated into a science. But even in being a science it had to possess a significance; and the Western colours were often allegorical where the Eastern were only accidental. To a certain extent this more philosophical ornament was doubtless imitated; and I have remarked elsewhere on the highly heraldic lions which even the Saracens carved over the gate of St. Stephen. But it is the extraordinary and even exasperating fact that it was not imitated as the most meaningless sort of modern vulgarity is imitated. King Richard's great red hat embroidered with beasts and birds has not overshadowed the earth so much as the billycock, which no one has yet thought of embroidering with any such natural and universal imagery. The cockney tourist is not only more likely to set out with the intention of knocking them, but he has actually knocked them; and Orientals are imitating the tweeds of the tourist more than they imitated the stripes of the squire. It is a curious and perhaps melancholy truth that the world is imitating our worst, our weariness and our dingy decline, when it did not imitate our best and the high moment of our morning.

Perhaps it is only when civilisation becomes a disease that it becomes an infection. Possibly it is only when it becomes a very virulent disease that it becomes an epidemic. Possibly again that is the meaning both of cosmopolitanism and imperialism. Anyhow the tribes sitting by Afric's sunny fountains did not take up the song when Francis of Assisi stood on the very mountain of the Middle Ages, singing the Canticle of the Sun. When Michael Angelo carved a statue in snow, Eskimos did not copy him, despite their large natural quarries or resources. Laplanders never made a model of the Elgin Marbles, with a frieze of reindeers instead of horses; nor did Hottentots try to paint Mumbo Jumbo as Raphael had painted Madonnas. But many a savage king has worn a top-hat, and the barbarian has sometimes been so debased as to add to it a pair of trousers. Explosive bullets and the brutal factory system numbers of advanced natives are anxious to possess. And it was this reflection, arising out of the mere pleasure of the eye in the parti-coloured crowd before me, that brought back my mind to the chief problem and peril of our position in Palestine, on which I touched earlier in this chapter; the peril which is largely at the back both of the just and of the unjust objections to Zionism. It is the fear that the West, in its modern mercantile mood, will send not its best but its worst. The artisan way of putting it, from the point of view of the Arab, is that it will mean not so much the English merchant as the Jewish money-lender. I shall write elsewhere of better types of Jew and the truths they really represent; but the Jewish money-lender is in a curious and complex sense the representative of this unfortunate paradox. He is not only unpopular both in the East and West, but he is unpopular in the West for being Eastern and in the East for being Western. He is accused in Europe of Asiatic crookedness and secrecy, and in Asia of European vulgarity and bounce. I have said *a propos* of the Arab that the dignity of the oriental is in his long robe; the merely mercantile Jew is the oriental who has lost his long robe, which leads to a dangerous liveliness in the legs. He bustles and hustles too much; and in Palestine some of the unpopularity even of the better sort of Jew is simply due to his restlessness. But there remains a fear that it will not be a question of the better sort of Jew, or of the better sort of British influence. The same ignominious inversion which reproduces everywhere the factory chimney without the church tower, which spreads a cockney commerce but not a Christian culture, has given many men a vague feeling that the influence of modern civilisation will surround these ragged but coloured groups with something as dreary and discoloured, as unnatural and as desolate as the unfamiliar snow in which they were shivering as I watched them. There seemed a sort of sinister omen in this strange visitation that the north had sent them; in the fact that when the north wind blew at last, it had only scattered on them this silver dust of death.

It may be that this more melancholy mood was intensified by that pale landscape and those impassable ways. I do not dislike snow; on the contrary I delight in it; and if it had drifted as deep in my own country against my own door I should have thought it the triumph of Christmas, and a thing as comic as my own dog and donkey. But the people in the coloured rags did dislike it; and the effects of it were not comic but tragic. The news that came in seemed in that little lonely town like the news of a great war, or even of a great defeat. Men fell to regarding it, as they have fallen too much to regarding the war, merely as an unmixed misery, and here the misery was really unmixed. As the snow began to melt corpses were found in it, homes were hopelessly buried, and even the gradual clearing of the roads only brought him stories of the lonely hamlets lost in the hills. It seemed as if a breath of the aimless destruction that wanders in the world had drifted across us; and no task remained for men but the weary rebuilding of ruins and the numbering of the dead.

Only as I went out of the Jaffa Gate, a man told me that the tree of the hundred deaths, that was the type of the eternal Caliphate of the Crescent, was cast down and lying broken in the snow.

CHAPTER VI

THE GROUPS OF THE CITY

Palestine is a striped country; that is the first effect of landscape on the eye. It runs in great parallel lines wavering into vast hills and valleys, but preserving the parallel pattern; as if drawn boldly but accurately with gigantic chalks of green and grey and red and yellow. The natural explanation or (to speak less foolishly) the natural process of this is simple enough. The stripes are the strata of the rock, only they are stripped by the great rains, so that everything has to grow on ledges, repeating yet again that terraced character to be seen in the vineyards and the staircase streets of the town. But though the cause is in a sense in the ruinous strength of the rain, the hues are not the dreary hues of ruin. What earth there is is commonly a red clay richer than that of Devon; a red clay of which it would be easy to believe that the giant limbs of the first man were made. What grass there is is not only an enamel of emerald, but is literally crowded with those crimson anemones which might well have called forth the great saying touching Solomon in all his glory. And even what rock there is is coloured with a thousand secondary and tertiary tints, as are the walls and streets of the Holy City which is built from the quarries of these hills. For the old stones of the old Jerusalem are as precious as the precious stones of the New Jerusalem; and at certain moments of morning or of sunset, every pebble might be a pearl.

And all these coloured strata rise so high and roll so far that they might be skies rather than slopes. It is as if we looked up at a frozen sunset; or a daybreak fixed for ever with its fleeting bars of cloud. And indeed the fancy is not without a symbolic suggestiveness. This is the land of eternal things; but we tend too much to forget that recurrent things are eternal things. We tend to forget that subtle tones and delicate hues, whether in the hills or the heavens, were to the primitive poets and sages as visible as they are to us; and the strong and simple words in which they describe them do not prove that they did not realise them. When Wordsworth speaks of “the clouds that gather round the setting sun,” we assume that he has seen every shadow of colour and every curve of form; but when the Hebrew poet says “He hath made the clouds his chariot”; we do not always realise that he was full of indescribable emotions aroused by indescribable sights. We vaguely assume that the very sky was plainer in primitive times. We feel as if there had been a fashion in sunsets; or as if dawn was always grey in the Stone Age or brown in the Bronze Age.

But there is another parable written in those long lines of many-coloured clay and stone. Palestine is in every sense a stratified country. It is not only true in the natural sense, as here where the clay has fallen away and left visible the very ribs of the hills. It is true in the quarries where men dig, in the dead cities where they excavate, and even in the living cities where they still fight and pray. The sorrow of all Palestine is that its divisions in culture, politics and theology are like its divisions in geology. The dividing line is horizontal instead of vertical. The frontier does not run between states but between stratified layers. The Jew did not appear beside the Canaanite but on top of the Canaanite; the Greek not beside the Jew but on top of the Jew; the Moslem not beside the Christian but on top of the Christian. It is not merely a house divided against itself, but one divided across itself. It is a house in which the first floor is fighting the second floor, in which the basement is oppressed from above and attics are besieged from below. There is a great deal of gunpowder in the cellars; and people are by no means comfortable even on the roof. In days of what some call Bolshevism, it may be said that most states are houses in which the kitchen has declared war on the drawing-room. But this will give no notion of the toppling pagoda of political and religious and racial differences, of which the name is Palestine. To explain that it is necessary to give the traveller’s first impressions more particularly in their order, and before I return to this view of the society as stratified, I must state the problem more practically as it presents itself while the society still seems fragmentary.

We are always told that the Turk kept the peace between the Christian sects. It would be nearer the nerve of vital truth to say that he made the war between the Christian sects. But it would be nearer still to say that the war is something not made by Turks but made up by infidels. The tourist visiting the churches is often incredulous about the tall tales told about them; but he is completely credulous about the tallest of all the tales, the tale that is told against them. He believes in a frantic fraticidal war perpetually waged by Christian against Christian in Jerusalem. It freshens the free sense of adventure to wander through those crooked and cavernous streets, expecting every minute to see the Armenian Patriarch trying to stick a knife into the Greek Patriarch; just as it would add to the romance of London to linger about Lambeth and Westminster in the hope of seeing the Archbishop of Canterbury locked in a deadly grapple with the President of the Wesleyan Conference. And if we return to our homes at evening without having actually seen these things with the eye of flesh, the vision has none the less shone on our path, and led us round many corners with alertness and with hope. But in bald fact religion does not involve perpetual war in the East, any more than patriotism involves perpetual war in the West. What it does involve in both cases is a defensive attitude; a vigilance on the frontiers. There is no war; but there is an armed peace.

I have already explained the sense in which I say that the Moslems are unhistoric or even anti-historic. Perhaps it would be near the truth to say that they are prehistoric. They attach themselves to the tremendous truisms which men might have realised before they had any political experience at all; which might have been scratched with primitive knives of flint upon primitive pots of clay. Being simple and sincere, they do not escape the need for legends; I might almost say that, being honest, they do not escape the need for lies. But their mood is not historic, they do not wish to grapple with the past; they do not love its complexities; nor do they understand the enthusiasm for its details and even its doubts. Now in all this the Moslems of a place like Jerusalem are the very opposite of the Christians of Jerusalem. The Christianity of Jerusalem is highly historic, and cannot be understood without historical imagination. And this is not the strong point perhaps of those among us who generally record their impressions of the place. As the educated Englishman does not know the history of England, it would be unreasonable to expect him to know the history of Moab or of Mesopotamia. He receives the impression, in visiting the shrines of Jerusalem, of a number of small sects squabbling about small things. In short, he has before him a tangle of trivialities, which include the Roman Empire in the West and in the East, the Catholic Church in its two great divisions, the Jewish race, the memories of Greece and Egypt, and the whole Mahometan world in Asia and Africa. It may be that he regards these as small things; but I should be glad if he would cast his eye over human history, and tell me what are the large things. The truth is that the things that meet to-day in Jerusalem are by far the greatest things that the world has yet seen. If they are not important nothing on this earth is important, and certainly not the impressions of those who happen to be bored by them. But to understand them it is necessary to have something which is much commoner in Jerusalem than in Oxford or Boston; that sort of living history which we call tradition.

For instance, the critic generally begins by dismissing these conflicts with the statement that they are all about small points of theology. I do not admit that theological points are small points. Theology is only thought applied to religion; and those who prefer a thoughtless religion need not be so very disdainful of others with a more rationalistic taste. The old joke that the Greek sects only differed about a single letter is about the lamest and most illogical joke in the world. An atheist and a theist only differ by a single letter; yet theologians are so subtle as to distinguish definitely between the two. But though I do not in any case allow that it is idle to be concerned about theology, as a matter of actual fact these quarrels are not chiefly concerned about theology. They are concerned about history. They are concerned with the things about which the only human sort of history is concerned; great memories of great men, great battles for great ideas, the love of brave people for beautiful places, and the faith by which the dead are alive. It is quite true that with this historic sense men inherit heavy responsibilities and revenges, fury and sorrow and shame. It is also true that without it men die, and nobody even digs their graves.

The truth is that these quarrels are rather about patriotism than about religion, in the sense of theology. That is, they are just such heroic passions about the past as we call in the West by the name of nationalism; but they are conditioned by the extraordinarily complicated position of the nations, or what corresponds to the nations. We of the West, if we wish to understand it, must imagine ourselves as left with all our local loves and family memories unchanged, but the places affected by them intermingled and tumbled about by some almost inconceivable convulsion. We must imagine cities and landscapes to have turned on some unseen pivots, or been shifted about by some unseen machinery, so that our nearest was furthest and our remotest enemy our neighbour. We must imagine monuments on the wrong sites, and the antiquities of one county emptied out on top of another. And we must imagine through all this the thin but tough threads of tradition everywhere tangled and yet everywhere unbroken. We must picture a new map made out of the broken fragments of the old map; and yet with every one remembering the old map and ignoring the new. In short we must try to imagine, or rather we must try to hope, that our own memories would be as long and our own loyalties as steady as the memories and loyalties of the little crowd in Jerusalem; and hope, or pray, that we could only be as rigid, as rabid and as bigoted as are these benighted people. Then perhaps we might preserve all our distinctions of truth and falsehood in a chaos of time and space.

We have to conceive that the Tomb of Napoleon is in the middle of Stratford-on-Avon, and that the Nelson Column is erected on the field of Bannockburn; that Westminster Abbey has taken wings and flown away to the most romantic situation on the Rhine, and that the wooden "Victory" is stranded, like the Ark on Ararat, on the top of the Hill of Tara; that the pilgrims to the shrine of Lourdes have to look for it in the Island of Runnymede, and that the only existing German statue of Bismarck is to be found in the Pantheon at Paris. This intolerable topsy-turvydom is no exaggeration of the way in which stories cut across each other and sites are imposed on each other in the historic chaos of the Holy City. Now we in the West are very lucky in having our nations normally distributed into their native lands; so that good patriots can talk about themselves without perpetually annoying their neighbours. Some of the pacifists tell us that national frontiers and divisions are evil because they exasperate us to war. It would be far truer to say that national frontiers and divisions keep us at peace. It would be far truer to say that we can always love each other so long as we do not see each other. But the people of Jerusalem are doomed to have difference without division. They are driven to set pillar against pillar in the same temple, while we can set city against city across the plains of the world. While for us a church rises from its foundations as naturally as a flower springs from a flower-bed, they have to bless the soil and curse the stones that stand on it. While the land we love is solid under our feet to the earth's centre, they have to see all they love and hate lying in strata like alternate night and day, as incompatible and as inseparable. Their entanglements are tragic, but they are not trumpery or accidental. Everything has a meaning; they are loyal to great names as men are loyal to great nations; they have differences about which they feel bound to dispute to the death; but in their death they are not divided.

Jerusalem is a small town of big things; and the average modern city is a big town full of small things. All the most important and interesting powers in history are here gathered within the area of a quiet village; and if they are not always friends, at least they are necessarily neighbours. This is a point of intellectual interest, and even intensity, that is far too little realised. It is a matter of modern complaint that in a place like Jerusalem the Christian groups do not always regard each other with Christian feelings. It is said that they fight each other; but at least they meet each other. In a great industrial city like London or Liverpool, how often do they even meet each other? In a large town men live in small cliques, which are much narrower than classes; but in this small town they live at least by large contacts, even if they are conflicts. Nor is it really true, in the daily humours of human life, that they are only conflicts. I have heard an eminent English clergyman from Cambridge bargaining for a brass lamp with a Syrian of the Greek Church, and asking the advice of a Franciscan friar who was standing smiling in the same shop. I have met the same representative of the Church of England, at a luncheon party with the wildest Zionist Jews, and with the Grand Mufti, the head of the Moslem religion. Suppose the same Englishman had been, as he might well have been, an eloquent and popular vicar in Chelsea or Hampstead. How often would he have met a Franciscan or a Zionist? Not once in a year. How often would he have met a Moslem or a Greek Syrian? Not once in a lifetime. Even if he were a bigot, he would be bound in Jerusalem to become a more interesting kind of bigot. Even if his opinions were narrow, his experiences would be wide. He is not, as a fact, a bigot, nor, as a fact, are the other people bigots, but at the worst they could not be unconscious bigots. They could not live in such uncorrected complacency as is possible to a larger social set in a larger social system. They could not be quite so ignorant as a broad-minded person in a big suburb. Indeed there is something fine and distinguished about the very delicacy, and even irony, of their diplomatic relations. There is something of chivalry in the courtesy of their armed truce, and it is a great school of manners that includes such differences in morals.

This is an aspect of the interest of Jerusalem which can easily be neglected and is not easy to describe. The normal life there is intensely exciting, not because the factions fight, but rather because they do not fight. Of the abnormal crisis when they did fight, and the abnormal motives that made them fight, I shall have something to say later on. But it was true for a great part of the time that what was picturesque and thrilling was not the war but the peace. The sensation of being in this little town is rather like that of being at a great international congress. It is like that moving and glittering social satire, in which diplomatists can join in a waltz who may soon be joining in a war. For the religious and political parties have yet another point in common with separate nations; that even within this narrow space the complicated curve of their frontiers is really more or less fixed, and certainly not particularly fluctuating. Persecution is impossible and conversion is not at all common. The very able Anglo-Catholic leader, to whom I have already referred, uttered to me a paradox that was a very practical truth. He said he felt exasperated with the Christian sects, not for their fanaticism but for their lack of fanaticism. He meant their lack of any fervour and even of any hope, of converting each other to their respective religions. An Armenian may be quite as proud of the Armenian Church as a Frenchman of the French nation, yet he may no more expect to make a Moslem an Armenian than the Frenchman expects to make an Englishman a Frenchman. If, as we are told, the quarrels could be condemned as merely theological, this would certainly be the very reverse of logical. But as I say, we get much nearer to them by calling them national; and the leaders of the great religions feel much more like the ambassadors of great nations. And, as I have also said, that ambassadorial atmosphere can be best expressed on the word irony, sometimes a rather tragic irony. At any tea-party or talk in the street, between the rival leaders, there is a natural tendency to that sort of wit which consists in veiled allusion to a very open secret. Each mail feels that there are heavy forces behind a small point, as the weight of the fencer is behind the point of the rapier. And the point can be yet more pointed because the politics of the city, when I was there, included several men with a taste and talent for such polished intercourse; including especially two men whose experience and culture would have been remarkable in any community in the world; the American Consul and the Military Governor of Jerusalem.

If in cataloguing the strata of the society we take first the topmost layer of Western officialism, we might indeed find it not inconvenient to take these two men as representing the chief realities about it. Dr. Glazebrook, the representative of the United States, has the less to do with the internal issues of the country; but his mere presence and history is so strangely picturesque that he might be put among the first reasons for finding the city interesting. He is an old man now, for he actually began life as a soldier in the Southern and Secessionist army, and still keeps alive in every detail, not merely the virtues but the very gestures of the old Southern and Secessionist aristocrat.

He afterward became a clergyman of the Episcopalian Church, and served as a chaplain in the Spanish-American war, then, at an age when most men have long retired from the most peaceful occupations, he was sent out by President Wilson to the permanent battlefield of Palestine. The brilliant services he performed there, in the protection of British and American subjects, are here chiefly interesting as throwing a backward light on the unearthly topsy-turvydom of Turkish rule. There appears in his experiences something in such rule which we are perhaps apt to forget in a vision of stately Eastern princes and gallant Eastern warriors, something more tyrannical even than the dull pigheadedness of Prussianism. I mean the most atrocious of all tortures, which is called caprice. It is the thing we feel in the Arabian tales, when no man knows whether the Sultan is good or bad, and he gives the same Vizier a thousand pounds or a thousand lashes. I have heard Dr. Glazebrook describe a whole day of hideous hesitation, in which fugitives for whom he pleaded were allowed four times to embark and four times were brought back again to their prison. There is something there dizzy as well as dark, a whirlpool in the very heart of Asia; and something wilder than our own worst oppressions in the peril of those men who looked up and saw above all the power of Asiatic arms, their hopes hanging on a rocking mind like that of a maniac. The tyrant let them go at last, avowedly out of a simple sentiment for the white hair of the consul, and the strange respect that many Moslems feel for the minister of any religion. Once at least the trembling rock of barbaric rule nearly fell on him and killed him. By a sudden movement of lawlessness the Turkish military authorities sent to him, demanding the English documents left in his custody. He refused to give them up; and he knew what he was doing. In standing firm he was not even standing like Nurse Cavell against organised Prussia under the full criticism of organised Europe. He was rather standing in a den of brigands, most of whom had never heard of the international rules they violated. Finally by another freak of friendliness they left him and his papers alone; but the old man had to wait many days in doubt, not knowing what they would do, since they did not know themselves. I do not know what were his thoughts, or whether they were far from Palestine and all possibilities that tyranny might return and reign for ever. But I have sometimes fancied that, in that ghastly silence, he may have heard again only the guns of Lee and the last battle in the Wilderness.

If the mention of the American Consul refers back to the oppression of the past, the mention of the Military Governor brings back all the problems of the present. Here I only sketch these groups as I first found them in the present; and it must be remembered that my present is already past. All this was before the latest change from military to civil government, but the mere name of Colonel Storrs raises a question which is rather misunderstood in relation to that change itself. Many of our journalists, especially at the time of the last and worst of the riots, wrote as if it would be a change from some sort of stiff militarism to a liberal policy akin to parliamentarism. I think this a fallacy, and a fallacy not uncommon in journalism, which is professedly very much up to date, and actually very much behind the times. As a fact it is nearly four years behind the times, for it is thinking in terms of the old small and rigidly professional army. Colonel Storrs is the very last man to be called militaristic in the narrow sense; he is a particularly liberal and enlightened type of the sort of English gentleman who readily served his country in war, but who is rather particularly fitted to serve her in politics or literature. Of course many purely professional soldiers have liberal and artistic tastes; as General Shea, one of the organisers of Palestinian victory, has a fine taste in poetry, or Colonel Popham, then deputy Governor of Jerusalem, an admirable taste in painting. But while it is sometimes forgotten that many soldiers are men, it is now still more strange to forget that most men are soldiers. I fancy there are now few things more representative than the British Army; certainly it is much more representative than the British Parliament. The men I knew, and whom I remember with so much gratitude, working under General Bols at the seat of government on the Mount of Olives, were certainly not narrowed by any military professionalism, and had if anything the mark of quite different professions. One was a very shrewd and humorous lawyer employed on legal problems about enemy property, another was a young schoolmaster, with keen and clear ideas, or rather ideals, about education for all the races in Palestine. These men did not cease to be themselves because they were all dressed in khaki; and if Colonel Storrs recurs first to the memory, it is not because he had become a colonel in the trade of soldiering, but because he is the sort of man who could talk equally about all these other trades and twenty more. Incidentally, and by way of example, he can talk about them in about ten languages. There is a story, which whether or no it be true is very typical, that one of the Zionist leaders made a patriotic speech in

Hebrew, and broke off short in his recollection of this partially revived national tongue; whereupon the Governor of Jerusalem finished his Hebrew speech for him — whether to exactly the same effect or not it would be impertinent to inquire. He is a man rather recalling the eighteenth century aristocrat, with his love of wit and classical learning; one of that small group of the governing class that contains his uncle, Harry Cust, and was warmed with the generous culture of George Wyndham. It was a purely mechanical distinction between the military and civil government that would lend to such figures the stiffness of a drumhead court martial. And even those who differed with him accused him in practice, not of militarist lack of sympathy with any of those he ruled, but rather with too imaginative a sympathy with some of them. To know these things, however slightly, and then read the English newspapers afterwards is often amusing enough; but I have only mentioned the matter because there is a real danger in so crude a differentiation. It would be a bad thing if a system military in form but representative in fact gave place to a system representative in form but financial in fact. That is what the Arabs and many of the English fear; and with the mention of that fear we come to the next stratum after the official. It must be remembered that I am not at this stage judging these groups, but merely very rapidly sketching them, like figures and costumes in the street.

The group standing nearest to the official is that of the Zionists; who are supposed to have a place at least in our official policy. Among these also I am happy to have friends; and I may venture to call the official head of the Zionists an old friend in a matter quite remote from Zionism. Dr. Eder, the President of the Zionist Commission, is a man for whom I conceived a respect long ago when he protested, as a professional physician, against the subjection of the poor to medical interference to the destruction of all moral independence. He criticised with great effect the proposal of legislators to kidnap anybody else’s child whom they chose to suspect of a feeblemindedness they were themselves too feeble-minded to define. It was defended, very characteristically, by a combination of precedent and progress; and we were told that it only extended the principle of the lunacy laws. That is to say, it only extended the principle of the lunacy laws to people whom no sane man would call lunatics. It is as if they were to alter the terms of a quarantine law from “lepers” to “light-haired persons”; and then say blandly that the principle was the same. The humour and human sympathy of a Jewish doctor was very welcome to us when we were accused of being Anti-Semites, and we afterwards asked Dr. Eder for his own views on the Jewish problem. We found he was then a very strong Zionist; and this was long before he had the faintest chance of figuring as a leader of Zionism. And this accident is important; for it stamps the sincerity of the small group of original Zionists, who were in favour of this nationalist ideal when all the international Jewish millionaires were against it. To my mind the most serious point now against it is that the millionaires are for it. But it is enough to note here the reality of the ideal in men like Dr. Eder and Dr. Weizmann, and doubtless many others. The only defect that need be noted, as a mere detail of portraiture, is a certain excessive vigilance and jealousy and pertinacity in the wrong place, which sometimes makes the genuine Zionists unpopular with the English, who themselves suffer unpopularity for supporting them. For though I am called an Anti-Semite, there were really periods of official impatience when I was almost the only Pro-Semite in the company. I went about pointing out what was really to be said for Zionism, to people who were represented by the Arabs as the mere slaves of the Zionists.

This group of Arab Anti-Semites may be taken next, but very briefly; for the problem itself belongs to a later page; and the one thing to be said of it here is very simple. I never expected it, and even now I do not fully understand it. But it is the fact that the native Moslems are more Anti-Semitic than the native Christians. Both are more or less so; and have formed a sort of alliance out of the fact. The banner carried by the mob bore the Arabic inscription “Moslems and Christians are brothers.” It is as if the little wedge of Zionism had closed up the cracks of the Crusades.

Of the Christian crowds in that partnership, and the Christian creeds they are proud to inherit, I have already suggested something; it is only as well to note that I have put them out of their strict order in the stratification of history. It is too often forgotten that in these countries the Christian culture is older than the Moslem culture. I for one regret that the old Pax Romana was broken up by the Arabs; and hold that in the long run there was more life in that Byzantine decline than in that Semitic revival. And I will add what I cannot here develop or defend; that in the long run it is best that the Pax Romana should return; and that the suzerainty of those lands at least will have to be Christian, and neither Moslem nor Jewish. To defend it is to defend a philosophy; but I do hold that there is in that philosophy, for all the talk of its persecutions in the past, a possibility of comprehension and many-sided sympathy which is not in the narrow intensity either of the Moslem or the Jew. Christianity is really the right angle of that triangle, and the other two are very acute angles.

But in the meetings that led up to the riots it is the more Moslem part of the mixed crowds that I chiefly remember; which touches the same truth that the Christians are the more potentially tolerant. But many of the Moslem leaders are as dignified and human as many of the Zionist leaders; the Grand Mufti is a man I cannot imagine as either insulting anybody, or being conceivably the object of insult. The Moslem Mayor of Jerusalem was another such figure, belonging also I believe to one of the Arab aristocratic houses (the Grand Mufti is a descendant of Mahomet) and I shall not forget his first appearance at the first of the riotous meetings in which I found myself. I will give it as the first of two final impressions with which I will end this chapter, I fear on a note of almost anarchic noise, the unearthly beating and braying of the Eastern gongs and horns of two fierce desert faiths against each other.

I first saw from the balcony of the hotel the crowd of riotors come rolling up the street. In front of them went two fantastic figures turning like teetotums in an endless dance and twirling two crooked and naked scimitars, as the Irish were supposed to twirl shillelaghs. I thought it a delightful way of opening a political meeting; and I wished we could do it at home at the General Election. I wish that instead of the wearisome business of Mr. Bonar Law taking the chair, and Mr. Lloyd George addressing the meeting, Mr. Law and Mr. Lloyd George would only hop and caper in front of a procession, spinning round and round till they were dizzy, and waving and crossing a pair of umbrellas in a thousand invisible patterns. But this political announcement or advertisement, though more intelligent than our own, had, as I could readily believe, another side to it. I was told that it was often a prelude to ordinary festivals, such as weddings; and no doubt it remains from some ancient ritual dance of a religious character. But I could imagine that it might sometimes seem to a more rational taste to have too religious a character. I could imagine that those dancing men might indeed be dancing dervishes, with their heads going round in a more irrational sense than their bodies. I could imagine that at some moments it might suck the soul into what I have called in metaphor the whirlpool of Asia, or the whirlwind of a world whipped like a top with a raging monotony; the cyclone of eternity. That is not the sort of rhythm nor the sort of religion by which I myself should hope to save the soul; but it is intensely interesting to the mind and even the eye, and I went downstairs and wedged myself into the thick and thronging press. It surged through the gap by the gate, where men climbed lamp-posts and roared out speeches, and more especially recited national poems in rich resounding voices; a really moving effect, at least for one who could not understand a word that was said. Feeling had already gone as far as knocking Jews' hats off and other popular sports, but not as yet on any universal and systematic scale; I saw a few of the antiquated Jews with wrinkles and ringlets, peering about here and there; some said as spies or representatives of the Zionists, to take away the Anti-Semitic colour from the meeting. But I think this unlikely; especially as it would have been pretty hard to take it away. It is more likely, I think, that the archaic Jews were really not unamused and perhaps not unsympathetic spectators; for the Zionist problem is complicated by a real quarrel in the Ghetto about Zionism. The old religious Jews do not welcome the new nationalist Jews; it would sometimes be hardly an exaggeration to say that one party stands for the religion without the nation, and the other for the nation without the religion. Just as the old agricultural Arabs hate the Zionists as the instruments of new Western business grab and sharp practice; so the old peddling and pedantic but intensely pious Jews hate the Zionists as the instruments of new Western atheism of free thought. Only I fear that when the storm breaks, such distinctions are swept away.

The storm was certainly rising. Outside the Jaffa Gate the road runs up steeply and is split in two by the wedge of a high building, looking as narrow as a tower and projecting like the prow of a ship. There is something almost theatrical about its position and stage properties, its one high-curtained window and balcony, with a sort of pole or flag-staff; for the place is official or rather municipal. Round it swelled the crowd, with its songs and poems and passionate rhetoric in a kind of crescendo, and then suddenly the curtain of the window rose like the curtain of the theatre, and we saw on that high balcony the red fez and the tall figure of the Mahometan Mayor of Jerusalem.

I did not understand his Arabic observations; but I know when a man is calming a mob, and the mob did become calmer. It was as if a storm swelled in the night and gradually died away in a grey morning; but there are perpetual mutterings of that storm. My point for the moment is that the exasperations come chiefly from the two extremes of the two great Semitic traditions of monotheism; and certainly not primarily from those poor Eastern Christians of whose fanaticism we have been taught to make fun. From time to time there are gleams of the extremities of Eastern fanaticism which are almost ghastly to Western feeling. They seem to crack the polish of the dignified leaders of the Arab aristocracy and the Zionist school of culture, and reveal a volcanic substance of which only oriental creeds have been made. One day a wild Jewish proclamation is passed from hand to hand, denouncing disloyal Jews who refuse the teaching Hebrew; telling doctors to let them die and hospitals to let them rot, ringing with the old unmistakable and awful accent that bade men dash their children against the stones. Another day the city would be placarded with posters printed in Damascus, telling the Jews who looked to Palestine for a national home that they should find it a national cemetery. And when these cries clash it is like the clash of those two crooked Eastern swords, that crossed and recrossed and revolved like blazing wheels, in the vanguard of the marching mob.

I felt the fullest pressure of the problem when I first walked round the whole of the Haram enclosure, the courts of the old Temple, where the high muezzin towers now stand at every corner, and heard the clear voices of the call to prayer. The sky was laden with a storm that became the snowstorm; and it was the time at which the old Jews beat their hands and mourn over what are believed to be the last stones of the Temple. There was a movement in my own mind that was attuned to these things, and impressed by the strait limits and steep sides of that platform of the mountains; for the sense of crisis is not only in the intensity of the ideals, but in the very conditions of the reality, the reality with which this chapter began. And the burden of it is the burden of Palestine; the narrowness of the boundaries and the stratification of the rock. A voice not of my reason but rather sounding heavily in my heart, seemed to be repeating sentences like pessimistic proverbs. There is no place for the Temple of Solomon but on the ruins of the Mosque of Omar. There is no place for the nation of the Jews but in the country of the Arabs. And these whispers came to me first not as intellectual conclusions upon the conditions of the case, of which I should have much more to say and to hope; but rather as hints of something immediate and menacing and yet mysterious. I felt almost a momentary impulse to flee from the place, like one who has received an omen. For two voices had met in my ears; and within the same narrow space and in the same dark hour, electric and yet eclipsed with cloud, I had heard Islam crying from the turret and Israel wailing at the wall.

CHAPTER VII

THE SHADOW OF THE PROBLEM

A traveller sees the hundred branches of a tree long before he is near enough to see its single and simple root; he generally sees the scattered or sprawling suburbs of a town long before he has looked upon the temple or the market-place. So far I have given impressions of the most motley things merely as they came, in chronological and not in logical order; the first flying vision of Islam as a sort of sea, with something both of the equality and the emptiness and the grandeur of its purple seas of sand; the first sharp silhouette of Jerusalem, like Mount St. Michael, lifting above that merely Moslem flood a crag still crowned with the towers of the Crusaders; the mere kaleidoscope of the streets, with little more than a hint of the heraldic meaning of the colours; a merely personal impression of a few of the leading figures whom I happened to meet first, and only the faintest suggestion of the groups for which they stood. So far I have not even tidied up my own first impressions of the place; far less advanced a plan for tidying up the place itself.

In any case, to begin with, it is easy to be in far too much of a hurry about tidying up. This has already been noted in the more obvious case, of all that religious art that bewildered the tourist with its churches full of flat and gilded ikons. Many a man has had the sensation of something as full as a picture gallery and as futile as a lumber-room, merely by not happening to know what is really of value, or especially in what way it is really valued. An Armenian or a Syrian might write a report on his visit to England, saying that our national and especially our naval heroes were neglected, and left to the lowest dregs of the rabble; since the portraits of Benbow and Nelson, when exhibited to the public, were painted on wood by the crudest and most incompetent artists. He would not perhaps fully appreciate the fine shade of social status and utility implied in a public-house sign. He might not realise that the sign of Nelson could be hung on high everywhere, because the reputation of Nelson was high everywhere, not because it was low anywhere; that his bad portrait was really a proof of his good name. Yet the too rapid reformer may easily miss even the simple and superficial parallel between the wooden pictures of admirals and the wooden pictures of angels. Still less will he appreciate the intense spiritual atmosphere, that makes the real difference between an ikon and an inn-sign, and makes the inns of England, noble and national as they are, relatively the homes of Christian charity but hardly a Christian faith. He can hardly bring himself to believe that Syrians can be as fond of religion as Englishmen of beer.

Nobody can do justice to these cults who has not some sympathy with the power of a mystical idea to transmute the meanest and most trivial objects with a kind of magic. It is easy to talk of superstitiously attaching importance to sticks and stones, but the whole poetry of life consists of attaching importance to sticks and stones; and not only to those tall sticks we call the trees or those large stones we call the mountains. Anything that gives to the sticks of our own furniture, or the stones of our own backyard, even a reflected or indirect divinity is good for the dignity of life; and this is often achieved by the dedication of similar and special things. At least we should desire to see the profane things transfigured by the sacred, rather than the sacred disenchanted by the profane; and it was a prophet walking on the walls of this mountain city, who said that in his vision all the bowls should be as the bowls before the altar, and on every pot in Jerusalem should be written Holy unto the Lord.

Anyhow, this intensity about trifles is not always understood. Several quite sympathetic Englishmen told me merely as a funny story (and God forbid that I should deny that it is funny) the fact of the Armenians or some such people having been allowed to suspend a string of lamps from a Greek pillar by means of a nail, and their subsequent alarm when their nail was washed by the owners of the pillar; a sort of symbol that their nail had finally fallen into the hands of the enemy. It strikes us as odd that a nail should be so valuable or so vivid to the imagination. And yet, to men so close to Calvary, even nails are not entirely commonplace.

All this, regarding a decent delay and respect for religion or even for superstition, is obvious and has already been observed. But before leaving it, we may note that the same argument cuts the other way; I mean that we should not insolently impose our own ideas of what is picturesque any more than our own ideas of what is practical. The aesthete is sometimes more of a vandal than the vandal. The proposed reconstructions of Jerusalem have been on the whole reasonable and sympathetic; but there is always a danger from the activities, I might almost say the antics, of a sort of antiquary who is more hasty than an anarchist. If the people of such places revolt against their own limitations, we must have a reasonable respect for their revolt, and we must not be impatient even with their impatience.

It is their town; they have to live in it, and not we. As they are the only judges of whether their antiquities are really authorities, so they are the only judges of whether their novelties are really necessities. As I pointed out more than once to many of my friends in Jerusalem, we should be very much annoyed if artistic visitors from Asia took similar liberties in London. It would be bad enough if they proposed to conduct excavations in Pimlico or Paddington, without much reference to the people who lived there; but it would be worse if they began to relieve them of the mere utilitarianism of Chelsea Bridge or Paddington Station. Suppose an eloquent Abyssinian Christian were to hold up his hand and stop the motor-omnibuses from going down Fleet Street on the ground that the thoroughfare was sacred to the simpler locomotion of Dr. Johnson. We should be pleased at the African's appreciation of Johnson; but our pleasure would not be unmixed. Suppose when you or I are in the act of stepping into a taxi-cab, an excitable Coptic Christian were to leap from behind a lamp-post, and implore us to save the grand old growler or the cab called the gondola of London. I admit and enjoy the poetry of the hansom; I admit and enjoy the personality of the true cabman of the old four-wheeler, upon whose massive manhood descended something of the tremendous tradition of Tony Weller. But I am not so certain as I should like to be, that I should at that moment enjoy the personality of the Copt. For these reasons it seems really desirable, or at least defensible, to defer any premature reconstruction of disputed things, and to begin this book as a mere note-book or sketch-book of things as they are, or at any rate as they appear. It was in this irregular order, and in this illogical disproportion, that things did in fact appear to me, and it was some time before I saw any real generalisation that would reduce my impressions to order. I saw that the groups disagreed, and to some extent why they disagreed, long before I could seriously consider anything on which they would be likely to agree. I have therefore confined the first section of this book to a mere series of such impressions, and left to the last section a study of the problem and an attempt at the solution. Between these two I have inserted a sort of sketch of what seemed to me the determining historical events that make the problem what it is. Of these I will only say for the moment that, whether by a coincidence or for some deeper cause, I feel it myself to be a case of first thoughts being best; and that some further study of history served rather to solidify what had seemed merely a sort of vision. I might almost say that I fell in love with Jerusalem at first sight; and the final impression, right or wrong, served only to fix the fugitive fancy which had seen, in the snow on the city, the white crown of a woman of Bethlehem.

But there is another cause for my being content for the moment, with this mere chaos of contrasts. There is a very real reason for emphasising those contrasts, and for shunning the temptation to shut our eyes to them even considered as contrasts. It is necessary to insist that the contrasts are not easy to turn into combinations; that the red robes of Rome and the green scarves of Islam will not very easily fade into a dingy russet; that the gold of Byzantium and the brass of Babylon will require a hot furnace to melt them into any kind of amalgam. The reason for this is akin to what has already been said about Jerusalem as a knot of realities. It is especially a knot of popular realities. Although it is so small a place, or rather because it is so small a place, it is a domain and a dominion for the masses. Democracy is never quite democratic except when it is quite direct; and it is never quite direct except when it is quite small. So soon as a mob has grown large enough to have delegates it has grown large enough to have despots; indeed the despots are often much the more representative of the two. Now in a place so small as Jerusalem, what we call the rank and file really counts. And it is generally true, in religions especially, that the real enthusiasm or even fanaticism is to be found in the rank and file. In all intense religions it is the poor who are more religious and the rich who are more irreligious. It is certainly so with the creeds and causes that come to a collision in Jerusalem. The great Jewish population throughout the world did hail Mr. Balfour’s declaration with something almost of the tribal triumph they might have shown when the Persian conqueror broke the Babylonian bondage. It was rather the plutocratic princes of Jewry who long hung back and hesitated about Zionism. The mass of Mahometans really are ready to combine against the Zionists as they might have combined against the Crusades. It is rather the responsible Mahometan leaders who will naturally be found more moderate and diplomatic. This popular spirit may take a good or a bad form; and a mob may cry out many things, right and wrong. But a mob cries out “No Popery”; it does not cry out “Not so much Popery,” still less “Only a moderate admixture of Popery.” It shouts “Three cheers for Gladstone,” it does not shout “A gradual and evolutionary social tendency towards some ideal similar to that of Gladstone.” It would find it quite a difficult thing to shout; and it would find exactly the same difficulty with all the advanced formulae about nationalisation and internationalisation and class-conscious solidarity. No rabble could roar at the top of its voice the collectivist formula of “The nationalisation of all the means of production, distribution, and exchange.” The mob of Jerusalem is no exception to the rule, but rather an extreme example of it. The mob of Jerusalem has cried some remarkable things in its time; but they were not pedantic and they were not evasive. There was a day when it cried a single word; “Crucify.” It was a thing to darken the sun and rend the veil of the temple; but there was no doubt about what it meant.

This is an age of minorities; of minorities powerful and predominant, partly through the power of wealth and partly through the idolatry of education. Their powers appeared in every crisis of the Great War, when a small group of pacifists and internationalists, a microscopic minority in every country, were yet constantly figuring as diplomatists and intermediaries and men on whose attitude great issues might depend. A man like Mr. Macdonald, not a workman nor a formal or real representative of workmen, was followed everywhere by the limelight; while the millions of workmen who worked and fought were out of focus and therefore looked like a fog. Just as such figures give a fictitious impression of unity between the crowds fighting for different flags and frontiers, so there are similar figures giving a fictitious unity to the crowds following different creeds. There are already Moslems who are Modernists; there have always been a ruling class of Jews who are Materialists. Perhaps it would be true to say about much of the philosophical controversy in Europe, that many Jews tend to be Materialists, but all tend to be Monists, though the best in the sense of being Monotheists. The worst are in a much grosser sense materialists, and have motives very different from the dry idealism of men like Mr. Macdonald, which is probably sincere enough in its way. But with whatever motives, these intermediaries everywhere bridge the chasm between creeds as they do the chasm between countries. Everywhere they exalt the minority that is indifferent over the majority that is interested. Just as they would make an international congress out of the traitors of all nations, so they would make an ecumenical council out of the heretics of all religions.

Mild constitutionalists in our own country often discuss the possibility of a method of protecting the minority. If they will find any possible method of protecting the majority, they will have found something practically unknown to the modern world. The majority is always at a disadvantage; the majority is difficult to idealise, because it is difficult to imagine. The minority is generally idealised, sometimes by its servants, always by itself. But my sympathies are generally, I confess, with the impotent and even invisible majority. And my sympathies, when I go beyond the things I myself believe, are with all the poor Jews who do believe in Judaism and all the Mahometans who do believe in Mahometanism, not to mention so obscure a crowd as the Christians who do believe in Christianity. I feel I have more morally and even intellectually in common with these people, and even the religions of these people, than with the supercilious negations that make up the most part of what is called enlightenment. It is these masses whom we ought to consider everywhere; but it is especially these masses whom we must consider in Jerusalem. And the reason is in the reality I have described; that the place is like a Greek city or a medieval parish; it is sufficiently small and simple to be a democracy. This is not a university town full of philosophies; it is a Zion of the hundred sieges raging with religions; not a place where resolutions can be voted and amended, but a place where men can be crowned and crucified.

There is one small thing neglected in all our talk about self-determination; and that is determination. There is a great deal more difference than there is between most motions and amendments between the things for which a democracy will vote and the things on which a democracy is determined. You can take a vote among Jews and Christians and Moslems about whether lamp-posts should be painted green or portraits of politicians painted at all, and even their solid unanimity may be solid indifference. Most of what is called self-determination is like that; but there is no self-determination about it. The people are not determined. You cannot take a vote when the people are determined. You accept a vote, or something very much more obvious than a vote.

Now it may be that in Jerusalem there is not one people but rather three or four; but each is a real people, having its public opinion, its public policy, its flag and almost, as I have said, its frontier. It is not a question of persuading weak and wavering voters, at a vague parliamentary election, to vote on the other side for a change, to choose afresh between two middle-class gentlemen, who look exactly alike and only differ on a question about which nobody knows or cares anything. It is a question of contrasts that will almost certainly remain contrasts, except under the flood of some spiritual conversion which cannot be foreseen and certainly cannot be enforced. We cannot enrol these people under our religion, because we have not got one. We can enrol them under our government, and if we are obliged to do that, the obvious essential is that like Roman rule before Christianity, or the English rule in India it should profess to be impartial if only by being irreligious. That is why I willingly set down for the moment only the first impressions of a stranger in a strange country. It is because our first safety is in seeing that it is a strange country; and our present preliminary peril that we may fall into the habit of thinking it a familiar country. It does no harm to put the facts in a fashion that seems disconnected; for the first fact of all is that they are disconnected. And the first danger of all is that we may allow some international nonsense or newspaper cant to imply that they are connected when they are not. It does no harm, at any rate to start with, to state the differences as irreconcilable. For the first and most unfamiliar fact the English have to learn in this strange land is that differences can be irreconcilable. And again the chief danger is that they may be persuaded that the wordy compromises of Western politics can reconcile them; that such abysses can be filled up with rubbish, or such chasms bridged with cobwebs. For we have created in England a sort of compromise which may up to a certain point be workable in England; though there are signs that even in England that point is approaching or is past. But in any case we could only do with that compromise as we could do without conscription; because an accident had made us insular and even provincial. So in India where we have treated the peoples as different from ourselves and from each other we have at least partly succeeded. So in Ireland, where we have tried to make them agree with us and each other, we have made one never-ending nightmare.

We can no more subject the world to the English compromise than to the English climate; and both are things of incalculable cloud and twilight. We have grown used to a habit of calling things by the wrong names and supporting them by the wrong arguments; and even doing the right thing for the wrong cause. We have party governments which consist of people who pretend to agree when they really disagree. We have party debates which consist of people who pretend to disagree when they really agree. We have whole parties named after things they no longer support, or things they would never dream of proposing. We have a mass of meaningless parliamentary ceremonials that are no longer even symbolic; the rule by which a parliamentarian possesses a constituency but not a surname; or the rule by which he becomes a minister in order to cease to be a member. All this would seem the most superstitious and idolatrous mummery to the simple worshippers in the shrines of Jerusalem. You may think what they say fantastic, or what they mean fanatical, but they do not say one thing and mean another. The Greek may or may not have a right to say he is Orthodox, but he means that he is Orthodox; in a very different sense from that in which a man supporting a new Home Rule Bill means that he is Unionist. A Moslem would stop the sale of strong drink because he is a Moslem. But he is not quite so muddleheaded as to profess to stop it because he is a Liberal, and a particular supporter of the party of liberty. Even in England indeed it will generally be found that there is something more clear and rational about the terms of theology than those of politics and popular science. A man has at least a more logical notion of what he means when he calls himself an Anglo-Catholic than when he calls himself an Anglo-Saxon. But the old Jew with the drooping ringlets, shuffling in and out of the little black booths of Jerusalem, would not condescend to say he is a child of anything like the Anglo-Saxon race. He does not say he is a child of the Aramaico-Semitic race. He says he is a child of the Chosen Race, brought with thunder and with miracles and with mighty battles out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage. In other words, he says something that means something, and something that he really means. One of the white Dominicans or brown Franciscans, from the great monasteries of the Holy City, may or may not be right in maintaining that a Papacy is necessary to the unity of Christendom. But he does not pass his life in proving that the Papacy is not a Papacy, as many of our liberal constitutionalists pass it in proving that the Monarchy is not a Monarchy. The Greek priests spend an hour on what seems to the sceptic mere meaningless formalities of the preparation of the Mass. But they would not spend a minute if they were themselves sceptics and thought them meaningless formalities, as most modern people do think of the formalities about Black Rod or the Bar of the House. They would be far less ritualistic than we are, if they cared as little for the Mass as we do for the Mace. Hence it is necessary for us to realise that these rude and simple worshippers, of all the different forms of worship, really would be bewildered by the ritual dances and elaborate ceremonial antics of John Bull, as by the superstitious forms and almost supernatural incantations of most of what we call plain English.

Now I take it we retain enough realism and common sense not to wish to transfer these complicated conventions and compromises to a land of such ruthless logic and such rending divisions. We may hope to reproduce our laws, we do not want to reproduce our legal fictions. We do not want to insist on everybody referring to Mr. Peter or Mr. Paul, as the honourable member for Waddy Walleh; because a retiring Parliamentarian has to become Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds, we shall not insist on a retiring Palestinian official becoming Steward of the Moabitic Hundreds. But yet in much more subtle and more dangerous ways we are making that very mistake. We are transferring the fictions and even the hypocrisies of our own insular institutions from a place where they can be tolerated to a place where they will be torn in pieces. I have confined myself hitherto to descriptions and not to criticisms, to stating the elements of the problem rather than attempting as yet to solve it; because I think the danger is rather that we shall underrate the difficulties than overdo the description; that we shall too easily deny the problem rather than that we shall too severely criticise the solution. But I would conclude this chapter with one practical criticism which seems to me to follow directly from all that is said here of our legal fictions and local anomalies. One thing at least has been done by our own Government, which is entirely according to the ritual or routine of our own Parliament. It is a parliament of Pooh Bah, where anybody may be Lord High Everything Else. It is a parliament of Alice in Wonderland, where the name of a thing is different from what it is called, and even from what its name is called. It is death and destruction to send out these fictions into a foreign daylight, where they will be seen as things and not theories. And knowing all this, I cannot conceive the reason, or even the meaning, of sending out Sir Herbert Samuel as the British representative in Palestine.

I have heard it supported as an interesting experiment in Zionism. I have heard it denounced as a craven concession to Zionism. I think it is quite obviously a flat and violent contradiction to Zionism. Zionism, as I have always understood it, and indeed as I have always defended it, consists in maintaining that it would be better for all parties if Israel had the dignity and distinctive responsibility of a separate nation; and that this should be effected, if possible, or so far as possible, by giving the Jews a national home, preferably in Palestine. But where is Sir Herbert Samuel's national home? If it is in Palestine he cannot go there as a representative of England. If it is in England, he is so far a living proof that a Jew does not need a national home in Palestine. If there is any point in the Zionist argument at all, you have chosen precisely the wrong man and sent him to precisely the wrong country. You have asserted not the independence but the dependence of Israel, and yet you have ratified the worst insinuations about the dependence of Christendom. In reason you could not more strongly state that Palestine does not belong to the Jews, than by sending a Jew to claim it for the English. And yet in practice, of course, all the Anti-Semites will say he is claiming it for the Jews. You combine all possible disadvantages of all possible courses of action; you run all the risks of the hard Zionist adventure, while actually denying the high Zionist ideal. You make a Jew admit he is not a Jew but an Englishman; even while you allow all his enemies to revile him because he is not an Englishman but a Jew.

Now this sort of confusion or compromise is as local as a London fog. A London fog is tolerable in London, indeed I think it is very enjoyable in London. There is a beauty in that brown twilight as well as in the clear skies of the Orient and the South. But it is simply horribly dangerous for a Londoner to carry his cloud of fog about with him, in the crystalline air about the crags of Zion, or under the terrible stars of the desert. There men see differences with almost unnatural clearness, and call things by savagely simple names. We in England may consider all sorts of aspects of a man like Sir Herbert Samuel; we may consider him as a Liberal, or a friend of the Fabian Socialists, or a cadet of one of the great financial houses, or a Member of Parliament who is supposed to represent certain miners in Yorkshire, or in twenty other more or less impersonal ways. But the people in Palestine will see only one aspect, and it will be a very personal aspect indeed. For the enthusiastic Moslems he will simply be a Jew; for the enthusiastic Zionists he will not really be a Zionist. For them he will always be the type of Jew who would be willing to remain in London, and who is ready to represent Westminster. Meanwhile, for the masses of Moslems and Christians, he will only be the aggravation in practice of the very thing of which he is the denial in theory. He will not mean that Palestine is not surrendered to the Jews, but only that England is. Now I have nothing as yet to do with the truth of that suggestion; I merely give it as an example of the violent and unexpected reactions we shall produce if we thrust our own unrealities amid the red-hot realities of the Near East; it is like pushing a snow man into a furnace. I have no objection to a snow man as a part of our own Christmas festivities; indeed, as has already been suggested, I think such festivities a great glory of English life. But I have seen the snow melting in the steep places about Jerusalem; and I know what a cataract it could feed.

As I considered these things a deepening disquiet possessed me, and my thoughts were far away from where I stood. After all, the English did not indulge in this doubling of parts and muddling of mistaken identity in their real and unique success in India. They may have been wrong or right but they were realistic about Moslems and Hindoos; they did not say Moslems were Hindoos, or send a highly intelligent Hindoo from Oxford to rule Moslems as an Englishman. They may not have cared for things like the ideal of Zionism; but they understood the common sense of Zionism, the desirability of distinguishing between entirely different things. But I remembered that of late their tact had often failed them even in their chief success in India; and that every hour brought worse and wilder news of their failure in Ireland. I remembered that in the Early Victorian time, against the advice only of the wisest and subtlest of the Early Victorians, we had tied ourselves to the triumphant progress of industrial capitalism; and that progress had now come to a crisis and what might well be a crash. And now, on the top of all, our fine patriotic tradition of foreign policy seemed to be doing these irrational and random things. A sort of fear took hold of me; and it was not for the Holy Land that I feared.

A cold wave went over me, like that unreasonable change and chill with which a man far from home fancies his house has been burned down, or that those dear to him are dead. For one horrible moment at least I wondered if we had come to the end of compromise and comfortable nonsense, and if at last the successful stupidity of England would topple over like the successful wickedness of Prussia; because God is not mocked by the denial of reason any more than the denial of justice. And I fancied the very crowds of Jerusalem retorted on me words spoken to them long ago; that a great voice crying of old along the Via Dolorosa was rolled back on me like thunder from the mountains; and that all those alien faces are turned against us to-day, bidding us weep not for them, who have faith and clarity and a purpose, but weep for ourselves and for our children.

CHAPTER VIII

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DESERT

There was a story in Jerusalem so true or so well told that I can see the actors in it like figures in coloured costumes on a lighted stage. It occurred during the last days of Turkish occupation, while the English advance was still halted before Gaza, and heroically enduring the slow death of desert warfare. There were German and Austrian elements present in the garrison with the Turks, though the three allies seem to have held strangely aloof from each other. In the Austrian group there was an Austrian lady, "who had some dignity or other," like Lord Lundy's grandmother. She was very beautiful, very fashionable, somewhat frivolous, but with fits of Catholic devotion. She had some very valuable Christian virtues, such as indiscriminate charity for the poor and indiscriminate loathing for the Prussians. She was a nurse; she was also a nuisance. One day she was driving just outside the Jaffa Gate, when she saw one of those figures which make the Holy City seem like the eternal crisis of an epic. Such a man will enter the gate in the most ghastly rags as if he were going to be crowned king in the city; with his head lifted as if he saw apocalyptic stars in heaven, and a gesture at which the towers might fall. This man was ragged beyond all that moving rag-heap; he was as gaunt as a gallows tree, and the thing he was uttering with arms held up to heaven was evidently a curse. The lady sent an inquiry by her German servant, whom also I can see in a vision, with his face of wood and his air of still trailing all the heraldic trappings of the Holy Roman Empire. This ambassador soon returned in state and said, "Your Serene High Sublimity (or whatever it is), he says he is cursing the English." Her pity and patriotism were alike moved; and she again sent the plenipotentiary to discover why he cursed the English, or what tale of wrong or ruin at English hands lay behind the large gestures of his despair. A second time the wooden intermediary returned and said, "Your Ecstatic Excellency (or whatever be the correct form), he says he is cursing the English because they don't come."

There are a great many morals to this story, besides the general truth to which it testifies; that the Turkish rule was not popular even with Moslems, and that the German war was not particularly popular even with Turks.

When all deductions are made for the patriot as a partisan, and his way of picking up only what pleases him, it remains true that the English attack was very widely regarded rather as a rescue than an aggression. And what complaint there was really was, in many cases, a complaint that the rescue did not come with a rush; that the English forces had to fall back when they had actually entered Gaza, and could not for long afterwards continue their advance on Jerusalem. This kind of criticism of military operations is always, of course, worthless. In journalists it is generally worthless without being even harmless. There were some in London whose pessimistic wailing was less excusable than that of the poor Arab in Jerusalem; who cursed the English with the addition of being English themselves, who did it, not as he did, before one foreigner, but before all foreign opinion; and who advertised their failure in a sort of rags less reputable than his. No one can judge of a point like the capture and loss of Gaza, unless he knows a huge mass of technical and local detail that can only be known to the staff on the spot; it is not a question of lack of water but of exactly how little water; not of the arrival of reinforcements but of exactly how much reinforcement; not of whether time presses, but of exactly how much time there is. Nobody can know these things who is editing a newspaper at the other end of the world; and these are the things which, for the soldier on the spot, make all the difference between jumping over a paling and jumping over a precipice. Even the latter, as the philosophic relativist will eagerly point out, is only a matter of degree. But this is a parenthesis; for the purpose with which I mentioned the anecdote is something different. It is the text of another and somewhat more elusive truth; some appreciation of which is necessary to a sympathy with the more profound problems of Palestine. And it might be expressed thus; it is a proverb that the Eastern methods seem to us slow; that the Arabs trail along on labouring camels while the Europeans flash by on motors or mono-planes. But there is another and stranger sense in which we do seem to them slow, and they do seem to themselves to have a secret of swiftness. There is a sense in which we here touch the limits of a land of lightning; across which, as in a dream, the motor-car can be seen crawling like a snail.

I have said that there is another side to the desert; though there is something queer in talking of another side to something so bare and big and oppressively obvious. But there is another side besides the big and bare truths, like giant bones, that the Moslem has found there; there is, so to speak, an obverse of the obvious. And to suggest what I mean I must go back again to the desert and the days I spent there, being carted from camp to camp and giving what were courteously described as lectures. All I can say is that if those were lectures, I cannot imagine why everybody is not a lecturer. Perhaps the secret is already out; and multitudes of men in evening dress are already dotted about the desert, wandering in search of an audience. Anyhow in my own wanderings I found myself in the high narrow house of the Base Commandant at Kantara, the only house in the whole circle of the horizon; and from the wooden balustrade and verandah, running round the top of it, could be seen nine miles of tents. Sydney Smith said that the bulbous domes of the Brighton Pavilion looked as if St. Paul's Cathedral had come down there and littered; and that grey vista of countless cones looked rather as if the Great Pyramid had multiplied itself on the prolific scale of the herring. Nor was even such a foolish fancy without its serious side; for though these pyramids would pass, the plan of them was also among the mightiest of the works of man; and the king in every pyramid was alive. For this was the great camp that was the pivot of the greatest campaign; and from that balcony I had looked on something all the more historic because it may never be seen again. As the dusk fell and the moon brightened above that great ghostly city of canvas, I had fallen into talk with three or four of the officers at the base; grizzled and hard-headed men talking with all the curious and almost colourless common sense of the soldier. All that they said was objective; one felt that everything they mentioned was really a thing and not merely a thought; a thing like a post or a palm-tree. I think there is something in this of a sympathy between the English and the Moslems, which may have helped us in India and elsewhere. For they mentioned many Moslem proverbs and traditions, lightly enough but not contemptuously, and in particular another of the proverbial prophecies about the term of Turkish power. They said there was an old saying that the Turk would never depart until the Nile flowed through Palestine; and this at least was evidently a proverb of pride and security, like many such; as who should say until the sea is dry or the sun rises in the west. And one of them smiled and made a small gesture as of attention. And in the silence of that moonlit scene we heard the clanking of a pump. The water from the Nile had been brought in pipes across the desert.

And I thought that the symbol was a sound one, apart from all vanities; for this is indeed the special sort of thing that Christendom can do, and that Islam by itself would hardly care to do. I heard more afterwards of that water, which was eventually carried up the hills to Jerusalem, when I myself followed it thither; and all I heard bore testimony to this truth so far as it goes; the sense among the natives themselves of something magic in our machinery, and that in the main a white magic; the sense of all the more solid sort of social service that belongs rather to the West than to the East. When the fountain first flowed in the Holy City in the mountains, and Father Waggett blessed it for the use of men, it is said that an old Arab standing by said, in the plain and powerful phraseology of his people: “The Turks were here for five hundred years, and they never gave us a cup of cold water.”

I put first this minimum of truth about the validity of Western work because the same conversation swerved slowly, as it were, to the Eastern side. These same men, who talked of all things as if they were chairs and tables, began to talk quite calmly of things more amazing than table-turning. They were as wonderful as if the water had come there like the wind, without any pipes or pumps; or if Father Waggett had merely struck the rock like Moses. They spoke of a solitary soldier at the end of a single telephone wire across the wastes, hearing of something that had that moment happened hundreds of miles away, and then coming upon a casual Bedouin who knew it already. They spoke of the whole tribes moving and on the march, upon news that could only come a little later by the swiftest wires of the white man. They offered no explanation of these things; they simply knew they were there, like the palm-trees and the moon. They did not say it was “telepathy”; they lived much too close to realities for that. That word, which will instantly leap to the lips of too many of my readers, strikes me as merely an evidence of two of our great modern improvements; the love of long words and the loss of common sense. It may have been telepathy, whatever that is; but a man must be almost stunned with stupidity if he is satisfied to say telepathy as if he were saying telegraphy. If everybody is satisfied about how it is done, why does not everybody do it? Why does not a cultivated clergyman in Cornwall make a casual remark to an old friend of his at the University of Aberdeen? Why does not a harassed commercial traveller in Barcelona settle a question by merely thinking about his business partner in Berlin? The common sense of it is, of course, that the name makes no sort of difference; the mystery is why some people can do it and others cannot; and why it seems to be easy in one place and impossible in another. In other words it comes back to that very mystery which of all mysteries the modern world thinks most superstitious and senseless; the mystery of locality. It works back at last to the hardest of all the hard sayings of supernaturalism; that there is such a thing as holy or unholy ground, as divinely or diabolically inspired people; that there may be such things as sacred sites or even sacred stones; in short that the airy nothing of spiritual essence, evil or good, can have quite literally a local habitation and a name.

It may be said in passing that this *genius loci* is here very much the presiding genius. It is true that everywhere to-day a parade of the theory of pantheism goes with a considerable practice of particularism; and that people everywhere are beginning to wish they were somewhere. And even where it is not true of men, it seems to be true of the mysterious forces which men are once more studying. The words we now address to the unseen powers may be vague and universal, but the words they are said to address to us are parochial and even private. While the Higher Thought Centre would widen worship everywhere to a temple not made with hands, the Psychical Research Society is conducting practical experiments round a haunted house. Men may become cosmopolitans, but ghosts remain patriots. Men may or may not expect an act of healing to take place at a holy well, but nobody expects it ten miles from the well; and even the sceptic who comes to expose the ghost-haunted churchyard has to haunt the churchyard like a ghost. There may be something faintly amusing about the idea of demi-gods with door-knockers and dinner tables, and demons, one may almost say, keeping the home fires burning. But the driving force of this dark mystery of locality is all the more indisputable because it drives against most modern theories and associations. The truth is that, upon a more transcendental consideration, we do not know what place is any more than we know what time is. We do not know of the unknown powers that they cannot concentrate in space as in time, or find in a spot something that corresponds to a crisis. And if this be felt everywhere, it is necessarily and abnormally felt in those alleged holy places and sacred spots. It is felt supremely in all those lands of the Near East which lie about the holy hill of Zion.

In these lands an impression grows steadily on the mind much too large for most of the recent religious or scientific definitions. The bogus heraldry of Haeckel is as obviously insufficient as any quaint old chronicle tracing the genealogies of English kings through the chiefs of Troy to the children of Noah. There is no difference, except that the tale of the Dark Ages can never be proved, while the travesty of the Darwinian theory can sometimes be disproved. But I should diminish my meaning if I suggested it as a mere score in the Victorian game of Scripture versus Science. Some much larger mystery veils the origins of man than most partisans on either side have realised; and in these strange primeval plains the traveller does realise it. It was never so well expressed as by one of the most promising of those whose literary possibilities were gloriously broken off by the great war; Lieutenant Warre-Cornish who left a strange and striking fragment, about a man who came to these lands with a mystical idea of forcing himself back against the stream of time into the very fountain of creation. This is a parenthesis; but before resuming the more immediate matter of the supernormal tricks of the tribes of the East, it is well to recognise this very real if much more general historic impression about the particular lands in which they lived. I have called it a historic impression; but it might more truly be called a prehistoric impression. It is best expressed in symbol by saying that the legendary site of the Garden of Eden is in Mesopotamia. It is equally well expressed in concrete experience by saying that, when I was in these parts, a learned man told me that the primitive form of wheat had just, for the first time, been discovered in Palestine.

The feeling that fills the traveller may be faintly suggested thus; that here, in this legendary land between Asia and Europe, may well have happened whatever did happen; that through this Eastern gate, if any, entered whatever made and changed the world. Whatever else this narrow strip of land may seem like, it does really seem, to the spirit and almost to the senses, like the bridge that may have borne across archaic abysses the burden and the mystery of man. Here have been civilisations as old as any barbarism; to all appearance perhaps older than any barbarism. Here is the camel; the enormous unnatural friend of man; the prehistoric pet. He is never known to have been wild, and might make a man fancy that all wild animals had once been tame. As I said elsewhere, all might be a runaway menagerie; the whale a cow that went swimming and never came back, the tiger a large cat that took the prize (and the prize-giver) and escaped to the jungle. This is not (I venture to think) true; but it is true as Pithecanthropus and Primitive Man and all the other random guesses from dubious bits of bone and stone. And the truth is some third thing, too tremendous to be remembered by men. Whatever it was, perhaps the camel saw it; but from the expression on the face of that old family servant, I feel sure that he will never tell.

I have called this the other side of the desert; and in another sense it is literally the other side. It is the other shore of that shifting and arid sea. Looking at it from the West and considering mainly the case of the Moslem, we feel the desert is but a barren border-land of Christendom; but seen from the other side it is the barrier between us and a heathendom far more mysterious and even monstrous than anything Moslem can be. Indeed it is necessary to realise this more vividly in order to feel the virtue of the Moslem movement. It belonged to the desert, but in one sense it was rather a clearance in the cloud that rests upon the desert; a rift of pale but clean light in volumes of vapour rolled on it like smoke from the strange lands beyond. It conceived a fixed hatred of idolatry, partly because its face was turned towards the multitudinous idolatries of the lands of sunrise; and as I looked Eastward I seemed to be conscious of the beginnings of that other world; and saw, like a forest of arms or a dream full of faces, the gods of Asia on their thousand thrones.

It is not a mere romance that calls it a land of magic, or even of black magic. Those who carry that atmosphere to us are not the romanticists but the realists. Every one can feel it in the work of Mr. Rudyard Kipling; and when I once remarked on his repulsive little masterpiece called “The Mark of the Beast,” to a rather cynical Anglo-Indian officer, he observed moodily, “It’s a beastly story. But those devils really can do jolly queer things.” It is but to take a commonplace example out of countless more notable ones to mention the many witnesses to the mango trick. Here again we have from time to time to weep over the weak-mindedness that hurriedly dismisses it as the practice of hypnotism. It is as if people were asked to explain how one unarmed Indian had killed three hundred men, and they said it was only the practice of human sacrifice. Nothing that we know as hypnotism will enable a man to alter the eyes in the heads of a huge crowd of total strangers; wide awake in broad daylight; and if it is hypnotism, it is something so appallingly magnified as to need a new magic to explain the explanation; certainly something that explains it better than a Greek word for sleep. But the impression of these special instances is but one example of a more universal impression of the Asiatic atmosphere; and that atmosphere itself is only an example of something vaster still for which I am trying to find words. Asia stands for something which the world in the West as well as the East is more and more feeling as a presence, and even a pressure. It might be called the spiritual world let loose; or a sort of psychical anarchy; a jungle of mango plants. And it is pressing upon the West also to-day because of the breaking down of certain materialistic barriers that have hitherto held it back. In plain words the attitude of science is not only modified; it is now entirely reversed. I do not say it with mere pleasure; in some ways I prefer our materialism to their spiritualism. But for good or evil the scientists are now destroying their own scientific world.

The agnostics have been driven back on agnosticism; and are already recovering from the shock. They find themselves in a really unknown world under really unknown gods; a world which is more mystical, or at least more mysterious. For in the Victorian age the agnostics were not really agnostics. They might be better described as reverent materialists; or at any rate monists. They had at least at the back of their minds a clear and consistent concept of their rather clockwork cosmos; that is why they could not admit the smallest speck of the supernatural into their clockwork. But to-day it is very hard for a scientific man to say where the supernatural ends or the natural begins, or what name should be given to either. The word agnostic has ceased to be a polite word for atheist. It has become a real word for a very real state of mind, conscious of many possibilities beyond that of the atheist, and not excluding that of the polytheist. It is no longer a question of defining or denying a simple central power, but of balancing the brain in a bewilderment of new powers which seem to overlap and might even conflict. Nature herself has become unnatural. The wind is blowing from the other side of the desert, not now with noble truism “There is no God but God,” but rather with that other motto out of the deeper anarchy of Asia, drawn out by Mr. Kipling, in the shape of a native proverb, in the very story already mentioned; “Your gods and my gods, do you or I know which is the stronger?” There was a mystical story I read somewhere in my boyhood, of which the only image that remains is that of a rose-bush growing mysteriously in the middle of a room. Taking this image for the sake of argument, we can easily fancy a man half-conscious and convinced that he is delirious, or still partly in a dream, because he sees such a magic bush growing irrationally in the middle of his bedroom. All the walls and furniture are familiar and solid, the table, the clock, the telephone, the looking glass or what not; there is nothing unnatural but this one hovering hallucination or optical delusion of green and red. Now that was very much the view taken of the Rose of Sharon, the mystical rose of the sacred tradition of Palestine, by any educated man about 1850, when the rationalism of the eighteenth century was supposed to have found full support in the science of the nineteenth. He had a sentiment about a rose: he was still glad it had fragrance or atmosphere; though he remembered with a slight discomfort that it had thorns. But what bothered him about it was that it was impossible. And what made him think it impossible was it was inconsistent with everything else. It was one solitary and monstrous exception to the sort of rule that ought to have no exceptions. Science did not convince him that there were few miracles, but that there were no miracles; and why should there be miracles only in Palestine and only for one short period? It was a single and senseless contradiction to an otherwise complete cosmos. For the furniture fitted in bit by bit and better and better; and the bedroom seemed to grow more and more solid. The man recognised the portrait of himself over the mantelpiece or the medicine bottles on the table, like the dying lover in Browning. In other words, science so far had steadily solidified things; Newton had measured the walls and ceiling and made a calculus of their three dimensions. Darwin was already arranging the animals in rank as neatly as a row of chairs, or Faraday the chemical elements as clearly as a row of medicine bottles. From the middle of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, science was not only making discoveries, but all the discoveries were in one direction. Science is still making discoveries; but they are in the opposite direction.

For things are rather different when the man in the bed next looks at the bedroom. Not only is the rose-bush still very obvious; but the other things are looking very odd. The perspective seems to have gone crooked; the walls seem to vary in measurement till the man thinks he is going mad. The wall-paper has a new pattern, of strange spirals instead of round dots. The table seems to have moved by itself across the room and thrown the medicine bottles out of the window. The telephone has vanished from the wall; the mirror does not reflect what is in front of it. The portrait of himself over the mantelpiece has a face that is not his own.

That is something like a vision of the vital change in the whole trend of natural philosophy in the last twenty or thirty years. It matters little whether we regard it as the deepening or the destruction of the scientific universe. It matters little whether we say that grander abysses have opened in it, or merely that the bottom has fallen out of it. It is quite self-evident that scientific men are at war with wilder and more unfathomable fancies than the facts of the age of Huxley. I attempt no controversy about any of the particular cases: it is the cumulative effect of all of them that makes the impression one of common sense. It is really true that the perspective and dimensions of the man's bedroom have altered; the disciples of Einstein will tell him that straight lines are curved and perhaps measure more one way than the other; if that is not a nightmare, what is? It is really true that the clock has altered, for time has turned into the fourth dimension or something entirely different; and the telephone may fairly be said to have faded from view in favour of the invisible telepath. It is true that the pattern of the paper has changed, for the very pattern of the world has changed; we are told that it is not made of atoms like the dots but of electrons like the spirals. Scientific men of the first rank have seen a table move by itself, and walk upstairs by itself. It does not matter here whether it was done by the spirits; it is enough that few still pretend that is entirely done by the spiritualists. I am not dealing with doctrines but with doubts; with the mere fact that all these things have grown deeper and more bewildering. Some people really are throwing their medicine bottles out of the window; and some of them at least are working purely psychological cures of a sort that would once have been called miraculous healing. I do not say we know how far this could go; it is my whole point that we do not know, that we are in contact with numbers of new things of which we know uncommonly little. But the vital point is, not that science deals with what we do not know, but that science is destroying what we thought we did know. Nearly all the latest discoveries have been destructive, not of the old dogmas of religion, but rather of the recent dogmas of science. The conservation of energy could not itself be entirely conserved. The atom was smashed to atoms. And dancing to the tune of Professor Einstein, even the law of gravity is behaving with lamentable levity.

And when the man looks at the portrait of himself he really does not see himself. He sees his Other Self, which some say is the opposite of his ordinary self; his Subconscious Self or his Subliminal Self, said to rage and rule in his dreams, or a suppressed self which hates him though it is hidden from him; or the Alter Ego of a Dual Personality. It is not to my present purpose to discuss the merit of these speculations, or whether they be medicinal or morbid. My purpose is served in pointing out the plain historical fact; that if you had talked to a Utilitarian and Rationalist of Bentham's time, who told men to follow "enlightened self-interest," he would have been considerably bewildered if you had replied brightly and briskly, "And to which self do you refer; the sub-conscious, the conscious, the latently criminal or suppressed, or others that we fortunately have in stock?" When the man looks at his own portrait in his own bedroom, it does really melt into the face of a stranger or flicker into the face of a fiend. When he looks at the bedroom itself, in short, it becomes clearer and clearer that it is exactly this comfortable and solid part of the vision that is altering and breaking up. It is the walls and furniture that are only a dream or memory. And when he looks again at the incongruous rose-bush, he seems to smell as well as see; and he stretches forth his hand, and his finger bleeds upon a thorn.

It will not be altogether surprising if the story ends with the man recovering full consciousness, and finding he has been convalescing in a hammock in a rose-garden. It is not so very unreasonable when you come to think of it; or at least when you come to think of the whole of it. He was not wrong in thinking the whole must be a consistent whole, and that one part seemed inconsistent with the other. He was only wrong about which part was wrong through being inconsistent with the other. Now the whole of the rationalistic doubt about the Palestinian legends, from its rise in the early eighteenth century out of the last movements of the Renascence, was founded on the fixity of facts. Miracles were monstrosities because they were against natural law, which was necessarily immutable law. The prodigies of the Old Testament or the mighty works of the New were extravagances because they were exceptions; and they were exceptions because there was a rule, and that an immutable rule. In short, there was no rose-tree growing out of the carpet of a trim and tidy bedroom; because rose-trees do not grow out of carpets in trim and tidy bedrooms. So far it seemed reasonable enough. But it left out one possibility; that a man can dream about a room as well as a rose; and that a man can doubt about a rule as well as an exception.

As soon as the men of science began to doubt the rules of the game, the game was up. They could no longer rule out all the old marvels as impossible, in face of the new marvels which they had to admit as possible. They were themselves dealing now with a number of unknown quantities; what is the power of mind over matter; when is matter an illusion of mind; what is identity, what is individuality, is there a limit to logic in the last extremes of mathematics? They knew by a hundred hints that their non-miraculous world was no longer watertight; that floods were coming in from somewhere in which they were already out of their depth, and down among very fantastical deep-sea fishes. They could hardly feel certain even about the fish that swallowed Jonah, when they had no test except the very true one that there are more fish in the sea than ever came out of it. Logically they would find it quite as hard to draw the line at the miraculous draught of fishes. I do not mean that they, or even I, need here depend on those particular stories; I mean that the difficulty now is to draw a line, and a new line, after the obliteration of an old and much more obvious line. Any one can draw it for himself, as a matter of mere taste in probability; but we have not made a philosophy until we can draw it for others. And the modern men of science cannot draw it for others. Men could easily mark the contrast between the force of gravity and the fable of the Ascension. They cannot all be made to see any such contrast between the levitation that is now discussed as a possibility and the ascension which is still derided as a miracle. I do not even say that there is not a great difference between them; I say that science is now plunged too deep in new doubts and possibilities to have authority to define the difference. I say the more it knows of what seems to have happened, or what is said to have happened, in many modern drawing-rooms, the less it knows what did or did not happen on that lofty and legendary hill, where a spire rises over Jerusalem and can be seen beyond Jordan.

But with that part of the Palestinian story which is told in the New Testament I am not directly concerned till the next chapter; and the matter here is a more general one. The truth is that through a thousand channels something has returned to the modern mind. It is not Christianity. On the contrary, it would be truer to say that it is paganism. In reality it is in a very special sense paganism; because it is polytheism. The word will startle many people, but not the people who know the modern world best. When I told a distinguished psychologist at Oxford that I differed from his view of the universe, he answered, “Why universe? Why should it not be a multiverse?” The essence of polytheism is the worship of gods who are not God; that is, who are not necessarily the author and the authority of all things. Men are feeling more and more that there are many spiritual forces in the universe, and the wisest men feel that some are to be trusted more than others. There will be a tendency, I think, to take a favourite force, or in other words a familiar spirit. Mr. H. G. Wells, who is, if anybody is, a genius among moderns and a modern among geniuses, really did this very thing; he selected a god who was really more like a daemon. He called his book *God, the Invisible King*; but the curious point was that he specially insisted that his God differed from other people’s God in the very fact that he was not a king. He was very particular in explaining that his deity did not rule in any almighty or infinite sense; but merely influenced, like any wandering spirit. Nor was he particularly invisible, if there can be said to be any degrees in invisibility. Mr. Wells’s Invisible God was really like Mr. Wells’s Invisible Man. You almost felt he might appear at any moment, at any rate to his one devoted worshipper; and that, as if in old Greece, a glad cry might ring through the woods of Essex, the voice of Mr. Wells crying, “We have seen, he hath seen us, a visible God.” I do not mean this disrespectfully, but on the contrary very sympathetically; I think it worthy of so great a man to appreciate and answer the general sense of a richer and more adventurous spiritual world around us. It is a great emancipation from the leaden materialism which weighed on men of imagination forty years ago. But my point for the moment is that the mode of the emancipation was pagan or even polytheistic, in the real philosophical sense that it was the selection of a single spirit, out of many there might be in the spiritual world. The point is that while Mr. Wells worships his god (who is not his creator or even necessarily his overlord) there is nothing to prevent Mr. William Archer, also emancipated, from adoring another god in another temple; or Mr. Arnold Bennett, should he similarly liberate his mind, from bowing down to a third god in a third temple. My imagination rather fails me, I confess, in evoking the image and symbolism of Mr. Bennett’s or Mr. Archer’s idolatries; and if I had to choose between the three, I should probably be found as an acolyte in the shrine of Mr. Wells. But, anyhow, the trend of all this is to polytheism, rather as it existed in the old civilisation of paganism.

There is the same modern mark in Spiritualism. Spiritualism also has the trend of polytheism, if it be in a form more akin to ancestor-worship. But whether it be the invocation of ghosts or of gods, the mark of it is that it invokes something less than the divine; nor am I at all quarrelling with it on that account. I am merely describing the drift of the day; and it seems clear that it is towards the summoning of spirits to our aid whatever their position in the unknown world, and without any clear doctrinal plan of that world. The most probable result would seem to be a multitude of psychic cults, personal and impersonal, from the vaguest reverence for the powers of nature to the most concrete appeal to crystals or mascots. When I say that the agnostics have discovered agnosticism, and have now recovered from the shock, I do not mean merely to sneer at the identity of the word agnosticism with the word ignorance. On the contrary, I think ignorance the greater thing; for ignorance can be creative. And the thing it can create, and soon probably will create, is one of the lost arts of the world; a mythology.

In a word, the modern world will probably end exactly where the Bible begins. In that inevitable setting of spirit against spirit, or god against god, we shall soon be in a position to do more justice not only to the New Testament, but to the Old Testament. Our descendants may very possibly do the very thing we scoff at the old Jews for doing; grope for and cling to their own deity as one rising above rivals who seem to be equally real. They also may feel him not primarily as the sole or even the supreme but only as the best; and have to abide the miracles of ages to prove that he is also the mightiest. For them also he may at first be felt as their own, before he is extended to others; he also, from the collision with colossal idolatries and towering spiritual tyrannies, may emerge only as a God of Battles and a Lord of Hosts. Here between the dark wastes and the clouded mountain was fought out what must seem even to the indifferent a wrestle of giants driving the world out of its course; Jehovah of the mountains casting down Baal of the desert and Dagon of the sea. Here wandered and endured that strange and terrible and tenacious people who held high above all their virtues and their vices one indestructible idea; that they were but the tools in that tremendous hand. Here was the first triumph of those who, in some sense beyond our understanding, had rightly chosen among the powers invisible, and found their choice a great god above all gods. So the future may suffer not from the loss but the multiplicity of faith; and its fate be far more like the cloudy and mythological war in the desert than like the dry radiance of theism or monism. I have said nothing here of my own faith, or of that name on which, I am well persuaded, the world will be most wise to call. But I do believe that the tradition founded in that far tribal battle, in that far Eastern land, did indeed justify itself by leading up to a lasting truth; and that it will once again be justified of all its children. What has survived through an age of atheism as the most indestructible would survive through an age of polytheism as the most indispensable. If among many gods it could not presently be proved to be the strongest, some would still know it was the best. Its central presence would endure through times of cloud and confusion, in which it was judged only as a myth among myths or a man among men. Even the old heathen test of humanity and the apparition of the body, touching which I have quoted the verse about the pagan polytheist as sung by the neo-pagan poet, is a test which that incarnate mystery will abide the best. And however much or little our spiritual inquirers may lift the veil from their invisible kings, they will not find a vision more vivid than a man walking unveiled upon the mountains, seen of men and seeing; a visible god.

CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLE WITH THE DRAGON

Lydda or Ludd has already been noted as the legendary birthplace of St. George, and as the camp on the edge of the desert from which, as it happened, I caught the first glimpse of the coloured fields of Palestine that looked like the fields of Paradise. Being an encampment of soldiers, it seems an appropriate place for St. George; and indeed it may be said that all that red and empty land has resounded with his name like a shield of copper or of bronze. The name was not even confined to the cries of the Christians; a curious imaginative hospitality in the Moslem mind, a certain innocent and imitative enthusiasm, made the Moslems also half-accept a sort of Christian mythology, and make an abstract hero of St. George. It is said that Coeur de Lion on these very sands first invoked the soldier saint to bless the English battle-line, and blazon his cross on the English banners. But the name occurs not only in the stories of the victory of Richard, but in the enemy stories that led up to the great victory of Saladin. In that obscure and violent quarrel which let loose the disaster of Hattin, when the Grand Master of the Templars, Gerard the Englishman from Bideford in Devon, drove with demented heroism his few lances against a host, there fell among those radiant fanatics one Christian warrior, who had made with his single sword such a circle of the slain, that the victorious Moslems treated even his dead body as something supernatural; and bore it away with them with honour, saying it was the body of St. George.

But if the purpose of the camp be appropriate to the story of St. George, the position of the camp might be considered appropriate to the more fantastic story of St. George and the Dragon. The symbolic struggle between man and monster might very well take place somewhere where the green culture of the fields meets the red desolation of the desert. As a matter of fact, I dare say, legend locates the duel itself somewhere else, but I am only making use of the legend as a legend, or even as a convenient figure of speech. I would only use it here to make a kind of picture which may clarify a kind of paradox, very vital to our present attitude towards all Palestinian traditions, including those that are more sacred even than St. George. This paradox has already been touched on in the last chapter about polytheistic spirits or superstitions such as surrounded the Old Testament, but it is yet more true of the criticisms and apologetics surrounding the New Testament. And the paradox is this; that we never find our own religion so right as when we find we are wrong about it. I mean that we are finally convinced not by the sort of evidence we are looking for, but by the sort of evidence we are not looking for. We are convinced when we come on a ratification that is almost as abrupt as a refutation. That is the point about the wireless telegraphy or wordless telepathy of the Bedouins. A supernatural trick in a dingy tribe wandering in dry places is not the sort of supernaturalism we should expect to find; it is only the sort that we do find. These rocks of the desert, like the bones of a buried giant, do not seem to stick out where they ought to, but they stick out, and we fall over them.

Whatever we think of St. George, most people would see a mere fairy-tale in St. George and the Dragon. I dare say they are right; and I only use it here as a figure for the sake of argument. But suppose, for the sake of argument, that a man has come to the conclusion that there probably was such a person as St. George, in spite of all the nonsense about dragons and the chimera with wings and claws that has somehow interwreathed itself with his image. Perhaps he is a little biased by patriotism or other ethical aims; and thinks the saint a good social ideal. Perhaps he knows that early Christianity, so far from being a religion of pacifists, was largely a religion of soldiers. Anyhow he thinks St. George himself a quite sufficiently solid and historical figure; and has little doubt that records or traces can be found of him. Now the point is this; suppose that man goes to the land of the legendary combat; and finds comparatively few or faint traces of the personality of St. George. But suppose he *does* find, on that very field of combat, the bones of a gigantic monster unlike every other creature except the legendary dragon. Or suppose he only finds ancient Eastern sculptures and hieroglyphics representing maidens, being sacrificed to such a monster, and making it quite clear that even within historic times one of those sacrificed was a princess. It is surely clear that he will be considerably impressed by this confirmation, not of the part he did believe, but actually of the part he did not believe. He has not found what he expected but he has found what he wanted, and much more than he wanted. He has not found a single detail directly in support of St. George. But he had found a very considerable support of St. George and the Dragon.

It is needless to inform the reader, I trust, that I do not think this particular case in the least likely; or that I am only using it for the sake of lucidity. Even as it stands, it would not necessarily make a man believe the traditional story, but it would make him guess that it was some sort of tradition of some sort of truth; that there was something in it, and much more in it than even he himself had imagined. And the point of it would be precisely that his reason had not anticipated the extent of his revelation. He has proved the improbable, not the probable thing. Reason had already taught him the reasonable part; but facts had taught him the fantastic part. He will certainly conclude that the whole story is very much more valid than anybody has supposed. Now as I have already said, it is not in the least likely that this will happen touching this particular tale of Palestine. But this is precisely what really has happened touching the most sacred and tremendous of all the tales of Palestine. This is precisely what has happened touching that central figure, round which the monster and the champion are alike only ornamental symbols; and by the right of whose tragedy even St. George's Cross does not belong to St. George. It is not likely to be true of the desert duel between George and the Dragon; but it is already true of the desert duel between Jesus and the Devil. St. George is but a servant and the Dragon is but a symbol, but it is precisely about the central reality, the mystery of Christ and His mastery of the powers of darkness, that this very paradox has proved itself a fact.

Going down from Jerusalem to Jericho I was more than once moved by a flippant and possibly profane memory of the swine that rushed down a steep place into the sea. I do not insist on the personal parallel; for whatever my points of resemblance to a pig I am not a flying pig, a pig with wings of speed and precipitancy; and if I am possessed of a devil, it is not the blue devil of suicide. But the phrase came back into my mind because going down to the Dead Sea does really involve rushing down a steep place. Indeed it gives a strange impression that the whole of Palestine is one single steep place. It is as if all other countries lay flat under the sky, but this one country had been tilted sideways. This gigantic gesture of geography or geology, this sweep as of a universal landslide, is the sort of thing that is never conveyed by any maps or books or even pictures. All the pictures of Palestine I have seen are descriptive details, groups of costume or corners of architecture, at most views of famous places; they cannot give the bottomless vision of this long descent. We went in a little rocking Ford car down steep and jagged roads among ribbed and columned cliffs; but the roads below soon failed us altogether; and the car had to tumble like a tank over rocky banks and into empty river-beds, long before it came to the sinister and discoloured landscapes of the Dead Sea. And the distance looks far enough on the map, and seems long enough in the motor journey, to make a man feel he has come to another part of the world; yet so much is it all a single fall of land that even when he gets out beyond Jordan in the wild country of the Shereef he can still look back and see, small and faint as if in the clouds, the spire of the Russian church (I fancy) upon the hill of the Ascension. And though the story of the swine is attached in truth to another place, I was still haunted with its fanciful appropriateness to this one, because of the very steepness of this larger slope and the mystery of that larger sea. I even had the fancy that one might fish for them and find them in such a sea, turned into monsters; sea-swine or four-legged fishes, swollen and with evil eyes, grown over with sea-grass for bristles; the ghosts of Gadara.

And then it came back to me, as a curiosity and almost a coincidence, that the same strange story had actually been selected as the text for the central controversy of the Victorian Age between Christianity and criticism. The two champions were two of the greatest men of the nineteenth century; Huxley representing scientific scepticism and Gladstone scriptural orthodoxy. The scriptural champion was universally regarded as standing for the past, if not for the dead past; and the scientific champion as standing for the future, if not the final judgment of the world. And yet the future has been entirely different to anything that anybody expected; and the final judgment may yet reverse all the conceptions of their contemporaries and even of themselves. The philosophical position now is in a very curious way the contrary of the position then. Gladstone had the worst of the argument, and has been proved right. Huxley had the best of the argument, and has been proved wrong. At any rate he has been ultimately proved wrong about the way the world was going, and the probable position of the next generation. What he thought indisputable is disputed; and what he thought dead is rather too much alive.

Huxley was not only a man of genius in logic and rhetoric; he was a man of a very manly and generous morality. Morally he deserves much more sympathy than many of the mystics who have supplanted him. But they have supplanted him. In the more mental fashions of the day, most of what he thought would stand has fallen, and most of what he thought would fall is standing yet. In the Gadarene controversy with Gladstone, he announced it as his purpose to purge the Christian ideal, which he thought self-evidently sublime, of the Christian demonology, which he thought self-evidently ridiculous. And yet if we take any typical man of the next generation, we shall very probably find Huxley's sublime thing scoffed at, and Huxley's ridiculous thing taken seriously. I imagine a very typical child of the age succeeding Huxley's may be found in Mr. George Moore. He has one of the most critical, appreciative and atmospheric talents of the age. He has lived in most of the sets of the age, and through most of the fashions of the age. He has held, at one time or another, most of the opinions of the age. Above all, he has not only thought for himself, but done it with peculiar pomp and pride; he would consider himself the freest of all freethinkers. Let us take him as a type and a test of what has really happened to Huxley's analysis of the gold and the dross. Huxley quoted as the indestructible ideal the noble passage in Micah, beginning "He hath shewed thee, O man, that which is good"; and asked scornfully whether anybody was ever likely to suggest that justice was worthless or that mercy was unlovable, and whether anything would diminish the distance between ourselves and the ideals that we reverence. And yet already, perhaps, Mr. George Moore was anticipating Nietzsche, sailing near, as he said, "the sunken rocks about the cave of Zarathustra." He said, if I remember right, that Cromwell should be admired for his injustice. He implied that Christ should be condemned, not because he destroyed the swine, but because he delivered the sick. In short he found justice quite worthless and mercy quite unlovable; and as for humility and the distance between himself and his ideals, he seemed rather to suggest (at this time at least) that his somewhat varying ideals were only interesting because they had belonged to himself. Some of this, it is true, was only in the *Confessions of a Young Man*; but it is the whole point here that they were then the confessions of a young man, and that Huxley's in comparison were the confessions of an old man. The trend of the new time, in very varying degrees, was tending to undermine, not merely the Christian demonology, not merely the Christian theology, not merely the Christian religion, but definitely the Christian ethical ideal, which had seemed to the great agnostic as secure as the stars.

But while the world was mocking the morality he had assumed, it was bringing back the mysticism he had mocked. The next phase of Mr. George

Moore himself, whom I have taken as a type of the time, was the serious and sympathetic consideration of Irish mysticism, as embodied in Mr. W. B. Yeats. I have myself heard Mr. Yeats, about that time, tell a story, to illustrate how concrete and even comic is the reality of the supernatural, saying that he knew a farmer whom the fairies had dragged out of bed and beaten. Now suppose Mr. Yeats had told Mr. Moore, then moving in this glamorous atmosphere, another story of the same sort. Suppose he had said that the farmer's pigs had fallen under the displeasure of some magician of the sort he celebrates, who had conjured bad fairies into the quadrupeds, so that they went in a wild dance down to the village pond. Would Mr. Moore have thought that story any more incredible than the other? Would he have thought it worse than a thousand other things that a modern mystic may lawfully believe? Would he have risen to his feet and told Mr. Yeats that all was over between them? Not a bit of it. He would at least have listened with a serious, nay, a solemn face. He would think it a grim little grotesque of rustic diablerie, a quaint tale of goblins, neither less nor more improbable than hundreds of psychic fantasies or farces for which there is really a good deal of evidence. He would be ready to entertain the idea if he found it anywhere except in the New Testament. As for the more vulgar and universal fashions that have followed after the Celtic movement, they have left such trifles far behind. And they have been directed not by imaginative artists like Mr. Yeats or even Mr. Moore, but by solid scientific students like Sir William Crookes and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. I find it easier to imagine an evil spirit agitating the legs of a pig than a good spirit agitating the legs of a table. But I will not here enter into the argument, since I am only trying to describe the atmosphere. Whatever has happened in more recent years, what Huxley expected has certainly not happened. There has been a revolt against Christian morality, and where there has not been a return of Christian mysticism, it has been a return of the mysticism without the Christianity. Mysticism itself has returned, with all its moons and twilights, its talismans and spells. Mysticism itself has returned, and brought with it seven devils worse than itself.

But the scientific coincidence is even more strict and close. It affects not only the general question of miracles, but the particular question of possession. This is the very last element in the Christian story that would ever have been selected by the enlightened Christian apologist. Gladstone would defend it, but he would not go out of his way to dwell on it. It is an excellent working model of what I mean by finding an unexpected support, and finding it in an unexpected quarter. It is not theological but psychological study that has brought us back into this dark underworld of the soul, where even identity seems to dissolve or divide, and men are not even themselves. I do not say that psychologists admit the discovery of demoniacs; and if they did they would doubtless call them something else, such as demono-maniacs. But they admit things which seem almost as near to a new supernaturalism, and things quite as incredible to the old rationalism. Dual personality is not so very far from diabolic possession. And if the dogma of subconsciousness allows of agnosticism, the agnosticism cuts both ways. A man cannot say there is a part of him of which he is quite unconscious, and only conscious that it is not in contact with the unknown. He cannot say there is a sealed chamber or cellar under his house, of which he knows nothing whatever; but that he is quite certain that it cannot have an underground passage leading anywhere else in the world. He cannot say he knows nothing whatever about its size or shape or appearance, except that it certainly does not contain a relic of the finger-joint of St. Catherine of Alexandria, or that it certainly is not haunted by the ghost of King Herod Agrippa. If there is any sort of legend or tradition or plausible probability which says that it is, he cannot call a thing impossible where he is not only ignorant but even unconscious. It comes back therefore to the same reality, that the old compact cosmos depended on a compact consciousness. If we are dealing with unknown quantities, we cannot deny their connection with other unknown quantities. If I have a self of which I can say nothing, how can I even say that it is my own self? How can I even say that I always had it, or that it did not come from somewhere else? It is clear that we are in very deep waters, whether or no we have rushed down a steep place to fall into them.

It will be noted that what we really lack here is not the supernatural but only the healthy supernatural. It is not the miracle, but only the miracle of healing. I warmly sympathise with those who think most of this rather morbid, and nearer the diabolic than the divine, but to call a thing diabolic is hardly an argument against the existence of diabolism. It is still more clearly the case when we go outside the sphere of science into its penumbra in literature and conversation. There is a mass of fiction and fashionable talk of which it may truly be said, that what we miss in it is not demons but the power to cast them out. It combines the occult with the obscene; the sensuality of materialism with the insanity of spiritualism. In the story of Gadara we have left out nothing except the Redeemer, we have kept the devils and the swine.

In other words, we have not found St. George; but we have found the Dragon. We have found in the desert, as I have said, the bones of the monster we did not believe in, more plainly than the footprints of the hero we did. We have found them not because we expected to find them, for our progressive minds look to the promise of something much brighter and even better; not because we wanted to find them, for our modern mood, as well as our human nature, is entirely in favour of more amiable and reassuring things; not because we thought it even possible to find them, for we really thought it impossible so far as we ever thought of it at all. We have found them because they are *there*; and we are bound to come on them even by falling over them. It is Huxley's method that has upset Huxley's conclusion. As I have said, that conclusion itself is completely reversed. What he thought indisputable is disputed; and what he thought impossible is possible. Instead of Christian morals surviving in the form of humanitarian morals, Christian demonology has survived in the form of heathen demonology. But it has not survived by scholarly traditionalism in the style of Gladstone, but rather by obstinate objective curiosity according to the advice of Huxley. We in the West have "followed our reason as far as it would go," and our reason has led us to things that nearly all the rationalists would have thought wildly irrational. Science was supposed to bully us into being rationalists; but it is now supposed to be bullying us into being irrationalists. The science of Einstein might rather be called following our unreason as far as it will go, seeing whether the brain will crack under the conception that space is curved, or that parallel straight lines always meet. And the science of Freud would make it essentially impossible to say how far our reason or unreason does go, or where it stops. For if a man is ignorant of his other self, how can he possibly know that the other self is ignorant? He can no longer say with pride that at least he knows that he knows nothing. That is exactly what he does not know. The floor has fallen out of his mind and the abyss below may contain subconscious certainties as well as subconscious doubts. He is too ignorant even to ignore; and he must confess himself an agnostic about whether he is an agnostic.

That is the coil or tangle, at least, which the dragon has reached even in the scientific regions of the West. I only describe the tangle; I do not delight in it. Like most people with a taste for Catholic tradition, I am too much of a rationalist for that; for Catholics are almost the only people now defending reason. But I am not talking of the true relations of reason and mystery, but of the historical fact that mystery has invaded the peculiar realms of reason; especially the European realms of the motor and the telephone. When we have a man like Mr. William Archer, lecturing mystically on dreams and psychoanalysis, and saying it is clear that God did not make man a reasonable creature, those acquainted with the traditions and distinguished record of that dry and capable Scot will consider the fact a prodigy. I confess it never occurred to me that Mr. Archer was of such stuff as dreams are made of; and if he is becoming a mystic in his old age (I use the phrase in a mystical and merely relative sense) we may take it that the occult oriental flood is rising fast, and reaching places that are not only high but dry. But the change is much more apparent to a man who has chanced to stray into those orient hills where those occult streams have always risen, and especially in this land that lies between Asia, where the occult is almost the obvious, and Europe, where it is always returning with a fresher and younger vigour. The truth becomes strangely luminous in this wilderness between two worlds, where the rocks stand out stark like the very bones of the Dragon.

As I went down that sloping wall or shoulder of the world from the Holy City on the mountain to the buried Cities of the Plain, I seemed to see more and more clearly all this Western evolution of Eastern mystery, and how on this one high place, as on a pivot, the whole purpose of mankind had swerved. I took up again the train of thought which I had trailed through the desert, as described in the last chapter, about the gods of Asia and of the ancient dispensation, and I found it led me along these hills to a sort of vista or vision of the new dispensation and of Christendom. Considered objectively, and from the outside, the story is something such as has already been loosely outlined; the emergence in this immemorial and mysterious land of what was undoubtedly, when thus considered, one tribe among many tribes worshipping one god among many gods, but it is quite as much an evident external fact that the god has become God. Still stated objectively, the story is that the tribe having this religion produced a new prophet, claiming to be more than a prophet. The old religion killed the new prophet; but the new prophet killed the old religion. He died to destroy it, and it died in destroying him. Now it may be reaffirmed equally realistically that there was nothing normal about the case or its consequences. The things that took part in that tragedy have never been the same since, and have never been like anything else in the world. The Church is not like other religions; its very crimes were unique. The Jews are not like other races; they remain as unique to everybody else as they are to themselves. The Roman Empire did not pass like other empires; it did not perish like Babylon and Assyria. It went through a most extraordinary remorse amounting to madness and resuscitation into sanity, which is equally strange in history whether it seems as ghastly as a galvanised corpse or as glorious as a god risen from the dead. The very land and city are not like other lands and cities. The concentration and conflict in Jerusalem to-day, whether we regard them as a reconquest by Christendom or a conspiracy of Jews or a part of the lingering quarrel with Moslems, are alike the effect of forces gathered and loosened in that one mysterious moment in the history of the city. They equally proclaim the paradox of its insignificance and its importance.

But above all the prophet was not and is not like other prophets; and the proof of it is to be found not primarily among those who believe in him, but among those who do not. He is not dead, even where he is denied. What is the use of a modern man saying that Christ is only a thing like Atys or Mithras, when the next moment he is reproaching Christianity for not following Christ? He does not suddenly lose his temper and talk about our most unmithraic conduct, as he does (very justly as a rule) about our most unchristian conduct. We do not find a group of ardent young agnostics, in the middle of a great war, tried as traitors for their extravagant interpretation of remarks attributed to Atys. It is improbable that Tolstoy wrote a book to prove that all modern ills could be cured by literal obedience to all the orders of Adonis. We do not find wild Bolshevists calling themselves Mithraic Socialists as many of them call themselves Christian Socialists. Leaving orthodoxy and even sanity entirely on one side, the very heresies and insanities of our time prove that after nearly two thousand years the issue is still living and the name is quite literally one to conjure with. Let the critics try to conjure with any of the other names. In the real centres of modern inquiry and mental activity, they will not move even a mystic with the name of Mithras as they will move a materialist with the name of Jesus. There are men who deny God and accept Christ.

But this lingering yet living power in the legend, even for those to whom it is little more than a legend, has another relevancy to the particular point here. Jesus of Nazareth, merely humanly considered, has thus become a hero of humanitarianism. Even the eighteenth-century deists in denying his divinity generally took pains to exalt his humanity. Of the nineteenth-century revolutionists it is really an understatement to say that they exalted him as a man; for indeed they rather exalted him as a superman. That is to say, many of them represented him as a man preaching a decisively superior and ever strange morality, not only in advance of his age but practically in advance of our age. They made of his mystical counsels of perfection a sort of Socialism or Pacifism or Communism, which they themselves still see rather as something that ought to be or that will be; the extreme limit of universal love. I am not discussing here whether they are right or not; I say they have in fact found in the same figure a type of humanitarianism and the care for human happiness. Every one knows the striking and sometimes staggering utterances that do really support and illustrate this side of the teaching. Modern idealists are naturally moved by such things as the intensely poetic paradox about the lilies of the field; which for them has a joy in life and living things like that of Shelley or Whitman, combined with a return to simplicity beyond that of Tolstoy or Thoreau. Indeed I rather wonder that those, whose merely historic or humanistic view of the case would allow of such criticism without incongruity, have not made some study of the purely poetical or oratorical structure of such passages. Certainly there are few finer examples of the swift architecture of style than that single fragment about the flowers; the almost idle opening of a chance reference to a wild flower, the sudden unfolding of the small purple blossom into pavilions and palaces and the great name of the national history; and then with a turn of the hand like a gesture of scorn, the change to the grass that to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven. Then follows, as so often in the Gospels, the “how much more” which is like a celestial flight of stairs, a ladder of imaginative logic. Indeed this *a fortiori*, and this power of thinking on three levels, is (I may remark incidentally) a thing very much needed in modern discussion. Many minds apparently cannot stretch to three dimensions, or to thinking that a cube can go beyond a surface as a surface goes beyond a line; for instance, that the citizen is infinitely above all ranks, and yet the soul is infinitely above the citizen. But we are only concerned at the moment with the sides of this many-sided mystery which happen to be really in sympathy with the modern mood. Judged even by our modern tests of emancipated art or ideal economics, it is admitted that Christ understood all that is rather crudely embodied in Socialism or the Simple Life. I purposely insist first on this optimistic, I might almost say this pantheistic or even this pagan aspect of the Christian Gospels. For it is only when we understand that Christ, considered merely as a prophet, can be and is a popular leader in the love of natural things, that we can feel that tremendous and tragic energy of his testimony to an ugly reality, the existence of unnatural things. Instead of taking a text as I have done, take a whole Gospel and read it steadily and honestly and straight through at a sitting, and you will certainly have one impression, whether of a myth or of a man. It is that the exorcist towers above the poet and even the prophet; that the story between Cana and Calvary is one long war with demons. He understood better than a hundred poets the beauty of the flowers of the battle-field; but he came out to battle. And if most of his words mean anything they do mean that there is at our very feet, like a chasm concealed among the flowers, an unfathomable evil.

In short, I would here only hint delicately that perhaps the mind which admittedly knew much of what we think we know about ethics and economics, knew a little more than we are beginning to know about psychology and psychic phenomena. I remember reading, not without amusement, a severe and trenchant article in the *Hibbert Journal*, in which Christ's admission of demonology was alone thought enough to dispose of his divinity. The one sentence of the article, which I cherish in my memory through all the changing years, ran thus: "If he was God, he knew there was no such thing as diabolical possession." It did not seem to strike the *Hibbert* critic that this line of criticism raises the question, not of whether Christ is God, but of whether the critic in the *Hibbert Journal* is God. About that mystery as about the other I am for the moment agnostic; but I should have thought that the meditations of Omniscience on the problem of evil might be allowed, even by an agnostic, to be a little difficult to discover. Of Christ in the Gospels and in modern life I will merely for the moment say this; that if he was God, as the critic put it, it seems possible that he knew the next discovery in science, as well as the last, not to mention (what is more common in rationalistic culture) the last but three. And what will be the next discovery in psychological science nobody can imagine; and we can only say that if it reveals demons and their name is Legion, we can hardly be much surprised now. But at any rate the days are over of Omniscience like that of the *Hibbert* critic, who knows exactly what he would know if he were God Almighty. What is pain? What is evil? What did they mean by devils? What do we mean by madness? The rising generation, when asked by a venerable Victorian critic and catechist, “What does God know?” will hardly think it unreasonably flippant to answer, “God knows.”

There was something already suggested about the steep scenery through which I went as I thought about these things; a sense of silent catastrophe and fundamental cleavage in the deep division of the cliffs and crags. They were all the more profoundly moving, because my sense of them was almost as subconscious as the subconsciousness about which I was reflecting. I had fallen again into the old habit of forgetting where I was going, and seeing things with one eye off, in a blind abstraction. I awoke from a sort of trance of absentmindedness in a landscape that might well awaken anybody. It might awaken a man sleeping; but he would think he was still in a nightmare. It might wake the dead, but they would probably think they were in hell. Halfway down the slope the hills had taken on a certain pallor which had about it something primitive, as if the colours were not yet created. There was only a kind of cold and wan blue in the level skies which contrasted with wild sky-line. Perhaps we are accustomed to the contrary condition of the clouds moving and mutable and the hills solid and serene; but anyhow there seemed something of the making of a new world about the quiet of the skies and the cold convulsion of the landscape. But if it was between chaos and creation, it was creation by God or at least by the gods, something with an aim in its anarchy. It was very different in the final stage of the descent, where my mind woke up from its meditations. One can only say that the whole landscape was like a leper. It was of a wasting white and silver and grey, with mere dots of decadent vegetation like the green spots of a plague. In shape it not only rose into horns and crests like waves or clouds, but I believe it actually alters like waves or clouds, visibly but with a loathsome slowness. The swamp is alive. And I found again a certain advantage in forgetfulness; for I saw all this incredible country before I even remembered its name, or the ancient tradition about its nature. Then even the green plague-spots failed, and everything seemed to fall away into a universal blank under the staring sun, as I came, in the great spaces of the circle of a lifeless sea, into the silence of Sodom and Gomorrah.

For these are the foundations of a fallen world, and a sea below the seas on which men sail. Seas move like clouds and fishes float like birds above the level of the sunken land. And it is here that tradition has laid the tragedy of the mighty perversion of the imagination of man; the monstrous birth and death of abominable things. I say such things in no mood of spiritual pride; such things are hideous not because they are distant but because they are near to us; in all our brains, certainly in mine, were buried things as bad as any buried under that bitter sea, and if He did not come to do battle with them, even in the darkness of the brain of man, I know not why He came. Certainly it was not only to talk about flowers or to talk about Socialism. The more truly we can see life as a fairy-tale, the more clearly the tale resolves itself into war with the Dragon who is wasting fairyland. I will not enter on the theology behind the symbol; but I am sure it was of this that all the symbols were symbolic. I remember distinguished men among the liberal theologians, who found it more difficult to believe in one devil than in many. They admitted in the New Testament an attestation to evil spirits, but not to a general enemy of mankind. As some are said to want the drama of Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark, they would have the drama of Hell without the Prince of Darkness. I say nothing of these things, save that the language of the Gospel seems to me to go much more singly to a single issue. The voice that is heard there has such authority as speaks to an army; and the highest note of it is victory rather than peace. When the apostles were first sent forth with their faces to the four corners of the earth, and turned again to acclaim their master, he did not say in that hour of triumph, “All are aspects of one harmonious whole” or “The universe evolves through progress to perfection” or “All things find their end in Nirvana” or “The dewdrop slips into the shining sea.” He looked up and said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”

Then I looked up and saw in the long jagged lines of road and rock and cleft something of the swiftness of such a thunderbolt. What I saw seemed not so much a scene as an act; as when abruptly Michael barred the passage of the Lord of Pride. Below me all the empire of evil was splashed and scattered upon the plain, like a wine-cup shattered into a star. Sodom lay like Satan, flat upon the floor of the world. And far away and aloft, faint with height and distance, small but still visible, stood up the spire of the Ascension like the sword of the Archangel, lifted in salute after a stroke.

CHAPTER X

THE ENDLESS EMPIRE

One of the adventures of travel consists, not so much in finding that popular sayings are false, as that they mean more than they say. We cannot appreciate the full force of the phrase until we have seen the fact. We make a picture of the things we do not know out of the things we know; and suppose the traveller’s tale to mean no more abroad than it would at home. If a man acquainted only with English churches is told about certain French churches that they are much frequented, he makes an English picture. He imagines a definite dense crowd of people in their best clothes going all together at eleven o’clock, and all coming back together to lunch. He does not picture the peculiar impression he would gain on the spot; of chance people going in and out of the church all day, sometimes for quite short periods, as if it were a sort of sacred inn. Or suppose a man knowing only English beer-shops hears for the first time of a German beer-garden, he probably does not imagine the slow ritual of the place. He does not know that unless the drinker positively slams down the top of his beer-mug with a resounding noise and a decisive gesture, beer will go on flowing into it as from a natural fountain; the drinking of beer being regarded as the normal state of man, and the cessation of it a decisive and even dramatic departure. I do not give this example in contempt; heaven forbid. I have had so much to say of the inhuman side of Prussianised Germany that I am glad to be able to pay a passing tribute to those more generous German traditions which we hope may revive and make Germany once more a part of Christendom. I merely give it as an instance of the way in which things we have all heard of, like church-going or beer-drinking, in foreign lands, mean much more, and something much more special, than we should infer from our own land. Now this is true of a phrase we have all heard of deserted cities or temples in the Near East: “The Bedouins camp in the ruins.” When I have read a hundred times that Arabs camp in some deserted town or temple near the Nile or the Euphrates, I always thought of gipsies near some place like Stonehenge. They would make their own rude shelter near the stones, perhaps sheltering behind them to light a fire; and for the rest, generations of gipsies might camp there without making much difference.

The thing I saw more than once in Egypt and Palestine was much more curious. It was as if the gipsies set to work to refurnish Stonehenge and make it a commodious residence. It was as if they spread a sort of giant umbrella over the circle of stones, and elaborately hung curtains between them, so as to turn the old Druid temple into a sort of patchwork pavilion. In one sense there is much more vandalism, and in another sense much more practicality; but it is a practicality that always stops short of the true creative independence of going off and building a house of their own. That is the attitude of the Arab; and it runs through all his history. Noble as is his masterpiece of the Mosque of Omar, there is something about it of that patchwork pavilion. It was based on Christian work, it was built with fragments, it was content with things that fastidious architects call fictions or even shams.

I frequently saw old ruined houses of which there only remained two walls of stone, to which the nomads had added two walls of canvas making an exact cube in form with the most startling incongruity in colour. He needs the form and he does not mind the incongruity, nor does he mind the fact that somebody else has done the solid part and he has only done the ramshackle part. You can say that he is nobly superior to jealousy, or that he is without artistic ambition, or that he is too much of a nomad to mind living half in somebody else’s house and half in his own. The real quality is probably too subtle for any simple praise or blame; we can only say that there is in the wandering Moslem a curious kind of limited common sense; which might even be called a short-sighted common sense. But however we define it, that is what can really be traced through Arab conquests and Arab culture in all its ingenuity and insufficiency. That is the note of these nomads in all the things in which they have succeeded and failed. In that sense they are constructive and in that sense unconstructive; in that sense artistic and in that sense inartistic; in that sense practical and in that sense unpractical; in that sense cunning and in that sense innocent. The curtains they would hang round Stonehenge might be of beautifully selected colours. The banners they waved from Stonehenge might be defended with glorious courage and enthusiasm. The prayers they recited in Stonehenge might be essentially worthy of human dignity, and certainly a great improvement on its older associations of human sacrifice. All this is true of Islam and the idolatries and negations are often replaced. But they would not have built Stonehenge; they would scarcely, so to speak, have troubled to lift a stone of Stonehenge. They would not have built Stonehenge; how much less Salisbury or Glastonbury or Lincoln.

That is the element about the Arab influence which makes it, after its ages of supremacy and in a sense of success, remain in a subtle manner superficial. When a man first sees the Eastern deserts, he sees this influence as I first described it, very present and powerful, almost omnipresent and omnipotent. But I fancy that to me and to others it is partly striking only because it is strange. Islam is so different to Christendom that to see it at all is at first like entering a new world. But, in my own case at any rate, as the strange colours became more customary, and especially as I saw more of the established seats of history, the cities and the framework of the different states, I became conscious of something else. It was something underneath, undestroyed and even in a sense unaltered. It was something neither Moslem nor modern; not merely oriental and yet very different from the new occidental nations from which I came. For a long time I could not put a name to this historical atmosphere. Then one day, standing in one of the Greek churches, one of those houses of gold full of hard highly coloured pictures, I fancied it came to me. It was the Empire. And certainly not the raid of Asiatic bandits we call the Turkish Empire. The thing which had caught my eye in that coloured interior was the carving of a two-headed eagle in such a position as to make it almost as symbolic as a cross. Every one has heard, of course, of the situation which this might well suggest, the suggestion that the Russian Church was far too much of an Established Church and the White Czar encroached upon the White Christ. But as a fact the eagle I saw was not borrowed from the Russian Empire; it would be truer to say that the Empire was borrowed from the eagle. The double eagle is the ancient emblem of the double empire of Rome and of Byzantium; the one head looking to the west and the other to the east, as if it spread its wings from the sunrise to the sunset. Unless I am mistaken, it was only associated with Russia as late as Peter the Great, though it had been the badge of Austria as the representative of the Holy Roman Empire. And what I felt brooding over that shrine and that landscape was something older not only than Turkey or Russia but than Austria itself. I began to understand a sort of evening light that lies over Palestine and Syria; a sense of smooth ruts of custom such as are said to give a dignity to the civilisation of China. I even understood a sort of sleepiness about the splendid and handsome Orthodox priests moving fully robed about the streets. They were not aristocrats but officials; still moving with the mighty routine of some far-off official system. In so far as the eagle was an emblem not of such imperial peace but of distant imperial wars, it was of wars that we in the West have hardly heard of; it was the emblem of official ovations.

When Heracleius rode homewards from the rout of Ispahan With the captives dragged behind him and the eagles in the van.

That is the rigid reality that still underlay the light mastery of the Arab rider; that is what a man sees, in the patchwork pavilion, when he grows used to the coloured canvas and looks at the walls of stone. This also was far too great a thing for facile praise or blame, a vast bureaucracy busy and yet intensely dignified, the most civilised thing ruling many other civilisations. It was an endless end of the world; for ever repeating its rich finality. And I myself was still walking in that long evening of the earth; and Caesar my lord was at Byzantium.

But it is necessary to remember next that this empire was not always at its evening. Byzantium was not always Byzantine. Nor was the seat of that power always in the city of Constantine, which was primarily a mere outpost of the city of Caesar. We must remember Rome as well as Byzantium; as indeed nobody would remember Byzantium if it were not for Rome. The more I saw of a hundred little things the more my mind revolved round that original idea which may be called the Mediterranean; and the fact that it became two empires, but remained one civilisation, just as it has become two churches, but remained one religion.

In this little world there is a story attached to every word; and never more than when it is the wrong word. For instance, we may say that in certain cases the word Roman actually means Greek. The Greek Patriarch is sometimes called the Roman Patriarch; while the real Roman Patriarch, who actually comes from Rome, is only called the Latin Patriarch, as if he came from any little town in Latium. The truth behind this confusion is the truth about five hundred very vital years, which are concealed even from cultivated Englishmen by two vague falsehoods; the notion that the Roman Empire was merely decadent and the notion that the Middle Ages were merely dark. As a fact, even the Dark Ages were not merely dark. And even the Byzantine Empire was not merely Byzantine. It seems a little unfair that we should take the very title of decay from that Christian city, for surely it was yet more stiff and sterile when it had become a Moslem city. I am not so exacting as to ask any one to popularise such a word as

"Constantinopolitan." But it would surely be a better word for stiffness and sterility to call it Stamboulish. But for the Moslems and other men of the Near East what counted about Byzantium was that it still inherited the huge weight of the name of Rome. Rome had come east and reared against them this Roman city, and though and priest or soldier who came out of it might be speaking as a Greek, he was ruling as a Roman. Its critics in these days of criticism may regard it as a corrupt civilisation. But its enemies in the day of battle only regarded it as civilisation. Saladin, the greatest of the Saracens, did not call Greek bishops degenerate dreamers or dingy outcasts, he called them, with a sounder historical instinct, "The monks of the imperial race." The survival of the word merely means that even when the imperial city fell behind them, they did not surrender their claim to defy all Asia in the name of the Christian Emperor. That is but one example out of twenty, but that is why in this distant place to this day the Greeks who are separated from the see of Rome sometimes bear the strange name of "The Romans."

Now that civilisation is our civilisation, and we never had any other. We have not inherited a Teutonic culture any more than a Druid culture; not half so much. The people who say that parliaments or pictures or gardens or roads or universities were made by the Teutonic race from the north can be disposed of by the simple question: why did not the Teutonic race make them in the north? Why was not the Parthenon originally built in the neighbourhood of Potsdam, or did ten Hansa towns compete to be the birthplace of Homer? Perhaps they do by this time; but their local illusion is no longer largely shared. Anyhow it seems strange that the roads of the Romans should be due to the inspiration of the Teutons; and that parliaments should begin in Spain because they came from Germany. If I looked about in these parts for a local emblem like that of the eagle, I might very well find it in the lion. The lion is common enough, of course, in Christian art both hagiological and heraldic. Besides the cavern of Bethlehem of which I shall speak presently, is the cavern of St. Jerome, where he lived with that real or legendary lion who was drawn by the delicate humour of Carpaccio and a hundred other religious painters. That it should appear in Christian art is natural; that it should appear in Moslem art is much more singular, seeing that Moslems are in theory forbidden so to carve images of living things. Some say the Persian Moslems are less particular; but whatever the explanation, two lions of highly heraldic appearance are carved over that Saracen gate which Christians call the gate of St. Stephen; and the best judges seem to agree that, like so much of the Saracenic shell of Zion, they were partly at least copied from the shields and crests of the Crusaders.

And the lions graven over the gate of St. Stephen might well be the text for a whole book on the subject. For if they indicate, however indirectly, the presence of the Latins of the twelfth century, they also indicate the earlier sources from which the Latin life had itself been drawn. The two lions are pacing, passant as the heralds would say, in two opposite directions almost as if prowling to and fro. And this also might well be symbolic as well as heraldic. For if the Crusaders brought the lion southward in spite of the conventional fancy of Moslem decoration, it was only because the Romans had previously brought the lion northward to the cold seas and the savage forests. The image of the lion came from north to south, only because the idea of the lion had long ago come from south to north. The Christian had a symbolic lion he had never seen, and the Moslem had a real lion that he refused to draw. For we could deduce from the case of this single creature the fact that all our civilisation came from the Mediterranean, and the folly of pretending that it came from the North Sea. Those two heraldic shapes over the gate may be borrowed from the Norman or Angevin shield now quartered in the Royal Arms of England. They may have been copied, directly or indirectly, from that great Angevin King of England whose title credited him with the heart of a lion. They may have in some far-off fashion the same ancestry as the boast or jest of our own comic papers when they talk about the British Lion. But why are there lions, though of French or feudal origin, on the flag of England? There might as well be camels or crocodiles, for all the apparent connection with England or with France. Why was an English king described as having the heart of a lion, any more than of a tiger? Why do your patriotic cartoons threaten the world with the wrath of the British Lion; it is really as strange as if they warned it against stimulating the rage of the British rhinoceros. Why did not the French and English princes find in the wild boars, that were the objects of their hunting, the subjects of their heraldry? If the Normans were really the Northmen, the sea-wolves of Scandinavian piracy, why did they not display three wolves on their shields? Why has not John Bull been content with the English bull, or the English bull-dog?

The answer might be put somewhat defiantly by saying that the very name of John Bull is foreign. The surname comes through France from Rome; and the Christian name comes through Rome from Palestine. If there had really been any justification for the Teutonic generalisation, we should expect the surname to be “ox” and not “bull”; and we should expect the hero standing as godfather to be Odin or Siegfried, and not the prophet who lived on locusts in the wilderness of Palestine or the mystic who mused with his burning eyes on the blue seas around Patmos. If our national hero is John Bull and not Olaf the Ox, it is ultimately because that blue sea has run like a blue thread through all the tapestries of our traditions; or in other words because our culture, like that of France or Flanders, came originally from the Mediterranean. And if this is true of our use of the word “bull,” it is obviously even truer of our use of the word “lion.” The later emblem is enough to show that the culture came, not only from the Mediterranean, but from the southern as well as the northern side of the Mediterranean. In other words, the Roman Empire ran all round the great inland sea; the very name of which meant, not merely the sea in the middle of the land, but more especially the sea in the middle of all the lands that mattered most to civilisation. One of these, and the one that in the long run has mattered most of all, was Palestine.

In this lies the deepest difference between a man like Richard the Lion Heart and any of the countless modern English soldiers in Palestine who have been quite as lion-hearted as he. His superiority was not moral but intellectual; it consisted in knowing where he was and why he was there. It arose from the fact that in his time there remained a sort of memory of the Roman Empire, which some would have re-established as a Holy Roman Empire. Christendom was still almost one commonwealth; and it seemed to Richard quite natural to go from one edge of it that happened to be called England to the opposite edge of it that happened to be called Palestine. We may think him right or wrong in the particular quarrel, we may think him innocent or unscrupulous in his incidental methods; but there is next to no doubt whatever that he did regard himself not merely as conquering but as re-conquering a realm. He was not like a man attacking total strangers on a hitherto undiscovered island. He was not opening up a new country, or giving his name to a new continent, and he could boast none of those ideals of imperial innovation which inspire the more enlightened pioneers, who exterminate tribes or extinguish republics for the sake of a gold-mine or an oil-field. Some day, if our modern educational system is further expanded and enforced, the whole of the past of Palestine may be entirely forgotten; and a traveller in happier days may have all the fresher sentiments of one stepping on a new and nameless soil. Disregarding any dim and lingering legends among the natives, he may then have the honour of calling Sinai by the name of Mount Higgins, or marking on a new map the site of Bethlehem with the name of Brownsville. But King Richard, adventurous as he was, could not experience the full freshness of this sort of adventure. He was not riding into Asia thus romantically and at random; indeed he was not riding into Asia at all. He was riding into Europa Irredenta.

But that is to anticipate what happened later and must be considered later. I am primarily speaking of the Empire as a pagan and political matter; and it is easy to see what was the meaning of the Crusade on the merely pagan and political side. In one sentence, it meant that Rome had to recover what Byzantium could not keep. But something further had happened as affecting Rome than anything that could be understood by a man standing as I have imagined myself standing, in the official area of Byzantium. When I have said that the Byzantian civilisation seemed still to be reigning, I meant a curious impression that, in these Eastern provinces, though the Empire had been more defeated it has been less disturbed. There is a greater clarity in that ancient air; and fewer clouds of real revolution and novelty have come between them and their ancient sun. This may seem an enigma and a paradox; seeing that here a foreign religion has successfully fought and ruled. But indeed the enigma is also the explanation. In the East the continuity of culture has only been interrupted by negative things that Islam has done. In the West it has been interrupted by positive things that Christendom itself has done. In the West the past of Christendom has its perspective blocked up by its own creations; in the East it is a true perspective of interminable corridors, with round Byzantine arches and proud Byzantine pillars. That, I incline to fancy, is the real difference that a man come from the west of Europe feels in the east of Europe, it is a gap or a void. It is the absence of the grotesque energy of Gothic, the absence of the experiments of parliament and popular representation, the absence of medieval chivalry, the absence of modern nationality. In the East the civilisation lived on, or if you will, lingered on; in the West it died and was reborn. But for a long time, it should be remembered, it must have seemed to the East merely that it died. The realms of Rome had disappeared in clouds of barbaric war, while the realms of Byzantium were still golden and gorgeous in the sun. The men of the East did not realise that their splendour was stiffening and growing sterile, and even the early successes of Islam may not have revealed to them that their rule was not only stiff but brittle. It was something else that was destined to reveal it. The Crusades meant many things; but in this matter they meant one thing, which was like a word carried to them on the great west wind. And the word was like that in an old Irish song: “The west is awake.” They heard in the distance the cries of unknown crowds and felt the earth shaking with the march of mobs; and behind them came the trampling of horses and the noise of harness and of horns of war; new kings calling out commands and hosts of young men full of hope crying out in the old Roman tongue “Id Deus vult,” Rome was risen from the dead.

Almost any traveller could select out of the countless things that he has looked at the few things that he has seen. I mean the things that come to him with a curious clearness; so that he actually sees them to be what he knows them to be. I might almost say that he can believe in them although he has seen them. There can be no rule about this realisation; it seems to come in the most random fashion; and the man to whom it comes can only speak for himself without any attempt at a critical comparison with others. In this sense I may say that the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem contains something impossible to describe, yet driving me beyond expression to a desperate attempt at description. The church is entered through a door so small that it it might fairly be called a hole, in which many have seen, and I think truly, a symbol of some idea of humility. It is also said that the wall was pierced in this way to prevent the appearance of a camel during divine service, but even that explanation would only repeat the same suggestion through the parable of the needle’s eye. Personally I should guess that, in so far as the purpose was practical, it was meant to keep out much more dangerous animals than camels, as, for instance, Turks. For the whole church has clearly been turned into a fortress, windows are bricked up and walls thickened in some or all of its thousand years of religious war. In the blank spaces above the little doorway hung in old times that strange mosaic of the Magi which once saved the holy place from destruction, in the strange interlude between the decline of Rome and the rise of Mahomet. For when the Persians who had destroyed Jerusalem rode out in triumph to the village of Bethlehem, they looked up and saw above the door a picture in coloured stone, a picture of themselves. They were following a strange star and worshipping an unknown child. For a Christian artist, following some ancient Eastern tradition containing an eternal truth, had drawn the three wise men with the long robes and high head-dresses of Persia. The worshippers of the sun had come westward for the worship of the star. But whether that part of the church were bare and bald as it is now or coloured with the gold and purple images of the Persians, the inside of the church would always be by comparison abruptly dark. As familiarity turns the darkness to twilight, and the twilight to a grey daylight, the first impression is that of two rows of towering pillars. They are of a dark red stone having much of the appearance of a dark red marble; and they are crowned with the acanthus in the manner of the Corinthian school. They were carved and set up at the command of Constantine; and beyond them, at the other end of the church beside the attar, is the dark stairway that descends under the canopies of rock to the stable where Christ was born.

Of all the things I have seen the most convincing, and as it were crushing, were these red columns of Constantine. In explanation of the sentiment there are a thousand things that want saying and cannot be said. Never have I felt so vividly the great fact of our history; that the Christian religion is like a huge bridge across a boundless sea, which alone connects us with the men who made the world, and yet have utterly vanished from the world. To put it curtly and very crudely on this point alone it was possible to sympathise with a Roman and not merely to admire him. All his pagan remains are but sublime fossils; for we can never know the life that was in them. We know that here and there was a temple to Venus or there an altar to Vesta; but who knows or pretends to know what he really felt about Venus or Vesta? Was a Vestal Virgin like a Christian Virgin, or something profoundly different? Was he quite serious about Venus, like a diabolist, or merely frivolous about Venus, like a Christian? If the spirit was different from ours we cannot hope to understand it, and if the spirit was like ours, the spirit was expressed in images that no longer express it. But it is here that he and I meet; and salute the same images in the end.

In any case I can never recapture in words the waves of sympathy with strange things that went through me in that twilight of the tall pillars, like giants robed in purple, standing still and looking down into that dark hole in the ground. Here halted that imperial civilisation, when it had marched in triumph through the whole world; here in the evening of its days it came trailing in all its panoply in the pathway of the three kings. For it came following not only a falling but a fallen star and one that dived before them into a birthplace darker than a grave. And the lord of the laurels, clad in his sombre crimson, looked down into that darkness, and then looked up, and saw that all the stars in his own sky were dead. They were deities no longer but only a brilliant dust, scattered down the vain void of Lucretius. The stars were as stale as they were strong; they would never die for they had never lived; they were cursed with an incurable immortality that was but the extension of mortality; they were chained in the chains of causation and unchangeable as the dead. There are not many men in the modern world who do not know that mood, though it was not discovered by the moderns; it was the final and seemingly fixed mood of nearly all the ancients. Only above the black hole of Bethlehem they had seen a star wandering like a lost spark; and it had done what the eternal suns and planets could not do. It had disappeared.

There are some who resent the presence of such purple beside the plain stable of the Nativity. But it seems strange that they always rebuke it as if it were a blind vulgarity like the red plush of a parvenu; a mere insensibility to a mere incongruity. For in fact the insensibility is in the critics and not the artists. It is an insensibility not to an accidental incongruity but to an artistic contrast. Indeed it is an insensibility of a somewhat tiresome kind, which can often be noticed in those sceptics who make a science of folk-lore. The mark of them is that they fail to see the importance of finding the upshot or climax of a tale, even when it is a fairy-tale. Since the old devotional doctors and designers were never tired of insisting on the sufferings of the holy poor to the point of squalor, and simultaneously insisting on the sumptuousness of the subject kings to the point of swagger, it would really seem not entirely improbable that they may have been conscious of the contrast themselves. I confess this is an insensibility, not to say stupidity, in the sceptics and simplifiers, which I find very fatiguing. I do not mind a man not believing a story, but I confess I am bored stiff (if I may be allowed the expression) by a man who can tell a story without seeing the point of the story, considered as a story or even considered as a lie. And a man who sees the rags and the royal purple as a clumsy inconsistency is merely missing the meaning of a deliberate design. He is like a man who should hear the story of King Cophetua and the beggar maid and say doubtfully that it was hard to recognise it as really *a mariage de* *convenance*; a phrase which (I may remark in parenthesis but not without passion) is not the French for “a marriage of convenience,” any more than *hors d’oeuvre* is the French for “out of work”; but may be more rightly rendered in English as “a suitable match.” But nobody thought the match of the king and the beggar maid conventionally a suitable match; and nobody would ever have thought the story worth telling if it had been. It is like saying that Diogenes, remaining in his tub after the offer of Alexander, must have been unaware of the opportunities of Greek architecture; or like saying that Nebuchadnezzar eating grass is clearly inconsistent with court etiquette, or not to be found in any fashionable cookery book. I do not mind the learned sceptic saying it is a legend or a lie; but I weep for him when he cannot see the gist of it, I might even say the joke of it. I do not object to his rejecting the story as a tall story; but I find it deplorable when he cannot see the point or end or upshot of the tall story, the very pinnacle or spire of that sublime tower.

This dull type of doubt clouds the consideration of many sacred things as it does that of the shrine of Bethlehem. It is applied to the divine reality of Bethlehem itself, as when sceptics still sneer at the littleness, the localism, the provincial particularity and obscurity of that divine origin; as if Christians could be confounded and silenced by a contrast which Christians in ten thousand hymns, songs and sermons have incessantly shouted and proclaimed. In this capital case, of course, the same principle holds. A man may think the tale is incredible; but it would never have been told at all if it had not been incongruous. But this particular case of the lesser contrast, that between the imperial pomp and the rustic poverty of the carpenter and the shepherds, is alone enough to illustrate the strange artistic fallacy involved. If it be the point that an emperor came to worship a carpenter, it is as artistically necessary to make the emperor imperial as to make the carpenter humble; if we wish to make plain to plain people that before this shrine kings are no better than shepherds, it is as necessary that the kings should have crowns as that the shepherds should have crooks. And if modern intellectuals do not know it, it is because nobody has really been mad enough even to try to make modern intellectualism popular. Now this conception of pomp as a popular thing, this conception of a concession to common human nature in colour and symbol, has a considerable bearing on many misunderstandings about the original enthusiasm that spread from the cave of Bethlehem over the whole Roman Empire. It is a curious fact that the moderns have mostly rebuked historic Christianity, not for being narrow, but for being broad. They have rebuked it because it did prove itself the desire of all nations, because it did satisfy the cravings of many creeds, because it did prove itself to idolaters as something as magic as their idols, or did prove itself to patriots something as lovable as their native land. In many other matters indeed, besides this popular art, we may find examples of the same illogical prejudice. Nothing betrays more curiously the bias of historians against the Christian faith than the fact that they blame in Christians the very human indulgences that they have praised in heathens. The same arts and allegories, the same phraseologies and philosophies, which appear first as proofs of heathen health turn up later as proofs of Christian corruption. It was noble of pagans to be pagan, but it was unpardonable of Christians to be paganised. They never tire of telling us of the glory that was Greece, the grandeur that was Rome, but the Church was infamous because it satisfied the Greek intellect and wielded the Roman power.

Now on the first example of the attempt of theology to meet the claims of philosophy I will not here dwell at length. I will only remark in passing that it is an utter fallacy to suggest, as for instance Mr. Wells suggests in his fascinating *Outline of History*, that the subtleties of theology were a mere falling away from the simplicities of religion. Religion may be better simple for those who find it simple; but there are bound to be many who in any case find it subtle, among those who think about it and especially those who doubt about it. To take an example, there is no saying which the humanitarians of a broad religion more commonly offer as a model of simplicity than that most mystical affirmation “God is Love.” And there is no theological quarrel of the Councils of the Church which they, especially Mr. Wells, more commonly deride as bitter and barren than that at the Council of Nicea about the Co-eternity of the Divine Son. Yet the subtle statement is simply a metaphysical explanation of the simple statement; and it would be quite possible even to make it a popular explanation, by saying that God could not love when there was nothing to be loved. Now the Church Councils were originally very popular, not to say riotous assemblies. So far from being undemocratic, they were rather too democratic; the real case against them was that they passed by uproarious votes, and not without violence, things that had ultimately to be considered more calmly by experts. But it may reasonably be suggested, I think, that the concentration of the Greek intellect on these things did gradually pass from a popular to a more professional or official thing; and that the traces of it have finally tended to fade from the official religion of the East. It was far otherwise with the more poetical and therefore more practical religion of the West. It was far otherwise with that direct appeal to pathos and affection in the highly coloured picture of the Shepherd and the King. In the West the world not only prolonged its life but recovered its youth. That is the meaning of the movement I have described as the awakening of the West and the resurrection of Rome. And the whole point of that movement, as I propose to suggest, was that it was a popular movement. It had returned with exactly that strange and simple energy that belongs to the story of Bethlehem. Not in vain had Constantine come clad in purple to look down into that dark cave at his feet; nor did the star mislead him when it seemed to end in the entrails of the earth. The men who followed him passed on, as it were, through the low and vaulted tunnel of the Dark Ages; but they had found the way, and the only way, out of that world of death, and their journey ended in the land of the living. They came out into a world more wonderful than the eyes of men have looked on before or after; they heard the hammers of hundreds of happy craftsmen working for once according to their own will, and saw St. Francis walking with his halo a cloud of birds.

CHAPTER XI

THE MEANING OF THE CRUSADE

There are three examples of Western work on the great eastern slope of the Mount of Olives; and they form a sort of triangle illustrating the truth about the different influences of the West on the East. At the foot of the hill is the garden kept by the Franciscans on the alleged site of Gethsemane, and containing the hoary olive that is supposed to be the terrible tree of the agony of Christ. Given the great age and slow growth of the olives, the tradition is not so unreasonable as some may suppose. But whether or not it is historically right, it is not artistically wrong. The instinct, if it was only an instinct, that made men fix upon this strange growth of grey and twisted wood, was a true imaginative instinct. One of the strange qualities of this strange Southern tree is its almost startling hardness; accidentally to strike the branch of an olive is like striking rock. With its stony surface, stunted stature, and strange holes and hollows, it is often more like a grotto than a tree. Hence it does not seem so unnatural that it should be treated as a holy grotto; or that this strange vegetation should claim to stand for ever like a sculptured monument. Even the shimmering or shivering silver foliage of the living olive might well have a legend like that of the aspen; as if it had grown grey with fear from the apocalyptic paradox of a divine vision of death. A child from one of the villages said to me, in broken English, that it was the place where God said his prayers. I for one could not ask for a finer or more defiant statement of all that separates the Christian from the Moslem or the Jew; *credo quia impossibile*.

Around this terrible spot the Franciscans have done something which will strike many good and thoughtful people as quite fantastically inadequate; and which strikes me as fantastically but precisely right. They have laid out the garden simply as a garden, in a way that is completely natural because it is completely artificial. They have made flower-beds in the shape of stars and moons, and coloured them with flowers like those in the backyard of a cottage. The combination of these bright patterns in the sunshine with the awful shadow in the centre is certainly an incongruity in the sense of a contrast. But it is a poetical contrast, like that of birds building in a temple or flowers growing on a tomb. The best way of suggesting what I for one feel about it would be something like this; suppose we imagine a company of children, such as those whom Christ blessed in Jerusalem, afterwards put permanently in charge of a field full of his sorrow; it is probable that, if they could do anything with it, they would do something like this. They might cut it up into quaint shapes and dot it with red daisies or yellow marigolds. I really do not know that there is anything better that grown up people could do, since anything that the greatest of them could do must be, must look quite as small. “Shall I, the gnat that dances in Thy ray, dare to be reverent?” The Franciscans have not dared to be reverent; they have only dared to be cheerful. It may be too awful an adventure of the imagination to imagine Christ in that garden. But there is not the smallest difficulty about imagining St. Francis there; and that is something to say of an institution which is eight hundred years old.

Immediately above this little garden, overshadowing and almost overhanging it, is a gorgeous gilded building with golden domes and minarets glittering in the sun, and filling a splendid situation with almost shameless splendour; the Russian church built over the upper part of the garden, belonging to the Orthodox-Greeks. Here again many Western travellers will be troubled; and will think that golden building much too like a fairy palace in a pantomime. But here again I shall differ from them, though perhaps less strongly. It may be that the pleasure is childish rather than childlike; but I can imagine a child clapping his hands at the mere sight of those great domes like bubbles of gold against the blue sky. It is a little like Aladdin’s Palace, but it has a place in art as Aladdin has a place in literature; especially since it is oriental literature. Those wise missionaries in China who were not afraid to depict the Twelve Apostles in the costume of Chinamen might have built such a church in a land of glittering mosques. And as it is said that the Russian has in him something of the child and something of the oriental, such a style may be quite sincere, and have even a certain simplicity in its splendour. It is genuine of its kind; it was built for those who like it; and those who do not like it can look at something else. This sort of thing may be called tawdry, but it is not what I call meretricious. What I call really meretricious can be found yet higher on the hill; towering to the sky and dominating all the valleys.

The nature of the difference, I think, is worth noting. The German Hospice, which served as a sort of palace for the German Emperor, is a very big building with a very high tower, planned I believe with great efficiency, solidity and comfort, and fitted with a thousand things that mark its modernity compared with the things around, with the quaint garden of the Franciscans or the fantastic temple of the Russians. It is what I can only describe as a handsome building; rather as the more vulgar of the Victorian wits used to talk about a fine woman. By calling it a handsome building I mean that from the top of its dizzy tower to the bottom of its deepest foundations there is not one line or one tint of beauty. This negative fact, however, would be nothing; it might be honestly ugly and utilitarian like a factory or a prison; but it is not. It is as pretentious as the gilded dome below it; and it is pretentious in a wicked way where the other is pretentious in a good and innocent way. What annoys me about it is that it was not built by children, or even by savages, but by professors; and the professors could profess the art and could not practise it. The architects knew everything about a Romanesque building except how to build it. We feel that they accumulated on that spot all the learning and organisation and information and wealth of the world, to do this one particular thing; and then did it wrong. They did it wrong, not through superstition, not through fanatical exaggeration, not through provincial ignorance, but through pure, profound, internal, intellectual incompetence; that intellectual incompetence which so often goes with intellectual pride. I will mention only one matter out of a hundred. All the columns in the Kaiser’s Chapel are in one way very suitable to their place; every one of them has a swelled head. The column itself is slender but the capital is not only big but bulging; and it has the air of bulging *downwards*, as if pressing heavily on something too slender to support it. This is false, not to any of the particular schools of architecture about which professors can read in libraries, but to the inmost instinctive idea of architecture itself. A Norman capital can be heavy because the Norman column is thick, and the whole thing expresses an elephantine massiveness and repose. And a Gothic column can be slender, because its strength is energy; and is expressed in its line, which shoots upwards like the life of a tree, like the jet of a fountain or even like the rush of a rocket. But a slender thing beneath, obviously oppressed by a bloated thing above, suggests weakness by one of those miraculous mistakes that are as precisely wrong as masterpieces are precisely right. And to all this is added the intolerable intuition; that the Russians and the Franciscans, even if we credit them with fantastic ignorance, are at least looking up at the sky; and we know how the learned Germans would look down upon them, from their monstrous tower upon the hill.

And this is as true of the moral as of the artistic elements in the modern Jerusalem. To show that I am not unjustly partisan, I will say frankly that I see little to complain of in that common subject of complaint; the mosaic portrait of the Emperor on the ceiling of the chapel. It is but one among many figures; and it is not an unknown practice to include a figure of the founder in such church decorations. The real example of that startling moral stupidity which marked the barbaric imperialism can be found in another figure of which, curiously enough, considerably less notice seems to have been taken. It is the more remarkable because it is but an artistic shadow of the actual fact; and merely records in outline and relief the temporary masquerade in which the man walked about in broad daylight. I mean the really astounding trick of dressing himself up as a Crusader. That was, under the circumstances, far more ludicrous and lunatic a proceeding than if he had filled the whole ceiling with cherub heads with his own features, or festooned all the walls with one ornamental pattern of his moustaches.

The German Emperor came to Jerusalem under the escort of the Turks, as the ally of the Turks, and solely because of the victory and supremacy of the Turks. In other words, he came to Jerusalem solely because the Crusaders had lost Jerusalem; he came there solely because the Crusaders had been routed, ruined, butchered before and after the disaster of Hattin: because the Cross had gone down in blood before the Crescent, under which alone he could ride in with safety. Under those circumstances to dress up as a Crusader, as if for a fancy dress ball, was a mixture of madness and vulgarity which literally stops the breath. There is no need whatever to blame him for being in alliance with the Turks; hundreds of people have been in alliance with the Turks; the English especially have been far too much in alliance with them. But if any one wants to appreciate the true difference, distinct from all the cant of newspaper nationality, between the English and the Germans (who were classed together by the same newspapers a little time before the war) let him take this single incident as a test. Lord Palmerston, for instance, was a firm friend of the Turks. Imagine Lord Palmerston appearing in chain mail and the shield of a Red Cross Knight.

It is obvious enough that Palmerston would have said that he cared no more for the Crusade than for the Siege of Troy; that his diplomacy was directed by practical patriotic considerations of the moment; and that he regarded the religious wars of the twelfth century as a rubbish heap of remote superstitions. In this he would be quite wrong, but quite intelligible and quite sincere; an English aristocrat of the nineteenth century inheriting from the English aristocrats of the eighteenth century; whose views were simply those of Voltaire. And these things are something of an allegory. For the Voltairian version of the Crusades is still by far the most reasonable of all merely hostile views of the Crusades. If they were not a creative movement of religion, then they were simply a destructive movement of superstition; and whether we agree with Voltaire in calling it superstition or with Villehardouin in calling it religion, at least both these very clear-headed Frenchmen would agree that the motive did exist and did explain the facts. But just as there is a clumsy German building with statues that at once patronise and parody the Crusaders, so there is a clumsy German theory that at once patronises and minimises the Crusades. According to this theory the essential truth about a Crusade was that it was not a Crusade. It was something that the professors, in the old days before the war, used to call a Teutonic Folk-Wandering. Godfrey and St. Louis were not, as Villehardouin would say, fighting for the truth; they were not even, as Voltaire would say, fighting for what they thought was the truth; this was only what they thought they thought, and they were really thinking of something entirely different. They were not moved either by piety or priestcraft, but by a new and unexpected nomadism. They were not inspired either by faith or fanaticism, but by an unusually aimless taste for foreign travel. This theory that the war of the two great religions could be explained by “Wanderlust” was current about twenty years ago among the historical professors of Germany, and with many of their other views, was often accepted by the historical professors of England. It was swallowed by an earthquake, along with other rubbish, in the year 1914.

Since then, so far as I know, the only person who has been patient enough to dig it up again is Mr. Ezra Pound. He is well known as an American poet; and he is, I believe, a man of great talent and information. His attempt to recover the old Teutonic theory of the Folk-Wandering of Peter the Hermit was expressed, however, in prose; in an article in the *New Age*. I have no reason to doubt that he was to be counted among the most loyal of our allies; but he is evidently one of those who, quite without being Pro-German, still manage to be German. The Teutonic theory was very

Teutonic; like the German Hospice on the hill it was put together with great care and knowledge and it is rotten from top to bottom. I do not understand, for that matter, why that alliance which we enjoy with Mr. Pound should not be treated in the same way as the other historical event; or why the war should not be an example of the Wanderlust. Surely the American Army in France must have drifted eastward merely through the same vague nomadic need as the Christian Army in Palestine. Surely Pershing as well as Peter the Hermit was merely a rather restless gentleman who found his health improved by frequent change of scene. The Americans said, and perhaps thought, that they were fighting for democracy; and the Crusaders said, and perhaps thought, that they were fighting for Christianity. But as we know what the Crusaders meant better than they did themselves, I cannot quite understand why we do not enjoy the same valuable omniscience about the Americans. Indeed I do not see why we should not enjoy it (for it would be very enjoyable) about any individual American. Surely it was this vague vagabond spirit that moved Mr. Pound, not only to come to England, but in a fashion to come to Fleet Street. A dim tribal tendency, vast and invisible as the wind, carried him and his article like an autumn leaf to alight on the *New Age* doorstep. Or a blind aboriginal impulse, wholly without rational motive, led him one day to put on his hat, and go out with his article in an envelope and put it in a pillar-box. It is vain to correct by cold logic the power of such primitive appetites; nature herself was behind the seemingly random thoughtlessness of the deed. And now that it is irrevocably done, he can look back on it and trace the large lines of an awful law of averages; wherein it is ruled by a ruthless necessity that a certain number of such Americans should write a certain number of such articles, as the leaves fall or the flowers return.

In plain words, this sort of theory is a blasphemy against the intellectual dignity of man. It is a blunder as well as a blasphemy; for it goes miles out of its way to find a bestial explanation when there is obviously a human explanation. It is as if a man told me that a dim survival of the instincts of a quadruped was the reason of my sitting on a chair with four legs. I answer that I do it because I foresee that there may be grave disadvantages in sitting on a chair with one leg. Or it is as if I were told that I liked to swim in the sea, solely because some early forms of amphibian life came out of the sea on to the shore. I answer that I know why I swim in the sea; and it is because the divine gift of reason tells me that it would be unsatisfactory to swim on the land. In short this sort of vague evolutionary theorising simply amounts to finding an unconvincing explanation of something that needs no explanation. And the case is really quite as simple with great political and religious movements by which man has from time to time changed the world in this or that respect in which he happened to think it would be the better for a change. The Crusade was a religious movement, but it was also a perfectly rational movement; one might almost say a rationalist movement. I could quite understand Mr. Pound saying that such a campaign for a creed was immoral; and indeed it often has been, and now perhaps generally is, quite horribly immoral. But when he implies that it is irrational he has selected exactly the thing which it is not.

It is not enlightenment, on the contrary it is ignorance and insularity, which causes most of us to miss this fact. But it certainly is the fact that religious war is in itself much more rational than patriotic war. I for one have often defended and even encouraged patriotic war, and should always be ready to defend and encourage patriotic passion. But it cannot be denied that there is more of mere passion, of mere preference and prejudice, in short of mere personal accident, in fighting another nation than in fighting another faith. The Crusader is in every sense more rational than the modern conscript or professional soldier. He is more rational in his object, which is the intelligent and intelligible object of conversion; where the modern militarist has an object much more confused by momentary vanity and one-sided satisfaction. The Crusader wished to make Jerusalem a Christian town; but the Englishman does not wish to make Berlin an English town. He has only a healthy hatred of it as a Prussian town. The Moslem wished to make the Christian a Moslem; but even the Prussian did not wish to make the Frenchman a Prussian. He only wished to make the Frenchman admire a Prussian; and not only were the means he adopted somewhat ill-considered for this purpose, but the purpose itself is looser and more irrational. The object of all war is peace; but the object of religious war is mental as well as material peace; it is agreement. In short religious war aims ultimately at equality, where national war aims relatively at superiority. Conversion is the one sort of conquest in which the conquered must rejoice.

In that sense alone it is foolish for us in the West to sneer at those who kill men when a foot is set in a holy place, when we ourselves kill hundreds of thousands when a foot is put across a frontier. It is absurd for us to despise those who shed blood for a relic when we have shed rivers of blood for a rag. But above all the Crusade, or, for that matter, the Jehad, is by far the most philosophical sort of fighting, not only in its conception of ending the difference, but in its mere act of recognising the difference, as the deepest kind of difference. It is to reverse all reason to suggest that a man's politics matter and his religion does not matter. It is to say he is affected by the town he lives in, but not by the world he lives in. It is to say that he is altered when he is a fellow-citizen walking under new lamp-posts, but not altered when he is another creature walking under strange stars. It is exactly as if we were to say that two people ought to live in the same house, but it need not be in the same town. It is exactly as if we said that so long as the address included York it did not matter whether it was New York; or that so long as a man is in Essex we do not care whether he is in England.

Christendom would have been entirely justified in the abstract in being alarmed or suspicious at the mere rise of a great power that was not Christian. Nobody nowadays would think it odd to express regret at the rise of a power because it was Militarist or Socialist or even Protectionist. But it is far more natural to be conscious of a difference, not about the order of battle but the battle of life; not about our definable enjoyment of possessions, but about our much more doubtful possession of enjoyment; not about the fiscal divisions between us and foreigners but about the spiritual divisions even between us and friends. These are the things that differ profoundly with differing views of the ultimate nature of the universe. For the things of our country are often distant; but the things of our cosmos are always near; we can shut our doors upon the wheeled traffic of our native town; but in our own inmost chamber we hear the sound that never ceases; that wheel which Dante and a popular proverb have dared to christen as the love that makes the world go round. For this is the great paradox of life; that there are not only wheels within wheels, but the larger wheels within the smaller. When a whole community rests on one conception of life and death and the origin of things, it is quite entitled to watch the rise of another community founded on another conception as the rise of something certain to be different and likely to be hostile. Indeed, as I have pointed out touching certain political theories, we already admit this truth in its small and questionable examples. We only deny the large and obvious examples.

Christendom might quite reasonably have been alarmed if it had not been attacked. But as a matter of history it had been attacked. The Crusader would have been quite justified in suspecting the Moslem even if the Moslem had merely been a new stranger; but as a matter of history he was already an old enemy. The critic of the Crusade talks as if it had sought out some inoffensive tribe or temple in the interior of Thibet, which was never discovered until it was invaded. They seem entirely to forget that long before the Crusaders had dreamed of riding to Jerusalem, the Moslems had almost ridden into Paris. They seem to forget that if the Crusaders nearly conquered Palestine, it was but a return upon the Moslems who had nearly conquered Europe. There was no need for them to argue by an appeal to reason, as I have argued above, that a religious division must make a difference; it had already made a difference. The difference stared them in the face in the startling transformation of Roman Barbary and of Roman Spain. In short it was something which must happen in theory and which did happen in practice; all expectation suggested that it would be so and all experience said it was so. Having thought it out theoretically and experienced it practically, they proceeded to deal with it equally practically. The first division involved every principle of the science of thought; and the last developments followed out every principle of the science of war. The Crusade was the counter-attack. It was the defensive army taking the offensive in its turn, and driving back the enemy to his base. And it is this process, reasonable from its first axiom to its last act, that Mr. Pound actually selects as a sort of automatic wandering of an animal. But a man so intelligent would not have made a mistake so extraordinary but for another error which it is here very essential to consider. To suggest that men engaged, rightly or wrongly, in so logical a military and political operation were only migrating like birds or swarming like bees is as ridiculous as to say that the Prohibition campaign in America was only an animal reversion towards lapping as the dog lappeth, or Rowland Hill’s introduction of postage stamps an animal taste for licking as the cat licks. Why should we provide other people with a remote reason for their own actions, when they themselves are ready to tell us the reason, and it is a perfectly reasonable reason?

I have compared this pompous imposture of scientific history to the pompous and clumsy building of the scientific Germans on the Mount of Olives, because it substitutes in the same way a modern stupidity for the medieval simplicity. But just as the German Hospice after all stands on a fine site, and might have been a fine building, so there is after all another truth, somewhat analogous, which the German historians of the Folk-Wanderings might possibly have meant, as distinct from all that they have actually said. There is indeed one respect in which the case of the Crusade does differ very much from modern political cases like prohibition or the penny post. I do not refer to such incidental peculiarities as the fact that Prohibition could only have succeeded through the enormous power of modern plutocracy, or that even the convenience of the postage goes along with an extreme coercion by the police. It is a somewhat deeper difference that I mean; and it may possibly be what these critics mean. But the difference is not in the evolutionary, but rather the revolutionary spirit.

The First Crusade was not a racial migration; it was something much more intellectual and dignified; a riot. In order to understand this religious war we must class it, not so much with the wars of history as with the revolutions of history. As I shall try to show briefly on a later page, it not only had all the peculiar good and the peculiar evil of things like the French Revolution or the Russian Revolution, but it was a more purely popular revolution than either of them. The truly modern mind will of course regard the contention that it was popular as tantamount to a confession that it was animal. In these days when papers and speeches are full of words like democracy and self-determination, anything really resembling the movement of a mass of angry men is regarded as no better than a stampede of bulls or a scurry of rats. The new sociologists call it the herd instinct, just as the old reactionaries called it the many-headed beast. But both agree in implying that it is hardly worth while to count how many head there are of such cattle. In face of such fashionable comparisons it will seem comparatively mild to talk of migration as it occurs among birds or insects. Nevertheless we may venture to state with some confidence that both the sociologists and the reactionaries are wrong. It does not follow that human beings become less than human because their ideas appeal to more and more of humanity. Nor can we deduce that men are mindless solely from the fact that they are all of one mind. In plain fact the virtues of a mob cannot be found in a herd of bulls or a pack of wolves, any more than the crimes of a mob can be committed by a flock of sheep or a shoal of herrings. Birds have never been known to besiege and capture an empty cage of an aviary, on a point of principle, merely because it had kept a few other birds in captivity, as the mob besieged and captured the almost empty Bastille, merely because it was the fortress of a historic tyranny. And rats have never been known to die by thousands merely in order to visit a particular trap in which a particular rat had perished, as the poor peasants of the First Crusade died in thousands for a far-off sight of the Sepulchre or a fragment of the true cross. In this sense indeed the Crusade was not rationalistic, if the rat is the only rationalist. But it will seem more truly rational to point out that the inspiration of such a crowd is not in such instincts as we share with the animals, but precisely in such ideas as the animals never (with all their virtues) understand.

What is peculiar about the First Crusade is that it was in quite a new and abnormal sense a popular movement. I might almost say it was the only popular movement there ever was in the world. For it was not a thing which the populace followed; it was actually a thing which the populace led. It was not only essentially a revolution, but it was the only revolution I know of in which the masses began by acting alone, and practically without any support from any of the classes. When they had acted, the classes came in; and it is perfectly true, and indeed only natural, that the masses alone failed where the two together succeeded. But it was the uneducated who educated the educated. The case of the Crusade is emphatically not a case in which certain ideas were first suggested by a few philosophers, and then preached by demagogues to the democracy. This was to a great extent true of the French Revolution; it was probably yet more true of the Russian Revolution; and we need not here pause upon the fine shade of difference that Rousseau was right and Karl Marx was wrong. In the First Crusade it was the ordinary man who was right or wrong. He came out in a fury at the insult to his own little images or private prayers, as if he had come out to fight with his own domestic poker or private carving-knife. He was not armed with new weapons of wit and logic served round from the arsenal of an academy. There was any amount of wit and logic in the academies of the Middle Ages; but the typical leader of the Crusade was not Abelard or Aquinas but Peter the Hermit, who can hardly be called even a popular leader, but rather a popular flag. And it was his army, or rather his enormous rabble, that first marched across the world to die for the deliverance of Jerusalem.

Historians say that in that huge host of thousands there were only nine knights. To any one who knows even a little of medieval war the fact seems astounding. It is indeed a long exploded fallacy to regard medievalism as identical with feudalism. There were countless democratic institutions, such as the guilds; sometimes as many as twenty guilds in one small town. But it is really true that the military organization of the Middle Ages was almost entirely feudal; indeed we might rather say that feudalism was the name of their military organisation. That so vast a military mass should have attempted to move at all, with only nine of the natural military leaders, seems to me a prodigy of popular initiative. It is as if a parliament were elected at the next general election, in which only two men could afford to read a daily newspaper.

This mob marched against the military discipline of the Moslems and was massacred; or, might I so mystically express it, martyred. Many of the great kings and knights who followed in their tracks did not so clearly deserve any haloes for the simplicity and purity of their motives. The canonisation of such a crowd might be impossible, and would certainly be resisted in modern opinion; chiefly because they indulged their democratic violence on the way by killing various usurers; a course which naturally fills modern society with an anger verging on alarm. A perversity leads me to weep rather more over the many slaughtered peasants than over the few slaughtered usurers; but in any case the peasants certainly were not slaughtered in vain. The common conscience of all classes, in a time when all had a common creed, was aroused, and a new army followed of a very different type of skill and training; led by most of the ablest captains and by some of the most chivalrous gentlemen of the age. For curiously enough, the host contained more than one cultured gentleman who was as simple a Christian as any peasant, and as recklessly ready to be butchered or tortured for the mere name of Christ.

It is a tag of the materialists that the truth about history rubs away the romance of history. It is dear to the modern mind because it is depressing; but it does not happen to be true. Nothing emerges more clearly from a study that is truly realistic, than the curious fact that romantic people were really romantic. It is rather the historical novels that will lead a modern man vaguely to expect to find the leader of the new knights, Godfrey de Bouillon, to have been merely a brutal baron. The historical facts are all in favour of his having been much more like a knight of the Round Table. In fact he was a far better man than most of the knights of the Round Table, in whose characters the fabulist, knowing that he was writing a fable, was tactful enough to introduce a larger admixture of vice. Truth is not only stranger than fiction, but often saintlier than fiction. For truth is real, while fiction is bound to be realistic. Curiously enough Godfrey seems to have been heroic even in those admirable accidents which are generally and perhaps rightly regarded as the trappings of fiction. Thus he was of heroic stature, a handsome red-bearded man of great personal strength and daring; and he was himself the first man over the wall of Jerusalem, like any boy hero in a boy's adventure story. But he was also, the realist will be surprised to hear, a perfectly honest man, and a perfectly genuine practiser of the theoretical magnanimity of knighthood. Everything about him suggests it; from his first conversion from the imperial to the papal (and popular) cause, to his great refusal of the kinghood of the city he had taken; "I will not wear a crown of gold where my Master wore a crown of thorns." He was a just ruler, and the laws he made were full of the plainest public spirit. But even if we dismiss all that was written of him by Christian chroniclers because they might be his friends (which would be a pathetic and exaggerated compliment to the harmonious unity of Crusaders and of Christians) he would still remain sufficiently assoiled and crowned with the words of his enemies. For a Saracen chronicler wrote of him, with a fine simplicity, that if all truth and honour had otherwise withered off the earth, there would still remain enough of them so long as Duke Godfrey was alive.

Allied with Godfrey were Tancred the Italian, Raymond of Toulouse with the southern French and Robert of Normandy, the adventurous son of the Conqueror, with the Normans and the English. But it would be an error, I think, and one tending to make the whole subsequent story a thing not so much misunderstood as unintelligible, to suppose that the whole crusading movement had been suddenly and unnaturally stiffened with the highest chivalric discipline. Unless I am much mistaken, a great mass of that army was still very much of a mob. It is probable *a priori*, since the great popular movement was still profoundly popular. It is supported by a thousand things in the story of the campaign; the extraordinary emotionalism that made throngs of men weep and wail together, the importance of the demagogue, Peter the Hermit, in spite of his unmilitary character, and the wide differences between the designs of the leaders and the actions of the rank and file. It was a crowd of rude and simple men that cast themselves on the sacred dust at the first sight of the little mountain town which they had tramped for two thousand miles to see. Tancred saw it first from the slope by the village of Bethlehem, which had opened its gates willingly to his hundred Italian knights; for Bethlehem then as now was an island of

Christendom in the sea of Islam. Meanwhile Godfrey came up the road from Jaffa, and crossing the mountain ridge, saw also with his living eyes his vision of the world’s desire. But the poorest men about him probably felt the same as he; all ranks knelt together in the dust, and the whole story is one wave of numberless and nameless men. It was a mob that had risen like a man for the faith. It was a mob that had truly been tortured like a man for the faith. It was already transfigured by pain as well as passion. Those that know war in those deserts through the summer months, even with modern supplies and appliances and modern maps and calculations, know that it could only be described as a hell full of heroes. What it must have been to those little local serfs and peasants from the Northern villages, who had never dreamed in nightmares of such landscapes or such a sun, who knew not how men lived at all in such a furnace and could neither guess the alleviations nor get them, is beyond the imagination of man. They arrived dying with thirst, dropping with weariness, lamenting the loss of the dead that rotted along their road; they arrived shrivelled to rags or already raving with fever and they did what they had come to do.

Above all, it is clear that they had the vices as well as the virtues of a mob. The shocking massacre in which they indulged in the sudden relaxation of success is quite obviously a massacre by a mob. It is all the more profoundly revolutionary because it must have been for the most part a French mob. It was of the same order as the Massacre of September, and it is but a part of the same truth that the First Crusade was as revolutionary as the French Revolution. It was of the same order as the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, which was also a piece of purely popular fanaticism, directed against what was also regarded as an anti-national aristocracy. It is practically self-evident that the Christian commanders were opposed to it, and tried to stop it. Tancred promised their lives to the Moslems in the mosque, but the mob clearly disregarded him. Raymond of Toulouse himself saved those in the Tower of David, and managed to send them safely with their property to Ascalon. But revolution with all its evil as well as its good was loose and raging in the streets of the Holy City. And in nothing do we see that spirit of revolution more clearly than in the sight of all those peasants and serfs and vassals, in that one wild moment in revolt, not only against the conquered lords of Islam, but even against the conquering lords of Christendom.

The whole strain of the siege indeed had been one of high and even horrible excitement. Those who tell us to-day about the psychology of the crowd will agree that men who have so suffered and so succeeded are not normal; that their brains are in a dreadful balance which may turn either way. They entered the city at last in a mood in which they might all have become monks; and instead they all became murderers. A brilliant general, who played a decisive part in our own recent Palestinian campaign, told me with a sort of grim humour that he hardly wondered at the story; for he himself had entered Jerusalem in a sort of fury of disappointment; “We went through such a hell to get there, and now it’s spoilt for all of us.” Such is the heavy irony that hangs over our human nature, making it enter the Holy City as if it were the Heavenly City, and more than any earthly city can be. But the struggle which led to the scaling of Jerusalem in the First Crusade was something much wilder and more incalculable than anything that can be conceived in modern war. We can hardly wonder that the crusading crowd saw the town in front of them as a sort of tower full of demons, and the hills around them as an enchanted and accursed land. For in one very real sense it really was so; for all the elements and expedients were alike unknown qualities. All their enemies’ methods were secrets sprung upon them. All their own methods were new things made out of nothing. They wondered alike what would be done on the other side and what could be done on their own side; every movement against them was a stab out of the darkness and every movement they made was a leap in the dark. First, on the one side, we have Tancred trying to take the whole fortified city by climbing up a single slender ladder, as if a man tried to lasso the peak of a mountain. Then we have the flinging from the turrets of a strange and frightful fiery rain, as if water itself had caught fire. It was afterwards known as the Greek Fire and was probably petroleum; but to those who had never seen (or felt) it before it may well have seemed the flaming oil of witchcraft. Then Godfrey and the wiser of the warriors set about to build wooden siege-towers and found they had next to no wood to build them. There was scarcely anything in that rocky waste but the dwarf trees of olive; a poetic fantasy woven about that war in after ages described them as hindered even in their wood-cutting by the demons of that weird place. And indeed the fancy had an essential truth, for the very nature of the land fought against them; and each of those dwarf trees, hard and hollow and twisted, may well have seemed like a grinning goblin. It is said that they found timbers by accident in a cavern; they tore down the beams from ruined houses; at last they got into touch with some craftsmen from Genoa who went to work more successfully; skinning the cattle, who had died in heaps, and covering the timbers. They built three high towers on rollers, and men and beasts dragged them heavily against the high towers of the city. The catapults of the city answered them, the cataracts of devouring fire came down; the wooden towers swayed and tottered, and two of them suddenly stuck motionless and useless. And as the darkness fell a great flare must have told them that the third and last was in flames.

All that night Godfrey was toiling to retrieve the disaster. He took down the whole tower from where it stood and raised it again on the high ground to the north of the city which is now marked by the pine tree that grows outside Herod’s gate. And all the time he toiled, it was said, sinister sorcerers sat upon the battlements, working unknown marvels for the undoing of the labour of man. If the great knight had a touch of such symbolism on his own side, he might have seen in his own strife with the solid timber something of the craft that had surrounded the birth of his creed, and the sacred trade of the carpenter. And indeed the very pattern of all carpentry is cruciform, and there is something more than an accident in the allegory. The transverse position of the timber does indeed involve many of those mathematical that are analogous to moral truths and almost every structural shape has the shadow of the mystic rood, as the three dimensions have a shadow of the Trinity. Here is the true mystery of equality; since the longer beam might lengthen itself to infinity, and never be nearer to the symbolic shape without the help of the shorter. Here is that war and wedding between two contrary forces, resisting and supporting each other; the meeting-place of contraries which we, by a sort of pietistic pun, still call the crux of the question. Here is our angular and defiant answer to the self-devouring circle of Asia. It may be improbable, though it is far from impossible (for the age was philosophical enough) that a man like Godfrey thus extended the mystical to the metaphysical; but the writer of a real romance about him would be well within his rights in making him see the symbolism of his own tower, a tower rising above him through the clouds of night as if taking hold on the heaven or showing its network of beams black against the daybreak; scaling the skies and open to all the winds, a ladder and a labyrinth, repeating till it was lost in the twilight the pattern of the sign of the cross.

When dawn was come all those starving peasants may well have stood before the high impregnable walls in the broad daylight of despair. Even their nightmares during the night, of unearthly necromancers looking down at them from the battlements and with signs and spells paralysing all their potential toils, may well have been a sort of pessimistic consolation, anticipating and accounting for failure. The Holy City had become for them a fortress full of fiends, when Godfrey de Bouillon again set himself sword in hand upon the wooden tower and gave the order once more to drag it tottering towards the towers on either side of the postern gate. So they crawled again across the fosse full of the slain, dragging their huge house of timber behind them, and all the blast and din of war broke again about their heads. A hail of bolts hammered such shields as covered them for a canopy, stones and rocks fell on them and crushed them like flies in the mire, and from the engines of the Greek Fire all the torrents of their torment came down on them like red rivers of hell. For indeed the souls of those peasants must have been sickened with something of the topsy-turvydom felt by too many peasants of our own time under the frightful flying batteries of scientific war; a blasphemy of inverted battle in which hell itself has occupied heaven. Something of the vapours vomited by such cruel chemistry may have mingled with the dust of battle, and darkened such light as showed where shattering rocks were rending a roof of shields, to men bowed and blinded as they are by such labour of dragging and such a hailstorm of death. They may have heard through all the racket of nameless noises the high minaret cries of Moslem triumph rising shriller like a wind in shrill pipes, and known little else of what was happening above or beyond them. It was most likely that they laboured and strove in that lower darkness, not knowing that high over their heads, and up above the cloud of battle, the tower of timber and the tower of stone had touched and met in mid-heaven; and great Godfrey, alone and alive, had leapt upon the wall of Jerusalem.

CHAPTER XII

THE FALL OF CHIVALRY

On the back of this book is the name of the New Jerusalem and on the first page of it a phrase about the necessity of going back to the old even to find the new, as a man retraces his steps to a sign-post. The common sense of that process is indeed most mysteriously misunderstood. Any suggestion that progress has at any time taken the wrong turning is always answered by the argument that men idealise the past, and make a myth of the Age of Gold. If my progressive guide has led me into a morass or a man-trap by turning to the left by the red pillar-box, instead of to the right by the blue palings of the inn called the Rising Sun, my progressive guide always proceeds to soothe me by talking about the myth of an Age of Gold. He says I am idealising the right turning. He says the blue palings are not so blue as they are painted. He says they are only blue with distance. He assures me there are spots on the sun, even on the rising sun. Sometimes he tells me I am wrong in my fixed conviction that the blue was of solid sapphires, or the sun of solid gold. In short he assures me I am wrong in supposing that the right turning was right in every possible respect; as if I had ever supposed anything of the sort. I want to go back to that particular place, not because it was all my fancy paints it, or because it was the best place my fancy can paint; but because it was a many thousand times better place than the man-trap in which he and his like have landed me. But above all I want to go back to it, not because I know it was the right place but because I think it was the right turning. And the right turning might possibly have led me to the right place; whereas the progressive guide has quite certainly led me to the wrong one.

Now it is quite true that there is less general human testimony to the notion of a New Jerusalem in the future than to the notion of a Golden Age in the past. But neither of those ideas, whether or no they are illusions, are any answer to the question of a plain man in the plain position of this parable; a man who has to find some guidance in the past if he is to get any good in the future. What he positively knows, in any case, is the complete collapse of the present. Now that is the exact truth about the thing so often rebuked as a romantic and unreal return of modern men to medieval things.

They suppose they have taken the wrong turning, because they know they are in the wrong place. To know that, it is necessary not to idealise the medieval world, but merely to realise the modern world. It is not so much that they suppose the medieval world was above the average as that they feel sure the modern world is below the average. They do not start either with the idea that man is meant to live in a New Jerusalem of pearl and sapphire in the future, or that a man was meant to live in a picturesque and richly-painted tavern of the past; but with a strong inward and personal persuasion that a man was not meant to live in a man-trap.

For there is and will be more and more a turn of total change in all our talk and writing about history. Everything in the past was praised if it had led up to the present, and blamed if it would have led up to anything else. In short everybody has been searching the past for the secret of our success. Very soon everybody may be searching the past for the secret of our failure. They may be talking in such terms as they use after a motor smash or a bankruptcy; where was the blunder? They may be writing such books as generals write after a military defeat; whose was the fault? The failure will be assumed even in being explained.

For industrialism is no longer a vulgar success. On the contrary, it is now too tragic even to be vulgar. Under the cloud of doom the modern city has taken on something of the dignity of Babel or Babylon. Whether we call it the nemesis of Capitalism or the nightmare of Bolshevism makes no difference; the rich grumble as much as the poor; every one is discontented, and none more than those who are chiefly discontented with the discontent. About that discord we are in perfect harmony; about that disease we all think alike, whatever we think of the diagnosis or the cure. By whatever process in the past we might have come to the right place, practical facts in the present and future will prove more and more that we have come to the wrong place. And for many a premonition will grow more and more of a probability; that we may or may not await another century or another world to see the New Jerusalem rebuilt and shining on our fields; but in the flesh we shall see Babylon fall.

But there is another way in which that metaphor of the forked road will make the position plain. Medieval society was not the right place; it was only the right turning. It was only the right road; or perhaps only the beginning of the right road. The medieval age was very far from being the age in which everything went right. It would be nearer the truth I mean to call it the age in which everything went wrong. It was the moment when things might have developed well, and did develop badly. Or rather, to be yet more exact, it was the moment when they were developing well, and yet they were driven to develop badly. This was the history of all the medieval states and of none more than medieval Jerusalem; indeed there were signs of some serious idea of making it the model medieval state. Of this notion of Jerusalem as the New Jerusalem, of the Utopian aspect of the adventure of the Latin Kingdom, something may be said in a moment. But meanwhile there was a more important part played by Jerusalem, I think, in all that great progress and reaction which has left us the problem of modern Europe. And the suggestion of it is bound up with the former suggestion, about the difference between the goal and the right road that might have led to it. It is bound up with that quality of the civilisation in question, that it was potential rather than perfect; and there is no need to idealise it in order to regret it. This peculiar part played by Jerusalem I mention merely as a suggestion; I might almost say a suspicion. Anyhow, it is something of a guess; but I for one have found it a guide.

Medievalism died, but it died young. It was at once energetic and incomplete when it died, or very shortly before it died. This is not a matter of sympathy or antipathy, but of appreciation of an interesting historic comparison with other historic cases. When the Roman Empire finally failed we cannot of course say that it had done all it was meant to do, for that is dogmatism. We cannot even say it had done all that it might have done, for that is guesswork. But we can say that it had done certain definite things and was conscious of having done them; that it had long and even literally rested on its laurels. But suppose that Rome had fallen when she had only half defeated Carthage, or when she had only half conquered Gaul, or even when the city was Christian but most of the provinces still heathen. Then we should have said, not merely that Rome had not done what she might have done, but that she had not done what she was actually doing. And that is very much the truth in the matter of the medieval civilisation. It was not merely that the medievals left undone what they might have done, but they left undone what they were doing. This potential promise is proved not only in their successes but in their failures. It is shown, for instance, in the very defects of their art. All the crafts of which Gothic architecture formed the frame-work were developed, not only less than they should have been, but less than they would have been. There is no sort of reason why their sculpture should not have become as perfect as their architecture; there is no sort of reason why their sense of form should not have been as finished as their sense of colour. A statue like the St. George of Donatello would have stood more appropriately under a Gothic than under a Classic arch. The niches were already made for the statues. The same thing is true, of course, not only about the state of the crafts but about the status of the craftsman. The best proof that the system of the guilds had an undeveloped good in it is that the most advanced modern men are now going back five hundred years to get the good out of it. The best proof that a rich house was brought to ruin is that our very pioneers are now digging in the ruins to find the riches. That the new guildsmen add a great deal that never belonged to the old guildsmen is not only a truth, but is part of the truth I maintain here. The new guildsmen add what the old guildsmen would have added if they had not died young. When we renew a frustrated thing we do not renew the frustration. But if there are some things in the new that were not in the old, there were certainly some things in the old that are not yet visible in the new; such as individual humour in the handiwork. The point here, however, is not merely that the worker worked well but that he was working better; not merely that his mind was free but that it was growing freer. All this popular power and humour was increasing everywhere, when something touched it and it withered away. The frost had struck it in the spring.

Some people complain that the working man of our own day does not show an individual interest in his work. But it will be well to realise that they would be much more annoyed with him if he did. The medieval workman took so individual an interest in his work that he would call up devils entirely on his own account, carving them in corners according to his own taste and fancy. He would even reproduce the priests who were his patrons and make them as ugly as devils; carving anti-clerical caricatures on the very seats and stalls of the clerics. If a modern householder, on entering his own bathroom, found that the plumber had twisted the taps into the images of two horned and grinning fiends, he would be faintly surprised. If the householder, on returning at evening to his house, found the door-knocker distorted into a repulsive likeness of himself, his surprise might even be tinged with disapproval. It may be just as well that builders and bricklayers do not gratuitously attach gargoyles to our smaller residential villas. But well or ill, it is certainly true that this feature of a flexible popular fancy has never reappeared in any school of architecture or any state of society since the medieval decline. The great classical buildings of the Renascence were swept as bare of it as any villa in Balham. But those who best appreciate this loss to popular art will be the first to agree that at its best it retained a touch of the barbaric as well as the popular. While we can admire these matters of the grotesque, we can admit that their work was sometimes unintentionally as well as intentionally grotesque. Some of the carving did remain so rude that the angels were almost as ugly as the devils. But this is the very point upon which I would here insist; the mystery of why men who were so obviously only beginning should have so suddenly stopped.

Men with medieval sympathies are sometimes accused, absurdly enough, of trying to prove that the medieval period was perfect. In truth the whole case for it is that it was imperfect. It was imperfect as an unripe fruit or a growing child is imperfect. Indeed it was imperfect in that very particular fashion which most modern thinkers generally praise, more than they ever praise maturity. It was something now much more popular than an age of perfection; it was an age of progress. It was perhaps the one real age of progress in all history. Men have seldom moved with such rapidity and such unity from barbarism to civilisation as they did from the end of the Dark Ages to the times of the universities and the parliaments, the cathedrals and the guilds. Up to a certain point we may say that everything, at whatever stage of improvement, was full of the promise of improvement. Then something began to go wrong, almost equally rapidly, and the glory of this great culture is not so much in what it did as in what it might have done. It recalls one of these typical medieval speculations, full of the very fantasy of free will, in which the schoolmen tried to fancy the fate of every herb or animal if Adam had not eaten the apple. It remains, in a cant historical phrase, one of the great might-have-beens of history.

I have said that it died young; but perhaps it would be truer to say that it suddenly grew old. Like Godfrey and many of its great champions in Jerusalem, it was overtaken in the prime of life by a mysterious malady. The more a man reads of history the less easy he will find it to explain that secret and rapid decay of medieval civilisation from within. Only a few generations separated the world that worshipped St. Francis from the world that burned Joan of Arc. One would think there might be no more than a date and a number between the white mystery of Louis the Ninth and the black mystery of Louis the Eleventh. This is the very real historical mystery; the more realistic is our study of medieval things, the more puzzled we shall be about the peculiar creeping paralysis which affected things so virile and so full of hope. There was a growth of moral morbidity as well as social inefficiency, especially in the governing classes; for even to the end the guildsmen and the peasants remained much more vigorous. How it ended we all know; personally I should say that they got the Reformation and deserved it. But it matters nothing to the truth here whether the Reformation was a just revolt and revenge or an unjust culmination and conquest. It is common ground to Catholics and Protestants of intelligence that evils preceded and produced the schism; and that evils were produced by it and have pursued it down to our own day. We know it if only in the one example, that the schism begat the Thirty Years' War, and the Thirty Years' War begat the Seven Years' War, and the Seven Years' War begat the Great War, which has passed like a pestilence through our own homes. After the schism Prussia could relapse into heathenry and erect an ethical system external to the whole culture of Christendom. But it can still be reasonably asked what begat the schism; and it can still be reasonably answered; something that went wrong with medievalism. But what was it that went wrong?

When I looked for the last time on the towers of Zion I had a fixed fancy that I knew what it was. It is a thing that cannot be proved or disproved; it must sound merely an ignorant guess. But I believe myself that it died of disappointment. I believe the whole medieval society failed, because the heart went out of it with the loss of Jerusalem. Let it be observed that I do not say the loss of the war, or even the Crusade. For the war against Islam was not lost. The Moslem was overthrown in the real battle-field, which was Spain; he was menaced in Africa; his imperial power was already stricken and beginning slowly to decline. I do not mean the political calculations about a Mediterranean war. I do not even mean the Papal conceptions about the Holy War. I mean the purely popular picture of the Holy City. For while the aristocratic thing was a view, the vulgar thing was a vision; something with which all stories stop, something where the rainbow ends, something over the hills and far away. In Spain they had been victorious; but their castle was not even a castle in Spain. It was a castle east of the sun and west of the moon, and the fairy prince could find it no more. Indeed that idle image out of the nursery books fits it very exactly. For its mystery was and is in standing in the middle, or as they said in the very centre of the earth. It is east of the sun of Europe, which fills the world with a daylight of sanity, and ripens real and growing things. It is west of the moon of Asia, mysterious and archaic with its cold volcanoes, silver mirror for poets and a most fatal magnet for lunatics.

Anyhow the fall of Jerusalem, and in that sense the failure of the Crusades, had a widespread effect, as I should myself suggest, for the reason I have myself suggested. Because it had been a popular movement, it was a popular disappointment; and because it had been a popular movement, its ideal was an image; a particular picture in the imagination. For poor men are almost always particularists; and nobody has ever seen such a thing as a mob of pantheists. I have seen in some of that lost literature of the old guilds, which is now everywhere coming to light, a list of the stage properties required for some village play, one of those popular plays acted by the medieval trades unions, for which the guild of the shipwrights would build Noah’s Ark or the guild of the barbers provide golden wigs for the haloes of the Twelve Apostles. The list of those crude pieces of stage furniture had a curious colour of poetry about it, like the impromptu apparatus of a nursery charade; a cloud, an idol with a club, and notably among the rest, the walls and towers of Jerusalem. I can imagine them patiently painted and gilded as a special feature, like the two tubs of Mr. Vincent Crummles. But I can also imagine that towards the end of the Middle Ages, the master of the revels might begin to look at those towers of wood and pasteboard with a sort of pain, and perhaps put them away in a corner, as a child will tire of a toy especially if it is associated with a disappointment or a dismal misunderstanding. There is noticeable in some of the later popular poems a disposition to sulk about the Crusades. But though the popular feeling had been largely poetical, the same thing did in its degree occur in the political realm that was purely practical. The Moslem had been checked, but he had not been checked enough. The whole story of what was called the Eastern Question, and three-quarters of the wars of the modern world, were due to the fact that he was not checked enough.

The only thing to do with unconquerable things is to conquer them. That alone will cure them of invincibility; or what is worse, their own vision of invincibility. That was the conviction of those of us who would not accept what we considered a premature peace with Prussia. That is why we would not listen either to the Tory Pro-Germanism of Lord Lansdowne or the Socialist Pro-Germanism of Mr. Macdonald. If a lunatic believes in his luck so fixedly as to feel sure be cannot be caught, he will not only believe in it still, but believe in it more and more, until the actual instant when he is caught. The longer the chase, the more certain he will be of escaping; the more narrow the escapes, the more certain will be the escape. And indeed if he does escape it will seem a miracle, and almost a divine intervention, not only to the pursued but to the pursuers. The evil thing will chiefly appear unconquerable to those who try to conquer it. It will seem after all to have a secret of success; and those who failed against it will hide in their hearts a secret of failure. It was that secret of failure, I fancy, that slowly withered from within the high hopes of the Middle Ages. Christianity and chivalry had measured their force against Mahound, and Mahound had not fallen; the shadow of his horned helmet, the crest of the Crescent, still lay across their sunnier lands; the Horns of Hattin. The streams of life that flowed to guilds and schools and orders of knighthood and brotherhoods of friars were strangely changed and chilled. So, if the peace had left Prussianism secure even in Prussia, I believe that all the liberal ideals of the Latins, and all the liberties of the English, and the whole theory of a democratic experiment in America, would have begun to die of a deep and even subconscious despair. A vote, a jury, a newspaper, would not be as they are, things of which it is hard to make the right use, or any use; they would be things of which nobody would even try to make any use. A vote would actually look like a vassal’s cry of “haro,” a jury would look like a joust; many would no more read headlines than blazon heraldic coats. For these medieval things look dead and dusty because of a defeat, which was none the less a defeat because it was more than half a victory.

A curious cloud of confusion rests on the details of that defeat. The Christian captains who acted in it were certainly men on a different moral level from the good Duke Godfrey; their characters were by comparison mixed and even mysterious. Perhaps the two determining personalities were Raymond of Tripoli, a skilful soldier whom his enemies seemed to have accused of being much too skilful a diplomatist; and Renaud of Chatillon, a violent adventurer whom his enemies seem to have accused of being little better than a bandit. And it is the irony of the incident that Raymond got into trouble for making a dubious peace with the Saracens, while Renaud got into trouble by making an equally dubious war on the Saracens. Renaud exacted from Moslem travellers on a certain road what he regarded as a sort of feudal toll or tax, and they regarded as a brigand ransom; and when they did not pay he attacked them. This was regarded as a breach of the truce; but probably it would have been easier to regard Renaud as waging the war of a robber, if many had not regarded Raymond as having made the truce of a traitor. Probably Raymond was not a traitor, since the military advice he gave up to the very instant of catastrophe was entirely loyal and sound, and worthy of so wise a veteran. And very likely Renaud was not merely a robber, especially in his own eyes; and there seems to be a much better case for him than many modern writers allow. But the very fact of such charges being bandied among the factions shows a certain fall from the first days under the headship of the house of Bouillon. No slanderer ever suggested that Godfrey was a traitor; no enemy ever asserted that Godfrey was only a thief. It is fairly clear that there had been a degeneration; but most people hardly realise sufficiently that there had been a very great thing from which to degenerate.

The first Crusades had really had some notion of Jerusalem as a New Jerusalem. I mean they had really had a vision of the place being not only a promised land but a Utopia or even an Earthly Paradise. The outstanding fact and feature which is seldom seized is this: that the social experiment in Palestine was rather in advance of the social experiments in the rest of Christendom. Having to begin at the beginning, they really began with what they considered the best ideas of their time; like any group of Socialists founding an ideal Commonwealth in a modern colony. A specialist on this period, Colonel Conder of the Palestine Exploration, has written that the core of the Code was founded on the recommendations of Godfrey himself in his “Letters of the Sepulchre”; and he observes concerning it: “The basis of these laws was found in Justinian’s code, and they presented features as yet quite unknown in Europe, especially in their careful provision of justice for the bourgeois and the peasant, and for the trading communes whose fleets were so necessary to the king. Not only were free men judged by juries of their equals, but the same applied to those who were technically serfs and actually aborigines.” The original arrangements of the Native Court seem to me singularly liberal, even by modern standards of the treatment of natives. That in many such medieval codes citizens were still called serfs is no more final than the fact that in many modern capitalist newspapers serfs are still called citizens. The whole point about the villein was that he was a tenant at least as permanent as a peasant. He “went with the land”; and there are a good many hopeless tramps starving in streets, or sleeping in ditches, who might not be sorry if they could go with a little land. It would not be very much worse than homelessness and hunger to go with a good kitchen garden of which you could always eat most of the beans and turnips; or to go with a good cornfield of which you could take a considerable proportion of the corn. There has been many a modern man would have been none the worse for “going” about burdened with such a green island, or dragging the chains of such a tangle of green living things. As a fact, of course, this system throughout Christendom was already evolving rapidly into a pure peasant proprietorship; and it will be long before industrialism evolves by itself into anything so equal or so free. Above all, there appears notably that universal mark of the medieval movement; the voluntary liberation of slaves. But we may willingly allow that something of the earlier success of all this was due to the personal qualities of the first knights fresh from the West; and especially to the personal justice and moderation of Godfrey and some of his immediate kindred. Godfrey died young; his successors had mostly short periods of power, largely through the prevalence of malaria and the absence of medicine. Royal marriages with the more oriental tradition of the Armenian princes brought in new elements of luxury and cynicism; and by the time of the disputed truce of Raymond of Tripoli, the crown had descended to a man named Guy of Lusignan who seems to have been regarded as a somewhat unsatisfactory character. He had quarrelled with Raymond, who was ruler of Galilee, and a curious and rather incomprehensible concession made by the latter, that the Saracens should ride in arms but in peace round his land, led to alleged Moslem insults to Nazareth, and the outbreak of the furious Templar, Gerard of Bideford, of which mention has been made already. But the most serious threat to them and their New Jerusalem was the emergence among the Moslems of a man of military genius, and the fact that all that land lay now under the shadow of the ambition and ardour of Saladin.

With the breach of the truce, or even the tale of it, the common danger of Christians was apparent; and Raymond of Tripoli repaired to the royal headquarters to consult with his late enemy the king; but he seems to have been almost openly treated as a traitor. Gerard of Bideford, the fanatic who was Grand Master of the Templars, forced the king’s hand against the advice of the wiser soldier, who had pointed out the peril of perishing of thirst in the waterless wastes between them and the enemy. Into those wastes they advanced, and they were already weary and unfit for warfare by the time they came in sight of the strange hills that will be remembered for ever under the name of the Horns of Hattin. On those hills, a few hours later, the last knights of an army of which half had fallen gathered in a final defiance and despair round the relic they carried in their midst, a fragment of the True Cross. In that hour fell, as I have fancied, more hopes than they themselves could number, and the glory departed from the Middle Ages. There fell with them all that New Jerusalem which was the symbol of a new world, all those great and growing promises and possibilities of Christendom of which this vision was the centre, all that "justice for the bourgeois and the peasant, and for the trading communes," all the guilds that gained their charters by fighting for the Cross, all the hopes of a happier transformation of the Roman Law wedded to charity and to chivalry. There was the first slip and the great swerving of our fate; and in that wilderness we lost all the things we should have loved, and shall need so long a labour to find again.

Raymond of Tripoli had hewn his way through the enemy and ridden away to Tyre. The king, with a few of the remaining nobles, including Renaud de Chatillon, were brought before Saladin in his tent. There occurred a scene strangely typical of the mingled strains in the creed or the culture that triumphed on that day; the stately Eastern courtesy and hospitality; the wild Eastern hatred and self-will. Saladin welcomed the king and gracefully gave him a cup of sherbet, which he passed to Renaud. "It is thou and not I who hast given him to drink," said the Saracen, preserving the precise letter of the punctilio of hospitality. Then he suddenly flung himself raving and reviling upon Renaud de Chatillon, and killed the prisoner with his own hands. Outside, two hundred Hospitallers and Templars were beheaded on the field of battle; by one account I have read because Saladin disliked them, and by another because they were Christian priests.

There is a strong bias against the Christians and in favour of the Moslems and the Jews in most of the Victorian historical works, especially historical novels. And most people of modern, or rather of very recent times got all their notions of history from dipping into historical novels. In those romances the Jew is always the oppressed where in reality he was often the oppressor. In those romances the Arab is always credited with oriental dignity and courtesy and never with oriental crookedness and cruelty. The same injustice is introduced into history, which by means of selection and omission can be made as fictitious as any fiction. Twenty historians mention the way in which the maddened Christian mob murdered the Moslems after the capture of Jerusalem, for one who mentions that the Moslem commander commanded in cold blood the murder of some two hundred of his most famous and valiant enemies after the victory of Hattin. The former cannot be shown to have been the act of Tancred, while the latter was quite certainly the act of Saladin. Yet Tancred is described as at best a doubtful character, while Saladin is represented as a Bayard without fear or blame. Both of them doubtless were ordinary faulty fighting men, but they are not judged by an equal balance. It may seem a paradox that there should be this prejudice in Western history in favour of Eastern heroes. But the cause is clear enough; it is the remains of the revolt among many Europeans against their own old religious organisation, which naturally made them hunt through all ages for its crimes and its victims. It was natural that Voltaire should sympathise more with a Brahmin he had never seen than with a Jesuit with whom he was engaged in a violent controversy; and should similarly feel more dislike of a Catholic who was his enemy than of a Moslem who was the enemy of his enemy. In this atmosphere of natural and even pardonable prejudice arose the habit of contrasting the intolerance of the Crusaders with the toleration shown by the Moslems. Now as there are two sides to everything, it would undoubtedly be quite possible to tell the tale of the Crusades, correctly enough in detail, and in such a way as entirely to justify the Moslems and condemn the Crusaders. But any such real record of the Moslem case would have very little to do with any questions of tolerance or intolerance, or any modern ideas about religious liberty and equality. As the modern world does not know what it means itself by religious liberty and equality, as the moderns have not thought out any logical theory of toleration at all (for their vague generalisations can always be upset by twenty tests from Thugs to Christian Science) it would obviously be unreasonable to expect the moderns to understand the much clearer philosophy of the Moslems. But some rough suggestion of what was really involved may be found convenient in this case.

Islam was not originally a movement directed against Christianity at all. It did not face westwards, so to speak; it faced eastwards towards the idolatries of Asia. But Mahomet believed that these idols could be fought more successfully with a simpler kind of creed; one might almost say with a simpler kind of Christianity. For he included many things which we in the West commonly suppose not only to be peculiar to Christianity but to be peculiar to Catholicism. Many things have been rejected by Protestantism that are not rejected by Mahometanism. Thus the Moslems believe in Purgatory, and they give at least a sort of dignity to the Mother of Christ. About such things as these they have little of the bitterness that rankles in the Jews and is said sometimes to become hideously vitriolic. While I was in Palestine a distinguished Moslem said to a Christian resident: “We also, as well as you, honour the Mother of Christ. Never do we speak of her but we call her the Lady Miriam. I dare not tell you what the Jews call her.”

The real mistake of the Moslems is something much more modern in its application than any particular or passing persecution of Christians as such. It lay in the very fact that they did think they had a simpler and saner sort of Christianity, as do many modern Christians. They thought it could be made universal merely by being made uninteresting. Now a man preaching what he thinks is a platitude is far more intolerant than a man preaching what he admits is a paradox. It was exactly because it seemed self-evident, to Moslems as to Bolshevists, that their simple creed was suited to everybody, that they wished in that particular sweeping fashion to impose it on everybody. It was because Islam was broad that Moslems were narrow. And because it was not a hard religion it was a heavy rule. Because it was without a self-correcting complexity, it allowed of those simple and masculine but mostly rather dangerous appetites that show themselves in a chieftain or a lord. As it had the simplest sort of religion, monotheism, so it had the simplest sort of government, monarchy. There was exactly the same direct spirit in its despotism as in its deism. The Code, the Common Law, the give and take of charters and chivalric vows, did not grow in that golden desert. The great sun was in the sky and the great Saladin was in his tent, and he must be obeyed unless he were assassinated. Those who complain of our creeds as elaborate often forget that the elaborate Western creeds have produced the elaborate Western constitutions; and that they are elaborate because they are emancipated. And the real moral of the relations of the two great religions is something much more subtle and sincere than any mere atrocity tales against Turks. It is the same as the moral of the Christian refusal of a Pagan Pantheon in which Christ should rank with Ammon and Apollo. Twice the Christian Church refused what seemed like a handsome offer of a large latitudinarian sort; once to include Christ as a god and once to include him as a prophet; once by the admission of all idols and once by the abandonment of all idols. Twice the Church took the risk and twice the Church survived alone and succeeded alone, filling the world with her own children; and leaving her rivals in a desert, where the idols were dead and the iconoclasts were dying.

But all this history has been hidden by a prejudice more general than the particular case of Saracens and Crusaders. The modern, or rather the Victorian prejudice against Crusaders is positive and not relative; and it would still desire to condemn Tancred if it could not acquit Saladin. Indeed it is a prejudice not so much against Crusaders as against Christians. It will not give to these heroes of religious war the fair measure it gives to the heroes of ordinary patriotic and imperial war. There never was a nobler hero than Nelson, or one more national or more normal. Yet Nelson quite certainly did do what Tancred almost certainly did not do; break his own word by giving up his own brave enemies to execution. If the cause of Nelson in other times comes to be treated as the creed of Tancred has often in recent times been treated, this incident alone will be held sufficient to prove not only that Nelson was a liar and a scoundrel, but that he did not love England at all, did not love Lady Hamilton at all, that he sailed in English ships only to pocket the prize money of French ships, and would as willingly have sailed in French ships for the prize money of English ships. That is the sort of dull dust of gold that has been shaken like the drifting dust of the desert over the swords and the relics, the crosses and the clasped hands of the men who marched to Jerusalem or died at Hattin. In these medieval pilgrims every inconsistency is a hypocrisy; while in the more modern patriots even an infamy is only an inconsistency. I have rounded off the story here with the ruin at Hattin because the whole reaction against the pilgrimage had its origin there; and because it was this at least that finally lost Jerusalem. Elsewhere in Palestine, to say nothing of Africa and Spain, splendid counter-strokes were still being delivered from the West, not the least being the splendid rescue by Richard of England. But I still think that with the mere name of that tiny town upon the hills the note of the whole human revolution had been struck, was changed and was silent. All the other names were only the names of Eastern towns; but that was nearer to a man than his neighbours; a village inside his village, a house inside his house.

There is a hill above Bethlehem of a strange shape, with a flat top which makes it look oddly like an island, habitable though uninhabited, when all Moab heaves about it and beyond it as with the curves and colours of a sea. Its stability suggests in some strange fashion what may often be felt in these lands with the longest record of culture; that there may be not only a civilisation but even a chivalry older than history. Perhaps the table-land with its round top has a romantic reminiscence of a round table. Perhaps it is only a fantastic effect of evening, for it is felt most when the low skies are swimming with the colours of sunset, and in the shadows the shattered rocks about its base take on the shapes of titanic paladins fighting and falling around it. I only know that the mere shape of the hill and vista of the landscape suggested such visions and it was only afterwards that I heard the local legend, which says it is here that some of the Christian knights made their last stand after they lost Jerusalem and which names this height The Mountain of the Latins.

They fell, and the ages rolled on them the rocks of scorn; they were buried in jests and buffooneries. As the Renascence expanded into the rationalism of recent centuries, nothing seemed so ridiculous as to butcher and bleed in a distant desert not only for a tomb, but an empty tomb. The last legend of them withered under the wit of Cervantes, though he himself had fought in the last Crusade at Lepanto. They were kicked about like dead donkeys by the cool vivacity of Voltaire; who went off, very symbolically, to dance attendance on the new drill-sergeant of the Prussians. They were dissected like strange beasts by the serene disgust of Gibbon, more serene than the similar horror with which he regarded the similar violence of the French Revolution. By our own time even the flippancy has become a platitude. They have long been the butt of every penny-a-liner who can talk of a helmet as a tin pot, of every caricaturist on a comic paper who can draw a fat man falling off a bucking horse; of every pushing professional politician who can talk about the superstitions of the Middle Ages. Great men and small have agreed to contemn them; they were renounced by their children and refuted by their biographers; they were exposed, they were exploded, they were ridiculed and they were right.

They were proved wrong, and they were right. They were judged finally and forgotten, and they were right. Centuries after their fall the full experience and development of political discovery has shown beyond question that they were right. For there is a very simple test of the truth; that the very thing which was dismissed, as a dream of the ages of faith, we have been forced to turn into a fact in the ages of fact. It is now more certain than it ever was before that Europe must rescue some lordship, or overlordship, of these old Roman provinces. Whether it is wise for England alone to claim Palestine, whether it would be better if the Entente could do so, I think a serious question. But in some form they are reverting for the Roman Empire. Every opportunity has been given for any other empire that could be its equal, and especially for the great dream of a mission for Imperial Islam. If ever a human being had a run for his money, it was the Sultan of the Moslems riding on his Arab steed. His empire expanded over and beyond the great Greek empire of Byzantium; a last charge of the chivalry of Poland barely stopped it at the very gates of Vienna. He was free to unfold everything that was in him, and he unfolded the death that was in him. He reigned and he could not rule; he was successful and he did not succeed. His baffled and retreating enemies left him standing, and he could not stand. He fell finally with that other half-heathen power in the North, with which he had made an alliance against the remains of Roman and Byzantine culture. He fell because barbarism cannot stand; because even when it succeeds it rather falls on its foes and crushes them. And after all these things, after all these ages, with a wearier philosophy, with a heavier heart, we have been forced to do again the very thing that the Crusaders were derided for doing. What Western men failed to do for the faith, other Western men have been forced to do even without the faith. The sons of Tancred are again in Tripoli. The heirs of Raymond are again in Syria. And men from the Midlands or the Northumbrian towns went again through a furnace of thirst and fever and furious fighting, to gain the same water-courses and invest the same cities as of old. They trod the hills of Galilee and the Horns of Hattin threw no shadow on their souls; they crossed dark and disastrous fields whose fame had been hidden from them, and avenged the fathers they had forgotten. And the most cynical of modern diplomatists, making their settlement by the most sceptical of modern philosophies, can find no practical or even temporary solution for this sacred land, except to bring it again under the crown of Coeur de Lion and the cross of St. George.

There came in through the crooked entry beside the great gap in the wall a tall soldier, dismounting and walking and wearing only the dust-hued habit of modern war. There went no trumpet before him, neither did he enter by the Golden Gate; but the silence of the deserts was full of a phantom acclamation, as when from far away a wind brings in a whisper the cheering of many thousand men. For in that hour a long-lost cry found fulfilment, and something counted irrational returned in the reason of things. And at last even the wise understood, and at last even the learned were enlightened on a need truly and indeed international, which a mob in a darker age had known by the light of nature; something that could be denied and delayed and evaded, but not escaped for ever. *Id Deus vult*.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PROBLEM OF ZIONISM

There is an attitude for which my friends and I were for a long period rebuked and even reviled; and of which at the present period we are less likely than ever to repent. It was always called Anti-Semitism; but it was always much more true to call it Zionism. At any rate it was much nearer to the nature of the thing to call it Zionism, whether or no it can find its geographical concentration in Zion. The substance of this heresy was exceedingly simple. It consisted entirely in saying that Jews are Jews; and as a logical consequence that they are not Russians or Roumanians or Italians or Frenchmen or Englishmen. During the war the newspapers commonly referred to them as Russians; but the ritual wore so singularly thin that I remember one newspaper paragraph saying that the Russians in the East End complained of the food regulations, because their religion forbade them to eat pork. My own brief contact with the Greek priests of the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem did not permit me to discover any trace of this detail of their discipline; and even the Russian pilgrims were said to be equally negligent in the matter. The point for the moment, however, is that if I was violently opposed to anything, it was not to Jews, but to that sort of remark about Jews; or rather to the silly and craven fear of making it a remark about Jews. But my friends and I had in some general sense a policy in the matter; and it was in substance the desire to give Jews the dignity and status of a separate nation. We desired that in some fashion, and so far as possible, Jews should be represented by Jews, should live in a society of Jews, should be judged by Jews and ruled by Jews. I am an Anti-Semite if that is Anti-Semitism. It would seem more rational to call it Semitism.

Of this attitude, I repeat, I am now less likely than ever to repent. I have lived to see the thing that was dismissed as a fad discussed everywhere as a fact; and one of the most menacing facts of the age. I have lived to see people who accused me of Anti-Semitism become far more Anti-Semitic than I am or ever was. I have heard people talking with real injustice about the Jews, who once seemed to think it an injustice to talk about them at all. But, above all, I have seen with my own eyes wild mobs marching through a great city, raving not only against Jews, but against the English for identifying themselves with the Jews. I have seen the whole prestige of England brought into peril, merely by the trick of talking about two nations as if they were one. I have seen an Englishman arriving in Jerusalem with somebody he had been taught to regard as his fellow countryman and political colleague, and received as if he had come arm-in-arm with a flaming dragon. So do our frosty fictions fare when they come under that burning sun.

Twice in my life, and twice lately, I have seen a piece of English pedantry bring us within an inch of an enormous English peril. The first was when all the Victorian historians and philosophers had told us that our German cousin was a cousin german and even germane; something naturally near and sympathetic. That also was an identification; that also was an assimilation; that also was a union of hearts. For the second time in a few short years, English politicians and journalists have discovered the dreadful revenge of reality. To pretend that something is what it is not is business that can easily be fashionable and sometimes popular. But the thing we have agreed to regard as what it is not will always abruptly punish and pulverise us, merely by being what it is. For years we were told that the Germans were a sort of Englishman because they were Teutons; but it was all the worse for us when we found out what Teutons really were. For years we were told that Jews were a sort of Englishman because they were British subjects. It is all the worse for us now we have to regard them, not subjectively as subjects, but objectively as objects; as objects of a fierce hatred among the Moslems and the Greeks. We are in the absurd position of introducing to these people a new friend whom they instantly recognise as an old enemy. It is an absurd position because it is a false position; but it is merely the penalty of falsehood.

Whether this Eastern anger is reasonable or not may be discussed in a moment; but what is utterly unreasonable is not the anger but the astonishment; at least it is our astonishment at their astonishment. We might believe ourselves in the view that a Jew is an Englishman; but there was no reason why they should regard him as an Englishman, since they already recognised him as a Jew. This is the whole present problem of the Jew in Palestine; and it must be solved either by the logic of Zionism or the logic of purely English supremacy and, impartiality; and not by what seems to everybody in Palestine a monstrous muddle of the two. But of course it is not only the peril in Palestine that has made the realisation of the Jewish problem, which once suffered all the dangers of a fad, suffer the opposite dangers of a fashion. The same journalists who politely describe Jews as Russians are now very impolitely describing certain Russians who are Jews. Many who had no particular objection to Jews as Capitalists have a very great objection to them as Bolshevists. Those who had an innocent unconsciousness of the nationality of Eckstein, even when he called himself Eckstein, have managed to discover the nationality of Braunstein, even, when he calls, himself Trotsky. And much of this peril also might easily have been lessened, by the simple proposal to call men and things by their own names.

I will confess, however, that I have no very full sympathy with the new Anti-Semitism which is merely Anti-Socialism. There are good, honourable and magnanimous Jews of every type and rank, there are many to whom I am greatly attached among my own friends in my own rank; but if I have to make a general choice on a general chance among different types of Jews, I have much more sympathy with the Jew who is revolutionary than the Jew who is plutocratic. In other words, I have much more sympathy for the Israelite we are beginning to reject, than for the Israelite we have already accepted. I have more respect for him when he leads some sort of revolt, however narrow and anarchic, against the oppression of the poor, than when he is safe at the head of a great money-lending business oppressing the poor himself. It is not the poor aliens, but the rich aliens I wish we had excluded. I myself wholly reject Bolshevism, not because its actions are violent, but because its very thought is materialistic and mean. And if this preference is true even of Bolshevism, it is ten times truer of Zionism. It really seems to me rather hard that the full storm of fury should have burst about the Jews, at the very moment when some of them at least have felt the call of a far cleaner ideal; and that when we have tolerated their tricks with our country, we should turn on them precisely when they seek in sincerity for their own.

But in order to judge this Jewish possibility, we must understand more fully the nature of the Jewish problem. We must consider it from the start, because there are still many who do not know that there is a Jewish problem. That problem has its proof, of course, in the history of the Jew, and the fact that he came from the East. A Jew will sometimes complain of the injustice of describing him as a man of the East; but in truth another very real injustice may be involved in treating him as a man of the West.

Very often even the joke against the Jew is rather a joke against those who have made the joke; that is, a joke against what they have made out of the Jew. This is true especially, for instance, of many points of religion and ritual. Thus we cannot help feeling, for instance, that there is something a little grotesque about the Hebrew habit of putting on a top-hat as an act of worship. It is vaguely mixed up with another line of humour, about another class of Jew, who wears a large number of hats; and who must not therefore be credited with an extreme or extravagant religious zeal, leading him to pile up a pagoda of hats towards heaven. To Western eyes, in Western conditions, there really is something inevitably fantastic about this formality of the synagogue. But we ought to remember that we have made the Western conditions which startle the Western eyes. It seems odd to wear a modern top-hat as if it were a mitre or a biretta; it seems quainter still when the hat is worn even for the momentary purpose of saying grace before lunch. It seems quaintest of all when, at some Jewish luncheon parties, a tray of hats is actually handed round, and each guest helps himself to a hat as a sort of *hors d'oeuvre*. All this could easily be turned into a joke; but we ought to realise that the joke is against ourselves. It is not merely we who make fun of it, but we who have made it funny. For, after all, nobody can pretend that this particular type of head-dress is a part of that uncouth imagery "setting painting and sculpture at defiance" which Renan remarked in the tradition of Hebrew civilisation. Nobody can say that a top-hat was among the strange symbolic utensils dedicated to the obscure service of the Ark; nobody can suppose that a top-hat descended from heaven among the wings and wheels of the flying visions of the Prophets. For this wild vision the West is entirely responsible. Europe has created the Tower of Giotto; but it has also created the topper. We of the West must bear the burden, as best we may, both of the responsibility and of the hat. It is solely the special type and shape of hat that makes the Hebrew ritual seem ridiculous. Performed in the old original Hebrew fashion it is not ridiculous, but rather if anything sublime. For the original fashion was an oriental fashion; and the Jews are orientals; and the mark of all such orientals is the wearing of long and loose draperies. To throw those loose draperies over the head is decidedly a dignified and even poetic gesture. One can imagine something like justice done to its majesty and mystery in one of the great dark drawings of William Blake. It may be true, and personally I think it is true, that the Hebrew covering of the head signifies a certain stress on the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom, while the Christian uncovering of the head suggests rather the love of God that is the end of wisdom. But this has nothing to do with the taste and dignity of the ceremony; and to do justice to these we must treat the Jew as an oriental; we must even dress him as an oriental.

I have only taken this as one working example out of many that would point to the same conclusion. A number of points upon which the unfortunate alien is blamed would be much improved if he were, not less of an alien, but rather more of an alien. They arise from his being too like us, and too little like himself. It is obviously the case, for instance, touching that vivid vulgarity in clothes, and especially the colours of clothes, with which a certain sort of Jews brighten the landscape or seascape at Margate or many holiday resorts. When we see a foreign gentleman on Brighton Pier wearing yellow spats, a magenta waistcoat, and an emerald green tie, we feel that he has somehow missed certain fine shades of social sensibility and fitness. It might considerably surprise the company on Brighton Pier, if he were to reply by solemnly unwinding his green necktie from round his neck, and winding it round his head. Yet the reply would be the right one; and would be equally logical and artistic. As soon as the green tie had become a green turban, it might look as appropriate and even attractive as the green turban of any pilgrim of Mecca or any descendant of Mahomet, who walks with a stately air through the streets of Jaffa or Jerusalem. The bright colours that make the Margate Jews hideous are no brighter than those that make the Moslem crowd picturesque. They are only worn in the wrong place, in the wrong way, and in conjunction with a type and cut of clothing that is meant to be more sober and restrained. Little can really be urged against him, in that respect, except that his artistic instinct is rather for colour than form, especially of the kind that we ourselves have labelled good form.

This is a mere symbol, but it is so suitable a symbol that I have often offered it symbolically as a solution of the Jewish problem. I have felt disposed to say: let all liberal legislation stand, let all literal and legal civic equality stand; let a Jew occupy any political or social position which he can gain in open competition; let us not listen for a moment to any suggestions of reactionary restrictions or racial privilege. Let a Jew be Lord Chief justice, if his exceptional veracity and reliability have clearly marked him out for that post. Let a Jew be Archbishop of Canterbury, if our national religion has attained to that receptive breadth that would render such a transition unobjectionable and even unconscious. But let there be one single-clause bill; one simple and sweeping law about Jews, and no other. Be it enacted, by the King's Most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and the Commons in Parliament assembled, that every Jew must be dressed like an Arab. Let him sit on the Woolsack, but let him sit there dressed as an Arab. Let him preach in St. Paul's Cathedral, but let him preach there dressed as an Arab. It is not my point at present to dwell on the pleasing if flippant fancy of how much this would transform the political scene; of the dapper figure of Sir Herbert Samuel swathed as a Bedouin, or Sir Alfred Mond gaining a yet greater grandeur from the gorgeous and trailing robes of the East. If my image is quaint my intention is quite serious; and the point of it is not personal to any particular Jew. The point applies to any Jew, and to our own recovery of healthier relations with him. The point is that we should know where we are; and he would know where he is, which is in a foreign land.

This is but a parenthesis and a parable, but it brings us to the concrete controversial matter which is the Jewish problem. Only a few years ago it was regarded as a mark of a blood-thirsty disposition to admit that the Jewish problem was a problem, or even that the Jew was a Jew. Through much misunderstanding certain friends of mine and myself have persisted in disregarding the silence thus imposed; but facts have fought for us more effectively than words. By this time nobody is more conscious of the Jewish problem than the most intelligent and idealistic of the Jews. The folly of the fashion by which Jews often concealed their Jewish names, must surely be manifest by this time even to those who concealed them. To mention but one example of the way in which this fiction falsified the relations of everybody and everything, it is enough to note that it involved the Jews themselves in a quite new and quite needless unpopularity in the first years of the war. A poor little Jewish tailor, who called himself by a German name merely because he lived for a short time in a German town, was instantly mobbed in Whitechapel for his share in the invasion of Belgium. He was cross-examined about why he had damaged the tower of Rheims; and talked to as if he had killed Nurse Cavell with his own pair of shears. It was very unjust; quite as unjust as it would be to ask Bethmann-Hollweg why he had stabbed Eglon or hewn Agag in pieces. But it was partly at least the fault of the Jew himself, and of the whole of that futile and unworthy policy which had led him to call himself Bernstein when his name was Benjamin.

In such cases the Jews are accused of all sorts of faults they have not got; but there are faults that they have got. Some of the charges against them, as in the cases I have quoted concerning religious ritual and artistic taste, are due merely to the false light in which they are regarded. Other faults may also be due to the false position in which they are placed. But the faults exist; and nothing was ever more dangerous to everybody concerned than the recent fashion of denying or ignoring them. It was done simply by the snobbish habit of suppressing the experience and evidence of the majority of people, and especially of the majority of poor people. It was done by confining the controversy to a small world of wealth and refinement, remote from all the real facts involved. For the rich are the most ignorant people on earth, and the best that can be said for them, in cases like these, is that their ignorance often reaches the point of innocence.

I will take a typical case, which sums up the whole of this absurd fashion. There was a controversy in the columns of an important daily paper, some time ago, on the subject of the character of Shylock in Shakespeare. Actors and authors of distinction, including some of the most brilliant of living Jews, argued the matter from the most varied points of view. Some said that Shakespeare was prevented by the prejudices of his time from having a complete sympathy with Shylock. Some said that Shakespeare was only restrained by fear of the powers of his time from expressing his complete sympathy with Shylock. Some wondered how or why Shakespeare had got hold of such a queer story as that of the pound of flesh, and what it could possibly have to do with so dignified and intellectual a character as Shylock. In short, some wondered why a man of genius should be so much of an Anti-Semite, and some stoutly declared that he must have been a Pro-Semite. But all of them in a sense admitted that they were puzzled as to what the play was about. The correspondence filled column after column and went on for weeks. And from one end of that correspondence to the other, no human being even so much as mentioned the word “usury.” It is exactly as if twenty clever critics were set down to talk for a month about the play of Macbeth, and were all strictly forbidden to mention the word “murder.”

The play called *The Merchant of Venice* happens to be about usury, and its story is a medieval satire on usury. It is the fashion to say that it is a clumsy and grotesque story; but as a fact it is an exceedingly good story. It is a perfect and pointed story for its purpose, which is to convey the moral of the story. And the moral is that the logic of usury is in its nature at war with life, and might logically end in breaking into the bloody house of life. In other words, if a creditor can always claim a man's tools or a man's home, he might quite as justly claim one of his arms or legs. This principle was not only embodied in medieval satires but in very sound medieval laws, which set a limit on the usurer who was trying to take away a man's livelihood, as the usurer in the play is trying to take away a man's life. And if anybody thinks that usury can never go to lengths wicked enough to be worthy of so wild an image, then that person either knows nothing about it or knows too much. He is either one of the innocent rich who have never been the victims of money-lenders, or else one of the more powerful and influential rich who are money-lenders themselves.

All this, I say, is a fact that must be faced, but there is another side to the case, and it is this that the genius of Shakespeare discovered. What he did do, and what the medieval satirist did not do, was to attempt to understand Shylock; in the true sense to sympathise with Shylock the money-lender, as he sympathised with Macbeth the murderer. It was not to deny that the man was an usurer, but to assert that the usurer was a man. And the Elizabethan dramatist does make him a man, where the medieval satirist made him a monster. Shakespeare not only makes him a man but a perfectly sincere and self-respecting man. But the point is this: that he is a sincere man who sincerely believes in usury. He is a self-respecting man who does not despise himself for being a usurer. In one word, he regards usury as normal. In that word is the whole problem of the popular impression of the Jews. What Shakespeare suggested about the Jew in a subtle and sympathetic way, millions of plain men everywhere would suggest about him in a rough and ready way. Regarding the Jew in relation to his ideas about interest, they think either that he is simply immoral; or that if he is moral, then he has a different morality. There is a great deal more to be said about how far this is true, and about what are its causes and excuses if it is true. But it is an old story, surely, that the worst of all cures is to deny the disease.

To recognise the reality of the Jewish problem is very vital for everybody and especially vital for Jews. To pretend that there is no problem is to precipitate the expression of a rational impatience, which unfortunately can only express itself in the rather irrational form of Anti-Semitism. In the controversies of Palestine and Syria, for instance, it is very common to hear the answer that the Jew is no worse than the Armenian. The Armenian also is said to be unpopular as a money-lender and a mercantile upstart; yet the Armenian figures as a martyr for the Christian faith and a victim of the Moslem fury. But this is one of those arguments which really carry their own answer. It is like the sceptical saying that man is only an animal, which of itself provokes the retort, “What an animal!” The very similarity only emphasises the contrast. Is it seriously suggested that we can substitute the Armenian for the Jew in the study of a world-wide problem like that of the Jews? Could we talk of the competition of Armenians among Welsh shop-keepers, or of the crowd of Armenians on Brighton Parade? Can Armenian usury be a common topic of talk in a camp in California and in a club in Piccadilly? Does Shakespeare show us a tragic Armenian towering over the great Venice of the Renascence? Does Dickens show us a realistic Armenian teaching in the thieves’ kitchens of the slums? When we meet Mr. Vernon Vavasour, that brilliant financier, do we speculate on the probability of his really having an Armenian name to match his Armenian nose? Is it true, in short, that all sorts of people, from the peasants of Poland to the peasants of Portugal, can agree more or less upon the special subject of Armenia? Obviously it is not in the least true; obviously the Armenian question is only a local question of certain Christians, who may be more avaricious than other Christians. But it is the truth about the Jews. It is only half the truth, and one which by itself would be very unjust to the Jews. But it is the truth, and we must realise it as sharply and clearly as we can. The truth is that it is rather strange that the Jews should be so anxious for international agreements. For one of the few really international agreements is a suspicion of the Jews.

A more practical comparison would be one between the Jews and gipsies; for the latter at least cover several countries, and can be tested by the impressions of very different districts. And in some preliminary respects the comparison is really useful. Both races are in different ways landless, and therefore in different ways lawless. For the fundamental laws are land laws. In both cases a reasonable man will see reasons for unpopularity, without wishing to indulge any task for persecution. In both cases he will probably recognise the reality of a racial fault, while admitting that it may be largely a racial misfortune. That is to say, the drifting and detached condition may be largely the cause of Jewish usury or gipsy pilfering; but it is not common sense to contradict the general experience of gipsy pilfering or Jewish usury. The comparison helps us to clear away some of the cloudy evasions by which modern men have tried to escape from that experience. It is absurd to say that people are only prejudiced against the money methods of the Jews because the medieval church has left behind a hatred of their religion. We might as well say that people only protect the chickens from the gipsies because the medieval church undoubtedly condemned fortune-telling. It is unreasonable for a Jew to complain that Shakespeare makes Shylock and not Antonio the ruthless money-lender; or that Dickens makes Fagin and not Sikes the receiver of stolen goods. It is as if a gipsy were to complain when a novelist describes a child as stolen by the gipsies, and not by the curate or the mothers' meeting. It is to complain of facts and probabilities. There may be good gipsies; there may be good qualities which specially belong to them as gipsies; many students of the strange race have, for instance, praised a certain dignity and self-respect among the women of the Romany. But no student ever praised them for an exaggerated respect for private property, and the whole argument about gipsy theft can be roughly repeated about Hebrew usury. Above all, there is one other respect in which the comparison is even more to the point. It is the essential fact of the whole business, that the Jews do not become national merely by becoming a political part of any nation. We might as well say that the gipsies had villas in Clapham, when their caravans stood on Clapham Common.

But, of course, even this comparison between the two wandering peoples fails in the presence of the greater problem. Here again even the attempt at a parallel leaves the primary thing more unique. The gipsies do not become municipal merely by passing through a number of parishes, and it would seem equally obvious that a Jew need not become English merely by passing through England on his way from Germany to America. But the gipsy not only is not municipal, but he is not called municipal. His caravan is not immediately painted outside with the number and name of 123 Laburnam Road, Clapham. The municipal authorities generally notice the wheels attached to the new cottage, and therefore do not fall into the error. The gipsy may halt in a particular parish, but he is not as a rule immediately made a parish councillor. The cases in which a travelling tinker has been suddenly made the mayor of an important industrial town must be comparatively rare. And if the poor vagabonds of the Romany blood are bullied by mayors and magistrates, kicked off the land by landlords, pursued by policemen and generally knocked about from pillar to post, nobody raises an outcry that *they* are the victims of religious persecution; nobody summons meetings in public halls, collects subscriptions or sends petitions to parliament; nobody threatens anybody else with the organised indignation of the gipsies all over the world. The case of the Jew in the nation is very different from that of the tinker in the town. The moral elements that can be appealed to are of a very different style and scale. No gipsies are millionaires.

In short, the Jewish problem differs from anything like the gipsy problem in two highly practical respects. First, the Jews already exercise colossal cosmopolitan financial power. And second, the modern societies they live in also grant them vital forms of national political power. Here the vagrant is already as rich as a miser and the vagrant is actually made a mayor. As will be seen shortly, there is a Jewish side of the story which leads really to the same ending of the story; but the truth stated here is quite independent of any sympathetic or unsympathetic view of the race in question. It is a question of fact, which a sensible Jew can afford to recognise, and which the most sensible Jews do very definitely recognise. It is really irrational for anybody to pretend that the Jews are only a curious sect of Englishmen, like the Plymouth Brothers or the Seventh Day Baptists, in the face of such a simple fact as the family of Rothschild. Nobody can pretend that such an English sect can establish five brothers, or even cousins, in the five great capitals of Europe. Nobody can pretend that the Seventh Day Baptists are the seven grandchildren of one grandfather, scattered systematically among the warring nations of the earth. Nobody thinks the Plymouth Brothers are literally brothers, or that they are likely to be quite as powerful in Paris or in Petrograd as in Plymouth.

The Jewish problem can be stated very simply after all. It is normal for the nation to contain the family. With the Jews the family is generally divided among the nations. This may not appear to matter to those who do not believe in nations, those who really think there ought not to be any nations. But I literally fail to understand anybody who does believe in patriotism thinking that this state of affairs can be consistent with it. It is in its nature intolerable, from a national standpoint, that a man admittedly powerful in one nation should be bound to a man equally powerful in another nation, by ties more private and personal even than nationality.

Even when the purpose is not any sort of treachery, the very position is a sort of treason. Given the passionately patriotic peoples of the west of Europe especially, the state of things cannot conceivably be satisfactory to a patriot. But least of all can it conceivably be satisfactory to a Jewish patriot; by which I do not mean a sham Englishman or a sham Frenchman, but a man who is sincerely patriotic for the historic and highly civilised nation of the Jews.

For what may be criticised here as Anti-Semitism is only the negative side of Zionism. For the sake of convenience I have begun by stating it in terms of the universal popular impression which some call a popular prejudice. But such a truth of differentiation is equally true on both its different sides. Suppose somebody proposes to mix up England and America, under some absurd name like the Anglo-Saxon Empire. One man may say, “Why should the jolly English inns and villages be swamped by these priggish provincial Yankees?” Another may say, “Why should the real democracy of a young country be tied to your snobbish old squirarchy?” But both these views are only versions of the same view of a great American: “God never made one people good enough to rule another.”

The primary point about Zionism is that, whether it is right or wrong, it does offer a real and reasonable answer both to Anti-Semitism and to the charge of Anti-Semitism. The usual phrases about religious persecution and racial hatred are not reasonable answers, or answers at all. These Jews do not deny that they are Jews; they do not deny that Jews may be unpopular; they do not deny that there may be other than superstitious reasons for their unpopularity. They are not obliged to maintain that when a Piccadilly dandy talks about being in the hands of the Jews he is moved by the theological fanaticism that prevails in Piccadilly; or that when a silly youth on Derby Day says he was done by a dirty Jew, he is merely conforming to that Christian orthodoxy which is one of the strict traditions of the Turf. They are not, like some other Jews, forced to pay so extravagant a compliment to the Christian religion as to suppose it the ruling motive of half the discontented talk in clubs and public-houses, of nearly every business man who suspects a foreign financier, or nearly every working man who grumbles against the local pawn-broker. Religious mania, unfortunately, is not so common. The Zionists do not need to deny any of these things; what they offer is not a denial but a diagnosis and a remedy. Whether their diagnosis is correct, whether their remedy is practicable, we will try to consider later, with something like a fair summary of what is to be said on both sides. But their theory, on the face of it, is perfectly reasonable. It is the theory that any abnormal qualities in the Jews are due to the abnormal position of the Jews. They are traders rather than producers because they have no land of their own from which to produce, and they are cosmopolitans rather than patriots because they have no country of their own for which to be patriotic. They can no more become farmers while they are vagrant than they could have built the Temple of Solomon while they were building the Pyramids of Egypt. They can no more feel the full stream of nationalism while they wander in the desert of nomadism than they could bathe in the waters of Jordan while they were weeping by the waters of Babylon. For exile is the worst kind of bondage. In insisting upon that at least the Zionists have insisted upon a profound truth, with many applications to many other moral issues. It is true that for any one whose heart is set on a particular home or shrine, to be locked out is to be locked in. The narrowest possible prison for him is the whole world.

It will be well to notice briefly, however, how the principle applies to the two Anti-Semitic arguments already considered. The first is the charge of usury and unproductive loans, the second the charge either of treason or of unpatriotic detachment. The charge of usury is regarded, not unreasonably, as only a specially dangerous development of the general charge of uncreative commerce and the refusal of creative manual exercise; the unproductive loan is only a minor form of the unproductive labour. It is certainly true that the latter complaint is, if possible, commoner than the former, especially in comparatively simple communities like those of Palestine. A very honest Moslem Arab said to me, with a singular blend of simplicity and humour, “A Jew does not work; but he grows rich. You never see a Jew working; and yet they grow rich. What I want to know is, why do we not all do the same? Why do we not also do this and become rich?” This is, I need hardly say, an over-simplification. Jews often work hard at some things, especially intellectual things. But the same experience which tells us that we have known many industrious Jewish scholars, Jewish lawyers, Jewish doctors, Jewish pianists, chess-players and so on, is an experience which cuts both ways. The same experience, if carefully consulted, will probably tell us that we have not known personally many patient Jewish ploughmen, many laborious Jewish blacksmiths, many active Jewish hedgers and ditchers, or even many energetic Jewish hunters and fishermen.

In short, the popular impression is tolerably true to life, as popular impressions very often are; though it is not fashionable to say so in these days of democracy and self-determination. Jews do not generally work on the land, or in any of the handicrafts that are akin to the land; but the Zionists reply that this is because it can never really be their own land. That is Zionism, and that has really a practical place in the past and future of Zion.

Patriotism is not merely dying for the nation. It is dying with the nation. It is regarding the fatherland not merely as a real resting-place like an inn, but as a final resting-place, like a house or even a grave. Even the most Jingo of the Jews do not feel like this about their adopted country; and I doubt if the most intelligent of the Jews would pretend that they did. Even if we can bring ourselves to believe that Disraeli lived for England, we cannot think that he would have died with her. If England had sunk in the Atlantic he would not have sunk with her, but easily floated over to America to stand for the Presidency. Even if we are profoundly convinced that Mr. Beit or Mr. Eckstein had patriotic tears in his eyes when he obtained a gold concession from Queen Victoria, we cannot believe that in her absence he would have refused a similar concession from the German Emperor. When the Jew in France or in England says he is a good patriot he only means that he is a good citizen, and he would put it more truly if he said he was a good exile. Sometimes indeed he is an abominably bad citizen, and a most exasperating and execrable exile, but I am not talking of that side of the case. I am assuming that a man like Disraeli did really make a romance of England, that a man like Dernburg did really make a romance of Germany, and it is still true that though it was a romance, they would not have allowed it to be a tragedy. They would have seen that the story had a happy ending, especially for themselves. These Jews would not have died with any Christian nation.

But the Jews did die with Jerusalem. That is the first and last great truth in Zionism. Jerusalem was destroyed and Jews were destroyed with it, men who cared no longer to live because the city of their faith had fallen. It may be questioned whether all the Zionists have all the sublime insanity of the Zealots. But at least it is not nonsense to suggest that the Zionists might feel like this about Zion. It is nonsense to suggest that they would ever feel like this about Dublin or Moscow. And so far at least the truth both in Semitism and Anti-Semitism is included in Zionism.

It is a commonplace that the infamous are more famous than the famous. Byron noted, with his own misanthropic moral, that we think more of Nero the monster who killed his mother than of Nero the noble Roman who defeated Hannibal. The name of Julian more often suggests Julian the Apostate than Julian the Saint; though the latter crowned his canonisation with the sacred glory of being the patron saint of inn-keepers. But the best example of this unjust historical habit is the most famous of all and the most infamous of all. If there is one proper noun which has become a common noun, if there is one name which has been generalised till it means a thing, it is certainly the name of Judas. We should hesitate perhaps to call it a Christian name, except in the more evasive form of Jude. And even that, as the name of a more faithful apostle, is another illustration of the same injustice; for, by comparison with the other, Jude the faithful might almost be called Jude the obscure. The critic who said, whether innocently or ironically, "What wicked men these early Christians were!" was certainly more successful in innocence than in irony; for he seems to have been innocent or ignorant of the whole idea of the Christian communion. Judas Iscariot was one of the very earliest of all possible early Christians. And the whole point about him was that his hand was in the same dish; the traitor is always a friend, or he could never be a foe. But the point for the moment is merely that the name is known everywhere merely as the name of a traitor. The name of Judas nearly always means Judas Iscariot; it hardly ever means Judas Maccabeus. And if you shout out "Judas" to a politician in the thick of a political tumult, you will have some difficulty in soothing him afterwards, with the assurance that you had merely traced in him something of that splendid zeal and valour which dragged down the tyranny of Antiochus, in the day of the great deliverance of Israel.

Those two possible uses of the name of Judas would give us yet another compact embodiment of the case for Zionism. Numberless international Jews have gained the bad name of Judas, and some have certainly earned it. If you have gained or earned the good name of Judas, it can quite fairly and intelligently be affirmed that this was not the fault of the Jews, but of the peculiar position of the Jews. A man can betray like Judas Iscariot in another man's house; but a man cannot fight like Judas Maccabeus for another man's temple. There is no more truly rousing revolutionary story amid all the stories of mankind, there is no more perfect type of the element of chivalry in rebellion, than that magnificent tale of the Maccabee who stabbed from underneath the elephant of Antiochus and died under the fall of that huge and living castle. But it would be unreasonable to ask Mr. Montagu to stick a knife into the elephant on which Lord Curzon, let us say, was riding in all the pomp of Asiatic imperialism. For Mr. Montagu would not be liberating his own land; and therefore he naturally prefers to interest himself either in operations in silver or in somewhat slower and less efficient methods of liberation. In short, whatever we may think of the financial or social services such as were rendered to England in the affair of Marconi, or to France in the affair of Panama, it must be admitted that these exhibit a humbler and more humdrum type of civic duty, and do not remind us of the more reckless virtues of the Maccabees or the Zealots. A man may be a good citizen of anywhere, but he cannot be a national hero of nowhere; and for this particular type of patriotic passion it is necessary to have a *patria*. The Zionists therefore are maintaining a perfectly reasonable proposition, both about the charge of usury and the charge of treason, if they claim that both could be cured by the return to a national soil as promised in Zionism.

Unfortunately they are not always reasonable about their own reasonable proposition. Some of them have a most unlucky habit of ignoring, and therefore implicitly denying, the very evil that they are wisely trying to cure. I have already remarked this irritating innocence in the first of the two questions; the criticism that sees everything in Shylock except the point of him, or the point of his knife. How in the politics of Palestine at this moment this first question is in every sense the primary question. Palestine has hardly as yet a patriotism to be betrayed; but it certainly has a peasantry to be oppressed, and especially to be oppressed as so many peasantries have been with usury and forestalling. The Syrians and Arabs and all the agricultural and pastoral populations of Palestine are, rightly or wrongly, alarmed and angered at the advent of the Jews to power; for the perfectly practical and simple reason of the reputation which the Jews have all over the world. It is really ridiculous in people so intelligent as the Jews, and especially so intelligent as the Zionists, to ignore so enormous and elementary a fact as that reputation and its natural results. It may or may not in this case be unjust; but in any case it is not unnatural. It may be the result of persecution, but it is one that has definitely resulted. It may be the consequence of a misunderstanding; but it is a misunderstanding that must itself be understood. Rightly or wrongly, certain people in Palestine fear the coming of the Jews as they fear the coming of the locusts; they regard them as parasites that feed on a community by a thousand methods of financial intrigue and economic exploitation. I could understand the Jews indignantly denying this, or eagerly disproving it, or best of all, explaining what is true in it while exposing what is untrue. What is strange, I might almost say weird, about the attitude of some quite intelligent and sincere Zionists, is that they talk, write and apparently think as if there were no such thing in the world.

I will give one curious example from one of the best and most brilliant of the Zionists. Dr. Weizmann is a man of large mind and human sympathies; and it is difficult to believe that any one with so fine a sense of humanity can be entirely empty of anything like a sense of humour. Yet, in the middle of a very temperate and magnanimous address on “Zionist Policy,” he can actually say a thing like this, “The Arabs need us with our knowledge, and our experience and our money. If they do not have us they will fall into the hands of others, they will fall among sharks.” One is tempted for the moment to doubt whether any one else in the world could have said that, except the Jew with his strange mixture of brilliancy and blindness, of subtlety and simplicity. It is much as if President Wilson were to say, “Unless America deals with Mexico, it will be dealt with by some modern commercial power, that has trust-magnates and hustling millionaires.” But would President Wilson say it? It is as if the German Chancellor had said, “We must rush to the rescue of the poor Belgians, or they may be put under some system with a rigid militarism and a bullying bureaucracy.” But would even a German Chancellor put it exactly like that? Would anybody put it in the exact order of words and structure of sentence in which Dr. Weizmann has put it? Would even the Turks say, “The Armenians need us with our order and our discipline and our arms. If they do not have us they will fall into the hands of others, they will perhaps be in danger of massacres.” I suspect that a Turk would see the joke, even if it were as grim a joke as the massacres themselves. If the Zionists wish to quiet the fears of the Arabs, surely the first thing to do is to discover what the Arabs are afraid of. And very little investigation will reveal the simple truth that they are very much afraid of sharks; and that in their book of symbolic or heraldic zoology it is the Jew who is adorned with the dorsal fin and the crescent of cruel teeth. This may be a fairy-tale about a fabulous animal; but it is one which all sorts of races believe, and certainly one which these races believe.

But the case is yet more curious than that. These simple tribes are afraid, not only of the dorsal fin and dental arrangements which Dr. Weizmann may say (with some justice) that he has not got; they are also afraid of the other things which he says he has got. They may be in error, at the first superficial glance, in mistaking a respectable professor for a shark. But they can hardly be mistaken in attributing to the respectable professor what he himself considers as his claims to respect. And as the imagery about the shark may be too metaphorical or almost mythological, there is not the smallest difficulty in stating in plain words what the Arabs fear in the Jews. They fear, in exact terms, their knowledge and their experience and their money. The Arabs fear exactly the three things which he says they need. Only the Arabs would call it a knowledge of financial trickery and an experience of political intrigue, and the power given by hoards of money not only of their own but of other peoples. About Dr. Weizmann and the true Zionists this is self-evidently unjust; but about Jewish influence of the more visible and vulgar kind it has to be proved to be unjust. Feeling as I do the force of the real case for Zionism, I venture most earnestly to implore the Jews to disprove it, and not to dismiss it. But above all I implore them not to be content with assuring us again and again of their knowledge and their experience and their money. That is what people dread like a pestilence or an earthquake; their knowledge and their experience and their money. It is needless for Dr. Weizmann to tell us that he does not desire to enter Palestine like a Junker or drive thousands of Arabs forcibly out of the land; nobody supposes that Dr. Weizmann looks like a Junker; and nobody among the enemies of the Jews says that they have driven their foes in that fashion since the wars with the Canaanites. But for the Jews to reassure us by insisting on their own economic culture or commercial education is exactly like the Junkers reassuring us by insisting on the unquestioned supremacy of their Kaiser or the unquestioned obedience of their soldiers. Men bar themselves in their houses, or even hide themselves in their cellars, when such virtues are abroad in the land.

In short the fear of the Jews in Palestine, reasonable or unreasonable, is a thing that must be answered by reason. It is idle for the unpopular thing to answer with boasts, especially boasts of the very quality that makes it unpopular. But I think it could be answered by reason, or at any rate tested by reason; and the tests by consideration. The principle is still as stated above; that the tests must not merely insist on the virtues the Jews do show, but rather deal with the particular virtues which they are generally accused of not showing. It is necessary to understand this more thoroughly than it is generally understood, and especially better than it is usually stated in the language of fashionable controversy. For the question involves the whole success or failure of Zionism. Many of the Zionists know it; but I rather doubt whether most of the Anti-Zionists know that they know it. And some of the phrases of the Zionists, such as those that I have noted, too often tend to produce the impression that they ignore when they are not ignorant. They are not ignorant; and they do not ignore in practice; even when an intellectual habit makes them seem to ignore in theory. Nobody who has seen a Jewish rural settlement, such as Rishon, can doubt that some Jews are sincerely filled with the vision of sitting under their own vine and fig-tree, and even with its accompanying lesson that it is first necessary to grow the fig-tree and the vine.

The true test of Zionism may seem a topsy-turvy test. It will not succeed by the number of successes, but rather by the number of failures, or what the world (and certainly not least the Jewish world) has generally called failures. It will be tested, not by whether Jews can climb to the top of the ladder, but by whether Jews can remain at the bottom; not by whether they have a hundred arts of becoming important, but by whether they have any skill in the art of remaining insignificant. It is often noted that the intelligent Israelite can rise to positions of power and trust outside Israel, like Witte in Russia or Rufus Isaacs in England. It is generally bad, I think, for their adopted country; but in any case it is no good for the particular problem of their own country. Palestine cannot have a population of Prime Ministers and Chief Justices; and if those they rule and judge are not Jews, then we have not established a commonwealth but only an oligarchy. It is said again that the ancient Jews turned their enemies into hewers of wood and drawers of water. The modern Jews have to turn themselves into hewers of wood and drawers of water. If they cannot do that, they cannot turn themselves into citizens, but only into a kind of alien bureaucrats, of all kinds the most perilous and the most imperilled. Hence a Jewish state will not be a success when the Jews in it are successful, or even when the Jews in it are statesmen. It will be a success when the Jews in it are scavengers, when the Jews in it are sweeps, when they are dockers and ditchers and porters and hodmen. When the Zionist can point proudly to a Jewish navvy who has *not* risen in the world, an under-gardener who is not now taking his ease as an upper-gardener, a yokel who is still a yokel, or even a village idiot at least sufficiently idiotic to remain in his village, then indeed the world will come to blow the trumpets and lift up the heads of the everlasting gates; for God will have turned the captivity of Zion.

Zionists of whose sincerity I am personally convinced, and of whose intelligence anybody would be convinced, have told me that there really is, in places like Rishon, something like a beginning of this spirit; the love of the peasant for his land. One lady, even in expressing her conviction of it, called it “this very un-Jewish characteristic.” She was perfectly well aware both of the need of it in the Jewish land, and the lack of it in the Jewish race. In short she was well aware of the truth of that seemingly topsy-turvy test I have suggested; that of whether men are worthy to be drudges. When a humorous and humane Jew thus accepts the test, and honestly expects the Jewish people to pass it, then I think the claim is very serious indeed, and one not lightly to be set aside. I do certainly think it a very serious responsibility under the circumstances to set it altogether aside. It is our whole complaint against the Jew that he does not till the soil or toil with the spade; it is very hard on him to refuse him if he really says, “Give me a soil and I will till it; give me a spade and I will use it.” It is our whole reason for distrusting him that he cannot really love any of the lands in which he wanders; it seems rather indefensible to be deaf to him if he really says, “Give me a land and I will love it.” I would certainly give him a land or some instalment of the land, (in what general sense I will try to suggest a little later) so long as his conduct on it was watched and tested according to the principles I have suggested. If he asks for the spade he must use the spade, and not merely employ the spade, in the sense of hiring half a hundred men to use spades. If he asks for the soil he must till the soil; that is he must belong to the soil and not merely make the soil belong to him. He must have the simplicity, and what many would call the stupidity of the peasant. He must not only call a spade a spade, but regard it as a spade and not as a speculation. By some true conversion the urban and modern man must be not only on the soil, but of the soil, and free from our urban trick of inventing the word dirt for the dust to which we shall return. He must be washed in mud, that he may be clean.

How far this can really happen it is very hard for anybody, especially a casual visitor, to discover in the present crisis. It is admitted that there is much Arab and Syrian labour employed; and this in itself would leave all the danger of the Jew as a mere capitalist. The Jews explain it, however, by saying that the Arabs will work for a lower wage, and that this is necessarily a great temptation to the struggling colonists. In this they may be acting naturally as colonists, but it is none the less clear that they are not yet acting literally as labourers. It may not be their fault that they are not proving themselves to be peasants; but it is none the less clear that this situation in itself does not prove them to be peasants. So far as that is concerned, it still remains to be decided finally whether a Jew will be an agricultural labourer, if he is a decently paid agricultural labourer. On the other hand, the leaders of these local experiments, if they have not yet shown the higher materialism of peasants, most certainly do not show the lower materialism of capitalists. There can be no doubt of the patriotic and even poetic spirit in which many of them hope to make their ancient wilderness blossom like the rose. They at least would still stand among the great prophets of Israel, and none the less though they prophesied in vain.

I have tried to state fairly the case for Zionism, for the reason already stated; that I think it intellectually unjust that any attempt of the Jews to regularise their position should merely be rejected as one of their irregularities. But I do not disguise the enormous difficulties of doing it in the particular conditions Of Palestine. In fact the greatest of the real difficulties of Zionism is that it has to take place in Zion. There are other difficulties, however, which when they are not specially the fault of Zionists are very much the fault of Jews. The worst is the general impression of a business pressure from the more brutal and businesslike type of Jew, which arouses very violent and very just indignation. When I was in Jerusalem it was openly said that Jewish financiers had complained of the low rate of interest at which loans were made by the government to the peasantry, and even that the government had yielded to them. If this were true it was a heavier reproach to the government even than to the Jews. But the general truth is that such a state of feeling seems to make the simple and solid patriotism of a Palestinian Jewish nation practically impossible, and forces us to consider some alternative or some compromise. The most sensible statement of a compromise I heard among the Zionists was suggested to me by Dr. Weizmann, who is a man not only highly intelligent but ardent and sympathetic. And the phrase he used gives the key to my own rough conception of a possible solution, though he himself would probably, not accept that solution.

Dr. Weizmann suggested, if I understood him rightly, that he did not think Palestine could be a single and simple national territory quite in the sense of France; but he did not see why it should not be a commonwealth of cantons after the manner of Switzerland. Some of these could be Jewish cantons, others Arab cantons, and so on according to the type of population. This is in itself more reasonable than much that is suggested on the same side; but the point of it for my own purpose is more particular. This idea, whether it correctly represents Dr. Weizmann's meaning or no, clearly involves the abandonment of the solidarity of Palestine, and tolerates the idea of groups of Jews being separated from each other by populations of a different type. Now if once this notion be considered admissible, it seems to me capable of considerable extension. It seems possible that there might be not only Jewish cantons in Palestine but Jewish cantons outside Palestine, Jewish colonies in suitable and selected places in adjacent parts or in many other parts of the world. They might be affiliated to some official centre in Palestine, or even in Jerusalem, where there would naturally be at least some great religious headquarters of the scattered race and religion. The nature of that religious centre it must be for Jews to decide; but I think if I were a Jew I would build the Temple without bothering about the site of the Temple. That they should have the old site, of course, is not to be thought of; it would raise a Holy War from Morocco to the marches of China. But seeing that some of the greatest of the deeds of Israel were done, and some of the most glorious of the songs of Israel sung, when their only temple was a box carried about in the desert, I cannot think that the mere moving of the situation of the place of sacrifice need even mean so much to that historic tradition as it would to many others. That the Jews should have some high place of dignity and ritual in Palestine, such as a great building like the Mosque of Omar, is certainly right and reasonable; for upon no theory can their historic connection be dismissed. I think it is sophistry to say, as do some Anti-Semites, that the Jews have no more right there than the Jebusites. If there are Jebusites they are Jebusites without knowing it. I think it sufficiently answered in the fine phrase of an English priest, in many ways more Anti-Semitic than I: "The people that remembers has a right." The very worst of the Jews, as well as the very best, do in some sense remember. They are hated and persecuted and frightened into false names and double lives; but they remember. They lie, they swindle, they betray, they oppress; but they remember. The more we happen to hate such elements among the Hebrews the more we admire the manly and magnificent elements among the more vague and vagrant tribes of Palestine, the more we must admit that paradox. The unheroic have the heroic memory; and the heroic people have no memory.

But whatever the Jewish nation might wish to do about a national shrine or other supreme centre, the suggestion for the moment is that something like a Jewish territorial scheme might really be attempted, if we permit the Jews to be scattered no longer as individuals but as groups. It seems possible that by some such extension of the definition of Zionism we might ultimately overcome even the greatest difficulty of Zionism, the difficulty of resettling a sufficient number of so large a race on so small a land. For if the advantage of the ideal to the Jews is to gain the promised land, the advantage to the Gentiles is to get rid of the Jewish problem, and I do not see why we should obtain all their advantage and none of our own. Therefore I would leave as few Jews as possible in other established nations, and to these I would give a special position best described as privilege; some sort of self-governing enclave with special laws and exemptions; for instance, I would certainly excuse them from conscription, which I think a gross injustice in their case. [Footnote: Of course the privileged exile would also lose the rights of a native.] A Jew might be treated as respectfully as a foreign ambassador, but a foreign ambassador is a foreigner. Finally, I would give the same privileged position to all Jews everywhere, as an alternative policy to Zionism, if Zionism failed by the test I have named; the only true and the only tolerable test; if the Jews had not so much failed as peasants as succeeded as capitalists.

There is one word to be added; it will be noted that inevitably and even against some of my own desires, the argument has returned to that recurrent conclusion, which was found in the Roman Empire and the Crusades. The European can do justice to the Jew; but it must be the European who does it. Such a possibility as I have thrown out, and any other possibility that any one can think of, becomes at once impossible without some idea of a general suzerainty of Christendom over the lands of the Moslem and the Jew. Personally, I think it would be better if it were a general suzerainty of Christendom, rather than a particular supremacy of England. And I feel this, not from a desire to restrain the English power, but rather from a desire to defend it. I think there is not a little danger to England in the diplomatic situation involved; but that is a diplomatic question that it is neither within my power or duty to discuss adequately. But if I think it would be wiser for France and England together to hold Syria and Palestine together rather than separately, that only completes and clinches the conclusion that has haunted me, with almost uncanny recurrence, since I first saw Jerusalem sitting on the hill like a turreted town in England or in France; and for one moment the dark dome of it was again the Templum Domini, and the tower on it was the Tower of Tancred.

Anyhow with the failure of Zionism would fall the last and best attempt at a rationalistic theory of the Jew. We should be left facing a mystery which no other rationalism has ever come so near to providing within rational cause and cure. Whatever we do, we shall not return to that insular innocence and comfortable unconsciousness of Christendom, in which the Victorian agnostics could suppose that the Semitic problem was a brief medieval insanity. In this as in greater things, even if we lost our faith we could not recover our agnosticism. We can never recover agnosticism, any more than any other kind of ignorance. We know that there is a Jewish problem; we only hope that there is a Jewish solution. If there is not, there is no other. We cannot believe again that the Jew is an Englishman with certain theological theories, any more than we can believe again any other part of the optimistic materialism whose temple is the Albert Memorial. A scheme of guilds may be attempted and may be a failure; but never again can we respect mere Capitalism for its success. An attack may be made on political corruption, and it may be a failure; but never again can we believe that our politics are not corrupt. And so Zionism may be attempted and may be a failure; but never again can we ourselves be at ease in Zion. Or rather, I should say, if the Jew cannot be at ease in Zion we can never again persuade ourselves that he is at ease out of Zion. We can only salute as it passes that restless and mysterious figure, knowing at last that there must be in him something mystical as well as mysterious; that whether in the sense of the sorrows of Christ or of the sorrows of Cain, he must pass by, for he belongs to God.

CONCLUSION

To have worn a large scallop shell in my hat in the streets of London might have been deemed ostentatious, to say nothing of carrying a staff like a long pole; and wearing sandals might have proclaimed rather that I had not come from Jerusalem but from Letchworth, which some identify with the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God. Lacking such attributes, I passed through South England as one who might have come from Ramsgate or from anywhere; and the only symbol left to me of my pilgrimage was a cheap ring of metal coloured like copper and brass. For on it was written in Greek characters the word “Jerusalem,” and though it may be less valuable than a brass nail, I do not think you can buy it in the Strand. All those enormous and everlasting things, all those gates of bronze and mosaics of purple and peacock colouring, all those chapels of gold and columns of crimson marble, had all shrivelled up and dwindled down to that one small thread of red metal round my finger. I could not help having a feeling, like Aladdin, that if I rubbed the ring perhaps all those towers would rise again. And there was a sort of feeling of truth in the fancy after all. We talk of the changeless East; but in one sense the impression of it is really rather changing, with its wandering tribes and its shifting sands, in which the genii of the East might well build the palace or the paradise of a day. As I saw the low and solid English cottages rising around me amid damp delightful thickets under rainy skies, I felt that in a deeper sense it is rather we who build for permanence or at least for a sort of peace. It is something more than comfort; a relative and reasonable contentment. And there came back on me like a boomerang a rather indescribable thought which had circled round my head through most of my journey; that Christendom is like a gigantic bronze come out of the furnace of the Near East; that in Asia is only the fire and in Europe the form. The nearest to what I mean was suggested in that very striking book *Form and Colour*, by Mr. March Philips. When I spoke of the idols of Asia, many moderns may well have murmured against such a description of the ideals of Buddha or Mrs. Besant. To which I can only reply that I do know a little about the ideals, and I think I prefer the idols. I have far more sympathy with the enthusiasm for a nice green or yellow idol, with nine arms and three heads, than with the philosophy ultimately represented by the snake devouring his tail; the awful sceptical argument in a circle by which everything begins and ends in the mind. I would far rather be a fetish worshipper and have a little fun, than be an oriental pessimist expected always to smile like an optimist. Now it seems to me that the fighting Christian creed is the one thing that has been in that mystical circle and broken out of it, and become something real as well. It has gone westward by a sort of centrifugal force, like a stone from a sling; and so made the revolving Eastern mind, as the Franciscan said in Jerusalem, do something at last.

Anyhow, although I carried none of the trappings of a pilgrim I felt strongly disposed to take the privileges of one. I wanted to be entertained at the firesides of total strangers, in the medieval manner, and to tell them interminable tales of my travels. I wanted to linger in Dover, and try it on the citizens of that town. I nearly got out of the train at several wayside stations, where I saw secluded cottages which might be brightened by a little news from the Holy Land. For it seemed to me that all my fellow-countrymen must be my friends; all these English places had come much closer together after travels that seemed in comparison as vast as the spaces between the stars. The hop-fields of Kent seemed to me like outlying parts of my own kitchen garden; and London itself to be really situated at London End. London was perhaps the largest of the suburbs of Beaconsfield. By the time I came to Beaconsfield itself, dusk was dropping over the beechwoods and the white cross-roads. The distance seemed to grow deeper and richer with darkness as I went up the long lanes towards my home; and in that distance, as I drew nearer, I heard the barking of a dog.

WHAT I SAW IN AMERICA

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What is America?

I have never managed to lose my old conviction that travel narrows the mind. At least a man must make a double effort of moral humility and imaginative energy to prevent it from narrowing his mind. Indeed there is something touching and even tragic about the thought of the thoughtless tourist, who might have stayed at home loving Laplanders, embracing Chinamen, and clasping Patagonians to his heart in Hampstead or Surbiton, but for his blind and suicidal impulse to go and see what they looked like. This is not meant for nonsense; still less is it meant for the silliest sort of nonsense, which is cynicism. The human bond that he feels at home is not an illusion. On the contrary, it is rather an inner reality. Man is inside all men. In a real sense any man may be inside any men. But to travel is to leave the inside and draw dangerously near the outside. So long as he thought of men in the abstract, like naked toiling figures in some classic frieze, merely as those who labour and love their children and die, he was thinking the fundamental truth about them. By going to look at their unfamiliar manners and customs he is inviting them to disguise themselves in fantastic masks and costumes. Many modern internationalists talk as if men of different nationalities had only to meet and mix and understand each other. In reality that is the moment of supreme danger — the moment when they meet. We might shiver, as at the old euphemism by which a meeting meant a duel.

Travel ought to combine amusement with instruction; but most travellers are so much amused that they refuse to be instructed. I do not blame them for being amused; it is perfectly natural to be amused at a Dutchman for being Dutch or a Chinaman for being Chinese. Where they are wrong is that they take their own amusement seriously. They base on it their serious ideas of international instruction. It was said that the Englishman takes his pleasures sadly; and the pleasure of despising foreigners is one which he takes most sadly of all. He comes to scoff and does not remain to pray, but rather to excommunicate. Hence in international relations there is far too little laughing, and far too much sneering. But I believe that there is a better way which largely consists of laughter; a form of friendship between nations which is actually founded on differences. To hint at some such better way is the only excuse of this book.

Let me begin my American impressions with two impressions I had before I went to America. One was an incident and the other an idea; and when taken together they illustrate the attitude I mean. The first principle is that nobody should be ashamed of thinking a thing funny because it is foreign; the second is that he should be ashamed of thinking it wrong because it is funny. The reaction of his senses and superficial habits of mind against something new, and to him abnormal, is a perfectly healthy reaction. But the mind which imagines that mere unfamiliarity can possibly prove anything about inferiority is a very inadequate mind. It is inadequate even in criticising things that may really be inferior to the things involved here. It is far better to laugh at a negro for having a black face than to sneer at him for having a sloping skull. It is proportionally even more preferable to laugh rather than judge in dealing with highly civilised peoples. Therefore I put at the beginning two working examples of what I felt about America before I saw it; the sort of thing that a man has a right to enjoy as a joke, and the sort of thing he has a duty to understand and respect, because it is the explanation of the joke.

When I went to the American consulate to regularise my passports, I was capable of expecting the American consulate to be American. Embassies and consulates are by tradition like islands of the soil for which they stand; and I have often found the tradition corresponding to a truth. I have seen the unmistakable French official living on omelettes and a little wine and serving his sacred abstractions under the last palm-trees fringing a desert. In the heat and noise of quarrelling Turks and Egyptians, I have come suddenly, as with the cool shock of his own shower-bath, on the listless amiability of the English gentleman. The officials I interviewed were very American, especially in being very polite; for whatever may have been the mood or meaning of Martin Chuzzlewit, I have always found Americans by far the politest people in the world. They put in my hands a form to be filled up, to all appearance like other forms I had filled up in other passport offices. But in reality it was very different from any form I had ever filled up in my life. At least it was a little like a freer form of the game called ‘Confessions’ which my friends and I invented in our youth; an examination paper containing questions like, ‘If you saw a rhinoceros in the front garden, what would you do?’ One of my friends, I remember, wrote, ‘Take the pledge.’ But that is another story, and might bring Mr. Pussyfoot Johnson on the scene before his time.

One of the questions on the paper was, ‘Are you an anarchist?’ To which a detached philosopher would naturally feel inclined to answer, ‘What the devil has that to do with you? Are you an atheist?’ along with some playful efforts to cross-examine the official about what constitutes an ἀρχη [Greek: archê]. Then there was the question, ‘Are you in favour of subverting the government of the United States by force?’ Against this I should write, ‘I prefer to answer that question at the end of my tour and not the beginning.’ The inquisitor, in his more than morbid curiosity, had then written down, ‘Are you a polygamist?’ The answer to this is, ‘No such luck’ or ‘Not such a fool,’ according to our experience of the other sex. But perhaps a better answer would be that given to W. T. Stead when he circulated the rhetorical question, ‘Shall I slay my brother Boer?’ — the answer that ran, ‘Never interfere in family matters.’ But among many things that amused me almost to the point of treating the form thus disrespectfully, the most amusing was the thought of the ruthless outlaw who should feel compelled to treat it respectfully. I like to think of the foreign desperado, seeking to slip into America with official papers under official protection, and sitting down to write with a beautiful gravity, ‘I am an anarchist. I hate you all and wish to destroy you.’ Or, ‘I intend to subvert by force the government of the United States as soon as possible, sticking the long sheath-knife in my left trouser-pocket into Mr. Harding at the earliest opportunity.’ Or again, ‘Yes, I am a polygamist all right, and my forty-seven wives are accompanying me on the voyage disguised as secretaries.’ There seems to be a certain simplicity of mind about these answers; and it is reassuring to know that anarchists and polygamists are so pure and good that the police have only to ask them questions and they are certain to tell no lies.

Now that is a model of the sort of foreign practice, founded on foreign problems, at which a man’s first impulse is naturally to laugh. Nor have I any intention of apologising for my laughter. A man is perfectly entitled to laugh at a thing because he happens to find it incomprehensible. What he has no right to do is to laugh at it as incomprehensible, and then criticise it as if he comprehended it. The very fact of its unfamiliarity and mystery ought to set him thinking about the deeper causes that make people so different from himself, and that without merely assuming that they must be inferior to himself.

Superficially this is rather a queer business. It would be easy enough to suggest that in this America has introduced a quite abnormal spirit of inquisition; an interference with liberty unknown among all the ancient despotisms and aristocracies. About that there will be something to be said later; but superficially it is true that this degree of officialism is comparatively unique. In a journey which I took only the year before I had occasion to have my papers passed by governments which many worthy people in the West would vaguely identify with corsairs and assassins; I have stood on the other side of Jordan, in the land ruled by a rude Arab chief, where the police looked so like brigands that one wondered what the brigands looked like. But they did not ask me whether I had come to subvert the power of the Shereef; and they did not exhibit the faintest curiosity about my personal views on the ethical basis of civil authority. These ministers of ancient Moslem despotism did not care about whether I was an anarchist; and naturally would not have minded if I had been a polygamist. The Arab chief was probably a polygamist himself. These slaves of Asiatic autocracy were content, in the old liberal fashion, to judge me by my actions; they did not inquire into my thoughts. They held their power as limited to the limitation of practice; they did not forbid me to hold a theory. It would be easy to argue here that Western democracy persecutes where even Eastern despotism tolerates or emancipates. It would be easy to develop the fancy that, as compared with the sultans of Turkey or Egypt, the American Constitution is a thing like the Spanish Inquisition.

Only the traveller who stops at that point is totally wrong; and the traveller only too often does stop at that point. He has found something to make him laugh, and he will not suffer it to make him think. And the remedy is not to unsay what he has said, not even, so to speak, to unlaugh what he has laughed, not to deny that there is something unique and curious about this American inquisition into our abstract opinions, but rather to continue the train of thought, and follow the admirable advice of Mr. H. G. Wells, who said, ‘It is not much good thinking of a thing unless you think it out.’ It is not to deny that American officialism is rather peculiar on this point, but to inquire what it really is which makes America peculiar, or which is peculiar to America. In short, it is to get some ultimate idea of what America *is*; and the answer to that question will reveal something much deeper and grander and more worthy of our intelligent interest.

It may have seemed something less than a compliment to compare the American Constitution to the Spanish Inquisition. But oddly enough, it does involve a truth; and still more oddly perhaps, it does involve a compliment.

The American Constitution does resemble the Spanish Inquisition in this: that it is founded on a creed. America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence; perhaps the only piece of practical politics that is also theoretical politics and also great literature. It enunciates that all men are equal in their claim to justice, that governments exist to give them that justice, and that their authority is for that reason just. It certainly does condemn anarchism, and it does also by inference condemn atheism, since it clearly names the Creator as the ultimate authority from whom these equal rights are derived. Nobody expects a modern political system to proceed logically in the application of such dogmas, and in the matter of God and Government it is naturally God whose claim is taken more lightly. The point is that there is a creed, if not about divine, at least about human things.

Now a creed is at once the broadest and the narrowest thing in the world. In its nature it is as broad as its scheme for a brotherhood of all men. In its nature it is limited by its definition of the nature of all men. This was true of the Christian Church, which was truly said to exclude neither Jew nor Greek, but which did definitely substitute something else for Jewish religion or Greek philosophy. It was truly said to be a net drawing in of all kinds; but a net of a certain pattern, the pattern of Peter the Fisherman. And this is true even of the most disastrous distortions or degradations of that creed; and true among others of the Spanish Inquisition. It may have been narrow touching theology, it could not confess to being narrow about nationality or ethnology. The Spanish Inquisition might be admittedly Inquisitorial; but the Spanish Inquisition could not be merely Spanish. Such a Spaniard, even when he was narrower than his own creed, had to be broader than his own empire. He might burn a philosopher because he was heterodox; but he must accept a barbarian because he was orthodox. And we see, even in modern times, that the same Church which is blamed for making sages heretics is also blamed for making savages priests. Now in a much vaguer and more evolutionary fashion, there is something of the same idea at the back of the great American experiment; the experiment of a democracy of diverse races which has been compared to a melting-pot. But even that metaphor implies that the pot itself is of a certain shape and a certain substance; a pretty solid substance. The melting-pot must not melt. The original shape was traced on the lines of Jeffersonian democracy; and it will remain in that shape until it becomes shapeless. America invites all men to become citizens; but it implies the dogma that there is such a thing as citizenship. Only, so far as its primary ideal is concerned, its exclusiveness is religious because it is not racial. The missionary can condemn a cannibal, precisely because he cannot condemn a Sandwich Islander. And in something of the same spirit the American may exclude a polygamist, precisely because he cannot exclude a Turk.

Now for America this is no idle theory. It may have been theoretical, though it was thoroughly sincere, when that great Virginian gentleman declared it in surroundings that still had something of the character of an English countryside. It is not merely theoretical now. There is nothing to prevent America being literally invaded by Turks, as she is invaded by Jews or Bulgars. In the most exquisitely inconsequent of the *Bab Ballads*, we are told concerning Pasha Bailey Ben: —

One morning knocked at half-past eight
A tall Red Indian at his gate.
In Turkey, as you ‘r’ p’raps aware,
Red Indians are extremely rare.

But the converse need by no means be true. There is nothing in the nature of things to prevent an emigration of Turks increasing and multiplying on the plains where the Red Indians wandered; there is nothing to necessitate the Turks being extremely rare. The Red Indians, alas, are likely to be rarer. And as I much prefer Red Indians to Turks, not to mention Jews, I speak without prejudice; but the point here is that America, partly by original theory and partly by historical accident, does lie open to racial admixtures which most countries would think incongruous or comic. That is why it is only fair to read any American definitions or rules in a certain light, and relatively to a rather unique position. It is not fair to compare the position of those who may meet Turks in the back street with that of those who have never met Turks except in the *Bab Ballads*. It is not fair simply to compare America with England in its regulations about the Turk. In short, it is not fair to do what almost every Englishman probably does; to look at the American international examination paper, and laugh and be satisfied with saying, ‘We don’t have any of that nonsense in England.’

We do not have any of that nonsense in England because we have never attempted to have any of that philosophy in England. And, above all, because we have the enormous advantage of feeling it natural to be national, because there is nothing else to be. England in these days is not well governed; England is not well educated; England suffers from wealth and poverty that are not well distributed. But England is English; *esto perpetua*. England is English as France is French or Ireland Irish; the great mass of men taking certain national traditions for granted. Now this gives us a totally different and a very much easier task. We have not got an inquisition, because we have not got a creed; but it is arguable that we do not need a creed, because we have got a character. In any of the old nations the national unity is preserved by the national type. Because we have a type we do not need to have a test.

Take that innocent question, ‘Are you an anarchist?’ which is intrinsically quite as impudent as ‘Are you an optimist?’ or ‘Are you a philanthropist?’ I am not discussing here whether these things are right, but whether most of us are in a position to know them rightly. Now it is quite true that most Englishmen do not find it necessary to go about all day asking each other whether they are anarchists. It is quite true that the phrase occurs on no British forms that I have seen. But this is not only because most of the Englishmen are not anarchists. It is even more because even the anarchists are Englishmen. For instance, it would be easy to make fun of the American formula by noting that the cap would fit all sorts of bald academic heads. It might well be maintained that Herbert Spencer was an anarchist. It is practically certain that Auberon Herbert was an anarchist. But Herbert Spencer was an extraordinarily typical Englishman of the Nonconformist middle class. And Auberon Herbert was an extraordinarily typical English aristocrat of the old and genuine aristocracy. Every one knew in his heart that the squire would not throw a bomb at the Queen, and the Nonconformist would not throw a bomb at anybody. Every one knew that there was something subconscious in a man like Auberon Herbert, which would have come out only in throwing bombs at the enemies of England; as it did come out in his son and namesake, the generous and unforgotten, who fell flinging bombs from the sky far beyond the German line. Every one knows that normally, in the last resort, the English gentleman is patriotic. Every one knows that the English Nonconformist is national even when he denies that he is patriotic. Nothing is more notable indeed than the fact that nobody is more stamped with the mark of his own nation than the man who says that there ought to be no nations. Somebody called Cobden the International Man; but no man could be more English than Cobden. Everybody recognises Tolstoy as the iconoclast of all patriotism; but nobody could be more Russian than Tolstoy. In the old countries where there are these national types, the types may be allowed to hold any theories. Even if they hold certain theories, they are unlikely to do certain things. So the conscientious objector, in the English sense, may be and is one of the peculiar by-products of England. But the conscientious objector will probably have a conscientious objection to throwing bombs.

Now I am very far from intending to imply that these American tests are good tests, or that there is no danger of tyranny becoming the temptation of America. I shall have something to say later on about that temptation or tendency. Nor do I say that they apply consistently this conception of a nation with the soul of a church, protected by religious and not racial selection. If they did apply that principle consistently, they would have to exclude pessimists and rich cynics who deny the democratic ideal; an excellent thing but a rather improbable one. What I say is that when we realise that this principle exists at all, we see the whole position in a totally different perspective. We say that the Americans are doing something heroic, or doing something insane, or doing it in an unworkable or unworthy fashion, instead of simply wondering what the devil they are doing.

When we realise the democratic design of such a cosmopolitan commonwealth, and compare it with our insular reliance or instincts, we see at once why such a thing has to be not only democratic but dogmatic. We see why in some points it tends to be inquisitive or intolerant. Any one can see the practical point by merely transferring into private life a problem like that of the two academic anarchists, who might by a coincidence be called the two Herberts. Suppose a man said, ‘Buffle, my old Oxford tutor, wants to meet you; I wish you’d ask him down for a day or two. He has the oddest opinions, but he’s very stimulating.’ It would not occur to us that the oddity of the Oxford don’s opinions would lead him to blow up the house; because the Oxford don is an English type. Suppose somebody said, ‘Do let me bring old Colonel Robinson down for the week-end; he’s a bit of a crank but quite interesting.’ We should not anticipate the colonel running amuck with a carving-knife and offering up human sacrifice in the garden; for these are not among the daily habits of an old English colonel; and because we know his habits, we do not care about his opinions. But suppose somebody offered to bring a person from the interior of Kamskatka to stay with us for a week or two, and added that his religion was a very extraordinary religion, we should feel a little more inquisitive about what kind of religion it was. If somebody wished to add a Hairy Ainu to the family party at Christmas, explaining that his point of view was so individual and interesting, we should want to know a little more about it and him. We should be tempted to draw up as fantastic an examination paper as that presented to the emigrant going to America. We should ask what a Hairy Ainu was, and how hairy he was, and above all what sort of Ainu he was. Would etiquette require us to ask him to bring his wife? And if we did ask him to bring his wife, how many wives would he bring? In short, as in the American formula, is he a polygamist? Merely as a point of housekeeping and accommodation the question is not irrelevant. Is the Hairy Ainu content with hair, or does he wear any clothes? If the police insist on his wearing clothes, will he recognise the authority of the police? In short, as in the American formula, is he an anarchist?

Of course this generalisation about America, like other historical things, is subject to all sorts of cross divisions and exceptions, to be considered in their place. The negroes are a special problem, because of what white men in the past did to them. The Japanese are a special problem, because of what men fear that they in the future may do to white men. The Jews are a special problem, because of what they and the Gentiles, in the past, present, and future, seem to have the habit of doing to each other. But the point is not that nothing exists in America except this idea; it is that nothing like this idea exists anywhere except in America. This idea is not internationalism; on the contrary it is decidedly nationalism. The Americans are very patriotic, and wish to make their new citizens patriotic Americans. But it is the idea of making a new nation literally out of any old nation that comes along. In a word, what is unique is not America but what is called Americanisation. We understand nothing till we understand the amazing ambition to Americanise the Kamskatkan and the Hairy Ainu. We are not trying to Anglicise thousands of French cooks or Italian organ-grinders. France is not trying to Gallicise thousands of English trippers or German prisoners of war. America is the one place in the world where this process, healthy or unhealthy, possible or impossible, is going on. And the process, as I have pointed out, is *not* internationalisation. It would be truer to say it is the nationalisation of the internationalised. It is making a home out of vagabonds and a nation out of exiles. This is what at once illuminates and softens the moral regulations which we may really think faddist or fanatical. They are abnormal; but in one sense this experiment of a home for the homeless is abnormal. In short, it has long been recognised that America was an asylum. It is only since Prohibition that it has looked a little like a lunatic asylum.

It was before sailing for America, as I have said, that I stood with the official paper in my hand and these thoughts in my head. It was while I stood on English soil that I passed through the two stages of smiling and then sympathising; of realising that my momentary amusement, at being asked if I were not an Anarchist, was partly due to the fact that I was not an American. And in truth I think there are some things a man ought to know about America before he sees it. What we know of a country beforehand may not affect what we see that it is; but it will vitally affect what we appreciate it for being, because it will vitally affect what we expect it to be. I can honestly say that I had never expected America to be what nine-tenths of the newspaper critics invariably assume it to be. I never thought it was a sort of Anglo-Saxon colony, knowing that it was more and more thronged with crowds of very different colonists. During the war I felt that the very worst propaganda for the Allies was the propaganda for the Anglo-Saxons. I tried to point out that in one way America is nearer to Europe than England is. If she is not nearer to Bulgaria, she is nearer to Bulgars; if she is not nearer to Bohemia, she is nearer to Bohemians. In my New York hotel the head waiter in the dining-room was a Bohemian; the head waiter in the grill-room was a Bulgar. Americans have nationalities at the end of the street which for us are at the ends of the earth. I did my best to persuade my countrymen not to appeal to the American as if he were a rather dowdy Englishman, who had been rusticating in the provinces and had not heard the latest news about the town. I shall record later some of those arresting realities which the traveller does not expect; and which, in some cases I fear, he actually does not see because he does not expect. I shall try to do justice to the psychology of what Mr. Belloc has called ‘Eye-Openers in Travel.’ But there are some things about America that a man ought to see even with his eyes shut. One is that a state that came into existence solely through its repudiation and abhorrence of the British Crown is not likely to be a respectful copy of the British Constitution. Another is that the chief mark of the Declaration of Independence is something that is not only absent from the British Constitution, but something which all our constitutionalists have invariably thanked God, with the jolliest boasting and bragging, that they had kept out of the British Constitution. It is the thing called abstraction or academic logic. It is the thing which such jolly people call theory; and which those who can practise it call thought. And the theory or thought is the very last to which English people are accustomed, either by their social structure or their traditional teaching. It is the theory of equality. It is the pure classic conception that no man must aspire to be anything more than a citizen, and that no man should endure to be anything less. It is by no means especially intelligible to an Englishman, who tends at his best to the virtues of the gentleman and at his worst to the vices of the snob. The idealism of England, or if you will the romance of England, has not been primarily the romance of the citizen. But the idealism of America, we may safely say, still revolves entirely round the citizen and his romance. The realities are quite another matter, and we shall consider in its place the question of whether the ideal will be able to shape the realities or will merely be beaten shapeless by them. The ideal is besieged by inequalities of the most towering and insane description in the industrial and economic field. It may be devoured by modern capitalism, perhaps the worst inequality that ever existed among men. Of all that we shall speak later. But citizenship is still the American ideal; there is an army of actualities opposed to that ideal; but there is no ideal opposed to that ideal. American plutocracy has never got itself respected like English aristocracy. Citizenship is the American ideal; and it has never been the English ideal. But it is surely an ideal that may stir some imaginative generosity and respect in an Englishman, if he will condescend to be also a man. In this vision of moulding many peoples into the visible image of the citizen, he may see a spiritual adventure which he can admire from the outside, at least as much as he admires the valour of the Moslems and much more than he admires the virtues of the Middle Ages. He need not set himself to develop equality, but he need not set himself to misunderstand it. He may at least understand what Jefferson and Lincoln meant, and he may possibly find some assistance in this task by reading what they said. He may realise that equality is not some crude fairy tale about all men being equally tall or equally tricky; which we not only cannot believe but cannot believe in anybody believing. It is an absolute of morals by which all men have a value invariable and indestructible and a dignity as intangible as death. He may at least be a philosopher and see that equality is an idea; and not merely one of these soft-headed sceptics who, having risen by low tricks to high places, drink bad champagne in tawdry hotel lounges, and tell each other twenty times over, with unwearied iteration, that equality is an illusion.

In truth it is inequality that is the illusion. The extreme disproportion between men, that we seem to see in life, is a thing of changing lights and lengthening shadows, a twilight full of fancies and distortions. We find a man famous and cannot live long enough to find him forgotten; we see a race dominant and cannot linger to see it decay. It is the experience of men that always returns to the equality of men; it is the average that ultimately justifies the average man. It is when men have seen and suffered much and come at the end of more elaborate experiments, that they see men as men under an equal light of death and daily laughter; and none the less mysterious for being many. Nor is it in vain that these Western democrats have sought the blazonry of their flag in that great multitude of immortal lights that endure behind the fires we see, and gathered them into the corner of Old Glory whose ground is like the glittering night. For veritably, in the spirit as well as in the symbol, suns and moons and meteors pass and fill our skies with a fleeting and almost theatrical conflagration; and wherever the old shadow stoops upon the earth, the stars return.

A Meditation in a New York Hotel

All this must begin with an apology and not an apologia. When I went wandering about the States disguised as a lecturer, I was well aware that I was not sufficiently well disguised to be a spy. I was even in the worst possible position to be a sight-seer. A lecturer to American audiences can hardly be in the holiday mood of a sight-seer. It is rather the audience that is sight-seeing; even if it is seeing a rather melancholy sight. Some say that people come to see the lecturer and not to hear him; in which case it seems rather a pity that he should disturb and distress their minds with a lecture. He might merely display himself on a stand or platform for a stipulated sum; or be exhibited like a monster in a menagerie. The circus elephant is not expected to make a speech. But it is equally true that the circus elephant is not allowed to write a book. His impressions of travel would be somewhat sketchy and perhaps a little over-specialised. In merely travelling from circus to circus he would, so to speak, move in rather narrow circles. Jumbo the great elephant (with whom I am hardly so ambitious as to compare myself), before he eventually went to the Barnum show, passed a considerable and I trust happy part of his life in Regent's Park. But if he had written a book on England, founded on his impressions of the Zoo, it might have been a little disproportionate and even misleading in its version of the flora and fauna of that country. He might imagine that lions and leopards were commoner than they are in our hedgerows and country lanes, or that the head and neck of a giraffe was as native to our landscapes as a village spire. And that is why I apologise in anticipation for a probable lack of proportion in this work. Like the elephant, I may have seen too much of a special enclosure where a special sort of lions are gathered together. I may exaggerate the territorial, as distinct from the vertical space occupied by the spiritual giraffe; for the giraffe may surely be regarded as an example of Uplift, and is even, in a manner of speaking, a high-brow. Above all, I shall probably make generalisations that are much too general; and are insufficient through being exaggerative. To this sort of doubt all my impressions are subject; and among them the negative generalisation with which I shall begin this rambling meditation on American hotels.

In all my American wanderings I never saw such a thing as an inn. They may exist; but they do not arrest the traveller upon every road as they do in

England and in Europe. The saloons no longer existed when I was there, owing to the recent reform which restricted intoxicants to the wealthier classes. But we feel that the saloons have been there; if one may so express it, their absence is still present. They remain in the structure of the street and the idiom of the language. But the saloons were not inns. If they had been inns, it would have been far harder even for the power of modern plutocracy to root them out. There will be a very different chase when the White Hart is hunted to the forests or when the Red Lion turns to bay. But people could not feel about the American saloon as they will feel about the English inns. They could not feel that the Prohibitionist, that vulgar chucker-out, was chucking Chaucer out of the Tabard and Shakespeare out of the Mermaid. In justice to the American Prohibitionists it must be realised that they were not doing quite such desecration; and that many of them felt the saloon a specially poisonous sort of place. They did feel that drinking-places were used only as drug-shops. So they have effected the great reconstruction, by which it will be necessary to use only drug-shops as drinking-places. But I am not dealing here with the problem of Prohibition except in so far as it is involved in the statement that the saloons were in no sense inns. Secondly, of course, there are the hotels. There are indeed. There are hotels toppling to the stars, hotels covering the acreage of villages, hotels in multitudinous number like a mob of Babylonian or Assyrian monuments; but the hotels also are not inns.

Broadly speaking, there is only one hotel in America. The pattern of it, which is a very rational pattern, is repeated in cities as remote from each other as the capitals of European empires. You may find that hotel rising among the red blooms of the warm spring woods of Nebraska, or whitened with Canadian snows near the eternal noise of Niagara. And before touching on this solid and simple pattern itself, I may remark that the same system of symmetry runs through all the details of the interior. As one hotel is like another hotel, so one hotel floor is like another hotel floor. If the passage outside your bedroom door, or hallway as it is called, contains, let us say, a small table with a green vase and a stuffed flamingo, or some trifle of the sort, you may be perfectly certain that there is exactly the same table, vase, and flamingo on every one of the thirty-two landings of that towering habitation. This is where it differs most perhaps from the crooked landings and unexpected levels of the old English inns, even when they call themselves hotels. To me there was something weird, like a magic multiplication, in the exquisite sameness of these suites. It seemed to suggest the still atmosphere of some eerie psychological story. I once myself entertained the notion of a story, in which a man was to be prevented from entering his house (the scene of some crime or calamity) by people who painted and furnished the next house to look exactly like it; the assimilation going to the most fantastic lengths, such as altering the numbering of houses in the street. I came to America and found an hotel fitted and upholstered throughout for the enactment of my phantasmal fraud. I offer the skeleton of my story with all humility to some of the admirable lady writers of detective stories in America, to Miss Carolyn Wells, or Miss Mary Roberts Rhinehart, or Mrs. A. K. Green of the unforgotten Leavenworth Case. Surely it might be possible for the unsophisticated Nimrod K. Moose, of Yellow Dog Flat, to come to New York and be entangled somehow in this net of repetitions or recurrences. Surely something tells me that his beautiful daughter, the Rose of Red Murder Gulch, might seek for him in vain amid the apparently unmistakable surroundings of the thirty-second floor, while he was being quietly butchered by the floor-clerk on the thirty-third floor, an agent of the Green Claw (that formidable organisation); and all because the two floors looked exactly alike to the virginal Western eye. The original point of my own story was that the man to be entrapped walked into his own house after all, in spite of it being differently painted and numbered, simply because he was absent-minded and used to taking a certain number of mechanical steps. This would not work in the hotel; because a lift has no habits. It is typical of the real tameness of machinery, that even when we talk of a man turning mechanically we only talk metaphorically; for it is something that a mechanism cannot do. But I think there is only one real objection to my story of Mr. Moose in the New York hotel. And that is unfortunately a rather fatal one. It is that far away in the remote desolation of Yellow Dog, among those outlying and outlandish rocks that almost seem to rise beyond the sunset, there is undoubtedly an hotel of exactly the same sort, with all its floors exactly the same.

Anyhow the general plan of the American hotel is commonly the same, and, as I have said, it is a very sound one so far as it goes. When I first went into one of the big New York hotels, the first impression was certainly its bigness. It was called the Biltmore; and I wondered how many national humorists had made the obvious comment of wishing they had built less.

But it was not merely the Babylonian size and scale of such things, it was the way in which they are used. They are used almost as public streets, or rather as public squares. My first impression was that I was in some sort of high street or market-place during a carnival or a revolution. True, the people looked rather rich for a revolution and rather grave for a carnival; but they were congested in great crowds that moved slowly like people passing through an overcrowded railway station. Even in the dizzy heights of such a sky-scraper there could not possibly be room for all those people to sleep in the hotel, or even to dine in it. And, as a matter of fact, they did nothing whatever except drift into it and drift out again. Most of them had no more to do with the hotel than I have with Buckingham Palace. I have never been in Buckingham Palace, and I have very seldom, thank God, been in the big hotels of this type that exist in London or Paris. But I cannot believe that mobs are perpetually pouring through the Hotel Cecil or the Savoy in this fashion, calmly coming in at one door and going out of the other. But this fact is part of the fundamental structure of the American hotel; it is built upon a compromise that makes it possible. The whole of the lower floor is thrown open to the public streets and treated as a public square. But above it and all round it runs another floor in the form of a sort of deep gallery, furnished more luxuriously and looking down on the moving mobs beneath. No one is allowed on this floor except the guests or clients of the hotel. As I have been one of them myself, I trust it is not unsympathetic to compare them to active anthropoids who can climb trees, and so look down in safety on the herds or packs of wilder animals wandering and prowling below. Of course there are modifications of this architectural plan, but they are generally approximations to it; it is the plan that seems to suit the social life of the American cities. There is generally something like a ground floor that is more public, a half-floor or gallery above that is more private, and above that the bulk of the block of bedrooms, the huge hive with its innumerable and identical cells.

The ladder of ascent in this tower is of course the lift, or, as it is called, the elevator. With all that we hear of American hustle and hurry it is rather strange that Americans seem to like more than we do to linger upon long words. And indeed there is an element of delay in their diction and spirit, very little understood, which I may discuss elsewhere. Anyhow they say elevator when we say lift, just as they say automobile when we say motor and stenographer when we say typist, or sometimes (by a slight confusion) typewriter. Which reminds me of another story that never existed, about a man who was accused of having murdered and dismembered his secretary when he had only taken his typing machine to pieces; but we must not dwell on these digressions. The Americans may have another reason for giving long and ceremonious titles to the lift. When first I came among them I had a suspicion that they possessed and practised a new and secret religion, which was the cult of the elevator. I fancied they worshipped the lift, or at any rate worshipped in the lift. The details or data of this suspicion it were now vain to collect, as I have regretfully abandoned it, except in so far as they illustrate the social principles underlying the structural plan of the building. Now an American gentleman invariably takes off his hat in the lift. He does not take off his hat in the hotel, even if it is crowded with ladies. But he always so salutes a lady in the elevator; and this marks the difference of atmosphere. The lift is a room, but the hotel is a street. But during my first delusion, of course, I assumed that he uncovered in this tiny temple merely because he was in church. There is something about the very word elevator that expresses a great deal of his vague but idealistic religion. Perhaps that flying chapel will eventually be ritualistically decorated like a chapel; possibly with a symbolic scheme of wings. Perhaps a brief religious service will be held in the elevator as it ascends; in a few well-chosen words touching the Utmost for the Highest. Possibly he would consent even to call the elevator a lift, if he could call it an uplift. There would be no difficulty, except what I cannot but regard as the chief moral problem of all optimistic modernism. I mean the difficulty of imagining a lift which is free to go up, if it is not also free to go down.

I think I know my American friends and acquaintances too well to apologise for any levity in these illustrations. Americans make fun of their own institutions; and their own journalism is full of such fanciful conjectures. The tall building is itself artistically akin to the tall story. The very word sky-scraper is an admirable example of an American lie. But I can testify quite as eagerly to the solid and sensible advantages of the symmetrical hotel. It is not only a pattern of vases and stuffed flamingoes; it is also an equally accurate pattern of cupboards and baths. It is a dignified and humane custom to have a bathroom attached to every bedroom; and my impulse to sing the praises of it brought me once at least into a rather quaint complication. I think it was in the city of Dayton; anyhow I remember there was a Laundry Convention going on in the same hotel, in a room very patriotically and properly festooned with the stars and stripes, and doubtless full of promise for the future of laundering. I was interviewed on the roof, within earshot of this debate, and may have been the victim of some association or confusion; anyhow, after answering the usual questions about Labour, the League of Nations, the length of ladies' dresses, and other great matters, I took refuge in a rhapsody of warm and well-deserved praise of American bathrooms. The editor, I understand, running a gloomy eye down the column of his contributor's 'story,' and seeing nothing but metaphysical terms such as justice, freedom, the abstract disapproval of sweating, swindling, and the like, paused at last upon the ablutionary allusion, and his eye brightened. 'That's the only copy in the whole thing,' he said, 'A Bath-Tub in Every Home.' So these words appeared in enormous letters above my portrait in the paper. It will be noted that, like many things that practical men make a great point of, they miss the point. What I had commended as new and national was a bathroom in every bedroom. Even feudal and moss-grown England is not entirely ignorant of an occasional bath-tub in the home. But what gave me great joy was what followed. I discovered with delight that many people, glancing rapidly at my portrait with its prodigious legend, imagined that it was a commercial advertisement, and that I was a very self-advertising commercial traveller. When I walked about the streets, I was supposed to be travelling in bath-tubs. Consider the caption of the portrait, and you will see how similar it is to the true commercial slogan: 'We offer a Bath-Tub in Every Home.' And this charming error was doubtless clinched by the fact that I had been found haunting the outer courts of the temple of the ancient Guild of Lavenders. I never knew how many shared the impression; I regret to say that I only traced it with certainty in two individuals. But I understand that it included the idea that I had come to the town to attend the Laundry Convention, and had made an eloquent speech to that senate, no doubt exhibiting my tubs.

Such was the penalty of too passionate and unrestrained an admiration for American bathrooms; yet the connection of ideas, however inconsequent, does cover the part of social practice for which these American institutions can really be praised. About everything like laundry or hot and cold water there is not only organisation, but what does not always or perhaps often go with it, efficiency. Americans are particular about these things of dress and decorum; and it is a virtue which I very seriously recognise, though I find it very hard to emulate. But with them it is a virtue; it is not a mere convention, still less a mere fashion. It is really related to human dignity rather than to social superiority. The really glorious thing about the American is that he does not dress like a gentleman; he dresses like a citizen or a civilised man. His Puritanic particularity on certain points is really detachable from any definite social ambitions; these things are not a part of getting into society but merely of keeping out of savagery. Those millions and millions of middling people, that huge middle class especially of the Middle West, are not near enough to any aristocracy even to be sham aristocrats, or to be real snobs. But their standards are secure; and though I do not really travel in a bath-tub, or believe in the bath-tub philosophy and religion, I will not on this matter recoil misanthropically from them: I prefer the tub of Dayton to the tub of Diogenes. On these points there is really something a million times better than efficiency, and that is something like equality.

In short, the American hotel is not America; but it is American. In some respects it is as American as the English inn is English. And it is symbolic of that society in this among other things: that it does tend too much to uniformity; but that that very uniformity disguises not a little natural dignity. The old Romans boasted that their republic was a nation of kings. If we really walked abroad in such a kingdom, we might very well grow tired of the sight of a crowd of kings, of every man with a gold crown on his head or an ivory sceptre in his hand. But it is arguable that we ought not to grow tired of the repetition of crowns and sceptres, any more than of the repetition of flowers and stars. The whole imaginative effort of Walt Whitman was really an effort to absorb and animate these multitudinous modern repetitions; and Walt Whitman would be quite capable of including in his lyric litany of optimism a list of the nine hundred and ninety-nine identical bathrooms. I do not sneer at the generous effort of the giant; though I think, when all is said, that it is a criticism of modern machinery that the effort should be gigantic as well as generous.

While there is so much repetition there is little repose. It is the pattern of a kaleidoscope rather than a wall-paper; a pattern of figures running and even leaping like the figures in a zoetrope. But even in the groups where there was no hustle there was often something of homelessness. I do not mean merely that they were not dining at home; but rather that they were not at home even when dining, and dining at their favourite hotel. They would frequently start up and dart from the room at a summons from the telephone. It may have been fanciful, but I could not help feeling a breath of home, as from a flap or flutter of St. George’s Cross, when I first sat down in a Canadian hostelry, and read the announcement that no such telephonic or other summonses were allowed in the dining-room. It may have been a coincidence, and there may be American hotels with this merciful proviso and Canadian hotels without it; but the thing was symbolic even if it was not evidential. I felt as if I stood indeed upon English soil, in a place where people liked to have their meals in peace.

The process of the summons is called ‘paging,’ and consists of sending a little boy with a large voice through all the halls and corridors of the building, making them resound with a name. The custom is common, of course, in clubs and hotels even in England; but in England it is a mere whisper compared with the wail with which the American page repeats the formula of ‘Calling Mr. So and So.’ I remember a particularly crowded *parterre* in the somewhat smoky and oppressive atmosphere of Pittsburg, through which wandered a youth with a voice the like of which I have never heard in the land of the living, a voice like the cry of a lost spirit, saying again and again for ever, ‘Carling Mr. Anderson.’ One felt that he never would find Mr. Anderson. Perhaps there never had been any Mr. Anderson to be found. Perhaps he and every one else wandered in an abyss of bottomless scepticism; and he was but the victim of one out of numberless nightmares of eternity, as he wandered a shadow with shadows and wailed by impassable streams. This is not exactly my philosophy, but I feel sure it was his. And it is a mood that may frequently visit the mind in the centres of highly active and successful industrial civilisation.

Such are the first idle impressions of the great American hotel, gained by sitting for the first time in its gallery and gazing on its drifting crowds with thoughts equally drifting. The first impression is of something enormous and rather unnatural, an impression that is gradually tempered by experience of the kindliness and even the tameness of so much of that social order. But I should not be recording the sensations with sincerity, if I did not touch in passing the note of something unearthly about that vast system to an insular traveller who sees it for the first time. It is as if he were wandering in another world among the fixed stars; or worse still, in an ideal Utopia of the future.

Yet I am not certain; and perhaps the best of all news is that nothing is really new. I sometimes have a fancy that many of these new things in new countries are but the resurrections of old things which have been wickedly killed or stupidly stunted in old countries. I have looked over the sea of little tables in some light and airy open-air café; and my thoughts have gone back to the plain wooden bench and wooden table that stands solitary and weather-stained outside so many neglected English inns. We talk of experimenting in the French café, as of some fresh and almost impudent innovation. But our fathers had the French café, in the sense of the free-and-easy table in the sun and air. The only difference was that French democracy was allowed to develop its café, or multiply its tables, while English plutocracy prevented any such popular growth. Perhaps there are other examples of old types and patterns, lost in the old oligarchy and saved in the new democracies. I am haunted with a hint that the new structures are not so very new; and that they remind me of something very old. As I look from the balcony floor the crowds seem to float away and the colours to soften and grow pale, and I know I am in one of the simplest and most ancestral of human habitations. I am looking down from the old wooden gallery upon the courtyard of an inn. This new architectural model, which I have described, is after all one of the oldest European models, now neglected in Europe and especially in England. It was the theatre in which were enacted innumerable picaresque comedies and romantic plays, with figures ranging from Sancho Panza to Sam Weller. It served as the apparatus, like some gigantic toy set up in bricks and timber, for the ancient and perhaps eternal game of tennis. The very terms of the original game were taken from the inn courtyard, and the players scored accordingly as they hit the buttery-hatch or the roof. Singular speculations hover in my mind as the scene darkens and the quadrangle below begins to empty in the last hours of night. Some day perhaps this huge structure will be found standing in a solitude like a skeleton; and it will be the skeleton of the Spotted Dog or the Blue Boar. It will wither and decay until it is worthy at last to be a tavern. I do not know whether men will play tennis on its ground floor, with various scores and prizes for hitting the electric fan, or the lift, or the head waiter. Perhaps the very words will only remain as part of some such rustic game. Perhaps the electric fan will no longer be electric and the elevator will no longer elevate, and the waiter will only wait to be hit. But at least it is only by the decay of modern plutocracy, which seems already to have begun, that the secret of the structure even of this plutocratic palace can stand revealed. And after long years, when its lights are extinguished and only the long shadows inhabit its halls and vestibules, there may come a new noise like thunder; of D’Artagnan knocking at the door.

A Meditation in Broadway

When I had looked at the lights of Broadway by night, I made to my American friends an innocent remark that seemed for some reason to amuse them. I had looked, not without joy, at that long kaleidoscope of coloured lights arranged in large letters and sprawling trade-marks, advertising everything, from pork to pianos, through the agency of the two most vivid and most mystical of the gifts of God; colour and fire. I said to them, in my simplicity, 'What a glorious garden of wonders this would be, to any one who was lucky enough to be unable to read.'

Here it is but a text for a further suggestion. But let us suppose that there does walk down this flaming avenue a peasant, of the sort called scornfully an illiterate peasant; by those who think that insisting on people reading and writing is the best way to keep out the spies who read in all languages and the forgers who write in all hands. On this principle indeed, a peasant merely acquainted with things of little practical use to mankind, such as ploughing, cutting wood, or growing vegetables, would very probably be excluded; and it is not for us to criticise from the outside the philosophy of those who would keep out the farmer and let in the forger. But let us suppose, if only for the sake of argument, that the peasant is walking under the artificial suns and stars of this tremendous thoroughfare; that he has escaped to the land of liberty upon some general rumour and romance of the story of its liberation, but without being yet able to understand the arbitrary signs of its alphabet. The soul of such a man would surely soar higher than the sky-scrapers, and embrace a brotherhood broader than Broadway. Realising that he had arrived on an evening of exceptional festivity, worthy to be blazoned with all this burning heraldry, he would please himself by guessing what great proclamation or principle of the Republic hung in the sky like a constellation or rippled across the street like a comet. He would be shrewd enough to guess that the three festoons fringed with fiery words of somewhat similar pattern stood for 'Government of the People, For the People, By the People'; for it must obviously be that, unless it were 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.' His shrewdness would perhaps be a little shaken if he knew that the triad stood for 'Tang Tonic To-day; Tang Tonic To-morrow; Tang Tonic All the Time.' He will soon identify a restless ribbon of red lettering, red hot and rebellious, as the saying, 'Give me liberty or give me death.’ He will fail to identify it as the equally famous saying, ‘Skyoline Has Gout Beaten to a Frazzle.’ Therefore it was that I desired the peasant to walk down that grove of fiery trees, under all that golden foliage, and fruits like monstrous jewels, as innocent as Adam before the Fall. He would see sights almost as fine as the flaming sword or the purple and peacock plumage of the seraphim; so long as he did not go near the Tree of Knowledge.

In other words, if once he went to school it would be all up; and indeed I fear in any case he would soon discover his error. If he stood wildly waving his hat for liberty in the middle of the road as Chunk Chutney picked itself out in ruby stars upon the sky, he would impede the excellent but extremely rigid traffic system of New York. If he fell on his knees before a sapphire splendour, and began saying an Ave Maria under a mistaken association, he would be conducted kindly but firmly by an Irish policeman to a more authentic shrine. But though the foreign simplicity might not long survive in New York, it is quite a mistake to suppose that such foreign simplicity cannot enter New York. He may be excluded for being illiterate, but he cannot be excluded for being ignorant, nor for being innocent. Least of all can he be excluded for being wiser in his innocence than the world in its knowledge. There is here indeed more than one distinction to be made. New York is a cosmopolitan city; but it is not a city of cosmopolitans. Most of the masses in New York have a nation, whether or no it be the nation to which New York belongs. Those who are Americanised are American, and very patriotically American. Those who are not thus nationalised are not in the least internationalised. They simply continue to be themselves; the Irish are Irish; the Jews are Jewish; and all sorts of other tribes carry on the traditions of remote European valleys almost untouched. In short, there is a sort of slender bridge between their old country and their new, which they either cross or do not cross, but which they seldom simply occupy. They are exiles or they are citizens; there is no moment when they are cosmopolitans. But very often the exiles bring with them not only rooted traditions, but rooted truths.

Indeed it is to a great extent the thought of these strange souls in crude American garb that gives a meaning to the masquerade of New York. In the hotel where I stayed the head waiter in one room was a Bohemian; and I am glad to say that he called himself a Bohemian. I have already protested sufficiently, before American audiences, against the pedantry of perpetually talking about Czecho-Slovakia. I suggested to my American friends that the abandonment of the word Bohemian in its historical sense might well extend to its literary and figurative sense. We might be expected to say, 'I'm afraid Henry has got into very Czecho-Slovakian habits lately,' or 'Don't bother to dress; it's quite a Czecho-Slovakian affair.' Anyhow my Bohemian would have nothing to do with such nonsense; he called himself a son of Bohemia, and spoke as such in his criticisms of America, which were both favourable and unfavourable. He was a squat man, with a sturdy figure and a steady smile; and his eyes were like dark pools in the depth of a darker forest, but I do not think he had ever been deceived by the lights of Broadway.

But I found something like my real innocent abroad, my real peasant among the sky-signs, in another part of the same establishment. He was a much leaner man, equally dark, with a hook nose, hungry face, and fierce black moustaches. He also was a waiter, and was in the costume of a waiter, which is a smarter edition of the costume of a lecturer. As he was serving me with clam chowder or some such thing, I fell into speech with him and he told me he was a Bulgar. I said something like, 'I'm afraid I don't know as much as I ought to about Bulgaria. I suppose most of your people are agricultural, aren't they?' He did not stir an inch from his regular attitude, but he slightly lowered his low voice and said, 'Yes. From the earth we come and to the earth we return; when people get away from that they are lost.'

To hear such a thing said by the waiter was alone an epoch in the life of an unfortunate writer of fantastic novels. To see him clear away the clam chowder like an automaton, and bring me more iced water like an automaton or like nothing on earth except an American waiter (for piling up ice is the cold passion of their lives), and all this after having uttered something so dark and deep, so starkly incongruous and so startlingly true, was an indescribable thing, but very like the picture of the peasant admiring Broadway. So he passed, with his artificial clothes and manners, lit up with all the ghastly artificial light of the hotel, and all the ghastly artificial life of the city; and his heart was like his own remote and rocky valley, where those unchanging words were carved as on a rock.

I do not profess to discuss here at all adequately the question this raises about the Americanisation of the Bulgar. It has many aspects, of some of which most Englishmen and even some Americans are rather unconscious.

For one thing, a man with so rugged a loyalty to land could not be Americanised in New York; but it is not so certain that he could not be Americanised in America. We might almost say that a peasantry is hidden in the heart of America. So far as our impressions go, it is a secret. It is rather an open secret; covering only some thousand square miles of open prairie. But for most of our countrymen it is something invisible, unimagined, and unvisited; the simple truth that where all those acres are there is agriculture, and where all that agriculture is there is considerable tendency towards distributive or decently equalised property, as in a peasantry. On the other hand, there are those who say that the Bulgar will never be Americanised, that he only comes to be a waiter in America that he may afford to return to be a peasant in Bulgaria. I cannot decide this issue, and indeed I did not introduce it to this end. I was led to it by a certain line of reflection that runs along the Great White Way, and I will continue to follow it. The criticism, if we could put it rightly, not only covers more than New York but more than the whole New World. Any argument against it is quite as valid against the largest and richest cities of the Old World, against London or Liverpool or Frankfort or Belfast. But it is in New York that we see the argument most clearly, because we see the thing thus towering into its own turrets and breaking into its own fireworks.

I disagree with the aesthetic condemnation of the modern city with its sky-scrapers and sky-signs. I mean that which laments the loss of beauty and its sacrifice to utility. It seems to me the very reverse of the truth. Years ago, when people used to say the Salvation Army doubtless had good intentions, but we must all deplore its methods, I pointed out that the very contrary is the case. Its method, the method of drums and democratic appeal, is that of the Franciscans or any other march of the Church Militant. It was precisely its aims that were dubious, with their dissenting morality and despotic finance. It is somewhat the same with things like the sky-signs in Broadway. The aesthete must not ask me to mingle my tears with his, because these things are merely useful and ugly. For I am not specially inclined to think them ugly; but I am strongly inclined to think them useless. As a matter of art for art’s sake, they seem to me rather artistic. As a form of practical social work they seem to me stark stupid waste. If Mr. Bilge is rich enough to build a tower four hundred feet high and give it a crown of golden crescents and crimson stars, in order to draw attention to his manufacture of the Paradise Tooth Paste or The Seventh Heaven Cigar, I do not feel the least disposition to thank him for any serious form of social service. I have never tried the Seventh Heaven Cigar; indeed a premonition moves me towards the belief that I shall go down to the dust without trying it. I have every reason to doubt whether it does any particular good to those who smoke it, or any good to anybody except those who sell it. In short Mr. Bilge's usefulness consists in being useful to Mr. Bilge, and all the rest is illusion and sentimentalism. But because I know that Bilge is only Bilge, shall I stoop to the profanity of saying that fire is only fire? Shall I blaspheme crimson stars any more than crimson sunsets, or deny that those moons are golden any more than that this grass is green? If a child saw these coloured lights, he would dance with as much delight as at any other coloured toys; and it is the duty of every poet, and even of every critic, to dance in respectful imitation of the child. Indeed I am in a mood of so much sympathy with the fairy lights of this pantomime city, that I should be almost sorry to see social sanity and a sense of proportion return to extinguish them. I fear the day is breaking, and the broad daylight of tradition and ancient truth is coming to end all this delightful nightmare of New York at night. Peasants and priests and all sorts of practical and sensible people are coming back into power, and their stern realism may wither all these beautiful, unsubstantial, useless things. They will not believe in the Seventh Heaven Cigar, even when they see it shining as with stars in the seventh heaven. They will not be affected by advertisements, any more than the priests and peasants of the Middle Ages would have been affected by advertisements. Only a very soft-headed, sentimental, and rather servile generation of men could possibly be affected by advertisements at all. People who are a little more hard-headed, humorous, and intellectually independent, see the rather simple joke; and are not impressed by this or any other form of self-praise. Almost any other men in almost any other age would have seen the joke. If you had said to a man in the Stone Age, 'Ugg says Ugg makes the best stone hatchets,' he would have perceived a lack of detachment and disinterestedness about the testimonial. If you had said to a medieval peasant, 'Robert the Bowyer proclaims, with three blasts of a horn, that he makes good bows,' the peasant would have said, 'Well, of course he does,' and thought about something more important. It is only among people whose minds have been weakened by a sort of mesmerism that so transparent a trick as that of advertisement could ever have been tried at all. And if ever we have again, as for other reasons I cannot but hope we shall, a more democratic distribution of property and a more agricultural basis of national life, it would seem at first sight only too likely that all this beautiful superstition will perish, and the fairyland of Broadway with all its varied rainbows fade away. For such people the Seventh Heaven Cigar, like the nineteenth-century city, will have ended in smoke. And even the smoke of it will have vanished.

But the next stage of reflection brings us back to the peasant looking at the lights of Broadway. It is not true to say in the strict sense that the peasant has never seen such things before. The truth is that he has seen them on a much smaller scale, but for a much larger purpose. Peasants also have their ritual and ornament, but it is to adorn more real things. Apart from our first fancy about the peasant who could not read, there is no doubt about what would be apparent to a peasant who could read, and who could understand. For him also fire is sacred, for him also colour is symbolic. But where he sets up a candle to light the little shrine of St. Joseph, he finds it takes twelve hundred candles to light the Seventh Heaven Cigar. He is used to the colours in church windows showing red for martyrs or blue for madonnas; but here he can only conclude that all the colours of the rainbow belong to Mr. Bilge. Now upon the aesthetic side he might well be impressed; but it is exactly on the social and even scientific side that he has a right to criticise. If he were a Chinese peasant, for instance, and came from a land of fireworks, he would naturally suppose that he had happened to arrive at a great firework display in celebration of something; perhaps the Sacred Emperor’s birthday, or rather birthnight. It would gradually dawn on the Chinese philosopher that the Emperor could hardly be born every night. And when he learnt the truth the philosopher, if he was a philosopher, would be a little disappointed ... possibly a little disdainful.

Compare, for instance, these everlasting fireworks with the damp squibs and dying bonfires of Guy Fawkes Day. That quaint and even queer national festival has been fading for some time out of English life. Still, it was a national festival, in the double sense that it represented some sort of public spirit pursued by some sort of popular impulse. People spent money on the display of fireworks; they did not get money by it. And the people who spent money were often those who had very little money to spend. It had something of the glorious and fanatical character of making the poor poorer. It did not, like the advertisements, have only the mean and materialistic character of making the rich richer. In short, it came from the people and it appealed to the nation. The historical and religious cause in which it originated is not mine; and I think it has perished partly through being tied to a historical theory for which there is no future. I think this is illustrated in the very fact that the ceremonial is merely negative and destructive. Negation and destruction are very noble things as far as they go, and when they go in the right direction; and the popular expression of them has always something hearty and human about it. I shall not therefore bring any fine or fastidious criticism, whether literary or musical, to bear upon the little boys who drag about a bolster and a paper mask, calling out

Guy Fawkes Guy
Hit him in the eye.

But I admit it is a disadvantage that they have not a saint or hero to crown in effigy as well as a traitor to burn in effigy. I admit that popular Protestantism has become too purely negative for people to wreathe in flowers the statue of Mr. Kensit or even of Dr. Clifford. I do not disguise my preference for popular Catholicism; which still has statues that can be wreathed in flowers. I wish our national feast of fireworks revolved round something positive and popular. I wish the beauty of a Catherine Wheel were displayed to the glory of St. Catherine. I should not especially complain if Roman candles were really Roman candles. But this negative character does not destroy the national character; which began at least in disinterested faith and has ended at least in disinterested fun. There is nothing disinterested at all about the new commercial fireworks. There is nothing so dignified as a dingy guy among the lights of Broadway. In that thoroughfare, indeed, the very word guy has another and milder significance. An American friend congratulated me on the impression I produced on a lady interviewer, observing, ‘She says you’re a regular guy.’ This puzzled me a little at the time. ‘Her description is no doubt correct,’ I said, ‘but I confess that it would never have struck me as specially complimentary.’ But it appears that it is one of the most graceful of compliments, in the original American. A guy in America is a colourless term for a human being. All men are guys, being endowed by their Creator with certain ... but I am misled by another association. And a regular guy means, I presume, a reliable or respectable guy. The point here, however, is that the guy in the grotesque English sense does represent the dilapidated remnant of a real human tradition of symbolising real historic ideals by the sacramental mystery of fire. It is a great fall from the lowest of these lowly bonfires to the highest of the modern sky-signs. The new illumination does not stand for any national ideal at all; and what is yet more to the point, it does not come from any popular enthusiasm at all. That is where it differs from the narrowest national Protestantism of the English institution. Mobs have risen in support of No Popery; no mobs are likely to rise in defence of the New Puffery. Many a poor crazy Orangeman has died saying, ‘To Hell with the Pope’; it is doubtful whether any man will ever, with his last breath, frame the ecstatic words, ‘Try Hugby’s Chewing Gum.’ These modern and mercantile legends are imposed upon us by a mercantile minority, and we are merely passive to the suggestion. The hypnotist of high finance or big business merely writes his commands in heaven with a finger of fire. All men really are guys, in the sense of dummies. We are only the victims of his pyrotechnic violence; and it is he who hits us in the eye.

This is the real case against that modern society that is symbolised by such art and architecture. It is not that it is toppling, but that it is top-heavy. It is not that it is vulgar, but rather that it is not popular. In other words, the democratic ideal of countries like America, while it is still generally sincere and sometimes intense, is at issue with another tendency, an industrial progress which is of all things on earth the most undemocratic. America is not alone in possessing the industrialism, but she is alone in emphasising the ideal that strives with industrialism. Industrial capitalism and ideal democracy are everywhere in controversy; but perhaps only here are they in conflict. France has a democratic ideal; but France is not industrial. England and Germany are industrial; but England and Germany are not really democratic. Of course when I speak here of industrialism I speak of great industrial areas; there is, as will be noted later, another side to all these countries; there is in America itself not only a great deal of agricultural society, but a great deal of agricultural equality; just as there are still peasants in Germany and may some day again be peasants in England. But the point is that the ideal and its enemy the reality are here crushed very close to each other in the high, narrow city; and that the sky-scraper is truly named because its top, towering in such insolence, is scraping the stars off the American sky, the very heaven of the American spirit.

That seems to me the main outline of the whole problem. In the first chapter of this book, I have emphasised the fact that equality is still the ideal though no longer the reality of America. I should like to conclude this one by emphasising the fact that the reality of modern capitalism is menacing that ideal with terrors and even splendours that might well stagger the wavering and impressionable modern spirit. Upon the issue of that struggle depends the question of whether this new great civilisation continues to exist, and even whether any one cares if it exists or not. I have already used the parable of the American flag, and the stars that stand for a multitudinous equality; I might here take the opposite symbol of these artificial and terrestrial stars flaming on the forehead of the commercial city; and note the peril of the last illusion, which is that the artificial stars may seem to fill the heavens, and the real stars to have faded from sight. But I am content for the moment to reaffirm the merely imaginative pleasure of those dizzy turrets and dancing fires. If those nightmare buildings were really all built for nothing, how noble they would be! The fact that they were really built for something need not unduly depress us for a moment, or drag down our soaring fancies. There is something about these vertical lines that suggests a sort of rush upwards, as of great cataracts topsy-turvy. I have spoken of fireworks, but here I should rather speak of rockets. There is only something underneath the mind murmuring that nothing remains at last of a flaming rocket except a falling stick. I have spoken of Babylonian perspectives, and of words written with a fiery finger, like that huge unhuman finger that wrote on Belshazzar’s wall.... But what did it write on Belshazzar’s wall?... I am content once more to end on a note of doubt and a rather dark sympathy with those many-coloured solar systems turning so dizzily, far up in the divine vacuum of the night.

‘From the earth we come and to the earth we return; when people get away from that they are lost.’

Irish and other Interviewers

It is often asked what should be the first thing that a man sees when he lands in a foreign country; but I think it should be the vision of his own country. At least when I came into New York Harbour, a sort of grey and green cloud came between me and the towers with multitudinous windows, white in the winter sunlight; and I saw an old brown house standing back among the beech-trees at home, the house of only one among many friends and neighbours, but one somehow so sunken in the very heart of England as to be unconscious of her imperial or international position, and out of the sound of her perilous seas. But what made most clear the vision that revisited me was something else. Before we touched land the men of my own guild, the journalists and reporters, had already boarded the ship like pirates. And one of them spoke to me in an accent that I knew; and thanked me for all I had done for Ireland. And it was at that moment that I knew most vividly that what I wanted was to do something for England.

Then, as it chanced, I looked across at the statue of Liberty, and saw that the great bronze was gleaming green in the morning light. I had made all the obvious jokes about the statue of Liberty. I found it had a soothing effect on earnest Prohibitionists on the boat to urge, as a point of dignity and delicacy, that it ought to be given back to the French, a vicious race abandoned to the culture of the vine. I proposed that the last liquors on board should be poured out in a pagan libation before it. And then I suddenly remembered that this Liberty was still in some sense enlightening the world, or one part of the world; was a lamp for one sort of wanderer, a star of one sort of seafarer. To one persecuted people at least this land had really been an asylum; even if recent legislation (as I have said) had made them think it a lunatic asylum. They had made it so much their home that the very colour of the country seemed to change with the infusion; as the bronze of the great statue took on a semblance of the wearing of the green.

It is a commonplace that the Englishman has been stupid in his relations with the Irish; but he has been far more stupid in his relations with the Americans on the subject of the Irish. His propaganda has been worse than his practice; and his defence more ill-considered than the most indefensible things that it was intended to defend. There is in this matter a curious tangle of cross-purposes, which only a parallel example can make at all clear. And

I will note the point here, because it is some testimony to its vivid importance that it was really the first I had to discuss on American soil with an American citizen. In a double sense I touched Ireland before I came to America. I will take an imaginary instance from another controversy; in order to show how the apology can be worse than the action. The best we can say for ourselves is worse than the worst that we can do.

There was a time when English poets and other publicists could always be inspired with instantaneous indignation about the persecuted Jews in Russia. We have heard less about them since we heard more about the persecuting Jews in Russia. I fear there are a great many middle-class Englishmen already who wish that Trotsky had been persecuted a little more. But even in those days Englishmen divided their minds in a curious fashion; and unconsciously distinguished between the Jews whom they had never seen, in Warsaw, and the Jews whom they had often seen in Whitechapel. It seemed to be assumed that, by a curious coincidence, Russia possessed not only the very worst Anti-Semites but the very best Semites. A moneylender in London might be like Judas Iscariot; but a moneylender in Moscow must be like Judas Maccabaeus.

Nevertheless there remained in our common sense an unconscious but fundamental comprehension of the unity of Israel; a sense that some things could be said, and some could not be said, about the Jews as a whole. Suppose that even in those days, to say nothing of these, an English protest against Russian Anti-Semitism had been answered by the Russian Anti-Semites, and suppose the answer had been somewhat as follows: —

‘It is all very well for foreigners to complain of our denying civic rights to our Jewish subjects; but we know the Jews better than they do. They are a barbarous people, entirely primitive, and very like the simple savages who cannot count beyond five on their fingers. It is quite impossible to make them understand ordinary numbers, to say nothing of simple economics. They do not realise the meaning or the value of money. No Jew anywhere in the world can get into his stupid head the notion of a bargain, or of exchanging one thing for another. Their hopeless incapacity for commerce or finance would retard the progress of our people, would prevent the spread of any sort of economic education, would keep the whole country on a level lower than that of the most prehistoric methods of barter. What Russia needs most is a mercantile middle class; and it is unjust to ask us to swamp its small beginnings in thousands of these rude tribesmen, who cannot do a sum of simple addition, or understand the symbolic character of a threepenny bit. We might as well be asked to give civic rights to cows and pigs as to this unhappy, half-witted race who can no more count than the beasts of the field. In every intellectual exercise they are hopelessly incompetent; no Jew can play chess; no Jew can learn languages; no Jew has ever appeared in the smallest part in any theatrical performance; no Jew can give or take any pleasure connected with any musical instrument. These people are our subjects; and we understand them. We accept full responsibility for treating such troglodytes on our own terms.'

It would not be entirely convincing. It would sound a little far-fetched and unreal. But it would sound exactly like our utterances about the Irish, as they sound to all Americans, and rather especially to Anti-Irish Americans. That is exactly the impression we produce on the people of the United States when we say, as we do say in substance, something like this: 'We mean no harm to the poor dear Irish, so dreamy, so irresponsible, so incapable of order or organisation. If we were to withdraw from their country they would only fight among themselves; they have no notion of how to rule themselves. There is something charming about their unpracticability, about their very incapacity for the coarse business of politics. But for their own sakes it is impossible to leave these emotional visionaries to ruin themselves in the attempt to rule themselves. They are like children; but they are our own children, and we understand them. We accept full responsibility for acting as their parents and guardians.'

Now the point is not only that this view of the Irish is false, but that it is the particular view that the Americans know to be false. While we are saying that the Irish could not organise, the Americans are complaining, often very bitterly, of the power of Irish organisation. While we say that the Irishman could not rule himself, the Americans are saying, more or less humorously, that the Irishman rules them. A highly intelligent professor said to me in Boston, 'We have solved the Irish problem here; we have an entirely independent Irish Government.' While we are complaining, in an almost passionate manner, of the impotence of mere cliques of idealists and dreamers, they are complaining, often in a very indignant manner, of the power of great gangs of bosses and bullies. There are a great many Americans who pity the Irish, very naturally and very rightly, for the historic martyrdom which their patriotism has endured. But there are a great many Americans who do not pity the Irish in the least. They would be much more likely to pity the English; only this particular way of talking tends rather to make them despise the English. Thus both the friends of Ireland and the foes of Ireland tend to be the foes of England. We make one set of enemies by our action, and another by our apology.

It is a thing that can from time to time be found in history; a misunderstanding that really has a moral. The English excuse would carry much more weight if it had more sincerity and more humility. There are a considerable number of people in the United States who could sympathise with us, if we would say frankly that we fear the Irish. Those who thus despise our pity might possibly even respect our fear. The argument I have often used in other places comes back with prodigious and redoubled force, after hearing anything of American opinion; the argument that the only reasonable or reputable excuse for the English is the excuse of a patriotic sense of peril; and that the Unionist, if he must be a Unionist, should use that and no other. When the Unionist has said that he dare not let loose against himself a captive he has so cruelly wronged, he has said all that he has to say; all that he has ever had to say; all that he will ever have to say. He is like a man who has sent a virile and rather vindictive rival unjustly to penal servitude; and who connives at the continuance of the sentence, not because he himself is particularly vindictive, but because he is afraid of what the convict will do when he comes out of prison. This is not exactly a moral strength, but it is a very human weakness; and that is the most that can be said for it. All other talk, about Celtic frenzy or Catholic superstition, is cant invented to deceive himself or to deceive the world. But the vital point to realise is that it is cant that cannot possibly deceive the American world. In the matter of the Irishman the American is not to be deceived. It is not merely true to say that he knows better. It is equally true to say that he knows worse. He knows vices and evils in the Irishman that are entirely hidden in the hazy vision of the Englishman. He knows that our unreal slanders are inconsistent even with the real sins. To us Ireland is a shadowy Isle of Sunset, like Atlantis, about which we can make up legends. To him it is a positive ward or parish in the heart of his huge cities, like Whitechapel; about which even we cannot make legends but only lies. And, as I have said, there are some lies we do not tell even about Whitechapel. We do not say it is inhabited by Jews too stupid to count or know the value of a coin.

The first thing for any honest Englishman to send across the sea is this; that the English have not the shadow of a notion of what they are up against in America. They have never even heard of the batteries of almost brutal energy, of which I had thus touched a live wire even before I landed. People talk about the hypocrisy of England in dealing with a small nationality. What strikes me is the stupidity of England in supposing that she is dealing with a small nationality; when she is really dealing with a very large nationality. She is dealing with a nationality that often threatens, even numerically, to dominate all the other nationalities of the United States. The Irish are not decaying; they are not unpractical; they are scarcely even scattered; they are not even poor. They are the most powerful and practical world-combination with whom we can decide to be friends or foes; and that is why I thought first of that still and solid brown house in Buckinghamshire, standing back in the shadow of the trees.

Among my impressions of America I have deliberately put first the figure of the Irish-American interviewer, standing on the shore more symbolic than the statue of Liberty. The Irish interviewer’s importance for the English lay in the fact of his being an Irishman, but there was also considerable interest in the circumstance of his being an interviewer. And as certain wild birds sometimes wing their way far out to sea and are the first signal of the shore, so the first Americans the traveller meets are often American interviewers; and they are generally birds of a feather, and they certainly flock together. In this respect, there is a slight difference in the etiquette of the craft in the two countries, which I was delighted to discuss with my fellow craftsmen. If I could at that moment have flown back to Fleet Street I am happy to reflect that nobody in the world would in the least wish to interview me. I should attract no more attention than the stone griffin opposite the Law Courts; both monsters being grotesque but also familiar. But supposing for the sake of argument that anybody did want to interview me, it is fairly certain that the fact of one paper publishing such an interview would rather prevent the other papers from doing so. The repetition of the same views of the same individual in two places would be considered rather bad journalism; it would have an air of stolen thunder, not to say stage thunder.

But in America the fact of my landing and lecturing was evidently regarded in the same light as a murder or a great fire, or any other terrible but incurable catastrophe, a matter of interest to all pressmen concerned with practical events. One of the first questions I was asked was how I should be disposed to explain the wave of crime in New York. Naturally I replied that it might possibly be due to the number of English lecturers who had recently landed. In the mood of the moment it seemed possible that, if they had all been interviewed, regrettable incidents might possibly have taken place. But this was only the mood of the moment, and even as a mood did not last more than a moment. And since it has reference to a rather common and a rather unjust conception of American journalism, I think it well to take it first as a fallacy to be refuted, though the refutation may require a rather longer approach.

I have generally found that the traveller fails to understand a foreign country, through treating it as a tendency and not as a balance. But if a thing were always tending in one direction it would soon tend to destruction. Everything that merely progresses finally perishes. Every nation, like every family, exists upon a compromise, and commonly a rather eccentric compromise; using the word ‘eccentric’ in the sense of something that is somehow at once crazy and healthy. Now the foreigner commonly sees some feature that he thinks fantastic without seeing the feature that balances it. The ordinary examples are obvious enough. An Englishman dining inside a hotel on the boulevards thinks the French eccentric in refusing to open a window. But he does not think the English eccentric in refusing to carry their chairs and tables out on to the pavement in Ludgate Circus. An Englishman will go poking about in little Swiss or Italian villages, in wild mountains or in remote islands, demanding tea; and never reflects that he is like a Chinaman who should enter all the wayside public-houses in Kent and Sussex and demand opium. But the point is not merely that he demands what he cannot expect to enjoy; it is that he ignores even what he does enjoy. He does not realise the sublime and starry paradox of the phrase, *vin ordinaire*, which to him should be a glorious jest like the phrase ‘common gold’ or ‘daily diamonds.’ These are the simple and self-evident cases; but there are many more subtle cases of the same thing; of the tendency to see that the nation fills up its own gap with its own substitute; or corrects its own extravagance with its own precaution. The national antidote generally grows wild in the woods side by side with the national poison. If it did not, all the natives would be dead. For it is so, as I have said, that nations necessarily die of the undiluted poison called progress.

It is so in this much-abused and over-abused example of the American journalist. The American interviewers really have exceedingly good manners for the purposes of their trade, granted that it is necessary to pursue their trade. And even what is called their hustling method can truly be said to cut both ways, or hustle both ways; for if they hustle in, they also hustle out. It may not at first sight seem the very warmest compliment to a gentleman to congratulate him on the fact that he soon goes away. But it really is a tribute to his perfection in a very delicate social art; and I am quite serious when I say that in this respect the interviewers are artists. It might be more difficult for an Englishman to come to the point, particularly the sort of point which American journalists are supposed, with some exaggeration, to aim at. It might be more difficult for an Englishman to ask a total stranger on the spur of the moment for the exact inscription on his mother's grave; but I really think that if an Englishman once got so far as that he would go very much farther, and certainly go on very much longer. The Englishman would approach the churchyard by a rather more wandering woodland path; but if once he had got to the grave I think he would have much more disposition, so to speak, to sit down on it. Our own national temperament would find it decidedly more difficult to disconnect when connections had really been established. Possibly that is the reason why our national temperament does not establish them. I suspect that the real reason that an Englishman does not talk is that he cannot leave off talking. I suspect that my solitary countrymen, hiding in separate railway compartments, are not so much retiring as a race of Trappists as escaping from a race of talkers.

However this may be, there is obviously something of practical advantage in the ease with which the American butterfly flits from flower to flower. He may in a sense force his acquaintance on us, but he does not force himself on us. Even when, to our prejudices, he seems to insist on knowing us, at least he does not insist on our knowing him. It may be, to some sensibilities, a bad thing that a total stranger should talk as if he were a friend, but it might possibly be worse if he insisted on being a friend before he would talk like one. To a great deal of the interviewing, indeed much the greater part of it, even this criticism does not apply; there is nothing which even an Englishman of extreme sensibility could regard as particularly private; the questions involved are generally entirely public, and treated with not a little public spirit. But my only reason for saying here what can be said even for the worst exceptions is to point out this general and neglected principle; that the very thing that we complain of in a foreigner generally carries with it its own foreign cure. American interviewing is generally very reasonable, and it is always very rapid. And even those to whom talking to an intelligent fellow creature is as horrible as having a tooth out may still admit that American interviewing has many of the qualities of American dentistry.

Another effect that has given rise to this fallacy, this exaggeration of the vulgarity and curiosity of the press, is the distinction between the articles and the headlines; or rather the tendency to ignore that distinction. The few really untrue and unscrupulous things I have seen in American 'stories' have always been in the headlines. And the headlines are written by somebody else; some solitary and savage cynic locked up in the office, hating all mankind, and raging and revenging himself at random, while the neat, polite, and rational pressman can safely be let loose to wander about the town.

For instance, I talked to two decidedly thoughtful fellow journalists immediately on my arrival at a town in which there had been some labour troubles. I told them my general view of Labour in the very largest and perhaps the vaguest historical outline; pointing out that the one great truth to be taught to the middle classes was that Capitalism was itself a crisis, and a passing crisis; that it was not so much that it was breaking down as that it had never really stood up. Slaveries could last, and peasantries could last; but wage-earning communities could hardly even live, and were already dying.

All this moral and even metaphysical generalisation was most fairly and most faithfully reproduced by the interviewer, who had actually heard it casually and idly spoken. But on the top of this column of political philosophy was the extraordinary announcement in enormous letters, 'Chesterton Takes Sides in Trolley Strike.' This was inaccurate. When I spoke I not only did not know that there was any trolley strike, but I did not know what a trolley strike was. I should have had an indistinct idea that a large number of citizens earned their living by carrying things about in wheel-barrows, and that they had desisted from the beneficent activities. Any one who did not happen to be a journalist, or know a little about journalism, American and English, would have supposed that the same man who wrote the article had suddenly gone mad and written the title. But I know that we have here to deal with two different types of journalists; and the man who writes the headlines I will not dare to describe; for I have not seen him except in dreams.

Another innocent complication is that the interviewer does sometimes translate things into his native language. It would not seem odd that a French interviewer should translate them into French; and it is certain that the American interviewer sometimes translates them into American. Those who imagine the two languages to be the same are more innocent than any interviewer. To take one out of the twenty examples, some of which I have mentioned elsewhere, suppose an interviewer had said that I had the reputation of being a nut. I should be flattered but faintly surprised at such a tribute to my dress and dashing exterior. I should afterwards be sobered and enlightened by discovering that in America a nut does not mean a dandy but a defective or imbecile person. And as I have here to translate their American phrase into English, it may be very defensible that they should translate my English phrases into American. Anyhow they often do translate them into American. In answer to the usual question about Prohibition I had made the usual answer, obvious to the point of dullness to those who are in daily contact with it, that it is a law that the rich make knowing they can always break it. From the printed interview it appeared that I had said, ‘Prohibition! All matter of dollar sign.’ This is almost avowed translation, like a French translation. Nobody can suppose that it would come natural to an Englishman to talk about a dollar, still less about a dollar sign — whatever that may be. It is exactly as if he had made me talk about the Skelt and Stevenson Toy Theatre as ‘a cent plain, and two cents coloured’ or condemned a parsimonious policy as dime-wise and dollar-foolish. Another interviewer once asked me who was the greatest American writer. I have forgotten exactly what I said, but after mentioning several names, I said that the greatest natural genius and artistic force was probably Walt Whitman. The printed interview is more precise; and students of my literary and conversational style will be interested to know that I said, ‘See here, Walt Whitman was your one real red-blooded man.’ Here again I hardly think the translation can have been quite unconscious; most of my intimates are indeed aware that I do not talk like that, but I fancy that the same fact would have dawned on the journalist to whom I had been talking. And even this trivial point carries with it the two truths which must be, I fear, the rather monotonous moral of these pages. The first is that America and England can be far better friends when sharply divided than when shapelessly amalgamated. These two journalists were false reporters, but they were true translators. They were not so much interviewers as interpreters. And the second is that in any such difference it is often wholesome to look beneath the surface for a superiority. For ability to translate does imply ability to understand; and many of these journalists really did understand. I think there are many English journalists who would be more puzzled by so simple an idea as the plutocratic foundation of Prohibition. But the American knew at once that I meant it was a matter of dollar sign; probably because he knew very well that it is.

Then again there is a curious convention by which American interviewing makes itself out much worse than it is. The reports are far more rowdy and insolent than the conversations. This is probably a part of the fact that a certain vivacity, which to some seems vitality and to some vulgarity, is not only an ambition but an ideal. It must always be grasped that this vulgarity is an ideal even more than it is a reality. It is an ideal when it is not a reality. A very quiet and intelligent young man, in a soft black hat and tortoise-shell spectacles, will ask for an interview with unimpeachable politeness, wait for his living subject with unimpeachable patience, talk to him quite sensibly for twenty minutes, and go noiselessly away. Then in the newspaper next morning you will read how he beat the bedroom door in, and pursued his victim on to the roof or dragged him from under the bed, and tore from him replies to all sorts of bald and ruthless questions printed in large black letters. I was often interviewed in the evening, and had no notion of how atrociously I had been insulted till I saw it in the paper next morning. I had no notion I had been on the rack of an inquisitor until I saw it in plain print; and then of course I believed it, with a faith and docility unknown in any previous epoch of history. An interesting essay might be written upon points upon which nations affect more vices than they possess; and it might deal more fully with the American pressman, who is a harmless clubman in private, and becomes a sort of highway-robber in print.

I have turned this chapter into something like a defence of interviewers, because I really think they are made to bear too much of the burden of the bad developments of modern journalism. But I am very far from meaning to suggest that those bad developments are not very bad. So far from wishing to minimise the evil, I would in a real sense rather magnify it. I would suggest that the evil itself is a much larger and more fundamental thing; and that to deal with it by abusing poor journalists, doing their particular and perhaps peculiar duty, is like dealing with a pestilence by rubbing at one of the spots. What is wrong with the modern world will not be righted by attributing the whole disease to each of its symptoms in turn; first to the tavern and then to the cinema and then to the reporter’s room. The evil of journalism is not in the journalists. It is not in the poor men on the lower level of the profession, but in the rich men at the top of the profession; or rather in the rich men who are too much on top of the profession even to belong to it. The trouble with newspapers is the Newspaper Trust, as the trouble might be with a Wheat Trust, without involving a vilification of all the people who grow wheat. It is the American plutocracy and not the American press. What is the matter with the modern world is not modern headlines or modern films or modern machinery. What is the matter with the modern world is the modern world; and the cure will come from another.

Some American Cities

There is one point, almost to be called a paradox, to be noted about New York; and that is that in one sense it is really new. The term very seldom has any relevance to the reality. The New Forest is nearly as old as the Conquest, and the New Theology is nearly as old as the Creed. Things have been offered to me as the new thought that might more properly be called the old thoughtlessness; and the thing we call the New Poor Law is already old enough to know better. But there is a sense in which New York is always new; in the sense that it is always being renewed. A stranger might well say that the chief industry of the citizens consists of destroying their city; but he soon realises that they always start it all over again with undiminished energy and hope. At first I had a fancy that they never quite finished putting up a big building without feeling that it was time to pull it down again; and that somebody began to dig up the first foundations while somebody else was putting on the last tiles. This fills the whole of this brilliant and bewildering place with a quite unique and unparalleled air of rapid ruin. Ruins spring up so suddenly like mushrooms, which with us are the growth of age like mosses, that one half expects to see ivy climbing quickly up the broken walls as in the nightmare of the Time Machine, or in some incredibly accelerated cinema.

There is no sight in any country that raises my own spirits so much as a scaffolding. It is a tragedy that they always take the scaffolding away, and leave us nothing but a mere building. If they would only take the building away and leave us a beautiful scaffolding, it would in most cases be a gain to the loveliness of earth. If I could analyse what it is that lifts the heart about the lightness and clarity of such a white and wooden skeleton, I could explain what it is that is really charming about New York; in spite of its suffering from the curse of cosmopolitanism and even the provincial superstition of progress. It is partly that all this destruction and reconstruction is an unexhausted artistic energy; but it is partly also that it is an artistic energy that does not take itself too seriously. It is first because man is here a carpenter; and secondly because he is a stage carpenter. Indeed there is about the whole scene the spirit of scene-shifting. It therefore touches whatever nerve in us has since childhood thrilled at all theatrical things. But the picture will be imperfect unless we realise something which gives it unity and marks its chief difference from the climate and colours of Western Europe. We may say that the back-scene remains the same. The sky remained, and in the depths of winter it seemed to be blue with summer; and so clear that I almost flattered myself that clouds were English products like primroses. An American would probably retort on my charge of scene-shifting by saying that at least he only shifted the towers and domes of the earth; and that in England it is the heavens that are shifty. And indeed we have changes from day to day that would seem to him as distinct as different magic-lantern slides; one view showing the Bay of Naples and the next the North Pole. I do not mean, of course, that there are no changes in American weather; but as a matter of proportion it is true that the most unstable part of our scenery is the most stable part of theirs. Indeed we might almost be pardoned the boast that Britain alone really possesses the noble thing called weather; most other countries having to be content with climate. It must be confessed, however, that they often are content with it. And the beauty of New York, which is considerable, is very largely due to the clarity that brings out the colours of varied buildings against the equal colour of the sky. Strangely enough I found myself repeating about this vista of the West two vivid lines in which Mr. W. B. Yeats has called up a vision of the East: —

And coloured like the eastern birds
At evening in their rainless skies.

To invoke a somewhat less poetic parallel, even the untravelled Englishman has probably seen American posters and trade advertisements of a patchy and gaudy kind, in which a white house or a yellow motor-car are cut out as in cardboard against a sky like blue marble. I used to think it was only New Art, but I found that it is really New York.

It is not for nothing that the very nature of local character has gained the nickname of local colour. Colour runs through all our experience; and we all know that our childhood found talismanic gems in the very paints in the paint-box, or even in their very names. And just as the very name of ‘crimson lake’ really suggested to me some sanguine and mysterious mere, dark yet red as blood, so the very name of ‘burnt sienna’ became afterwards tangled up in my mind with the notion of something traditional and tragic; as if some such golden Italian city had really been darkened by many conflagrations in the wars of mediaeval democracy. Now if one had the caprice of conceiving some city exactly contrary to one thus seared and seasoned by fire, its colour might be called up to a childish fancy by the mere name of ‘raw umber’; and such a city is New York. I used to be puzzled by the name of ‘raw umber,’ being unable to imagine the effect of fried umber or stewed umber. But the colours of New York are exactly in that key; and might be adumbrated by phrases like raw pink or raw yellow. It is really in a sense like something uncooked; or something which the satiric would call half-baked. And yet the effect is not only beautiful, it is even delicate. I had no name for this nuance; until I saw that somebody had written of ‘the pastel-tinted towers of New York’; and I knew that the name had been found. There are no paints dry enough to describe all that dry light; and it is not a box of colours but of crayons. If the Englishman returning to England is moved at the sight of a block of white chalk, the American sees rather a bundle of chalks. Nor can I imagine anything more moving. Fairy tales are told to children about a country where the trees are like sugar-sticks and the lakes like treacle, but most children would feel almost as greedy for a fairyland where the trees were like brushes of green paint and the hills were of coloured chalks.

But here what accentuates this arid freshness is the fragmentary look of the continual reconstruction and change. The strong daylight finds everywhere the broken edges of things, and the sort of hues we see in newly-turned earth or the white sections of trees. And it is in this respect that the local colour can literally be taken as local character. For New York considered in itself is primarily a place of unrest, and those who sincerely love it, as many do, love it for the romance of its restlessness. A man almost looks at a building as he passes to wonder whether it will be there when he comes back from his walk; and the doubt is part of an indescribable notion, as of a white nightmare of daylight, which is increased by the very numbering of the streets, with its tangle of numerals which at first makes an English head reel. The detail is merely a symbol; and when he is used to it he can see that it is, like the most humdrum human customs, both worse and better than his own. ‘271 West 52nd Street’ is the easiest of all addresses to find, but the hardest of all addresses to remember. He who is, like myself, so constituted as necessarily to lose any piece of paper he has particular reason to preserve, will find himself wishing the place were called ‘Pine Crest’ or ‘Heather Crag’ like any unobtrusive villa in Streatham. But his sense of some sort of incalculable calculations, as of the vision of a mad mathematician, is rooted in a more real impression. His first feeling that his head is turning round is due to something really dizzy in the movement of a life that turns dizzily like a wheel. If there be in the modern mind something paradoxical that can find peace in change, it is here that it has indeed built its habitation or rather is still building and unbuilding it. One might fancy that it changes in everything and that nothing endures but its invisible name; and even its name, as I have said, seems to make a boast of novelty.

That is something like a sincere first impression of the atmosphere of New York. Those who think that is the atmosphere of America have never got any farther than New York. We might almost say that they have never entered America, any more than if they had been detained like undesirable aliens at Ellis Island. And indeed there are a good many undesirable aliens detained in Manhattan Island too. But of that I will not speak, being myself an alien with no particular pretensions to be desirable. Anyhow, such is New York; but such is not the New World. The great American Republic contains very considerable varieties, and of these varieties I necessarily saw far too little to allow me to generalise. But from the little I did see, I should venture on the generalisation that the great part of America is singularly and even strikingly unlike New York. It goes without saying that New York is very unlike the vast agricultural plains and small agricultural towns of the Middle West, which I did see. It may be conjectured with some confidence that it is very unlike what is called the Wild and sometimes the Woolly West, which I did not see. But I am here comparing New York, not with the newer states of the prairie or the mountains, but with the other older cities of the Atlantic coast. And New York, as it seems to me, is quite vitally different from the other historic cities of America. It is so different that it shows them all for the moment in a false light, as a long white searchlight will throw a light that is fantastic and theatrical upon ancient and quiet villages folded in the everlasting hills. Philadelphia and Boston and Baltimore are more like those quiet villages than they are like New York.

If I were to call this book ‘The Antiquities of America,’ I should give rise to misunderstanding and possibly to annoyance. And yet the double sense in such words is an undeserved misfortune for them. We talk of Plato or the Parthenon or the Greek passion for beauty as parts of the antique, but hardly of the antiquated. When we call them ancient it is not because they have perished, but rather because they have survived. In the same way I heard some New Yorkers refer to Philadelphia or Baltimore as ‘dead towns.’ They mean by a dead town a town that has had the impudence not to die. Such people are astonished to find an ancient thing alive, just as they are now astonished, and will be increasingly astonished, to find Poland or the Papacy or the French nation still alive. And what I mean by Philadelphia and Baltimore being alive is precisely what these people mean by their being dead; it is continuity; it is the presence of the life first breathed into them and of the purpose of their being; it is the benediction of the founders of the colonies and the fathers of the republic. This tradition is truly to be called life; for life alone can link the past and the future. It merely means that as what was done yesterday makes some difference to-day, so what is done to-day will make some difference to-morrow. In New York it is difficult to feel that any day will make any difference. These moderns only die daily without power to rise from the dead. But I can truly claim that in coming into some of these more stable cities of the States I felt something quite sincerely of that historic emotion which is satisfied in the eternal cities of the Mediterranean. I felt in America what many Americans suppose can only be felt in Europe. I have seldom had that sentiment stirred more simply and directly than when I saw from afar off, above the vast grey labyrinth of Philadelphia, great Penn upon his pinnacle like the graven figure of a god who had fashioned a new world; and remembered that his body lay buried in a field at the turning of a lane, a league from my own door.

For this aspect of America is rather neglected in the talk about electricity and headlines. Needless to say, the modern vulgarity of avarice and advertisement sprawls all over Philadelphia or Boston; but so it does over Winchester or Canterbury. But most people know that there is something else to be found in Canterbury or Winchester; many people know that it is rather more interesting; and some people know that Alfred can still walk in Winchester and that St. Thomas at Canterbury was killed but did not die. It is at least as possible for a Philadelphian to feel the presence of Penn and Franklin as for an Englishman to see the ghosts of Alfred and of Becket. Tradition does not mean a dead town; it does not mean that the living are dead but that the dead are alive. It means that it still matters what Penn did two hundred years ago or what Franklin did a hundred years ago; I never could feel in New York that it mattered what anybody did an hour ago. And these things did and do matter. Quakerism is not my favourite creed; but on that day when William Penn stood unarmed upon that spot and made his treaty with the Red Indians, his creed of humanity did have a triumph and a triumph that has not turned back. The praise given to him is not a priggish fiction of our conventional history, though such fictions have illogically curtailed it. The Nonconformists have been rather unfair to Penn even in picking their praises; and they generally forget that toleration cuts both ways and that an open mind is open on all sides. Those who deify him for consenting to bargain with the savages cannot forgive him for consenting to bargain with the Stuarts. And the same is true of the other city, yet more closely connected with the tolerant experiment of the Stuarts. The state of Maryland was the first experiment in religious freedom in human history. Lord Baltimore and his Catholics were a long march ahead of William Penn and his Quakers on what is now called the path of progress. That the first religious toleration ever granted in the world was granted by Roman Catholics is one of those little informing details with which our Victorian histories did not exactly teem. But when I went into my hotel at Baltimore and found two priests waiting to see me, I was moved in a new fashion, for I felt that I touched the end of a living chain. Nor was the impression accidental; it will always remain with me with a mixture of gratitude and grief, for they brought a message of welcome from a great American whose name I had known from childhood and whose career was drawing to its close; for it was but a few days after I left the city that I learned that Cardinal Gibbons was dead.

On the top of a hill on one side of the town stood the first monument raised after the Revolution to Washington. Beyond it was a new monument saluting in the name of Lafayette the American soldiers who fell fighting in France in the Great War. Between them were steps and stone seats, and I sat down on one of them and talked to two children who were clambering about the bases of the monument. I felt a profound and radiant peace in the thought that they at any rate were not going to my lecture. It made me happy that in that talk neither they nor I had any names. I was full of that indescribable waking vision of the strangeness of life, and especially of the strangeness of locality; of how we find places and lose them; and see faces for a moment in a far-off land, and it is equally mysterious if we remember and mysterious if we forget. I had even stirring in my head the suggestion of some verses that I shall never finish —

If I ever go back to Baltimore

The city of Maryland.

But the poem would have to contain far too much; for I was thinking of a thousand things at once; and wondering what the children would be like twenty years after and whether they would travel in white goods or be interested in oil, and I was not untouched (it may be said) by the fact that a neighbouring shop had provided the only sample of the substance called ‘tea’ ever found on the American continent; and in front of me soared up into the sky on wings of stone the column of all those high hopes of humanity a hundred years ago; and beyond there were lighted candles in the chapels and prayers in the ante-chambers, where perhaps already a Prince of the Church was dying. Only on a later page can I even attempt to comb out such a tangle of contrasts, which is indeed the tangle of America and this mortal life; but sitting there on that stone seat under that quiet sky, I had some experience of the thronging thousands of living thoughts and things, noisy and numberless as birds, that give its everlasting vivacity and vitality to a dead town.

Two other cities I visited which have this particular type of traditional character, the one being typical of the North and the other of the South. At least I may take as convenient anti-types the towns of Boston and St. Louis; and we might add Nashville as being a shade more truly southern than St. Louis. To the extreme South, in the sense of what is called the Black Belt, I never went at all. Now English travellers expect the South to be somewhat traditional; but they are not prepared for the aspects of Boston in the North which are even more so. If we wished only for an antic of antithesis, we might say that on one side the places are more prosaic than the names and on the other the names are more prosaic than the places. St. Louis is a fine town, and we recognise a fine instinct of the imagination that set on the hill overlooking the river the statue of that holy horseman who has christened the city. But the city is not as beautiful as its name; it could not be. Indeed these titles set up a standard to which the most splendid spires and turrets could not rise, and below which the commercial chimneys and sky-signs conspicuously sink. We should think it odd if Belfast had borne the name of Joan of Arc. We should be slightly shocked if the town of Johannesburg happened to be called Jesus Christ. But few have noted a blasphemy, or even a somewhat challenging benediction, to be found in the very name of San Francisco.

But on the other hand a place like Boston is much more beautiful than its name. And, as I have suggested, an Englishman's general information, or lack of information, leaves him in some ignorance of the type of beauty that turns up in that type of place. He has heard so much about the purely commercial North as against the agricultural and aristocratic South, and the traditions of Boston and Philadelphia are rather too tenuous and delicate to be seen from across the Atlantic. But here also there are traditions and a great deal of traditionalism. The circle of old families, which still meets with a certain exclusiveness in Philadelphia, is the sort of thing that we in England should expect to find rather in New Orleans. The academic aristocracy of Boston, which Oliver Wendell Holmes called the Brahmins, is still a reality though it was always a minority and is now a very small minority. An epigram, invented by Yale at the expense of Harvard, describes it as very small indeed: —

Here is to jolly old Boston, the home of the bean and the cod,
Where Cabots speak only to Lowells, and Lowells speak only to God.

But an aristocracy must be a minority, and it is arguable that the smaller it is the better. I am bound to say, however, that the distinguished Dr. Cabot, the present representative of the family, broke through any taboo that may tie his affections to his Creator and to Miss Amy Lowell, and broadened his sympathies so indiscriminately as to show kindness and hospitality to so lost a being as an English lecturer. But if the thing is hardly a limit it is very living as a memory; and Boston on this side is very much a place of memories. It would be paying it a very poor compliment merely to say that parts of it reminded me of England; for indeed they reminded me of English things that have largely vanished from England. There are old brown houses in the corners of squares and streets that are like glimpses of a man's forgotten childhood; and when I saw the long path with posts where the Autocrat may be supposed to have walked with the schoolmistress, I felt I had come to the land where old tales come true.

I pause in this place upon this particular aspect of America because it is very much missed in a mere contrast with England. I need not say that if I felt it even about slight figures of fiction, I felt it even more about solid figures of history. Such ghosts seemed particularly solid in the Southern States, precisely because of the comparative quietude and leisure of the atmosphere of the South. It was never more vivid to me than when coming in, at a quiet hour of the night, into the comparatively quiet hotel at

Nashville in Tennessee, and mounting to a dim and deserted upper floor where I found myself before a faded picture; and from the dark canvas looked forth the face of Andrew Jackson, watchful like a white eagle.

At that moment, perhaps, I was in more than one sense alone. Most Englishmen know a good deal of American fiction, and nothing whatever of American history. They know more about the autocrat of the breakfast-table than about the autocrat of the army and the people, the one great democratic despot of modern times; the Napoleon of the New World. The only notion the English public ever got about American politics they got from a novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; and to say the least of it, it was no exception to the prevalence of fiction over fact. Hundreds of us have heard of Tom Sawyer for one who has heard of Charles Sumner; and it is probable that most of us could pass a more detailed examination about Toddy and Budge than about Lincoln and Lee. But in the case of Andrew Jackson it may be that I felt a special sense of individual isolation; for I believe that there are even fewer among Englishmen than among Americans who realise that the energy of that great man was largely directed towards saving us from the chief evil which destroys the nations to-day. He sought to cut down, as with a sword of simplicity, the new and nameless enormity of finance; and he must have known, as by a lightning flash, that the people were behind him, because all the politicians were against him. The end of that struggle is not yet; but if the bank is stronger than the sword or the sceptre of popular sovereignty, the end will be the end of democracy. It will have to choose between accepting an acknowledged dictator and accepting dictation which it dare not acknowledge. The process will have begun by giving power to people and refusing to give them their titles; and it will have ended by giving the power to people who refuse to give us their names.

But I have a special reason for ending this chapter on the name of the great popular dictator who made war on the politicians and the financiers. This chapter does not profess to touch on one in twenty of the interesting cities of America, even in this particular aspect of their relation to the history of America, which is so much neglected in England. If that were so, there would be a great deal to say even about the newest of them; Chicago, for instance, is certainly something more than the mere pork-packing yard that English tradition suggests; and it has been building a boulevard not unworthy of its splendid position on its splendid lake. But all these cities are defiled and even diseased with industrialism. It is due to the Americans to remember that they have deliberately preserved one of their cities from such defilement and such disease. And that is the presidential city, which stands in the American mind for the same ideal as the President; the idea of the Republic that rises above modern money-getting and endures. There has really been an effort to keep the White House white. No factories are allowed in that town; no more than the necessary shops are tolerated. It is a beautiful city; and really retains something of that classical serenity of the eighteenth century in which the Fathers of the Republic moved. With all respect to the colonial place of that name, I do not suppose that Wellington is particularly like Wellington. But Washington really is like Washington.

In this, as in so many things, there is no harm in our criticising foreigners, if only we would also criticise ourselves. In other words, the world might need even less of its new charity, if it had a little more of the old humility. When we complain of American individualism, we forget that we have fostered it by ourselves having far less of this impersonal ideal of the Republic or commonwealth as a whole. When we complain, very justly, for instance, of great pictures passing into the possession of American magnates, we ought to remember that we paved the way for it by allowing them all to accumulate in the possession of English magnates. It is bad that a public treasure should be in the possession of a private man in America, but we took the first step in lightly letting it disappear into the private collection of a man in England. I know all about the genuine national tradition which treated the aristocracy as constituting the state; but these very foreign purchases go to prove that we ought to have had a state independent of the aristocracy. It is true that rich Americans do sometimes covet the monuments of our culture in a fashion that rightly revolts us as vulgar and irrational. They are said sometimes to want to take whole buildings away with them; and too many of such buildings are private and for sale. There were wilder stories of a millionaire wishing to transplant Glastonbury Abbey and similar buildings as if they were portable shrubs in pots. It is obvious that it is nonsense as well as vandalism to separate Glastonbury Abbey from Glastonbury. I can understand a man venerating it as a ruin; and I can understand a man despising it as a rubbish-heap. But it is senseless to insult a thing in order to idolatrise it; it is meaningless to desecrate the shrine in order to worship the stones. That sort of thing is the bad side of American appetite and ambition; and we are perfectly right to see it not only as a deliberate blasphemy but as an unconscious buffoonery.

But there is another side to the American tradition, which is really too much lacking in our own tradition. And it is illustrated in this idea of preserving Washington as a sort of paradise of impersonal politics without personal commerce. Nobody could buy the White House or the Washington Monument; it may be hinted (as by an inhabitant of Glastonbury) that nobody wants to; but nobody could if he did want to. There is really a certain air of serenity and security about the place, lacking in every other American town. It is increased, of course, by the clear blue skies of that half-southern province, from which smoke has been banished. The effect is not so much in the mere buildings, though they are classical and often beautiful. But whatever else they have built, they have built a great blue dome, the largest dome in the world. And the place does express something in the inconsistent idealism of this strange people; and here at least they have lifted it higher than all the sky-scrapers, and set it in a stainless sky.

In the American Country

The sharpest pleasure of a traveller is in finding the things which he did not expect, but which he might have expected to expect. I mean the things that are at once so strange and so obvious that they must have been noticed, yet somehow they have not been noted. Thus I had heard a thousand things about Jerusalem before I ever saw it; I had heard rhapsodies and disparagements of every description. Modern rationalistic critics, with characteristic consistency, had blamed it for its accumulated rubbish and its modern restoration, for its antiquated superstition and its up-to-date vulgarity. But somehow the one impression that had never pierced through their description was the simple and single impression of a city on a hill, with walls coming to the very edge of slopes that were almost as steep as walls; the turreted city which crowns a cone-shaped hill in so many mediaeval landscapes. One would suppose that this was at once the plainest and most picturesque of all the facts; yet somehow, in my reading, I had always lost it amid a mass of minor facts that were merely details. We know that a city that is set upon a hill cannot be hid; and yet it would seem that it is exactly the hill that is hid; though perhaps it is only hid from the wise and the understanding. I had a similar and simple impression when I discovered America. I cannot avoid the phrase; for it would really seem that each man discovers it for himself.

Thus I had heard a great deal, before I saw them, about the tall and dominant buildings of New York. I agree that they have an instant effect on the imagination; which I think is increased by the situation in which they stand, and out of which they arose. They are all the more impressive because the building, while it is vertically so vast, is horizontally almost narrow. New York is an island, and has all the intensive romance of an island. It is a thing of almost infinite height upon very finite foundations. It is almost like a lofty lighthouse upon a lonely rock. But this story of the sky-scrapers, which I had often heard, would by itself give a curiously false impression of the freshest and most curious characteristic of American architecture. Told only in terms of these great towers of stone and brick in the big industrial cities, the story would tend too much to an impression of something cold and colossal like the monuments of Asia. It would suggest a modern Babylon altogether too Babylonian. It would imply that a man of the new world was a sort of new Pharaoh, who built not so much a pyramid as a pagoda of pyramids. It would suggest houses built by mammoths out of mountains; the cities reared by elephants in their own elephantine school of architecture. And New York does recall the most famous of all sky-scrapers — the tower of Babel. She recalls it none the less because there is no doubt about the confusion of tongues. But in truth the very reverse is true of most of the buildings in America. I had no sooner passed out into the suburbs of New York on the way to Boston than I began to see something else quite contrary and far more curious. I saw forests upon forests of small houses stretching away to the horizon as literal forests do; villages and towns and cities. And they were, in another sense, literally like forests. They were all made of wood. It was almost as fantastic to an English eye as if they had been all made of cardboard. I had long outlived the silly old joke that referred to Americans as if they all lived in the backwoods. But, in a sense, if they do not live in the woods, they are not yet out of the wood.

I do not say this in any sense as a criticism. As it happens, I am particularly fond of wood. Of all the superstitions which our fathers took lightly enough to love, the most natural seems to me the notion it is lucky to touch wood. Some of them affect me the less as superstitions, because I feel them as symbols. If humanity had really thought Friday unlucky it would have talked about bad Friday instead of good Friday. And while I feel the thrill of thirteen at a table, I am not so sure that it is the most miserable of all human fates to fill the places of the Twelve Apostles. But the idea that there was something cleansing or wholesome about the touching of wood seems to me one of those ideas which are truly popular, because they are truly poetic. It is probable enough that the conception came originally from the healing of the wood of the Cross; but that only clinches the divine coincidence. It is like that other divine coincidence that the Victim was a carpenter, who might almost have made His own cross. Whether we take the mystical or the mythical explanation, there is obviously a very deep connection between the human working in wood and such plain and pathetic mysticism. It gives something like a touch of the holy childishness to the tale, as if that terrible engine could be a toy. In the same fashion a child fancies that mysterious and sinister horse, which was the downfall of Troy, as something plain and staring, and perhaps spotted, like his own rocking-horse in the nursery.

It might be said symbolically that Americans have a taste for rocking-horses, as they certainly have a taste for rocking-chairs. A flippant critic might suggest that they select rocking-chairs so that, even when they are sitting down, they need not be sitting still. Something of this restlessness in the race may really be involved in the matter; but I think the deeper significance of the rocking-chair may still be found in the deeper symbolism of the rocking-horse. I think there is behind all this fresh and facile use of wood a certain spirit that is childish in the good sense of the word; something that is innocent, and easily pleased. It is not altogether untrue, still less is it unfriendly, to say that the landscape seems to be dotted with dolls' houses. It is the true tragedy of every fallen son of Adam that he has grown too big to live in a doll's house. These things seem somehow to escape the irony of time by not even challenging it; they are too temporary even to be merely temporal. These people are not building tombs; they are not, as in the fine image of Mrs. Meynell's poem, merely building ruins. It is not easy to imagine the ruins of a doll's house; and that is why a doll's house is an everlasting habitation. How far it promises a political permanence is a matter for further discussion; I am only describing the mood of discovery; in which all these cottages built of lath, like the palaces of a pantomime, really seemed coloured like the clouds of morning; which are both fugitive and eternal.

There is also in all this an atmosphere that comes in another sense from the nursery. We hear much of Americans being educated on English literature; but I think few Americans realise how much English children have been educated on American literature. It is true, and it is inevitable, that they can only be educated on rather old-fashioned American literature. Mr. Bernard Shaw, in one of his plays, noted truly the limitations of the young American millionaire, and especially the staleness of his English culture; but there is necessarily another side to it. If the American talked more of Macaulay than of Nietzsche, we should probably talk more of Emerson than of Ezra Pound. Whether this staleness is necessarily a disadvantage is, of course, a different question. But, in any case, it is true that the old American books were often the books of our childhood, even in the literal sense of the books of our nursery. I know few men in England who have not left their boyhood to some extent lost and entangled in the forests of *Huckleberry Finn*. I know few women in England, from the most revolutionary Suffragette to the most carefully preserved Early Victorian, who will not confess to having passed a happy childhood with the Little Women of Miss Alcott. *Helen's Babies* was the first and by far the best book in the modern scriptures of baby-worship. And about all this old-fashioned American literature there was an undefinable savour that satisfied, and even fed, our growing minds. Perhaps it was the smell of growing things; but I am far from certain that it was not simply the smell of wood. Now that all the memory comes back to me, it seems to come back heavy in a hundred forms with the fragrance and the touch of timber. There was the perpetual reference to the wood-pile, the perpetual background of the woods. There was something crude and clean about everything; something fresh and strange about those far-off houses, to which I could not then have put a name. Indeed, many things become clear in this wilderness of wood, which could only be expressed in symbol and even in fantasy. I will not go so far as to say that it shortened the transition from Log Cabin to White House; as if the White House were itself made of white wood (as Oliver Wendell Holmes said), 'that cuts like cheese, but lasts like iron for things like these.' But I will say that the experience illuminates some other lines by Holmes himself: —

Little I ask, my wants are few,
I only ask a hut of stone.

I should not have known, in England, that he was already asking for a good deal even in asking for that. In the presence of this wooden world the very combination of words seems almost a contradiction, like a hut of marble, or a hovel of gold.

It was therefore with an almost infantile pleasure that I looked at all this promising expansion of fresh-cut timber and thought of the housing shortage at home. I know not by what incongruous movement of the mind there swept across me, at the same moment, the thought of things ancestral and hoary with the light of ancient dawns. The last war brought back body-armour; the next war may bring back bows and arrows. And I suddenly had a memory of old wooden houses in London; and a model of Shakespeare's town.

It is possible indeed that such Elizabethan memories may receive a check or a chill when the traveller comes, as he sometimes does, to the outskirts of one of these strange hamlets of new frame-houses, and is confronted with a placard inscribed in enormous letters, 'Watch Us Grow.' He can always imagine that he sees the timbers swelling before his eyes like pumpkins in some super-tropical summer. But he may have formed the conviction that no such proclamation could be found outside Shakespeare’s town. And indeed there is a serious criticism here, to any one who knows history; since the things that grow are not always the things that remain; and pumpkins of that expansiveness have a tendency to burst. I was always told that Americans were harsh, hustling, rather rude and perhaps vulgar; but they were very practical and the future belonged to them. I confess I felt a fine shade of difference; I liked the Americans; I thought they were sympathetic, imaginative, and full of fine enthusiasms; the one thing I could not always feel clear about was their future. I believe they were happier in their frame-houses than most people in most houses; having democracy, good education, and a hobby of work; the one doubt that did float across me was something like, ‘Will all this be here at all in two hundred years?’ That was the first impression produced by the wooden houses that seemed like the waggons of gipsies; it is a serious impression, but there is an answer to it. It is an answer that opens on the traveller more and more as he goes westward, and finds the little towns dotted about the vast central prairies. And the answer is agriculture. Wooden houses may or may not last; but farms will last; and farming will always last.

The houses may look like gipsy caravans on a heath or common; but they are not on a heath or common. They are on the most productive and prosperous land, perhaps, in the modern world. The houses might fall down like shanties, but the fields would remain; and whoever tills those fields will count for a great deal in the affairs of humanity. They are already counting for a great deal, and possibly for too much, in the affairs of America. The real criticism of the Middle West is concerned with two facts, neither of which has been yet adequately appreciated by the educated class in England. The first is that the turn of the world has come, and the turn of the agricultural countries with it. That is the meaning of the resurrection of Ireland; that is the meaning of the practical surrender of the Bolshevist Jews to the Russian peasants. The other is that in most places these peasant societies carry on what may be called the Catholic tradition. The Middle West is perhaps the one considerable place where they still carry on the Puritan tradition. But the Puritan tradition was originally a tradition of the town; and the second truth about the Middle West turns largely on its moral relation to the town. As I shall suggest presently, there is much in common between this agricultural society of America and the great agricultural societies of Europe. It tends, as the agricultural society nearly always does, to some decent degree of democracy. The agricultural society tends to the agrarian law. But in Puritan America there is an additional problem, which I can hardly explain without a periphrasis.

There was a time when the progress of the cities seemed to mock the decay of the country. It is more and more true, I think, to-day that it is rather the decay of the cities that seems to poison the progress and promise of the countryside. The cinema boasts of being a substitute for the tavern, but I think it a very bad substitute. I think so quite apart from the question about fermented liquor. Nobody enjoys cinemas more than I, but to enjoy them a man has only to look and not even to listen, and in a tavern he has to talk. Occasionally, I admit, he has to fight; but he need never move at the movies. Thus in the real village inn are the real village politics, while in the other are only the remote and unreal metropolitan politics. And those central city politics are not only cosmopolitan politics but corrupt politics. They corrupt everything that they reach, and this is the real point about many perplexing questions.

For instance, so far as I am concerned, it is the whole point about feminism and the factory. It is very largely the point about feminism and many other callings, apparently more cultured than the factory, such as the law court and the political platform. When I see women so wildly anxious to tie themselves to all this machinery of the modern city my first feeling is not indignation, but that dark and ominous sort of pity with which we should see a crowd rushing to embark in a leaking ship under a lowering storm. When I see wives and mothers going in for business government I not only regard it as a bad business but as a bankrupt business. It seems to me very much as if the peasant women, just before the French Revolution, had insisted on being made duchesses or (as is quite as logical and likely) on being made dukes.

It is as if those ragged women, instead of crying out for bread, had cried out for powder and patches. By the time they were wearing them they would be the only people wearing them. For powder and patches soon went out of fashion, but bread does not go out of fashion. In the same way, if women desert the family for the factory, they may find they have only done it for a deserted factory. It would have been very unwise of the lower orders to claim all the privileges of the higher orders in the last days of the French monarchy. It would have been very laborious to learn the science of heraldry or the tables of precedence when all such things were at once most complicated and most moribund. It would be tiresome to be taught all those tricks just when the whole bag of tricks was coming to an end. A French satirist might have written a fine apologue about Jacques Bonhomme coming up to Paris in his wooden shoes and demanding to be made Gold Stick in Waiting in the name of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity; but I fear the stick in waiting would be waiting still.

One of the first topics on which I heard conversation turning in America was that of a very interesting book called *Main Street*, which involves many of these questions of the modern industrial and the eternal feminine. It is simply the story, or perhaps rather the study than the story, of a young married woman in one of the multitudinous little towns on the great central plains of America; and of a sort of struggle between her own more restless culture and the provincial prosperity of her neighbours. There are a number of true and telling suggestions in the book, but the one touch which I found tingling in the memory of many readers was the last sentence, in which the master of the house, with unshaken simplicity, merely asks for the whereabouts of some domestic implement; I think it was a screw-driver. It seems to me a harmless request, but from the way people talked about it one might suppose he had asked for a screw-driver to screw down the wife in her coffin. And a great many advanced persons would tell us that wooden house in which she lived really was like a wooden coffin. But this appears to me to be taking a somewhat funereal view of the life of humanity.

For, after all, on the face of it at any rate, this is merely the life of humanity, and even the life which all humanitarians have striven to give to humanity. Revolutionists have treated it not only as the normal but even as the ideal. Revolutionary wars have been waged to establish this; revolutionary heroes have fought, and revolutionary martyrs have died, only to build such a wooden house for such a worthy family. Men have taken the sword and perished by the sword in order that the poor gentleman might have liberty to look for his screw-driver. For there is here a fact about America that is almost entirely unknown in England. The English have not in the least realised the real strength of America. We in England hear a great deal, we hear far too much, about the economic energy of industrial America, about the money of Mr. Morgan, or the machinery of Mr. Edison. We never realise that while we in England suffer from the same sort of successes in capitalism and clockwork, we have not got what the Americans have got; something at least to balance it in the way of a free agriculture, a vast field of free farms dotted with small freeholders. For the reason I shall mention in a moment, they are not perhaps in the fullest and finest sense a peasantry. But they are in the practical and political sense a pure peasantry, in that their comparative equality is a true counterweight to the toppling injustice of the towns.

And, even in places like that described as Main Street, that comparative equality can immediately be felt. The men may be provincials, but they are certainly citizens; they consult on a common basis. And I repeat that in this, after all, they do achieve what many prophets and righteous men have died to achieve. This plain village, fairly prosperous, fairly equal, untaxed by tyrants and untroubled by wars, is after all the place which reformers have regarded as their aim; whenever reformers have used their wits sufficiently to have any aim. The march to Utopia, the march to the Earthly Paradise, the march to the New Jerusalem, has been very largely the march to Main Street. And the latest modern sensation is a book written to show how wretched it is to live there.

All this is true, and I think the lady might be more contented in her coffin, which is more comfortably furnished than most of the coffins where her fellow creatures live. Nevertheless, there is an answer to this, or at least a modification of it. There is a case for the lady and a case against the gentleman and the screw-driver. And when we have noted what it really is, we have noted the real disadvantage in a situation like that of modern America, and especially the Middle West. And with that we come back to the truth with which I started this speculation; the truth that few have yet realised, but of which I, for one, am more and more convinced — that industrialism is spreading because it is decaying; that only the dust and ashes of its dissolution are choking up the growth of natural things everywhere and turning the green world grey.

In this relative agricultural equality the Americans of the Middle West are far in advance of the English of the twentieth century. It is not their fault if they are still some centuries behind the English of the twelfth century. But the defect by which they fall short of being a true peasantry is that they do not produce their own spiritual food, in the same sense as their own material food. They do not, like some peasantries, create other kinds of culture besides the kind called agriculture. Their culture comes from the great cities; and that is where all the evil comes from.

If a man had gone across England in the Middle Ages, or even across Europe in more recent times, he would have found a culture which showed its vitality by its variety. We know the adventures of the three brothers in the old fairy tales who passed across the endless plain from city to city, and found one kingdom ruled by a wizard and another wasted by a dragon, one people living in castles of crystal and another sitting by fountains of wine. These are but legendary enlargements of the real adventures of a traveller passing from one patch of peasantry to another, and finding women wearing strange head-dresses and men singing new songs.

A traveller in America would be somewhat surprised if he found the people in the city of St. Louis all wearing crowns and crusading armour in honour of their patron saint. He might even feel some faint surprise if he found all the citizens of Philadelphia clad in a composite costume, combining that of a Quaker with that of a Red Indian, in honour of the noble treaty of William Penn. Yet these are the sort of local and traditional things that would really be found giving variety to the valleys of mediaeval Europe. I myself felt a perfectly genuine and generous exhilaration of freedom and fresh enterprise in new places like Oklahoma. But you would hardly find in Oklahoma what was found in Oberammergau. What goes to Oklahoma is not the peasant play, but the cinema. And the objection to the cinema is not so much that it goes to Oklahoma as that it does not come from Oklahoma. In other words, these people have on the economic side a much closer approach than we have to economic freedom. It is not for us, who have allowed our land to be stolen by squires and then vulgarised by sham squires, to sneer at such colonists as merely crude and prosaic. They at least have really kept something of the simplicity and, therefore, the dignity of democracy; and that democracy may yet save their country even from the calamities of wealth and science.

But, while these farmers do not need to become industrial in order to become industrious, they do tend to become industrial in so far as they become intellectual. Their culture, and to some great extent their creed, do come along the railroads from the great modern urban centres, and bring with them a blast of death and a reek of rotting things. It is that influence that alone prevents the Middle West from progressing towards the Middle Ages.

For, after all, linked up in a hundred legends of the Middle Ages, may be found a symbolic pattern of hammers and nails and saws; and there is no reason why they should not have also sanctified screw-drivers. There is no reason why the screw-driver that seemed such a trifle to the author should not have been borne in triumph down Main Street like a sword of state, in some pageant of the Guild of St. Joseph of the Carpenters or St. Dunstan of the Smiths. It was the Catholic poetry and piety that filled common life with something that is lacking in the worthy and virile democracy of the West. Nor are Americans of intelligence so ignorant of this as some may suppose. There is an admirable society called the Mediaevalists in Chicago; whose name and address will strike many as suggesting a certain struggle of the soul against the environment. With the national heartiness they blazon their note-paper with heraldry and the hues of Gothic windows; with the national high spirits they assume the fancy dress of friars; but any one who should essay to laugh at them instead of with them would find out his mistake. For many of them do really know a great deal about mediaevalism; much more than I do, or most other men brought up on an island that is crowded with its cathedrals. Something of the same spirit may be seen in the beautiful new plans and buildings of Yale, deliberately modelled not on classical harmony but on Gothic irregularity and surprise. The grace and energy of the mediaeval architecture resurrected by a man like Mr. R. A. Cram of Boston has behind it not merely artistic but historical and ethical enthusiasm; an enthusiasm for the Catholic creed which made mediaeval civilisation. Even on the huge Puritan plains of the Middle West the influence strays in the strangest fashion. And it is notable that among the pessimistic epitaphs of the Spoon River Anthology, in that churchyard compared with which most churchyards are cheery, among the suicides and secret drinkers and monomaniacs and hideous hypocrites of that happy village, almost the only record of respect and a recognition of wider hopes is dedicated to the Catholic priest.

But Main Street is Main Street in the main. Main Street is Modern Street in its multiplicity of mildly half-educated people; and all these historic things are a thousand miles from them. They have not heard the ancient noise either of arts or arms; the building of the cathedral or the marching of the crusade. But at least they have not deliberately slandered the crusade and defaced the cathedral. And if they have not produced the peasant arts, they can still produce the peasant crafts. They can sow and plough and reap and live by these everlasting things; nor shall the foundations of their state be moved. And the memory of those colossal fields, of those fruitful deserts, came back the more readily into my mind because I finished these reflections in the very heart of a modern industrial city, if it can be said to have a heart. It was in fact an English industrial city, but it struck me that it might very well be an American one. And it also struck me that we yield rather too easily to America the dusty palm of industrial enterprise, and feel far too little apprehension about greener and fresher vegetables. There is a story of an American who carefully studied all the sights of London or Rome or Paris, and came to the conclusion that ‘it had nothing on Minneapolis.’ It seems to me that Minneapolis has nothing on Manchester. There were the same grey vistas of shops full of rubber tyres and metallic appliances; a man felt that he might walk a day without seeing a blade of grass; the whole horizon was so infinite with efficiency. The factory chimneys might have been Pittsburg; the sky-signs might have been New York. One looked up in a sort of despair at the sky, not for a sky-sign but in a sense for a sign, for some sentence of significance and judgment; by the instinct that makes any man in such a scene seek for the only thing that has not been made by men. But even that was illogical, for it was night, and I could only expect to see the stars, which might have reminded me of Old Glory; but that was not the sign that oppressed me. All the ground was a wilderness of stone and all the buildings a forest of brick; I was far in the interior of a labyrinth of lifeless things. Only, looking up, between two black chimneys and a telegraph pole, I saw vast and far and faint, as the first men saw it, the silver pattern of the Plough.

The American Business Man

It is a commonplace that men are all agreed in using symbols, and all differ about the meaning of the symbols. It is obvious that a Russian republican might come to identify the eagle as a bird of empire and therefore a bird of prey. But when he ultimately escaped to the land of the free, he might find the same bird on the American coinage figuring as a bird of freedom. Doubtless, he might find many other things to surprise him in the land of the free, and many calculated to make him think that the bird, if not imperial, was at least rather imperious. But I am not discussing those exceptional details here. It is equally obvious that a Russian reactionary might cross the world with a vow of vengeance against the red flag. But that authoritarian might have some difficulties with the authorities, if he shot a man for using the red flag on the railway between Willesden and Clapham Junction.

But, of course, the difficulty about symbols is generally much more subtle than in these simple cases. I have remarked elsewhere that the first thing which a traveller should write about is the thing which he has not read about. It may be a small or secondary thing, but it is a thing that he has seen and not merely expected to see.

I gave the example of the great multitude of wooden houses in America; we might say of wooden towns and wooden cities. But after he has seen such things, his next duty is to see the meaning of them; and here a great deal of complication and controversy is possible. The thing probably does not mean what he first supposes it to mean on the face of it; but even on the face of it, it might mean many different and even opposite things.

For instance, a wooden house might suggest an almost savage solitude; a rude shanty put together by a pioneer in a forest; or it might mean a very recent and rapid solution of the housing problem, conducted cheaply and therefore on a very large scale. A wooden house might suggest the very newest thing in America or one of the very oldest things in England. It might mean a grey ruin at Stratford or a white exhibition at Earl’s Court.

It is when we come to this interpretation of international symbols that we make most of the international mistakes. Without the smallest error of detail, I will promise to prove that Oriental women are independent because they wear trousers, or Oriental men subject because they wear skirts.

Merely to apply it to this case, I will take the example of two very commonplace and trivial objects of modern life — a walking stick and a fur coat.

As it happened, I travelled about America with two sticks, like a Japanese nobleman with his two swords. I fear the simile is too stately. I bore more resemblance to a cripple with two crutches or a highly ineffectual version of the devil on two sticks. I carried them both because I valued them both, and did not wish to risk losing either of them in my erratic travels. One is a very plain grey stick from the woods of Buckinghamshire, but as I took it with me to Palestine it partakes of the character of a pilgrim’s staff. When I can say that I have taken the same stick to Jerusalem and to Chicago, I think the stick and I may both have a rest. The other, which I value even more, was given me by the Knights of Columbus at Yale, and I wish I could think that their chivalric title allowed me to regard it as a sword.

Now, I do not know whether the Americans I met, struck by the fastidious foppery of my dress and appearance, concluded that it is the custom of elegant English dandies to carry two walking sticks. But I do know that it is much less common among Americans than among Englishmen to carry even one. The point, however, is not merely that more sticks are carried by Englishmen than by Americans; it is that the sticks which are carried by Americans stand for something entirely different.

In America a stick is commonly called a cane, and it has about it something of the atmosphere which the poet described as the nice conduct of the clouded cane. It would be an exaggeration to say that when the citizens of the United States see a man carrying a light stick, they deduce that if he does that he does nothing else. But there is about it a faint flavour of luxury and lounging, and most of the energetic citizens of this energetic society avoid it by instinct.

Now, in an Englishman like myself, carrying a stick may imply lounging, but it does not imply luxury, and I can say with some firmness that it does not imply dandyism. In a great many Englishmen it means the very opposite even of lounging. By one of those fantastic paradoxes which are the mystery of nationality, a walking stick often actually means walking. It frequently suggests the very reverse of the beau with his clouded cane; it does not suggest a town type, but rather specially a country type. It rather implies the kind of Englishman who tramps about in lanes and meadows and knocks the tops off thistles. It suggests the sort of man who has carried the stick through his native woods, and perhaps even cut it in his native woods.

There are plenty of these vigorous loungers, no doubt, in the rural parts of America, but the idea of a walking stick would not especially suggest them to Americans; it would not call up such figures like a fairy wand. It would be easy to trace back the difference to many English origins, possibly to aristocratic origins, to the idea of the old squire, a man vigorous and even rustic, but trained to hold a useless staff rather than a useful tool. It might be suggested that American citizens do at least so far love freedom as to like to have their hands free. It might be suggested, on the other hand, that they keep their hands for the handles of many machines. And that the hand on a handle is less free than the hand on a stick or even a tool. But these again are controversial questions and I am only noting a fact.

If an Englishman wished to imagine more or less exactly what the impression is, and how misleading it is, he could find something like a parallel in what he himself feels about a fur coat. When I first found myself among the crowds on the main floor of a New York hotel, my rather exaggerated impression of the luxury of the place was largely produced by the number of men in fur coats, and what we should consider rather ostentatious fur coats, with all the fur outside.

Now an Englishman has a number of atmospheric but largely accidental associations in connection with a fur coat. I will not say that he thinks a man in a fur coat must be a wealthy and wicked man; but I do say that in his own ideal and perfect vision a wealthy and wicked man would wear a fur coat. Thus I had the sensation of standing in a surging mob of American millionaires, or even African millionaires; for the millionaires of Chicago must be like the Knights of the Round Table compared with the millionaires of Johannesburg.

But, as a matter of fact, the man in the fur coat was not even an American millionaire, but simply an American. It did not signify luxury, but rather necessity, and even a harsh and almost heroic necessity. Orson probably wore a fur coat; and he was brought up by bears, but not the bears of Wall Street. Eskimos are generally represented as a furry folk; but they are not necessarily engaged in delicate financial operations, even in the typical and appropriate occupation called freezing out. And if the American is not exactly an arctic traveller rushing from pole to pole, at least he is often literally fleeing from ice to ice. He has to make a very extreme distinction between outdoor and indoor clothing. He has to live in an icehouse outside and a hothouse inside; so hot that he may be said to construct an icehouse inside that. He turns himself into an icehouse and warms himself against the cold until he is warm enough to eat ices. But the point is that the same coat of fur which in England would indicate the sybarite life may here very well indicate the strenuous life; just as the same walking stick which would here suggest a lounger would in England suggest a plodder and almost a pilgrim.

And these two trifles are types which I should like to put, by way of proviso and apology, at the very beginning of any attempt at a record of any impressions of a foreign society. They serve merely to illustrate the most important impression of all, the impression of how false all impressions may be. I suspect that most of the very false impressions have come from the careful record of very true facts. They have come from the fatal power of observing the facts without being able to observe the truth. They came from seeing the symbol with the most vivid clarity and being blind to all that it symbolises. It is as if a man who knew no Greek should imagine that he could read a Greek inscription because he took the Greek R for an English P or the Greek long E for an English H. I do not mention this merely as a criticism on other people’s impressions of America, but as a criticism on my own. I wish it to be understood that I am well aware that all my views are subject to this sort of potential criticism, and that even when I am certain of the facts I do not profess to be certain of the deductions.

In this chapter I hope to point out how a misunderstanding of this kind affects the common impression, not altogether unfounded, that the Americans talk about dollars. But for the moment I am merely anxious to avoid a similar misunderstanding when I talk about Americans. About the dogmas of democracy, about the right of a people to its own symbols, whether they be coins or customs, I am convinced, and no longer to be shaken. But about the meaning of those symbols, in silver or other substances, I am always open to correction. That error is the price we pay for the great glory of nationality. And in this sense I am quite ready, at the start, to warn my own readers against my own opinions.

The fact without the truth is futile; indeed the fact without the truth is false. I have already noted that this is especially true touching our observations of a strange country; and it is certainly true touching one small fact which has swelled into a large fable. I mean the fable about America commonly summed up in the phrase about the Almighty Dollar. I do not think the dollar is almighty in America; I fancy many things are mightier, including many ideals and some rather insane ideals. But I think it might be maintained that the dollar has another of the attributes of deity. If it is not omnipotent it is in a sense omnipresent. Whatever Americans think about dollars, it is, I think, relatively true that they talk about dollars. If a mere mechanical record could be taken by the modern machinery of dictaphones and stenography, I do not think it probable that the mere word ‘dollars’ would occur more often in any given number of American conversations than the mere word ‘pounds’ or ‘shillings’ in a similar number of English conversations. And these statistics, like nearly all statistics, would be utterly useless and even fundamentally false. It is as if we should calculate that the word ‘elephant’ had been mentioned a certain number of times in a particular London street, or so many times more often than the word ‘thunderbolt’ had been used in Stoke Poges. Doubtless there are statisticians capable of carefully collecting those statistics also; and doubtless there are scientific social reformers capable of legislating on the basis of them. They would probably argue from the elephantine imagery of the London street that such and such a percentage of the householders were megalomaniacs and required medical care and police coercion. And doubtless their calculations, like nearly all such calculations, would leave out the only important point; as that the street was in the immediate neighbourhood of the Zoo, or was yet more happily situated under the benignant shadow of the Elephant and Castle. And in the same way the mechanical calculation about the mention of dollars is entirely useless unless we have some moral understanding of why they are mentioned. It certainly does not mean merely a love of money; and if it did, a love of money may mean a great many very different and even contrary things. The love of money is very different in a peasant or in a pirate, in a miser or in a gambler, in a great financier or in a man doing some practical and productive work. Now this difference in the conversation of American and English business men arises, I think, from certain much deeper things in the American which are generally not understood by the Englishman. It also arises from much deeper things in the Englishman, of which the Englishman is even more ignorant.

To begin with, I fancy that the American, quite apart from any love of money, has a great love of measurement. He will mention the exact size or weight of things, in a way which appears to us as irrelevant. It is as if we were to say that a man came to see us carrying three feet of walking stick and four inches of cigar. It is so in cases that have no possible connection with any avarice or greed for gain. An American will praise the prodigal generosity of some other man in giving up his own estate for the good of the poor. But he will generally say that the philanthropist gave them a 200-acre park, where an Englishman would think it quite sufficient to say that he gave them a park. There is something about this precision which seems suitable to the American atmosphere; to the hard sunlight, and the cloudless skies, and the glittering detail of the architecture and the landscape; just as the vaguer English version is consonant to our mistier and more impressionist scenery. It is also connected perhaps with something more boyish about the younger civilisation; and corresponds to the passionate particularity with which a boy will distinguish the uniforms of regiments, the rigs of ships, or even the colours of tram tickets. It is a certain godlike appetite for things, as distinct from thoughts.

But there is also, of course, a much deeper cause of the difference; and it can easily be deduced by noting the real nature of the difference itself. When two business men in a train are talking about dollars I am not so foolish as to expect them to be talking about the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. But if they were two English business men I should not expect them to be talking about business. Probably it would be about some sport; and most probably some sport in which they themselves never dreamed of indulging. The approximate difference is that the American talks about his work and the Englishman about his holidays. His ideal is not labour but leisure. Like every other national characteristic, this is not primarily a point for praise or blame; in essence it involves neither and in effect it involves both. It is certainly connected with that snobbishness which is the great sin of English society. The Englishman does love to conceive himself as a sort of country gentleman; and his castles in the air are all castles in Scotland rather than in Spain. For, as an ideal, a Scotch castle is as English as a Welsh rarebit or an Irish stew. And if he talks less about money I fear it is sometimes because in one sense he thinks more of it. Money is a mystery in the old and literal sense of something too sacred for speech. Gold is a god; and like the god of some agnostics has no name and is worshipped only in his works. It is true in a sense that the English gentleman wishes to have enough money to be able to forget it. But it may be questioned whether he does entirely forget it. As against this weakness the American has succeeded, at the price of a great deal of crudity and clatter, in making general a very real respect for work. He has partly disenchanted the dangerous glamour of the gentleman, and in that sense has achieved some degree of democracy; which is the most difficult achievement in the world.

On the other hand, there is a good side to the Englishman’s day-dream of leisure, and one which the American spirit tends to miss. It may be expressed in the word ‘holiday’ or still better in the word ‘hobby.’ The Englishman, in his character of Robin Hood, really has got two strings to his bow. Indeed the Englishman really is well represented by Robin Hood; for there is always something about him that may literally be called outlawed, in the sense of being extra-legal or outside the rules. A Frenchman said of Browning that his centre was not in the middle; and it may be said of many an Englishman that his heart is not where his treasure is. Browning expressed a very English sentiment when he said: —

I like to know a butcher paints,
A baker rhymes for his pursuit,
Candlestick-maker much acquaints
His soul with song, or haply mute
Blows out his brains upon the flute.

Stevenson touched on the same insular sentiment when he said that many men he knew, who were meat-salesmen to the outward eye, might in the life of contemplation sit with the saints. Now the extraordinary achievement of the American meat-salesman is that his poetic enthusiasm can really be for meat sales; not for money but for meat. An American commercial traveller asked me, with a religious fire in his eyes, whether I did not think that salesmanship could be an art. In England there are many salesmen who are sincerely fond of art; but seldom of the art of salesmanship. Art is with them a hobby; a thing of leisure and liberty. That is why the English traveller talks, if not of art, then of sport. That is why the two city men in the London train, if they are not talking about golf, may be talking about gardening. If they are not talking about dollars, or the equivalent of dollars, the reason lies much deeper than any superficial praise or blame touching the desire for wealth. In the English case, at least, it lies very deep in the English spirit. Many of the greatest English things have had this lighter and looser character of a hobby or a holiday experiment. Even a masterpiece has often been a by-product. The works of Shakespeare come out so casually that they can be attributed to the most improbable people; even to Bacon. The sonnets of Shakespeare are picked up afterwards as if out of a wastepaper basket. The immortality of Dr. Johnson does not rest on the written leaves he collected, but entirely on the words he wasted, the words he scattered to the winds. So great a thing as Pickwick is almost a kind of accident; it began as something secondary and grew into something primary and pre-eminent. It began with mere words written to illustrate somebody else's pictures; and swelled like an epic expanded from an epigram. It might almost be said that in the case of Pickwick the author began as the servant of the artist. But, as in the same story of Pickwick, the servant became greater than the master. This incalculable and accidental quality, like all national qualities, has its strength and weakness; but it does represent a certain reserve fund of interests in the Englishman's life; and distinguishes him from the other extreme type, of the millionaire who works till he drops, or who drops because he stops working. It is the great achievement of American civilisation that in that country it really is not cant to talk about the dignity of labour. There is something that might almost be called the sanctity of labour; but it is subject to the profound law that when anything less than the highest becomes a sanctity, it tends also to become a superstition. When the candlestick-maker does not blow out his brains upon the flute there is always a danger that he may blow them out somewhere else, owing to depressed conditions in the candlestick market.

Now certainly one of the first impressions of America, or at any rate of New York, which is by no means the same thing as America, is that of a sort of mob of business men, behaving in many ways in a fashion very different from that of the swarms of London city men who go up every day to the city. They sit about in groups with Red-Indian gravity, as if passing the pipe of peace; though, in fact, most of them are smoking cigars and some of them are eating cigars. The latter strikes me as one of the most peculiar of transatlantic tastes, more peculiar than that of chewing gum. A man will sit for hours consuming a cigar as if it were a sugar-stick; but I should imagine it to be a very disagreeable sugar-stick. Why he attempts to enjoy a cigar without lighting it I do not know; whether it is a more economical way of carrying a mere symbol of commercial conversation; or whether something of the same queer outlandish morality that draws such a distinction between beer and ginger beer draws an equally ethical distinction between touching tobacco and lighting it. For the rest, it would be easy to make a merely external sketch full of things equally strange; for this can always be done in a strange country. I allow for the fact of all foreigners looking alike; but I fancy that all those hard-featured faces, with spectacles and shaven jaws, do look rather alike, because they all like to make their faces hard. And with the mention of their mental attitude we realise the futility of any such external sketch. Unless we can see that these are something more than men smoking cigars and talking about dollars we had much better not see them at all.

It is customary to condemn the American as a materialist because of his worship of success. But indeed this very worship, like any worship, even devil-worship, proves him rather a mystic than a materialist. The Frenchman who retires from business when he has money enough to drink his wine and eat his omelette in peace might much more plausibly be called a materialist by those who do not prefer to call him a man of sense. But Americans do worship success in the abstract, as a sort of ideal vision. They follow success rather than money; they follow money rather than meat and drink. If their national life in one sense is a perpetual game of poker, they are playing excitedly for chips or counters as well as for coins. And by the ultimate test of material enjoyment, like the enjoyment of an omelette, even a coin is itself a counter. The Yankee cannot eat chips as the Frenchman can eat chipped potatoes; but neither can he swallow red cents as the Frenchman swallows red wine. Thus when people say of a Yankee that he worships the dollar, they pay a compliment to his fine spirituality more true and delicate than they imagine. The dollar is an idol because it is an image; but it is an image of success and not of enjoyment.

That this romance is also a religion is shown in the fact that there is a queer sort of morality attached to it. The nearest parallel to it is something like the sense of honour in the old duelling days. There is not a material but a distinctly moral savour about the implied obligation to collect dollars or to collect chips. We hear too much in England of the phrase about ‘making good’; for no sensible Englishman favours the needless interlarding of English with scraps of foreign languages. But though it means nothing in English, it means something very particular in American. There is a fine shade of distinction between succeeding and making good, precisely because there must always be a sort of ethical echo in the word good. America does vaguely feel a man making good as something analogous to a man being good or a man doing good. It is connected with his serious self-respect and his sense of being worthy of those he loves. Nor is this curious crude idealism wholly insincere even when it drives him to what some of us would call stealing; any more than the duellist's honour was insincere when it drove him to what some would call murder. A very clever American play which I once saw acted contained a complete working model of this morality. A girl was loyal to, but distressed by, her engagement to a young man on whom there was a sort of cloud of humiliation. The atmosphere was exactly what it would have been in England if he had been accused of cowardice or card-sharping. And there was nothing whatever the matter with the poor young man except that some rotten mine or other in Arizona had not 'made good.' Now in England we should either be below or above that ideal of good. If we were snobs, we should be content to know that he was a gentleman of good connections, perhaps too much accustomed to private means to be expected to be businesslike. If we were somewhat larger-minded people, we should know that he might be as wise as Socrates and as splendid as Bayard and yet be unfitted, perhaps one should say therefore be unfitted, for the dismal and dirty gambling of modern commerce. But whether we were snobbish enough to admire him for being an idler, or chivalrous enough to admire him for being an outlaw, in neither case should we ever really and in our hearts despise him for being a failure. For it is this inner verdict of instinctive idealism that is the point at issue. Of course there is nothing new, or peculiar to the new world, about a man's engagement practically failing through his financial failure. An English girl might easily drop a man because he was poor, or she might stick to him faithfully and defiantly although he was poor. The point is that this girl was faithful but she was not defiant; that is, she was not proud. The whole psychology of the situation was that she shared the weird worldly idealism of her family, and it was wounded as her patriotism would have been wounded if he had betrayed his country. To do them justice, there was nothing to show that they would have had any real respect for a royal duke who had inherited millions; what the simple barbarians wanted was a man who could 'make good.' That the process of making good would probably drag him through the mire of everything bad, that he would make good by bluffing, lying, swindling, and grinding the faces of the poor, did not seem to trouble them in the least. Against this fanaticism there is this shadow of truth even in the fiction of aristocracy; that a gentleman may at least be allowed to be good without being bothered to make it.

Another objection to the phrase about the almighty dollar is that it is an almighty phrase, and therefore an almighty nuisance. I mean that it is made to explain everything, and to explain everything much too well; that is, much too easily. It does not really help people to understand a foreign country; but it gives them the fatal illusion that they do understand it. Dollars stood for America as frogs stood for France; because it was necessary to connect particular foreigners with something, or it would be so easy to confuse a Moor with a Montenegrin or a Russian with a Red Indian. The only cure for this sort of satisfied familiarity is the shock of something really unfamiliar. When people can see nothing at all in American democracy except a Yankee running after a dollar, then the only thing to do is to trip them up as they run after the Yankee, or run away with their notion of the Yankee, by the obstacle of certain odd and obstinate facts that have no relation to that notion. And, as a matter of fact, there are a number of such obstacles to any such generalisation; a number of notable facts that have to be reconciled somehow to our previous notions. It does not matter for this purpose whether the facts are favourable or unfavourable, or whether the qualities are merits or defects; especially as we do not even understand them sufficiently to say which they are. The point is that we are brought to a pause, and compelled to attempt to understand them rather better than we do. We have found the one thing that we did not expect; and therefore the one thing that we cannot explain. And we are moved to an effort, probably an unsuccessful effort, to explain it.

For instance, Americans are very unpunctual. That is the last thing that a critic expects who comes to condemn them for hustling and haggling and vulgar ambition. But it is almost the first fact that strikes the spectator on the spot. The chief difference between the humdrum English business man and the hustling American business man is that the hustling American business man is always late. Of course there is a great deal of difference between coming late and coming too late. But I noticed the fashion first in connection with my own lectures; touching which I could heartily recommend the habit of coming too late. I could easily understand a crowd of commercial Americans not coming to my lectures at all; but there was something odd about their coming in a crowd, and the crowd being expected to turn up some time after the appointed hour. The managers of these lectures (I continue to call them lectures out of courtesy to myself) often explained to me that it was quite useless to begin properly until about half an hour after time. Often people were still coming in three-quarters of an hour or even an hour after time. Not that I objected to that, as some lecturers are said to do; it seemed to me an agreeable break in the monotony; but as a characteristic of a people mostly engaged in practical business, it struck me as curious and interesting. I have grown accustomed to being the most unbusinesslike person in any given company; and it gave me a sort of dizzy exaltation to find I was not the most unpunctual person in that company. I was afterwards told by many Americans that my impression was quite correct; that American unpunctuality was really very prevalent, and extended to much more important things. But at least I was not content to lump this along with all sorts of contrary things that I did not happen to like, and call it America. I am not sure of what it really means, but I rather fancy that though it may seem the very reverse of the hustling, it has the same origin as the hustling. The American is not punctual because he is not punctilious. He is impulsive, and has an impulse to stay as well as an impulse to go. For, after all, punctuality belongs to the same order of ideas as punctuation; and there is no punctuation in telegrams. The order of clocks and set hours which English business has always observed is a good thing in its own way; indeed I think that in a larger sense it is better than the other way. But it is better because it is a protection against hustling, not a promotion of it. In other words, it is better because it is more civilised; as a great Venetian merchant prince clad in cloth of gold was more civilised; or an old English merchant drinking port in an oak-panelled room was more civilised; or a little French shopkeeper shutting up his shop to play dominoes is more civilised. And the reason is that the American has the romance of business and is monomaniac, while the Frenchman has the romance of life and is sane. But the romance of business really is a romance, and the Americans are really romantic about it. And that romance, though it revolves round pork or petrol, is really like a love-affair in this; that it involves not only rushing but also lingering.

The American is too busy to have business habits. He is also too much in earnest to have business rules. If we wish to understand him, we must compare him not with the French shopkeeper when he plays dominoes, but with the same French shopkeeper when he works the guns or mans the trenches as a conscript soldier. Everybody used to the punctilious Prussian standard of uniform and parade has noticed the roughness and apparent laxity of the French soldier, the looseness of his clothes, the unsightliness of his heavy knapsack, in short his inferiority in every detail of the business of war except fighting. There he is much too swift to be smart. He is much too practical to be precise. By a strange illusion which can lift pork-packing almost to the level of patriotism, the American has the same free rhythm in his romance of business. He varies his conduct not to suit the clock but to suit the case. He gives more time to more important and less time to less important things; and he makes up his time-table as he goes along. Suppose he has three appointments; the first, let us say, is some mere trifle of erecting a tower twenty storeys high and exhibiting a sky-sign on the top of it; the second is a business discussion about the possibility of printing advertisements of soft drinks on the table-napkins at a restaurant; the third is attending a conference to decide how the populace can be prevented from using chewing-gum and the manufacturers can still manage to sell it. He will be content merely to glance at the sky-sign as he goes by in a trolley-car or an automobile; he will then settle down to the discussion with his partner about the table-napkins, each speaker indulging in long monologues in turn; a peculiarity of much American conversation. Now if in the middle of one of these monologues, he suddenly thinks that the vacant space of the waiter’s shirt-front might also be utilised to advertise the Gee Whiz Ginger Champagne, he will instantly follow up the new idea in all its aspects and possibilities, in an even longer monologue; and will never think of looking at his watch while he is rapturously looking at his waiter. The consequence is that he will come late into the great social movement against chewing-gum, where an Englishman would probably have arrived at the proper hour. But though the Englishman’s conduct is more proper, it need not be in all respects more practical. The Englishman’s rules are better for the business of life, but not necessarily for the life of business. And it is true that for many of these Americans business is the business of life. It is really also, as I have said, the romance of life. We shall admire or deplore this spirit, accordingly as we are glad to see trade irradiated with so much poetry, or sorry to see so much poetry wasted on trade. But it does make many people happy, like any other hobby; and one is disposed to add that it does fill their imaginations like any other delusion. For the true criticism of all this commercial romance would involve a criticism of this historic phase of commerce. These people are building on the sand, though it shines like gold, and for them like fairy gold; but the world will remember the legend about fairy gold. Half the financial operations they follow deal with things that do not even exist; for in that sense all finance is a fairy tale. Many of them are buying and selling things that do nothing but harm; but it does them good to buy and sell them. The claim of the romantic salesman is better justified than he realises. Business really is romance; for it is not reality.

There is one real advantage that America has over England, largely due to its livelier and more impressionable ideal. America does not think that stupidity is practical. It does not think that ideas are merely destructive things. It does not think that a genius is only a person to be told to go away and blow his brains out; rather it would open all its machinery to the genius and beg him to blow his brains in. It might attempt to use a natural force like Blake or Shelley for very ignoble purposes; it would be quite capable of asking Blake to take his tiger and his golden lions round as a sort of Barnum's Show, or Shelley to hang his stars and haloed clouds among the lights of Broadway. But it would not assume that a natural force is useless, any more than that Niagara is useless. And there is a very definite distinction here touching the intelligence of the trader, whatever we may think of either course touching the intelligence of the artist. It is one thing that Apollo should be employed by Admetus, although he is a god. It is quite another thing that Apollo should always be sacked by Admetus, because he is a god. Now in England, largely owing to the accident of a rivalry and therefore a comparison with France, there arose about the end of the eighteenth century an extraordinary notion that there was some sort of connection between dullness and success. What the Americans call a bonehead became what the English call a hard-headed man. The merchants of London evinced their contempt for the fantastic logicians of Paris by living in a permanent state of terror lest somebody should set the Thames on fire. In this as in much else it is much easier to understand the Americans if we connect them with the French who were their allies than with the English who were their enemies. There are a great many Franco-American resemblances which the practical Anglo-Saxons are of course too hard-headed (or boneheaded) to see. American history is haunted with the shadow of the Plebiscitary President; they have a tradition of classical architecture for public buildings. Their cities are planned upon the squares of Paris and not upon the labyrinth of London. They call their cities Corinth and Syracuse, as the French called their citizens Epaminondas and Timoleon. Their soldiers wore the French kepi; and they make coffee admirably, and do not make tea at all. But of all the French elements in America the most French is this real practicality. They know that at certain times the most businesslike of all qualities is ‘l’audace, et encore de l’audace, et toujours de l’audace.’ The publisher may induce the poet to do a pot-boiler; but the publisher would cheerfully allow the poet to set the Mississippi on fire, if it would boil his particular pot. It is not so much that Englishmen are stupid as that they are afraid of being clever; and it is not so much that Americans are clever as that they do not try to be any stupider than they are. The fire of French logic has burnt that out of America as it has burnt it out of Europe, and of almost every place except England. This is one of the few points on which English insularity really is a disadvantage. It is the fatal notion that the only sort of commonsense is to be found in compromise, and that the only sort of compromise is to be found in confusion. This must be clearly distinguished from the commonplace about the utilitarian world not rising to the invisible values of genius. Under this philosophy the utilitarian does not see the utility of genius, even when it is quite visible. He does not see it, not because he is a utilitarian, but because he is an idealist whose ideal is dullness. For some time the English aspired to be stupid, prayed and hoped with soaring spiritual ambition to be stupid. But with all their worship of success, they did not succeed in being stupid. The natural talents of a great and traditional nation were always breaking out in spite of them. In spite of the merchants of London, Turner did set the Thames on fire. In spite of our repeatedly explained preference for realism to romance, Europe persisted in resounding with the name of Byron. And just when we had made it perfectly clear to the French that we despised all their flamboyant tricks, that we were a plain prosaic people and there was no fantastic glory or chivalry about us, the very shaft we sent against them shone with the name of Nelson, a shooting and a falling star.

Presidents and Problems

All good Americans wish to fight the representatives they have chosen. All good Englishmen wish to forget the representatives they have chosen. This difference, deep and perhaps ineradicable in the temperaments of the two peoples, explains a thousand things in their literature and their laws. The American national poet praised his people for their readiness ‘to *rise* against the never-ending audacity of elected persons.’ The English national anthem is content to say heartily, but almost hastily, ‘Confound their politics,’ and then more cheerfully, as if changing the subject, ‘God Save the King.’ For this is especially the secret of the monarch or chief magistrate in the two countries. They arm the President with the powers of a King, that he may be a nuisance in politics. We deprive the King even of the powers of a President, lest he should remind us of a politician. We desire to forget the never-ending audacity of elected persons; and with us therefore it really never does end. That is the practical objection to our own habit of changing the subject, instead of changing the ministry. The King, as the Irish wit observed, is not a subject; but in that sense the English crowned head is not a King. He is a popular figure intended to remind us of the England that politicians do not remember; the England of horses and ships and gardens and good fellowship. The Americans have no such purely social symbol; and it is rather the root than the result of this that their social luxury, and especially their sport, are a little lacking in humanity and humour. It is the American, much more than the Englishman, who takes his pleasures sadly, not to say savagely.

The genuine popularity of constitutional monarchs, in parliamentary countries, can be explained by any practical example. Let us suppose that great social reform, The Compulsory Haircutting Act, has just begun to be enforced. The Compulsory Haircutting Act, as every good citizen knows, is a statute which permits any person to grow his hair to any length, in any wild or wonderful shape, so long as he is registered with a hairdresser who charges a shilling. But it imposes a universal close-shave (like that which is found so hygienic during a curative detention at Dartmoor) on all who are registered only with a barber who charges threepence. Thus, while the ornamental classes can continue to ornament the street with Piccadilly weepers or chin-beards if they choose, the working classes demonstrate the care with which the State protects them by going about in a fresher, cooler, and cleaner condition; a condition which has the further advantage of revealing at a glance that outline of the criminal skull, which is so common among them. The Compulsory Haircutting Act is thus in every way a compact and convenient example of all our current laws about education, sport, liquor and liberty in general. Well, the law has passed and the masses, insensible to its scientific value, are still murmuring against it. The ignorant peasant maiden is averse to so extreme a fashion of bobbing her hair; and does not see how she can even be a flapper with nothing to flap. Her father, his mind already poisoned by Bolshevists, begins to wonder who the devil does these things, and why. In proportion as he knows the world of to-day, he guesses that the real origin may be quite obscure, or the real motive quite corrupt. The pressure may have come from anybody who has gained power or money anyhow. It may come from the foreign millionaire who owns all the expensive hairdressing saloons; it may come from some swindler in the cutlery trade who has contracted to sell a million bad razors. Hence the poor man looks about him with suspicion in the street; knowing that the lowest sneak or the loudest snob he sees may be directing the government of his country. Anybody may have to do with politics; and this sort of thing is politics. Suddenly he catches sight of a crowd, stops, and begins wildly to cheer a carriage that is passing. The carriage contains the one person who has certainly not originated any great scientific reform. He is the only person in the commonwealth who is not allowed to cut off other people’s hair, or to take away other people’s liberties. He at least is kept out of politics; and men hold him up as they did an unspotted victim to appease the wrath of the gods. He is their King, and the only man they know is not their ruler. We need not be surprised that he is popular, knowing how they are ruled.

The popularity of a President in America is exactly the opposite. The American Republic is the last mediaeval monarchy. It is intended that the President shall rule, and take all the risks of ruling. If the hair is cut he is the haircutter, the magistrate that bears not the razor in vain. All the popular Presidents, Jackson and Lincoln and Roosevelt, have acted as democratic despots, but emphatically not as constitutional monarchs. In short, the names have become curiously interchanged; and as a historical reality it is the President who ought to be called a King.

But it is not only true that the President could correctly be called a King. It is also true that the King might correctly be called a President. We could hardly find a more exact description of him than to call him a President. What is expected in modern times of a modern constitutional monarch is emphatically that he should preside. We expect him to take the throne exactly as if he were taking the chair. The chairman does not move the motion or resolution, far less vote it; he is not supposed even to favour it. He is expected to please everybody by favouring nobody. The primary essentials of a President or Chairman are that he should be treated with ceremonial respect, that he should be popular in his personality and yet impersonal in his opinions, and that he should actually be a link between all the other persons by being different from all of them. This is exactly what is demanded of the constitutional monarch in modern times. It is exactly the opposite to the American position; in which the President does not preside at all. He moves; and the thing he moves may truly be called a motion; for the national idea is perpetual motion. Technically it is called a message; and might often actually be called a menace. Thus we may truly say that the King presides and the President reigns. Some would prefer to say that the President rules; and some Senators and members of Congress would prefer to say that he rebels. But there is no doubt that he moves; he does not take the chair or even the stool, but rather the stump.

Some people seem to suppose that the fall of President Wilson was a denial of this almost despotic ideal in America. As a matter of fact it was the strongest possible assertion of it. The idea is that the President shall take responsibility and risk; and responsibility means being blamed, and risk means the risk of being blamed. The theory is that things are done by the President; and if things go wrong, or are alleged to go wrong, it is the fault of the President. This does not invalidate, but rather ratifies the comparison with true monarchs such as the mediaeval monarchs. Constitutional princes are seldom deposed; but despots were often deposed. In the simpler races of sunnier lands, such as Turkey, they were commonly assassinated. Even in our own history a King often received the same respectful tribute to the responsibility and reality of his office. But King John was attacked because he was strong, not because he was weak. Richard the Second lost the crown because the crown was a trophy, not because it was a trifle. And President Wilson was deposed because he had used a power which is such, in its nature, that a man must use it at the risk of deposition. As a matter of fact, of course, it is easy to exaggerate Mr. Wilson’s real unpopularity, and still more easy to exaggerate Mr. Wilson’s real failure. There are a great many people in America who justify and applaud him; and what is yet more interesting, who justify him not on pacifist and idealistic, but on patriotic and even military grounds. It is especially insisted by some that his demonstration, which seemed futile as a threat against Mexico, was a very far-sighted preparation for the threat against Prussia. But in so far as the democracy did disagree with him, it was but the occasional and inevitable result of the theory by which the despot has to anticipate the democracy.

Thus the American King and the English President are the very opposite of each other; yet they are both the varied and very national indications of the same contemporary truth. It is the great weariness and contempt that have fallen upon common politics in both countries. It may be answered, with some show of truth, that the new American President represents a return to common politics; and that in that sense he marks a real rebuke to the last President and his more uncommon politics. And it is true that many who put Mr. Harding in power regard him as the symbol of something which they call normalcy; which may roughly be translated into English by the word normality. And by this they do mean, more or less, the return to the vague capitalist conservatism of the nineteenth century. They might call Mr. Harding a Victorian if they had ever lived under Victoria. Perhaps these people do entertain the extraordinary notion that the nineteenth century was normal. But there are very few who think so, and even they will not think so long. The blunder is the beginning of nearly all our present troubles. The nineteenth century was the very reverse of normal. It suffered a most unnatural strain in the combination of political equality in theory with extreme economic inequality in practice. Capitalism was not a normalcy but an abnormalcy. Property is normal, and is more normal in proportion as it is universal. Slavery may be normal and even natural, in the sense that a bad habit may be second nature. But Capitalism was never anything so human as a habit; we may say it was never anything so good as a bad habit. It was never a custom; for men never grew accustomed to it. It was never even conservative; for before it was even created wise men had realised that it could not be conserved. It was from the first a problem; and those who will not even admit the Capitalist problem deserve to get the Bolshevist solution. All things considered, I cannot say anything worse of them than that.

The recent Presidential election preserved some trace of the old Party System of America; but its tradition has very nearly faded like that of the Party System of England. It is easy for an Englishman to confess that he never quite understood the American Party System. It would perhaps be more courageous in him, and more informing, to confess that he never really understood the British Party System. The planks in the two American platforms may easily be exhibited as very disconnected and ramshackle; but our own party was as much of a patchwork, and indeed I think even more so. Everybody knows that the two American factions were called ‘Democrat’ and ‘Republican.’ It does not at all cover the case to identify the former with Liberals and the latter with Conservatives. The Democrats are the party of the South and have some true tradition from the Southern aristocracy and the defence of Secession and State Rights. The Republicans rose in the North as the party of Lincoln, largely condemning slavery. But the Republicans are also the party of Tariffs, and are at least accused of being the party of Trusts. The Democrats are the party of Free Trade; and in the great movement of twenty years ago the party of Free Silver. The Democrats are also the party of the Irish; and the stones they throw at Trusts are retorted by stones thrown at Tammany. It is easy to see all these things as curiously sporadic and bewildering; but I am inclined to think that they are as a whole more coherent and rational than our own old division of Liberals and Conservatives. There is even more doubt nowadays about what is the connecting link between the different items in the old British party programmes. I have never been able to understand why being in favour of Protection should have anything to do with being opposed to Home Rule; especially as most of the people who were to receive Home Rule were themselves in favour of Protection. I could never see what giving people cheap bread had to do with forbidding them cheap beer; or why the party which sympathises with Ireland cannot sympathise with Poland. I cannot see why Liberals did not liberate public-houses or Conservatives conserve crofters. I do not understand the principle upon which the causes were selected on both sides; and I incline to think that it was with the impartial object of distributing nonsense equally on both sides. Heaven knows there is enough nonsense in American politics too; towering and tropical nonsense like a cyclone or an earthquake. But when all is said, I incline to think that there was more spiritual and atmospheric cohesion in the different parts of the American party than in those of the English party; and I think this unity was all the more real because it was more difficult to define. The Republican party originally stood for the triumph of the North, and the North stood for the nineteenth century; that is for the characteristic commercial expansion of the nineteenth century; for a firm faith in the profit and progress of its great and growing cities, its division of labour, its industrial science, and its evolutionary reform. The Democratic party stood more loosely for all the elements that doubted whether this development was democratic or was desirable; all that looked back to Jeffersonian idealism and the serene abstractions of the eighteenth century, or forward to Bryanite idealism and some simplified Utopia founded on grain rather than gold. Along with this went, not at all unnaturally, the last and lingering sentiment of the Southern squires, who remembered a more rural civilisation that seemed by comparison romantic. Along with this went, quite logically, the passions and the pathos of the Irish, themselves a rural civilisation, whose basis is a religion or what the nineteenth century tended to call a superstition. Above all, it was perfectly natural that this tone of thought should favour local liberties, and even a revolt on behalf of local liberties, and should distrust the huge machine of centralised power called the Union. In short, something very near the truth was said by a suicidally silly Republican orator, who was running Blaine for the Presidency, when he denounced the Democratic party as supported by ‘Rome, rum, and rebellion.’ They seem to me to be three excellent things in their place; and that is why I suspect that I should have belonged to the Democratic party, if I had been born in America when there was a Democratic party. But I fancy that by this time even this general distinction has become very dim. If I had been an American twenty years ago, in the time of the great Free Silver campaign, I should certainly never have hesitated for an instant about my sympathies or my side. My feelings would have been exactly those that are nobly expressed by Mr. Vachell Lindsay, in a poem bearing the characteristic title of ‘Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan.’ And, by the way, nobody can begin to sympathise with America whose soul does not to some extent begin to swing and dance to the drums and gongs of Mr. Vachell Lindsay’s great orchestra; which has the note of his whole nation in this: that a refined person can revile it a hundred times over as violent and brazen and barbarous and absurd, but not as insincere; there is something in it, and that something is the soul of many million men. But the poet himself, in the political poem referred to, speaks of Bryan’s fall over Free Silver as ‘defeat of my boyhood, defeat of my dream'; and it is only too probable that the cause has fallen as well as the candidate. The William Jennings Bryan of later years is not the man whom I should have seen in my youth, with the visionary eyes of Mr. Vachell Lindsay. He has become a commonplace Pacifist, which is in its nature the very opposite of a revolutionist; for if men will fight rather than sacrifice humanity on a golden cross, it cannot be wrong for them to resist its being sacrificed to an iron cross. I came into very indirect contact with Mr. Bryan when I was in America, in a fashion that made me realise how hard it has become to recover the illusions of a Bryanite. I believe that my lecture agent was anxious to arrange a debate, and I threw out a sort of loose challenge to the effect that woman's suffrage had weakened the position of woman; and while I was away in the wilds of Oklahoma my lecture agent (a man of blood-curdling courage and enterprise) asked Mr. Bryan to debate with me. Now Mr. Bryan is one of the greatest orators of modern history, and there is no conceivable reason why he should trouble to debate with a wandering lecturer. But as a matter of fact he expressed himself in the most magnanimous and courteous terms about my personal position, but said (as I understood) that it would be improper to debate on female suffrage as it was already a part of the political system. And when I heard that, I could not help a sigh; for I recognised something that I knew only too well on the front benches of my own beloved land. The great and glorious demagogue had degenerated into a statesman. I had never expected for a moment that the great orator could be bothered to debate with me at all; but it had never occurred to me, as a general moral principle, that two educated men were for ever forbidden to talk sense about a particular topic, because a lot of other people had already voted on it. What is the matter with that attitude is the loss of the freedom of the mind. There can be no liberty of thought unless it is ready to unsettle what has recently been settled, as well as what has long been settled. We are perpetually being told in the papers that what is wanted is a strong man who will do things. What is wanted is a strong man who will undo things; and that will be a real test of strength.

Anyhow, we could have believed, in the time of the Free Silver fight, that the Democratic party was democratic with a small d. In Mr. Wilson it was transfigured, his friends would say into a higher and his foes into a hazier thing. And the Republican reaction against him, even where it has been healthy, has also been hazy. In fact, it has been not so much the victory of a political party as a relapse into repose after certain political passions; and in that sense there is a truth in the strange phrase about normalcy; in the sense that there is nothing more normal than going to sleep. But an even larger truth is this; it is most likely that America is no longer concentrated on these faction fights at all, but is considering certain large problems upon which those factions hardly troubled to take sides. They are too large even to be classified as foreign policy distinct from domestic policy. They are so large as to be inside as well as outside the state. From an English standpoint the most obvious example is the Irish; for the Irish problem is not a British problem, but also an American problem. And this is true even of the great external enigma of Japan. The Japanese question may be a part of foreign policy for America, but it is a part of domestic policy for California. And the same is true of that other intense and intelligent Eastern people, the genius and limitations of which have troubled the world so much longer. What the Japs are in California, the Jews are in America. That is, they are a piece of foreign policy that has become imbedded in domestic policy; something which is found inside but still has to be regarded from the outside. On these great international matters I doubt if Americans got much guidance from their party system; especially as most of these questions have grown very recently and rapidly to enormous size. Men are left free to judge of them with fresh minds. And that is the truth in the statement that the Washington Conference has opened the gates of a new world.

On the relations to England and Ireland I will not attempt to dwell adequately here. I have already noted that my first interview was with an Irishman, and my first impression from that interview a vivid sense of the importance of Ireland in Anglo-American relations; and I have said something of the Irish problem, prematurely and out of its proper order, under the stress of that sense of urgency. Here I will only add two remarks about the two countries respectively. A great many British journalists have recently imagined that they were pouring oil upon the troubled waters, when they were rather pouring out oil to smooth the downward path; and to turn the broad road to destruction into a butter-slide. They seem to have no notion of what to do, except to say what they imagine the very stupidest of their readers would be pleased to hear, and conceal whatever the most intelligent of their readers would probably like to know. They therefore informed the public that ‘the majority of Americans’ had abandoned all sympathy with Ireland, because of its alleged sympathy with Germany; and that this majority of Americans was now ardently in sympathy with its English brothers across the sea. Now to begin with, such critics have no notion of what they are saying when they talk about the majority of Americans. To anybody who has happened to look in, let us say, on the city of Omaha, Nebraska, the remark will have something enormous and overwhelming about it. It is like saying that the majority of the inhabitants of China would agree with the Chinese Ambassador in a preference for dining at the Savoy rather than the Ritz. There are millions and millions of people living in those great central plains of the North American Continent of whom it would be nearer the truth to say that they have never heard of England, or of Ireland either, than to say that their first emotional movement is a desire to come to the rescue of either of them. It is perfectly true that the more monomaniac sort of Sinn Feiner might sometimes irritate this innocent and isolated American spirit by being pro-Irish. It is equally true that a traditional Bostonian or Virginian might irritate it by being pro-English. The only difference is that large numbers of pure Irishmen are scattered in those far places, and large numbers of pure Englishmen are not. But it is truest of all to say that neither England nor Ireland so much as crosses the mind of most of them once in six months. Painting up large notices of ‘Watch Us Grow,’ making money by farming with machinery, together with an occasional hold-up with six-shooters and photographs of a beautiful murderess or divorcée, fill up the round of their good and happy lives, and fleet the time carelessly as in the golden age.

But putting aside all this vast and distant democracy, which is the real ‘majority of Americans,’ and confining ourselves to that older culture on the eastern coast which the critics probably had in mind, we shall find the case more comforting but not to be covered with cheap and false comfort. Now it is perfectly true that any Englishman coming to this eastern coast, as I did, finds himself not only most warmly welcomed as a guest, but most cordially complimented as an Englishman. Men recall with pride the branches of their family that belong to England or the English counties where they were rooted; and there are enthusiasms for English literature and history which are as spontaneous as patriotism itself. Something of this may be put down to a certain promptitude and flexibility in all American kindness, which is never sufficiently stodgy to be called good nature. The Englishman does sometimes wonder whether if he had been a Russian, his hosts would not have remembered remote Russian aunts and uncles and disinterred a Muscovite great-grandmother; or whether if he had come from Iceland, they would not have known as much about Icelandic sagas and been as sympathetic about the absence of Icelandic snakes. But with a fair review of the proportions of the case he will dismiss this conjecture, and come to the conclusion that a number of educated Americans are very warmly and sincerely sympathetic with England.

What I began to feel, with a certain creeping chill, was that they were only too sympathetic with England. The word sympathetic has sometimes rather a double sense. The impression I received was that all these chivalrous Southerners and men mellow with Bostonian memories were *rallying* to England. They were on the defensive; and it was poor old England that they were defending. Their attitude implied that somebody or something was leaving her undefended, or finding her indefensible. The burden of that hearty chorus was that England was not so black as she was painted; it seemed clear that somewhere or other she was being painted pretty black. But there was something else that made me uncomfortable; it was not only the sense of being somewhat boisterously forgiven; it was also something involving questions of power as well as morality. Then it seemed to me that a new sensation turned me hot and cold; and I felt something I have never before felt in a foreign land. Never had my father or my grandfather known that sensation; never during the great and complex and perhaps perilous expansion of our power and commerce in the last hundred years had an Englishman heard exactly that note in a human voice. England was being *pitied*. I, as an Englishman, was not only being pardoned but pitied. My country was beginning to be an object of compassion, like Poland or Spain. My first emotion, full of the mood and movement of a hundred years, was one of furious anger. But the anger has given place to anxiety; and the anxiety is not yet at an end.

It is not my business here to expound my view of English politics, still less of European politics or the politics of the world; but to put down a few impressions of American travel. On many points of European politics the impression will be purely negative; I am sure that most Americans have no notion of the position of France or the position of Poland. But if English readers want the truth, I am sure this is the truth about their notion of the position of England. They are wondering, or those who are watching are wondering, whether the term of her success is come and she is going down the dark road after Prussia. Many are sorry if this is so; some are glad if it is so; but all are seriously considering the probability of its being so. And herein lay especially the horrible folly of our Black-and-Tan terrorism over the Irish people. I have noted that the newspapers told us that America had been chilled in its Irish sympathies by Irish detachment during the war. It is the painful truth that any advantage we might have had from this we ourselves immediately proceeded to destroy. Ireland *might* have put herself wrong with America by her attitude about Belgium, if England had not instantly proceeded to put herself more wrong by her attitude towards Ireland. It is quite true that two blacks do not make a white; but you cannot send a black to reproach people with tolerating blackness; and this is quite as true when one is a Black Brunswicker and the other a Black-and-Tan. It is true that since then England has made surprisingly sweeping concessions; concessions so large as to increase the amazement that the refusal should have been so long. But unfortunately the combination of the two rather clinches the conception of our decline. If the concession had come before the terror, it would have looked like an attempt to emancipate, and would probably have succeeded. Coming so abruptly after the terror, it looked only like an attempt to tyrannise, and an attempt that failed. It was partly an inheritance from a stupid tradition, which tried to combine what it called firmness with what it called conciliation; as if when we made up our minds to soothe a man with a five-pound note, we always took care to undo our own action by giving him a kick as well. The English politician has often done that; though there is nothing to be said of such a fool, except that he has wasted a fiver. But in this case he gave the kick first, received a kicking in return, and *then* gave up the money; and it was hard for the bystanders to say anything except that he had been badly beaten. The combination and sequence of events seems almost as if it were arranged to suggest the dark and ominous parallel. The first action looked only too like the invasion of Belgium, and the second like the evacuation of Belgium. So that vast and silent crowd in the West looked at the British Empire, as men look at a great tower that has begun to lean. Thus it was that while I found real pleasure, I could not find unrelieved consolation in the sincere compliments paid to my country by so many cultivated Americans; their memories of homely corners of historic counties from which their fathers came, of the cathedral that dwarfs the town, or the inn at the turning of the road. There was something in their voices and the look in their eyes which from the first disturbed me. So I have heard good Englishmen, who died afterwards the death of soldiers, cry aloud in 1914, ‘It seems impossible, of those jolly Bavarians!’ or, ‘I will never believe it, when I think of the time I had at Heidelberg!’

But there are other things besides the parallel of Prussia or the problem of Ireland. The American press is much freer than our own; the American public is much more familiar with the discussion of corruption than our own; and it is much more conscious of the corruption of our politics than we are. Almost any man in America may speak of the Marconi Case; many a man in England does not even know what it means. Many imagine that it had something to do with the propriety of politicians speculating on the Stock Exchange. So that it means a great deal to Americans to say that one figure in that drama is ruling India and another is ruling Palestine. And this brings me to another problem, which is also dealt with much more openly in America than in England. I mention it here only because it is a perfect model of the misunderstandings in the modern world. If any one asks for an example of exactly how the important part of every story is left out, and even the part that is reported is not understood, he could hardly have a stronger case than the story of Henry Ford of Detroit.

When I was in Detroit I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Ford, and it really was a pleasure. He is a man quite capable of views which I think silly to the point of insanity; but he is not the vulgar benevolent boss. It must be admitted that he is a millionaire; but he cannot really be convicted of being a philanthropist. He is not a man who merely wants to run people; it is rather his views that run him, and perhaps run away with him. He has a distinguished and sensitive face; he really invented things himself, unlike most men who profit by inventions; he is something of an artist and not a little of a fighter. A man of that type is always capable of being wildly wrong, especially in the sectarian atmosphere of America; and Mr. Ford has been wrong before and may be wrong now. He is chiefly known in England for a project which I think very preposterous; that of the Peace Ship, which came to Europe during the war. But he is not known in England at all in connection with a much more important campaign, which he has conducted much more recently and with much more success; a campaign against the Jews like one of the Anti-Semitic campaigns of the Continent. Now any one who knows anything of America knows exactly what the Peace Ship would be like. It was a national combination of imagination and ignorance, which has at least some of the beauty of innocence. Men living in those huge, hedgeless inland plains know nothing about frontiers or the tragedy of a fight for freedom; they know nothing of alarum and armaments or the peril of a high civilisation poised like a precious statue within reach of a mailed fist. They are accustomed to a cosmopolitan citizenship, in which men of all bloods mingle and in which men of all creeds are counted equal. Their highest moral boast is humanitarianism; their highest mental boast is enlightenment. In a word, they are the very last men in the world who would seem likely to pride themselves on a prejudice against the Jews. They have no religion in particular, except a sincere sentiment which they would call ‘true Christianity,’ and which specially forbids an attack on the Jews. They have a patriotism which prides itself on assimilating all types, including the Jews. Mr. Ford is a pure product of this pacific world, as was sufficiently proved by his pacifism. If a man of that sort has discovered that there is a Jewish problem, it is because there is a Jewish problem. It is certainly not because there is an Anti-Jewish prejudice. For if there had been any amount of such racial and religious prejudice, he would have been about the very last sort of man to have it. His particular part of the world would have been the very last place to produce it. We may well laugh at the Peace Ship, and its wild course and inevitable shipwreck; but remember that its very wildness was an attempt to sail as far as possible from the castle of Front-de-Bœuf. Everything that made him Anti-War should have prevented him from being Anti-Semite. We may mock him for being mad on peace; but we cannot say that he was so mad on peace that he made war on Israel.

It happened that, when I was in America, I had just published some studies on Palestine; and I was besieged by Rabbis lamenting my ‘prejudice.’ I pointed out that they would have got hold of the wrong word, even if they had not got hold of the wrong man. As a point of personal autobiography, I do not happen to be a man who dislikes Jews; though I believe that some men do. I have had Jews among my most intimate and faithful friends since my boyhood, and I hope to have them till I die. But even if I did have a dislike of Jews, it would be illogical to call that dislike a prejudice. Prejudice is a very lucid Latin word meaning the bias which a man has before he considers a case. I might be said to be prejudiced against a Hairy Ainu because of his name, for I have never been on terms of such intimacy with him as to correct my preconceptions. But if after moving about in the modern world and meeting Jews, knowing Jews, doing business with Jews, and reading and hearing about Jews, I came to the conclusion that I did not like Jews, my conclusion certainly would not be a prejudice. It would simply be an opinion; and one I should be perfectly entitled to hold; though as a matter of fact I do not hold it. No extravagance of hatred merely following on *experience* of Jews can properly be called a prejudice.

Now the point is that this new American Anti-Semitism springs from experience and nothing but experience. There is no prejudice for it to spring from. Or rather the prejudice is all the other way. All the traditions of that democracy, and very creditable traditions too, are in favour of toleration and a sort of idealistic indifference. The sympathies in which these nineteenth-century people were reared were all against Front-de-Bœuf and in favour of Rebecca. They inherited a prejudice against Anti-Semitism; a prejudice of Anti-Anti-Semitism. These people of the plains have found the Jewish problem exactly as they might have struck oil; because it is *there*, and not even because they were looking for it. Their view of the problem, like their use of the oil, is not always satisfactory; and with parts of it I entirely disagree. But the point is that the thing which I call a problem, and others call a prejudice, has now appeared in broad daylight in a new country where there is no priestcraft, no feudalism, no ancient superstition to explain it. It has appeared because it *is* a problem; and those are the best friends of the Jews, including many of the Jews themselves, who are trying to find a solution. That is the meaning of the incident of Mr. Henry Ford of Detroit; and you will hardly hear an intelligible word about it in England.

The talk of prejudice against the Japs is not unlike the talk of prejudice against the Jews. Only in this case our indifference has really the excuse of ignorance. We used to lecture the Russians for oppressing the Jews, before we heard the word Bolshevist and began to lecture them for being oppressed by the Jews. In the same way we have long lectured the Californians for oppressing the Japs, without allowing for the possibility of their foreseeing that the oppression may soon be the other way. As in the other case, it may be a persecution but it is not a prejudice. The Californians know more about the Japanese than we do; and our own colonists when they are placed in the same position generally say the same thing. I will not attempt to deal adequately here with the vast international and diplomatic problems which arise with the name of the new power in the Far East. It is possible that Japan, having imitated European militarism, may imitate

European pacifism. I cannot honestly pretend to know what the Japanese mean by the one any more than by the other. But when Englishmen, especially English Liberals like myself, take a superior and censorious attitude towards Americans and especially Californians, I am moved to make a final remark. When a considerable number of Englishmen talk of the grave contending claims of our friendship with Japan and our friendship with America, when they finally tend in a sort of summing up to dwell on the superior virtues of Japan, I may be permitted to make a single comment.

We are perpetually boring the world and each other with talk about the bonds that bind us to America. We are perpetually crying aloud that England and America are very much alike, especially England. We are always insisting that the two are identical in all the things in which they most obviously differ. We are always saying that both stand for democracy, when we should not consent to stand their democracy for half a day. We are always saying that at least we are all Anglo-Saxons, when we are descended from Romans and Normans and Britons and Danes, and they are descended from Irishmen and Italians and Slavs and Germans. We tell a people whose very existence is a revolt against the British Crown that they are passionately devoted to the British Constitution. We tell a nation whose whole policy has been isolation and independence that with us she can bear safely the White Man’s Burden of universal empire. We tell a continent crowded with Irishmen to thank God that the Saxon can always rule the Celt. We tell a populace whose very virtues are lawless that together we uphold the Reign of Law. We recognise our own law-abiding character in people who make laws that neither they nor anybody else can abide. We congratulate them on clinging to all they have cast away, and on imitating everything which they came into existence to insult. And when we have established all these nonsensical analogies with a nonexistent nation, we wait until there is a crisis in which we really are at one with America, and then we falter and threaten to fail her. In a battle where we really are of one blood, the blood of the great white race throughout the world, when we really have one language, the fundamental alphabet of Cadmus and the script of Rome, when we really do represent the same reign of law, the common conscience of Christendom and the morals of men baptized, when we really have an implicit faith and honour and type of freedom to summon up our souls as with trumpets — *then* many of us begin to weaken and waver and wonder whether there is not something very nice about little yellow men, whose heroic stories revolve round polygamy and suicide, and whose heroes wore two swords and worshipped the ancestors of the Mikado.

Prohibition in Fact and Fancy

I went to America with some notion of not discussing Prohibition. But I soon found that well-to-do Americans were only too delighted to discuss it over the nuts and wine. They were even willing, if necessary, to dispense with the nuts. I am far from sneering at this; having a general philosophy which need not here be expounded, but which may be symbolised by saying that monkeys can enjoy nuts but only men can enjoy wine. But if I am to deal with Prohibition, there is no doubt of the first thing to be said about it. The first thing to be said about it is that it does not exist. It is to some extent enforced among the poor; at any rate it was intended to be enforced among the poor; though even among them I fancy it is much evaded. It is certainly not enforced among the rich; and I doubt whether it was intended to be. I suspect that this has always happened whenever this negative notion has taken hold of some particular province or tribe. Prohibition never prohibits. It never has in history; not even in Moslem history; and it never will. Mahomet at least had the argument of a climate and not the interest of a class. But if a test is needed, consider what part of Moslem culture has passed permanently into our own modern culture. You will find the one Moslem poem that has really pierced is a Moslem poem in praise of wine. The crown of all the victories of the Crescent is that nobody reads the Koran and everybody reads the Rubaiyat.

Most of us remember with satisfaction an old picture in *Punch*, representing a festive old gentleman in a state of collapse on the pavement, and a philanthropic old lady anxiously calling the attention of a cabman to the calamity. The old lady says, ‘I’m sure this poor gentleman is ill,’ and the cabman replies with fervour, ‘Ill! I wish I ‘ad ‘alf ‘is complaint.’

We talk about unconscious humour; but there is such a thing as unconscious seriousness. Flippancy is a flower whose roots are often underground in the subconsciousness. Many a man talks sense when he thinks he is talking nonsense; touches on a conflict of ideas as if it were only a contradiction of language, or really makes a parallel when he means only to make a pun. Some of the *Punch* jokes of the best period are examples of this; and that quoted above is a very strong example of it. The cabman meant what he said; but he said a great deal more than he meant. His utterance contained fine philosophical doctrines and distinctions of which he was not perhaps entirely conscious. The spirit of the English language, the tragedy and comedy of the condition of the English people, spoke through him as the god spoke through a teraph-head or brazen mask of oracle. And the oracle is an omen; and in some sense an omen of doom.

Observe, to begin with, the sobriety of the cabman. Note his measure, his moderation; or to use the yet truer term, his temperance. He only wishes to have half the old gentleman’s complaint. The old gentleman is welcome to the other half, along with all the other pomps and luxuries of his superior social station. There is nothing Bolshevist or even Communist about the temperance cabman. He might almost be called Distributist, in the sense that he wishes to distribute the old gentleman’s complaint more equally between the old gentleman and himself. And, of course, the social relations there represented are very much truer to life than it is fashionable to suggest. By the realism of this picture Mr. Punch made amends for some more snobbish pictures, with the opposite social moral. It will remain eternally among his real glories that he exhibited a picture in which the cabman was sober and the gentleman was drunk. Despite many ideas to the contrary, it was emphatically a picture of real life. The truth is subject to the simplest of all possible tests. If the cabman were really and truly drunk he would not be a cabman, for he could not drive a cab. If he had the whole of the old gentleman’s complaint, he would be sitting happily on the pavement beside the old gentleman; a symbol of social equality found at last, and the levelling of all classes of mankind. I do not say that there has never been such a monster known as a drunken cabman; I do not say that the driver may not sometimes have approximated imprudently to three-quarters of the complaint, instead of adhering to his severe but wise conception of half of it. But I do say that most men of the world, if they spoke sincerely, could testify to more examples of helplessly drunken gentlemen put inside cabs than of helplessly drunken drivers on top of them. Philanthropists and officials, who never look at people but only at papers, probably have a mass of social statistics to the contrary; founded on the simple fact that cabmen can be cross-examined about their habits and gentlemen cannot. Social workers probably have the whole thing worked out in sections and compartments, showing how the extreme intoxication of cabmen compares with the parallel intoxication of costermongers; or measuring the drunkenness of a dustman against the drunkenness of a crossing-sweeper.

But there is more practical experience embodied in the practical speech of the English; and in the proverb that says ‘as drunk as a lord.’

Now Prohibition, whether as a proposal in England or a pretence in America, simply means that the man who has drunk less shall have no drink, and the man who has drunk more shall have all the drink. It means that the old gentleman shall be carried home in the cab drunker than ever; but that, in order to make it quite safe for him to drink to excess, the man who drives him shall be forbidden to drink even in moderation. That is what it means; that is all it means; that is all it ever will mean. It tends to that in Moslem countries; where the luxurious and advanced drink champagne, while the poor and fanatical drink water. It means that in modern America; where the wealthy are all at this moment sipping their cocktails, and discussing how much harder labourers can be made to work if only they can be kept from festivity. This is what it means and all it means; and men are divided about it according to whether they believe in a certain transcendental concept called ‘justice,’ expressed in a more mystical paradox as the equality of men. So long as you do not believe in justice, and so long as you are rich and really confident of remaining so, you can have Prohibition and be as drunk as you choose.

I see that some remarks by the Rev. R. J. Campbell, dealing with social conditions in America, are reported in the press. They include some observations about Sinn Fein in which, as in most of Mr. Campbell’s allusions to Ireland, it is not difficult to detect his dismal origin, or the acrid smell of the smoke of Belfast. But the remarks about America are valuable in the objective sense, over and above their philosophy. He believes that Prohibition will survive and be a success, nor does he seem himself to regard the prospect with any special disfavour. But he frankly and freely testifies to the truth I have asserted; that Prohibition does not prohibit, so far as the wealthy are concerned. He testifies to constantly seeing wine on the table, as will any other grateful guest of the generous hospitality of America; and he implies humorously that he asked no questions about the story told him of the old stocks in the cellars. So there is no dispute about the facts; and we come back as before to the principles. Is Mr. Campbell content with a Prohibition which is another name for Privilege? If so, he has simply absorbed along with his new theology a new morality which is different from mine. But he does state both sides of the inequality with equal logic and clearness; and in these days of intellectual fog that alone is like a ray of sunshine.

Now my primary objection to Prohibition is not based on any arguments against it, but on the one argument for it. I need nothing more for its condemnation than the only thing that is said in its defence. It is said by capitalists all over America; and it is very clearly and correctly reported by Mr. Campbell himself. The argument is that employees work harder, and therefore employers get richer. That this idea should be taken calmly, by itself, as the test of a problem of liberty, is in itself a final testimony to the presence of slavery. It shows that people have completely forgotten that there is any other test except the servile test. Employers are willing that workmen should have exercise, as it may help them to do more work. They are even willing that workmen should have leisure; for the more intelligent capitalists can see that this also really means that they can do more work. But they are not in any way willing that workmen should have fun; for fun only increases the happiness and not the utility of the worker. Fun is freedom; and in that sense is an end in itself. It concerns the man not as a worker but as a citizen, or even as a soul; and the soul in that sense is an end in itself. That a man shall have a reasonable amount of comedy and poetry and even fantasy in his life is part of his spiritual health, which is for the service of God; and not merely for his mechanical health, which is now bound to the service of man. The very test adopted has all the servile implication; the test of what we can get out of him, instead of the test of what he can get out of life.

Mr. Campbell is reported to have suggested, doubtless rather as a conjecture than a prophecy, that England may find it necessary to become teetotal in order to compete commercially with the efficiency and economy of teetotal America. Well, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was in America one of the most economical and efficient of all forms of labour. It did not happen to be feasible for the English to compete with it by copying it. There were so many humanitarian prejudices about in those days. But economically there seems to be no reason why a man should not have prophesied that England would be forced to adopt American Slavery then, as she is urged to adopt American Prohibition now. Perhaps such a prophet would have prophesied rightly. Certainly it is not impossible that universal Slavery might have been the vision of Calhoun as universal Prohibition seems to be the vision of Campbell. The old England of 1830 would have said that such a plea for slavery was monstrous; but what would it have said of a plea for enforced water-drinking? Nevertheless, the nobler Servile State of Calhoun collapsed before it could spread to Europe. And there is always the hope that the same may happen to the far more materialistic Utopia of Mr. Campbell and Soft Drinks.

Abstract morality is very important; and it may well clear the mind to consider what would be the effect of Prohibition in America, if it were introduced there. It would, of course, be a decisive departure from the tradition of the Declaration of Independence. Those who deny that are hardly serious enough to demand attention. It is enough to say that they are reduced to minimising that document in defence of Prohibition, exactly as the slave-owners were reduced to minimising it in defence of Slavery. They are reduced to saying that the Fathers of the Republic meant no more than that they would not be ruled by a king. And they are obviously open to the reply which Lincoln gave to Douglas on the slavery question; that if that great charter was limited to certain events in the eighteenth century, it was hardly worth making such a fuss about in the nineteenth — or in the twentieth. But they are also open to another reply which is even more to the point, when they pretend that Jefferson’s famous preamble only means to say that monarchy is wrong. They are maintaining that Jefferson only meant to say something that he does not say at all. The great preamble does not say that all monarchical government must be wrong; on the contrary, it rather implies that most government is right. It speaks of human governments in general as justified by the necessity of defending certain personal rights. I see no reason whatever to suppose that it would not include any royal government that does defend those rights. Still less do I doubt what it would say of a republican government that does destroy those rights.

But what are those rights? Sophists can always debate about their degree; but even sophists cannot debate about their direction. Nobody in his five wits will deny that Jeffersonian democracy wished to give the law a general control in more public things, but the citizens a more general liberty in private things. Wherever we draw the line, liberty can only be personal liberty; and the most personal liberties must at least be the last liberties we lose. But to-day they are the first liberties we lose. It is not a question of drawing the line in the right place, but of beginning at the wrong end. What are the rights of man, if they do not include the normal right to regulate his own health, in relation to the normal risks of diet and daily life? Nobody can pretend that beer is a poison as prussic acid is a poison; that all the millions of civilised men who drank it all fell down dead when they had touched it. Its use and abuse is obviously a matter of judgment; and there can be no personal liberty, if it is not a matter of private judgment. It is not in the least a question of drawing the line between liberty and licence. If this is licence, there is no such thing as liberty. It is plainly impossible to find any right more individual or intimate. To say that a man has a right to a vote, but not a right to a voice about the choice of his dinner, is like saying that he has a right to his hat but not a right to his head.

Prohibition, therefore, plainly violates the rights of man, if there are any rights of man. What its supporters really mean is that there are none. And in suggesting this, they have all the advantages that every sceptic has when he supports a negation. That sort of ultimate scepticism can only be retorted upon itself, and we can point out to them that they can no more prove the right of the city to be oppressive than we can prove the right of the citizen to be free. In the primary metaphysics of such a claim, it would surely be easier to make it out for a single conscious soul than for an artificial social combination. If there are no rights of men, what are the rights of nations? Perhaps a nation has no claim to self-government. Perhaps it has no claim to good government. Perhaps it has no claim to any sort of government or any sort of independence. Perhaps they will say *that* is not implied in the Declaration of Independence. But without going deep into my reasons for believing in natural rights, or rather in supernatural rights (and Jefferson certainly states them as supernatural), I am content here to note that a man’s treatment of his own body, in relation to traditional and ordinary opportunities for bodily excess, is as near to his self-respect as social coercion can possibly go; and that when that is gone there is nothing left. If coercion applies to that, it applies to everything; and in the future of this controversy it obviously will apply to everything. When I was in America, people were already applying it to tobacco. I never can see why they should not apply it to talking. Talking often goes with tobacco as it goes with beer; and what is more relevant, talking may often lead both to beer and tobacco. Talking often drives a man to drink, both negatively in the form of nagging and positively in the form of bad company. If the American Puritan is so anxious to be a *censor morum*, he should obviously put a stop to the evil communications that really corrupt good manners. He should reintroduce the Scold’s Bridle among the other Blue Laws for a land of blue devils. He should gag all gay deceivers and plausible cynics; he should cut off all flattering lips and the tongue that speaketh proud things. Nobody can doubt that nine-tenths of the harm in the world is done simply by talking. Jefferson and the old democrats allowed people to talk, not because they were unaware of this fact, but because they were fettered by this old fancy of theirs about freedom and the rights of man. But since we have already abandoned that doctrine in a final fashion, I cannot see why the new principle should not be applied intelligently; and in that case it would be applied to the control of conversation. The State would provide us with forms already filled up with the subjects suitable for us to discuss at breakfast; perhaps allowing us a limited number of epigrams each. Perhaps we should have to make a formal application in writing, to be allowed to make a joke that had just occurred to us in conversation. And the committee would consider it in due course. Perhaps it would be effected in a more practical fashion, and the private citizens would be shut up as the public-houses were shut up. Perhaps they would all wear gags, which the policeman would remove at stated hours; and their mouths would be opened from one to three, as now in England even the public-houses are from time to time accessible to the public. To some this will sound fantastic; but not so fantastic as Jefferson would have thought Prohibition. But there is one sense in which it is indeed fantastic, for by hypothesis it leaves out the favouritism that is the fundamental of the whole matter. The only sense in which we can say that logic will never go so far as this is that logic will never go the length of equality. It is perfectly possible that the same forces that have forbidden beer may go on to forbid tobacco. But they will in a special and limited sense forbid tobacco — but not cigars. Or at any rate not expensive cigars. In America, where large numbers of ordinary men smoke rather ordinary cigars, there would be doubtless a good opportunity of penalising a very ordinary pleasure. But the Havanas of the millionaire will be all right. So it will be if ever the Puritans bring back the Scold’s Bridle and the statutory silence of the populace. It will only be the populace that is silent. The politicians will go on talking.

These I believe to be the broad facts of the problem of Prohibition; but it would not be fair to leave it without mentioning two other causes which, if not defences, are at least excuses. The first is that Prohibition was largely passed in a sort of fervour or fever of self-sacrifice, which was a part of the passionate patriotism of America in the war. As I have remarked elsewhere, those who have any notion of what that national unanimity was like will smile when they see America made a model of mere international idealism. Prohibition was partly a sort of patriotic renunciation; for the popular instinct, like every poetic instinct, always tends at great crises to great gestures of renunciation. But this very fact, while it makes the inhumanity far more human, makes it far less final and convincing. Men cannot remain standing stiffly in such symbolical attitudes; nor can a permanent policy be founded on something analogous to flinging a gauntlet or uttering a battle-cry. We might as well expect all the Yale students to remain through life with their mouths open, exactly as they were when they uttered the college yell. It would be as reasonable as to expect them to remain through life with their mouths shut, while the wine-cup which has been the sacrament of all poets and lovers passed round among all the youth of the world. This point appeared very plainly in a discussion I had with a very thoughtful and sympathetic American critic, a clergyman writing in an Anglo-Catholic magazine. He put the sentiment of these healthier Prohibitionists, which had so much to do with the passing of Prohibition, by asking, ‘May not a man who is asked to give up his blood for his country be asked to give up his beer for his country?’ And this phrase clearly illuminates all the limitations of the case. I have never denied, in principle, that it might in some abnormal crisis be lawful for a government to lock up the beer, or to lock up the bread. In that sense I am quite prepared to treat the sacrifice of beer in the same way as the sacrifice of blood. But is my American critic really ready to treat the sacrifice of blood in the same way as the sacrifice of beer? Is bloodshed to be as prolonged and protracted as Prohibition? Is the normal noncombatant to shed his gore as often as he misses his drink? I can imagine people submitting to a special regulation, as I can imagine them serving in a particular war. I do indeed despise the political knavery that deliberately passes drink regulations as war measures and then preserves them as peace measures. But that is not a question of whether drink and drunkenness are wrong, but of whether lying and swindling are wrong. But I never denied that there might need to be exceptional sacrifices for exceptional occasions; and war is in its nature an exception. Only, if war is the exception, why should Prohibition be the rule? If the surrender of beer is worthy to be compared to the shedding of blood, why then blood ought to be flowing for ever like a fountain in the public squares of Philadelphia and

New York. If my critic wants to complete his parallel, he must draw up rather a remarkable programme for the daily life of the ordinary citizens. He must suppose that, through all their lives, they are paraded every day at lunch time and prodded with bayonets to show that they will shed their blood for their country. He must suppose that every evening, after a light repast of poison gas and shrapnel, they are made to go to sleep in a trench under a permanent drizzle of shell-fire. It is surely obvious that if this were the normal life of the citizen, the citizen would have no normal life. The common sense of the thing is that sacrifices of this sort are admirable but abnormal. It is not normal for the State to be perpetually regulating our days with the discipline of a fighting regiment; and it is not normal for the State to be perpetually regulating our diet with the discipline of a famine. To say that every citizen must be subject to control in such bodily things is like saying that every Christian ought to tear himself with red-hot pincers because the Christian martyrs did their duty in time of persecution. A man has a right to control his body, though in a time of martyrdom he may give his body to be burned; and a man has a right to control his bodily health, though in a state of siege he may give his body to be starved. Thus, though the patriotic defence was a sincere defence, it is a defence that comes back on the defenders like a boomerang. For it proves only that Prohibition ought to be ephemeral, unless war ought to be eternal.

The other excuse is much less romantic and much more realistic. I have already said enough of the cause which is really realistic. The real power behind Prohibition is simply the plutocratic power of the pushing employers who wish to get the last inch of work out of their workmen. But before the progress of modern plutocracy had reached this stage, there was a predetermining cause for which there was a much better case. The whole business began with the problem of black labour. I have not attempted in this book to deal adequately with the question of the negro. I have refrained for a reason that may seem somewhat sensational; that I do not think I have anything particularly valuable to say or suggest. I do not profess to understand this singularly dark and intricate matter; and I see no use in men who have no solution filling up the gap with sentimentalism. The chief thing that struck me about the coloured people I saw was their charming and astonishing cheerfulness. My sense of pathos was appealed to much more by the Red Indians; and indeed I wish I had more space here to do justice to the Red Indians. They did heroic service in the war; and more than justified their glorious place in the day-dreams and nightmares of our boyhood. But the negro problem certainly demands more study than a sight-seer could give it; and this book is controversial enough about things that I have really considered, without permitting it to exhibit me as a sight-seer who shoots at sight. But I believe that it was always common ground to people of common sense that the enslavement and importation of negroes had been the crime and catastrophe of American history. The only difference was originally that one side thought that, the crime once committed, the only reparation was their freedom; while the other thought that, the crime once committed, the only safety was their slavery. It was only comparatively lately, by a process I shall have to indicate elsewhere, that anything like a positive case for slavery became possible. Now among the many problems of the presence of an alien and at least recently barbaric figure among the citizens, there was a very real problem of drink. Drink certainly has a very exceptionally destructive effect upon negroes in their native countries; and it was alleged to have a peculiarly demoralising effect upon negroes in the United States; to call up the passions that are the particular temptation of the race and to lead to appalling outrages that are followed by appalling popular vengeance. However this may be, many of the states of the American Union, which first forbade liquor to citizens, meant simply to forbid it to negroes. But they had not the moral courage to deny that negroes are citizens. About all their political expedients necessarily hung the load that hangs so heavy on modern politics; hypocrisy. The superior race had to rule by a sort of secret society organised against the inferior. The American politicians dared not disfranchise the negroes; so they coerced everybody in theory and only the negroes in practice. The drinking of the white men became as much a conspiracy as the shooting by the white horsemen of the Ku-Klux Klan. And in that connection, it may be remarked in passing that the comparison illustrates the idiocy of supposing that the moral sense of mankind will ever support the prohibition of drinking as if it were something like the prohibition of shooting. Shooting in America is liable to take a free form, and sometimes a very horrible form; as when private bravos were hired to kill workmen in the capitalistic interests of that pure patron of disarmament, Carnegie. But when some of the rich Americans gravely tell us that their drinking cannot be interfered with, because they are only using up their existing stocks of wine, we may well be disposed to smile. When I was there, at any rate, they were using them up very fast; and with no apparent fears about the supply. But if the Ku-Klux Klan had started suddenly shooting everybody they didn’t like in broad daylight, and had blandly explained that they were only using up the stocks of their ammunition, left over from the Civil War, it seems probable that there would at least have been a little curiosity about how much they had left. There might at least have been occasional inquiries about how long it was likely to go on. It is even conceivable that some steps might have been taken to stop it.

No steps are taken to stop the drinking of the rich, chiefly because the rich now make all the rules and therefore all the exceptions, but partly because nobody ever could feel the full moral seriousness of this particular rule. And the truth is, as I have indicated, that it was originally established as an exception and not as a rule. The emancipated negro was an exception in the community, and a certain plan was, rightly or wrongly, adopted to meet his case. A law was made professedly for everybody and practically only for him. Prohibition is only important as marking the transition by which the trick, tried successfully on black labour, could be extended to all labour. We in England have no right to be Pharisaic at the expense of the Americans in this matter; for we have tried the same trick in a hundred forms. The true philosophical defence of the modern oppression of the poor would be to say frankly that we have ruled them so badly that they are unfit to rule themselves. But no modern oligarch is enough of a man to say this. For like all virile cynicism it would have an element of humility; which would not mix with the necessary element of hypocrisy. So we proceed, just as the Americans do, to make a law for everybody and then evade it for ourselves. We have not the honesty to say that the rich may bet because they can afford it; so we forbid any man to bet in any place; and then say that a place is not a place. It is exactly as if there were an American law allowing a negro to be murdered because he is not a man within the meaning of the Act. We have not the honesty to drive the poor to school because they are ignorant; so we pretend to drive everybody; and then send inspectors to the slums but not to the smart streets. We apply the same ingenuous principle; and are quite as undemocratic as Western democracy. Nevertheless there is an element in the American case which cannot be present in ours; and this chapter may well conclude upon so important a change.

America can now say with pride that she has abolished the colour bar. In this matter the white labourer and the black labourer have at last been put upon an equal social footing. White labour is every bit as much enslaved as black labour; and is actually enslaved by a method and a model only intended for black labour. We might think it rather odd if the exact regulations about flogging negroes were reproduced as a plan for punishing strikers; or if industrial arbitration issued its reports in the precise terminology of the Fugitive Slave Law. But this is in essentials what has happened; and one could almost fancy some negro orgy of triumph, with the beating of gongs and all the secret violence of Voodoo, crying aloud to some ancestral Mumbo Jumbo that the Poor White Trash was being treated according to its name.

Fads and Public Opinion

A foreigner is a man who laughs at everything except jokes. He is perfectly entitled to laugh at anything, so long as he realises, in a reverent and religious spirit, that he himself is laughable. I was a foreigner in America; and I can truly claim that the sense of my own laughable position never left me. But when the native and the foreigner have finished with seeing the fun of each other in things that are meant to be serious, they both approach the far more delicate and dangerous ground of things that are meant to be funny. The sense of humour is generally very national; perhaps that is why the internationalists are so careful to purge themselves of it. I had occasion during the war to consider the rights and wrongs of certain differences alleged to have arisen between the English and American soldiers at the front. And, rightly or wrongly, I came to the conclusion that they arose from the failure to understand when a foreigner is serious and when he is humorous. And it is in the very nature of the best sort of joke to be the worst sort of insult if it is not taken as a joke.

The English and the American types of humour are in one way directly contrary. The most American sort of fun involves a soaring imagination, piling one house on another in a tower like that of a sky-scraper. The most English humour consists of a sort of bathos, of a man returning to the earth his mother in a homely fashion; as when he sits down suddenly on a butter-slide. English farce describes a man as being in a hole. American fantasy, in its more aspiring spirit, describes a man as being up a tree. The former is to be found in the cockney comic songs that concern themselves with hanging out the washing or coming home with the milk. The latter is to be found in those fantastic yarns about machines that turn live pigs into pig-skin purses or burning cities that serve to hatch an egg. But it will be inevitable, when the two come first into contact, that the bathos will sound like vulgarity and the extravagance will sound like boasting.

Suppose an American soldier said to an English soldier in the trenches, ‘The Kaiser may want a place in the sun; I reckon he won’t have a place in the solar system when we begin to hustle.’ The English soldier will very probably form the impression that this is arrogance; an impression based on the extraordinary assumption that the American means what he says. The American has merely indulged in a little art for art’s sake, and abstract adventure of the imagination; he has told an American short story. But the Englishman, not understanding this, will think the other man is boasting, and reflecting on the insufficiency of the English effort. The English soldier is very likely to say something like, ‘Oh, you’ll be wanting to get home to your old woman before that, and asking for a kipper with your tea.’ And it is quite likely that the American will be offended in his turn at having his arabesque of abstract beauty answered in so personal a fashion. Being an American, he will probably have a fine and chivalrous respect for his wife; and may object to her being called an old woman. Possibly he in turn may be under the extraordinary delusion that talking of the old woman really means that the woman is old. Possibly he thinks the mysterious demand for a kipper carries with it some charge of ill-treating his wife; which his national sense of honour swiftly resents. But the real cross-purposes come from the contrary direction of the two exaggerations, the American making life more wild and impossible than it is, and the Englishman making it more flat and farcical than it is; the one escaping from the house of life by a skylight and the other by a trap-door.

This difficulty of different humours is a very practical one for practical people. Most of those who profess to remove all international differences are not practical people. Most of the phrases offered for the reconciliation of severally patriotic peoples are entirely serious and even solemn phrases. But human conversation is not conducted in those phrases. The normal man on nine occasions out of ten is rather a flippant man. And the normal man is almost always the national man. Patriotism is the most popular of all the virtues. The drier sort of democrats who despise it have the democracy against them in every country in the world. Hence their international efforts seldom go any farther than to effect an international reconciliation of all internationalists. But we have not solved the normal and popular problem until we have an international reconciliation of all nationalists.

It is very difficult to see how humour can be translated at all. When Sam Weller is in the Fleet Prison and Mrs. Weller and Mr. Stiggins sit on each side of the fireplace and weep and groan with sympathy, old Mr. Weller observes, ‘Vell, Sammy, I hope you find your spirits rose by this ‘ere lively visit.’ I have never looked up this passage in the popular and successful French version of *Pickwick*; but I confess I am curious as to what French past-participle conveys the precise effect of the word ‘rose.’ A translator has not only to give the right translation of the right word but the right translation of the wrong word. And in the same way I am quite prepared to suspect that there are English jokes which an Englishman must enjoy in his own rich and romantic solitude, without asking for the sympathy of an American. But Englishmen are generally only too prone to claim this fine perception, without seeing that the fine edge of it cuts both ways. I have begun this chapter on the note of national humour because I wish to make it quite clear that I realise how easily a foreigner may take something seriously that is not serious. When I think something in America is really foolish, it may be I that am made a fool of. It is the first duty of a traveller to allow for this; but it seems to be the very last thing that occurs to some travellers. But when I seek to say something of what may be called the fantastic side of America, I allow beforehand that some of it may be meant to be fantastic. And indeed it is very difficult to believe that some of it is meant to be serious. But whether or no there is a joke, there is certainly an inconsistency; and it is an inconsistency in the moral make-up of America which both puzzles and amuses me.

The danger of democracy is not anarchy but convention. There is even a sort of double meaning in the word ‘convention’; for it is also used for the most informal and popular sort of parliament; a parliament not summoned by any king. The Americans come together very easily without any king; but their coming together is in every sense a convention, and even a very conventional convention. In a democracy riot is rather the exception and respectability certainly the rule. And though a superficial sight-seer should hesitate about all such generalisations, and certainly should allow for enormous exceptions to them, he does receive a general impression of unity verging on uniformity. Thus Americans all dress well; one might almost say that American women all look well; but they do not, as compared with Europeans, look very different. They are in the fashion; too much in the fashion even to be conspicuously fashionable. Of course there are patches, both Bohemian and Babylonian, of which this is not true, but I am talking of the general tone of a whole democracy. I have said there is more respectability than riot; but indeed in a deeper sense the same spirit is behind both riot and respectability. It is the same social force that makes it possible for the respectable to boycott a man and for the riotous to lynch him. I do not object to it being called ‘the herd instinct,’ so long as we realise that it is a metaphor and not an explanation.

Public opinion can be a prairie fire. It eats up everything that opposes it; and there is the grandeur as well as the grave disadvantages of a natural catastrophe in that national unity. Pacifists who complained in England of the intolerance of patriotism have no notion of what patriotism can be like. If they had been in America, after America had entered the war, they would have seen something which they have always perhaps subconsciously dreaded, and would then have beyond all their worst dreams detested; and the name of it is democracy. They would have found that there are disadvantages in birds of a feather flocking together; and that one of them follows on a too complacent display of the white feather. The truth is that a certain flexible sympathy with eccentrics of this kind is rather one of the advantages of an aristocratic tradition. The imprisonment of Mr. Debs, the American Pacifist, which really was prolonged and oppressive, would probably have been shortened in England where his opinions were shared by aristocrats like Mr. Bertrand Russell and Mr. Ponsonby. A man like Lord Hugh Cecil could be moved to the defence of conscientious objectors, partly by a true instinct of chivalry; but partly also by the general feeling that a gentleman may very probably have aunts and uncles who are quite as mad. He takes the matter personally, in the sense of being able to imagine the psychology of the persons. But democracy is no respecter of persons. It is no respecter of them, either in the bad and servile or in the good and sympathetic sense. And Debs was nothing to democracy. He was but one of the millions. This is a real problem, or question in the balance, touching different forms of government; which is, of course, quite neglected by the idealists who merely repeat long words. There was during the war a society called the Union of Democratic Control, which would have been instantly destroyed anywhere where democracy had any control, or where there was any union. And in this sense the United States have most emphatically got a union. Nevertheless I think there is something rather more subtle than this simple popular solidity behind the assimilation of American citizens to each other. There is something even in the individual ideals that drives towards this social sympathy. And it is here that we have to remember that biological fancies like the herd instinct are only figures of speech, and cannot really cover anything human. For the Americans are in some ways a very self-conscious people. To compare their social enthusiasm to a stampede of cattle is to ask us to believe in a bull writing a diary or a cow looking in a looking-glass. Intensely sensitive by their very vitality, they are certainly conscious of criticism and not merely of a blind and brutal appetite. But the peculiar point about them is that it is this very vividness in the self that often produces the similarity. It may be that when they are unconscious they are like bulls and cows. But it is when they are self-conscious that they are like each other.

Individualism is the death of individuality. It is so, if only because it is an ‘ism.’ Many Americans become almost impersonal in their worship of personality. Where their natural selves might differ, their ideal selves tend to be the same. Anybody can see what I mean in those strong self-conscious photographs of American business men that can be seen in any American magazine. Each may conceive himself to be a solitary Napoleon brooding at St. Helena; but the result is a multitude of Napoleons brooding all over the place. Each of them must have the eyes of a mesmerist; but the most weak-minded person cannot be mesmerised by more than one millionaire at a time. Each of the millionaires must thrust forward his jaw, offering (if I may say so) to fight the world with the same weapon as Samson. Each of them must accentuate the length of his chin, especially, of course, by always being completely clean-shaven. It would be obviously inconsistent with Personality to prefer to wear a beard. These are of course fantastic examples on the fringe of American life; but they do stand for a certain assimilation, not through brute gregariousness, but rather through isolated dreaming. And though it is not always carried so far as this, I do think it is carried too far. There is not quite enough unconsciousness to produce real individuality. There is a sort of worship of will-power in the abstract, so that people are actually thinking about how they can will, more than about what they want. To this I do think a certain corrective could be found in the nature of English eccentricity. Every man in his humour is most interesting when he is unconscious of his humour; or at least when he is in an intermediate stage between humour in the old sense of oddity and in the new sense of irony. Much is said in these days against negative morality; and certainly most Americans would show a positive preference for positive morality. The virtues they venerate collectively are very active virtues; cheerfulness and courage and vim, otherwise zip, also pep and similar things. But it is sometimes forgotten that negative morality is freer than positive morality. Negative morality is a net of a larger and more open pattern, of which the lines or cords constrict at longer intervals. A man like Dr. Johnson could grow in his own way to his own stature in the net of the Ten

Commandments; precisely because he was convinced there were only ten of them. He was not compressed into the mould of positive beauty, like that of the Apollo Belvedere or the American citizen.

This criticism is sometimes true even of the American woman, who is certainly a much more delightful person than the mesmeric millionaire with his shaven jaw. Interviewers in the United States perpetually asked me what I thought of American women, and I confessed a distaste for such generalisations which I have not managed to lose. The Americans, who are the most chivalrous people in the world, may perhaps understand me; but I can never help feeling that there is something polygamous about talking of women in the plural at all; something unworthy of any American except a Mormon. Nevertheless, I think the exaggeration I suggest does extend in a less degree to American women, fascinating as they are. I think they too tend too much to this cult of impersonal personality. It is a description easy to exaggerate even by the faintest emphasis; for all these things are subtle and subject to striking individual exceptions. To complain of people for being brave and bright and kind and intelligent may not unreasonably appear unreasonable. And yet there is something in the background that can only be expressed by a symbol, something that is not shallowness but a neglect of the subconsciousness and the vaguer and slower impulses; something that can be missed amid all that laughter and light, under those starry candelabra of the ideals of the happy virtues. Sometimes it came over me, in a wordless wave, that I should like to see a sulky woman. How she would walk in beauty like the night, and reveal more silent spaces full of older stars! These things cannot be conveyed in their delicate proportion even in the most detached description. But the same thing was in the mind of a white-bearded old man I met in New York, an Irish exile and a wonderful talker, who stared up at the tower of gilded galleries of the great hotel, and said with that spontaneous movement of style which is hardly heard except from Irish talkers: ‘And I have been in a village in the mountains where the people could hardly read or write; but all the men were like soldiers, and all the women had pride.’

It sounds like a poem about an Earthly Paradise to say that in this land the old women can be more beautiful than the young. Indeed, I think Walt Whitman, the national poet, has a line somewhere almost precisely to that effect. It sounds like a parody upon Utopia, and the image of the lion lying down with the lamb, to say it is a place where a man might almost fall in love with his mother-in-law. But there is nothing in which the finer side of American gravity and good feeling does more honourably exhibit itself than in a certain atmosphere around the older women. It is not a cant phrase to say that they grow old gracefully; for they do really grow old. In this the national optimism really has in it the national courage. The old women do not dress like young women; they only dress better. There is another side to this feminine dignity in the old, sometimes a little lost in the young, with which I shall deal presently. The point for the moment is that even Whitman's truly poetic vision of the beautiful old women suffers a little from that bewildering multiplicity and recurrence that is indeed the whole theme of Whitman. It is like the green eternity of Leaves of Grass. When I think of the eccentric spinsters and incorrigible grandmothers of my own country, I cannot imagine that any one of them could possibly be mistaken for another, even at a glance. And in comparison I feel as if I had been travelling in an Earthly Paradise of more decorative harmonies; and I remember only a vast cloud of grey and pink as of the plumage of cherubim in an old picture. But on second thoughts, I think this may be only the inevitable effect of visiting any country in a swift and superficial fashion; and that the grey and pink cloud is probably an illusion, like the spinning prairies scattered by the wheel of the train.

Anyhow there is enough of this equality, and of a certain social unity favourable to sanity, to make the next point about America very much of a puzzle. It seems to me a very real problem, to which I have never seen an answer even such as I shall attempt here, why a democracy should produce fads; and why, where there is so genuine a sense of human dignity, there should be so much of an impossible petty tyranny. I am not referring solely or even specially to Prohibition, which I discuss elsewhere. Prohibition is at least a superstition, and therefore next door to a religion; it has some imaginable connection with moral questions, as have slavery or human sacrifice. But those who ask us to model ourselves on the States which punish the sin of drink forget that there are States which punish the equally shameless sin of smoking a cigarette in the open air. The same American atmosphere that permits Prohibition permits of people being punished for kissing each other. In other words, there are States psychologically capable of making a man a convict for wearing a blue neck-tie or having a green front-door, or anything else that anybody chooses to fancy. There is an

American atmosphere in which people may some day be shot for shaking hands, or hanged for writing a post-card.

As for the sort of thing to which I refer, the American newspapers are full of it and there is no name for it but mere madness. Indeed it is not only mad, but it calls itself mad. To mention but one example out of many, it was actually boasted that some lunatics were teaching children to take care of their health. And it was proudly added that the children were 'health-mad.' That it is not exactly the object of all mental hygiene to make people mad did not occur to them; and they may still be engaged in their earnest labours to teach babies to be valetudinarians and hypochondriacs in order to make them healthy. In such cases, we may say that the modern world is too ridiculous to be ridiculed. You cannot caricature a caricature. Imagine what a satirist of saner days would have made of the daily life of a child of six, who was actually admitted to be mad on the subject of his own health. These are not days in which that great extravaganza could be written; but I dimly see some of its episodes like uncompleted dreams. I see the child pausing in the middle of a cart-wheel, or when he has performed three-quarters of a cart-wheel, and consulting a little note-book about the amount of exercise per diem. I see him pausing half-way up a tree, or when he has climbed exactly one-third of a tree; and then producing a clinical thermometer to take his own temperature. But what would be the good of imaginative logic to prove the madness of such people, when they themselves praise it for being mad?

There is also the cult of the Infant Phenomenon, of which Dickens made fun and of which educationalists make fusses. When I was in America another newspaper produced a marvellous child of six who had the intellect of a child of twelve. The only test given, and apparently one on which the experiment turned, was that she could be made to understand and even to employ the word 'annihilate.' When asked to say something proving this, the happy infant offered the polished aphorism, 'When common sense comes in, superstition is annihilated.' In reply to which, by way of showing that I also am as intelligent as a child of twelve, and there is no arrested development about me, I will say in the same elegant diction, 'When psychological education comes in, common sense is annihilated.' Everybody seems to be sitting round this child in an adoring fashion. It did not seem to occur to anybody that we do not particularly want even a child of twelve to talk about annihilating superstition; that we do not want a child of six to talk like a child of twelve, or a child of twelve to talk like a man of fifty, or even a man of fifty to talk like a fool. And on the principle of hoping that a little girl of six will have a massive and mature brain, there is every reason for hoping that a little boy of six will grow a magnificent and bushy beard.

Now there is any amount of this nonsense cropping up among American cranks. Anybody may propose to establish coercive Eugenics; or enforce psychoanalysis — that is, enforce confession without absolution. And I confess I cannot connect this feature with the genuine democratic spirit of the mass. I can only suggest, in concluding this chapter, two possible causes rather peculiar to America, which may have made this great democracy so unlike all other democracies, and in this so manifestly hostile to the whole democratic idea.

The first historical cause is Puritanism; but not Puritanism merely in the sense of Prohibitionism. The truth is that prohibitions might have done far less harm as prohibitions, if a vague association had not arisen, on some dark day of human unreason, between prohibition and progress. And it was the progress that did the harm, not the prohibition. Men can enjoy life under considerable limitations, if they can be sure of their limited enjoyments; but under Progressive Puritanism we can never be sure of anything. The curse of it is not limitation; it is unlimited limitation. The evil is not in the restriction; but in the fact that nothing can ever restrict the restriction. The prohibitions are bound to progress point by point; more and more human rights and pleasures must of necessity be taken away; for it is of the nature of this futurism that the latest fad is the faith of the future, and the most fantastic fad inevitably makes the pace. Thus the worst thing in the seventeenth-century aberration was not so much Puritanism as sectarianism. It searched for truth not by synthesis but by subdivision. It not only broke religion into small pieces, but it was bound to choose the smallest piece. There is in America, I believe, a large religious body that has felt it right to separate itself from Christendom because it cannot believe in the morality of wearing buttons. I do not know how the schism arose; but it is easy to suppose, for the sake of argument, that there had originally existed some Puritan body which condemned the frivolity of ribbons though not of buttons. I was going to say of badges but not buttons; but on reflection I cannot bring myself to believe that any American, however insane, would object to wearing badges. But the point is that as the holy spirit of progressive prophesy rested on the first sect because it had invented a new objection to ribbons, so that holy spirit would then pass from it to the new sect who invented a further objection to buttons. And from them it must inevitably pass to any rebel among them who shall choose to rise and say that he disapproves of trousers because of the existence of trouser-buttons. Each secession in turn must be right because it is recent, and progress must progress by growing smaller and smaller. That is the progressive theory, the legacy of seventeenth-century sectarianism, the dogma implied in much modern politics, and the evident enemy of democracy. Democracy is reproached with saying that the majority is always right. But progress says that the minority is always right. Progressives are prophets; and fortunately not all the people are prophets. Thus in the atmosphere of this slowly dying sectarianism anybody who chooses to prophesy and prohibit can tyrannise over the people. If he chooses to say that drinking is always wrong, or that kissing is always wrong, or that wearing buttons is always wrong, people are afraid to contradict him for fear they should be contradicting their own great-grandchild. For their superstition is an inversion of the ancestor-worship of China; and instead of vainly appealing to something that is dead, they appeal to something that may never be born.

There is another cause of this strange servile disease in American democracy. It is to be found in American feminism, and feminist America is an entirely different thing from feminine America. I should say that the overwhelming majority of American girls laugh at their female politicians at least as much as the majority of American men despise their male politicians. But though the aggressive feminists are a minority, they are in this atmosphere which I have tried to analyse; the atmosphere in which there is a sort of sanctity about the minority. And it is this superstition of seriousness that constitutes the most solid obstacle and exception to the general and almost conventional pressure of public opinion. When a fad is frankly felt to be anti-national, as was Abolitionism before the Civil War, or Pro-Germanism in the Great War, or the suggestion of racial admixture in the South at all times, then the fad meets far less mercy than anywhere else in the world; it is snowed under and swept away. But when it does not thus directly challenge patriotism or popular ideas, a curious halo of hopeful solemnity surrounds it, merely because it is a fad, but above all if it is a feminine fad. The earnest lady-reformer who really utters a warning against the social evil of beer or buttons is seen to be walking clothed in light, like a prophetess. Perhaps it is something of the holy aureole which the East sees shining around an idiot.

But I think there is another explanation, feminine rather than feminist, and proceeding from normal women and not from abnormal idiots. It is something that involves an old controversy, but one upon which I have not, like so many politicians, changed my opinion. It concerns the particular fashion in which women tend to regard, or rather to disregard, the formal and legal rights of the citizen. In so far as this is a bias, it is a bias in the directly opposite direction from that now lightly alleged. There is a sort of underbred history going about, according to which women in the past have always been in the position of slaves. It is much more to the point to note that women have always been in the position of despots. They have been despotic because they ruled in an area where they had too much common sense to attempt to be constitutional. You cannot grant a constitution to a nursery; nor can babies assemble like barons and extort a Great Charter. Tommy cannot plead a Habeas Corpus against going to bed; and an infant cannot be tried by twelve other infants before he is put in the corner. And as there can be no laws or liberties in a nursery, the extension of feminism means that there shall be no more laws or liberties in a state than there are in a nursery. The woman does not really regard men as citizens but as children. She may, if she is a humanitarian, love all mankind; but she does not respect it. Still less does she respect its votes. Now a man must be very blind nowadays not to see that there is a danger of a sort of amateur science or pseudo-science being made the excuse for every trick of tyranny and interference. Anybody who is not an anarchist agrees with having a policeman at the corner of the street; but the danger at present is that of finding the policeman half-way down the chimney or even under the bed. In other words, it is a danger of turning the policeman into a sort of benevolent burglar. Against this protests are already being made, and will increasingly be made, if men retain any instinct of independence or dignity at all. But to complain of the woman interfering in the home will always sound like complaining of the oyster intruding into the oyster-shell. To object that she has too much power over education will seem like objecting to a hen having too much to do with eggs. She has already been given an almost irresponsible power over a limited region in these things; and if that power is made infinite it will be even more irresponsible. If she adds to her own power in the family all these alien fads external to the family, her power will not only be irresponsible but insane. She will be something which may well be called a nightmare of the nursery; a mad mother. But the point is that she will be mad about other nurseries as well as her own, or possibly instead of her own. The results will be interesting; but at least it is certain that under this softening influence government of the people, by the people, for the people, will most assuredly perish from the earth.

But there is always another possibility. Hints of it may be noted here and there like muffled gongs of doom. The other day some people preaching some low trick or other, for running away from the glory of motherhood, were suddenly silenced in New York; by a voice of deep and democratic volume. The prigs who potter about the great plains are pygmies dancing round a sleeping giant. That which sleeps, so far as they are concerned, is the huge power of human unanimity and intolerance in the soul of America. At present the masses in the Middle West are indifferent to such fancies or faintly attracted by them, as fashions of culture from the great cities. But any day it may not be so; some lunatic may cut across their economic rights or their strange and buried religion; and then he will see something. He will find himself running like a nigger who has wronged a white woman or a man who has set the prairie on fire. He will see something which the politicians fan in its sleep and flatter with the name of the people, which many reactionaries have cursed with the name of the mob, but which in any case has had under its feet the crowns of many kings. It was said that the voice of the people is the voice of God; and this at least is certain, that it can be the voice of God to the wicked. And the last antics of their arrogance shall stiffen before something enormous, such as towers in the last words that Job heard out of the whirlwind; and a voice they never knew shall tell them that his name is Leviathan, and he is lord over all the children of pride.

The Extraordinary American

When I was in America I had the feeling that it was far more foreign than France or even than Ireland. And by foreign I mean fascinating rather than repulsive. I mean that element of strangeness which marks the frontier of any fairyland, or gives to the traveller himself the almost eerie title of the stranger. And I saw there more clearly than in countries counted as more remote from us, in race or religion, a paradox that is one of the great truths of travel.

We have never even begun to understand a people until we have found something that we do not understand. So long as we find the character easy to read, we are reading into it our own character. If when we see an event we can promptly provide an explanation, we may be pretty certain that we had ourselves prepared the explanation before we saw the event. It follows from this that the best picture of a foreign people can probably be found in a puzzle picture. If we can find an event of which the meaning is really dark to us, it will probably throw some light on the truth. I will therefore take from my American experiences one isolated incident, which certainly could not have happened in any other country I have ever clapped eyes on. I have really no notion of what it meant. I have heard even from Americans about five different conjectures about its meaning. But though I do not understand it, I do sincerely believe that if I did understand it, I should understand America.

It happened in the city of Oklahoma, which would require a book to itself, even considered as a background. The State of Oklahoma is a district in the south-west recently reclaimed from the Red Indian territory. What many, quite incorrectly, imagine about all America is really true of Oklahoma. It is proud of having no history. It is glowing with the sense of having a great future — and nothing else. People are just as likely to boast of an old building in Nashville as in Norwich; people are just as proud of old families in Boston as in Bath. But in Oklahoma the citizens do point out a colossal structure, arrogantly affirming that it wasn’t there last week. It was against the colours of this crude stage scenery, as of a pantomime city of pasteboard, that the fantastic figure appeared which still haunts me like a walking note of interrogation. I was strolling down the main street of the city, and looking in at a paper-stall vivid with the news of crime, when a stranger addressed me; and asked me, quite politely but with a curious air of having authority to put the question, what I was doing in that city.

He was a lean brown man, having rather the look of a shabby tropical traveller, with a grey moustache and a lively and alert eye. But the most singular thing about him was that the front of his coat was covered with a multitude of shining metallic emblems made in the shape of stars and crescents. I was well accustomed by this time to Americans adorning the lapels of their coats with little symbols of various societies; it is a part of the American passion for the ritual of comradeship. There is nothing that an American likes so much as to have a secret society and to make no secret of it. But in this case, if I may put it so, the rash of symbolism seemed to have broken out all over the man, in a fashion that indicated that the fever was far advanced. Of this minor mystery, however, his first few sentences offered a provisional explanation. In answer to his question, touching my business in Oklahoma, I replied with restraint that I was lecturing. To which he replied without restraint, but rather with an expansive and radiant pride, ‘I also am lecturing. I am lecturing on astronomy.’

So far a certain wild rationality seemed to light up the affair. I knew it was unusual, in my own country, for the Astronomer Royal to walk down the Strand with his coat plastered all over with the Solar System. Indeed, it was unusual for any English astronomical lecturer to advertise the subject of his lectures in this fashion. But though it would be unusual, it would not necessarily be unreasonable. In fact, I think it might add to the colour and variety of life, if specialists did adopt this sort of scientific heraldry. I should like to be able to recognise an entomologist at sight by the decorative spiders and cockroaches crawling all over his coat and waistcoat. I should like to see a conchologist in a simple costume of shells. An osteopath, I suppose, would be agreeably painted so as to resemble a skeleton, while a botanist would enliven the street with the appearance of a Jack-in-the-Green. So while I regarded the astronomical lecturer in the astronomical coat as a figure distinguishable, by a high degree of differentiation, from the artless astronomers of my island home (enough their simple loveliness for me) I saw in him nothing illogical, but rather an imaginative extreme of logic. And then came another turn of the wheel of topsy-turvydom, and all the logic was scattered to the wind.

Expanding his starry bosom and standing astraddle, with the air of one who owned the street, the strange being continued, ‘Yes, I am lecturing on astronomy, anthropology, archaeology, palaeontology, embryology, eschatology,' and so on in a thunderous roll of theoretical sciences apparently beyond the scope of any single university, let alone any single professor. Having thus introduced himself, however, he got to business. He apologised with true American courtesy for having questioned me at all, and excused it on the ground of his own exacting responsibilities. I imagined him to mean the responsibility of simultaneously occupying the chairs of all the faculties already mentioned. But these apparently were trifles to him, and something far more serious was clouding his brow.

'I feel it to be my duty,' he said, 'to acquaint myself with any stranger visiting this city; and it is an additional pleasure to welcome here a member of the Upper Ten.' I assured him earnestly that I knew nothing about the Upper Ten, except that I did not belong to them; I felt, not without alarm, that the Upper Ten might be another secret society. He waved my abnegation aside and continued, 'I have a great responsibility in watching over this city. My friend the mayor and I have a great responsibility.' And then an extraordinary thing happened. Suddenly diving his hand into his breast-pocket, he flashed something before my eyes like a hand-mirror; something which disappeared again almost as soon as it appeared. In that flash I could only see that it was some sort of polished metal plate, with some letters engraved on it like a monogram. But the reward of a studious and virtuous life, which has been spent chiefly in the reading of American detective stories, shone forth for me in that hour of trial; I received at last the prize of a profound scholarship in the matter of imaginary murders in tenth-rate magazines. I remembered who it was who in the Yankee detective yarn flashes before the eyes of Slim Jim or the Lone Hand Crook a badge of metal sometimes called a shield. Assuming all the desperate composure of Slim Jim himself, I replied, 'You mean you are connected with the police authorities here, don't you? Well, if I commit a murder here, I'll let you know.' Whereupon that astonishing man waved a hand in deprecation, bowed in farewell with the grace of a dancing master; and said, 'Oh, those are not things we expect from members of the Upper Ten.'

Then that moving constellation moved away, disappearing in the dark tides of humanity, as the vision passed away down the dark tides from Sir Galahad and, starlike, mingled with the stars.

That is the problem I would put to all Americans, and to all who claim to understand America. Who and what was that man? Was he an astronomer?

Was he a detective? Was he a wandering lunatic? If he was a lunatic who thought he was an astronomer, why did he have a badge to prove he was a detective? If he was a detective pretending to be an astronomer, why did he tell a total stranger that he was a detective two minutes after saying he was an astronomer? If he wished to watch over the city in a quiet and unobtrusive fashion, why did he blazon himself all over with all the stars of the sky, and profess to give public lectures on all the subjects of the world? Every wise and well-conducted student of murder stories is acquainted with the notion of a policeman in plain clothes. But nobody could possibly say that this gentleman was in plain clothes. Why not wear his uniform, if he was resolved to show every stranger in the street his badge? Perhaps after all he had no uniform; for these lands were but recently a wild frontier rudely ruled by vigilance committees. Some Americans suggested to me that he was the Sheriff; the regular hard-riding, free-shooting Sheriff of Bret Harte and my boyhood's dreams. Others suggested that he was an agent of the Ku-Klux Klan, that great nameless revolution of the revival of which there were rumours at the time; and that the symbol he exhibited was theirs. But whether he was a sheriff acting for the law, or a conspirator against the law, or a lunatic entirely outside the law, I agree with the former conjectures upon one point. I am perfectly certain he had something else in his pocket besides a badge. And I am perfectly certain that under certain circumstances he would have handled it instantly, and shot me dead between the gay bookstall and the crowded trams. And that is the last touch to the complexity; for though in that country it often seems that the law is made by a lunatic, you never know when the lunatic may not shoot you for keeping it. Only in the presence of that citizen of Oklahoma I feel I am confronted with the fullness and depth of the mystery of America. Because I understand nothing, I recognise the thing that we call a nation; and I salute the flag.

But even in connection with this mysterious figure there is a moral which affords another reason for mentioning him. Whether he was a sheriff or an outlaw, there was certainly something about him that suggested the adventurous violence of the old border life of America; and whether he was connected with the police or no, there was certainly violence enough in his environment to satisfy the most ardent policeman. The posters in the paper-shop were placarded with the verdict in the Hamon trial; a *cause célèbre* which reached its crisis in Oklahoma while I was there. Senator Hamon had been shot by a girl whom he had wronged, and his widow demanded justice, or what might fairly be called vengeance. There was very great excitement culminating in the girl's acquittal. Nor did the Hamon case appear to be entirely exceptional in that breezy borderland. The moment the town had received the news that Clara Smith was free, newsboys rushed down the street shouting, 'Double stabbing outrage near Oklahoma,' or 'Banker's throat cut on Main Street,' or otherwise resuming their regular mode of life. It seemed as much as to say, 'Do not imagine that our local energies are exhausted in shooting a Senator,' or 'Come, now, the world is young, even if Clara Smith is acquitted, and the enthusiasm of Oklahoma is not yet cold.'

But my particular reason for mentioning the matter is this. Despite my friend's mystical remarks about the Upper Ten, he lived in an atmosphere of something that was at least the very reverse of a respect for persons. Indeed, there was something in the very crudity of his social compliment that smacked, strangely enough, of that egalitarian soil. In a vaguely aristocratic country like England, people would never dream of telling a total stranger that he was a member of the Upper Ten. For one thing, they would be afraid that he might be. Real snobbishness is never vulgar; for it is intended to please the refined. Nobody licks the boots of a duke, if only because the duke does not like his boots cleaned in that way. Nobody embraces the knees of a marquis, because it would embarrass that nobleman. And nobody tells him he is a member of the Upper Ten, because everybody is expected to know it. But there is a much more subtle kind of snobbishness pervading the atmosphere of any society trial in England. And the first thing that struck me was the total absence of that atmosphere in the trial at Oklahoma. Mr. Hamon was presumably a member of the Upper Ten, if there is such a thing. He was a member of the Senate or Upper House in the American Parliament; he was a millionaire and a pillar of the Republican party, which might be called the respectable party; he is said to have been mentioned as a possible President. And the speeches of Clara Smith's counsel, who was known by the delightfully Oklahomite title of Wild Bill McLean, were wild enough in all conscience; but they left very little of my friend's illusion that members of the Upper Ten could not be accused of crimes. Nero and Borgia were quite presentable people compared with Senator Hamon when Wild Bill McLean had done with him. But the difference was deeper, and even in a sense more delicate than this. There is a certain tone about English trials, which does at least begin with a certain scepticism about people prominent in public life being abominable in private life. People do vaguely doubt the criminality of ‘a man in that position’; that is, the position of the Marquise de Brinvilliers or the Marquis de Sade. *Prima facie,* it would be an advantage to the Marquis de Sade that he was a marquis. But it was certainly against Hamon that he was a millionaire. Wild Bill did not minimise him as a bankrupt or an adventurer; he insisted on the solidity and size of his fortune, he made mountains out of the ‘Hamon millions,’ as if they made the matter much worse; as indeed I think they do. But that is because I happen to share a certain political philosophy with Wild Bill and other wild buffaloes of the prairies. In other words, there is really present here a democratic instinct against the domination of wealth. It does not prevent wealth from dominating; but it does prevent the domination from being regarded with any affection or loyalty. Despite the man in the starry coat, the Americans have not really any illusions about the Upper Ten. McLean was appealing to an implicit public opinion when he pelted the Senator with his gold.

But something more is involved. I became conscious, as I have been conscious in reading the crime novels of America, that the millionaire was taken as a type and not an individual. This is the great difference; that America recognises rich crooks as a *class*. Any Englishman might recognise them as individuals. Any English romance may turn on a crime in high life; in which the baronet is found to have poisoned his wife, or the elusive burglar turns out to be the bishop. But the English are not always saying, either in romance or reality, ‘What’s to be done, if our food is being poisoned by all these baronets?’ They do not murmur in indignation, ‘If bishops will go on burgling like this, something must be done.’ The whole point of the English romance is the exceptional character of a crime in high life. That is not the tone of American novels or American newspapers or American trials like the trial in Oklahoma. Americans may be excited when a millionaire crook is caught, as when any other crook is caught; but it is at his being caught, not at his being discovered. To put the matter shortly, England recognises a criminal class at the bottom of the social scale. America also recognises a criminal class at the top of the social scale. In both, for various reasons, it may be difficult for the criminals to be convicted; but in America the upper class of criminals is recognised. In both America and England, of course, it exists.

This is an assumption at the back of the American mind which makes a great difference in many ways; and in my opinion a difference for the better. I wrote merely fancifully just now about bishops being burglars; but there is a story in New York, illustrating this, which really does in a sense attribute a burglary to a bishop. The story was that an Anglican Lord Spiritual, of the pompous and now rather antiquated school, was pushing open the door of a poor American tenement with all the placid patronage of the squire and rector visiting the cottagers, when a gigantic Irish policeman came round the corner and hit him a crack over the head with a truncheon on the assumption that he was a house-breaker. I hope that those who laugh at the story see that the laugh is not altogether against the policeman; and that it is not only the policeman, but rather the bishop, who had failed to recognise some fine logical distinctions. The bishop, being a learned man, might well be called upon (when he had sufficiently recovered from the knock on the head) to define what is the exact difference between a house-breaker and a home-visitor; and why the home-visitor should not be regarded as a house-breaker when he will not behave as a guest. An impartial intelligence will be much less shocked at the policeman's disrespect for the home-visitor than by the home-visitor's disrespect for the home.

But that story smacks of the western soil, precisely because of the element of brutality there is in it. In England snobbishness and social oppression are much subtler and softer; the manifestations of them at least are more mellow and humane. In comparison there is indeed something which people call ruthless about the air of America, especially the American cities. The bishop may push open the door without an apology, but he would not break open the door with a truncheon; but the Irish policeman's truncheon hits both ways. It may be brutal to the tenement dweller as well as to the bishop; but the difference and distinction is that it might really be brutal to the bishop. It is because there is after all, at the back of all that barbarism, a sort of a negative belief in the brotherhood of men, a dark democratic sense that men are really men and nothing more, that the coarse and even corrupt bureaucracy is not resented exactly as oligarchic bureaucracies are resented. There is a sense in which corruption is not so narrow as nepotism. It is upon this queer cynical charity, and even humility, that it has been possible to rear so high and uphold so long that tower of brass, Tammany Hall. The modern police system is in spirit the most inhuman in history, and its evil belongs to an age and not to a nation. But some American police methods are evil past all parallel; and the detective can be more crooked than a hundred crooks. But in the States it is not only possible that the policeman is worse than the convict, it is by no means certain that he thinks that he is any better. In the popular stories of O. Henry there are light allusions to tramps being kicked out of hotels which will make any Christian seek relief in strong language and a trust in heaven — not to say in hell. And yet books even more popular than O. Henry's are those of the 'sob-sisterhood' who swim in lachrymose lakes after love-lorn spinsters, who pass their lives in reclaiming and consoling such tramps. There are in this people two strains of brutality and sentimentalism which I do not understand, especially where they mingle; but I am fairly sure they both work back to the dim democratic origin. The Irish policeman does not confine himself fastidiously to bludgeoning bishops; his truncheon finds plenty of poor people's heads to hit; and yet I believe on my soul he has a sort of sympathy with poor people not to be found in the police of more aristocratic states. I believe he also reads and weeps over the stories of the spinsters and the reclaimed tramps; in fact, there is much of such pathos in an American magazine (my sole companion on many happy railway journeys) which is not only devoted to detective stories, but apparently edited by detectives. In these stories also there is the honest, popular astonishment at the Upper Ten expressed by the astronomical detective, if indeed he was a detective and not a demon from the dark Red-Indian forests that faded to the horizon behind him. But I have set him as the head and text of this chapter because with these elements of the Third Degree of devilry and the Seventh Heaven of sentimentalism I touch on elements that I do not understand; and when I do not understand, I say so.

The Republican in the Ruins

The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone; especially to a wood-cut or a lithographic stone. Modern people put their trust in pictures, especially scientific pictures, as much as the most superstitious ever put it in religious pictures. They publish a portrait of the Missing Link as if he were the Missing Man, for whom the police are always advertising; for all the world as if the anthropoid had been photographed before he absconded. The scientific diagram may be a hypothesis; it may be a fancy; it may be a forgery. But it is always an idol in the true sense of an image; and an image in the true sense of a thing mastering the imagination and not the reason. The power of these talismanic pictures is almost hypnotic to modern humanity. We can never forget that we have seen a portrait of the Missing Link; though we should instantly detect the lapse of logic into superstition, if we were told that the old Greek agnostics had made a statue of the Unknown God. But there is a still stranger fashion in which we fall victims to the same trick of fancy. We accept in a blind and literal spirit, not only images of speculation, but even figures of speech. The nineteenth century prided itself on having lost its faith in myths, and proceeded to put all its faith in metaphors. It dismissed the old doctrines about the way of life and the light of the world; and then it proceeded to talk as if the light of truth were really and literally a light, that could be absorbed by merely opening our eyes; or as if the path of progress were really and truly a path, to be found by merely following our noses. Thus the purpose of God is an idea, true or false; but the purpose of Nature is merely a metaphor; for obviously if there is no God there is no purpose. Yet while men, by an imaginative instinct, spoke of the purpose of God with a grand agnosticism, as something too large to be seen, something reaching out to worlds and to eternities, they speak of the purpose of Nature in particular and practical problems of curing babies or cutting up rabbits. This power of the modern metaphor must be understood, by way of an introduction, if we are to understand one of the chief errors, at once evasive and pervasive, which perplex the problem of America.

America is always spoken of as a young nation; and whether or no this be a valuable and suggestive metaphor, very few people notice that it is a metaphor at all. If somebody said that a certain deserving charity had just gone into trousers, we should recognise that it was a figure of speech, and perhaps a rather surprising figure of speech. If somebody said that a daily paper had recently put its hair up, we should know it could only be a metaphor, and possibly a rather strained metaphor. Yet these phrases would mean the only thing that can possibly be meant by calling a corporate association of all sorts of people ‘young’; that is, that a certain institution has only existed for a certain time. I am not now denying that such a corporate nationality may happen to have a psychology comparatively analogous to the psychology of youth. I am not even denying that America has it. I am only pointing out, to begin with, that we must free ourselves from the talismanic tyranny of a metaphor which we do not recognise as a metaphor. Men realised that the old mystical doctrines were mystical; they do not realise that the new metaphors are metaphorical. They have some sort of hazy notion that American society must be growing, must be promising, must have the virtues of hope or the faults of ignorance, merely *because* it has only had a separate existence since the eighteenth century. And that is exactly like saying that a new chapel must be growing taller, or that a limited liability company will soon have its second teeth.

Now in truth this particular conception of American hopefulness would be anything but hopeful for America. If the argument really were, as it is still vaguely supposed to be, that America must have a long life before it, because it only started in the eighteenth century, we should find a very fatal answer by looking at the other political systems that did start in the eighteenth century. The eighteenth century was called the Age of Reason; and there is a very real sense in which the other systems were indeed started in a spirit of reason. But starting from reason has not saved them from ruin. If we survey the Europe of to-day with real clarity and historic comprehension, we shall see that it is precisely the most recent and the most rationalistic creations that have been ruined. The two great States which did most definitely and emphatically deserve to be called modern states were Prussia and Russia. There was no real Prussia before Frederick the Great; no real Russian Empire before Peter the Great. Both those innovators recognised themselves as rationalists bringing a new reason and order into an indeterminate barbarism; and doing for the barbarians what the barbarians could not do for themselves. They did not, like the kings of England or France or Spain or Scotland, inherit a sceptre that was the symbol of a historic and patriotic people. In this sense there was no Russia but only an Emperor of Russia. In this sense Prussia was a kingdom before it was a nation; if it ever was a nation. But anyhow both men were particularly modern in their whole mood and mind. They were modern to the extent of being not only anti-traditional, but almost anti-patriotic. Peter forced the science of the West on Russia to the regret of many Russians. Frederick talked the French of Voltaire and not the German of Luther. The two experiments were entirely in the spirit of Voltairean rationalism; they were built in broad daylight by men who believed in nothing but the light of common day; and already their day is done.

If then the promise of America were in the fact that she is one of the latest births of progress, we should point out that it is exactly the latest born that were the first to die. If in this sense she is praised as young, it may be answered that the young have died young, and have not lived to be old. And if this be confused with the argument that she came in an age of clarity and scepticism, uncontaminated by old superstitions, it could still be retorted that the works of superstition have survived the works of scepticism. But the truth is, of course, that the real quality of America is much more subtle and complex than this; and is mixed not only of good and bad, and rational and mystical, but also of old and new. That is what makes the task of tracing the true proportions of American life so interesting and so impossible.

To begin with, such a metaphor is always as distracting as a mixed metaphor. It is a double-edged tool that cuts both ways; and consequently opposite ways. We use the same word ‘young’ to mean two opposite extremes. We mean something at an early stage of growth, and also something having the latest fruits of growth. We might call a commonwealth young if it conducted all its daily conversation by wireless telegraphy; meaning that it was progressive. But we might also call it young if it conducted all its industry with chipped flints; meaning that it was primitive. These two meanings of youth are hopelessly mixed up when the word is applied to America. But what is more curious, the two elements really are wildly entangled in America. America is in some ways what is called in advance of the times, and in some ways what is called behind the times; but it seems a little confusing to convey both notions by the same word.

On the one hand, Americans often are successful in the last inventions. And for that very reason they are often neglectful of the last but one. It is true of men in general, dealing with things in general, that while they are progressing in one thing, such as science, they are going back in another thing, such as art. What is less fully realised is that this is true even as between different methods of science. The perfection of wireless telegraphy might well be followed by the gross imperfection of wires. The very enthusiasm of American science brings this out very vividly. The telephone in New York works miracles all day long. Replies from remote places come as promptly as in a private talk; nobody cuts anybody off; nobody says, 'Sorry you've been troubled.' But then the postal service of New York does not work at all. At least I could never discover it working. Letters lingered in it for days and days, as in some wild village of the Pyrenees. When I asked a taxi-driver to drive me to a post-office, a look of far-off vision and adventure came into his eyes, and he said he had once heard of a post-office somewhere near West Ninety-Seventh Street. Men are not efficient in everything, but only in the fashionable thing. This may be a mark of the march of science; it does certainly in one sense deserve the description of youth. We can imagine a very young person forgetting the old toy in the excitement of a new one.

But on the other hand, American manners contain much that is called young in the contrary sense; in the sense of an earlier stage of history. There are whole patches and particular aspects that seem to me quite Early Victorian. I cannot help having this sensation, for instance, about the arrangement for smoking in the railway carriages. There are no smoking carriages, as a rule; but a corner of each of the great cars is curtained off mysteriously, that a man may go behind the curtain and smoke. Nobody thinks of a woman doing so. It is regarded as a dark, bohemian, and almost brutally masculine indulgence; exactly as it was regarded by the dowagers in Thackeray's novels. Indeed, this is one of the many such cases in which extremes meet; the extremes of stuffy antiquity and cranky modernity. The American dowager is sorry that tobacco was ever introduced; and the American suffragette and social reformer is considering whether tobacco ought not to be abolished. The tone of American society suggests some sort of compromise, by which women will be allowed to smoke, but men forbidden to do so.

In one respect, however, America is very old indeed. In one respect America is more historic than England; I might almost say more archaeological than England. The record of one period of the past, morally remote and probably irrevocable, is there preserved in a more perfect form as a pagan city is preserved at Pompeii. In a more general sense, of course, it is easy to exaggerate the contrast as a mere contrast between the old world and the new. There is a superficial satire about the millionaire's daughter who has recently become the wife of an aristocrat; but there is a rather more subtle satire in the question of how long the aristocrat has been aristocratic. There is often much misplaced mockery of a marriage between an upstart's daughter and a decayed relic of feudalism; when it is really a marriage between an upstart's daughter and an upstart's grandson. The sentimental socialist often seems to admit the blue blood of the nobleman, even when he wants to shed it; just as he seems to admit the marvellous brains of the millionaire, even when he wants to blow them out. Unfortunately (in the interests of social science, of course) the sentimental socialist never does go so far as bloodshed or blowing out brains; otherwise the colour and quality of both blood and brains would probably be a disappointment to him. There are certainly more American families that really came over in the *Mayflower* than English families that really came over with the Conqueror; and an English county family clearly dating from the time of the *Mayflower* would be considered a very traditional and historic house. Nevertheless, there are ancient things in England, though the aristocracy is hardly one of them. There are buildings, there are institutions, there are even ideas in England which do preserve, as in a perfect pattern, some particular epoch of the past, and even of the remote past. A man could study the Middle Ages in Lincoln as well as in Rouen; in Canterbury as well as in Cologne. Even of the Renaissance the same is true, at least on the literary side; if Shakespeare was later he was also greater than Ronsard. But the point is that the spirit and philosophy of the periods were present in fullness and in freedom. The guildsmen were as Christian in England as they were anywhere; the poets were as pagan in England as they were anywhere. Personally I do not admit that the men who served patrons were freer than those who served patron saints. But each fashion had its own kind of freedom; and the point is that the English, in each case, had the fullness of that kind of freedom. But there was another ideal of freedom which the English never had at all; or, anyhow, never expressed at all. There was another ideal, the soul of another epoch, round which we built no monuments and wrote no masterpieces. You will find no traces of it in England; but you will find them in America.

The thing I mean was the real religion of the eighteenth century. Its religion, in the more defined sense, was generally Deism, as in Robespierre or Jefferson. In the more general way of morals and atmosphere it was rather Stoicism, as in the suicide of Wolfe Tone. It had certain very noble and, as some would say, impossible ideals; as that a politician should be poor, and should be proud of being poor. It knew Latin; and therefore insisted on the strange fancy that the Republic should be a public thing. Its Republican simplicity was anything but a silly pose; unless all martyrdom is a silly pose. Even of the prigs and fanatics of the American and French Revolutions we can often say, as Stevenson said of an American, that 'thrift and courage glowed in him.' And its virtue and value for us is that it did remember the things we now most tend to forget; from the dignity of liberty to the danger of luxury. It did really believe in self-determination, in the self-determination of the self, as well as of the state. And its determination was really determined. In short, it believed in self-respect; and it is strictly true even of its rebels and regicides that they desired chiefly to be respectable. But there were in it the marks of religion as well as respectability; it had a creed; it had a crusade. Men died singing its songs; men starved rather than write against its principles. And its principles were liberty, equality, and fraternity, or the dogmas of the Declaration of Independence. This was the idea that redeemed the dreary negations of the eighteenth century; and there are still corners of Philadelphia or Boston or Baltimore where we can feel so suddenly in the silence its plain garb and formal manners, that the walking ghost of Jefferson would hardly surprise us.

There is not the ghost of such a thing in England. In England the real religion of the eighteenth century never found freedom or scope. It never cleared a space in which to build that cold and classic building called the Capitol. It never made elbow-room for that free if sometimes frigid figure called the Citizen.

In eighteenth-century England he was crowded out, partly perhaps by the relics of better things of the past, but largely at least by the presence of much worse things in the present. The worst things kept out the best things of the eighteenth century. The ground was occupied by legal fictions; by a godless Erastian church and a powerless Hanoverian king. Its realities were an aristocracy of Regency dandies, in costumes made to match Brighton Pavilion; a paganism not frigid but florid. It was a touch of this aristocratic waste in Fox that prevented that great man from being a glorious exception. It is therefore well for us to realise that there is something in history which we did not experience; and therefore probably something in Americans that we do not understand. There was this idealism at the very beginning of their individualism. There was a note of heroic publicity and honourable poverty which lingers in the very name of Cincinnati.

But I have another and special reason for noting this historical fact; the fact that we English never made anything upon the model of a capitol, while we can match anybody with the model of a cathedral. It is far from improbable that the latter model may again be a working model. For I have myself felt, naturally and for a long time, a warm sympathy with both those past ideals, which seem to some so incompatible. I have felt the attraction of the red cap as well as the red cross, of the Marseillaise as well as the Magnificat. And even when they were in furious conflict I have never altogether lost my sympathy for either. But in the conflict between the Republic and the Church, the point often made against the Church seems to me much more of a point against the Republic. It is emphatically the Republic and not the Church that I venerate as something beautiful but belonging to the past. In fact I feel exactly the same sort of sad respect for the republican ideal that many mid-Victorian free-thinkers felt for the religious ideal. The most sincere poets of that period were largely divided between those who insisted, like Arnold and Clough, that Christianity might be a ruin, but after all it must be treated as a picturesque ruin; and those, like Swinburne, who insisted that it might be a picturesque ruin, but after all it must be treated as a ruin. But surely their own pagan temple of political liberty is now much more of a ruin than the other; and I fancy I am one of the few who still take off their hats in that ruined temple. That is why I went about looking for the fading traces of that lost cause, in the old-world atmosphere of the new world.

But I do not, as a fact, feel that the cathedral is a ruin; I doubt if I should feel it even if I wished to lay it in ruins. I doubt if Mr. M’Cabe really thinks that Catholicism is dying, though he might deceive himself into saying so. Nobody could be naturally moved to say that the crowded cathedral of St. Patrick in New York was a ruin, or even that the unfinished Anglo-Catholic cathedral at Washington was a ruin, though it is not yet a church; or that there is anything lost or lingering about the splendid and spirited Gothic churches springing up under the inspiration of Mr. Cram of Boston. As a matter of feeling, as a matter of fact, as a matter quite apart from theory or opinion, it is not in the religious centres that we now have the feeling of something beautiful but receding, of something loved but lost. It is exactly in the spaces cleared and levelled by America for the large and sober religion of the eighteenth century; it is where an old house in Philadelphia contains an old picture of Franklin, or where the men of Maryland raised above their city the first monument of Washington. It is there that I feel like one who treads alone some banquet hall deserted, whose lights are fled, whose garlands dead, and all save he departed. It is then that I feel as if I were the last Republican.

But when I say that the Republic of the Age of Reason is now a ruin, I should rather say that at its best it is a ruin. At its worst it has collapsed into a death-trap or is rotting like a dunghill. What is the real Republic of our day as distinct from the ideal Republic of our fathers, but a heap of corrupt capitalism crawling with worms; with those parasites, the professional politicians? I was re-reading Swinburne's bitter but not ignoble poem, 'Before a Crucifix,' in which he bids Christ, or the ecclesiastical image of Christ, stand out of the way of the onward march of a political idealism represented by United Italy or the French Republic. I was struck by the strange and ironic exactitude with which every taunt he flings at the degradation of the old divine ideal would now fit the degradation of his own human ideal. The time has already come when we can ask his Goddess of Liberty, as represented by the actual Liberals, 'Have *you* filled full men's starved-out souls; have *you* brought freedom on the earth?' For every engine in which these old free-thinkers firmly and confidently trusted has itself become an engine of oppression and even of class oppression. Its free parliament has become an oligarchy. Its free press has become a monopoly. If the pure Church has been corrupted in the course of two thousand years, what about the pure Republic that has rotted into a filthy plutocracy in less than a hundred?

O, hidden face of man, whereover
The years have woven a viewless veil,
If thou wert verily man's lover
What did thy love or blood avail?
Thy blood the priests make poison of;
And in gold shekels coin thy love.

Which has most to do with shekels to-day, the priests or the politicians? Can we say in any special sense nowadays that clergymen, as such, make a poison out of the blood of the martyrs? Can we say it in anything like the real sense, in which we do say that yellow journalists make a poison out of the blood of the soldiers?

But I understand how Swinburne felt when confronted by the image of the carven Christ, and, perplexed by the contrast between its claims and its consequences, he said his strange farewell to it, hastily indeed, but not without regret, not even really without respect. I felt the same myself when I looked for the last time on the Statue of Liberty.

Is the Atlantic Narrowing?

A certain kind of question is asked very earnestly in our time. Because of a certain logical quality in it, connected with premises and data, it is very difficult to answer. Thus people will ask what is the hidden weakness in the Celtic race that makes them everywhere fail or fade away; or how the Germans contrived to bring all their organisation into a state of such perfect efficiency; and what was the significance of the recent victory of Prussia. Or they will ask by what stages the modern world has abandoned all belief in miracles; and the modern newspapers ceased to print any news of murders. They will ask why English politics are free from corruption; or by what mental and moral training certain millionaires were enabled to succeed by sheer force of character; in short, they will ask why plutocrats govern well and how it is that pigs fly, spreading their pink pinions to the breeze or delighting us as they twitter and flutter from tree to tree. The logical difficulty of answering these questions is connected with an old story about Charles the Second and a bowl of goldfish, and with another anecdote about a gentleman who was asked, ‘When did you leave off beating your wife?’ But there is something analogous to it in the present discussions about the forces drawing England and America together. It seems as if the reasoners hardly went far enough back in their argument, or took trouble enough to disentangle their assumptions. They are still moving with the momentum of the peculiar nineteenth-century notion of progress; of certain very simple tendencies perpetually increasing and needing no special analysis. It is so with the international *rapprochement* I have to consider here.

In other places I have ventured to express a doubt about whether nations can be drawn together by an ancient rumour about races; by a sort of prehistoric chit-chat or the gossip of the Stone Age. I have ventured farther; and even expressed a doubt about whether they ought to be drawn together, or rather dragged together, by the brute violence of the engines of science and speed. But there is yet another horrible doubt haunting my morbid mind, which it will be better for my constitution to confess frankly. And that is the doubt about whether they are being drawn together at all.

It has long been a conversational commonplace among the enlightened that all countries are coming closer and closer to each other. It was a conversational commonplace among the enlightened, somewhere about the year 1913, that all wars were receding farther and farther into a barbaric past. There is something about these sayings that seems simple and familiar and entirely satisfactory when we say them; they are of that consoling sort which we can say without any of the mental pain of thinking what we are saying. But if we turn our attention from the phrases we use to the facts that we talk about, we shall realise at least that there are a good many facts on the other side and examples pointing the other way. For instance, it does happen occasionally, from time to time, that people talk about Ireland. He would be a very hilarious humanitarian who should maintain that Ireland and England have been more and more assimilated during the last hundred years. The very name of Sinn Fein is an answer to it, and the very language in which that phrase is spoken. Curran and Sheil would no more have dreamed of uttering the watchword of ‘Repeal’ in Gaelic than of uttering it in Zulu. Grattan could hardly have brought himself to believe that the real repeal of the Union would actually be signed in London in the strange script as remote as the snaky ornament of the Celtic crosses. It would have seemed like Washington signing the Declaration of Independence in the picture-writing of the Red Indians. Ireland has clearly grown away from England; and her language, literature, and type of patriotism are far less English than they were. On the other hand, no one will pretend that the mass of modern Englishmen are much nearer to talking Gaelic or decorating Celtic crosses. A hundred years ago it was perfectly natural that Byron and Moore should walk down the street arm in arm. Even the sight of Mr. Rudyard Kipling and Mr. W. B. Yeats walking down the street arm in arm would now arouse some remark.

I could give any number of other examples of the same new estrangement of nations. I could cite the obvious facts that Norway and Sweden parted company not very long ago, that Austria and Hungary have again become separate states. I could point to the mob of new nations that have started up after the war; to the fact that the great empires are now nearly all broken up; that the Russian Empire no longer directs Poland, that the Austrian Empire no longer directs Bohemia, that the Turkish Empire no longer directs Palestine. Sinn Fein is the separatism of the Irish. Zionism is the separatism of the Jews. But there is one simple and sufficing example, which is here more to my purpose, and is at least equally sufficient for it. And that is the deepening national difference between the Americans and the English.

Let me test it first by my individual experience in the matter of literature. When I was a boy I read a book like *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table* exactly as I read another book like *The Book of Snobs*. I did not think of it as an American book, but simply as a book. Its wit and idiom were like those of the English literary tradition; and its few touches of local colour seemed merely accidental, like those of an Englishman who happened to be living in Switzerland or Sweden. My father and my father's friends were rightly enthusiastic for the book; so that it seemed to come to me by inheritance like *Gulliver's Travels* or *Tristram Shandy*. Its language was as English as Ruskin, and a great deal more English than Carlyle. Well, I have seen in later years an almost equally wide and well-merited popularity of the stories of O. Henry. But never for one moment could I or any one else reading them forget that they were stories by an American about America. The very first fact about them is that they are told with an American accent, that is, in the unmistakable tones of a brilliant and fascinating foreigner. And the same is true of every other recent work of which the fame has managed to cross the Atlantic. We did not say that *The Spoon River Anthology* was a new book, but that it was a new book from America. It was exactly as if a remarkable realistic novel was reported from Russia or Italy. We were in no danger of confusing it with the 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard.' People in England who heard of Main Street were not likely to identify it with a High Street; with the principal thoroughfare in any little town in Berkshire or Buckinghamshire. But when I was a boy I practically identified the boarding-house of the Autocrat with any boarding-house I happened to know in Brompton or Brighton. No doubt there were differences; but the point is that the differences did not pierce the consciousness or prick the illusion. I said to myself, 'People are like this in boarding-houses,' not 'People are like this in Boston.'

This can be seen even in the simple matter of language, especially in the sense of slang. Take, for instance, the delightful sketch in the causerie of Oliver Wendell Holmes; the character of the young man called John. He is the very modern type in every modern country who does specialise in slang. He is the young fellow who is something in the City; the everyday young man of the Gilbertian song, with a stick and a pipe and a half-bred black-and-tan. In every country he is at once witty and commonplace. In every country, therefore, he tends both to the vivacity and the vulgarity of slang. But when he appeared in Holmes's book, his language was not very different from what it would have been in a Brighton instead of a Boston boarding-house; or, in short, if the young man called John had more commonly been called ‘Arry. If he had appeared in a modern American book, his language would have been almost literally unintelligible. At the least an Englishman would have had to read some of the best sentences twice, as he sometimes has to read the dizzy and involved metaphors of O. Henry. Nor is it an answer that this depended on the personalities of the particular writers. A comparison between the real journalism of the time of Holmes and the real journalism of the time of Henry reveals the same thing. It is the expansion of a slight difference of style into a luxuriant difference of idiom; and the process continued indefinitely would certainly produce a totally different language. After a few centuries the signatures of American ambassadors would look as fantastic as Gaelic, and the very name of the Republic be as strange as Sinn Fein.

It is true that there has been on the surface a certain amount of give and take; or at least, as far as the English are concerned, of take rather than give. But it is true that it was once all the other way; and indeed the one thing is something like a just nemesis of the other. Indeed, the story of the reversal is somewhat singular, when we come to think of it. It began in a certain atmosphere and spirit of certain well-meaning people who talked about the English-speaking race; and were apparently indifferent to how the English was spoken, whether in the accent of a Jamaican negro or a convict from Botany Bay. It was their logical tendency to say that Dante was a Dago. It was their logical punishment to say that Disraeli was an Englishman. Now there may have been a period when this Anglo-American amalgamation included more or less equal elements from England and America. It never included the larger elements, or the more valuable elements of either. But, on the whole, I think it true to say that it was not an allotment but an interchange of parts; and that things first went all one way and then all the other. People began by telling the Americans that they owed all their past triumphs to England; which was false. They ended up by telling the English that they would owe all their future triumphs to America; which is if possible still more false. Because we chose to forget that New York had been New Amsterdam, we are now in danger of forgetting that London is not New York. Because we insisted that Chicago was only a pious imitation of Chiswick, we may yet see Chiswick an inferior imitation of Chicago. Our Anglo-Saxon historians attempted that conquest in which Howe and

Burgoyne had failed, and with infinitely less justification on their side. They attempted the great crime of the Anglicisation of America. They have called down the punishment of the Americanisation of England. We must not murmur; but it is a heavy punishment.

It may lift a little of its load, however, if we look at it more closely; we shall then find that though it is very much on top of us, it is only on top. In that sense such Americanisation as there is is very superficial. For instance, there is a certain amount of American slang picked up at random; it appears in certain pushing types of journalism and drama. But we may easily dwell too much on this tragedy; of people who have never spoken English beginning to speak American. I am far from suggesting that American, like any other foreign language, may not frequently contribute to the common culture of the world phrases for which there is no substitute; there are French phrases so used in England and English phrases in France. The word ‘high-brow,’ for instance, is a real discovery and revelation, a new and necessary name for something that walked nameless but enormous in the modern world, a shaft of light and a stroke of lightning. That comes from America and belongs to the world, as much as ‘The Raven’ or *The Scarlet Letter* or the novels of Henry James belong to the world. In fact, I can imagine Henry James originating it in the throes of self-expression, and bringing out a word like ‘high-browed,’ with a sort of gentle jerk, at the end of searching sentences which groped sensitively until they found the phrase. But most of the American slang that is borrowed seems to be borrowed for no particular reason. It either has no point or the point is lost by translation into another context and culture. It is either something which does not need any grotesque and exaggerative description, or of which there already exists a grotesque and exaggerative description more native to our tongue and soil. For instance, I cannot see that the strong and simple expression ‘Now it is for you to pull the police magistrate’s nose’ is in any way strengthened by saying, ‘Now it is up to you to pull the police magistrate’s nose.’ When Tennyson says of the men of the Light Brigade ‘Theirs but to do and die,’ the expression seems to me perfectly lucid. ‘Up to them to do and die’ would alter the metre without especially clarifying the meaning. This is an example of ordinary language being quite adequate; but there is a further difficulty that even wild slang comes to sound like ordinary language. Very often the English have already as humorous and fanciful idiom of their own, only that through habit it has lost its humour. When Keats wrote the line, ‘What pipes and timbrels, what wild ecstasy!’ I am willing to believe that the American humorist would have expressed the same sentiment by beginning the sentence with ‘Some pipe!’ When that was first said, somewhere in the wilds of Colorado, it was really funny; involving a powerful understatement and the suggestion of a mere sample. If a spinster has informed us that she keeps a bird, and we find it is an ostrich, there will be considerable point in the Colorado satirist saying inquiringly, ‘Some bird?’ as if he were offering us a small slice of a small plover. But if we go back to this root and rationale of a joke, the English language already contains quite as good a joke. It is not necessary to say, ‘Some bird’; there is a far finer irony in the old expression, ‘Something like a bird.’ It suggests that the speaker sees something faintly and strangely birdlike about a bird; that it remotely and almost irrationally reminds him of a bird; and that there is about ostrich plumes a yard long something like the faint and delicate traces of a feather. It has every quality of imaginative irony, except that nobody even imagines it to be ironical. All that happens is that people get tired of that turn of phrase, take up a foreign phrase and get tired of that, without realising the point of either. All that happens is that a number of weary people who used to say, ‘Something like a bird,’ now say, ‘Some bird,’ with undiminished weariness. But they might just as well use dull and decent English; for in both cases they are only using jocular language without seeing the joke.

There is indeed a considerable trade in the transplantation of these American jokes to England just now. They generally pine and die in our climate, or they are dead before their arrival; but we cannot be certain that they were never alive. There is a sort of unending frieze or scroll of decorative designs unrolled ceaselessly before the British public, about a hen-pecked husband, which is indistinguishable to the eye from an actual self-repeating pattern like that of the Greek Key, but which is imported as if it were as precious and irreplaceable as the Elgin Marbles. Advertisement and syndication make mountains out of the most funny little mole-hills; but no doubt the mole-hills are picturesque enough in their own landscape. In any case there is nothing so national as humour; and many things, like many people, can be humorous enough when they are at home. But these American jokes are boomed as solemnly as American religions; and their supporters gravely testify that they are funny, without seeing the fun of it for a moment. This is partly perhaps the spirit of spontaneous institutionalism in American democracy, breaking out in the wrong place. They make humour an institution; and a man will be set to tell an anecdote as if to play the violin. But when the story is told in America it really is amusing; and when these jokes are reprinted in England they are often not even intelligible. With all the stupidity of the millionaire and the monopolist, the enterprising proprietor prints jokes in England which are necessarily unintelligible to nearly every English person; jokes referring to domestic and local conditions quite peculiar to America. I saw one of these narrative caricatures the other day in which the whole of the joke (what there was of it) turned on the astonishment of a housewife at the absurd notion of not having an ice-box. It is perfectly true that nearly every ordinary American housewife possesses an ice-box. An ordinary English housewife would no more expect to possess an ice-box than to possess an iceberg. And it would be about as sensible to tow an iceberg to an English port all the way from the North Pole, as to trail that one pale and frigid joke to Fleet Street all the way from the New York papers. It is the same with a hundred other advertisements and adaptations. I have already confessed that I took a considerable delight in the dancing illuminations of Broadway — in Broadway. Everything there is suitable to them, the vast interminable thoroughfare, the toppling houses, the dizzy and restless spirit of the whole city. It is a city of dissolving views, and one may almost say a city in everlasting dissolution. But I do not especially admire a burning fragment of Broadway stuck up opposite the old Georgian curve of Regent Street. I would as soon express sympathy with the Republic of Switzerland by erecting a small Alp, with imitation snow, in the middle of St. James’s Park.

But all this commercial copying is very superficial; and above all, it never copies anything that is really worth copying. Nations never *learn* anything from each other in this way. We have many things to learn from America; but we only listen to those Americans who have still to learn them. Thus, for instance, we do not import the small farm but only the big shop. In other words, we hear nothing of the democracy of the Middle West, but everything of the plutocracy of the middleman, who is probably as unpopular in the Middle West as the miller in the Middle Ages. If Mr. Elihu K. Pike could be transplanted bodily from the neighbourhood of his home town of Marathon, Neb., with his farm and his frame-house and all its fittings, and they could be set down exactly in the spot now occupied by Selfridge’s (which could be easily cleared away for the purpose), I think we could really get a great deal of good by watching him, even if the watching were inevitably a little too like watching a wild beast in a cage or an insect under a glass case. Urban crowds could collect every day behind a barrier or railing, and gaze at Mr. Pike pottering about all day in his ancient and autochthonous occupations. We could see him growing Indian corn with all the gravity of an Indian; though it is impossible to imagine Mrs. Pike blessing the cornfield in the manner of Minnehaha. As I have said, there is a certain lack of humane myth and mysticism about this Puritan peasantry. But we could see him transforming the maize into pop-corn, which is a very pleasant domestic ritual and pastime, and is the American equivalent of the glory of roasting chestnuts. Above all, many of us would learn for the first time that a man can really live and walk about upon something more productive than a pavement; and that when he does so he can really be a free man, and have no lord but the law. Instead of that, America can give nothing to London but those multiple modern shops, of which it has too many already. I know that many people entertain the innocent illusion that big shops are more efficient than small ones; but that is only because the big combinations have the monopoly of advertisement as well as trade. The big shop is not in the least remarkable for efficiency; it is only too big to be blamed for its inefficiency. It is secure in its reputation for always sacking the wrong man. A big shop, considered as a place to shop in, is simply a village of small shops roofed in to keep out the light and air; and one in which none of the shopkeepers is really responsible for his shop. If any one has any doubts on this matter, since I have mentioned it, let him consider this fact: that in practice we never do apply this method of commercial combination to anything that matters very much. We do not go to the surgical department of the Stores to have a portion of our brain removed by a delicate operation; and then pass on to the advocacy department to employ one or any of its barristers, when we are in temporary danger of being hanged. We go to men who own their own tools and are responsible for the use of their own talents. And the same truth applies to that other modern method of advertisement, which has also so largely fallen across us like the gigantic shadow of America. Nations do not arm themselves for a mortal struggle by remembering which sort of submarine they have seen most often on the hoardings. They can do it about something like soap, precisely because a nation will not perish by having a second-rate sort of soap, as it might by having a second-rate sort of submarine. A nation may indeed perish slowly by having a second-rate sort of food or drink or medicine; but that is another and much longer story, and the story is not ended yet. But nobody wins a great battle at a great crisis because somebody has told him that Cadgerboy’s Cavalry Is the Best. It may be that commercial enterprise will eventually cover these fields also, and advertisement-agents will provide the instruments of the surgeon and the weapons of the soldier. When that happens, the armies will be defeated and the patients will die. But though we modern people are indeed patients, in the sense of being merely receptive and accepting things with astonishing patience, we are not dead yet; and we have lingering gleams of sanity.

For the best things do not travel. As I appear here as a traveller, I may say with all modesty that the best people do not travel either. Both in England and America the normal people are the national people; and I repeat that I think they are growing more and more national. I do not think the abyss is being bridged by cosmopolitan theories; and I am sure I do not want it bridged by all this slang journalism and blatant advertisement. I have called all that commercial publicity the gigantic shadow of America. It may be the shadow of America, but it is not the light of America. The light lies far beyond, a level light upon the lands of sunset, where it shines upon wide places full of a very simple and a very happy people; and those who would see it must seek for it.

Lincoln and Lost Causes

It has already been remarked here that the English know a great deal about past American literature, but nothing about past American history. They do not know either, of course, as well as they know the present American advertising, which is the least important of the three. But it is worth noting once more how little they know of the history, and how illogically that little is chosen. They have heard, no doubt, of the fame and the greatness of Henry Clay. He is a cigar. But it would be unwise to cross-examine any Englishman, who may be consuming that luxury at the moment, about the Missouri Compromise or the controversies with Andrew Jackson. And just as the statesman of Kentucky is a cigar, so the state of Virginia is a cigarette. But there is perhaps one exception, or half-exception, to this simple plan. It would perhaps be an exaggeration to say that Plymouth Rock is a chicken. Any English person keeping chickens, and chiefly interested in Plymouth Rocks considered as chickens, would nevertheless have a hazy sensation of having seen the word somewhere before. He would feel subconsciously that the Plymouth Rock had not always been a chicken. Indeed, the name connotes something not only solid but antiquated; and is not therefore a very tactful name for a chicken. There would rise up before him something memorable in the haze that he calls his history; and he would see the history books of his boyhood and old engravings of men in steeple-crowned hats struggling with sea-waves or Red Indians. The whole thing would suddenly become clear to him if (by a simple reform) the chickens were called Pilgrim Fathers.

Then he would remember all about it. The Pilgrim Fathers were champions of religious liberty; and they discovered America. It is true that he has also heard of a man called Christopher Columbus; but that was in connection with an egg. He has also heard of somebody known as Sir Walter Raleigh; and though his principal possession was a cloak, it is also true that he had a potato, not to mention a pipe of tobacco. Can it be possible that he brought it from Virginia, where the cigarettes come from? Gradually the memories will come back and fit themselves together for the average hen-wife who learnt history at the English elementary schools, and who has now something better to do. Even when the narrative becomes consecutive, it will not necessarily become correct. It is not strictly true to say that the Pilgrim Fathers discovered America. But it is quite as true as saying that they were champions of religious liberty. If we said that they were martyrs who would have died heroically in torments rather than tolerate any religious liberty, we should be talking something like sense about them, and telling the real truth that is their due. The whole Puritan movement, from the Solemn League and Covenant to the last stand of the last Stuarts, was a struggle *against* religious toleration, or what they would have called religious indifference. The first religious equality on earth was established by a Catholic cavalier in Maryland. Now there is nothing in this to diminish any dignity that belongs to any real virtues and virilities in the Pilgrim Fathers; on the contrary, it is rather to the credit of their consistency and conviction. But there is no doubt that the note of their whole experiment in New England was intolerance, and even inquisition. And there is no doubt that New England was then only the newest and not the oldest of these colonial experiments. At least two Cavaliers had been in the field before any Puritans. And they had carried with them much more of the atmosphere and nature of the normal Englishman than any Puritan could possibly carry. They had established it especially in Virginia, which had been founded by a great Elizabethan and named after the great Elizabeth. Before there was any New England in the North, there was something very like Old England in the South. Relatively speaking, there is still.

Whenever the anniversary of the *Mayflower* comes round, there is a chorus of Anglo-American congratulation and comradeship, as if this at least were a matter on which all can agree. But I knew enough about America, even before I went there, to know that there are a good many people there at any rate who do not agree with it. Long ago I wrote a protest in which I asked why Englishmen had forgotten the great state of Virginia, the first in foundation and long the first in leadership; and why a few crabbed Nonconformists should have the right to erase a record that begins with Raleigh and ends with Lee, and incidentally includes Washington. The great state of Virginia was the backbone of America until it was broken in the Civil War. From Virginia came the first great Presidents and most of the Fathers of the Republic. Its adherence to the Southern side in the war made it a great war, and for a long time a doubtful war. And in the leader of the Southern armies it produced what is perhaps the one modern figure that may come to shine like St. Louis in the lost battle, or Hector dying before holy Troy.

Again, it is characteristic that while the modern English know nothing about Lee they do know something about Lincoln; and nearly all that they know is wrong. They know nothing of his Southern connections, nothing of his considerable Southern sympathy, nothing of the meaning of his moderation in face of the problem of slavery, now lightly treated as self-evident. Above all, they know nothing about the respect in which Lincoln was quite un-English, was indeed the very reverse of English; and can be understood better if we think of him as a Frenchman, since it seems so hard for some of us to believe that he was an American. I mean his lust for logic for its own sake, and the way he kept mathematical truths in his mind like the fixed stars. He was so far from being a merely practical man, impatient of academic abstractions, that he reviewed and revelled in academic abstractions, even while he could not apply them to practical life. He loved to repeat that slavery was intolerable while he tolerated it, and to prove that something ought to be done while it was impossible to do it. This was probably very bewildering to his brother-politicians; for politicians always whitewash what they do not destroy. But for all that this inconsistent consistency beat the politicians at their own game, and this abstracted logic proved the most practical of all. For when the chance did come to do something, there was no doubt about the thing to be done. The thunderbolt fell from the clear heights of heaven; it had not been tossed about and lost like a common missile in the market-place. The matter is worth mentioning, because it has a moral for a much larger modern question. A wise man's attitude towards industrial capitalism will be very like Lincoln's attitude towards slavery. That is, he will manage to endure capitalism; but he will not endure a defence of capitalism. He will recognise the value, not only of knowing what he is doing, but of knowing what he would like to do. He will recognise the importance of having a thing clearly labelled in his own mind as bad, long before the opportunity comes to abolish it. He may recognise the risk of even worse things in immediate abolition, as Lincoln did in abolitionism. He will not call all business men brutes, any more than Lincoln would call all planters demons; because he knows they are not. He will regard many alternatives to capitalism as crude and inhuman, as Lincoln regarded John Brown's raid; because they are. But he will clear his *mind* from cant about capitalism; he will have no doubt of what is the truth about Trusts and Trade Combines and the concentration of capital; and it is the truth that they endure under one of the ironic silences of heaven, over the pageants and the passing triumphs of hell.

But the name of Lincoln has a more immediate reference to the international matters I am considering here. His name has been much invoked by English politicians and journalists in connection with the quarrel with Ireland. And if we study the matter, we shall hardly admire the tact and sagacity of those journalists and politicians.

History is an eternal tangle of cross-purposes; and we could not take a clearer case, or rather a more complicated case, of such a tangle, than the facts lying behind a political parallel recently mentioned by many politicians. I mean the parallel between the movement for Irish independence and the attempted secession of the Southern Confederacy in America. Superficially any one might say that the comparison is natural enough; and that there is much in common between the quarrel of the North and South in Ireland and the quarrel of the North and South in America. In both cases the South was on the whole agricultural, the North on the whole industrial. True, the parallel exaggerates the position of Belfast; to complete it we must suppose the whole Federal system to have consisted of Pittsburg. In both the side that was more successful was felt by many to be less attractive. In both the same political terms were used, such as the term 'Union' and 'Unionism.' An ordinary Englishman comes to America, knowing these main lines of American history, and knowing that the American knows the similar main lines of Irish history. He knows that there are strong champions of Ireland in America; possibly he also knows that there are very genuine champions of England in America. By every possible historical analogy, he would naturally expect to find the pro-Irish in the South and the pro-English in the North. As a matter of fact, he finds almost exactly the opposite. He finds Boston governed by Irishmen, and Nashville containing people more pro-English than Englishmen. He finds Virginians not only of British blood, like George Washington, but of British opinions almost worthy of George the Third.

But I do not say this, as will be seen in a moment, as a criticism of the comparative Toryism of the South. I say it as a criticism of the superlative stupidity of English propaganda. On another page I remark on the need for a new sort of English propaganda; a propaganda that should be really English and have some remote reference to England. Now if it were a matter of making foreigners feel the real humours and humanities of England, there are no Americans so able or willing to do it as the Americans of the Southern States. As I have already hinted, some of them are so loyal to the English humanities, that they think it their duty to defend even the English inhumanities. New England is turning into New Ireland. But Old England can still be faintly traced in Old Dixie. It contains some of the best things that England herself has had, and therefore (of course) the things that England herself has lost, or is trying to lose. But above all, as I have said, there are people in these places whose historic memories and family traditions really hold them to us, not by alliance but by affection. Indeed, they have the affection in spite of the alliance. They love us in spite of our compliments and courtesies and hands across the sea; all our ambassadorial salutations and speeches cannot kill their love. They manage even to respect us in spite of the shady Jew stockbrokers we send them as English envoys, or the 'efficient' men, who are sent out to be tactful with foreigners because they have been too tactless with trades unionists. This type of traditional American, North or South, really has some traditions connecting him with England; and though he is now in a very small minority, I cannot imagine why England should wish to make it smaller. England once sympathised with the South. The South still sympathises with England. It would seem that the South, or some elements in the South, had rather the advantage of us in political firmness and fidelity; but it does not follow that that fidelity will stand every shock. And at this moment, and in this matter, of all things in the world, our political propagandists must try to bolster British Imperialism up, by kicking Southern Secession when it is down. The English politicians eagerly point out that we shall be justified in crushing Ireland exactly as Sumner and Stevens crushed the most English part of America. It does not seem to occur to them that this comparison between the Unionist triumph in America and a Unionist triumph in Britain is rather hard upon our particular sympathisers, who did not triumph. When England exults in Lincoln's victory over his foes, she is exulting in his victory over her own friends. If her diplomacy continues as delicate and chivalrous as it is at present, they may soon be her only friends. England will be defending herself at the expense of her only defenders. But however this may be, it is as well to bear witness to some of the elements of my own experience; and I can answer for it, at least, that there are some people in the South who will not be pleased at being swept into the rubbish heap of history as rebels and ruffians; and who will not, I regret to say, by any means enjoy even being classed with Fenians and Sinn Feiners.

Now touching the actual comparison between the conquest of the Confederacy and the conquest of Ireland, there are, of course, a good many things to be said which politicians cannot be expected to understand. Strange to say, it is not certain that a lost cause was never worth winning; and it would be easy to argue that the world lost very much indeed when that particular cause was lost. These are not days in which it is exactly obvious that an agricultural society was more dangerous than an industrial one. And even Southern slavery had this one moral merit, that it was decadent; it has this one historic advantage, that it is dead. The Northern slavery, industrial slavery, or what is called wage slavery, is not decaying but increasing; and the end of it is not yet. But in any case, it would be well for us to realise that the reproach of resembling the Confederacy does not ring in all ears as an unanswerable condemnation. It is scarcely a self-evident or sufficient argument, to some hearers, even to prove that the English are as delicate and philanthropic as Sherman, still less that the Irish are as criminal and lawless as Lee. Nor will it soothe every single soul on the American continent to say that the English victory in Ireland will be followed by a reconstruction, like the reconstruction exhibited in the film called ‘The Birth of a Nation.’ And, indeed, there is a further inference from that fine panorama of the exploits of the Ku-Klux Klan. It would be easy, as I say, to turn the argument entirely in favour of the Confederacy. It would be easy to draw the moral, not that the Southern Irish are as wrong as the Southern States, but that the Southern States were as right as the Southern Irish. But upon the whole, I do not incline to accept the parallel in that sense any more than in the opposite sense. For reasons I have already given elsewhere, I do believe that in the main Abraham Lincoln was right. But right in what?

If Lincoln was right, he was right in guessing that there was not really a Northern nation and a Southern nation, but only one American nation. And if he has been proved right, he has been proved right by the fact that men in the South, as well as the North, do now feel a patriotism for that American nation. His wisdom, if it really was wisdom, was justified not by his opponents being conquered, but by their being converted. Now, if the English politicians must insist on this parallel, they ought to see that the parallel is fatal to themselves. The very test which proved Lincoln right has proved them wrong. The very judgment which may have justified him quite unquestionably condemns them. We have again and again conquered Ireland, and have never come an inch nearer to converting Ireland. We have had not one Gettysburg, but twenty Gettysburgs; but we have had no Union. And that is where, as I have remarked, it is relevant to remember that flying fantastic vision on the films that told so many people what no histories have told them. I heard when I was in America rumours of the local reappearance of the Ku-Klux Klan; but the smallness and mildness of the manifestation, as compared with the old Southern or the new Irish case, is alone a sufficient example of the exception that proves the rule. To approximate to any resemblance to recent Irish events, we must imagine the Ku-Klux Klan riding again in more than the terrors of that vision, wild as the wind, white as the moon, terrible as an army with banners. If there were really such a revival of the Southern action, there would equally be a revival of the Southern argument. It would be clear that Lee was right and Lincoln was wrong; that the Southern States were national and were as indestructible as nations. If the South were as rebellious as Ireland, the North would be as wrong as England.

But I desire a new English diplomacy that will exhibit, not the things in which England is wrong but the things in which England is right. And England is right in England, just as she is wrong in Ireland; and it is exactly that rightness of a real nation in itself that it is at once most difficult and most desirable to explain to foreigners. Now the Irishman, and to some extent the American, has remained alien to England, largely because he does not truly realise that the Englishman loves England, still less can he really imagine why the Englishman loves England. That is why I insist on the stupidity of ignoring and insulting the opinions of those few Virginians and other Southerners who really have some inherited notion of why Englishmen love England; and even love it in something of the same fashion themselves. Politicians who do not know the English spirit when they see it at home, cannot of course be expected to recognise it abroad. Publicists are eloquently praising Abraham Lincoln, for all the wrong reasons; but fundamentally for that worst and vilest of all reasons — that he succeeded. None of them seems to have the least notion of how to look for England in England; and they would see something fantastic in the figure of a traveller who found it elsewhere, or anywhere but in New England. And it is well, perhaps, that they have not yet found England where it is hidden in England; for if they found it, they would kill it.

All I am concerned to consider here is the inevitable failure of this sort of Anglo-American propaganda to create a friendship. To praise Lincoln as an Englishman is about as appropriate as if we were praising Lincoln as an English town. We are talking about something totally different. And indeed the whole conversation is rather like some such cross-purposes about some such word as ‘Lincoln’; in which one party should be talking about the President and the other about the cathedral. It is like some wild bewilderment in a farce, with one man wondering how a President could have a church-spire, and the other wondering how a church could have a chin-beard. And the moral is the moral on which I would insist everywhere in this book; that the remedy is to be found in disentangling the two and not in entangling them further. You could not produce a democrat of the logical type of Lincoln merely out of the moral materials that now make up an English cathedral town, like that on which Old Tom of Lincoln looks down. But on the other hand, it is quite certain that a hundred Abraham Lincolns, working for a hundred years, could not build Lincoln Cathedral. And the farcical allegory of an attempt to make Old Tom and Old Abe embrace to the glory of the illogical Anglo-Saxon language is but a symbol of something that is always being attempted, and always attempted in vain. It is not by mutual imitation that the understanding can come. It is not by erecting New York sky-scrapers in London that New York can learn the sacred significance of the towers of Lincoln. It is not by English dukes importing the daughters of American millionaires that England can get any glimpse of the democratic dignity of American men. I have the best of all reasons for knowing that a stranger can be welcomed in America; and just as he is courteously treated in the country as a stranger, so he should always be careful to treat it as a strange land. That sort of imaginative respect, as for something different and even distant, is the only beginning of any attachment between patriotic peoples. The English traveller may carry with him at least one word of his own great language and literature; and whenever he is inclined to say of anything ‘This is passing strange,’ he may remember that it was no inconsiderable Englishman who appended to it the answer, ‘And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.’

Wells and the World State

There was recently a highly distinguished gathering to celebrate the past, present, and especially future triumphs of aviation. Some of the most brilliant men of the age, such as Mr. H. G. Wells and Mr. J. L. Garvin, made interesting and important speeches, and many scientific aviators luminously discussed the new science. Among their graceful felicitations and grave and quiet analyses a word was said, or a note was struck, which I myself can never hear, even in the most harmless after-dinner speech, without an impulse to leap up and yell, and smash the decanters and wreck the dinner-table.

Long ago, when I was a boy, I heard it with fury; and never since have I been able to understand any free man hearing it without fury. I heard it when Bloch, and the old prophets of pacifism by panic, preached that war would become too horrible for patriots to endure. It sounded to me like saying that an instrument of torture was being prepared by my dentist, that would finally cure me of loving my dog. And I felt it again when all these wise and well-meaning persons began to talk about the inevitable effect of aviation in bridging the Atlantic, and establishing alliance and affection between England and America.

I resent the suggestion that a machine can make me bad. But I resent quite equally the suggestion that a machine can make me good. It might be the unfortunate fact that a coolness had arisen between myself and Mr. Fitzarlington Blenkinsop, inhabiting the suburban villa and garden next to mine; and I might even be largely to blame for it. But if somebody told me that a new kind of lawn-mower had just been invented, of so cunning a structure that I should be forced to become a bosom-friend of Mr. Blenkinsop whether I liked it or not, I should be very much annoyed. I should be moved to say that if that was the only way of cutting my grass I would not cut my grass, but continue to cut my neighbour. Or suppose the difference were even less defensible; suppose a man had suffered from a trifling shindy with his wife. And suppose somebody told him that the introduction of an entirely new vacuum-cleaner would compel him to a reluctant reconciliation with his wife. It would be found, I fancy, that human nature abhors that vacuum. Reasonably spirited human beings will not be ordered about by bicycles and sewing-machines; and a sane man will not be made good, let alone bad, by the things he has himself made. I have occasionally dictated to a typewriter, but I will not be dictated to by a typewriter, even of the newest and most complicated mechanism; nor have I ever met a typewriter, however complex, that attempted such a tyranny.

Yet this and nothing else is what is implied in all such talk of the aeroplane annihilating distinctions as well as distances; and an international aviation abolishing nationalities. This and nothing else was really implied in one speaker’s prediction that such aviation will almost necessitate an Anglo-American friendship. Incidentally, I may remark, it is not a true suggestion even in the practical and materialistic sense; and the speaker’s phrase refuted the speaker’s argument. He said that international relations must be more friendly when men can get from England to America in a day. Well, men can already get from England to Germany in a day; and the result was a mutual invitation of which the formalities lasted for five years. Men could get from the coast of England to the coast of France very quickly, through nearly all the ages during which those two coasts were bristling with arms against each other. They could get there very quickly when Nelson went down by that Burford Inn to embark for Trafalgar; they could get there very quickly when Napoleon sat in his tent in that camp at Boulogne that filled England with alarums of invasion. Are these the amiable and pacific relations which will unite England and America, when Englishmen can get to America in a day? The shortening of the distance seems quite as likely, so far as that argument goes, to facilitate that endless guerilla warfare which raged across the narrow seas in the Middle Ages; when French invaders carried away the bells of Rye, and the men of those flats of East Sussex gloriously pursued and recovered them. I do not know whether American privateers, landing at Liverpool, would carry away a few of the more elegant factory chimneys as a substitute for the superstitious symbols of the past. I know not if the English, on ripe reflection, would essay with any enthusiasm to get them back. But anyhow it is anything but self-evident that people cannot fight each other because they are near to each other; and if it were true, there would never have been any such thing as border warfare in the world. As a fact, border warfare has often been the one sort of warfare which it was most difficult to bring under control. And our own traditional position in face of this new logic is somewhat disconcerting. We have always supposed ourselves safer because we were insular and therefore isolated. We have been congratulating ourselves for centuries on having enjoyed peace because we were cut off from our neighbours. And now they are telling us that we shall only enjoy peace when we are joined up with our neighbours. We have pitied the poor nations with frontiers, because a frontier only produces fighting; and now we are trusting to a frontier as the only thing that will produce friendship. But, as a matter of fact, and for a far deeper and more spiritual reason, a frontier will not produce friendship. Only friendliness produces friendship. And we must look far deeper into the soul of man for the thing that produces friendliness.

But apart from this fallacy about the facts, I feel, as I say, a strong abstract anger against the idea, or what some would call the ideal. If it were true that men could be taught and tamed by machines, even if they were taught wisdom or tamed to amiability, I should think it the most tragic truth in the world. A man so improved would be, in an exceedingly ugly sense, losing his soul to save it. But in truth he cannot be so completely coerced into good; and in so far as he is incompletely coerced, he is quite as likely to be coerced into evil. Of the financial characters who figure as philanthropists and philosophers in such cases, it is strictly true to say that their good is evil. The light in their bodies is darkness, and the highest objects of such men are the lowest objects of ordinary men. Their peace is mere safety, their friendship is mere trade; their international friendship is mere international trade. The best we can say of that school of capitalism is that it will be unsuccessful. It has every other vice, but it is not practical. It has at least the impossibility of idealism; and so far as remoteness can carry it, that Inferno is indeed a Utopia. All the visible manifestations of these men are materialistic; but at least their visions will not materialise. The worst we suffer; but the best we shall at any rate escape. We may continue to endure the realities of cosmopolitan capitalism; but we shall be spared its ideals.

But I am not primarily interested in the plutocrats whose vision takes so vulgar a form. I am interested in the same thing when it takes a far more subtle form, in men of genius and genuine social enthusiasm like Mr. H. G. Wells. It would be very unfair to a man like Mr. Wells to suggest that in his vision the Englishman and the American are to embrace only in the sense of clinging to each other in terror. He is a man who understands what friendship is, and who knows how to enjoy the motley humours of humanity. But the political reconstruction which he proposes is too much determined by this old nightmare of necessitarianism. He tells us that our national dignities and differences must be melted into the huge mould of a World State, or else (and I think these are almost his own words) we shall be destroyed by the instruments and machinery we have ourselves made. In effect, men must abandon patriotism or they will be murdered by science. After this, surely no one can accuse Mr. Wells of an undue tenderness for scientific over other types of training. Greek may be a good thing or no; but nobody says that if Greek scholarship is carried past a certain point, everybody will be torn in pieces like Orpheus, or burned up like Semele, or poisoned like Socrates. Philosophy, theology and logic may or may not be idle academic studies; but nobody supposes that the study of philosophy, or even of theology, ultimately forces its students to manufacture racks and thumb-screws against their will; or that even logicians need be so alarmingly logical as all that. Science seems to be the only branch of study in which people have to be waved back from perfection as from a pestilence. But my business is not with the scientific dangers which alarm Mr. Wells, but with the remedy he proposes for them; or rather with the relation of that remedy to the foundation and the future of America. Now it is not too much to say that Mr. Wells finds his model in America. The World State is to be the United States of the World. He answers almost all objections to the practicability of such a peace among states, by pointing out that the American States have such a peace, and by adding, truly enough, that another turn of history might easily have seen them broken up by war. The pattern of the World State is to be found in the New World.

Oddly enough, as it seems to me, he proposes almost cosmic conquests for the American Constitution, while leaving out the most successful thing in that Constitution. The point appeared in answer to a question which many, like myself, must have put in this matter; the question of despotism and democracy. I cannot understand any democrat not seeing the danger of so distant and indirect a system of government. It is hard enough anywhere to get representatives to represent. It is hard enough to get a little town council to fulfil the wishes of a little town, even when the townsmen meet the town councillors every day in the street, and could kick them down the street if they liked. What the same town councillors would be like if they were ruling all their fellow-creatures from the North Pole or the New Jerusalem, is a vision of Oriental despotism beyond the towering fancies of Tamberlane. This difficulty in all representative government is felt everywhere, and not least in America. But I think that if there is one truth apparent in such a choice of evils, it is that monarchy is at least better than oligarchy; and that where we have to act on a large scale, the most genuine popularity can gather round a particular person like a Pope or a President of the United States, or even a dictator like Caesar or Napoleon, rather than round a more or less corrupt committee which can only be defined as an obscure oligarchy. And in that sense any oligarchy is obscure. For people to continue to trust twenty-seven men it is necessary, as a preliminary formality, that people should have heard of them. And there are no twenty-seven men of whom everybody has heard as everybody in France had heard of Napoleon, as all Catholics have heard of the Pope or all Americans have heard of the President. I think the mass of ordinary Americans do really elect their President; and even where they cannot control him at least they watch him, and in the long run they judge him. I think, therefore, that the American Constitution has a real popular institution in the Presidency. But Mr. Wells would appear to want the American Constitution without the Presidency. If I understand his words rightly, he seems to want the great democracy without its popular institution. Alluding to this danger, that the World State might be a world tyranny, he seems to take tyranny entirely in the sense of autocracy. He asks whether the President of the World State would not be rather too tremendous a person, and seems to suggest in answer that there need not even be any such person. He seems to imply that the committee controlling the planet could meet almost without any one in the chair, certainly without any one on the throne. I cannot imagine anything more manifestly made to be a tyranny than such an acephalous aristocracy. But while Mr. Wells’s decision seems to me strange, his reason for it seems to me still more extraordinary.

He suggests that no such dictator will be needed in his World State because ‘there will be no wars and no diplomacy.’ A World State ought doubtless to go round the world; and going round the world seems to be a good training for arguing in a circle. Obviously there will be no wars and no war-diplomacy if something has the power to prevent them; and we cannot deduce that the something will not want any power. It is rather as if somebody, urging that the Germans could only be defeated by uniting the Allied commands under Marshal Foch, had said that after all it need not offend the British Generals because the French supremacy need only be a fiction, the Germans being defeated. We should naturally say that the German defeat would only be a reality because the Allied command was not a fiction. So the universal peace would only be a reality if the World State were not a fiction. And it could not be even a state if it were not a government. This argument amounts to saying, first that the World State will be needed because it is strong, and then that it may safely be weak because it will not be needed.

Internationalism is in any case hostile to democracy. I do not say it is incompatible with it; but any combination of the two will be a compromise between the two. The only purely popular government is local, and founded on local knowledge. The citizens can rule the city because they know the city; but it will always be an exceptional sort of citizen who has or claims the right to rule over ten cities, and these remote and altogether alien cities. All Irishmen may know roughly the same sort of things about Ireland; but it is absurd to say they all know the same things about Iceland, when they may include a scholar steeped in Icelandic sagas or a sailor who has been to Iceland. To make all politics cosmopolitan is to create an aristocracy of globe-trotters. If your political outlook really takes in the Cannibal Islands, you depend of necessity upon a superior and picked minority of the people who have been to the Cannibal Islands; or rather of the still smaller and more select minority who have come back.

Given this difficulty about quite direct democracy over large areas, I think the nearest thing to democracy is despotism. At any rate I think it is some sort of more or less independent monarchy, such as Andrew Jackson created in America. And I believe it is true to say that the two men whom the modern world really and almost reluctantly regards with impersonal respect, as clothed by their office with something historic and honourable, are the Pope and the President of the United States.

But to admire the United States as the United States is one thing. To admire them as the World State is quite another. The attempt of Mr. Wells to make America a sort of model for the federation of all the free nations of the earth, though it is international in intention, is really as narrowly national, in the bad sense, as the desire of Mr. Kipling to cover the world with British Imperialism, or of Professor Treitschke to cover it with Prussian Pan-Germanism. Not being schoolboys, we no longer believe that everything can be settled by painting the map red. Nor do I believe it can be done by painting it blue with white spots, even if they are called stars. The insufficiency of British Imperialism does not lie in the fact that it has always been applied by force of arms. As a matter of fact, it has not. It has been effected largely by commerce, by colonisation of comparatively empty places, by geographical discovery and diplomatic bargain. Whether it be regarded as praise or blame, it is certainly the truth that among all the things that have called themselves empires, the British has been perhaps the least purely military, and has least both of the special guilt and the special glory that goes with militarism. The insufficiency of British Imperialism is not that it is imperial, let alone military. The insufficiency of British Imperialism is that it is British; when it is not merely Jewish. It is that just as a man is no more than a man, so a nation is no more than a nation; and any nation is inadequate as an international model. Any state looks small when it occupies the whole earth. Any polity is narrow as soon as it is as wide as the world. It would be just the same if Ireland began to paint the map green or Montenegro were to paint it black. The objection to spreading anything all over the world is that, among other things, you have to spread it very thin.

But America, which Mr. Wells takes as a model, is in another sense rather a warning. Mr. Wells says very truly that there was a moment in history when America might well have broken up into independent states like those of Europe. He seems to take it for granted that it was in all respects an advantage that this was avoided. Yet there is surely a case, however mildly we put it, for a certain importance in the world still attaching to Europe. There are some who find France as interesting as Florida; and who think they can learn as much about history and humanity in the marble cities of the Mediterranean as in the wooden towns of the Middle West. Europe may have been divided, but it was certainly not destroyed; nor has its peculiar position in the culture of the world been destroyed. Nothing has yet appeared capable of completely eclipsing it, either in its extension in America or its imitation in Japan. But the immediate point here is perhaps a more important one. There is now no creed accepted as embodying the common sense of all Europe, as the Catholic creed was accepted as embodying it in mediaeval times. There is no culture broadly superior to all others, as the Mediterranean culture was superior to that of the barbarians in Roman times. If Europe were united in modern times, it would probably be by the victory of one of its types over others, possibly over all the others. And when America was united finally in the nineteenth century, it *was* by the victory of one of its types over others. It is not yet certain that this victory was a good thing. It is not yet certain that the world will be better for the triumph of the North over the Southern traditions of America. It may yet turn out to be as unfortunate as a triumph of the North Germans over the Southern traditions of Germany and of Europe.

The men who will not face this fact are men whose minds are not free. They are more crushed by Progress than any pietists by Providence. They are not allowed to question that whatever has recently happened was all for the best. Now Progress is Providence without God. That is, it is a theory that everything has always perpetually gone right by accident. It is a sort of atheistic optimism, based on an everlasting coincidence far more miraculous than a miracle. If there be no purpose, or if the purpose permits of human free will, then in either case it is almost insanely unlikely that there should be in history a period of steady and uninterrupted progress; or in other words a period in which poor bewildered humanity moves amid a chaos of complications, without making a single mistake. What has to be hammered into the heads of most normal newspaper-readers to-day is that Man has made a great many mistakes. Modern Man has made a great many mistakes. Indeed, in the case of that progressive and pioneering character, one is sometimes tempted to say that he has made nothing but mistakes. Calvinism was a mistake, and Capitalism was a mistake, and Teutonism and the flattery of the Northern tribes were mistakes. In the French the persecution of Catholicism by the politicians was a mistake, as they found out in the Great War; when the memory gave Irish or Italian Catholics an excuse for hanging back. In England the loss of agriculture and therefore of food-supply in war, and the power to stand a siege, was a mistake. And in America the introduction of the negroes was a mistake; but it may yet be found that the sacrifice of the Southern white man to them was even more of a mistake.

The reason of this doubt is in one word. We have not yet seen the end of the whole industrial experiment; and there are already signs of it coming to a bad end. It may end in Bolshevism. It is more likely to end in the Servile State. Indeed, the two things are not so different as some suppose, and they grow less different every day. The Bolshevists have already called in Capitalists to help them to crush the free peasants. The Capitalists are quite likely to call in Labour Leaders to whitewash their compromise as social reform or even Socialism. The cosmopolitan Jews who are the Communists in the East will not find it so very hard to make a bargain with the cosmopolitan Jews who are Capitalists in the West. The Western Jews would be willing to admit a nominal Socialism. The Eastern Jews have already admitted that their Socialism is nominal. It was the Bolshevist leader himself who said, ‘Russia is again a Capitalist country.’ But whoever makes the bargain, and whatever is its precise character, the substance of it will be servile. It will be servile in the only rational and reliable sense; that is, an arrangement by which a mass of men are ensured shelter and livelihood, in return for being subjected to a law which obliges them to continue to labour. Of course it will not be called the Servile State; it is very probable that it will be called the Socialist State. But nobody seems to realise how very near all the industrial countries are to it. At any moment it may appear in the simple form of compulsory arbitration; for compulsory arbitration dealing with private employers is by definition slavery. When workmen receive unemployment pay, and at the same time arouse more and more irritation by going on strike, it may seem very natural to give them the unemployment pay for good and forbid them the strike for good; and the combination of those two things is by definition slavery. And Trotsky can beat any Trust magnate as a strike-breaker; for he does not even pretend that his compulsory labour is a free bargain. If Trotsky and the Trust magnate come to a working compromise, that compromise will be a Servile State. But it will also be the supreme and by far the most constructive and conclusive result of the industrial movement in history; of the power of machinery or money; of the huge populations of the modern cities; of scientific inventions and resources; of all the things before which the agricultural society of the Southern Confederacy went down. But even those who cannot see that commercialism may end in the triumph of slavery can see that the Northern victory has to a great extent ended in the triumph of commercialism. And the point at the moment is that this did definitely mean, even at the time, the triumph of one American type over another American type; just as much as any European war might mean the triumph of one European type over another. A victory of England over France would be a victory of merchants over peasants; and the victory of Northerners over Southerners was a victory of merchants over squires. So that that very unity, which Mr. Wells contrasts so favourably with war, was not only itself due to a war, but to a war which had one of the most questionable and even perilous of the results of war. That result was a change in the balance of power, the predominance of a particular partner, the exaltation of a particular example, the eclipse of excellent traditions when the defeated lost their international influence. In short, it made exactly the same sort of difference of which we speak when we say that 1870 was a disaster to Europe, or that it was necessary to fight Prussia lest she should Prussianise the whole world. America would have been very different if the leadership had remained with Virginia. The world would have been very different if America had been very different. It is quite reasonable to rejoice that the issue went as it did; indeed, as I have explained elsewhere, for other reasons I do on the whole rejoice in it. But it is certainly not self-evident that it is a matter for rejoicing. One type of American state conquered and subjugated another type of American state; and the virtues and value of the latter were very largely lost to the world. So if Mr. Wells insists on the parallel of a United States of Europe, he must accept the parallel of a Civil War of Europe. He must suppose that the peasant countries crush the industrial countries or vice versa; and that one or other of them becomes the European tradition to the neglect of the other. The situation which seems to satisfy him so completely in America is, after all, the situation which would result in Europe if the Germanic Empires, let us say, had entirely arrested the special development of the Slavs; or if the influence of France had really broken off short under a blow from Britain. The Old South had qualities of humane civilisation which have not sufficiently survived; or at any rate have not sufficiently spread. It is true that the decline of the agricultural South has been considerably balanced by the growth of the agricultural West. It is true, as I have occasion to emphasise in another place, that the West does give the New America something that is nearly a normal peasantry, as a pendant to the industrial towns. But this is not an answer; it is rather an augmentation of the argument. In so far as America is saved it is saved by being patchy; and would be ruined if the Western patch had the same fate as the Southern patch. When all is said, therefore, the advantages of American unification are not so certain that we can apply them to a world unification. The doubt could be expressed in a great many ways and by a great many examples. For that matter, it is already being felt that the supremacy of the Middle West in politics is inflicting upon other localities exactly the sort of local injustice that turns provinces into nations struggling to be free. It has already inflicted what amounts to religious persecution, or the imposition of an alien morality, on the wine-growing civilisation of California. In a word, the American system is a good one as governments go; but it is too large, and the world will not be improved by making it larger. And for this reason alone I should reject this second method of uniting England and America; which is not only Americanising England, but Americanising everything else.

But the essential reason is that a type of culture came out on top in America and England in the nineteenth century, which cannot and would not be tolerated on top of the world. To unite all the systems at the top, without improving and simplifying their social organisation below, would be to tie all the tops of the trees together where they rise above a dense and poisonous jungle, and make the jungle darker than before. To create such a cosmopolitan political platform would be to build a roof above our own heads to shut out the sunlight, on which only usurers and conspirators clad in gold could walk about in the sun. This is no moment when industrial intellectualism can inflict such an artificial oppression upon the world. Industrialism itself is coming to see dark days, and its future is very doubtful. It is split from end to end with strikes and struggles for economic life, in which the poor not only plead that they are starving, but even the rich can only plead that they are bankrupt. The peasantries are growing not only more prosperous but more politically effective; the Russian moujik has held up the Bolshevist Government of Moscow and Petersburg; a huge concession has been made by England to Ireland; the League of Nations has decided for Poland against Prussia. It is not certain that industrialism will not wither even in its own field; it is certain that its intellectual ideas will not be allowed to cover every field; and this sort of cosmopolitan culture is one of its ideas. Industrialism itself may perish; or on the other hand industrialism itself may survive, by some searching and scientific reform that will really guarantee economic security to all. It may really purge itself of the accidental maladies of anarchy and famine; and continue as a machine, but at least as a comparatively clean and humanely shielded machine; at any rate no longer as a man-eating machine. Capitalism may clear itself of its worst corruptions by such reform as is open to it; by creating humane and healthy conditions for labour, and setting the labouring classes to work under a lucid and recognised law. It may make Pittsburg one vast model factory for all who will model themselves upon factories; and may give to all men and women in its employment a clear social status in which they can be contented and secure. And on the day when that social security is established for the masses, when industrial capitalism has achieved this larger and more logical organisation and found peace at last, a strange and shadowy and ironic triumph, like an abstract apology, will surely hover over all those graves in the Wilderness where lay the bones of so many gallant gentlemen; men who had also from their youth known and upheld such a social stratification, who had the courage to call a spade a spade and a slave a slave.

A New Martin Chuzzlewit

The aim of this book, if it has one, is to suggest this thesis; that the very worst way of helping Anglo-American friendship is to be an Anglo-American. There is only one thing lower, of course, which is being an Anglo-Saxon. It is lower, because at least Englishmen do exist and Americans do exist; and it may be possible, though repulsive, to imagine an American and an Englishman in some way blended together. But if Angles and Saxons ever did exist, they are all fortunately dead now; and the wildest imagination cannot form the weakest idea of what sort of monster would be made by mixing one with the other. But my thesis is that the whole hope, and the only hope, lies not in mixing two things together, but rather in cutting them very sharply asunder. That is the only way in which two things can succeed sufficiently in getting outside each other to appreciate and admire each other. So long as they are different and yet supposed to be the same, there can be nothing but a divided mind and a staggering balance. It may be that in the first twilight of time man and woman walked about as one quadruped. But if they did, I am sure it was a quadruped that reared and bucked and kicked up its heels. Then the flaming sword of some angel divided them, and they fell in love with each other.

Should the reader require an example a little more within historical range, or a little more subject to critical tests, than the above prehistoric anecdote (which I need not say was revealed to me in a vision) it would be easy enough to supply them both in a hypothetical and a historical form. It is obvious enough in a general way that if we begin to subject diverse countries to an identical test, there will not only be rivalry, but what is far more deadly and disastrous, superiority. If we institute a competition between Holland and Switzerland as to the relative grace and agility of their mountain guides, it will be clear that the decision is disproportionately easy; it will also be clear that certain facts about the configuration of Holland have escaped our international eye. If we establish a comparison between them in skill and industry in the art of building dykes against the sea, it will be equally clear that the injustice falls the other way; it will also be clear that the situation of Switzerland on the map has received insufficient study. In both cases there will not only be rivalry but very unbalanced and unjust rivalry; in both cases, therefore, there will not only be enmity but very bitter or insolent enmity. But so long as the two are sharply divided there can be no enmity because there can be no rivalry. Nobody can argue about whether the Swiss climb mountains better than the Dutch build dykes; just as nobody can argue about whether a triangle is more triangular than a circle is round.

This fancy example is alphabetically and indeed artificially simple; but, having used it for convenience, I could easily give similar examples not of fancy but of fact. I had occasion recently to attend the Christmas festivity of a club in London for the exiles of one of the Scandinavian nations. When I entered the room the first thing that struck my eye, and greatly raised my spirits, was that the room was dotted with the colours of peasant costumes and the specimens of peasant craftsmanship. There were, of course, other costumes and other crafts in evidence; there were men dressed like myself (only better) in the garb of the modern middle classes; there was furniture like the furniture of any other room in London. Now, according to the ideal formula of the ordinary internationalist, these things that we had in common ought to have moved me to a sense of the kinship of all civilisation. I ought to have felt that as the Scandinavian gentleman wore a collar and tie, and I also wore a collar and tie, we were brothers and nothing could come between us. I ought to have felt that we were standing for the same principles of truth because we were wearing the same pair of trousers; or rather, to speak with more precision, similar pairs of trousers. Anyhow, the pair of trousers, that cloven pennon, ought to have floated in fancy over my head as the banner of Europe or the League of Nations. I am constrained to confess that no such rush of emotions overcame me; and the topic of trousers did not float across my mind at all. So far as those things were concerned, I might have remained in a mood of mortal enmity, and cheerfully shot or stabbed the best dressed gentleman in the room. Precisely what did warm my heart with an abrupt affection for that northern nation was the very thing that is utterly and indeed lamentably lacking in my own nation. It was something corresponding to the one great gap in English history, corresponding to the one great blot on English civilisation. It was the spiritual presence of a peasantry, dressed according to its own dignity, and expressing itself by its own creations.

The sketch of America left by Charles Dickens is generally regarded as something which is either to be used as a taunt or covered with an apology. Doubtless it was unduly critical, even of the America of that day; yet curiously enough it may well be the text for a true reconciliation at the present day. It is true that in this, as in other things, the Dickensian exaggeration is itself exaggerated. It is also true that, while it is over-emphasised, it is not allowed for. Dickens tended too much to describe the United States as a vast lunatic asylum; but partly because he had a natural inspiration and imagination suited to the description of lunatic asylums. As it was his finest poetic fancy that created a lunatic over the garden wall, so it was his fancy that created a lunatic over the western sea. To read some of the complaints, one would fancy that Dickens had deliberately invented a low and farcical America to be a contrast to his high and exalted England. It is suggested that he showed America as full of rowdy bullies like Hannibal Chollop, or ridiculous wind-bags like Elijah Pogram, while England was full of refined and sincere spirits like Jonas Chuzzlewit, Chevy Slime, Montague Tigg, and Mr. Pecksniff. If *Martin Chuzzlewit* makes America a lunatic asylum, what in the world does it make England? We can only say a criminal lunatic asylum. The truth is, of course, that Dickens so described them because he had a genius for that sort of description; for the making of almost maniacal grotesques of the same type as Quilp or Fagin. He made these Americans absurd because he was an artist in absurdity; and no artist can help finding hints everywhere for his own peculiar art. In a word, he created a laughable Pogram for the same reason that he created a laughable Pecksniff; and that was only because no other creature could have created them.

It is often said that we learn to love the characters in romances as if they were characters in real life. I wish we could sometimes love the characters in real life as we love the characters in romances. There are a great many human souls whom we should accept more kindly, and even appreciate more clearly, if we simply thought of them as people in a story. *Martin Chuzzlewit* is itself indeed an unsatisfactory and even unfortunate example; for it is, among its author’s other works, a rather unusually harsh and hostile story. I do not suggest that we should feel towards an American friend that exact shade or tint of tenderness that we feel towards Mr. Hannibal Chollop. Our enjoyment of the foreigner should rather resemble our enjoyment of Pickwick than our enjoyment of Pecksniff. But there is this amount of appropriateness even in the particular example; that Dickens did show in both countries how men can be made amusing to each other. So far the point is not that he made fun of America, but that he got fun out of

America. And, as I have already pointed out, he applied exactly the same method of selection and exaggeration to England. In the other English stories, written in a more amiable mood, he applied it in a more amiable manner; but he could apply it to an American too, when he was writing in that mood and manner. We can see it in the witty and withering criticism delivered by the Yankee traveller in the musty refreshment room of Mugby Junction; a genuine example of a genuinely American fun and freedom satirising a genuinely British stuffiness and snobbery. Nobody expects the American traveller to admire the refreshments at Mugby Junction; but he might admire the refreshment at one of the Pickwickian inns, especially if it contained Pickwick. Nobody expects Pickwick to like Pogram; but he might like the American who made fun of Mugby Junction. But the point is that, while he supported him in making fun, he would also think him funny. The two comic characters could admire each other, but they would also be amused at each other. And the American would think the Englishman funny because he was English; and a very good reason too. The Englishman would think the American amusing because he was American; nor can I imagine a better ground for his amusement.

Now many will debate on the psychological possibility of such a friendship founded on reciprocal ridicule, or rather on a comedy of comparisons. But I will say of this harmony of humours what Mr. H. G. Wells says of his harmony of states in the unity of his World State. If it be truly impossible to have such a peace, then there is nothing possible except war. If we cannot have friends in this fashion, then we shall sooner or later have enemies in some other fashion. There is no hope in the pompous impersonalities of internationalism.

And this brings us to the real and relevant mistake of Dickens. It was not in thinking his Americans funny, but in thinking them foolish because they were funny. In this sense it will be noticed that Dickens’s American sketches are almost avowedly superficial; they are descriptions of public life and not private life. Mr. Jefferson Brick had no private life. But Mr. Jonas Chuzzlewit undoubtedly had a private life; and even kept some parts of it exceeding private. Mr. Pecksniff was also a domestic character; so was Mr. Quilp. Mr. Pecksniff and Mr. Quilp had slightly different ways of surprising their families; Mr. Pecksniff by playfully observing ‘Boh!’ when he came home; Mr. Quilp by coming home at all. But we can form no picture of how Mr. Hannibal Chollop playfully surprised his family;

possibly by shooting at them; possibly by not shooting at them. We can only say that he would rather surprise us by having a family at all. We do not know how the Mother of the Modern Gracchi managed the Modern Gracchi; for her maternity was rather a public than a private office. We have no romantic moonlit scenes of the love-making of Elijah Pogram, to balance against the love story of Seth Pecksniff. These figures are all in a special sense theatrical; all facing one way and lit up by a public limelight. Their ridiculous characters are detachable from their real characters, if they have any real characters. And the author might perfectly well be right about what is ridiculous, and wrong about what is real. He might be as right in smiling at the Pograms and the Bricks as in smiling at the Pickwicks and the Boffins. And he might still be as wrong in seeing Mr. Pogram as a hypocrite as the great Buzfuz was wrong in seeing Mr. Pickwick as a monster of revolting heartlessness and systematic villainy. He might still be as wrong in thinking Jefferson Brick a charlatan and a cheat as was that great disciple of Lavater, Mrs. Wilfer, in tracing every wrinkle of evil cunning in the face of Mrs. Boffin. For Mr. Pickwick's spectacles and gaiters and Mrs. Boffin's bonnets and boudoir are after all superficial jokes; and might be equally well seen whatever we saw beneath them. A man may smile and smile and be a villain; but a man may also make us smile and not be a villain. He may make us smile and not even be a fool. He may make us roar with laughter and be an exceedingly wise man.

Now that is the paradox of America which Dickens never discovered. Elijah Pogram was far more fantastic than his satirist thought; and the most grotesque feature of Brick and Chollop was hidden from him. The really strange thing was that Pogram probably did say, 'Rough he may be. So air our bars. Wild he may be. So air our buffalers,' and yet was a perfectly intelligent and public-spirited citizen while he said it. The extraordinary thing is that Jefferson Brick may really have said, 'The libation of freedom must sometimes be quaffed in blood,' and yet Jefferson Brick may have served freedom, resisting unto blood. There really has been a florid school of rhetoric in the United States which has made it quite possible for serious and sensible men to say such things. It is amusing simply as a difference of idiom or costume is always amusing; just as English idiom and English costume are amusing to Americans. But about this kind of difference there can be no kind of doubt. So sturdy not to say stuffy a materialist as Ingersoll could say of so shoddy not to say shady a financial politician as Blaine, ‘Like an arméd warrior, like a pluméd knight, James G. Blaine strode down the hall of Congress, and flung his spear full and true at the shield of every enemy of his country and every traducer of his fair name.’ Compared with that, the passage about bears and buffaloes, which Mr. Pogram delivered in defence of the defaulting post-master, is really a very reasonable and appropriate statement. For bears and buffaloes are wild and rough and in that sense free; while pluméd knights do not throw their lances about like the assegais of Zulus. And the defaulting post-master was at least as good a person to praise in such a fashion as James G. Blaine of the Little Rock Railway. But anybody who had treated Ingersoll or Blaine merely as a fool and a figure of fun would have very rapidly found out his mistake. But Dickens did not know Brick or Chollop long enough to find out his mistake. It need not be denied that, even after a full understanding, he might still have found things to smile at or to criticise. I do not insist on his admitting that Hannibal Chollop was as great a hero as Hannibal, or that Elijah Pogram was as true a prophet as Elijah. But I do say very seriously that they had something about their atmosphere and situation that made possible a sort of heroism and even a sort of prophecy that were really less natural at that period in that Merry England whose comedy and common sense we sum up under the name of Dickens. When we joke about the name of Hannibal Chollop, we might remember of what nation was the general who dismissed his defeated soldiers at Appomatox with words which the historian has justly declared to be worthy of Hannibal: ‘We have fought through this war together. I have done my best for you.’ It is not fair to forget Jefferson, or even Jefferson Davis, entirely in favour of Jefferson Brick.

For all these three things, good, bad, and indifferent, go together to form something that Dickens missed, merely because the England of his time most disastrously missed it. In this case, as in every case, the only way to measure justly the excess of a foreign country is to measure the defect of our own country. For in this matter the human mind is the victim of a curious little unconscious trick, the cause of nearly all international dislikes. A man treats his own faults as original sin and supposes them scattered everywhere with the seed of Adam. He supposes that men have then added their own foreign vices to the solid and simple foundation of his own private vices. It would astound him to realise that they have actually, by their strange erratic path, avoided his vices as well as his virtues. His own faults are things with which he is so much at home that he at once forgets and assumes them abroad. He is so faintly conscious of them in himself that he is not even conscious of the absence of them in other people. He assumes that they are there so that he does not see that they are not there. The Englishman takes it for granted that a Frenchman will have all the English faults. Then he goes on to be seriously angry with the Frenchman for having dared to complicate them by the French faults. The notion that the Frenchman has the French faults and *not* the English faults is a paradox too wild to cross his mind.

He is like an old Chinaman who should laugh at Europeans for wearing ludicrous top-hats and curling up their pig-tails inside them; because obviously all men have pig-tails, as all monkeys have tails. Or he is like an old Chinese lady who should justly deride the high-heeled shoes of the West, considering them a needless addition to the sufficiently tight and secure bandaging of the foot; for, of course, all women bind up their feet, as all women bind up their hair. What these Celestial thinkers would not think of, or allow for, is the wild possibility that we do not have pig-tails although we do have top-hats, or that our ladies are not silly enough to have Chinese feet, though they are silly enough to have high-heeled shoes. Nor should we necessarily have come an inch nearer to the Chinese extravagances even if the chimney-pot hat rose higher than a factory chimney or the high heels had evolved into a sort of stilts. By the same fallacy the Englishman will not only curse the French peasant as a miser, but will also try to tip him as a beggar. That is, he will first complain of the man having the surliness of an independent man, and then accuse him of having the servility of a dependent one. Just as the hypothetical Chinaman cannot believe that we have top-hats but not pig-tails, so the Englishman cannot believe that peasants are not snobs even when they are savages. Or he sees that a Paris paper is violent and sensational; and then supposes that some millionaire owns twenty such papers and runs them as a newspaper trust. Surely the Yellow Press is present everywhere to paint the map yellow, as the British Empire to paint it red. It never occurs to such a critic that the French paper is violent because it is personal, and personal because it belongs to a real and responsible person, and not to a ring of nameless millionaires. It is a pamphlet, and not an anonymous pamphlet. In a hundred other cases the same truth could be illustrated; the situation in which the black man first assumes that all mankind is black, and then accuses the rest of the artificial vice of painting their faces red and yellow, or the hypocrisy of white-washing themselves after the fashion of whited sepulchres. The particular case of it now before us is that of the English misunderstanding of America; and it is based, as in all these cases, on the English misunderstanding of England.

For the truth is that England has suffered of late from not having enough of the free shooting of Hannibal Chollop; from not understanding enough that the libation of freedom must sometimes be quaffed in blood. The prosperous Englishman will not admit this; but then the prosperous Englishman will not admit that he has suffered from anything. That is what he is suffering from. Until lately at least he refused to realise that many of his modern habits had been bad habits, the worst of them being contentment. For all the real virtue in contentment evaporates, when the contentment is only satisfaction and the satisfaction is only self-satisfaction. Now it is perfectly true that America and not England has seen the most obvious and outrageous official denials of liberty. But it is equally true that it has seen the most obvious flouting of such official nonsense, far more obvious than any similar evasions in England. And nobody who knows the subconscious violence of the American character would ever be surprised if the weapons of Chollop began to be used in that most lawful lawlessness. It is perfectly true that the libation of freedom must sometimes be drunk in blood, and never more (one would think) than when mad millionaires forbid it to be drunk in beer. But America, as compared with England, is the country where one can still fancy men obtaining the libation of beer by the libation of blood. Vulgar plutocracy is almost omnipotent in both countries; but I think there is now more kick of reaction against it in America than in England. The Americans may go mad when they make laws; but they recover their reason when they disobey them. I wish I could believe that there was as much of that destructive repentance in England; as indeed there certainly was when Cobbett wrote. It faded gradually like a dying fire through the Victorian era; and it was one of the very few realities that Dickens did not understand. But any one who does understand it will know that the days of Cobbett saw the last lost fight for English democracy; and that if he had stood at that turning of the historic road, he would have wished a better fate to the frame-breakers and the fury against the first machinery, and luck to the Luddite fires.

Anyhow, what is wanted is a new Martin Chuzzlewit, told by a wiser Mark Tapley. It is typical of something sombre and occasionally stale in the mood of Dickens when he wrote that book, that the comic servant is not really very comic. Mark Tapley is a very thin shadow of Sam Weller. But if Dickens had written it in a happier mood, there might have been a truer meaning in Mark Tapley's happiness. For it is true that this illogical good humour amid unreason and disorder is one of the real virtues of the English people. It is the real advantage they have in that adventure all over the world, which they were recently and reluctantly induced to call an Empire. That receptive ridicule remains with them as a secret pleasure when they are colonists — or convicts. Dickens might have written another version of the great romance, and one in which America was really seen gaily by Mark instead of gloomily by Martin. Mark Tapley might really have made the best of America. Then America would have lived and danced before us like Pickwick's England, a fairyland of happy lunatics and lovable monsters, and we might still have sympathised as much with the rhetoric of Lafayette Kettle as with the rhetoric of Wilkins Micawber, or with the violence of Chollop as with the violence of Boythorn. That new Martin Chuzzlewit will never be written; and the loss of it is more tragic than the loss of *Edwin Drood*. But every man who has travelled in America has seen glimpses and episodes in that untold tale; and far away on the Red-Indian frontiers or in the hamlets in the hills of Pennsylvania, there are people whom I met for a few hours or for a few moments, whom I none the less sincerely like and respect because I cannot but smile as I think of them. But the converse is also true; they have probably forgotten me; but if they remember they laugh.

The Spirit of America

I suggest that diplomatists of the internationalist school should spend some of their money on staging farces and comedies of cross-purposes, founded on the curious and prevalent idea that England and America have the same language. I know, of course, that we both inherit the glorious tongue of Shakespeare, not to mention the tune of the musical glasses; but there have been moments when I thought that if we spoke Greek and they spoke Latin we might understand each other better. For Greek and Latin are at least fixed, while American at least is still very fluid. I do not know the American language, and therefore I do not claim to distinguish between the American language and the American slang. But I know that highly theatrical developments might follow on taking the words as part of the English slang or the English language. I have already given the example of calling a person ‘a regular guy,’ which in the States is a graceful expression of respect and esteem, but which on the stage, properly handled, might surely lead the way towards a divorce or duel or something lively. Sometimes coincidence merely clinches a mistake, as it so often clinches a misprint. Every proof-reader knows that the worst misprint is not that which makes nonsense but that which makes sense; not that which is obviously wrong but that which is hideously right. He who has essayed to write ‘he got the book,’ and has found it rendered mysteriously as ‘he got the boob’ is pensively resigned. It is when it is rendered quite lucidly as ‘he got the boot’ that he is moved to a more passionate mood of regret. I have had conversations in which this sort of accident would have wholly misled me, if another accident had not come to the rescue. An American friend of mine was telling me of his adventures as a cinema-producer down in the south-west where real Red Indians were procurable. He said that certain Indians were ‘very bad actors.’ It passed for me as a very ordinary remark on a very ordinary or natural deficiency. It would hardly seem a crushing criticism to say that some wild Arab chieftain was not very good at imitating a farmyard; or that the Grand Llama of Thibet was rather clumsy at making paper boats. But the remark might be natural in a man travelling in paper boats, or touring with an invisible farmyard for his menagerie. As my friend was a cinema-producer, I supposed he meant that the Indians were bad cinema actors. But the phrase has really a high and austere moral meaning, which my levity had wholly missed. A bad actor means a man whose actions are bad or morally reprehensible. So that I might have embraced a Red Indian who was dripping with gore, or covered with atrocious crimes, imagining there was nothing the matter with him beyond a mistaken choice of the theatrical profession. Surely there are here the elements of a play, not to mention a cinema play. Surely a New England village maiden might find herself among the wigwams in the power of the formidable and fiendish ‘Little Blue Bison,’ merely through her mistaken sympathy with his financial failure as a Film Star. The notion gives me glimpses of all sorts of dissolving views of primeval forests and flamboyant theatres; but this impulse of irrelevant theatrical production must be curbed. There is one example, however, of this complication of language actually used in contrary senses, about which the same figure can be used to illustrate a more serious fact.

Suppose that, in such an international interlude, an English girl and an American girl are talking about the fiancé of the former, who is coming to call. The English girl will be haughty and aristocratic (on the stage), the American girl will of course have short hair and skirts and will be cynical; Americans being more completely free from cynicism than any people in the world. It is the great glory of Americans that they are not cynical; for that matter, English aristocrats are hardly ever haughty; they understand the game much better than that. But on the stage, anyhow, the American girl may say, referring to her friend’s fiancé, with a cynical wave of the cigarette, ‘I suppose he’s bound to come and see you.’ And at this the blue blood of the Vere de Veres will boil over; the English lady will be deeply wounded and insulted at the suggestion that her lover only comes to see her because he is forced to do so. A staggering stage quarrel will then ensue, and things will go from bad to worse; until the arrival of an Interpreter who can talk both English and American. He stands between the two ladies waving two pocket dictionaries, and explains the error on which the quarrel turns. It is very simple; like the seed of all tragedies. In English ‘he is bound to come and see you’ means that he is obliged or constrained to come and see you. In American it does not. In American it means that he is bent on coming to see you, that he is irrevocably resolved to do so, and will surmount any obstacle to do it. The two young ladies will then embrace as the curtain falls.

Now when I was lecturing in America I was often told, in a radiant and congratulatory manner, that such and such a person was bound to come and hear me lecture. It seemed a very cruel form of conscription, and I could not understand what authority could have made it compulsory. In the course of discovering my error, however, I thought I began to understand certain American ideas and instincts that lie behind this American idiom. For as I have urged before, and shall often urge again, the road to international friendship is through really understanding jokes. It is in a sense through taking jokes seriously. It is quite legitimate to laugh at a man who walks down the street in three white hats and a green dressing gown, because it is unfamiliar; but after all the man has *some* reason for what he does; and until we know the reason we do not understand the story, or even understand the joke. So the outlander will always seem outlandish in custom or costume; but serious relations depend on our getting beyond the fact of difference to the things wherein it differs. A good symbolical figure for all this may be found among the people who say, perhaps with a self-revealing simplicity, that they are bound to go to a lecture.

If I were asked for a single symbolic figure summing up the whole of what seems eccentric and interesting about America to an Englishman, I should be satisfied to select that one lady who complained of Mrs. Asquith's lecture and wanted her money back. I do not mean that she was typically American in complaining; far from it. I, for one, have a great and guilty knowledge of all that amiable American audiences will endure without complaint. I do not mean that she was typically American in wanting her money; quite the contrary. That sort of American spends money rather than hoards it; and when we convict them of vulgarity we acquit them of avarice. Where she was typically American, summing up a truth individual and indescribable in any other way, is that she used these words: 'I've risen from a sick-bed to come and hear her, and I want my money back.'

The element in that which really amuses an Englishman is precisely the element which, properly analysed, ought to make him admire an American. But my point is that only by going through the amusement can he reach the admiration. The amusement is in the vision of a tragic sacrifice for what is avowedly a rather trivial object. Mrs. Asquith is a candid lady of considerable humour; and I feel sure she does not regard the experience of hearing her read her diary as an ecstasy for which the sick should thus suffer martyrdom. She also is English; and had no other claim but to amuse Americans and possibly to be amused by them. This being so, it is rather as if somebody said, ‘I have risked my life in fire and pestilence to find my way to the music hall,’ or, ‘I have fasted forty days in the wilderness sustained by the hope of seeing Totty Toddles do her new dance.’ And there is something rather more subtle involved here. There is something in an Englishman which would make him feel faintly ashamed of saying that he had fasted to hear Totty Toddles, or risen from a sick-bed to hear Mrs. Asquith. He would feel that it was undignified to confess that he had wanted mere amusement so much; and perhaps that he had wanted anything so much. He would not like, so to speak, to be seen rushing down the street after Totty Toddles, or after Mrs. Asquith, or perhaps after anybody. But there is something in it distinct from a mere embarrassment at admitting enthusiasm. He might admit the enthusiasm if the object seemed to justify it; he might perfectly well be serious about a serious thing. But he cannot understand a person being proud of serious sacrifices for what is not a serious thing. He does not like to admit that a little thing can excite him; that he can lose his breath in running, or lose his balance in reaching, after something that might be called silly.

Now that is where the American is fundamentally different. To him the enthusiasm itself is meritorious. To him the excitement itself is dignified. He counts it a part of his manhood to fast or fight or rise from a bed of sickness for something, or possibly for anything. His ideal is not to be a lock that only a worthy key can open, but a ‘live wire’ that anything can touch or anybody can use. In a word, there is a difference in the very definition of virility and therefore of virtue. A live wire is not only active, it is also sensitive. Thus sensibility becomes actually a part of virility. Something more is involved than the vulgar simplification of the American as the irresistible force and the Englishman as the immovable post. As a fact, those who speak of such things nowadays generally mean by something irresistible something simply immovable, or at least something unalterable, motionless even in motion, like a cannon ball; for a cannon ball is as dead as a cannon. Prussian militarism was praised in that way — until it met a French force of about half its size on the banks of the Marne. But that is not what an American means by energy; that sort of Prussian energy is only monotony without repose. American energy is not a soulless machine; for it is the whole point that he puts his soul into it. It is a very small box for so big a thing; but it is not an empty box. But the point is that he is not only proud of his energy, he is proud of his excitement. He is not ashamed of his emotion, of the fire or even the tear in his manly eye, when he tells you that the great wheel of his machine breaks four billion butterflies an hour.

That is the point about American sport; that it is not in the least sportive. It is because it is not very sportive that we sometimes say it is not very sporting. It has the vices of a religion. It has all the paradox of original sin in the service of aboriginal faith. It is sometimes untruthful because it is sincere. It is sometimes treacherous because it is loyal. Men lie and cheat for it as they lied for their lords in a feudal conspiracy, or cheated for their chieftains in a Highland feud. We may say that the vassal readily committed treason; but it is equally true that he readily endured torture. So does the American athlete endure torture. Not only the self-sacrifice but the solemnity of the American athlete is like that of the American Indian. The athletes in the States have the attitude of the athletes among the Spartans, the great historical nation without a sense of humour. They suffer an ascetic régime not to be matched in any monasticism and hardly in any militarism. If any tradition of these things remains in a saner age, they will probably be remembered as a mysterious religious order of fakirs or dancing dervishes, who shaved their heads and fasted in honour of Hercules or Castor and Pollux. And that is really the spiritual atmosphere though the gods have vanished; and the religion is subconscious and therefore irrational. For the problem of the modern world is that it has continued to be religious when it has ceased to be rational. Americans really would starve to win a cocoa-nut shy. They would fast or bleed to win a race of paper boats on a pond. They would rise from a sick-bed to listen to Mrs. Asquith.

But it is the real reason that interests me here. It is certainly not that Americans are so stupid as not to know that cocoa-nuts are only cocoa-nuts and paper boats only made of paper. Americans are, on an average, rather more intelligent than Englishmen; and they are well aware that Hercules is a myth and that Mrs. Asquith is something of a mythologist. It is not that they do not know that the object is small in itself; it is that they do really believe that the enthusiasm is great in itself. They admire people for being impressionable. They admire people for being excited. An American so struggling for some disproportionate trifle (like one of my lectures) really feels in a mystical way that he is right, because it is his whole morality to be keen. So long as he wants something very much, whatever it is, he feels he has his conscience behind him, and the common sentiment of society behind him, and God and the whole universe behind him. Wedged on one leg in a hot crowd at a trivial lecture, he has self-respect; his dignity is at rest. That is what he means when he says he is bound to come to the lecture.

Now the Englishman is fond of occasional larks. But these things are not larks; nor are they occasional. It is the essential of the Englishman's lark that he should think it a lark; that he should laugh at it even when he does it. Being English myself, I like it; but being English myself, I know it is connected with weaknesses as well as merits. In its irony there is condescension and therefore embarrassment. This patronage is allied to the patron, and the patron is allied to the aristocratic tradition of society. The larks are a variant of laziness because of leisure; and the leisure is a variant of the security and even supremacy of the gentleman. When an undergraduate at Oxford smashes half a hundred windows he is well aware that the incident is merely a trifle. He can be trusted to explain to his parents and guardians that it was merely a trifle. He does not say, even in the American sense, that he was bound to smash the windows. He does not say that he had risen from a sick-bed to smash the windows. He does not especially think he has risen at all; he knows he has descended (though with delight, like one diving or sliding down the banisters) to something flat and farcical and full of the English taste for the bathos. He has collapsed into something entirely commonplace; though the owners of the windows may possibly not think so. This rather indescribable element runs through a hundred English things, as in the love of bathos shown even in the sound of proper names; so that even the yearning lover in a lyric yearns for somebody named Sally rather than Salome, and for a place called Wapping rather than a place called Westermain. Even in the relapse into rowdiness there is a sort of relapse into comfort. There is also what is so large a part of comfort; carelessness. The undergraduate breaks windows because he does not care about windows, not because he does care about more fresh air like a hygienist, or about more light like a German poet. Still less does he heroically smash a hundred windows because they come between him and the voice of Mrs. Asquith. But least of all does he do it because he seriously prides himself on the energy apart from its aim, and on the will-power that carries it through. He is not 'bound' to smash the windows, even in the sense of being bent upon it. He is not bound at all but rather relaxed; and his violence is not only a relaxation but a laxity. Finally, this is shown in the fact that he only smashes windows when he is in the mood to smash windows; when some fortunate conjunction of stars and all the tints and nuances of nature whisper to him that it would be well to smash windows. But the American is always ready, at any moment, to waste his energies on the wilder and more suicidal course of going to lectures. And this is because to him such excitement is not a mood but a moral ideal. As I note in another connection, much of the English mystery would be clear to Americans if they understood the word ‘mood.’ Englishmen are very moody, especially when they smash windows. But I doubt if many Americans understand exactly what we mean by the mood; especially the passive mood.

It is only by trying to get some notion of all this that an Englishman can enjoy the final crown and fruit of all international friendship; which is really liking an American to be American. If we only think that parts of him are excellent because parts of him are English, it would be far more sensible to stop at home and possibly enjoy the society of a whole complete Englishman. But anybody who does understand this can take the same pleasure in an American being American that he does in a thunderbolt being swift and a barometer being sensitive. He can see that a vivid sensibility and vigilance really radiate outwards through all the ramifications of machinery and even of materialism. He can see that the American uses his great practical powers upon very small provocation; but he can also see that there is a kind of sense of honour, like that of a duellist, in his readiness to be provoked. Indeed, there is some parallel between the American man of action, however vulgar his aims, and the old feudal idea of the gentleman with a sword at his side. The gentleman may have been proud of being strong or sturdy; he may too often have been proud of being thick-headed; but he was not proud of being thick-skinned. On the contrary, he was proud of being thin-skinned. He also seriously thought that sensitiveness was a part of masculinity. It may be very absurd to read of two Irish gentlemen trying to kill each other for trifles, or of two Irish-American millionaires trying to ruin each other for trash. But the very pettiness of the pretext and even the purpose illustrates the same conception; which may be called the virtue of excitability. And it is really this, and not any rubbish about iron will-power and masterful mentality, that redeems with romance their clockwork cosmos and its industrial ideals. Being a live wire does not mean that the nerves should be like wires; but rather that the very wires should be like nerves.

Another approximation to the truth would be to say that an American is really not ashamed of curiosity. It is not so simple as it looks. Men will carry off curiosity with various kinds of laughter and bravado, just as they will carry off drunkenness or bankruptcy. But very few people are really proud of lying on a door-step, and very few people are really proud of longing to look through a key-hole. I do not speak of looking through it, which involves questions of honour and self-control; but few people feel that even the desire is dignified. Now I fancy the American, at least by comparison with the Englishman, does feel that his curiosity is consistent with his dignity, because dignity is consistent with vivacity. He feels it is not merely the curiosity of Paul Pry, but the curiosity of Christopher Columbus. He is not a spy but an explorer; and he feels his greatness rather grow with his refusal to turn back, as a traveller might feel taller and taller as he neared the source of the Nile or the North-West Passage. Many an Englishman has had that feeling about discoveries in dark continents; but he does not often have it about discoveries in daily life. The one type does believe in the indignity and the other in the dignity of the detective. It has nothing to do with ethics in the merely external sense. It involves no particular comparison in practical morals and manners. It is something in the whole poise and posture of the self; of the way a man carries himself. For men are not only affected by what they are; but still more, when they are fools, by what they think they are; and when they are wise, by what they wish to be.

There are truths that have almost become untrue by becoming untruthful. There are statements so often stale and insincere that one hesitates to use them, even when they stand for something more subtle. This point about curiosity is not the conventional complaint against the American interviewer. It is not the ordinary joke against the American child. And in the same way I feel the danger of it being identified with the cant about ‘a young nation’ if I say that it has some of the attractions, not of American childhood, but of real childhood. There is some truth in the tradition that the children of wealthy Americans tend to be too precocious and luxurious. But there is a sense in which we can really say that if the children are like adults, the adults are like children. And that sense is in the very best sense of childhood. It is something which the modern world does not understand.

It is something that modern Americans do not understand, even when they possess it; but I think they do possess it.

The devil can quote Scripture for his purpose; and the text of Scripture which he now most commonly quotes is, ‘The kingdom of heaven is within you.’ That text has been the stay and support of more Pharisees and prigs and self-righteous spiritual bullies than all the dogmas in creation; it has served to identify self-satisfaction with the peace that passes all understanding. And the text to be quoted in answer to it is that which declares that no man can receive the kingdom except as a little child. What we are to have inside is the childlike spirit; but the childlike spirit is not entirely concerned about what is inside. It is the first mark of possessing it that one is interested in what is outside. The most childlike thing about a child is his curiosity and his appetite and his power of wonder at the world. We might almost say that the whole advantage of having the kingdom within is that we look for it somewhere else.

The Spirit of England

Nine times out of ten a man’s broad-mindedness is necessarily the narrowest thing about him. This is not particularly paradoxical; it is, when we come to think of it, quite inevitable. His vision of his own village may really be full of varieties; and even his vision of his own nation may have a rough resemblance to the reality. But his vision of the world is probably smaller than the world. His vision of the universe is certainly much smaller than the universe. Hence he is never so inadequate as when he is universal; he is never so limited as when he generalises. This is the fallacy in the many modern attempts at a creedless creed, at something variously described as essential Christianity or undenominational religion or a world faith to embrace all the faiths in the world. It is that every sectarian is more sectarian in his unsectarianism than he is in his sect. The emancipation of a Baptist is a very Baptist emancipation. The charity of a Buddhist is a very Buddhist charity, and very different from Christian charity. When a philosophy embraces everything it generally squeezes everything, and squeezes it out of shape; when it digests it necessarily assimilates. When a theosophist absorbs Christianity it is rather as a cannibal absorbs Christian missionaries. In this sense it is even possible for the larger thing to be swallowed by the smaller; and for men to move about not only in a Clapham sect but in a Clapham cosmos under Clapham moon and stars.

But if this danger exists for all men, it exists especially for the Englishman. The Englishman is never so insular as when he is imperial; except indeed when he is international. In private life he is a good friend and in practical politics generally a good ally. But theoretical politics are more practical than practical politics. And in theoretical politics the Englishman is the worst ally the world ever saw. This is all the more curious because he has passed so much of his historical life in the character of an ally. He has been in twenty great alliances and never understood one of them. He has never been farther away from European politics than when he was fighting heroically in the thick of them. I myself think that this splendid isolation is sometimes really splendid; so long as it is isolation and does not imagine itself to be imperialism or internationalism. With the idea of being international, with the idea of being imperial, comes the frantic and farcical idea of being impartial. Generally speaking, men are never so mean and false and hypocritical as when they are occupied in being impartial. They are performing the first and most typical of all the actions of the devil; they are claiming the throne of God. Even when it is not hypocrisy but only mental confusion, it is always a confusion worse and worse confounded. We see it in the impartial historians of the Victorian Age, who now seem far more Victorian than the partial historians. Hallam wrote about the Middle Ages; but Hallam was far less mediaeval than Macaulay; for Macaulay was at least a fighter. Huxley had more mediaeval sympathies than Herbert Spencer for the same reason; that Huxley was a fighter. They both fought in many ways for the limitations of their own rationalistic epoch; but they were nearer the truth than the men who simply assumed those limitations as rational. The war of the controversionalists was a wider thing than the peace of the arbiters. And in the same way the Englishman never cuts a less convincing figure before other nations than when he tries to arbitrate between them.

I have by this time heard a great deal about the necessity of saving Anglo-American friendship, a necessity which I myself feel rather too strongly to be satisfied with the ambassadorial and editorial style of achieving it. I have already said that the worst style of all is to be Anglo-American; or, as the more illiterate would express, to be Anglo-Saxon. I am more and more convinced that the way for the Englishman to do it is to be English; but to know that he is English and not everything else as well. Thus the only sincere answer to Irish nationalism is English nationalism, which is a reality; and not English imperialism, which is a reactionary fiction, or English internationalism, which is a revolutionary one.

For the English are reviled for their imperialism because they are not imperialistic. They dislike it, which is the real reason why they do it badly; and they do it badly, which is the real reason why they are disliked when they do it. Nobody calls France imperialistic because she has absorbed Brittany. But everybody calls England imperialistic because she has not absorbed Ireland. The Englishman is fixed and frozen for ever in the attitude of a ruthless conqueror; not because he has conquered such people, but because he has not conquered them; but he is always trying to conquer them with a heroism worthy of a better cause. For the really native and vigorous part of what is unfortunately called the British Empire is not an empire at all, and does not consist of these conquered provinces at all. It is not an empire but an adventure; which is probably a much finer thing. It was not the power of making strange countries similar to our own, but simply the pleasure of seeing strange countries because they were different from our own. The adventurer did indeed, like the third son, set out to seek his fortune, but not primarily to alter other people's fortunes; he wished to trade with people rather than to rule them. But as the other people remained different from him, so did he remain different from them. The adventurer saw a thousand strange things and remained a stranger. He was the Robinson Crusoe on a hundred desert islands; and on each he remained as insular as on his own island.

What is wanted for the cause of England to-day is an Englishman with enough imagination to love his country from the outside as well as the inside. That is, we need somebody who will do for the English what has never been done for them, but what is done for any outlandish peasantry or even any savage tribe. We want people who can make England attractive; quite apart from disputes about whether England is strong or weak. We want somebody to explain, not that England is everywhere, but what England is anywhere; not that England is or is not really dying, but why we do not want her to die. For this purpose the official and conventional compliments or claims can never get any farther than pompous abstractions about Law and Justice and Truth; the ideals which England accepts as every civilised state accepts them, and violates as every civilised state violates them. That is not the way in which the picture of any people has ever been painted on the sympathetic imagination of the world. Enthusiasts for old Japan did not tell us that the Japs recognised the existence of abstract morality; but that they lived in paper houses or wrote letters with paint-brushes. Men who wished to interest us in Arabs did not confine themselves to saying that they are monotheists or moralists; they filled our romances with the rush of Arab steeds or the colours of strange tents or carpets. What we want is somebody who will do for the Englishman with his front garden what was done for the Jap and his paper house; who shall understand the Englishman with his dog as well as the Arab with his horse. In a word, what nobody has really tried to do is the one thing that really wants doing. It is to make England attractive as a nationality, and even as a small nationality.

For it is a wild folly to suppose that nations will love each other because they are alike. They will never really do that unless they are really alike; and then they will not be nations. Nations can love each other as men and women love each other, not because they are alike but because they are different. It can easily be shown, I fancy, that in every case where a real public sympathy was aroused for some unfortunate foreign people, it has always been accompanied with a particular and positive interest in their most foreign customs and their most foreign externals. The man who made a romance of the Scotch High-lander made a romance of his kilt and even of his dirk; the friend of the Red Indians was interested in picture writing and had some tendency to be interested in scalping. To take a more serious example, such nations as Serbia had been largely commended to international consideration by the study of Serbian epics, or Serbian songs. The epoch of negro emancipation was also the epoch of negro melodies. Those who wept over Uncle Tom also laughed over Uncle Remus. And just as the admiration for the Redskin almost became an apology for scalping, the mysterious fascination of the African has sometimes almost led us into the fringes of the black forest of Voodoo. But the sort of interest that is felt even in the scalp-hunter and the cannibal, the torturer and the devil-worshipper, that sort of interest has never been felt in the Englishman.

And this is the more extraordinary because the Englishman is really very interesting. He is interesting in a special degree in this special manner; he is interesting because he is individual. No man in the world is more misrepresented by everything official or even in the ordinary sense national. A description of English life must be a description of private life. In that sense there is no public life. In that sense there is no public opinion. There have never been those prairie fires of public opinion in England which often sweep over America. At any rate, there have never been any such popular revolutions since the popular revolutions of the Middle Ages. The English are a nation of amateurs; they are even a nation of eccentrics. An Englishman is never more English than when he is considered a lunatic by the other Englishmen. This can be clearly seen in a figure like Dr. Johnson, who has become national not by being normal but by being extraordinary. To express this mysterious people, to explain or suggest why they like tall hedges and heavy breakfasts and crooked roads and small gardens with large fences, and why they alone among Christians have kept quite consistently the great Christian glory of the open fireplace, here would be a strange and stimulating opportunity for any of the artists in words, who study the souls of strange peoples. That would be the true way to create a friendship between England and America, or between England and anything else; yes, even between England and Ireland. For this justice at least has already been done to Ireland; and as an indignant patriot I demand a more equal treatment for the two nations.

I have already noted the commonplace that in order to teach internationalism we must talk nationalism. We must make the nations as nations less odious or mysterious to each other. We do not make men love each other by describing a monster with a million arms and legs, but by describing the men as men, with their separate and even solitary emotions. As this has a particular application to the emotions of the Englishman, I will return to the topic once more. Now Americans have a power that is the soul and success of democracy, the power of spontaneous social organisation. Their high spirits, their humane ideals are really creative, they abound in unofficial institutions; we might almost say in unofficial officialism. Nobody who has felt the presence of all the leagues and guilds and college clubs will deny that Whitman was national when he said he would build states and cities out of the love of comrades. When all this communal enthusiasm collides with the Englishman, it too often seems literally to leave him cold. They say he is reserved; they possibly think he is rude. And the Englishman, having been taught his own history all wrong, is only too likely to take the criticism as a compliment. He admits that he is reserved because he is stern and strong; or even that he is rude because he is shrewd and candid. But as a fact he is not rude and not especially reserved; at least reserve is not the meaning of his reluctance. The real difference lies, I think, in the fact that American high spirits are not only high but level; that the hilarious American spirit is like a plateau, and the humorous English spirit like a ragged mountain range.

The Englishman is moody; which does not in the least mean that the Englishman is morose. Dickens, as we all feel in reading his books, was boisterously English. Dickens was moody when he wrote *Oliver Twist*; but he was also moody when he wrote *Pickwick*. That is, he was in another and much healthier mood. The mood was normal to him in the sense that nine times out of ten he felt and wrote in that humorous and hilarious mood. But he was, if ever there was one, a man of moods; and all the more of a typical Englishman for being a man of moods. But it was because of this, almost entirely, that he had a misunderstanding with America.

In America there are no moods, or there is only one mood. It is the same whether it is called hustle or uplift; whether we regard it as the heroic love of comrades or the last hysteria of the herd instinct. It has been said of the typical English aristocrats of the Government offices that they resemble certain ornamental fountains and play from ten till four; and it is true that an Englishman, even an English aristocrat, is not always inclined to play any more than to work. But American sociability is not like the Trafalgar fountains. It is like Niagara. It never stops, under the silent stars or the rolling storms. There seems always to be the same human heat and pressure behind it; it is like the central heating of hotels as explained in the advertisements and announcements. The temperature can be regulated; but it is not. And it is always rather overpowering for an Englishman, whose mood changes like his own mutable and shifting sky. The English mood is very like the English weather; it is a nuisance and a national necessity.

If any one wishes to understand the quarrel between Dickens and the Americans, let him turn to that chapter in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, in which young Martin has to receive endless defiles and deputations of total strangers each announced by name and demanding formal salutation. There are several things to be noticed about this incident. To begin with, it did not happen to Martin Chuzzlewit; but it did happen to Charles Dickens. Dickens is incorporating almost without alteration a passage from a diary in the middle of a story; as he did when he included the admirable account of the prison petition of John Dickens as the prison petition of Wilkins Micawber. There is no particular reason why even the gregarious Americans should so throng the portals of a perfectly obscure steerage passenger like young Chuzzlewit. There was every reason why they should throng the portals of the author of *Pickwick* and *Oliver Twist*. And no doubt they did. If I may be permitted the aleatory image, you bet they did. Similar troops of sociable human beings have visited much more insignificant English travellers in America, with some of whom I am myself acquainted. I myself have the luck to be a little more stodgy and less sensitive than many of my countrymen; and certainly less sensitive than Dickens. But I know what it was that annoyed him about that unending and unchanging stream of American visitors; it was the unending and unchanging stream of American sociability and high spirits. A people living on such a lofty but level tableland do not understand the ups and downs of the English temperament; the temper of a nation of eccentrics or (as they used to be called) of humorists. There is something very national in the very name of the old play of *Every Man in His Humour*. But the play more often acted in real life is ‘Every Man Out of His Humour.’ It is true, as Matthew Arnold said, that an Englishman wants to do as he likes; but it is not always true even that he likes what he likes. An Englishman can be friendly and yet not feel friendly. Or he can be friendly and yet not feel hospitable. Or he can feel hospitable and yet not welcome those whom he really loves. He can think, almost with tears of tenderness, about people at a distance who would be bores if they came in at the door.

American sociability sweeps away any such subtlety. It cannot be expected to understand the paradox or perversity of the Englishman, who thus can feel friendly and avoid friends. That is the truth in the suggestion that Dickens was sentimental. It means that he probably felt most sociable when he was solitary. In all these attempts to describe the indescribable, to indicate the real but unconscious differences between the two peoples, I have tried to balance my words without the irrelevant bias of praise and blame. Both characteristics always cut both ways. On one side this comradeship makes possible a certain communal courage, a democratic derision of rich men in high places, that is not easy in our smaller and more stratified society. On the other hand the Englishman has certainly more liberty, if less equality and fraternity. But the richest compensation of the Englishman is not even in the word ‘liberty,’ but rather in the word ‘poetry.’ That humour of escape or seclusion, that genial isolation, that healing of wounded friendship by what Christian Science would call absent treatment, that is the best atmosphere of all for the creation of great poetry; and out of that came ‘bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang’ and ‘Thou wast not made for death, immortal bird.’ In this sense it is indeed true that poetry is emotion remembered in tranquillity; which may be extended to mean affection remembered in loneliness. There is in it a spirit not only of detachment but even of distance; a spirit which does desire, as in the old English rhyme, to be not only over the hills but also far away. In other words, in so far as it is true that the Englishman is an exception to the great truth of Aristotle, it is because he is not so near to Aristotle as he is to Homer. In so far as he is not by nature a political animal, it is because he is a poetical animal. We see it in his relations to the other animals; his quaint and almost illogical love of dogs and horses and dependants whose political rights cannot possibly be defined in logic. Many forms of hunting or fishing are but an excuse for the same thing which the shameless literary man does without any excuse. Sport is speechless poetry. It would be easy for a foreigner, by taking a few liberties with the facts, to make a satire about the sort of silent Shelley who decides ultimately to shoot the skylark. It would be easy to answer these poetic suggestions by saying that he himself might be responsible for ruining the choirs where late the sweet birds sang, or that the immortal bird was likely to be mortal when he was out with his gun. But these international satires are never just; and the real relations of an Englishman and an English bird are far more delicate. It would be equally easy and equally unjust to suggest a similar satire against American democracy; and represent Americans merely as birds of a feather who can do nothing but flock together. But this would leave out the fact that at least it is not the white feather; that democracy is capable of defiance and of death for an idea. Touching the souls of great nations, these criticisms are generally false because they are critical.

But when we are quite sure that we rejoice in a nation's strength, then and not before we are justified in judging its weakness. I am quite sure that I rejoice in any democratic success without *arrière pensée*; and nobody who knows me will credit me with a covert sneer at civic equality. And this being granted, I do think there is a danger in the gregariousness of American society. The danger of democracy is not anarchy; on the contrary, it is monotony. And it is touching this that all my experience has increased my conviction that a great deal that is called female emancipation has merely been the increase of female convention. Now the males of every community are far too conventional; it was the females who were individual and criticised the conventions of the tribe. If the females become conventional also, there is a danger of individuality being lost. This indeed is not peculiar to America; it is common to the whole modern industrial world, and to everything which substitutes the impersonal atmosphere of the State for the personal atmosphere of the home. But it is emphasised in America by the curious contradiction that Americans do in theory value and even venerate the individual. But individualism is still the foe of individuality. Where men are trying to compete with each other they are trying to copy each other. They become featureless by 'featuring' the same part. Personality, in becoming a conscious ideal, becomes a common ideal. In this respect perhaps there is really something to be learnt from the Englishman with his turn or twist in the direction of private life. Those who have travelled in such a fashion as to see all the American hotels and none of the American houses are sometimes driven to the excess of saying that the Americans have no private life. But even if the exaggeration has a hint of truth, we must balance it with the corresponding truth; that the English have no public life. They on their side have still to learn the meaning of the public thing, the republic; and how great are the dangers of cowardice and corruption when the very State itself has become a State secret.

The English are patriotic; but patriotism is the unconscious form of nationalism. It is being national without understanding the meaning of a nation. The Americans are on the whole too self-conscious, kept moving too much in the pace of public life, with all its temptations to superficiality and fashion; too much aware of outside opinion and with too much appetite for outside criticism. But the English are much too unconscious; and would be the better for an increase in many forms of consciousness, including consciousness of sin. But even their sin is ignorance of their real virtue. The most admirable English things are not the things that are most admired by the English, or for which the English admire themselves. They are things now blindly neglected and in daily danger of being destroyed. It is all the worse that they should be destroyed, because there is really nothing like them in the world. That is why I have suggested a note of nationalism rather than patriotism for the English; the power of seeing their nation as a nation and not as the nature of things. We say of some ballad from the Balkans or some peasant costume in the Netherlands that it is unique; but the good things of England really are unique. Our very isolation from continental wars and revolutionary reconstructions have kept them unique. The particular kind of beauty there is in an English village, the particular kind of humour there is in an English public-house, are things that cannot be found in lands where the village is far more simply and equally governed, or where the vine is far more honourably served and praised. Yet we shall not save them by merely sinking into them with the conservative sort of contentment, even if the commercial rapacity of our plutocratic reforms would allow us to do so. We must in a sense get far away from England in order to behold her; we must rise above patriotism in order to be practically patriotic; we must have some sense of more varied and remote things before these vanishing virtues can be seen suddenly for what they are; almost as one might fancy that a man would have to rise to the dizziest heights of the divine understanding before he saw, as from a peak far above a whirlpool, how precious is his perishing soul.

The Future of Democracy

The title of this final chapter requires an apology. I do not need to be reminded, alas, that the whole book requires an apology. It is written in accordance with a ritual or custom in which I could see no particular harm, and which gives me a very interesting subject, but a custom which it would be not altogether easy to justify in logic. Everybody who goes to America for a short time is expected to write a book; and nearly everybody does. A man who takes a holiday at Trouville or Dieppe is not confronted on his return with the question, ‘When is your book on France going to appear?’ A man who betakes himself to Switzerland for the winter sports is not instantly pinned by the statement, ‘I suppose your History of the Helvetian Republic is coming out this spring?’ Lecturing, at least my kind of lecturing, is not much more serious or meritorious than ski-ing or sea-bathing; and it happens to afford the holiday-maker far less opportunity of seeing the daily life of the people. Of all this I am only too well aware; and my only defence is that I am at least sincere in my enjoyment and appreciation of America, and equally sincere in my interest in its most serious problem, which I think a very serious problem indeed; the problem of democracy in the modern world. Democracy may be a very obvious and facile affair for plutocrats and politicians who only have to use it as a rhetorical term. But democracy is a very serious problem for democrats. I certainly do not apologise for the word democracy; but I do apologise for the word future. I am no Futurist; and any conjectures I make must be taken with the grain of salt which is indeed the salt of the earth; the decent and moderate humility which comes from a belief in free will. That faith is in itself a divine doubt. I do not believe in any of the scientific predictions about mankind; I notice that they always fail to predict any of the purely human developments of men; I also notice that even their successes prove the same truth as their failures; for their successful predictions are not about men but about machines. But there are two things which a man may reasonably do, in stating the probabilities of a problem, which do not involve any claim to be a prophet. The first is to tell the truth, and especially the neglected truth, about the tendencies that have already accumulated in human history; any miscalculation about which must at least mislead us in any case. We cannot be certain of being right about the future;

but we can be almost certain of being wrong about the future, if we are wrong about the past. The other thing that he can do is to note what ideas necessarily go together by their own nature; what ideas will triumph together or fall together. Hence it follows that this final chapter must consist of two things. The first is a summary of what has really happened to the idea of democracy in recent times; the second a suggestion of the fundamental doctrine which is necessary for its triumph at any time.

The last hundred years has seen a general decline in the democratic idea. If there be anybody left to whom this historical truth appears a paradox, it is only because during that period nobody has been taught history, least of all the history of ideas. If a sort of intellectual inquisition had been established, for the definition and differentiation of heresies, it would have been found that the original republican orthodoxy had suffered more and more from secessions, schisms, and backslidings. The highest point of democratic idealism and conviction was towards the end of the eighteenth century, when the American Republic was 'dedicated to the proposition that all men are equal.' It was then that the largest number of men had the most serious sort of conviction that the political problem could be solved by the vote of peoples instead of the arbitrary power of princes and privileged orders. These men encountered various difficulties and made various compromises in relation to the practical politics of their time; in England they preserved aristocracy; in America they preserved slavery. But though they had more difficulties, they had less doubts. Since their time democracy has been steadily disintegrated by doubts; and these political doubts have been contemporary with and often identical with religious doubts. This fact could be followed over almost the whole field of the modern world; in this place it will be more appropriate to take the great American example of slavery. I have found traces in all sorts of intelligent quarters of an extraordinary idea that all the Fathers of the Republic owned black men like beasts of burden because they knew no better, until the light of liberty was revealed to them by John Brown and Mrs. Beecher Stowe. One of the best weekly papers in England said recently that even those who drew up the Declaration of Independence did not include negroes in its generalisation about humanity. This is quite consistent with the current convention, in which we were all brought up; the theory that the heart of humanity broadens in ever larger circles of brotherhood, till we pass from embracing a black man to adoring a black beetle. Unfortunately it is quite inconsistent with the facts of

American history. The facts show that, in this problem of the Old South, the eighteenth century was *more* liberal than the nineteenth century. There was *more* sympathy for the negro in the school of Jefferson than in the school of Jefferson Davis. Jefferson, in the dark estate of his simple Deism, said the sight of slavery in his country made him tremble, remembering that God is just. His fellow Southerners, after a century of the world’s advance, said that slavery in itself was good, when they did not go farther and say that negroes in themselves were bad. And they were supported in this by the great and growing modern suspicion that nature is unjust. Difficulties seemed inevitably to delay justice, to the mind of Jefferson; but so they did to the mind of Lincoln. But that the slave was human and the servitude inhuman — that was, if anything, clearer to Jefferson than to Lincoln. The fact is that the utter separation and subordination of the black like a beast was a *progress*; it was a growth of nineteenth-century enlightenment and experiment; a triumph of science over superstition. It was ‘the way the world was going,’ as Matthew Arnold reverentially remarked in some connection; perhaps as part of a definition of God. Anyhow, it was not Jefferson’s definition of God. He fancied, in his far-off patriarchal way, a Father who had made all men brothers; and brutally unbrotherly as was the practice, such democratical Deists never dreamed of denying the theory. It was not until the scientific sophistries began that brotherhood was really disputed. Gobineau, who began most of the modern talk about the superiority and inferiority of racial stocks, was seized upon eagerly by the less generous of the slave-owners and trumpeted as a new truth of science and a new defence of slavery. It was not really until the dawn of Darwinism, when all our social relations began to smell of the monkey-house, that men thought of the barbarian as only a first and the baboon as a second cousin. The full servile philosophy has been a modern and even a recent thing; made in an age whose invisible deity was the Missing Link. The Missing Link was a true metaphor in more ways than one; and most of all in its suggestion of a chain.

By a symbolic coincidence, indeed, slavery grew more brazen and brutal under the encouragement of more than one movement of the progressive sort. Its youth was renewed for it by the industrial prosperity of Lancashire; and under that influence it became a commercial and competitive instead of a patriarchal and customary thing. We may say with no exaggerative irony that the unconscious patrons of slavery were Huxley and Cobden. The machines of Manchester were manufacturing a great many more things than the manufacturers knew or wanted to know; but they were certainly manufacturing the fetters of the slave, doubtless out of the best quality of steel and iron. But this is a minor illustration of the modern tendency, as compared with the main stream of scepticism which was destroying democracy. Evolution became more and more a vision of the break-up of our brotherhood, till by the end of the nineteenth century the genius of its greatest scientific romancer saw it end in the anthropophagous antics of the Time Machine. So far from evolution lifting us above the idea of enslaving men, it was providing us at least with a logical and potential argument for eating them. In the case of the American negroes, it may be remarked, it does at any rate permit the preliminary course of roasting them. All this materialistic hardening, which replaced the remorse of Jefferson, was part of the growing evolutionary suspicion that savages were not a part of the human race, or rather that there was really no such thing as the human race. The South had begun by agreeing reluctantly to the enslavement of men. The South ended by agreeing equally reluctantly to the emancipation of monkeys.

That is what had happened to the democratic ideal in a hundred years. Anybody can test it by comparing the final phase, I will not say with the ideal of Jefferson, but with the ideal of Johnson. There was far more horror of slavery in an eighteenth-century Tory like Dr. Johnson than in a nineteenth-century Democrat like Stephen Douglas. Stephen Douglas may be mentioned because he is a very representative type of the age of evolution and expansion; a man thinking in continents, like Cecil Rhodes, human and hopeful in a truly American fashion, and as a consequence cold and careless rather than hostile in the matter of the old mystical doctrines of equality. He ‘did not care whether slavery was voted up or voted down.’ His great opponent Lincoln did indeed care very much. But it was an intense individual conviction with Lincoln exactly as it was with Johnson. I doubt if the spirit of the age was not much more behind Douglas and his westward expansion of the white race. I am sure that more and more men were coming to be in the particular mental condition of Douglas; men in whom the old moral and mystical ideals had been undermined by doubt but only with a negative effect of indifference. Their positive convictions were all concerned with what some called progress and some imperialism. It is true that there was a sincere sectional enthusiasm against slavery in the North;

and that the slaves were actually emancipated in the nineteenth century. But I doubt whether the Abolitionists would ever have secured Abolition. Abolition was a by-product of the Civil War; which was fought for quite other reasons. Anyhow, if slavery had somehow survived to the age of Rhodes and Roosevelt and evolutionary imperialism, I doubt if the slaves would ever have been emancipated at all. Certainly if it had survived till the modern movement for the Servile State, they would never have been emancipated at all. Why should the world take the chains off the black man when it was just putting them on the white? And in so far as we owe the change to Lincoln, we owe it to Jefferson. Exactly what gives its real dignity to the figure of Lincoln is that he stands invoking a primitive first principle of the age of innocence, and holding up the tables of an ancient law, *against* the trend of the nineteenth century; repeating, ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator, etc.,’ to a generation that was more and more disposed to say something like this: ‘We hold these truths to be probable enough for pragmatists; that all things looking like men were evolved somehow, being endowed by heredity and environment with no equal rights, but very unequal wrongs,’ and so on. I do not believe that creed, left to itself, would ever have founded a state; and I am pretty certain that, left to itself, it would never have overthrown a slave state. What it did do, as I have said, was to produce some very wonderful literary and artistic flights of sceptical imagination. The world did have new visions, if they were visions of monsters in the moon and Martians striding about like spiders as tall as the sky, and the workmen and capitalists becoming two separate species, so that one could devour the other as gaily and greedily as a cat devours a bird. No one has done justice to the meaning of Mr. Wells and his original departure in fantastic fiction; to these nightmares that were the last apocalypse of the nineteenth century. They meant that the bottom had fallen out of the mind at last, that the bridge of brotherhood had broken down in the modern brain, letting up from the chasms this infernal light like a dawn. All had grown dizzy with degree and relativity; so that there would not be so very much difference between eating dog and eating darkie, or between eating darkie and eating dago. There were different sorts of apes; but there was no doubt that we were the superior sort.

Against all this irresistible force stood one immovable post. Against all this dance of doubt and degree stood something that can best be symbolised by a simple example. An ape cannot be a priest, but a negro can be a priest. The dogmatic type of Christianity, especially the Catholic type of Christianity, had riveted itself irrevocably to the manhood of all men. Where its faith was fixed by creeds and councils it could not save itself even by surrender. It could not gradually dilute democracy, as could a merely sceptical or secular democrat. There stood, in fact or in possibility, the solid and smiling figure of a black bishop. And he was either a man claiming the most towering spiritual privileges of a man, or he was the mere buffoonery and blasphemy of a monkey in a mitre. That is the point about Christian and Catholic democracy; it is not that it is necessarily at any moment more democratic, it is that its indestructible minimum of democracy really is indestructible. And by the nature of things that mystical democracy was destined to survive, when every other sort of democracy was free to destroy itself. And whenever democracy destroying itself is suddenly moved to save itself, it always grasps at rag or tag of that old tradition that alone is sure of itself. Hundreds have heard the story about the mediaeval demagogue who went about repeating the rhyme

When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?

Many have doubtless offered the obvious answer to the question, ‘The Serpent.’ But few seem to have noticed what would be the more modern answer to the question, if that innocent agitator went about propounding it. ‘Adam never delved and Eve never span, for the simple reason that they never existed. They are fragments of a Chaldeo-Babylonian mythos, and Adam is only a slight variation of Tag-Tug, pronounced Uttu. For the real beginning of humanity we refer you to Darwin’s *Origin of Species*.’ And then the modern man would go on to justify plutocracy to the mediaeval man by talking about the Struggle for Life and the Survival of the Fittest; and how the strongest man seized authority by means of anarchy, and proved himself a gentleman by behaving like a cad. Now I do not base my beliefs on the theology of John Ball, or on the literal and materialistic reading of the text of Genesis; though I think the story of Adam and Eve infinitely less absurd and unlikely than that of the prehistoric ‘strongest man’ who could fight a hundred men. But I do note the fact that the idealism of the leveller could be put in the form of an appeal to Scripture, and could not be put in the form of an appeal to Science. And I do note also that democrats were still driven to make the same appeal even in the very century of Science. Tennyson was, if ever there was one, an evolutionist in his vision and an aristocrat in his sympathies. He was always boasting that John Bull was evolutionary and not revolutionary, even as these Frenchmen. He did not pretend to have any creed beyond faintly trusting the larger hope. But when human dignity is really in danger, John Bull has to use the same old argument as John Ball. He tells Lady Clara Vere de Vere that ‘the gardener Adam and his wife smile at the claim of long descent’; their own descent being by no means long. Lady Clara might surely have scored off him pretty smartly by quoting from ‘Maud’ and ‘In Memoriam’ about evolution and the eft that was lord of valley and hill. But Tennyson has evidently forgotten all about Darwin and the long descent of man. If this was true of an evolutionist like Tennyson, it was naturally ten times truer of a revolutionist like Jefferson. The Declaration of Independence dogmatically bases all rights on the fact that God created all men equal; and it is right; for if they were not created equal, they were certainly evolved unequal.

There is no basis for democracy except in a dogma about the divine origin of man. That is a perfectly simple fact which the modern world will find out more and more to be a fact. Every other basis is a sort of sentimental confusion, full of merely verbal echoes of the older creeds. Those verbal associations are always vain for the vital purpose of constraining the tyrant. An idealist may say to a capitalist, ‘Don’t you sometimes feel in the rich twilight, when the lights twinkle from the distant hamlet in the hills, that all humanity is a holy family?’ But it is equally possible for the capitalist to reply with brevity and decision, ‘No, I don’t,’ and there is no more disputing about it further than about the beauty of a fading cloud. And the modern world of moods is a world of clouds, even if some of them are thunderclouds.

For I have only taken here, as a convenient working model, the case of negro slavery; because it was long peculiar to America and is popularly associated with it. It is more and more obvious that the line is no longer running between black and white but between rich and poor. As I have already noted in the case of Prohibition, the very same arguments of the inevitable suicide of the ignorant, of the impossibility of freedom for the unfit, which were once applied to barbarians brought from Africa are now applied to citizens born in America. It is argued even by industrialists that industrialism has produced a class submerged below the status of emancipated mankind. They imply that the Missing Link is no longer missing, even from England or the Northern States, and that the factories have manufactured their own monkeys. Scientific hypotheses about the feeble-minded and the criminal type will supply the masters of the modern world with more and more excuses for denying the dogma of equality in the case of white labour as well as black. And any man who knows the world knows perfectly well that to tell the millionaires, or their servants, that they are disappointing the sentiments of Thomas Jefferson, or disregarding a creed composed in the eighteenth century, will be about as effective as telling them that they are not observing the creed of St. Athanasius or keeping the rule of St. Benedict.

The world cannot keep its own ideals. The secular order cannot make secure any one of its own noble and natural conceptions of secular perfection. That will be found, as time goes on, the ultimate argument for a Church independent of the world and the secular order. What has become of all those ideal figures from the Wise Man of the Stoics to the democratic Deist of the eighteenth century? What has become of all that purely human hierarchy of chivalry, with its punctilious pattern of the good knight, its ardent ambition in the young squire? The very name of knight has come to represent the petty triumph of a profiteer, and the very word squire the petty tyranny of a landlord. What has become of all that golden liberality of the Humanists, who found on the high tablelands of the culture of Hellas the very balance of repose in beauty that is most lacking in the modern world? The very Greek language that they loved has become a mere label for snuffy and snobbish dons, and a mere cock-shy for cheap and half-educated utilitarians, who make it a symbol of superstition and reaction. We have lived to see a time when the heroic legend of the Republic and the Citizen, which seemed to Jefferson the eternal youth of the world, has begun to grow old in its turn. We cannot recover the earthly estate of knighthood, to which all the colours and complications of heraldry seemed as fresh and natural as flowers. We cannot re-enact the intellectual experiences of the Humanists, for whom the Greek grammar was like the song of a bird in spring. The more the matter is considered the clearer it will seem that these old experiences are now only alive, where they have found a lodgment in the Catholic tradition of Christendom, and made themselves friends for ever. St. Francis is the only surviving troubadour. St. Thomas More is the only surviving Humanist. St. Louis is the only surviving knight.

It would be the worst sort of insincerity, therefore, to conclude even so hazy an outline of so great and majestic a matter as the American democratic experiment, without testifying my belief that to this also the same ultimate test will come. So far as that democracy becomes or remains Catholic and Christian, that democracy will remain democratic. In so far as it does not, it will become wildly and wickedly undemocratic. Its rich will riot with a brutal indifference far beyond the feeble feudalism which retains some shadow of responsibility or at least of patronage. Its wage-slaves will either sink into heathen slavery, or seek relief in theories that are destructive not merely in method but in aim; since they are but the negations of the human appetites of property and personality. Eighteenth-century ideals, formulated in eighteenth-century language, have no longer in themselves the power to hold all those pagan passions back. Even those documents depended upon Deism; their real strength will survive in men who are still Deists; and the men who are still Deists are more than Deists. Men will more and more realise that there is no meaning in democracy if there is no meaning in anything; and that there is no meaning in anything if the universe has not a centre of significance and an authority that is the author of our rights. There is truth in every ancient fable, and there is here even something of it in the fancy that finds the symbol of the Republic in the bird that bore the bolts of Jove. Owls and bats may wander where they will in darkness, and for them as for the sceptics the universe may have no centre; kites and vultures may linger as they like over carrion, and for them as for the plutocrats existence may have no origin and no end; but it was far back in the land of legends, where instincts find their true images, that the cry went forth that freedom is an eagle, whose glory is gazing at the sun.

EUGENICS AND OTHER EVILS

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TO THE READER

I publish these essays at the present time for a particular reason connected with the present situation; a reason which I should like briefly to emphasize and make clear.

Though most of the conclusions, especially towards the end, are conceived with reference to recent events, the actual bulk of preliminary notes about the science of Eugenics were written before the war. It was a time when this theme was the topic of the hour; when eugenic babies — -not visibly very distinguishable from other babies — - sprawled all over the illustrated papers; when the evolutionary fancy of Nietzsche was the new cry among the intellectuals; and when Mr. Bernard Shaw and others were considering the idea that to breed a man like a cart-horse was the true way to attain that higher civilization, of intellectual magnanimity and sympathetic insight, which may be found in cart-horses. It may therefore appear that I took the opinion too controversially, and it seems to me that I some times took it too seriously. But the criticism of Eugenics soon expanded of itself into a more general criticism of a modern craze for scientific officialism and strict social organization.

And then the hour came when I felt, not without relief, that I might well fling all my notes into the fire. The fire was a very big one, and was burning up bigger things than such pedantic quackeries. And, anyhow, the issue itself was being settled in a very different style. Scientific officialism and organization in the State which had specialized in them, had gone to war with the older culture of Christendom. Either Prussianism would win and the protest would be hopeless, or Prussianism would lose and the protest would be needless. As the war advanced from poison gas to piracy against neutrals, it grew more and more plain that the scientifically organized State was not increasing in popularity. Whatever happened, no Englishmen would ever again go nosing round the stinks of that low laboratory. So I thought all I had written irrelevant, and put it out of my mind.

I am greatly grieved to say that it is not irrelevant. It has gradually grown apparent, to my astounded gaze, that the ruling classes in England are still proceeding on the assumption that Prussia is a pattern for the whole world. If parts of my book are nearly nine years old most of their principles and proceedings are a great deal older. They can offer us nothing but the same stuffy science, the same bullying bureaucracy and the same terrorism by tenth-rate professors that have led the German Empire to its recent conspicuous triumph. For that reason, three years after the war with Prussia, I collect and publish these papers.

G. K. C.

PART ONE

THE FALSE THEORY

I

WHAT IS EUGENICS?

The wisest thing in the world is to cry out before you are hurt. It is no good to cry out after you are hurt; especially after you are mortally hurt. People talk about the impatience of the populace; but sound historians know that most tyrannies have been possible because men moved too late. It is often essential to resist a tyranny before it exists. It is no answer to say, with a distant optimism, that the scheme is only in the air. A blow from a hatchet can only be parried while it is in the air.

There exists to-day a scheme of action, a school of thought, as collective and unmistakable as any of those by whose grouping alone we can make any outline of history. It is as firm a fact as the Oxford Movement, or the Puritans of the Long Parliament; or the Jansenists; or the Jesuits. It is a thing that can be pointed out; it is a thing that can be discussed; and it is a thing that can still be destroyed. It is called for convenience “Eugenics”; and that it ought to be destroyed I propose to prove in the pages that follow. I know that it means very different things to different people; but that is only because evil always takes advantage of ambiguity. I know it is praised with high professions of idealism and benevolence; with silver-tongued rhetoric about purer motherhood and a happier posterity. But that is only because evil is always flattered, as the Furies were called “The Gracious Ones.” I know that it numbers many disciples whose intentions are entirely innocent and humane; and who would be sincerely astonished at my describing it as I do. But that is only because evil always wins through the strength of its splendid dupes; and there has in all ages been a disastrous alliance between abnormal innocence and abnormal sin. Of these who are deceived I shall speak of course as we all do of such instruments; judging them by the good they think they are doing, and not by the evil which they really do. But Eugenics itself does exist for those who have sense enough to see that ideas exist; and Eugenics itself, in large quantities or small, coming quickly or coming slowly, urged from good motives or bad, applied to a thousand people or applied to three, Eugenics itself is a thing no more to be bargained about than poisoning.

It is not really difficult to sum up the essence of Eugenics: though some of the Eugenists seem to be rather vague about it. The movement consists of two parts: a moral basis, which is common to all, and a scheme of social application which varies a good deal. For the moral basis, it is obvious that man's ethical responsibility varies with his knowledge of consequences. If I were in charge of a baby (like Dr. Johnson in that tower of vision), and the baby was ill through having eaten the soap, I might possibly send for a doctor. I might be calling him away from much more serious cases, from the bedsides of babies whose diet has been far more deadly; but I should be justified. I could not be expected to know enough about his other patients to be obliged (or even entitled) to sacrifice to them the baby for whom I was primarily and directly responsible. Now the Eugenic moral basis is this; that the baby for whom we are primarily and directly responsible is the babe unborn. That is, that we know (or may come to know) enough of certain inevitable tendencies in biology to consider the fruit of some contemplated union in that direct and clear light of conscience which we can now only fix on the other partner in that union. The one duty can conceivably be as definite as or more definite than the other. The baby that does not exist can be considered even before the wife who does. Now it is essential to grasp that this is a comparatively new note in morality. Of course sane people always thought the aim of marriage was the procreation of children to the glory of God or according to the plan of Nature; but whether they counted such children as God's reward for service or Nature's premium on sanity, they always left the reward to God or the premium to Nature, as a less definable thing. The only person (and this is the point) towards whom one could have precise duties was the partner in the process. Directly considering the partner's claims was the nearest one could get to indirectly considering the claims of posterity. If the women of the harem sang praises of the hero as the Moslem mounted his horse, it was because this was the due of a man; if the Christian knight helped his wife off her horse, it was because this was the due of a woman. Definite and detailed dues of this kind they did not predicate of the babe unborn; regarding him in that agnostic and opportunist light in which Mr. Browdie regarded the hypothetical child of Miss Squeers. Thinking these sex relations healthy, they naturally hoped they would produce healthy children; but that was all. The Moslem woman doubtless expected Allah to send beautiful sons to an obedient wife; but she would not have allowed any direct vision of such sons to alter the obedience itself. She would not have said, “I will now be a disobedient wife; as the learned leech informs me that great prophets are often children of disobedient wives.” The knight doubtless hoped that the saints would help him to strong children, if he did all the duties of his station, one of which might be helping his wife off her horse; but he would not have refrained from doing this because he had read in a book that a course of falling off horses often resulted in the birth of a genius. Both Moslem and Christian would have thought such speculations not only impious but utterly unpractical. I quite agree with them; but that is not the point here.

The point here is that a new school believes Eugenics against Ethics. And it is proved by one familiar fact: that the heroisms of history are actually the crimes of Eugenics. The Eugenists’ books and articles are full of suggestions that non-eugenic unions should and may come to be regarded as we regard sins; that we should really feel that marrying an invalid is a kind of cruelty to children. But history is full of the praises of people who have held sacred such ties to invalids; of cases like those of Colonel Hutchinson and Sir William Temples, who remained faithful to betrothals when beauty and health had been apparently blasted. And though the illnesses of Dorothy Osborne and Mrs. Hutchinson may not fall under the Eugenic speculations (I do not know), it is obvious that they might have done so; and certainly it would not have made any difference to men’s moral opinion of the act. I do not discuss here which morality I favour; but I insist that they are opposite. The Eugenist really sets up as saints the very men whom hundreds of families have called sneaks. To be consistent, they ought to put up statues to the men who deserted their loves because of bodily misfortune; with inscriptions celebrating the good Eugenist who, on his fiancée falling off a bicycle, nobly refused to marry her; or to the young hero who, on hearing of an uncle with erysipelas, magnanimously broke his word. What is perfectly plain is this: that mankind have hitherto held the bond between man and woman so sacred, and the effect of it on the children so incalculable, that they have always admired the maintenance of honour more than the maintenance of safety. Doubtless they thought that even the children might be none the worse for not being the children of cowards and shirkers; but this was not the first thought, the first commandment. Briefly, we may say that while many moral systems have set restraints on sex almost as severe as any Eugenist could set, they have almost always had the character of securing the fidelity of the two sexes to each other, and leaving the rest to God. To introduce an ethic which makes that fidelity or infidelity vary with some calculation about heredity is that rarest of all things, a revolution that has not happened before.

It is only right to say here, though the matter should only be touched on, that many Eugenists would contradict this, in so far as to claim that there was a consciously Eugenic reason for the horror of those unions which begin with the celebrated denial to man of the privilege of marrying his grandmother. Dr. S. R. Steinmetz, with that creepy simplicity of mind with which the Eugenists chill the blood, remarks that “we do not yet know quite certainly” what were “the motives for the horror of” that horrible thing which is the agony of Oedipus. With entirely amiable intention, I ask Dr. S. R. Steinmetz to speak for himself. I know the motives for regarding a mother or a sister as separate from other women; nor have I reached them by any curious researches. I found them where I found an analogous aversion to eating a baby for breakfast. I found them in a rooted detestation in the human soul to liking a thing in one way, when you already like it in another quite incompatible way. Now it is perfectly true that this aversion may have acted eugenically; and so had a certain ultimate confirmation and basis in the laws of procreation. But there really cannot be any Eugenist quite so dull as not to see that this is not a defence of Eugenics but a direct denial of Eugenics. If something which has been discovered at last by the lamp of learning is something which has been acted on from the first by the light of nature, this (so far as it goes) is plainly not an argument for pestering people, but an argument for letting them alone. If men did not marry their grandmothers when it was, for all they knew, a most hygienic habit; if we know now that they instinctively avoided scientific peril; that, so far as it goes, is a point in favour of letting people marry anyone they like. It is simply the statement that sexual selection, or what Christians call falling in love, is a part of man which in the rough and in the long run can be trusted. And that is the destruction of the whole of this science at a blow.

The second part of the definition, the persuasive or coercive methods to be employed, I shall deal with more fully in the second part of this book. But some such summary as the following may here be useful. Far into the unfathomable past of our race we find the assumption that the founding of a family is the personal adventure of a free man. Before slavery sank slowly out of sight under the new climate of Christianity, it may or may not be true that slaves were in some sense bred like cattle, valued as a promising stock for labour. If it was so it was so in a much looser and vaguer sense than the breeding of the Eugenists; and such modern philosophers read into the old paganism a fantastic pride and cruelty which are wholly modern. It may be, however, that pagan slaves had some shadow of the blessings of the Eugenist's care. It is quite certain that the pagan freemen would have killed the first man that suggested it. I mean suggested it seriously; for Plato was only a Bernard Shaw who unfortunately made his jokes in Greek. Among free men, the law, more often the creed, most commonly of all the custom, have laid all sorts of restrictions on sex for this reason or that. But law and creed and custom have never concentrated heavily except upon fixing and keeping the family when once it had been made. The act of founding the family, I repeat, was an individual adventure outside the frontiers of the State. Our first forgotten ancestors left this tradition behind them; and our own latest fathers and mothers a few years ago would have thought us lunatics to be discussing it. The shortest general definition of Eugenics on its practical side is that it does, in a more or less degree, propose to control some families at least as if they were families of pagan slaves. I shall discuss later the question of the people to whom this pressure may be applied; and the much more puzzling question of what people will apply it. But it is to be applied at the very least by somebody to somebody, and that on certain calculations about breeding which are affirmed to be demonstrable. So much for the subject itself. I say that this thing exists. I define it as closely as matters involving moral evidence can be defined; I call it Eugenics. If after that anyone chooses to say that Eugenics is not the Greek for this — - I am content to answer that “chivalrous” is not the French for “horsy”; and that such controversial games are more horsy than chivalrous.

II

THE FIRST OBSTACLES

Now before I set about arguing these things, there is a cloud of skirmishers, of harmless and confused modern sceptics, who ought to be cleared off or calmed down before we come to debate with the real doctors of the heresy. If I sum up my statement thus: “Eugenics, as discussed, evidently means the control of some men over the marriage and unmarriage of others; and probably means the control of the few over the marriage and unmarriage of the many,” I shall first of all receive the sort of answers that float like skim on the surface of teacups and talk. I may very roughly and rapidly divide these preliminary objectors into five sects; whom I will call the Euphemists, the Casuists, the Autocrats, the Precedenters, and the Endeavourers. When we have answered the immediate protestation of all these good, shouting, short-sighted people, we can begin to do justice to those intelligences that are really behind the idea.

Most Eugenists are Euphemists. I mean merely that short words startle them, while long words soothe them. And they are utterly incapable of translating the one into the other, however obviously they mean the same thing. Say to them “The persuasive and even coercive powers of the citizen should enable him to make sure that the burden of longevity in the previous generations does not become disproportionate and intolerable, especially to the females?”; say this to them and they sway slightly to and fro like babies sent to sleep in cradles. Say to them “Murder your mother,” and they sit up quite suddenly. Yet the two sentences, in cold logic, are exactly the same. Say to them “It is not improbable that a period may arrive when the narrow if once useful distinction between the anthropoid *homo* and the other animals, which has been modified on so many moral points, may be modified also even in regard to the important question of the extension of human diet”; say this to them, and beauty born of murmuring sound will pass into their faces. But say to them, in a simple, manly, hearty way “Let’s eat a man!” and their surprise is quite surprising. Yet the sentences say just the same thing. Now, if anyone thinks these two instances extravagant, I will refer to two actual cases from the Eugenic discussions. When Sir Oliver Lodge spoke of the methods “of the stud-farm” many Eugenists exclaimed against the crudity of the suggestion. Yet long before that one of the ablest champions in the other interest had written “What nonsense this education is! Who could educate a racehorse or a greyhound?” Which most certainly either means nothing, or the human stud-farm. Or again, when I spoke of people “being married forcibly by the police,” another distinguished Eugenist almost achieved high spirits in his hearty assurance that no such thing had ever come into their heads. Yet a few days after I saw a Eugenist pronouncement, to the effect that the State ought to extend its powers in this area. The State can only be that corporation which men permit to employ compulsion; and this area can only be the area of sexual selection. I mean somewhat more than an idle jest when I say that the policeman will generally be found in that area. But I willingly admit that the policeman who looks after weddings will be like the policeman who looks after wedding-presents. He will be in plain clothes. I do not mean that a man in blue with a helmet will drag the bride and bridegroom to the altar. I do mean that nobody that man in blue is told to arrest will even dare to come near the church. Sir Oliver did not mean that men would be tied up in stables and scrubbed down by grooms. He meant that they would undergo a loss of liberty which to men is even more infamous. He meant that the only formula important to Eugenists would be “by Smith out of Jones.” Such a formula is one of the shortest in the world; and is certainly the shortest way with the Euphemists.

The next sect of superficial objectors is even more irritating. I have called them, for immediate purposes, the Casuists. Suppose I say “I, dislike this spread of Cannibalism in the West End restaurants.” Somebody is sure to say “Well, after all, Queen Eleanor when she sucked blood from her husband’s arm was a cannibal.” What is one to say to such people? One can only say “Confine yourself to sucking poisoned blood from people’s arms? and I permit you to call yourself by the glorious title of Cannibal.” In this sense people say of Eugenics, “After all, whenever we discourage a schoolboy from marrying a mad negress with a hump back, we are really Eugenists.” Again one can only answer, “Confine yourselves strictly to such schoolboys as are naturally attracted to hump-backed negresses; and you may exult in the title of Eugenist, all the more proudly because that distinction will be rare.” But surely anyone’s common-sense must tell him that if Eugenics dealt only with such extravagant cases, it would be called common-sense — - and not Eugenics. The human race has excluded such absurdities for unknown ages; and has never yet called it Eugenics. You may call it flogging when you hit a choking gentleman on the back; you may call it torture when a man unfreezes his fingers at the fire; but if you talk like that a little longer you will cease to live among living men. If nothing but this mad minimum of accident were involved, there would be no such thing as a Eugenic Congress, and certainly no such thing as this book.

I had thought of calling the next sort of superficial people the Idealists; but I think this implies a humility towards impersonal good they hardly show; so I call them the Autocrats. They are those who give us generally to understand that every modern reform will "work" all right, because they will be there to see. Where they will be, and for how long, they do not explain very clearly. I do not mind their looking forward to numberless lives in succession; for that is the shadow of a human or divine hope. But even a theosophist does not expect to be a vast number of people at once. And these people most certainly propose to be responsible for a whole movement after it has left their hands. Each man promises to be about a thousand policemen. If you ask them how this or that will work, they will answer, "Oh, I would certainly insist on this"; or "I would never go so far as that"; as if they could return to this earth and do what no ghost has ever done quite successfully — - force men to forsake their sins. Of these it is enough to say that they do not understand the nature of a law any more than the nature of a dog. If you let loose a law, it will do as a dog does. It will obey its own nature, not yours. Such sense as you have put into the law (or the dog) will be fulfilled. But you will not be able to fulfill a fragment of anything you have forgotten to put into it.

Along with such idealists should go the strange people who seem to think that you can consecrate and purify any campaign for ever by repeating the names of the abstract virtues that its better advocates had in mind. These people will say "So far from aiming at *slavery*, the Eugenists are seeking *true* liberty; liberty from disease and degeneracy, etc." Or they will say "We can assure Mr. Chesterton that the Eugenists have no intention of segregating the harmless; justice and mercy are the very motto of — -" etc. To this kind of thing perhaps the shortest answer is this. Many of those who speak thus are agnostic or generally unsympathetic to official religion. Suppose one of them said "The Church of England is full of hypocrisy." What would he think of me if I answered, "I assure you that hypocrisy is condemned by every form of Christianity; and is particularly repudiated in the Prayer Book”? Suppose he said that the Church of Rome had been guilty of great cruelties. What would he think of me if I answered, “The Church is expressly bound to meekness and charity; and therefore cannot be cruel”? This kind of people need not detain us long. Then there are others whom I may call the Precedenters; who flourish particularly in Parliament. They are best represented by the solemn official who said the other day that he could not understand the clamour against the Feeble-Minded Bill as it only extended the “principles” of the old Lunacy Laws. To which again one can only answer “Quite so. It only extends the principles of the Lunacy Laws to persons without a trace of lunacy.” This lucid politician finds an old law, let us say, about keeping lepers in quarantine. He simply alters the word “lepers” to “long-nosed people,” and says blandly that the principle is the same.

Perhaps the weakest of all are those helpless persons whom I have called the Endeavourers. The prize specimen of them was another M. P. who defended the same Bill as “an honest attempt” to deal with a great evil: as if one had a right to dragoon and enslave one’s fellow citizens as a kind of chemical experiment; in a state of reverent agnosticism about what would come of it. But with this fatuous notion that one can deliberately establish the Inquisition or the Terror, and then faintly trust the larger hope, I shall have to deal more seriously in a subsequent chapter. It is enough to say here that the best thing the honest Endeavourer could do would be to make an honest attempt to know what he is doing. And not to do anything else until he has found out. Lastly, there is a class of controversialists so hopeless and futile that I have really failed to find a name for them. But whenever anyone attempts to argue rationally for or against any existent and recognizable *thing*, such as the Eugenic class of legislation, there are always people who begin to chop hay about Socialism and Individualism; and say “*You* object to all State interference; I am in favour of State interference. You are an Individualist; I, on the other hand,” etc. To which I can only answer, with heart-broken patience, that I am not an Individualist, but a poor fallen but baptized journalist who is trying to write a book about Eugenists, several of whom he has met; whereas he never met an Individualist and is by no means certain he would recognize him if he did. In short, I do not deny, but strongly affirm, the right of the State to interfere to cure a great evil. I say in this case it would interfere to create a great evil; and I am not going to be turned from the discussion of that direct issue to bottomless botherations about Socialism and Individualism, or the relative advantages of always turning to the right and always turning to the left.

And for the rest, there is undoubtedly an enormous mass of sensible, rather thoughtless people, whose rooted sentiment it is that any deep change in our society must be in some way infinitely distant. They cannot believe that men in hats and coats like themselves can be preparing a revolution; all their Victorian philosophy has taught them that such transformations are always slow. Therefore, when I speak of Eugenic legislation, or the coming of the Eugenic State, they think of it as something like *The Time Machine* or *Looking Backward*: a thing that, good or bad, will have to fit itself to their great-great-great-grandchild, who may be very different and may like it; and who in any case is rather a distant relative. To all this I have, to begin with, a very short and simple answer. The Eugenic State has begun. The first of the Eugenic Laws has already been adopted by the Government of this country; and passed with the applause of both parties through the dominant House of Parliament. This first Eugenic Law clears the ground and may be said to proclaim negative Eugenics; but it cannot be defended, and nobody has attempted to defend it, except on the Eugenic theory. I will call it the Feeble-Minded Bill, both for brevity and because the description is strictly accurate. It is, and quite simply and literally, a Bill for incarcerating as madmen those whom no doctor will consent to call mad. It is enough if some doctor or other may happen to call them weak-minded. Since there is scarcely any human being to whom this term has not been conversationally applied by his own friends and relatives on some occasion or other (unless his friends and relatives have been lamentably lacking in spirit), it can be clearly seen that this law, like the early Christian Church (to which, however, it presents points of dissimilarity), is a net drawing in of all kinds. It must not be supposed that we have a stricter definition incorporated in the Bill. Indeed, the first definition of “feeble-minded” in the Bill was much looser and vaguer than the phrase “feeble-minded” itself. It is a piece of yawning idiocy about “persons who though capable of earning their living under favourable circumstances” (as if anyone could earn his living if circumstances were directly unfavourable to his doing so), are nevertheless “incapable of managing their affairs with proper prudence”; which is exactly what all the world and his wife are saying about their neighbours all over this planet. But as an incapacity for any kind of thought is now regarded as statesmanship, there is nothing so very novel about such slovenly drafting. What is novel and what is vital is this: that the *defence* of this crazy Coercion Act is a Eugenic defence. It is not only openly said, it is eagerly urged, that the aim of the measure is to prevent any person whom these propagandists do not happen to think intelligent from having any wife or children. Every tramp who is sulky, every labourer who is shy, every rustic who is eccentric, can quite easily be brought under such conditions as were designed for homicidal maniacs. That is the situation; and that is the point. England has forgotten the Feudal State; it is in the last anarchy of the Industrial State; there is much in Mr. Belloc’s theory that it is approaching the Servile State; it cannot at present get at the Distributive State; it has almost certainly missed the Socialist State. But we are already under the Eugenist State; and nothing remains to us but rebellion.

III

THE ANARCHY FROM ABOVE

A silent anarchy is eating out our society. I must pause upon the expression; because the true nature of anarchy is mostly misapprehended. It is not in the least necessary that anarchy should be violent; nor is it necessary that it should come from below. A government may grow anarchic as much as a people. The more sentimental sort of Tory uses the word anarchy as a mere term of abuse for rebellion; but he misses a most important intellectual distinction. Rebellion may be wrong and disastrous; but even when rebellion is wrong, it is never anarchy. When it is not self-defence, it is usurpation. It aims at setting up a new rule in place of the old rule. And while it cannot be anarchic in essence (because it has an aim), it certainly cannot be anarchic in method; for men must be organized when they fight; and the discipline in a rebel army has to be as good as the discipline in the royal army. This deep principle of distinction must be clearly kept in mind. Take for the sake of symbolism those two great spiritual stories which, whether we count them myths or mysteries, have so long been the two hinges of all European morals. The Christian who is inclined to sympathize generally with constituted authority will think of rebellion under the image of Satan, the rebel against God. But Satan, though a traitor, was not an anarchist. He claimed the crown of the cosmos; and had he prevailed, would have expected his rebel angels to give up rebelling. On the other hand, the Christian whose sympathies are more generally with just self-defence among the oppressed will think rather of Christ Himself defying the High Priests and scourging the rich traders. But whether or no Christ was (as some say) a Socialist, He most certainly was not an Anarchist. Christ, like Satan, claimed the throne. He set up a new authority against an old authority; but He set it up with positive commandments and a comprehensible scheme. In this light all mediaeval people — - indeed, all people until a little while ago — - would have judged questions involving revolt. John Ball would have offered to pull down the government because it was a bad government, not because it was a government. Richard II would have blamed Bolingbroke not as a disturber of the peace, but as a usurper. Anarchy, then, in the useful sense of the word, is a thing utterly distinct from any rebellion, right or wrong. It is not necessarily angry; it is not, in its first stages, at least, even necessarily painful. And, as I said before, it is often entirely silent.

Anarchy is that condition of mind or methods in which you cannot stop yourself. It is the loss of that self-control which can return to the normal. It is not anarchy because men are permitted to begin uproar, extravagance, experiment, peril. It is anarchy when people cannot *end* these things. It is not anarchy in the home if the whole family sits up all night on New Year's Eve. It is anarchy in the home if members of the family sit up later and later for months afterwards. It was not anarchy in the Roman villa when, during the Saturnalia, the slaves turned masters or the masters slaves. It was (from the slave-owners' point of view) anarchy if, after the Saturnalia, the slaves continued to behave in a Saturnalian manner; but it is historically evident that they did not. It is not anarchy to have a picnic; but it is anarchy to lose all memory of mealtimes. It would, I think, be anarchy if (as is the disgusting suggestion of some) we all took what we liked off the sideboard. That is the way swine would eat if swine had sideboards; they have no immovable feasts; they are uncommonly progressive, are swine. It is this inability to return within rational limits after a legitimate extravagance that is the really dangerous disorder. The modern world is like Niagara. It is magnificent, but it is not strong. It is as weak as water — - like Niagara. The objection to a cataract is not that it is deafening or dangerous or even destructive, it is that it cannot stop. Now it is plain that this sort of chaos can possess the powers that rule a society as easily as the society so ruled. And in modern England it is the powers that rule who are chiefly possessed by it — - who are truly possessed by devils. The phrase, in its sound old psychological sense, is not too strong. The State has suddenly and quietly gone mad. It is talking nonsense and it can't stop.

Now it is perfectly plain that government ought to have, and must have, the same sort of right to use exceptional methods occasionally that the private householder has to have a picnic or to sit up all night on New Year's Eve. The State, like the householder, is sane if it can treat such exceptions as exceptions. Such desperate remedies may not even be right; but such remedies are endurable as long as they are admittedly desperate. Such cases, of course, are the communism of food in a besieged city; the official disavowal of an arrested spy; the subjection of a patch of civil life to martial law; the cutting of communication in a plague; or that deepest degradation of the commonwealth, the use of national soldiers not against foreign soldiers, but against their own brethren in revolt. Of these exceptions some are right and some wrong; but all are right in so far as they are taken as exceptions. The modern world is insane, not so much because it admits the abnormal as because it cannot recover the normal.

We see this in the vague extension of punishments like imprisonment; often the very reformers who admit that prison is bad for people propose to reform them by a little more of it. We see it in panic legislation like that after the White Slave scare, when the torture of flogging was revived for all sorts of ill-defined and vague and variegated types of men. Our fathers were never so mad, even when they were torturers. They stretched the man out on the rack. They did not stretch the rack out, as we are doing. When men went witch-burning they may have seen witches everywhere — - because their minds were fixed on witchcraft. But they did not see things to burn everywhere, because their minds were unfixed. While tying some very unpopular witch to the stake, with the firm conviction that she was a spiritual tyranny and pestilence, they did not say to each other, “A little burning is what my Aunt Susan wants, to cure her of her back-biting,” or “Some of these faggots would do your Cousin James good, and teach him to play with poor girls’ affections.”

Now the name of all this is Anarchy. It not only does not know what it wants, but it does not even know what it hates. It multiplies excessively in the more American sort of English newspapers. When this new sort of New Englander burns a witch the whole prairie catches fire. These people have not the decision and detachment of the doctrinal ages. They cannot do a monstrous action and still see it is monstrous. Wherever they make a stride they make a rut. They cannot stop their own thoughts, though their thoughts are pouring into the pit.

A final instance, which can be sketched much more briefly, can be found in this general fact: that the definition of almost every crime has become more and more indefinite, and spreads like a flattening and thinning cloud over larger and larger landscapes. Cruelty to children, one would have thought, was a thing about as unmistakable, unusual and appalling as parricide. In its application it has come to cover almost every negligence that can occur in a needy household. The only distinction is, of course, that these negligences are punished in the poor, who generally can’t help them, and not in the rich, who generally can. But that is not the point I am arguing just now. The point here is that a crime we all instinctively connect with Herod on the bloody night of Innocents has come precious near being attributable to Mary and Joseph when they lost their child in the Temple. In the light of a fairly recent case (the confessedly kind mother who was lately jailed because her confessedly healthy children had no water to wash in) no one, I think, will call this an illegitimate literary exaggeration. Now this is exactly as if all the horror and heavy punishment, attached in the simplest tribes to parricide, could now be used against my son who had done any act that could colourably be supposed to have worried his father, and so affected his health. Few of us would be safe.

Another case out of hundreds is the loose extension of the idea of libel. Libel cases bear no more trace of the old and just anger against the man who bore false witness against his neighbour than "cruelty" cases do of the old and just horror of the parents that hated their own flesh. A libel case has become one of the sports of the less athletic rich — - a variation on *baccarat*, a game of chance. A music-hall actress got damages for a song that was called "vulgar," which is as if I could fine or imprison my neighbour for calling my handwriting "rococo." A politician got huge damages because he was said to have spoken to children about Tariff Reform; as if that seductive topic would corrupt their virtue, like an indecent story. Sometimes libel is defined as anything calculated to hurt a man in his business; in which case any new tradesman calling himself a grocer slanders the grocer opposite. All this, I say, is Anarchy; for it is clear that its exponents possess no power of distinction, or sense of proportion, by which they can draw the line between calling a woman a popular singer and calling her a bad lot; or between charging a man with leading infants to Protection and leading them to sin and shame. But the vital point to which to return is this. That it is not necessarily nor even specially, an anarchy in the populace. It is an anarchy in the organ of government. It is the magistrates — - voices of the governing class — - who cannot distinguish between cruelty and carelessness. It is the judges (and their very submissive special juries) who cannot see the difference between opinion and slander. And it is the highly placed and highly paid experts who have brought in the first Eugenic Law, the Feeble-Minded Bill — - thus showing that they can see no difference between a mad and a sane man.

That, to begin with, is the historic atmosphere in which this thing was born. It is a peculiar atmosphere, and luckily not likely to last. Real progress bears the same relation to it that a happy girl laughing bears to an hysterical girl who cannot stop laughing. But I have described this atmosphere first because it is the only atmosphere in which such a thing as the Eugenist legislation could be proposed among men. All other ages would have called it to some kind of logical account, however academic or narrow. The lowest sophist in the Greek schools would remember enough of Socrates to force the Eugenist to tell him (at least) whether Midias was segregated because he was curable or because he was incurable. The meanest Thomist of the mediaeval monasteries would have the sense to see that you cannot discuss a madman when you have not discussed a man. The most owlish Calvinist commentator in the seventeenth century would ask the Eugenist to reconcile such Bible texts as derided fools with the other Bible texts that praised them. The dullest shopkeeper in Paris in l790 would have asked what were the Rights of Man, if they did not include the rights of the lover, the husband, and the father. It is only in our own London Particular (as Mr. Guppy said of the fog) that small figures can loom so large in the vapour, and even mingle with quite different figures, and have the appearance of a mob. But, above all, I have dwelt on the telescopic quality in these twilight avenues, because unless the reader realizes how elastic and unlimited they are, he simply will not believe in the abominations we have to combat.

One of those wise old fairy tales, that come from nowhere and flourish everywhere, tells how a man came to own a small magic machine like a coffee-mill, which would grind anything he wanted when he said one word and stop when he said another. After performing marvels (which I wish my conscience would let me put into this book for padding) the mill was merely asked to grind a few grains of salt at an officers' mess on board ship; for salt is the type everywhere of small luxury and exaggeration, and sailors' tales should be taken with a grain of it. The man remembered the word that started the salt mill, and then, touching the word that stopped it, suddenly remembered that he forgot. The tall ship sank, laden and sparkling to the topmasts with salt like Arctic snows; but the mad mill was still grinding at the ocean bottom, where all the men lay drowned. And that (so says this fairy tale) is why the great waters about our world have a bitter taste. For the fairy tales knew what the modern mystics don't — - that one should not let loose either the supernatural or the natural.

IV

THE LUNATIC AND THE LAW

The modern evil, we have said, greatly turns on this: that people do not see that the exception proves the rule. Thus it may or may not be right to kill a murderer; but it can only conceivably be right to kill a murderer because it is wrong to kill a man. If the hangman, having got his hand in, proceeded to hang friends and relatives to his taste and fancy, he would (intellectually) unhang the first man, though the first man might not think so. Or thus again, if you say an insane man is irresponsible, you imply that a sane man is responsible. He is responsible for the insane man. And the attempt of the Eugenists and other fatalists to treat all men as irresponsible is the largest and flattest folly in philosophy. The Eugenist has to treat everybody, including himself, as an exception to a rule that isn't there.

The Eugenists, as a first move, have extended the frontiers of the lunatic asylum; let us take this as our definite starting point, and ask ourselves what lunacy is, and what is its fundamental relation to human society. Now that raw juvenile scepticism that clogs all thought with catchwords may often be heard to remark that the mad are only the minority, the sane only the majority. There is a neat exactitude about such people's nonsense; they seem to miss the point by magic. The mad are not a minority because they are not a corporate body; and that is what their madness means. The sane are not a majority; they are mankind. And mankind (as its name would seem to imply) is a *kind*, not a degree. In so far as the lunatic differs, he differs from all minorities and majorities in kind. The madman who thinks he is a knife cannot go into partnership with the other who thinks he is a fork. There is no trysting place outside reason; there is no inn on those wild roads that are beyond the world.

The madman is not he that defies the world. The saint, the criminal, the martyr, the cynic, the nihilist may all defy the world quite sanely. And even if such fanatics would destroy the world the world owes them a strictly fair trial according to proof and public law. But the madman is not the man who defies the world; he is the man who denies it. Suppose we are all standing round a field and looking at a tree in the middle of it. It is perfectly true that we all see it (as the decadents say) in infinitely different aspects: that is not the point; the point is that we all say it is a tree. Suppose, if you will, that we are all poets? which seems improbable; so that each of us could turn his aspect into a vivid image distinct from a tree. Suppose one says it looks like a green cloud and another like a green fountain, and a third like a green dragon and the fourth like a green cheese. The fact remains: that they all say it looks like these things. It is a tree. Nor are any of the poets in the least mad because of any opinions they may form, however frenzied, about the functions or future of the tree. A conservative poet may wish to clip the tree; a revolutionary poet may wish to burn it. An optimist poet may want to make it a Christmas tree and hang candles on it. A pessimist poet may want to hang himself on it. None of these are mad, because they are all talking about the same thing. But there is another man who is talking horribly about something else. There is a monstrous exception to mankind. Why he is so we know not; a new theory says it is heredity; an older theory says it is devils. But in any case, the spirit of it is the spirit that denies, the spirit that really denies realities. This is the man who looks at the tree and does not say it looks like a lion, but says that it is a lamp-post.

I do not mean that all mad delusions are as concrete as this, though some are more concrete. Believing your own body is glass is a more daring denial of reality than believing a tree is a glass lamp at the top of a pole. But all true delusions have in them this unalterable assertion — - that what is not is. The difference between us and the maniac is not about how things look or how things ought to look, but about what they self-evidently are. The lunatic does not say that he ought to be King; Perkin Warbeck might say that. He says he is King. The lunatic does not say he is as wise as Shakespeare; Bernard Shaw might say that. The lunatic says he *is* Shakespeare. The lunatic does not say he is divine in the same sense as Christ; Mr. R. J. Campbell would say that. The lunatic says he *is* Christ. In all cases the difference is a difference about what is there; not a difference touching what should be done about it.

For this reason, and for this alone, the lunatic is outside public law. This is the abysmal difference between him and the criminal. The criminal admits the facts, and therefore permits us to appeal to the facts. We can so arrange the facts around him that he may really understand that agreement is in his own interests. We can say to him, “Do not steal apples from this tree, or we will hang you on that tree.” But if the man really thinks one tree is a Lamp-post and the other tree a Trafalgar Square fountain, we simply cannot treat with him at all. It is obviously useless to say, “Do not steal apples from this lamp-post, or I will hang you on that fountain.” If a man denies the facts, there is no answer but to lock him up. He cannot speak our language: not that varying verbal language which often misses fire even with us, but that enormous alphabet of sun and moon and green grass and blue sky in which alone we meet, and by which alone we can signal to each other. That unique man of genius, George Macdonald, described in one of his weird stories two systems of space co-incident; so that where I knew there was a piano standing in a drawing-room you knew there was a rose-bush growing in a garden. Something of this sort is in small or great affairs the matter with the madman. He cannot have a vote, because he is the citizen of another country. He is a foreigner. Nay, he is an invader and an enemy; for the city he lives in has been super-imposed on ours.

Now these two things are primarily to be noted in his case. First, that we can only condemn him to a *general* doom, because we only know his *general* nature. All criminals, who do particular things for particular reasons (things and reasons which, however criminal, are always comprehensible), have been more and more tried for such separate actions under separate and suitable laws ever since Europe began to become a civilization — - and until the rare and recent reincursions of barbarism in such things as the Indeterminate Sentence. Of that I shall speak later; it is enough for this argument to point out the plain facts. It is the plain fact that every savage, every sultan, every outlawed baron, every brigand-chief has always used this instrument of the Indeterminate Sentence, which has been recently offered us as something highly scientific and humane. All these people, in short, being barbarians, have always kept their captives until they (the barbarians) chose to think the captives were in a fit frame of mind to come out. It is also the plain fact that all that has been called civilization or progress, justice or liberty, for nearly three thousand years, has had the general direction of treating even the captive as a free man, in so far as some clear case of some defined crime had to be shown against him. All law has meant allowing the criminal, within some limits or other, to argue with the law: as Job was allowed, or rather challenged, to argue with God. But the criminal is, among civilized men, tried by one law for one crime for a perfectly simple reason: that the motive of the crime like the meaning of the law, is conceivable to the common intelligence. A man is punished specially as a burglar, and not generally as a bad man, because a man may be a burglar and, in many other respects not be a bad man. The act of burglary is punishable because it is intelligible. But when acts are unintelligible, we can only refer them to a general untrustworthiness, and guard against them by a general restraint. If a man breaks into a house to get a piece of bread, we can appeal to his reason in various ways. We can hang him for housebreaking; or again (as has occurred to some daring thinkers) we can give him a piece of bread. But if he breaks in, let us say, to steal the parings of other people's finger nails, then we are in a difficulty: we cannot imagine what he is going to do with them, and therefore cannot easily imagine what we are going to do with him. If a villain comes in, in cloak and mask, and puts a little arsenic in the soup, we can collar him and say to him distinctly, "You are guilty of murder; and I will now consult the code of tribal law, under which we live, to see if this practice is not forbidden." But if a man in the same cloak and mask is found at midnight putting a little soda-water in the soup, what can we say? Our charge necessarily becomes a more general one. We can only observe, with a moderation almost amounting to weakness, "You seem to be the sort of person who will do this sort of thing." And then we can lock him up. The principle of the indeterminate sentence is the creation of the indeterminate mind. It does apply to the incomprehensible creature, the lunatic. And it applies to nobody else.

The second thing to be noted is this: that it is only by the unanimity of sane men that we can condemn this man as utterly separate. If he says a tree is a lamp-post he is mad; but only because all other men say it is a tree. If some men thought it was a tree with a lamp on it, and others thought it was a lamp-post wreathed with branches and vegetation, then it would be a matter of opinion and degree; and he would not be mad, but merely extreme. Certainly he would not be mad if nobody but a botanist could see it was a tree. Certainly his enemies might be madder than he, if nobody but a lamplighter could see it was not a lamp-post. And similarly a man is not an imbecile if only a Eugenist thinks so. The question then raised would not be his sanity, but the sanity of one botanist or one lamplighter or one Eugenist. That which can condemn the abnormally foolish is not the abnormally clever, which is obviously a matter in dispute. That which can condemn the abnormally foolish is the normally foolish. It is when he begins to say and do things that even stupid people do not say or do, that we have a right to treat him as the exception and not the rule. It is only because we none of us profess to be anything more than man that we have authority to treat him as something less.

Now the first principle behind Eugenics becomes plain enough. It is the proposal that somebody or something should criticize men with the same superiority with which men criticize madmen, it might exercise this right with great moderation; but I am not here talking about the exercise, but about the right. Its *claim* certainly is to bring all human life under the Lunacy Laws.

Now this is the first weakness in the case of the Eugenists: that they cannot define who is to control whom; they cannot say by what authority they do these things. They cannot see the exception is different from the rule — - even when it is misrule, even when it is an unruly rule. The sound sense in the old Lunacy Law was this: that you cannot deny that a man is a citizen until you are practically prepared to deny that he is a man. Men, and only men, can be the judges of whether he is a man. But any private club of prigs can be judges of whether he ought to be a citizen. When once we step down from that tall and splintered peak of pure insanity we step on to a tableland where one man is not so widely different from an other. Outside the exception, what we find is the average. And the practical, legal shape of the quarrel is this: that unless the normal men have the right to expel the abnormal, what particular sort of abnormal men have the right to expel the normal men? If sanity is not good enough, what is there that is saner than sanity?

Without any grip of the notion of a rule and an exception, the general idea of judging people’s heredity breaks down and is useless. For this reason: that if everything is the result of a doubtful heredity, the judgment itself is the result of a doubtful heredity also. Let it judge not that it be not judged. Eugenists, strange to say, have fathers and mothers like other people; and our opinion about their fathers and mothers is worth exactly as much as their opinions about ours. None of the parents were lunatics, and the rest is mere likes and dislikes. Suppose Dr. Saleeby had gone to Byron and said, “My lord, I perceive you have a club-foot and inordinate passions: such are the hereditary results of a profligate soldier marrying a hot-tempered woman.” The poet might logically reply (with characteristic lucidity and impropriety), “Sir, I perceive you have a confused mind and an unphilosophic theory about other people’s love affairs. Such are the hereditary delusions bred by a Syrian doctor marrying a Quaker lady from

New York.” Suppose Dr. Karl Pearson had said to Shelley, “From what I see of your temperament, you are running great risks in forming a connection with the daughter of a fanatic and eccentric like Godwin.” Shelley would be employing the strict rationalism of the older and stronger free thinkers, if he answered, “From what I observe of your mind, you are rushing on destruction in marrying the great-niece of an old corpse of a courtier and dilettante like Samuel Rogers.” It is only opinion for opinion. Nobody can pretend that either Mary Godwin or Samuel Rogers was mad; and the general view a man may hold about the healthiness of inheriting their blood or type is simply the same sort of general view by which men do marry for love or liking. There is no reason to suppose that Dr. Karl Pearson is any better judge of a bridegroom than the bridegroom is of a bride.

An objection may be anticipated here, but it is very easily answered. It may be said that we do, in fact, call in medical specialists to settle whether a man is mad; and that these specialists go by technical and even secret tests that cannot be known to the mass of men. It is obvious that this is true; it is equally obvious that it does not affect our argument. When we ask the doctor whether our grandfather is going mad, we still mean mad by our own common human definition. We mean, is be going to be a certain sort of person whom men recognize when once he exists. That certain specialists can detect the approach of him, before he exists, does not alter the fact that it is of the practical and popular madman that we are talking, and of him alone. The doctor merely sees a certain fact potentially in the future, while we, with less information, can only see it in the present; but his fact is our fact and everybody’s fact, or we should not bother about it at all. Here is no question of the doctor bringing an entirely new sort of person under coercion, as in the Feeble-Minded Bill. The doctor can say, “Tobacco is death to you,” because the dislike of death can be taken for granted, being a highly democratic institution; and it is the same with the dislike of the indubitable exception called madness. The doctor can say, “Jones has that twitch in the nerves, and he may burn down the house.” But it is not the medical detail we fear, but the moral upshot. We should say, “Let him twitch, as long as he doesn’t burn down the house.” The doctor may say “He has that look in the eyes, and he may take the hatchet and brain you all.” But we do not object to the look in the eyes as such; we object to consequences which, once come, we should all call insane if there were no doctors in the world. We should say, “Let him look how he likes; as long as he does not look for the hatchet.”

Now, that specialists are valuable for this particular and practical purpose, of predicting the approach of enormous and admitted human calamities, nobody but a fool would deny. But that does not bring us one inch nearer to allowing them the right to define what is a calamity; or to call things calamities which common-sense does not call calamities. We call in the doctor to save us from death; and, death being admittedly an evil, he has the right to administer the queerest and most recondite pill which he may think is a cure for all such menaces of death. He has not the right to administer death as the cure for all human ills. And as he has no moral authority to enforce a new conception of happiness, so he has no moral authority to enforce a new conception of sanity. He may know I am going mad; for madness is an isolated thing like leprosy; and I know nothing about leprosy. But if he merely thinks my mind is weak, I may happen to think the same of his. I often do.

In short, unless pilots are to be permitted to ram ships on to the rocks and then say that heaven is the only true harbour; unless judges are to be allowed to let murderers loose, and explain afterwards that the murder had done good on the whole; unless soldiers are to be allowed to lose battles and then point out that true glory is to be found in the valley of humiliation; unless cashiers are to rob a bank in order to give it an advertisement; or dentists to torture people to give them a contrast to their comforts; unless we are prepared to let loose all these private fancies against the public and accepted meaning of life or safety or prosperity or pleasure — - then it is as plain as Punch’s nose that no scientific man must be allowed to meddle with the public definition of madness. We call him in to tell us where it is or when it is. We could not do so, if we had not ourselves settled what it is.

As I wish to confine myself in this chapter to the primary point of the plain existence of sanity and insanity, I will not be led along any of the attractive paths that open here. I shall endeavor to deal with them in the next chapter. Here I confine myself to a sort of summary. Suppose a man’s throat has been cut, quite swiftly and suddenly, with a table knife, at a small table where we sit. The whole of civil law rests on the supposition that we are witnesses; that we saw it; and if we do not know about it, who does? Now suppose all the witnesses fall into a quarrel about degrees of eyesight. Suppose one says he had brought his reading-glasses instead of his usual glasses; and therefore did not see the man fall across the table and cover it with blood. Suppose another says he could not be certain it was blood, because a slight colour-blindness was hereditary in his family. Suppose a third says he cannot swear to the uplifted knife, because his oculist tells him he is astigmatic, and vertical lines do not affect him as do horizontal lines. Suppose another says that dots have often danced before his eyes in very fantastic combinations, many of which were very like one gentleman cutting another gentleman's throat at dinner. All these things refer to real experiences. There is such a thing as myopia, there is such a thing as colour-blindness; there is such a thing as astigmatism; there is such a thing as shifting shapes swimming before the eyes. But what should we think of a whole dinner party that could give nothing except these highly scientific explanations when found in company with a corpse? I imagine there are only two things we could think either that they were all drunk, or they were all murderers.

And yet there is an exception. If there were one man at table who was admittedly blind, should we not give him the benefit of the doubt? Should we not honestly feel that he was the exception that proved the rule? The very fact that he could not have seen would remind us that the other men must have seen. The very fact that he had no eyes must remind us of eyes. A man can be blind; a man can be dead: a man can be mad. But the comparison is necessarily weak, after all. For it is the essence of madness to be unlike anything else in the world: which is perhaps why so many men wiser than we have traced it to another.

Lastly, the literal maniac is different from all other persons in dispute in this vital respect: that he is the only person whom we can, with a final lucidity, declare that we do not want. He is almost always miserable himself, and he always makes others miserable. But this is not so with the mere invalid. The Eugenists would probably answer all my examples by taking the case of marrying into a family with consumption (or some such disease which they are fairly sure is hereditary) and asking whether such cases at least are not clear cases for a Eugenic intervention. Permit me to point out to them that they once more make a confusion of thought. The sickness or soundness of a consumptive may be a clear and calculable matter. The happiness or unhappiness of a consumptive is quite another matter, and is not calculable at all. What is the good of telling people that if they marry for love, they may be punished by being the parents of Keats or the parents of Stevenson? Keats died young; but he had more pleasure in a minute than a Eugenist gets in a month. Stevenson had lung-trouble; and it may, for all I know, have been perceptible to the Eugenic eye even a generation before. But who would perform that illegal operation: the stopping of Stevenson? Intercepting a letter bursting with good news, confiscating a hamper full of presents and prizes, pouring torrents of intoxicating wine into the sea, all this is a faint approximation for the Eugenic in action of the ancestors of Stevenson. This, however, is not the essential point; with Stevenson it is not merely a case of the pleasure we get, but of the pleasure he got. If he had died without writing a line, he would have had more red-hot joy than is given to most men. Shall I say of him, to whom I owe so much, let the day perish wherein he was born? Shall I pray that the stars of the twilight thereof be dark and it be not numbered among the days of the year, because it shut not up the doors of his mother's womb? I respect fully decline; like Job, I will put my hand upon my mouth.

V

THE FLYING AUTHORITY

It happened one day that an atheist and a man were standing together on a doorstep; and the atheist said, “It is raining.” To which the man replied, “What is raining?”: which question was the beginning of a violent quarrel and a lasting friendship. I will not touch upon any heads of the dispute, which doubtless included Jupiter, Pluvius, the Neuter Gender, Pantheism, Noah’s Ark, Mackintoshes, and the Passive Mood; but I will record the one point upon which the two persons emerged in some agreement. It was that there is such a thing as an atheistic literary style; that materialism may appear in the mere diction of a man, though he be speaking of clocks or cats or anything quite remote from theology. The mark of the atheistic style is that it instinctively chooses the word which suggests that things are dead things; that things have no souls. Thus they will not speak of waging war, which means willing it; they speak of the “outbreak of war,” as if all the guns blew up without the men touching them. Thus those Socialists that are atheist will not call their international sympathy, sympathy; they will call it “solidarity,” as if the poor men of France and Germany were physically stuck together like dates in a grocer’s shop. The same Marxian Socialists are accused of cursing the Capitalists inordinately; but the truth is that they let the Capitalists off much too easily. For instead of saying that employers pay less wages, which might pin the employers to some moral responsibility, they insist on talking about the “rise and fall” of wages; as if a vast silver sea of sixpences and shillings was always going up and down automatically like the real sea at Margate. Thus they will not speak of reform, but of development; and they spoil their one honest and virile phrase, “the class war” by talking of it as no one in his wits can talk of a war, predicting its finish and final result as one calculates the coming of Christmas Day or the taxes. Thus, lastly (as we shall see touching our special subject-matter here) the atheist style in letters always avoids talking of love or lust, which are things alive, and calls marriage or concubinage “the relations of the sexes”; as if a man and a woman were two wooden objects standing in a certain angle and attitude to each other like a table and a chair.

Now the same anarchic mystery that clings round the phrase, “*il pleut,*” clings round the phrase, “*il fait*” In English it is generally represented by the passive mood in grammar, and the Eugenists and their like deal especially in it; they are as passive in their statements as they are active in their experiments. Their sentences always enter tail first, and have no subject, like animals without heads. It is never “the doctor should cut off this leg” or “the policeman should collar that man.” It is always “Such limbs should be amputated,” or “Such men should be under restraint.” Hamlet said, “I should have fatted all the region kites with this slave’s offal.” The Eugenist would say, “The region kites should, if possible, be fattened; and the offal of this slave is available for the dietetic experiment.” Lady Macbeth said, “Give me the daggers; I’ll let his bowels out.” The Eugenist would say, “In such cases the bowels should, etc.” Do not blame me for the repulsiveness of the comparisons. I have searched English literature for the most decent parallels to Eugenist language.

The formless god that broods over the East is called “Om.” The formless god who has begun to brood over the West is called “On.” But here we must make a distinction. The impersonal word *on* is French, and the French have a right to use it, because they are a democracy. And when a Frenchman says “one” he does not mean himself, but the normal citizen. He does not mean merely “one,” but one and all. “*On n’a que sa parole*” does not mean “*Noblesse oblige*,” or “I am the Duke of Billingsgate and must keep my word.” It means: “One has a sense of honour as one has a backbone: every man, rich or poor, should feel honourable”; and this, whether possible or no, is the purest ambition of the republic. But when the Eugenists say, “Conditions must be altered”, or “Ancestry should be investigated,” or what not, it seems clear that they do not mean that the democracy must do it, whatever else they may mean. They do not mean that any man not evidently mad may be trusted with these tests and rearrangements as the French democratic system trusts such a man with a vote or a farm or the control of a family. That would mean that Jones and Brown, being both ordinary men, would set about arranging each other’s marriages. And this state of affairs would seem a little elaborate, and it might occur even to the Eugenic mind that if Jones and Brown are quite capable of arranging each other’s marriages, it is just possible that they might be capable of arranging their own.

This dilemma, which applies in so simple a case, applies equally to any wide and sweeping system of Eugenist voting; for though it is true that the community can judge more dispassionately than a man can judge in his own case, this particular question of the choice of a wife is so full of disputable shades in every conceivable case, that it is surely obvious that almost any democracy would simply vote the thing out of the sphere of voting, as they would any proposal of police interference in the choice of walking weather or of children's names. I should not like to be the politician who should propose a particular instance of Eugenics to be voted on by the French people. Democracy dismissed, it is here hardly needful to consider the other old models. Modern scientists will not say that George III, in his lucid intervals, should settle who is mad; or that the aristocracy that introduced gout shall supervise diet.

I hold it clear, therefore, if anything is clear about the business, that the Eugenists do not merely mean that the mass of common men should settle each other's marriages between them; the question remains, therefore, whom they do instinctively trust when they say that this or that ought to be done. What is this flying and evanescent authority that vanishes wherever we seek to fix it? Who is the man who is the lost subject that governs the Eugenist's verb? In a large number of cases I think we can simply say that the individual Eugenist means himself and nobody else. Indeed one Eugenist, Mr. A. H. Huth, actually had a sense of humour, and admitted this. He thinks a great deal of good could be done with a surgical knife, if we would only turn him loose with one. And this may be true. A great deal of good could be done with a loaded revolver, in the hands of a judicious student of human nature. But it is imperative that the Eugenist should perceive that on that principle we can never get beyond a perfect balance of different sympathies and antipathies. I mean that I should differ from Dr. Saleeby or Dr. Karl Pearson not only in a vast majority of individual cases, but in a vast majority of cases in which they would be bound to admit that such a difference was natural and reasonable. The chief victim of these famous doctors would be a yet more famous doctor: that eminent though unpopular practitioner, Dr. Fell.

To show that such rational and serious differences do exist, I will take one instance from that Bill which proposed to protect families and the public generally from the burden of feeble-minded persons. Now, even if I could share the Eugenic contempt for human rights, even if I could start gaily on the Eugenic campaign, I should not begin by removing feeble-minded persons. I have known as many families in as many classes as most men; and I cannot remember meeting any very monstrous human suffering arising out of the presence of such insufficient and negative types. There seems to be comparatively few of them; and those few by no means the worst burdens upon domestic happiness. I do not hear of them often; I do not hear of them doing much more harm than good; and in the few cases I know well they are not only regarded with human affection, but can be put to certain limited forms of human use. Even if I were a Eugenist, then I should not personally elect to waste my time locking up the feeble-minded. The people I should lock up would be the strong-minded. I have known hardly any cases of mere mental weakness making a family a failure; I have known eight or nine cases of violent and exaggerated force of character making a family a hell. If the strong-minded could be segregated it would quite certainly be better for their friends and families. And if there is really anything in heredity, it would be better for posterity too. For the kind of egoist I mean is a madman in a much more plausible sense than the mere harmless "deficient"; and to hand on the horrors of his anarchic and insatiable temperament is a much graver responsibility than to leave a mere inheritance of childishness. I would not arrest such tyrants, because I think that even moral tyranny in a few homes is better than a medical tyranny turning the state into a madhouse. I would not segregate them, because I respect a man's free-will and his front door and his right to be tried by his peers. But since free-will is believed by Eugenists no more than by Calvinists, since front-doors are respected by Eugenists no more than by house-breakers, and since the Habeas Corpus is about as sacred to Eugenists as it would be to King John, why do not *they* bring light and peace into so many human homes by removing a demoniac from each of them? Why do not the promoters of the Feeble-Minded Bill call at the many grand houses in town or county where such nightmares notoriously are? Why do they not knock at the door and take the bad squire away? Why do they not ring the bell and remove the dipsomaniac prize fighter? I do not know; and there is only one reason I can think of, which must remain a matter of speculation. When 1 was at school, the kind of boy who liked teasing halfwits was not the sort that stood up to bullies.

That, however it may be, does not concern my argument. I mention the case of the strong-minded variety of the monstrous merely to give one out of the hundred cases of the instant divergence of individual opinions the moment we begin to discuss who is fit or unfit to propagate. If Dr. Saleeby and I were setting out on a segregating trip together, we should separate at the very door; and if he had a thousand doctors with him, they would all go different ways. Everyone who has known as many kind and capable doctors as I have, knows that the ablest and sanest of them have a tendency to possess some little hobby or half-discovery of their own, as that oranges are bad for children, or that trees are dangerous in gardens, or that many more people ought to wear spectacles. It is asking too much of human nature to expect them not to cherish such scraps of originality in a hard, dull, and often heroic trade. But the inevitable result of it, as exercised by the individual Saleebys, would be that each man would have his favourite kind of idiot. Each doctor would be mad on his own madman. One would have his eyes on devotional Curates; another would wander about collecting obstreperous majors; a third would be the terror of animal-loving spinsters, who would flee with all their cats and dogs before him. Short of sheer literal anarchy, therefore, it seems plain that the Eugenist must find some authority other than his own implied personality. He must, once and for all, learn the lesson which is hardest for him and me and for all our fallen race — - the fact that he is only himself.

We now pass from mere individual men who obviously cannot be trusted, even if they are individual medical men, with such despotism over their neighbours; and we come to consider whether the Eugenists have at all clearly traced any more imaginable public authority, any apparatus of great experts or great examinations to which such risks of tyranny could be trusted. They are not very precise about this either; indeed, the great difficulty I have throughout in considering what are the Eugenist’s proposals is that they do not seem to know themselves. Some philosophic attitude which I cannot myself connect with human reason seems to make them actually proud of the dimness of their definitions and the uncompleteness of their plans. The Eugenic optimism seems to partake generally of the nature of that dazzled and confused confidence, so common in private theatricals, that it will be all right on the night. They have all the ancient despotism, but none of the ancient dogmatism. If they are ready to reproduce the secrecies and cruelties of the Inquisition, at least we cannot accuse them of offending us with any of that close and complicated thought, that arid and exact logic which narrowed the minds of the Middle Ages, they have discovered how to combine the hardening of the heart with a sympathetic softening of the head. Nevertheless, there is one large, though vague, idea of the Eugenists, which is an idea, and which we reach when we reach this problem of a more general supervision.

It was best presented perhaps by the distinguished doctor who wrote the article on these matters in that composite book which Mr. Wells edited, and called “The Great State.” He said the doctor should no longer be a mere plasterer of paltry maladies, but should be, in his own words, “the health adviser of the community.” The same can be expressed with even more point and simplicity in the proverb that prevention is better than cure. Commenting on this, I said that it amounted to treating all people who are well as if they were ill. This the writer admitted to be true, only adding that everyone is ill. To which I rejoin that if everyone is ill the health advisor is ill too, and therefore cannot know how to cure that minimum of illness. This is the fundamental fallacy in the whole business of preventive medicine. Prevention is not better than cure. Cutting off a man’s head is not better than curing his headache; it is not even better than failing to cure it. And it is the same if a man is in revolt, even a morbid revolt. Taking the heart out of him by slavery is not better than leaving the heart in him, even if you leave it a broken heart. Prevention is not only not better than cure; prevention is even worse than disease. Prevention means being an invalid for life, with the extra exasperation of being quite well. I will ask God, but certainly not man, to prevent me in all my doings. But the decisive and discussable form of this is well summed up in that phrase about the health adviser of society. I am sure that those who speak thus have something in their minds larger and more illuminating than the other two propositions we have considered. They do not mean that all citizens should decide, which would mean merely the present vague and dubious balance. They do not mean that all medical men should decide, which would mean a much more unbalanced balance. They mean that a few men might be found who had a consistent scheme and vision of a healthy nation, as Napoleon had a consistent scheme and vision of an army. It is cold anarchy to say that all men are to meddle in all men’s marriages. It is cold anarchy to say that any doctor may seize and segregate anyone he likes. But it is not anarchy to say that a few great hygienists might enclose or limit the life of all citizens, as nurses do with a family of children. It is not anarchy, it is tyranny; but tyranny is a workable thing. When we ask by what process such men could be certainly chosen, we are back again on the old dilemma of despotism, which means a man, or democracy which means men, or aristocracy which means favouritism. But as a vision the thing is plausible and even rational. It is rational, and it is wrong.

It is wrong, quite apart from the suggestion that an expert on health cannot be chosen. It is wrong because an expert on health cannot exist. An expert on disease can exist, for the very reason we have already considered in the case of madness, because experts can only arise out of exceptional things. A parallel with any of the other learned professions will make the point plain. If I am prosecuted for trespass, I will ask my solicitor which of the local lanes I am forbidden to walk in. But if my solicitor, having gained my case, were so elated that he insisted on settling what lanes I should walk in; if he asked me to let him map out all my country walks, because he was the perambulatory adviser of the community — - then that Solicitor would solicit in vain. If he will insist on walking behind me through woodland ways, pointing out with his walking-stick likely avenues and attractive short-cuts, I shall turn on him with passion, saying “Sir, I pay you to know one particular puzzle in Latin and Norman French, which they call the law of England; and you do know the law of England. I have never had any earthly reason to suppose that you know England. If you did, you would leave a man alone when he was looking at it.” As are the limits of the lawyer’s special knowledge about walking, so are the limits of the doctor’s. If I fall over the stump of a tree and break my leg, as is likely enough, I shall say to the lawyer, “Please go and fetch the doctor.” I shall do it because the doctor really has a larger knowledge of a narrower area. There are only a certain number of ways in which a leg can be broken; I know none of them, and he knows all of them. There is such a thing as being a specialist in broken legs. There is no such thing as being a specialist in legs. When unbroken, legs are a matter of taste. If the doctor has really mended my leg, he may merit a colossal equestrian statue on the top of an eternal tower of brass. But if the doctor has really mended my leg he has no more rights over it. He must not come and teach me how to walk; because he and I learnt that in the same school, the nursery. And there is no more abstract likelihood of the doctor walking more elegantly than I do than there is of the barber or the bishop or the burglar walking more elegantly than I do. There cannot be a general specialist; the specialist can have no kind of authority, unless he has avowedly limited his range. There cannot be such a thing as the health adviser of the community, because there cannot be such a thing as one who specialises in the universe.

Thus when Dr. Saleeby says that a young man about to be married should be obliged to produce his health-book as he does his bank-book, the expression is neat; but it does not convey the real respects in which the two things agree, and in which they differ. To begin with, of course, there is a great deal too much of the bank-book for the sanity of our commonwealth; and it is highly probable that the health-book, as conducted in modern conditions, would rapidly become as timid, as snobbish, and as sterile as the money side of marriage has become. In the moral atmosphere of modernity the poor and the honest would probably get as much the worst of it if we fought with health-books as they do when we fight with bank-books. But that is a more general matter; the real point is in the difference between the two. The difference is in this vital fact; that a monied man generally thinks about money, whereas a healthy man does not think about health. If the strong young man cannot produce his health-book, it is for the perfectly simple reason that he has not got one. He can mention some extraordinary malady he has; but every man of honour is expected to do that now, whatever may be the decision that follows on the knowledge.

Health is simply Nature, and no naturalist ought to have the impudence to understand it. Health, one may say, is God; and no agnostic has any right to claim His acquaintance. For God must mean, among other things, that mystical and multitudinous balance of all things, by which they are at least able to stand up straight and endure; and any scientist who pretends to have exhausted this subject of ultimate sanity, I will call the lowest of religious fanatics. I will allow him to understand the madman, for the madman is an exception. But if he says he understands the sane man, then he says he has the secret of the Creator. For whenever you and I feel fully sane, we are quite incapable of naming the elements that make up that mysterious simplicity. We can no more analyse such peace in the soul than we can conceive in our heads the whole enormous and dizzy equilibrium by which, out of suns roaring like infernos and heavens toppling like precipices, He has hanged the world upon nothing.

We conclude, therefore, that unless Eugenic activity be restricted to monstrous things like mania, there is no constituted or constitutable authority that can really over-rule men in a matter in which they are so largely on a level. In the matter of fundamental human rights, nothing can be above Man, except God. An institution claiming to come from God might have such authority; but this is the last claim the Eugenists are likely to make. One caste or one profession seeking to rule men in such matters is like a man's right eye claiming to rule him, or his left leg to run away with him. It is madness. We now pass on to consider whether there is really anything in the way of Eugenics to be done, with such cheerfulness as we may possess after discovering that there is nobody to do it.

VI

THE UNANSWERED CHALLENGE

Dr. Saleeby did me the honour of referring to me in one of his addresses on this subject, and said that even I cannot produce any but a feeble-minded child from a feeble-minded ancestry. To which I reply, first of all, that he cannot produce a feeble-minded child. The whole point of our contention is that this phrase conveys nothing fixed and outside opinion. There is such a thing as mania, which has always been segregated; there is such a thing as idiocy, which has always been segregated; but feeble-mindedness is a new phrase under which you might segregate anybody. It is essential that this fundamental fallacy in the use of statistics should be got somehow into the modern mind. Such people must be made to see the point, which is surely plain enough, that it is useless to have exact figures if they are exact figures about an inexact phrase. If I say, “There are five fools in Action,” it is surely quite clear that, though no mathematician can make five the same as four or six, that will not stop you or anyone else from finding a few more fools in Action. Now weak-mindedness, like folly, is a term divided from madness in this vital manner — - that in one sense it applies to all men, in another to most men, in another to very many men, and so on. It is as if Dr. Saleeby were to say, “Vanity, I find, is undoubtedly hereditary. Here is Mrs. Jones, who was very sensitive about her sonnets being criticized, and I found her little daughter in a new frock looking in the glass. The experiment is conclusive, the demonstration is complete; there in the first generation is the artistic temperament — - that is vanity; and there in the second generation is dress — - and that is vanity.” We should answer, “My friend, all is vanity, vanity and vexation of spirit — - especially when one has to listen to logic of your favourite kind. Obviously all human beings must value themselves; and obviously there is in all such evaluation an element of weakness, since it is not the valuation of eternal justice. What is the use of your finding by experiment in some people a thing we know by reason must be in all of them?”

Here it will be as well to pause a moment and avert one possible misunderstanding. I do not mean that you and I cannot and do not practically see and personally remark on this or that eccentric or intermediate type, for which the word "feeble-minded" might be a very convenient word, and might correspond to a genuine though indefinable fact of experience. In the same way we might speak, and do speak, of such and such a person being "mad with vanity" without wanting two keepers to walk in and take the person off. But I ask the reader to remember always that I am talking of words, not as they are used in talk or novels, but as they will be used, and have been used, in warrants and certificates, and Acts of Parliament. The distinction between the two is perfectly clear and practical. The difference is that a novelist or a talker can be trusted to try and hit the mark; it is all to his glory that the cap should fit, that the type should be recognized; that he should, in a literary sense, hang the right man. But it is by no means always to the interest of governments or officials to hang the right man. The fact that they often do stretch words in order to cover cases is the whole foundation of having any fixed laws or free institutions at all. My point is not that I have never met anyone whom I should call feeble-minded, rather than mad or imbecile. My point is that if I want to dispossess a nephew, oust a rival, silence a blackmailer, or get rid of an importunate widow, there is nothing in logic to prevent my calling them feeble-minded too. And the vaguer the charge is the less they will be able to disprove it.

One does not, as I have said, need to deny heredity in order to resist legislation, any more than one needs to deny the spiritual world in order to resist an epidemic of witch-burning. I admit there may be such a thing as hereditary feeble-mindedness; I believe there is such a thing as witchcraft. Believing that there are spirits, I am bound in mere reason to suppose that there are probably evil spirits; believing that there are evil spirits, I am bound in mere reason to suppose that some men grow evil by dealing with them. All that is mere rationalism; the superstition (that is the unreasoning repugnance and terror) is in the person who admits there can be angels but denies there can be devils. The superstition is in the person who admits there can be devils but denies there can be diabolists. Yet I should certainly resist any effort to search for witches, for a perfectly simple reason, which is the key of the whole of this controversy. The reason is that it is one thing to believe in witches and quite another to believe in witch smellers. I have more respect for the Eugenists, who go about persecuting the fool of the family; because the witch-finders, according to their own conviction, ran a risk. Witches were not the feeble-minded, but the strong-minded — - the evil mesmerists, the rulers of the elements. Many a raid on a witch, right or wrong, seemed to the villagers who did it a righteous popular rising against a vast spiritual tyranny, a papacy of sin. Yet we know that the thing degenerated into a rabid and despicable persecution of the feeble or the old. It ended by being a war upon the weak. It ended by being what Eugenics begins by being. When I said above that I believed in witches, but not in witch-smellers, I stated my full position about that conception of heredity, that half-formed philosophy of fears and omens; of curses and weird recurrence and darkness and the doom of blood, which, as preached to humanity to-day, is often more inhuman than witchcraft itself. I do not deny that this dark element exists; I only affirm that it is dark; or, in other words, that its most strenuous students are evidently in the dark about it. I would no more trust Dr. Karl Pearson on a heredity-hunt than on a heresy-hunt. I am perfectly ready to give my reasons for thinking this; and I believe any well-balanced person, if he reflects on them, will think as I do. There are two senses in which a man may be said to know or not know a subject. I know the subject of arithmetic, for instance; that is, I am not good at it, but I know what it is. I am sufficiently familiar with its use to see the absurdity of anyone who says, “So vulgar a fraction cannot be mentioned before ladies,” or “This unit is Unionist, I hope.” Considering myself for one moment as an arithmetician, I may say that I know next to nothing about my subject: but I know my subject. I know it in the street. There is the other kind of man, like Dr. Karl Pearson, who undoubtedly knows a vast amount about his subject; who undoubtedly lives in great forests of facts concerning kinship and inheritance. But it is not, by any means, the same thing to have searched the forests and to have recognized the frontiers. Indeed, the two things generally belong to two very different types of mind. I gravely doubt whether the Astronomer-Royal would write the best essay on the relations between astronomy and astrology. I doubt whether the President of the Geographical Society could give the best definition and the history of the words “geography” and “geology.”

Now the students of heredity, especially, understand all of their subject except their subject. They were, I suppose, bred and born in that brier-patch, and have really explored it without coming to the end of it. That is, they have studied everything but the question of what they are studying. Now I do not propose to rely merely on myself to tell them what they are studying. I propose, as will be seen in a moment, to call the testimony of a great man who has himself studied it. But to begin with, the domain of heredity (for those who see its frontiers) is a sort of triangle, enclosed on its three sides by three facts. The first is that heredity undoubtedly exists, or there would be no such thing as a family likeness, and every marriage might suddenly produce a small negro. The second is that even simple heredity can never be simple; its complexity must be literally, unfathomable, for in that field fight unthinkable millions. But yet again it never is simple heredity: for the instant anyone is, he experiences. The third is that these innumerable ancient influences, these instant inundations of experiences, come together according to a combination that is unlike anything else on this earth. It is a combination that does combine. It cannot be sorted out again, even on the Day of Judgment. Two totally different people have become in the sense most sacred, frightful, and unanswerable, one flesh. If a golden-haired Scandinavian girl has married a very swarthy Jew, the Scandinavian side of the family may say till they are blue in the face that the baby has his mother's nose or his mother's eyes. They can never be certain the black-haired Bedouin is not present in every feature, in every inch. In the person of the baby he may have gently pulled his wife's nose. In the person of the baby he may have partly blacked his wife's eyes.

Those are the three first facts of heredity. That it exists; that it is subtle and made of a million elements; that it is simple, and cannot be unmade into those elements. To summarize: you know there is wine in the soup. You do not know how many wines there are in the soup, because you do not know how many wines there are in the world. And you never will know, because all chemists, all cooks, and all common-sense people tell you that the soup is of such a sort that it can never be chemically analysed. That is a perfectly fair parallel to the hereditary element in the human soul. There are many ways in which one can feel that there is wine in the soup, as in suddenly tasting a wine specially favoured; that corresponds to seeing suddenly flash on a young face the image of some ancestor you have known. But even then the taster cannot be certain he is not tasting one familiar wine among many unfamiliar ones — - or seeing one known ancestor among a million unknown ancestors. Another way is to get drunk on the soup, which corresponds to the case of those who say they are driven to sin and death by hereditary doom. But even then the drunkard cannot be certain it was the soup, any more than the traditional drunkard who is certain it was the salmon.

Those are the facts about heredity which anyone can see. The upshot of them is not only that a miss is as good as a mile, but a miss is as good as a win. If the child has his parents' nose (or noses) that may be heredity. But if he has not, that may be heredity too. And as we need not take heredity lightly because two generations differ — - so we need not take heredity a scrap more seriously because two generations are similar. The thing is there, in what cases we know not, in what proportion we know not, and we cannot know.

Now it is just here that the decent difference of function between Dr. Saleeby's trade and mine comes in. It is his business to study human health and sickness as a whole, in a spirit of more or less enlightened guesswork; and it is perfectly natural that he should allow for heredity here, there, and everywhere, as a man climbing a mountain or sailing a boat will allow for weather without even explaining it to himself. An utterly different attitude is incumbent on any conscientious man writing about what laws should be enforced or about how commonwealths should be governed. And when we consider how plain a fact is murder, and yet how hesitant and even hazy we all grow about the guilt of a murderer, when we consider how simple an act is stealing, and yet how hard it is to convict and punish those rich commercial pirates who steal the most, when we consider how cruel and clumsy the law can be even about things as old and plain as the Ten Commandments — - I simply cannot conceive any responsible person proposing to legislate on our broken knowledge and bottomless ignorance of heredity.

But though I have to consider this dull matter in its due logical order, it appears to me that this part of the matter has been settled, and settled in a most masterly way, by somebody who has infinitely more right to speak on it than I have. Our press seems to have a perfect genius for fitting people with caps that don't fit; and affixing the wrong terms of eulogy and even the wrong terms of abuse. And just as people will talk of Bernard Shaw as a naughty winking Pierrot, when he is the last great Puritan and really believes in respectability; just as (*si parva licet*, etc.) they will talk of my own paradoxes, when I pass my life in preaching that the truisms are true; so an enormous number of newspaper readers seem to have it fixed firmly in their heads that Mr. H. G. Wells is a harsh and horrible Eugenist in great goblin spectacles who wants to put us all into metallic microscopes and dissect us with metallic tools. As a matter of fact, of course, Mr. Wells, so far from being too definite, is generally not definite enough. He is an absolute wizard in the appreciation of atmospheres and the opening of vistas; but his answers are more agnostic than his questions. His books will do everything except shut. And so far from being the sort of man who would stop a man from propagating, he cannot even stop a full stop. He is not Eugenic enough to prevent the black dot at the end of a sentence from breeding a line of little dots.

But this is not the clear-cut blunder of which I spoke. The real blunder is this. Mr. Wells deserves a tiara of crowns and a garland of medals for all kinds of reasons. But if I were restricted, on grounds of public economy, to giving Mr. Wells only one medal *ob cives servatos*, I would give him a medal as the Eugenist who destroyed Eugenics. For everyone spoke of him rightly or wrongly, as a Eugenist; and he certainly had, as I have not, the training and type of culture required to consider the matter merely in a biological and not in a generally moral sense. The result was that in that fine book, "Mankind in the Making," where he inevitably came to grips with the problem, he threw down to the Eugenists an intellectual challenge which seems to me unanswerable, but which, at any rate, is unanswered. I do not mean that no remote Eugenist wrote upon the subject; for it is impossible to read all writings, especially Eugenist writings. I do not mean that the leading Eugenists write as if this challenge had never been offered. The gauntlet lies unlifted on the ground.

Having given honour for the idea where it is due, I may be permitted to summarize it myself for the sake of brevity. Mr. Wells' point was this. That we cannot be certain about the inheritance of health, because health is not a quality. It is not a thing like darkness in the hair or length in the limbs. It is a relation, a balance. You have a tall, strong man; but his very strength depends on his not being too tall for his strength. You catch a healthy, full-blooded fellow; but his very health depends on his being not too full of blood. A heart that is strong for a dwarf will be weak for a giant; a nervous system that would kill a man with a trace of a certain illness will sustain him to ninety if he has no trace of that illness. Nay, the same nervous system might kill him if he had an excess of some other comparatively healthy thing. Seeing, therefore, that there are apparently healthy people of all types, it is obvious that if you mate two of them, you may even then produce a discord out of two inconsistent harmonies. It is obvious that you can no more be certain of a good offspring than you can be certain of a good tune if you play two fine airs at once on the same piano. You can be even less certain of it in the more delicate case of beauty, of which the Eugenists talk a great deal. Marry two handsome people whose noses tend to the aquiline, and their baby (for all you know) may be a goblin with a nose like an enormous parrot's. Indeed, I actually know a case of this kind. The Eugenist has to settle, not the result of fixing one steady thing to a second steady thing; but what will happen when one toppling and dizzy equilibrium crashes into another.

This is the interesting conclusion. It is on this degree of knowledge that we are asked to abandon the universal morality of mankind. When we have stopped the lover from marrying the unfortunate woman he loves, when we have found him another uproariously healthy female whom he does not love in the least, even then we have no logical evidence that the result may not be as horrid and dangerous as if he had behaved like a man of honour.

VII

THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH OF DOUBT

Let us now finally consider what the honest Eugenists do mean, since it has become increasingly evident that they cannot mean what they say. Unfortunately, the obstacles to any explanation of this are such as to insist on a circuitous approach. The tendency of all that is printed and much that is spoken to-day is to be, in the only true sense, behind the times. It is because it is always in a hurry that it is always too late. Give an ordinary man a day to write an article, and he will remember the things he has really heard latest; and may even, in the last glory of the sunset, begin to think of what he thinks himself. Give him an hour to write it, and he will think of the nearest text-book on the topic, and make the best mosaic he may out of classical quotations and old authorities. Give him ten minutes to write it and he will run screaming for refuge to the old nursery where he learnt his stalest proverbs, or the old school where he learnt his stalest politics. The quicker goes the journalist the slower go his thoughts. The result is the newspaper of our time, which every day can be delivered earlier and earlier, and which, every day, is less worth delivering at all. The poor panting critic falls farther behind the motor-car of modern fact. Fifty years ago he was barely fifteen years behind the times. Fifteen years ago he was not more than fifty years behind the times. Just now he is rather more than a hundred years behind the times: and the proof of it is that the things he says, though manifest nonsense about our society to-day, really were true about our society some hundred and thirty years ago. The best instance of his belated state is his perpetual assertion that the supernatural is less and less believed. It is a perfectly true and realistic account — - of the eighteenth century. It is the worst possible account of this age of psychics and spirit-healers and fakirs and fashionable fortune-tellers. In fact, I generally reply in eighteenth century language to this eighteenth century language to this eighteenth century illusion. If somebody says to me, “The creeds are crumbling,” I reply, “And the King of Prussia, who is himself a Freethinker, is certainly capturing Silesia from the Catholic Empress.” If somebody says “Miracles must be reconsidered in the light of rational experience,” I answer affably, “But I hope that our enlightened leader, Hébert, will not insist on guillotining that poor French queen.” If somebody says, “We must watch for the rise of some new religion which can commend itself to reason,” I reply, “But how much more necessary is it to watch for the rise of some military adventurer who may destroy the Republic; and, to my mind, that young Major Bonaparte has rather a restless air.” It is only in such language from the Age of Reason that we can answer such things. The age we live in is something more than an age of superstition — - it is an age of innumerable superstitions. But it is only with one example of this that I am concerned here.

I mean the error that still sends men marching about disestablishing churches and talking of the tyranny of compulsory church teaching or compulsory church tithes. I do not wish for an irrelevant misunderstanding here; I would myself certainly disestablish any church that had a numerical minority, like the Irish or the Welsh; and I think it would do a great deal of good to genuine churches that have a partly conventional majority, like the English, or even the Russian. But I should only do this if I had nothing else to do; and just now there is very much else to do. For religion, orthodox, or unorthodox, is not just now relying on the weapon of State establishment at all. The Pope practically made no attempt to preserve the Concordat; but seemed rather relieved at the independence his Church gained by the destruction of it: and it is common talk among the French clericalists that the Church has gained by the change. In Russia the one real charge brought by religious people (especially Roman Catholics) against the Orthodox Church is not its orthodoxy or heterodoxy, but its abject dependence on the State. In England we can almost measure an Anglican’s fervour for his Church by his comparative coolness about its establishment — - that is, its control by a Parliament of Scotch Presbyterians like Balfour, or Welsh Congregationalists like Lloyd George. In Scotland the powerful combination of the two great sects outside the establishment have left it in a position in which it feels no disposition to boast of being called by mere lawyers the Church of Scotland. I am not here arguing that Churches should not depend on the State; nor that they do not depend upon much worse things. It may be reasonably maintained that the strength of Romanism, though it be not in any national police, is in a moral police more rigid and vigilant. It may be reasonably maintained that the strength of Anglicanism, though it be not in establishment, is in aristocracy, and its shadow, which is called snobbishness. All I assert here is that the Churches are not now leaning heavily on their political establishment; they are not using heavily the secular arm. Almost everywhere their legal tithes have been modified, their legal boards of control have been mixed. They may still employ tyranny, and worse tyranny: I am not considering that. They are not specially using that special tyranny which consists in using the government.

The thing that really is trying to tyrannize through government is Science. The thing that really does use the secular arm is Science. And the creed that really is levying tithes and capturing schools, the creed that really is enforced by fine and imprisonment, the creed that really is proclaimed not in sermons but in statutes, and spread not by pilgrims but by policemen — - that creed is the great but disputed system of thought which began with Evolution and has ended in Eugenics. Materialism is really our established Church; for the Government will really help it to persecute its heretics. Vaccination, in its hundred years of experiment, has been disputed almost as much as baptism in its approximate two thousand. But it seems quite natural to our politicians to enforce vaccination; and it would seem to them madness to enforce baptism.

I am not frightened of the word “persecution” when it is attributed to the churches; nor is it in the least as a term of reproach that I attribute it to the men of science. It is as a term of legal fact. If it means the imposition by the police of a widely disputed theory, incapable of final proof — - then our priests are not now persecuting, but our doctors are. The imposition of such dogmas constitutes a State Church — - in an older and stronger sense than any that can be applied to any supernatural Church to-day. There are still places where the religious minority is forbidden to assemble or to teach in this way or that; and yet more where it is excluded from this or that public post. But I cannot now recall any place where it is compelled by the criminal law to go through the rite of the official religion. Even the Young Turks did not insist on all Macedonians being circumcised.

Now here we find ourselves confronted with an amazing fact. When, in the past, opinions so arguable have been enforced by State violence, it has been at the instigation of fanatics who held them for fixed and flaming certainties. If truths could not be evaded by their enemies, neither could they be altered even by their friends. But what are the certain truths that the secular arm must now lift the sword to enforce? Why, they are that very mass of bottomless questions and bewildered answers that we have been studying in the last chapters — - questions whose only interest is that they are trackless and mysterious; answers whose only glory is that they are tentative and new. The devotee boasted that he would never abandon the faith; and therefore he persecuted for the faith. But the doctor of science actually boasts that he will always abandon a hypothesis; and yet he persecutes for the hypothesis. The Inquisitor violently enforced his creed, because it was unchangeable. The *savant* enforces it violently because he may change it the next day.

Now this is a new sort of persecution; and one may be permitted to ask if it is an improvement on the old. The difference, so far as one can see at first, seems rather favourable to the old. If we are to be at the merciless mercy of man, most of us would rather be racked for a creed that existed intensely in somebody’s head, rather than vivisected for a discovery that had not yet come into anyone’s head, and possibly never would. A man would rather be tortured with a thumbscrew until he chose to see reason than tortured with a vivisecting knife until the vivisector chose to see reason. Yet that is the real difference between the two types of legal enforcement. If I give in to the Inquisitors, I should at least know what creed to profess. But even if I yelled out a *credo* when the Eugenists had me on the rack, I should not know what creed to yell. I might get an extra turn of the rack for confessing to the creed they confessed quite a week ago.

Now let not light-minded persons say that I am here taking extravagant parallels; for the parallel is not only perfect, but plain. For this reason: that the difference between torture and vivisection is not in any way affected by the fierceness or mildness of either. Whether they gave the rack half a turn or half a hundred, they were, by hypothesis, dealing with a truth which they knew to be there. Whether they vivisect painfully or painlessly, they are trying to find out whether the truth is there or not. The old inquisitors tortured to put their own opinions into somebody. But the new Inquisitors torture to get their own opinions out of him. They do not know what their own opinions are, until the victim of vivisection tells them. The division of thought is a complete chasm for anyone who cares about thinking. The old persecutor was trying to *teach* the citizen, with fire and sword. The new persecutor is trying to *learn* from the citizen, with scalpel and germ-injector. The master was meeker than the pupil will be.

I could prove by many practical instances that even my illustrations are not exaggerated, by many placid proposals I have heard for the vivisection of criminals, or by the filthy incident of Dr. Neisser. But I prefer here to stick to a strictly logical line of distinction, and insist that whereas in all previous persecutions the violence was used to end *our* indecision, the whole point here is that the violence is used to end the indecision of the persecutors. This is what the honest Eugenists really mean, so far as they mean anything. They mean that the public is to be given up, not as a heathen land for conversion, but simply as a *pabulum* for a experiment. That is the real, rude, barbaric sense behind this Eugenic legislation. The Eugenist doctors are not such fools as they look in the light of any logical inquiry about what they want. They do not know what they want, except that they want your soul and body and mine in order to find out. They are quite seriously, as they themselves might say, the first religion to be experimental instead of doctrinal. All other established Churches have been based on somebody having found the truth. This is the first Church that was ever based on not having found it.

There is in them a perfectly sincere hope and enthusiasm; but it is not for us, but for what they might learn from us, if they could rule us as they can rabbits. They cannot tell us anything about heredity, because they do not know anything about it. But they do quite honestly believe that they would know something about it, when they had married and mismarried us for a few hundred years. They cannot tell us who is fit to wield such authority, for they know that nobody is; but they do quite honestly believe that when that authority has been abused for a very long time, somebody somehow will be evolved who is fit for the job. I am no Puritan, and no one who knows my opinions will consider it a mere criminal charge if I say that they are simply gambling. The reckless gambler has no money in his pockets; he has only the ideas in his head. These gamblers have no idea in their heads; they have only the money in their pockets. But they think that if they could use the money to buy a big society to experiment on, something like an idea might come to them at last. That is Eugenics.

I confine myself here to remarking that I do not like it. I may be very stingy, but I am willing to pay the scientist for what he does know; I draw the line at paying him for everything he doesn’t know. I may be very cowardly, but I am willing to be hurt for what I think or what he thinks — -I am not willing to be hurt, or even inconvenienced, for whatever he might happen to think after he had hurt me. The ordinary citizen may easily be more magnanimous than I, and take the whole thing on trust; in which case his career may be happier in the next world. But (I think) sadder in this. At least, I wish to point out to him that he will not be giving his glorious body as soldiers give it, to the glory of a fixed flag, or martyrs to the glory of a deathless God. He will be, in the strict sense of the Latin phrase, giving his vile body for an experiment — - an experiment of which even the experimentalist knows neither the significance nor the end.

VIII

A SUMMARY OF A FALSE THEORY

I have up to this point treated the Eugenists, I hope, as seriously as they treat themselves. I have attempted an analysis of their theory as if it were an utterly abstract and disinterested theory; and so considered, there seems to be very little left of it. But before I go on, in the second part of this book, to talk of the ugly things that really are left, I wish to recapitulate the essential points in their essential order, lest any personal irrelevance or over-emphasis (to which I know myself to be prone) should have confused the course of what I believe to be a perfectly fair and consistent argument. To make it yet clearer, I will summarize the thing under chapters, and in quite short paragraphs.

In the first chapter I attempted to define the essential point in which Eugenics can claim, and does claim, to be a new morality. That point is that it is possible to consider the baby in considering the bride. I do not adopt the ideal irresponsibility of the man who said, “What has posterity done for us?” But I do say, to start with, “What can we do for posterity, except deal fairly with our contemporaries?” Unless a man love his wife whom he has seen, how shall he love his child whom he has not seen?

In the second chapter I point out that this division in the conscience cannot be met by mere mental confusions, which would make any woman refusing any man a Eugenist. There will always be something in the world which tends to keep outrageous unions exceptional; that influence is not Eugenics, but laughter.

In the third chapter I seek to describe the quite extraordinary atmosphere in which such things have become possible. I call that atmosphere anarchy; but insist that it is an anarchy in the centres where there should be authority. Government has become ungovernable; that is, it cannot leave off governing. Law has become lawless; that is, it cannot see where laws should stop. The chief feature of our time is the meekness of the mob and the madness of the government. In this atmosphere it is natural enough that medical experts, being authorities, should go mad, and attempt so crude and random and immature dream as this of petting and patting (and rather spoiling) the babe unborn.

In chapter four I point out how this impatience has burst through the narrow channel of the Lunacy Laws, and has obliterated them by extending them. The whole point of the madman is that he is the exception that prove the rule. But Eugenics seeks to treat the whole rule as a series of exceptions — - to make all men mad. And on that ground there is hope for nobody; for all opinions have an author, and all authors have a heredity. The mentality of the Eugenist makes him believe in Eugenics as much as the mentality of the reckless lover makes him violate Eugenics; and both mentalities are, on the materialist hypothesis, equally the irresponsible product of more or less unknown physical causes. The real security of the man against any logical Eugenics is like the false security of Macbeth. The only Eugenist that could rationally attack him must be a man of no woman born.

In the chapter following this, which is called "The Flying Authority," I try in vain to locate and fix any authority that could rationally rule men in so rooted and universal a matter; little would be gained by ordinary men doing it to each other; and if ordinary practitioners did it they would very soon show, by a thousand whims and quarrels, that they were ordinary men. I then discussed the enlightened despotism of a few general professors of hygiene, and found it unworkable, for an essential reason: that while we can always get men intelligent enough to know more than the rest of us about this or that accident or pain or pest, we cannot count on the appearance of great cosmic philosophers; and only such men can be even supposed to know more than we do about normal conduct and common sanity. Every sort of man, in short, would shirk such a responsibility, except the worst sort of man, who would accept it.

I pass on, in the next chapter, to consider whether we know enough about heredity to act decisively, even if we were certain who ought to act. Here I refer the Eugenists to the reply of Mr. Wells, which they have never dealt with to my knowledge or satisfaction — - the important and primary objection that health is not a quality but a proportion of qualities; so that even health married to health might produce the exaggeration called disease. It should be noted here, of course, that an individual biologist may quite honestly believe that he has found a fixed principle with the help of Weissmann or Mendel. But we are not discussing whether he knows enough to be justified in thinking (as is somewhat the habit of the anthropoid *Homo*) that he is right. We are discussing whether *we* know enough, as responsible citizens, to put such powers into the hands of men who may be deceived or who may be deceivers. I conclude that we do not.

In the last chapter of the first half of the book I give what is, I believe, the real secret of this confusion, the secret of what the Eugenists really want. They want to be allowed to find out what they want. Not content with the endowment of research, they desire the establishment of research; that is the making of it a thing official and compulsory, like education or state insurance; but still it is only research and not discovery. In short, they want a new kind of State Church, which shall be an Established Church of Doubt — - instead of Faith. They have no Science of Eugenics at all, but they do really mean that if we will give ourselves up to be vivisected they may very probably have one some day. I point out, in more dignified diction, that this is a bit thick.

And now, in the second half of this book, we will proceed to the consideration of things that really exist. It is, I deeply regret to say, necessary to return to realities, as they are in your daily life and mine. Our happy holiday in the land of nonsense is over; we shall see no more its beautiful city, with the almost Biblical name of Bosh, nor the forests full of mares' nests, nor the fields of tares that are ripened only by moonshine. We shall meet no longer those delicious monsters that might have talked in the same wild club with the Snark and the Jabberwock or the Pobble or the Dong with the Luminous Nose; the father who can't make head or tail of the mother, but thoroughly understands the child she will some day bear; the lawyer who has to run after his own laws almost as fast as the criminals run away from them; the two mad doctors who might discuss for a million years which of them has the right to lock up the other; the grammarian who clings convulsively to the Passive Mood, and says it is the duty of something to get itself done without any human assistance, the man who would marry giants to giants until the back breaks, as children pile brick upon brick for the pleasure of seeing the staggering tower tumble down; and, above all, the superb man of science who wants you to pay him and crown him because he has so far found out nothing. These fairy-tale comrades must leave us. They exist, but they have no influence in what is really going on. They are honest dupes and tools, as you and I were very nearly being honest dupes and tools. If we come to think coolly of the world we live in, if we consider how very practical is the practical politician, at least where cash is concerned, how very dull and earthy are most of the men who own millions and manage the newspaper trusts, how very cautious and averse from idealist upheaval are those that control this capitalist society —- when we consider all this, it is frankly incredible that Eugenics should be a front bench fashionable topic and almost an Act of Parliament, if it were in practice only the unfinished fantasy which it is, as I have shown, in pure reason. Even if it were a just revolution, it would be much too revolutionary a revolution for modern statesmen, if there were not something else behind. Even if it were a true ideal, it would be much too idealistic an ideal for our "practical men," if there were not something real as well. Well, there is something real as well. There is no reason in Eugenics, but there is plenty of motive. Its supporters are highly vague about its theory, but they will be painfully practical about its practice. And while I reiterate that many of its more eloquent agents are probably quite innocent instruments, there are some, even among Eugenists, who by this time know what they are doing. To them we shall not say, "What is Eugenics?" or "Where on earth are you going?" but only "Woe unto you, hypocrite that devour widows' houses and for a pretence use long words."

PART TWO

THE REAL AIM

I

THE IMPOTENCE OF IMPENITENCE

The root formula of an epoch is always an unwritten law, just as the law that is the first of all laws, that which protects life from the murderer, is written nowhere in the Statute Book. Nevertheless there is all the difference between having and not having a notion of this basic assumption in an epoch. For instance, the Middle Ages will simply puzzle us with their charities and cruelties, their asceticism and bright colours, unless we catch their general eagerness for building and planning, dividing this from that by walls and fences — - the spirit that made architecture their most successful art. Thus even a slave seemed sacred; the divinity that did hedge a king, did also, in one sense, hedge a serf, for he could not be driven out from behind his hedges. Thus even liberty became a positive thing like a privilege; and even, when most men had it, it was not opened like the freedom of a wilderness, but bestowed, like the freedom of a city. Or again, the seventeenth century may seem a chaos of contradictions, with its almost priggish praise of parliaments and its quite barbaric massacre of prisoners, until we realize that, if the Middle Ages was a house half built, the seventeenth century was a house on fire. Panic was the note of it, and that fierce fastidiousness and exclusiveness that comes from fear. Calvinism was its characteristic religion, even in the Catholic Church, the insistence on the narrowness of the way and the fewness of the chosen. Suspicion was the note of its politics — -”put not you trust in princes.” It tried to thrash everything out by learned, virulent, and ceaseless controversy; and it weeded its population by witch-burning. Or yet again: the eighteenth century will present pictures that seem utterly opposite, and yet seem singularly typical of the time: the sack of Versailles and the “Vicar of Wakefield”; the pastorals of Watteau and the dynamite speeches of Danton. But we shall understand them all better if we once catch sight of the idea of *tidying up* which ran through the whole period, the quietest people being prouder of their tidiness, civilization, and sound taste than of any of their virtues; and the wildest people having (and this is the most important point) no love of wildness for its own sake, like Nietzsche or the anarchic poets, but only a readiness to employ it to get rid of unreason or disorder. With these epochs it is not altogether impossible to say that some such form of words is a key. The epoch for which it is almost impossible to find a form of words is our own.

Nevertheless, I think that with us the key-word is “inevitability,” or, as I should be inclined to call it, “impenitence.” We are subconsciously dominated in all departments by the notion that there is no turning back, and it is rooted in materialism and the denial of free will. Take any handful of modern facts and compare them with the corresponding facts a few hundred years ago. Compare the modern Party System with the political factions of the seventeenth century. The difference is that in the older time the party leaders not only really cut off each other’s heads, but (what is much more alarming) really repealed each other’s laws. With us it has become traditional for one party to inherit and leave untouched the acts of the other when made, however bitterly they were attacked in the making. James II and his nephew William were neither of them very gay specimens; but they would both have laughed at the idea of “a continuous foreign policy.” The Tories were not Conservatives; they were, in the literal sense, reactionaries. They did not merely want to keep the Stuarts; they wanted to bring them back.

Or again, consider how obstinately the English mediaeval monarchy returned again and again to its vision of French possessions, trying to reverse the decision of fate; how Edward III returned to the charge after the defeats of John and Henry III, and Henry V after the failure of Edward III; and how even Mary had that written on her heart which was neither her husband nor her religion. And then consider this: that we have comparatively lately known a universal orgy of the thing called imperialism, the unity of the Empire the only topic, colonies counted like crown jewels, and the Union Jack waved across the world. And yet no one so much as dreamed, I will not say of recovering, the American colonies for the Imperial unity (which would have been too dangerous a task for modern empire-builders), but even of re-telling the story from an Imperial standpoint. Henry V justified the claims of Edward III. Joseph Chamberlain would not have dreamed of justifying the claims of George III. Nay, Shakespeare justifies the French War, and sticks to Talbot and defies the legend of Joan of Arc. Mr. Kipling would not dare to justify the American War, stick to Burgoyne, and defy the legend of Washington. Yet there really was much more to be said for George III than there ever was for Henry V. It was not said, much less acted upon, by the modern Imperialists; because of this basic modern sense, that as the future is inevitable, so is the past irrevocable. Any fact so complete as the American exodus from the Empire must be considered as final for aeons, though it hardly happened more than a hundred years ago. Merely because it has managed to occur it must be called first, a necessary evil, and then an indispensable good. I need not add that I do not want to reconquer America; but then I am not an Imperialist.

Then there is another way of testing it: ask yourself how many people you have met who grumbled at a thing as incurable, and how many who attacked it as curable? How many people we have heard abuse the British elementary schools, as they would abuse the British climate? How few have we met who realized that British education can be altered, but British weather cannot? How few there were that knew that the clouds were more immortal and more solid than the schools? For a thousand that regret compulsory education, where is the hundred, or the ten, or the one, who would repeal compulsory education? Indeed, the very word proves my case by its unpromising and unfamiliar sound. At the beginning of our epoch men talked with equal ease about Reform and Repeal. Now everybody talks about reform; but nobody talks about repeal. Our fathers did not talk of Free Trade, but of the Repeal of the Corn Laws. They did not talk of Home Rule, but of the Repeal of the Union. In those days people talked of a “Repealer” as the most practical of all politicians, the kind of politician that carries a club. Now the Repealer is flung far into the province of an impossible idealism: and the leader of one of our great parties, having said, in a heat of temporary sincerity, that he would repeal an Act, actually had to write to all the papers to assure them that he would only amend it. I need not multiply instances, though they might be multiplied almost to a million. The note of the age is to suggest that the past may just as well be praised, since it cannot be mended. Men actually in that past have toiled like ants and died like locusts to undo some previous settlement that seemed secure; but we cannot do so much as repeal an Act of Parliament. We entertain the weak-minded notion that what is done can’t be undone. Our view was well summarized in a typical Victorian song with the refrain: “The mill will never grind with the water that is past.” There are many answers to this. One (which would involve a disquisition on the phenomena of evaporation and dew) we will here avoid. Another is, that to the minds of simple country folk, the object of a mill is not to grind water, but to grind corn, and that (strange as it may seem) there really have been societies sufficiently vigilant and valiant to prevent their corn perpetually flowing away from them, to the tune of a sentimental song.

Now this modern refusal to undo what has been done is not only an intellectual fault, it is a moral fault also. It is not merely our mental inability to understand the mistake we have made. It is also our spiritual refusal to admit that we have made a mistake. It was mere vanity in Mr. Brummell when he sent away trays full of imperfectly knotted neck cloths, lightly remarking, “These are our failures.” It is a good instance of the nearness of vanity to humility, for at least he had to admit that they were failures. But it would have been spiritual pride in Mr. Brummell if he had tied on all the cravats, one on top of the other, lest his valet should discover that he had ever tied one badly. For in spiritual pride there is always an element of secrecy and solitude. Mr. Brummell would be satanic; also (which I fear would affect him more) he would be badly dressed. But he would be a perfect presentation of the modern publicist, who cannot do anything right, because he must not admit that he ever did anything wrong.

This strange, weak obstinacy, this persistence in the wrong path of progress, grows weaker and worse, as do all such weak things. And by the time in which I write its moral attitude has taken on something of the sinister and even the horrible. Our mistakes have become our secrets. Editors and journalists tear up with a guilty air all that reminds them of the party promises unfulfilled, or the party ideals reproaching them. It is true of our statesmen (much more than of our bishops, of whom Mr. Wells said it), that socially in evidence they are intellectually in hiding. The society is heavy with unconfessed sins; its mind is sore and silent with painful subjects; it has a constipation of conscience. There are many things it has done and allowed to be done which it does not really dare to think about; it calls them by other names and tries to talk itself into faith in a false past, as men make up the things they would have said in a quarrel. Of these sins one lies buried deepest but most noisome, and though it is stifled, stinks, the true story of the relations of the rich man and the poor in England. The half-starved English proletarian is not only nearly a skeleton, but he is a skeleton in a cupboard.

It may be said, in some surprise, that surely we hear to-day on every side the same story of the destitute proletariat and the social problem, of the sweating in the unskilled trades or the overcrowding in the slums. It is granted, but I said the true story. Untrue stories there are in plenty, on all sides of the discussion. There is the interesting story of the Class Conscious Proletarian of All Lands, the chap who has “solidarity,” and is always just going to abolish war. The Marxian Socialists will tell you all about him; only he isn’t there. A common English workman is just as incapable of thinking of a German as anything but a German as he is of thinking of himself as anything but an Englishman. Then there is the opposite story; the story of the horrid man who is an atheist and wants to destroy the home, but who, for some private reason, prefers to call this Socialism. He isn’t there either. The prosperous Socialists have homes exactly like yours and mine; and the poor Socialists are not allowed by the Individualists to have any at all. There is the story of the Two Workmen, which is a very nice and exciting story, about how one passed all the public houses in Cheapside and was made Lord Mayor on arriving at the Guildhall, while the other went into all the public houses and emerged quite ineligible for such a dignity. Alas! for this also is vanity. A thief might become Lord Mayor, but an honest workman certainly couldn’t. Then there is the story of “The Relentless Doom” by which rich men were, by economic laws, forced to go on taking away money from poor men, although they simply longed to leave off: this is an unendurable thought to a free and Christian man, and the reader will be relieved to hear that it never happened. The rich could have left off stealing whenever they wanted to leave off, only this never happened either. Then there is the story of the cunning Fabian who sat on six committees at once and so coaxed the rich man to become quite poor. By simply repeating in a whisper, that there are “wheels within wheels,” this talented man managed to take away the millionaire’s motor car, one wheel at a time, till the millionaire had quite forgotten that he ever had one. It was very clever of him to do this, only he has not done it. There is not a screw loose in the millionaire’s motor, which is capable of running over the Fabian and leaving him a flat corpse in the road at a moment’s notice. All these stories are very fascinating stories to be told by the Individualist and Socialist in turn to the great Sultan of Capitalism, because if they left off amusing him for an instant he would cut off their heads. But if they once began to tell the true story of the Sultan to the Sultan, he would boil them in oil, and this they wish to avoid.

The true story of the sin of the Sultan he is always trying, by listening to these stories, to forget. As we have said before in this chapter, he would prefer not to remember, because he has made up his mind not to repent. It is a curious story, and I shall try to tell it truly in the two chapters that follow. In all ages the tyrant is hard because he is soft. If his car crashes over bleeding and accusing crowds, it is because he has chosen the path of least resistance. It is because it is much easier to ride down a human race than ride up a moderately steep hill. The fight of the oppressor is always a pillow fight; commonly a war with cushions — - always a war for cushions. Saladin, the great Sultan, if I remember rightly, accounted it the greatest feat of swordsmanship to cut a cushion. And so indeed it is, as all of us can attest who have been for years past trying to cut into the swollen and windy corpulence of the modern compromise, that is at once cosy and cruel. For there is really in our world to-day the colour and silence of the cushioned divan; and that sense of palace within palace and garden within garden which makes the rich irresponsibility of the East. Have we not already the wordless dance, the wineless banquet, and all that strange unchristian conception of luxury without laughter? Are we not already in an evil Arabian Nights, and walking the nightmare cities of an invisible despot? Does not our hangman strangle secretly, the bearer of the bow string? Are we not already eugenists — - that is, eunuch-makers? Do we not see the bright eyes, the motionless faces, and all the presence of something that is dead and yet sleepless? It is the presence of the sin that is sealed with pride and impenitence; the story of how the Sultan got his throne. But it is not the story he is listening to just now, but another story which has been invented to cover it — - the story called “Eugenius: or the Adventures of One Not Born,” a most varied and entrancing tale, which never fails to send him to sleep.

II

TRUE HISTORY OF A TRAMP

He awoke in the Dark Ages and smelt dawn in the dark, and knew he was not wholly a slave. It was as if, in some tale of Hans Andersen, a stick or a stool had been left in the garden all night and had grown alive and struck root like a tree. For this is the truth behind the old legal fiction of the servile countries, that the slave is a “chattel,” that is a piece of furniture like a stick or a stool. In the spiritual sense, I am certain it was never so unwholesome a fancy as the spawn of Nietzsche suppose to-day. No human being, pagan or Christian, I am certain, ever thought of another human being as a chair or a table. The mind cannot base itself on the idea that a comet is a cabbage; not can it on the idea that a man is a stool. No man was ever unconscious of another’s presence — - or even indifferent to another’s opinion. The lady who is said to have boasted her indifference to being naked before male slaves was showing off — - or she meant something different. The lord who fed fishes by killing a slave was indulging in what most cannibals indulge in — - a satanist affectation. The lady was consciously shameless and the lord was consciously cruel. But it simply is not in the human reason to carve men like wood or examine women like ivory, just as it is not the human reason to think that two and two make five.

But there was this truth in the legal simile of furniture: that the slave, though certainly a man, was in one sense a dead man; in the sense that he was *moveable*. His locomotion was not his own: his master moved his arms and legs for him as if he were a marionette. Now it is important in the first degree to realize here what would be involved in such a fable as I have imagined, of a stool rooting it self like a shrub. For the general modern notion certainly is that life and liberty are in some way to be associated with novelty and not standing still. But it is just because the stool is lifeless that it moves about. It is just because the tree is alive that it does stand still. That was the main difference between the pagan slave and the Christian serf. The serf still belonged to the lord, as the stick that struck root in the garden; would have still belonged to the owner of the garden; but it would have become a *live* possession. Therefore the owner is forced, by the laws of nature, to treat it with some respect; something becomes due from him. He cannot pull it up without killing it; it has gained a *place* in the garden — - or the society. But the moderns are quite wrong in supposing that mere change and holiday and variety have necessarily any element of this life that is the only seed of liberty. You may say if you like that an employer, taking all his work people to a new factory in a Garden City, is giving them the greater freedom of forest landscapes and smokeless skies. If it comes to that, you can say that the slave-traders took negroes from their narrow and brutish African hamlets, and gave them the polish of foreign travel and medicinal breezes of a sea-voyage. But the tiny seed of citizenship and independence there already was in the serfdom of the Dark Ages, had nothing to do with what nice things the lord might do to the serf. It lay in the fact that there were some nasty things he could not do to the serf — - there were not many, but there were some, and one of them was eviction. He could not make the serf utterly landless and desperate utterly without access to the means of production, though doubtless it was rather the field that owned the serf, than the serf that owned the field. But even if you call the serf a beast of the field, he was not what we have tried to make the town workman — - a beast with no field. Foulon said of the French peasants, “Let them eat grass.” If he had said it of the modern London proletariat, they might well reply, “You have not left us even grass to eat.”

There was, therefore, both in theory and practice, some security for the serf, because he had come to life and rooted. The seigneur could not wait in the field in all weathers with a battle-ax to prevent the serf scratching any living out of the ground, any more than the man in my fairy-tale could sit out in the garden all night with an umbrella to prevent the shrub getting any rain. The relation of lord and serf, therefore, involves a combination of two things: inequality and security. I know there are people who will at once point wildly to all sorts of examples, true and false, of insecurity of life in the Middle Ages; but these are people who do not grasp what we mean by the characteristic institutions of a society. For the matter of that, there are plenty of examples of equality in the Middle Ages, as the craftsmen in their guild or the monks electing their abbot. But just as modern England is not a feudal country, though there is a quaint survival called Heralds’ College — - or Ireland is not a commercial country, though there is a quaint survival called Belfast — - it is true of the bulk and shape of that society that came out of the Dark Ages and ended at the Reformation, that it did not care about giving everybody an equal position, but did care about giving everybody a position. So that by the very beginning of that time even the slave had become a slave one could not get rid of, like the Scotch servant who stubbornly asserted that if his master didn't know a good servant he knew a good master. The free peasant, in ancient or modern times, is free to go or stay. The slave, in ancient times, was free neither to go nor stay. The serf was not free to go; but he was free to stay.

Now what have we done with this man? It is quite simple. There is no historical complexity about it in that respect. We have taken away his freedom to stay. We have turned him out of his field, and whether it was injustice, like turning a free farmer out of his field, or only cruelty to animals, like turning a cow out of its field, the fact remains that he is out in the road. First and last, we have simply destroyed the security. We have not in the least destroyed the inequality. All classes, all creatures, kind or cruel, still see this lowest stratum of society as separate from the upper strata and even the middle strata; he is as separate as the serf. A monster fallen from Mars, ignorant of our simplest word, would know the tramp was at the bottom of the ladder, as well as he would have known it of the serf. The walls of mud are no longer round his boundaries, but only round his boots. The coarse bristling hedge is at the end of his chin, and not of his garden. But mud and bristles still stand out round him like a horrific halo, and separate him from his kind. The Martian would have no difficulty in seeing he was the poorest person in the nation. It is just as impossible that he should marry an heiress, or fight a duel with a duke, or contest a seat at Westminster, or enter a club in Pall Mall, or take a scholarship at Balliol, or take a seat at an opera, or propose a good law, or protest against a bad one, as it was impossible to the serf. Where he differs is in something very different. He has lost what was possible to the serf. He can no longer scratch the bare earth by day or sleep on the bare earth by night, without being collared by a policeman.

Now when I say this man has been oppressed as hardly any other man on this earth has been oppressed, I am not using rhetoric: I have a clear meaning which I am confident of explaining to any honest reader. I do not say he has been treated worse: I say he has been treated differently from the unfortunate in all ages. And the difference is this: that all the others were told to do something, and killed or tortured if they did anything else. This man is not told to do something: he is merely forbidden to do anything. When he was a slave, they said to him, "Sleep in this shed; I will beat you if you sleep anywhere else.” When he was a serf, they said to him, “Let me find you in this field: I will hang you if I find you in anyone else’s field.” But now he is a tramp they say to him, “You shall be jailed if I find you in anyone else’s field: *but I will not give you a field*.” They say, “You shall be punished if you are caught sleeping outside your shed: *but there is no shed*.” If you say that modern magistracies could never say such mad contradictions, I answer with entire certainty that they do say them. A little while ago two tramps were summoned before a magistrate, charged with sleeping in the open air when they had nowhere else to sleep. But this is not the full fun of the incident. The real fun is that each of them eagerly produced about twopence, to prove that they could have got a bed, but deliberately didn’t. To which the policeman replied that two pence would not have got them a bed: they could not possibly have got a bed: and *therefore* (argued that thoughtful officer) they ought to be punished for not getting one. The intelligent magistrate was much struck with the argument: and proceeded to imprison these two men for not doing a thing they could not do. But he was careful to explain that if they had sinned needlessly and in wanton lawlessness, they would have left the court without a stain on their characters; but as they could not avoid it, they were very much to blame. These things are being done in every part of England every day. They have their parallels even in every daily paper; but they have no parallel in any other earthly people or period; except in that insane command to make bricks without straw which brought down all the plagues of Egypt. For the common historical joke about Henry VIII hanging a man for being Catholic and burning him for being Protestant is a symbolic joke only. The sceptic in the Tudor time could do something: he could always agree with Henry VIII. The desperate man to-day can do nothing. For you cannot agree with a maniac who sits on the bench with the straws sticking out of his hair and says, “Procure three-pence from nowhere and I will give you leave to do without it.”

If it be answered that he can go to the work-house, I reply that such an answer is founded on confused thinking. It is true that he is free to go to the workhouse, but only in the same sense in which he is free to go to jail, only in the same sense in which the serf under the gibbet was free to find peace in the grave. Many of the poor greatly prefer the grave to the workhouse, but that is not at all my argument here. The point is this: that it could not have been the general policy of a lord towards serfs to kill them all like wasps. It could not have been his standing "Advice to Serfs" to say, "Get hanged." It cannot be the standing advice of magistrates to citizens to go to prison. And, precisely as plainly, it cannot be the standing advice of rich men to very poor men to go to the workhouses. For that would mean the rich raising their own poor rates enormously to keep a vast and expensive establishment of slaves. Now it may come to this, as Mr. Belloc maintains, but it is not the theory on which what we call the workhouse does in fact rest. The very shape (and even the very size) of a workhouse expresses the fact that it was found for certain quite exceptional human failures — - like the lunatic asylum. Say to a man, "Go to the madhouse," and he will say, "Wherein am I mad?" Say to a tramp under a hedge, "Go to the house of exceptional failures," and he will say with equal reason, "I travel because I have no house; I walk because I have no horse; I sleep out because I have no bed. Wherein have I failed?" And he may have the intelligence to add, "Indeed, your worship, if somebody has failed, I think it is not I." I concede, with all due haste, that he might perhaps say "me."

The specialty then of this man's wrong is that it is the only historic wrong that has in it the quality of *nonsense*. It could only happen in a nightmare, not in a clear and rational hell. It is the top point of that anarchy in the governing mind which, as I said at the beginning, is the main trait of modernity, especially in England. But if the first note in our policy is madness, the next note is certainly meanness. There are two peculiarly mean and unmanly legal mantraps in which this wretched man is tripped up. The first is that which prevents him from doing what any ordinary savage or nomad would do — - take his chance of an uneven subsistence on the rude bounty of nature.

There is something very abject about forbidding this; because it is precisely this adventurous and vagabond spirit which the educated classes praise most in their books, poems and speeches. To feel the drag of the roads, to hunt in nameless hills and fish in secret streams, to have no address save "Over the Hills and Far Away," to be ready to breakfast on berries and the daybreak and sup on the sunset and a sodden crust, to feed on wild things and be a boy again, all this is the heartiest and sincerest impulse in recent culture, in the songs and tales of Stevenson, in the cult of George Borrow and in the delightful little books published by Mr. E. V. Lucas. It is the one true excuse in the core of Imperialism; and it faintly softens the squalid prose and wooden-headed wickedness of the Self-Made

Man who “came up to London with twopence in his pocket.” But when a poorer but braver man with less that twopence in his pocket does the very thing we are always praising, makes the blue heavens his house, we send him to a house built for infamy and flogging. We take poverty itself and only permit it with a property qualification; we only allow a man to be poor if he is rich. And we do this most savagely if he has sought to snatch his life by that particular thing of which our boyish adventure stories are fullest — -hunting and fishing. The extremely severe English game laws hit most heavily what the highly reckless English romances praise most irresponsibly. All our literature is full of praise of the chase — - especially of the wild goose chase. But if a poor man followed, as Tennyson says, “far as the wild swan wings to where the world dips down to sea and sands,” Tennyson would scarcely allow him to catch it. If he found the wildest goose in the wildest fenland in the wildest regions of the sunset, he would very probably discover that the rich never sleep and that there are no wild things in England.

In short, the English ruler is always appealing to a nation of sportsmen and concentrating all his efforts on preventing them from having any sport. The Imperialist is always pointing out with exultation that the common Englishman can live by adventure anywhere on the globe. But if the common Englishmen tries to live by adventure in England, he is treated as harshly as a thief, and almost as harshly as an honest journalist. This is hypocrisy: the magistrate who gives his son “Treasure Island” and then imprisons a tramp is a hypocrite; the squire who is proud of English colonists and indulgent to English schoolboys, but cruel to English poachers, is drawing near that deep place wherein all liars have their part. But our point here is that the baseness is in the idea of *bewildering* the tramp; of leaving him no place for repentance. It is quite true, of course, that in the days of slavery or of serfdom the needy were fenced by yet fiercer penalties from spoiling the hunting of the rich. But in the older case there were two very important differences, the second of which is our main subject in this chapter. The first is that in a comparatively wild society, however fond of hunting, it seems impossible that enclosing and game-keeping can have been so omnipresent and efficient as in a society full of maps and policemen. The second difference is the one already noted: that if the slave or semi-slave was forbidden to get his food in the green wood, he was told to get it somewhere else. The note of unreason was absent.

This is the first meanness; and the second is like unto it. If there is one thing of which cultivated modern letters is full besides adventure it is altruism. We are always being told to help others, to regard our wealth as theirs, to do what good we can, for we shall not pass this way again. We are everywhere urged by humanitarians to help lame dogs over stiles — - though some humanitarians, it is true, seem to feel a colder interest in the case of lame men and women. Still, the chief fact of our literature, among all historic literatures, is human charity. But what is the chief fact of our legislation? The great outstanding fact of modern legislation, among all historic legislations, is the forbidding of human charity. It is this astonishing paradox, a thing in the teeth of all logic and conscience, that a man that takes another man's money with his leave can be punished as if he had taken it without his leave. All through those dark or dim ages behind us, through times of senile stagnation, of feudal insolence, of pestilence and civil strife and all else that can wear down the weak, for the weak to ask for charity was counted lawful, and to give that charity, admirable. In all other centuries, in short, the casual bad deeds of bad men could be partly patched and mended by the casual good deeds of good men. But this is now forbidden; for it would leave the tramp a last chance if he could beg.

Now it will be evident by this time that the interesting scientific experiment on the tramp entirely depends on leaving him *no* chance, and not (like the slave) one chance. Of the economic excuses offered for the persecution of beggars it will be more natural to speak in the next chapter. It will suffice here to say that they are mere excuses, for a policy that has been persistent while probably largely unconscious, with a selfish and atheistic unconsciousness. That policy was directed towards something — - or it could never have cut so cleanly and cruelly across the sentimental but sincere modern trends to adventure and altruism. Its object is soon stated. It was directed towards making the very poor man work for the capitalist, for any wages or none. But all this, which I shall also deal with in the next chapter, is here only important as introducing the last truth touching the man of despair. The game laws have taken from him his human command of Nature. The mendicancy laws have taken from him his human demand on Man. There is one human thing left it is much harder to take from him. Debased by him and his betters, it is still something brought out of Eden, where God made him a demigod; it does not depend on money and but little on time. He can create in his own image. The terrible truth is in the heart of a hundred legends and mysteries. As Jupiter could be hidden from all-devouring Time, as the Christ Child could be hidden from Herod — - so the child unborn is still hidden from the omniscient oppressor. He who lives not yet, he and he alone is left; and they seek his life to take it away.

III

TRUE HISTORY OF A EUGENIST

He does not live in a dark lonely tower by the sea, from which are heard the screams of vivisected men and women. On the contrary, he lives in Mayfair. He does not wear great goblin spectacles that magnify his eyes to moons or diminish his neighbours to beetles. When he is more dignified he wears a single eyeglass; when more intelligent, a wink. He is not indeed wholly without interest in heredity and Eugenical biology; but his studies and experiments in this science have specialized almost exclusively in *equus celer*, the rapid or running horse. He is not a doctor; though he employs doctors to work up a case for Eugenics, just as he employs doctors to correct the errors of his dinner. He is not a lawyer, though unfortunately often a magistrate. He is not an author or a journalist; though he not infrequently owns a newspaper. He is not a soldier, though he may have a commission in the yeomanry; nor is he generally a gentleman, though often a nobleman. His wealth now commonly comes from a large staff of employed persons who scurry about in big buildings while he is playing golf. But he very often laid the foundations of his fortune in a very curious and poetical way, the nature of which I have never fully understood. It consisted in his walking about the street without a hat and going up to another man and saying, “Suppose I have two hundred whales out of the North Sea.” To which the other man replied, “And let us imagine that I am in possession of two thousand elephants’ tusks.” They then exchange, and the first man goes up to a third man and says, “Supposing me to have lately come into the possession of two thousand elephants’ tusks, would you, etc.?” If you play this game well, you become very rich; if you play it badly you have to kill yourself or try your luck at the Bar. The man I am speaking about must have played it well, or at any rate successfully.

He was born about 1860; and has been a Member of Parliament since about 1890. For the first half of his life he was a Liberal; for the second half he has been a Conservative; but his actual policy in Parliament has remained largely unchanged and consistent. His policy in Parliament is as follows: he takes a seat in a room downstairs at Westminster, and takes from his breast pocket an excellent cigar case, from which in turn he takes an excellent cigar. This he lights, and converses with other owners of such cigars on *equus celer* or such matters as may afford him entertainment. Two or three times in the afternoon a bell rings; whereupon he deposits the cigar in an ash tray with great particularity, taking care not to break the ash, and proceeds to an upstairs room, flanked with two passages. He then walks into whichever of the two passages shall be indicated to him by a young man of the upper classes, holding a slip of paper. Having gone into this passage he comes out of it again, is counted by the young man and proceeds downstairs again; where he takes up the cigar once more, being careful not to break the ash. This process, which is known as Representative government, has never called for any great variety in the manner of his life. Nevertheless, while his Parliamentary policy is unchanged, his change from one side of the House to the other did correspond with a certain change in his general policy in commerce and social life. The change of the party label is by this time quite a trifling matter; but there was in his case a change of philosophy or at least a change of project; though it was not so much becoming a Tory, as becoming rather the wrong kind of Socialist. He is a man with a history. It is a sad history, for he is certainly a less good man than he was when he started. That is why he is the man who is really behind Eugenics. It is because he has degenerated that he has come to talking of Degeneration.

In his Radical days (to quote from one who corresponded in some ways to this type) he was a much better man, because he was a much less enlightened one. The hard impudence of his first Manchester Individualism was softened by two relatively humane qualities; the first was a much great manliness in his pride; the second was a much greater sincerity in his optimism. For the first point, the modern capitalist is merely industrial; but this man was also industrious. He was proud of hard work; nay, he was even proud of low work — - if he could speak of it in the past and not the present. In fact, he invented a new kind of Victorian snobbishness, an inverted snobbishness. While the snobs of Thackeray turned Muggins into De Mogyns, while the snobs of Dickens wrote letters describing themselves as officers' daughters "accustomed to every luxury — - except spelling," the Individualist spent his life in hiding his prosperous parents. He was more like an American plutocrat when he began; but he has since lost the American simplicity. The Frenchman works until he can't play; and then thanks the devil, his master, that he is donkey enough to die in harness. But the Englishman, as he has since become, works until he can pretend that he never worked at all. He becomes as far as possible another person — - a country gentleman who has never heard of his shop; one whose left hand holding a gun knows not what his right hand doeth in a ledger. He uses a peerage as an alias, and a large estate as a sort of alibi. A stern Scotch minister remarked concerning the game of golf, with a terrible solemnity of manner, “the man who plays golf — - he neglects his business, he forsakes his wife, he forgets his God.” He did not seem to realize that it is the chief aim of many a modern capitalist’s life to forget all three.

This abandonment of a boyish vanity in work, this substitution of a senile vanity in indolence, this is the first respect in which the rich Englishman has fallen. He was more of a man when he was at least a master-workman and not merely a master. And the second important respect in which he was better at the beginning is this: that he did then, in some hazy way, half believe that he was enriching other people as well as himself. The optimism of the early Victorian Individualists was not wholly hypocritical. Some of the clearest-headed and blackest-hearted of them, such as Malthus, saw where things were going, and boldly based their Manchester city on pessimism instead of optimism. But this was not the general case; most of the decent rich of the Bright and Cobden sort did have a kind of confused faith that the economic conflict would work well in the long run for everybody. They thought the troubles of the poor were incurable by State action (they thought that of all troubles), but they did not cold-bloodedly contemplate the prospect of those troubles growing worse and worse. By one of those tricks or illusions of the brain to which the luxurious are subject in all ages, they sometimes seemed to feel as if the populace had triumphed symbolically in their own persons. They blasphemously thought about their thrones of gold what can only be said about a cross — - that they, being lifted up, would draw all men after them. They were so full of the romance that anybody could be Lord Mayor, that they seemed to have slipped into thinking that everybody could. It seemed as if a hundred Dick Whittingtons, accompanied by a hundred cats, could all be accommodated at the Mansion House. It was all nonsense; but it was not (until later) all humbug.

Step by step, however, with a horrid and increasing clearness, this man discovered what he was doing. It is generally one of the worst discoveries a man can make. At the beginning, the British plutocrat was probably quite as honest in suggesting that every tramp carried a magic cat like Dick

Whittington, as the Bonapartist patriot was in saying that every French soldier carried a marshal's *baton* in his knapsack. But it is exactly here that the difference and the danger appears. There is no comparison between a well-managed thing like Napoleon's army and an unmanageable thing like modern competition. Logically, doubtless, it was impossible that every soldier should carry a marshal's *baton*; they could not all be marshals anymore than they could all be mayors. But if the French soldier did not always have a *baton* in his knapsack, he always had a knapsack. But when that Self-Helper who bore the adorable name of Smiles told the English tramp that he carried a coronet in his bundle, the English tramp had an unanswerable answer. He pointed out that he had no bundle. The powers that ruled him had not fitted him with a knapsack, any more than they had fitted him with a future — - or even a present. The destitute Englishman, so far from hoping to become anything, had never been allowed even to be anything. The French soldier's ambition may have been in practice not only a short, but even a deliberately shortened ladder, in which the top rungs were knocked out. But for the English it was the bottom rungs that were knocked out, so that they could not even begin to climb. And sooner or later, in exact proportion to his intelligence, the English plutocrat began to understand not only that the poor were impotent, but that their impotence had been his only power. The truth was not merely that his riches had left them poor; it was that nothing but their poverty could have been strong enough to make him rich. It is this paradox, as we shall see, that creates the curious difference between him and every other kind of robber.

I think it is no more than justice to him to say that the knowledge, where it has come to him, has come to him slowly; and I think it came (as most things of common-sense come) rather vaguely and as in a vision — - that is, by the mere look of things. The old Cobdennite employer was quite within his rights in arguing that earth is not heaven, that the best obtainable arrangement might contain many necessary evils; and that Liverpool and Belfast might be growing more prosperous as a whole in spite of pathetic things that might be seen there. But I simply do not believe he has been able to look at Liverpool and Belfast and continue to think this: that is why he has turned himself into a sham country gentleman. Earth is not heaven, but the nearest we can get to heaven ought not to *look* like hell; and Liverpool and Belfast look like hell, whether they are or not. Such cities might be growing prosperous as a whole, though a few citizens were more miserable.

But it was more and more broadly apparent that it was exactly and precisely *as a whole* that they were not growing more prosperous, but only the few citizens who were growing more prosperous by their increasing misery. You could not say a country was becoming a white man's country when there were more and more black men in it every day. You could not say a community was more and more masculine when it was producing more and more women. Nor can you say that a city is growing richer and richer when more and more of its inhabitants are very poor men. There might be a false agitation founded on the pathos of individual cases in a community pretty normal in bulk. But the fact is that no one can take a cab across Liverpool without having a quite complete and unified impression that the pathos is not a pathos of individual cases, but a pathos in bulk. People talk of the Celtic sadness; but there are very few things in Ireland that look so sad as the Irishman in Liverpool. The desolation of Tara is cheery compared with the desolation of Belfast. I recommend Mr. Yeats and his mournful friends to turn their attention to the pathos of Belfast. I think if they hung up the harp that once in Lord Furness's factory, there would be a chance of another string breaking.

Broadly, and as things bulk to the eye, towns like Leeds, if placed beside towns like Rouen or Florence, or Chartres, or Cologne, do actually look like beggars walking among burghers. After that overpowering and unpleasant impression it is really useless to argue that they are richer because a few of their parasites get rich enough to live somewhere else. The point may be put another way, thus: that it is not so much that these more modern cities have this or that monopoly of good or evil; it is that they have every good in its fourth-rate form and every evil in its worst form. For instance, that interesting weekly paper *The Nation* amiably rebuked Mr. Belloc and myself for suggesting that revelry and the praise of fermented liquor were more characteristic of Continental and Catholic communities than of communities with the religion and civilization of Belfast. It said that if we would "cross the border" into Scotland, we should find out our mistake. Now, not only have I crossed the border, but I have had considerable difficulty in crossing the road in a Scotch town on a festive evening. Men were literally lying like piled-up corpses in the gutters, and from broken bottles whisky was pouring down the drains. I am not likely, therefore, to attribute a total and arid abstinence to the whole of industrial Scotland. But I never said that drinking was a mark rather of the Catholic countries. I said that moderate drinking was a mark rather of the Catholic countries. In other words, I say of the common type of Continental citizen, not that he is the only person who is drinking, but that he is the only person who knows how to drink. Doubtless gin is as much a feature of Hoxton as beer is a feature of Munich. But who is the connoisseur who prefers the gin of Hoxton to the beer of Munich? Doubtless the Protestant Scotch ask for "Scotch," as the men of Burgundy ask for Burgundy. But do we find them lying in heaps on each side of the road when we walk through a Burgundian village? Do we find the French peasant ready to let Burgundy escape down a drain-pipe? Now this one point, on which I accept *The Nation*'s challenge, can be exactly paralleled on almost every point by which we test a civilization. It does not matter whether we are for alcohol or against it. On either argument Glasgow is more objectionable than Rouen. The French abstainer makes less fuss; the French drinker gives less offence. It is so with property, with war, with everything. I can understand a teetotaller being horrified, on his principles, at Italian wine-drinking. I simply cannot believe he could be *more* horrified at it than at Hoxton gin-drinking. I can understand a Pacifist, with his special scruples, disliking the militarism of Belfort. I flatly deny that he can dislike it more than the militarism of Berlin. I can understand a good Socialist hating the petty cares of the distributed peasant property. I deny that any good Socialist can hate them more than he hates the large cares of Rockefeller. That is the unique tragedy of the plutocratic state to-day; it has no successes to hold up against the failures it alleges to exist in Latin or other methods. You can (if you are well out of his reach) call the Irish rustic debased and superstitious. I defy you to contrast his debasement and superstition with the citizenship and enlightenment of the English rustic.

To-day the rich man knows in his heart that he is a cancer and not an organ of the State. He differs from all other thieves or parasites for this reason: that the brigand who takes by force wishes his victims to be rich. But he who wins by a one-sided contract actually wishes them to be poor. Rob Roy in a cavern, hearing a company approaching, will hope (or if in a pious mood, pray) that they may come laden with gold or goods. But Mr. Rockefeller, in his factory, knows that if those who pass are laden with goods they will pass on. He will therefore (if in a pious mood) pray that they may be destitute, and so be forced to work his factory for him for a starvation wage. It is said (and also, I believe, disputed) that Blucher riding through the richer parts of London exclaimed, “What a city to sack!” But Blucher was a soldier if he was a bandit. The true sweater feels quite otherwise. It is when he drives through the poorest parts of London that he finds the streets paved with gold, being paved with prostrate servants; it is when he sees the grey lean leagues of Bow and Poplar that his soul is uplifted and he knows he is secure. This is not rhetoric, but economics.

I repeat that up to a point the profiteer was innocent because he was ignorant; he had been lured on by easy and accommodating events. He was innocent as the new Thane of Glamis was innocent, as the new Thane of Cawdor was innocent; but the King — - the modern manufacturer, like Macbeth, decided to march on, under the mute menace of the heavens. He knew that the spoil of the poor was in his houses; but he could not, after careful calculation, think of any way in which they could get it out of his houses without being arrested for housebreaking. He faced the future with a face flinty with pride and impenitence. This period can be dated practically by the period when the old and genuine Protestant religion of England began to fail; and the average business man began to be agnostic, not so much because he did not know where he was, as because he wanted to forget. Many of the rich took to scepticism exactly as the poor took to drink; because it was a way out. But in any case, the man who had made a mistake not only refused to unmake it, but decided to go on making it. But in this he made yet another most amusing mistake, which was the beginning of all Eugenics.

IV

THE VENGEANCE OF THE FLESH

By a quaint paradox, we generally miss the meaning of simple stories because we are not subtle enough to understand their simplicity. As long as men were in sympathy with some particular religion or other romance of things in general, they saw the thing solid and swallowed it whole, knowing that it could not disagree with them. But the moment men have lost the instinct of being simple in order to understand it, they have to be very subtle in order to understand it. We can find, for instance, a very good working case in those old puritanical nursery tales about the terrible punishment of trivial sins; about how Tommy was drowned for fishing on the Sabbath, or Sammy struck by lightning for going out after dark. Now these moral stories are immoral, because Calvinism is immoral. They are wrong, because Puritanism is wrong. But they are not quite so wrong, they are not a quarter so wrong, as many superficial sages have supposed.

The truth is that everything that ever came out of a human mouth had a human meaning; and not one of the fixed fools of history was such a fool as he looks. And when our great-uncles or great grandmothers told a child he might be drowned by a breaking of the Sabbath, their souls (though undoubtedly, as Touchstone said, in a parlous state) were not in quite so simple a state as is suggested by supposing that their god was a devil who dropped babies into the Thames for a trifle. This form of religious literature is a morbid form if taken by itself; but it did correspond to certain reality in psychology which most people of any religion, or even of none, have felt a touch of at some time or other. Leaving out theological terms as far as possible, it is the subconscious feeling that one can be wrong with Nature as well as right with Nature; that the point of wrongness may be a detail (in the superstitions of heathens this is often quite a triviality); but that if one is really wrong with Nature, there is no particular reason why all her rivers should not drown or all her storm-bolts strike one who is, by this vague yet vivid hypothesis, her enemy. This may be a mental sickness, but it is too human or too mortal a sickness to be called solely a superstition. It is not solely a superstition; it is not simply superimposed upon human nature by something that has got on top of it. It flourishes without check among non-

Christian systems, and it flourishes especially in Calvinism, because Calvinism is the most non-Christian of Christian systems. But like everything else that inheres in the natural senses and spirit of man, it has something in it; it is not stark unreason. If it is an ill (and it generally is), it is one of the ills that flesh is heir to, but he is the lawful heir. And like many other dubious or dangerous human instincts or appetites, it is sometimes useful as a warning against worse things.

Now the trouble of the nineteenth century very largely came from the loss of this; the loss of what we may call the natural and heathen mysticism. When modern critics say that Julius Caesar did not believe in Jupiter, or that Pope Leo did not believe in Catholicism, they overlook an essential difference between those ages and ours. Perhaps Julius did not believe in Jupiter; but he did not disbelieve in Jupiter. There was nothing in his philosophy, or the philosophy of that age, that could forbid him to think that there was a spirit personal and predominant in the world. But the modern materialists are not permitted to doubt; they are forbidden to believe. Hence, while the heathen might avail himself of accidental omens, queer coincidences or casual dreams, without knowing for certain whether they were really hints from heaven or premonitory movements in his own brain, the modern Christian turned heathen must not entertain such notions at all, but must reject the oracle as the altar. The modern sceptic was drugged against all that was natural in the supernatural. And this was why the modern tyrant marched upon his doom, as a tyrant literally pagan might possibly not have done.

There is one idea of this kind that runs through most popular tales (those, for instance, on which Shakespeare is so often based) — - an idea that is profoundly moral even if the tales are immoral. It is what may be called the flaw in the deed: the idea that, if I take my advantage to the full, I shall hear of something to my disadvantage. Thus Midas fell into a fallacy about the currency; and soon had reason to become something more than a Bimetallist. Thus Macbeth had a fallacy about forestry; he could not see the trees for the wood. He forgot that, though a place cannot be moved, the trees that grow on it can. Thus Shylock had a fallacy of physiology; he forgot that, if you break into the house of life, you find it a bloody house in the most emphatic sense. But the modern capitalist did not read fairy-tales, and never looked for the little omens at the turnings of the road. He (or the most intelligent section of him) had by now realized his position, and knew in his heart it was a false position. He thought a margin of men out of work was good for his business; he could no longer really think it was good for his country. He could no longer be the old "hard-headed" man who simply did not understand things; he could only be the hard-hearted man who faced them. But he still marched on, he was sure he had made no mistake.

However, he had made a mistake — - as definite as a mistake in multiplication. It may be summarized thus: that the same inequality and insecurity that makes cheap labour may make bad labour, and at last no labour at all. It was as if a man who wanted something from an enemy, should at last reduce the enemy to come knocking at his door in the despair of winter, should keep him waiting in the snow to sharpen the bargain; and then come out to find the man dead upon the doorstep.

He had discovered the divine boomerang; his sin had found him out. The experiment of Individualism — - the keeping of the worker half in and half out of work — - was far too ingenious not to contain a flaw. It was too delicate a balance to work entirely with the strength of the starved and the vigilance of the benighted. It was too desperate a course to rely wholly on desperation. And as time went on the terrible truth slowly declared itself; the degraded class was really degenerating. It was right and proper enough to use a man as a tool; but the tool, ceaselessly used, was being used up. It was quite reasonable and respectable, of course, to fling a man away like a tool; but when it was flung away in the rain the tool rusted. But the comparison to a tool was insufficient for an awful reason that had already begun to dawn upon the master's mind. If you pick up a hammer you do not find a whole family of nails clinging to it. If you fling away a chisel by the roadside, it does not litter and leave a lot of little chisels. But the meanest of the tools, Man, had still this strange privilege which God had given him. doubtless by mistake. Despite all improvements in machinery, the most important part of the machinery (the fittings technically described in the trade as "hands") were apparently growing worse. The firm was not only encumbered with one useless servant, but he immediately turned himself into five useless servants. "The poor should not be emancipated," the old reactionaries used to say, "until they are fit for freedom." But if this downrush went on, it looked as if the poor would not stand high enough to be fit for slavery.

So at least it seemed, doubtless in a great degree subconsciously, to the man who had wagered all his wealth on the usefulness of the poor to the rich and the dependence of the rich on the poor. The time came at last when the rather reckless breeding in the abyss below ceased to be a supply, and began to be something like a wastage; ceased to be something like keeping foxhounds, and began alarmingly to resemble a necessity of shooting foxes. The situation was aggravated by the fact that these sexual pleasures were often the only ones the very poor could obtain, and were, therefore, disproportionately pursued, and by the fact that their conditions were often such that prenatal nourishment and such things were utterly abnormal. The consequences began to appear. To a much less extent than the Eugenists assert, but still to a notable extent, in a much looser sense than the Eugenists assume, but still in some sort of sense, the types that were inadequate or incalculable or uncontrollable began to increase. Under the hedges of the country, on the seats of the parks, loafing under the bridges or leaning over the Embankment, began to appear a new race of men — - men who are certainly not mad, whom we shall gain no scientific light by calling feeble-minded, but who are, in varying individual degrees, dazed or drink-sodden, or lazy or tricky or tired in body and spirit. In a far less degree than the teetotallers tell us, but still in a large degree, the traffic in gin and bad beer (itself a capitalist enterprise) fostered the evil, though it had not begun it. Men who had no human bond with the instructed man, men who seemed to him monsters and creatures without mind, became an eyesore in the market-place and a terror on the empty roads. The rich were afraid.

Moreover, as I have hinted before, the act of keeping the destitute out of public life, and crushing them under confused laws, had an effect on their intelligences which paralyses them even as a proletariat. Modern people talk of “Reason versus Authority”; but authority itself involves reason, or its orders would not even be understood. If you say to your valet, “Look after the buttons on my waistcoat,” he may do it, even if you throw a boot at his head. But if you say to him, “Look after the buttons on my tophat,” he will not do it, though you empty a bootshop over him. If you say to a schoolboy, “Write out that Ode to Horace from memory in the original Latin,” he may do it without a flogging. If you say, “Write out that Ode of Horace in the original German,” he will not do it with a thousand floggings. If you will not learn logic, he certainly will not learn Latin. And the ludicrous laws to which the needy are subject (such as that which punishes the homeless for not going home) have really, I think, a great deal to do with a certain increase in their sheepishness and short-wittedness, and, therefore, in their industrial inefficiency. By one of the monstrosities of the feeble-minded theory, a man actually acquitted by judge and jury could then be examined by doctors as to the state of his mind — - presumably in order to discover by what diseased eccentricity he had refrained from the crime. In other words, when the police cannot jail a man who is innocent of doing something, they jail him for being too innocent to do anything. I do not suppose the man is an idiot at all, but I can believe he feels more like one after the legal process than before. Thus all the factors — - the bodily exhaustion, the harassing fear of hunger, the reckless refuge in sexuality, and the black botheration of bad laws — - combined to make the employee more unemployable.

Now, it is very important to understand here that there were two courses of action still open to the disappointed capitalist confronted by the new peril of this real or alleged decay. First, he might have reversed his machine, so to speak, and started unwinding the long rope of dependence by which he had originally dragged the proletarian to his feet. In other words, he might have seen that the workmen had more money, more leisure, more luxuries, more status in the community, and then trusted to the normal instincts of reasonably happy human beings to produce a generation better born, bred and cared for than these tortured types that were less and less use to him. It might still not be too late to rebuild the human house upon such an architectural plan that poverty might fly out of the window, with the reasonable prospect of love coming in at the door. In short, he might have let the English poor, the mass of whom were not weak-minded, though more of them were growing weaker, a reasonable chance, in the form of more money, of achieving their eugenical resurrection themselves. It has never been shown, and it cannot be shown, that the method would have failed. But it can be shown, and it must be closely and clearly noted, that the method had very strict limitations from the employers’ own point of view. If they made the worker too comfortable, he would not work to increase another’s comforts; if they made him too independent, he would not work like a dependent. If, for instance, his wages were so good that he could save out of them, he might cease to be a wage-earner. If his house or garden were his own, he might stand an economic siege in it. The whole capitalist experiment had been built on his dependence; but now it was getting out of hand, not in the direction of freedom, but of frank helplessness. One might say that his dependence had got independent of control.

But there was another way. And towards this the employer's ideas began, first darkly and unconsciously, but now more and more clearly, to drift. Giving property, giving leisure, giving status costs money. But there is one human force that costs nothing. As it does not cost the beggar a penny to indulge, so it would not cost the employer a penny to employ. He could not alter or improve the tables or the chairs on the cheap. But there were two pieces of furniture (labelled respectively "the husband" and "the wife") whose relations were much cheaper. He could alter the *marriage* in the house in such a way as to promise himself the largest possible number of the kind of children he did want, with the smallest number of the kind he did not. He could divert the force of sex from producing vagabonds. And he could harness to his high engines unbought the red unbroken river of the blood of a man in his youth, as he has already harnessed to them all the wild waste rivers of the world.

V

THE MEANNESS OF THE MOTIVE

Now, if any ask whether it be imaginable that an ordinary man of the wealthier type should analyse the problem or conceive the plan, the inhumanly far-seeing plan, as I have set it forth, the answer is: “Certainly not.” Many rich employers are too generous to do such a thing; many are too stupid to know what they are doing. The eugenical opportunity I have described is but an ultimate analysis of a whole drift of thoughts in the type of man who does not analyse his thoughts. He sees a slouching tramp, with a sick wife and a string of rickety children, and honestly wonders what he can do with them. But prosperity does not favour self-examination; and he does not even ask himself whether he means “How can I help them?” or “How can I use them?” — - what he can still do for them, or what they could still do for him. Probably he sincerely means both, but the latter much more than the former; he laments the breaking of the tools of Mammon much more than the breaking of the images of God. It would be almost impossible to grope in the limbo of what he does think; but we can assert that there is one thing he doesn’t think. He doesn’t think, “This man might be as jolly as I am, if he need not come to me for work or wages.”

That this is so, that at root the Eugenist is the Employer, there are multitudinous proofs on every side, but they are of necessity miscellaneous, and in many cases negative. The most enormous is in a sense the most negative: that no one seems able to imagine capitalist industrialism being sacrificed to any other object. By a curious recurrent slip in the mind, as irritating as a catch in a clock, people miss the main thing and concentrate on the mean thing. “Modern conditions” are treated as fixed, though the very word “modern” implies that they are fugitive. “Old ideas” are treated as impossible, though their very antiquity often proves their permanence. Some years ago some ladies petitioned that the platforms of our big railway stations should be raised, as it was more convenient for the hobble skirt. It never occurred to them to change to a sensible skirt. Still less did it occur to them that, compared with all the female fashions that have fluttered about on it, by this time St. Pancras is as historic as St Peter’s.

I could fill this book with examples of the universal, unconscious assumption that life and sex must live by the laws of “business” or industrialism, and not *vice versa*; examples from all the magazines, novels, and newspapers. In order to make it brief and typical, I take one case of a more or less Eugenist sort from a paper that lies open in front of me — - a paper that still bears on its forehead the boast of being peculiarly an organ of democracy in revolt. To this a man writes to say that the spread of destitution will never be stopped until we have educated the lower classes in the methods by which the upper classes prevent procreation. The man had the horrible playfulness to sign his letter “Hopeful.” Well, there are certainly many methods by which people in the upper classes prevent procreation; one of them is what used to be called “platonic friendship,” till they found another name for it at the Old Bailey. I do not suppose the hopeful gentleman hopes for this; but some of us find the abortion he does hope for almost as abominable. That, however, is not the curious point. The curious point is that the hopeful one concludes by saying, “When people have large families and small wages, not only is there a high infantile death-rate, but often those who do live to grow up are stunted and weakened by having had to share the family income for a time with those who died early. There would be less unhappiness if there were no unwanted children.” You will observe that he tacitly takes it for granted that the small wages and the income, desperately shared, are the fixed points, like day and night, the conditions of human life. Compared with them marriage and maternity are luxuries, things to be modified to suit the wage market. There are unwanted children; but unwanted by whom? This man does not really mean that the parents do not want to have them. He means that the employers do not want to pay them properly. Doubtless, if you said to him directly, “Are you in favour of low wages?” he would say, “No.” But I am not, in this chapter, talking about the effect on such modern minds of a cross-examination to which they do not subject themselves. I am talking about the way their minds work, the instinctive trick and turn of their thoughts, the things they assume before argument, and the way they faintly feel that the world is going. And, frankly, the turn of their mind is to tell the child he is not wanted, as the turn of my mind is to tell the profiteer he is not wanted. Motherhood, they feel, and a full childhood, and the beauty of brothers and sisters, are good things in their way, but not so good as a bad wage. About the mutilation of womanhood and the massacre of men unborn, he signs himself “Hopeful.” He is hopeful of female indignity, hopeful of human annihilation. But about improving the small bad wage he signs himself “Hopeless.”

This is the first evidence of motive: the ubiquitous assumption that life and love must fit into a fixed framework of employment, even (as in this case) of bad employment. The second evidence is the tacit and total neglect of the scientific question in all the departments in which it is not an employment question; as, for instance, the marriages of the princely, patrician, or merely plutocratic houses. I do not mean, of course, that no scientific men have rigidly tackled these, though I do not recall any cases. But I am not talking of the merits of individual men of science, but of the push and power behind this movement, the thing that is able to make it fashionable and politically important. I say, if this power were an interest in truth, or even in humanity, the first field in which to study would be in the weddings of the wealthy. Not only would the records be more lucid, and the examples more in evidence, but the cases would be more interesting and more decisive. For the grand marriages have presented both extremes of the problem of pedigree — - first the “breeding in and in,” and later the most incongruous cosmopolitan blends. It would really be interesting to note which worked the best, or what point of compromise was safest. For the poor (about whom the newspaper Eugenists are always talking) cannot offer any test cases so complete. Waiters never had to marry waitresses, as princes had to marry princesses. And (for the other extreme) housemaids seldom marry Red Indians. It may be because there are none to marry. But to the millionaires the continents are flying railway stations, and the most remote races can be rapidly linked together. A marriage in London or Paris may chain Ravenna to Chicago, or Ben Cruachan to Bagdad. Many European aristocrats marry Americans, notoriously the most mixed stock in the world; so that the disinterested Eugenist, with a little trouble, might reveal rich stores of negro or Asiatic blood to his delighted employer. Instead of which he dulls our ears and distresses our refinement by tedious denunciations of the monochrome marriages of the poor.

For there is something really pathetic about the Eugenist’s neglect of the aristocrat and his family affairs. People still talk about the pride of pedigree; but it strikes me as the one point on which the aristocrats are almost morbidly modest. We should be learned Eugenists if we were allowed to know half as much of their heredity as we are of their hairdressing. We see the modern aristocrat in the most human poses in the illustrated papers, playing with his dog or parrot — - nay, we see him playing with his child, or with his grandchild. But there is something heartrending in his refusal to play with his grandfather. There is often something vague and even fantastic about the antecedents of our most established families, which would afford the Eugenist admirable scope not only for investigation but for experiment. Certainly, if he could obtain the necessary powers, the Eugenist might bring off some startling effects with the mixed materials of the governing class. Suppose, to take wild and hypothetical examples, he were to marry a Scotch earl, say, to the daughter of a Jewish banker, or an English duke to an American parvenu of semi-Jewish extraction? What would happen? We have here an unexplored field.

It remains unexplored not merely through snobbery and cowardice, but because the Eugenist (at least the influential Eugenist) half consciously knows it is no part of his job; what he is really wanted for is to get the grip of the governing classes on to the unmanageable output of poor people. It would not matter in the least if all Lord Cowdray's descendants grew up too weak to hold a tool or turn a wheel. It would matter very much, especially to Lord Cowdray, if all his employees grew up like that. The oligarch can be unemployable because he will not be employed. Thus the practical and popular exponent of Eugenics has his face always turned towards the slums, and instinctively thinks in terms of them. If he talks of segregating some incurably vicious type of the sexual sort, he is thinking of a ruffian who assaults girls in lanes. He is not thinking of a millionaire like White, the victim of Thaw. If he speaks of the hopelessness of feeble-mindedness, he is thinking of some stunted creature gaping at hopeless lessons in a poor school. He is not thinking of a millionaire like Thaw, the slayer of White. And this not because he is such a brute as to like people like White or Thaw any more than we do, but because he knows that *his* problem is the degeneration of the useful classes; because he knows that White would never have been a millionaire if all his workers had spent themselves on women as White did, that Thaw would never have been a millionaire if all his servants had been Thaws. The ornaments may be allowed to decay, but the machinery must be mended. That is the second proof of the plutocratic impulse behind all Eugenics: that no one thinks of applying it to the prominent classes. No one thinks of applying it where it could most easily be applied.

A third proof is the strange new disposition to regard the poor as a race; as if they were a colony of Japs or Chinese coolies. It can be most clearly seen by comparing it with the old, more individual, charitable, and (as the Eugenists might say) sentimental view of poverty. In Goldsmith or Dickens or Hood there is a basic idea that the particular poor person ought not to be so poor: it is some accident or some wrong. Oliver Twist or Tiny Tim are fairy princes waiting for their fairy godmother. They are held as slaves, but rather as the hero and heroine of a Spanish or Italian romance were held as slaves by the Moors. The modern poor are getting to be regarded as slaves in the separate and sweeping sense of the negroes in the plantations. The bondage of the white hero to the black master was regarded as abnormal; the bondage of the black to the white master as normal. The Eugenist, for all I know, would regard the mere existence of Tiny Tim as a sufficient reason for massacring the whole family of Cratchit; but, as a matter of fact, we have here a very good instance of how much more practically true to life is sentiment than cynicism. The poor are not a race or even a type. It is senseless to talk about breeding them; for they are not a breed. They are, in cold fact, what Dickens describes: “a dustbin of individual accidents,” of damaged dignity, and often of damaged gentility. The class very largely consists of perfectly promising children, lost like Oliver Twist, or crippled like Tiny Tim. It contains very valuable things, like most dustbins. But the Eugenist delusion of the barbaric breed in the abyss affects even those more gracious philanthropists who almost certainly do want to assist the destitute and not merely to exploit them. It seems to affect not only their minds, but their very eyesight. Thus, for instance, Mrs. Alec Tweedie almost scornfully asks, “When we go through the slums, do we see beautiful children?” The answer is, “Yes, very often indeed.” I have seen children in the slums quite pretty enough to be Little Nell or the outcast whom Hood called “young and so fair.” Nor has the beauty anything necessarily to do with health, there are beautiful healthy children, beautiful dying children, ugly dying children, ugly uproarious children in Petticoat Lane or Park Lane. There are people of every physical and mental type of every sort of health and breeding, in a single back street. They have nothing in common but the wrong we do them.

The important point is, however, that there is more fact and realism in the wildest and most elegant old fictions about disinherited dukes and long-lost daughters than there is in this Eugenist attempt to make the poor all of a piece — - a sort of black fungoid growth that is ceaselessly increasing in chasm. There is a cheap sneer at poor landladies: that they always say they have seen better days. Nine times out of ten they say it because it is true. What can be said of the great mass of Englishmen, by anyone who knows any history, except that they have seen better days? And the landlady's claim is not snobbish, but rather spirited; it is her testimony to the truth in the old tales of which I spoke: that she *ought not* to be so poor or so servile in status; that a normal person ought to have more property and more power in the State than *that*. Such dreams of lost dignity are perhaps the only things that stand between us and the cattle breeding paradise now promised. Nor are such dreams by any means impotent. I remember Mr. T. P. O'Connor wrote an interesting article about Madame Humbert, in the course of which he said that Irish peasants, and probably most peasants, tended to have a half fictitious family legend about an estate to which they were entitled. This was written in the time when Irish peasants were landless in their land; and the delusion doubtless seemed all the more entertaining to the landlords who ruled them and the money-lenders who ruled the landlords. But the dream has conquered the realities. The phantom farms have materialized. Merely by tenaciously affirming the kind of pride that comes after a fall, by remembering the old civilization and refusing the new, by recurring to an old claim that seemed to most Englishmen like the lie of a broken-down lodging-house keeper at Margate — - by all this the Irish have got what they want, in solid mud and turf. That imaginary estate has conquered the Three Estates of the Realm.

But the homeless Englishman must not even remember a home. So far from his house being his castle, he must not have even a castle in the air. He must have no memories; that is why he is taught no history. Why is he told none of the truth about the mediaeval civilization except a few cruelties and mistakes in chemistry? Why does a mediaeval burgher never appear till he can appear in a shirt and a halter? Why does a mediaeval monastery never appear till it is "corrupt" enough to shock the innocence of Henry VIII? Why do we hear of one charter — - that of the barons — - and not a word of the charters of the carpenters, smiths, shipwrights and all the rest? The reason is that the English peasant is not only not allowed to have an estate, he is not even allowed to have lost one. The past has to be painted pitch black, that it may be worse than the present.

There is one strong, startling, outstanding thing about Eugenics, and that is its meanness. Wealth, and the social science supported by wealth, had tried an inhuman experiment. The experiment had entirely failed. They sought to make wealth accumulate — - and they made men decay. Then instead of confessing the error, and trying to restore the wealth, or attempting to repair the decay, they are trying to cover their first cruel experiment with a more cruel experiment. They put a poisonous plaster on a poisonous wound. Vilest of all, they actually quote the bewilderment produced among the poor by their first blunder as a reason for allowing them to blunder again. They are apparently ready to arrest all the opponents of their system as mad, merely because the system was maddening. Suppose a captain had collected volunteers in a hot, waste country by the assurance that he could lead them to water, and knew where to meet the rest of his regiment. Suppose he led them wrong, to a place where the regiment could not be for days, and there was no water. And suppose sunstroke struck them down on the sand man after man, and they kicked and danced and raved. And, when at last the regiment came, suppose the captain successfully concealed his mistake because all his men had suffered too much from it to testify to its ever having occurred. What would you think of the gallant captain? It is pretty much what I think of this particular captain of industry.

Of course, nobody supposes that all Capitalists, or most Capitalists, are conscious of any such intellectual trick. Most of them are as much bewildered as the battered proletariat; but there are some who are less well-meaning and more mean. And these are leading their more generous colleagues towards the fulfilment of this ungenerous evasion, if not towards the comprehension of it. Now a ruler of the Capitalist civilization, who had come to consider the idea of ultimately herding and breeding the workers like cattle, has certainly contemporary problems to review. He has to consider what forces still exist in the modern world for the frustration of his design. The first question is how much remains of the old ideal of individual liberty. The second question is how far the modern mind is committed to such egalitarian ideas as may be implied in Socialism. The third is whether there is any power of resistance in the tradition of the populace itself. These three questions for the future I shall consider in their order in the final chapters that follow. It is enough to say here that I think the progress of these ideals has broken down at the precise point where they will fail to prevent the experiment. Briefly, the progress will have deprived the Capitalist of his old Individualist scruples, without committing him to his new Collectivist obligations. He is in a very perilous position; for he has ceased to be a Liberal without becoming a Socialist, and the bridge by which he was crossing has broken above an abyss of Anarchy.

VI

THE ECLIPSE OF LIBERTY

If such a thing as the Eugenic sociology had been suggested in the period from Fox to Gladstone, it would have been far more fiercely repudiated by the reformers than by the Conservatives. If Tories had regarded it as an insult to marriage, Radicals would have far more resolutely regarded it as an insult to citizenship. But in the interval we have suffered from a process resembling a sort of mystical parricide, such as is told of so many gods, and is true of so many great ideas. Liberty has produced scepticism, and scepticism has destroyed liberty. The lovers of liberty thought they were leaving it unlimited, when they were only leaving it undefined. They thought they were only leaving it undefined, when they were really leaving it undefended. Men merely finding themselves free found themselves free to dispute the value of freedom. But the important point to seize about this reactionary scepticism is that as it is bound to be unlimited in theory, so it is bound to be unlimited in practice. In other words, the modern mind is set in an attitude which would enable it to advance, not only towards Eugenic legislation, but towards any conceivable or inconceivable extravagances of Eugenics.

Those who reply to any plea for freedom invariably fall into a certain trap. I have debated with numberless different people on these matters, and I confess I find it amusing to see them tumbling into it one after another. I remember discussing it before a club of very active and intelligent Suffragists, and I cast it here for convenience in the form which it there assumed. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that I say that to take away a poor man’s pot of beer is to take away a poor man’s personal liberty, it is very vital to note what is the usual or almost universal reply. People hardly ever do reply, for some reason or other, by saying that a man’s liberty consists of such and such things, but that beer is an exception that cannot be classed among them, for such and such reasons. What they almost in variably do say is something like this. “After all, what is liberty? Man must live as a member of a society, and must obey those laws which, etc., etc.” In other words, they collapse into a complete confession that they are attacking all liberty and any liberty; that they do deny the very existence or the very possibility of liberty. In the very form of the answer they admit the full scope of the accusation against them. In trying to rebut the smaller accusation, they plead guilty to the larger one.

This distinction is very important, as can be seen from any practical parallel. Suppose we wake up in the middle of the night and find that a neighbor has entered the house not by the front-door but by the skylight; we may suspect that he has come after the fine old family jewellery. We may be reassured if he can refer it to a really exceptional event; as that he fell on to the roof out of an aeroplane, or climbed on to the roof to escape from a mad dog. Short of the incredible, the stranger the story the better the excuse; for an extraordinary event requires an extraordinary excuse. But we shall hardly be reassured if he merely gazes at us in a dreamy and wistful fashion and says, “After all, what is property? Why should material objects be thus artificially attached, etc., etc.?” We shall merely realize that his attitude allows of his taking the jewellery and everything else. Or if the neighbour approaches us carrying a large knife dripping with blood, we may be convinced by his story that he killed another neighbour in self-defence, that the quiet gentleman next door was really a homicidal maniac. We shall know that homicidal mania is exceptional and that we ourselves are so happy as not to suffer from it, and being free from the disease may be free from the danger. But it will not soothe us for the man with the gory knife to say softly and pensively, “After all, what is human life? Why should we cling to it? Brief at the best, sad at the brightest, it is itself but a disease from which, etc., etc.” We shall perceive that the sceptic is in a mood not only to murder us but to massacre everybody in the street. Exactly the same effect which would be produced by the questions of “What is property?” and “What is life?” is produced by the question of “What is liberty?” It leaves the questioner free to disregard any liberty, or in other words to take any liberties. The very thing he says is an anticipatory excuse for anything he may choose to do. If he gags a man to prevent him from indulging in profane swearing, or locks him in the coal cellar to guard against his going on the spree, he can still be satisfied with saying “After all, what is liberty? Man is a member of, etc., etc.”

That is the problem, and that is why there is now no protection against Eugenic or any other experiments. If the men who took away beer as an unlawful pleasure had paused for a moment to define the lawful pleasures, there might be a different situation. If the men who had denied one liberty had taken the opportunity to affirm other liberties, there might be some defence for them. But it never occurs to them to admit any liberties at all. It never so much as crosses their minds. Hence the excuse for the last oppression will always serve as well as for the next oppression; and to that tyranny there can be no end.

Hence the tyranny has taken but a single stride to reach the secret and sacred place of personal freedom, where no sane man ever dreamed of seeing it; and especially the sanctuary of sex. It is as easy to take away a man's wife or baby as to take away his beer when you can say "What is liberty?"; just as it is easy to cut off his head as to cut off his hair if you are free to say "What is life?" There is no rational philosophy of human rights generally disseminated among the populace, to which we can appeal in defence even of the most intimate or individual things that anybody can imagine. For so far as there was a vague principle in these things, that principle has been wholly changed. It used to be said that a man could have liberty, so long as it did not interfere with the liberty of others. This did afford some rough justification for the ordinary legal view of the man with the pot of beer. For instance, it was logical to allow some degree of distinction between beer and tea, on the ground that a man may be moved by excess of beer to throw the pot at somebody's head. And it may be said that the spinster is seldom moved by excess of tea to throw the tea-pot at anybody's head. But the whole ground of argument is now changed. For people do not consider what the drunkard does to others by throwing the pot, but what he does to himself by drinking the beer. The argument is based on health; and it is said that the Government must safeguard the health of the community. And the moment that is said, there ceases to be the shadow of a difference between beer and tea. People can certainly spoil their health with tea or with tobacco or with twenty other things. And there is no escape for the hygienic logician except to restrain and regulate them all. If he is to control the health of the community, he must necessarily control all the habits of all the citizens, and among the rest their habits in the matter of sex.

But there is more than this. It is not only true that it is the last liberties of man that are being taken away; and not merely his first or most superficial liberties. It is also inevitable that the last liberties should be taken first. It is inevitable that the most private matters should be most under public coercion. This inverse variation is very important, though very little realized. If a man's personal health is a public concern, his most private acts are *more* public than his most public acts. The official must deal *more* directly with his cleaning his teeth in the morning than with his using his tongue in the market place. The inspector must interfere *more* with how he sleeps in the middle of the night than with how he works in the course of the day. The private citizen must have much *less* to say about his bath or his bedroom window than about his vote or his banking account. The policeman must be in a new sense a private detective; and shadow him in private affairs rather than in public affairs. A policeman must shut doors behind him for fear he should sneeze, or shove pillows under him for fear he should snore. All this and things far more fantastic follow from the simple formula that the State must make itself responsible for the health of the citizen. But the point is that the policeman must deal primarily and promptly with the citizen in his relation to his home, and only indirectly and more doubtfully with the citizen in his relation to his city. By the whole logic of this test, the king must hear what is said in the inner chamber and hardly notice what is proclaimed from the house-tops. We heard of a revolution that turns everything upside down. But this is almost literally a revolution that turns everything inside out.

If a wary reactionary of the tradition of Metternich had wished in the nineteenth century to reverse the democratic tendency, he would naturally have begun by depriving the democracy of its margin of more dubious powers over more distant things. He might well begin, for instance, by removing the control of foreign affairs from popular assemblies; and there is a case for saying that a people may understand its own affairs, without knowing anything whatever about foreign affairs. Then he might centralize great national questions, leaving a great deal of local government in local questions. This would proceed so for a long time before it occurred to the blackest terrorist of the despotic ages to interfere with a man's own habits in his own house. But the new sociologists and legislators are, by the nature of their theory, bound to begin where the despots leave off, even if they leave off where the despots begin. For them, as they would put it, the first things must be the very fountains of life, love and birth and babyhood; and these are always covered fountains, flowing in the quiet courts of the home. For them, as Mr. H. G. Wells put it, life itself may be regarded merely as a tissue of births. Thus they are coerced by their own rational principle to begin all coercion at the other end, at the inside end. What happens to the outside end, the external and remote powers of the citizen, they do not very much care; and it is probable that the democratic institutions of recent centuries will be allowed to decay in undisturbed dignity for a century or two more. Thus our civilization will find itself in an interesting situation, not without humour; in which the citizen is still supposed to wield imperial powers over the ends of the earth, but has admittedly no power over his own body and soul at all. He will still be consulted by politicians about whether opium is good for Chinamen, but not whether ale is good for him. He will be cross-examined for his opinions about the danger of allowing Kamshatkal to have a war-fleet, but not about allowing his own child to have a wooden sword. Above all, he will be consulted about the delicate diplomatic crisis created by the proposed marriage of the Emperor of China, and not allowed to marry as he pleases.

Part of this prophecy or probability has already been accomplished; the rest of it, in the absence of any protest, is in process of accomplishment. It would be easy to give an almost endless catalogue of examples, to show how, in dealing with the poorer classes at least, coercion has already come near to a direct control of the relations of the sexes. But I am much more concerned in this chapter to point out that all these things have been adopted in principle, even where they have not been adopted in practice. It is much more vital to realize that the reformers have possessed themselves of a *principle*, which will cover all such things if it be granted, and which is not sufficiently comprehended to be contradicted. It is a principle whereby the deepest things of flesh and spirit must have the most direct relation with the dictatorship of the State. They must have it, by the whole reason and rationale upon which the thing depends. It is a system that might be symbolized by the telephone from headquarters standing by a man’s bed. He must have a relation to Government like his relation to God. That is, the more he goes into the inner chambers, and the more he closes the doors, the more he is alone with the law. The social machinery which makes such a State uniform and submissive will be worked outwards from the household as from a handle, or a single mechanical knob or button. In a horrible sense, loaded with fear and shame and every detail of dishonour, it will be true to say that charity begins at home.

Charity will begin at home in the sense that all home children will be like charity children. Philanthropy will begin at home, for all householders will be like paupers. Police administration will begin at home, for all citizens will be like convicts. And when health and the humours of daily life have passed into the domain of this social discipline, when it is admitted that the community must primarily control the primary habits, when all law begins, so to speak, next to the skin or nearest the vitals — - then indeed it will appear absurd that marriage and maternity should not be similarly ordered. Then indeed it will seem to be illogical, and it will be illogical, that love should be free when life has lost its freedom.

So passed, to all appearance, from the minds of men the strange dream and fantasy called freedom. Whatever be the future of these evolutionary experiments and their effect on civilization, there is one land at least that has something to mourn. For us in England something will have perished which our fathers valued all the more because they hardly troubled to name it; and whatever be the stars of a more universal destiny, the great star of our night has set. The English had missed many other things that men of the same origins had achieved or retained. Not to them was given, like the French, to establish eternal communes and clear codes of equality; not to them, like the South Germans, to keep the popular culture of their songs; not to them, like the Irish, was it given to die daily for a great religion. But a spirit had been with them from the first which fenced, with a hundred quaint customs and legal fictions, the way of a man who wished to walk nameless and alone. It was not for nothing that they forgot all their laws to remember the name of an outlaw, and filled the green heart of England with the figure of Robin Hood. It was not for nothing that even their princes of art and letters had about them something of kings incognito, undiscovered by formal or academic fame; so that no eye can follow the young Shakespeare as he came up the green lanes from Stratford, or the young Dickens when he first lost himself among the lights of London. It is [not] for nothing that the very roads are crooked and capricious, so that a man looking down on a map like a snaky labyrinth, could tell that he was looking on the home of a wandering people. A spirit at once wild and familiar rested upon its woodlands like a wind at rest. If that spirit be indeed departed, it matters little that it has been driven out by perversions it had itself permitted, by monsters it had idly let loose. Industrialism and Capitalism and the rage for physical science were English experiments in the sense that the English lent themselves to their encouragement; but there was something else behind them and within them that was not they — - its name was liberty, and it was our life. It may be that this delicate and tenacious spirit has at last evaporated. If so, it matters little what becomes of the external experiments of our nation in later time. That at which we look will be a dead thing alive with its own parasites. The English will have destroyed England.

VII

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIALISM

Socialism is one of the simplest ideas in the world. It has always puzzled me how there came to be so much bewilderment and misunderstanding and miserable mutual slander about it. At one time I agreed with Socialism, because it was simple. Now I disagree with Socialism, because it is too simple. Yet most of its opponents still seem to treat it, not merely as an iniquity but as a mystery of iniquity, which seems to mystify them even more than it maddens them. It may not seem strange that its antagonists should be puzzled about what it is. It may appear more curious and interesting that its admirers are equally puzzled. Its foes used to denounce Socialism as Anarchy, which is its opposite. Its friends seemed to suppose that it is a sort of optimism, which is almost as much of an opposite. Friends and foes alike talked as if it involved a sort of faith in ideal human nature; why I could never imagine. The Socialist system, in a more special sense than any other, is founded not on optimism but on original sin. It proposes that the State, as the conscience of the community, should possess all primary forms of property; and that obviously on the ground that men cannot be trusted to own or barter or combine or compete without injury to themselves. Just as a State might own all the guns lest people should shoot each other, so this State would own all the gold and land lest they should cheat or rackrent or exploit each other. It seems extraordinarily simple and even obvious; and so it is. It is too obvious to be true. But while it is obvious, it seems almost incredible that anybody ever thought it optimistic.

I am myself primarily opposed to Socialism, or Collectivism or Bolshevism or whatever we call it, for a primary reason not immediately involved here: the ideal of property. I say the ideal and not merely the idea; and this alone disposes of the moral mistake in the matter. It disposes of all the dreary doubts of the Anti-Socialists about men not yet being angels, and all the yet drearier hopes of the Socialists about men soon being supermen. I do not admit that private property is a concession to baseness and selfishness; I think it is a point of honour. I think it is the most truly popular of all points of honour. But this, though it has everything to do with my plea for a domestic dignity, has nothing to do with this passing summary of the situation of Socialism. I only remark in passing that it is vain for the more vulgar sort of Capitalists, sneering at ideals, to say to me that in order to hate Socialism "You must alter human nature." I answer "Yes. You must alter it for the worse."

The clouds were considerably cleared away from the meaning of Socialism by the Fabians of the 'nineties; by Mr. Bernard Shaw, a sort of anti-romantic Quixote, who charged chivalry as chivalry charged windmills, with Sidney Webb for his Sancho Panza. In so far as these paladins had a castle to defend, we may say that their castle was the Post Office. The red pillar-box was the immovable post against which the irresistible force of Capitalist individualism was arrested. Business men who said that nothing could be managed by the State were forced to admit that they trusted all their business letters and business telegrams to the State.

After all, it was not found necessary to have an office competing with another office, trying to send out pinker postage-stamps or more picturesque postmen. It was not necessary to efficiency that the postmistress should buy a penny stamp for a halfpenny and sell it for two pence; or that she should haggle and beat customers down about the price of a postal order; or that she should always take tenders for telegrams. There was obviously nothing actually impossible about the State management of national needs; and the Post Office was at least tolerably managed. Though it was not always a model employer, by any means, it might be made so by similar methods. It was not impossible that equitable pay, and even equal pay, could be given to the Post-Master-General and the postman. We had only to extend this rule of public responsibility, and we should escape from all the terror of insecurity and torture of compassion, which hag-rides humanity in the insane extremes of economic inequality and injustice. As Mr. Shaw put it, "A man must save Society's honour before he can save his own."

That was one side of the argument: that the change would remove inequality; and there was an answer on the other side. It can be stated most truly by putting another model institution and edifice side by side with the Post Office. It is even more of an ideal republic, or commonwealth without competition or private profit. It supplies its citizens not only with the stamps but with clothes and food and lodging, and all they require. It observes considerable level of equality in these things; notably in the clothes. It not only supervises the letters but all the other human communications; notable the sort of evil communications that corrupt good manners. This twin model to the Post Office is called the Prison. And much of the scheme for a model State was regarded by its opponents as a scheme for a model prison; good because it fed men equally, but less acceptable since it imprisoned them equally.

It is better to be in a bad prison than in a good one. From the standpoint of the prisoner this is not at all a paradox; if only because in a bad prison he is more likely to escape. But apart from that, a man was in many ways better off in the old dirty and corrupt prison, where he could bribe turnkeys to bring him drink and meet fellow prisoners to drink with. Now that is exactly the difference between the present system and the proposed system. Nobody worth talking about respects the present system. Capitalism is a corrupt prison. That is the best that can be said for Capitalism. But it is something to be said for it; for a man is a little freer in that corrupt prison than he would be in a complete prison. As a man can find one jailer more lax than another, so he could find one employer more kind than another; he has at least a choice of tyrants. In the other case he finds the same tyrant at every turn. Mr. Shaw and other rational Socialists have agreed that the State would be in practice government by a small group. Any independent man who disliked that group would find his foe waiting for him at the end of every road.

It may be said of Socialism, therefore, very briefly, that its friends recommended it as increasing equality, while its foes resisted it as decreasing liberty. On the one hand it was said that the State could provide homes and meals for all, on the other it was answered that this could only be done by State officials who would inspect houses and regulate meals. The compromise eventually made was one of the most interesting and even curious cases in history. It was decided to do everything that had even been denounced in Socialism, and nothing that had ever been desired in it. Since it was supposed to gain equality at the sacrifice of liberty, we proceeded to prove that it was possible to sacrifice liberty without gaining equality. Indeed, there was not the faintest attempt to gain equality, least of all economic equality. But there was a very spirited and vigourous effort to eliminate liberty, by means of an entirely new crop of crude regulations and interferences. But it was not the Socialist State regulating those whom it fed, like children or even like convicts. It was the Capitalist State raiding those whom it had trampled and deserted in every sort of den, like outlaws or broken men. It occurred to the wiser sociologists that, after all, it would be easy to proceed more promptly to the main business of bullying men, without having gone through the laborious preliminary business of supporting them. After all it was easy to inspect the house without having helped to build it; it was even possible, with luck, to inspect the house in time to prevent it being built. All that is described in the documents of the Housing Problem; for the people of this age loved problems and hated solutions. It was easy to restrict the diet without providing the dinner. All that can be found in the documents of what is called Temperance Reform.

In short, people decided that it was impossible to achieve any of the good of Socialism, but they comforted themselves by achieving all the bad. All that official discipline, about which the Socialists themselves were in doubt or at least on the defensive, was taken over bodily by the Capitalists. They have now added all the bureaucratic tyrannies of a Socialist state to the old plutocratic tyrannies of a Capitalist State. For the vital point is that it did not in the smallest degree diminish the inequalities of a Capitalist State. It simply destroyed such individual liberties as remained among its victims. It did not enable any man to build a better house; it only limited the houses he might live in — - or how he might manage to live there, forbidding him to keep pigs or poultry or to sell beer or cider. It did not even add anything to a man's wages; it only took away something from a man's wages and locked it up, whether he liked it or not, in a sort of money-box which was regarded as a medicine-chest. It does not send food into the house to feed the children; it only sends an inspector into the house to punish the parents for having no food to feed them. It does not see that they have got a fire; it only punishes them for not having a fireguard. It does not even occur to it to provide the fireguard.

Now this anomalous situation will probably ultimately evolve into the Servile State of Mr. Belloc's thesis. The poor will sink into slavery; it might as correctly be said that the poor will rise into slavery. That is to say, sooner or later, it is very probable that the rich will take over the philanthropic as well as the tyrannic side of the bargain; and will feed men like slaves as well as hunting them like outlaws. But for the purpose of my own argument it is not necessary to carry the process so far as this, or indeed any farther than it has already gone. The purely negative stage of interference, at which we have stuck for the present, is in itself quite favourable to all these eugenical experiments. The capitalist whose half-conscious thought and course of action I have simplified into a story in the preceding chapters, finds this insufficient solution quite sufficient for his purposes. What he has felt for a long time is that he must check or improve the reckless and random breeding of the submerged race, which is at once outstripping his requirements and failing to fulfil his needs. Now the anomalous situation has already accustomed him to stopping things. The first interferences with sex need only be negative; and there are already negative interferences without number. So that the study of this stage of Socialism brings us to the same conclusion as that of the ideal of liberty as formally professed by Liberalism. The ideal of liberty is lost, and the ideal of Socialism is changed, till it is a mere excuse for the oppression of the poor.

The first movements for intervention in the deepest domestic concerns of the poor all had this note of negative interference. Official papers were sent round to the mothers in poor streets; papers in which a total stranger asked these respectable women questions which a man would be killed for asking, in the class of what we called gentlemen or in the countries of what were called free men. They were questions supposed to refer to the conditions of maternity; but the point is here that the reformers did not begin by building up those economic or material conditions. They did not attempt to pay money or establish property to create those conditions. They never give anything — - except orders. Another form of the intervention, and one already mentioned, is the kidnapping of children upon the most fantastic excuses of sham psychology. Some people established an apparatus of tests and trick questions; which might make an amusing game of riddles for the family fireside, but seems an insufficient reason for mutilating and dismembering the family. Others became interested in the hopeless moral condition of children born in the economic condition which they did not attempt to improve. They were great on the fact that crime was a disease; and carried on their criminological studies so successfully as to open the reformatory for little boys who played truant; there was not reformatory for reformers. I need not pause to explain that crime is not a disease. It is criminology that is a disease.

Finally one thing may be added which is at least clear. Whether or no the organisation of industry will issue positively in a eugenical reconstruction of the family, it has already issued negatively, as in the negations already noted, in a partial destruction of it. It took the form of a propaganda of popular divorce, calculated at least to accustom the masses to a new notion of the shifting and re-grouping of families. I do not discuss the question of divorce here, as I have done elsewhere, in its intrinsic character; I merely note it as one of these negative reforms which have been substituted for positive economic equality. It was preached with a weird hilarity, as if the suicide of love were something not only humane but happy. But it need not be explained, and certainly it need not be denied, that the harassed poor of a diseased industrialism were indeed maintaining marriage under every disadvantage, and often found individual relief in divorce. Industrialism does produce many unhappy marriages, for the same reason that it produces so many unhappy men. But all the reforms were directed to rescuing the industrialism rather than the happiness. Poor couples were to be divorced because they were already divided. Through all this modern muddle there runs the curious principle of sacrificing the ancient uses of things because they do not fit in with the modern abuses. When the tares are found in the wheat, the greatest promptitude and practicality is always shown in burning the wheat and gathering the tares into the barn. And since the serpent coiled about the chalice had dropped his poison in the wine of Cana, analysts were instantly active in the effort to preserve the poison and to pour away the wine.

VIII

THE END OF THE HOUSEHOLD GOD

The only place where it is possible to find an echo of the mind of the English masses is either in conversation or in comic songs. The latter are obviously the more dubious, but they are the only things recorded and quotable that come anywhere near it. We talk about the popular Press; but in truth there is no popular press. It may be a good thing; but, anyhow, most readers would be mildly surprised if a newspaper leading article were written in the language of a navvy. Sometimes the Press is interested in things in which the democracy is also genuinely interested; such as horse-racing. Sometimes the Press is about as popular as the Press Gang. We talk of Labour leaders in Parliament; but they would be highly unparliamentary if they talked like labourers. The Bolshevists, I believe, profess to promote something that they call “proletarian art,” which only shows that the word Bolshevism can sometimes be abbreviated into bosh. That sort of Bolshevist is not a proletarian, but rather the very thing he accuses everybody also of being. The Bolshevist is above all a bourgeois; a Jewish intellectual of the town. And the real case against industrial intellectualism could hardly be put better than in this very comparison. There has never been such a thing as proletarian art; but there has emphatically been such a thing as peasant art. And the only literature which even reminds us of the real tone and talk of the English working classes is to be found in the comic song of the English music-hall.

I first heard one of them on my voyage to America, in the midst of the sea within sight of the New World, with the Statue of Liberty beginning to loom up on the horizon. From the lips of a young Scotch engineer, of all people in the world, I heard for the first time these immortal words from a London music-hall song: — -

“Father’s got the sack from the water-works
For smoking of his old cherry-briar;
Father’s got the sack from the water-works
‘Cos he might set the water-works on fire.”

As I told my friends in America, I think it no part of a patriot to boast; and boasting itself is certainly not a thing to boast of. I doubt the persuasive power of English as exemplified in Kipling, and one can easily force it on foreigners too much, even as exemplified in Dickens. I am no Imperialist, and only on rare and proper occasions a Jingo. But when I hear those words about Father and the water-works, when I hear under far-off foreign skies anything so gloriously English as that, then indeed (I said to them), then indeed: — -

‘ I thank the goodness and the grace
That on my birth have smiled,
And made me, as you see me here,
A little English child.”

But that noble stanza about the water-works has other elements of nobility besides nationality. It provides a compact and almost perfect summary of the whole social problem in industrial countries like England and America. If I wished to set forth systematically the elements of the ethical and economic problem in Pittsburgh of Sheffield, I could not do better than take these few words as a text, and divide them up like the heads of a sermon. Let me note the points in some rough fashion here.

I. — - *Father*. This word is still in use among the more ignorant and ill-paid of the industrial community; and is the badge of an old convention or unit called the family. A man and woman having vowed to be faithful to each other, the man makes himself responsible for all the children of the woman, and is thus generically called “Father.” It must not be supposed that the poet or singer is necessarily one of the children. It may be the wife, called by the same ritual “Mother.” Poor English wives say “Father” as poor Irish wives say “Himself,” meaning the titular head of the house. The point to seize is that among the ignorant this convention or custom still exists. Father and the family are the foundations of thought; the natural authority still comes natural to the poet; but it is overlaid and thwarted with more artificial authorities; the official, the schoolmaster, the policeman, the employer, and so on. What these forces fighting the family are we shall see, my dear brethren, when we pass to our second heading; which is: — -

2. — - *Got the Sack*. This idiom marks a later stage of the history of the language than the comparatively primitive word “Father.” It is needless to discuss whether the term comes from Turkey or some other servile society. In America they say that Father has been fired. But it involves the whole of the unique economic system under which Father has now to live. Though assumed by family tradition to be a master, he can now, by industrial

tradition, only be a particular kind of servant; a servant who has not the security of a slave. If he owned his own shop and tools, he could not get the sack. If his master owned him, he could not get the sack. The slave and the guildsman know where they will sleep every night; it was only the proletarian of individualist industrialism who could get the sack, if not in the style of the Bosphorus, at least in the sense of the Embankment. We pass to the third heading.

3. — - *From the Water-works*. This detail of Father's life is very important; for this is the reply to most of the Socialists, as the last section is to so many of the Capitalists. The water-works which employed Father is a very large, official and impersonal institution. Whether it is technically a bureaucratic department or a Big business makes little or no change in the feelings of Father in connection with it. The water-works might or might not be nationalized; and it would make no necessary difference to Father being fired, and no difference at all to his being accused of playing with fire. In fact, if the Capitalists are more likely to give him the sack, the Socialists are even more likely to forbid him the smoke. There is no freedom for Father except in some sort of private ownership of things like water and fire. If he owned his own well his water could never be cut off, and while he sits by his own fire his pipe can never be put out. That is the real meaning of property, and the real argument against Socialism; probably the only argument against Socialism.

4. — -*For Smoking*. Nothing marks this queer intermediate phase of industrialism more strangely than the fact that, while employers still claim the right to sack him like a stranger, they are already beginning to claim the right to supervise him like a son. Economically he can go and starve on the Embankment; but ethically and hygienically he must be controlled and coddled in the nursery. Government repudiates all responsibility for seeing that he gets bread. But it anxiously accepts all responsibility for seeing that he does not get beer. It passes an Insurance Act to force him to provide himself with medicine; but it is avowedly indifferent to whether he is able to provide himself with meals. Thus while the sack is inconsistent with the family, the supervision is really inconsistent with the sack. The whole thing is a tangled chain of contradictions. It is true that in the special and sacred text of scripture we are here considering, the smoking is forbidden on a general and public and not on a medicinal and private ground. But it is none the less relevant to remember that, as his masters have already proved that

alcohol is a poison, they may soon prove that nicotine is a poison. And it is most significant of all that this sort of danger is even greater in what is called the new democracy of America than in what is called the old oligarchy of England. When I was in America, people were already "defending" tobacco. People who defend tobacco are on the road to proving that daylight is defensible, or that it is not really sinful to sneeze. In other words, they are quietly going mad.

5. — - *Of his old Cherry-briar*. Here we have the intermediate and anomalous position of the institution of Property. The sentiment still exists, even among the poor, or perhaps especially among the poor. But it is attached to toys rather than tools; to the minor products rather than to the means of production. But something of the sanity of ownership is still to be observed; for instance, the element of custom and continuity. It was an old cherry-briar; systematically smoked by Father in spite of all wiles and temptations to Woodbines and gaspers; an old companion possibly connected with various romantic or diverting events in Father's life. It is perhaps a relic as well as a trinket. But because it is not a true tool, because it gives the man no grip on the creative energies of society, it is, with all the rest of his self-respect, at the mercy of the thing called the sack. When he gets the sack from the water-works, it is only too probable that he will have to pawn his old cherry-briar.

6. — - *'Cos he might set the water-works on fire*. And that single line, like the lovely single lines of the great poets, is so full, so final, so perfect a picture of all the laws we pass and all the reasons we give for them, so exact an analysis of the logic of all our precautions at the present time, that the pen falls even from the hand of the commentator; and the masterpiece is left to speak for itself.

Some such analysis as the above gives a better account than most of the anomalous attitude and situation of the English proletarian today. It is the more appropriate because it is expressed in the words he actually uses; which certainly do not include the word "proletarian." It will be noted that everything that goes to make up that complexity is in an unfinished state. Property has not quite vanished; slavery has not quite arrived; marriage exists under difficulties; social regimentation exists under restraints, or rather under subterfuges. The question which remains is which force is gaining on the other, and whether the old forces are capable of resisting the new. I hope they are; but I recognize that they resist under more than one heavy handicap. The chief of these is that the family feeling of the workmen is by this time rather an instinct than an ideal. The obvious thing to protect an ideal is a religion. The obvious thing to protect the ideal of marriage is the Christian religion. And for various reasons, which only a history of England could explain (though it hardly ever does), the working classes of this country have been very much cut off from Christianity. I do not dream of denying, indeed I should take every opportunity of affirming, that monogamy and its domestic responsibilities can be defended on rational apart from religious grounds. But a religion is the practical protection of any moral idea which has to be popular and which has to be pugnacious. And our ideal, if it is to survive, will have to be both.

Those who make merry over the landlady who has seen better days, of whom something has been said already, commonly speak, in the same jovial journalese, about her household goods as her household gods. They would be much startled if they discovered how right they are. Exactly what is lacking to the modern materialist is something that can be what the household gods were to the ancient heathen. The household gods of the heathen were not only wood and stone; at least there is always more than that in the stone of the hearth-stone and the wood of the roof-tree. So long as Christianity continued the tradition of patron saints and portable relics, this idea of a blessing on the household could continue. If men had not domestic divinities, at least they had divine domesticities. When Christianity was chilled with Puritanism and rationalism, this inner warmth or secret fire in the house faded on the hearth. But some of the embers still glow or at least glimmer; and there is still a memory among the poor that their material possessions are something sacred. I know poor men for whom it is the romance of their lives to refuse big sums of money for an old copper warming-pan. They do not want it, in any sense of base utility. They do not use it as a warming pan; but it warms them for all that. It is indeed, as Sergeant Buzfuz humorously observed, a cover for hidden fire. And the fire is that which burned before the strange and uncouth wooden gods, like giant dolls in the huts of ancient Italy. It is a household god. And I can imagine some such neglected and unlucky English man dying with his eyes on the red gleam of that piece of copper, as happier men have died with their eyes on the golden gleam of a chalice or a cross.

It will thus be noted that there has always been some connection between a mystical belief and the materials of domesticity; that they generally go together; and that now, in a more mournful sense, they are gone together. The working classes have no reserves of property with which to defend their relics of religion. They have no religion with which to sanctify and dignify their property. Above all, they are under the enormous disadvantage of being right without knowing it. They hold their sound principles as if they were sullen prejudices. They almost secrete their small property as if it were stolen property. Often a poor woman will tell a magistrate that she sticks to her husband, with the defiant and desperate air of a wanton resolved to run away from her husband. Often she will cry as hopelessly, and as it were helplessly, when deprived of her child as if she were a child deprived of her doll. Indeed, a child in the street, crying for her lost doll, would probably receive more sympathy than she does.

Meanwhile the fun goes on; and many such conflicts are recorded, even in the newspapers, between heart-broken parents and house-breaking philanthropists; always with one issue, of course. There are any number of them that never get into the newspapers. And we have to be flippant about these things as the only alternative to being rather fierce; and I have no desire to end on a note of universal ferocity. I know that many who set such machinery in motion do so from motives of sincere but confused compassion, and many more from a dull but not dishonourable medical or legal habit. But if I and those who agree with me tend to some harshness and abruptness of condemnation, these worthy people need not be altogether impatient with our impatience. It is surely beneath them, in the scope of their great schemes, to complain of protests so ineffectual about wrongs so individual. I have considered in this chapter the chances of general democratic defence of domestic honour, and have been compelled to the conclusion that they are not at present hopeful; and it is at least clear that we cannot be founding on them any personal hopes. If this conclusion leaves us defeated, we submit that it leaves us disinterested. Ours is not the sort of protest, at least, that promises anything even to the demagogue, let alone the sycophant. Those we serve will never rule, and those we pity will never rise. Parliament will never be surrounded by a mob of submerged grandmothers brandishing pawn-tickets. There is no trade union of defective children. It is not very probable that modern government will be overturned by a few poor dingy devils who are sent to prison by mistake, or rather by ordinary accident. Surely it is not for those magnificent Socialists, or those great reformers and reconstructors of Capitalism, sweeping onward to their scientific triumphs and caring for none of these things, to murmur at our vain indignation. At least if it is vain it is the less venal; and in so far as it is hopeless it is also thankless. They have their great campaigns and cosmopolitan systems for the regimentation of millions, and the records of science and progress. They need not be angry with us, who plead for those who will never read our words or reward our effort, even with gratitude. They need surely have no worse mood towards us than mystification, seeing that in recalling these small things of broken hearts or homes, we are but recording what cannot be recorded; trivial tragedies that will fade faster and faster in the flux of time, cries that fail in a furious and infinite wind, wild words of despair that are written only upon running water; unless, indeed, as some so stubbornly and strangely say, they are somewhere cut deep into a rock, in the red granite of the wrath of God.

IX

A SHORT CHAPTER

Round about the year 1913 Eugenics was turned from a fad to a fashion. Then, if I may so summarize the situation, the joke began in earnest. The organizing mind which we have seen considering the problem of slum population, the popular material and the possibility of protests, felt that the time had come to open the campaign Eugenics began to appear in big headlines in the daily Press, and big pictures in the illustrated papers. A foreign gentleman named Bolce, living at Hampstead, was advertised on a huge scale as having every intention of being the father of the Superman. It turned out to be a Superwoman, and was called Eugenette. The parents were described as devoting themselves to the production of perfect pre-natal conditions. They “eliminated everything from their lives which did not tend towards complete happiness.” Many might indeed be ready to do this; but in the voluminous contemporary journalism on the subject I can find no detailed notes about how it is done. Communications were opened with Mr. H. G. Wells, with Dr. Saleeby, and apparently with Dr. Karl Pearson. Every quality desired in the ideal baby was carefully cultivated in the parents. The problem of a sense of humour was felt to be a matter of great gravity. The Eugenist couple, naturally fearing they might be deficient on this side, were so truly scientific as to have resort to specialists. To cultivate a sense of fun, they visited Harry Lauder, and then Wilkie Bard, and afterwards George Robey; but all, it would appear, in vain. To the newspaper reader, however, it looked as if the names of Metchnikof and Steimnetz and Karl Pearson would soon be quite as familiar as those of Robey and Lauder and Bard. Arguments about these Eugenic authorities, reports of the controversies at the Eugenic Congress, filled countless columns. The fact that Mr. Bolce, the creator of perfect prenatal conditions, was afterwards sued in a lawcourt for keeping his own flat in conditions of filth and neglect, cast but a slight and momentary shadow upon the splendid dawn of the science. It would be vain to record any of the thousand testimonies to its triumph. In the nature of things, this should be the longest chapter in the book, or rather the beginning of another book. It should record, in numberless examples, the triumphant popularization of Eugenics in England. But as a matter of fact this is not the first chapter but the last. And this must be a very short chapter, because the whole of this story was cut short. A very curious thing happened. England went to war.

This would in itself have been a sufficiently irritating interruption in the early life of Eugenette, and in the early establishment of Eugenics. But a far more dreadful and disconcerting fact must be noted. With whom, alas, did England go to war? England went to war with the Superman in his native home. She went to war with that very land of scientific culture from which the very ideal of a Superman had come. She went to war with the whole of Dr. Steinmetz, and presumably with at least half of Dr. Karl Pearson. She gave battle to the birthplace of nine-tenths of the professors who were the prophets of the new hope of humanity. In a few weeks the very name of professor was a matter for hissing and low plebeian mirth. The very name of Nietzsche, who had held up this hope of something superhuman to humanity, was laughed at for all the world as if he had been touched with lunacy. A new mood came upon the whole people, a mood of marching, of spontaneous soldierly vigilance and democratic discipline, moving to the faint tune of bugles far away. Men began to talk strangely of old and common things, of the counties of England, of its quiet landscapes, of motherhood and the half-buried religion of the race. Death shone on the land like a new daylight, making all things vivid and visibly dear. And in the presence of this awful actuality it seemed, somehow or other, as if even Mr. Bolce and the Eugenic baby were things unaccountably far-away and almost, if one may say so, funny.

Such a revulsion requires explanation, and it may be briefly given. There was a province of Europe which had carried nearer to perfection than any other the type of order and foresight that are the subject of this book. It had long been the model State of all those more rational moralists who saw in science the ordered salvation of society. It was admittedly ahead of all other States in social reform. All the systematic social reform. All the systematic social reforms were professedly and proudly borrowed from it. Therefore when this province of Prussia found it convenient to extend its imperial system to the neighbouring and neutral State of Belgium, all these scientific enthusiasts had a privilege not always granted to mere theorists. They had the gratification of seeing their great Utopia at work, on a grand scale and very close at hand. They had not to wait, like other evolutionary idealists, for the slow approach of something nearer to their dreams; or to leave it merely as a promise to posterity. They had not to wait for it as for a distant thing like the vision of a future state; but in the flesh they had seen their Paradise. And they were very silent for five years.

The thing died at last, and the stench of it stank to the sky. It might be thought that so terrible a savour would never altogether leave the memories of men; but men's memories are unstable things. It may be that gradually these dazed dupes will gather again together, and attempt again to believe their dreams and disbelieve their eyes. There may be some whose love of slavery is so ideal and disinterested that they are loyal to it even in its defeat. Wherever a fragment of that broken chain is found, they will be found hugging it. But there are limits set in the everlasting mercy to him who has been once deceived and a second time deceives himself. They have seen their paragons of science and organization playing their part on land and sea; showing their love of learning at Louvain and their love of humanity at Lille. For a time at least they have believed the testimony of their senses. And if they do not believe now, neither would they believe though one rose from the dead; though all the millions who died to destroy Prussianism stood up and testified against it.

ST. FRANCIS

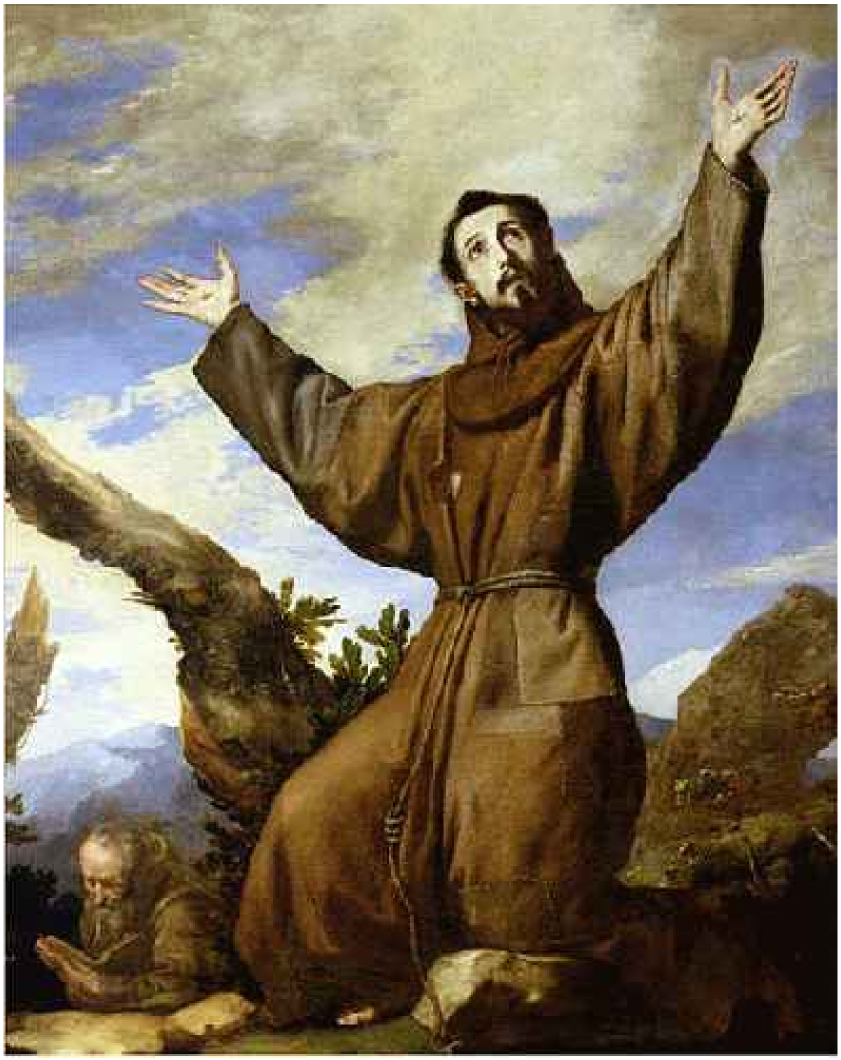

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM OF ST. FRANCIS

A sketch of St. Francis of Assisi in modern English may be written in one of three ways. Between these the writer must make his selection; and the third way, which is adopted here, is in some respects the most difficult of all. At least, it would be the most difficult if the other two were not impossible.

First, he may deal with this great and most amazing man as a figure in secular history and a model of social virtues. He may describe this divine demagogue as being, as he probably was, the world's one quite sincere democrat. He may say (what means very little) that St. Francis was in advance of his age. He may say (what is quite true) that St. Francis anticipated all that is most liberal and sympathetic in the modern mood; the love of nature; the love of animals; the sense of social compassion; the sense of the spiritual dangers of prosperity and even of property. All those things that nobody understood before Wordsworth were familiar to St. Francis. All those things that were first discovered by Tolstoy could have been taken for granted by St Francis. He could be presented, not only as a human but a humanitarian hero; indeed as the first hero of humanism. He has been described as a sort of morning star of the Renaissance. And in comparison with all these things, his ascetical theology can be ignored or dismissed as a contempory accident, which was fortunately not a fatal accident. His religion can be regarded as a superstition, but an inevitable superstition, from which not even genius could wholly free itself; in the consideration of which it would be unjust to condemn St. Francis for his self denial or unduly chide him for his chastity. It is quite true that even from so detached a standpoint his stature would still appear heroic. There would still be a great deal to be said about the man who tried to end the Crusades by talking to the Saracens or who interceded with the Emporer for the birds. The writer might describe in a purely historical spirit the whole of the Franciscan inspiration that was felt in the painting of Giotto, in the poetry of Dante, in the miracle plays that made possible the modern drama, and in so many things that are already appreciated by the modern culture. He may try to do it, as others have done, almost without raising any religious question at all. In short, he may try to tell the story of a saint without God; which is like being told to write the life of Nansen and forbidden to mention the North Pole.

Second, he may go to the opposite extreme, and decide, as it were, to be defiantly devotional. He may make the theological enthusiasm as thoroughly the theme as it was the theme of the first Franciscans. He may treat religion as the real thing that it was to the real Francis of Assisi. He can find an austere joy, so to speak, in parading the paradoxes of asceticism and all the topsy-turveydom of humility. He can stamp the whole history with the Stigmata, record fasts like fights against a dragon; till in the vague modern mind St Francis is as dark a figure as St. Dominic. In short, he can produce what many in our world will regard as a sort of photographic negative; the reversal of all lights and shades; what the foolish will find as impenetrable as darkness and even many of the wise will find almost as invisible as if it were written in silver upon white. Such a study of St. Francis would be unintelligible to anyone who does not share his religion, perhaps only partly intelligible to anyone who does not share his vocation. According to degrees of judgement, it will be regarded as something too bad or too good for the world. The only difficulty about doing the thing in this way is that it cannot be done. It would really require a saint to write about the life of a saint. In the present case the objections to such a course are insuperable.

Third, he may try to do what I have tried to do here; and as I have already suggested, the course has peculiar problems of its own. The writer may put himself in the position of the ordinary modern outsider and enquirer; as indeed the present writer is still largely and was once entirely in that position. He may start from the standpoint of a man who already admires St. Francis, but only for those things which such a man finds admirable. In other words he may assume that the reader is at least as enlightened as Renan or Matthew Arnold; but in the light of that enlightenment he may try to illimunate what Renan and Matthew Arnold left dark. He may try to use what is understood to explain what is not understood. He may try to say to the modern English reader: “Here is an historical character which is admittedly attractive to many of us already, by its gaiety, its romantic imagination, its spiritual courtesy and cameraderie, but which also contains elements (evidently equally sincere and emphatic) which seem to you quite remote and repulsive. But after all, this man was a man and not half a dozen men. What seems inconsistency to you did not seem inconsistency to him. Let us see whether we can understand, with the help of the existing understanding, these other things that now seem to be doubly dark, by their intrinsic gloom and their ironic contrast." I do not mean, of course, that I can really reach a psychological completeness in this crude and curt outline. But I mean that this is the only controversial condition that I shall here assume; that I am dealing with the sympathetic outsider. I shall not assume any more or any less agreement than this. A materialist may not care whether the inconsistencies are reconciled or not. A Catholic may not see any inconsistencies to reconcile. But I am here addressing the ordinary common man, sympathetic but sceptical, and I can only rather hazily hope that, by approaching the great saint's story through what is evidently picturesque and popular about it, I may at least leave the reader understanding a little more than he did before of the consistency of a complete character; that by approaching it in this way, we may at least get a glimmering of why the poet who praised his lord the sun, often hid himself in a dark cavern, of why the saint who was so gentle with his Brother the Wolf was so harsh to his Brother the Ass (as he nicknamed his own body), of why the troubadour who said that love set his heart on fire separated himself from women, of why the singer who rejoiced in the strength and gaiety of the fire deliberately rolled himself in the snow, of why the very song which cries with all the passion of a pagan, "Praised be God for our Sister, Mother Earth, which brings forth varied fruits and grass and glowing flowers," ends almost with the words "Praised be God for our Sister, the death of the body."

Renan and Matthew Arnold failed utterly at this test. They were content to follow Francis with their praises until they were stopped by their prejudices; the stubborn prejudices of the sceptic. The moment Francis began to do something they did not understand or did not like, they did not try to understand, still less to like it; they simply turned their backs on the whole business and "walked no more with him." No man will get any further along a path of historical enquiry in that fashion. These skeptics are really driven to drop the whole subject in despair, to leave the most simple and sincere of all historical characters as a mass of contradiction, to be praised on the principle of the curate's egg. Arnold refers to the asceticism of Alverno almost hurriedly, as if it were an unlucky but undeniable blot on the beauty of the story; or rather as if it were a pitiable break-down and bathos at the end of story. Now this is simply to be stone-blind to the whole point of any story. To represent Mount Alverno as the mere collapse of Francis is exactly like representing Mount Calvary as the mere collapse of Christ. Those mountains are mountains, whatever else they are, and it is nonsense to say (like the Red Queen) that they are comparitive hollows or negative holes in the ground. They were quite manifestly meant to be culminations and landmarks. To treat the Stigmata as a sort of scandal, to be touched on tenderly but with pain, is exactly like treating the original five wounds of Jesus Christ as five blots on his character. You may dislike the idea of asceticism; you may dislike equally the idea of martyrdom; for that matter you may have an honest and natural dislike of the whole conception of sacrifice symbolised by the cross. But if it is an intelligent dislike, you will retain the capacity for seeing the point of the story; the story of a martyr or even the story of a monk. You will not be able rationally to read the Gospel and regard the Crucifixion as an afterthought or an anti-climax or an accident in the life of Christ; it is obviously the point of the story like the point of a sword, the sword that pierced the heart of the Mother of God.

And you will not be able rationally to read the story of a man presented as a Mirror of Christ without understanding his final phase as a Man of Sorrows, and at least artistically appreciating the appropriatness of his receiving, in a cloud of mystery and isolation, inflicted by no human hand, the unhealed everlasting wounds that heal the world.

The practical reconciliation of the gaiety and austerity I must leave the story itself to suggest. But since I have mentioned Matthew Arnold and Renan and the rationalistic admirers of St. Francis, I will here give a hint of what it seems to me most advisable for such readers to keep in mind. These distinguished writers found things like the Stigmata a stumbling block because to them a religion was a philosophy. It was an impersonal thing; and it is only the most personal passion that provides here an approximate earthly parallel. A man will not roll in the snow for a stream of tendency by which all things fulfil the law of their being. He will not go without food in the name of something, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness. He will do things like this, or pretty like this, under quite a different impulse. He will do these things when he is in love. The first fact to realise about St Francis is involved with the first fact with which his story starts; that when he said from the first that he was a Troubadour, and said later that he was a Troubadour of a newer and nobler romance, he was not using a mere metaphor, but understood himself much better than the scholars understand him. He was, to the last agonies of asceticism, a Troubadour. He was a Lover. He was a lover of God and he was really and truly a lover of men; possibly a much rarer mystical vocation. A lover of men is very nearly the opposite of a philanthropist; indeed the pedantry of the Greek word carries something like a satire on itself. A philanthropist may be said to love anthropoids. But as St. Francis did not love humanity but men, so he did not love Christianity but Christ. Say, if you think so, that he was a lunatic loving an imaginary person; but an imaginary person, not an imaginary idea. And for the modern reader the clue to the asceticism and all the rest can be found in the stories of lovers when they seemed to be rather like lunatics. Tell it as the tale of one of the Troubadours, and the wild things he would do for his lady, and the whole of the modern puzzle disappears. In such a romance there would be no contradiction between the poet gathering flowers in the sun and enduring a freezing vigil in the snow, between his praising all earthly and bodily beauty and then refusing to eat, and between his glorifying gold and purple and perversely going in rags, between his showing pathetically a hunger for a happy life and a thirst for a heroic death. All these riddles would be easily be resolved in the simplicity of any noble love; only this was so noble a love that nine out of ten men have hardly even heard of it. We shall see later that this parallel of the earthly lover has a very practical relation to the problems of his life, as to his relations with his father and his friends and their families. The modern reader will almost always find that if he could only find this kind of love as a reality, he could feel this kind of extravagance as a romance. But I only note it here as a preliminary point because, though it is very far from being the final truth in the matter, it is the best approach to it. The reader cannot even begin to see the sense of a story that may well seem to him a very wild one, until he understands that to this great mystic his religion was not a thing like a theory but a thing like a love affair. And the only purpose of this prefatory chapter is to explain the limits of the present book; which is only addressed to that part of the modern world which finds in St. Francis a certain modern difficulty; which can admire him yet hardly accept him, or which can appreciate the saint almost without the sanctity. And my only claim even to attempt such a task is that I myself have for so long been in various stages of such a condition. Many thousand things that I now partly comprehend I should have thought utterly incomprehensible, many things I now hold sacred I should have scouted as utterly superstitious, many things that seem to me lucid and enlightened now they are seen from the inside I should honestly have called dark and barbarous seen from the outside, when long ago in those days of boyhood my fancy first caught fire with the glory of Francis of Assisi. I too have lived in Arcady; but even in Arcady I met one walking in a brown habit who loved the woods better than Pan. The figure in the brown habit stands above the hearth in the room where I write, and alone among many such images, at no stage of my pilgrimage has he ever seemed to me a stranger. There is something of a harmony between the hearth and the firelight and my own first pleasure in his words about the brother fire; for he stands far enough back in my memory to mingle with all those more domestic dreams of the first days. Even the fantastic shadows thrown by fire make a sort of shadow pantomine that belongs to the nursery; yet the shadows were even then the shadows of his favourite beast and birds, as he saw them, grotesque but haloed with the love of God. His Brother Wolf and Brother Sheep seemed then almost like the Brer Fox and Brer Rabbit of a more Christian Uncle Remus. I have come slowly to see many more marvellous aspects of such a man, but I have never lost that one. His figure stands on a sort of bridge connecting my boyhood with my conversion to many other things; for the romance of his religion has penetrated even the rationalism of that vague Victorian time. In so far as I have had this experience, I may be able to lead others a little further along that road; but only a very little further. Nobody knows better than I do now that it is a road upon which angels might fear to tread; but though I am certain of failure I am not altogether overcome by fear; for he suffered fools gladly.

CHAPTER II

THE WORLD ST. FRANCIS FOUND

The modern innovation which has substituted journalism for history, or for that tradition that is the gossip of history, has had at least one definite effect. It has insured that everybody should only hear the end of every story. Journalists are in the habit of printing above the very last chapters of their serial stories (when the hero and the heroine are just about to embrace in the last chapter, as only an unfathomable perversity prevented them from doing so in the first) the rather misleading words, “You can only begin this story here.” But even this is not a complete parallel; for the journals do give some sort of a summary of the story, while they never give anything remotely resembling a summary of the history. Newspapers not only deal with news, but they deal with everything as if it were entirely new. It is exactly in the same fashion that we read that Admiral Bangs has been shot, which is the first intimation we have that he has ever been born.

There is something singularly significant in the use which journalism makes of its stores of biography. It never thinks of publishing the life until it is publishing the death. As it deals with individuals it deals with institutions and ideas. After the Great War our public began to be told of all sorts of nations being emancipated. It had never been told a word about their being enslaved. We were called upon to judge of the justice of settlements, when we had never been allowed to hear of the very existence of the quarrels. People would think it pedantic to talk about the Serbian epics and they prefer to talk about the Yugo-Slavonic international new diplomacy; and they are quite excited about something they call Czecho-Slovakia without apparently having ever heard about Bohemia. Things that are as old as Europe are regarded as more recent than the very latest claims pegged out on the prairies of America. It is very exciting; like the last act of a play to people who have only come into the theatre just before the curtain falls. But it does not conduce exactly to knowing what it is all about. To those content with the mere fact of a pistol-shot or a passionate embrace, such a leisurely manner of patronising the drama may be recommended. To those tormented by a mere intellectual curiosity about who is kissing or killing whom, it is unsatisfactory.

Most modern history, especially in England, suffers from the same imperfection as journalism. At best it only tells half the story of Christendom; and that the second half without the first half. Men for whom reason begins with the Reformation, can never give a complete account of anything, for they have to start with institutions whose origin they can never explain, or generally even imagine. Just as we hear of the admiral being shot but have never heard of his being born, so we all heard a great deal about the dissolution of the monasteries, but we heard next to nothing about the creation of the monasteries. Now this sort of history would be hopelessly insufficient, even for an intelligent man who hated the monasteries. It is hopelessly insufficient in connection with institutions that many intelligent men do in a quite healthy spirit hate. For instance, it is possible that some of us have occasionally seen some mention, by our learned leader-writers, of an obscure institution called the Spanish Inquisition. Well, it really is an obscure institution, according to them and the histories they read. It is obscure because its origin is obscure. Protestant history simply begins with the horrible thing in possession, as the pantomine begins with the demon king in the goblin kitchen. It is likely enough that it was, especially towards the end, a horrible thing that might be haunted by demons; but if we say this was so, we have no notion why it was so. To understand the Spanish Inquisition it would be necessary to discover two things that we have never dreamed of bothering about; what Spain was and what an Inquisition was. The former would bring in the whole great question about the Crusade against the Moors; and by what heroic chivalry a European nation freed itself of an alien domination from Africa. The latter would bring in the whole business of the other Crusade against the Albigensians, and why men loved and hated that nihilistic vision from Asia. Unless we understand that there was in these things originally the rush and romance of a Crusade, we cannot understand how they came to deceive men or drag them on towards evil. The Crusaders doubtless abused their victory, but there was a victory to abuse. And where there is victory there is valour in the field and popularity in the forum. There is some sort of enthusiasm that encourages excesses or covers faults. For instance, I for one have maintained from very early days the responsibility of the English for their atrocious treatment of the Irish. But it would be quite unfair to describe even the devilry of ‘98 and leave out altogether all mention of the war with Napoleon. It would be unjust to suggest that the English mind was bent on nothing but the death of Emmett, when it was more probably full of the glory of the death of Nelson. Unfortunately ‘98 was very far from being the last date of such dirty work; and only a few years ago our politicians started trying to rule by random robbing and killing, while gently remonstrating with the Irish for their memory of old unhappy far-off things and battles long ago. But however badly we may think of the Black-and tan business, it would be unjust to forget that most of us were not thinking of Black-and-Tan but of khaki; and that khaki had just then a noble and national connotation covering many things. To write of the war with Ireland and leave out the war against Prussia, and the English sincerity about it, would be unjust to the English. So to talk about the torture-engine as if it had been a hideous toy is unjust to the Spanish. It does not tell sensibly from the start the story of what the Spaniards did, and why. We may concede to our contempories that in any case it is not a story that ends well. We do not insist that in their version it should begin well. What we complain of is that in their version it does not begin at all. They are only in at the death; or even, like Lord Tom Noddy, to late for the hanging. It is quite true that it was more horrible than any hanging; but they only gather, so to speak, the very ashes of the ashes; the fag-end of the faggot.

The case of the Inquisition is here taken at random, for it is one among any number illustrating the same thing; and not because it is especially connected with St. Francis, in whatever sense it may have been connected with St Dominic. It may well be suggested later indeed that St. Francis is unintelligible, just as St. Dominic is unintelligible, unless we do understand something of what the thirteenth century meant by heresy and a crusade. But for the moment I use it as a lesser example for a much larger purpose. It is to point out that to begin the story of St. Francis with the birth of St Francis would be to miss the whole point of the story, or rather not to tell the story at all. And it is to suggest that the modern tail-foremost type of journalistic history perpetually fails us. We learn about reformers without knowing what they had to reform, about rebels without knowing what they rebelled against, of memorials that are not connected with any memory and restorations of things that apparently never existed before. Even at the expense of this chapter appearing disproportionate, it is necessary to say something about the great movements that led up to the entrance of the founder of the Franciscans. It may seem to mean describing a world, or even a universe to describe a man. It will inevitably mean that the world or the universe will be described with a few desperate generalisations in a few abrupt sentences. But so far from its meaning that we shall see a very small figure under so large a sky, it will mean that we must measure the sky before we can begin to measure the towering stature of the man.

And this phrase alone brings me to the preliminary suggestions that seem necessary before even a slight sketch of the life of St. Francis. It is necessary to realise, in however rude and elementary a fashion, into what sort of a world St. Francis entered and what had been the history of that world, at least in so far as it affected him. It is necessary to have, if only in a few sentences, a sort of preface in the form of an Outline of History, if we may borrow the phrase of Mr. Wells. in the case of Mr. Wells himself, it is evident that the distinguished novelist suffered the same disadvantage as if he had been obliged to write a novel of which he hated the hero. To write history and hate Rome, both pagan and papal, is to hate everything that has happened. It comes very nearly to hating humanity on purely humanitarian grounds. To dislike both the priest and the soldier, both the laurels of the warrior and the lilies of the saint, is to suffer a division from the mass of mankind for which not all the dexterities of the finest and most flexible of modern intelligences can compensate. A much wider sympathy is needed for the historical setting of St. Francis, himself both a soldier and a saint. I will therefore conclude this chapter with a few generalisations about the world St. Francis found.

Men will not believe because they will not broaden their minds. As a matter of individual belief, I should of course express it by saying they are not sufficiently catholic to be Catholic. But I am not going to discuss here the doctrinal truths of Christianity, but simply the broad historical fact of Christianity, as it might appear to a really enlightened and imaginative person even if he were not a Christian. What I mean at the moment is that the majority of doubts are made out of details. In the course of random reading a man comes across a pagan custom that strikes him as picturesque or a Christian action that strikes him as cruel; but he does not enlarge his mind sufficiently to see the main truth about pagan custom or the Christian reaction against it. Until we understand, not necessarily in detail, but in their big bulk and proportion that pagan progress and that Christian reaction, we cannot really understand the point of history at which St. Francis appears or what his great popular mission was all about.

Now everybody knows, I imagine, that the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were an awakening of the world. They were a fresh flowering of culture and the creative arts after a long spell of much sterner and even more sterile experience which we call the Dark Ages. They may be called an emancipation; they were certainly an end; an end of what may at least seem a harsher and more inhuman time. But what was it that was ended? From what was it that men were emancipated? That is where there is a real collision and point at issue between the different philosophies of history. On the merely external and secular side, it has been truly said that men awoke from a sleep; but there had been dreams in that sleep of a mystical and sometimes of a monstrous kind. In that rationalistic routine into which most modern historians have fallen, it is considered enough to say that they were emancipated from mere savage superstition and advanced towards mere civilised enlightenment. Now this is the big blunder that stands as a stumbling-block at the very beginning of our story. Anybody who supposes that the Dark Ages were plain darkness and nothing else, and that the dawn of the thirteenth century was plain daylight and nothing else, will not be able to make head or tail of the human story of St. Francis of Assisi. The truth is that the joy of St. Francis and his Jongleurs de Dieu was not merely an awakening. It was something which cannot be understood without understanding their own mystical creed. The end of the Dark Ages was not merely the end of a sleep. It was certainly not merely the end of a superstitious enslavement. It was the end of something belonging to a quite definite but quite different order of ideas.

It was the end of a penance; or, if it be preferred, a purgation. It marked the moment when a certain spiritual expiation had been finally worked out and certain spiritual diseases had been finally expelled from the system. They had been expelled by an era of asceticism, which was the only thing that could have expelled them. Christianity had entered the world to cure the world; and she cured it in the only way in which it could be cured. Viewed merely in an external and experimental fashion, the whole of the high civilisation of antiquity had ended in the learning of a certain lesson; that is, in its conversion to Christianity. But that lesson was a psychological fact as well as a theological faith. That pagan civilization had indeed been a very high civilisation. It would not weaken our thesis, it might even strengthen it, to say that it was the highest that humanity ever reached. It had discovered its still unrivalled arts of poetry and plastic representation; it had discovered its own permanent political ideals; it had discovered its own clear system of logic and language. But above all, it had discovered its own mistake. That mistake was too deep to be ideally defined; the short-hand of it is to call it the mistake of nature-worship. It might almost as truly be called the mistake of being natural; and it was a very natural mistake. The Greeks, the great guides and pioneers of pagan antiquity, started out with the idea of something splendidly obvious and direct; the idea that if a man walked straight ahead on the high road of reason and nature, he would come to no harm; especially if he was, as the Greek was, eminently enlightened and intelligent. We might be so flippant as to say that man was simply to follow his nose, so long as it was a Greek nose. And the case of the Greeks themselves is alone enough to illustrate the strange but certain fatality that attends upon this fallacy. No sooner did the Greeks themselves begin to follow their own noses and their own notion of being natural, than the queerest thing in history seems to have happened to them. It was much too queer to be an easy matter to discuss. It may be remarked that our more repulsive realists never give us the benefit of their realism. Their studies of unsavoury subjects never take note of the testimony they bear to the truths of traditional morality. But if we had the taste for such things, we could cite thousands of such things as part of the case for Christian morals. And an instance of this is found in the fact that nobody has written, in this sense, a real moral history of the Greeks. Nobody has seen the scale or the strangeness of the story. The wisest men in the world set out to be natural; and the most unnatural thing in the world was the very first thing they did. The immediate effect of saluting the sun and the sunny sanity of nature was a perversion spreading like a pestilence. The greatest and even the purest philosophers could not apparently avoid this low sort of lunacy. Why? It would seem simple enough for the people whose poets had conceived Helen of Troy, whose sculptors had carved the Venus of Milo, to remain healthy on the point. The truth is people who worship health cannot remain healthy on the point. When Man goes straight he goes crooked. When he follows his nose he manages somehow to put his nose out of joint, or even to cut off his nose to spite his face; and that in accordance with something much deeper in human nature than nature-worshippers could ever understand. It was the discovery of that deeper thing, humanly speaking, that constituted the conversion to Christianity. There is a bias in a man like the bias on a bowl; and Christianity was the discovery of how to correct the bias and therefore hit the mark. There are many who will smile at the saying; but it is profoundly true to say that the glad good news brought by the Gospel was the news of original sin.

Rome rose at the expense of her Greek teachers largely because she did not entirely consent to be taught these tricks. She had a much more decent tradition; but she ultimately suffered from the same fallacy in her religious tradition; which was necessarily in no small degree the heathen tradition of nature worship. What was the matter with the whole heathen civilisation was that there nothing for the mass of men in the way of mysticism, except that concerned with the mystery of the nameless forces of nature, such as sex and growth and death. In the Roman Empire also, long before the end, we find nature-worship inevitably producing things that are against nature. Cases like that of Nero have passed into a proverb when Sadism sat on a throne brazen in the broad daylight. But the truth I mean is something much more subtle and universal than a conventional catalogue of atrocities. What had happened to the human imagination, as a whole, was that the whole world was coloured by dangerous and rapidly deteriorating passions; by natural passions becoming unnatural passions. Thus the effect of treating sex as only one innocent natural thing was that every other innocent natural thing became soaked and sodden with sex. For sex cannot be admitted to a mere equality among elementary emotions or experiences like eating and sleeping. The moment sex ceases to be a servant it becomes a tyrant. There is something dangerous and disproportionate in its place in human nature, for whatever reason; and it does really need a special purification and dedication. The modern talk about sex being free like any other sense, about the body being beautiful like any tree or flower, is either a description of the Garden of Eden or a piece of thoroughly bad psychology, of which the world grew weary two thousand years ago.

This is not to be confused with mere self-righteous sensationalism about the wickedness of the pagan world. It was not so much that the pagan world was wicked as that it was good enough to realise that its paganism was becoming wicked, or rather it was on the logical high road to wickedness. I mean that there was no future for “natural magic”; to deepen it was only to darken it into black magic. There was no future for it; because in the past it had only been innocent because it was young. We might say it had only been innocent because it was shallow. Pagans were wiser that paganism; that is why the pagans became Christians. Thousands of them had philosophy and family virtues and military honour to hold them up; but by this time the purely popular thing called religion was certainly dragging them down. When this reaction against the evil is allowed for, it is true to repeat that it was an evil that was everywhere. In another and more literal sense its name was Pan.

It was no metaphor to say that these people needed a new heaven and a new earth; for they had really defiled their own earth and even their own heaven. How could their case be met by looking at the sky, when erotic legends were scrawled in stars across it; how could they learn anything from the love of birds and flowers after the sort of love stories that were told of them? It is impossible here to multiply evidences, and one small example may stand for the rest. We know what sort of sentimental associations are called up to us by the phrase “a garden”; and how we think mostly of the memory of melancholy and innocent romances, or quite as often of some gracious maiden lady or kindly old person pottering under a yew hedge, perhaps in sight of a village spire. Then, let anyone who knows a little Latin poetry recall suddenly what would have once stood in place of the sun-dial or the fountain, obscene and monstrous in the sun; and of what sort was the god of their gardens.

Nothing could purge this obsession but a religion that was literally unearthly. It was no good telling such people to have a natural religion full of stars and flowers; there was not a flower or even a star that had not been stained. They had to go into the desert where they could find no flowers or even into the cavern where they could see no stars. Into that desert and that cavern the highest human intellect entered for some four centuries; and it was the very wisest thing it could do. Nothing but the stark supernatural stood up for its salvation; if God could not save it, certainly the gods could not. The early Church called the gods of paganism devils; and the Early Church was perfectly right. Whatever natural religion may have had to do with their beginnings, nothing but fiends now inhabited those hollow shrines. Pan was nothing but panic. Venus was nothing but venereal vice. I do not mean for a moment, of course, that all the individual pagans were of this character even to the end; but it was as individuals that they differed from it. Nothing distinguishes paganism from Christianity so clearly as the fact that the individual thing called philosophy had little or nothing to do with the social thing called religion. Anyhow it was no good to preach natural religion to people to whom nature had grown as unnatural as any religion. They knew much better than we do what was the matter with them and what sort of demons at once tempted and tormented them; and they wrote across that great space of history the text; “This sort goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”

Now the historical importance of St. Francis and the transition from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries, lies in the fact that they marked the end of this expiation. Men at the close of the dark Ages may have been rude and unlettered and unlearned in everything but wars with heathen tribes, more barbarous than themselves, but they were clean. They were like children; the first beginnings of their rude arts have all the clean pleasure of children. We have to conceive them in Europe as a whole living under little local governments, feudal in so far as they were a survival of fierce wars with the barbarians, often monastic and carrying a far more friendly and fatherly character, still faintly imperial as far as Rome still ruled as a great legend. But in Italy something had survived more typical of the finer spirit of antiquity; the republic, Italy, was dotted with little states, largely democratic in their ideals, and often filled with real citizens. But the city no longer lay open as under the Roman peace, but was pent in high walls for defence against feudal war and all the citizens had to be soldiers. One of these stood in a steep and striking position on the wooded hills of Umbria; and its name was Assisi. Out of its deep gate under its high turrets was to come the message that was the gospel of the hour, “Your warfare is accomplished, your iniquity is pardoned.” But it was out of all these fragmentary things of feudalism and freedom and remains of Roman Law that there were to rise, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, vast and almost universal, the mighty civilisation of the Middle Ages.

It is an exaggeration to attribute it entirely to the inspiration of any one man, even the most original genius of the thirteenth century. Its elementary ethics of fraternity and fair play had never been entirely extinct and Christendom had never been anything less than Christian. The great truisms about justice and pity can be found in the rudest monastic records of the barbaric transition or the stiffest maxims of the Byzantine decline. And early in the eleventh and twelfth centuries a larger moral movement had clearly begun, but what may fairly be said of it is this, that over all those first movements there was still something of that ancient austerity that came from the long penitentiary period. It was the twilight of the morning; but it was still a grey twilight. This may be illustrated by the mere mention of two or three of these reforms before the Franciscan reform. The monastic institution itself, of course, was far older than all these things; indeed it was undoubtedly almost as old as Christianity. Its counsels of perfection had always taken the form of vows of chastity and poverty and obedience. With these unworldly aims it had long ago civilised a great part of the world. The monks had taught people to plough and sow as well as to read and write; indeed they had taught the people nearly everything the people knew. But it may truly be said that the monks were severely practical, in the sense that they not only practical but also severe; though they were generally severe with themselves and practical for other people. All this early monastic movement had long ago settled down and doubtless often deteriorated; but when we come to the first medieval movements this sterner character is still apparent. Three examples may be taken to illustrate the point.

First, the ancient social mould of slavery was already beginning to melt. Not only was the slave turning into a serf, who was practically free as regards his own farm and family life, but many lords were freeing slaves and serfs altogether. This was done under the pressure of the priests; but especially it was done in the spirit of a penance. In one sense, of course, any Catholic society must have an atmosphere of penance; but I am speaking of that sterner spirit of penance which had expiated the excesses of paganism. There was about such restitutions the atmosphere of the death-bed; as many of them were doubtless were examples of death-bed repentance. A very honest atheist with whom I once debated made use of the expression, “Men have only been kept in slavery by the fear of hell.” As I pointed out to him, if he had said that men had only been freed from slavery by the fear of hell, he would have at least have been referring to an unquestionable historical fact.

Another example was the sweeping reform of Church discipline by Pope Gregory the Seventh. It really was a reform, undertaken from the highest motives and having the healthiest results; it conducted a searching inquisition against simony or the financial corruption of the clergy; it insisted on a more serious and self-sacrificing ideal for the life of the parish priest. But the very fact that this largely took the form of making universal the obligation of celibacy will strike the note of something which, however noble, would seem to many to be vaguely negative. The third example is in one sense the strongest of all. For the third example was a war; a heroic war and for many of us a holy war; but still having all the stark and terrible responsibilities of war. There is no space here to say all that should be said about the true nature of the Crusades. Everybody knows that in the very darkest hour of the Dark Ages a sort of heresy had sprung up in Arabia and become a new religion of a military but nomadic sort; invoking the name of Mahomet. Intrinsically it had a character found in many heresies from the Moslem to the Monist. It seemed to the heretic a sane simplification of religion; while it seems to a Catholic an insane simplification of religion, because it simplifies all to a single idea and so loses the breadth and balance of Catholicism. Anyhow its objective character was that of a military danger to Christendom and Christendom had struck at the very heart of it, in seeking to reconquer the Holy Places. The great Duke Godfrey and the first Christians who stormed Jerusalem were heroes if there were any in the world; but they were the heroes of a tragedy.

Now I have taken these two or three examples of the earlier medieval movements in order to note about them one general character, which refers back to the penance that followed paganism. There is something in all these movements that is bracing even while it is still bleak, like a wind blowing between the clefts of the mountains. That wind, austere and pure, of which the poet speaks, is really the spirit of the time, for it is the wind of a world that has at last been purified. To anyone who can appreciate atmospheres there is something clear and clean about the atmosphere of this crude and often harsh society. Its very lusts are clean; for they no have longer any smell of perversion. Its very cruelties are clean; they are not the luxurious cruelties of the amphitheatre. They come either of a very simple horror at blasphemy or a very simple fury at an insult. Gradually against this grey background beauty begins to appear, as something really fresh and delicate and above all surprising. Love returning is no longer what was once called platonic but what is still called chivalric love. The flowers and stars are have recovered their first innocence. Fire and water are felt to be worthy to be the brother and sister of a saint. The purge of paganism is complete at last.

For water itself has been washed. Fire itself has been purified as by fire. Water is no longer the water into which slaves were flung to feed the fishes. Fire is no longer that fire through which children were passed to Moloch. Flowers smell no more of the forgotten garlands gathered in the garden of Priapus; stars stand no more as signs of the far frigidity of gods as cold as those cold fires. They are like all new things newly made and awaiting new names, from one who shall come to name them. Neither the universe nor the earth have now any longer the old sinister significance of the world. They await a new reconciliation with man, but they are already capable of being reconciled. Man has stripped from his soul the last rag of nature worship, and can return to nature.

While it was yet twilight a figure appeared silently and suddenly on a little hill above the city, dark against the fading darkness. For it was the end of a long and stern night, a night of vigil, not unvisited by stars. He stood with his hands lifted, as in so many statues and pictures, and about him was a burst of birds singing; and behind him was the break of day.

CHAPTER III

FRANCIS THE FIGHTER

According to one tale, which if not true would be none the less typical, the very name of St. Francis was not so much a name as a nickname. There would be something akin to his familiar and popular instinct in the notion that he was nicknamed very much as an ordinary schoolboy might be called “Frenchy” at school. According to this version his name was not Francis at all but John; and his companions called him “Francesco”, or “The little Frenchman” because of his passion for the French poetry of the Troubadours. The more probable story is that his mother had him named John when he was born in the absence of his father, who shortly returned from a visit to France, Where his commercial success had filled him with so much enthusiasm for French taste and social usage that he gave his son the new name signifying the Frank or Frenchman. In either case the name had a certain significance, as connecting Francis from the first with what he himself regarded as the romantic fairy land of the Troubadours.

The name of the father was Pietro Bernadone and he was a substantial citizen of the guild of the cloth merchants in the town of Assisi. It is hard to describe the position of such a man without some appreciation of such a guild and even of such a town. It did not exactly correspond to anything that is meant in modern times either by a merchant or a man of business or a tradesman, or anything that exists under the conditions of capitalism. Bernadone may have employed people but he was not an employer; that is; he did not belong to an employing class as distinct from an employed class. The person we definitely hear of his employing is his son Francis; who, one is tempted to guess, was about the last person that any man of business would employ if it were convenient to employ anybody else. He was rich, as a peasant may be rich by the work of his own family; but he evidently expected his own family to work in a way almost as plain as a peasant’s. He was a prominent citizen, but he belonged to a social order which existed to prevent him being too prominent to be a citizen. It kept all such people on their own simple level, and no prosperity connoted that escape from drudgery by which in modern times the lad might have seemed to be a lord or a fine gentleman or something other than the cloth merchant’s son. This is a rule that is proved even in the exception. Francis was one of those people who are popular with everybody in any case; and his guiless swagger as a Troubadour and leader of French fashions made him a sort of romantic ringleader among the young men of the town. He threw money about both in extravagance and benevolence, in a way native to a man who never, all his life, exactly understood what money was. This moved his mother to mingled exultation and exasperation and she said, as any tradesman's wife might say anywhere: "He is more like a prince than our son." But one of the earliest glimpses we have of him shows him as simply selling bales of cloth from a booth in the market; which his mother may or may not have believed to be one of the habits of princes. This first glimpse of the young man in the market is symbolic in more ways than one. An incident occurred which is perhaps the shortest and sharpest summary that could be given of certain curious things which were a part of his character, long before it was transfigured by transcendental faith. While he was selling velvet and fine embroideries to some solid merchant of the town a beggar came imploring alms; evidently in a somewhat tactless manner. It was a rude and simple society and there were no laws to punish a starving man for expressing his need for food, such as have been established in a more humanitarian age; and the lack of any organised police permitted such persons to pester the wealthy without any great danger. But there was I believe, in many places a local custom of the guild forbidding outsiders to interrupt a fair bargain; and it is possible that some such thing put the mendicant more than normally in the wrong. Francis had all his life a great liking for people who had been put hopelessly in the wrong. On this occasion he seems to have dealt with the double interview with rather a divided mind; certainly with distraction, possibly with irritation. Perhaps he was all the more uneasy because of the almost fastidious standard of manners that came to him quite naturally. All are agreed that politeness flowed from him from the first, like one of the public fountains in such a sunny Italian market place. He might have written among his own poems as his own motto that verse of Mr. Belloc's poem —

"Of Courtesy, it is much less
Than courage of heart or holiness
Yet in my walks it seems to me
That the grace of God is in Courtesy."

Nobody ever doubted that Francis Bernadone had courage of heart, even of the most manly and military sort; and a time was to come when there was quite as little doubt about the holiness and grace of God. But I think that if there was one thing about which he was punctilious, it was punctiliousness. If there was one thing of which so humble a man could be said to be proud, he was proud of good manners. Only behind his perfectly natural urbanity were wider and even wilder possibilities, of which we get the first flash in this trivial incident. Anyhow Francis was evidently torn two ways with the botheration of two talkers, but finished his business with the merchant somehow; and when he had finished it, found the beggar was gone. Francis leapt from his booth, left all the bales of velvet and embroidery behind him apparently unprotected, and went racing across the market-place like an arrow from the bow. Still running, he threaded the labrynth of the narrow and crooked streets of the little town, looking for his beggar whom he eventually discovered; and loaded the astonished mendicant with money. Then he straightened himself, so to speak, and swore before God that he would never all his life refuse help to a poor man. The sweeping simplicity of this undertaking is extremely characteristic. Never was any man so little afraid of his own promises. His life was one riot of rash vows; of rash vows that turned out right.

The first biographers of Francis, naturally alive with the great religious revolution that he wrought, equally naturally looked back to his first years chiefly for omens and signs of such a spiritual earthquake. But writing at a greater distance, we shall not decrease that dramatic effect, but rather increase it, if we realise that there was not at this time any external sign of anything particularly mystical about the young man. He had not anything of that early sense of his vocation that has belonged to some of the saints. Over and above his main ambition to win fame as a French poet, he would seem to have most often thought of winning fame as a soldier. He was born kind; he was brave in the normal boyish fashion; but he drew the line in both in kindness and bravery pretty well where most boys would have drawn it; for instance, he had the human horror of leprosy of which few normal people felt any need to be ashamed. He had the love of gay and bright apparel which was inherent in the heraldic taste of medieval times and seems altogether to have been rather a festive figure. If he did not paint the town red, he would probably have preferred to paint it all the colours of the rainbow, as in a medieval picture. But in this story of the young man in gay garments scampering after the vanishing beggar in rags there are certain notes of his natural individuality that must be assumed from first to last.

For instance, there is the spirit of swiftness. In a sense he continued running for the rest of his life, as he ran after the beggar. Because nearly all the errands he ran were errands of mercy, there appeared in his portraiture a mere element of mildness which was true in the truest sense, but is easily misunderstood. A certain precipitancy was the very poise of his soul. This saint should be represented among the other saints as angels were sometimes represented in pictures of angels; with flying feet or with feathers; in the spirit of the text that makes angels winds and messengers a flaming fire. It is a curiosity of language that courage actually means running; and some of our sceptics will no doubt demonstrate that courage really means running away. But his courage was running, in the sense of rushing. With all his gentleness, there was originally something of impatience in his impetuosity. The psychological truth about it illustrates very well the modern muddle about the word “practical.” If we mean by what is practical what is most immediately practicable, we merely mean what is easiest. In that sense St. Francis was very impractical, and his ultimate aims were very unworldly. Bit if we mean by practicality a preference for prompt effort and energy over doubt or delay, he was very practical indeed. Some might call him a madman, but he was the very reverse of a dreamer. Nobody would be likely to call him a man of business; but he was very emphatically a man of action. In some of his early experiments he was rather too much of a man of action; he acted too soon and was too practical to be prudent. But at every turn of his extraordinary career we shall find him flinging himself around corners in the most unexpected fashion, as when he flew through the streets after the beggar.

Another element implied in the story, which was already partially a natural instinct, before it became supernatural ideal, was something that had never perhaps been wholly lost in those little republics of medieval Italy. It was something very puzzling to some people; something clearer as a rule to Southerners than to Northeners, and I think to Catholics than to Protestants; the quite natural assumption of the equality of men. It has nothing necessarily to do with the Franciscan love for men; on the contrary one of its merely practical tests is the equality of the duel. Perhaps a gentleman will never be fully an egalitarian until he can really quarrel with his servant. But it was an antecedant condition of the Franciscan brotherhood; and we feel it in this early and secular incident. Francis, I fancy, felt a real doubt about which he must attend to, the beggar or the merchant; and having attended to the merchant, he turned to attend the beggar; he thought of them as two men. This is a thing much more difficult to describe, in a society from which it is absent, but it was the original basis of the whole business; it was why the popular movement arose in that sort of place and that sort of man. His imaginative magnanimity rose like a tower to starry heights that might well seem dizzy and even crazy; but it was founded on this high table land of human equality.

I have taken this the first among a hundred tales of the youth of St. Francis, and dwelt on its significance a little, because until we have learned to look for the significance there will often seem to be little but a sort of light sentiment in telling the story. St. Francis is not a proper person to be patronised with merely “pretty” stories. There are often any number of them; but they are too often used so as to be a sort of sentimental sediment of the medieval world, instead of being, as the saint emphatically is, a challenge to the modern world. We must take his human development somewhat more seriously; and the next story in which we get a glimpse of it is in a very different setting. But in exactly the same way it opens, as if by accident, certain abysses of the mind and perhaps of the unconscious mind. Francis still looks more or less like an ordinary young man; and it is only when we look at him as an ordinary young man, that we realise what an extraordinary young man he was.

War had broken out between Assisi and Perugia. It is now fashionable to say in a satirical spirit that such wars did not so much break out as to go on idefinitely between the city states of medieval Italy. It will be enough to say here that if one of those medieval wars had really gone on without stopping for a century, it might possibly have come within a remote distance of killing as many people as we kill in a year, in one of our great modern scientific wars between our great modern industrial empires. But the citizens of the medieval republic were certainly under the limitation of only being asked to die for the things with which they had always lived, the house they inhabited, the shrines they venerated and the rulers and representatives they new; and had not the larger vision calling for them to die for the latest rumours about remote colonies as reported in anonymous newspapers. And if we infer from our own experience that war paralyzed civilization, we must at least admit that these warring towns turned out a number of paralytics who go by the names of Dante and Michael Angelo, Ariosto and Titian, Leonardo and Columbus, not to mention Catherine of Siena and the subject of this story. While we lament all this local patriotism as a hubbub of the Dark Ages, it must seem a rather curious fact that about three quarters of the greatest men who ever lived came out of these little towns and were often engaged in these little wars. It remains to be seen what will ultimately come out of our large towns; but there has been no sign of anything of this sort since they became large; and I have sometimes been haunted by a fancy of my youth, that these things will not come till there is a city wall around Clapham and the tocsin is rung at night to arm the citizens of Wimbledon.

Anyhow, the tocsin was rung at Assisi and the citizens armed, and among them was Francis the son of the cloth merchant. He went out to fight with some company of lancers and in some fight or other he and his little band were taken prisoners. To me it seems most probable that there had been some tale of treason or cowardice about the disaster; for we are told that there was one of the captives with whom his fellow-prisoners flatly refused to associate even in prison; and when this happens in such circumstances, it is generally because the military blame for the surrender is thrown on some individual. Anyhow, somebody noted a small but rather curious thing, though it might seem rather negative than positive. Francis, we are told, moved among his captive companions with all his characteristic courtesy and even conviviality, “liberal and hilarious” as somebody said of him, resolved to keep up their spirits and his own. And when he came across the mysterious outcast, traitor or coward or whatever he was called, he simply treated him exactly like all the rest, neither with coldness or compassion, but with the same unaffected gaiety and good fellowship. But if there had been present in that prison someone with a sort of second sight about the truth and trend of spiritual things, he might have known he was in the presence of something new and seemingly almost anarchic; a deep tide driving out to uncharted seas of charity. For in this sense there was really something wanting in Francis of Assisi, something to which he was blind that he might see better and more beautiful things. All those limits in good fellowship and good form, all those landmarks of social life that divide the tolerable and the intolerable, all those social scruples and conventional conditions that are normal and even noble in ordinary men, all those things that hold many decent societies together, could never hold this man at all.

He liked as he liked; he seems to have liked everybody, but especially those whom everybody disliked him for liking. Something very vast and universal was already present in that narrow dungeon; and such a seer might have seen in its darkness that red halo of caritas caritatum which marks one saint among saints as well as among men. He might well have heard the first whisper of that wild blessing that afterwards took the form of a blasphemy; “He listens to those whom God himself will not listen”.

But though such a seer might have seen such a truth, it is exceedingly doubtful if Francis himself saw it. He had acted out of an unconscious largeness, or in the fine medieval phrase largesse, within himself, something might almost have been lawless if it had not been reaching out to a more divine law; but is doubtful whether he new the law was divine. It is evident that he had not at this time any notion of abandoning the military, still less of adopting the monastic life. It is true that there is not, as pacifists and prigs imagine, the least inconsistency between loving men and fighting them, if we fight them fairly and for a good cause. But it seems to me that there was more than this involved; that the mind of the young man was really running towards a military morality in any case. About this time the first calamity crossed his path in the form of a malady which was to revisit him many times and hamper his headlong career. Sickness made him more serious; but one fancies it would only have made him a more serious soldier, or even more serious about soldiering. And while he was recovering, something rather larger than the little fueds and raids of the Italian towns opened an avenue of adventure and ambition. The crown of Sicily, a considerable centre of controversy at the time, was apparently claimed by a certain Gauthier de Brienne, and the Papal cause to aid which Gauthier was called in aroused enthusiasm among a number of young Assisians, including Francis, who proposed to march into Apulia on the count’s behalf; perhaps his French name had something to do with it. For it must never be forgotten that though that world was in one sense a world of little things, it was a world of little things concerned with great things. There was more internationalism in the lands dotted with tiny republics than in the huge homogeneous impenetrable national divisions of to-day. The legal authority of the Assisian magistrates might hardly reach further than a bow-shot from their high embattled city walls. But their sympathies might be with the ride of the Normans through Sicily or the palace of the Troubadours at Toulouse; with the Emperor throned in the German forests or the great Pope dying in the exile of Salerno. Above all, it must be remembered that when the interests of an age are mainly religious they must be universal. Nothing can be more universal than the universe. And there are several things about the religious position at that particular moment which modern people not unnaturally fail to realise. For one thing, modern people naturally think of people so remote as ancient people, and even early people. We feel vaguely that these things happened in the first ages of the Church. The Church was already a good deal more than a thousand years old. That is, the Church was then rather older than France is now, a great deal older than England is now. And she looked old then; almost as old as she does now; possibly older than she does now. The Church looked like great Charlemagne with the long white beard, who had already fought a hundred wars with the heathen, and in the legend was bidden by an angel to go forth and fight once more though he was two thousand years old. The Church had topped her thousand years and turned the corner for the second thousand; she had come through the Dark Ages in which nothing could be done except desperate fighting against the barbarians and the stubborn repitition of the creed. The creed was still being repeated after the victory or escape; but it is not unnatural to suppose that there was something a little monotonous about the repitition. The Church looked old then as now; and there were some who thought her dying as now. In truth orthodoxy was not dead but it may have been dull; it is certain that some people began to think it dull. The Troubadours of the Provencal movement had already begun to take that turn or twist towards Oriental fancies and the paradox of pessimism, which always comes to Europeans as something fresh when their own sanity seems to be something stale. It is likely enough that after all those centuries of hopeless war without and ruthless asceticism within, the official orthodoxy seemed to be something stale. The freshness and freedom of the first Christians seemed then as much as now a lost and almost prehistoric age of gold. Rome was still more rational than anything else; the Church was really wiser but it may well have seemed wearier than the world. There was something more adventurous and alluring, perhaps, about the mad metaphysics that had been blown across out of Asia. Dreams were gathering like dark clouds over the Midi to break in a thunder of anathema and civil war. Only the light lay on the great plain around Rome; but the light was blank and the plain was flat; and there was no stir in the still air and the immemorial silence about the sacred town.

High in the dark house of Assisi Francesco Bernadonne slept and dreamed of arms. There came to him in the darkness a vision splendid with swords, patterned after the cross in the Crusading fashion, of spears and shields and helmets hung in a high armoury, all bearing the sacred sign. When he awoke he accepted the dream as a trumpet bidding him to the battlefield, and rushed out to take horse and arms. He delighted in all the exercises of chivalry; and was evidently an accomplished cavalier and fighting man by the tests of the camp. He would doubtless at any time have preferred a Christian sort of chivalry; but it seems clear that he was also in a mood which thirsted for glory, though in him that glory would always have been identical with honour. He was not without some vision of that wreath of laurel which Ceasar has left for all the Latins. As he rode out to war the great gate in the deep wall of Assisi resounded with his last boast, “I shall come back a great prince.”

A little way along the road his sickness rose again and threw him. It seems highly probable, in the light of his impetuous temper, that he had ridden away long before he was fit to move. And in the darkness of this second and fare more desolating interruption, he seems to have had another dream in which a voice said to him, “You have mistaken the meaning of the vision. Return to your own town.” And Francis trailed back in his sickness to Assisi, a very dismal and disappointed and perhaps even derided figure, with nothing to do but wait for what should happen next. It was his first descent into a dark ravine that is called the valley of humiliation, which seemed to him very rocky and desolate, but in which he was afterwards to find many flowers.

But he was not only disappointed and humiliated; he was very much puzzled and bewildered. He still firmly believed that his two dreams must have meant something; and he could not imagine what they could possibly mean. It was while he was drifting, one might even say mooning, about the streets of Assisi and the fields outside the city wall, that an incident occurred to him which has not always been immediately connected with the business of the dreams, but which seems to me the obvious culmination of them. He was riding listlessly in some wayside place, apparently in the open country, when he saw a figure coming along the road towards him and halted; for he saw it was a leper. And he knew instantly that his courage was challenged, not as the world challenges, but as one would challenge who knew the secrets of the heart of a man. What he saw advancing was not the banner and spears of Perugia, from which it never occurred to him to shrink; nor the armies that fought for the crown of Sicily, of which he had always thought as a courageous man thinks of mere vulgar danger. Francis Bernadone saw his fear coming up the road towards him; the fear that comes from within and not without; though it stood white and horrible in the sunlight. For once in the long rush of his life his soul must have stood still. Then he sprang from his horse, knowing nothing between stillness and swiftness, and rushed on the leper and threw his arms around him. It was the beginning of a long vocation of ministry among many lepers, for whom he did many services; to this man he gave what money he could and mounted and rode on. We do not know how far he rode, or with what sense of the things around him; but it is said that when he looked back, he could see no figure on the road.

CHAPTER IV

FRANCIS THE BUILDER

We have now reached the great break in the life of Francis of Assisi; the point at which something happened to him that must remain greatly dark to most of us, who are ordinary and selfish men whom God has not broken to make anew.

In dealing with this difficult passage, especially for my own purpose of making things moderately easy for the more secular sympathiser, I have hesitated as to the more proper course; and have eventually decided to state first of all what happened, with little more of a hint of what I imagine to have been the meaning of what happened. The fuller meaning may be debated more easily afterwards, when it was unfolded in the full Franciscan life. Anyway, what happened was this. The story very largely revolves around the ruins of the Church of St. Damien, an old shrine in Assisi which was apparently neglected and falling to pieces. Here Francis was in the habit of praying before the crucifix during those dark and aimless days of transition which followed the tragical collapse of all his military ambitions, probably made bitter by some loss of social prestige terrible to his sensitive spirit. As he did so he heard a voice saying to him, “Francis, seest thou not that my house is in ruins? Go and restore it for me.”

Francis sprang up and went. To go and do something was one of the driving demands of his nature; probably he had gone and done it before he had at all thoroughly thought out what he had done. In any case what he had done was something very decisive and immediately very disastrous for his singular social career. In the coarse conventional language of the uncomprehending world, he stole. From his own enthusiastic point of view, he extended to his venerable father Peter Bernadone the exquisite excitement and inestimable privilege of assisting, more or less unconsciously, in the rebuilding of St. Damiens Church. In point of fact what he did first was to sell his own horse and then go off and sell several bales of his father’s cloth, making the sign of the cross over them to indicate their pious and charitable destination. Peter Bernadone did not see things in this light. Peter Bernadone indeed had not very much light to see by, so far as understanding the genius and temperament of his extraordinary son was concerned. Instead of understanding in what sort of a wind and flame of abstract appetites the lad was living, instead of simply telling him (as the priest practically did later) that he done an indefensible thing with the best intentions, old Bernadone took up the matter in the hardest style; in a legal and literal fashion. He used absolute political powers like a heathen father, and himself put his son under lock and key as a vulgar thief. It would appear that the cry was caught up among many with whom the unlucky Francis had once been popular; and altogether, in his efforts to build up the house of God he had only succeeded in bringing his own house about his ears and lying buried under the ruins. The quarrel dragged drearily through several stages; at one time the wretched young man seems to have disappeared underground, so to speak, into some cavern or cellar where he remained huddled hopelessly in the darkness. Anyhow, it was his blackest moment; the whole world had turned over; the whole world was on top of him.

When he came out, it was only perhaps gradually that anybody grasped that something had happened. He and his father were summoned in the court of the bishop; for Francis had refused the authority of all legal tribunals. The bishop addressed some remarks to him, full of that excellent common sense which the Catholic Church keeps permanently as the background for all the fiery attitudes of her saints. He told Francis that he must unquestionably restore the money to his father; that no blessing could follow a work done by unjust methods; and in short (to put it crudely) if the young fanatic would give back his money to the old fool, the incident would then terminate. There was a new air about Francis. He was no longer crushed, still less crawling, so far as his father was concerned; yet his words do not, I think, indicate either just indignation or wanton insult or anything in the nature of a mere continuation of the quarrel. They are rather remotely akin to the mysterious utterances of his great model, “What have I to do with thee?” or even the terrible “Touch me not.”

He stood up before them all and said, “Up to this time I have called Pietro Bernadone father, but now I am the servant of God. Not only the money but everything that can be called his I will restore to my father, even the very clothes he has given me.” And he rent off all his garments except one; and they saw that it was a hair-shirt.

He piled the garments in a heap on the floor and threw the money on top of them. Then he turned to the bishop, and received his blessing, like one who turns his back on society; and, according to the account, went out as he was into the cold world. Apparently it was literally a cold world at the moment, and snow was on the ground. A curious detail, very deep in its significance, I fancy, is given in the same account of this great crisis in his life. He went out half-naked in his hair shirt into the winter woods, walking the frozen ground between the frosty trees: a man without a father. He was penniless, he was parentless, he was to all appearances without a trade or a plan or a hope in the world; and as he went under the frosty trees, he burst suddenly into song.

It was apparently noted as remarkable that the language in which he sang was French, or that Provencal which was called for convenience French. It was not his native language; and it was in his native language that he ultimately won fame as a poet; indeed St. Francis is one of the very first of the national poets in the purely national dialects of Europe. But it was the language with which all his most boyish ardours and ambitions had been identified; it was for him pre-eminently the language of romance. That it broke from him in this extraordinary extremity seems to me something at first sight very strange and in the last analysis very significant. What that significance was, or may well have been, I will try to suggest in the subsequent chapter; it is enough to indicate here that the whole philosophy of St. Francis revolved around the idea of a new supernatural light on natural things, which meant the ultimate recovery not the ultimate refusal of natural things. And for the purpose of this purely narrative part of the business, it is enough to record that while he wandered in the winter forest in his hair-shirt, like the very wildest of the hermits, he sang in the tongue of the Troubadours.

Meanwhile the narrative naturally reverts to the problem of the ruined or at least neglected church, which had been the starting point of the saint’s innocent crime and beatific punishment. That problem still predominated in his mind and was soon engaging his insatiable activities; but they were activities of a new sort; and he made no more attempts to interfere with commercial ethics of the town of Assisi. There had dawned on him one of those great paradoxes that are also platitudes. He realised that the way to build a church is not to become entangled in bargains and, to him, rather bewildering questions of legal claim. The way to build a church is not to pay for it, certainly not with somebody else’s money. The way to build a church is not to pay for it even with your own money. The way to build a church is to build it.

He went about by himself collecting stones. He begged all the people he met to give him stones. In fact he became a new sort of beggar, reversing the parable; a beggar who asks not for bread but stone. Probably, as happened to him again and again throughout his extraordinary existence, the very queerness of the request gave it a sort of popularity; and all sorts of idle and luxurious people fell in with the benevolent project, as they would have done with a bet. He worked with his own hands at the rebuilding of the church, dragging the material like a beast of burden and learning the very last and lowest lessons of toil. A vast number of stories are told about Francis at this as at every other period of his life; but for the purpose here, which is one of simplification, it is best to dwell on this definite re-entrance of the saint into the world by the low gate of physical labour. There does indeed run through the whole of his life a sort of double meaning, like his shadow thrown upon the wall. All his actions had something of the character of an allegory; and it is likely enough that some leaden-witted scientific historian may some day try to prove that he himself was never anything but an allegory. It is true enough in this sense that he was labouring at a double task, and rebuilding something else as well as the church of St. Damien. He was not only discovering the general lesson that his glory was not to be in overthrowing men in battle but in building up the positive and creative monuments of peace. He was truly building up something else, or beginning to build it up; something that has often enough fallen into ruin but has never been past rebuilding; a church that could always be built anew though it had rotted away to its first foundation stone, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

The next stage in his progress is probably marked by his transferring the same energies of architectural reconstruction to the little church of St. Mary of the Angels at the Portiuncula. He had already done something of the same kind at a church dedicated to St. Peter; and that quality in his life noted above, which made it seem like a symbolical drama, led many of his most devout biographers to note the numerical symbolism of the three churches. There was at any rate a more historical and practical symbolism about two of them. For the original church of St. Damian afterwards became the seat of his striking experiment of a female order, and of the pure and spiritual romance of St. Clare. And the church of the Portiuncula will remain forever as one of the great historic buildings of the world; for it was here that he gathered the little knot of friends and enthusiasts; it was the home of many homeless men. At this time, however, it is not clear that he had the definite idea of any such monastic developments. How early the plan appeared in his own mind it is of course impossible to say; but on the face of events it first takes the form of a few friends who attached themselves to him one by one because they shared his own passion for simplicity. The account given of the form of their dedication is, however, significant; for it was that of an invocation of the simplification of life as suggested in the New Testament. The adoration of Christ had been a part of the man's passionate nature for a long time past. But the imitation of Christ, as a sort of plan or ordered scheme of life, may in that sense may be said to begin here.

The two men who have the credit, apparently, of having first perceived something of what was happening in the world of the soul were a solid and wealthy citizen named Bernard of Quintaville and a canon from a neighbouring church named Peter. It is the more to their credit because Francis, if one may put it so, was by this time wallowing in poverty and association with lepers and ragged mendicants; and the two were men with much to give up; the one of comforts in the world and the other of ambition in the church. Bernard the rich burgher did quite literally and finally sell all he had and give it to the poor. Peter did even more; for he descended from a chair of spiritual authority, probably when he was already a man of mature years and therefore of fixed mental habits, to follow an extravagant young eccentric whom most people probably regarded as a maniac. What it was which they had caught a glimpse, of which Francis had seen the glory, may be suggested later so far as it can be suggested at all. At this stage we need profess to see no more than all Assisi saw, and that something not altogether unworthy of comment. The citizens of Assisi only saw the camel go in triumph through the eye of the needle and God do impossible things because to him all things were possible; only a priest who rent his robes like the Publican and not like the Pharisee and a rich man who went away joyful, for he had no possessions.

These three strange figures are said to have built themselves a sort of hut or den adjoining the leper hospital. There they talked to each other, in the intervals of drudgery and danger (for it needed ten times more courage to look after a leper than to fight for the crown of Sicily), in the terms of their new life, almost like children talking a secret language. Of these individual elements on their first friendship we can say little with certainty; but it is certain that they remained friends to the end. Bernard of Quintaville occupies in the story something of the position of Sir Bedivere, “first made and latest left of Arthur’s knights,” for he reappears at the right hand side of the saint on his deathbed and receives some sort of special blessing. But all these things belong to another historical world and were quite remote from the ragged and fantastic trio in their tumble-down hut. They were not monks except perhaps in the most literal and archaic sense which was identical with hermits. They were, so to speak, three solitaries living together socially, but not as a society. The whole thing seems to have been intensely individual, as seen from the outside doubtless individual to the point of insanity. The stir of something that had in it the promise of a movement or a mission can first be felt as I have said in the affair of the appeal to the New Testament.

It was a sort of sors vigiliana applied to the Bible; a practice not unknown among Protestants though open to their criticism, one would think, as being rather a superstition of pagans. Anyhow it seems almost the opposite of searching the Scriptures to open them at random; but St. Francis certainly opened them at random. According to one story, he merely made the sign of the cross over the volume of the Gospel and opened it at three places reading three texts. The first was the tale of the rich young man whose refusal to sell all his goods was the occasion of the great paradox about the camel and the needle. The second was the commandment to the disciples to take nothing with them on their journey, neither scrip nor staff nor any money. The third was that saying, literally to be called crucial, that the follower of Christ must also carry his cross. There is a somewhat similar story of St. Francis finding one of these texts, almost as accidentally, merely in listening to what happened to be the Gospel of the day. But from the former version at least it would seem that the incident occurred very early indeed in his new life; for it was after this oracle, apparently, that Bernard the first disciple rushed forth and scattered all his goods among the poor. If this be so, it would seem that nothing followed it for the moment except the individual ascetical life with the hut for a hermitage. It must of course have been a rather public sort of hermitage, but it was none the less in a very real sense withdrawn from the world. St. Simeon Stylites on the top of his pillar was in one sense an exceedingly public character; but there was something a little singular in his situation for all that. It must be presumed that most people thought the situation of Francis singular, that some even thought it too singular. There was inevitably indeed in any Catholic society something ultimate and even subconscious that was at least capable of comprehending it better than a pagan or puritan society could comprehend it. But we must not at this stage, I think, exaggerate this potential public sympathy. As has already been suggested, the Church and all its institutions had already the air of being old and settled and sensible things, the monastic institutions amongst the rest. Common sense was commoner in the Middle Ages, I think, than in our own rather jumpy journalistic age; but men like Francis are not common in any age, nor are they to be fully understood merely by the exercise of common sense. The thirteenth century was certainly a progressive period; perhaps the only really progressive period in human history. But it can truly be called progressive precisely because its progress was very orderly. It is really and truly an example of an epoch of reforms without revolutions. But the reforms were not only progressive but very practical; and they were very much to the advantage of highly practical institutions; the towns and the trading guilds and the manual crafts. Now the solid men of town and guild in the time of Francis of Assisi were probably very solid indeed. They were much more economically equal, they were much more justly governed in their own economic environment, than the moderns who struggle madly between starvation and the monopolist prizes of capitalism; but it likely enough that the majority of citizens were as hard-headed as peasants. Certainly the behaviour of the venerable Pietro Bernadone does not indicate a delicate sympathy with the fine and almost fanciful subtleties of the Franciscan spirit. And we cannot measure the beauty and originality of this strange spiritual adventure, unless we have the humour and human sympathy to put into plain words how it would have looked to such an unsympathetic person at the time when it happened. In the next chapter I shall make an attempt, inevitably inadequate, to indicate the inside of the story of the building of the three churches and the little hut. In this chapter I have but outlined it from the outside. And in concluding that chapter I ask the reader to remember and realize what the story really looked like, when thus seen from the outside. Given a critic of rather coarse common sense, with no feeling about the incident except annoyance, and how would the story seem to stand?

A young fool or rascal is caught robbing his father and selling goods which he ought to guard; and the only explanation he will offer is that a loud voice from nowhere spoke in his ear and told him to mend the cracks and holes in a particular wall. He then declared himself naturally independant of all powers corresponding to the police or magistrates, and takes refuge with an amiable bishop who is forced to remonstrate with him and tell him he is wrong. He then proceeds to take off his clothes in public and practically throw them at his father; announcing at the same time that his father is not his father at all. He then runs about the town asking everybody he meets to give him fragments of buildings or building materials, apparently with reference to his old monomania about mending the wall. It may be an excellent thing that cracks should be filled up, but preferably not by somebody who is himself cracked; and architectural restoration like other things is not best performed by builders who, as we should say, have a tile loose. Finally the wretched youth relapses into rags and squalor and practically crawls away into the gutter. That is the spectacle that Francis must have presented to a very large number of his neighbours and friends.

How he lived at all must have seemed to them dubious; but presumably he already begged for bread as he had begged for building materials. But he was always very careful to beg for the blackest or worst bread he could get, for the stalest crusts or something less luxurious than the crumbs which the dogs eat, and which fell from the rich man’s table. Thus he probably fared worse than an ordinary beggar; for the beggar would eat the best he could get and the saint ate the worst he could get. In plain fact he was ready to live on refuse; and it was probably something much uglier as an experience than the refined simplicity which vegetarians and water drinkers would call the simple life. As he dealt with the question of food, so he apparently dealt with the question of clothing. He dealt with it, that is, upon the same principle of taking what he could get, and not even the best of what he could get. According to one story he changed clothes with a beggar; and he would doubtless have been content to change them with a scarecrow. In another version he got hold of the rough brown tunic of a peasant, but presumably only because the peasant gave him his very oldest brown tunic, which was probably very old indeed. Most peasants have few changes of clothing to give away; and some peasants are not specially inclined to give them away unless absolutely necessary. It is said that in place of the girdle which he had flung off (perhaps with the more symbolic scorn because it probably carried the purse or wallet by the fashion of the period) he picked up a rope more or less at random, because it was lying near, and tied it round his waist. He undoubtedly meant it as a shabby expedient; rather as the very destitute tramp will sometimes tie his clothes together with a piece of string. He meant to strike the note of collecting his clothes anyway, like rags from a succession of dust bins. Ten years later that make-shift costume was the uniform of five thousand men; and a hundred years later, in that, for a pontifical panoply, they laid great Dante in the grave.

CHAPTER V

LE JONGLEUR DE DIEU

Many signs and symbols might yet be used to give a hint of what really happened in the mind of the young poet of Assisi. Indeed they are at once too numerous for selection and yet too slight for satisfaction. But one of them may be adumbrated in this small and apparently accidental fact; that when he and his secular companions carried their pageant of poetry through the town, they called themselves Troubadours. But when he and his spiritual companions came out to do their spiritual work in the world, they were called by their leader the Jongleurs de Dieu.

Nothing has been said here at any length of the great culture of the Troubadours as it appeared in Provence or Languedoc, great as was their influence in history and their influence on St. Francis. Something more May be said of them when we come to summarise his relation to history; it is enough to note here in a few sentences the facts about them that were relevant to him, and especially the particular point now in question, which was the most relevant of all. Everybody knows who the Troubadours were; everybody knows that very early in the Middle Ages, in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, there arose a civilisation in Southern France which threatened to rival or eclipse the rising tradition of Paris. Its chief product was a school of poetry, or rather more especially a school of poets. They were primarily love-poets, though they were often also satirists and critics of things in general. Their picturesque posture in history is largely due to the fact that they sang their own poems and often played their own accompaniments, on the light musical instruments of the period; they were minstrels as well as men of letters. Allied to their love-poetry were other institutions of a decorative and fanciful kind concerned with the same theme. There was what was called the “Gay Science,” the attempt to reduce to a sort of system the fine shades of flirtation and philandering. There were the things called Courts of Love, in which the same delicate subjects were dealt with legal pomp and pedantry. There is one point in this part of the business that must be remembered in relation to St. Francis. There were manifest moral dangers in all this superb sentimentalism; but it is a mistake to suppose that its only danger of exaggeration was in the direction of sensualism. There was a strain in the southern romance that was actually an excess of spirituality; just as the pessimist heresy it produced was in one sense an excess of spirituality. The love was not always animal; sometimes it was so airy as to be almost allegorical. The reader realises that the lady is the most beautiful being that can possibly exist, only he has occasional doubts as to whether she does exist. Dante owed something to the Troubadours; and the critical debates about his ideal woman are an excellent example of these doubts. We know that Beatrice was not his wife, but we should in any case be equally sure she was not his mistress; and some critics have even suggested that she was nothing at all, so to speak, except his muse. This idea of Beatrice as an allegorical figure is, I believe, unsound; it would seem unsound to any man who has read the Vit Nuova and has been in love. But the very fact that it is possible to suggest it illustrates something abstract and scholastic in these medieval passions. But though they were abstract passions they were very passionate passions. These men could feel almost like lovers, even about allegories and abstractions. It is necessary to realise that St. Francis was talking the true language of a troubadour when he said that he also had a most glorious and gracious lady and that her name was poverty.

But the particular point to be noted here is not concerned so much with the word Troubadour as with the word Jongleur. It is especially concerned with the transition from one to the other; and for this it is necessary to grasp another detail about the poets of the Gay Science. A jongleur was not the same thing as a troubadour, even if the same man were both a troubadour and a jongleur. More often, I believe, they were separate men as well as separate trades. In many cases, apparently the two men would walk the world together like companions in arms, or rather companions in arts. The jongleur was properly a joculator or jester; sometimes he was what we should call a juggler. This is the point, I imagine, of the tale about Taillifer the Jongleur at the Battle of Hastings, who sang the death of Roland while he tossed up his sword and caught it, as a juggler catches balls. Sometimes he may been even a tumbler; like that acrobat in the beautiful legend who was called “The Tumbler of Our Lady,” because he turned head over heels and stood on his head before the image of the Blessed Virgin, for which he was nobly thanked and comforted by her and the whole company of heaven. In the ordinary way, we may imagine, the troubadour would exalt the company with earnest and solemn strains of love and then the jongleur would do his turn as a sort as a sort of comic relief. A glorious medieval romance remains to be written about two such companions wandering through the world. At any rate, if there is one place in which the Franciscan spirit can be found outside the true Franciscan story, it is in the tale of the Tumbler of our Lady. And when St. Francis called his followers the Jongleurs de Dieu, he meant something very like the Tumblers of our Lady.

Somewhere in that transition from the ambition of the Troubadour to the antics of the Tumbler is hidden, as under a parable, the truth of St. Francis. Of the two minstrels or entertainers, the jester was presumably the servant or at least the secondary figure. St. Francis really meant what he said when he said he had found the secret of life in being the servant and the secondary figure. There was to be found ultimately in such service a freedom almost amounting to frivolity. It was comparable to the condition of the jongleur because it almost amounted to frivolity. The jester could be free when the knight was rigid; and it was possible to be a jester in the service which is perfect freedom. This parallel of the two poets or minstrels is perhaps the best preliminary and external statement of the Franciscan change of heart, being conceived under an image with which the imagination of the modern world has a certain sympathy. There was, of course, a great deal more than this involved; and we must endeavour however insufficiently to penetrate past the image to the idea. It is so far like the tumblers that it is really to many people a topsy-turvy idea.

Francis, at the time or somewhere about the time when he disappeared into the prison or the dark cavern, underwent a reversal of a certain psychological kind; which was really like the reversal of a complete somersault, in that by coming full circle it came back, or apparently came back, to the same normal posture. It is necessary to use the grotesque simile of an acrobatic antic, because there is hardly any other figure that will make the fact clear. But in the inward sense it was a profound spiritual revolution. The man who went into the cave was not the man who came out again; in that sense he was almost as different as if he were dead, as if he were a ghost or a blessed spirit. And the effects of this on his attitude towards the actual world were really as extravagant as any parallel can make them. He looked at the world as differently from other men as if he had come out of that dark hole walking on his hands.

If we apply this parable of Our Lady’s Tumbler to the case, we shall come very near to the point of it. Now it really is a fact that any scene such as a landscape can sometimes be more clearly and freshly seen if it is seen upside down. There have been landscape-painters who adopted the most startling and pantomimic postures in order to look at it for a moment in that fashion. Thus that inverted vision, so much more bright and quaint and arresting, does bear a certain resemblance to the world which a mystic like St. Francis sees every day. But herein is the essential part of the parable. Our Lady’s Tumbler did not stand on his head in order to see flowers and trees as a clearer or quainter vision. He did not do so; and it would never have occurred to him to do so. Our Lady’s Tumbler stood on his head to please Our Lady. If St. Francis had done the same thing, as he was quite capable of doing, it would originally have been from the same motive; a motive of a purely supernatural thought. It would be after this that his enthusiasm would extend itself and give a sort of halo to the edges of all earthly things. This is why it is not true to represent St. Francis as a mere romantic forerunner of the Renaissance and a revival of natural pleasures for their own sake. The whole point of him was that the secret of recovering the natural pleasures lay in regarding them in the light of a supernatural pleasure. In other words, he repeated in his own person that historic process noted in the introductory chapter; the vigil of asceticism which ends in the vision of a natural world made new. But in the personal case there was even more than this; there were elements that make the parallel of the Jongleur or Tumbler even more appropriate than this.

It may be suspected that in that black cell or cave Francis passed the blackest hours of his life. By nature he was the sort of man who has that vanity which is the opposite of pride; that vanity which is very near to humility. He never despised his fellow creatures and therefore he never despised the opinion of his fellow creatures; including the admiration of his fellow creatures. All that part of his human nature had suffered the heaviest and most crushing blows. It is possible that after his humiliating return from his frustrated military campaign he was called a coward. It is certain that after his quarrel with his father about the bales of cloth he was called a thief. And even those who had sympathised most with him, the priest whose church he had restored, the bishop whose blessing he had received, had evidently treated him with an almost humorous amiability which left only too clear the ultimate conclusion of the matter. He had made a fool of himself. Any man who has been young, who has ridden horses or thought himself ready for a fight, who has fancied himself as a troubadour and accepted the conventions of comradeship, will appreciate the ponderous and crushing weight of that simple phrase. The conversion of St. Francis, like the conversion of St. Paul, involved his being in some sense flung suddenly from a horse; but in a sense it was an even worse fall; for it was a war-horse. Anyhow, there was not a rag of him left that was not ridiculous. Everybody knew that at the best he had made a fool of himself. It was a solid objective fact, like the stones in the road, that he had made a fool of himself. He saw himself as an object, very small and distinct like a fly walking on a clear window pane; and it was unmistakably a fool. And as he stared at the word "fool" written in luminous letters before him, the word itself began to shine and change.

We used to be told in the nursery that if a man were to bore a hole through the centre of the earth and climb continually down and down, there would come a moment at the centre when he would seem to be climbing up and up. I do not know whether this is true. The reason I do not know whether it is true is that I never happened to bore a hole through the centre of the earth, still less to crawl through it. If I do not know what this reversal or inversion feels like, it is because I have never been there. And this also is an allegory. It is certain that the writer, it is even possible that the reader, is an ordinary person who has never been there. We cannot follow St. Francis to that final spiritual overturn in which complete humiliation becomes complete holiness or happiness, because we have never been there. I for one do not profess to follow it any further than that first breaking down of the romantic barricades of boyish vanity, which I have suggested in the last paragraph. And even that paragraph, of course, is merely conjectural, an individual guess at what he may have felt; but he may have felt something quite different. But whatever else it was, it was so far analogous to the story of the man making a tunnel through the earth that it did mean a man going down and down until at some mysterious moment he begins to go up and up. We have never gone up like that because we have never gone down like that; we are obviously incapable of saying that it does not happen; and the more candidly and calmly we read human history, and especially the history of the wisest men, the more we shall come to the conclusion that it does happen. Of the intrinsic internal essence of the experience, I make no pretence of writing at all. But the external effect of it, for the purpose of this narrative, may be expressed by saying that when Francis came forth from his cave of vision, he was wearing the same word "fool" as a feather in his cap; as a crest or even a crown. He would go on being a fool; he would become more and more of a fool; he would be the court fool of the King of Paradise.

This state can only be represented in symbol; but the symbol of inversion is true in another way. If a man saw the world upside down, with all the trees and towers hanging head downwards as in a pool, one effect would be to emphasise the idea of dependence. There is a Latin and literal connection; for the very word dependence only means hanging. It would make vivid the Scriptural text which says that God has hung the world upon nothing. If St. Francis had seen, in one of his strange dreams, the town of Assisi upside down, it need not have differed in a single detail from itself except in being entirely the other way round. But the point is this: that whereas to the normal eye the large masonry of its walls or the massive foundations of its watchtowers and its high citadel would make it seem safer and more permanent, the moment it was turned over the very same weight would make it seem more helpless and more in peril. It is but a symbol; but it happens to fit the psychological fact. St. Francis might love his little town as much as before, or more than before; but the nature of the love would be altered even in being increased. He might see and love every tile on the steep roofs or every bird on the battlements; but he would see them all in a new and divine light of eternal danger and dependence. Instead of being merely proud of his strong city because it could not be moved, he would be thankful to God Almighty that it had not been dropped; he would be thankful to God for not dropping the whole cosmos like a vast crystal to be shattered into falling stars. Perhaps St. Peter saw the world so, when he was crucified head-downwards.

It is commonly in a somewhat cynical sense that men have said, “Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall not be disappointed.” It was in a wholly happy and enthusiastic sense that St. Francis said, “Blessed is he who expecteth nothing, for he shall enjoy everything.” It was by this deliberate idea of starting from zero, from the dark nothingness of his own deserts, that he did come to enjoy even earthly things as few people have enjoyed them; and they are in themselves the best working example of the idea. For there is no way in which a man can earn a star or deserve a sunset. But there is more than this involved, and more indeed than is easily to be expressed in words. It is not only true that the less a man thinks of himself, the more he thinks of his good luck and of all the gifts of God. It is also true that he sees more of the things themselves when he sees more of their origin; for their origin is a part of them and indeed the most important part of them. Thus they become more extraordinary by being explained. He has more wonder at them but less fear of them; for a thing is really wonderful when it is significant and not when it is insignificant; and a monster, shapeless or dumb or merely destructive, may be larger than the mountains, but is still in a literal sense insignificant. For a mystic like St. Francis the monsters had a meaning; that is, they had delivered their message. They spoke no longer in an unknown tongue. That is the meaning of all those stories whether legendary or historical, in which he appears as a magician speaking the language of beasts and birds. The mystic will have nothing to do with mere mystery; mere mystery is generally a mystery of iniquity.

The transition from the good man to the saint is a sort of revolution; by which one for whom all things illustrate and illuminate God becomes one for whom God illustrates and illuminates all things. It is rather like the reversal whereby a lover might say at first sight that a lady looked like a flower, and say afterwards that all flowers reminded him of his lady. A saint and a poet standing by the same flower might seem to say the same thing; but indeed though they would both be telling the truth, they would be telling different truths. For one the joy of life is a cause of faith, for the other rather a result of faith. But one effect of the difference is that the sense of a divine dependence, which for the artist is like the brilliant levin-blaze, for the saint is like the broad daylight. Being in some mystical sense on the other side of things, he sees things go forth from the divine as children going forth from a familiar and accepted home, instead of meeting them as they come out, as most of us do, upon the roads of the world. And it is the paradox that by this privilege he is more familiar, more free and fraternal, more carelessly hospitable than we. For us the elements are like heralds who tell us with trumpet and tabard that we are drawing near the city of a great king; but he hails them with an old familiarity that is almost an old frivolity. He calls them his Brother Fire and his Sister Water.

So arises out of this almost nihilistic abyss the noble thing that is called Praise; which no one will ever understand while he identifies it with nature-worship or pantheistic optimism. When we say that a poet praises the whole creation, we commonly mean only that he praises the whole cosmos. But this sort of poet does really praise creation, in the sense of the act of creation. He praises the passage or transition from nonentity to entity; there falls here also the shadow of that archetypal image of the bridge, which has given to the priest his archaic and mysterious name. The mystic who passes through the moment when there is nothing but God does in some sense behold the beginningless beginnings in which there was really nothing else. He not only appreciates everything but the nothing of which everything was made. In a fashion he endures and answers even the earthquake irony of the Book of Job; in some sense he is there when the foundations of the world are laid, with the morning stars singing together and the sons of God shouting for joy. That is but a distant adumbration of the reason why the Franciscan, ragged, penniless, homeless and apparently hopeless, did indeed come forth singing such songs as might come from the stars of morning; and shouting, a son of God.

This sense of the great gratitude and the sublime dependence was not a phrase or even a sentiment; it is the whole point that this was the very rock of reality. It was not a fancy but a fact; rather it is true that beside it all facts are fancies. That we all depend in every detail, at every instant, as a Christian would say upon God, as even an agnostic would say upon existence and the nature of things, is not an illusion of imagination; on the contrary, it is the fundamental fact which we cover up, as with curtains, with the illusion of ordinary life. That ordinary life is an admirable thing in itself, just as imagination is an admirable thing in itself. But it is much more the ordinary life that is made of imagination than the contemplative life. He who has seen the whole world hanging on a hair of the mercy of God has seen the truth; we might almost say the cold truth. He who has seen the vision of his city upside-down has seen it the right way up.

Rossetti makes the remark somewhere, bitterly but with great truth, that the worst moment for the atheist is when he is really thankful and has nobody to thank. The converse of this proposition is also true; and it is certain that this gratitude produced, in such men as we are here considering, the most purely joyful moments that have been known to man. The great painter boasted that he mixed all his colours with brains, and the great saint may be said to mix all his thoughts with thanks. All goods look better when they look like gifts. In this sense it is certain that the mystical method establishes a very healthy external relation to everything else. But it must always be remembered that everything else has for ever fallen into a second place, in comparison with this simple fact of dependence on the divine reality. In so far as ordinary social relations have in them something that seems solid and self-supporting, some sense of being at once buttressed and cushioned; in so far as they establish sanity in the sense of security and security in the sense of self-sufficiency, the man who has seen the world hanging on a hair does have some difficulty in taking them so seriously as that. In so far as even the secular authorities and hierarchies, even the most natural superiorities and the most necessary subordinations, tend at once to put a man in his place, and to make him sure of his position, the man who has seen the human hierarchy upside down will always have something of a smile for its superiorities. In this sense the direct vision of divine reality does disturb solemnities that are sane enough in themselves. The mystic may have added a cubit to his stature; but he generally loses something of his status. He can no longer take himself for granted, merely because he can verify his own existence in a parish register or a family Bible. Such a man may have something of the appearance of the lunatic who has lost his name while preserving his nature; who straightway forgets what manner of man he was. "Hitherto I have called Pietro Bernardone father; but now I am the servant of God."

All these profound matters must be suggested in short and imperfect phrases; and the shortest statement of one aspect of this illumination is to say that it is the discovery of an infinite debt. It may seem a paradox to say that a man may be transported with joy to discover that he is in debt. But this is only because in commercial cases the creditor does not generally share the transports of joy; especially when the debt is by hypothesis infinite and therefore unrecoverable. But here again the parallel of a natural love-story of the nobler sort disposes of the difficulty in a flash. There the infinite creditor does share the joy of the infinite debtor; for indeed they are both debtors and both creditors. In other words debt and dependence do become pleasures in the presence of unspoilt love; the word is used too loosely and luxuriously in popular simplifications like the present; but here the word is really the key. It is the key of all the problems of Franciscan morality which puzzle the merely modern mind; but above all it is the key of asceticism. It is the highest and holiest of the paradoxes that the man who really knows he cannot pay his debt will be for ever paying it. He will be for ever giving back what he cannot give back, and cannot be expected to give back. He will be always throwing things away into a bottomless pit of unfathomable thanks. Men who think they are too modern to understand this are in fact too mean to understand it; we are most of us too mean to practise it. We are not generous enough to be ascetics; one might almost say not genial enough to be ascetics. A man must have magnanimity of surrender, of which he commonly only catches a glimpse in first love, like a glimpse of our lost Eden. But whether he sees it or not, the truth is in that riddle; that the whole world has, or is, only one good thing; and it is a bad debt.

If ever that rarer sort of romantic love, which was the truth that sustained the Troubadours, falls out of fashion and is treated as fiction, we may see some such misunderstanding as that of the modern world about asceticism. For it seems conceivable that some barbarians might try to destroy chivalry in love, as the barbarians ruling in Berlin destroyed chivalry in war. If that were ever so, we should have the same sort of unintelligent sneers and unimaginative questions. Men will ask what selfish sort of woman it must have been who ruthlessly exacted tribute in the form of flowers, or what an avaricious creature she can have been to demand solid gold in the form of a ring; just as they ask what cruel kind of God can have demanded sacrifice and self-denial. They will have lost the clue to all that lovers have meant by love; and will not understand that it was because the thing was not demanded that it was done. But whether or no any such lesser things will throw a light on the greater, it is utterly useless to study a great thing like the Franciscan movement while remaining in the modern mood that murmurs against gloomy asceticism. The whole point about St. Francis of Assisi is that he certainly was ascetical and he certainly was not gloomy. As soon as ever he had been unhorsed by the glorious humiliation of his vision of dependence on the divine love, he flung himself into fasting and vigil exactly as he had flung himself furiously into battle. He had wheeled his charger clean round, but there was no halt or check in the thundering impetuosity of his charge. There was nothing negative about it; it was not a regimen or a stoical simplicity of life. It was not self-denial merely in the sense of self-control. It was as positive as a passion; it had all the air of being as positive as a pleasure. He devoured fasting as a man devours food. He plunged after poverty as men have dug madly for gold. And it is precisely the positive and passionate quality of this part of his personality that is a challenge to the modern mind in the whole problem of the pursuit of pleasure. There undeniably is the historical fact; and there attached to it is another moral fact almost as undeniable. It is certain that he held on this heroic or unnatural course from the moment when he went forth in his hair-shirt into the winter woods to the moment when he desired even in his death agony to lie bare upon the bare ground, to prove that he had and that he was nothing. And we can say, with almost as deep a certainty, that the stars which passed above that gaunt and wasted corpse stark upon the rocky floor had for once, in all their shining cycles round the world of labouring humanity, looked down upon a happy man.

CHAPTER VI

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

From that cavern, that was a furnace of glowing gratitude and humility, there came forth one of the strongest and strangest and most original personalities that human history has known. He was, among other things, emphatically what we call a character; almost as we speak of a character in a good novel or play. He was not only a humanist but a humourist; a humourist especially in the old English sense of a man always in his humour, going his own way and doing what nobody else would have done. The anecdotes about him have a certain biographical quality of which the most familiar example is Dr. Johnson; which belongs in another way to William Blake or to Charles Lamb. The atmosphere can only be defined by a sort of antithesis; the act is always unexpected and never inappropriate. Before the thing is said or done it cannot even be conjectured; but after it is said or done it is felt to be merely characteristic. It is surprisingly and yet inevitably individual. This quality of abrupt fitness and bewildering consistency belongs to St. Francis in a way that marks him out from most men of his time. Men are learning more and more of the solid social virtues of medieval civilisation; but those impressions are still social rather than individual. The medieval world was far ahead of the modern world in its sense of the things in which all men are at one: death and the daylight of reason and the common conscience that holds communities together. Its generalisations were saner and sounder than the mad materialistic theories of to-day; nobody would have tolerated a Schopenhauer scorning life or a Nietzsche living only for scorn. But the modern world is more subtle in its sense of the things in which men are not at one; in the temperamental varieties and differentiations that make up the personal problems of life. All men who can think themselves now realise that the great schoolmen had a type of thought that was wonderfully clear; but it was as it were deliberately colourless. All are now agreed that the greatest art of the age was the art of public buildings; the popular and communal art of architecture. But it was not an age for the art of portrait-painting. Yet the friends of St. Francis have really contrived to leave behind a portrait; something almost resembling a devout and affectionate caricature. There are lines and colours in it that are personal almost to the extent of being perverse, if one can use the word perversity of an inversion that was also a conversion. Even among the saints he has the air of a sort of eccentric, if one may use the word of one whose eccentricity consisted in always turning towards the centre.

Before resuming the narrative of his first adventures, and the building of the great brotherhood which was the beginning of so merciful a revolution, I think it well to complete this imperfect personal portrait here; and having attempted in the last chapter a tentative description of the process, to add in this chapter a few touches to describe the result. I mean by the result the real man as he was after his first formative experiences; the man whom men met walking about on the Italian roads in his brown tunic tied with a rope. For that man, saving the grace of God, is the explanation of all that followed; men acted quite differently according to whether they had met him or not. If we see afterwards a vast tumult, an appeal to the Pope, mobs of men in brown habits besieging the seats of authority, Papal pronouncements, heretical sessions, trial and triumphant survival, the world full of a new movement, the friar a household word in every corner of Europe, and if we ask why all this happened, we can only approximate to any answer to our own question if we can, in some faint and indirect imaginative fashion, hear one human voice or see one human face under a hood. There is no answer except that Francis Bernardone had happened; and we must try in some sense to see what we should have seen if he had happened to us. In other words, after some groping suggestions about his life from the inside, we must again consider it from the outside; as if he were a stranger coming up the road towards us, along the hills of Umbria, between the olives or the vines.

Francis of Assisi was slight in figure with that sort of slightness which, combined with so much vivacity, gives the impression of smallness. He was probably taller than he looked; middle-sized, his biographers say; he was certainly very active and, considering what he went through, must have been tolerably tough. He was of the brownish Southern colouring, with a dark beard thin and pointed such as appears in pictures under the hoods of elves. And his eyes glowed with the fire that fretted him night and day. There is something about the description of all he said and did which suggests that, even more than most Italians, he turned naturally to a passionate pantomime of gestures. If this was so it is equally certain that with him, even more than with most Italians, the gestures were all gestures of politeness or hospitality. And both these facts, the vivacity and the courtesy, are the outward signs of something that mark him out very distinctively from many who might appear to be more of his kind than they really are. It is truly said that Francis of Assisi was on of the founders of the medieval drama, and therefore of the modern drama. He was the very reverse of a theatrical person in the selfish sense; but for all that he was pre-eminently a dramatic person. This side of him can best be suggested by taking what is commonly regarded as a reposeful quality; what is commonly described as a love of nature. We are compelled to use the term; and it is entirely the wrong term.

St. Francis was not a lover of nature. Properly understood, a lover of nature was precisely what he was not. The phrase implies accepting the material universe as a vague environment, a sort of sentimental pantheism. In the romantic period of literature, in the age of Byron and Scott, it was easy enough to imagine that a hermit in the ruins of a chapel (preferably by moonlight) might find peace and a mild pleasure in the harmony of solemn forests and silent stars, while he pondered over some scroll or illuminated volume, about the liturgical nature of which the author was a little vague. In short, the hermit might love nature as a background. Now for St. Francis nothing was ever in the background. We might say that his mind had no background, except perhaps that divine darkness out of which the divine love had called up every coloured creature one by one. He saw everything as dramatic, distinct from its setting, not all of a piece like a picture but in action like a play. A bird went by him like an arrow; something with a story and a purpose, though it was a purpose of life and not a purpose of death. A bush could stop him like a brigand; and indeed he was as ready to welcome the brigand as the bush.

In a word, we talk about a man who cannot see the wood for the trees. St. Francis was a man who did not want to see the wood for the trees. He wanted to see each tree as a separate and almost a sacred thing, being a child of God and therefore a brother or sister of man. But he did not want to stand against a piece of stage scenery used merely as a background, and inscribed in a general fashion: “Scene; a wood.” In this sense we might say that he was too dramatic for the drama. The scenery would have come to life in his comedies; the walls would really have spoken like Snout the Tinker and the trees would really have come walking to Dunsinane. Everything would have been in the foreground; and in that sense in the footlights. Everything would be in every sense a character. This is the quality in which, as a poet, he is the very opposite of a pantheist. He did not call nature his mother; he called a particular donkey his brother or a particular sparrow his sister. If he had called a pelican his aunt or an elephant his uncle as he might possibly have done, e would still have meant that they were particular creatures assigned by their Creator to particular places; not mere expressions of the evolutionary energy of things. That is where his mysticism is so close to the common sense of the child. A child has no difficulty about understanding that God made the dog and the cat; though he is well aware that the making of dogs and cats out of nothing is a mysterious process beyond his own imagination. But no child would understand what you meant if you mixed up the dog and the cat and everything else into one monster with myriad legs and called it nature. The child would resolutely refuse to make head or tail of any such animal. St. Francis was a mystic, but he believed in mysticism and not in mystification. As a mystic he was the mortal enemy of all those mystics who melt away the edges of things and dissolve an entity into its environment. He was a mystic of the daylight and the darkness; but not a mystic of the twilight. He was the very contrary of that sort of oriental visionary who is only a mystic because he is too much of a sceptic to be a materialist. St. Francis was emphatically a realist, using the word realist in its much more real medieval sense. In this matter he really was akin to the best spirit of his age, which had just won its victory over the nominalism of the twelfth century. In this indeed there was something symbolic in the contemporary art and decoration of his period; as in the art of heraldry. The Franciscan birds and beasts were really rather like heraldic birds and beasts; not in the sense of being fabulous animals but in the sense of being treated as if they were facts, clear and positive and unaffected by the illusions of atmosphere and perspective. In that sense he did see a bird sable on a field azure or a sheep argent on a field vert. But the heraldry of humility was richer than the heraldry of pride; for it saw all these things that God had given as something more precious and unique than the blazonry that princes and peers had only given to themselves. Indeed out of the depths of that surrender it rose higher than the highest titles of the feudal age; than the laurel of Ceasar or the Iron Crown of Lombardy. It is an example of extremes that meet, that the Little Poor Man, who had stripped himself of everything and named himself as nothing, took the same title that has been the wild vaunt of the vanity of the gorgeous Asiatic autocrat, and called himself the Brother of the Sun and Moon.

This quality, of something outstanding and even startling in things as St. Francis saw them, is here important as illustrating a character in his own life. As he saw all things dramatically, so he himself was always dramatic. We have to assume throughout, needless to say, that he was a poet and can only be understood as a poet. But he had one poetic privilege denied to most poets. In that respect indeed he might be called the one happy poet among all the unhappy poets of the world. He was a poet whose whole life was a poem. He was not so much a minstrel merely singing his own songs as a dramatist capable of acting the whole of his own play. The things he said were more imaginative than the things he wrote. The things he did were more imaginative than the things he said. His whole course through life was a series of scenes in which he had a sort of perpetual luck in bringing things to a beautiful crisis. To talk about the art of living has come to sound rather artificial than artistic. But St. Francis did in a definite sense make the very act of living an art, though it was an unpremeditated art. Many of his acts will seem grotesque and puzzling to a rationalistic taste. But they were always acts and not explanations; and they always meant what he meant them to mean. The amazing vividness with which he stamped himself on the memory and imagination of mankind is very largely due to the fact that he was seen again and again under such dramatic conditions. From the moment when he rent his robes and flung them at his father’s feet to the moment when he stretched himself in death on the bare earth in the pattern of the cross, his life was made up of these unconscious attitudes and unhesitating gestures. It would be easy to fill page after page with examples; but I will here pursue the method found convenient everywhere in this short sketch, and take one typical example, dwelling on it with a little more detail than would be possible in a catalogue, in the hope of making the meaning more clear. The example taken here occurred in the last days of his life, but it refers back in a rather curious fashion to the first; and rounds off the remarkable unity of that romance of religion.

The phrase about his brotherhood with the sun and moon, and with the water and the fire, occurs of course in his famous poem called the Canticle of the Creatures or the Canticle of the Sun. He sang it wandering in the meadows in the sunnier season of his own career, when he was pouring upwards into the sky all the passions of a poet. It is a supremely characteristic work, and much of St. Francis could be reconstructed from that work alone. Though in some ways the thing is as simple and straightforward as a ballad, there is a delicate instinct of differentiation in it. Notice, for instance, the sense of sex in inanimate things, which goes far beyond the arbitrary genders of a grammar. It was not for nothing that he called fire his brother, fierce and gay and strong, and water his sister, pure and clear and inviolate. Remember that St. Francis was neither encumbered nor assisted by all that Greek and Roman polytheism turned into allegory, which has been to European poetry often an inspiration, too often a convention. Whether he gained or lost by his contempt of learning, it never occurred to him to connect Neptune and the nymphs with the water or Vulcan and the Cyclops with the flame. This point exactly illustrates what has already been suggested; that, so far from being a revival of paganism, the Franciscan renascence was a sort of fresh start and first awakening after a forgetfulness of paganism. Certainly it is responsible for a certain freshness in the thing itself. Anyhow St. Francis was, as it were, the founder of a new folk-lore; but he could distinguish his mermaids from his mermen and his witches from his wizards. In short, he had to make his own mythology; but he knew at a glance the goddesses from the gods. This fanciful instinct for the sexes is not the only example of an imaginative instinct of the kind. There is just the same quaint felicity in the fact that he singles out the sun with a slightly more courtly title besides that of brother; a phrase that one king might use of another, corresponding to “Monsieur notre frere.” It is like a faint half ironic shadow of the shining primacy that it had held in the pagan heavens. A bishop is said to have complained of a Nonconformist saying Paul instead of Saint Paul; and to have added, “He might at least have called him Mr. Paul.” So St. Francis is free of all obligation to cry out in praise or terror on the Lord God Apollo, but in his new nursery heavens, he salutes him as Mr. Sun. Those are the things in which he has a sort of inspired infancy, only to be paralleled in nursery tales. Something of the same hazy but healthy awe makes the story of Br’er Fox and Br’er Rabbit refer respectfully to Mr. Man.

This poem, full of the mirth of youth and the memories of childhood, runs through his whole life like a refrain, and scraps of it turn up continually in the ordinary habit of his talk. Perhaps the last appearance of its special language was in an incident that has always seemed to me intensely impressive, and is at any rate very illustrative of the great manner and gesture of which I speak. Impressions of that kind are a matter of imagination and in that sense of taste. It is idle to argue about them; for it is the whole point of them that they have passed beyond words; and even when they use words, seem to be completed by some ritual movement like a blessing or a blow. So, in a supreme example, there is something far past all exposition, something like the sweeping movement and mighty shadow of a hand, darkening even the darkness of Gethsemane; “Sleep on now, and take your rest... “ Yet there are people who have started to paraphrase and expand the story of the Passion.

St. Francis was a dying man. We might say he was an old man, at the time this typical incident occurred; but in fact he was only prematurely old; for he was not fifty when he died, worn out with his fighting and fasting life. But when he came down from the awful asceticism and more awful revelation of Alverno, he was a broken man. As will be apparent when these events are touched on in their turn, it was not only sickness and bodily decay that may well have darkened his life; he had been recently disappointed in his main mission to end the Crusades by the conversion of Islam; he had been still more disappointed by the signs of compromise and a more political or practical spirit in his own order; he had spent his last energies in protest.

At this point he was told that he was going blind. If the faintest hint has been given here of what St. Francis felt about the glory and pageantry of earth and sky, about the heraldic shape and colour and symbolism of birds and beasts and flowers, some notion may be formed of what it meant to him to go blind. Yet the remedy might well have seemed worse than the disease. The remedy, admittedly an uncertain remedy, was to cauterise the eye, and that without any anaesthetic. In other words it was to burn his living eyeballs with a red-hot iron. Many of the tortures of martyrdom, which he envied in martyrology and sought vainly in Syria, can have been no worse. When they took the brand from the furnace, he rose as with an urbane gesture and spoke as to an invisible presence: “Brother Fire, God made you beautiful and strong and useful; I pray you be courteous with me.”

If there be any such thing as the art of life, it seems to me that such a moment was one of its masterpieces. Not too many poets has it been given to remember their own poetry at such a moment, still less to live one of their own poems. Even William Blake would have been disconcerted if, while he was re-reading the noble lines, “Tiger, tiger, burning bright,” a large live Bengal tiger had put his head in at the window of the cottage in Felpham, evidently with every intention of biting his head off. He might have wavered before politely saluting it, above all by calmly completing the recitation of the poem to the quadruped to whom it was dedicated. Shelley, who wished to be a cloud or a leaf carried before the wind, have been mildly surprised to find himself turning slowly head over heels in mid-air a thousand feet above the sea. Even Keats, knowing that his hold on life was a frail one, might have been disturbed to discover that the true, the blushful Hippocrene of which he had just partaken freely had indeed contained a drug, which really ensured that he should cease upon the midnight with no pain. For Francis there was no drug; and for Francis there was plenty of pain. But his first thought was one of his first fancies from the songs of his youth. He remembered the time when a flame was a flower, only the most glorious and gaily coloured of the flowers in the garden of God; and when that shining thing returned to him in the shape of an instrument of torture, he hailed it from afar like an old friend, calling it by the nickname which might most truly be called its Christian name.

That is only one incident out of a life of such incidents; and I have selected it partly because it shows what is meant here by that shadow of gesture there is in all his words, the dramatic gesture of the south; and partly because its special reference to courtesy covers the next fact to be noted. The popular instinct of St. Francis, and his perpetual preoccupation with the idea of brotherhood, will be entirely misunderstood if it is understood in the sense of what is often called camaraderie; the backslapping sort of brotherhood. Frequently from the enemies and too frequently from the friends of the democratic ideal, there has come a notion that this note is necessary to that ideal. It is assumed that equality means all men being equally uncivil, whereas it obviously ought to mean all men being equally civil. Such people have forgotten the very meaning and derivation of the word civility, if they do not see that to be uncivil is to be uncivic. But anyhow that was not the equality which Francis of Assisi encouraged; but an equality of the opposite kind; it was a camaraderie actually founded on courtesy.

Even in that fairy borderland of his mere fancies about flowers and animals and even inanimate things, he retained this permanent posture of a sort of deference. A friend of mine said that somebody was the sort of man who apologises to the cat. St. Francis really would have apologised to the cat. When he was about to preach in a wood full of the chatter of birds, he said, with a gentle gesture, “Little sisters, if you have now had your say, it is time that I also should be heard.” And all the birds were silent; as I for one can very easily believe. In deference to my special design of making matters intelligible to average modernity, I have treated separately the subject of the miraculous powers that St. Francis most certainly possessed.

But even apart from any miraculous powers, men of that magnetic sort, with that intense interest in animals, often have an extraordinary power over them. St. Francis’s power was always exercised with this elaborate politeness. Much of it was doubtless a sort of symbolic joke, a pious pantomime intended to convey the vital distinction in his divine mission, that he not only loved but reverenced God in all his creatures. In this sense he had the air not only of apologising to the cat or to the birds, but of apologising to a chair for sitting on it or to a table for sitting down at it. Any one who had followed him through life merely to laugh at him, as a sort of lovable lunatic, might easily have had an impression as of a lunatic who bowed to every post or took off his hat to every tree. This was all a part of his instinct for imaginative gesture. He taught the world a large part of its lesson by a sort of divine dumb alphabet. But if there was this ceremonial element even in lighter or lesser matters, its significance became far more serious in the serious work of his life, which was an appeal to humanity, or rather to human beings.

I have said that St. Francis deliberately did not see the wood for the trees. It is even more true that he deliberately did not see the mob for the men. What distinguishes this very genuine democrat from any mere demagogue is that he never either deceived or was deceived by the illusion of mass-suggestion. Whatever his taste in monsters, he never saw before him a many-headed beast. He only saw the image of God multiplied but never monotonous. To him a man was always a man and did not disappear in a dense crowd any more than in a desert. He honoured all men; that is, he not only loved but respected them all. What gave him his extraordinary personal power was this; that from the Pope to the beggar, from the sultan of Syria in his pavilion to the ragged robbers crawling out of the wood, there was never a man who looked into those brown burning eyes without being certain that Francis Bernardone was really interested in him; in his own inner individual life from the cradle to the grave; that he himself was being valued and taken seriously, and not merely added to the spoils of some social policy or the names in some clerical document. Now for this particular moral and religious idea there is no external expression except courtesy. Exhortation does not express it, for it is not mere abstract enthusiasm; beneficence does not express it, for it is not mere pity. It can only be conveyed by a certain grand manner which may be called good manners. We may say if we like that St. Francis, in the bare and barren simplicity of his life, had clung to one rag of luxury; the manners of a court.

But whereas in a court there is one king and a hundred courtiers, in this story there was one courtier, moving among a hundred kings. For he treated the whole mob of men as a mob of kings. And this was really and truly the only attitude that will appeal to that part of man to which he wished to appeal. It cannot be done by giving gold or even bread; for it is a proverb that any reveller may fling largesse in mere scorn. It cannot even be done by giving time and attention; for any number of philanthropists and benevolent bureaucrats do such work with a scorn far more cold and horrible in their hearts. No plans or proposals or efficient rearrangements will give back to a broken man his self-respect and sense of speaking with an equal. One gesture will do it.

With that gesture Francis of Assisi moved among men; and it was soon found to have something in it of magic and to act, in a double sense, like a charm. But it must always be conceived as a completely natural gesture; for indeed it was almost a gesture of apology. He must be imagined as moving thus swiftly through the world with a sort of impetuous politeness; almost like the movement of a man who stumbles on one knee half in haste and half in obeisance. The eager face under the brown hood was that of a man always going somewhere, as if he followed as well as watched the flight of the birds. And this sense of motion is indeed the meaning of the whole revolution that he made; for the work that has now to be described was of the nature of an earthquake or a volcano, an explosion that drove outwards with dynamic energy the forces stored up by ten centuries in the monastic fortress or arsenal and scattered all its riches recklessly to the ends of the earth. In a better sense than the antithesis commonly conveys, it is true to say that what St. Benedict had stored St. Francis scattered; but in the world of spiritual things what had been stored into the barns like grain was scattered over the world as seed. The servants of God who had been a besieged garrison became a marching army; the ways of the world were filled as with thunder with the trampling of their feet and far ahead of that ever swelling host went a man singing; as simply he had sung that morning in the winter woods, where he walked alone.

CHAPTER VII

THE THREE ORDERS

There is undoubtedly a sense in which two is company and three is none; there is also another sense in which three is company and four is none as is proved by the procession of historic and fictitious figures moving three deep the famous trios like the Three Musketeers or the Three Soldiers of Kipling. But there is yet another and a different sense in which four is company and three is none; if we use the word company in the vaguer sense of a crowd or a mass. With the fourth man enters the shadow of a mob; the group is no longer one of three individuals only conceived individually. That shadow of the fourth man fell across the little hermitage of the Portiuncula when a man named Egidio apparently a poor workman was invited by St. Francis to enter. He mingled without difficulty with the merchant and the canon who had already become the companions of Francis; but with his coming an invisible line was crossed; for it must have been felt by this time that the growth of that small group had become potentially infinite, or at least that its outline had become permanently indefinite. It may have been in the time of that transition that Francis had another of his dreams full of voices; but now the voices were a clamour of the tongues of all nations, Frenchmen and Italians and English and Spanish and Germans, telling of the glory of God each in his own tongue; a new Pentecost and a happier Babel.

Before describing the first steps he took to regularise the growing group, it is well to have a rough grasp of what he conceived that group to be. He did not call his followers monks; and it is not clear, at this time at least, that he even thought of them as monks. He called them by a name which is generally rendered in English as the Friars Minor; but we shall be much closer to the atmosphere of his own mind if we render it almost literally as The Little Brothers. Presumably he was already resolved, indeed, that they should take the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience which had always been the mark of a monk. But it would seem that he was not so much afraid of the idea of a monk as of the idea of an abbot. He was afraid that the great spiritual magistracies which had given even to their holiest possessors at least a sort of impersonal and corporate pride, would import an element of pomposity that would spoil his extremely and almost extravagantly simple version of the life of humility. But the supreme difference between his discipline and the discipline of the old monastic system was concerned, of course, with the idea that the monks were to become migratory and almost nomadic instead of stationary. They were to mingle with the world; and to this the more old-fashioned monk would naturally reply by asking how they were to mingle with the world without becoming entangled with the world. It was a much more real question than a loose religiosity is likely to realise; but St. Francis had his answer to it, of his own individual sort; and the interest of the problem is in that highly individual answer.

The good Bishop of Assisi expressed a sort of horror at the hard life which the Little Brothers lived at the Portiuncula, without comforts, without possessions, eating anything they could get and sleeping anyhow on the ground. St. Francis answered him with that curious and almost stunning shrewdness which the unworldly can sometimes wield like a club of stone. He said, “if we had any possessions, we should need weapons and laws to defend them.” That sentence is the clue to the whole policy that he pursued. It rested upon a real piece of logic; and about that he was never anything but logical. He was ready to own himself wrong about anything else; but he was quite certain he was right about this particular rule. He was only once seen angry; and that was when there was talk of an exception to the rule.

His argument was this: that the dedicated man might go anywhere among any kind of men, even the worst kind of men, so long as there was nothing by which they could hold him. If he had any ties or needs like ordinary men, he would become like ordinary men. St. Francis was the last man in the world to think any the worse of ordinary men for being ordinary. They had more affection and admiration from him than they are ever likely to have again. But for his own particular purpose of stirring up the world to a new spiritual enthusiasm, he saw with a logical clarity that was quite reverse of fanatical or sentimental, that friars must not become like ordinary men; that the salt must not lose its savour even to turn into human nature’s daily food. And the difference between a friar and an ordinary man was really that a friar was freer than an ordinary man. It was necessary that he should be free from the cloister; but it was even more important that he should be free from the world. It is perfectly sound common sense to say that there is a sense in which the ordinary man cannot be free from the world; or rather ought not to be free from the world. The feudal world in particular was one labyrinthine system of dependence; but it was not only the feudal world that went to make up the mediaeval world nor the mediaeval world that went to make up the whole world; and the whole world is full of this fact. Family life as much as feudal life is in its nature a system of dependence. Modern trade unions as much as mediaeval guilds are interdependent among themselves even in order to be independent of others. In mediaeval as in modern life, even where these limitations do exist for the sake of liberty, they have in them a considerable element of luck. They are partly the result of circumstances; sometimes the almost unavoidable result of circumstances. So the twelfth century had been the age of vows; and there was something of relative freedom in that feudal gesture of the vow; for no man asks vows from slaves any more than from spades. Still, in practice, a man rode to war in support of the ancient house of the Column or behind the Great Dog of the Stairway largely because had been born in a certain city or countryside. But no man need obey little Francis in the old brown coat unless he chose. Even in his relations with his chosen leader he was in one sense relatively free, compared with the world around him. He was obedient but not dependent. And he was as free as the wind, he was almost wildly free, in his relation to that world around him. The world around him was, as has been noted, a network of feudal and family and other forms of dependence. The whole idea of St. Francis was that the Little Brothers should be like little fishes who could go freely in and out of that net. They could do so precisely because they were small fishes and in that sense even slippery fishes. There was nothing that the world could hold them by; for the world catches us mostly by the fringes of our garments, the futile externals of our lives. One of the Franciscans says later, “A monk should own nothing but his harp”; meaning, I suppose, that he should value nothing but his song, the song with which it was his business as a minstrel to serenade every castle and cottage, the song of the joy of the Creator in his creation and the beauty of the brotherhood of men. In imagining the life of this sort of visionary vagabond, we May already get a glimpse also of the practical side of that asceticism which puzzles those who think themselves practical. A man had to be thin to pass always through the bars and out of the cage; he had to travel light in order to ride so fast and so far. It was the whole calculation, so to speak, of that innocent cunning, that the world was to be outflanked and outwitted by him, and be embarrassed about what to do with him. You could not threaten to starve a man who was ever striving to fast. You could not ruin him and reduce him to beggary, for he was already a beggar. There was a very lukewarm satisfaction even in beating him with a stick, when he only indulged in little leaps and cries of joy because indignity was his only dignity. You could not put his head in a halter without the risk of putting it in a halo.

But one distinction between the old Monks and the new friars counted especially in the matter of practicality and especially of promptitude. The old fraternities with their fixed habitations and enclosed existence had the limitations of ordinary householders. However simply they lived there must be a certain number of cells or a certain number of beds or at least a certain cubic space for a certain number of brothers; their numbers therefore depended on their land and building material. But since a man could become a Franciscan by merely promising to take his chance of eating berries in a lane or begging a crust from a kitchen, of sleeping under a hedge or sitting patiently on a doorstep, there was no economic reason why there should not be any number of such eccentric enthusiasts within any short period of time. It must also be remembered that the whole of this rapid development was full of a certain kind of democratic optimism that really was part of the personal character of St. Francis. His very asceticism was in one sense the height of optimism. He demanded a great deal of human nature not because he despised it but rather because he trusted it. He was expecting a very great deal from the extraordinary men who followed him; but he was also expecting a good deal from the ordinary men to whom he sent them. He asked the laity for food as confidently as he asked the fraternity for fasting. But he counted on the hospitality of humanity because he really did regard every house as the house of a friend. He really did love and honour ordinary men and ordinary things; indeed we may say that he only sent out the extraordinary men to encourage men to be ordinary.

This paradox may be more exactly stated or explained when we come to deal with the very interesting matter of the Third Order, which was designed to assist ordinary men to be ordinary with an extraordinary exultation. The point at issue at present is the audacity and simplicity of the Franciscan plan for quartering its spiritual soldiery upon the population; not by force but by persuasion, and even by the persuasion of impotence. It was an act of confidence and therefore a compliment. It was completely successful. It was an example of something that clung about St. Francis always; a kind of tact that looked like luck because it was as simple and direct as a thunderbolt. There are many examples in his private relations of this sort of tactless tact; this surprise effected by striking at the heart of the matter. It is said that a young friar was suffering from a sort of sulks between morbidity and humility, common enough in youth and hero-worship, in which he had got it into his head that his hero hated or despised him. We can imagine how tactfully social diplomatists would steer clear of scenes and excitements, how cautiously psychologists would watch and handle such delicate cases. Francis suddenly walked up to the young man, who was of course secretive and silent as the grave, and said, "Be not troubled in your thoughts for you are dear to me, and even among the number of those who are most dear. You know that you are worthy of my friendship and society; therefore come to me, in confidence, whensoever you will, and from friendship learn faith." Exactly as he spoke to that morbid boy he spoke to all mankind. He always went to the point; he always seemed at once more right and more simple than the person he was speaking to. He seemed at once to be laying open his guard and yet lunging at the heart. Something in this attitude disarmed the world as it has never been disarmed again. He was better than other men; he was a benefactor of other men; and yet he was not hated. The world came into church by a newer and nearer door; and by friendship it learnt faith.

It was while the little knot of people at the Portiuncula was still small enough to gather in a small room that St. Francis resolved on his first important and even sensational stroke. It is said that there were only twelve Franciscans in the whole world when he decided to march, as it were, on Rome and found a Franciscan order. It would seem that this appeal to remote headquarters was not generally regarded as necessary; possibly something could have been done in a secondary way under the Bishop of Assisi and the local clergy. It would seem even more probable that people thought it somewhat unnecessary to trouble the supreme tribunal of Christendom about what a dozen chance men chose to call themselves. But Francis was obstinate and as it were blind on this point; and his brilliant blindness is exceedingly characteristic of him. A man satisfied with small things, or even in love with small things, he yet never felt quite as we do about the disproportion between small things and large. He never saw things to scale in our sense, but with a dizzy disproportion which makes the mind reel. Sometimes it seems merely out of drawing like a gaily coloured medieval map; and then again it seems to have escaped from everything like a short cut in the fourth dimension. He is said to have made a journey to interview the Emperor, throned among his armies under the eagle of the Holy Roman Empire, to intercede for the lives of certain little birds. He was quite capable of facing fifty emperors to intercede for one bird. He started out with two companions to convert the Mahometan world. He started out with eleven companions to ask the Pope to make a new monastic world.

Innocent III, the great Pope, according to Bonaventura, was walking on the terrace of St. John Lateran, doubtless revolving the great political questions which troubled his reign, when there appeared abruptly before him a person in peasant costume whom he took to be some sort of shepherd. He appears to have got rid of the shepherd with all convenient speed; possibly he formed the opinion that the shepherd was mad. Anyhow he thought no more about it until, says the great Franciscan biographer, he dreamed that night a strange dream. He fancied that he saw the whole huge ancient temple of St. John Lateran, on whose high terraces he had walked so securely, leaning horribly and crooked against the sky as if all its domes and turrets were stooping before an earthquake Then he looked again and saw that a human figure was holding it up like a living caryatid; and the figure was that of the ragged shepherd or peasant from whom he had turned away on the terrace. Whether this be a fact or a figure it is a very true figure of the abrupt simplicity with which Francis won the attention and the favour of Rome. His first friend seems to have been the Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo who pleaded for the Franciscan idea before a conclave of Cardinals summoned for the purpose. It is interesting to note that the doubts thrown upon it seem to have been chiefly doubts about whether the rule was not too hard for humanity, for the Catholic Church is always on the watch against excessive asceticism and its evils. Probably they meant, especially when they said it was unduly hard, that it was unduly dangerous. For a certain element that can only be called danger is what marks the innovation as compared with older institutions of the kind. In one sense indeed the friar was almost the opposite of the monk. The value of the old monasticism had been that there was not only an ethical but an economic repose. Out of that repose had come the works for which the world will never be sufficiently grateful, the preservation of the classics, the beginning of the Gothic, the schemes of science and philosophies, the illuminated manuscripts and the coloured glass. The whole point of a monk was that his economic affairs were settled for good; he knew where he would get his supper, though it was a very plain supper. But the whole point of a friar was that he did not know where he would get his supper. There was always a possibility that he might get no supper. There was an element of what would be called romance, as of the gipsy or adventurer. But there was also an element of potential tragedy, as of the tramp or the casual labourer. So the Cardinals of the thirteenth century were filled with compassion, seeing a few men entering of their own free will that estate to which the poor of the twentieth century are daily driven by cold coercion and moved on by the police.

Cardinal San Paolo seems to have argued more or less in this manner: it may be a hard life, but after all it is the life apparently described as ideal in the Gospel; make what compromises you think wise or humane about that ideal; but do not commit yourselves to saying that men shall not fulfil that ideal if they can. We shall see the importance of this argument when we come to the whole of that higher aspect of the life of St. Francis which may be called the imitation of Christ. The upshot of the discussion was that the Pope gave his verbal approval to the project and promised a more definite endorsement, if the movement should grow to more considerable proportions. It is probable that Innocent, who was himself a man of no ordinary mentality, had very little doubt that it would do so; anyhow he was not left long in doubt before it did do so. The next passage in the history of the order is simply the story of more and more people flocking to its standard; and as has already been remarked, once it had begun to grow, it could in its nature grow much more quickly than any ordinary society requiring ordinary funds and public buildings. Even the return of the twelve pioneers from their papal audience seems to have been a sort of triumphal procession. In one place in particular, it is said, the whole population of a town, men, women and children, turned out, leaving their work and wealth and homes exactly as they stood and begging to be taken into the army of God on the spot. According to the story, it was on this occasion that St. Francis first foreshadowed his idea of the Third Order which enabled men to share in the movement without leaving the homes and habits of normal humanity. For the moment it is most important to regard this story as one example of the riot of conversion with which he was already filling all the roads of Italy. It was a world of wandering; friars perpetually coming and going in all the highways and byways, seeking to ensure that any man who met one of them by chance should have a spiritual adventure. The first Order of St. Francis had entered history.

This rough outline can only be rounded off here with some description of the Second and Third Orders, though they were founded later and at separate times. The former was an order for women and owed its existence, of course, to the beautiful friendship of St. Francis and St. Clare. There is no story about which even the most sympathetic critics of another creed have been more bewildered and misleading. For there is no story that more clearly turns on that simple test which I have taken as crucial throughout this criticism. I mean that what is the matter with these critics is that they will not believe that a heavenly love can be as real as an earthly love. The moment it is treated as real, like an earthly love, their whole riddle is easily resolved. A girl of seventeen, named Clare and belonging to one of the noble families of Assisi, was filled with an enthusiasm for the conventual life; and Francis helped her to escape from her home and to take up the conventual life. If we like to put it so, he helped her to elope into the cloister, defying her parents as he had defied his father. Indeed the scene had many of the elements of a regular romantic elopement; for she escaped through a hole in the wall, fled through a wood and was received at midnight by the light of torches. Even Mrs. Oliphant, in her fine and delicate study of St. Francis, calls it “an incident which we can hardly record with satisfaction.”

Now about that incident I will here only say this. If it had really been a romantic elopement and the girl had become a bride instead of a nun, practically the whole modern world would have made her a heroine. If the action of the Friar towards Clare had been the action of the Friar towards Juliet, everybody would be sympathising with her exactly as they sympathise with Juliet. It is not conclusive to say that Clare was only seventeen. Juliet was only fourteen. Girls married and boys fought in battles at such early ages in mediaeval times; and a girl of seventeen in the thirteenth century was certainly old enough to know her own mind. There cannot be the shadow of a doubt, for any sane person considering subsequent events, that St. Clare did know her own mind. But the point for the moment is that modern romanticism entirely encourages such defiance of parents when it is done in the name of romantic love. For it knows that romantic love is a reality, but it does not know that divine love is a reality. There may have been something to be said for the parents of Clare; there may have been something to be said for Peter Bernardone. So there may have been a great deal to be said for the Montagues or the Capulets; but the modern world does not want it said; and does not say it. The fact is that as soon as we assume for a moment as a hypothesis, what St. Francis and St. Clare assumed all the time as an absolute, that there is a direct divine relation more glorious than any romance, the story of St. Clare's elopement is simply a romance with a happy ending; and St. Francis is the St. George or knight-errant who gave it a happy ending. And seeing that some millions of men and women have lived and died treating this relation as a reality, a man is not much of a philosopher if he cannot even treat it as a hypothesis.

For the rest, we may at least assume that no friend of what is called the emancipation of women will regret the revolt of St. Clare. She did most truly, in the modern jargon, live her own life, the life that she herself wanted to lead, as distinct from the life into which parental commands and conventional arrangements would have forced her. She became the foundress of a great feminine movement which still profoundly affects the world; and her place is with the powerful women of history. It is not clear that she would have been so great or so useful if she had made a runaway match, or even stopped at home and made a mariage de convenance. So much any sensible man may well say considering the matter merely from the outside; and I have no intention of attempting to consider it from the inside. If a man may well doubt whether he is worthy to write a word about St. Francis, he will certainly want words better than his own to speak of the friendship of St. Francis and St. Clare. I have often remarked that the mysteries of this story are best expressed symbolically in certain silent attitudes and actions. And I know no better symbol than that found by the felicity of popular legend, which says that one night the people of Assisi thought the trees and the holy house were on fire, and rushed up to extinguish the conflagration. But they found all quiet within, where St. Francis broke bread with St. Clare at one of their rare meetings, and talked of the love of God. It would be hard to find a more imaginative image, for some sort of utterly pure and disembodied passion, than that red halo round the unconscious figures on the hill; a flame feeding on nothing and setting the very air on fire.

But if the Second Order was the memorial of such an unearthly love, the Third Order was as solid a memorial of a very solid sympathy with earthly loves and earthly lives. The whole of this feature in Catholic life, the lay orders in touch with clerical orders, is very little understood in Protestant countries and very little allowed for in Protestant history. The vision which has been so faintly suggested in these pages has never been confined to monks or even to friars. It has been an inspiration to innumerable crowds of ordinary married men and women; living lives like our own, only entirely different. That morning glory which St. Francis spread over the earth and sky has lingered as a secret sunshine under a multitude of roofs and in a multitude of rooms. In societies like ours nothing is known of such a Franciscan following. Nothing is known of such obscure followers; and if possible less is known of the well-known followers. If we imagine passing us in the street a pageant of the Third Order of St. Francis, the famous figures would surprise us more than the strange ones. For us it would be like the unmasking of some mighty secret society. There rides St. Louis, the great king, lord of the higher justice whose scales hang crooked in favour of the poor. There is Dante crowned with laurel, the poet who in his life of passions sang the praises of the Lady Poverty, whose grey garment is lined with purple and all glorious within. All sorts of great names from the most recent and rationalistic centuries would stand revealed; the great Galvani, for instance, the father of all electricity, the magician who has made so many modern systems of stars and sounds. So various a following would alone be enough to prove that St. Francis had no lack of sympathy with normal men, if the whole of his own life did not prove it.

But in fact his life did prove it, and that possibly in a more subtle sense. There is, I fancy, some truth in the hint of one of his modern biographers, that even his natural passions were singularly normal and even noble, in the sense of turning towards things not unlawful in themselves but only unlawful for him. Nobody ever lived of whom we could less fitly use the word “regret” than Francis of Assisi. Though there was much that was romantic, there was nothing in the least sentimental about his mood. It was not melancholy enough for that. He was of far too swift and rushing a temper to be troubled with doubts and reconsiderations about the race he ran; though he had any amount of self-reproach about not running faster. But it is true, one suspects, that when he wrestled with the devil, as every man must to be worth calling a man, the whispers referred mostly to those healthy instincts that he would have approved for others; they bore no resemblance to that ghastly painted paganism which sent its demoniac courtesans to plague St. Anthony in the desert. If St. Francis had only pleased himself, it would have been with simpler pleasures. He was moved to love rather than lust, and by nothing wilder than wedding bells. It is suggested in that strange story of how he defied the devil by making images in the snow, and crying out that these sufficed him for a wife and family. It is suggested in the saying he used when disclaiming any security from sin, “I may yet have children”; almost as if it was of the children rather than the woman that he dreamed. And this, if it be true, gives a final touch to the truth about his character. There was so much about him of the spirit of the morning, so much that was curiously young and clean, that even what was bad in him was good. As it was said of others that the light in their body was darkness, so it may be said of this luminous spirit that the very shadows in his soul were of light. Evil itself could not come to him save in the form of a forbidden good; and he could only be tempted by a sacrament.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MIRROR OF CHRIST

No man who has been given the freedom of the Faith is likely to fall into those hole-and corner extravagances in which later degenerate Franciscans, or rather Fraticelli, sought to concentrate entirely on St. Francis as a second Christ, the creator of a new gospel. In fact any such notion makes nonsense of every motive in the man’s life; for no man would reverently magnify what he was meant to rival, or only profess to follow what he existed to supplant. On the contrary, as will appear later, this little study would rather specially insist that it was really the papal sagacity that saved the great Franciscan movement for the whole world and the universal Church, and prevented it from petering out as that sort of stale and second rate sect that is called a new religion. Everything that is written here must be understood not only as distinct from but diametrically opposed to the idolatry of the Fraticelli. The difference between Christ and St. Francis was the difference between the Creator and the creature; and certainly no creature was ever so conscious of that colossal contrast as St. Francis himself. But subject to this understanding, it is perfectly true and it is vitally important that Christ was the pattern on which St. Francis sought to fashion himself; and that at many points their human and historical lives were even curiously coincident; and above all, that compared to most of us at least St. Francis is a most sublime approximation to his Master, and, even in being an intermediary and a reflection, is a splendid and yet a merciful Mirror of Christ. And this truth suggests another, which I think has hardly been noticed; but which happens to be a highly forcible argument for the authority of Christ being continuous in the Catholic Church.

Cardinal Newman wrote in his liveliest controversial work a sentence that might be a model of what we mean by saying that his creed tends to lucidity and logical courage. In speaking of the ease with which truth may be made to look like its own shadow or sham, he said, “And if Antichrist is like Christ, Christ I suppose is like Antichrist.” Mere religious sentiment might well be shocked at the end of the sentence; but nobody could object to it except the logician who said that Ceasar and Pompey were very much alike, especially Pompey. It may give a much milder shock if I say here, what most of us have forgotten, that if St. Francis was like Christ, Christ was to that extent like St. Francis. And my present point is that it is really very enlightening to realise that Christ was like St. Francis. What I mean is this; that if men find certain riddles and hard sayings in the story of Galilee, and if they find the answers to those riddles in the story of Assisi, it really does show that a secret has been handed down in one religious tradition and no other. It shows that the casket that was locked in Palestine can be unlocked in Umbria; for the Church is the keeper of the keys.

Now in truth while it has always seemed natural to explain St. Francis in the light of Christ, it has not occurred to many people to explain Christ in the light of St. Francis. Perhaps the word “light” is not here the proper metaphor; but the same truth is admitted in the accepted metaphor of the mirror. St. Francis is the mirror of Christ rather as the moon is the mirror of the sun. The moon is much smaller than the sun, but it is also much nearer to us; and being less vivid it is more visible. Exactly in the same sense St. Francis is nearer to us, and being a mere man like ourselves is in that sense more imaginable. Being necessarily less of a mystery, he does not, for us, so much open his mouth in mysteries. Yet as a matter of fact, many minor things that seem mysteries in the mouth of Christ would seem merely characteristic paradoxes in the mouth of St. Francis. It seems natural to reread the more remote incidents with the help of the more recent ones. It is a truism to say that Christ lived before Christianity; and it follows that as a historical figure. He is a figure in heathen history. I mean that the medium in which He moved was not the medium of Christendom but of the old pagan empire; and from that alone, not to mention the distance of time, it follows that His circumstances are more alien to us than those of an Italian monk such as we might meet even to-day. I suppose the most authoritative commentary can hardly be certain of the current or conventional weight of all His words or phrases; of which of them would then have seemed a common allusion and which a strange fancy. This archaic setting has left many of the sayings standing like hieroglyphics and subject to many and peculiar individual interpretations. Yet it is true of almost any of them that if we simply translate them into the Umbrian dialect of the first Franciscans, they would seem like any other part of the Franciscans story; doubtless in one sense fantastic, but quite familiar. All sorts of critical controversies have revolved round the passage which bids men consider the lilies of the field and copy them in taking no thought for the morrow. The sceptic has alternated between telling us to be true Christians and do it, and explaining that it is impossible to do. When he is a communist as well as an atheist, he is generally doubtful whether to blame us for preaching what is impracticable or for not instantly putting it into practice. I am not going to discuss here the point of ethics and economics; I merely remark that even those who are puzzled at the saying of Christ would hardly pause in accepting it as a saying of St. Francis. Nobody would be surprised to find that he had said, “I beseech you, little brothers, that you be as wise as Brother Daisy and Brother Dandelion; for never do they lie awake thinking of to-morrow, yet they have gold crowns like kings and emperors or like Charlemagne in all his glory.” Even more bitterness and bewilderment has arisen about the command to turn the other cheek and to give the coat to the robber who has taken the cloak. It is widely held to imply the wickedness of war among nations about which, in itself, not a word seems to have been said. Taken thus literally and universally, it much more clearly implies the wickedness of all law and government. Yet there are many prosperous peacemakers who are much more shocked at the idea of using the brute force of soldiers against a powerful foreigner than they are at using the brute force of policemen against a poor fellow-citizen. Here again I am content to point out that the paradox becomes perfectly human and probable if addressed by Francis to Franciscans. Nobody would be surprised to read that Brother Juniper did then run after the thief that had stolen his hood, beseeching him to take his gown also; for so St. Francis had commanded him. Nobody would be surprised if St. Francis told a young noble, about to be admitted to his company, that so far from pursuing a brigand to recover his shoes, he ought to pursue him to make him a present of his stockings. We may like or not the atmosphere these things imply; but we know what atmosphere they do imply. We recognise a certain note as natural and clear as the note of a bird; the note of St. Francis. There is in it something of gentle mockery of the very idea of possessions; something of a hope of disarming the enemy by generosity; something of a humorous sense of bewildering the worldly with the unexpected; something of the joy of carrying an enthusiastic conviction to a logical extreme. But anyhow we have no difficulty in recognising it if we have read any of the literature of the Little Brothers and the movement that began in Assisi. It seems reasonable to infer that if it was this spirit that made such strange things possible in Umbria, it was the same spirit that made them possible in

Palestine. If we hear the same unmistakable note and sense the same indescribable savour in two things at such a distance from each other, it seems natural to suppose that the case that is more remote from our experience was like the case that is closer to our experience. As the thing is explicable on the assumption that Francis was speaking to Franciscans, it is not an irrational explanation to suggest that Christ also was speaking to some dedicated band that had much the same function as Franciscans. In other words, it seems only natural to hold, as the Catholic Church has held, that these counsels of perfection were part of a particular vocation to astonish and awaken the world. But in any case it is important to note that when we do find these particular features, with their seemingly fantastic fitness, reappearing after more than a thousand years, we find them produced by the same religious system which claims continuity and authority from the scenes in which they first appeared. Any number of philosophies will repeat the platitudes of Christianity. But it is the ancient Church that can again startle the world with the paradoxes of Christianity. Ubi Petrus ibi Franciscus.

But if we understand that it was truly under the inspiration of his divine Master that St. Francis did these merely quaint or eccentric acts of charity, we must understand that it was under the same inspiration that he did acts of self-denial and austerity. It is clear that these more or less playful parables of the love of men were conceived after a close study of the Sermon on the Mount. But it is evident that he made an even closer study of the silent sermon on that other mountain; the mountain that was called Golgotha. Here again he was speaking the strict historical truth, when he said that in fasting or suffering humiliation he was but trying to do something of what Christ did; and here again it seems probable that as the same truth appears at the two ends of a chain of tradition, the tradition has preserved the truth. But the import of this fact at the moment affects the next phase in the personal history of the man himself.

For as it becomes clearer that his great communal scheme is an accomplished fact and past the peril of an early collapse, as it becomes evident that there already is such a thing as an Order of the Friars Minor, this more individual and intense ambition of St. Francis emerges more and more. So soon as he certainly has followers, he does not compare himself with his followers, towards whom he might appear as a master; he compares himself more and more with his Master, towards whom he appears only as a servant. This, it may be said in passing, is one of the moral and even practical conveniences of the ascetical privilege. Every other sort of superiority may be superciliousness. But the saint is never supercilious, for he is always by hypothesis in the presence of a superior. The objection to an aristocracy is that it is a priesthood without a god. But in any case the service to which St. Francis had committed himself was one which, about this time, he conceived more and more in terms of sacrifice and crucifixion. He was full of the sentiment that he had not suffered enough to be worthy even to be a distant follower of his suffering God. And this passage in his history may really be roughly summarized as the Search for Martyrdom.

This was the ultimate idea in the remarkable business of his expedition among the Saracens in Syria. There were indeed other elements in his conception, which are worthy of more intelligent understanding than they have often received. His idea, of course, was to bring the Crusades in a double sense to their end; that is, to reach their conclusion and to achieve their purpose. Only he wished to do it by conversion and not by conquest; that is, by intellectual and not material means. The modern mind is hard to please; and it generally calls the way of Godfrey ferocious and the way of Francis fanatical. That is, it calls any moral method unpractical, when it has just called any practical method immoral. But the idea of St. Francis was far from being a fanatical or necessarily even an unpractical idea; though perhaps he saw the problem as rather too simple, lacking the learning of his great inheritor, Raymond Lully, who understood more but has been quite as little understood. The way he approached the matter was indeed highly personal and peculiar; but that was true of almost everything he did. It was in one way a simple idea, as most of his ideas were simple ideas. But it was not a silly idea; there was a great deal to be said for it and it might have succeeded. It was, of course, simply the idea that it is better to create Christians than to destroy Moslems. If Islam had been converted, the world would have been immeasurably more united and happy; for one thing, three quarters of the wars of modern history would never have taken place. It was not absurd to suppose that this might be effected, without military force, by missionaries who were also martyrs. The Church had conquered Europe in that way and may yet conquer Asia or Africa in that way. But when all this is allowed for, there is still another sense in which St. Francis was not thinking of Martyrdom as a means to an end, but almost as an end in itself;

in the sense that to him the supreme end was to come closer to the example of Christ. Through all his plunging and, restless days ran the refrain: I have not suffered enough; I have not sacrificed enough; I am not yet worthy even of the shadow of the crown of thorns. He wandered about the valleys of the world looking for the hill that has the outline of a skull.

A little while before his final departure for the East a vast and triumphant assembly of the whole order had been held near the Portiuncula; and called the Assembly of the Straw Huts, from the manner in which that mighty army encamped in the field. Tradition says that it was on this occasion that St. Francis met St. Dominic for the first and last time. It also says, what is probable enough, that the practical spirit of the Spaniard was almost appalled at the devout irresponsibility of the Italian, who had assembled such a crowd without organising a commissariat. Dominic the Spaniard was, like nearly every Spaniard, a man with the mind of a soldier. His charity took the practical form of provision and preparation. But, apart from the disputes about faith which such incidents open, he probably did not understand in this case the power of mere popularity produced by mere personality. In all his leaps in the dark, Francis had an extraordinary faculty of falling on his feet. The whole countryside came down like a landslide to provide food and drink for this sort of pious picnic. Peasants brought waggons of wine and game; great nobles walked about doing the work of footmen. It was a very real victory for the Franciscan spirit of a reckless faith not only in God but in man. Of course there is much doubt and dispute about the whole story and the whole relation of Francis and Dominic; and the story of the Assembly of the Straw Huts is told from the Franciscan side. But the alleged meeting is worth mentioning, precisely because it was immediately before St. Francis set forth on his bloodless crusade that he is said to have met St. Dominic, who has been so much criticised for lending himself to a more bloody one. There is no space in this little book to explain how St. Francis, as much as St. Dominic, would ultimately have defended the defence of Christian unity by arms. Indeed it would need a large book instead of a little book to develop that point alone from its first principles. For the modern mind is merely a blank about the philosophy of toleration; and the average agnostic of recent times has really had no notion of what he meant by religious liberty and equality. He took his own ethics as self-evident and enforced them; such as decency or the error of the Adamite heresy. Then he was horribly shocked if he heard of anybody else, Moslem or Christian, taking his ethics as self-evident and enforcing them; such as reverence or the error of the Athiest heresy. And then he wound up by taking all this lop-sided illogical deadlock, of the unconscious meeting the unfamiliar, and called it the liberality of his own mind. Medieval men thought that if a social system was founded on a certain idea it must fight for that idea, whether it was as simple as Islam or as carefully balanced as Catholicism. Modern men really think the same thing, as is clear when communists attack their ideas of property. Only they do not think it so clearly, because they have not really thought out their idea of property. But while it is probable that St. Francis would have reluctantly agreed with St. Dominic that war for the truth was right in the last resort, it is certain that St. Dominic did enthusiastically agree with St. Francis that it was far better to prevail by persuasion and enlightenment if it were possible. St. Dominic devoted himself much more to persuading than to persecuting; but there was a difference in the methods simply because there was a difference in the men. About everything St. Francis did there was something that was in a good sense childish, and even in a good sense wilful. He threw himself into things abruptly, as if they had just occurred to him. He made a dash for his Mediterranean enterprise with something of the air of a schoolboy running away to sea.

In the first act of that attempt he characteristically distinguished himself by becoming the Patron Saint of Stowaways. He never thought of waiting for introductions or bargains or any of the considerable backing that he already had from rich and responsible people. He simply saw a boat and threw himself into it, as he threw himself into everything else. It has all that air of running a race which makes his whole life read like an escapade or even literally an escape. He lay like lumber among the cargo, with one companion whom he had swept with him in his rush; but the voyage was apparently unfortunate and erratic and ended in an enforced return to Italy. Apparently it was after this first false start that the great reunion took place at the Portiuncula, and between this and the final Syrian journey there was also an attempt to meet the Moslem menace by preaching to the Moors in Spain. In Spain indeed several of the first Franciscans had already succeeded gloriously in being martyred. But the great Francis still went about stretching out his arms for such torments and desiring that agony in vain. No one would have said more readily than he that he was probably less like Christ than those others who had already found their Calvary; but the thing remained with him like a secret; the strangest of the sorrows of man.

His later voyage was more successful, so far as arriving at the scene of operations was concerned. He arrived at the headquarters of the Crusade which was in front of the besieged city of Damietta, and went on in his rapid and solitary fashion to seek the headquarters of the Saracens. He succeeded in obtaining an interview with the Sultan; and it was at that interview that he evidently offered, and as some say proceeded, to fling himself into the fire as a divine ordeal, defying the Moslem religious teachers to do the same. It is quite certain that he would have done so at a moment's notice. Indeed throwing himself into the fire was hardly more desperate, in any case, than throwing himself among the weapons and tools of torture of a horde of fanatical Mahometans and asking them to renounce Mahomet. It is said further that the Mahometan muftis showed some coldness towards the proposed competition, and that one of them quietly withdrew while it was under discussion; which would also appear credible. But for whatever reason Francis evidently returned as freely as he came. There may be something in the story of the individual impression produced on the Sultan, which the narrator represents as a sort of secret conversion. There may be something in the suggestion that the holy man was unconsciously protected among half-barbarous Orientals by the halo of sanctity that is supposed in such places to surround an idiot. There is probably as much or more in the more generous explanation of that graceful though capricious courtesy and compassion which mingled with wilder things in the stately Soldans of the type and tradition of Saladin. Finally, there is perhaps something in the suggestion that the tale of St. Francis might be told as a sort of ironic tragedy and comedy called The Man Who Could Not Get Killed. Men liked him too much for himself to let him die for his faith; and the man was received instead of the message. But all these are only converging guesses at a great effort that is hard to judge, because it broke off short like the beginnings of a great bridge that might have united East and West, and remains one of the great might-have-beens of history.

Meanwhile the great movement in Italy was making giant strides. Backed now by papal authority as well as popular enthusiasm, and creating a kind of comradeship among all classes, it had started a riot of reconstruction on all sides of religious and social life; and especially began to express itself in that enthusiasm for building which is the mark of all the resurrections of Western Europe. There had notably been established at Bologna a magnificent mission house of the Friars Minor; and a vast body of them and their sympathisers surrounded it with a chorus of acclamation. Their unanimity had a strange interruption. One man alone in that crowd was seen to turn and suddenly denounce the building as if it had been a Babylonian temple; demanding indignantly since when the Lady Poverty had thus been insulted with the luxury of palaces. It was Francis, a wild figure, returned from his Eastern Crusade; and it was the first and last time that he spoke in wrath to his children.

A word must be said later about this serious division of sentiment and policy, about which many Franciscans, and to some extent Francis himself, parted company with the more moderate policy which ultimately prevailed. At this point we need only note it as another shadow fallen upon his spirit after his disappointment in the desert; and as in some sense the prelude to the next phase of his career, which is the most isolated and the most mysterious. It is true that everything about this episode seems to be covered with some cloud of dispute, even including its date; some writers putting it much earlier in the narrative than this. But whether or no it was chronologically it was certainly logically the culmination of the story, and may best be indicated here. I say indicated for it must be a matter of little more than indication; the thing being a mystery both in the higher moral and the more trivial historical sense. Anyhow the conditions of the affair seem to have been these. Francis and a young companion, in the course of their common wandering, came past a great castle all lighted up with the festivities attending a son of the house receiving the honour of knighthood. This aristocratic mansion, which took its name from Monte Feltro, they entered in their beautiful and casual fashion and began to give their own sort of good news. There were some at least who listened to the saint “as if he had been an angel of God”; among them a gentleman named Orlando of Chiusi, who had great lands in Tuscany and who proceeded to do St. Francis a singular and somewhat picturesque act of courtesy. He gave him a mountain; a thing somewhat unique among the gifts of the world. Presumably the Franciscan rule which forbade a man to accept money had made no detailed provision about accepting mountains. Nor indeed did St. Francis accept it save as he accepted everything, as a temporary convenience rather than a personal possession; but he turned it into a sort of refuge for the eremitical rather than the monastic life; he retired there when he wished for a life of prayer and fasting which he did not ask even his closest friends to follow. This was Alverno of the Apennines, and upon its peak there rests for ever a dark cloud that has a rim or halo of glory.

What it was exactly that happened there may never be known. The matter has been, I believe, a subject of dispute among the most devout students of the saintly life as well as between such students and others of the more secular sort. It may be that St. Francis never spoke to a soul on the subject; it would be highly characteristic, and it is certain in any case that he said very little; I think he is only alleged to have spoken of it to one man. Subject however to such truly sacred doubts, I will confess that to me personally this one solitary and indirect report that has come down to us reads very like the report of something real; of some of those things that are more real than what we call daily realities. Even something as it were double and bewildering about the image seems to carry the impression of an experience shaking the senses; as does the passage in Revelation about the supernatural creatures full of eyes. It would seem that St. Francis beheld the heavens above him occupied by a vast winged being like a seraph spread out like a cross. There seems some mystery about whether the winged figure was itself crucified or in the posture of crucifixion, or whether it merely enclosed in its frame of wings some colossal crucifix. But it seems clear that there was some question of the former impression; for St. Bonaventura distinctly says that St. Francis doubted how a seraph could be crucified, since those awful and ancient principalities were without the infirmity of the Passion. St. Bonaventura suggests that the seeming contradiction may have meant that St. Francis was to be crucified as a spirit since he could not be crucified as a man; but whatever the meaning of the vision, the general idea of it is very vivid and overwhelming. St. Francis saw above him, filling the whole heavens, some vast immemorial unthinkable power, ancient like the Ancient of Days, whose calm men had conceived under the forms of winged bulls or monstrous cherubim, and all that winged wonder was in pain like a wounded bird. This seraphic suffering, it is said, pierced his soul with a sword of grief and pity; it may be inferred that some sort of mounting agony accompanied the ecstasy. Finally after some fashion the apocalypse faded from the sky and the agony within subsided; and silence and the natural air filled the morning twilight and settled slowly in the purple chasms and cleft abysses of the Apennines. The head of the solitary sank, amid all that relaxation and quiet in which time can drift by with the sense of something ended and complete; and as he stared downwards, he saw the marks of nails in his own hands.

CHAPTER IX

MIRACLES AND DEATH

The tremendous story of the Stigmata of St. Francis, which was the end of the last chapter, was in some sense the end of his life. In a logical sense, it would have been the end even if it had happened at the beginning. But truer traditions refer it to a later date and suggest that his remaining days on the earth had something about them of the lingering of a shadow. Whether St. Bonaventura was right in his hint that St. Francis saw in that seraphic vision something almost like a vast mirror of his own soul, that could at least suffer like an angel though not like a god, or whether it expressed under an imagery more primitive and colossal than common Christian art the primary paradox of the death of God, it is evident from its traditional consequences that it was meant for a crown and for a seal. It seems to have been after seeing this vision that he began to go blind.

But the incident has another and much less important place in this rough and limited outline. It is the natural occasion for considering briefly and collectively all the facts or fables of another aspect of the life of St. Francis; an aspect which is, I will not say more disputable, but certainly more disputed. I mean all that mass of testimony and tradition that concerns his miraculous powers and supernatural experiences, with which it would have been easy to stud and bejewel every page of the story; only that certain circumstances necessary to the conditions of this narration make it better to gather, somewhat hastily, all such jewels into a heap.

I have here adopted this course in order to make allowance for a prejudice. It is indeed to a great extent a prejudice of the past; a prejudice that is plainly disappearing in days of greater enlightenment, and especially of a greater range of scientific experiment and knowledge. But it is a prejudice that is still tenacious in many of an older generation and still traditional in many of the younger. I mean, of course, what used to be called the belief “that miracles do not happen,” as I think Matthew Arnold expressed it, in expressing the standpoint of so many of our Victorian uncles and great-uncles. In other words it was the remains of that sceptical simplification by which some of the philosophers of the early eighteenth century had popularised the impression (for a very short time) that we had discovered the regulations of the cosmos like the works of a clock, of so very simple a clock that it was possible to distinguish almost at a glance what could or could not have happened in human experience. It should be remembered that these real sceptics, of the golden age of scepticism, were quite as scornful of the first fancies of science as of the lingering legends of religion. Voltaire, when he was told that a fossil fish had been found on the peaks of the Alps, laughed openly at the tale and said that some fasting monk or hermit had dropped his fish-bones there; possibly in order to effect another monkish fraud. Everybody knows by this time that science has had its revenge on scepticism. The border between the credible and the incredible has not only become once more as vague as in any barbaric twilight; but the credible is obviously increasing and the incredible shrinking. A man in Voltaire's time did not know what miracle he would next have to throw up. A man in our time does not know what miracle he will next have to swallow.

But long before these things had happened, in those days of my boyhood when I first saw the figure of St. Francis far away in the distance and drawing me even at that distance, in those Victorian days which did seriously separate the virtues from the miracles of the saints — -even in those days I could not help feeling vaguely puzzled about how this method could be applied to history. Even then I did not quite understand, and even now I do not quite understand, on what principle one is to pick and choose in the chronicles of the past which seem to be all of a piece. All our knowledge of certain historical periods, and notably of the whole medieval period, rests on certain connected chronicles written by people who are some of them nameless and all of them dead, who cannot in any case be cross-examined and cannot in some cases be corroborated. I have never been quite clear about the nature of the right by which historians accepted masses of detail from them as definitely true, and suddenly denied their truthfulness when one detail was preternatural. I do not complain of their being sceptics; I am puzzled about why the sceptics are not more sceptical. I can understand their saying that these details would never have been included in a chronicle except by lunatics or liars; but in that case the only inference is that the chronicle was written by liars or lunatics. They will write for instance: “Monkish fanaticism found it easy to spread the report that miracles were already being worked at the tomb of Thomas Becket.” Why should they not say equally well, “Monkish fanaticism found it easy to spread the slander that four knights from King Henry’s court had assassinated Thomas Becket in the cathedral”? They would write something like this: “The credulity of the age readily believed that Joan of Arc had been inspired to point out the Dauphin although he was in disguise.” Why should they not write on the same principle: “The credulity of the age was such as to suppose that an obscure peasant girl could get an audience at the court of the Dauphin”? And so, in the present case, when they tell us there is a wild story that St. Francis flung himself into the fire and emerged scathless, upon what precise principle are they forbidden to tell us of a wild story that St. Francis flung himself into the camp of the ferocious Moslems and returned safe? I only ask for information; for I do not see the rationale of the thing myself. I will undertake to say there was not a word written of St. Francis by any contemporary who was himself incapable of believing and telling a miraculous story. Perhaps it is all monkish fables and there never was any St. Francis or any St. Thomas Becket or any Joan of Arc. This is undoubtedly a reductio ad absurdum; but it is a reductio ad absurdum of the view which thought all miracles absurd.

And in abstract logic this method of selection would lead to the wildest absurdities. An intrinsically incredible story could only mean that the authority was unworthy of credit. It could not mean that other parts of his story must be received with complete credulity. If somebody said he had met a man in yellow trousers, who proceeded to jump down his own throat, we should not exactly take our Bible oath or be burned at the stake for the statement that he wore yellow trousers. If somebody claimed to have gone up in a blue balloon and found that the moon was made of green cheese, we should not exactly take an affidavit that the balloon was blue any more than that the moon was green. And the really logical conclusion from throwing doubts on all tales like the miracles of St. Francis was to throw doubts on the existence of men like St. Francis. And there really was a modern moment, a sort of high-water mark of insane scepticism, when this sort of thing was really said or done. People used to go about saying that there was no such person as St. Patrick; which is every bit as much of a human and historical howler as saying there was no such person as St. Francis. There was a time, for instance, when the madness of mythological explanation had dissolved a large part of solid history under the universal and luxuriant warmth and radiance of the Sun-Myth. I believe that that particular sun has already set, but there have been any number of moons and meteors to take its place.

St. Francis, of course, would make a magnificent Sun-Myth. How could anybody miss the chance of being a Sun-Myth when he is actually best known by a song called The Canticle of the Sun? It is needless to point out that the fire in Syria was the dawn in the East and the bleeding wounds in Tuscany the sunset in the West. I could expound this theory at considerable length; only, as so often happens to such fine theorists, another and more promising theory occurs to me. I cannot think how everybody, including myself, can have overlooked the fact that the whole tale of St. Francis is of Totemistic origin. It is unquestionably a tale that simply swarms with totems. The Franciscan woods are as full of them as any Red Indian fable. Francis is made to call himself an ass, because in the original mythos Francis was merely the name given to the real four-footed donkey, afterwards vaguely evolved into a half-human god or hero. And that, no doubt, is why I used to feel that the Brother Wolf and Sister Bird of St. Francis were somehow like the Brer Fox and Sis Cow of Uncle Remus. Some say there is an innocent stage of infancy in which we do really believe that a cow talked or a fox made a tar baby. Anyhow there is an innocent period of intellectual growth in which we do sometimes really believe that St. Patrick was a Sun-Myth or St. Francis a Totem. But for the most of us both those phases of paradise are past.

As I shall suggest in a moment, there is one sense in which we can for practical purposes distinguish between probable and improbable things in such a story. It is not so much a question of cosmic criticism about the nature of the event as of literary criticism about the nature of the story. Some stories are told much more seriously than others. But apart from this, I shall not attempt here any definite differentiation between them. I shall not do so for a practical reason affecting the utility of the proceeding; I mean the fact that in a practical sense the whole of this matter is again in the melting pot, from which many things may emerge moulded into what rationalism would have called monsters. The fixed points of faith and philosophy do indeed remain always the same. Whether a man believes that fire in one case could fail to burn depends on why he thinks it generally does burn. If it burns nine sticks out of ten because it is its nature or doom to do so, then it will burn the tenth stick as well. If it burns nine sticks because it is the will of God that it should, then it might be the will of God that the tenth should be unburned. Nobody can get behind that fundamental difference about the reason of things; and it is as rational for a theist to believe in miracles as for an atheist to disbelieve in them. In other words there is only one intelligent reason why a man does not believe in miracles and that is that he does believe in materialism. But these fixed points of faith and philosophy are things for a theoretical work and have no particular place here. And in the matter of history and biography, which have their place here, nothing is fixed at all. The world is in a welter of the possible and impossible, and nobody knows what will be the next scientific hypothesis to support some ancient superstition. Three-quarters of the miracles attributed to St. Francis would already be explained by psychologists, not indeed as a Catholic explains them, but as a materialist must necessarily refuse to explain them. There is one whole department of the miracles of St. Francis; the miracles of healing. What is the good of a superior sceptic throwing them away as unthinkable, at the moment when faith-healing is already a big booming Yankee business like Barnum's Show? There is another whole department analogous to the tales of Christ "perceiving men's thoughts." What is the use of censoring them and blacking them out because they are marked "miracles," when thought reading is already a parlour game like musical chairs? There is another whole department, to be studied separately if such scientific study were possible, of the well-attested wonders worked from his relics and fragmentary possessions. What is the use of dismissing all that as inconceivable, when even these common psychical parlour tricks turn perpetually upon touching some familiar object or holding in the hand some personal possession? I do not believe, of course, that these tricks are of the same type as the good works of the saint; save perhaps in the sense of Diabolus simius Dei. But it is not a question of what I believe and why, but of what the sceptic disbelieves and why. And the moral for the practical biographer and historian is that he must wait till things settle down a little more, before he claims to disbelieve anything.

This being so he can choose between two courses; and not without some hesitation, I have here chosen between them. The best and boldest course would be to tell the whole story in a straightforward way, miracles and all, as the original historians told it. And to this sane and simple course the new historians will probably have to return. But it must be remembered that this book is avowedly only an introduction to St. Francis or the study of St.

Francis. Those who need an introduction are in their nature strangers. With them the object is to get them to listen to St. Francis at all; and in doing so it is perfectly legitimate so to arrange the order of the facts that the familiar come before the unfamiliar and those they can at once understand before those they have a difficulty in understanding. I should only be too thankful if this thin and scratchy sketch contains a line or two that attracts men to study St. Francis for themselves; and if they do study him for themselves, they will soon find that the supernatural part of the story seems quite as natural as the rest. But it was necessary that my outline should be a merely human one, since I was only presenting his claim on all humanity, including sceptical humanity. I therefore adopted the alternative course, of showing first that nobody but a born fool could fail to realise that Francis of Assisi was a very real historical human being; and then summarising briefly in this chapter the superhuman powers that were certainly a part of that history and humanity. It only remains to say a few words about some distinctions that may reasonably be observed in the matter by any man of any views; that he may not confuse the point and climax of the saint’s life with the fancies or rumours that were really only the fringes of his reputation.

There is so immense a mass of legends and anecdotes about St. Francis of Assisi, and there are so many admirable compilations that cover nearly all of them, that I have been compelled within these narrow limits to pursue a somewhat narrow policy; that of following one line of explanation and only mentioning one anecdote here or there because it illustrates that explanation. If this is true about all the legends and stories, it is especially true about the miraculous legends and the supernatural stories. If we were to take some stories as they stand, we should receive a rather bewildered impression that the biography contains more supernatural events than natural ones. Now it is clean against Catholic tradition, co-incident in so many points with common sense, to suppose that this is really the proportion of these things in practical human life. Moreover, even considered as supernatural or preternatural stories, they obviously fall into certain different classes, not so much by our experience of miracles as by our experience of stories. Some of them have the character of fairy stories in their form even more than their incident. They are obviously tales told by the fire to peasants or the children of peasants, under conditions in which nobody thinks he is propounding a religious doctrine to be received or rejected, but only rounding off a story in the most symmetrical way, according to that sort of decorative scheme or pattern that runs through all fairy stories. Others are obviously in their form most emphatically evidence; that is they are testimony that is truth or lies; and it will be very hard for any judge of human nature to think they are lies.

It is admitted that the story of the Stigmata is not a legend but can only be a lie. I mean that it is certainly not a late legendary accretion added afterwards to the fame of St. Francis; but is something that started almost immediately with his earliest biographers. It is practically necessary to suggest that it was a conspiracy; indeed there has been some disposition to put the fraud upon the unfortunate Elias, whom so many parties have been disposed to treat as a useful universal villain. It has been said, indeed, that these early biographers, St. Bonaventura and Celano and the Three Companions, though they declare that St. Francis received the mystical wounds, do not say that they themselves saw those wounds. I do not think this argument conclusive; because it only arises out of the very nature of the narrative. The Three Companions are not in any case making an affidavit; and therefore none of the admitted parts of their story are in the form of an affidavit. They are writing a chronicle of a comparatively impersonal and very objective description. They do not say, “I saw St. Francis’s wounds”; they say, “St. Francis received wounds.” But neither do they say, “I saw St. Francis go into the Portiuncula”; they say, “St. Francis went into the Portiuncula.” But I still cannot understand why they should be trusted as eye-witnesses about the one fact and not trusted as eye-witnesses about the other. It is all of a piece; it would be a most abrupt and abnormal interruption in their way of telling the story if they suddenly began to curse and to swear, and give their names and addresses, and take their oath that they themselves saw and verified the physical facts in question. It seems to me, therefore, that this particular discussion goes back to the general question I have already mentioned; the question of why these chronicles should be credited at all, if they are credited with abounding in the incredible. But that again will probably be found to revert, in the last resort, to the mere fact that some men cannot believe in miracles because they are materialists. That is logical enough; but they are bound to deny the preternatural as much in the testimony of a modern scientific professor as in that of a medieval monkish chronicler. And there are plenty of professors for them to contradict by this time.

But whatever may be thought of such supernaturalism in the comparatively material and popular sense of supernatural acts, we shall miss the whole point of St. Francis, especially of St. Francis after Alverno, if we do not realise that he was living a supernatural life. And there is more and more of such supernaturalism in his life as he approaches towards his death. This element of the supernatural did not separate him from the natural; for it was the whole point of his position that it united him more perfectly to the natural. It did not make him dismal or dehumanised; for it was the whole meaning of his message that such mysticism makes a man cheerful and humane. But it was the whole point of his position, and it was the whole meaning of his message, that the power that did it was a supernatural power. If this simple distinction were not apparent from the whole of his life, it would be difficult for any one to miss it in reading the account of his death.

In a sense he may be said to have wandered as a dying man, just as he had wandered as a living one. As it became more and more apparent that his health was failing, he seems to have been carried from place to place like a pageant of sickness or almost like a pageant of mortality. He went to Rieti, to Nursia, perhaps to Naples, certainly to Cortona by the lake of Perugia. But there is something profoundly pathetic, and full of great problems, in the fact that at last, as it would seem, his flame of life leapt up and his heart rejoiced when they saw afar off on the Assisian hill the solemn pillars of the Portiuncula. He who had become a vagabond for the sake of a vision, he who had denied himself all sense of place and possession, he whose whole gospel and glory it was to be homeless, received like a Parthian shot from nature, the sting of the sense of home. He also had his maladie du clocher, his sickness of the spire; though his spire was higher than ours. “Never,” he cried with the sudden energy of strong spirits in death, “never give up this place. If you would go anywhere or make any pilgrimage, return always to your home, for this is the holy house of God.” And the procession passed under the arches of his home; and he lay down on his bed and his brethren gathered round him for the last long vigil. It seems to me no moment for entering into the subsequent disputes about which successors he blessed or in what form and with what significance. In that one mighty moment he blessed us all.

After he had taken farewell of some of his nearest an especially some of his oldest friends, he was lifted at his own request off his own rude bed and laid on the bare ground; as some say clad only in a hair-shirt, as he had first gone forth into the wintry woods from the presence of his father. It was the final assertion of his great fixed idea; of praise and thanks springing to their most towering height out of nakedness and nothing. As he lay there we may be certain that his seared and blinded eyes saw nothing but their object and their origin. We may be sure that the soul, in its last inconceivable isolation, was face to face with nothing less than God Incarnate and Christ Crucified. But for the men standing around him there must have been other thoughts mingling with these; and many memories must have gathered like ghosts in the twilight, as that day wore on and that great darkness descended in which we all lost a friend. For what lay dying there was not Dominic of the Dogs of God, a leader in logical and controversial wars that could be reduced to a plan and handed on like a plan; a master of a machine of democratic discipline by which others could organise themselves. What was passing from the world was a person; a poet; an outlook on life like a light that was never after on sea or land; a thing not to be replaced or repeated while the earth endures. It has been said that there was only one Christian, who died on the cross; it is truer to say in this sense that there was only one Franciscan, whose name was Francis. Huge and happy as was the popular work he left behind him, there was something that he could not leave behind, any more than a landscape painter can leave his eyes in his will. It was an artist in life who was here called to be an artist in death; and he had a better right than Nero, his anti-type, to say Qualis artifexpereo. For Nero’s life was full of posing for the occasion like that of an actor; while the Umbrian’s had a natural and continuous grace like that of an athlete. But St. Francis had better things to say and better things to think about, and his thoughts were caught upwards where we cannot follow them, in divine and dizzy heights to which death alone can lift us up.

Round about him stood the brethren in their brown habits, those that had loved him even if they afterwards disputed with each other. There was Bernard, his first friend, and Angelo, who had served as his secretary, and Elias, his successor, whom tradition tried to turn into a sort of Judas, but who seems to have been little worse than an official in the wrong place. His tragedy was that he had a Franciscan habit without a Franciscan heart, or at any rate with a very un-Franciscan head. But though he made a bad Franciscan, he might have made a decent Dominican. Anyhow, there is no reason to doubt that he loved Francis, for ruffians and savages did that.

Anyhow he stood among the rest as the hours passed and the shadows lengthened in the house of the Portiuncula; and nobody need think so ill of him as to suppose that his thoughts were then in the tumultuous future, in the ambitions and controversies of his later years.

A man might fancy that the birds must have known when it happened; and made some motion in the evening sky. As they had once, according to the tale, scattered to the four winds of heaven in the pattern of a cross at his signal of dispersion, they might now have written in such dotted lines a more awful augury across the sky. Hidden in the woods perhaps were little cowering creatures never again to be so much noticed and understood; and it has been said that animals are sometimes conscious of things to which man, their spiritual superior, is for the moment blind. We do not know whether any shiver passed through all the thieves and the outcasts and the outlaws, to tell them what had happened to him who never knew the nature of scorn.

But at least in the passages and porches of the Portiuncula there was a sudden stillness, where all the brown figures stood like bronze statues; for the stopping of the great heart that had not broken till it held the world.

CHAPTER X

THE TESTAMENT OF ST. FRANCIS

In one sense doubtless it is a sad irony that St. Francis, who all his life had desired all men to agree, should have died amid increasing disagreements. But we must not exaggerate this discord, as some have done, so as to turn it into a mere defeat of all his ideals. There are some who represent his work as having been merely ruined by the wickedness of the world, or what they always assume to be the even greater wickedness of the Church.

This little book is an essay on St. Francis and not on the Franciscan Order, still less on the Catholic Church or the Papacy or the policy pursued towards the extreme Franciscans or the Fraticelli. It is therefore only necessary to note in a very few words what was the general nature of the controversy that raged after the great saint's death, and to some extent troubled the last days of his life. The dominant detail was the interpretation of the vow of poverty, or the refusal of all possessions. Nobody so far as I know ever proposed to interfere with the vow of the individual friar that he would have no individual possessions. Nobody, that is, proposed to interfere with his negation of private property. But some Franciscans, invoking the authority of Francis on their side, went further than this and further I think than anybody else has ever gone. They proposed to abolish not only private property but property. That is, they refused to be corporately responsible for anything at all; for any buildings or stores or tools; they refused to own them collectively even when they used them collectively. It is perfectly true that many, especially among the first supporters of this view, were men of a splendid and selfless spirit, wholly devoted to the great saint's ideal. It is also perfectly true that the Pope and the authorities of the Church did not think this conception was a workable arrangement, and went so far in modifying it as to set aside certain clauses in the great saint's will. But it is not at all easy to see that it was a workable arrangement or even an arrangement at all; for it was really a refusal to arrange anything. Everybody knew of course that Franciscans were communists; but this was not so much being a communist as being an anarchist. Surely upon any argument somebody or something must be answerable for what happened to or in or concerning a number of historic edifices and ordinary goods and chattels. Many idealists of a socialistic sort, notably of the school of Mr. Shaw or Mr. Wells, have treated this dispute as if it were merely a case of the tyranny of wealthy and wicked pontiffs crushing the true Christianity of Christian Socialists. But in truth this extreme ideal was in a sense the very reverse of Socialist, or even social. Precisely the thing which these enthusiasts refused was that social ownership on which Socialism is built; what they primarily refused to do was what Socialists primarily exist to do; to own legally in their corporate capacity. Nor is it true that the tone of the Popes towards the enthusiasts was merely harsh and hostile. The Pope maintained for a long time a compromise which he had specially designed to meet their own conscientious objections, a compromise by which the Papacy itself held the property in a kind of trust for the owners who refused to touch it. The truth is that this incident shows two things which are common enough in Catholic history, but very little understood by the journalistic history of industrial civilisation. It shows that the Saints were sometimes great men when the Popes were small men. But it also shows that great men are sometimes wrong when small men are right. And it will be found, after all, very difficult for any candid and clear-headed outsider to deny that the Pope was right, when he insisted that the world was not made only for Franciscans.

For that was what was behind the quarrel. At the back of this particular practical question there was something much larger and more momentous, the stir and wind of which we can feel as we read the controversy. We might go so far as to put the ultimate truth thus. St. Francis was so great and original a man that he had something in him of what makes the founder of a religion. Many of his followers were more or less ready, in their hearts, to treat him as the founder of a religion. They were willing to let the Franciscan spirit escape from Christendom as the Christian spirit had escaped from Israel. They were willing to let it eclipse Christendom as the Christian spirit had eclipsed Israel. Francis, the fire that ran through the roads of Italy, was to be the beginning of a conflagration in which the old Christian civilisation was to be consumed. That was the point the Pope had to settle; whether Christendom should absorb Francis or Francis Christendom. And he decided rightly, apart from the duties of his place; for the Church could include all that was good in the Franciscans and the Franciscans could not include all that was good in the Church. There is one consideration which, though sufficiently clear in the whole story, has not perhaps been sufficiently noted, especially by those who cannot see the case for a certain Catholic common sense larger even than Franciscan enthusiasm. Yet it arises out of the very merits of the man whom they so rightly admire. Francis of Assisi, as has been said again and again, was a poet; that is, he was a person who could express his personality. Now it is everywhere the mark of this sort of man that his very limitations make him larger. He is what he is, not only by what he has, but in some degree by what he has not. But the limits that make the lines of such a personal portrait cannot be made the limits of all humanity. St. Francis is a very strong example of this quality in the man of genius, that in him even what is negative is positive, because it is part of a character. An excellent example of what I mean may be found in his attitude towards learning and scholarship. He ignored and in some degree discouraged books and book-learning; and from his own point of view and that of his own work in the world he was absolutely right. The whole point of his message was to be so simple that the village idiot could understand it. The whole point of his point of view was that it looked out freshly upon a fresh world, that might have been made that morning. Save for the great primal things, the Creation and the Story of Eden, the first Christmas and the first Easter, the world had no history. But is it desired or desirable that the whole Catholic Church should have no history?

It is perhaps the chief suggestion of this book that St. Francis walked the world like the Pardon of God. I mean that his appearance marked the moment when men could be reconciled not only to God but to nature and, most difficult of all, to themselves. For it marked the moment when all the stale paganism that had poisoned the ancient world was at last worked out of the social system. He opened the gates of the Dark Ages as of a prison of purgatory, where men had cleansed themselves as hermits in the desert or heroes in the barbarian wars. It was in fact his whole function to tell men to start afresh and, in that sense, to tell them to forget. If they were to turn over a new leaf and begin a fresh page with the first large letters of the alphabet, simply drawn and brilliantly coloured in the early mediaeval manner, it was clearly a part of that particular childlike cheerfulness that they should paste down the old page that was all black and bloody with horrid things. For instance, I have already noted that there is not a trace in the poetry of this first Italian poet of all that pagan mythology which lingered long after paganism. The first Italian poet seems the only man in the world who has never even heard of Virgil. This was exactly right for the special sense in which he is the first Italian poet. It is quite right that he should call a nightingale a nightingale, and not have its song spoilt or saddened by the terrible tales of Itylus or Procne. In short, it is really quite right and quite desirable that St. Francis should never have heard of Virgil. But do we really desire that Dante should never have heard of Virgil? Do we really desire that Dante should never have read any pagan mythology? It has been truly said that the use that Dante makes of such fables is altogether part of a deeper orthodoxy; that his huge heathen fragments, his gigantic figures of Minos or of Charon, only give a hint of some enormous natural religion behind all history and from the first foreshadowing the Faith. It is well to have the Sybil as well as David in the Dies Irae. That St. Francis would have burned all the leaves of all the books of the Sybil, in exchange for one fresh leaf from the nearest tree, is perfectly true; and perfectly proper to St. Francis. But it is good to have the Dies Irae as well as the Canticle of the Sun.

By this thesis, in short, the coming of St. Francis was like the birth of a child in a dark house, lifting its doom; a child that grows up unconscious of the tragedy and triumphs over it by his innocence. In him it is necessarily not only innocence but ignorance. It is the essence of the story that he should pluck at the green grass without knowing it grows over a murdered man or climb the apple-tree without knowing it was the gibbet of a suicide. It was such an amnesty and reconciliation that the freshness of the Franciscan spirit brought to all the world. But it does not follow that it ought to impose its ignorance on all the world. And I think it would have tried to impose it on all the world. For some Franciscans it would have seemed right that Franciscan poetry should expel Benedictine prose. For the symbolic child it was quite rational. It was right enough that for such a child the world should be a large new nursery with blank white-washed walls, on which he could draw his own pictures in chalk in the childish fashion, crude in outline and gay in colour; the beginnings of all our art. It was right enough that to him such a nursery should seem the most magnificent mansion of the imagination of man. But in the Church of God are many mansions.

Every heresy has been an effort to narrow the Church. If the Franciscan movement had turned into a new religion, it would after all have been a narrow religion. In so far as it did turn here and there into a heresy, it was a narrow heresy. It did what heresy always does; it set the mood against the mind. The mood was indeed originally the good and glorious mood of the great St. Francis, but it was not the whole mind of God or even of man. And it is a fact that the mood itself degenerated, as the mood turned into a monomania. A sect that came to be called the Fraticelli declared themselves the true sons of St. Francis and broke away from the compromises of Rome in favour of what they would have called the complete programme of Assisi. In a very little while these loose Franciscans began to look as ferocious as Flagellants. They launched new and violent vetoes; they denounced marriage; that is, they denounced mankind. In the name of the most human of saints they declared war upon humanity. They did not perish particularly through being persecuted; many of them were eventually persuaded; and the unpersuadable rump of them that remained remained without producing anything in the least calculated to remind anybody of the real St. Francis. What was the matter with these people was that they were mystics; mystics and nothing else but mystics; mystics and not Catholics; mystics and not Christians; mystics and not men. They rotted away because, in the most exact sense, they would not listen to reason. And St. Francis, however wild and romantic his gyrations might appear to many, always hung on to reason by one invisible and indestructible hair.

The great saint was sane; and with the very sound of the word sanity, as at a deeper chord struck upon a harp, we come back to something that was indeed deeper than everything about him that seemed an almost elvish eccentricity. He was not a mere eccentric because he was always turning towards the centre and heart of the maze; he took the queerest and most zigzag short cuts through the wood, but he was always going home. He was not only far too humble to be an heresiarch, but he was far too human to desire to be an extremist, in the sense of an exile at the ends of the earth. The sense of humour which salts all the stories of his escapades alone prevented him from ever hardening into the solemnity of sectarian self-righteousness. He was by nature ready to admit that he was wrong; and if his followers had on some practical points to admit that he was wrong, they only admitted that he was wrong in order to prove that he was right. For it is they, his real followers, who have really proved that he was right and even in transcending some of his negations have triumphantly extended and interpreted his truth. The Franciscan order did not fossilise or break off short like something of which the true purpose has been frustrated by official tyranny or internal treason. It was this, the central and orthodox trunk of it, that afterwards bore fruit for the world. It counted among its sons Bonaventura, the great mystic, and Bernardino, the popular preacher, who filled Italy with the very beatific buffooneries of a Jongleur de Dieu. It counted Raymond Lully with his strange learning and his large and daring plans for the conversion of the world; a man intensely individual exactly as St. Francis was intensely individual. It counted Roger Bacon, the first naturalist whose experiments with light and water had all the luminous quaintness that belongs to the beginnings of natural history; and whom even the most material scientists have hailed as a father of science. It is not merely true that these were great men who did great work for the world; it is also true that they were a certain kind of men keeping the spirit and savour of a certain kind of man, that we can recognise in them a taste and tang of audacity and simplicity, and know them for the sons of St. Francis.

For that is the full and final spirit in which we should turn to St. Francis; in the spirit of thanks for what he has done. He was above all things a great giver; and he cared chiefly for the best kind of giving which is called thanksgiving. If another great man wrote a grammar of assent, he may well be said to have written a grammar of acceptance; a grammar of gratitude. He understood down to its very depths the theory of thanks; and its depths are a bottomless abyss. He knew that the praise of God stands on its strongest ground when it stands on nothing. He knew that we can best measure the towering miracle of the mere fact of existence if we realise that but for some strange mercy we should not even exist. And something of that larger truth is repeated in a lesser form in our own relations with so mighty a maker of history. He also is a giver of things we could not have even thought of for ourselves; he also is too great for anything but gratitude. From him came a whole awakening of the world and a dawn in which all shapes and colours could be seen anew. The mighty men of genius who made the Christian civilisation that we know appear in history almost as his servants and imitators. Before Dante was, he had given poetry to Italy; before St. Louis ruled, he had risen as the tribune of the poor; and before Giotto had painted the pictures, he had enacted the scenes. That great painter who began the whole human inspiration of European painting had himself gone to St. Francis to be inspired. It is said that when St. Francis staged in his own simple fashion a Nativity Play of Bethlehem, with kings and angels in the stiff and gay mediaeval garments and the golden wigs that stood for haloes, a miracle was wrought full of the Franciscan glory. The Holy Child was a wooden doll or bambino, and it was said that he embraced it and that the image came to life in his arms. He assuredly was not thinking of lesser things; but we may at least say that one thing came to life in his arms; and that was the thing that we call the drama. Save for his intense individual love of song, he did not perhaps himself embody this spirit in any of these arts. He was the spirit that was embodied. He was the spiritual essence and substance that walked the world, before any one had seen these things in visible forms derived from it: a wandering fire as if from nowhere, at which men more material could light both torches and tapers. He was the soul of mediaeval civilisation before it even found a body. Another and quite different stream of spiritual inspiration derives largely from him; all that reforming energy of mediaeval and modern times that goes to the burden of Deus est Deus Pauperum. His abstract ardour for human beings was in a multitude of just mediaeval laws against the pride and cruelty of riches; it is to-day behind much that is loosely called Christian Socialist and can more correctly be called Catholic Democrat. Neither on the artistic nor the social side would anybody pretend that these things would not have existed without him; yet it is strictly true to say that we cannot now imagine them without him; since he has lived and changed the world.

And something of that sense of impotence which was more than half his power will descend on any one who knows what that inspiration has been in history, and can only record it in a series of straggling and meagre sentences. He will know something of what St. Francis meant by the great and good debt that cannot be paid. He will feel at once the desire to have done infinitely more and the futility of having done anything. He will know what it is to stand under such a deluge of a dead man’s marvels, and have nothing in return to establish against it; to have nothing to set up under the overhanging, overwhelming arches of such a temple of time and eternity, but this brief candle burnt out so quickly before his shrine.

FANCIES VERSUS FADS

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INTRODUCTION

I HAVE strung these things together on a slight enough thread; but as the things themselves are slight, it is possible that the thread (and the metaphor) may manage to hang together. These notes range over very variegated topics and in many cases were made at very different times. They concern all sorts of things from lady barristers to cave-men, and from psycho-analysis to free verse. Yet they have this amount of unity in their wandering, that they all imply that it is only a more traditional spirit that is truly able to wander. The wild theorists of our time are quite unable to wander. When they talk of making new roads, they are only making new ruts. Each of them is necessarily imprisoned in his own curious cosmos; in other words, he is limited by the very largeness of his own generalization. The explanations of the Marxian must not go outside economics; and the student of Freud is forbidden to forget sex. To see only the fanciful side of these serious sects may seem a very frivolous pleasure — and I will not dispute that these are very frivolous criticisms. I only submit that this frivolity is the last lingering form of freedom.

In short the note of these notes, so to speak, is that it is only from a normal standpoint that all the nonsense of the world takes on something of the wild interest of wonderland. I mean it is only in the mirror of a very moderate sense and sanity, which is all I have ever claimed to possess, that even insanities can appear as images clear enough to appeal to the imagination. After all, the ordinary orthodox person is he to whom the heresies can appear as fantasies. After all, it is we ordinary human and humdrum people who can enjoy eccentricity as a sort of elfland; while the eccentrics are too serious even to know that they are elves. When a man tells us that he disapproves of children being told fairy tales, it is we who can perceive that he is himself a fairy. He himself has not the least idea of it. When he says he would discourage children from playing with tin soldiers, because it is militarism, it is we and not he who can enjoy in fancy the fantastic possibilities of his idea. It is we who suddenly think of children playing with little tin figures of philanthropists, rather round and with tin top-hats; the little tin gods of our commercial religion. It is we who develop his imaginative idea for him, by suggesting little leaden dolls of Conscientious Objectors in fixed attitudes of refined repugnance; or a whole regiment of tiny Quakers with little grey coats and white flags. He would never have thought of any of these substitutes for himself; his negation is purely negative. Or when an educational philosopher tells us that the child should have complete equality with the adult, he cannot really carry his idea any farther without our assistance. It will be from us and not from him that the natural suggestion will come; that the baby should take its turn and carry the mother, the moment the mother is tired of carrying the baby. He will not, when left to himself, call up the poetical picture of the child wheeling a double perambulator with the father and mother at each end. He has no motive to look for lively logical developments; for him the assimilation of parent and child is simply a platitude; and an inevitable part of his own rather platitudinous philosophy. It is we and not he who can behold the whole vista and vanishing perspective of his own opinions; and work out what he really means. It is only those who have ordinary views who have extraordinary visions.

There is indeed nothing very extraordinary about these visions, except the extraordinary people who have provoked some of them. They are only very sketchy sort of sketches of some of the strange things that may be found in the modern world. But however inadequate be the example, it is none the less true that this is the sound principle behind much better examples; and that, in those great things as in these small ones, sanity was the condition of satire. It is because Gulliver is a man of moderate stature that he can stray into the land of the giants and the land of the pygmies. It is Swift and not the professors of Laputa who sees the real romance of getting sunbeams out of cucumbers. It would be less than exact to call Swift a sunbeam in the house; but if he did not himself get much sunshine out of cucumbers, at least he let daylight into professors. It was not the mad Swift but the sane Swift who made that story so wild. The truth is more self-evident in men who were more sane. It is the good sense of Rabelais that makes him seem to grin like a gargoyle; and it is in a sense because Dickens was a Philistine that he saw the land so full of strange gods. These idle journalistic jottings have nothing in common with such standards of real literature, except the principle involved; but the principle is the right one.

But while these are frivolous essays, pretending only to touch on topics and theories they cannot exhaustively examine, I have added some that may not seem to fit so easily even into so slight a scheme. Nevertheless, they are in some sense connected with it. I have opened with an essay on rhyme, because it is a type of the sort of tradition which the anti-traditionalists now attack; and I have ended with one called “Milton and Merry England,” because I feel that many may misunderstand my case against the new Puritans, if they have no notion of how I should attempt to meet the more accepted case in favour of the old Puritans. Both these articles appeared originally in the “London Mercury,” and I desire to express my thanks to Mr. J. C. Squire for his kind permission to reprint them. But, in the latter case, I had the further feeling that I wished to express somewhere the historical sentiment that underlies the whole; the conviction that there did and does exist a more normal and national England, which we once inhabited and to which we may yet return; and which is not a Utopia but a home. I have therefore thought it worth while to write this line of introduction to show that such a scrap-book is not entirely scrappy; and that even to touch such things lightly we need something like a test. It is necessary to have in hand a truth to judge modern philosophies rapidly; and it is necessary to judge them very rapidly to judge them before they disappear.

THE ROMANCE OF RHYME

THE poet in the comic opera, it will be remembered (I hope), claimed for his aesthetic authority that “Hey diddle diddle will rank as an idyll, if I pronounce it chaste.” In face of a satire which still survives the fashion it satirized, it may require some moral courage seriously to pronounce it chaste, or to suggest that the nursery rhyme in question has really some of the qualities of an idyll. Of its chastity, in the vulgar sense, there need be little dispute, despite the scandal of the elopement of the dish with the spoon, which would seem as free from grossness as the loves of the triangles. And though the incident of the cow may have something of the moonstruck ecstasy of Endymion, that also has a silvery coldness about it worthy of the wilder aspects of Diana. The truth more seriously tenable is that this nursery rhyme is a complete and compact model of the nursery short story. The cow jumping over the moon fulfils to perfection the two essentials of such a story for children. It makes an effect that is fantastic out of objects that are familiar; and it makes a picture that is at once incredible and unmistakable. But it is yet more tenable, and here more to the point, that this nursery rhyme is emphatically a rhyme. Both the lilt and the jingle are just right for their purpose, and are worth whole libraries of elaborate literary verse for children. And the best proof of its vitality is that the satirist himself has unconsciously echoed the jingle even in making the joke. The metre of that nineteenth-century satire is the metre of the nursery rhyme. “Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle” and “Hey diddle diddle will rank as an idyll” are obviously both dancing to the same ancient tune; and that by no means the tune the old cow died of, but the more exhilarating air to which she jumped over the moon.

The whole history of the thing called rhyme can be found between those two things: the simple pleasure of rhyming “diddle” to “fiddle,” and the more sophisticated pleasure of rhyming “diddle” to “idyll.” Now the fatal mistake about poetry, and more than half of the fatal mistake about humanity, consists in forgetting that we should have the first kind of pleasure as well as the second. It might be said that we should have the first pleasure as the basis of the second; or yet more truly, the first pleasure inside the second. The fatal metaphor of progress, which means leaving things behind us, has utterly obscured the real idea of growth, which means leaving things inside us. The heart of the tree remains the same, however many rings are added to it; and a man cannot leave his heart behind by running hard with his legs. In the core of all culture are the things that may be said, in every sense, to be learned by heart. In the innermost part of all poetry is the nursery rhyme, the nonsense that is too happy even to care about being nonsensical. It may lead on to the more elaborate nonsense of the Gilbertian line, or even far less poetic nonsense of some of the Browningesque rhymes. But the true enjoyment of poetry is in having the simple pleasure as well as the subtle pleasure. Indeed it is on this primary point that so many of our artistic and other reforms seem to go wrong. What is the matter with the modern world is that it is trying to get simplicity in everything except the soul. Where the soul really has simplicity it can be grateful for anything — even complexity. Many peasants have to be vegetarians, and their ordinary life is really a simple life. But the peasants do not despise a good dinner when they can get it; they wolf it down with enthusiasm, because they have not only the simple life but the simple spirit. And it is so with the modern modes of art which revert, very rightly, to what is “primitive.” But their moral mistake is that they try to combine the ruggedness that should belong to simplicity with a superciliousness that should only belong to satiety. The last Futurist draughtsmanship, for instance, evidently has the aim of drawing a tree as it might be drawn by a child of ten. I think the new artists would admit it; nor do I merely sneer at it. I am willing to admit, especially for the sake of argument, that there is a truth of philosophy and psychology in this attempt to attain the clarity even through the crudity of childhood. In this sense I can see what a man is driving at when he draws a tree merely as a stick with smaller sticks standing out of it. He may be trying to trace in black and white or grey a primeval and almost pre-natal illumination; that it is very remarkable that a stick should exist, and still more remarkable that a stick should stick up or stick out. He may be similarly enchanted with his own stick of charcoal or grey chalk; he may be enraptured, as a child is, with the mere fact that it makes a mark on the paper — a highly poetic fact in itself. But the child does not despise the real tree for being different from his drawing of the tree. He does not despise Uncle Humphrey because that talented amateur can really draw a tree. He does not think less of the real sticks because they are live sticks, and can grow and branch and curve in a way uncommon in walking sticks. Because he has a single eye he can enjoy a double pleasure.

This distinction, which seems strangely neglected, may be traced again in the drama and most other domains of art. Reformers insist that the audiences of simpler ages were content with bare boards or rudimentary scenery if they could hear Sophocles or Shakespeare talking a language of the gods. They were very properly contented with plain boards. But they were not discontented with pageants. The people who appreciated Antony's oration as such would have appreciated Aladin's palace as such. They did not think gilding and spangles substitutes for poetry and philosophy, because they are not. But they did think gilding and spangles great and admirable gifts of God, because they are.

But the application of this distinction here is to the case of rhyme in poetry. And the application of it is that we should never be ashamed of enjoying a thing as a rhyme as well as enjoying it as a poem. And I think the modern poets who try to escape from the rhyming pleasure, in pursuit of a freer poetical pleasure, are making the same fundamentally fallacious attempt to combine simplicity with superiority. Such a poet is like a child who could take no pleasure in a tree because it looked like a tree, or a playgoer who could take no pleasure in the Forest of Arden because it looked like a forest. It is not impossible to find a sort of prig who professes that he could listen to literature in any scenery, but strongly objects to good scenery. And in poetical criticism and creation there has also appeared the prig who insists that any new poem must avoid the sort of melody that makes the beauty of any old song. Poets must put away childish things, including the child's pleasure in the mere sing-song of irrational rhyme. It may be hinted that when poets put away childish things they will put away poetry. But it may be well to say a word in further justification of rhyme as well as poetry, in the child as well as the poet. Now, the neglect of this nursery instinct would be a blunder, even if it were merely an animal instinct or an automatic instinct. If a rhyme were to a man merely what a bark is to a dog, or a crow to a cock, it would be clear that such natural things cannot be merely neglected. It is clear that a canine epic, about Argus instead of Ulysses, would have a beat ultimately consisting of barks. It is clear that a long poem like "Chantecler," written by a real cock, would be to the tune of Cock-a-doodle-doo. But in truth the nursery rhyme has a nobler origin; if it be ancestral it is not animal; its principle is a primary one, not only in the body but in the soul.

Milton prefaced “Paradise Lost” with a ponderous condemnation of rhyme. And perhaps the finest and even the most familiar line in the whole of “Paradise Lost” is really a glorification of rhyme. “Seasons return, but not to me return,” is not only an echo that has all the ring of rhyme in its form, but it happens to contain nearly all the philosophy of rhyme in its spirit. The wonderful word “return” has, not only in its sound but in its sense, a hint of the whole secret of song. It is not merely that its very form is a fine example of a certain quality in English, somewhat similar to that which Mrs. Meynell admirably analysed in a former issue of this magazine in the case of words like “unforgiven.” It is that it describes poetry itself, not only in a mechanical but a moral sense. Song is not only a recurrence, it is a return. It does not merely, like the child in the nursery, take pleasure in seeing the wheels go round. It also wishes to go back as well as round; to go back to the nursery where such pleasures are found. Or to vary the metaphor slightly, it does not merely rejoice in the rotation of a wheel on the road, as if it were a fixed wheel in the air. It is not only the wheel but the wagon that is returning. That labouring caravan is always travelling towards some camping-ground that it has lost and cannot find again. No lover of poetry needs to be told that all poems are full of that noise of returning wheels; and none more than the poems of Milton himself. The whole truth is obvious, not merely in the poem, but even in the two words of the title. All poems might be bound in one book under the title of “Paradise Lost.” And the only object of writing “Paradise Lost” is to turn it, if only by a magic and momentary illusion, into “Paradise Regained.”

It is in this deeper significance of return that we must seek for the peculiar power in the recurrence we call rhyme. It would be easy enough to reply to Milton’s strictures on rhyme in the spirit of a sensible if superficial liberality by saying that it takes all sorts to make a world, and especially the world of the poets. It is evident enough that Milton might have been right to dispense with rhyme without being right to despise it. It is obvious that the peculiar dignity of his religious epic would have been weakened if it had been a rhymed epic, beginning: —

Of man’s first disobedience and the fruit Of that forbidden tree whose mortal root.

But it is equally obvious that Milton himself would not have tripped on the light fantastic toe with quite so much charm and cheerfulness in the lines: —

But come thou Goddess fair and free   In heaven yclept Euphrosyne

if the goddess had been yclept something else, as, for the sake of argument, Syrinx. Milton in his more reasonable moods would have allowed rhyme in theory a place in all poetry, as he allowed it in practice in his own poetry. But he would certainly have said at this time, and possibly at all times, that he allowed it an inferior place, or at least a secondary place. But is its place secondary; and is it in any sense inferior?

The romance of rhyme does not consist merely in the pleasure of a jingle, though this is a pleasure of which no man should be ashamed. Certainly most men take pleasure in it, whether or not they are ashamed of it. We see it in the older fashion of prolonging the chorus of a song with syllables like “rumty tumty” or “tooral looral.” We see it in the similar but later fashion of discussing whether a truth is objective or subjective, or whether a reform is constructive or destructive, or whether an argument is deductive or inductive: all bearing witness to a very natural love for those nursery rhyme recurrences which make a sort of song without words, or at least without any kind of intellectual significance. But something much deeper is involved in the love of rhyme as distinct from other poetic forms, something which is perhaps too deep and subtle to be described. The nearest approximation to the truth I can think of is something like this: that while all forms of genuine verse recurs there is in rhyme a sense of return to exactly the same place. All modes of song go forward and backward like the tides of the sea; but in the great sea of Homeric or Virgilian hexametres, the sea that carried the labouring ships of Ulysses and Oeneas, the thunder of the breakers is rhythmic, but the margin of the foam is necessarily irregular and vague. In rhyme there is rather a sense of water poured safely into one familiar well, or (to use a nobler metaphor) of ale poured safely into one familiar flagon. The armies of Homer and Virgil advance and retreat over a vast country, and suggest vast and very profound sentiments about it, about whether it is their own country or only a strange country. But when the old nameless ballad boldly rhymes “the bonny ivy tree” to “my ain countree” the vision at once dwindles and sharpens to a very vivid image of a single soldier passing under the ivy that darkens his own door. Rhythm deals with similarity, but rhyme with identity. Now in the one word identity are involved perhaps the deepest and certainly the dearest human things. He who is homesick does not desire houses or even homes. He who is lovesick does not want to see all the women with whom he might have fallen in love. Only he who is sea-sick, perhaps, may be said to have a cosmopolitan craving for all lands or any kind of land. And this is probably why sea-sickness, like cosmopolitanism, has never yet been a high inspiration to song. Songs, especially the most poignant of them, generally refer to some absolute, to some positive place or person for whom no similarity is a substitute. In such a case all approximation is merely asymptotic. The prodigal returns to his father's house and not the house next door, unless he is still an imperfectly sober prodigal; the lover desires his lady and not her twin sister, except, in old complications of romance; and even the spiritualist is generally looking for a ghost and not merely for ghosts. I think the intolerable torture of spiritualism must be a doubt about identity. Anyhow, it will generally be found that where this call for the identical has been uttered most ringingly and unmistakably in literature, it has been uttered in rhyme. Another purpose for which this pointed and definite form is very much fitted is the expression of dogma, as distinct from doubt or even opinion. This is why, with all allowance for a decline in the most classical effects of the classical tongue, the rhymed Latin of the mediaeval hymns does express what it had to express in a very poignant poetical manner, as compared with the reverent agnosticism so nobly uttered in the rolling unrhymed metres of the ancients. For even if we regard the matter of the mediaeval verses as a dream, it was at least a vivid dream, a dream full of faces, a dream of love and of lost things. And something of the same spirit runs in a vaguer way through proverbs and phrases that are not exactly religious, but rather in a rude sense philosophical, but which all move with the burden of returning; things to be felt only in familiar fragments... *on revient toujours*... it's the old story — it's love that makes the world go round; and all roads lead to Rome: we might almost say that all roads lead to Rhyme.

Milton's revolt against rhyme must be read in the light of history. Milton is the Renascence frozen into a Puritan form; the beginning of a period which was in a sense classic, but was in a still more definite sense aristocratic. There the Classicist was the artistic aristocrat because the Calvinist was the spiritual aristocrat. The seventeenth century was intensely individualistic; it had both in the noble and the ignoble sense a respect for persons. It had no respect whatever for popular traditions; and it was in the midst of its purely logical and legal excitement that most of the popular traditions died. The Parliament appeared and the people disappeared. The arts were put under patrons, where they had once been under patron saints. The schools and colleges at once strengthened and narrowed the New Learning, making it something rather peculiar to one country and one class. A few men talked a great deal of good Latin, where all men had once talked a little bad Latin. But they talked even the good Latin so that no Latinist in the world could understand them. They confined all study of the classics to that of the most classical period, and grossly exaggerated the barbarity and barrenness of patriotic Greek or mediaeval Latin. It is as if a man said that because the English translation of the Bible is perhaps the best English in the world, therefore Addison and Pater and Newman are not worth reading. We can imagine what men in such a mood would have said of the rude rhymed hexametres of the monks; and it is not unnatural that they should have felt a reaction against rhyme itself. For the history of rhyme is the history of something else, very vast and sometimes invisible, certainly somewhat indefinable, against which they were in aristocratic rebellion.

That thing is difficult to define in impartial modern terms. It might well be called Romance, and that even in a more technical sense, since it corresponds to the rise of the Romance languages as distinct from the Roman language. It might more truly be called Religion, for historically it was the gradual re-emergence of Europe through the Dark Ages, because it still had one religion, though no longer one rule. It was, in short, the creation of Christendom. It may be called Legend, for it is true that the most overpowering presence in it is that of omnipresent and powerful popular Legend; so that things that may never have happened, or, as some say, could never have happened, are nevertheless rooted in our racial memory like things that have happened to ourselves. The whole Arthurian Cycle, for instance, seems something more real than reality. If the faces in that darkness of the Dark Ages, Lancelot and Arthur and Merlin and Modred, are indeed faces in a dream, they are like faces in a real dream: a dream in a bed and not a dream in a book. Sub-consciously at least, I should be much less surprised if Arthur was to come again than I should be if the Superman were to come at all. Again, the thing might be called Gossip: a noble name, having in it the name of God and one of the most generous and genial of the relations of men. For I suppose there has seldom been a time when such a mass of culture and good traditions of craft and song have been handed down orally, by one universal buzz of conversation, through centuries of ignorance down to centuries of greater knowledge. Education must have been an eternal *viva voce* examination; but the men passed their examination. At least they went out in such rude sense masters of art as to create the Song of Roland and the round Roman arches that carry the weight of so many Gothic towers. Finally, of course, it can be called ignorance, barbarism, black superstition, a reaction towards obscurantism and old night; and such a vie is eminently complete and satisfactory, only that it leaves behind it a sort of weak wonder as to why the very youngest poets do still go on writing poems about the sword of Arthur and the horn of Roland.

All this was but the beginning of a process which has two great points of interest. The first is the way in which the mediaeval movement did rebuild the old Roman civilization; the other was the way in which it did not. A strange interest attaches to the things which had never existed in the pagan culture and did appear in the Christian culture. I think it is true of most of them that they had a quality that can very approximately be described as popular, or perhaps as vulgar, as indeed we still talk of the languages which at that time liberated themselves from Latin as the vulgar tongues. And to many Classicists these things would appear to be vulgar in a more vulgar sense. They were vulgar in the sense of being vivid almost to excess, of making a very direct and unsophisticated appeal to the emotions. The first law of heraldry was to wear the heart upon the sleeve. Such mediaevalism was the reverse of mere mysticism, in the sense of mere mystery; it might more truly be described as sensationalism. One of these things, for instance, was a hot and even an impatient love of colour. It learned to paint before it could draw, and could afford the twopence coloured long before it could manage the penny plain. It culminated at last, of course, in the energy and gaiety of the Gothic; but even the richness of Gothic rested on a certain psychological simplicity. We can contrast it with the classic by noting its popular passion for telling a story in stone. We may admit that a Doric portico is a poem, but no one would describe it as an anecdote. The time was to come when much of the imagery of the cathedrals was to be lost; but it would have mattered the less that it was defaced by its enemies if it had not been already neglected by its friends. It would have mattered less if the whole tide of taste among the rich had not turned against the old popular masterpieces. The Puritans defaced them, but the Cavaliers did not truly defend them. The Cavaliers were also aristocrats of the new classical culture, and used the word Gothic in the sense of barbaric. For the benefit of the Teutonists we may note in parenthesis that, if this phrase meant that Gothic was despised, it also meant that the Goths were despised. But when the Cavaliers came back, after the Puritan interregnum, they restored not in the style of Pugin but in the style of Wren. The very thing we call the Restoration, which was the restoration of King Charles, was also the restoration of St. Paul's. And it was a very modern restoration.

So far we might say that simple people do not like simple things. This is certainly true if we compare the classic with these highly coloured things of mediaevalism, or all the vivid visions which first began to glow in the night of the Dark Ages. Now one of these things was the romantic expedient called rhyme. And even in this, if we compare the two, we shall see something of the same paradox by which the simple like complexities and the complex like simplicities. The ignorant like rich carvings and melodious and often ingenious rhymes. The learned like bare walls and blank verse. But in the case of rhyme it is peculiarly difficult to define the double and yet very definite truth. It is difficult to define the sense in which rhyme is artificial and the sense in which it is simple. In truth it is simple because it is artificial. It is an artifice of the kind enjoyed by children and other poetic people; it is a toy. As a technical accomplishment it stands at the same distance from the popular experience as the old popular sports. Like swimming, like dancing, like drawing the bow, anybody can do it, but nobody can do it without taking the trouble to do it; and only a few can do it very well. In a hundred ways it was akin to that simple and even humble energy that made all the lost glory of the guilds. Thus their rhyme was useful as well as ornamental. It was not merely a melody but also a mnemonic; just as their towers were not merely trophies but beacons and belfries. In another aspect rhyme is akin to rhetoric, but of a very positive and emphatic sort: the coincidence of sound giving the effect of saying, "It is certainly so." Shakespeare realized this when he rounded off a fierce or romantic scene with a rhymed couplet. I know that some critics do not like this, but I think there is a moment when a drama ought to become a melodrama. Then there is a much older effect of rhyme that can only be called mystical, which may seem the very opposite of the utilitarian, and almost equally remote from the rhetorical. Yet it shares with the former the tough texture of something not easily forgotten, and with the latter the touch of authority which is the aim of all oratory. The thing I mean may be found in the fact that so many of the old proverbial prophecies, from Merlin to

Mother Shipton, were handed down in rhyme. It can be found in the very name of Thomas the Rhymer.

But the simplest way of putting this popular quality is in a single word: it is a song. Rhyme corresponds to a melody so simple that it goes straight like an arrow to the heart. It corresponds to a chorus so familiar and obvious that all men can join in it. I am not disturbed by the suggestion that such an arrow of song, when it hits the heart, may entirely miss the head. I am not concerned to deny that the chorus may sometimes be a drunken chorus, in which men have lost their heads to find their tongues. I am not defending but defining; I am trying to find words for a large but elusive distinction between certain things that are certainly poetry and certain other things which are also song. Of course it is only an accident that Horace opens his greatest series of odes by saying that he detests the profane populace and wishes to drive them from his temple of poetry. But it is the sort of accident that is almost an allegory. There is even a sense in which it has a practical side. When all is said, *could* a whole crowd of men sing the “Descende Coelo,” that noble ode, as a crowd can certainly sing the “Dies Irae,” or for that matter “Down among the Dead Men”? Did Horace himself sing the Horatian odes in the sense in which Shakespeare could sing, or could hardly help singing, the Shakespearean songs. I do not know, having no kind of scholarship on these points. But I do not feel that it could have been at all the same thing; and my only purpose is to attempt a rude description of that thing. Rhyme is consonant to the particular kind of song that can be a popular song, whether pathetic or passionate or comic; and Milton is entitled to his true distinction; nobody is likely to sing “Paradise Lost” as if it were a song of that kind. I have tried to suggest my sympathy with rhyme, in terms true enough to be accepted by the other side as expressing their antipathy for it. I have admitted that rhyme is a toy and even a trick, of the sort that delights children. I have admitted that every rhyme is a nursery rhyme. What I will never admit is that anyone who is too big for the nursery is big enough for the Kingdom of God, though the God were only Apollo.

A good critic should be like God in the great saying of a Scottish mystic. George Macdonald said that God was easy to please and hard to satisfy. That paradox is the poise of all good artistic appreciation. Without the first part of the paradox appreciation perishes, because it loses the power to appreciate. Good criticism, I repeat, combines the subtle pleasure in a thing being done well with the simple pleasure in it being done at all. It combines the pleasure of the scientific engineer in seeing how the wheels work together to a logical end with the pleasure of the baby in seeing the wheels go round. It combines the pleasure of the artistic draughtsman in the fact that his lines of charcoal, light and apparently loose, fall exactly right and in a perfect relation with the pleasure of the child in the fact that the charcoal makes marks of any kind on the paper. And in the same fashion it combines the critic's pleasure in a poem with the child's pleasure in a rhyme. The historical point about this kind of poetry, the rhymed romantic kind, is that it rose out of the Dark Ages with the whole of this huge popular power behind it, the human love of a song, a riddle, a proverb, a pun or a nursery rhyme; the sing-song of innumerable children's games, the chorus of a thousand camp-fires and a thousand taverns. When poetry loses its link with all these people who are easily pleased it loses all its power of giving pleasure. When a poet looks down on a rhyme it is, I will not say as if he looked down on a daisy (which might seem possible to the more literal-minded), but rather as if he looked down on a lark because he had been up in a balloon. It is cutting away the very roots of poetry; it is revolting against nature because it is natural, against sunshine because it is bright, or mountains because they are high, or moonrise because it is mysterious. The freezing process began after the Reformation with a fastidious search for finer yet freer forms; to-day it has ended in formlessness.

But the joke of it is that even when it is formless it is still fastidious. The new anarchic artists are not ready to accept everything. They are not ready to accept anything except anarchy. Unless it observes the very latest conventions of unconventionality, they would rule out anything classic as coldly as any classic ever ruled out anything romantic. But the classic was a form; and there was even a time when it was a new form. The men who invented Sapphics did invent a new metre; the introduction of Elizabethan blank verse was a real revolution in literary form. But *vers libre,* or nine-tenths of it, is not a new metre any more than sleeping in a ditch is a new school of architecture. It is no more a revolution in literary form than eating meat raw is an innovation in cookery. It is not even original, because it is not creative; the artist does not invent anything, but only abolishes something. But the only point about it that is to my present purpose is expressed in the word "pride." It is not merely proud in the sense of being exultant, but proud in the sense of being disdainful. Such outlaws are more exclusive than aristocrats; and their anarchical arrogance goes far beyond the pride of Milton and the aristocrats of the New Learning. And this final refinement has completed the work which the saner aristocrats began, the work now most evident in the world: the separation of art from the people. I need not insist on the sensational and self-evident character of that separation. I need not recommend the modern poet to attempt to sing his *vers libres* in a public-house. I need not even urge the young Imagist to read out a number of his disconnected Images to a public meeting. The thing is not only admitted but admired. The old artist remained proud in spite of his unpopularity; the new artist is proud because of his unpopularity; perhaps it is his chief ground for pride.

Dwelling as I do in the Dark Ages, or at latest along the mediaeval fairy tales, I am yet moved to remember something I once read in a modern fairy tale. As it happens, I have already used the name of George Macdonald; and in the best of his books there is a description of how a young miner in the mountains could always drive away the subterranean goblins if he could remember and repeat any kind of rhyme. The impromptu rhymes were often doggerel, as was the dog-Latin of many monkish hexametres or the burden of many rude Border ballads. But I have a notion that they drove away the devils, blue devils of pessimism and black devils of pride. Anyhow Madame Montessori, who has apparently been deploring the educational effects of fairy tales, would probably see in me a pitiable example of such early perversion, for that image which was one of my first impressions seems likely enough to be one of my last; and when the noise of many new and original musical instruments, with strange shapes and still stranger noises, has passed away like a procession, I shall bear in the succeeding silence only a rustle and scramble among the rocks and a boy singing on the mountain.

HAMLET AND THE PSYCHO-ANALYST

THIS morning, for a long stretch of hours before breakfast, and even as it were merging into breakfast, and almost overlapping breakfast, I was engaged in scientific researches in the great new department of psycho-analysis. Every journalist knows by this time that psycho-analysis largely depends on the study of dreams. But in order to study our dreams it is necessary to dream; and in order to dream it is necessary to sleep. So, while others threw away the golden hours in lighter and less learned occupations, while ignorant and superstitious peasants were already digging in their ignorant and superstitious kitchen-gardens, to produce their ignorant and superstitious beans and potatoes, while priests were performing their pious mummeries and poets composing lyrics on listening to the skylark — I myself was pioneering hundreds of years ahead of this benighted century; ruthlessly and progressively probing into all the various horrible nightmares, from which a happier future will take its oracles and its commandments. I will not describe my dreams in detail; I am not quite so ruthless a psychologist as all that. And indeed it strikes me as possible that the new psychologist will be rather a bore at breakfast. My dream was something about wandering in some sort of catacombs under the Albert Hall, and it involved eating jumbles (a brown flexible cake now almost gone from us, like so many glories of England) and also arguing with a Theosophist. I cannot fit this in very well with Freud and his theory of suppressed impulses. For I swear I never in my life suppressed the impulse to eat a jumble or to argue with a Theosophist. And as for wandering about in the Albert Hall, nobody could ever have had an impulse to do that.

When I came down to breakfast I looked at the morning paper; not (as you humorously suggest) at the evening paper. I had not pursued my scientific studies quite so earnestly as that. I looked at the morning paper, as I say, and found it contained a good deal about Psycho-Analysis, indeed it explained almost everything about Psycho-Analysis except what it was. This was naturally a thing which newspapers would present in a rather fragmentary fashion; and I fitted the fragments together as best I could. Apparently the dreams were merely symbols; and apparently symbols of something very savage and horrible which remained a secret. This seems to me a highly unscientific use of the word symbol. A symbol is not a disguise but rather a display; the best expression of something that cannot otherwise be expressed. Eating a jumble may mean that I wished to bite off my father's nose (the mother-complex being strong on me); but it does not seem to show much symbolic talent. The Albert Hall may imply the murder of an uncle; but it hardly makes itself very clear. And we do not seem to be getting much nearer the truth by dreaming, if we hide things by night more completely than we repress them by day. Anyhow, the murdered uncle reminds me of Hamlet, of whom more anon; at the moment I am merely remarking that my newspaper was a little vague; and I was all the more relieved to open my "London Mercury" and find an article on the subject by so able and suggestive a writer as Mr. J. D. Beresford.

Mr. J. D. Beresford practically asked himself whether he should become a psycho-analyst or continue to be a novelist. It will readily be understood that he did not put it precisely in these words; he would probably put psycho-analysis higher, and very possibly his own fiction lower; for men of genius are often innocent enough of their own genuine originality. That is a form of the unconscious mind with which none of us will quarrel. But I have no desire to watch a man of genius tying himself in knots, and perhaps dying in agony, in the attempt to be conscious of his own unconsciousness. I have seen too many unfortunate sceptics thus committing suicide by self-contradiction. Haeckel and his Determinists, in my youth, bullied us all about the urgent necessity of choosing a philosophy which would prove the impossibility of choosing anything. No doubt the new psychology will somehow enable us to know what we are doing, about all that we do without knowing it. These things come and go, and pass through their phases in order, from the time when they are as experimental as Freudism to the time when they are as exploded as Darwinism. But I never can understand men allowing things so visibly fugitive to hide things that are visibly permanent, like morals and religion and (what is in question here) the art of letters. Ars longa, scientia brevis.

Anyhow, as has been said, psycho-analysis depends in practice upon the interpretation of dreams. I do not know whether making masses of people, chiefly children, confess their dreams, would lead to a great output of literature; though it would certainly lead, if I know anything of human nature, to a glorious output of lies. There is something touching in the inhuman innocence of the psychologist, who is already talking of the scientific exactitude of results reached by the one particular sort of evidence that cannot conceivably be checked or tested in any way whatever. But, as Mr. Beresford truly says, the general notion of finding signs in dreams is as old as the world; but even the special theory of it is older than many seem to suppose. Indeed, it is not only old, but obvious; and was never discovered, because it was always noticed. Long before the present fashion I myself (who, heaven knows, am no psychologist) remember saying that as there is truth in all popular traditions, there is truth in the popular saying that dreams go by the rule of contraries. That is, that a man does often think at night about the very things he does not think by day. But the popular saying had in it a certain virtue never found in the anti-popular sciences of our day. Popular superstition has one enormous element of sanity; it is never serious. We talk of ages like the mediaeval as the ages of faith; but it would be quite as true a tribute to call them the ages of doubt; of a healthy doubt, and even a healthy derision. There was always something more or less consciously grotesque about an old ghost story. There was fun mixed with the fear; and the yokels knew too much about turnips not occasionally to think of turnip-ghosts. There is no fun about psycho-analysis. One yokel would say, "'Ar,' they do say dreams go by contraries." And then the others would say, "Ar," and they would all laugh in a deep internal fashion. But when Mr. J. D. Beresford says that Freud's theory is among scientific theories the most attractive for novelists, "it was a theory of sex, the all but universal theme of the novel," it is clear that our audience is slower and more solemn than the yokels. For nobody laughs at all. People seem to have lost the power of reacting to the humorous stimulus. When one milkmaid dreamed of a funeral, the other milkmaid said, "That means a wedding," and then they would both giggle. But when Mr. J. D. Beresford says that the theory "adumbrated the suggestion of a freer morality, by dwelling upon the physical and spiritual necessity for the liberation of impulse," the point seems somehow to be missed. Not a single giggle is heard in the deep and disappointing silence. It seems truly strange that when a modern and brilliant artist actually provides jokes far more truly humorous than the rude jests of the yokels and the milkmaids, the finer effort should meet with the feebler response. It is but an example of the unnatural solemnity, like an artificial vacuum, in which all these modern experiments are conducted. But no doubt if Freud had enjoyed the opportunity of explaining his ideas in an ancient ale-house, they would have met with more spontaneous applause.

I hope I do not seem unsympathetic with Mr. Beresford; for I not only admire his talent, but I am at this moment acting in strict obedience to his theories. I am — I say it proudly — acting as a disciple of Freud, who apparently forbids me to conceal any impulse, presumably including the impulse to laugh. I mean no disrespect to Mr. Beresford; but my first duty, of course, is to my own psychological inside. And goodness knows what damage might not be done to the most delicate workings of my own mental apparatus (as Mr. Arnold Bennett called it) if I were to subject it to the sudden and violent strain of not smiling at the scientific theory which is attractive because it is sexual, or of forcing my features into a frightful composure when I hear of the spiritual necessity for the liberation of impulse. I am not quite sure how far the liberation of impulse is to be carried out in practice by its exponents in theory; I do not know whether it is better to liberate the impulse to throw somebody else out of an express train in order to have the carriage to oneself all the way; or what may be the penalties for repressing the native instinct to shoot Mr. Lloyd George. But obviously the greater includes the less; and it would be very illogical if we were allowed to chuck out our fellow-traveller but not to chaff him; or if I were permitted to shoot at Mr. George but not to smile at Mr. Beresford. And though I am not so serious as he is, I assure him that in this I am quite as sincere as he is. In that sense I do seriously regret his seriousness; I do seriously think such seriousness a very serious evil. For some healthy human impulses are really the better for the relief by words and gestures, and one of them is the universal human sense that there is something comic about the relations of the sexes. The impulse to laugh at the mention of morality as “free” or of sex science as “attractive” is one of the impulses which is already gratified by most people who have never heard of psycho-analysis and is only mortified by people like the psycho-analysts.

Mr. Beresford must therefore excuse me if, with a sincere desire to follow his serious argument seriously, I note at the beginning a certain normal element of comedy of which critics of his school seem to be rather unconscious. When he asks whether this theory of the Nemesis of suppression can serve the purposes of great literary work, it would seem natural at first to test it by the example of the greatest literary works. And, judged by this scientific test, it must be admitted that our literary classics would appear to fail. Lady Macbeth does not suffer as a sleep-walker because she has resisted the impulse to murder Duncan, but rather (by some curious trick of thought) because she has yielded to it. Hamlet's uncle is in a morbid frame of mind, not, as one would naturally expect, because he had thwarted his own development by leaving his own brother alive and in possession; but actually because he has triumphantly liberated himself from the morbid impulse to pour poison in his brother's ear. On the theory of psycho-analysis, as expounded, a man ought to be haunted by the ghosts of all the men he has not murdered. Even if they were limited to those he has felt a vague fancy for murdering, they might make a respectable crowd to follow at his heels. Yet Shakespeare certainly seems to represent Macbeth as haunted by Banquo, whom he removed at one blow from the light of the sun and from his own sub-consciousness. Hell ought to mean the regret for lost opportunities for crime; the insupportable thought of houses still standing unburned or unburgled, or of wealthy uncles still walking about alive with their projecting watch-chains. Yet Dante certainly seemed to represent it as concerned exclusively with things done and done with, and not as merely the morbidly congested imagination of a thief who had not thieved and a murderer who had not murdered. In short, it is only too apparent that the poets and sages of the past knew very little of psycho-analysis, and whether or no Mr. Beresford can achieve great literary effects with it, they managed to achieve their literary effects without it. This is but a preliminary point, and I touch the more serious problem in a few minutes, if the fashion has not changed before then. For the moment I only take the test of literary experience, and of how independent of such theories have been the real masterpieces of man. Men are still excited over the poetic parts of poets like Shakespeare and Dante; if they go to sleep it is over the scientific parts. It is over some system of the spheres which Dante thought the very latest astronomy or some argument about the humours of the body which Shakespeare thought the very latest physiology. I appeal to Mr. Beresford's indestructible sense of humanity and his still undestroyed sense of humour. What would have become of the work of Dickens if it had been rewritten to illustrate the thesis of Darwin? What even of the work of Mr. Kipling if modified to meet the theories of Mr. Kidd? Believe me, the proportions are as I have said. Art is long, but science is fleeting; and Mr. Beresford's sub-consciousness, though stout and brave, is in danger of being not so much a muffled drum as a drum which somebody silences for ever; by knocking a hole in it, only to find nothing inside.

But there is one incidental moral in the matter that seems to me topical and rather arresting. It concerns the idea of punishment.

The psycho-analysts continue to buzz in a mysterious manner round the problem of Hamlet. They are especially interested in the things of which Hamlet was unconscious, not to mention the things of which Shakespeare was unconscious. It is in vain for old-fashioned rationalists like myself to point out that this is like dissecting the brain of Puck or revealing the real private life of Punch and Judy. The discussion no longer revolves round whether Hamlet is mad, but whether everybody is mad, especially the experts investigating the madness. And the curious thing about this process is that even when the critics are really subtle enough to see subtle things, they are never simple enough to see self-evident things. A really fine critic is reported as arguing that in Hamlet the consciousness willed one thing and the sub-consciousness another. Apparently the conscious Hamlet had unreservedly embraced and even welcomed the obligation of vengeance, but the shock (we are told) had rendered the whole subject painful, and started a strange and secret aversion to the scheme. It did not seem to occur to the writers that there might possibly be something slightly painful, at the best, in cutting the throat of your own uncle and the husband of your own mother. There might certainly be an aversion from the act; but I do not quite see why it should be an unconscious aversion. It seems just possible that a man might be quite conscious of not liking such a job. Where he differed from the modern morality was that he believed in the possibility of disliking it and yet doing it.

But to follow the argument of these critics, one would think that murdering the head of one’s family was a sort of family festivity or family joke; a gay and innocent indulgence into which the young prince would naturally have thrown himself with thoughtless exuberance, were it not for the dark and secretive thoughts that had given him an unaccountable distaste for it. Suppose it were borne in upon one of these modern middle-class critics, of my own rank and routine of life (possibly through his confidence in the messages at a Spiritualist séance) that it was his business to go home to Brompton or Surbiton and stick the carving-knife into Uncle William, who had poisoned somebody and was beyond the reach of the law. It is possible that the critic’s first thought would be that it was a happy way of spending a half-holiday; and that only in the critic’s sub-consciousness the suspicion would stir that there was something unhappy about the whole business. But it seems also possible that the regret might not be confined to his sub-consciousness, but might swim almost to the surface of his consciousness. In plain words, this sort of criticism has lost the last rags of common sense. Hamlet requires no such sub-conscious explanation, for he explains himself, and was perhaps rather too fond of doing so. He was a man to whom duty had come in a very dreadful and repulsive form, and to a man not fitted for that form of duty. There was a conflict, but he was conscious of it from beginning to end. He was not an unconscious person; but a far too conscious one.

Strangely enough, this theory of sub-conscious repulsion in the dramatic character is itself an example of sub-conscious repulsion in the modern critic. It is the critic who has a sort of subliminal prejudice which makes him avoid something, that seems very simple to others. The thing which he secretly and obscurely avoids, from the start, is the very simple fact of the morality in which Shakespeare did believe, as distinct from all the crude psychology in which he almost certainly did not believe. Shakespeare certainly did believe in the struggle between duty and inclination. The critic instinctively avoids the admission that Hamlet's was a struggle between duty and inclination; and tries to substitute a struggle between consciousness and sub-consciousness. He gives Hamlet a complex to avoid giving him a conscience. But he is actually forced to talk as if it was a man's natural inclination to kill an uncle, because he does not want to admit that it might be his duty to kill him. He is really driven to talking as if some dark and secretive monomania alone prevented us all from killing our uncles. He is driven to this because he will not even take seriously the simple and, if you will, primitive morality upon which the tragedy is built. For that morality involves three moral propositions, from which the whole of the morbid modern sub-consciousness does really recoil as from an ugly jar of pain. These principles are: first, that it may be our main business to do the right thing, even when we detest doing it; second, that the right thing may involve punishing some person, especially some powerful person; third, that the just process of punishment may take the form of fighting and killing. The modern critic is prejudiced against the first principle and calls it asceticism; he is prejudiced against the second principle and calls it vindictiveness; he is prejudiced against the third and generally calls it militarism. That it actually might be the duty of a young man to risk his own life, much against his own inclination, by drawing a sword and killing a tyrant, that is an idea instinctively avoided by this particular mood of modern times. That is why tyrants have such a good time in modern times. And in order to avoid this plain and obvious meaning, of war as a duty and peace as a temptation, the critic has to turn the whole play upside down, and seek its meaning in modern notions so remote as to be in this connexion meaningless. He has to make William Shakespeare of Stratford one of the pupils of Professor Freud. He has to make him a champion of psycho-analysis, which is like making him a champion of vaccination. He has to fit Hamlet's soul somehow into the classifications of Freud and Jung; which is just as if he had to fit Hamlet's father into the classifications of Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He has to interpret the whole thing by a new morality that Shakespeare had never heard of, because he has an intense internal dislike of the old morality that Shakespeare could not help hearing of. And that morality, which some of us believe to be based on a much more realistic psychology, is that punishment as punishment is a perfectly healthy process, not merely because it is reform, but also because it is expiation. What the modern world means by proposing to substitute pity for punishment is really very simple. It is that the modern world dare not punish those who are punishable, but only those who are pitiable. It would never touch anyone so important as King Claudius — or Kaiser William.

Now this truth is highly topical just now. The point about Hamlet was that he wavered, very excusably, in something that had to be done; and this is the point quite apart from whether we ourselves would have done it. That was pointed out long ago by Browning in “The Statue and the Bust.” He argued that even if the motive for acting was bad, the motive for not acting was worse. And an action or inaction is judged by its real motive, not by whether somebody else might have done the same thing from a better motive. Whether or no the tyrannicide of Hamlet was a duty, it was accepted as a duty and it was shirked as a duty. And that is precisely true of a tyrannicide like that for which everybody clamoured at the conclusion of the Great War. It may have been right or wrong to punish the Kaiser; it was certainly no more right to punish the German generals and admirals for their atrocities. But even if it was wrong, it was not abandoned because it was wrong. It was abandoned because it was troublesome. It was abandoned for all those motives — weakness and mutability of mood which we associate with the name of Hamlet. It might be glory or ignominy to shed the blood of imperial enemies, but it is certainly ignominy to shout for what you dare not shed; "to fall a-cursing like a common drab, a scullion." Granted that we had no better motives than we had then or have now, it would certainly have been more dignified if we had fatted all the region-kites with this slave's offal. The motive is the only moral test. A saint might provide us with a higher motive for forgiving the War-Lords who butchered Fryatt and Edith Cavell. But we have not forgiven the War-Lords. We have simply forgotten the War. We have not pardoned like Christ; we have only procrastinated like Hamlet. Our highest motive has been laziness; our commonest motive has been money. In this respect indeed I must apologize to the charming and chivalrous Prince of Denmark for comparing him, even on a single point, with the princes of finance and the professional politicians of our time. At least Hamlet did not spare Claudius solely because he hoped to get money out of him for the salaries of the Players, or meant to do a deal with him about wine supplied to Elsinore or debts contracted at Wittenburg. Still less was Hamlet acting entirely in the interests of Shylock, an inhabitant of the distant city of Venice. Doubtless Hamlet was sent to England in order that he might develop further these higher motives for peace and pardon. "'Twill not be noticed in him there; there the men are as mad as he."

It is therefore very natural that men should be trying to dissolve the moral problem of Hamlet into the unmoral elements of consciousness and unconsciousness. The sort of duty that Hamlet shirked is exactly the sort of duty that we are all shirking; that of dethroning justice and vindicating truth. Many are now in a mood to deny that it is a duty because it is a danger. This applies, of course, not only to international but internal and especially industrial matters. Capitalism was allowed to grow into a towering tyranny in England because the English were always putting off their popular revolution, just as the Prince of Denmark put off his palace revolution. They lectured the French about their love of bloody revolutions, exactly as they are now lecturing the French about their love of bloody wars. But the patience which suffered England to be turned into a plutocracy was not the patience of the saints; it was that patience which paralyzed the noble prince of the tragedy; *accidia* and the great refusal. In any case, the vital point is that by refusing to punish the powerful we soon lost the very idea of punishment; and turned our police into a mere persecution of the poor.

THE MEANING OF MOCK TURKEY

HAVING lately taken part in a pageant of Nursery Rhymes, in the character of Old King Cole, I meditated not so much on the glorious past of the great kingdom of Colchester, as on the more doubtful future of Nursery Rhymes. The Modern Movements cannot produce a nursery rhyme; it is one of the many such things they cannot even be conceived as doing. But if they cannot create the nursery rhyme, will they destroy it? The new poets have already abolished rhyme; and presumably the new educationalists will soon abolish nurseries. Or if they do not destroy, will they reform; which is worse? Nursery rhymes are a positive network of notions and allusions of which the enlightened disapprove. To take only my own allotted rhyme as an example, some might think the very mention of a king a piece of reactionary royalism, inconsistent with that democratic self-determination we all enjoy under some five Controllers and a committee of the Cabinet. Perhaps in the amended version he will be called President Cole. Probably he will be confused with Mr. G. D. H. Cole, the first President of the Guild Socialistic Republic. With the greatest admiration for Mr. Cole, I cannot quite picture him as so festive a figure; and I incline to think that the same influences will probably eliminate the festivity. It is said that America, having already abolished the bowl, is now attempting to abolish the pipe. After that it might very reasonably go on to abolish the fiddlers; for music can be far more maddening than wine. Tolstoy, the only consistent prophet of the Simple Life, did really go on to denounce music as a mere drug. Anyhow, it is quite intolerable that the innocent minds of children should be poisoned with the idea of anybody calling for his pipe and his bowl. There will have to be some other version, such as: “He called for his milk and he called for his lozenge,” or whatever form of bodily pleasure is still permitted to mankind. This particular verse will evidently have to be altered a great deal; it is founded on so antiquated a philosophy, that I fear even the alteration will not be easy or complete. I am not sure, for instance, that there is not a memory of animism and spiritism in the very word “soul,” used in calling the monarch a merry old soul. It would seem that some other simple phrase, such as “a merry old organism,” might be used with advantage. Indeed it would save more advantages than one; for if the reader will say the amended line in a flowing and lyrical manner, he cannot but observe that the experiment has burst the fetters of formal metre, and achieved one of these larger and lovelier melodies that we associate with vers libre.

It is needless to note the numberless other examples of nursery rhymes to which the same criticism applies. Some of the other cases are even more shocking to the true scientific spirit. For instance, in the typically old-world rhyme of "Girls and boys come out to play," there appear the truly appalling words: "Leave your supper and leave your sleep." As the great medical reformer of our day observed, in a striking and immortal phrase, "All Eugenists are agreed upon the importance of sleep." The case of supper may be more complex and controversial. If the supper were a really hygienic and wholesome supper, it might not be so difficult to leave it. But it is obvious that the whole vision which the rhyme calls up is utterly incompatible with a wise educational supervision. It is a wild vision of children playing in the streets by moonlight, for all the world as if they were fairies. Moonlight, like music, is credited with a power of upsetting the reason; and it is at least obvious that the indulgence is both unseasonable and unreasonable. No scientific reformer desires hasty and destructive action; for his reform is founded on that evolution which has produced the anthropoid from the amoeba, a process which none have ever stigmatized as hasty. But when the eugenist recalls the reckless and romantic love affairs encouraged by such moonlight, he will have to consider seriously the problem of abolishing the moon.

But indeed I have much more sympathy with the simplicity of the baby who cries for the moon than with the sort of simplicity that dismisses the moon as all moonshine. And indeed I think that these two antagonistic types of simplicity are perhaps the pivotal terms of the present transition. It is a new thing called the Simple Life against an older thing which may be called the Simple Soul; possibly exemplified, so far as nursery rhymes are concerned, by the incident of Simple Simon. I prefer the old Simple Simon, who, though ignorant of the economic theory of exchange, had at least a positive and poetic enthusiasm for pies. I think him far wiser than the new Simple Simon, who simplifies his existence by means of a perverse and pedantic antipathy to pies. It is unnecessary to add that this philosophy of pies is applicable with peculiar force to mince-pies; and thus to the whole of the Christmas tradition which descended from the first carols to the imaginative world of Dickens. The morality of that tradition is much too simple and obvious to be understood to-day. Awful as it may seem to many modern people, it means no less than that Simple Simon should have his pies, even in the absence of his pennies.

But the philosophy of the two Simple Simons is plain enough. The former is an expansion of simplicity towards complexity; Simon, conscious that he cannot himself make pies, approaches them with an ardour not unmixed with awe. But the latter is a reaction of complexity towards simplicity; in other words the other Simon refuses pies for various reasons, often including the fact that he has eaten too many of them. Most of the Simple Life as we see it to-day is, of course, a thing having this character of the surfeit or satiety of Simon, when he has become less simple and certainly less greedy. This reaction may take two diverse forms; it may send Simon searching for more and more expensive and extravagant confectionery, or it may reduce him to nibbling at some new kind of nut biscuit. For it may be noted, in passing, that it probably will not reduce him to eating dry bread. The Simple Life never accepts anything that is simple in the sense of self-evident and familiar. The thing must be uncommonly simple; it must not be simply common. Its philosophy must be something higher than the ordinary breakfast table, and something drier than dry bread. The usual process, as I have observed it in vegetarian and other summaries, seems in one sense indeed to be simple enough. The pie-man produces what looks like the same sort of pie, or is supposed to look like it; only it has thinner crust outside and nothing at all inside. Then instead of asking Simple Simon for a penny he asks him for a pound, or possibly a guinea or a five-pound note. And what is strangest of all, the customer is often so singularly Simple a Simon that he pays for it. For that is perhaps the final and most marked difference between Simon of the Simple Spirit and Simon of the Simple Life. It is the fact that the ardent and appreciative Simon was not in possession of a penny. The more refined and exalted Simon is generally in possession of far too many pennies. He is often very rich and needs to be; for the drier and thinner and emptier are the pies, the more he is charged for them. But this alone will reveal another side of the same paradox; and if it be possible to spend a lot of money on the Simple Life, it is also possible to make a great deal of money out of it. There are several self-advertisers doing very well out of the new self-denial. But wealth is always at one end of it or the other; and that is the great difference between the two Simons. Perhaps it is the difference between Simon Peter and Simon Magus.

I have before me a little pamphlet in which the most precise directions are given for a Mock Turkey, for a vegetarian mince-pie, and for a cautious and hygienic Christmas pudding. I have never quite understood why it should be a part of the Simple Life to have anything so deceptive and almost conspiratorial as an imitation turkey. The coarse and comic alderman may be expected, in his festive ribaldry, to mock a turtle; but surely a lean and earnest humanitarian ought not to mock a turkey. Nor do I understand the theory of the imitation in its relation to the ideal. Surely one who thinks meat eating mere cannibalism ought not to arrange vegetables so as to look like an animal. It is as if a converted cannibal in the Sandwich Islands were to arrange joints of meat in the shape of a missionary. The missionaries would surely regard the proceedings of their convert with something less than approval, and perhaps with something akin to alarm. But the consistency of these concessions I will leave on one side, because I am not here concerned with the concessions but with the creed itself. And I am concerned with the creed not merely as affecting its practice in diet or cookery but its general theory. For the compilers of the little book before me are great on philosophy and ethics. There are whole pages about brotherhood and fellowship and happiness and healing. In short, as the writer observes, we have "also some Mental Helps, as set forth in the flood of Psychology Literature to-day — but raised to a higher plane." It may be a little risky to set a thing forth in a flood, or a little difficult to raise a flood to a higher plane; but there is behind these rather vague expressions a very real modern intelligence and point of view, common to considerable numbers of cultivated people, and well worthy of some further study.

Under the title of "How to Think" there are twenty-four rules of which the first few are: "Empty Your Mind," "Think of the Best Things," "Appreciate," "Analyze," "Prepare Physically," "Prepare Mentally," and so on. I have met some earnest students of this school, who had apparently entered on this course, but at the time of our meeting had only graduated so far as the fulfilment of the first rule. It was more obvious, on the whole, that they had succeeded in the preliminary process of emptying the mind than that they had as yet thought of the best things, or analyzed or appreciated anything in particular. But there were others, I willingly admit, who had really thought of certain things in a genuinely thoughtful fashion, though whether they were really the best things might involve a difference of opinion between us. Still, so far as they are concerned, it is a school of thought, and therefore worth thinking about. Having been able to this extent to appreciate, I will now attempt to analyze. I have attempted to discover in my own mind where the difference between us really lies, apart from all these superficial jests and journalistic points; to ask myself why it is exactly that their ideal vegetarian differs so much from my ideal Christian. And the result of the concentrated contemplation of their ideal is, I confess, a somewhat impatient forward plunge in the progress of their initiation. I am strongly disposed to “Prepare Physically” for a conflict with the ideal vegetarian, with the only hope of hitting him on the nose. In one of Mr. P. G. Wodehouse’s stories the vegetarian rebukes his enemy for threatening to skin him, by reminding him that man should only think beautiful thoughts; to which the enemy gives the unanswerable answer: “Skinning you is a beautiful thought.” In the same way I am quite prepared to think of the best things; but I think hitting the ideal vegetarian on the nose would be one of the best things in the world. This may be an extreme example; but it involves a much more serious principle. What such philosophers often forget is that among the best things in the world are the very things which their placid universalism forbids; and that there is nothing better or more beautiful than a noble hatred. I do not profess to feel it for them; but they themselves do not seem to feel it for anything.

But as my new idealistic instructor tells me to analyze, I will attempt to analyze. In the ordinary way it would perhaps be enough to say that I do not like his ideals, and that I prefer my own, as I should say I did not like the taste of nut cutlet so much as the taste of veal cutlet. But just as it is possible to resolve the food into formulas about proteids, so it is partly possible to resolve the religious preference into formulas about principles. The most we can hope to do is to find out which of these principles are the first principles. And in this connexion I should like to speak a little more seriously, and even a little more respectfully, of the formulas about emptying the mind. I do not deny that it is sometimes a good thing to empty the mind of the mere accumulation of secondary and tertiary impressions. If what is meant is something which a friend of mine once called “a mental spring clean,” then I can see what it means. But the most drastic spring clean in a house does not generally wash away the house. It does not tear down the roof like a cobweb, or pluck up the walls like weeds. And the true formula is not so much to empty the mind as to discover that we cannot empty the mind, by emptying it as much as we can. In other words we always came back to certain fundamentals which are convictions, because we can hardly even conceive their contraries. But it is the paradox of human language that though these truths are in a manner past all parallel, hard and clear, yet any attempt to talk about them always has the appearance of being hazy and elusive.

Now this antagonism, when thus analyzed, seems to me to arise from one ultimate thing at the back of the minds of these men; that they believe in taking the body seriously. The body is a sort of pagan god, though the pagans are more often stoics than epicureans. To begin with, it is itself a beginning. The body, if not the creator of the soul in Heaven, is regarded as the practical producer of it on earth. In this their materialism is the very foundation of their asceticism. They wish us to consume clean fruit and clear water that our minds may be clear or our lives clean. The body is a sort of magical factory where these things go in as vegetables and come out as virtues. Thus digestion has the first sign of a deity; that of being an origin. It has the next sign of a deity; that if it is satisfied other things do not matter, or at any rate other things follow in their place. And so, they would say, the services of the body should be serious and not grotesque; and its smallest hints should be taken as terrible warnings. Art has a place in it because the body must be draped like an altar; and science is paraded in it because the service must be in Latin or Greek or some hieratic tongue. I quite understand these things surrounding a god or an altar; but I do not happen to worship at that altar or to believe in that god. I do not think the body ought to be taken seriously; I think it is far safer and saner when it is taken comically and even coarsely. And I think that when the body is given a holiday, as it is in a great feast, I think it should be set free not merely for wisdom but for folly, not merely to dance but to turn head over heels. In short, when it is really allowed to exaggerate its own pleasures, it ought also to exaggerate its own absurdity. The body has its own rank, and its own rights, and its own place under government; but the body is not the king but rather the Court Jester. And the human and historical importance of the old jests and buffooneries of Christmas, however vulgar or stale or trivial they appear, is that in them the popular instinct always resisted this pagan solemnity about sensual things. A man was meant to feel rather a goose when he was eating goose; and to realize that he is such stuff as stuffing is made of. That is why anyone who has in these things the touch of the comic will also have the taste for the conservative; he will be unwilling to alter what that popular instinct has made in its own absurd image. He will be doubtful about a Christmas pudding moulded in the shape of the Pyramid or the Parthenon, or anything that is not as round and ridiculous as the world. And when Mr. Pickwick, as round and ridiculous as any Christmas pudding or any world worth living in, stood straddling and smiling under the mistletoe he disinfected that vegetable of its ancient and almost vegetarian sadness and heathenism, of the blood of Baldur and the human sacrifice of the Druids.

SHAKESPEARE AND THE LEGAL LADY

I WONDER how long liberated woman will endure the invidious ban which excludes her from being a hangman. Or rather, to speak with more exactitude, a hangwoman. The very fact that there seems something vaguely unfamiliar and awkward about the word, is but a proof of the ages of sex oppression that have accustomed us to this sex privilege. The ambition would not perhaps have been understood by the prudish and sentimental heroines of Fanny Burney and Jane Austen. But it is now agreed that the farther we go beyond these faded proprieties the better; and I really do not see how we could go farther. There are always torturers of course; who will probably return under some scientific name. Obscurantists may use the old argument, that woman has never risen to the first rank in this or other arts; that Jack Ketch was not Jemima Ketch, and that the headsman was called Samson and not Delilah. And they will be overwhelmed with the old retort: that until we have hundreds of healthy women happily engaged in this healthful occupation, it will be impossible to judge whether they can rise above the average or no. Tearful sentimentalists may feel something unpleasing, something faintly repugnant, about the new feminine trade. But, as the indignant policewoman said the other day, when a magistrate excluded some of her sex and service from revolting revelations, "crime is a disease," and must be studied scientifically, however hideous it may be. Death also is a disease; and frequently a fatal one. Experiments must be made in it; and it must be inflicted in any form, however hideous, in a cool and scientific manner.

It is not true, of course, that crime is a disease. It is criminology that is a disease. But the suggestion about the painful duties of a policewoman leads naturally to my deduction about the painful duties of a hangwoman. And I make it in the faint hope of waking up some of the feminists, that they may at least be moved to wonder what they are doing, and to attempt to find out. What they are not doing is obvious enough. They are not asking themselves two perfectly plain questions; first, whether they want anybody to be a hangman; and second, whether they want everybody to be a hangman. They simply assume, with panting impetuosity, that we want everybody to be everything, criminologists, constables, barristers, executioners, torturers. It never seems to occur to them that some of us doubt the beauty and blessedness of these things, and are rather glad to limit them like other necessary evils. And this applies especially to the doubtful though defensible case of the advocate.

There is one phrase perpetually repeated and now practically stereotyped, which to my mind concentrates and sums up all the very worst qualities in the very worst journalism; all its paralysis of thought, all its monotony of chatter, all its sham culture and shoddy picturesqueness, all its perpetual readiness to cover any vulgarity of the present with any sentimentalism about the past. There is one phrase that does measure to how low an ebb the mind of my unfortunate profession can sink. It is the habit of perpetually calling any of the new lady barristers "Portia."

First of all, of course, it is quite clear that the journalist does not know who Portia was. If he has ever heard of the story of the "Merchant of Venice" he has managed to miss the only point of the story. Suppose a man had been so instructed in the story of "As You Like It" that he remained under the impression that Rosalind merely was a boy, and was the brother of Celia. We should say that the plot of the comedy had reached his mind in a rather confused form. Suppose a man had seen a whole performance of the play of "Twelfth Night" without discovering the fact that the page called Cesario was really a girl called Viola. We should say that he had succeeded in seeing the play without exactly seeing the point. But there is exactly the same blind stupidity in calling a barrister Portia; or even in calling Portia a barrister. It misses in exactly the same sense the whole meaning of the scene. Portia is no more a barrister than Rosalind is a boy. She is no more the learned jurist whom Shylock congratulates than Viola is the adventurous page whom Olivia loves. The whole point of her position is that she is a heroic and magnanimous fraud. She has not taken up the legal profession, or any profession; she has not sought that public duty, or any public duty. Her action, from first to last, is wholly and entirely private. Her motives are not professional but private. Her ideal is not public but private. She acts as much on personal grounds in the Trial Scene as she does in the Casket Scene. She acts in order to save a friend, and especially a friend of the husband whom she loves. Anything less like the attitude of an advocate, for good or evil, could not be conceived. She seeks individually to save an individual; and in order to do so is ready to *break* all the existing laws of the profession and the public tribunal; to assume lawlessly powers she has not got, to intrude where she would never be legally admitted, to pretend to be somebody else, to dress up as a man; to do what is actually a crime against the law. This is not what is now called the attitude of a public woman; it is certainly not the attitude of a lady lawyer, any more than of any other kind of lawyer. But it is emphatically the attitude of a private woman; that much more ancient and much more powerful thing.

Suppose that Portia had really become an advocate, merely by advocating the cause of Antonio against Shylock. The first thing that follows is that, as like as not, she would be briefed in the next case to advocate the cause of Shylock against Antonio. She would, in the ordinary way of business, have to help Shylock to punish with ruin the private extravagances of Gratiano. She would have to assist Shylock to distrain on poor Launcelot Gobbo and sell up all his miserable sticks. She might well be employed by him to ruin the happiness of Lorenzo and Jessica, by urging some obsolete parental power or some technical flaw in the marriage service. Shylock evidently had a great admiration for her forensic talents; and indeed that sort of lucid and detached admission of the talents of a successful opponent is a very Jewish characteristic. There seems no reason why he should not have employed her regularly, whenever he wanted some one to recover ruthless interest, to ruin needy households, to drive towards theft or suicide the souls of desperate men. But there seems every reason to doubt whether the Portia whom Shakespeare describes for us is likely to have taken on the job.

Anyhow, that is the job; and I am not here arguing that it is not a necessary job; or that it is always an indefensible job. Many honourable men have made an arguable case for the advocate who has to support Shylock, and men much worse than Shylock. But that is the job; and to cover up its ugly realities with a loose literary quotation that really refers to the exact opposite, is one of those crawling and cowardly evasions and verbal fictions which make all this sort of servile journalism so useless for every worthy or working purpose. If we wish to consider whether a lady should be a barrister, we should consider sanely and clearly what a barrister is and what a lady is; and then come to our conclusion according to what we considered worthy or worthless in the traditions of the two things. But the spirit of advertisement, which tries to associate soap with sunlight or grapenuts with grapes, calls to its rescue an old romance of Venice and tries to cover up a practical problem in the robes of a romantic heroine of the stage. This is the sort of confusion that really leads to corruption. In one sense it would matter very little that the legal profession was formally open to women, for it is only a very exceptional sort of woman who would see herself as a vision of beauty in the character of Mr. Sergeant Buzfuz. And most girls are more likely to be stage-struck, and want to be the real Portia on the stage, rather than law-struck and want to be the very reverse of Portia in a law court. For that matter, it would make relatively little difference if formal permission were given to a woman to be a hangman or a torturer. Very few women would have a taste for it; and very few men would have a taste for the women who had a taste for it. But advertisement, by its use of the vulgar picturesque, can hide the realities of this professional problem, as it can hide the realities of tinned meats and patent medicines. It can conceal the fact that the hangman exists to hang, and that the torturer exists to torture. Similarly it can conceal the fact that the Buzfuz barrister exists to bully. It can hide from the innocent female aspirants outside even the perils and potential abuses that would be admitted by the honest male advocate inside. And that is part of a very much larger problem, which extends beyond this particular profession to a great many other professions; and not least to the lowest and most lucrative of all modern professions: that of professional politics.

I wonder how many people are still duped by the story of the extension of the franchise. I wonder how many Radicals have been a little mystified, in remarking how many Tories and reactionaries have helped in the extension of the franchise. The truth is that calling in crowds of new voters will very often be to the interest, not only of Tories, but of really tyrannical Tories. It will often be in the interest of the guilty to appeal to the innocent; if they are innocent in the matter of other people’s conduct as well as of their own. The tyrant calls in those he has not wronged, to defend him against those he has wronged. He is not afraid of the new and ignorant masses who know too little; he is afraid of the older and nearer nucleus of those who know too much. And there is nothing that would please the professional politician more than to flood the constituencies with innocent negroes or remote Chinamen, who might possibly admire him more, because they knew him less. I should not wonder if the Party System had been saved three or four times at the point of extinction, by the introduction of new voters who had never had time to discover why it deserved to be extinguished. The last of these rescues by an inrush of dupes was the enfranchisement of women.

What is true of the political is equally true of the professional ambition. Much of the mere imitation of masculine tricks and trades is indeed trivial enough; it is a mere masquerade. The greatest of Roman satirists noted that in his day the more fast of the fashionable ladies liked to fight as gladiators in the amphitheatre. In that one statement he pinned and killed, like moths on a cork, a host of women prophets and women pioneers and large-minded liberators of their sex in modern England and America. But besides these more showy she-gladiators there are also multitudes of worthy and sincere women who take the new (or rather old) professions seriously. The only disadvantage is that in many of those professions they can only continue to be serious by ceasing to be sincere. But the simplicity with which they first set out is an enormous support to old and complex and corrupt institutions. No modest person setting out to learn an elaborate science can be expected to start with the assumption that it is not worth learning. The young lady will naturally begin to learn Law as gravely as she begins to learn Greek. It is not in that mood that she will conceive independent doubts about the ultimate relations of Law and Justice. Just as the Suffragettes are already complaining that the realism of industrial revolution interferes with their new hobby of voting, so the lady lawyers are quite likely to complain that the realism of legal reformers interferes with their new hobby of legalism. We are suffering in every department from the same cross-purposes that can be seen in the case of any vulgar patent medicine. In Law and Medicine, we have the thing advertised in the public press instead of analyzed by the public authority. What we want is not the journalistic Portia but the theatrical Portia, who is also the real Portia. We do not want the woman who will enter the law court with the solemn sense of a lasting vocation. We want a Portia; a woman who will enter it as lightly, and leave it as gladly as she did.

The same thing is true of a fact nobler than any fiction; the story, so often quoted, of the woman who won back mediaeval France. Joan of Arc was a soldier; but she was not a normal soldier. If she had been, she would have been vowed, not to the war for France, but to any war with Flanders, Spain or the Italian cities to which her feudal lord might lead her. If she were a modern conscript, she would be bound to obey orders not always coming from St. Michael. But the point is here that merely making all women soldiers, under either system, could do nothing at all except whitewash and ratify feudalism or conscription. And both feudalism and conscription are much more magnanimous things than our modern system of police and prisons.

In fact there are few sillier implications than that in the phrase that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. A cook who really rules a kitchen on that principle would wait patiently for milk from the bull, because he got it from the cow. It is neither a perceptible fact nor a first principle that the sexes must not specialize; and if one sex must specialize in adopting dubious occupations, we ought to be very glad that the other sex specializes in abstaining from them. That is how the balance of criticism in the Commonwealth is maintained; as by a sort of government and opposition. In this, as in other things, the new régime is that everybody shall join the government. The government of the moment will be monstrously strengthened; for everybody will be a tyrant and everybody will be a slave. The detached criticism of official fashions will disappear; and none was ever so detached as the deadly criticism that came from women. When all women wear uniforms, all women will wear gags; for a gag is part of every uniform in the world.

ON BEING AN OLD BEAN

I WAS looking at some press cuttings that had pursued me down to a remote cottage beside a river of Norfolk; and as it happened, those that caught my eye were mostly not from the vulgar monopolist press, but from all sorts of quieter and even more studious publications. But what struck me as curious about the collection as a whole was the selection, among half a hundred things that were hardly worth saying, of the things that were considered worth repeating. There seemed to be a most disproportionate importance attached to a trivial phrase I had used about the alleged indecorum of a gentleman calling his father an old bean. I had been asked to join in a discussion in the "Morning Post," touching the alleged disrespect of youth towards age, and I had done so; chiefly because I have a respect for the "Morning Post" for its courage about political corruption and cosmopolitan conspiracies, in spite of deep disagreement on other very vital things. And I said what I should have thought was so true as to be trite. I said that it makes life narrower and not broader to lose the special note of piety or respect for the past still living; and that to call an old man an old bean is merely to lose all intelligent sense of the significance of an old man. Since then, to my great entertainment, I seem to have figured in various papers as a sort of ferocious heavy father, come out on my own account to curse the numerous young sprigs who have called me an old bean. But this is an error. I should be the last to deny that I am heavy, but I am not fatherly; nor am I ferocious, at any rate I am not ferocious about this. Individually I regard the question with a detachment verging on indifference. I cannot imagine anybody except an aged and very lean vegetarian positively dancing with joy at being called an old bean; and I am not a very lean vegetarian. But still less can I imagine anyone regarding the accusation with horror or resentment; the sins and crimes blackening the career of a bean must be comparatively few; its character must be simple and free from complexity, and its manner of life innocent. A philosophic rationalist wrote to me the other day to say that my grubbing in the grossest superstitions of the past reminded him of "an old sow pig rooting in the refuse of the kitchen heap," and expressed a hope that I should be dragged from this occupation and made to resume "the cap and bells of yore." That is something like a vigorous and vivid comparison; though my Feminist friends may be distressed at my being compared to a sow as well as a pig; and though I am not quite clear myself about how the animal would get on when he had resumed the cap and bells of yore. But it would certainly be a pity, when it was possible to find this image in the kitchen heap, to be content with one from the kitchen-garden. It would indeed be a lost opportunity to work yourself up to the furious pitch of calling your enemy a beast, and then only call him a bean.

From the extracts I saw, it would seem that certain ladies were especially lively in their protest against my antiquated prejudices; and rioted in quite a bean-feast of old beans. The form the argument generally takes is to ask why parents and children should not be friends, or, as they often put it (I deeply regret to say), pals. Neither term seems to me to convey a sufficiently distinctive meaning; and I take it that the best term for what they really mean is that they should be comrades. Now comradeship is a very real and splendid thing; but this is simply the cant of comradeship. A boy does not take his mother with him when he goes bird-nesting; and his affection for his mother is of another kind unconnected with the idea of her climbing a tree. Three men do not generally take an aged and beloved aunt with them as part of their luggage on a walking tour; and if they did, it would not be so much disrespectful to age as unjust to youth. For this confusion between two valuable but varied things, like most of such modern confusions, is quite as liable to obscurantist as to mutinous abuse; and is as easy to turn into tyranny as into licence. If a boy's aunts are his comrades, why should he need any comrades except his aunts? If his father and mother are perfect and consummate pals, why should he fool away his time with more ignorant, immature and insufficient pals? As in a good many other modern things, the end of the old parental dignity would be the beginning of a new parental tyranny. I would rather the boy loved his father as his father than feared him as a Frankenstein giant of a superior and supercilious friend, armed in that unequal friendship with all the weapons of psychology and psycho-analysis. If he loves him as a father he loves him as an older man; and if we are to abolish all differences of tone towards those older than ourselves, we must presumably do the same to those younger than ourselves. All healthy people, for instance, feel an instinctive and almost impersonal affection for a baby. Is a baby a comrade? Is he to climb the tree and go on the walking tour; or are we on his account to abolish all trees and tours? Are the grandfather aged ninety, the son aged thirty, and the grandson aged three, all to set out together on their travels, with the same knapsacks and knickerbockers? I have read somewhere that in one of the Ten or Twelve or Two Hundred Types of Filial Piety reverenced by the Chinese, one was an elderly sage and statesman, who dressed up as a child of four and danced before his yet more elderly parents, to delight them with the romantic illusion that they were still quite young. This in itself could not but attract remark; but this in itself I am prepared to defend. It was an exceptional and even extraordinary festivity, like the reversals of the Saturnalia; and I wish we could have seen some vigorous old gentleman like Lord Halsbury or the Archbishop of Canterbury performing a similar act of piety. But in the Utopia of comradeship now commended to us, old and young are expected normally to think alike, feel alike and talk alike; and may therefore normally and permanently be supposed to dress alike. Whether the parents dress as children or the children as parents, it is clear that they must all dress as pals, whatever be the ceremonial dress of that rank. I imagine it as something in tweeds, with rather a loud check.

As I considered these things I looked across the kitchen-garden of the cottage, and the association of peas and beans brought the fancy back to the foolish figure of speech with which the discussion began. There is a proverb, which is like most of our popular sayings, a country proverb, about things that are as like as two peas. There is something significant in the fact that this is as near as the rural imagination could get to a mere mechanical monotony. For as a matter of fact it is highly improbable that any two peas are exactly alike. A survey of the whole world of peas, with all their forms and uses, would probably reveal every sort of significance between the sweet peas of sentiment and the dried peas of asceticism. Modern machinery has gone far beyond such rude rural attempts at dullness. Things are not as like as two peas in the sense that they are as like as two pins. But the flippant phrase under discussion does really imply that they are as like as two beans. It is really part of the low and levelling philosophy that assimilates all things too much to each other. It does not mean that we see any fanciful significance in the use of the term, as in a country proverb. It is not that we see an old gentleman with fine curling white hair and say to him poetically, “Permit me, venerable cauliflower, to inquire after your health.” It is not that we address an old farmer with a deep and rich complexion, saying, “I trust, most admirable of beetroots, that you are as well as you look.” When we say, “How are you, old bean,” the error is not so much that we say something rude, but that we may say nothing because we mean nothing.

As I happened to meet at that moment a girl belonging to the family of the cottage, I showed her the cutting, and asked her opinion upon the great progressive problem of calling your father an old bean. At which she laughed derisively, and merely said, “As if anybody would!”

THE FEAR OF THE FILM

LONG lists are being given of particular cases in which children have suffered in spirits or health from alleged horrors of the kinema. One child is said to have had a fit after seeing a film; another to have been sleepless with some fixed idea taken from a film; another to have killed his father with a carving-knife through having seen a knife used in a film. This may possibly have occurred; though if it did, anybody of common sense would prefer to have details about that particular child, rather than about that particular picture. But what is supposed to be the practical moral of it, in any case? Is it that the young should never see a story with a knife in it? Are they to be brought up in complete ignorance of "The Merchant of Venice" because Shylock flourishes a knife for a highly disagreeable purpose? Are they never to hear of Macbeth, lest it should slowly dawn upon their trembling intelligence that it is a dagger that they see before them? It would be more practical to propose that a child should never see a real carving-knife, and still more practical that he should never see a real father. All that may come; the era of preventive and prophetic science has only begun. We must not be impatient. But when we come to the cases of morbid panic after some particular exhibition, there is yet more reason to clear the mind of cant. It is perfectly true that a child will have the horrors after seeing some particular detail. It is quite equally true that nobody can possibly predict what that detail will be. It certainly need not be anything so obvious as a murder or even a knife. I should have thought anybody who knew anything about children, or for that matter anybody who had been a child, would know that these nightmares are quite incalculable. The hint of horror may come by any chance in any connexion. If the kinema exhibited nothing but views of country vicarages or vegetarian restaurants, the ugly fancy is as likely to be stimulated by these things as by anything else. It is like seeing a face in the carpet; it makes no difference that it is the carpet at the vicarage.

I will give two examples from my own most personal circle; I could give hundreds from hearsay. I know a child who screamed steadily for hours if he had been taken past the Albert Memorial. This was not a precocious precision or excellence in his taste in architecture. Nor was it a premature protest against all that gimcrack German culture which nearly entangled us in the downfall of the barbaric tyranny. It was the fear of something which he himself described with lurid simplicity as “The Cow with the India-rubber Tongue.” It sounds rather a good title for a creepy short story. At the base of the Albert Memorial (I may explain for those who have never enjoyed that monument) are four groups of statuary representing Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. America especially is very overwhelming; borne onward on a snorting bison who plunges forward in a fury of western progress, and is surrounded with Red Indians, Mexicans, and all sorts of pioneers, 0 pioneers, armed to the teeth. The child passed this transatlantic tornado with complete coolness and indifference. Europe however is seated on a bull so mild as to look like a cow; the tip of its tongue is showing and happened to be discoloured by weather; suggesting, I suppose, a living thing coming out of the dead marble. Now nobody could possibly foretell that a weather-stain would occur in that particular place, and fill that particular child with that particular fancy. Nobody is likely to propose meeting it by forbidding graven images, like the Moslems and the Jews. Nobody has said (as yet) that it is bad morals to make a picture of a cow. Nobody has even pleaded that it is bad manners for a cow to put its tongue out. These things are utterly beyond calculation; they are also beyond counting, for they occur all over the place, not only to morbid children but to any children. I knew this particular child very well, being a rather older child myself at the time. He certainly was not congenitally timid or feeble-minded; for he risked going to prison to expose the Marconi Scandal and died fighting in the Great War.

Here is another example out of scores. A little girl, now a very normal and cheerful young lady, had an insomnia of insane terror entirely arising from the lyric of “Little Bo-Peep.” After an inquisition like that of the confessor or the psycho-analyst, it was found that the word “bleating” had some obscure connexion in her mind with the word “bleeding.” There was thus perhaps an added horror in the phrase “heard”; in hearing rather than seeing the flowing of blood. Nobody could possibly provide against that sort of mistake. Nobody could prevent the little girl from hearing about sheep, any more than the little boy from hearing about cows. We might abolish all nursery rhymes; and as they are happy and popular and used with universal success, it is very likely that we shall. But the whole point of the mistake about that phrase is that it might have been a mistake about any phrase. We cannot foresee all the fancies that might arise, not only out of what we say, but of what we do not say. We cannot avoid promising a child a caramel lest he should think we say cannibal, or conceal the very word "hill" lest it should sound like "hell."

All the catalogues and calculations offered us by the party of caution in this controversy are therefore quite worthless. It is perfectly true that examples can be given of a child being frightened of this, that or the other. But we can never be certain of his being frightened of the same thing twice. It is not on the negative side, by making lists of vetoes, that the danger can be avoided; it can never indeed be entirely avoided. We can only fortify the child on the positive side by giving him health and humour and a trust in God; not omitting (what will much mystify the moderns) an intelligent appreciation of the idea of authority, which is only the other side of confidence, and which alone can suddenly and summarily cast out such devils. But we may be sure that most modern people will not look at it in this way. They will think it more scientific to attempt to calculate the incalculable. So soon as they have realized that it is not so simple as it looks, they will try to map it out, however complicated it may be. When they discover that the terrible detail need not be a knife, but might just as well be a fork, they will only say there is a fork complex as well as a knife complex. And that increasing complexity of complexes is the net in which liberty will be taken.

Instead of seeing in the odd cases of the cow's tongue or the bleating sheep the peril of their past generalizations, they will see them only as starting points for new generalizations. They will get yet another theory out of it. And they will begin acting on the theory long before they have done thinking about it. They will start out with some new and crude conception that sculpture has made children scream or that nursery rhymes have made children sleepless; and the thing will be a clause in a programme of reform before it has begun to be a conclusion in a serious study of psychology. That is the practical problem about modern liberty which the critics will not see; of which eugenics is one example and all this amateur child-psychology is another. So long as an old morality was in black and white like a chess-board, even a man who wanted more of it made white was certain that no more of it would be made black. Now he is never certain what vices may not be released, but neither is he certain what virtues may be forbidden. Even if he did not think it wrong to run away with a married woman, he knew that his neighbours only thought it wrong because the woman was married. They did not think it wrong to run away with a red-haired woman, or a left-handed woman, or a woman subject to headaches. But when we let loose a thousand eugenical speculations, all adopted before they are verified and acted on even before they are adopted, he is just as likely as not to find himself separated from the woman for those or any other reasons. Similarly there was something to be said for restrictions, even rather puritanical and provincial restrictions, upon what children should read or see, so long as they fenced in certain fixed departments like sex or sensational tortures. But when we begin to speculate on whether other sensations may not stimulate as dangerously as sex, those other sensations may be as closely controlled as sex. When, let us say, we hear that the eye and brain are weakened by the rapid turning of wheels as well as by the most revolting torturing of men, we have come into a world in which cart-wheels and steam-engines may become as obscene as racks and thumbscrews. In short, so long as we *combine* ceaseless and often reckless scientific speculation with rapid and often random social reform, the result must inevitably be not anarchy but ever-increasing tyranny. There must be a ceaseless and almost mechanical multiplication of things forbidden. The resolution to cure all the ills that flesh is heir to, combined with the guesswork about all possible ills that flesh and nerve and brain-cell may be heir to — these two things conducted simultaneously must inevitably spread a sort of panic of prohibition. Scientific imagination and social reform between them will quite logically and almost legitimately have made us slaves. This seems to me a very clear, a very fair and a very simple point of public criticism; and I am much mystified about why so many publicists cannot even see what it is, but take refuge in charges of anarchism, which firstly are not true, and secondly have nothing to do with it.

WINGS AND THE HOUSEMAID

AMONG the numberless fictitious things that I have fortunately never written, there was a little story about a logical maiden lady engaging apartments in which she was not allowed to keep a cat or dog, who, nevertheless, stipulated for permission to keep a bird, and who eventually walked round to her new lodgings accompanied by an ostrich. There was a moral to the fable, connected with that exaggeration of small concessions, in which, for instance, the Germans indulged about espionage, or the Jews about interest. But this faded fancy returned to my mind in another fashion when a very humane lady suggested the other day that every domestic servant, including the butler, I presume, should be described as "a home-bird." Unless the lady is mis-reported, which is likely enough, she wanted servants called home-birds because they keep the home-fires burning, which, as many will be ready to point out, is hardly the particular form in which the domesticity of the nest commonly expresses itself. But I am not at all disposed to deride the lady's real meaning, still less her real motives, which referred to a real movement of social conscience and sentiment, however wrongly expressed. She was troubled about the implied insolence of calling servants servants and apparently even of talking about "maids" or "the cook." Therefore she evolved the ornithological substitute; about which, of course, it would be easy to evolve a whole aviary of allegorical parodies. It would be easy to ask whether a private secretary is to be called a secretary bird, or, perhaps, the telephone girl a humming-bird; but it will be enough to say generally of the proposal, in its present verbal form, that one has only to submit it to any living and human house-maid in order to find that particular home-bird developing rapidly into a mocking-bird. Nevertheless, as I have said, we should not merely dismiss any social doubts thus suggested, or any impulse towards a warmer respect for work generally grossly under-valued. Too many people, of the more snobbish social strata, have treated their servants as home-birds; as owls, for instance, who can be up all night, or as vultures, who can eat the refuse fit for the dustbin. I would not throw cold water on any indignation on this score; but I note it as typical of the time that the indignation should fail on the side of intelligence. For it is the mark of our time, above almost everything else, that it goes by associations and not by arguments; that is why it has a hundred arts and no philosophy.

Thus, for instance, the lady in question lumps together a number of terms that have no logical connexion at all. There is at least a meaning in objecting to one person calling another a servant. As I shall suggest in a moment, there is not much sense in changing the name when you do not change the thing; and there is a great deal of nonsense in denying the status of the servant at the moment when you are making it more servile. Still, anybody can see how the term might be held to hurt human dignity; but the other terms mentioned cannot hurt human dignity at all. I cannot conceive why it should insult a cook to call her a cook, any more than it insults a cashier to call him a cashier; to say nothing of the fact that dealing with cookery is far nobler than dealing with cash. And the third title certainly tells entirely the other way. The word “maid” is not only a noble old English word, with no note of social distinction; for a mediaeval king might have praised his daughter as “a good maid.” It is a word loaded with magnificent memories, in history, literature, and religion. Joan the Maid suggests a little more than Joan the maid-servant; and, as it says in Mr. Belloc’s stirring little poem: —

By God who made the Master Maids,   I know not whence she came;
But the sword she bore to save the soul   Went up like an altar flame.

It is needless here to trace the idea back to its splendid sources; or to explain how the word maid has been the highest earthly title, not only on earth but in Heaven. “Mother and maiden was never none but she.” Here at least modern humanitarian criticism has gone curiously astray, even for its own purposes; any servant may well be satisfied with the dignity of being called the maid, just as any workman may be rightly honoured by the accident which calls him the man. For in a modern industrial dispute, as reported in the papers, I always feel there is a final verdict and sentence in the very statement of the case of Masters *versus* Men.

The true objection lies much farther back. It begins with the simple fact that the home-bird is not in her own home. When that particular sparrow stokes the fire, as above described, it is not her own fireside; when we happen to meet a canary carrying a coal scuttle, the canary is not generally a coal-owner. In short, wherever we find pelicans, penguins, or flamingoes keeping the home-fires burning, they may all be earnestly wishing that they could fly away to their homes. Now a moderate amount of this temporary and vicarious domesticity is a natural enough accident in social relations, so long as it does not obscure and obstruct more individual and direct domesticity. In short, there is no particular harm in the maid being a housemaid in some one else's house, if she normally has a chance of being a housewife in her own. As I shall suggest in a moment, this is what was really implied in certain older institutions to which the wisest are now looking back. But in any case it is odd that the home-bird should thus plume itself at this moment; for the trend of the time is certainly not towards any domesticity, direct or indirect. The birds have long been netted or caged, by cold, fear and hunger, into larger and more terrorist systems. The happy home-birds are keeping the factory fires burning. The only legal and industrial tendency seems to be to shut up more and more of the women, those strange wild fowl, in those colossal cages of iron. Nor is the change one of mere aesthetic atmosphere; we know now that it is one of economic fact and may soon be one of legal definition. In a word, it is queer that we should suddenly grow sensitive about calling people servants when we are in the act of making them slaves. Indeed, in many concrete cases we may already be said to be making them convicts. The true moral meaning of much that is called the improvement of prisons is not that we are turning prisoners into a better sort of people, but rather that we are treating a better sort of people as prisoners. The broad arrow is broadened in so liberal a fashion as to cover those who would once have been counted respectable and there is a sense in which the broad arrow, becoming broader, is bound to become blunter. The prison becomes utilitarian as well as disciplinary, as the factory becomes disciplinary as well as utilitarian. The two become simply and substantially the same; for they have to treat the same sort of impecunious people in the same sort of impersonal way. People may differ about the definition of that common condition or status. Some may eagerly salute persons involved as home-birds; others may prefer to describe them as jail-birds.

For the rest, if anybody wants to strike the central stream of moderate sanity in the servant problem, I recommend him first to read with a close attention or preferably to sing in a loud voice, the song called "Sally in Our Alley." In that great and gloriously English lyric, the poet does not disguise the accidental discomforts of the great system of apprenticeship which was part of the glory of the Guilds. He even exhibits his Christian prejudices by comparing his master to a Turk. He actually entertains, as every reflective social reformer must, the hypothetical alternative of the Servile State, and considers the relative advantages of a slave that rows a galley. But the point is that what makes him refuse and endure is hope, the sure and certain hope of a glorious emancipation; not the hopeless hope of a chance in a scramble, with a general recommendation to get on or get out, but a charter of knowledge and honour, that “when his seven long years are past,” a door shall open to him, which our age has shut on the great multitude of mankind.

THE SLAVERY OF FREE VERSE

THE truth most needed to-day is that the end is never the right end. The beginning is the right end at which to begin. The modern man has to read everything backwards; as when he reads journalism first and history afterwards — if at all. He is like a blind man exploring an elephant, and condemned to begin at the very tip of its tail. But he is still more unlucky; for when be has a first principle, it is generally the very last principle that he ought to have. He starts, as it were, with one infallible dogma about the elephant; that its tail is its trunk. He works the wrong way round on principle; and tries to fit all the practical facts to his principle. Because the elephant has no eyes in its tail-end, he calls it a blind elephant; and expatiates on its ignorance, superstition, and need of compulsory education. Because it has no tusks at its tail-end, he says that tusks are a fantastic flourish attributed to a fabulous creature, an ivory chimera that must have come through the ivory gate. Because it does not as a rule pick up things with its tail, he dismisses the magical story that it can pick up things with its trunk. He probably says it is plainly a piece of anthropomorphism to suppose that an elephant can pack its trunk. The result is that he becomes as pallid and worried as a pessimist; the world to him is not only an elephant, but a white elephant. He does not know what to do with it, and cannot be persuaded of the perfectly simple explanation; which is that he has not made the smallest real attempt to make head or tail of the animal. He will not begin at the right end; because he happens to have come first on the wrong end.

But in nothing do I feel this modern trick, of trusting to a fag-end rather than a first principle, more than in the modern treatment of poetry. With this or that particular metrical form, or unmetrical form, or unmetrical formlessness, I might be content or not, as it achieves some particular effect or not. But the whole general tendency, regarded as an emancipation, seems to me more or less of an enslavement. It seems founded on one subconscious idea; that talk is freer than verse; and that verse, therefore, should claim the freedom of talk. But talk, especially in our time, is not free at all. It is tripped up by trivialities, tamed by conventions loaded with dead words, thwarted by a thousand meaningless things. It does not liberate the soul so much, when a man can say, “You always look so nice,” as when he can say, “But your eternal summer shall not fade.” The first is an awkward and constrained sentence ending with the weakest word ever used, or rather misused, by man. The second is like the gesture of a giant or the sweeping flight of an archangel; it has the very rush of liberty. I do not despise the man who says the first, because he *means* the second; and what he means is more important than what he says. I have always done my best to emphasize the inner dignity of these daily things, in spite of their dull externals; but I do not think it an improvement that the inner spirit itself should grow more external and more dull. It is thought right to discourage numbers of prosaic people trying to be poetical; but I think it much more of a bore to watch numbers of poetical people trying to be prosaic. In short, it is another case of tail-foremost philosophy; instead of watering the laurel hedge of the cockney villa, we bride the cockney to brick in the plant of Apollo.

I have always had the fancy that if a man were really free, he would talk in rhythm and even in rhyme. His most hurried post card would be a sonnet; and his most hasty wires like harp-strings. He would breathe a song into the telephone; a song which would be a lyric or an epic, according to the time involved in awaiting the call; or in his inevitable altercation with the telephone girl, the duel would be also a duet. He would express his preference among the dishes at dinner in short impromptu poems, combining the more mystical gratitude of grace with a certain epigrammatic terseness, more convenient for domestic good feeling. If Mr. Yeats can say, in exquisite verse, the exact number of bean-rows he would like on his plantation, why not the number of beans he would like on his plate? If he can issue a rhymed request to procure the honey-bee, why not pass the honey? Misunderstandings might arise at first with the richer and more fantastic poets; and Francis Thompson might have asked several times for “the gold skins of undelirious wine” before anybody understood that he wanted the grapes. Nevertheless, I will maintain that his magnificent phrase would be a far more real expression of God’s most glorious gift of the vine, than if he had simply said in a peremptory manner “grapes”; especially if the culture of compulsory education had carefully taught him to pronounce it as if it were “gripes.” And if a man could ask for a potato in the form of a poem, the poem would not be merely a more romantic but a much more realistic rendering of a potato. For a potato is a poem; it is even an ascending scale of poems; beginning at the root, in subterranean grotesques in the Gothic manner, with humps like the deformities of a goblin and eyes like a beast of Revelation, and rising up through the green shades of the earth to a crown that has the shape of stars and the hue of Heaven.

But the truth behind all this is that expressed in that very ancient mystical notion, the music of the spheres. It is the idea that, at the back of everything, existence begins with a harmony and not a chaos; and, therefore, when we really spread our wings and find a wider freedom, we find it in something more continuous and recurrent, and not in something more fragmentary and crude. Freedom is fullness, especially fullness of life; and a full vessel is more rounded and complete than an empty one, and not less so. To vary Browning's phrase, we find in prose the broken arcs, in poetry the perfect round. Prose is not the freedom of poetry; rather prose is the fragments of poetry. Prose, at least in the prosaic sense, is poetry interrupted, held up and cut off from its course; the chariot of Phoebus stopped by a block in the Strand. But when it begins to move again at all, I think we shall find certain old-fashioned things move with it, such as repetition and even measure, rhythm and even rhyme. We shall discover with horror that the wheels of the chariot go round and round; and even that the horses of the chariot have the usual number of feet.

Anyhow, the right way to encourage the cortège is not to put the cart before the horse. It is to make poetry more poetical by ignoring what distinguishes it from prose. There may be many new ways of making the chariot move again; but I confess that most of the modern theorists seem to me to be lecturing on a new theory of its mechanics, while it is standing still. If a wizard before my very eyes works a miracle with a rope, a boy and a mango plant, I am only theoretically interested in the question of a sceptic, who asks why it should not be done with a garden hose, a maiden aunt and a monkey-tree. Why not, indeed, if he can do it? If a saint performs a miracle to-morrow, by turning a stone into a fish, I shall be the less concerned at being asked, in the abstract, why a man should not also turn a camp-stool into a cockatoo; but let him do it, and not merely explain how it can be done. It is certain that words such as "birds" and "sweet," which are as plain as "fish" or "stone," can be combined in such a miracle as "Bare ruined quires where late the sweet birds sang." So far as I can follow my own feelings, the metre and fall of the feet, even the rhyme and place in the sonnet, have a great deal to do with producing such an effect. I do not say there is no other way of producing such an effect. I only ask, not without longing, where else in this wide and weary time is it produced? I know I cannot produce it; and I do not in fact feel it when I hear vers libres. I know not where is that Promethean heat; and, even to express my ignorance, I am glad to find better words than my own.

PROHIBITION AND THE PRESS

AN organ of the Nonconformist Conscience, while commenting very kindly on my recent remarks about America, naturally went on to criticize, though equally kind, my remarks about Prohibition. Now, so far as I am concerned, the problem is not so much Prohibition with a large P as prohibition with a small one. I mean, I am interested not so much in liquor as in liberty. I want to know on what principle the prohibitionists are proceeding in this case, and how they think it applies to any other case. And I cannot for the life of me make out. They might be expected to argue that there is something peculiar in principle about the position of liquor, and make that the basis for attacking liquor. But in point of fact they do not attack liquor; they do quite simply attack liberty. I mean that they are satisfied with saying about this liberty what can obviously be said about any liberty — that it can be, and is, abominably abused. If that had been a final objection to any form of freedom, there never would have been any form of freedom. And there most notably would never have been the particular forms of freedom which are most sacred to the Nonconformist Conscience. The Nonconformists have demanded liberty to secede, though they knew it led to an anarchy of sects and spiteful controversies. They had demanded the licence to print, though they knew it involved the licence to print twenty falsehoods to one truth. I suppose there is nothing in history of which the modern Puritan would be more innocently proud than the thing called the Liberty of the Press, which arose out of the pamphleteering of the seventeenth century, and especially the great pamphlet of Milton. Yet everything that Milton says, about allowing controversy in spite of its dangers, could be applied word for word to the case of allowing drinking in spite of its dangers. Is not the virtue that shuts itself up in a temperance hotel a fugitive and cloistered virtue? Is not the morality that dare not have wine on the table, or in the town, emphatically one that dares not sally out to meet its enemy? All Milton's arguments for freedom are arguments for beer; and, of course, Milton himself would certainly have applied them to beer. The highly successful brewer to whom he was Latin secretary — a gentleman of the name of Williams, otherwise Cromwell — would hardly have been pleased with him if he had not applied them to beer.

For instance the critic whom I am here venturing to criticize says that people differ about Prohibition according to their knowledge or ignorance of the dreadful state of the slums, the ravages of alcoholism in our industrial cities, and all the rest of it. Whether or no this be a good argument against the public-house, there is no doubt that I could easily turn it against the public press. I could insist that I am a common Cockney Fleet Street journalist who has done nightly work for daily papers and fed off nocturnal potato-stalls; whereas he is probably a cultivated Congregationalist minister writing in a library of theological works. I might say that I know better than he does, or than most people do, the cynicism and the vulgarity and the vices of journalism. But, as a matter of fact, the vices of journalism have by this time become as evident to the people who read journals as to the people who write them. All responsible people are complaining of the power and condition of the press, and no people more than these earnest and ethical Nonconformists. It is they who complain most bitterly that a Jingo press can manufacture war. It is they who declare most indignantly that a sensational press is undermining morality. They often, to my mind, unduly confuse matters of morality with matters of taste. They often, to my mind, denounce as mere Jingoism what is simply the deeply democratic and popular character of patriotism. But nobody will deny that to a large extent they are legitimately and logically alarmed about the abuses and absurdities of the newspapers. But they have not yet used this as an argument for a veto upon all newspapers. Why in the world should they use the parallel evils as an argument for a veto on all public-houses?

For my part I do feel very strongly about the frivolity and irresponsibility of the press. It seems impossible to exaggerate the evil that can be done by a corrupt and unscrupulous press. If drink directly ruins the family, it only indirectly ruins the nation. But bad journalism does directly ruin the nation, considered as a nation; it acts on the corporate national will and sways the common national decision. It may force a decision in a few hours that will be an incurable calamity for hundreds of years. It may drive a whole civilization to defeat, to slavery, to bankruptcy, to universal famine. Even at this moment there are prominent papers wildly urging us to war — not with our foes but with our friends. There are some journalists so wicked as to want war, almost for its own sake; there are more journalists so weak-minded as to work for war without even wanting it. Let us give one example out of fifty of the sort of phrases that flash by us when we turn over the papers. A headline in enormous letters announces that the French are “scuttling” out of the disputed areas in the Near East. The phrase about scuttling, and the policy of scuttle, has been familiar and firmly established in English journalism as meaning a cowardly and servile surrender, admitting abject defeat. And the suggestion is that the French, being notoriously a nation of cowards, having that tendency to panic produced by a habit of dancing and a diet of frogs, can vividly be pictured as scampering with screams of terror from the sight of a Turk with a drawn sabre. This is the way our newspapers improve our relations with our Allies. Only the newspaper men seem to have got a little mixed in their eagerness to expatiate on the wide field of French vileness and ignominy. Only a little while ago the same papers were telling us that the French were furious filibusters, forcing war in every corner of the world. We were told that it was France which was militaristic and aggressive, and all her rivals were made to scuttle. We were told that it was, the Frenchman and not the Turk who was the terrible person holding the drawn sabre. In plain words, these journalists are resolved to show that whatever the French do is wrong. If they advance, they are arrogant; if they retreat, they are cowardly. If they keep an army beyond the Rhine, they are pursuing a policy of militarism; if they withdraw an army from somewhere else, they are pursuing a policy of scuttle. Where M. Poincaré is ready to fight, he is a fire-eater who cares for nothing but fighting; where he is not ready to fight, he is a poltroon who is always notoriously too timid to fight. The careful selection of language of this sort, for a given period, might quite possibly land us in a European war — a war in which we should be certainly on the wrong side, and almost certainly on the losing side.

Suppose I come forward with this great reform of the Prohibition of the Press. Suppose I suggest that the police should forcibly shut up all the newspaper-offices, as the other reformers wish to shut up all the public-houses. What answer will the Puritan moralists make to me, or on what principle do they distinguish between the one reform and the other? There is no kind of doubt about the harm that journalism does; and their own line of argument precludes them from appealing merely to the good that it does. As a matter of fact, far better poems have been written in taverns than are ever likely to appear in daily papers. And, from Pantagruel to Pickwick, this form of festivity has a roll of literary glory to its credit which is never likely to be found in the back files of any newspaper that I know of. But the

Puritans do not discuss the healthier tradition of wine; they consider their argument sufficiently supported by the unhealthy effects of gin and bad beer in the slums. And if we adopt that principle of judging by the worst, then the worst effects of the press are far wider than the worst effects of the public-house. What exactly is the principle by which they distinguish between lawful and unlawful liberty, or mixed and unmixed licence? I have a rough-and-ready test, which may be right or wrong, but which I can at least state; but where has their test been stated? I say that the simplest form of freedom is that which distinguishes the free man from the slave — the ownership of his own body and his own bodily activities. That there is a risk in allowing him this ownership is obvious, and has always been obvious. The risk is not confined to the question of drink, but covers the whole question of health. But surely the other forms of freedom, such as freedom to print, are very much more indirect and disputable. A newspaper may be made the instrument of the vilest sort of swindling or starving of a whole people. Why are we to grant the remote right, and deny the intimate right? Moreover, a newspaper is a new thing; if our fathers had the right to it, they never knew it. Fermented liquor is as old as civilization, or older. But what I have asked for again and again is simply the principle of the Prohibitionists: and I am asking still.

THE MERCY OF MR. ARNOLD BENNETT

MR. ARNOLD BENNETT recently wrote one of his humorous and humane *causeries,* pleading very properly for social imagination and the better understanding of our fellows. He carried it, however, to the point of affirming, as some fatalists do, that we should never judge anybody in the sense of condemning anybody, in connexion with his moral conduct. Some time ago the same distinguished writer showed that his mercy and magnanimity were indeed on a heroic scale by reviewing a book of mine, and even saying many kind things about it. But to these he added a doubt about whether true intelligence could be consistent with the acceptance of any dogma. In truth there are only two kinds of people; those who accept dogmas and know it, and those who accept dogmas and don't know it. My only advantage over the gifted novelist lies in my belonging to the former class. I suspect that his unconsciousness of his dogmas extends to an unconsciousness of what he means by a dogma. If it means merely the popular idea of being dogmatic, it might be suggested that saying that all dogmatism is unintelligent is itself somewhat dogmatic. And something of what is true of his veto on dogma is also true of his veto on condemnation; which is really a veto on vetoes.

Mr. Arnold Bennett does not darken the question with the dreary metaphysics of determinism; he is far too bright and adroit a journalist for that. But he does make a simple appeal to charity, and even Christianity, basing on it the idea that we should not judge people at all, or even blame them at all. Like everybody else who argues thus, he imagines himself to be pleading for mercy and humanity. Like everybody else who argues thus, he is doing the direct contrary. This particular notion of not judging people really means hanging them without trial. It would really substitute for judgment not mercy but something much more like murder. For the logical process through which the discussion passes is always the same; I have seen it in a hundred debates about fate and free-will. First somebody says, like Mr. Bennett: "Let us be kinder to our brethren, and not blame them for faults we cannot judge." Then some casual common-sense person says: "Do you really mean you would let anybody pick your pocket or cut your throat without protest?" Then the first man always answers as Mr. Bennett does: "Oh, no; I would punish him to protect myself and protect society; but

I would not *blame* him, because I would not venture to judge him." The philosopher seems to have forgotten that he set out with the idea of being kinder to the cut-throat and the pick-pocket. His sense of humour should suggest to him that the pick-pocket might possibly prefer to be blamed, rather than go to penal servitude for the protection of society.

Now of course Mr. Bennett is quite right in the most mystical and therefore the most deeply moral sense. We do not know what God knows about the merits of a man. Nor do we know what God knows about the needs of a community. A man who poisons his little niece for money may have mysterious motives and excuses we cannot understand. And so he may serve mysterious social purposes we cannot follow. We are not infallible when we think we are punishing criminals; but neither are we infallible when we think we are protecting society. Our inevitable ignorance seems to me to cut both ways. But even in our ignorance one thing is vividly clear. Mr. Bennett's solution is not the more merciful, but the less merciful of the two. To say that we may punish people, but not blame them, is to say that we have a right to be cruel to them, but not a right to be kind to them.

For after all, blame is itself a compliment. It is a compliment because it is an appeal; and an appeal to a man as a creative artist making his soul. To say to a man, "rascal" or "villain" in ordinary society may seem abrupt; but it is also elliptical. It is an abbreviation of a sublime spiritual apostrophe for which there may be no time in our busy social life. When you meet a millionaire, the cornerer of many markets, out at dinner in Mayfair, and greet him (as is your custom) with the exclamation "Scoundrel!" you are merely shortening for convenience some such expression as: "How can you, having the divine spirit of man that might be higher than the angels, drag it down so far as to be a scoundrel?" When you are introduced at a garden party to a Cabinet Minister who takes tips on Government contracts, and when you say to him in the ordinary way "Scamp!" you are merely using the last word of a long moral disquisition; which is in effect, "How pathetic is the spiritual spectacle of this Cabinet Minister, who being from the first made glorious by the image of God, condescends so far to lesser ambitions as to allow them to turn him into a scamp." It is a mere taking of the tail of a sentence to stand for the rest; like saying 'bus for omnibus. It is even more like the case of that seventeenth century Puritan whose name was something like "If-Jesus-Christ-Had-Not-Died-For-Thee-Thou-Hadst-Been-Damned, Higgins"; but who was, for popular convenience, referred to as

“Damned Higgins.” But it is obvious, anyhow, that when we call a man a coward, we are in so doing asking him how he can be a coward when he could be a hero. When we rebuke a man for being a sinner, we imply that he has the powers of a saint.

But punishing him for the protection of society involves no regard for him at all. It involves no limit of proportion in the punishment at all. There are some limits to what ordinary men are likely to say that an ordinary man deserves. But there are no limits to what the danger of the community may be supposed to demand. We would not, even if we could, boil the millionaire in oil or skin the poor little politician alive; for we do not think a man deserves to be skinned alive for taking commissions on contracts. But it is by no means so certain that the skinning him alive might not protect the community. Corruption can destroy communities; and torture can deter men. At any rate the thing is not so self-evidently useless as it is self-evidently unjust and vindictive. We refrain from such fantastic punishments, largely because we *do* have some notion of making the punishment fit the crime, and not merely fit the community. If the State were the sole consideration, it may be inferred a priori that people might be much more cruel. And in fact, where the State was the sole consideration, it was found in experience that they were much more cruel. They were much more cruel precisely because they were freed from all responsibilities about the innocence or guilt of the individual. I believe that in heathen Rome, the model of a merely civic and secular loyalty, it was a common practice to torture the slaves of any household subjected to legal enquiry. If you had remonstrated, because no crime had been proved against the slaves, the State would have answered in the modern manner: “We are not punishing the crime; we are protecting the community.”

Now that example is relevant just now in more ways than one. Of course I do not mean that this was the motive of all historical cruelties, or that some did not spring from quite an opposite motive. But it was the motive of such tyranny in the heathen world; and in this, as in other things, the modern world has largely become a heathen world. And modern tyranny can find its prototype in the torturing of heathen slaves in two fundamental respects. First, that the modern world has returned to the test of the heathen world, that of considering service to the state and not justice to the individual. And second, that the modern world, like the heathen world, is here inflicting it chiefly on subordinate and submerged classes of society; on slaves or those who are almost slaves.

For the heathen state is a Servile State. And no one has more of this view of the state than the State Socialists. The official Labour Politician would be the first to say in theory that punishment must not be a moral recompense, but merely a social regulation. And he would be the first to say in practice that it is the poor and ignorant who must be regulated. Doubtless it is one thing to be regulated and another to be tortured. But when once the principle is admitted broadly, the progress towards torture may proceed pretty briskly. In the psychological sphere, it is already as bad as it has ever been. It may come as a surprise to the humanitarian to learn it; but it is none the less true, that a mother may undergo moral torture in the last degree, when her children are taken from her by brute force. And that incident has become so common in the policing of the poor nowadays as hardly to call for notice. And that example is particularly relevant to the present argument. Nobody could pretend that the affectionate mother of a rather backward child *deserves* to be punished by having all the happiness taken out of her life. But anybody can pretend that the act is needed for the happiness of the community. Nobody will say it was so wicked of her to love her baby that she deserves to lose it. But it is always easy to say that some remote social purpose will be served by taking it away. Thus the elimination of punishment means the extension of tyranny. Men would not do things so oppressive so long as they were vindictive. It is only when punishment is purged of vengeance that it can be as villainous as that.

For that matter, it would be easy to find examples much nearer than this one to the torturing of the Roman slaves. There is a very close parallel in the Third Degree, as applied by the police to the criminal class on suspicion, especially in America; for the criminal class is a submerged class like the slaves; and it is but an experiment on the nerves in one way instead of another, like a preference for the rack rather than the thumbscrew. But the point is that it is applied to the criminal type without any proof that it is in this case criminal; and the thing is justified not by the criminality of the individual but by the needs of the State. The police would answer exactly as the pagans answered: “We are not punishing the crime; we are protecting the community.”

This tyranny is spreading. And there is no hope for liberty or democracy until we all demand again, with a tongue of thunder, the right to be blamed.

We shall never feel like free men until we assert again our sacred claim to be punished. The denunciation of a man for what he chose to do is itself the confession that he chose to do it; and it is beneath his dignity to admit that he could have done nothing else. The only alternative theory is that we can do nothing but what we do, and our rulers can do anything whatever to restrain us. Compared with that, it would be better that roaring mobs should rise all over England, uproariously demanding to be hanged.

A DEFENCE OF DRAMATIC UNITIES

INJUSTICE is done to the old classical rules of artistic criticism, because we do not treat them as artistic criticism. We first turn them into police regulations, and then complain of them for being so. But I suspect, with the submission proper to ignorance, that the art canons of Aristotle and others were much more generally artistic, in the sense of atmospheric. We allow a romantic critic to be as dogmatic as Ruskin, and still feel that he is not really being so despotic as Boileau. If a modern, like Maeterlinck, says that all drama is in an open door at the end of an empty passage, we do not take it literally, like a notice requiring an extra exit in case of fire. But if an ancient, like Horace, says that all drama demands a closed door, which shall hide Medea while she murders her children, then we do receive it as something rigid and formal, like the order to close the shutters on Zeppelin nights. Now how far the classical critics took their rules absolutely I do not know. But I am substantially sure that there is a true instinct at the back of them, whatever exceptions be allowed at the edges. The unities of time and place, that is the idea of keeping figures and events within the frame of a few hours or a few yards, is naturally decided as a specially artificial affront to the intellect. But I am sure it is an especially true suggestion to the imagination. It is exactly in the artistic atmosphere, where rules and reasons are so hard to define, that this unification would be most easy to defend. This limitation to a few scenes and actors really has something in it that pleases the imagination and not the reason. There are instances in which it may be broken boldly: there are types of art to which it does not apply at all. But wherever it can be satisfied, something not superficial but rather sub-conscious is satisfied. Something re-visits us that is the strange soul of single places; the shadow of haunting ghosts or of household gods. Like all such things, it is indescribable when it is successful: it is easier to describe the disregard of it as unsuccessful. Thus Stevenson’s masterpiece, “The Master of Ballantrae,” always seems to me to fall into two parts, the finer which revolves round Durisdeer and the inferior which rambles through India and America. The slender and sinister figure in black, standing on the shore or vanishing from the shrubbery, does really seem to have come from the ends of the earth. In the chapters of travel he only serves to show that, for a boy’s adventure tale, a good villain makes a bad hero. And even about

Hamlet I am so heretical as to be almost classical; I doubt whether the exile in England does not rather dwarf than dignify the prisoner of Denmark. I am not sure that he got anything out of the pirates he could not have got out of the players. And I am very sure indeed that this figure in black, like the other, produces a true though intangible effect of tragedy when, and because, we see him against the great grey background of the house of his fathers. In a word it is what Mr. J. B. Yeats, the poet's stimulating parent, calls in his excellent book of essays "the drama of the home." The drama is domestic, and is dramatic because it is domestic.

We might say that superior literature is centripetal, while inferior literature is centrifugal. But oddly enough, the same truth may be found by studying inferior as well as superior literature. What is true of a Shakespearean play is equally true of a shilling shocker. The shocker is at its worst when it wanders and escapes through new scenes and new characters. The shocker is at its best when it shocks by something familiar; a figure or fact that is already known though not understood. A good detective story also can keep the classic unities; or otherwise play the game. I for one devour detective stories; I am delighted when the dagger of the curate is found to be the final clue to the death of the vicar. But there is a point of honour for the author; he may conceal the curate's crime, but he must not conceal the curate. I feel I am cheated when the last chapter hints for the first time that the vicar had a curate. I am annoyed when a curate, who is a total stranger to me, is produced from a cupboard or a box in a style at once abrupt and belated. I am annoyed most of all when the new curate is only the tool of a terrible secret society ramifying from Moscow or Thibet. These cosmopolitan complications are the dull and not the dramatic element in the ingenious tales of Mr. Oppenheim or Mr. Le Queux. They entirely spoil the fine domesticity of a good murder. It is unsportsmanlike to call spies from the end of the earth, as it is to call spirits from the vasty deep, in a story that does not imply them from the start. And this because the supply is infinite; and the infinite, as Coventry Patmore well said, is generally alien to art. Everybody knows that the universe contains enough spies or enough spectres to kill the most healthy and vigorous vicar. The drama of detection is in discovering how he can be killed decently and economically, within the classic unities of time and place.

In short the good mystery story should narrow its circles like an eagle about to swoop. The spiral should curve inwards and not outwards. And this inward movement is in true poetic mysteries as well as mere police mystifications. It will be assumed that I am joking if I say there is a serious social meaning in this novel-reader's notion of keeping a crime in the family. It must seem mere nonsense to find a moral in this fancy, about washing gory linen at home. It will naturally be asked whether I have idealized the home merely as a good place for assassinations. I have not; any more than I have idealized the Church as a thing in which the curates can kill the vicars. Nevertheless the thing, like many things, is symbolic though it is not serious. And the objection to it implies a subtle misunderstanding, in many minds, of the whole case for the home as I have sometimes had occasion to urge it. When we defend the family we do not mean it is always a peaceful family; when we maintain the thesis of marriage we do not mean that it is always a happy marriage. We mean that it is the theatre of the spiritual drama, the place where things happen, especially the things that matter. It is not so much the place where a man kills his wife as the place where he can take the equally sensational step of not killing his wife. There is truth in the cynicism that calls marriage a trial; but even the cynic will admit that a trial may end in an acquittal. And the reason that the family has this central and crucial character is the same reason that makes it in politics the only prop of liberty. The family is the test of freedom; because the family is the only thing that the free man makes for himself and by himself. Other institutions must largely be made for him by strangers, whether the institutions be despotic or democratic. There is no other way of organizing mankind which can give this power and dignity, not only to mankind but to men. If anybody likes to put it so, we cannot really make all men democrats unless we make all men despots. That is to say, the co-operation of the common-wealth will be a mere automatic unanimity like that of insects, unless the citizen has some province of purely voluntary action; unless he is so far not only a citizen but a king. In the world of ethics this is called liberty; in the world of economics it is called property, and in the world of aesthetics, necessarily so much more dim and indefinable, it is darkly adumbrated in the old dramatic unities of place or time. It must indeed be a mistake in any case to treat such artistic rules as rigidly as if they were moral rules. It was an error if they ever were so treated; it may well be a question whether they were ever meant to be so treated. But when critics have suggested that these classical canons were a mere superficial varnish, it may safely be said that it is the critics who are superficial. Modern artists would have been wiser if they had developed sympathetically some of the Aristotelian aesthetics, as mediaeval philosophers developed sympathetically the Aristotelian logic and ethics. For a more subtle study of the unities of time and place, for example, as outlined for the Greek drama, might have led us towards what is perhaps the last secret of all legend and literature. It might have suggested why poets, pagan or not, returned perpetually to the idea of happiness as a place for humanity as a person. It might suggest why the world is always seeking for absolutes that are not abstractions; why fairyland was always a land, and even the Superman was almost a man.

THE BOREDOM OF BUTTERFLIES

THERE is one thing which critics perhaps tend to forget when they complain that Mr. H. G. Wells no longer concerns himself with telling a story. It is that nobody else could interest and excite us so much without telling a story. It is possible to read one of his recent novels almost without knowing the story at all. It is possible to dip into it as into a book of essays, and pick up opinions here and there. But all the essays are brilliant essays, and all the opinions are striking opinions. It does not much matter who holds the opinions; it is possible that the author does not hold them at all, and pretty certain that he will not hold them long. But nobody else could make such splendid stuff out of the very refuse of his rejected opinions. Seen from this side, even what is called his failure must be recognized as a remarkable success. The personal story may fade away, but it is something of an achievement to be still interesting after becoming impersonal; like the achievement of the Cheshire cat who could grin when he was no longer there. Moreover, these impersonal and even irresponsible opinions of Mr. Wells, though never conclusive, are always suggestive; each is a good starting-point for thought, if only for the thought that refutes it. In short, the critics of Mr. Wells rather exaggerate the danger of his story running to speculation, as if it were merely running to seed. Anyhow, they ought to remember that there are two meanings in running to seed; and one of them is connected with seed-time. I have, however, a particular reason for mentioning the matter here. I confess there is more than one of Mr. Wells’s recent novels that I have both read and not read. I am never quite sure that I have read all Shakespeare or all Boswell’s Johnson; because I have so long had the habit of opening them anywhere. So I have opened the works of Mr. Wells anywhere, and had great fun out of the essays that would have seemed only long parentheses in the story. But, on getting to rather closer grips with the last of his stories, “The Secret Places of the Heart,” I think I have caught a glimpse of a difficulty in this sort of narrative which is something deeper than mere digression. In a story like “Pickwick” or “Tristram Shandy” digression is never disappointment. But in this case, differing as I do from the merely hostile critics, I cannot dispel the atmosphere of disappointment. The story seems inconclusive in a sense beyond anything merely inconsistent; and I fancy I can guess why.

A pedantic logician may perhaps imagine that a thing can only be inconclusive at the conclusion. But I will boldly claim the liberty in language of saying that this sort of thing is inconclusive from the start. It begins inconclusive, and in that sense begins dull. The hero begins by telling the doctor about a mutable flux of flirtation, about his own experiments as a philanderer, always flitting like a butterfly from flower to flower. Now, it is highly probable that the diary of a butterfly would be very dull, even if it were only the diary of a day. His round need be no more really amusing than a postman's, since he has no serious spiritual interest in any of his places of call. Now, by starting his hero as a philosopher and also philanderer, and taking seriously his philosophy of philandering, the author as good as tells us, to start with, that his hero will not have any serious adventures at all. At the beginning of the story, he practically tells us that there will be no story. The story of a fickle man is not a story at all; because there is no strain or resistance in it. Somebody talked about tales with a twist; and it is certain that all tales are tales with a tug.

All the most subtle truths of literature are to be found in legend. There is no better test of the truth of serious fiction than the simple truths to be found in a fairy tale or an old ballad. Now, in the whole of folk-lore there is no such thing as free love. There is such a thing as false love. There is also another thing, which the old ballads always talk of as true love. But the story always turns on the keeping of a bond or the breaking of it; and this quite apart from orthodox morality in the matter of the marriage bond. The love may be in the strict sense sinful, but it is never anarchical. There was quite as little freedom for Lancelot as for Arthur; quite as little mere philandering in the philosophy of Tristram as in the philosophy of Galahad. It may have been unlawful love, but it certainly was not lawless love. In the old ballads there is the triumph of true love, as in "The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington"; or the tragedy of true love, as in "Helen of Kirkconnel Lea"; or the tragedy of false love as in the ballad of "Oh, waly, waly up the bank." But there is neither triumph nor tragedy in the idea of *avowedly* transient love; and no literature will ever be made out of it, except the very lightest literature of satire. And even the satire must be a satire on fickleness, and therefore involve an indirect ideal of fidelity. But you cannot make any enduring literature out of love *conscious* that it will not endure. Even if this mutability were working as morality, it would still be unworkable as art.

The decadents used to say that things like the marriage vow might be very convenient for common-place public purposes, but had no place in the world of beauty and imagination. The truth is exactly the other way. The truth is that if marriage had not existed it would have been necessary for artists to invent it. The truth is that if constancy had never been needed as a social requirement, it would still have been created out of cloud and air as a poetical requirement. If ever monogamy is abandoned in practice, it will linger in legend and in literature. When society is haunted by the butterfly flitting from flower to flower, poetry will still be describing the desire of the moth for the star; and it will be a fixed star. Literature must always revolve round loyalties; for a rudimentary psychological reason, which is simply the nature of narrative. You cannot tell a *story* without the idea of pursuing a purpose and sticking to a point. You cannot tell a story without the idea of the Quest, the idea of the Vow; even if it be only the idea of the Wager.

Perhaps the most modern equivalent to the man who makes a vow is the man who makes a bet. But he must not hedge on a bet; still less must he welsh, or do a bolt when he has made a bet. Even if the story ends with his doing so, the dramatic emotion depends on our realizing the dishonesty of his doing so. That is, the drama depends on the keeping or breaking of a bond, if it be only a bet. A man wandering about a race-course, making bets that nobody took seriously, would be merely a bore. And so the hero wandering through a novel, making vows of love that nobody took seriously, is merely a bore. The point here is not so much that morally it cannot be a creditable story, but that artistically it cannot be a story at all. Art is born when the temporary touches the eternal; the shock of beauty is when the irresistible force hits the immovable post.

Thus in the last novel of Mr. Wells, what is inconclusive in the second part is largely due to what is convincing in the first part. By the time that the hero meets his new heroine on Salisbury Plain, he has seriously convinced us that there is nothing heroic about him, and that nothing heroic will happen to him; at any rate in that department. He disenchants the enchantment beforehand, and warns the reader against even a momentary illusion. When once a man looks forward as well as backward to disillusionment, no romance can be made of him.

Profligacy may be made romantic, precisely because it implies some betrayal or breaking of a law. But polygamy is not in the least romantic. Polygamy is dull to the point of respectability. When a man looks forward to a number of wives as he does to a number of cigarettes, you can no more make a book out of them than out of the bills from his tobacconist. Anything having the character of a Turkish harem has also something of the character of a Turkey carpet. It is not a portrait, or even a picture, but a pattern. We may at the moment be looking at one highly coloured and even flamboyant figure in the carpet; but we know that on every side, in front as well as behind, the image is repeated without purpose and without finality.

THE TERROR OF A TOY

IT would be too high and hopeful a compliment to say that the world is becoming absolutely babyish. For its chief weak-mindedness is an inability to appreciate the intelligence of babies. On every side we hear whispers and warnings that would have appeared half-witted to the Wise Men of Gotham. Only this Christmas I was told in a toy-shop that not so many bows and arrows were being made for little boys; because they were considered dangerous. It might in some circumstances be dangerous to have a little bow. It is always dangerous to have a little boy. But no other society, claiming to be sane, would have dreamed of supposing that you could abolish all bows unless you could abolish all boys. With the merits of the latter reform I will not deal here. There is a great deal to be said for such a course; and perhaps we shall soon have an opportunity of considering it. For the modern mind seems quite incapable of distinguishing between the means and the end, between the organ and the disease, between the use and the abuse; and would doubtless break the boy along with the bow, as it empties out the baby with the bath.

But let us, by way of a little study in this mournful state of things, consider this case of the dangerous toy. Now the first and most self-evident truth is that, of all the things a child sees and touches, the most dangerous toy is about the least dangerous thing. There is hardly a single domestic utensil that is not much more dangerous than a little bow and arrow. He can burn himself in the fire, he can boil himself in the bath, he can cut his throat with the carving-knife, he can scald himself with the kettle, he can choke himself with anything small enough, he can break his neck off anything high enough. He moves all day long amid a murderous machinery, as capable of killing and maiming as the wheels of the most frightful factory. He plays all day in a house fitted up with engines of torture like the Spanish Inquisition. And while he thus dances in the shadow of death, he is to be saved from all the perils of possessing a piece of string, tied to a bent bough or twig. When he is a little boy it generally takes him some time even to learn how to hold the bow. When he does hold it, he is delighted if the arrow flutters for a few yards like a feather or an autumn leaf. But even if he grows a little older and more skilful and has yet not learned to despise arrows in favour of aeroplanes, the amount of damage he could conceivably do with his little arrows would be about one hundredth part of the damage that he could always in any case have done by simply picking up a stone in the garden.

Now you do not keep a little boy from throwing stones by preventing him from ever seeing stones. You do not do it by locking up all the stones in the Geological Museum, and only issuing tickets of admission to adults. You do not do it by trying to pick up all the pebbles on the beach, for fear he should practise throwing them into the sea. You do not even adopt so obvious and even pressing a social reform as forbidding roads to be made of anything but asphalt, or directing that all gardens shall be made on clay and none on gravel. You neglect all these great opportunities opening before you; you neglect all these inspiring vistas of social science and enlightenment. When you want to prevent a child from throwing stones, you fall back on the stalest and most sentimental and even most superstitious methods. You do it by trying to preserve some reasonable authority and influence over the child. You trust to your private relation with the boy, and not to your public relation with the stone. And what is true of the natural missile is just as true, of course, of the artificial missile; especially as it is a very much more ineffectual and therefore innocuous missile. A man could be really killed, like St. Stephen, with the stones in the road. I doubt if he could be really killed, like St. Sebastian, with the arrows in the toyshop. But anyhow the very plain principle is the same. If you can teach a child not to throw a stone, you can teach him when to shoot an arrow; if you cannot teach him anything, he will always have something to throw. If he can be persuaded not to smash the Archdeacon’s hat with a heavy flint, it will probably be possible to dissuade him from transfixing that head-dress with a toy arrow. If his training deters him from heaving half a brick at the postman, it will probably also warn him against constantly loosening shafts of death against the policeman. But the notion that the child depends upon particular implements, labelled dangerous, in order to be a danger to himself and other people, is a notion so nonsensical that it is hard to see how any human mind can entertain it for a moment. The truth is that all sorts of faddism, both official and theoretical, have broken down the natural authority of the domestic institution, especially among the poor; and the faddists are now casting about desperately for a substitute for the thing they have themselves destroyed. The normal thing is for the parents to prevent a boy from doing more than a reasonable amount of damage with his bow and arrow; and for the rest, to leave him to a reasonable enjoyment of them. Officialism cannot thus follow the life of the individual boy, as can the individual guardian. You cannot appoint a particular policeman for each boy, to pursue him when he climbs trees or falls into ponds. So the modern spirit has descended to the indescribable mental degradation of trying to abolish the abuse of things by abolishing the things themselves; which is as if it were to abolish ponds or abolish trees. Perhaps it will have a try at that before long. Thus we have all heard of savages who try a tomahawk for murder, or burn a wooden club for the damage it has done to society. To such intellectual levels may the world return.

There are indeed yet lower levels. There is a story from America about a little boy who gave up his toy cannon to assist the disarmament of the world. I do not know if it is true, but on the whole I prefer to think so; for it is perhaps more tolerable to imagine one small monster who could do such a thing than many more mature monsters who could invent or admire it. There were some doubtless who neither invented nor admired. It is one of the peculiarities of the Americans that they combine a power of producing what they satirize as “sob-stuff” with a parallel power of satirizing it. And of the two American tall stories, it is sometimes hard to say which is the story and which the satire. But it seems clear that some people did really repeat this story in a reverential spirit. And it marks, as I have said, another stage of cerebral decay. You can (with luck) break a window with a toy arrow; but you can hardly bombard a town with a toy gun. If people object to the mere model of a cannon, they must equally object to the picture of a cannon, and so to every picture in the world that depicts a sword or a spear. There would be a splendid clearance of all the great art-galleries of the world. But it would be nothing to the destruction of all the great libraries of the world, if we logically extended the principle to all the literary masterpieces that admit the glory of arms. When this progress had gone on for a century or two, it might begin to dawn on people that there was something wrong with their moral principle. What is wrong with their moral principle is that it is immoral. Arms, like every other adventure or art of man, have two sides according as they are invoked for the infliction or the defiance of wrong. They have also an element of real poetry and an element of realistic and therefore repulsive prose. The child’s symbolic sword and bow are simply the poetry without the prose; the good without the evil. The toy sword is the abstraction and emanation of the heroic, apart from all its horrible accidents. It is the soul of the sword, that will never be stained with blood.

FALSE THEORY AND THE THEATRE

A THEATRICAL manager recently insisted on introducing Chinese labour into the theatrical profession. He insisted on having real Chinamen to take the parts of Chinese servants; and some actors seem to have resented it — as I think, very reasonably. A distinguished actress, who is clever enough to know better, defended it on the ground that nothing must interfere with the perfection of a work of art. I dispute the moral thesis in any case; and Nero would no doubt have urged it in defence of having real deaths in the amphitheatre. I do not admit in any case that the artist can be entirely indifferent to hunger and unemployment, any more than to lions or boiling oil. But, as a matter of fact, there is no need to raise the moral question, because the case is equally strong in relation to the artistic question. I do not think that a Chinese character being represented by a Chinese actor is the finishing touch to the perfection of a work of art. I think it is the last and lowest phase of the vulgarity that is called realism. It is in the same style and taste as the triumphs on which, I believe, some actor-managers have prided themselves: the triumphs of having real silver for goblets or real jewels for crowns. That is not the spirit of a perfect artist, but rather of a purse-proud parvenu. The perfect artist would be he who could put on a crown of gilt wire or tinsel and make us feel he was a king.

Moreover, if the principle is to be extended from properties to persons, it is not easy to see where the principle can stop. If we are to insist on real Asiatics to act “Chu Chin Chow,” why not insist on real Venetians to act “The Merchant of Venice”? We did experiment recently and I believe very successfully, in having the Jew acted by a real Jew. But I hardly think we should like to make it a rule that nobody must be allowed to act Shylock unless he can prove his racial right to call upon his father Abraham. Must the characters of Macbeth and Macduff only be represented by men with names like Macpherson and Macnab? Must the Prince of Denmark always be in private life a Dane? Must we import a crowd of Greeks before we are allowed to act “Troilus and Cressida,” or a mob of real Egyptians to form the background of “Antony and Cleopatra”? Will it be necessary to kidnap an African gentleman out of Africa, by the methods of the slave trade, and force him into acting Othello? It was rather foolishly suggested at one time that our allies in Japan might be offended at the fantastic satire of “The

Mikado." As a matter of fact, the satire of "The Mikado" is not at all directed against Japanese things, but exclusively against English things. But I certainly think there might be some little ill-feeling in Japan if gangs of Japanese coolies were shipped across two continents merely in order to act in it. If once this singular rule be recognized, a dramatist will certainly be rather shy of introducing Zulus or Red Indians into his dramas, owing to the difficulty in securing appropriate dramatic talent. He will hesitate before making his hero an Eskimo. He will abandon his intention of seeking his heroine in the Sandwich Islands. If he were to insist on introducing real cannibals, it seems possible that they might insist on introducing real cannibalism. This would be quite in the spirit of Nero and all the art critics of the Roman realism of the amphitheatre. But surely it would be putting almost too perfect a finishing touch to the perfection of a work of art. That kind of finishing touch is a little too finishing.

The irony grew more intense when the newspapers that had insisted on Chinamen because they could not help being Chinamen began to praise them with admiration and astonishment because they looked Chinese. This opens up a speculation so complex and contradictory that I do not propose to follow it, for I am interested here not in the particular incident but in the general idea. It will be a sufficient statement of the fundamental fact of all the arts if I say simply that I do not believe in the resemblance. I do not believe that a Chinaman does look like a Chinaman. That is, I do not believe that any Chinaman will necessarily look like *the* Chinaman — the Chinaman in the imagination of the artist and the interest of the crowd. We all know the fable of the man who imitated a pig, and his rival who was hooted by the crowd because he could only produce what was (in fact) the squeak of a real pig. The crowd was perfectly right. The crowd was a crowd of very penetrating and philosophical art critics. They had come there not to hear an ordinary pig, which they could hear by poking in any ordinary pig-sty. They had come to hear how the voice of the pig affects the immortal mind and spirit of man; what sort of satire he would make of it; what sort of fun he can get out of it; what sort of exaggeration he feels to be an exaggeration of its essence, and not of its accidents. In other words, they had come to hear a squeak, but the sort of squeak which expresses what a man thinks of a pig — not the vastly inferior squeak which only expresses what a pig thinks of a man. I have myself a poetical enthusiasm for pigs, and the paradise of my fancy is one where the pigs have wings. But it is only men, especially wise men, who discuss whether pigs can fly; we have no particular proof that pigs ever discuss it. Therefore the actor who imitated the quadruped may well have put into his squeak something of the pathetic cry of one longing for the wings of the dove. The quadruped himself might express no such sentiment; he might appear, and generally does appear, singularly unconscious of his own lack of feathers. But the same principle is true of things more dignified than the most dignified porker, though clad in the most superb plumage. If a vision of a stately Arab has risen in the imagination of an author who is an artist, he will be wise if he confides it to an actor who is also an artist. He will be much wiser to confide it to an actor than to an Arab. The actor, being a fellow-countryman and a fellow-artist, may bring out what the author thinks the Arab stands for; whereas the real Arab might be a particular individual who at that particular moment refused to stand for anything of the sort, or for anything at all. The principle is a general one; and I mean no disrespect to China in the porcine parallel, or in the figurative association of pigs and pig-tails.

But, as a matter of fact, the argument is especially apt in the case of China. For I fear that China is chiefly interesting to most of us as the other end of the world. It is valued as something far-off, and therefore fantastical, like a kingdom in the clouds of sunrise. It is not the very real virtues of the Chinese tradition — its stoicism, its sense of honour, its ancient peasant cults — that most people want to put into a play. It is the ordinary romantic feeling about something remote and extravagant, like the Martians or the Man in the Moon. It is perfectly reasonable to have that romantic feeling in moderation, like other amusements. But it is not reasonable to expect the remote person to feel remote from himself, or the man at the other end of the world not to feel it as this end. We must not ask the outlandish Oriental to feel outlandish, or a Chinaman to be astonished at being Chinese. If, therefore, the literary artist has the legitimate literary purpose of expressing the mysterious and alien atmosphere which China implies to him, he will probably do it much better with the aid of an actor who is not Chinese. Of course, I am not criticizing the particular details of the particular performance, of which I know little or nothing. I do not know the circumstances; and under the circumstances, for all I know, the experiment may have been very necessary or very successful. I merely protest against a theory of dramatic truth, urged in defence of the dramatic experiment, which seems to me calculated to falsify the whole art of the drama. It is founded on exactly the same fallacy as that of the infant in Stevenson’s nursery rhyme, who thought that the Japanese children must suffer from home-sickness through being always abroad in Japan.

This brings us very near to an old and rather threadbare theatrical controversy, about whether staging should be simple or elaborate. I do not mean to begin that argument all over again. What is really wanted is not so much the simple stage-manager as the simple spectator. In a very real sense, what is wanted is the simple critic, who would be in truth the most subtle critic. The healthy human instincts in these things are at least as much spoiled by sophistication in the stalls as by elaboration on the stage. A really simple mind would enjoy a simple scene and also a gorgeous scene. A popular instinct, to be found in all folk-lore, would know well enough when the one or the other was appropriate. But what is involved here is not the whole of that sophistication, but only one particular sophistry, and against that sophistry we may well pause to protest. It is the critical fallacy of cutting off a real donkey’s head to put it on Bottom the Weaver; when the head is symbolical, and in that case more appropriate to the critic than to the actor.

THE SECRET SOCIETY OF MANKIND

WITH that fantastic love of paradox which gives pain to so many critics, I once suggested that there may be some truth in the notion of the brotherhood of men. This was naturally a subject for severe criticism from the modern or modernist standpoint; and I remember that the cleverest refutation of it occurred in a book which was called “We Moderns.” It was written by a Mr. Edward Moore, and very well written too; indeed the author did himself some injustice in insisting on his own modernity; for he was not so very modern after all, but really quite lucid and coherent. But I will venture to take his remark as a text here because it concerns a matter on which most moderns darken council in a highly incoherent manner. It concerns the nature of the unity of men; which I did certainly state in its more defiant form as the equality of man. And I said that this norm or meeting-place of mankind can be found in the two extremes of the comic and the tragic. I said that no individual tragedy could be so tragic as having to die; and all men have equally to die. I said that nothing can be funnier than having two legs; and all men can join equally in the joke.

The critic in question was terribly severe on this remark. I believe that the words of his condemnation ran as follows: “Well, in this passage, there is an error so plain, it is almost inconceivable that a responsible thinker could have put it forward even in jest. For it is clear that the tragic and comic elements of which Mr. Chesterton speaks make not only mankind, but *all life,* equal. Everything that lives must die; and therefore it is, in Mr. Chesterton’s sense, tragic. Everything that lives has shape; and therefore it is, in Mr. Chesterton’s sense, comic. His premises lead to the equality not of mankind, but of all that lives; whether it be leviathan or butterfly, oak or violet, worm or eagle. ... Would that he had said this! Then we who affirm inequality would be the first to echo him.” I do not feel it hard to show that where Mr. Moore thinks equality wrong is exactly where it is right; and I will begin with mortality; premising that the same is true (for those who believe it) of immortality. Both are absolutes: a man cannot be somewhat mortal; nor can he be rather immortal.

To begin with, it must be understood that having an equality in being black or white is not even the same as being equally black or white. It is generally fair to take a familiar illustration; and I will take the ordinary expression about being all in the same boat. Mr. Moore and I and all men are not only all in the same boat, but have a very real equality implied in that fact. Nevertheless, since there is a word “inner” as well as a word “in,” there is a sense in which some of us might be more in the boat than others. My fellow passengers might have stowed me at the bottom of the boat and sat on top of me, moved by a natural distaste for my sitting on top of them. I have noticed that I am often thus packed in a preliminary fashion into the back seats or basic parts of cabs, cars, or boats; there being evidently a feeling that I am the stuff of which the foundations of an edifice are made rather than its toppling minarets or tapering spires. Meanwhile Mr. Moore might be surveying the world from the masthead, if there were one, or leaning out over the prow with the forward gestures of a leader of men, or even sitting by preference on the edge of the boat with his feet paddling in the water, to indicate the utmost possible aristocratic detachment from us and our concerns. Nevertheless, in the large and ultimate matters which are the whole meaning of the phrase “all in the same boat,” we should be all equally in the same boat. We should be all equally dependent upon the reassuring fact that a boat can float. If it did not float but sink, each one of us would have lost his one and only boat at the same decisive time and in the same disconcerting manner. If the King of the Cannibal Islands, upon whose principal island we might suffer the inconvenience of being wrecked, were to exclaim in a loud voice, “I will eat every single man who has arrived by that identical boat and no other,” we should all be eaten, and we should all be equally eaten. For being eaten, considered as a tragedy, is not a matter of degree.

Now there is a fault in every analogy; but the fault in my analogy is not a fault in my argument; it is the chief fault in Mr. Moore’s argument. It may be said that even in a shipwreck men are not equal, for some of us might be so strong that we could swim to the shore, or some of us might be so tough that the island king would repent of his rash vow after the first bite. But it is precisely here that I have again, as delicately as possible, to draw the reader’s attention to the modest and little-known institution called death. We are all in a boat which will certainly drown us all, and drown us equally, the strongest with the weakest; we sail to the land of an ogre, *edax rerum*, who devours all without distinction. And the meaning in the phrase about being all in the same boat is, not that there are no degrees among the people in a boat, but that all those degrees are nothing compared with the stupendous fact that the boat goes home or goes down. And it is when I come to the particular criticism on my remarks about "the fact of having to die" that I feel most confident that I was right and that Mr. Moore is wrong.

It will be noted that I spoke of the fact of having to die, not of the fact of dying. The brotherhood of men, being a spiritual thing, is not concerned merely with the truth that all men will die, but with the truth that all men know it. It is true, as Mr. Moore says, that everything will die, "whether it be leviathan or butterfly, oak or violet, worm or eagle"; but exactly what, at the very start, we do not know is whether they know it. Can Mr. Moore draw forth leviathan with a hook, and extract his hopes and fears about the heavenly harpooner? Can he worm its philosophy out of a worm, or get the caterpillar to talk about the faint possibility of a butterfly? The caterpillar on the leaf may repeat to Blake his mother's grief; but it does not repeat to anybody its own grief about its own mother. Can he know whether oaks confront their fate with hearts of oak, as the phrase is used in a sailor's song? He cannot; and this is the whole point about human brotherhood, the point the vegetarians cannot see. This is why a harpooner is not an assassin; this is why eating whale's blubber, though not attractive to the fancy, is not repulsive to the conscience. We do not know what a whale thinks of death; still less what the other whales think of his being killed and eaten. He may be a pessimistic whale, and be perpetually wishing that this too, too solid blubber would melt, thaw and resolve itself into a dew. He may be a fanatical whale, and feel frantically certain of passing instantly into a polar paradise of whales, ruled by the sacred whale who swallowed Jonah. But we can elicit no sign or gesture from him suggestive of such reflections; and the working common sense of the thing is that no creatures outside man seem to have any sense of death at all. Mr. Moore has therefore chosen a strangely unlucky point upon which to challenge the true egalitarian doctrine. Almost the most arresting and even startling stamp of the solidarity and sameness of mankind is precisely this fact, not only of death, but of the shadow of death. We do know of any man whatever what we do not know of any other thing whatever, that his death is what we call a tragedy. From the fact that it is a tragedy flow all the forms and tests by which we say it is a murder or an execution, a martyrdom or a suicide. They all depend on an echo or vibration, not only in the soul of man; but in the souls of all men.

Oddly enough, Mr. Moore has made exactly the same mistake about the comic as about the tragic. It is true, I think, that almost everything which has a shape is humorous; but it is not true that everything which has a shape has a sense of humour. The whale may be laughable, but it is not the whale who laughs; the image indeed is almost alarming. And the instant the question is raised, we collide with another colossal fact, dwarfing all human differentiations; the fact that man is the only creature who does laugh. In the presence of this prodigious fact, the fact that men laugh in different degrees, and at different things, shrivels not merely into insignificance but into invisibility. It is true that I have often felt the physical universe as something like a firework display: the most practical of all practical jokes. But if the cosmos is meant for a joke, men seem to be the only cosmic conspirators who have been let into the joke. There could be no fraternity like our freemasonry in that secret pleasure. It is true that there are no limits to this jesting faculty, that it is not confined to common human jests; but it is confined to human jesters. Mr. Moore may burst out laughing when he beholds the morning star, or be thrown into convulsions of amusement by the effect of moonrise seen through a mist. He may, to quote his own catalogue, see all the fun of an eagle or an oak tree. We may come upon him in some quiet dell rolling about in uproarious mirth, at the sight of a violet. But we shall not find the violet in a state of uproarious mirth at Mr. Moore. He may laugh at the worm; but the worm will not turn and laugh at him. For that comfort he must come to his fellow-sinners: I shall always be ready to oblige.

The truth involved here has had many names; that man is the image of God; that he is the microcosm; that he is the measure of all things. He is the microcosm in the sense that he is the mirror, the only crystal we know in which the fantasy and fear in things are, in the double and real sense, things of reflection. In the presence of this mysterious monopoly the differences of men are like dust. That is what the equality of men means to me; and that is the only intelligible thing it ever meant to anybody. The common things of men infinitely outclass all classes. For a man to disagree with this it is necessary that he should understand it; Mr. Moore may really disagree with it; but the ordinary modern anti-egalitarian does not understand it, or apparently anything else. If a man says he had some transcendental dogma of his own, as Mr. Moore may possibly have, which mixes man with nature or claims to see other values in men, I shall say no more than that my religion is different from his, and I am uncommonly glad of it. But if he simply says that men cannot be equal because some of them are clever and some of them are stupid — why then I shall merely agree (not without tears) that some of them are very stupid.

THE SENTIMENTALISM OF DIVORCE

DIVORCE is a thing which the newspapers now not only advertise, but advocate, almost as if it were a pleasure in itself. It may be, indeed, that all the flowers and festivities will now be transferred from the fashionable wedding to the fashionable divorce. A superb iced and frosted divorce-cake will be provided for the feast, and in military circles will be cut with the co-respondent's sword. A dazzling display of divorce presents will be laid out for the inspection of the company, watched by a detective dressed as an ordinary divorce guest. Perhaps the old divorce breakfast will be revived; anyhow, toasts will be drunk, the guests will assemble on the doorstep to see the husband and wife go off in opposite directions; and all will go merry as a divorce-court bell. All this, though to some it might seem a little fanciful, would really be far less fantastic than the sort of things that are really said on the subject. I am not going to discuss the depth and substance of that subject. I myself hold a mystical view of marriage; but I am not going to debate it here. But merely in the interests of light and logic I would protest against the way in which it is frequently debated. The process cannot rationally be called a debate at all. It is a sort of chorus of sentimentalists in the sensational newspapers, perpetually intoning some such formula as this: "We respect marriage, we reverence marriage, holy, sacred, ineffably exquisite and ideal marriage. True marriage is love, and when love alters, marriage alters, and when love stops or begins again, marriage does the same; wonderful, beautiful, beatific marriage."

Now, with all reasonable sympathy with everything sentimental, I may remark that all that talk is tosh. Marriage is an institution like any other, set up deliberately to have certain functions and limitations; it is an institution like private property, or conscription, or the legal liberties of the subject. To talk as if it were made or melted with certain changing moods is a mere waste of words. The object of private property is that as many citizens as possible should have a certain dignity and pleasure in being masters of material things. But suppose a dog-stealer were to say that as soon as a man was bored with his dog it ceased to be his dog, and he ceased to be responsible for it. Suppose he were to say that by merely coveting the dog, he could immediately morally possess the dog. The answer would be that the only way to make men responsible for dogs was to make the relation a legal one, apart from the likes and dislikes of the moment. Suppose a burglar were to say: “Private property I venerate, private property I revere; but I am convinced that Mr. Brown does not truly value his silver Apostle spoons as such sacred objects should be valued; they have therefore ceased to be his property; in reality they have already become my property, for I appreciate their precious character as nobody else can do.” Suppose a murderer were to say: “What can be more amiable and admirable than human life lived with a due sense of its priceless opportunity! But I regret to observe that Mr. Robinson has lately been looking decidedly tired and melancholy; life accepted in this depressing and demoralizing spirit can no longer truly be called life; it is rather my own exuberant and perhaps exaggerated joy of life which I must gratify by cutting his throat with a carving-knife.”

It is obvious that these philosophers would fail to understand what we mean by a rule, quite apart from the problem of its exceptions. They would fail to grasp what we mean by an institution, whether it be the institution of law, of property, or of marriage. A reasonable person will certainly reply to the burglar: “You will hardly soothe us by merely poetical praises of property; because your case would be much more convincing if you denied, as the Communists do, that property ought to exist at all. There may be, there certainly are, gross abuses in private property; but, so long as it is an institution at all, it cannot alter merely with moods and emotions. A farm cannot simply float away from a farmer, in proportion as his interest in it grows fainter than it was. A house cannot shift away by inches from a householder, by certain fine shades of feeling that he happens to have about it. A dog cannot drift away like a dream, and begin to belong to somebody else who happens just then to be dreaming of him. And neither can the serious social relation of husband and wife, of mother and father, or even of man and woman, be resolved in all its relations by passions and reactions of sentiment.” This question is quite apart from the question of whether there are exceptions to the rule of loyalty, or what they are. The primary point is that there is an institution to which to be loyal. If the new sentimentalists mean what they say, when they say they venerate that institution, they must not suggest that an institution can be actually identical with an emotion. And that is what their rhetoric does suggest, so far as it can be said to suggest anything.

These writers are always explaining to us why they believe in divorce. I think I can easily understand why they believe in divorce. What I do not understand is why they believe in marriage. Just as the philosophical burglar would be more philosophical if he were a Bolshevist, so this sort of divorce advocate would be more philosophical if he were a free-lover. For his arguments never seem to touch on marriage as an institution, or anything more than an individual experience. The real explanation of this strange indifference to the institutional idea is, I fancy, something not only deeper, but wider; something affecting all the institutions of the modern world. The truth is that these sociologists are not at all interested in promoting the sort of social life that marriage does promote. The sort of society of which marriage has always been the strongest pillar is what is sometimes called the distributive society; the society in which most of the citizens have a tolerable share of property, especially property in hand. Everywhere, all over the world, the farm goes with the family and the family with the farm. Unless the whole domestic group hold together with a sort of loyalty or local patriotism, unless the inheritance of property is logical and legitimate, unless the family quarrels are kept out of the courts of officialism, the tradition of family ownership cannot be handed on unimpaired. On the other hand, the Servile State, which is the opposite of the distributive state, has always been rather embarrassed by the institution of marriage. It is an old story that the negro slavery of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” did its worst work in the breaking-up of families. But, curiously enough, the same story is told from both sides. For the apologists of the Slave States, or, at least, of the Southern States, make the same admission even in their own defence. If they denied breaking up the slave family, it was because they denied that there was any slave family to break up.

Free love is the direct enemy of freedom. It is the most obvious of all the bribes that can be offered by slavery. In servile societies a vast amount of sexual laxity can go on in practice, and even in theory, save when now and then some cranky speculator or crazy squire has a fad for some special breed of slaves like a breed of cattle. And even that lunacy would not last long; for lunatics are the minority among slave-owners. Slavery has a much more sane and a much more subtle appeal to human nature than that. It is much more likely that, after a few such fads and freaks, the new Servile State would settle down into the sleepy resignation of the old Servile State; the old pagan repose in slavery, as it was before Christianity came to trouble and perplex the world with ideals of liberty and chivalry. One of the conveniences of that pagan world is that, below a certain level of society, nobody really need bother about pedigree or paternity at all. A new world began when slaves began to stand on their dignity as virgin martyrs. Christendom is the civilization that such martyrs made; and slavery is its returning enemy. But of all the bribes that the old pagan slavery can offer, this luxury and laxity is the strongest; nor do I deny that the influences desiring the degradation of human dignity have here chosen their instrument well.

STREET CRIES AND STRETCHING THE LAW

ABOUT a hundred years ago some enemy sowed among our people the heresy that it is more practical to use a corkscrew to open a sardine-tin, or to employ a door-scraper as a paper-weight. Practical politics came to mean the habit of using everything for some other purpose than its own; of snatching up anything as a substitute for something else. A law that had been meant to do one thing, and had conspicuously failed to do it, was always excused because it might do something totally different and perhaps directly contrary. A custom that was supposed to keep everything white was allowed to survive on condition that it made everything black. In reality this is so far from being practical that it does not even rise to the dignity of being lazy. At the best it can only claim to save trouble, and it does not even do that. What it really means is that some people will take every other kind of trouble in the world, if they are saved the trouble of thinking. They will sit for hours trying to open the tin with a corkscrew, rather than make the mental effort of pursuing the abstract, academic, logical connexion between a corkscrew and a cork.

Here is an example of the sort of thing I mean, which I came across in a daily paper to-day. A headline announces in staring letters, and with startled notes of exclamation, that some abominable judicial authority has made the monstrous decision that musicians playing in the street are not beggars. The journalist bitterly remarks that they may shove their hats under our very noses for money, but yet we must not call them beggars. He follows this remark with several notes of exclamation, and I feel inclined to add a few of my own. The most astonishing thing about the matter, to my mind, is that the journalist is quite innocent in his own indignation. It never so much as crosses his mind that organ-grinders are not classed as beggars because they are not beggars. They may be as much of a nuisance as beggars; they may demand special legislation like beggars; it may be right and proper for every philanthropist to stop them, starve them, harry them, and hound them to death just as if they were beggars. But they are not beggars, by any possible definition of begging. Nobody can be said to be a mere mendicant who is offering something in exchange for money, especially if it is something which some people like and are willing to pay for. A street singer is no more of a mendicant than Madame Clara Butt, though the method (and the scale) of remuneration differs more or less. Anybody who sells anything, in the streets or in the shops, is begging in the sense of begging people to buy. Mr. Selfridge is begging people to buy; the Imperial International Universal Cosmic Stores is begging people to buy. The only possible definition of the actual beggar is not that he is begging people to buy, but that he has nothing to sell.

Now, it is interesting to ask ourselves what the newspaper really meant, when it was so wildly illogical in what it said. Superficially, and as a matter of mood or feeling, we can all guess what was meant. The writer meant that street musicians looked very much like beggars, because they wore thinner and dirtier clothes than his own; and that he had grown quite used to people who looked like that being treated anyhow and arrested for everything. That is a state of mind not uncommon among those whom economic security has kept as superficial as a varnish. But what was intellectually involved in his vague argument was more interesting. What he meant was, in that deeper sense, that it would be a great convenience if the law that punishes beggars could be *stretched* to cover people who are certainly not beggars, but who may be as much of a botheration as beggars. In other words, he wanted to use the mendacity laws in a matter quite unconnected with mendacity; but he wanted to use the old laws because it would save the trouble of making new laws — as the corkscrew would save the trouble of going to look for the tin-opener. And for this notion of the crooked and anomalous use of laws, for ends logically different from their own, he could, of course, find much support in the various sophists who have attacked reason in recent times. But, as I have said, it does not really save trouble; and it is becoming increasingly doubtful whether it will even save disaster. It used to be said that this rough-and-ready method made the country richer; but it will be found less and less consoling to explain why the country is richer when the country is steadily growing poorer. It will not comfort us in the hour of failure to listen to long and ingenious explanations of our success. The truth is that this sort of practical compromise has not led to practical success. The success of England came as the culmination of the highly logical and theoretical eighteenth century. The method was already beginning to fail by the time we came to the end of the compromising and constitutional nineteenth century. Modern scientific civilization was launched by logicians. It was only wrecked by practical men. Anyhow, by this time everybody in England has given up pretending to be particularly rich. It is, therefore, no appropriate moment for proving that a course of being consistently unreasonable will always lead to riches.

In truth, it would be much more practical to be more logical. If street musicians are a nuisance, let them be legislated against for being a nuisance. If begging is really wrong, a logical law should be imposed on all beggars, and not merely on those whom particular persons happen to regard as being also nuisances. What this sort of opportunism does is simply to prevent any question being considered as a whole. I happen to think the whole modern attitude towards beggars is entirely heathen and inhuman. I should be prepared to maintain, as a matter of general morality, that it is intrinsically indefensible to punish human beings for asking for human assistance. I should say that it is intrinsically insane to urge people to give charity and forbid people to accept charity. Nobody is penalized for crying for help when he is drowning; why should he be penalized for crying for help when he is starving? Every one would expect to have to help a man to save his life in a shipwreck; why not a man who has suffered a shipwreck of his life? A man may be in such a position by no conceivable fault of his own; but in any case his fault is never urged against him in the parallel cases. A man is saved from shipwreck without inquiry about whether he has blundered in the steering of his ship; and we fish him out of a pond before asking whose fault it was that he fell into it. A striking social satire might be written about a man who was rescued again and again out of mere motives of humanity in all the wildest places of the world; who was heroically rescued from a lion and skilfully saved out of a sinking ship; who was sought out on a desert island and scientifically recovered from a deadly swoon; and who only found himself suddenly deserted by all humanity when he reached the city that was his home.

In the ultimate sense, therefore, I do not myself disapprove of mendicants. Nor do I disapprove of musicians. It may not unfairly be retorted that this is because I am not a musician. I allow full weight to the fairness of the retort, but I cannot think it a good thing that even musicians should lose all their feelings except the feeling for music. And it may surely be said that a man must have lost most of his feelings if be does not feel the pathos of a barrel-organ in a poor street. But there are other feelings besides pathos covered by any comprehensive veto upon street music and minstrelsy. There are feelings of history, and even of patriotism. I have seen in certain rich and respectable quarters of London a notice saying that all street cries are forbidden. If there were a notice up to say that all old tombstones should be carted away like lumber, it would be rather less of an act of vandalism. Some of the old street cries of London are among the last links that we have with the London of Shakespeare and the London of Chaucer. When I meet a man who utters one I am so far from regarding him as a beggar; it is I who should be a beggar, and beg him to say it again.

But in any case it should be made clear that we cannot make one law do the work of another. If we have real reasons for forbidding something like a street cry, we should give the reasons that are real; we should forbid it because it is a cry, because it is a noise, because it is a nuisance, or perhaps, according to our tastes, because it is old, because it is popular, because it is historic and a memory of Merry England. I suspect that the sub-conscious prejudice against it is rooted in the fact that the pedlar or hawker is one of the few free men left in the modern city; that he often sells his own wares directly to the consumer, and does not pay rent for a shop. But if the modern spirit wishes to veto him, to harry him, or to hang, draw, and quarter him for being free, at least let it so far recognize his dignity as to define him; and let the law deal with him in principle as well as in practice.

WHY REFORMS GO WRONG

EVERYBODY says that each generation revolts against the last. Nobody seems to notice that it generally revolts against the revolt of the last. I mean that the latest grievance is really the last reform. To take but one example in passing. There is a new kind of novel which I have seen widely reviewed in the newspapers. No; it is not an improper novel. On the contrary, it is more proper — almost in the sense of prim — than its authors probably imagine. It is really a reaction towards a more old-fashioned morality, and away from a new-fashioned one. It is not so much a revolt of the daughters as a return of the grandmothers.

Miss May Sinclair wrote a novel of the kind I mean, about a spinster whose life had been blighted by a tender and sensitive touch in her education, which had taught her — or rather, expected her — always to "behave beautifully." Mrs. Delafield wrote a story with the refreshing name of "Humbug" on somewhat similar lines. It suggests that children are actually trained to deception, and especially self-deception, by a delicate and considerate treatment that continually appealed to their better feelings, which was always saying, "You would not hurt father." Now, certainly a more old-fashioned and simple style of education did not invariably say "You would not hurt father." Sometimes it preferred to say, "Father will hurt you." I am not arguing for or against the father with the big stick. I am pointing out that Miss Sinclair and the modern novelists really *are* arguing for the father with the big stick, and against a more recent movement that is supposed to have reformed him. I myself can remember the time when the progressives offered us, as a happy prospect, the very educational method which the novelists now describe so bitterly in retrospect. We were told that true education would only appeal to the better feelings of children; that it would devote itself entirely to telling them to live beautifully; that it would use no argument more arbitrary than saying, "You would not hurt father." That ethical education was the whole plan for the rising generation in the days of my youth. We were assured beforehand how much more effective such a psychological treatment would be than the bullying and blundering idea of authority. The hope of the future was in this humanitarian optimism in the training of the young; in other words, the hope was set on something which, when it is established, Mrs. Delafield instantly calls humbug and Miss Sinclair appears to hate as a sort of hell. What they are suffering from, apparently, is not the abuses of their grandfathers, but the most modern reforms of their fathers. These complaints are the first fruits of reformed education, of ethical societies, and social idealists. I repeat that I am for the moment talking about their opinions and not mine. I am not eulogizing either big sticks or psychological scalpels; I am pointing out that the outcry against the scalpel inevitably involves something of a case for the stick. I have never tied myself to a final belief in either; but I point out that the progressive, generation after generation, does elaborately tie himself up in new knots, and then roar and yell aloud to be untied.

It seems a little hard on the late Victorian idealist to be so bitterly abused merely for being kind to his children. There is something a little unconsciously comic about the latest generation of critics, who are crying out against their parents, “Never, never can I forgive the tenderness with which my mother treated me.” There is a certain irony in the bitterness which says, “My soul cries for vengeance when I remember that papa was always polite at the breakfast-table; my soul is seared by the persistent insolence of Uncle William in refraining from clouting me over the head.” It seems harsh to blame these idealists for idealizing human life, when they were only following what was seriously set before them as the only ideal of education. But, if this is to be said for the late Victorian idealist, there is also something to be said for the early Victorian authoritarian. Upon their own argument, there is something to be said for Uncle William if he did clout them over the head. It is rather hard, even on the great-grandfather with the big stick, that we should still abuse him merely for having neglected the persuasive methods that we have ourselves abandoned. It is hard to revile him for not having discovered to be sound the very sentimentalities that we have since discovered to be rotten.

For the case of these moderns is worst of all when they do try to find any third ideal, which is neither the authority which they once condemned for not being persuasion, nor the persuasion which they now condemn for being worse than authority. The nearest they can get to any other alternative is some notion about individuality; about drawing out the true personality of the child, or allowing a human being to find his real self. It is, perhaps, the most utterly meaningless talk in the whole muddle of the modern world. How is a child of seven to decide whether he has or has not found his true individuality? How, for that matter, is any grown-up person to tell it for him? How is anybody to know whether anybody has become his true self? In the highest sense it can only be a matter of mysticism; it can only mean that there was a purpose in his creation. It can only be the purpose of God, and even then it is a mystery. In anybody who does not accept the purpose of God, it can only be a muddle. It is so unmeaning that it cannot be called mystery but only mystification. Humanly considered, a human personality is the only thing that does in fact emerge out of a combination of the forces inside the child and the forces outside. The child cannot grow up in a void or vacuum with no forces outside. Circumstances will control or contribute to his character, whether they are the grandfather's stick or the father's persuasion or the conversations among the characters of Miss May Sinclair. Who in the world is to say positively which of these things has or has not helped his real personality?

What is his real personality? These philosophers talk as if there was a complete and complex animal curled up inside every baby, and we had nothing to do but to let it come out with a yell. As a matter of fact, we all know, in the case of the finest and most distinguished personalities, that it would be very difficult to disentangle them from the trials they have suffered, as well as from the truths they have found. But, anyhow, these thinkers must give us some guidance as to how they propose to tell whether their transcendental notion of a true self has been realized or no. As it is, anybody can say of any part of any personality that it is or is not an artificial addition obscuring that personality. In fiction, most of the wild and anarchical characters strike me as entirely artificial. In real life they would no doubt be much the same, if they could ever be met with in real life. But anyhow, they would be the products of experience as well as of elemental impulses; they would be influenced in some way by all they had gone through; and anybody would be free to speculate on what they would have been like if they had never had such experiences. Anybody might amuse himself by trying to subtract the experiences and find the self; anybody who wanted to waste his time.

Therefore, without feeling any fixed fanaticism for all the old methods, whether coercive or persuasive, I do think they both had a basis of common sense which is wanting in this third theory. The parent, whether persuading or punishing the child, was at least aware of one simple truth. He knew that, in the most serious sense, God alone knows what the child is really like, or is meant to be really like. All we can do to him is to fill him with those truths which we believe to be equally true whatever he is like. We must have a code of morals which we believe to be applicable to all children, and impose it on this child because it is applicable to all children. If it seems to be a part of his personality to be a swindler or a torturer, we must tell him that we do not want any personalities to be swindlers and torturers. In other words, we must believe in a religion or philosophy firmly enough to take the responsibility of acting on it, however much the rising generations may knock or kick at the door. I know all about the word education meaning drawing things out, and mere instruction meaning putting things in. And I respectfully reply that God alone knows what there is to draw out; but we can be reasonably responsible for what we are ourselves putting in.

THE INNOCENCE OF THE CRIMINAL

A PHRASE, which we have all heard, is sometimes uttered by some small man sentenced to some small town of imprisonment, for either or both of the two principal reasons for imprisoning a man in modern England: that he is known to the police, and that he is not known to the magistrate. When such a man receives a more or less temperate term of imprisonment, he is often reported as having left the dock saying that he would "do it on his head." In his own self-consciousness, he is merely seeking to maintain his equilibrium by that dazed and helpless hilarity which is the only philosophy allowed to him. But the phrase itself, like a great part of really popular slang, is highly symbolic. The English pauper (who tends to become numerically the preponderant Englishman) does really reconcile himself to existence by putting himself in an inverted and grotesque posture towards it. He does really stand on his head, because he is living in topsy-turvydom. He finds himself in an Upsidonia fully as fantastic as Mr. Archibald Marshall's, and far less fair and logical; in a landscape as wild as if the trees grew downwards or the moon hung below his feet. He lives in a world in which the man who lends him money makes him a beggar; in which, when he is a beggar, the man who gives him money makes him a criminal; in which, when he is a criminal and "known to the police," he becomes permanently liable to be arrested for other people's crimes.

He is punished if his home is neglected though there is nobody to look after it, and punished again if it is not neglected, and the children are kept from school to look after it. He is arrested for sleeping on private land, and arrested again for sleeping on public land, and arrested, be it noted, for the positive and explicit reason that he has no money to sleep anywhere else. In short, he is under laws of such naked and admitted lunacy that they might quite as well tell him to pluck all the feathers off the cows, or to amputate the left leg of a whale. There is no possible way of behaving in such a pantomime city except as a sort of comic acrobat, a knockabout comedian who does as many things as possible on his head. He is, both by accident and design, a tumbler. It is a proverb about his children that they tumble up; it is the whole joke about his drunkenness that he tumbles down. But he is in a world in which standing straight or standing still have become both impossible and fatal. Meredith rightly conceived the only possible philosophy of this modern outlaw as that of Juggling Jerry; and even what is called his swindling is mostly this sort of almost automatic juggling. His nearest approach to social status is mere kinetic stability, like a top. There was, indeed, another tumbler called in tradition Our Lady's Tumbler, who performed happier antics before a shrine in the days of superstition; and whose philosophy was perhaps more positive than Juggling Jerry's, or Meredith's. But a strenuous reform has passed through our own cities, careful of the survival of the fittest, and we have been able to preserve the antic while abolishing the altar.

But though this form of reaction into ridicule, and even self-ridicule, is very natural, it is also very national; it is not the only human reaction against injustice, nor perhaps the most obvious. The Irishman has shot his landlord, the Italian has joined a revolutionary Secret Society, the Russian has either thrown a bomb or gone on a pilgrimage, long before the Englishman has come finally to the conclusion that existence is a joke. Even as he does so he is too fully conscious that it would be too bad as a tragedy if it were not so good as a farce. It is further to be noticed, for the fact is of ominous importance, that this topsy-turvy English humour has, during the last six or seven generations, been more and more abandoned to the poorer orders. Sir John Falstaff is a knight; Tony Weller is a coachman; his son Sam is a servant to the middle classes, and the recent developments of social discipline seem calculated to force Sam Weller into the status of the Artful Dodger. It is certain that a youth of that class who should do to-day a tenth of the things that Sam Weller did would in one way or another spend most of his life in jail. To-day, indeed, it is the main object of social reform that he should spend the whole of his life in jail; but in a jail that can be used as a factory. That is the real meaning of all the talk about scientific criminology and remedial penalties. For such outcasts punishment is to be abolished by being perpetuated. When men propose to eliminate retribution as "vindictive," they mean two very simple things: ceasing altogether to punish the few who are rich, and enslaving all the rest for being poor.

Nevertheless this half-conscious buffoon who is the butt of our society is also the satirist of it. He is even the judge of it, in the sense that he is the normal test by which it will be judged. In a number of quite practical matters it is he who represents historic humanity, and speaks naturally and truthfully where his judges and critics are crooked, crabbed and superstitious. This can be seen, for instance, if we see him for a moment not in the dock but in the witness-box. In several books and newspapers I happened to read lately, I have noticed a certain tone touching the uneducated witness; phrases like “the vagueness characteristic of their class,” or “easily confused, as such witnesses are.” Now such vagueness is simple truthfulness. Nine times out of ten, it is the confusion any man would show at any given instant about the complications which crowd human life. Nine times out of ten, it is avoided in the case of educated witnesses by the mere expedient of a legal fiction. The witness has a brief, like the barrister: he has consulted dates, he has made memoranda, he has frequently settled with solicitors exactly what he can safely say. His evidence is artificial even when it is not fictitious; we might almost say it is fictitious even when it is not false. The model testimony, regarded as the most regular of all in a law court, is constabulary testimony; if what the soldier said is not evidence, what the policeman says is often the only evidence. And what the policeman says is incredible, as he says it. It is something like this: “I met the prisoner coming out of Clapham Junction Station and he told me he went to see Mrs. Nehemiah Blagg, of 192 Paardeburg Terrace, West Ealing, about a cat which he had left there last Tuesday week which she was going to keep if it was a good mouser, and she told him it had killed a mouse in the back kitchen on Sunday morning so he had better leave it. She gave him a shilling for his trouble, and he went to West Ealing post-office where he bought two half-penny stamps and a ball of string, and then to the Imperial Stores at Ealing Broadway, and bought a pennyworth of mixed sweets. Coming out he met a friend, and they went to the Green Dolphin and made an appointment for 5.30 next day at the third lamp-post in Eckstein Street,” and so on. It is frankly impossible for anybody to say such a sentence; still more for anybody to remember it. If the thing is not a tissue of mere inventions, it can only be the arbitrary summary of a very arbitrary cross-examination, conducted precisely as are the examinations of a secret police in Russia. The story was not only discovered bit by bit, but discovered backwards. Mountains were in labour to bring forth that mouse in West Ealing. The police made a thorough official search of the man’s mental boxes and baggage, before that cat was let out of the bag. I am not here supposing the tale to be untrue — I am pointing out that the telling of it is unreal. The right way to tell a story is the way in which the prisoner told it to the policeman, and not the way in which the policeman tells it to the court. It is the way in which all true tales are told, the way in which all men learn the news about their neighbours, the way in which we all learned everything we know in childhood; it is the only real evidence for anything on this earth, and it is not evidence in a court of law. The man who tells it is vague about some things, less vague about others, and so on in proportion; but at his very vaguest, among the stiff unreason of modern conditions, he is a judgment on those conditions. His very bewilderment is a criticism, and his very indecision is a decision against us. It is an old story that we are judged by the innocence of a child, and every child is, in the French phrase, a terrible child. There is a true sense in which all our laws are judged by the innocence of a criminal.

In politics, of course, the case is the same. I will defer the question of whether the democracy knows how to answer questions until the oligarchy knows how to ask them. Asking a man if he approves of Tariff Reform is not only a silly but an insane question, for it covers the wildest possibilities, just as asking him whether he approves of Trouser Reform might mean anything from wearing no trousers to wearing a particular pattern of yellow trousers decorated with scarlet snakes. Talking about Temperance, when you mean pouring wine down the gutter, is quite literally as senseless as talking about Thrift, when you mean throwing money into the sea. The rambling speech of yokels and tramps is as much wiser than this as a rambling walk in the woods is wiser than the mathematical straightness of a fall from a precipice. The present leaders of progress are, I think, very near to that precipice; about all their schemes and ideals there is a savour of suicide. But the clown will go on talking in a living and, therefore, a leisurely fashion, and the great truth of pure gossip which sprang up in simpler ages and was the fountain of all the literatures, will flow on when our intricate and tortured society has died of its sins.

THE PRUDERY OF THE FEMINISTS

IN the ultimate and universal sense I am astonished at the lack of astonishment. Starting from scratch, so to speak, we are all in the position of the first frog, whose pious and compact prayer was “Lord, how you made me jump!” Matthew Arnold told us to see life steadily and see it whole. But the flaw in his whole philosophy is that when we do see life whole we do not see it steadily, in Arnold’s sense, but as a staggering prodigy of creation. There is a primeval light in which all stones are precious stones; a primeval darkness against which all flowers are as vivid as fireworks. Nevertheless, there is one kind of surprise that does surprise me, the more, perhaps, because it is not true surprise but a supercilious fuss. There is a kind of man who not only claims that his stone is the only pebble on the beach, but declares it must be the one and only philosopher’s stone, because he is the one and only philosopher. He does not discover suddenly the sensational fact that grass is green. He discovers it very slowly, and proves it still more slowly, bringing us one blade of grass at a time. He is made haughty instead of humble by hitting on the obvious. The flowers do not make him open his eyes, but, rather, cover them with spectacles; and this is even more true of the weeds and thorns. Even his bad news is banal. A young man told me he had abandoned his Bible religion and vicarage environment at the withering touch of the one line of Fitzgerald: “The flower that once has blown, for ever dies.” I vainly pointed out that the Bible or the English burial service could have told him that man cometh up as a flower and is cut down. If that were self-evidently final, there would never have been any Bibles or any vicarages. I do not see how the flower can be any more dead, when a mower can cut it down, merely because a botanist can cut it up. It should further be remembered that the belief in the soul, right or wrong, arose and flourished among men who knew all there is to know about cutting down, not unfrequently cutting each other down, with considerable vivacity. The physical fact of death, in a hundred horrid shapes, was more naked and less veiled in times of faith or superstition than in times of science or scepticism. Often it was not merely those who had seen a man die, but those who had seen him rot, who were most certain that he was everlastingly alive.

There is another case somewhat analogous to this discovery of the new disease of death. I am puzzled in somewhat the same way when I hear, as we often hear just now, somebody saying that he was formerly opposed to Female Suffrage but was converted to it by the courage and patriotism shown by women in nursing and similar war work. Really, I do not wish to be superior in my turn, when I can only express my wonder in a question. But from what benighted dens can these people have crawled, that they did not know that women are brave? What horrible sort of women have they known all their lives? Where do they come from? Or, what is a still more apposite question, where do they think they come from? Do they think they fell from the moon, or were really found under cabbage-leaves, or brought over the sea by storks? Do they (as seems more likely) believe they were produced chemically, by Mr. Schefer on principles of abiogenesis? Should we any of us be here at all if women were not brave? Are we not all trophies of that war and triumph? Does not every man stand on the earth like a graven statue as the monument of the valour of a woman?

As a matter of fact, it is men much more than women who needed a war to redeem their reputation, and who have redeemed it. There was much more plausibility in the suspicion that the old torture of blood and iron would prove too much for a somewhat drugged and materialistic male population long estranged from it. I have always suspected that this doubt about manhood was the real sting in the strange sex quarrel, and the meaning of the new and nervous tattoo about the unhappiness of women. Man, like the Master Builder, was suspected by the female intelligence of having lost his nerve for climbing that dizzy battle-tower he had built in times gone by. In this the war did certainly straighten out the sex tangle; but it did also make clear on how terrible a thread of tenure we hold our privileges — and even our pleasures. For even bridge parties and champagne suppers take place on the top of that toppling war-tower; an hour can come when even a man who cared for nothing but bridge would have to defend it like Horatius; or when the man who only lives for champagne would have to die for champagne, as certainly as thousands of French soldiers have died for that flat land of vines; when he would have to fight as hard for the wine as Jeanne D’Arc for the oil of Rheims.

Just as civilization is guarded by potential war, so it is guarded by potential revolution. We ought never to indulge in either without extreme provocation; but we ought to be cured for ever of the fancy that extreme provocation is impossible. Against the tyrant within, as against the barbarian without, every voter should be a potential volunteer. “Thou goest with women, forget not thy whip,” said the Prussian philosopher; and some such echo probably infected those who wanted a war to make them respect their wives and mothers. But there would really be a symbolic sense in saying, “Thou goest with men, forget not thy sword.” Men coming to the council of the tribe should sheathe their swords, but not surrender them. Now I am not going to talk about Female Suffrage at this time of day; but these were the elements upon which a fair and sane opposition to it were founded. These are the risks of real politics; and the woman was not called upon to run such a risk, for the very simple reason that she was already running another risk. It was not laws that fixed her in the family; it was the very nature of the family. If the family was a fact in any very full sense, and if popular rule was also a fact in any very full sense, it was simply physically impossible for the woman to play the same part in such politics as the man. The difficulty was only evaded because the democracy was not a free democracy or the family not a free family. But whether this view was right or wrong, it is at least clear that the only honourable basis for any limitations of womanhood is the same as the basis of the respect for womanhood. It consisted in certain realities, which it may be undesirable to discuss, but is certainly even more undesirable to ignore. And my complaint against the more fussy Feminists (so called from their detestation of everything feminine) is that they do ignore these realities. I do not even propose the alternative of discussing them; on that point I am myself content to be what some call conventional, and others, civilized. I do not in the least demand that anyone should accept my own deduction from them; and I do not care a brass farthing what deduction anybody accepts about such a rag as modern ballot paper. But I do suggest that the peril with which one half of humanity is perpetually at war should be at least present in the minds of those who are perpetually bragging about breaking conventions, rending veils, and violating antiquated taboos. And, in nine cases out of ten, it seems to be quite absent from their minds. The mere fact of using the argument before mentioned, of women’s strength vindicated by war work, shows that it is absent from their minds.

If this oddity of the new obscurantism means, rather, that women have shown the moral courage and mental capacity needed for important concerns, I am equally unable to summon up any surprise at the revelation.

Nothing can well be more important than our own souls and bodies; and they, at their most delicate and determining period, are almost always and almost entirely confided to women. Those who have been appointed as educational experts in every age are not surely a new order of priestesses? If it means that in a historic crisis all kinds of people must do all kinds of work, and that women are the more to be admired for doing work to which they are unaccustomed, or even unsuited, it is a point which I should quite as easily concede. But if it means that in planning the foundations of a future society we should ignore the one eternal and incurable contrast in humanity; if it means that we may now go ahead gaily as if there were really no difference at all; if it means, as I read in a magazine to-day, and as almost anyone may now read almost anywhere, that if such and such work is bad for women it must be bad for men; if it means that patriotic women in munition factories prove that any women can be happy in any factories; if, in short, it means that the huge and primeval facts of the family no longer block the way to a mere social assimilation and regimentation — then I say that the prospect is not one of liberty but of perpetuation of the dreariest sort of humbug. It is not emancipation, it is not even anarchy; it is simply prudery in the thoughts. It means that we have Bowdlerized our brains as well as our books. It is every bit as senseless a surrender to a superstitious decorum as it would be to force every woman to cut herself with a razor, because it was not etiquette to admit that she cannot grow a beard.

HOW MAD LAWS ARE MADE

ANY one of the strange laws we suffer is a compromise between a fad and a vested interest. The fashionable way of effecting a social reform is as follows. To make the story clearer, and worthier of its wild and pointless process, I will call the two chief agents in it the March Hare and the Hatter. The Hatter is mad, in a quiet way; but he is merely mad on making hats, or rather on making money. He has a huge and prosperous emporium which advertises all possible hats to fit all possible heads; but he certainly nourishes an occult conviction that it is really the duty of the heads to fit the hats. This is his mild madness; in other respects he is a stodgy and rather stupid millionaire. Now, the man whom we will call the March Hare is at first sight the flat contrary of this. He is a wild intellectual and the leader of the Hatless Brigade. It does not much matter why there is this quarrel between the Hare and the Hat; it may be any progressive sophistry. Perhaps it is because he is a March Hare; and finds it hard to keep his hat on in a March wind. Perhaps it is because his ears are too long to allow him to wear a hat; or perhaps he hopes that every emancipated member of the Hatless Brigade will eventually evolve ears as long as a hare's — or a donkey's. The point is that anyone would fancy that the Hare and the Hatter would collide. As a matter of fact they co-operate. In other words, every "reform" to-day is a treaty between the two most influential modern figures — the great capitalist and the small faddist. They are the father and mother of a new law; and therefore it is so much of a mongrel as to be a monster.

What happens is something like this. The line of least resistance is found between the two by a more subtle analysis of their real respective aims. The intuitive eye of friendship detects a fine shade in the feelings of the Hatter. The desire of his heart, when delicately apprehended, is not necessarily that people should wear his hats, but rather that they should buy them. On the other hand, even his fanatically consistent colleague has no particular objection to a human being purchasing a hat, so long as he does not wreck his health, blast his prospects and generally blow his brains out, by the one suicidal act of putting it on. Between them they construct a law called the Habitual Hat-Pegs Act, which lays it down that every householder shall have not less than twenty-three hat-pegs and that, lest these should accumulate unwholesome dust, each must be covered by a hat in uninterrupted occupation. Or the thing might be managed some other way; as by arranging that a great modern nobleman should wear an accumulation of hats, one on top of the other, in pleasing memory of what has often been the itinerant occupation of his youth. Broadly, it would be enacted that hats might be used in various ways; to take rabbits out of, as in the case of conjurers, or put pennies into, as in the case of beggars, or smash on the heads of scarecrows, or stick on the tops of poles; if only it were guaranteed that as many citizens as possible should be forced to go bareheaded. Thus, the two most powerful elements in the governing class are satisfied; of which the first is finance and the second fidgets. The Capitalist has made money; and he only wanted to make money. The Social Reformer has done something; and he only wanted something to do.

Now every one of the recent tricks about temperance and economy has been literally of this type. I have chosen the names from a nonsense story merely for algebraic lucidity and universality; what has really happened in our own shops and streets is every bit as nonsensical. But quite recent events have confirmed this analysis with an accuracy which even the unconverted can hardly regard as a coincidence. I have already traced the truth in the case of the liquor traffic; but many public-spirited persons of the Prohibitionist school have found it very difficult to believe. All "temperance legislation" is a compromise between a liquor merchant who wants to get rid of his liquor and a teetotaller who does not want his neighbours to get it. But as the capitalist is much stronger than the crank, the compromise is lop-sided as such; the neighbours do get it, but always in the wrong way. But again, since the crank has not a true creed, but only an intellectual itch, he cares much more to be up and doing than to understand what he has done. As I said above, he only wants to do something; he has increased drunkenness. Anyhow, all such reforms are upon the plan of my parable. Sometimes it is decreed that drink shall only be sold in large quantities suitable to large incomes; that is exactly like allowing one nobleman to wear twenty hats. Sometimes it is proposed that the State should take over the liquor traffic; we hardly need to be told what that means, when it is the Plutocratic State. It means quite simply this: the policeman goes to the hatter and buys his whole stock of hats at a hundred pounds a piece, and then parades the street handing out hats to those who may take his fancy, and by blows of the truncheon forcing every man Jack of the rest of them to pay a hundred pounds for a hat he does not get.

Merely to divert the rivers of ale or gin from private power to public power or from poor men to rich men, or from good taverns to bad taverns, is the sort of effort with which the faddists are satisfied and the liquor lords much more than satisfied.

There was a curious case of the same thing in the attempt to economize food during the Great War. The reformers did not wish really to economize food; the great food profiteers would not let them. The fussy person wants to force or forbid something, under the conditions defining all such effort; it must be something that will interfere with the citizen and will not interfere with the profiteer. Given such a problem, we might almost predict, for instance, that he will propose the limitation of the number of courses at a restaurant. It will not save the beef; it is not meant to save the beef; but to save the beef merchant. There will actually be more food bought, if the cook is not allowed to turn the scraps into kickshaws. But why should a plutocracy including food profiteers object to more food being bought? Why, for that matter, should the pure-minded social idealist object to more food being bought, as long as it is the wrong food that is sold? His quite disinterested aim is not that food should be restricted, but merely that freedom should be restricted. When once he is assured that a sufficient number of thoughtless persons are really getting what they don’t want, he says he is building Jerusalem in England’s green and pleasant land. And so he is; if the expression signifies handing over England to the wealthier Jews.

Now the only way in which this conclusive explanation can be countered is by ridiculing as impossible the notion that so fantastic a compact can be clearly and coolly made. The two attitudes are not logically interlocked, like the antlers of stags; they simply squeeze each other out of shape, as in a wrestle of two rival jelly-fish. We should be far safer if they had the intellectual honesty of a bargain or a bribe. As it is, they have an almost creepy quality which justifies the comparison to shapeless beasts of the sea. I defy any rational man to deny that he has noticed something moonstruck and mis-shapen, as apart from anything unjust or uncomfortable, about the little laws which have lately been tripping him up; laws which may tell him at any minute that he must not purchase turpentine before a certain tick of the clock, or that if he buys a pound of tea he must also buy a pennyworth of tin-tacks. The strictly correct word for such things is half-witted; and they are half-witted because each of the two incongruous partners has only half his will. They have not, for instance, the sweeping simplicity of the old sumptuary laws or even the old Puritan persecutions. But they are also half-witted because even the one mind is not the whole mind; it is largely the sub-conscious mind, which dares not trust itself in speech. The Drink Capitalist dares not actually say to the teetotaller, “Let me sell a quart bottle of whisky to be drunk in a day, and then I will let you pester a poor fellow who makes a pot of beer last half an hour.” That is exactly what happens in essence; but it is easy to guess what happens in external form. The teetotaller has twenty schemes for cutting off free citizens from the beverage of their fathers; and out of these twenty the liquor lord, without whose permission nothing can be done, selects the one scheme which will not interfere with him and his money. It is even more probable that the temperance reformer himself selects, by an instinct for what he would call practical politics, the one scheme which the liquor lord is likely to look at. And it matters nothing that it is a scheme too witless for Wonderland; a scheme for abolishing hats while preserving hatters.

It might be a good thing to give the control of drink to the State — if there were a State to give it to. But there is not. There is nothing but a congested compromise made by the pressure of powerful interests on each other. The liquor lords may bargain with the other lords to take their abnormal tribute in a lump instead of a lifetime; but not one of them will live the poorer. The main point is that, in passing through that plutocratic machinery, even a mad opinion will always emerge in a shape more maniacal than its own; and even the silliest fool can only do what the stupidest fool will let him.

THE PAGODA OF PROGRESS

THERE is one fashionable fallacy that crops up everywhere like a weed, until a man feels inclined to devote the rest of his life to the hopeless task of weeding it out. I take one example of it from a newspaper correspondence headed “Have Women Gone Far Enough?” It is immediately concerned with alleged impropriety in dress; but I am not directly interested in that. I quote one paragraph from a lady correspondent, not because it is any worse than the same thing as stated by countless scholars and thinkers, but rather because it is more clearly stated —

“‘Women have gone far enough.’ That has always been the cry of the individual with the unprogressive mind. It seems to me that until Doomsday there will always be the type of man who will cry ‘Women have gone far enough’; but no one can stop the tide of evolution, and women will still go on.”

Which raises the interesting question of where they will go to. Now, as a matter of fact, every thinking person wants to stop the tide of evolution at some particular mark in his own mind. If I were to propose that people should wear no clothes at all, the lady might be shocked. But I should have as much right as anyone else to say that she was obviously an individual with an unprogressive mind. If I were to propose that this reform should be imposed on people by force, she would be justly indignant. But I could answer her with her own argument — that there had always been unprogressive people, and would be till Doomsday. If I then proposed that people should not only be stripped, but skinned alive, she might, perhaps, see several moral objections. But her own argument would still hold good, or as good as it held in her own case; and I could say that evolution would not stop and the skinning would go on. The argument is quite as good on my side as on hers; and it is worthless on both.

Of course, it would be just as easy to urge people to progress or evolve in exactly the opposite direction. It would be as easy to maintain that they ought to go on wearing more and more clothes. It might be argued that savages wear fewer clothes, that clothes are a mark of civilization, and that the evolution of them will go on. I am highly civilized if I wear ten hats, and more highly civilized if I wear twelve hats. When I have already evolved so far as to put on six pairs of trousers, I must still hail the appearance of the seventh pair of trousers with the joy due to the waving banner of a great reform. When we balance these two lunacies against each other, the central point of sanity is surely apparent. The man who headed his inquiry: “Have Women Gone Far Enough?” was at least in a real sense stating the point rightly. The point is that there is a “far enough.” There is a point at which something that was once neglected becomes exaggerated; something that is valuable up to that stage becomes undesirable after that stage. It is possible for the human intellect to consider clearly at what stage, or in what condition, it would have enough complication of clothes, or enough simplification of clothes, or enough of any other social element or tendency. It is possible to set a limit to the pagoda of human hats, rising for ever into infinity. It is possible to count the human legs, and, after a brief calculation, allot to them the appropriate number of trousers. There is such a thing as the miscalculation of making hats for a hydra or boots for a centipede, just as there are such things as bare-footed friars or the Hatless Brigade. There are exceptions and exaggerations, good and bad; but the point is that they are not only both good and bad, but they are good and bad in opposite directions. Let a man have what ideal of human costume or custom he likes. That ideal must still consist of elements in a certain proportion; and if that proportion is disturbed that ideal is destroyed. Let him once be clear in his own mind about what he wants, and then, whatever it is that he wants, he will not want the tide of evolution to wash it away. His ideal may be as revolutionary as he likes or as reactionary as he likes, but it must remain as he likes it. To make it more revolutionary or more reactionary is distortion; to suggest its growing more and more reactionary or revolutionary for ever is demented nonsense. How can a man know what he wants, how can he even want what he wants, if it will not even remain the same while he wants it?

The particular argument about women is not primarily the point; but as a matter of fact it is a very good illustration of the point. If a man thinks the Victorian conventions kept women out of things they would be the happier for having, his natural course is to consider what things they are; not to think that any things will do, so long as there are more of them. This is only the sort of living logic everybody acts in life. Suppose somebody says, “Don’t you think all this wood could be used for something else besides palings?” We shall very probably answer, “Well, I dare say it could,” and perhaps begin to think of wooden boxes or wooden stools. But we shall not see, as in a sort of vision, a vista of wooden razors, wooden carving-knives, wooden coats and hats, wooden pillows and pocket-handkerchiefs. If people had made a false and insufficient list of the uses of wood, we shall try to make a true and sufficient list of them; but not imagine that the list can go on for ever, or include more and more of everything in the world. I am not establishing a scientific parallel between wood and womanhood. But there would be nothing disrespectful in the symbol, considered as a symbol; for wood is the most sacred of all substances: it typifies the divine trade of the carpenter, and men count themselves fortunate to touch it. Here it is only a working simile, but the point of it is this — that all this nonsense about progressive and unprogressive minds, and the tide of evolution, divides people into those who stick ignorantly to wood for one thing and those who attempt insanely to use wood for everything. Both seem to think it a highly eccentric suggestion that we should find out what wood is really useful for, and use it for that. They either profess to worship a wooden womanhood inside the wooden fences of certain trivial and temporary Victorian conventions; or else they profess to see the future as a forest of dryads growing more and more feminine for ever.

But it does not matter to the main question whether anybody else draws the line exactly where I do. The point is that I am not doing an illogical thing, but the only logical thing, in drawing the line. I think tennis for women normal, and football for women quite abnormal; and I am no more inconsistent than I am in having a wooden walking-stick and not a wooden hat. I do not particularly object to a female despot; but I do object to a female demagogue. And my distinction is as much founded on the substance of things as my eccentric conduct in having a wooden chair and table but not a wooden knife and fork. You may think my division wrong; the point is that it is not wrong in being a division. All this fallacy of false progress tends to obscure the old common sense of all mankind, which is still the common sense of every man in his own daily dealings: that everything has its place and proportion and proper use, and that it is rational to trust its use and distrust its abuse. Progress, in the good sense, does not consist in looking for a direction in which one can go on indefinitely. For there is no such direction, unless it be in quite transcendental things, like the love of God. It would be far truer to say that true progress consists in looking for the place where we can stop.

THE MYTH OF THE “MAYFLOWER”

AGNOSTICISM, the ancient confession of ignorance, was a singularly sane and healthy thing so far as it went. Unfortunately it has not gone as far as the twentieth century. It has declared in all ages, as a heathen chief declared in the dark ages, that the life of a man is like the flight of a bird across a firelit room, because we know nothing of whence it comes or whither it goes. It would seem natural to apply it not only to man but to mankind. But the moderns do not apply the same principle but the very opposite principle. They specialize in the unknown origins and in the unknown future. They dwell on the prehistoric and on the post-historic or prophetic; and neglect only the historic. They will give a most detailed description of the habits of the bird when he was a sort of pterodactyl only faintly to be traced in a fossil. They will give an equally detailed description of the habits of the bird a hundred years hence, when he shall have turned into a super-bird, or the dove of universal peace. But the bird in the hand is worth far less to them than the two mysterious birds in these two impenetrable bushes. They will publish a portrait with life, letters, and table-talk of the Missing Link, although he is missing; they will publish a plan and documented history of how the Social Revolution happened, though it has not happened yet. It is the men who are not missing and the revolutions that have happened that they have rather a habit of overlooking. Anyone who has argued, for instance, with the young Jewish intellectuals who are the brain of Bolshevism knows that their whole system turns on the two pivots of the prehistoric and the prophetic. They talk of the Communism of prehistoric ages as if it were a thing like the Crusades in the Middle Ages; not even a probable conjecture but a proved and familiar fact. They will tell you exactly how private property arose in primitive times, just as if they had been there. And then they will take one gigantic leap over all human history, and tell you about the inevitable Communism of the future. Nothing seems to matter unless it is either new enough to be foretold or old enough to be forgotten.

Mr. H. G. Wells has hit off his human habit in the account of a very human character, the American girl who glorifies Stonehenge in his last novel. I do not make Mr. Wells responsible for her opinions, though she is an attractive person and much too good for her Lothario. But she interests me here because she typifies very truly another variation upon this same tendency. To the prehistoric and the post-historic must be added a third thing, which may be called the unhistoric. I mean the bad teaching of real history that such intelligent people so often suffer. She sums up exactly what I mean when she says humorously that Stonehenge has been "kept from her," that Notre Dame is far less important, and that this is the real starting-point of the "Mayflower."

Now the "Mayflower" is a myth. It is an intensely interesting example of a real modern myth. I do not mean of course that the "Mayflower" never sailed, any more than I admit that King Arthur never lived or that Roland never died. I do not mean that the incident had no historic interest, or that the men who figured in it had no heroic qualities; any more than I deny that Charlemagne was a great man because the legend says he was two hundred years old; any more than I deny that the resistance of Roman Britain to the heathen invasion was valiant and valuable, because the legend says that Arthur at Mount Badon killed nine hundred men with his own hand. I mean that there exists in millions of modern minds a traditional image or vision called the "Mayflower," which has far less relation to the real facts than Charlemagne's two hundred years or Arthur's nine hundred corpses. Multitudes of people in England and America, as intelligent and sympathetic as the young lady in Mr. Wells's novel, think of the "Mayflower" as an origin, or archetype, like the Ark or at least the Argo. Perhaps it would be an exaggeration to say that they think the "Mayflower" discovered America. They do really talk as if the "Mayflower" populated America. Above all, they talk as if the establishment of New England had been the first and formative example of the expansion of England. They believe that English expansion was a Puritan experiment; and that an expansion of Puritan ideas was also the expansion of what have been claimed as English ideas, especially ideas of liberty. The Puritans of New England were champions of religious freedom, seeking to found a newer and freer state beyond the sea, and thus becoming the origin and model of modern democracy. All this betrays a lack of exactitude. It is certainly nearer to exact truth to say that Merlin built the castle at Camelot by magic, or that Roland broke the mountains in pieces with his unbroken sword.

For at least the old fables are faults on the right side. They are symbols of the truth and not of the opposite of the truth. They described Roland as brandishing his unbroken sword against the Moslems, but not in favour of the Moslems. And the New England Puritans would have regarded the establishment of real religious liberty exactly as Roland would have regarded the establishment of the religion of Mahound. The fables described Merlin as building a palace for a king and not a public hall for the London School of Economics. And it would be quite as sensible to read the Fabian politics of Mr. Sidney Webb into the local kingships of the Dark Ages, as to read anything remotely resembling modern liberality into the most savage of all the savage theological frenzies of the seventeenth century. Thus the "Mayflower" is not merely a fable, but is much more false than fables generally are. The revolt of the Puritans against the Stuarts was really a revolt *against* religious toleration. I do not say the Puritans were never persecuted by their opponents; but I do say, to their great honour and glory, that the Puritans never descended to the hypocrisy of pretending for a moment that they did not mean to persecute their opponents. And in the main their quarrel with the Stuarts was that the Stuarts would not persecute those opponents enough. Not only was it then the Catholics who were proposing toleration, but it was they who had already actually established toleration in the State of Maryland, before the Puritans began to establish the most intolerant sort of intolerance in the State of New England. And if the fable is fabulous touching the emancipation of religion, it is yet more fabulous touching the expansion of empire. That had been started long before either New England or Maryland, by Raleigh who started it in Virginia. Virginia is still perhaps the most English of the states, certainly more English than New England. And it was also the most typical and important of the states, almost up to Lee's last battle in the Wilderness. But I have only taken the "Mayflower" as an example of the general truth; and in a way the truth has its consoling side. Modern men are not allowed to have any history; but at least nothing can prevent men from having legends.

We have thus before us, in a very true and typical modern picture, the two essential parts of modern culture. It consists first of false history and second of fancy history. What the American tourist believed about Plymouth Rock was untrue; what she believed about Stonehenge was only unfounded. The popular story of Primitive Man cannot be proved. The popular story of Puritanism can be disproved. I can fully sympathize with Mr. Wells and his heroine in feeling the imaginative stimulus of mysteries like Stonehenge; but the imagination springs from the mystery; that is, the imagination springs from the ignorance. It is the very greatness of

Stonehenge that there is very little of it left. It is its chief feature to be featureless. We are very naturally and rightly moved to mystical emotions about signals from so far away along the path of the past; but part of the poetry lies in our inability really to read the signals. And this is what gives an interest, and even an irony, to the comparison half consciously invoked by the American lady herself when she asked "What's Notre Dame to this?" And the answer that should be given to her is: "Notre Dame, compared to this, is true. It is history. It is humanity. It is what has really happened, what we know has really happened, what we know is really happening still. It is the central fact of your own civilization. And it is the thing that has really been kept from you."

Notre Dame is not a myth. Notre Dame is not a theory. Its interest does not spring from ignorance but from knowledge; from a culture complicated with a hundred controversies and revolutions. It is not featureless, but carved into an incredible forest and labyrinth of fascinating features, any one of which we could talk about for days. It is not great because there is little of it, but great because there is a great deal of it. It is true that though there is a great deal of it, Puritans may not be allowed to see a great deal in it; whether they were those brought over in the "Mayflower" or only those brought up on the "Mayflower." But that is not the fault of Notre Dame; but of the extraordinary evasion by which such people can dodge to right or left of it, taking refuge in things more recent or things more remote. Notre Dame, on its merely human side, is mediaeval civilization, and therefore not a fable or a guess but a great solid determining part of modern civilization. It is the whole modern debate about guilds; for such cathedrals were built by the guilds. It is the whole modern question of religion and irreligion; for we know what religion it stands for, while we really have not a notion what religion Stonehenge stands for. A Druid temple is a ruin, and a Puritan ship by this time may well be called a wreck. But a church is a challenge; and that is why it is not answered.

MUCH TOO MODERN HISTORY

ALL wise men will agree that history ought to be taught more fully in the form of world history. In that respect at least Mr. Wells gave us an excellent working model. England is meaningless without Europe, more meaningless than England without Empire. But those who would broaden history with human brotherhood too often suffer from a limitation not absent even from Mr. Wells. They exchange the narrowness of a nation for the narrowness of a theory, or even a fad. They think they have a world-wide philosophy because they extend their own narrowness to the whole world. A distinguished professor, who is a member of the League of Nations Union, has been telling an interviewer what he thinks history-books should teach. And it seems to me that, according to his views if correctly reported, the new histories would be rather more prejudiced and limited than the old.

He begins with a small but singular error, which itself shows some lack of the imagination that can see two sides of a question. He says, “Textbooks of history should aim at truth. It should not be possible for one version of the American War of Independence to be taught in American schools, and another in English schools.”

Now, in point of fact, the same version of that story is taught both in English and American schools. It is the other version, a very tenable one, that is not allowed to be taught anywhere. No American historian, however American, could be more positive that George III was wrong and George Washington right than all the English historians are. What would show real independence of mind would be to state the case for George III. And there was a very real case for George III. I will not go into it here, but every honest historical student will agree with me. Perhaps the fairest way of putting it is this: that it was not really a case of a government resolved on tyranny, but of a nation resolved on independence.

But if we sympathize with national independence, surely there is something to be said for intellectual independence. And the professor is far from being really sympathetic with intellectual independence. He is so far from it that he wants both sides forced to tell the same story, apparently whether they like it or not. As a fact, they do agree; but apparently in any case the professor would coerce them into agreement. And his extraordinary reason for this course is that history should aim at truth.

But suppose I do aim at truth, and sincerely come to the conclusion that North was a patriot and Burke a sophist? How would the professor prevent it being "possible" for me to teach what I think is true? The truth is that it has never occurred to these progressive professors that there could be any view of any question except their own, or what they call their own. For it is only a tradition they have been taught; a tradition as narrow as North's and now nearly as old.

But the professor goes on to say something much more interesting and curious. After saying very truly that the past, the Plantagenet period, for instance, should not be made a mere matter of kings and battles, he goes on to say, "What we want to see is the textbook of history and the teaching of it brought more closely into touch with the realities of the modern world — the world of the division of labour between different countries, of the application of science to industry, of the shortening of the spaces of the earth by improvements in transport — and with all that these realities imply."

Now it seems to me obvious that what we want is exactly the opposite. A child can see these realities of the modern world, whether he is taught any history or not. He will see them whether you want him to or not. As he grows up he will learn by experience all about the improvements in transport, its acceleration by Zeppelins and its interruption by submarines. He will realize for himself that the modern world is the world of the division of labour between nations. For he will know that England has been turned into an isolated workshop with hardly food enough for a fortnight, with the potential alternative of surrender or starvation or eating nails. He will by the light of nature know all about the application of science to industry — in war by chemical analyses of poison gas, in peace by bright little pamphlets about phossy jaw. He will know "all that these realities imply," about which also there is very much that might be said. But even if we consider only the somewhat cheerier products of the division of labour and the application of science to industry, there is quite as little need laboriously to instruct the infant in what he can see for himself. A child has a very pure and poetical love of machinery, a love in which there is nothing in the least evil or materialistic. But it is hardly necessary to devote years to proving to him that motor-cars have been invented, as he can see them going by in the street. It is not necessary to read up in the British Museum the details with which to demonstrate that there are really such things as tube stations or motor bicycles. The child can see these things everywhere, and the real danger obviously is that he should think they had existed always. The danger is that he should know nothing of humanity, except as it is under these special and sometimes cramping conditions of scientific industry and the division of labour. It is that he should be unable to imagine any civilization without tube stations, whatever its substitutes in the way of temples or trophies of war. It is that he should see man as a sort of cyclist-centaur, inseparable from his motor-bike. In short, the whole danger of historical ignorance is that he may be as limited to his local circumstances as a savage on an island, or a provincial in a decayed town, or a historical professor in the League of Nations Union.

The whole object of history is to enlarge experience by imagination. And this sort of history would enlarge neither imagination nor experience. The whole object of history is to make us realize that humanity could be great and glorious, under conditions quite different and even contrary to our own. It is to teach us that men could achieve most profitable labour without our own division of labour. It is to teach us that men could be industrious without being industrial. It is to make us understand that there might be a world in which there was far less improvement in the transport for visiting various places, and there might still be a very great improvement in the places visited.

The professor is perfectly right in saying that a history of the Plantagenet period ought not merely to record the succession of kings and battles. But what ought it to record? Is it to record only the absence of motors and electric lights? Should we say nothing of the Plantagenet period except that it did not have motor-bikes? I venture to suggest that we might record the presence of some things which the whole people had then and have not got now, such as the guilds, the great popular universities, the use of the common lands, the fraternity of the common creed.

I fear the professor will not follow me into matters so disturbing to his perfect picture of progress. But, in conclusion, there is one little question I should like to ask him, and it is this: If you cannot see Man, divine and democratic, under the disguises of all the centuries, why on earth should you suppose you will be able to see him under the disguises of all the nations and tribes? If the Dark Ages must be as dark as they look, why are the black men not so black as they are painted? If I may feel supercilious towards a Chaldean, why not towards a Chinaman? If I may despise a

Roman for not having a steam-plough, why not a Russian for not wanting a steam-plough? If scientific industry is the supreme historical test, it divides us as much from backward peoples as from bygone peoples. It divides even European peoples from each other. And if that be the test, why bother to join the League of Nations Union?

THE EVOLUTION OF SLAVES

A VERY curious and interesting thing has recently happened in America. There has suddenly appeared an organized political attack on Darwinian Evolution, led by an old demagogue appealing entirely to the ideals of democracy. I mean no discredit to Mr. Bryan in calling him a demagogue; for I should have been far more heartily on his side in the days when he was a demagogue than in the days when he was a diplomatist. He was a much wiser man when he refused to allow the financiers to crucify humanity on a golden cross, than when he consented to allow the Kaiser to crucify it on an iron cross. The movement is religious and therefore popular; but it is Protestant and therefore provincial. Its opponents, the old guard of materialism, will of course do their best to represent it as something like the village that voted the earth was flat. But there is one sharp difference, which is the point of the whole position. If an ignorant man went about saying that the earth was flat, the scientific man would promptly and confidently answer, "Oh, nonsense; of course it's round." He might even condescend to give the real reasons, which I believe are quite different from the current ones. But when the private citizen rushes wild-eyed down the streets of Heliopolis, Neb., calling out "Have you heard the news? Darwin's wrong!" the scientific man does not say, "Oh, nonsense, of course he's right." He says tremulously, "Not entirely wrong; surely not entirely wrong"; and we can draw our conclusions. But I believe myself there is a deeper and more democratic force behind this reaction; and I think it worthy of further study.

I recently heard a debate on that American system of class privilege which we call for convenience Prohibition; and I was very much amused by one argument that was advanced in its favour. A very intelligent young American, a Rhodes scholar from Oxford, advanced the thesis that Prohibition was not a violation of liberty because, if it were fully established, its victims would never know what they had lost. If a generation of total abstainers could once grow up "without the desire" for drink, they would not be conscious of any restraint on their freedom. The argument is ingenious and promising and opens up a wide field of application. Thus, if I happen to find it convenient to keep miners or other proletarians permanently underground, I have only to make sure that all their babies are born in pitch darkness and they will certainly never imagine the light of day. My action therefore will not only be just and benevolent in itself, but will obviously involve not even the faintest infringement of the ideal of freedom. Or if I merely kidnap all the babies from all the mothers in the country, it is obvious that the infants will not remember their mothers, and in that sense will not miss them. There is therefore no reason why I should not adopt this course; and even if I hide the babies from their mothers by locking them up in boxes, I shall not be violating the principle of liberty; because the babies will not understand what I have done. Or, to take a comparison even closer in many ways, there is an ordinary social problem like dress. I come to the conclusion that ladies spend too much money on dress, that it is a social evil because families suffer from the extravagance, and rivalries and seductions distract the State. I therefore decree, on the lines of Prohibitionist logic, that the law shall forbid anybody to wear any clothes at all. Nobody who grows up naked, according to this theory, will ever have any regrets for beauty or dignity or decency; and therefore will have suffered no loss. I cannot sufficiently express my admiration for the extraordinary simplicity which can smooth the path of Prussianism with this large, elementary and satisfactory principle. So long as we tyrannize enough we are not tyrannizing at all; and so long as we steal enough our victims will never know what has been stolen. Seriously, everybody knows that the rich planning the oppression of the poor will never lack a sycophant to act as a sophist. But I never dreamed that I should live to enjoy so crude and stark and startling a sophistry as this.

But the last example I gave, that of the normality of clothes or of nakedness, has a further relevance in this connection. What is really at the back of the minds of the people who say these strange things is one very simple error. They imagine that the drinking of fermented liquor has been an artifice and a luxury; something odd like the strange self-indulgences praised by the decadent poets. This is simply an accident of the ignorance of history and humanity. Drinking fermented liquor is not a fashion like wearing a green carnation. It is a habit like wearing clothes. It is one of the habits that are indeed man’s second nature; if indeed they are not his first nature. Wine is purest and healthiest in the highest civilization, just as clothing is most complete in the highest civilization. But there is nothing to show that the savage has not shed the clothes of a higher civilization, retaining only the ornaments; as a good many fashionable people in our own civilization seem to be doing now. And there is nothing to show that ruder races who brew their “native beers” in Africa or Polynesia have not lost the art of brewing something better; just as Prohibitionist America, before our very eyes, has left off brewing Christian beer and taken to drinking fermented wood-pulp and methylated spirit. The very example of modern America falling from better to baser drinks, under a dismal taboo, is a perfect model of the way in which civilizations have relapsed into savagery, and produced the savages we know. But the point is that drink, like dress, is the rule; and the exceptions only prove the rule. There are individuals who for personal and particular reasons are right to drink no liquor but water; just as there are individuals who have to stay in bed, and wear no clothes but bedclothes. There have been sects of Moslems and there have been sects of Adamites. There have been, as I have said, barbarized peoples fallen so far from civilization as to wear grotesque garments or none, or to drink bad beer or none. But nobody has ever seen Primitive Man, naked and drinking water; he is a myth of the modern mythologists. Man, as Aristotle saw long ago, is an abnormal animal whose nature it is to be civilized. In so far as he ever becomes uncivilized he becomes unnatural, and even artificial.

Now at the back of all this, of course, the real difference is religious. I only take this one case of what is called temperance for the sake of the wider philosophy that underlies it. When my young American friend talked of the next generation growing up without the desire for “alcohol,” he had at the back of his mind a certain idea. It is the idea which I have just seen expressed by another American in a high-brow article, in the words: “Evolution does not stand still. We are not finished. The world is not finished.” What it means is that the nature of man can be modified to suit the convenience of particular men; and this would certainly be very convenient. If the rich man wants the miners to live underground, he may really breed for it a new race as blind as bats and owls. If he finds it cheaper to run the school and school inspections on Adamite principles, he can hope to produce Adamites not merely as a sect but as a species. And the same will be true of teetotalism or vegetarianism; nature, having evolved man, who is an ale-drinking animal, may now evolve a super-man, or a sub-man, who shall be a water-drinking animal. Having risen from a monkey who eats nuts to a man who eats mutton, he may rise yet higher by eating nuts again.

Thinking people, of course, know that all that is nonsense. They know there is no such constant flux of adaption. So far from saying that the evolution of man has not finished, they will point out that (as far as we know) it has not begun. In all the five thousand years of recorded history, and in all the prehistoric indications before it, there is not a shadow or suspicion of movement or change in the human biological type. Even evolution, let alone natural selection, is only a conjecture about things unknown, compared with the broad daylight of things known in all those thousands of years. The only difference is that evolution seems a probable conjecture, and natural selection is on the face of it an extravagantly improbable one. All this, which is obvious to thinking people, has at last become obvious even to the most unthinking; and *that* is the meaning of the attack on Darwinism in America and the battle of Mr. Bryan against the Missing Link. The secret is out. The obscurantism of the professors is over. Those of us who have humbly hammered on this point from time to time suddenly find ourselves hammering on an open door. For these changes almost always come suddenly; which is alone enough to show that human history at least has never been merely an evolution. As Darwinism came with a rush, so anti-Darwinism has come with a rush; and just as people who accepted evolution could not be held back from embracing natural selection, so it is likely enough that many, who now see reason to reject natural selection, will not be stopped in their course till they have also rejected evolution. They will merely have a vague but angry conviction that the professors have been kidding them. But behind all this there will be a very real moral and religious reaction; the meaning of which is what I have described in this article. It is the profound popular impression that scientific materialism, at the end of its hundred years, is found to have been used chiefly for the oppression of the people. Of this the most evident example is that evolution itself can be offered as something able to evolve a people who can be oppressed. As in the argument about Prohibition, it will offer to breed slaves; to produce a new race indifferent to its rights. Morally the argument is quite indistinguishable from justifying assassination by promising to bring up children as suicides, who will prefer to be poisoned.

IS DARWIN DEAD?

MR. ERNEST NEWMAN, that lively and acute critic, once rebuked the arrogance of those of us who confessed that we knew nothing about music. Why he should suppose we are arrogant about it, if he does think so, I cannot quite understand. I, for one, am fully conscious of my inferiority to him and others through this deficiency; nor is it, alas, the only deficiency. I have sometimes thought it would be wholesome for anybody who has succeeded pretty well by some trick of some trade, to have a huge notice board or diagram hung in front of him all day; showing exactly where he stood in all the other crafts and competitions of mankind. Thus the poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling, as it rose from the paper on which an entirely new type of villanelle had just sprung into being, would encounter the disconcerting facts and figures about his suitability to be a professional acrobat or a pearl-diver. On the other hand, the radiant victor in the great International Egg and Spoon Race can see at a glance how very far down he stands, so to speak, in the queue of those waiting for the post of Astronomer Royal. Most of us have at least one or two gaps in our general culture and information; and sometimes whole departments of knowledge are practically hidden from whole generations and classes of mankind. There is something very defective and disproportionate about even the ideal culture of a modern man. It may be that Mr. Newman is deeply read in that mediaeval theology which is still the sub-conscious basis of most morality; but it is also possible that he is not. He may have at his fingers' ends that military art which has often turned the fortunes of history; but he may not. He would be none the less a highly cultivated gentleman, if he did not. Yet the mystical and the military mind have been at least as pivotal and practical in history as the musical mind. I can admire them all, but I have no claim to possess any of them.

But my ignorance of music happens to assist me with a convenient metaphor in the more controversial matter of my ignorance of science. I once made some remarks about the decline of Darwinism, in a review of the Wells "Outline of History." This aroused rather excited criticism; but one comparatively calm critic challenged what really interests me in the matter: he said that my conundrums about the wing of the bat and similar things "could easily be solved on purely Darwinian lines by any competent zoologist, or even by one so incompetent as myself." The conundrum in question, of course, concerns the survival value of features in their unfinished state. If a thing can fly it may survive, and if it has a wing it may fly; but if it cannot fly with half a wing, why should it survive with half a wing? Yet Darwinism pre-supposes that numberless generations could survive before one generation could fly. Now it is quite true that I am not even an incompetent zoologist; and that my critic is more competent than I, if only in the mere fact of being a zoologist at all. Nevertheless, I adhere to my opinion, and do so for a reason that seems to me worthy of some little consideration. I do it because this does happen to be exactly one of those questions on which, as it seems to me, the independent critic has really a right to check the specialist. For it is a larger question of logic, and not a smaller question of fact. It is like the difficulty of believing that a halfpenny can fall head or tail a hundred times running; which has nothing to do with the numismatic value of the coin. It is like the difficulty of believing that a mere tax could make a loaf cheaper, which has nothing to do with the agrarian craft of growing corn. There is a general tide of reason flowing against such improbabilities, even if they are possibilities; they would still be exceptions, and reason would be on the side of the rule. And whatever the details of natural history, this thing is against the very nature of things.

To explain what I mean I will take this parallel of the technique of music, of which I know even less than of the technique of natural history. To begin with a simple though moving musical instrument, suppose an expert told me that a coach-horn could be blown quite as well if it were only two feet long. I should believe him; partly because it seems probable enough, and partly because I know nothing about the matter. I am not even an incompetent coach-horn blower. But I should certainly not believe him if he told me, as a generalization about all musical instruments, that half a musical instrument was better than no music, or even as good as any music. I should disbelieve it because it is inconsistent with the general nature of a musical instrument, or any instrument. I should disbelieve it long before I had thought of the thousand particular instruments to which it does not apply. I should not primarily need to think of the particular examples, though they are obvious enough. A stringed instrument cannot even be called stringed without two fixed points to hold both ends of the string. At the stage when the fiddle-strings floated like filaments in the void, feeling their way towards an evolutionary other end of nowhere, there could be nothing serving any purpose of a fiddle. A drum with a hole in is not a drum at all. But an evolutionary drum has to turn slowly into a drum, when it has begun by being only a hole. I cannot see any survival for a bagpipe that begins by being slit; I think such bagpipes would die with all their music in them. I feel a faint doubt, mingled with fascination, about the idea that a violin could grow out of the ground like a tree; it would at least make a charming fairy story. But whether or no a fiddle could grow like a tree, I feel sure nobody could play on it while it was still only a twig. But all these, as I say, are only examples that throng into the mind afterwards, of a principle seen in a flash from the first. Of things serving particular purposes, by a balance and arrangement of parts, it *cannot* be generally true that they are fit for use before they are finished for use. It is against the general nature of such things; and can only be true by an individual coincidence. I can see for myself, for instance, that some particular case like the trunk of an elephant might really be compared to the simpler case of the coach-horn. Length and flexibility *are* mere matters of degree; and I might possibly find it convenient if my nose were six inches longer, and sufficiently lively to be able to point right and left at various objects on the tea-table. But this is simply an accident of the particular qualities of length and laxity, not a general truth about the qualities of growth and use. It is not in the least true that I should experience the least convenience from the membrane between my fingers thickening or widening a little; even if an evolutionist at my elbow comforted and inspired me with the far-off divine event when my descendant should have the wings of a bat. Until the membrane can really be spread properly from point to point it is like the fiddle-string before it is stretched properly from point to point. It is no nearer serving its ultimate purpose than if it were not there at all. But it would be easy to find a similar animal parallel to the drum with a hole in it. There are monsters who would die instantly if they could not close the holes in their head under water. One supposes they would have died swiftly, before their closing apparatus could develop slowly. But the principle is a general one, and is involved in the very nature of any apparatus. It is only by way of figure of speech, in defence of the freedom of the ignorant, that I take the type of a musical apparatus. I take it because I am entirely ignorant of musical instruments. I am of the candid class of those who have "never tried" to perform on the violin. I cannot play upon this pipe; especially if it be a bagpipe. But if anybody tells me that the wildest pibroch rose from a whisper gradually, as a hole in the wind-bag was filled up gradually — why then, I shall not be so rude, I hope, as to say that there is a wind-bag in his head, but I shall venture to say that there is a hole in his argument. And if he says that pieces of wood came together slowly, stick by stick, to form a fiddle, and that before it was yet a fiddle at all the sticks discoursed most excellent music — why, I fear I shall be content to say "fiddlesticks."

There is another answer often made which seems to me even more illogical. The critic generally says it is unreasonable to expect from the geological record that continuous gradation of types which the challengers of Darwinism demand. He says that only a part of the earth can be examined and that it could not in any case prove so much. This mode of argument involves an amazing oblivion of what is the thing to be proved, and who is trying to prove it. By hypothesis the Darwinians are trying to prove Darwinism. The Anti-Darwinians are not trying to prove anything; except that the Darwinians have not proved it. I do not demand anything, in the sense of complaining anything or the absence of anything. I am quite comfortable in a completely mysterious cosmos. I am not reviling the rocks or cursing the eternal hills for not containing these things. I am only saying that these are the things they would have to contain to make me believe something that somebody else wants me to believe. These traces are not things that the Anti-Darwinian demands. They are things that the Darwinian requires. The Darwinian requires them in order to convince his opponent of Darwinism; his opponent may be right or wrong, but he cannot be expected to accept the mere absence of them as proof of Darwinism. If the evidences in support of the theory are unfortunately hidden, why then, we do not know whether they were in support of the theory. If the proofs of natural selection are lost, why then, there are no proofs of natural selection; and there is an end of it.

And I would respectfully ask these critics what would be thought of a theological or miraculous argument which thus based itself on the very gaps in its own evidence. Let them indulge in the flight of fancy that I have just told them, let us say, that I saw the Devil at Brighton: and that the proof of his presence there can still be seen on the sands, in gigantic marks of a cloven hoof as big as the foot of an elephant. Suppose we all search the sands of Brighton and find no such thing. And suppose I then say that, after all, the tide might have washed away the footprints, or that the fiend may have flown through the air from his little country seat at the Dyke, or that he may have walked along the hard asphalt of Brighton parade, as proudly as once upon the flaming marl. To those acquainted with Brighton parade this will seem probable enough; but there would be a fallacy in merely saying that the evil spirit may have done all this. The sceptic will not unnaturally reply: “Yes, he may; and he may not; and it may be a legend; and you may be a liar; and I think our little investigation is now concluded.” I am very far indeed from calling the Darwinian a liar; but I shall continue to say that he is not always a logician.

TURNING INSIDE OUT

WHEN the author of “If Winter Comes” brought out another book about the life of the family, it was almost as much criticized as the first book was praised. I do not say that there was nothing to criticize, but I do say that I was not convinced by the abstract logic of the criticism. Probably the critics would have accepted it as a true story if the author had not been so incautious as to give it a true moral. And the moral is not fashionable in the Press at the moment; for it is to the effect that a woman may gain a professional success at the price of a domestic failure. And it is the convention of journalism at this moment to support what is feminist against what is feminine. Anyhow, while the story might be criticized, the criticisms can certainly be criticized. It is not really conclusive to say that a woman may be ambitious in business without her children going to the bad. It is just as easy to say that a woman may be ambitious in politics without helping to murder an old gentleman in his bed. But that does not make “Macbeth” either inartistic or untrue. It is just as easy to say that a woman may be ambitious in society without tricking her husband into a debtor’s prison, so that she may spend the time with a bald-headed nobleman with red whiskers. But that does not make the great scene in “Vanity Fair” unconvincing either in detail or design. The question in fiction is not whether that thing must occur, but whether that sort of thing may occur, and whether it is significant of larger things. Now this business of the woman at work and the woman at home is a very large thing, and this story about it is highly significant.

For in this matter the modern mind is inconsistent with itself. It has managed to get one of its rather crude ideals in flat contradiction to the other. People of the progressive sort are perpetually telling us that the hope of the world is in education. Education is everything. Nothing is so important as training the rising generation. Nothing is really, important except the rising generation. They tell us this over and over again, with slight variations of the same formula, and never seem to see what it involves. For if there be any word of truth in all this talk about the education of the child, then there is certainly nothing but nonsense in nine-tenths of the talk about the emancipation of the woman. If education is the highest function in the State, why should anybody want to be emancipated from the highest function in the State? It is as if we talked of commuting the sentence that condemned a man to be President of the United States; or a reprieve coming in time to save him from being Pope. If education is the largest thing in the world, what is the sense of talking about a woman being liberated from the largest thing in the world? It is as if we were to rescue her from the cruel doom of being a poet like Shakespeare; or to pity the limitations of an all-round artist like Leonardo da Vinci. Nor can there be any doubt that there is truth in this claim for education. Only precisely the sort of which it is particularly true is the sort called domestic education. Private education really is universal. Public education can be comparatively narrow. It would really be an exaggeration to say that the school-master who takes his pupils in freehand drawing is training them in all the uses of freedom. It really would be fantastic to say that the harmless foreigner who instructs a class in French or German is talking with all the tongues of men and angels. But the mother dealing with her own daughters in her own home does literally have to deal with all forms of freedom, because she has to deal with all sides of a single human soul. She is obliged, if not to talk with the tongues of men and angels, at least to decide how much she shall talk about angels and how much about men.

In short, if education is really the larger matter, then certainly domestic life is the larger matter; and official or commercial life the lesser matter. It is a mere matter of arithmetic that anything taken from the larger matter will leave it less. It is a mere matter of simple subtraction that the mother must have less time for the family if she has more time for the factory. If education, ethical and cultural, really were a trivial and mechanical matter, the mother might possibly rattle through it as a rapid routine, before going about her more serious business of serving a capitalist for hire. If education were merely instruction, she might briefly instruct her babies in the multiplication tables, before she mounted to higher and nobler spheres as the servant of a Milk Trust or the secretary of a Drug Combine. But the moderns are perpetually assuring us that education is not instruction; they are perpetually insisting that it is not a mechanical exercise, and must on no account be an abbreviated exercise. It must go on at every hour. It must cover every subject. But if it must go on at all hours, it must not be neglected in business hours. And if the child is to be free to cover every subject, the parent must be free to cover every subject too.

For the idea of a non-parental substitute is simply an illusion of wealth. The advanced advocate of this inconsistent and infinite education for the child is generally thinking of the rich child; and all this particular sort of liberty should rather be called luxury. It is natural enough for a fashionable lady to leave her little daughter with the French governess or the Czecho-Slovakian governess or the Ancient Sanskrit governess, and know that one or other of these sides of the infant's intelligence is being developed; while she, the mother, figures in public as a money-lender or some other modern position of dignity. But among poorer people there cannot be five teachers to one pupil. Generally there are about fifty pupils to one teacher. There it is impossible to cut up the soul of a single child and distribute it among specialists. It is all we can do to tear in pieces the soul of a single schoolmaster, and distribute it in rags and scraps to a whole mob of boys. And even in the case of the wealthy child it is by no means clear that specialists are a substitute for spiritual authority. Even a millionaire can never be certain that he has not left out one governess, in the long procession of governesses perpetually under his marble portico; and the omission may be as fatal as that of the king who forgot to ask the bad fairy to the christening. The daughter, after a life of ruin and despair, may look back and say, "Had I but also had a Lithuanian governess, my fate as a diplomatist's wife in Eastern Europe would have been very different." But it seems rather more probable, on the whole, that what she would miss would not be one or other of these special accomplishments, but some common sense code of morals or general view of life. The millionaire could, no doubt, hire a mahatma or mystical prophet to give his child a general philosophy. But I doubt if the philosophy would be very successful even for the rich child, and it would be quite impossible for the poor child. In the case of comparative poverty, which is the common lot of mankind, we come back to a general parental responsibility, which is the common sense of mankind. We come back to the parent as the person in charge of education. If you exalt the education, you must exalt the parental power with it. If you exaggerate the education, you must exaggerate the parental power with it. If you depreciate the parental power, you must depreciate education with it. If the young are always right and can do as they like, well and good; let us all be jolly, old and young, and free from every kind of responsibility. But in that case do not come pestering us with the importance of education, when nobody has any authority to educate anybody. Make up your mind whether you want unlimited education or unlimited emancipation, but do not be such a fool as to suppose you can have both at once.

There is evidence, as I have noted, that the more hard-headed people, even of the most progressive sort, are beginning to come back to realities in this respect. The new work of Mr. Hutchinson's is only one of many indications among the really independent intelligences, working on modern fiction, that the cruder culture of merely commercial emancipation is beginning to smell a little stale. The work of Miss Clemence Dane and even of Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith contains more than one suggestion of what I mean. People are no longer quite so certain that a woman's liberty consists of having a latch-key without a house. They are no longer wholly convinced that every housekeeper is dull and prosaic, while every bookkeeper is wild and poetical. And among the intelligent the reaction is actually strengthened by all the most modern excitements about psychology and hygiene. We cannot insist that every trick of nerves or train of thought is important enough to be searched for in libraries and laboratories, and not important enough for anybody to watch by simply staying at home. We cannot insist that the first years of infancy are of supreme importance, and that mothers are not of supreme importance; or that motherhood is a topic of sufficient interest for men, but not of sufficient interest for mothers. Every word that is said about the tremendous importance of trivial nursery habits goes to prove that being a nurse is not trivial. All tends to the return of the simple truth that the private work is the great one and the public work the small. The human house is a paradox, for it is larger inside than out.

But in the problem of private versus public life there is another neglected truth. It is true of many masculine problems as well as of this feminine problem. Indeed, feminism falls here into exactly the same mistake as militarism and imperialism. I mean that anything on a grand scale gives the illusion of a grand success. Curiously enough, multiplication acts as a concealment. Repetition actually disguises failure. Take a particular man, and tell him to put on a particular kind of hat and coat and trousers, and to stand in particular attitudes in the back garden; and you will have great difficulty in persuading yourself (or him) that he has passed through a triumph and transfiguration. Order four hundred such hats, and eight hundred such trousers, and you will have turned the fancy costume into a uniform. Make all the four hundred men stand in the special attitudes on Salisbury Plain, and there will rise up before you the spirit of a regiment.

Let the regiment march past, and, if you have any life in you above the brutes that perish, you will have an overwhelming sense that something splendid has just happened, or is just going to begin. I sympathize with this moral emotion in militarism; I think it does symbolize something great in the soul, which has given us the image of St. Michael. But I also realize that in practical relations that emotion can get mixed up with an illusion. It is not really possible to know the characters of all the four hundred men in the marching column as well as one might know the character of the one man attitudinizing in the back garden. If all the four hundred men were individual failures, we could still vaguely feel that the whole thing was a success. If we know the one man to be a failure, we cannot think him a success. That is why a footman has become rather a foolish figure, while a foot-soldier remains rather a sublime one. Or rather, that is one of the reasons; for there are others much more worthy. Anyhow, footmen were only formidable or dignified when they could come in large numbers like foot-soldiers — when they were in fact the feudal army of some great local family, having some of the loyalty of local patriotism. Then a livery was as dignified as a uniform, because it really was a uniform. A man who said he served the Nevilles or rode with the Douglases could once feel much like a man fighting for France or England. But military feeling is mob feeling, noble as mob feeling may be. Parading one footman is like lunching on one pea, or curing baldness by the growth of one hair. There ought not to be anything but a plural for flunkeys, any more than for measles or vermin or animalculae or the sweets called hundreds and thousands. Strictly speaking, I suppose that a logical Latinist could say, “I have seen an animalcula”; but I never heard of a child having the moderation to remark, “I have eaten a hundred and thousand.” Similarly, any one of us can feel that to have hundreds and thousands of slaves, let alone soldiers, might give a certain imaginative pleasure in magnificence. To have one slave reveals all the meanness of slavery. For the solitary flunkey really is the man in fancy dress, the man standing in the back garden in the strange and the fantastic coat and breeches. His isolation reveals our illusion. We find our failure in the back garden, when we have been dreaming a dream of success in the market-place. When you ride through the streets amid a great mob of vassals (you may have noticed) you have a genial and not ungenerous sense of being at one with them all. You cannot remember their names or count their numbers, but their very immensity seems a substitute for intimacy.

That is what great men have felt at the head of great armies; and the reason why Napoleon or Foch would call his soldiers “mes enfants.” He feels at that moment that they are a part of him, as if he had a million arms and legs. But it is very different if you disband your army of lackeys; or if (as is, after all, possible) you have not got an army of lackeys. It is very different if you look at one lackey; one solitary solemn footman standing in your front hall. You never have the sense of being caught up into a rapture of unity with him. All your sense of social solidarity with your social inferiors has dropped from you. It is only in public that people can be so intimate as that. When you look into the eyes of the lonely footman, you see that his soul is far away.

In other words, you find yourself at the foot of a steep and staggering mountain crag, that is the real character and conscience of a man. To be really at one with that man, you would have to solve real problems and believe that your own solutions were real. In dealing with the one man you would really have a far huger and harder job than in dealing with your throng of thousands. And that is the job that people run away from when they wish to escape from domesticity to public work, especially educational work. They wish to escape from a sense of failure which is simply a sense of fact. They wish to recapture the illusion of the market-place. It is an illusion that departs in the dark interiors of domesticity, where the realities dwell. As I have said, I am very far from condemning it altogether; it is a lawful pleasure, and a part of life, in its proper proportion, like any other. But I am concerned to point out to the feminists and the faddists that it is not an approach to truth, but rather the opposite. Publicity is rather of the nature of a harmless romance. Public life at its very best will contain a great deal of harmless romancing, and much more often a very harmful romancing. In other words, I am concerned with pointing out that the passage from private life to public life, while it may be right or wrong, or necessary or unnecessary, or desirable or undesirable, is always of necessity a passage from a greater work to a smaller one, and from a harder work to an easier one. And that is why most of the moderns do wish to pass from the great domestic task to the smaller and easier commercial one. They would rather provide the liveries of a hundred footmen than be bothered with the love-affairs of one. They would rather take the salutes of a hundred soldiers than try to save the soul of one. They would rather serve out income-tax papers or telegraph forms to a hundred men than meals, conversation, and moral support to one. They would rather arrange the educational course in history or geography, or correct the examination papers in algebra or trigonometry, for a hundred children, than struggle with the whole human character of one. For anyone who makes himself responsible for one small baby, as a whole, will soon find that he is wrestling with gigantic angels and demons.

In another way there is something of illusion, or of irresponsibility, about the purely public function, especially in the case of public education. The educationist generally deals with only one section of the pupil's mind. But he always deals with only one section of the pupil's life. The parent has to deal, not only with the whole of the child's character, but also with the whole of the child's career. The teacher sows the seed, but the parent reaps as well as sows. The schoolmaster sees more children, but it is not clear that he sees more childhood; certainly he sees less youth and no maturity. The number of little girls who take prussic acid is necessarily small. The boys who hang themselves on bed-posts, after a life of crime, are generally the minority. But the parent has to envisage the whole life of the individual, and not merely the school life of the scholar. It is not probable that the parent will exactly anticipate crime and prussic acid as the crown of the infant's career. But he will anticipate hearing of the crime if it is committed; he will probably be told of the suicide if it takes place. It is quite doubtful whether the schoolmaster or schoolmistress will ever hear of it at all. Everybody knows that teachers have a harassing and often heroic task, but it is not unfair to them to remember that in this sense they have an exceptionally happy task. The cynic would say that the teacher is happy in never seeing the results of his own teaching. I prefer to confine myself to saying that he has not the extra worry of having to estimate it from the other end. The teacher is seldom in at the death. To take a milder theatrical metaphor, he is seldom there on the night. But this is only one of many instances of the same truth: that what is called public life is not larger than private life, but smaller. What we call public life is a fragmentary affair of sections and seasons and impressions; it is only in private life that dwells the fullness of our life bodily.

STRIKES AND THE SPIRIT OF WONDER

THERE is a story which pleases me so much that I feel sure I have repeated it in print, about an alleged and perhaps legendary lady secretary of Madam Blavatsky or Mrs. Besant, who was so much delighted with a new sofa or ottoman that she sat on it by preference when resting or reading her correspondence. At last it moved slightly, and she found it was a mahatma covered with his Eastern robe and rigid in prayer, or some more impersonal ecstasy. That a lady secretary should have a seat any gentleman will approve; that a mahatma should be sat on no Christian will deny; nevertheless, there is another possible moral to the fable which is a reproach rather to the sitter than the seat. It might be put, as in a sort of vision or allegory, by imagining that all our furniture really was made thus of living limbs instead of dead sticks. Suppose the legs of the table were literally legs — the legs of slaves standing still. Suppose the arms of an armchair really were arms — the arms of a patient domestic permanently held out, like those of an old nurse waiting for a baby. It would be calculated to make the luxurious occupant of the easy chair feel rather like a baby; which might do him good. Suppose every sofa were like that of Mrs. Besant's secretary — simply made of a man. They need not be made merely of Theosophists or Buddhists — God forbid. Many of us would greatly prefer to trust ourselves to a Moslem or Turk. This might, with strict accuracy, be called sitting on an Ottoman. I have even read, I think, of some oriental potentate who rejoiced in a name sounding like "sofa." It might even be hinted that some of them might be Christians, but there is no reason, of course, why all of them should not be praying. To sit on a man while he was praying would doubtless require some confidence. It would also give a more literal version of the possession of a prie-dieu chair. It would be easy to expand the extravagance into a vision of a whole house alive, an architecture of arms and legs, a temple of temples of the spirit. The four walls might be made of men like the squares in military formation. There is even, perhaps, a shadow of the fantasy in the popular phrases that compare the roof to the human head, that name the chimney-pot hat after the chimney, or lightly allude to all modern masculine head-dresses as "tiles." But the only value of the vision, as of most visions — even the most topsy-turvy ones — is a moral value. It figures forth, in emblem enigma, the truth that we do treat merely as furniture a number of people who are, at the very least, live stock. And the proof of it is that when they move we are startled like the secretary sitting on the praying man; but perhaps it is we who should begin to pray.

In the current criticisms of the Strikes there is a particular tone, which affects me not as a matter of politics, but rather of philosophy, or even of poetry. It is, indeed, the servile spirit expressed, if not in its poetry, at least in its rhetoric. But it is a spirit I can honestly claim to have hated and done my best to hammer long before I ever heard of the Servile State, long before I ever dreamed of applying this test to Strikes, or indeed of applying it to any political question. I felt it originally touching things at once elemental and everyday — things like grass or daylight, like stones or daisies. But in the light of it at least, I always rebelled against the trend or tone of which I speak. It may roughly be described as the spirit of taking things for granted. But, indeed, oddly enough, the very form of this phrase rather misses its own meaning. The spirit, I mean, strictly speaking, does not take things for granted. It takes them as if they had not been granted. It takes them as if it held them by something more autocratic than a right; by a cold and unconscious occupation, as stiff as a privilege and as baseless as a caprice. As a fact, things generally are granted ultimately by God, but often immediately by men. But this type of man is so unconscious of what he has been given that he is almost unconscious of what he has got; not realizing things as gifts, he hardly realizes them as goods. About the natural things, with which I began, this oblivion has only inward and spiritual, and not outward and political, effects. If we forget the sun the sun will not forget us, or, rather, he will not remember us to revenge himself by “striking” at us with a sunstroke. The stars will not go on strike or extinguish the illumination of the universe as the electricians would extinguish the illumination of the city. And so, while we repeat that there is a special providence in a falling star, we can ignore it in a fixed star. But when we at once ignore and assume thousands of thinking, brooding, free, lonely and capricious human creatures, they will remind us that we can no more order souls than we can order stars. This primary duty of doubt and wonder has nothing to do with the rights or wrongs of special industrial quarrels. The workmen might be quite wrong to go on strike, and we should still be much more wrong in never expecting them to go on strike. Ultimately, it is a mystical but most necessary mood of astonishment at everything outside one's own soul — even one's own body. It may even involve a wild vision in which one's own boots on one's own feet seem to be things distant and unfamiliar. And if this sound a shade fantastic, it is far less fantastic than the opposite extreme — the state of the man who feels as if he owned not only his own feet, but hundreds of other human feet like a huge centipede, or as if he were a universal octopus, and all rails, tubes and tramlines were his own tentacles, the nerves of his own body, or the circulation of his own blood. That is a much worse nightmare, and at this moment a much commoner one.

Tennyson struck a true note of the nineteenth century when he talked about "the fairy tales of science and the long result of time." The Victorians had a very real and even childlike wonder at things like the steam-engine or the telephone, considered as toys. Unfortunately the long result of time, on the fairy tales of science, has been to extend the science and lessen the fairy tale, that is, the sense of the fairy tale. Take for example the current case of the Tubes. Suppose that at an age of innocence you had met a strange man who had promised to drive you by the force of the lightning through the bowels of the earth. Suppose he had offered, in a friendly way, to throw you from one end of London to the other, not only like a thunderbolt, but by the same force as a thunderbolt. Or if we picture it a pneumatic and not an electric railway; suppose he gaily promised to blow you through a pea-shooter to the other side of London Bridge. Suppose he indicated all these fascinating opportunities by pointing to a hole in the ground and telling you he would take you there in a sort of flying or falling room. I hope you would have agreed that there was a special providence in a falling room. But whether or no you could call it providential, you would agree to call it special. You would at least think that the strange man was a very strange man. You would perhaps call him a very strange and special liar, if he merely undertook to do it. You might even call him a magician, if he did do it. But the point is this, that you would not call him a Bolshevik merely because he did not do it. You would think it a wonderful thing that it should be done at all; passing in that swift car through those secret caverns, you would feel yourself whirled away like Cinderella carried off in the coach that had once been a pumpkin. But though such things happened in every fairy tale, they were not expected in any fairy tale. Nobody turned on the fairies and complained that they were not working because they were not always working wonders. The Press in those parts did not break into big headlines of “Pumpkins held up; no Transformation Scenes,” or “Wands Won’t Work; Famine of Coaches.” They did not announce with horror a “Strike of Fairy Godmothers.” They did not draw panic-stricken pictures of mobs of fairy godmothers, meeting in parks and squares, merely because the majority of pumpkins still continued to be pumpkins. Now I do not argue that we ought to treat every tube-girl as our fairy godmother; she might resent the familiarity, especially the suggestion of anything so near to a grandmother. But I do suggest that we should, by a return to earlier sentiments, realize that the tube servants are doing something for us that we could not do for ourselves; something that is no part of our natural capacities, or even of our natural rights. It is not inevitable, or in the nature of things, that when we have walked as we can or want to, somebody else should carry us further in a cart, even for hire: or that when we have wandered up a road and come to a river, a total stranger should take us over in a boat, even if we bribe him to do so. If we would look at things in this plain white daylight of wonder, that shines on all the roads of the fairy tales, we come to see at last the simplest truth about the Strikes, which is utterly missed in all contemporary comments on them. It is merely the fact that Strikers are not *doing* something: they are doing nothing. If you mean that they should be *made* to do something, say so, and establish slavery. But do not be muddled by the mere word “strike” into mixing it up with breaking a window or hitting a policeman on the nose. Do not be stunned by a metaphor; there are no metaphors in fairy tales.

A NOTE ON OLD NONSENSE

THE Suffragettes have found out that they were wrong; I might even be so egotistical as to say they have found out that we were right. At least they have found out that the modern plutocratic parliamentary franchise is what I for one always said it was. In other words, they are startled and infuriated to find that the most vital modern matters are not settled in Parliament at all, but mostly by a conflict or compromise between Trusts and Trade Unions. Hence Mrs. Flora Drummond actually cries aloud that she is being robbed of her precious vote; and says dramatically, "We women are being disenfranchised" — apparently by "Soviets." It is as if somebody who had just spent half a million on a sham diamond, that ought never to have deceived anybody, should shriek from the window that thieves had stolen the real diamond that never existed at all.

Whether or no there are Soviets, there are undoubtedly Strikes; and I do not under-rate the difficulty or danger of the hour. There is at least a case for blaming men for striking right and left, illogically and without a system; there is a case for blaming them for striking steadily and logically in accordance with a false system; there is a case for saying that "direct action" implies such a false system. But there is no case whatever for blaming them for having depreciated the waste paper of the Westminster ballot-box; for that was depreciated long before the war, and long before the word "Soviet" came to soothe and satisfy the mind of Mrs. Drummond. It is absurd to blame the poor miners for discrediting the members of Parliament, who could always be trusted to discredit themselves. It was not the wild destructive Soviet which decided that Parliament should not know who paid the bills of its own political parties; it was Parliament itself. It was not a mad Bolshevist addressing a mob who said that the men of the parliamentary group have to treat charges of corruption among themselves differently from those outside; it was the greatest living parliamentarian in a great parliamentary debate. Miners had no more to be with it than missionaries in the Cannibal Islands; it was not because men could not get coal that they wanted to get coronets; and the empty coal-scuttle did not fill the party chest. But in any case the policy of people like Mrs. Drummond seems to require explanation. I can only fall back on the suggestion I have already made; that she and her friends insisted on taking shares in a rotten concern. They were quite sincere; so far as anybody can be quite sincere who flatly refuses to listen to reason. They have no right to complain if those who had to listen to their lawlessness will not listen to their legalism.

As a fact such a lady is rather contemptuous than complaining. She says the miners do not want Nationalization; which may or may not be true. But she explains the demand by the old disdainful allusion to agitators; or Labour leaders who "have to beat the big drum or lose their jobs." Nobody of course could possibly connect Mrs. Flora Drummond with the idea of a big drum; any more than with a big horse or a uniform or a self-created military rank. But this particular school of Feminists must not be too fastidious in the present case. The miners are poor and rudely instructed men; and cannot be expected to have that touch of quiet persuasiveness and softening courtesy, by which the Militant Suffragettes did so much to defend the historic dignity of their sex. They have to fall back on something only too like a big drum, having no skill in the silvery flutings of the W.S.P.U., or that tender lute which Miss Pankhurst touched at twilight. But under all the disadvantages of the coarser sex, the advocates of Nationalization have not yet used all the methods that precedent might suggest to them. Mr. Smillie has not cut up any Raphaels or Rembrandts at the National Gallery; nor even set fire to any of the theatres he may happen to pass when he is out for a walk. Mr. Bonar Law, on returning home at evening, does not find Mr. Sidney Webb, a solitary figure chained to his railings. One of the Suffragettes distinguished herself by getting inside a grand piano; but it is seldom that we open our own private piano and find a large coal-miner inside the instrument. The coal-miner may be better at the big drum than the grand piano; but he remains on the outside of both; and his drum is really smaller than some. The big drum, however, is rather a convenient metaphor for something obvious and loud and hollow; and the true moral in the matter is that recent English history was a procession led far too much by the big drum; and the agitation about mere Parliamentary votes was one of the most recent and most remarkable examples of it.

What will be the future of the present industrial crisis I will not prophesy; but I do know that every element in the past, which has led to this impasse in the present, has been thus glorified as a mere novelty by such a noisy minority. It was just because sanguine and shallow people found it easier to act than to write, and easier to write than to think, that every one of the changes came which now complicate our position. The very industrialism which makes us dependent on coal, and therefore on coal-miners and coal-owners, was forced on us by fussy inefficient fools, for whom anything fresh seemed to be free. Neither miners nor mine-owners could have put out the fire by which Shakespeare told his Winter's Tale. The unequal ownership, which has justly alienated the workers, was hurried happily through because the owners were new, and it did not matter that they were few. The blind hypocrisy with which our press and publicists hardened their hearts in the great strikes before the war, was made possible by loud evasions about political progress and especially by the big drum of Votes for Women. I have begun this essay on a controversial note, with the echo of an old controversy; and yet I do not mean to be merely provocative. The Suffragettes are only doing what we all do; and I have only put them first as an example of accumulated abuses for which we are all responsible. I do not mean to blame the Suffragettes as they blame the Socialists; but only to point to an impasse of impenitence for which we are all to blame.

I am more and more convinced that what is wanted nowadays is not optimism or pessimism, but a sort of reform that might more truly be called repentance. The reform of a State ought to be a thing more like the reform of a thief, which involves the admission that he has been a thief. We ought not to be merely inventing consolations, or even merely prophesying disasters; we ought, first and foremost, to be confessing our own very bad mistakes. It is easy enough to say that the world is getting better, by some mysterious thing called progress — which seems to mean providence without purpose. But it is almost as easy to say the world is getting worse, if we assume that it is only the younger generation that has just begun to make it worse. It is easy enough to say that the country is going to the dogs, if we are careful to identify the dogs with the puppies. What we need is not the assertion that other people are going to the dogs, but the confession that we ourselves have only just come back from the swine. We also are the younger generation, in the sense of being the Prodigal Son. As somebody said, there is such a thing as the Prodigal Father. We could purchase hope at the dreadful price of humility. But all thinkers and writers, of all political parties and philosophical sects, seem to shrink from this notion of admitting they are on the wrong road and getting back on to the right one. They are always trying to pretend, by hook or crook, that they are all on the same somewhat meandering road, and that they were right in going east yesterday, though they are right in going west to-day. They will try to make out that every school of thought was an advance on the last school of thought, and that no apology is due to anybody. For instance, we might really have a moderate, cautious, and even conservative reform of the evils affecting Labour, if we would only confess that Capitalism itself was a blunder which it is very difficult to undo. As it is, men seem to be divided into those that think it an achievement so admirable that it cannot be improved upon, and those who think it an achievement so encouraging that it can be improved upon. The former will leave it in chaos, and the latter will probably improve it into slavery. Neither will admit what is the truth — that we have got to get *back* to a better distribution of property, as it was before we fell into the blunder of allowing property to be clotted into monstrous monopolies. For that involves admitting that we have made a mistake; and that we none of us have the moral courage to do.

I suggest very seriously that it will do good to our credit for courage and right reason if we drop this way of doing things. The conversions that have converted the world were not effected by this sort of evolutionary curve. St. Paul did not pretend that he had changed slowly and imperceptibly from a Pharisee to a Christian. Victor Hugo did not maintain that he had been very right to be a Royalist, and only a little more right to be a Republican. If we have come to the conclusion that we have been wrong, let us say so, and congratulate ourselves on being now right; not insinuate that in some relative fashion we were just as right when we were wrong. For in this respect the progressive is the worst sort of conservative. He insists on conserving, in the most obstinate and obscurantist fashion, all the courses that have been marked out for progress in the past. He does literally, in the rather unlucky metaphor of Tennyson, “let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.” For anyone who changes in that fashion has only got into a groove. There is no obligation on anybody to invent evolutionary excuses for all these experiments. There is no need to be so much ashamed of our blunders as all that. It is human to err; and the only final and deadly error, among all our errors, is denying that we have ever erred.

MILTON AND MERRY ENGLAND

MR. FREEMAN, in contributing to the “London Mercury” some of those critical analyses which we all admire, remarked about myself (along with compliments only too generous and strictures almost entirely just) that there was very little autobiography in my writings. I hope the reader will not have reason to curse him for this kindly provocation, watching me assume the graceful poses of Marie Bashkirtseff, but I feel tempted to plead it in extenuation or excuse for this article, which can hardly avoid being egotistical. For though it concerns one of those problems of literature, of philosophy and of history that certainly interest me more than my own psychology, it is one on which I can hardly explain myself without seeming to expose myself.

That valuable public servant, “The Gentleman with the Duster,” has passed on from Downing Street, from polishing up the Mirrors and polishing off the Ministers, to a larger world of reflections in “The Glass of Fashion.” I call the glass a world of reflections rather than a world of shadows: especially as I myself am one of those tenuous shades. And the matter which interests me here is that the critic in question complains that I have been very unjust to Puritans and Puritanism, and especially to a certain ethical idealism in them, which he declares to have been more essential than the Calvinism of which I “make so much.” He puts the point in a genial but somewhat fantastic fashion by saying that the world owes something to the jokes of Mr. G. K. Chesterton, but more to the moral earnestness of John Milton. This involves rather a dizzy elevation than a salutary depression; and the comparison is rather too overwhelming to be crushing. For I suppose the graceful duster of mirrors himself would hardly feel crushed if I told him he did not hold the mirror up to Nature quite so successfully as Shakespeare. Nor can I be described as exactly reeling from the shock of being informed that I am a less historic figure than Milton. I know not how to answer, unless it be in the noble words of Sam Weller: “That’s what we call a self-evident proposition, as the cats’-meat-man said to the housemaid when she said he was no gentleman.” But for all that I have a controversial issue with the critic about the moral earnestness of Milton, and I have a confession to make which will seem to many only too much in the personal manner referred to by Mr. Freeman.

My first impulse to write, and almost my first impulse to think, was a revolt of disgust with the Decadents and the aesthetic pessimism of the ‘nineties. It is now almost impossible to bring home to anybody, even to myself, how final that *fin de siècle* seemed to be; not the end of the century but the end of the world. To a boy his first hatred is almost as immortal as his first love. He does not realize that the objects of either can alter; and I did not know that the twilight of the gods was only a mood. I thought that all the wit and wisdom in the world were banded together to slander and depress the world, and in becoming an optimist I had the feelings of an outlaw. Like Prince Florizel of Bohemia, I felt myself to be alone in a luxurious Suicide Club. But even the death seemed to be a living or rather everlasting death. To-day the whole thing is merely dead; it was not sufficiently immortal to be damned, but then the image of Dorian Gray was really an idol, with something of the endless youth of a god. To-day the picture of Dorian Gray has really grown old. Dodo then was not merely an amusing female; she was the eternal feminine. To-day the Dodo is extinct. Then, above all, everyone claiming intelligence insisted on what was called “Art for art’s sake.” To-day even the biographer of Oscar Wilde proposes to abandon “art for art’s sake,” and to substitute “art for life’s sake.” But at the time I was more inclined to substitute “no art, for God’s sake.” I would rather have had no art at all than one which occupies itself in matching shades of peacock and turquoise for a decorative scheme of blue devils. I started to think it out, and the more I thought of it the more certain I grew that the whole thing was a fallacy; that art could not exist apart from, still less in opposition to, life; especially the life of the soul, which is salvation; and that great art never had been so much detached as that from conscience and common sense, or from what my critic would call moral earnestness. Unfortunately, by the time I had exposed it as a fallacy it had entirely evaporated as a fashion. Since then I have taken universal annihilations more lightly. But I can still be stirred, as man always can be by memories of their first excitements or ambitions, by anything that shows the cloven hoof of that particular blue devil. I am still ready to knock him about, though I no longer think he has a cloven hoof or even a lame leg to stand on. But for all that there is one real argument which I still recognize on his side; and that argument is in a single word. There is still one word which the aesthete can whisper; and the whisper will bring back all my childish fears that the aesthete may be right after all. There is one name that does seem to me a strong argument for the decadent doctrine that “art is unmoral.” When that name is uttered, the world of Wilde and Whistler comes back with all its cold levity and cynical connoisseurship; the butterfly becomes a burden, and the green carnation flourishes like the green baytree. For the moment I do believe in “art for art’s sake.” And that name is John Milton.

It does really seem to me that Milton was an artist, and nothing but an artist; and yet so great an artist as to sustain by his own strength the idea that art can exist alone. He seems to me an almost solitary example of a man of magnificent genius whose greatness does not depend at all upon moral earnestness, or upon anything connected with morality. His greatness is in a style, and a style which seems to me rather unusually separate from its substance. What is the exact nature of the pleasure which I, for one, take in reading and repeating some such lines, for instance, as those familiar ones:

Dying put on the weeds of Dominic   Or in Franciscan think to pass disguised.

So far as I can see, the whole effect is in a certain unexpected order and arrangement of words, independent and distinguished, like the perfect manners of an eccentric gentleman. Say instead “Put on in death the weeds of Dominic,” and the whole unique dignity of the line has broken down. It is something in the quiet but confident inversion of “Dying put on” which exactly achieves that perpetual slight novelty which Aristotle profoundly said was the language of poetry. The idea itself is at best an obvious and even conventional condemnation of superstition, and in the ultimate sense a rather superficial one. Coming where it does, indeed, it does not so much suggest moral earnestness as rather a moralizing priggishness. For it is dragged in very laboriously into the very last place where it is wanted, before a splendidly large and luminous vision of the world newly created, and the first innocence of earth and sky. It is that passage in which the wanderer through space approaches Eden; one of the most unquestionable triumphs of all human literature. That one book at least of “Paradise Lost” could claim the more audacious title of “Paradise Found.” But if it was necessary for the poet going to Eden to pass through Limbo, why was it necessary to pass through Lambeth and Little Bethel? Why should he go there via Rome and Geneva? Why was it necessary to compare the débris of Limbo to the details of ecclesiastical quarrels in the seventeenth century, when he was moving in a world before the dawn of all the centuries, or the shadow of the first quarrel? Why did he talk as if the Church was reformed before the world was made, or as if Latimer lit his candle before God made the sun and moon? Matthew Arnold made fun of those who claimed divine sanction for episcopacy by suggesting that when God said, “Let there be light,” He also said “Let there be Bishops.” But his own favourite Milton went very near suggesting that when God said, “Let there be light,” He soon afterwards remarked, “Let there be Nonconformists,” I do not feel this merely because my own religious sympathies happen to be rather on the other side. It is indeed probable that Milton did not appreciate a whole world of ideas in which he saw merely the corruptions: the idea of relics and symbolic acts and the drama of the deathbed. It does not enlarge his place in the philosophy of history that this should be his only relation either to the divine demagogy of the Dogs of God or to the fantastical fraternity of the Jugglers of God. But I should feel exactly the same incongruity if the theological animus were the other way. It would be equally disproportionate if the approach to Eden were interrupted with jokes against Puritans, or if Limbo were littered with steeple-crowned hats and the scrolls of interminable Calvinistic sermons. We should still feel that a book of “Paradise Lost” was not the right place for a passage from Hudibras. So far from being morally earnest, in the best sense, there is something almost philosophically frivolous in the incapacity to think firmly and magnanimously about the First Things, and the primary colours of the creative palette, without spoiling the picture with this ink-slinging of sectarian politics. Speaking from the standpoint of moral earnestness, I confess it seems to me trivial and spiteful and even a little vulgar. After which impertinent criticism, I Will now repeat in a loud voice, and for the mere lust of saying it as often as possible:

Dying put on the weeds of Dominic Or in Franciscan think to pass disguised.

And the exuberant joy I take in it is the nearest thing I have ever known to art for art’s sake.

In short it seems to me that Milton was a great artist, and that he was also a great accident. It was rather in the same sense that his master Cromwell was a great accident. It is not true that all the moral virtues were crystallized in Milton and his Puritans. It is not true that all the military virtues were concentrated in Cromwell and his Ironsides. There were masses of moral devotion on the one side, and masses of military valour on the other side. But it did so happen that Milton had more ability and success in literary expression, and Cromwell more ability and success in military science, than any of their many rivals. To represent Cromwell as a fiend or Milton as a hypocrite is to rush to another extreme and be ridiculous; they both believed sincerely enough in certain moral ideas of their time. Only they were not, as seems to be supposed, the only moral ideas of their time. And they were not, in my private opinion, the best moral ideas of their time. One of them was the idea that wisdom is more or less weakened by laughter and a popular taste in pleasure; and we may call this moral earnestness if we like. But the point is that Cromwell did not succeed by his moral earnestness, but by his strategy; and Milton did not succeed by his moral earnestness, but by his style.

And, first of all, let me touch on the highest form of moral earnestness and the relation of Milton to the religious poetry of his day. "Paradise Lost" is certainly a religious poem; but, for many of its admirers, the religion is the least admirable part of it. The poet professes indeed to justify the ways of God to men; but I never heard of any men who read it in order to have them justified, as men do still read a really religious poem, like the dark and almost sceptical Book of Job. A poem can hardly be said to justify the ways of God, when its most frequent effect is admittedly to make people sympathize with Satan. In all this I am in a sense arguing against myself; for all my instincts, as I have said, are against the aesthetic theory that art so great can be wholly irreligious. And I agree that even in Milton there are gleams of Christianity. Nobody quite without them could have written the single line: "By the dear might of Him that walked the waves." But it is hardly too much to say that it is the one place where that Figure walks in the whole world of Milton. Nobody, I imagine, has ever been able to recognize Christ in the cold conqueror who drives a chariot in the war in Heaven, like Apollo warring on the Titans. Nobody has ever heard Him in the stately disquisitions either of the Council in Heaven or of "Paradise Regained." But apart from all these particular problems, it is surely the general truth that the great religious epic strikes us with a sense of disproportion; the sense of how little it is religious considering how manifestly it is great. It seems almost strange that a man should have written so much and so well without stumbling on Christian tradition.

Now in the age of Milton there was a riot of religious poetry. Most of it had moral earnestness, and much of it had splendid spiritual conviction.

But most of it was not the poetry of the Puritans; on the contrary, it was mostly the poetry of the Cavaliers. The most real religion — we might say the most realistic religion — is not to be found in Milton, but in Vaughan, in Traherne, in Crashaw, in Herbert, and even in Herrick. The best proof of it is that the religion is alive to-day, as religion and not merely as literature. A Roman Catholic can read Crashaw, an Anglo-Catholic can read Herbert, in a direct devotional spirit; I gravely doubt whether many modern Congregationalists read the theology of "Paradise Lost" in that spirit. For the moment I mention only this purely religious emotion; I do not deny that Milton's poetry, like all great poetry, can awaken other great emotions. For instance, a man bereaved by one of the tragedies of the Great War might well find a stoical serenity in the great lines beginning, "Nothing is here, for tears." That sort of consolation is uttered, as nobly as it could be uttered, by Milton; but it might be uttered by Sophocles or Goethe, or even by Lucretius or Voltaire. But supposing that a man were seeking a more Christian kind of consolation, he would not find it in Milton at all, as he would find it in the lines beginning, "They are all gone into the world of light." The whole of the two great Puritan epics do not contain all that is said in saying, "0 holy hope and high humility." Neither hope nor humility were Puritan specialties.

But it was not only in devotional mysticism that these Cavaliers could challenge the great Puritan; it was in a mysticism more humanistic and even more modern. They shine with that white mystery of daylight which many suppose to have dawned with Wordsworth and with Blake. In that sense they make earth mystical where Milton only made Heaven material. Nor are they inferior in philosophic freedom; the single line of Crashaw, addressed to a woman, "By thy large draughts of intellectual day," is less likely, I fancy, to have been addressed by Adam to Eve, or by Milton to Mrs. Milton. It seems to me that these men were superior to Milton in magnanimity, in chivalry, in joy of life, in the balance of sanity and subtlety, in everything except the fact (not wholly remote from literary criticism) that they did not write so well as he did. But they wrote well enough to lift the load of materialism from the English name and show us the shining fields of a Paradise that is not wholly lost.

Of such was the anti-Puritan party; and the reader may learn more about it from the author of "The Glass of Fashion." There he may form a general idea of how, but for the Puritans, England would have been abandoned to mere ribaldry and licence; blasted by the blasphemies of George Herbert; rolled in the mire of the vile materialism of Vaughan; tickled to ribald laughter by the cheap cynicism and tap-room familiarities of Crashaw and Traherne. But the same Cavalier tradition continued into the next age, and indeed into the next century; and the critic must extend his condemnation to include the brutal buffooneries of Bishop Ken or the gay and careless worldliness of Jeremy Collier. Nay, he must extend it to cover the last Tories who kept the tradition of the Jacobites; the careless merriment of Dean Swift, the godless dissipation of Dr. Johnson. None of these men were Puritans; all of them were strong opponents of political and religious Puritanism. The truth is that English literature bears a very continuous and splendid testimony to the fact that England was not merely Puritan. Ben Jonson in "Bartholomew Fair" spoke for most English people, and certainly for most English poets. Anti-Puritanism was the one thing common to Shakespeare and Dryden, to Swift and Jonson, to Cobbett and Dickens. And the historical bias the other way has come, not from Puritan superiority, but simply from Puritan success. It was the political triumph of the party, in the Revolution and the resultant commercial industrialism, that suppressed the testimony of the populace and the poets. Loyalty died away in a few popular songs; the Cromwellians never had any popular song to die. English history has moved away from English literature. Our culture, like our agriculture, is at once very native and very neglected. And as this neglect is regrettable, if only as neglect of literature, I will pause in conclusion upon the later period, two generations after Milton, when the last of the true Tories drank wine with Bolingbroke or tea with Johnson.

The truth that is missed about the Tories of this tradition is that they were rebels. They had the virtues of rebels; they also had the vices of rebels. Swift had the fury of a rebel; Johnson the surliness of a rebel; Goldsmith the morbid sensibility of a rebel; and Scott, at the end of the process, something of the despair and mere retrospection of a defeated rebel. And the Whig school of literary criticism, like the Whig school of political history, has omitted or missed this truth about them, because it necessarily omitted the very existence of the thing against which they rebelled. For Macaulay and Thackeray and the average of Victorian liberality the Revolution of 1688 was simply an emancipation, the defeat of the Stuarts was simply a downfall of tyranny and superstition; the politics of the eighteenth century were simply a progress leading up to the pure and happy politics of the nineteenth century; freedom slowly broadening down, etc., etc. This makes the attitude of the Tory rebels entirely meaningless; so that the critics in question have been forced to represent some of the greatest Englishmen who ever lived as a mere procession of lunatics and ludicrous eccentrics. But these rebels, right or wrong, can only be understood in relation to the real power against which they were rebelling; and their titanic figures can best be traced in the light of the lightning which they defied. That power was a positive thing; it was anything but a mere negative emancipation of everybody. It was as definite as the monarchy which it had replaced; for it was an aristocracy that replaced it. It was the oligarchy of the great Whig families, a very close corporation indeed, having Parliament for its legal form, but the new wealth for its essential substance. That is why these lingering Jacobites appear most picturesque when they are pitted against some of the princes of the new aristocratic order. That is why Bolingbroke remains in the memory, standing in his box at the performance of "Cato," and flinging forth his defiance to Marlborough. That is why Johnson remains rigid in his magnificent disdain, hurling his defiance at Chesterfield. Churchill and Chesterfield were not small men, either in personality or in power; they were brilliant ornaments of the triumph of the world. They represented the English governing class when it could really govern; the modern plutocracy when it still deserved to be called an aristocracy also. And the whole point of the position of these men of letters is that they were denying and denouncing something which was growing every day in prestige and prosperity; which seemed to have, and indeed had, not only the present but the future on its side. The only thing it had not got on its side was the ancient tradition of the English populace. That populace was being more and more harried by evictions and enclosures, that its old common lands and yeomen freeholds might be added to the enormous estates of the all-powerful aristocracy. One of the Tory rebels has himself made that infamy immortal in the great lines of the "Deserted Village." At least, it is immortal in the sense that it can never now be lost for lovers of English literature; but even this record was for a long time lost to the public by under-valuation and neglect. In recent times the "Deserted Village" was very much of a deserted poem. But of that I may have occasion to speak later. The point for the moment is that the psychology of these men, in its evil as well as its good, is to be interpreted not so much in terms of a lingering loyalty as of a frustrated revolution. Some of them had, of course, elements of extravagance and morbidity peculiar to their own characters; but they grew ten times more extravagant and more morbid as their souls swelled within them at the success of the shameless and the insolence of the fortunate. I doubt whether anybody ever felt so bitter against the Stuarts. Now this misunderstanding has made a very regrettable gap in literary criticism. The masterpieces of these men are represented as much more crabbed or cranky or inconsequent than they really were, because their objective is not seen objectively. It is like judging the raving of some Puritan preacher without allowing for the fact that the Pope or the King had ever possessed any power at all. To ignore the fact of the great Whig families because of the legal fiction of a free Parliament is like ignoring the feelings of the Christian martyrs about Nero, because of the legal fiction that the Imperator was only a military general. These fictions do not prevent imaginative persons from writing books like the "Apocalypse" or books like "Gulliver's Travels."

I will take only one example of what I mean by this purely literary misunderstanding: an example from "Gulliver's Travels" itself. The case of the under-valuation of Swift is a particularly subtle one, for Swift was really unbalanced as an individual, which has made it much easier for critics not to keep the rather delicate balance of justice about him. There is a superficial case for saying he was mad, apart from the physical accident of his madness; but the point is that even those who have realized that he was sometimes mad with rage have not realized what he was in a rage with. And there is a curious illustration of this in the conclusion of the story of Gulliver. Everyone remembers the ugly business about the Yahoos, and the still uglier business about the real human beings who reminded the returned traveller of Yahoos; how Gulliver shrank at first from his friends, and would only gradually consent to sit near his wife. And everybody remembers the picturesque but hostile sketch which Thackeray gives of the satire and the satirist; of Swift as the black and evil blasphemer sitting down to write his terrible allegory, of which the only moral is that all things are, and always must be, valueless and vile. I say that everybody remembers both these literary passages; but, indeed, I fear that many remember the critical who do not really remember the creative passage, and that many have read Thackeray who have not read Swift.

Now it is here that purely literary criticism has a word to say. A man of letters may be mad or sane in his cerebral constitution; he may be right or wrong in his political antipathies; he may be anything we happen to like or dislike from our own individual standpoint. But there is one thing to which a man of letters has a right, whatever he is, and that is a fair critical comprehension of any particular literary effect which he obviously aims at and achieves. He has a right to his climax, and a right not to be judged without reference to his climax. It would not be fair to leave out the beautiful last lines of "Paradise Lost" as mere bathos; without realizing that the poet had a fine intention in allowing that conclusion, after all the thunder and the trumps of doom, to fall and fade away on a milder note of mercy and reasonable hope. It would not be fair to stigmatize the incident of Ignorance, damned at the very doors of Heaven at the end of Bunyan's book, as a mere blot of black Calvinist cruelty and spite, without realizing that the writer fully intended its fearful irony, like a last touch of the finger of fear. But this justice which is done to the Puritan masters of imagination has hardly been done to the great Tory masters of irony. No critic I have read has noticed the real point and climax of that passage about the Yahoos. Swift leads up to it ruthlessly enough, for an artist of that sort is often ruthless; and it is increased by his natural talent for a sort of mad reality of detail, as in his description of the slowly diminished distance between himself and his wife at the dinner-table. But he was working up to something that he really wished to say, something which was well worth saying, but which few seem to have thought worth hearing. He suggests that he gradually lost the loathing for humanity with which the Yahoo parallel had inspired him, that although men are in many ways petty and animal, he came to feel them to be normal and tolerable; that the sense of their unworthiness now very seldom returns; and indeed that there is only one thing that revives it. If one of these creatures exhibits Pride.

That is the voice of Swift, and the cry arraigning aristocracy. It is natural for a monkey to collect nuts, and it may be pardonable for John Churchill to collect guineas. But to think that John Churchill can be proud of his heap of guineas, can convert them into stars and coronets, and can carry that calm and classic face disdainful above the multitude! It is natural for she-monkeys to be mated somehow; but to think that the Duchess of Yarmouth is proud of being the Duchess of Yarmouth! It may not be surprising that the nobility should have scrambled like screaming Yahoos for the rags and ribbons of the Revolution, tripping up and betraying anybody and everybody in turn, with every dirty trick of treason, for anything and everything they could get. But that those of them who had got everything should then despise those who had got nothing, that the rich should sneer at the poor for having no part of the plunder, that this oligarchy of Yahoos should actually feel superior to anything or anybody — that does move the prophet of the losing side to an indignation which is something much deeper and nobler than the negative flippancies that we call blasphemy. Swift was perhaps more of a Jeremiah than an Isaiah, and a faulty Jeremiah at that; but in his great climax of his grim satire he is none the less a seer and a speaker of the things of God; because he gives the testimony of the strongest and most searching of human intellects to the profound truth of the meanness and imbecility of pride.

And the other men of the same tradition had essentially the same instinct. Johnson was in many ways unjust to Swift, just as Cobbett was afterwards unjust to Johnson. But looking back up the perspective of history we can all see that those three great men were all facing the same way; that they all regretted the rise of a rapacious and paganized commercial aristocracy, and its conquest over the old popular traditions, which some would call popular prejudices. When Johnson said that the devil was the first Whig, he might have merely varied the phrase by saying that he was the first aristocrat. For the men of this Tory tradition, in spirit if not in definition, distinguished between the privilege of monarchy and that of the new aristocracy by a very tenable test. The mark of aristocracy is ambition. The king cannot be ambitious. We might put it now by saying that monarchy is authority; but in its essence aristocracy is always anarchy. But the men of that school did not criticize the oligarch merely as a rebel against those above; they were well aware of his activities as an oppressor of those below. This aspect, as has already been noted, was best described by a friend of Johnson, for whom Johnson had a very noble and rather unique appreciation — Oliver Goldsmith.

I hope that the author of an admirable study of Mr. Belloc in this magazine will not think that I am merely traversing one of his criticisms if I venture to add something to it. He used the phrase that Mr. Belloc had been anticipated by Disraeli in his view of England as having evolved into a Venetian oligarchy. The truth is that Disraeli was anticipated by Bolingbroke and the many highly intelligent men who agreed with him; and not least by Goldsmith. The whole view, including the very parallel with Venice, can be found stated with luminous logic and cogency in the “Vicar of Wakefield." And Goldsmith attacked the problem entirely from the popular side. Nobody can mistake his Toryism for a snobbish submission to a privilege or title:

Princes and lords, the shadow of a shade, A breath can make them, as a breath has made: But a bold peasantry, a nation's pride, When once destroyed can never be supplied.

I hope he was wrong; but I sometimes have a horrible feeling that he may have been right.

But I have here, thank God, no cause for touching upon modern politics. I was educated, as much as my critic, in the belief that Whiggism was a pure deliverance; and I hope I am still as willing as he to respect Puritans for their individual virtue as well as for their individual genius. But it moves all my memories of the unmorality of the 'nineties to be charged with indifference to the importance of being earnest. And it is for the sake of English literature that I protest against the suggestion that we had no purity except Puritanism, or that only a man like the author of "Paradise Lost" could manage to be on the side of the angels.

On Peace Day I set up outside my house two torches, and twined them with laurel; because I thought at least there was nothing pacifist about laurel. But that night, after the bonfire and the fireworks had faded, a wind grew and blew with gathering violence, blowing away the rain. And in the morning I found one of the laurelled posts torn off and lying at random on the rainy ground; while the other still stood erect, green and glittering in the sun. I thought that the pagans would certainly have called it an omen; and it was one that strangely fitted my own sense of some great work half fulfilled and half frustrated. And I thought vaguely of that man in Virgil, who prayed that he might slay his foe and return to his country; and the gods heard half the prayer, and the other half was scattered to the winds. For I knew we were right to rejoice; since the tyrant was indeed slain and his tyranny fallen for ever; but I know not when we shall find our way back to our own land.

THE END

THE EVERLASTING MAN

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Prefatory Note

This book needs a preliminary note that its scope be not misunderstood. The view suggested is historical rather than theological, and does not deal directly with a religious change which has been the chief event of my own life; and about which I am already writing a more purely controversial volume. It is impossible, I hope, for any Catholic to write any book on any subject, above all this subject, without showing that he is a Catholic; but this study is not specially concerned with the differences between a Catholic and a Protestant. Much of it is devoted to many sorts of Pagans rather than any sort of Christians; and its thesis is that those who say that Christ stands side by side with similar myths, and his religion side by side with similar religions, are only repeating a very stale formula contradicted by a very striking fact. To suggest this I have not needed to go much beyond matters known to us all; I make no claim to learning; and have to depend for some things, as has rather become the fashion, on those who are more learned. As I have more than once differed from Mr. H. G. Wells in his view of history, it is the more right that I should here congratulate him on the courage and constructive imagination which carried through his vast and varied and intensely interesting work; but still more on having asserted the reasonable right of the amateur to do what he can with the facts which the specialists provide.

Introduction
The Plan Of This Book

There are two ways of getting home; and one of them is to stay there. The other is to walk round the whole world till we come back to the same place; and I tried to trace such a journey in a story I once wrote. It is, however, a relief to turn from that topic to another story that I never wrote. Like every book I never wrote, it is by far the best book I have ever written. It is only too probable that I shall never write it, so I will use it symbolically here; for it was a symbol of the same truth. I conceived it as a romance of those vast valleys with sloping sides, like those along which the ancient White Horses of Wessex are scrawled along the flanks of the hills. It concerned some boy whose farm or cottage stood on such a slope, and who went on his travels to find something, such as the effigy and grave of some giant; and when he was far enough from home he looked back and saw that his own farm and kitchen-garden, shining flat on the hill-side like the colours and quarterings of a shield, were but parts of some such gigantic figure, on which he had always lived, but which was too large and too close to be seen. That, I think, is a true picture of the progress of any really independent intelligence today; and that is the point of this book.

The point of this book, in other words, is that the next best thing to being really inside Christendom is to be really outside it. And a particular point of it is that the popular critics of Christianity are not really outside it. They are on a debatable ground, in every sense of the term. They are doubtful in their very doubts. Their criticism has taken on a curious tone; as of a random and illiterate heckling. Thus they make current and anti-clerical cant as a sort of small-talk. They will complain of parsons dressing like parsons; as if we should be any more free if all the police who shadowed or collared us were plain clothes detectives. Or they will complain that a sermon cannot be interrupted, and call a pulpit a coward’s castle; though they do not call an editor’s office a coward’s castle. It would be unjust both to journalists and priests; but it would be much truer of journalist. The clergyman appears in person and could easily be kicked as he came out of church; the journalist conceals even his name so that nobody can kick him. They write wild and pointless articles and letters in the press about why the churches are empty, without even going there to find out if they are empty, or which of them are empty. Their suggestions are more vapid and vacant than the most insipid curate in a three-act farce, and move us to comfort him after the manner of the curate in the Bab Ballads; ‘Your mind is not so blank as that of Hopley Porter.’ So we may truly say to the very feeblest cleric: ‘Your mind is not so blank as that of Indignant Layman or Plain Man or Man in the Street, or any of your critics in the newspapers; for they have not the most shadowy notion of what they want themselves. Let alone of what you ought to give them.’ They will suddenly turn round and revile the Church for not having prevented the War, which they themselves did not want to prevent; and which nobody had ever professed to be able to prevent, except some of that very school of progressive and cosmopolitan sceptics who are the chief enemies of the Church. It was the anti-clerical and agnostic world that was always prophesying the advent of universal peace; it is that world that was, or should have been, abashed and confounded by the advent of universal war. As for the general view that the Church was discredited by the War — they might as well say that the Ark was discredited by the Flood. When the world goes wrong, it proves rather that the Church is right. The Church is justified, not because her children do not sin, but because they do. But that marks their mood about the whole religious tradition they are in a state of reaction against it. It is well with the boy when he lives on his father’s land; and well with him again when he is far enough from it to look back on it and see it as a whole. But these people have got into an intermediate state, have fallen into an intervening valley from which they can see neither the heights beyond them nor the heights behind. They cannot get out of the penumbra of Christian controversy. They cannot be Christians and they can not leave off being Anti-Christians. Their whole atmosphere is the atmosphere of a reaction: sulks, perversity, petty criticism. They still live in the shadow of the faith and have lost the light of the faith.

Now the best relation to our spiritual home is to be near enough to love it. But the next best is to be far enough away not to hate it. It is the contention of these pages that while the best judge of Christianity is a Christian, the next best judge would be something more like a Confucian. The worst judge of all is the man now most ready with his judgements; the ill-educated Christian turning gradually into the ill-tempered agnostic, entangled in the end of a feud of which he never understood the beginning, blighted with a sort of hereditary boredom with he knows not what, and already weary of hearing what he has never heard. He does not judge

Christianity calmly as a Confucian would; he does not judge it as he would judge Confucianism. He cannot by an effort of fancy set the Catholic Church thousands of miles away in strange skies of morning and judge it as impartially as a Chinese pagoda. It is said that the great St. Francis Xavier, who very nearly succeeded in setting up the Church there as a tower overtopping all pagodas, failed partly because his followers were accused by their fellow missionaries of representing the Twelve Apostles with the garb or attributes of Chinamen. But it would be far better to see them as Chinamen, and judge them fairly as Chinamen, than to see them as featureless idols merely made to be battered by iconoclasts; or rather as cockshies to be pelted by empty-handed cockneys. It would be better to see the whole thing as a remote Asiatic cult; the mitres of its bishops as the towering head dresses of mysterious bonzes; its pastoral staffs as the sticks twisted like serpents carried in some Asiatic procession; to see the prayer book as fantastic as the prayer-wheel and the Cross as crooked as the Swastika. Then at least we should not lose our temper as some of the sceptical critics seem to lose their temper, not to mention their wits. Their anti-clericalism has become an atmosphere, an atmosphere of negation and hostility from which they cannot escape. Compared with that, it would be better to see the whole thing as something belonging to another continent, or to another planet. It would be more philosophical to stare indifferently at bonzes than to be perpetually and pointlessly grumbling at bishops. It would be better to walk past a church as if it were a pagoda than to stand permanently in the porch, impotent either to go inside and help or to go outside and forget. For those in whom a mere reaction has thus become an obsession, I do seriously recommend the imaginative effort of conceiving the Twelve Apostles as Chinamen. In other words, I recommend these critics to try to do as much justice to Christian saints as if they were Pagan sages.

But with this we come to the final and vital point I shall try to show in these pages that when we do make this imaginative effort to see the whole thing from the outside, we find that it really looks like what is traditionally said about it inside. It is exactly when the boy gets far enough off to see the giant that he sees that he really is a giant. It is exactly when we do at last see the Christian Church afar under those clear and level eastern skies that we see that it is really the Church of Christ. To put it shortly, the moment we are really impartial about it, we know why people are partial to it. But this second proposition requires more serious discussion; and I shall here set myself to discuss it.

As soon as I had clearly in my mind this conception of something solid in the solitary and unique character of the divine story, it struck me that there was exactly the same strange and yet solid character in the human story that had led up to it; because that human story also had a root that was divine. I mean that just as the Church seems to grow more remarkable when it is fairly compared with the common religious life of mankind, so mankind itself seems to grow more remarkable when we compare it with the common life of nature. And I have noticed that most modern history is driven to something like sophistry, first to soften the sharp transition from animals to men, and then to soften the sharp transition from heathens to Christians. Now the more we really read in a realistic spirit of those two transitions the sharper we shall find them to be. It is because the critics are not detached that they do not see this detachment; it is because they are not looking at things in a dry light that they cannot see the difference between black and white. It is because they are in a particular mood of reaction and revolt that they have a motive for making out that all the white is dirty grey and the black not so black as it is painted. I do not say there are not human excuses for their revolt; I do not say it is not in some ways sympathetic; what I say is that it is not in any way scientific. An iconoclast may be indignant; an iconoclast may be justly indignant; but an iconoclast is not impartial. And it is stark hypocrisy to pretend that nine-tenths of the higher critics and scientific evolutionists and professors of comparative religion are in the least impartial. Why should they be impartial, what is being impartial, when the whole world is at war about whether one thing is a devouring superstition or a divine hope? I do not pretend to be impartial in the sense that the final act of faith fixes a man’s mind because it satisfies his mind. But I do profess to be a great deal more impartial than they are; in the sense that I can tell the story fairly, with some sort of imaginative justice to all sides; and they cannot. I do profess to be impartial in the sense that I should be ashamed to talk such nonsense about the Lama of Thibet as they do about the Pope of Rome, or to have as little sympathy with Julian the Apostate as they have with the Society of Jesus. They are not impartial; they never by any chance hold the historical scales even; and above all they are never impartial upon this point of evolution and transition. They suggest everywhere the grey gradations of twilight, because they believe it is the twilight of the gods. I propose to maintain that whether or no it is the twilight of gods, it is not the daylight of men.

I maintain that when brought out into the daylight these two things look altogether strange and unique; and that it is only in the false twilight of an imaginary period of transition that they can be made to look in the least like anything else. The first of these is the creature called man and the second is the man called Christ. I have therefore divided this book into two parts: the former being a sketch of the main adventure of the human race in so far as it remained heathen; and the second a summary of the real difference that was made by it becoming Christian. Both motives necessitate a certain method, a method which is not very easy to manage, and perhaps even less easy to define or defend.

In order to strike, in the only sane or possible sense, the note of impartiality, it is necessary to touch the nerve of novelty. I mean that in one sense we see things fairly when we see them first. That, I may remark in passing, is why children generally have very little difficulty about the dogmas of the Church. But the Church, being a highly practical thing for working and fighting, is necessarily a thing for men and not merely for children. There must be in it for working purposes a great deal of tradition, of familiarity, and even of routine. So long as its fundamentals are sincerely felt, this may even be the saner condition. But when its fundamentals are doubted, as at present, we must try to recover the candour and wonder of the child; the unspoilt realism and objectivity of innocence. Or if we cannot do that, we must try at least to shake off the cloud of mere custom and see the thing as new, if only by seeing it as unnatural. Things that may well be familiar so long as familiarity breeds affection had much better become unfamiliar when familiarity breeds contempt. For in connection with things so great as are here considered, whatever our view of them, contempt must be a mistake. Indeed contempt must be an illusion. We must invoke the most wild and soaring sort of imagination; the imagination that can see what is there.

The only way to suggest the point is by an example of something, indeed of almost anything, that has been considered beautiful or wonderful. George Wyndham once told me that he had seen one of the first aeroplanes rise for the first time and it was very wonderful but not so wonderful as a horse allowing a man to ride on him. Somebody else has said that a fine man on a fine horse is the noblest bodily object in the world. Now, so long as people feel this in the right way, all is well. The first and best way of appreciating it is to come of people with a tradition of treating animals properly; of men in the right relation to horses. A boy who remembers his father who rode a horse, who rode it well and treated it well, will know that the relation can be satisfactory and will be satisfied. He will be all the more indignant at the ill-treatment of horses because he knows how they ought to be treated; but he will see nothing but what is normal in a man riding on a horse. He will not listen to the great modern philosopher who explains to him that the horse ought to be riding on the man. He will not pursue the pessimist fancy of Swift and say that men must be despised as monkeys and horses worshipped as gods. And horse and man together making an image that is to him human and civilised, it will be easy, as it were, to lift horse and man together into something heroic or symbolical; like a vision of St. George in the clouds. The fable of the winged horse will not be wholly unnatural to him: and he will know why Ariosto set many a Christian hero in such an airy saddle, and made him the rider of the sky. For the horse has really been lifted up along with the man in the wildest fashion in the very word we use when we speak ‘chivalry.’ The very name of the horse has been given to the highest mood and moment of the man; so that we might almost say that the handsomest compliment to a man is to call him a horse.

But if a man has got into a mood in which he is not able to feel this sort of wonder, then his cure must begin right at the other end. We must now suppose that he has drifted into a dull mood, in which somebody sitting on a horse means no more than somebody sitting on a chair. The wonder of which Wyndham spoke, the beauty that made the thing seem an equestrian statue, the meaning of the more chivalric horseman, may have become to him merely a convention and a bore. Perhaps they have been merely a fashion; perhaps they have gone out of fashion; perhaps they have been talked about too much or talked about in the wrong way; perhaps it was then difficult to care for horses without the horrible risk of being horsy. Anyhow, he has got into a condition when he cares no more for a horse than for a towel-horse. His grandfather’s charge at Balaclava seems to him as dull and dusty as the album containing such family portraits. Such a person has not really become enlightened about the album; on the contrary, he has only become blind with the dust. But when he has reached that degree of blindness, he will not be able to look at a horse or a horseman at all until he has seen the whole thing as a thing entirely unfamiliar and almost unearthly.

Out of some dark forest under some ancient dawn there must come towards us, with lumbering yet dancing motions, one of the very queerest of the prehistoric creatures. We must see for the first time the strangely small head set on a neck not only longer but thicker than itself, as the face of a gargoyle is thrust out upon a gutter-spout, the one disproportionate crest of hair running along the ridge of that heavy neck like a beard in the wrong place; the feet, each like a solid club of horn, alone amid the feet of so many cattle; so that the true fear is to be found in showing, not the cloven, but the uncloven hoof. Nor is it mere verbal fancy to see him thus as a unique monster; for in a sense a monster means what is unique, and he is really unique. But the point is that when we thus see him as the first man saw him, we begin once more to have some imaginative sense of what it meant when the first man rode him. In such a dream he may seem ugly, but he does not seem unimpressive; and certainly that two-legged dwarf who could get on top of him will not seem unimpressive. By a longer and more erratic road we shall come back to the same marvel of the man and the horse; and the marvel will be, if possible, even more marvellous. We shall have again a glimpse of St. George; the more glorious because St. George is not riding on the horse, but rather riding on the dragon.

In this example, which I have taken merely because it is an example, it will be noted that I do not say that the nightmare seen by the first man of the forest is either more true or more wonderful than the normal mare of the stable seen by the civilised person who can appreciate what is normal. Of the two extremes, I think on the whole that the traditional grasp of truth is the better. But I say that the truth is found at one or other of these two extremes, and is lost in the intermediate condition of mere fatigue and forgetfulness of tradition. In other words, I say it is better to see a horse as a monster than to see it only as a slow substitute for a motor-car. If we have got into that state of mind about a horse as something stale, it is far better to be frightened of a horse because it is a good deal too fresh.

Now, as it is with the monster that is called a horse, so it is with the monster that is called a man. Of course the best condition of all, in my opinion, is always to have regarded man as he is regarded in my philosophy. He who holds the Christian and Catholic view of human nature will feel certain that it is a universal and therefore a sane view, and will be satisfied. But if he has lost the sane vision, he can only get it back by something very like a mad vision; that is, by seeing man as a strange animal and realising how strange an animal he is. But just as seeing the horse as a prehistoric prodigy ultimately led back to, and not away from, an admiration for the mastery of man, so the really detached consideration of the curious career of man will lead back to, and not away from, the ancient faith in the dark designs of God. In other words, it is exactly when we do see how queer the quadruped is that we praise the man who mounts him; and exactly when we do see how queer the biped is that we praise the Providence that made him. In short, it is the purpose of this introduction to maintain this thesis: that it is exactly when we do regard man as an animal that we know he is not an animal. It is precisely when we do try to picture him as a sort of horse on its hind legs, that we suddenly realise that he must be something as miraculous as the winged horse that towered up into the clouds of heaven. All roads lead to Rome, all ways lead round again to the central and civilised philosophy, including this road through elf-land and topsyturvydom. But it may be that it is better never to have left the land of the reasonable tradition, where men ride lightly upon horses and are mighty hunters before the Lord. So also in the specially Christian case we have to react against the heavy bias of fatigue. It is almost impossible to make the facts vivid, because the facts are familiar; and for fallen men it is often true that familiarity is fatigue. I am convinced that if we could tell the supernatural story of Christ word for word as of a Chinese hero, call him the Son of Heaven instead of the Son of God, and trace his rayed nimbus in the gold tread of Chinese embroideries or the gold lacquer of Chinese pottery, instead of in the gold leaf of our own old Catholic paintings, there would be a unanimous testimony to the spiritual purity of the story. We should hear nothing then of the injustice of substitution or the illogicality of atonement, of the superstitious exaggeration of the burden of sin or the impossible insolence of an invasion of the laws of nature. We should admire the chivalry of the Chinese conception of a god who fell from the sky to fight the dragons and save the wicked from being devoured by their own fault and folly. We should admire the subtlety of the Chinese view of life, which perceives that all human imperfection is in very truth a crying imperfection. We should admire the Chinese esoteric and superior wisdom, which said there are higher cosmic laws than the laws we know; we believe every common Indian conjurer who chooses to come to us and talk in the same style. If Christianity were only a new oriental fashion, it would never be reproached with being an old and oriental faith. I do not propose in this book to follow the alleged example of St. Francis Xavier with the opposite imaginative intention, and turn the Twelve Apostles into Mandarins; not so much to make them look like natives as to make them look like foreigners. I do not propose to work what I believe would be a completely successful practical joke; that of telling the whole story of the Gospel and the whole history of the church in a setting of pagodas and pigtails; and noting with malignant humour how much it was admired as a heathen story, in the very quarters where it is condemned as a Christian story. But I do propose to strike wherever possible this note of what is new and strange, and for that reason the style even on so serious a subject may sometimes be deliberately grotesque and fanciful. I do desire to help the reader to see Christendom from the outside in the sense of seeing it as a whole, against the background of other historic things; just as I desire him to see humanity as a whole against the background of natural things. And I say that in both cases, when seen thus, they stand out from their background like supernatural things. They do not fade into the rest with the colours of impressionism; they stand out from the rest with the colours of heraldry; as vivid as a red cross on a white shield or a black lion on a ground of gold. So stands the Red Clay against the green field of nature, or the White Christ against the red clay of his race.

But in order to see them clearly we have to see them as a whole. We have to see how they developed as well as how they began; for the most incredible part of the story is that things which began thus should have developed thus. Anyone who chooses to indulge in mere imagination can imagine that other things might have happened or other entities evolved. Anyone thinking of what might have happened may conceive a sort of evolutionary equality; but anyone facing what did happen must face an exception and a prodigy. If there was ever a moment when man was only an animal, we can if we choose make a fancy picture of his career transferred to some other animal. An entertaining fantasia might be made in which elephants built in elephantine architecture, with towers and turrets like tusks and trunks, cities beyond the scale of any colossus. A pleasant fable might be conceived in which a cow had developed a costume, and put on four boots and two pairs of trousers. We could imagine a Supermonkey more marvellous than any Superman, a quadrumanous creature carving and painting with his hands and cooking and carpentering with his feet. But if we are considering what did happen, we shall certainly decide that man has distanced everything else with a distance like that of the astronomical spaces and a speed like that of the still thunderbolt of the light. And in the same fashion, while we can if we choose see the Church amid a mob of Mithraic or Manichean superstitions squabbling and killing each other at the end of the Empire, while we can if we choose imagine the Church killed in the struggle and some other chance cult taking its place, we shall be the more surprised (and possibly puzzled) if we meet it two thousand years afterwards rushing through the ages as the winged thunderbolt of thought and everlasting enthusiasm; a thing without rival or resemblance; and still as new as it is old.

Part I
On the Creature Called Man

I. The Man in the Cave

Far away in some strange constellation in skies infinitely remote, there is a small star, which astronomers may some day discover. At least I could never observe in the faces or demeanour of most astronomers or men of science any evidence that they have discovered it; though as a matter of fact they were walking about on it all the time. It is a star that brings forth out of itself very strange plants and very strange animals; and none stranger than the men of science. That at least is the way in which I should begin a history of the world, if I had to follow the scientific custom of beginning with an account of the astronomical universe. I should try to see even this earth from the outside, not by the hackneyed insistence of its relative position to the sun, but by some imaginative effort to conceive its remote position for the dehumanised spectator. Only I do not believe in being dehumanised in order to study humanity. I do not believe in dwelling upon the distances that are supposed to dwarf the world; I think there is even something a trifle vulgar about this idea of trying to rebuke spirit by size. And as the first idea is not feasible, that of making the earth a strange planet so as to make it significant, I will not stoop to the other trick of making it a small planet in order to make it insignificant. I would rather insist that we do not even know that it is a planet at all, in the sense in which we know that it is a place; and a very extraordinary place too. That is the note which I wish to strike from the first, if not in the astronomical, then in some more familiar fashion.

One of my first journalistic adventures, or misadventures, concerned a comment on Grant Allen, who had written a book about the Evolution of the Idea of God. I happened to remark that it would be much more interesting if God wrote a book about the evolution of the idea of Grant Allen. And I remember that the editor objected to my remark on the ground that it was blasphemous; which naturally amused me not a little. For the joke of it was, of course, that it never occurred to him to notice the title of the book itself, which really was blasphemous; for it was, when translated into English, ‘I will show you how this nonsensical notion that there is God grew up among men.’ My remark was strictly pious and proper confessing the divine purpose even in its most seemingly dark or meaningless manifestations. In that hour I learned many things, including the fact that there is something purely acoustic in much of that agnostic sort of reverence. The editor had not seen the point, because in the title of the book the long word came at the beginning and the short word at the end; whereas in my comments the short word came at the beginning and gave him a sort of shock. I have noticed that if you put a word like God into the same sentence with a word like dog, these abrupt and angular words affect people like pistol-shots. Whether you say that God made the dog or the dog made God does not seem to matter; that is only one of the sterile disputations of the too subtle theologians. But so long as you begin with a long word like evolution the rest will roll harmlessly past; very probably the editor had not read the whole of the title, for it is rather a long title and he was rather a busy man.

But this little incident has always lingered in my mind as a sort of parable. Most modern histories of mankind begin with the word evolution, and with a rather wordy exposition of evolution, for much the same reason that operated in this case. There is something slow and soothing and gradual about the word and even about the idea. As a matter of fact, it is not, touching these primary things, a very practical word or a very profitable idea. Nobody can imagine how nothing could turn into something. Nobody can get an inch nearer to it by explaining how something could turn into something else. It is really far more logical to start by saying ‘In the beginning God created heaven and earth’ even if you only mean ‘In the beginning some unthinkable power began some unthinkable process.’ For God is by its nature a name of mystery, and nobody ever supposed that man could imagine how a world was created any more than he could create one. But evolution really is mistaken for explanation. It has the fatal quality of leaving on many minds the impression that they do understand it and everything else; just as many of them live under a sort of illusion that they have read the Origin of Species.

But this notion of something smooth and slow, like the ascent of a slope, is a great part of the illusion. It is an illogicality as well as an illusion; for slowness has really nothing to do with the question. An event is not any more intrinsically intelligible or unintelligible because of the pace at which it moves. For a man who does not believe in a miracle, a slow miracle would be just as incredible as a swift one. The Greek witch may have turned sailors to swine with a stroke of the wand. But to see a naval gentleman of our acquaintance looking a little more like a pig every day, till he ended with four trotters and a curly tail, would not be any more soothing. It might be rather more creepy and uncanny. The medieval wizard may have flown through the air from the top of a tower; but to see an old gentleman walking through the air, in a leisurely and lounging manner, would still seem to call for some explanation. Yet there runs through all the rationalistic treatment of history this curious and confused idea that difficulty is avoided, or even mystery eliminated, by dwelling on mere delay or on something dilatory in the processes of things. There will be something to be said upon particular examples elsewhere; the question here is the false atmosphere of facility and ease given by the mere suggestion of going slow; the sort of comfort that might be given to a nervous old woman travelling for the first time in a motor-car.

Mr. H. G. Wells has confessed to being a prophet; and in this matter he was a prophet at his own expense. It is curious that his first fairy-tale was a complete answer to his last book of history. The Time Machine destroyed in advance all comfortable conclusions founded on the mere relativity of time. In that sublime nightmare the hero saw trees shoot up like green rockets, and vegetation spread visibly like a green conflagration, or the sun shoot across the sky from east to west with the swiftness of a meteor. Yet in his sense these things were quite as natural when they went swiftly; and in our sense they are quite as supernatural when they go slowly. The ultimate question is why they go at all; and anybody who really understands that question will know that it always has been and always will be a religious question; or at any rate a philosophical or metaphysical question. And most certainly he will not think the question answered by some substitution of gradual for abrupt change; or, in other words by a merely relative question of the same story being spun out or rattled rapidly through, as can be done with any story at a cinema by turning a handle.

Now what is needed for these problems of primitive existence is something more like a primitive spirit. In calling up this vision of the first things, I would ask the reader to make with me a sort of experiment in simplicity. And by simplicity I do not mean stupidity, but rather the sort of clarity that sees things like life rather than words like evolution. For this purpose it would really be better to turn the handle of the Time Machine a little more quickly and see the grass growing and the trees springing up into the sky, if that experiment could contract and concentrate and make vivid the upshot of the whole affair. What we know, in a sense in which we know nothing else, is that the trees and the grass did grow and that number of other extraordinary things do in fact happen; that queer creatures support themselves in the empty air by beating it with fans of various fantastic shapes; that other queer creatures steer themselves about alive under a load of mighty waters; that other queer creatures walk about on four legs, and that the queerest creature of all walks about on two. These are things and not theories; and compared with them evolution and the atom and even the solar system are merely theories. The matter here is one of history and not of philosophy so that it need only be noted that no philosopher denies that a mystery still attaches to the two great transitions: the origin of the universe itself and the origin of the principle of life itself. Most philosophers have the enlightenment to add that a third mystery attaches to the origin of man himself. In other words, a third bridge was built across a third abyss of the unthinkable when there came into the world what we call reason and what we call will. Man is not merely an evolution but rather a revolution. That he has a backbone or other parts upon a similar pattern to birds and fishes is an obvious fact, whatever be the meaning of the fact. But if we attempt to regard him, as it were, as a quadruped standing on his hind legs, we shall find what follows far more fantastic and subversive than if he were standing on his head.

I will take one example to serve for an introduction to the story of man. It illustrates what I mean by saying that a certain childish directness is needed to see the truth about the childhood of the world. It illustrates what I mean by saying that a mixture of popular science and journalistic jargon have confused the facts about the first things, so that we cannot see which of them really comes first. It illustrates, though only in one convenient illustration, all that I mean by the necessity of seeing the sharp differences that give its shape to history, instead of being submerged in all these generalisations about slowness and sameness. For we do indeed require, in Mr. Wells’s phrase, an outline of history. But we may venture to say, in Mr. Mantalini’s phrase, that this evolutionary history has no outline or is a demd outline. But, above all, it illustrates what I mean by saying that the more we really look at man as an animal, the less he will look like one.

To-day all our novels and newspapers will be found swarming with numberless allusions to a popular character called a Cave-Man. He seems to be quite familiar to us, not only as a public character but as a private character. His psychology is seriously taken into account in psychological fiction and psychological medicine. So far as I can understand, his chief occupation in life was knocking his wife about, or treating women in general with what is, I believe, known in the world of the film as ‘rough stuff.’ I have never happened to come upon the evidence for this idea; and I do not know on what primitive diaries or prehistoric divorce-reports it is founded. Nor, as I have explained elsewhere, have I ever been able to see the probability of it, even considered a priori. We are always told without any explanation or authority that primitive man waved a club and knocked the woman down before he carried her off. But on every animal analogy, it would seem an almost morbid modesty and reluctance, on the part of the lady, always to insist on being knocked down before consenting to be carried off. And I repeat that I can never comprehend why, when the male was so very rude, the female should have been so very refined. The cave-man may have been a brute, but there is no reason why he should have been more brutal than the brutes. And the loves of the giraffes and the river romance of the hippopotami are effected without any of this preliminary fracas or shindy. The cave-man may have been no better that the cave-bear; but the child she-bear, so famous in hymnology, is not trained with any such bias for spinsterhood. In short these details of the domestic life of the cave puzzle me upon either the revolutionary or the static hypothesis; and in any case I should like to look into the evidence for them, but unfortunately I have never been able to find it. But the curious thing is this: that while ten thousand tongues of more or less scientific or literary gossip seemed to be talking at once about this unfortunate fellow, under the title of the cave-man, the one connection in which it is really relevant and sensible to talk about him as the cave-man has been comparatively neglected. People have used this loose term in twenty loose ways, but they have never even looked at their own term for what could really be learned from it.

In fact, people have been interested in everything about the cave-man except what he did in the cave. Now there does happen to be some real evidence of what he did in the cave. It is little enough, like all the prehistoric evidence, but it is concerned with the real cave-man and his cave and not the literary cave-man and his club. And it will be valuable to our sense of reality to consider quite simply what that real evidence is, and not to go beyond it. What was found in the cave was not the club, the horrible gory club notched with the number of women it had knocked on the head. The cave was not a Bluebeard’s Chamber filled with the skeletons of slaughtered wives; it was not filled with female skulls all arranged in rows and all cracked like eggs. It was something quite unconnected, one way or the other, with all the modern phrases and philosophical implications and literary rumours which confuse the whole question for us. And if we wish to see as it really is this authentic glimpse of the morning of the world, it will be far better to conceive even the story of its discovery as some such legend of the land of morning. It would be far better to tell the tale of what was really found as simply as the tale of heroes finding the Golden Fleece or the Gardens of the Hesperides, if we could so escape from a fog of controversial theories into the clear colours and clean-cut outlines of such a dawn. The old epic poets at least knew how to tell a story, possibly a tall story but never a twisted story, never a story tortured out of its own shape to fit theories and philosophies invented centuries afterwards. It would be well if modern investigators could describe their discoveries in the bald narrative style of the earliest travellers, and without any of these long allusive words that are full of irrelevant implication and suggestion. Then we might realise exactly what we do know about the cave-man, or at any rate about the cave.

A priest and a boy entered sometime ago a hollow in the hills and passed into a sort of subterranean tunnel that led into a labyrinth of such sealed and secret corridors of rock. They crawled through cracks that seemed almost impassable, they crept through tunnels that might have been made for moles, they dropped into holes as hopeless as wells, they seemed to be burying themselves alive seven times over beyond the hope of resurrection. This is but the commonplace of all such courageous exploration; but what is needed here is some one who shall put such stories in the primary light, in which they are not commonplace. There is, for instance, something strangely symbolic in the accident that the first intruders into that sunken world were a priest and a boy, the types of the antiquity and of youth of the world. But here I am even more concerned with the symbolism of the boy than with that of the priest. Nobody who remembers boyhood needs to be told what it might be to a boy to enter like Peter Pan under a roof of the roots of all the trees and go deeper and deeper, till he reach what William Morris called the very roots of the mountains. Suppose somebody, with that simple and unspoilt realism that is a part of innocence, to pursue that journey to its end, not for the sake of what he could deduce or demonstrate in some dusty magazine controversy, but simply for the sake of what he could see. What he did see at last was a cavern so far from the light of day that it might have been the legendary Domdaniel cavern, that was under the floor of the sea. This secret chamber of rock, when illuminated after its long night of unnumbered ages, revealed on its walls large and sprawling outlines diversified with coloured earths; and when they followed the lines of them they recognised, across that vast and void of ages, the movement and the gesture of a man's hand. They were drawings or paintings of animals; and they were drawn or painted not only by a man but by an artist. Under whatever archaic limitations, they showed that love of the long sweeping or the long wavering line which any man who has ever drawn or tried to draw will recognise; and about which no artist will allow himself to be contradicted by any scientist. They showed the experimental and adventurous spirit of the artist, the spirit that does not avoid but attempt difficult things; as where the draughtsman had represented the action of the stag when he swings his head clean round and noses towards his tail, an action familiar enough in the horse. But there are many modern animal-painters who would set themselves something of a task in rendering it truly. In this and twenty other details it is clear that the artist had watched animals with a certain interest and presumably a certain pleasure. In that sense it would seem that he was not only an artist but a naturalist; the sort of naturalist who is really natural.

Now it is needless to note, except in passing, that there is nothing whatever in the atmosphere of that cave to suggest the bleak and pessimistic atmosphere of that journalistic cave of the winds, that blows and bellows about us with countless echoes concerning the cave-man. So far as any human character can be hinted at by such traces of the past, that human character is quite human and even humane. It is certainly not the ideal of an inhuman character, like the abstraction invoked in popular science. When novelists and educationists and psychologists of all sorts talk about the cave-man, they never conceive him in connection with anything that is really in the cave. When the realist of the sex novel writes, 'Red sparks danced in Dagmar Doubledick's brain; he felt the spirit of the cave-man rising within him,' the novelist's readers would be very much disappointed if Dagmar only went off and drew large pictures of cows on the drawing-room wall. When the psycho-analyst writes to a patient, 'The submerged instincts of the cave-man are doubtless prompting you to gratify a violent impulse,' he does not refer to the impulse to paint in water-colours; or to make conscientious studies of how cattle swing their heads when they graze. Yet we do know for a fact that the cave man did these mild and innocent things; and we have not the most minute speck of evidence that he did any of the violent and ferocious things. In other words the cave-man as commonly presented to us is simply a myth or rather a muddle; for a myth has at least an imaginative outline of truth. The whole of the current way of talking is simply a confusion and a misunderstanding, founded on no sort of scientific evidence and valued only as an excuse for a very modern mood of anarchy. If any gentleman wants to knock a woman about, he can surely be a cad without taking away the character of the cave-man, about whom we know next to nothing except what we can gather from a few harmless and pleasing pictures on a wall.

But this is not the point about the pictures or the particular moral here to be drawn from them. That moral is something much larger and simpler, so large and simple that when it is first stated it will sound childish. And indeed it is in the highest sense childish; and that is why I have in this apologue in some sense seen it through the eyes of a child. It is the biggest of all the facts really facing the boy in the cavern; and is perhaps too big to be seen. If the boy was one of the flock of the priest, it may be presumed that he had been trained in a certain quality of common sense; that common sense that often comes to us in the form of tradition. In that case he would simply recognise the primitive man’s work as the work of a man, interesting but in no way incredible in being primitive. He would see what was there to see; and he would not be tempted into seeing what was not there, by any evolutionary excitement or fashionable speculation. If he had heard of such things he would admit, of course, that the speculations might be true and were not incompatible with the facts that were true. The artist may have had another side to his character besides that which he has alone left on record in his works of art. The primitive man may have taken a pleasure in beating women as well as in drawing animals; all we can say is that the drawings record the one but not the other. It may be true that when the cave-man’s finished jumping on his mother, or his wife as the case may be, he loves to hear the little brook a-gurgling, and also to watch the deer as they come down to drink at the brook. These things are not impossible, but they are irrelevant. The common sense of the child could confine itself to learning from the facts what the facts have to teach; and the pictures in the cave are very nearly all the facts there are. So far as that evidence goes, the child would be justified in assuming that a man had represented animals with rock and red ochre for the same reason as he himself was in the habit of trying to represent animals with charcoal and red chalk. The man had drawn a stag just as the child had drawn a horse; because it was fun. The man had drawn a stag with his head turned as the child had drawn a pig with his eyes shut; because it was difficult. The child and the man, being both human, would be united by the brotherhood of men; and the brotherhood of men is even nobler when it bridges the abyss of ages than when it bridges only the chasm of class. But anyhow he would see no evidence of the cave man of crude evolutionism; because there is none to be seen. If somebody told him that the pictures had all been drawn by St. Francis of Assisi out of pure and saintly love of animals, there would be nothing in the cave to contradict it.

Indeed I once knew a lady who half-humorously suggested that the cave was a crèche, in which the babies were put to be specially safe, and that coloured animals were drawn on the walls to amuse them; very much as diagrams of elephants and giraffes adorn a modern infant school. And though this was but a jest, it does draw attention to some of the other assumptions that we make only too readily. The pictures do not prove even that the cave-men lived in caves, any more than the discovery of a wine-cellar in Balham (long after that suburb had been destroyed by human or divine wrath) would prove that the Victorian middle classes lived entirely underground. The cave might have had a special purpose like the cellar; it might have been a religious shrine or a refuge in war or the meeting place of a secret society or all sorts of things. But it is quite true that its artistic decoration has much more of the atmosphere of a nursery than of any of these nightmares of anarchical fury and fear. I have conceived a child as standing in the cave; and it is easy to conceive any child, modern or immeasurably remote, as making a living gesture as if to pat the painted beasts upon the wall. In that gesture there is a foreshadowing, as we shall see later, of another cavern and another child.

But suppose the boy had not been taught by a priest but by a professor, by one of the professors who simplify the relation of men and beasts to a mere evolutionary variation. Suppose the boy saw himself, with the same simplicity and sincerity, as a mere Mowgli running with the pack of nature and roughly indistinguishable from the rest save by a relative and recent variation. What would be for him the simplest lesson of that strange stone picture-book? After all, it would come back to this; that he had dug very deep and found the place where a man had drawn the picture of a reindeer.

But he would dig a good deal deeper before he found a place where a reindeer had drawn a picture of a man. That sounds like a truism, but in this connection it is really a very tremendous truth. He might descend to depths unthinkable, he might sink into sunken continents as strange as remote stars, he might find himself in the inside of the world as far from men as the other side of the moon; he might see in those cold chasms or colossal terraces of stone, traced in the faint hieroglyphic of the fossil, the ruins of lost dynasties of biological life, rather like the ruins of successive creations and separate universes than the stages in the story of one. He would find the trail of monsters blindly developing in directions outside all our common imagery of fish and bird; groping and grasping and touching life with every extravagant elongation of horn and tongue and tentacle; growing a forest of fantastic caricatures of the claw and the fin and the finger. But nowhere would he find one finger that had traced one significant line upon the sand; nowhere one claw that had even begun to scratch the faint suggestion of a form. To all appearance, the thing would be as unthinkable in all those countless cosmic variations of forgotten aeons as it would be in the beasts and birds before our eyes The child would no more expect to see it than to see the cat scratch on the wall a vindictive caricature of the dog. The childish common sense would keep the most evolutionary child from expecting to see anything like that; yet in the traces of the rude and recently evolved ancestors of humanity he would have seen exactly that. It must surely strike him as strange that men so remote from him should be so near, and that beasts so near to him should be so remote. To his simplicity it must seem at least odd that he could not find any trace of the beginning of any arts among any animals. That is the simplest lesson to learn in the cavern of the coloured pictures; only it is too simple to be learnt. It is the simple truth that man does differ from the brutes in kind and not in degree; and the proof of it is here; that it sounds like a truism to say that the most primitive man drew a picture of a monkey and that it sounds like a joke to say that the most intelligent monkey drew a picture of a man. Something of division and disproportion has appeared; and it is unique. Art is the signature of man.

That is the sort of simple truth with which a story of the beginnings ought really to begin. The evolutionist stands staring in the painted cavern at the things that are too large to be seen and too simple to be understood. He tries to deduce all sorts of other indirect and doubtful things from the details of the pictures, because he can not see the primary significance of the whole; thin and theoretical deductions about the absence of religion or the presence of superstition; about tribal government and hunting and human sacrifice and heaven knows what. In the next chapter I shall try to trace in a little more detail the much disputed question about these prehistoric origins of human ideas and especially of the religious idea. Here I am only taking this one case of the cave as a sort of symbol of the simpler sort of truth with which the story ought to start. When all is said, the main fact that the record of the reindeer men attests, along with all other records, is that the reindeer man could draw and the reindeer could not. If the reindeer man was as much an animal as the reindeer, it was all the more extraordinary that he could do what all other animals could not. If he was an ordinary product of biological growth, like any other beast or bird, then it is all the more extraordinary that he was not in the least like any other beast or bird. He seems rather more supernatural as a natural product than as a supernatural one.

But I have begun this story in the cave, like the cave of the speculations of Plato, because it is a sort of model of the mistake of merely evolutionary introductions and prefaces. It is useless to begin by saying that everything was slow and smooth and a mere matter of development and degree. For in the plain matter like the pictures there is in fact not a trace of any such development or degree. Monkeys did not begin pictures and men finish them; Pithecanthropus did not draw a reindeer badly and Homo Sapiens draw it well. The higher animals did not draw better and better portraits; the dog did not paint better in his best period than in his early bad manner as a jackal; the wild horse was not an Impressionist and the race-horse a Post-Impressionist. All we can say of this notion of reproducing things in shadow or representative shape is that it exists nowhere in nature except in man; and that we cannot even talk about it without treating man as something separate from nature. In other words, every sane sort of history must begin with man as man, a thing standing absolute and alone. How he came there, or indeed how anything else came there, is a thing for theologians and philosophers and scientists and not for historians. But an excellent test case of this isolation and mystery is the matter of the impulse of art. This creature was truly different from all other creatures; because he was a creator as well as a creature. Nothing in that sense could be made in any other image but the image of man. But the truth is so true that, even in the absence of any religious belief, it must be assumed in the form of some moral or metaphysical principle. In the next chapter we shall see how this principle applies to all the historical hypotheses and evolutionary ethics now in fashion; to the origins of tribal government or mythological belief. But the clearest and most convenient example to start with is this popular one of what the cave-man really did in his cave. It means that somehow or other a new thing had appeared in the cavernous night of nature, a mind that is like a mirror. It is like a mirror because it is truly a thing of reflection. It is like a mirror because in it alone all the other shapes can be seen like shining shadows in a vision. Above all, it is like a mirror because it is the only thing of its kind. Other things may resemble it or resemble each other in various ways; other things may excel it or excel each other in various ways; just as in the furniture of a room a table may be round like a mirror or a cupboard may be larger than a mirror. But the mirror is the only thing that can contain them all. Man is the microcosm; man is the measure of all things; man is the image of God These are the only real lessons to be learnt in the cave, and it is time to leave it for the open road.

It will be well in this place, however, to sum up once and for all what is meant by saying that man is at once the exception to everything and the mirror and the measure of all things. But to see man as he is, it is necessary once more to keep close to that simplicity that can clear itself of accumulated clouds of sophistry. The simplest truth about man is that he is a very strange being; almost in the sense of being a stranger on the earth. In all sobriety, he has much more of the external appearance of one bringing alien habits from another land than of a mere growth of this one. He has an unfair advantage and an unfair disadvantage. He cannot sleep in his own skin; he cannot trust his own instincts. He is at once a creator moving miraculous hands and fingers and a kind of cripple. He is wrapped in artificial bandages called clothes; he is propped on artificial crutches called furniture. His mind has the same doubtful liberties and the same wild limitations. Alone among the animals, he is shaken with the beautiful madness called laughter; as if he had caught sight of some secret in the very shape of the universe hidden from the universe itself. Alone among the animals he feels the need of averting his thought from the root realities of his own bodily being; of hiding them as in the presence of some higher possibility which creates the mystery of shame. Whether we praise these things as natural to man or abuse them as artificial in nature, they remain in the same sense unique. This is realised by the whole popular instinct called religion, until disturbed by pedants, especially the laborious pedants of the Simple Life. The most sophistical of all sophists are gymnosophists.

It is not natural to see man as a natural product. It is not common sense to call man a common object of the country or the seashore. It is not seeing straight to see him as an animal. It is not sane. It sins against the light; against that broad daylight of proportion which is the principle of all reality. It is reached by stretching a point, by making out a case, by artificially selecting a certain light and shade, by bringing into prominence the lesser or lower things which may happen to be similar. The solid thing standing in the sunlight, the thing we can walk round and see from all sides, is quite different. It is also quite extraordinary, and the more sides we see of it the more extraordinary it seems. It is emphatically not a thing that follows or flows naturally from anything else. If we imagine that an inhuman or impersonal intelligence could have felt from the first the general nature of the non-human world sufficiently to see that things would evolve in whatever way they did evolve, there would have been nothing whatever in all that natural world to prepare such a mind for such an unnatural novelty. To such a mind, man would most certainly not have seemed something like one herd out of a hundred herds finding richer pasture, or one swallow out of a hundred swallows making a summer under a strange sky. It would not be in the same scale and scarcely in the same dimension. We might as truly say that it would not be in the same universe. It would be more like seeing one cow out of a hundred cows suddenly jump over the moon or one pig out of a hundred pigs grow wings in a flash and fly. It would not be a question of the cattle finding their own grazing ground but of their building their own cattle-sheds, not a question of one swallow making a summer but of his making a summer house. For the very fact that birds do build nests is one of those similarities that sharpen the startling difference. The very fact that a bird can get as far as building a nest, and cannot get any farther, proves that he has not a mind as man has a mind; it proves it more completely than if he built nothing at all. If he built nothing at all, he might possibly be a philosopher of the Quietist or Buddhistic school, indifferent to all but the mind within. But when he builds as he does build and is satisfied and sings aloud with satisfaction, then we know there is really an invisible veil like a pane of glass between him and us, like the window on which a bird will beat in vain. But suppose our abstract onlooker saw one of the birds begin to build as men build. Suppose in an incredibly short space of time there were seven styles of architecture for one style of nest. Suppose the bird carefully selected forked twigs and pointed leaves to express the piercing piety of Gothic, but turned to broad foliage and black mud when he sought in a darker mood to call up the heavy columns of Bel and Ashtaroth; making his nest indeed one of the hanging gardens of Babylon. Suppose the bird made little clay statues of birds celebrated in letters or politics and stuck them up in front of the nest. Suppose that one bird out of a thousand birds began to do one of the thousand things that man had already done even in the morning of the world; and we can be quite certain that the onlooker would not regard such a bird as a mere evolutionary variety of the other birds; he would regard it as a very fearful wild-fowl indeed; possibly as a bird of ill-omen, certainly as an omen. That bird would tell the augurs, not of something that would happen, but of some thing that had happened. That something would be the appearance of a mind with a new dimension of depth; a mind like that of man. If there be no God, no other mind could conceivably have foreseen it.

Now, as a matter of fact, there is not a shadow of evidence that this thing was evolved at all. There is not a particle of roof that this transition came slowly, or even that it came naturally. In a strictly scientific sense, we simply know nothing whatever about how it grew, or whether it grew, or what it is. There may be a broken trail of stone and bone faintly suggesting the development of the human body. There is nothing even faintly suggesting such a development of this human mind. It was not and it was; we know not in what instant or in what infinity of years. Something happened; and it has all the appearance of a transaction outside of time. It has therefore nothing to do with history in the ordinary sense. The historian must take it or something like it for granted; it is not his business as a historian to explain it. But if he cannot explain it as a historian, he will not explain it as a biologist. In neither case is there any disgrace to him in accepting it without explaining it; for it is a reality, and history and biology deal with realities. He is quite justified in calmly confronting the pig with wings and the cow that jumped over the moon, merely because they have happened. He can reasonably accept man as a freak, because he accepts man as a fact. He can be perfectly comfortable in a crazy and disconnected world, or in a world that can produce such a crazy and disconnected thing. For reality is a thing in which we can all repose, even if it hardly seems related to anything else. The thing is there; and that is enough for most of us. But if we do indeed want to know how it can conceivably have come there, if we do indeed wish to see it related realistically to other things, if we do insist on seeing it evolved before our very eyes from an environment nearer to its own nature, then assuredly it is to very different things that we must go. We must stir very strange memories and return to very simple dreams, if we desire some origin that can make man other than a monster. We shall have discovered very different causes before he becomes a creature of causation; and invoked other authority to turn him into something reasonable, or even into anything probable. That way lies all that is at once awful and familiar and forgotten, with dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms. We can accept man as a fact, if we are content with an unexplained fact. We can accept him as an animal, if we can live with a fabulous animal. But if we must needs have sequence and necessity, then indeed we must provide a prelude and crescendo of mounting miracles, that ushered in with unthinkable thunders in all the seven heavens of another order, a man may be an ordinary thing.

II. Professors and Prehistoric Men

Science is weak about these prehistoric things in a way that has hardly been noticed. The science whose modern marvels we all admire succeeds by incessantly adding to its data. In all practical inventions, in most natural discoveries, it can always increase evidence by experiment. But it cannot experiment in making men; or even in watching to see what the first men make. An inventor can advance step by step in the construction of an aeroplane, even if he is only experimenting with sticks and scraps of metal in his own back-yard. But he cannot watch the Missing Link evolving in his own back-yard. If he has made a mistake in his calculations, the aeroplane will correct it by crashing to the ground. But if he has made a mistake about the arboreal habitat of his ancestor, he cannot see his arboreal ancestor falling off the tree. He cannot keep a cave-man like a cat in the back-yard and watch him to see whether he does really practice cannibalism or carry off his mate on the principles of marriage by capture. He cannot keep a tribe of primitive men like a pack of hounds and notice how far they are influenced by the herd instinct. If he sees a particular bird behave in a particular way, he can get other birds and see if they behave in that way; but if he finds a skull, or the scrap of a skull, in the hollow of a hill, he cannot multiply it into a vision of the valley of dry bones. In dealing with a past that has almost entirely perished, he can only go by evidence and not by experiment. And there is hardly enough evidence to be even evidential. Thus while most science moves in a sort of curve, being constantly corrected by new evidence, this science flies off into space in a straight line uncorrected by anything. But the habit of forming conclusions, as they can really be formed in more fruitful fields, is so fixed in the scientific mind that it cannot resist talking like this. It talks about the idea suggested by one scrap of bone as if it were something like the aeroplane which is constructed at last out of whole scrapheaps of scraps of metal. The trouble with the professor of the prehistoric is that he cannot scrap his scrap. The marvellous and triumphant aeroplane is made out of a hundred mistakes. The student of origins can only make one mistake and stick to it.

We talk very truly of the patience of science; but in this department it would be truer to talk of the impatience of science. Owing to the difficulty above described, the theorist is in far too much of a hurry. We have a series of hypotheses so hasty that they may well be called fancies, and cannot in any case be further corrected by facts. The most empirical anthropologist is here as limited as an antiquary. He can only cling to a fragment of the past and has no way of increasing it for the future He can only clutch his fragment of fact, almost as the primitive man clutched his fragment of flint. And indeed he does deal with it in much the same way and for much the same reason. It is his tool and his only tool. It is his weapon and his only weapon. He often wields it with a fanaticism far in excess of anything shown by men of science when they can collect more facts from experience and even add new facts by experiment. Sometimes the professor with his bone becomes almost as dangerous as a dog with his bone. And the dog at least does not deduce a theory from it, proving that mankind is going to the dogs — or that it came from them.

For instance, I have pointed out the difficulty of keeping a monkey and watching it evolve into a man. Experimental evidence of such an evolution being impossible, the professor is not content to say (as most of us would be ready to say) that such an evolution is likely enough anyhow. He produces his little bone, or little collection of bones, and deduces the most marvellous things from it. He found in Java a piece of a skull, seeming by its contour to be smaller than the human. Somewhere near it he found an upright thigh-bone and in the same scattered fashion some teeth that were not human. If they all form part of one creature, which is doubtful, our conception of the creature would be almost equally doubtful. But the effect on popular science was to produce a complete and even complex figure, finished down to the last details of hair and habits. He was given a name as if he were an ordinary historical character. People talked of Pithecanthropus as of Pitt or Fox or Napoleon. Popular histories published portraits of him like the portraits of Charles the First and George the Fourth. A detailed drawing was reproduced, carefully shaded, to show that the very hairs of his head were all numbered No uninformed person looking at its carefully lined face and wistful eyes would imagine for a moment that this was the portrait of a thigh-bone; or of a few teeth and a fragment of a cranium. In the same way people talked about him as if he were an individual whose influence and character were familiar to us all. I have just read a story in a magazine about Java, and how modern white inhabitants of that island are prevailed on to misbehave themselves by the personal influence of poor old Pithecanthropus. That the modern inhabitants of Java misbehave themselves

I can very readily believe; but I do not imagine that they need any encouragement from the discovery of a few highly doubtful bones. Anyhow, those bones are far too few and fragmentary and dubious to fill up the whole of the vast void that does in reason and in reality lie between man and his bestial ancestors, if they were his ancestors. On the assumption of that evolutionary connection (a connection which I am not in the least concerned to deny), the really arresting and remarkable fact is the comparative absence of any such remains recording that connection at that point. The sincerity of Darwin really admitted this; and that is how we came to use such a term as the Missing Link. But the dogmatism of Darwinians has been too strong for the agnosticism of Darwin; and men have insensibly fallen into turning this entirely negative term into a positive image. They talk of searching for the habits and habitat of the Missing Link; as if one were to talk of being on friendly terms with the gap in a narrative or the hole in an argument, of taking a walk with a non-sequitur or dining with an undistributed middle.

In this sketch, therefore, of man in his relation to certain religious and historical problems, I shall waste no further space on these speculations on the nature of man before he became man. His body may have been evolved from the brutes; but we know nothing of any such transition that throws the smallest light upon his soul as it has shown itself in history. Unfortunately the same school of writers pursue the same style of reasoning when they come to the first real evidence about the first real men. Strictly speaking of course we know nothing about prehistoric man, for the simple reason that he was prehistoric. The history of prehistoric man is a very obvious contradiction in terms. It is the sort of unreason in which only rationalists are allowed to indulge. If a parson had casually observed that the Flood was ante-diluvian, it is possible that he might be a little chaffed about his logic. If a bishop were to say that Adam was Preadamite, we might think it a little odd. But we are not supposed to notice such verbal trifles when sceptical historians talk of the part of history that is prehistoric. The truth is that they are using the terms historic and prehistoric without any clear test or definition in their minds. What they mean is that there are traces of human lives before the beginning of human stories; and in that sense we do at least know that humanity was before history.

Human civilisation is older than human records. That is the sane way of stating our relations to these remote things. Humanity has left examples of its other arts earlier than the art of writing; or at least of any writing that we can read. But it is certain that the primitive arts were arts; and it is in every way probable that the primitive civilisations were civilisations. The man left a picture of the reindeer, but he did not leave a narrative of how he hunted the reindeer; and therefore what we say of him is hypothesis and not history. But the art he did practice was quite artistic; his drawing was quite intelligent and there is no reason to doubt that his story of the hunt would be quite intelligent, only if it exists it is not intelligible. In short, the prehistoric period need not mean the primitive period, in the sense of the barbaric or bestial period. It does not mean the time before civilisation or the time before arts and crafts. It simply means the time before any connected narratives that we can read. This does indeed make all the practical difference between remembrance and forgetfulness; but it is perfectly possible that there were all sorts of forgotten forms of civilisation, as well as all sorts of forgotten forms of barbarism. And in any case everything indicated that many of these forgotten or half-forgotten social stages were much more civilised and much less barbaric than is vulgarly imagined today. But even about these unwritten histories of humanity, when humanity was quite certainly human, we can only conjecture with the greatest doubt and caution. And unfortunately doubt and caution are the last things commonly encouraged by the loose evolutionism of current culture. For that culture is full of curiosity; and the one thing that it cannot endure is the agony of agnosticism. It was in the Darwinian age that the word first became known and the thing first became impossible.

It is necessary to say plainly that all this ignorance is simply covered by impudence. Statements are made so plainly and positively that men have hardly the moral courage to pause upon them and find that they are without support. The other day a scientific summary of the state of a prehistoric tribe began confidently with the words ‘They wore no clothes.’ Not one reader in a hundred probably stopped to ask himself how we should come to know whether clothes had once been worn by people of whom everything has perished except a few chips of bone and stone. It was doubtless hoped that we should find a stone hat as well as a stone hatchet. It was evidently anticipated that we might discover an everlasting pair of trousers of the same substance as the everlasting rock. But to persons of a less sanguine temperament it will be immediately apparent that people might wear simple garments, or even highly ornamental garments, without leaving any more traces of them than these people have left. The plaiting of rushes and grasses, for instance, might have become more and more elaborate without in the least becoming more eternal. One civilisation might specialise in things that happened to be perishable, like weaving and embroidery, and not in things that happen to be more permanent, like architecture and sculpture. There have been plenty of examples of such specialist societies. A man of the future finding the ruins of our factory machinery might as fairly say that we were acquainted with iron and with no other substance; and announce the discovery that the proprietor and manager of the factory undoubtedly walked about naked — or possibly wore iron hats and trousers.

It is not contended here that these primitive men did wear clothes any more than they did weave rushes; but merely that we have not enough evidence to know whether they did or not. But it may be worthwhile to look back for a moment at some of the very few things that we do know and that they did do. If we consider them, we shall certainly not find them inconsistent with such ideas as dress and decoration. We do not know whether they decorated other things. We do not know whether they had embroideries, and if they had the embroideries could not be expected to have remained. But we do know that they did have pictures; and the pictures have remained. And there remains with them, as already suggested, the testimony to something that is absolute and unique; that belongs to man and to nothing else except man; that is a difference of kind and not a difference of degree. A monkey does not draw clumsily and a man cleverly; a monkey does not begin the art of representation and a man carry it to perfection. A monkey does not do it at all; he does not begin to do it at all; he does not begin to begin to do it at all. A line of some kind is crossed before the first faint line can begin.

Another distinguished writer, again, in commenting on the cave drawings attributed to the neolithic men of the reindeer period, said that none of their pictures appeared to have any religious purpose; and he seemed almost to infer that they had no religion. I can hardly imagine a thinner thread of argument than this which reconstructs the very inmost moods of the pre-historic mind from the fact that somebody who has scrawled a few sketches on a rock, from what motive we do not know, for what purpose we do not know, acting under what customs or conventions we do not know, may possibly have found it easier to draw reindeer than to draw religion. He may have drawn it because it was his religious symbol.

He may have drawn it because it was not his religious symbol. He may have drawn anything except his religious symbol. He may have drawn his real religious symbol somewhere else; or it may have been deliberately destroyed when it was drawn. He may have done or not done half a million things; but in any case it is an amazing leap of logic to infer that he had no religious symbol, or even to infer from his having no religious symbol that he had no religion. Now this particular case happens to illustrate the insecurity of these guesses very clearly. For a little while afterwards, people discovered not only paintings but sculptures of animals in the caves. Some of these were said to be damaged with dints or holes supposed to be the marks of arrows; and the damaged images were conjectured to be the remains of some magic rite of killing the beasts in effigy; while the undamaged images were explained in connection with another magic rite invoking fertility upon the herds. Here again there is something faintly humorous about the scientific habit of having it both ways. If the image is damaged it proves one superstition and if it is undamaged it proves another. Here again there is a rather reckless jumping to conclusions; it has hardly occurred to the speculators that a crowd of hunters imprisoned in winter in a cave might conceivably have aimed at a mark for fun, as a sort of primitive parlour game. But in any case, if it was done out of superstition, what has become of the thesis that it had nothing to do with religion? The truth is that all this guess work has nothing to do with anything. It is not half such a good parlour game as shooting arrows at a carved reindeer, for it is shooting them into the air.

Such speculators rather tend to forget, for instance, that men in the modern world also sometimes make marks in caves. When a crowd of trippers is conducted through the labyrinth of the Marvelous Grotto or the Magic Stalactite Cavern, it has been observed that hieroglyphics spring into sight where they have passed; initials and inscriptions which the learned refuse to refer to any remote date. But the time will come when these inscriptions will really be of remote date. And if the professors of the future are anything like the professors of the present, they will be able to deduce a vast number of very vivid and interesting things from these cave-writings of the twentieth century. If I know anything about the breed, and if they have not fallen away from the full-blooded confidence of their fathers, they will be able to discover the most fascinating facts about us from the initials left in the Magic Grotto by ‘Arry and ‘Arriet, possibly in the form of two intertwined A’s. From this alone they will know (1) That as the letters are rudely chipped with a blunt pocket knife, the twentieth century possessed no delicate graving-tools and was unacquainted with the art of sculpture. (2) That as the letters are capital letters, our civilisation never evolved any small letters or anything like a running hand. (3) That because initial consonants stand together in an unpronounceable fashion, our language was possibly akin to Welsh or more probably of the early Semitic type that ignored vowels. (4) That as the initials of ‘Arry and ‘Arriet do not in any special fashion profess to be religious symbols, our civilisation possessed no religion. Perhaps the last is about the nearest to the truth; for a civilisation that had religion would have a little more reason.

It is commonly affirmed, again, that religion grew in a very slow and evolutionary manner; and even that it grew not from one cause; but from a combination that might be called a coincidence. Generally speaking, the three chief elements in the combination are, first, the fear of the chief of the tribe (whom Mr. Wells insists on calling, with regrettable familiarity, the Old Man), second, the phenomena of dreams, and third, the sacrificial associations of the harvest and the resurrection symbolised in the growing corn. I may remark in passing that it seems to me very doubtful psychology to refer one living and single spirit to three dead and disconnected causes, if they were merely dead and disconnected causes. Suppose Mr. Wells, in one of his fascinating novels of the future, were to tell us that there would arise among men a new and as yet nameless passion, of which men will dream as they dream of first love, for which they will die as they die for a flag and a fatherland. I think we should be a little puzzled if he told us that this singular sentiment would be a combination of the habit of smoking Woodbines, the increase of the income tax and the pleasure of a motorist in exceeding the speed limit. We could not easily imagine this, because we could not imagine any connection between the three or any common feeling that could include them all. Nor could anyone imagine any connection between corn and dreams and an old chief with a spear, unless there was already a common feeling to include them all. But if there was such a common feeling it could only be the religious feeling; and these things could not be the beginnings of a religious feeling that existed already. I think anybody’s common sense will tell him that it is far more likely that this sort of mystical sentiment did exist already; and that in the light of it dreams and kings and corn-fields could appear mystical then, as they can appear mystical now.

For the plain truth is that all this is a trick of making things seem distant and dehumanised, merely by pretending not to understand things that we do understand. It is like saying that prehistoric men had an ugly and uncouth habit of opening their mouths wide at intervals and stuffing strange substances into them, as if we had never heard of eating. It is like saying that the terrible Troglodytes of the Stone Age lifted alternate legs in rotation, as if we never heard of walking. If it were meant to touch the mystical nerve and awaken us to the wonder of walking and eating, it might be a legitimate fancy. As it is here intended to kill the mystical nerve and deaden us to the wonder of religion, it is irrational rubbish. It pretends to find some thing incomprehensible in the feelings that we all comprehend. Who does not find dreams mysterious, and feel that they lie on the dark borderland of being? Who does not feel the death and resurrection of the growing things of the earth as something near to the secret of the universe? Who does not understand that there must always be the savour of something sacred about authority and the solidarity that is the soul of the tribe? If there be any anthropologist who really finds these things remote and impossible to realise, we can say nothing of that scientific gentleman except that he has not got so large and enlightened a mind as a primitive man. To me it seems obvious that nothing but a spiritual sentiment already active could have clothed these separate and diverse things with sanctity. To say that religion came from reverencing a chief or sacrificing at a harvest is to put a highly elaborate cart before a really primitive horse. It is like saying that the impulse to draw pictures came from the contemplation of the pictures of reindeers in the cave. In other words, it is explaining painting by saying that it arose out of the work of painters; or accounting for art by saying that it arose out of art. It is even more like saying that the thing we call poetry arose as the result of certain customs; such as that of an ode being officially composed to celebrate the advent of spring; or that of a young man rising at a regular hour to listen to the skylark and then writing his report on a piece of paper. It is quite true that young men often become poets in the spring; and it is quite true that when once there are poets, no mortal power can restrain them from writing about the skylark But the poems did not exist before the poets. The poetry did not arise out of the poetic forms. In other words, it is hardly an adequate explanation of how a thing appeared for the first time to say it existed already. Similarly, we cannot say that religion arose out of the religious forms, because that is only another way of saying that it only arose when it existed already. It needed a certain sort of mind to see that there was anything mystical about the dreams or the dead, as it needed a particular sort of mind to see that there was any thing poetical about the skylark or the spring. That mind was presumably what we call the human mind, very much as it exists to this day; for mystics still meditate upon death and dreams as poets still write about spring and skylarks. But there is not the faintest hint to suggest that anything short of the human mind we know feels any of these mystical associations at all. A cow in a field seems to derive no lyrical impulse or instruction from her unrivalled opportunities for listening to the skylark. And similarly there is no reason to suppose that live sheep will ever begin to use dead sheep as the basis of a system of elaborate ancestor-worship. It is true that in the spring a young quadruped's fancy may lightly turn to thoughts of love, but no succession of springs has ever led it to turn however lightly to thoughts of literature. And in the same way, while it is true that a dog has dreams, while most other quadrupeds do not seem even to have that, we have waited a long time for the dog to develop his dreams into an elaborate system or religious ceremonial. We have waited so long that we have really ceased to expect it; and we no more look to see a dog apply his dreams to ecclesiastical construction than to see him examine his dreams by the rules of psycho-analysis. It is obvious, in short, that for some reason or other these natural experiences, and even natural excitements, never do pass the line that separates them from creative expression like art and religion, in any creature except man. They never do, they never have, and it is now to all appearance very improbable that they ever will. It is not impossible, in the sense of self-contradictory, that we should see cows fasting from grass every Friday or going on their knees as in the old legend about Christmas Eve. It is not in that sense impossible that cows should contemplate death until they can lift up a sublime psalm of lamentation to the tune the old cow died of. It is not in that sense impossible that they should express their hopes of a heavenly career in a symbolic dance, in honour of the cow that jumped over the moon. It may be that the dog will at last have laid in a sufficient store of dreams to enable him to build a temple to Cerberus as a sort of canine trinity. It may be that his dreams have already begun to turn into visions capable of verbal expression, in some revelation about the Dog

Star as the spiritual home for lost dogs. These things are logically possible, in the sense that it is logically difficult to prove the universal negative which we call an impossibility. But all that instinct for the probable, which we call common sense, must long ago have told us that the animals are not to all appearance evolving in that sense; and that, to say the least, we are not likely to have any personal evidence of their passing from the animal experience to the human experiments. But spring and death and even dreams, considered merely as experiences, are their experiences as much as ours. The only possible conclusion is that these experiences, considered as experiences, do not generate anything like a religious sense in any mind except a mind like ours. We come back to the fact of a certain kind of mind that was already alive and alone. It was unique and it could make creeds as it could make cave-drawings. The materials for religion had lain there for countless ages like the materials for everything else; but the power of religion was in the mind. Man could already see in these things the riddles and hints and hopes that he still sees in them. He could not only dream but dream about dreams. He could not only see the dead but see the shadow of death; and was possessed with that mysterious mystification that forever finds death incredible.

It is quite true that we have even these hints chiefly about man when he unmistakably appears as man. We cannot affirm this or anything else about the alleged animal originally connecting man and the brutes. But that is only because he is not an animal but an allegation. We cannot be certain the Pithecanthropus ever worshipped, because we cannot be certain that he ever lived. He is only a vision called up to fill the void that does in fact yawn between the first creatures who were certainly men and any other creatures that are certainly apes or other animals. A few very doubtful fragments are scraped together to suggest such an intermediate creature because it is required by a certain philosophy; but nobody supposes that these are sufficient to establish anything philosophical even in support of that philosophy. A scrap of skull found in Java cannot establish anything about religion or about the absence of religion. If there ever was any such ape-man, he may have exhibited as much ritual in religion as a man or as much simplicity in religion as an ape. He may have been a mythologist or he may have been a myth. It might be interesting to inquire whether this mystical quality appeared in a transition from the ape to the man, if there were really any types of the transition to inquire about. In other words, the missing link might or might not be mystical if he were not missing. But compared with the evidence we have of real human beings, we have no evidence that he was a human being or a half-human being or a being at all. Even the most extreme evolutionists do not attempt to deduce any evolutionary views about the origin of religion from him. Even in trying to prove that religion grew slowly from rude or irrational sources, they begin their proof with the first men who were men. But their own proof only proves that the men who were already men were already mystics. They used the rude and irrational elements as only men and mystics can use them. We come back once more to the simple truth; that at sometime too early for these critics to trace, a transition had occurred to which bones and stones cannot in their nature bear witness; and man became a living soul.

Touching this matter of the origin of religion, the truth is that those who are thus trying to explain it are trying to explain it away. Subconsciously they feel that it looks less formidable when thus lengthened out into a gradual and almost invisible process. But in fact this perspective entirely falsifies the reality of experience. They bring together two things that are totally different, the stray hints of evolutionary origins and the solid and self-evident block of humanity, and try to shift their standpoint till they see them in a single foreshortened line. But it is an optical illusion. Men do not in fact stand related to monkeys or missing links in any such chain as that in which men stand related to men. There may have been intermediate creatures whose faint traces can be found here and there in the huge gap. Of these beings, if they ever existed, it may be true that they were things very unlike men or men very unlike ourselves. But of prehistoric men, such as those called the cave-men or the reindeer men, it is not true in any sense whatever. Prehistoric men of that sort were things exactly like men and men exceedingly like our selves. They only happened to be men about whom we do not know much, for the simple reason that they have left no records or chronicles; but all that we do know about them makes them just as human and ordinary as men in a medieval manor or a Greek city.

Looking from our human standpoint up the long perspective of humanity, we simply recognise this thing as human. If we had to recognise it as animal we should have had to recognise it as abnormal. If we chose to look through the other end of the telescope, as I have done more than once in these speculations, if we chose to project the human figure forward out of an unhuman world, we could only say that one of the animals had obviously gone mad. But seeing the thing from the right end, or rather from the inside, we know it is sanity; and we know that these primitive men were sane. We hail a certain human freemasonry wherever we see it, in savages, in foreigners or in historical characters. For instance, all we can infer from primitive legend, and all we know of barbaric life, supports a certain moral and even mystical idea of which the commonest symbol is clothes. For clothes are very literally vestments and man wears them because he is a priest. It is true that even as an animal he is here different from the animals. Nakedness is not nature to him; it is not his life but rather his death; even in the vulgar sense of his death of cold. But clothes are worn for dignity or decency or decoration where they are not in any way wanted for warmth. It would sometimes appear that they are valued for ornament before they are valued for use. It would almost always appear that they are felt to have some connection with decorum. Conventions of this sort vary a great deal with various times and places; and there are some who cannot get over this reflection, and for whom it seems a sufficient argument for letting all conventions slide. They never tire of repeating, with simple wonder, that dress is different in the Cannibal Islands and in Camden Town; they cannot get any further and throw up the whole idea of decency in despair. They might as well say that because there have been hats of a good many different shapes, and some rather eccentric shapes, therefore hats do not matter or do not exist. They would probably add that there is no such thing as sunstroke or going bald. Men have felt everywhere that certain norms were necessary to fence off and protect certain private things from contempt or coarse misunderstanding; and the keeping of those forms, whatever they were, made for dignity and mutual respect. The fact that they mostly refer, more or less remotely, to the relations of the sexes illustrates the two facts that must be put at the very beginning of the record of the race. The first is the fact that original sin is really original. Not merely in theology but in history it is a thing rooted in the origins. Whatever else men have believed, they have all believed that there is something the matter with mankind This sense of sin has made it impossible to be natural and have no clothes, just as it has made it impossible to be natural and have no laws. But above all it is to be found in that other fact, which is the father and mother of all laws as it is itself founded on a father and mother; the thing that is before all thrones and even all commonwealths.

That fact is the family. Here again we must keep the enormous proportions of a normal thing clear of various modifications and degrees and doubts more or less reasonable, like clouds clinging about a mountain. It may be that what we call the family had to fight its way from or through various anarchies and aberrations; but it certainly survived them and is quite as likely as not to have also preceded them. As we shall see in the case of communism and nomadism, more formless things could and did lie on the flank of societies that had taken a fixed form; but there is nothing to show that the form did not exist before the formlessness. What is vital is that form is more important than formlessness; and that the material called mankind has taken this form. For instance, of the rules revolving round sex, which were recently mentioned, none is more curious than the savage custom commonly called the couvade. That seems like a law out of topsyturvydom; by which the father is treated as if he were the mother. In any case it clearly involves the mystical sense of sex; but many have maintained that it is really a symbolic act by which the father accepts the responsibility of fatherhood. In that case that grotesque antic is really a very solemn act; for it is the foundation of all we call the family and all we know as human society. Some groping in these dark beginnings have said that mankind was once under a matriarchy; I suppose that under a matriarchy it would not be called mankind but womankind. But others have conjectured that what is called matriarchy was simply moral anarchy, in which the mother alone remained fixed because all the fathers were fugitive and irresponsible. Then came the moment when the man decided to guard and guide what he had created. So he became the head of the family, not as a bully with a big club to beat women with, but rather as a respectable person trying to be a responsible person. Now all that might be perfectly true, and might even have been the first family act, and it would still be true that man then for the first time acted like a man, and therefore for the first time became fully a man. But it might quite as well be true that the matriarchy or moral anarchy, or whatever we call it, was only one of the hundred social dissolutions or barbaric backslidings which may have occurred at intervals in prehistoric as they certainly did in historic times. A symbol like the couvade, if it was really such a symbol, may have commemorated the suppression of a heresy rather than the first rise of a religion. We cannot conclude with any certainty about these things, except in their big results in the building of mankind, but we can say in what style the bulk of it and the best of it is built. We can say that the family is the unit of the state; that it is the cell that makes up the formation. Round the family do indeed gather the sanctities that separate men from ants and bees. Decency is the curtain of that tent; liberty is the wall of that city; property is but the family farm; honour is but the family flag. In the practical proportions of human history, we come back to that fundamental of the father and the mother and the child. It has been said already that if this story cannot start with religious assumptions, it must none the less start with some moral or metaphysical assumptions, or no sense can be made of the story of man. And this is a very good instance of that alternative necessity. If we are not of those who begin by invoking a divine Trinity, we must none the less invoke a human Trinity; and see that triangle repeated everywhere in the pattern of the world. For the highest event in history, to which all history looks forward and leads up, is only something that is at once the reversal and the renewal of that triangle. Or rather it is the one triangle superimposed so as to intersect the other, making a sacred pentacle of which, in a mightier sense than that of the magicians, the fiends are afraid. The old Trinity was of father and mother and child and is called the human family. The new is of child and mother and father and has the name of the Holy Family. It is in no way altered except in being entirely reversed; just as the world which is transformed was not in the least different, except in being turned upside-down.

III. The Antiquity of Civilisation

The modern man looking at the most ancient origins has been like a man watching for daybreak in a strange land; and expecting to see that dawn breaking behind bare uplands or solitary peaks. But that dawn is breaking behind the black bulk of great cities long builded and lost for us in the original night; colossal cities like the houses of giants, in which even the carved ornamental animals are taller than the palm-trees; in which the painted portrait can be twelve times the size of the man; with tombs like mountains of man set four-square and pointing to the stars; with winged and bearded bulls standing and staring enormous at the gates of temples; standing still eternally as if a stamp would shake the world. The dawn of history reveals a humanity already civilized. Perhaps it reveals a civilisation already old. And among other more important things, it reveals the folly of most of the generalisations about the previous and unknown period when it was really young. The two first human societies of which we have any reliable and detailed record are Babylon and Egypt. It so happens that these two vast and splendid achievements of the genius of the ancients bear witness against two of the commonest and crudest assumptions of the culture of the moderns. If we want to get rid of half the nonsense about nomads and cave-men and the old man of the forest, we need only look steadily at the two solid and stupendous facts called Egypt and Babylon.

Of course most of these speculators who are talking about primitive men are thinking about modern savages. They prove their progressive evolution by assuming that a great part of the human race has not progressed or evolved; or even changed in any way at all. I do not agree with their theory of change; nor do I agree with their dogma of things unchangeable. I may not believe that civilised man has had so rapid and recent a progress; but I cannot quite understand why uncivilised man should be so mystically immortal and immutable. A somewhat simpler mode of thought and speech seems to me to be needed throughout this inquiry. Modern savages cannot be exactly like primitive man, because they are not primitive. Modern savages are not ancient because they are modern. Something has happened to their race as much as to ours, during the thousands of years of our existence and endurance on the earth. They have had some experiences, and have presumably acted on them if not profited by them. Like the rest of us.

They have had some environment, and even some change of environment, and have presumably adapted themselves to it in a proper and decorous evolutionary manner. This would be true even if the experiences were mild or the environment dreary; for there is an effect in mere time when it takes the moral form of monotony. But it has appeared to a good many intelligent and well-informed people quite as probable that the experience of the savages has been that of a decline from civilisation. Most of those who criticise this view do not seem to have any very clear notion of what a decline from civilisation would be like. Heaven help them, it is likely enough that they will soon find out. They seem to be content if cave-men and cannibal islanders have some things in common, such as certain particular implements. But it is obvious on the face of it that any peoples reduced for any reason to a ruder life would have some things in common. If we lost all our firearms we should make bows and arrows; but we should not necessarily resemble in every way the first men who made bows and arrows. It is said that the Russians in their great retreat were so short of armament that they fought with clubs cut in the wood. But a professor of the future would err in supposing that the Russian army of 1916 was a naked Scythian tribe that had never been out of the wood. It is like saying that a man in his second childhood must exactly copy his first. A baby is bald like an old man; but it would be an error for one ignorant of infancy to infer that the baby had a long white beard. Both a baby and an old man walk with difficulty; but he who shall expect the old gentleman to lie on his back, and kick joyfully instead, will be disappointed.

It is therefore absurd to argue that the first pioneers of humanity must have been identical with some of the last and most stagnant leavings of it. There were almost certainly some things, there were probably many things, in which the two were widely different or flatly contrary. An example of the way in which this distinction works, and an example essential to our argument here, is that of the nature and origin of government I have already alluded to Mr. H. G. Wells and the Old Man, with whom he appears to be on such intimate terms. If we considered the cold facts of prehistoric evidence for this portrait of the prehistoric chief of the tribe, we could only excuse it by saying that its brilliant and versatile author simply forgot for a moment that he was supposed to be writing a history, and dreamed he was writing one of his own very wonderful and imaginative romances. At least I cannot imagine how he can possibly know that the prehistoric ruler was called the Old Man or that court etiquette requires it to be spelt with capital letters. He says of the same potentate, ‘No one was allowed to touch his spear or to sit in his seat.’ I have difficulty in believing that anybody has dug up a prehistoric spear with a prehistoric label, ‘Visitors are Requested not to Touch,’ or a complete throne with the inscription, ‘Reserved for the Old Man.’ But it may be presumed that the writer, who can hardly be supposed to be merely making up things out of his own head, was merely taking for granted this very dubious parallel between the prehistoric and the decivilised man. It may be that in certain savage tribes the chief is called the Old Man and nobody is allowed to touch his spear or sit on his seat. It may be that in those cases he is surrounded with superstitious and traditional terrors; and it may be that in those cases, for all I know, he is despotic and tyrannical. But there is not a grain of evidence that primitive government was despotic and tyrannical. It may have been, of course, for it may have been anything or even nothing; it may not have existed at all. But the despotism in certain dingy and decayed tribes in the twentieth century does not prove that the first men were ruled despotically. It does not even suggest it; it does not even begin to hint at it. If there is one fact we really can prove, from the history that we really do know, it is that despotism can be a development, often a late development and very often indeed the end of societies that have been highly democratic. A despotism may almost be defined as a tired democracy. As fatigue falls on a community, the citizens are less inclined for that eternal vigilance which has truly been called the price of liberty; and they prefer to arm only one single sentinel to watch the city while they sleep. It is also true that they sometimes needed him for some sudden and militant act of reform; it is equally true that he often took advantage of being the strong man armed to be a tyrant like some of the Sultans of the East. But I cannot see why the Sultan should have appeared any earlier in history than many other human figures. On the contrary, the strong man armed obviously depends upon the superiority of his armour, and armament of that sort comes with more complex civilisation. One man may kill twenty with a machine-gum; it is obviously less likely that he could do it with a piece of flint. As for the current cant about the strongest man ruling by force and fear, it is simply a nursery fairy-tale about a giant with a hundred hands. Twenty men could hold down the strongest strong man in any society, ancient or modern. Undoubtedly they might admire, in a romantic and poetical sense, the man who was really the strongest; but that is quite a different thing, and is as purely moral and even mystical as the admiration for the purest or the wisest. But the spirit that endures the mere cruelties and caprices of an established despot is the spirit of an ancient and settled and probably stiffened society, not the spirit of a new one. As his name implies, the Old Man is the ruler of an old humanity.

It is far more probable that a primitive society was something like a pure democracy. To this day the comparatively simple agricultural communities are by far the purest democracies. Democracy is a thing which is always breaking down through the complexity of civilisation. Anyone who likes may state it by saying that democracy is the foe of civilisation. But he must remember that some of us really prefer democracy to civilisation, in the sense of preferring democracy to complexity. Anyhow, peasants tilling patches of their own land in a rough equality, and meeting to vote directly under a village tree, are the most truly self-governing of men. It is surely as likely as not that such a simple idea was found in the first condition of even simpler men. Indeed the despotic vision is exaggerated, even if we do not regard the men as men. Even on an evolutionary assumption of the most materialistic sort, there is really no reason why men should not have had at least as much camaraderie as rats or rooks. Leadership of some sort they doubtless had, as have the gregarious animals; but leadership implies no such irrational servility as that attributed to the superstitious subjects of the Old Man. There was doubtless some body corresponding, to use Tennyson’s expression, to the many-wintered crow that leads the clanging rookery home. But I fancy that if that venerable fowl began to act after the fashion of some Sultans in ancient and decayed Asia, it would become a very clanging rookery and the many-wintered crow would not see many more winters. It may be remarked, in this connection, but even among animals it would seem that something else is respected more than bestial violence, if it be only the familiarity which in men is called tradition or the experience which in men is called wisdom. I do not know if crows really follow the oldest crow, but if they do they are certainly not following the strongest crow. And I do know, in the human case, that if some ritual of seniority keeps savages reverencing somebody called Old Man, then at least they have not our own servile sentimental weakness for worshipping the Strong Man.

It may be said then that primitive government, like primitive art and religion and everything else, is very imperfectly known or rather guessed at;

but that it is at least as good a guess to suggest that it was as popular as a Balkan or Pyrenean village as that it was as capricious and secret as a Turkish divan. Both the mountain democracy and the oriental palace are modern in the sense that they are still there, or are some sort of growth of history; but of the two the palace has much more the look of being an accumulation and a corruption, the village much more the look of being a really unchanged and primitive thing. But my suggestions at this point do not go beyond expressing a wholesome doubt about the current assumption. I think it interesting, for instance, that liberal institutions have been traced even by moderns back to barbarians or undeveloped states, when it happened to be convenient for the support of some race or nation or philosophy. So the Socialists profess that their ideal of communal property existed in very early times. So the Jews are proud of the Jubilees or juster redistributions under their ancient law . So the Teutonists boasted of tracing parliaments and juries and various popular things among the Germanic tribes of the north. So the Celtophiles and those testifying to the wrongs of Ireland have pleaded the more equal justice of the clan system, to which the Irish chiefs bore witness before Strongbow. The strength of the case varies in the different cases; but as there is some case for all of them, I suspect there is some case for the general proposition that popular institutions of some sort were by no means uncommon in early and simple societies. Each of these separate schools were making the admission to prove a particular modern thesis; but taken together they suggest a more ancient and general truth, that there was something more in prehistoric councils than ferocity and fear. Each of these separate theorists had his own axe to grind, but he was willing to use a stone axe; and he manages to suggest that the stone axe might have been as republican as the guillotine.

But the truth is that the curtain rises upon the play already in progress In one sense it is a true paradox that there was history before history. But it is not the irrational paradox implied in prehistoric history; for it is a history we do not know. Very probably it was exceedingly like the history we do know, except in the one detail that we do not know it. It is thus the very opposite of the pretentious prehistoric history, which professes to trace everything in a consistent course from the amoeba to the anthropoid and from the anthropoid to the agnostic. So far from being a question of our knowing all about queer creatures very different from ourselves, they were very probably people very like ourselves, except that we know nothing about them. In other words, our most ancient records only reach back to a time when humanity had long been human, and even long been civilised. The most ancient records we have not only mention but take for granted things like kings and priests and princes and assemblies of the people; they describe communities that are roughly recognisable as communities in our own sense. Some of them are despotic; but we cannot tell that they have always been despotic. Some of them may be already decadent and nearly all are mentioned as if they were old. We do not know what really happened in the world before those records; but the little we do know would leave us anything but astonished if we learnt that it was very much like what happens in this world now. There would be nothing inconsistent or confounding about the discovery that those unknown ages were full of republics collapsing under monarchies and rising again as republics, empires expanding and finding colonies and then losing colonies. Kingdoms combining again into world states and breaking up again into small nationalities, classes selling themselves into slavery and marching out once more into liberty; all that procession of humanity which may or may not be a progress but most assuredly a romance. But the first chapters of the romance have been torn out of the book; and we shall never read them.

It is so also with the more special fancy about evolution and social stability. According to the real records available, barbarism and civilisation were not successive states in the progress of the world. They were conditions that existed side by side, as they still exist side by side. There were civilisations then as there are civilisations now; there are savages now as there were savages then. It is suggested that all men passed through a nomadic stage; but it is certain that there are some who have never passed out of it, and it seems not unlikely that there were some who never passed into it. It is probable that from very primitive times the static tiller of the soil and the wandering shepherd were two distinct types of men; and the chronological rearrangement of them is but a mark of that mania for progressive stages that has largely falsified history. It is suggested that there was a communist stage, in which private property was everywhere unknown, a whole humanity living on the negation of property; but the evidences of this negation are themselves rather negative. Redistributions of property, jubilees, and agrarian laws, occur at various intervals and in various forms; but that humanity inevitably passed through a communist stage seems as doubtful as the parallel proposition that humanity will inevitably return to it. It is chiefly interesting as evidence that the boldest plans for the future invoke the authority of the past; and that even a revolutionary seeks to satisfy himself that he is also a reactionary. There is an amusing parallel example in the case of what is called feminism. In spite of all the pseudo-scientific gossip about marriage by capture and the cave-man beating the cave-woman with a club, it may be noted that as soon as feminism became a fashionable cry, it was insisted that human civilisation in its first stage had been a matriarchy. Apparently it was the cave-woman who carried the club. Anyhow all these ideas are little better than guesses; they have a curious way of following the fortune of modern theories and fads. In any case they are not history in the sense of record; and we may repeat that when it comes to record, the broad truth is that barbarism and civilisation have always dwelt side by side in the world, the civilisation sometimes spreading to absorb the barbarians, sometimes decaying into relative barbarism, and in almost all cases possessing in a more finished form certain ideas and institutions which the barbarians possess in a ruder form; such as government or social authority, the arts and especially the decorative arts, mysteries and taboos of various kinds especially surrounding the matter of sex, and some form of that fundamental thing which is the chief concern of this enquiry; the thing that we call religion.

Now Egypt and Babylon, those two primeval monsters, might in this matter have been specially provided as models. They might almost be called working models to show how these modern theories do not work. The two great truths we know about these two great cultures happen to contradict flatly the two current fallacies which have just been considered. The story of Egypt might have been invented to point the moral that man does not necessarily begin with despotism because he is barbarous, but very often finds his way to despotism because he is civilised. He finds it because he is experienced; or, what is often much the same thing, because he is exhausted And the story of Babylon might have been invented to point the moral that man need not be a nomad or a communist before he becomes a peasant or a citizen, and that such cultures are not always in successive stages but often in contemporary states. Even touching these great civilisations with which our written history begins there is a temptation of course to be too ingenious or too cocksure. We can read the bricks of Babylon in a very different sense from that in which we guess about the Cup and Ring stones; and we do definitely know what is meant by the animals in the Egyptian hieroglyphic as we know nothing of the animal in the neolithic cave. But even here the admirable archeologists who have deciphered line after line of miles of hieroglyphics may be tempted to read too much between the lines; even the real authority on Babylon may forget how fragmentary is his hard-won knowledge; may forget that Babylon has only heaved half a brick at him, though half a brick is better than no cuneiform. But some truths, historic and not prehistoric, dogmatic and not evolutionary, facts and not fancies, do indeed emerge from Egypt and Babylon; and these two truths are among them.

Egypt is a green ribbon along the river edging the dark red desolation of the desert. It is a proverb, and one of vast antiquity, that it is created by the mysterious bounty and almost sinister benevolence of the Nile. When we first hear of Egyptians they are living as in a string of river-side villages, in small and separate but co-operative communities along the bank of the Nile. Where the river branched into the broad Delta there was traditionally the beginning of a somewhat different district or people; but this need not complicate the main truth. These more or less independent though interdependent peoples were considerably civilised already. They had a sort of heraldry; that is, decorative art used for symbolic and social purposes; each sailing the Nile under its own ensign representing some bird or animal. Heraldry involves two things of enormous importance to normal humanity; the combination of the two making that noble thing called co-operation; on which rest all peasantries and peoples that are free. The art of heraldry means independence; an image chosen by the imagination to express the individuality. The science of heraldry means interdependence; an agreement between different bodies to recognise different images; a science of imagery. We have here therefore exactly that compromise of co-operation between free families or groups which is the most normal mode of life for humanity and is particularly apparent wherever men own their own land and live on it. With the very mention of the image of bird and beast the student of mythology will murmur the word ‘totem’ almost in his sleep. But to my mind much of the trouble arises from his habit of saying such words as if in his sleep. Throughout this rough outline I have made a necessarily inadequate attempt to keep on the inside rather than the outside of such things; to consider them where possible in terms of thought and not merely in terms of terminology. There is very little value in talking about totems unless we have some feeling of what it really felt like to have a totem.

Granted that they had totems and we have no totems; was it because they had more fear of animals or more familiarity with animals? Did a man whose totem was a wolf feel like a were-wolf or like a man running away from a were-wolf? Did he feel like Uncle Remus about Brer Wolf or like St. Francis about his brother the wolf, or like Mowgli about his brothers the wolves? Was a totem a thing like the British lion or a thing like the British bull-dog? Was the worship of a totem like the feeling of niggers about Mumbo Jumbo, or of children about Jumbo? I have never read any book of folk-lore, however learned, that gave me any light upon this question, which I think by far the most important one. I will confine myself to repeating that the earliest Egyptian communities had a common understanding about the images that stood for their individual states; and that this amount of communication is prehistoric in the sense that it is already there at the beginning of history. But as history unfolds itself, this question of communication is clearly the main question of these riverside communities. With the need of communication comes the need of a common government and the growing greatness and spreading shadow of the king. The other binding force besides the king, and perhaps older than the king, is the priesthood; and the priesthood has presumably even more to do with these ritual symbols and signals by which men can communicate. And here in Egypt arose probably the primary and certainly the typical invention to which we owe all history, and the whole difference between the historic and the prehistoric: the archetypal script, the art of writing.

The popular pictures of these primeval empires are not half so popular as they might be. There is shed over them the shadow of an exaggerated gloom, more than the normal and even healthy sadness of heathen men. It is part of the same sort of secret pessimism that loves to make primitive man a crawling creature, whose body is filth and whose soul is fear. It comes of course from the fact that men are moved most by their religion; especially when it is irreligion. For them anything primary and elemental must be evil. But it is the curious consequence that while we have been deluged with the wildest experiments in primitive romance, they have all missed the real romance of being primitive. They have described scenes that are wholly imaginary, in which the men of the Stone Age are men of stone like walking statues; in which the Assyrians or Egyptians are as stiff or as painted as their own most archaic art. But none of these makers of imaginary scenes have tried to imagine what it must really have been like to see those things as fresh which we see as familiar. They have not seen a man discovering fire like a child discovering fireworks. They have not seen a man playing with the wonderful invention called the wheel, like a boy playing at putting up a wireless station. They have never put the spirit of youth into their descriptions of the youth of the world. It follows that amid all their primitive or prehistoric fancies there are no jokes. There are not even practical jokes, in connection with the practical inventions. And this is very sharply defined in the particular case of hieroglyphics; for there seems to be serious indication that the whole high human art of scripture or writing began with a joke.

There are some who will learn with regret that it seems to have begun with a pun. The king or the priests or some responsible persons, wishing to send a message up the river in that inconveniently long and narrow territory, hit on the idea of sending it in picture writing, like that of the Red Indian. Like most people who have written picture-writing for fun, he found the words did not always fit. But when the word for taxes sounded rather like the word for pig, he boldly put down a pig as a bad pun and chanced it. So a modern hieroglyphist might represent ‘at once’ by unscrupulously drawing a hat followed by a series of upright numerals. It was good enough for the Pharaohs and ought to be good enough for him. But it must have been great fun to write or even to read these messages, when writing and reading were really a new thing. And if people must write romances about ancient Egypt (and it seems that neither prayers nor tears nor curses can withhold them from the habit), I suggest that scenes like this would really remind us that the ancient Egyptians were human beings. I suggest that somebody should describe the scene of the great monarch sitting among his priests, and all of them roaring with laughter and bubbling over with suggestions as the royal puns grew more and more wild and indefensible. There might be another scene of almost equal excitement about the decoding of this cipher; the guesses and clues and discoveries having all the popular thrill of a detective story. That is how primitive romance and primitive history really ought to be written. For whatever was the quality of the religious or moral life of remote times, and it was probably much more human than is conventionally supposed, the scientific interest of such a time must have been intense. Words must have been more wonderful than wireless telegraphy; and experiments with common things a series of electric shocks. We are still waiting for somebody to write a lively story of primitive life. The point is in some sense a parenthesis here; but it is connected with the general matter of political development, by the institution which was most active in these first and most fascinating of all the fairy-tales of science.

It is admitted that we owe most of this science to the priests. Modern writers like Mr. Wells cannot be accused of any weakness of sympathy with a pontifical hierarchy; but they agree at least in recognising what pagan priesthoods did for the arts and sciences. Among the more ignorant of the enlightened there was indeed a convention of saying that priests had obstructed progress in all ages; and a politician once told me in a debate that I was resisting modern reforms exactly as some ancient priest probably resisted the discovery of wheels. I pointed out, in reply, that it was far more likely that the ancient priest made the discovery of the wheels. It is overwhelmingly probable that the ancient priest had a great deal to do with the discovery of the art of writing. It is obvious enough in the fact that the very word hieroglyphic is akin to the word hierarchy. The religion of these priests was apparently a more or less tangled polytheism of a type that is more particularly described elsewhere. It passed through a period when it cooperated with the king, another period when it was temporarily destroyed by the king, who happened to be a prince with a private theism of his own, and a third period when it practically destroyed the king and ruled in his stead. But the world has to thank it for many things which it considers common and necessary: and the creators of those common things ought really to have a place among the heroes of humanity. If we were at rest in a real paganism, instead of being restless in a rather irrational reaction from Christianity, we might pay some sort of pagan honour to these nameless makers of mankind. We might have veiled statues of the man who first found fire or the man who first made a boat or the man who first tamed a horse. And if we brought them garlands or sacrifices, there would be more sense in it than in disfiguring our cities with cockney statues of stale politicians and philanthropists. But one of the strange marks of the strength of Christianity is that, since it came, no pagan in our civilisation has been able to be really human.

The point is here, however, that the Egyptian government, whether pontifical or royal, found it more and more necessary to establish communication; and there always went with communication a certain element of coercion. It is not necessarily an indefensible thing that the state grew more despotic as it grew more civilised; it is arguable that it had to grow more despotic in order to grow more civilised. That is the argument for autocracy in every age; and the interest lies in seeing it illustrated in the earliest age. But it is emphatically not true that it was most despotic in the earliest age and grew more liberal in a later age; the practical process of history is exactly the reverse. It is not true that the tribe began in the extreme of terror of the Old Man and his seat and spear; it is probable, at least in Egypt, that the Old Man was rather a New Man armed to attack new conditions. His spear grew longer and longer and his throne rose higher and higher, as Egypt rose into a complex and complete civilisation. That is what I mean by saying that the history of the Egyptian territory is in this the history of the earth; and directly denies the vulgar assumption that terrorism can only come at the beginning and cannot come at the end. We do not know what was the very first condition of the more or less feudal amalgam of land owners, peasants and slaves in the little commonwealths beside the Nile; but it may have been a peasantry of an even more popular sort. What we do know is that it was by experience and education that little commonwealths lose their liberty; that absolute sovereignty is something not merely ancient but rather relatively modern; and it is at the end of the path called progress that men return to the king.

Egypt exhibits, in that brief record of its remotest beginnings, the primary problem of liberty and civilisation. It is the fact that men actually lose variety by complexity. We have not solved the problem properly any more than they did; but it vulgarises the human dignity of the problem itself to suggest that even tyranny has no motive save in tribal terror. And just as the Egyptian example refutes the fallacy about despotism and civilisation, so does the Babylonian example refute the fallacy about civilisation and barbarism. Babylon also we first hear of when it is already civilised; for the simple reason that we cannot hear of anything until it is educated enough to talk. It talks to us in what is called cuneiform; that strange and stiff triangular symbolism that contrasts with the picturesque alphabet of Egypt. However relatively rigid Egyptian art may be, there is always something different from the Babylonian spirit which was too rigid to have any art. There is always a living grace in the lines of the lotus and something of rapidity as well as rigidity in the movement of the arrows and the birds. Perhaps there is something of the restrained but living curve of the river, which makes us in talking of the serpent of old Nile almost think of the Nile as a serpent. Babylon was a civilisation of diagrams rather than of drawings.

Mr. W. B. Yeats who has a historical imagination to match his mythological imagination (and indeed the former is impossible without the latter) wrote truly of the men who watched the stars ‘from their pedantic Babylon.’ The cuneiform was cut upon bricks, of which all their architecture was built up; the bricks were of baked mud and perhaps the material had something in it forbidding the sense of form to develop in sculpture or relief. Theirs was a static but a scientific civilisation, far advanced in the machinery of life and in some ways highly modern. It is said that they had much of the modern cult of the higher spinsterhood and recognised an official class of independent working women. There is perhaps something in that mighty stronghold of hardened mud that suggests the utilitarian activity of a huge hive. But though it was huge it was human; we see many of the same social problems as in ancient Egypt or modern England; and whatever its evils this also was one of the earliest masterpieces of man. It stood, of course, in the triangle formed by the almost legendary rivers of Tigris and Euphrates, and the vast agriculture of its empire, on which its towns depended, was perfected by a highly scientific system of canals. It had by tradition a high intellectual life, though rather philosophic than artistic; and there preside over its primal foundation those figures who have come to stand for the star-gazing wisdom of antiquity; the teachers of Abraham; the Chaldees.

Against this solid society, as against some vast bare wall of brick, there surged age after age the nameless armies of the Nomads. They came out of the deserts where the nomadic life had been lived from the beginning and where it is still lived to-day. It is needless to dwell on the nature of that life; it was obvious enough and even easy enough to follow a herd or a flock which generally found its own grazing-ground and to live on the milk or meat it provided. Nor is there any reason to doubt that this habit of life could give almost every human thing except a home. Many such shepherds or herds men may have talked in the earliest time of all the truths and enigmas of the Book of Job; and of these were Abraham and his children, who have given to the modern world for an endless enigma the almost mono-maniac monotheism of the Jews. But they were a wild people without comprehension of complex social organisation; and a spirit like the wind within them made them wage war on it again and again. The history of Babylonia is largely the history of its defence against the desert hordes; who came on at intervals of a century or two and generally retreated as they came. Some say that an admixture of nomad invasion built at Nineveh the arrogant kingdom of the Assyrians, who carved great monsters upon their temples, bearded bulls with wings like cherubim, and who sent forth many military conquerors who stamped the world as if with such colossal hooves. Assyria was an imperial interlude; but it was an interlude. The main story of all that land is the war between the wandering peoples and the state that was truly static. Presumably in prehistoric times, and certainly in historic times, those wanderers went westward to waste whatever they could find. The last time they came they found Babylon vanished; but that was in historic times and the name of their leader was Mahomet.

Now it is worth while to pause upon that story because, as has been suggested, it directly contradicts the impression still current that nomadism is merely a prehistoric thing and social settlement a comparatively recent thing. There is nothing to show that the Babylonians had ever wandered; there is very little to show that the tribes of the desert ever settled down. Indeed it is probable that this notion of a nomadic stage followed by a static stage has already been abandoned by the sincere and genuine scholars to whose researches we all owe so much. But I am not at issue in this book with sincere and genuine scholars, but with a vast and vague public opinion which has been prematurely spread from certain imperfect investigations, and which has made fashionable a false notion of the whole history of humanity. It is the whole vague notion that a monkey evolved into a man and in the same way a barbarian evolved into a civilised man and therefore at every stage we have to look back to barbarism and forward to civilisation. Unfortunately this notion is in a double sense entirely in the air. It is an atmosphere in which men live rather than a thesis which they defend. Men in that mood are more easily answered by objects than by theories; and it will be well if anyone tempted to make that assumption, in some trivial turn of talk or writing, can be checked for a moment by shutting his eyes and seeing for an instant, vast and vaguely crowded, like a populous precipice, the wonder of the Babylonian wall.

One fact does certainly fall across us like its shadow. Our glimpses of both these early empires show that the first domestic relation had been complicated by something which was less human, but was often regarded as equally domestic. The dark giant called Slavery had been called up like a genii and was labouring on gigantic works of brick and stone. Here again we must not too easily assume that what was backward was barbaric; in the matter of manumission the earlier servitude seems in some ways more liberal than the later; perhaps more liberal than the servitude of the future. To insure food for humanity by forcing part of it to work was after all a very human expedient; which is why it will probably be tried again. But in one sense there is a significance in the old slavery. It stands for one fundamental fact about all antiquity before Christ; something to be assumed from first to last. It is the insignificance of the individual before the State. It was as true of the most democratic City State in Hellas as of any despotism in Babylon. It is one of the signs of this spirit that a whole class of individuals could be insignificant or even invisible. It must be normal because it was needed for what would now be called 'social service.' Somebody said, 'The Man is nothing and the Work is all,' meaning it for a breezy Carlylean commonplace. It was the sinister motto of the heathen Servile State. In that sense there is truth in the traditional vision of vast pillars and pyramids going up under those everlasting skies for ever by the labour of numberless and nameless men, toiling like ants and dying like flies, wiped out by the work of their own hands.

But there are two other reasons for beginning with the two fixed points of Egypt and Babylon. For one thing they are fixed in tradition as the types of antiquity; and history without tradition is dead. Babylon is still the burden of a nursery rhyme, and Egypt (with its enormous population of princesses awaiting reincarnation) is still the topic of an unnecessary number of novels. But a tradition is generally a truth; so long as the tradition is sufficiently popular; even if it is almost vulgar. And there is a significance in this Babylonian and Egyptian element in nursery rhymes and novels; even the news papers, normally so much behind the times, have already got as far as the reign of Tutankhamen. The first reason is full of the common sense of popular legend; it is the simple fact that we do know more of these traditional things than of other contemporary things; and that we always did. All travellers from Herodotus to Lord Carnarvon follow this route. Scientific speculations of to-day do indeed spread out a map of the whole primitive world, with streams of racial emigration or admixture marked in dotted lines everywhere; over spaces which the unscientific medieval map-maker would have been content to call 'Terra incognita,' if he did not fill the inviting blank with a picture of a dragon, to indicate the probable reception given to pilgrims. But these speculations are only speculations at the best; and at the worst the dotted lines can be far more fabulous than the dragon.

There is unfortunately one fallacy here into which it is very easy for men to fall, even those who are most intelligent and perhaps especially those who are most imaginative. It is the fallacy of suppositing that because an idea is greater in the sense of larger, therefore it is greater in the sense of more fundamental and fixed and certain. If a man lives alone in a straw hut in the middle of Thibet, he may be told that he is living in the Chinese Empire; and the Chinese Empire is certainly a splendid and spacious and impressive thing. Or alternatively he may be told that he is living in the British Empire, and be duly impressed. But the curious thing is that in certain mental states he can feel much more certain about the Chinese Empire that he can not see than about the straw hut that he can see. He has some strange magical juggle in his mind, by which his argument begins with the empire though his experience begins with the hut. Sometimes he goes mad and appears to be proving that a straw hut cannot exist in the domains of the Dragon Throne; that it is impossible for such a civilisation as he enjoys to contain such a hovel as he inhabits. But his insanity arises from the intellectual slip of supposing that because China is a large and all-embracing hypothesis, therefore it is something more than a hypothesis. Now modern people are perpetually arguing in this way; and they extend it to things much less real and certain than the Chinese Empire. They seem to forget, for instance, that a man is not even certain of the Solar System as he is certain of the South Downs. The Solar System is a deduction, and doubtless a true deduction; but the point is that it is a very vast and far-reaching deduction and therefore he forgets that it is a deduction at all and treats it as a first principle. He might discover that the whole calculation is a mis-calculation; and the sun and stars and street-lamps would look exactly the same. But he has forgotten that it is a calculation, and is almost ready to contradict the sun if it does not fit into the solar system. If this is a fallacy even in the case of facts pretty well ascertained, such as the Solar System and the Chinese Empire, it is an even more devastating fallacy in connection with theories and other things that are not really ascertained at all. Thus history, especially prehistoric history, has a horrible habit of beginning with certain generalisations about races. I will not describe the disorder and misery this inversion has produced in modern politics. Because the race is vaguely supposed to have produced the nation, men talk as if the nation were something vaguer than the race. Because they have themselves invented a reason to explain a result, they almost deny the result in order to justify the reason. They first treat a Celt as an axiom and then treat an Irishman as an inference. And then they are surprised that a great fighting, roaring Irishman is angry at being treated as an inference. They cannot see that the Irish are Irish whether or no they are Celtic, whether or no there ever were any Celts. And what misleads them once more is the size of the theory; the sense that the fancy is bigger than the fact. A great scattered Celtic race is supposed to contain the Irish, so of course the Irish must depend for their very existence upon it. The same confusion, of course, has eliminated the English and the Germans by swamping them in the Teutonic race; and some tried to prove from the races being at one that the nations could not be at war. But I only give these vulgar and hackneyed examples in passing, as more familiar examples of the fallacy; the matter at issue here is not its application to these modern things but rather to the most ancient things. But the more remote and unrecorded was the racial problem, the more fixed was this curious inverted certainty in the Victorian man of science. To this day it gives a man of those scientific traditions the same sort of shock to question these things, which were only the last inferences when he turned them into first principles. He is still more certain that he is an Aryan even than that he is an Anglo-Saxon, just as he is more certain that he is an Anglo-Saxon than that he is an Englishman. He has never really discovered that he is a European. But he has never doubted that he is an Indo-European. These Victorian theories have shifted a great deal in their shape and scope; but this habit of a rapid hardening of a hypothesis into a theory, and of a theory into an assumption, has hardly yet gone out of fashion. People cannot easily get rid of the mental confusion of feeling that the foundations of history must surely be secure; that the first steps must be safe; that the biggest generalisation must be obvious. But though the contradiction may seem to them a paradox, this is the very contrary of the truth. It is the large thing that is secret and invisible; it is the small thing that is evident and enormous.

Every race on the face of the earth has been the subject of these speculations, and it is impossible even to suggest an outline of the subject. But if we take the European race alone, its history, or rather its prehistory, has undergone many retrospective revolutions in the short period of my own lifetime. It used to be called the Caucasian race; and I read in childhood an account of its collision with the Mongolian race; it was written by Bret Harte and opened with the query ‘Or is the Caucasian played out?’

Apparently the Caucasian was played out, for in a very short time he had been turned into the Indo-European man; sometimes, I regret to say, proudly presented as the Indo-Germanic man. It seems that the Hindu and the German have similar words for mother or father; there were other similarities between Sanskrit and various Western tongues; and with that all superficial differences between a Hindu and a German seemed suddenly to disappear. Generally this composite person was more conveniently described as the Aryan, and the really important point was that he had marched westward out of those high lands of India where fragments of his language could still be found. When I read this as a child, I had the fancy that after all the Aryan need not have marched westward and left his language behind him; he might also have marched eastward and taken his language with him. If I were to read it now, I should content myself with confessing my ignorance of the whole matter. But as a matter of fact I have great difficulty in reading it now, because it is not being written now. It looks as if the Aryan is also played out. Anyhow he has not merely changed his name but changed his address; his starting-place and his route of travel. One new theory maintains that our race did not come to its present home from the East but from the South. Some say the Europeans did not come from Asia but from Africa. Some have even had the wild idea that the Europeans came from Europe; or rather that they never left it.

Then there is a certain amount of evidence of a more or less prehistoric pressure from the North, such as that which seems to have brought the Greeks to inherit the Cretan culture and so often brought the Gauls over the hills into the fields in Italy. But I merely mention this example of European ethnology to point out that the learned have pretty well boxed the compass by this time; and that I, who am not one of the learned, cannot pretend for a moment to decide where such doctors disagree. But I can use my own common sense, and I sometimes fancy that theirs is a little rusty from want of use. The first act of common sense is to recognise the difference between a cloud and a mountain. And I will affirm that nobody knows any of these things, in the sense that we all know of the existence of the Pyramids of Egypt.

The truth, it may be repeated, is that what we really see, as distinct from what we may reasonably guess, in this earliest phase of history is darkness covering the earth and great darkness the peoples, with a light or two gleaming here and there on chance patches of humanity; and that two of these flames do burn upon two of these tall primeval towns; upon the high terraces of Babylon and the huge pyramids of the Nile. There are indeed other ancient lights, or lights that may be conjectured to be very ancient, in very remote parts of that vast wilderness of night. Far away to the east there is a high civilisation of vast antiquity in China; there are the remains of civilisations in Mexico and South America and other places, some of them apparently so high in civilisation as to have reached the most refined forms of devil-worship. But the difference lies in the element old tradition; the tradition of these lost cultures has been broken off, and though the tradition of China still lives, it is doubtful whether we know anything about it. Moreover, a man trying to measure the Chinese antiquity has to use Chinese traditions of measurement; and he has a strange sensation of having passed into another world under other laws of time and space. Time is telescoped outwards and centuries assume the slow and stiff movement of aeons; the white man trying to see it as the yellow man sees, feels as if his head were turning round and wonders wildly whether it is growing a pigtail. Any how he cannot take in a scientific sense that queer perspective that leads up to the primeval pagoda of the first of the Sons of Heaven. He is the real antipodes; the only true alternative world to Christendom; and he is after a fashion walking upside down. I have spoken of the medieval map-maker and his dragon; but what medieval traveller, however much interested in monsters, would expect to find a country where a dragon is a benevolent and amiable being? Of the more serious side of Chinese tradition something will be said in another connection; but I am only talking of tradition and the test of antiquity. And I only mention China as an antiquity that is not for us reached by a bridge old tradition; and Babylon and Egypt as antiquities that are. Herodotus is a human being, in a sense in which a Chinaman in a billy-cock hat, sitting opposite to us in a London tea shop, is hardly human. We feel as if we knew what David and Isaiah felt like, in a way in which we never were quite certain what Li Hung Chang felt like. The very sins that snatched away Helen or Bathsheba have passed into a proverb of private human weakness, of pathos and even of pardon. The very virtues of the Chinaman have about them something terrifying. This is the difference made by the destruction or preservation of a continuous historical inheritance; as from ancient Egypt to modern Europe. But when we ask what was that world that we inherit, and why those particular people and places seem to belong to it, we are led to the central fact of civilised history.

That centre was the Mediterranean; which was not so much a piece of water as a world. But it was a world with something of the character of such a water; for it became more and more a place of unification in which the streams of strange and very diverse cultures met. The Nile and the Tiber alike flow into the Mediterranean; so did the Egyptian and the Etrurian alike contribute to a Mediterranean civilisation. The glamour of the great sea spread indeed very far in land and the unity was felt among the Arabs alone in the deserts and the Gauls beyond the northern hills. But the gradual building up of a common culture running round all the coasts of this inner sea is the main business of antiquity. As will be seen, it was sometimes a bad business as well as a good business. In that *orbis terrarum* or circle of lands there were the extremes of evil and of piety, there were contrasted races and still more contrasted religions. It was the scene of an endless struggle between Asia and Europe from the night of the Persian ships at Salamis to the flight of the Turkish ships at Lepanto. It was the scene, as will be more especially suggested later, of a supreme spiritual struggle between the two types of paganism, confronting each other in the Latin and the Phoenician cities; in the Roman forum and the Punic mart. It was the world of war and peace, the world of good and evil, the world of all that matters most, with all respect to the Aztecs and the Mongols of the Far East, they did not matter as the Mediterranean tradition mattered and still matters. Between it and the Far East there were, of course, interesting cults and conquests of various kinds, more or less in touch with it, and in proportion as they were so intelligible also to us. The Persians came riding in to make an end of Babylon; and we are told in a Greek story how these barbarians learned to draw the bow and tell the truth. Alexander the great Greek marched with his Macedonians into the sunrise and brought back strange birds coloured like the sunrise clouds and strange flowers and jewels from the gardens and treasuries of nameless kings. Islam went eastward into that world and made it partly imaginable to us; precisely because Islam itself was born in that circle of lands that fringed our own ancient and ancestral sea. In the Middle Ages the empire of the Moguls increased its majesty without losing its mystery; the Tartars conquered China and the Chinese apparently took very little notice of them. All these things are interesting in themselves; but it is impossible to shift the centre of gravity to the inland spaces of Asia from the in]and sea of Europe. When all is said, if there were nothing in the world but what was said and done and written and built in the lands lying round the Mediterranean, it would still be in all the most vital and valuable things the world in which we live. When that southern culture spread to the north-west it produced many very wonderful things; of which doubtless we ourselves are the most wonderful. When it spread thence to colonies and new countries, it was still the same culture so long as it was culture at all. But round that little sea like a lake were the things themselves, apart from all extensions and echoes and commentaries on the things, the Republic and the Church; the Bible and the heroic epics; Islam and Israel and the memories of the lost empires, Aristotle and the measure of all things. It is because the first light upon this world is really light, the daylight in which we are still walking to-day, and not merely the doubtful visitation of strange stars, that I have begun here with noting where that light first falls on the towered cities of the eastern Mediterranean.

But though Babylon and Egypt have thus a sort of first claim, in the very fact of being familiar and traditional, fascinating riddles to us but also fascinating riddles to our fathers, we must not imagine that they were the only old civilisations on the southern sea; or that all the civilisation was merely Sumerian or Semitic or Coptic, still less merely Asiatic or African. Real research is more and more exalting the ancient civilisation of Europe and especially of what we may still vaguely call the Greeks. It must be understood in the sense that there were Greeks before the Greeks, as in so many of their mythologies there were gods before the gods. The island of Crete was the centre of the civilisation now called Minoan, after the Minos who lingered in ancient legend and whose labyrinth was actually discovered by modern archeology. This elaborate European society, with its harbours and its drainage and its domestic machinery, seems to have gone down before some invasion of its northern neighbours, who made or inherited the Hellas we know in history. But that earlier period did not pass till it had given to the world gifts so great that the world has ever since been striving in vain to repay them, if only by plagiarism.

Somewhere along the Ionian coast opposite Crete and the islands was a town of some sort, probably of the sort that we should call a village or hamlet with a wall. It was called Ilion but it came to be called Troy, and the name will never perish from the earth. A poet who may have been a beggar and a ballad-monger, who may have been unable to read and write, and was described by tradition as a blind, composed a poem about the Greeks going to war with this town to recover the most beautiful woman in the world.

That the most beautiful woman in the world lived in that one little town sounds like a legend; that the most beautiful poem in the world was written by somebody who knew of nothing larger than such little towns is a historical fact. It is said that the poem came at the end of the period; that the primitive culture brought it forth in its decay; in which case one would like to have seen that culture in its prime. But anyhow it is true that this, which is our first poem, might very well be our last poem too. It might well be the last word as well as the first word spoken by man about his mortal lot, as seen by merely mortal vision. If the world becomes pagan and perishes, the last man left alive would do well to quote the *Iliad* and die.

But in this one great human revelation of antiquity there is another element of great historical importance; which has hardly I think been given its proper place in history. The poet has so conceived the poem that his sympathies apparently, and those of his reader certainly, are on the side of the vanquished rather than of the victor. And this is a sentiment which increases in the poetical tradition even as the poetical origin itself recedes. Achilles had some status as a sort of demigod in pagan times; but he disappears altogether in late times. But Hector grows greater as the ages pass, and it is his name that is the name of a Knight of the Round Table and his sword that legend puts into the hand of Roland, laying about him with the weapon of the defeated Hector in the last ruin and splendour of his own defeat. The name anticipates all the defeats through which our race and religion were to pass; that survival of a hundred defeats that is its triumph.

The tale of the end of Troy shall have no ending, for it is lifted up forever into living echoes, immortal as our hopelessness and our hope. Troy standing was a small thing that may have stood nameless for ages. But Troy falling has been caught up in a flame and suspended in an immortal instant of annihilation; and because it was destroyed with fire the fire shall never be destroyed. And as with the city so with the hero; traced in archaic lines in that primeval twilight is found the first figure of the Knight. There is a prophetic coincidence in his title; we have spoken of the word chivalry and how it seems to mingle the horseman with the horse. It is almost anticipated ages before in the thunder of the Homeric hexameter, and that long leaping word with which the *Iliad* ends. It is that very unity for which we can find no name but the holy centaur of chivalry. But there are other reasons for giving in this glimpse of antiquity the name upon the sacred town. The sanctity of such towns ran like a fire round the coasts and islands of the northern Mediterranean, the high-fenced hamlet for which heroes died. From the smallness of the city came the greatness of the citizen. Hellas with her hundred statues produced nothing statelier than that walking statue; the ideal of the self-commanding man. Hellas of the hundred statues was one legend and literature; and all that labyrinth of little walled nations resounding with the lament of Troy.

A later legend, an afterthought but not an accident, said that stragglers from Troy founded a republic on the Italian shore. It was true in spirit that republican virtue had such a root. A mystery of honour, that was not born of Babylon or the Egyptian pride, there shone like the shield of Hector, defying Asia and Africa; till the light of a new day was loosened, with the rushing of the eagles and the coming of the name; the name that came like a thunderclap when the world woke to Rome.

IV. God and Comparative Religion

I was once escorted over the Roman foundations of an ancient British city by a professor, who said something that seems to me a satire on a good many other professors. Possibly the professor saw the joke, though he maintained an iron gravity, and may or may not have realised that it was a joke against a great deal of what is called comparative religion. I pointed out a sculpture of the head of the sun with the usual halo of rays, but with the difference that the face in the disc, instead of being boyish like Apollo, was bearded like Neptune or Jupiter. ‘Yes,’ he said with a certain delicate exactitude, ‘that is supposed to represent the local god Sul. The best authorities identify Sul with Minerva, but this has been held to show that the identification is not complete.’

That is what we call a powerful understatement. The modern world is madder than any satires on it; long ago Mr. Belloc made his burlesque don say that a bust of Ariadne had been proved by modern research to be a Silenus. But that is not better than the real appearance of Minerva as the Bearded Woman of Mr. Barnum. Only both of them are very like many identifications by ‘the best authorities’ on comparative religion; and when Catholic creeds are identified with various wild myths, I do not laugh or curse or misbehave myself; I confine myself decorously to saying that the identification is not complete.

In the days of my youth the Religion of Humanity was a term commonly applied to Comtism, the theory of certain rationalists who worshipped corporate mankind as a Supreme Being. Even in the days of my youth, I remarked that there was something slightly odd about despising and dismissing the doctrine of the Trinity as a mystical and even maniacal contradiction; and then asking us to adore a deity who is a hundred million persons in one God, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.

But there is another entity, more or less definable and much more imaginable than the many-headed and monstrous idol of mankind. And it has a much better light to be called, in a reasonable sense, the religion of humanity. Man is not indeed the idol; but man is almost everywhere the idolator. And these multitudinous idolatries of man kind have something about them in many ways more human and sympathetic than modern metaphysical abstractions. If an Asiatic god has three heads and seven arms, there is at least in it an idea of material incarnation bringing an unknown power nearer to us and not farther away. But if our friends Brown, Jones, and Robinson, when out for a Sunday walk, were transformed and amalgamated into an Asiatic idol before our eyes, they would surely seem farther away. If the arms of Brown and the legs of Robinson waved from the same composite body, they would seem to be waving something of a sad farewell. If the heads of an three gentlemen appeared smiling on the same neck, we should hesitate even by what name to address our new and somewhat abnormal friend. In the many-headed and many-handed Oriental idol there is a certain sense of mysteries be coming at least partly intelligible; of formless forces of nature taking some dark but material form, but though this may be true of the multiform god it is not so of the multiform man The human beings be come less human by becoming less separate; we might say less human in being less lonely. The human beings become less intelligible as they become less isolated; we might say with strict truth that the closer they are to us the farther they are away. An Ethical Hymn-book of this humanitarian sort of religion was carefully selected and expurgated on the principle of preserving anything human and eliminating anything divine. One consequence was that a hymn appeared in the amended form of ‘Nearer Mankind to Thee, nearer to Thee.’ It always suggested to me the sensations of a strap-hanger during a crush on the Tube. But it is strange and wonderful how far away the souls of men can seem, when their bodies are so near as all that.

The human unity with which I deal here is not to be confounded with this modern industrial monotony and herding, which is rather a congestion than a communion. It is a thing to which human groups left to themselves, and even human individuals left to themselves, have everywhere tended by an instinct that may truly be called human. Like all healthy human things, it has varied very much within the limits of a general character; for that is characteristic of everything belonging to that ancient land of liberty that lies before and around the servile industrial town. Industrialism actually boasts that its products are all of one pattern; that men in Jamaica or Japan can break the same seal and drink the same bad whiskey, that a man at the North Pole and another at the South might recognise the same optimistic level on the same dubious tinned salmon. But wine, the gift of gods to men, can vary with every valley and every vineyard, can turn into a hundred wines without any wine once reminding us of whiskey; and cheeses can change from county to county without forgetting the difference between chalk and cheese. When I am speaking of this thing, therefore, I am speaking of something that doubtless includes very wide differences; nevertheless I will here maintain that it is one thing. I will maintain that most of the modern botheration comes from not realising that it is really one thing. I will advance the thesis that before all talk about comparative religion and the separate religious founders of the world, the first essential is to recognise this thing as a whole, as a thing almost native and normal to the great fellowship that we call mankind. This thing is Paganism, and I propose to show in these pages that it is the one real rival to the Church of Christ.

Comparative religion is very comparative indeed. That is, it is so much a matter of degree and distance and difference that it is only comparatively successful when it tries to compare. When we come to look at it closely we find it comparing things that are really quite incomparable. We are accustomed to see a table or catalogue of the world’s great religions in parallel columns, until we fancy they are really parallel. We are accustomed to see the names of the great religious founders all in a row: Christ; Mahomet; Buddha; Confucius. But in truth this is only a trick, another of these optical illusions by which any objects may be put into a particular relation by shifting to a particular point of sight. Those religions and religious founders, or rather those whom we choose to lump together as religions and religious founders, do not really show any common character. The illusion is partly produced by Islam coming immediately after Christianity in the list; as Islam did come after Christianity and was largely an imitation of Christianity. But the other eastern religions, or what we call religions, not only do not resemble the Church but do not resemble each other. When we come to Confucianism at the end of the list, we come to something in a totally different world of thought. To compare the Christian and Confucian religions is like comparing a theist with an English squire or asking whether a man is a believer in immortality or a hundred-per-cent American. Confucianism may be a civilisation but it is not a religion.

In truth the Church is too unique to prove herself unique. For most popular and easy proof is by parallel; and here there is no parallel. It is not easy, therefore, to expose the fallacy by which a false classification is created to swamp a unique thing, when it really is a unique thing. As there is nowhere else exactly the same fact, so there is nowhere else exactly the same fallacy. But I will take the nearest thing I can find to such a solitary social phenomenon, in order to show how it is thus swamped and assimilated. I imagine most of us would agree that there is something unusual and unique about the position of the Jews. There is nothing that is quite in the same sense an international nation; an ancient culture scattered in different countries but still distinct and indestructible. Now this business is like an attempt to make a list of Nomadic Nations in order to soften the strange solitude of the Jew. It would be easy enough to do it, by the same process of putting a plausible approximation first, and then tailing off into totally different things thrown in somehow to make up the list. Thus in the new list of nomadic nations the Jews would be followed by the Gypsies; who at least are really nomadic if they are not really national. Then the professor of the new science of Comparative Nomadics could pass easily on to something different; even if it was very different. He could remark on the wandering adventure of the English who had scattered their colonies over so many seas; and call them nomads. It is quite true that a great many Englishmen seem to be strangely restless in England. It is quite true that not all of them have left their country for their country's good. The moment we mention the wandering empire of the English, we must add the strange exiled empire of the Irish. For it is a curious fact, to be noted in our imperial literature, that the same ubiquity and unrest which is a proof of English enterprise and triumph is a proof of Irish futility and failure. Then the professor of Nomadism would look round thoughtfully and remember that there was great talk recently of German waiters, German barbers, German clerks, Germans naturalising themselves in England and the United States and the South American republics. The Germans would go down as the fifth nomadic race; the words Wanderlust and Folk-Wandering would come in very useful here. For there really have been historians who explained the Crusades by suggesting that the Germans were found wandering (as the police say) in what happened to be the neighbourhood of Palestine. Then the professor, feeling he was now near the end, would make a last leap in desperation. He would recall the fact that the French army has captured nearly every capital in Europe, that it marched across countless conquered lands under Charlemagne or Napoleon; and that would be wanderlust and that would be the note of a nomadic race. Thus he would have his six nomadic nations all compact and complete, and would feel that the Jew was no longer a sort of mysterious and even mystical exception. But people with more common sense would probably realise that he had only extended nomadism by extending the meaning of nomadism, and that he had extended that until it really had no meaning at all. It is quite true that the French soldier has made some of the finest marches in all military history. But it is equally true, and far more self-evident, that if the French peasant is not a rooted reality there is no such thing as a rooted reality in the world; or in other words, if he is a nomad there is nobody who is not a nomad.

Now that is the sort of trick that has been tried in the case of comparative religion and the world's religious founders all standing respectably in a row. It seeks to classify Jesus as the other would classify Jews, by inventing a new class for the purpose and filling up the rest of it with stop-gaps and second-rate copies. I do not mean that these other things are not often great things in their own real character and class. Confucianism and Buddhism are great things, but it is not true to call them Churches; just as the French and English are great peoples, but it is nonsense to call them nomads. There are some points of resemblance between Christendom and its imitation in Islam; for that matter there are some points of resemblance between Jews and Gypsies. But after that the lists are made up of anything that comes to hand; of anything that can be put in the same catalogue without being in the same category.

In this sketch of religious history, with all decent deference to men much more learned than myself, I propose to cut across and disregard this modern method of classification, which I feel sure has falsified the facts of history. I shall here submit an alternative classification of religion or religions, which I believe would be found to cover all the facts and, what is quite as important here, all the fancies. Instead of dividing religion geographically and as it were vertically, into Christian, Moslem, Brahmin, Buddhist, and so on, I would divide it psychologically and in some sense horizontally; into the strata of spiritual elements and influences that could sometimes exist in the same country, or even in the same man. Putting the Church apart for the moment, I should be disposed to divide the natural religion of the mass of mankind under such headings as these: God; the Gods; the Demons; the Philosophers. I believe some such classification will help us to sort out the spiritual experiences of men much more successfully than the conventional business of comparing religions; and that many famous figures will naturally fall into their place in this way who are only forced into their place in the other. As I shall make use of these titles or terms more than once in narrative and allusion, it will be well to define at this stage for what I mean them to stand. And I will begin with the first, the simplest and the most sublime, in this chapter.

In considering the elements of pagan humanity, we must begin by an attempt to describe the indescribable. Many get over the difficulty of describing it by the expedient of denying it, or at least ignoring it; but the whole point of it is that it was something that was never quite eliminated even when it was ignored. They are obsessed by their evolutionary monomania that every great thing grows from a seed, or something smaller than itself. They seem to forget that every seed comes from a tree, or something larger than itself. Now there is very good ground for guessing that religion did not originally come from some detail that was forgotten, because it was too small to be traced. Much more probably it was an idea that was abandoned because it was too large to be managed. There is very good reason to suppose that many people did begin with the simple but overwhelming idea of one God who governs all; and afterwards fell away into such things as demon-worship almost as a sort of secret dissipation. Even the test of savage beliefs, of which the folk-lore students are so fond, is admittedly often found to support such a view. Some of the very rudest savages, primitive in every sense in which anthropologists use the word, the Australian aborigines for instance, are found to have a pure monotheism with a high moral tone. A missionary was preaching to a very wild tribe of polytheists, who had told him all their polytheistic tales, and telling them in return of the existence of the one good God who is a spirit and judges men by spiritual standards. And there was a sudden buzz of excitement among these stolid barbarians, as at somebody who was letting out a secret, and they cried to each other, ‘Atahocan! He is speaking of Atahocan!’

Probably it was a point of politeness and even decency among those polytheists not to speak of Atahocan. The name is not perhaps so much adapted as some of our own to direct and solemn religious exhortation but many other social forces are always covering up and confusing such simple ideas. Possibly the old god stood for an old morality found irksome in more expansive moments; possibly intercourse with demons was more fashionable among the best people, as in the modern fashion of Spiritualism. Anyhow, there are any number of similar examples. They all testify to the unmistakable psychology of a thing taken for granted, as distinct from a thing talked about. There is a striking example in a tale taken down word for word from a Red Indian in California which starts out with hearty legendary and literary relish: ‘The sun is the father and ruler of the heavens. He is the big chief. The moon is his wife and the stars are their children’; and so on through a most ingenious and complicated story, in the middle of which is a sudden parenthesis saying that the sun and moon have to do something because ‘It is ordered that way by the Great Spirit Who lives above the place of all.’ That is exactly the attitude of most paganism towards God. He is something assumed and forgotten and remembered by accident; a habit possibly not peculiar to pagans. Sometimes the higher deity is remembered in the higher moral grades and is a sort of mystery. But always, it has been truly said, the savage is talkative about his mythology and taciturn about his religion. The Australian savages, indeed, exhibit a topsyturveydom such as the ancients might have thought truly worthy of the antipodes. The savage who thinks nothing of tossing off such a trifle as a tale of the sun and moon being the halves of a baby chopped in two, or dropping into small-talk about a colossal cosmic cow milked to make the rain, merely in order to be sociable, will then retire to secret caverns sealed against women and white men, temples of terrible initiation where to the thunder of the bull-roarer and the dripping of sacrificial blood, the priest whispers the final secrets, known only to the initiate: that honesty is the best policy, that a little kindness does nobody any harm, that all men are brothers and that there is but one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible.

In other words, we have here the curiosity of religious history that the savage seems to be parading all the most repulsive and impossible parts of his belief and concealing all the most sensible and creditable parts. But the explanation is that they are not in that sense parts of his belief, or at least not parts of the same sort of belief. The myths are merely tall stories, though as tall as the sky, the water spout, or the tropic rain. The mysteries are true stories, and are taken secretly that they may be taken seriously. Indeed it is only too easy to forget that there is a thrill in theism. A novel in which a number of separate characters all turned out to be the same character would certainly be a sensational novel. It is so with the idea that sun and tree and river are the disguises of one god and not of many. Alas, we also find it only too easy to take Atahocan for granted. But whether he is allowed to fade into a truism or preserved as a sensation by being preserved as a secret, it is clear that he is always either an old truism or an old tradition. There is nothing to show that he is an improved product of the mere mythology and everything to show that he preceded it. He is worshipped by the simplest tribes with no trace of ghosts or grave-offerings, or any of the complications in which Herbert Spencer and Grant Allen sought the origin of the simplest of all ideas. Whatever else there was, there was never as such thing as the Evolution of the Idea of God. The idea was concealed, was avoided, was almost forgotten, was even explained away; but it was never evolved.

There are not a few indications of this change in other places It is implied, for instance, in the fact that even polytheism seems often the combination of several monotheisms. A god will gain only a minor seat on Mount Olympus, when he had owned earth and heaven and all the stars while he lived in his own little valley. Like many a small nation melting in a great empire, he gives up local universality only to come under universal limitation. The very name of Pan suggests that he became a god of the wood when he had been a god of the world. The very name of Jupiter is almost a pagan translation of the words ‘Our Father which art in heaven.’ As with the Great Father symbolised by the sky, so with the Great Mother whom we still call Mother Earth. Demeter and Ceres and Cybele often seem to be almost capable of taking over the whole business of godhood, so that men should need no other gods. It seems reasonably probable that a good many men did have no other gods but one of these, worshipped as the author of all.

Over some of the most immense and populous tracts of the world such as China, it would seem that the simpler idea of the Great Father has never been very much complicated with rival cults, though it may have in some sense ceased to be a cult itself. The best authorities seem to think that though Confucianism is in one sense agnosticism, it does not directly contradict the old theism, precisely because it has become a rather vague theism. It is one in which God is called Heaven, as in the case of polite persons tempted to swear in drawing-rooms. But Heaven is still overhead, even if it is very far overhead. We have all the impression of a simple truth that has receded, until it was remote without ceasing to be true. And this phrase alone would bring us back to the same idea even in the pagan mythology of the West. There is surely something of this very notion of the withdrawal of some higher power, in all those mysterious and very imaginative myths about the separation of earth and sky. In a hundred forms we are told that heaven and earth were once lovers, or were once at one, when some upstart thing, often some undutiful child, thrust them apart; and the world was built on an abyss; upon a division and a parting. One of its grossest versions was given by Greek civilisation in the myth of Uranus and Saturn. One of its most charming versions was that of some savage niggers, who say that a little pepper-plant grew taller and taller and lifted the whole sky like a lid; a beautiful barbaric vision of daybreak for some of our painters who love that tropical twilight. Of myths, and the highly mythical explanations which the moderns offer of myths, something will be said in another section; for I cannot but think that most mythology is on another and more superficial plane. But in this primeval vision of the rending of one world into two there is surely something more of ultimate ideas. As to what it means, a man will learn far more about it by lying on his back in a field, and merely looking at the sky, than by reading all the libraries even of the most learned and valuable folklore. He will know what is meant by saying that the sky ought to be nearer to us than it is, that perhaps it was once nearer than it is, that it is not a thing merely alien and abysmal but in some fashion sundered from us and saying farewell. There will creep across his mind the curious suggestion that after all, perhaps, the myth-maker was not merely a moon-calf or village idiot thinking he could cut up the clouds like a cake, but had in him something more than it is fashionable to attribute to the Troglodyte; that it is just possible that Thomas Hood was not talking like a Troglodyte when he said that, as time went on, the tree-tops only told him he was further off from heaven than when he was a boy. But anyhow the legend of Uranus the Lord of Heaven dethroned by Saturn the Time Spirit would mean something to the author of that poem. And it would mean, among other things, this banishment of the first fatherhood. There is the idea of God in the very notion that there were gods before the gods. There is an idea of greater simplicity in all the allusions to that more ancient order. The suggestion is supported by the process of propagation we see in historic times. Gods and demigods and heroes breed like herrings before our very eyes and suggest of themselves that the family may have had one founder; mythology grows more and more complicated, and the very complication suggests that at the beginning it was more simple. Even on the external evidence, of the sort called scientific, there is therefore a very good case for the suggestion that man began with monotheism before it developed or degenerated into polytheism. But I am concerned rather with an internal than an external truth; and, as I have already said, the internal truth is almost indescribable. We have to speak of something of which it is the whole point that people did not speak of it; we have not merely to translate from a strange tongue or speech, but from a strange silence.

I suspect an immense implication behind all polytheism and paganism. I suspect we have only a hint of it here and there in these savage creeds or Greek origins. It is not exactly what we mean by the presence of God; in a sense it might more truly be called the absence of God. But absence does not mean non-existence; and a man drinking the toast of absent friends does not mean that from his life all friendship is absent. It is a void but it is not a negation; it is some thing as positive as an empty chair. It would be an exaggeration to say that the pagan saw higher than Olympus an empty throne. It would be nearer the truth to take the gigantic imagery of the Old Testament, in which the prophet saw God from behind; it was as if some immeasurable presence had turned its back on the world. Yet the meaning will again be missed, if it is supposed to be anything so conscious and vivid as the monotheism of Moses and his people. I do not mean that the pagan peoples were in the least overpowered by this idea merely because it is overpowering. On the contrary, it was so large that they all carried it lightly, as we all carry the load of the sky. Gazing at some detail like a bird or a cloud, we can all ignore its awful blue background; we can neglect the sky; and precisely because it bears down upon us with an annihilating force it is felt as nothing. A thing of this kind can only be an impressing and a rather subtle impression; but to me it is a very strong impression made by pagan literature and religion. I repeat that in our special sacramental sense there is, of course, the absence of the presence of God. But there is in a very real sense the presence of the absence of God. We feel it in the unfathomable sadness of pagan poetry; for I doubt if there was ever in all the marvellous manhood of antiquity a man who was happy as St. Francis was happy. We feel it in the legend of a Golden Age and again in the vague implication that the gods themselves are ultimately related to something else, even when that Unknown God has faded into a Fate. Above all we feel it in those immortal moments when the pagan literature seems to return to a more innocent antiquity and speak with a more direct voice, so that no word is worthy of it except our own monotheistic monosyllable. We cannot say anything but ‘God’ in a sentence like that of Socrates bidding farewell to his judges: ‘I go to die and you remain to live; and God alone knows which of us goes the better way.’ We can use no other word even for the best moments of Marcus Aurelius: ‘Can they say dear city of Cecrops, and canst thou not say dear city of God?’ We can use no other word in that mighty line in which Virgil spoke to all who suffer with the veritable cry of a Christian before Christ: ‘O you that have borne things more terrible, to this also God shall give an end.’

In short, there is a feeling that there is something higher than the gods; but because it is higher it is also further away. Not yet could even Virgil have read the riddle and the paradox of that other divinity, who is both higher and nearer. For them what was truly divine was very distant, so distant that they dismissed it more and more from their minds. It had less and less to do with the mere mythology of which I shall write later. Yet even in this there was a sort of tacit admission of its intangible purity, when we consider what most of the mythologies like. As the Jews would not degrade it by images, so the Greeks did not degrade it even by imaginations. When the gods were more and more remembered only by pranks and profligacies, it was relatively a movement of reverence. It was an act of piety to forget God. In other words, there is something in the whole tone of the time suggesting that men had accepted a lower level, and still were half conscious that it was a lower level. It is hard to find words for these things; yet the one really just word stands ready. These men were conscious of the Fall if they were conscious of nothing else; and the same is true of an heathen humanity. Those who have fallen may remember the fall, even when they forget the height. Some such tantalising blank or break in memory is at the back of all pagan sentiment. There is such a thing as the momentary power to remember that we forget. And the most ignorant of humanity know by the very look of earth that they have forgotten heaven. But it remains true that even for these men there were moments, like the memories of childhood, when they heard themselves talking with a simpler language; there were moments when the Roman, like Virgil in the line already quoted, cut his way with a sword-stroke of song out of the tangle of the mythologies, the motley mob of gods and goddesses sank suddenly out of sight and the Sky-Father was alone in the sky.

This latter example is very relevant to the next step in the process. A white light as of a lost morning still lingers on the figure of Jupiter, of Pan or of the elder Apollo; and it may well be, as already noted, that each was once a divinity as solitary as Jehovah or Allah. They lost this lonely universality by a process it is here very necessary to note; a process of amalgamation very like what was afterwards called syncretism. The whole pagan world set itself to build a Pantheon. They admitted more and more gods, gods not only of the Greeks but of the barbarians; gods not only of Europe but of Asia and Africa. The more the merrier, though some of the Asian and African ones were not very merry. They admitted them to equal thrones with their own, sometimes they identified them with their own. They may have regarded it as an enrichment of their religious life; but it meant the final loss of all that we now call religion. It meant that ancient light of simplicity, that had a single source like the sun, finally fades away in a dazzle of conflicting Lights and colours. God is really sacrificed to the Gods; in a very literal sense of the flippant phrase, they have been too many for him.

Polytheism, therefore, was really a sort of pool; in the sense of the pagans having consented to the pooling of their pagan religions. And this point is very important in many controversies ancient and modern. It is regarded as a liberal and enlightened thing to say that the god of the stranger may be as good as our own; and doubtless the pagans thought themselves very liberal and enlightened when they agreed to add to the gods of the city or the hearth some wild and fantastic Dionysus coming down from the mountains or some shaggy and rustic Pan creeping out of the woods. But exactly what it lost by these larger ideas is the largest idea of all. It is the idea of the fatherhood that makes the whole world one. And the converse is also true. Doubtless those more antiquated men of antiquity who clung to their solitary statues and their single sacred names were regarded as superstitious savages benighted and left behind. But these superstitious savages were preserving something that is much more like the cosmic power as conceived by philosophy, or even as conceived by science. This paradox by which the rude reactionary was a sort of prophetic progressive has one consequence very much to the point. In a purely historical sense, and apart from any other controversies in the same connection, it throws a light, a single and a steady light, that shines from the beginning on a little and lonely people. In this paradox, as in some riddle of religion of which the answer was sealed up for centuries, lies the mission and the meaning of the Jews.

It is true in this sense, humanly speaking, that the world owes God to the Jews. It owes that truth to much that is blamed on the Jews, possibly to much that is blameable in the Jews. We have already noted the nomadic position of the Jews amid the other pastoral peoples upon the fringe of the Babylonian Empire, and something of that strange erratic course of theirs blazed across the dark territory of extreme antiquity, as they passed from the seat of Abraham and the shepherd princes into Egypt and doubled back into the Palestinian hills and held them against the Philistines from Crete and fell into captivity in Babylon; and yet again returned to their mountain city by the Zionist policy of the Persian conquerors; and so continued that amazing romance of restlessness of which we have not yet seen the end. But through all their wanderings, and especially through all their early wanderings, they did indeed carry the fate of the world in that wooden tabernacle, that held perhaps a featureless symbol and certainly an invisible god. We may say that one most essential feature was that it was featureless. Much as we may prefer that creative liberty which the Christian culture has declared and by which it has eclipsed even the arts of antiquity, we must not underrate the determining importance at the time of the Hebrew inhibition of images. It is a typical example of one of those limitations that did in fact preserve and perpetuate enlargement, like a wall built round a wide open space. The God who could not have a statue remained a spirit. Nor would his statue in any case have had the disarming dignity and grace of the Greek statues then or the Christian statues afterwards. He was living in a land of monsters. We shall have occasion to consider more fully what those monsters were, Moloch and Dagon and Tanit the terrible goddess. If the deity of Israel had ever had an image, he would have had a phallic image. By merely giving him a body they would have brought in all the worst elements of mythology; all the polygamy of polytheism; the vision of the harem in heaven. This point about the refusal of art is the first example of the limitations which are often adversely criticised, only because the critics themselves are limited. But an even stronger case can be found in the other criticism offered by the same critics. It is often said with a sneer that the God of Israel was only a God of battles, ‘a mere barbaric Lord of Hosts’ pitted in rivalry against other gods only as their envious foe. Well it is for the world that he was a God of Battles. Well it is for us that he was to all the rest only a rival and a foe. In the ordinary way, it would have been only too easy for them to have achieved the desolate disaster of conceiving him as a friend. It would have been only too easy for them to have seen him stretching out his hands in love and reconciliation, embracing Baal and kissing the painted face of Astarte, feasting in fellowship with the gods; the last god to sell his crown of stars for the Soma of the Indian pantheon or the nectar of Olympus or the mead of Valhalla. It would have been easy enough for his worshippers to follow the enlightened course of Syncretism and the pooling of all the pagan traditions. It is obvious indeed that his followers were always sliding down this easy slope; and it required the almost demoniac energy of certain inspired demagogues, who testified to the divine unity in words that are still like winds of inspiration and ruin. The more we really understand of the ancient conditions that contributed to the final culture of the Faith, the more we shall have a real and even a realistic reverence for the greatness of the Prophets of Israel. As it was, while the whole world melted into this mass of confused mythology, this Deity who is called tribal and narrow, precisely because he was what is called tribal and narrow, preserved the primary religion of all mankind. He was tribal enough to be universal. He was as narrow as the universe. In a word, there was a popular pagan god called Jupiter-Ammon. There was never a god called Jehovah-Ammon. There was never a god called Jehovah-Jupiter. If there had been, there would certainly have been another called Jehovah-Moloch. Long before the liberal and enlightened amalgamators had got so far afield as Jupiter, the image of the Lord of Hosts would have been deformed out of all suggestion of a monotheistic maker and ruler and would have become an idol far worse than any savage fetish; for he might have been as civilised as the gods of Tyre and Carthage. What that civilisation meant we shall consider more fully in the chapter that follows; when we note how the power of demons nearly destroyed Europe and even the heathen health of the world. But the world's destiny would have been distorted still more fatally if monotheism had failed in the Mosaic tradition. I hope in a subsequent section to show that I am not without sympathy with all that health in the heathen world that made its fairy-tales and its fanciful romances of religion. But I hope also to show that these were bound to fail in the long run; and the world would have been lost if it had been unable to return to that great original simplicity of a single authority in all things. That we do preserve something of that primary simplicity that poets and philosophers can still indeed in some sense say an Universal Prayer, that we live in a large and serene world under a sky that stretches paternally over all the peoples of the earth, that philosophy and philanthropy are truisms in a religion of reasonable men, all that we do most truly owe, under heaven, to a secretive and restless nomadic people; who bestowed on men the supreme and serene blessing of a jealous God.

The unique possession was not available or accessible to the pagan world, because it was also the possession of a jealous people. The Jews were unpopular, partly because of this narrowness already noted in the Roman world, partly perhaps because they had already fallen into that habit of merely handling things for exchange instead of working to make them with their hands. It was partly also because polytheism had become a sort of jungle in which solitary monotheism could be lost; but it is strange to realise how completely it really was lost. Apart from more disputed matters, there were things in the tradition of Israel which belong to all humanity now, and might have belonged to all humanity then. They had one of the colossal corner-stones of the world: the Book of Job. It obviously stands over against the *Iliad* and the Greek tragedies; and even more than they it was an early meeting and parting of poetry and philosophy in the mornings of the world. It is a solemn and uplifting sight to see those two eternal fools, the optimist and the pessimist, destroyed in the dawn of time. And the philosophy really perfects the pagan tragic irony, precisely because it is more monotheistic and therefore more mystical. Indeed the Book of Job avowedly only answers mystery with mystery. Job is comforted with riddles; but he is comforted. Herein is indeed a type, in the sense of a prophecy, of things speaking with authority. For when he who doubts can only say ‘I do not understand,’ it is true that he who knows can only reply or repeat ‘You do not understand.’ And under that rebuke there is always a sudden hope in the heart; and the sense of something that would be worth understanding. But this mighty monotheistic poem remained unremarked by the whole world of antiquity, which was thronged with polytheistic poetry. It is a sign of the way in which the Jews stood apart and kept their tradition unshaken and unshared, that they should have kept a thing like the Book of Job out of the whole intellectual world of antiquity. It is as if the Egyptians had modestly concealed the Great Pyramid. But there were other reasons for a cross-purpose and an impasse, characteristic of the whole of the end of paganism. After all, the tradition of Israel had only got hold of one-half of the truth, even if we use the popular paradox and call it the bigger half. I shall try to sketch in the next chapter that love of locality and personality that ran through mythology; here it need only be said that there was a truth in it that could not be let out though it were a lighter and less essential truth.

The sorrow of Job had to be joined with the sorrow of Hector; and while the former was the sorrow of the universe the latter was the sorrow of the city; for Hector could only stand pointing to heaven as the pillar of holy Troy. When God speaks out of the whirlwind he may well speak in the wilderness. But the monotheism of the nomad was not enough for all that varied civilisation of fields and fences and walled cities and temples and towns; and the turn of these things also was to come, when the two could be combined in a more definite and domestic religion. Here and there in all that pagan crowd could be found a philosopher whose thought ran of pure theism; but he never had, or supposed that he had, the power to change the customs of the whole populace. Nor is it easy even in such philosophies to find a true definition of this deep business of the relation of polytheism and theism. Perhaps the nearest we can come to striking the note, or giving the thing a name, is in something far away from all that civilisation and more remote from Rome than the isolation of Israel. It is in a saying I once heard from some Hindu tradition; that gods as well as men are only the dreams of Brahma; and will perish when Brahma wakes. There is indeed in such an image something of the soul of Asia which is less sane than the soul of Christendom. We should call it despair, even if they would call it peace. This note of nihilism can be considered later in a fuller comparison between Asia and Europe. It is enough to say here that there is more of disillusion in that idea of a divine awakening than is implied for us in the passage from mythology to religion. But the symbol is very subtle and exact in one respect; that it does suggest the disproportion and even disruption between the very ideas of mythology and religion, the chasm between the two categories. It is really the collapse of comparative religion that there is no comparison between God and the gods. There is no more comparison than there is between a man and the men who walked about in his dreams. Under the next heading some attempt will be made to indicate the twilight of that dream in which the gods walk about like men. But if anyone fancies the contrast of monotheism and polytheism is only a matter of some people having one god and others a few more, for him it will be far nearer the truth to plunge into the elephantine extravagance of Brahmin cosmology; that he may feel a shudder going through the veil of things, the many-handed creators, and the throned and haloed animals and all the network of entangled stars and rulers of the night, as the eyes of Brahma open like dawn upon the death of all.

V. Man and Mythologies

What are here called the Gods might almost alternatively be called the day-dreams. To compare them to dreams is not to deny that dreams can come true. To compare them to travellers’ tales is not to deny that they may be true tales, or at least truthful tales. In truth they are the sort of tales the traveller tells to himself. All this mythological business belongs to the poetical part of men. It seems strangely forgotten nowadays that a myth is a work of imagination and therefore a work of art. It needs a poet to make it. It needs a poet to criticise it. There are more poets than non-poets in the world, as is proved by the popular origin of such legends. But for some reason I have never heard explained, it is only the minority of unpoetical people who are allowed to write critical studies of these popular poems. We do not submit a sonnet to a mathematician or a song to a calculating boy; but we do indulge the equally fantastic idea that folk-lore can be treated as a science. Unless these things are appreciated artistically they are not appreciated at all. When the professor is told by the Polynesian that once there was nothing except a great feathered serpent, unless the learned man feels a thrill and a half temptation to wish it were true, he is no judge of such things at all. When he is assured, on the best Red Indian authority, that a primitive hero carried the sun and moon and stars in a box, unless he clasps his hands and almost kicks his legs as a child would at such a charming fancy, he knows nothing about the matter. This test is not nonsensical; primitive children and barbaric children do laugh and kick like other children; and we must have a certain simplicity to repicture the childhood of the world. When Hiawatha was told by his nurse that a warrior threw his grandmother up to the moon, he laughed like any English child told by his nurse that a cow jumped over the moon. The child sees the joke as well as most men, and better than some scientific men. But the ultimate test even of the fantastic is the appropriateness of the inappropriate. And the test must appear merely arbitrary because it is merely artistic. If any student tells me that the infant Hiawatha only laughed out of respect for tribal custom of sacrificing the aged to economical housekeeping, I say he did not. If any scholar tells me that the cow jumped over the moon only because a heifer was sacrificed to Diana, I answer that it did not. It happened because it is obviously the right thing for a cow to jump over the moon.

Mythology is a lost art, one of the few arts that really are lost; but it is an art. The horned moon and the horned mooncalf make a harmonious and almost a quiet pattern. And throwing your grandmother into the sky is not good behaviour; but it is perfectly good taste.

Thus scientists seldom understand, as artists understand, that one branch of the beautiful is the ugly. They seldom allow for the legitimate liberty of the grotesque. And they will dismiss a savage myth as merely coarse and clumsy and an evidence of degradation, because it has not all the beauty of the herald Mercury new lighted on a heaven-kissing hill; when it really has the beauty of the Mock Turtle or the Mad Hatter. It is the supreme proof of a man being prosaic that he always insists on poetry being poetical. Sometimes the humour is in the very subject as well as the style of the fable. The Australian aborigines, regarded as the rudest of savages, have a story about a giant frog who had swallowed the sea and all the waters of the world; and who was only forced to spill them by being made to laugh. All the animals with all their antics passed before him and, like Queen Victoria, he was not amused. He collapsed at last before an eel who stood delicately balanced on the tip of its tail, doubtless with a rather desperate dignity. Any amount of fine fantastic literature might be made out of that fable. There is philosophy in that vision of the dry world before the beatific Deluge of laughter. There is imagination in the mountainous monster erupting like an aqueous volcano; there is plenty of fun in the thought of his goggling visage as the pelican or the penguin passed by. Anyhow the frog laughed; but the folk-lore student remains grave.

Moreover, even where the fables are inferior as art, they cannot be properly judged by science; still less properly judged as science. Some myths are very crude and queer like the early drawings of children; but the child is trying to draw. It is none the less an error to treat his drawing as if it were a diagram, or intended to be a diagram. The student cannot make a scientific statement about the savage, because the savage is not making a scientific statement about the world. He is saying something quite different; what might be called the gossip of the gods. We may say, if we like, that it is believed before there is time to examine it. It would be truer to say it is accepted before there is time to believe it.

I confess I doubt the whole theory of the dissemination of myths or (as it commonly is) of one myth. It is true that something in our nature and conditions makes many stories similar; but each of them may be original.

One man does not borrow the story from the other man, though he may tell it from the same motive as the other man. It would be easy to apply the whole argument about legend to literature; and turn it into a vulgar monomania of plagiarism. I would undertake to trace a notion like that of the Golden Bough through individual modern novels as easily as through communal and antiquated myths. I would undertake to find something like a bunch of flowers figuring again and again from the fatal bouquet of Becky Sharpe to the spray of roses sent by the Princess of Ruritania. But though these flowers may spring from the same soil, it is not the same faded flower that is flung from hand to hand. Those flowers are always fresh.

The true origin of all the myths has been discovered much too often. There are too many keys to mythology, as there are too many cryptograms in Shakespeare. Everything is phallic; everything is totemistic; everything is seed-time and harvest; everything is ghosts and grave-offerings; everything is the golden bough of sacrifice; everything is the sun and moon; everything is everything. Every folk-lore student who knew a little more than his own monomania, every man of wider reading and critical culture like Andrew Lang, has practically confessed that the bewilderment of these things left his brain spinning. Yet the whole trouble comes from a man trying to look at these stories from the outside, as if they were scientific objects. He has only to look at them from the inside, and ask himself how he would begin a story. A story may start with anything and go anywhere. It may start with a bird without the bird being a totem; it may start with the sun without being a solar myth. It is said there are only ten plots in the world; and there will certainly be common and recurrent elements. Set ten thousand children talking at once, and telling tarradiddles about what they did in the wood, and it will not be hard to find parallels suggesting sun-worship or animal worship. Some of the stories may be pretty and some silly and some perhaps dirty; but they can only be judged as stories. In the modern dialect, they can only be judged aesthetically. It is strange that aesthetics, or mere feeling, which is now allowed to usurp where it has no rights at all, to wreck reason with pragmatism and morals with anarchy, is apparently not allowed to give a purely aesthetic judgement on what is obviously a purely aesthetic question. We may be fanciful about everything except fairy-tales.

Now the first fact is that the most simple people have the most subtle ideas. Everybody ought to know that, for everybody has been a child. Ignorant as a child is, he knows more than he can say and feels not only atmospheres but fine shades. And in this matter there are several fine shades. Nobody understands it who has not had what can only be called the ache of the artist to find some sense and some story in the beautiful things he sees; his hunger for secrets and his anger at any tower or tree escaping with its tale untold. He feels that nothing is perfect unless it is personal. Without that the blind unconscious beauty of the world stands in its garden like a headless statue. One need only be a very minor poet to have wrestled with the tower or the tree until it spoke like a titan or a dryad. It is often said that pagan mythology was a personification of the powers of nature. The phrase is true in a sense, but it is very unsatisfactory; because it implies that the forces are abstractions and the personification is artificial. Myths are not allegories. Natural powers are not in this case abstractions. It is not as if there were a God of Gravitation. There may be a genius of the waterfall; but not of mere falling, even less than of mere water. The impersonation is not of something impersonal. The point is that the personality perfects the water with significance. Father Christmas is not an allegory of snow and holly; he is not merely the stuff called snow afterwards artificially given a human form, like a snow man. He is something that gives a new meaning to the white world and the evergreens, so that snow itself seems to be warm rather than cold. The test therefore is purely imaginative. But imaginative does not mean imaginary. It does not follow that it is all what the moderns call subjective, when they mean false. Every true artist does feel, consciously or unconsciously, that he is touching transcendental truths; that his images are shadows of things seen through the veil. In other words, the natural mystic does know that there is something there; something behind the clouds or within the trees; but he believes that the pursuit of beauty is the way to find it; that imagination is a sort of incantation that can call it up.

Now we do not comprehend this process in ourselves, far less in our most remote fellow-creatures And the danger of these things being classified is that they may seem to be comprehended. A really fine work of folklore, like The Golden Bough, will leave too many readers with the idea, for instance, that this or that story of a giant’s or wizard’s heart in a casket or a cave only ‘means’ some stupid and static superstition called ‘the external soul.’ But we do not know what these things mean, simply because we do not know what we ourselves mean when we are moved by them. Suppose somebody in a story says ‘Pluck this flower and a princess will die in a castle beyond the sea,’ we do not know why something stirs in the subconsciousness, or why what is impossible seems almost inevitable. Suppose we read ‘And in the hour when the king extinguished the candle his ships were wrecked far away on the coast of Hebrides.’ We do not know why the imagination has accepted that image before the reason can reject it; or why such correspondences seem really to correspond to something in the soul. Very deep things in our nature, some dim sense of the dependence of great things upon small, some dark suggestion that the things nearest to us stretch far beyond our power, some sacramental feeling of the magic in material substances, and many more emotions past fading out, are in an idea like that of the external soul. The power even in the myths of savages is like the power in the metaphors of poets. The soul of such a metaphor is often very emphatically an external soul. The best critics have remarked that in the best poets the simile is often a picture that seems quite separate from the text. It is as irrelevant as the remote castle to the flower or the Hebridean coast to the candle. Shelley compares the skylark to a young woman on a turret, to a rose embedded in thick foliage, to a series of things that seem to be about as unlike a skylark in the sky as anything we can imagine. I suppose the most potent piece of pure magic in English literature is the much-quoted passage in Keats’s *Nightingale* about the casements opening on the perilous foam. And nobody notices that the image seems to come from nowhere; that it appears abruptly after some almost equally irrelevant remarks about Ruth; and that it has nothing in the world to do with the subject of the poem. If there is one place in the world where nobody could reasonably expect to find a nightingale, it is on a window-sill at the seaside. But it is only in the same sense that nobody would expect to find a giant’s heart in a casket under the sea. Now, it would be very dangerous to classify the metaphors of the poets. When Shelley says that the cloud will rise ‘like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,’ it would be quite possible to call the first a case of the coarse primitive birth-myth and the second a survival of the ghost-worship which became ancestor-worship. But it is the wrong way of dealing with a cloud; and is liable to leave the learned in the condition of Polonius, only too ready to think it like a weasel, or very like a whale.

Two facts follow from this psychology of day-dreams, which must be kept in mind throughout their development in mythologies and even religions. First, these imaginative impressions are often strictly local. So far from being abstractions turned into allegories, they are often images almost concentrated into idols. The poet feels the mystery of a particular forest; not of the science of afforestation or the department of woods and forests. He worships the peak of a particular mountain, not the abstract idea of altitude. So we find the god is not merely water but often one special river; he may be the sea because the sea is single like a stream; the river that runs round the world. Ultimately doubtless many deities are enlarged into elements; but they are something more than omnipresent. Apollo does not merely dwell wherever the sun shines; his home is on the rock of Delphi. Diana is great enough to be in three places at once, earth and heaven and hell, but greater is Diana of the Ephesians. This localised feeling has its lowest form in the mere fetish or talisman, such as millionaires put on their motor-cars. But it can also harden into something like a high and serious religion, where it is connected with high and serious duties; into the gods of the city or even the gods of the hearth.

The second consequence is this; that in these pagan cults there is every shade of sincerity — and insincerity. In what sense exactly did an Athenian really think he had to sacrifice to Pallas Athena? What scholar is really certain of the answer? In what sense did Dr. Johnson really think that he had to touch all the posts in the street or that he had to collect orange-peel? In what sense does a child really think that he ought to step on every alternate paving-stone? Two things are at least fairly clear. First, in simpler and less self-conscious times these forms could become more solid without really becoming more serious. Day-dreams could be acted in broad daylight, with more liberty of artistic expression; but still perhaps with something of the light step of the somnambulist. Wrap Dr. Johnson in an antique mantle, crown him (by his kind permission) with a garland, and he will move in state under those ancient skies of morning; touching a series of sacred posts carved with the heads of the strange terminal gods, that stand at the limits of the land and of the life of man. Make the child free of the marbles and mosaics of some classic temples to play on a whole floor inlaid with squares of black and white; and he will willingly make this fulfilment of his idle and drifting daydream the clear field for a grave and graceful dance. But the posts and the paving-stones are little more and little less real than they are under modern limits. They are not really much more serious for being taken seriously. They have the sort of sincerity that they always had; the sincerity of art as a symbol that expresses very real spiritualities under the surface of life. But they are only sincere in the same sense as art; not sincere in the same sense as morality. The eccentric's collection of orange-peel may turn to oranges in a Mediterranean festival or to golden apples in a Mediterranean myth. But they are never on the same plane with the difference between giving the orange to a blind beggar and carefully placing the orange-peel so that the beggar may fall and break his leg. Between these two things there is a difference of kind and not of degree. The child does not think it wrong to step on the paving-stone as he thinks it wrong to step on the dog's tail. And it is very certain that whatever jest or sentiment or fancy first set Johnson touching the wooden posts, he never touched wood with any of the feeling with which he stretched out his hands to the timber of that terrible tree, which was the death of God and the life of man.

As already noted, this does not mean that there was no reality or even no religious sentiment in such a mood. As a matter of fact the Catholic Church has taken over with uproarious success the whole of this popular business of giving people local legends and lighter ceremonial movements. In so far as all this sort of paganism was innocent and in touch with nature, there is no reason why it should not be patronised by patron saints as much as by pagan gods. And in any case there are degrees of seriousness in the most natural make-believe. There is all the difference between fancying there are fairies in the wood, which often only means fancying a certain wood as fit for fairies, and really frightening ourselves until we walk a mile rather than pass a house we have told ourselves is haunted. Behind all these things is the fact that beauty and terror are very real things and related to a real spiritual world; and to touch them at all, even in doubt or fancy, is to stir the deep things of the soul. We all understand that and the pagans understood it. The point is that paganism did not really stir the soul except with these doubts and fancies, with the consequence that we to-day can have little beyond doubts and fancies about paganism. All the best critics agree that all the greatest poets, in pagan Hellas for example, had an attitude towards their gods which is quite queer and puzzling to men in the Christian era. There seems to be an admitted conflict between the god and the man; but everybody seems to be doubtful about which is the hero and which is the villain. This doubt does not merely apply to a doubter like Euripides in the *Bacchae*; it applies to a moderate conservative like Sophocles in the *Antigone*; or even to a regular Tory and reactionary like Aristophanes in the *Frogs*. Sometimes it would seem that the Greeks believed above all things in reverence, only they had nobody to revere. But the point of the puzzle is this, that all this vagueness and variation arise from the fact that the whole thing began in fancy and in dreaming; and that there are no rules of architecture for a castle in the clouds.

This is the mighty and branching tree called mythology which ramifies round the whole world, whose remote branches under separate skies bear like coloured birds the costly idols of Asia and the half-baked fetishes of Africa and the fairy kings and princesses of the folk-tales of the forest, and buried amid vines and olives the Lares of the Latins, and carried on the clouds of Olympus the buoyant supremacy of the gods of Greece. These are the myths: and he who has no sympathy with myths has no sympathy with men. But he who has most sympathy with myths will most fully realise that they are not and never were a religion, in the sense that Christianity or even Islam is a religion. They satisfy some of the needs satisfied by a religion; and notably the need for doing certain things at certain dates; the need of the twin ideas of festivity and formality. But though they provide a man with a calendar they do not provide him with a creed. A man did not stand up and say ‘I believe in Jupiter and Juno and Neptune,’ etc., as he stands up and says ‘I believe in God the Father Almighty,’ and the rest of the Apostles Creed. Many believed in some and not in others, or more in some and less in others, or only in a very vague poetical sense in any. There was no moment when they were all collected into an orthodox order which men would fight and be tortured to keep intact. Still less did anybody ever say in that fashion: ‘I believe in Odin and Thor and Freya,’ for outside Olympus even the Olympian order grows cloudy and chaotic. It seems clear to me that Thor was not a god at all but a hero. Nothing resembling a religion would picture anybody resembling a god as groping like a pigmy in a great cavern, that turned out to be the glove of a giant. That is the glorious ignorance called adventure Thor may have been a great adventurer; but to call him a god is like trying to compare Jehovah with Jack and the Beanstalk. Odin seems to have been a real barbarian chief, possibly of the Dark Ages after Christianity. Polytheism fades away at its fringes into fairy-tales or barbaric memories; it is not a thing like monotheism as held by serious monotheists. Again it does satisfy the need to cry out on some uplifted name or some noble memory in moments that are themselves noble and uplifted; such as the birth of a child or the saving of a city. But the name was so used by many to whom it was only a name. Finally it did satisfy, or rather it partially satisfied, a thing very deep in humanity indeed;

the idea of surrendering something as the portion of the unknown powers; of pouring of wine upon the ground, of throwing a ring into the sea; in a word, of sacrifice. It is the wise and worthy idea of not taking our advantage to the full; of putting something in the other balance to ballast our dubious pride, of paying tithes to nature for our land. This deep truth of the danger of insolence, or being too big for our boots, runs through all the great Greek tragedies and makes them great. But it runs side by side with an almost cryptic agnosticism about the real nature of the gods to be propitiated. Where that gesture of surrender is most magnificent, as among the great Greeks, there is really much more idea that the man will be the better for losing the ox than that the god will be the better for getting it. It is said that in its grosser forms there are often actions grotesquely suggestive of the god really eating the sacrifice. But this fact is falsified by the error that I put first in this note on mythology. It is misunderstanding the psychology of day-dreams. A child pretending there is a goblin in a hollow tree will do a crude and material thing, like leaving a piece of cake for him. A poet might do a more dignified and elegant thing, like bringing to the god fruits as well as flowers. But the degree of seriousness in both acts may be the same or it may vary in almost any degree. The crude fancy is no more a creed than the ideal fancy is a creed. Certainly the pagan does not disbelieve like an atheist, any more than he believes like a Christian. He feels the presence of powers about which he guesses and invents. St. Paul said that the Greeks had one altar to an unknown god. But in truth all their gods were unknown gods. And the real break in history did come when St. Paul declared to them whom they had ignorantly worshipped.

The substance of all such paganism may be summarised thus. It is an attempt to reach the divine reality through the imagination alone; in its own field reason does not restrain it at all. It is vital to view of all history that reason is something separate from religion even in the most rational of these civilisations. It is only as an afterthought, when such cults are decadent or on the defensive, that a few Neo-Platonists or a few Brahmins are found trying to rationalise them, and even then only by trying to allegorise them. But in reality the rivers of mythology and philosophy run parallel and do not mingle till they meet in the sea of Christendom. Simple secularists still talk as if the Church had introduced a sort of schism between reason and religion. The truth is that the Church was actually the first thing that ever tried to combine reason and religion. There had never before been any such union of the priests and the philosophers. Mythology, then, sought god through the imagination; or sought truth by means of beauty, in the sense in which beauty includes much of the most grotesque ugliness. But the imagination has its own laws and therefore its own triumphs, which neither logicians nor men of science can understand. It remained true to that imaginative instinct through a thousand extravagances, through every crude cosmic pantomime of a pig eating the moon or the world being cut out of a cow, through all the dizzy convolutions and mystic malformations of Asiatic art, through all the stark and staring rigidity of Egyptian and Assyrian portraiture, through every kind of cracked mirror of mad art that seemed to deform the world and displace the sky, it remained true to something about which there can be no argument; something that makes it possible for some artist of some school to stand suddenly still before that particular deformity and say, ‘My dream has come true.’ Therefore do we all in fact feel that pagan or primitive myths are infinitely suggestive, so long as we are wise enough not to inquire what they suggest. Therefore we all feel what is meant by Prometheus stealing fire from heaven, until some prig of a pessimist or progressive person explains what it means. Therefore we all know the meaning of Jack and the Beanstalk, until we are told. In this sense it is true that it is the ignorant who accept myths, but only because it is the ignorant who appreciate poems. Imagination has its own laws and triumphs; and a tremendous power began to clothe its images, whether images in the mind or in the mud, whether in the bamboo of the South Sea Islands or the marble of the mountains of Hellas. But there was always a trouble in the triumph, which in these pages I have tried to analyse in vain; but perhaps I might in conclusion state it thus.

The crux and crisis is that man found it natural to worship; even natural to worship unnatural things. The posture of the idol might be stiff and strange; but the gesture of the worshipper was generous and beautiful. He not only felt freer when he bent; he actually felt taller when he bowed. Henceforth anything that took away the gesture of worship would stunt and even maim him for ever. Henceforth being merely secular would be a servitude and an inhibition. If man cannot pray he is gagged; if he cannot kneel he is in irons. We therefore feel throughout the whole of paganism a curious double feeling of trust and distrust. When the man makes the gesture of salutation and of sacrifice, when he pours out the libation or lifts up the sword, he knows he is doing a worthy and a virile thing. He knows he is doing one of the things for which a man was made. His imaginative experiment is therefore justified. But precisely because it began with imagination, there is to the end something of mockery in it, and especially in the object of it. This mockery, in the more in tense moments of the intellect, becomes the almost intolerable irony of Greek tragedy. There seems a disproportion between the priest and the altar or between the altar and the god. The priest seems more solemn and almost more sacred than the god. All the order of the temple is solid and sane and satisfactory to certain parts of our nature; except the very centre of it, which seems strangely mutable and dubious, like a dancing flame. It is the first thought round which the whole has been built; and the first thought is still a fancy and almost a frivolity. In that strange place of meeting, the man seems more statuesque than the statue. He himself can stand for ever in the noble and natural attitude of the statue of the Praying Boy. But whatever name be written on the pedestal, whether Zeus or Ammon or Apollo, the god whom he worships is Proteus.

The Praying Boy may be said to express a need rather than to satisfy a need. It is by a normal and necessary action that his hands are lifted; but it is no less a parable that his hands are empty. About the nature of that need there will be more to say; but at this point it may be said that perhaps after all this true instinct, that player and sacrifice are a liberty and an enlargement, refers back to that vast and half-forgotten conception of universal fatherhood. which we have already seen everywhere fading from the morning sky. This is true; and yet it is not all the truth. There remains an indestructible instinct, in the poet as represented by the pagan, that he is not entirely wrong in localising his God. It is something in the soul of poetry if not of piety. And the greatest of poets, when he defined the poet, did not say that he gave us the universe or the absolute or the infinite; but, in his own larger language, a local habitation and a name. No poet is merely a pantheist; those who are counted most pantheistic, like Shelley, start with some local and particular image as the pagans did. After all, Shelley wrote of the skylark because it was a skylark. You could not issue an imperial or international translation of it for use in South America, in which it was changed to an ostrich. So the mythological imagination moves as it were in circles, hovering either to find a place or to return to it. In a word, mythology is a search; it is something that combines a recurrent desire with a recurrent doubt, mixing a most hungry sincerity in the idea of seeking for a place with a most dark and deep and mysterious levity about all the places found. So far could the lonely imagination lead, and we must turn later to the lonely reason. Nowhere along this road did the two ever travel together.

That is where all these things differed from religion or the reality in which these different dimensions met in a sort of solid. They differed from the reality not in what they looked like but in what they were. A picture may look like a landscape; it may look in every detail exactly like a landscape. The only detail in which it differs is that it is not a landscape. The difference is only that which divides a portrait of Queen Elizabeth from Queen Elizabeth. Only in this mythical and mystical world the portrait could exist before the person; and the portrait was therefore more vague and doubtful. But anybody who has felt and fed on the atmosphere of these myths will know what I mean, when I say that in one sense they did not really profess to be realities. The pagans had dreams about realities; and they would have been the first to admit, in their own words, that some came through the gate of ivory and others through the gate of horn. The dreams do indeed tend to be very vivid dreams when they touch on those tender or tragic things, which can really make a sleeper awaken with the sense that his heart has been broken in his sleep. They tend continually to hover over certain passionate themes of meeting and parting, of a life that ends in death or a death that is the beginning of life. Demeter wanders over a stricken world looking for a stolen child; Isis stretches out her arms over the earth in vain to gather the limbs of Osiris; and there is lamentation upon the hills for Atys and through the woods for Adonis. There mingles with all such mourning the mystical and profound sense that death can be a deliverer and an appeasement; that such death gives us a divine blood for a renovating river and that all good is found in gathering the broken body of the god. We may truly call these foreshadowing; so long as we remember that foreshadowings are shadows. And the metaphor of a shadow happens to hit very exactly the truth that is very vital here. For a shadow is a shape; a thing which reproduces shape but not texture. These things were something like the real thing; and to say that they were like is to say that they were different. Saying something is like a dog is another way of saying it is not a dog; and it is in this sense of identity that a myth is not a man. Nobody really thought of Isis as a human being, nobody really thought of Demeter as a historical character, nobody thought of Adonis as the founder of a Church. There was no idea that any one of them had changed the world; but rather that their recurrent death and life bore the sad and beautiful burden of the changelessness of the world. Not one of them was a revolution, save in the sense of the revolution of the sun and moon. Their whole meaning is missed if we do not see that they mean the shadows that we are and the shadows that we pursue. In certain sacrificial and communal aspects they naturally suggest what sort of a god might satisfy them; but they do not profess to be satisfied. Anyone who says they do is a bad judge of poetry.

Those who talk about Pagan Christs have less sympathy with Paganism than with Christianity. Those who call these cults 'religions,' and 'compare' them with the certitude and challenge of the Church have much less appreciation than we have of what made heathenism human, or of why classic literature is still something that hangs in the air like a song. It is no very human tenderness for the hungry to prove that hunger is the same as food. It is no very genial understanding of youth to argue that hope destroys the need for happiness. And it is utterly unreal to argue that these images in the mind, admired entirely in the abstract, were even in the same world with a living man and a living polity that were worshipped because they were concrete. We might as well say that a boy playing at robbers is the same as a man in his first day in the trenches; or that boy's first fancies about 'the not impossible she' are the same as the sacrament of marriage. They are fundamentally different exactly where they are superficially similar; we might almost say they are not the same even when they are the same. They are only different because one is real and the other is not. I do not mean merely that I myself believe that one is true and the other is not. I mean that one was never meant to be true in the same sense as the other. The sense in which it was meant to be true I have tried to suggest vaguely here, but it is undoubtedly very subtle and almost indescribable. It is so subtle that the students who profess to put it up as a rival to our religion miss the whole meaning and purport of their own study. We know better than the scholars, even those of us who are no scholars, what was in that hollow cry that went forth over the dead Adonis and why the Great Mother had a daughter wedded to death. We have entered more deeply than they into the Eleusinian Mysteries and have passed a higher grade, where gate within gate guarded the wisdom of Orpheus. We know the meaning of all the myths. We know the last secret revealed to the perfect initiate. And it is not the voice of a priest or a prophet saying 'These things are.' It is the voice of a dreamer and an idealist crying, 'Why cannot these things be?'

VI. The Demons and the Philosophers

I have dwelt at some little length on this imaginative sort of paganism, which has crowded the world with temples and is everywhere the parent of popular festivity. For the central history of civilisation, as I see it, consists of two further stages before the final stage of Christendom. The first was the struggle between this paganism and something less worthy than itself, and the second the process by which it grew in itself less worthy. In this very varied and often very vague polytheism there was a weakness of original sin. Pagan gods were depicted as tossing men like dice; and indeed they are loaded dice. About sex especially men are born unbalanced; we might almost say men are born mad. They scarcely reach sanity till they reach sanctity. This disproportion dragged down the winged fancies; and filled the end of paganism with a mere filth and litter of spawning gods. But the first point to realise is that this sort of paganism had an early collision with another sort of paganism; and that the issue of that essentially spiritual struggle really determined the history of the world. In order to understand it we must pass to a review of the other kind of paganism. It can be considered much more briefly; indeed there is a very real sense in which the less that is said about it the better. If we have called the first sort of mythology the day-dream, we might very well call the second sort of mythology the nightmare.

Superstition recurs in all ages, and especially in rationalistic ages. I remember defending the religious tradition against a whole luncheon table of distinguished agnostics; and before the end of our conversation every one of them had procured from his pocket, or exhibited on his watch-chain, some charm or talisman from which he admitted that he was never separated. I was the only person present who had neglected to provide himself with a fetish. Superstition recurs in a rationalist age because it rests on something which, if not identical with rationalism, is not unconnected with scepticism. It is at least very closely connected with agnosticism. It rests on something that is really a very human and intelligible sentiment, like the local invocations of the numen in popular paganism. But it is an agnostic sentiment, for it rests on two feelings: first that we do not really know the laws of the universe; and second that they may be very different to all we call reason. Such men realise the real truth that enormous things do often turn upon tiny things. When a whisper comes, from tradition or what not, that one particular tiny thing is the key or clue, something deep and not altogether senseless in human nature tells them that it is not unlikely. This feeling exists in both the forms of paganism here under consideration. But when we come to the second form of it, we find it transformed and filled with another and more terrible spirit.

In dealing with the lighter thing called mythology, I have said little about the most disputable aspect of it; the extent to which such invocation of the spirits of the sea or the elements can indeed call spirits from the vasty deep; or rather, (as the Shakespearean scoffer put it) whether the spirits come when they are called. I believe that I am right in thinking that this problem, practical as it sounds, did not play a dominant part in the poetical business of mythology. But I think it even more obvious, on the evidence, that things of that sort have sometimes appeared, even if they were only appearances. But when we come to the world of superstition, in a more subtle sense, there is a shade of difference; a deepening and a darkening shade. Doubtless most popular superstition is as frivolous as any popular mythology. Men do not believe as a dogma that God would throw a thunderbolt at them for walking under a ladder; more often they amuse themselves with the not very laborious exercise of walking round it. There is no more in it than what I have already adumbrated; a sort of airy agnosticism about the possibilities of so strange a world. But there is another sort of superstition that does definitely look for results; what might be called a realistic superstition. And with that the question of whether spirits do answer or do appear becomes much more serious. As I have said, it seems to me pretty certain that they sometimes do; but about that there is a distinction that has been the beginning of much evil in the world. Whether it be because the Fall has really brought men nearer to less desirable neighbours in the spiritual world, or whether it is merely that the mood of men eager or greedy finds it easier to imagine evil, I believe that the black magic of witchcraft has been much more practical and much less poetical than the white magic of mythology. I fancy the garden of the witch has been kept much more carefully than the woodland of the nymph. I fancy the evil field has even been more fruitful than the good. To start with, some impulse, perhaps a sort of desperate impulse, drove men to the darker powers when dealing with practical problems. There was a sort of secret and perverse feeling that the darker powers would really do things; that they had no nonsense about them. And indeed that popular phase exactly expresses the point. The gods of mere mythology had a great deal of nonsense about them. They had a great deal of good nonsense about them; in the happy and hilarious sense in which we talk of the nonsense of Jabberwocky or the Land where Jumblies live. But the man consulting a demon felt as many a man has felt in consulting a detective, especially a private detective; that it was dirty work but the work would really be done. A man did not exactly go into the wood to meet a nymph; he rather went with the hope of meeting a nymph. It was an adventure rather than an assignation. But the devil really kept his appointments and even in one sense kept his promises; even if a man sometimes wished afterwards, like Macbeth, that he had broken them.

In the accounts given us of many rude or savage races we gather that the cult of demons often came after the cult of deities, and even after the cult of one single and supreme deity. It may be suspected that in almost all such places the higher deity is felt to be too far off for appeal in certain petty matters, and men invoke the spirits because they are in a more literal sense familiar spirits. But with the idea of employing the demons who get things done, a new idea appears more worthy of the demons. It may indeed be truly described as the idea of being worthy of the demons; of making oneself fit for their fastidious and exacting society. Superstition of the lighter sort toys with the idea that some trifle, some small gesture such as throwing the salt, may touch the hidden spring that works the mysterious machinery of the world. And there is after all something in the idea of such an Open Sesame. But with the appeal to lower spirits comes the horrible notion that the gesture must not only be very small but very low; that it must be a monkey trick of an utterly ugly and unworthy sort. Sooner or later a man deliberately sets himself to do the most disgusting thing he can think of. It is felt that the extreme of evil will extort a sort of attention or answer from the evil powers under the surface of the world. This is the meaning of most of the cannibalism in the world. For most cannibalism is not a primitive or even a bestial habit. It is artificial and even artistic, a sort of art for art's sake. Men do not do it because they do not think it horrible; but, on the contrary, because they do think it horrible. They wish, in the most literal sense, to sup on horrors. That is why it is often found that rude races like the Australian natives are not cannibals; while much more refined and intelligent races, like the New Zealand Maories, occasionally are. They are refined and intelligent enough to indulge sometimes in a self-conscious diabolism. But if we could understand their minds, or even really understand their language, we should probably find that they were not acting as ignorant, that is as innocent cannibals. They are not doing it because they do not think it wrong, but precisely because they do think it wrong. They are acting like a Parisian decadent at a Black Mass. But the Black Mass has to hide underground from the presence of the real Mass. In other words, the demons have really been in hiding since the coming of Christ on earth. The cannibalism of the higher barbarians is in hiding from the civilisation of the white man. But before Christendom, and especially outside Europe, this was not always so. In the ancient world the demons often wandered abroad like dragons. They could be positively and publicly enthroned as gods. Their enormous images could be set up in public temples in the centre of populous cities. And all over the world the traces can be found of this striking and solid fact, so curiously overlooked by the moderns who speak of all such evil as primitive and early in evolution, that as a matter of fact some of the very highest civilisations of the world were the very places where the horns of Satan were exalted, not only to the stars but in the face of the sun. Take for example the Aztecs and American Indians of the ancient empires of Mexico and Peru. They were at least as elaborate as Egypt or China and only less lively than that central civilisation which is our own. But those who criticise that central civilisation (which is always their own civilisation) have a curious habit of not merely doing their legitimate duty in condemning its crimes, but of going out of their way to idealise its victims. They always assume that before the advent of Europe there was nothing anywhere but Eden. And Swinburne, in that spirited chorus of the nations in ‘Songs before Sunrise,’ used an expression about Spain in her South American conquests which always struck me as very strange. He said something about ‘her sins and sons through sinless lands dispersed,’ and how they ‘made accursed the name of man and thrice accursed the name of God.’ It may be reasonable enough that he should say the Spaniards were sinful, but why in the world should he say that the South Americans were sinless? Why should he have supposed that continent to be exclusively populated by archangels or saints perfect in heaven? It would be a strong thing to say of the most respectable neighbourhood; but when we come to think of what we really do know of that society the remark is rather funny. We know that the sinless priests of this sinless people worshipped sinless gods, who accepted as the nectar and ambrosia of their sunny paradise nothing but incessant human sacrifice accompanied by horrible torments. We may note also in the mythology of this American civilisation that element of reversal or violence against instinct of which Dante wrote; which runs backwards everywhere through the unnatural religion of the demons. It is notable not only in ethics but in aesthetics. A South American idol was made as ugly as possible, as a Greek image was made as beautiful as possible. They were seeking the secret of power, by working backwards against their own nature and the nature of things. There was always a sort of yearning to carve at last, in gold or granite or the dark red timber of the forests, a face at which the sky itself would break like a cracked mirror.

In any case it is clear enough that the painted and gilded civilisation of tropical America systematically indulged in human sacrifice. It is by no means clear, so far as I know, that the Eskimos ever indulged in human sacrifice. They were not civilised enough. They were too closely imprisoned by the white winter and the endless dark. Chill penury repressed their noble rage and froze the genial current of the soul. It was in brighter days and broader daylight that the noble rage is found unmistakably raging. It was in richer and more instructed lands that the genial current flowed on the altars, to be drunk by great gods wearing goggling and grinning masks and called on in terror or torment by long cacophonous names that sound like laughter in hell. A warmer climate and a more scientific cultivation were needed to bring forth these blooms; to draw up towards the sun the large leaves and flamboyant blossoms that gave their gold and crimson and purple to that garden, which Swinburne compares to the Hesperides. There was at least no doubt about the dragon.

I do not raise in this connection the special controversy about Spain and Mexico; but I may remark in passing that it resembles exactly the question that must in some sense be raised afterwards about Rome and Carthage. In both cases there has been a queer habit among the English of always siding against the Europeans, and representing the rival civilisation, in Swinburne’s phrase, as sinless; when its sins were obviously crying or rather screaming to heaven. For Carthage also was a high civilisation, indeed a much more highly civilised civilisation. And Carthage also founded that civilisation on a religion of fear, sending up everywhere the smoke of human sacrifice. Now it is very right to rebuke our own race or religion for falling short of our own standards and ideals. But it is absurd to pretend that they fell lower than the other races and religions that professed the very opposite standards and ideals. There is a very real sense in which the Christian is worse than the heathen, the Spaniard worse than the Red Indian, or even the Roman potentially worse than the Carthaginian. But there is only one sense in which he is worse; and that is not in being positively worse. The Christian is only worse because it is his business to be better.

This inverted imagination produces things of which it is better not to speak. Some of them indeed might almost be named without being known; for they are of that extreme evil which seems innocent to the innocent. They are too inhuman even to be indecent. But without dwelling much longer in these dark corners, it may be noted as not irrelevant here that certain anti-human antagonisms seem to recur in this tradition of black magic. There may be suspected as running through it everywhere, for instance, a mystical hatred of the idea of childhood. People would understand better the popular fury against the witches, if they remembered that the malice most commonly attributed to them was preventing the birth of children. The Hebrew prophets were perpetually protesting against the Hebrew race relapsing into an idolatry that involved such a war upon children; and it is probable enough that this abominable apostasy from the God of Israel has occasionally appeared in Israel since, in the form of what is called ritual murder; not of course by any representative of the religion of Judaism, but by individual and irresponsible diabolists who did happen to be Jews. This sense that the forces of evil especially threaten childhood is found again in the enormous popularity of the Child Martyr of the Middle Ages. Chaucer did but give another version of a very national English legend, when he conceived the wickedest of all possible witches as the dark alien woman watching behind her high lattice and heading, like the babble of a brook down the stony street, the singing of little St. Hugh.

Anyhow the part of such speculations that concerns this story centered especially round that eastern end of the Mediterranean, where the nomads had turned gradually into traders and had begun to trade with the whole world. Indeed in the sense of trade and travel and colonial extension, it already had something like an empire of the whole world. Its purple dye, the emblem of its rich pomp and luxury, had steeped the wares which were sold far away amid the last crags of Cornwall and the sails that entered the silence of tropic seas amid all the mystery of Africa. It might be said truly to have painted the map purple. It was already a world-wide success, when the princes of Tyre would hardly have troubled to notice that one of their princesses had condescended to marry the chief of some tribe called Judah; when the merchants of its African outpost would only have curled their bearded and Semitic lips with a slight smile at the mention of a village called Rome. And indeed no two things could have seemed more distant from each other, not only in space but in Spirit, than the monotheism of the Palestinian tribe and the very virtues of the small Italian republic. There was but one thing between them; and the thing which divided them has united them. Very various and incompatible were the things that could be loved by the consuls of Rome and the prophets of Israel; but they were at one in what they hated. It is very easy in both cases to represent that hatred as something merely hateful. It is easy enough to make a merely harsh and inhuman figure either of Elijah raving above the slaughter of Carmel or Cato thundering against the amnesty of Africa. These men had their limitations and their local passions; but this criticism of them is unimaginative and therefore unreal. It leaves out something, something immense and intermediate, facing east and west and calling up this passion in its eastern and western enemies; and that something is the first subject of this chapter.

The civilisation that centered in Tyre and Sidon was above all things practical. It has left little in the way of art and nothing in the way of poetry. But it prided itself upon being very efficient; and it followed in its philosophy and religion that strange and sometimes secret train of thought which we have already noted in those who look for immediate effects. There is always in such a mentality an idea that there is a short cut to the secret of all success; something that would shock the world by this sort of shameless thoroughness. They believed, in the appropriate modern phrase, in people who delivered the goods. In their dealings with their god Moloch, they themselves were always careful to deliver the goods. It was an interesting transaction, upon which we shall have to touch more than once in the rest of the narrative; it is enough to say here that it involved the theory I have suggested, about a certain attitude towards children. This was what called up against it in simultaneous fury the servant of one God in Palestine and the guardians of all the household gods in Rome This is what challenged two things naturally so much divided by every sort of distance and disunion, whose union was to save the world.

I have called the fourth and final division of the spiritual elements into which I should divide heathen humanity by the name of The Philosophers. I confess that it covers in my mind much that would generally be classified otherwise; and that what are here called philosophies are very often called religions. I believe however that my own description will be found to be much the more realistic and not the less respectful. But we must first take philosophy in its purest and clearest form that we may trace its normal outline; and that is to be found in the world of the purest and clearest outlines, that culture of the Mediterranean of which we have been considering the mythologies and idolatries in the last two chapters.

Polytheism, or that aspect of paganism, was never to the pagan what Catholicism is to the Catholic. It was never a view of the universe satisfying all sides of life; a complete and complex truth with something to say about everything. It was only a satisfaction of one side of the soul of man, even if we call it the religious side; and I think it is truer to call it the imaginative side. But this it did satisfy; in the end it satisfied it to satiety. All that world was a tissue of interwoven tales and cults, and there ran in and out of it, as we have already seen, that black thread among its more blameless colours; the darker paganism that was really diabolism. But we all know that this did not mean that all pagan men thought of nothing but pagan gods. Precisely because mythology only satisfied one mood, they turned in other moods to something totally different. But it is very important to realise that it was totally different. It was too different to be inconsistent. It was so alien that it did not clash. While a mob of people were pouring on a public holiday to the feast of Adonis or the games in honour of Apollo, this or that man would prefer to stop at home and think out a little theory about the nature of things. Sometimes his hobby would even take the form of thinking about the nature of God; or even in that sense about the nature of the gods. But he very seldom thought of pitting his nature of the gods against the gods of nature.

It is necessary to insist on this abstraction in the first student of abstractions. He was not so much antagonistic as absent-minded. His hobby might be the universe; but at first the hobby was as private as if it had been numismatics or playing draughts. And even when his wisdom came to be a public possession, and almost a political situation, it was very seldom on the same plane as the popular and religious institutions. Aristotle, with his colossal common sense, was perhaps the greatest of all philosophers;

certainly the most practical of all philosophies But Aristotle would no more have set up the Absolute side by side with the Apollo of Delphi, as a similar or rival religion, than Archimedes would have thought of setting up the lever as a sort of idol or fetish to be substituted for the Palladium of the city. Or we might as well imagine Euclid building an altar to an isosceles triangle, or offering sacrifices to the square of the hypotenuse. The one man meditated on metaphysics as the other man did on mathematics; for the love of truth or for curiosity or for the fun of the thing. But that sort of fun never seems to have interfered very much with the other sort of fun; the fun of dancing or singing to celebrate some rascally romance about Zeus becoming a bull or a swan. It is perhaps the proof of a certain superficiality and even insincerity about the popular polytheism, that men could be philosophers and even sceptics without disturbing it. These thinkers could move the foundations of the world without altering even the outline of that coloured cloud that hung above it in the air.

For the thinkers did move the foundations of the world, even when a curious compromise seemed to prevent them from moving the foundations of the city. The two great philosophers of antiquity do indeed appear to us as defenders of sane and even of sacred ideas; their maxims often read like the answers to sceptical questions too completely answered to be always recorded. Aristotle annihilated a hundred anarchists and nature-worshipping cranks by the fundamental statement that man is a political animal. Plato in some sense anticipated the Catholic realism, as attacked by the heretical nominalism, by insisting on the equally fundamental fact that ideas are realities; that ideas exist just as men exist. Plato however seemed sometimes almost to fancy that ideas exist as men do not exist; or that the men need hardly be considered where they conflict with the ideas. He had something of the social sentiment that we call Fabian in his ideal of fitting the citizen to the city. Like an imaginary head to an ideal hat; and great and glorious as he remains, he has been the Father of all faddists. Aristotle anticipated more fully the sacramental sanity that was to combine the body and the soul of things; for he considered the nature of men as well as the nature of morals, and looked to the eyes as well as to the light. But though these great men were in that sense constructive and conservative, they belonged to a world where thought was free to the point of being fanciful. Many other great intellects did indeed follow them, some exalting an abstract vision of virtue, others following more rationalistically the necessity of the human pursuit of happiness. The former had the name of Stoics; and their name has passed into a proverb for what is indeed one of the main moral ideals of mankind: that of strengthening the mind itself until it is of a texture to resist calamity or even pain. But it is admitted that a great number of the philosophers degenerated into what we still call sophists. They became a sort of professional sceptics who went about asking uncomfortable questions, and were handsomely paid for making themselves a nuisance to normal people. It was perhaps an accidental resemblance to such questioning quacks that was responsible for the unpopularity of the great Socrates; whose death might seem to contradict the suggestion of the permanent truce between the philosophers and the gods. But Socrates did not die as a monotheist who denounced polytheism; certainly not as a prophet who denounced idols. It is clear to anyone reading between the lines that there was some notion, right or wrong, of a purely personal influence affecting morals and perhaps politics The general compromise remained, whether it was that the Greeks thought their myths a joke or that they thought their theories a joke. There was never any collision in which one really destroyed the other, and there was never any combination in which one was really reconciled with the other. They certainly did not work together; if anything the philosopher was a rival of the priest. But both seemed to have accepted a sort of separation of functions and remained parts of the same social system. Another important tradition descends from Pythagoras; who is significant because he stands nearest to the Oriental mystics who must be considered in their turn. He taught a sort of mysticism of mathematics, that number is the ultimate reality; but he also seems to have taught the transmigration of souls like the Brahmins; and to have left to his followers certain traditional tricks of vegetarianism and water-drinking very common among the eastern sages, especially those who figure in fashionable drawing-rooms, like those of the later Roman Empire. But in passing to eastern sages, and the somewhat different atmosphere of the east, we may approach a rather important truth by other path.

One of the great philosophers said that it would be well if philosophers were kings, or kings were philosophers. He spoke as of something too good to be true; but, as a matter of fact, it not unfrequently was true. A certain type, perhaps too little noticed in history, may really be called the royal philosopher. To begin with, apart from actual royalty, it did occasionally become possible for the sage, though he was not what we call a religious founder, to be something like a political founder. And the great example of this, one of the very greatest in the world, will with the very thought of it carry us thousands of miles across the vast spaces of Asia to that very wonderful and in some ways that very wise world of ideas and institutions, which we dismiss somewhat cheaply when we talk of China. Men have served many very strange gods; and trusted themselves loyally to many ideals and even idols. China is a society that has really chosen to believe in intellect. It has taken intellect seriously; and it may be that it stands alone in the world. From a very early age it faced the dilemma of the king and the philosopher by actually appointing a philosopher to advise the king. It made a public institution out of a private individual, who had nothing in the world to do but to be intellectual. It had and has, of course, many other things on the same pattern. It creates all ranks and privileges by public examination; it has nothing that we call an aristocracy; it is a democracy dominated by an intelligensia. But the point here is that it had philosophers to advise kings; and one of those philosophers must have been a great philosopher and a great statesman.

Confucius was not a religious founder or even a religious teacher; possibly not even a religious man. He was not an atheist; he was apparently what we call an agnostic. But the really vital point is that it is utterly irrelevant to talk about his religion at all. It is like talking of theology as the first thing in the story of how Rowland Hill established the postal system or Baden Powell organised the Boy Scouts. Confucius was not there to bring a message from heaven to humanity, but to organise China; and he must have organised it exceedingly well. It follows that he dealt much with morals; but he bound them up strictly with manners. The peculiarity of his scheme and of his country, in which it contrasts with its great pendant the system of Christendom, is that he insisted on perpetuating an external life with all its forms, that outward continuity might preserve internal peace. Anyone who knows how much habit has to do with health, of mind as well as body, will see the truth in his idea. But he will also see that the ancestor-worship and the reverence for the Sacred Emperor were habits and not creeds. It is unfair to the great Confucius to say he was a religious founder. It is even unfair to him to say he was not a religious founder. It is as unfair as going out of one's way to say that Jeremy Bentham was not a Christian martyr.

But there is a class of most interesting cases in which philosophers were kings, and not merely the friends of kings. The combination is not accidental. It has a great deal to do with this rather elusive question of the function of the philosopher. It contains in it some hint of why philosophy and mythology seldom came to an open rupture. It was not only because there was something a little frivolous about the mythology. It was also because there was something a little supercilious about the philosopher. He despised the myths, but he also despised the mob; and thought they suited each other. The pagan philosopher was seldom a man of the people, at any rate in spirit; he was seldom a democrat and often a bitter critic of democracy. He had about him an air of aristocratic and humane leisure; and his part was most easily played by men who happened to be in such a position. It was very easy and natural for a prince or a prominent person to play at being as philosophical as Hamlet or Theseus in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. And from very early ages we find ourselves in the presence of these princely intellectuals. In fact, we find one of them in the very first recorded ages of the world; sitting on the primeval throne that looked over ancient Egypt.

The most intense interest of the incident of Akenahten, commonly called the Heretic Pharaoh, lies in the fact that he was the one example, at any rate before Christian times, of one of these royal philosophers who set himself to fight popular mythology in the name of private philosophy. Most of them assumed the attitude of Marcus Aurelius, who is in many ways the model of this sort of monarch and sage. Marcus Aurelius has been blamed for tolerating the pagan amphitheatre or the Christian martyrdoms. But it was characteristic; for this sort of man really thought of popular religion just as he thought of popular circuses. Of him Professor Phillimore has profoundly said 'a great and good man — and he knew it.' The heretic Pharaoh had a philosophy more earnest and perhaps more humble. For there is a corollary to the conception of being too proud to fight. It is that the humble have to do most of the fighting. Anyhow, the Egyptian prince was simple enough to take his own philosophy seriously, and alone among such intellectual princes he affected a sort of coup d'etat; hurling down the high gods of Egypt with one imperial gesture and lifting up for all men, like a blazing mirror of monotheistic truth, the disc of the universal sun. He had other interesting ideas often to be found in such idealists. In the sense in which we speak of a Little Englander he was a Little Egypter. In art he was a realist because he was an idealist; for realism is more impossible than any other ideal. But after all there falls on him something of the shadow of

Marcus Aurelius, stalked by the shadow of Professor Phillimore. That is the matter with this noble sort of prince is that he has nowhere quite escaped being something of a prig. Priggishness is so pungent a smell that it clings amid the faded spices even to an Egyptian mummy. That was the matter with the heretic Pharaoh, as with a good many other heretics, was that he probably never paused to ask himself whether there was anything in the popular beliefs and tales of people less educated than himself. And, as already suggested, there was something in them. There was a real human hunger in all that element of feature and locality, that procession of deities like enormous pet animals, in that unwearied watching at certain haunted spots, in all the many wanderings of mythology. Nature may not have the name of Isis; Isis may not be really looking for Osiris. But it is true that Nature is really looking for something; Nature is always looking for the supernatural. Something much more definite was to satisfy that need; but a dignified monarch with a disc of the sun did not satisfy it. The royal experiment failed amid a roaring reaction of popular superstitions, in which the priests rose on the shoulders of the people and ascended the throne of the kings.

The next great example I shall take of the princely sage is Gautama, the great Lord Buddha. I know he is not generally classed merely with the philosophers; but I am more and more convinced from all information that reaches me, that this is the real interpretation of his immense importance. He was by far the greatest and the best of these intellectuals born in the purple. His reaction was perhaps the noblest and most sincere of all the resultant actions of that combination of thinkers and of thrones. For his reaction was renunciation. Marcus Aurelius was content to say, with a refined irony, that even in a palace life could be lived well. The fierier Egyptian king concluded that it could be lived even better after a palace revolution. But the great Gautama was the only one of them who proved he could really do without his palace. One fell back on toleration and the other on revolution. But after all there is something more absolute about abdication. Abdication is perhaps the one really absolute action of an absolute monarch. The Indian prince, reared in Oriental luxury and pomp, deliberately went out and lived the life of a beggar. That is magnificent, but it is not war; that is, it is not necessarily a Crusade in the Christian sense. It does not decide the question of whether the life of a beggar was the life of a saint or the life of a philosopher. It does not decide whether this great man is really to go into the tub of Diogenes or the cave of St. Jerome. Now those who seem to be nearest to the study of Buddha, and certainly those who write most clearly and intelligently about him, convince me for one that he was simply a philosopher who founded a successful school of philosophy, and was turned into a sort of divus or sacred being merely by the more mysterious and unscientific atmosphere of all such traditions in Asia. So that it is necessary to say at this point a word about that invisible yet vivid border-line that we cross in passing from the Mediterranean into the mystery of the East.

Perhaps there are no things out of which we get so little of the truth as the truisms; especially when they are really true. We are all in the habit of saying certain things about Asia, which are true enough but which hardly help us because we do not understand their truth; as that Asia is old or looks to the past or is not progressive. Now it is true that Christendom is more progressive, in a sense that has very little to do with the rather provincial notion of an endless fuss of political improvement. Christendom does believe, for Christianity does believe, that man can eventually get somewhere, here or hereafter, or in various ways according to various doctrines. The world’s desire can somehow be satisfied as desires are satisfied, whether by a new life or an old love or some form of positive possession and fulfilment. For the rest, we all know there is a rhythm and not a mere progress in things, that things rise and fall; only with us the rhythm is a fairly free and incalculable rhythm. For most of Asia the rhythm has hardened into a recurrence. It is no longer merely a rather topsy-turvy sort of world; it is a wheel. What has happened to all those highly intelligent and highly civilised peoples is that they have been caught up in a sort of cosmic rotation, of which the hollow hub is really nothing. In that sense the worst part of existence is that it may just as well go on like that forever. That is what we really mean when we say that Asia is old or unprogressive or looking backwards. That is why we see even her curved swords as arcs broken from that blinding wheel; why we see her serpentine ornament as returning everywhere, like a snake that is never slain. It has very little to do with the political varnish of progress; all Asiatics might have top-hats on their heads but if they had this spirit still in their hearts, they would only think the hats would vanish and come round again like the planets; not that running after a hat could lead them to heaven or even to home.

Now when the genius of Buddha arose to deal with the matter, this sort of cosmic sentiment was already common to almost everything in the east. There was indeed the jungle of an extraordinarily extravagant and almost asphyxiating mythology. Nevertheless it is possible to have more sympathy with this popular fruitfulness in folk-lore than with some of the higher pessimism that might have withered it. It must always be remembered, however, when all fair allowances are made, that a great deal of spontaneous eastern imagery really is idolatry; the local and literal worship of an idol. This is probably not true of the ancient Brahminical system, at least as seen by Brahmins. But that phrase alone will remind us of a reality of much greater moment. This great reality is the Caste System of ancient India. It may have had some of the practical advantages of the Guild System of Medieval Europe. But it contrasts not only with that Christian democracy, but with every extreme type of Christian aristocracy, in the fact that it does really conceive the social superiority as a spiritual superiority. This not only divides it fundamentally from the fraternity of Christendom, but leaves it standing like a mighty and terraced mountain of pride between the relatively egalitarian levels both of Islam and of China. But the fixity of this formation through thousands of years is another illustration of that spirit of repetition that has marked time from time immemorial. Now we may also presume the prevalence of another idea which we associate with the Buddhists as interpreted by the Theosophists. As a fact, some of the strictest Buddhists repudiate the idea and still more scornfully repudiate the Theosophists. But whether the idea is in Buddhism, or only in the birthplace of Buddhism, or only in a tradition or a travesty of Buddhism, it is an idea entirely proper to this principle of recurrence. I mean of course the idea of Reincarnation.

But Reincarnation is not really a mystical idea. It is not really a transcendental idea, or in that sense a religious idea. Mysticism conceives something transcending experience; religion seeks glimpses of a better good or a worse evil than experience can give. Reincarnation need only extend experiences in the sense of repeating them. It is no more transcendental for a man to remember what he did in Babylon before he was born than to remember what he did in Brixton before he had a knock on the head. His successive lives need not be any more than human lives, under whatever limitations burden human life. It has nothing to do with seeing God or even conjuring up the devil. In other words, reincarnation as such does not necessarily escape from the wheel of destiny, in some sense it is the wheel of destiny. And whether it was something that Buddha founded, or something that Buddha found, or something that Buddha entirely renounced when he found, it is certainly something having the general character of that Asiatic atmosphere in which he had to play his part. And the part he played was that of an intellectual philosopher, with a particular theory about the right intellectual attitude towards it.

I can understand that Buddhists might resent the view that Buddhism is merely a philosophy, if we understand by a philosophy merely an intellectual game such as Greek sophists played, tossing up worlds and catching them like balls. Perhaps a more exact statement would be that Buddha was a man who made a metaphysical discipline; which might even be called a psychological discipline. He proposed a way of escaping from all this recurrent sorrow; and that was simply by getting rid of the delusion that is called desire. It was emphatically not that we should get what we want better by restraining our impatience for part of it, or that we should get it in a better way or in a better world. It was emphatically that we should leave off wanting it. If once a man realised that there is really no reality, that everything, including his soul, is in dissolution at every instant, he would anticipate disappointment and be intangible to change, existing (in so far as he could be said to exist) in a sort of ecstasy of indifference. The Buddhists call this beatitude and we will not stop our story to argue the point; certainly to us it is indistinguishable from despair. I do not see, for instance, why the disappointment of desire should not apply as much to the most benevolent desires as to the most selfish ones. Indeed the Lord of Compassion seems to pity people for living rather than for dying. For the rest, an intelligent Buddhist wrote ‘the explanation of popular Chinese and Japanese Buddhism is that it is not Buddhism.’ That has doubtless ceased to be a mere philosophy, but only by becoming a mere mythology. One thing is certain; it has never become anything remotely resembling what we call a Church.

It will appear only a jest to say that all religious history has really been a pattern of noughts and crosses. But I do not by noughts mean nothings, but only things that are negative compared with the positive shape or pattern of the other. And though the symbol is of course only a coincidence, it is a coincidence that really does coincide. The mind of Asia can really be represented by a round 0, if not in the sense of a cypher at least of a circle.

The great Asiatic symbol of a serpent with its tail in its mouth is really a very perfect image of a certain idea of unity and recurrence that does indeed belong to the Eastern philosophies and religions. It really is a curve that in one sense includes everything, and in another sense comes to nothing. In that sense it does confess, or rather boast, that all argument is an argument in a circle. And though the figure is but a symbol, we can see how sound is the symbolic sense that produces it, the parallel symbol of the Wheel of Buddha generally called the Swastika The cross is a thing at right angles pointing boldly in opposite directions; but the Swastika is the same thing in the very act of returning to the recurrent curve. That crooked cross is in fact a cross turning into a wheel. Before we dismiss even these symbols as if they were arbitrary symbols, we must remember how intense was the imaginative instinct that produced them or selected them both in the east and the west. The cross has become something more than a historical memory; it does convey, almost as by a mathematical diagram, the truth about the real point at issue; the idea of a conflict stretching outwards into eternity. It is true, and even tautological, to say that the cross is the crux of the whole matter.

In other words the cross, in fact as well as figure, does really stand for the idea of breaking out of the circle that is everything and nothing. It does escape from the circular argument by which everything begins and ends in the mind. Since we are still dealing in symbols, it might be put in a parable in the form of that story about St. Francis, which says that the birds departing with his benediction could wing their way into the infinites of the four winds of heaven, their tracks making a vast cross upon the sky; for compared with the freedom of that flight of birds, the very shape of the Swastika is like a kitten chasing its tail. In a more popular allegory, we might say that when St. George thrust his spear into the monster’s jaws, he broke in upon the solitude of the self-devouring serpent and gave it something to bite besides its own tail. But while many fancies might be used as figures of the truth, the truth itself is abstract and absolute; though it is not very easy to sum up except by such figures. Christianity does appeal to a solid truth outside itself; to something which is in that sense external as well as eternal. It does declare that things are really there; or in other words that things are really things — In this Christianity is at one with common sense; but all religious history shows that this common sense perishes except where there is Christianity to preserve it.

It cannot otherwise exist, or at least endure, because mere thought does not remain sane. In a sense it becomes too simple to be sane. The temptation of the philosophers is simplicity rather than subtlety. They are always attracted by insane simplifications, as men poised above abysses are fascinated by death and nothingness and the empty air. It needed another kind of philosopher to stand poised upon the pinnacle of the Temple and keep his balance without casting himself down. One of these obvious, these too obvious explanations is that everything is a dream and a delusion and there is nothing outside the ego. Another is that all things recur; another, which is said to be Buddhist and is certainly Oriental, is the idea that what is the matter with us is our creation, in the sense of our coloured differentiation and personality, and that nothing will be well till we are again melted into one unity. By this theory, in short, the Creation was the Fall. It is important historically because it was stored up in the dark heart of Asia and went forth at various times in various forms over the dim borders of Europe. Here we can place the mysterious figure of Manes or Manichaeus, the mystic of inversion, whom we should call a pessimist, parent of many sects and heresies; here, in a higher place, the figure of Zoroaster. He has been popularly identified with another of these too simple explanations; the equality of evil and good, balanced and battling in every atom. He also is of the school of sages that may be called mystics; and from the same mysterious Persian garden came upon ponderous wings Mithras, the unknown god, to trouble the last twilight of Rome.

That circle or disc of the sun set up in the morning of the world by the remote Egyptian has been a mirror and a model for all the philosophers. They have made many things out of it, and sometimes gone mad about it, especially when as in these eastern sages the circle became a wheel going round and round in their heads. But the point about them is that they all think that existence can be represented by a diagram instead of a drawing; and the rude drawings of the childish myth-makers are a sort of crude and spirited protest against that view. They cannot believe that religion is really not a pattern but a picture. Still less can they believe that it is a picture of something that really exists outside our minds. Sometimes the philosophy paints the disc all black and calls himself a pessimist; sometimes he paints it all white and calls himself an optimist; sometimes he divides it exactly into halves of black and white and calls himself a dualist, like those Persian mystics to whom I wish there were space to do justice. None of them could understand a thing that began to draw the proportions just as if they were real proportions, disposed in the living fashion which the mathematical draughtsman would call disproportionate. Like the first artist in the cave, it revealed to incredulous eyes the suggestion of a new purpose in what looked like a wildly crooked pattern; he seemed only to be distorting his diagram, when he began for the first time in all the ages to trace the lines of a form — and of a Face.

VII. The War of the Gods and Demons

The materialist theory of history, that all politics and ethics are the expression of economics, is a very simple fallacy indeed. It consists simply of confusing the necessary conditions of life with the normal preoccupations of life, that are quite a different thing. It is like saying that because a man can only walk about on two legs, therefore he never walks about except to buy shoes and stockings. Man cannot live without the two props of food and drink, which support him like two legs; but to suggest that they have been the motives of all his movements in history is like saying that the goal of all his military marches or religious pilgrimages must have been the Golden Leg of Miss Kilmansegg or the ideal and perfect leg of Sir Willoughby Patterne. But it is such movements that make up the story of mankind and without them there would practically be no story at all. Cows may be purely economic, in the sense that we cannot see that they do much beyond grazing and seeking better grazing grounds; and that is why a history of cows in twelve volumes would not be very lively reading. Sheep and goats may be pure economists in their external action at least; but that is why the sheep has hardly been a hero of epic wars and empires thought worthy of detailed narration; and even the more active quadruped has not inspired a book for boys called Golden Deeds of Gallant Goats or any similar title. But so far from the movements that make up the story of man being economic, we may say that the story only begins where the motive of the cows and sheep leaves off. It will be hard to maintain that the Crusaders went from their homes into a howling wilderness because cows go from a wilderness to a more comfortable grazing-grounds. It will be hard to maintain that the Arctic explorers went north with the same material motive that made the swallows go south. And if you leave things like all the religious wars and all the merely adventurous explorations out of the human story, it will not only cease to be human at all but cease to be a story at all. The outline of history is made of these decisive curves and angles determined by the will of man. Economic history would not even be history.

But there is a deeper fallacy besides this obvious fact; that men need not live for food merely because they cannot live without food The truth is that the thing most present to the mind of man is not the economic machinery necessary to his existence; but rather that existence itself; the world which he sees when he wakes every morning and the nature of his general position in it. There is something that is nearer to him than livelihood, and that is life. For once that he remembers exactly what work produces his wages and exactly what wages produce his meals, he reflects ten times that it is a fine day or it is a queer world, or wonders whether life is worth living, or wonders whether marriage is a failure, or is pleased and puzzled with his own children, or remembers his own youth, or in any such fashion vaguely reviews the mysterious lot of man. This is true of the majority even of the wage-slaves of our morbid modern industrialism, which by its hideousness and in-humanity has really forced the economic issue to the front. It is immeasurably more true of the multitude of peasants or hunters or fishers who make up the real mass of mankind. Even those dry pedants who think that ethics depend on economics must admit that economics depend on existence. And any number of normal doubts and day-dreams are about existence; not about how we can live, but about why we do. And the proof of it is simple; as simple as suicide. Turn the universe upside down in the mind and you turn all the political economists upside down with it. Suppose that a man wishes to die, and the professor of political economy becomes rather a bore with his elaborate explanations of how he is to live. And all the departures and decisions that make our human past into a story have this character of diverting the direct course of pure economics. As the economist may be excused from calculating the future salary of a suicide, so he may be excused from providing an old age pension for a martyr. As he need not provide for the future of a martyr so he need not provide for the family of a monk. His plan is modified in lesser and varying degrees by a man being a soldier and dying for his own country, by a man being a peasant and specially loving his own land, by a man being more or less affected by any religion that forbids or allows him to do this or that. But all these come back not to an economic calculation about livelihood but to an elemental outlook upon life. They all come back to what a man fundamentally feels, when he looks forth from those strange windows which we call the eyes, upon that strange vision that we call the world.

No wise man will wish to bring more long words into the world. But it may be allowable to say that we need a new thing; which may be called psychological history. I mean the consideration of what things meant in the mind of a man, especially an ordinary man; as distinct from what is defined or deduced merely from official forms or political pronouncements. I have already touched on it in such a case as the totem or indeed any other popular myth. It is not enough to be told that a tom-cat was called a totem; especially when it was not called a totem. We want to know what it felt like. Was it like Whittington's cat or like a witch's cat? Was its real name Pashtl or Puss-in-Boots? That is the sort of thing we need touching the nature of political and social relations. We want to know the real sentiment that was the social bond of many common men, as sane and as selfish as we are. What did soldiers feel when they saw splendid in the sky that strange totem that we call the Golden Eagle of the Legions? What did vassals feel about those other totems the lions or the leopards upon the shield of their lord? So long as we neglect this subjective side of history, which may more simply be called the inside of history, there will always be a certain limitation on that science which can be better transcended by art. So long as the historian cannot do that, fiction will be truer than fact. There will be more reality in a novel; yes, even in a historical novel.

In nothing is this new history needed so much as in the psychology of war. Our history is stiff with official documents, public or private, which tell us nothing of the thing itself. At the worst we only have the official posters, which could not have been spontaneous precisely because they were official. At the best we have only the secret diplomacy, which could not have been popular precisely because it was secret. Upon one or other of these is based the historical judgement about the real reasons that sustained the struggle. Governments fight for colonies or commercial rights; governments fight about harbours or high tariffs; governments fight for a gold mine or a pearl fishery. It seems sufficient to answer that governments do not fight at all. Why do the fighters fight? What is the psychology that sustains the terrible and wonderful thing called a war? Nobody who knows anything of soldiers believes the silly notion of the dons, that millions of men can be ruled by force. If they were all to slack, it would be impossible to punish all the slackers And the least little touch of slacking would lose a whole campaign in half a day. What did men really feel about the policy? If it be said that they accepted the policy from the politician, what did they feel about the politician? If the vassals warred blindly for their prince what did those blind men see in their prince?

There is something we all know which can only be rendered, in an appropriate language, as realpolitik. As a matter of fact, it is an almost insanely unreal politik. It is always stubbornly and stupidly repeating that men fight for material ends, without reflecting for a moment that the material ends are hardly ever material to the men who fight. In any case no man will die for practical politics, just as no man will die for pay. Nero could not hire a hundred Christians to be eaten by lions at a shilling an hour; for men will not be martyred for money. But the vision called up by real politik, or realistic politics, is beyond example crazy and incredible. Does anybody in the world believe that d soldier says, ‘My leg is nearly dropping off, but I shall go on till it drops; for after all I shall enjoy all the advantages of my government obtaining a warm-water port in the Gulf of Finland.’ Can anybody suppose that a clerk turned conscript says, ‘If I am gassed I shall probably die in torments, but it is a comfort to reflect that should I ever decide to become a pearl-diver in the South Seas, that career is now open to me and my countrymen.’ Materialist history is the most madly incredible of all histories, or even of all romances. Whatever starts wars, the thing that sustains wars is something in the soul; that is something akin to religion. It is what men feel about life and about death. A man near to death is dealing directly with an absolute; it is nonsense to say he is concerned only with relative and remote complications that death in any case will end. If he is sustained by certain loyalties, they must be loyalties as simple as death. They are generally two ideas, which are only two sides of one idea. The first is the love of something said to be threatened, if it be only vaguely known as home; the second is dislike and defiance of some strange thing that threatens it. The first is far more philosophical than it sounds, though we need not discuss it here. A man does not want his national home destroyed or even changed, because he cannot even remember all the good things that go with it; just as he does not want his house burnt down, because he can hardly count all the things he would miss. Therefore he fights for what sounds like a hazy abstraction, but is really a house. But the negative side of it is quite as noble as well as quite as strong. Men fight hardest when they feel that the foe is at once an old enemy and an eternal stranger, that his atmosphere is alien and antagonistic, as the French feel about the Prussian or the Eastern Christians about the Turk. If we say it is a difference of religion, people will drift into dreary bickerings about sects and dogmas. We will pity them and say it is a difference about death and daylight; a difference that does really come like a dark shadow between our eyes and the day. Men can think of this difference even at the point of death; for it is a difference about the meaning of life.

Men are moved in these things by something far higher and holier than policy; by hatred. When men hung on in the darkest days of the Great War, suffering either in their bodies or in their souls for those they loved, they were long past caring about details of diplomatic objects as motives for their refusal to surrender. Of myself and those I knew best I can answer for the vision that made surrender impossible. It was the vision of the German Emperor’s face as he rode into Paris. This is not the sentiment which some of my idealistic friends describe as Love. I am quite content to call it hatred; the hatred of hell and all its works, and to agree that as they do not believe in hell they need not believe in hatred. But in the face of this prevalent prejudice, this long introduction has been unfortunately necessary, to ensure an understanding of what is meant by a religious war. There is a religious war when two worlds meet; that is when two visions of the world meet; or in more modern language when two moral atmospheres meet. What is the one man’s breath is the other man’s poison; and it is vain to talk of giving a pestilence a place in the sun. And this is what we must understand, even at the expense of digression, if we would see what really happened in the Mediterranean; when right athwart the rising of the Republic on the Tiber, a thing overtopping and disdaining it, dark with all the riddles of Asia and trailing all the tribes and dependencies of imperialism, came Carthage riding on the sea.

The ancient religion of Italy was on the whole that mixture which we have considered under the head of mythology; save that where the Greeks had a natural turn for the mythology, the Latins seem to have had a real turn for religion. Both multiplied gods, yet they sometimes seem to have multiplied them for almost opposite reasons. It would seem sometimes as if the Greek polytheism branched and blossomed upwards like the boughs of a tree, while the Italian polytheism ramified downward like the roots. Perhaps it would be truer to say that the former branches lifted themselves lightly, bearing flowers; while the latter hung down, being heavy with fruit. I mean that the Latins seem to multiply gods to bring them nearer to men, while the Greek gods rose and radiated outwards into the morning sky. What strikes us in the Italian cults is their local and especially their domestic character. We gain the impression of divinities swarming about the house like flies; of deities clustering and clinging like bats about the pillars or building like birds under the eaves. We have a vision of a god of roofs and a god of gate-posts, of a god of doors and even a god of drains. It has been suggested that all mythology was a sort of fairy-tale; but this was a particular sort of fairy-tale which may truly be called a fireside tale, or a nursery-tale; because it was a tale of the interior of the home; like those which make chairs and tables talk like elves. The old household gods of the Italian peasants seem to have been great, clumsy. wooden images, more featureless than the figure-head which Quilp battered with the poker. This religion of the home was very homely. Of course there were other less human elements in the tangle of Italian mythology. There were Greek deities superimposed on the Roman; there were here and there uglier things underneath, experiments in the cruel kind of paganism, like the Arician rite of the priest slaying the slayer. But these things were always potential in paganism; they are certainly not the peculiar character of Latin paganism. The peculiarity of that may be roughly covered by saying that if mythology personified the forces of nature, this mythology personified nature as transformed by the forces of man. It was the god of the corn and not of the grass, of the cattle and not the wild things of the forest; in short the cult was literally a culture; as when we speak of it as agriculture.

With this there was a paradox which is still for many the puzzle or riddle of the Latins. With religion running through every domestic detail like a climbing plant, there went what seems to many the very opposite spirit; the spirit of revolt. Imperialists and reactionaries often involve Rome as the very model of order and obedience; but Rome was the very reverse. The real history of ancient Rome is much more like the history of modern Paris. It might be called in modern language a city built out of barricades. It is said that the gate of Janus was never closed because there was an eternal war without; it is almost as true that there was an eternal revolution within. From the first Plebeian riots to the last Servile Wars, the state that imposed peace on the world was never really at peace. The rulers were themselves rebels.

There is a real relation between this religion in private and this revolution in public life. Stories none the less heroic for being hackneyed remind us that the Republic was founded on a tyrannicide that avenged an insult to a wife; that the Tribunes of the people were re-established after another which avenged an insult to a daughter. The truth is that only men to whom the family is sacred will ever have a standard or a status by which to criticise the state. They alone can appeal to something more holy than the gods of the city; the gods of the hearth. That is why men are mystified in seeing that the same nations that are thought rigid in domesticity are also thought restless in politics, for instance the Irish and the French. It is worth while to dwell on this domestic point because it is an exact example of what is meant here by the inside of history, like the inside of houses. Merely political histories of Rome may be right enough in saying that this or that was a cynical or cruel act of the Roman politicians; but the spirit that lifted Rome from beneath was the spirit of all the Romans; and it is not a cant to call it the ideal of Cincinnatus passing from the senate to the plough. Men of that sort had strengthened their village on every side, had extended its victories already over Italians and even over Greeks, when they found themselves confronted with a war that changed the world. I have called it here the war of the gods and demons.

There was established on the opposite coast of the inland sea a city that bore the name of the New Town. It was already much older, more powerful, and more prosperous than the Italian town; but there still remained about it an atmosphere that made the name not inappropriate. It had been called new because it was a colony like New York or New Zealand. It was an outpost or settlement of the energy and expansion of the great commercial cities of Tyre and Sidon. There was a note of the new countries and colonies about it, a confident and commercial outlook. It was fond of saying things that rang with a certain metallic assurance; as that nobody could wash his hands in the sea without the leave of the New Town. For it depended almost entirely on the greatness of its ships, as did the two great ports and markets from which its people came. It brought from Tyre and Sidon a prodigious talent for trade and considerable experience of travel. It brought other things as well.

In a previous chapter I have hinted at something of the psychology that lies behind a certain type of religion. There was a tendency in those hungry for practical results, apart from poetical results, to call upon spirits of terror and compulsion; to move Acheron in despair of bending the Gods. There is always a sort of dim idea that these darker powers will really do things, with no nonsense about it. In the interior psychology of the Punic peoples this strange sort of pessimistic practicality had grown to great proportions. In the New Town, which the Romans called Carthage, as in the parent cities of Phoenicia, the god who got things done bore the name of Moloch, who was perhaps identical with the other deity whom we know as Baal, the Lord. The Romans did not at first quite know what to call him or what to make of him; they had to go back to the grossest myth of Greek or Roman origins and compare him to Saturn devouring his children. But the worshippers of Moloch were not gross or primitive. They were members of a mature and polished civilisation, abounding in refinements and luxuries; they were probably far more civilised than the Romans. And Moloch was not a myth; or at any rate his meal was not a myth. These highly civilised people really met together to invoke the blessing of heaven on their empire by throwing hundreds of their infants into a large furnace. We can only realise the combination by imagining a number of Manchester merchants with chimney-pot hats and mutton-chop whiskers, going to church every Sunday at eleven o’clock to see a baby roasted alive.

The first stages of the political or commercial quarrel can be followed in far too much detail, precisely because it is merely political or commercial. The Punic Wars looked at one time as if they would never end; and it is not easy to say when they ever began. The Greeks and the Sicilians had already been fighting vaguely on the European side against the African city. Carthage had defeated Greece and conquered Sicily. Carthage had also planted herself firmly in Spain; and between Spain and Sicily the Latin city was contained and would have been crushed; if the Romans had been of the sort to be easily crushed. Yet the interest of the story really consists in the fact that Rome was crushed. If there had not been certain moral elements as well as the material elements, the story would have ended where Carthage certainly thought it had ended. It is common enough to blame Rome for not making peace. But it was a true popular instinct that there could be no peace with that sort of people. It is common enough to blame the Roman for his *Delenda est Carthago*; Carthage must be destroyed. It is commoner to forget that, to all appearance, Rome itself was destroyed. The sacred savour that hung round Rome for ever, it is too often forgotten, clung to her partly because she had risen suddenly from the dead. Carthage was an aristocracy, as are most of such mercantile states. The pressure of the rich on the poor was impersonal as well as irresistible. For such aristocracies never permit personal government, which is perhaps why this one was jealous of personal talent. But genius can turn up anywhere, even in a governing class. As if to make the world’s supreme test as terrible as possible, it was ordained that one of the great houses of Carthage should produce a man who came out of those gilded palaces with all the energy and originality of Napoleon coming from nowhere. At the worst crisis of the war Rome learned that Italy itself, by a military miracle, was invaded from the north. Hannibal, the Grace of Baal as his name ran in his own tongue, had dragged a ponderous chain of armaments over the starry solitudes of the Alps; and pointed southward to the city which he had been pledged by all his dreadful gods to destroy.

Hannibal marched down the road to Rome, and the Romans who rushed to war with him felt as if they were fighting with a magician. Two great armies sank to right and left of him into the swamps of the Trebia; more and more were sucked into the horrible whirlpool of Cannae; more and more went forth only to fall in ruin at his touch. The supreme sign of all disasters, which is treason, turned tribe after tribe against the falling cause of Rome, and still the unconquerable enemy rolled nearer and nearer to the city; and following their great leader the swelling cosmopolitan army of Carthage passed like a pageant of the whole world; the elephants shaking the earth like marching mountains and the gigantic Gauls with their barbaric panoply and the dark Spaniards girt in gold and the brown Numidians on their unbridled desert horses wheeling and darting like hawks, and whole mobs of deserters and mercenaries and miscellaneous peoples; and the grace of Baal went before them.

The Roman augurs and scribes who said in that hour that it brought forth unearthly prodigies, that a child was born with the head of an elephant or that stars fell down like hailstones, had a far more philosophical grasp of what had really happened than the modern historian who can see nothing in it but a success of strategy concluding a rivalry in commerce. Something far different was felt at the time and on the spot, as it is always felt by those who experience a foreign atmosphere entering their own like a fog or a foul savour. It was no mere military defeat, it was certainly no mere mercantile rivalry, that filled the Roman imagination with such hideous omens of nature herself becoming unnatural. It was Moloch upon the mountain of the Latins, looking with his appalling face across the plain; it was Baal who trampled the vineyards with his feet of stone; it was the voice of Tanit the invisible, behind her trailing veils, whispering of the love that is more horrible than hate. The burning of the Italian cornfields, the ruin of the Italian vines, were some thing more than actual; they were allegorical. They were the destruction of domestic and fruitful things, the withering of what was human before that inhumanity that is far beyond the human thing called cruelty. The household gods bowed low in darkness under their lowly roofs; and above them went the demons upon a wind from beyond all walls, blowing the trumpet of the Tramontane. The door of the Alps was broken down; and in no vulgar but a very solemn sense, it was Hell let loose. The war of the gods and demons seemed already to have ended; and the gods were dead. The eagles were lost, the legions were broken; and in Rome nothing remained but honour and the cold courage of despair.

In the whole world one thing still threatened Carthage, and that was Carthage. There still remained the inner working of an element strong in all successful commercial states, and the presence of a spirit that we know. There was still the solid sense and shrewdness of the men who manage big enterprises; there was still the advice of the best financial experts; there was still business government; there was still the broad and sane outlook of practical men of affairs, and in these things could the Romans hope. As the war trailed on to what seemed its tragic end, there grew gradually a faint and strange possibility that even now they might not hope in vain. The plain business men of Carthage, thinking as such men do in terms of living and dying races, saw clearly that Rome was not only dying but dead. The war was over; it was obviously hopeless for the Italian city to resist any longer, and inconceivable that anybody should resist when it was hopeless. Under these circumstances, another set of broad, sound business principles remained to be considered. Wars were waged with money, and consequently cost money; perhaps they felt in their hearts, as do so many of their kind, that after all war must be a little wicked because it costs money. The time had now come for peace; and still more for economy. The messages sent by Hannibal from time to time asking for reinforcements were a ridiculous anachronism; there were much more important things to attend to now. It might be true that some consul or other had made a last dash to the Metaurus, had killed Hannibal’s brother and flung his head, with Latin fury, into Hannibal’s camp; and mad actions of that sort showed how utterly hopeless the Latins felt about their cause. But even excitable Latins could not be so mad as to cling to a lost cause for ever. So argued the best financial experts; and tossed aside more and more letters, full of rather queer alarmist reports. So argued and acted the great Carthaginian Empire. That meaningless prejudice, the curse of commercial states, that stupidity is in some way practical and that genius is in some way futile, led them to starve and abandon that great artist in the school of arms, whom the gods had given them in vain.

Why do men entertain this queer idea that what is sordid must always overthrow what is magnanimous; that there is some dim connection between brains and brutality, or that it does not matter if a man is dull so long as he is also mean? Why do they vaguely think of all chivalry as sentiment and all sentiment as weakness? They do it because they are, like all men, primarily inspired by religion. For them, as for all men, the first fact is their notion of the nature of things; their idea about what world they are living in. And it is their faith that the only ultimate thing is fear and therefore that the very heart of the world is evil. They believe that death is stronger than life, and therefore dead things must be stronger than living things; whether those dead things are gold and iron and machinery or rocks and rivers and forces of nature. It may sound fanciful to say that men we meet at tea-tables or talk to at garden-parties are secretly worshippers of Baal or Moloch. But this sort of commercial mind has its own cosmic vision and it is the vision of Carthage. It has in it the brutal blunder that was the ruin of Carthage. The Punic power fell because there is in this materialism a mad indifference to real thought. By disbelieving in the soul, it comes to disbelieving in the mind. Being too practical to be moral, it denies what every practical soldier calls the moral of an army. It fancies that money will fight when men will no longer fight. So it was with the Punic merchant princes. Their religion was a religion of despair, even when their practical fortunes were hopeful. How could they understand that the Romans could hope even when their fortunes were hopeless? Their religion was a religion of force and fear; how could they understand that men can still despise fear even when they submit to force? Their philosophy of the world had weariness in its very heart; above all they were weary of warfare; how should they understand those who still wage war even when they are weary of it? In a word, how should they understand the mind of Man, who had so long bowed down before mindless things, money and brute force and gods who had the hearts of beasts? They awoke suddenly to the news that the embers they had disdained too much even to tread out were again breaking everywhere into flames; that Hasdrubal was defeated, that Hannibal was outnumbered, that Scipio had carried the war into Spain; that he had carried it into Africa. Before the very gates of the golden city Hannibal fought his last fight for it and lost; and Carthage fell as nothing has fallen since Satan.

The name of the New City remains only as a name. There is no stone of it left upon the sand. Another war was indeed waged before the final destruction: but the destruction was final. Only men digging in its deep foundation centuries after found a heap of hundreds of little skeletons, the holy relics of that religion. For Carthage fell because she was faithful to her own philosophy and had followed out to its logical conclusion her own vision of the universe. Moloch had eaten his children.

The gods had risen again, and the demons had been defeated after all. But they had been defeated by the defeated, and almost defeated by the dead. Nobody understands the romance of Rome, and why she rose afterwards to a representative leadership that seemed almost fated and fundamentally natural. Who does not keep in mind the agony of horror and humiliation through which she had continued to testify to the sanity that is the soul of Europe? She came to stand alone in the midst of an empire because she had once stood alone in the midst of a ruin and a waste. After that all men knew in their hearts that she had been representative of mankind, even when she was rejected of men. And there fell on her the shadow from a shining and as yet invisible light and the burden of things to be. It is not for us to guess in what manner or moment the mercy of God might in any case have rescued the world; but it is certain that the struggle which established Christendom would have been very different if there had been an empire of Carthage instead of an empire of Rome. We have to thank the patience of the Punic wars if, in after ages, divine things descended at least upon human things and not inhuman. Europe evolved into its own vices and its own impotence, as will be suggested on another page; but the worst into which it evolved was not like what it had escaped. Can any man in his senses compare the great wooden doll, whom the children expected to eat a little bit of the dinner, with the great idol who would have been expected to eat the children ? That is the measure of how far the world went astray, compared with how far it might have gone astray. If the Romans were ruthless, it was in a true sense to an enemy, and certainly not merely a rival. They remembered not trade routes and regulations, but the faces of sneering men; and hated the hateful soul of Carthage. And we owe them something if we never needed to cut down the groves of Venus exactly as men cut down the groves of Baal. We owe it partly to their harshness that our thoughts of our human past are not wholly harsh. If the passage from heathenry to Christianity was a bridge as well as a breach, we owe it to those who kept that heathenry human. If, after all these ages, we are in some sense at peace with paganism, and can think more kindly of our fathers, it is well to remember the things that were and the things that might have been. For this reason alone we can take lightly the load of antiquity and need not shudder at a nymph on a fountain or a cupid on a valentine. Laughter and sadness link us with things long past away and remembered without dishonour; and we can see not altogether without tenderness the twilight sinking around the Sabine farm and hear the household gods rejoice when Catullus comes home to Sirmio. *Deleta est Carthago*.

VIII. The End of the World

I was once sitting on a summer day in a meadow in Kent under the shadow of a little village church, with a rather curious companion with whom I had just been walking through the woods. He was one of a group of eccentrics I had come across in my wanderings who had a new religion called Higher Thought; in which I had been so far initiated as to realise a general atmosphere of loftiness or height, and was hoping at some later and more esoteric stage to discover the beginnings of thought. My companion was the most amusing of them, for however he may have stood towards thought, he was at least very much their superior in experience, having travelled beyond the tropics while they were meditating in the suburbs; though he had been charged with excess in telling travellers' tales. In spite of anything said against him, I preferred him to his companions and willingly went with him through the wood; where I could not but feel that his sunburnt face and fierce tufted eyebrows and pointed beard gave him something of the look of Pan. Then we sat down in the meadow and gazed idly at the tree-tops and the spire of the village church; while the warm afternoon began to mellow into early evening and the song of a speck of a bird was faint far up in the sky and no more than a whisper of breeze soothed rather than stirred the ancient orchards of the garden of England. Then my companion said to me: 'Do you know why the spire of that church goes up like that, I expressed a respectable agnosticism, and he answered in an off-hand way, 'Oh, the same as the obelisks; the Phallic Worship of antiquity.' Then I looked across at him suddenly as he lay there leering above his goatlike beard; and for the moment I thought he was not Pan but the Devil. No mortal words can express the immense, the insane incongruity and unnatural perversion of thought involved in saying such a thing at such a moment and in such a place. For one moment I was in the mood in which men burned witches; and then a sense of absurdity equally enormous seemed to open about me like a dawn. 'Why, of course,' I said after a moment's reflection, 'if it hadn't been for phallic worship, they would have built the spire pointing downwards and standing on its own apex.' I could have sat in that field and laughed for an hour. My friend did not seem offended, for indeed he was never thin-skinned about his scientific discoveries. I had only met him by chance and I never met him again, and I believe he is now dead; but though it has nothing to do with the argument, it may be worth while to mention the name of this adherent of Higher Thought and interpreter of primitive religious origins; or at any rate the name by which he was known. It was Louis de Rougemont.

That insane image of the Kentish church standing on the point of its spire, as in some old rustic, topsy-turvy tale, always comes back into my imagination when I hear these things said about pagan origins; and calls to my aid the laughter of the giants. Then I feel as genially and charitably to all other scientific investigators, higher critics, and authorities on ancient and modern religion, as I do to poor Louis de Rougemont. But the memory of that immense absurdity remains as a sort of measure and check by which to keep sane, not only on the subject of Christian churches, but also on the subject of heathen temples. Now a great many people have talked about heathen origins as the distinguished traveller talked about Christian origins. Indeed a great many modern heathens have been very hard on heathenism. A great many modern humanitarians have been very hard on the real religion of humanity. They have represented it as being everywhere and from the first rooted only in these repulsive arcana; and carrying the character of something utterly shameless and anarchical. Now I do not believe this for a moment. I should never dream of thinking about the whole worship of Apollo what De Rougemont could think about the worship of Christ. I would never admit that there was such an atmosphere in a Greek city as that madman was able to smell in a Kentish village. On the contrary, it is the whole point, even of this final chapter upon the final decay of paganism, to insist once more that the worst sort of paganism had already been defeated by the best sort. It was the best sort of paganism that conquered the gold of Carthage. It was the best sort of paganism that wore the laurels of Rome. It was the best thing the world had yet seen, all things considered and on any large scale, that ruled from the wall of the Grampians to the garden of the Euphrates. It was the best that conquered; it was the best that ruled; and it was the best that began to decay.

Unless this broad truth be grasped, the whole story is seen askew. Pessimism is not in being tired of evil but in being tired of good. Despair does not lie in being weary of suffering, but in being weary of joy. It is when for some reason or other the good things in a society no longer work that the society begins to decline; when its food does not feed, when its cures do not cure, when its blessings refuse to bless. We might almost say that in a society without such good things we should hardly have any test by which to register a decline; that is why some of the static commercial oligarchies like Carthage have rather an air in history of standing and staring like mummies, so dried up and swathed and embalmed that no man knows when they are new or old. But Carthage at any rate was dead, and the worst assault ever made by the demons on mortal society had been defeated. But how much would it matter that the worst was dead if the best was dying?

To begin with, it must be noted that the relation of Rome to Carthage was partially repeated and extended in her relation to nations more normal and more nearly akin to her than Carthage. I am not here concerned to controvert the merely political view that Roman statesmen acted unscrupulously towards Corinth or the Greek cities. But I am concerned to contradict the notion that there was nothing but a hypocritical excuse in the ordinary Roman dislike of Greek cities. I am not presenting these pagans as paladins of chivalry, with a sentiment about nationalism never known until Christian times. But I am presenting them as men with the feelings of men; and those feelings were not a pretence. The truth is that one of the weaknesses in nature-worship and mere mythology had already produced a perversion among the Greeks due to the worst sophistry; the sophistry of simplicity. Just as they became unnatural by worshipping nature, so they actually became unmanly by worshipping man. If Greece led her conqueror, she might have misled her conqueror; but these were things he did originally wish to conquer — ever in himself. It is true that in one sense there was less inhumanity even in Sodom and Gomorrah than in Tyre and Sidon. When we consider the war of the demons on the children, we cannot compare even Greek decadence to Punic devil-worship. But it is not true that the sincere revulsion from either need be merely pharisaical. It is not true to human nature or to common sense. Let any lad who has had the luck to grow up sane and simple in his day-dreams of love hear for the first time of the cult of Ganymede; he will not be merely shocked but sickened. And that first impression, as has been said here so often about first impressions, will be right. Our cynical indifference is an illusion; it is the greatest of all illusions; the illusion of familiarity. It is right to conceive the more or less rustic virtues of the ruck of the original Romans as reacting against the very rumour of it, with complete spontaneity and sincerity. It is right to regard them as reacting, if in a lesser degree, exactly as they did against the cruelty of Carthage. Because it was in a less degree they did not destroy Corinth as they destroyed Carthage. But if their attitude and action was rather destructive, in neither case need their indignation have been mere self-righteousness covering mere selfishness. And if anybody insists that nothing could have operated in either case but reasons of state and commercial conspiracies, we can only tell him that there is something which he does not understand; something which possibly he will never understand; something which, until he does understand, he will never understand the Latins. That something is called democracy. He has probably heard the word a good many times and even used it himself; but he has no notion of what it means. All through the revolutionary history of Rome there was an incessant drive towards democracy; the state and the statesman could do nothing without a considerable backing of democracy; the sort of democracy that never has anything to do with diplomacy. It is precisely because of the presence of Roman democracy that we hear so much about Roman oligarchy. For instance, recent historians have tried to explain the valour and victory of Rome in terms of that detestable and detested usury which was practised by some of the Patricians; as if Curius had conquered the men of the Macedonian phalanx by lending them money; or the consul Nero had negotiated the victory of Metaurus at five per cent. But we realise the usury of the Patricians because of the perpetual revolt of the Plebeians. The rule of the Punic merchant princes had the very soul of usury. But there was never a Punic mob that dared to call them usurers.

Burdened like all mortal things with all mortal sin and weakness, the rise of Rome had really been the rise of normal and especially of popular things; and in nothing more than in the thoroughly normal and profoundly popular hatred of perversion. Now among the Greeks a perversion had become a convention. It is true that it had become so much of a convention, especially a literary convention, that it was sometimes conventionally copied by Roman literary men. But this is one of those complications that always arise out of conventions. It must not obscure our sense of the difference of tone in the two societies as a whole. It is true that Virgil would once in a way take over a theme of Theocritus; but nobody can get the impression that Virgil was particularly fond of that theme. The themes of Virgil were specially and notably the normal themes and nowhere more than in morals; piety and patriotism and the honour of the countryside. And we may well pause upon the name of the poet as we pass into the autumn of antiquity; upon his name who was in so supreme a sense the very voice of autumn of its maturity and its melancholy; of its fruits of fulfilment and its prospect of decay. Nobody who reads even a few lines of Virgil can doubt that he understood what moral sanity means to mankind. Nobody can doubt his feelings when the demons were driven in flight before the household gods. But there are two particular points about him and his work which are particularly important to the main thesis here. The first is that the whole of his great patriotic epic is in a very peculiar sense founded upon the fall of Troy; that is upon an avowed pride in Troy although she had fallen. In tracing to Trojans the foundation of his beloved race and republic, he began what may be called the great Trojan tradition which runs through medieval and modern history. We have already seen the first hint of it in the pathos of Homer about Hector. But Virgil turned it not merely into a literature but into a legend. And it was a legend of the almost divine dignity that belongs to the defeated. This was one of the traditions that did truly prepare the world for the coming of Christianity and especially of Christian chivalry. This is what did help to sustain civilisation through the incessant defeats of the Dark Ages and the barbarian wars; out of which what we call chivalry was born. It is the moral attitude of the man with his back to the wall; and it was the wall of Troy. All through medieval and modern times this version of the virtues in the Homeric conflict can be traced in a hundred ways co-operating with all that was akin to it in Christian sentiment. Our own countrymen, and the men of other countries, loved to claim like Virgil that their own nation was descended from the heroic Trojans. All sorts of people thought it the most superb sort of heraldry to claim to be descended from Hector. Nobody seems to have wanted to be descended from Achilles. The very fact that the Trojan name has become a Christian name, and been scattered to the last limits of Christendom, to Ireland or the Gaelic Highlands, while the Greek name has remained relatively rare and pedantic, is a tribute to the same truth. Indeed it involves a curiosity of language almost in the nature of a joke. The name has been turned into a verb; and the very phrase about hectoring, in the sense of swaggering, suggests the myriads of soldiers who have taken the fallen Trojan for a model. As a matter of fact, nobody in antiquity was less given to hectoring than Hector. But even the bully pretending to be a conqueror took his title from the conquered. That is why the popularisation of the Trojan origin by Virgil has a vital relation to all those elements that have made men say that Virgil was almost a Christian. It is almost as if two great tools or toys of the same timber, the divine and the human, had been in the hands of Providence; and the only thing comparable to the Wooden Cross of Calvary was the Wooden Horse of Troy. So, in some wild allegory, pious in purpose if almost profane in form, the Holy Child might have fought the dragon with a wooden sword and a wooden horse.

The other element in Virgil which is essential to the argument is the particular nature of his relation to mythology; or what may here in a special sense be called folklore, the faiths and fancies of the populace. Everybody knows that his poetry at its most perfect is less concerned with the pomposity of Olympus than with the numina of natural and agricultural life. Everyone knows where Virgil looked for the causes of things. He speaks of finding them not so much in cosmic allegories of Uranus and Chronos; but rather in Pan and the sisterhood of the nymphs and Sylvanus the old man of the forest. He is perhaps most himself in some passages of the Eclogues, in which he has perpetuated for ever the great legend of Arcadia and the shepherds. Here again it is easy enough to miss the point with petty criticism about all the things that happen to separate his literary convention from ours. There is nothing more artificial than the cry of artificiality as directed against the old pastoral poetry. We have entirely missed all that our fathers meant by looking at the externals of what they wrote. People have been so much amused with the mere fact that the china shepherdess was made of china that they have not even asked why she was made at all. They have been so content to consider the Merry Peasant as a figure in an opera that they have not asked even how he came to go to the opera, or how he strayed on to the stage.

In short, one have only to ask why there is a china shepherdess and not a china shopkeeper. Why were not mantelpieces adorned with figures of city merchants in elegant attitudes; of ironmasters wrought in iron or gold speculators in gold? Why did the opera exhibit a Merry Peasant and not a Merry Politician? Why was there not a ballet of bankers, pirouetting upon pointed toes? Because the ancient instinct and humour of humanity have always told them, under whatever conventions, that the conventions of complex cities were less really healthy and happy than the customs of the countryside. So it is with the eternity of the Eclogues. A modern poet did indeed write things called Fleet Street Eclogues, in which poets took the place of the shepherds. But nobody has yet written anything called Wall

Street Eclogues, in which millionaires should take the place of the poets. And the reason is that there is a real if only a recurrent yearning for that sort of simplicity; and there is never that sort of yearning for that sort of complexity. The key to the mystery of the Merry Peasant is that the peasant often is merry. Those who do not believe it are simply those who do not know anything about him, and therefore do not know which are his times for merriment. Those who do not believe in the shepherd's feast or song are merely ignorant of the shepherd's calendar. The real shepherd is indeed very different from the ideal shepherd, but that is no reason for forgetting the reality at the root of the ideal. It needs a truth to make a tradition. It needs a tradition to make a convention. Pastoral poetry is certainly often a convention, especially in a social decline. It was in a social decline that Watteau shepherds and shepherdesses lounged about the gardens of Versailles. It was also in a social decline that shepherds and shepherdesses continued to pipe and dance through the most faded imitations of Virgil. But that is no reason for dismissing the dying paganism without ever understanding its life. It is no reason for forgetting that the very word Pagan is the same as the word Peasant. We may say that this art is only artificiality; but it is not a love of the artificial. On the contrary, it is in its very nature only the failure of nature-worship, or the love of the natural

For the shepherds were dying because their gods were dying. Paganism lived upon poetry; that poetry already considered under the name of mythology. But everywhere, and especially in Italy, it had been a mythology and a poetry rooted in the countryside; and that rustic religion had been largely responsible for the rustic happiness. Only as the whole society grew in age and experience, there began to appear that weakness in all mythology already noted in the chapter under that name. This religion was not quite a religion. In other words, this religion was not quite a reality. It was the young world's riot with images and ideas like a young man's riot with wine or love-making; it was not so much immoral as irresponsible; it had no foresight of the final test of time. Because it was creative to any extent it was credulous to any extent. It belonged to the artistic side of man, yet even considered artistically it had long become overloaded and entangled. The family trees sprung from the seed of Jupiter were a jungle rather than a forest; the claims of the gods and demi-gods seemed like things to be settled rather by a lawyer or a professional herald than by a poet. But it is needless to say that it was not only in the artistic sense that these things had grown more anarchic. There had appeared in more and more flagrant fashion that flower of evil that is really implicit in the very seed of nature-worship, however natural it may seem. I have said that I do not believe that natural worship necessarily begins with this particular passion; I am not of the De Rougemont school of scientific folk-lore. I do not believe that mythology must begin with eroticism. But I do believe that mythology must end in it. I am quite certain that mythology did end in it. Moreover, not only did the poetry grow more immoral, but the immorality grew more indefensible. Greek vices, oriental vices, hints of the old horrors of the Semitic demons began to fill the fancies of decaying Rome, swarming like flies on a dung heap. The psychology of it is really human enough to anyone who will try that experiment of seeing history from the inside. There comes an hour in the afternoon when the child is tired of ‘pretending’; when he is weary of being a robber or a Red Indian. It is then that he torments the cat. There comes a time in the routine of an ordered civilisation when the man is tired at playing at mythology and pretending that a tree is a maiden or that the moon made love to a man. The effect of this staleness is the same everywhere; it is seen in all drug-taking and dram-drinking and every form of the tendency to increase the dose. Men seek stranger sins or more startling obscenities as stimulants to their jaded sense. They seek after mad oriental religions for the same reason. They try to stab their nerves to life, if it were with the knives of the priests of Baal. They are walking in their sleep and try to wake themselves up with nightmares.

At that stage even of paganism therefore the peasant songs and dances sound fainter and fainter in the forest. For one thing the peasant civilisation was fading, or had already faded from the whole countryside. The Empire at the end was organised more and more on that servile system which generally goes with the boast of organisation, indeed it was almost as senile as the modern schemes for the organisation of industry. It is proverbial that what would once have been a peasantry became a mere populace of the town dependent for bread and circuses; which may again suggest to some a mob dependent upon doles and cinemas. In this as in many other respects the modern return to heathenism has been a return not even to the heathen youth but rather to the heathen old age. But the causes of it were spiritual in both cases; and especially the spirit of paganism had departed with its familiar spirits. The heat had gone out of it with its household gods, who went along with the gods of the garden and the field and the forest. The Old

Man of the Forest was too old; he was already dying. It is said truly in a sense that Pan died because Christ was born. It is almost as true in another sense that men knew that Christ was born because Pan was already dead. A void was made by the vanishing of the whole mythology of mankind, which would have asphyxiated like a vacuum if it had not been filled with theology. But the point for the moment is that the mythology could not have lasted like a theology in any case. Theology is thought, whether we agree with it or not. Mythology was never thought, and nobody could really agree with it or disagree with it. It was a mere mood of glamour and when the mood went it could not be recovered. Men not only ceased to believe in the gods, but they realised that they had never believed in them. They had sung their praises; they had danced round their altars. They had played the flute; they had played the fool.

So came the twilight upon Arcady and the last notes of the pipe sound sadly from the beechen grove. In the great Virgilian poems there is already something of the sadness; but the loves and the household gods linger in lovely lines like that which Mr. Belloc took for a test of understanding; *incipe parve puer risu cognoscere matrem*. But with them as with us, the human family itself began to break down under servile organisation and the herding of the towns. The urban mob became enlightened; that is it lost the mental energy that could create myths. All round the circle of the Mediterranean cities the people mourned for the loss of gods and were consoled with gladiators. And meanwhile something similar was happening to that intellectual aristocracy of antiquity that had been walking about and talking at large ever since Socrates and Pythagoras. They began to betray to the world the fact that they were walking in a circle and saying the same thing over and over again. Philosophy began to be a joke; it also began to be a bore. That unnatural simplification of everything into one system or another, which we have noted as the fault of the philosopher, revealed at once its finality and its futility. Everything was virtue or everything was happiness or everything was fate or everything was good or everything was bad; anyhow, everything was everything and there was no more to be said; so they said it. Everywhere the sages had degenerated into sophists; that is, into hired rhetoricians or askers of riddles. It is one of the symptoms of this that the sage begins to turn not only into a sophist but into a magician. A touch of oriental occultism is very much appreciated in the best houses. As the philosopher is already a society entertainer, he may as well also be a conjurer.

Many moderns have insisted on the smallness of that Mediterranean world; and the wider horizons that might have awaited it with the discovery of the other continents. But this is an illusion, one of the many illusions of materialism. The limits that paganism had reached in Europe were the limits of human existence; at its best it had only reached the same limits anywhere else. The Roman stoics did not need any Chinamen to teach them stoicism. The Pythagoreans did not need any Hindus to teach them about recurrence or the simple life or the beauty of being a vegetarian. In so far as they could get these things from the East, they had already got rather too much of them from the East. The Syncretists were as convinced as Theosophists that all religions are really the same. And how else could they have extended philosophy merely by extending geography? It can hardly be proposed that they should learn a purer religion from the Aztecs or sit at the feet of the Incas of Peru. All the rest of the world was a welter of barbarism. It is essential to recognise that the Roman Empire was recognised as the highest achievement of the human race; and also as the broadest. A dreadful secret seemed to be written as in obscure hieroglyphics across those mighty works of marble and stone, those colossal amphitheatres and aqueducts. Man could do no more.

For it was not the message blazed on the Babylonian wall, that one king was found wanting or his one kingdom given to a stranger. It was no such good news as the news of invasion and conquest. There was nothing left that could conquer Rome; but there was also nothing left that could improve it. It was the strongest thing that was growing weak. It was the best thing that was going to the bad. It is necessary to insist again and again that many civilisations had met in one civilisation of the Mediterranean sea; that it was already universal with a stale and sterile universality. The peoples had pooled their resources and still there was not enough. The empires had gone into partnership and they were still bankrupt. No philosopher who was really philosophical could think anything except that, in that central sea, the wave of the world had risen to its highest, seeming to touch the stars. But the wave was already stooping; for it was only the wave of the world.

That mythology and that philosophy into which paganism has already been analysed had thus both of them been drained most literally to the dregs. If with the multiplication of magic the third department, which we have called the demons, was even increasingly active, it was never anything but destructive. There remains only the fourth element or rather the first; that which had been in a sense forgotten because it was the first. I mean the primary and overpowering yet impalpable impression that the universe after all has one origin and one aim; and because it has an aim must have an author. What became of this great truth in the background of men's minds, at this time, it is perhaps more difficult to determine. Some of the Stoics undoubtedly saw it more and more clearly as the clouds of mythology cleared and thinned away; and great men among them did much even to the last to lay the foundations of a concept of the moral unity of the world. The Jews still held their secret certainty of it jealously behind high fences of exclusiveness; yet it is intensely characteristic of the society and the situation that some fashionable figures, especially fashionable ladies, actually embraced Judaism. But in the case of many others I fancy there entered at this point a new negation. Atheism became really possible in that abnormal time; for atheism is abnormality. It is not merely the denial of a dogma. It is the reversal of a subconscious assumption in the soul; the sense that there is a meaning and a direction in the world it sees. Lucretius, the first evolutionist who endeavoured to substitute Evolution for God, had already dangled before men's eyes his dance of glittering atoms, by which he conceived cosmos as created by chaos. But it was not his strong poetry or his sad philosophy, as I fancy, that made it possible for men to entertain such a vision. It was something in the sense of impotence and despair with which men shook their fists vainly at the stars, as they saw all the best work of humanity sinking slowly and helplessly into a swamp. They could easily believe that even creation itself was not a creation but a perpetual fall, when they saw that the weightiest and worthiest of all human creations was falling by its own weight. They could fancy that all the stars were falling stars; and that the very pillars of their own solemn porticos were bowed under a sort of gradual deluge. To men in that mood there was a reason for atheism that is in some sense reasonable. Mythology might fade and philosophy might stiffen; but if behind these things there was a reality, surely that reality might have sustained things as they sank. There was no God; if there had been a God, surely this was the very moment when He would have moved and saved the world.

The life of the great civilisation went on with dreary industry and even with dreary festivity. It was the end of the world, and the worst of it was that it need never end. A convenient compromise had been made between all the multitudinous myths and religions of the Empire; that each group should worship freely and merely live a sort of official flourish of thanks to the tolerant Emperor, by tossing a little incense to him under his official title of Divus. Naturally there was no difficulty about that; or rather it was a long time before the world realised that there ever had been even a trivial difficulty anywhere. The members of some Eastern sect or secret society or other seemed to have made a scene somewhere; nobody could imagine why. The incident occurred once or twice again and began to arouse irritation out of proportion to its insignificance. It was not exactly what these provincials said; though of course it sounded queer enough. They seemed to be saying that God was dead and that they themselves had seen him die. This might be one of the many manias produced by the despair of the age; only they did not seem particularly despairing. They seem quite unnaturally joyful about it, and gave the reason that the death of God had allowed them to eat him and drink his blood. According to other accounts God was not exactly dead after all; there trailed through the bewildered imagination some sort of fantastic procession of the funeral of God, at which the sun turned black, but which ended with the dead omnipotence breaking out of the tomb and rising again like the sun. But it was not the strange story to which anybody paid any particular attention; people in that world had seen queer religions enough to fill a madhouse. It was something in the tone of the madmen and their type of formation. They were a scratch company of barbarians and slaves and poor and unimportant people; but their formation was military; they moved together and were very absolute about who and what was really a part of their little system; and about what they said. However mildly, there was a ring like iron. Men used to many mythologies and moralities could make no analysis of the mystery, except the curious conjecture that they meant what they said. All attempts to make them see reason in the perfectly simple matter of the Emperor’s statue seemed to be spoken to deaf men. It was as if a new meteoric metal had fallen on the earth; it was a difference of substance to the touch. Those who touched their foundation fancied they had struck a rock.

With a strange rapidity, like the changes of a dream, the proportions of things seemed to change in their presence. Before most men knew what had happened, these few men were palpably present. They were important enough to be ignored. People became suddenly silent about them and walked stiffly past them. We see a new scene, in which the world has drawn its skirts away from these men and women and they stand in the centre of a great space like lepers. The scene changes again and the great space where they stand is overhung on every side with a cloud of witnesses, interminable terraces full of faces looking down towards them intently; for strange things are happening to them. New tortures have been invented for the madmen who have brought good news. That sad and weary society seems almost to find a new energy in establishing its first religious persecution. Nobody yet knows very clearly why that level world has thus lost its balance about the people in its midst; but they stand unnaturally still while the arena and the world seem to revolve round them. And there shone on them in that dark hour a light that has never been darkened; a white fire clinging to that group like an unearthly phosphorescence, blazing its track through the twilights of history and confounding every effort to confound it with the mists of mythology and theory; that shaft of light or lightning by which the world itself has struck and isolated and crowned it; by which its own enemies have made it more illustrious and its own critics have made it more inexplicable; the halo of hatred around the Church of God.

Part II
On the Man Called Christ

I. The God in the Cave

This sketch of the human story began in a cave; the cave which popular science associates with the cave-man and in which practical discovery has really found archaic drawings of animals. The second half of human history, which was like a new creation of the world, also begins in a cave. There is even a shadow of such a fancy in the fact that animals were again present; for it was a cave used as a stable by the mountaineers of the uplands about Bethlehem; who still drive their cattle into such holes and caverns at night. It was here that a homeless couple had crept underground with the cattle when the doors of the crowded caravanserai had been shut in their faces; and it was here beneath the very feet of the passers-by, in a cellar under the very floor of the world, that Jesus Christ was born. But in that second creation there was indeed something symbolical in the roots of the primeval rock or the horns of the prehistoric herd. God also was a Cave-Man, and had also traced strange shapes of creatures, curiously coloured, upon the wall of the world; but the pictures that he made had come to life.

A mass of legend and literature, which increases and will never end, has repeated and rung the changes on that single paradox; that the hands that had made the sun and stars were too small to reach the huge heads of the cattle. Upon this paradox, we might almost say upon this jest, all the literature of our faith is founded. It is at least like a jest in this, that it is something which the scientific critic cannot see. He laboriously explains the difficulty which we have always defiantly and almost derisively exaggerated; and mildly condemns as improbable something that we have almost madly exalted as incredible; as something that would be much too good to be true, except that it is true. When that contrast between the cosmic creation and the little local infancy has been repeated, reiterated, underlined, emphasised, exulted in, sung, shouted, roared, not to say howled, in a hundred thousand hymns, carols, rhymes, rituals, pictures, poems, and popular sermons, it may be suggested that we hardly need a higher critic to draw our attention to something a little odd about it; especially one of the sort that seems to take a long time to see a joke, even his own joke. But about this contrast and combination of ideas one thing may be said here, because it is relevant to the whole thesis of this book. The sort of modern critic of whom I speak is generally much impressed with the importance of education in life and the importance of psychology in education. That sort of man is never tired of telling us that first impressions fix character by the law of causation; and he will become quite nervous if a child’s visual sense is poisoned by the wrong colours on a golliwog or his nervous system prematurely shaken by a cacophonous rattle. Yet he will think us very narrow-minded, if we say that this is exactly why there really is a difference between being brought up as a Christian and being brought up as a Jew or a Moslem or an atheist. The difference is that every Catholic child has learned from pictures, and even every Protestant child from stories, this incredible combination of contrasted ideas as one of the very first impressions on his mind. It is not merely a theological difference. It is a psychological difference which can outlast any theologies. It really is, as that sort of scientist loves to say about anything, incurable. Any agnostic or atheist whose childhood has known a real Christmas has ever afterwards, whether he likes it or not, an association in his mind between two ideas that most of mankind must regard as remote from each other; the idea of a baby and the idea of unknown strength that sustains the stars. His instincts and imagination can still connect them, when his reason can no longer see the need of the connection; for him there will always be some savour of religion about the mere picture of a mother and a baby; some hint of mercy and softening about the mere mention of the dreadful name of God. But the two ideas are not naturally or necessarily combined. They would not be necessarily combined for an ancient Greek or a Chinaman, even for Aristotle or Confucius. It is no more inevitable to connect God with an infant than to connect gravitation with a kitten. It has been created in our minds by Christmas because we are Christians, because we are psychological Christians even when we are not theological ones. In other words, this combination of ideas has emphatically, in the much disputed phrase, altered human nature. There is really a difference between the man who knows it and the man who does not. It may not be a difference of moral worth, for the Moslem or the Jew might be worthier according to his lights; but it is a plain fact about the crossing of two particular lights, the conjunction of two stars in our particular horoscope. Omnipotence and impotence, or divinity and infancy, do definitely make a sort of epigram which a million repetitions cannot turn into a platitude. It is not unreasonable to call it unique. Bethlehem is emphatically a place where extremes meet.

Here begins, it is needless to say, another mighty influence for the humanisation of Christendom. If the world wanted what is called a non-controversial aspect of Christianity, it would probably select Christmas. Yet it is obviously bound up with what is supposed to be a controversial aspect (I could never at any stage of my opinions imagine why); the respect paid to the Blessed Virgin. When I was a boy a more Puritan generation objected to a statue upon my parish church representing the Virgin and Child. After much controversy, they compromised by taking away the Child. One would think that this was even more corrupted with Mariolatry, unless the mother was counted less dangerous when deprived of a sort of weapon. But the practical difficulty is also a parable. You cannot chip away the statue of a mother from all round that of a new-born child. You can not suspend the new-born child in mid-air; indeed you cannot really have a statue of a new-born child at all. Similarly, you cannot suspend the idea of a new-born child in the void or think of him without thinking of his mother. You cannot visit the child without visiting the mother; you cannot in common human life approach the child except through the mother. If we are to think of Christ in this aspect at all, the other idea follows as it is followed in history. We must either leave Christ out of Christmas, or Christmas out of Christ, or we must admit, if only as we admit it in an old picture, that those holy heads are too near together for the haloes not to mingle and cross.

It might be suggested, in a somewhat violent image, that nothing had happened in that fold or crack in the great grey hills except that the whole universe had been turned inside out. I mean that all the eyes of wonder and worship which had been turned outwards to the largest thing were now turned inward to the smallest. The very image will suggest all that multitudinous marvel of converging eyes that makes so much of the coloured Catholic imagery like a peacock’s tail. But it is true in a sense that God who had been only a circumference was seen as a centre; and a centre is infinitely small. It is true that the spiritual spiral henceforward works inwards instead of outwards, and in that sense is centripetal and not centrifugal. The faith becomes, in more ways than one, a religion of little things. But its traditions in art and literature and popular fable have quite sufficiently attested, as has been said, this particular paradox of the divine being in the cradle. Perhaps they have not so clearly emphasised the significance of the divine being in the cave. Curiously enough, indeed, tradition has not very clearly emphasised the cave. It is a familiar fact that the Bethlehem scene has been represented in every possible setting of time and country, of landscape and architecture; and it is a wholly happy and admirable fact that men have conceived it as quite different according to their different individual traditions and tastes. But while all have realised that it was a stable, not so many have realised that it was a cave. Some critics have even been so silly as to suppose that there was some contradiction between the stable and the cave; in which case they cannot know much about caves or stables in Palestine. As they see differences that are not there, it is needless to add that they do not see differences that are there. When a well-known critic says, for instance, that Christ being born in a rocky cavern is like Mithras having sprung alive out of a rock, it sounds like a parody upon comparative religion. There is such a thing as the point of a story, even if it is a story in the sense of a lie. And the notion of a hero appearing, like Pallas from the brain of Zeus, mature and without a mother, is obviously the very opposite of the idea of a god being born like an ordinary baby and entirely dependent on a mother. Whichever ideal we might prefer, we should surely see that they are contrary ideals. It is as stupid to connect them because they both contain a substance called stone as to identify the punishment of the Deluge with the baptism in the Jordan because they both contain a substance called water. Whether as a myth or a mystery, Christ was obviously conceived as born in a hole in the rocks primarily because it marked the position of one outcast and homeless. Nevertheless it is true, as I have said, that the cave has not been so commonly or so clearly used as a symbol as the other realities that surrounded the first Christmas.

And the reason for this also refers to the very nature of that new world. It was in a sense the difficulty of a new dimension. Christ was not only born on the level of the world, but even lower than the world. The first act of the divine drama was enacted, not only on no stage set up above the sight-seer, but on a dark and curtained stage sunken out of sight; and that is an idea very difficult to express in most modes of artistic expression. It is the idea of simultaneous happenings on different levels of life. Something like it might have been attempted in the more archaic and decorative medieval art. But the more the artists learned of realism and perspective, the less they could depict at once the angels in the heavens and the shepherds on the hills, and the glory in the darkness that was under the hills. Perhaps it could have been best conveyed by the characteristic expedient of some of the medieval guilds, when they wheeled about the streets a theatre with three stages one above the other, with heaven above the earth and hell under the earth. But in the riddle of Bethlehem it was heaven that was under the earth.

There is in that alone the touch of a revolution, as of the world turned upside down. It would be vain to attempt to say anything adequate, or anything new, about the change which this conception of a deity born like an outcast or even an outlaw had upon the whole conception of law and its duties to the poor and outcast. It is profoundly true to say that after that moment there could be no slaves. There could be and were people bearing that legal title, until the Church was strong enough to weed them out, but there could be no more of the pagan repose in the mere advantage to the state of keeping it a servile state. Individuals became important, in a sense in which no instruments can be important. A man could not be a means to an end, at any rate to any other man's end. All this popular and fraternal element in the story has been rightly attached by tradition to the episode of the Shepherds; the hinds who found themselves talking face to face with the princes of heaven. But there is another aspect of the popular element as represented by the shepherds which has not perhaps been so fully developed; and which is more directly relevant here.

Men of the people, like the shepherds, men of the popular tradition, had everywhere been the makers of the mythologies. It was they who had felt most directly, with least check or chill from philosophy or the corrupt cults of civilisation, the need we have already considered; the images that were adventures of the imagination; the mythology that was a sort of search; the tempting and tantalising hints of something half-human in nature; the dumb significance of seasons and special places. They had best understood that the soul of a landscape is a story and the soul of a story is a personality. But rationalism had already begun to rot away these really irrational though imaginative treasures of the peasant; even as systematic slavery had eaten the peasant out of house and home. Upon all such peasantries everywhere there was descending a dusk and twilight of disappointment, in the hour when these few men discovered what they sought. Everywhere else Arcadia was fading from the forest. Pan was dead and the shepherds were scattered like sheep. And though no man knew it, the hour was near which was to end and to fulfil all things; and though no man heard it, there was one far-off cry in an unknown tongue upon the heaving wilderness of the mountains. The shepherds had found their Shepherd.

And the thing they found was of a kind with the things they sought. The populace had been wrong in many things; but they had not been wrong in believing that holy things could have a habitation and that divinity need not disdain the limits of time and space. And the barbarian who conceived the crudest fancy about the sun being stolen and hidden in a box, or the wildest myth about the god being rescued and his enemy deceived with a stone, was nearer to the secret of the cave and knew more about the crisis of the world, than all those in the circle of cities round the Mediterranean who had become content with cold abstractions or cosmopolitan generalisations; than all those who were spinning thinner and thinner threads of thought out of the transcendentalism of Plato or the orientalism of Pythagoras. The place that the shepherds found was not an academy or an abstract republic, it was not a place of myths allegorised or dissected or explained or explained away. It was a place of dreams come true. Since that hour no mythologies have been made in the world. Mythology is a search.

We all know that the popular presentation of this popular story, in so many miracle plays and carols, has given to the shepherds the costumes, the language, and the landscape of the separate English and European countrysides. We all know that one shepherd will talk in a Somerset dialect or another talk of driving his sheep from Conway towards Clyde. Most of us know by this time how true is that error, how wise, how artistic, how intensely Christian and Catholic is that anachronism. But some who have seen it in these scenes of medieval rusticity have perhaps not seen it in another sort of poetry, which it is sometimes the fashion to call artificial rather than artistic. I fear that many modern critics will see only a faded classicism in the fact that men like Crashaw and Herrick conceived the shepherds of Bethlehem under the form of the shepherds of Virgil. Yet they were profoundly right; and in turning their Bethlehem play into a Latin Eclogue they took up one of the most important links in human history. Virgil, as we have already seen, does stand for all that saner heathenism that had over-thrown the insane heathenism of human sacrifice; but the very fact that even the Virgilian virtues and the sane heathenism were in incurable decay is the whole problem to which the revelation to the shepherds is the solution. If the world had ever had the chance to grow weary of being demoniac, it might have been healed merely by becoming sane. But if it had grown weary even of being sane, what was to happen, except what did happen? Nor is it false to conceive the Arcadian shepherd of the Eclogues as rejoicing in what did happen. One of the Eclogues has even been claimed as a prophecy of what did happen. But it is quite as much in the tone and incidental diction of the great poet that we feel the potential sympathy with the great event; and even in their own human phrases the voices of the Virgilian shepherds might more than once have broken upon more than the tenderness of Italy `Incipe, parve puer, risu cognoscere matrem.' They might have found in that strange place all that was best in the last traditions of the Latins; and something better than a wooden idol standing up for ever for the pillar of the human family; a household god. But they and all the other mythologists would be justified in rejoicings that the event had fulfilled not merely the mysticism but the materialism of mythology. Mythology had many sins; but it had not been wrong in being as carnal as the Incarnation. But something of the ancient voice that was supposed to have rung through the graves, it could cry again, 'We have seen, he hath seen us, a visible god.' So the ancient shepherds might have danced, and their feet have been beautiful upon the mountains, rejoicing over the philosophers. But the philosophers had also heard.

It is still a strange story, though an old one, how they came out of orient lands, crowned with the majesty of kings and clothed with something of the mystery of magicians. That truth that is tradition has wisely remembered them almost as unknown quantities, as mysterious as their mysterious and melodious names; Melchior, Caspar, Balthazar. But there came with them all that world of wisdom that had watched the stars in Chaldea and the sun in Persia; and we shall not be wrong if we see in them the same curiosity that moves all the sages. They would stand for the same human ideal if their names had really been Confucius or Pythagoras or Plato. They were those who sought not tales but the truth of things, and since their thirst for truth was itself a thirst for God, they also have had their reward. But even in order to understand that reward, we must understand that for philosophy as much as mythology, that reward was the completion of the incomplete.

Such learned men would doubtless have come, as these learned men did come, to find themselves confirmed in much that was true in their own traditions and right in their own reasoning. Confucius would have found a new foundation for the family in the very reversal of the Holy Family; Buddha would have looked upon a new renunciation, of stars rather than jewels and divinity than royalty. These learned men would still have the right to say, or rather a new right to say, that there was truth in their old teaching. But after all these learned men would have come to learn. They would have come to complete their conceptions with something they had not yet conceived; even to balance their imperfect universe with something they might once have contradicted. Buddha would have come from his impersonal paradise to worship a person. Confucius would have come from his temples of ancestor-worship to worship a child.

We must grasp from the first this character in the new cosmos; that it was larger than the old cosmos. In that sense Christendom is larger than creation; as creation had been before Christ. It included things that had not been there; it also included the things that had been there. The point happens to be well illustrated in this example of Chinese piety, but it would be true of other pagan virtues or pagan beliefs. Nobody can doubt that a reasonable respect for parents is part of a gospel in which God himself was subject in childhood to earthly parents. But the other sense in which the parents were subject to him does introduce an idea that is not Confucian. The infant Christ is not like the infant Confucius; our mysticism conceives him in an immortal infancy. I do not know what Confucius would have done with the Bambino had it come to life in his arms as it did in the arms of St. Francis. But this is true in relation to all the other religions and philosophies; it is the challenge of the Church. The Church contains what the world does not contain. Life itself does not provide as she does for all sides of life. That every other single system is narrow and insufficient compared to this one; that is not a rhetorical boast; it is a real fact and a real dilemma. Where is the Holy child amid the Stoics and the ancestor-worshippers? Where is Our Lady of the Moslems, a woman made for no man and set above all angels? Where is St. Michael of the monks of Buddha, rider and master of the trumpets, guarding for every soldier the honour of the sword? What could St. Thomas Aquinas do with the mythology of Brahminism, he who set forth all the science and rationality and even rationalism of Christianity? Yet even if we compare Aquinas with Aristotle, at the other extreme of reason, we shall find the same sense of something added. Aquinas could understand the most logical parts of Aristotle; it is doubtful if Aristotle could have understood the most mystical parts of Aquinas. Even where we can hardly call the Christian greater, we are forced to call him larger. But it is so to whatever philosophy or heresy or modern movement we may turn. How would Francis the Troubadour have fared among the Calvinists, or for that matter among the Utilitarians of the

Manchester School? Yet men like Bossuet and Pascal could be as stern and logical as any Calvinist or Utilitarian. How would St. Joan of Arc, a woman waving on men to war with the sword, have fared among the Quakers or the Doukhabors or the Tolstoyan sect of pacifists? Yet any number of Catholic saints have spent their lives in preaching peace and preventing wars. It is the same with all the modern attempts at Syncretism. They are never able to make something larger than the Creed without leaving something out. I do not mean leaving out something divine but something human; the flag or the inn or the boy’s tale of battle or the hedge at the end of the field. The Theosophists build a pantheon; but it is only a pantheon for pantheists. They call a Parliament of Religions as a reunion of all the peoples; but it is only a reunion of all the prigs. Yet exactly such a pantheon had been set up two thousand years before by the shores of the Mediterranean; and Christians were invited to set up the image of Jesus side by side with the image of Jupiter, of Mithras, of Osiris, of Atys, or of Ammon. It was the refusal of the Christians that was the turning-point of history. If the Christians had accepted, they and the whole world would have certainly, in a grotesque but exact metaphor, gone to pot. They would all have been boiled down to one lukewarm liquid in that great pot of cosmopolitan corruption in which all the other myths and mysteries were already melting. It was an awful and an appalling escape. Nobody understands the nature of the Church, or the ringing note of the creed descending from antiquity, who does not realise that the whole world once very nearly died of broadmindedness and the brotherhood of all religions.

Here it is the important point that the Magi, who stand for mysticism and philosophy, are truly conceived as seeking something new and even as finding something unexpected. That tense sense of crisis which still tingles in the Christmas story and even in every Christmas celebration, accentuates the idea of a search and a discovery. The discovery is, in this case, truly a scientific discovery. For the other mystical figures in the miracle play; for the angel and the mother, the shepherds and the soldiers of Herod, there may be aspects both simpler and more supernatural, more elemental or more emotional. But the wise Men must be seeking wisdom, and for them there must be a light also in the intellect. And this is the light; that the Catholic creed is catholic and that nothing else is catholic. The philosophy of the Church is universal. The philosophy of the philosophers was not universal. Had Plato and Pythagoras and Aristotle stood for an instant in the light that came out of that little cave, they would have known that their own light was not universal. It is far from certain, indeed, that they did not know it already. Philosophy also, like mythology, had very much the air of a search. It is the realisation of this truth that gives its traditional majesty and mystery to the figures of the Three Kings; the discovery that religion is broader than philosophy and that this is the broadest of religions, contained within this narrow space. The Magicians were gazing at the strange pentacle with the human triangle reversed; and they have never come to the end of their calculations about it. For it is the paradox of that group in the cave, that while our emotions about it are of childish simplicity, our thoughts about it can branch with a never-ending complexity. And we can never reach the end even of our own ideas about the child who was a father and the mother who was a child.

We might well be content to say that mythology had come with the shepherds and philosophy with the philosophers; and that it only remained for them to combine in the recognisation of religion. But there was a third element that must not be ignored and one which that religion for ever refuses to ignore, in any revel or reconciliation. There was present in the primary scenes of the drama that Enemy that had rotted the legends with lust and frozen theories into atheism, but which answered the direct challenge with something of that more direct method which we have seen in the conscious cult of the demons. In the description of that demon-worship, of the devouring detestation of innocence shown in the works of its witchcraft and the most inhuman of its human sacrifice, I have said less of its incorrect and secret penetration of the saner paganism; the soaking of mythological imagination with sex; the rise of imperial pride into insanity. But both the indirect and the direct influence make themselves felt in the drama of Bethlehem. A ruler under the Roman suzerainty, probably equipped and surrounded with the Roman ornament and order though himself of eastern blood, seems in that hour to have felt stirring within him the spirit of strange things. We all know the story of how Herod, alarmed at some rumour of a mysterious rival, remembered the wild gesture of the capricious despots of Asia and ordered a massacre of suspects of the new generation of the populace. Everyone knows the story; but not everyone has perhaps noted its place in the story of the strange religions of men. Not everybody has seen the significance even of its very contrast with the Corinthian columns and Roman pavement of that conquered and superficially civilised world. Only, as the purpose in his dark spirit began to show and shine in the eyes of the Idumean, a seer might perhaps have seen something like a great grey ghost that looked over his shoulder; have seen behind him filling the dome of night and hovering for the last time over history, that vast and fearful face that was Moloch of the Carthaginians; awaiting his last tribute from a ruler of the races of Shem. The demons also, in that first festival of Christmas, feasted after their own fashion.

Unless we understand the presence of that enemy, we shall not only miss the point of Christianity, but even miss the point of Christmas. Christmas for us in Christendom has become one thing, and in one sense even a simple thing. But like all the truths of that tradition, it is in another sense a very complex thing. Its unique note is the simultaneous striking of many notes; of humility, of gaiety, of gratitude, of mystical fear, but also of vigilance and of drama. It is not only an occasion for the peacemakers any more than for the merry-makers; it is not only a Hindu peace conference any more than it is only a Scandinavian winter feast. There is something defiant in it also; something that makes the abrupt bells at midnight sound like the great guns of a battle that has just been won. All this indescribable thing that we call the Christmas atmosphere only hangs in the air as something like a lingering fragrance or fading vapour from the exultant explosion of that one hour in the Judean hills nearly two thousand years ago. But the savour is still unmistakable, and it is something too subtle or too solitary to be covered by our use of the word peace. By the very nature of the story the rejoicings in the cavern were rejoicings in a fortress or an outlaw’s den; properly understood it is not unduly flippant to say they were rejoicings in a dug-out. It is not only true that such a subterranean chamber was a hiding-place from enemies; and that the enemies were already scouring the stony plain that lay above it like a sky. It is not only that the very horse-hoofs of Herod might in that sense have passed like thunder over the sunken head of Christ. It is also that there is in that image a true idea of an outpost, of a piercing through the rock and an entrance into an enemy territory. There is in this buried divinity an idea of undermining the world; of shaking the towers and palaces from below; even as Herod the great king felt that earthquake under him and swayed with his swaying palace.

That is perhaps the mightiest of the mysteries of the cave. It is already apparent that though men are said to have looked for hell under the earth, in this case it is rather heaven that is under the earth. And there follows in this strange story the idea of an upheaval of heaven. That is the paradox of the whole position; that henceforth the highest thing can only work from below. Royalty can only return to its own by a sort of rebellion. Indeed the Church from its beginnings, and perhaps especially in its beginnings, was not so much a principality as a revolution against the prince of the world. This sense that the world had been conquered by the great usurper, and was in his possession, has been much deplored or derided by those optimists who identify enlightenment with ease. But it was responsible for all that thrill of defiance and a beautiful danger that made the good news seem to be really both good and new. It was in truth against a huge unconscious usurpation that it raised a revolt, and originally so obscure a revolt. Olympus still occupied the sky like a motionless cloud moulded into many mighty forms; philosophy still sat in the high places and even on the thrones of the kings, when Christ was born in the cave and Christianity in the catacombs. In both cases we may remark the same paradox of revolution; the sense of something despised and of something feared. The cave in one aspect is only a hole or corner into which the outcasts are swept like rubbish; yet in the other aspect it is a hiding-place of something valuable which the tyrants are seeking like treasure. In one sense they are there because the innkeeper would not even remember them, and in another because the king can never forget them. We have already noted that this paradox appeared also in the treatment of the early Church. It was important while it was still insignificant, and certainly while it was still impotent. It was important solely because it was intolerable; and in that sense it is true to say that it was intolerable because it was intolerant. It was resented, because, in its own still and almost secret way, it had declared war. It had risen out of the ground to wreck the heaven and earth of heathenism. It did not try to destroy all that creation of gold and marble; but it contemplated a world without it. It dared to look right through it as though the gold and marble had been glass. Those who charged the Christians with burning down Rome with firebrands were slanderers; but they were at least far nearer to the nature of Christianity than those among the moderns who tell us that the Christians were a sort of ethical society, being martyred in a languid fashion for telling men they had a duty to their neighbors, and only mildly disliked because they were meek and mild.

Herod had his place, therefore, in the miracle play of Bethlehem because he is the menace to the Church Militant and shows it from the first as under persecution and fighting for its life. For those who think this a discord, it is a discord that sounds simultaneously with the Christmas bells. For those who think the idea of the Crusade is one that spoils the idea of the Cross, we can only say that for them the idea of the Cross is spoiled; the idea of the cross is spoiled quite literally in the cradle. It is not here to the purpose to argue with them on the abstract ethics of fighting; the purpose in this place is merely to sum up the combination of ideas that make up the Christian and Catholic idea, and to note that all of them are already crystallised in the first Christmas story. They are three distinct and commonly contrasted things which are nevertheless one thing; but this is the only thing which can make them one. The first is the human instinct for a heaven that shall be as literal and almost as local as a home. It is the idea pursued by all poets and pagans making myths; that a particular place must be the shrine of the god or the abode of the blest; that fairyland is a land; or that the return of the ghost must be the resurrection of the body. I do not here reason about the refusal of rationalism to satisfy this need. I only say that if the rationalists refuse to satisfy it, the pagans will not be satisfied. This is present in the story of Bethlehem and Jerusalem as it is present in the story of Delos and Delphi; and as it is not present in the whole universe of Lucretius or the whole universe of Herbert Spencer. The second element is a philosophy larger than other philosophies; larger than that of Lucretius and infinitely larger than that of Herbert Spencer. It looks at the world through a hundred windows where the ancient stoic or the modern agnostic only looks through one. It sees life with thousands of eyes belonging to thousands of different sorts of people, where the other is only the individual standpoint of a stoic or an agnostic. It has something for all moods of man, it finds work for all kinds of men, it understands secrets of psychology, it is aware of depths of evil, it is able to distinguish between ideal and unreal marvels and miraculous exceptions, it trains itself in tact about hard cases, all with a multiplicity and subtlety and imagination about the varieties of life which is far beyond the bald or breezy platitudes of most ancient or modern moral philosophy. In a word, there is more in it; it finds more in existence to think about; it gets more out of life. Masses of this material about our many-sided life have been added since the time of St. Thomas Aquinas. But St. Thomas Aquinas alone would have found himself limited in the world of Confucius or of Comte. And the third point is this; that while it is local enough for poetry and larger than any other philosophy, it is also a challenge and a fight. While it is deliberately broadened to embrace every aspect of truth, it is still stiffly embattled against every mode of error. It gets every kind of man to fight for it, it gets every kind of weapon to fight with, it widens its knowledge of the things that are fought for and against with every art of curiosity or sympathy; but it never forgets that it is fighting. It proclaims peace on earth and never forgets why there was war in heaven.

This is the trinity of truths symbolised here by the three types in the old Christmas story; the shepherds and the kings and that other king who warred upon the children. It is simply not true to say that other religions and philosophies are in this respect its rivals. It is not true to say that any one of them combines these characters; it is not true to say that any one of them pretends to combine them. Buddhism may profess to be equally mystical; it does not even profess to be equally military. Islam may profess to be equally military; it does not even profess to be equally metaphysical and subtle. Confucianism may profess to satisfy the need of the philosophers for order and reason; it does not even profess to satisfy the need of the mystics for miracle and sacrament and the consecration of concrete things. There are many evidences of this presence of a spirit at once universal and unique. One will serve here which is the symbol of the subject of this chapter; that no other story, no pagan legend or philosophical anecdote or historical event, does in fact affect any of us with that peculiar and even poignant impression produced on us by the word Bethlehem. No other birth of a god or childhood of a sage seems to us to be Christmas or anything like Christmas. It is either too cold or too frivolous, or too formal and classical, or too simple and savage, or too occult and complicated. Not one of us, whatever his opinions, would ever go to such a scene with the sense that he was going home. He might admire it because it was poetical, or because it was philosophical, or any number of other things in separation; but not because it was itself. The truth is that there is a quite peculiar and individual character about the hold of this story on human nature; it is not in its psychological substance at all like a mere legend or the life of a great man. It does not exactly in the ordinary sense turn our minds to greatness; to those extensions and exaggerations of humanity which are turned into gods and heroes, even by the healthiest sort of hero-worship. It does not exactly work outwards, adventurously, to the wonders to be found at the ends of the earth. It is rather something that surprises us from behind, from the hidden and personal part of our being; like that which can some times take us off our guard in the pathos of small objects or the blind pieties of the poor. It is rather as if a man had found an inner room in the very heart of his own house, which he had never suspected; and seen a light from within. It is as if he found something at the back of his own heart that betrayed him into good. It is not made of what the world would call strong materials; or rather it is made of materials whose strength is in that winged levity with which they brush us and pass. It is all that is in us but a brief tenderness that is there made eternal; all that means no more than a momentary softening that is in some strange fashion become a strengthening and a repose; it is the broken speech and the lost word that are made positive and suspended unbroken; as the strange kings fade into a far country and the mountains resound no more with the feet of the shepherds; and only the night and the cavern lie in fold upon fold over something more human than humanity.

II. The Riddles of the Gospel

To understand the nature of this chapter, it is necessary to recur to the nature of this book. The argument which is meant to be the backbone of the book is of the kind called the *reductio ad absurdum*. It suggests that the results of assuming the rationalist thesis are more irrational than ours; but to prove it we must assume that thesis. Thus in the first section I often treated man as merely an animal, to show that the effect was more impossible than if he were treated as an angel. In the sense in which it was necessary to treat man merely as an animal, it is necessary to treat Christ merely as a man. I have to suspend my own beliefs, which are much more positive; and assume this limitation even in order to remove it. I must try to imagine what would happen to a man who did really read the story of Christ as the story of a man; and even of a man of whom he had never heard before. And I wish to point out that a really impartial reading of that kind would lead, if not immediately to belief, at least to a bewilderment of which there is really no solution except in belief. In this chapter, for this reason, I shall bring in nothing of the spirit of my own creed; I shall exclude the very style of diction, and even of lettering, which I should think fitting in speaking in my own person. I am speaking as an imaginary heathen human being, honestly, staring at the Gospel story for the first time.

Now it is not at all easy to regard the New Testament as a New Testament. It is not at all easy to realise the good news as new. Both for good and evil familiarity fills us with assumptions and associations; and no man of our civilisation, whatever he thinks of our religion, can really read the thing as if he had never heard of it before. Of course it is in any case utterly unhistorical to talk as if the New Testament were a neatly bound book that had fallen from heaven. It is simply the selection made by the authority of the Church from a mass of early Christian literature. But apart from any such question there is a psychological difficulty in feeling the New Testament as new. There is a psychological difficulty in seeing those well-known words simply as they stand and without going beyond what they intrinsically stand for. And this difficulty must indeed be very great; for the result of it is very curious. The result of it is that most modern critics and most current criticism, even popular criticism, makes a comment that is the exact reverse of the truth. It is so completely the reverse of the truth that one could almost suspect that they had never read the New Testament at all.

We have all heard people say a hundred times over, for they seem never to tire of saying it, that the Jesus of the New Testament is indeed a most merciful and humane lover of humanity, but that the Church has hidden this human character in repellent dogmas and stiffened it with ecclesiastical terrors till it has taken on an inhuman character. This is, I venture to repeat, very nearly the reverse of the truth. The truth is that it is the image of Christ in the churches that is almost entirely mild and merciful. It is the image of Christ in the Gospels that is a good many other things as well. The figure in the Gospels does indeed utter in words of almost heart-breaking beauty his pity for our broken hearts. But they are very far from being the only sort of words that he utters. Nevertheless they are almost the only kind of words that the Church in its popular imagery ever represents him as uttering. That popular imagery is inspired by a perfectly sound popular instinct. The mass of the poor are broken, and the mass of the people are poor, and for the mass of mankind the main thing is to carry the conviction of the incredible compassion of God. But nobody with his eyes open can doubt that it is chiefly this idea of compassion that the popular machinery of the Church does seek to carry. The popular imagery carries a great deal to excess the sentiment of ‘Gentle Jesus, meek and mild.’ It is the first thing that the outsider feels and criticises in a Pieta or a shrine of the Sacred Heart. As I say, while the art may be insufficient, I am not sure that the instinct is unsound. In any case there is something appalling, something that makes the blood run cold, in the idea of having a statue of Christ in wrath. There is something insupportable even to the imagination in the idea of turning the corner of a street or coming out into the spaces of a marketplace, to meet the petrifying petrifaction of that figure as it turned upon a generation of vipers, or that face as it looked at the face of a hypocrite. The Church can reasonably be justified therefore if she turns the most merciful face or aspect towards men; but it is certainly the most merciful aspect that she does turn. And the point is here that it is very much more specially and exclusively merciful than any impression that could be formed by a man merely reading the New Testament for the first time. A man simply taking the words of the story as they stand would form quite another impression; an impression full of mystery and possibly of inconsistency; but certainly not merely an impression of mildness. It would be intensely interesting; but part of the interest would consist in its leaving a good deal to be guessed at or explained. It is full of sudden gestures evidently significant except that we hardly know what they signify, of enigmatic silences; of ironical replies. The outbreaks of wrath, like storms above our atmosphere, do not seem to break out exactly where we should expect them, but to follow some higher weather-chart of their own. The Peter whom popular Church teaching presents is very rightly the Peter to whom Christ said in forgiveness, 'Feed my lambs.' He is not the Peter upon whom Christ turned as if he were the devil, crying in that obscure wrath, 'Get thee behind me, Satan.' Christ lamented with nothing but love and pity over Jerusalem which was to murder him. We do not know what strange spiritual atmosphere or spiritual insight led him to sink Bethsaida lower in the pit than Sodom. I am putting aside for the moment all questions of doctrinal inferences or expositions, orthodox or otherwise; I am simply imagining the effect on a man's mind if he did really do what these critics are always talking about doing; if he did really read the New Testament without reference to orthodoxy and even without reference to doctrine. He would find a number of things which fit in far less with the current unorthodoxy than they do with the current orthodoxy. He would find, for instance, that if there are any descriptions that deserved to be called realistic, they are precisely the descriptions of the supernatural. If there is one aspect of the New Testament Jesus in which he may be said to present himself eminently as a practical person, it is in the aspect of an exorcist. There is nothing meek and mild, there is nothing even in the ordinary sense mystical, about the tone of the voice that says 'Hold thy peace and come out of him.' It is much more like the tone of a very business-like lion-tamer or a strong-minded doctor dealing with a homicidal maniac. But this is only a side issue for the sake of illustration; I am not now raising these controversies; but considering the case of the imaginary man from the moon to whom the New Testament is new.

Now the first thing to note is that if we take it merely as a human story, it is in some ways a very strange story. I do not refer here to its tremendous and tragic culmination or to any implications involving triumph in that tragedy. I do not refer to what is commonly called the miraculous element; for on that point philosophies vary and modern philosophies very decidedly waver. Indeed the educated Englishman of to-day may be said to have passed from an old fashion, in which he would not believe in any miracles unless they were ancient, and adopted a new fashion in which he will not believe in any miracles unless they are modern. He used to hold that miraculous cures stopped with the first Christians and is now inclined to suspect that they began with the first Christian Scientists. But I refer here rather specially to unmiraculous and even to unnoticed and inconspicuous parts of the story. There are a great many things about it which nobody would have invented, for they are things that nobody has ever made any particular use of; things which if they were remarked at all have remained rather as puzzles. For instance, there is that long stretch of silence in the life of Christ up to the age of thirty. It is of all silences the most immense and imaginatively impressive. But it is not the sort of thing that anybody is particularly likely to invent in order to prove something; and no body so far as I know has ever tried to prove anything in particular from it. It is impressive, but it is only impressive as a fact; there is nothing particularly popular or obvious about it as a fable. The ordinary trend of hero-worship and myth-making is much more likely to say the precise opposite. It is much more likely to say (as I believe some of the gospels rejected by the Church do say) that Jesus displayed a divine precocity and began his mission at a miraculously early age. And there is indeed something strange in the thought that he who of all humanity needed least preparation seems to have had most. Whether it was some mode of the divine humility, or some truth of which we see the shadow of the longer domestic tutelage of the higher creatures of the earth. I do not propose to speculate; I mention it simply as an example of the sort of thing that does in any case give rise to speculations, quite apart from recognised religious speculations. Now the whole story is full of these things. It is not by any means, as baldly presented in print, a story that it is easy to get to the bottom of. It is anything but what these people talk of as a simple Gospel. Relatively speaking, it is the Gospel that has the mysticism and the Church that has the rationalism. As I should put it, of course, it is the Gospel that is the riddle and the Church that is the answer. But whatever be the answer, the Gospel as it stands is almost a book of riddles.

First, a man reading the Gospel sayings would not find platitudes. If he had read even in the most respectful spirit the majority of ancient philosophers and of modern moralists, he would appreciate the unique importance of saying that he did not find platitudes. It is more than can be said even of Plato. It is much more than can be said of Epictetus or Seneca or Marcus Aurelius or Apollonius of Tyana. And it is immeasurably more than can be said of most of the agnostic moralists and the preachers of the ethical societies; with their songs of service and their religion of brotherhood. The morality of most moralists ancient and modern, has been one solid and polished cataract of platitudes flowing for ever and ever. That would certainly not be the impression of the imaginary independent outsider studying the New Testament. He would be conscious of nothing so commonplace and in a sense of nothing so continuous as that stream. He would find a number of strange claims that might sound like the claim to be the brother of the sun and moon; a number of very startling pieces of advice; a number of stunning rebukes; a number of strangely beautiful stories. He would see some very gigantesque figures of speech about the impossibility of threading a needle with a camel or the possibility of throwing a mountain into the sea. He would see a number of very daring simplifications of the difficulties of life; like the advice to shine upon everybody indifferently as does the sunshine or not to worry about the future any more than the birds. He would find on the other hand some passages of almost impenetrable darkness, so far as he is concerned, such as the moral of the parable of the Unjust Steward. Some of these things might strike him as fables and some as truths; but none as truisms. For instance, he would not find the ordinary platitudes in favour of peace. He would find several paradoxes in favour of peace. He would find several ideals of non-resistance, which taken as they stand would be rather too pacific for any pacifist. He would be told in one passage to treat a robber not with passive resistance, but rather with positive and enthusiastic encouragement, if the terms be taken literally; heaping up gifts upon the man who had stolen goods. But he would not find a word of all that obvious rhetoric against war which has filled countless books and odes and orations; not a word about the wickedness of war, the wastefulness of war, the appalling scale of the slaughter in war and all the rest of the familiar frenzy; indeed not a word about war at all. There is nothing that throws any particular light on Christ’s attitude towards organised warfare, except that he seems to have been rather fond of Roman soldiers. Indeed it is another perplexity, speaking from the same external and human stand point, that he seems to have got on much better with Romans than he did with Jews. But the question here is a certain tone to be appreciated by merely reading a certain text; and we might give any number of instances of it.

The statement that the meek shall inherit the earth is very far from being a meek statement. I mean it is not meek in the ordinary sense of mild and moderate and inoffensive. To justify it, it would be necessary to go very deep into history and anticipate things undreamed of then and by many unrealised even now; such as the way in which the mystical monks reclaimed the lands which the practical kings had lost. If it was a truth at all, it was because it was a prophecy. But certainly it was not a truth in the sense of a truism. The blessing upon the meek would seem to be a very violent statement; in the sense of doing violence to reason and probability. And with this we come to another important stage in the speculation. As a prophecy it really was fulfilled; but it was only fulfilled long afterwards. The monasteries were the most practical and prosperous estates and experiments in reconstruction after the barbaric deluge; the meek did really inherit the earth. But nobody could have known anything of the sort at the time — unless indeed there was one who knew. Something of the same thing may be said about the incident of Martha and Mary; which has been interpreted in retrospect and from the inside by the mystics of the Christian contemplative life. But it was not at all an obvious view of it; and most moralists, ancient and modern, could be trusted to make a rush for the obvious. What torrents of effortless eloquence would have flowed from them to swell any slight superiority on the part of Martha; what splendid sermons about the Joy of Service and the Gospel of Work and the World Left Better Than We Found It, and generally all the ten thousand platitudes that can be uttered in favour of taking trouble — by people who need take no trouble to utter them. If in Mary the mystic and child of love Christ was guarding the seed of something more subtle, who was likely to understand it at the time? Nobody else could have seen Clare and Catherine and Teresa shining above the little roof at Bethany. It is so in another way with that magnificent menace about bringing into the world a sword to sunder and divide. Nobody could have guessed then either how it could be fulfilled or how it could be justified. Indeed some freethinkers are still so simple as to fall into the trap and be shocked at a phrase so deliberately defiant. They actually complain of the paradox for not being a platitude.

But the point here is that if we could read the Gospel reports as things as new as newspaper reports, they would puzzle us and perhaps terrify us much more than the same things as developed by historical Christianity. For instance, Christ after a clear allusion to the eunuchs of eastern courts, said there would be eunuchs of the kingdom of heaven. If this does not mean the voluntary enthusiasm of virginity, it could only be made to mean something much more unnatural or uncouth. It is the historical religion that humanises it for us by experience of Franciscans or of Sisters of Mercy. The mere statement standing by itself might very well suggest a rather dehumanised atmosphere; the sinister and inhuman silence of the Asiatic harem and divan. This is but one instance out of scores; but the moral is that the Christ of the Gospel might actually seem more strange and terrible than the Christ of the Church.

I am dwelling on the dark or dazzling or defiant or mysterious side of the Gospel words, not because they had not obviously a more obvious and popular side, but because this is the answer to a common criticism on a vital point. The freethinker frequently says that Jesus of Nazareth was a man of his time, even if he was in advance of his time; and that we cannot accept his ethics as final for humanity. The freethinker then goes on to criticise his ethics, saying plausibly enough that men cannot turn the other cheek, or that they must take thought for the morrow, or that the self-denial is too ascetic or the monogamy too severe. But the Zealots and the Legionaries did not turn the other cheek any more than we do, if so much. The Jewish traders and Roman tax-gatherers took thought for the morrow as much as we, if not more. We cannot pretend to be abandoning the morality of the past for one more suited to the present. It is certainly not the morality of another age, but it might be of another world.

In short, we can say that these ideals are impossible in themselves. Exactly what we cannot say is that they are impossible for us. They are rather notably marked by a mysticism which, if it be a sort of madness, would always have struck the same sort of people as mad. Take, for instance, the case of marriage and the relations of the sexes. It might very well have been true that a Galilean teacher taught things natural to a Galilean environment; but it is not. It might rationally be expected that a man in the time of Tiberius would have advanced a view conditioned by the time of Tiberius; but he did not. What he advanced was something quite different; something very difficult; but something no more difficult now than it was then. When, for instance, Mahomet made his polygamous compromise we may reasonably say that it was conditioned by a polygamous society. When he allowed a man four wives he was really doing something suited to the circumstances, which might have been less suited to other circumstances. Nobody will pretend that the four wives were like the four winds, something seemingly a part of the order of nature; nobody will say that the figure four was written for ever in stars upon the sky. But neither will anyone say that the figure four is an inconceivable ideal; that it is beyond the power of the mind of man to count up to four; or to count the number of his wives and see whether it amounts to four. It is a practical compromise carrying with it the character of a particular society. If Mahomet had been born in Acton in the nineteenth century, we may well doubt whether he would instantly have filled that suburb with harems of four wives apiece. As he was born in Arabia in the sixth century, he did in his conjugal arrangements suggest the conditions of Arabia in the sixth century. But Christ in his view of marriage does not in the least suggest the conditions of Palestine of the first century. He does not suggest anything at all, except the sacramental view of marriage as developed long afterwards by the Catholic Church. It was quite as difficult for people then as for people now. It was much more puzzling to people then than to people now. Jews and Romans and Greeks did not believe, and did not even understand enough to disbelieve, the mystical idea that the man and the woman had become one sacramental substance. We may think it an incredible or impossible ideal; but we cannot think it any more incredible or impossible than they would have thought it. In other words, whatever else is true, it is not true that the controversy has been altered by time. Whatever else is true, it is emphatically not true that the ideas of Jesus of Nazareth were suitable to his time, but are no longer suitable to our time. Exactly how suitable they were to his time is perhaps suggested in the end of his story.

The same truth might be stated in another way by saying that if the story be regarded as merely human and historical, it is extraordinary how very little there is in the recorded words of Christ that ties him at all to his own time. I do not mean the details of a period, which even a man of the period knows to be passing. I mean the fundamentals which even the wisest man often vaguely assumes to be eternal. For instance, Aristotle was perhaps the wisest and most wide-minded man who ever lived. He founded himself entirely upon fundamentals, which have been generally found to remain rational and solid through all social and historical changes. Still, he lived in a world in which it was thought as natural to have slaves as to have children. And therefore he did permit himself a serious recognition of a difference between slaves and free men. Christ as much as Aristotle lived in a world that took slavery for granted. He did not particularly denounce slavery. He started a movement that could exist in a world with slavery. But he started a movement that could exist in a world without slavery. He never used a phrase that made his philosophy depend even upon the very existence of the social order in which he lived. He spoke as one conscious that everything was ephemeral, including the things that Aristotle thought eternal. By that time the Roman Empire had come to be merely the orbis terrarum, another name for the world. But he never made his morality dependent on the existence of the Roman Empire or even on the existence of the world. ‘Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.’

The truth is that when critics have spoken of the local limitations of the Galilean, it has always been a case of the local limitations of the critics. He did undoubtedly believe in certain things that one particular modern sect of materialists do not believe. But they were not things particularly peculiar to his time. It would be nearer the truth to say that the denial of them is quite peculiar to our time. Doubtless it would be nearer still to the truth to say merely that a certain solemn social importance, in the minority disbelieving them, is peculiar to our time. He believed, for instance, in evil spirits or in the psychic healing of bodily ills; but not because he was a Galilean born under Augustus. It is absurd to say that a man believed things because he was a Galilean under Augustus when he might have believed the same things if he had been an Egyptian under Tutenkamen or an Indian under Gengis Khan. But with this general question of the philosophy of diabolism or of divine miracles I deal elsewhere. It is enough to say that the materialists have to prove the impossibility of miracles against the testimony of all mankind, not against the prejudices of provincials in North Palestine under the first Roman Emperors. What they have to prove, for the present argument, is the presence in the Gospels of those particular prejudices of those particular provincials. And, humanly speaking, it is astonishing how little they can produce even to make a beginning of proving it.

So it is in this case of the sacrament of marriage. We may not believe in sacraments, as we may not believe in spirits, but it is quite clear that Christ believed in this sacrament in his own way and not in any current or contemporary way. He certainly did not get his argument against divorce from the Mosaic law or the Roman law or the habits of the Palestinian people. It would appear to his critics then exactly what it appears to his critics now; an arbitrary and transcendental dogma coming from nowhere save in the sense that it came from him. I am not at all concerned here to defend that dogma; the point here is that it is just as easy to defend it now as it was to defend it then. It is an ideal altogether outside time; difficult at any period; impossible at no period. In other words, if anyone says it is what might be expected of a man walking about in that place at that period, we can quite fairly answer that it is much more like what might be the mysterious utterance of a being beyond man, if he walked alive among men.

I maintain therefore that a man reading the New Testament frankly and freshly would not get the impression of what is now often meant by a human Christ. The merely human Christ is a made-up figure, a piece of artificial selection, like the merely evolutionary man. Moreover there have been too many of these human Christs found in the same story, just as there have been too many keys to mythology found in the same stories. Three or four separate schools of rationalism have worked over the ground and produced three or four equally rational explanations of his life. The first rational explanation of his life was that he never lived. And this in turn gave an opportunity for three or four different explanations, as that he was a sun-myth or a corn-myth, or any other kind of myth that is also a monomania. Then the idea that he was a divine being who did not exist gave place to the idea that he was a human being who did exist. In my youth it was the fashion to say that he was merely an ethical teacher in the manner of the Essenes, who had apparently nothing very much to say that Hillel or a hundred other Jews might not have said; as that it is a kindly thing to be kind and an assistance to purification to be pure. Then somebody said he was a madman with a Messianic delusion. Then others said he was indeed an original teacher because he cared about nothing but Socialism; or (as others said) about nothing but Pacifism. Then a more grimly scientific character appeared who said that Jesus would never have been heard of at all except for his prophecies of the end of the world. He was important merely as a Millenarian like Dr. Cumming; and created a provincial scare by announcing the exact date of the crack of doom. Among other variants on the same theme was the theory that he was a spiritual healer and nothing else; a view implied by Christian Science, which has really to expound a Christianity without the Crucifixion in order to explain the curing of Peter’s wife’s mother or the daughter of a centurion. There is another theory that concentrates entirely on the business of diabolism and what it would call the contemporary superstition about demoniacs, as if Christ, like a young deacon taking his first orders, had got as far as exorcism and never got any further. Now, each of these explanations in itself seems to me singularly inadequate; but taken together they do suggest something of the very mystery which they miss. There must surely have been something not only mysterious but many-sided about Christ if so many smaller Christs can be carved out of him. If the Christian Scientist is satisfied with him as a spiritual healer and the Christian Socialist is satisfied with him as a social reformer, so satisfied that they do not even expect him to be anything else, it looks as if he really covered rather more ground than they could be expected to expect. And it does seem to suggest that there might be more than they fancy in these other mysterious attributes of casting out devils or prophesying doom.

Above all, would not such a new reader of the New Testament stumble over something that would startle him much more than it startles us? I have here more than once attempted the rather impossible task of reversing time and the historic method; and in fancy looking forward to the facts, instead of backward through the memories. So I have imagined the monster that man might have seemed at first to the mere nature around him. We should have a worse shock if we really imagined the nature of Christ named for the first time. What should we feel at the first whisper of a certain suggestion about a certain man? Certainly it is not for us to blame anybody who should find that first wild whisper merely impious and insane. On the contrary, stumbling on that rock of scandal is the first step. Stark staring incredulity is a far more loyal tribute to that truth than a modernist metaphysic that would make it out merely a matter of degree. It were better to rend our robes with a great cry against blasphemy, like Caiaphas in the judgement, or to lay hold of the man as a maniac possessed of devils like the kinsmen and the crowd, rather than to stand stupidly debating fine shades of pantheism in the presence of so catastrophic a claim. There is more of the wisdom that is one with surprise in any simple person, full of the sensitiveness of simplicity, who should expect the grass to wither and the birds to drop dead out of the air, when a strolling carpenter’s apprentice said calmly and almost carelessly, like one looking over his shoulder: ‘Before Abraham was, I am.’

III. The Strangest Story in the World

In the last chapter I have deliberately stressed what seems to be nowadays a neglected side of the New Testament story, but nobody will suppose, I imagine, that it is meant to obscure that side that may truly be called human. That Christ was and is the most merciful of judges and the most sympathetic of friends is a fact of considerably more importance in our own private lives than in anybody's historical speculations. But the purpose of this book is to point out that something unique has been swamped in cheap generalisations; and for that purpose it is relevant to insist that even what was most universal was also most original. For instance, we might take a topic which really is sympathetic to the modern mood, as the ascetic vocations recently referred to are not. The exaltation of childhood is something which we do really understand; but it was by no means a thing that was then in that sense understood. If we wanted an example of the originality of the Gospels we could hardly take a stronger or more startling one. Nearly two thousand years afterwards we happen to find ourselves in a mood that does really feel the mystical charm of the child; we express it in romances and regrets about childhood, in *Peter Pan* or *The Child's Garden of Verses*. And we can say of the words of Christ with so angry an anti-Christian as Swinburne: —

'No sign that ever was given
To faithful or faithless eyes
Showed ever beyond clouds riven
So clear a paradise.

Earth's creeds may be seventy times seven
And blood have defiled each creed
But if such be the kingdom of heaven
It must be heaven indeed.'

But that paradise was not clear until Christianity had gradually cleared it. The pagan world, as such, would not have understood any such thing as a serious suggestion that a child is higher or holier than a man. It would have seemed like the suggestion that a tadpole is higher or holier than a frog. To the merely rationalistic mind, it would sound like saying that a bud must be more beautiful than a flower or that an unripe apple must be better than a ripe one. In other words, this modern feeling is an entirely mystical feeling. It is quite as mystical as the cult of virginity; in fact it is the cult of virginity. But pagan antiquity had much more idea of the holiness of the virgin than of the holiness of the child. For various reasons we have come nowadays to venerate children, perhaps partly because we envy children for still doing what men used to do; such as play simple games and enjoy fairy-tales. Over and above this, however, there is a great deal of real and subtle psychology in our appreciation of childhood; but if we turn it into a modern discovery, we must once more admit that the historical Jesus of Nazareth had already discovered it two thousand years too soon. There was certainly nothing in the world around him to help him to the discovery. Here Christ was indeed human; but more human than a human being was then likely to be. Peter Pan does not belong to the world of Pan but the world of Peter.

Even in the matter of mere literary style, if we suppose ourselves thus sufficiently detached to look at it in that light, there is a curious quality to which no critic seems to have done justice. It had among other things a singular air of piling tower upon tower by the use of the *a fortiori*; making a pagoda of degrees like the seven heavens. I have already noted that almost inverted imaginative vision which pictured the impossible penance of the Cities of the Plain. There is perhaps nothing so perfect in all language or literature as the use of these three degrees in the parable of the lilies of the field; in which he seems first to take one small flower in his hand and note its simplicity and even its impotence; then suddenly expands it in flamboyant colours into all the palaces and pavilions full of a great name in national legend and national glory; and then, by yet a third overturn, shrivels into nothing once more with a gesture as if flinging it away `and if God so clothes the grass that today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven — how much more’ It is like the building of a good Babel tower by white magic in a moment and in the movement of a hand; a tower heaved suddenly up to heaven on the top of which can be seen afar off, higher than we had fancied possible, the figure of man; lifted by three infinities above all other things, on a starry ladder of light logic and swift imagination. Merely in a literary sense it would be more of a masterpiece than most of the masterpieces in the libraries; yet it seems to have been uttered almost at random while a man might pull a flower. But merely in a literary sense also, this use of the comparative in several degrees has about it a quality which seems to me to hint of much higher things than the modern suggestion of the simple teaching of pastoral or communal ethics. There is nothing that really indicates a subtle and in the true sense a superior mind so much as this power of comparing a lower thing with a higher and yet that higher with a higher still; of thinking on three planes at once. There is nothing that wants the rarest sort of wisdom so much as to see, let us say, that the citizen is higher than the slave and yet that the soul is infinitely higher than the citizen or the city. It is not by any means a faculty that commonly belongs to these simplifiers of the Gospel; those who insist on what they call a simple morality and others call a sentimental morality. It is not at all covered by those who are content to tell everybody to remain at peace. On the contrary, there is a very striking example of it in the apparent inconsistency between Christ's sayings about peace and about a sword. It is precisely this power which perceives that while a good peace is better than a good war, even a good war is better than a bad peace. These far-flung comparisons are nowhere so common as in the Gospels; and to me they suggest something very vast. So a thing solitary and solid, with the added dimension of depth or height, might tower over the flat creatures living only on a plane.

This quality of something that can only be called subtle and superior, something that is capable of long views and even of double meanings, is not noted here merely as a counterblast to the commonplace exaggerations of amiability and mild idealism. It is also to be noted in connection with the more tremendous truth touched upon at the end of the last chapter. For this is the very last character that commonly goes with mere megalomania; especially such steep and staggering megalomania as might be involved in that claim. This quality that can only be called intellectual distinction is not, of course, an evidence of divinity. But it is an evidence of a probable distaste for vulgar and vainglorious claims to divinity. A man of that sort, if he were only a man, would be the last man in the world to suffer from that intoxication by one notion from nowhere in particular, which is the mark of the self-deluding sensationalist in religion . Nor is it even avoided by denying that Christ did make this claim. Of no such man as that, of no other prophet or philosopher of the same intellectual order, would it be even possible to pretend that he had made it. Even if the Church had mistaken his meaning, it would still be true that no other historical tradition except the Church had ever even made the same mistake. Mahomedans did not misunderstand Mahomet and suppose he was Allah. Jews did not misinterpret Moses and identify him with Jehovah. Why was this claim alone exaggerated unless this alone was made. Even if Christianity was one vast universal blunder, it is still a blunder as solitary as the Incarnation.

The purpose of these pages is to fix the falsity of certain vague and vulgar assumptions; and we have here one of the most false. There is a sort of notion in the air everywhere that all the religions are equal because all the religious founders were rivals, that they are all fighting for the same starry crown. It is quite false. The claim to that crown, or anything like that crown, is really so rare as to be unique. Mahomet did not make it any more than Micah or Malachi. Confucius did not make it any more that Plato or Marcus Aurelius. Buddha never said he was Brahma. Zoroaster no more claimed to be Ormuz than to be Ahriman. The truth is that, in the common run of cases, it is just as we should expect it to be, in common sense and certainly in Christian philosophy. It is exactly the other way. Normally speaking, the greater a man is, the less likely he is to make the very greatest claim. Outside the unique case we are considering, the only kind of man who ever does make that kind of claim is a very small man; a secretive or self-centered monomaniac. Nobody can imagine Aristotle claiming to be the father of gods and men, come down from the sky; though we might imagine some insane Roman Emperor like Caligula claiming it for him, or more probably for himself. Nobody can imagine Shakespeare talking as if he were literally divine; though we might imagine some crazy American crank finding it as a cryptogram in Shakespeare’s works, or preferably in his own works. It is possible to find here and there human beings who make this supremely superhuman claim. It is possible to find them in lunatic asylums; in padded cells; possibly in strait waistcoats. But what is much more important than their mere materialistic fate in our very materialistic society, under very crude and clumsy laws about lunacy, the type we know as tinged with this, or tending towards it, is a diseased and disproportionate type; narrow yet swollen and morbid to monstrosity. It is by rather an unlucky metaphor that we talk of a madman as cracked; for in a sense he is not cracked enough. He is cramped rather than cracked; there are not enough holes in his head to ventilate it. This impossibility of letting in daylight on a delusion does sometimes cover and conceal a delusion of divinity. It can be found, not among prophets and sages and founders of religions, but only among a low set of lunatics. But this is exactly where the argument becomes intensely interesting; because the argument proves too much. For nobody supposes that Jesus of Nazareth was that sort of person. No modern critic in his five wits thinks that the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount was a horrible half-witted imbecile that might be scrawling stars on the walls of a cell. No atheist or blasphemer believes that the author of the Parable of the Prodigal Son was a monster with one mad idea like a cyclops with one eye. Upon any possible historical criticism, he must be put higher in the scale of human beings than that. Yet by all analogy we have really to put him there or else in the highest place of all.

In fact, those who can really take it (as I here hypothetically take it) in a quite dry and detached spirit, have here a most curious and interesting human problem. It is so intensely interesting, considered as a human problem, that it is in a spirit quite disinterested, so to speak, that I wish some of them had turned that intricate human problem into something like an intelligible human portrait. If Christ was simply a human character, he really was a highly complex and contradictory human character. For he combined exactly the two things that lie at the two extremes of human variation. He was exactly what the man with a delusion never is; he was wise; he was a good judge. What he said was always unexpected; but it was always unexpectedly magnanimous and often unexpectedly moderate. Take a thing like the point of the parable of the tares and the wheat. It has the quality that unites sanity and subtlety. It has not the simplicity of a madman. It has not even the simplicity of a fanatic. It might be uttered by a philosopher a hundred years old, at the end of a century of Utopias. Nothing could be less like this quality of seeing beyond and all round obvious things, than the condition of the egomaniac with the one sensitive spot on his brain. I really do not see how these two characters could be convincingly combined, except in the astonishing way in which the creed combines them. For until we reach the full acceptance of the fact as a fact, however marvellous, all mere approximations to it are actually further and further away from it. Divinity is great enough to be divine; it is great enough to call itself divine. But as humanity grows greater, it grows less and less likely to do so. God is God, as the Moslems say; but a great man knows he is not God, and the greater he is the better he knows it. That is the paradox; everything that is merely approaching to that point is merely receding from it. Socrates, the wisest man, knows that he knows nothing. A lunatic may think he is omniscience, and a fool may talk as if he were omniscient. But Christ is in another sense omniscient if he not only knows, but knows that he knows.

Even on the purely human and sympathetic side, therefore, the Jesus of the New Testament seems to me to have in a great many ways the note of something superhuman; that is of something human and more than human. But there is another quality running through all his teachings which seems to me neglected in most modern talk about them as teachings; and that is the persistent suggestion that he has not really come to teach. If there is one incident in the record which affects me personally as grandly and gloriously human, it is the incident of giving wine for the wedding-feast. That is really human in the sense in which a whole crowd of prigs, having the appearance of human beings, can hardly be described as human. It rises superior to all superior persons. It is as human as Herrick and as democratic as Dickens. But even in that story there is something else that has that note of things not fully explained; and in a way here very relevant. I mean the first hesitation, not on any ground touching the nature of the miracle, but on that of the propriety of working any miracles at all, at least at that stage; ‘my time is not yet come.’ What does that mean? At least it certainly meant a general plan or purpose in the mind, with which certain things did or did not fit in. And if we leave out that solitary strategic plan, we not only leave out the point of the story, but the story.

We often hear of Jesus of Nazareth as a wandering teacher, and there is a vital truth in that view in so far as it emphasises an attitude towards luxury and convention which most respectable people would still regard as that of a vagabond. It is expressed in his own great saying about the holes of the foxes and the nests of the birds, and, like many of his great sayings, it is felt as less powerful than it is, through lack of appreciation of that great paradox by which he spoke of his own humanity as in some way collectively and representatively human; calling himself simply the Son of Man; that is, in effect, calling himself simply Man. It is fitting that the New Man or the Second Adam should repeat in so ringing a voice and with so arresting a gesture the great fact which came first in the original story, that man differs from the brutes by everything, even by deficiency; that he is in a sense less normal and even less native; a stranger upon the earth. It is well to speak of his wanderings in this sense and in the sense that he shared the drifting life of the most homeless and hopeless of the poor. It is assuredly well to remember that he would quite certainly have been moved on by the police and almost certainly arrested by the police for having no visible means of subsistence. For our law has in it a turn of humour or touch of fancy which Nero and Herod never happened to think of, that of actually punishing homeless people for not sleeping at home.

But in another sense the word ‘wandering’ as applied to his life is a little misleading. As a matter of fact, a great many of the pagan sages and not a few of the pagan sophists might truly be described as wandering teachers. In some of them their rambling journeys were not altogether without a parallel in their rambling remarks. Apollonius of Tyana, who figured in some fashionable cults as a sort of ideal philosopher, is represented as rambling as far as the Ganges and Ethiopia, more or less talking all the time. There was actually a school of philosophers called the Peripatetics; and most even of the great philosophers give us a vague impression of having very little to do except to walk and talk. The great conversations which give us our glimpses of the great minds of Socrates or Buddha or even Confucius often seem to be parts of a never-ending picnic; and especially, which is the important point, to have neither beginning nor end. Socrates did indeed find the conversation interrupted by the incident of his execution. But it is the whole point and the whole particular merit, of the position of Socrates that death was only an interruption and an incident. We miss the real moral importance of the great philosopher if we miss that point; that he stares at the executioner with an innocent surprise, and almost an innocent annoyance, at finding anyone so unreasonable as to cut short a little conversation for the elucidation of truth. He is looking for truth and not looking for death. Death is but a stone in the road which can trip him up. His work in life is to wander on the roads of the world and talk about truth for ever. Buddha, on the other hand, did arrest attention by one gesture; it was the gesture of renunciation, and therefore in a sense of denial. But by one dramatic negation he passed into a world of negation that was not dramatic; which he would have been the first to insist was not dramatic. Here again we miss the particular moral importance of the great mystic if we do not see the distinction; that it was his whole point that he had done with drama, which consists of desire and struggle and generally of defeat and disappointment. He passes into peace and lives to instruct others how to pass into it. Henceforth his life is that of the ideal philosopher; certainly a far more really ideal philosopher than Apollonius of Tyana; but still a philosopher in the sense that it is not his business to do anything but rather to explain everything; in his case, we might almost say, mildly and softly to explore everything. For the messages are basically different. Christ said ‘Seek first the kingdom, and all these things shall be added unto you.’ Buddha said ‘Seek first the kingdom, and then you will need none of these things.’

Now compared to these wanderers the life of Jesus went as swift and straight as a thunderbolt. It was above all things dramatic; it did above all things consist in doing something that had to be done. It emphatically would not have been done, if Jesus had walked about the world for ever doing nothing except tell the truth. And even the external movement of it must not be described as a wandering in the sense of forgetting that it was a journey. This is where it was a fulfilment of the myths rather than of the philosophies; it is a journey with a goal and an object, like Jason going to find the Golden Fleece, or Hercules the golden apples of the Hesperides. The gold that he was seeking was death. The primary thing that he was going to do was to die. He was going to do other things equally definite and objective; we might almost say equally external and material. But from first to last the most definite fact is that he is going to die. No two things could possibly be more different than the death of Socrates and the death of Christ. We are meant to feel that the death of Socrates was, from the point of view of his friends at least, a stupid muddle and miscarriage of justice interfering with the flow of a humane and lucid, I had almost said a light philosophy. We are meant to feel that Death was the bride of Christ as Poverty was the bride of St. Francis. We are meant to feel that his life was in that sense a sort of love-affair with death, a romance of the pursuit of the ultimate sacrifice. From the moment when the star goes up like a birthday rocket to the moment when the sun is extinguished like a funeral torch, the whole story moves on wings with the speed and direction of a drama, ending in an act beyond words.

Therefore the story of Christ is the story of a journey, almost in the manner of a military march; certainly in the manner of the quest of a hero moving to his achievement or his doom. It is a story that begins in the paradise of Galilee, a pastoral and peaceful land having really some hint of Eden, and gradually climbs the rising country into the mountains that are nearer to the storm-clouds and the stars, as to a Mountain of Purgatory. He may be met as if straying in strange places, or stopped on the way for discussion or dispute; but his face is set towards the mountain city. That is the meaning of that great culmination when he crested the ridge and stood at the turning of the road and suddenly cried aloud, lamenting over Jerusalem. Some light touch of that lament is in every patriotic poem; or if it is absent, the patriotism stinks with vulgarity. That is the meaning the stirring and startling incident at the gates of the Temple, when the tables were hurled like lumber down the steps, and the rich merchants driven forth with bodily blows; the incident that must be at least as much of a puzzle to the pacifists as any paradox about non resistance can be to any of the militarists. I have compared the quest to the journey of Jason, but we must never forget that in a deeper sense it is rather to be compared to the journey of Ulysses. It was not only a romance of travel but a romance of return; and of the end of a usurpation. No healthy boy reading the story regards the rout of the Ithacan suitors as anything but a happy ending. But there are doubtless some who regard the rout of the Jewish merchants and money changers with that refined repugnance which never fails to move them in the presence of violence, and especially of violence against the well-to-do. The point, here however, is that all these incidents have in them a character of mounting crisis. In other words. these incidents are not incidental. When Apollonius the ideal philosopher is brought before the judgement-seat of Domitian and vanishes by magic, the miracle is entirely incidental. It might have occurred at any time in the wandering life of the Tyanean; indeed, I believe it is doubtful in date as well as in substance. The ideal philosopher merely vanished, and resumed his ideal existence somewhere else for an indefinite period. It is characteristic of the contrast perhaps that Apollonius was supposed to have lived to an almost miraculous old age. Jesus of Nazareth was less prudent in his miracles. When Jesus was brought before the judgement-seat of Pontius Pilate, he did not vanish. It was the crisis and the goal; it was the hour and the power of darkness. It was the supremely supernatural act, of all his miraculous life, that he did not vanish.

Every attempt to amplify that story has diminished it. The task has been attempted by many men of real genius and eloquence as well as by only too many vulgar sentimentalists and self-conscious rhetoricians. The tale has been retold with patronising pathos by elegant sceptics and with fluent enthusiasm by boisterous best-sellers. It will not be retold here. The grinding power of the plain words of the Gospel story is like the power of mill-stones; and those who can read them simply enough will feel as if rocks had been rolled upon them. Criticism is only words about words; and of what use are words about such words as these? What is the use of word-painting about the dark garden filled suddenly with torchlight and furious faces? ‘Are you come out with swords and staves as against a robber? All day I sat in your temple teaching, and you took me not.’ Can anything be added to the massive and gathered restraint of that irony; like a great wave lifted to the sky and refusing to fall? ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me but weep for yourselves and for your children.’ As the High Priest asked what further need he had of witnesses, we might well ask what further need we have of words. Peter in a panic repudiated him: ‘and immediately the cock crew; and Jesus looked upon Peter, and Peter went out and wept bitterly.’ Has anyone any further remarks to offer. Just before the murder he prayed for all the murderous race of men, saying, ‘They know not what they do’; is there anything to say to that, except that we know as little what we say? Is there any need to repeat and spin out the story of how the tragedy trailed up the Via Dolorosa and how they threw him in haphazard with two thieves in one of the ordinary batches of execution; and how in all that horror and howling wilderness of desertion one voice spoke in homage, a startling voice from the very last place where it was looked for, the gibbet of the criminal; and he said to that nameless ruffian, ‘This night shalt thou be with me in Paradise’? Is there anything to put after that but a full stop? Or is anyone prepared to answer adequately that farewell gesture to all flesh which created for his Mother a new Son?

It is more within my powers, and here more immediately to my purpose, to point out that in that scene were symbolically gathered all the human forces that have been vaguely sketched in this story. As kings and philosophers and the popular element had been symbolically present at his birth, so they were more practically concerned in his death; and with that we come face to face with the essential fact to be realised. All the great groups that stood about the Cross represent in one way or another the great historical truth of the time; that the world could not save itself. Man could do no more. Rome and Jerusalem and Athens and everything else were going down like a sea turned into a slow cataract. Externally indeed the ancient world was still at its strongest; it is always at that moment that the inmost weakness begins. But in order to understand that weakness we must repeat what has been said more than once; that it was not the weakness of a thing originally weak. It was emphatically the strength of the world that was turned to weakness and the wisdom of the world that was turned to folly.

In this story of Good Friday it is the best things in the world that are at their worst. That is what really shows us the world at its worst. It was, for instance, the priests of a true monotheism and the soldiers of an international civilisation. Rome, the legend, founded upon fallen Troy and triumphant over fallen Carthage, had stood for a heroism which was the nearest that any pagan ever came to chivalry. Rome had defended the household gods and the human decencies against the ogres of Africa and the hermaphrodite monstrosities of Greece. But in the lightning flash of this incident, we see great Rome, the imperial republic, going downward under her Lucretian doom. Scepticism has eaten away even the confident sanity of the conquerors of the world. He who is enthroned to say what is justice can only ask: 'What is truth?' So in that drama which decided the whole fate of antiquity, one of the central figures is fixed in what seems the reverse of his true role. Rome was almost another name for responsibility. Yet he stands for ever as a sort of rocking statue of the irresponsible. Man could do no more. Even the practical had become the impracticable. Standing between the pillars of his own judgement-seat, a Roman had washed his hands of the world.

There too were the priests of that pure and original truth that was behind all the mythologies like the sky behind the clouds. It was the most important truth in the world; and even that could not save the world. Perhaps there is something overpowering in pure personal theism; like seeing the sun and moon and sky come together to form one staring face. Perhaps the truth is too tremendous when not broken by some intermediaries divine or human; perhaps it is merely too pure and far away. Anyhow it could not save the world; it could not even conquer the world. There were philosophers who held it in its highest and noblest form; but they not only could not convert the world, but they never tried. You could no more fight the jungle of popular mythology with a private opinion than you could clear away a forest with a pocket-knife. The Jewish priests had guarded it jealously in the good and the bad sense. They had kept it as a gigantic secret. As savage heroes might have kept the sun in a box, they kept the Everlasting in the tabernacle. They were proud that they alone could look upon the blinding sun of a single deity; and they did not know that they had themselves gone blind. Since that day their representatives have been like blind men in broad daylight, striking to right and left with their staffs, and cursing the darkness. But there has been that in their monumental monotheism that it has at least remained like a monument, the last thing of its kind, and in a sense motionless in the more restless world which it cannot satisfy. For it is certain that for some reason it cannot satisfy. Since that day it has never been quite enough to say that God is in his heaven and all is right with the world, since the rumour that God had left his heavens to set it right.

And as it was with these powers that were good, or at least had once been good, so it was with the element which was perhaps the best, or which Christ himself seems certainly to have felt as the best. The poor to whom he preached the good news, the common people who heard him gladly, the populace that had made so many popular heroes and demigods in the old pagan world, showed also the weaknesses that were dissolving the world. They suffered the evils often seen in the mob of the city, and especially the mob of the capital, during the decline of a society. The same thing that makes the rural population live on tradition makes the urban population live on rumour. Just as its myths at the best had been irrational, so its likes and dislikes are easily changed by baseless assertion that is arbitrary without being authoritative. Some brigand or other was artificially turned into a picturesque and popular figure and run as a kind of candidate against Christ. In all this we recognise the urban population that we know, with its newspaper scares and scoops. But there was present in this ancient population an evil more peculiar to the ancient world. We have noted it already as the neglect of the individual, even of the individual voting the condemnation and still more of the individual condemned. It was the soul of the hive; a heathen thing. The cry of this spirit also was heard in that hour, ‘It is well that one man die for the people.’ Yet this spirit in antiquity of devotion to the city and to the state had also been in itself and in its time a noble spirit. It had its poets and its martyrs; men still to be honoured for ever. It was failing through its weakness in not seeing the separate soul of a man, the shrine of all mysticism; but it was only failing as everything else was failing. The mob went along with the Sadducees and the Pharisees, the philosophers and the moralists. It went along with the imperial magistrates and the sacred priests, the scribes and the soldiers, that the one universal human spirit might suffer a universal condemnation; that there might be one deep, unanimous chorus of approval and harmony when Man was rejected of men.

There were solitudes beyond where none shall follow. There were secrets in the inmost and invisible part of that drama that have no symbol in speech; or in any severance of a man from men. Nor is it easy for any words less stark and single-minded than those of the naked narrative even to hint at the horror of exaltation that lifted itself above the hill. Endless expositions have not come to the end of it, or even to the beginning. And if there be any sound that can produce a silence, we may surely be silent about the end and the extremity; when a cry was driven out of that darkness in words dreadfully distinct and dreadfully unintelligible, which man shall never understand in all the eternity they have purchased for him; and for one annihilating instant an abyss that is not for our thoughts had opened even in the unity of the absolute; and God had been forsaken of God.

They took the body down from the cross and one of the few rich men among the first Christians obtained permission to bury it in a rock tomb in his garden; the Romans setting a military guard lest there should be some riot and attempt to recover the body. There was once more a natural symbolism in these natural proceedings; it was well that the tomb should be sealed with all the secrecy of ancient eastern sepulture and guarded by the authority of the Caesars. For in that second cavern the whole of that great and glorious humanity which we call antiquity was gathered up and covered over; and in that place it was buried. It was the end of a very great thing called human history; the history that was merely human. The mythologies and the philosophies were buried there, the gods and the heroes and the sages. In the great Roman phrase, they had lived. But as they could only live, so they could only die; and they were dead.

On the third day the friends of Christ coming at daybreak to the place found the grave empty and the stone rolled away. In varying ways they realised the new wonder; but even they hardly realised that the world had died in the night. What they were looking at was the first day of a new creation, with a new heaven and a new earth; and in a semblance of the gardener God walked again in the garden, in the cool not of the evening but the dawn.

IV. The Witness of the Heretics

Christ founded the Church with two great figures of speech; in the final words to the Apostles who received authority to found it. The first was the phrase about founding it on Peter as on a rock; the second was the symbol of the keys. About the meaning of the former there is naturally no doubt in my own case; but it does not directly affect the argument here save in two more secondary aspects. It is yet another example of a thing that could only fully expand and explain itself afterwards, and even long afterwards. And it is yet another example of something the very reverse of simple and self-evident even in the language, in so far as it described a man as a rock when he had much more the appearance of a reed.

But the other image of the keys has an exactitude that has hardly been exactly noticed. The keys have been conspicuous enough in the art and heraldry of Christendom; but not everyone has noted the peculiar aptness of the allegory. We have now reached the point in history where something must be said of the first appearance and activities of the Church in the Roman Empire; and for that brief description nothing could be more perfect than that ancient metaphor. The Early Christian was very precisely a person carrying about a key, or what he said was a key. The whole Christian movement consisted in claiming to possess that key. It was not merely a vague forward movement, which might be better represented by a battering-ram. It was not something that swept along with it similar or dissimilar things, as does a modern social movement. As we shall see in a moment, it rather definitely refused to do so. It definitely asserted that there was a key and that it possessed that key and that no other key was like it; in that sense it was as narrow as you please. Only it happened to be the key that could unlock the prison of the whole world; and let in the white daylight of liberty.

The creed was like a key in three respects; which can be most conveniently summed up under this symbol. First, a key is above all things a thing with a shape. It is a thing that depends entirely upon keeping its shape. The Christian creed is above all things the philosophy of shapes and the enemy of shapelessness. That is where it differs from all that formless infinity, Manichean or Buddhist, which makes a sort of pool of night in the dark heart of Asia; the ideal of uncreating all the creatures. That is where it differs also from the analogous vagueness of mere evolutionism, the idea of creatures constantly losing their shape. A man told that his solitary latchkey had been melted down with a million others into a Buddhistic unity would be annoyed. But a man told that his key was gradually growing and sprouting in his pocket, and branching into new wards or complications, would not be more gratified.

Second, the shape of a key is in itself a rather fantastic shape. A savage who did not know it was a key would have the greatest difficulty in guessing what it could possibly be. And it is fantastic because it is in a sense arbitrary. A key is not a matter of abstractions; in that sense a key is not a matter of argument. It either fits the lock or it does not. It is useless for men to stand disputing over it, considered by itself; or reconstructing it on pure principles of geometry or decorative art. It is senseless for a man to say he would like a simple key; it would be far more sensible to do his best with a crowbar. And thirdly, as the key is necessarily a thing with a pattern, so this was one having in some ways a rather elaborate pattern. When people complain of the religion being so early complicated with theology and things of the kind, they forget that the world had not only got into a hole, but had got into a whole maze of holes and corners. The problem itself was a complicated problem; it did not in the ordinary sense merely involve anything so simple as sin. It was also full of secrets, of unexplored and unfathomable fallacies, of unconscious mental diseases, of dangers in all directions. If the faith had faced the world only with the platitudes about peace and simplicity some moralists would confine it to, it would not have had the faintest effect on that luxurious and labyrinthine lunatic asylum. What it did do we must now roughly describe; it is enough to say here that there was undoubtedly much about the key that seemed complex, indeed there was only one thing about it that was simple. It opened the door.

There are certain recognised and accepted statements in this matter which may for brevity and convenience be described as lies. We have all heard people say that Christianity arose in an age of barbarism. They might just as well say that Christian Science arose in an age of barbarism. They may think Christianity was a symptom of social decay, as I think Christian Science a symptom of mental decay. They may think Christianity a superstition that ultimately destroyed a civilisation, as I think Christian Science a superstition capable (if taken seriously) of destroying any number of civilisations. But to say that a Christian of the fourth or fifth centuries was a barbarian living in a barbarous time is exactly like saying that Mrs. Eddy was a Red Indian. And if I allowed my constitutional impatience with Mrs. Eddy to impel me to call her a Red Indian, I should incidentally be telling a lie. We may like or dislike the imperial civilisation of Rome in the fourth century; we may like or dislike the industrial civilisation of America in the nineteenth century; but that they both were what we commonly mean by a civilisation no person of commonsense could deny if he wanted to. This is a very obvious fact but it is also a very fundamental one; and we must make it the foundation of any further description of constructive Christianity in the past. For good or evil, it was pre-eminently the product of a civilised age, perhaps of an over-civilised age. This is the first fact apart from all praise or blame; indeed I am so unfortunate as not to feel that I praise a thing when I compare it to Christian Science. But it is at least desirable to know something of the savour of a society in which we are condemning or praising anything; and the science that connects Mrs. Eddy with tomahawks or the Mater Dolorosa with totems may for our general convenience be eliminated. The dominant fact, not merely about the Christian religion, but about the whole pagan civilisation, was that which has been more than once repeated in these pages. The Mediterranean was a lake in the real sense of a pool; in which a number of different cults or cultures were, as the phrase goes, pooled. Those cities facing each other round the circle of the lake became more and more one cosmopolitan culture. On its legal and military side it was the Roman Empire, but it was very many-sided. It might be called superstitious in the sense that it contained a great number of varied superstitions; but by no possibility can any part of it be called barbarous.

In this level of cosmopolitan culture arose the Christian religion and the Catholic Church; and everything in the story suggests that it was felt to be something new and strange. Those who have tried to suggest that it evolved out of something much milder or more ordinary have found that in this case their evolutionary method is very difficult to apply. They may suggest that Essenes or Ebionites or such things were the seed; but the seed is invisible; the tree appears very rapidly full-grown; and the tree is something totally different. It is certainly a Christmas tree in the sense that it keeps the kindliness and moral beauty of the story of Bethlehem; but it was as ritualistic as the seven-branched candlestick, and the candles it carried were considerably more than were probably permitted by the first prayer-book of

Edward the Sixth. It might well be asked, indeed, why any one accepting the Bethlehem tradition should object to golden or gilded ornament since the Magi themselves brought gold, why he should dislike incense in the church since incense was brought even to the stable. But these are controversies that do not concern me here. I am concerned only with the historical fact, more and more admitted by historians, that very early in its history this thing became visible to the civilisation of antiquity; and that already the Church appeared as a Church; with everything that is implied in a Church and much that is disliked in a Church. We will discuss in a moment how far it was like other ritualistic or magical or ascetical mysteries in its own time. It was certainly not in the least like merely ethical and idealistic movements in our time. It had a doctrine; it had a discipline; it had sacraments; it had degrees of initiation, it admitted people and expelled people; it affirmed one dogma with authority and repudiated another with anathemas. If all these things be the marks of Antichrist, the reign of Antichrist followed very rapidly upon Christ.

Those who maintain that Christianity was not a Church but a moral movement of idealists have been forced to push the period of its perversion or disappearance further and further back. A bishop of Rome writes claiming authority in the very lifetime of St. John the Evangelist; and it is described as the first papal aggression. A friend of the Apostles writes of them as men he knew and says they taught him the doctrine of the Sacrament, and Mr. Wells can only murmur that the reaction towards barbaric blood-rites may have happened rather earlier than might be expected. The date of the Fourth Gospel, which at one time was steadily growing later and later, is now steadily growing earlier and earlier; until critics are staggered at the dawning and dreadful possibility that it might be something like what it professes to be. The last limit of an early date for the extinction of true Christianity has probably been found by the latest German professor whose authority is invoked by Dean Inge. This learned scholar says that Pentecost was the occasion for the first founding of an ecclesiastical, dogmatic, and despotic Church utterly alien to the simple ideals of Jesus of Nazareth. This may be called, in a popular as well as a learned sense, the limit. What do professors of this kind imagine that men are made of? Suppose it were a matter of any merely human movement, let us say that of the conscientious objectors. Some say the early Christians were Pacifists; I do not believe it for a moment; but I am quite ready to accept the parallel for the sake of the argument. Tolstoy or some great preacher of peace among peasants has been shot as a mutineer for defying conscription; and a little while afterwards his few followers meet together in an upper room in remembrance of him. They never had any reason for coming together except that common memory; they are men of many kinds with nothing to bind them, except that the greatest event in all their lives was this tragedy of the teacher of universal peace. They are always repeating his words, revolving his problems, trying to imitate his character. The Pacifists meet at their Pentecost and are possessed of a sudden ecstasy of enthusiasm and wild rush of the whirlwind of inspiration, in the course of which they proceed to establish universal Conscription, to increase the Navy Estimates, to insist on everybody going about armed to the teeth and on all the frontiers bristling with artillery; the proceedings concluded with the singing of ‘Boys of the Bulldog Breed’ and ‘Don’t let them scrap the British Navy.’ That is something like a fair parallel to the theory of these critics; that the transition from their idea of Jesus to their idea of Catholicism could have been made in the little upper room at Pentecost. Surely anybody’s commonsense would tell him that enthusiasts who only met through their common enthusiasm for a leader whom they loved, would not instantly rush away to establish everything that he hated. No, if the ‘ecclesiastical and dogmatic system’ is as old as Pentecost it is as old as Christmas. If we trace it back to such very early Christians we must trace it back to Christ.

We may begin then with these two negations. It is nonsense to say that the Christian faith appeared in a simple age; in the sense of an unlettered and gullible age. It is equally nonsense to say that the Christian faith was a simple thing; in the sense of a vague or childish or merely instinctive thing. Perhaps the only point in which we could possibly say that the Church fitted into the pagan world, is the fact that they were both not only highly civilised but rather complicated. They were both emphatically many-sided; but antiquity was then a many-sided hole, like a hexagonal hole waiting for an equally hexagonal stopper. In that sense only the Church was many-sided enough to fit the world. The six sides of the Mediterranean world faced each other across the sea and waited for something that should look all ways at once. The Church had to be both Roman and Greek and Jewish and African and Asiatic. In the very words of the Apostle of the Gentiles, it was indeed all things to all men. Christianity then was not merely crude and simple and was the very reverse of the growth of a barbaric time. But when we come to the contrary charge, we come to a much more plausible charge. It is very much more tenable that the Faith was but the final phase of the decay of civilisation, in the sense of the excess of civilisation; that this superstition was a sign that Rome was dying, and dying of being much too civilised. That is an argument much better worth considering; and we will proceed to consider it.

At the beginning of this book I ventured on a general summary of it, in a parallel between the rise of humanity out of nature and the rise of Christianity out of history. I pointed out that in both cases what had gone before might imply something coming after; but did not in the least imply what did come after. If a detached mind had seen certain apes it might have deduced more anthropoids; it would not have deduced man or anything within a thousand miles of what man has done. In short, it might have seen Pithecanthropus or the Missing Link looming in the future, if possible almost as dimly and doubtfully as we see him looming in the past. But if it foresaw him appearing it would also foresee him disappearing, and leaving a few faint traces just as he has left a few faint traces; if they are traces. To foresee that Missing Link would not be to foresee Man, or anything like Man. Now this earlier explanation must be kept in mind; because it is an exact parallel to the true view of the Church; and the suggestion of it having evolved naturally out of the Empire in decay.

The truth is that in one sense a man might very well have predicted that the imperial decadence would produce something like Christianity. That is, something a little like and gigantically different. A man might very well have said, for instance, ‘Pleasure has been pursued so extravagantly that there will be a reaction into pessimism. Perhaps it will take the form of asceticism; men will mutilate themselves instead of merely hanging themselves.’ Or a man might very reasonably have said, ‘If we weary of our Greek and Latin gods we shall be hankering after some eastern mystery or other; there will be a fashion in Persians or Hindoos.’ Or a man of the world might well have been shrewd enough to say, ‘Powerful people are picking up these fads; some day the court will adopt one of them and it may become official.’ Or yet another and gloomier prophet might be pardoned for saying, ‘The world is going down-hill; dark and barbarous superstitions will return, it does not matter much which. They will all be formless and fugitive like dreams of the night.’

Now it is the intense interest of the case that all these prophecies were really fulfilled; but it was not the Church that fulfilled them. It was the Church that escaped from them, confounded them, and rose above them in triumph. In so far as it was probable that the mere nature of hedonism would produce a mere reaction of asceticism it did produce a mere reaction of asceticism. It was the movement called Manichean and the Church was its mortal enemy. In so far as it would have naturally appeared at that point of history, it did appear; it did also disappear, which was equally natural. The mere pessimist reaction did come with the Manichees and did go with the Manichees. But the Church did not come with them or go with them; and she had much more to do with them going than with their coming. Or again, in so far as it was probable that even the growth of scepticism would bring in a fashion of eastern religion, it did bring it in; Mithras came from far beyond Palestine out of the heart of Persia, bringing strange mysteries of the blood of bulls. Certainly there was everything to show that some such fashion would have come in any case but certainly there is nothing in the world to show that it would not have passed away in any case. Certainly an Oriental fad was something eminently fitted to the fourth or fifth century; but that hardly explains it having remained to the twentieth century, and still going strong. In short, in so far as things of the kind might have been expected then, things like Mithraism were experienced then; but it scarcely explains our more recent experiences. And if we were still Mithraists merely because Mithraic head-dresses and other Persian apparatuses might be expected to be all the rage in the days of Domitian, it would almost seem by this time that we must be a little dowdy.

It is the same, as will be suggested in a moment, with the idea of official favouritism. In so far as such favouritism shown towards a fad was something that might have been looked for during the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, it was something that did exist in that Empire and did decline and fall with it. It throws no sort of light on the thing that resolutely refused to decline and fall; that grew steadily while the other was declining and falling; and which even at this moment is going forward with fearless energy, when an other aeon has completed its cycle and another civilisation seems almost ready to fall or to decline.

Now the curious fact is this; that the very heresies which the early Church is blamed for crushing testify to the unfairness for which she is blamed. In so far as something deserved the blame, it was precisely the things that she is blamed for blaming. In so far as something was merely a superstition, she herself condemned that superstition. In so far as something was a mere reaction into barbarism, she herself resisted it because it was a reaction into barbarism. In so far as something was a fad of the fading empire, that died and deserved to die, it was the Church alone that killed it. The Church is reproached for being exactly what the heresy was repressed for being. The explanations of the evolutionary historians and higher critics do really explain why Arianism and Gnosticism and Nestorianism were born — and also why they died. They do not explain why the Church was born or why she has refused to die. Above all, they do not explain why she should have made war on the very evils she is supposed to share.

Let us take a few practical examples of the principle; the principle that if there was anything that was really a superstition of the dying empire, it did really die with the dying empire; and certainly was not the same as the very thing that destroyed it. For this purpose we will take in order two or three of the most ordinary explanations of Christian origins among the modern critics of Christianity. Nothing is more common, for instance, than to find such a modern critic writing something like this: ‘Christianity was above all a movement of ascetics, a rush into the desert, a refuge in the cloister, a renunciation of all life and happiness; and this was a part of a gloomy and inhuman reaction against nature itself, a hatred of the body, a horror of the material universe, a sort of universal suicide of the senses and even of the self. It came from an eastern fanaticism like that of the fakirs and was ultimately founded on an eastern pessimism, which seems to feel existence itself as an evil.’

Now the most extraordinary thing about this is that it is all quite true; it is true in every detail except that it happens to be attributed entirely to the wrong person. It is not true of the Church; but it is true of the heretics condemned by the Church. It is as if one were to write a most detailed analysis of the mistakes and misgovernment of the ministers of George the Third, merely with the small inaccuracy that the whole story was told about George Washington; or as if somebody made a list of the crimes of the Bolshevists with no variation except that they were all attributed to the Czar. The early Church was indeed very ascetic in connection with a totally different philosophy; but the philosophy of a war on life and nature as such really did exist in the world, if the critics only knew where to look for it.

What really happened was this. When the Faith first emerged into the world, the very first thing that happened to it was that it was caught in a sort of swarm of mystical and metaphysical sects, mostly out of the East; like one lonely golden bee caught in a swarm of wasps. To the ordinary onlooker, there did not seem to be much difference, or anything beyond a general buzz; indeed in a sense there was not much difference so far as stinging and being stung were concerned. The difference was that only one golden dot in all that whirring gold-dust had the power of going forth to make hives for all humanity; to give the world honey and wax or (as was so finely said in a context too easily forgotten) ‘the two noblest things, which are sweetness and light.’ The wasps all died that winter; and half the difficulty is that hardly anyone knows anything about them and most people do not know that they ever existed; so that the whole story of that first phase of our religion is lost. Or, to vary the metaphor, when this movement or some other movement pierced the dyke between the east and west and brought more mystical ideas into Europe, it brought with it a whole flood of other mystical ideas besides its own, most of them ascetical and nearly all of them pessimistic. They very nearly flooded and over-whelmed the purely Christian element. They came mostly from that region that was a sort of dim borderland between the eastern philosophies and the eastern mythologies, and which shared with the wilder philosophers that curious crave for making fantastic patterns of the cosmos in the shape of maps and genealogical trees. Those that are supposed to derive from the mysterious Manes are called Manichean; kindred cults are more generally known as Gnostic; they are mostly of a labyrinthine complexity, but the point to insist on is the pessimism; the fact that nearly all in one form or another regarded the creation of the world as the work of an evil spirit. Some of them had that Asiatic atmosphere that surrounds Buddhism; the suggestion that life is a corruption of the purity of being. Some of them suggested a purely spiritual order which had been betrayed by the coarse and clumsy trick of making such toys as the sun and moon and stars. Anyhow all this dark tide out of the metaphysical sea in the midst of Asia poured through the dykes simultaneously with the creed of Christ; but it is the whole point of the story that the two were not the same; that they flowed like oil and water. That creed remained in the shape of a miracle; a river still flowing through the sea. And the proof of the miracle was practical once more; it was merely that while all that sea was salt and bitter with the savour of death, of this one stream in the midst of it a man could drink.

Now that purity was preserved by dogmatic definitions and exclusions. It could not possibly have been preserved by anything else. If the Church had not renounced the Manicheans it might have become merely Manichean. If it had not renounced the Gnostics it might have become Gnostic. But by the very fact that it did renounce them it proved that it was not either Gnostic or Manichean. At any rate it proved that something was not either Gnostic or Manichean; and what could it be that condemned them, if it was not the original good news of the runners from Bethlehem and the trumpet of the Resurrection? The early Church was ascetic, but she proved that she was not pessimistic, simply by condemning the pessimists. The creed declared that man was sinful, but it did not declare that life was evil, and it proved it by damning those who did. The condemnation of the early heretics is itself condemned as something crabbed and narrow; but it was in truth the very proof that the Church meant to be brotherly and broad. It proved that the primitive Catholics were specially eager to explain that they did not think man utterly vile; that they did not think life incurably miserable; that they did not think marriage a sin or procreation a tragedy. They were ascetic because asceticism was the only possible purge of the sins of the world; but in the very thunder of their anathemas they affirmed for ever that their asceticism was not to be anti-human or anti-natural; that they did wish to purge the world and not destroy it. And nothing else except those anathemas could possibly have made it clear, amid a confusion which still confuses them with their mortal enemies. Nothing else but dogma could have resisted the riot of imaginative invention with which the pessimists were waging their war against nature; with their Aeons and their Demiurge, their strange Logos and their sinister Sophia. If the Church had not insisted on theology, it would have melted into a mad mythology of the mystics, yet further removed from reason or even from rationalism; and, above all yet further removed from life and from the love of life. Remember that it would have been an inverted mythology, one contradicting everything natural in paganism; a mythology in which Pluto would be above Jupiter and Hades hang higher than Olympus; in which Brahma and all that has the breath of life would be subject to Seeva, shining with the eye of death.

That the early Church was itself full of an ecstatic enthusiasm for renunciation and virginity makes this distinction much more striking and not less so. It makes all the more important the place where the dogma drew the line. A man might crawl about on all fours like a beast because he was an ascetic. He might stand night and day on the top of a pillar and be adored for being an ascetic, but he could not say that the world was a mistake or the marriage state a sin without being a heretic. What was it that thus deliberately disengaged itself from eastern asceticism by sharp definition and fierce refusal, if it was not something with an individuality of its own; and one that was quite different? If the Catholics are to be confused with the Gnostics, we can only say it was not their fault if they are. And it is rather hard that the Catholics should be blamed by the same critics for persecuting the heretics and also for sympathising with the heresy.

The Church was not a Manichean movement if only because it was not a movement at all. It was not even merely an ascetical movement, because it was not a movement at all. It would be nearer the truth to call it the tamer of asceticism than the mere leader or loosener of it. It was a thing having its own theory of asceticism, its own type of asceticism, but most conspicuous at the moment as the moderator of other theories and types. This is the only sense that can be made, for instance, of the story of St. Augustine. As long as he was a mere man of the world, a mere man drifting with his time, he actually was a Manichean. It really was quite modern and fashionable to be a Manichean. But when he became a Catholic, the people he instantly turned on and rent in pieces were the Manicheans. The Catholic way of putting it is that he left off being a pessimist to become an ascetic. But as the pessimists interpreted asceticism, it ought to be said that he left off being an ascetic to become a saint. The war upon life, the denial of nature, were exactly the things he had already found in the heathen world outside the Church, and had to renounce when he entered the Church. The very fact that St. Augustine remains a somewhat sterner or sadder figure than St. Francis or St. Teresa only accentuates the dilemma. Face to face with the gravest or even grimmest of Catholics, we can still ask, ‘Why did Catholicism make war on Manichees, if Catholicism was Manichean?’

Take another rationalistic explanation of the rise of Christendom. It is common enough to find another critic saying, ‘Christianity did not really rise at all; that is, it did not merely rise from below; it was imposed from above. It is an example of the power of the executive, especially in despotic states. The Empire was really an Empire; that is, it was really ruled by the Emperor. One of the Emperors happened to become a Christian. He might just as well have become a Mithraist or a Jew or a Fire-Worshipper; it was common in the decline of the Empire for eminent and educated people to adopt these eccentric eastern cults. But when he adopted it, it became the official religion of the Roman Empire; and when it became the official religion of the Roman Empire, it became as strong, as universal and as invincible as the Roman Empire. It has only remained in the world as a relic of that Empire; or, as many have put it, it is but the ghost of Caesar still hovering over Rome.' This also is a very ordinary line taken in the criticism of orthodoxy, to say that it was only officialism that ever made it orthodoxy. And here again we can call on the heretics to refute it.

The whole great history of the Arian heresy might have been invented to explode this idea. It is a very interesting history often repeated in this connection; and the upshot of it is in that in so far as there ever was a merely official religion, it actually died because it was merely an official religion; and what destroyed it was the real religion. Arius advanced a version of Christianity which moved, more or less vaguely, in the direction of what we should call Unitarianism; though it was not the same, for it gave to Christ a curious intermediary position between the divine and human. The point is that it seemed to many more reasonable and less fanatical; and among these were many of the educated class in a sort of reaction against the first romance of conversion. Arians were a sort of moderates and a sort of modernists. And it was felt that after the first squabbles this was the final form of rationalised religion into which civilisation might well settle down. It was accepted by Divus Caesar himself and became the official orthodoxy; the generals and military princes drawn from the new barbarian powers of the north, full of the future, supported it strongly. But the sequel is still more important. Exactly as a modern man might pass through Unitarianism to complete agnosticism, so the greatest of the Arian emperors ultimately shed the last and thinnest pretense of Christianity; he abandoned ever Arius and returned to Apollo. He was a Caesar of the Caesars; a soldier, a scholar, a man of large ambitions and ideals; another of the philosopher kings. It seemed to him as if at his signal the sun rose again. The oracles began to speak like birds beginning to sing at dawn; paganism was itself again; the gods returned. It seemed the end of that strange interlude of an alien superstition. And indeed it was the end of it, so far as there was a mere interlude of mere superstition. It was the end of it, in so far as it was the fad of an emperor or the fashion of a generation. If there really was something that began with Constantine, then it ended with Julian.

But there was something that did not end. There had arisen in that hour of history, defiant above the democratic tumult of the Councils of the Church, Athanasius against the world. We may pause upon the point at issue; because it is relevant to the whole of this religious history, and the modern world seems to miss the whole point of it. We might put it this way. If there is one question which the enlightened and liberal have the habit of deriding and holding up as a dreadful example of barren dogma and senseless sectarian strife, it is this Athanasian question of the Co-Eternity of the Divine Son. On the other hand, if there is one thing that the same liberals always offer us as a piece of pure and simple Christianity, untroubled by doctrinal disputes, it is the single sentence, ‘God is Love.’ Yet the two statements are almost identical; at least one is very nearly nonsense without the other. The barren dogma is only the logical way of stating the beautiful sentiment. For if there be a being without beginning, existing before all things, was He loving when there was nothing to be loved? If through that unthinkable eternity He is lonely, what is the meaning of saying He is love? The only justification of such a mystery is the mystical conception that in His own nature there was something analogous to self-expression; something of what begets and beholds what it has begotten. Without some such idea, it is really illogical to complicate the ultimate essence of deity with an idea like love. If the moderns really want a simple religion of love, they must look for it in the Athanasian Creed. The truth is that the trumpet of true Christianity, the challenge of the charities and simplicities of Bethlehem or Christmas Day never rang out more arrestingly and unmistakably than in the defiance of Athanasius to the cold compromise of the Arians. It was emphatically he who really was fighting for a God of Love against a God of colourless and remote cosmic control; the God of the stoics and the agnostics. It was emphatically he who was fighting for the Holy Child against the grey deity of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He was fighting for that very balance of beautiful interdependence and intimacy, in the very Trinity of the Divine Nature, that draws our hearts to the Trinity of the Holy Family. His dogma, if the phrase be not misunderstood, turns even God into a Holy Family.

That this purely Christian dogma actually for a second time rebelled against the Empire, and actually for a second time refounded the Church in spite of the Empire, is itself a proof that there was something positive and personal working in the world, other than whatever official faith the Empire chose to adopt. This power utterly destroyed the official faith that the Empire did adopt. It went on its own way as it is going on its own way still. There are any number of other examples in which is repeated precisely the same process we have reviewed in the case of the Manichean and the Arian. A few centuries afterwards, for instance, the Church had to maintain the same Trinity, which is simply the logical side of love, against another appearance of the isolated and simplified deity in the religion of Islam. Yet there are some who cannot see what the Crusaders were fighting for; and some even who talk as if Christianity had never been anything but a form of what they call Hebraism coming in with the decay of Hellenism. Those people must certainly be very much puzzled by the war between the Crescent and the Cross. If Christianity had never been anything but a simpler morality sweeping away polytheism, there is no reason why Christendom should not have been swept into Islam. The truth is that Islam itself was a barbaric reaction against that very humane complexity that is really a Christian character; that idea of balance in the deity, as of balance in the family, that makes that creed a sort of sanity, and that sanity the soul of civilisation. And that is why the Church is from the first a thing holding its own position and point of view, quite apart from the accidents and anarchies of its age. That is why it deals blows impartially right and left, at the pessimism of the Manichean or the optimism of the Pelagian. It was not a Manichean movement because it was not a movement at all. It was not an official fashion because it was not a fashion at all. It was something that could coincide with movements and fashions, could control them and could survive them.

So might rise from their graves the great heresiarchs to confound their comrades of to-day. There is nothing that the critics now affirm that we cannot call on these great witnesses to deny. The modern critic will say lightly enough that Christianity was but a reaction into asceticism and anti-natural spirituality, a dance of fakirs furious against life and love. But Manes the great mystic will answer them from his secret throne and cry, ‘These Christians have no right to be called spiritual; these Christians have no title to be called ascetics, they who compromised with the curse of life and all the filth of the family. Through them the earth is still foul with fruit and harvest and polluted with population. Theirs was no movement against nature, or my children would have carried it to triumph; but these fools renewed the world when I would have ended it with a gesture.’ And another critic will write that the Church was but the shadow of the Empire, the fad of a chance Emperor, and that it remains in Europe only as the ghost of the power of Rome. And Arius the deacon will answer out of the darkness of oblivious `No, indeed, or the world would have followed my more reasonable religion. For mine went down before demagogues and men defying Caesar; and around my champion was the purple cloak and mine was the glory of the eagles. It was not for lack of these things that I failed.’ And yet a third modern will maintain that the creed spread only as a sort of panic of hell-fire; men everywhere attempting impossible things in fleeing from incredible vengeance; a nightmare of imaginary remorse; and such an explanation will satisfy many who see something dreadful in the doctrine of orthodoxy. And then there will go up against it the terrible voice of Tertullian, saying, ‘And why then was I cast out; and why did soft hearts and heads decide against me when I proclaimed the perdition of all sinners; and what was this power that thwarted me when I threatened all backsliders with hell? For none ever went up that hard road so far as I; and mine was the *Credo Quia Impossible*.’ Then there is the fourth suggestion that there was something of the Semitic secret society in the whole matter; that it was a new invasion of the nomad spirit shaking a kindlier and more comfortable paganism, its cities and its household gods; whereby the jealous monotheistic races could after all establish their jealous God. And Mahomet shall answer out of the whirlwind, the red whirlwind of the desert, ‘Who ever served the jealousy of God as I did or left him more lonely in the sky? Who ever paid more honour to Moses and Abraham or won more victories over idols and the images of paganism? And what was this thing that thrust me back with the energy of a thing alive; whose fanaticism could drive me from Sicily and tear up my deep roots out of the rock of Spain? What faith was theirs who thronged in thousands of every class a country crying out that my ruin was the will of God; and what hurled great Godfrey as from a catapult over the wall of Jerusalem, and what brought great Sobieski like a thunderbolt to the gates of Vienna? I think there was more than you fancy in the religion that has so matched itself with mine.’

Those who would suggest that the faith was a fanaticism are doomed to an eternal perplexity. In their account it is bound to appear as fanatical for nothing, and fanatical against everything. It is ascetical and at war with ascetics, Roman and in revolt against Rome, monotheistic and fighting furiously against monotheism; harsh in its condemnation of harshness; a riddle not to be explained even as unreason. And what sort of unreason is it that seems reasonable to millions of educated Europeans through all the revolutions of some sixteen hundred years? People are not amused with a puzzle or a paradox or a mere muddle in the mind for all that time. I know of no explanation except that such a thing is not unreason but reason; that if it is fanatical it is fanatical for reason and fanatical against all the unreasonable things. That is the only explanation I can find of a thing from the first so detached and so confident, condemning things that looked so like itself, refusing help from powers that seemed so essential to its existence, sharing on its human side all the passions of the age, yet always at the supreme moment suddenly rising superior to them, never saying exactly what it was expected to say and never needing to unsay what it had said; I can find no explanation except that, like Pallas from the brain of Jove, it had indeed come forth out of the mind of God, mature and mighty and armed for judgement and for war.

V. The Escape from Paganism

The modern missionary, with his palm-leaf hat and his umbrella, has become rather a figure of fun. He is chaffed among men of the world for the ease with which he can be eaten by cannibals and the narrow bigotry which makes him regard the cannibal culture as lower than his own. Perhaps the best part of the joke is that the men of the world do not see that the joke is against themselves. It is rather ridiculous to ask a man just about to be boiled in a pot and eaten, at a purely religious feast, why he does not regard all religions as equally friendly and fraternal. But there is a more subtle criticism uttered against the more old-fashioned missionary; to the effect that he generalises too broadly about the heathen and pays too little attention to the difference between Mahomet and Mumbo-Jumbo. There was probably truth in this complaint, especially in the past; but it is my main contention here that the exaggeration is all the other way at present. It is the temptation of the professors to treat mythologies too much as theologies; as things thoroughly thought out are seriously held. It is the temptation of the intellectuals to take much too seriously the fine shades of various schools in the rather irresponsible metaphysics of Asia. Above all it is their temptation to miss the real truth implied in the idea of *Aquinas contra Gentiles* or *Athanasius contra mundum*.

If the missionary says, in fact, that he is exceptional in being a Christian, and that the rest of the races and religions can be collectively classified as heathen, he is perfectly right. He may say it in quite the wrong spirit, in which case he is spiritually wrong. But in the cold light of philosophy and history, he is intellectually right. He may not be right minded, but he is right. He may not even have a right to be right, but he is right. The outer world to which he brings his creed really is some thing subject to certain generalisations covering all its varieties, and is not merely a variety of similar creeds. Perhaps it is in any case too much of a temptation to pride or hypocrisy to call it heathenry. Perhaps it could be better simply to call it humanity. But there are certain broad characteristics of what we call humanity while it remains in what we call heathenry. They are not necessarily bad characteristics; some of them are worthy of the respect of Christendom; some of them have been absorbed and transfigured in the substance of Christendom. But they existed before Christendom and they still exist outside Christendom, as certainly as the sea existed before a boat and all round a boat; and they have as strong and as universal and as unmistakable a savour as the sea.

For instance, all real scholars who have studied the Greek and Roman culture say one thing about it. They agree that in the ancient world religion was one thing and philosophy quite another. There was very little effort to rationalise and at the same time to realise a real belief in the gods. There was very little pretense of any such real belief among the philosophers. But neither had the passion or perhaps the power to persecute the others save in particular and peculiar cases; and neither the philosopher in his school nor the priest in his temple seems ever to have seriously contemplated his own concept as covering the world. A priest sacrificing to Artemis in Calydon did not seem to think that people would some day sacrifice to her instead of to Isis beyond the sea; a sage following the vegetarian rule of the Neo-Pythagoreans did not seem to think it would universally prevail and exclude the methods of Epictetus or Epicurus. We may call this liberality if we like; I am not dealing with an argument but describing an atmosphere. All this, I say, is admitted by all scholars; but what neither the learned nor the unlearned have fully realised, perhaps, is that this description is really an exact description of all non-Christian civilisation today; and especially of the great civilisations of the East. Eastern paganism really is much more all of a piece, just as ancient paganism was much more all of a piece, than the modern critics admit. It is a many-coloured Persian Carpet as the other was a varied and tessellated Roman pavement; but the one real crack right across that pavement came from the earthquake of the Crucifixion.

The modern European seeking his religion in Asia is reading his religion into Asia. Religion there is something different; it is both more and less. He is like a man mapping out the sea as land; marking waves as mountains; not understanding the nature of its peculiar permanence. It is perfectly true that Asia has its own dignity and poetry and high civilisation. But it is not in the least true that Asia has its own definite dominions of moral government, where all loyalty is conceived in terms of morality; as when we say that Ireland is Catholic or that New England was Puritan. The map is not marked out in religions, in our sense of churches. The state of mind is far more subtle, more relative, more secretive, more varied and changing, like the colours of the snake. The Moslem is the nearest approach to a militant Christian; and that is precisely because he is a much nearer approach to an envoy from western civilisation. The Moslem in the heart of Asia almost stands for the soul of Europe. And as he stands between them and Europe in the matter of space so he stands between them and Christianity in the matter of time. In that sense the Moslems in Asia are merely like the Nestorians in Asia. Islam, historically speaking, is the greatest of the Eastern heresies. It owed something to the quite isolated and unique individuality of Israel; but it owed more to Byzantium and the theological enthusiasm of Christendom. It owed something even to the Crusades. It owed nothing whatever to Asia. It owed nothing to the atmosphere of the ancient and traditional world of Asia, with its immemorial etiquette and its bottomless or bewildering philosophies. All that ancient and actual Asia felt the entrance of Islam as something foreign and western and warlike, piercing it like a spear.

Even where we might trace in dotted lines the domains of Asiatic religions, we should probably be reading into them something dogmatic and ethical belonging to our own religion. It is as if a European ignorant of the American atmosphere were to suppose that each ‘state’ was a separate sovereign state as patriotic as France or Poland; or that when a Yankee referred fondly to his ‘home town’ he meant he had no other nation, like a citizen of ancient Athens or Rome. As he would be reading a particular sort of loyalty into America, so we are reading a particular sort of loyalty into Asia. There are loyalties of other kinds; but not what men in the West mean by being a believer, by trying to be a Christian, by being a good Protestant or a practising Catholic. In the intellectual world it means something far more vague and varied by doubts and speculations. In the moral world it means something far more loose and drifting. A professor of Persian at one of our great universities, so passionate a partisan of the East as practically to profess a contempt for the West, said to a friend of mine: ‘You will never understand oriental religions, because you always conceive religion as connected with ethics. This kind has really nothing to do with ethics.’ We have most of us known some Masters of the Higher Wisdom, some Pilgrims upon the Path to Power, some eastern esoteric saints and seers, who had really nothing to do with ethics. Something different, something detached and irresponsible, tinges the moral atmosphere of Asia and touches even that of Islam. It was very realistically caught in the atmosphere of Hassan; and a very horrible atmosphere too. It is even more vivid in such glimpses as we get of the genuine and ancient cults of Asia. Deeper than the depths of metaphysics, far down in the abysses of mystical meditations under all that solemn universe of spiritual things, is a secret, an intangible and a terrible levity. It does not really very much matter what one does. Either because they do not believe in a devil, or because they do believe in a destiny, or because experience here is everything and eternal life something totally different, but for some reason they are totally different. I have read somewhere that there were three great friends famous in medieval Persia for their unity of mind. One became the responsible and respected Vizier of the Great King; the second was the poet Omar, pessimist and epicurean, drinking wine in mockery of Mahomet; the third was the Old Man of the Mountain who maddened his people with hashish that they might murder other people with daggers. It does not really much matter what one does.

The Sultan in Hassan would have understood all those three men; indeed he was all those three men. But this sort of universalist cannot have what we call a character; it is what we call a chaos. He cannot choose; he cannot fight; he cannot repent; he cannot hope. He is not in the same sense creating something; for creation means rejection. He is not, in our religious phrase, making his soul. For our doctrine of salvation does really mean a labour like that of a man trying to make a statue beautiful; a victory with wings. For that there must be a final choice, for a man cannot make statues without rejecting stone. And there really is this ultimate unmorality behind the metaphysics of Asia. And the reason is that there has been nothing through all those unthinkable ages to bring the human mind sharply to the point; to tell it that the time has come to choose. The mind has lived too much in eternity. The soul has been too immortal, in the special sense that it ignores the idea of mortal sin. It has had too much of eternity, in the sense that it has not had enough of the hour of death and the day of judgement. It is not crucial enough; in the literal sense that it has not had enough of the cross. That is what we mean when we say that Asia is very old. But strictly speaking Europe is quite as old as Asia; indeed in a sense any place is as old as any other place. What we mean is that Europe has not merely gone on growing older. It has been born again.

Asia is all humanity; as it has worked out its human doom. Asia, in its vast territory, in its varied populations, in its heights of past achievement and its depths of dark speculation, is itself a world; and represents something of what we mean when we speak of the world. It is a cosmos rather than a continent. It is the world as man has made it; and contains many of the most wonderful things that man has made. Therefore Asia stands as the one representative of paganism and the one rival to Christendom. But everywhere else where we get glimpses of that mortal destiny, they suggest stages in the same story. Where Asia trails away into the southern archipelagoes of the savages, or where a darkness full of nameless shapes dwells in the heart of Africa, or where the last survivors of lost races linger in the cold volcano of prehistoric America, it is all the same story; sometimes perhaps later chapters of the same story. It is men entangled in the forest of their own mythology; it is men drowned in the sea of their own metaphysics. Polytheists have grown weary of the wildest of fictions. Monotheists have grown weary of the most wonderful of truths. Diabolists here and there have such a hatred of heaven and earth that they have tried to take refuge in hell. It is the Fall of Man; and it is exactly that fall that was being felt by our own fathers at the first moment of the Roman decline. We also were going down that side road; down that easy slope; following the magnificent procession of the high civilisations of the world.

If the Church had not entered the world then, it seems probable that Europe would be now very much what Asia is now. Something may be allowed for a real difference of race and environment, visible in the ancient as in the modern world. But after all we talk about the changeless East very largely because it has not suffered the great change. Paganism in its last phase showed considerable signs of becoming equally changeless. This would not mean that new schools or sects of philosophy would not arise; as new schools did arise in Antiquity and do arise in Asia. It does not mean that there would be no real mystics or visionaries; as there were mystics in Antiquity and are mystics in Asia. It does not mean that there would be no social codes, as there were codes in Antiquity and are codes in Asia. It does not mean that there could not be good men or happy lives, for God has given all men a conscience and conscience can give all men a kind of peace. But it does mean that the tone and proportion of all these things, and especially the proportion of good and evil things, would be in the unchanged West what they are in the changeless East. And nobody who looks at that changeless East honestly, and with a real sympathy, can believe that there is anything there remotely resembling the challenge and revolution of the Faith.

In short, if classic paganism had lingered until now, a number of things might well have lingered with it; and they would look very like what we call the religions of the East. There would still be Pythagoreans teaching reincarnation, as there are still Hindus teaching reincarnation. There would still be Stoics making a religion out of reason and virtue, as there are still Confucians making a religion out of reason and virtue. There would still be Neo-Platonists studying transcendental truths, the meaning of which was mysterious to other people and disputed even amongst themselves; as the Buddhists still study a transcendentalism mysterious to others and disputed among themselves. There would still be intelligent Apollonians apparently worshipping the sun-god but explaining that they were worshipping the divine principle; just as there are still intelligent Parsees apparently worshipping the sun but explaining that they are worshipping the deity. There would still be wild Dionysians dancing on the mountain as there are still wild Dervishes dancing in the desert. There would still be crowds of people attending the popular feasts of the gods, in pagan Europe as in pagan Asia. There would still be crowds of gods, local and other, for them to worship. And there would still be a great many more people who worshipped them than people who believed in them. Finally there would still be a very large number of people who did worship gods and did believe in gods; and who believed in gods and worshipped gods simply because they were demons. There would still be Levantines secretly sacrificing to Moloch as there are still Thugs secretly sacrificing to Kalee. There would still be a great deal of magic; and a great deal of it would be black magic. There would still be a considerable admiration of Seneca and a considerable imitation of Nero; just as the exalted epigrams of Confucius could coexist with the tortures of China. And over all that tangled forest of traditions growing wild or withering would brood the broad silence of a singular and even nameless mood; but the nearest name of it is nothing. All these things, good and bad, would have an indescribable air of being too old to die.

None of these things occupying Europe in the absence of Christendom would bear the least likeness to Christendom. Since the Pythagorean Metempsychosis would still be there, we might call it the Pythagorean religion as we talk about the Buddhist religion. As the noble maxims of Socrates would still be there, we might call it the Socratic religion as we talk about the Confucian religion. As the popular holiday was still marked by a mythological hymn to Adonis, we might call it the religion of Adonis as we talk about the religion of Juggernaut. As literature would still be based on the Greek mythology, we might call that mythology a religion, as we call the Hindu mythology a religion. We might say that there were so many thousands or millions of people belonging to that religion, in the sense of frequenting such temples or merely living in a land full of such temples. But if we called the last tradition of Pythagoras or the lingering legend of Adonis by the name of a religion, then we must find some other name for the Church of Christ.

If anybody says that philosophic maxims presented through many ages, or mythological temples frequented by many people, are things of the same class and category as the Church, it is enough to answer quite simply that they are not. Nobody thinks they are the same when he sees them in the old civilisation of Greece and Rome; nobody would think they were the same if that civilisation had lasted two thousand years longer and existed at the present day; nobody can in reason think they are the same in the parallel pagan civilisation in the East, as it is at the present day. None of these philosophies or mythologies are anything like a Church; certainly nothing like a Church Militant. And, as I have shown elsewhere, even if this rule were not already proved, the exception would prove the rule. The rule is that pre-Christian or pagan history does not produce a Church Militant; and the exception, or what some would call the exception, is that Islam is at least militant if it is not Church. And that is precisely because Islam is the one religious rival that is not pre-Christian and therefore not in that sense pagan. Islam was a product of Christianity; even if it was a by-product; even if it was a bad product. It was a heresy or parody emulating and therefore imitating the Church. It is no more surprising that Mahomedanism had something of her fighting spirit than that Quakerism had something of her peaceful spirit. After Christianity there are any number of such emulations or extensions. Before it there are none.

The Church Militant is thus unique because it is an army marching to effect a universal deliverance. The bondage from which the world is thus to be delivered is something that is very well symbolised by the state of Asia as by the state of pagan Europe. I do not mean merely their moral or immoral state. The missionary, as a matter of fact, has much more to say for himself than the enlightened imagine even when he says that the heathen are idolatrous and immoral. A touch or two of realistic experience about Eastern religion, even about Moslem religion, will reveal some startling insensibilities in ethics; such as the practical indifference to the line between passion and perversion. It is not prejudice but practical experience which says that Asia is full of demons as well as gods. But the evil I mean is in the mind. And it is in the mind wherever the mind has worked for a long time alone. It is what happens when all dreaming and thinking have come to an end in an emptiness that is at once negation and necessity. It sounds like an anarchy, but it is also a slavery. It is what has been called already the wheel of Asia; all those recurrent arguments about cause and effect or things beginning and ending in the mind, which make it impossible for the soul really to strike out and go anywhere or do anything. And the point is that it is not necessarily peculiar to Asiatics; it would have been true in the end of Europeans — if something had not happened. If the Church Militant had not been a thing marching, all men would have been marking time. If the Church Militant had not endured a discipline, all men would have endured a slavery.

What that universal yet fighting faith brought into the world was hope. Perhaps the one thing common to mythology and philosophy was that both were really sad; in the sense that they had not this hope even if they had touches of faith or charity. We may call Buddhism a faith; though to us it seems more like a doubt. We may call the Lord of Compassion a Lord of Charity, though it seems to us a very pessimist sort of pity. But those who insist most on the antiquity and size of such cults must agree that in all their ages they have not covered all their areas with that sort of practical and pugnacious hope. In Christendom hope has never been absent; rather it has been errant, extravagant, excessively fixed upon fugitive chances. Its perpetual revolution and reconstruction has at least been an evidence of people being in better spirits. Europe did very truly renew its youth like the eagles; just as the eagles of Rome rose again over the legions of Napoleon, or we have seen soaring but yesterday the silver eagle of Poland. But in the Polish case ever revolution always went with religion. Napoleon himself sought a reconciliation with religion. Religion could never be finally separated even from the most hostile of the hopes; simply because it was the very source of the hopefulness. And the cause of this is to be found simply in the religion itself. Those who quarrel about it seldom even consider it in itself. There is neither space nor place for such a full consideration here; but a word may be said to explain a reconciliation that always recurs and still seems to require explanation.

There will be no end to the weary debates about liberalising theology, until people face the fact that the only liberal part of it is really the dogmatic part. If dogma is incredible, it is because it is incredibly liberal. If it is irrational, it can only be in giving us more assurance of freedom than is justified by reason. The obvious example is that essential form of freedom which we call free-will. It is absurd to say that a man shows his liberality in denying his liberty. But it is tenable that he has to affirm a transcendental doctrine in order to affirm his liberty. There is a sense in which we might reasonably say that if man has a primary power of choice, he has in that fact a super-natural power of creation, as if he could raise the dead or give birth to the unbegotten. Possibly in that case a man must be a miracle; and certainly in that case he must be a miracle in order to be a man; and most certainly in order to be a free man. But it is absurd to forbid him to be a free man and do it in the name of a more free religion.

But it is true in twenty other matters. Anybody who believes at all in God must believe in the absolute supremacy of God. But in so far as that supremacy does allow of any degrees that can be called liberal or illiberal, it is self-evident that the illiberal power is the deity of the rationalists and the liberal power is the deity of the dogmatists. Exactly in proportion as you turn monotheism into monism you turn it into despotism. It is precisely the unknown God of the scientist, with his impenetrable purpose and his inevitable and unalterable law, that reminds us of a Prussian autocrat making rigid plans in a remote tent and moving mankind like machinery. It is precisely the God of miracles and of answered prayers who reminds us of a liberal and popular prince, receiving petitions, listening to parliaments and considering the cases of a whole people. I am not now arguing the rationality of this conception in other respects; as a matter of fact it is not, as some suppose, irrational; for there is nothing irrational in the wisest and most well-informed king acting differently according to the action of those he wishes to save. But I am here only noting the general nature of liberality, or of free or enlarged atmosphere of action. And in this respect it is certain that the king can only be what we call magnanimous if he is what some call capricious. It is the Catholic, who has the feeling that his prayers do make a difference, when offered for the living and the dead, who also has the feeling of living like a free citizen in something almost like a constitutional commonwealth. It is the monist who lives under a single iron law who must have the feeling of living like a slave under a sultan. Indeed I believe that the original use of the word suffragium, which we now use in politics for a vote, was that employed in theology about a prayer. The dead in Purgatory were said to have the suffrages of the living. And in this sense, of a sort of right of petition to the supreme ruler, we may truly say that the whole of the Communion of Saints, as well as the whole of the Church Militant, is founded on universal suffrage.

But above all, it is true of the most tremendous issue; of that tragedy which has created the divine comedy of our creed. Nothing short of the extreme and strong and startling doctrine of the divinity of Christ will give that particular effect that can truly stir the popular sense like a trumpet; the idea of the king himself serving in the ranks like a common soldier. By making that figure merely human we make that story much less human. We take away the point of the story which actually pierces humanity; the point of the story which was quite literally the point of a spear. It does not especially humanise the universe to say that good and wise men can die for their opinions; any more than it would be any sort of uproariously popular news in an army that good soldiers may easily get killed. It is no news that King Leonidas is dead any more than that Queen Anne is dead; and men did not wait for Christianity to be men, in the full sense of being heroes. But if we are describing, for the moment, the atmosphere of what is generous and popular and even picturesque, any knowledge of human nature will tell us that no sufferings of the sons of men, or even of the servants of God, strike the same note as the notion of the master suffering instead of his servants. And this is given by the theological and emphatically not by the scientific deity. No mysterious monarch, hidden in his starry pavilion at the base of the cosmic campaign, is in the least like that celestial chivalry of the Captain who carries his five wounds in the front of battle.

What the denouncer of dogma really means is not that dogma is bad; but rather that dogma is too good to be true. That is, he means that dogma is too liberal to be likely. Dogma gives man too much freedom when it permits him to fall. Dogma gives even God too much freedom when it permits him to die. That is what the intelligent sceptics ought to say; and it is not in the least my intention to deny that there is something to be said for it. They mean that the universe is itself a universal prison; that existence itself is a limitation and a control; and it is not for nothing that they call causation a chain. In a word, they mean quite simply that they cannot believe these things; not in the least that they are unworthy of belief. We say not lightly but very literally, that the truth has made us free. They say that it makes us so free that it cannot be the truth. To them it is like believing in fairyland to believe in such freedom as we enjoy. It is like believing in men with wings to entertain the fancy of men with wills. It is like accepting a fable about a squirrel in conversation with a mountain to believe in a man who is free to ask or a God who is free to answer. This is a manly and a rational negation for which I for one shall always show respect. But I decline to show any respect for those who first of all clip the wings and cage the squirrel, rivet the chains and refuse the freedom, close all the doors of the cosmic prison on us with a clang of eternal iron, tell us that our emancipation is a dream and our dungeon a necessity; and then calmly turn round and tell us they have a freer thought and a more liberal theology.

The moral of all this is an old one; that religion is revelation. In other words it is a vision, and a vision received by faith; but it is a vision of reality. The faith consists in a conviction of its reality. That, for example, is the difference between a vision and a day-dream. And that is the difference between religion and mythology. That is the difference between faith and all that fancy-work, quite human and more or less healthy, which we considered under the head of mythology. There is something in the reasonable use of the very word vision that implies two things about it; first that it comes very rarely, possibly that it comes only once; and secondly that it probably comes once and for all. A day-dream may come every day. A day-dream may be different every day. It is something more than the difference between telling ghost-stories and meeting a ghost.

But if it is not a mythology neither is it a philosophy. It is not a philosophy because, being a vision, it is not a pattern but a picture. It is not one of those simplifications which resolve everything into an abstract explanation; as that everything is recurrent; or everything is relative; or everything is inevitable; or everything is illusive. It is not a process but a story. It has proportions, of the sort seen in a picture or a story; it has not the regular repetitions of a pattern or a process; but it replaces them by being convincing as a picture or a story is convincing. In other words, it is exactly, as the phrase goes, like life. For indeed it is life. An example of what is meant here might well be found in the treatment of the problem of evil. It is easy enough to make a plan of life of which the background is black, as the pessimists do; and then admit a speck or two of star-dust more or less accidental, or at least in the literal sense insignificant. And it is easy enough to make another plan on white paper, as the Christian Scientists do, and explain or explain away somehow such dots or smudges as may be difficult to deny. Lastly it is easiest of all perhaps, to say as the dualists do, that life is like a chess-board in which the two are equal, and can as truly be said to consist of white squares on a black board or of black squares on a white board. But every man feels in his heart that none of these three paper plans is like life; that none of these worlds is one in which he can live. Something tells him that the ultimate idea of a world is not bad or even neutral; staring at the sky or the grass or the truths of mathematics or even a new-laid egg, he has a vague feeling like the shadow of that saying of the great Christian philosopher, St. Thomas Aquinas, 'Every existence, as such, is good.' On the other hand, something else tells him that it is unmanly and debased and even diseased to minimise evil to a dot or even a blot. He realises that optimism is morbid. It is if possible even more morbid than pessimism. These vague but healthy feelings, if he followed them out, would result in the idea that evil is in some way an exception but an enormous exception; and ultimately that evil is an invasion or yet more truly a rebellion. He does not think that everything is right or that every thing is wrong, or that everything is equally right and wrong. But he does think that right has a right to be right and therefore a right to be there, and wrong has no right to be wrong and therefore no right to be there. It is the prince of the world; but it is also a usurper. So he will apprehend vaguely what the vision will give to him vividly; no less than all that strange story of treason in heaven and the great desertion by which evil damaged and tried to destroy a cosmos that it could not create. It is a very strange story and its proportions and its lines and colours are as arbitrary and absolute as the artistic composition of a picture. It is a vision which we do in fact symbolise in pictures by titanic limbs and passionate tints of plumage; all that abysmal vision of falling stars and the peacock panoplies of the night. But that strange story has one small advantage over the diagrams. It is like life.

Another example might be found, not in the problem of evil, but in what is called the problem of progress. One of the ablest agnostics of the age once asked me whether I thought mankind grew better or grew worse or remained the same. He was confident that the alternative covered all possibilities. He did not see that it only covered patterns and not pictures; processes and not stories. I asked him whether he thought that Mr. Smith of Golder's Green got better or worse or remained exactly the same between the age of thirty and forty. It then seemed to dawn on him that it would rather depend on Mr. Smith; and how he chose to go on. It had never occurred to him that it might depend on how mankind chose to go on; and that its course was not a straight line or an upward or downward curve, but a track like that of a man across a valley, going where he liked and stopping where he chose, going into a church or falling down in a ditch. The life of man is a story; an adventure story; and in our vision the same is true even of the story of God.

The Catholic faith is the reconciliation because it is the realisation both of mythology and philosophy. It is a story and in that sense one of a hundred stories; only it is a true story. It is a philosophy and in that sense one of a hundred philosophies; only it is a philosophy that is like life. But above all, it is a reconciliation because it is something that can only be called the philosophy of stories. That normal narrative instinct which produced all the fairy tales is something that is neglected by all the philosophies — except one. The Faith is the justification of that popular instinct; the finding of a philosophy for it or the analysis of the philosophy in it. Exactly as a man in an adventure story has to pass various tests to save his life, so the man in this philosophy has to pass several tests and save his soul. In both there is an idea of free will operating under conditions of design; in other words, there is an aim and it is the business of a man to aim at it; we therefore watch to see whether he will hit it. Now this deep and democratic and dramatic instinct is derided and dismissed in all the other philosophies. For all the other philosophies avowedly end where they begin; and it is the definition of a story that it ends differently; that it begins in one place and ends in another. From Buddha and his wheel to Akhen Aten and his disc, from Pythagoras with his abstraction of number to Confucius with his religion of routine, there is not one of them that does not in some way sin against the soul of a story. There is none of them that really grasps this human notion of the tale, the test, the adventure; the ordeal of the free man. Each of them starves the story-telling instinct, so to speak, and does something to spoil human life considered as a romance; either by fatalism (pessimist or optimist) and that destiny that is the death of adventure; or by indifference and that detachment that is the death of drama; or by a fundamental scepticism that dissolves the actors into atoms; or by a materialistic limitation blocking the vista of moral consequences; or a mechanical recurrence making even moral tests monotonous; or a bottomless relativity making even practical tests insecure. There is such a thing as a human story; and there is such a thing as the divine story which is also a human story; but there is no such thing as a Hegelian story or a

Monist story or a relativist story or a determinist story; for every story, yes, even a penny dreadful or a cheap novelette, has something in it that belongs to our universe and not theirs. Every short story does truly begin with creation and end with a last judgement.

And that is the reason why the myths and the philosophers were at war until Christ came. That is why the Athenian democracy killed Socrates out of respect for the gods; and why every strolling sophist gave himself the airs of a Socrates whenever he could talk in a superior fashion of the gods; and why the heretic Pharaoh wrecked his huge idols and temples for an abstraction and why the priests could return in triumph and trample his dynasty under foot; and why Buddhism had to divide itself from Brahminism, and why in every age and country outside Christendom there has been a feud for ever between the philosopher and the priest. It is easy enough to say that the philosopher is generally the more rational; it is easier still to forget that the priest is always the more popular. For the priest told the people stories; and the philosopher did not understand the philosophy of stories. It came into the world with the story of Christ.

And this is why it had to be a revelation or vision given from above. Any one who will think of the theory of stories or pictures will easily see the point. The true story of the world must be told by somebody to somebody else. By the very nature of a story it cannot be left to occur to anybody. A story has proportions, variations, surprises, particular dispositions, which cannot be worked out by rule in the abstract, like a sum. We could not deduce whether or no Achilles would give back the body of Hector from a Pythagorean theory of number or recurrence; and we could not infer for ourselves in what way the world would get back the body of Christ, merely from being told that all things go round and round upon the wheel of Buddha. A man might perhaps work out a proposition of Euclid without having heard of Euclid; but he would not work out the precise legend of Eurydice without having heard of Eurydice. At any rate he would not be certain how the story would end and whether Orpheus was ultimately defeated. Still less could he guess the end of our story; or the legend of our Orpheus rising, not defeated from, the dead.

To sum up; the sanity of the world was restored and the soul of man offered salvation by something which did indeed satisfy the two warring tendencies of the past; which had never been satisfied in full and most certainly never satisfied together. It met the mythological search for romance by being a story and the philosophical search for truth by being a true story. That is why the ideal figure had to be a historical character, as nobody had ever felt Adonis or Pan to be a historical character. But that is also why the historical character had to be the ideal figure; and even fulfil many of the functions given to these other ideal figures; why he was at once the sacrifice and the feast, why he could be shown under the emblems of the growing vine or the rising sun. The more deeply we think of the matter the more we shall conclude that, if there be indeed a God, his creation could hardly have reached any other culmination than this granting of a real romance to the world. Otherwise the two sides of the human mind could never have touched at all; and the brain of man would have remained cloven and double; one lobe of it dreaming impossible dreams and the other repeating invariable calculations. The picture-makers would have remained forever painting the portrait of nobody. The sages would have remained for ever adding up numerals that came to nothing. It was that abyss that nothing but an incarnation could cover; a divine embodiment of our dreams; and he stands above that chasm whose name is more than priest and older even than Christendom; Pontifex Maximus, the mightiest maker of a bridge.

But even with that we return to the more specially Christian symbol in the same tradition; the perfect pattern of the keys. This is a historical and not a theological outline, and it is not my duty here to defend in detail that theology, but merely to point out that it could not even be justified in design without being justified in detail — like a key. Beyond the broad suggestion of this chapter I attempt no apologetic about why the creed should be accepted. But in answer to the historical query of why it was accepted and is accepted, I answer for millions of others in my reply; because it fits the lock, because it is like life. It is one among many stories; only it happens to be a true story. It is one among many philosophies; only it happens to be the truth. We accept it; and the ground is solid under our feet and the road is open before us. It does not imprison us in a dream of destiny or a consciousness of the universal delusion. It opens to us not only incredible heavens but what seems to some an equally incredible earth, and makes it credible. This is the sort of truth that is hard to explain because it is a fact; but it is a fact to which we can call witnesses. We are Christians and Catholics not because we worship a key, but because we have passed a door; and felt the wind that is the trumpet of liberty blow over the land of the living.

VI. The Five Deaths of the Faith

It is not the purpose of this book to trace the subsequent history of Christianity, especially the later history of Christianity; which involves controversies of which I hope to write more fully elsewhere. It is devoted only to the suggestion that Christianity, appearing amid heathen humanity, had all the character of a unique thing and even of a supernatural thing. It was not like any of the other things; and the more we study it the less it looks like any of them. But there is a certain rather peculiar character which marked it henceforward even down to the present moment, with a note on which this book may well conclude.

I have said that Asia and the ancient world had an air of being too old to die. Christendom has had the very opposite fate. Christendom has had a series of revolutions and in each one of them Christianity has died. Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it had a God who knew the way out of the grave. But the first extraordinary fact which marks this history is this: that Europe has been turned upside down over and over again; and that at the end of each of these revolutions the same religion has again been found on top. The Faith is always converting the age, not as an old religion but as a new religion. This truth is hidden from many by a convention that is too little noticed. Curiously enough, it is a convention of the sort which those who ignore it claim especially to detect and denounce. They are always telling us that priests and ceremonies are not religion and that religious organisation can be a hollow sham, but they hardly realise how true it is. It is so true that three or four times at least in the history of Christendom the whole soul seemed to have gone out of Christianity; and almost every man in his heart expected its end. This fact is only masked in medieval and other times by that very official religion which such critics pride themselves on seeing through. Christianity remained the official religion of a Renaissance prince or the official religion of an eighteenth-century bishop, just as an ancient mythology remained the official religion of Julius Caesar or the Arian creed long remained the official religion of Julian the Apostate. But there was a difference between the cases of Julius and of Julian; because the Church had begun its strange career. There was no reason why men like Julius should not worship gods like Jupiter for ever in public and laugh at them for ever in private. But when Julian treated

Christianity as dead, he found it had come to life again. He also found, incidentally, that there was not the faintest sign of Jupiter ever coming to life again. This case of Julian and the episode of Arianism is but the first of a series of examples that can only be roughly indicated here. Arianism, as has been said, had every human appearance of being the natural way in which that particular superstition of Constantine might be expected to peter out. All the ordinary stages had been passed through; the creed had become a respectable thing, had become a ritual thing, had then been modified into a rational thing; and the rationalists were ready to dissipate the last remains of it, just as they do to-day. When Christianity rose again suddenly and threw them, it was almost as unexpected as Christ rising from the dead. But there are many other examples of the same thing, even about the same time. The rush of missionaries from Ireland, for instance, has all the air of an unexpected onslaught of young men on an old world, and even on a Church that showed signs of growing old. Some of them were martyred on the coast of Cornwall; and the chief authority on Cornish antiquities told me that he did not believe for a moment that they were martyred by heathens but (as he expressed it with some humour) ‘by rather slack Christians.’

Now if we were to dip below the surface of history, as it is not in the scope of this argument to do, I suspect that we should find several occasions when Christendom was thus to all appearance hollowed out from within by doubt and indifference, so that only the old Christian shell stood as the pagan shell had stood so long. But the difference is that in every such case, the sons were fanatical for the faith where the fathers had been slack about it. This is obvious in the case of the transition from the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation. It is obvious in the case of a transition from the eighteenth century to the many Catholic revivals of our own time. But I suspect many other examples which would be worthy of separate studies.

The Faith is not a survival. It is not as if the Druids had managed somehow to survive somewhere for two thousand years. That is what might have happened in Asia or ancient Europe, in that indifference or tolerance in which mythologies and philosophies could live for ever side by side. It has not survived; it has returned again and again in this Western world of rapid change and institutions perpetually perishing. Europe, in the tradition of Rome, was always trying revolution and reconstruction; rebuilding a universal republic. And it always began by rejecting this old stone and ended by making it the head of the corner; by bringing it back from the rubbish-heap to make it the crown of the capitol. Some stones of Stonehenge are standing and some are fallen; and as the stone falleth so shall it lie. There has not been a Druidic renaissance every century or two, with the young Druids crowned with fresh mistletoe, dancing in the sun on Salisbury Plain. Stonehenge has not been rebuilt in every style of architecture from the rude round Norman to the last rococo of the Baroque. The sacred place of the Druids is safe from the vandalism of restoration.

But the Church in the West was not in a world where things were too old to die; but in one in which they were always young enough to get killed. The consequence was that superficially and externally it often did get killed; nay, it sometimes wore out even without getting killed. And there follows a fact I find it somewhat difficult to describe, yet which I believe to be very real and rather important. As a ghost is the shadow of a man, and in that sense the shadow of life, so at intervals there passed across this endless life a sort of shadow of death. It came at the moment when it would have perished had it been perishable. It withered away everything that was perishable. If such animal parallels were worthy of the occasion we might say that the snake shuddered and shed a skin and went on, or even that the cat went into convulsions as it lost only one of its nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine lives. It is truer to say, in a more dignified image, that a clock struck and nothing happened; or that a bell tolled for an execution that was everlastingly postponed.

What was the meaning of all that dim but vast unrest of the twelfth century; when, as it has been so finely said, Julian stirred in his sleep? Why did there appear so strangely early, in the twilight of dawn after the Dark Ages, so deep a scepticism as that involved in urging nominalism against realism? For realism against nominalism was really realism against rationalism, or something more destructive than what we call rationalism. The answer is that just as some might have thought the Church simply a part of the Roman Empire, so others later might have thought the Church only a part of the Dark Ages. The Dark Ages ended as the Empire had ended, and the Church should have departed with them, if she had been also one of the shades of night. It was another of those spectral deaths or simulations of death. I mean that if nominalism had succeeded, it would have been as if Arianism had succeeded, it would have been the beginning of a confession that Christianity had failed. For nominalism is a far more fundamental scepticism than mere atheism. Such was the question that was openly asked as the Dark Ages broadened into that daylight that we call the modern world. But what was the answer? The answer was Aquinas in the chair of Aristotle, taking all knowledge for his province; and tens of thousands of lads down to the lowest ranks of peasant and serf, living in rags and on crusts about the great colleges, to listen to the scholastic philosophy.

What was the meaning of all that whisper of fear that ran round the west under the shadow of Islam, and fills every old romance with incongruous images of Saracen knights swaggering in Norway or the Hebrides? Why were men in the extreme west, such as King John if I remember rightly, accused of being secretly Moslems, as men are accused of being secretly atheists? Why was there that fierce alarm among some of the authorities about the rationalistic Arab version of Aristotle? Authorities are seldom alarmed like that except when it is too late. The answer is that hundreds of people probably believed in their hearts that Islam would conquer Christendom; that Averroes was more rational than Anselm; that the Saracen Culture was really, as it was superficially, a superior culture. Here again we should probably find a whole generation, the older generation, serve doubtful and depressed and weary. The coming of Islam would only have been the coming of Unitarianism a thousand years before its time. To many it may have seemed quite reasonable and quite probable and quite likely to happen. If so, they would have been surprised at what did happen. What did happen was a roar like thunder from thousands and thousands of young men, throwing all their youth into one exultant counter-charge, the Crusades. It was the sons of St. Francis, the Jugglers of God, wandering singing over all the roads of the world; it was the Gothic going up like a flight of arrows; it was the waking of the world. In considering the war of the Albigensians, we come to the breach in the heart of Europe and the landslide of a new philosophy that nearly ended Christendom for ever. In that case the new philosophy was also a very new philosophy; it was pessimism. It was none the less like modern ideas because it was as old as Asia; most modern ideas are. It was the Gnostics returning; but why did the Gnostics return? Because it was the end of an epoch, like the end of the Empire; and should have been the end of the Church. It was Schopenhauer hovering over the future; but it was also Manichaeus rising from the dead; that men might have death and that they might have it more abundantly.

It is rather more obvious in the case of the Renaissance, simply because the period is so much nearer to us and people know so much more about it. But there is more even in that example than most people know. Apart from the particular controversies which I wish to reserve for a separate study, the period was far more chaotic that those controversies commonly imply. When Protestants call Latimer a martyr to Protestantism, and Catholics reply that Campion was a martyr to Catholicism, it is often forgotten that many who perished in such persecutions could only be described as martyrs to atheism or anarchism or even diabolism. That world was almost as wild as our own; the men wandering about in it included the sort of man who says there is no God, the sort of man who says he is himself God, the sort of man who says something that nobody can make head or tail of. If we could have the conversation of the age following the Renaissance, we should probably be shocked by its shameless negations. The remarks attributed to Marlowe are probably pretty typical of the talk in many intellectual taverns. The transition from Pre-Reformation to Post-Reformation Europe was through a void of very yawning questions; yet again in the long run the answer was the same. It was one of those moments when, as Christ walked on the water, so was Christianity walking in the air.

But all these cases are remote in date and could only be proved in detail. We can see the fact much more clearly in the case when the paganism of the Renaissance ended Christianity and Christianity unaccountably began all over again. But we can see it most clearly of all in the case which is close to us and full of manifest and minute evidence; the case of the great decline of religion that began about the time of Voltaire. For indeed it is our own case, and we ourselves have seen the decline of that decline. The two hundred years since Voltaire do not flash past us at a glance like the fourth and fifth centuries or the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In our own case we can see this oft-repeated process close at hand; we know how completely a society can lose its fundamental religion without abolishing its official religion; we know how men can all become agnostics long before they abolish bishops. And we know that also in this last ending, which really did look to us like the final ending, the incredible thing has happened again; the Faith has a better following among the young men than among the old. When Ibsen spoke of the new generation knocking at the door, he certainly never expected that it would be the church-door.

At least five times, therefore, with the Arian and the Albigensian, with the Humanist sceptic, after Voltaire and after Darwin, the Faith has to all appearance gone to the dogs. In each of these five cases it was the dog that died. How complete was the collapse and how strange the reversal we can only see in detail in the case nearest to our own time.

A thousand things have been said about the Oxford Movement and the parallel French Catholic revival; but few have made us feel the simplest fact about it; that it was a surprise. It was a puzzle as well as a surprise; because it seemed to most people like a river turning backwards from the sea and trying to climb back into the mountains. To have read the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is to know that nearly everybody had come to take it for granted that religion was a thing that would continually broaden like a river, till it reached an infinite sea. Some of them expected it to go down in a cataract of catastrophe, most of them expected it to widen into an estuary of equality and moderation; but all of them thought its returning on itself a prodigy as incredible as witchcraft. In other words, most moderate people thought that faith like freedom would be slowly broadened down, and some advanced people thought that it would be very rapidly broadened down, not to say flattened out. All that world of Guizot and Macaulay and the commercial and scientific liberality was perhaps more certain than any men before or since about the direction in which the world is going. People were so certain about the direction that they only differed about the pace. Many anticipated with alarm, and a few with sympathy, a Jacobin revolt that should guillotine the Archbishop of Canterbury or a Chartist riot that should hang the parsons on the lampposts. But it seemed like a convulsion in nature that the Archbishop instead of losing his head should be looking for his mitre; and that instead of diminishing the respect due to parsons we should strengthen it to the respect due to priests. It revolutionised their very vision of revolution; and turned their very topsyturveydom topsyturvey.

In short, the whole world being divided about whether the stream was going slower or faster, became conscious of something vague but vast that was going against the stream. Both in fact and figure there is something deeply disturbing about this, and that for an essential reason. A dead thing can go with the stream, but only a living thing can go against it. A dead dog can be lifted on the leaping water with all the swiftness of a leaping hound; but only a live dog can swim backwards. A paper boat can ride the rising deluge with all the airy arrogance of a fairy ship, but if the fairy ship sails up stream it is really rowed by the fairies. And among the things that merely went with the tide of apparent progress and enlargement there was many a demagogue or sophist whose wild gestures were in truth as lifeless as the movement of a dead dog’s limbs wavering in the eddying water; and many a philosophy uncommonly like a paper boat, of the sort that it is not difficult to knock into a cocked hat. But even the truly living and even life-giving things that went with that stream did not thereby prove that they were living or life-giving. It was this other force that was unquestionably and unaccountably alive; the mysterious and unmeasured energy that was thrusting back the river. That was felt to be like the movement of some great monster; and it was none the less clearly a living monster because most people thought it a prehistoric monster. It was none the less an unnatural, an incongruous, and to some a comic upheaval; as if the Great Sea Serpent had suddenly risen out of the Round Pond — unless we consider the Sea Serpent as more likely to live in the Serpentine. This flippant element in the fantasy must not be missed, for it was one of the clearest testimonies to the unexpected nature of the reversal. That age did really feel that a preposterous quality in prehistoric animals belonged also to historic rituals; that mitres and tiaras were like the horns or crests of antediluvian creatures; and that appealing to a Primitive Church was like dressing up as a Primitive Man.

The world is still puzzled by that movement; but most of all because it still moves. I have said something elsewhere of the rather random sort of reproaches that are still directed against it and its much greater consequences; it is enough to say here that the more such critics reproach it the less they explain it. In a sense it is my concern here, if not to explain it, at least to suggest the direction of the explanation; but above all, it is my concern to point out one particular thing about it. And that is that it had all happened before; and even many times before.

To sum up, in so far as it is true that recent centuries have seen an attenuation of Christian doctrine, recent centuries have only seen what the most remote centuries have seen. And even the modern example has only ended as the medieval and pre-medieval examples ended. It is already clear, and grows clearer every day, that it is not going to end in the disappearance of the diminished creed; but rather in the return of those parts of it that had really disappeared. It is going to end as the Arian compromise ended, as the attempts at a compromise with Nominalism and even with Albigensianism ended. But the point to seize in the modern case, as in all the other cases is that what returns is not in that sense a simplified theology; not according to that view a purified theology; it is simply theology. It is that enthusiasm for theological studies that marked the most doctrinal ages; it is the divine science. An old Don with D. D. after his name may have become the typical figure of a bore; but that was because he was himself bored with his theology, not because he was excited about it. It was precisely because he was admittedly more interested in the Latin of Plautus than in the Latin of Augustine, in the Greek of Xenophon than in the Greek of Chrysostom. It was precisely because he was more interested in a dead tradition than in a decidedly living tradition. In short, it was precisely because he was himself a type of the time in which Christian faith was weak. It was not because men would not hail, if they could, the wonderful and almost wild vision of a Doctor of Divinity.

There are people who say they wish Christianity to remain as a spirit. They mean, very literally, that they wish it to remain as a ghost. But it is not going to remain as a ghost. What follows this process of apparent death is not the lingerings of the shade; it is the resurrection of the body. These people are quite prepared to shed pious and reverential tears over the Sepulchre of the Son of Man; what they are not prepared for is the Son of God walking once more upon the hills of morning. These people, and indeed most people, were indeed by this time quite accustomed to the idea that the old Christian candle-light would fade into the light of common day. To many of them it did quite honestly appear like that pale yellow flame of a candle when it is left burning in daylight. It was all the more unexpected, and therefore all the more unmistakable, that the seven branched candlestick suddenly towered to heaven like a miraculous tree and flamed until the sun turned pale. But other ages have seen the day conquer the candle-light and then the candle-light conquer the day. Again and again, before our time, men have grown content with a diluted doctrine. And again and again there has followed on that dilution, coming as out of the darkness in a crimson cataract, the strength of the red original wine. And we only say once more to-day as has been said many times by our fathers: `Long years and centuries ago our fathers or the founders of our people drank, as they dreamed, of the blood of God. Long years and centuries have passed since the strength of that giant vintage has been anything but a legend of the age of giants. Centuries ago already is the dark time of the second fermentation, when the wine of Catholicism turned into the vinegar of Calvinism. Long since that bitter drink has been itself diluted; rinsed out and washed away by the waters of oblivion and the wave of the world. Never did we think to taste again even that bitter tang of sincerity and the spirit, still less the richer and the sweeter strength of the purple vineyards in our dreams of the age of gold. Day by day and year by year we have lowered our hopes and lessened our convictions; we have grown more and more used to seeing those vats and vineyards overwhelmed in the water-floods and the last savour and suggestion of that special element fading like a stain of purple upon a sea of grey. We have grown used to dilution, to dissolution, to a watering down that went on for ever. But ‘Thou hast kept the good wine until now.’’

This is the final fact, and it is the most extraordinary of all. The faith has not only often died but it has often died of old age. It has not only been often killed but it has often died a natural death; in the sense of coming to a natural and necessary end. It is obvious that it has survived the most savage and the most universal persecutions from the shock of the Diocletian fury to the shock of the French Revolution. But it has a more strange and even a more weird tenacity; it has survived not only war but peace. It has not only died often but degenerated often and decayed often; it has survived its own weakness and even its own surrender. We need not repeat what is so obvious about the beauty of the end of Christ in its wedding of youth and death. But this is almost as if Christ had lived to the last possible span, had been a white-haired sage of a hundred and died of natural decay, and then had risen again rejuvenated, with trumpets and the rending of the sky. It was said truly enough that human Christianity in its recurrent weakness was sometimes too much wedded to the powers of the world; but if it was wedded it has very often been widowed. It is a strangely immortal sort of widow. An enemy may have said at one moment that it was but an aspect of the power of the Caesars; and it sounds as strange to-day as to call it an aspect of the Pharaohs. An enemy might say that it was the official faith of feudalism; and it sounds as convincing now as to say that it was bound to perish with the ancient Roman villa. All these things did indeed run their course to its normal end; and there seemed no course for the religion but to end with them. It ended and it began again.

‘Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.’ The civilisation of antiquity was the whole world: and men no more dreamed of its ending than of the ending of daylight. They could not imagine another order unless it were in another world. The civilisation of the world has passed away and those words have not passed away. In the long night of the Dark Ages feudalism was so familiar a thing that no man could imagine himself without a lord: and religion was so woven into that network that no man would have believed they could be torn asunder. Feudalism itself was torn to rags and rotted away in the popular life of the true Middle Ages; and the first and freshest power in that new freedom was the old religion. Feudalism had passed away, and the words did not pass away. The whole medieval order, in many ways so complete and almost cosmic a home for man, wore out gradually in its turn and here at least it was thought that the words would die. They went forth across the radiant abyss of the Renaissance and in fifty years were using all its light and learning for new religious foundations, new apologetics, new saints. It was supposed to have been withered up at last in the dry light of the Age of Reason; it was supposed to have disappeared ultimately in the earthquake of the Age of Revolution. Science explained it away; and it was still there. History disinterred it in the past; and it appeared suddenly in the future. To-day it stands once more in our path; and even as we watch it, it grows.

If our social relations and records retain their continuity, if men really learn to apply reason to the accumulating facts of so crushing a story, it would seem that sooner or later even its enemies will learn from their incessant and interminable disappointments not to look for anything so simple as its death. They may continue to war with it, but it will be as they war with nature; as they war with the landscape, as they war with the skies. ‘Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.’ They will watch for it to stumble; they will watch for it to err; they will no longer watch for it to end. Insensibly, even unconsciously, they will in their own silent anticipations fulfil the relative terms of that astounding prophecy; they will forget to watch for the mere extinction of what has so often been vainly extinguished; and will learn instinctively to look first for the coming of the comet or the freezing of the star.

Conclusion
The Summary Of This Book

I have taken the liberty once or twice of borrowing the excellent phrase about an Outline of History; though this study of a special truth and a special error can of course claim no sort of comparison with the rich and many-sided encyclopedia of history, for which that name was chosen. And yet there is a certain reason in the reference: and a sense in which the one thing touches and even cuts across the other. For the story of the world as told by Mr. Wells could here only be criticised as an outline. And, strangely enough, it seems to me that it is only wrong as an outline. It is admirable as an accumulation of history; it is splendid as a store-house or treasure of history; it is a fascinating disquisition on history; it is most attractive as an amplification of history; but it is quite false as an outline of history. The one thing that seems to me quite wrong about it is the outline; the sort of outline that can really be a single line, like that which makes all the difference between a caricature of the profile of Mr. Winston Churchill and of Sir Alfred Mond. In simple and homely language, I mean the things that stick out; the things that make the simplicity of a silhouette. I think the proportions are wrong; the proportions of what is certain as compared with what is uncertain, of what played a great part as compared with what played a smaller part, of what is ordinary and what is extraordinary, of what really lies level with an average and what stands out as an exception.

I do not say it as a small criticism of a great writer, and I have no reason to do so; for in my own much smaller task I feel I have failed in very much the same way. I am very doubtful whether I have conveyed to the reader the main point I meant about the proportions of history, and why I have dwelt so much more on some things than others. I doubt whether I have clearly fulfilled the plan that I set out in the introductory chapter; and for that reason I add these lines as a sort of summary in a concluding chapter. I do believe that the things on which I have insisted are more essential to an outline of history than the things which I have subordinated or dismissed. I do not believe that the past is most truly pictured as a thing in which humanity merely fades away into nature, or civilisation merely fades away into barbarism, or religion fades away into mythology, or our own religion fades away into the religions of the world. In short I do not believe that the best way to produce an outline of history is to rub out the lines. I believe that, of the two, it would be far nearer the truth to tell the tale very simply, like a primitive myth about a man who made the sun and stars or a god who entered the body of a sacred monkey. I will therefore sum up all that has gone before in what seems to me a realistic and reasonably proportioned statement; the short story of mankind.

In the land lit by that neighbouring star, whose blaze is the broad daylight, there are many and very various things motionless and moving. There moves among them a race that is in its relation to others a race of gods. The fact is not lessened but emphasised because it can behave like a race of demons. Its distinction is not an individual illusion, like one bird pluming itself on its own plumes; it is a solid and a many-sided thing. It is demonstrated in the very speculations that have led to its being denied. That men, the gods of this lower world, are linked with it in various ways is true; but it is another aspect of the same truth. That they grow as the grass grows and walk as the beasts walk is a secondary necessity that sharpens the primary distinction. It is like saying that a magician must after all have the appearance of a man; or that even the fairies could not dance without feet. It has lately been the fashion to focus the mind entirely on these mild and subordinate resemblances and to forget the main fact altogether. It is customary to insist that man resembles the other creatures. Yes; and that very resemblance he alone can see. The fish does not trace the fish-bone pattern in the fowls of the air; or the elephant and the emu compare skeletons. Even in the sense in which man is at one with the universe it is an utterly lonely universality. The very sense that he is united with all things is enough to sunder him from all.

Looking around him by this unique light, as lonely as the literal flame that he alone has kindled, this demigod or demon of the visible world makes that world visible. He sees around him a world of a certain style or type. It seems to proceed by certain rules or at least repetitions. He sees a green architecture that builds itself without visible hands; but which builds itself into a very exact plan or pattern, like a design already drawn in the air by an invisible finger. It is not, as is now vaguely suggested, a vague thing. It is not a growth or a groping of blind life. Each seeks an end; a glorious and radiant end, even for every daisy or dandelion we see in looking across the level of a common field. In the very shape of things there is more than green growth; there is the finality of the flower. It is a world of crowns. This impression, whether or no it be an illusion, has so profoundly influenced this race of thinkers and masters of the material world, that the vast majority have been moved to take a certain view of that world. They have concluded, rightly or wrongly, that the world had a plan as the tree seemed to have a plan; and an end and crown like the flower. But so long as the race of thinkers was able to think, it was obvious that the admission of this idea of a plan brought with it another thought more thrilling and even terrible. There was someone else, some strange and unseen being, who had designed these things, if indeed they were designed. There was a stranger who was also a friend; a mysterious benefactor who had been before them and built up the woods and hills for their coming, and had kindled the sunrise against their rising, as a servant kindles a fire. Now this idea of a mind that gives a meaning to the universe has received more and more confirmation within the minds of men, by meditations and experiences much more subtle and searching than any such argument about the external plan of the world. But I am concerned here with keeping the story in its most simple and even concrete terms; and it is enough to say here that most men, including the wisest men, have come to the conclusion that the world has such a final purpose and therefore such a first cause. But most men in some sense separated themselves from the wisest men, when it came to the treatment of that idea. There came into existence two ways of treating that idea, which between them made up most of the religious history of the world. The majority, like the minority, had this strong sense of a second meaning in things; of a strange master who knew the secret of the world. But the majority, the mob or mass of men, naturally tended to treat it rather in the spirit of gossip. The gossip, like all gossip, contained a great deal of truth and falsehood. The world began to tell itself tales about the unknown being or his sons or servants or messengers. Some of the tales may truly be called old wives’ tales; as professing only to be very remote memories of the morning of the world; myths about the baby moon or the half-baked mountains. Some of them might more truly be called travellers’ tales; as being curious but contemporary tales brought from certain borderlands of experience; such as miraculous cures or those that bring whispers of what has happened to the dead. Many of them are probably true tales; enough of them are probably true to keep a person of real commonsense more or less conscious that there really is something rather marvellous behind the cosmic curtain. But in a sense it is only going by appearances; even if the appearances are called apparitions. It is a matter of appearances — and disappearances. At the most these gods are ghosts; that is, they are glimpses. For most of us they are rather gossip about glimpses. And for the rest, the whole world is full of rumours, most of which are almost avowedly romances. The great majority of the tales about gods and ghosts and the invisible king are told, if not for the sake of the tale, at least for the sake of the topic. They are evidence of the eternal interest of the theme; they are not evidence of anything else, and they are not meant to be. They are mythology or the poetry that is not bound in books — or bound in any other way.

Meanwhile the minority, the sages or thinkers, had withdrawn apart and had taken up an equally congenial trade. They were drawing up plans of the world; of the world which all believed to have a plan. They were trying to set forth the plan seriously and to scale. They were setting their minds directly to the mind that had made the mysterious world; considering what sort of a mind it might be and what its ultimate purpose might be. Some of them made that mind much more impersonal than mankind has generally made it; some simplified it almost to a blank; a few, a very few, doubted it altogether. One or two of the more morbid fancied that it might be evil and an enemy; just one or two of the more degraded in the other class worshipped demons instead of gods. But most of these theorists were theists: and they not only saw a moral plan in nature, but they generally laid down a moral plan for humanity. Most of them were good men who did good work: and they were remembered and reverenced in various ways. They were scribes; any their scriptures became more or less holy scriptures. They were law-givers; and their tradition became not only legal but ceremonial. We may say that they received divine honours, in the sense in which kings and great captains in certain countries often received divine honours. In a word, wherever the other popular spirit, the spirit of legend and gossip could come into play, it surrounded them with the more mystical atmosphere of the myths. Popular poetry turned the sages into saints. But that was all it did. They remained themselves; men never really forgot that they were men, only made into gods in the sense that they were made into heroes. Divine Plato, like Divus Caesar, was a title and not a dogma. In Asia, where the atmosphere was more mythological, the man was made to look more like a myth, but he remained a man. He remained a man of a certain social class or school of men, receiving and deserving great honour from mankind. It is the order or school of the philosophers; the men who have set themselves seriously to trace the order across any apparent chaos in the vision of life. Instead of living on imaginative rumours and remote traditions and the tail-end of exceptional experiences about the mind and meaning behind the world, they have tried in a sense to project the primary purpose of that mind a priori. They have tried to put on paper a possible plan of the world; almost as if the world were not yet made.

Right in the middle of all these things stands up an enormous exception. It is quite unlike anything else. It is a thing final like the trump of doom, though it is also a piece of good news; or news that seems too good to be true. It is nothing less than the loud assertion that this mysterious maker of the world has visited his world in person. It declares that really and even recently, or right in the middle of historic times, there did walk into the world this original invisible being; about whom the thinkers make theories and the mythologists hand down myths; the Man Who Made the World. That such a higher personality exists behind all things had indeed always been implied by all the best thinkers, as well as by all the most beautiful legends. But nothing of this sort had ever been implied in any of them. It is simply false to say that the other sages and heroes had claimed to be that mysterious master and maker, of whom the world had dreamed and disputed. Not one of them had ever claimed to be anything of the sort. Not one of their sects or schools had even claimed that they had claimed to be anything of the sort. The most that any religious prophet had said was that he was the true servant of such a being. The most that any visionary had ever said was that men might catch glimpses of the glory of that spiritual being; or much more often of lesser spiritual beings. The most that any primitive myth had even suggested was that the Creator was present at the Creation. But that the Creator was present at scenes a little subsequent to the supper-parties of Horace, and talked with tax-collectors and government officials in the detailed daily life of the Roman Empire, and that this fact continued to be firmly asserted by the whole of that great civilisation for more than a thousand years — that is something utterly unlike anything else in nature. It is the one great startling statement that man has made since he spoke his first articulate word, instead of barking like a dog. Its unique character can be used as an argument against it as well as for it. It would be easy to concentrate on it as a case of isolated insanity; but it makes nothing but dust and nonsense of comparative religion.

It came on the world with a wind and rush of running messengers proclaiming that apocalyptic portent, and it is not unduly fanciful to say that they are running still. What puzzles the world, and its wise philosophers and fanciful pagan poets, about the priests and people of the Catholic Church is that they still behave as if they were messengers. A messenger does not dream about what his message might be, or argue about what it probably would be; he delivers it as it is. It is not a theory or a fancy but a fact. It is not relevant to this intentionally rudimentary outline to prove in detail that it is a fact; but merely to point out that these messengers do deal with it as men deal with a fact. All that is condemned in Catholic tradition, authority, and dogmatism and the refusal to retract and modify, are but the natural human attributes of a man with a message relating to a fact. I desire to avoid in this last summary all the controversial complexities that may once more cloud the simple lines of that strange story; which I have already called, in words that are much too weak, the strangest story in the world. I desire merely to mark those main lines and specially to mark where the great line is really to be drawn. The religion of the world, in its right proportions, is not divided into fine shades of mysticism or more or less rational forms of mythology. It is divided by the line between the men who are bringing that message and the men who have not yet heard it, or cannot yet believe it.

But when we translate the terms of that strange tale back into the more concrete and complicated terminology of our time, we find it covered by names and memories of which the very familiarity is a falsification. For instance, when we say that a country contains so many Moslems, we really mean that it contains so many monotheists; and we really mean, by that, that it contains so many men; men with the old average assumption of men — that the invisible ruler remains invisible. They hold it along with the customs of a certain culture and under the simpler laws of a certain law-giver; but so they would if their law-giver were Lycurgus or Solon. They testify to something which is a necessary and noble truth; but was never a new truth. Their creed is not a new colour; it is the neutral and normal tint that is the background of the many-coloured life of man. Mahomet did not, like the Magi, find a new star; he saw through his own particular window a glimpse of the great grey field of the ancient starlight. So when we say that the country contains so many Confucians or Buddhists, we mean it contains so many pagans whose prophets have given them another and rather vaguer version of the invisible power; making it not only invisible but almost impersonal. When we say that they also have temples and idols and priests and periodical festivals, we simply mean that this sort of heathen is enough of a human being to admit the popular element of pomp and pictures and feasts and fairy-tales. We only mean that Pagans have more sense than Puritans. But what the gods are supposed to be, what the priests are commissioned to say, is not a sensational secret like what those running messengers of the Gospel had to say. Nobody else except those messengers has any Gospel; nobody else has any good news; for the simple reason that nobody else has any news.

Those runners gather impetus as they run. Ages afterwards they still speak as if something had just happened. They have not lost the speed and momentum of messengers; they have hardly lost, as it were, the wild eyes of witnesses. In the Catholic Church, which is the cohort of the message, there are still those headlong acts of holiness that speak of something rapid and recent; a self-sacrifice that startles the world like a suicide. But it is not a suicide; it is not pessimistic; it is still as optimistic as St. Francis of the flowers and birds. It is newer in spirit than the newest schools of thought; and it is almost certainly on the eve of new triumphs. For these men serve a mother who seems to grow more beautiful as new generations rise up and call her blessed. We might sometimes fancy that the Church grows younger as the world grows old.

For this is the last proof of the miracle; that something so supernatural should have become so natural. I mean that anything so unique when seen from the outside should only seem universal when seen from the inside. I have not minimised the scale of the miracle, as some of our wilder theologians think it wise to do. Rather have I deliberately dwelt on that incredible interruption, as a blow that broke the very backbone of history. I have great sympathy with the monotheists, the Moslems, or the Jews, to whom it seems a blasphemy; a blasphemy that might shake the world. But it did not shake the world; it steadied the world. That fact, the more we consider it, will seem more solid and more strange. I think it a piece of plain justice to all the unbelievers to insist upon the audacity of the act of faith that is demanded of them. I willingly and warmly agree that it is, in itself, a suggestion at which we might expect even the brain of the believer to reel, when he realised his own belief. But the brain of the believer does not reel; it is the brains of the unbelievers that reel. We can see their brains reeling on every side and into every extravagance of ethics and psychology; into pessimism and the denial of life; into pragmatism and the denial of logic; seeking their omens in nightmares and their canons in contradictions; shrieking for fear at the far-off sight of things beyond good and evil, or whispering of strange stars where two and two make five. Meanwhile this solitary thing that seems at first so outrageous in outline remains solid and sane in substance. It remains the moderator of all these manias; rescuing reason from the Pragmatists exactly as it rescued laughter from the Puritans. I repeat that I have deliberately emphasised its intrinsically defiant and dogmatic character. The mystery is how anything so startling should have remained defiant and dogmatic and yet become perfectly normal and natural. I have admitted freely that, considering the incident in itself, a man who says he is God may be classed with a man who says he is glass. But the man who says he is glass is not a glazier making windows for all the world. He does not remain for after ages as a shining and crystalline figure, in whose light everything is as clear as crystal.

But this madness has remained sane. The madness has remained sane when everything else went mad. The madhouse has been a house to which, age after age, men are continually coming back as to a home. That is the riddle that remains; that anything so abrupt and abnormal should still be found a habitable and hospitable thing. I care not if the sceptic says it is a tall story; I cannot see how so toppling a tower could stand so long without foundation. Still less can I see how it could become, as it has become, the home of man. Had it merely appeared and disappeared, it might possibly have been remembered or explained as the last leap of the rage of illusion, the ultimate myth of the ultimate mood, in which the mind struck the sky and broke. But the mind did not break. It is the one mind that remains unbroken in the break-up of the world. If it were an error, it seems as if the error could hardly have lasted a day. If it were a mere ecstasy, it would seem that such an ecstasy could not endure for an hour. It has endured for nearly two thousand years; and the world within it has been more lucid, more level-headed, more reasonable in its hopes, more healthy in its instincts, more humorous and cheerful in the face of fate and death, than all the world outside. For it was the soul of Christendom that came forth from the incredible Christ; and the soul of it was common sense. Though we dared not look on His face we could look on His fruits; and by His fruits we should know Him. The fruits are solid and the fruitfulness is much more than a metaphor; and nowhere in this sad world are boys happier in apple-trees, or men in more equal chorus singing as they tread the vine, than under the fixed flash of this instant and intolerant enlightenment; the lightning made eternal as the light.

Appendix I. On Prehistoric Man

On re-reading these pages I feel that I have tried in many places and with many words, to say something that might be said in one word. In a sense this study is meant to be superficial. That is, it is not meant as a study of the things that need to be studied. It is rather a reminder of the things that are seen so quickly that they are forgotten almost as quickly. Its moral, in a manner of speaking, is that first thoughts are best; so a flash might reveal a landscape; with the Eiffel Tower or the Matterhorn standing up in it as they would never stand up again in the light of common day. I ended the book with an image of everlasting lightning; in a very different sense, alas, this little flash has lasted only too long. But the method has also certain practical disadvantages upon which I think it well to add these two notes. It may seem to simplify too much and to ignore out of ignorance. I feel this especially in the passage about the prehistoric pictures; which is not concerned with all that the learned may learn from prehistoric pictures, but with the single point of what anyone could learn from there being any prehistoric pictures at all. I am conscious that this attempt to express it in terms of innocence may exaggerate even my own ignorance. Without any pretence of scientific research or information, I should be sorry to have it thought that I knew no more than what was needed, in that passage, of the states into which primitive humanity has been divided. I am aware, of course, that the story is elaborately stratified; and that there were many such stages before the Cro-Magnon or any peoples with whom we associate such pictures. Indeed recent studies about the Neanderthal and other races rather tend to repeat the moral that is here most relevant. The notion noted in these pages of something necessarily slow or late in the development of religion, will gain little indeed from these later revelations about the precursors of the reindeer picture-maker. The learned appear to hold that, whether the reindeer picture could be religious or not, the people that lived before it were religious already; burying their dead with the significant signs of mystery and hope. This obviously brings us back to the same argument; an argument that is not approached by any measurement of the earlier man's skull. It is little use here to compare the head of the man with the head of the monkey, if it certainly never came into the head of the monkey to bury another monkey with nuts in his grave to help him towards a heavenly monkey house. Talking of skulls, I am also aware of the story of the Cro-Magnon skull that was much larger and finer than a modern skull. It is a very funny story; because an eminent evolutionist, awakening to a somewhat belated caution, protested against anything being inferred from one specimen. It is the duty of a solitary skull to prove that our fathers were our inferiors. Any solitary skull presuming to prove that they were superior is felt to be suffering from swelled head.

Appendix II. On Authority and Accuracy

In this book which is merely meant as a popular criticism of popular fallacies, often indeed of very vulgar errors, I feel that I have sometimes given an impression of scoffing at serious scientific work. It was however the very reverse of my intentions. I am not arguing with the scientist who explains the elephant, but only with the sophist who explains it away. And as a matter of fact the sophist plays to the gallery, as he did in ancient Greece. He appeals to the ignorant, especially when he appeals to the learned. But I never meant my own criticism to be an impertinence to the truly learned. We all owe an infinite debt to the researches, especially the recent researches, of single minded students in these matters; and I have only professed to pick up things here and there from them. I have not loaded my abstract argument with quotations and references, which only make a man look more learned than he is; but in some cases I find that my own loose fashion of allusion is rather misleading about my own meaning. The passage about Chaucer and the Child Martyr is badly expressed; I only mean that the English poet probably had in mind the English saint; of whose story he gives a sort of foreign version. In the same way two statements in the chapter on Mythology follow each other in such a way that it may seem to be suggested that the second story about monotheism refers to the Southern Seas. I may explain that Atahocan belongs not to Australasian but to American savages. So in the chapter called “The Antiquity of Civilisation,” which I feel to be the most unsatisfactory, I have given my own impression of the meaning of the development of Egyptian monarchy too much, perhaps, as if it were identical with the facts on which it was formed as given in works like those of Professor J. L Myres. But the confusion was not intentional; still less was there any intention to imply, in the remainder of the chapter, that the anthropological speculations about races are less valuable than they undoubtedly are. My criticism is strictly relative; I may say that the pyramids are plainer than the tracks of the desert; without denying that wiser men than I may see tracks in what is to me the trackless sand.

WILLIAM COBBETT

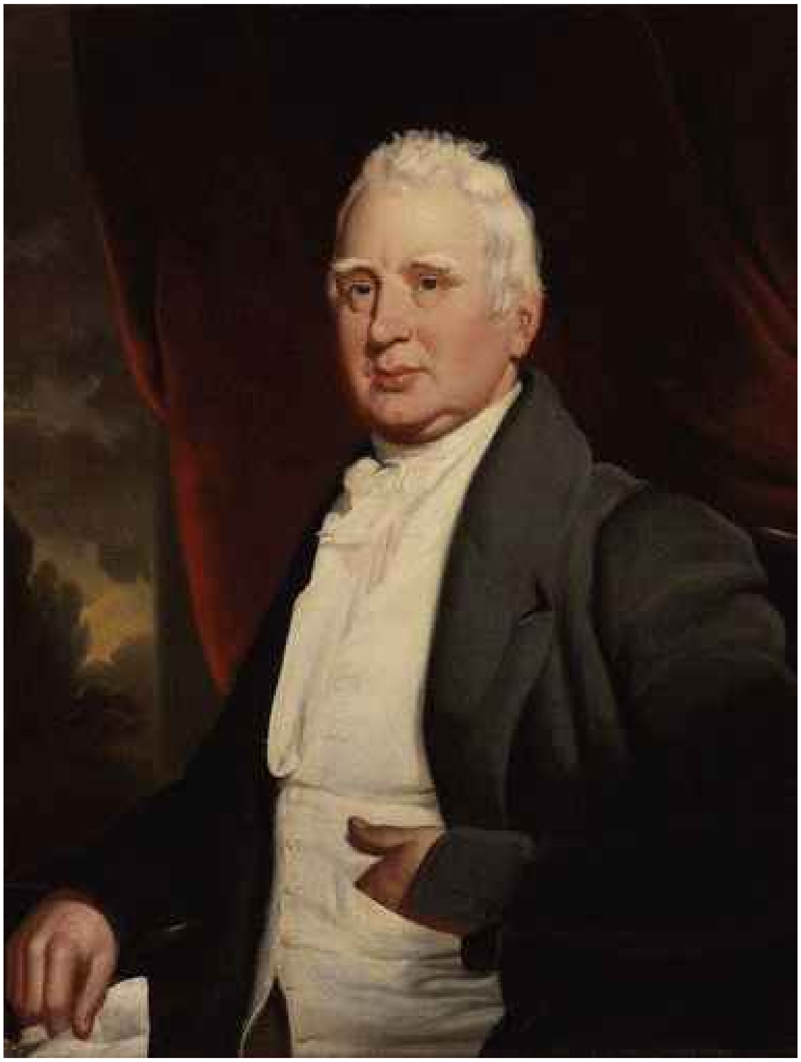

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CHAPTER I

THE REVIVAL OF COBBETT

This chapter is here called `The Revival of Cobbett.' As originally planned, only a little while ago, it was to have been called `The Neglect of Cobbett.' It is not unimportant to realise how recent has been the change. It is but a year or two ago that I had the great and (it is to be feared) the undeserved honour of reading a paper an the subject to the Royal Society of Literature on my admission to that body, which certainly consists almost entirely of men who know much more about literature than I do. It was a graceful formality on such an occasion for the least learned person in the room to lecture to all the rest. Yet on that occasion the chairman, who was much more of a literary expert than I am, remarked on my having chosen an obscure and largely forgotten writer, just as if I had been lecturing on one of the last and least of the Greek sophists, or one of the numberless and nameless lyrists among the Cavaliers. Between then and now the change from neglect to revival has taken place. It is true that it is not until the first beginnings of the revival that we ever even hear of the neglect. Until that moment even the neglect is neglected. When I delivered the highly amateur address in question, the memory was already stirring, in others besides myself. But it is not out of egotism that I give this example; but because it happens to illustrate the first fact to be realised about the present position of Cobbett.

In one sense, of course, Cobbett has never been neglected. He has only been admired in the way in which he would have specially hated to be admired. He who was full of his subject has been valued only for his style. He who was so stuffed with matter has been admired for his manner; though not perhaps for his manners. He shouted to the uproarious many, and his voice in a faint whisper has reached the refined few; who delicately applauded a turn of diction or a flight of syntax. But if such applause be rather disconcerting to the demagogue, the real revival of his demagogy would be even more disconcerting to the academic admirer. Now I mean by the revival of Cobbett the revival of the things that Cobbett wished to revive. They were things which until a little while ago nobody imagined there was the slightest chance of reviving; such as liberty, England, the family, the honour of the yeoman, and so on. Many of the learned who, on the occasion above mentioned, were very indulgent to my own eccentric enthusiasm, would even now be a little puzzled if that enthusiasm became something more than an eccentricity. Cobbett had been for them a man who praised an extravagant and impossible England in exact and excellent English. It must seem strange indeed that one who can never hope to write such English can yet hope to see such an England. The critics must feel like cultivated gentlemen who, after long relishing Jeremy Taylor's diction, should abruptly receive an unwelcome invitation to give an exhibition of Holy Dying. They must feel like scholars who should have lingered lovingly all their lives over the lapidary Babylonian jests and vast verbal incantations of the wonderful essay on Urn-Burial; and then have lived to see it sold by the hundred as the popular pamphlet of a bustling modern movement in favour of cremation.

Nevertheless, this classic preservation of Cobbett in an urn, in the form of ashes, has not been quite consistent with itself. Even now it would seem that the ashes were still a little too hot to touch. And I only mentioned my own little effort in academic lecturing because it concerned something that may be repeated here, as relevant to the first essentials of the subject. Many professors have in a merely literary sense recognised Cobbett as a model; but few have modelled themselves upon their model. They were always ready to hope that their pupils would write such good English. But they would have been mildly surprised if any pupil had written such plain English. Yet, as I pointed out on that occasion, the strongest quality of Cobbett as a stylist is in the use he made of a certain kind of language; the sort of use commonly called abuse. It is especially his bad language that is always good. It is precisely the passages that have always been recognised as good style that would now be regarded as bad form. And it is precisely these violent passages that especially bring out not only the best capacities of Cobbett but also the best capacities of English. I was and am therefore ready to repeat what I said in my little lecture, and to repeat it quite seriously, though it was the subject at the time of merely amused comment. I pointed out that in the formation of the noble and beautiful English language, out of so many local elements, nothing had emerged more truly beautiful than the sort of English that has been localised under the name of Billingsgate. I pointed out that English excels in certain angular consonants and abrupt terminations that make it extraordinarily effective for the expression of the fighting spirit and a fierce contempt. How fortunate is the condition of the Englishman who can kick people; and how relatively melancholy that of the Frenchman who can only give them a blow of the foot! If we say that two people fight like cat and dog, the very words seem to have in them a shindy of snaps and screams and scratches. If we say `comme le chat et le chien,' we are depressed with the suggestion of comparative peace. French has of course its own depths of resounding power: but not this sort of battering ram of bathos. Now nobody denies that Cobbett and his enemies did fight like cat and dog, but it is precisely his fighting passages that contain some of the finest examples of a style as English as the word dog or the word cat. So far as this goes the point has nothing to do with political or moral sympathy with Cobbett's cause. The beauty of his incessant abuse is a matter of art for art's sake. The pleasure which an educated taste would receive in hearing Cobbett call a duchess an old eat or a bishop a dirty dog is almost onomatopoeic, in its love of a melody all but detached from meaning. In saying this, it might be supposed, I was indeed meeting the purely artistic and academic critic half way, and might well have been welcomed, so to speak, with an embrace of reconciliation. This is indeed the reason why most lovers of English letters have at least kept alive a purely literary tradition of Cobbett. But, as it happened, I added some words which I will also take the liberty of mentioning, because they exactly illustrate the stages of this re-emergence of the great writer's fame from the field of literature to the field of life. `There is a serious danger that this charm in English literature may be lost. The comparative absence of abuse in social and senatorial life may take away one of the beauties of our beautiful and historic speech. Words like "scamp" and "scoundrel," which have the unique strength of English in them, are likely to grow unfamiliar through lack of use, though certainly not through lack of opportunity for use. It is indeed strange that when public life presents so wide and promising a field for the use of these terms, they should be suffered to drop into desuetude. It seems singular that when the careers of our public men, the character of our commercial triumphs, and the general culture and ethic of the modern world seem so specially to invite and, as it were, to cry aloud for the use of such language, the secret of such language should be in danger of being lost.' Now, when I drew the attention of those authoritative guardians of English literature, responsible for the preservation of the purity of the English language, to this deplorable state of things — to the words that are like weapons rusting on the wall, to the most choice terms of abuse becoming obsolete in face of rich and even bewildering opportunities in the way of public persons to apply them to — when I appealed against this neglect of our noble tongue, I am sorry to say that my appeal was received with heartless laughter and was genially criticised in the newspapers as a joke. It was regarded not only as a piece of mild buffoonery but as a sort of eighteenth-century masquerade; as if I only wished to bring back cudgels and cutlasses along with wigs and three-cornered hats. It was assumed that nobody could possibly seriously hope, or even seriously expect, to hear again the old Billingsgate of the hustings and the election fight. And yet, since those criticisms were written, only a very little time ago, that sort of very Early English has suddenly been heard, if not in journalism, at least in politics. By a strange paradox, even the House of Commons has heard the sound of common speech, not wholly unconnected with common sense. Labour members and young Tories have both been heard talking like men in the street. Mr. Jack Jones, by his interruptions, has made himself a judicious patron of this literary revival, this attempt to save the heritage of English culture; and Mr. Kirkwood has said things about capitalists of which even Cobbett might be proud.

Now, I have only mentioned my premature lament over the bargee, that disreputable Tom Bowling, because it serves to introduce a certain equally premature rejoicing which explains much of our present position. The Victorian critics had insisted on regarding the violence of Cobbett as entirely a thing of the past; with the result that they find themselves suddenly threatened with that sort of violence advancing on them from the future. They are perhaps a little alarmed; and at least they are very naturally puzzled. They had always been taught that Cobbett was a crank whose theories had been thrashed out long ago and found to be quite empty and fallacious. He had been preserved only for his style; and even that was rude and old-fashioned, especially in the quaint Saxon archaism of calling a spade a spade. They little thought to have heard the horrid sound, the hideous word `spade’ itself, shake the arches of St. Stephen’s as with a blasphemy. But the question is not merely one of idioms but of ideas. They had always supposed at least that Cobbett’s ideas were exploded; and they found they were still exploding. They found that the explosion which missed fire a hundred years ago, like that of Guy Fawkes three hundred years ago, still has a time fuse whose time was not quite expired; and that the location of the peril (I regret to say) was also not very far from the same spot as Guy Fawkes's. In a peril of that sort it is very important to understand what is really happening; and I doubt if the comfortable classes understand what is happening much better than they did in Cobbett's day — to say nothing of Guy Fawkes's. And one reason why I originally agreed to write this little book, is that I think it a matter of life and death that it should be understood.

The cudgel has come back like a boomerang: and the common Englishman, so long content with taking half a loaf, may yet in the same tradition of compromise confine himself to heaving half a brick. The reason why Parliamentary language is unparliamentary and Westminster has been joined to Billingsgate, the reason why the English poor in many places are no longer grumbling or even growling but rather howling, the reason why there is a new note in our old polite politics, is a reason that vitally concerns the subject of this little study. There are a great many ways of stating that reason; but the way most relevant here is this. All this is happening because the critics have been all wrong about Cobbett. I mean they were specially wrong about what he represented. It is happening because Cobbett was not what they have always represented him as being; not even what they have always praised him as being. It is happening because Cobbett stood for a reality of quite another sort; and realities can return whether we understand them or not. Cobbett was not merely a wrong-headed fellow with a knack of saying the right word about the wrong thing. Cobbett was not merely an angry and antiquated old farmer who thought the country must be going to the dogs because the whole world was not given up to the cows. Cobbett was not merely a man with a lot of nonsensical notions that could be exploded by political economy; a man looking to turn England into an Eden that should grow nothing but Cobbett's Corn. What he saw was not an Eden that cannot exist but rather an Inferno that can exist, and even that does exist. What he saw was the perishing of the whole English power of self-support, the growth of cities that drain and dry up the countryside, the growth of dense dependent populations incapable of finding their own food, the toppling triumph of machines over men, the sprawling omnipotence of financiers over patriots, the herding of humanity in nomadic masses whose very homes are homeless, the terrible necessity of peace and the terrible probability of war, all the loading up of our little island like a sinking ship; the wealth that may mean famine and the culture that may mean despair; the bread of Midas and the sword of Damocles. In a word, he saw what we see, but he saw it when it was not there. And some cannot see it — even when it is there.

It is the paradox of his life that he loved the past, and he alone really lived in the future. That is, he alone lived in the real future. The future was a fog, as it always is; and in some ways his largely instinctive intelligence was foggy enough about it. But he and he alone had some notion of the sort of London fog that it was going to be. He was in France during the French Revolution; amid all that world of carnage and classical quotations, of Greek names and very Latin riots. He must have looked, as he stood there with his big heavy figure and black beaver hat, as solemn and solid a specimen as ever was seen of the Englishman abroad — the sort of Englishman who is very much abroad. He went to America just after the American Revolution; and played the part of the old Tory farmer, waving the beaver hat and calling on those astonished republicans for three cheers for King George. Everywhere, amid all that dance of humanitarian hopes, he seemed like a survival and a relic of times gone by. And he alone was in any living touch with the times that were to come.

All those reformers and revolutionists around him, talking hopefully of the future, were without exception living in the past. The very future they happily prophesied was the future as it would have been in the past. Some were dreaming of a remote and some of a recent past; some of a true and some of a false past; some of a heroic past and others of a past more dubious. But they all meant by their ideal democracy what democracy would have been in a simpler age than their own. The French republicans were living in the lost republics of the Mediterranean; in the cold volcanoes of Athens and Thebes. Theirs was a great ideal; but no modern state is small enough to achieve anything so great. We might say that some of those eighteenth century progressives had even got so far as the reign of Pepin or Dagobert, and discovered the existence of the French Monarchy. For things so genuine and primarily so popular as the French Monarchy are generally not really discovered until they have existed for some time; and when they are discovered they are generally destroyed. The English and to some extent the American liberals were living in one sense even more in the past; for they were not destroying what had recently been discovered. They were destroying what had recently been destroyed. The Americans were defying George the Third, under the extraordinary idea that George the Third ruled

England. When they set up their republic, the simple colonists probably really did think that England was a monarchy. The same illusion filled the English Whigs; but it was only because England had once been a monarchy. The Whigs were engaged permanently in expelling the Stuarts, an enjoyable occupation that could be indefinitely repeated. They were always fighting the battles of Naseby and Newbury over again, and defying a divine right that nobody was defending. For them indeed Charles the First walked and talked half an hour, or half a century, or a century and a half, after his head was cut off and they themselves could walk nowhere but in Whitehall, and talk of nothing but what happened there. We can see how that long tradition lingered in a light and popular book like Dickens's Child's History of England; and how even the child was still summoned to take part in that retrospective revolution. For there were moments when even Mr. Dickens had the same obsession as Mr. Dick.

But the point is that these idealists — most of them very noble idealists — all saw the future upon the simple pattern of the past. It is typical that the American band of comrades were called the Cincinnati, and were named after Cincinnatus the Consul who threw away the toga to take the plough. But Cobbett knew a little more about ploughing. He knew the ploughshare had stuck in a stiff furrow; and he knew as nobody else knew upon what sort of stone it had struck. He knew that stone was the metal out of which the whole modern world would be made; unless the operation could be stopped in time. He knew it indeed only blindly and instinctively; but nobody else knew it at all. Nobody else had felt the future; nobody else had smelt the fog; nobody else had any notion of what was really coming upon the world.

I mean that if you had gone to Jefferson at the moment when he was writing the Declaration of Independence, and shown him the exact picture of an Oil Trust, and its present position in America, he would have said, `It is not to be believed.' If you had gone to Cobbett, and shown him the same thing, he would have said, like the bearded old gentleman in the rhyme, `It is just as I feared.' If you had confronted Carnot with Caillaux, the old revolutionist would have wondered what inconceivable curse could have fallen on great France of the soldiers. If you had confronted Cobbett with some of our similar specimens, he would have said it was what might be expected when you gave over great England to the stockjobbers. For men like Jefferson and Carnot were thinking of an ancient agricultural society merely changing from inequality to equality. They were thinking of Greek and Roman villages in which democracy had driven out oligarchy. They were thinking of a medieval manor that had become a medieval commune. The merchant and man of affairs was a small and harmless by-product of their system; they had no notion that it would grow large enough to swallow all the rest. The point about Cobbett is that he alone really knew that there and not in kings or republics, Jacobins or Anti-Jacobins, lay the peril and oppression of the times to come.

It is the riddle of the man that if he was wrong then, he is right now. As a dead man fighting with dead men, he can still very easily be covered with derision; but if we imagine him still alive and talking to living men, his remarks are rather uncomfortably like life. The very words that we should once have read as the most faded and antiquated history can now be read as the most startling and topical journalism. Let it be granted that the denunciation was not always correct about Dr. Priestley or Dr. Rush, that the abuse was not really applicable to Mr. Hunt or Mr. Wright; let us console ourselves with the fact that the abuse is quite applicable to us. We at least have done all that Cobbett's enemies were accused of doing. We have fulfilled all those wild prophecies; we have justified all those most unjustifiable aspersions; we have come into the world as if to embody and fulfill in a belated fashion that highly improbable prediction. Cobbett's enemies may or may not have ruined agriculture; but anyhow we have. Cobbett's contemporaries may or may not have decreased the national wealth, but it is decreased. Paper money may not have driven out gold in his lifetime, but we have been more privileged than he. In a mere quarrel between the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century he may easily appear wrong; but in a quarrel between the nineteenth century and the twentieth century he is right. He did not always draw precise diagrams of things as they were. He only had frantic and fantastic nightmares of things as they are. The fame of Cobbett faded and indeed completely vanished during our time of prosperity or what is counted our time of prosperity. For in fact it was only the prosperity of the prosperous. But during all that time his version of the doubts about what Carlyle called the profit-and-loss philosophy practically disappeared from the modern mind. I have mentioned Carlyle but as expressed by Carlyle the same doubts were not the same thing. Carlyle would have turned capitalism into a sort of feudalism, with the feudal loyalty on the one side and the feudal liberality on the other.

He meant by the profit-and-loss philosophy a small and mean philosophy that could not face a small loss even for the sake of a great profit. But he never denied that there could be a great profit, he never contradicted the whole trend of the age as Cobbett did. On the contrary, Carlyle called the capitalist by a romantic name, where Cobbett would have called him by a shockingly realistic name. Carlyle called the capitalist a captain of industry, a very sad scrap of Victorian sentimentalism. That romantic evasion misses the whole point, the point that Cobbett kept steadily in sight all his life. Militarism would be much less respectable and respected if the captain of a line regiment had pocketed the rent of every acre that he fought for in Flanders. Capitalism would be much more respectable and respected if all the master builders climbed to the tops of towers and fell off, if there were as many capitalists knocked on the head by bricks as there were captains killed at the front by bullets. But as I pointed out in a connection already mentioned, Carlyle was really rather an optimist than a pessimist. Certainly Carlyle was an optimist where Cobbett was a pessimist. Cobbett dug much deeper; he not only called a spade a spade, but he used it like a resurrectionist — not merely like a reformer weeding out small evils. We might say that the mere reformer calls a spade a spud. Carlyle gave hints and suggestions rather darkly that the whole business might end badly; but he never really dared to wish that it had never begun. He told the rich sternly how they should dispose of their wealth, he did not, like Cobbett, tell them coarsely how they had collected it. The consequence was that Carlyle has been exhibited as a Puritan, a pessimist, a prophet of woe. Cobbett has not been exhibited at all. Carlyle has been set over against Mill and Macaulay as a sort of official opposition, but Cobbett's opposition was not sufficiently official. Carlyle has been allowed to grumble like a choleric old major much respected in the club. Cobbett has been entirely removed, like the enfant terrible, kicking and screaming, lest he should say something dreadful in the drawing room. Hence the big secret with which he was bursting has actually been too big to be uttered; his condemnation was so large and sweeping that it had to be hidden in a hole. The Victorians were quite cultivated enough and broad-minded enough to realise that there must be some reminder amid their rejoicings of human fallibility and frailty; lest Mr. George Augustus Sala should seem a creature all too bright and good for human nature's daily food. They had something of the imperial imagination and philosophic outlook of the ancient Egyptians, who set a skeleton at the banquet to remind them of mortality and a more melancholy mood that might mingle harmlessly with the mood of joy. Carlyle was the skeleton of the feast. But Cobbett was not the skeleton of the feast; he was the skeleton in the cupboard.

In short, Carlyle did criticise the profit-and-loss school, but not the profitableness of the whole world in which it was made. Certainly he did not question the assumption that it was at least profitable in the sense of being practicable. But since then deeper forces have moved and darker riddles begun to be murmured amongst us; and it is not the superficial abnormalities and accidents but the whole main movement and purpose of the nineteenth century that is brought in question. We have come back to doing what Carlyle never really did, what Cobbett always wanted to do, to make a real reckoning of ultimate loss and profit on the profit-and-loss philosophy. Even in the economic sphere the answer has been looking more and more doubtful. We talk of it as the age of profiteers; but it is a question how long even profiteers will make profits. We talk of it as capitalism; and so it is, in the rather sinister sense of living on capital.

So in some old romance of some old manor-house and manorial family there might come a dark hour in its annals and a dark cloud upon its towers (a thunderstorm thrown in, or the fall of some shield or picture or garden statue or anything necessary to the novelist's taste in doom); and through the darkened halls and corridors the master of the house would pass to some dim disordered library and take down some forbidden or neglected volume, in which are traced strange emblems or figures or maps or charts of hidden things, or forgotten runes and riddles returning only with the end. So the Englishman of the twentieth century is to-day groping his way back past all the literature of the nineteenth; past all the varied Victorian romances of fashionable progress in Macaulay and fashionable reaction in Carlyle; till he finds far up on a high shelf the old thick, leather-bound volumes, with faded print and the barely decipherable title of `Cobbett's Register'; and taking down the book, amid the gathering storm and the growing darkness, reads this old story.

CHAPTER II

A SELF-MADE MAN

IT is now rather more than a century and a half since a small boy of the poorer sort was occupied in scaring rooks where they rose, as they still rise, in black flotillas flecking the great white clouds that roll up against the great ridges of Surrey and the southern shires. Yet further south where the Sussex hills take on an outline at once more opulent and more bare there was repeated a rhyme that might run like a refrain through much of his story.

Bees are bees of Paradise, Do the work of Jesus Christ, Do the work that no man can; God made bees and bees make honey, God made man and man makes money, God made man to plough and reap and sow, And God made little boys to scare away the crow.

And so the little boy in question continued to scare away the crow, in obedience to that providential arrangement.

The little boy was destined to grow up into a tall and vigorous man, who was to travel far and into strange places, into exile and into prison and into Parliament; but his heart never wandered very far from the simple ideals that are summed up in that verse. He was no mere dreamer or more or less lovable loafer, of the sort sometimes associated with the village genius. He would have been as ready as any man of the utilitarian school to admit that men would do well to imitate the industry of bees. Only, those who look at his literary industry may be tempted to say that he had more sting than honey. Similarly he was no mere romantic or sentimentalist, such as is sometimes associated with a love of the rural scene. He would have been as ready as any merchant or trader to face the fact that man, as God has made him, must make money. But he had a vivid sense that the money must be as solid and honest as the corn and fruit for which it stood, that it must be closely in touch with the realities that it represented; and he waged a furious war on all those indirect and sometimes imaginary processes of debts and shares and promises and percentages which make the world of wealth to-day a world at the worst unreal and at the best unseen. He was most immediately concerned, in the conditions of the hour, with what he regarded as the fugitive and wasteful paper-chase of paper money. But what he was at once predicting and denouncing, like a small cloud that had not yet become a universal fog, was that vast legal fiction that we call finance. In any case, against a world in which such financial mysteries were multiplying every day, in which machinery was everywhere on the march, and the new towns spreading with the swiftness of a landslide, in which England was already well on the way to becoming merely the workshop of the world, against the whole great crawling labyrinth of the modern state which is almost one with the modern city, there remained in him unaltered, cut deep into the solitary rock of his soul, the single clause of his single creed: that God made man to plough and reap and sow.

For this was William Cobbett, who was born in 1762 at a little farm at Farnham in Surrey. His grandfather had been an ordinary agricultural labourer, one of a class drudging for a miserable wage, and fallen so far from anything resembling the pride of a peasantry that in English history it had utterly sunk out of sight. It was something that has hardly been known since heathen times; there rests on all its records the ancient silence of slavery. It was to these slaves that the heart of Cobbett continually turned, in what seemed to many its dizzy and incalculable turnings. Those that were trampled and forgotten alike by the Tory squire and the Radical merchant were those whom Cobbett eared to remember; exactly as both Patrician and Plebeian citizens might have been puzzled by a sage whose first thought was of the slaves. And if ever in this land of ours the poor are truly lifted up, if ever the really needy find a tongue for their own needs, if ever progressives and reactionaries alike realise upon what ruins were built both their order and their reform, how many failures went to make their success, and what crimes have set their house in order, if they see the underside of their own history with its secrets of sealed-up wrath and irrevocable injustice — in a word, if a great people can ever repent, then posterity may see achieved by this agency also, by this one lonely and angry bee in whom society saw nothing but a hornet, the work of Jesus Christ.

His father was a small farmer and evidently no fool; but the son could have but a very rudimentary and rustic schooling. The son was perhaps all his life’ a little too prone to play the schoolmaster; and from an early age he played the schoolmaster to himself. We have many notes of his first reading; notably a glimpse which shows him gaping at the broad farcical title of `The Tale of a Tub,’ so much in his own verbal fashion, and buying it and trying to understand it. He read it under a haystack, and it was so that there fell across him in his first sunshine the shadow of that dark but not ignoble spirit who a hundred years before had seen the first victory of our Venetian oligarchy and despaired. For many have discussed whether Cobbett owed anything to Swift's style, but few have sufficiently considered his connection with Swift's cause or creed. Anyhow, precious little of either could have been made out by a farmer's boy reading 'The Tale of a Tub' under a haystack. For the rest, there is something of the boy's adventure story running through his boyhood. He embodied the recognised romance of England by running away to sea. He also embodied his own rather recurrent and fitful sagacity by running back again.

He was a character from his earliest years. There was a sort of calm impetuosity about his movements. He set out one day to escort some girls to the village fair, dressed up in all his village finery. He saw a coach with `London' on it, and inconsequently got on to it and went careering away, leaving his lady friends, his fair, his farm, and his family behind him like things of the past. Fortunately he met a friend of his father's in London, who got him a post as clerk in a lawyer's office. He hated the lawyer's office, as he hated lawyers and law, all his life; as he hated long words and pedantry and petty tyranny. He took another plunge with the same placid abruptness; he took the King's shilling and enlisted as a private soldier. Here he was more successful; for there was much more of the soldier than the lawyer about him. Moreover, he was none the less a country boy because he had played the traditional part of the country boy who comes up to London where the streets are paved with gold. He was tall and strong, with a stride for which there seemed to be no room in the narrow streets, which went with a better swing on the long marches over the hills and far away. His lungs, which in every sense played so large a part in his life, demanded the deep air of the open places. Fifty years afterwards, at Westminster, as lie would have said, he was to find himself dying in another den of lawyers. He was much happier anyhow in the camp of soldiers; indeed, he was not only happy but fortunate. He was recognised as a good soldier, and rose to be corporal and sergeant and eventually a sort of secretary to the whole regiment, assisting the adjutant. All this time he had been teaching himself grammar; and also (what is pleasingly characteristic) teaching the adjutant grammar. Anyhow it is obvious that he was trustworthy and that he was trusted. He was strict in his duty; rose early, an early bird ready to catch the earliest worm; he kept an eye on everything; he was as busy as a business man. Such a man generally dies rich and respected; but it is just here that there appears that little twist or bias which decided how William Cobbett was to live and die.

Cobbett began to note something queer and quite wrong about the regimental accounts. He soon discovered that a number of officers were simply pocketing money meant for the regimental food. Then it was that there appeared the deplorable difference between Cobbett and a really respectable and successful man. All his life long he never could leave things alone. He was a business man: but he could not mind his own business. He kept an eye on things; but he had never learnt to wink the other eye. He was the early bird; but he fell into the melancholy mistake of supposing that all worms ought really to be treated as worms. He had not the fine instinct which makes the really successful secretary-bird distinguish between the earthworms of the underworld and the silkworms of the smart set. It is not suggested that he was a pure altruist, a spotless saint of patriotism; then as always his action involved a vast amount of vanity, of self-assertion, of sensationalism and crudity, also a vast amount of inconsistency and inconsequence. The point is that, whatever his other vices, he did not really know how to rise in the world. He made a scene; and discovered too late that in denouncing what he supposed to be a detail of individual swindling in his own regiment he had really challenged a system running through the whole British Army, or for that matter through the whole British Constitution. Where his restless meddling thought to let the regimental cat out of the bag, or out of one particular knapsack, he found he had roused from its lair a sort of Tammany Tiger. He was not by any means clear or consistent about it. The truth is he was quite out of his depth; yet he was perfectly right in feeling that there were depths of degradation. While he was in the Army his protest was easily crushed; when he had left it the Government granted some sort of enquiry; but as Cobbett could not get what he demanded as the conditions of that enquiry, he refused even to attend it himself, and the whole protest went by default. In a society like ours, it is very common for scandals that are too big to be cured to fizzle out like that, as if they were too small to be considered.

It was while he was a soldier that lie took another of those characteristic steps, that might seem to many like steps over a precipice. But it is essential to realise about him that the very first step always had about it something almost stiff and automatic in its composure, however stormy might be the consequences or however much he might rave back against the storm. In this connection we must try to remember what is so entirely forgotten: the Stoic ideal of the end of the eighteenth century. The secular ideals of humanity fossilise very fast, and nothing but religion ever remains. Stoicism is stratified amid layers of lost moral fashions; but it was a fine thing in its day, when it stiffened with heathen virtues the Revolutionists of France and America. Our luxurious and orientalised fashions and fictions have a great deal to learn from the Roman virtues advocated in Sandford and Merton. That is why they certainly will not learn it. It must be admitted that in Mr. Cobbett there was a touch of Mr. Barlow. All his life he admired people who did things for themselves; especially if they did them under difficulties. He admired home-made bread or home-brewed ale even if some would call it the bread of affliction or consider it very bitter beer. Very early one morning he was going some of his military rounds in his sergeant's uniform, when the grey day was just breaking over fields of snow. He had a great power of sketching a landscape in simple words; and somehow such a twilight of grey and silver remains long in the reader's memory. At the end of a small yard he saw a girl with dark hair scouring out some pots and pans. He looked at her again and saw she was very beautiful. Then he said with a sort of fatal finality: `That's the girl for me.' And indeed she was the wife who was with him when he died fifty years afterwards, on those Surrey hills that were his home.

Another incident attaches itself to her memory which is very significant of Cobbett's career from its earliest days. Doubtless he had before and since taken many girls to fairs, or failed to take them to fairs, like those who must have waited wondering after the incident of the coach. But like many combative, objective men he was really by nature very faithful in relations of mere affection; and he makes us believe it by a very convincing account of his one serious temptation to unfaithfulness. Unfaithfulness is never so vivid to an unfaithful man. By the time he returned to England, it was with the perfectly simple and concentrated purpose of seeking out the girl he had seen in the snow. In the old days he had come to a sort of understanding with her; and had solemnly placed in her hands a sealed packet of money, telling her to use it whenever she was in need. Then his regiment crossed the Atlantic and she was lost in the labyrinth of the poverty of a modern town. For a long time he could find no trace; at last he tracked her to a slum where she was working as the poorest sort of servant; and she handed him back his packet of money with the seal unbroken.

It is clear that for Cobbett that small gesture of repayment seemed as splendid as the throwing of the gauntlet. To enter into his sense of triumph we must understand something that is found in him through life, and especially found in him, when it is generally rarest, in youth. It is something seldom understood in a society without peasants; an oligarchy which can only understand what we call `honour' as it is understood by gentlemen. It was the self-respect of the poor, which all modern industrial society has been slowly crushing to death. To find it anywhere uncrushed and even uncowed was to Cobbett like the noise of a great victory in a war of the world. When the poor servant-girl stood up and handed him back his little handful, there were things in it that neither snobs nor Bohemians will ever understand. There was at once fidelity and defiance, there was at once loyalty and solitude, there was a hard pride in work and a fine shade of delicacy; there was dignity, there was justice, above all there was triumph. Not here at least had the almighty meanness of the modern world prevailed, that lopped all lofty simplicities and lamed all lovers' quests; here was a romance rounded and complete and solid as the sealed packet in his hand; here in this unhappy world was a story with a happy ending. In all the long comedy of the contrast between the heart of man and its surroundings, never has there been a stranger disproportion than between the outside and the inside of that one small incident; of a young man finding his first love left alone with her honour and her pride. To any one passing in the street there could have been nothing visible but a tall and shabby soldier staring at a servant-girl on a door-step; but in his own narration it becomes easy to understand that she came back to him with all the beauty of banners.

I have dwelt on this one case of the contrast between the external homeliness of poverty and the internal glow of its occasional festivals and triumphs, because this is something very near to the whole secret of the man's life. It was always of such small tragedies and small triumphs that he was thinking when he talked about the problem of poverty. He differed from many modern social reformers and from most modern philanthropists, in the fact that he was not merely concerned with what is called the welfare of the workers. He was very much concerned for their dignity, their good name, their honour, and even their glory. Any humane man may desire the well-being of his servants, as he may the well-being of his horses or his sheep. But he does not commonly expect a horse to bring back a nosebag, full of oats, to which the conscientious quadruped does not think himself entitled by the terms of the contract. He does not expect a sheep to fire up and take offence, either at being bribed with grass or water, or at being criticised as the black sheep of the flock. He does not expect the sheep to offer to fight the sheep-dog, when accused of running away from the wolf. In short, he does not expect horses and sheep to have a sense of honour; but Cobbett, always so eccentric and paradoxical, did really desire peasants and working-men to have a sense of honour. The agony of rage in which so much of his life was passed was due to the consciousness that this popular sense of honour was everywhere being broken down by a cruel and ignoble industrialism. His whole life was a resistance to the degradation of the poor; to their degradation in the literal sense of the loss of a step, of a standing, of a status. There lay on his mind, like a nightmare of machinery crushing and crunching millions of bones, all the detailed destruction of the private property and domestic traditions of destitute families; all the selling up and breaking up of furniture, all the pawning of heirlooms and keepsakes; all that is meant by the awful sacrifice of the wedding-ring. He thought of a thousand stories like the story of the servant-girl: except that these stories did not have a happy ending.

His wife was soon to discover that if she had married (as she had) one of the most constant and considerate of husbands, she had also married one of the most restless and incalculable of men. It would be instructive to have a diary of Mrs. Cobbett, as well as the endless autobiographies of Mr. Cobbett. But she remains in the background of his life in a sort of powerful silence; and is known to us only by the praises that he never ceased to give her. She was soon called upon to go on some of his interminable travels. When he found in the case of Army corruption, to use one of his own homely sort of figures, that he had bitten off more than he could chew, he retired in disgust to France, and remained there through some of the most thrilling days of the French Revolution. Yet it is typical of him that he took with immense seriousness to the subject of French grammar, as a pendant to his devouring hobby of English grammar. When he set sail again from France it was not for England but for America, where he and his wife remained in exile for seven years. Their travels were not without their tragedies; for his first child died and his second was still-born, and it was not until he was more finally established that a living child rejoiced the most enthusiastic of fathers. But through all these early days we have the same vigilant activity in private things; as in the touching story of his striding up and down all night and driving away the howling dogs that his wife might sleep.

But there is another moral affecting the man and his work and arising in this connection out of an incident like that of his courtship and marriage. From the start we find him standing up sternly and almost priggishly for ideals of thrift and self-control. He might almost have been mistaken for a supporter of Smiles and Self-Help, if it were not for his second phase in raising a riot far more reckless than that of Wilkes and Liberty. But he enormously strengthened his case for Liberty by being the very antithesis of Wilkes. He justified his riot precisely because it could not be mistaken merely for riotous living. No sane person could pretend that Cobbett only sympathised with poverty because he sympathised with profligacy; because he sympathised with improvidence and irresponsibility and imbecile waste. Nobody could say he was merely an idler sympathising with idlers, or a wastrel sympathising with wastrels, or a man who loved ignorance preferring those who were ignorant. He was not even a man like Byron or Burns, whose sincere love of public liberty could be confused with a love of private licence. His case against industrialism was immensely strengthened by the fact that he himself was quite cut out to be the industrious apprentice. When he said that thousands were not only unlucky but unjustly oppressed, he said it with the authority of one who might quite well have been the hundredth lucky man who was the only hope of industrial competition. He who was so obviously a self-educated man might surely have been a self-made man. At least he stood a better chance of it than the thousands who were told to live only for that remote chance. When he said that the chance was worthless he was a reasonable and valid witness; when he said that most men were unfairly equipped for the struggle, he was better equipped than most. It was a much wiser Mr. Smiles, himself entirely capable of self-help, who saw that the poor were really and truly helpless. And this second consideration comes back to the same truth as the first. It comes back to the fundamental truth of the modern state. Our commercialism does not punish the vices of the poor, but the virtues of the poor. It hampers the human character at its best and not merely at its worst; and makes impossible even the merits that it vainly recommends. Capitalism has prevented the poor man from saving more than it has prevented him from spending. It has restrained him from respectable marriage more than from casual immorality. It may be that Socialism threatens to destroy domesticity; but it is capitalism that destroys it. This is doubtless what is meant by saying that capitalism is the more practical of the two.

Cobbett was eminently and emphatically a respectable man. He was denounced as a demagogue, he was thrown in prison like a felon, he was all his life in the midst of riot and abuse, he was regarded as the inaugurator of red ruin and the breaking up of laws; but he remained to the last a highly respectable person, in the sense that he valued what are called the respectable virtues. That he was respectable to the last is perhaps less remarkable than that he was respectable from the first; and perhaps especially respectable at the first. That period of youth, which is commonly excused as the irresponsible period, was with him by far the most responsible period. It was during that period that he was improving his mind, limiting his luxuries, schooling himself in simple habits and rising in his military profession. He married the girl whose independence and probity he so much admired: and he was all his life a model husband and father. He was respectable and he might easily have been respected. It is his great virtue that he preferred to be reviled. It is his great glory that having taken the first steps in the successful life as it has been lived by so many successful men, he preferred to make himself a mockery and a cockshy for every worldly wit or comfortable critic to laugh at as a failure for a hundred years. He might have been a self-made man; but he died unfinished, trying to make something better than himself.

Finally, he was by nature a traditionalist and he was by tradition a Tory. He appeared first as a solid and loyal supporter of Church and King; and he appeared with complete success. As we shall see, his place was prepared for him as a good party man; his path was straight before him to the position of a great party leader. It seemed to most honest people, it seemed to him quite honestly, his logical and legitimate goal. It is his glory that he never reached his goal. It is his merit that his fallen figure was found far astray, and picked up, so to speak, like a dead vagabond; a puzzle for pedants and a sort of suicidal wreck to politicians; when he had set out on his journey stiff with so many strict loyalties and so many respectable conventions. For there dwelt within him a divine spirit more restless than a devil; a spirit that could not feed on fictions or sleep at the dictation of any drug; an insomnia of intelligence that could not choose but understand; a lidless eye that could not escape from seeing a surge of spontaneous protest almost as involuntary as vomiting and stronger than the strength of fear, a voice not to be strangled, which forever, in a fashion so fierce and unfamiliar that it startled men like the roar of a blind beast, appealed from tyranny to God.

CHAPTER II

THE TRAGEDY OF THE PATRIOT

A book like this can be but a bare outline a life so full as that of William Cobbett. Nevertheless an outline is needed, and is an outline that is not often supplied, is the advantage of such a small scope that it can focus what often seems formless and sprawling, through being too large to be seen. Cobbett produced a vast and voluminous mass of work; and vast and voluminous masses of work have been produced about Cobbett. Most of it is interesting and much of it is true; but none of it is the truth. What is wanted in modern biography is something as simple as the single line that marks the sweeping curve or the sharp corner in a weather-chart, that yet more simple line that runs round the nose or chin is a caricature. There have been caricatures enough of Cobbett but they caricatured the wrong features. They missed the point. The subject of Cobbett has been admirably simplified; but when it has been simplified, it has been simplified wrong.

The story of Cobbett was a tragedy; a tragedy of a certain type. It was the disillusionment of a patriot. That definition covers all that is called its bewildering inconsistency. I do not mean to imply that he lost his patriotism. He most certainly retained it that was the tragedy. But he began by having the ordinary optimistic patriotism that looks outwards, and it changed into a pessimistic patriotism that looked inwards. His earlier and more cheerful attitude was one of mere defiance; but it grew to be a much more gloomy attitude when it seriously passed from defiance to defence. It was like the difference between a man blowing a trumpet and a man examining the condition of a gun. But there was also bound up in it the whole business of the modern economic problem; of the industrial individualism that produced the proletarian peril; in short, the whole problem of modern England. We may, say of Cobbett, as of more than one great man, that some of the most important incidents in his life happened after he was dead. But the truth to seize at this stage is the truth about this transition from a sort of centrifugal nationalism, that was cheery and even cheeky, to a sort of centripetal nationalism that was grave and even grim. A modern writer, resembling Cobbett only in having proved that the highest literary genius can be combined with publicity and popular journalism, has called one of his books of essays An Englishman Looks at the World. It would have fitted very well the first essays of Cobbett. But the time came when a deeper, a darker, a more withering experience might have carried the title: An Englishman Looks at England.

The first fact about this first phase is that the patriotism of Cobbett was the passionate patriotism of the exile. He went to America while he was still quite young; so that even his memories of England were almost memories of childhood. They had not only the glamour of distance, but the glamour of which Wordsworth wrote, the glory and the freshness of a dream. The islands of the blest were supposed to lie to the west like Atlantis; but every man who has really sailed to Atlantis knows that the islands of the blest are left behind. Certainly all the islanders who have ever set forth from these islands to the modern Atlantis are at one in having that homing imagination that wings its way backward into the sunrise. Greatly as they have disagreed among themselves, they all agree in that. Perhaps the one rallying point for all Britons is that their songs in America have been songs of exile. The most familiar of them represents the Irishman with his bundle bound for Philadelphia, or the Englishman whistling `Falmouth is a fine town' as he walks down the street of Baltimore, or the Scotsman rising to that high note not unworthy of the waters of Babylon.

But still our hearts are true, our hearts are Highland, And we in dreams behold the Hebrides.

So strong is such a tradition that later generations will dream of what they have never seen. The nationalism is most intense where the nation is only a name. Irish American is more Irish than Irish. The English colonial loyalist is more loyal than an Englishman. The loves and hatreds harden in that hard air under those clear skies of the western world. They are unsoftened by all internal doubts and criticisms that; from being on the spot. But with Cobbett this ignorance of interior details combined with the memories of one who had from childhood an eye for detail, especially for the details of fields and skies. He remembered England as a great green nursery; and felt as homesick in America as a boy sent to a big, bare, strange, uncomfortable boarding school.

Nowhere in the world does an Englishman feel so much a stranger as in America. He does not necessarily dislike America, and Cobbett himself came to like it in the long run. He simply feels it is a stranger place than France or Flanders or Italy; that it is really the other side of the world like the other side of the moon. But if an Englishman still feels like this, in spite of the hypnotism of the talk about an Anglo-Saxon race and the hope of an Anglo-American alliance, it was immeasurably more so when Cobbett landed in what had quite recently been enemy territory. He met not only an alien atmosphere but a blast of hatred against England.

There were indeed some Americans who sympathised with England as compared with France. They were those grouped around Hamilton, who being avowedly anti-popular in his politics was not likely to be very popular in his personality. They counted a certain number of New England Puritans; for almost the only real resemblance between New England and Old England was that neither of them could make head or tail of France. But though historians divide American opinion into the French party and the English party, I suspect that the atmosphere of popular sympathy was far more French than English. The whole romance of America consisted of rebellion against England; except that part of it that consisted of rescue by France. Nobody who knows what popular legends are like could expect the princess suddenly to take the side of the dragon against St. George. It was quite true, of course, that England was by no means merely a dragon and France was by no means only a saint. But in revolutions strong enough to overthrow all historic authorities and create a new nationality there must be the sort of impatient simplicity that sees characters in black and white; and few men at that moment could persuade a real American mob that England was not so black as she was painted. Moreover, the men of that age did not talk about racial unity; and they were bound to France by something like a religious unity. To leave out the definite democratic creed in judging Jefferson and his contemporaries is exactly like leaving Mahomedanism out of Mahomet. England did not believe in that democratic creed; and, being honest in those days, did not pretend to do so for a moment. I take it that the air that Cobbett had to breathe was not only American but Anti-English.

It is part of the picturesque combat of personalities throughout his life that his first cockshy was, of all men in the world, the famous Priestley, the Unitarian and friend of French or American ideals in England. Priestley was a type of the sort of idealist whose ideals are pure but just a little perverse; the sort of internationalist who is specially unpopular among nationalists. The slight superiority in the tone of such intellectuals towards the popular patriotism of their hour aroused Cobbett to a rage quite ignorant and incongruous and yet not unhealthy. What probably made the refined

Unitarian very annoying to the unrefined Surrey farmer was the notion of attacking England in America. For exile affected the Surrey farmer in quite the opposite way. It drove him to representing England as a sort of Eden from which he and Dr. Priestley had been driven forth; only that Priestley slandered that paradise and it was left for Cobbett to defend it. In a series of furious pamphlets with the appropriate signature of Peter Porcupine, he not only attacked the English democrats but to a great extent the American democracy. It is important to note that his motive was much more patriotism than conservatism. It is sometimes said that Cobbett began in pure conservatism; men talk of him as a Tory from the start; but even from the start the ease was more complex than that. His old father the farmer, if he was a Tory, was a Tory with ideas of his own, for he defended the American rebels; and Cobbett had first gone to America bearing a letter to the great Thomas Jefferson. He did not defend England because England was monarchical and he was a Royalist, or because England was aristocratic and he was a snob, or because England was the home of Toryism and he was a Tory. He defended England because England was attacked and he was an Englishman; and his real rage was reserved for other Englishmen who attacked her, or seemed to him not sufficiently to defend her. For this reason he extravagantly abused Dr. Priestley, for this reason he extravagantly abused Tom Paine, the author of The Age of Reason: writing a bitter burlesque life of that author, full of innocent lies: a story with a strange sequel. For this reason he lectured the wondering people of that western land about the beauty of the British Constitution, of British laws, of British landlords, of British military policy, of almost everything, in fact, that he was afterwards famous for rending and rolling in the mud.

Meanwhile his pamphleteering was getting better and better; those quaint studies of English grammar in the corners of the cold barracks at daybreak had trained him not only in language but in logic; and the furious tenderness of exile gave him inspiration. Towards the end of his American visit he showed his uncontrollable fancy for having a finger in every pie by denouncing an American doctor as a quack. He lost his case and was cast in heavy damages so that he decided to quit the country, leaving behind him a farewell address to the Americans, one of the least friendly farewells to be found in literature. This last American injustice, as he saw it, finally reconciled him to his own country; and it was in a glow of romantic reaction in favour of everything English that the exile re-entered England.

The crisis of his life came between that hour and the hour some seventeen years later when he left it once more.

The Tories of England, waging war against Republicans abroad and Radicals at home, naturally received the great reactionary with a roar of welcome. The most prominent figure in the political group that received him was William Windham. He was a fine specimen of the old English aristocrat; that is, he was a Whig more Tory than the Tories. He was a fine specimen of the cultivated gentleman and dilettante; and therefore he was educated enough to see that the uneducated demagogue was a genuine English man of letters. He and his friends gave Cobbett the practical backing necessary for the founding of the celebrated Cobbett's Register. It may be well to remark that Cobbett's Register really was Cobbett's. He retained his intellectual independence he made no party compact with Windham or anybody else: nay, he flatly refused money from his friends in a way almost tartly honourable. But Windham and he were at one with the enthusiasm with which they flung their energies into the defence of Old England against the French Revolution and its American sympathisers. The swing and momentum of his American triumphs carried Cobbett on like a tide, and he may well have felt that he was at the top of his fortunes. It was just about this time that curious things began to happen.

All the time he had wandered on the bare baked prairies under the hard white light of the western skies, he had remembered the high green fields of his father's farm and the clouds and the comfort of the rain. For him even more than for Nelson, and in another sense, there was something united and almost interchangeable in the three terms of England, home, and beauty. But his was no mere landscape-painter's but a land-owner's and a land-worker's love; and he pored more and more intently over the practice and detail of the farming he had known in boyhood. As he looked at crops or barns or orchards, it seemed as if the frown on his shrewd square face became first thoughtful and then doubtful. Things were not going well; and bit by bit he began to work out in his own mind a notion of the cause. For instance, it was essential to true farming that the farmer should be secure on his farm. If he was not legally and literally a peasant proprietor, he must at least be rooted like a peasant. At the moment peasants were being rooted out like weeds instead of being rooted like trees. Landlords were refusing to grant the long leases that gave a status to a yeomanry; they were chopping them up into shorter terms, and shifting and evicting for higher rents. And when he looked for the cause of this, he thought he had found it in the new fluctuation of prices and even of the value of money; in the paper money that symbolised to him such insecurity and shuffling and sharp practice. It meant the destruction not only of the old sort of yeoman but of the old sort of squire. Stockbrokers and Jews and jobbers from the town were driving out the national gentry; he would appeal to the great leaders of the party of the gentry to save them. He turned to his own Tory leaders, to Windham and the party of Pitt; for they were the natural saviours of the green countryside from this yellow fever of finance.

There is sometimes in a great comedy a scene of almost tragic irony, when some simple character enters, eager, voluble, and full of his subject, and pours it out quite confidently to a group of listeners. It is long before even the spectator realises that the listeners are very silent. It is much longer before the speaker realises it. It is long before even a hint leads him to look, at first with doubt and at last with horror, at the significant and sinister smile faintly present on all those unanswering faces. That was the sort of scene that occurred in history when Cobbett came rushing to his Tory friends with his great scheme for saving English agriculture. He did not understand that restrained smirk on the pinched face of Pitt; that shadow of something like shame that may have rested for a moment on the more generous face of Windham. We could imagine one of them looking at the ceiling and the other at the floor; and neither answering a word.

For William Cobbett had not in fact the faintest notion of what manner of men he served, or what sort of Government he was supporting. If Cobbett eventually found that the Tories were not satisfactory, it was for the very simple reason that he found that the Tories were not Tories. They may have had a desire to restore the old regime in France, largely because it would mean France being less vigorous and victorious than under the new regime of Napoleon. But they had not the faintest desire to save the old regime in England. Why should they? Men like Pitt and Perceval and the rest were more entangled with the new world than ever they were with the old; and were in much closer touch with the stockbrokers than with the farmers. Above all they had no notion of what Cobbett was talking about when he talked of giving the farmer the stability of a yeoman. The only laws they could imagine as applicable to rural life were the game laws. For that purpose perhaps it was desirable that the country should continue to exist. It was seldom possible to start a hare in Lombard Street, and quite awkward to shoot a partridge in Threadneedle Street. Otherwise there was really no reason why Lombard Street and Threadneedle Street should not extend to the ends of the earth. The educated class in England knew much more about preserving pheasants than peasants: it was an aitch they were very careful not to drop.

The biographies of Cobbett commonly say that he began life as a Tory and afterwards changed his politics and became a sort of Radical. The proportions of this picture are misleading. Cobbett was never anything that an enemy would call a turncoat or a friend would call a brand from the burning. There is no sharp break in his life, breaking the very backbone of his principles; such as there is in the life of a penitent or the life of a traitor. It is not true that he belonged successively to two parties: it is much truer to say that he never belonged to any. But in so far as there were elements of the Radical in him at the end, there had been traces of them from the beginning. And in so far as he was in one sense a Tory at the beginning, he remained a Tory to the end. The truth is that the confusion was riot in Cobbett but in the terms Tory and Radical. They are not exact terms; they are nothing like so exact as Cobbett was. His general position is intrinsically quite clear and, as men go, quite consistent. It was the Tories who were not clear about Toryism. It was the Radicals who were inconsistent about Radicalism. I do not mean that he had no inconsistencies; he had a great many. He had all those inconsistencies of mere verbal variation which are almost invariable in a man who throws himself with equal vehemence into the proving of many different propositions in many different connections. But the inconsistencies of Cobbett were very superficial; much more superficial than the changes in most political careers. The man who played Peter Porcupine in America did not differ so much from the man who brought the bones of Tom Paine like holy relics to England as the Disraeli of the Revolutionary Epick differed from the Disraeli of the Primrose League, or the Gladstone who was the hope of the stern and unbending Tories from the Gladstone who was the idol of the Radicals and Nonconformists.

Cobbett was a very consistent man, in every essential sense. It was the parties claiming or repudiating him who were quite inconsistent. To understand the point it is necessary to refer briefly to the history of those parties. There had once been something like a real war between Whigs and Tories. It was the real war between aristocracy and monarchy; two mortal enemies who have wrestled through all history. But in England aristocracy had won. Formal histories tell us that the Crown passed from the House of Stuart to the House of Brunswick. But in fact, while the Stuarts lost it, the Brunswicks never got it. The old original Crown the Stuarts had worn was thrown away with the Great Seal, when James the Second fled to France. The young George the Third had indeed tried to recover it with the aid of a Scottish Tory; just as the young Charles Edward had tried to recover it with the aid of the Scottish Jacobites. But it never was recovered. A loyalty to it lingered in middle-class and especially literary circles; as in Johnson and Goldsmith and many of the wisest and best individual thinkers of the eighteenth century. Cobbett came a little too late in time and a little too low in the social scale to touch this old and intelligent Tory middleclass before it died out. I do not know whether he realised how often he visited the Deserted Village in the course of the Rural Rides. Johnson he regarded with one of those accidental animosities that justified to some extent his reputation for mere spite. Cobbett had a prejudice against Johnson; which is all the more amusing because it was exactly the sort of prejudice that Johnson might have had against him. Cobbett regarded Johnson as a mere pedantic pensioner; and Johnson would very possibly have regarded Cobbett as he regarded Wilkes, more or less in the abstract as a dirty demagogue. So many things united these two great Englishmen, and not least their instinctive embodiment of England; they were alike in their benevolent bullying, in something private and practical, and very much to the point in their individual tenderness, in their surly sympathy for the Catholic tradition, in their dark doubts of the coming time. But above all they were united by the thing that divided them: the most genial and humane of all forms of hatred; their passionate and personal hatred of people they had never seen.

In any case, Cobbett was born long after the true Tory monarchy had died, and he never quite understood its tradition. If he grew up a Tory and in some sense remained a Tory, it was in somewhat vaguer traditions that he was traditional. He liked old customs and the continuity of family life to be found in the countryside; he loved England in a sense that was very real and unfortunately very rare. I mean that it was a positive love that looked inwards upon the beloved; and not merely a negative love that looked outwards for rivals or remote imitations. If this sort of love of what is national and normal be called conservative, certainly that character was rooted in him. But what was called his Radicalism was equally radical. He realised by the light of nature the last deductions of the democratic speculators in so far as they can fairly be deduced. But the last conclusions which the republicans could reach were only the ancient axioms on which the monarchies had originally been founded. They were only forgotten because they were fundamental. Cobbett had a great faculty of not forgetting the foundations, as most of us do forget the foundations of a house, especially if we walk about on the roof. He had one very virile sort of simplicity: he was true to the truisms. He was never ashamed of the homely appearance of a humble and a faithful truth. Cobbett always really believed in popular principles, though he saw no cause to talk Greek and call them democratic principles. He could not see that the new industrial progress had anything to do with these principles; and he was perfectly right. He knew that the real revolutionary song had been about fields and furrows, and not about wheels and rails. He knew that the Revolution had begun with bread. He was not in the least impressed by its ending in smoke. The man who had once been a rioter waving the red flag in a revolution may now be a guard waving the red flag on a railway-line. But this will not convince the realistic reformer that a railway-line is the same as a revolution.

When Radicalism was caught up in the wheel that was the symbol of industrialism, the opposite school tended the opposite way, by the slight movement that makes the balance of a party system. The Tories could pose as the agricultural party; if only a party of squires and not of peasants. But it was no longer a real war, like the war between Parliament and the King, in which Parliament had finally triumphed. The new Whigs and Tories were only two different shades of the same colour, like the dark blue of the Tory University and the light blue of the Whig University. They were at most only two different types of the same only garchy. They were often only two different, generations of the same oligarchy. The one was still making money in the town, while the other had made enough money to live in the country. That Cobbett cut across this sort of distinction of mere sentiment and association is not a mark of his inconsistency but of his consistency. He knew what he wanted and the Whigs and Tories only offered two slightly different reasons for not giving it to him. There was no logic in the things that held them apart, or in the things they lumped together. There was nothing in the nature of a rational sequence in the notion of one party standing for aristocracy and the land, and the other for democracy and machinery. It was as meaningless as if one party were associated with justice and beef, while the other was wholly dedicated to mercy and mutton. And it was as if they had joined in reviling the inconsistency of a common-sense person, who desired the more merciful treatment of oxen or the more just distribution of muttonchops. Now this is why it is vital at this point to realise the true nature of the Tory regime which extends intermittently from Pitt to Peel. Friends and foes alike have treated it as a reactionary regime; but that is only because the facts about it have not been faced. Pitt and his followers were not in the least Tory in the sense of traditional. They were only Tory in the sense of tyrannical. If trying to destroy all old constitutional liberties makes a man a conservative, then certainly Pitt and Castlereagh were model conservatives. But it would be hard to say what it was they conserved. There was not a single historic tradition, not a single human memory of the past, for which they ever showed the faintest sympathy. The truth is that the whole of this passage in history will be read wildly wrong unless we clearly understand that Pitt and Peel were highly modern and purely mercantile figures, helping to found the purely modern and mercantile world. Thus it was Pitt who began the degradation and destruction of a genuine gentry, by selling peerages right and left to every pawnbroker or pork butcher who would pay for them. If ever men were responsible for handing the country over to cads, it was the party of gentlemen who waved the Union Jack after Waterloo. It was so in all the more decent or defensible aspects of commercialism. In that sense Pitt cared nothing for the opinion of the Country Party; or even for the opinion of the Country. What he cared for was the opinion of the City. His real bodyguard was a battalion of bankers. It has often been pointed out that he had many of the merits of a liberal; he had also the vices of a liberal, and especially the illiberalities of a liberal. Pitt was the real founder of the Manchester School. Peel only followed the real policy of his party in eventually helping its triumph. We talk of Peel’s abrupt acceptance of Free Trade; but it would be truer to talk of his temporary acceptance of Protection. As a type of human being, he had always been purely commercial, and not in the least conservative. In a word, these men did indeed fight democracy abroad and persecute it at home. But they did not defend aristocracy, far less monarchy. What they did was to establish plutocracy; and mainly a parvenu plutocracy. And if it be a glory to have created the modern industrial state, they can claim a very great share in it. Cobbett did not grudge it to them.

Broadly speaking, if there was one man who was bound to be the antithesis of William Cobbett it was William Pitt. Anybody who expected anything else, merely because the two men were at one time classed as Tories, is the person really incapable of understanding intellectual consistency. Cobbett had only supported Pitt because he thought the Pitt rule stood for Old England; but it did not. Cobbett never supported the Pitt party after he had discovered that it did not. It is true that as he drifted further from Pitt and the Tories he necessarily appeared to be drifting nearer to Brougham and the Radicals, who also did not. But the slightest acquaintance with what he said about Brougham and the Radicals will show that it was almost always a movement of repulsion and not of attraction. His preference for any party was rather too comparative to be complimentary. It would hardly have been flattering to Mr. Pitt to be told that his appearance had only seemed to be something of a relief after that of Dr. Rush, or to Lord Brougham to say that his society seemed quite tolerable to one fleeing from that of Lord Castlereagh. But Cobbett's public alliances, as distinct from his private affections, seldom went much further than this. He may have come eventually almost to hate Orator Hunt; but I doubt whether he had ever really liked him. Windham I am inclined to think that he really liked; and lie made earnest efforts to explain to that perplexed Tory that there was nothing inconsistent with Toryism in his pleas for labour and the land. He remained in this doubtful and negative attitude, nearer to the Radicals rather than more Radical, when something happened that changed everything; something that broke his life in two in the middle like a blow that breaks the backbone.

He inserted in his Register an indignant protest against the flogging of certain English soldiers under a guard of German mercenaries. It is essential to realise that the accent is on the word English and the word German. He was not merely a humanitarian protesting against inhumanity. He was a patriot protesting against his countrymen being tortured to make a spectacle for foreigners. Being a very genuine Englishman, he cared nothing for all the nonsense about allies and enemies, in comparison with the real difference between Englishmen and foreigners. Indeed, by the whole trend of his mind he would always have preferred the French to the German; and nobody would have rejoiced more than he at that great and just alliance that brought about the downfall of Prussia. Anyhow he printed his protest; and instantly discovered that he had touched the spring which launched a whole huge engine of destruction against himself. The great Tory Government, which he had come back from America to serve, had no doubt about how it should deal with this sort of patriotic service. He was instantly pinned with a prosecution, tried before the usual packed jury of the White Terror, and eventually sentenced to imprisonment for two years in Newgate, accompanied by a fine that meant ruin.

Cobbett was bewildered by the blow; and seems at first to have been reduced to despair. It is said that he talked of throwing up his whole public work, since it could not be conducted without involving his family in such ruin. There has been much dispute about the story of some such despairing surrender being communicated to the Government. It seems to me that Cobbett's own account of the incident is probably true in the main; all the more as he owned frankly that his family had once persuaded him to this course: of which, he said, he had afterwards repented. There was some talk of a letter that he had recalled being maliciously published. It is possible: but the whole story seems rather confused. Certainly Cobbett was fought through all his life with weapons of a peculiar baseness; a certain mean spirit which is rather peculiar to such aristocracies when alarmed. It was that mean spirit that stole and published the scandalous poem of Wilkes. It was that spirit which used for political ends the private fault of Parnell. Cobbett suffered from this often enough; but his complaints in this case are rather chaotic and inconsistent. It is very characteristic of Cobbett that even in repudiating the action he argued in defence of it; pointing out that there would be nothing immoral in a private man out of private affection abandoning public work that nobody could demand of him as a duty. His argument was sound enough; but it did not give a real picture of his complex and confused situation. In order to understand the meaning of the whole business, we must understand two things that are relevant to the whole of his life; though the first refers more particularly to this earlier passage in his life. It will be well to get these conceptions clear before this chapter concludes.

First, it must be clearly understood that Cobbett was not yet a Revolutionist; even if he was already a Radical, he was still subconsciously the Tory patriot who had made his name by waging war on all Revolutionists. He had indeed kept his English journalism independent of parties; but if he had originally had any party, it was the Tory party. In other words, his disappointment had begun, but he still had enough admiration to be disappointed. He was still sufficiently orthodox to be troubled by doubt. Then came the shameful and incredible shock of the Constitution he had once defended swinging round and knocking him silly. It was no wonder if, for the moment, it did knock him very silly. But it is reading the last lucid rage of the Radical Cobbett into the first dark and confused doubts of the Conservative Cobbett to expect him to have met his first trial in as he met his second trial in His real revolutionary spirit was not the cause of his imprisonment; it was the result of it.

The fools who put Cobbett in prison probably did believe they were crushing a Jacobin, when they were really creating one. And they were creating a Jacobin out of the best Anti-Jacobin of the age. Apart from all political labels, they were manufacturing the greatest rebel, of English history out of the most unpromising materials. Perhaps he was the only real rebel that was ever manufactured out of purely English materials. But he was all the more a furious rebel because he was a reluctant rebel. For the man who paced that cell, like a lion in a cage, had not any of the detachment given either by idealism or cynicism. He had not fully learned to expect injustice; he had not yet survived disappointment, the dark surprise of youth. The man in that cell was no Stoic, trained in the Latin logic of Condorcet or Carnot, seeing his own virtues as part of the ideal system of the Republic and his own sufferings as part of the inevitable system of the Kings. He was no Irish martyr, schooled to breathe the very air of tragedy and tyranny and vengeance, and living in a noble but unnatural exaltation of wholly spiritual hate. Like most men of a very English type, he was inordinately fond of happiness. And happiness to him was concrete and not abstract; it was his own farm, his own family, his own children. Like most men of a very masculine type, he was probably a good deal dominated by his wife. And his wife and family had evidently hung on heavily to drag him back from his political precipice. But the worst of it was that he was suffering for an idea; and as yet did not quite know what idea. That is where this great angry and bewildered Englishman differed from the French Stoics or the Irish patriots. They appealed to the gods against the kings, to the ideas against the facts; but it seemed to the Englishman that his own god and king had condemned him. They saw clear skies above a confused world; but it was upon him that his own sky had fallen. He had indeed in his mind all that volcanic amalgam of ancient loyalties and popular sympathies which puzzles the student of party labels; but it was still in his subconscious mind. He had not yet a creed as Robespierre or Jefferson or O'Connell had a creed. In fact, he was not suffering for an idea he was suffering for an instinct. But the instinct seemed to him a natural part of that natural order which had suddenly sprung on him an unnatural revenge. In so far as he had originally believed in anything, it was in the authorities that had thrown him into gaol. In so far as he had any creed, it had been the Constitution which condemned him as a felon. He had acted on a patriotic impulse; and patriotism had punished him for being patriotic. All this first transition of bewilderment must be allowed for; but when it is allowed for, something else remains. Even when his head had cleared and his creed consolidated, there remained something about him for which the reader must be prepared to make allowances; as much as when we see him swaying rather blindly under this first blow.

Cobbett was a particular human type; the very last to be fairly understood in those quiet times of which the virtue is sociability and the vice is snobbery. He was the imperfect martyr. The modern and popular way of putting it is to say that a man can really be a martyr without being by any means a saint. The more subtle truth is that he can even be a saint and still have that sort of imperfection. The first of Christian saints was in that sense a very imperfect martyr. He eventually suffered martyrdom for a Master whom he had cursed and denied. That marks the tremendous realism of our religion: its heroes had not heroic faults. They had not those Byronic vices that can pose almost as virtues. When they said they were miserable sinners, it was because they really dared to confess the miserable sins. Tradition says that the saint in question actually asked to be crucified upside-down, as if making himself a mere parody of a martyr. And there is something of the same sacred topsy-turvydom in the strange fancy by which he is haunted in all hagiological art and legend by the symbol of his failure. The crowing of a cock, which has become a phrase for insolence, has in this case actually become an emblem of meekness. Rome has lifted up the cock of Peter higher than the eagle of Caesar, not to preach pride to kings but to preach humility to pontiffs. The cock is crowing for ever that the saint may never crow.

Cobbett was a much more imperfect martyr; for he lived and died by a much more imperfect light. But this is the contradiction that explains all his contradictions. His courage was not consistent, complete, a thing working itself out by a perfectly clear principle. His heroic stature was not properly or perfectly proportioned, it was merely heroic. He sometimes fell below himself; but it was because he had a far higher and more arduous standard of manhood than most men, especially the men around him. He began tasks that he did not always finish; he took up rash positions that he sometimes found to be untenable.

More than once in his career there comes in an element of anti-climax and bathos, at which the world will find it easy to laugh. But the world will have no sort of right to laugh. In the lives of most of us there is no such anti-climax simply because there is no climax. If we do not abandon those tasks it is because we do not attempt them; and we are not crucified upside-down because we have no intention of being crucified at all. The ordinary Sophist or Sadducee, passing the grotesque crucifixion, would have no right to mock the martyr with the crowing of the cock. The ordinary politician or political writer of Cobbett's time or ours had no right to mock the inconsistencies of Cobbett. The whole scheme and standard of his life was higher and harder than theirs, even of the best of them. Men like Bentham and Brougham were sincere reformers in the ordinary sense. Men like Macaulay and Mackintosh were good men in the normal fashion. But they served their world; they never set out to fight the whole world as Cobbett did. Good and bad alike, they are like civilians sitting at home and criticising a shattered and shell-shocked soldier. There is no particular disgrace in being a civilian; though there may be in being an ungenerous civilian.

One example may illustrate what is meant by the comparison. Cobbett got himself flung into a common gaol for protesting against the flogging of British soldiers in the middle of the Napoleonic war; he afterwards went to America to avoid being flung into prison again. Macaulay, nearly a generation later, in time of peace, when the general mood was much more humanitarian, had the ordinary official task of apologising for flagrantly savage floggings of the same sort, simply because he happened to be Secretary for War and the blustering Lord Cardigan happened to be Commander of the Forces in London. Nobody in his senses would call Macaulay a cruel man. He simply regarded himself as a good party man, making the best of a bad case, as a part of his least agreeable parliamentary duties. His biographer, Sir George Trevelyan, certainly a very liberal and humane man, expresses no particular surprise at it; and nobody felt any particular surprise at it. Most people probably regarded it as we regard the uncomfortable duty of a barrister, who has to minimise the acts of a monster who has tortured children. It was part of the routine, of the rules of the game, of the way of the world. But the man who accepts everything and defends such things is not in the same world with the man who risks everything, or even anything, to denounce them. We may well say about Macaulay what he himself said about Cranmer: `It is no great condemnation of a man to say that he did not possess heroic fortitude.' And it is no great condemnation of him to say that he will never come within a thousand miles of the man who does possess heroic fortitude, even for a moment.

For if the common or conventional man is not to be condemned for failing to be a hero, still less is the other man to be condemned for succeeding in being half a hero or nine-tenths of a hero. The imperfect martyr may be judged by the perfect martyr, but not by anybody else; and the perfect martyr will probably have the charity as well as the patience of the perfect saint. Nobody will pretend that Cobbett had the patience of the perfect saint. He had not enough of the charity, though he had more than many might suppose, especially the people who make a point of being charitable to the rich. It is true that even his heroism was incalculable and inconsequent; but the question of proportion and even of quantity does not touch the question of quality. One moment of Cobbett's courage is of a different quality from a lifetime of Macaulay's common sense. Macaulay, in his life as in his logic, was nothing worse than superficial. It was the tragedy of Cobbett that he was fundamental. Of all our social critics lie was by far the most fundamental. He could not help seeing a fight of first principles deadly enough to daunt any fighter. He could not help realising an evil too large for most men to realise, let alone resist. It was as if he had been given an appalling vision, in which the whole land he looked at, dotted with peaceful houses and indifferent men, had the lines and slopes of a slow earthquake.

Macaulay, it has been noted, said about Cranmer that he could not be blamed for not being a hero and a martyr. But for all that Macaulay blamed him a good deal for being a coward and a snob. Cobbett said about Cranmer that the very thought that such a being had walked the earth on two legs was enough to make the reeling brain doubt the existence of God; but that peace and faith flow back again into the soul when we remember that he was burned alive. I quote the sentiment from memory; but that was the substance of the remark. It is a remark touched with a certain exaggeration. It is not an observation marked primarily by measure or precise proportion or the mellowing of truth with charity. Macaulay's criticism of Cranmer is more effective for everyday purposes; as when he says that the crime of the Tudor politician was not in being too indifferent to be killed, but in killing other people for things about which he was indifferent, and enacting laws against anyone `who should do from conviction what he had done from cowardice.' But there is a quality in that outburst of Cobbett about Cranmer which we must learn to appreciate or leave off troubling about Cobbett. There is a volume and a violence of humanity in such hatred; a hatred straight from the heart like a knockout blow straight from the shoulder. It is a blast from a furnace. And it is only in such a furnace seven times heated that men suffer for an idea-or even suffer for an impulse.

Anyhow, the only effect of the imprisonment was to turn an impulse into an idea. He may have lacked some of the virtues of a philosopher; even including the philosophy. He may not have been perfect as a hero; or even have possessed any of the qualities of a martyr except the martyrdom. But he was emphatically the sort of man with whom one cannot afford to be in the wrong. It was suicidally silly to act with such injustice to a man with such a talent for expounding justice, including intellectual justice. It would have been wiser in the governing class to have gone on their natural course and continued to harry the imbecile and to torment the dumb. Thousands of poor men have been and are persecuted quite as unjustly as Cobbett by the police and plutocracy of modern states; but a certain political instinct and practical intuition have generally and wisely guided the authorities to hit the sort of man who cannot possibly hit them back. It is impossible not to comment on the very curious carelessness, which in this case allowed the rich and the rulers to commit the customary cruelties upon a man eminently capable of telling the tale. They threw him into gaol for nothing, or for anything, or for something more or less meritorious, for all the world as if he had been his own grandfather the agricultural labourer.

Certainly if they put him in prison, they ought never to have let him out. Surely the flexible British Constitution of Pitt and Castlereagh would have been equal to the necessity of sending him to Botany Bay for life. For that Constitution was very free when it came to attacking freedom. The man who came out of that prison was not the man who went in. It is not enough to say that he came out in a rage, and may be said to have remained in a rage; to have lived in a rage for thirty years, until he died in a rage in his own place upon the hills of Surrey. There are rages and rages, and they ought to have seen in his eyes when they opened the door that they had let loose a revolution. We talk of a man being in a towering passion and that vigorous English phrase, so much in his own literary manner, is symbolic of his intellectual importance. He did indeed return in a towering passion, a passion that towered above towns and villages like a waterspout, or a cyclone visible from ten counties and crossing England like the stride of the storm. The most terrible of human tongues was loosened and went through the country like a wandering bell, of incessant anger and alarum; till men must have wondered why, when it was in their power, they had not cut it out.

CHAPTER IV

REVOLUTION AND THE BONES OF PAINE

His imprisonment destroyed in Cobbett the whole dream with which he had returned rejoicing from America. That is, it did not in the least destroy his love of his native land; but it did destroy the illusion that he would there be able to breathe quite easily a native air. He could no longer hope, as it had once seemed so natural to do, that the spontaneous and colloquial language that sprang so easily to his own lips would commend itself as easily to people in his own land; that there he would be among neighbours and would talk without an interpreter. England was not a place where they understood plain English. From the very beginning of his fresh start after imprisonment we find him, therefore, facing the fact that he will never be able to say all that he wants to say or to fulfil himself as he had meant to do. Moreover, his fresh start was one not only after imprisonment, but after ruin and practical bankruptcy; and the fresh start was not a very fortunate start. His farming was not successful, his financial difficulties became acute; and it looked as if Cobbett in England would be in every sense a failure. Hence we have to record (before coming to the crowning and decisive part of his English career) another interruption in the form of a visit to America. The visit was a shorter one; and is chiefly interesting through two or three episodes which must be taken in their turn. But we must first say a word of the conditions in his own country.

The first note of the new Cobbett who came out from captivity is the abrupt and absolute cessation of his first boyish feelings about the war with France; the feelings he probably had when he ran away to sea as a boy. He was no longer jolly enough to be a Jingo. I do not use the word in a bad sense; for indeed Cobbett's Jingoism has never been bad enough to be called Imperialism. He had been for fighting the French on the perfectly healthy ground that he was saving his own beloved island from the French. But anyhow this simple way of looking at it became impossible after his imprisonment. He was still a patriot; he was never anything in the least like a pacifist; but he had learnt something that he could not unlearn. He who had cheered on the dogs of war with Windham for a fellow-huntsman called them off abruptly, with a sort of harsh humanitarianism. He came out positively on the side of stopping the war. That is the change that is really significant. He would waste no more time on saving England from the French. He had the huge task of saving England from the English.

Even here, however, it is easy to miss the consistency under all the inconsistencies. It is highly characteristic of him that he had refused with especial fury the proposal to stop the war at an earlier stage, when the proposal was based on the argument (still so common among commercial peacemongers) that war is bad for commerce. Cobbett was quite consistent in having an equal contempt for the Pacifist who made peace for that reason and for the Pittite who made war for that reason. But he was more and more convinced that the Pittites were only making war for that reason. The moment he concluded that only the bankers and merchants really wanted war, and the populace suffered from it without need, he was perfectly consistent in changing sides. He would have been quite inconsistent if he had not changed sides. Windham himself had said, “Perish Commerce; but let the Constitution be saved.” Cobbett had made it his motto, though now perhaps in the amended form, “Perish Commerce and Constitutions; but let the country be saved.” Only, he was more and more grimly convinced that it needed saving, and not from Napoleon. He was not less of an English patriot, but perhaps he was in one sense a little less of an Englishman, if being an Englishman means being happy and happy-go-lucky and comforted by compromises and ready to believe anything printed in the Times.

Meanwhile the war ended with Waterloo and the peace began with Peterloo. That was the only kind of peace that seemed likely to begin. It was time that somebody did something, whether or no Cobbett could do anything. The new capitalistic phase of England was coming to a crisis, especially in the North. The industrial revolution was already producing the anti-industrial revolution — which is likely to be a much more real revolution. Machines were busy and men were idle. Some men indeed were not idle; but those who were most busy were the political economists, who were busy proving on paper that the machinery that had made people poor must really have made them rich. Very soon something began to happen that anybody might have foreseen, whether he was on the side of the machines or the men, so long as he understood that men are not machines. Cobbett realised it, though he did not approve of it. The men began to destroy the machine; to destroy them as if they were dragons that had come in to destroy the paradise of innocence and liberty. Cobbett, who upon that matter was a moderate, wrote a Letter to the Luddites, urging them to desist from this method of protest; but he banded himself with the most resolute of the Radicals, with old Cartwright and Orator Hunt and Burdett, in demanding drastic democratic reforms. His Register, already popular at a shilling, was made enormously more popular by being sold for twopence, with the ironic boast of Twopenny Trash. Never in English history perhaps has one man wielded so vast and potent a popular instrument as Cobbett did. He and his friends were incessant in demanding reform, which had already begun to be spelt with a capital letter. They pointed to the dark sphinx of industrial destitution and demanded that there should be at least some answer to its riddle.

The answer of the Government was interesting. It was to discover a Plot of the most vast and sanguinary sort started by a Mr. Spence, a little bookseller holding the mild sort of Socialism that is called Land Nationalisation. It was called Spencean Philanthropy. All the other reformers were apparently in the plot, however remote or contrary were their notions of reform. Cobbett was about as unlike a Spencean Philanthropist, or indeed any other philanthropist, as any one could conceivably be, but he was supposed to be deep in the plot. The Government hastily armed itself with abnormal powers of violence and secrecy, and threw an iron net of spies and special agents over the whole country to catch all fish, great and small, all reformers, reasonable and unreasonable. One of the big fish decided to break the net before it closed and to get away into other waters. He may have been wise or foolish, but he was in the habit of acting very promptly on his wisdom or folly. Cobbett resolved once more to escape to America and conduct his campaign from there. As a matter of fact, he only stayed there two years, bombarding England with pamphlets all the time, and then came back to follow up his pamphlets with a yet more furious personal onslaught. But he was blamed for his expedient; and indeed it was his fate to go through life being blamed first for attacking and then for retreating, blamed for all he did and all he did not do. Anyhow he thought he was more useful to the reform in America than in gaol; and certainly we should otherwise have lost some protests that were much needed. Nobody else could have done justice to an even more absurd plot called `the Derbyshire Insurrection,' which was entirely created by an agent provocateur named Oliver. It is typical of the wrangles that go on among reformers that if some of the other Radicals blamed Cobbett for escaping to America, he was even more withering about them for playing the coward in England. He denounced them for doing nothing to save the wretched men who suffered from this hideous plot to manufacture a plot. It was on this occasion that Cobbett quarrelled with Burdett, as he afterwards quarrelled with Hunt, and indeed with nearly everybody else. Before leaving for America, indeed, he had had quarrels of less public but more personal importance with his own agents. As already noted, his own economic position was not promising; and this probably contributed to his deciding on a second American visit. In any case, he reached America in the May of 1817, and soon established himself on a farm in Long Island.

Cobbett's second visit to America is associated with an action which all the authorities have censured as ridiculous, and which I think has been ridiculously censured. I do not mean that there was nothing to criticise, but only that there is something quite wrong in the criticisms. The story thus strangely misunderstood is the story of Cobbett carrying back the remains of Thomas Paine, the English Jacobin, to be laid to rest in England.

Thomas Paine invented the name of the Age of Reason; and he was one of those sincere but curiously simple men who really did think that the age of reason was beginning, at about the time when it was really ending. Being a secularist of the most simple-minded sort, he naturally aroused angry passions at the moment, as does any poor fellow who stands on a chair and tries to heckle heaven in Hyde Park. But considering him in retrospect, the modern world will be more disposed to wonder at his belief than at his unbelief. The denial of Christianity is as old as Christianity; we might well say older. The anti-clerical will probably last as long as the Church, which will last as long as the world. But it is doubtful when we shall see again the positive side of Paine's philosophy; the part that was at once credulous and creative. It is impossible, alas, for us to believe that a Republic will put everything right, that elections everywhere will ensure equality for all. For him the Church was at best a beautiful dream and the Republic a human reality today it is his Republic that is the beautiful dream. There was in that liberalism much of the leisure of the eighteenth-century aristocrats who invented it; and much of the sheltered seclusion also. The garden which Voltaire told a man to cultivate was really almost as innocent as the garden of Eden. But the young men who saw such visions were none the less seeing visions of paradise, though it was an earthly paradise. Rationalism is a romance of youth. There is nothing very much the matter with the age of reason; except, alas, that it comes before the age of discretion.

But Paine had one point of superiority to the mere Radicals then rising in England, who shared his cocksure rationalism and sublime superficiality. He was not merely commercial, any more than Shelley; and he seems to have had his doubts about the hopefulness of mere huckstering and unhampered exchange, somewhat in the manner of Cobbett. Now Cobbett, in his first American period, was hitting out at the Jacobins on the principle of `see a head and hit it'; and the intellectual brow of Thomas Paine was naturally prominent. He attacked Paine as he generally did attack people, in a highly personal and ferocious manner. He said things about that ingenuous Deist that were certainly quite false; Cobbett was not guilty of lying, but he was guilty of readily thinking evil. To him at that time Tom Paine was simply the Age of Reason; that is, the Age of Red Ruin. For Cobbett also was as simple as Tom Paine and especially at that time he had as guileless a faith in Royalism as the other had in Republicanism. But when Cobbett came back to America after his imprisonment, he had made the terrible discovery that terminates youth, even if it often gives a new interest to life; the discovery that it is a strange world, that things are not what they seem, and certainly not always what they profess to be. He was in a position to begin to admit that there might be more in Tom Paine than met the eye, especially the blind eye that he had turned on all the enemies of the English crown. But above all he went to America with his head still buzzing like a beehive with all sorts of new notions and suspicions, which went to make up the really original political philosophy of his later years. He was becoming a sceptic, not about crowns and creeds but about things that the world round him reverenced far more than any creed or crown. He was doubting things that Whigs and Tories and Radicals were more and more taking for granted; the whole basis of the commercial success of his country. Just as he was questioning the very medium of their exchange, so he was questioning the very language of their controversy. He thought that paper money was waste paper; and he thought that industrial wealth was really only industrious waste. He doubted above all the abstract and invisible, we might say the transcendental, part of modern capitalism; the national debts and the international loans. Tom Paine took on a comparatively easy job when he attacked the Church. Will Cobbett had the inconceivable impudence to attack the Bank. Then he knew he was in collision with the colossal force of the whole modern world, like a man running with his head down at an express train. The whole world would leave such a lunatic to run alone; and Cobbett was left to run entirely alone. All the books and pamphlets of the period, and indeed all the books and pamphlets ever since, have scoffed at him about this part of his political adventure. He read such books and pamphlets with a face continually hardening into defiance and scorn; and then he made a strange discovery. In turning over, it may be, one out of twenty of the contemporary books and papers he was thus in the habit of tossing aside with a snort, not to say a snarl, he came upon some of the real writings of the atrocious Paine; and was astonished to find that some of the opinions of the atrocious Paine bore a remarkable resemblance to those of the just and public-spirited Cobbett. He found that Paine, of all men, and apparently alone among all men, had really tried to say some of these things that needed so excruciatingly to be said; and about which all mankind walked about gagged and in a ghastly silence. Surely it is not so very difficult to understand that he should have a revulsion so violent and impetuous as his original plunge of prejudice; surely those who have taken the trouble to write studies of Cobbett might have learned something of his manner of living, and how all his generosity and his vanity, his simplicity and his emotionalism, his sympathy for the under-dog and his fury at being himself the dupe, should have called clamorously in him for some vigorous external action; for some proclamation or practical motion that should relieve the feelings and perhaps right the wrong. He had cruelly calumniated a man who might have been his friend and was certainly his ally. And it was too late to tell him so. For that which he had madly splashed with mud had already returned to dust, and Thomas Paine was dead.

Cobbett did something which any other age would have understood; nay, something that we should have understood if narrated of any other age. He was instantly possessed by a human impulse, which even the heathens have comprehended and only the humanitarians have denied. It brought him as it were at one stride to the grave of the man whose pardon he would have asked. The man had been buried in his land of exile; and Cobbett, himself an exile, realised as few could realise the horror of dying far away from home. He believed, as only he could believe, that the one perfect act of piety which could be done to the body of an Englishman was to bring it back to England. It seemed an absurd notion to men in the mercantile and rather materialistic mood of the beginning of the nineteenth century; it may well still seem absurd to many in the twentieth century. It would not seem absurd to men in the twelfth century. It will not seem absurd to men in the thirtieth or the fortieth century. It was felt to be incongruous with something comic and commonplace about contemporary manners; with the chimney-pot hats and the mutton-chop whiskers. But when men look back over long periods they have lost the contemporary derision of details and see only the main lines of humanity, and these acts of primitive ritual seem merely human. Aristophanes was a mighty mocker and derider of the details that were modern in his day; the wild hats and whiskers of ancient progress. Aristophanes was an enemy of modernity, and indeed of modernism. Aristophanes was also a lord of bad language, a man with all the splendid scurrility of Cobbett. But suppose it were recorded of Aristophanes that he came to repent of his satire on Euripides; suppose he had concluded too late that what he had taken for sophistry and scepticism had been a truer traditionalism. We should see nothing but beauty and pathos in some story about Aristophanes bringing the body of Euripides from some barbarian country to the temple of Athene. There would be nothing undignified or unworthy to be carved on a classic frieze in the figure of the great scoffer following the hearse of the great sceptic. But this is only because in the process of time the little things are lost and only the large lines remain. For that little flask of oil, with which the scoffer once stopped the mouth of the sceptic, has lost its bathos for us: and might well be the vessel of the sacred chrism for the anointing of the dead.

Cobbett was a son of the earth, or what used to be called a child of nature; and these rude and natural people are all ritualists. He had those giant gestures that are encouraged by the elbowroom of empty spaces and open skies; those impulses to send signals by instinctive posture and pantomime; to beckon, to brandish, to lift the head in battle or bow it at the graveside. He had in him also the mysticism of the mob; the mob that makes bonfires and burns men in effigy and chairs a man through the cheering streets on a chariot made of marching men. In all this impulsive imagery, and in another sense (I fear) than that in which it was said of Abraham Lincoln, he does truly and indeed belong to the ages. He belongs to all the ages except perhaps his own age. His own age certainly saw nothing but absurdity in his strange pilgrimage and his strange relics. The men with the chimney-pot hats could see nothing but the grotesque side of "Cobby" lugging about as his luggage the bones of an old blasphemer in a box. And yet their idea of the grotesque in the matter is something of a paradox. For in a sense these people objected to ritual not because it was grotesque but because it was not grotesque. It was not grotesque enough to fit in with the grotesque hats and whiskers that were the fashion. The Utilitarians, like their fathers the Puritans, used ugliness as a uniform; that is, as a symbol. For the utilitarian ritual was not merely utilitarian. The chimney-pot hats were not really useful like chimney pots. The mutton-chop whiskers were not really sustaining like muttonchops. These also were a sort of black heraldry, like the black trappings of their funerals; but they symbolised the funeral of art or the old spontaneous symbolism. When a man used one of the gestures of that more generous symbolism they were offended with him and considered him ludicrous. But they were really offended with him for not being so ludicrous as themselves.

This itch or instinct for representative action, for ritual that goes beyond words like an embrace or a blow, was that part of Cobbett's character which was always reaching backwards to the medieval England that has never lost the name of Merry England. He was a man born out of due time, and forced to live and suffer in a world of mechanical traffic going to Manchester; when he ought to have ridden with Chaucer to Canterbury. His heraldry was sometimes deliberately grotesque, but it was always heraldic. When he hung up the gridiron outside his house in Kensington, he not only repeated the ritual of all the old shop signs and inn-signs, but that of the crests and banners. But it was this in him that brought him into sympathy with another people whom he began to understand; and a remark of Peel aptly illustrates how little that understanding was understood.

Sir Robert Peel was a man who had stupidity in the soul. It went, as it often does, along with all the talents of a man of business and a man of the world. He was the kind of man who only knows things by their labels, and has not only no comprehension but no curiosity touching their substance or what they are made of. A supreme example of this is to be found in this phase of the life of Cobbett. Peel seems to have suggested that nothing could seemingly be more impossible, nothing certainly more absurd, than a combination between Cobbett and O'Connell. And the reason he gave was that O'Connell was a Roman Catholic and Cobbett had brought back the bones of Tom Paine, who was an infidel. In other words, O'Connell was labelled a Papist and Paine was labelled a blasphemer and Cobbett was saddled with his bones as a sort of joke in the comic papers. This is the kind of folly that makes the fool walk like a mystical figure through the pages of the Book of Proverbs. If the man who said it had ever caught one glimpse of the inside of things, of the inside of men's minds, of the intrinsic implications of men's religions, he would have seen something that might have surprised him. The truth is that in all public life at that moment there was only one public man who could possibly understand and sympathise with the business of poor Paine's bones; and that man was Daniel O'Connell the Liberator. Any Catholic understands the idea of penitence taking the form of penance; if it be only natural penitence for a wrong done to a naturalistic philosopher. Any Catholic understands the idea of penance taking the form of public penance, and all the more if it really has in it something of humiliation. But above all O'Connell had the best reasons in the world for knowing that, in the English atmosphere of the moment, any attempt at such a public penance would really be accompanied by the simplest form of humiliation: that of being laughed at. He knew much better than most people that England in that mood thought such public penance theatrical. The business of the death of D'Esterre was in many ways a curious parallel to that of the burial of Paine. O'Connell in his youth had shot a man dead in a duel; and his perfectly sincere remorse led him to swear never again to accept a challenge, and to wear on his right hand a white glove to remind himself of his sin, especially when he took Sacrament. The refusal of challenges provided his political opponents with a conveniently safe man to challenge. And the wearing of the white glove was a piece of dramatic symbolism which naturally offended the plain sobriety and simple modesty of the young Disraeli. But O'Connell was well aware that, even among ordinary Englishmen, there was not one in a thousand who understood what his public gesture meant. It is possible that their fathers might have understood it. It is possible that their fathers did not think Henry the Second was merely striking a melodramatic attitude when he was scourged at the tomb of the saint he had martyred. But anyhow the sentiments of O'Connell were equally simple, too simple to be understood. Morbid as his scruple may seem to those who lament the murderous habits of the Irish, it really did seem to O'Connell a serious thing to have killed a man. Morbid as the other scruple may seem to those who are always reviling that demagogue for reviling everybody, it really did seem to

Cobbett a serious thing to have libelled a man. That his sorrow for wrongdoing was highly intermittent and inconsistent is very true; but he scarcely stands alone among his fellow creatures in that respect. But not to see that there was a reason for remorse in the case of Paine is to be blind to the whole case of Cobbett. Cobbett was shouting in deafening tones to deaf ears a certain warning of danger; a danger he alone could see, or at least a danger in which no one else would believe. He believed that the whole financial network of national debts and paper money would eventually drag England to destruction. He may have been wrong; though in fact it is far easier now than it was then to maintain that he was right. But anyhow, believing this, he found that almost the only other Englishman who had warned England, or helped him to save England, was an Englishman whom he had himself slandered and might even have silenced by mistake. If there be any man who does not understand his feeling the need of a public apology to such a solitary and silent ally, such a man is very much less of a man than William Cobbett or Daniel O'Connell or Thomas Paine.

Anyhow, as things stood, he could get no more good out of the possible sympathy of O'Connell than out of the inevitable contempt of Peel. His political friendships, as we have noted, were very unstable and unsatisfactory; not so much, as is often supposed, because Cobbett changed his opinion, as because nobody else ever really understood the fundamental opinion that he did not change. The fellowship he did afterwards establish with O'Connell was more genuine than most; but that also was disturbed by quarrels. In one case, curiously enough, Cobbett was more O'Connellite than O'Connell. He fiercely (and perhaps rightly) blamed the Liberator for accepting a compromise suited to the more reactionary Irish bishops. His quarrel with Hunt dates originally from his second visit to America, from which he sent word, in his reckless way, repudiating some letter of which he had forgotten the details, and which contained a charge against the domestic morals of Hunt, whom Cobbett did not then even know. Yet even the misunderstanding is of the sort that wants understanding. Many of the Radicals really were cut off from Cobbett by a deep difference about morals; and anybody who thinks the Radical Programme must look a larger thing than the institution of marriage does not know what the story of Cobbett is all about.

Another work of this period bore the fine title of The Last Hundred Days of English Freedom, attacking the coercion acts that had threatened his liberty in England. It is notable that Cobbett always treated tyranny as a new thing; his attitude to abstract revolution was well expressed in the phrase, `I was born under a King and Constitution; but I was not born under the Six Acts.' It was a new Tory raid and reign of terror that had driven him into exile; but he did not remain there long; and his conduct when he returned showed he had no intention of being silent at home if he had been noisy abroad. An accident brought his change of plans to a head. His farm on Long Island was burned down; he moved first to New York, and finally from New York to England. He was given a public dinner and addressed a large meeting; perhaps it is ironical that his only immediate difficulty was bringing the bones of Paine through the customhouse. I wonder what he said when asked if he had anything to declare.

So for the second time William Cobbett came back across the Atlantic to the harbours of his own land. It would be easy to insist on a picturesque contrast between the two voyages. Doubtless, if somebody had told him on his first voyage that he would make the second voyage in the character of the chief mourner for Tom Paine, he might well have thrown that obliging prophet into the sea. On the first occasion he had returned to receive what truly might be called a royal welcome; a royal welcome from Royalists. He had come back to be toasted by the gentlemen of England, talking over their wine of his services to the Tory cause, of the blows that their loyal yeoman could deal at Boney and the Yanks. He had come back the second time, the demagogue of a darker hour, to meet a roar of angry admiration from the strikers and frame-breakers of the smoky north as well as the potential rick-burners of the agrarian war; the Titan of the English Revolution. At least if any man could have made an English revolution, if any hour in our history could really have been revolutionary, the hour was come and the man.

And yet he was exactly the same man. He was the same solid figure, with his sober good-humoured face and small shrewd eye; and in the depths of his mind, I fancy, no difference at all. It is difficult to talk of his inner consciousness, for nobody ever went there, least of all himself. But if it were penetrated, I fancy it would be found to be filled with a vast void of innocence that wondered and questioned, and was a little puzzled by the answers to its questions; as is a child by the inconsistencies or quarrels of its parents. Enormous queries, as elementary as nursery riddles, would have been found to fill that void. What was wrong? and how could it be wrong to be right? Why must not a soldier object to soldiers being starved by swindlers? Why must not a patriot object to their being flogged by foreigners? Why ought not a Tory to dislike squires being driven out by stockbrokers? Why ought not a Radical to dislike peasants being oppressed by Jews? Why did a man find himself in the House of Lords if he cheated the nation, and in Newgate if he tried to point out that it was cheated? As he gazed at the great expanses of that empty and shining sea, it may be that there was an interlude in his incessant mental activity of mere recrimination and retort, that the clouds of too much controversy cleared a little, and he became half conscious of why he was so incurably himself. But even so there would only have been found, like some strange sunrise under the sea, under his all too salt humour and all the waters of bitterness that had gone over him, a lucid and enduring surprise.

CHAPTER V

THE AMATEUR HISTORIAN

There is a joke with which we are all familiar, about the rustic who relates some local legend, as of a hero who hurled a huge rock into a river, and who says that it must be true because the rock is till there. As is commonly the case in the small talk of a scientific age, the satire is directed against popular ideas. As is also commonly the case in such an age, the satire is really very shallow. When the critics mock a man for saying `I believe it because I have seen the rock,’ nine-tenths of them could not give any sort of reason for their own historic beliefs, beyond saying, ‘I believe it because I saw it somewhere set out in printer’s ink by somebody I never knew, referring to evidence I have never seen, and telling a tale which I cannot test in any way whatever, even by the look of the landscape.’ The rustic does not rely merely on the rock but on the tradition — that is, the truthfulness of a certain sort of people, many of whom he has known. But at least the rock and the river do fit in with the tradition; and to that limited extent consistency is corroboration. It is far more superstitious to assume that print is proof. So far as print is concerned, the whole of history might be as utterly imaginationary as that mazy river and that dancing rock in the dizzy pipe-dream of `Kubla Khan’.

But there are others whose state of mind is still more extraordinary. They not only do not need the landscape to corroborate their history, but they do not care if the landscape contradicts their history. They are not content with the very reasonable statement that the existence of the rock does not prove the existence of the hero. They are so anxious to show that there was no hero, that they will shut their eyes and say there is no rock. If the map marks the place as a waterless desert, they will declare it is as dry as a bone, though the whole valley resound with the rushing river. The whole huge rock will be invisible, if a little book on geology says it is impossible. This is at the opposite extreme to the irrational credulity of the rustic, but it is infinitely more irrational. It is not inferring something from the rock that the rock does not prove; it is denying what the rock does prove. Or rather it is denying what the rock is; that ultimate and terrible rock of reality, that veritable rock of offence, against which all delusions will dash themselves to pieces. This great delusion of the prior claim of printed matter, as something anterior to experience and capable of contradicting it, is the main weakness of modern urban society. The chief mark of the modern man has been that he has gone through a landscape with his eyes glued to a guidebook, and could actually deny in the one anything that he could not find in the other. One man, however, happened to look up from the book and see things for himself; he was a man of too impatient a temper, and later he showed too hasty a disposition to tear the book up, or toss the book away. But there had been granted to him a strange and high and heroic sort of faith. He could believe his eyes.

William Cobbett was pre-eminently a man with eyes in his head. He had of course other human attributes; such as a tongue in his head. Many considered it a merely bitter or blasphemously seditious tongue; but it was a tongue that could sometimes be for great mobs like the tocsin from a great tower. But when all emotional effects of such demagogy or deafening sensationalism have died away, the impression that will remain longest in the mind is the quiet and constant use that he made of his eyes. It is as if, after all passions had chased each other like shadows across his face, we saw his face at last in repose and realised that he had the eyes of a sailor; the eyes that can see a dot or speck on the distant horizon. But he could see dots and specks in the foreground as well. He could focus his sight at many different ranges; an organic power which is the point of what Carlyle said of somebody else that he had eyes and not merely spectacles. Because his eyes were sharp they were clear; because his sight was exact it was even subtle. At its best it could really measure things, and even the degrees of things. It could place anything from the face of a stranger to the strength of a horse; from the shade of ripeness in a cornfield to the shade of rottenness in a Cabinet Minister. The ultimate impression of his personality is not so much of violence as of vigilance. So strong is this impression, that any one who has been long in his literary company cannot shake off an uncanny impression of being watched. He cannot help fancying that this man who has been dead a hundred years has his eye on events in England and may suddenly speak — probably not in an amiable manner. It is as if, in some elfin tale, those strange eyes in one man’s head were stars that could survive him.

But there is one particular form of this faculty in Cobbett which is not so sharply apprehended; and perhaps is not so easy to apprehend. For in this sense it is a faculty which few people, if any people fully possess in the urban population of to day. It is destroyed rather than helped by the urban education of to day. Cobbett was very far from being an enemy of education. He was, as has been said elsewhere, a great educationist. He published French and English grammars of his own composition, and exhorted all young people to learn. Here and there he even showed a touch of that too crude and earnest respect for education which so often marks the self educated man. But for all that, he had a native power or piece of good fortune which education never gives and sometimes destroys. In one thing he was a very lucky and lonely mortal.

He could see before he could read. Most modern people can read before they can see. They have read about a hundred things long before they have seen one of them. Most town children have read about corn or cattle as if they were dwarfs or dragons, long before they have seen a grain of wheat or a cow. Many of them have read about ships or churches, or the marching of soldiers or the crowd cheering a king, or any other normal sight, which they have never seen. By a weird mesmerism which it is not here necessary to analyse, what people read has a sort of magic power over their sight. It lays a spell on their eyes, so that they see what they expect to see. They do not see the most solid and striking things that contradict what they expect to see. They believe their schoolmasters too well to believe their eyes. They trust the map against the mountain. Cobbett was a man without these magic spectacles. He did not see what he expected to see, but what he saw. He liked books; but he could not only read between the lines but through the book.

Now, in nothing is this more vivid than in his vision of history. Most of us know what was the accepted general version of English history when we were at school; at anyrate when I was at school, and still more, of course, when Cobbett was at school-in so far as he ever was at school. England had emerged out of a savage past to be the greatest empire in the world, with the best-balanced constitution in the world, by a wise and well-timed progress or series of reforms, that ever kept in mind the need of constitutionalism and of balance. The Barons had extorted a constitutional charter from the King, in advance of that feudal `age’ and a foundation for parliamentary freedom. The Commons came into the struggle for parliamentary freedom when it was waged against the Stuarts. By that time the Revival of Learning had led to the Reformation or sweeping away of the superstition that had been the only religion of the ruder feudal time. This enlightenment favoured the growth of democracy; and though the aristocrats still remained, and remain still, to give dignity to the state with their ancient blazonry of the Conquest and the Crusades, the law of the land is no longer controlled by the lords but by the citizens. Hence the country has been filled with a fresh and free population, made happy by humane and rational ideas, where there were once only a few serfs stunted by the most senseless superstitions. I ask any one if that is not a fair summary of the historical education in which most modern people over forty were brought up. And having read it first, we went to look at the towns and castles and abbeys afterwards, and saw it or tried to see it. Cobbett, not having read it, or not caring whether he had read it, saw something totally different. He saw what is really there.

What would a man really see with his eyes if he simply walked across England? What would he actually see in the solid farms and towns of three-quarters of the country, if he could see them without any prejudice of historical interpretation? To begin with, he would see one thing which Cobbett saw, and nobody else seems ever to have seen, though it stared and still stares at everybody in big bulk and broad daylight. He would find England dotted with a vast number of little hamlets consisting entirely of little houses. Considered as little houses there is much that might be said about them both critical and sympathetic. They are generally picturesque cottages; they are often what is described as picturesque tumbledown cottages. They are the most beautiful houses in the world for all appreciative people who have ever been outside them. For the less obvious and outstanding people who have always been inside them, it would be an exaggeration to say that they are the most beautiful houses in the world. About these people inside also a great deal that is good and bad might be said; they are kindly and full of English humours and all the virtues that belong to an atmosphere of ale. But they are not citizens and do not want to be; they have hardly even heard of the word. They can no more imagine the vanishing of the squire than the vanishing of the sky; though they may grumble at the moods of both. But anyhow the point is that their houses are little houses, and’ especially low houses; so that a tall man walking past them would sometimes have to stoop down under the eaves to peer into the front window, as if he were travelling in a town of the dwarfs. And the town is a very little town; often only a handful of houses to be counted on the fingers.

In the midst of this little cluster or huddle of low houses rises something of which the spire or tower may be seen for miles. Relatively to the roofs beneath it, the tower is as much an exception as the Eiffel Tower. Relatively to the world in which it was built, it was really an experiment in engineering more extraordinary than the Eiffel Tower. For the first Gothic arch was really a thing more original than the first flying-ship. And indeed something of its leap and its uplifting seems to make architecture akin to aviation. Its distant vaulted roof looks like a maze of mathematical patterns as mysterious as the stars; and its balance of fighting gravitations and flying buttresses was a fine calculation in medieval mathematics. But it is not bare and metallic like the Eiffel Tower or the Zeppelin. Its stones are hurled at heaven in an arc as by the kick of a catapult; but that simple curve has not the mere cruelty of an engine of war. The whole building is also a forest of images and symbols and stories. There are saints bringing their tales from all the towns and countries in Europe. There are saints bearing the tools of all the trades and crafts in England. There are traces of trade brotherhoods as egalitarian as trades unions. There are traditions of universities more popular than popular education. There are a thousand things in the way of fancy and parody and pantomime; but with the wildest creative variety it is not chaotic. From the highest symbol of God tortured in stone and in silence, to the last wild gargoyle flung out into the sky as a devil cast forth with a gesture, the whole plan of that uplifted labyrinth shows the mastery of an ordered mind.

It is the parish church, and it is often very old; for it was built in the days of darkness and savage superstition. The picturesque cottages are all of much later date; for they belong to the ages of progress and enlightenment.

If people saw the Great Pyramid and found scattered about its base a few patchwork tents of a few ragged Bedouins, they would hardly say there had been no civilisation in that land until the Bedouins brought it. Yet a Pyramid is as plain as a post of wood compared with the dizzy balance and delicate energy of the Gothic. If they had seen some dingy tribe of barbarians living in their little mud huts, when high above their heads went the soaring arch of a Roman aqueduct almost as remote as the rainbow, they would hardly say that the Romans must have been savages and that the savages alone were civilised. Yet the round Roman arch is really rudimentary compared with the prism of forces in the pointed Gothic arch. But the truth is that the Catholics, having some humility even in their hatred, never did make this absurd pretence that paganism was barbaric, as their enemies afterwards made the absurd pretence that Catholicism was barbaric. They denounced the wickedness of the world, but they recognised the Pyramids and the Coliseum as wonders of the world. It was only the great medieval civilisation whose conquerors were base enough to pretend that it had not been a civilisation at all. But that is not the aspect of the ease immediately important here. The point immediately important here is that this solid stone object did and does stand up among the others like a mountain among molehills; and that nobody could see it but Cobbett. We talk of not seeing the wood for the trees; but one would think anybody could see a poplar-tree in spite of the presence of six rhododendron-trees. Yet we may repeat, in a spiritual but most realistic sense, that nobody except Cobbett could see the church spire.

He did not by any means see all that was to be seen in the church, or all that has here been noted in the church. For that he would really have required more education; and not the sort of education that he could then have got merely by being educated. He was a simple man in a rationalistic age, and he saw something. It was something very primitive and elementary; but he saw it. He saw the size. He tells us again and again that he has found a village of which the whole present population could be put into the porch of the village church, leaving the whole vast and varied interior as empty and useless as Stonehenge. What had become of all the people? Why should anybody, in any age, pay to build a church serving two thousand people when he only had to serve twenty people? Was it true, could it be true, after all, that the population of England had so hugely increased from what had once been a mere handful? Was it only that the new towns had hugely increased, leaving the countryside a mere wilderness? And could it be true that the men who built such things were a sort of Pictish dwarfs or troglodytes of the twilight, when what they had left looked so like the houses of a generation of giants, which could not even be filled with a generation of dwarfs?

These doubts had much to do with historical and social views of Cobbett to be considered in their order; but in the first place they are to be noted as a working model of his power to see things simply and as they stand. Hundreds of elegant essayists and artists had traced the more graceful proportions of Gothic buildings, vaguely regarding them as ruins. The end of the eighteenth century is full of these painters in watercolours and first cousins to the Earl of Cork. What Cobbett saw was not the graceful proportions but rather the disgraceful disproportions. He saw a colossal contrast; the contrast between a village that was hardly a hamlet and a village church that was almost a cathedral. It was the biggest and baldest of all the facts; and yet it was the fact that nobody else saw. The others did not see it because they had been educated not to see it; because they had been educated to see the opposite. Since liberty and light had come to the Commons with the Whig revolution, the Commons must somewhere or other be free and enlightened; they could not still be living in hovels under the shadow of a huge old church. There had been nothing before that revolution but feudal ferocity and priest craft. So, somehow or other, somebody had built the church by sheer ferocity; or priest craft can be made a complete substitute for every other craft, including the craft of the sculptor and the stonemason. But Cobbett began with the big fact that he could see with his own eyes, and with that he contrived, with tremendous reconstructive power, to turn all English history upside down.

His view involved another truth that may be symbolised by another building. When we said that there was nothing but small houses to compete with the church, we meant of course that there was nothing else within the immediate circuit of the church: that the village church was the only big building in the village. There was another very big building at some distance from the village which bulked very much larger in the minds of the villagers. Indeed, it might be said that they lived in the material shadow of the church and in the moral shadow of the country house. Now the example of the squire’s house is yet another which illustrates the illusion that is general and the realism that is exceedingly rare. All that Cobbett could have read in books, all that he could have learnt at school, would have taught him a view of the manor-house or country seat which is still a commonplace in novels and newspapers. It is almost literally a view; in the sense of a landscape seen in the mind’s eye. But men only see that sort of view by shutting their eyes. Cobbett formed his views by opening his eyes. The universal impression or illusion was that the Tory squires were an ancient aristocracy, full of feudal notions and Norman blood; and from this it followed logically that they lived in castles or at anyrate in moated granges, Tudor manor-houses, and other ancient and appropriate haunts. If Cobbett had believed in historical novels, or in the histories that were all on the same model as the historical novels, he would have gone about looking for the Castle of Otranto in the valleys of England: and never seen the little temple that Horace Walpole really stuck up for himself on the top of Strawberry Hill.

But Cobbett had this strange power of faith: he could believe his eyes. Most people cannot believe their eyes; it is the very last thing in which they can believe. They can believe in the wildest creeds and the crudest philosophies; similarly they can believe in a past made up of The Castle of Otranto and The Mysteries of Udolpho. But they cannot believe in the present; in the thing present to their sight; in the thing in whose real presence they stand. But Cobbett really had this unearthly detachment, this dry light of reality, this vision of a man from the moon. In that light he probably saw what the country houses are really like; as he certainly saw what the parish churches are really like. Here and there, there is really a castle; now generally a show place. Here and there, there is really an old Tudor manor, often preserved as carefully as a model in a museum. But the house of the squire dominating a hundred countrysides all over England is something quite different; something quite unmistakable; and something to a large extent uniform. It is emphatically a rule, where the romantic castles and manors are exceptions. It is a rule in more senses than one; for the populace has the squire for a landlord, for an employer, and, it may be added, for a judge; for the magistracy is made up of the gentry. Anyhow, the house has a positive character which amounts to a pattern.

It really looks rather like a large public building from a large city exiled in the provinces. It looks like a Town Hall taken away on the wings of the fairies, and set down far away in the woodlands. It looks like a Palais de Justice rusticating for some reason or other and taking a ramble in the country. It is not only very large, but it does not look like a private house at all. It is like something conscious that it is a seat of government and power over men — as it is. It is nothing like so cosy as a castle. It is rather open in the same sense as a law-court. Above all, it is built in the same style as the average modern law-court. What makes that style important is its date. Very few of the real countryseats are really of a Tudor type; hardly any are of a medieval type. The type and pattern of them is of a sort that bears the stamp of a subsequent and clearly marked epoch of society. Generally they are Georgian houses; often they are rather earlier, and correspond to the quainter style of William of Orange and Queen Anne. But nearly all belong to what the French call the Classic Age; meaning that stretch of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in which the full result of the Renaissance worked itself out, becoming if anything more and more classical until its shell was broken by the Romantic movement and the French Revolution. In short, the whole architecture is the recent creation of a rationalistic age. It belongs as much to the Age of Reason as the books of Voltaire.

But people were blinded to this fact by books they knew better than those of Voltaire. Every novel and novelette told them that a bad baronet lived in a castellated tower; and they could not see that he lived in a sort of comfortable classic temple. Tennyson, calling in his youth on the Lady Clara Vere de Vere, suffered the delusion of seeing a lion on her old stone gates. Most probably it was really a nymph or an urn. For that matter, Tennyson would probably have made some curious discoveries if he had looked more closely into Lady Clara's claims to Norman blood, however it might be with her claims to coronets. But for the moment I am speaking simply of things seen, or rather of things not seen. I am speaking of the veil which our version of history hangs between us and the real facts about our fathers, even the facts in front of our eyes. Very few people saw that the aristocratic country house is commonly a comparatively new building, and looks more like a General Post Office than a feudal fortress. Such ornament as it has is a curious cold exuberance of heathen nymphs and hollow temples. Because it stands for the age of the sceptics, its gods are not only dead but have never been alive. Its gardens are full of shrines without idols or idols without idolaters.

Finally, as has been hinted already, there does exist a third historic memorial and variety of architecture or the use of architecture. Among these aristocratic houses and estates, setting aside such curiosities as castles, there does appear fairly commonly one type of country house that really is old and really is medieval. The medieval part of it is often in ruins, and only valued because it is in ruins. But the ruins have the same soaring and skyward lines as those of the large and empty parish church. Yet the house as a whole is by no means a ruin, but is turned into a country house quite as comfortable, or rather luxurious, as the more common pattern of the Georgian houses. But the very name of that house of luxury remains a medieval name; and a very queer name too.

We should think it rather odd if a profiteer had a country house that was called The Cathedral. We might think it strange if a stockbroker had built a villa and habitually referred to it as a church. But we can hardly see the preposterous profanity by which one chance rich man after another has been able to commandeer or purchase a house which he still calls an Abbey. It is precisely as if he had gone to live in the parish church; had breakfasted on the altar, or cleaned his teeth in the font. That is the short and sharp summary of what has happened in English history; but few can get it thus foreshortened or in any such sharp outline. Anyhow, this third type of monument of the past does offer itself visibly to the eye like the other two. The romantic reactionary at the end of the eighteenth century might not often find the Bad Baronet in a castle, but might really find him in an abbey. The most attractive of all such reactionaries, Miss Catherine Morland, was not altogether disappointed in her search for the Mysteries of Udolpho. She knew at least that General Tilney lived in an abbey; though even she could hardly have mistaken General Tilney for an abbot. Nor was she wrong in supposing that a crime had been committed by that gentleman in Northanger Abbey. His crime was not being an abbot. But Jane Austen, who had so piercing a penetration of the shams of her own age, had had a little too much genteel education to penetrate the shams of history. Despite the perverse humour of her juvenile History of England, despite her spirited sympathy with Mary Stuart, she could not be expected to see the truth about the Tudor transition. In these matters she had begun with books, and could not be expected to read what is written in mere buildings and big monuments. She was educated, and had not the luck to be self-educated like Cobbett. The comparison is not so incongruous as it may seem. They were the four sharpest eyes that God had given to the England of that time; but two of them were turned inward into the home, and two were looking out of the window. I wish I could think that they ever met.

Anyhow, all this is written in large letters of stone and clay across the land; in a giant alphabet of arch and column and flying buttress. And these three striking things stand out to tell the main talc of English history, even to a man who had never opened a book. The first is a very ancient and artistically beautiful parish church, far too big for its parish. The second is an aristocratic mansion of much later date, and looking like the palace of a German prince of the eighteenth century. The third is a similar palace constructed out of the ruins, if not of a similar parish church, at least of a religious building similar to the parish church. With those three solid facts alone a man might have pieced together the truth that no historians would tell him. Somehow or other there had once been a larger religious life which was also a popular life. Somehow or other its memorials had been taken over by a new race of men, who had become great lords in the land, and had been able to disdain alike the people and the religion.

Cobbett was an amateur historian in that sense; that he used his own wits. Those who sniff at such amateur history are not using theirs. They say the amateur's views cannot be correct, because they are not founded on research. In other words, they say he cannot see what is there, because he sees what is obviously there. He cannot have seen the sun, because he evidently did not have to extract the sunbeams from cucumbers. He cannot have really understood that two and two make four, because he understood it at once. But allowing for this, such academic characters underrate even the detailed information of men like Cobbett. It must once more be emphasised very strongly that Cobbett did not in the least despise books. He had far too much common sense to despise any common and convenient way of obtaining information. He was the very reverse of the sort of sentimental reactionary who thinks that all humanity would be innocent if only it were illiterate. But he did not allow what he read to contradict what he had seen. And when he really began to read, he found that what he read confirmed what he had seen.

I say he really began to read; for there is a distinction in this case. It is not merely a question of the books, but rather of the books behind the books. The fashionable book of history is at best little better than a leading article; it is founded on the documents as a leading article is founded on the news; in both cases a rather careful selection. Like a leading article the historical summary is generally partisan; and never quite so partisan as when it professes to be impartial. Cobbett had to go a little deeper than these superficial summaries to trace in the past the truths he had already discovered in the present. It was a fortunate coincidence that it was precisely at this time that the most learned and laborious of English historians produced the work on which so many other works have been founded. John Lingard was a very moderate man, but even the prejudices he was presumed to have gave him a detached position from the fashionable fallacies of that particular age. With a mass of material he established his own very moderate version of what had really happened in England; and by the use of that material Cobbett produced his own version, which some have hesitated to call moderate.

This was the celebrated History of the Reformation, published in 1824. The real question at issue about the History of the Reformation is not so much concerned with a certain state of things as with the right reaction to that state of things. What ought a man to do when he believes that public opinion has grown accustomed to repose confidently in a completely wrong picture of the past? A man might agree with Cobbett about the existence of the error, without in the least agreeing with Cobbett about the proper process of the enlightenment. The very name of Lingard is enough to prove the possibility. Lingard had a strong case, and deliberately understated the case to give a greater impression of impartiality. Cobbett had the same strong case, and deliberately flung away all such airs of impartiality to prove how completely he had been convinced. When Cobbett found that what he conceived to be a truth had been concealed by a trick, his reaction was a towering passion; and whether that or a more patient exposition be appropriate to controversy, there is no doubt about which is appropriate to Cobbett. He would have said that when he found a man robbing his hen-roost he called out `Stop, thief!’ and not `Stop, philosophical communist invading the thesis of private property!’ He would have said that when a man told lies he called him a liar, and not a person insensible to the value of objective reality. Yet it is probably true that many listened to Lingard who could not listen to Cobbett. And it is true to say that such persons could not hear him because he talked so loud. But as to questioning what he said — that is quite different and much more difficult. Those who suppose that he must be talking nonsense because he was talking too loud are much less clearheaded and even cool-headed than he was. Veracity has nothing to do with violence, one way or the other. One historian may prefer to say, `The Emperor Nero set on foot several conspiracies against the life of Agrippina his mother, and expressed satisfaction when the final attempt was successful.’ Another may say, `The bloody and treacherous tyrant foully murdered his own mother, and fiendishly exulted in the detestable deed.’ But the second statement records the same fact as the first, and records it equally correctly. It is accurate to say, ‘The Rev. Titus Oates declared on oath his knowledge of a Papist conspiracy; but his statements, which led to the execution of many Papists, were subsequently found to be fictitious.’ But it is every bit as accurate to say, `The liar and perjurer Oates cruelly swore away the lives of innocent Catholics, blasphemously calling on God to witness to his murderous lie.' The violent man is telling the truth quite as logically and precisely as the more dignified man. It is a question of what we consider superiority of literary form; not of any sort of superiority in historical fact. And this was substantially the chief difference between Cobbett and Lingard; not to mention all the modern scholars who are pupils of Lingard.

Cobbett stated all his facts in one prolonged and almost monotonous fury. But if he was wrong, he was wrong in his fury, not especially in his facts. There are many mistakes in his History of the Reformation, as there are in most histories; though most people did not even know what they were until they were carefully discovered and tabulated by Cardinal Gasquet. I doubt if there are so many of them as could be found by so good a scholar in all the more cautious and constitutional historians. Cobbett did not begin with whole masses of obvious myth and romance, like those which Macaulay criticised in Hume. He did not depend on the expurgated extravagances of manifestly mad sectarians, like those which Aytoun criticised in Macaulay. The truth is that the general impression that Cobbett wrote a wild romance is really only a general impression. It does not rest, and it never did rest, on the discovery of the particular points in which he was wrong. The impression was one of paradox; the mere fact that he seemed to be calling black white, when he declared that what was white had been blackened, or that what seemed to be white had only been whitewashed. But the shock came from the moral comment or application rather than from the definite details. For the definite details even then, very often, were not in dispute. For instance, it is supremely characteristic of Cobbett that he reversed the common titles by talking of Bloody Bess and Good Queen Mary. He could always find a popular phrase for an unpopular opinion. For he was always speaking to the mob, even when he was defying it. But this is an excellent example; for it is not shaken by any particular controversy about facts. Everybody knew even then that Queen Elizabeth was bloody, if pursuing people with execution and persecution and torture makes a person bloody; and that was the only reason for saying it of Mary. Everybody knew even then that Mary was good, if certain real virtues and responsibilities make a person good; a great deal more indubitably good than Elizabeth. It was the too obvious and biased motive of the inversion that irritated people. It was not really Cobbett's history that was in controversy; it was his controversialism. It was not his facts that were challenged; it was his challenge.

Here we are only concerned with his controversy as a part of his character. And of this sort of challenge we may almost say that it was the whole of his character. We must see the situation very simply, if we would see it as he saw it. He was simply a man who had discovered a crime: ancient like many crimes; concealed like all crimes. He was as one who had found in a dark wood the bones of his mother, and suddenly knew she had been murdered. He knew now that England had been secretly slain. Some, he would say, might think it a matter of mild regret to be expressed in murmurs. But when he found a corpse he gave a shout; and if fools laughed at anyone shouting, he would shout the more, till the world should be shaken with that terrible cry in the night.

It is that ringing and arresting cry of `Murder!' wrung from him as he stumbled over those bones of the dead England, that distinguishes him from all his contemporaries. It is not the mere discovery of the bones, or in a sense even the study of them. It was not really, I repeat, the facts that were in dispute. The Gothic tower overhanging the modern cottage was as plain as a skeleton hanging on a gibbet. Some held that the bones were justly gibbeted; that the old England was fortunately dead. Others held that the bones were so old and decayed that they could now be the object of merely archaeological interest, like Egyptian mummies. What was peculiar to Cobbett was the way in which he treated this question of the past as a question of the present. He treated it, not as a historical point to be decided, but rather as a legal wrong to be righted. If he did not exactly answer the question, `Can these dry bones live?' he did say in another sense, `I know that their avenger liveth.' He was prepared to make those bones his business, like those of Paine; to be a detective in a mystery story, and present himself ex ossibus ultor. One might suppose a detective story would be more popular than an antiquarian essay; and a charge of crime more lucid than a meditation on archaeology. Yet this was not wholly so; and the paradox is relevant to the whole riddle of Cobbett. The cry that rang through the startled village was loud but hardly clear. It may be that it was too loud to be clear.

It is possible to speak much too plainly to be understood. Most men with any convictions in a confused and complicated age have had the almost uncanny sensation of shouting at people that a mad dog is loose or the house is on fire, to be met merely with puzzled and painfully respectful expressions, as if the remark were a learned citation in Greek or Hebrew. For men in such an age are used to long words and cannot understand short ones. This comic sort of cross-purposes was especially the ease with Cobbett. The world, in the sense of the ordinary political and literary world, could not understand him or what he said. People could not understand it because it was not obscure enough. It did not soothe them with those formless but familiar obscurities which they expected as the proper prelude to any political suggestion. He came to the point too quickly; and it deafened them like an explosion and blinded them like a flash of lightning. His rapidity produced all the effect of remoteness. People of this political and literary sort understood much better the speakers they were used to; or liked much better the speakers they did not understand. The pompous and polysyllabic felicities of the diction of Pitt seemed to them comforting if not comprehensible. The rich and loaded style of Burke seemed like some display of imperial wealth which could be admired though not calculated. It was the same with the literary as with the political utterance of the time. It was much easier to persuade people to listen to the merely romantic praise of the past as uttered by Scott than to the realistic praise of the past as uttered by Cobbett. Men vaguely felt that any sympathy with things thus lost in the mists of antiquity ought to be conveyed in more or less misty language, and with the air of one dealing with things not only dead but even unreal. It was more soothing to be told by a Great Enchanter what ghosts might haunt a ruined abbey than to be asked by a hard-headed bully of a yeoman how many people would fit into the porch of a parish church. Men found Melrose Abbey more visible by moonlight than their own parish church by daylight. The world will never pay its debt to the great genius of Walter Scott, who effected in European literature that second Renaissance that was called Romance. He opened those high dikes of mud that cut men off from the rivers of popular romantic tradition, and irrigated the dry garden of the Age of Reason. It is no disrespect to him to say that lie was, like his own hero, an antiquary and at the same time a sceptic. But he was fashionable because he assured men that medievalism was only a romance; and Cobbett was far less fashionable when he urged it as a reality.

Scott was merely sentimental about Mary Stuart, as he was about Charles Edward Stuart; he was singing `Will ye no’ come back again?’ to people who would have been a horrible nuisance to him if they had come back again. But Cobbett was not sentimental about Mary Tudor; he did solidly believe that with her the good times went; and he did really want them to return.

Anyhow, when he revised history the revision really was a revelation. The revision may be revised, but it will not be reversed. The revelation may reveal itself further, but it will never hide itself again. Cobbett let the cat out of the bag; and this is nonetheless true because it was rather a wild cat when it came out of his bag. Nobody could pretend that because it was a wild cat it was a fabulous animal, when it was so obviously careering down the street. In other words, he drew attention to a fact; a fact which others have followed up and matched and balanced with other facts, a fact which others have restated more mildly or analysed more delicately, but still the original fact which he furiously asserted and his foes furiously denied. In so far as modern histories do really differ from the History of the Reformation, it is mostly because we have come to repeat with decorum what even he only dared to hurl with defiance. Ruskin and William Morris and many more pursued his path through that living labyrinth that had once been regarded as the dead shell of a village church. Maitland and Gasquet and many others justified by laborious study and annotation his wild but shrewd guesses about the greatness of medieval sociology. It. was easy for them to state the medieval argument more mildly; simply because the modern audience had become more mild. But Cobbett's discovery can never be undiscovered; that is, it can never be covered up again. And that for the reason stated at the starting-point of this chapter.

A city that is set on a, hill cannot be hid; a church set high above a city is even more hard to hide, when once it has been discovered. You cannot undiscover the elephant. That is why it is essential in this chapter to insist on the size and simplicity of the neglected thing, and the plain picture of the Surrey farmer standing staring at the village spire. Since Cobbett's historical conceptions have increasingly prevailed, there have been many attempts among the opponents of medieval ideals to get rid of this medieval renascence. There have been many efforts to explain away the elephant or minimise the cathedral. And they all fail by beginning at the trivial end and trying to chop inches off the elephant's tail; or seeking to set the ugliness of a gargoyle against the beauty of a cathedral. Thus they will pick this or that hole in the application of the Guild principle, without noticing that everything is conceded with the Guild principle itself; the simple fact that the principle of medieval trade was admittedly comradeship and justice, while the principle of modern trade was avowedly competition and greed. They will say that the Guild spirit was deficient in this and that; without beginning to touch the truth that we are deficient in the Guild spirit. In short, the attempts to rebut the revelations of medieval culture and creative reform are above all things trivial. They not only pick very small holes in a very large thing, but they do not seem to realise that the rest of the world can now look at the large thing as well as the small hole. But it was really William Cobbett, alighted from his horse, and standing for some idle moment in a church porch out of the rain, who first had a vision of this towering resurrection of a forgotten Christendom; and lifted up his eyes to things so lofty and remote that men had let them float unheeded over their heads like the tree-tops or the clouds. Perhaps the real story of Jack the Giant Killer is that Jack was the first man who was even tall enough to see the giant.

CHAPTER VI

THE RURAL RIDER

Even the most elementary sketches of Cobbett have tended to give too much of his biography and too little of his life. He had a picturesque career, if the pictures sometimes seemed to his critics to be comic pictures; he was always fighting, he was flung into gaol, he went wandering in foreign lands. And yet there was a sense in which everything he did was directed towards peace; a peace that he never fully gained. I have said that he swept across the country like a whirlwind; but in the heart of the whirlwind there is a calm. The picture in his own mind was a quiet picture; only, he was never left alone to enjoy it quietly. Perhaps it would be truer to say that he never left himself alone to enjoy it quietly. Anyhow, it was only occasionally in his wanderings through the world that he encountered the romantic adventure of staying at home. In the midst of his mind there was a secret landscape of field and farm under the evening light, which was continually being jerked out of the field of vision like a picture in a jolting camera. It is very difficult in practice to present the whole of his mind except as a fragmentary, mind; but perhaps the most continuous scroll of all that he liked and thought about can be found in the long, rolling panorama of the Rural Rides.

A little while before the affair of his imprisonment he had taken a farm at Botley in Hampshire; where he lived for a time the sort of life he liked, spoiling his children and sparring with his neighbours; especially with the Botley parson. This reverend gentleman figured so prominently in Cobbett’s satire as to become a sort of proverb; and yet the origin of a proverb is often difficult to trace. And it is by no means clear in what respect the infamy of the incumbent of Botley differed from that of other country clergymen. But he stands as a symbol of Cobbett’s quarrel with the clergy of the Church of England; which in most of the other cases had other and more serious grounds. Two things may be noted, even at this stage, about his own rather curious sort of anti-clericalism. One is that if he scoffed at the Anglican clergy, he had not less but much more scorn and fury for the Dissenting Ministers and the Methodists and the Quakers. And second, that his first serious reason for dislike concerned the corruption of pluralism, and especially family favouritism. He execrated for economic reasons the large clerical families that kept their hold on a vast variety of livings and tithes. He was as yet unconscious that this road was leading him, past the comfortable vicarage which he cursed as he passed it, towards the gateway of a grey ruin that was still called an abbey.

In the confusion accompanying his great catastrophe, he had been obliged to sell his place at Botley; but much of his early life had radiated from there, and it makes a sort of starting-point for considering him in his capacity of a Rural Rider.

The Rural Rides are a landscape; but they are also a portrait. Sometimes we seem to be watching under rolling clouds the rolling country of the shires, valleys coloured like maps, or downs that seem to shoulder away the sky; and then again we are only looking at the changes on one stubborn face as it relapses into good humour or hardens into hate. That combination of the object and the subject is what makes writing into literature; and the Rural Rides are pure literature. Perhaps they are all the more literature because they might be counted loose and colloquial even for language. It would be a breathless experience even to hear a man talk in as slap-dash a style as Cobbett wrote; but the thing would be brilliant as well as breathless. Everything comes into this great soliloquy: details, dogmas, personalities, political debates, private memories, mere exclamations such as a man utters in really riding along a road. But through all there is the assumption that heaven has appointed him, or he has appointed himself (and perhaps he was too prone to confuse the conditions), to be a sort of national surveyor of the whole land of England and publish his report to the world. His notes simply as notes never fail to be amusing. Anybody with his wits about him may well read Cobbett for amusement, even when there is no question of agreement. He could make great buildings and even landscapes look ludicrous, like landscapes of topsy-turvydom, when he turned on them that Gargantuan grin. We shall note later how for him great London was simply; ‘the Wen,’ a big boil and repulsive eruption on the body politic. We shall see how Old Sarum was `the Accursed Hill.’ He made the Martello towers look even sillier than they look now. Nothing was ever better in its way than the dramatic derision with which he pointed at the canal at Hythe, and told the people that this was meant to keep out the French armies-that had just crossed the Rhine and the Danube. More questionable, but equally laughable, was his irreverent picture of the fortifications on the cliffs of

Dover; which he described, with a sort of impudent innocence, as a hill full of holes to hide Englishmen from Frenchmen. So simple a view of the science of fortification it is perhaps needless to maintain; but even here we have the sort of cranky common sense that was never far distant from Cobbett, even when he was talking about what he did not in the least understand; as when he pointed out that it was very unlikely that the French would try to land on a precipice at Dover when they had the whole flat stretch away to East Sussex and the levels of Rye and Pevensey, where all the conquerors had landed since history began.

He had hatreds that seemed too big for their object; like his loathing of tea and potatoes. But in his hate there was humour, and even conscious humour. Many social reformers who have a hankering after his principles would be much distressed by his prejudices. But it was one of his principles to have such prejudices. Nor indeed is it an unintelligent or unintelligible principle. He believed in the traditions of the past and the instincts of the people. And these things have always moved along generalisations, touching certain social types or local atmospheres. You cannot have that sort of common sense of the countryside if it is not allowed to say that Yorkshiremen are this or Kentishmen are that, or that one course is the best way with Gypsies or another the usual habit of Jews. Most people are still allowed to express these general impressions, until they come to the case of the Jews. There (for some reason I have never understood), the whole natural tendency has been to stop; and anybody who says anything whatever about Jews as Jews is supposed to wish to burn them at the stake. Cobbett was so exceedingly and almost alarmingly hearty in the expression of his dislikes that he can hardly be said to have laboured to remove the last impression. For anybody whose horror of persecution has not yet entirely destroyed his sense of humour, nothing could be more exhilarating than the passage in which Cobbett, having heard a Methodist preaching in a village, and being afterwards shown an antiquated pair of stocks on the village green, comments indignantly on the incongruity, the inconsequence, the intellectual outrage of having these two things so near to each other and not bringing the two things together into one harmonious whole.

The primary picturesqueness of his work has therefore something of the knockabout farce or even pantomime; like Mr. Punch, he fights with the cudgel, the heavy but humorous and relatively even humane English weapon. When he hits our noble lords and learned judges such thundering cracks, we have the same causes of consolation as in the case of Punch and Judy. We have reason to know the weapon is made of wood. We have still better reason to know the heads are made of wood. All this superficial and broad farce must be allowed for first as part of the fun. He got a great deal of fun out of it, and we get a great deal of fun out of him; even if it is not only his foes who are made to look a little funny. But to be content with considering this pantomimic energy is to miss the paradox and therefore miss the point. The interesting thing is that this swashbuckler who, as we say, put on so much side had very notably another side; which might be called a soft side. But it was also decidedly a sober side. For instance, he who was the most impatient of men was the most patient of fathers. He was even the most patient of schoolmasters. The ploughman was capable of plodding as well as kicking. He could be not only soft but even subtle; and if we read the Rural Rides a second time, so to speak, we shall see certain things that are the moral of the book: and were never put there by a mere bully.

For instance, there is the educational element in him. Cobbett was a demagogue in the literal sense; that is, he was a demagogue in the dignified sense. He was a mob-leader; but he was not merely a man mob-led. He certainly was not a man merely seeking to ingratiate himself with the crowd, or indeed with anybody else. At least, if he were supposed to be ingratiating himself, he must be credited with a curious and original selection of words with which to do it. But the truth is that it was not his words but his ideas that were curious and original. He wished to arouse a mob, or if you will a rabble, to support those ideas; but not to support any ideas — least of all to support any ideas that they might happen to have already. Fundamentally and almost unconsciously he was indeed appealing to popular instincts that were not only equally fundamental but equally unconscious. But in the mere form and method of his utterance, he was much more disposed to ram information down their throats than to take hints from their faces. If he was in his way demagogic, he was much more definitely didactic. Education was an enthusiasm with him: from teaching economics as he taught French by a sort of public correspondence, to helping his own little boy with a horn-book. But while he was in private the very gentlest of teachers, he was in public, when talking to a crowd of farmers instead of to a little boy, the most violent and even offensive; to the child he was rather persuasive than didactic, and to the men not so much didactic as dictatorial.

We have already noted something of the sort about the English Grammar. He was a logician as well as a grammarian. He was the last man in the world to be really a pedant. He would always have preferred splitting infinitives to splitting straws. These criticisms of diction are also criticisms of thought; or of absence of thought. This was the period of which it used to be said, with all solemnity, that an English statesman never quite recovered from having uttered a false quantity in a Latin quotation in early life. It sounds like a parody on the secret sin of the mysterious baronet; but indeed he recovered easily enough from deserting the village maiden; and he never tried to recover from being drunk. Under these circumstances, Cobbett was surely justified in suggesting that too much notice was taken of a false quantity in Latin, and too little of a false quality in English. To some it may seem a rather remote question whether the English statesman in talking Latin accented it right, considering that he almost certainly pronounced it wrong: But in any ease Cobbett, if we may extend the metaphor, always threw the moral accent far back and let it fall on the root of the word. In that and many other respects he was really a Radical.

But our concern here is not so much with whether it was correct as with whether it was characteristic. Of course, if Cobbett had treated any abstract science it would have become a concrete science. If he had merely undertaken to set out the multiplication table it would have run: `Twice one useless regiment is two useless regiments; twice two venal Ministers is four venal Ministers; twice three pluralistic parsonages is six pluralistic parsonages like those possessed by the Reverend Mr. Hugg of Netherwallop,' and so on. If he had set out a system of astronomy, and had merely to give the names of the stars, he would have been unable to mention Mars without saying something caustic about Lord Wellington or Mercury, without a few contemporary illustrations of the connection between commerce and theft. No icy abstractions could freeze out that ferocious familiarity. It is said that the discoverer of the North Pole would see a Scotsman's cap on it; certainly the sight of that cap would fill Cobbett with sentiments sufficient to keep him warm. On that side the grammatical experiment illustrates only his obvious pugnacity; his tendency to personify everything in order to pelt it with personalities. But it illustrates something else as well. And it is exactly that something else that seems in a sense contrary, and yet is the completion of the character, without which it cannot be understood.

There was something cool about Cobbett, for all his fire; and that was his educational instinct, his love of alphabetical and objective teaching. He was a furious debater; but he was a mild and patient schoolmaster. His dogmatism left off where most dogmatism begins. He would always bully an equal; but he would never have bullied a pupil. Put a child before him to be taught arithmetic or the use of the globes, and he became in the most profound and even touching sense a different man. There came about him like a cold air out of the clean heavens, cooling his hot head, something that counted with him more than it does with most men; something about which we hear perhaps too much now as too little then; something that only too easily provides perorations for politicians or themes for ethical societies; but something which does exist in some men and did emphatically exist in this one. The pure passion of education went through him like a purging wind; he thirsted to tell young people about things-not about theories or parties or political allegations, but about things. Whether they were grammatical roots or vegetable roots or cube roots, he wanted to dig them up; to show them and to share them. He had the schoolmaster's enthusiasm for being followed, for being understood; his inmost ideal was a sort of white-hot lucidity. He above all men made the appeal: He that hath ears to hear, let him hear; though he was too prone to decorate with very long ears the rivals who would certainly refuse to hear. But the dunces were the dons. There was no dunce in the class he taught; for the whole fury of his genius was poured into simplifying his lesson to suit it to the village idiot.

For this reason also, and not only for the other, he had decorated his Grammar with grotesque caricatures. He was resolved to make English grammar amusing; and he did. It is not true that his only pleasure was in execrating somebody or even exposing something. Stronger even than these was his rational rapture in explaining something. He had learnt that in order to explain something it is necessary to hold the attention; and his examples always do hold the attention. In some ways, therefore, the two contrary forces in him come together, more than anywhere, in this strange volume; in what some would call this mad text-book.

But he appears as a better because a broader teacher in the Rural Rides. He really had a great talent for teaching; in the real sense in which a schoolmaster like a poet is born and not made. He could go back with the beginner to the beginnings. He could understand the pupil’s failure to understand. He would take trouble to make everything mean something, and sift the language for terms to which other terms could be reduced. A model of educational method may be found in his little talk with the farmhand at Beaulieu Abbey. Most educated men, even of a didactic turn, would be content to tell the man that, it was spelt Beaulieu but pronounced Buley, and leave the man merely puzzled. At best they would have told him that Beau is the French for fine and lieu the French for place; and left him with an arbitrary fact fallen out of the air, like the Hebrew word for hat or the Chinese word for umbrella. But Cobbett really translated the words, making them part of the man’s own language. He pointed out that even in English we talk of a beau when we mean a buck or dandy; and talk of taking goods in lieu of money when we mean in place of money. There is not one educated man in a thousand who would think of those illustrations to make things clear to a yokel in a lane; and the man who habitually talked like that was one of the great schoolmasters of the world.

It is quite impossible to pick up all the varied and vivid trifles that are scattered through the Rural Rides. It would be undesirable even if it were not impossible. It would be saving the reader the trouble of reading the book; and it ought to be no trouble. The man who does not find one of Cobbett’s books amusing is doomed to find every book dull. They contain a hundred fragments from which the whole habit of his life has been built up. They show him to us in a series of snapshots, in attitudes so active as to amount to the animation of a cinema. We can picture him swaggering about on his own farm at Botley, in the red waistcoat that he wore so appropriately, like a defiance to a whole herd of bulls. We can watch him peering over fences and hedges in his eager and shameless vanity, enquiring everywhere about Cobbett’s Corn (the name he modestly gave to the maize he brought from America), and sternly admonishing those who were unconscious of their good luck in possessing it. We can behold him as he curses London from the hills; he always called it the Wen. But here again his humour is more subtle than it seems. We have noticed the same offhand offensiveness in his quotations in the English Grammar. With his artless artistry, he gives more weight to this abusive term by using it not so much abusively as allusively. Instead of saying, `This vile city is only one monstrous Wen,’ he is careful to say quite carelessly, `I was coming from the Wen,’ as if he were saying, `I was coming from the Wood.’ He seems to assume that everybody knows it by that name. It is impossible, I say, to deal with all these details; we can only pick out one or two because they are symbolic and consider the social view they symbolise.

For instance, we can see that even as a reactionary he was a realist. An excellent example of Cobbett's general attitude may be found in his view of fairs and markets. This is especially true in that his attitude is emphatically not what most of his critics and some of his supporters would suppose. On the theory that he was a sort of retrospective rustic, merely regretting the good old times, it would be easy enough to make a picture of such a sentimental veteran recalling the romance of his youth at fair and market. But Cobbett is really concerned with the business of the market, and not merely with the fun of the fair. He does not imagine that village maidens pass their whole lives dancing round the Maypole. Some of the later romantics of Young England would have been quite capable of making them set up a Maypole at Christmas, perhaps with a Christmas pudding on top of it. He does not even cling to that yet nobler pillar of Christendom, the greasy-pole with a leg of mutton on top of it; more truly Christian because offering more opportunities for a cheerful humility. He does not see it as an old-world pageant, in the manner of Ruskin or William Morris. He sees it as an economic question as strictly as Ricardo or John Stuart Mill. Only, rightly or wrongly, he turns the economic argument the other way. It is also quite typical of him that his economics are really economical. He does not primarily praise the fair as a place in which people can spend money. He actually praises it as a way in which they can save money. And his argument, whether we agree with it or not, is perfectly practical and prosaic. I do not mean, of course, that he would not sympathise with the Maypole and the greasy-pole; for he certainly would. I do not mean that he would not enjoy the enjoyment, for he certainly did. He had a pretty taste in pretty girls, as have many men who are quite happy with their own wives; he would certainly have liked to see them dancing round a Maypole; though perhaps he would not have been sufficiently modern and advanced to enjoy seeing one of them asserting sex equality and making her own career by climbing the greasy pole. He would have entirely sympathised with the girl whose lover lingered at the fair, when he had promised to buy her a bunch of blue ribbons, as it says in the song, to tie up her bonny brown hair. Perhaps, again, he would have been so old-fashioned as to doubt whether the girl would gain very much by never buying ribbon for her hair, but only ribbon for her typewriter. But all this was a matter of light sentiment with him; and he was quite sane enough to take his sentiment lightly. The basis of his argument was in no sense sentimental; it was perfectly practical as far as it went. It was that the young man would not have to pay so much for ribbons for the young woman, because the person selling the ribbons would not have to pay so much for building or renting a shop. Somebody somewhere else, he argued, living in an ordinary cottage and garden, would make the ribbons at home, as the old country lace makers made lace, and would then walk into the nearest market-town and sell them to the young; man, who had also walked into the same market-town to buy them. The young woman would get her ribbons, and the n young man would have so much more left to go towards Cottage Economy and the expenses of married life, which do not consist entirely of the purchase of ribbons. But suppose (Cobbett's argument ran) the cottage woman, instead of working in her own cottage in her own way, had to go to a special place for working, all the expenses of that place must be thrown in. Suppose the cottage woman has to come into the market and put up four walls and a roof in order to sell a ribbon. The expenses of the shop are also added to the expenses of the ribbon; and the young woman has fewer ribbons or (more probably) less housekeeping money. I am not now arguing whether this economic argument is sound. I am only pointing out that this economic argument is economic. Cobbett seldom felt comfortable unless his strongest sentimental instincts had some such solid foundation. I think on the whole the argument is quite sound as far as it goes; and it goes a good way, until we come into the world of such very large and very lifeless mass production that things can be produced cheaply, especially by huge and rich monopolies by which they can even be, for some time, produced at a loss. In other words, it probably is true that one big millionaire might own one big machine with wheels incessantly going round and reeling off interminable lengths of the same very ugly ribbon; and that he might even sell it below cost price for the pleasure of driving every other sort of better and more varied ribbon out of the market. But some (including the present writer) do not like monopolies of that kind or machines of that kind, or millionaires of that kind, or even ribbons of that kind; and some of us even decline under any circumstances to use them to tie up our bonny brown hair. In any case, in this sketch we are concerned less with controversy than with character; and it is essential to the character of Cobbett that he believed that a market was better than a shop, not merely because it was brighter or quainter or more picturesque, but because he thought it was cheaper. It must be noted as marking him off from the romantic reactionary, and even from the school of Ruskin when it denounced the economical tendency of economics. We can all sympathise with what Ruskin' meant by the Lamp of Sacrifice. Even Cobbett could have sympathised, as his love of the great Gothic churches had shown; but if he had been arranging such an allegorical illumination, he would probably have added a Lamp of Thrift.

In this limited and definite sense he did object to England being a nation of shopkeepers. Today, of course, England is most unmistakably not a nation of shopkeepers. I myself, in a moment of controversial exaggeration, described it as a nation of shopwalkers. But anyhow, it is obvious that the process which Cobbett condemned has not only gone far beyond anything that he described, but has gone far enough to destroy itself, as a thing covered by that description. If ownership be the test, it has been a process and a period of people losing things and not gaining them. It has been a process of people going into service, in the language of servants, into service if not into servitude. It has been a process of people losing even the little booth at the fair, that was thought so poor a substitute for the little farm in the fields. Somewhat sadly we can now toss away from us the taunt of our great enemy. By the best proof of all, the English are not a nation of shopkeepers. They have not kept their shops.

But the point here is that Cobbett was not weeping over lost causes; he was rather if anything raving over lost cash: or at anyrate lost capital. He was perfectly practical; but he was sorry that the small capitalists were being ruined; and in the long run he may possibly turn out to be right. As we have said, he was emphatically not a mere laudator temporis acti. He was not merely crying over spilt milk; he was crying for justice over stolen cows. But he was not reckless in the sense of a friend to recklessness: on the contrary, he felt that such a licence to theft was the end of thrift. He gave his enemies beans, as the saying is, but he knew how many beans make five: and even counted them carefully.

It is curious that men of the type of Brougham were always lecturing the poor on foresight, when the one thing they could not do was to foresee the future of the poor. They were always urging them to thrift and urging them to set up a system which would make it impossible to be thrifty. Those who used the word thrift twenty times a day never looked at the word once. If they had, they would have seen that thrift depends upon thriving. In Shakespeare, it is used as practically meaning property or wealth; `where thrift may follow fawning.' Unfortunately, in a modern plutocracy it can only follow fawning. It certainly cannot follow saving. A servant who is agreeably servile may possibly have a fortune by favouritism. But by no possibility could he save enough out of common wages to buy a farm, still less a shop in the town where land is priceless; and those are the sort of things for which men save. But it is the paradox of the whole position that the Utilitarians who were always preaching prudence committed this country to one of the most really reckless revolutions in history — the industrial revolution. They destroyed agriculture and turned England into a workshop; a workshop in which the workers were liable at any moment to be locked up and left to eat hammers and saws. The Radicals who did that were as picturesque as pirates, so far as pirates become specially picturesque when they burn their boats. In truth they were not so much metaphorically burning their boats: they were almost literally burning their barns. But there is something fitting in the accident by which the term Free Trader used to mean a smuggler. If romantic recklessness be the test, Cobden and Bright should always have appeared brandishing cutlasses and with a belt full of pistols.

But Cobbett did really value foresight; Cobbett did really believe in forethought; Cobbett did really believe in thrift. He was ever ready to urge a wise economy of expenditure with the wildest extravagance of words. He praised prudence in a series of the most appallingly imprudent speeches ever made by man. He howled and bellowed all the beauties of a sober and sensible and quiet life. But he was perfectly sincere; and it was really thrift and forethought and sobriety that he recommended. Only, it was the trouble with his forethought that it was, among other things, thought; and of his foresight that he could see a little further. He could see a little further than his nose; or that supercilious nose on which the spectacles of the economist were balanced. He saw that even when the economists were right in recommending economy, they were recommending it to people who could not possibly be economical. He saw that the economists were not even creating their own monster of an Economic Man; they were creating nothing but the thriftless thousands of a wandering proletariat. As for the ordinary Whigs and champions of Reform, he did not believe they were even trying to create anything except salaries and sinecures for themselves.

Then again, his coarseness is not only touched by shrewdness but by tenderness; of a sort much too shrewd to be sentimental. His charity was not cheap. To say that he had a sense of human equality will convey little to those who can make no sense of that sense. Perhaps it would be more intelligible to say that there are some who sympathise with the poor from the outside and some who can sympathise from the inside. There is one kind of man who pities a beggar because the beggar is so different from himself, and another who does it because the beggar is so similar. Many a perfectly sincere reformer will say, `Imagine a man starving in such a slum,' as he would say, `Imagine a man being really boiled by cannibals in a pot,' or, `Imagine that a man really was-chopped in pieces by Chinese torturers.' His phrase is a piece of perfectly honest rhetoric; but he knows that we do not really imagine it. But when Cobbett writes about it, we do imagine it. He does not deal in lurid description; in this matter he is rather unusually responsible and reasonable. He simply has the knack of making the thing happen to himself and therefore to his reader. There is an excellent illustration of his quieter method in one passage in the Rural Rides. He describes, in that plain and almost naked narrative style that seems to lie like strong morning daylight upon every detail of the day, how he started out riding with his son at dawn; how some hitch occurred about the inn at which he had intended to breakfast, and he rode on hoping to reach another hostelry in reasonable time; how other hitches occurred which annoyed him, making him scold the boy for some small blunders about the strapping of a bag; and how he awoke at last to a sort of wonder as to why he should be so irritable with a child whom he loved so much. And then it dawned upon him that it was for the very simple reason that he had had no breakfast. He, who had fed well the night before and intended to feed well again, who was well clothed and well mounted, could not deny that a good appetite might gradually turn into a bad temper. And then, with one of his dramatic turns or gestures, he suddenly summons up before us all the army of Englishmen who had no hope of having any breakfast until they could somehow beg work from hard or indifferent men; who wandered about the world in a normal state of hunger and anger and blank despair about the future; who were exposed to every insult and impotent under every wrong; and who were expected by the politicians and the papers to be perfectly mild and moderate in their language, perfectly loyal and law-abiding in their sentiments, to invoke blessings on all who were more fortunate and respectfully touch their hats to anybody who had a little more money.

Now, the unconscious ingenuity of that approach is that it surprises us from the inside. The man writing it has not struck any attitudes of a demagogue or a prophet of woe; he has not set out to describe slums as a missionary to describe savages. The man reading it does not know what is coming; but when it comes it comes to him and not to some remote stranger. It is he that feels the sinking within him that comes from the withdrawal of all our, bodily supports; it is his own stomach that is hollow and his own heart that is sick with hope deferred. It will be all the better for him if it is his own brain that grows black and his own tongue bitter; if it teaches him for a moment what it must be to be a tramp walking with pain and bludgeoned by perpetual snubs and sneers and refusals. When a man has imagined that for a moment for himself, he knows for the first time what is meant by saying that men are brothers, and not merely poor relations. That is the psychological experience corresponding to the philosophical doctrine which for many remains a mystery: the equality of man.

It must also always be remembered, if we are to make any meaning of the tale, that it was this type of the very poor man, the tramp or the beggar, whom Cobbett almost unconsciously made the test of the time. He was not the man for whom it was possible to represent it as a good time. He was not the man who was being tolerated by toleration acts or enfranchised by reform bills. He was not the man who was being educated by Brougham’s popular science or equipped by Arkwright’s mechanical discoveries. He was not one of those whom the new world was making richer. As Cobbett would have put it in his bitter way, he had not the advantage of being a Jew who blasphemed Christ or a Quaker who ran away from patriotism. He was only a normal national baptized Englishman with nothing to eat. He was only a poor man; and he was quite certainly growing poorer.

Tyranny varies with temperament, especially national temperament. Some have taxed the poor, and some have enslaved the poor, and a few have massacred the poor; but the English rulers simply forgot the poor. They talked as if they did not exist; they generalised as if no such people need be included in the generalisation. They drew up reports of progress and prosperity in which the common people did not figure at all. They did not suppress the subject; by that time they simply did not think of it any more than a man shooting pheasants prides himself on killing flies or an angler counts the midges. It was said that the English founded an empire in a fit of absence of mind. It must be somewhat sadly added that they neglected a nation with the same absence of mind. Oligarchies far harsher and more arbitrary in legal form would probably have more responsibility in the sense of remembrance. A Roman official might have written in a famine, `There is still food enough for the citizens and even the slaves.' A Victorian gentleman in the Hungry Forties simply sat down at his groaning mahogany and said, `There is enough food.' A planter in South Carolina might well have been heard saying, `The Blockade is starving the blacks as well as ourselves,' The merchant in Manchester was only heard saying, `There may be a slump; but with the next boom we shall completely recover ourselves.' That is the mental blank peculiar to this mentality. They did not even look down with scorn and say, `We are all comfortable, even if these vagabonds are beggared by their own vices.' They looked round with complete satisfaction and said, `We are all comfortable.'

This distinction is simply a fact, and should not be mixed up with moral or sentimental recriminations. It is a character of the condition called capitalism, whether we dwell on the economic dependence or the political independence of the worker under capitalism. In part, doubtless, the proletarian was forgotten because he was free. The slave was remembered because he was always under the eye of the master. But I am not now arguing about whether nineteenth century capitalism has been better or worse than slavery. I am pointing out that the whole business of hiring men and sacking men did allow of forgetting men. It allowed of it much more than the servile system of owning men. Capitalism has produced a peculiar thing, which may be called oppression by oblivion. And this negative and indirect injustice was native both to what is good and what is bad in the English temper. It is the paradox of the English that they are always being cruel through an aversion to cruelty. They dislike quite sincerely the sight of pain, and therefore shut their eyes to it; and it was not unnatural that they should prefer a system in which men were starved in slums but not scourged in slave-compounds.

Now, here again we have one of the subtleties under the superficial simplicities of Rural Rides. Cobbett, it has been often repeated, was as English as any Englishman who ever lived. He had all the English virtues: the love of loafing and of lonely adventure; the spirit of the genial eccentric;

the capacity to be a hermit without being a misanthrope; the love of landscape and of roads astray; and above all, that love of the grotesque that is as brave as a broad grin. Nor, as we say, was he without that softer side, only that with him it was generally the inside. I mean that it was in his private and domestic character that we see the English aversion to what is painful and severe. He was a very gentle father and schoolmaster, not only in practice but in theory; and much that he wrote on education almost anticipates the complete amnesty of the Montessori school, He always expressed himself strongly about the stupidity of schoolmasters knocking children about, though he did it with a cheerful readiness to knock the schoolmasters about. Here he does indeed touch something in the English that is behind their dislike of a scene. Victor Hugo in his Art of being a Grandfather describes in his rather boastful fashion how he had lashed the world like Isaiah or Juvenal, and refused to descend to the bathos of slapping a child. Cobbett had lashed the world like nobody in the world but Cobbett. And he had a better right than Hugo to say truly of himself that `thunder should be mild at home.'

But when all this element in the great Englishman has been allowed for, it is still true that there was one quality in him that was not English. He was extremely provocative. He was as provocative as an. Irishman. He refused to leave people alone. He refused emphatically to let sleeping dogs lie. It is not surprising that at the end he had the whole pack in full cry after him; and that it only gave him a further opportunity for turning on them and telling them they were all curs and mongrels, not to mention mad dogs. He always trailed his coat, especially so as to make men say that he had turned his coat. He rejoiced and exulted in a scene. There is nothing more vivid than that scene on which Mr. Edward Thomas touched with great felicity, the great meeting which Cobbett had worked up to the point of a passionate enthusiasm for throwing him out. `I stood up,' he says,'that they might see the man they had to throw out.' That phrase is a photograph before the days of photography; the picture of that big, snorting, bellicose farmer, standing up with distended nostrils and the expression which in the prize ring is called being a glutton.

Now, the combination in Cobbett of the deepest English humours and the love and understanding of England with this quality which is rare in England, the aggressive and challenging quality, is a sort of coincidence or contradiction which gave him his whole value in our politics and history. It was exactly because he was English in everything else, and not English in this, that he did serve England, and very nearly saved England. He very nearly saved her from that oppression by oblivion, that absent-minded cruelty of the mere capitalist, which has now brought upon her such accumulated and appalling problems in the industrial world. He was capable of being candid about cruelty; and indeed of being cruel about cruelty. He would not let sleeping dogs lie; he also would not let progressive politicians lie. While a rather oily optimism was being applied like oil, lie rubbed in his pessimism like pepper. To a society that was more and more covering itself up with its own superficial success, he was always deliberately digging up the mass of submerged failure. To use a metaphor that would have appealed to him, he was always refusing to judge our society by the top-layer of apples or strawberries in the basket, and always declaring that the shopkeeper was a swindler and the fruit underneath was rotten. While the whole of that version of things afterwards called Victorian was gently pressing everybody to judge England by an idealised version of the public schoolboy and the gentleman, he delighted to pester our very imagination with beggars and tramps. While the New Poor Law was putting away such people in prisons and police institutions, he delighted to exhibit them with all their sores like the cripples on the steps of a church in Italy.

But though in this he was an exception among Englishmen, he was still an English exception among Englishmen. The distinction should be understood; somewhat in the same sense, in spite of what is said to the contrary, a man like Parnell was an exception among Irishmen, but a purely Irish exception. Cobbett represented one piece of England awake where much of England was asleep: he represented certain English things in revolt that are commonly in repose. But his way of reaching even these was very national; since it was very casual and almost entirely experimental. He did not start with theories but with things; with the things he saw. A philosophy can be deduced from his comments; but we do not feel that they were deduced from a philosophy.

Lastly, he embodied the English paradox: because he was a sort of poet whose ideal was prose. He was easily infuriated; and he would have been immensely infuriated at being called a poet; or, still more, being called a mystic. But there was much more poetry in him than he knew. There was even much more mysticism in him than he knew; for a simple man is a mystery to himself. And nothing is more notable in the great panorama of the Rural Rides than the fact that he often sees things in an epical and symbolical fashion which others saw in a very material or mechanical fashion. To take only one instance: all the books and speeches and pamphlets of the latter period of his life are full of allusions to Old Sarum. It was, of course, the outstanding, not to say outrageous example of the anomalies of the unreformed representative system; a place that had practically ceased to exist without ceasing to send legislators to make laws for England. There are any number of jokes and anecdotes and debates and diatribes about Old Sarum; but they are all concerned with it as something on a map or even in a table of figures. The joke is an abstract and arithmetical joke. The idea of anybody going to Old Sarum would seem somehow like going to the Other End of Nowhere. It is intensely characteristic of Cobbett that for him alone Old Sarum was a place; and because it happened to be a high and hilly place, it stood up in his imagination with the monstrosity of a mountain. He called it the Accursed Hill. That single title, compared with the terms used by, pamphleteers and politicians, has in it something of the palpable apocalypse. We can fancy him seeing it afar off from some terrace of hills looking over the coloured counties, as some primitive traveller might have fancied he saw afar off the peak of Purgatory, or the volcanic prison of the Titans. He hated it not as arithmetical anomalies can be hated; but as places can be hated, which is almost as persons can be hated. And in all this, as compared with the contemporary rationalism, there was more mysticism precisely because there was more materialism. There is almost in such a combination a sort of sacrament of hate. His feeling about the sin and shame of Sarum was of the same moral type as the feeling about the sanctity of the other Sarum, which might have been felt by some ardent devotee of the Use of Sarum. But in that sense Cobbett could not see the u se of Sarum.

This imaginative quality in the man is all the more interesting because it is partly unconscious and partly suppressed. In so far as he had an imaginative concept of himself, we might almost say it was the concept of not being imaginative. Even the world which has understood him so little has at least understood that he was essentially and emphatically English. But perhaps the most English thing about him was that he contrived by sheer poetry to picture himself as prosaic. He was so imaginative that he imagined himself to be merely a plain man. This is really an illusion that explains much of the history of John Bull; as indeed it explains the whole legend and ideal of John Bull. As poets dream not of a poet but of a hero, so a nation of poets has called up as its ideal the vision of a practical man. But in Cobbett's time, and especially in Cobbett's case, what there was of illusion in this was quite innocent; and he did not know that there was anything spiritual or elemental about him. That universe that exists in the brain of every man was then rather by way of being a buried universe; and those were few who, like Blake and Swedenborg, dived after its submerged stars. In the Age of Reason there was some tendency for the soul to become the subconsciousness. Cobbett certainly was cheerfully unconscious of having any subeonsciousness. I shudder to think what would have happened to anybody who had told him he had a complex; and indeed there was very little complex about him. In that sense he believed in reason as rigidly as Tom Paine; and the world in which he moves over downland and dale and country town is eternally in the broad daylight. But there is one passage in that practical pilgrimage in which we do get a glimpse of those deeper things, at once more dark and more illuminated. It is all the more moving because it comes quite without warning in the middle of that quiet and unpretentious narrative, and with one turn takes on the character of some terrible allegory. There is something about it mysterious and macabre, like a dark woodcut of Albert Durer.

He describes how he came in his careful wanderings to a district in which the large estates had been reorganised by new landlords of a certain kind; landlords named Ricardo and Baring and other rather foreign and financial names, whom he was wont to name very frankly. All day his heart had grown heavier with the increasing sense that the country was passing into the hands of these oriental merchants, and he was probably brooding, as he often did, on the very darkest version of their history and character, when he saw a strange object or ornament or accident standing up in those smooth and well-ordered grounds neatly fenced from the road. It was actually in the shape of a cross; `big enough and broad enough to crucify a man on.' With something that makes his staccato style sound for the first time like broken speech, he repeats more than once, `Aye, big enough and broad enough to crucify a man on.' And then he says that his horse, who was accustomed to the ambling trot with which he rambled about for his adventures, was startled by the spur or the gesture which urged him to sudden activity. He must have gone, he says, at a great and very uncommon pace as he got away from that place. `I think he [meaning the horse] must often have wondered what gave me wings that once and that once only.'

That curious incident is all the more impressive because Cobbett tells it with powerful restraint and saying as little as may be of its emotional side. He who flung fierce words about like a fury slinging flame, always had a rather fine instinct of sobriety and simplicity when it came to the few things, rather in the background of his mind, which he did really though vaguely reverence. But in this ease something rather more unusual and even uncanny was involved. A man has been pottering about from farm to farm and town to town on a trotting horse, inspecting crops, making notes about wages, cocking an eye at the weather and calling for a glass of ale at the inn; but all with the sense that this older England is passing away, and feeling it more and more as he comes nearer to Surrey and the suburbs, or to the great new estates run by the new gentry. Their names are strange names; and he has suspicions that even those names are not always their own. Their faces are strange faces; associated in his mind with sketches of eastern travel or with pictures in the family Bible. They are very busy; very orderly; in their own way very philanthropic. But what are they doing, what are they driving at, what is the ultimate design by which they build? There lies like a load upon him the impression that the whole world is being reformed; and it is being reformed wrong. The world's great age begins anew; and it begins wrong. He cannot think where it will all end; what form so foreign and perhaps formless a growth is ultimately meant to take. And then he sees, standing up quite neat and new and solid in the sunlight, something that seems crude and freshly carpentered and yet frightfully familiar; not a. symbol but rather a substantial purpose; not an emblem but an end. And we know not what shock of revelation or revulsion all but unhorsed that strong rider as on the road to Damascus; something indescribable, overwhelming a plain man in a passion of subtleties, that had no outlet but a rush of flight; and far away down the darkling English lanes the throb and thunder of the flying hooves. For that unholy cross the heathen saw stood up still ugly and unsanctified; black against the daybreak of the world, the shape of shame; and saving such a strange flash of reversion, the cross no Christian will ever see.

CHAPTER VII

LAST DAYS AND DEATH

A MERE outline of the career of Cobbett has been broken or interrupted here for the sake of two studies of his literary personality. That outline left him in England after his second return from the United States. The time of his return was largely the time of his triumph; in spite of, or rather because of, the tumultuous hour in which he returned. In this period he received all the highest compliments which he was ever likely to receive. He was hailed as a democratic deliverer, not only by his own natural following among the farm-labourers of the southern shires, but by the grim and growing power of the Trades Unions of the Midlands and the North. He was given a great public banquet and toasted with tremendous enthusiasm. He was invited, in many times and places daring these later years, to stand for Parliament. He was eventually elected to Parliament. If the Reform Government had really been a Reform Government, he might have been a Minister in it or received any honour that popular government could bestow. In any case he received, in this his time of honour, the highest of all these honours. He was prosecuted by the Government for sedition.

But the man in the dock was a very different person from the dazed and disillusioned Tory farmer who had once stood distracted between the doom hanging over his farm and the doom hanging over his country. He stood in the dock like a man risen from the dead. He was an incarnate and historic revenge that had renewed its youth like the eagle’s. He was far younger than when he was young. If it was foolish of the politicians to have prosecuted him on the first occasion, there is something of the madness that marks the wrath of the gods in their repetition of the folly so long afterwards. They were actually silly enough to attempt to make him responsible for the Luddites smashing the machines. He had not, of course, the smallest difficulty in showing that he had actually written to the Luddites asking them not to smash the machines. He could and did call Brougham as a witness to prove that his appeal had actually been used on the side of law and order. But Cobbett was not likely to confine himself to the defensive, with such an opening for a counter-offensive. He tore to rags their ridiculous case against him; then he drew a deep breath into his great lungs, and they heard his case against them. He let himself go; we might say he let himself loose. Tribunals and officials had a startling experience of what sort of elemental rage had been dwelling among them. He browbeat the browbeating judges; he bullied the bullies of the bar; he raised the jury against them like a mob; it was the hour of his life. For once at least he could make men understand that he did well to be angry; and he did. He spat out his passionate contempt for all that cold and cowardly world which had gone about to trap him lest he should somewhere let out the truth. He gave its own name to all that bottomless baseness in the comfortable classes, that would destroy a man for his sympathy with the poor. He swept away all the ridiculous relevancies of whether he had said this or that about an election or a trade union, and attacked the’ thing his enemies were really attacking. He accused them of their accusation. He charged them with charging, a man with having a heart for the oppressed. He told them why they hated him; and showed them the face of their own fear. It was not because he was blatant or inconsistent or coarse or reckless; even if he was. It was not because he raged or ranted or made a noise. It was because of those silent on whose behalf he made a noise; of the dumb for whom he ranted and the impotent for whom he raged. It was his love of the poor that made him horrible to his enemies; and in that hour he made them feed on the full horrors that such love reveals. When he had done shaking the court of justice with his voice, everything around him seemed shrunken and silent; the jury acquitted him almost mechanically, and he left the court, if not without a stain on his character, at least with a smile on his face broader than the grim smile he wore during his sentence to Newgate. He might have been dismounting after a holiday ride along the hills, before an honest alehouse of his youth. And indeed he had been doing the same thing; he had been enjoying himself.

That hour in the dock was the supreme moment of his life; and though in one sense it was followed by more success and popularity than he had hitherto, he was never again so near to his own vision of triumph. He became more and more identified with the great movement against the rotten boroughs, which culminated (or collapsed) with the great Act of 1830. The Reform movement united him with many who had once been his friends and with many who would always have been his enemies. But the Reform movement was very different from the Reform Bill. Cobbett lived to see Reform, but not the Reform he had longed to see. He sat in

Parliament, but not in the Parliament where he wished to sit. The atmosphere he hated most of all, more than any smoke of destruction or any smell of decay, the Whig atmosphere, was what prevailed in the new Parliament and the new Ministry. If he watched with too harsh a sneer its first act of emancipating the niggers by an enormous bribe to the nigger-drivers, we may imagine (or fail to imagine) how he regarded its second act, which was to complete and extend the most cruel Tudor policy against poor vagabonds, by passing the New Poor Law and putting them into prisons called workhouses. To a more detached mind there might seem something of symmetry and balance in thus simultaneously letting out black people and locking up white.

Before this had happened, of course, and while it was happening, he had pursued his other controversial interests, and figured in several other fields. He had taken a seed-farm in Kensington: where he conducted an experiment in bartering goods for labour, and sold all sorts of things. His Register still sold like hot cakes; the cakes continued to be very hot indeed. Some of them were more than most people could swallow, in the way of absolute assertions, positive prophecies, and personal threats. He was by this time a great public character; from some points of view a great comic character. It is possible that some people tried to take a rise out of him. Sometimes the laugh was on his side; sometimes on the other. But this could always be said of him, that he stood in the same swaggering attitude whether he stood alone or backed by a whole nation. Two examples will serve: of the former, the joke about the gridiron; of the latter, an affair that had happened earlier-that of the Royal Divorce.

Certainly Cobbett had a way of brazening things out, whether we think him right or wrong; indeed, we cannot but feel a sort of breathless admiration especially when we think him wrong. The story of the gridiron which he came to carry like a coat-of-arms is an excellent illustration of his invincible impudence. It arose out of a trifle, or at anyrate out of a detail; a detail which was very doubtful and not at all decisive. The Government had declared, in connection with the crisis which necessitated paper money, that things would improve, and that certain payments would be made in coin. Cobbett, contradicting flatly and flying into a passion, as was his habit about a hundred things large and small, had said he would be broiled on a gridiron if the Government could do any such thing. It was of course only one of his characteristic idioms; which were at once homely and extravagant. He meant no more by this singular fireside fantasy than he would have meant by using the more familiar theological fantasy and saying he would see them damned first. Indeed, he would have looked forward to seeing the Ministers damned with a much more solemn and religious expectation. It only illustrates in passing a certain individual twist that lie could always give to his plain talk, that where another man would say `I'll be hanged if you do,' or possibly `I'll be shot if you do,' he had the fine fastidiousness to say `I'll be broiled if you do.' But when his enemies began to shoot this light thing at him as an arrow from his own quiver, he wore it like a feather in his cap. He seized the opportunity of solidifying into an emblem something that had been but an idle word. They taunted him by turning his metaphor against him; and he answered them by turning their taunt against them. He hung up a huge gridiron outside his house; he brandished his gridiron in controversy like a club in a street riot. It seemed impossible to believe that any man could be wrong on a point that he pressed so provocatively; it was manifest that no man could be ashamed of an episode which he so paraded and perpetuated. And yet, in the actual episode itself, it is quite possible that he was quite wrong. A slight financial recovery of that sort was certainly not so insanely impossible as his metaphor implied; and as a matter of fact he was wrong in his general notion that immediate failure would follow the new financial experiments. Anyhow, he would probably have behaved in exactly the same way whatever had happened in the particular matter of which he originally spoke. It may be disputed whether this audacity should be classed as one of his vices or merely one of his talents. But certainly he had this talent, or if you will this trick, of turning defeat into victory. In this sense it is true to say that he had the tricks of a demagogue. Only, something more in the way of a definition of demagogy is needed before justice is done to him. But he did shout down his hecklers; and it was he on the hustings, much more than Johnson at the tea table, who knocked men down with the butt-end when his pistol missed fire. And he did have the power of making his very digressions and irrelevancies more important than other men's questions; the great gridiron did brand itself on men's memory when its origin was forgotten, and glowed through the twilight of time almost like the sacred gridiron of St. Lawrence.

It was characteristic of Cobbett's instinct for the national sentiment, for a sort of sporting variety of chivalry very deep in his people, that he had thrown himself with refreshing fury against the opponents of Queen Caroline. It is also characteristic of his fighting spirit that he must have been rather more of a nuisance to her supporters than to her enemies. He bullied and browbeat the Queen's lawyers and advisers, he came near to bullying and browbeating the Queen; but in the main he respectfully confined himself to pestering and plaguing her. Yet his aim, as was often the case with him, was nonetheless sane because it was strenuous. It was his whole purpose to pin her to her full claims, and especially to nail her to her post in London, when there was any danger of her leaving the country; which might look like a surrender. So Dundee, a man of the fighting sort, had tried to nail James the Second, and prevent him seeming to abandon his claim with his country. Perhaps the feeling was the fiercer because Cobbett's old enemy Brougham was the lady's chief legal adviser; and nothing pleased Cobbett so much as to suggest that he was too legal to be loyal. Anyhow, there is no doubt that Cobbett was quite sincerely loyal. He enjoyed, indeed, not without an innocent vanity, his chivalric attitude as the champion of a woman; he had all his life a very honourable simplicity in his view of women. There are some very delightful touches in the letters of his daughter, who adored him, but who does not conceal her amusement at papa's new grandeur and gratification in his powdered hair and new court-suit and sword. There was no red waistcoat on these occasions.

The affair of Caroline of Anspach need not be fully discussed here; though it is not without interest and certainly not without irony. The irony most relevant to her relations with the great demagogue is its suggestion of something not uncommon in democratic emotions. The mob has a curious way of being right by being wrong. It often champions the wrong person to punish the right person. It supports a true view by a false argument; or convicts a real criminal of an unreal crime. It may be doubted whether the official wife of George the Fourth deserved all the democratic devotion that was poured out for her; but there is little doubt that George the Fourth by this time deserved most of the democratic detestation that was hurled against him. Yet he had once been a far more generous and even a far more liberal man. And the sin that had rotted his honour was not his repudiation of his official wife Caroline, but his repudiation of his real wife Mrs. Fitzherbert. And it is the supreme irony of that strange story that his old and real crime rose from the grave against him, at the very moment when he was committing what was regarded as a more indefensible crime, but was really far more defensible. Lord Liverpool and the King’s friends, goaded by the defiances of Cobbett and the mob, brought in a bill legally divorcing and degrading the Queen. The Queen’s party retorted with a boldness that smacks very much of’ Cobbett’s controversial spirit; they threatened to bring up the King’s first and secret marriage as an illegality forfeiting his whole position, because it was a marriage to a Catholic. At this point also, not for the first time, England and the great English agitator touched for a moment the hidden thing that had remained behind English history; at first a martyr and always a witness, and perhaps at last a deliverer.

It is more difficult to make the people support the cause of the people than to make it support the cause of a person. Cobbett had not only the masses but most of the middle class with him about the dubious royal romance. He stood much more alone in dealing with the indubitable popular reality. That reality to which he testified with unwearied violence was something quite simple; yet it seemed to be too simple for the educated to understand. He shouted it in a, place more and more padded and cushioned with a comfortable optimism; and it had no echo. He shouted it in such a fashion that many of his hearers would have retorted that it was well that he should be in a padded cell. Yet what he shouted is of a certain curious interest and is worth recording. It might be typified very tersely in what he said in answer to one of the leading statesmen, who said that we might look with confidence to the future, `because all the great interests are prospering.’ Cobbett wrote in large letters like a man scrawling on a great wall or the side of a hill: `The working classes, then, are not a great interest.’

He added grimly that perhaps they might be some day. Those who see in Trade Union dictatorship a red dawn of revolutionary tyranny may pause upon the postscript: I am concerned to point out that this was, first and last, what he had to say: and he could not say it in the Reform Parliament. It is notable that a very fair sketch of Cobbett says that he did nothing in Parliament but make a crack-brained attack on Peel. Yet he can be judged even by what he attacked.

That Cobbett should have attacked Peel, especially in Parliament, is exactly what any understanding person would have expected; I am tempted to say what any understanding person would have hoped. It was equally obvious that he would attack him in Parliament in very unparliamentary language. It is most obvious of all that his attack would be utterly unintelligible to all the Parliamentarians who can only speak the Parliamentary language and are unacquainted with the English language. Peel was a model Parliamentarian; in other words, he was a monument of everything that Cobbett detested and despised. Peel was a Tory without traditions; Peel was a Liberal without popular sympathies. Peel was Parliament, and could not be expected to have the faintest notion of what the people felt or experienced. The only truly popular tradition about Peel has nothing to do with the inscriptions on the statues or the speeches on the Corn Laws. It is the fact that, far down in the depths of a democratic world that politicians never visit, the slang names for the new police were `Bobbies' or `Peelers.' And if we want to seize the very soul of Peel and his Parliamentary type, we can fix it in the fact that he organised a tremendously powerful and privileged gendarmerie for the control or coercion of the people, and thought they could be distinguished from the guards of Continental despots by the fact that they wore top hats. That was the definition of Peelite citizenship: bribery in a top hat; tyranny in a top hat; anything so long as it was in a top hat. All that is really to be called British hypocrisy, all that can be fairly classed as English snobbery, all the vices that grew under cover of decorum, and of which the very vulgarities were shy-all that is truly expressed in the fact that men in those days were set to control mobs in top-hats, just as they played cricket in top-hats. It is no contradiction to this that the hat has since evolved into a helmet. It might have evolved into a complete suit of armour, so long as it evolved; evolution was the essence of that cautious and creeping philosophy. The point is that at the beginning the gendarme would not have been accepted if he had appeared in a cocked hat. It was a world, as Tennyson should have said, where tyranny slowly broadened down from precedent to precedent. The essential' thing of the epoch was the thin end of the wedge. It is needless to ask what Cobbett thought of the thin end of the wedge; he who always fought with the thick end of the cudgel. Nothing-not even his defence of Factory Acts with the scornful phrase that his England depended on yeomen, but the new Lancashire was apparently lost without little girls-was so typical as the fact that he opposed a Police Force.

The short way of putting it is that Cobbett failed in Parliament. In a longer view it may be Parliament that failed. We can hardly say that the politicians failed to use the genius and energy of one of the greatest of Englishmen; for he was not a man to be used for any ends but his own, and they did not in the least desire to serve those ends. There was no possible point of contact, even for contradiction. It would be a very inadequate metaphor to say he was a fish out of water; for it was rather the politicians that were fishy. It would be truer to say that he was a very incautious diver drowning in a tank; but the truth is that he was simply a bull in a china shop. His sort of English, his sort of eloquence, his gesture, and his very bodily presence were not suitable in any case to senatorial deliberations. His was the sort of speaking that may make the welkin ring, but only makes the chairman ring a little bell. His attitude and action had about them the great spaces of the downs or the sweeping countrysides; the lifting of the great clouds and the silent upheaval of the hills. His warnings and rebukes sounded more homely and natural when they were shouted, as a man might shout across a meadow a rebuke to a trespasser or a warning against a bull. But that sort of shouting when it is shut up in a close and heated room has the appearance of madness. The company received the impression of a mere maniac. Yet there was not a man in that room who had a clearer head or a clearer style, or a better basis of common sense. And he showed easily enough in his English Grammar that it was really he who could reason and his critics who could only rant.

Indeed, a change was passing over England which he was already too old to understand; under the double rule of so patrician a Liberal as Melbourne and so bourgeois a Tory as Peel. An atmosphere was being generated not exactly like anything that had ever existed or perhaps will ever exist again; in which the jests of Canning would have been quite as inappropriate as the curses of Cobbett. It was not exactly a creed or a cause, or even a spirit; the nearest description is to say that it was a silence. All its undertakings were understandings; all its laws were unwritten laws. There was a silent understanding in the new middle class that it would not really rebel against the aristocracy. There was a silent understanding in the aristocracy that it would not really resist the invasion of the middle class. There was a silent alliance between the two that neither would really think about that third thing which moved in the depths; visible for an instant in burning hayricks and broken machines. It was an understanding that produced its own courtesy and culture, its own poets and painters, its own patriotism and historic pride; so that we who were born in the last days of that tradition can never treat it altogether without piety and gratitude. The atmosphere had then no name; but a few years afterwards there was found for it a name and a figure and a national symbol; when a girl stood crowned before the altar at Westminster. We call it the Victorian Age.

It is not very likely that many members of Parliament noticed a little before this time that a seat in the House of Commons was empty. To a much greater extent than the profane vulgar are aware, the House of Commons often largely consists of empty seats. On important occasions, when there was more of a bustle and a crowd, the gap might be even less noticeable; there were so many serious things to hold the attention. There was the question of whether one Graham with the assistance of another Graham, his brother, could or could not have formed a Ministry that would include a gentleman named Grey. There was the question of whether somebody known as Lord Althorpe would soon be turned into somebody else called Earl Spencer, Under the strain of pressing problems of this kind, the Commons were not likely, to trouble about the more and more frequent and eventually prolonged absence of one member or even of one vote; for indeed the vote had been as erratic as the member. His name was down in the lists among that queer and laughable little minority that had voted against the New Poor Law; along with Dan O’Connell and such odd creatures. Lately he had not been seen about at all. Probably nobody knew that in the last few days William Cobbett had gone back to his farm and died.

Far away on those great windy and grassy heights where he had gone crow scaring as a child, his funeral procession trailed as black and meagre as a string of crows. They buried him in the little churchyard at Farnham; and he had died on the farm not far off that lay on the hillside looking across to the hill-town of Guildford: a place of steep streets and a crown of roofs and spires which, seen from a distance, seems not unworthy of its noble medieval name. He had a happy death, who in the last achievement of his ambition had had an unhappy life. For he was suffered to die, after all his wanderings, among those he loved, and in the privacy which he loved to be the cover of such love, with all his appetite for a loud publicity in other things. Considering what a name he left, the privacy might have been called neglect; but in that sense, and especially in that mood, he would certainly have preferred to be to that extent neglected. Only his family and a few friends appear as recognisable figures in the landscape of his funeral; but as they carried, the coffin through meadow and churchyard, there followed it one lonely figure that would have been conspicuous in any landscape; a man of giant stature, clad in black and with a white glove on his right hand: O'Connell.

It seems to have been the general impression of his contemporaries that he, who had survived hard riding and the sea and prison and the American summer, was eventually killed by the House of Commons. Chatham had carried his dramatic talent almost to the point of dying in the House of Lords. But certainly Westminster was the very last place where Cobbett would have wished to die — or for that matter to live. He had no such power of illusion as had enabled the great Imperialist to live and die in a passion of patriotic play-acting. Indeed, Cobbett had no power of illusion at all; that is why he was not what people call a practical man. That was especially why he could never manage to be a Whig; however much he might be called a Tory or a Radical. He could never have understood the sincerity there was in the self-deception of a man like Burke, who could look back on the oligarchical intrigues of 1688 and onwards in a glow of Constitutional enthusiasm. Perhaps to say that he was never a Whig is but another way of saying that he was not an aristocrat. History was not a hobby; politics were not a game, even a game played for money. He had that indefinable attitude which marks the man who has always had to earn his own living. He wanted history and polities to be useful; in that sense he was quite utilitarian. In the strict sense of the word, he was not a gentleman — he was a yeoman. He was a farmer who worked for a harvest; not a landscape painter or even a landscape gardener. All his wild life long he was working for a harvest; even when men thought he was sowing the wild oats of fanaticism; even when they thought he was sowing the dragon's teeth of revolution. He was trying to get results; and did not mind how hard he worked to get them. He worked to get a reform of Parliament; he worked to get a more popular control of Parliament; not because he particularly wanted to see the working of a new constitution in the abstract, but because he thought the old constitution was delaying the harvest. He worked for a right to take a hand in the work. He worked for a place among the new rulers of a new realm. He worked for a seat at Westminster because he really believed, more or less, that it would be a sort of throne from which he would see all England rejoicing in the new liberty; since the hirelings and hacks of the wicked squires were gone and there had been summoned, in the ancient language of English liberty, a Free Parliament. The height from which he would look over that landscape of liberty would be higher than the Accursed Hill. He would see a New Sarum almost as ideal as the New Jerusalem, if not descending out of heaven from God, at least lifted towards heaven by the giant limbs of liberated man; by the proud toil and spontaneous prudence of the free. The new Parliament was meant to make a new people. And almost the first thing it did was to pass the New Poor Law. Almost the first thing it did was to hand over little Oliver Twist to be starved and beaten by Bumble and Claypole: and sell English children into slavery for being poor.

There is an irony that is like an agony and is beyond speech or measure. It were vain to wonder, in the normal way, what manner of words would have come to those all too tempestuous lips; what lucid violence of logic as of light through rending rocks would have tried to do justice to that towering contradiction, in the days when the giant was young. Much he did say, of course, in his own way. But there was something in that final contradiction that could not so be contradicted finally or fully: and when Cobbett came with the clearer eyes of later life to look at the Reform Parliament, to look steadily at its Reformers and its Parliamentarians, to absorb the whole scene of how such laws are made and how such men make them; to sit in his seat in silence for a little, and take in all that enormous thing calmly and completely — then he made the only comment at all commensurate with it, or equal in eloquence to the occasion: he died.

The great world with its wheels of progress that went rolling over him did not understand his death any more than his life. A hundred years afterwards he is perhaps better known than he was ten years afterwards, or even ten minutes afterwards. Two hundred years afterwards, perhaps, he will be known better still. Johnson is more human and familiar to every casual reader today than he was to Churchill or Horace Walpole; but Johnson had a bodyguard of faithful friends who really understood him, his quaint weaknesses and his mighty worth. Cobbett hardly had a friend outside his family; and it is doubtful whether there had ever been one human being who really understood what he meant. His political allies were not friend; and they were not generally for very long allies. And the reason was that not one of them could enlarge his mind to understand the mind of Cobbett; or that immense desire for the deliverance and perpetuation of the whole huge humanity of England. The makers of the French Pantheon, wisely combining republican and royal and imperial trophies, have inscribed their common monument, ‘To All the Glories of

France.’ If any man as wise had stood by the little gravestone in the churchyard of Farnham, he might have traced the words, `To All the Glories of England.’ All the other leaders were falling apart into foolish party systems and false antitheses; into Tories who were mere squires, and Radicals who were mere merchants. Windham had been his friend; but who could expect Windham to understand what he felt about the wild justice of the Luddite fires? Orator Hunt had been his ally; but who could expect Hunt to know what Cobbett was talking about when he praised the spires of the Gothic churches or the saints of the Dark Ages? This uneducated man was too well educated for all his contemporaries. He stood in a world which believed that it was broadening; and the whole mind of that world was narrower than his own. It believed itself to be growing modern and many-sided; and he alone saw that it was growing monomaniac and mean. And that larger vision died with him: and vanished for a hundred years.

Cobbett was only too ready to give people, in the language of the comic landlady, a piece of his mind. But the accidental phrase is after all an accurate phrase. It was only a piece of his mind that was ever given to anybody; a rather ragged piece often torn off in a rather random fashion: but not the whole truth that he really meant, for that he had great difficulty in giving to anybody, perhaps even to himself. Talkative as he was, it may be that he never said enough; and lucid as he was, it may be that he never quite got to the point. But the point was a whole point of view. And whether it was his fault or the other people’s fault, that point of view was never really taken by anybody else: nobody stood exactly where he stood or saw the world exactly as he saw it; or others would have realised that, amid all his contradictory phrases and combative passions, he did in a real sense of his own see life steadily and see it whole. As we look back on his life, even the views that were not consistent with each other seem to be consistent with him. A friend would not deny that he contradicted himself; but a friend would be able to guess when and where he would probably contradict himself. Only in this sense it is true to say that he never had a friend. He had affections, and he had alliances; but not one true intellectual friendship.

There was this true distinction in the mind of the self-taught farmer: that his mind is a place where extremes meet. When it can be said of a man that the Tories thought him a Radical, and the Radicals thought him a Tory, the first thing that will occur to us is that he is a moderate. It can truly be said of Cobbett; and the very last thing that would occur to anybody would be to call him a moderate. He was not only the reverse of a moderate, he was something that would be utterly bewildering to any moderate. He was an extremist all round. He was more Tory than most Tories, and more Radical than most Radicals. In other words, it was because he was original; but it was also because he was universal. He did not altogether understand his own universality; and he expressed it mostly in the form of inconsistency. He was fanatical, but he was not narrow. With all his fanaticism, he was really looking at things from too many points of view at once to be understood by those who wore the blinkers of a party or even a theory. He seemed to be at all extremes, because he had in some sense encircled and surrounded his whole generation. Ignorant and violent as he seemed on the surface, his spirit was like one that had lived before and after. He was there before they were all born, in the crowded medieval churches. He was there after they were all dead, in the crowded congresses of the Trades Unions. It was not knowledge, but it was understanding, in the sense of sympathy. When we find this sort of universality we find, I think, a thing on the heroic scale. It would surely be no bad definition of greatness in a man, to say that we can strike out in any direction and still find the circumference of his mind.

There was never a Cobbettite except Cobbett. That gives him an absolute quality not without a sort of authority. He was a full man and a ready man, but he was not an exact man. He was not a scientific man or in the orderly and conscious sense even a philosophical man. But he was, by this rather determining test, a great man. He was large enough to be lonely. He had more inside him than he could easily find satisfied outside him. He meant more by what he said even than the other men who said it. He was one of the rare men to whom the truisms are truths. This union of different things in his thoughts was not sufficiently thought out; but it was a union. It was not a compromise; it was a man. That is what is meant by saying that it was also a great man. There was something in him that the world had not taught him; even if it was too vast and vague for him to teach it to the world. Things were part of that thing that could not be parts of any other thing. That is why he had no real intellectual friendships among the intellectuals of his day, when all allowance is made for his real faults of vanity and violence and readiness to quarrel. It is easy to argue about how he came to quarrel with his best friends. It is more penetrating to ask how he could ever come to agree with them. Even to the best of them his whole outlook, which seemed to him so simple, would have been bewildering. How was Orator Hunt to understand that the great empty churches with their gaping mouths cried aloud that they also belonged to the future, because they belonged to the past? How was the Right Honourable William Windham to understand that riotous artisans in the Black Country were also appealing to the past, as well as threatening the future? How was Mr. Carlile the atheist bookseller to know that a ruined abbey and a raging mob were one thing; and that thing liberty? How was Lord Brougham to understand that a field of clover and a grotesque gridiron were one thing; and that thing England?

That is the paradox of Cobbett; that in a sense he quarrelled with everybody because he reconciled everything. From him, at least, so many men were divided, because in him so many things were unified. He appeared inconsistent enough in the thousand things that he reviled; but he would have appeared far more inconsistent in the things that he accepted. The breadth of his sympathy would have been stranger than all his antipathies; and his peace was more provocative than war. Therefore it is that our last impression of him is of a loneliness not wholly due to his hatreds, but partly also to his loves. For the desires of his intellect and imagination never met anything but thwarting and wounding in this world; and though the ordinary part of him was often happy enough, the superior part was never satisfied. He never came quite near enough to a religion that might have satisfied him. But with philosophies he would never have been satisfied, especially the mean and meagre philosophies of his day. The cause he felt within him was too mighty and multiform to have been fed with anything less than the Faith. Therefore it was that when he lay dying in his farmhouse on the hills, those he had loved best in his simple fashion were near to his heart; but of all the millions of the outer world there was none near to his mind, and all that he meant escaped and went its way, like a great wind that roars over the rolling downs.

This book began with an indefensible piece of personal recollection, and I fear it will have to end with another. Perhaps I might plead the influence of the man I have been studying and trying to understand; who has been called egotistical, though I should be content to call him autobiographical. As Mr. Cole pointed out in his admirable biography, Cobbett treated his ego as an emblematic figure of England, as Whitman did his of America. My own memories can have no such symbolic excuse; but I passed much of my childhood along that main thoroughfare where Cobbett had his seed farm at Kensington; and one of the last things my own fattier told me was a tale of a strange object hanging above the road, before alterations and destructions removed it; one glimpse of a symbolic shape more ugly and ungainly than a gallows in the sunlight: the Gridiron.

All that he hated has triumphed on that spot. The ordinary shop that he thought a nuisance has swelled into the big emporium he would have thought a nightmare; the suburb has sunk deep into the new London; but the road still runs westward down which he went riding so often, heading for the open country, and leaving the Wen as far as possible behind. The Wen has pursued him, shooting out further and further in telescopic perspective, past Hammersmith and Chiswick and Richmond; and still I seem to see the back of that vanishing rider ever ahead, and lessening amid changing scenery; hills turning about him like a transformation scene, away almost to the stormy wall of Wales. It was as if he were riding further and further westward, following towards the sunset the road of the fallen kings; where a low red light glows for ever upon things forgotten and the last ruins of the Round Table. And yet I am not sure of such a view of history; it seems to me that with us also things change and even change places; and the war does not always go one way. When I used to go out as a boy into the green twilight, having written nonsense all night (fortunately unpublished), and drink coffee at a stall in the street, brooding upon all these things, it seemed then as if the tide were running high enough in the one direction; but I have since had a notion that high tides can turn. The enormous buildings, seen in outline like uncouth drawings, seem to stand up more insecurely against an altered sky; with some change in it too subtle yet to be called the twilight. I discovered, at least, that even in all that labyrinth of the new London by night there is an unvisited hour of almost utter stillness, before the creaking carts begin to come in from the market-gardens, to remind us that there is still somewhere a countryside. And in that stillness I have sometimes fancied I heard, tiny and infinitely far away, something like a faint voice hallooing and the sound of horse-hoofs that return.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND CONVERSION

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTORY: A NEW RELIGION

The Catholic faith used to be called the Old Religion; but at the present moment it has a recognized place among the New Religions. This has nothing to do with its truth or falsehood; but it is a fact that has a great deal to do with the understanding of the modern world.

It would be very undesirable that modern men should accept Catholicism merely as a novelty; but it is a novelty. It does act upon its existing environment with the peculiar force and freshness of a novelty. Even those who denounce it generally denounce it as a novelty; as an innovation and not merely a survival. They talk of the "advanced" party in the Church of England; they talk of the "aggression" of the Church of Rome. When they talk of an Extremist they are as likely to mean a Ritualist as a Socialist. Given any normal respectable Protestant family, Anglican or Puritan, in England or America, we shall find that Catholicism is actually for practical purposes treated as a new religion, that is, a revolution. It is not a survival. It is not in that sense an antiquity. It does not necessarily owe anything to tradition. In places where tradition can do nothing for it, in places where all the tradition is against it, it is intruding on its own merits; not as a tradition but a truth. The father of some such Anglican or American Puritan family will find, very often, that all his children are breaking away from his own more or less Christian compromise (regarded as normal in the nineteenth century) and going off in various directions after various faiths or fashions which he would call fads. One of his sons will become a Socialist and hang up a portrait of Lenin; one of his daughters will become a Spiritualist and play with a planchette; another daughter will go over to Christian Science and it is quite likely that another son will go over to Rome. The point is, for the moment, that from the point of view of the father, and even in a sense of the family, all these things act after the manner of new religions, of great movements, of enthusiasms that carry young people off their feet and leave older people bewildered or annoyed. Catholicism indeed, even more than the others, is often spoken of as if it were actually one of the wild passions of youth. Optimistic aunts and uncles say that the youth will "get over it," as if it were a childish love affair or that unfortunate business with the barmaid. Darker and sterner aunts and uncles, perhaps at a rather earlier period, used actually to talk about it as an indecent indulgence, as if its literature were literally a sort of pornography. Newman remarks quite naturally, as if there were nothing odd about it at the time, that an undergraduate found with an ascetic manual or a book of monastic meditations was under a sort of cloud or taint, as having been caught with "a bad book" in his possession. He had been wallowing in the sensual pleasure of Nones or inflaming his lusts by contemplating an incorrect number of candles. It is perhaps no longer the custom to regard conversion as a form of dissipation; but it is still common to regard conversion as a form of revolt. And as regards the established convention of much of the modern world, it is a revolt. The worthy merchant of the middle class, the worthy farmer of the Middle West, when he sends his son to college, does now feel a faint alarm lest the boy should fall among thieves, in the sense of Communists; but he has the same sort of fear lest he should fall among Catholics.

Now he has no fear lest he should fall among Calvinists. He has no fear that his children will become seventeenth-century Supralapsarians, however much he may dislike that doctrine. He is not even particularly troubled by the possibility of their adopting the extreme solifidian conceptions once common among some of the more extravagant Methodists. He is not likely to await with terror the telegram that will inform him that his son has become a Fifth-Monarchy man, any more than that he has joined the Albigensians. He does not exactly lie awake at night wondering whether Tom at Oxford has become a Lutheran any more than a Lollard. All these religions he dimly recognises as dead religions; or at any rate as old religions. And he is only frightened of new religions. He is only frightened of those fresh, provocative, paradoxical new notions that fly to the young people's heads. But amongst these dangerous juvenile attractions he does in practice class the freshness and novelty of Rome.

Now this is rather odd; because Rome is not so very new. Among these annoying new religions, one is rather an old religion; but it is the only old religion that is so new. When it was originally and really new, no doubt a Roman father often found himself in the same position as the Anglican or Puritan father. He too might find all his children going strange ways and deserting the household gods and the sacred temple of the Capitol. He too might find that one of those children had joined the Christians in their Ecclesia and possibly in their Catacombs. But he would have found that, of his other children, one cared for nothing but the Mysteries of Orpheus, another was inclined to follow Mithras, another was a Neo-Pythagorean who had learned vegetarianism from the Hindoos, and so on. Though the Roman father, unlike the Victorian father, might have the pleasure of exercising the patria potestas and cutting off the heads of all the heretics, he could not cut off the stream of all the heresies. Only by this time most of the streams have run rather dry. It is now seldom necessary for the anxious parent to warn his children against the undesirable society of the Bull of Mithras, or even to wean him from the exclusive contemplation of Orpheus; and though we have vegetarians always with us, they mostly know more about proteids than about Pythagoras. But that other youthful extravagance is still youthful. That other new religion is once again new. That one fleeting fashion has refused to fleet; and that ancient bit of modernity is still modern. It is still to the Protestant parent now exactly what it was to the pagan parent then. We might say simply that it is a nuisance; but anyhow it is a novelty. It is not simply what the father is used to, or even what the son is used to. It is coming in as something fresh and disturbing, whether as it came to the Greeks who were always seeking some new thing, or as it came to the shepherds who first heard the cry upon the hills of the good news that our language calls the Gospel. We can explain the fact of the Greeks in the time of St. Paul regarding it as a new thing, because it was a new thing. But who will explain why it is still as new to the last of the converts as it was to the first of the shepherds? It is as if a man a hundred years old entered the Olympian games among the young Greek athletes; which would surely have been the basis of a Greek legend. There is something almost as legendary about the religion that is two thousand years old now appearing as a rival of the new religions. That is what has to be explained and cannot be explained away; nothing can turn the legend into a myth. We have seen with our own eyes and heard with our own ears this great modern quarrel between young Catholics and old Protestants; and it is the first step to recognise in any study of modern conversion.

I am not going to talk about numbers and statistics, though I may say something about them later. The first fact to realise is a difference of substance which falsifies all the difference of size. The great majority of Protestant bodies today, whether they are strong or weak, are not strengthened in this particular fashion; by the actual attraction of their new followers to their old doctrines. A young man will suddenly become a Catholic priest, or even a Catholic monk, because he has a spontaneous and even impatient personal enthusiasm for the doctrine of Virginity as it appeared to St. Catherine or St. Clare. But how many men become Baptist ministers because they have a personal horror of the idea of an innocent infant coming unconsciously to Christ? How many honest Presbyterian ministers in Scotland really want to go back to John Knox, as a Catholic mystic might want to go back to John of the Cross? These men inherit positions which they feel they can hold with reasonable consistency and general agreement; but they do inherit them. For them religion is tradition. We Catholics naturally do not sneer at tradition; but we say that in this case it is really tradition and nothing else. Not one man in a hundred of these people would ever have joined his present communion if he had been born outside it. Not one man in a thousand of them would have invented anything like his church formulas if they had not been laid down for him. None of them has any real reason for being in their own particular church, whatever good reason they may still have for being outside ours. In other words, the old creed of their communion has ceased to function as a fresh and stimulating idea. It is at best a motto or a war cry and at the worst a catchword. But it is not meeting contemporary ideas like a contemporary idea. In their time and in their turn we believe that those other contemporary ideas will also prove their mortality by having also become mottoes and catchwords and traditions. A century or two hence Spiritualism may be a tradition and Socialism may be a tradition and Christian Science may be a tradition. But Catholicism will not be a tradition. It will still be a nuisance and a new and dangerous thing.

These are the general considerations which govern any personal study of conversion to the Catholic faith. The Church has defended tradition in a time which stupidly denied and despised tradition. But that is simply because the Church is always the only thing defending whatever is at the moment stupidly despised. It is already beginning to appear as the only champion of reason in the twentieth century, as it was the only champion of tradition in the nineteenth. We know that the higher mathematics is trying to deny that two and two make four and the higher mysticism to imagine something that is beyond good and evil. Amid all these anti-rational philosophies, ours will remain the only rational philosophy. In the same spirit the Church did indeed point out the value of tradition to a time which treated it as quite valueless. The nineteenth-century neglect of tradition and mania for mere documents were altogether nonsensical. They amounted to saying that men always tell lies to children but men never make mistakes in books. But though our sympathies are traditional because they are human, it is not that part of the thing which stamps it as divine. The mark of the Faith is not tradition; it is conversion. It is the miracle by which men find truth in spite of tradition and often with the rending of all the roots of humanity.

It is with the nature of this process that I propose to deal; and it is difficult to deal with it without introducing something of a personal element. My own is only a very trivial case but naturally it is the case I know best; and I shall be compelled in the pages that follow to take many illustrations from it. I have therefore thought it well to put first this general note on the nature of the movement in my time; to show that I am well aware that it is a very much larger and even a very much later movement than is implied in describing my own life or generation. I believe it will be more and more an issue for the rising generation and for the generation after that, as they discover the actual alternative in the awful actualities of our time. And Catholics when they stand up together and sing “Faith of our Fathers” may realise almost with amusement that they might well be singing “Faith of our Children.” And in many cases the return has been so recent as almost to deserve the description of a Children’s Crusade.

CHAPTER II: THE OBVIOUS BLUNDERS

I have noted that Catholicism really is in the twentieth century what it was in the second century; it is the New Religion. Indeed its very antiquity preserves an attitude of novelty. I have always thought it striking and even stirring that in the venerable invocation of the “Tantum Ergo,” which for us seems to come loaded with accumulated ages, there is still the language of innovation; of the antique document that must yield to a new rite. For us the hymn is something of an antique document itself. But the rite is always new.

But if a convert is to write of conversion he must try to retrace his steps out of that shrine back into that ultimate wilderness where he once really believed that this eternal youth was only the “Old Religion.” It is a thing exceedingly difficult to do and not often done well, and I for one have little hope of doing it even tolerably well. The difficulty was expressed to me by another convert who said, “I cannot explain why I am a Catholic; because now that I am a Catholic I cannot imagine myself as anything else.” Nevertheless, it is right to make the imaginative effort. It is not bigotry to be certain we are right; but it is bigotry to be unable to imagine how we might possibly have gone wrong. It is my duty to try to understand what H. G. Wells can possibly mean when he says that the medieval Church did not care for education but only for imposing dogmas; it is my duty to speculate (however darkly) on what can have made an intelligent man like Arnold Bennett stone-blind to all the plainest facts about Spain; it is my duty to find if I can the thread of connected thought in George Moore’s various condemnations of Catholic Ireland; and it is equally my duty to labour till I understand the strange mental state of G. K. Chesterton when he really assumed that the Catholic Church was a sort of ruined abbey, almost as deserted as Stonehenge.

I must say first that, in my own case, it was at worst a matter of slights rather than slanders. Many converts far more important than I have had to wrestle with a hundred devils of howling falsehood; with a swarm of lies and libels. I owe it to the liberal and Universalist atmosphere of my family, of Stopford Brooke and the Unitarian preachers they followed, that I was always just sufficiently enlightened to be out of the reach of Maria Monk. Nevertheless, as this is but a private privilege for which I have to be thankful, it is necessary to say something of what I might be tempted to call the obvious slanders, but that better men than I have not always seen that the slander was obvious. I do not think that they exercise much influence on the generation that is younger than mine. The worst temptation of the most pagan youth is not so much to denounce monks for breaking their vow as to wonder at them for keeping it. But there is a state of transition that must be allowed for in which a vague Protestant prejudice would rather like to have it both ways. There is still a sort of woolly-minded philistine who would be content to consider a friar a knave for his unchastity and a fool for his chastity. In other words, these dying calumnies are dying but not dead; and there are still enough people who may still be held back by such crude and clumsy obstacles that it is necessary to some extent to clear them away. After that we can consider what may be called the real obstacles, the real difficulties we find, which, as a fact, are generally the very opposite of the difficulties we are told about. But let us consider the evidence of all these things being black, before we go on to the inconvenient fact of their being white.

The usual protest of the Protestant, that the Church of Rome is afraid of the Bible, did not, as I shall explain in a moment, have any great terrors for me at any time. This was by no merit of my own, but by the accident of my age and situation. For I grew up in a world in which the Protestants, who had just proved that Rome did not believe the Bible, were excitedly discovering that they did not believe the Bible themselves. Some of them even tried to combine the two condemnations and say that they were steps of progress. The next step in progress consisted in a man kicking his father for having locked up a book of such beauty and value, a book which the son then proceeded to tear into a thousand pieces. I early discovered that progress is worse than Protestantism so far as stupidity is concerned. But most of the free-thinkers who were friends of mine happened to think sufficiently freely to see that the Higher Criticism was much more of an attack on Protestant Bible-worship than on Roman authority. Anyhow, my family and friends were more concerned with the opening of the book of Darwin than the book of Daniel; and most of them regarded the Hebrew Scriptures as if they were Hittite sculptures. But, even then, it would seem odd to worship the sculptures as gods and then smash them as idols and still go on blaming somebody else for not having worshipped them enough. But here again it is hard for me to know how far my own experience is representative, or whether it would not be well to say more of these purely Protestant prejudices and doubts than I, from my own experience, am able to say.

The Church is a house with a hundred gates; and no two men enter at exactly the same angle. Mine was at least as much Agnostic as Anglican, though I accepted for a time the borderland of Anglicanism; but only on the assumption that it could really be Anglo-Catholicism. There is a distinction of ultimate intention there which in the vague English atmosphere is often missed. It is not a difference of degree but of definite aim. There are High Churchmen as much as Low Churchmen who are concerned first and last to save the Church of England. Some of them think it can be saved by calling it Catholic, or making it Catholic, or believing that it is Catholic; but that is what they want to save. But I did not start out with the idea of saving the English Church, but of finding the Catholic Church. If the two were one, so much the better; but I had never conceived of Catholicism as a sort of showy attribute or attraction to be tacked on to my own national body, but as the inmost soul of the true body, wherever it might be. It might be said that Anglo-Catholicism was simply my own uncompleted conversion to Catholicism. But it was from a position originally much more detached and indefinite that I had been converted, an atmosphere if not agnostic at least pantheistic or unitarian. To this I owe the fact that I find it very difficult to take some of the Protestant propositions even seriously. What is any man who has been in the real outer world, for instance, to make of the everlasting cry that Catholic traditions are condemned by the Bible? It indicates a jumble of topsy-turvy tests and tail-foremost arguments, of which I never could at any time see the sense. The ordinary sensible sceptic or pagan is standing in the street (in the supreme character of the man in the street) and he sees a procession go by of the priests of some strange cult, carrying their object of worship under a canopy, some of them wearing high head-dresses and carrying symbolical staffs, others carrying scrolls and sacred records, others carrying sacred images and lighted candles before them, others sacred relics in caskets or cases, and so on. I can understand the spectator saying, “This is all hocus-pocus”; I can even understand him, in moments of irritation, breaking up the procession, throwing down the images, tearing up the scrolls, dancing on the priests and anything else that might express that general view. I can understand his saying, “Your croziers are bosh, your candles are bosh, your statues and scrolls and relics and all the rest of it are bosh.” But in what conceivable frame of mind does he rush in to select one particular scroll of the scriptures of this one particular group (a scroll which had always belonged to them and been a part of their hocus-pocus, if it was hocus-pocus); why in the world should the man in the street say that one particular scroll was not bosh, but was the one and only truth by which all the other things were to be condemned? Why should it not be as superstitious to worship the scrolls as the statues, of that one particular procession? Why should it not be as reasonable to preserve the statues as the scrolls, by the tenets of that particular creed? To say to the priests, “Your statues and scrolls are condemned by our common sense,” is sensible. To say, “Your statues are condemned by your scrolls, and we are going to worship one part of your procession and wreck the rest,” is not sensible from any standpoint, least of all that of the man in the street.

Similarly, I could never take seriously the fear of the priest, as of something unnatural and unholy; a dangerous man in the home. Why should man who wanted to be wicked encumber himself with special and elaborate promises to be good? There might sometimes be a reason for a priest being a profligate. But what was the reason for a profligate being a priest? There are many more lucrative walks of life in which a person with such shining talents for vice and villainy might have made a brighter use of his gifts. Why should a man encumber himself with vows that nobody could expect him to take and he did not himself expect to keep? Would any man make himself poor in order that he might become avaricious; or take a vow of chastity frightfully difficult to keep in order to get into a little more trouble when he did not keep it? All that early and sensational picture of the sins of Rome always seemed to me silly even when I was a boy or an unbeliever; and I cannot describe how I passed out of it because I was never in it. I remember asking some friends at Cambridge, people of the Puritan tradition, why in the world they were so afraid of Papists; why a priest in somebody’s house was a peril or an Irish servant the beginning of a pestilence. I asked them why they could not simply disagree with Papists and say so, as they did with Theosophists or Anarchists. They seemed at once pleased and shocked with my daring, as if I had undertaken to convert a burglar or tame a mad dog. Perhaps their alarm was really wiser than my bravado. Anyhow, I had not then the most shadowy notion that the burglar would convert me. That, however, I am inclined to think, is the subconscious intuition in the whole business. It must either mean that they suspect that our religion has something about it so wrong that the hint of it is bad for anybody; or else that it has something so right that the presence of it would convert anybody. To do them justice, I think most of them darkly suspect the second and not the first.

A shade more plausible than the notion that Popish priests merely seek after evil was the notion that they are exceptionally ready to seek good by means of evil. In vulgar language, it is the notion that if they are not sensual they are always sly. To dissipate this is a mere matter of experience; but before I had any experience I had seen some objections to the thing even in theory. The theory attributed to the Jesuits was very often almost identical with the practice adopted by nearly everybody I knew. Everybody in society practised verbal economies, equivocations and often direct fictions, without any sense of essential falsehood. Every gentleman was expected to say he would be delighted to dine with a bore; every lady said that somebody else's baby was beautiful if she thought it as ugly as sin: for they did not think it a sin to avoid saying ugly things. This might be right or wrong; but it was absurd to pillory half a dozen Popish priests for a crime committed daily by half a million, Protestant laymen. The only difference was that the Jesuits had been worried enough about the matter to try to make rules and limitations saving as much verbal veracity as possible; whereas the happy Protestants were not worried about it at all, but told lies from morning to night as merrily and innocently as the birds sing in the trees. The fact is, of course, that the modern world is full of an utterly lawless casuistry because the Jesuits were prevented from making a lawful casuistry. But every man is a casuist or a lunatic.

It is true that this general truth was hidden from many by certain definite assertions. I can only call them, in simple language, Protestant lies about Catholic lying. The men who repeated them were not necessarily lying, because they were repeating. But the statements were of the same lucid and precise order as a statement that the Pope has three legs or that Rome is situated at the North Pole. There is no more doubt about their nature than that. One of them, for instance, is the positive statement, once heard everywhere and still heard often: "Roman Catholics are taught that anything is lawful if done for the good of the Church." This is not the fact; and there is an end of it. It refers to a definite statement of an institution whose statements are very definite; and it can be proved to be totally false.

Here as always the critics cannot see that they are trying to have it both ways. They are always complaining that our creed is cut and dried; that we are told what to believe and must believe nothing else; that it is all written down for us in bulls and confessions of faith. In so far as this is true, it brings a matter like this to the point of legal and literal truth, which can be tested; and so tested, it is a lie. But even here I was saved at a very early stage by noticing a curious fact. I noticed that those who were most ready to blame priests for relying on rigid formulas seldom took the trouble to find out what the formulas were. I happened to pick up some of the amusing pamphlets of James Britten, as I might have picked up any other pamphlets of any other propaganda; but they set me on the track of that delightful branch of literature which he called Protestant Fiction. I found some of that fiction on my own account, dipping into novels by Joseph Hocking and others. I am only concerned with them here to illustrate this particular and curious fact about exactitude. I could not understand why these romancers never took the trouble to find out a few elementary facts about the thing they denounced. The facts might easily have helped the denunciation, where the fictions discredited it. There were any number of real Catholic doctrines I should then have thought disgraceful to the Church. There are any number which I can still easily imagine being made to look disgraceful to the Church. But the enemies of the Church never found these real rocks of offence. They never looked for them. They never looked for anything. They seemed to have simply made up out of their own heads a number of phrases, such as a Scarlet Woman of deficient intellect might be supposed to launch on the world; and left it at that. Boundless freedom reigned; it was not treated as if it were a question of fact at all. A priest might say anything about the Faith; because a Protestant might say anything about the priest. These novels were padded with pronouncements like this one, for instance, which I happen to remember: "Disobeying a priest is the one sin for which there is no absolution. We term it a reserved case." Now obviously a man writing like that is simply imagining what might exist; it has never occurred to him to go and ask if it does exist. He has heard the phrase "a reserved case" and considers, in a poetic reverie, what he shall make it mean. He does not go and ask the nearest priest what it does mean. He does not look it up in an encyclopedia or any ordinary work of reference. There is no doubt about the fact that it simply means a case reserved for ecclesiastical superiors and not to be settled finally by the priest. That may be a fact to be denounced; but anyhow it is a fact. But the man much prefers to denounce his own fancy. Any manual would tell him that there is no sin "for which there is no absolution"; not disobeying the priest; not assassinating the Pope. It would be easy to find out these facts and quite easy to base a Protestant invective upon them. It puzzled me very much, even at that early stage, to imagine why people bringing controversial charges against a powerful and prominent institution should thus neglect to test their own case, and should draw in this random way on their own imagination. It did not make me any more inclined to be a Catholic; in those days the very idea of such a thing would have seemed crazy. But it did save me from swallowing all the solid and solemn assertion about what Jesuits said and did. I did not accept quite so completely as others the well-ascertained and widely accepted fact that "Roman Catholics may do anything for the good of the Church"; because I had already learned to smile at equally accepted truths like "Disobeying a priest is the one sin for which there is no absolution." I never dreamed that the Roman religion was true; but I knew that its accusers, for some reason or other, were curiously inaccurate.

It is strange to me to go back to these things now, and to think that I ever took them even as seriously as that. But I was not very serious even then; and certainly I was not serious long. The last lingering shadow of the Jesuit, gliding behind curtains and concealing himself in cupboards, faded from my young life about the time when I first caught a distant glimpse of the late Father Bernard Vaughan. He was the only Jesuit I ever knew in those days; and as you could generally hear him half a mile away, he seemed to be ill-selected for the duties of a curtain-glider. It has always struck me as curious that this Jesuit raised a storm by refusing to be Jesuitical (in the journalese sense I mean), by refusing to substitute smooth equivocation and verbal evasion for a brute fact. Because he talked about "killing Germans" when Germans had to be killed, all our shifty and shamefaced morality was shocked at him. And none of those protesting Protestants took thought for a moment to realise that they were showing all the shuffling insincerity they attributed to the Jesuits, and the Jesuit was showing all the plain candour that they claimed for the Protestant.

I could give a great many other instances besides, these I have given of the hidden Bible, the profligate priest or the treacherous Jesuit. I could go steadily through the list of all these more old-fashioned charges against Rome and show how they affected me, or rather why they did not affect me. But my only purpose here is to point out, as a preliminary, that they did not affect me at all. I had all the difficulties that a heathen would have had in becoming a Catholic in the fourth century. I had very few of the difficulties that a Protestant had, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth. And I owe this to men whose memories I shall always honour; to my father and his circle and the literary tradition of men like George Macdonald and the Universalists of the Victorian Age. If I was born on the wrong side of the Roman wall, at least I was not born on the wrong side of the No Popery quarrel; and if I did not inherit a fully civilised faith, neither did I inherit a barbarian feud. The people I was born amongst wished to be just to Catholics if they did not always understand them; and I should be very thankless if I did not record of them that (like a very much more valuable convert) I can say I was born free.

I will add one example to illustrate this point, because it leads us on to larger matters. After a long time — I might almost say after a lifetime — I have at last begun to realise what the worthy Liberal or Socialist of Balham or Battersea really means when he says he is an Internationalist and that humanity should be preferred to the narrowness of nations. It dawned on me quite suddenly, after I had talked to such a man for many hours, that of course he had really been brought up to believe that God’s Englishmen were the Chosen Race. Very likely his father or uncle actually thought they were the lost Ten Tribes. Anyhow, everything from his daily paper to his weekly sermon assumed that they were the salt of the earth, and especially that they were the salt of the sea. His people had never thought outside their British nationality. They lived in an Empire on which the sun never set, or possibly never rose. Their Church was emphatically the Church of England — even if it was a chapel. Their religion was the Bible that went everywhere with the Union Jack. And when I realised that, I realised the whole story. That was why they were excited by the exceedingly dull theory of the Internationalist. That was why the brotherhood of nations, which to me was a truism, to them was a trumpet. That was why it seemed such a thrilling paradox to say that we must love foreigners; it had in it the divine paradox that we must love enemies. That was why the Internationalist was always planning deputations and visits to foreign capitals and heart-to-heart talks and hands across the sea. It was the marvel of discovering that foreigners had hands, let alone hearts. There was in that excitement a sort of stifled cry: “Look! Frenchmen also have two legs! See! Germans have noses in the same place as we!” Now a Catholic, especially a born Catholic, can never understand that attitude, because from the first his whole religion is rooted in the unity of the race of Adam, the one and only Chosen Race. He is loyal to his own country; indeed he is generally ardently loyal to it, such local affections being in other ways very natural to his religious life, with its shrines and relics. But just as the relic follows upon the religion, so the local loyalty follows on the universal brotherhood of all men. The Catholic says, “Of course we must love all men: but what do all men love? They love their lands, their lawful boundaries, the memories of their fathers. That is the justification of being national, that it is normal.” But the Protestant patriot really never thought of any patriotism except his own. In that sense Protestantism is patriotism. But unfortunately it is only patriotism. It starts with it and never gets beyond it. We start with mankind and go beyond it to all the varied loves and traditions of mankind. There never was a more illuminating flash than that which lit up the last moment of one of the most glorious of English Protestants; one of the most Protestant and one of the most English. For that is the meaning of that phrase of Nurse Cavell, herself the noblest martyr of our modern religion of nationality, when the very shaft of the white sun of death shone deep into her mind and she cried aloud, like one who had just discovered something, “I see now that patriotism is not enough.”

There was this in common between the Catholics to whom I have come and the Liberals among whom I was born: neither of them would ever have imagined for a moment that patriotism was enough. But that insular idealism by which that great lady lived really had taught her unconsciously from childhood that patriotism was enough. Not seldom has the English lady appeared in history as a heroine; but generally as facing and defying strangers or savages, not specially as feeling them as fellows and equals. Those last words of the English martyr in Belgium have often been quoted by mere cosmopolitans; but cosmopolitans are the last people really to understand them. They are generally trying to prove, not that patriotism is not enough, but that it is a great deal too much. The point is here that hundreds of the most heroic and high-minded people in Protestant countries have really assumed that it is enough to be a patriot. The most careless and cynical of Catholics knows better; and so did the most vague and visionary of Universalists. Of all the Protestant difficulties, which I here find it hard to imagine, this is perhaps the most common and in many ways commendable: the fact that the normal British subject begins by being so very British. By accident I did not. The tradition I heard in my youth, the simple, the too simple truths inherited from Priestly and Martineau, had in them something of that grand generalisation upon men as men which, in the first of those great figures, faced the howling Jingoism of the French Wars and defied even the legend of Trafalgar. It is to that tradition that I owe the fact, whether it be an advantage or a disadvantage, that I cannot worthily analyse the very heroic virtues of a Plymouth Brother whose only centre is Plymouth. For that nationalism, defective as it was, began long ago in the same central civilisation in which the Church herself began; if it has ended in the Church it began long ago in the Republic: in a world where all these flags and frontiers were unknown; where all these state establishments and national sects were unthinkable; a vast cosmopolitan cosmos that had never heard the name of England, or conceived the image of a kingdom separate and at war; in that vast pagan peace which was the matrix of all these mysteries, which had forgotten the free cities and had not dreamed of the small nationalities; which knew only humanity, the humanum genus, and the name of Rome.

The Catholic Church loves nations as she loves men; because they are her children. But they certainly are her children, in the sense that they are secondary to her in time and process of production. This is, as it happens, a very good example of a fallacy that often confuses discussion about the convert. The same people who call he convert a pervert, and especially a traitor to patriotism, very often use the other catchword to the effect that he is forced to believe this or that. But it is not really a question of what a man is made to believe but of what he must believe; what he cannot help believing. He cannot disbelieve in an elephant when he has seen one; and he cannot treat the Church as a child when he has discovered that she is his mother. She is not only his mother but his country’s mother in being much older and more aboriginal than his country. She is such a mother not in sentimental feeling but in historical fact. He cannot think one thing when he knows the contrary thing. He cannot think that Christianity was invented by Penda of Mercia, who sent missionaries to the heathen Augustine and the rude and barbarous Gregory. He cannot think that the Church first rose in the middle of the British Empire, and not of the Roman Empire. He cannot think that England existed, with cricket and fox-hunting and the Jacobean translation all complete, when Rome was founded or when Christ was born.

It is no good talking about his being “free” to believe these things. He is exactly as free to believe them as he is to believe that a horse has feathers or that the sun is pea green. He cannot believe them when once he fully realises them; and among such things is the notion that the national claim upon a good patriot is in its nature more absolute, ancient and authoritative than the claim of the whole religious culture which first mapped out its territories and anointed its kings. That religious culture does indeed encourage him to fight to the last for his country, as for his family. But that is because the religious culture is generous and imaginative and humane and knows that men must have intimate and individual ties. But those secondary loyalties are secondary in time and logic to the law of universal morality which justifies them. And if the patriot is such a fool as to force the issue against that universal tradition from which his own patriotism descends, if he presses his claim to priority over the primitive law of the whole earth — then he will have brought it on himself if he is answered with the pulverising plainness of the Book of Job. As God said to the man, “Where were you when the foundations of the world were laid?” We might well say to the nation, “Where were you when the foundations of the Church were laid?” And the nation will not know in the least what to answer — if it should wish to answer — but will be forced to put its hand upon its mouth, if only like one who yawns and falls asleep.

I have taken this particular case of patriotism because it concerns at least an emotion in which I profoundly believe and happen to feel strongly. I have always done my best to defend it; though I have sometimes become suspect by sympathising with other people’s patriotism besides my own. But I cannot see how it can be defended except as part of a larger morality; and the Catholic morality happens to be one of the very few large moralities now ready to defend it. But the Church defends it as one of the duties of men and not as the whole duty of man; as it was in the Prussian theory of the State and too often in the British theory of the Empire. And for this the Catholic rests, exactly as the Universalist Unitarian rested, upon the actual fact of a human unity anterior to all these healthy and natural human divisions. But it is absurd to treat the Church as a novel conspiracy attacking the State, when the State was only recently a novel experiment arising within the Church. It is absurd to forget that the Church itself received the first loyalties of men who had not yet even conceived the notion of founding such a national and separate state; that the Faith really was not only the faith of our fathers, but the faith of our fathers before they had even named our fatherland.

CHAPTER III: THE REAL OBSTACLES

In the last chapter I have dealt in a preliminary fashion with the Protestant case in the conventional controversial sense. I have dealt with the objections which I suspected very early of being prejudices and which I now know to be prejudices. I have dealt last and at the greatest length with what I believe to be the noblest of all the prejudices of Protestantism: that which is simply founded on patriotism. I do not think patriotism is necessarily prejudice; but I am quite sure it must be prejudice and nothing else but prejudice, unless it is covered by some common morality. And a patriotism that does not allow other people to be patriots is not a morality but an immorality. Even such a tribal prejudice, however, is a more respectable thing than most of the rags and tatters of stale slander and muddleheadedness which I am obliged to put first as the official policy of the opposition to the Church. These stale stories seem to count for a great deal with people who are resolved to keep far away from the Church. I do not believe they ever counted with anybody who had begun to draw near to it. When a man really sees the Church, even if he dislikes what he sees, he does not see what he had expected to dislike. Even if he wants to slay it he is no longer able to slander it; though he hates it at sight, what he sees is not what he looked to see; in that place he may gain a new passion but he loses his old prejudice. There drops from him the holy armour of his invincible ignorance; he can never be so stupid again. If he has a ready mind he can doubtless set his new reasons in some sort of order and even attempt to link them with his lost tradition. But the thing he hates is there; and the last chapter was wholly devoted to the study of things that are not there.

The real reasons are almost the opposite of the recognised reasons. The real difficulties are almost the opposite of the recognised difficulties. This is connected, of course, with a general fact, now so large and obvious but still not clearly comprehended and confessed. The whole case of Protestantism against Catholicism has been turned clean round and is facing the contrary way. On practically every single point on which the Reformation accused the Church, the modern world has not only acquitted the Church of the crime, but has actually charged it with the opposite crime. It is as if the reformers had mobbed the Pope for being a miser, and then the court had not only acquitted him but had censured him for his extravagance in scattering money among the mob. The principle of modern Protestantism seems to be that so long as we go on shouting “To hell with the Pope” there is room for the widest differences of opinion about whether he should go to the hell of the misers or the hell of the spendthrifts. This is what is meant by a broad basis for Christianity and the statement that there is room for many different opinions side by side. When the reformer says that the principles of the Reformation give freedom to different points of view, he means that they give freedom to the Universalist to curse Rome for having too much predestination and to the Calvinist to curse her for having too little. He means that in that happy family there is a place for the No Popery man who finds Purgatory too tender-hearted and also for the other No Popery man who finds Hell too harsh. He means that the same description can somehow be made to cover the Tolstoyan who blames priests because they permit patriotism and the Diehard who blames priests because they represent Internationalism. After all, the essential aim of true Christianity is that priests should be blamed; and who are we that we should set narrow dogmatic limits to the various ways in which various temperaments may desire to blame them? Why should we allow a cold difficulty of the logician, technically called a contradiction in terms, to stand between us and the warm and broadening human brotherhood of all who are full of sincere and unaffected dislike of their neighbours? Religion is of the heart, not of the head; and as long as all our hearts are full of a hatred for everything that our fathers loved, we can go on flatly contradicting each other for ever about what there is to be hated.

Such is the larger and more liberal modern attack upon the Church. It is quite inconsistent with the old doctrinal attack; but it does not propose to lose the advantages arising from any sort of attack. But in a somewhat analogous fashion, it will be found that the real difficulties of a modern convert are almost the direct contrary of those which were alleged by the more ancient Protestants. Protestant pamphlets do not touch even remotely any of the real hesitations that he feels; and even Catholic pamphlets have often been concerned too much with answering the Protestant pamphlets. Indeed, the only sense in which the priests and propagandists of Catholicism can really be said to be behind the times is that they sometimes go on flogging a dead horse and killing a heresy long after it has killed itself. But even that is, properly understood, a fault on the side of chivalry. The preacher, and even the persecutor, really takes the heresy more seriously than it is seen ultimately to deserve; the inquisitor has more respect for the heresy than the heretics have. Still, it is true that the grounds of suspicion or fear that do really fill the convert, and sometimes paralyse him at the very point of conversion, have really nothing in the world to do with this old crop of crude slanders and fallacies, and are often the very inversion of them.

The short way of putting it is to say that he is no longer afraid of the vices but very much afraid of the virtues of Catholicism. For instance, he has forgotten all about the old nonsense of the cunning lies of the confessional, in his lively and legitimate alarm of the truthfulness of the confessional. He does not recoil from its insincerity but from its sincerity; nor is he necessarily insincere in doing so. Realism is really a rock of offence; it is not at all unnatural to shrink from it; and most modern realists only manage to like it because they are careful to be realistic about other people. He is near enough to the sacrament of penance to have discovered its realism and not near enough to have yet discovered its reasonableness and its common sense. Most of those who have gone through this experience have a certain right to say, like the old soldier to his ignorant comrade, “Yes, I was afraid; and if you were half as much afraid, you would run away.” Perhaps it is just as well that people go through this stage before discovering how very little there is to be afraid of. In any case, I will say little more of that example here, having a feeling that absolution, like death and marriage, is a thing that a man ought to find out for himself. It will be enough to say that this is perhaps the supreme example of the fact that the Faith is a paradox that measures more within than without. If that be true of the smallest church, it is truer still of the yet smaller confessional-box, that is like a church within a church. It is almost a good thing that nobody outside should know what gigantic generosity, and even geniality, can be locked up in a box, as the legendary casket held the heart of the giant. It is a satisfaction, and almost a joke, that it is only in a dark corner and a cramped space that any man can discover that mountain of magnanimity.

It is the same with all the other points of attack, especially the old ones. The man who has come so far as that along the road has long left behind him the notion that the priest will force him to abandon his will. But he is not unreasonably dismayed at the extent to which he may have to use his will. He is not frightened because, after taking this drug, he will be henceforward irresponsible. But he is very much frightened because he will be responsible. He will have somebody to be responsible to and he will know what he is responsible for; two uncomfortable conditions which his more fortunate fellow-creatures have nowadays entirely escaped. There are of course many other examples of the same principle: that there is indeed an interval of acute doubt, which is, strictly speaking, rather fear than doubt, since in some cases at least (as I shall point out elsewhere) there is actually least doubt when there is most fear.

But anyhow, the doubts are hardly ever of the sort suggested by ordinary anti-Catholic propaganda: and it is surely time that such propagandists brought themselves more in touch with the real problem. The Catholic is scarcely ever frightened of the Protestant picture of Catholicism; but he is sometimes frightened of the Catholic picture of Catholicism; which may be a good reason for not disproportionately stressing the difficult or puzzling parts of the scheme. For the convert's sake, it should also be remembered that one foolish word from inside does more harm than a hundred thousand foolish words from outside. The latter he has already learned to expect, like a blind hail or rain beating upon the Ark; but the voices from within, even the most casual and accidental, he is already prepared to regard as holy or more than human; and though this is unfair to people who only profess to be human beings, it is a fact that Catholics ought to remember. There is many a convert who has reached a stage at which no word from any Protestant or pagan could any longer hold him back. Only the word of a Catholic can keep him from Catholicism.

It is quite false, in my experience, to say that Jesuits, or any other Roman priests, pester and persecute people in order to proselytise. Nobody has any notion of what the whole story is about, who does not know that, through those long and dark and indecisive days, it is the man who persecutes himself. The apparent inaction of the priest may be something like the statuesque stillness of the angler; and such an attitude is not unnatural in the functions of a fisher of men. But it is very seldom impatient or premature and the person acted upon is quite lonely enough to realise that it is nothing merely external that is tugging at his liberty. The laity are probably less wise; for in most communions the ecclesiastical layman is more ecclesiastical than is good for his health, and certainly much more ecclesiastical than the ecclesiastics. My experience is that the amateur is generally much more angry than the professional; and if he expresses his irritation at the slow process of conversion, or the inconsistencies of the intermediate condition, he may do a great deal of harm, of the kind that he least intends to do. I know in my own case that I always experienced a slight setback whenever some irresponsible individual interposed to urge me on. It is worth while, for practical reasons, to testify to such experience, because it may guide the convert when he in his turn begins converting. Our enemies no longer really know how to attack the faith; but that is no reason why we should not know how to defend it.

Yet even that one trivial or incidental caution carries with it a reminder of what has been already noted: I mean the fact that whatever be the Catholic's worries, they are the very contrary of the Protestant's warnings. Merely as a matter of personal experience, I have been led to note here that it is not generally the priest, but much more often the layman, who rather too ostentatiously compasses sea and land to make one proselyte. All the creepy and uncanny whispers about the horror of having the priest in the home, as if he were a sort of vampire or a monster intrinsically different from mankind, vanishes with the smallest experience of the militant layman. The priest does his job, but it is much more his secular co-religionist who is disposed to explain it and talk about it. I do not object to laymen proselytising; for I never could see, even when I was practically a pagan, why a man should not urge his own opinions if he liked and that opinion as much as any other. I am not likely to complain of the evangelising energy of Mr. Hilaire Belloc or Mr. Eric Gill; if only because I owe to it the most intelligent talks of my youth. But it is that sort of man who proselytises in that sort of way; and the conventional caricature is wrong again when it always represents him in a cassock. Catholicism is not spread by any particular professional tricks or tones or secret signs or ceremonies. Catholicism is spread by Catholics; but not certainly, in private life at least, merely by Catholic priests. I merely give this here out of a hundred examples, as showing once again that the old traditional version of the terrors of Popery was almost always wrong, even where it might possibly have been right. A man may say if he likes that Catholicism is the enemy; and he may be stating from his point of view a profound spiritual truth. But if he says that Clericalism is the enemy, he is repeating a catchword.

It is my experience that the convert commonly passes through three stages or states of mind. The first is when he imagines himself to be entirely detached, or even to be entirely indifferent, but in the old sense of the term, as when the Prayer Book talks of judges who will truly and indifferently administer justice. Some flippant modern person would probably agree that our judges administer justice very indifferently. But the older meaning was legitimate and even logical and it is that which is applicable here. The first phase is that of the young philosopher who feels that he ought to be fair to the Church of Rome. He wishes to do it justice; but chiefly because he sees that it suffers injustice. I remember that when I was first on the Daily News, the great Liberal organ of the Nonconformists, I took the trouble to draw up a list of fifteen falsehoods which I found out, by my own personal knowledge, in a denunciation of Rome by Messrs. Horton and Hocking. I noted, for instance, that it was nonsense to say that the Covenanters fought for religious liberty when the Covenant denounced religious toleration; that it was false to say the Church only asked for orthodoxy and was indifferent to morality, since, if this was true of anybody, it was obviously true of the supporters of salvation by faith and not of salvation by works; that it was absurd to say that Catholics introduced a horrible sophistry of saying that a man might sometimes tell a lie, since every sane man knows he would tell a lie to save a child from Chinese torturers; that it missed the whole point, in this connection, to quote Ward's phrase, "Make up your mind that you are justified in lying and then lie like a trooper," for Ward's argument was against equivocation or what people call Jesuitry. He meant, "When the child really is hiding in the cupboard and the Chinese torturers really are chasing him with red-hot pincers, then (and then only) be sure that you are right to deceive and do not hesitate to lie; but do not stoop to equivocate. Do not bother yourself to say, "The child is in a wooden house not far from here," meaning the cupboard; but say the child is in Chiswick or Chimbora zoo, or anywhere you choose." I find I made elaborate notes of all these arguments all that long time ago, merely for the logical pleasure of disentangling an intellectual injustice. I had no more idea of becoming a Catholic than of becoming a cannibal. I imagined that I was merely pointing out that justice should be done even to cannibals. I imagined that I was noting certain fallacies partly for the fun of the thing and partly for a certain feeling of loyalty to the truth of things. But as a matter of fact, looking back on these notes (which I never published), it seems to me that I took a tremendous amount of trouble about it if I really regarded it as a trifle; and taking trouble has certainly never been a particular weakness of mine. It seems to me that something was already working subconsciously to keep me more interested in fallacies about this particular topic than in fallacies about Free Trade or Female Suffrage or the House of Lords. Anyhow, that is the first stage in my own case and I think in many other cases: the stage of simply wishing to protect Papists from slander and oppression, not (consciously at least) because they hold any particular truth, but because they suffer from a particular accumulation of falsehood. The second stage is that in which the convert begins to be conscious not only of the falsehood but the truth and is enormously excited to find that there is far more of it than he would ever have expected. This is not so much a stage as a progress; and it goes on pretty rapidly but often for a long time. It consists in discovering what a very large number of lively and interesting ideas there are in the Catholic philosophy, that a great many of them commend themselves at once to his sympathies, and that even those which he would not accept have something to be said for them justifying their acceptance. This process, which may be called discovering the Catholic Church, is perhaps the most pleasant and straightforward part of the business easier than joining the Catholic Church and much easier than trying to live the Catholic life. It is like discovering a new continent full of strange flowers and fantastic animals, which is at once wild and hospitable. To give anything like a full account of that process would simply be to discuss about half a hundred Catholic ideas and institutions in turn. I might remark that much of it consists of the act of translation; of discovering the real meaning of words, which the Church uses rightly and the world uses wrongly. For instance, the convert discovers that “scandal” does not mean “gossip”; and the sin of causing it does not mean that it is always wicked to set silly old women wagging their tongues. Scandal means scandal, what it originally meant in Greek and Latin: the tripping up of somebody else when he is trying to be good. Or he will discover that phrases like “counsel of perfection” or “venial sin,” which mean nothing at all in the newspapers, mean something quite intelligent and interesting in the manuals of moral theology. He begins to realise that it is the secular world that spoils the sense of words; and he catches an exciting glimpse of the real case for the iron immortality of the Latin Mass. It is not a question between a dead language and a living language, in the sense of an everlasting language. It is a question between a dead language and a dying language; an inevitably degenerating language. It is these numberless glimpses of great ideas, that have been hidden from the convert by the prejudices of his provincial culture, that constitute the adventurous and varied second stage of the conversion. It is, broadly speaking, the stage in which the man is unconsciously trying to be converted. And the third stage is perhaps the truest and the most terrible. It is that in which the man is trying not to be converted.

He has come too near to the truth, and has forgotten that truth is a magnet, with the powers of attraction and repulsion. He is filled with a sort of fear, which makes him feel like a fool who has been patronising "Popery" when he ought to have been awakening to the reality of Rome. He discovers a strange and alarming fact, which is perhaps implied in Newman's interesting lecture on Blanco White and the two ways of attacking Catholicism. Anyhow, it is a truth that Newman and every other convert has probably found in one form or another. It is impossible to be just to the Catholic Church. The moment men cease to pull against it they feel a tug towards it. The moment they cease to shout it down they begin to listen to it with pleasure. The moment they try to be fair to it they begin to be fond of it. But when that affection has passed a certain point it begins to take on the tragic and menacing grandeur of a great love affair. The man has exactly the same sense of having committed or compromised himself; of having been in a sense entrapped, even if he is glad to be entrapped. But for a considerable time he is not so much glad as simply terrified. It may be that this real psychological experience has been misunderstood by stupider people and is responsible for all that remains of the legend that Rome is a mere trap. But that legend misses the whole point of the psychology. It is not the Pope who has set the trap or the priests who have baited it. The whole point of the position is that the trap is simply the truth. The whole point is that the man himself has made his way towards the trap of truth, and not the trap that has run after the man. All steps except the last step he has taken eagerly on his own account, out of interest in the truth; and even the last step, or the last stage, only alarms him because it is so very true. If I may refer once more to a personal experience, I may say that I for one was never less troubled by doubts than in the last phase, when I was troubled by fears. Before that final delay I had been detached and ready to regard all sorts of doctrines with an open mind. Since that delay has ended in decision, I have had all sorts of changes in mere mood; and I think I sympathise with doubts and difficulties more than I did before. But I had no doubts or difficulties just before. I had only fears; fears of something that had the finality and simplicity of suicide. But the more I thrust the thing into the back of my mind, the more certain I grew of what Thing it was. And by a paradox that does not frighten me now in the least, it may be that I shall never again have such absolute assurance that the thing is true as I had when I made my last effort to deny it.

There is a postscript or smaller point to be added here to this paradox; which I know that many will misunderstand. Becoming a Catholic broadens the mind. It especially broadens the mind about the reasons for becoming a Catholic. Standing in the centre where all roads meet, a man can look down each of the roads in turn and realise that they come from all points of the heavens. As long as he is still marching along his own road, that is the only road that can be seen, or sometimes even imagined. For instance, many a man who is not yet a Catholic calls himself a Mediaevalist. But a man who is only a Mediaevalist is very much broadened by becoming a Catholic. I am myself a Mediaevalist, in the sense that I think modern life has a great deal to learn from mediaeval life; that Guilds are a better social system than Capitalism; that friars are far less offensive than philanthropists. But I am a much more reasonable and moderate Mediaevalist than I was when I was only a Mediaevalist. For instance, I felt it necessary to be perpetually pitting Gothic architecture against Greek architecture, because it was necessary to back up Christians against pagans. But now I am in no such fuss and I know what Coventry Patmore meant when he said calmly that it would have been quite as Catholic to decorate his mantelpiece with the Venus of Milo as with the Virgin. As a Mediaevalist I am still proudest of the Gothic; but as a Catholic I am proud of the Baroque. That intensity which seems almost narrow because it comes to the point, like a mediaeval window, is very representative of that last concentration that comes just before conversion. At the last moment of all, the convert often feels as if he were looking through a leper’s window. He is looking through a little crack or crooked hole that seems to grow smaller as he stares at it; but it is an opening that looks towards the Altar. Only, when he has entered the Church, he finds that the Church is much larger inside than it is outside. He has left behind him the lop-sidedness of lepers’ windows and even in a sense the narrowness of Gothic doors; and he is under vast domes as open as the Renaissance and as universal as the Republic of the world. He can say in a sense unknown to all modern men certain ancient and serene words: Romanus civis sum; I am not a slave.

The point for the moment, however, is that there is generally an interval of intense nervousness, to say the least of it, before this normal heritage is reached. To a certain extent it is a fear which attaches to all sharp and irrevocable decisions; it is suggested in all the old jokes about the shakiness of the bridegroom at the wedding or the recruit who takes the shilling and gets drunk partly to celebrate, but partly also to forget it. But it is the fear of a fuller sacrament and a mightier army. He has, by the nature of the case, left a long way behind him the mere clumsy idea that the sacrament will poison him or the army will kill him. He has probably passed the point, though he does generally pass it at some time, when he wonders whether the whole business is an extraordinarily intelligent and ingenious confidence trick. He is not now in the condition which may be called the last phase of real doubt. I mean that in which he wondered whether the thing that everybody told him was too bad to be tolerable, is not too good to be true. Here again the recurrent principle is present; and the obstacle is the very opposite of that which Protestant propaganda has pointed out. If he still has the notion of being trapped, he has no longer any notion of being tricked. He is not afraid of finding the Church out, but rather of the Church finding him out.

This note on the stages of conversion is necessarily very negative and inadequate. There is in the last second of time or hair's breadth of space, before the iron leaps to the magnet, an abyss full of all the unfathomable forces of the universe. The space between doing and not doing such a thing is so tiny and so vast. It is only possible here to give the reasons for Catholicism, not the cause of Catholicism. I have tried to suggest here some of the enlightenments and experiences which gradually teach those who have been taught to think ill of the Church to begin to think well of her. That anything described as so bad should turn out to be so good is itself a rather arresting process having a savour of something sensational and strange. To come to curse and remain to bless, to come to scoff and remain to pray, is always welcome in a spirit of wonder and the glow of an unexpected good.

But it is one thing to conclude that Catholicism is good and another to conclude that it is right. It is one thing to conclude that it is right and another to conclude that it is always right. I had never believed the tradition that it was diabolical; I had soon come to doubt the idea that it was inhuman, but that would only have left me with the obvious inference that it was human. It is a considerable step from that to the inference that it is divine. When we come to that conviction of divine authority, we come to the more mysterious matter of divine aid. In other words. we come to the unfathomable idea of grace and the gift of faith; and I have not the smallest intention of attempting to fathom it. It is a theological question of the utmost complexity; and it is one thing to feel it as a fact and another to define it as a truth. One or two points about the preliminary dispositions that prepare the mind for it are all that need be indicated here. To begin with, there is one sense in which the blackest bigots are really the best philosophers. The Church really is like Antichrist in the sense that it is as unique as Christ. Indeed, if it be not Christ it probably is Antichrist; but certainly it is not Moses or Mahomet or Buddha or Plato or Pythagoras. The more we see of humanity, the more we sympathise with humanity, the more we shall see that when it is simply human it is simply heathen; and the names of its particular local gods or tribal prophets or highly respectable sages are a secondary matter compared with that human and heathen character. In the old paganism of Europe, in the existing paganism of Asia, there have been gods and priests and prophets and sages of all sorts; but not another institution of this sort. The pagan cults die very slowly; they do not return very rapidly. They do not make the sort of claim that is made at a crisis; and then make the same claim again and again at crisis after crisis throughout the whole history of the earth. All that people fear in the Church, all that they hate in her, all against which they most harden their hearts and sometimes (one is tempted to say) thicken their heads, all that has made people consciously and unconsciously treat the Catholic Church as a peril, is the evidence that there is something here that we cannot look on at languidly and with detachment, as we might look on at Hottentotts dancing at the new moon or Chinamen burning paper in porcelain temples. The Chinaman and the tourist can be on the best of terms on a basis of mutual scorn. But in the duel of the Church and the world is no such shield of contempt. The Church will not consent to scorn the soul of a coolie or even a tourist; and the measure of the madness with which men hate her is but their vain attempt to despise.

Another element, far more deep and delicate and hard to describe, is the immediate connection of what is most awful and archaic with what is most intimate and individual. It is a miracle in itself that anything so huge and historic in date and design should be so fresh in the affections. It is as if a man found his own parlour and fireside in the heart of the Great Pyramid. It is as if a child's favourite doll turned out to be the oldest sacred image in the world, worshipped in Chaldea or Nineveh. It is as if a girl to whom a man made love in a garden were also, in some dark and double fashion, a statue standing for ever in a square. It is just here that all those things which were regarded as weakness come in as the fulness of strength. Everything that men called sentimental in Roman Catholic religion, its keepsakes, its small flowers and almost tawdry trinkets, its figures with merciful gestures and gentle eyes, its avowedly popular pathos and all that Matthew Arnold meant by Christianity with its "relieving tears" — all this is a sign of sensitive and vivid vitality in anything so vast and settled and systematic. There is nothing quite like this warmth, as in the warmth of Christmas, amid ancient hills hoary with such snows of antiquity. It can address even God Almighty with diminutives. In all its varied vestments it wears its Sacred Heart upon its sleeve. But to those who know that it is full of these lively affections, like little leaping flames, there is something of almost ironic satisfaction in the stark and primitive size of the thing, like some prehistoric monster; in its spires and mitres like the horns of giant herds or its colossal cornerstones like the four feet of an elephant. It would be easy to write a merely artistic study of the strange externals of the Roman religion, which should make it seem as uncouth and unearthly as Aztec or African religion It would be easy to talk of it as if it were really some sort of mammoth or monster elephant, older than the Ice Age, towering over the Stone Age; his very lines traced, it would seem, in the earthquakes or landslides of some older creation, his very organs and outer texture akin to unrecorded patterns of vegetation and air and light — the last residuum of a lost world. But the prehistoric monster is in the Zoological Gardens and not in the Natural History Museum. The extinct animal is still alive. And anything outlandish and unfamiliar in its form accentuates the startling naturalness and familiarity of its mind, as if the Sphinx began suddenly to talk of the topics of the hour. The super-elephant is not only a tame animal but a pet; and a young child shall lead him.

This antithesis between all that is formidable and remote and all that is personally relevant and realistically tender is another of those converging impressions which meet in the moment of conviction. But of all these things, that come nearest to the actual transition of the gift of faith, it is far harder to write than of the rationalistic and historical preliminaries of the enquiry. It is only with those preliminary dispositions towards the truth that I claim to deal here. In the chapters that follow I propose to touch upon two of the larger considerations of this class, not because they are in themselves any larger than many other immense aspects of so mighty a theme, but because they happen to balance each other and form a sort of antithesis very typical of all Catholic truth. In the first of the two chapters I shall try to point out how it is that when we praise the Church for her greatness we do not merely mean her largeness but, in a rather notable and unique sense, her universality. We mean her power of being cosmos and containing other things. And in the second chapter I shall point out what may seem to disturb this truth but really balances it. I mean the fact that we value the Church because she is a Church Militant; and sometimes even because she militates against ourselves. She is something more than the cosmos, in the sense of completed nature or completed human nature. She proves that she is some thing more by sometimes being right where they are wrong. These two aspects must be considered separately, though they come together to form the full conviction that comes just before conversion. But in this chapter I have merely noted down a few points or stages of the conversion considered as a practical process; and especially those three stages of it through which many a Protestant or Agnostic must have passed. Many a man, looking back cheerfully on them now, will not be annoyed if I call the first, patronising the Church; and the second, discovering the Church; and the third, running away from the Church. When those three phases are over, a larger truth begins to come into sight; it is much too large to describe and we will proceed to describe it.

CHAPTER IV: THE WORLD INSIDE OUT

The first fallacy about the Catholic Church is the idea that it is a church. I mean that it is a church in the sense in which the Nonconformist newspapers talk about The Churches. I do not intend any expression of contempt about The Churches; nor is it an expression of contempt to say that it would be more convenient to call them the sects. This is true in a much deeper and more sympathetic sense than may at first appear; but to begin with, it is certainly true in a perfectly plain and historical sense, which has nothing to do with sympathy at all. Thus, for instance, I have much more sympathy for small nationalities than I have for small sects. But it is simply a historical fact that the Roman Empire was the Empire and that it was not a small nationality. And it is simply a historical fact that the Roman Church is the Church and is not a sect. Nor is there anything narrow or unreasonable in saying that the Church is the Church. It may be a good thing that the Roman Empire broke up into nations; but it certainly was not one of the nations into which it broke up. And even a person who thinks it fortunate that the Church broke up into sects ought to be able to distinguish between the little things he likes and the big thing he has broken. As a matter of fact, in the case of things so large, so unique and so creative of the culture about them as were the Roman Empire and the Roman Church, it is not controversial but simply correct to confine the one word to the one example. Everybody who originally used the word “Empire” used it of that Empire; everybody who used the word “Ecclesia” used it of that Ecclesia. There may have been similar things in other places, but they could not be called by the same name for the simple reason that they were not named in the same language. We know what we mean by a Roman Emperor; we can if we like talk of a Chinese Emperor, just as we can if we like take a particular sort of a Mandarin and say he is equivalent to a Marquis. But we never can be certain that he is exactly equivalent; for the thing we are thinking about is peculiar to our own history and in that sense stands alone. Now in that, if in no other sense, the Catholic Church stands alone. It does not merely belong to a class of Christian churches. It does not merely belong to a class of human religions. Considered quite coldly and impartially, as by a man from the moon, it is much more sui generis than that. It is, if the critic chooses to think so, the ruin of an attempt at a Universal Religion which was bound to fail. But calling the wreckers to break up a ship does not turn the ship into one of its own timbers; and cutting Poland up into three pieces does not make Poland the same as Posen.

But in a much more profound and philosophical sense this notion that the Church is one of the sects is the great fallacy of the whole affair. It is a matter more psychological and more difficult to describe. But it is perhaps the most sensational of the silent upheavals or reversals in the mind that constitute the revolution called conversion. Every man conceives himself as moving about in a cosmos of some kind; and the man of the days of my youth walked about in a kind of vast and airy Crystal Palace in which there were exhibits set side by side. The cosmos, being made of glass and iron, was partly transparent and partly colourless; anyhow, there was something negative about it; arching over all our heads, a roof as remote as a sky, it seemed to be impartial and impersonal. Our attention was fixed on the exhibits, which were all carefully ticketed and arranged in rows; for it was the age of science. Here stood all the religions in a row — the churches or sects or whatever we called them; and towards the end of the row there was a particularly dingy and dismal one, with a pointed roof half fallen in and pointed windows most broken with stones by passers-by; and we were told that this particular exhibit was the Roman Catholic Church. Some of us were sorry for it and even fancied it had been rather badly used; most of us regarded it as dirty and disreputable; a few of us even pointed out that many details in the ruin were artistically beautiful or architecturally important. But most people preferred to deal at other and more business-like booths; at the Quaker shop of Peace and Plenty or the Salvation Army store where the showman beats the big drum outside. Now conversion consists very largely, on its intellectual side, in the discovery that all that picture of equal creeds inside an indifferent cosmos is quite false. It is not a question of comparing the merits and defects of the Quaker meeting-house set beside the Catholic cathedral. It is the Quaker meeting-house that is inside the Catholic cathedral; it is the Catholic cathedral that covers everything like the vault of the Crystal Palace; and it is when we look up at the vast distant dome covering all the exhibits that we trace the Gothic roof and the pointed windows. In other words, Quakerism is but a temporary form of Quietism which has arisen technically outside the Church as the Quietism of Fenelon appeared technically inside the Church. But both were in themselves temporary and would have, like Fenelon, sooner or later to return to the Church in order to live. The principle of life in all these variations of Protestantism, in so far as it is not a principle of death, consists of what remained in them of Catholic Christendom; and to Catholic Christendom they have always returned to be recharged with vitality. I know that this will sound like a statement to be challenged; but it is true. The return of Catholic ideas to the separated parts of Christendom was often indeed indirect. But though the influence came through many, centrest it always came from one. It came through the Romantic Movement, a glimpse of the mere picturesqueness of mediaevalism; but it is something more than an accident that Romances, like Romance languages, are named after Rome. Or it came through the instinctive reaction of old-fashioned people like Johnson or Scott or Cobbett, wishing to save old elements that had originally been Catholic against a progress that was merely Capitalist. But it led them to denounce that Capitalist progress and become, like Cobbett, practical foes of Protestantism without being practising followers of Catholicism. Or it came from the Pre-Raphaelites or the opening of continental art and culture by Matthew Arnold and Morris and Ruskin and the rest. But examine the actual make-up of the mind of a good Quaker or Congregational minister at this moment, and compare it with the mind of such a dissenter in the Little Bethel before such culture came. And you will see how much of his health and happiness he owes to Ruskin and what Ruskin owed to Giotto; to Morris and what Morris owed to Chaucer; to fine scholars of his own school like Philip Wicksteed, and what they owe to Dante and St. Thomas. Such a man will still sometimes talk of the Middle Ages as the Dark Ages. But the Dark Ages have improved the wallpaper on his wall and the dress on his wife and all the whole dingy and vulgar life which he lived in the days of Stiggins and Brother Tadger. For he also is a Christian and lives only by the life of Christendom.

It is not easy to express this enormous inversion which I have here tried to suggest in the image of a world turned inside out. I mean that the thing which had been stared at as a small something swells out and swallows everything. Christendom is in the literal sense a continent. We come to feel that it contains everything, even the things in revolt against itself. But it is perhaps the most towering intellectual transformation of all and the one that it is hardest to undo even for the sake of argument. It is almost impossible even in imagination to reverse that reversal. Another way of putting it is to say that we have come to regard all these historical figures as characters in Catholic history, even if they are not Catholics. And in a certain sense, the historical as distinct from the theological sense, they never do cease to be Catholic. They are not people who have really created something entirely new, until they actually pass the border of reason and create more or less crazy nightmares. But nightmares do not last; and most of them even now are in various stages of waking up. Protestants are Catholics gone wrong; that is what is really meant by saying they are Christians. Sometimes they have gone very wrong; but not often have they gone right ahead with their own particular wrong. Thus a Calvinist is a Catholic obsessed with the Catholic idea of the sovereignty of God. But when he makes it mean that God wishes particular people to be damned, we may say with all restraint that he has become a rather morbid Catholic. In point of fact he is a diseased Catholic; and the disease left to itself would be death or madness. But, as a matter of fact, the disease did not last long, and is itself now practically dead. But every step he takes back towards humanity is a step back towards Catholicism. Thus a Quaker is a, Catholic obsessed with the Catholic idea of gentle simplicity and truth. But when he made it mean that it is a lie to say “you” and an act of idolatry to take off your hat to a lady, it is not too much to say that whether or not he had a hat off, he certainly had a tile loose. But as a matter of fact he himself found it necessary to dispense with the eccentricity (and the hat) and to leave the straight road that would have led him to a lunatic asylum. Only every step he takes back towards common sense is a step back towards Catholicism. In so far as he was right he was a Catholic; and in so far as he was wrong he has not himself been able to remain a Protestant.

To us, therefore, it is henceforth impossible to think of the Quaker as a figure at the beginning of a new Quaker history or the Calvinist as the founder of a new Calvinistic world. It is quite obvious to us that they are simply characters in our own Catholic history, only characters who caused a great deal of trouble by trying to do something that we could do better and that they did not really do at all. Now some may suppose that this can be maintained of the older sects like Calvinists and Quakers, but cannot be maintained of modern movements like those of Socialists or Spiritualists. But they will be quite wrong. The covering or continental character of the Church applies just as much to modern manias as to the old religious manias; it applies quite as much to Materialists or Spiritualists as to

Puritans. In all of them you find that some Catholic dogma is, first, taken for granted; then exaggerated into an error; and then generally reacted against and rejected as an error, bringing the individual in question a few steps back again on the homeward road. And this is almost always the mark of such a heretic; that while he will wildly question any other Catholic dogma, he never dreams of questioning his own favourite Catholic dogma and does not even seem to know that it could be questioned. It never occurred to the Calvinist that anybody might use his liberty to deny or limit the divine omnipotence, or to the Quaker that anyone could question the supremacy of simplicity. That is exactly the situation of the Socialist. Bolshevism and every shade of any such theory of brotherhood is based upon one unfathomably mystical Catholic dogma; the equality of men. The Communists stake everything on the equality of man as the Calvinists staked everything on the omnipotence of God. They ride it to death as the others rode their dogma to death, turning their horse into a nightmare. But it never seems to occur to them that some people do not believe in the Catholic dogma of the mystical equality of men. Yet there are many, even among Christians, who are so heretical as to question it. The Socialists get into a great tangle when they try to apply it; they compromise with their own ideals; they modify their own doctrine; and so find themselves, like the Quakers and the Calvinists, after all their extreme extravagances, a day's march nearer Rome.

In short, the story of these sects is not one of straight lines striking outwards and onwards, though if it were they would all be striking in different directions. It is a pattern of curves continually returning into the continent and common life of their and our civilisation; and the summary of that civilisation and central sanity is the philosophy of the Catholic Church. To us, Spiritualists are men studying the existence of spirits, in a brief and blinding oblivion of the existence of evil spirits. They are, as it were, people just educated enough to have heard of ghosts but not educated enough to have heard of witches. If the evil spirits succeed in stopping their education and stunting their minds, they may of course go on for ever repeating silly messages from Plato and doggerel verses from Milton. But if they do go a step or two further, instead of marking time on the borderland, their next step will be to learn what the Church could have taught. To us, Christian Scientists are simply people with one idea, which they have never learnt to balance and combine with all the other ideas. That is why the wealthy business man so often becomes a Christian Scientist. He is not used to ideas and one idea goes to his head, like one glass of wine to a starving man. But the Catholic Church is used to living with ideas and walks among all those very dangerous wild beasts with the poise and the lifted head of a lion-tamer. The Christian Scientist can go on monotonously repeating his one idea and remain a Christian Scientist. But if ever he really goes on to any other ideas, he will be so much the nearer to being a Catholic.

When the convert has once seen the world like that, with one balance of ideas and a number of other ideas that have left it and lost their balance, he does not in fact experience any of the inconveniences that he might reasonably have feared before that silent but stunning revolution. He is not worried by being told that there is something in Spiritualism or something in Christian Science. He knows there is something in everything. But he is moved by the more impressive fact that he finds everything in something. And he is quite sure that if these investigators really are looking for everything, and not merely looking for anything, they will be more and more likely to look for it in the same place. In that sense he is far less worried about them than he was when he thought that one or other of them might be the only person having any sort of communication with the higher mysteries and obviously rather capable of making a mess of it. He is no more likely to be overawed by the fact that Mrs. Eddy achieved spiritual healing or Mr. Home achieved bodily levitation than a fully dressed gentleman in Bond Street would be overawed by the top-hat on the head of a naked savage. A top-hat may be a good hat but it is a bad costume. And a magnetic trick may be a sufficient sensation but it is a very insufficient philosophy. He is no more envious of a Bolshevist for making a revolution than of a beaver for making a dam; for he knows his own civilisation can make things on a pattern not quite so simple or so monotonous. But he believes this of his civilisation and his religion and not merely of himself. There is nothing supercilious about his attitude; because he is well aware that he has only scratched the surface of the spiritual estate that is now open to him. In other words, the convert does not in the least abandon investigation or even adventure. He does not think he knows everything, nor has he lost curiosity about the things he does not know. But experience has taught him that he will find nearly everything somewhere inside that estate and that a very large number of people are finding next to nothing outside it. For the estate is not only a formal garden or an ordered farm;

there is plenty of hunting and fishing on it, and, as the phrase goes, very good sport.

For this is one of the very queerest of the common delusions about what happens to the convert. In some muddled way people have confused the natural remarks of converts, about having found moral peace, with some idea of their having found mental rest, in the sense of mental inaction. They might as well say that a man who has completely recovered his health, after an attack of palsy or St. Vitus' dance, signalises his healthy state by sitting absolutely still like a stone. Recovering his health means recovering his power of moving in the right way as distinct from the wrong way; but he will probably move a great deal more than before. To become a Catholic is not to leave off thinking, but to learn how to think. It is so in exactly the same sense in which to recover from palsy is not to leave off moving but to learn how to move. The Catholic convert has for the first time a starting-point for straight and strenuous thinking. He has for the first time a way of testing the truth in any question that he raises. As the world goes, especially at present, it is the other people, the heathen and the heretics, who seem to have every virtue except the power of connected thought. There was indeed a brief period when a small minority did some hard thinking on the heathen or heretical side. It barely lasted from the time of Voltaire to the time of Huxley. It has now entirely disappeared. What is now called free thought is valued, not because it is free thought, but because it is freedom from thought; because it is free thoughtlessness.

Nothing is more amusing to the convert, when his conversion has been complete for some time, than to hear the speculations about when or whether he will repent of the conversion; when he will be sick of it, how long he will stand it, at what stage of his external exasperation he will start up and say he can bear it no more. For all this is founded on that optical illusion about the outside and the inside which I have tried to sketch in this chapter. The outsiders, stand by and see, or think they see, the convert entering with bowed head a sort of small temple which they are convinced is fitted up inside like a prison, if not a torture-chamber. But all they really know about it is that he has passed through a door. They do not know that he has not gone into the inner darkness, but out into the broad daylight. It is he who is, in the beautiful and beatific sense of the word, an outsider. He does not want to go into a larger room, because he does not know of any larger room to go into. He knows of a large number of much smaller rooms, each of which is labelled as being very large; but he is quite sure he would be cramped in any of them. Each of them professes to be a complete cosmos or scheme of all things; but then so does the cosmos of the Clapham Sect or the Clapton Agapemone. Each of them is supposed to be domed with the sky or painted inside with all the stars. But each of these cosmic systems or machines seems to him much smaller and even much simpler than the broad and balanced universe in which he lives. One of them is labelled Agnostic; but he knows by experience that it has not really even the freedom of ignorance. It is a wheel that must always go round without a single jolt of miraculous interruption — a circle that must not be squared by any higher mathematics of mysticism; a machine that must be scoured as clean of all spirits as if it were the avowed machine of materialism. In living in a world with two orders, the supernatural and the natural, the convert feels he is living in a larger world and does not feel any temptation to crawl back into a smaller one. One of them is labelled Theosophical or Buddhistic; but he knows by experience that it is only the same sort of wearisome wheel used for spiritual things instead of material things. Living in a world where he is free to do anything, even to go to the devil, he does not see why he should tie himself to the wheel of a mere destiny. One of them is labelled Humanitarian; but he knows that such humanitarians have really far less experience of humanity. He knows that they are thinking almost entirely of men as they are at this moment in modern cities, and have nothing like the huge human interest of what began by being preached to legionaries in Palestine and is still being preached to peasants in China. So clear is this perception that I have sometimes put it to myself, as something between a melancholy meditation and a joke. “Where should I go now, if I did leave the Catholic Church?” I certainly would not go to any of those little social sects which only express one idea at a time, because that idea happens to be fashionable at the moment. The best I could hope for would be to wander away into the woods and become, not a Pantheist (for that is also a limitation and a bore) but rather a pagan, in the mood to cry out that some particular mountain peak or flowering fruit tree was sacred and a thing to be worshipped. That at least would be beginning all over again; but it would bring me back to the same problem in the end. If it was reasonable to have a sacred tree it was not unreasonable to have a sacred crucifix; and if the god was to be found on one peak he may as reasonably be found under one spire. To find a new religion is sooner or later to have found one;

and why should I have been discontented with the one I had found? Especially, as I said in the first words of this essay, when it is the one old religion which seems capable of remaining new.

I know very well that if I went upon that journey I should either despair or return; and that none of the trees would ever be a substitute for the real sacred tree. Paganism is better than pantheism, for paganism is free to imagine divinities, while pantheism is forced to pretend, in a priggish way, that all things are equally divine. But I should not imagine any divinity that was sufficiently divine. I seem to know that weary return through the woodlands; for I think in some symbolic fashion I have walked that road before. For as I have tried to confess here without excessive egotism, I think I am the sort of man who came to Christ from Pan and Dionysus and not from Luther or Laud; that the conversion I understand is that of the pagan and not the Puritan; and upon that antique conversion is founded the whole world that we know. It is a transformation far more vast and tremendous than anything that has been meant for many years past, at least in England and America, by a sectarian controversy or a doctrinal division. On the height of that ancient empire and that international experience, humanity had a vision. It has not had another; but only quarrels about that one. Paganism was the largest thing in the world and Christianity was larger; and everything else has been comparatively small.

CHAPTER V: THE EXCEPTION PROVES THE RULE

The Catholic Church is the only thing which saves a man from the degrading slavery of being a child of his age. I have compared it with the New Religions; but this is exactly where it differs from the New Religions. The New Religions are in many ways suited to the new conditions; but they are only suited to the new conditions. When those conditions shall have changed in only a century or so, the points upon which alone they insist at present will have become almost pointless. If the Faith has all the freshness of a new religion, it has all the richness of an old religion; it has especially all the reserves of an old religion. So far as that is concerned, its antiquity is alone a great advantage, and especially a great advantage for purposes of renovation and youth. It is only by the analogy of animal bodies that we suppose that old things must be stiff. It is a mere metaphor from bones and arteries. In an intellectual sense old things are flexible. Above all, they are various and have many alternatives to offer. There is a sort of rotation of crops in religious history; and old fields can lie fallow for a while and then be worked again. But when the new religion or any such notion has sown its one crop of wild oats, which the wind generally blows away, it is barren. A thing as old as the Catholic Church has an accumulated armoury and treasury to choose from; it can pick and choose among the centuries and brings one age to the rescue of another. It can call in the old world to redress the balance of the new.

Anyhow, the New Religions are suited to the new world; and this is their most damning defect. Each religion is produced by contemporary causes that can be clearly pointed out. Socialism is a reaction against Capitalism. Spiritualism is a reaction against Materialism; it is also in its intensified form merely the trail of the tragedy of the Great War. But there is a somewhat more subtle sense in which the very fitness of the new creeds makes them unfit; their very acceptability makes them inacceptable. Thus they all profess to be progressive because the peculiar boast of their peculiar period was progress; they claim to be democratic because our political system still rather pathetically claims to be democratic. They rushed to a reconciliation with science, which was often only a premature surrender to science. They hastily divested themselves of anything considered dowdy or old-fashioned in the way of vesture or symbol. They claimed to have bright services and cheery sermons; the churches competed with the cinemas; the churches even became cinemas. In its more moderate form the mood was merely one of praising natural pleasures, such as the enjoyment of nature and even the enjoyment of human nature. These are excellent things and this is an excellent liberty; and yet it has its limitations.

We do not really want a religion that is right where we are right. What we want is a religion that is right where we are wrong. In these current fashions it is not really a question of the religion allowing us liberty; but (at the best) of the liberty allowing us a religion. These people merely take the modern mood, with much in it that is amiable and much that is anarchical and much that is merely dull and obvious, and then require any creed to be cut down to fit that mood. But the mood would exist even without the creed. They say they want a religion to be social, when they would be social without any religion. They say they want a religion to be practical, when they would be practical without any religion. They say they want a religion acceptable to science, when they would accept the science even if they did not accept the religion. They say they want a religion like this because they are like this already. They say they want it, when they mean that they could do without it.

It is a very different matter when a religion, in the real sense of a binding thing, binds men to their morality when it is not identical with their mood. It is very different when some of the saints preached social reconciliation to fierce and raging factions who could hardly bear the sight of each others' faces. It was a very different thing when charity was preached to pagans who really did not believe in it; just as it is a very different thing now, when chastity is preached to new pagans who do not believe in it. It is in those cases that we get the real grapple of religion; and it is in those cases that we get the peculiar and solitary triumph of the Catholic faith. It is not in merely being right when we are right, as in being cheerful or hopeful or humane. It is in having been right when we were wrong, and in the fact coming back upon us afterwards like a boomerang. One word that tells us what we do not know outweighs a thousand words that tell us what we do know. And the thing is all the more striking if we not only did not know it but could not believe it. It may seem a paradox to say that the truth teaches us more by the words we reject than by the words we receive. Yet the paradox is a parable of the simplest sort and familiar to us all; any example might be given of it. If a man tells us to avoid public houses, we think him a tiresome though perhaps a well-intentioned old party. If he tells us to use public houses, we recognise that he has a higher morality and presents an ideal that is indeed lofty, but perhaps a little too simple and obvious to need defence. But if a man tells us to avoid the one particular public house called The Pig and Whistle, on the left hand as you turn round by the pond, the direction may seem very dogmatic and arbitrary and showing insufficient process of argument. But if we then fling ourselves into The Pig and Whistle and are immediately poisoned with the gin or smothered in the feather-bed and robbed of our money, we recognise that the man who advised us did know something about it and had a cultivated and scientific knowledge of the public houses of the district. We think it even more, as we emerge half-murdered from The Pig and Whistle, if we originally rejected his warning as a silly superstition. The warning itself is almost more impressive if it was not justified by reasons, but only by results. There is something very notable about a thing which is arbitrary when it is also accurate. We may very easily forget, even while we fulfil, the advice that we thought was self-evident sense. But nothing can measure our mystical and unfathomable reverence for the advice that we thought was nonsense.

As will be seen in a moment, I do not mean in the least that the Catholic Church is arbitrary in the sense of never giving reasons; but I do mean that the convert is profoundly affected by the fact that, even when he did not see the reason, he lived to see that it was reasonable. But there is something even more singular than this, which it will be well to note as a part of the convert’s experience. In many cases, as a matter of fact, he did originally have a glimpse of the reasons, even if he did not reason about them; but they were forgotten in the interlude when reason was clouded by rationalism. The point is not very easy to explain, and I shall be obliged to take merely personal examples in order to explain it. I mean that we have often had a premonition as well as a warning; and the fact often comes back to us after we have disregarded both. It is worth noting in connection with conversion, because the convert is often obstructed by a catchword which says that the Church crushes the conscience. The Church does not crush any man’s conscience. It is the man who crushes his conscience and then finds out that it was right, when he has almost forgotten that he had one.

I will take two examples out of the new movements: Socialism and Spiritualism. Now it is perfectly true that when I first began to think seriously about Socialism, I was a Socialist. But it is equally true, and more important than it sounds, that before I had ever heard of Socialism I was a strong anti-Socialist. I was what has since been called a Distributist, though I did not know it. When I was a child and dreamed the usual dreams about kings and clowns and robbers and policemen, I always conceived all contentment and dignity as consisting in something compact and personal; in being king of the castle or captain of the pirate ship or the man who owned the shop or the robber who was safe in the cavern. As I passed through boyhood I always imagined battles for justice as being the defence of special walls and houses and high defiant shrines; and I embodied some of those crude but coloured visions in a story called The Napoleon of Notting Hill. All this happened, in fancy at least, when I had never heard of Socialism and was a much better judge of it.

Shades of the prison-house began to close and with them came a merely mechanical discussion as to how we were all to get out of prison. Then indeed, in the darkness of the dungeon, was heard the voice of Mr. Sidney Webb, telling us that we could only conceivably get out of our Capitalist captivity with the patent Chubb key of Collectivism. Or to use a more exact metaphor, he told us that we could only escape from our dark and filthy cells of industrial slavery by melting all our private latchkeys into one gigantic latchkey as large as a battering ram. We did not really like giving up our little private keys or local attachments or love of our own possessions; but we were quite convinced that social justice must be done somehow and could only be done socialistically. I therefore became a Socialist in the old days of the Fabian Society; and so I think did everybody else worth talking about except the Catholics. And the Catholics were an insignificant handful, the dregs of a dead religion, essentially a superstition. About this time appeared the Encyclical on Labour by Leo XIII; and nobody in our really well-informed world took much notice of it. Certainly the Pope spoke as strongly as any Socialist could speak when he said that Capitalism "laid on the toiling millions a yoke little better than slavery." But as the Pope was not a Socialist it was obvious that he had not read the right Socialist books and pamphlets; and we could not expect the poor old gentleman to know what every young man knew by this time — that Socialism was inevitable. That was a long time ago, and by a gradual process, mostly practical and political, which I have no intention of describing here, most of us began to realise that Socialism was not inevitable; that it was not really popular; that it was not the only way, or even the right way, of restoring the rights of the poor. We have come to the conclusion that the obvious cure for private property being given to the few is to see that it is given to the many; not to see that it is taken away from everybody or given in trust to the dear good politicians. Then, having discovered that fact as a fact, we look back at Leo XIII and discover in his old and dated document, of which we took no notice at the time, that he was saying then exactly what we are saying now. “As many as possible of the working classes should become owners.” That is what I mean by the justification of arbitrary warning. If the Pope had said then exactly what we said and wanted him to say, we should not have really reverenced him then and we should have entirely repudiated him afterwards. He would only have marched with the million who accepted Fabianism; and with them he would have marched away. But when he saw a distinction we did not see then, and do see now, that distinction is decisive. It marks a disagreement more convincing than a hundred agreements. It is not that he was right when we were right, but that he was right when we were wrong.

The superficial critic of these things, noting that I am no longer a Socialist, will always say, “Of course, you are a Catholic and you are not allowed to be a Socialist.” To which I answer emphatically, No. That is missing the whole point. The Church anticipated my experience; but it was experience and not only obedience. I am quite sure now from merely living in this world, and seeing something of Catholic peasants as well as Collectivist officials, that it is happier and healthier for most men to become owners than for them to give up all ownership to those officials. I do not follow the State Socialist in his extreme belief in the State; but I have not ceased to be credulous about the State merely because I have become credulous about the Church. I believe less in the State because I know more of the statesmen. I cannot believe small property to be impossible after I have seen it. I cannot believe State management to be impeccable after I have seen it. It is not any authority, except what St. Thomas calls the authority of the senses, which tells me that the mere community of goods is a solution that is too much of a simplification. The Church has taught me, but I could not unteach myself; I have learned because I have lived. and I could not unlearn it. If I ceased to be a Catholic I could not again be a Communist.

As it happens, my story was almost exactly the same in connection with Spiritualism. There again I was modern when I was young, but not when I was very young. While I had a vague but innocent nursery religion still hanging about me, I regarded the first signs of these psychic and psychological things with mere repugnance. I hated the whole notion of mesmerism and magnetic tricks with the mind; I loathed their bulging eyes and stiff attitudes and unnatural trances and the whole bag of tricks. When I saw a girl I admired set down to crystal-gazing, I was furious; I hardly knew why. Then came the period when I wanted to know why, when I examined my own reasons and found I had none. I saw that it was inconsistent in science to revere research and forbid psychical research. I saw that men of science were more and more accepting these things and I went along with my scientific age. I was never exactly a Spiritualist, but I almost always defended Spiritualism. I experimented with a planchette, quite enough to convince myself finally that some things do happen that are not in the ordinary sense natural. I have since come to think, for reasons that would require too much space to detail, that it is not so much supernatural as unnatural and even anti-natural. I believe the experiments were bad for me; I believe they are bad for the other experimentalists. But I found out the fact long before I found out the Catholic Church or the Catholic view of that question. Only, as I have said, when I do find it out, I find it rather impressive; for it is not the religion that was right when I was right, but the religion that was right when I was wrong.

But I wish to note about both those cases that the common cant in the matter is emphatically not true. It is not true that the Church crushed my natural conscience; it is not true that the Church asked me to give up my individual ideal. It is not true that Collectivism was ever my ideal. I do not believe it was ever really anybody else’s ideal. It was not an ideal but a compromise; it was a concession to practical economists who told us that we could not prevent poverty except by something uncommonly like slavery. State Socialism never came natural to us; it never convinced us that it was natural; it convinced us that it was necessary. In exactly the same way Spiritualism never came as something natural but only as something necessary. Each told us that it was the only way into the promised land, in the one case of a future life and the other of life in the future. We did not like government departments and tickets and registers; but we were told there was no other way of reaching a better society. We did not like dark rooms and dubious mediums and ladies tied up with rope, but we were told there was no other way to reach a better world. We were ready to crawl down a municipal drain-pipe or through a spiritual sewer, because it was the only way to better things; the only way even to prove that there were better things. But the drain-pipe had never figured in our dreams like a tower of ivory or a house of gold, or even like the robbers' tower of our romantic boyhood or the solid and comfortable house of our matured experience. The Faith had not only been true all along, but it had been true to the first and the last things, to our unspoilt instincts and our conclusive experience; and it had condemned nothing but an interlude of intellectual snobbishness and surrender to the persuasions of pedantry. It had condemned nothing but what we ourselves should have come to condemn, though we might have condemned it too late.

The Church therefore never made my individual ideal impossible; it would be truer to say that she was the first to make it possible. The Encyclical's ideal had been much nearer my own instinct than the ideal I had consented to substitute for it. The Catholic suspicion of table-rapping was much more like my own original suspicion than it was like my own subsequent surrender. But in those two cases it is surely clear that the Catholic Church plays exactly the part that she professes to play: something that knows what we cannot be expected to know, but should probably accept if we really knew it. I am not in this case, any more than in the greater part of this study, referring to the things that are really best worth knowing. The supernatural truths are connected with the mystery of grace and are a matter for theologians; admittedly a rather delicate and difficult matter even for them. But though the transcendental truths are the most important they are not those that best illustrate this particular point, which concerns the decisions which can be more or less tested by experience And of all those things that can be tested by experience I could tell the same story: that there was a time when I thought the Catholic doctrine was meaningless, but that even that was not the very earliest time, which was a time of greater simplicity, when I had a sort of glimpse of the meaning though I had never even heard of the doctrine. The world deceived me and the Church would at any time have undeceived me. The thing that a man may really shed at last like a superstition is the fashion of this world that passes away.

I could give many other examples, but I fear they, would inevitably tend to be egotistical examples. Throughout this brief study I am under the double difficulty that all roads lead to Rome, but that each pilgrim is tempted to talk as if all roads had been like his own road. I could write a great deal, for instance, about my early wrestlings with the rather ridiculous dilemma which was put to me in my youth by the optimist and the pessimist. I promptly and properly refused to be a pessimist; and I therefore fell into the way of calling myself an optimist. Now I should not call myself either, and what is more important I can see that virtue may be entangled in both. But I think it is entangled; and I think that an older and simpler truth can loosen the tangle. But the point in the present connection is this: that before I had ever heard of optimists or pessimists I was something much more like what I am now than could be covered by either of those two pedantic words. In my childhood I assumed that cheerfulness was a good thing, but I also assumed that it was a bad thing not to protest against things that are really bad. After an interlude of intellectual formalism and false antithesis, I have come back to being able to think what I could then only feel. But I have realised that the protest can rise to a much more divine indignation and that the cheerfulness is but a faint suggestion of a much more divine joy. It is not so much that I have found I was wrong as that I have found out why I was right.

In this we find the supreme example of the exception that proves the rule. The rule, of which I have given a rough outline in the previous chapter, is that the Catholic philosophy is a universal philosophy found to fit anywhere with human nature and the nature of things. But even when it does not fit in with human nature it is found in the long run to favour something yet more fitting. It generally suits us, but where it does not suit us we learn to suit it, so long as we are alive enough to learn anything. In the rare cases where a reasonable man can really say that it cuts across his intelligence, it will generally be found that it is true, not only to truth, but even to his deepest instinct for truth. Education does not cease with conversion, but rather begins. The man does not cease to study because he has become convinced that certain things are worth studying; and these things include not only the orthodox values but even the orthodox vetoes. Strangely enough, in a sense, the forbidden fruit is often more fruitful than the free. It is more fruitful in the sense of a fascinating botanical study of why it is really poisonous. Thus for the sake of an example, all healthy people have an instinct against usury; and the Church has only confirmed that instinct. But to learn how to define usury, to study what it is and to argue why it is wrong, is to have a liberal education, not only in political economy, but in the philosophy of Aristotle and the history of the Councils of Lateran. There almost always is a human reason for all the merely human advice given by the Church to humanity; and to find out the principle of the thing is, among other things, one of the keenest of intellectual pleasures. But in any case the fact remains that the Church is right in the main in being tolerant in the main; but that where she is intolerant she is most right and even most reasonable. Adam lived in a garden where a thousand mercies were granted to him; but the one inhibition was the greatest mercy of all.

In the same way, let the convert, or still more the semi-convert, face any one fact that does seem to him to deface the Catholic scheme as a falsehood; and if he faces it long enough he will probably find that it is the greatest truth of all. I have found this myself in that extreme logic of free will which is found in the fallen angels and the possibility of perdition. Such things are altogether beyond my imagination, but the lines of logic go out towards them in my reason. Indeed, I can undertake to justify the whole Catholic theology, if I be granted to start with the supreme sacredness and value of two things: Reason and Liberty. It is an illuminating comment on current anti-Catholic talk that they are the two things which most people imagine to be forbidden to Catholics.

But the best way of putting what I mean is to repeat what I have already said, in connection with the satisfying scope of Catholic universality. I cannot picture these theological ultimates and I have not the authority or learning to define them. But I still put the matter to myself thus: Supposing I were so miserable as to lose the Faith, could I go back to that cheap charity and crude optimism which says that every sin is a blunder, that evil cannot conquer or does not even exist? I could no more go back to those cushioned chapels than a man who has regained his sanity would willingly go back to a padded cell. I might cease to believe in a God of any kind; but I could not cease to think that a God who had made men and angels free was finer than one who coerced them into comfort. I might cease to believe in a future life of any kind; but I could not cease to think it was a finer doctrine that we choose and make our future life than that it is fitted out for us like an hotel and we are taken there in a celestial omnibus as compulsory as a Black Maria. I know that Catholicism is too large for me, and I have not yet explored its beautiful or terrible truths. But I know that Universalism is too small for me; and I could not creep back into that dull safety, who have looked on the dizzy vision of liberty.

CHAPTER VI: A NOTE ON PRESENT PROSPECTS

On reconsidering these notes I find them to be far too personal; yet I do not know how any conception of conversion can be anything else. I do not profess to have any particular knowledge about the actual conditions and calculations of the Catholic movement at the moment. I do not believe that anybody else has any knowledge of what it will be like the next moment. Statistics are generally misleading and predictions are practically always false. But there is always a certain faint tradition of the thing called common sense; and so long as a glimmer of it remains, in spite of all journalism and State instruction, it is possible to appreciate what we call a reality. Nobody in his five wits will deny that at this moment conversion is a reality. Everybody knows that his own social circle, which fifty years ago would have been a firm territory of Protestantism, perhaps hardening into rationalism or indifference but doing even that slowly and without conscious convulsion, has just lately shown a curious disposition to collapse softly and suddenly, first in one unexpected place and then in another, making great holes in that solid land and letting up the leaping flames of what was counted an extinct volcano. It is in everybody’s experience, whether he is sad or glad or mad or merely indifferent, that these conversions seem to come of themselves in the most curious and apparently accidental quarters; Tom’s wife, Harry’s brother, Fanny’s funny sister-in-law who went on the stage, Sam’s eccentric uncle who studied military strategy — of each of these isolated souls we hear suddenly that it is isolated no longer. It is one with the souls militant and triumphant.

Against these things (which we know as facts and do not merely read as statistics) there is admittedly something to be set. It is what is commonly called leakage; and with a paragraph upon this point I will close these pages. Father Ronald Knox, with that felicity that is so good that the wit almost seems like good luck, has remarked that the Catholic Church really does have to get on by hook or crook. That is, by the hook of the fisherman and the crook of the shepherd; and it is the hook that has to catch the convert and the crook that has to keep him. He said in this connection that the conversions to the Church just now were so numerous that they would be obvious and overwhelming, like a landslide, if it were not that they were neutralised in mere numbers, or rather lessened in their full claim of numbers, by a certain amount of falling away in other directions. Now the first fact to realise is that it is in other directions, in totally different directions. Some people, especially young people, abandon practising Catholicism. But none of them abandon it for Protestantism. All of them practically abandon it for paganism. Most of them abandon it for something that is really rather too simple to be called an -ism of any kind. They abandon it for things and not theories; and when they do have theories they may sometimes be Bolshevist theories or Futurist theories, but they are practically never the theological theories of Protestantism. I will not say they leave Catholicism for beer and skittles; for Catholicism has never discouraged those Christian institutions as Protestantism sometimes has. They leave it to have a high old time; and considering what a muddle we have made of modern morality, they can hardly be blamed. But this reaction, which is only that of a section, is in its nature a reaction of the young and as such I do not think it will last. I know it is the cant phrase of the old rationalists that their reason prevents a return to the Faith, but it is false: it is no longer reason but rather passion.

This may sound a sweeping statement, but if it be examined it will be found not unjust, and certainly not unsympathetic. Nothing is more notable if we really study the characteristics of the rising generation than the fact that they are not acting upon any exact and definite philosophy, such as those which have made the revolutions of the past. If they are anarchical, they are not anarchist. The dogmatic anarchism of the middle of the nineteenth century is not the creed they hold, or even the excuse they offer. They have a considerable negative revolt against religion, a negative revolt against negative morality. They have a feeling, which is not unreasonable, that to commit themselves to the Catholic citizenship is to take responsibilities that continually act as restraints. But they do not maintain anything like a contrary system of spiritual citizenship, or moral responsibility. For instance, it is perfectly natural that they should want to act naturally. But they do not want to act naturally according to any intellectual theory of the reliability of Nature. On the contrary, their young and brilliant literary representatives are very prone to press upon us the crudity and cruelty of Nature. That is the moral of Mr. Aldous Huxley, and of many others. State to them any of the consistent theories of the supreme claim of Nature upon us, such as the pantheistic idea of God in all natural things; or the Nietzschean theory that nature is evolving something with superior claims to our own; or any other definable defence of the natural process itself, and they will almost certainly reject it as something unproved or exploded. They do not want to have an exact imitation of the laws of the physical universe; they want to have their own way, a much more intelligible desire. But the result is that they are, after all, at a disadvantage in face of those other young people who have satisfied their reason by a scheme that makes the universe reasonable.

For that is the very simple explanation of the affair. In so far as there is really a secession among the young, it is but a part of the same process as that conversion of the young, of which I wrote in the first chapter. The rising generation sees the real issue; and those who are ready for it rally, and those who are not ready for it scatter. But there can be but one end to a war between a solid and a scattered army. It is not a controversy between two philosophies, as was the Catholic and the Calvinist, or the Catholic and the Materialist. It is a controversy between philosophers and philanderers. I do not say it in contempt; I have much more sympathy with the person who leaves the Church for a love-affair than with one who leaves it for a long-winded German theory to prove that God is evil or that children are a sort of morbid monkey. But the very laws of life are against the endurance of a revolt that rests on nothing but natural passion; it is bound to change in its proportion with the coming of experience; and, at the worst, it will become a battle between bad Catholics and good Catholics, with the great dome over all.

THE OUTLINE OF SANITY

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I THE BEGINNING OF THE QUARREL

I have been asked to republish these notes — which appeared in a weekly paper — as a rough sketch of certain aspects of the institution of Private Property, now so completely forgotten amid the journalistic jubilations over Private Enterprise. The very fact that the publicists say so much of the latter and so little of the former is a measure of the moral tone of the times. A pickpocket is obviously a champion of private enterprise. But it would perhaps be an exaggeration to say that a pickpocket is a champion of private property. The point about Capitalism and Commercialism, as conducted of late, is that they have really preached the extension of business rather than the preservation of belongings; and have at best tried to disguise the pickpocket with some of the virtues of the pirate. The point about Communism is that it only reforms the pickpocket by forbidding pockets.

Pockets and possessions generally seem to me to have not only a more normal but a more dignified defence than the rather dirty individualism that talks about private enterprise. In the hope that it may possibly help others to understand it, I have decided to reproduce these studies as they stand, hasty and sometimes merely topical as they were. It is indeed very hard to reproduce them in this form, because they were editorial notes to a controversy largely conducted by others; but the general idea is at least present. In any case, “private enterprise” is no very noble way of stating the truth of one of the Ten Commandments. But there was at least a time when it was more or less true. The Manchester Radicals preached a rather crude and cruel sort of competition; but at least they practised what they preached. The newspapers now praising private enterprise are preaching the very opposite of anything that anybody dreams of practising. The practical tendency of all trade and business to-day is towards big commercial combinations, often more imperial, more impersonal, more international than many a communist commonwealth — things that are at least collective if not collectivist. It is all very well to repeat distractedly, “What are we coming to, with all this Bolshevism?” It is equally relevant to add, “What are we coming to, even without Bolshevism?” The obvious answer is — Monopoly. It is certainly not private enterprise. The American Trust is not private enterprise. It would be truer to call the Spanish Inquisition private judgment. Monopoly is neither private nor enterprising. It exists to prevent private enterprise. And that system of trust or monopoly, that complete destruction of property, would still be the present goal of all our progress, if there were not a Bolshevist in the world.

Now I am one of those who believe that the cure for centralization is decentralization. It has been described as a paradox. There is apparently something elvish and fantastic about saying that when capital has come to be too much in the hand of the few, the right thing is to restore it into the hands of the many. The Socialist would put it in the hands of even fewer people; but those people would be politicians, who (as we know) always administer it in the interests of the many. But before I put before the reader things written in the very thick of the current controversy, I foresee it will be necessary to preface them with these few paragraphs, explaining a few of the terms and amplifying a few of the assumptions. I was in the weekly paper arguing with people who knew the shorthand of this particular argument; but to be clearly understood, we must begin with a few definitions or, at least, descriptions. I assure the reader that I use words in quite a definite sense, but it is possible that he may use them in a different sense; and a muddle and misunderstanding of that sort does not even rise to the dignity of a difference of opinion.

For instance, Capitalism is really a very unpleasant word. It is also a very unpleasant thing. Yet the thing I have in mind, when I say so, is quite definite and definable; only the name is a very unworkable word for it. But obviously we must have some word for it. When I say "Capitalism," I commonly mean something that may be stated thus: "That economic condition in which there is a class of capitalists, roughly recognizable and relatively small, in whose possession so much of the capital is concentrated as to necessitate a very large majority of the citizens serving those capitalists for a wage." This particular state of things can and does exist, and we must have some word for it, and some way of discussing it. But this is undoubtedly a very bad word, because it is used by other people to mean quite other things. Some people seem to mean merely private property. Others suppose that capitalism must mean anything involving the use of capital. But if that use is too literal, it is also too loose and even too large. If the use of capital is capitalism, then everything is capitalism. Bolshevism is capitalism and anarchist communism is capitalism; and every revolutionary scheme, however wild, is still capitalism. Lenin and Trotsky believe as much as Lloyd George and Thomas that the economic operations of to-day must leave something over for the economic operations of to-morrow. And that is all that capital means in its economic sense. In that case, the word is useless. My use of it may be arbitrary, but it is not useless. If capitalism means private property, I am capitalist. If capitalism means capital, everybody is capitalist. But if capitalism means this particular condition of capital, only paid out to the mass in the form of wages, then it does mean something, even if it ought to mean something else.

The truth is that what we call Capitalism ought to be called Proletarianism. The point of it is not that some people have capital, but that most people only have wages because they do not have capital. I have made an heroic effort in my time to walk about the world always saying Proletarianism instead of Capitalism. But my path has been a thorny one of troubles and misunderstandings. I find that when I criticize the Duke of Northumberland for his Proletarianism, my meaning does not get home. When I say I should often agree with the Morning Post if it were not so deplorably Proletarian, there seems to be some strange momentary impediment to the complete communion of mind with mind. Yet that would be strictly accurate; for what I complain of, in the current defence of existing capitalism, is that it is a defence of keeping most men in wage dependence; that is, keeping most men without capital. I am not the sort of precision who prefers conveying correctly what he doesn’t mean, rather than conveying incorrectly what he does. I am totally indifferent to the term as compared to the meaning. I do not care whether I call one thing or the other by this mere printed word beginning with a “C,” so long as it is applied to one thing and not the other. I do not mind using a term as arbitrary as a mathematical sign, if it is accepted like a mathematical sign. I do not mind calling Property x and Capitalism y, so long as nobody thinks it necessary to say that x=y. I do not mind saying “cat” for capitalism and “dog” for distributism, so long as people understand that the things are different enough to fight like cat and dog. The proposal of the wider distribution of capital remains the same, whatever we call it, or whatever we call the present glaring contradiction of it. It is the same whether we state it by saying that there is too much capitalism in the one sense or too little capitalism in the other. And it is really quite pedantic to say that the use of capital must be capitalist. We might as fairly say that anything social must be Socialist; that Socialism can be identified with a social evening or a social glass. Which, I grieve to say, is not the case.

Nevertheless, there is enough verbal vagueness about Socialism to call for a word of definition. Socialism is a system which makes the corporate unity of society responsible for all its economic processes, or all those affecting life and essential living. If anything important is sold, the Government has sold it; if anything important is given, the Government has given it; if anything important is even tolerated, the Government is responsible for tolerating it. This is the very reverse of anarchy; it is an extreme enthusiasm for authority. It is in many ways worthy of the moral dignity of the mind; it is a collective acceptance of a very complete responsibility. But it is silly of Socialists to complain of our saying that it must be a destruction of liberty. It is almost equally silly of Anti-Socialists to complain of the unnatural and unbalanced brutality of the Bolshevist Government in crushing a political opposition. A Socialist Government is one which in its nature does not tolerate any true and real opposition. For there the Government provides everything; and it is absurd to ask a Government to provide an opposition.

You cannot go to the Sultan and say reproachfully, “You have made no arrangements for your brother dethroning you and seizing the Caliphate.” You cannot go to a medieval king and say, “Kindly lend me two thousand spears and one thousand bowmen, as I wish to raise a rebellion against you.” Still less can you reproach a Government which professes to set up everything, because it has not set up anything to pull down all it has set up. Opposition and rebellion depend on property and liberty. They can only be tolerated where other rights have been allowed to strike root, besides the central right of the ruler. Those rights must be protected by a morality which even the ruler will hesitate to defy. The critic of the State can only exist where a religious sense of right protects his claims to his own bow and spear; or at least, to his own pen or his own printing-press. It is absurd to suppose that he could borrow the royal pen to advocate regicide or use the Government printing-presses to expose the corruption of the Government. Yet it is the whole point of Socialism, the whole case for Socialism, that unless all printing-presses are Government printing-presses, printers may be oppressed. Everything is staked on the State’s justice; it is putting all the eggs in one basket. Many of them will be rotten eggs; but even then you will not be allowed to use them at political elections.

About fifteen years ago a few of us began to preach, in the old New Age and New Witness, a policy of small distributed property (which has since assumed the awkward but accurate name of Distributism), as we should have said then, against the two extremes of Capitalism and Communism. The first criticism we received was from the most brilliant Fabians, especially Mr. Bernard Shaw. And the form which that first criticism took was simply to tell us that our ideal was impossible. It was only a case of Catholic credulity about fairy-tales. The Law of Rent, and other economic laws, made it inevitable that the little rivulets of property should run down into the pool of plutocracy. In truth, it was the Fabian wit, and not merely the Tory fool, who confronted our vision with that venerable verbal opening, "If it were all divided up to-morrow—"

Nevertheless, we had an answer even in those days, and though we have since found many others, it will clarify the question if I repeat this point of principle. It is true that I believe in fairy-tales — in the sense that I marvel so much at what does exist that I am the readier to admit what might. I understand the man who believes in the Sea Serpent on the ground that there are more fish in the sea than ever came out of it. But I do it the more because the other man, in his ardour for disproving the Sea Serpent, always argues that there are not only no snakes in Iceland, but none in the world. Suppose Mr. Bernard Shaw, commenting on this credulity, were to blame me for believing (on the word of some lying priest) that stones could be thrown up into the air and hang there suspended like a rainbow. Suppose he told me tenderly that I should not believe this Popish fable of the magic stones, if I had ever had the Law of Gravity scientifically explained to me. And suppose, after all this, I found he was only talking about the impossibility of building an arch. I think most of us would form two main conclusions about him and his school. First, we should think them very ill-informed about what is really meant by recognizing a law of nature. A law of nature can be recognized by resisting it, or out-manoeuvring it, or even using it against itself, as in the case of the arch. And second, and much more strongly, we should think them astonishingly ill-informed about what has already been done upon this earth.

Similarly, the first fact in the discussion of whether small properties can exist is the fact that they do exist. It is a fact almost equally unmistakable that they not only exist but endure. Mr. Shaw affirmed, in a sort of abstract fury, that "small properties will not stay small." Now it is interesting to note here that the opponents of anything like a several proprietary bring two highly inconsistent charges against it. They are perpetually telling us that the peasant life in Latin or other countries is monotonous, is unprogressive, is covered with weedy superstitions, and is a sort of survival of the Stone Age. Yet even while they taunt us with its survival, they argue that it can never survive. They point to the peasant as a perennial stick-in-the-mud; and then refuse to plant him anywhere, on the specific ground that he would not stick. Now, the first of the two types of denunciation is arguable enough; but in order to denounce peasantries, the critics must admit that there are peasantries to denounce. And if it were true that they always tended rapidly to disappear, it would not be true that they exhibited those primitive customs and conservative opinions which they not only do, in fact, exhibit, but which the critics reproach them with exhibiting. They cannot in common sense accuse a thing at once of being antiquated and of being ephemeral. It is, of course, the dry fact, to be seen in broad daylight, that small peasant properties are not ephemeral. But anyhow, Mr. Shaw and his school must not say that arches cannot be built, and then that they disfigure the landscape. The Distributive State is not a hypothesis for him to demolish; it is a phenomenon for him to explain.

The truth is that the conception that small property evolves into Capitalism is a precise picture of what practically never takes place. The truth is attested even by facts of geography, facts which, as it seems to me, have been strangely overlooked. Nine times out of ten, an industrial civilization of the modern capitalist type does not arise, wherever else it may arise, in places where there has hitherto been a distributive civilization like that of a peasantry. Capitalism is a monster that grows in deserts. Industrial servitude has almost everywhere arisen in those empty spaces where the older civilization was thin or absent. Thus it grew up easily in the North of England rather than the South; precisely because the North had been comparatively empty and barbarous through all the ages when the South had a civilization of guilds and peasantries. Thus it grew up easily in the American continent rather than the European; precisely because it had nothing to supplant in America but a few savages, while in Europe it had to supplant the culture of multitudinous farms. Everywhere it has been but one stride from the mudhut to the manufacturing town. Everywhere the mudhut which really turned into the free farm has never since moved an inch towards the manufacturing town. Wherever there was the mere lord and the mere serf, they could almost instantly be turned into the mere employer and the mere employee. Wherever there has been the free man, even when he was relatively less rich and powerful, his mere memory has made complete industrial capitalism impossible. It is an enemy that has sown these tares, but even as an enemy he is a coward. For he can only sow them in waste places, where no wheat can spring up and choke them.

To take up our parable again, we say first that arches exist; and not only exist but remain. A hundred Roman aqueducts and amphitheatres are there to show that they can remain as long or longer than anything else. And if a progressive person informs us that an arch always turns into a factory chimney, or even that an arch always falls down because it is weaker than a factory chimney, or even that wherever it does fall down people perceive that they must replace it by a factory chimney — why, we shall be so audacious as to cast doubts on all these three assertions. All we could possibly admit is that the principle supporting the chimney is simpler than the principle of the arch; and for that very reason the factory chimney, like the feudal tower, can rise the more easily in a howling wilderness.

But the image has yet a further application. If at this moment the Latin countries are largely made our model in the matter of the small property, it is only in the sense in which they would have been, through certain periods of history, the only exemplars of the arch. There was a time when all arches were Roman arches; and when a man living by the Liffey or the Thames would know as little about them as Mr. Shaw knows about peasant proprietors. But that does not mean that we fight for something merely foreign, or advance the arch as a sort of Italian ensign; any more than we want to make the Thames as yellow as the Tiber, or have any particular taste in macaroni or malaria. The principle of the arch is human, and applicable to and by all humanity. So is the principle of well-distributed private property. That a few Roman arches stood in ruins in Britain is not a proof that arches cannot be built, but on the contrary, a proof that they can.

And now, to complete the coincidence or analogy, what is the principle of the arch? You can call it, if you like, an affront to gravitation; you will be more correct if you call it an appeal to gravitation. The principle asserts that by combining separate stones of a particular shape in a particular way, we can ensure that their very tendency to fall shall prevent them from falling. And though my image is merely an illustration, it does to a great extent hold even as to the success of more equalized properties. What upholds an arch is an equality of pressure of the separate stones upon each other. The equality is at once mutual aid and mutual obstruction. It is not difficult to show that in a healthy society the moral pressure of different private properties acts in exactly the same way. But if the other school finds the key or comparison insufficient, it must find some other. It is clear that no natural forces can frustrate the fact. To say that any law, such as that of rent, makes against it is true only in the sense that many natural laws make against all morality and the very essentials of manhood. In that sense, scientific arguments are as irrelevant to our case for property as Mr. Shaw used to say they were to his case against vivisection.

Lastly, it is not only true that the arch of property remains, it is true that the building of such arches increases, both in quantity and quality. For instance, the French peasant before the French Revolution was already indefinitely a proprietor; it has made his property more private and more absolute, not less. The French are now less than ever likely to abandon the system, when it has proved for the second, if not the hundredth time, the most stable type of prosperity in the stress of war. A revolution as heroic, and even more unconquerable, has already in Ireland disregarded alike the Socialist dream and the Capitalist reality, with a driving energy of which no one has yet dared to foresee the limits. So, when the round arch of the Romans and the Normans had remained for ages as a sort of relic, the rebirth of Christendom found for it a further application and issue. It sprang in an instant to the titanic stature of the Gothic; where man seemed to be a god who had hanged his worlds upon nothing. Then was unsealed again something of that ancient secret which had so strangely described the priest as the builder of bridges. And when I look to-day at some of the bridges which he built above the air, I can understand a man still calling them impossible, as their only possible praise.

What do we mean by that “equality of pressure” as of the stones in an arch? More will be said of this in detail; but in general we mean that the modern passion for incessant and restless buying and selling goes along with the extreme inequality of men too rich or too poor. The explanation of the continuity of peasantries (which their opponents are simply forced to leave unexplained) is that, where that independence exists, it is valued exactly as any other dignity is valued when it is regarded as normal to a man; as no man goes naked or is beaten with a stick for hire.

The theory that those who start reasonably equal cannot remain reasonably equal is a fallacy founded entirely on a society in which they start extremely unequal. It is quite true that when capitalism has passed a certain point, the broken fragments of property are very easily devoured. In other words, it is true when there is a small amount of small property; but it is quite untrue when there is a large amount of small property. To argue from what happened in the rush of big business and the rout of scattered small businesses to what must always happen when the parties are more on a level, is quite illogical. It is proving from Niagara that there is no such thing as a lake. Once tip up the lake and the whole of the water will rush one way; as the whole economic tendency of capitalist inequality rushes one way. Leave the lake as a lake, or the level as a level, and there is nothing to prevent the lake remaining until the crack of doom — as many levels of peasantry seem likely to remain until the crack of doom. This fact is proved by experience, even if it is not explained by experience; but, as a matter of fact, it is possible to suggest not only the experience but the explanation. The truth is that there is no economic tendency whatever towards the disappearance of small property, until that property becomes so very small as to cease to act as property at all. If one man has a hundred acres and another man has half an acre, it is likely enough that he will be unable to live on half an acre. Then there will be an economic tendency for him to sell his land and make the other man the proud possessor of a hundred and a half. But if one man has thirty acres and the other man has forty acres, there is no economic tendency of any kind whatever to make the first man sell to the second. It is simply false to say that the first man cannot be secure of thirty or the second man content with forty. It is sheer nonsense; like saying that any man who owns a bull terrier will be bound to sell it to somebody who owns a mastiff. It is like saying that I cannot own a horse because I have an eccentric neighbour who owns an elephant.

Needless to say, those who insist that roughly equalized ownership cannot exist, base their whole argument on the notion that it has existed. They have to suppose, in order to prove their point, that people in England, for instance, did begin as equals and rapidly reached inequality. And it only rounds off the humour of their whole position that they assume the existence of what they call an impossibility in the one case where it has really not occurred. They talk as if ten miners had run a race, and one of them became the Duke of Northumberland. They talk as if the first Rothschild was a peasant who patiently planted better cabbages than the other peasants. The truth is that England became a capitalist country because it had long been an oligarchical country. It would be much harder to point out in what way a country like Denmark need become oligarchical. But the case is even stronger when we add the ethical to the economic common sense. When there is once established a widely scattered ownership, there is a public opinion that is stronger than any law; and very often (what in modern times is even more remarkable) a law that is really an expression of public opinion. It may be very difficult for modern people to imagine a world in which men are not generally admired for covetousness and crushing their neighbours but I assure them that such strange patches of an earthly paradise do really remain on earth.

The truth is that this first objection of impossibility in the abstract flies flat in the face of all the facts of experience and human nature. It is not true that a moral custom cannot hold most men content with a reasonable status, and careful to preserve it. It is as if we were to say that because some men are more attractive to women than others, therefore the inhabitants of Balham under Queen Victoria could not possibly have been arranged on a monogamous model, with one man one wife. Sooner or later, it might be said, all females would be found clustering round the fascinating few, and nothing but bachelorhood be left for the unattractive many. Sooner or later the suburb must consist of a hundred hermitages and three harems. But this is not the case. It is not the case at present, whatever may happen if the moral tradition of marriage is really lost in Balham. So long as that moral tradition is alive, so long as stealing other people's wives is reprobated or being faithful to a spouse is admired, there are limits to the extent to which the wildest profligate in Balham can disturb the balance of the sexes. So any land-grabber would very rapidly find that there were limits to the extent to which he could buy up land in an Irish or Spanish or Serbian village. When it is really thought hateful to take Naboth's vineyard, as it is to take Uriah's wife, there is little difficulty in finding a local prophet to pronounce the judgment of the Lord. In an atmosphere of capitalism the man who lays field to field is flattered; but in an atmosphere of property he is promptly jeered at or possibly stoned. The result is that the village has not sunk into plutocracy or the suburb into polygamy.

Property is a point of honour. The true contrary of the word "property" is the word "prostitution." And it is not true that a human being will always sell what is sacred to that sense of self-ownership, whether it be the body or the boundary. A few do it in both cases; and by doing it they always become outcasts. But it is not true that a majority must do it; and anybody who says it is, is ignorant, not of our plans and proposals, not of anybody's visions and ideals, not of distributism or division of capital by this or that process, but of the facts of history and the substance of humanity. He is a barbarian who has never seen an arch.

In the notes I have here jotted down it will be obvious, of course, that the restoration of this pattern, simple as it is, is much more complicated in a complicated society. Here I have only traced it in the simplest form as it stood, and still stands, at the beginning of our discussion. I disregard the view that such "reaction" cannot be. I hold the old mystical dogma that what Man has done, Man can do. My critics seem to hold a still more mystical dogma: that Man cannot possibly do a thing because he has done it. That is what seems to be meant by saying that small property is "antiquated." It really means that all property is dead. There is nothing to be reached upon the present lines except the increasing loss of property by everybody, as something swallowed up into a system equally impersonal and inhuman, whether we call it Communism or Capitalism. If we cannot go back, it hardly seems worth while to go forward.

There is nothing in front but a flat wilderness of standardization either by Bolshevism or Big Business. But it is strange that some of us should have seen sanity, if only in a vision, while the rest go forward chained eternally to enlargement without liberty and progress without hope.

II THE PERIL OF THE HOUR

When we are for a moment satisfied, or sated, with reading the latest news of the loftiest social circles, or the most exact records of the most responsible courts of justice, we naturally turn to the serial story in the newspaper, called “Poisoned by Her Mother” or “The Mystery of the Crimson Wedding Ring,” in search of something calmer and more quietly convincing, more restful, more domestic, and more like real life. But as we turn over the pages, in passing from the incredible fact to the comparatively credible fiction, we are very likely to encounter a particular phrase on the general subject of social degeneracy. It is one of a number of phrases that seem to be kept in solid blocks in the printing-offices of newspapers. Like most of these solid statements, it is of a soothing character. It is like the headline of “Hopes of a Settlement,” by which we learn that things are unsettled; or that topic of the “Revival of Trade,” which it is part of the journalistic trade periodically to revive. The sentence to which I refer is to this effect: that the fears about social degeneracy need not disturb us, because such fears have been expressed in every age; and there are always romantic and retrospective persons, poets, and such riff-raff, who look back to imaginary “good old times.”

It is the mark of such statements that they seem to satisfy the mind; in other words, it is the mark of such thoughts that they stop us from thinking. The man who has thus praised progress does not think it necessary to progress any further. The man who has dismissed a complaint, as being old, does not himself think it necessary to say anything new. He is content to repeat this apology for existing things; and seems unable to offer any more thoughts on the subject. Now, as a matter of fact, there are a number of further thoughts that might be suggested by the subject. Of course, it is quite true that this notion of the decline of a state has been suggested in many periods, by many persons, some of them, unfortunately, poets. Thus, for instance, Byron, notoriously so moody and melodramatic, had somehow or other got it into his head that the Isles of Greece were less glorious in arts and arms in the last days of Turkish rule than in the days of the battle of Salamis or the Republic of Plato. So again Wordsworth, in an equally sentimental fashion, seems to insinuate that the Republic of Venice was not quite so powerful when Napoleon trod it out like a dying ember as when its commerce and art filled the seas of the world with a conflagration of colour. So many writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have even gone so far as to suggest that modern Spain played a less predominant part than Spain in the days of the discovery of America or the victory of Lepanto. Some, even more lacking in that Optimism which is the soul of commerce, have made an equally perverse comparison between the earlier and the later conditions of the commercial aristocracy of Holland. Some have even maintained that Tyre and Sidon are not quite so fashionable as they used to be; and somebody once said something about "the ruins of Carthage."

In somewhat simpler language, we may say that all this argument has a very big and obvious hole in it. When a man says, "People were as pessimistic as you are in societies which were not declining, but were even advancing," it is permissible to reply, "Yes, and people were probably as optimistic as you are in societies which really declined." For, after all, there were societies which really declined. It is true that Horace said that every generation seemed to be worse than the last, and implied that Rome was going to the dogs, at the very moment when all the external world was being brought under the eagles. But it is quite likely that the last forgotten court poet, praising the last forgotten Augustulus at the stiff court of Byzantium, contradicted all the seditious rumours of social decline, exactly as our newspapers do, by saying that, after all, Horace had said the same thing. And it is also possible that Horace was right; that it was in his time that the turn was taken which led from Horatius on the bridge to Heracleius in the palace; that if Rome was not immediately going to the dogs, the dogs were coming to Rome, and their distant howling could first be heard in that hour of the uplifted eagles; that there had begun a long advance that was also a long decline, but ended in the Dark Ages. Rome had gone back to the Wolf.

I say this view is at least tenable, though it does not really represent my own; but it is quite sufficiently reasonable to refuse to be dismissed with the cheap cheerfulness of the current maxim. There has been, there can be, such a thing as social decline; and the only question is, at any given moment, whether Byzantium had declined or whether Britain is declining. In other words, we must judge any such case of alleged degeneracy on its own merits. It is no answer to say, what is, of course, perfectly true, that some people are naturally prone to such pessimism. We are not judging them, but the situation which they judged or misjudged. We may say that schoolboys have always disliked having to go to school. But there is such a thing as a bad school. We may say the farmers always grumble at the weather. But there is such a thing as a bad harvest. And we have to consider as a question of the facts of the case, and not of the feelings of the farmer, whether the moral world of modern England is likely to have a bad harvest.

Now the reasons for regarding the present problem of Europe, and especially of England, as most menacing and tragic, are entirely objective reasons; and have nothing to do with this alleged mood of melancholy reaction. The present system, whether we call it capitalism or anything else, especially as it exists in industrial countries, has already become a danger; and is rapidly becoming a death-trap. The evil is evident in the plainest private experience and in the coldest economic science. To take the practical test first, it is not merely alleged by the enemies of the system, but avowed by the defenders of it. In the Labour disputes of our time, it is not the employees but the employers who declare that business is bad. The successful business man is not pleading success; he is pleading bankruptcy. The case for Capitalists is the case against Capitalism. What is even more extraordinary is that its exponent has to fall back on the rhetoric of Socialism. He merely says that miners or railwaymen must go on working "in the interests of the public." It will be noted that the capitalists now never use the argument of private property. They confine themselves entirely to this sort of sentimental version of general social responsibility. It is amusing to read the capitalist press on Socialists who sentimentally plead for people who are "failures." It is now the chief argument of almost every capitalist in every strike that he is himself on the brink of failure.

I have one simple objection to this simple argument in the papers about Strikes and the Socialist peril. My objection is that their argument leads straight to Socialism. In itself it cannot possibly lead to anything else. If workmen are to go on working because they are the servants of the public, there cannot be any deduction except that they ought to be the servants of the public authority. If the Government ought to act in the interests of the public, and there is no more to be said, then obviously the Government ought to take over the whole business, and there is nothing else to be done. I do not think the matter is so simple as this; but they do. I do not think this argument for Socialism is conclusive. But according to the Anti-Socialists the argument for Socialism is quite conclusive. The public alone is to be considered, and the Government can do anything it likes so long as it considers the public. Presumably it can disregard the liberty of the employees and force them to work, possibly in chains. Presumably also it can disregard the property of the employers, and pay the proletariat for them, if necessary out of their trouser-pockets. All these consequences follow from the highly Bolshevist doctrine bawled at us every morning in the capitalist press. That is all they have to say; and if it is the only thing to be said, then the other is the only thing to be done.

In the last paragraph it is noted that if we were left to the logic of the leader-writers on the Socialist peril, they could only lead us straight to Socialism. And as some of us most heartily and vigorously refuse to be led to Socialism, we have long adopted the harder alternative called trying to think things out. And we shall certainly land in Socialism or in something worse called Socialism, or else in mere chaos and ruin, if we make no effort to see the situation as a whole apart from our immediate irritations. Now the capitalist system, good or bad, right or wrong, rests upon two ideas: that the rich will always be rich enough to hire the poor; and the poor will always be poor enough to want to be hired. But it also presumes that each side is bargaining with the other, and that neither is thinking primarily of the public. The owner of an omnibus does not run it for the good of all mankind, despite the universal fraternity blazoned in the Latin name of the vehicle. He runs it to make a profit for himself, and the poorer man consents to drive it in order to get wages for himself. Similarly, the omnibus-conductor is not filled with an abstract altruistic desire for the nice conduct of a crowded omnibus instead of a clouded cane. He does not want to conduct omnibuses because conduct is three-fourths of life. He is bargaining for the biggest wage he can get. Now the case for capitalism was that through this private bargain the public did really get served. And so for some time it did. But the only original case for capitalism collapses entirely, if we have to ask either party to go on for the good of the public. If capitalism cannot pay what will tempt men to work, capitalism is on capitalist principles simply bankrupt. If a tea-merchant cannot pay clerks, and cannot import tea without clerks, then his business is bust and there is an end of it. Nobody in the old capitalist conditions said the clerks were bound to work for less, so that a poor old lady might get a cup of tea.

So it is really the capitalist press that proves on capitalist principles that capitalism has come to an end. If it had not, it would not be necessary for them to make the social and sentimental appeals they do make. It would not be necessary for them to appeal for the intervention of the Government like Socialists. It would not have been necessary for them to plead the discomfort of passengers like sentimentalists or altruists. The truth is that everybody has now abandoned the argument on which the whole of the old capitalism was based: the argument that if men were left to bargain individually the public would benefit automatically. We have to find a new basis of some kind; and the ordinary Conservatives are falling back on the Communist basis without knowing it. Now I respectfully decline to fall back on the Communist basis. But I am sure it is perfectly impossible to continue to fall back on the old Capitalist basis. Those who try to do so tie themselves in quite impossible knots. The most practical and pressing affairs of the hour exhibit the contradiction day after day. For instance, when some great strike or lock-out takes place in a big business like that of the mines, we are always assured that no great saving could be achieved by cutting out private profits, because those private profits are now negligible and the trade in question is not now greatly enriching the few. Whatever be the value of this particular argument, it obviously entirely destroys the general argument. The general argument for capitalism or individualism is that men will not adventure unless there are considerable prizes in the lottery. It is what is familiar in all Socialistic debates as the argument of "the incentive of gain." But if there is no gain, there is certainly no incentive. If royalty-owners and shareholders only get a little insecure or doubtful profit out of profiteering, it seems as if they might as well fall to the lowly estate of soldiers and servants of society. I have never understood, by the way, why Tory debaters are so very anxious to prove against Socialism that "State servants" must be incompetent and inert. Surely it might be left to others to point out the lethargy of Nelson or the dull routine of Gordon.

But this collapse of industrial individualism, which is not only a collapse but a contradiction (since it has to contradict all its own commonest maxims), is not only an accident of our condition, though it is most marked in our country. Anybody who can think in theories, those highly practical things, will see that sooner or later this paralysis in the system is inevitable. Capitalism is a contradiction; it is even a contradiction in terms. It takes a long time to box the compass, and a still longer time to see that it has done so; but the wheel has come full circle now. Capitalism is contradictory as soon as it is complete; because it is dealing with the mass of men in two opposite ways at once. When most men are wage-earners, it is more and more difficult for most men to be customers. For, the capitalist is always trying to cut down what his servant demands, and in doing so is cutting down what his customer can spend. As soon as his business is in any difficulties, as at present in the coal business, he tries to reduce what he has to spend on wages, and in doing so reduces what others have to spend on coal. He is wanting the same man to be rich and poor at the same time. This contradiction in capitalism does not appear in the earlier stages, because there are still populations not reduced to the common proletarian condition. But as soon as the wealthy as a whole are employing the wage-earners as a whole, this contradiction stares them in the face like an ironic doom and judgment. Employer and employee are simplified and solidified to the relation of Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday. Robinson Crusoe may say he has two problems: the supply of cheap labour and the prospect of trade with the natives. But as he is dealing in these two different ways with the same man, he will get into a muddle. Robinson Crusoe may possibly force Friday to work for nothing but his bare keep, the white man possessing all the weapons. As in the Geddes parallel, he may economize with an Axe. But he cannot cut down Friday’s salary to nothing and then expect Friday to give him gold and silver and orient pearls in return for rum and rifles. Now in proportion as capitalism covers the whole earth, links up large populations, and is ruled by centralized systems, the nearer and nearer approaches this resemblance to the lonely figures on the remote island. If the trade with the natives is really going down, so as to necessitate the wages of the natives also going down, we can only say that the case is rather more tragic if the excuse is true than if it is false. We can only say that Crusoe is now indeed alone, and that Friday is unquestionably unlucky.

I think it very important that people should understand that there is a principle at work behind the industrial troubles of England in our time; and that, whoever be right or wrong in any particular quarrel, it is no particular person or party who is responsible for our commercial experiment being faced with failure. It is a vicious circle into which wage-earning society will finally sink when it begins to lose profits and lower wages; and though some industrial countries are still rich enough to remain ignorant of the strain, it is only because their progress is incomplete; when they reach the goal they will find the riddle. In our own country, which concerns most of us most, we are already falling into that vicious circle of sinking wages and decreasing demand. And as I am going to suggest here, in however sketchy a manner, the line of escape from this slowly closing snare, and because I know some of the things that are commonly said about any such suggestion, I have a reason for reminding the reader of all these things at this stage.

"Safe! Of course it's not safe! It's a beggarly chance to cheat the gallows." Such was the intemperate exclamation of Captain Wicks in the romance of Stevenson; and the same romancer has put a somewhat similar piece of candour into the mouth of Alan Breck Stewart. "But mind you, it's no small thing! ye maun lie bare and hard . . . and ye shall sleep with your hand upon your weapons. Aye, man, ye shall taigle many a weary foot or we get clear. I tell ye this at the start, for it's a life that I ken well. But if ye ask what other chance you have, I answer; Nane."

And I myself am sometimes tempted to talk in this abrupt manner, after listening to long and thoughtful disquisitions throwing doubt on the detailed perfection of a Distributist State, as compared with the rich happiness and final repose that crowns the present Capitalist and Industrial State. People ask us how we should deal with the unskilled labour at the docks, and what we have to offer to replace the radiant popularity of Lord Devonport and the permanent industrial peace of the Port of London. Those who ask us what we shall do with the docks seldom seem to ask themselves what the docks will do with themselves, if our commerce steadily declines like that of so many commercial cities in the past. Other people ask us how we should deal with workmen holding shares in a business that might possibly go bankrupt. It never occurs to them to answer their own question, in a capitalist state in which business after business is going bankrupt. We have got to deal with the smallest and most remote possibilities of our more simple and static society, while they do not deal with the biggest and most blatant facts about their own complex and collapsing one. They are inquisitive about the details of our scheme, and wish to arrange beforehand a science of casuistry for all the exceptions. But they dare not look their own systems in the face, where ruin has become the rule. Other people wish to know whether a machine would be permitted to exist in this or that position in our Utopia; as an exhibit in a museum, or a toy in the nursery, or a "torture implement of the twentieth century" shown in the Chamber of Horrors. But those who ask us so anxiously how men are to work without machines do not tell us how machines are to work if men do not work them, or how either machines or men are to work if there is no work to do. They are so eager to discover the weak points in our proposal that they have not yet discovered any strong points in their own practice. Strange that our vain and sentimental vision should be so vivid to these realists that they can see its every detail; and that their own reality should be so vague to them that they cannot see it at all; that they cannot see the most obvious and overwhelming fact about it: that it is no longer there.

For it is one of the grim and even grisly jokes of the situation that the very complaint they always make of us is specially and peculiarly true of them. They are always telling us that we think we can bring back the past, or the barbarous simplicity and superstition of the past; apparently under the impression that we want to bring back the ninth century. But they do really think they can bring back the nineteenth century. They are always telling us that this or that tradition has gone for ever, that this or that craft or creed has gone for ever; but they dare not face the fact that their own vulgar and huckstering commerce has gone for ever. They call us reactionaries if we talk of a Revival of Faith or a Revival of Catholicism. But they go on calmly plastering their papers with the headline of a Revival of Trade. What a cry out of the distant past! What a voice from the tomb! They have no reason whatever for believing that there will be a revival of trade, except that their great-grandfathers would have found it impossible to believe in a decline of trade. They have no conceivable ground for supposing that we shall grow richer, except that our ancestors never prepared us for the prospect of growing poorer. Yet it is they who are always blaming us for depending on a sentimental tradition of the wisdom of our ancestors. It is they who are always rejecting social ideals merely because they were the social ideals of some former age. They are always telling us that the mill will never grind again the water that is past; without noticing that their own mills are already idle and grinding nothing at all — like ruined mills in some watery Early Victorian landscape suitable to their watery Early Victorian quotation. They are always telling us that we are fighting against the tide of time, as Mrs. Partington with a mop fought against the tide of the sea. And they cannot even see that time itself has made Mrs. Partington as antiquated a figure as Mother Shipton. They are always telling us that in resisting capitalism and commercialism we are like Canute rebuking the waves; and they do not even know that the England of Cobden is already as dead as the England of Canute. They are always seeking to overwhelm us in the water-floods, to sweep us away upon these weary and washy metaphors of tide and time; for all the world as if they could call back the rivers that have left our cities so far behind, or summon back the seven seas to their allegiance to the trident; or bridle again, with gold for the few and iron for the many, the roaring river of the Clyde.

We may well be tempted to the exclamation of Captain Wicks. We are not choosing between a possible peasantry and a successful commerce. We are choosing between a peasantry that might succeed and a commerce that has already failed. We are not seeking to lure men away from a thriving business to a sort of holiday in Arcadia or the peasant type of Utopia. We are trying to make suggestions about starting anew after a bankrupt business has really gone bankrupt. We can see no possible reason for supposing that English trade will regain its nineteenth-century predominance, except mere Victorian sentimentalism and that particular sort of lying which the newspapers call “optimism.” They taunt us for trying to bring back the conditions of the Middle Ages; as if we were trying to bring back the bows or the body-armour of the Middle Ages. Well, helmets have come back; and body-armour may come back; and bows and arrows will have to come back, a long time before there is any return of that fortunate moment on whose luck they live. It is quite as likely that the long bow will be found through some accident superior to the rifle as that the battleship will be able any longer to rule the waves without reference to the aeroplane. The commercial system implied the security of our commercial routes; and that implied the superiority of our national navy. Everybody who faces facts knows that aviation has altered the whole theory of that naval security. The whole huge horrible problem of a big population on a small island dependent on insecure imports is a problem quite as much for Capitalists and Collectivists as for Distributists. We are not choosing between model villages as part of a serene system of town-planning. We are making a sortie from a besieged city, sword in hand; a sortie from the ruin of Carthage. “Safe! Of course it’s not safe!” said Captain Wicks.

I think it is not unlikely that in any case a simpler social life will return; even if it return by the road of ruin. I think the soul will find simplicity again, if it be in the Dark Ages. But we are Christians and concerned with the body as well as the soul; we are Englishmen and we do not desire, if we can help it, that the English people should be merely the People of the Ruins. And we do most earnestly desire a serious consideration of whether the transition cannot be made in the light of reason and tradition; whether we cannot yet do deliberately and well what nemesis will do wastefully and without pity; whether we cannot build a bridge from these slippery downward slopes to freer and firmer land beyond, without consenting yet that our most noble nation must descend into that valley of humiliation in which nations disappear from history. For this purpose, with great conviction of our principles and with no shame of being open to argument about their application, we have called our companions to council.

III THE CHANCE OF RECOVERY

Once upon a time, or conceivably even more than once, there was a man who went into a public-house and asked for a glass of beer. I will not mention his name, for various and obvious reasons; it may be libel nowadays to say this about a man; or it may lay him open to police prosecution under the more humane laws of our day. So far as this first recorded action is concerned, his name may have been anything: William Shakespeare or Geoffrey Chaucer or Charles Dickens or Henry Fielding, or any of those common names that crop up everywhere in the populace. The important thing about him is that he asked for a glass of beer. The still more important thing about him is that he drank it; and the most important thing of all is that he spat it out again (I regret to say) and threw the pewter mug at the publican. For the beer was abominably bad.

True, he had not yet submitted it to any chemical analysis; but, after he had drank a little of it, he felt an inward, a very inward, persuasion that there was something wrong about it. When he had been ill for a week, steadily getting worse all the time, he took some of the beer to the Public Analyst; and that learned man, after boiling it, freezing it, turning it green, blue, and yellow, and so on, told him that it did indeed contain a vast quantity of deadly poison. "To continue drinking it," said the man of science thoughtfully, "will undoubtedly be a course attended with risks, but life is inseparable from risk. And before you decide to abandon it, you must make up your mind what Substitute you propose to put into your inside, in place of the beverage which at present (more or less) reposes there. If you will bring me a list of your selections in this difficult matter, I will willingly point out the various scientific objections that can be raised to all of them."

The man went away, and became more and more ill; and indeed he noticed that nobody else seemed to be really well. As he passed the tavern, his eye chanced to fall upon various friends of his writhing in agony on the ground, and indeed not a few of them lying dead and stiff in heaps about the road. To his simple mind this seemed a matter of some concern to the community; so he hurried to a police court and laid before a magistrate a complaint against the inn. "It would indeed appear," said the Justice of the Peace, "that the house you mention is one in which people are systematically murdered by means of poison. But before you demand so drastic a course as that of pulling it down or even shutting it up, you have to consider a problem of no little difficulty. Have you considered precisely what building you would Put In Its Place, whether a — ." At this point I regret to say that the man gave a loud scream and was forcibly removed from the court announcing that he was going mad. Indeed, this conviction of his mental malady increased with his bodily malady; to such an extent that he consulted a distinguished Doctor of Psychology and Psycho-Analysis, who said to him confidentially, "As a matter of diagnosis, there can be no doubt that you are suffering from Bink's Aberration; but when we come to treatment I may say frankly that it is very difficult to find anything to take the place of that affliction. Have you considered what is the alternative to madness — ?" Whereupon the man sprang up waving his arms and cried, "There is none. There is no alternative to madness. It is inevitable. It is universal. We must make the best of it."

So making the best of it, he killed the doctor and then went back and killed the magistrate and the public analyst, and is now in an asylum, as happy as the day is long.

In the fable appearing above the case is propounded which is primarily necessary to see at the start of a sketch of social renewal. It concerned a gentleman who was asked what he would substitute for the poison that had been put into his inside, or what constructive scheme he had to put in place of the den of assassins that had poisoned him. A similar demand is made of those of us who regard plutocracy as a poison or the present plutocratic state as something like a den of thieves. In the parable of the poison it is possible that the reader may share some of the impatience of the hero. He will say that nobody would be such a fool as not to get rid of prussic acid or professional criminals, merely because there were differences of opinion about the course of action that would follow getting rid of them. But I would ask the reader to be a little more patient, not only with me but with himself; and ask himself why it is that we act with this promptitude in the case of poison and crime. It is not, even here, really because we are indifferent to the substitute. We should not regard one poison as an antidote to the other poison, if it made the malady worse. We should not set a thief to catch a thief, if it really increased the amount of thieving. The principle upon which we are acting, even if we are acting too quickly to think, or thinking too quickly to define, is nevertheless a principle that we could define. If we merely give a man an emetic after he has taken a poison, it is not because we think he can live on emetics any more than he can live on poisons. It is because we think that after he has first recovered from the poison, and then recovered from the emetic, there will come a time when he himself will think he would like a little ordinary food. That is the starting-point of the whole speculation, so far as we are concerned. If certain impediments are removed, it is not so much a question of what we would do as of what he would do. So if we save the lives of a number of people from the den of poisoners, we do not at that moment ask what they will do with their lives. We assume that they will do something a little more sensible than taking poison. In other words, the very simple first principle upon which all such reforms rest, is that there is some tendency to recovery in every living thing if we remove the pressure of an immediate peril or pain. Now at the beginning of all this rough outline of a social reform, which I propose to trace here, I wish to make clear this general principle of recovery, without which it will be unintelligible. We believe that if things were released they would recover; but we also believe (and this is very important in the practical question) that if things even begin to be released, they will begin to recover. If the man merely leaves off drinking the bad beer, his body will make some effort to recover its ordinary condition. If the man merely escapes from those who are slowly poisoning him, to some extent the very air he breathes will be an antidote to his poison.

As I hope to explain in the essays that follow, I think the question of the real social reform divides itself into two distinct stages and even ideas. One is arresting a race towards mad monopoly that is already going on, reversing that revolution and returning to something that is more or less normal, but by no means ideal; the other is trying to inspire that more normal society with something that is in a real sense ideal, though not necessarily merely Utopian. But the first thing to be understood is that any relief from the present pressure will probably have more moral effect than most of our critics imagine. Hitherto all the triumphs have been triumphs of plutocratic monopoly; all the defeats have been defeats of private property. I venture to guess that one real defeat of a monopoly would have an instant and incalculable effect, far beyond itself, like the first defeats in the field of a military empire like Prussia parading itself as invincible. As each group or family finds again the real experience of private property, it will become a centre of influence, a mission. What we are dealing with is not a question of a General Election to be counted by a calculating machine. It is a question of a popular movement, that never depends on mere numbers.

That is why we have so often taken, merely as a working model, the matter of a peasantry. The point about a peasantry is that it is not a machine, as practically every ideal social state is a machine; that is, a thing that will work only as it is set down to work in the pattern. You make laws for a Utopia; it is only by keeping those laws that it can be kept a Utopia. You do not make laws for a peasantry. You make a peasantry; and the peasants make the laws. I do not mean, as will be clear enough when I come to more detailed matters, that laws must not be used for the establishment of a peasantry or even for the protection of it. But I mean that the character of a peasantry does not depend on laws. The character of a peasantry depends on peasants. Men have remained side by side for centuries in their separate and fairly equal farms, without many of them losing their land, without any of them buying up the bulk of the land. Yet very often there was no law against their buying up the bulk of the land. Peasants could not buy because peasants would not sell. That is, this form of moderate equality, when once it exists, is not merely a legal formula; it is also a moral and psychological fact. People behave when they find themselves in that position as they do when they find themselves at home. That is, they stay there; or at least they behave normally there. There is nothing in abstract logic to prove that people cannot thus feel at home in a Socialist Utopia. But the Socialists who describe Utopias generally feel themselves in some dim way that people will not; and that is why they have to make their mere laws of economic control so elaborate and so clear. They use their army of officials to move men about like crowds of captives, from old quarters to new quarters, and doubtless to better quarters. But we believe that the slaves that we free will fight for us like soldiers.

In other words, all that I ask in this preliminary note is that the reader should understand that we are trying to make something that will run of itself. A machine will not run of itself. A man will run of himself; even if he runs into a good many things that he would have been wiser to avoid. When freed from certain disadvantages, he can to some extent take over the responsibility. All schemes of collective concentration have in them the character of controlling the man even when he is free; if you will, of controlling him to keep him free. They have the idea that the man will not be poisoned if he has a doctor standing behind his chair at dinner-time, to check the mouthfuls and measure the wine. We have the idea that the man may need a doctor when he is poisoned, but no longer needs him when he is unpoisoned. We do not say, as they possibly do say, that he will always be perfectly happy or perfectly good; because there are other elements in life besides the economic; and even the economic is affected by original sin. We do not say that because he does not need a doctor he does not need a priest or a wife or a friend or a God; or that his relations to these things can be ensured by any social scheme. But we do say that there is something which is much more real and much more reliable than any social scheme; and that is a society. There is such a thing as people finding a social life that suits them and enables them to get on reasonably well with each other. You do not have to wait till you have established that sort of society everywhere. It makes all the difference so soon as you have established it anywhere. So if I am told at the start: "You do not think Socialism or reformed Capitalism will save England; do you really think Distributism will save England?" I answer, "No; I think Englishmen will save England, if they begin to have half a chance."

I am therefore in this sense hopeful; I believe that the breakdown has been a breakdown of machinery and not of men. And I fully agree, as I have just explained, that leaving work for a man is very different from leaving a plan for a machine. I ask the reader to realize this distinction, at this stage of the description, before I go on to describe more definitely some of the possible directions of reform. I am not at all ashamed of being ready to listen to reason; I am not at all afraid of leaving matters open to adjustment; I am not at all annoyed at the prospect of those who carry out these principles varying in many ways in their programmes. I am much too much in earnest to treat my own programme as a party programme; or to pretend that my private bill must become an Act of Parliament without any amendments. But I have a particular cause, in this particular case, for insisting in this chapter that there is a reasonable chance of escape; and for asking that the reasonable chance should be considered with reasonable cheerfulness. I do not care very much for that sort of American virtue which is now sometimes called optimism. It has too much of the flavour of Christian Science to be a comfortable thing for Christians. But I do feel, in the facts of this particular case, that there is a reason for warning people against a too hasty exhibition of pessimism and the pride of impotence. I do ask everybody to consider, in a free and open fashion, whether something of the sort here indicated cannot be carried out, even if it be carried out differently in detail; for it is a matter of the understanding of men. The position is much too serious for men to be anything but cheerful. And in this connection I would venture to utter a warning.

A man has been led by a foolish guide or a self-confident fellow-traveller to the brink of a precipice, which he might well have fallen over in the dark. It may well be said that there is nothing to be done but to sit down and wait for the light. Still, it might be well to pass the hours of darkness in some discussion about how it will be best for them to make their way backwards to more secure ground; and the recollection of any facts and the formulation of any coherent plan of travel will not be waste of time, especially if there is nothing else to do. But there is one piece of advice which we should be inclined to give to the guide who has misguided the simple stranger — especially if he is a really simple stranger, a man perhaps of rude education and elementary emotions. We should strongly advise him not to beguile the time by proving conclusively that it is impossible to go back, that there is no really secure ground behind, that there is no chance of finding the homeward path again, that the steps recently taken are irrevocable, and that progress must go forward and can never return. If he is a tactful man, in spite of his previous error, he will avoid this tone in conversation. If he is not a tactful man, it is not altogether impossible that before the end of the conversation, somebody will go over the precipice after all; and it will not be the simple stranger.

An army has marched across a wilderness, its column, in the military phrase, in the air; under a confident commander who is certain he will pick up new communications which will be far better than the old ones. When the soldiers are almost worn out with marching, and the rank and file of them have suffered horrible privations from hunger and exposure, they find they have only advanced unsupported into a hostile country; and that the signs of military occupation to be seen on every side are only those of an enemy closing round. The march is suddenly halted and the commander addresses his men. There are a great many things that he may say. Some may hold that he had much better say nothing at all. Many may hold that the less he says the better. Others may urge, very truly, that courage is even more needed for a retreat than for an advance. He may be advised to rouse his disappointed men by threatening the enemy with a more dramatic disappointment; by declaring that they will best him yet; that they will dash out of the net even as it is thrown, and that their escape will be far more victorious than his victory. But anyhow there is one kind of speech which the commander will not make to his men, unless he is much more of a fool than his original blunder proves him. He will not say: “We have now taken up a position which may appear to you very depressing; but I assure you it is nothing to the depression which you will certainly suffer as you make a series of inevitably futile attempts to improve it, or to fall back on what you may foolishly regard as a stronger position. I am very much amused at your absurd suggestions for getting back to our old communications; for I never thought much of your mangy old communications anyhow.” There have been mutinies in the desert before now; and it is possible that the general will not be killed in battle with the enemy.

A great nation and civilization has followed for a hundred years or more a form of progress which held itself independent of certain old communications, in the form of ancient traditions about the land, the hearth, or the altar. It has advanced under leaders who were confident, not to say cocksure. They were quite sure that their economic rules were rigid, that their political theory was right, that their commerce was beneficent, that their parliaments were popular, that their press was enlightened, that their science was humane. In this confidence they committed their people to certain new and enormous experiments; to making their own independent nation an eternal debtor to a few rich men; to piling up private property in heaps on the faith of financiers; to covering their land with iron and stone and stripping it of grass and grain; to driving food out of their own country in the hope of buying it back again from the ends of the earth; to loading up their little island with iron and gold till it was weighted like a sinking ship; to letting the rich grow richer and fewer and the poor poorer and more numerous; to letting the whole world be cloven in two with a war of mere masters and mere servants; to losing every type of moderate prosperity and candid patriotism, till there was no independence without luxury and no labour without ugliness; to leaving the millions of mankind dependent on indirect and distant discipline and indirect and distant sustenance, working themselves to death for they knew not whom and taking the means of life from they knew not where; and all hanging on a thread of alien trade which grew thinner and thinner. To the people who have been brought into this position many things may still be said. It will be right to remind them that mere wild revolt will make things worse and not better. It may be true to say that certain complexities must be tolerated for a time because they correspond to other complexities, and the two must be carefully simplified together. But if I may say one word to the princes and rulers of such a people, who have led them into such a pass, I would say to them as seriously as anything was ever said by man to men: “For God’s sake, for our sake, but, above all, for your own sake, do not be in this blind haste to tell them there is no way out of the trap into which your folly has led them; that there is no road except the road by which you have brought them to ruin; that there is no progress except the progress that has ended here. Do not be so eager to prove to your hapless victims that what is hapless is also hopeless. Do not be so anxious to convince them, now that you are at the end of your experiment, that you are also at the end of your resources. Do not be so very eloquent, so very elaborate, so very rational and radiantly convincing in proving that your own error is even more irrevocable and irremediable than it is. Do not try to minimize the industrial disease by showing it is an incurable disease. Do not brighten the dark problem of the coal-pit by proving it is a bottomless pit. Do not tell the people there is no way but this; for many even now will not endure this. Do not say to men that this alone is possible; for many already think it impossible to bear. And at some later time, at some eleventh hour, when the fates have grown darker and the ends have grown clearer, the mass of men may suddenly understand into what a blind alley your progress has led them. Then they may turn on you in the trap. And if they bore all else, they might not bear the final taunt that you can do nothing; that you will not even try to do anything. ‘What art thou, man, and why art thou despairing?’ wrote the poet. ‘God shall forgive thee all but thy despair.’ Man also may forgive you for blundering and may not forgive you for despairing.”

IV ON A SENSE OF PROPORTION

Those of us who study the papers and the parliamentary speeches with proper attention must have by this time a fairly precise idea of the nature of the evil of Socialism. It is a remote Utopian dream impossible of fulfilment and also an overwhelming practical danger that threatens us at every moment. It is only a thing that is as distant as the end of the world and as near as the end of the street. All that is clear enough; but the aspect of it that arrests me at this moment is more especially the Utopian aspect. A person who used to write in the Daily Mail paid some attention to this aspect; and represented this social ideal, or indeed almost any other social ideal, as a sort of paradise of poltroons. He suggested that “weaklings” wished to be protected from the strain and stress of our vigorous individualism, and so cried out for this paternal government or grand-motherly legislation. And it was while I was reading his remarks, with a deep and never-failing enjoyment, that the image of the Individualist rose before me; of the sort of man who probably writes such remarks and certainly reads them.

The reader refolds the Daily Mail and rises from his intensely individualistic breakfast-table, where he has just dispatched his bold and adventurous breakfast; the bacon cut in rashers from the wild boar which but lately turned to bay in his back garden; the eggs perilously snatched from swaying nest and flapping bird at the top of those toppling trees which gave the house its appropriate name of Pine Crest. He puts on his curious and creative hat, built on some bold plan entirely made up out of his own curious and creative head. He walks outside his unique and unparalleled house, also built with his own well-won wealth according to his own well-conceived architectural design, and seeming by its very outline against the sky to express his own passionate personality. He strides down the street, making his own way over hill and dale towards the place of his own chosen and favourite labour, the workshop of his imaginative craft. He lingers on the way, now to pluck a flower, now to compose a poem, for his time is his own; he is an individual and a free man and not as these Communists. He can work at his own craft when he will, and labour far into the night to make up for an idle morning. Such is the life of the clerk in a world of private enterprise and practical individualism; such the manner of his free passage from his home. He continues to stride lightly along, until he sees afar off the picturesque and striking tower of that workshop in which he will, as with the creative strokes of a god . . .

He sees it, I say, afar off. The expression is not wholly accidental. For that is exactly the defect in all that sort of journalistic philosophy of individualism and enterprise; that those things are at present even more remote and improbable than communal visions. It is not the dreadful Bolshevist republic that is afar off. It is not the Socialistic State that is Utopian. In that sense, it is not even Utopia that is Utopian. The Socialist State may in one sense be very truly described as terribly and menacingly near. The Socialist State is exceedingly like the Capitalist State, in which the clerk reads and the journalist writes. Utopia is exactly like the present state of affairs, only worse.

It would make no difference to the clerk if his job became a part of a Government department to-morrow. He would be equally civilized and equally uncivic if the distant and shadowy person at the head of the department were a Government official. Indeed, it does make very little difference to him now, whether he or his sons and daughters are employed at the Post Office on bold and revolutionary Socialistic principles or employed at the Stores on wild and adventurous Individualist principles. I never heard of anything resembling civil war between the daughter at the Stores and the daughter in the Post Office. I doubt whether the young lady at the Post Office is so imbued with Bolshevist principles that she would think it a part of the Higher Morality to expropriate something without payment off the counter of the Stores. I doubt whether the young lady at the Stores shudders when she passes a red pillar box, seeing in it an outpost of the Red Peril.

What is really a long way off is this individuality and liberty the Daily Mail praised. It is the tower that a man has built for himself that is seen in the distance. It is Private Enterprise that is Utopian, in the sense of something as distant as Utopia. It is Private Property that is for us an ideal and for our critics an impossibility. It is that which can really be discussed almost exactly as the writer in the Daily Mail discusses Collectivism. It is that which some people consider a goal and some people a mirage. It is that which its friends maintain to be the final satisfaction of modern hopes and hungers, and its enemies maintain to be a contradiction to common sense and common human possibilities. All the controversialists who have become conscious of the real issue are already saying of our ideal exactly what used to be said of the Socialists' ideal. They are saying that private property is too ideal not to be impossible. They are saying that private enterprise is too good to be true. They are saying that the idea of ordinary men owning ordinary possessions is against the laws of political economy and requires an alteration in human nature. They are saying that all practical business men know that the thing would never work, exactly as the same obliging people are always prepared to know that State management would never work. For they hold the simple and touching faith that no management except their own could ever work. They call this the law of nature; and they call anybody who ventures to doubt it a weakling. But the point to see is that, although the normal solution of private property for all is even now not very widely realized, in so far as it is realized by the rulers of the modern market (and therefore of the modern world) it is to this normal notion of property that they apply the same criticism as they applied to the abnormal notion of Communism. They say it is Utopian; and they are right. They say it is idealistic; and they are right. They say it is quixotic; and they are right. It deserves every name that will indicate how completely they have driven justice out of the world; every name that will measure how remote from them and their sort is the standard of honourable living; every name that will emphasize and repeat the fact that property and liberty are sundered from them and theirs, by an abyss between heaven and hell.

That is the real issue to be fought out with our serious critics; and I have written here a series of articles dealing more directly with it. It is the question of whether this ideal can be anything but an ideal; not the question of whether it is to be confounded with the present contemptible reality. It is simply the question of whether this good thing is really too good to be true. For the present I will merely say that if the pessimists are convinced of their pessimism, if the sceptics really hold that our social ideal is now banished for ever by mechanical difficulties or materialistic fate, they have at least reached a remarkable and curious conclusion. It is hardly stranger to say that man will have henceforth to be separated from his arms and legs, owing to the improved pattern of wheels, than to say that he must for ever say farewell to two supports so natural as the sense of choosing for himself and of owning something of his own. These critics, whether they figure as critics of Socialism or Distributism, are very fond of talking about extravagant stretches of the imagination or impossible strains upon human nature. I confess I have to stretch and strain my own human imagination and human nature very far, to conceive anything so crooked and uncanny as the human race ending with a complete forgetfulness of the possessive pronoun.

Nevertheless, as we say, it is with these critics we are in controversy. Distribution may be a dream; three acres and a cow may be a joke; cows may be fabulous animals; liberty may be a name; private enterprise may be a wild goose chase on which the world can go no further. But as for the people who talk as if property and private enterprise were the principles now in operation — those people are so blind and deaf and dead to all the realities of their own daily existence, that they can be dismissed from the debate.

In this sense, therefore, we are indeed Utopian; in the sense that our task is possibly more distant and certainly more difficult. We are more revolutionary in the sense that a revolution means a reversal: a reversal of direction, even if it were accompanied with a restraint upon pace. The world we want is much more different from the existing world than the existing world is different from the world of Socialism. Indeed, as has been already noted, there is not much difference between the present world and Socialism; except that we have left out the less important and more ornamental notions of Socialism, such additional fancies as justice, citizenship, the abolition of hunger, and so on. We have already accepted anything that anybody of intelligence ever disliked in Socialism. We have everything that critics used to complain of in the desolate utility and unity of Looking Backward. In so far as the world of Wells or Webb was criticized as a centralized, impersonal, and monotonous civilization, that is an exact description of existing civilization. Nothing has been left out but some idle fancies about feeding the poor or giving rights to the populace. In every other way the unification and regimentation is already complete. Utopia has done its worst. Capitalism has done all that Socialism threatened to do. The clerk has exactly the sort of passive functions and permissive pleasures that he would have in the most monstrous model village. I do not sneer at him; he has many intelligent tastes and domestic virtues in spite of the civilization he enjoys. They are exactly the tastes and virtues he could have as a tenant and servant of the State. But from the moment he wakes up to the moment he goes to sleep again, his life is run in grooves made for him by other people, and often other people he will never even know. He lives in a house that he does not own, that he did not make, that he does not want. He moves everywhere in ruts; he always goes up to his work on rails. He has forgotten what his fathers, the hunters and the pilgrims and the wandering minstrels, meant by finding their way to a place. He thinks in terms of wages; that is, he has forgotten the real meaning of wealth. His highest ambition is concerned with getting this or that subordinate post in a business that is already a bureaucracy. There is a certain amount of competition for that post inside that business; but so there would be inside any bureaucracy. This is a point that the apologists of monopoly often miss. They sometimes plead that even in such a system there may still be a competition among servants; presumably a competition in servility. But so there might be after Nationalization, when they were all Government servants. The whole objection to State Socialism vanishes, if that is an answer to the objection. If every shop were as thoroughly nationalized as a police station, it would not prevent the pleasing virtues of jealousy, intrigue, and selfish ambition from blooming and blossoming among them, as they sometimes do even among policemen.

Anyhow, that world exists; and to challenge that world may be called Utopian; to change that world may be called insanely Utopian. In that sense the name may be applied to me and those who agree with me, and we shall not quarrel with it. But in another sense the name is highly misleading and particularly inappropriate. The word "Utopia" implies not only difficulty of attainment but also other qualities attached to it in such examples as the Utopia of Mr. Wells. And it is essential to explain at once why they do not attach to our Utopia — if it is a Utopia.

There is such a thing as what we should call ideal Distributism; though we should not, in this vale of tears, expect Distributism to be ideal. In the same sense there certainly is such a thing as ideal Communism. But there is no such thing as ideal Capitalism; and there is no such thing as a Capitalist ideal. As we have already noticed (though it has not been noticed often enough), whenever the capitalist does become an idealist, and specially when he does become a sentimentalist, he always talks like a Socialist. He always talks about "social service" and our common interests in the whole community. From this it follows that in so far as such a man is likely to have such a thing as a Utopia, it will be more or less in the style of a Socialist Utopia. The successful financier can put up with an imperfect world, whether or no he has the Christian humility to recognize himself as one of its imperfections. But if he is called upon to conceive a perfect world, it will be something in the way of the pattern state of the Fabians or the I.L.P. He will look for something systematized, something simplified, something all on the same plan. And he will not get it; at least he will not get it from me. It is exactly from that simplification and sameness that I pray to be saved, and should be proud if I could save anybody. It is exactly from that order and unity that I call on the name of Liberty to deliver us.

We do not offer perfection; what we offer is proportion. We wish to correct the proportions of the modern state; but proportion is between varied things; and a proportion is hardly ever a pattern. It is as if we were drawing the picture of a living man and they thought we were drawing a diagram of wheels and rods for the construction of a Robot. We do not propose that in a healthy society all land should be held in the same way; or that all property should be owned on the same conditions; or that all citizens should have the same relation to the city. It is our whole point that the central power needs lesser powers to balance and check it, and that these must be of many kinds: some individual, some communal, some official, and so on. Some of them will probably abuse their privilege; but we prefer the risk to that of the State or of the Trust, which abuses its omnipotence.

For instance, I am sometimes blamed for not believing in my own age, or blamed still more for believing in my own religion. I am called medieval; and some have even traced in me a bias in favour of the Catholic Church to which I belong. But suppose we were to take a parallel from these things. If anyone said that medieval kings or modern peasant countries were to blame for tolerating patches of avowed Bolshevism, we should be rather surprised if we found that the remark really referred to their tolerating monasteries. Yet it is quite true in one sense that monasteries are devoted to Communism and that monks are all Communists. Their economic and ethical life is an exception to a general civilization of feudalism or family life. Yet their privileged position was regarded as rather a prop of social order. They give to certain communal ideas their proper and proportionate place in the State; and something of the same thing was true of the Common Land. We should welcome the chance of allowing any guilds or groups of a communal colour their proper and proportionate place in the State; we should be perfectly willing to mark off some part of the land as Common Land. What we say is that merely nationalizing all the land is like merely making monks of all the people; it is giving those ideals more than their proper and proportionate place in the State. The ordinary meaning of Communism is not that some people are Communists, but that all people are Communists. But we should not say, in the same hard and literal sense, that the meaning of Distributism is that all people are Distributists. We certainly should not say that the meaning of a peasant state is that all people are peasants. We should mean that it had the general character of a peasant state; that the land was largely held in that fashion and the law generally directed in that spirit; that any other institutions stood up as recognizable exceptions, as landmarks on that high tableland of equality.

If this is inconsistent, nothing is consistent; if this is unpractical, all human life in unpractical. If a man wants what he calls a flower-garden he plants flowers where he can, and especially where they will determine the general character of the landscape gardening. But they do not completely cover the garden; they only positively colour it. He does not expect roses to grow in the chimney-pots, or daisies to climb up the railings; still less does he expect tulips to grow on the pine, or the monkey tree to blossom like a rhododendron. But he knows perfectly well what he means by a flower-garden; and so does everybody else. If he does not want a flower-garden but a kitchen-garden, he proceeds differently. But he does not expect a kitchen-garden to be exactly like a kitchen. He does not dig out all the potatoes, because it is not a flower-garden and the potato has a flower. He knows the main thing he is trying to achieve; but, not being a born fool, he does not think he can achieve it everywhere in exactly the same degree, or in a manner equally unmixed with things of another sort. The flower-gardener will not banish nasturtiums to the kitchen-garden because some strange people have been known to eat them. Nor will the other class a vegetable as a flower because it is called a cauliflower. So, from our social garden, we should not necessarily exclude every modern machine any more than we should exclude every medieval monastery. And indeed the apologue is appropriate enough; for this is the sort of elementary human reason that men never lost until they lost their gardens: just as that higher reason that is more than human was lost with a garden long ago.

SOME ASPECTS OF BIG BUSINESS

1. The Bluff of the Big Shops   2. A Misunderstanding about Method   3. A Case in Point   4. The Tyranny of Trusts

I THE BLUFF OF THE BIG SHOPS

Twice in my life has an editor told me in so many words that he dared not print what I had written, because it would offend the advertisers in his paper. The presence of such pressure exists everywhere in a more silent and subtle form. But I have a great respect for the honesty of this particular editor; for it was, evidently as near to complete honesty as the editor of an important weekly magazine can possibly go. He told the truth about the falsehood he had to tell.

On both those occasions he denied me liberty of expression because I said that the widely advertised stores and large shops were really worse than little shops. That, it may be interesting to note, is one of the things that a man is now forbidden to say; perhaps the only thing he is really forbidden to say. If it had been an attack on Government, it would have been tolerated. If it had been an attack on God, it would have been respectfully and tactfully applauded. If I had been abusing marriage or patriotism or public decency, I should have been heralded in headlines and allowed to sprawl across Sunday newspapers. But the big newspaper is not likely to attack the big shop; being itself a big shop in its way and more and more a monument of monopoly. But it will be well if I repeat here in a book what I found it impossible to repeat in an article. I think the big shop is a bad shop. I think it bad not only in a moral but a mercantile sense; that is, I think shopping there is not only a bad action but a bad bargain. I think the monster emporium is not only vulgar and insolent, but incompetent and uncomfortable; and I deny that its large organization is efficient. Large organization is loose organization. Nay, it would be almost as true to say that organization is always disorganization. The only thing perfectly organic is an organism; like that grotesque and obscure organism called a man. He alone can be quite certain of doing what he wants; beyond him, every extra man may be an extra mistake. As applied to things like shops, the whole thing is an utter fallacy. Some things like armies have to be organized; and therefore do their very best to be well organized. You must have a long rigid line stretched out to guard a frontier; and therefore you stretch it tight. But it is not true that you must have a long rigid line of people trimming hats or tying bouquets, in order that they may be trimmed or tied neatly. The work is much more likely to be neat if it is done by a particular craftsman for a particular customer with particular ribbons and flowers. The person told to trim the hat will never do it quite suitably to the person who wants it trimmed; and the hundredth person told to do it will do it badly; as he does. If we collected all the stories from all the housewives and householders about the big shops sending the wrong goods, smashing the right goods, forgetting to send any sort of goods, we should behold a welter of inefficiency. There are far more blunders in a big shop than ever happen in a small shop, where the individual customer can curse the individual shopkeeper. Confronted with modern efficiency the customer is silent; well aware of that organization's talent for sacking the wrong man. In short, organization is a necessary evil — which in this case is not necessary.

I have begun these notes with a note on the big shops because they are things near to us and familiar to us all. I need not dwell on other and still more entertaining claims made for the colossal combination of departments. One of the funniest is the statement that it is convenient to get everything in the same shop. That is to stay, it is convenient to walk the length of the street, so long as you walk indoors, or more frequently underground, instead of walking the same distance in the open air from one little shop to another. The truth is that the monopolists' shops are really very convenient — to the monopolist. They have all the advantage of concentrating business as they concentrate wealth, in fewer and fewer of the citizens. Their wealth sometimes permits them to pay tolerable wages; their wealth also permits them to buy up better businesses and advertise worse goods. But that their own goods are better nobody has ever even begun to show; and most of us know any number of concrete cases where they are definitely worse. Now I expressed this opinion of my own (so shocking to the magazine editor and his advertisers) not only because it is an example of my general thesis that small properties should be revived, but because it is essential to the realization of another and much more curious truth. It concerns the psychology of all these things: of mere size, of mere wealth, of mere advertisement and arrogance. And it gives us the first working model of the way in which things are done to-day and the way in which (please God) they may be undone to-morrow.

There is one obvious and enormous and entirely neglected general fact to be noted before we consider the laws chiefly needed to renew the State. And that is the fact that one considerable revolution could be made without any laws at all. It does not concern any existing law, but rather an existing superstition. And the curious thing is that its upholders boast that it is a superstition. The other day I saw and very thoroughly enjoyed a popular play called It Pays to Advertise; which is all about a young business man who tries to break up the soap monopoly of his father, a more old-fashioned business man, by the wildest application of American theories of the psychology of advertising. One thing that struck me as rather interesting about it was this. It was quite good comedy to give the old man and the young man our sympathy in turn. It was quite good farce to make the old man and the young man each alternately look a fool. But nobody seemed to feel what I felt to be the most outstanding and obvious points of folly. They scoffed at the old man because he was old; because he was old-fashioned; because he himself was healthy enough to scoff at the monkey tricks of their mad advertisements. But nobody really criticized him for having made a corner, for which he might once have stood in a pillory. Nobody seemed to have enough instinct for independence and human dignity to be irritated at the idea that one purse-proud old man could prevent us all from having an ordinary human commodity if he chose. And as with the old man, so it was with the young man. He had been taught by his American friend that advertisement can hypnotize the human brain; that people are dragged by a deadly fascination into the doors of a shop as into the mouth of a snake; that the subconscious is captured and the will paralysed by repetition; that we are all made to move like mechanical dolls when a Yankee advertiser says, “Do It Now.” But it never seemed to occur to anybody to resent this. Nobody seemed sufficiently alive to be annoyed. The young man was made game of because he was poor; because he was bankrupt; because he was driven to the shifts of bankruptcy; and so on. But he did not seem to know he was something much worse than a swindler, a sorcerer. He did not know he was by his own boast a mesmerist and a mystagogue; a destroyer of reason and will; an enemy of truth and liberty.

I think such people exaggerate the extent to which it pays to advertise; even if there is only the devil to pay. But in one sense this psychological case for advertising is of great practical importance to any programme of reform. The American advertisers have got hold of the wrong end of the stick; but it is a stick that can be used to beat something else besides their own absurd big drum. It is a stick that can be used also to beat their own absurd business philosophy. They are always telling us that the success of modern commerce depends on creating an atmosphere, on manufacturing a mentality, on assuming a point of view. In short, they insist that their commerce is not merely commercial, or even economic or political, but purely psychological. I hope they will go on saying it; for then some day everybody may suddenly see that it is true.

For the success of big shops and such things really is psychology; not to say psycho-analysis; or, in other words, nightmare. It is not real and, therefore, not reliable. This point concerns merely our immediate attitude, at the moment and on the spot, towards the whole plutocratic occupation of which such publicity is the gaudy banner. The very first thing to do, before we come to any of our proposals that are political and legal, is something that really is (to use their beloved word) entirely psychological. The very first thing to do is to tell these American poker-players that they do not know how to play poker. For they not only bluff, but they boast that they are bluffing. In so far as it really is a question of an instant psychological method, there must be, and there is, an immediate psychological answer. In other words, because they are admittedly bluffing, we can call their bluff.

I said recently that any practical programme for restoring normal property consists of two parts, which current cant would call destructive and constructive; but which might more truly be called defensive and offensive. The first is stopping the mere mad stampede towards monopoly, before the last traditions of property and liberty are lost. It is with that preliminary problem of resisting the world's trend towards being more monopolist, that I am first of all dealing here. Now, when we ask what we can do, here and now, against the actual growth of monopoly, we are always given a very simple answer. We are told that we can do nothing. By a natural and inevitable operation the large things are swallowing the small, as large fish might swallow little fish. The trust can absorb what it likes, like a dragon devouring what it likes, because it is already the largest creature left alive in the land. Some people are so finally resolved to accept this result that they actually condescend to regret it. They are so convinced that it is fate that they will even admit that it is fatality. The fatalists almost become sentimentalists when looking at the little shop that is being bought up by the big company. They are ready to weep, so long as it is admitted that they weep because they weep in vain. They are willing to admit that the loss of a little toy-shop of their childhood, or a little tea-shop of their youth, is even in the true sense a tragedy. For a tragedy means always a man's struggle with that which is stronger than man. And it is the feet of the gods themselves that are here trampling on our traditions; it is death and doom themselves that have broken our little toys like sticks; for against the stars of destiny none shall prevail. It is amazing what a little bluff will do in this world.

For they go on saying that the big fish eats the little fish, without asking whether little fish swim up to big fish and ask to be eaten. They accept the devouring dragon without wondering whether a fashionable crowd of princesses ran after the dragon to be devoured. They have never heard of a fashion; and do not know the difference between fashion and fate. The necessitarians have here carefully chosen the one example of something that is certainly not necessary, whatever else is necessary. They have chosen the one thing that does happen still to be free, as a proof of the unbreakable chains in which all things are bound. Very little is left free in the modern world; but private buying and selling are still supposed to be free; and indeed still are free; if anyone has a will free enough to use his freedom. Children may be driven by force to a particular school. Men may be driven by force away from a public-house. All sorts of people, for all sorts of new and nonsensical reasons, may be driven by force to a prison. But nobody is yet driven by force to a particular shop.

I shall deal later with some practical remedies and reactions against the rush towards rings and corners. But even before we consider these, it is well to have paused a moment on the moral fact which is so elementary and so entirely ignored. Of all things in the world, the rush to the big shops is the thing that could be most easily stopped — by the people who rush there. We do not know what may come later; but they cannot be driven there by bayonets just yet. American business enterprise, which has already used British soldiers for purposes of advertisement, may doubtless in time use British soldiers for purposes of coercion. But we cannot yet be dragooned by guns and sabres into Yankee shops or international stores. The alleged economic attraction, with which I will deal in due course, is quite a different thing: I am merely pointing out that if we came to the conclusion that big shops ought to be boycotted, we could boycott them as easily as we should (I hope) boycott shops selling instruments of torture or poisons for private use in the home. In other words, this first and fundamental question is not a question of necessity but of will. If we chose to make a vow, if we chose to make a league, for dealing only with little local shops and never with large centralized shops, the campaign could be every bit as practical as the Land

Campaign in Ireland. It would probably be nearly as successful. It will be said, of course, that people will go to the best shop. I deny it; for Irish boycotters did not take the best offer. I deny that the big shop is the best shop; and I especially deny that people go there because it is the best shop. And if I be asked why, I answer at the end with the unanswerable fact with which I began at the beginning. I know it is not merely a matter of business, for the simple reason that the business men themselves tell me it is merely a matter of bluff. It is they who say that nothing succeeds like a mere appearance of success. It is they who say that publicity influences us without our will or knowledge. It is they who say that “It Pays to Advertise”; that is, to tell people in a bullying way that they must “Do It Now,” when they need not do it at all.

II A MISUNDERSTANDING ABOUT METHOD

Before I go any further with this sketch, I find I must pause upon a parenthesis touching the nature of my task, without which the rest of it may be misunderstood. As a matter of fact, without pretending to any official or commercial experience, I am here doing a great deal more than has ever been asked of most of the mere men of letters (if I may call myself for the moment a man of letters) when they confidently conducted social movements or setup social ideals. I will promise that, by the end of these notes, the reader shall know a great deal more about how men might set about making a Distributive State than the readers of Carlyle ever knew about how they should set about finding a Hero King or a Real Superior. I think we can explain how to make a small shop or a small farm a common feature of our society better than Matthew Arnold explained how to make the State the organ of Our Best Self. I think the farm will be marked on some sort of rude map more clearly than the Earthly Paradise on the navigation chart of William Morris; and I think that in comparison with his News from Nowhere this might fairly be called News from Somewhere. Rousseau and Ruskin were often much more vague and visionary than I am; though Rousseau was even more rigid in abstractions, and Ruskin was sometimes very much excited about particular details. I need not say that I am not comparing myself to these great men; I am only pointing out that even from these, whose minds dominated so much wider a field, and whose position as publicists was much more respected and responsible, nothing was as a matter of fact asked beyond the general principles we are accused of giving. I am merely pointing out that the task has fallen to a very minor poet when these very major prophets were not required to carry out and complete the fulfilment of their own prophecies. It would seem that our fathers did not think it quite so futile to have a clear vision of the goal with or without a detailed map of the road; or to be able to describe a scandal without going on to describe a substitute. Anyhow, for whatever reason, it is quite certain that if I really were great enough to deserve the reproaches of the utilitarians, if I really were as merely idealistic or imaginative as they make me out, if I really did confine myself to describing a direction without exactly measuring a road, to pointing towards home or heaven and telling men to use their own good sense in getting there — if this were really all that I could do, it would be all that men immeasurably greater than I am were ever expected to do; from Plato and Isaiah to Emerson and Tolstoy.

But it is not all that I can do; even though those who did not do it did so much more. I can do something else as well; but I can only do it if it be understood what I am doing. At the same time I am well aware that, in explaining the improvement of so elaborate a society, a man may often find it very difficult to explain exactly what he is doing, until it is done. I have considered and rejected half a dozen ways of approaching the problem, by different roads that all lead to the same truth. I had thought of beginning with the simple example of the peasant; and then I knew that a hundred correspondents would leap upon me, accusing me of trying to turn all of them into peasants. I thought of beginning with describing a decent Distributive State in being, with all its balance of different things; just as the Socialists describe their Utopia in being, with its concentration in one thing. Then I knew a hundred correspondents would call me Utopian; and say it was obvious my scheme could not work, because I could only describe it when it was working. But what they would really mean by my being Utopian, would be this: that until that scheme was working, there was no work to be done. I have finally decided to approach the social solution in this fashion: to point out first that the monopolist momentum is not irresistible; that even here and now much could be done to modify it, much by anybody, almost everything by everybody. Then I would maintain that on the removal of that particular plutocratic pressure, the appetite and appreciation of natural property would revive, like any other natural thing. Then, I say, it will be worth while to propound to people thus returning to sanity, however sporadically, a sane society that could balance property and control machinery. With the description of that ultimate society, with its laws and limitations, I would conclude.

Now that may or may not be a good arrangement or order of ideas; but it is an intelligible one; and I submit with all humility that I have a right to arrange my explanations in that order, and no critic has a right to complain that I do not disarrange them in order to answer questions out of their order. I am willing to write him a whole Encyclopaedia of Distributism if he has the patience to read it; but he must have the patience to read it. It is unreasonable for him to complain that I have not dealt adequately with Zoology, State Provision For, under the letter B; or described the honourable social status of the Guild of the Xylographers while I am still dealing alphabetically with the Guild of Architects. I am willing to be as much of a bore as Euclid; but the critic must not complain that the forty-eighth proposition of the second book is not a part of the Pons Asinorum. The ancient Guild of Bridge-Builders will have to build many such bridges.

Now from comments that have come my way, I gather that the suggestions I have already made may not altogether explain their own place and purpose in this scheme. I am merely pointing out that monopoly is not omnipotent even now and here; and that anybody could think, on the spur of the moment, of many ways in which its final triumph can be delayed and perhaps defeated. Suppose a monopolist who is my mortal enemy endeavours to ruin me by preventing me from selling eggs to my neighbours, I can tell him I shall live on my own turnips in my own kitchen-garden. I do not mean to tie myself to turnips; or swear never to touch my own potatoes or beans. I mean the turnips as an example; something to throw at him. Suppose the wicked millionaire in question comes and grins over my garden wall and says, “I perceive by your starved and emaciated appearance that you are in immediate need of a few shillings; but you can’t possibly get them,” I may possibly be stung into retorting, “Yes, I can. I could sell my first edition of Martin Chuzzlewit.” I do not necessarily mean that I see myself already in a pauper’s grave unless I can sell Martin Chuzzlewit; I do not mean that I have nothing else to suggest except selling Martin Chuzzlewit; I do not mean to brag like any common politician that I have nailed my colours to the Martin Chuzzlewit policy. I mean to tell the offensive pessimist that I am not at the end of my resources; that I can sell a book or even, if the case grows desperate, write a book. I could do a great many things before I came to definitely anti-social action like robbing a bank or (worse still) working in a bank. I could do a great many things of a great many kinds, and I give an example at the start to suggest that there are many more of them, not that there are no more of them. There are a great many things of a great many kinds in my house, besides the copy of a Martin Chuzzlewit. Not many of them are of great value except to me; but some of them are of some value to anybody. For the whole point of a home is that it is a hotch-potch. And mine, at any rate, rises to that austere domestic ideal. The whole point of one’s own house is that it is not only a number of totally different things, which are nevertheless one thing, but it is one in which we still value even the things that we forget. If a man has burnt my house to a heap of ashes, I am none the less justly indignant with him for having burnt everything, because I cannot at first even remember everything he has burnt. And as it is with the household gods, so it is with the whole of that household religion, or what remains of it, to offer resistance to the destructive discipline of industrial capitalism. In a simpler society, I should rush out of the ruins, calling for help on the Commune or the King, and crying out, “Haro! a robber has burnt my house.” I might, of course, rush down the street crying in one passionate breath, “Haro! a robber has burnt my front door of seasoned oak with the usual fittings, fourteen window frames, nine curtains, five and a half carpets, 753 books, of which four were editions de luxe, one portrait of my great-grandmother,” and so on through all the items; but something would be lost of the fierce and simple feudal cry. And in the same way I could have begun this outline with an inventory of all the alterations I should like to see in the laws, with the object of establishing some economic justice in England. But I doubt whether the reader would have had any better idea of what I was ultimately driving at; and it would not have been the approach by which I propose at present to drive. I shall have occasion later to go into some slight detail about these things; but the cases I give are merely illustrations of my first general thesis: that we are not even at the moment doing everything that could be done to resist the rush of monopoly; and that when people talk as if nothing could now be done, that statement is false at the start; and that all sorts of answers to it will immediately occur to the mind.

Capitalism is breaking up; and in one sense we do not pretend to be sorry it is breaking up. Indeed, we might put our own point pretty correctly by saying that we would help it to break up; but we do not want it merely to break down. But the first fact to realize is precisely that; that it is a choice between its breaking up and its breaking down. It is a choice between its being voluntarily resolved into its real component parts, each taking back its own, and its merely collapsing on our heads in a crash or confusion of all its component parts, which some call communism and some call chaos. The former is the one thing all sensible people should try to procure. The latter is the one thing that all sensible people should try to prevent. That is why they are often classed together.

I have mainly confined myself to answering what I have always found to be the first question, “What are we to do now?” To that I answer, “What we must do now is to stop the other people from doing what they are doing now.” The initiative is with the enemy. It is he who is already doing things, and will have done them long before we can begin to do anything, since he has the money, the machinery, the rather mechanical majority, and other things which we have first to gain and then to use. He has nearly completed a monopolist conquest, but not quite; and he can still be hampered and halted. The world has woken up very late; but that is not our fault. That is the fault of all the fools who told us for twenty years that there could never be any Trusts; and are now telling us, equally wisely, that there can never be anything else.

There are other things I ask the reader to bear in mind. The first is that this outline is only an outline, though one that can hardly avoid some curves and loops. I do not profess to dispose of all the obstacles that might arise in this question, because so many of them would seem to many to be quite a different question. I will give one example of what I mean. What would the critical reader have thought, if at the very beginning of this sketch I had gone off into a long disputation about the Law of Libel? Yet, if I were strictly practical, I should find that one of the most practical obstacles. It is the present ridiculous position that monopoly is not resisted as a social force but can still be resented as a legal imputation. If you try to stop a man cornering milk, the first thing that happens will be a smashing libel action for calling it a corner. It is manifestly mere common sense that if the thing is not a sin it is not a slander. As things stand, there is no punishment for the man who does it; but there is a punishment for the man who discovers it. I do not deal here (though I am quite prepared to deal elsewhere) with all these detailed difficulties which a society as now constituted would raise against such a society as we want to constitute. If it were constituted on the principles I suggest, those details would be dealt with on those principles as they arose. For instance, it would put an end to the nonsense whereby men, who are more powerful than emperors, pretend to be private tradesmen suffering from private malice; it will assert that those who are in practice public men must be criticized as potential public evils. It would destroy the absurdity by which an “important case” is tried by a “special jury”; or, in other words, that any serious issue between rich and poor is tried by the rich. But the reader will see that I cannot here rule out all the ten thousand things that might trip us up; I must assume that a people ready to take the larger risks would also take the smaller ones.

Now this outline is an outline; in other words, it is a design, and anybody who thinks we can have practical things without theoretical designs can go and quarrel with the nearest engineer or architect for drawing thin lines on thin paper. But there is another and more special sense in which my suggestion is an outline; in the sense that it is deliberately drawn as a large limitation within which there are many varieties. I have long been acquainted, and not a little amused, with the sort of practical man who will certainly say that I generalize because there is no practical plan. The truth is that I generalize because there are so many practical plans. I myself know four or five schemes that have been drawn up, more or less drastically, for the diffusion of capital. The most cautious, from a capitalist standpoint, is the gradual extension of profit-sharing. A more stringently democratic form of the same thing is the management of every business (if it cannot be a small business) by a guild or group clubbing their contributions and dividing their results. Some Distributists dislike the idea of the workman having shares only where he has work; they think he would be more independent if his little capital were invested elsewhere; but they all agree that he ought to have the capital to invest. Others continue to call themselves Distributists because they would give every citizen a dividend out of much larger national systems of production. I deliberately draw out my general principles so as to cover as many as possible of these alternative business schemes. But I object to being told that I am covering so many because I know there are none. If I tell a man he is too luxurious and extravagant, and that he ought to economize in something, I am not bound to give him a list of his luxuries. The point is that he will be all the better for cutting down any of his luxuries. And my point is that modern society would be all the better for cutting up property by any of these processes. This does not mean that I have not my own favourite form; personally I prefer the second type of division given in the above list of examples. But my main business is to point out that any reversal of the rush to concentrate property will be an improvement on the present state of things. If I tell a man his house is burning down in Putney, he may thank me even if I do not give him a list of all the vehicles which go to Putney, with the numbers of all the taxicabs and the time-table of all the trams. It is enough that I know there are a great many vehicles for him to choose from, before he is reduced to the proverbial adventure of going to Putney on a pig. It is enough that any one of those vehicles is on the whole less uncomfortable than a house on fire or even a heap of ashes. I admit I might be called unpractical if impenetrable forests and destructive floods lay between here and Putney; it might then be as merely idealistic to praise Putney as to praise Paradise. But I do not admit that I am unpractical because I know there are half a dozen practical ways which are more practical than the present state of things. But it does not follow, in fact, that I do not know how to get to Putney. Here, for instance, are half a dozen things which would help the process of Distributism, apart from those on which I shall have occasion to touch as points of principle. Not all Distributists would agree with all of them; but all would agree that they are in the direction of Distributism. (1) The taxation of contracts so as to discourage the sale of small property to big proprietors and encourage the break-up of big property among small proprietors. (2) Something like the Napoleonic testamentary law and the destruction of primogeniture. (3) The establishment of free law for the poor, so that small property could always be defended against great. (4) The deliberate protection of certain experiments in small property, if necessary by tariffs and even local tariffs. (5) Subsidies to foster the starting of such experiments. (6) A league of voluntary dedication, and any number of other things of the same kind. But I have inserted this chapter here in order to explain that this is a sketch of the first principles of Distributism and not of the last details, about which even Distributists might dispute. In such a statement, examples are given as examples, and not as exact and exhaustive lists of all the cases covered by the rule. If this elementary principle of exposition be not understood I must be content to be called an unpractical person by that sort of practical man. And indeed in his sense there is something in his accusation. Whether or no I am a practical man, I am not what is called a practical politician, which means a professional politician. I can claim no part in the glory of having brought our country to its present promising and hopeful condition. Harder heads than mine have established the present prosperity of coal. Men of action, of a more rugged energy, have brought us to the comfortable condition of living on our capital. I have had no part in the great industrial revolution which has increased the beauties of nature and reconciled the classes of society; nor must the too enthusiastic reader think of thanking me for this more enlightened England, in which the employee is living on a dole from the State and the employer on an overdraft at the Bank.

III A CASE IN POINT

It is as natural to our commercial critics to argue in a circle as to travel on the Inner Circle. It is not mere stupidity, but it is mere habit; and it is not easy either to break into or to escape from that iron ring. When we say things can be done, we commonly mean either that they could be done by the mass of men, or else by the ruler of the State. I gave an example of something that could be done quite easily by the mass; and here I will give an example of something that could be done quite easily by the ruler. But we must be prepared for our critics beginning to argue in a circle and saying that the present populace will never agree or the present ruler act in that way. But this complaint is a confusion. We are answering people who call our ideal impossible in itself. If you do not want it, of course, you will not try to get it; but do not say that because you do not want it, it follows that you could not get it if you did want it. A thing does not become intrinsically impossible merely by a mob not trying to obtain it; nor does a thing cease to be practical politics because no politician is practical enough to do it.

I will start with a small and familiar example. In order to ensure that our huge proletariat should have a holiday, we have a law obliging all employers to shut their shops for half a day once a week. Given the proletarian principle, it is a healthy and necessary thing for a proletarian state; just as the saturnalia is a healthy and necessary thing for a slave state. Given this provision for the proletariat, a practical person will naturally say: “It has other advantages, too; it will be a chance for anybody who chooses to do his own dirty work; for the man who can manage without servants.” That degraded being who actually knows how to do things himself, will have a look in at last. That isolated crank, who can really work for his own living, may possibly have a chance to live. A man does not need to be a Distributist to say this; it is the ordinary and obvious thing that anybody would say. The man who has servants must cease to work his servants. Of course, the man who has no servants to work cannot cease to work them. But the law is actually so constructed that it forces this man also to give a holiday to the servants he has not got. He proclaims a saturnalia that never happens to a crowd of phantom slaves that have never been there. Now there is not a rudiment of reason about this arrangement. In every possible sense, from the immediate material to the abstract and mathematical sense, it is quite mad. We live in days of dangerous division of interests between the employer and the employed. Therefore, even when the two are not divided, but actually united in one person, we must divide them again into two parties. We coerce a man into giving himself something he does not want, because somebody else who does not exist might want it. We warn him that he had better receive a deputation from himself, or he might go on strike against himself. Perhaps he might even become a Bolshevist, and throw a bomb at himself; in which case he would have no other course left to his stern sense of law and order but to read the Riot Act and shoot himself. They call us unpractical; but we have not yet produced such an academic fantasy as this. They sometimes suggest that our regret for the disappearance of the yeoman or the apprentice is a mere matter of sentiment. Sentimental! We have not quite sunk to such sentimentalism as to be sorry for apprentices who never existed at all. We have not quite reached that richness of romantic emotion that we are capable of weeping more copiously for an imaginary grocer's assistant than for a real grocer. We are not quite so maudlin yet as to see double when we look into our favourite little shop; or to set the little shopkeeper fighting with his own shadow. Let us leave these hard-headed and practical men of business shedding tears over the sorrows of a non-existent office boy, and proceed upon our own wild and erratic path, that at least happens to pass across the land of the living.

Now if so small a change as that were made to-morrow, it would make a difference: a considerable and increasing difference. And if any rash apologist of Big Business tells me that a little thing like that could make very little difference, let him beware. For he is doing the one thing which such apologists commonly avoid above all things: he is contradicting his masters. Among the thousand things of interest, which are lost in the million things of no interest, in the newspaper reports of Parliament and public affairs, there really was one delightful little comedy dealing with this point. Some man of normal sense and popular instincts, who had strayed into Parliament by some mistake or other, actually pointed out this plain fact: that there was no need to protect the proletariat where there was no proletariat to protect; and that the lonely shopkeeper might, therefore, remain in his lonely shop. And the Minister in charge of the matter actually replied, with a ghastly innocence, that it was impossible; for it would be unfair to the big shops. Tears evidently flow freely in such circles, as they did from the rising politician, Lord Lundy; and in this case it was the mere thought of the possible sufferings of the millionaires that moved him. There rose before his imagination Mr. Selfridge in his agony, and the groans of Mr. Woolworth, of the Woolworth Tower, thrilled through the kind hearts to which the cry of the sorrowing rich will never come in vain. But whatever we may think of the sensibility needed to regard the big store-owners as objects of sympathy, at any rate it disposes at a stroke of all the fashionable fatalism that sees something inevitable in their success. It is absurd to tell us that our attack is bound to fail; and then that there would be something quite unscrupulous in its so immediately succeeding. Apparently Big Business must be accepted because it is invulnerable, and spared because it is vulnerable. This big absurd bubble can never conceivably be burst; and it is simply cruel that a little pin-prick of competition can burst it.

I do not know whether the big shops are quite so weak and wobbly as their champion said. But whatever the immediate effect on the big shops, I am sure there would be an immediate effect on the little shops. I am sure that if they could trade on the general holiday, it would not only mean that there would be more trade for them, but that there would be more of them trading. It might mean at last a large class of little shopkeepers; and that is exactly the sort of thing that makes all the political difference, as it does in the case of a large class of little farmers. It is not in the merely mechanical sense a matter of numbers. It is a matter of the presence and pressure of a particular social type. It is not a question merely of how many noses are counted; but in the more real sense whether the noses count. If there were anything that could be called a class of peasants, or a class of small shopkeepers, they would make their presence felt in legislation, even if it were what is called class legislation. And the very existence of that third class would be the end of what is called the class war; in so far as its theory divides all men into employers and employed. I do not mean, of course, that this little legal alteration is the only one I have to propose; I mention it first because it is the most obvious. But I mention it also because it illustrates very clearly what I mean by the two stages: the nature of the negative and positive reform. If little shops began to gain custom and big shops began to lose it, it would mean two things, both indeed preliminary but both practical. It would mean that the mere centripetal rush was slowed down, if not stopped, and might at last change to a centrifugal movement.

And it would mean that there were a number of new citizens in the State to whom all the ordinary Socialist or servile arguments were inapplicable. Now when you have got your considerable sprinkling of small proprietors, of men with the psychology and philosophy of small property, then you can begin to talk to them about something more like a just general settlement upon their own lines; something more like a land fit for Christians to live in. You can make them understand, as you cannot make plutocrats or proletarians understand, why the machine must not exist save as the servant of the man, why the things we produce ourselves are precious like our own children, and why we can pay too dearly for the possession of luxury by the loss of liberty. If bodies of men only begin to be detached from the servile settlements, they will begin to form the body of our public opinion. Now there are a large number of other advantages that could be given to the small man, which can be considered in their place. In all of them I presuppose a deliberate policy of favouring the small man. But in the primary example here given we can hardly even say that there is any question of favour. You make a law that slave-owners shall free their slaves for a day: the man who has no slaves is outside the thing entirely; he does not come under it in law, because he does not come into it in logic. He has been deliberately dragged into it; not in order that all slaves shall be free for a day, but in order that all free men shall be slaves for a lifetime. But while some of the expedients are only common justice to small property, and others are deliberate protection of small property, the point at the moment is that it will be worth while at the beginning to create small property though it were only on a small scale. English citizens and yeomen would once more exist; and wherever they exist they count. There are many other ways, which can be briefly described, by which the break-up of property can be encouraged on the legal and legislative side. I shall deal with some of them later, and especially with the real responsibility which Government might reasonably assume in a financial and economic condition which is becoming quite ludicrous. From the standpoint of any sane person, in any other society, the present problem of capitalist concentration is not only a question of law but of criminal law, not to mention criminal lunacy.

Of that monstrous megalomania of the big shops, with their blatant advertisements and stupid standardization, something is said elsewhere. But it may be well to add, in the matter of the small shops, that when once they exist they generally have an organization of their own which is much more self-respecting and much less vulgar. This voluntary organization, as every one knows, is called a Guild; and it is perfectly capable of doing everything that really needs to be done in the way of holidays and popular festivals. Twenty barbers would be quite capable of arranging with each other not to compete with each other on a particular festival or in a particular fashion, It is amusing to note that the same people who say that a Guild is a dead medieval thing that would never work are generally grumbling against the power of a Guild as a living modern thing where it is actually working. In the case of the Guild of the Doctors, for instance, it is made a matter of reproach in the newspapers, that the confederation in question refuses to "make medical discoveries accessible to the general public." When we consider the wild and unbalanced nonsense that is made accessible to the general public by the public press, perhaps we have some reason to doubt whether our souls and bodies are not at least as safe in the hands of a Guild as they are likely to be in the hands of a Trust. For the moment the main point is that small shops can be governed even if they are not bossed by the Government. Horrible as this may seem to the democratic idealists of the day, they can be governed by themselves.

IV THE TYRANNY OF TRUSTS

We have most of us met in literature, and even in life, a certain sort of old gentleman; he is very often represented by an old clergyman. He is the sort of man who has a horror of Socialists without any very definite idea of what they are. He is the man of whom men say that he means well; by which they mean that he means nothing. But this view is a little unjust to this social type. He is really something more than well-meaning; we might even go so far as to say that he would probably be right-thinking, if he ever thought. His principles would probably be sound enough if they were really applied; it is his practical ignorance that prevents him from knowing the world to which they are applicable. He might really be right, only he has no notion of what is wrong. Those who have sat under this old gentleman know that he is in the habit of softening his stern repudiation of the mysterious Socialists by saying that, of course, it is a Christian duty to use our wealth well, to remember that property is a trust committed to us by Providence for the good of others as well as ourselves, and even (unless the old gentleman is old enough to be a Modernist) that it is just possible that we may some day be asked a question or two about the abuse of such a trust. Now all this is perfectly true, so far as it goes, but it happens to illustrate in a rather curious way the queer and even uncanny innocence of the old gentleman. The very phrase that he uses, when he says that property is a trust committed to us by Providence, is a phrase which takes on, when it is uttered to the world around him, the character of an awful and appalling pun. His pathetic little sentence returns in a hundred howling echoes, repeating it again and again like the laughter of a hundred fiends in hell: "Property is a Trust."

Now I could not more conveniently sum up what I meant by this first section than by taking this type of the dear old conservative clergyman, and considering the curious way in which he has been first caught napping, and then as it were knocked on the head. The first thing we have had to explain to him is expressed in that horrible pun about the Trust. While he has been crying out against imaginary robbers, whom he calls Socialists, he has been caught and carried away bodily by real robbers, whom he still could not even imagine. For the gangs of gamblers who make the great combines are really gangs of robbers, in the sense that they have far less feeling than anybody else for that individual responsibility for individual gifts of God which the old gentleman very rightly calls a Christian duty. While he has been weaving words in the air about irrelevant ideals, he has been caught in a net woven out of the very opposite words and notions: impersonal, irresponsible, irreligious. The financial forces that surround him are further away than anything else from the domestic idea of ownership with which, to do him justice, he himself began. So that when he still bleats faintly, "Property is a trust," we shall reply firmly, "A trust is not property."

And now I come to the really extraordinary thing about the old gentleman. I mean that I come to the queerest fact about the conventional or conservative type in modern English society. And that is the fact that the same society, which began by saying there was no such danger to avoid, now says that the danger cannot possibly be avoided. Our whole capitalist community has taken one huge stride from the extreme of optimism to the extreme of pessimism. They began by saying that there could not be Trusts in this country. They have ended by saying that there cannot be anything else except Trusts in this age. And in the course of calling the same thing impossible on Monday and inevitable on Tuesday, they have saved the life of the great gambler or robber twice over; first by calling him a fabulous monster, and second by calling him an almighty fate. Twelve years ago, when I talked of Trusts, people said: "There are no Trusts in England." Now, when I say it, the same people say: "But how do you propose that England should escape from the Trusts?" They talk as if the Trusts had always been a part of the British Constitution, not to mention the Solar System. In short, the pun and parable with which I began this article have exactly and ironically come true. The poor old clergyman is now really driven to talk as if a Trust with a big T were something that had been bestowed on him by Providence. He is driven to abandon all that he originally meant by his own curious sort of Christian individualism, and hastily reconcile himself to something that is more like a sort of plutocratic collectivism. He is beginning, in a rather bewildered way, to understand that he must now say that monopoly and not merely private property is a part of the nature of things. The net had been thrown over him while he slept, because he never thought of such a thing as a net; because he would have denied the very possibility of anybody weaving such a net. But now the poor old gentleman has to begin to talk as if he had been born in the net. Perhaps, as I say, he has had a knock on the head; perhaps, as his enemies say, he was always just a little weak in the head. But, anyhow, now that his head is in the noose, or the net, he will often start preaching to us about the impossibility of escaping from nets and nooses that are woven or spun upon the wheel of the fates. In a word, I wish to point out that the old gentleman was much too heedless about getting into the net and is much too hopeless about getting out of it.

In short, I would sum up my general suggestions so far by saying that the chief danger to be avoided now, and the first danger to be considered now, is the danger of supposing the capitalist conquest more complete than it is. If I may use the terms of the Penny Catechism about the two sins against hope, the peril now is no longer the peril of presumption but rather of despair. It is not mere impudence like that of those who told us, without winking an eyelid, that there were no Trusts in England. It is rather mere impotence like that of those who tell us that England must soon be swallowed up in an earthquake called America. Now this sort of surrender to modern monopoly is not only ignoble, it is also panic-stricken and premature. It is not true that we can do nothing. What I have written so far has been directed to showing the doubtful and the terrified that it is not true that we can do nothing. Even now there is something that can be done, and done at once; though the things so to be done may appear to be of different kinds and even of degrees of effectiveness. Even if we only save a shop in our own street or stop a conspiracy in our own trade, or get a Bill to punish such conspiracies pressed by our own member, we may come in the nick of time and make all the difference.

To vary the metaphor to a military one, what has happened is that the monopolists have attempted an encircling movement. But the encircling movement is not yet complete. Unless we do something it will be complete; but it is not true to say that we can do nothing to prevent it being completed. We are in favour of striking out, of making sorties or sallies, of trying to pierce certain points in the line (far enough apart and chosen for their weakness), of breaking through the gap in the uncompleted circle. Most people around us are for surrender to the surprise; precisely because it was to them so complete a surprise. Yesterday they denied that the enemy could encircle. The day before yesterday they denied that the enemy could exist. They are paralysed as by a prodigy. But just as we never agreed that the thing was impossible, so we do not now agree that it is irresistible. Action ought to have been taken long ago; but action can still be taken now. That is why it is worth while to dwell on the diverse expedients already given as examples. A chain is as strong as its weakest link; a battleline is as strong as its weakest man; an encircling movement is as strong as its weakest point, the point at which the circle may still be broken. Thus, to begin with, if anybody asks me in this matter, “What am I to do now?” I answer, “Do anything, however small, that will prevent the completion of the work of capitalist combination. Do anything that will even delay that completion. Save one shop out of a hundred shops. Save one croft out of a hundred crofts. Keep open one door out of a hundred doors; for so long as one door is open, we are not in prison. Throw up one barricade in their way, and you will soon see whether it is the way the world is going. Put one spoke in their wheel, and you will soon see whether it is the wheel of fate.” For it is of the essence of their enormous and unnatural effort that a small failure is as big as a big failure. The modern commercial combine has a great many points in common with a big balloon. It is swollen and yet it is swollen with levity; it climbs and yet it drifts; above all, it is full of gas, and generally of poison gas. But the resemblance most relevant here is that the smallest prick will shrivel the biggest balloon. If this tendency of our time received anything like a reasonably definite check, I believe the whole tendency would soon begin to weaken in its preposterous prestige. Until monopoly is monopolist it is nothing. Until the combine can combine everything, it is nothing. Ahab has not his kingdom so long as Naboth has his vineyard. Haman will not be happy in the palace while Mordecai is sitting in the gate. A hundred tales of human history are there to show that tendencies can be turned back, and that one stumbling-block can be the turning-point. The sands of time are simply dotted with single stakes that have thus marked the turn of the tide. The first step towards ultimately winning is to make sure that the enemy does not win, if it be only that he does not win everywhere. Then, when we have halted his rush, and perhaps fought it to a standstill, we may begin a general counter-attack. The nature of that counter-attack I shall next proceed to consider. In other words, I will try to explain to the old clergyman caught in the net (whose sufferings are ever before my eyes) what it will no doubt comfort him to know: that he was wrong from the first in thinking there could be no net; that he is wrong now in thinking there is no escape from the net; and that he will never know how wrong he was till he finds he has a net of his own, and is once more a fisher of men.

I began by enunciating the paradox that one way of supporting small shops would be to support them. Everybody could do it, but nobody can imagine it being done. In one sense nothing is so simple, and in another nothing is so hard. I went on to point out that without any sweeping change at all, the mere modification of existing laws would probably call thousands of little shops into life and activity. I may have occasion to return to the little shops at greater length; but for the moment I am only running rapidly through certain separate examples, to show that the citadel of plutocracy could even now be attacked from many different sides. It could be met by a concerted effort in the open field of competition. It could be checked by the creation or even correction of a large number of little laws. Thirdly, it could be attacked by the more sweeping operation of larger laws. But when we come to these, even at this stage, we also come into collision with larger questions.

The common sense of Christendom, for ages on end, has assumed that it was as possible to punish cornering as to punish coining. Yet to most readers to-day there seems a sort of vital contradiction, echoed in the verbal contradiction of saying, “Put not your trust in Trusts.” Yet to our fathers this would not seem even so much of a paradox as saying, “Put not your trust in princes,” but rather like saying, “Put not your trust in pirates.” But in applying this to modern conditions, we are checked first by a very modern sophistry.

When we say that a corner should be treated as a conspiracy, we are always told that the conspiracy is too elaborate to be unravelled. In other words, we are told that the conspirators are too conspiratorial to be caught. Now it is exactly at this point that my simple and childlike confidence in the business expert entirely breaks down. My attitude, a moment ago trustful and confiding, becomes disrespectful and frivolous. I am willing to agree that I do not know much about the details of business, but not that nobody could possibly ever come to know anything about them. I am willing to believe that there are people in the world who like to feel that they depend for the bread of life on one particular bounder, who probably began by making large profits on short weight. I am willing to believe that there are people so strangely constituted that they like to see a great nation held up by a small gang, more lawless than brigands but not so brave. In short, I am willing to admit that there may be people who trust in Trusts. I admit it with tears, like those of the benevolent captain in the Bab Ballads who said:

“It’s human nature p’raps; if so, Oh, isn’t human nature low?”

I myself doubt whether it is quite so low as that; but I admit the possibility of this utter lowness; I admit it with weeping and lamentation. But when they tell me it would be impossible to find out whether a man is making a Trust or not — that is quite another thing. My demeanour alters. My spirits revive. When I am told that if cornering were a crime nobody could be convicted of that crime — then I laugh; nay, I jeer.

A murder is usually committed, we may infer, when one gentleman takes a dislike to the appearance of another gentleman in Piccadilly Circus at eleven o’clock in the morning; and steps up to the object of his distaste and dexterously cuts his throat. He then walks across to the kind policeman who is regulating the traffic, and draws his attention to the presence of the corpse on the pavement, consulting him about how to dispose of the encumbrance. That is apparently how these people expect financial crimes to be done, in order to be discovered. Sometimes indeed they are done almost as brazenly, in communities where they can safely be discovered. But the theory of legal impotence looks very extraordinary when we consider the sort of things that the police do discover. Look at the sort of murders they discover. An utterly ordinary and obscure man in some hole-and-corner house or tenement among ten thousand like it, washes his hands in a sink in a back scullery; the operation taking two minutes. The police can discover that, but they could not possibly discover the meeting of men or the sending of messages that turn the whole commercial world upside down. They can track a man that nobody has ever heard of to a place where nobody knew he was going, to do something that he took every possible precaution that nobody should see. But they cannot keep a watch on a man that everybody has heard of, to see whether he communicates with another man that everybody has heard of, in order to do something that nearly everybody knows he is trying all his life to do. They can tell us all about the movements of a man whose own wife or partner or landlady does not profess to know his movements; but they cannot tell when a great combination covering half the earth is on the move. Are the police really so foolish as this; or are they at once so foolish and so wise? Or if the police were as helpless as Sherlock Holmes thought them, what about Sherlock Holmes? What about the ardent amateur detective about whom all of us have read and some of us (alas!) have written. Is there no inspired sleuth to succeed where all the police have failed; and prove conclusively from a greasy spot on the tablecloth that Mr.

Rockefeller is interested in oil? Is there no keen-faced man to infer from the late Lord Leverhulme buying up a crowd of soap-businesses that he was interested in soap? I feel inclined to write a new series of detective stories myself, about the discovery of these obscure and cryptic things. They would describe Sherlock Holmes with his monstrous magnifying-glass poring over a paper and making out one of the headlines letter by letter. They would show us Watson standing in amazement at the discovery of the Bank of England. My stories would bear the traditional sort of titles, such as “The Secret of the Skysign” and “The Mystery of the Megaphone” and “The Adventure of the Unnoticed Hoarding.”

What these people really mean is that they cannot imagine cornering being treated like coining. They cannot imagine attempted forestalling, or, indeed, any activity of the rich, coming into the realm of the criminal law at all. It would give them a shock to think of such men subjected to such tests. I will give one obvious example. The science of finger-prints is perpetually paraded before us by the criminologists when they merely want to glorify their not very glorious science. Finger-prints would prove as easily whether a millionaire had used a pen as whether a housebreaker had used a jemmy. They might show as clearly that a financier had used a telephone as that a burglar had used a ladder. But if we began to talk about taking the finger-prints of financiers, everybody would think it was a joke. And so it is: a very grim joke. The laughter that leaps up spontaneously at the suggestion is itself a proof that nobody takes seriously, or thinks of taking seriously, the idea of rich men and poor being equal before the law.

That is the reason why we do not treat Trust magnates and monopolists as they would be treated under the old laws of popular justice. And that is the reason why I take their case at this stage, and in this section of my remarks, along with such apparently light and superficial things as transferring custom from one shop to another. It is because in both cases it is a question wholly and solely of moral will; and not in the least, in any sense, a question of economic law. In other words, it is a lie to say that we cannot make a law to imprison monopolists, or pillory monopolists, or hang monopolists if we choose, as our fathers did before us. And in the same sense it is a lie to say that we cannot help buying the best advertised goods or going to the biggest shop or falling in, in our general social habits, with the general social trend. We could help it in a hundred ways; from the very simple one of walking out of a shop to the more ceremonial one of hanging a man on a gallows. If we mean that we do not want to help it, that may be very true, and even in some cases very right. But arresting a forestaller is as easy as falling off a log or walking out of a shop. Putting the log-roller in prison is no more impossible than walking out of the shop is impossible; and it is highly desirable for the health of this discussion that we should realize the fact from the first. Practically about half of the recognized expedients by which a big business is now made have been marked down as a crime in some community of the past; and could be so marked in a community of the future. I can only refer to them here in the most cursory fashion. One of them is the process against which the statesmen of the most respectable party rave day and night so long as they can pretend that it is only done by foreigners. It is called Dumping. There is a policy of deliberately selling at a loss to destroy another man's market. Another is: a process against which the same statesmen of the same party actually have attempted to legislate, so long as it was confined to moneylenders. Unfortunately, however, it is not by any means confined to moneylenders. It is the trick of tying a poorer man up in a tangle of all sorts of obligations that he cannot ultimately discharge, except by selling his shop or business. It is done in one form by giving to the desperate things on the instalment plan or on long credit. All these conspiracies I would have tried as we try a conspiracy to overthrow the State or to shoot the King. We do not expect the man to write the King a post-card, telling him he is to be shot, or to give warning in the newspapers of the Day of Revolution. Such plots have always been judged in the only way in which they can be judged: by the use of common sense as to the existence of a purpose and the apparent existence of a plan. But we shall never have a real civic sense until it is once more felt that the plot of three citizens against one citizen is a crime, as well as the plot of one citizen against three. In other words, private property ought to be protected against private crime, just as public order is protected against private judgment. But private property ought to be protected against much bigger things than burglars and pick-pockets. It needs protection against the plots of a whole plutocracy. It needs defence against the rich, who are now generally the rulers who ought to defend it. It may not be difficult to explain why they do not defend it. But anyhow, in all these cases, the difficulty is in imagining people wanting to do it; not in imagining people doing it. By all means let people say that they do not think the ideal of the Distributive State is worth the risk or even worth the trouble. But do not let them say that no human being in the past has ever taken any risk; or that no children of Adam are capable of taking any trouble. If they chose to take half as much risk to achieve justice as they have already taken to achieve degradation, if they toiled half as laboriously to make anything beautiful as they toiled to make everything ugly, if they had served their God as they have served their Pork King and their Petrol King, the success of our whole Distributive democracy would stare at the world like one of their flaming sky-signs and scrape the sky like one of their crazy towers.

SOME ASPECTS OF THE LAND

1. The Simple Truth   2. Vows and Volunteers   3. The Real Life on the Land

I THE SIMPLE TRUTH

All of us, or at least all those of my generation, heard in our youth an anecdote about George Stephenson, the discoverer of the Locomotive Steam-Engine. It was said that some miserable rustic raised the objection that it would be very awkward if a cow strayed on the railway line, whereupon the inventor replied, “It would be very awkward for the cow.” It is supremely characteristic of his age and school that it never seemed to occur to anybody that it might be rather awkward for the rustic who owned the cow.

Long before we heard that anecdote, however, we had probably heard another and more exciting anecdote called “Jack and the Beanstalk.” That story begins with the strange and startling words, “There once was a poor woman who had a cow.” It would be a wild paradox in modern England to imagine that a poor woman could have a cow; but things seem to have been different in ruder and more superstitious ages. Anyhow, she evidently would not have had a cow long in the sympathetic atmosphere of Stephenson and his steam-engine. The train went forward, the cow was killed in due course; and the state of mind of the old woman was described as the Depression of Agriculture. But everybody was so happy in travelling in trains and making it awkward for cows that nobody noticed that other difficulties remained. When wars or revolutions cut us off from cows, the industrialists discovered that milk does not come originally from cans. On this fact some of us have founded the idea that the cow (and even the miserable rustic) have a use in society, and have been prepared to concede her as much as three acres. But it will be well at this stage to repeat that we do not propose that every acre should be covered with cows; and do not propose to eliminate townspeople as they would eliminate rustics. On many minor points we might have to compromise with conditions, especially at first. But even my ideal, if ever I found it at last, would be what some call a compromise. Only I think it more accurate to call it a balance. For I do not think that the sun compromises with the rain when together they make a garden; or that the rose that grows there is a compromise between green and red. But I mean that even my Utopia would contain different things of different types holding on different tenures: that as in a medieval state there were some peasants, some monasteries, some common land, some private land, some town guilds, and so on, so in my modern state there would be some things nationalized, some machines owned corporately, some guilds sharing common profits, and so on, as well as many absolute individual owners, where such individual owners are most possible. But with these latter it is well to begin, because they are meant to give, and nearly always do give, the standard and tone of the society.

Among the things we have heard a thousand times is the statement that the English are a slow people, a cautious people, a conservative people, and so on. When we have heard a thing as many times as that, we generally either accept it as a truism, or suddenly see that it is quite untrue. And in this case it is quite untrue. The real peculiarity of England is that it is the only country on earth that has not got a conservative class. There are a large number, possibly a majority, of people who call themselves conservative. But the more they are examined, the less conservative they will appear. The commercial class that is in a special sense capitalist is in its nature the very opposite of conservative. By its own profession, it proclaims that it is perpetually using new methods and seeking for new markets. To some of us there seems to be something exceedingly stale about all that novelty. But that is because of the type of mind that is inventing, not because it does not mean to invent. From the biggest financier floating a company to the smallest tout peddling a sewing-machine, the same ideal prevails. It must always be a new company, especially after what has generally happened to the old company. And the sewing-machine must always be a new sort of sewing-machine, even if it is the sort that does not sew. But while this is obvious of the mere capitalist, it is equally true of the pure oligarch. Whatever else an aristocracy is, an aristocracy is never conservative. By its very nature it goes by fashion rather than by tradition. Men living a life of leisure and luxury are always eager for new things; we might fairly say they would be fools if they weren’t. And the English aristocrats are by no means fools. They can proudly claim to have played a great part in every stage of the intellectual progress that has brought us to our present ruin.

The first fact about establishing an English peasantry is that it is establishing, for the first time for many centuries, a traditional class. The absence of such a class will be found to be a very terrible fact, if the tug really becomes between Bolshevism and the historic ideal of property. But the converse is equally true and much more comforting. This difference in the quality means that the change will begin to be effective merely by quantity. I mean that we have not been concerned so much with the strength or weakness of a peasantry, as with presence or absence of a peasantry. As the society has suffered from its mere absence, so the society will begin to change by its mere presence. It will be a somewhat different England in which the peasant has to be considered at all. It will begin to alter the look of things, even when politicians think about peasants as often as they do about doctors. They have been known even to think about soldiers.

The primary case for the peasant is of a stark and almost savage simplicity. A man in England might live on the land, if he did not have rent to pay to the landlord and wages to pay to the labourer. He would therefore be better off, even on a small scale, if he were his own landlord and his own labourer. But there are obviously certain further considerations, and to my mind certain common misconceptions, to which the following notes refer roughly in their order. In the first place, of course, it is one thing to say that this is desirable, and another that it is desired. And in the first place, as will be seen, I do not deny that if it is to be desired, it can hardly be as a mere indulgence is desired; there will undoubtedly be required a certain spirit of effort and sacrifice for the sake of an acute national necessity, if we are to ask any landlord to do without rent or any farmer to do without assistance. But at least there really is a crisis and a necessity; to such an extent that the squire would often be only remitting a debt which he has already written off as a bad debt, and the employer only sacrificing the service of men who are already on strike. Still, we shall need the virtues that belong to a crisis; and it will be well to make the fact clear. Next, while there is all the difference between the desirable and the desired, I would point out that even now this normal life is more desired than many suppose. It is perhaps subconsciously desired; but I think it worth while to throw out a few suggestions that may bring it to the surface. Lastly, there is a misconception about what is meant by “living on the land” — and I have added some suggestions about how much more desirable it is than many suppose.

I shall consider these separate aspects of agricultural distributism more or less in the order in which I have just noted them; but here in the preliminary note I am concerned only with the primary fact. If we could create a peasantry we could create a conservative populace; and he would be a bold man who should undertake to tell us how the present industrial deadlock in the great cities is to produce a conservative populace. I am well aware that many would call the conservatism by coarser names; and say that peasants are stupid and stick-in-the-mud and tied to dull and dreary existence. I know it is said that a man must find it monotonous to do the twenty things that are done on a farm, whereas, of course, he always finds it uproariously funny and festive to do one thing hour after hour and day after day in a factory. I know that the same people also make exactly the contrary comment; and say it is selfish and avaricious for the peasant to be so intensely interested in his own farm, instead of showing, like the proletarians of modern industrialism, a selfless and romantic loyalty to somebody else's factory, and an ascetic self-sacrifice in making profits for somebody else. Giving each of these claims of modern capitalism their due weight, it is still permissible to say that in so far as the peasant proprietor is certainly tenacious of the peasant property, is concentrated on the interest or content with the dullness, as the case may be, he does, in fact, constitute a solid block of private property which can be counted on to resist Communism; which is not only more than can be said of the proletariat, but is very much more than any capitalists say of them. I do not believe that the proletariat is honeycombed with Bolshevism (if honey be an apt metaphor for that doctrine), but if there is any truth in the newspaper fears on that subject it would certainly seem that large properties cannot prevent the thing happening, whereas small properties can. But, as a matter of fact, all experience is against the assertion that peasants are dreary and degraded savages, crawling about on all fours and eating grass like the beasts of the field. All over the world, for instance, there are peasant dances; and the dances of peasants are like dances of kings and queens. The popular dance is much more stately and ceremonial and full of human dignity than is the aristocratic dance. In many a modern countryside the countryfolk may still be found on high festivals wearing caps like crowns and using gestures like a religious ritual, while the castle or chateau of the lords and ladies is already full of people waddling about like monkeys to the noises made by negroes. All over Europe peasants have produced the embroideries and the handicrafts which were discovered with delight by artists when they had long been neglected by aristocrats. These people are not conservative merely in a negative sense; though there is great value in that which is negative when it is also defensive. They are also conservative in a positive sense; they conserve customs that do not perish like fashions, and crafts less ephemeral than those artistic movements which so very soon cease to move.

The Bolshevists, I believe, have invented something which they call Proletarian Art, upon what principle I cannot imagine; save that they seem to have a mysterious pride in calling themselves a proletariat when they claim to be no longer proletarian. I rather think it is merely the reluctance of the half-educated to relinquish the use of a long word. Anyhow, there never has been in this world any such thing as Proletarian Art. But there has most emphatically been such a thing as Peasant Art.

I suppose that what is really meant is Communist Art; and that phrase alone will reveal much. I suppose a truly communal art would consist in a hundred men hanging on to one huge paint-brush like a battering-ram, and steering it across some vast canvas with the curves and lurches and majestic hesitations that would express, in darkly outlined forms, the composite mind of the community. Peasants have produced art because they were communal but not communist. Custom and a corporate tradition gave unity to their art; but each man was a separate artist. It is that satisfaction of the creative instinct in the individual that makes the peasantry as a whole content and therefore conservative. A multitude of men are standing on their own feet, because they are standing on their own land. But in our country, alas, the landowners have been standing upon nothing, except what they have trampled underfoot.

II VOWS AND VOLUNTEERS

We have sometimes been asked why we do not admire advertisers quite so much as they admire themselves. One answer is that it is of their very nature to admire themselves. And it is of the very nature of our task that people must be taught to criticize themselves; or rather (preferably) to kick themselves. They talk about Truth in Advertising; but there cannot be any such thing in the sharp sense in which we need truth in politics. It is impossible to put in the cheery terms of "publicity" either the truth about how bad things are, or the truth about how hard it will be to cure them. No advertiser is so truthful as to say, "Do your best with our rotten old typewriter; we can't get anything better just now." But we have really got to say, "Do your best with your rotten old machine of production; don't let it fall to pieces too suddenly." We seldom see a gay and conspicuous hoarding inscribed, "You are in for a rough time if you use our new kitchen-range." But we have really got to say to our friends, "You are in for a rough time if you start new farms on your own; but it is the right thing." We cannot pretend to be offering merely comforts and conveniences. Whatever our ultimate view of labour-saving machinery, we cannot offer our ideal as a labour-saving machine. There is no more question of comfort than there is for a man in a fire, a battle, or a shipwreck. There is no way out of the danger except the dangerous way.

The sort of call that must be made on the modern English is the sort of call that is made before a great war or a great revolution. If the trumpet give an uncertain sound — but it must be unmistakably the sound of a trumpet. The megaphone of mere mercantile self-satisfaction is merely loud and not in the least clear. In its nature it is saying smooth things, even if it is roaring them; it is like one whispering soft nothings, even if its whisper is a horrible yell. How can advertisement bid men prepare themselves for a battle? How can publicity talk in the language of public spirit? It cannot say, "Buy land at Blinkington-on-Sea and prepare yourself for the battle with stones and thistles." It cannot give a certain sound, like the old tocsin that rang for fire and flood, and tell the people of Puddleton that they are in danger of famine. To do men justice, no man did announce the needs of Kitchener's Army like the comforts of the kitchen-range. We did not say to the recruits, "Spend your holiday at Mons." We did not say, "Try our trenches; they are a treat." We made some sort of attempt to appeal to better things. We have to make that appeal again; and in the face of worse things. It is this that is made so difficult by the whole tone of advertisement. For the next thing we have to consider is the need of independent individual action on a large scale. We want to make the need known, as the need for recruits was made known. Education was too commercial in origin, and has allowed itself to be largely swamped by commercial advertisement. It came too much from the town; and now it is nearly driven from the town. Education really meant the teaching of town things to country people who did not want to learn them. I suggest that education should now mean the teaching of country things to town people who do want to learn them. I quite admit it would be much better to begin at least with those who really want it. But I also maintain that there are really a great many people in town and country who do really want it.

Whether we look forward to an Agrarian Law or no, whether our notion of distribution is rigid or rough and ready, whether we believe in compensation or confiscation, whether we look for this law or that law, we ought not to sit down and wait for any law at all. While the grass grows the steed has got to show that he wants grass: the steed has got to explain that he is really a graminivorous quadruped. The fulfilment of parliamentary promises grows rather slower than grass; and if nothing is done before the completion of what is called a constitutional process, we shall be about as near to Distributism as a Labour politician is to Socialism. It seems to me first necessary to revive the medieval or moral method, and call for volunteers.

The English could do what the Irish did. They could make laws by obeying them. If we are, like the original Sinn Feiners, to anticipate legal change by social agreement, we want two sorts of volunteers, in order to make the experiment on the spot. We want to find out how many peasants there are, actual or potential, who would take over the responsibility of small farms, for the sake of self-sufficiency, of real property, and of saving England in a desperate hour. We want to know how many landlords there are who would now give or sell cheaply their land to be cut up into a number of such farms. Honestly, I think the landlord would have the best of the bargain. Or rather I think that the peasant would have the hardest and most heroic part of the bargain. Sometimes it would practically pay the landlord to chuck the land altogether, since he is paying out to something that does not pay him back. But in any case, everybody has got to realize that the situation is, in no cant phrases, one for heroic remedies. It is impossible to disguise that the man who gets the land, even more than the man who gives up the land, will have to be something of a hero. We shall be told that heroes do not grow on every hedgerow, that we cannot find enough to defend all our hedges. We raised three million heroes with the blast of a bugle but a few years ago; and the trumpet we hear to-day is in a more terrible sense the trump of doom.

We want a popular appeal for volunteers to save the land; exactly as volunteers in 1914 were wanted to save the country. But we do not want the appeal weakened by that weak-minded, that wearisome, that dismal and deplorable thing that the newspapers call Optimism. We are not asking babies to look pleasant while their photographs are taken; we are asking grown men to meet a crisis as grave as a great war. We are not asking people to cut a coupon out of a newspaper, but to carve a farm out of a trackless waste; and if it is to be successful, it must be faced in something of the stubborn spirit of the old fulfilment of a vow. St. Francis showed his followers the way to a greater happiness; but he did not tell them that a wandering and homeless life would mean Everything as Nice as Mother Makes It; nor did he advertise it on hoardings as a Home From Home. But we live in a time when it is harder for a free man to make a home than it was for a medieval ascetic to do without one.

The quarrel about the Limehouse slums was a working model of the problem — if we can talk of a working model of something that does not work, and something on which only a madman would model anything. The slum-dwellers actually and definitely say that they prefer their slums to the blocks of flats provided as a refuge from the slums. And they prefer them, it is stated, because the old homes had backyards in which they could pursue “their hobbies of bird-fancying and poultry-rearing.” When offered other opportunities on some scheme of allotment, they had the hideous depravity to say that they liked fences round their private yards. So awful and overwhelming is the Red torrent of Communism as it boils through the brains of the working classes.

Now, of course, it might conceivably be necessary, in some wild congestion and convulsion, for people’s houses to be piled on top of each other for ever, in the form of a tower of flats. And so it might be necessary for men to climb on other men’s shoulders in a flood or to get out of a chasm cloven by an earthquake. And it is logically conceivable, and even mathematically correct, that we might thin the crowds in the London streets, if we could thus arrange men vertically instead of horizontally. If there were only some expedient by which a man might walk about with another man standing above him, and another above that, and so on, it would save a great deal of jostling. Men are arranged like that in acrobatic performances; and a course of such acrobatics might be made compulsory in all the schools. It is a picture that pleases me very much, as a picture. I look forward (in spirit of art for art's sake) to seeing such a living tower moving majestically down the Strand. I like to think of the time of true social organization, when all the clerks of Messrs. Boodle & Bunkham shall no longer come up in their present random and straggling fashion, each from his little suburban villa. They shall not even, as in the immediate and intermediary stage of the Servile State, march in a well-drilled column from the dormitory in one part of London, to the emporium in the other. No, a nobler vision has arisen before me into the very heights of heaven. A toppling pagoda of clerks, one balanced on the top of another, moves down the street, perhaps making acrobatic patterns in the air as it moves, to illustrate the perfect discipline of its social machinery. All that would be very impressive; and it really would, among other things, economize space. But if one of the men near the top of that swaying tower were to say that he hoped some day to be able to revisit the earth, I should sympathize with his sense of exile. If he were to say that it is natural to man to walk on the earth, I should find myself in agreement with his school of philosophy. If he were to say that it was very difficult to look after chickens in that acrobatic attitude and altitude, I should think his difficulty a real one. At first it might be retorted that bird-fancying would be even more appropriate to such an airy perch, but in practice those birds would be very fancy birds. Finally, if he said that keeping chickens that laid eggs was a worthy and valuable social work, much more worthy and valuable than serving Messrs. Boodle & Bunkham with the most perfect discipline and organization, I should agree with that sentiment most of all.

Now the whole of our modern problem is very difficult, and though in one way the agricultural part of it is much the simplest, in another way it is by no means the least difficult. But this Limehouse affair is a vivid example of how we make the difficulty more difficult. We are told again and again that the slum-dwellers of the big towns cannot merely be turned loose on the land, that they do not want to go on the land, that they have no tastes or turn of thought that could make them by any process into a people interested in the land, that they cannot be conceived as having any pleasures except town pleasures, or even any discontents except the Bolshevism of the towns. And then when a whole crowd of them want to keep chickens, we force them to live in flats. When a whole crowd of them want to have fences, we laugh and order them off into communal barracks. When a whole population wishes to insist on palings and enclosures and the traditions of private property, the authorities act as if they were suppressing a Red riot. When these very hopeless slum-dwellers do actually set all their hopes on a rural occupation, which they can still practise even in the slums, we tear them away from that occupation and call it improving their condition. You pick a man up who has his head in a hen-coop, forcibly set him on giant stilts a hundred feet high where he cannot reach the ground, and then say you have saved him from misery. And you add that a man like that can only live on stilts and would never be interested in hens.

Now the very first question that is always asked of those advocating our sort of agricultural reconstruction is this question, which is fundamental because it is psychological. Whatever else we may or may not need for a peasantry, we do certainly need peasants. In the present mixture and muddle of more or less urbanized civilization, have we even the first elements or the first possibilities? Have we peasants, or even potential peasants? Like all questions of this sort, it cannot be answered by statistics. Statistics are artificial even when they are not fictitious, for they always assume the very fact which a moral estimate must always deny; they assume that every man is one man. They are based on a sort of atomic theory that the individual is really individual, in the sense of indivisible. But when we are dealing professedly with the proportion of different loves or hates or hopes or hungers, this is so far from being a fact that can be assumed, it is the very first that must be denied. It is denied by all that deeper consideration which wise men used to call spiritual, but which fools were frightened out of calling spiritual, till they ventured to say it in Greek and call it psychical or psychological. In one sense the highest spirituality insists, of course, that one man is one. But in the sense here involved, the spiritual view has always been that one man was at least two, and the psychological view has shown some taste for turning him into half a dozen. It is no good, therefore, to discuss the number of peasants who are nothing else but peasants. Very probably there are none at all. It is no good asking how many complete and compact yeomen or yokels are waiting all ready in smock-frocks or blouses, their spades and hay-forks clutched in their hand, in the neighbourhood of Brompton or Brixton; waiting for us to give the signal to rush back to the land. If anybody is such a fool as to expect that sort of thing, the fool is not to be found in our small political party. When we are dealing with a matter of this kind, we are dealing with different elements in the same class, or even in the same man. We are dealing with elements which should be encouraged or educated or (if we must bring the word in somewhere) evolved. We have to consider whether there are any materials out of which to make peasants to make a peasantry, if we really choose to try. Nowhere in these notes have I suggested that there is the faintest possibility of it being done, if we do not choose to try.

Now, using words in this sensible sense, I should maintain that there is a very large element still in England that would like to return to this simpler sort of England. Some of them understand it better than others, some of them understand themselves better than others; some would be prepared for it as a revolution; some only cling to it very blindly as a tradition; some have never thought of it as anything but a hobby; some have never heard of it and feel it only as a want. But the number of people who would like to get out of the tangle of mere ramifications and communications in the town, and get back nearer to the roots of things, where things are made directly out of nature, I believe to be very large. It is probably not a majority, but I suspect that even now it is a very large minority. A man does not necessarily want this more than everything else at every moment of his life. No sane person expects any movement to consist entirely of such monomaniacs. But a good many people want it a good deal. I have formed that impression from experience, which is of all things the most difficult to reproduce in controversy. I guess it from the way in which numberless suburbans talk about their gardens. I guess it from the sort of things that they really envy in the rich; one of the most notable of which is merely empty space. I notice it in all the element that desires the country, even if it defaces the country. I notice it in the profound popular interest everywhere, especially in England, in the breeding or training of any kind of animal. And if I wanted a supreme, a symbolic, a triumphant example of all that I mean, I could find it in the case I have quoted of these men living in the most miserable slums of Limehouse, and reluctant to leave them because it would mean leaving behind a rabbit in a rabbit-hutch or a chicken in a hen-coop.

Now if we were really doing what I suggest, or if we really knew what we were doing, we should seize on these slum dwellers as if they were infant prodigies or (even more lucrative) monsters to be exhibited in a fair. We should see that such people have a natural genius for such things. We should encourage them in such things. We should educate them in such things. We should see in them the seed and living principle of a real spontaneous revival of the countryside. I repeat that it would be a matter of proportion and therefore of tact. But we should be on their side, being confident that they are on our side and on the side of the countryside. We should reconstruct our popular education so as to help these hobbies. We should think it worth while to teach people the things they are so eager to teach themselves. We should teach them; we might even, in a burst of Christian humility, occasionally allow them to teach us. What we do is to bundle them out of their houses, where they do these things with difficulty, and drag them shrieking to new and unfamiliar places where they cannot do them at all. This example alone would show how much we are really doing for the rural reconstruction of England.

Though much could be done by volunteers, and by a voluntary bargain between the man who really could do the work and the man who frequently cannot get the rent, there is nothing in our social philosophy that forbids the use of the State power where it can be used. And either by the State subsidy or some large voluntary fund, it seems to me that it would still be possible at least to give the other man something as good as the rent that he does not get. In other words, long before our Communists come to the controversial ethics of confiscation, it seems to me within the resources of civilization to enable Brown to buy from Smith what is now of very little value to Smith and might be of very great value to Brown. I know the current complaint against subsidy, and the general argument that applies equally to subscription; but I do think that a subsidy to restore agriculture would find more repayment in the future than a subsidy to patch up the position of coal; just as I think that in its turn more defensible than half a hundred salaries that we pay to a mob of nobodies for plaguing the poor with sham science and petty tyranny. But there are, as I have already hinted, other ways by which even the State could help in the matter. So long as we have State education, it seems a pity that it can never at any moment be determined by the needs of the State. If the immediate need of the State is to pay some attention to the existence of the earth, there really seems no reason why the eyes of the schoolmasters and schoolboys, staring at the stars, should not be turned in the direction of that planet. At present we have education, not indeed for angels, but rather for aviators. They do not even understand a man's wish to remain tied to the ground. There is in their ideal an insanity that may be truly called unearthly.

Now I suggest such a peasantry of volunteers primarily as a nucleus, but I think it will be a nucleus of attraction. I think it will stand up not only as a rock but as a magnet. In other words, as soon as it is admitted that it can be done, it will become important when a number of other things can no longer be done. When trade is increasingly bad, this will be counted better even by those who count it a second best. When we speak of people leaving the countryside and flocking to the towns, we are not judging the case fairly. Something may be allowed for a social type that would always prefer cinemas and picture post cards even to property and liberty. But there is nothing conclusive in the fact that people prefer to go without property and liberty, with a cinema, to going without property and liberty without a cinema. Some people may like the town so much that they would rather be sweated in the town than free in the country. But nothing is proved by the mere fact that they would rather be sweated in the town than sweated in the country. I believe, therefore, that if we created even a considerable patch of peasantry, the patch would grow. People would fall back on it as they retired from the declining trades. At present the patch is not growing, because there is no patch to grow; people do not even believe in its existence, and can hardly believe in its extension.

So far, I merely propose to suggest that many peasants would now be ready to work alone on the land, though it would be a sacrifice; that many squires would be ready to let them have the land, though it would be a sacrifice; that the State (and for that matter any other patriotic corporation) could be called upon to help either or both in these actions, that it might not be an intolerable or impossible sacrifice. In all this I would remind the reader that I am only dealing with immediately practicable action and not with an ultimate or complete condition; but it seems to me that something of this sort might be set about almost at once. I shall next proceed to consider a misunderstanding about how a group of peasants could live on the land.

III THE REAL LIFE ON THE LAND

We offer one among many proposals for undoing the evil of capitalism, on the ground that ours is the only one that really is a proposal for undoing it. The others are all proposals for overdoing it. The natural thing to do with a wrong operation is to reverse it. The natural action, when property has fallen into fewer hands, is to restore it to more numerous hands. If twenty men are fishing in a river in such a crowd that their fishing-lines all get entangled into one, the normal operation is to disentangle them, and sort them out so that each fisherman has his own fishing-line. No doubt a collectivist philosopher standing on the bank might point out that the interwoven lines were now practically a net; and might be trailed along by a common effort so as to drag the river-bed. But apart from his scheme being doubtful in practice, it insults the intellectual instincts even in principle. It is not putting things right to take a doubtful advantage of their being wrong; and it does not even sound like a sane design to exaggerate an accident. Socialism is but the completion of the capitalist concentration; yet that concentration was itself effected blindly like a blunder. Now this naturalness, in the idea of undoing what was ill done would appeal, I think, to many natural people who feel the long-winded sociological schemes to be quite unnatural. For that reason I suggest in this section that many ordinary men, landlords and labourers, Tories and Radicals, would probably help us in this task, if it were separated from party politics and from the pride and pedantry of the intellectuals.

But there is another aspect in which the task is both more easy and more difficult. It is more easy because it need not be crushed by complexities of cosmopolitan trade. It is harder because it is a hard life to live apart from them. A Distributist for whose work (on a little paper defaced, alas, with my own initials) I have a very lively gratitude, once noted a truth often neglected. He said that living on the land was quite a different thing from living by carting things off it. He proved, far more lucidly than I could, how practical is the difference in economics. But I should like to add here a word about a corresponding distinction in ethics. For the former, it is obvious that most arguments about the inevitable failure of a man growing turnips in Sussex are arguments about his failing to sell them, not about his failing to eat them. Now as I have already explained, I do not propose to reduce all citizens to one type, and certainly not to one turnip-eater. In a greater or less degree, as circumstances dictated, there would doubtless be people selling turnips to other people; perhaps even the most ardent turnip-eater would probably sell some turnips to some people. But my meaning will not be clear if it be supposed that no more social simplification is needed than is implied in selling turnips out of a field instead of top-hats out of a shop. It seems to me that a great many people would be only too glad to live on the land, when they find the only alternative is to starve in the street. And it would surely modify the modern enormity of unemployment, if any large number of people were really living on the land, not merely in the sense of sleeping on the land but of feeding on the land. There will be many who maintain that this would mean a very dull life compared with the excitements of dying in a workhouse in Liverpool; just as there are many who insist that the average woman is made to drudge in the home, without asking whether the average man exults in having to drudge in the office. But passing over the fact that we may soon be faced with a problem at least as prosaic as a famine, I do not admit that such a life is necessarily or entirely prosaic. Rustic populations, largely self-supporting, seem to have amused themselves with a great many mythologies and dances and decorative arts; and I am not convinced that the turnip-eater always has a head like a turnip or that the top-hat always covers the brain of a philosopher. But if we look at the problem from the point of view of the community as a whole, we shall note other and not uninteresting things. A system based entirely on the division of labour is in one sense literally half-witted. That is, each performer of half of an operation does really use only half of his wits. It is not a question in the ordinary sense of intellect, and certainly not in the sense of intellectualism. But it is a question of integrity, in the strict sense of the word. The peasant does live, not merely a simple life, but a complete life. It may be very simple in its completeness, but the community is not complete without that completeness. The community is at present very defective because there is not in the core of it any such simple consciousness; any one man who represents the two parties to a contract. Unless there is, there is nowhere a full understanding of those terms: self-support, self-control, self-government. He is the only unanimous mob and the only universal man. He is the one half of the world which does know how the other half lives.

Many must have quoted the stately tag from Virgil which says, “Happy were he who could know the causes of things,” without remembering in what context it comes. Many have probably quoted it because the others have quoted it. Many, if left in ignorance to guess whence it comes, would probably guess wrong. Everybody knows that Virgil, like Homer, ventured to describe boldly enough the most secret councils of the gods. Everybody knows that Virgil, like Dante took his hero into Tartarus and the labyrinth of the last and lowest foundations of the universe. Every one knows that he dealt with the fall of Troy and the rise of Rome, with the laws of an empire fitted to rule all the children of men, with the ideals that should stand like stars before men committed to that awful stewardship. Yet it is in none of these connections, in none of these passages, that he makes the curious remark about human happiness consisting in a knowledge of causes. He says it, I fancy, in a pleasantly didactic poem about the rules for keeping bees. Anyhow, it is part of a series of elegant essays on country pursuits, in one sense, indeed, trivial, but in another sense almost technical. It is in the midst of these quiet and yet busy things that the great poet suddenly breaks out into the great passage, about the happy man whom neither kings nor mobs can cow; who, having beheld the root and reason of all things, can even hear under his feet, unshaken, the roar of the river of hell.

And in saying this, the poet certainly proves once more the two great truths: that a poet is a prophet, and that a prophet is a practical man. Just as his longing for a deliverer of the nations was an unconscious prophecy of Christ, so his criticism of town and country is an unconscious prophecy of the decay that has come on the world through falling away from Christianity. Much may be said about the monstrosity of modern cities; it is easy to see and perhaps a little too easy to say. I have every sympathy with some wild-haired prophet who should lift up his voice in the streets to proclaim the Burden of Brompton in the manner of the Burden of Babylon. I will support (to the extent of sixpence, as Carlyle said) any old man with a beard who will wave his arms and call down fire from heaven upon Bayswater. I quite agree that lions will howl in the high places of Paddington; and I am entirely in favour of jackals and vultures rearing their young in the ruins of the Albert Hall. But in these cases, perhaps, the prophet is less explicit than the poet. He does not tell us exactly what is wrong with the town; but merely leaves it to our own delicate intuitions, to infer from the sudden appearance of wild unicorns trampling down our gardens, or a shower of flaming serpents shooting over our heads through the sky like a flight of arrows, or some such significant detail, that there probably is something wrong. But if we wish in another mood to know intellectually what it is that is wrong with the city, and why it seems to be driving on to dooms quite as unnatural and much more ugly, we shall certainly find it in that profound and piercing irrelevancy of the Latin line.

What is wrong with the man in the modern town is that he does not know the causes of things; and that is why, as the poet says, he can be too much dominated by despots and demagogues. He does not know where things come from; he is the type of the cultivated Cockney who said he liked milk out of a clean shop and not a dirty cow. The more elaborate is the town organization, the more elaborate even is the town education, the less is he the happy man of Virgil who knows the causes of things. The town civilization simply means the number of shops through which the milk does pass from the cow to the man; in other words, it means the number of opportunities of wasting the milk, of watering the milk, of poisoning the milk, and of swindling the man. If ever he protests against being poisoned or swindled, he will certainly be told that it is no good crying over spilt milk; or, in other words, that it is reactionary sentimentalism to attempt to undo what is done or to restore what is perished. But he does not protest very much, because he cannot; and he cannot because he does not know enough about the causes of things — about the primary forms of property and production, or the points where man is nearest to his natural origins.

So far the fundamental fact is clear enough; and by this time this side of the truth is even fairly familiar. A few people are still ignorant enough to talk about the ignorant peasant. But obviously in the essential sense it would be far truer to talk about the ignorant townsman. Even where the townsman is equally well employed, he is not in this sense equally well informed. Indeed, we should see this simple fact clearly enough, if it concerned almost anything except the essentials of our life. If a geologist were tapping with a geological hammer on the bricks of a half-built house, and telling the bricklayers what the clay was and where it came from, we might think him a nuisance; but we should probably think him a learned nuisance. We might prefer the workman's hammer to the geologist's hammer; but we should admit that there were some things in the geologist's head that did not happen to be in the workman's head. Yet the yokel, or young man from the country, really would know something about the origin of our breakfasts, as does the professor about the origin of our bricks. Should we see a grotesque medieval monster called a pig hung topsy-turvy from a butcher's hook, like a huge bat from a branch, it will be the young man from the country who will soothe our fears and still our refined shrieks with some account of the harmless habits of this fabulous animal, and by tracing the strange and secret connection between it and the rashers on the breakfast table. If a thunderbolt or meteoric stone fell in front of us in the street, we might have more sympathy with the policeman who wanted to remove it from the thoroughfare than with the professor who wished to stand in the middle of the thoroughfare, lecturing on the constituent elements of the comet or nebula of which it was a flying fragment. But though the policeman might be justified in exclaiming (in the original Greek) "What are the Pleiades to me?" even he would admit that more information about the soil and strata of the Pleiades can be obtained from a professor than from a policeman. So if some strange and swollen monstrosity called a vegetable marrow surprises us like a thunderbolt, let us not imagine that it is so strange to the man who grows marrows as it is to us, merely because his field and work seem to be as far away as the Pleiades. Let us recognize that he is, after all, a specialist on these mysterious marrows and prehistoric pigs; and treat him like a learned man come from a foreign university. England is now such a long way off from London that its emissaries might at least be received with the respect due to distinguished visitors from China or the Cannibal Islands. But, anyhow, we need no longer talk of them as merely ignorant, in talking of the very thing of which we are ignorant ourselves. One man may think the peasant's knowledge irrelevant, as another may think the professor's irrelevant; but in both cases it is knowledge; for it is knowledge of the causes of things.

Most of us realize in some sense that this is true; but many of us have not yet realized that the converse is also true. And it is that other truth, when we have understood it, that leads to the next necessary point about the full status of the peasant. And the point is this: that the peasant also will have but a partial experience if he grows things in the country solely in order to sell them to the town. Of course, it is only a joke to represent either the ignorance of town or country as being so grotesque as I have suggested for the sake of example. The townsman does not really think that milk is rained from the clouds or that rashers grow on trees, even when he is a little vague about vegetable marrows. He knows something about it; but not enough to make his advice of much value. The rustic does not really think that milk is used as whitewash or marrows as bolsters, even if he never actually sees them used. But if he is a mere producer and not a consumer of them, his position does become as partial as that of any Cockney clerk; nearly as narrow and even more servile. Given the wonderful romance of the vegetable marrow, it is a bad thing that the peasant should only know the beginning of the story, as it is a bad thing that the clerk should only know the end of it.

I insert here this general suggestion for a particular reason. Before we come to the practical expediency of the peasant who consumes what he produces (and the reason for thinking it, as Mr. Heseltine has urged, much more practicable than the method by which he only sells what he produces), I think it well to point out that this course, while it is more expedient, is not a mere surrender to expediency. It seems to me a very good thing, in theory as well as practice, that there should be a body of citizens primarily concerned in producing and consuming and not in exchanging. It seems to me a part of our ideal, and not merely a part of our compromise, that there should be in the community a sort of core not only of simplicity but of completeness. Exchange and variation can then be given their reasonable place; as they were in the old world of fairs and markets. But there would be somewhere in the centre of civilization a type that was truly independent; in the sense of producing and consuming within its own social circle. I do not say that such a complete human life stands for a complete humanity. I do not say that the State needs only the man who needs nothing from the State. But I do say that this man who supplies his own needs is very much needed. I say it largely because of his absence from modern civilization, that modern civilization has lost unity. It is nobody's business to note the whole of a process, to see where things come from and where they go to. Nobody follows the whole winding course of the river of milk as it flows from the cow to the baby. Nobody who is in at the death of the pig is responsible for realizing that the proof of the pig is in the eating. Men throw marrows at other men like cannon balls; but they do not return to them like boomerangs. We need a social circle in which things constantly return to those that threw them; and men who know the end and the beginning and the rounding of our little life.

SOME ASPECTS OF MACHINERY

1. The Wheel of Fate   2. The Romance of Machinery   3. The Holiday of the Slave   4. The Free Man and the Ford Car

I THE WHEEL OF FATE

The evil we are seeking to destroy clings about in corners especially in the form of catch-phrases by which even the intelligent can easily be caught. One phrase, which we may hear from anybody at any moment, is the phrase that such and such a modern institution has “come to stay.” It is these half-metaphors that tend to make us all half-witted. What is precisely meant by the statement that the steam-engine or the wireless apparatus has come to stay? What is meant, for that matter, even by saying that the Eiffel Tower has come to stay? To begin with, we obviously do not mean what we mean when we use the words naturally; as in the expression, “Uncle Humphrey has come to stay.” That last sentence may be uttered in tones of joy, or of resignation, or even of despair; but not of despair in the sense that Uncle Humphrey is really a monument that can never be moved. Uncle Humphrey did come; and Uncle Humphrey will presumably at some time go; it is even possible (however painful it may be to imagine such domestic relations) that in the last resort he should be made to go. The fact that the figure breaks down, even apart from the reality it is supposed to represent, illustrates how loosely these catch-words are used. But when we say, “The Eiffel Tower has come to stay,” we are still more inaccurate. For, to begin with, the Eiffel Tower has not come at all. There was never a moment when the Eiffel Tower was seen striding towards Paris on its long iron legs across the plains of France, as the giant in the glorious nightmare of Rabelais came to tower over Paris and carry away the bells of Notre-Dame. The figure of Uncle Humphrey seen coming up the road may possibly strike as much terror as any walking tower or towering giant; and the question that may leap into every mind may be the question of whether he has come to stay. But whether or no he has come to stay he has certainly come. He has willed; he has propelled or precipitated his body in a certain direction; he has agitated his own legs; it is even possible (for we all know what Uncle Humphrey is like) that he has insisted on carrying his own portmanteau, to show the lazy young dogs what he can still do at seventy-three.

Now suppose that what had really happened was something like this; something like a weird story of Hawthorne or Poe. Suppose we ourselves had actually manufactured Uncle Humphrey; had put him together, piece by piece, like a mechanical doll. Suppose we had so ardently felt at the moment the need of an uncle in our home life that we had constructed him out of domestic materials, like a Guy for the fifth of November. Taking, it may be, a turnip from the kitchen-garden to represent his bald and venerable head; permitting the water-butt, as it were, to suggest the lines of his figure; stuffing a pair of trousers and attaching a pair of boots, we could produce a complete and convincing uncle of whom any family might be proud. Under those conditions, it might be graceful enough to say, in the merely social sense and as a sort of polite fiction, "Uncle Humphrey has come to stay." But surely it would be very extraordinary if we afterwards found the dummy relative was nothing but a nuisance, or that his materials were needed for other purposes — surely it would be very extraordinary if we were then forbidden to take him to pieces again; if every effort in that direction were met with the resolute answer, "No, no; Uncle Humphrey has come to stay." Surely we should be tempted to retort that Uncle Humphrey never came at all. Suppose all the turnips were wanted for the self-support of the peasant home. Suppose the water-butts were wanted; let us hope for the purpose of holding beer. Suppose the male members of the family refused any longer to lend their trousers to an entirely imaginary relative. Surely we should then see through the polite fiction that led us to talk as if the uncle had "come," had come with an intention, had remained with a purpose, and all the rest. The thing we made did not come, and certainly did not come to do anything, either to stay or to depart.

Now no doubt most people even in the logical city of Paris would say that the Eiffel Tower has come to stay. And no doubt most people in the same city rather more than a hundred years before would have said that the Bastille had come to stay. But it did not stay; it left the neighbourhood quite abruptly. In plain words, the Bastille was something that man had made and, therefore, man could unmake. The Eiffel Tower is something that man has made and man could unmake; though perhaps we may think it practically probable that some time will elapse before man will have the good taste or good sense or even the common sanity to unmake it. But this one little phrase about the thing "coming" is alone enough to indicate something profoundly wrong about the very working of men's minds on the subject. Obviously a man ought to be saying, "I have made an electric battery. Shall I smash it, or shall I make another?" Instead of that, he seems to be bewitched by a sort of magic and stand staring at the thing as if it were a seven-headed dragon; and he can only say, “The electric battery has come. Has it come to stay?”

Before we begin any talk of the practical problem of machinery, it is necessary to leave off thinking like machines. It is necessary to begin at the beginning and consider the end. Now we do not necessarily wish to destroy every sort of machinery. But we do desire to destroy a certain sort of mentality. And that is precisely the sort of mentality that begins by telling us that nobody can destroy machinery. Those who begin by saying that we cannot abolish the machine, that we must use the machine, are themselves refusing to use the mind.

The aim of human polity is human happiness. For those holding certain beliefs it is conditioned by the hope of a larger happiness, which it must not imperil. But happiness, the making glad of the heart of man, is the secular test and the only realistic test. So far from this test, by the talisman of the heart, being merely sentimental, it is the only test that is in the least practical. There is no law of logic or nature or anything else forcing us to prefer anything else. There is no obligation on us to be richer, or busier, or more efficient, or more productive, or more progressive, or in any way worldlier or wealthier, if it does not make us happier. Mankind has as much right to scrap its machinery and live on the land, if it really likes it better, as any man has to sell his old bicycle and go for a walk, if he likes that better. It is obvious that the walk will be slower; but he has no duty to be fast. And if it can be shown that machinery has come into the world as a curse, there is no reason whatever for our respecting it because it is a marvellous and practical and productive curse. There is no reason why we should not leave all its powers unused, if we have really come to the conclusion that the powers do us harm. The mere fact that we shall be missing a number of interesting things would apply equally to any number of impossible things. Machinery may be a magnificent sight, but not so magnificent as a Great Fire of London; yet we resist that vision and avert our eyes from all that potential splendour. Machinery may not yet be at its best; and perhaps lions and tigers will never be at their best, will never make their most graceful leaps or show all their natural splendours, until we erect an amphitheatre and give them a few live people to eat. Yet that sight also is one which we forbid ourselves, with whatever austere self-denial. We give up so many glorious possibilities, in our stern and strenuous and self-sacrificing preference for having a tolerable time. Happiness, in a sense, is a hard taskmaster. It tells us not to get entangled with many things that are much more superficially attractive than machinery. But, anyhow, it is necessary to clear our minds at the start of any mere vague association or assumption to the effect that we must go by the quickest train or cannot help using the most productive instrument. Granted Mr. Penty's thesis of the evil of machinery, as something like the evil of black magic, and there is nothing in the least unpractical about Mr. Penty's proposal that it should simply stop. A process of invention would cease that might have gone further. But its relative imperfection would be nothing compared with the rudimentary state in which we have left such scientific instruments as the rack and the thumbscrew. Those rude implements of torture are clumsy compared with the finished products that modern knowledge of physiology and mechanics might have given us. Many a talented torturer is left in obscurity by the moral prejudices of modern society. Nay, his budding promise is now nipped even in childhood, when he attempts to develop his natural genius on the flies or the tail of the dog. Our own strong sentimental bias against torture represses his noble rage and freezes the genial current of his soul. But we reconcile ourselves to this; though it be undoubtedly the loss of a whole science for which many ingenious persons might have sought out many inventions. If we really conclude that machinery is hostile to happiness, then it is no more inevitable that all ploughing should be done by machinery than it is inevitable that a shop should do a roaring trade on Ludgate Hill by selling the instruments of Chinese tortures.

Let it be clearly understood that I note this only to make the primary problem clear; I am not now saying, nor perhaps should I ever say, that machinery has been proved to be practically poisonous in this degree. I am only stating, in answer to a hundred confused assumptions, the only ultimate aim and test. If we can make men happier, it does not matter if we make them poorer, it does not matter if we make them less productive, it does not matter if we make them less progressive, in the sense of merely changing their life without increasing their liking for it. We of this school of thought may or may not get what we want; but it is at least necessary that we should know what we are trying to get. And those who are called practical men never know what they are trying to get. If machinery does prevent happiness, then it is as futile to tell a man trying to make men happy that he is neglecting the talents of Arkwright, as to tell a man trying to make men humane that he is neglecting the tastes of Nero.

Now it is exactly those who have the clarity to imagine the instant annihilation of machines who will probably have too much common sense to annihilate them instantly. To go mad and smash machinery is a more or less healthy and human malady, as it was in the Luddites. But it was really owing to the ignorance of the Luddites, in a very different sense from that spoken of scornfully by the stupendous ignorance of the Industrial Economists. It was blind revolt as against some ancient and awful dragon, by men too ignorant to know how artificial and even temporary was that particular instrument, or where was the seat of the real tyrants who wielded it. The real answer to the mechanical problem for the present is of a different sort; and I will proceed to suggest it, having once made clear the only methods of judgment by which it can be judged. And having begun at the right end, which is the ultimate spiritual standard by which a man or a machine is to be valued, I will now begin at the other end; I might say at the wrong end; but it will be more respectful to our practical friends to call it the business end.

If I am asked what I should immediately do with a machine, I have no doubt about the sort of practical programme that could be a preliminary to a possible spiritual revolution of a much wider sort. In so far as the machine cannot be shared, I would have the ownership of it shared; that is, the direction of it shared and the profits of it shared. But when I say "shared" I mean it in the modern mercantile sense of the word "shares." That is, I mean something divided and not merely something pooled. Our business friends bustle forward to tell us that all this is impossible; completely unconscious, apparently, that all this part of the business exists already. You cannot distribute a steam-engine, in the sense of giving one wheel to each shareholder to take home with him, clasped in his arms. But you not only can, but you already do distribute the ownership and profit of the steam-engine; and you distribute it in the form of private property. Only you do not distribute it enough, or to the right people, or to the people who really require it or could really do work for it. Now there are many schemes having this normal and general character; almost any one of which I should prefer to the concentration presented by capitalism or promised by communism. My own preference, on the whole, would be that any such necessary machine should be owned by a small local guild, on principles of profit-sharing, or rather profit-dividing: but of real profit-sharing and real profit-dividing, not to be confounded with capitalist patronage.

Touching the last point, it may be well to say in passing that what I say about the problem of profit-sharing is in that respect parallel to what I say also about the problem of emigration. The real difficulty of starting it in the right way is that it has so often been started in the wrong way; and especially in the wrong spirit. There is a certain amount of prejudice against profit-sharing, just as there is a certain amount of prejudice against emigration, in the industrial democracy of to-day. It is due in both cases to the type and especially the tone of the proposals. I entirely sympathize with the Trade Unionist who dislikes a certain sort of condescending capitalist concession; and the spirit which gives every man a place in the sun which turns out to be a place in Port Sunlight. Similarly, I quite sympathize with Mr. Kirkwood when he resented being lectured about emigration by Sir Alfred Mond, to the extent of saying, "The Scots will leave Scotland when the German Jews leave England." But I think it would be possible to have a more genuinely egalitarian emigration, with a positive policy of self-government for the poor, to which Mr. Kirkwood might be kind; and I think that profit-sharing that began at the popular end, establishing first the property of a guild and not merely the caprice of an employer, would not contradict any true principle of Trades Unions. For the moment, however, I am only saying that something could be done with what lies nearest to us; quite apart from our general ideal about the position of machinery in an ideal social state. I understand what is meant by saying that the ideal in both cases depends upon the wrong ideals. But I do not understand what our critics mean by saying that it is impossible to divide the shares and profits in a machine among definite individuals. Any healthy man in any historical period would have thought it a project far more practicable than a Milk Trust.

II THE ROMANCE OF MACHINERY

I have repeatedly asked the reader to remember that my general view of our potential future divides itself into two parts. First, there is the policy of reversing, or even merely of resisting, the modern tendency to monopoly or the concentration of capital. Let it be noted that this is a policy because it is a direction, if pursued in any degree. In one sense, indeed, he who is not with us is against us; because if that tendency is not resisted, it will prevail. But in another sense anyone who resists it at all is with us; even if he would not go so far in the reversal as we should. In trying to reverse the concentration at all, he is helping us to do what nobody has done yet. He will be setting himself against the trend of his age, or at least of recent ages. And a man can work in our direction, instead of the existing and contrary direction, even with the existing and perhaps contrary machinery. Even while we remain industrial, we can work towards industrial distribution and away from industrial monopoly. Even while we live in town houses, we can own town houses. Even while we are a nation of shopkeepers, we can try to own our shops. Even while we are the workshop of the world, we can try to own our tools. Even if our town is covered with advertisements, it can be covered with different advertisements. If the mark of our whole society is the trade-mark, it need not be the same trade-mark. In short, there is a perfectly tenable and practicable policy of resisting mercantile monopoly even in a mercantile state. And we say that a great many people ought to support us in that, who might not agree with our ultimate ideal of a state that should not be mercantile — or rather a state that should not be entirely mercantile. We cannot call on England as a nation of peasants, as France or Serbia is a nation of peasants. But we can call on England that has been a nation of shopkeepers to resist being turned into one big Yankee store.

That is why in beginning here the discussion of machinery I pointed out, first, that in the ultimate sense we are free to destroy machinery; and second, that in the immediate sense it is possible to divide the ownership of machinery. And I should say myself that even in a healthy state there would be some ownership of machinery to divide. But when we come to consider that larger test, we must say something about the definition of machinery, and even the ideal of machinery. Now I have a great deal of sympathy with what I may call the sentimental argument for machinery. Of all the critics who have rebuked us, the man I like best is the engineer who says: “But I do like machinery — just as you like mythology. Why should I have my toys taken away any more than you?” And of the various positions that I have to meet, I will begin with his. Now on a previous page I said I agreed with Mr. Penty that it would be a human right to abandon machinery altogether. I will add here that I do not agree with Mr. Penty in thinking machinery like magic — a mere malignant power or origin of evils. It seems to me quite as materialistic to be damned by a machine as saved by a machine. It seems to me quite as idolatrous to blaspheme it as to worship it. But even supposing that somebody, without worshipping it, is yet enjoying it imaginatively and in some sense mystically, the case as we state it still stands.

Nobody would be more really unsuitable to the machine age than a man who really admired machines. The modern system presupposes people who will take mechanism mechanically; not people who will take it mystically. An amusing story might be written about a poet who was really appreciative of the fairy-tales of science, and who found himself more of an obstacle in the scientific civilization than if he had delayed it by telling the fairy-tales of infancy. Suppose whenever he went to the telephone (bowing three times as he approached the shrine of the disembodied oracle and murmuring some appropriate form of words such as vox et praeterea nihil), he were to act as if he really valued the significance of the instrument. Suppose he were to fall into a trembling ecstasy on hearing from a distant exchange the voice of an unknown young woman in a remote town, were to linger upon the very real wonder of that momentary meeting in mid-air with a human spirit whom he would never see on earth, were to speculate on her life and personality, so real and yet so remote from his own, were to pause to ask a few personal questions about her, just sufficient to accentuate her human strangeness, were to ask whether she also had not some sense of this weird psychical tete-a-tete, created and dissolved in an instant, whether she also thought of those unthinkable leagues of valley and forest that lay between the moving mouth and the listening ear — suppose, in short, he were to say all this to the lady at the Exchange who was just about to put him on to 666 Upper Tooting. He would be really and truly expressing the sentiment, “Wonderful thing, the telephone!”; and, unlike the thousands who say it, he would actually mean it. He would be really and truly justifying the great scientific discoveries and doing honour to the great scientific inventors. He would indeed be the worthy son of a scientific age. And yet I fear that in a scientific age he would possibly be misunderstood, and even suffer from lack of sympathy. I fear that he would, in fact, be in practice an opponent of all that he desired to uphold. He would be a worse enemy of machinery than any Luddite smashing machines. He would obstruct the activities of the telephone exchange, by praising the beauties of the telephone, more than if he had sat down, like a more normal and traditional poet, to tell all those bustling business people about the beauties of a wayside flower.

It would of course be the same with any adventure of the same luckless admiration. If a philosopher, when taken for the first time for a ride in a motor-car, were to fall into such an enthusiasm for the marvel that he insisted on understanding the whole of the mechanism on the spot, it is probable that he would have got to his destination rather quicker if he had walked. If he were, in his simple zeal, to insist on the machine being taken to pieces in the road, that he might rejoice in the inmost secrets of its structure, he might even lose his popularity with the garage taxi-driver or chauffeur. Now we have all known children, for instance, who did really in this fashion want to see wheels go round. But though their attitude may bring them nearest to the kingdom of heaven, it does not necessarily bring them nearer to the end of the journey. They are admiring motors; but they are not motoring — that is, they are not necessarily moving. They are not serving that purpose which motoring was meant to serve. Now as a matter of fact this contradiction has ended in a congestion; and a sort of stagnant state of the spirit in which there is rather less real appreciation of the marvels of man’s invention than if the poet confined himself to making a penny whistle (on which to pipe in the woods of Arcady) or the child confined himself to making a toy bow or a catapult. The child really is happy with a beautiful happiness every time he lets fly an arrow. It is by no means certain that the business man is happy with a beautiful happiness every time he sends off a telegram. The very name of a telegram is a poem, even more magical than the arrow; for it means a dart, and a dart that writes. Think what the child would feel if he could shoot a pencil-arrow that drew a picture at the other end of the valley or the long street. Yet the business man but seldom dances and claps his hands for joy, at the thought of this, whenever he sends a telegram.

Now this has a considerable relevancy to the real criticism of the modern mechanical civilization. Its supporters are always telling us of its marvellous inventions and proving that they are marvellous improvements. But it is highly doubtful whether they really feel them as improvements. For instance, I have heard it said a hundred times that glass is an excellent illustration of the way in which something becomes a convenience for everybody. “Look at glass in windows,” they say; “that has been turned into a mere necessity; yet that also was once a luxury.” And I always feel disposed to answer, “Yes, and it would be better for people like you if it were still a luxury; if that would induce you to look at it, and not only to look through it. Do you ever consider how magical a thing is that invisible film standing between you and the birds and the wind? Do you ever think of it as water hung in the air or a flattened diamond too clear to be even valued? Do you ever feel a window as a sudden opening in a wall? And if you do not, what is the good of glass to you?” This may be a little exaggerated, in the heat of the moment, but it is really true that in these things invention outstrips imagination. Humanity has not got the good out of its own inventions; and by making more and more inventions, it is only leaving its own power of happiness further and further behind.

I remarked in an earlier part of this particular meditation that machinery was not necessarily evil, and that there were some who valued it in the right spirit, but that most of those who had to do with it never had a chance of valuing it at all. A poet might enjoy a clock as a child enjoys a musical-box. But the actual clerk who looks at the actual clock, to see that he is just in time to catch the train for the city, is no more enjoying machinery than he is enjoying music. There may be something to be said for mechanical toys; but modern society is a mechanism and not a toy. The child indeed is a good test in these matters; and illustrates both the fact that there is an interest in machinery and the fact that machinery itself generally prevents us from being interested. It is almost a proverb that every little boy wants to be an engine-driver. But machinery has not multiplied the number of engine-drivers, so as to allow all little boys to drive engines. It has not given each little boy a real engine, as his family might give him a toy engine. The effect of railways on a population cannot be to produce a population of engine-drivers. It can only produce a population of passengers; and of passengers a little too like packages. In other words, its only effect on the visionary or potential engine-driver is to put him inside the train, where he cannot see the engine, instead of outside the train where he can. And though he grows up to the greatest and most glorious success in life, and swindles the widow and orphan till he can travel in a first-class carriage specially reserved, with a permanent pass to the International Congress of Cosmopolitan World Peace for Wire-Pullers, he will never perhaps enjoy a railway train again, he will never even see a railway train again, as he saw it when he stood as a ragged urchin and waved wildly from a grassy bank at the passage of the Scotch Express.

We may transfer the parable from engine-drivers to engineers. It may be that the driver of the Scotch Express hurls himself forward in a fury of speed because his heart is in the Highlands, his heart is not here; that he spurns the Border behind him with a gesture and hails the Grampians before him with a cheer. And whether or no it is true that the engine-driver’s heart is in the Highlands, it is sometimes true that the little boy’s heart is in the engine. But it is by no means true that passengers as a whole, travelling behind engines as a whole, enjoy the speed in a positive sense, though they may approve of it in a negative sense. I mean that they wish to travel swiftly, not because swift travelling is enjoyable, but because it is not enjoyable. They want it rushed through; not because being behind the railway-engine is a rapture, but because being in the railway-carriage is a bore. In the same way, if we consider the joy of engineers, we must remember that there is only one joyful engineer to a thousand bored victims of engineering. The discussion that raged between Mr. Penty and others at one time threatened to resolve itself into a feud between engineers and architects. But when the engineer asks us to forget all the monotony and materialism of a mechanical age because his own science has some of the inspiration of an art, the architect may well be ready with a reply. For this is very much as if architects were never engaged in anything but the building of prisons and lunatic asylums. It is as if they told us proudly with what passionate and poetical enthusiasm they had themselves reared towers high enough for the hanging of Haman or dug dungeons impenetrable enough for the starving of Ugolino.

Now I have already explained that I do not propose anything in what some call the practical way, but should rather be called the immediate way, beyond the better distribution of the ownership of such machines as are really found to be necessary. But when we come to the larger question of machinery in a fundamentally different sort of society, governed by our philosophy and religion, there is a great deal more to be said. The best and shortest way of saying it is that instead of the machine being a giant to which the man is a pygmy, we must at least reverse the proportions until man is a giant to whom the machine is a toy. Granted that idea, and we have no reason to deny that it might be a legitimate and enlivening toy. In that sense it would not matter if every child were an engine-driver or (better still) every engine-driver a child. But those who were always taunting us with unpracticality will at least admit that this is not practical.

I have thus tried to put myself fairly in the position of the enthusiast, as we should always do in judging of enthusiasms. And I think it will be agreed that even after the experiment a real difference between the engineering enthusiasm and older enthusiasms remains as a fact of common sense. Admitting that the man who designs a steam-engine is as original as the man who designs a statue, there is an immediate and immense difference in the effects of what they design. The original statue is a joy to the sculptor; but it is also in some degree (when it is not too original) a joy to the people who see the statue. Or at any rate it is meant to be a joy to other people seeing it, or there would be no point in letting it be seen. But though the engine may be a great joy to the engineer and of great use to the other people, it is not, and it is not meant to be, in the same sense a great joy to the other people. Nor is this because of a deficiency in education, as some of the artists might allege in the case of art. It is involved in the very nature of machinery; which, when once it is established, consists of repetitions and not of variations and surprises. A man can see something in the limbs of a statue which he never saw before; they may seem to toss or sweep as they never did before; but he would not only be astonished but alarmed if the wheels of the steam-engine began to behave as they never did before. We may take it, therefore, as an essential and not an accidental character of machinery that it is an inspiration for the inventor but merely a monotony for the consumer.

This being so, it seems to me that in an ideal state engineering would be the exception, just as the delight in engines is the exception. As it is, engineering and engines are the rule; and are even a grinding and oppressive rule. The lifelessness which the machine imposes on the masses is an infinitely bigger and more obvious fact than the individual interest of the man who makes machines. Having reached this point in the argument, we may well compare it with what may be called the practical aspect of the problem of machinery. Now it seems to me obvious that machinery, as it exists to-day, has gone almost as much beyond its practical sphere as it has beyond its imaginative sphere. The whole of industrial society is founded on the notion that the quickest and cheapest thing is to carry coals to Newcastle; even if it be only with the object of afterwards carrying them from Newcastle. It is founded on the idea that rapid and regular transit and transport, perpetual interchange of goods, and incessant communication between remote places, is of all things the most economical and direct. But it is not true that the quickest and cheapest thing, for a man who has just pulled an apple from an apple tree, is to send it in a consignment of apples on a train that goes like a thunderbolt to a market at the other end of England. The quickest and cheapest thing for a man who has pulled a fruit from a tree is to put it in his mouth. He is the supreme economist who wastes no money on railway journeys. He is the absolute type of efficiency who is far too efficient to go in for organization. And though he is, of course, an extreme and ideal case of simplification, the case for simplification does stand as solid as an apple tree. In so far as men can produce their own goods on the spot, they are saving the community a vast expenditure which is often quite out of proportion to the return. In so far as we can establish a considerable proportion of simple and self-supporting people, we are relieving the pressure of what is often a wasteful as well as a harassing process. And taking this as a general outline of the reform, it does appear true that a simpler life in large areas of the community might leave machinery more or less as an exceptional thing; as it may well be to the exceptional man who really puts his soul into it.

There are difficulties in this view; but for the moment I may well take as an illustration the parallel of the particular sort of modern engineering which moderns are very fond of denouncing. They often forget that most of their praise of scientific instruments applies most vividly to scientific weapons. If we are to have so much pity for the unhappy genius who has just invented a new galvanometer, what about the poor genius who has just invented a new gun? If there is a real imaginative inspiration in the making of a steam-engine, is there not imaginative interest in the making of a submarine? Yet many modern admirers of science would be very anxious to abolish these machines altogether; even in the very act of telling us that we cannot abolish machines at all. As I believe in the right of national self-defence, I would not abolish them altogether. But I think they may give us a hint of how exceptional things may be treated exceptionally. For the moment I will leave the progressive to laugh at my absurd notion of a limitation of machines, and go off to a meeting to demand the limitation of armaments.

III THE HOLIDAY OF THE SLAVE

I have sometimes suggested that industrialism of the American type, with its machinery and mechanical hustle, will some day be preserved on a truly American model; I mean in the manner of the Red Indian Reservation. As we leave a patch of forest for savages to hunt and fish in, so a higher civilization might leave a patch of factories for those who are still at such a stage of intellectual infancy as really to want to see the wheels go round. And as the Red Indians could still, I suppose, tell their quaint old legends of a red god who smoked a pipe or a red hero who stole the sun and moon, so the simple folk in the industrial enclosure could go on talking of their own Outline of History and discussing the evolution of ethics, while all around them a more mature civilization was dealing with real history and serious philosophy. I hesitate to repeat this fancy here; for, after all, machinery is their religion, or at any rate superstition, and they do not like it to be treated with levity. But I do think there is something to be said for the notion of which this fancy might stand as a sort of symbol; for the idea that a wiser society would eventually treat machines as it treats weapons, as something special and dangerous and perhaps more directly under a central control. But however this may be, I do think the wildest fancy of a manufacturer kept at bay like a painted barbarian is much more sane than a serious scientific alternative now often put before us. I mean what its friends call the Leisure State, in which everything is to be done by machinery. It is only right to say a word about this suggestion in comparison with our own.

In practice we already know what is meant by a holiday in a world of machinery and mass production. It means that a man, when he has done turning a handle, has a choice of certain pleasures offered to him. He can, if he likes, read a newspaper and discover with interest how the Crown Prince of Fontarabia landed from the magnificent yacht Atlantis amid a cheering crowd; how certain great American millionaires are making great financial consolidations; how the Modern Girl is a delightful creature, in spite of (or because of) having shingled hair or short skirts; and how the true religion, for which we all look to the Churches, consists of sympathy and social progress and marrying, divorcing, or burying everybody without reference to the precise meaning of the ceremony. On the other hand, if he prefers some other amusement, he may go to the Cinema, where he will see a very vivid and animated scene of the crowds cheering the Crown Prince of Fontarabia after the arrival of the yacht Atlantis; where he will see an American film featuring the features of American millionaires, with all those resolute contortions of visage which accompany their making of great financial consolidations; where there will not be lacking a charming and vivacious heroine, recognizable as a Modern Girl by her short hair and short skirts; and possibly a kind and good clergyman (if any) who explains in dumb show, with the aid of a few printed sentences, that true religion is social sympathy and progress and marrying and burying people at random. But supposing the man’s tastes to be detached from the drama and from the kindred arts, he may prefer the reading of fiction; and he will have no difficulty in finding a popular novel about the doubts and difficulties of a good and kind clergyman slowly discovering that true religion consists of progress and social sympathy, with the assistance of a Modern Girl whose shingled hair and short skirts proclaim her indifference to all fine distinctions about who should be buried and who divorced; nor, probably, will the story fail to contain an American millionaire making vast financial consolidations, and certainly a yacht and possibly a Crown Prince. But there are yet other tastes that are catered for under the conditions of modern publicity and pleasure-seeking. There is the great institution of wireless or broadcasting; and the holiday-maker, turning away from fiction, journalism, and film drama, may prefer to “listen-in” to a programme that will contain the very latest news of great financial consolidations made by American millionaires; which will most probably contain little lectures on how the Modern Girl can crop her hair or abbreviate her skirts; in which he can hear the very accents of some great popular preacher proclaiming to the world that revelation of true religion which consists of sympathy and social progress rather than of dogma and creed; and in which he will certainly hear the very thunder of cheering which welcomes His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Fontarabia when he lands from the magnificent yacht Atlantis. There is thus indeed a very elaborate and well-ordered choice placed before him, in the matter of the means of entertainment.

But even the rich variety of method and approach unfolded before us in this alternative seems to some to cover a certain secret and subtle element of monotony. Even here the pleasure-seeker may have that weird psychological sensation of having known the same thing before. There seems to be something recurrent about the type of topic; suggestive of something rigid about the type of mind. Now I think it very doubtful whether it is really a superior mind. If the pleasure-seeker himself were really a pleasure-maker for himself, if he were forced to amuse himself instead of being amused, if he were, in short, obliged to sit down in an old tavern and talk — I am really very doubtful about whether he would confine his conversation entirely to the Crown Prince of Fontarabia, the shingling of hair, the greatness of certain rich Yankees, and so on; and then begin the same round of subjects all over again. His interests might be more local, but they would be more lively; his experience of men more personal but more mixed; his likes and dislikes more capricious but not quite so easily satisfied. To take a parallel, modern children are made to play public-school games, and will doubtless soon be made to listen to the praise of the millionaires on the wireless and in the newspaper. But children left to themselves almost invariably invent games of their own, dramas of their own, often whole imaginary kingdoms and commonwealths of their own. In other words, they produce; until the competition of monopoly kills their production. The boy playing at robbers is not liberated but stunted by learning about American crooks, all of one pattern less picturesque than his own. He is psychologically undercut, undersold, dumped upon, frozen out, flooded, swamped, and ruined; but not emancipated.

Inventions have destroyed invention. The big modern machines are like big guns dominating and terrorizing a whole stretch of country, within the range of which nothing can raise its head. There is far more inventiveness to the square yard of mankind than can ever appear under that monopolist terror. The minds of men are not so much alike as the motor-cars of men, or the morning papers of men, or the mechanical manufacture of the coats and hats of men. In other words, we are not getting the best out of men. We are certainly not getting the most individual or the most interesting qualities out of men. And it is doubtful whether we ever shall, until we shut off this deafening din of megaphones that drowns their voices, this deathly glare of limelight which kills the colours of their complexions, this plangent yell of platitudes which stuns and stops their minds. All this sort of thing is killing thoughts as they grow, as a great white death-ray might kill plants as they grow. When, therefore, people tell me that making a great part of England rustic and self-supporting would mean making it rude and senseless, I do not agree with them; and I do not think they understand the alternative or the problem. Nobody wants all men to be rustics even in normal times; it is very tenable that some of the most intelligent would turn to the towns even in normal times. But I say the towns themselves are the foes of intelligence, in these times; I say the rustics themselves would have more variety and vivacity than is really encouraged by these towns. I say it is only by shutting off this unnatural noise and light that men's minds can begin again to move and to grow. Just as we spread paving-stones over different soils without reference to the different crops that might grow there, so we spread programmes of platitudinous plutocracy over souls that God made various, and simpler societies have made free.

If by machinery saving labour, and therefore producing leisure, be meant the machinery that now achieves what is called mass production, I cannot see any vital value in the leisure; because there is in that leisure nothing of liberty. The man may only work for an hour with his machine-made tools, but he can only run away and play for twenty-three hours with machine-made toys. Everything he handles has to come from a huge machine that he cannot handle. Everything must come from something to which, in the current capitalist phrase, he can only lend "a hand." Now as this would apply to intellectual and artistic toys as well as to merely material toys, it seems to me that the machine would dominate him for a much longer time than his hand had to turn the handle. It is practically admitted that much fewer men are needed to work the machine. The answer of the mechanical collectivists is that though the machine might give work to the few, it could give food to the many. But it could only give food to the many by an operation that had to be presided over by the few. Or even if we suppose that some work, subdivided into small sections, were given to the many, that system of rotation would have to be ruled by a responsible few; and some fixed authority would be needed to distribute the work as much as to distribute the food. In other words, the officials would very decidedly be permanent officials. In a sense all the rest of us might be intermittent or occasional officials. But the general character of the system would remain; and whatever else it is like, nothing can make it like a population pottering about in its own several fields or practising small creative crafts in its own little workshops. The man who has helped to produce a machine-made article may indeed leave off working, in the sense of leaving off turning one particular wheel. He may have an opportunity to do as he likes, in so far as he likes using what the system likes producing. He may have a power of choice — in the sense that he may choose between one thing it produces and another thing it produces. He may choose to pass his leisure hours in sitting in a machine-made chair or lying on a machine-made bed or resting in a machine-made hammock or swinging on a machine-made trapeze. But he will not be in the same position as a man who carves his own hobby-horse out of his own wood or his own hobby out of his own will. For that introduces another principle or purpose; which there is no warrant for supposing will coexist with the principle or purpose of using all the wood so as to save labour or simplifying all the wills so as to save leisure. If our ideal is to produce things as rapidly and easily as possible, we must have a definite number of things that we desire to produce. If we desire to produce them as freely and variously as possible, we must not at the same time try to produce them as quickly as possible. I think it most probable that the result of saving labour by machinery would be then what it is now, only more so: the limitation of the type of thing produced; standardization.

Now it may be that some of the supporters of the Leisure State have in mind some system of distributed machinery, which shall really make each man the master of his machine; and in that case I agree that the problem becomes different and that a great part of the problem is resolved. There would still remain the question of whether a man with a free soul would want to use a machine upon about three-quarters of the things for which machines are now used. In other words, there would remain the whole problem of the craftsman in the sense of the creator. But I should agree that if the small man found his small mechanical plant helpful to the preservation of his small property, its claim would be very considerable. But it is necessary to make it clear, that if the holidays provided for the mechanic are provided as mechanically as at present, and with the merely mechanical alternative offered at present, I think that even the slavery of his labour would be light compared to the grinding slavery of his leisure.

IV THE FREE MAN AND THE FORD CAR

I am not a fanatic; and I think that machines may be of considerable use in destroying machinery. I should generously accord them a considerable value in the work of exterminating all that they represent. But to put the truth in those terms is to talk in terms of the remote conclusion of our slow and reasonable revolution. In the immediate situation the same truth may be stated in a more moderate way. Towards all typical things of our time we should have a rational charity. Machinery is not wrong; it is only absurd. Perhaps we should say it is merely childish, and can even be taken in the right spirit by a child. If, therefore, we find that some machine enables us to escape from an inferno of machinery, we cannot be committing a sin though we may be cutting a silly figure, like a dragoon rejoining his regiment on an old bicycle. What is essential is to realize that there is something ridiculous about the present position, something wilder than any Utopia. For instance, I shall have occasion here to note the proposal of centralized electricity, and we could justify the use of it so long as we see the joke of it. But, in fact, we do not even see the joke of the waterworks and the water company. It is almost too broadly comic that an essential of life like water should be pumped to us from nobody knows where, by nobody knows whom, sometimes nearly a hundred miles away. It is every bit as funny as if air were pumped to us from miles away, and we all walked about like divers at the bottom of the sea. The only reasonable person is the peasant who owns his own well. But we have a long way to go before we begin to think about being reasonable.

There are at present some examples of centralization of which the effects may work for decentralization. An obvious case is that recently discussed in connection with a common plant of electricity. I think it is broadly true that if electricity could be cheapened, the chances of a very large number of small independent shops, especially workshops, would be greatly improved. At the same time, there is no doubt at all that such dependence for essential power on a central plant is a real dependence, and is therefore a defect in any complete scheme of independence. On this point I imagine that many Distributists might differ considerably; but, speaking for myself, I am inclined to follow the more moderate and provisional policy that I have suggested more than once in this place. I think the first necessity is to make sure of any small properties obtaining any success in any decisive or determining degree. Above all, I think it is vital to create the experience of small property, the psychology of small property, the sort of man who is a small proprietor. When once men of that sort exist, they will decide, in a manner very different from any modern mob, how far the central power-house is to dominate their own private house, or whether it need dominate at all. They will perhaps discover the way of breaking up and individualizing that power. They will sacrifice, if there is any need to sacrifice, even the help of science to the hunger for possession. So that I am disposed at the moment to accept any help that science and machinery can give in creating small property, without in the least bowing down to such superstitions where they only destroy it. But we must keep in mind the peasant ideal as the motive and the goal; and most of those who offer us mechanical help seem to be blankly ignorant of what we regard it as helping. A well-known name will illustrate both the thing being done and the man being ignorant of what he is doing.

The other day I found myself in a Ford car, like that in which I remember riding over Palestine, and in which, (I suppose) Mr. Ford would enjoy riding over Palestinians. Anyhow, it reminded me of Mr. Ford, and that reminded me of Mr. Penty and his views upon equality and mechanical civilization. The Ford car (if I may venture on one of those new ideas urged upon us in newspapers) is a typical product of the age. The best thing about it is the thing for which it is despised; that it is small. The worst thing about it is the thing for which it is praised; that it is standardized. Its smallness is, of course, the subject of endless American jokes, about a man catching a Ford like a fly or possibly a flea. But nobody seems to notice how this popularization of motoring (however wrong in motive or in method) really is a complete contradiction to the fatalistic talk about inevitable combination and concentration. The railway is fading before our eyes — birds nesting, as it were, in the railway signals, and wolves howling, so to speak, in the waiting-room. And the railway really was a communal and concentrated mode of travel like that in a Utopia of the Socialists. The free and solitary traveller is returning before our very eyes; not always (it is true) equipped with scrip or scallop, but having recovered to some extent the freedom of the King's highway in the manner of Merry England. Nor is this the only ancient thing such travel has revived. While Mugby Junction neglected its refreshment-rooms, Hugby-in-the-Hole has revived its inns. To that limited extent the Ford motor is already a reversion to the free man. If he has not three acres and a cow, he has the very inadequate substitute of three hundred miles and a car. I do not mean that this development satisfies my theories. But I do say that it destroys other people's theories; all the theories about the collective thing as a thing of the future and the individual thing as a thing of the past. Even in their own special and stinking way of science and machinery, the facts are very largely going against their theories.

Yet I have never seen Mr. Ford and his little car really and intelligently praised for this. I have often, of course, seen him praised for all the conveniences of what is called standardization. The argument seems to be more or less to this effect. When your car breaks down with a loud crash in the middle of Salisbury Plain, though it is not very likely that any fragments of other ruined motor cars will be lying about amid the ruins of Stonehenge, yet if they are, it is a great advantage to think that they will probably be of the same pattern, and you can take them to mend your own car. The same principle applies to persons motoring in Tibet, and exulting in the reflection that if another motorist from the United States did happen to come along, it would be possible to exchange wheels or footbrakes in token of amity. I may not have got the details of the argument quite correct; but the general point of it is that if anything goes wrong with parts of a machine, they can be replaced with identical machinery. And anyhow the argument could be carried much further; and used to explain a great many other things. I am not sure that it is not the clue to many mysteries of the age. I begin to understand, for instance, why magazine stories are all exactly alike; it is ordered so that when you have left one magazine in a railway carriage in the middle of a story called "Pansy Eyes," you may go on with exactly the same story in another magazine under the title of "Dandelion Locks." It explains why all leading articles on The Future of the Churches are exactly the same; so that we may begin reading the article in the Daily Chronicle and finish it in the Daily Express. It explains why all the public utterances urging us to prefer new things to old never by any chance say anything new; they mean that we should go to a new paper-stall and read it in a new newspaper. This is why all American caricatures repeat themselves like a mathematical pattern; it means that when we have torn off a part of the picture to wrap up sandwiches, we can tear off a bit of another picture and it will always fit in. And this is also why American millionaires all look exactly alike; so that when the bright, resolute expression of one of them has led us to do serious damage to his face with a heavy blow of the fist, it is always possible to mend it with noses and jaw-bones taken from other millionaires, who are exactly similarly constituted.

Such are the advantages of standardization; but, as may be suspected, I think the advantages are exaggerated; and I agree with Mr. Penty in doubting whether all this repetition really corresponds to human nature. But a very interesting question was raised by Mr. Ford's remarks on the difference between men and men; and his suggestion that most men preferred mechanical action or were only fitted for it. About all those arguments affecting human equality, I myself always have one feeling, which finds expression in a little test of my own. I shall begin to take seriously those classifications of superiority and inferiority, when I find a man classifying himself as inferior. It will be noted that Mr. Ford does not say that he is only fitted to mind machines; he confesses frankly that he is too fine and free and fastidious a being for such tasks. I shall believe the doctrine when I hear somebody say: "I have only got the wits to turn a wheel." That would be real, that would be realistic, that would be scientific. That would be independent testimony that could not easily be disputed. It is exactly the same, of course, with all the other superiorities and denials of human equality that are so specially characteristic of a scientific age. It is so with the men who talk about superior and inferior races; I never heard a man say: "Anthropology shows that I belong to an inferior race." If he did, he might be talking like an anthropologist; as it is, he is talking like a man, and not unfrequently like a fool. I have long hoped that I might some day hear a man explaining on scientific principles his own unfitness for any important post or privilege, say: "The world should belong to the free and fighting races, and not to persons of that servile disposition that you will notice in myself; the intelligent will know how to form opinions, but the weakness of intellect from which I so obviously suffer renders my opinions manifestly absurd on the face of them: there are indeed stately and godlike races — but look at me! Observe my shapeless and fourth-rate features! Gaze, if you can bear it, on my commonplace and repulsive face!" If I heard a man making a scientific demonstration in that style, I might admit that he was really scientific. But as it invariably happens, by a curious coincidence, that the superior race is his own race, the superior type is his own type, and the superior preference for work the sort of work he happens to prefer — I have come to the conclusion that there is a simpler explanation.

Now Mr. Ford is a good man, so far as it is consistent with being a good millionaire. But he himself will very well illustrate where the fallacy of his argument lies. It is probably quite true that, in the making of motors, there are a hundred men who can work a motor and only one man who can design a motor. But of the hundred men who could work a motor, it is very probable that one could design a garden, another design a charade, another design a practical joke or a derisive picture of Mr. Ford. I do not mean, of course, in anything I say here, to deny differences of intelligence, or to suggest that equality (a thing wholly religious) depends on any such impossible denial. But I do mean that men are nearer to a level than anybody will discover by setting them all to make one particular kind of run-about clock. Now Mr. Ford himself is a man of defiant limitations. He is so indifferent to history, for example, that he calmly admitted in the witness-box that he had never heard of Benedict Arnold. An American who has never heard of Benedict Arnold is like a Christian who has never heard of Judas Iscariot. He is rare. I believe that Mr. Ford indicated in a general way that he thought Benedict Arnold was the same as Arnold Bennett. Not only is this not the case, but it is an error to suppose that there is no importance in such an error. If he were to find himself, in the heat of some controversy, accusing Mr. Arnold Bennett of having betrayed the American President and ravaged the South with an Anti-American army, Mr. Bennett might bring an action. If Mr. Ford were to suppose that the lady who recently wrote revelations in the Daily Express was old enough to be the widow of Benedict Arnold, the lady might bring an action. Now it is not impossible that among the workmen whom Mr. Ford perceives (probably quite truly) to be only suited to the mechanical part of the construction of mechanical things, there might be a man who was fond of reading all the history he could lay his hands on; and who had advanced step by step, by painful efforts of self-education, until the difference between Benedict Arnold and Arnold Bennett was quite clear in his mind. If his employer did not care about the difference, of course, he would not consult him about the difference, and the man would remain to all appearance a mere cog in the machine; there would be no reason for finding out that he was a rather cogitating cog. Anybody who knows anything of modern business knows that there are any number of such men who remain in subordinate and obscure positions because their private tastes and talents have no relation to the very stupid business in which they are engaged. If Mr. Ford extends his business over the Solar System, and gives cars to the Martians and the Man in the Moon, he will not be an inch nearer to the mind of the man who is working his machine for him, and thinking about something more sensible. Now all human things are imperfect; but the condition in which such hobbies and secondary talents do to some extent come out is the condition of small independence. The peasant almost always runs two or three sideshows and lives on a variety of crafts and expedients. The village shopkeeper will shave travellers and stuff weasels and grow cabbages and do half a dozen such things, keeping a sort of balance in his life like the balance of sanity in the soul. The method is not perfect; but it is more intelligent than turning him into a machine in order to find out whether he has a soul above machinery.

Upon this point of immediate compromise with machinery, therefore, I am inclined to conclude that it is quite right to use the existing machines in so far as they do create a psychology that can despise machines; but not if they create a psychology that respects them. The Ford car is an excellent illustration of the question; even better than the other illustration I have given of an electrical supply for small workshops. If possessing a Ford car means rejoicing in a Ford car, it is melancholy enough; it does not bring us much farther than Tooting or rejoicing in a Tooting tramcar. But if possessing a Ford car means rejoicing in a field of corn or clover, in a fresh landscape and a free atmosphere, it may be the beginning of many things — and even the end of many things. It may be, for instance, the end of the car and the beginning of the cottage. Thus we might almost say that the final triumph of Mr. Ford is not when the man gets into the car, but when he enthusiastically falls out of the car. It is when he finds somewhere, in remote and rural corners that he could not normally have reached, that perfect poise and combination of hedge and tree and meadow in the presence of which any modern machine seems suddenly to look an absurdity; yes, even an antiquated absurdity. Probably that happy man, having found the place of his true home, will proceed joyfully to break up the car with a large hammer, putting its iron fragments for the first time to some real use, as kitchen utensils or garden tools. That is using a scientific instrument in the proper way; for it is using it as an instrument. The man has used modern machinery to escape from modern society; and the reason and rectitude of such a course commends itself instantly to the mind. It is not so with the weaker brethren who are not content to trust Mr. Ford's car, but also trust Mr. Ford's creed. If accepting the car means accepting the philosophy I have just criticized, the notion that some men are born to make cars, or rather small bits of cars, then it will be far more worthy of a philosopher to say frankly that men never needed to have cars at all. It is only because the man had been sent into exile in a railway-train that he has to be brought back home in a motor-car. It is only because all machinery has been used to put things wrong that some machinery may now rightly be used to put things right. But I conclude upon the whole that it may so be used; and my reason is that which I considered on a previous page under the heading of "The Chance of Recovery." I pointed out that our ideal is so sane and simple, so much in accord with the ancient and general instincts of men, that when once it is given a chance anywhere it will improve that chance by its own inner vitality because there is some reaction towards health whenever disease is removed. The man who has used his car to find his farm will be more interested in the farm than in the car; certainly more interested than in the shop where he once bought the car. Nor will Mr. Ford always woo him back to that shop, even by telling him tenderly that he is not fitted to be a lord of land, a rider of horses, or a ruler of cattle; since his deficient intellect and degraded anthropological type fit him only for mean and mechanical operations. If anyone will try saying this (tenderly, of course) to any considerable number of large farmers, who have lived for some time on their own farms with their own families, he will discover the defects of the approach.

A NOTE ON EMIGRATION

1. The Need of a New Spirit   2. The Religion of Small Property

I THE NEED OF A NEW SPIRIT

Before closing these notes, with some words on the colonial aspect of democratic distribution, it will be well to make some acknowledgment of the recent suggestion of so distinguished a man as Mr. John Galsworthy. Mr. Galsworthy is a man for whom I have the very warmest regard; for a human being who really tries to be fair is something very like a monster and miracle in the long history of this merry race of ours. Sometimes, indeed, I get a little exasperated at being so persistently excused. I can imagine few things more annoying, to a free-born and properly constituted Christian, than the thought that if he did choose to wait for Mr. Galsworthy behind a wall, knock him down with a brick, jump on him with heavy boots, and so on, Mr. Galsworthy would still faintly gasp that it was only the fault of the System; that the System made bricks and the System heaved bricks and the System went about wearing heavy boots, and so on. As a human being, I should feel a longing for a little human justice, after all that inhuman mercy.

But these feelings do not interfere with the other feelings I have, of something like enthusiasm, for something that can only be called beautiful in the fair-mindedness of a study like “The White Monkey.” It is when this attitude of detachment is applied not to the judgment of individuals but of men in bulk, that the detachment begins to savour of something unnatural. And in Mr. Galsworthy’s last political pronouncement the detachment amounts to despair. At any rate, it amounts to despair about this earth, this England, about which I am certainly not going to despair yet. But I think it might be well if I took this opportunity of stating what I, for one, at least feel about the different claims here involved.

It may be debated whether it is a good or a bad thing for England that England has an Empire. It may be debated, at least as a matter of true definition, whether England has an Empire at all. But upon one point all Englishmen ought to stand firm, as a matter of history, of philosophy, and of logic. And that is that it has been, and is, a question of our owning an Empire and not of an Empire owning us.

There is sense in being separated from Americans on the principles of George Washington, and sense in being attached to Americans on the principles of George the Third. But there is no sense in being out-voted and swamped by Americans in the name of the Anglo-Saxon race. The Colonies were by origin English. They owe us that much; if it be only the trivial circumstance, so little valued by modern thought, that without their maker they could never have existed at all. If they choose to remain English, we thank them very sincerely for the compliment. If they choose not to remain English, but to turn into something else, we think they are within their rights. But anyhow England shall remain English. They shall not first turn themselves into something else, and then turn us into themselves. It may have been wrong to be an Empire, but it does not rob us of our right to be a nation.

But there is another sense in which those of our school would use the motto of "England First." It is in the sense that our first step should be to discover how far the best ethical and economic system can be fitted into England, before we treat it as an export and cart it away to the ends of the earth. The scientific or commercial character, who is sure he has found an explosive that will blow up the solar system or a bullet that will kill the man in the moon, always makes a great parade of saying that he offers it first to his own country, and only afterwards to a foreign country. Personally, I cannot conceive how a man can bring himself in any case to offer such a thing to a foreign country. But then I am not a great scientific and commercial genius. Anyhow, such as our little notion of normal ownership is, we certainly do not propose to offer it to any foreign country, or even to any colony, before we offer it to our own country. And we do think it highly urgent and practical to find out first how much of it can really be carried out in our own country. Nobody supposes that the whole English population could live on the English land. But everybody ought to realize that immeasurably more people could live on it than do live on it; and that if such a policy did establish such a peasantry, there would be a recognizable narrowing of the margin of men left over for the town and the colonies. But we would suggest that these ought really to be left over, and dealt with as seems most desirable, after the main experiment has been made where it matters most. And what most of us would complain of in the emigrationists of the ordinary sort is that they seem to think first of the colony and then of what must be left behind in the country; instead of thinking first of the country and then of what must overflow into the colony.

People talk about an optimist being in a hurry; but it seems to me that a pessimist like Mr. Galsworthy is very much in a hurry. He has not tried the obvious reform on England, and, finding it fail, gone into exile to try it elsewhere. He is trying the obvious reform everywhere except where it is most obvious. And in this I think he has a subconscious affinity to people much less reasonable and respectable than himself. The pessimists have a curious way of urging us to counsels of despair as the only solution of a problem they have not troubled to solve. They declare solemnly that some unnatural thing would become necessary if certain conditions existed; and then somehow assume from that that they exist. They never think of attempting to prove that they exist, before they prove what follows from their existence. This is exactly the sort of plunging and premature pessimism, for instance, that people exhibit about Birth Control. Their desire is towards destruction; their hope is for despair; they eagerly anticipate the darkest and most doubtful predictions. They run with eager feet before and beyond the lingering and inconveniently slow statistics; like as the hart pants for the water-brooks they thirst to drink of Styx and Lethe before their hour; even the facts they show fall far short of the faith that they see shining beyond them; for faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

If I do not compare the critic in question with the doctors of this dismal perversion, still less do I compare him with those whose motives are merely self-protective and plutocratic. But it must also be said that many rush to the expedient of emigration, just as many rush to the expedient of Birth Control, for the perfectly simple reason that it is the easiest way in which the capitalists can escape from their own blunder of capitalism. They lured men into the town with the promise of greater pleasures; they ruined them there and left them with only one pleasure; they found the increase it produced at first convenient for labour and then inconvenient for supply; and now they are ready to round off their experiment in a highly appropriate manner, by telling them that they must have no families, or that their families must go to the modern equivalent of Botany Bay. It is not in that spirit that we envisage an element of colonization; and so long as it is treated in that spirit we refuse to consider it. I put first the statement that real colonial settlement must be not only stable but sacred. I say the new home must be not only a home but a shrine. And that is why I say it must be first established in England, in the home of our fathers and the shrine of our saints, to be a light and an ensign to our children.

I have explained that I cannot content myself with leaving my own nationality out of my own normal ideal; or leaving England as the mere tool-house or coal-cellar of other countries like Canada or Australia — or, for that matter, Argentina. I should like England also to have a much more rural type of redistribution; nor do I think it impossible. But when this is allowed for, nobody in his five wits would dream of denying that there is a real scope and even necessity for emigration and colonial settlement. Only, when we come to that, I have to draw a line rather sharply and explain something else, which is by no means inconsistent with my love of England, but I fear is not so likely to make me loved by Englishmen. I do not believe, as the newspapers and national histories always tell me to believe, that we have "the secret" of this sort of successful colonization and need nothing else to achieve this sort of democratic social construction. I ask for nothing better than that a man should be English in England. But I think he will have to be something more than English (or at any rate something more than "British") if he is to create a solid social equality outside England. For something is needed for that solid social creation which our colonial tradition has not given. My reasons for holding this highly unpopular opinion I will attempt to suggest; but the fact that they are rather difficult to suggest is itself an evidence of their unfamiliarity and of that narrowness which is neither national nor international, but only imperial.

I should very much like to be present at a conversation between Mr. Saklatvala and Dean Inge. I have a great deal of respect for the real sincerity of the Dean of St. Paul's, but his subconscious prejudices are of a strange sort. I cannot help having a feeling that he might have a certain sympathy with a Socialist so long as he was not a Christian Socialist. I do not indeed pretend to any respect for the ordinary sort of broad-mindedness which is ready to embrace a Buddhist but draws the line at a Bolshevist. I think its significance is very simple. It means welcoming alien religions when they make us feel comfortable, and persecuting them when they make us feel uncomfortable. But the particular reason I have at the moment for entertaining this association of ideas is one that concerns a larger matter. It concerns, indeed, what is commonly called the British Empire, which we were once taught to reverence largely because it was large. And one of my complaints against that common and rather vulgar sort of imperialism is that it did not really secure even the advantages of largeness. As I have said, I am a nationalist; Eng-land is good enough for me. I would defend England against the whole European continent. With even greater joy would I defend

England against the whole British Empire. With a romantic rapture would I defend England against Mr. Ramsay MacDonald when he had become King of Scotland; lighting again the watch fires of Newark and Carlisle and sounding the old tocsins of the Border. With equal energy would I defend England against Mr. Tim Healy as King of Ireland, if ever the gross and growing prosperity of that helpless and decaying Celtic stock became positively offensive. With the greatest ecstasy of all would I defend England against Mr. Lloyd George as King of Wales. It will be seen, therefore, that there is nothing broad-minded about my patriotism; most modern nationality is not narrow enough for me.

But putting aside my own local affections, and looking at the matter in what is called a larger way, I note once more that our Imperialism does not get any of the good that could be got out of being large. And I was reminded of Dean Inge, because he suggested some time ago that the Irish and the French Canadians were increasing in numbers, not because they held the Catholic view of the family, but because they were a backward and apparently almost barbaric stock which naturally (I suppose he meant) increased with the blind luxuriance of a jungle. I have already remarked on the amusing trick of having it both ways which is illustrated in this remark. So long as savages are dying out, we say they are dying out because they are savages. When they are inconveniently increasing, we say they are increasing because they are savages. And from this it is but a simple logical step to say that the countrymen of Sir Wilfred Laurier or Senator Yeats are savages because they are increasing. But what strikes me most about the situation is this: that this spirit will always miss what is really to be learnt by covering any large and varied area. If French Canada is really a part of the British Empire, it would seem that the Empire might at least have served as a sort of interpreter between the British and the French. The Imperial statesman, if he had really been a statesman, ought to have been able to say, “It is always difficult to understand another nation or another religion; but I am more fortunately placed than most people. I know a little more than can be known by self-contained and isolated states like Sweden or Spain. I have more sympathy with the Catholic faith or the French blood because I have French Catholics in my own Empire.” Now it seems to me that the Imperial statesman never has said this; never has even been able to say it; never has even tried or pretended to be able to say it. He has been far narrower than a nationalist like myself, engaged in desperately defending Offa’s Dyke against a horde of Welsh politicians. I doubt if there was ever a politician who knew a word more of the French language, let alone a word more of the Latin Mass, because he had to govern a whole population that drew its traditions from Rome and Gaul. I will suggest in a moment how this enormous international narrowness affects the question of a peasantry and the extension of the natural ownership of land. But for the moment it is important to make the point clear about the nature of that narrowness. And that is why some light might be thrown on it in that tender, that intimate, that heart-to-heart talk between Mr. Saklatvala and the Dean of St. Paul's. Mr. Saklatvala is a sort of parody or extreme and extravagant exhibition of the point; that we really know nothing at all about the moral and philosophical elements that make up the Empire. It is quite obvious, of course, that he does not represent Battersea. But have we any way of knowing to what extent he represents India? It seems to me not impossible that the more impersonal and indefinite doctrines of Asia do form a soil for Bolshevism. Most of the eastern philosophy differs from the western theology in refusing to draw the line anywhere; and it would be a highly probable perversion of that instinct to refuse to draw the line between meum and tuum. I do not think the Indian gentleman is any judge of whether we in the West want to have a hedge round our fields or a wall round our gardens. And as I happen to hold that the very highest human thought and art consists almost entirely in drawing the line somewhere, though not in drawing it anywhere, I am completely confident that in this the western tendency is right and the eastern tendency is wrong. But, in any case, it seems to me that a rather sharp lesson to us is indicated in these two parallel cases of the Indian who grows into a Bolshevist in our dominions without our being able to influence his growth, and the French Canadian who remains a peasant in our dominions without our getting any sort of advantage out of his stability.

I do not profess to know very much about the French Canadians; but I know enough to know that most of the people who talk at large about the Empire know even less than I do. And the point about them is that they generally do not even try to know any more. The very vague picture that they always call up, of colonists doing wonders in all the corners of the world, never does, in fact, include the sort of thing that French Canadians can do, or might possibly show other people how to do. There is about all this fashionable fancy of colonization a very dangerous sort of hypocrisy.

People tried to use the Over-seas Dominion as Eldorado while still using it as Botany Bay. They sent away people that they wanted to get rid of, and then added insult to injury by representing that the ends of the earth would be delighted to have them. And they called up a sort of fancy portrait of a person whose virtues and even vices were entirely suitable for founding an Empire, though apparently quite unsuitable for founding a family. The very language they used was misleading. They talked of such people as settlers; but the very last thing they ever expected them to do was to settle. They expected of them a sort of indistinct individualistic breaking of new ground, for which the world is less and less really concerned to-day. They sent an inconvenient nephew to hunt wild bisons in the streets of Toronto; just as they had sent any number of irrepressible Irish exiles to war with wild Redskins in the streets of New York. They incessantly repeated that what the world wants is pioneers, and had never even heard that what the world wants is peasants. There was a certain amount of sincere and natural sentiment about the wandering exile inheriting our traditions. There was really no pretence that he was engaged in founding his own traditions. All the ideas that go with a secure social standing were absent from the very discussion; no one thought of the continuity, the customs, the religion, or the folklore of the future colonist. Above all, nobody ever conceived him as having any strong sense of private property. There was in the vague idea of his gaining something for the Empire always, if anything, the idea of his gaining what belonged to somebody else. I am not now discussing how wrong it was or whether it could in some cases be right; I am pointing out that nobody ever entertained the notion of the other sort of right; the special right of every man to his own. I doubt whether a word could be quoted emphasizing it even from the healthiest adventure story or the jolliest Jingo song. I quite appreciate all there is in such songs or stories that is really healthy or jolly. I am only pointing out that we have badly neglected something; and are now suffering from the neglect. And the worst aspect of the neglect was that we learnt nothing whatever from the peoples that were actually inside the Empire which we wished to glorify: nothing whatever from the Irish; nothing whatever from the French Canadian; nothing whatever even from the poor Hindoos. We have now reached a crisis in which we particularly require these neglected talents; and we do not even know how to set about learning them. And the explanation of this blunder, as of most blunders, is in the weakness which is called pride: in other words, it is in the tone taken by people like the Dean of St. Paul's.

Now there will be needed a large element of emigration in the solution of re-creating a peasantry in the modern world. I shall have more to say about the elements of the idea in the next section. But I believe that any scheme of the sort will have to be based on a totally different and indeed diametrically opposite spirit and principle to that which is commonly applied to emigration in England to-day. I think we need a new sort of inspiration, a new sort of appeal, a new sort of ordinary language even, before that solution will even help to solve anything. What we need is the ideal of Property, not merely of Progress — especially progress over other people's property. Utopia needs more frontiers, not less. And it is because we were weak in the ethics of property on the edges of Empire that our own society will not defend property as men defend a right. The Bolshevist is the sequel and punishment of the Buccaneer.

II THE RELIGION OF SMALL PROPERTY

We hear a great deal nowadays about the disadvantages of decorum, especially from those who are always telling us that women in the last generation were helpless and impotent, and then proceed to prove it by describing the tremendous and towering tyranny of Mrs. Grundy. Rather in the same way, they insist that Victorian women were especially soft and submissive. And it is rather unfortunate for them that, even in order to say so, they have to introduce the name of Queen Victoria. But it is more especially in connection with the indecorous in art and literature that the question arises, and it is now the fashion to argue as if there were no psychological basis for reticence at all. That is where the argument should end; but fortunately these thinkers do not know how to get to the end of an argument. I have heard it argued that there is no more harm in describing the violation of one Commandment than of another; but this is obviously a fallacy. There is at least a case in psychology for saying that certain images move the imagination to the weakening of the character. There is no case for saying that the mere contemplation of a kit of burglar’s tools would inflame us all with a desire to break into houses. There is no possibility of pretending that the mere sight of means to murder our maiden aunt with a poker does really make the ill deed done. But what strikes me as most curious about the controversy is this: that while our fiction and journalism is largely breaking down the prohibitions for which there really was a logical case, in the consideration of human nature, they still very largely feel the pressure of prohibitions for which there was never any case at all. And the most curious thing about the criticism we hear directed against the Victorian Age is that it is never directed against the most arbitrary conventions of that age. One of these, which I remember very vividly in my youth, was the convention that there is something embarrassing or unfair about a man mentioning his religion. There was something of the same feeling about his mentioning his money. Now these things cannot possibly be defended by the same psychological argument as the other. Nobody is moved to madness by the mere sight of a church spire, or finds uncontrollable emotions possess him at the thought of an archdeacon’s hat. Yet there is still enough of that really irrational Victorian convention lingering in our life and literature to make it necessary to offer a defence, if not an apology, whenever an argument depends upon this fundamental fact in life.

Now when I remark that we want a type of colonization rather represented by the French Canadians, there are probably still a number of sly critics who would point the finger of detection at me and cry, as if they had caught me in something very naughty, “You believe in the French Canadians because they are Catholics”; which is in one sense not only true, but very nearly the whole truth. But in another sense it is not true at all; if it means that I exercise no independent judgment in perceiving that this is really what we do want. Now when this difficulty and misunderstanding arises, there is only one practical way of meeting it in the present state of public information, or lack of information. It is to call what is generally described as an impartial witness; though it is quite probable that he is far less impartial than I am. What is really important about him is that, if he were partial, he would be partial on the other side.

The dear old Daily News, of the days of my youth, on which I wrote happily for many years and had so many good and admirable friends, cannot be accused as yet as being an organ of the Jesuits. It was, and is, as every one knows, the organ of the Nonconformists. Dr. Clifford brandished his teapot there when he was selling it in order to demonstrate, by one symbolical act, that he had long been a teetotaller and was now a Passive Resister. We may be pardoned for smiling at this aspect of the matter; but there are many other aspects which are real and worthy of all possible respect. The tradition of the old Puritan ideal does really descend to this paper; and multitudes of honest and hard-thinking Radicals read it in my youth and read it still.

I therefore think that the following remarks which appeared recently in the Daily News, in an article by Mr. Hugh Martin, writing from Toronto, are rather remarkable. He begins by saying that the Anglo-Saxon has got too proud to bend his back; but the curious thing is that he goes on to suggest, almost in so many words, that the backs of the French Canadians are actually strengthened, not only by being bent over rustic spades, but even by being bent before superstitious altars. I am very anxious not to do my impartial witness an unfair damage in the matter; so I may be excused if I quote his own words at some little length. After saying that the Anglo-Saxons are drawn away to the United States, or at any rate to the industrial cities, he remarks that the French are of course very numerous in Quebec and elsewhere, but that it is not here that the notable development is taking place, and that Montreal, being a large city, is showing signs of the slackening to be seen in other large cities.

"Now look at the other picture. The race that is going ahead is the French race. . . . In Quebec, where there are nearly 2,000,000 Canadians of French origin in a population of 2,350,000, that might have been expected. But as a matter of fact it is not in Quebec that the French are making good most conspicuously . . . nor in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick is the comparative success of the French stock most marked. They are doing splendidly on the land and raising prodigious families. A family of twelve is quite common, and I could name several cases where there have been twenty, who all lived. The day may come when they will equal or outnumber the Scotch, but that is some way ahead. If you want to see what French stock can still achieve, you should go to the northern part of this province of Ontario. It is doing pioneer work. It is bending its back as men did in the old days. It is multiplying and staying on the soil. It is content to be happy without being rich.

"Though I am not a religious man myself, I must confess I think religion has a good deal to do with it. These French Canadians are more Catholic than the Pope. You might call a good many of them desperately ignorant and desperately superstitious. They seem to me to be a century behind the times and a century nearer happiness."

These seem to me, I repeat, to be rather remarkable words; remarkable if they appeared anywhere, arresting and astonishing when they appear in the traditional paper of the Manchester Radicals and the nineteenth-century Nonconformists. The words are splendidly straightforward and unaffected in their literary form; they have a clear ring of sincerity and experience, and they are all the more convincing because they are written by somebody who does not share my own desperate ignorance and desperate superstition. But he proceeds to suggest a reason, and incidentally to make his own independence in the matter quite clear.

"Apart from the fact that their women bear an incredible number of children, you have this other consequence of their submission to the priest, that a social organism is created, which is of incalculable value in the backwoods. The church, the school, the cure, hold each little group together as a unit. Do not think for a moment that I believe a general spread of Catholicism would turn us back into a pioneer people. One might just as reasonably recommend a return to early Scottish Protestantism. I merely record the fact that the simplicity of these people is proving their salvation and is one of the most hopeful things in Canada to-day."

Of course, there are a good many things of an incidental kind that a person with my views might comment on in that passage. I might go off at a gallop on the highly interesting comparison with early Scottish Protestantism. Very early Scottish Protestantism, like very early English Protestantism, consisted chiefly of loot. But if we take it as referring to the perfectly pure and sincere enthusiasm of many Covenanters or early Calvinists, we come upon the contrast that is the point of the whole matter. Early Puritanism was pure Puritanism; but the purer it is the more early it seems. We cannot imagine it as a good thing and also a modern thing. It might have been one of the most honest things in Scotland then. But nobody would be found calling it one of the most hopeful things in Canada to-day. If John Knox appeared to-morrow in the pulpit of St. Giles, he would be a stickit minister. He would be regarded as a raving savage because of his ignorance of German metaphysics. That comparison does not meet the extraordinary case of the thing that is older than Knox and yet also newer than Knox. Or again, I might point out that the common connotation of "submission to the priest" is misleading, even if it is true. It is like talking of the Charge of the Light Brigade as the submission to Lord Raglan. It is still more like talking about the storming of Jerusalem as the submission to the Count of Bouillon. In one sense it is quite true; in another it is very untrue. But I have not the smallest desire here to disturb the impartiality of my witness. I have not the smallest intention of using any of the tortures of the Inquisition to make him admit anything that he did not wish to admit. The admission as it stands seems to me very remarkable; not so much because it is a tribute to Frenchmen as colonists as because it is a tribute to colonists as pious and devout people. But what concerns me most of all in the general discussion of my own theme is the insistence on stability. They are staying on the soil; they are a social organism; they are held together as a unit. That is the new note which I think is needed in all talk of colonization, before it can again be any part of the hope of the world.

A recent description of the Happy Factory, as it exists in America or will exist in Utopia, rose from height to height of ideality until it ended with a sort of hush, as of the ultimate opening of the heavens, and these words about the workman, "He turns out for his homeward journey like a member of the Stock Exchange.” Any attempt to imagine humanity in its final perfection always has about it something faintly unreal, as being too good for this world; but the visionary light that breaks from the cloud, in that last phrase, accentuates clearly the contrast which is to be drawn between such a condition and that of the labour of common men. Adam left Eden as a gardener; but he will set out for his homeward journey like a member of the Stock Exchange. St. Joseph was a carpenter; but he will be raised again as a stockbroker. Giotto was a shepherd; for he was not yet worthy to be a stockbroker. Shakespeare was an actor; but he dreamed day and night of being a stockbroker. Burns was a ploughman; but if he sang at the plough, how much more appropriately he would have sung in the Stock Exchange. It is assumed in this kind of argument that all humanity has consciously or unconsciously hoped for this consummation; and that if men were not brokers, it was because they were not able to broke. But this remarkable passage in Sir Ernest Benn’s exposition has another application besides the obvious one. A stockbroker in one sense really is a very poetical figure. In one sense he is as poetical as Shakespeare, and his ideal poet, since he does give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name. He does deal to a great extent in what economists (in their poetical way) describe as imaginaries. When he exchanges two thousand Patagonian Pumpkins for one thousand shares in Alaskan Whale Blubber, he does not demand the sensual satisfaction of eating the pumpkin or need to behold the whale with the gross eye of flesh. It is quite possible that there are no pumpkins; and if there is somewhere such a thing as a whale, it is very unlikely to obtrude itself upon the conversation in the Stock Exchange. Now what is the matter with the financial world is that it is a great deal too full of imagination, in the sense of fiction. And when we react against it, we naturally in the first place react into realism. When the stockbroker homeward plods his weary way and leaves the world to darkness and Sir Ernest Benn, we are disposed to insist that it is indeed he who has the darkness and we who have the daylight. He has not only the darkness but the dreams, and all the unreal leviathans and unearthly pumpkins pass before him like a mere scroll of symbols in the dreams of the Old Testament. But when the small proprietor grows pumpkins, they really are pumpkins, and sometimes quite a large pumpkin for quite a small proprietor. If he should ever have occasion to grow whales (which seems improbable) they would either be real whales or they would be of no use to him. We naturally grow a little impatient, under these conditions, when people who call themselves practical scoff at the small proprietor as if he were a minor poet. Nevertheless, there is another side to the case, and there is a sense in which the small proprietor had better be a minor poet, or at least a mystic. Nay, there is even a sort of queer paradoxical sense in which the stockbroker is a man of business.

It is to that other side of small property, as exemplified in the French Canadians, and an article on them in the Daily News, that I devoted my last remarks. The really practical point in that highly interesting statement is, that in this case, being progressive is actually identified with being what is called static. In this case, by a strange paradox, a pioneer is really d settler. In this case, by a still stranger paradox, a settler is a person who really settles. It will be noted that the success of the experiment is actually founded on a certain power of striking root; which we might almost call rapid tradition, as others talk of rapid transit. And indeed the ground under the pioneer's feet can only be made solid by being made sacred. It is only religion that can thus rapidly give a sort of accumulated power of culture and legend to something that is crude or incomplete. It sounds like a joke to say that baptizing a baby makes the baby venerable; it suggests the old joke of the baby with spectacles who died an enfeebled old dotard at five. Yet it is profoundly true that something is added that is not only something to be venerated, but something partly to be venerated for its antiquity — that is, for the unfathomable depth of its humanity. In a sense a new world can be baptized as a new baby is baptized, and become a part of an ancient order not merely on the map but in the mind. Instead of crude people merely extending their crudity, and calling that colonization, it would be possible for people to cultivate the soil as they cultivate the soul. But for this it is necessary to have a respect for the soil as well as for the soul; and even a reverence for it, as having some associations with holy things. But for that purpose we need some sense of carrying holy things with us and taking them home with us; not merely the feeling that holiness may exist as a hope. In the most exalted phrase, we need a real presence. In the most popular phrase, we need something that is always on the spot.

That is, we want something that is always on the spot, and not only beyond the horizon. The pioneer instinct is beginning to fail, as a well-known traveller recently complained, but I doubt whether he could tell us the reason. It is even possible that he will not understand it, in one radiant burst of joyful comprehension, if I tell him that I am all in favour of a wild-goose chase, so long as he really believes that the wild goose is the bird of paradise; but that it is necessary to hunt it with the hounds of heaven. If it be barely possible that this does not seem quite clear to him, I will explain that the traveller must possess something as well as pursue something, or he will not even know what to pursue. It is not enough always to follow the gleam: it is necessary sometimes to rest in the glow; to feel something sacred in the glow of the camp fire as well as the gleam of the polar star. And that same mysterious and to some divided voice, which alone tells that we have here no abiding city, is the only voice which within the limits of this world can build up cities that abide.

As I said at the beginning of this section, it is futile to pretend that such a faith is not a fundamental of the true change. But its practical relation to the reconstruction of property is that, unless we understand this spirit, we cannot now relieve congestion with colonization. People will prefer the mere nomadism of the town to the mere nomadism of the wilderness. They will not tolerate emigration if it merely means being moved on by the politicians as they have been moved on by the policemen. They will prefer bread and circuses to locusts and wild honey, so long as the forerunner does not know for what God he prepares the way.

But even if we put aside for the moment the strictly spiritual ideals involved in the change, we must admit that there are secular ideals involved which must be positive and not merely comparative, like the ideal of progress. We are sometimes taunted with setting against all other Utopias what is in truth the most impossible Utopia; with describing a Merry Peasant who cannot exist except on the stage, with depending on a China Shepherdess who never was seen except on the mantelpiece. If we are indeed presenting impossible portraits of an ideal humanity, we are not alone in that. Not only the Socialists but also the Capitalists parade before us their imaginary and ideal figures, and the Capitalists if possible more than the Socialists. For once that we read of the last Earthly Paradise of Mr. Wells, where men and women move gracefully in simple garments and keep their tempers in a way in which we in this world sometimes find difficult (even when we are the authors of Utopian novels), for once that we see the ideal figure of that vision, we see ten times a day the ideal figure of the commercial advertisers. We are told to "Be Like This Man," or to imitate an aggressive person pointing his finger at us in a very rude manner for one who regards himself as a pattern to the young. Yet it is entirely an ideal portrait; it is very unlikely (we are glad to say) that any of us will develop a chin or a finger of that obtrusive type. But we do not blame either the Capitalists or the Socialists for setting up a type or talismanic figure to fix the imagination. We do not wonder at their presenting the perfect person for our admiration; we only wonder at the person they admire. And it is quite true that, in our movement as much as any other, there must be a certain amount of this romantic picture-making. Men have never done anything in the world without it; but ours is much more of a reality as well as a romance than the dreams of the other romantics. There cannot be a nation of millionaires, and there has never yet been a nation of Utopian comrades; but there have been any number of nations of tolerably contented peasants. In this connection, however, the point is that if we do not directly demand the religion of small property, we must at least demand the poetry of small property. It is a thing about which it is definitely and even urgently practical to be poetical. And it is those who blame us for being poetical who do not really see the practical problem.

For the practical problem is the goal. The pioneer notion has weakened like the progressive notion, and for the same reason. People could go on talking about progress so long as they were not merely thinking about progress. Progressives really had in their minds some notion of a purpose in progress; and even the most practical pioneer had some vague and shadowy idea of what he wanted. The Progressives trusted the tendency of their time, because they did believe, or at least had believed, in a body of democratic doctrines which they supposed to be in process of establishment. And the pioneers and empire-builders were filled with hope and courage because, to do them justice, most of them did at least in some dim way believe that the flag they carried stood for law and liberty, and a higher civilization. They were therefore in search of something and not merely in search of searching. They subconsciously conceived an end of travel and not endless travelling; they were not only breaking through a jungle but building a city. They knew more or less the style of architecture in which it would be built, and they honestly believed it was the best style of architecture in the world. The spirit of adventure has failed because it has been left to adventurers. Adventure for adventure's sake became like art for art's sake. Those who had lost all sense of aim lost all sense of art and even of accident. The time has come in every department, but especially in our department, to make once again vivid and solid the aim of political progress or colonial adventure. Even if we picture the goal of the pilgrimage as a sort of peasant paradise, it will be far more practical than setting out on a pilgrimage which has no goal. But it is yet more practical to insist that we do not want to insist only on what are called the qualities of a pioneer; that we do not want to describe merely the virtues that achieve adventures. We want men to think, not merely of a place which they would be interested to find, but of a place where they would be contented to stay. Those who wish merely to arouse again the social hopes of the nineteenth century must offer not an endless hope, but the hope of an end. Those who wish to continue the building of the old colonial idea must leave off telling us that the Church of Empire is founded entirely on the rolling stone. For it is a sin against the reason to tell men that to travel hopefully is better than to arrive; and when once they believe it, they travel hopefully no longer.

A SUMMARY

I once debated with a learned man who had a curious fancy for arranging the correspondence in mathematical patterns; first a thousand words each and then a hundred words each — and then altering them all to another pattern. I accepted as I would always accept a challenge, especially an apparent appeal for fairness, but I was tempted to tell him how utterly unworkable this mechanical method is for a living thing like argument. Obviously a man might need a thousand words to reply to ten words. Suppose I began the philosophic dialogue by saying, “You strangle babies.” He would naturally reply, “Nonsense — I never strangled any babies.” And even in that obvious ejaculation he has already used twice as many words as I have. It is impossible to have real debate without digression. Every definition will look like a digression. Suppose somebody puts to me some journalistic statement, say, “Spanish Jesuits denounced in Parliament.” I cannot deal with it without explaining to the journalist where I differ from him about the atmosphere and implication of each term in turn. I cannot answer quickly if I am just discovering slowly that the man suffers from a series of extraordinary delusions: as (1) that Parliament is a popular representative assembly; (2) that Spain is an effete and decadent country; or (3) that a Spanish Jesuit is a sort of soft-footed court chaplain; whereas it was a Spanish Jesuit who anticipated the whole democratic theory of our day, and actually hurled it as a defiance against the divine right of kings. Each of these explanations would have to be a digression, and each would be necessary. Now in this book I am well aware that there are many digressions that may not at first sight seem to be necessary. For I have had to construct it out of what was originally a sort of controversial causerie; and it has proved impossible to cut down the causerie and only leave the controversy. Moreover, no man can controvert with many foes without going into many subjects, as every one knows who has been heckled. And on this occasion I was, I am happy to say, being heckled by many foes who were also friends. I was discharging the double function of writing essays and of talking over the tea-table, or preferably over the tavern table. To turn this sort of mixture of a gossip and a gospel into anything like a grammar of Distributism has been quite impossible. But I fancy that, even considered as a string of essays, it appears more inconsequent than it really is; and many may read the essays without quite seeing the string. I have decided, therefore, to add this last essay merely in order to sum up the intention of the whole; even if the summary be only a recapitulation. I have had a reason for many of my digressions, which may not appear until the whole is seen in some sort of perspective; and where the digression has no such justification, but was due to a desire to answer a friend or (what is even worse) a disposition towards idle and unseemly mirth, I can only apologize sincerely to the scientific reader and promise to do my best to make this final summary as dull as possible.

If we proceed as at present in a proper orderly fashion, the very idea of property will vanish. It is not revolutionary violence that will destroy it. It is rather the desperate and reckless habit of not having a revolution. The world will be occupied, or rather is already occupied, by two powers which are now one power. I speak, of course, of that part of the world that is covered by our system, and that part of the history of the world which will last very much longer than our time. Sooner or later, no doubt, men would rediscover so natural a pleasure as property. But it might be discovered after ages, like those ages filled with pagan slavery. It might be discovered after a long decline of our whole civilization. Barbarians might rediscover it and imagine it was a new thing.

Anyhow, the prospect is a progress towards the complete combination of two combinations. They are both powers that believe only in combination; and have never understood or even heard that there is any dignity in division. They have never had the imagination to understand the idea of Genesis and the great myths: that Creation itself was division. The beginning of the world was the division of heaven and earth; the beginning of humanity was the division of man and woman. But these flat and platitudinous minds can never see the difference between the creative cleavage of Adam and Eve and the destructive cleavage of Cain and Abel. Anyhow, these powers or minds are now both in the same mood; and it is a mood of disliking all division, and therefore all distribution. They believe in unity, in unanimity, in harmony. One of these powers is State Socialism and the other is Big Business. They are already one spirit; they will soon be one body. For, disbelieving in division, they cannot remain divided; believing only in combination, they will themselves combine. At present one of them calls it Solidarity and the other calls it Consolidation. It would seem that we have only to wait while both monsters are taught to say

Consolidarity. But, whatever it is called, there will be no doubt about the character of the world which they will have made between them. It is becoming more and more fixed and familiar. It will be a world of organization, or syndication, of standardization. People will be able to get hats, houses, holidays, and patent medicines of a recognized and universal pattern; they will be fed, clothed, educated, and examined by a wide and elaborate system; but if you were to ask them at any given moment whether the agency which housed or hatted them was still merely mercantile or had become municipal, they probably would not know, and they possibly would not care.

Many believe that humanity will be happy in this new peace; that classes can be reconciled and souls set at rest. I do not think things will be quite so bad as that. But I admit that there are many things which may make possible such a catastrophe of contentment. Men in large numbers have submitted to slavery; men submit naturally to government, and perhaps even especially to despotic government. But I take it as obvious to any intelligent person that this government will be something more than despotic. It is the very essence of the Trust that it has the power, not only to extinguish military rivalry or mob rebellion as has the State, but also the power to crush any new custom or costume or craft or private enterprise that it does not choose to like. Militarism can only prevent people from fighting; but monopoly can prevent them from buying or selling anything except the article (generally the inferior article) having the trade mark of the monopoly. If anything can be inferred from history and human nature, it is absolutely certain that the despotism will grow more and more despotic, and that the article will grow more and more inferior. There is no conceivable argument from psychology, by which it can be pretended that people preserving such a power, generation after generation, would not abuse it more and more, or neglect everything else more and more. We know what far less rigid rule has become, even when founded by spirited and intelligent rulers. We can darkly guess the effect of larger powers in the hands of lesser men. And if the name of Caesar came at last to stand for all that we call Byzantine, exactly what degree of dullness are we to anticipate when the name of Harrod shall sound even duller than it does? If China passed into a proverb at last for stiffness and monotony after being nourished for centuries by Confucius, what will be the condition of the brains that have been nourished for centuries by Callisthenes?

I leave out there the particular case of my own country, where we are threatened not with a long decline, but rather with an unpleasantly rapid collapse. But taking monopolist capitalism in a country where it is still in the vulgar sense successful, as in the United States, we only see more clearly, and on a more colossal scale, the long and descending perspectives that point down to Byzantium or Pekin. It is perfectly obvious that the whole business is a machine for manufacturing tenth-rate things, and keeping people ignorant of first-rate things. Most civilized systems have declined from a height; but this starts on a low level and in a flat place; and what it would be like when it had really crushed all its critics and rivals and made its monopoly watertight for two hundred years, the most morbid imagination will find it hard to imagine. But whatever the last stage of the story, no sane man any longer doubts that we are seeing the first stages of it. There is no longer any difference in tone and type between collectivist and ordinary commercial order; commerce has its officialism and communism has its organization. Private things are already public in the worst sense of the word; that is, they are impersonal and dehumanized. Public things are already private in the worst sense of the word; that is, they are mysterious and secretive and largely corrupt. The new sort of Business Government will combine everything that is bad in all the plans for a better world. There will be no eccentricity; no humour; no noble disdain of the world. There will be nothing but a loathsome thing called Social Service; which means slavery without loyalty. This Service will be one of the ideals. I forgot to mention that there will be ideals. All the wealthiest men in the movement have made it quite clear that they are in possession of a number of these little comforts. People always have ideals when they can no longer have ideas.

The philanthropists in question will probably be surprised to learn that some of us regard this prospect very much as we should regard the theory that we are to be evolved back into apes. We therefore consider whether it is even yet conceivable to restore that long-forgotten thing called Self-Government: that is, the power of the citizen in some degree to direct his own life and construct his own environment; to eat what he likes, to wear what he chooses, and to have (what the Trust must of necessity deny him) a range of choice. In these notes upon the notion, I have been concerned to ask whether it is possible to escape from this enormous evil of simplification or centralization, and what I have said is best summed up under two heads or in two parallel statements. They may seem to some to contradict each other, but they really confirm each other.

First, I say that this is a thing that could be done by people. It is not a thing that can be done to people. That is where it differs from nearly all Socialist schemes as it does from plutocratic philanthropy. I do not say that I, regarding this prospect with hatred and contempt, can save them from it. I say that they can save me from it, and themselves from it, if they also regard it with hatred and contempt. But it must be done in the spirit of a religion, of a revolution, and (I will add) of a renunciation. They must want to do it as they want to drive invaders out of a country or to stop the spread of a plague. And in this respect our critics have a curious way of arguing in a circle. They ask why we trouble to denounce what we cannot destroy; and offer an ideal we cannot attain. They say we are merely throwing away dirty water before we can get clean; or rather that we are merely analysing the animalculae in the dirty water, while we do not even venture to throw it away. Why do we make men discontented with conditions with which they must be content? Why revile an intolerable slavery that must be tolerated? But when we in turn ask why our ideal is impossible or why the evil is indestructible, they answer in effect, “Because you cannot persuade people to want it destroyed.” Possibly; but, on their own showing, they cannot blame us because we try. They cannot say that people do not hate plutocracy enough to kill it; and then blame us for asking them to look at it enough to hate it. If they will not attack it until they hate it, then we are doing the most practical thing we can do, in showing it to be hateful. A moral movement must begin somewhere; but I do most positively postulate that there must be a moral movement. This is not a financial flutter or a police regulation or a private bill or a detail of book-keeping. It is a mighty effort of the will of man, like the throwing off of any other great evil, or it is nothing. I say that if men will fight for this they may win; I have nowhere suggested that there is any way of winning without fighting.

Under this heading I have considered in their place, for instance, the possibility of an organized boycott of big shops. Undoubtedly it would be some sacrifice to boycott big shops; it would be some trouble to seek out small shops. But it would be about a hundredth part of the sacrifice and trouble that has often been shown by masses of men making some patriotic or religious protest — when they really wanted to protest. Under the same general rule, I have remarked that a real life on the land, men not only dwelling on the land but living off it, would be an adventure involving both stubbornness and abnegation. But it would not be half so ascetic as the sort of adventure which it is a commonplace to attribute to colonists and empire-builders; it is nothing to what has been normally shown by millions of soldiers and monks. Only it is true that monks have a faith, that soldiers have a flag, and that even empire-builders were presumably under the impression that they could assist the Empire. But it does not seem to me quite inconceivable, in the varieties of religious experience, that men might take as much notice of earth as monks do of heaven; that people might really believe in the spades that create as well as in the swords that destroy; and that the English who have colonized everywhere else might begin to colonize England.

Having thus admitted, or rather insisted, that this thing cannot be done unless people do really think it worth doing, I then proceeded to suggest that, even in these different departments, there are more people who think it worth doing than is noticed by the people who do not think it worth noticing. Thus, even in the crowds that throng the big shops, you do in fact hear a vast amount of grumbling at the big shops — not so much because they are big as because they are bad. But these real criticisms are disconnected, while the unreal puffs and praises are connected, like any other conspiracy. When the millionaire owning the stores is criticized, it is by his customers. When he is handsomely complimented, it is by himself. But when he is cursed, it is in the inner chamber; when he is praised (by himself) it is proclaimed from the house-tops. That is what is meant by publicity — a voice loud enough to drown any remarks made by the public.

In the case of the land, as in the case of the shops, I went on to point out that there is, if not a moral agitation, at least the materials of a moral agitation. Just as a discontent with the shops lingers even among those who are shopping, so a desire for the land lingers even in those who are hardly allowed to walk on the ground. I gave the instance of the slum population of Limehouse, who were forcibly lifted into high flats, bitterly lamenting the loss of the funny little farmyards they had constructed for themselves in the corners of their slum. It seems absurd to say of a country that none of its people could be countrymen, when even its cockneys try to be countrymen. I also noted that, in the case of the country, there is now a general discontent, in landlords as well as tenants. Everything seems to point to a simpler life of one man one field, free as far as possible of the complications of rent and labour, especially when the rent is so often unpaid or unprofitable, and the labourers are so often on strike or on the dole. Here again there may often be a million individuals feeling like this; but the million has not become a mob; for a mob is a moral thing. But I will never be so unpatriotic as to suggest that the English could never conduct an agrarian war in England as the Irish did in Ireland. Generally, therefore, under this first principle, the thing would most certainly have to be preached rather like a Crusade; but it is quite untrue and unhistorical to say, as a rule, that when once the Crusade is preached, there are no Crusaders.

And my second general principle, which may seem contradictory but is confirmatory, is this. I think the thing would have to be done step by step and with patience and partial concessions. I think this, not because I have any faith whatever in the silly cult of slowness that is sometimes called evolution, but because of the peculiar circumstances of the case. First, mobs may loot and burn and rob the rich man, very much to his spiritual edification and benefit. They may not unnaturally do it, almost absentmindedly, when they are thinking of something else, such as a dislike of Jews or Huguenots. But it would never do for us to give very violent shocks to the sentiment of property, even where it is very ill-placed or ill-proportioned; for that happens to be the very sentiment we are trying to revive. As a matter of psychology, it would be foolish to insult even an unfeminine feminist in order to awaken a delicate chivalry towards females. It would be unwise to use a sacred image as a club with which to thump an Iconoclast and teach him not to touch the holy images. Where the old-fashioned feeling of property is still honest, I think it should be dealt with by degrees and with some consideration. Where the sense of property does not exist at all, as in millionaires, it might well be regarded rather differently; there it would become a question of whether property procured in certain ways is property at all. As for the case of cornering and making monopolies in restraint of trade, that falls under the first of my two principles. It is simply a question of whether we have the moral courage to punish what is certainly immoral. There is no more doubt about these operations of high finance than there is about piracy on the high seas. It is merely a case of a country being so disorderly and ill-governed that it becomes infested with pirates. I have, therefore, in this book treated of Trusts and Anti-Trust Law as a matter, not merely for the popular protest of a boycott or a strike, but for the direct action of the State against criminals.

But when the criminals are stronger than the State, any attempt to punish them will be certainly called a rebellion and may rightly be called a Crusade.

Recurring to the second principle, however, there is another and less abstract reason for recognizing that the goal must be reached by stages. I have here had to consider several things that may bring us a stage nearer to Distributism, even if they are in themselves not very satisfactory to ardent or austere Distributists. I took the examples of a Ford car, which may be made by mass production but is used for individual adventure; for, after all, a private car is more private than a train or a tram. I also took the example of a general supply of electricity, which might lead to many little workshops having a chance for the first time. I do not claim that all Distributists would agree with me in my decision here; but on the whole I am inclined to decide that we should use these things to break up the hopeless block of concentrated capital and management, even if we urge their abandonment when they have done their work. We are concerned to produce a particular sort of men, the sort of men who will not worship machines even if they use machines. But it is essential to insist at every stage that we hold ourselves free not only to cease worshipping machines, but to cease using them. It was in this connection that I criticized certain remarks of Mr. Ford and the whole of that idea of standardization which he may be said to represent. But everywhere I recognize a difference between the methods we may use to produce a saner society and the things which that saner society might itself be sane enough to do. For instance, a people who had really found out what fun it is to make things would never want to make most of them with a machine. Sculptors do not want to turn a statue out with a lathe or painters to print off a picture as a pattern, and a craftsman who was really capable of making pots or pans would be no readier to condescend to what is called manufacturing them. It is odd, by the way, that the very word “manufacture” means the opposite of what it is supposed to mean. It is itself a testimony to a better time when it did not mean the work of a modern factory. In the strict meaning of words, a sculptor does manufacture a statue, and a factory worker does not manufacture a screw.

But, anyhow, a world in which there were many independent men would probably be a world in which there were more individual craftsmen. When we have created anything like such a world, we may trust it to feel more than the modern world does the danger of machinery deadening creation, and the value of what it deadens. And I suggested that such a world might very well make special provision about machines, as we all do about weapons; admitting them for particular purposes, but keeping watch on them in particular ways.

But all that belongs to the later stage of improvement, when the commonwealth of free men already exists; I do not think it inconsistent with using any instruments that are innocent in themselves in order to help such citizens to find a footing. I have also noted that just as I do not think machinery an immoral instrument in itself, so I do not think State action an immoral instrument in itself. The State might do a great deal in the first stages, especially by education in the new and necessary crafts and labours, by subsidy or tariff to protect distributive experiments and by special laws, such as the taxation of contracts. All these are covered by what I call the second principle, that we may use intermediate or imperfect instruments; but it goes along with the first principle, that we must be perfect not only in our patience, but in our passion and our enduring indignation.

Lastly, there are the ordinary and obvious problems like that of population, and in that connection I fully concede that the process may sooner or later involve an element of emigration. But I think the emigration must be undertaken by those who understand the new England, and not by those who want to escape from it or from the necessity of it. Men must realize the new meaning of the old phrase, “the sacredness of private property.” There must be a spirit that will make the colonist feel at home and not abroad. And there, I admit, there is a difficulty; for I confess I know only one thing that will thus give to a new soil the sanctity of something already old and full of mystical affections. And that thing is a shrine — the real presence of a sacramental religion.

Thus, unavoidably, I end on the note of another controversy — a controversy that I have no idea of pursuing here. But I should not be honest if I did not mention it, and whatever be the case in that connection it is impossible to deny that there is a doctrine behind the whole of our political position. It is not necessarily the doctrine of the religious authority which I myself receive; but it cannot be denied that it must in a sense be religious. That is to say, it must at least have some reference to an ultimate view of the universe and especially of the nature of man. Those who are thus ready to see property atrophied would ultimately be ready to see arms and legs amputated. They really believe that these could become extinct organs like the appendix. In other words, there is indeed a fundamental difference between my own view and that vision of man as a merely intermediate and changing thing — a Link, if not a Missing Link. The creature, it is claimed, once went on four legs and now goes on two legs. The obvious inference would be that the next stage of evolution will be for a man to stand on one leg. And this will be of very great value to the capitalist or bureaucratic powers that are now to take charge of him. It will mean, for one thing, that only half the number of boots need be supplied to the working classes. It will mean that all wages will be of a one-legged sort. But I would testify at the end, as at the beginning, that I believe in Man standing on two legs and requiring two boots, and that I desire them to be his own boots. You may call it conservative to want this. You may call it revolutionary to attempt to get it. But if that is conservative, I am conservative; if that is revolutionary, I am revolutionary — but too democratic to be evolutionary, anyhow.

The thing behind Bolshevism and many other modern things is a new doubt. It is not merely a doubt about God; it is rather specially a doubt about Man. The old morality, the Christian religion, the Catholic Church, differed from all this new mentality because it really believed in the rights of men. That is, it believed that ordinary men were clothed with powers and privileges and a kind of authority. Thus the ordinary man had a right to deal with dead matter, up to a given point; that is the right of property. Thus the ordinary man had a right to rule the other animals within reason; that is the objection to vegetarianism and many other things. The ordinary man had a right to judge about his own health, and what risks he would take with the ordinary things of his environment; that is the objection to Prohibition and many other things. The ordinary man had a right to judge of his children's health, and generally to bring up children to the best of his ability; that is the objection to many interpretations of modern State education. Now in these primary things in which the old religion trusted a man, the new philosophy utterly distrusts a man. It insists that he must be a very rare sort of man to have any rights in these matters; and when he is the rare sort, he has the right to rule others even more than himself. It is this profound scepticism about the common man that is the common point in the most contradictory elements of modern thought. That is why Mr. Bernard Shaw wants to evolve a new animal that shall live longer and grow wiser than man. That is why Mr. Sidney Webb wants to herd the men that exist like sheep, or animals much more foolish than man. They are not rebelling against an abnormal tyranny; they are rebelling against what they think is a normal tyranny — the tyranny of the normal. They are not in revolt against the King. They are in revolt against the Citizen. The old revolutionist, when he stood on the roof (like the revolutionist in The Dynamiter) and looked over the city, used to say to himself, “Think how the princes and nobles revel in their palaces; think how the captains and cohorts ride the streets and trample on the people.” But the new revolutionist is not brooding on that. He is saying, “Think of all those stupid men in vulgar villas or ignorant slums. Think how badly they teach their children; think how they do the wrong thing to the dog and offend the feelings of the parrot.” In short, these sages, rightly or wrongly, cannot trust the normal man to rule in the home, and most certainly do not want him to rule in the State. They do not really want to give him any political power. They are willing to give him a vote, because they have long discovered that it need not give him any power. They are not willing to give him a house, or a wife, or a child, or a dog, or a cow, or a piece of land, because these things really do give him power.

Now we wish it to be understood that our policy is to give him power by giving him these things. We wish to insist that this is the real moral division underlying all our disputes, and perhaps the only one really worth disputing. We are far from denying, especially at this time, that there is much to be said on the other side. We alone, perhaps, are likely to insist in the full sense that the average respectable citizen ought to have something to rule. We alone, to the same extent and for the same reason, have the right to call ourselves democratic. A republic used to be called a nation of kings, and in our republic the kings really have kingdoms. All modern governments, Prussian or Russian, all modern movements, Capitalist or Socialist, are taking away that kingdom from the king. Because they dislike the independence of that kingdom, they are against property. Because they dislike the loyalty of that kingdom, they are against marriage.

It is therefore with a somewhat sad amusement that I note the soaring visions that accompany the sinking wages. I observe that the social prophets are still offering the homeless something much higher and purer than a home, and promising a supernormal superiority to people who are not allowed to be normal. I am quite content to dream of the old drudgery of democracy, by which as much as possible of a human life should be given to every human being; while the brilliant author of The First Men in the

Moon will doubtless be soon deriding us in a romance called The Last Men on the Earth. And indeed I do believe that when they lose the pride of personal ownership they will lose something that belongs to their erect posture and to their footing and poise upon the planet. Meanwhile I sit amid droves of overdriven clerks and underpaid workmen in a tube or a tram; I read of the great conception of Men Like Gods and I wonder when men will be like men.

THE END

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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CHAPTER I

"THE MYTH OF STEVENSON"

IN this brief study of Stevenson I propose to follow a somewhat unusual course; or to sketch what may be considered a rather eccentric outline. It can only be justified in practice; and I have a healthy fear that my practice will not justify it. Nevertheless, I have not adopted it without considerable thought, and even doubt, about the best way of dealing with a real and practical problem. So before it collapses completely in practice, I will give myself the triumph and the joy of justifying it in principle.

The difficulty arises thus. In the great days of Stevenson critics had begun to be ashamed of being critics, and of giving to their ancient function the name of criticism. It was the fashion to publish a book that was a bundle of reviews and to call it "Appreciations." But the world advances; and if that sort of book is published now, it might well bear the general title of "Depreciations." Stevenson has suffered more than most from this new fashion of minimising and finding fault; and some energetic and successful writers have thrown themselves into the business almost with the eagerness of stockbrokers, bent on making a slump instead of a boom in Stevenson Stock. It may be questioned whether we need welcome the bear any more than the bull in the china-shop of elegant English letters. Others seem to make quite a hobby of proving a particular writer to be overrated. They write long and laborious articles, full of biographical detail and bitter commentary, in order to show that the subject is unworthy of attention; and write pages upon Stevenson to prove that he is not worth writing about. Neither their motives nor their methods are very clear or satisfactory. If it be true that all swans are geese to the discriminating eye of the scientific ornithologist, it hardly suffices to explain so long or so fatiguing a wild-goose chase.

But it is true that, in a sense more general than that of these rather irritable individuals, such a reaction does exist. And it is a reaction against Stevenson, or at least against Stevensonians. Perhaps it would be most correct to call it a reaction against Stevensoniana. And let me say at this early stage that I heartily agree that there has been far too much Stevensoniana. In one sense, indeed, everything about anybody so interesting as Stevenson is interesting. In one sense, everything about everybody is interesting. But not everybody can interest everybody else: and it is well to know an author is loved, but not to publish all the love-letters. Sometimes we only had to endure that most awful and appalling tragedy: a truth told once too often. Sometimes we heard Stevensonian sentiments repeated in violation of all Stevensonian rules. For of all things he hated dilution: and loved to take language neat, like a liqueur. In short, it was overdone; it was too noisy and yet all on one note; above all, it was too incessant and too prolonged. As I say, there were a variety of causes, which it would be unnecessary and sometimes unamiable to discuss. There was perhaps something in it of the very virtue of Stevenson; he was tolerant of many societies and interested in many men; and there was nothing to ward off the direst results of the men being interested in him. Especially after he was dead, one person after another turned up and wrote a book about meeting Stevenson on a steamboat or in a restaurant; and it is not surprising that such book-makers began to look as vulgar as bookies. There was perhaps something in it of the old joke of Johnson: that the Scots are in a conspiracy to praise each other. It was often because the Scots are secret sentimentalists and cannot always keep the secret. Their interest in a story so brilliant and in some ways so pathetic was perfectly natural and human; but for all that, their interest was overdone. It was sometimes, I regret to say, because the interest might fairly be called a vested interest. Anyhow, any number of things happened to combine to vulgarise the thing; but vulgarising a thing does not really make it vulgar.

Now Stevenson’s life was really what we call picturesque; partly because he saw everything in pictures; and partly because a chapter of accidents did really attach him to very picturesque places. He was born on the high terraces of the noblest of northern cities: in the family mansion in Edinburgh in 1850; he was the son of a house of highly respected architects of lighthouses; and nothing could be more really romantic than such a legend of men laboriously lifting the star-crowned towers of the sea. He failed to follow the family tradition, however, for various reasons; he was blighted with ill-health and a taste for art; the latter sent him to pick up picturesque tricks and poses in the art colony of Barbizon; the former very soon sent him southward into warmer and warmer climates; and it so happens as he himself remarked, that the countries to which we are sent when health deserts us have a magical and rather mocking beauty. At one time he had paid a sort of vagabond visit to America, crossing the ugly plains that lead to the abrupt beauty of California, that promised land. He described it in the studies called Across the Plain: a work vaguely unsatisfying both to writer and reader. I think it records the subconscious blank and sense of bewilderment felt by every true European on first seeing the very light and landscape of America. The shock of negation was in his case truly unnatural. He almost wrote a dull book. But there is another reason for noting this exception here.

This book makes no pretence of being even an outline of the life of Stevenson. In his particular case I deliberately omit such an outline, because I find that it has cut across and confused the very sharp and lucid outline of his art. But indeed in any case it would be very difficult to tell the tale with truth without telling it in detail, and in rather bewildering detail. The first thing that strikes us, on a rapid survey of his life and letters, is his innumerable changes of domicile, especially in his early days. If his friends followed the example he professes to set, in the matter of Mr. Michael Finsbury, and refused to learn more than one address for one friend, he must have left his correspondence very far behind indeed. His wanderings in Western Europe would appear on the map as much wilder as well as wider than the “probable course of David Balfour’s wanderings” in Western Scotland. If we started out to tell his story thus, we should have to note how he went first to Mentone and then back again to Edinburgh and then to Fontainebleau and then to the Highlands and then to Fontainebleau again and then to Davos in the mountains, and so on; a zigzag pilgrimage impossible to compress except in a larger biography. But all or most of it is covered by one generalisation. This navigation chart was really a hospital chart. Its jagged mountains represented temperatures; or at least climates. The whole story of Stevenson is conditioned by a certain complexity, which a tenderness for the English language will restrain us from calling a complex. It was a sort of paradox, by which he was at once more and less protected than other men; like somebody travelling the wildest roads of the world in a covered waggon. He went where he did partly because he was an adventurer and partly because he was an invalid. By that sort of limping agility, he may be said to have seen at once too little and too much. He was perhaps a natural traveller; but he was not a normal traveller. Nobody ever did treat him as quite normal; which is the truth hidden in the falsehood of those who sneer at his childishness as that of a spoilt child. He was courageous; and yet he had to be shielded against two things at once, his weakness and his courage. But his picture of himself as a vagabond with blue fingers on the winter road is avowedly an ideal picture; it was exactly that sort of freedom that he could never have. He could only be carried from sight to sight; or even from adventure to adventure. Indeed there is here a curious aptness in the quaint simplicity of his childish rhyme that ran, “My bed is like a little boat.” Through all his varied experiences his bed was a boat and his boat was a bed. Panoramas of tropic palm and Californian orange-grove passed over that moving couch like the long nightmare of the nursery walls. But his real courage was not so much turned outwards to the drama of the boat as inwards to the drama of the bed. Nobody knew better than he did that nothing is more terrible than a bed; since it is always waiting to be a deathbed.

Broadly speaking, therefore, his biography would consist of journeys hither and thither, with a donkey in the Cevennes, with a baronet on the French canals; on a sledge in Switzerland or in a bathchair at Bournemouth. But they were all, in one way or another, related to the problem of his health as well as to the cheerfulness of his curiosity. Now of all human things the search for health is the most unhealthy. And it is truly a great glory to Stevenson that he, almost alone among men, could go on pursuing his bodily health without once losing his mental health. As soon as he came to any place, he lost no time in finding a new and better reason for having come there. It might be a child or a sonnet, a flirtation or the plan of a story; but he made that the real reason; and not the unhealthy reason of health. Nevertheless, there generally had been, somewhere in the background, some suggestion of the reason of health; as there was in that last great journey to his final home in the South Seas.

The one real break, I suspect, in this curious double process of protection and risk, was his break-away to America, which arose partly at least in connection with the matter of his marriage. It seemed to his friends and family, not so much like the conduct of an invalid who had done a bolt from the hospital, as the conduct of a lunatic unaccountably loose from the asylum. In truth, the voyage struck them as less mad than the marriage. As this is not a biographical study, I need not go deeply into the delicate disputes about that business; but it was admittedly at least unconventional. All that matters to the argument here is that, while there was much in it that was even noble, it was not normal. It was not love as it should come to youth: it is no disrespect to either to say that in both, psychologically speaking, there was an element of patching up as well as of binding together. Stevenson had met, first in Paris and later in America, an American lady married to a seemingly somewhat unsatisfactory American gentleman, against whom she took proceedings for divorce. Stevenson at the same time precipitately crossed the seas and in some sense pursued her to California; I suppose with some vague idea of being in at the death; and indeed he was very nearly in at his own. The escapade brought on him one of the worst and sharpest of his attacks of illness; the lady, being on the spot, naturally threw herself into nursing him; and as soon as he could stand on two rickety legs they were married. It caused consternation to his family, who were however really reconciled afterwards, it would seem, by the personal magnetism of his foreign and almost exotic bride. Certainly in her society his literary work went with a renewed swing and even regularity; and the rest of his story is practically the story of his important works; varied by his, if possible, still more important friendships. There was illness, in which, it should be said, it was often a case of two invalids nursing each other. Then came the decision to fall back on the secure climate of the Pacific Islands; which led to his taking up his last station at Vailima on the island of Samoa: in a coloured archipelago which our cheerful forefathers might have described as the Cannibal Islands, but which Stevenson was more disposed to describe as the Islands of the Blest. There he lived as happily as can an exile who loves his country and his friends, free at least of all the daily dangers of his lung trouble; and there he died very suddenly, at the age of forty-four, the beloved patriarch of a little white and brown community, to whom he was known as Tusitala or the Teller of Tales.

That is the main outline of the actual biography of Robert Louis Stevenson; and from the time when he clambered as a boy among the crags and castellations of the Painted Hill, looking across the islets of the Forth, to the time when tall brown barbarians, crowned with red flowers, bore him on their spears to the peak of their sacred mountain, the spirit of this artist had been permitted to inhabit, and as it were to haunt, the beautiful places of the earth. To the last he had tasted that beauty with a burning sensibility; and it is no joke, in his case, to say that he would have enjoyed coming to his own funeral. Of course, even this generalisation is too much of a simplification. He was not, as we shall later have occasion to note, unacquainted with sombre nor, alas, with sordid surroundings. Oscar Wilde said with some truth that Stevenson might have produced yet richer and more purple romances if he had always lived in Gower Street; and he was certainly one of the very few who have managed to feel fierce and adventurous at Bournemouth. But broadly speaking, it is true that the outline of his life was romantic; and was therefore perhaps too easily turned into a romance. He himself deliberately turned it into a romance; but not all those romancing were such good romancers as he. So the romance tended to turn into mere repetition and gossip; and the romantic figure faded into journalism as the figure of Robin Hood faded into endless penny dreadfuls or schoolboy serials; as the figure of Micawber was multiplied and cheapened into Ally Sloper. Then came the reaction; a reaction which I should call rather excusable than justifiable. But that reaction is the problem in any Popular treatment of him to-day.

Now if I were to follow here the natural course of such a volume as this, I should have to begin by telling slowly and systematically the tale that I have just told rapidly and briefly. I should have to give a chapter to his childhood, to his favourite aunt and his yet more beloved nurse, and to all the things much more clearly recorded in A Child's Garden of Verses. I should have to give a chapter to his youth, his differences with his father, his struggles with his malady, his greater struggles about his marriage; working up slowly through the whole length of the book to the familiar picture of so many magazines and memoirs; the slender semi-tropical Tusitala with his long brown hair and long olive face and long strange slits of eyes, sitting clad in white or crowned with garlands and telling tales to all the tribes of men. Now the misfortune of all this would be that it would amount to saying, through a slow series of chapters, that there is nothing more to be said about Stevenson except what has been said a thousand times. It would be to suggest that Stevenson's serious fame does still really depend on this string of picturesque accidents; and that there is really nothing to be told of him, except that he wore long hair in the Savile Club or light clothes in the Samoan mountains. His life really was romantic; but to repeat that romance is like reprinting the *Scarlet Pimpernel* or offering the world an entirely new portrait of Rudolph Valentino. It is against this repetition that the reaction has set in; perhaps wrongly but certainly strongly. And to spin it out through the whole of this book would be to give the impression (which I should mildly resent) that this book is only the thousandth unnecessary volume of Stevensoniana. However I told his story in detail, though it were with all the sympathy I feel, I could not avoid that suggestion of a sort of jaded journalism. Stevenson's picturesque attitude and career are rather in his way at this moment; not for me, because I like the picturesque, but for this new pose which may be called the pose of the prosaic. To these unfortunate realists, to say that there were all these romantic things about him is only another way of saying that there was nothing in him. And there was a very great deal in him. I am driven to adopt some other method of bringing it out.

When I come to describing it, I find it is perhaps even more difficult to describe it than to do it. But something of this sort is what I propose to do. Loudon Dodd, in whom there is much of Louis Stevenson, says very truly in *The Wrecker,* that for the artist the external result is always a fizzle: his eyes are turned inward: "he lives for a state of mind." I mean to attempt the conjectural description of certain states of mind, with the books that were the "external expression" of them. If for the artist his art is a fizzle, his life is often far more of a fizzle: it is even far more of a fiction. It is the one of his works in which he tells least of the truth. Stevenson's was more real than most, because more romantic than most. But I prefer the romances, which were still more real. I mean that I think the wanderings of Balfour more Stevensonian than the wanderings of Stevenson: that the duel of Jekyll and Hyde is more illuminating than the quarrel of Stevenson and Henley: and that the true private life is to be sought not in Samoa but in Treasure Island; for where the treasure is, there is the heart also.

In short, I propose to review his books with illustrations from his life; rather than to write his life with illustrations from his books. And I do it deliberately, not because his life was not as interesting as any book; but because the habit of talking too much about his life has already actually led to thinking far too little of his literature. His ideas are being underrated, precisely because they are not being studied separately and seriously as ideas. His art is being underrated, precisely because he is not accorded even the fair advantages of Art for Art's Sake. There is indeed a queer irony about the fate of the men of that age, who delighted in that axiom. They claimed judgement as artists, not men; and they are really remembered as men much more than they are remembered as artists. More men know the Whistlerian anecdotes than the Whistlerian etchings; and poor Wilde will live in history as immoral rather than unmoral. But there is a real reason for studying intrinsic intellectual values in the case of Stevenson; and it need not be said that exactly where the modern maxim would be useful, it is never used. The new criticism of Stevenson is still a criticism of Stevenson rather than of Stevenson's work; it is always a personal criticism, and often, I think, rather a spiteful criticism. It is simply nonsense, for instance, for a distinguished living novelist to suggest that Stevenson's correspondence is a thin stream of selfish soliloquy devoid of feeling for anybody but himself. It teems with lively expressions of longing for particular people and places; it breaks out everywhere with delight into that broad Scots idiom which, as Stevenson truly said elsewhere, gives a special freedom to all the terms of affection. Stevenson might be lying, of course, though I know not why a busy author should lie at such length for nothing. But I cannot see how any man could say any more to suggest his dependence on the society of friends. These are positive facts of personality that can never be proved or disproved. I never knew Stevenson; but I knew very many of his favourite friends and correspondents. I knew Henry James and William Archer; I have still the honour of knowing Sir James Barrie and Sir Edmund Gosse. And anybody who knows them, even most slightly and superficially, must know they are not the men to be in confidential correspondence for years with a silly, greedy and exacting egoist without seeing through him; or to be bombarded with boring autobiographies without being bored. But it seems rather a pity that such critics should still be called upon to hunt up Stevenson's letter-bag, when they might well think it time to form some conclusions about Stevenson's place in letters. Anyhow, I propose on the present occasion to be so perverse as to interest myself in literature when dealing with a literary man; and to be especially interested not only in the literature left by the man but in the philosophy inhering in the literature. And I am especially interested in a certain story, which was indeed the story of his life, but not exactly the story in his biography. It was an internal and spiritual story; and the stages of it are to be found rather in his stories than in his external acts. It is told much better in the difference between *Treasure Island* and *The Story of a Lie,* or in the difference between A Child's Garden of Verses *and* Markheim *or* Olalla, than in any detailed account of his wrangles with his father or the fragmentary love-affairs of his youth. For it seems to me that there is a moral to the art of Stevenson (if the shades of Wilde and Whistler will endure the challenge), and that it is one with a real bearing on the future of

European culture and the hope that is to guide our children. Whether I shall be able to draw out this moral and make it sufficiently large and clear, I know as little as the reader does.

Nevertheless, at this stage of the attempt I will say one thing. I have, in a sense, a sort of theory about Stevenson; a view of him which, right or wrong, concerns his life and work as a whole. But it is perhaps less exclusively personal than much of the interest that has been naturally taken in his personality. It is certainly the very contrary of the attacks which have commonly, and especially recently, been made on that personality. Thus the critics are fond of suggesting that he was nothing if not self-conscious; that the whole of his significance came from self-consciousness. I believe that the one really great and important work which he did for the world was done quite unconsciously. Many have blamed him for posing; some have blamed him for preaching. The matter which mainly interests me is not merely his pose, if it was a pose, but the large landscape or background against which he was posing; which he himself only partly realised, but which goes to make up a rather important historical picture. And though it is true that he sometimes preached, and preached very well, I am by no means certain that the thing which he preached was the same as the thing which he taught. Or, to put it another way, the thing which he could teach was not quite so large as the thing which we can learn. Or again, many of them declare that he was only a nine days' wonder, a passing figure that happened to catch the eye and even affect the fashion; and that with that fashion he will be forgotten. I believe that the lesson of his life will only be seen after time has revealed the full meaning of all our present tendencies; I believe it will be seen from afar off like a vast plan or maze traced out on a hillside; perhaps traced by one who did not even see the plan while he was making the tracks. I believe that his travels and doublings and returns reveal an idea, and even a doctrine. Yet it was perhaps a doctrine in which he did not believe, or at any rate did not believe that he believed. In other words, I think his significance will stand out more strongly in relation to larger problems which are beginning to press once more upon the mind of man; but of which many men are still largely unaware in our time, and were almost entirely unaware in his. But any contribution to the solution of those problems will be remembered; and he made a very great contribution, probably greater than he knew. Lastly, these same critics do not hesitate, in many cases, to accuse him flatly of being insincere. I should say that nobody, so openly fond of play-acting as he was, could possibly be insincere. But it is more to my purpose now to say that his relation to the huge half-truth that he carried was in its very simplicity a mark of truthfulness. For he had the splendid and ringing sincerity to testify, in a voice like a trumpet, to a truth that he did not understand.

CHAPTER II

IN THE COUNTRY OF SKELT

EVERY now and then the eye is riveted, in reading current criticism, by some statement so astonishingly untrue, or even contrary to the fact, that it seems as if a man walking down the street were suddenly standing on his head. It is all the more noticeable when the critic really has a strong head to stand on. One of the ablest of the younger critics, whose studies in other subjects I have warmly admired, wrote in our invaluable *London Mercury* a study of Stevenson; or what purported to be a study of Stevenson. And the chief thing he said, indeed almost the only thing he said, was that the thought of Stevenson instantly throws us back to the greater example of Edgar Allan Poe; that both were pallid and graceful figures "making wax flowers," as somebody said; and of course the earlier and greater had the advantage of the later and the less. In fact, the critic treated Stevenson as the shadow of Poe; which may not unfairly be called the shadow of a shade. He almost hinted that, for those who had read Poe, it was hardly worth while to read Stevenson. And indeed I could almost suspect he had taken his own advice; and never read a line of Stevenson in his life.

If a man were to say that Maeterlinck derives so directly from Dickens that it is difficult to draw the line between them, I should be momentarily at a loss to catch his meaning. If he were to say that Walt Whitman was so close a copyist of Pope that it is hardly worth while to read the copy, I should not at once seize the clue. But I should think these comparisons rather more close, if anything, than the comparison between Stevenson and Poe. Dickens did not confine himself to comic subjects so much as Poe did to tragic ones; and an Essay on Optimism might couple the names of Pope and Whitman. It might also include the name of Stevenson; but it would hardly beam and sparkle with the name of Poe. The contrast, however, is much deeper than labels or the commonplaces of controversy. It is much deeper than formal divisions between what is funny and what is serious. It is concerned with something which it is now fashionable in drawing-rooms to call psychological; but which those who would as soon talk Latin as Greek still prefer to call spiritual. It is not necessarily what the newspapers would call moral; but that is only because it is more moral than most modern morality.

When Stevenson was known as Stennis, by Parisian art students struggling with his name, it was the hour of Art for Art's Sake. Painting was to be impersonal, though painters (like Whistler) were sometimes perhaps a little personal. But they all insisted that every picture is as impersonal as a pattern. They ought to have insisted that every pattern is as personal as a picture. Whether or no we see faces in the carpet, we ought to see a mind in the carpet; and in fact there is a mind in every scheme of ornament. There is as emphatically a morality expressed in Babylonian architecture or Baroque architecture as if it were plastered all over with Biblical texts. Now in the same manner there is at the back of every artist's mind something like a pattern or a type of architecture. The original quality in any man of imagination is imagery. It is a thing like the landscapes of his dreams; the sort of world he would wish to make or in which he would wish to wander; the strange flora and fauna of his own secret planet; the *sort* of thing that he likes to think about. This general atmosphere, and pattern or structure of growth, governs all his creations however varied; and because he can in this sense create a world, he is in this sense a creator; the image of God. Now everybody knows what was in this sense the atmosphere and architecture of Poe. Dark wine, dying lamps, drugging odours, a sense of being stifled in curtains of black velvet, a substance which is at once utterly black and unfathomably soft, all carried with them a sense of indefinite and infinite decay. The word infinite is not itself used indefinitely. The point of Poe is that we feel that *everything* is decaying, including ourselves; faces are already growing featureless like those of lepers; roof-trees are rotting from root to roof; one great grey fungus as vast as a forest is sucking up life rather than giving it forth; mirrored in stagnant pools like lakes of poison which yet fade without line or frontier into the swamp. The stars are not clean in his sight; but are rather more worlds made for worms. And this corruption is increased, by an intense imaginative genius, with the addition of a satin surface of luxury and even a terrible sort of comfort. "Purple cushions that the lamplight gloated o'er" is in the spirit of his brother Baudelaire who wrote of divans profonds commes les tombeaux. This dark luxury has something almost liquid about it. Its laxity seems to be betraying more vividly how all these things are being sucked away from us, down a slow whirlpool more like a moving swamp. That is the atmosphere of Edgar Allan Poe; a sort of rich rottenness of decomposition, with something thick and narcotic in the very air. It is idle to describe what so darkly and magnificently describes itself. But perhaps the shortest and best way of describing that artistic talent is to say that Stevenson’s is exactly the opposite.

The first fact about the imagery of Stevenson is that all his images stand out in very sharp outline; and are, as it were, all edges. It is something in him that afterwards attracted him to the abrupt and angular black and white of woodcuts. It is to be seen from the first, in the way in which his eighteenth-century figures stand up against the skyline, with their cutlasses and cocked hats. The very words carry the sound and the significance. It is as if they were cut out with cutlasses; as was that unforgettable chip or wedge that was hacked by the blade of Billy Bones out of the wooden sign of the “Admiral Benbow.” That sharp indentation of the wooden square remains as a sort of symbolic shape expressing Stevenson’s type of literary attack; and if all the colours should fade from me and the scene of all that romance grow dark, I think that black wooden sign with a piece bitten out of it would be the last shape that I should see. It is no mere pun to say that it is the best of his woodcuts. Normally, anyhow, the scene is the very reverse of dark, and certainly the very reverse of indefinite. Just as all the form can best be described as clean-cut, so all the colour is conspicuously clear and bright. That is why such figures are so often seen standing against the sea. Everybody who has been at the seaside has noted how sharp and highly coloured, like painted caricatures, appear even the most ordinary figures as they pass in profile to and fro against the blue dado of the sea. There is something also of that hard light that falls full and pale upon ships and open shores; and even more, it need not be said, of a certain salt and acrid clearness in the air. But it is notably the case in the outlines of these maritime figures. They are all edges and they stand by the sea, that is the edge of the world.

This is but a rough experimental method; but it will be found useful to make the experiment, of calling up all the Stevensonian scenes that recur most readily to the memory; and noting this bright hard quality in shape and hue. It will make it seem all the stranger that any ornithologist could have confused the raven of Poe with the parrot of Long John Silver. The parrot was scarce more reputable; but he was a bird from the lands of bright plumage and blue skies, where the other bird was a mere shadow making

darkness more dark. It is even worth noting that when the more modern pirates of *The Wrecker* carried away with them a caged bird, it had to be a canary. It is specially observed when Stevenson is dealing with things which many of his contemporaries made merely shadowy or unfathomably mysterious; such as the Highland hills and all the lost kingdoms of the Gael. His Highland tales have everything Scotch except Scotch mist. At that time, and even before, writers of the school of Fiona Macleod were already treating such peoples entirely as the Children of the Mist. But there is very little mist on the mountains of Stevenson. There is no Celtic twilight about his Celts. Alan Breck Stewart had no yearning for any delicate vapour to veil his bright silver buttons or his bright blue French coat. There was hardly a cloud in the sky upon that day of doom, when Glenure dropped dead in the sunshine; and he did not have red hair for nothing. Stevenson is even moved to mention that the servant behind him was laden with lemons; because lemons are bright yellow. This sort of making of a picture may not be conscious, but it is none the less characteristic. Of course I do not mean literally that all the scenes in any novel could have the same scheme of colour, or occur at the same time of day. There are exceptions to the rule; but even these will generally be found to be exceptions that prove the rule.
A time of *A Lodging for the Night* is not unnaturally at night; but even in that nightmare of winter in mediaeval Paris the mind’s eye is really filled rather with the whiteness of snow than the blackness of darkness. It is against the snow that we see the flaming mediaeval figures; and especially that memorable figure who (like Campbell of Glenure) had no right to have red hair when he was dead. The hair is like a scarlet splash of blood crying for vengeance; but I doubt whether the doomed gentleman in Poe’s poetry would have been allowed to have red hair even when he was alive. In the same way, it would be easy to answer in detail, by finding some description of night in the works of Stevenson; but it would never be the night that broods eternally on the works of Poe. It might be said, for instance, that there are few more vivid or typical scenes in the Stevensonian tales than that of the duel at midnight in The Master of Ballantrae. But there again the exception proves the rule; the description insists not on the darkness of night but on the hardness of winter, the “windless stricture of the frost”; the candles that stand as straight as the swords; the candle-flames that seem almost as cold as the stars. I have spoken of the double meaning of a woodcut; this was surely, in the same double sense, a steel engraving. A

steely cold stiffens and steadies that tingling play of steel; and that not only materially but morally. The House of Durrisdeer does not fall after the fashion of The House of Ussher. There is in that murderous scene I know not what that is clean and salt and sane; and, in spite of all, the white frost gives to the candles a sort of cold purification as of Candlemas. But the point is, at the moment, that when we say this deed was done at night, we do not mean that it was done in the dark. There is a sense of exactitude and emphatic detail that belongs entirely to the day. Here indeed the two authors so strangely compared might almost have conspired in advance against the critic who compared them: as when Poe's ideal detective prefers to think in the dark, and therefore puts up the shutters even during the day. Dupin brings the outer darkness into the parlour, while Durie carries the candle-light into the forest.

These images are not fancies or accidents: their spirit runs through the whole scene. The same incident, for instance, shows all the author's love of sharp edges and cutting or piercing action. It is supremely typical that he made Mrs. Durie thrust the sword up to the hilt into the frozen ground. It is true that afterwards (perhaps under the sad eye of Mr. Archer and the sensitive realists) he consented to withdraw this as "an exaggeration to stagger Hugo." But it is much more significant that it did not originally stagger Stevenson. It was the very vital gesture of all his works that that sharp blade should cleave that stiff clay. It was true in many other senses, touching mortal clay and the sword of the spirit. But I am speaking now of the gesture of the craftsman, like that of a man cutting wood. This man had an appetite for cutting it clean. He never committed a murder without making a clean job of it.

Whence did that spirit come; and how did the story of it begin? That is the right and real way of beginning the story of Stevenson. If I say that it began with cutting figures out of cardboard, it might sound like a parody of the pedantic fancies about juvenile psychology and early education. But perhaps it will be better even to run the horrid risk of being mistaken for a modern educationist, rather than to repeat the too familiar phrases by which the admirer of Stevenson has got himself described as a sentimentalist. Too much has been talked in this connection about the Soul of the Child or the Peter Pan of Samoa; not because it is untrue, but because it is a mistake to tell a truth too often, so that it loses its freshness; especially when it is the truth about how to remain fresh. Many are perhaps rather tired of hearing about it; though they would never be tired of having it. I have therefore deliberately approached the matter by another road; and even by a road running backwards. Instead of talking first about Cummy and the nursery anecdotes of Master Louis (at the risk of making a really graceful figure grow ridiculous by mere repetition, in the eyes of multitudes of greatly inferior people) I have tried to take the stock and normal of his work first, and then note that it really does date in a special sense from his childhood; and that it is not sentimental and not senseless and not irrelevant to say so.

If therefore we ask, "Where does the story of Stevenson really start; where does his special style or spirit begin and where do they come from; how did he get, or begin to get, the thing that made him different from the man next-door?" I have no doubt about the answer. He got them from the mysterious Mr. Skelt of the Juvenile Drama, otherwise the toy theatre, which of all toys has most of the effect of magic on the mind. Or rather, of course, he got it from the way in which his own individual temper and talent grasped the nature of the game. He has written it all in an excellent essay and at least in one very real sentence of autobiography. "What is the world, what is man and life but what my Skelt has made them?" The psychological interest is rather more special than is conveyed by the common generalisation about the imagination of infancy. It is not merely a question of children's toys; it is a question of a particular kind of toy, as of a particular kind of talent. It was not quite the same thing, for instance, to buy toy theatres in Edinburgh as it would have been to go to real theatres in London. In that little pasteboard play there might be something of the pantomime; but there was nothing of the dissolving view. The positive outline of everything, so well sketched in his own essay, the hard favour of the heroine, the clumps of vegetation, the clouds rolled up stiff as bolsters — these things meant something to the soul of Stevenson by their very swollen solidity or angular swagger. And it is hardly an exaggeration to say that he spent his life in teaching the world what he had learnt from them. What he learnt from them was very much more than anybody else had ever learnt from them; and that is his teaching and his qualification to teach. But to the last he presented his morality in a series of Moral Emblems which had something in common with those definite outlines and defiant attitudes; and there was never any name for it but his own name of Skeltery.

It was because he loved to see on those lines, and to think in those terms, that all his instinctive images are clear and not cloudy; that he liked a gay patch-work of colour combined with a zigzag energy of action, as quick as the crooked lightning. He loved things to stand out; we might say he loved them to stick out; as does the hilt of a sabre or the feather in a cap. He loved the pattern of crossed swords; he almost loved the pattern of the gallows because it is a clear shape like the cross. And the point is that this pattern still runs through or underneath all his more mature or complex writing; and is never lost even at the moments when he is really tragic or, what is worse, realistic. Even when he mourns as a man, he still rejoices as a child. The men in divers' helmets like monsters, in the sordid misery of The Ebb-Tide, are still like masks of pantomime goblins against the glowing azure. And James Durie is quite as clear, we might say quite as bright, in his black coat as Alan Breck in his blue one.

Taking such a toy as a type or symbol, we may well say that Stevenson lived inside his toy theatre. It is certain that he lived in an exceptional sense inside his own home; and often, I imagine, inside his own bedroom. It is here that there appears, thus early in his life, that other element that was destined to darken it, often with something like the shadow of death. I know not how far that shadow could sometimes be traced upon the nursery wall. But it is certain that he was at least relatively a delicate or sickly child; and was therefore more thrown back upon that inner imaginative life than if he had been more robust in boyhood. The world inside that home was largely a world of his own; yes, even a world of his own imagining, a thing not so much of firelight as of pictures in the fire. The world outside his home was very different, even for those who shared his home life; and that is a contrast that I shall have occasion to emphasise, when we come to the crisis of his youth. It is enough to note here the paradox that he was to some extent protected by family life even from the heavier traditions of his family. As it did not build lighthouses in the garden pond, so it did not always bring the Kirk into the nursery. He has described how his stern Calvinistic grandfather tolerated in the nursery the wild Arabian fables that he might well have denounced in the pulpit. As even that Edinburgh house defended him from the winter winds of Edinburgh, so it protected him in some degree from the full icy blasts of Puritanism which blew so high in public life. It may have been that he was a sick child; it may have been that he was a spoilt child; but this fact that he was largely left alone with his daydreams, dwelling in that house within a house which is typified by the toy theatre, is a thing to be remembered; for it means much at a later stage.

In this matter of what has been called the Child in R. L. S., I have admitted that there has been far too much talking; but there has been far too little thinking. The thing is a reality; and it does remain as a very considerable problem for the reason, as yet quite unsolved by the modern world, even when most is said about it. We have a mass of testimony from men of every description, from Treherne to Hazlitt, or from Wordsworth to Thackeray, to the psychological fact that the child experiences joys which glow like jewels even in retrospect. None of the normal naturalistic explanations explain that natural fact; and some have suggested that it is indeed a supernatural fact. In the ordinary sense of mental growth, there is no more reason for the child being better than the man than for the tadpole being better than the frog. And the attempts to explain it by physical growth are even weaker. There is a good example of the weakness in one of the essays of Stevenson, who found himself, of course, at the particular modern moment to catch the first fashion and excitement of Darwinism. Speaking of the old Calvinist minister who confessed the gorgeous spell of the *Arabian Nights,* he suggests that in the brain of the theologian there is still the gambolling ape; the ancestor of man; "probably arboreal." It marks the security of such science, I may remark, that anthropologists are now saying that he was probably not arboreal. But anyhow, it is a little difficult to see why a man should love the complexity of labyrinthine cities, or wish to ride with the jewelled cohorts of the high princes of Arabia, merely because his relative had once been a hairy beast clambering like a bear on the top of a branching pole. It reminds one of the glorious apology which Stevenson made for having expected that a wealthy man would know a Governor of Christ's Hospital: "A man with a cold in his head does not necessarily know a rat-catcher; and the connection, as it appears to my humbled and awakened sense, is equally close."

The connection between the expanding energy of the young monkey and the secret daydreams of the young child is equally close. As a matter of fact, the time when the boy is most full of the energy of a monkey is emphatically not the time when the child is most full of the imaginative pleasures of a poet. These always come at a less vigorous period; they very often come to a less vigorous person. They especially and notably did so in the case of Stevenson; and it is absurd to explain the intensity of an infant who is an invalid by the bodily exuberance of a lad at the time when he is often rather a lout. Stevenson, with all the advantage of his disadvantages, may have lived through the period when everybody has a touch of loutishness. But that uncomfortable period of youth was not the period when the coloured pictures in his mind were most clear; they were much clearer later in the age of self-control and earlier in the age of innocence. The main point to be seized here is that they were coloured pictures of a particular kind. The colours faded, but in a certain sense the forms remained fixed; that is, that though they were slowly discoloured by the light of common day, yet when the lantern was again lit from within, the same magic-lantern slides glowed upon the blank screen. They were still pictures of pirates and red gold and bright blue sea, as they were in his childhood. And this fact is very important in the story of his mind; as we shall see when his mind reverted to them. For the time was to come when he was truly, like Jim Hawkins, to be rescued by a leering criminal with crutch and cutlass from destiny worse than death and men worse than Long John Silver — from the last phase of the enlightened nineteenth century and the leading thinkers of the age.

CHAPTER III

YOUTH AND EDINBURGH

IT is the suggestion of this chapter that when Stevenson first stepped out of his early Edinburgh home, he slipped upon the step. It may have been nothing worse, to begin with, than the ordinary butter-slide of the buffoonery of youth; such buffoonery as makes up the typical Edinburgh tale called The Misadventures of John Nicholson. But that tale alone would suggest that there was something a little greasy or even grimy about the butter. It is an odd story for Stevenson to have written; and no Stevensonian has any particular desire to dwell on those few of his works that might almost have been written by somebody else. But it has a biographical importance that has hardly been properly estimated, even in connection with this rather overworked biography. It is a curiously unlovely and uncomfortable comedy, not even uncomfortable enough to be a tragedy. The hero is not only not heroic, but he is hardly more amusing than attractive; and the fun that is made of him is not only not genial, but is not particularly funny. It is strange that such misadventures should come from the mind that gave us the radiant harlequinade of The Wrong Box. But I mention it here because it is full of a certain atmosphere, into which Stevenson was plunged too abruptly, as I believe, when he passed from boyhood into youth. It is true to call it the atmosphere, or one of the atmospheres of Edinburgh; yet it is the very reverse of so much that we rightly associate with the arid dignity of the Modern Athens. There is something very specially sordid and squalid in the glimpses of low life given in the dissipations of John Nicholson; and something of the same kind comes to us like a gust of gas from the medical students of The Body Snatcher. When I say that this first step of Stevenson led him rather abruptly astray, I do not mean that he did anything half so bad as multitudes of polite persons have done in the most polished centres of civilisation. But I do mean that his city was not, in that particular aspect, very polite or polished or even particularly civilised. And I notice it because it has been noticed too little; and some other things have been noticed too much.

It is an obvious truth that Stevenson was born of a Puritan tradition, in a Presbyterian country, where still rolled the echoes, at least, of the theological thunders of Knox; and where the Sabbath was sometimes more like a day of death than a day of rest. It is easy, only too easy, to apply this by representing Stevenson's father as a stern old Covenanter who frowned down the gay talents of his son; and such a simplification stands out boldly in black and white. But like many other black and white statements, it is not true; it is not even fair. Old Mr. Stevenson was a Presbyterian and presumably a Puritan, but he was not a Pharisee; and he certainly did not need to be a Pharisee in order to condemn some parts of the conduct of his son. It is probably true that almost any other son might have offended equally; but it is also true that almost any other father would have been equally offended. The son would have been the last to pretend that the faults were all on one side; the only thing that can concern posterity in the matter is certain social conditions which gave to those faults a particular savour, which counted for something even when the faults themselves have been long left behind. And while people have written rather too much about the shadow of the Kirk and the restrictions of a Puritan society, there is something that has not been seen about what may be called the underside of such a Puritan city. There is something strangely ugly and ungracious not merely about the virtues but about the vices, and especially the pleasures, of such a place. It can be felt, as I say, in Stevenson's own stories and in many other stories about Edinburgh. Blasts of raw whisky come to us on that raw wind: there is sometimes something shrill, like the skirl of the pipes, about Scottish laughter; occasionally something very nearly insane about Scottish intoxication. I will not connect it, as did a friend of mine, with the hypothesis that the heathen Scots originally worshipped demons; but it is probably connected with the same rather savage intensity which gave them their theological thoroughness. Anyhow, it is true that in such a world even temptation itself has something terrifying as well as tempting; and yet something at the same time undignified and flat. It was this that cut across the natural poetic adventure or ambition of a young poet; and gave to the early part of his story a quality of frustration, if not of aberration.

What was the matter with Stevenson, I fancy, in so far as there was ever anything much the matter with him, was that there was too sharp a contrast between the shelter and delicate fancies of his childhood and the sort of world which met him like the wind on the front door-step. It was not merely the contrast between poetry and Puritanism; it was also the contrast between poetry and prose; and prose that was almost repulsively prosaic. He did not believe enough in Puritanism to cling to it; but he did believe very much in a potential poetry of life, and he was bewildered by its apparently impossible position in the world of real living. And his national religion, even if he had believed in his religion as ardently as he believed in his nation, would never have met that particular point at issue.

Puritanism had no idea of purity. We might almost say that there is every other virtue in Puritanism except purity; often including continence, which is quite a different thing from purity. But it has not many images of positive innocence; of the things that are at once white and solid, like the white chalk or white wood which children love. This does not detract at all from the noble Puritan qualities: the republican simplicity, the fighting spirit, the thrift, the logic, the renunciation of luxuries, the resistance to tyrants, the energy and enterprise which have helped to give the Scot his adventurous advantage all over the world. But it is none the less true that there has been in his creed, at best, negative rather than positive purity: the difference between the blank white window and the ivory tower. I know that a Victorian prejudice still regards this interpretation of history by theology as a piece of most distressing bad taste. I also know that this taboo on the main topic of mankind is becoming an intolerable nuisance; and preventing anybody, from the Papist to the atheist, from saying what he really thinks about the most real themes in the world. And I will take the liberty of stating, in spite of the taboo, that it is really relevant here to remember this Puritan defect. It is as much a fact that the Kirk of Stevenson’s country had no cult of the Holy Child, no feast of the Holy Innocents, no tradition of the Little Brothers of St. Francis, nothing that could in any way *carry on* the childish enthusiasm for simple things, and link it up with a lifelong rule of life — this is as much a fact as that the Quakers are not a good military school or the good Moslem a good wine-taster. Hence it followed that when Stevenson left his home, he shut the door on a house lined with fairy gold, but he came out on a frightful contrast; on temptations at once attractive and repulsive, and terrors that were still depressing even when they were disregarded. The boy in such surroundings is torn by something worse than the dilemma of Tannhäuser. He wonders why he is attracted by repellent things.

I will here make what is a mere guess in the dark; and in a very dark matter of the mind. But I suspect that it was originally out of this chasm of ugly division that there rose that two-headed monster, the mystery of Jekyll and Hyde. There is indeed one peculiarity about that grim grotesque which I have never seen noted anywhere; though I dare say it may have been noted more than once. It will be realised that I am not, alas, so close a student of Stevensoniana as many who seem to think much less of Stevenson. But it seems to me that the story of Jekyll and Hyde, which is presumably presented as happening in London, is all the time very unmistakably happening in Edinburgh. More than one of the characters seem to be pure Scots. Mr. Utterson, the lawyer, is a most unmistakably Scottish lawyer, strictly occupied with Scots Law. No modern English lawyer ever read a book of dry divinity in the evening merely because it was Sunday. Mr. Hyde indeed possesses the cosmopolitan charm that unites all nations; but there is something decidedly Caledonian about Dr. Jekyll; and especially something that calls up that quality in Edinburgh that led an unkind observer (probably from Glasgow) to describe it as "an east-windy, west-endy place." The particular tone about his respectability, and the horror of mixing his reputation with mortal frailty, belongs to the upper middle classes in solid Puritan communities. But what is especially to the point of the present argument, there is a sense in which that Puritanism is expressed even more in Mr. Hyde than in Dr. Jekyll. The sense of the sudden stink of evil, the immediate invitation to step into stark filth, the abruptness of the alternative between that prim and proper pavement and that black and reeking gutter — all this, though doubtless involved in the logic of the tale, is far too frankly and familiarly offered not to have had some basis in observation and reality. It is not thus that the ordinary young pagan, of warmer climes, conceives the alternative of Christ and Aphrodite. His imagination and half his mind are involved in defending the beauty and dignity of the joy of gods and men. It is not so that Stevenson himself came to talk of such things, when he had felt the shadow of old Athens fall on the pagan side of Paris. I allow for all the necessary horror of the conception of Hyde. But this dingy quality does not belong only to the demon antics of Hyde. It is implied, somehow, in every word about the furtive and embarrassed vices of Jekyll.

It is the tragedy of a Puritan town; every bit as much as that black legend which Stevenson loved, in which the walking-stick of Major Weir went walking down the street all by itself. I hope to say something in a moment about the very deep and indeed very just and wise morality that is really involved in that ugly tale. I am only remarking here that the atmosphere and setting of it are those of some tale of stiff hypocrisy in a rigid sect or provincial village; it might be a tale of the Middle West savagely dissected in the Spoon River Anthology. But the point about it is that the human beauty which makes sin most dangerous hardly appears by a hint; this Belial is never graceful or humane; and in this there seems to me to be something suggestive of the inverted order and ugly contrast with which licence presents itself in a world that has frowned on liberty. It is the utterance of somebody who, in the words of Kipling, knew the worst too young; not necessarily in his own act or by his own fault, but by the nature of a system which saw no difference between the worst and the moderately bad. But whatever form the shock of evil might take, I think it jerked him out of the right development of his romantic nature; and was responsible for much that seemed random or belated in his life.

I do not mean to imply that the morality of the story itself has anything of weakness or morbidity; my opinion is very much the other way. Though the fable may seem mad, the moral is very sane; indeed, the moral is strictly orthodox. The trouble is that most of those who mention it do not know the moral, possibly because they have never read the fable. From time to time those anonymous authorities in the newspapers, who dismiss Stevenson with such languid grace, will say that there is something quite cheap and obvious about the idea that one man is really two men and can be divided into the evil and the good. Unfortunately for them, that does not happen to be the idea. The real stab of the story is not in the discovery that the one man is two men; but in the discovery that the two men are one man. After all the diverse wandering and warring of those two incompatible beings, there was still one man born and only one man buried. Jekyll and Hyde have become a proverb and a joke; only it is a proverb read backwards and a joke that nobody really sees. But it might have occurred to the languid critics, as a part of the joke, that the tale is a tragedy; and that this is only another way of saying that the experiment was a failure. The point of the story is not that a man *can* cut himself off from his conscience, but that he cannot. The surgical operation is fatal in the story. It is an amputation of which both the parts die. Jekyll, even in dying, declares the conclusion of the matter; that the load of man’s moral struggle is bound upon him and cannot be thus escaped. The reason is that there can never be equality between the evil and the good. Jekyll and Hyde are not twin brothers. They are rather, as one of them truly remarks, like father and son. After all, Jekyll created Hyde; Hyde would never have created Jekyll; he only destroyed Jekyll. The notion is not so hackneyed as the critics find it, after Stevenson has found it for them thirty years ago. But Jekyll's claim is not that it is the first of such experiments in duality; but rather that it must be the last.

Nor do I necessarily admit the technical clumsiness which some have alleged against the tale, merely because I believe that many of its emotions were first experienced in the crude pain of youth. Some have gone into particular detail in order to pick it to pieces; and Mr. E. F. Benson has made the (to me) strange remark that the structure of the story breaks down when Jekyll discovers that his chemical combination was partly accidental and is therefore unrecoverable. The critic says scornfully that it would have done just as well if Jekyll had taken a blue pill. It seems to me odd that any one who seems to know so much about the devil as the author of *Colin* should fail to recognise the cloven hoof in the cloven spirit called up by the Jekyll experiment. That moment in which Jekyll finds his own formula fail him, through an accident he had never foreseen, is simply the supreme moment in every story of a man buying power from hell; the moment when he finds the flaw in the deed. Such a moment comes to Macbeth and Faustus and a hundred others; and the whole point of it is that nothing is really secure, least of all a Satanist security. The moral is that the devil is a liar, and more especially a traitor; that he is more dangerous to his friends than his foes; and, with all deference to Mr. Benson, it is not a shallow or unimportant moral. But although the story ultimately emerged as a gargoyle very carefully graven by a mature master-craftsman, and was moreover a gargoyle of the greatest spiritual edification, eminently suited to be stuck on to the most sacred edifice, my point for the moment is that the stone of which it was made was originally found, I think, by Stevenson as a boy, kicking about the street, not to mention the gutter. In other words, he did not need to leave the respectable metropolis of the north to find the weaknesses of Jekyll and the crimes of Hyde.

I deal with these things in general terms, not merely out of delicacy, but partly out of something that I might almost call impatience or contempt. For the quarrels between the Victorian whitewashers and the Post-Victorian mudslingers seem to me deficient in the ordinary decent comprehension of the difficulties of human nature. Both the scandalised and the scandalmonger seem to me to look very silly beside the sensible person in the Bible, who confined himself to saying that there are things that no man knows, such as the way of a bird in the air and the way of a man in his youth. That Stevenson was in the mature and sane sense a good man is certain, without any Victorian apologetics; that he never did anything that he thought wrong is improbable, even without any elaborate cloacan researches; and the whole thing is further falsified by the fact that, outside a certain religious tradition, very few either of the whitewashers or the mudslingers really believe in the morality involved. The former seek to save nothing better than respectability; the latter even when they slander can hardly condemn. Stevenson was not a Catholic: he did not pretend to have remained a Puritan; but he was a highly honourable, responsible and chivalrous Pagan, in a world of Pagans who were most of them considerably less conspicuous for chivalry and honour. I for one, if I may say so, am ready to defend my own standards or to judge other men by theirs. But the Victorian pretence that every well-dressed hero of romance with over five hundred a year is born immune from the temptations which the mightiest saints have rolled themselves in brambles to control — that does not concern me and I shall not discuss it again.

But what does concern me, at this particular stage of the story, is not the question of what Stevenson thought right or wrong when he had become consciously and consistently a Pagan, but the particular way in which right and wrong appeared to him at this crude and groping age when he was still by tradition a Puritan. And I do think there was something tail-foremost, to use one of his own favourite words, in the way in which evil crept into his existence, as it does into everybody else’s. He saw the tail of the devil before he saw his horns. Puritanism gave him the key rather to the cellars than the halls of Babylon; and something thus subterranean, suffocating and debased rolls like a smoke over the story of Jekyll and Hyde. But I only mention these matters as part of a general unfolding of his mind and moral nature, which seems to me to have had a great deal to do with the latter development of his destiny. The normal, or at least the ideal, development of a man’s destiny is from the coloured chamber of childhood to an even more romantic garden of the faith and tryst of youth. It is from the child’s garden of verses to the man’s garden of vows. I do not think that time of transition went right with Stevenson; I think that something thwarted or misled him; I think it was then that the east wind of Edinburgh Puritanism blew him out of his course, so that he returned only long after to anything like a secure loyalty and a right human relation. In a word, I think that in his childhood he had the best luck in the world, and in his youth the worst luck in the world; and that this explains most of his story.

Anyhow, he found no foothold on those steep streets of his beautiful and precipitous city; and as he looked forth over the litter of little islands in the large and shining estuary, he may have had some foreshadowing of that almost vagabond destiny which ended in the ends of the earth. There seemed in one sense no social reason why it should not end in Edinburgh as it had begun in Edinburgh. There seemed nothing against a normal successful career for one so brilliant, so graceful and essentially so humane; his story might have been as comfortable as a Victorian three-volume novel. He might have had the luck to marry an Edinburgh lady as delightful and satisfactory as Barbara Grant. He might have presided over the revels of a new bunch of Stevensons, coming home from Leith Walk laden with the gay portfolios of Skelt. They also might have bought Penny Pickwicks or gone about girt with lanterns; and his own view of these things might have altered, though not necessarily weakened, with the responsibility of one who sees them reproduced in others. But among these early Edinburgh pranks, which he has left on record, was one which is something of a symbol. He speaks somewhere of a special sort of apples which he gathered by the seashore, which were such as might well be gathered from the salted and crooked trees that grow by the sea. I do not know what it was; or what form it took; or whether it ever took any definable form at all. But somehow or other, in thought or word or deed, in that bleak place he ate the apple of knowledge; and it was a crab apple.

I think it was partly the pains of youth that afterwards made so vivid to him the pleasures of childhood. The break in his life was of course partly due to the break in his health. But it was also due, I think, to something ragged and unseemly in the edge of life he laid hold of when he touched the hem of her garment; to something unsatisfactory in all that side of existence as it appears accidentally to the child of Puritan conventions. The effect on him was that, during those years, he grew up too much out of touch with his domestic and civic, if not his national traditions; knowing at once too much and too little. He was never denationalised; for he was a Scotsman; and a Scotsman never is, even when he is in theory internationalised. But he did begin to become internationalised, in the sense that he gained a sort of indiscriminate intimacy with the culture of the world, especially the rather cynical sort of culture which was then current. The local and domestic conventions, which were in many ways wrong, lost their power to control him even when they were right. And in all that retrospect nothing remained so real as the unreal romances of the first days. In the Puritan creeds there was nothing that he could believe, even as much as he had believed in make-believe. There was nothing to call him back half so clearly as the call of that childish rhyme of which he afterwards wrote, in the touching dedication that has the burden, “How far is it to Babylon?” Unfortunately it is not very far to Babylon. That cosmopolitan market of the arts, which is in his story perhaps best represented by Paris, called to him more and more to live the life of the complete artist, which in those days had something like a touch of the complete anarchist. He passed into it, ultimately in person and already in spirit; there was nothing to call him back but the thin and tiny cry of a tin trumpet; that sounded once and was mute.

I say there was nothing to call him back; and very little to restrain him; and to any one who really understands the psychology and philosophy of that time of transition, it is really rather a wonder that he was so restrained. All his after adventures will be misunderstood if we do not realise that he left behind him a dead religion. Men are misled by the fact that he often used the old national creed as a subject; which really means rather that it had become an object. It was a subject that had ceased to be subjective; he worked upon it and not with it. He and the inheritors of his admirable tradition, like Barrie and Buchan, treated that national secret genially and even tenderly; but their very tenderness was the first soft signal that the thing was dead. At least they would never have so fondled the tiger-cat of Calvinism until, for them, its teeth were drawn. Indeed this was the irony and the pathos of the position of Scottish Calvinism: to be rammed down people’s throats for three hundred years as an unanswerable argument and then to be inherited at the last as an almost indefensible affection; to be expounded to boys with a scowl and remembered by men with a smile; to crush down all human sentiments and to linger at last in the sentimental comedy of Thrums. All that long agony of lucidity and masterful logic ended at last suddenly with a laugh; and the laugh was Robert Louis Stevenson. With him the break had come; and it follows that something in himself was broken. The whaups were crying round the graves of the martyrs, and his heart remembered, but not his mind; great Knox blew thrice upon the trumpet, and what thrilled him were no words but a noise; Old Mortality seemed still to be tinkering on his eternal round to preserve the memorials of the Covenant, but a bell had already tolled to announce that even Old Mortality was mortal. When Stevenson stepped into the wider world of the Continent, with its more graceful logic and even its more graceful vice, he went as one emptied of all the ethics and metaphysics of his home, and open to all the views and vices of a rationalistic civilisation. All the deeper lessons of his early life must have seemed to him to be dead within him; nor did he himself know what thing within him was yet alive.

CHAPTER IV

THE REACTION TO ROMANCE

WHEN a man walks down the street with a very long feather stuck in his hat and streaming behind him, or carrying a gold-hilted rapier cocked at a gallant angle, there are some among the typists and clerks of Clapham Junction shrewd enough to perceive that there is something faintly ostentatious about him. And when a man walks down Piccadilly or the parade at Bournemouth with long hair streaming behind him and surmounted by an embroidered smoking-cap, there are not wanting critics so acute as to deduce (with all the detailed shrewdness of Sherlock Holmes) that such a man is not entirely averse from being looked at. Many long and laborious studies of Stevenson have been published lately, to fortify and establish this remarkable result; and I need not devote myself to proving it further. Let us record with all due solemnity that Robert Louis Stevenson has been convicted by the court of being very vain, if "dressing up" in the manner of a child, and not resenting the consequent conspicuous position, be the marks of vanity. But there is one aspect of this truth which seems to me to have been strangely and even astonishingly overlooked. Everybody talks as if Stevenson had been not only conspicuous but quite unique in this sort of vanity. Everybody seems to assume that among the artists of his time he was entirely alone in his affectation. Contrasting in this respect with the humdrum respectability of Oscar Wilde, notable as the very reverse of the evangelical meekness of Jimmy Whistler, standing out as he does against the stodgy chapel-going piety of Max Beerbohm, having none of the cheery commonplaces of Aubrey Beardsley or the prosaic self-effacement of Richard Le Gallienne, he naturally aroused attention by the slightest deviation into oddity or dandyism; things notoriously so unpopular among the decadents of the ‘nineties. Among other things, everybody seems to have forgotten that Stevenson lived for some time among the Parisian art students; who have never been remarkable for the bourgeois regularity of their coats and hats. Yet he actually mentions the offensive smoking-cap himself as originating in the Bohemian masquerade of the Quartier Latin. There he was not so much being eccentric as being conventional; for the convention was unconventionality. A mob of men in that place and at that age, would have played the same sort of tricks and worn the same kind of clothes; nor was Stevenson, as I have said, the only one of them who carried these attitudes and antics through life. Any one of them might have worn a smoking-cap; none of them would have objected to any variety of fool's cap, though they hardly wished it identified with a dunce's cap. Many of them, still alive, would cheerfully admit that the cap fits. But poor Stevenson is to be remembered as a fool, because all the fools are forgotten except Stevenson.

It was not that sort of oddity that was really odd. The costume for which he is now conspicuous was really part of a carnival. The attitude in which he stands, to the astonishment and grief of the critics, was really the fashion of a crowd. But what was really individual and interesting about him was the way in which he did actually react against the surroundings; the point at which he refused to run with the crowd or follow the fashion. No insanity in that cheerful lunatic asylum is so interesting to the psychologist as the shock of Stevenson going sane. No romantic ruffianism in which he may or may not have indulged is so curious as the real spirit of his revolt into respectability.

Treasure Island, if hardly a historical novel, was essentially a historical event. The rise or revolt of R. L. S. must be taken in relation to history, to the history of the whole European mind and mood. It was, first and last, a reaction against pessimism. There was thrown across all that earth and sky the gigantic shadow of Schopenhauer. At least it seemed gigantic then, though some of us may already have suspected that the shadow was larger than the man. Anyhow, in that period we might almost say that pessimism was another name for culture. Cheerfulness was associated with the Philistine, like the broad grin with the bumpkin. Pessimism could be read between the lines of the lightest triolet or most elegant essay. Any one who really remembers that time will admit that the world was much more hopeful after the worst of its wars than it was not long before. Mr. H. G. Wells, whose genius had just been discovered by Henley, was very much older than he is now. He was prophesying that the outline of history would end, not in communism, but in cannibalism. He was prophesying the end of the world: a crack of doom not even cheerful enough to be a day of judgement. Oscar Wilde, who perhaps filled up more room, both in mind and body, than anybody else on that stage at that moment, expressed his philosophy in that bitter parable in which Christ seeks to comfort a man weeping and is answered, “Lord, I was dead and you raised me to life; what else can I do but weep?”

This was the spirit that was behind all that levity; a levity that was like fireworks in more ways than one. We talk of some Whistlerian satire as a squib; but squibs can only shine in the dark. It is all the difference between the colours of fireworks that have their back to the vault of night and the colours of church windows that have their backs to the sun. For these people all the light of life was in the foreground; there was nothing in the background but an abyss. They were rather nihilists than atheists; for there is a difference between worshipping Nothing and not worshipping anything. Now the interest of the next stage of Stevenson is that he stood up suddenly amid all these things and shook himself with a sort of impatient sanity; a shrug of scepticism about scepticism. His real distinction is that he had the sense to see that there is nothing to be done with Nothing. He saw that in that staggering universe it was absolutely necessary to stand somehow on something; and instead of falling about anyhow with all the other lunatics, he did seek for a ledge on which he could really stand. He did definitely and even dramatically refuse to go mad; or, what is very much worse, to remain futile. But the whole turning-point of the tale is now missed; partly by the too concentrated idolatry of the sentimentalists, and partly by the too concentrated spite of the iconoclasts. They miss the *historic* relation of the man to his time and school. It was one of the crowd of artists who showed mutinous signs of deserting art for life. It was even one of the decadents who refused to decay.

Now what really remains interesting in this story of Stevenson, in spite of all the vain repetitions, is the authority to which he appealed. It was rather an odd one; and many would have said that his sanity was madder than madness. He did not appeal to any ideal of the sort usually pursued by idealists; he did not try to construct an optimist philosophy like Spinoza or Emerson; he did not preach a good time coming like William Morris or Wells; he did not appeal to Imperialism or Socialism or Scotland: he appealed to Skelt.

Familiarity had dulled the divine paradox that we should learn morality from little children. He advanced the more disturbing paradox that we should learn morality from little boys. The young child who should lead us was the common (or garden) little boy: the boy of the catapult and the toy pistol — and the toy theatre. Stevenson seemed to say to the semi-suicides drooping round him at the café tables; drinking absinthe and discussing atheism: “Hang it all, the hero of a penny-dreadful play was a better man than you are! A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured was an art more worthy of living men than the art that you are all professing. Painting pasteboard figures of pirates and admirals was better worth doing than all this, it was fun; it was fighting; it was a life and a lark; and if I can’t do anything else, dang me but I will try to do that again!” So was presented to the world this entertaining spectacle; of the art student surrounded by easels on which other artists were debating the fine shades of Corot and Renoir, while he himself was gravely painting mariners a bright prussian blue of a shilling paint-box and shedding their blood in streams of unmistakable crimson lake. That is the primary paradox about Stevenson’s early manhood; or, if you will, the real joke about Stevenson. Of all that intellectualism in Bohemia the result was the return to Skelt. Of all that wallowing in Balzac the remarkable outcome was Treasure Island. But it is no exaggeration to say that it had still more to do with toys than treasures. Stevenson was not really looking forward or outward to a world of larger things, but backward and inward into a world of smaller ones: in the peepshow of Skelt, which was still the true window of the world.

Thus, Skelt and his puppets seemed made for a repartee to the favourite phrases of the pessimists. All that world was haunted as with melody by the hedonist despair of Fitzgerald’s Omar: one of the great historical documents of this history. No image could make them bow their heads with more hopelessness and helplessness of despair than that famous one:

“We are none other than a moving row Of magic shadow-shapes that come and go Around the sun-illumined lantern held At midnight by the Master of the show.”

And no image could make the infant Stevenson kick his little legs with keener joy. His answer, in effect, to the philosophy of the magic shadow-shapes, was that the shadow-shapes really were magic. At any rate, they really did seem to the children to be magic: and it was not false but true psychology to call the thing a magic lantern. He was capable of feeling passionate delight in being such a Lantern-Bearer. He was capable even of feeling passionate delight in being such a shadow. And any one who has seen a shadow pantomime as a child, as I have, and who has retained any living link with his own childhood, will realise that Omar was as unlucky in his commentary on the lantern-show as the delightful curate in *Voces Populi* who talked about Valentine and Orson. He was teaching optimism as an illustration to pessimism. Later we may make a guess at the nature of this glamour about such tricks or toys; the point for the moment is that they were associated with gloom in philosophy, while they were associated with pleasure in psychology. The same applies to more common examples of the fancies of the fatalist. When the sage said that men are “only puppets,” it must have seemed to the young Louis almost like the blasphemy of saying they were “only pirates.” It might well seem to any child like saying that they were only fairies. There was something weak about bewailing drearily the fate of the puppets of destiny, to an audience that was eagerly awaiting the joyful apocalypse of a puppet-show. The Stevensonian reaction might be roughly represented by the suggestion — if we are as futile as puppets, is there anything particular to prevent our being as entertaining, as Punch? And there is, as I say, a real spiritual mystery behind this mystical ecstasy of mimicry. If living dolls were so dull and dead, why in the world were dead dolls so very much alive? And if being a puppet is so depressing, how is it that the puppet of a puppet can be so enthralling?

It is to be noted that this sort of romanticism, as compared with realism, is *not* more superficial, but on the contrary more fundamental. It is an appeal from what is experienced to what is felt. When people are avowedly talking about happiness and unhappiness, as the pessimists were, it is futile to say that shadows and sham pasteboard figures *ought* not to make people happy. It was futile to tell the young Stevenson that the toy-theatre shop was a dingy booth stocked with dusty rolls of paper, covered with ill-drawn and ungainly figures; and to insist that these were the only facts. He naturally answered: “My facts were my feelings; and what do you make of those facts? Either there is something in Skelt; which you do not admit. Or else there is something in Life; which you also do not admit.” Hence arose that answer to the realists which is best expressed in the essay called The Lantern-Bearers. The realists, who overlook so many details, have never quite noticed where lay the falsity of their method; it lay in the fact that so long as it was materialistic, it could not really be realistic. For it could not be psychological. If toys and trifles can make people happy, that happiness is not a trifle and certainly cannot be a trick.

This is the point that has been missed in all the talk about posing. Those who repeat for the hundredth time that he posed have not got as far as the obvious question, “Posed as what?” All the other poets and artists posed;

but they posed as the members of the Suicide Club. He posed as Prince Florizel with a sword, challenging the President of the Suicide Club. He was, if you will, the foolish masker I have imagined, tricked out with a feather and a sword or dagger; but not tricked out more extravagantly than those who appeared as fantastic figures at their own funeral. If he had a feather, it was not a white feather; if he had a dagger, it was not a poisoned dagger or the pessimist dagger that is turned inwards; in short, if he had a posture it was a posture of defence and even of defiance. And it was, after all, the fashionable posture of his time which he set himself to defy. And it is here that it is really relevant to remember that he was not altogether posturing when he said he was defying death. Death was much nearer to him than it was to the pessimists; and he knew it whenever he coughed and found blood on his handkerchief. He was not pretending to defy it half so much as they were pretending to seek it. It is no very unreasonable claim for him that he made a better use of his bad health than Oscar Wilde made of his good health; and nothing affected in the externals of either can alter the contrast. The dagger may have been theatrical; but the blood was real. As Cyrano said of his friend, “Le sang, c’est le sien.” And it really was the absence of courage in the current culture that awoke his protest or pose. In any case, the intellectual fine shades were morally more than a little shady. But he hated chiefly the loss of what soldiers call morale rather than what parsons call morality. All that world cowered under the shadow of death. All alike were travelling under the flag of the skull and crossbones. But he alone could call it the Jolly Roger.

What is really not appreciated about Stevenson is the abruptness of this breakaway. We talk of looking back with gratitude to innovators or the introducers of new ideas; but in fact nothing is more difficult to do, since for us they are now necessarily old ideas. There is only one moment, at most, of triumph for the original thinker; while his thought is an originality and before it becomes merely an origin. News spreads quickly; that is, it grows stale quickly; and though we may call a work wonderful, we cannot easily put ourselves in the position of those for whom it was a cause of wonder, in the sense of surprise. Between the first fashion of talking too much in praise of Stevenson, and the newer fashion of talking nonsense in disparagement of Stevenson, we have become quite familiar with the association of certain ideas; of extreme stylistic polish applied to rough schoolboy adventure, of the Penny Plain figure tinted as carefully as a miniature. But these ideas were not always associated in the way in which Stevenson associated them. We may tear the combination to pieces, but it was he who wove it together; and — as many would have thought — of very incongruous threads. It really did seem preposterous to many that a serious literary artist of the age of Pater should devote himself to rewriting Penny Dreadfuls. It was just as if George Meredith had chosen to put all his fine feminine psychology into writing the sort of twopenny novelettes that were read by housemaids, and called “Pansy’s Elopement” or “Winnie’s Wedding Bells.” It was as if Henry James had been heard to say or, so to speak, to suggest, that there was, after all, and in a way quite annoyingly overlooked, *something* — something that really should have been better evaluated and re-expressed, as it were, in all that really unquestionable productiveness of Ally Sloper’s Half-Holiday. It was as if Paderewski had insisted on only going round with a barrel-organ; or Whistler had confined himself solely to painting public-house signs. A distinguished dramatist, who is old enough to remember in his youth the first successes of Stevenson’s manhood, told me how absurd it seemed at the time that any one should take seriously such gutter literature of the gamin. A book written only for boys generally meant a book written only for errand-boys. It seemed a strange association of ideas that it should be written carefully as a book for men, and even for literary men. It does not seem so strange now; because Stevenson has done it quite a long time ago. But it is important to realise that not everybody thought it natural to expend the style of *Pulvis et Umbra* on the equivalent of “Dick Deadshot Among the Pirates.” It was the very last sort of enthusiasm that would have easily carried any of his cultivated contemporaries off their feet. The typical literary man, with the outlook and philosophy of that generation, would have been about as likely to pass his life in throwing paper darts or chalking caricatures of his publisher on a blackboard.

Thus, there is one of those phrases quoted too much, as against so many quoted too little, that he and his artistic friends bore with them bulky yellow volumes “quite impudently French.” But, by the tests of that artistic world, *Treasure Island* is quite impudently English. By the conventions of that world, there was nothing unconventional about studying Balzac or being Bohemian. It was much more unconventional to study Captain Marryat and to write about the good captain who flew the Union Jack over the stockade, in defiance of the bad buccaneers. From the standpoint of Art in those days, even that flag was a much too Moral Emblem. It is only when we understand what there was that seemed quaint and even undignified in his adventurous antic, that we can clearly understand the unconscious truths that lay behind it. For, as against the black flag of pessimism, his flag really was a Moral Emblem. There was a morality in his reaction into adventure; his appeal to the spirit of the highway — though it were sometimes the spirit of the highwayman.

In other words, he appealed to his own childhood. A tale is told of it: that when some one chaffed him about a toy sword he replied solemnly, "The hilt is of gold and the scabbard of silver and the child is well content." It was to that moment that he suddenly returned. Groping for something that would satisfy, he found nothing so solid as that fancy. That had not been Nothing; that had not been pessimistic; that was not a life over which Lazarus could do nothing but weep. That was as positive as the paints in the paint-box and the difference between vermilion and chrome yellow. Its pleasures had been as solid as the taste of sweets; and it was nonsense to say that there had been nothing in them worth living for. Play at least is always serious. So long as we can say, "Let us pretend," we must be sincere. Therefore he appealed across the void or valley of his somewhat sterile youth to that garden of childhood, which he had once known and which was his nearest notion of paradise. There were no shrines in the faith or in the city of his fathers; there were no channels of consecration or confession; there was no imagery save in the faceless images left behind by the image-breakers. A man in his mood of reaction towards happiness, might almost as well have prayed to the Black Man who figured as the Scottish provincial devil as to the God behind the black cloud that sent out such stiff horrific rays in the Calvinist family Bible. But in all that waste of Scottish moorland, the sun still glowed on that square of garden like a patch of gold. The lessons were lost, but the toys were eternal; the men had been harsh, but the child had been well content; if there were nothing better, he would return.

In the elementary philosophy of the thing, of course, what moved Stevenson was what moved Wordsworth; the unanswerable fact of that first vividness in the vision of life. But he had it in his own quaint way; and it was hardly the vision of meadow, grove and stream. It was rather the vision of coffin, gallows and gory sabre that were apparelled in celestial light, the glory and the freshness of a dream. But he was appealing to a sort of sanguinary innocence against a sort of silent and secretive perversion. Here, as everywhere in this rude outline, I am taking a thing like *Treasure Island,* in a spirit of simplification and symbol. I do not mean, of course, that he wrote *Treasure Island* sitting in a café on the boulevards; any more than I mean that he wrote *Jekyll and Hyde* in a cellar or a garret in the lands of the Cowgate. Both these books were developed by stages of the greatest literary care, in later life; and pursued with the characteristic consistency of his art through all the equally characteristic mutability of his domicile. When I say that a certain book came out of a certain experience, I mean that he drew on that experience to write it, or that it was the ultimate result of the reaction which that experience produced in his mind. And I mean in this case that what shaped and sharpened Stevenson's memory of the mere nonsense of Skeltery was his growing sense of the need of some escape from the suffocating cynicism of the mass of men and artists in his time. He wished to go back to that nonsense; for it seemed, by comparison, quite sensible.

Treasure Island was written as a boy's book; perhaps it is not always read as a boy's book. I sometimes fancy that a real boy could read it better if he could read it backwards. The end, which is full of skeletons and ancient crime, is in the fullest sense, beautiful; it is even idealistic. For it is the realisation of an ideal, that which is promised in its provocative and beckoning map; a vision not only of white skeletons but also green palm trees and sapphire seas. But the beginning of the book, considered as a boy's book, can hardly be called idealistic; and is found in practice to be rather too realistic. I may make an egotistical confession here, which I think is not unique and not without its universal inference about the spirit of youth. When I read the book as a child, I was not horrified by what are called the horrors. Something did indeed shock me, just a little more than a child should be shocked; for of course he would have no fun if he were never shocked at all. But what shook me was not the dead man's chest or the live man's crimes or the information that "Drink and the devil have done for the rest"; all that seemed to me quite cheery and comforting. What did seem to me ugly was exactly what might happen in any inn-parlour, if there were no pirates in the world. It was that business about apoplexy; or some sort of alcoholic poisoning. It was the sailor having a mysterious thing called a stroke; so much more terrifying than any sabre-stroke. I was ready to wade in seas of gore; for all that gore was crimson lake; and indeed I always imagined it as a lake of crimson. Exactly what I was not ready for were those few drops of blood drawn from the arm of the insensible sailor, when he was bled by the surgeon. That blood is not crimson lake. Thus we have the paradox that I was horrified by the act of healing; while all the rowdy business of hitting and hurting did not hurt me at all. I was disgusted with an act of mercy, because it took the form of medicine. I will not pause to draw the many morals of this paradox; especially in relation to a common fallacy of pacifism. I will content myself with saying, whether I make my meaning clear or no, that a child is not wicked enough to disapprove of war.

But whatever be the case with most boys, there was certainly one boy who enjoyed Treasure Island; and his name was Robert Louis Stevenson. He really had very much of the feeling of one who had got away to great waters and outlandish lands; perhaps even more vividly than he had it later, when he made that voyage not metaphorically but materially, and found his own Treasure Island in the South Seas. But just as in the second case he was fleeing to clear skies from unhealthy climates, so he was in reviving the adventure story escaping from an exceedingly unhealthy climate. The microbe of morbidity maybe have been within him, as well as the germ of phthisis; but in the cities he had left behind pessimism was raging like a pestilence. Multitudes of pale-faced poets, formless and forgotten, sat crowded at those café tables like ghosts in Hades, worshipping “la sorcière glauque,” like that one of them whose mortality has been immortalised by Max. It is too often forgotten that if Stevenson had really been only a pale young man making wax flowers, he would have found plenty of pale young men to make them with him; and the flowers and flower-makers would long have withered together. But he alone escaped, as from a city of the dead; he cut the painter as Jim Hawkins stole the boat, and went on his own voyage, following the sun. Drink and the devil have done for the rest, especially the devil; but then they were drinking absinthe and not with a “Yo ho ho”; consuming it without the most feeble attempt at any “Yo ho ho” — a defect which was, of course the most serious and important part of the affair. For “Yo ho ho” was precisely what Stevenson, with his exact choice of words, particularly desired to say just then. It was for the present his most articulate message to mankind.

CHAPTER V

THE SCOTTISH STORIES

PROVERBS are generally true, when they are the proverbs of the people; so long as they are not proverbs about another people. It was unwise to search Sussex to discover if Kentish men had tails, or England to learn if French husbands had horns. And obviously there is much that is misleading in the traditional type of the practical Puritanical Scotsman, with his dry thrift and bleak respectability. A figure of such severe decorum is not very vividly evoked either by the title of Rab the Ranter or the Wizard of the North. And few of our own generation are yet convinced of it, even by the scientific severity that has given us *Peter Pan* or the sober responsibility that stiffens the narrative of The New Arabian Nights. The readers of the latter work will be much interested to realise that a Scotsman is incapable of seeing a joke, since he seems so eminently capable of making one; and the reader of the former will be disposed to suggest that the national jesting is not too sober but rather too extravagant. *Peter Pan* carries on by lineal tradition the cult of the child, beginning with Treasure Island; but if there be anything to criticise in Sir James Barrie's beautiful fantasia, it is that wilder things happen to Wendy in a London nursery than ever happened to Jim in a tropical island. The only object to living in a nursery where the dog is the nurse, or the father lives in the dog-kennel, is that there seems no necessity to go to the Never-Never Land to look for the things that never happen. Whatever else we say of the Scottish genius, it is certainly not merely dry or prosaic; and indeed the real mixture of the Scottish genius is as full of contradictions as that pattern of crosses in the Scottish plaid. And even here there is subtlety as well as cross-purposes; and the tartan may be an old tribal form of camouflage.

There is an aspect of a Scottish hill or moor, which for the moment will look grey and at the least change of light look purple; which is in itself an image of Scotland. A passing from the most dispassionate to the most passionate tint, which yet seems to be no more than a new shade, might well represent the mixture of restraint and violence that runs through the national history and the national character. Stevenson stands for one of those moments in the national history when the grey turned to purple; and yet in his purple there is still a great deal of grey. There is a great deal of restraint, artistic even more than moral; there is a certain coolness in the commentary even on picturesque objects; there is even a certain absence of the common conception of passion. There are shades even in purple; there are differences between the purple orchid and the purple heather; and his often seems to be like white heather, for luck. In other words, his idea of happiness is still of the breezy and boyish sort; and though he described the happiness of lovers very happily in *Catriona* and began to foreshadow their unhappiness in *Weir of Hermiston,* he attacked the theme relatively late in life; and it counted for little in that original idea of a return to simplicity, which had come upon him like a wind from a playground. Imagine how annoyed Jim Hawkins would have been, if a lot of girls had been allowed to muck up the business of going after treasure! So brilliant is this resurrection of boyhood, that we almost believe for the moment that Stevenson must have been as young and callous as Jim. Only I suspect, as I say, that in some ways he had even made himself a little callous in those matters. There his adventures had been misadventures. He did not recall for mere pleasure the memory of youth, as he did the memory of boyhood.

The two novels about David Balfour are very notable examples of what I have mentioned generally as the Stevensonian note; the brisk and bright treatment, the short speeches, the sharp gestures and the pointed profile of energy, as of a man following his nose very rapidly along the open road. The great scenes in *Kidnapped*, the defence of the Round House or the confrontation of Uncle Ebenezer and Alan Breck, are full of those snapping phrases that seem to pick things off like pistol shots. A whole essay on the style of Stevenson, such as I shall attempt forlornly and ineffectually on another page, might be written by a real critic on the phrase, “His sword flashed like quicksilver into the huddle of our fleeing enemies.” The fact that the name of a certain metal happens to combine the word “silver” with the word “quick” is simply a rather recondite accident; but the art of Stevenson consisted in taking advantage of such accidents. To those who say that such tricks are easy to play or such words easy to find, the only answer is, “Go and find them.” An author cannot create words, unless he be the happy author of *Jaberwocky* or The Land Where the Jumblies Live; but the nearest he can come to creating them is finding them in such a fashion and for such a use. The characters in the story are excellent, though perhaps there are really only two of them. There are more in the sequel called Catriona; and the study of the Lord Advocate Prestongrange is a highly interesting attempt to do a very difficult thing; to describe a politician who has not altogether ceased to be a man. The dialogue is spirited and full of fine Scottish humours, but all these things are almost as secondary in *Kidnapped* and *Catriona* as they are in *Treasure Island* itself. The thing is still simply an adventure story, and especially a boy's adventure story; such as is fitted to describe the adventures of a boy. And there are moments when it is the same boy; and his name is neither Hawkins nor Balfour, but Stevenson.

But though the thing is to be criticised (and admired) strictly as an adventure story, there are side-lights of interest about it considered as a historical novel. It carries on a rather curiously balanced critical attitude, partly inherited from the attitude of Sir Walter Scott; the paradox of being intellectually on the side of the Whigs and morally on the side of the Jacobites. There is enough moral material, in the story of the long legal murder of James of the Glens, to raise a whole clan of Jacobites and roll them red-hot down the pass of Killiecrankie. But there still stands over against it the large legal assumption that in some sort of way all these things will be for the best, which is the inheritance of the providential view of the Presbyterian settlement. Similarly, it is obvious in the earlier story that David Balfour does not really differ very much from Alan Breck, in his view of the oppression of the Highland crofters and their pathetic loyalty to the past. In the ethical balance of the Appin Murder, if he does not palliate tyrannicide, he certainly says nothing calculated to palliate tyranny. It is obvious that he is moved and impressed with the spectacle of a whole peasantry loyal to their ideal and defying a more civilised but a much more cynical pressure. But, curiously enough, when Stevenson saw exactly the same story acted before his eyes in the tragedy of the peasants of Ireland, he was carried away by some newspaper nonsense about the wickedness of the Land League (prodded perhaps by the rather absurd Jingoism of Henley) and, with all his native courage and much less than his native sense, wanted to plant himself on an eviction farm belonging to a family named Curtin, whom he seemed to regard as the sole victims of the social situation. It did not seem to occur to him that he was merely assisting the Master of Lovat to bully David Balfour. He seemed really to suppose that, in those social conditions, the Irish peasants could look for justice to imperial governments which abolished all local rights and carried away every Irish patriot to be tried before a packed jury of foreigners and foes. “Justice, David! The same justice, by all the world, that Glenure found by the roadside.”

But this curious and sometimes inconsistent mingling of the grey Whiggery with the purple Jacobite romance, in the traditional sentiment of such Scots as Stevenson, is connected with much deeper things touching the hold that their history had upon them. It is necessary to state at this stage that there is really and seriously an influence of Scottish Puritanism upon Stevenson; though I think it rather a philosophy partially accepted by his intellect than the special ideal that was the secret of his heart. But every philosopher is affected by philosophy; even if, as in the immortal instance in Boswell, cheerfulness is always breaking out. And there was a part of Stevenson’s mind that was not cheerful; which I think, in some manifestations, was not even healthy. And yet the tribute of truth is due to that special Scottish element; that even when we say it was not healthy, we can hardly venture to say it was not strong. It was the shadow of that ancient heathen fatalism, which in the seventeenth century had taken the hardly less heathen form of Calvinism; and which had sounded in so many Scottish tragedies with a note of doom. We appreciate it sharply when we turn from his two Scottish comedies of adventure to his third Scottish romance, which is a tragedy of character. It is true, as may be noted later, that even into this concentrated drama of sin and sorrow there enters a curious and rather incongruous element of the adventure story; like a fragment of the former adventures of David or Jim. But leaving that aside for the moment, we must do justice to the dignity which is given to the story itself by its more sombre scenery and its sterner creed. Stevenson showed his perfect instinct when he called it A Winter’s Tale. It is his one story in black and white, and I cannot recall one word that is a patch of colour.

In touching on the rather neglected point of the nastier side of Puritan sociology, the raw and barbarous flavour about its evil and excess, I may have seemed to underrate the higher though harsher aspects of Scottish Puritanism. I do not mean to do so; and certainly nobody can afford to do so in attempting an adequate study of Stevenson. He remained to the day of his death in some ways particularly loyal to the Presbyterian tradition; I might say to the Presbyterian prejudices; and at least in one or two cases to the Presbyterian antipathies. But I think it was mostly rather a case of the modern religion of patriotism, as against the larger patriotism of religion. Like many other men of frank, tart and humorous prejudices (which are the sort of prejudices that need never prejudice us against a man) he was apt to see in some foreign things the evils to which he had grown accustomed in native things; and to start again the great international dispute of the pot and the kettle. It is amusing, for instance, to find the young Scotsman in *Olalla* gravely disapproving of the grim Spanish crucifix, with its tortured and grimacing art; and presumably leaving that land of religious gloom, to go back and enjoy the charm and gaiety of Thrawn Janet. If there was ever grim and grimacing art, one would think it was in that twisted figure; and even Stevenson admitted that Olalla got more comfort from the crucifix than Janet from the minister; or, I will add, the minister from the ministry. Indeed, stories of this kind are told by Stevenson with a deliberate darkening of the Scottish landscape and exultation in the ferocity of the Scottish creed. But it would be quite a mistake to miss in this a certain genuine national pride running through all the abnormal artistry; and a sense that the strength of the tribal tragedy testifies in a manner to the strength of the tribe.

It might be maintained that the best effect of the Scotsman's religious training was teaching him to do without his religion. It enabled him to survive as a certain sort of freethinker; one who, unlike his more familiar fellows, is not so intoxicated with freedom as to forget to think. It might be said that among the Scots, so far from a sentimental religiosity taking the place of dogmatic religion (as is generally the case among the English), something like the very opposite had occurred. When the religion was dead, the theology remained: at any rate, the taste for theology remained. It remained because, whatever else it is, theology is at least a form of thought. Stevenson certainly retained this turn of mind long after his beliefs, like those of most of his generation, had been simplified to vanishing point. He was, as Henley said, something of the Shorter Catechist; even when his own Catechism had become shorter still. All this, however, was indubitably a strength to him and his nation; and a real reason for gratitude to their old religious tradition. Those dry Deists and hard-headed Utilitarians who stalked the streets of Glasgow and Edinburgh in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were very obviously the products of the national religious spirit. The Scottish atheists were unmistakable children of the Kirk. And though they often seemed absurdly detached and dehumanised, the world is now rather suffering for want of such dull lucidity. To put it shortly, by being theological they had at least learnt to be logical; and in dropping the Greek prefix as a superfluous trifle they will have the sympathy of many moderns much less logical than themselves. The influence of all this sort of clarity on Stevenson is very clear. It did not happen to be his mission to figure as the metaphysical Scotsman; or draw out his deductions along the lines of logic. But he did always by instinct draw lines that were as hard and clear as those of a mathematical diagram. He himself has made a very luminous and valuable comparison between a geometrical theorem and a work of art. I have had cause to remark again and again, in the course of this sketch, on a certain almost arid decision in the strokes of Stevenson's style. I believe it was due in no small degree to that inheritance of definition, that goes with an inheritance of dogma. What he wrote was not written, as he said scornfully of some literary performance, in sand with a salt-spoon; it was at least in the tradition of scriptures cut with steel into stone. This was among the many good things that he got from the spiritual atmosphere of his ancestry. But he got other things as well; though they are less easy to describe and far less easy to command.

From time to time I have insensibly and inevitably fallen into a tone of defending Stevenson, as if he needed defence. And indeed I do think that he needs some defence; though not upon the points in which it is now considered necessary to defend him. I do feel a certain impatience with the petty depreciation of our own time, which seems much more frivolous and far less generous than the boom of a best-seller. I do feel a certain contempt for those who call every phrase affected that happens to be effective; or who charge a man with talking for effect, as if there were anything else to talk for. But I should think it very unfair to revile the revilers of Stevenson, without taking the risk of saying where I think he is, if not to be reviled, at least to be rebuked. There was, I think, a weaker strain in Stevenson; but it is the very opposite of the weakness now generally alleged by critics; indeed it is the very opposite of what they would probably regard as weak. The excuse for it, in so far as it existed to be excused, was in the very direction of that sharp turn which he took in early life, when he turned his back upon the decadents. I have already said, and it can hardly be said too often, that the story of Stevenson was a reaction against an age of pessimism. Now the real objection to being a reactionary is that a reactionary, as such, hardly ever avoids reacting into evil and exaggeration. The opposite of the heresy of pessimism was the twin heresy of optimism.

Stevenson was not at all attracted to a placid and pacific optimism. But he did begin to be too much attracted to a sort of insolent and oppressive optimism. The reaction from the idea that what is good is always unsuccessful is the idea that what is good is always victorious. And from that many slide into the worse delusion; that what is victorious is always good.

In the days when Stevenson's ancestors the Covenanters were fighting with the Cavaliers, a fine old Cavalier of the Episcopalian persuasion made a rather interesting remark; that the change he really hated was represented by saying "The Lord" instead of "Our Lord." The latter implied affection, the former only fear; indeed he described the former succinctly as the talk of devils. And this is so far true that the very eloquent language in which the name of "The Lord" has figured has generally been the language of might and majesty and even terror. And there really was implied in it in varying degrees the idea of glorifying God for His greatness rather than His goodness. And again there occurred the natural inversion of ideas. Since the Puritan was content to cry with the Moslem: "God is great," so the descendant of the Puritan is always a little inclined to cry with the Nietzschean: "Greatness is God." In some of the really evil extremes, this sentiment shaded darkly into a sort of diabolism. In Stevenson it was very faintly present; but it is occasionally felt; and by me (I must confess) felt as a fault. It is faintly felt, for instance, in the next great Scottish romance, The Master of Ballantrae; *it is felt more definitely, I think, in the last Scottish romance of* Weir of Hermiston. In the first case, Stevenson said in his correspondence, in a tone that was humorous and healthy enough, that The Master was all he knew of The Devil. I do not in the least object to The Master being The Devil. But I do object to a subtle subconscious something, which every now and then seems almost to suggest that he is The Lord. I mean The Lord in the vague sense of a certain authority in aristocracy, or even in mere mastery. Perhaps I even dimly feel that there is the distant thunder of The Lord in the very title of The Master.

This thing, however we define it and in whatever degree we admit it, had advanced in several degrees when he wrote the later story. Perhaps it was partly the influence of Henley; who, with all his many generous virtues, certainly had this weakness to the point of hysteria. I mean the loss of the natural reaction of a man against a tyrant. It sometimes takes the form of that least masculine of all vices, the admiration for brutality. It has been much debated whether bullies are always cowards; I am content to remark that the admirers of bullies are always, by the very nature of things, trying to be cowards. If they do not always succeed, it is because they have unconscious virtues restraining that obscene worship: and this was true even of Henley; and far truer of Stevenson. Stevenson had always a training in real courage; for he fought when he was weak. But it cannot be denied that, by a combination of causes, his own revolt against spineless pessimism, the reactionary violence of Henley, but chiefly I think the vague Scottish tradition of a God of mere power and terror, he grew too familiar in his later works with the sort of swaggering cult of fear. I feel it in the character of Weir of Hermiston, or rather in the attitude of everybody else, including the author, towards that character. I do not mind the judge exulting over the game of insulting and hanging somebody; for I know the judge can be baser than the man he hangs. But I do mind the author exulting over it, when I know he is not base at all. The same fine shade of unpleasantness can be found in the last pages of The Ebb-Tide. My point might be put crudely by saying that I do not object to the author creating such a loathsome person as Mr. Attwater; but I do rather object to his creating him and not loathing him. It would be truer to put the point in another form; that there would be no objection if he loathed and admired Attwater exactly as he loathed and admired Huish. In a sense he obviously did admire Huish; as it was the very passion of his life to admire courage. But he did not expect anybody to look up to Huish; and there are moments when he seems to think it natural that people should look up to Attwater. This secret idolatry of what a feminine sentiment calls “strength,” this was the only lesion in Stevenson’s perfect sanity, the only running sore in the normal health of his soul; and even that had come from too violent an effort to be healthy. So he might, poor fellow, have started a haemorrhage by moving too vigorously on his pillow.

For I am not blaming him for having any such evil, in the sense of having any excess of it. I blame him, being what he was, for having even a touch of it. But I think it is unfortunately certain that he did have a touch of it. There is something almost cruel in thus tracing the innocent springs of cruelty. But, as has been said so often and so foolishly and so truly, Robert Louis Stevenson was a child. It is the moral of these chapters about his nation, his city and his home, that he was also something more than a child. He was a lost child. There was nothing to guide him in the mad movements and reactions of modernity; neither his nation nor his religion nor his irreligion were equal to the task. He had no chart for that gallant voyage; he was hardly to blame if he thought he had to choose between the savage rock of the pride of Scylla and the suicidal whirlpool of the despair of Charybdis. Only, like Ulysses, for all his adventurousness, he was always trying to get home. To vary the metaphor, his face was for ever turning like the sunflower towards the sun, even if it were behind a cloud; and perhaps after all there is nothing truer than the too familiar phrase from the diary of the doctor or the nurse; that he was a sick child, who passed his life in trying to get well.

CHAPTER VI

THE STYLE OF STEVENSON

BEFORE writing this chapter I ought to explain that I am quite incapable of writing it; at least as many serious literary authorities think it ought to be written. I am one of those humble characters for whom the main matter of style is concerned with making a statement; and generally, in the case of Stevenson, with telling a story. Style takes its own most living and therefore most fitting form from within; as the narrative quickens and leaps, or the statement becomes warm or weighty, by being either authoritative or argumentative. The sentence takes its shape from motion; as it takes its motion from motive. And the motive (for us outcasts) is what the man has to say. But there is a technical treatment of style for which I have a profound respect, but it is a respect for the unknown, not to say the unintelligible. I will not say it is Greek to me, for I know the Greek alphabet and I do not know the alphabet of these grammars of cadence and sequence; I can still even read the Greek Testament, but the gospel of pure and abstract English brings me no news. I salute it, from afar as I do musical harmony or the higher mathematics; but I shall not introduce into this book a chapter on any of these three topics. When I speak of the style of Stevenson I mean the manner in which he could express himself in plain English, even if it were in some ways peculiar English; and I have nothing but the most elementary English with which to criticise it. I cannot use the terms of any science of language, or even any science of literature.

Mr. Max Beerbohm, whose fine and classic criticism is full of those shining depths that many mistake for shallowness, has remarked truly enough on the rather wearisome repetitions in the newspapers, which did great harm to the Stevensonian fame at the time of the Stevensonian fashion. He noticed especially that a certain phrase used by Stevenson about his early experiments in writing, that he has “played the sedulous ape” to Hazlitt or to Lamb, must be permanently kept in type in the journalistic offices, so frequently do the journalists quote it. There are about a thousand things in Stevenson much more worth quoting, and much more really enlightening about his education in letters. Every young writer, however original, does begin by imitating other people, consciously or unconsciously, and nearly every old writer would be quite as willing to admit it. The real irony in the incident seems never to have been noticed. The real reason why this confession of plagiarism, out of a hundred such confessions, is always quoted, is because the confession itself has the stamp not of plagiarism but of personal originality. In the very act of claiming to have copied other styles, Stevenson writes most unmistakably in his own style. I think I could have guessed amid a hundred authors who had used the expression "played the sedulous ape." I do not think that Hazlitt would have added that word "sedulous." Some might say he was the better because the simpler without it; some would say that the word is in the strict sense too recherché; some might say it can be recognised because it is strained or affected. All that is matter for argument; but it is rather a joke when so individual a trick is made a proof of being merely imitative. Anyhow, that sort of trick, the rather curious combination of two such words, is the thing I mean by the style of Stevenson.

In the case of Stevenson, criticism has always tended to be hypercriticism. It is as if the critic were strung up to be as strict with the artist as the artist was with himself. But they are not very consistent or considerate in the matter. They blame him for being fastidious; and so become more fastidious themselves. They condemn him for wasting time in trying to find the right word; and then waste more time in not very successful attempts to prove it is the wrong word. I remember that Mr. George Moore (who at least led the attack when Stevenson was alive and at the height of his popularity) professed in a somewhat mysterious manner to have exposed or exploded the whole trick of Stevenson, by dwelling at length on the word "interjected": in the passage which describes a man stopping a clock with interjected finger. There seemed to be some notion that because the word is unusual in that use, it showed that there was nothing but artificial verbalism in the whole tragedy of *Jekyll and Hyde* or the fun of The Wrong Box. I think it is time that this sort of fastidiousness about fastidiousness should be corrected with a little common sense. The obvious question to ask Mr. Moore, if he objects to the word "interjected," is, "What word would you use?" He would immediately discover that any other word would be much weaker and even much less exact. To say "interposed finger" would suggest by its very sound a much clumsier and less precise action; "interjected" suggests by its very sound a sort of jerk of neatness; a mechanical neatness correcting mechanism. In other words, it suggests what it was meant to suggest. Stevenson used the word because it was the right word. Nobody else used it, because nobody else thought of it. And that is the whole story of Stevensonian style.

Literature is but language; it is only a rare and amazing miracle by which a man really says what he means. It is inevitable that most conversation should be convention; as when we cover a myriad beautiful contrasts or comedies of opposites by calling any number of different people “nice.” Some writers, including Stevenson, desired (in the old and proper sense) to be more nice in their discrimination of niceness. Now whether we like such fastidious felicities or no, whether we are individually soothed or irritated by a style like that of Stevenson, whether we have any personal or impersonal reason for impatience with the style or the man, we ought really to have enough critical impartiality and justice to see what is the literary test. The test is whether the words are well or ill chosen, not for the purpose of fitting our own taste in words, but for the purpose of satisfying everybody’s sense of the realities of things. Now it is nonsense for anybody who pretends to like literature not to see the excellence of Stevenson’s expression in this way. He does pick the words that make the picture that he particularly wants to make. They do fix a particular thing, and not some general thing of the same sort; yet the thing is often one very difficult to distinguish from other things of the same sort. That is the craft of letters; and the craftsman made a vast multitude of such images in all sorts of materials. In this matter we may say of Stevenson very much what he said of Burns. He remarked that Burns surprised the polite world, with its aesthetes and antiquarians, by never writing poems on waterfalls, ruined castles or other recognised places of interest; the very fact, of course, which showed Burns to be a poet and not a tourist. It is always the prosaic person who demands poetic subjects. They are the only subjects about which he can possibly be poetic. But Burns, as Stevenson said, had a natural gift of lively and flexible comment that could play as easily upon one thing as another; a kirk or a tavern or a group going to market or a pair of dogs in the street. This gift must be judged by its aptness, its vividness and its range; and anybody who suggests that Stevenson’s talent was only one piece of thin silver polished perpetually in its napkin does not, in the most exact and emphatic sense, know what he is talking about. Stevenson had exactly the talent he attributes to Burns of touching nothing that he did not animate. And so far from hiding one talent in one napkin, it would be truer to say that he became ruler over ten cities; set in the ends of the earth. Indeed the last phrase alone suggests an example or a text.

I will take the case of one of his books; I deliberately refrain from taking one of his best books. I will take *The Wrecker*, a book which many would call a failure and which nobody would call a faultless artistic success, least of all the artist. The picture breaks out of the frame; indeed it is rather a panorama than a picture. The story sprawls over three continents; and the climax has too much the air of being only the last of a long string of disconnected passages. It has the look of a scrap-book; indeed it is very exactly a sketch-book. It is merely the sketch-book of Loudon Dodd, the wandering art student never allowed to be fully an artist; just as his story is never allowed to be fully a work of art. He sketches people with the pen as he does with the pencil, in four or five incongruous societies, in the commercial school of Muskegon or the art school of Paris, in the east wind of Edinburgh or the black squall of the South Seas; just as he sketched the four fugitive murderers gesticulating and lying in the Californian saloon. The point is (on the strict principles of l’art pour l’art, so dear to Mr. Dodd) that he sketched devilish well. We can take the portraits of twenty social types in turn, taken from six social worlds utterly shut out from each other, and find in every case that the strokes are at once few and final; that is, that the word is well chosen out of a hundred words and that one word does the work of twenty. The story starts: “The beginning of this yarn is my poor father’s character”; and the character is compact in one paragraph. When Jim Pinkerton first strides into the story and is described as a young man “with cordial, agitated manners,” we walk through the rest of the narrative with a living man; and listen not merely to words, but to a voice. No other two adjectives could have done the trick. When the shabby and shady lawyer, with his cockney culture and underbred refinement, is first introduced as handling a big piece of business beyond his *metier*, he bears himself “with a sort of shrinking assumption.” The reader, especially if he is not a writer, may imagine that such words matter little; but if he supposes that it might just as well have been “flinching pride” or “quailing arrogance” he knows nothing about writing and perhaps not much about reading. The whole point is in that hitting of the right nail on the head; and rather more so when the nail is such a very battered little tintack as Mr. Henry D. Bellairs of San Francisco. When Loudon Dodd merely has to meet a naval officer and record that he got next to nothing out of him, that very negation has a touch of chilly life like a fish. “I judged he was suffering torments of alarm lest I should prove an undesirable acquaintance; diagnosed him for a shy, dull, vain, unamiable animal, without adequate defence — a sort of dis-housed snail.” The visit to an English village, under the shadow of an English country house, is equally aptly appreciated; from the green framework of the little town, “a domino of tiled houses and walled gardens,” to the reminiscences of the ex-butler about the exiled younger son; “near four generations of Carthews were touched upon without eliciting one point of interest; and we had killed Mr. Henry in the hunting field with a vast elaboration of painful circumstance and buried him in the midst of a whole sorrowing county, before I could so much as manage to bring upon the stage my intimate friend, Mr. Norris. . . . He was the only person of the whole featureless series who seemed to have accomplished anything worth mentioning; and his achievements, poor dog, seemed to have been confined to going to the devil and leaving some regrets. . . . He had no pride about him, I was told; he would sit down with any man; and it was somewhat woundingly implied that I was indebted to this peculiarity for my own acquaintance with the hero.” But I must not be led away by the large temptation of quoting examples of the cool and collected and sustained irony, with which Loudon Dodd tells his whole story. I am only giving random examples of his rapid sketches of very different sorts of societies and personalities; and the point is that he can describe them rapidly and yet describe them rightly. In other words the author does possess a quite exceptional power of putting what he really means into the words that really convey it. And to show that this was a matter of genius in the man, and not (as some of his critics would imply) a matter of laborious technical treatment applied to two or three prize specimens, I have taken all these examples from one of the less known works, one of the least admired and perhaps of the least admirable. Whole tracts of it run almost as casually as his private correspondence; and his private correspondence is full of the same lively and animated neatness. In this one neglected volume of *The Wrecker* there are thousands of such things; and everything to show that he could have written twenty more volumes, equally full of these felicities. A man who does this is not only an artist doing what most men cannot do, but he is certainly doing what most novelists do not do. Even very good novelists have not this particular knack of putting a whole human figure together with a few unforgettable words.

By the end of a novel by Mr. Arnold Bennett or Mr. E. F. Benson I have the sense that Lord Raingo or Lord Chesham is a real man, very rightly understood; but I never have at the beginning that feeling of magic; that a man has been brought to life by three words of an incantation.

This was the genius of Stevenson; and it is simply silly to complain of it because it was Stevensonian. I do not blame either of the other two novelists for not being somebody else. But I do venture to blame them a little for grumbling because Stevenson was himself. I do not quite see why he should be covered with cold depreciation merely because he could put into a line what other men put into a page; why he should be regarded as superficial because he saw more in a man's walk or profile than the moderns can dig out of his complexes and his subconsciousness; why he should be called artificial because he sought (and found) the right word for a real object; why he should be thought shallow because he went straight for what was significant, without wading towards it through wordy seas of insignificance; or why he should be treated as a liar because he was not ashamed to be a story-teller.

Of course there are many other vivid marks of Stevenson's style, besides this particular element of picked and pointed phrase, or rather especially the combination of picked and pointed phrases. I might make much more than I have made out of something in his rapidly stepping sentences, especially in narrative, which corresponds to his philosophy of the militant attitude and the active virtues. That word angular, which I have been driven to use too often, belongs to the sharpness of his verbal gestures as much as to the cutlasses and choppers of his paste-board pirates. Those early theatrical figures, from the sketch-book of Skelt, were all of them in their nature like snapshots of people in swift action. Three-Fingered Jack could not have remained permanently with the cudgel or the sabre swung about his head nor Robin Hood with the arrow drawn to his ear; and the descriptions of Stevenson's characters are seldom static but rather dynamic descriptions; and deal rather with how a man did or said something than with what he was like. The sharp and shrewd Scottish style of Ephraim Mackellar or David Balfour seems by its very sound exactly fitted to describe a man snapping his fingers or rapping with his stick. Doubtless so careful an artist as Stevenson varied his style to suit the subject and the speaker; we should not look for these dry or abrupt brevities in the dilettante deliberations of Loudon Dodd; but I know very few of the writer's works in which there are not, at the crisis, phrases as short and sharp as the knife that Captain Wicks rammed through his own hand. Something should also have been said, of course, of the passages in which Stevenson deliberately plays on a somewhat different musical instrument; as when he exercised upon Pan's Pipes in respectful imitation of Meredith upon a penny whistle. Something should have been said of the style of his poems; which are perhaps more successful in their phraseology than their poetry. But these again teem with these taut and trenchant separate phrases; the description of the interlacing branches like crossed swords in battle; the men upholding the falling skies like unfrowning caryatids; the loud stairs of honour and the bright eyes of danger. But I have already explained that I profess no scientific thoroughness about these problems of execution; and can only speak of the style of Stevenson as it specially affects my own taste and fancy. And the thing that strikes me most is still this sense of somebody being pinked with a rapier in a particular button; of a sort of fastidiousness that has still something of the fighting spirit, that aims at a mark and makes a point, and is certainly not merely an idle trifling with words for the sake of their external elegance or intrinsic melody. As a part of the present criticism, such a statement is only another way of saying, in the old phrase, that the style is the man; and that the man was certainly a man and not only a man of letters. I find everywhere, even in his mere diction and syntax, that theme that is the whole philosophy of fairy-tales, of the old romances and even of the absurd libretto of the little theatre — the conception that man is born with hope and courage indeed, but born outside that which he was meant to attain; that there is a quest, a test, a trial by combat or pilgrimage of discovery; or, in other words, that whatever else man is he is not sufficient to himself, either through peace or through despair. The very movement of the sentence is the movement of a man going somewhere and generally fighting something; and that is where optimism and pessimism are alike opposed to that ultimate or potential peace, which the violent take by storm.

CHAPTER VII

EXPERIMENT AND RANGE

IN any generalisation about Stevenson, it is of course easy to forget that his work was very varied, in the sense of being very versatile. In one sense, he tried very different styles; and was always very careful only to try one style at a time. The unity of each accentuates the diversity of all. The very fact that he was careful to keep each several study in its own tone or tint, makes the range of his work look more like a patchwork than it really is. It is always a sharp contrast between complete and homogeneous things; when these things are broken up into subdivisions, the whole falls back into a more mixed but a more general pattern. In one sense this is merely a platitude. It would hardly be difficult to point out that the style of *Prince Otto* is very different from the style of The Wrong Box. It is different with the whole difference between a man working in wax or cardboard or ivory or ebony. *Prince Otto* is a sort of china shepherdess group, practising arcadian courtliness in an eighteenth-century park; the other is a sort of Aunt Sally pelted with comic misfortunes as if with cocoanuts. Nobody is likely to confuse these forms of art; nobody sets up a china shepherdess to be pelted with cocoanuts; few are so chivalrous as to approach their Aunt Sally with the deferential bows of a courtier. But when we get past this obvious contrast, which nobody could possibly miss, we find that (in a queer manner) there is versatility without variety. What makes those two stories stand out in our memory is a certain spirit with which they are told; yes, and even a certain style as well as spirit. It is not exactly the stories themselves; still less is it any real immersion of the author in the subjects of the stories themselves. We feel, even as we read, that Stevenson would be the last man really to wish to be imprisoned for life in a petty German court or poised for ever amid such very fragile china. We know it, just as we know that Stevenson does not really intend to turn his attention to the leather-business, or even (though here we may fancy the temptation stronger) to become a rowdy solicitor with shady clients, in the manner of the priceless Mr. Michael Finsbury. We remember the treatment more than the subject; because the treatment is really much more alive than the subject. Long after the ghosts in that ornamental garden have faded, and we have completely forgotten Who was Who at the court of Prince Otto, we hear and remember in the depths of that valley, “the solid plunge of the cataract.” And long after the details of the Tontine System have become blurred and all the far less interesting details of our own daily life along with them, when all lesser things have diminished and life itself is fading from my eyes — I shall still see before me the Form called up by that inspired paragraph: “His costume was of a mercantile brilliancy best described as stylish; nor could anything be said against him, except that he was a little too like a wedding guest to be quite a gentleman.”

Even through these wide divergences of subject, therefore, there runs something which is not only the genius but decidedly the method of Stevenson. In one sense he is careful to vary the style; in another sense the style is never varied. We might say, so to speak, that it is the style within the style that is never varied. But subject to this general understanding, it is only just to him to insist on the wide range that he managed to cover in his short and very much hampered literary life. He once reproached himself with not having enlarged his life by building lighthouses as well as writing books. But the firm of Stevenson and Son might have been mildly convulsed if there had risen on every side lighthouses in seven styles of architecture; a Gothic lighthouse, an ancient Egyptian lighthouse, and a lighthouse like a Chinese pagoda. And that is what he did with the towers of imagination and the light of reason.

There are indeed, as I have hinted, one or two places where it may be maintained that Stevenson let his style stray; and wandered into other tracks, sometimes older tracks, away from the immediate track of travel. Personally, I have this feeling about the wanderings of the Master of Ballantrae and the Chevalier Burke. They are a sort of adventure story in the wrong place; and though Mr. James Durie was certainly an adventurer in the bad sense, it is impossible to make him one in the good. It is impossible to turn a villain into a hero for the purposes of pure romance; Jim Hawkins could not have gone on his adventures permanently arm-in-arm with Long John Silver. The episode of Blackbeard is a sort of fizzling anticlimax, spluttering like the blue matches in that fool’s hat. Such a shoddy person had no claim to be so much as mentioned in that spiritual tragedy of the terrible twin spirits; the brothers of Durrisdeer. It is almost as if pirates were really a private mania with the author; and he could not keep them out of the tale if he tried; though pirates have really no more business in this tale than pirates in The Wrong Box. But it is curious to note how completely they are discoloured by the white death-ray that shines on that winter's tale. Their blood and gold were not really red; their seas were not even really blue. This was no occasion for Two-pence Coloured. The very style of Mackeller's narrative might be shrewdly summed up indeed under the title of A Penny Plain. But this is not only because that worthy steward was addicted to plainness and not averse to pennies. It is also because he is addicted to home and habit and averse to adventure; and the notion of the Master dragging him across half the world has something about it ungainly and grotesque and unworthy of the intensity of their intellectual and spiritual relations. The truth is that the Master of Ballantrae is not only a family demon but also a family ghost; and ought not to haunt any house except his own. Ghosts do not travel like tourists; even for the pleasure of visiting their relatives in the colonies. The story of the Duries is emphatically domestic; like those very domestic stories of home life in which Oedipus butchered his father or Orestes trampled on the body of his mother. These incidents were regrettable, and even painful; but they were all kept in the family. Something tells us that most of them happened behind high barred doors or in terrible unrecorded interviews. They did not wash their bloody linen in public; least of all did they wash it in all the seven seas of the British Empire. But the appearance of the Master first in India and then in America has almost the suggestion of the Prince of Wales on an imperial tour. Now those scenes in *The Master of Ballantrae* which do take place in the dark house of his fathers, or in the dim and wintry plantations without, do have an indefinable grandeur and even hugeness of outline that recalls Greek tragedies. Nay, they have even that hint of long wanderings and remote places, which is lost when the wanderings and the places are too elaborately followed out. At that unforgotten moment when the stranger first stands up, long and black and slender on the point of rock, and makes a motion with his cane that is like a spoken word of mockery, we do feel that he might have come from the ends of the earth, that he might have strolled from the empire of the Mogul or fallen from the moon. But the irony of the story is in that hateful love, or that pure love of hatred, that is the link between him and his; and makes him as domestic as the roof-tree even when he is as destructive as the battering-ram. It is curious, and perhaps over-curious, to find this rare fault in the work which is in its principal parts so faultless. It may seem still more pedantic to pick another very small hole in it; but it seems to me that Stevenson missed one great chance, in a way he rarely did, when he made even Mackellar such a prig as to write for the last line of the epitaph a phrase like, "With his fraternal enemy." Surely the words would have stood out with a much more sinister and significant finality, if he had merely written, "And sleeps in the same grave with his brother."

But this mixture of two types of tale in one is the very reverse of characteristic. I know not where else in his works it can be found; unless perhaps we might take exception to the slight element of political irritation that makes itself felt, of all places in the world, in the amiable nightmare of The Dynamiter. It is really impossible to use a story in which everything is ridiculous to prove that certain particular Fenians or anarchist agitators are ridiculous. Nor indeed is it tenable that men who risk their lives to commit such crimes are quite so ridiculous as that. But broadly speaking, the characteristic of this writer's conscientious artistry is that he is very careful to keep the different forms of art in water-tight compartments. It was, of course, a sentiment about technique and material which was very fashionable in the age of Whistler and the world where Stevenson had studied art. And the artist would as soon have stuck a lump of marble into the middle of a bas-relief in terracotta, or applied a coat of paint to a tracery he was making out of ivory, as put a piece of tragedy into the middle of a tea-table comedy or a burst of righteous indignation into a farce. In all this part of Stevenson's mind, especially as revealed in his letters, most of the critics have missed the very lasting effect of the chatter of craftsmanship, and all the jargon of tricks of the trade, which he heard among the French art students. He had reversed almost the whole philosophy of everything that they wanted to do; but he still retained the dialect in which they talked about how it was done. But he talked it much better than they did; and he had his own knack of using the right word even for the search for the right word. It is typical that he said that a story must have one general tendency; and that in the whole book there must not be a single word "that looks the other way." There is not a single word that looks the other way in the whole of *Prince Otto* or in the whole of The Wrong Box.

But now and then he did something more than this. He created a form of art. He invented a *genre* which does not really exist outside his work. It may seem a paradox to say that his most original work was a parody. But certainly the notion of *The New Arabian Nights* is quite as unique in the world as the old Arabian Nights; and it does not owe its real ingenuity to the model which it mocks. Stevenson here wove a singular sort of texture, or mixed a singular sort of atmosphere, which is not like anything else; a medium in which many incongruous things may find a comic congruity. It is partly like the atmosphere of a dream; in which so many incongruous things cause no surprise. It is partly the real atmosphere of London at night; it is partly the unreal atmosphere of Baghdad. The broad and placid presence of Prince Florizel of Bohemia, that mysterious semi-reigning sovereign, is treated with a sort of vast and vague diplomatic reserve; which is like the confused nightmare of an old cosmopolitan courtier. The Prince himself seems to have palaces in every country; and yet the humorous reader suspects, with half his mind, that the man is really only a pompous tobacconist, whom Stevenson happened to find in Rupert Street and chose to make the hero of a standing joke. This double mentality, like that of the true dreamer, is suggested with extraordinary skill without loading with a single question the inimitable lightness of the narrative. The humour of Florizel's colossal condescension constitutes not only a new character, but a new sort of character. He stands in a new relation to reality and unreality; he is a sort of solid impossibility. Since that time many writers have written such fanciful extravagances about the lights of London; for Stevenson suffered much more than Tennyson from that of which the latter complained when "all had got the seed." But few of them have really struck those ironical semitones or made the same thing so completely a cockney conspiracy and an Arabian fairy-tale. We have heard much of making the life of the modern town romantic; and many of the attempts in modern poetry seem only to make it more ugly than it really is. We have at the present moment a considerable cult of the fantastic; with the result that the fantastic has become rather a fixed type. It is picked out in crying colours of chrome yellow or magenta; with the result that it is perhaps too obviously a puppet. But Prince Florizel of Bohemia is not a puppet. He is a presence; a person who seems to fill the room and yet to be such stuff as dreams are made of; not simply a thing made of stuffing. The rigid and unreal dolls may fall into dust when the mood changes; but we do not easily imagine anybody kicking the stuffing out of Florizel. I will not say that the *New Arabian Nights* is the greatest of Stevenson's works; though a considerable case might be made for the challenge. But I will say that it is probably the most unique; there was nothing like it before, and, I think, nothing equal to it since.

But it is worth while to remark that even here, where the atmosphere might be expected to be more hazy, the generalisation stands about edges and the exact extravagance of Skelt. However delicate is the air of mockery or mystery, there is very little change in the staccato style. The quarrel with the Suicide Club is "put to the touch of swords" and the phrase tingles like the twin blades of Durrisdeer. Nothing could be more angular than Mr. Malthus, the horrible paralysed man who plays on the brink of the precipice of suicide; he is as hard as a huge beetle. There is all the jerk of the old energetic puppets when he jumps from his seat, losing his disease for an instant at the sight of death. There is more movement in that one paralytic than in crowds of softly moving society figures, in milder or more meditative fiction. The very clatter of his broken bones down the stone steps of Trafalgar Square, of which we hear but an echo, has that almost metallic quality. Jack Vandeleur's "brutalities of gesture," his pantomime of opening and shutting the hand, are surely somewhat piratical; he had been Dictator of Paraguay; but I think he had sailed there on the Hispaniola. In short we have here once more the continuity of a style within a style. And the inner thread within the silk is as thin and hard as wire.

Again, it illustrates this variety of experiment that Stevenson also wrote a detective story; or as he characteristically called it (in a sort of pedantic plain English) a police novel. He wrote it in collaboration with Mr. Lloyd Osbourne; and I have considered another aspect of it already, in the local colour of The Wrecker. *But* The Wrecker is ultimately a police novel; and the best sort of police novel, in which the police are never called in. Stevenson explained his reasons for leading up to the problem with studies of social life; and certainly it says much for the liveliness of that life that we do not grow so impatient as to offer the obvious comment. Otherwise we should certainly make one reasonable criticism. The writer may be pardoned if he is a long time getting to the solution, but not when he is such a long time getting to the mystery. It must be confessed that we have to wait for the question to be asked, as well as for it to be answered. Personally I am very glad to wait in the waiting-room of Pinkerton and Dodd. But anyhow when the question is asked, it is with great animation; and the excitement of beginning to piece together a puzzle, which is the essence of a detective story, has seldom been more lively and lifelike than in the cross questions and crooked answers of Captain Nares and his super-cargo. Here, however, the detective story merely illustrates the fact of his having almost as many irons in the fire as Jim Pinkerton. It illustrates the general fact that he tried a great many different styles; and yet his style was not different.

If there were experiments in which his touch was less happy they were, strangely enough perhaps, those connected with the simple or semi-savage world in which he found so much happiness. The Island Nights' Entertainments are not quite so entertaining as the Arabian Nights' Entertainments, whether New or Old. The explanation may be found, perhaps, in that casual phrase with which he swept the South Seas and swept away a good many imperial or international illusions, probably without knowing it; when he said of all those regions, "It is a large ocean but a narrow world." He did not really find new types, at least among the white men; he rather found new countries full of old and battered types, white men who no longer looked very conspicuously white. One exception must be allowed; the story of The Ebb-Tide has a very great deal of kick in it; even though we hardly have the full satisfaction of seeing all the characters kicked. Anyhow, it is quite certain that whatever was the cause of the relative ineffectiveness of some of the work done at Vailima, it was not due to his having written himself out or experienced any weakening of power. For the very last days of all were spent in producing what was, or would have been, his most powerful piece of work. I have said something elsewhere, in connection with the Scottish romances, of his last great story, which is unfortunately a great fragment. Actually (I am tempted to say fortunately) that story named after Weir of Hermiston is not mainly about Weir of Hermiston. At least it is not about the first and most famous person of that name; and the best chapters of the book now in existence are concerned with the most sensitive and passionate shades of the Scottish temperament; richer shades of passion than he had ever yet attempted to touch. If ever the grey moor turned purple, it did at the moment when the girl lifted her voice to sing the song of the Elliots. He never forgets his abrupt gesture; and it was never so arresting as when her psalm-book page was rent across.

When Stevenson drew the long bow for the last time, like Robin Hood, he had two strings to his bow; and they both broke; but one was much stronger than the other. In other words he had two stories in his head, both of which broke off short; and perhaps it is not surprising that the weaker was rather neglected in favour of the stronger. The story of St. Ives contains excellent things, as does everything that he ever wrote, down to the most casual private letter. But it may be called disappointing, with rather more exactitude than is usual in the use of that word. St. Ives can hardly avoid being a sort of historical novel; and yet it is a rather unhistorical novel. By which I do not mean that there may be mistakes about dates or details; which matter nothing in fiction and are made too much fuss of even in history. I mean it is unhistorical in showing a strange lack of historical imagination and the sense of historical opportunity. It is the story of a soldier of Napoleon imprisoned on Edinburgh Rock and escaping from it. But indeed we might fancy it was Stevenson and not St. Ives who was imprisoned on Edinburgh Rock. And Stevenson does not escape from it. Such a subject demanded a sort of international interpreter; but it is in truth the most strangely insular of all his books. St. Ives is not a Frenchman; he is the less and not the more French because he is given all the foppery and swagger which spinsters in Edinburgh in 1813 doubtless did associate with a Frenchman. He is no more a French soldier than Bonaparte was Boney. He has neither the French realism nor the French idealism. He does not look at England as a Frenchman of the revolutionary wars would have looked at it. This story is simply France seen from Britain; it is not, as it should be, Britain seen from France. Unless St. Ives were a very bitter Royalist (which he evidently was not, but a moderate Bonapartist) he would quite certainly have conceived himself as carrying not mere military glory but the light of reason and philosophy and social justice to the aristocratic and autocratic states. He would have been impatient with the illogical resistance to rational things; not merely annoyed at not being shaved or provided with a looking-glass. But St. Ives is not a French soldier. He is a man in a French uniform; but so was Alan Breck Stewart. And that blessed and beloved name may perhaps recall to us that vanity and a love of fine coats can occasionally be found, even in the British Isles.

But perhaps in this very insularity there is something like a return to earlier things, and a rounding off of his life. In that sense the story of Stevenson, like the story of St. Ives, began on the crag and castle of Edinburgh; and it may be right that it should in a fashion end there, and not really get any further. The most really Stevensonian scenes, in their spirit and spitfire animation, are those which occur first in the prison. It seems almost as if St. Ives was more free before he escaped. The business of the duel with sticks turned into spears, by the addition of scissor-blades, has all the hilarity of his old dance of death. That alone serves as an excellent symbol of that magnifying of the sharp and the metallic; and the way in which steel was always a sort of magnet to his mind. Perhaps he was the first quiet householder to whom it ever occurred to see even scissors as swords.

But the book offers a yet better example of this return to an almost narrowly national romance, like the flight of a homing bird. It occurs almost in the first few lines of the book; yet it might stand in a fashion for a title to all his books. It occurs in connection with the highly characteristic passage, typical of his love of gay pictorial colouring, in which he instantly lights up the prison hill with flames; saying that the yellow convict coats and the red uniforms made up together "a lively picture of hell." And with reference to this he remarks, as if in passing, that the ancient Pictish or Celtic name of that castle of Edinburgh was "The painted hill," or, as I have seen it somewhere in another version, "The painted rock." That might stand as a symbol of many things here less sufficiently suggested; of a Scotsman dressed, or almost disguised, as an artist; of a style that could be at once abrupt and austere, and yet was always vivid with colour; but above all of that combination of colour with a solemn and childish caricature which we have seen in the background of his boyhood; for the landscape of Skelt consisted entirely of painted rocks. Stevenson had a passion of compression. With all his output, he had a strange ambition to be a man of few words. It seems to me that he was always seeking in words for a combination that should be also a compression; for two words that should instantly give birth to the third thing that he really wanted to say. It may be questioned, of him as of any other artist, whether he ever really succeeded in saying it. But we might amuse ourselves with the fancy that such a system of brilliant abbreviations might be more and more rapidly, like signals, uttered and understood; that some day a symbol of two words might stand for a thesis as a cryptic Chinese character stands for a word; and that all men could easily write and read such compact hieroglyphics. If that were so, it were hardly an exaggeration to say that the great mission given by God to Robert Louis Stevenson was to say the words "painted rock" and perish.

Anyhow, it was in the midst of these new experiments that he did perish; fulfilling the very terms of his challenge in Aes Triplex; of the happy man whom death finds flushed with hope and planning vast foundations. And indeed his death may well come also at the end of this chapter of experiment, as the last of his experiments. I was a lad when the news came to England; and I remember that some of his friends doubted at first, because the telegram said that he died making a salad; and they “had never heard of his doing such a thing.” And I remember fancying, with a secret arrogance, that I knew one thing about him better than they did, though I never saw him with these mortal eyes; for it seemed to me that if there were something that Stevenson had never been known to do before, it would be the very thing that he would do. So indeed he died mixing new salads of many sorts; and the image is not inappropriate or irreverent; but only touched with a certain lightness and resilience as of a coiled spring that belonged to him from first to last; and is that quality which Dr. Sarolea has truly called the French spirit of Stevenson. He died swiftly as if struck with an arrow and even over his grave something of a higher frivolity hovers upon wings like a bird; “Glad did I live and gladly die,” has a lilt that no repetition can make quite unreal, light as the lifted spires of Spyglass Hill and translucent as the dancing waves; types of a tenuous but tenacious levity and the legend that has made his graveyard a mountain-peak and his epitaph a song.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LIMITS OF A CRAFT

THE truest adverse criticism of Stevenson was written by Stevenson. It was also very Stevensonian; for it took the form of saying, about his own fictitious characters, that his temptation was always “to cut the flesh off the bones.” Even here we may note his peculiar cutting or hacking accent; it sounds like some horrid crime of Barbecue or Billy Bones. Indeed that word is sufficiently symbolic of Stevenson. His name might have been Bones, like the seafaring man at the “Admiral Benbow”; nor was this only because his eternal boyhood was as full of skeletons as the school life of Traddles. It was also because of a certain bony structure in his whole taste and turn of mind; something that was angular though slender like his own slim and brittle frame and long Quixotic face. Nevertheless the words were uttered as a condemnation; and they were a just condemnation.

The real defect of Stevenson as a writer, so far from being a sort of silken trifling and superficial or superfluous embroidery, was that he simplified so much that he lost some of the comfortable complexity of real life. He treated everything with an economy of detail and a suppression of irrelevance which had at last something about it stark and unnatural. He is to be commended among authors for sticking to the point; but real people do not stick quite so stubbornly to the point as that. We can here best realise his real error, as well as his real originality, by comparing him with the great Victorian novelists in whose vast shadow he grew up. I shall have occasion to note afterwards that his collision was not with these in the matter of morals or philosophy; for on that side he was looking forward and not back. But there is a strong contrast, and a striking new departure, in the passage from the very best of Thackeray or Trollope to the first sketches, I had almost said scratches, of Stevenson. Those sketches were in a few lines, and only of the necessary lines; it was the whole point that one necessary line was a loss and not a gain. Compared with this, the very best of the old Victorian novels were full of padding. But there was something to be said for the Victorian padding; as there was for the Victorian upholstery. Comfort is not always a contemptible thing, when its other name is hospitality; and Dickens and Thackeray and Trollope had a huge hospitality for their own characters. They were heartily and unaffectedly glad to see them; and especially glad to see them again. Hence their taste for sequels and continuous family histories; and all the positively last appearances of Mr. Pendennis or Mrs. Proudie. And this repetition, this rambling, even this padding, did in a curious confused fashion confirm the reality of the characters. As the padded Victorian furniture did really make people feel at home, so the padded Victorian novels made the reader feel at home with the characters. Now the reader never does feel quite at home with Stevenson's characters. He cannot get rid of an impression that he knows too little about them; though he knows that he knows all that is important about them. His tragedy is that he knows only what is important. Alan Breck Stewart is not only a very lively but a very loveable character. And yet there is too little of him to love; though he might well draw his claymore upon us, if we made so dangerous an allusion. We are not quite at ease with him, as we are at ease with Pickwick or Pendennis. We know the vital things about him; and they are very vital. But we do not know *thousands* of things about him; as we do about a man with whom we have lived through a long Early Victorian novel. Stevenson has in fact done exactly what he accused himself of doing; it is he who wields the claymore and he has cut the flesh off the bones.

An illustration of the difference, of course, could be found in the presentation of the externals of a character. The dark vivacity of the face of Alan Breck, the eyes with their "dancing madness, at once engaging and alarming," springs up before us as clearly as a coloured photograph in the first few words of description; and the same few words have already set strutting the whole brisk little figure in the blue coat and silver buttons and the swagger of the big sword. But the whole operation is so rapid and complete as to have something about it almost unconvincing, like a conjuring trick. It is like seeing something by a single flash of lightning; there is in that illumination a sort of illusion. For in the heart of anything that partakes of magic there is also something of mockery. It is not so that we "get to know" the personal appearance of somebody in Thackeray or Trollope. It is by a multitude of apparently accidental or even unnecessary allusions that we gradually gain the impression that Warrington was dark and moody with a blue shaven chin. The appearance of Lord Steyne is scattered all over *Vanity Fair* in scraps; his red whiskers in one chapter, his bandy legs in another, his bald head in a third. But this is so like the way in which we really do talk about real people, that in comparison there is something almost unreal about Stevenson's rapid realism. Perhaps the story-teller ought to remember more often that he is a man telling a story. Perhaps he even forgets that it is supposed to sound like a true story. And after all a man does not say to his wife at dinner, in real life, "A stranger came to my office this morning; he was of an elegant, strenuous figure, with a fine falcon profile, the eyebrows and the corners of the mouth touched with temper; and a general appearance which, though not without distinction, was thrown up in a somewhat theatrical fashion by his dashing cutaway coat and white spats and the magenta coloured orchid in his buttonhole." Such a soliloquy seldom resounds in the suburban home; and if the stranger's appearance comes to count for anything, it comes out bit by bit; as in saying, "I wasn't altogether surprised when he threw the inkstand; for I saw by his eyebrows he had a beast of a temper," or, "The office-boy was taken out incapacitated with laughter at the first sight of the spats." In the same way, nobody does actually say, as Mackellar does in the Stevensonian romance, "I was now near enough to see him, a very handsome figure and countenance, swarthy, lean, long, with a quick, alert, black look, as of one who was a fighter and accustomed to command; upon one cheek he had a mole, not unbecoming; a large diamond sparkled on his hand; his clothes, although of the one hue, were of a French and foppish design; his ruffles, which he wore longer than common, of exquisite lace." Men do not really describe things like that; would that they described anything so well! These facts about the Master of Ballantrae would have come out in a more fragmentary fashion in the real record of a real Mackellar. The diamond would have been mentioned in connection with a rumour of thieves; the lace in connection with the laundry. And that is more or less how the older Victorian novelists did often describe or mention these things; and I think it really does give an impression of reality. Compared with it, the very completeness of Stevenson seems incomplete. But it is also true that the older Victorians could not have achieved this familiar realism except by being a little more formless than Stevenson and lacking his beautiful and piercing sense of the clarity of form. Though he may seem to describe his subject in detail, he describes it to be done with it; and he does not return to the subject. He never says anything needlessly; above all he never says anything twice. Few will venture to say that Thackeray never says anything twice; or that he was incapable in some cases of saying twenty times. Yet in some ways this repetition, though sometimes boring, is somehow convincing; I might almost say comforting. It comes from that comfortable sense of social ease, which was a mark of the England of that brief period of mercantile success; or at least of that part of England which consisted of the merchants who had succeeded. And it exhibited, along with its other virtues and vices, that rather coarse benevolence that was at once a virtue and a vice. "The British merchant's son shan't want, sir," said old Mr. Osborne; and neither should the spiritual child of Mr. William Makepeace Thackeray. Words shall be poured out on him like wine; pages shall be open for him like parks, in which he may wander. He shall be allowed to hang about as long as he likes and the poorest relations of the story shall be asked again and again to dinner. In short, the reader shall "get to know him" and discuss all sorts of little details about him at leisure; they shall not all be disposed of once and for all in one closely packed paragraph. We return to the word hospitality; and the chatter of a hundred friends and relations at an English Christmas party. In comparison the verbal economy of the Scottish romancer suggests something of the old joke against the Scot. He is so very thrifty that his characters are almost thin.

The loftiest things of this world have their weakness or defect; and with that word "thin" we come to the limit of the glory of Skelt and discover that even the maker of toy theatres is human. Just as Stevenson gained in that school of boyish bravado his admirable sense of symbolic attitude and action, his deep joy in gay colour and gallant carriage, his fine feeling for life as a story and honour as a fight; his response to the challenge of the open door or the drag of the road over the hill — as he gained all these great virtues and values under the symbol of A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured, so he betrayed also even in his best work something of the technical limitation of such an instrument. And it cannot be more clearly stated than by saying that these flat figures could only be seen from one side. They are aspects or attitudes of men rather than men; though the aspects and attitudes are of great importance considered as symbols, like the flat haloes of saints or the flat blazonry of shields. In that sense only they are not deep enough; and lack another measurement. They are deep enough in the sense in which any beautiful picture is deep; in the sense that anything beautiful always means more than it says; possibly means more than it means to mean. In that sense there can be depth enough even in the shallow scenery of Skelt, when the child's eye plunges into it. But there is not depth in the sense of a great familiarity with the other side of the scenery or the implied life behind the scenes. When all is said and done, the splendid and inspiring figure of Three-Fingered Jack is a figure and not a statue. You cannot walk round him; and if he has no more than three fingers, he has much less than three dimensions. But the important paradox is that in this the imperfection of the work is actually due to the perfection of the art. It is exactly because Balfour or Ballantrae only do what they are meant to do, and do it so swiftly and well, that we have a vague feeling that we do not know them as we know more loitering, more rambling or more sprawling characters. This is, if you will, a weakness in the author's work; but it is even more emphatically a weakness in the critics who call him weak. For they accuse him of the very opposite of his real fault; of a sort of self-indulgent delicacy or a luxury of mere words. The evil arises from his very passion of economy and severity; from the fact that he pruned too much, so as almost to kill the plant; from the fact that he went too straight to the point, so that the movement was too quick to be clear, let alone familiar; above all, from the fact that such hardness of technique had about it something almost inhuman. He does sometimes simplify the puppet so much as to show the wire. But even in that relation between wire and wood there is a queer sort of realism.

Stevenson was a man who believed in craftsmanship; that is, in creation. He had not the smallest natural sympathy with all those hazy pagan and pantheistic notions often covered by the name of inspiration. He might not have expressed it in the phrase that man is an image of the Creator; but he did very definitely regard man as a maker of images. There is, and has long been, pouring upon the world, mostly in an immediate sense from the Germans and the Slavs, probably in an ultimate sense from the dark philosophies of Asia, a sort of doctrine of mystical helplessness that takes a hundred forms; and that recognises everything in the world except will. It denies the will of God and it does not believe even in the will of man. It does not believe in one of the most glorious manifestations of the will of man, which is the act of creative choice essential to art. The tendency has been admirably treated in the work of M. Henri Massis in his book on the Defence of the West; and another French writer of the same school, M. Maritain, has remarked on the important part which the word *artifex*, as the title of an artist, played in mediaeval philosophy as well as mediaeval craftsmanship. As we shall see later, it is the paradox of Stevenson that he would have cared nothing for such mediaeval metaphysics; and yet he carried out in practice precisely what these writers are now maintaining in principle. He was, if ever there was one, an artifex; not a mere mouthpiece of elemental powers or destinies, but a man making something by the force of will and in the light of reason. It was a sort of craftsmanship characteristic of mediaeval work in literature as well as sculpture. It was strikingly present in those mediaeval poets whom Stevenson himself admired; and perhaps admired more than he understood. It is supremely typical of the close and finely carved ballades of Villon. Indeed the name of Stevenson will always, I suppose, be picturesquely associated with the name of Villon; if only because of the fine macabre nocturne of A Lodging for the Night. And yet if there was one thing in the world about which Stevenson was entirely wrong, it was about François Villon. He was even, on that subject, guilty of a very unusual lapse of logic and error of fact. In his essay on Villon, while showing all the enthusiasm of a fine critic for a fine poet, he insists with almost rabid emphasis that the mind of the man was rotten with mere bestial cynicism and base materialism. “His eyes were sealed with their own filth”; and he could see nothing noble or beautiful in heaven or earth. And to this he adds the rather curious remark that even in that France of the fifteenth century Villon might have learnt something better; since a few years before Joan of Arc had lived one of the noblest lives in history. It seems rather hard on poor Villon to attribute to him a contented ignorance of all such people as Joan of Arc; since he actually goes out of his way to mention her in the most famous of his ballades; “The good lady of Lorraine whom the English burnt at Rouen.” But the criticism is far more false according to the spirit than according to the letter. It is founded on a sort of modern fashionable fallacy, compounded of sentimentalism and optimism, to the effect that a man who is rather bitter about this world cannot have any ideals; whereas the bitterness does sometimes come from the intensity of his ideals. Anyhow, there is no doubt, to anybody who can read poetry without prejudice, that Villon had ideals and high ideals; only they happened to be highly Catholic ideals. The devotional poem that he wrote for his old mother, which describes her gazing at the glowing mediaeval window, itself glows with sincerity. And he wrote at least one line that would be sufficient to destroy the accusation; one of those lines that are too simple to be adequately translated, “Offrit à la mort sa très claire jeunesse"; which is something like, "Offered his clear and shining youth to death." He wrote it of Jesus Christ; but what better thing could be written of Joan of Arc?

I have paused upon this parenthesis; because it foreshadows the general view to which all these rather rambling criticisms ultimately tend; that Stevenson stood for the truth and did not quite understand the truth he stood for. If he had understood it, he would have known that the virile craftsmanship which he was only too eager to admire in Villon, was really connected with certain virtues, which were none the less the virtues of a craftsman because they happened to be the virtues of a thief. Nobody pretends that Villon was a saint; but the socially disreputable externals of his sin do not (for those of his faith) make him a specially or supremely hopeless sinner. If he was a thief, nobody can prove that he was not a penitent thief; and the moral system to which he was attached had raised such a man to its altars under the somewhat paradoxical title of The Good Thief. He was probably the last man to expect in his own person to be that night in paradise; but he was not any further off from heaven merely because he was likely to be hanged high on a gallows. Here we have once more, I fancy, a touch of Calvinism with its finger of fear. There is also that grim and stony optimism attributed to the Old Testament, with its divine favouritism for the fortunate. But though the surface of this rather superficial criticism was alien to that free will which is the creed of craftsmanship, the personal creative spirit underneath the criticism was still that of the genuine Christian craftsman. When Stevenson set about to describe Villon and his gang of ragamuffins, under the snow and gargoyles of mediaeval Paris, he carved his grotesque as carefully as a gargoyle and balanced his story as beautifully as a French ballade. He did not take opium and absinthe and then sit down to wait for nameless cosmic energies to pour into his soul from nowhere. His spirit was a spirit utterly different from the mystical scepticism common in his time. He was responsible; he was deliberate; he was thrifty; he thoroughly deserved the dignified title of a working man.

The point here is that even his chief fault as an artist was typically the fault of a craftsman. He worked too narrowly, perhaps, producing only a thing perfect of its kind out of certain materials, by a certain method and under the limitations of a certain style. The same sort of criticism that feels a French ballade to be too fixed and artificial a form, the same sort of criticism that feels a fourteenth-century Virgin to be too stiff or affected in its posture, does doubtless feel a story of Stevenson to be too meagre in its materials or too strict in its stylistic unity. As I have explained above, I do not mean to suggest that such criticism is entirely unjust or unreasonable. Stevenson's work has its faults, like other good work; and its chief deficiency does appear in a certain defect of thinness, which is produced by this instinct for hard simplification. But nobody could adequately write a history of nineteenth-century literature without noting this important departure in the direction of a closer and more vigilant verbal choice, as compared either with the cheerful laxity that went before it or the more gloomy laxity that has come since. Whatever else Stevenson stands for, he certainly stands for the idea that literature is not mere sensation or mere self-expression or mere record; but is sensation appealing to certain senses, self-expression in a certain material and record in a certain style. And in this he was certainly asserting the rights of the soul of man, as against various formless forces which some regarded as the soul of nature; the *anima mundi* of the pantheists. In this way Stevenson represented the same deep, ancient, hieratic and traditional truth that was taught to that generation by William Morris; and neither of them had the least idea what it was.

CHAPTER IX

THE PHILOSOPHY OF GESTURE

SOMETHING has been said, from time to time, in these pages about the justice or injustice of the alleged reaction against Stevenson. Little or nothing will be said about its final success or failure, and that for at least two reasons. First, that such guesses about the fashions of the future are generally quite wide of the mark, because they are founded on a very obvious fallacy. They always imply that public taste will continue to progress in its present direction; which is, in truth, the only thing we know that it will not do. A thing that wanders away in great winding curves may end anywhere; but to turn each curve into a straight line striking out into the void will be wrong in any case. This is obvious even in the tolerably short history of the modern novel. Victorians had a sort of parlour game of comparing Dickens and Thackeray; but they would have been amazed to hear modern young people declaring that Thackeray is much more sentimental than Dickens. They would have been astounded by the revival of Trollope, accompanied by the comparative neglect of Thackeray. For to the more earnest Victorians of that world, Trollope was another name for triviality. They would have felt as we should feel if we were told that Charles Garvice would outlive John Galsworthy. For a great genius may appear in almost any disguise; even in the disguise of a successful novelist. The second reason for which I wave away from me the prophet’s mantle, and decline to decide the question of the future, is that I do not think it very much matters. There are fine writers of the past as well as the present, who are read only by few; and I do not admit that the many know all about them, merely because they never knew them. I do not see why we should so blindly distrust popularity and so blindly trust posterity. But some of the conditions of survival may perhaps be generally considered.

The fame of Stevenson in the future will stand or fall with the strength or weakness of a particular argument. It was perhaps most compactly expressed by a critic who accused him of “externality.” What he called the fault of externality I should be inclined to ascribe to the fallacy of internalism. Perhaps it will be recognised better if I call it the fallacy of “psychology.” It is the notion that a serious novelist should confine himself to the inside of the human skull. Now Stevenson's fiction is full of pantomime; in the strict sense of animated action or gesture. And it really seems as if the critics, by a sort of pun or perversion of meaning, associated it with a children's pantomime; though Stevenson would have been the last to object even to that. Anyhow, this idea that intellectual fiction should concern the solitary and uncommunicative intellect is a very obvious fallacy indeed. It is sound enough to say that we can see below the surface; but not that we cannot see what is on the surface. Least of all is it sensible to say that we cannot believe in it because it has come to the surface; though it were as enormous as a spouting whale. Indeed the tone rather recalls that of some sceptics who implied that sailors ought not to think they saw the Great Sea Serpent, because it was a quarter of a mile long when they saw it. So we may well urge that psychological things are not less psychological because they come to the surface in pantomime. The argument amounts to saying that a really delicate piece of clockwork only exists when the clock stops. And indeed I suppose these critics would consider the action of a clock, in whirling its hands about, a very offensive piece of foreign gesticulation. It is like saying that a locomotive steam-engine is only a steam-engine when it is standing still; or that a building blowing up with a loud bang offers a final proof that it was not a powder-magazine.

Indeed in this respect the psychological critics are rather backward even in psychology. It generally distresses such people more to be behind the times than to be against the truth; and in this case it seems possible that they are both. The objection to their fallacy of internalism is that it is nonsense to think only of thoughts and not of words or deeds, since words are only spoken thoughts and deeds are only acted words. They are in fact the most dominant words and the most triumphant thoughts; the thoughts that emerge. But, according to "the latest modern psychology" (that infallible and immutable authority), it is even more of a mistake to treat the surface so superficially. Acts are not only the swiftest thoughts; they are even too swift to be called thoughts. They come from something more fundamental than common or conscious thinking. It is exactly our subconsciousness that appears in acts more than in words, or even thoughts. It is precisely our subconsciousness that bites its nails or twirls its moustaches, that kicks its heels or grinds its teeth. According to some, it is even our subconsciousness (that jolly companion) that occasionally cuts our mother's throat or picks our father's pocket. I do not take the latest modern psychology quite so seriously; but what element of truth there is in it is all against the tone of the latest Stevensonian, or Anti-Stevensonian, criticism. The test of fine fiction, by this or any other standard, is not whether it follows out threads of thought in silence; not whether it is subjective rather than objective or avoids any violent issue in events. It is simply whether it is right; whether the psychology is right and whether the act represents it rightly. In psychology, as in any other science, one cannot be more than right. And the most embittered critic will find it very difficult to show that Stevenson was very often wrong. What the embittered critic can show, and what will make him still more embittered, is that Stevenson expressed everything by some dramatic act. And, according to such critics, anything that is dramatic is melodramatic. The boyish brooding and smarting sentimental self-importance of David Balfour during his one quarrel with Alan Breck Stewart are described so delicately and exactly as to be worthy of George Meredith, who was so excellent with boys; they might easily be the broodings of Evan Harrington or Harry Richmond. Only in Stevenson's story they end (alas!) in the crossing of blades and Alan tossing away his sword; and that, of course, is dreadfully melodramatic. One cannot be psychological inside a sword-belt; and cerebral processes must not take place under a three-cornered hat. The interlude of Henry Durie's crippled and almost half-witted happiness, when the shadow of his brother is withdrawn for a season and his child is growing in the sun, is as pathetic and as true as any lucid interval (if such there be) in the suburban depression of the school of Gissing. Only when the fool's paradise is lost, by a random word about the possible perversion of the child, it is not to be denied that Henry Durie falls to the earth like a stone. And the thoughtful critic explains that such a man cannot have had any really internal feelings; because his internal feelings were strong enough to knock him down. The dark, drudging and almost automatic altruism of poor Herrick, amid all his tangle of treasons in The Ebb-Tide, is as sad and true as the most miserable modern could wish it to be. But then Herrick jumps into the sea with a great splash; though he ought to endear himself to the modern critic by not actually doing anything after all, even for the fruitful cult of suicide. The girl Kirstie's "gabble" of recollection and daydream and imaginary lovers' quarrels, as she goes home from church, is quite as true to the actual inner workings of the young sentimental mind as any feminine fine shade in Henry James. But then the critic cannot be expected to forgive her for giving two or three little skips as she walks along the road. No lady in Henry James ever skipped. It is because in each of these cases some outward motion makes memorable the inward mood that these critics feel that it cannot really be so very inward. It is to be noted that they do not commit themselves to a positive negation; they do not affirm that the characters in question would *not* feel as they are described as feeling; they do not even say that they would not act as they are described as acting; that David would not fight or Durie fall or Kirstie leap upon the road. They simply have a refined and delicate feeling that psychological fiction ought to deal only, or mostly, with unspoken words or uncompleted thoughts. That is a very interesting point of view; and it is just as well to have it clearly stated and understood. If Stevenson had only served as an excuse for expounding this interesting critical thesis, they might so far thank him and even constrain themselves to be reasonably polite to him. Anyhow, that seems to be their principle; and I have paused long enough upon it to show that I do not wish to ignore it. Only I would respectfully submit that their quarrel is not with Stevenson; certainly their quarrel is not merely with Stevenson. It is with Homer and the bending of the bow; it is with Hamlet and the leap into the grave; it is with Francesca dropping the book or Quixote driving at the windmill; it is with Henry putting on his crown or Anthony putting off his helmet; it is with Roland in Roncesvaux, blowing the horn and breaking the sword and holding up his glove to God. It is in all those epic energies which gave to the last story and its sequel the noble title of Songs of Action — Chansons de Geste.

Among the many unreasonable objections to the Stevensonian romance, I admit that there is a reasonable objection that may be advanced here. It may be said that he was guilty of externality in this sense; that he sometimes began with externals, in so far as he saw in some scene or other setting the suggestion or rather the provocation of romance. “Certain dank gardens cry aloud for a murder,” he very truly observed; and he was often moved to commit the murder in a vicarious literary manner. He wished sometimes, he said, to fit every such place with its appropriate legend. Superficially there is sense in this objection; but in a deeper and more sympathetic sense I do not admit that it contradicts what I have said of the deep spring of gesture or the deliberation of craftsmanship. It merely means that there was from the first, in any such work of art, the unity of mood that there always ought to be. It means that he had decided what sort of novel he would write, before he had decided what novel he would write; and this is right and inevitable. The dank garden cannot cry aloud immediately, in so many words, “In this place the sinister tutor with one eye larger than the other buried the old sailor’s cutlass with which he had killed the horribly but secretly wicked admiral who was really his brother.” No dank garden ever expressed itself with such accuracy when crying aloud to anybody; but it is none the less true that the exact shade of gloom and the exact outline of disorder may have suggested, not merely a vulgar murder, but a murder having certain special qualities of the unnatural or the strange. This does not prove that they were not *deep* feelings which thus rose up at the sight of the strange landscape and groped to find their appropriate images of doom. It only proves that the origin of the story was of the same sort as the origin of a poem. We can call Stevenson a prose poet, if we like; but we cannot call him a superficial writer, unless all poets are superficial.

I shall have occasion to remark elsewhere that there is one strictly technical sense in which Stevenson’s treatment can be called a thin or a flat treatment. It is a sense in which we might say that a certain style in decorative ironwork is light and slender, in which we might say that Whistler’s way of laying on monochrome washes was merely flat. It has its defects, even considered as a technical treatment; there is an artistic aversion to filigree; and many have maintained that Whistler’s washes were too washy. But it is essential that this criticism should not be confused with the suggestion I have just answered; the suggestion that the spiritual significance of the pattern or the picture is shallow and not deep. That is another matter and has nothing whatever to do with the question of our favourite form; and though Stevenson’s favourite form was sometimes picturesque to excess, there was nothing platitudinous or merely sentimental about the moral of the picture. On the contrary, he was very much drawn towards difficult and perplexing moral themes and liked to put puzzles to himself in the possible relations of human souls. Only, as we have seen, he liked to make the human soul come to a conclusion in some fashion and announce its conclusion in some way. Hence all the abrupt signals and bodily departures which the sensitive so much lament; hence the coin hurled through the windowpane at Durrisdeer; the banjo flung into the fire on Midway Island; the knife sticking in the mast or the diamond tossed into the river. In short, Stevenson’s stories were often problem stories, in the style of what were called problem plays. But by one crime he disqualified himself for the company of the really realistic and earnest authors of problem plays or problem novels. He had a weakness for solving the problem.

There is in this merit the other side of a fault; and a fault of which he has often been accused. He was called self-conscious; and in his work he was perhaps a little too self-conscious, as compared with some writers whose fundamental and even almost forgotten impulses were allowed to flow forth more freely, and perhaps more naturally. But these things are a matter of degree and balance; and some may hold that it is the opposite type that has now become unbalanced. Walking the world to-day, I am not sure that I do not prefer the self-conscious to the subconscious. Stevenson felt a responsibility in art which was like his vivid and almost morbid sense of responsibility in conduct. His problems of conduct were indeed sometimes a little anarchical; and his ethical decision in them perhaps a little amateurish. Like Ibsen and Bernard Shaw and many men of his time, he had not quite discovered the pressing practical necessity of having a general rule, in the absence of which the world becomes a welter of exceptions. But he was intensely interested in the right moral solution whatever it might be; even if it seemed to involve the inversion of a moral rule. And this sense of social responsibility was thoroughly sincere: even when the special pleading had to be, perhaps, a little too individual to be social. It was natural for a novelist, perhaps, to feel most fiercely and keenly the particular personal case. Anyhow, I think he generally did so; as did Loudon Dodd in *The Wrecker,* when he balanced opium and Jim. He was certainly vastly intrigued by that sort of problem. Henley called him a Catechist; but he should have said Casuist. He professed to have a defective sympathy with Catholicism; and he was still probably provincial enough to have had a horror of Jesuitry; but as a matter of fact he was more casuistical than any Jesuit. He was much less clear about the original universal dogmas of a catechism, whether it were the Shorter Catechism or the Penny Catechism. But he was much more closely concerned about the special occasion when the general sense of those doctrines seemed challenged by a special necessity. We may say, therefore, that, in life and in literature, he was essentially a conscientious person. And a conscientious person is presumably a conscious person; and sometimes perhaps a self-conscious person. He committed a great many crimes vicariously in his books; and delivered batches of corpses to his publishers in the style required of all writers of sensational romance. But his deaths had the delicacy and fine distinction of murder; and nothing of the vulgar communism of massacre. In the one episode in his stories that might be called a massacre, the butchery of the old crew of *The Flying Scud* by Wicks and his men, the whole horror of the incident is in its intense individualism. It is in the fact that the men have to be slain one by one; in the fact that the massacre is not a massacre but a series of murders. He went so far, in his correspondence, as to say cheerfully of Henry Durie's bloody trap for his brother that it is "a perfectly cold-blooded murder of which I expect and intend the reader to approve." But even here it will be noted that he intended something, and said so; seeming almost as cold-blooded as the murderer. But at least he did not commit murders without knowing it, in the manner of our more subconscious criminals and maniacs in modern fiction. He was not in sympathy with those more recent heroes who seem to seduce and betray and even stab in a sort of prolonged fit of absence of mind. There had not been established, for him or for his characters, that convenient back-stairs of unconscious mind or automatic motion, by which something that is not ourselves (and makes for unrighteousness) may escape from the cellar into the street. It was perhaps a defect; but in the whole of his life and work there is a complete absence of absence of mind.

And with this matter of responsibility, and the reliance on the will in moral matters, we come to that larger question to be considered in the last chapter. It will be in a sense a summary of what has already been said; and yet it will be necessary to say it somewhat more plainly, and in relation to large matters about which many modern people are rather too confused or too timid to talk plain. For the moment it need only be said that the importance of Stevenson largely consists in his relation with the tendency of his age. That tendency was towards a certain mysticism of materialism, of which the most dogmatic expression is what is called monism; but which can be more lightly expressed in a hundred forms, as that all life is one, or that everything is heredity and environment, or that the impersonal is higher than the personal, or that men live by the herd instinct or the soul of the hive. Our fathers called the general atmosphere fatalism; but it has now any number of more idealistic names. Stevenson felt all this, without exactly defining it; he felt it in the realism of nineteenth-century literature, in the pessimism of contemporary poetry, in the timidity of hygienic precaution, in the smugness of middle-class uniformity. And while he was entirely of that time and society, while he read all the realists, knew all the artists, doubted with the doubters and even denied with the deniers, he had that within him which could not but break out in a sort of passionate protest for more personal and poetical things. He flung out his arms with a wide and blind gesture, as one who would find wings at the moment when the world sank beneath him.

CHAPTER X

THE MORAL OF STEVENSON

EVEN those unfortunates for whom the tale of *Treasure Island,* and the tradition continued in the pirates of *Peter Pan*, form an episode that is ended, may still be asked to consider it as an episode; to consider it, or perhaps to reconsider it. Even those who hardly feel it as a piece of literature will be forced at least to accept it as a piece of history. I am not one of these dismal and disinherited persons, as the reader has perhaps by this time darkly suspected; but I am quite content for the moment to put aside the question of whether their lack of appreciation is due to the advance of literary experiment or the decline of literary taste. I ask them for the moment to consider it not as a literary masterpiece, but merely as a curiosity of literature. I ask them to pause upon the episode of the Stevensonian Buccaneers, much as they might pause upon the episode of the real Buccaneers; upon some quaint old volume about the real lives of Blackbeard and Henry Morgan. Just as there would always be some historical interest in considering how the pirate sack of Panama was related to the great affairs of the Spanish Empire or the English Navy, so there is always some philosophical interest in considering how Stevenson's romanticism was related to realism and rationalism and all the great movements of the nineteenth-century. In short, I am content for the moment if all that wonderful library of books is lumped together under the name of one of the least of them; and considered as a Footnote to History.

What was the historical meaning then of that strange splash of crimson lake on the drab age of Gissing and Howells; like a burlesque bloodstain in a detective story? To begin with, I foresee that in having stated the matter thus historically, I have laid myself open to some criticisms of the strictly historical sort. It may be said that the dates and details of Stevenson's life and time do not correspond with such a comparison; that he came too early in the Victorian progress to be really a type of the 'nineties; and that his real rivals or models were the Victorian Philistines. I do not admit this as a truth, even where I might admit part of it as a fact. An anachronism is often simply an ellipsis; and an ellipsis is often simply a necessity. The thing that a living intelligence like that of Stevenson feels is not the stale and static conventions of his world, but the way the world is going. We talk familiarly of time and tide; and, in a case like this, it is idle to remember a time without realising that it was a tide. The author of The Ebb-Tide knew well enough what tide was at that moment ebbing. It was the tide of what many regarded as Victorian virtue and all the happiness described in the three-volume novel. Stevenson knew very well that this stuffy sort of stuff was not the strong menace or promise of the coming time. He sometimes pokes fun at the Philistines; but he thrusts with furious energy at the Aesthetes. Compare for instance the way in which he speaks of Walter Besant with the way in which he speaks of Henry James, when he has to differ from them both, in that admirable letter about "art competing with life." He dismisses the successful novelist as representing something that had already failed; but he takes seriously the serious novelist, and is obviously afraid that in the long run his more subtle methods may succeed. Those more subtle methods, of the impressionists and realists and the rest, were obviously for him the real danger because they were the rising tide. In short, it may be complained that I have represented Stevenson as reacting against decadence before it existed. And I answer that this is the only real way in which a fighting man ever does successfully attack a movement; when he attacks later, he attacks too late.

Or again, it may be said that I exaggerate the novelty of work like that of Treasure Island; and that it was but a natural continuation of the historical novel of Scott or the nautical novel of Marryat. Here again I think the critic will not only miss a fine distinction, but a very sharp point. The old novels were novels; they were not boys' stories, but simply stories. The comedy of the Oldbucks and Osbaldistones is as much a solid comedy of character as that of Mr. Bennett or Miss Bates. It is only Scott's incurable and almost unconscious sense of romance that sends the comedy characters to the dangerous cliff or to the Clachan of Aberfoyle. There was no deliberate and defiant return to juvenile art out of season, such as that which is flaunted in Stevenson's letters as well as in Stevenson's story. The point can be best illustrated once more by the memory of Skelt's Juvenile Drama. It is one thing to say that a painter like Maclise or an actor like Macready may have had a style that would strike us as stagey and pompous. Maclise and Macready did not themselves think that they were stagey and pompous. It would be quite another thing to revive the actual figures of the old toy theatre, almost (in a sense) *because* they were stagey and pompous.

Stevenson obviously resurrected all this romance, not because it was the fashion of his time, like the historical painting of Maclise, but because it was *against* the growing fashion of his time; and had to be fought for as a new fashion because it was really an old fashion. He glorified an antiquated Skeltery, when he knew it was antiquated. He concentrated on a certain type of book for boys, when he knew it had long been abandoned to boys. He is often called self-conscious; and in this sense he was very self-conscious. He was as self-consciously copying an old piratical penny dreadful as the Pre-Raphaelites were self-consciously copying an old mediaeval religious picture. As they were carefully inlaying it with jewels of childlike colour, he was carefully resetting the lost jewel of his own childhood. But he knew he was not merely fashionable, just as he knew that he was not really five years old.

What then exactly did he mean? What, so to speak, did *it* mean; even if in a sense he did not mean it; or at least, did not mean to mean it? First of all it was, I think, a sort of dash for liberty; and especially a dash for happiness. It was a defence of the possibility of happiness; and a kind of answer to the question, “Can a man be happy?” But it was an answer of a curious kind, defiantly delivered in rather curious circumstances. It was the escape of a prisoner as he was led in chains from the prison of Puritanism to the prison of Pessimism. Few have understood that passage in the history of the manufacturing civilisation of northwest Europe and America. Few have realised that the gloomier sort of modern materialism often came upon a class that was only just escaping from an equally gloomy sort of spirituality. They had hardly come out of the shadow of Calvin when they came into the shadow of Schopenhauer. From the world of the worm that dieth not, they passed into a world of men dying like worms; and in the case of some of the decadents, almost exulting in being devoured by worms like Herod. Puritanism and pessimism, in short, were prisons that stood near together; and none have ever counted how many left one only for the other; or under what a covered way they passed. Stevenson’s escapade was an escape; a sort of runaway romantic evasion for the purpose of escaping both. And as a fugitive has often fled and hidden in his mother’s house, this outlaw took refuge in his old home; barricaded himself in the nursery and almost tried to creep into the dolls’-house. And he did it upon a kind of instinct, that here had dwelt definite pleasures which the Puritan could not forbid nor the pessimist deny. But it was a strange story. He had his answer to the question, “Can a man be happy?”; and it was, “Yes, before he grows to be a man.”

It is only the obvious things that are never seen; and a thing is often counted stale merely because men have been staring at it so long without seeing it. There is nothing harder to bring within a small and clear compass than generalisations about history, or even about humanity. But there is one especially evident and yet elusive in this matter of happiness. When men pause in the pursuit of happiness, seriously to picture happiness, they have always made what may be called a “primitive” picture. Men rush towards complexity; but they yearn towards simplicity. They try to be kings; but they dream of being shepherds. This is equally true whether they look back to a Golden Age or look forward to the most modern Utopia. The Golden Age is always imagined as an age free from the curse of gold. The perfect civilisation of the future is always something which many would call the higher savagery; and is conceived in the spirit that spoke of “Civilisation, its Cause and Cure.” Whether it is Arcadia of the past or Utopia of the future, it is always something simpler than the present. From the Greek or Roman poet yearning for the peace of pastoral life to the last sociologist explaining the ideal social life, this sense of a return and a resolution into elemental things is apparent. The pipe of the shepherd is always something rather plainer than the lyre of the poet; and the ideal social life is some more or less subtle form of the simple life. Of this tendency there is yet a third and perhaps a truer expression. It may be remarked that these daydreams of happiness concern rather the dawn than the day. The reactionary wishes to return to what he would call “the morning of the world.” But the revolutionist is quite equally prone to talk about waiting for the daybreak, about songs before sunrise, and about the dawn of a happier day. He does not seem to think so much about the noon of that day. And one mode in which this morning spirit is expressed is the return to the child.

Stevenson might have been asking his question a hundred years before, at the time of the first humanitarian revolt against the Puritans; when the same city of Geneva, that had seen Calvin found the religion of pessimism, saw Rousseau found the religion of optimism. If he had been in that first liberal or naturalistic movement, he would probably have felt that the best expression of the romantic movement was in the fulfilment of romantic love. Paul and Virginia, instead of Poll and Robinson Crusoe (not to mention Long John Silver), would have been the happy inhabitants of the desert island. In that honeymoon of humanity, it would have seemed quite enough that Edwin and Angelina united at last (by a dignified civil marriage by the Registrar of the Republic) would populate the world with pure and happy republicans. But that eighteenth-century Arcadia had clouded over long before Stevenson's time; and indeed he was prone to be a little too cloudy even about those of its principles which are really clear. And while the more Bohemian artists of the later time continued to claim all the liberties and more than the laxities of such a theory, they had left off pretending that it led to such felicity in practice. Indeed there has been a curious irony in this respect about the modern artists, especially the literary artists. Half the outcry against them arose, rightly or wrongly, because they insisted that their books must be repulsive in order to be realistic or sordid in order to be true. They insisted on a free hand in describing sex; and seemed to assume, in their own apologia, that to describe sex is to describe sin — and sorrow. They insisted that anything pretty must be a pretence; and never saw how sharply they were reflecting on the end of that very dance of pretty nymphs and cupids, which had brought them the licence that they liked best. In short, they seemed to make two claims; first to be free to find the perfect happiness of passion; and second, to be free to describe how exceedingly unhappy it is. In life one might do anything to follow love, because it was so very beautiful; and in art one must do anything to describe love, because it was so abominably ugly. Their own anarchical doctrines were really contradicted by their own anarchical descriptions. The house of love, in which it was necessary to take out such hospital licences for amputation and vivisection, could hardly be (as the poet said) the house of fulfilment of craving. It was certainly not the house that Rousseau and the old romantic liberals had craved. Anyhow, it was not possible for a man of Stevenson's generation to look for this light and lucid happiness in sex, or in that sense even in sentiment. It was not possible for a romantic who, perhaps born out of his due time, was living not in the age of Rousseau but in the age of Zola. Thus we find in Stevenson something like an actual avoidance of those themes of passion, that were throbbing in the new fiction all around him; an avoidance even of that normal romantic love, which is not touched at all in *Kidnapped* and touched gracefully but still lightly even in Catriona. It was not only that girls interfere with adventures. It was not only that he could not be one of those for whom a girl is the only adventure. It was also because a man living under the harsh challenge of the new realism could no longer pretend that it was an adventure which always ended well. He wished to escape into a world of more secure pleasure and perhaps of less potential pain. And this is connected with very profound truths of psychology, which have not yet been properly explored. But most men know that there is a difference between the intense momentary emotion called up by memory of the loves of youth, and the yet more instantaneous but more perfect pleasure of the memory of childhood. The former is always narrow and individual, piercing the heart like a rapier; but the latter is like a flash of lightning, for one split second revealing a whole varied landscape; it is not the memory of a particular pleasure any more than of a particular pain, but of a whole that shone with wonder. The first is only a lover remembering love; the second is like a dead man remembering life.

I once heard in a railway-train a farmer's family of the Puritan sort discussing with a Nonconformist minister the action of a boy, at the front in the Great War, who had occupied himself in hospital with carving a wooden cross and sent it home to his family. His family was pained but apologetic. Their remarks had a continual chorus of, "He didn't mean anything by it." This extraordinary state of mind intrigued me so much that I listened to the rest of the conversation; at intervals of which the minister repeated firmly that we didn't want that sort of thing; what we wanted was a living Christ. And it never seemed to occur to this reverend gentleman that he was at that moment at war with every living as well as every Christian thing; with the creative instinct, with the desire for form, with the love of family, with the impulse to send signals and messages, with humour, with pathos, with the virility of martyrdom and the vividness of exile. It was in truth the carver of the cross who was bearing witness to a living Christ and the partisan of a living Christ who was repeating a dead form. It was none the less so, because it was not a fixed shape in wood, but only a fixed shape in words. This curious incident has always remained in my memory, however, if only for its fresh and superficial humour. The image of the unconscious youth who didn't mean anything by it, who merely whittled a stick until it came by sheer ill-luck into the form of a cross, will always be a source of fruitful entertainment to the mind. The idea of the young man hacking wood about right and left in a reckless manner, and seeing theological symbols spring up on every side in spite of his most earnest efforts, has something in it of the fairy-tale. And the idea that if he had only known what was coming, nothing would have induced him to touch anything so improper and shocking, is a matter of deep indwelling joy.

And yet, strangely enough, I must in a manner apologise to the poor minister and admit that something like that fantastic suggestion may really occur. After all, there is in the world a great crowd of unconscious cross-builders or unintentional crosses. There is, running through the very framework of our houses and our furniture, a sort of pattern of crosses. There are a great many honest carpenters and joiners who make wooden crosses and don't mean anything by it. But the figure means something for all that; precisely because it is a fundamental figure, based on basic principles of balance and conflict and support. All our chairs and tables are full of crosses, of cross-bars and cross-beams; and it is probable that most of us use the furniture without feeling the significance; do not think of a table as the condition of a communion table and can sit on a chair without immediately speaking ex cathedra. And in the same fashion, the more we study active and artistic history, the more often we shall see men making thrones when they meant only to make chairs or building churches when they meant only to build houses. And in the retrospect of religious history, it seems to me that most excursions and even aberrations have only served to scrawl on a larger scale the truth of certain ancient doctrines near and necessary to man; and illustrate orthodoxy if only with awful examples. Milton was himself an example; for he told more truth than he intended, when he said that new Presbyter was but old Priest writ large. It was indeed the human need of a priest written large; and it was written very large indeed.

Now the men of Stevenson's generation, and especially the men who were as intelligent as he was, were perhaps more unconscious of the real case for these old ideas than any men who have lived before or since. Nothing was further from their thoughts than the suggestion that their artistic fancies could refer back to those antiquated and sombre dogmas about the Fall or the obscuration of the divine light by sin. Wordsworth, though he is sometimes called pantheistic, saw in the vivid pleasures of childhood what he called intimations of immortality. Stevenson admitted that he often found it difficult to get any intimations of immortality. And yet, if he could bear no witness to the Resurrection, he was continually bearing witness to the Fall. We say lightly enough of a good man that he is a Christian without knowing it. But Stevenson was a Christian theologian without knowing it. Nothing, as I say, would have surprised him or his generation more than to discover it; and it may be that some even of a younger generation are so traditional as to have missed the gradual unfolding of the truth. He would have been the first to say that such dogmas were dead and that we cannot put back the clock to the fifth century. Yet he did not explain why he was so often trying to put back his own clock to his fifth year. For the truth is that there really is no sense or meaning, in this continuous tribute of the poets to the poetry of early childhood, unless it be, as Treherne says, that the world of sin comes between us and something more beautiful or, as Wordsworth says, that we came first from God who is our home. I will not pause to distinguish here between the true doctrine of the Fall and the doctrine of depravity which the Calvinists had probably taught to Stevenson, which would alone be enough to explain his not knowing how orthodox he was. Nor will I here expound the distinction between original and acted sin, apart from the ideal of infant baptism; or the already bewildered modern sceptic would probably think I was mad. He must accept my benevolent assurance that it is rather he that is mad; or rather, through no fault of his own, mentally defective. The point is that there really is no explanation of this intense imaginative concentration on babies except a mystical explanation. The whole point of Stevenson's story is that of a man haunted by a tune, always seeking for the broken notes of a lost melody; which he himself called the note of the time-devouring nightingale. "But only children hear it right." Why?

Moreover, as I have already noted, this principle of the beatific vision of innocence was even more proved in the breach than in the observance. The rationalists and realists who were praising the adult pursuit of happiness, or ought to have been praising such a pursuit of happiness, were (and still are) mainly occupied with describing unhappiness. They only prove that free life and free love are really worse than any ascetic had ever represented them. The naturalistic philosophies did not only contradict Christianity. The naturalistic philosophies also contradicted the naturalistic novels. Their own exercise of their own right of expression was quite enough to show that the mere combination of the maturity of reason with the pleasures of passion does not in fact produce a Utopia. We need not debate here whether the Zolaists were justified in so laboriously describing horrors. If mere liberty had really led to happiness, they would have been describing happiness. It would not have been necessary for a grown man with a library of modern literature to hide himself in a twopenny toy theatre in order to be happy.

This very simple truth is probably too simple to be seen; because, like many such things, it is too large to be seen. But certainly it is still there to be seen, if any of the moderns could enlarge their minds enough to see it. The type of realism has changed since the days of Zola, just as the type of romance has changed since the days of Stevenson. But it has not answered this unanswerable distinction between the cheerful songs of innocence and the melancholy songs of experience. Of the recent literature of the rising generation, there is much that is frivolous, but uncommonly little that is joyous. Just now we are incessantly asked to rejoice in the sight of youth enjoying itself; which I for one am very ready to do; but all the readier if I can be quite certain that it is enjoying itself. And it is a curious fact that in its characteristic contemporary literature there is an almost complete absence of joy. And I think it would be true to say, in a general fashion, that it is not childish enough to be cheerful. In this connection I may be allowed once more to be at once anecdotal and allegorical. When I first saw the title of *The Green Hat* I pictured it as the top-hat of an old gentleman who had a fancy for that colour. I imagined him a strutting symbolic figure of springtime, with hair like the hawthorn and a hat like the new leaves; my mind lost itself amid tree-tops and all the antics of the April wind; I imagined him chasing his hat to elfland and the end of the world, or climbing trees to find the blue bird nesting in the green headgear. The mere idea of a green hat gave me a glimpse into that elusive element of which the blue bird was made the emblem. When I opened the book and found that the green hat was only a lady’s hat, and that the book was full of sentiments about sex, I was as blankly disappointed as a boy who has been given a dictionary instead of a book. My feelings towards the intrusive females were those of Jim Hawkins; much what he would have felt if a fashionable lady had dissuaded Squire Trelawney from going to sea. It is true that the people in the book professed to be enjoying themselves, in what appeared to be their own fashion; but they could not help me to enjoy myself, as I should have done with the only true, real and original story of the green hat. I recognised that there was wit in the work, but no fun in it; there was no stir of that deep gale of spring; but rather an accepted air of autumn; of things dancing as dead leaves dance; like the Falling Leaves in the joyful revelation of Mr. Aldous Huxley. I know all about the defence of this gloomy realism on the ground that it is real. I have known it ever since the time of Stevenson writing on Zola. But I am not talking about whether this literature is reasonable or justifiable; I am talking about whether it does in fact call up, or even try to call up, the passion of positive joy.

That is why this episode is worth noting and recalling if only as an episode; and all the more so, if it is in sharp contrast with the episodes that follow as well as the episodes that went before. I have admitted that some part of Stevenson's deliberate choice of childishness was a reaction from ill-chosen surroundings and courses of conduct in the periods of passion and of youth. But the younger writers, who boast of choosing for themselves, seem just as unsuccessful in making passion identical with pleasure; and just as unsuccessful in preserving the youthful spirit of youth. I have admitted that when he made his dash for liberty and happiness, it may have appeared that there was no other alternative but that of Puritanism or pessimism. But the new writers who are not threatened with Puritanism seem to be just as much moved to pessimism. There seems no explanation of the two tempers; except that the apostle of childhood was at least seeking pleasure where it could be found, while the apostles of youth are seeking it where it cannot be found. What awaits us after all these episodes I will not pretend to prophesy; I will only profess to hope that it may be the rebuilding of the great and neglected Christian philosophy, to which all contributions will be thankfully received, especially those of atheists and anarchists. And that is really the chief importance, both of the man who can show human nature happy in the nursery and the man who can only show it unhappy in the night-club. Both of them may be, and generally are, of the sort that would smile scornfully at the thought of calling up the old pious fables about heaven and hell. But in fact Stevenson was describing the kingdom of heaven and calling it Skelt; while Zola was describing all the kingdoms of hell and calling it real life. Neither of them get outside the iron ring of the real truth of the matter; that the one thing, however babyish, really is a picture of contentment, while in the other the only decent element is discontent.

It may be that the world will forget Stevenson, a century or so after it has forgotten all the present distinguished detractors of Stevenson. It may be quite the other way, as the poet said; it may be the world will remember Stevenson; will remember him with a start, so to speak, when everybody else has forgotten that there ever was any story in a novel. The dissolution hinted at by Sir Edmund Gosse, whereby fiction which was always a rather vague form shall become utterly formless, may have by that time dropped out of the novel all its original notion of a narrative. Mr. H. G. Wells, if he lives to delight the world so long, will be able to deliver the goods in the form of great masses of admirable analyses of economics and social conditions, without the embarrassment of having to remember at every two hundred pages or so that he has somewhere left a hero in a motor-car or a heroine in a lodging-house. Miss Dorothy Richardson may pour out those vivid inventories of the furniture and family crockery, which her subconscious self notes with the accuracy of an inventory clerk, without being pestered to tell us who owned these objects, or what was the object of owning them. The psychologists may present us with a series of subtle and fascinating states of mind, without our being morbidly curious to enquire whose mind. They in turn may yield to some other school; such as those bright and breezy Americans who call themselves Behaviourists. They declare with some warmth that there is really nothing in their minds and that they only think with their muscles; which, in the case of some thinking, we might well believe. At present the Behaviourists are on their best behaviour. But there seems no reason why this new sort of muscular Christianity should not eventually invade the novel, just as psychoanalysis did; and we shall all be able to rejoice in a new type of fiction, in which a bright thought flashes through Edwin's biceps or a vivid memory rises unbidden in the deltoid of Angelina. For it is the habit of modern psychological science to make quite sure of its fiction a long time before it is sure of its facts. But the trouble about such fiction will be that it is very much of a novelty, but not much of a novel. The passion for making patterns of loops and spirals, like a chart of currents at sea, has so far dissolved the outline of individuality that we lose all sense of what a man is, let alone what a man wants. Nameless universal forces streaming through the subconsciousness, run very truly like that dark and sacred river that wound its way through caverns measureless to man. When this process of shapelessness is complete, it is always possible that men may come upon a shape with something of a sharp surprise; like a geologist finding in featureless rocks the fossil of some wild creature, looking as if petrified in the last wild leap or on the wing. Or it is as if an antiquary, passing through halls and temples of some iconoclastic city, covered with dizzy patterns of merely mathematical beauty, were to come upon the heaving limb or lifted shoulder of some broken statue of the Greeks. In that condition it may be that the novel will again be novel. And in that condition, in that reaction, certainly no novel will serve its purpose so forcibly, or make its point so plainly, as a novel by Stevenson. The story, the first of childish and the oldest of human pleasures, will nowhere reveal its structure and its end so swiftly and simply as in the tales of Tusitala. The world's great age will in that degree begin anew; the childhood of the earth be rediscovered; for the story-teller will once more have spread his carpet in the dust; and it will really be a magic carpet.

But whether or no the world returns thus to Stevenson, whether or no it returns thus to stories, it will certainly return to something; and to something of this kind. The only thing which we can safely prophesy is the one thing which is always called impossible. Again and again we are told, by all sorts of priggish and progressive persons, that mankind cannot go back. The answer is that if mankind cannot go back, it cannot go anywhere. Every important change in history has been founded on something historic: and if the world had not again and again tried to renew its youth, it would have been dead long ago. As the poet makes his songs out of memories of first love, or the writer of fairy-tales has to play at being a child as the child plays at being a man, so every republican has looked back to the remote republics of antiquity and even the Communist talks about a primitive community of goods. The sharp return to simplicity, as the expression of the fiery thirst for happiness — that is the one recurring fact of all history; and that is the importance of Stevenson's place in literary history. Nor is there the smallest reason to suppose that the literary history of the future will in this respect be any different from the literary history of the past. On the contrary, the two or three examples of extreme change, with which the most recent days have challenged us, have very curiously confirmed this old truth in a new way. Of that it is indeed true to say that the more it changes, the more it is the same thing; and a jolly good thing too.

Fashions change; but this return to the nursery is not a fashion and it does not change. If we turn to the very latest, and we might say loudest, of literary innovators, we still find that in so far as they are saying anything, they are saying that. Let us suppose that the Stevensonian way of doing it is altogether dated and out of date; let us leave Stevenson behind in the dead past, along with such lumber as Cervantes and Balzac and Charles Dickens. If we shoot forward into the most fashionable fads and fancies, if we rush to the newest salons or listen to the most advanced lectures, we do not escape the challenge of our childhood. There is already a group, we might say a family group, of poets who consider themselves, and are generally considered, the last word in experiment and even extravagance; and who are not without real qualities of deep atmosphere and suggestion. Yet all that is really deep in the best of their work comes out of those depths of garden perspective and large rooms as seen by little children, white with the windows of the morning. The best poetry of Miss Sitwell is after all a sort of parody of A Child's Garden of Verses, decked with slightly altered adjectives that would mildly surprise the child. But the poet is as certainly groping after her own lost shadow as the child who "rose and found the shining dew on every buttercup"; and is even more ready to idealise the moving cloud of the crinoline than he who was content to say, "Whenever Aunty moves around, her dresses make a curious sound." In Miss Sitwell's version they would make a still more curious sound, the nature of which I have not the courage to conjecture. The shining dew might become the shrieking dew, or on a more moderate estimate the sniggering dew; but it would still be a long-lost child who stood bewildered in those grey meadows before the dawn. Many have complained, and perhaps justly, of the almost American modernity of the artistic ambition of these artists. They announce their message through a megaphone; they shout it through pantomime masks; they hustle and push and pick quarrels; but there is something in them, for all their efforts to advertise — or to hide it. And that something is the new form of the reaction of Stevenson; exactly as Stevenson was the new form of the reaction of Rousseau. Many have speculated on what they are really after; but what they are really after is still the same: those lost children who are themselves; lost in the deep gardens at dusk.

That is why the real story of Stevenson must end where it began; because it was to that end that he himself perpetually wandered and strove. I said at the beginning that the key to his career was put early into his hands; it was well symbolised by the paint-brush dipped in purple or prussian blue, with which he started to colour the stiff caricatures upon the cardboard of Skelt. But that paint-brush has been in other hands besides his; I remarked elsewhere that, dipped in somewhat paler hues, it has brightened the lives of many of those vague Victorian aunts whose cloudy crinolines float through the gardens of the new "Early Victorian" poetry. Neither perhaps know that, even in lingering on such things, they do but illustrate a more ancient parable and the mystery of a child set in the midst. Here, however, we may take the matter more lightly and leave it to tell its own story; but at least it is amusing to reflect that the old story of the unconsciously comic tombstone, the epitaph that was the butt of a hundred jests, is not really so far wrong after all; that there is a sort of truth concealed in that remarkable inscription, and that (leaving on one side a somewhat needless allusion to the Earl of Cork) we may repeat the epitaph with truth and even profundity: "He also painted in watercolours. For of such is the kingdom of heaven."

THE END

DO WE AGREE?

A DEBATE BETWEEN G. K. CHESTERTON and BERNARD SHAW
with
HILAIRE BELLOC
in the chair

A PREFATORY NOTE

In justice to all concerned I feel it to be my duty to state frankly that this account of a public discussion between Mr. Chesterton and Mr. Shaw is something less than a verbatim report. But with some assistance from the debaters it has been possible to save enough from oblivion to justify publication.

CECIL PALMER
London, 1928

DO WE AGREE?

MR. BELLOC: I am here to take the chair in the debate between two men whom you desire to hear more than you could possibly desire to hear me. They will debate whether they agree or do not agree. From what I know of attempts at agreement between human beings there is a prospect of a very pretty fight. When men debate agreement between nations then you may be certain a disastrous war is on the horizon. I make an exception for the League of Nations, of which I know nothing. If the League of Nations could make a war it would be the only thing it ever has made.

I do not know what Mr. Chesterton is going to say. I do not know what Mr. Shaw is going to say. If I did I would not say it for them. I vaguely gather from what I have heard that they are going to try to discover a principle: whether men should be free to possess private means, as is Mr. Shaw, as is Mr. Chesterton; or should be, like myself, an embarrassed person, a publishers' hack. I could tell them; but my mouth is shut. I am not allowed to say what I think. At any rate, they are going to debate this sort of thing. I know not what more to say They are about to debate. You are about to listen. I am about to sneer.

MR. SHAW: Mr. Belloc, and Ladies and Gentlemen. Our subject this evening, "Do We Agree?" was an inspiration of Mr. Chesterton's. Some of you might reasonably wonder, if we agree, what we are going to debate about. But I suspect that you do not really care much what we debate about provided we entertain you by talking in our characteristic manners.

The reason for this, though you may not know it — and it is my business to tell you — is that Mr. Chesterton and I are two madmen. Instead of doing honest and respectable work and behaving ourselves as ordinary citizens. we go about the world possessed by a strange gift of tongues — in my own case almost exclusively confined to the English language — uttering all sorts of extraordinary opinions for no reason whatever.

Mr. Chesterton tells and prints the most extravagant lies. He takes ordinary incidents of human life — commonplace middle-class life — and gives them a monstrous and strange and gigantic outline. He fills suburban gardens with the most impossible murders, and not only does he invent the murders but also succeeds in discovering the murderer who never committed the murders. I do very much the same sort of thing. I promulgate lies in the shape of plays; but whereas Mr. Chesterton takes events which you think ordinary and makes them gigantic and colossal to reveal their essential miraculousness, I am rather inclined to take these things in their utter commonplaceness, and yet to introduce among them outrageous ideas which scandalize the ordinary play-goer and send him away wondering whether he has been standing on his head all his life or whether I am standing on mine.

A man goes to see one of my plays and sits by his wife. Some apparently ordinary thing is said on the stage, and his wife says to him: "Aha! What do you think of that?" Two minutes later another apparently ordinary thing is said and the man turns to his wife and says to her: "Aha! What do you think of that?"

Curious, is it not, that we should go about doing these things and be tolerated and even largely admired for doing them? Of late years I might say that I have almost been reverenced for doing these things.

Obviously we are mad; and in the East we should be reverenced as madmen. The wisdom of the East says: "Let us listen to these men carefully; but let us not forget that they are madmen."

In this country they say "Let us listen to these amusing chaps. They are perfectly sane, which we obviously are not." Now there must be some reason for shewing us all this consideration. There must be some force in nature which...

(At this point the debate was interrupted by persistent knocking at the doors by ticket-holders who had, through some misunderstanding, been locked out. On the chairman's intervention the doors were opened, and order was restored Mr. Shaw then proceeded.)

Ladies and Gentlemen, I must go on because, as you see, if I don't begin to talk everybody else does. Now I was speaking of the curious respect in which mad people are held in the East and in this country. What I was leading up to is this, that it matters very little on what points they differ: they have all kinds of aberrations which rise out of their personal circumstances, out of their training out of their knowledge or ignorance. But if you listen to them carefully and find that at certain points they agree, then you have some reason for supposing that here the spirit of the age is coming through, and giving you an inspired message. Reject all the contradictory things they say and concentrate your attention on the things upon which they agree, and you may be listening to the voice of revelation.

You will do well to-night to listen attentively, because probably what is urging us to these utterances is not personal to ourselves but some conclusion to which all mankind is moving either by reason or by inspiration. The mere fact that Mr. Chesterton and 1 may agree upon any point may not at all prevent us from debating it passionately. I find that the people who fight me generally hold the very ideas I am trying to express. I do not know if it is because they resent the liberty I am taking or because they do not like the words I use or the twist of my mind; but they are the people who quarrel most with me.

You have at this moment a typical debate raging in the Press. You have a very pretty controversy going on in the Church of England between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Birmingham. I hope you have all read the admirable letter of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Everybody is pleased with that letter. It has the enormous virtue of being entirely good-humoured, of trying to make peace, of avoiding making mischief: a popular English virtue which is a credit to the English race. But it has another English quality which is a little more questionable, and that is the quality of being entirely anti-intellectual. The letter is a heartfelt appeal for ambiguity. You can imagine the Archbishop of Canterbury, if he were continuing the controversy in private, saying to the Bishop of Birmingham: "Now, my dear Barnes, let me recommend you to read that wonderful book, the Pilgrim's Progress. Read the history of the hero, Christian, no doubt a very splendid fellow, and from the literary point of view the only hero of romantic fiction resembling a real man. But he is always fighting. He is out of one trouble into another. He is leading a terrible life. How different to that great Peacemaker, Mr. Facing-Both-Ways! Mr. Facing-Both-Ways has no history. Happy is the country that has no history; and happy, you may say, is the man who has no history; and Mr. Facing-Both-Ways in The Pilgrim's Progress is that man."

Bunyan, by the way, does not even mention Mr. Facing-Both Ways' extraordinary historical feat of drafting the Twenty-seventh Article of the Church of England. There being some very troublesome people for Elizabeth to deal with — Catholics and Puritans, for instance, quarrelling about Transubstantiation — Mr. Facing-Both Ways drafted an Article in two paragraphs. The first paragraph affirmed the doctrine of Transubstantiation. The second paragraph said it was an idle superstition. Then Queen Elizabeth was able to say "Now you are all satisfied; and you must all attend the Church of England. If you don't I will send you to prison."

But I am not for one moment going to debate the doctrine of Transubstantiation. I mention it only to shew, by the controversy between the Archbishop and the Bishop, that in most debates you will find two types of mind playing with the same subject. There is one sort of mind that 1 think is my own sort. I sometimes call it the Irish mind, as distinct from the English mind. But that is only to make the English and Irish sit up and listen. Spengler talks not of Irish and English minds, but of the Greek, or Grecian mind, and the Gothic mind — the Faustian mind as he, being a German, calls it. And in this controversy you find that what is moving Bishop Barnes is a Grecian dislike of not knowing what it is he believes, and on the other side a Gothic instinctive feeling that it is perhaps just as well not to know too distinctly. I am not saying which is the better type of mind. I think on the whole both of them are pretty useful. But I always like to know what it is I am preaching. It gets me into trouble in England, where people say, "Why go into these matters? Why do you want to think so accurately and sharply?" I can only say that my head is built that way; but I protest that I do not claim any moral superiority because when I know what I mean the other people do not know what they mean, and very often do not know what I mean. And one subject on which I know what I mean is the opinion which has inevitably been growing up for the last hundred years or so, not so much an opinion as a revolt against the mis-distribution, the obviously monstrous and anomalous mis-distribution of wealth under what we call the capitalist system.

I have always, since I got clear on the subject of Socialism said, Don't put in the foreground the nationalisation of the means of production, distribution, and exchange: you will never get there if you begin with them. You have to begin with the question of the distribution of wealth.

The other day a man died and the Government took four and a half million pounds as death duty on his property. That man made all his money by the labour of men who received twenty-six shillings a week after years of qualifying for their work. Was that a reasonable distribution of wealth between them? We are all coming to the opinion that it was not reasonable. What does Mr. Chester ton think about it? I want to know, not only because of the public importance of his opinions, but because I have always followed Mr. Chesterton with extraordinary interest and enjoyment, and his assent to any view of mine is a great personal pleasure, because I am very fond of Mr. Chesterton.

Mr. Chesterton has rejected Socialism nominally, probably because it is a rather stupid word. But he is a distributist, which means today a Redistributist. He has arrived by his own path at my own position. (Laughter.) I do not see why you should laugh: I cannot imagine anything more natural.

But now comes the question upon which I will ask Mr. Chesterton whether he agrees with me or not. The moment I made up my mind that the present distribution of wealth was wrong, the peculiar constitution of my brain obliged me to find out exactly how far it was wrong and what is the right distribution. I went through all the proposals ever made and through the arguments used in justification of the existing distribution; and I found they were utterly insensate and grotesque.

Eventually I was convinced that we ought to be tolerant of any sort of crime except unequal distribution of income. In organized society the question always arises at what point are we justified in killing for the good of the community. I should answer in this way. If you take two shillings as your share and another man wants two shillings and sixpence, kill him. Similarly, if a man accepts two shillings while you have two shillings and sixpence, kill him.

On the stroke of the hour, I ask Mr. Chesterton: “Do you agree with that?”

MR. CHESTERTON: Ladies and gentlemen. The answer is in the negative. I don’t agree with it. Nor does Mr. Shaw. He does not think, any more than I do, that all the people in this hall, who have already created some confusion, should increase the confusion by killing each other and searching each other’s pockets to see whether there is half-a-crown or two shillings in them. As regards the general question, what I want to say is this: I should like to say to begin with that I have no intention of following Mr. Shaw into a discussion which would be very improper on my part on the condition of the Church of England. But since he has definitely challenged me on the point I will say — he will not agree — that Mr. Shaw is indeed a peacemaker and has reconciled both sides. For if the Arch bishop is anti-intellectual there will be nobody to pretend that the Bishop is intellectual.

VOICE: Yes he is.

MR. CHESTERTON: Now as to the much more interesting question, about a much more interesting person than Bishop Barnes — I mean Mr. Shaw — I should like to say that in a sense I can agree with him, in which case he can claim a complete victory. This is not a real controversy or debate. It is an enquiry, and I hope a profitable and interesting enquiry. Up to a point I quite agree with him, because I did start entirely by agreeing with him, as many years ago I began by being a Socialist, just as he was a Socialist. Barring some difference of age we were in the same position. We grew in beauty side by side. I will not say literally we filled one home with glee: but I do believe we have filled a fair number of homes with glee. Whether those homes included our own personal households it is for others to say. But up to a point I agreed with Mr. Shaw by being a Socialist, and I agreed upon grounds he has laid down with critical justice and lucidity, grounds which I can imagine nobody being such a fool as to deny: the distribution of property in the modern world is a monstrosity and a blasphemy. Thus I come to the important stage of the proceedings. I claim that I might agree with Mr. Shaw a step farther.

I have heard from nearly all the Socialists I have known, the phrase which Mr. Shaw has with characteristic artfulness avoided, a phrase which I think everyone will agree is common to collectivist philosophy, and the phrase is this: “that the means of production should be owned by the community.” I ask you to note that phrase because it is really upon that that the whole question turns.

Now there is a sense in which I do agree with Mr. Bernard Shaw. There is a point up to which I would agree with that formula. So far as is possible under human conditions I should desire the community — or, as we used to call it in the old English language, The Commons — to own the means of production. So far, I say, you have Mr. Bernard Shaw and me walking in fact side by side in the flowery meads... But after that, alas! a change takes place. The change is owing to Mr. Shaw’s vast superiority, to his powerful intellect. It is not my fault if he has remained young, while I have grown in comparison wrinkled and haggard, old and experienced, and acquainted with the elementary facts of human life.

Now the first thing I want to note is this. When you say the community ought to own the means of production, what do you mean? That is the whole point. There was a time when Mr. Shaw would probably have said in all sincerity that anything possessed by the State or the Government would be in fact possessed by the Commons: in other words, by the community. I do not wish to challenge Mr. Shaw about later remarks of his, but I doubt whether Mr. Shaw, in his eternal youth, still believes in democracy in that sense. I quite admit he has a more hopeful and hearty outlook in some respects, and he has even gone to the length of saying that if democracy will not do for mankind, perhaps it will do for some other creature different from mankind. He has almost proposed to invent a new animal, which might be supposed to live for 300 years. I am inclined to think that if Mr. Shaw lived for 300 years — and I heartily hope he will — I never knew a man more likely to do it — he would certainly agree with me. I would even undertake to prove it from the actual history of the last 300 years, but though I think it is probable I will not insist upon it. As a very profound philosopher has said, "You never can tell." And it may be that Mr. Shaw's immortal power of talking nonsense would survive even that 300 years and he would still be fixed in his unnatural theories in the matter.

Now I do not believe myself that Mr. Shaw thinks that the community, in the sense of that state which owns and rules, the thing that issues postage stamps and provides policemen, I do not believe he thinks that that community is now, at this moment, identical with the Commons, and I do not believe he ready thinks that in his own socialistic state it would be identical. I am glad therefore that he has sufficient disordered common sense to perceive that, as a matter of fact, when you have vast systems, however just and however reasonably controlled, indirectly, by elaborate machinery of officials and other things, you do in fact find that those who rule are the few. It may be a good thing or a bad thing, but it is not true that all the people directly control. Collectivism has put all their eggs in one basket. I do not think that Mr. Shaw believes, or that anybody believes, that 12,000,000 men, say, carry the basket, or look after the basket, or have any real distributed control over the eggs in the basket. I believe that it is controlled from the centre by a few people. They may be quite right or quite necessary. A certain limit to that sort of control any sane man will recognise as necessary: it is not the same as the Commons controlling the means of production. It is a few oligarchs or a few officials who do in fact control all the means of production.

What Mr. Shaw means is not that all the people should control the means of production, but that the product should be distributed among the vast mass of the Commons, and that is guide a different thing. It is not controlling the means of production at all. If all the citizens had simply an equal share of the income of the State they would not have any control of the capital. That is where G. K. Chesterton differs from George Bernard Shaw. I begin at the other end. I do not think that a community arranged on the principles of Distributism and on nothing else would be a perfect community. All admit that the society that we propose is more a matter of proportion and arrangement than a perfectly clear system in which all production is pooled and the result given out in wages. But what I say is this: Let us, so far as is possible in the complicated affairs of humanity, put into the hands of the Commons the control of the means of production — and real control. The man who owns a piece of land controls it in a direct and real sense. He really owns the means of production. It is the same with a man who owns a piece of machinery. He can use it or not use it. Even a man who owns his own tools or works in his own workshop, to that extent owns and controls the means of production.

But if you establish right in the middle of the State one enormous machine, if you turn the handle of that machine, and somebody, who must be an official, and therefore a ruler, distributes to everybody equally the food or whatever else is produced by that machine, no single one of any of these people receiving more than any other single person, but all equal fragments: that fulfils a definite ideal of equality, yet no single one of those citizens has any control over the means of production. They have no control whatever — unless you think that the prospect of voting about once every five years for Mr. Vanboodle — then a Socialist member — with the prospect that he will or will not make a promise to a political assembly or that he will or will not promise to ask a certain question which may or may not be answered — unless you think that by this means they possess control.

I have used the metaphor of the Collectivists of having all your eggs in one basket. Now there are men whom we are pleased to call bad eggs. They are not all of them in politics. On the other hand there are men who deserve the encomium of “good egg.” There are, in other words, a number of good men and a number of bad men scattered among the commonwealth.

To put the matter shortly, I might say that all this theory of absolutely equal mechanical distribution depends upon a sort of use of the passive mood. It is easy enough to say Property should be distributed, but who is, as it were, the subject of the verb? Who or what is to distribute? Now it is based on the idea that the central power which condescends to distribute will be permanently just, wise, sane, and representative of the conscience of the community which has created it.

That is what we doubt. We say there ought to be in the world a great mass of scattered powers, privileges, limits, points of resistance, so that the mass of the Commons may resist tyranny. And we say that there is a permanent possibility of that central direction, however much it may have been appointed to distribute money equally, becoming a tyranny. I do not think it would be difficult to suggest a way in which it could happen. As soon as any particular mob of people are behaving in some way which the governing group chooses to regard as anti-civic, supplies could be cut off easily with the approval of this governing group. You have only to call someone by some name like Bolshevist or Papist. You have only to tie some label on a set of people and the community will contentedly see these people starved into surrender.

We say the method to be adopted is the other method. We admit, frankly, that our method is in a sense imperfect, and only in that sense illogical. It is imperfect, or illogical, because it corresponds to the variety and differences of human life. Mr. Shaw is making abstract diagrams of triangles, squares. and circles; we are trying to paint a portrait, the portrait of a man. We are trying to make our lines and colours follow the characteristics of the real object. Man desires certain things. He likes a certain amount of liberty, certain kinds of ownership, certain kinds of local affection, and won’t be happy without them.

There are a great many other things that might be said, but I think it will be clearer if I repeat some of the things we have already said.

I do in that sense accept the propositions that the community should own the means of production, but I say that the Commons should own the means of production, and the only way to do that is to keep actual hold upon land. Mr. Bernard Shaw proposes to distribute wealth. We propose to distribute power.

MR. SHAW: I cannot say that Mr. Chesterton has succeeded in forcing a difference of opinion on me. There are, I suppose, at least some people in this room who have heard me orating on this platform at lectures of the Fabian Society, and they must have been considerably amused at Mr. Chesterton’s attempt to impress upon me what income is. My main activity as an economist of late has been to try to concentrate the attention of my party on the fact not only that they must distribute income, but that there is nothing else to distribute.

We must be perfectly clear as to what capital is. I will tell you. Capital is spare money. And, of course, spare money means spare food. If I happen to have more of the means of subsistence than I can use, I may take that part that is unconsumed, and say to another man: "Let me feed you whilst you produce some kind of contraption that will facilitate my work in future." But when the man has produced it for me, the capital has all gone: there is nothing left for me or him to eat. If he has made me a spade I cannot eat that spade.

I have said I may employ my spare subsistence in this way; but I must employ it so because it will not keep: if nobody eats it, it will go rotten. The only thing to be done with it is to have it promptly consumed. All that remains of it then is a figure in a ledger. Some of my capital was employed in the late war; and this country has still my name written down as the proprietor of the capital they blew to pieces in that war.

Having said that for your instruction, let us come down to facts. Mr. Chesterton has formed the Distributist League which organized this meeting. What was the very first thing the League said must be done? It said the coal-mines must be nationalized. Instead of saying that the miner's means of production must he made his own property, it was forced to advocate making national property of the coal mines. These coal-mines, when nationalized, will not be managed by the House of Commons: if they were you would very soon have no coal. But neither will they be managed by the miners. If you ask the man working in the mine to manage the mine he will say, "Not me, governor! That is your job."

I would like Mr. Chesterton to consider what he understands by the means of production. He has spoken of them in rather a nineteenth-century manner. He has been talking as though the means of production were machines. I submit to you that the real means of production in this country are men and women, and that consequently you always have the maximum control of the individual over the means of production, because it means self-control over his own person. But he must surrender that control to the manager of the mine because he does not know how to manage it himself. Under the present capitalistic system he has to surrender it to the manager appointed by the proprietors of the mine. Under Socialism he would have to surrender it to the manager appointed by the Coalmaster-General. That would not prevent the product of the mine being equally distributed among the people.

There is no difficulty here. In a sense Mr. Chesterton really does not disagree with me in this matter, since he does see that in the matter of fuel in this country you have to come to nationalization. Fuel must be controlled equally for the benefit of all the people. Since we agreed upon that, I am not disposed to argue the matter further. Now that Mr. Chesterton agreed that the coal-mines will have to be nationalized he will be led by the same pressure of facts to agree to the nationalization of everything else.

I have to allow for the pressure of facts because, as a playwright, I think of all problems in terms of actual men and women. Mr. Chesterton lets himself idealize them sometimes as virtuous peasant proprietors and self-managing petty capitalists.

The capitalist and the landlord have their own particular ways of robbing the poor; but their legal rights are quite different. It is a very direct way on the part of the landlord. He may do exactly what he likes with the land he owns. If I own a large part of Scotland I can turn the people off the land practically into the sea, or across the sea. I can take women in child-bearing and throw them into the snow and leave them there. That has been done. I can do it for no better reason than I think it is better to shoot deer on the land than allow people to live on it. They might frighten the deer.

But now compare that with the ownership of my umbrella. As a matter of fact the umbrella I have to-night belongs to my wife; but I think she will permit me to call it mine for the purpose of the debate. Now I have a very limited legal right to the use of that umbrella. I cannot do as I like with it. For instance, certain passages in Mr. Chesterton's speech tempted me to get up and smite him over the head with my umbrella. I may presently feel inclined to smite Mr. Belloc. But should I abuse my right to do what I like with my property — with my umbrella — in this way I should soon be made aware — possibly by Mr. Belloc's fist — that I cannot treat my umbrella as my own property in the way in which a landlord can treat his land. I want to destroy ownership in order that possession and enjoyment may be raised to the highest point in every section of the community. That, I think, is perfectly simple.

There are points on which a landlord, even a Scottish landlord, and his tenant the crofter entirely agree. The landlord objects to being shot at sight. The Irish landlord used to object. His tenants sometimes took no notice of his objection, but all the same they had a very strong objection to being shot themselves. You have no objection to a State law being carried out vigorously that people shall not shoot one another. There is no difficulty in modern civilized States in having it carried out. If you could once convince the people that inequality of income is a greater social danger than murder, very few people would want to continue to commit it; and the State could suppress it with the assent of the community generally. We are always adding fresh crimes to the calendar. Why not enact that no person shall live in this community without pulling his weight in the social boat, without producing more than he consumes — because you have to provide for the accumulation of spare money as capital — who does not replace by his own labour what he takes out of the community, who attempts to live idly, as men are proud to live nowadays. Is there any greater difficulty in treating such a parasite as a malefactor, than in treating a murderer as a malefactor?

Having said that much about the property part of the business, 1 think I have succeeded in establishing that Mr. Chesterton does not disagree with me. I should like to say I do not believe in Democracy. I do believe in Catholicism; but I hold that the Irish Episcopal Protestant Church, of which I was baptized a member, takes the name of Catholicism in vain; that the Roman Church has also taken it in vain; and so with the Greek Church and the rest. My Catholicism is really catholic Catholicism: that is what I believe in, as apart from this voting business and democracy. Does Mr. Chesterton agree with me on that?

MR. CHESTERTON: Among the bewildering welter of fallacies which Mr. Shaw has just given us, I prefer to deal first with the simplest. When Mr. Shaw refrains from hitting me over the head with his umbrella, the real reason — apart from his real kindness of heart, which makes him tolerant of the humblest of the creatures of God — is not because he does not own his umbrella, but because he does not own my head. As I am still in possession of that imperfect organ, I will proceed to use it to the confutation of some of his other fallacies.

I should like to say now what I ought perhaps to have said earlier in the evening, that we are enormously grateful to Mr. Shaw for his characteristic generosity in consenting to debate with a humble movement like our own. I am so conscious of that condescension on his part that I should feel it a very unfair return to ask him to read any of our potty little literature or cast his eye over our little weekly paper or become conscious of the facts we have stated a thousand times. One of these facts, with which every person who knows us is familiar, is our position with regard to the coal question. We have said again and again that in our human state of society there must be a class of things called exceptions. We admit that upon the whole in the very peculiar case of coal it is desirable and about the best way out of the difficulty that it should be controlled by the officials of the State, just in the same way as postage stamps are controlled. No one says anything else about postage stamps. I cannot imagine that anyone wants to have his own postage stamps, of perhaps more picturesque design and varied colours. I can assure you that Distributists are perfectly sensible and sane people, and they have always recognized that there are institutions in the State in which it is very difficult to apply the principle of individual property, and that one of these cases is the discovery under the earth of valuable minerals. Socialists are not alone in believing this. Charles I, who, I suppose, could not be called a Socialist, pointed out that certain kinds of minerals ought to belong to the State, that is, to the Commons. We have said over and over again that we support the nationalization of the coal-mines, not as a general example of Distribution but as a common-sense admission of an exception. The reason why we make it an exception is because it is not very easy to see how the healthy principle of personal ownership can be applied. If it could we should apply it with the greatest pleasure. We consider personal ownership infinitely more healthy. If there were a way in which a miner could mark out one particular piece of coal and say, “This is mine, and I am proud of it,” we should have made an enormous improvement upon State management. There are cases in which it is very difficult to apply the principle, and that is one of them. It is the reverse of the truth for Mr. Shaw to say that the logic of that fact will lead me to the application of the same principle to other cases, like the ownership of the land. One could not illustrate it better than by the case of coal. It may be true for all I know that if you ask a miner if he would like to manage the mine he would say, “I do not want to manage it; it is for my betters to manage it.” I had not noticed that meek and simple manner among miners. I have even heard complaints of the opposite temper in that body. I defy Mr. Shaw to say if you went to the Irish farmers, or the French farmers, or the Serbian or the Dutch farmers, or any of the millions of peasant owners throughout the world, I defy him to say if you went to the farmer and said, “Who controls these farms?’” he would say, “It is not for the likes of me to control a farm.” Mr.

Shaw knows perfectly well it is nonsense to suggest that peasants would talk that way anywhere. It is part of his complaints against peasants that they claim personal possessions. I am not likely to be led to the denial of property in land, for I know ordinary normal people who feel property in land to be normal. I fully agree with Mr. Shaw, and speak as strongly as he would speak, of the abomination and detestable foulness and sin of landlords who drove poor people from their land in Scotland and elsewhere. It is quite true that men in possession of land have committed these crimes; but I do not see why wicked officials under a socialistic state could not commit these crimes. But that has nothing to do with the principle of ownership in land. In fact these very Highland crofters, these very people thus abominably outraged and oppressed, if you asked them what they want would probably say, "I want to own my own croft; I want to own my own land."

Mr. Shaw's dislike of the landlord is not so much a denial of the right to private property. not so much that he owns the land, but that the landlord has swallowed up private property. In the face of these facts of millions and millions of ordinary human beings who have private property, who know what it is like to own property, I must confess that I am not overwhelmed and crushed by Mr. Shaw's claim that he knows all about men and women as they really are. I think Mr. Shaw knows something about certain kinds of men and women; though he sometimes makes them a little more amusing than they really are. But I cannot agree with his discovery that peasants do not like peasant property, because I know the reverse is the fact.

Then we come to the general point he raised about the State. He raised a very interesting question. He said that after all the State does command respect, that we all do accept laws even though they are issued by an official group. Up to a point I willingly accept his argument. The Distributist is certainly not an anarchist. He does not believe it would be a good thing if there were no such laws. But the reason why most of these laws are accepted is because they correspond with the common conscience of mankind. Mr. Shaw and Bishop Barnes might think it would be an inadequate way of explaining it, but we might call attention to an Hebraic code called the Ten Commandments. They do, I think, correspond pretty roughly to the moral code of every religion that is at all sane. These all reverence certain ideas about "Thou shalt not kill." They all have a reverence for the commandment which says, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s goods.” They reverence the idea that you must not covet his house or his ox or his ass. It should be noted, too, that besides forbidding us to covet our neighbour’s property, this commandment also implies that every man has a right to own some property.

MR. SHAW: I now want to ask Mr. Chesterton why he insists, on the point about the nationalization of the coal-mines — on which he agrees with me — that they are an exception. Are they an exception? In what way are the coal-mines an exception? What is the fundamental reason why you must nationalize your coal-mine? The reason is this. If you will go up to the constituency of Mr. Sidney Webb, to the Sunderland coast, you will be able to pick up coal for nothing, absolutely nothing at all. You see people doing it there. You take a perambulator, or barrow, or simple sack, and when the tide goes out you go out on the foreshore and pick up excellent coal. If you go to other parts of England, like Whitehaven, you will find you have to go through workings driven out under the sea, which took 20 years to make, 20 years continual expenditure of capital before coal could be touched, where men going down the shaft have to travel sometimes two or three miles to their work. That is the reason at bottom why you cannot distribute your coal mine. The reason you have to pay such monstrous prices for your coal is they are fixed by the cost of making the submarine mines. People who have mines like the Sunderland foreshore naturally make colossal fortunes. Everyone can see at once that in order to have any kind of equable dealing in coal, the only way is to charge the citizens the average cost for the total national supply. You cannot average the cost by putting your eggs into different baskets. Now this is not the exception: it is the rule. You have exactly the same difference in the case of the land. You have land worth absolutely nothing at all and land worth a million an acre or more. And the acre worth more than a million and the acre worth nothing are within half-an-hour’s drive in a taxi.

You cannot say that the coal-mine is an exception. The coal-mine is only one instance. Mr. Chesterton in arriving at the necessity for the nationalization of the coal-mines has started on his journey towards the nationalization of all the industries. If he goes on to the land, and from the land to the factory, and from there to every other industrial department, he will find that every successive case is an exception; and eventually he will have to say to himself: “I think it will be better to call nationalization the rule rather than the exception.”

I must deny that I ever said that the coal-miner says he wants to be ruled by his betters. I may not be a democrat; but I am not a snob. Intellectually I am a snob, and you will admit that I have good ground for that. Socially I am not a snob. There is no question of betters at all in the matter. The manager is not better than the executant, nor the executant better than the manager. Both are equally necessary and equally honourable. But if you ask the executant to manage he will refuse on the ground that it is not his job; and vice versa.

Mr. Chesterton says he does not see why State officials under a system which recognises nationalization of land should not act as the old landlords acted. I should say, in the first place, they won't have the power. A State official does what he is instructed to do and paid to do, just as a landlord's agent does; and there is no more danger of the official making himself a landlord than there is now of the agent making himself one.

As to the instinct of owning — and you have it widely in the country — you have not got it in the towns. People are content to live in houses they do not own: when they possess them they often find them a great nuisance. But you must not conclude that because a miner would refuse to manage a mine a farmer will refuse to manage his farm. The farmer is himself a manager.

How does this wonderful system of peasant proprietorship work? Do you realise that it has to be broken up every day? The reason is that when a man owning a farm has a family, each son, when the farmer dies, has a right to an equal part of the land. They find that this arrangement is entirely impossible, and they have to make some other arrangement, and some of the sons have to go off into the towns to work. It is unthinkable that all could remain on the land: you cannot split up the land and give every person a bit of property.

I have stolen two minutes from Mr. Chesterton, and I apologise.

MR. CHESTERTON: I am sure Mr. Shaw is very welcome to as many minutes as I can offer him, or anything else, for his kindness in entertaining us this evening. It is rather late now and there is not much time left for me. He has been rather slow in discovering what Distributism is and what the whole question is about. If this were the beginning of the discussion I could do over our system completely. I could tell him exactly what we think about property in towns. It is absurd to say it does not exist.

In rural ownership different problems have to be faced. We are not cutting a thing up into mathematical squares. We are trying to deal with human beings, creatures quite outside the purview of Mr. Shaw and his political philosophy. We know town people are a little different from country people; business of one kind is different from business of another kind; difficulties arise about family, and all the rest of it. We show man's irrepressible desire to own property and because some landlords have been cruel, it is no use talking of abolishing, denying, and destroying property, saying no one shall have any property at all. It is characteristic of his school, of his age. The morality he represents is above all the morality of negations. Just as it says you must not drink wine at all as the only solution to a few people drinking too much: just as it would say you must not touch meat or smoke tobacco at all. Let us always remember, therefore, that when Mr. Shaw says he can persuade all men to give up the sentiment of private property, it is in exactly the same hopeful spirit that he says he will get all of you to give up meat, tobacco, beer, and a vast number of other things. He will not do anything of the sort and I suspect he himself suspects by this time that he will not do it. It is quite false to say you must have a centralised machinery, even in towns. It is quite false to say that all forces must be used, as they are in monopolies, from the centre. It is absurd to say that because the wind is a central thing you cannot separate windmills. How am I to explain all that in five minutes? I could go through a vast number of fallacies into which he has fallen. He said, ironically, he would like to see me go down a mine. I have no difficulty in imagining myself sinking in such a fashion in any geological deposit. I really should like to see him doing work on a farm, because he would find out about five hundred pieces of nonsense he has been speaking to be the nonsense they are.

It is absolutely fallacious to suggest that there is some sort of difficulty in peasantries whereby they are bound to disappear. The answer to that is that they have not disappeared. It is part of the very case against peasantry, among those who do not like them, that they are antiquated, covered with hoary superstition. Why have they remained through all these centuries, if they must immediately break up and become impossible? There is an answer to all that and I am quite prepared to give it at some greater length than five minutes. But at no time did I say that we must make the whole community a community of agricultural peasants. It is absurd. What I said was that a desire for property which is universal, everywhere, does appear in a perfect and working example in the ownership of land. It only remains for me to say one thing. Mr. Shaw said, in reference to the State owning the means of production, that men and women are the only means of production. I quite accept the parallel of the phrase. His proposition is that the government, the officials of the State, should own the men and women: in other words that the men and women should be slaves.

MR. BELLOC: I was told when I accepted this onerous office that I was to sum up. I shall do nothing of the sort. In a very few years from now this debate will be antiquated. I will now recite you a poem:

"Our civilization Is built upon coal. Let us chant in rotation Our civilization That lump of damnation Without any soul, Our civilization Is built upon coal.

"In a very few years, It will float upon oil. Then give three hearty cheers, In a very few years We shall mop up our tears And have done with our toil. In a very few years It will float upon oil."

In I do not know how many years — five, ten, twenty — this debate will be as antiquated as crinolines are. I am surprised that neither of the two speakers pointed out that one of three things is going to happen. One of three things: not one of two. It is always one of three things. This industrial civilization which, thank God, oppresses only the small part of the world in which we are most inextricably bound up, will break down and therefore end from its monstrous wickedness, folly, ineptitude, leading to a restoration of sane, ordinary human affairs, complicated but based as a whole upon the freedom of the citizens. Or it will break down and lead to nothing but a desert. Or it will lead the mass of men to become contented slaves, with a few rich men controlling them. Take your choice. You will all be dead before any of the three things comes off. One of the three things is going to happen, or a mixture of two, or possibly a mixture of the three combined.

THE THING

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INTRODUCTION

IT will be naturally objected to the publication of these papers that they are ephemeral and that they are controversial. In other words, the normal critic will at once dismiss them as too frivolous and dislike them as too serious. The rather one-sided truce of good taste, touching all religious matters, which prevailed until a short time ago, has now given place to a rather one-sided war. But the truce can still be invoked, as such terrorism of taste generally is invoked, against the minority. We all know the dear old Conservative colonel who swears himself red in the face that he is not going to talk politics, but that damning to hell all those bloody blasted Socialists is not politics. We all have a kindly feeling for the dear old lady, living at Bath or Cheltenham, who would not dream of talking uncharitably about anybody, but who does certainly think the Dissenters are too dreadful or that Irish servants are really impossible. It is in the spirit of these two very admirable persons that the controversy is now conducted in the Press on behalf of a Progressive Faith and a Broad and Brotherly Religion. So long as the writer employs vast and universal gestures of fellowship and hospitality to all those who are ready to abandon their religious beliefs, he is allowed to be as rude as he likes to all those who venture to retain them. The Dean of St. Paul’s permits himself genially to call the Catholic Church a treacherous and bloody corporation; Mr. H. G. Wells is allowed to compare the Blessed Trinity to an undignified dance; the Bishop of Birmingham to compare the Blessed Sacrament to a barbarous blood-feast. It is felt that phrases like these cannot ruffle that human peace and harmony which all such humanitarians desire; there is nothing in THESE expressions that could possibly interfere with brotherhood and the sympathy that is the bond of society. We may be sure of this, for we have the word of the writers themselves that their whole aim is to generate an atmosphere of liberality and love. If, therefore, any unlucky interruption mars the harmony of the occasion, if it is really impossible for these fraternal festivities to pass off without some silly disturbance, or somebody making a scene, it is obvious that the blame must lie with a few irritable and irritating individuals, who cannot accept these descriptions of the Trinity and the Sacrament and the Church as soothing their feelings or satisfying their ideas.

It is explained very clearly in all such statements that they are accepted by all intelligent people except those who do not accept them. But as I myself, in my political experience, have ventured to doubt the right of the Tory colonel to curse his political opponents and say it is not politics, or of the lady to love everybody and loathe Irishmen, I have the same difficulty in admitting the right of the most liberal and large-minded Christian to see good in all religions and nothing but evil in mine. But I know that to publish replies to this effect, particularly direct replies given in real controversy, will be regarded by many as a provocation and an impertinence.

Well, I must in this matter confess to being so old-fashioned as to feel something like a point of honour. I think I may say that I am normally of the sort to be sociable and get on easily with my fellows; I am not so much disposed to quarrel as to argue; and I value more than I can easily say the generally genial relations I have kept with those who differ from me merely in argument. I am very fond of England even as it is, quite apart from what it was or might be; I have a number of popular tastes, from detective stories to the defence of public-houses; I have been on many occasions on the side of the majority, as for instance in the propaganda of English patriotism during the Great War. I could even find in these sympathies a sufficient material for popular appeals; and, in a more practical sense, I should enjoy nothing more than always writing detective stories, except always reading them. But if in this much too lucky and even lazy existence I find that my co-religionists are being pelted with insults for saying that their religion is right, it would ill become me not to put myself in the way of being insulted. Many of them have had far too hard a life, and I have had far too easy a life, for me not to count it a privilege to be the object of the same curious controversial methods. If the Dean of St. Paul’s really does believe, as he most undoubtedly does say, that the most devout and devoted rulers of the Catholic Church, when they accepted (realistically and even reluctantly) the fact of a modern miracle, were engaged in a “lucrative imposture,” I should very much prefer to believe that he accuses me, along with better men than myself, of becoming an impostor merely for filthy lucre. If the word “Jesuit” is still to be used as synonymous with the word “liar,” I should prefer that the same simple translation should apply to the word “Journalist,” of which it is much more often true. If the Dean accuses Catholics as Catholics of desiring innocent men to die in prison (as he does), I should much prefer that he should cast me for some part in that terrific and murderous melodrama; it might in any case be material for a detective story. In short, it is precisely because I do sympathise and agree with my Protestant and agnostic fellow countrymen, on about ninety-nine subjects out of a hundred, that I do feel it a point of honour not to avoid their accusations on these points, if they really have such accusations to bring. I am very sorry if this little book of mine seems to be controversial on subjects about which everybody is allowed to be controversial except ourselves. But I am afraid there is no help for it; and if I assure the reader that I have tried to start putting it together in an unimpaired spirit of charity, it is always possible that the charity may be as one-sided as the controversy. Anyhow, it represents my attitude towards this controversy; and it is quite possible that everything is wrong about it, except that it is right.

THE SCEPTIC AS A CRITIC

IT takes three to make a quarrel. There is needed a peacemaker. The full potentialities of human fury cannot be reached until a friend of both parties tactfully intervenes. I feel myself to be in some such position in the recent American debate about Mr. Mencken's MERCURY and the Puritans; and I admit it at the beginning with an embarrassment not untinged with terror. I know that the umpire may be torn in pieces. I know that the self-appointed umpire ought to be torn in pieces. I know, above all, that this is especially the case in anything which in any way involves international relations. Perhaps the only sound criticism is self-criticism. Perhaps this is even more true of nations than of men. And I can quite well understand that many Americans would accept suggestions from their fellow countrymen which they would rightly refuse from a foreigner. I can only plead that I have endeavoured to carry out the excellent patriotic principle of "See England First" in the equally patriotic paraphrase of "Criticize England First." I have been engaged upon it long enough to be quite well aware that there are evils present in England that are relatively absent from America; and none more conspicuously absent, as Mr. Belloc has pointed out to the surprise of many, than the real, servile, superstitious, and mystical adoration of Money.

But what makes me so objectionable on the present occasion is that I feel a considerable sympathy with both sides. This offensive attitude I will endeavour to disguise, as far as possible, by tactfully distributed abuse of such things as I really think are abuses, and a gracefully simulated disgust with this or that part of each controversial case. But the plain truth is, that if I were an American, I should very frequently rejoice at the AMERICAN MERCURY's scoring off somebody or something; nor would my modest fireside be entirely without mild rejoicings when the AMERICAN MERCURY was scored off. But I do definitely think that both sides, and perhaps especially the iconoclastic side, need what the whole modern world needs — a fixed spiritual standard even for their own intellectual purposes. I might express it by saying that I am very fond of revolutionists, but not very fond of nihilists. For nihilists, as their name implies, have nothing to revolt about.

On this side of the matter there is little to be added to the admirably sane, subtle, and penetrating article by Mr. T. S. Eliot;* especially that vital sentence in it in which he tells Professor Irving Babbitt (who admits the need of enthusiasm) that we cannot have an enthusiasm for having an enthusiasm. I think I know, incidentally, what we must have. Professor Babbitt is a very learned man; and I myself have little Latin and less Greek. But I know enough Greek to know the meaning of the second syllable of "enthusiasm," and I know it to be the key to this and every other discussion.

Let me take two examples, touching my points of agreement with the two sides. I heartily admire Mr. Mencken, not only for his vivacity and wit, but for his vehemence and sometimes for his violence. I warmly applaud him for his scorn and detestation of Service; and I think he was stating a historical fact when he said, as quoted in THE FORUM: "When a gang of real estate agents, bond salesmen, and automobile dealers gets together to sob for Service, it takes no Freudian to surmise that someone is about to be swindled." I do not see why he should not call a spade a spade and a swindler a swindler. I do not blame him for using vulgar words for vulgar things. But I do remark upon two ways in which the fact of his philosophy being negative makes his criticism almost shallow. First of all, it is obvious that such a satire is entirely meaningless unless swindling is a sin. And it is equally obvious that we are instantly swallowed up in the abysses of "moralism" and "religionism," if it is a sin. And the second point, if less obvious, is equally important — that his healthy instinct against greasy hypocrisy does not really enlighten him about the heart of that hypocrisy.

What is the matter with the cult of Service is that, like so many modern notions, it is an idolatry of the intermediate, to the oblivion of the ultimate. It is like the jargon of the idiots who talk about Efficiency without any criticism of Effect. The sin of Service is the sin of Satan: that of trying to be first where it can only be second. A word like Service has stolen the sacred capital letter from the thing which it was once supposed to serve. There is a sense in serving God, and an even more disputed sense in serving man; but there is no sense in serving Service. To serve God is at least to serve an ideal being. Even if he were an imaginary being, he would still be an ideal being. That ideal has definite and even dogmatic attributes — truth, justice, pity, purity, and the rest. To serve it, however imperfectly, is to serve a particular concept of perfection. But the man who rushes down the street waving his arms and wanting something or somebody to serve, will probably fall into the first bucket-shop or den of thieves and usurers, and be found industriously serving THEM. There arises the horrible idea that industry, reliability, punctuality, and business activity are good things; that mere readiness to serve the powers of this world is a Christian virtue. That is the case against Service, as distinct from the curse against Service, so heartily and inspiringly hurled by Mr. Mencken. But the serious case cannot be stated without once more raising the real question of whether mankind ought to serve anything; and of whether they had not better try to define what they intend to serve. All these silly words like Service and Efficiency and Practicality and the rest fail because they worship the means and not the end. But it all comes back to whether we do propose to worship the end; and preferably the right end.

Two other characteristic passages from Mr. Mencken will serve to show more sharply this curious sense in which he misses his own point. On the one hand, he appears to state most positively the purely personal and subjective nature of criticism; he makes it individual and almost irresponsible. "The critic is first and last simply trying to express himself; he is trying to achieve thereby for his own inner ego the grateful feeling of a function performed, a tension relieved, a katharsis attained, which Wagner achieved when he wrote DIE WALKURIE, and a hen achieves every time she lays an egg." That is all consistent enough as far as it goes; but unfortunately Mr. Mencken appears to go on to something quite inconsistent with it. According to the quotation, he afterwards bursts into a song of triumph because there is now in America not only criticism, but controversy. "To-day for the first time in years there is strife in American criticism... ears are bitten off, noses are bloodied. There are wallops both above and below the belt."

Now, there may be something in his case for controversy; but it is quite inconsistent with his case for creative self-expression. If the critic produces the criticism ONLY to please himself; it is entirely irrelevant that it does not please somebody else. The somebody else has a perfect right to say the exact opposite to please himself, and be perfectly satisfied with himself. But they cannot controvert because they cannot compare. They cannot compare because there is no common standard of comparison. Neither I nor anybody else can have a controversy about literature with Mr. Mencken, because there is no way of criticizing the criticism, except by asking whether the critic is satisfied. And there the debate ends, at the beginning: for nobody can doubt that Mr. Mencken is satisfied.

But not to make Mr. Mencken a mere victim of the ARGUMENTUM AD HOMINEM, I will make the experiment in a viler body and offer myself for dissection. I daresay a great deal of the criticism I write really is moved by a mood of self-expression; and certainly it is true enough that there is a satisfaction in self-expression. I can take something or other about which I have definite feelings — as, for instance, the philosophy of Mr. Dreiser, which has been mentioned more than once in this debate. I can achieve for my own inner ego the grateful feeling of writing as follows:

"He describes a world which appears to be a dull and discolouring illusion of indigestion, not bright enough to be called a nightmare; smelly, but not even stinking with any strength; smelling of the stale gas of ignorant chemical experiments by dirty, secretive schoolboys — the sort of boys who torture cats in corners; spineless and spiritless like a broken-backed worm; loathsomely slow and laborious like an endless slug; despairing, but not with dignity; blaspheming, but not with courage; without wit without will, without laughter or uplifting of the heart; too old to die, too deaf to leave off talking, too blind to stop, too stupid to start afresh, too dead to be killed, and incapable even of being damned, since in all its weary centuries it has not reached the age of reason."

That is what I feel about it; and it certainly gives me pleasure to relieve my feelings. I have got it off my chest. I have attained a katharsis. I have laid an egg. I have produced a criticism, satisfying all Mr. Mencken's definitions of the critic. I have performed a function. I feel better, thank you.

But what influence my feelings can be expected to have on Mr. Dreiser, or anybody who does not admit my standards of truth and falsehood, I do not quite see. Mr. Dreiser can hardly be expected to say that his chemistry is quackery, as I think it — quackery without the liveliness we might reasonably expect from quacks. He does not think fatalism base and servile, as I do; he does not think free will the highest truth about humanity, as I do. He does not believe that despair is itself a sin, and perhaps the worst of sins, as Catholics do. He does not think blasphemy the smallest and silliest sort of pride, as even pagans do. He naturally does not think his own picture of life a false picture, resembling real life about as much as a wilderness of linoleum would resemble the land of all the living flowers, as I do. But he would not think it falser for being like a wilderness. He would probably admit that it was dreary, but think it correct to be dreary. He would probably own that he was hopeless, but not see any harm in being hopeless. What I advance as accusations, he would very probably accept as compliments.

Under these circumstances, I do not quite see how I, or anyone with my views, could have a CONTROVERSY with Mr. Dreiser. There does not seem to be any way in which I could prove him wrong, because he does not accept my view of what is wrong. There does not seem to be any way in which he could prove himself right, because I do not share his notions of what is right. We might, indeed, meet in the street and fall on each other; and while I believe we are both heavy men, I doubt not that he is the more formidable. The very possibility of our being reduced to this inarticulate explanation may possibly throw some light on Mr. Mencken's remarkable description of the new literary life in America. "Ears are bitten off," he says; and this curious form of cultural intercourse might really be the only solution, when ears are no longer organs of hearing and there are no organs except organs of self-expression. He that hath ears to hear and will not hear may just as well have them bitten off. Such deafness seems inevitable in the creative critic, who is as indifferent as a hen to all noises except her own cackling over her own egg. Anyhow, hens do not criticize each other's eggs, or even pelt each other with eggs, in the manner of political controversy. We can only say that the novelist in question has undoubtedly laid a magnificently large and solid egg — something in the nature of an ostrich's egg; and after that, there is really nothing to prevent the ostrich from hiding its head in the sand, achieving thereby for its own inner ego the grateful feeling of a function performed. But we cannot argue with it about whether the egg is a bad egg, or whether parts of it are excellent.

In all these instances, therefore, because of the absence of a standard of ultimate values, the most ordinary functions really cannot be performed. They not only cannot be performed with "a grateful feeling," or a katharsis, but in the long run they cannot be performed at all. We cannot really denounce the Service-mongering bond salesman as a swindler, because we have no certain agreement that it is shameful to be a swindler. A little manipulation of some of Mr. Mencken's own individualistic theories about mentality as superior to moralism might present the swindler as a superman. We cannot really argue for or against the mere ideal of Service, because neither side has really considered what is to be served or how we are to arrive at the right rules for serving it. Consequently, in practice, it may turn out that the State of Service is merely the Servile State. And finally, we cannot really argue about that or anything else, because there are no rules of the game of argument. There is nothing to prove who has scored a point and who has not. There cannot be “strife in American criticism”; the professors cannot be “forced to make some defence.” That would require plaintiffs and defendants to appear before some tribunal and give evidence according to some tests of truth. There can be a disturbance, but there can not be a discussion.

In plain words, the normal functions of man — effort, protest, judgment, persuasion, and proof — are found in fact to be hampered and hamstrung by these negations of the sceptic even when the sceptic seems at first to be only denying some distant vision or some miraculous tale. Each function is found in fact to refer to some end, to some test, to some way of distinguishing between use and misuse, which the mere sceptic destroys as completely as he could destroy any myth or superstition. If the function is only performed for the satisfaction of the performer, as in the parable of the critic and the egg, it becomes futile to discuss whether it is an addled egg. It becomes futile to consider whether eggs will produce chickens or provide breakfasts. But even to be certain of our own sanity in applying the tests, we do really have to go back to some aboriginal problem, like that of the old riddle of the priority of egg or chicken; we do really, like the great religions, have to begin AB OVO. If those primordial sanities can be disturbed, the whole of practical life can be disturbed with them. Men can be frozen by fatalism, or crazed by anarchism, or driven to death by pessimism; for men will not go on indefinitely acting on what they feel to be a fable. And it is in this organic and almost muscular sense that religion is really the help of man — in the sense that without it he is ultimately helpless, almost motionless.

Mr. Mencken and Mr. Sinclair Lewis and the other critics in the MERCURY movement are so spirited and sincere, they attack so vigorously so many things that ought to be attacked, they expose so brilliantly many things that really are impostures, that in discussing matters with them a man will have every impulse to put his cards on the table. It would be affectation and almost hypocrisy in me to ignore, in this place, the fact that I do myself believe in a special spiritual solution of this problem, a special spiritual authority above this chaos. Nor, indeed, is the idea altogether absent, as an idea, from many other minds besides my own. The Catholic philosophy is mentioned in terms of respect, and even a sort of hope, both by Professor Babbitt** and Mr. T. S. Eliot. I do not misunderstand their courtesies, or seek to lure them a step further than they desire to go. But, as a matter of fact, by a series of faultlessly logical steps, Mr. Eliot led Professor Babbitt so near to the very gates of the Catholic Church that in the end I felt quite nervous, so to speak, for fear they should both take another unintentional step and fall into it by accident.

I have a particular reason for mentioning this matter in conclusion — a reason that is directly related to this curious effect of scepticism in weakening the normal functions of the human being. In one of the most brilliant and amusing of Mr. Sinclair Lewis's recent books there is a passage which I quote from memory, but I think more or less correctly. He said that the Catholic Faith differs from current Puritanism in that it does not ask a man to give up his sense of beauty, or his sense of humour, or his pleasant vices (by which he probably meant smoking and drinking, which are not vices at all), but that it does ask a man to give up his life and soul, his mind, body, reason, and all the rest. I ask the reader to consider, as quietly and impartially as possible, the statement thus made; and put it side by side with all those other facts about the gradual fossilizing of human function by the fundamental doubts of our day.

It would be far truer to say that the Faith gives a man back his body and his soul and his reason and his will and his very life. It would be far truer to say that the man who has received it receives all the old human functions which all the other philosophies are already taking away. It would be nearer to reality to say that he alone will have freedom, that he alone will have will, because he alone will believe in free will; that he alone will have reason, since ultimate doubt denies reason as well as authority; that he alone will truly act, because action is performed to an end. It is at least a less unlikely vision that all this hardening and hopeless despair of the intellect will leave him at last the only walking and talking citizen in a city of paralytics.

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* "The Humanism of Irving Babbitt," The Forum for July 1928.

** "The Critic and American life," The Forum for February 1928.

IS HUMANISM A RELIGION?

I HAVE just been reading Mr. Norman Foerster's book on "American Criticism"; and I hope it is no disrespect to the bulk of the book, a series of very thoughtful studies on American thinkers, if I say that the whole point of it is in the last chapter; which propounds a certain problem or challenge to modern thought. It is the problem of whether what he calls Humanism can satisfy humanity. Of his other topics it would be easy to talk for ever. He generally says the right thing; he sometimes says the last word, in that suggestive or provocative style that tempts somebody to say one word more. In my own estimate of his subjects, Whitman would be very much larger and Lowell very much smaller. About Emerson he seems both sensitive and just; and Emerson certainly had distinction; but just that dry sort of distinction to which I should always be afraid of being unfair. A Puritan tried to be a Pagan; and succeeded in being a Pagan who hesitated about whether he ought to go and see a girl dancing. But all these things are stimulating but secondary to the question which I will take the liberty of attacking separately and attempting to answer seriously. I fear that answering it seriously must mean answering it personally. The question really is whether Humanism can perform all the functions of religion; and I cannot but regard it in relation to my own religion. It is only just to say that Humanism is quite different from Humanitarianism. It means, as explained here, something like this. Modern science and organization are in a sense only too natural. They herd us like the beasts along lines of heredity or tribal doom; they attach man to the earth like a plant instead of liberating him, even like a bird, let alone an angel. Indeed, their latest psychology is lower than the level of life. What is subconscious is sub-human and, as it were, subterranean: or something less than earthly. This fight for culture is above all a fight for consciousness: what some would call self-consciousness: but anyhow against mere subconsciousness. We need a rally of the really HUMAN things; will which is morals, memory which is tradition, culture which is the mental thrift of our fathers. Nevertheless, my first duty is to answer the question put to me; and I must answer it in the negative.

I do not believe that Humanism can be a complete substitute for Superhumanism. I do not believe it because of a certain truth to me so concrete as to be called a fact. I know it sounds very like something that has often been said in conventional or superficial apologetics. But I do not mean it in that vague sense; so far from inheriting it as a convention, I have rather recently collided with it as a discovery. I have realized it relatively late in life, and realized that it is indeed the whole story and moral of my own lifetime. But even a few years ago, when most of my moral and religious views were pretty finally formed, I should not have seen it quite sharply and clearly; as I see it now.

The fact is this: that the modern world, with its modern movements, is living on its Catholic capital. It is using, and using up, the truths that remain to it out of the old treasury of Christendom; including, of course, many truths known to pagan antiquity but crystallized in Christendom. But it is NOT really starting new enthusiasms of its own. The novelty is a matter of names and labels, like modern advertisement; in almost every other way the novelty is merely negative. It is not starting fresh things that it can really carry on far into the future. On the contrary, it is picking up old things that it cannot carry on at all. For these are the two marks of modern moral ideals. First, that they were borrowed or snatched out of ancient or mediaeval hands. Second, that they wither very quickly in modern hands. That is, very briefly, the thesis I maintain; and it so happens that the book called AMERICAN CRITICISM might almost have been meant for a text-book to prove my point.

I will begin with a particular example with which the book also deals. My whole youth was filled, as with a sunrise, with the sanguine glow of Walt Whitman. He seemed to me something like a crowd turned to a giant, or like Adam the First Man. It thrilled me to hear of somebody who had heard of somebody, who saw him in the street; it was as if Christ were still alive. I did not care about whether his unmetrical poetry were a wise form or no, any more than whether a true Gospel of Jesus were scrawled on parchment or stone. I never had a hint of the evil some enemies have attributed to him; if it was there, it was not there for me. What I saluted was a new equality, which was not a dull levelling but an enthusiastic lifting; a shouting exultation in the mere fact that men were men. Real men were greater than unreal gods; and each remained as mystic and majestic as a god, while he became as frank and comforting as a comrade. The point can be put most compactly in one of Whitman’s own phrases; he says somewhere that old artists painted crowds, in which one head had a nimbus of gold-coloured light; “but I paint hundreds of heads, but paint no head without its nimbus of gold-coloured light.” A glory was to cling about men as men; a mutual worship was to take the form of fellowship; and the least and lowest of men must be included in this fellowship; a hump-backed Negro half-wit, with one eye and homicidal mania, must not be painted without his nimbus of gold-coloured light. This might seem only the final expansion of a movement begun a century before with Rousseau and the Revolutionists; and I was brought up to believe and did believe that the movement was the beginning of bigger and better things. But these were songs before sunrise; and there is no comparison between even sunrise and the sun. Whitman was brotherhood in broad daylight, showing endless varieties of radiant and wonderful creatures, all the more sacred for being solid. Shelley had adored Man, but Whitman adored Men. Every human face, every human feature, was a matter of mystical poetry, such as lit like chance torchlight, hitherto, a face here and there in the crowd. A king was a man treated as all men should be treated. A god was a man worshipped as all men should be worshipped. What could they do against a race of gods and a republic of kings; not verbally but veritably the New World?

Well ... here is what Mr. Foerster says about the present position of the founder of the new world of democracy: “Our present science lends little support to an inherent ‘dignity of man’ or to his ‘perfectibility.’ It is wholly possible that the science of the future will lead us away from democracy towards some form of aristocracy. The millennial expectations that Whitman built upon science and democracy, we are now well aware rested upon insecure foundations.... The perfection of nature, the natural goodness of man, ‘the great pride of man in himself’ offset with an emotional humanitarianism — these are the materials of a structure only slightly coloured with modernity. His politics, his ethics, his religion belong to the past, even that facile ‘religiousness’ which he hoped would suffuse and complete the work of science and democracy.... In the essentials of his prophecy, Whitman, we must conclude, has been falsified by the event.” This is a very moderate and fair statement; it would be easy to find the same thing in a much fiercer statement. Here is a monumental remark by Mr. H.L. Mencken: “They (he means certain liberal or ex-liberal thinkers) have come to realize that the morons whom they sweated to save do not want to be saved, and are not worth saving.” That is the New Spirit, if there is any New Spirit. “I will make unconquerable cities, with their arms about each other's necks," cried Walt Whitman, "by the love of comrades, by the lifelong love of comrades." I like to think of the face of Mr. Mencken of Baltimore, if some casual comrade from Pittsburgh tried to make him unconquerable by putting an arm around his neck. But the idea is dead for much less ferocious people than Mr. Mencken. It is dead in a man like Aldous Huxley, who complained recently of the "gratuitous" romancing of the old republican view of human nature. It is dead in the most humane and humorous of our recent critics. It is dead in so many wise and good men to-day, that I cannot help wondering whether, under modern conditions of his favourite "science," it would not be dead in Whitman himself.

It is not dead in me. It remains real for me, not by any merit of mine, but by the fact that this mystical idea, while it has evaporated as a mood, still exists as a creed. I am perfectly prepared to assert, as firmly as I should have asserted in my boyhood, that the hump-backed and half-witted Negro is decorated with a nimbus of gold-coloured light. The truth is that Whitman's wild picture, or what he thought was a wild picture, is in fact a very old and orthodox picture. There are, as a matter of fact, any number of old pictures in which whole crowds are crowned with haloes, to indicate that they have all attained Beatitude. But for Catholics it is a fundamental dogma of the Faith that all human beings, without any exception whatever, were specially made, were shaped and pointed like shining arrows, for the end of hitting the mark of Beatitude. It is true that the shafts are feathered with free will, and therefore throw the shadow of all the tragic possibilities of free will; and that the Church (having also been aware for ages of that darker side of truth, which the new sceptics have just discovered) does also draw attention to the darkness of that potential tragedy. But that does not make any difference to the gloriousness of the potential glory. In one aspect it is even a part of it; since the freedom is itself a glory. In that sense they would still wear their haloes even in hell.

But the point is that anyone believing that all these beings were made to be blessed, and multitudes of them probably well on their way to be blessed, really has a sound philosophic reason for regarding them all as radiant and wonderful creatures, or seeing all their heads in haloes. That conviction does make every human face, every human feature, a matter of mystical poetry. But it is not at all like modern poetry. The most modern of modern poetry is not the poetry of reception, but of rejection, or rather, of repulsion. The spirit that inhabits most recent work might be called a fury of fastidiousness. The new man of letters does not get his effect by saying that for him a hump-backed Negro has a halo. He gets his effect by saying that, just as he was about to embrace finally the fairest of women, he was nauseated by a pimple above her eyebrow or a stain of grease on her left thumb. Whitman tried to prove that dirty things were really clean, as when he glorified manure as the matrix of the purity of grass. His followers in free verse try to prove that clean things are really dirty; to suggest something leprous and loathsome about the thick whiteness of milk, or something prickly and plague-stricken about the unaccountable growth of hair. In short, the whole mood has changed, as a matter of poetry. But it has not changed as a matter of theology; and that is the argument for having an unchanging theology. The Catholic theology has nothing to do with democracy, for or against, in the sense of a machinery of voting or a criticism of particular political privileges. It is not committed to support what Whitman said for democracy, or even what Jefferson or Lincoln said for democracy. But it is absolutely committed to contradict what Mr. Mencken says against democracy. There will be Diocletian persecutions, there will be Dominican crusades, there will be rending of all religious peace and compromise, or even the end of civilization and the world, before the Catholic Church will admit that one single moron, or one single man, "is not worth saving."

I have therefore found in my middle age this curious fact about the lesson of my life, and that of all my generation. We all grew up with a common conviction, lit by the flames of the literary genius of Rousseau, of Shelley, of Victor Hugo, finding its final flare up and conflagration in the universalism of Walt Whitman. And we all took it for granted that all our descendants would take it for granted. I said the discovery of brotherhood seemed like the discovery of broad daylight; of something that men could never grow tired of. Yet even in my own short lifetime, men have already grown tired of it. We cannot now appeal to the love of equality as an EMOTION. We cannot now open a new book of poems, and expect it to be about the life-long love of comrades, or "Love, the beloved Republic, that feeds upon freedom and lives." We realize that in most men it has died, because it was a mood and not a doctrine. And we begin to wonder too late, in the wise fashion of the aged, how we could ever have expected it to last as a mood, if it was not strong enough to last as a doctrine. And we also begin to realize that all the real strength there was in it, which is the only strength that remains in it, was the original strength of the doctrine. What really happened was this: that the men of the eighteenth century, many of them in a just impatience with corrupt and cynical priests, turned on those priests and said in effect, “Well, I suppose you call yourselves Christians; so you can’t actually DENY that men are brothers or that it is our duty to help the poor.” The very confidence of their challenge, the very ringing note in the revolutionary voice, came from the fact that the Christian reactionaries were in a false position as Christians. The democratic demand won because it seemed unanswerable. And it seemed unanswerable, not in the least because it is unanswerable, but because even decadent Christians dared not give the answer. Mr. H. L. Mencken will always be happy to oblige with the answer.

Now, it was just here that, for me, the business began to be odd and interesting. For, looking back on older religious crises, I seem to see a certain coincidence, or rather, a set of things too coincident to be called a coincidence After all, when I come to think of it, all the other revolts against the Church, before the Revolution and especially since the Reformation, had told the same strange story. Every great heretic had always exhibit three remarkable characteristics in combination. First, he picked out some mystical idea from the Church’s bundle or balance of mystical ideas. Second, he used that one mystical idea against all the other mystical ideas. Third (and most singular), he seems generally to have had no notion that his own favourite mystical idea was a mystical idea, at least in the sense of a mysterious or dubious or dogmatic idea. With a queer uncanny innocence, he seems always to have taken this one thing for granted. He assumed it to be unassailable, even when he was using it to assail all sorts of similar things. The most popular and obvious example is the Bible. To an impartial pagan or sceptical observer, it must always seem the strangest story in the world; that men rushing in to wreck a temple, overturning the altar and driving out the priest, found there certain sacred volumes inscribed “Psalms” or “Gospels”; and (instead of throwing them on the fire with the rest) began to use them as infallible oracles rebuking all the other arrangements. If the sacred high altar was all wrong, why were the secondary sacred documents necessarily all right? If the priest had faked his Sacraments, why could he not have faked his Scriptures? Yet it was long before it even occurred to those who brandished this one piece of Church furniture to break up all the other Church furniture that anybody could be so profane as to examine this one fragment of furniture itself. People were quite surprised, and in some parts of the world are still surprised, that anybody should dare to do so.

Again, the Calvinists took the Catholic idea of the absolute knowledge and power of God; and treated it as a rocky irreducible truism so solid that anything could be built on it, however crushing or cruel. They were so confident in their logic, and its one first principle of predestination, that they tortured the intellect and imagination with dreadful deductions about God, that seemed to turn Him into a demon. But it never seems to have struck them that somebody might suddenly say that he did not believe in the demon. They were quite surprised when people called "infidels" here and there began to say it. They had assumed the Divine foreknowledge as so fixed, that it must, if necessary, fulfil itself by destroying the Divine mercy. They never thought anybody would deny the knowledge exactly as they denied the mercy. Then came Wesley and the reaction against Calvinism; and Evangelicals seized on the very Catholic idea that mankind has a sense of sin; and they wandered about offering everybody release from his mysterious burden of sin. It is a proverb, and almost a joke, that they address a stranger in the street and offer to relax his secret agony of sin. But it seldom seemed to strike them, until much later, that the man in the street might possibly answer that he did not want to be saved from sin, any more than from spotted fever or St. Vitus's Dance; because these things were not in fact causing him any suffering at all. They, in their turn, were quite surprised when the result of Rousseau and the revolutionary optimism began to express itself in men claiming a purely human happiness and dignity; a contentment with the comradeship of their kind; ending with the happy yawp of Whitman that he would not "lie awake and weep for his sins."

Now the plain truth is that Shelley and Whitman and the revolutionary optimists were themselves doing exactly the same thing all over again. They also, though less consciously because of the chaos of their times, had really taken out of the old Catholic tradition one particular transcendental idea; the idea that there is a spiritual dignity in man as man, and a universal duty to love men as men. And they acted in exactly the same extraordinary fashion as their prototypes, the Wesleyans and the Calvinists. They took it for granted that this spiritual idea was absolutely self-evident like the sun and moon; that nobody could ever destroy that, though in the name of it they destroyed everything else. They perpetually hammered away at their human divinity and human dignity, and inevitable love for all human beings; as if these things were naked natural facts. And now they are quite surprised when new and restless realists suddenly explode, and begin to say that a pork-butcher with red whiskers and a wart on his nose does not strike them as particularly divine or dignified, that they are not conscious of the smallest sincere impulse to love him, that they could not love him if they tried, or that they do not recognize any particular obligation to try.

It might appear that the process has come to an end, and that there is nothing more for the naked realist to shed. But it is not so; and the process can still go on. There are still traditional charities to which men cling. There are still traditional charities for them to fling away when they find they are only traditional. Everybody must have noticed in the most modern writers the survival of a rather painful sort of pity. They no longer honour all men, like St. Paul and the other mystical democrats. It would hardly be too much to say that they despise all men; often (to do them justice) including themselves. But they do in a manner pity all men, and particularly those that are pitiable; by this time they extend the feeling almost disproportionately to the other animals. This compassion for men is also tainted with its historical connection with Christian charity; and even in the case of animals, with the example of many Christian saints. There is nothing to show that a new revulsion from such sentimental religions will not free men even from the obligation of pitying the pain of the world. Not only Nietzsche, but many Neo-Pagans working on his lines, have suggested such hardness as a higher intellectual purity. And having read many modern poems about the Man of the Future, made of steel and illumined with nothing warmer than green fire, I have no difficulty in imagining a literature that should pride itself on a merciless and metallic detachment. Then, perhaps, it might be faintly conjectured that the last of the Christian virtues had died. But so long as they lived they were Christian.

I do not therefore believe that Humanism and Religion are rivals on equal terms. I believe it is a rivalry between the pools and the fountain; or between the firebrands and the fire. Each of these old intellectuals snatched one firebrand out of the undying fire; but the point is that though he waved the torch very wildly, though he would have used the torch to burn down half the world, the torch went out very soon. The Puritans did not really perpetuate their sublime exultation in helplessness; they only made it unpopular. We did not go on indefinitely looking at the Brooklyn crowds with the eye of Whitman; we have come with singular rapidity to regard them with the eye of Dreiser. In short, I distrust spiritual experiments outside the central spiritual tradition; for the simple reason that I think they do not last, even if they manage to spread. At the most they stand for one generation; at the commonest for one fashion; at the lowest for one clique. I do not think they have the secret of continuity; certainly not of corporate continuity. For an antiquated, doddering old democrat like myself may be excused for attaching some slight importance to that last question; that of covering the common life of mankind. How many Humanists are there supposed to be among the inferior crowd of human beings? Are there to be, for instance, no more than there were Greek philosophers in an ordinary rabble of jolly pagan polytheistic Greeks? Are there to be no more than there were men concentrated on the Culture of Matthew Arnold, among the mobs who followed Cardinal Manning or General Booth? I do not in the least intend to sneer at Humanism; I think I understand the intellectual distinction it draws, and I have tried to understand it in a spirit of humility; but I feel a faint interest in how many people out of the battered and bewildered human race are actually expected to understand it. And I ask with a certain personal interest; for there are three hundred million people in the world who accept the mysteries that I accept and live by the faith I hold. I really want to know whether it is anticipated that there will be three hundred million Humanists in Humanity. The sanguine may say that Humanism will be the religion of the next generation, just as Comte said that Humanity would be the God of the next generation; and so in one sense it was. But it is not the God of this generation. And the question is what will be the religion of the next generation after that, or all the other generations (as a certain ancient promise ran) even unto the end of the world.

Humanism, in Mr. Foerster’s sense, has one very wise and worthy character. It is really trying to pick up the pieces; that is, to pick up all the pieces. All that was done before was first blind destruction and then random and scrappy selection; as if boys had broken up a stained-glass window and then made a few scraps into coloured spectacles, the rose-coloured spectacles of the republican or the green or yellow spectacles of the pessimist and the decadent. But Humanism as here professed will stoop to gather all it can; for instance, it is great enough to stoop and pick up the jewel of humility. Mr. Foerster does understand, as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not understand, the case for humility. Matthew Arnold, who made something of the same stand for what he called Culture in the mid-nineteenth century, attempted something of the same preservation of chastity; which he would call, in a rather irritating manner, “pureness.” But before we call either Culture or Humanism a substitute for religion, there is a very plain question that can be asked in the form of a very homely metaphor. Humanism may try to pick up the pieces; but can it stick them together? Where is the cement which made religion corporate and popular, which can prevent it falling to pieces in a debris of individualistic tastes and degrees? What is to prevent one Humanist wanting chastity without humility, and another humility without chastity, and another truth or beauty without either? The problem of an enduring ethic and culture consists in finding an arrangement of the pieces by which they remain related, as do the stones arranged in an arch. And I know only one scheme that has thus proved its solidity, bestriding lands and ages with its gigantic arches, and carrying everywhere the high river of baptism upon an aqueduct of Rome.

THE DRIFT FROM DOMESTICITY

IN the matter of reforming things, as distinct from deforming them, there is one plain and simple principle; a principle which will probably be called a paradox. There exists in such a case a certain institution or law; let us say for the sake of simplicity, a fence or gate erected across a road. The more modern type of reformer goes gaily up to it and says, “I don’t see the use of this; let us clear it away.” To which the more intelligent type of reformer will do well to answer: “If you don’t see the use of it, I certainly won’t let you clear it away. Go away and think. Then, when you can come back and tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it.”

This paradox rests on the most elementary common sense. The gate or fence did not grow there. It was not set up by somnambulists who built it in their sleep. It is highly improbable that it was put there by escaped lunatics who were for some reason loose in the street. Some person had some reason for thinking it would be a good thing for somebody. And until we know what the reason was, we really cannot judge whether the reason was reasonable. It is extremely probable that we have overlooked some whole aspect of the question, if something set up by human beings like ourselves seems to be entirely meaningless and mysterious. There are reformers who get over this difficulty by assuming that all their fathers were fools; but if that be so, we can only say that folly appears to be a hereditary disease. But the truth is that nobody has any business to destroy a social institution until he has really seen it as an historical institution. If he knows how it arose, and what purposes it was supposed to serve, he may really be able to say that they were bad purposes, or that they have since become bad purposes, or that they are purposes which are no longer served. But if he simply stares at the thing as a senseless monstrosity that has somehow sprung up in his path, it is he and not the traditionalist who is suffering from an illusion. We might even say that he is seeing things in a nightmare. This principle applies to a thousand things, to trifles as well as true institutions, to convention as well as to conviction. It was exactly the sort of person, like Joan of Arc, who did know why women wore skirts, who was most justified in not wearing one; it was exactly the sort of person, like St. Francis, who did sympathise with the feast and the fireside, who was most entitled to become a beggar on the open road. And when, in the general emancipation of modern society, the Duchess says she does not see why she shouldn't play leapfrog, or the Dean declares that he sees no valid canonical reason why he should not stand on his head, we may say to these persons with patient benevolence: "Defer, therefore, the operation you contemplate until you have realised by ripe reflection what principle or prejudice you are violating. Then play leapfrog and stand on your head and the Lord be with you."

Among the traditions that are being thus attacked, not intelligently but most unintelligently, is the fundamental human creation called the Household or the Home. That is a typical thing which men attack, not because they can see through it, but because they cannot see it at all. They beat at it blindly, in a fashion entirely haphazard and opportunist; and many of them would pull it down without even pausing to ask why it was ever put up. It is true that only a few of them would have avowed this object in so many words. That only proves how very blind and blundering they are. But they have fallen into a habit of mere drift and gradual detachment from family life; something that is often merely accidental and devoid of any definite theory at all. But though it is accidental it is none the less anarchical. And it is all the more anarchical for not being anarchist. It seems to be largely founded on individual irritation; an irritation which varies with the individual. We are merely told that in this or that case a particular temperament was tormented by a particular environment; but nobody even explained how the evil arose, let alone whether the evil is really escaped. We are told that in this or that family Grandmamma talked a great deal of nonsense, which God knows is true; or that it is very difficult to have intimate intellectual relations with Uncle Gregory without telling him he is a fool, which is indeed the case. But nobody seriously considers the remedy, or even the malady; or whether the existing individualistic dissolution is a remedy at all. Much of this business began with the influence of Ibsen, a very powerful dramatist and an exceedingly feeble philosopher. I suppose that Nora of THE DOLL'S HOUSE was intended to be an inconsequent person; but certainly her most inconsequent action was her last. She complained that she was not yet fit to look after children, and then proceeded to get as far as possible from the children, that she might study them more closely.

There is one simple test and type of this neglect of scientific thinking and the sense of a social rule; the neglect which has now left us with nothing but a welter of exceptions. I have read hundreds and thousands of times, in all the novels and newspapers of our epoch, certain phrases about the just right of the young to liberty, about the unjust claim of the elders to control, about the conception that all souls must be free or all citizens equal, about the absurdity of authority or the degradation of obedience. I am not arguing those matters directly at the moment. But what strikes me as astounding, in a logical sense, is that not one of these myriad novelists and newspaper-men ever seems to think of asking the next and most obvious question. It never seems to occur to them to enquire what becomes of the opposite obligation. If the child is free from the first to disregard the parent, why is not the parent free from the first to disregard the child? If Mr. Jones, Senior, and Mr. Jones, Junior, are only two free and equal citizens, why should one citizen sponge on another citizen for the first fifteen years of his life? Why should the elder Mr. Jones be expected to feed, clothe and shelter out of his own pocket another person who is entirely free of any obligations to him? If the bright young thing cannot be asked to tolerate her grandmother, who has become something of a bore, why should the grandmother or the mother have tolerated the bright young thing at a period of her life when she was by no means bright? Why did they laboriously look after her at a time when her contributions to the conversation were seldom epigrammatic and not often intelligible? Why should Jones Senior stand drinks and free meals to anybody so unpleasant as Jones Junior, especially in the immature phases of his existence? Why should he not throw the baby out of the window; or at any rate, kick the boy out of doors? It is obvious that we are dealing with a real relation, which may be equality, but is certainly not similarity.

Some social reformers try to evade this difficulty, I know, by some vague notions about the State or an abstraction called Education eliminating the parental function. But this, like many notions of solid scientific persons, is a wild illusion of the nature of mere moonshine. It is based on that strange new superstition, the idea of infinite resources of organisation. It is as if officials grew like grass or bred like rabbits. There is supposed to be an endless supply of salaried persons, and of salaries for them; and they are to undertake all that human beings naturally do for themselves; including the care of children. But men cannot live by taking in each other’s baby-linen. They cannot provide a tutor for each citizen; who is to tutor the tutors? Men cannot be educated by machinery; and though there might be a Robot bricklayer or scavenger, there will never be a Robot schoolmaster or governess. The actual effect of this theory is that one harassed person has to look after a hundred children, instead of one normal person looking after a normal number of them. Normally that normal person is urged by a natural force, which costs nothing and does not require a salary; the force of natural affection for his young, which exists even among the animals. If you cut off that natural force, and substitute a paid bureaucracy, you are like a fool who should pay men to turn the wheel of his mill, because he refused to use wind or water which he could get for nothing. You are like a lunatic who should carefully water his garden with a watering-can, while holding up an umbrella to keep off the rain.

It is now necessary to recite these truisms; for only by doing so can we begin to get a glimpse of that REASON for the existence of the family, which I began this essay by demanding. They were all familiar to our fathers, who believed in the links of kinship and also in the links of logic. To-day our logic consists mostly of missing links; and our family largely of absent members. But, anyhow, this is the right end at which to begin any such enquiry; and not at the tail-end or the fag-end of some private muddle, by which Dick has become discontented or Susan has gone off on her own. If Dick or Susan wish to destroy the family because they do not see the use of it, I say as I said in the beginning; if they do not see the use of it, they had much better preserve it. They have no business even to think of destroying it until they have seen the use of it.

But it has other uses, besides the obvious fact that it means a necessary social work being done for love when it cannot be done for money; and (one might almost dare to hint) presumably to be repaid with love since it is never repaid in money. On that simple side of the matter the general situation is easy to record. The existing and general system of society, subject in our own age and industrial culture to very gross abuses and painful problems, is nevertheless a normal one. It is the idea that the commonwealth is made up of a number of small kingdoms, of which a man and a woman become the king and queen and in which they exercise a reasonable authority, subject to the common sense of the commonwealth, until those under their care grow up to found similar kingdoms and exercise similar authority. This is the social structure of mankind, far older than all its records and more universal than any of its religions; and all attempts to alter it are mere talk and tomfoolery.

But the other advantage of the small group is now not so much neglected as simply not realised. Here again we have some extraordinary delusions spread all over the literature and journalism of our time. Those delusions now exist in such a degree that we may say, for all practical purposes, that when a thing has been stated about a thousand times as obviously true, it is almost certain to be obviously false. One such statement may be specially noted here. There is undoubtedly something to be said against domesticity and in favour of the general drift towards life in hotels, clubs, colleges, communal settlements and the rest; or for a social life organised on the plan of the great commercial systems of our time. But the truly extraordinary suggestion is often made that this escape from the home is an escape into greater freedom. The change is actually offered as favourable to liberty.

To anybody who can think, of course, it is exactly the opposite. The domestic division of human society is not perfect, being human. It does not achieve complete liberty; a thing somewhat difficult to do or even to define. But it is a mere matter of arithmetic that it puts a larger number of people in supreme control of something, and able to shape it to their personal liking, than do the vast organisations that rule society outside; whether those systems are legal or commercial or even merely social. Even if we were only considering the parents, it is plain that there are more parents than there are policemen or politicians or heads of big businesses or proprietors of hotels. As I shall suggest in a moment, the argument actually applies indirectly to the children as well as directly to the parents. But the main point is that the world OUTSIDE the home is now under a rigid discipline and routine and it is only inside the home that there is really a place for individuality and liberty. Anyone stepping out of the front-door is obliged to step into a procession, all going the same way and to a great extent even obliged to wear the same uniform. Business, especially big business, is now organised like an army. It is, as some would say, a sort of mild militarism without bloodshed; as I should say, a militarism without the military virtues. But anyhow, it is obvious that a hundred clerks in a bank or a hundred waitresses in a teashop are more regimented and under rule than the same individuals when each has gone back to his or her own dwelling or lodging, hung with his or her favourite pictures or fragrant with his or her favourite cheap cigarettes. But this, which is so obvious in the commercial case, is no less true even in the social case. In practice, the pursuit of pleasure is merely the pursuit of fashion. The pursuit of fashion is merely the pursuit of convention; only that it happens to be a new convention. The jazz dances, the joy rides, the big pleasure parties and hotel entertainments, do not make any more provision for a REALLY independent taste than did any of the fashions of the past. If a wealthy young lady wants to do what all the other wealthy young ladies are doing, she will find it great fun, simply because youth is fun and society is fun. She will enjoy being modern exactly as her Victorian grandmother enjoyed being Victorian. And quite right too; but it is the enjoyment of convention, not the enjoyment of liberty. It is perfectly healthy for all young people of all historic periods to herd together, to a reasonable extent, and enthusiastically copy each other. But in that there is nothing particularly fresh and certainly nothing particularly free. The girl who likes shaving her head and powdering her nose and wearing short skirts will find the world organised for her and will march happily with the procession. But a girl who happened to like having her hair down to her heels or loading herself with barbaric gauds and trailing garments or (most awful of all) leaving her nose in its natural state — she will still be well advised to do these things on her own premises. If the Duchess does want to play leap frog, she must not start suddenly leaping in the manner of a frog across the ballroom of the Babylon Hotel, when it is crowded with the fifty best couples professionally practising the very latest dance, for the instruction of society. The Duchess will find it easier to practise leap frog to the admiration of her intimate friends in the old oak-panelled hall of Fitzdragon Castle. If the Dean must stand on his head, he will do it with more ease and grace in the calm atmosphere of the Deanery than by attempting to interrupt the programme of some social entertainment already organised for philanthropic purposes.

If there is this impersonal routine in commercial and even in social things, it goes without saying that it exists and always must exist in political and legal things. For instance, the punishments of the State must be sweeping generalisations. It is only the punishments of the home that can possibly be adapted to the individual case; because it is only there that the judge can know anything of the individual. If Tommy takes a silver thimble out of a work-basket, his mother may act very differently according as she knows that he did it for fun or for spite or to sell to somebody, or to get somebody into trouble. But if Tomkins takes a silver thimble out of a shop, the law not only can but must punish him according to the rule made for all shoplifters or stealers of silver. It is only the domestic discipline that can show any sympathy or especially any humour. I do not say that the family always does do this; but I say that the State never ought to attempt it. So that even if we consider the parents alone as independent princes, and the children merely as subjects, the relative freedom of the family can and often does work to the advantage of those subjects. But so long as the children are children, they will always be the subjects of somebody. The question is whether they are to be distributed naturally under their natural princes, as the old phrase went, who normally feel for them what nobody else will feel, a natural affection. It seems to me clear that this normal distribution gives the largest amount of liberty to the largest number of people.

My complaint of the anti-domestic drift is that it is unintelligent. People do not know what they are doing; because they do not know what they are undoing. There are a multitude of modern manifestations, from the largest to the smallest, ranging from a divorce to a picnic party. But each is a separate escape or evasion; and especially an evasion of the point at issue. People ought to decide in a philosophical fashion whether they desire the traditional social order or not; or if there is any particular alternative to be desired. As it is they treat the public question merely as a mess or medley of private questions. Even in being anti-domestic they are much too domestic in their test of domesticity. Each family considers only its own case and the result is merely narrow and negative. Each case is an exception to a rule that does not exist. The family, especially in the modern state, stands in need of considerable correction and reconstruction; most things do in the modern state. But the family mansion should be preserved or destroyed or rebuilt; it should not be allowed to fall to pieces brick by brick because nobody has any historic sense of the object of bricklaying. For instance, the architects of the restoration should rebuild the house with wide and easily opened doors, for the practice of the ancient virtue of hospitality. In other words, private property should be distributed with sufficiently decent equality to allow of a margin for festive intercourse. But the hospitality of a house will always be different from the hospitality of a hotel. And it will be different in being more individual, more independent, more interesting than the hospitality of a hotel. It is perfectly right that the young Browns and the young Robinsons should meet and mix and dance and make asses of themselves, according to the design of their Creator. But there will always be some difference between the Browns entertaining the Robinsons and the Robinsons entertaining the Browns. And it will be a difference to the advantage of variety, of personality, of the potentialities of the mind of man; or, in other words, of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

LOGIC AND LAWN TENNIS

WHEN we say that we doubt the intellectual improvement produced by Protestantism and Rationalism and the modern world, there generally arises a very confused controversy, which is a sort of tangle of terminology. But, broadly speaking, the difference between us and our critics is this. They mean by growth an increase of the tangle; whereas we mean by thought a disentangling of the tangle. Even a short and simple length of straight and untangled wire is worth more to us than whole forests of mere entanglement. That there are more topics talked about, or more terms used, or more people using them, or more books and other authorities cited — all this is nothing to us if people misuse the terms, misunderstand the topics, invoke the authorities at random and without the use of reason; and finally bring out a false result. A peasant who merely says, "I have five pigs; if I kill one I shall have four pigs," is thinking in an extremely simple and elementary way; but he is thinking as clearly and correctly as Aristotle or Euclid. But suppose he reads or half-reads newspapers and books of popular science. Suppose he starts to call one pig the Land and another pig Capital and a third pig Exports, and finally brings out the result that the more pigs he kills the more he possesses; or that every sow that litters decreases the number of pigs in the world. He has learnt economic terminology, merely as a means of becoming entangled in economic fallacy. It is a fallacy he could never have fallen into while he was grounded in the divine dogma that Pigs is Pigs. Now for that sort of intellectual instruction and advancement we have no use at all; and in that sense only it is true that we prefer the ignorant peasant to the instructed pedant. But that is not because we think ignorance better than instruction or barbarism better than culture. It is merely that we think a short length of the untangled logical chain is better than an interminable length of it that is interminably tangled. It is merely that we prefer a man to do a sum of simple addition right than a sum in long division wrong.

Now what we observe about the whole current culture of journalism and general discussion is that people do not know how to begin to think. Not only is their thinking at third and fourth hand, but it always starts about three-quarters of the way through the process. Men do not know where their own thoughts came from. They do not know what their own words imply.

They come in at the end of every controversy and know nothing of where it began or what it is all about. They are constantly assuming certain absolutes, which, if correctly defined, would strike even themselves as being not absolutes but absurdities. To think thus is to be in a tangle; to go on thinking is to be in more and more of a tangle. And at the back of all there is always something understood; which is really something misunderstood.

For instance, I read an article by the admirable Mr. Tilden, the great tennis-player, who was debating what is wrong with English Tennis. “Nothing can save English Tennis,” he said, except certain reforms of a fundamental sort, which he proceeded to explain. The English, it appears, have a weird and unnatural way of regarding tennis as a game, or thing to be enjoyed. He admitted that this has been part of a sort of amateur spirit in everything which is (as he very truly noted) also a part of the national character. But all this stands in the way of what he called saving English Tennis. He meant what some would call making it perfect, and others would call making it professional. Now, I take that as a very typical passage, taken from the papers at random, and containing the views of a keen and acute person on a subject that he thoroughly understands. But what he does not understand is the thing which he supposes to be understood. He thoroughly knows his subject and yet he does not know what he is talking about; because he does not know what he is taking for granted. He does not realise the relation of means and ends, or axioms and inferences, in his own philosophy. And nobody would probably be more surprised and even legitimately indignant than he, if I were to say that the first principles of his philosophy appear to be as follows: (1) There is in the nature of things a certain absolute and divine Being, whose name is Mr. Lawn Tennis. (2) All men exist for the good and glory of this Mr. Tennis and are bound to approximate to his perfections and fulfil his will. (3) To this higher duty they are bound to surrender their natural desire for enjoyment in this life. (4) They are bound to put this loyalty first; and to love it more passionately than patriotic tradition, the preservation of their own national type and national culture; not to mention even their national virtues. That is the creed or scheme of doctrine that is here developed without being defined. The only way for us to save the game of Lawn Tennis is to prevent it from being a game. The only way to save English Tennis is to prevent it from being English. It does not occur to such thinkers that some people may possibly like it because it is English and enjoy it because it is enjoyable. There is some abstract divine standard in the thing, to which it is everybody's duty to rise, at any sacrifice of pleasure or affection. When Christians say this of the sacrifices made for Christ, it sounds rather a hard saying. But when tennis-players say it about the sacrifices demanded by tennis, it sounds quite ordinary and casual in the confusion of current thought and expression. And nobody notices that a sort of human sacrifice is being offered to a sort of new and nameless god.

In the good old days of Victorian rationalism it used to be the conventional habit to scoff at St. Thomas Aquinas and the mediaeval theologians; and especially to repeat perpetually a well-worn joke about the man who discussed how many angels could dance on the point of a needle. The comfortable and commercial Victorians, with their money and merchandise, might well have felt a sharper end of the same needle, even if it was the other end of it. It would have been good for their souls to have looked for that needle, not in the haystack of mediaeval metaphysics, but in the neat needle-case of their own favourite pocket Bible. It would have been better for them to meditate, not on how many angels could go on the point of a needle, but on how many camels could go through the eye of it. But there is another comment on this curious joke or catchword, which is more relevant to our purpose here. If the mediaeval mystic ever did argue about angels standing on a needle, at least he did not argue as if the object of angels was to stand on a needle; as if God had created all the Angels and Archangels, all the Thrones, Virtues, Powers and Principalities, solely in order that there might be something to clothe and decorate the unseemly nakedness of the point of a needle. But that is the way that modern rationalists reason. The mediaeval mystic would not even have said that a needle exists to be a standing-ground for angels. The mediaeval mystic would have been the first to say that a needle exists to make clothes for men. For mediaeval mystics, in their dim transcendental way, were much interested in the real reasons for things and the distinction between the means and the end. They wanted to know what a thing was really for, and what was the dependence of one idea on another. And they might even have suggested, what so many journalists seem to forget, the paradoxical possibility that Tennis was made for Man and not Man for Tennis.

The Modernists were peculiarly unfortunate when they said that the modern world must not be expected to tolerate the old syllogistic methods of the Schoolmen. They were proposing to scrap the one mediaeval instrument which the modern world will most immediately require. There would have been a far better case for saying that the revival of Gothic architecture has been sentimental and futile; that the Pre-Raphaelite movement in art was only an eccentric episode; that the fashionable use of the word “Guild” for every possible sort of social institution was affected and artificial; that the feudalism of Young England was very different from that of Old England. But this method of clean-cut deduction, with the definition of the postulates and the actual answering of the question, is something of which the whole of our newspaper-flattered society is in sharp and instant need; as the poisoned are in need of medicine. I have here taken only one example which happened to catch my eye out of a hundred thousand that flash past every hour. And as Tennis, like every other good game, has to be played with the head as well as the hand, I think it highly desirable that it should be occasionally discussed at least as intelligently as it is played.

OBSTINATE ORTHODOXY

I HAVE been asked to explain something about myself which seems to be regarded as very extraordinary. The problem has been presented to me in the form of a cutting from a very flattering American article, which yet contained a certain suggestion of wonder. So far as I can understand, it is thought extraordinary that a man should be ordinary. I am ordinary in the correct sense of the term; which means the acceptance of an order; a Creator and the Creation, the common sense of gratitude for Creation, life and love as gifts permanently good, marriage and chivalry as laws rightly controlling them, and the rest of the normal traditions of our race and religion. It is also thought a little odd that I regard the grass as green, even after some newly-discovered Slovak artist has painted it grey; that I think daylight very tolerable in spite of thirteen Lithuanian philosophers sitting in a row and cursing the light of day; and that, in matters more polemical, I actually prefer weddings to divorces and babies to Birth Control. These eccentric views, which I share with the overwhelming majority of mankind, past and present, I should not attempt to defend here one by one. And I only give a general reply for a particular reason. I wish to make it unmistakably plain that my defence of these sentiments is not sentimental. It would be easy to gush about these things; but I defy the reader, after reading this, to find the faintest trace of the tear of sensibility. I hold this view not because it is sensibility, but because it is sense.

On the contrary, it is the sceptics who are the sentimentalists. More than half the “revolt” and the talk of being advanced and progressive is simply a weak sort of snobbishness which takes the form of a worship of Youth. Some men of my generation delight in declaring that they are of the Party of the Young and defending every detail of the latest fashions or freaks. If I do not do that, it is for the same reason that I do not dye my hair or wear stays. But even when it is less despicable than that, the current phrase that everything must be done for youth, that the rising generation is all that matters, is in sober fact a piece of pure sentimentalism. It is also, within reason, a perfectly natural piece of sentiment. All healthy people like to see the young enjoying themselves; but if we turn that pleasure into a principle, we are sentimentalists. If we desire the greatest happiness of the greatest number, it will be obvious that the greatest number, at any given moment, are rather more likely to be between twenty-five and seventy than to be between seventeen and twenty-five. Sacrificing everything to the young will be like working only for the rich. They will be a privileged class and the rest will be snobs or slaves. Moreover, the young will always have a fair amount of fun under the worst conditions; if we really wish to console the world, it will be much more rational to console the old. This is what I call facing facts; and I have continued to believe in most of these traditions because they are facts. I could give a great many other examples; for instance, chivalry. Chivalry is not the romantic, but the realistic, view of the sexes. It is so realistic that the real reasons for it cannot always be given in print.

If those called free-thinkers are sentimentalists, those called free-lovers are open and obvious sentimentalists. We can always convict such people of sentimentalism by their weakness for euphemism. The phrase they use is always softened and suited for journalistic appeals. They talk of free love when they mean something quite different, better defined as free lust. But being sentimentalists they feel bound to simper and coo over the word "love." They insist on talking about Birth Control when they mean less birth and no control. We could smash them to atoms, if we could be as indecent in our language as they are immoral in their conclusions. And as it is with morals, so it is with religion. The general notion that science establishes agnosticism is a sort of mystification produced by talking Latin and Greek instead of plain English. Science is the Latin for knowledge. Agnosticism is the Greek for ignorance. It is not self-evident that ignorance is the goal of knowledge. It is the ignorance and not the knowledge that produces the current notion that free thought weakens theism. It is the real world, that we see with our own eyes, that obviously unfolds a plan of things that fit into each other. It is only a remote and misty legend that ever pretended to explain it by the automatic advantage of the "fit." As a fact, modern evolutionists, even when they are still Darwinians, do not pretend that the theory explains all varieties and adaptations. Those who know are rather rescuing Darwin at the expense of Darwinism. But it is those who do not know who doubt or deny; it is typical that their myth is actually called the Missing Link. They actually know nothing of their own argument except that it breaks down somewhere. But it is worth while to ask why this loose legend has such power over many; and I will proceed to my suggestion. I have not changed my mind; nor, indeed, have they changed their mind. They have only changed their mood.

What we call the intellectual world is divided into two types of people — those who worship the intellect and those who use it. There are exceptions; but, broadly speaking, they are never the same people. Those who use the intellect never worship it; they know too much about it. Those who worship the intellect never use it; as you can see by the things they say about it. Hence there has arisen a confusion about intellect and intellectualism; and, as the supreme expression of that confusion, something that is called in many countries the Intelligentsia, and in France more especially, the Intellectuals. It is found in practice to consist of clubs and coteries of people talking mostly about books and pictures, but especially new books and new pictures; and about music, so long as it is very modern music; or what some would call very unmusical music. The first fact to record about it is that what Carlyle said of the world is very specially true of the intellectual world — that it is mostly fools. Indeed, it has a curious attraction for complete fools, as a warm fire has for cats. I have frequently visited such societies, in the capacity of a common or normal fool, and I have almost always found there a few fools who were more foolish than I had imagined to be possible to man born of woman; people who had hardly enough brains to be called half-witted. But it gave them a glow within to be in what they imagined to be the atmosphere of intellect; for they worshipped it like an unknown god. I could tell many stories of that world. I remember a venerable man with a very long beard who seemed to live at one of these clubs. At intervals he would hold up his hand as if for silence and preface his remarks by saying, “A Thought.” And then he would say something that sounded as if a cow had suddenly spoken in a drawing-room. I remember once a silent and much-enduring man (I rather think it was my friend Mr. Edgar Jepson, the novelist) who could bear it no longer and cried with a sort of expiring gasp, “But, Good God, man, you don’t call that a THOUGHT, do you?” But that was pretty much the quality of the thought of such thinkers, especially of the freethinkers. Out of this social situation arises one sort of exception to the rule. Intelligence does exist even in the Intelligentsia. It does sometimes happen that a man of real talent has a weakness for flattery, even the flattery of fools. He would rather say something that silly people think clever than something which only clever people could perceive to be true. Oscar Wilde was a man of this type. When he said somewhere that an immoral woman is the sort of woman a man never gets tired of, he used a phrase so baseless as to be perfectly pointless. Everybody knows that a man may get tired of a whole procession of immoral women, especially if he is an immoral man. That was “a Thought”; otherwise something to be uttered, with uplifted hand, to people who could not think at all. In their poor muddled minds there was some vague connection between wit and cynicism; so they never applauded him so warmly as a wit, as when he was cynical without being witty. But when he said, “A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing,” he made a statement (in excellent epigrammatic form) which really meant something. But it would have meant his own immediate dethronement if it could have been understood by those who only enthroned him for being cynical.

Anyhow, it is in this intellectual world, with its many fools and few wits and fewer wise men, that there goes on perpetually a sort of ferment of fashionable revolt and negation. From this comes all that is called destructive criticism; though, as a matter of fact, the new critic is generally destroyed by the next critic long before he has had any chance of destroying anything else. When people say solemnly that the world is in revolt against religion or private property or patriotism or marriage, they mean that this world is in revolt against them; or rather, is in permanent revolt against everything. Now, as a matter of fact, this world has a certain excuse for being always in that state of excitement, apart from mere fuss and mere folly. The reason is rather an important one; and I would ask anyone who really does want to think, and especially to think freely, to pause upon it seriously for a moment. It arises from the fact that these people are so much concerned with the study of Art. It collapses into mere drivelling and despair, because they try to transfer their treatment of art to the treatment of morals and philosophy. In this they make a bad blunder in reasoning. But then, as I have explained, intellectuals are not very intellectual.

The Arts, exist, as we should put it in our primeval fashion, to show forth the glory of God; or, to translate the same thing in terms of our psychology, to awaken and keep alive the sense of wonder in man. The success of any work of art is achieved when we say of any subject, a tree or a cloud or a human character, “I have seen that a thousand times and I never saw it before.” Now for this purpose a certain variation of VENUE is natural and even necessary. Artists change what they call their attack; for it is to some extent their business to make it a surprise attack. They have to throw a new light on things; and it is not surprising if it is sometimes an invisible ultra-violet ray or one rather resembling a black ray of madness or death. But when the artist extends the eccentric experiment from art to real life, it is quite different. He is like an absent-minded sculptor turning his chisel from chipping at the bust to chipping at the bald head of the distinguished sitter. And these anarchic artists do suffer a little from absence of Mind.

Let us take a practical case for the sake of simplicity. Many moderns will be heard scoffing at what they would call "chocolate-box art"; meaning an insipid and sickly art. And it is easy to call up the sort of picture that might well make anybody ill. I will suppose, for the sake of argument, that we are looking sadly at the outside of a chocolate-box (now, I need hardly say, empty) and that we see painted on it in rather pallid colours a young woman with golden ringlets gazing from a balcony and holding a rose in the spot-light caused by a convenient ray of moonlight. Any similar touches may be added to the taste or distaste of the critic; she may be convulsively clasping a letter or conspicuously wearing an engagement ring or languidly waving farewell to a distant gentleman in a gondola; or anything else I can think of, calculated to cause pain to the sensitive critic. I sympathise with the critic's feeling; but I think he goes quite wrong in his thinking.

Now, what do we mean when we say that this is a silly picture, or a stale subject, or something very difficult to bear, even when we are fortified by chocolates to endure it? We mean it is possible to have too much of a good thing; to have too many chocolate-boxes, as to have too many chocolates. We mean that it is not a picture, but a picture of a picture. Ultimately it is a picture of innumerable pictures; not a real picture of a rose or a girl or a beam of moonlight. In other words, artists have copied artists, right away back to the first sentimental pictures of the Romantic Movement.

But roses have not copied roses. Moonbeams have not imitated each other. And though a woman may copy women in externals, it is only in externals and not in existence; her womanhood was not copied from any other woman. Considered as realities, the rose and the moon and the woman are simply themselves. Suppose that scene to be a real one, and there is nothing particularly imitative about it. The flower is unquestionably fresh as the young woman is unquestionably young. The rose is a real object, which would smell as sweet by any other name, or by no name. The girl is a particular person, whose personality is entirely new to the world and whose experiences are entirely new to herself. If she does indeed choose to stand in that attitude on that balcony holding that botanical specimen (which seems improbable), we have no right to doubt that she has her own reasons for doing so. In short, when once we conceive the thing as reality, we have no reason whatever to dismiss it as mere repetition. So long as we are thinking of the thing as copied mechanically and for money, as a piece of monotonous and mercenary ornament, we naturally feel that the flower is in a special sense an artificial flower and that the moonlight is all moonshine. We feel inclined to welcome even wild variations in the decorative style; and to admire the new artist who will paint the rose black, lest we should forget that it is a deep red, or the moonshine green, that we may realise it is something more subtle than white. But the moon is the moon and the rose is the rose; and we do not expect the real things to alter. Nor is there any reason to expect the rules about them to alter. Nor is there any reason, so far as this question is concerned, to expect the woman to alter her attitude either about the beauty of the rose or the obligations of the engagement-ring. These things, considered as real things, are quite unaffected by the variation of artistic attack in fictitious things. The moon will continue to affect the tides, whether we paint it blue or green or pink with purple spots. And the man who imagines that artistic revolutions must always affect morals is like a man who should say, “I am so bored with seeing pink roses painted on chocolate-boxes that I refuse to believe that roses grow well in a clay soil.”

In short, what the critics would call romanticism is in fact the only form of realism. It is also the only form of rationalism. The more a man uses his reason upon realities, the more he will see that the realities remain much the same, though the representations are very different, And it is only the representations that are repetitions. The sensations are always sincere; the individuals are always individual. If the real girl is experiencing a real romance, she is experiencing something old, but not something stale. If she has plucked something from a real rose-tree, she is holding a very ancient symbol, but a very recent rose. And it is exactly in so far as a man can clear his head, so as to see actual things as they are, that he will see these things as permanently important as they are. Exactly in so far as his head is confused with current fashions and aesthetic modes of the moment, he will see nothing about it except that it is like a picture on a chocolate-box, and not like a picture at the Post-Futurist Gallery. Exactly in so far as he is thinking about real people, he will see that they are really romantic. Exactly in so far as he is thinking only about pictures and poems and decorative styles, he will think that romance is a false or old-fashioned style. He can only see people as imitating pictures; whereas the real people are not imitating anything. They are only being themselves — as they will always be. Roses remain radiant and mysterious, however many pink rosebuds are sprinkled like pips over cheap wallpapers. Falling in love remains radiant and mysterious, however threadbare be the thousandth repetition of a rhyme as a valentine or a cracker-motto. To see this fact is to live in a world of facts. To be always thinking of the banality of bad wallpapers and valentines is to live in a world of fictions.

Now the main truth about all this sceptical revolt, and all the rest of it, is that it was born in a world of fictions. It came from the Intelligentsia, who were perpetually discussing novels and plays and pictures instead of people. They insisted on putting "real life" on the stage and never saw it in the street. They professed to be putting realism into their novels when there was less and less of it in their conversation, as compared with the conversation of the common people. And that perpetual experiment, and shifting of the standpoint, which was natural enough in an artist seeking for certain effects (as it is natural in a photographer hovering round and focussing and fussing with his camera), was wholly inapplicable to any study of the permanent rules and relations of society. When these people began to play about with morals and metaphysics, they simply produced a series of mad worlds where they might have been harmlessly producing a series of mad pictures. Pictures are always meant to catch a certain aspect, at a certain angle, in a certain light; sometimes in light that is almost as brief as lightning. But when the artists became anarchists and began to exhibit the community and the cosmos by these flashes of lightning, the result was not realism but simply nightmare. Because a particular painter, for a particular purpose, might paint the red rose black, the pessimist deduced that the red rose of love and life was really as black as it was painted. Because one artist, from one angle, seized a momentary impression of moonlight as green, the philosopher solemnly put on a pair of green spectacles and declared that it was now a solid scientific certainty that the moon must be crawling with maggots, because it was made of green cheese.

In short, there might have been some value in the old cry of art for the artists; if it had meant that the artists would confine themselves to the medium of art. As a fact, they were always meddling with the medium of morals and religion; and they imported into them the unrest, the changing moods and the merely experimental tricks of their own trade. But a man with a solid sense of reality can see that this is utterly unreal. Whatever the laws of life and love and human relations may be, it is monstrously improbable that they ought to be changed with every fashion in poetry any more than with every fashion in pantaloons. It is insane that there should be a new pattern of hearts or heads whenever there is a new pattern of hats. These things are realities, like a high tide or a clay soil; and you do not get rid of high tides and clay soils by calling roses and moonlight old-fashioned and sentimental. I will venture to say, therefore, and I trust without undue vanity, that I have remained rooted in certain relations and traditions, not because I am a sentimentalist or even a romanticist; but because I am a realist. And I realise that morals must not change with moods, as Cubism must not mean chopping up real houses into cubes, or Vorticism swallowing real ships in whirlpools.

I have not changed my views on these things because there has never been any reason to change them. For anybody impelled by reason and not by running with a crowd will, for instance, perceive that there are always the same arguments for a Purpose and therefore a Personality in things, if he is a thinking person. Only it is now made easy for him to admit vaguely that there may be a Purpose, while denying that there is a Personality, so long as he happens to be a very unthinking person. It is quite as certain as it ever was that life is a gift of God immensely valuable and immensely valued, and anybody can prove it by putting a pistol to the head of a pessimist. Only a certain sort of modern does not like any problem presented to his head; and would dislike a plain question almost as much as a pistol. It is obvious common sense, and obviously consonant to real life, that romantic love is normal to youth and has its natural development in marriage and parenthood as the corresponding conditions of age. None of the nonsense talked about this, that or the other individual irritation or licence has ever made any difference to that solid social truth, for anyone who cares whether things are true, apart from whether they are trite. It is the man who cannot see that a thing is true, although it is trite, who is very truly a victim of mere words and verbal associations. He is the fool who has grown so furious with paper roses that he will not believe that the real rose has a root; nor (till he discovers it with an abrupt and profane ejaculation) that it has a thorn.

The truth is that the modern world has had a mental breakdown; much more than a moral breakdown. Things are being settled by mere associations because there is a reluctance to settle them by arguments. Nearly all the talk about what is advanced and what is antiquated has become a sort of giggling excitement about fashions. The most modern of the moderns stare at a picture of a man making love to a lady in a crinoline with exactly the same sort of vacant grin with which yokels stare at a stranger in an outlandish sort of hat. They regard their fathers of another age exactly as the most insular would regard the foreigners from another country. They seem mentally incapable of getting any further than the statement that our girls are shingled and short-skirted while their silly old great-grandmothers wore ringlets and hoops. That seems to satisfy all their appetite for satire; they are a simple race, a little like savages. They are exactly like the sort of cockney tripper who would roar with laughter because French soldiers wore red trousers and blue coats, while English soldiers were dressed properly in blue trousers and red coats. I have not altered my lines of thought for people who think in this fashion. Why should I?

THE USUAL ARTICLE

THE Editor of an evening paper published recently what he announced as, and even apologized for as “an unusual article.” He anxiously guarded himself from expressing any opinion on the dreadful and dangerous views which the unusual article set forth. Needless to say, before I had read five lines of the unusual article, I knew it was a satisfactory sample of the usual article. It was even a careful and correct copy of the usual article; a sort of prize specimen, as if a thing could be unusually usual. I had read the article before, of course — thousands and thousands of times (as it seems to me) — and had always found it the same; but never before, somehow, had it seemed so exactly the same.

There are things of which the world to-day is subconsciously very weary. It does not always know what they are; for they commonly bear large though faded labels, describing them as the New Movement or the Latest Discovery. For instance, men are already as tired of the Socialist State as if they had been living in it for a thousand years. But there are some things on which boredom is becoming acute. It is now very near the surface; and may suddenly wake up in the form of suicide or murder or tearing newspapers with the teeth. So it is with this familiar product, the Usual Article. It is not only too usual; it has become intolerably, insupportably, unbearably usual. It is appropriately described as “A Woman’s Cry to the Churches.” And I beg to announce that, though I am of a heavy and placid habit, and have never been accused of any such feminine graces as hysteria, yet, if I have to read this article three more times, I shall scream. My scream will be entitled, “A Man’s Cry to the Newspapers.”

I will repeat somewhat hurriedly what the lady in question cried; for the reader knows it already by heart. The message of Christ was perfectly “simple”: that the cure of everything is Love; but since He was killed (I do not quite know why) for making this remark, great temples have been put up to Him and horrid people called priests have given the world nothing but “stones, amulets, formulas, shibboleths.” They also “quarrel eternally among themselves as to the placing of a button or the bending of a knee.” All this gives no comfort to the unhappy Christian, who apparently wishes to be comforted only by being told that he has a duty to his neighbour. “How many men in the time of their passing get comfort out of the thought of the Thirty-Nine Articles, Predestination, Transubstantiation, the doctrine of eternal punishment, and the belief that Christ will return on the Seventh Day?" The items make a curious catalogue; and the last item I find especially mysterious. But I can only say that, if Christ was the giver of the original and really comforting message of love, I should have thought it DID make a difference whether He returned on the Seventh Day. For the rest of that singular list, I should probably find it necessary to distinguish. I certainly never gained any deep and heartfelt consolation from the thought of the Thirty-Nine Articles. I never heard of anybody in particular who did. Of the idea of Predestination there are broadly two views; the Calvinist and the Catholic; and it would make a most uncommon difference to MY comfort, if I held the former instead of the latter. It is the difference between believing that God knows, as a fact, that I choose to go to the devil; and believing that God has given me to the devil, without my having any choice at all. As to Transubstantiation, it is less easy to talk currently about that; but I would gently suggest that, to most ordinary outsiders with any common sense, there would be a considerable practical difference between Jehovah pervading the universe and Jesus Christ coming into the room.

But I touch rapidly and reluctantly on these examples, because they exemplify a much wider question of this interminable way of talking. It consists of talking as if the moral problem of man were perfectly simple, as everyone knows it is not; and then depreciating attempts to solve it by quoting long technical words, and talking about senseless ceremonies without enquiring about their sense. In other words, it is exactly as if somebody were to say about the science of medicine: "All I ask is Health; what could be simpler than the beautiful gift of Health? Why not be content to enjoy for ever the glow of youth and the fresh enjoyment of being fit? Why study dry and dismal sciences of anatomy and physiology; why enquire about the whereabouts of obscure organs of the human body? Why pedantically distinguish between what is labelled a poison and what is labelled an antidote, when it is so simple to enjoy Health? Why worry with a minute exactitude about the number of drops of laudanum or the strength of a dose of chloral, when it is so nice to be healthy? Away with your priestly apparatus of stethoscopes and clinical thermometers; with your ritualistic mummery of feeling pulses, putting out tongues, examining teeth, and the rest! The god Esculapius came on earth solely to inform us that Life is on the whole preferable to Death; and this thought will console many dying persons unattended by doctors."

In other words, the Usual Article, which is now some ten thousand issues old, was always stuff and nonsense even when it was new. There may be, and there has been, pedantry in the medical profession. There may be, and there has been, theology that was thin or dry or without consolation for men. But to talk as if it were possible for any science to attack any problem, without developing a technical language, and a method always methodical and often minute, merely means that you are a fool and have never really attacked a problem at all. Quite apart from the theory of a Church, if Christ had remained on earth for an indefinite time, trying to induce men to love one another, He would have found it necessary to have some tests, some methods, some way of dividing true love from false love, some way of distinguishing between tendencies that would ruin love and tendencies that would restore it. You cannot make a success of anything, even loving, entirely without thinking. All this is so obvious that it would seem unnecessary to repeat it; and yet it is necessary to repeat it, because it is the flat contradiction of it that is now incessantly repeated. Its flatness stretches around us like a vast wilderness on every side.

It is a character of the Usual Article that it alludes occasionally to the New Religion; but always in a rather timid and remote fashion. It suggests that there will be a better and broader belief; though it seldom touches on the belief, but only on the broadness. There is never in it by any chance anything resembling even the note of the true innovator. For the true innovator must be in some sense a legislator. We may put it in a hostile fashion, by saying that the revolutionist always becomes the tyrant. We may put it in a friendly fashion, by saying that the reformer must return to the idea of form. But anybody really founding a new religion, even a false religion, must have a certain quality of responsibility. He must make himself responsible for saying that some things shall be forbidden and some permitted; that there shall be a certain plan or system that must be defended from destruction. And all the things in any way resembling new religions, to do them justice, do show this quality and suffer this disadvantage. Christian Science is theoretically based on peace and almost on the denial of struggle. But for all that there has been not a little struggle in the councils of that creed; and the relations of all the successors of Mrs. Eddy have by no means been relations of peace. I do not say it as a taunt, but rather as a tribute; I should say that these proceedings did prove that the people involved were trying to found a real religion. It is a compliment to Christian Scientists to say that they also had their tests and their creeds, their anathemas and their excommunications, their encyclicals and their heresy-hunts. But it is a compliment to Christian Scientists which they can hardly use as an insult to Christians. Communism, even in its final form of Marxian materialism, had some of the qualities of a fresh and sincere faith. It had one of them at least; that it did definitely expel men for denying the creed. Both the Communist and the Christian Scientist were under this grave disadvantage; that they did turn a faith into a fact. There is such a thing as a Bolshevist government and it governs, even if it misgoverns. There are such things as Christian Science healers; there probably is such a thing as Christian Science healing, even if we do not fully admit that the healing is health. There is a Church in active operation; and for that reason it exhibits all the dogmas and differences charged against the Church of Christ. But the philosophy expressed in the Usual Article avoids all these disadvantages by never coming into the world of reality at all. Its god is afraid to be born; its scripture is afraid to be written; it only manages to remain as the New Religion by always coming to-morrow and never to-day. It puffs itself out with spiritual pride, because it does not impose what it cannot even invent. It shines with Pharisaical self-satisfaction, because there are no crimes committed for its creed and no creed to be the motive of its crimes. This sort of critic is a surgeon who never performs an unsuccessful operation because he never operates; a soldier who never falls because he never fights. Anybody can talk for ever about a non-existent religion which shall be free from all the evils of existence. Anybody can dream of that entirely humane and harmonious Christianity, whose Christ is never born and never crucified. It is so easy to do, that half a hundred people in the papers and the public discussions have been doing nothing else for the last twenty or thirty years. But it is every bit as futile as applied to a spiritual ideal as it would be if applied to a scientific theory or a political programme; and I only mention it because I have just heard it for the hundredth time; and feel a faint hope that I may be mentioning it for the last time.

WHY I AM A CATHOLIC

A LEADING article in a daily paper was recently devoted to the New Prayer Book; without having anything very new to say about it. For it mostly consisted in repeating for the nine-hundredth-and-ninety-nine-thousandth time that what the ordinary Englishman wants is a religion without dogma (whatever that may be), and that the disputes about Church matters were idle and barren on both sides. Only, suddenly remembering that this equalisation of both sides might possibly involve some slight concession or consideration for our side, the writer hastily corrected himself. He proceeded to suggest that though it is wrong to be dogmatic, it is essential to be dogmatically Protestant. He suggested that the ordinary Englishman (that useful character) was quite convinced, in spite of his aversion to all religious differences, that it was vital to religion to go on differing from Catholicism. He is convinced (we were told) that "Britain is as Protestant as the sea is salt." Gazing reverently at the profound Protestantism of Mr. Michael Arlen or Mr. Noel Coward, or the latest jazz dance in Mayfair, we might be tempted to ask: If the salt lose its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? But since we may rightly deduce from this passage that Lord Beaverbrook and Mr. James Douglas and Mr. Hannen Swaffer, and all their following, are indeed stern and unbending Protestants (and as we know that Protestants are famous for the close and passionate study of the Scriptures, unhindered by Pope or priest), we might even take the liberty of interpreting the saying in the light of a less familiar text. Is it possible that in comparing Protestantism to the salt of the sea they were haunted with some faint memory of another passage, in which the same Authority spoke of one single and sacred fountain that is of living water, because it is of life-giving water, and really quenches the thirst of men; while all other pools and puddles are distinguished from it by the fact that those who drink of them will thirst again. It is a thing that does occasionally happen to people who prefer to drink salt water.

This is perhaps a somewhat provocative way of opening the statement of my strongest conviction; but I would respectfully plead that the provocation came from the Protestant. When Protestantism calmly claims to rule all the souls in the tone of Britannia ruling all the seas, it is permissible to retort that the very quintessence of such salt can be found thickest in the stagnation of the Dead Sea. But it is still more permissible to retort that Protestantism is claiming what no religion at this moment can possibly claim. It is calmly claiming the allegiance of millions of agnostics, atheists, hedonistic pagans, independent mystics, psychic investigators, theists, theosophists, followers of Eastern cults and jolly fellows living like the beasts that perish. To pretend that all these are Protestants is considerably to lower the prestige and significance of Protestantism. It is to make it merely negative; and salt is not negative.

Taking this as a text and test of the present problem of religious choice, we find ourselves faced from the first with a dilemma about the traditional religion of our fathers. Protestantism as here named is either a negative or a positive thing. If Protestantism is a positive thing, there is no doubt whatever that it is dead. In so far as it really was a set of special spiritual beliefs it is no longer believed. The genuine Protestant creed is now hardly held by anybody — least of all by the Protestants. So completely have they lost faith in it, that they have mostly forgotten what it was. If almost any modern man be asked whether we save our souls solely through our theology, or whether doing good (to the poor, for instance) will help us on the road to God, he would answer without hesitation that good works are probably more pleasing to God than theology. It would probably come as quite a surprise to him to learn that, for three hundred years, the faith in faith alone was the badge of a Protestant, the faith in good works the rather shameful badge of a disreputable Papist. The ordinary Englishman (to bring in our old friend once more) would now be in no doubt whatever on the merits of the long quarrel between Catholicism and Calvinism. And that was the most important and intellectual quarrel between Catholicism and Protestantism. If he believes in a God at all, or even if he does not, he would quite certainly prefer a God who has made all men for joy, and desires to save them all, to a God who deliberately made some for involuntary sin and immortal misery. But that was the quarrel; and it was the Catholic who held the first and the Protestant who held the second. The modern man not only does not share, he does not even understand, the unnatural aversion of the Puritans to all art and beauty in relation to religion. Yet that was the real Protestant protest; and right into the Mid-Victorian time Protestant matrons were shocked at a white gown, let alone a coloured vestment. On practically every essential count on which the

Reformation actually put Rome in the dock, Rome has since been acquitted by the jury of the whole world.

It Is perfectly true that we can find real wrongs, provoking rebellion, in the Roman Church just before the Reformation. What we cannot find is one ot those real wrongs that the Reformation reformed. For instance, it was an abominable abuse that the corruption of the monasteries sometimes permitted a rich noble to play the patron and even play at being the Abbot, or draw on the revenues supposed to belong to a brotherhood of poverty and charity. But all that the Reformation did was to allow the same rich noble to take over ALL the revenue, to seize the whole house and turn it into a palace or a pig-sty, and utterly stamp out the last legend of the poor brotherhood. The worst things in worldly Catholicism were made worse by Protestantism. But the best things remained somehow through the era of corruption; nay, they survived even the era of reform. They survive to-day in all Catholic countries, not only in the colour and poetry and popularity of religion, but in the deepest lessons of practical psychology. And so completely are they justified, after the judgment of four centuries, that every one of them is now being copied, even by those who condemned it; only it is often caricatured. Psycho-analysis is the Confessional without the safeguards of the Confessional; Communism is the Franciscan movement without the moderating balance of the Church; and American sects, having howled for three centuries at the Popish theatricality and mere appeal to the senses, now “brighten” their services by super-theatrical films and rays of rose-red light falling on the head of the minister. If we had a ray of light to throw about, we should not throw it on the minister.

Next, Protestantism may be a negative thing. In other words, it may be a new and totally different list of charges against Rome; and only in continuity because it is still against Rome. That is very largely what it is; and that is presumably what the DAILY EXPRESS really meant, when it said that our country and our countrymen are soaked in Protestantism as in salt. In other words, the legend that Rome is wrong anyhow, is still a living thing, though all the features of the monster are now entirely altered in the caricature. Even this is an exaggeration, as applied to the England of to-day; but there is still a truth in it. Only the truth, when truly realised, can hardly be very satisfactory to honest and genuine Protestants. For, after all, what sort of a tradition is this, that tells a different story every day or every decade, and is content so long as all the contradictory tales are told against one man or one institution? What sort of holy cause is it to inherit from our ancestors, that we should go on hating something and being consistent only in hatred; being fickle and false in everything else, even in our reason for hating it? Are we really to settle down seriously to make up a new set of stories against the bulk of our fellow-Christians? Is that Protestantism; and is that worth comparing to patriotism or the sea?

Anyhow, that was the situation I found myself facing when I began to think of these things, the child of a purely Protestant ancestry and, in the ordinary sense, of a Protestant household. But as a fact my family, having become Liberal, was no longer Protestant. I was brought up a sort of Universalist and Unitarian; at the feet of that admirable man, Stopford Brooke. It was not Protestantism save in a very negative sense. Often it was the flat contrary of Protestantism, even in that sense. For instance, the Universalist did not believe in hell; and he was emphatic in saying that heaven was a happy state of mind— "a temper." But he had the sense to see that most men do not live or die in a state of mind so happy that it will alone ensure them a heaven. If heaven is a temper, it is certainly not a universal temper; and a good many people pass through this life in a devil of a temper. If all these were to have heaven, solely through happiness, it seemed clear that something must happen to them first. The Universalist therefore believed in a progress after death, at once punishment and enlightenment. In other words, he believed in Purgatory; though he did not believe in Hell. Right or wrong, he obviously and flatly contradicted the Protestant, who believed in Hell but not in Purgatory. Protestantism, through its whole history, had waged ceaseless war on this one idea of Purgatory or Progress beyond the grave. I have come to see in the complete Catholic view much deeper truths on all three ideas; truths concerned with will and creation and God's most glorious love of liberty. But even at the start, though I had no thought of Catholicism, I could not see why I should have any concern with Protestantism; which had always said the very opposite of what a Liberal is now expected to say.

I found, in plain words, that there was no longer any question of clinging to the Protestant faith. It was simply a question of whether I should cling to the Protestant feud. And to my enormous astonishment, I found a large number of my fellow Liberals eager to go on with the Protestant feud, though they no longer held the Protestant faith. I have no title to judge them; but to me, I confess, it seemed like a rather ugly breach of honour. To find out that you have been slandering somebody about something, to refuse to apologise, and to make up another more plausible story against him, so that you can carry on the spirit of the slander, seemed to me at the start a rather poor way of behaving. I resolved at least to consider the original slandered institution on its own merits and the first and most obvious question was: Why were Liberals so very illiberal about it? What was the meaning of the feud, so constant and so inconsistent? That question took a long time to answer and would now take much too long a time to record. But it led me at last to the only logical answer, which every fact of life now confirms; that the thing is hated, as nothing else is hated, simply because it is, in the exact sense of the popular phrase, like nothing on earth.

There is barely space here to indicate this one thing out of the thousand things that confirm the same fact and confirm each other. I would undertake to pick up any topic at random, from pork to pyrotechnics, and show that it illustrates the truth of the only true philosophy; so realistic is the remark that all roads lead to Rome. Out of all these I have here only taken one fact; that the thing is pursued age after age by an unreasonable hatred that is perpetually changing its reason. Now of nearly all the dead heresies it may be said that they are not only dead, but damned; that is, they are condemned or would be condemned by common sense, even outside the Church, when once the mood and mania of them is passed. Nobody now wants to revive the Divine Right of Kings which the first Anglicans advanced against the Pope. Nobody now wants to revive the Calvinism which the first Puritans advanced against the King. Nobody now is sorry that the Iconoclasts were prevented from smashing all the statues of Italy. Nobody now is sorry that the Jansenists failed to destroy all the dramas of France. Nobody who knows anything about the Albigensians regrets that they did not convert the world to pessimism and perversion. Nobody who really understands the logic of the Lollards (a much more sympathetic set of people) really wishes that they had succeeded in taking away all political rights and privileges from everybody who was not in a state of grace. “Dominion founded on Grace” was a devout ideal, but considered as a plan for disregarding an Irish policeman controlling the traffic in Piccadilly, until we have discovered whether he has confessed recently to his Irish priest, it is wanting in actuality. In nine cases out of ten the Church simply stood for sanity and social balance against heretics who were sometimes very like lunatics. Yet at each separate moment the pressure of the prevalent error was very strong;

the exaggerated error of a whole generation, like the strength of the Manchester School in the ‘fifties, or of Fabian Socialism as a fashion in my own youth. A study of the true historical cases commonly shows us the spirit of the age going wrong, and the Catholics at least relatively going right. It is a mind surviving a hundred moods.

As I say, this is only one aspect; but it was the first that affected me and it leads on to others. When a hammer has hit the right nail on the head a hundred times, there comes a time when we think it was not altogether by accident. But these historical proofs would be nothing without the human and personal proofs, which would need quite a different sort of description. It is enough to say that those who know the Catholic practice find it not only right, but always right when everything else is wrong; making the Confessional the very throne of candour where the world outside talks nonsense about it as a sort of conspiracy; upholding humility when everybody is praising pride; charged with sentimental charity when the world is talking a brutal utilitarianism; charged with dogmatic harshness when the world is loud and loose with vulgar sentimentalism — as it is to-day. At the place where the roads meet there is no doubt of the convergence. A man may think all sorts of things, most of them honest and many of them true, about the right way to turn in the maze at Hampton Court. But he does not think he is in the centre; he knows.

WHAT DO THEY THINK?

ALL science, even the divine science, is a sublime detective story. Only it is not set to detect why a man is dead; but the darker secret of why he is alive. The Catholic Church remains in the best sense a mystery even to believers. It would be foolish of them to complain if it is a riddle to unbelievers. But in a more practical sense we may well ask a question. What do they think it really is? What do they think we think it really is? What do they think it is all about, or even supposed to be all about? That problem becomes darker and darker for me, the more I stare at it. It becomes black as midnight, for instance, when I stare at such a sentence as I saw recently in TRUTH, a singularly intelligent and often a highly valuable paper. It stated that Rome tolerates, in her relation with the Russian Uniats, “strange heresies and even bearded and wedded clergy.”

In that one extraordinary phrase, what formless monster begins to take form in their visions? In those eight words it is not too much to say that every term is startling in its inconsequence. As somebody tumbling down the stairs bumps upon every step, the writer comes a crash upon every word. The word “strange” is strange enough. The word “heresy” is stranger. Perhaps at first sight the word “bearded,” with its joyous reminiscences of the game of Beaver, may appear the most funny. “Wedded” is also funny. Even the “and” between bearded and wedded is funny. But by far the funniest and most fantastic thing in all that fantastic sentence is the word “even.”

It is not everybody who can thus bestrew a page with comic conjunctions and farcical particles of speech. Only a wild unreason, about the whole way the thing hangs together, could thus make even the joints and hinges of that rickety statement rattle and creak with laughter. We can hardly say of this version of the Roman Catholic faith that it is a false version, or that it differs from the true version, or even that it differs from our version. What is the version; and how can it be even their version? There is in the world, they would tell us, a powerful and persecuting superstition, intoxicated with the impious idea of having a monopoly of divine truth, and therefore cruelly crushing and exterminating everything else as error. It burns thinkers for thinking, discoverers for discovering, philosophers and theologians who differ by a hair’s breadth from its dogmas; it will tolerate no tiny change or shadow of variety even among its friends and followers; it sweeps the whole world with one encyclical cyclone of uniformity; it would destroy nations and empires for a word, so wedded is it to its fixed idea that its own word is the Word of God. When it is thus sweeping the world, it comes to a remote and rather barbarous region somewhere on the borders of Russia; where it stops suddenly; smiles broadly; and tells the people there that they can have the strangest heresies they like. Strange heresies, by the standard of strangeness likely to exist in an experience so long as that of the Roman Church, may well be very strange indeed. The Church is no stranger to heresies that involved human sacrifice, or the worship of demons, or the practice of perversions. We might well suppose, therefore, that the Church says benevolently to these fortunate Slavs, “By all means worship Baphomet and Beelzebub; say the Lord’s Prayer backwards; continue to drink the blood of infants — nay, even,” and here her voice falters, till she rallies with an effort of generous resolution, “ — yes, even, if you really must, grow a beard.” And then, I suppose, we must call up yet darker and more dreadful visions, of the heretic hiding himself in secret places, in caverns of witchcraft or sealed gardens of black magic, while the blasphemous beard is grown. Nobody explains why these particular Eastern Europeans should be regarded with so much favour, or why a number of long hairs on the chin should be regarded with so much disfavour. It is presumably a problem on which this intolerant spiritual tyranny will suffer no question to be asked.

Does the reader realise the despair that falls upon the hapless Catholic journalist at such moments; or how wild a prayer he may well send up for the intercession of St. Francis of Sales? What is he to say; or at what end of that sentence is he to begin? What is the good of his laboriously beginning to explain that a married clergy is a matter of discipline and not doctrine, that it can therefore be allowed locally without heresy — when all the time the man thinks a beard as important as a wife and more important than a false religion? What is the sense of explaining to him the peculiar historical circumstances that have led to preserving some local habits in Kiev or Warsaw, when the man at any moment may receive a mortal shock by seeing a bearded Franciscan walking through Wimbledon or Walham Green? What we want to get at is the mind of the man who can think so absurdly about us as to suppose we could have a horror of heresy, and then a weakness for heresy, and then a greater horror of hair. To what does he attribute all the inconsistent nonsense and inconsequent bathos that he associates with us? Does he think we are all joking; or all dreaming; or all out of our minds; or what does he think? Until we have got at that, we have really got very little further.

The notion that he merely thinks the Church is all nonsense is not very consistent with the way in which he talks about her in other aspects; as when he says she has always resisted such and such changes, which he perhaps approves; or that she can be counted on as an influence for such and such principles, which he perhaps dislikes; or that she is forbidden to accept this doctrine or committed to defending that. But what he can possibly suppose to be the principle upon which she accepts or rejects doctrines I never can imagine. And the more we really come in contact with the puzzle, the more we shall feel, I think, something quite unique and even creepy about it. It is like the old fable of the five blind men who tried to explore an elephant; a fable that used to be told as a sort of farce; but which I can well imagine being told by Maeterlinck or some modern mystic so as to make the flesh creep with mysteries. The thing is at once so obvious and so invisible; so public and so impalpable; so universal and so secret. They say so much about it; and they say so little. They see so much of it; and they see so little. There is a sort of colossal contradiction, such as can only be conceived between different dimensions or different planes of thought, in the coexistence of such familiar fact and such utterly unknown truth. Indeed, there is only one combination of words I know of, which ever did exactly express so huge a human and historical paradox; and they also are familiar and unfathomable: “The light shone in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not.”

Some part of the difficulty is doubtless due to the odd way in which so many people are at once preoccupied with it and prejudiced against it. It is queer to observe so much ignorance with so little indifference. They love talking about it and they hate hearing about it. It would seem that they especially hate asking about it. If, for instance, a man contributing to TRUTH, in the middle of educated London, really were a little puzzled by Rome making an exception of the Uniats, and were perhaps especially puzzled by an exception to the celibacy of the clergy (I omit his dark and inscrutable broodings on the subject of Beavers) might it not have occurred to him to go and ask some Catholic priest, or for that matter, some Catholic layman, and thus gain some sort of rough idea of the relative importance attached in our system to celibacy and heresy and hair on the face? Could he not have gained a glimpse of the usual order or hierarchy of these ideas, which would have prevented him from writing the staggering word “and” or the stunning word “even”? But I am inclined to suspect that even this omission, negative as it may seem, has in it something deeper than mere negligence. I fancy that there is more than meets the eye in this curious controversial attitude; the desire to ask rhetorical questions and not to ask real questions; the wish to heckle and not to hear. It may well be connected with more mystical aspects of the whole question, on which I am certainly not going to speculate, since they are admittedly the most subtle problems of the trained theologian; all those questions about the will to believe and the operations of grace; and the fact that something more than reason is needed to bring any of us into the most reasonable of all philosophies.

But apart from these mysteries, I think there is another reason that is human and historical. The thing that causes Catholic philosophy to be neglected is the very thing that really makes it impossible to neglect. It is the fact that it was something left for dead; and now rather incredibly come to life. An ordinary man would not mind very much whether he knew the exact ritual with which Roman augurs examined the entrails of beasts or watched the movements of birds; because he is certain that the world will not go back to that Roman religion. The world was once almost as certain that it would not go back to this other Roman religion. A man would not be very much ashamed of having put the metals in the wrong order in the imaginary formula of an alchemist, described in a historical romance; because he is convinced that alchemists can only return in romance and can never return in history. There was a time when he felt quite as safe about abbots as about alchemists. That time has already passed. That mere confident contempt, as I have said, has already been succeeded by a rather restless curiosity. But mental habits overlap; and the dead momentum of the old disregard of facts goes along side by side with a new movement of anxiety about possibilities. They would not be so ignorant about it if they had not decided that it was dead. They would not be so irritated about it if they had not discovered that it was alive. For ignorance accumulates like knowledge; and these newly aroused critics are the inheritors of the accruing interest of four hundred years of an ignorance that became an indifference. At this moment they are no longer indifferent; but they are still ignorant. They have been awakened suddenly in the watches of the night, and what they see they can neither deny nor understand. For they see one that was dead walking; and the blaze of that living death blasts or obliterates all the older details of life; and all the fables they have believed and all the facts they have forgotten are alike swallowed up in the miracle they can neither believe nor forget.

THE MASK OF THE AGNOSTIC

SIR ARTHUR KEITH, in his recent remarks on the soul, let the cat out of the bag. He let it out of that very prim and proper professional bag which is carried by the "medical man" whom he described as conscientiously compelled to assert that the life of the soul ceases with the breath of the body. Perhaps the figure which fits in so well with the bag is less fortunate in the case of the cat; a mystic animal, whose nine lives might rather be supposed to represent immortality, at least in the form of reincarnation. But anyhow, he let the cat out of the bag; in the sense of revealing a secret which such wise men would be wiser to keep. It is the secret that such scientists do not speak as scientists, but simply as materialists. That is, they do not give their conclusions, but simply their opinions; and a very shaky sort of opinions some of them are.

Not long ago, in his famous address on Anthropoids to the Congress at Leeds, Sir Arthur Keith said that he spoke simply as the foreman of a jury. It is true that he had not apparently consulted the jury; and it was rapidly made clear that the jury violently disagreed; which is unusual in a jury after the foreman has delivered the verdict. Still, in using this image he meant to claim complete impartiality of a judicial sort. He meant that a juryman is bound by oath to go entirely by the facts and the evidence, without fear or favour. And this effect would be a hundred times more effective if we were left free to imagine that the juryman's personal sympathies might be on the other side; or at least, if we did not know that they were very keenly on the one side. Sir Arthur should have been careful to preserve the impression that, speaking strictly and solely as an anthropologist, he was forced to accept the natural selection of anthropoids. He should then have left it to be inferred that, merely as a private person, he might be yearning for seraphic visions and celestial hopes; he might be searching the Scriptures or awaiting the Apocalypse. For all it was any business of ours, or any business of anybody's, he might be in private life a Mormon multiplying the stars in his heavenly crown or a Holy Roller continually convulsed by the Holy Ghost. The point was that the facts forced the Darwinian conclusion upon him. And a man of that sort, being forced to accept them, would be a real witness because a reluctant witness. In the trial of Darwin the man might feel for the plaintiff, but the juryman would be forced to find for the defendant.

And now Sir Arthur Keith has thrown the whole of that imperial impartiality away. He has gone out of his way to dogmatise and lay down the law about the soul; which has nothing to do with his subject, except in so far as it is everybody's subject. But while it does not relate to what is his subject, it has told everybody which is his side. It has turned the foreman of the jury into a very unmistakable advocate for that side. Indeed, such a partisan is more like a party to the suit than an advocate; since it is the whole point that as a private person he has long had the private prejudice. Henceforth it is obvious that Keith deciding for Darwin is simply like Bradlaugh deciding for Darwin, or Ingersoll deciding for Darwin, or any atheist on a stool in Hyde Park deciding for Darwin. When THEY choose the side of natural selection, we can all agree that it is a very natural selection.

As to the conclusion itself, it seems almost incredibly inconclusive. Unless Sir Arthur Keith is very badly misreported, he specially stated that spiritual existence ceases with the physical functions; and that no medical man could conscientiously say anything else. However grave be the injury called death (which indeed is often fatal), this strikes me as a case in which it is quite unnecessary to call in a medical man at all. There is always a certain irony, even in the simple pages of my favourite detective stories, in the fact that everybody rushes for a doctor as soon as they are quite certain that a man is dead. But in the detective story there may at least be something to be learnt by the doctor from the dead body. In the doctrinal speculation there is nothing whatever; and it does but confuse the eternal detective story for the doctor of medicine to pretend to be a doctor of divinity. The truth is that all this business about "a medical man" is mere bluff and mystagogy. The medical man "sees" that the mind has ceased with the body. What the medical man sees is that the body can no longer kick, talk, sneeze, whistle or dance a jig. And a man does not need to be very medical in order to see that. But whether the principle of energy, that once made it kick, talk, sneeze, whistle and dance, does or does not still exist on some other plane of existence — a medical man knows no more about that than any other man. And when medical men were clear-headed, some of them (like an ex-surgeon named Thomas Henry Huxley) said they did not believe that medical men or any men could know anything about it. That is an intelligible position; but it does not seem to be Sir Arthur Keith's position. He has been put up publicly to DENY that the soul survives the body; and to make the extraordinary remark that any medical man must say the same. It is as if we were to say that any competent builder or surveyor must deny the possibility of the Fourth Dimension; because he has learnt the technical secret that a building is measured by length, breadth and height. The obvious query is — Why bring in a surveyor? Everybody knows that everything is in fact measured by three dimensions. Anybody who thinks there is a fourth dimension thinks so in spite of being well aware that things are generally measured by three. Or it is as if a man were to answer a Berkeleian metaphysician, who holds all matter to be an illusion of mind, by saying, "I can call the evidence of an intelligent navvy who actually has to deal with solid concrete and cast iron; and he will tell you they are quite real." We should naturally answer that we do not need a navvy to tell us that solid things are solid; and it is quite in another sense that the philosopher says they are not solid. Similarly, there is nothing to make a medical man a materialist, except what might make any man a materialist. And it is when a man has absorbed all that obvious materialism that he begins to use his mind. And, as some hold, does not stop.

This very unphilosophical irruption into philosophy was, however, in one way enlightening. It threw a light backwards on the speaker's previous proclamation on things on which he has more right to speak. Even in those things he betrayed a curious simplicity common among such official scientists. The truth is that they become steadily less scientific and more official. They develop that thin disguise that is the daily wear of politicians. They perform before us the most artful tricks with the most artless transparency. It is like watching a child trying to hide something. They are perpetually trying to bluff us with big words and learned allusions; on the assumption that we have never learnt anything — even of their own funny little ways. Every leader-writer who thunders "Galileo" at us assumes that we know even less about Galileo than he does. Every preacher of popular science who throws a long word at us thinks we shall have to look it up in the dictionary and hopes we shall not study it seriously even in the encyclopaedia. Their use of science is rather like the use made of it by the heroes of certain adventure stories, in which the white men terrify the savages by predicting an eclipse or producing an electric shock. These are in a sense true demonstrations of science. They are in a sense right in saying that they are scientists. Where they are perhaps wrong is in supposing that we are savages.

But it is rather amusing for us who watch the preparations for giving us an electric shock, when we are seriously expected to be shocked by the shock. It is rather a joke when we, the benighted savages, are ourselves not only quite capable of predicting the eclipse, but capable of predicting the prediction. Now, among these facts that have been familiar to us for a long time is the fact that men of science stage and prepare their effects exactly as politicians do. They also do it rather badly — exactly as politicians do. Neither of these two modern mystagogues has yet realised how transparent his tricks have become. One of the most familiar and transparent of them is what is known as the "official contradiction." It is a strange symbolic way of declaring that something has happened by denying that it has happened. So whitewashing reports are published after political scandals as regularly as bluebooks. So the Right Honourable Gentleman hopes it is not necessary for him to contradict what he feels sure the Honourable Member could not have intended to insinuate. So a Cabinet Minister is put up to deny from a platform that there is any change in the Government's policy about Damascus. And so Sir Arthur Keith is put up to deny that there is any change in the scientific attitude about Darwin.

And when we hear that, we all give a sort of sigh of satisfaction; for we all know exactly what THAT means. It means more or less the opposite of what it says. It means that there has been a devil of a row about Damascus inside the Party, or, in other words, that there is beginning to be a devil of a scandal about discredited Darwinians inside the scientific world. The curious thing is that in the latter case the officials are not only solemn in uttering the official contradiction, but much more simple in supposing that nobody will realize that it is official. In the case of the similar legal fiction in politics, the politicians by this time not only know the truth, but often know that we know the truth. Everybody knows by this time, by the gossip that is repeated everywhere, exactly what is meant by the absolute agreement on everything which binds the Prime Minister and all his colleagues. The Prime Minister does not really expect us to believe that he is the holy and beloved king of a brotherhood of knights sworn to a faith and giving their hearts to him alone. But Sir Arthur Keith does really expect us to believe that he is the foreman of a jury containing all the different men of science, all absolutely agreed that Darwin's particular opinion was "eternal." That is what I mean by childish concealment; and the artless or transparent trick. That is why I say that they do not even know how much we know.

For the politician is less pompously absurd than the anthropologist, even if we test it by what they both call Progress; which is mostly only another word for Time. We all know the official optimism which always defends the present government. But this is like an official defence of all the past governments. If a man were to say that the politics of Palmerston were eternal, we should think him a little out of date. Yet Darwin was prominent at about the same date as Palmerston; and is quite equally dated. If Mr. Lloyd George were to get up and say that the great Liberal Party had not receded from one single position taken up by Gobden and Bright, the only true Tribunes of the People, we should reluctantly conclude (if such a thing be conceivable) that he was talking party claptrap to people ignorant of the history of the party. If a social reformer were to affirm solemnly that all social philosophy was still proceeding strictly on the principles of Herbert Spencer, we should know it was doing nothing of the sort, and that only an absolutely fossilized official could pretend that it was. Yet Darwin and Spencer were not only contemporaries but comrades and allies; and the Darwinian biology and the Spencerian sociology were regarded as parts of the same movement, which our grandfathers regarded as a very modern movement. Even considered a priori as a matter of probability it therefore seems rather unlikely that the science of that generation was any more infallible than its ethics and politics. Even on the principles Sir Arthur professes, it seems very queer that there should now be no more to be said about Darwinism than he said about it. But we do not need to appeal to those principles or those probabilities. We can appeal to the facts. As it happens, we do know something about the facts; and Sir Arthur Keith does not seem to know that we know.

It was in a Catholic paper that certain statements were made about Darwinism to-day; statements which Sir Arthur Keith himself went out of his way to contradict; and about which Sir Arthur Keith himself was proved sensationally and disastrously wrong. Probably the story is now known to all readers of that paper; but it will possibly never come to the knowledge of most other journalists, and it certainly will not be recorded in most of the other papers. Touching this cosmic controversy, most of the other papers are emphatically party papers; and they support the party leader when he publishes the official contradiction. They will not let the public know how triumphantly his other contradiction was contradicted.

When Mr. Belloc stated that these Darwinians were out of date and ignorant of recent biology, he quoted among a great many other recent authorities the French biologist Vialleton as denying the possibility of natural selection in a particular case connected with reptiles and birds. Sir Arthur Keith, coming to the rescue of Mr. H. G. Wells, and eager to prove that he and Mr. Wells were not out of date or ignorant of recent biology, proceeded to contradict Mr. Belloc flatly. He said that there was no such statement in Vialleton's book; in other words, he accused Mr. Belloc of having misquoted or misrepresented Vialleton's book. It then appeared, to the amazement of everybody, and especially of Mr. Belloc, that Sir Arthur Keith did not even know of the existence of the book. He was referring only to an early and elementary work by the same author published long ago. That was the last he had ever read of Vialleton. The important book, of which even I, a mere unscientific man in the street, had heard at least something, had never come to his ears at all. In short, the general charge, that Darwinians are out of date in their information, was proved about as completely as anything controversial can ever be proved in this world.

Now, when a thing like that has happened, above all when it has happened to us, in the pages of a paper in which I write, in the experience of one of my own friends, how can it be expected that people in our position should take seriously the speech at the opening of the British Association at Leeds? How can we keep a straight face when the President strikes an attitude as if pointing to the stars and declaring Darwinism equally eternal? That sort of thing is not meant for us; but for the reporters; just as the true story of Wells and Belloc is generally kept out of the reports.

THE EARLY BIRD IN HISTORY

ST. JOAN OF ARC, a star and a thunderbolt, strange as a meteoric stone whose very solidity is not of this earth, may be compared also to a diamond among pebbles; the one white stone of history. Like a diamond, she is clear but not simple, as some count simplicity; but having many facets or aspects. There is one aspect of the discussion on St. Joan which I have never seen specially noted, and it seems to be worth a note. It concerns that common and current charge against the Catholic Church that she is, as the phrase goes, always behind the times.

When I became a Catholic, I was quite prepared to find that in many respects she really was behind the times. I was very tolerant of the idea of being behind the times, having had long opportunities of studying the perfectly ghastly people who were abreast of the times; or the still more pestilent people who were in advance of the times. I was prepared to find Catholicism rather Conservative, and in that sense slow; and so, of course, in some aspects it is. I knew that being in the movement generally meant only being in the fashion. I knew that fashions had an extraordinary way of being first omnipresent and oppressive and then suddenly blank and forgotten. I knew how publicity seems fixed like a spotlight and vanishes like a lightning-flash. I had seen the whole public imagination filled with a succession of Krugers and Kaisers, who were to be hanged next week and about whom nobody cared a hang next month. I have lived through an overwhelming illusion that there was nobody in the world except General Gordon or Captain Dreyfus or the elephant Jumbo at the Zoo. If there is something in the world that takes no notice of these world-changes, I confess to finding a certain comfort in its indifference. I think it was just as well, from every point of view, that the ecclesiastical authorities delayed a decision about Darwinism or even Evolution; and declined altogether to be excited in that universal excitement. There were many, even among the sympathetic, who seemed to think that Catholics ought to put up an altar to the Missing Link, as Pagans did to the Unknown God. But Catholics prefer to wait until they know what they are doing; and would prefer to learn a little more about a thing besides the fact that nobody can find it. And of course it is true that in some matters, judged by the feverish pace of recent fashion, the Church has always been slow as well as sure. But there is another side of the truth, and one which is more commonly missed. As it happens, both sides are strikingly illustrated in the story of the status of St. Joan.

If we go back to the very beginning of a story, we very often find that the Church did actually do something which her foes ignored and even her friends forgot. Then other social tendencies set in, other questions occupied the world, the tides of time and change passed over the whole business; and when that business came again to the surface, the world had the impression that the Church was dealing with it after a very long delay. But the world itself had never dealt with it at all. The world, as a matter of fact, had never woken up to the fact at all, until it woke up with a start and began to abuse the Church for not having woken up before. During all those long intervening ages, the world had really been much more asleep than the Church. The Church, a very long time ago, had done something; and the world had done nothing. The case of St. Joan of Arc is one curious example.

The Canonisation of St. Joan came very slowly and very late. But the Rehabilitation of St. Joan came very promptly and very early. It is a very exceptional example of rapid reparation for a judicial crime or a miscarriage of justice. There have been any number of these judicial crimes in history. There have been any number of heroes and martyrs whom history regards as having suffered for their virtues. It has almost passed into a popular proverb, especially in modern times; as in the words of the American popular poet: “Right for ever on the scaffold, wrong for ever on the throne.” But I can hardly remember another example of the throne paying so prompt a salute to the scaffold. The condemnation of St. Joan was reversed by the Pope in the lifetime of her contemporaries, at the appeal of her brothers; about as soon as anybody could have expected anything of the sort to be reversed. I do not know if the Athenian Republic did as much for Socrates or the Florentine for Savonarola; but I am pretty certain that nobody could have got the Carthaginians to apologise thus to Regulus or the Antiochi to Maccabaeus. The only really fair way of considering the fashionable subject of the crimes of Christendom would be to compare them with the crimes of heathenism; and the normal human practice of the Pagan world. And while it may be a weakness of human beings, of every age and creed, to stone the prophets and then build their sepulchres, it is really very seldom that the sepulchre is built even as quickly as that. When those who build the sepulchre are really and truly the representatives or inheritors of those who threw the stones, it does not generally happen for hundreds of years. To take the parallel passions of the secular side of the Middle Ages, we should be considerably surprised to learn that when the head of William Wallace had been stuck on a spike by Edward the First, his remains had been respectfully interred and his character cleared by Edward the Third. We should be considerably surprised if the courts of Queen Elizabeth had gone out of their way to repudiate and quash the case against Thomas More. It is generally long afterwards, when the actual ambitions and rivalries are dead, when the feuds and family interests have long been forgotten, that a rather sentimental though sincere tenderness is shown to the dead enemy. In the nineteenth century the English do make a romance about Wallace and a statue of Washington. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the English do produce a fine enthusiasm and a number of excellent books about St. Joan. And I for one hope to see the day when this measure of magnanimity shall be filled up where it has been most wanting; and some such payment made for the deepest debt of all. I should like to see the day when the English put up a statue of Emmett beside the statue of Washington; and I wish that in the Centenary of Emancipation there were likely to be as much fuss in London about the figure of Daniel O'Connell as there was about that of Abraham Lincoln.

But I mean the comment here in a rather larger sense; and in a larger sense it is an even stronger case. I mean that if we take the tale of St. Joan as a test, the really remarkable thing is not so much the slowness of the Church to appreciate her, as the slowness of everybody else. The world, especially the wisest men of the world, were extraordinarily late in realising what a remarkable thing had happened; very much later than the rather rigid religious officials of the fifteenth century. That rigidity of fifteenth century religion was very soon broken up, partly by good and partly by bad forces. Comparatively soon after St. Joan's ashes were thrown into the Seine, quite soon after the Rehabilitation, the Renaissance had really begun. Very soon after that the Reformation had begun. The Renaissance produced a number of large and liberal views on all sorts of things. The Reformation produced numberless narrow views, divided among all sorts of sects. But at least there were plenty of differences and varied points of view, many of them now loosened from anything that may have been restrictive in the medieval discipline. Human reason and imagination, left to themselves, might at least have made as much of Jeanne d'Arc as of John Huss. As a fact, human reason and imagination, left to themselves, made extraordinarily little of her. Humanism and Humanitarianism and, in a general sense, Humanity, did not really rehabilitate Joan until about five hundred years after the Church had done so.

The history of what great men have said about this great woman is a very dismal tale. The greatest man of all, Shakespeare, has an unfortunate pre-eminence by his insular insults in HENRY THE SIXTH. But the thing went on long after Shakespeare; and was far worse in people who had far less excuse than Shakespeare. Voltaire was a Frenchman; he was a great Frenchman; he professed an admiration for many French heroes; he certainly professed to be a reformer and a friend of freedom; he most certainly might have seized on any mediaeval miscarriage of justice that might be turned to anti-clerical account. What Voltaire wrote about St. Joan it will be most decent to pass over in silence. But it is the same all along the line; it is the same far later in rationalistic history than Voltaire. Byron had with all his faults a sensibility to the splendid and heroic, especially in the matter of nations struggling to be free. He was far less insular than any other English poet; he had far more comprehension of France and of the Continent; and he is still comprehended and admired there. He called St. Joan of Arc a fanatical strumpet. That was the general tone of human culture, of history as taught and talked in the age of reason. Mr. Belloc has noted that, so strong was this secular social pressure, that even a Catholic, when he wished to be moderate, like Lingard, was more or less sceptical, not indeed of the morality, but certainly of the miraculous mission of St. Joan. It is true that Schiller was sympathetic, though sentimental — and therefore out of touch. But it was not till nearly the end of the nineteenth century, not fully until the beginning of the twentieth century, that ordinary men of genius awoke to the recognition of one of the most wonderful women of genius in the history of the world. One of the first really popular attempts at a rationalist rehabilitation came, of all people in the world, from Mark Twain. His notion of the Middle Ages was as provincial as the Yankee at the Court of King Arthur; but it is to the credit of this rather crude genius, of the late culture of a new country, that he did catch the flame from the pyre of Rouen, which so many cultivated sceptics had found cold. Then came a patronising pamphlet by Anatole France; which I for one think rather more insulting than the ribald verse of Voltaire. Then came the last great attempt; wrong in many ways in its contention, but conspicuously spirited and sincere — the play of St. Joan. On the whole, nobody can say that humanists and rationalists have been very early in the field. This heroine had to wait about five centuries for Bernard Shaw.

Now, in that comparison, nobody can say that the Church comes off very badly in comparison with the world. The truth is that the ecclesiastical apology to the martyr came so early that everybody had forgotten all about it, long before the rest of the world began to consider the question at all. And though I have taken here the particular case of St. Joan of Arc, I believe that something of the same sort could be traced through a great many other affairs in human history.

It is true of those who gave the Jesuits a bad name and hanged them; and the hanging was not always metaphorical. The simplified version of it is to say that the Jesuits, especially in their capacity of Casuists, suffered almost entirely from being two hundred years before their time. They tried to start in a cautious way what is now surging up on every side of us in a chaotic way; all that is implied in talking about problem novels and problem plays. In other words, they recognised that there really are problems in moral conduct; not problems about whether the moral law should be obeyed, but problems about how in a particular case the moral law really applies. But they were not remembered as pioneers who had begun to ask the questions of Ibsen and Hardy and Shaw. They were remembered only as wicked conspirators who had not always believed in the Divine Right of Kings. They pioneered early enough to be execrated by an earlier generation; but too early to be thanked by a later generation. Protestants have eagerly supported Pascal against them, without taking the trouble to discover that any number of the things that Pascal denounced are things that any modern man would defend. For instance, Pascal blamed the infamous Jesuits for saying that a girl might in some conditions marry against the wish of her parents. The Jesuits would have had all modern novels, let alone problem novels, on their side. But they were too early in the field to have anybody on their side. Moreover, they wished to fit these exceptions into the moral rule; the Moderns who did it two centuries later have produced no rule, but a welter of exceptions.

Here, again, is yet another example that occurs to me at the moment. Many have given long histories of the laborious slowness with which the idea of justice to the aborigines, to Red Indians or such races, has advanced step by step with the progress of modern humanitarian ideas. In such a history Penn, the great Quaker, appears like a primeval founder and father of the republic; and he was undoubtedly very early in the field — in the Puritan field. But Las Casas, the Apostle of the Indians, actually sailed in a ship with Christopher Columbus. It would be difficult to be earlier in the American field than that. He spent his life pleading for the rights of the savages; but he did it at a time when nobody in the north would listen to such a story about a saint of Spain. In this and in many other examples, I believe that the real history of the Catholic pioneer has been the same; to be first and to be forgotten.

PROTESTANTISM: A PROBLEM NOVEL

I HAVE been looking at the little book on Protestantism which Dean Inge has contributed to the sixpenny series of Sir Ernest Benn; and though I suppose it has already been adequately criticised, it may be well to jot down a few notes on it before it is entirely forgotten. The book, which is called "Protestantism," obviously ought to be called "Catholicism." What the Dean has to say about any real thing recognisable as Protestantism is extraordinarily patchy, contradictory and inconclusive. It is only what he has to say about Catholicism that is clear, consistent and to the point. It is warmed and quickened by the human and hearty motive of hatred; and it makes everything else in the book look timid and tortuous by comparison. I am not going to annotate the work considered as history. There are some curious, if not conscious, falsifications of fact, especially in the form of suppressions of fact. He begins by interpreting Protestantism as a mere "inwardness and sincerity" in religion; which none of the Protestant reformers would have admitted to be Protestantism, and which any number of Catholic reformers have made the very heart and soul of their reforms inside Catholicism. It might be suggested that self-examination is now more often urged and practised among Catholics than among Protestants. But whether or no the champions of sincerity examine themselves, they might well examine their statements. Some of the statements here might especially be the subject of second thoughts. It is really a startling suppression and falsification to say that Henry the Eighth had only a few household troops; so that his people must have favoured his policy, or they would have risen against it. It seems enough to reply that they did rise against it. And BECAUSE Henry had only a few household troops, he brought in bands of ferocious mercenaries from abroad to put down the religious revolt of his own people. It is an effort of charity to concede even complete candour to the story-teller, who can actually use such an argument, and then keep silent upon such a sequel. Or again, it is outrageously misleading to suggest that the Catholic victims of Tudor and other tyranny were justly executed as traitors and not as martyrs to a religion. Every persecutor alleges social and secular necessity; so did Caiaphas and Annas; so did Nero and Diocletian; from the first the Christians were suppressed as enemies of the Empire; to the last the heretics were handed over to the secular arm with secular justifications. But when, in point of plain fact, a man can be hanged, drawn and quartered merely for saying Mass, or sometimes for helping somebody who has said Mass, it is simply raving nonsense to say that a religion is not being persecuted. To mention only one of many minor falsifications of this kind, it is quite true to say that Milton was in many ways more of a Humanist than a Puritan; but it is quite false to suggest that the Milton family was a typical Puritan family, in its taste for music and letters. The very simple explanation is that the Milton family was largely a Catholic family; and it was the celebrated John who specially separated himself from its creed but retained its culture. Countless other details as definitely false could be quoted; but I am much more interested in the general scope of the work — which allows itself to be so curiously pointless about Protestantism, merely in order to make a point against Catholicism.

Here is the Dean's attempt at a definition. "What is the main function of Protestantism? It is essentially an attempt to check the tendency to corruption and degradation which attacks every institutional religion." So far, so good. In that case St. Charles Borromeo, for instance, was obviously a leading Protestant. St. Dominic and St. Francis, who purged the congested conventionalism of much of the monasticism around them, were obviously leading Protestants. The Jesuits who sifted legend by the learning of Bollandism, were obviously leading Protestants. But most living Protestant leaders are not leading Protestants. If degradation drags down EVERY institutional religion, it has presumably dragged down Protestant institutional religion. Protestants might possibly appear to purge Protestantism; but so did Catholics appear to purge Catholicism. Plainly this definition is perfectly useless as a DISTINCTION between Protestantism and Catholicism. For it is not a description of any belief or system or body of thought; but simply of a good intention, which all men of all Churches would profess and a few men in some Churches practise — especially in ours. But the Dean not only proves that modern Protestant institutions ought to be corrupt, he says that their primitive founders ought to be repudiated. He distinctly holds that we cannot follow Luther and Calvin.

Very well — let us go on and see whom we are to follow. I will take one typical passage towards the end of the book. The Dean first remarks, "The Roman Church has declared that there can be no reconciliation between

Rome and modern Liberalism or Progress.” One would like to see the encyclical or decree in which this declaration was made. Liberalism might mean many things, from the special thing which Newman denounced and defined to the intention of voting at a by-election for Sir John Simon. Progress generally means something which the Pope has never, so far as I know, found it necessary to deny; but which the Dean himself has repeatedly and most furiously denied. He then goes on: “Protestantism is entirely free from this uncompromising preference for the Dark Ages.” “The Dark Ages,” of course, is cant and claptrap; we need take no notice of that. But we may perhaps notice, not without interest and amusement, that about twenty-five lines before, the Dean himself has described the popular Protestantism of America as if it were a barbarism and belated obscurantism. From which one may infer that the Dark Ages are still going on, exactly where there is Protestantism to preserve them. And considering that he says at least five times that the appeal of Protestants to the letter of Scripture is narrow and superstitious, it surely seems a little astonishing that he should sum up by declaring Protestantism, as such, to be “ENTIRELY free” from this sort of darkness. Then, on top of all this welter of wordy contradictions, we have this marvellous and mysterious conclusion: “It is in this direction that Protestants may look for the beginning of what may really be a new Reformation, a resumption of the unfinished work of Sir Thomas More, Giordano Bruno and Erasmus.”

In short, Protestants may look forward to a Reformation modelled on the work of two Catholics and one obscure mystic, who was not a Protestant and of whose tenets they and the world know practically nothing. One hardly knows where to begin, in criticising this very new Reformation, two-thirds of which was apparently started by men of the Old Religion. We might meekly suggest that, if it be regrettable that the work of Sir Thomas More was “unfinished,” some portion of the blame may perhaps attach to the movement that cut off his head. Is it possible, I wonder, that what the Dean really means is that we want a new Reformation to undo all the harm that was done by the old Reformation? In this we certainly have no reason to quarrel with him. We should be delighted also to have a new Reformation, of ourselves as well as of Protestants and other people; though it is only fair to say that Catholics did, within an incredibly short space of time, contrive to make something very like a new Reformation; which is commonly called the Counter-Reformation. St. Vincent de Paul and St.

Francis of Sales have at least as good a right to call themselves inheritors of the courtesy and charity of More as has the present Dean of St. Paul's. But putting that seventeenth century reform on one side, there is surely something rather stupendous about the reform that the Dean proposes for the twentieth century, and the patron saints he selects for it out of the sixteenth century.

For this, it seems, is how we stand. We are not to follow Luther and Calvin. But we are to follow More and Erasmus. And that, if you please, is the true Protestantism and the promise of a second Reformation. We are to copy the views and virtues of the men who found they could remain under the Pope, and especially of one who actually died for the supremacy of the Pope. We are to throw away practically every rag of thought or theory that was held by the people who did not remain under the supremacy of the Pope. And we are to bind up all these views in a little popular pamphlet with an orange cover and call them "Protestantism." The truth is that Dean Inge had an impossible title and an impossible task. He had to present Protestantism as Progress; when he is far too acute and cultivated a man not to suspect that it was (as it was) a relapse into barbarism and a break away from all that was central in civilisation. Even by the test of the Humanist, it made religion inhuman. Even by the test of the liberal, it substituted literalism for liberalism. Even if the goal had been mere Modernism, it led its followers to it by a long, dreary and straggling detour, a wandering in the wilderness, that did not even discover Modernism till it had first discovered Mormonism. Even if the goal had been logical scepticism, Voltaire could reach it more rapidly from the school of the Jesuits than the poor Protestant provincial brought up among the Jezreelites. Every mental process, even the process of going wrong, is clearer in the Catholic atmosphere. Protestantism has done nothing for Dean Inge, except give him a Deanery which rather hampers his mental activity. It has done nothing for his real talent or scholarship or sense of ideas. It has not in history defended any of the ideas he defends, or helped any of the liberties in which he hopes. But it has done one thing: it has hurt something he hates. It has done some temporary or apparent harm to the heritage of St. Peter. It once made something that looked like a little crack in the wall of Rome. And because of THAT, the Dean can pardon anything to the Protestants — even Protestantism.

For this is the strange passion of his life; and he toils through all these pages of doubts and distinctions only for the moment when he can liberate his soul in one wild roar of monomaniac absurdity: “Let the innocent Dreyfus die in prison; let the Irishman who has committed a treacherous murder be told to leave ‘politics’ out of his confession; let the lucrative imposture of Lourdes...” That is the way to talk! It is so tiring, pretending to talk sense.

A SIMPLE THOUGHT

MOST men would return to the old ways in faith and morals if they could broaden their minds enough to do so. It is narrowness that chiefly keeps them in the rut of negation. But this enlargement is easily misunderstood, because the mind must be enlarged to see the simple things; or even to see the self-evident things. It needs a sort of stretch of imagination to see the obvious objects against the obvious background; and especially the big objects against the big background. There is always the sort of man who can see nothing but the spot on the carpet, so that he cannot even see the carpet. And that tends to irritation, which he may magnify into rebellion. Then there is the kind of man who can only see the carpet, perhaps because it is a new carpet. That is more human, but it may be tinged with vanity and even vulgarity. There is the man who can only see the carpeted room; and that will tend to cut him off too much from other things, especially the servants' quarters. Finally, there is the man enlarged by imagination, who cannot sit in the carpeted room, or even in the coal-cellar, without seeing all the time the outline of the whole house against its aboriginal background of earth and sky. He, understanding that the roof is raised from the beginning as a shield against sun or snow, and the door against frost or slime, will know better and not worse than the rest the reasons of the rules within. He will know better than the first man that there ought not to be a spot on the carpet. But he will know, unlike the first man, why there is a carpet.

He will regard in the same fashion a speck or spot upon the records of his tradition or his creed. He will not explain it ingeniously; certainly he will not explain it away. On the contrary, he will see it very simply; but he will also see it very largely; and against the background of larger things. He will do what his critics never by any chance do; he will see the obvious thing and ask the obvious question. For the more I read of the modern criticisms of religion, especially of my own religion, the more I am struck by this narrow concentration and this imaginative incapacity to take in the problem as a whole. I have recently been reading a very moderate condemnation of current Catholic practices, coming from America, where the condemnation is often far from moderate. It takes the form, generally speaking, of a swarm of questions, all of which I should be quite willing to answer. Only I am vividly conscious of the big questions that are not asked, rather than of the little questions that are.

And I feel above all, this simple and forgotten fact; that whether certain charges are or are not true of Catholics, they are quite unquestionably true of everybody else. It never occurs to the critic to do anything so simple as to compare what is Catholic with what is Non-Catholic. The one thing that never seems to cross his mind, when he argues about what the Church is like, is the simple question of what the world would be like without it.

That is what I mean by being too narrow to see the house called the church against the background called the cosmos. For instance, the writer of whom I speak indulges in the millionth mechanical repetition of the charge of mechanical repetition. He says that we repeat prayers and other verbal forms without thinking about them. And doubtless there are many sympathisers who will repeat that denunciation after him, without thinking about it at all. But, before we come to explaining the Church's real teaching about such things, or quoting her numberless recommendations of attention and vigilance, or expounding the reason of the reasonable exceptions that she does allow, there is a wide, a simple and a luminous truth about the whole situation which anybody can see if he will walk about with his eyes open. It is the obvious fact that ALL human forms of speech tend to fossilise into formalism; and that the Church stands unique in history not as talking a dead language among everlasting languages; but, on the contrary, as having preserved a living language in a world of dying languages. When the great Greek cry breaks into the Latin of the Mass, as old as Christianity itself, it may surprise some to learn that there are a good many people in church who really do say KYRIE ELEISON and mean exactly what they say. But anyhow, they mean what they say rather more than a man who begins a letter with "Dear Sir" means what he says. "Dear" is emphatically a dead word; in that place it has ceased to have any meaning. It is exactly what the Protestants would allege of Popish rites and forms; it is done rapidly, ritually, and without any memory even of the meaning of the rite. When Mr. Jones the solicitor uses it to Mr. Brown the banker, he does not mean that the banker is dear to him, or that his heart is filled with Christian love, even so much as the heart of some poor ignorant Papist listening to the Mass. Now, life, ordinary, jolly, heathen, human life, is simply chockful of these dead words and meaningless ceremonies. You will not escape from them by escaping from the Church into the world. When the critic in question, or a thousand other critics like him, say that we are only required to make a material or mechanical attendance at Mass, he says something which is NOT true about the ordinary Catholic in his feelings about the Catholic Sacraments. But he says something which IS true about the ordinary official attending official functions, about the ordinary Court levee or Ministerial reception, and about three-quarters of the ordinary society calls and polite visits in the town. This deadening of repeated social action may be a harmless thing; it may be a melancholy thing; it may be a mark of the Fall of Man; it may be anything the critic chooses to think. But those who have made it, hundreds and hundreds of times, a special and concentrated charge against the Church, are men blind to the whole human world they live in and unable to see anything but the thing they traduce.

There are, even in this record, any number of other cases of this queer and uncanny unconsciousness. The writer complains that priests are led blindfold into their calling and do not understand the duties involved in it. That also we seem to have heard before. But we have seldom heard it in so extraordinary a form as in his statement, that a man can be finally committed to the priesthood while he is still "a child." He would appear to have odd and elastic ideas about the duration of childhood. As Mr. Michael Williams has pointed out in his most thoughtful and illuminating collection of essays, "Catholicism and the Modern Mind," this is playing about with a matter of plain fact; since a priest is twenty-four at the earliest when he takes his vows. But here again I myself am haunted by this huge and naked and yet neglected comparison between the Church and everything outside the Church. Most critics of Catholicism declare it to be destructive of patriotism; and this critic says something about the disadvantages of the Church being merely "attached to an Italian diocese." Well, I for one have always been a defender of the cult of patriotism; and nothing that I say here has any connection with what is commonly called pacifism. I think that our friends and brethren fell ten years ago in a just war against the hard heathenism of the north; I think the Prussianism they defeated was frozen with the pride of hell; and for these dead, I think it is well with them; and perhaps better than with us, who live to see how evil Peace can be.

But really — when we come to talk about the Church involving young people in vows! What are we to say to those who would pit patriotism or pagan citizenship against the Church on that issue? They conscript by violence boys of eighteen, they applaud volunteers of sixteen for saying they are eighteen, they throw them by thousands into a huge furnace and torture-chamber, of which their imaginations can have conceived nothing and from which their honour forbids them to escape; they keep them in those horrors year after year without any knowledge even of the possibility of victory; and kill them like flies by the million before they have begun to live. That is what the State does; that is what the World does; that is what their Protestant, practical, sensible, secular society does. And after that they have the astounding impudence to come and complain of us, because in dealing with a small minority of specialists, we allow a man finally to choose a charitable and peaceful life, not only long after he is twenty-one, but when he is well on towards thirty, and after he has had about ten years to think quietly whether he will do it or not!

In short, what I miss in all these things is the obvious thing: the question of how the Church compares with the world outside the Church, or opposed to the Church, or offered as a substitute for the Church. And the fact obviously is that the world will do all that it has ever accused the Church of doing, and do it much worse, and do it on a much larger scale, and do it (which is worst and most important of all) without any standards for a return to sanity or any motives for a movement of repentance. Catholic abuses can be reformed, because there is the admission of a form. Catholic sins can be expiated, because there is a test and a principle of expiation. But where else in the world to-day is any such test or standard found; or anything except a changing mood, which makes patriotism the fashion ten years ago and pacifism the fashion ten years afterwards?

The danger is to-day that men will not sufficiently enlarge their minds to take in the obvious things; and this is one of them. It is that men charge the Roman tradition with being half-heathen and then take refuge from it in a complete heathenism. It is that men complain because Christians have been infected with paganism; and then flee from the plague-spotted to take refuge with the pestilence. There is no single one of these faults alleged against the Catholic institution, which is not far more flagrant and even flamboyant in every other institution. And it is to these other institutions, the State, the School, the modern machinery of taxation and police, to which these people actually look to save them from the superstition of their fathers. That is the contradiction; that is the crashing collision; that is the inevitable intellectual disaster in which they have already involved themselves; and we have only to wait as patiently as we can, to see how long it is before they realise what has happened.

THE CALL TO THE BARBARIANS

A BOOK was sent me the other day by a gentleman who pins his faith to what he calls the Nordic race; and who, indeed, appears to offer that race as a substitute for all religions. Crusaders believed that Jerusalem was not only the Holy City, but the centre of the whole world. Moslems bow their heads towards Mecca and Roman Catholics are notorious for being in secret communication with Rome. I presume that the Holy Place of the Nordic religion must be the North Pole. What form of religious architecture is exhibited in its icebergs, how far its vestments are modified by the white covering of Arctic animals, how the morning and evening service may be adapted to a day and a night each lasting for six months, whether their only vestment is the alb or their only service the angelus of noon, upon all these mysteries I will not speculate. But I can affirm with some confidence that the North Pole is very little troubled by heretical movements or the spread of modern doubt. Anyhow, it would seem that we know next to nothing about this social principle, except that anything is good if it is near enough to the North. And this undoubtedly explains the spiritual leadership of the Eskimo throughout history; and the part played by Spitzbergen as the spiritual arena of modern times. The only thing that puzzles me is that the Englishmen who now call themselves Nordic used to call themselves Teutonic; and very often even Germanic. I cannot think why they altered this so abruptly in the autumn of 1914. Some day, I suppose, when we have diplomatic difficulties with Norway, they will equally abruptly drop the word Nordic. They will hastily substitute some other — I would suggest Borealic. They might be called the Bores, for short.

But I only mention this book because of a passage in it which is rather typical of the tone of a good many other people when they are talking about Catholic history. The writer would substitute one race for all religions; in which he certainly differs from us, who are ready to offer one religion to all races. And even here, perhaps, the comparison is not altogether to his advantage. For anybody who likes can belong to the religion; whereas it is not very clear what is to be done with the people who do not happen to belong to the race. But even among religions he is ready to admit degrees of depravity; he will distinguish between these disgusting institutions; of course, according to their degree of latitude. It is rather unfortunate for him that many Eskimos are Catholics and that most French Protestants live in the south of France; but he proceeds on his general principle clearly enough. He points out, in his pleasant way, why it is exactly that Roman Catholicism is such a degrading superstition. And he adds (which is what interests me at the moment) that this was illustrated in the Dark Ages, which were a nightmare of misery and ignorance. He then admits handsomely that Protestantism is not quite so debased and devilish as Catholicism; and that men of the Protestant nations do exhibit rudimentary traces of the human form. But this, he says, "is not due to their Protestantism, but to their Nordic common sense." They are more educated, more liberal, more familiar with reason and beauty, because they are what used to be called Teutonic; descended from Vikings and Gothic chiefs rather than from the Tribunes of Florence or the Troubadours of Provence. And in this curious idea I caught a glimpse of something much wider and more interesting; which is another note of the modern ignorance of the Catholic tradition. In speaking of things that people do not know, I have mostly spoken of things that are really within the ring or circle of our own knowledge; things inside the Catholic culture which they miss because they are outside it. But there are some cases in which they themselves are ignorant even of the things outside it. They themselves are ignorant, not only of the centre of civilisation which they slander, but even of the ends of the earth to which they appeal; they not only cannot find Rome on their map, but they do not even know where to look for the North Pole.

Take, for instance, that remark about the Dark Ages and the Nordic common sense. It is tenable and tolerable enough to say that the Dark Ages were a nightmare. But it is nonsense to say that the Nordic element was anything remotely resembling sense. If the Dark Ages were a nightmare, it was very largely because the Nordic nonsense made them an exceedingly Nordic nightmare. It was the period of the barbarian invasions; when piracy was on the high seas and civilisation was in the monasteries. You may not like monasteries, or the sort of civilisation that is preserved by monasteries; but it is quite certain that it was the only sort of civilisation there was. But this is simply one of the things that the Nordic gentleman does not know. He imagines that the Danish pirate was talking about Tariff Reform and Imperial Preference, with scientific statistics from Australia and Alaska, when he was rudely interrupted by a monk named Bede, who had never heard of anything but monkish fables. He supposes that a Viking or a

Visigoth was firmly founded on the principles of the Primrose League and the English Speaking Union, and that everything else would have been founded on them if fanatical priests had not rushed in and proclaimed the savage cult called Christianity. He thinks that Penda of Mercia, the last heathen king, was just about to give the whole world the benefits of the British Constitution, not to mention the steam engine and the works of Rudyard Kipling, when his work was blindly ruined by unlettered ruffians with such names as Augustine and Dunstan and Anselm. And that is the little error which invalidates our Nordic friend's importance as a serious historian; that is why we cannot throw ourselves with utter confidence and surrender into the stream of his historical enthusiasm. The difficulty consists in the annoying detail that nothing like what he is thinking about ever happened in the world at all; that the religion of race that he proposes is exactly what he himself calls the Dark Ages. It is what some scientific persons call a purely subjective idea; or in other words, a nightmare. It is very doubtful if there ever was any Nordic race. It is quite certain that there never was any Nordic common sense. The very words "common sense" are a translation from the Latin.

Now that one typical or even trivial case has a larger application. One very common form of Protestant or rationalist ignorance may be called the ignorance of what raw humanity is really like. Such men get into a small social circle, very modern and very narrow, whether it is called the Nordic race or the Rationalist Association. They have a number of ideas, some of them truisms, some of them very untrue, about liberty, about humanity, about the spread of knowledge. The point is that those ideas, whether true or untrue, are the very reverse of universal. They are not the sort of ideas that any large mass of mankind, in any age or country, may be assumed to have. They may in some cases be related to deeper realities; but most men would not even recognise them in the form in which these men present them. There is probably, for instance, a fundamental assumption of human brotherhood that is common to all humanity. But what we call humanitarianism is not common to humanity. There is a certain recognition of reality and unreality which may be called common sense. But the scientific sense of the special value of truth is not generally regarded as common sense. It is silly to pretend that priests specially persecuted a naturalist, when the truth is that all the little boys would have persecuted him in any village in the world, merely because he was a lunatic with a butterfly-net. Public opinion, taken as a whole is much more contemptuous of specialists and seekers after truth than the Church ever was. But these critics never can take public opinion as a whole. There are a great many examples of this truth; one is the case I have given, the absurd notion that a horde of heathen raiders out of the northern seas and forests, in the most ignorant epoch of history, were not likely to be at least as ignorant as anybody else. They were, of course, much more ignorant than anybody with the slightest social connection with the Catholic Church. Other examples may be found in the story of other religions. Great tracts of the globe, covered in theory by the other religions, are often covered in practice merely by certain human habits of fatalism or pessimism or some other human mood. Islam very largely stands for the fatalism. Buddhism very largely stands for the pessimism. Neither of them knows anything of either the Christian or the humanitarian sort of hope. But an even more convincing experience is to go out into the street, or into a tube or a tram, and talk to the actual cabmen, cooks and charwomen cut off from the Creed by the modern chaos. You will find that heathens are not happy, however Nordic. You will soon find that you do not need to go to Arabia for fatalism; or to the Thibetan desert for despair.

ON THE NOVEL WITH A PURPOSE

I SEE that Mr. Patrick Braybrooke and others, writing to the CATHOLIC TIMES, have raised the question of Catholic propaganda in novels written by Catholics. The very phrase, which we are all compelled to use, is awkward and even false. A Catholic putting Catholicism into a novel, or a song, or a sonnet, or anything else, is not being a propagandist; he is simply being a Catholic. Everybody understands this about every other enthusiasm in the world. When we say that a poet's landscape and atmosphere are full of the spirit of England, we do not mean that he is necessarily conducting an Anti-German propaganda during the Great War. We mean that if he is really an English poet, his poetry cannot be anything but English. When we say that songs are full of the spirit of the sea, we do not mean that the poet is recruiting for the Navy or even trying to collect men for the merchant service. We mean that he loves the sea; and for that reason would like other people to love it. Personally, I am all for propaganda; and a great deal of what I write is deliberately propagandist. But even when it is not in the least propagandist, it will probably be full of the implications of my own religion; because that is what is meant by having a religion. So the jokes of a Buddhist, if there were any, would be Buddhist jokes. So the love-songs of a Calvinistic Methodist, should they burst from him, would be Calvinistic Methodist love-songs. Catholics have produced more jokes and love-songs than Calvinists and Buddhists. That is because, saving their holy presence, Calvinists and Buddhists have not got so large or human a religion. But anything they did express would be steeped in any convictions that they do hold; and that is a piece of common sense which would seem to be quite self-evident; yet I foresee a vast amount of difficulty about it in the one isolated case of the Catholic Church.

To begin with, what I have said would be true of any other real religion; but so much of the modern world is full of a religiosity that is rather a sort of unconscious prejudice. Buddhism is a real religion, or at any rate, a very real philosophy. Calvinism was a real religion, with a real theology. But the mind of the modern man is a curious mixture of decayed Calvinism and diluted Buddhism; and he expresses his philosophy without knowing that he holds it. We say what it is natural to us to say; but we know what we are saying; therefore it is assumed that we are saying it for effect. He says what it is natural to him to say; but he does not know what he is saying, still less why he is saying it. So he is not accused of uttering his dogma with the purpose of revealing it to the world; for he has not really revealed it to himself. He is just as partisan; he is just as particularist; he is just as much depending on one doctrinal system as distinct from another. But he has taken it for granted so often that he has forgotten what it is. So his literature does not seem to him partisan, even when it is. But our literature does seem to him propagandist, even when it isn't.

Suppose I write a story, let us hope a short story, say, about a wood that is haunted by evil spirits. Let us give ourselves the pleasure of supposing that at night all the branches have the appearance of being hung with hundreds of corpses, like the orchard of Louis the Eleventh, the spirits of travellers who have hanged themselves when they came to that spot; or anything bright and cheery like that. Suppose I make my hero, Gorlias Fitzgorgon (that noble character) make the sign of the cross as he passes this spot; or the friend who represents wisdom and experience advise him to consult a priest with a view to exorcism. Making the sign of the cross seems to me not only religiously right, but artistically appropriate and psychologically probable. It is what I should do; it is what I conceive that my friend Fitzgorgon would do; it is also aesthetically apt, or, as they say, "in the picture." I rather fancy it might be effective if the traveller saw with the mystical eye, as he saw the forest of dead men, a sort of shining pattern or silver tangle of crosses hovering in the dark, where so many human fingers had made that sign upon the empty air. But though I am writing what seems to me natural and appropriate and artistic, I know that the moment I have written it, a great roar and bellow will go up with the word "Propaganda" coming from a thousand throats; and that every other critic, even if he is kind enough to commend the story, will certainly add: "But why does Mr. Chesterton drag in his Roman Catholicism?"

Now let us suppose that Mr Chesterton has not this disgusting habit. Let us suppose that I write the same story, or the same sort of story, informed with a philosophy which is familiar and therefore unobserved. Let us suppose that I accept the ready-made assumptions of the hour, without examining them any more than the others do. Suppose I get into the smooth rut of newspaper routine and political catchwords; and make the man in my story act exactly like the man in the average magazine story. I know exactly what the man in the average magazine story would do. I can almost give you his exact words. In that case Fitzgorgon, on first catching a glimpse of the crowds of swaying spectres in the moon, will almost inevitably say: “But this is the twentieth century!”

In itself, of course, the remark is simply meaningless. It is far more meaningless than making the sign of the cross could ever be; for to that even its enemies attach some sort of meaning. But to answer a ghost by saying, “This is the twentieth century,” is in itself quite unmeaning; like seeing somebody commit a murder and then saying, “But this is the second Tuesday in August!” Nevertheless, the magazine writer who for the thousandth time puts these words into the magazine story, has an intention in this illogical phrase. He is really depending upon two dogmas; neither of which he dares to question and neither of which he is able to state. The dogmas are: first, that humanity is perpetually and permanently improving through the process of time; and, second, that improvement consists in a greater and greater indifference or incredulity about the miraculous. Neither of these two statements can be proved. And it goes without saying that the man who uses them cannot prove them, for he cannot even state them. In so far as they are at all in the order of things that can be proved, they are things that can be disproved. For certainly there have been historical periods of relapse and retrogression; and there certainly are highly organised and scientific civilizations very much excited about the supernatural; as people are about Spiritualism to-day. But anyhow, those two dogmas must be accepted on authority as absolutely true before there is any sense whatever in Gorlias Fitzgorgon saying, “But this is the twentieth century.” The phrase depends on the philosophy; and the philosophy is put into the story.

Yet nobody says the magazine story is propagandist. Nobody says it is preaching that philosophy because it contains that phrase. We do not say that the writer has dragged in his progressive party politics. We do not say that he is going out of his way to turn the short story into a novel with a purpose. He does not feel as if he were going out of his way; his way lies straight through the haunted wood, as does the other; and he only makes Gorlias say what seems to him a sensible thing to say; as I make him do what seems to me a sensible thing to do. We are both artists in the same sense; we are both propagandists in the same sense and non-propagandists in the same sense. The only difference is that I can defend my dogma and he cannot even define his.

In other words, this world of to-day does not know that all the novels and newspapers that it reads or writes are in fact full of certain assumptions, that are just as dogmatic as dogmas. With some of those assumptions I agree, such as the ideal of human equality implied in all romantic stories from CINDERELLA to OLIVER TWIST; that the rich are insulting God in despising poverty. With some of them I totally disagree; as in the curious idea of human inequality, which is permitted about races though not about classes. "Nordic" people are so much superior to "Dagoes," that a score of Spanish desperados armed to the teeth are certain to flee in terror from the fist of any solitary gentleman who has learned all the military and heroic virtues in Wall Street or the Stock Exchange. But the point about these assumptions, true or false, is that they are felt as being assumed, or alluded to, or taken naturally as they come. They are not felt as being preached; and therefore they are not called propaganda. Yet they have in practice all the double character of propaganda; they involve certain views with which everyone does not agree; and they do in fact spread those views by means of fiction and popular literature. What they do not do is to state them clearly so that they can be criticised. I do not blame the writers for putting their philosophy into their stories. I should not blame them even if they used their stories to spread their philosophy. But they do blame us; and the real reason is that they have not yet realised that we have a philosophy at all.

The truth is, I think, that they are caught in a sort of argument in a circle. Their vague philosophy says to them: "All religion is dead; Roman Catholicism is a religious sect which must be particularly dead, since it consists of mere external acts and attitudes, crossings, genuflections and the rest; which these sectarians suppose they have to perform in a particular place at a particular time." Then some Catholic will write a romance or a tragedy about the love of a man and woman, or the rivalry of two men, or any other general human affair; and they will be astonished to find that he cannot preach these things in an "unsectarian" way. They say, "Why does he drag in his religion?" They mean, "Why does he drag in his religion, which consists entirely of crossings, genuflections and external acts belonging to a particular place and time, when he is talking about the wide world and the beauty of woman and the anger and ambition of man?" In other words, they say, "When we have assumed that his creed is a small and dead thing, how dare he apply it as a universal and living thing? It has no right to be so broad, when we all know it is so narrow."

I conclude therefore that, while Mr. Braybrooke was quite right in suggesting that a novelist with a creed ought not to be ashamed of having a cause, the more immediate necessity is to find some way of popularising our whole philosophy of life, by putting it more plainly than it can be put in the symbol of a story. The difficulty with a story is in its very simplicity and especially in its swiftness. Men do things and do not define or defend them. Gorlias Fitzgorgon makes the sign of the cross; he does not stop in the middle of the demon wood to explain why it is at once an invocation of the Trinity and a memorial of the Crucifixion. What is wanted is a popular outline of the way in which ordinary affairs are affected by our view of life, and how it is also a view of death, a view of sex, a view of social decencies, and so on. When people understood the light that shines for us upon all these facts, they would no longer be surprised to find it shining in our fictions.

THE REVOLT AGAINST IDEAS

AT the time when the DAILY EXPRESS communiques provided some pretty awful revelations about Mexico, the DAILY EXPRESS correspondence column provided almost equally awful revelations about England. It gave us a glimpse of what monstrous and misshapen things are still living in our midst, veiled in red brick villas or disguised under bowler hats. The awful revelations about England were, of course, mainly psychological. It was not anarchy in the State, which is the failing of the fighting Latin peoples. It was anarchy in the mind, which is the special character of those whom we call, in moments of anger, Anglo-Saxons. A Mexican atheist would be quite capable of cutting the throat of a priest or training a cannon on a nunnery. But he would be quite incapable of arguing, as the English Protestants did in the newspaper, that it was quite right of Calles to persecute this belief on this occasion, because it was quite wrong of Catholics to persecute any belief on any occasion. No anarchist can be as anarchical as all that. Calles might blow up a St. Peter's but he would not blame a Spaniard for having once done what he was praising a Mexican for trying to do. To that extent even Calles is more of a Catholic as well as more of a Latin. He wants to have his own way, and to prevent thousands of people from having their way; but he does not want to have it both ways. That wild sacrament, the miracle of the vanishing and reappearing cake, of the cake that is ever devoured and ever remaining — that miracle belongs to the religion of unreason and only takes place in the chapels of our own free country.

Amid a welter of such words there was a phrase in one of the letters which is of some sociological interest to us. One of these intolerant tolerationists was endeavouring to defend Calles by suggesting that only prejudice can accuse him of anarchical or anti-religious extremes of opinion. It is quite unfair (it was said) to call Calles an atheist or a Bolshevist. Indeed, we may learn from all these letters that Calles is probably a Wesleyan Methodist and regularly attends a chapel in East Croydon. But he is even worse. They appear to regard it as a favour to Calles to pay him the extraordinary compliment of comparing him to the sixteenth century Reformers. The correspondent here in question uses this as an argument against any alleged anarchism in the Mexican — if he is a

Mexican. “Calles and his partisans are branded as Atheists and Bolsheviks — Why? Were the English Reformers Bolsheviks? Certainly not.”

Here we are happily all able to agree. With heartfelt unanimity we can repeat, “Certainly not.” The English Reformers were certainly not Bolshevists. None will withhold the handsome admission that the English Reformers were Capitalists. Few people in history have deserved to be described so exactly, so completely, so typically as Capitalists. They were a great many other things besides Capitalists; some of them were cads, some gentlemen, a few honest men, many thieves, a baser sort courtiers, a better sort monomaniacs; but they were all Capitalists and what they created was Capitalism. They all conducted their powerful political operations on a basis of much accumulated capital; but they never, even with their dying eyes, lost the light of hope and expectation; the promise and the vision of more capital.

But what concerns us nowadays is this; that it is their Capitalism that has remained. As a matter of fact, many of them did have other ideals of spiritual simplification which might in some ways be compared to Communism. We should never be likely to call a man like Cranmer or a man like Burleigh a Bolshevist. We could only say, with Hamlet, that we would he were so honest a man. But there were men in that movement, or that muddle, who were as mad and as honest as Bolshevists. There were theoretical, and especially theological enthusiasms which moved specially towards simplicity; like that of the Bolshevists. But the point to fix and rivet is that THOSE theories are dead. There was a logical and even lofty scheme of thought; but it is that which is utterly abandoned by modern thought. There were sincere ideals in some of the early Protestants; but they are not the ideals of any of the modern Protestants. Thus Calvinism was a clear philosophy; which is alone enough to distinguish it from Modern Thought. But in so far as they had an element of Calvinism, their Calvinism is dead. If they had had an element of Communism, as some of them might, that Communism would now be dead. Nothing but their Capitalism is alive.

We must remember that even to talk of the corruption of the monasteries is a compliment to the monasteries. For we do not talk of the corruption of the corrupt. Nobody pretends that the mediaeval institutions began in mere greed and pride. But the modern institutions did. Nobody says that St. Benedict drew up his rule of labour in order to make his monks lazy; but only that they became lazy. Nobody says that the first Franciscans practised poverty to obtain wealth; but only that later fraternities did obtain wealth. But it is quite certain that the Cecils and the Russells and the rest did from the first want to obtain wealth. That which was death to Catholicism was actually the birth of Capitalism. Since then we have had, not the inconsistency that a man who vowed to be poor became rich; but rather a shocking consistency, that the man who vowed to be rich became richer. After that there was no stopping a race of relative ambition; and a belief in bigger and bigger things. It is indeed true that the Reformers were not Communists. It might be aptly retorted that the Religious were Communists. But the more vital point is not Communism, but a certain comparative spirit. The English squire increased and the English yeoman diminished. Both found their pride in private ownership of land. But the pride was more and more in having a great estate, and not in having an estate. So, in his turn, the English shopkeeper ceased to be proud of minding his own business and could only be proud of the number of businesses he could mind. From this has come all the mercantile megalomania to-day; with its universal transformation of Trades into Trusts. It is the natural conclusion of the movement away from the transformation of all Trades into Guilds. But its genesis was the change from an ideal of humility, in which many failed, to an ideal of pride in which (by its nature) only a few can succeed.

In this sense we may agree with the newspaper correspondent; that the Reformers were not Revolutionists. We can reassure that simple gentleman of our full realisation that they were not Bolshevists. We can entirely absolve the Cranmers and the Cromwells of any restless desire to raise the proletariat. We can clear the great names of Burleigh and Bacon of the stain of any dangerous sympathy with the poor. The distinguishing mark of the Reformers was a profound respect for the powers that be, but an even profounder respect for the wealth that was to be; and a really unfathomable reverence for the wealth that was to be their own. Some people like that spirit, and regard it as the soundest foundation of stable government; we need not argue about it here. It is, broadly speaking, what is regarded as respectability by all those who have nothing else to respect. Certainly nobody could confuse it with revolution. But the point of historical importance could be put in another fashion, also more or less favourable to the Reformers. Capitalism was not only solid, it was in a sense candid. It set up a class to be worshipped openly and frankly because of its wealth.

That is the point at the moment and the real contrast between this and the older mediaeval order. Such wealth was the abuse of the monks and abbots; it was the use of the merchants and the squires. The avaricious abbot violated his ideals. The avaricious employer had no ideals to violate. For there never has been, properly speaking, such a thing as the ideal good of Capitalism; though there are any number of good men who are Capitalists following other ideals. The Reformation, especially in England, was above all the abandonment of the attempt to rule the world by ideals, or even by ideas. The attempt had undoubtedly failed, in part, because those who were supposed to be the idealists failed to uphold the ideals; and any number of people who were supposed to accept the general idea thwarted the fulfilment of the ideas. But it also fell under the attack of those who hated, not only those ideals, but any ideals. It was the result of the impatient and imperious appetites of humanity, hating to be restrained by bonds; but most of all to be restrained by invisible bonds. For the English Reformers did not really set up an opposite ideal or an alternative set of ideas. As our friend truly said, they were not Bolshevists. They set up certain very formidable things called facts. They set out almost avowedly to rule the realm merely by facts; by the fact that somebody called Russell had two hundred times more money than any of his neighbours; by the fact that somebody called Cecil had obtained the power of having any of his neighbours hanged. Facts are at least solid while they last; but the fatal thing about them is that they do not last. It is only the ideas that last. And to-day a man may be called Russell and have considerably less money than a man who is called Rockefeller; and history may see the amazing spectacle of a man called Cecil largely thrust out of practical politics and called an idealist and a failure.

The same progress of Capitalism that made the squires has destroyed the squires. The same commercial advance that exalted England before Europe has abased England before America. Exactly in so far as we have our affections healthily attached to this adventurous and patriotic England of the last few centuries, we shall see that our affections and attachments are bound to be betrayed. The process called practical, the attempt to rule merely by facts, has in its own nature the essence of all betrayal. We discover that facts, which seem so solid, are of all things the most fluid. As the professors and the prigs say, facts are always evolving; in other words, they are always evading or escaping or running away. Men who bow down to the wealth of a squire, because it enables him to behave like a gentleman, have to go on bowing down to the same wealth in somebody who cannot behave like a gentleman; and eventually perhaps to the same wealth not attached to any recognisable human being at all, but invested in an irresponsible company in a foreign country. Wealth does indeed take to itself wings, and even abide in the uttermost parts of the sea. Wealth becomes formless and almost fabulous; indeed, they were unconscious satirists who talked about "fabulous wealth." Great financiers buy and sell thousands of things that nobody has ever seen; and which are for all practical purposes imaginary. So ends the adventure of trusting only to facts; it ends in a fairyland of fantastic abstractions.

We must go back to the idea of government by ideas. There is just that grain of truth in the already mentioned fantasy of Communism. But there were many richer, and subtler and better balanced ideas even in the mediaeval make-up of Catholicism. I repeat that this Catholicism was ruined by Catholics as well as Protestants. Mediaeval sins hampered and corrupted mediaeval ideas, before the Reformers decided to throw away all ideas. But that was the right thing to follow, or to try to follow; and there is not and never will be anything else to do except to try again. Many mediaeval men failed in the attempt to live up to those ideals. But many more modern men are more disastrously failing in the attempt to live without them. And through that failure we shall gradually come to understand the real advantages of that ancient scheme which only partly failed; according to which, in theory at least, the man of peace was higher than the man of war, and poverty superior to wealth.

There is one quaint little phrase in Macaulay's essay on Bacon; that great outbreak of the Philistines against the Philosophers. In one small sentence the great Philistine betrays the weakness of his whole argument of utility. Speaking scornfully of the Schoolmen, he says that St. Thomas Aquinas would doubtless (such was his simplicity) have thought it more important to engage in the manufacture of syllogisms than in the manufacture of gunpowder. Not even the Gunpowder Plot could prevent that sturdy Protestant from assuming that gunpowder is always useful. Since his time we have seen a good deal more gunpowder. One does not need to be a pacifist to think that gunpowder need hardly go on being useful on quite such a grand scale. And a great part of the world has now reached a mood of reaction, in which it is disposed to cry out, "If there are any syllogisms that will save us from all this gunpowder, for God’s sake let us listen to them.” Even logic they are prepared, in their despair, to accept. They will not only listen to religion, they will even perhaps listen to reason, if it will promise them a little peace.

THE FEASTS AND THE ASCETIC

I WAS reflecting in the course of the recent feast of Christmas (which, like other feasts, is preceded by a fast) that the combination is still a puzzle to many. The Modernist, or man who boasts of being modern, is generally rather like a man who overeats himself so much on Christmas Eve that he has no appetite on Christmas Day. It is called being In Advance of the Times; and is incumbent upon all who are progressive, prophetic, futuristic and generally looking towards what Mr. Belloc calls the Great Rosy Dawn: a dawn which generally looks a good deal rosier the night before than it does the morning after.

To many people, however, who are not offensively in advance of the times the combination of these ideas does seem to be a sort of contradiction or confusion. But in real fact it is not only not so confused, but even not so complicated. The great temptation of the Catholic in the modern world is the temptation to intellectual pride. It is so obvious that most his critics are talking without in the least knowing what they are talking about, that he is sometimes a little provoked towards the very un-Christian logic of answering a fool according to his folly. He is a little bit disposed to luxuriate in secret, as it were over the much greater subtlety and richness of the philosophy he inherits; and only answer a bewildered barbarian so as to bewilder him still more. He is tempted to ironical agreements or even to disguising himself as a dunce. Men who have an elaborate philosophical defence of their views sometimes take pleasure in boasting of their almost babyish credulity. Having reached their own goal through labyrinths of logic, they will point the stranger only to the very shortest short cut of authority; merely in order to shock the simpleton with simplicity. Or, as in the present case, they will find a grim amusement in presenting the separate parts of the scheme as if they were really separate; and leave the outsider to make what he can of them. So when somebody says that a fast is the opposite to a feast, and yet both seem to be sacred to us, some of us will always be moved merely to say, “Yes,” and relapse into an objectionable grin. When the anxious ethical enquirer says, “Christmas is devoted to merry-making, to eating meat and drinking wine, and yet you encourage this pagan and materialistic enjoyment,” you or I will be tempted to say, “Quite right, my boy,” and leave it at that. When he then says, looking even more worried, “Yet you admire men for fasting in caves and deserts and denying themselves ordinary pleasures; you are clearly committed, like the Buddhists, to the opposite or ascetic principle,” we shall be similarly inspired to say, “Quite correct, old bean,” or “Got it first time, old top,” and merely propose an adjournment for convivial refreshment.

Nevertheless, it is a temptation to be resisted. Not only is it obviously our duty to explain to the other people that what seems to them contradictory is really complementary, but we are not altogether justified in any such tone of superiority. We are not right in making our geniality an expression of our despair. We are not entitled to despair of explaining the truth; nor is it really so horribly difficult to explain. The real difficulty is not so much that the critic is crude as that we ourselves are not always clear, even in our own minds, far less in our public expositions. It is not so much that they are not subtle enough to understand it, as that they and we and everybody else are not simple enough to understand it. Those two things are obviously part of one thing, if we are straightforward enough to look at the thing; and to see it simply as it is. I suggested recently that people would see the Christian story if it could only be told as a heathen story. The Faith is simply the story of a God who died for men. But, queerly enough, if we were even to print the words without a capital G, as if it were the cult of some new and nameless tribe, many would realise the idea for the first time. Many would feel the thrill of a new fear and sympathy if we simply wrote, “the story of a god who died for men.” People would sit up suddenly and say what a beautiful and touching pagan religion that must be.

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that the Church is out of the question; that we have nothing but the earth and the children of man pottering about on it, with their normal mortal tales and traditions. Then suppose there appears on this earth a prodigy, a portent, or what is alleged to be a portent. In some way heaven has rent the veil or the gods have given some new marvel to mankind. Suppose, for instance, it is a fountain of magic water, said to be flowing at the top of a mountain. It blesses like holy water; it heals diseases; it inspires more than wine, or those who drink of it never thirst again. Well, this story may be true or false; but among those who spread it as true, it is perfectly obvious that the story will produce a number of other stories. It is equally obvious that those stories will be of two kinds. The first sort will say: “When the water was brought down to the valley there was dancing in all the villages; the young men and maidens rejoiced with music and laughter. A surly husband and wife were sprinkled with the holy water and reconciled, so that their house was full of happy children. A cripple was sprinkled and he went capering about gaily like an acrobat. The gardens were watered and became gay with flowers," and so on. It is quite equally obvious that there will be another sort of story from exactly the same source, told with exactly the same motive. "A man limped a hundred miles, till he was quite lame, to find the sacred fountain. Men lay broken and bleeding among the rocks on the mountainside in their efforts to climb after it. A man sold all his lands and the rivers running through them for one drop of the water. A man refused to turn back from it, when confronted with brigands, but was tortured and died calling for it," and so on. There is nothing in the least inconsistent between these two types of legend. They are exactly what would naturally be expected, given the original legend of the miraculous fountain. Anyone who can really look at them simply, can see that they are both equally simple. But we in our time have confused ourselves with long words for unreal distinctions; and talking incessantly about optimism and pessimism, about asceticism and hedonism, about what we call Paganism and what we think about Buddhism, till we cannot understand a plain tale when it is told. The Pagan would have understood it much better.

This very simple truth explains another fact that I have heard the learned insist on with some excitement: the emphasis and repetition touching the ascetic side of religion. It is exactly what would happen with any human story, even if it were a heathen story. We remark upon the case of the man who starves to get the water more than on the case of the man who is merely glad to get the water. We remark upon it more because it is more remarkable. Any human tradition would make more of the heroes who suffered for something than of the human beings who simply benefited by it. But that does not alter the fact that there are more human beings than heroes; and that this great majority of human beings has benefited by it. It is natural that men should marvel more at the man who deliberately lames himself than at the man who dances when he is no longer lame. But that does not alter the fact that the countries where that legend prevails are, in fact, full of dancing. I have here only suggested how very simple, after all, is the contradiction between austerity and jollity which puzzles our critics so much. There is a higher application of it to ascetics, which I may consider on another occasion. Here I will only hint at it by saying: "The more a man could LIVE only on the water, the more he would prove it to be the water of life.”

WHO ARE THE CONSPIRATORS?

I CAME across, more or less indirectly, the other day, a lady of educated and even elegant pretensions, of the sort whom her foes would call luxurious and her friends cultured, who happened to mention a certain small West Country town, and added with a sort of hiss that it contained “a nest of Roman Catholics.” This apparently referred to a family with which I happen to be acquainted. The lady then said, her voice changing to a deep note of doom, “God alone knows what is said and done behind those closed doors.”

On hearing this stimulating speculation, my mind went back to what I remembered of the household in question, which was largely concerned with macaroons, and a little girl who rightly persuaded herself that I could eat an almost unlimited number of them. But when I contrasted that memory with that vision it was brought suddenly and stunningly to my mind what a vast abyss still yawns between us and many of our countrymen, and what extraordinary ideas are still entertained about us, by people who walk about the world without keepers or strait-waistcoats and are apparently, on all other subjects, sane. It is doubtless true, and theologically sound, to say that God alone knows what goes on in Catholic homes; as it is to say that God alone knows what goes on in Protestant heads. I do not know why a Catholic’s doors should be any more closed than anybody else’s doors; the habit is not unusual in persons of all philosophical beliefs when retiring for the night; and on other occasions depends on the weather and the individual taste. But even those who would find it difficult to believe that an ordinary Catholic is so eccentric as to bolt and padlock himself in the drawing-room or the smoking-room, whenever he strolls into those apartments, do really have a haunting idea that it is more conceivable of a Catholic than of a Calvinistic Methodist or a Plymouth Brother. There does remain the stale savour of a sort of sensational romance about us; as if we were all foreign counts and conspirators. And the really interesting fact is that this absurd melodrama can be found among educated people; though now rather in an educated individual than in an educated class. The world still pays us this wild and imaginative compliment of imagining that we are much less ordinary than we really are. The argument, of course, is the one with which we are wearily familiar in twenty other aspects; the argument that because the evidence against us cannot be produced, it must have been concealed. It is obvious that Roman Catholics do not generally shout to each other the arrangements of a St. Bartholomew Massacre across the public streets; and the only deduction any reasonable man can draw is that they do it behind closed doors. It is but seldom that the project of burning down London is proclaimed in large letters on the posters of the UNIVERSE; so what possible deduction can there be, except that the signals are given at the private tea-table by means of a symbolical alphabet of macaroons? It would be an exaggeration to say that it is my daily habit to leap upon aged Jews in Fleet Street and tear out their teeth; so, given my admitted monomania on the subject, it only remains to suppose that my private house is fitted up like a torture chamber for this mode of mediaeval dentistry. Catholic crimes are not plotted in public, so it stands to reason that they must be plotted in private. There is indeed a third remote and theoretical alternative; that they are not plotted anywhere; but it is unreasonable to expect our fellow-countrymen to suggest anything so fanciful as that.

Now this mysterious delusion, still far commoner than many suppose even in England, and covering whole interior spaces of America, happens to be another illustration of what I have been suggesting in an earlier essay; the fact that those who are always digging and prying for secret things about us, have never even glanced at the most self-evident things about themselves. We have only to ask ourselves, with a sort of shudder, what would have been said if we really had confessed to conspiracy as shamelessly as half our accusers have confessed to it themselves. What in the world would be said, either in America or in Europe, if we really had behaved like a secret society, in places where the groups of our enemies cannot even deny that they are secret societies? What in the world would happen if a Catholic Congress at Glasgow or Leeds really consisted entirely of hooded and white-robed delegates, all with their faces covered and their names unknown, looking out of slits in their ghastly masks of white? Yet this was, until just lately, the rigid routine of the great American organisation to destroy Catholicism; an organisation which recently threatened to seize all government in America. What would have been said, if there really was a definite, recognised, but entirely unknown thing, called the Secret of the Catholics; as there has been for long past a recognised but unknown reality called the Secret of the Freemasons? I dare say a great deal involved in such things is mere harmless foolery. But if we had done such things, would our critics have said it was harmless foolery? Suppose we had started to spread the propaganda of the Faith by means of a movement called "Know Nothing," because we were in the habit of always shaking our heads and shrugging our shoulders and swearing that we knew nothing of the Faith we meant to spread. Suppose our veneration for the dignity of St. Peter were wholly and solely a veneration for the denial of St. Peter; and we used it as a sort of motto or password to swear that we knew not Christ. Yet that was admittedly the policy of a whole political movement in America, which aimed at destroying the citizenship of Catholics. Suppose that the Mafia and all the murderous secret associations of the Continent had been notoriously working on the Catholic side, instead of the other side. Should we ever have heard the last of it? Would not the world have rung with indignant denunciation of a disgrace clinging to all our conduct, and a treason that must never be forgot? Yet these things are done constantly, and at regular intervals, and right down to the present day, by the Anti-Catholic parties; and it is never thought necessary to recall them, or say a word of apology for them, in the writings of any Anti-Catholic partisan. It would be just our Jesuitical way to dare to look over hedges, when everybody else is only stealing horses.

In short, what I recently said of bigotry is even more true of secrecy. In so far as there is something merely antiquated about a certain type of doctrinal narrowness, it is much more characteristic of Dayton, Tennessee, than of Louvain or Rome. And in the same way, in so far as there is something antiquated about all these antics in masks and cloaks, it has been much more characteristic of the Ku Klux Klan than of the Jesuits. Indeed, this sort of Protestant is a figure of old-fashioned melodrama in a double sense and in a double aspect. He is antiquated in the plots he attributes to us and in the plots that he practises himself.

As regards the latter, it is probable that the whole world will discover this fact a long time before he does. The anti-clerical will go on playing solemnly the pranks of Cagliostro, like a medium still blindfolded in broad daylight; and will open his mouth in mysteries long after everybody in the world is completely illuminated about the illuminati. And though the almost half-witted humour of the American society, which seemed to consist entirely of beginning as many words as possible with KL, has been rather abruptly toned down by a reaction of relative sanity, I have no doubt that there is still many a noble Nordic fellow going about hugging himself over the happy secret that he is a Kleagle or a Klemperor, long after everybody has ceased to klare a klam whether he is or not. On the political side the power of these conspiracies has been practically broken in both Continents; in Italy by the Fascists and in America by a rally of reasonable and public-spirited governors of both political parties. But the point of historical interest remains: that it was the very people who accused us of mummery and mystery who surrounded all their secularising activities with far more fantastic mysteries and mummeries; that they had not even the manhood to fight an ancient ritual with the appearance of republican simplicity, but boasted of hiding everything in a sort of comic complexity; even when there was nothing to hide. By this time such movements as the Ku Klux Klan have very little left which can be hidden or which is worth hiding; and it is therefore probable that our romantic curiosity about them will be considerably colder than their undying romantic curiosity about us. The Protestant lady will continue to resent the fact that God does not share with her his knowledge of the terrible significance of tea and macaroons in the Catholic home. But we shall probably in the future feel a fainter and fainter interest in whatever it is that Kleagues do behind closed — or perhaps I should say Klosed Doors.

THE HAT AND THE HALO

PERHAPS it is a little ungenerous to refer again to the fiasco of the unfortunate Bishop of Birmingham, when he made an exhibition of himself on the subject of St. Francis. That he should be unable to restrain himself from attacking one whom so many free-thinkers have loved and reverenced is interesting as showing how far sectarians can go. But the tone of the attack raises a question more interesting than the personal one. It may be called broadly the question of Sentiment; but it involves the whole question of what things in life are deep and what things shallow; what is central and what is merely external. It is needless to say that people like the Bishop invariably and instinctively get them the wrong way round.

For instance, he said something to the effect that people are now seeing St. Francis in a halo of false sentiment, or through a haze of false sentiment. I am not sure which he said and I doubt whether he knew which he meant. If the Bishop had a halo it would probably be rather like a haze. But anyhow he implied that the hero-worship of St. Francis was a sort of external and extraneous thing, a dazzling distraction or a distorting medium, something added to his figure afterwards; whereas the facts about the real St. Francis were quite different and decidedly repulsive to a refined person. Well, the poor Bishop got all his facts about St. Francis quite wrong; and his claim to talk about the REAL St. Francis, even in an ordinary historical sense, was pretty rapidly shown up. But there was something behind it which interests me much more. It is the curious trick of turning everything inside out; so that the really central things become external and the merely external things central. The inmost soul of St. Francis is a haze of false sentiment; but the accidents of his historical setting, as viewed by people without any historical sense, are a sort of dreadful secret of his soul.

According to this sort of criticism, St. Francis had a great soul; which was merely a cloak for a miserable body. It is sentimental to consider what he felt like. But it is realistic to consider what he looked like. Or rather it is realistic to consider what he would have looked like to the best-dressed people in Birmingham who never saw him, or the fashionable tailor in Bond Street who never had the opportunity of making him a suit of clothes. The critic tells us what some hypothetical suburban snob of the twentieth century would have thought of the Saint he never saw; and THAT is the real truth about the Saint. We can tell him what the Saint would have thought of the suburban snob (and his thoughts would have been full of the simple and spontaneous tenderness which he showed to all small and helpless creatures) but that is only sentiment about St. Francis. What St Francis himself felt about all other creatures is only a misleading and artificial addition to his character. But what some of the most limited and least imaginative of those creatures might possibly think about him, or rather about his clothes or his meals — that alone is reality.

When the admirers of St. Francis, who number myriads of Protestants and Agnostics as well as Catholics, say that they admire that great man, they mean that they admire his mind, his affections, his tastes, his point of view. They mean that, like any other poet, he puts them in a position to view the world in a certain way; and that life looked at from his mental standpoint is more inspiring or intelligible. But when the Bishop tells them that they do not know the facts about St. Francis, he does not mean that St. Francis had some other mind or some other standpoint. He means that St. Francis did not have hot and cold water laid on in the bathroom, did not put on a clean collar every morning, did not send a sufficient number of shirts to the Birmingham Imperial Laundry every week, did not have black mud smeared on his boots or white mud to stiffen his shirt front, and all the rest of it. And THAT is what he calls the truth about St. Francis! Everything else, including everything that St. Francis did do, is a haze of sentiment.

That is the deeper problem of which this foolish affair happens to be an illustration. How are we to make these superficial people understand that we are not being sentimental about St. Francis, that we are not presenting an elegant and poetical picture of St. Francis; that we are not presenting irresponsible emotional ravings about St. Francis; that we are simply presenting St. Francis? We are presenting a remarkable mind; just as Plato presented a remarkable mind, whether it was his own or somebody else's. We think no more of Bishop Barnes and his nonsense than a Platonist would think about some joke in Aristophanes about Socrates catching fleas. There may have been people who saw that mind through a haze of false sentiment; there were people who saw it through a haze of exaggerated enthusiasm; like those heretics who made St. Francis greater than Christ and the founder of a new dispensation. But even those fanatics were more like philosophers than a gentleman who is content to say either of a true saint or a false god, that his taste in linen and steam laundries was "not ours." In short, the true situation is simple and obvious enough. It is we who are thinking about the real Francis Bernadone, even the realistic Francis Bernadone, the actual man whose mind and mood we admire. It is the critic who is thinking of the unreal Francis, a fantastic phantom produced by looking at him in a Bond Street looking-glass or comparing him with the fashion-plates of 1926. If it is well for a man to be happy, to have the way of welcoming the thing that happens and the next man that comes along, then St. Francis was happy; happier than most modern men. If it be good that a man should be sympathetic, should include a large number of things in his imaginative sympathy, should have a hospitality of the heart for strange things and strange people, then St. Francis was sympathetic; more sympathetic than most modern men. If it be good that a man should be original, should add something creative and not merely customary or conventional, should do what he thinks right in his own way and without fear of worldly consequences in ruin or starvation, then St. Francis was original; more original than most modern men. All these are tests at once personal and permanent; they deal with the very essence of the ego or individual and they are not affected by changes in external fashion. To say that these things are mere sentiment is to say that the inmost sense of the inmost self is mere sentiment. And yet how are we to stop superficial people from calling it mere sentiment? How are we to make them realise that it is not we who have a sentimental attachment to a mediaeval friar, but they who have an entirely sentimental attachment to certain modern conventions?

Such critics have never really thought of asking what they mean by “sentiment,” still less what they mean by “false sentiment.” “False” is simply a conventional term of abuse to be applied to “sentiment”; and “sentiment” is simply a conventional term of abuse to be applied to Catholicism. But it is very much more applicable nowadays to Protestantism. It is especially applicable to Bishop Barnes’s own rather nebulous type of Protestantism. Men of his school always complain of our thinking too much of theology, just as they complained a few centuries before of our thinking too little of theology. But theology is only the element of reason in religion; the reason that prevents it from being a mere emotion. There are a good many broad-minded persons for whom it is only an emotion; and it would hardly be unfair to say it is only a sentiment. And we have not to look far for them in cases like these.

If a school of critics were found prepared to pay divine honours to a certain person while doubting whether he was divine, men who took off their hats in his churches while denying that he was present on his altars, who hinted that he was only a religious teacher and then hinted again that he must be served as if he were the only teacher of religion; who are always ready to treat him as a fallible individual in relation to his rivals, and then to invoke him as an infallible authority against his followers, who dismiss every text they choose to think dogmatic and then gush over every text they choose to think amiable, who heckle him with Higher Criticism about three-quarters of what he said and then grovel before a mawkish and unmanly ideal made by misunderstanding the little which is left — if there were a school of critics in THIS relation to a historical character, we might very well admit that they were not getting to grips with it, but surrounding it with "a halo of false sentiment."

That is the vital distinction. At least we do not admit sentiment as a substitute for statement; still less as a contradiction of something that we state. There may be devotional expressions that are emotional, and even extravagantly emotional; but they do not actually distort any definition that is purely intellectual. But in the case of our critics, the confusion is in the intellect. We do not claim that all our pictorial or poetical expressions are adequate; but the fault is in the execution not in the conception. And there is a conception which is not a confusion. We do not say that every pink and blue doll from an Art Repository is a satisfactory symbol of the Mother of God. But we do say that it is less of a contradiction than exists in a person who says there is no Original Sin in anybody, and then calls it Mariolatry to say there was no Original Sin in Mary. We do not profess to admire the little varnished pictures of waxen angels or wooden children around the Communion Table. But we do most strongly profess and proclaim that they are less of a blot on the intellectual landscape than a bishop who suggests that the Host may actually be the divine Presence, but that High Church curates will do his lordship a personal favour if they take no notice of it. We are under no illusions about the literary quality of a large number of hymns in our hymn-books, or any other hymn-books. But we modestly submit that though they are doggerel they are not nonsense; and that saying that we can assert a personal God, a personal immortality, a personal divine love that extends to the least and worst, and do all this without holding "a Creed," IS nonsense. We know that the nearest sane agnostic or atheist would agree that it is nonsense. Devotional art and literature are often out of balance or broken in expression; sometimes because the emotion is too real and too strong for the reason, the same thing which makes the love-letters of the wisest men like the letters of lunatics; sometimes from a real deficiency in the individual power of reason; but never from a theoretical repudiation of reason, like that of the Pragmatists and about three-quarters of the Modernists. And in the same way it is the very reverse of the truth to say that a mere emotional distortion of the facts has drawn the modern mind towards St. Francis. It is, on the contrary, emphatically an attraction of mind to mind; and the more purely mental the process, the less it will be interrupted by ignorant irritation against the strangeness of Italian manners or mediaeval conditions. And in this case there is no international problem. Thousands of Englishmen who know nothing but England glow with love and understanding of St. Francis. We may well feel an unaffected pity for the one unlucky Englishman who cannot understand.

ON TWO ALLEGORIES

PERHAPS it is only fair that the modern iconoclasm should be applied also to the ancient iconoclasts; and especially to the great Puritans, those idol-breakers who have long been idols. Mr. Belloc was recently tapping the Parliamentary statue of Cromwell with a highly scientific hammer; and Mr. Noyes has suddenly assailed the image of Bunyan with something more like a sledge-hammer. In the latter case I confess to thinking the reaction excessive; I should say nothing worse of Bunyan than of many old writers; that he is best known by his best passages, and that many, who fondly believe they have read him, would be mildly surprised at some of his worst passages. But that is not peculiar to Bunyan; and I for one should be content with saying what I said some years ago. A fair and balanced view of the culture and creeds involved can best be reached by comparing the Pilgrimage of Christian with the Pilgrimage of Piers Plowman. The Puritan allegory is much neater (even if it be not always neat) than the rather bewildering mediaeval medley. The Puritan allegory is more national, in the sense that the language and style have obviously become clearer and more fixed. But the Puritan allegory is certainly much narrower than the mediaeval allegory. Piers Plowman deals with the death or resurrection of a whole human society, where men are members of each other. In the later work schism has "isolated the soul"; and it is certainly mere individualism, when it is not mere terrorism. But I will only say now what I said then; I do not want to damage the statue of John Bunyan at Bedford, where it stands facing (symbolically in more ways than one) the site of his own prison. But I do wish there were a statue of John Langland, uplifted on a natural height into a more native air, and looking across all England from the Malvern hills.

But there is one intellectual side issue of the debate that does interest me very much. Mr. James Douglas, who once presented himself to me as a representative of Protestant truth, and who is certainly a representative of Protestant tradition, answered Mr. Alfred Noyes in terms very typical of the present state of that tradition. He said that we should salute Bunyan's living literary genius, and not bother our heads about Bunyan's obsolete theology. Then he added the comparison which seems to me so thought-provoking: that this is after all what we do, when we admire Dante's genius and not

HIS obsolete theology. Now there is a distinction to be made here; if the whole modern mind is to realize at all where it stands. If I say that Bunyan's theology IS obsolete, but Dante's theology is NOT obsolete — then I know the features of my friend Mr. Douglas will be wreathed in a refined smile of superiority and scorn. He will say that I am a Papist and therefore of course I think the Papist dogmatism living. But the point is that he is a Protestant and he thinks the Protestant dogmatism dead. I do at least defend the Catholic theory because it can be defended. The Puritans would presumably be defending the Puritan theory — if it could be defended. The point is that it is dead for them as much as for us. It is not merely that Mr. Noyes demands the disappearance of a disfigurement; it is that Mr. Douglas says it cannot be a disfigurement because it has already disappeared. Now the Thomist philosophy, on which Dante based his poetry has not disappeared. It is not a question of faith but of fact; anybody who knows Paris or Oxford, or the worlds where such things are discussed, will tell you that it has not disappeared. All sorts of people, including those who do not believe in it, refer to it and argue against it on equal terms.

I do not believe, for a fact, that modern men so discuss the seventeenth century sectarianism. Had I the privilege of passing a few days with Mr. Douglas and his young lions of the DAILY EXPRESS, I doubt not that we should discuss and differ about many things. But I do rather doubt whether Mr. Douglas would every now and again cry out, as with a crow of pure delight "Oh, I must read you this charming little bit from Calvin." I do rather doubt whether his young journalists are joyously capping each other's quotations from Toplady's sermons on Calvinism. But eager young men do still quote Aquinas, just as they still quote Aristotle. I have heard them at it. And certain ideas are flying about, even in the original prose of St. Thomas, as well as in the poetry of Dante — or, for that matter, of Donne.

The case of Bunyan is really the opposite of the case of Dante. In Dante the abstract theory still illuminates the poetry; the ideas enlighten even where the images are dark. In Bunyan it is the human facts and figures that are bright; while the spiritual background is not only dark in spirit, but blackened by time and change. Of course it is true enough that in Dante the mere images are immensely imaginative. It is also true that in one sense some of them are obsolete; in the sense that the incidents are obsolete and the personal judgment merely personal. Nobody will ever forget how there came through the infernal twilight the figure of that insolent troubadour, carrying his own head aloft in his hand like a lantern to light his way. Everybody knows that such an image is poetically true to certain terrible truths about the unnatural violence of intellectual pride. But as to whether anybody has any business to say that Bertrand de Born is damned, the obvious answer is No. Dante knew no more about it than I do: only he cared more about it; and his personal quarrel is an obsolete quarrel. But that sort of thing is not Dante's theology, let alone Catholic theology.

In a word; so far from his theology being obsolete, it would be much truer to say that everything is obsolete except his theology. That he did not happen to like a particular Southern gentleman is obsolete; but that was at most a private fancy, in demonology rather than theology. We come to theology when we come to theism. And if anybody will read the passage in which Dante grapples with the gigantic problem of describing the Beatific Vision, he will find it is uplifted into another world of ideas from the successful entry to the Golden City at the end of the Pilgrim's Progress. It is a Thought; which a thinker, especially a genuine freethinker, is always free to go on thinking. The images of Dante are not to be worshipped, any more than any other images. But there is an idea behind all images; and it is before that, in the last lines of the Paradiso, that the spirit of the poet seems first to soar like an eagle and then to fall like a stone.

There is nothing in this comparison that reflects on the genius and genuineness of Bunyan in his own line or class; but it does serve to put him in his own class. I think there was something to be said for the vigorous denunciation of Mr. Noyes; but no such denunciation is involved in this distinction. On the contrary, it would be easy to draw the same distinction between two men both at the very top of all literary achievement. It would be true to say, I think, that those who most enjoy reading Homer care more about an eternal humanity than an ephemeral mythology. The reader of Homer cares more about men than about gods. So, as far as one can guess, does Homer. It is true that if those curious and capricious Olympians did between them make up a religion, it is now a dead religion. It is the human Hector who so died that he will never die. But we should remonstrate with a critic who, after successfully proving this about Homer, should go on to prove it about Plato. We should protest if he said that the only interest of the Platonic Dialogues to-day is in their playful asides and very lively local colour, in the gay and graceful picture of Greek life; but that nobody troubles nowadays about the obsolete philosophy of Plato. We should point out that there is no truth in the comparison; and that if anything the case is all the other way. Plato's philosophy will be important as long as there is philosophy; and Dante's religion will be important as long as there is religion. Above all it will be important as long as there is that lucid and serene sort of religion that is most in touch with philosophy. Nobody will say that the theology of the Baptist tinker is in that sense serene or even lucid; on many points it necessarily remains obscure. The reason is that such religion does not do what philosophy does; it does not begin at the beginning. In the matter of mere chronological order, it is true that the pilgrimage of Dante and that of Bunyan both end in the Celestial City. But it is in a very different sense that the pilgrimage of Bunyan begins in the City of Destruction. The mind of Dante, like that of his master St. Thomas, really begins as well as ends in the City of Creation. It begins as well as ends in the burning focus in which all things began. He sees his series from the right end, though he then begins it at the wrong end. But it is the whole point of a personal work like THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS that it does begin with a man's own private sins and private panic about them. This intense individualism gives it great force; but it cannot in the nature of things give it great breadth and range. Heaven is haven; but the wanderer has not many other thoughts about it except that it is haven. It is typical of the two methods, each of them very real in its way, that Dante could write a whole volume, one-third of his gigantic epic, describing the things of Heaven; whereas in the case of Bunyan, as the gates of Heaven open the book itself closes.

I think it worth while to write this note on the critical remark of Mr. James Douglas, because it is a remark that would be made as readily by many other intelligent men to-day. But it is founded on a fallacy; on the idea that the choice between living philosophies and dead philosophies is the same as the choice between old philosophies and new. It is not true of Plato and it is not true of Dante; and, apart from whatever is our own philosophy, we should realise that some of the most ancient are the most alive.

THE PROTESTANT SUPERSTITIONS

THAT delightful guessing game, which has long caused innocent merriment in so many Catholic families, the game of guessing at exactly which line of an article say on Landscape or Latin Elegiacs, we shall find the Dean of St. Paul’s introducing the Antidote to Antichrist; or the Popish Plot Revealed — that most familiar of our Catholic parlour games happened to be entertaining me some time ago, as a sort of substitute for a crossword puzzle, when I found I had hit on a very lucky example. I wrote above about “Catholic families,” and had almost, by force of associations written “Catholic firesides.” And I imagine that the Dean really does think that even in this weather we keep the home-fires burning, like the fire of Vesta, in permanent expectation of relighting the fires of Smithfield. Anyhow, this sort of guessing game or crossword puzzle is seldom disappointing. The Dean must by this time have tried quite a hundred ways of leading up to his beloved topic; and even concealing it, like a masked battery, until he can let loose the cannonade in a perfect tornado of temper. Then the crossword puzzle is no longer a puzzle, though the crosswords are apparent and appropriate enough; especially those devoted to the great historical process of crossing out the Cross.

In the case of this particular article, it was only towards the end of it that the real subject was allowed to leap out from an ambush upon the reader. I think it was a general article on Superstition; and, being a journalistic article of the modern type, it was of course devoted to discussing superstition without defining superstition. In an article of that enlightened sort, it seemed enough for the writer to suggest that superstition is anything that he does not happen to like. Some of the things are also things that I do not happen to like. But such a writer is not reasonable even when he is right. A man ought to have some more philosophical objection to stories of ill luck than merely calling them credulity; as certainly as a man ought to have some more philosophical objection to Mass than to call it Magic. It is hardly a final refutation of Spiritualists to prove that they believe in Spirits; any more than a refutation of Deists to prove that they believe in Deity. Creed and credence and credulity are words of the same origin and can be juggled backwards and forwards to any extent. But when a man assumes the absurdity of anything that anybody else believes, we wish first to know what he believes; on what principle he believes; and, above all, upon what principle he disbelieves. There is no trace of anything so rational in the Dean's piece of metaphysical journalism. If he had stopped to define his terms, or in other words to tell us what he was talking about, such an abstract analysis would of course have filled up some space in the article. There might have been no room for the Alarum Against the Pope.

The Dean of St. Paul's got to business, in a paragraph in the second half of his article, in which he unveiled to his readers all the horrors of a quotation from Newman; a very shocking and shameful passage in which the degraded apostate says that he is happy in his religion, and in being surrounded by the things of his religion; that he likes to have objects that have been blessed by the holy and beloved, that there is a sense of being protected by prayers, sacramentals and so on; and that happiness of this sort satisfies the soul. The Dean, having given us this one ghastly glimpse of the Cardinal's spiritual condition, drops the curtain with a groan and says it is Paganism. How different from the Christian orthodoxy of Plotinus!

Now it was exactly that little glimpse that interested me in this matter; not so much a glimpse into the soul of the Cardinal as into the mind of the Dean. I suddenly seemed to see, in much simpler form than I had yet realised, the real issue between him and us. And the curious thing about the issue is this; that what he thinks about us is exactly what we think about him. What I for one feel most strongly, in considering a case like that of the Dean and his quotation from the Cardinal, is that the Dean is a man of distinguished intelligence and culture, that he is always interesting, that he is sometimes even just, or at least justified or justifiable; but that he is first and last the champion of a Superstition; the man who is really and truly defending a Superstition, as it would be understood by people who could define a Superstition. What makes it all the more amusing is that it is in a rather special sense a Pagan Superstition. But what makes it most intensely interesting, so far as I am concerned, is that the Dean is devoted to what may be called par excellence a superstitious Superstition. I mean that it is in a special sense a LOCAL superstition.

Dean Inge is a superstitious person because he is worshipping a relic; a relic in the sense of a remnant. He is idolatrously adoring the broken fragment of something; simply because that something happens to have lingered out of the past in the place called England; in the rather battered form called Protestant Christianity. It is as if a local patriot were to venerate the statue of Our Lady of Walsingham only because she was in Walsingham and without even remembering that she was in Heaven. It is still more as if he venerated a fragment chipped from the toe of the statue and forgot where it came from and ignored Our Lady altogether. I do not think it superstitious to respect the chip in relation to the statue, or the statue in relation to the saint, or the saint in relation to the scheme of theology and philosophy. But I do think it superstitious to venerate, or even to accept, the fragment because it happens to be there. And Dean Inge does accept the fragment called Protestantism because it happens to be there.

Let us for a moment consider the whole matter as philosophers should; in a universal air above all local superstitions like the Dean's. It is quite obvious that there are three or four philosophies or views of life possible to reasonable men; and to a great extent these are embodied in the great religions or in the wide field of irreligion. There is the atheist, the materialist or monist or whatever he calls himself, who believes that all is ultimately material, and all that is material is mechanical. That is emphatically a view of life; not a very bright or breezy view, but one into which it is quite possible to fit many facts of existence. Then there is the normal man with the natural religion, which accepts the general idea that the world has a design and therefore a designer; but feels the Architect of the Universe to be inscrutable and remote, as remote from men as from microbes. That sort of theism is perfectly sane; and is really the ancient basis of the solid if somewhat stagnant sanity of Islam. There is again the man who feels the burden of life so bitterly that he wishes to renounce all desire and all division, and rejoin a sort of spiritual unity and peace from which (as he thinks) our separate selves should never have broken away. That is the mood answered by buddhism and by many metaphysicians and mystics. Then there is a fourth sort of man, sometimes called a mystic and perhaps more properly to be called a poet; in practice he can very often be called a pagan. His position is this; it is a twilight world and we know not where it ends. If we do not know enough for monotheism, neither do we know enough for monism. There may be a borderland and a world beyond; but we can only catch hints of it as they come; we may meet a nymph in the forest; we may see the fairies on the mountains. We do not know enough about the natural to DENY the preternatural. That was, in ancient times, the healthiest aspect of Paganism. That is, in modern times, the rational part of

Spiritualism. All these are possible as general views of life; and there is a fourth that is at least equally possible, though certainly more positive.

The whole point of this last position might be expressed in the line of M. Cammaerts’s beautiful little poem about bluebells; LE CIEL EST TOMBE PAR TERRE. Heaven has DESCENDED into the world of matter; the supreme spiritual power is now operating by the machinery of matter, dealing miraculously with the bodies and souls of men. It blesses all the five senses; as the senses of the baby are blessed at a Catholic christening. It blesses even material gifts and keepsakes, as with relics or rosaries. It works through water or oil or bread or wine. Now that sort of mystical materialism may please or displease the Dean, or anybody else. But I cannot for the life of me understand why the Dean, or anybody else, does not SEE that the Incarnation is as much a part of that idea as the Mass; and that the Mass is as much a part of that idea as the Incarnation. A Puritan may think it blasphemous that God should become a wafer. A Moslem thinks it blasphemous that God should become a workman in Galilee. And he is perfectly right, from his point of view; and given his primary principle. But if the Moslem has a principle, the Protestant has only a prejudice. That is, he has only a fragment; a relic; a superstition. If it be profane that the miraculous should descend to the plane of matter, then certainly Catholicism is profane; and Protestantism is profane; and Christianity is profane. Of all human creeds or concepts, in that sense, Christianity is the most utterly profane. But why a man should accept a Creator who was a carpenter, and then worry about holy water, why he should accept a local Protestant tradition that God was born in some particular place mentioned in the Bible, merely because the Bible had been left lying about in England, and then say it is incredible that a blessing should linger on the bones of a saint, why he should accept the first and most stupendous part of the story of Heaven on Earth, and then furiously deny a few small but obvious deductions from it — that is a thing I do not understand; I never could understand; I have come to the conclusion that I shall never understand. I can only attribute it to Superstition.

ON COURAGE AND INDEPENDENCE

WHEN we are pressed and taunted upon our obstinacy in saying the Mass in a dead language, we are tempted to reply to our questioners by telling them that they are apparently not fit to be trusted with a living language. When we consider what they have done with the noble English language, as compared with the English of the Anglican Prayer-Book, let alone the Latin of the Mass, we feel that their development may well be called degenerate.

The language called dead can never be called degenerate. Surely even they might understand our taking refuge in it, by the time that (in the vernacular) the word "immaculate" is applied only to the shirt-fronts of snobs; or "unction" means not Extreme Unction, but only unctuous rectitude. It is needless to note once more how the moral qualities have lost their mystical quality; and with it all their dignity and delicacy and spontaneous spiritual appeal. Charity, that was the flaming heart of the world, has become a name for a niggardly and pompous patronage of the poor, generally amounting by this time to the enslavement of the poor.

But there are more subtle examples of this degeneration in ideal terms. And an even worse example, I think, than the cheapening of the word CHARITY is the new newspaper cheapening of the word COURAGE.

Any man living in complete luxury and security who chooses to write a play or a novel which causes a flutter and exchange of compliments in Chelsea and Chiswick and a faint thrill in Streatham and Surbiton, is described as "daring," though nobody on earth knows what danger it is that he dares. I speak, of course, of terrestrial dangers; or the only sort of dangers he believes in. To be extravagantly flattered by everybody he considers enlightened, and rather feebly rebuked by everybody he considers dated and dead, does not seem so appalling a peril that a man should be stared at as a heroic warrior and militant martyr because he has had the strength to endure it.

The dramatic critic of a Sunday paper, a little while ago, lashed himself into a frenzy of admiration for the "courage" of some dismal and dirty play or other, because it represented a soldier as raving like a hysterical woman against the cruelty of those who had expected him to defend his country. It may be amusing that his idea of courage should be a defence of cowardice. But it is the sort of defence of it that we have heard ten thousand times during the reaction after the War; and the courage required to utter it is exactly as great as the courage required to utter any other stale quotation from the cant and convention of the moment: such trifles as the absurdity of marriage or the sympathetic personality of Judas Iscariot. These things have become quite commonplace; but they still pretend to be courageous. So sham soldiers have been known to swagger about in uniform when the war was over.

The Catholic Church, as the guardian of all values, guards also the value of words. Her children will not fall, I hope, into this conventional and comfortable folly. We need not pretend that Catholics to-day are called upon to show anything worth calling courage, by the standard of the Catholics in other days. It did require some courage to be a Catholic when it involved the definite disinclination felt by most of us for being racked or ripped up with a knife. It did require some courage when there was only an intermittent possibility of being torn in pieces by a mob. Even that our subtle human psychology regards with some distaste.

But I hope we do not feel any distaste for being on the opposite side to Bishop Barnes, or for being regarded with alarm and suspicion by Jix. These things are almost intellectual pleasures. Indeed, they really involve a certain temptation to intellectual pride. Let us pray to be delivered from it; and let us hope that we are not left altogether without occasions for courage. But most of them will be present in private life and in other practical aspects of public life; in resisting pain or passion or defying the economic threat and tyranny of our time. But do not let us make fools of ourselves like the rationalists and the realists, by posing as martyrs who are never martyred or defying tyrants who have been dead for two hundred years.

But though the name of this virtue has been vulgarized so much that it is hard to use it even where it is exact, let alone where it is in any case exaggerative, there is a somewhat analogous quality which the modern world lauds equally loudly and has lost almost more completely. Putting aside the strict sense of a Catholic courage, the world ought to be told something about Catholic intellectual independence. It is, of course, the one quality which the world supposes that Catholics have lost. It is also, at this moment, the one quality which Catholics perceive that all the world has lost. The modern world has many marks, good as well as bad; but by far the most modern thing in it is the abandonment of individual reason, in favour of press stunts and suggestion and mass psychology and mass production.

The Catholic Faith, which always preserves the unfashionable virtue, is at this moment alone sustaining the independent intellect of man.

Our critics, in condemning us, always argue in a circle. They say of mediaevalism that all men were narrow. When they discover that many of them were very broad, they insist that those men must have been in revolt, not only against mediaevalism, but against Catholicism. No Catholics were intelligent; for when they were intelligent, they cannot really have been Catholics. This circular argument appears with a slight difference in the matter of independent thought to-day. It consists of extending to all Catholicism what are in fact the independent ideas of different Catholics. Men start by assuming (what they have been told) that Rome rigidly suppresses ALL variety and therefore Romanists never differ on anything. Then if one of them advances an interesting view, they say that Rome must have imposed it on him and therefore on all the other Roman Catholics. I myself have advanced several economic and political suggestions, for which I never dreamed of claiming anything more than that a loyal Catholic can offer them. But I would rather take any other example than my own unimportant opinions.

In any case, my own experience of the modern world tells me that Catholics are much more and not less individualistic than other men in their general opinions. Mr. Michael Williams, the spirited propagandist of Catholicism in America, gave this as a very cogent reason for refusing to found or join anything like a Catholic party in politics. He said that Catholics will combine for Catholicism, but it is quite abnormally difficult to get them to combine for anything else. This is confirmed by my own impressions and is contrasted very sharply with my recollections about most other religious groups. For instance, what we called the Free Churches, constituting what was also called the Nonconformist Conscience, represented a marvel of moral unity and the spreading of a special spiritual atmosphere. But the Free Churches were not free, whatever else they were. The most striking and even startling thing about them was the ABSENCE of any individual repudiations of the common ideals which the Conscience laid down. The Nonconformist Conscience was not the normal conscience; they would hardly themselves have pretended that the mass of mankind necessarily agreed with them about Drink or Armaments. But they all agreed with each other about Drink or Armaments. A Nonconformist minister standing up to defend public-houses, or public expenditure on guns and bayonets, was a much rarer thing than a heretic in much more hierarchical systems. It was broadly the fact that ALL such men supported what they called Temperance; which seemed to mean an intemperate denunciation of temperate drinking. It is almost as certain that ALL of them insisted on what they called Peace; which seemed, so far as I could make out, to mean such weakening of armament as would involve disaster and destruction in War. But the question here is not whether I disagreed with them; but whether they ever disagreed with each other. And one thing is at least certain, that on things of this sort they disagreed with each other infinitely less than Catholics do. Though the traditional culture and sacramental symbol of the vine makes most Catholics moderately favourable to fermented liquor in moderation, there have been many prominent Catholics who were teetotallers in a degree hardly to be called moderate. The great Cardinal Manning startled all his own supporters by the passion of this private conviction; just as he startled them by many other Radical eccentricities, such as making friends with Stead and championing the Salvation Army. Whether he was right is not here in question; the point is that he thought he was right when his own religious world thought he was wrong, and not unfrequently told him so. You would not have found a man in the Salvation Army to defend Irish whisky, as you found a man like Father Matthew to denounce it.

The same facts could be supported by a hundred facts in my own experience. Dean Inge observed the other day that Mr. Belloc was the only man in England who believed that Dreyfus was guilty. He might have added that he was nearly the only man in England who knew any of the actual facts of the case, which were suppressed in the English newspapers. In any case, the phrase is an exaggeration; for several men, like Lord Chief Justice Russell, whom no one will call incompetent to judge evidence, and old Harry Labouchere, whom no one will call a zealot for militarism, were of the same opinion. But substantially it is true that Mr. Belloc, in the days of his youth, found himself absolutely alone in almost any assembly of English people discussing the question. It is by no means the only occasion on which he has found himself alone. Merely from my own personal knowledge of him, I could give a list as long as this article of topics on which he was opposed to everyone else’s opinion and sometimes opposed to mine. To mention only a few things, large and small, he would probably be the only person in a drawing-room saying that Lewis Carroll was overrated, that Byron and Longfellow were not overrated, that wit is superior to humour, that ALLY SLOPE'S HALF-HOLIDAY was superior to PUNCH, that James the Second was chiefly notable as a stolid English patriot suspicious of French influence, that an Irish political murder might actually be as excusable as a Russian political murder (old regime), that half the modern legislation advanced in favour of Labour is part of a plan to re-establish pagan slavery, that it is the mark of the Protestant culture to tolerate Catholicism and the mark of the Catholic culture to persecute it, and a variety of other opinions which would at least be largely regarded as paradoxes. And he says such things because he is a Catholic: which does not mean that other Catholics would say the same. On the contrary, each would say something quite different. It is not that they need agree with him; but that he need not agree with them. Apart from his own genius, Catholics do differ thus more than a company of Anglican public-school patriots or solid Liberal Nonconformists; to say nothing of the middle class of the Middle West, with its rigid pattern of regular guys. Catholics know the two or three transcendental truths on which they do agree; and take rather a pleasure in disagreeing on everything else. A glance at the living literature, written by other Catholics besides Mr. Belloc, will confirm what I say.

I might take, for instance, a book like the remarkable recent work of Mr. Christopher Hollis, "The American Heresy." Now surely nobody in his senses will say that all Catholics are bound to believe that the Slave States ought to have won the American Civil War, that America ought never to have extended westward of Tennessee, that Andrew Jackson was a savage, or that Abraham Lincoln was a failure, that Calhoun was like a heathen Roman or that Wilson was an arrogant and dishonest schoolmaster. These opinions are not part of the Catholic order; but they are illustrations of the Catholic liberty. And they illustrate exactly the sort of liberty which the modern world emphatically has not got; the real liberty of the mind. It is no longer a question of liberty from kings and captains and inquisitors. It is a question of liberty from catchwords and headlines and hypnotic repetitions and all the plutocratic platitudes imposed on us by advertisement and journalism.

It is strictly true to say that the average reader of the DAILY MAIL and the "Outline of History" is inhibited from these intellectual acts. It is true to say that he CANNOT think that Abraham Lincoln was a failure. It is true to say that he CANNOT think that a Republic should have refused to expand as it has expanded. He cannot move his mind to such a position, even experimentally; it means moving it out of too deep a rut, worn too smooth by the swift traffic of modern talk and journalism, all perpetually moving one way.

These modern people mean by mental activity simply an express train going faster and faster along the same rails to the same station; or having more and more railway carriages hooked on to it to be taken to the same place. The one notion that has vanished from their minds is the notion of voluntary movement even to the same end. They have fixed not only the ends, but the means. They have imposed not only the doctrines, but the words. They are bound not merely in religion, which is avowedly binding, but in everything else as well. There are formal praises of free thought; but even the praises are in a fixed form. Thousands who have never learned to think at all are urged to think whatever may take their fancy about Jesus Christ. But they are, in fact, forbidden to think in any way but one about Abraham Lincoln. That is why it is worth remarking that it is a Catholic who has thought for himself.

THE NORDIC HINDOO

I CANNOT, as some do, find Dr. Barnes a very exciting Bishop merely because he is an Evolutionist in the style of fifty years ago and a Protestant persecutor in the style of eighty years ago. His views are stale enough; but I admit that his arguments are sometimes amusing.

Thus, he reached the last limit of wildness in one remark which he made in the course of explaining that the folklore of the Mediterranean had been forced upon the Nordic nations — whatever that may mean. He added abruptly that Indian and Chinese metaphysics are now much more important than ours. But, above all, he made the crowning assertion that Rome is thus stamped as Provincial. This seems to suggest to the educational mind the construction of an examination paper in elementary general knowledge. It might run something like this:

1. From what language is the word "provincial" derived?
2. To what provinces did it generally refer?
3. If Athens, Antioch, Rome and Jerusalem were provincial towns, what was their Metropolitan city?
4. What reasons are there for supposing that Birmingham occupied this Metropolitan position from the earliest times?
5. Give a short account of the conquest of Southern Europe and the Near East by the Emperors of Birmingham.
6. At what date did the Papacy rebel against the Diocese of Birmingham?
7. Explain the old proverb, "All roads lead to Birmingham."
8. Discuss the following remark, "The most charmingly Nordic people I know are those dear Chinamen."
9. Why is the folklore of the Hindoos so much more reasonable than that of the Romans?
10. When will the Bishop of Birmingham go touring in the Provinces?

Answers must be sent in before the time of the Disestablishment of the Church of England, and priests are forbidden to give their crafty assistance to the candidates.

Really, I do not know any other way of dealing with even a pretence of seriousness with such an extraordinary remark. It was rendered even more extraordinary, of course, by the further remarks on the subject of Chinamen and Hindoos. Now we know all about the Nordic Man, so far as anybody can know anything about a person who does not exist. We know, for instance, that up to the autumn of 1914 he used to be called the Teutonic Man. Dean Inge used to be frightfully fond of him in those days; even fonder than he is now. He once quoted lavishly, and still quotes occasionally, from that great and glorious English patriot, Mr. Houston Stewart Chamberlain.

We quite understood that all Nordic Men were like gods, having long golden hair and gigantic stature; and this made it all the more pleasant to realize that we ourselves were Nordic Men, Unfortunately, the Germans were even more Nordic and gigantic and beautiful to gaze upon; they said so; and they ought to know. The poor Teuton was a little unpopular for five years or so; but now he is creeping out again to feel the sun, like the kings after Napoleon's fall in Mrs. Browning's poem. Like several other people, he changed his name during the War. He is now entirely Nordic and not at all Teutonic. And, as it is, and always was, his whole profession in life to praise himself and exalt the virtue of pride, so much undervalued by Christians, it is perfectly natural that he should despise "Dagos" and talk about the lower culture of lesser breeds without the law. It is natural that he should insist that all Spaniards are cowardly bullfighters and all Italians luxurious organ-grinders. He may be expected to point out at intervals the sluggish incompetence of Napoleon and the impotent languor of Mussolini.

All this we were used to; it was what we expected from the Nordic Man; for nobody ever expected a Nordic Man to face facts staring him in the face, or to learn anything even from his own experience. We thought we had it all clear and complete, like a mutual understanding; there was the Nordic Man who was noble because he was Protestant and had light hair; and there was the Southern Catholic who was a lower sort of animal, because he was swarthy and superstitious. But why Hindoos? 0 Venerable Father in God and gentle shepherd of souls, why Hindoos?

Why are we now told to learn from people who are even less light-haired and even further off from the Arctic Circle? Are they not a lower race, conquered by the earth-shaking Imperialism of Birmingham? Are they not a lesser breed without the law? Are we to go to Asia to escape from the folklore and magic? Do the dear Indians never exhibit any of the errors that deface the deplorable Romans? If the Latins are idolaters, do the Indians never have idols? If Southern Europe is attached to mythology, is Southern Asia a world of pure reason that has never been defaced by a myth?

The explanation, the only explanation that I can suggest, is the one I have already suggested; and it is in a simple word; the word DESPAIR. Everybody knows that when a military campaign begins to fail there is an inevitable and even pardonable temptation to every military commander on the defeated side to lower the standard of military fitness and collect soldiers from anywhere, whatever be their military quality. This has happened again and again even among the white races; something similar is constantly happening in their relation to the other races. So both the Dutch and the English in the South African quarrel have been continually tempted to make use of the natives for war as well as labour. France has been blamed for relying on dark troops; though I never could see why she should be blamed by us, who drew dark troops from all over our own Empire.

Anyhow, it is a process that defeated or embarrassed captains fall back upon regularly but often reluctantly. It is a very exact parallel to the defeat of the Bishop of Birmingham and his cry for help to the Hindoos. He has reached the position in which he will accept reinforcements from anywhere except Rome. Rome must be provincial; even if it is the only place in the world that is provincial. Rome must be barbaric; if all the barbarians of the earth are called up to sack the city.

And when we have reached that point, it is not difficult to see that the very invasion and spoliation proclaim it to be a Holy City; unique and universal and towering over the tribes of men.

A SPIRITUALIST LOOKS BACK

WE hear much about new religions; many of them based on the very latest novelties of Buddha and Pythagoras. But I have come to a conclusion which I fear will offend still more. I fancy that all modern religions are counter-religions; attacks on, or alternative to the Catholic Church. They bear no likeness to the natural pagan speculations that existed before the Catholic Church, or would exist if it had never existed. The attitude of Dean Inge is certainly much more like that of Plotinus than that of Plato. But it is even more like that of Porphyry than that of Plotinus. He is exactly like some pagan of the decline; it is not necessary for him to know very much about the Christian superstition; as soon as he heard of it, he hated it.

In a recent work, which I have considered in this place, he is careful to insist that the word PROTESTANT had an old meaning which was not merely negative. And he has certainly fulfilled an old meaning that is positive; if the word Protestant means a man who doth protest too much. He is so very anxious to explain what he thinks about the Catholic Church that he cannot keep it out of any article about M. Coue or Monkey Glands.

The Dean stands by himself; and must be presumably described as an Anglican, for want of anything else in particular to call him. But it is very interesting to observe that even those who seem to go out into the wilderness to stake out their own Promised Land, like the Mormons, are eventually found to be as much a mere reaction against orthodoxy as the Modernists. Their march towards the new Utopia is found to be only a rather longer and more elaborate manoeuvre of one of the armies besieging the Holy City. We imagined that these new schismatics had finally gone off to pray; but we always find (a little while afterwards) that they have remained to scoff. They always come back to boo and riot in our churches when they have got tired of trying to build their own.

One who thus reveals all that he does not know, and certainly ought to know, is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He broke out the other day into a diatribe, which was supposed to begin with the relations of his new religion to others, but which turned with incalculable rapidity into mere abuse of his old original family religion, as if there were no other in the world.

Perhaps he is right; and there is not. But you would think a man fresh from founding a new religion might have a few new things to say about that; instead of old and negative things to say about something else. But the special strictures of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle on Catholic orthodoxy had a certain very curious character, which alone makes them worth noting at all. In themselves they are almost indescribably stale and thin and shabby; and have been thrashed threadbare in a hundred controversies. But the odd thing which I want to remark about them is this; that they are not only old, but old-fashioned, in the sense that they do not even fit into what is now fashionable. They had some meaning sixty years ago. They have no meaning at all for anybody who looks at the living world as it is — even at the world of new faiths or fads like Spiritualism. But the Spiritualist is not looking even at the Spiritualist world. He is not looking at the human world, or the heathen world, or even at the worldly world. He is looking only at the thing he hates.

For instance, he says, exactly as did our Calvinist great-grandmother, that the Confessional is a most indelicate institution; and that it is highly improper for a young lady of correct deportment, in the matter of prunes and prisms, to mention such things as sins to a strange gentleman who is a celibate. Well, of course, all Catholics know the answer to that; and hundreds of Catholics have answered it to Protestants who had some sort of right or reason to ask it.

Nobody, or next to nobody, has ever had to go into so much morbid detail in confessing to a priest as in confessing to a doctor. And the joke of it is that the Protestant great-grandmother, who objected to the gentleman priest, would have been the very first to object to a lady doctor. What matters in the confessional is the moral guilt and not the material details. But the material details are everything in medicine, even for the most respectable and responsible physician, let alone all the anarchical quacks who have been let loose to hear confessions in the name of Psychoanalysis or Hypnotic Cures. But though we all know the old and obvious answers, what I find startling is this: that our critic does not see the new and obvious situation.

What in the world is the sense of his coming with his prunes and prisms into the sort of society that surrounds us to-day? If a girl must not mention sin to a man in a corner of a church, it is apparently the only place nowadays in which she may not do so. She may sit side by side with him on a jury and discuss the details of the foulest and most perverted wickedness in the world, perhaps with a man’s life hanging on the minuteness of the detail. She may read in novels and newspapers sins she has never heard of, let alone sins she is likely to commit or confess. She must not whisper to an impersonal presence behind a grating the most abstract allusion to the things that she hears shouted and cat-called in all the theatrical art and social conversation of the day.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle must know as well as I do that modesty of that sort is not being regarded at all by the modern world; and that nobody dreams of attempting to safeguard it so strictly as it is safeguarded in Catholic conversation and Catholic confessions. We can say of Rome and Purity what Swinburne said, in another sense, about Rome and Liberty—“Who is against but all her men, and who is beside her but Thou?” And yet the critic has the impudence to accuse us of the neglect of what all but we are neglecting; simply because that charge was used against us a century ago, and anything used against us can be used over and over again, until it drops to pieces. The old stick of the old grandmother is still good enough to beat the old dog with, though if the old grandmother could rise from the dead, she would think the dog the only decent object in the landscape.

I mean nothing flippant when I say that the only interesting thing about all this is its staleness. I have no unfriendly feelings towards Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, to whom we all owe so much gratitude in the realm of literature and entertainment, and who often seems to me entirely right in his manner of defending Spiritualism against Materialism. But I do realize, even if he does not realize, that, at the back of the whole business, he is not defending Spiritualism, and not attacking Materialism; he is attacking Rome.

By a deep and true ancestral instinct with him, he knows that this is ultimately the one Thing to be either attacked or defended; and that he that is not against it is for it. Unless the claim of the Church can be challenged in the modern world, it is impossible really to set up an alternative modern religion. He feels that to be a fact, and I am glad to sympathize with him. Indeed, it is because I would remain so far sympathetic that I take only one example among the doctrines he denounced; and deliberately avoid, for instance, his strangely benighted remarks on the cult of the Blessed Virgin. For I confess to a difficulty in remaining patient with blindness about that topic. But there are other parallel topics.

He has some very innocent remarks about what he considers grotesque in the sacramental system; innocent, because apparently unconscious of what everybody else in the world considers grotesque in the spiritualistic system. If any Christian service was so conducted as to resemble a really successful seance, the world might well be excused for falling back on the word "grotesque," a favourite word of Dr. Watson. Indeed, we may well question whether the institution of the Red-Headed League or the episode of the Yellow Face at the window, or any of the fantasies of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, were any more fantastic than some that have been submitted to us seriously enough by the school of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. I do not say that this test of external extravagance ought to be final, or that no defence of such details could be made. But when Sir Arthur deliberately gibes at our ceremonies, we may at least be allowed to smile at his. Suppose any Catholic rite before the altar consisted of binding a human being hand and foot with ropes; should we ever hear the last of the horrible survival of human sacrifice? Suppose we declared that the priest went into a trance and that clouds of thick white stuff like cotton-wool came out of his mouth, as a manifestation of celestial grace; might not some of our critics be heard to murmur the word, "grotesque"? If we conducted a quiet little evening service in which a big brass trumpet careered about in the air and patted people on the head, caressed a lady with intimate gestures of affection, and generally exhibited itself as about as attractive an object as a philandering trombone or an amorous big drum, would not our critics have something to say about the unwholesome hysteria and senseless excitement of Popery? If the Spiritualist goes out of his way to challenge us to a duel in the matter of dignity, I do not really think it can be reasonably said that he is on stronger ground than we.

But I remark on all these charges, not in order to show how they recoil upon themselves, but in order to show how the Spiritualist is driven to return upon himself, and to react against his origins, and to forget all else in making war upon his mother.

The man of the modern religion does not quarrel with the modern world, as he well might, for its neglect of modesty. He quarrels with the ancient mother, who is alone teaching it any modesty at all. He does not devote himself to condemning the modern dances or the fashionable comedies for their vulgar and obvious indifference to dignity. He brings his special charge of grotesque extravagance against the only ceremonial that really retains any dignity. It seems to him, somehow, more important that the Catholic Church should be, on the most minute point, open to misunderstanding, than that the whole world should go to the devil in a dance of death before his very eyes. And he is quite right; at least, the instinct of which this is a symbol is quite right.

The world really pays the supreme compliment to the Catholic Church in being intolerant of her tolerating even the appearance of the evils which it tolerates in everything else. A fierce light does indeed beat upon that throne and blacken every blot; but the interest here is in the fact that even those who profess to be setting up new thrones or throwing new light are perpetually looking backwards at the original blaze if only to discover the blots. They have not really succeeded in getting out of the orbit of the system which they criticize. They have not really found new stars; they are still pointing at alleged spots on the sun, and thereby admitting that it is their native daylight and the centre of their solar system.

THE ROOTS OF SANITY

THE Dean of St. Paul's, when he is right, is very right. He is right with all that ringing emphasis that makes him in other matters so rashly and disastrously wrong. And I cannot but hail with gratitude the scorn with which he spoke lately of all the newspaper nonsense about using monkey-glands to turn old men into young men; or into young monkeys, if that is to be the next step towards the Superman. Not unnaturally, he tried to balance his denunciation of that very experimental materialism which he is always accusing us of denouncing, by saying that this materialism is one evil extreme and that Catholicism is the other. In that connection he said some of the usual things which he commonly finds it easy to say, and we generally find it tolerably easy to answer.

For instance, it is a good example of the contradictory charges brought against Rome that the Dean apparently classes us with those who leave children entirely "unwarned" about the moral dangers of the body. Considering that we have been abused for decades on the ground that we forced on the young the infamous suggestions of the Confessional, this is rather funny.

Only the other day I noted that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle revived this charge of an insult to innocence; and I will leave Dean Inge and Sir Arthur to fight it out. And when he charges us with indifference to Eugenics and the breeding of criminals and lunatics, it is enough that he has himself to denounce the perversion of science manifested in the monkey business. He might permit others to resent equally the schemes by which men are to act like lunatics and criminals in order to avoid lunacy and crime.

There is, however, another aspect of this matter of being right or wrong, which is not so often associated with us, but which is equally consistent with our philosophy. And it has a notable bearing on the sort of questions here raised by Dean Inge. It concerns not only the matters in which the world is wrong, but rather especially the matters in which the world is right. The world, especially the modern world, has reached a curious condition of ritual or routine; in which we might almost say that it is wrong even when it is right. It continues to a great extent to do the sensible things. It is rapidly ceasing to have any of the sensible reasons for doing them. It is always lecturing us on the deadness of tradition; and it is living entirely on the life of tradition. It is always denouncing us for superstition; and its own principal virtues are now almost entirely superstitions.

I mean that when we are right, we are right by principle; and when they are right, they are right by prejudice. We can say, if they prefer it so, that they are right by instinct. But anyhow, they are still restrained by healthy prejudice from many things into which they might be hurried by their own unhealthy logic. It is easiest to take very simple and even extreme examples; and some of the extremes are nearer to us than some may fancy.

Thus, most of our friends and acquaintances continue to entertain a healthy prejudice against Cannibalism. The time when this next step in ethical evolution will be taken seems as yet far distant. But the notion that there is not very much difference between the bodies of men and animals — that is not by any means far distant, but exceedingly near. It is expressed in a hundred ways, as a sort of cosmic communism. We might almost say that it is expressed in every other way except cannibalism.

It is expressed, as in the Voronoff notion, in putting pieces of animals into men. It is expressed, as in the vegetarian notion, in not putting pieces of animals into men. It is expressed in letting a man die as a dog dies, or in thinking it more pathetic that a dog should die than a man. Some are fussy about what happens to the bodies of animals, as if they were quite certain that a rabbit resented being cooked, or that an oyster demanded to be cremated. Some are ostentatiously indifferent to what happens to the bodies of men; and deny all dignity to the dead and all affectionate gesture to the living. But all these have obviously one thing in common; and that is that they regard the human and bestial body as common things. They think of them under a common generalisation; or under conditions at best comparative. Among people who have reached this position, the REASON for disapproving of cannibalism has already become very vague. It remains as a tradition and an instinct. Fortunately, thank God, though it is now very vague, it is still very strong. But though the number of earnest ethical pioneers who are likely to begin to eat boiled missionary is very small, the number of those among them who could explain their own real reason for not doing so is still smaller.

The real reason is that all such social sanities are now the traditions of old Catholic dogmas. Like many other Catholic dogmas, they are felt in some vague way even by heathens, so long as they are healthy heathens. But when it is a question of their not being merely felt but formulated, it will be found to be a formula of the Faith. In this case it is all those ideas that Modernists most dislike, about “special creation” and that Divine image that does not come merely by evolution, and the chasm between man and the other creatures. In short, it is those very doctrines with which men like Dean Inge are perpetually reproaching us, as things that forbid us a complete confidence in science or a complete unity with animals. It is these that stand between men and cannibalism — or possibly monkey glands. They have the prejudice; and long may they retain it! We have the principle, and they are welcome to it when they want it.

If Euclid were demonstrating with diagrams for the first time and used the argument of the REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM, he would now only produce the impression that his own argument was absurd. I am well aware that I expose myself to this peril by extending my opponent’s argument to an extreme, which may be considered an extravagance. The question is, why is it an extravagance? I know that in this case it will be answered that the social feature of cannibalism is rare in our culture. So far as I know, there are no cannibal restaurants threatening to become fashionable in London like Chinese restaurants. Anthropophagy is not like Anthroposophy, a subject of society lectures; and, varied as are the religions and moralities among us, the cooking of missionaries is not yet a mission. But if anyone has so little of logic as to miss the meaning of an extreme example, I should have no difficulty in giving a much more practical and even pressing example. A few years ago, all sane people would have said that Adamitism was quite as mad as Anthropophagy. A banker walking down the streets with no clothes on would have been quite as nonsensical as a butcher selling man instead of mutton. Both would be the outbreak of a lunatic under the delusion that he was a savage. But we have seen the New Adamite or No Clothes Movement start quite seriously in Germany; start indeed with a seriousness of which only Germans are capable. Englishmen probably are still English enough to laugh at it and dislike it. But they laugh by instinct; and they only dislike by instinct. Most of them, with their present muddled moral philosophy, would probably have great difficulty in refuting the Prussian professor of nakedness, however heartily they might desire to kick him. For if we examine the current controversies, we shall find the same negative and defenceless condition as in the case of the theory of cannibalism. All the fashionable arguments used against Puritanism do in fact lead to Adamitism. I do not mean, of course, that they are not often practically healthy as against Puritanism; still less do I mean that there are no better arguments against Puritanism. But I mean that in pure logic the civilised man has laid open his guard; and is, as it were, naked against the inroads of nakedness. So long as he is content merely to argue that the body is beautiful or that what is natural is right, he has surrendered to the Adamite in theory, though it may be, please God, a long time before he surrenders in practice. Here again the modern theorist will have to defend his own sanity with a prejudice. It is the mediaeval theologian who can defend it with a reason. I need not go into that reason at length; it is enough to say that it is founded on the Fall of Man, just as the other instinct against cannibalism is founded on the Divinity of Man. The Catholic argument can be put shortly by saying that there is nothing the matter with the human body; what is the matter is with the human soul.

In other words, if man were completely a god, it might be true that all aspects of his bodily being were godlike; just as if he were completely a beast, we could hardly blame him for any diet, however beastly. But we say that experience confirms our theory of his human complexity. It has nothing to do with the natural things themselves. If red roses mysteriously maddened men to commit murder, we should make rules to cover them up; but red roses would be quite as pure as white ones.

In most modern people there is a battle between the new opinions, which they do not follow out to their end, and the old traditions, which they do not trace back to their beginning. If they followed the new notions forward, it would lead them to Bedlam. If they followed the better instincts backward, it would lead them to Rome. At the best they remain suspended between two logical alternatives, trying to tell themselves, as does Dean Inge, that they are merely avoiding two extremes. But there is this great difference in his case, that the question on which he is wrong is, in however perverted a form, a matter of science, whereas the matter in which he is right is by this time simply a matter of sentiment. I need not say that I do not use the word here in a contemptuous sense, for in these things there is a very close kinship between sentiment and sense. But the fact remains that all the people in his position can only go on being sensible. It is left for us to be also reasonable.

SOME OF OUR ERRORS

THE thoughtful reader, studying the literature of the enlightened and scientific when they advise us about ethics and religion, will be arrested by one phrase which really has a meaning. Nay, he will observe, with increasing interest and excitement, that it really contains a truth. Most of the phrases that are supposed to go along with it, and to be of the same sort, will be found to be not only untrue but almost unmeaning. When the Modernist says that we must free the human intellect from the mediaeval syllogism, it is as if he said we must free it from the multiplication-table. Some people can count or reason quicker than others; some people put in all the steps and are safe; some people leave out the steps and are still right; many leave out the steps and are consequently wrong. But the process of multiplication is the same, and the process of demonstration is the same. Men think in that way, except when they escape from it by ceasing to think. Or again, when we find in the same context the remark that some Christian doctrine which we do know is "only a form of" some Pagan cult that nobody really knows, we realise that the mathematician is treating the unknown quantity as the known. But when we find among these fallacies the remark I speak of, we shall be wise to pause upon it with greater patience. It is the remark, "We need a restatement of religion"; and though it has been said thirty thousand times, it is quite true.

It is also true that those who say it often mean the very opposite of what they say. As I have remarked elsewhere, they very often intend not to restate anything, but to state something else, introducing as many of the old words as possible. By this time not only the word religion, but also the word restatement, is becoming rather an old word. But anyhow the point is that they do not really mean that we should give freshness and a new aspect to religion by calling it roly-poly or rumpti-foo. On the contrary, they mean that we should take something totally different and agree to call it religion. I mention, with some sadness, that I have said this before; because I have found it quite difficult to get them to see a fact of almost heart-breaking simplicity. It seems to strike them as being merely a fine shade of distinction; but it strikes me as a rather grotesque and staggering reversal. There would be the same fine shade of difference, if somebody of a sartorial sort came to me protesting that my aged father was waiting in rags on my door-step, and urgently needing a new hat and coat, and indeed a complete equipment; if he made the most animated preparations for the reclothing of my parent, and the whole episode ended by his introducing me to a total stranger begging for my father's old hat.

Now I do really believe that there is a need for the restatement of religious truth; but not the statement of something quite different, which I do not believe to be true. I believe there is a very urgent need for a verbal paraphrase of many of the fundamental doctrines; simply because people have ceased to understand them as they are traditionally stated. It does not follow from this that the traditional statement is not the true statement. It only means that the traditional statement now needs to be translated; although translation is seldom true. This is especially the case in connection with Catholic ideas; because they were originally stated in what some call a dead language and some an everlasting language. But anyhow, they were stated in a language that has since broken up into other languages, and mixed with other dialects, and produced a popular PATOIS which is spirited, and often splendid, but necessarily less exact. Now I do think that the Catholic culture suffers very much from the popular misunderstanding of its original terminology. I do think that Catholics are themselves to blame, in many cases, for not realising that their doctrines need to be stated afresh, and not left in language that is intrinsically correct but practically misleading. Those who call themselves liberal, commonly take for granted that the fault is with a dead language, as against a language that has developed. If they were really liberal, they could enlarge their minds to see that there is a case for the language having degenerated. But in either case, it is practically true that there are misunderstandings, and that we ought chiefly to desire to make people understand. And I think we have faults and follies of our own in this matter; and that it is not always the fault of our enemies that they misunderstand. There are cases in which we, more or less unconsciously, misinform them. We do not allow enough, in justifying the words that we speak, for the difference in the words that they hear. And I propose to say a few words in this article upon what I may call Catholic criticisms of Catholic faults; or what are (in many cases) merely Catholic accidents and misunderstanding.

For instance, there is a sort of misunderstanding that is simply mistranslation. Probably we have never properly explained to them the real case for using Latin for something that must be immutable and universal.

But as half of them are howling day and night for an international language, and accepting a journalese jibberish with plurals in “oj” because they can get no better, some glimmering of the old use of Latin by Erasmus or Bacon might reasonably be expected of them. Of the full defence of such a hieratic tongue I may say something later. But for the moment I am thinking of certain mistakes which arise very largely by our fault and not theirs. It is not the Church’s Latin that is to blame; it is the English Catholic’s English. It is not because we do not translate it into the vulgar tongue that we are wrong; it is because we do. Sometimes, I am sorry to say, we translate it into a very vulgar tongue. When we do translate things into English, they often only serve as a luminous argument for leaving them in Latin. Latin is Latin, and always says exactly what it means. But popular versions of Latin things often only serve to make them unpopular.

I will venture to take one example, about which I feel very strongly. Will somebody with better authority than I have announce in a voice of thunder, through a trumpet or with a salute of big guns, the vital and very much needed truth that “dulcis” is not the Latin for “sweet”? “Sweet” is not the English word for “dulcis”; any more than for “doux” or “douce.” It has a totally different connotation and atmosphere. “Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori” does not mean “it is sweet and decorous to die for our country.” It means something untranslatable like everything that means anything; but something more like “It is a gracious thing and of good report to die for our country.” When Roland was dying in the mountains, having blown his horn and broken his sword, and thought of “La doulce France” and the men of his line, he did not sully his lips by saying “sweet France,” but something like “beautiful and gracious France.” In English the word “sweet” has been rendered hopelessly sticky by the accident of the word “sweets.” But in any case it suggests something much more intense and even pungent in sweetness like the tabloids of saccharine that are of concentrated sugar. It is at once too strong and too weak a word. It has not the same savour as the same word in the Latin languages, which often means no more than the word “gentle” as it was used of “a perfect gentle knight.” But English Catholicism, having in the great calamity of our history gone into exile in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (at the very moment when our modern language was being finally made) naturally had to seek for its own finest enthusiasms in foreign languages. It could not find a salutation to the Mass or the Blessed Virgin except in French or

Italian or Spanish or some such tongue; and it translated these things back into a language with which the exile had lost touch and in which his taste was not quite firm and sure. It seemed to be thought necessary to use the word "sweet" in every single case of the kind; which produces not only something that did not sound English; but something which did not sound in the least as the Latin or French sounded. In a certain number of cases, of course, it is exactly the right word; just as it is from time to time in ordinary English poetry. Sometimes it is right because it is so obviously the natural and inevitable word that it would seem more affected not to use it than to use it; as in the song of Burns; "My love is like the melody that's sweetly played in tune." Sometimes it is right because there is something to be a salt to its sweetness, as in Sir Philip Sidney's line; "Before the eyes of that sweet enemy France." Similarly it is often exactly right in good Catholic translations or compositions in English. But this fixed notion that it must always be used wherever some such tender expression would be used in Romance literature is simply a blunder in translation; and a blunder that has had very bad effects in fields much more important than literature. I believe that this incongruous and inaccurate repetition of the word "sweet" has kept more Englishmen out of the Catholic Church than all the poison of the Borgias or all the poisonous lies of the people who have written about them.

Ours is at this moment the most rational of all religions. It is even, in a sense, the most rationalistic of all religions. Those who talk about it as merely or mainly emotional simply do not know what they are talking about. It is all the other religions, all the modern religions, that are merely emotional. This is as true of the emotional salvationism of the first Protestants as of the emotional intuitionalism of the last Modernists. We alone are left accepting the action of the reason and the will, without any necessary assistance from the emotions. A convinced Catholic is easily the most hard-headed and logical person walking about the world to-day. But this old slander, of a slimy sentimentalism in all we say and do, is terribly perpetuated by this mere muddle about words. We are still supposed to have a silly sort of devotion, when we really have the most sensible sort, merely because we have taken a foreign phrase and translated it wrong; instead of either leaving it in Latin for those who can read Latin or trusting it in English to people who can write English. But if in this case we admit that the misunderstanding is more our fault than our opponents' fault, the fault which we confess is the very reverse of the fault of which the opponents complain. It has not arisen through the Catholic practice of saying prayers in Latin. On the contrary, it has arisen through the Protestant practice of always saying them in English. It has come through yielding merely weakly and mechanically to the Protestant pressure in the days when our tradition was completely out of fashion. In other words, it has come through doing exactly what they advised us to do, and not doing it well. Of course I do not mean that it is not a good thing to have good popular translation when it is done well. I think it is a very good thing indeed. But while I see what there is to be said for the cult of the vernacular, the Protestant critic does not see what there is to be said for the fixed form of the classic tongue. He does not see that there is something to be said even for the general idea that Catholic poetry should be in the vernacular like the Divine Comedy and Catholic worship in the fundamental language like the Mass.

It is a question between a dead language and a dying language. Every living language is a dying language, even if it does not die. Parts of it are perpetually perishing or changing their sense; there is only one escape from that flux; and a language must die to be immortal. The style of the English Jacobean translation is as noble and simple a thing as any in the world; but even there the words degenerate. It is not their fault; but ours who misuse them; but they are misused. No language could lift itself into a loftier or simpler strain than that which begins, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people”; but even then, when we pass on to “speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem,” we stumble over a word we have vulgarised.

But the world plays havoc with all such words, whether they are in the English Bible or the Latin Canon. There are many words of Catholic usage which have in practice been thus misused. When an outsider hears that a Catholic has refrained from something for fear of “causing scandal,” he instantly has an irritated impression that it means a fear of setting all the silly old women in the town talking gossip. Of course it means nothing of the kind. It does not mean that in Greek. It does not mean that in Latin. It ought not to mean that in English. It ought to mean what it says; the fear of tripping somebody up, of putting a stumbling-block in the way of some struggling human being. If I encourage to carousals a man who must be kept off drink, I am causing scandal. If I talk what might be a wholesome realism for some hearers, to a young and innocent person who is certain to feel it as mere obscenity, I am causing scandal. I am doing what for me is right, at the risk of making him do what for him is wrong. To say that that is unjustifiable is manifest moral common sense. But it is not conveyed in modern English by talking about causing scandal. All that is conveyed in modern English is that the person so acting is disdaining idle chatter and irresponsible criticism; which is exactly what all the saints and martyrs have consistently lived and died by doing. And that is a good example of what I mean by translation; or, if the word be preferred, by restatement. But that does not mean turning round and abusing the old statement, which was really quite correctly stated. It only means restating exactly what the old statement states.

I could give many other examples of words which were right in their Latin use, but which have become obscured in their English misuse. I always feel it in the necessarily frequent phrase “offending” God; which had originally almost the awful meaning of wounding God. But the word has degenerated through its application to man, until the sound of it is quite petty and perverted. We say that Mr. Binks was quite offended or that Aunt Susan will take offence; and lose sight of the essential truth, and even dogma that (in that lower sense) God is the very last to take offence. But here again we should not abuse the Latin language; we should abuse our own vulgarisation of the English language. Upon this one point, of the restatement of religious ideas, the reformers are right in everything except the one essential; which is knowing where to throw the blame.

THE SLAVERY OF THE MIND

I HAVE chosen the subject of the slavery of the mind because I believe many worthy people imagine I am myself a slave. The nature of my supposed slavery I need not name and do not propose specially to discuss. It is shared by every sane man when he looks up a train in Bradshaw. That is, it consists in thinking a certain authority reliable; which is entirely reasonable. Indeed it would be rather difficult to travel in every train to find out where it went. It would be still more difficult to go to the destination in order to discover whether it was safe to begin the journey. Suppose a wild scare arose that Bradshaw was a conspiracy to produce railway accidents, a man might still believe the Guide to be a Guide and the scare to be only a scare; but he would know of the existence of the scare. What I mean by the slavery of the mind is that state in which men do not know of the alternative. It is something which clogs the imagination, like a drug or a mesmeric sleep, so that a person cannot possibly think of certain things at all. It is not the state in which he says, “I see what you mean; but I cannot think that because I sincerely think this” (which is simply rational): it is one in which he has never thought of the other view; and therefore does not even know that he has never thought of it. Though I am not discussing here my own religion, I think it only right to say that its authorities have never had this sort of narrowness. You may condemn their condemnations as oppressive; but not in this sense as obscurantist. St. Thomas Aquinas begins his enquiry by saying in effect, “Is there a God? It would seem not, for the following reasons”; and the most criticised of recent Encyclicals always stated a view before condemning it. The thing I mean is a man’s inability to state his opponent’s view; and often his inability even to state his own.

Curiously enough, I find this sort of thing rather specially widespread in our age, which claims to possess a popular culture or enlightenment. There is everywhere the habit of assuming certain things, in the sense of not even imagining the opposite things. For instance, as history is taught, nearly everybody assumes that in all important past conflicts, it was the right side that won. Everybody assumes it; and nobody knows that he assumes it. The man has simply never seriously entertained the other notion. Say to him that we should now all of us be better off if Charles Edward and the Jacobites had captured London instead of falling back from Derby, and he will laugh. He will think it is what he calls a "paradox." Yet nothing can be a more sober or solid fact than that, when the issue was undecided, wise and thoughtful men were to be found on both sides; and the Jacobite theory is not in any way disproved by the fact that Cumberland could outflank the clans at Drummossie. I am not discussing whether it was right as a theory; I am only noting that it is never allowed to occur to anybody as a thought. The things that might have been are not even present to the imagination. If somebody says that the world would now be better if Napoleon had never fallen, but had established his Imperial dynasty, people have to adjust their minds with a jerk. The very notion is new to them. Yet it would have prevented the Prussian reaction; saved equality and enlightenment without a mortal quarrel with religion; unified Europeans and perhaps avoided the Parliamentary corruption and the Fascist and Bolshevist revenges. But in this age of free-thinkers, men's minds are not really free to think such a thought.

What I complain of is that those who accept the verdict of fate in this way accept it without knowing why. By a quaint paradox, those who thus assume that history always took the right turning are generally the very people who do not believe there was any special providence to guide it. The very rationalists who jeer at the trial by combat, in the old feudal ordeal, do in fact accept a trial by combat as deciding all human history. In the war of the North and South in America, some of the Southern rebels wrote on their flags the rhyme, "Conquer we must for our cause is just." The philosophy was faulty; and in that sense it served them right that their opponents copied and continued it in the form "Conquer they didn't; so their cause wasn't." But the latter logic is as bad as the former. I have just read a book called, "The American Heresy," by Mr. Christopher Hollis. It is a very brilliant and original book; but I know it will not be taken sufficiently seriously; because the reader will have to wrench his mind out of a rut even to imagine the South victorious; still more to imagine anybody saying that a small, limited and agricultural America would have been better for everybody — especially Americans.

I could give many other examples of what I mean by this imaginative bondage. It is to be found in the strange superstition of making sacred figures out of certain historical characters; who must not be moved from their stiff symbolic attitudes. Even their bad qualities are sacred. Much new light has lately been thrown on Queen Elizabeth and Mary Stuart. It is not only favourable to Mary but on the whole favourable to Elizabeth. It seems pretty certain that Mary did not plot to kill Darnley. It seems highly probable that Elizabeth did not plot to kill Mary. But many people are quite as tenderly attached to the idea of a merciless Elizabeth as to that of a murderous Mary. That a man devoted to Protestantism should rejoice that Elizabeth succeeded, that a man devoted to Catholicism should wish that Mary had succeeded — all that would be perfectly natural and rational. But Elizabeth was not Protestantism; and it ought not to disturb anybody to discover that she was hardly a Protestant. It ought to be even less gratification to her supporters to insist that she was a tyrant. But there is a sort of waxwork history, that cannot be happy unless Elizabeth has an axe and Mary a dagger. This sense of fixed and sacred figures ought to belong to a religion; but a historical speculation is not a religion. To believe in Calvinism by faith alone is comprehensible. To believe in Cromwell by faith alone is incomprehensible. It is supremely incomprehensible that when Calvinists left off believing in Calvinism, they still insisted on believing in Cromwell. To a simple rationalist like myself, these prejudices are hard to understand.

INGE VERSUS BARNES

NONE of us I hope ever wished to be unjust to Dean Inge: though in such fights the button will sometimes come off the foil. And a cruel injustice is being done to him, in the suggestion widely circulated that he agrees with Dr. Barnes. Such things should not be lightly said of any gentleman. It is in accordance with the current legend, at least, that the Gloomy Dean even when he comes to bless should remain to curse. But if there is one isolated human being whom he can be imagined as wanting to bless, one would think it would be his ally, Bishop Barnes of Birmingham. And yet the alliance only serves to soften the curse and not to secure the blessing. If we may use such popular terms of such dignified ecclesiastics, we might be tempted to say that the Dean has found it necessary to throw over the Bishop. An interesting review by the Dean of the Bishop's recent book of sermons contains, of course, a certain number of rather conventional compliments and a certain number of rather abrupt sneers, we might say snarls, at various other people including the greater part of Christendom. But on the two striking and outstanding matters on which Bishop Barnes was condemned by the Catholics, he is almost as strongly condemned by the Dean of St. Paul's. Dean Inge is far too intelligent and cultivated a man to pretend to have much patience with the nonsense about testing Transubstantiation either by chemical experiments or psychical research. He tries to break it to his Broad Church colleague as gently as possible that the latter has made himself a laughing stock. But allowing for such necessary politeness between partners, it could hardly be stated better or even more plainly. He curtly refers the Bishop to the responsible definition of the doctrine in Father Rickaby's book on metaphysics; and drily observes that it will be found rather more subtle and plausible than the Bishop seems to be aware of. He also adds, with a grim candour which is rather attractive, that it is pretty disastrous to challenge Catholics about whether the Mass does them any spiritual good, since they would quite certainly unite in testifying that it does. After these frank and arresting admissions, it is a mere matter of routine, and almost of respectability, that the Dean should agree with the Bishop that all such sacramentalism is very deplorable; that the admittedly intelligent people he knows who say they have found Christ in the Mass and not in the Morning Service must be "natural idolaters" and that it is "obvious" that the Blessed Sacrament has an affinity with the lower religions. Also with the lower classes. That, I fancy, is what the Dean really finds so disgusting about it.

The point is, however, that the Dean definitely snubs the Bishop on the one great point on which the newspapers have boomed and boosted him. And he does exactly the same thing, if in a lesser degree, on the second and lesser matter which was similarly boosted. I mean, of course, the matter of Evolution. The Dean, of course, believes in Evolution, as do a good many other people, Catholic and Protestant as well as agnostic. But though he believes in Evolution, he does not believe in Bishop Barnes's Evolution. He comments with admirable clarity and decision on the folly of identifying progress with evolution; or even mere complication with progress. Nothing could be better than the brief and brisk sentences in which he disposes altogether of that idealisation of the scientific theory, which is in fact simply ignorance of it. In plain words, Bishop Barnes, for all his bluster, knows almost as little about Evolution as he does about Transubstantiation. The Dean of St. Paul's does not, of course, put this truth in such plain words; but he manages to make it pretty plain. His candour in this case also has to be balanced by general expressions of agreement with the Bishop, and somewhat heartier expressions of disagreement with everybody else, especially with the Bishop's enemies. The Dean alludes scornfully to the orthodox world, as if it necessarily repudiated certain biological theories; or as if it mattered very much if it did. The difference between the Broad Churchman and the Catholic Church is not that the former thinks Evolution true and the latter thinks it false. It is that the former thinks Evolution an explanation and the latter knows it is not an explanation. Hence the former thinks it all important; and the latter thinks it rather unimportant. Being unable to grasp this principle, the Dean has to fall back on quoting an old Victorian cant phrase; and saying that a new scientific discovery passes through three stages: that of being called absurd; of being called anti-scriptural; and of being discovered to be quite old and familiar. He might have added that it generally goes on to a fourth stage; that of being discovered to be quite untrue.

For that is the very simple fact which both Dean Inge and Bishop Barnes leave out; and which seems to be as utterly unknown to the more lucid rationalism of the one as to the cruder secularism of the other. Not only was the Archbishop of Canterbury right in suggesting that old gentlemen like himself had been familiar with Evolution all their lives; but he might have added that they were much more certain of it in the earlier part of their lives than they will be by the end of their lives. Those of them who have really read the most recent European enquiries and speculations know that Darwinism is every day becoming much less of a dogma and much more of a doubt. Those who have not read the speculations and the doubts simply go on repeating the dogma. While Dr. Barnes was preaching sermons carefully founded on the biology of fifty years ago, Mr. Belloc was proving conclusively before the whole world that Mr. H. G. Wells and Sir Arthur Keith were unacquainted with the biology of five years ago. In short, it is only just, as we have said, to insist on the difference between Dean Inge and Dr. Barnes; which is like the difference between Huxley and Haeckel. Everybody would be better and happier if Dean Inge were known as Professor Inge; and if Dr. Barnes were not only a Professor but a Prussian Professor. Then he could be boomed along with other barbarians attacking Christianity, without having the ecclesiastical privilege of actually persecuting Christians. But there are heathens and heathens and there are persecutors and persecutors. The Dean is a pagan Roman of the Senate House. The Bishop is a pagan Teuton of the swamps and fens. The Dean dislikes the Christian tradition in the spirit of Diocletian and Julian. The Bishop dislikes it in the simpler spirit of a Danish pirate staring at the rigid mystery of a Roman-British Church. Even the common cause and broad brotherly maxim of CHRISTIANI AD LEONES did not always, I fancy, reconcile the Roman and the Goth. These historical comparisons may seem fanciful; and indeed in one sense both parties are very much tied to their own historical period. They are both very Victorian; but even here there is a difference and a superiority. The superiority of the Dean is that he knows it and says so. He is man enough to boast of being Victorian and not to mind being called reactionary. Whereas the Bishop seems really to cherish the truly extraordinary notion that his notions are new and up-to-date.

Of course they have a philosophy in common; and it would be a cheap simplification to call it Materialism. Indeed, we should be almost as shallow in talking about Materialism as they are in talking about Magic. The truth is that the strange bigotry, which leads the Bishop to scream and rail at all sacramentalism as Magic, is in its inmost essence the very reverse of Materialism. Indeed it is nothing half so healthy as Materialism. The root of this prejudice is not so much a trust in matter as a sort of horror of matter. The man of this philosophy is always asking that worship shall be wholly spiritual, or even wholly intellectual; because he does really feel a disgust at the idea of spiritual things having a body and a solid form. It probably does really give him a mystical shudder to suppose that God can become as bread and wine; though I never understood why it should not give the same shudder to say that God could become flesh and blood. But whether or no these thinkers are logical in their philosophy, I think this is their philosophy. It has a very long history and an ancient name. It is not Materialist but Manichee.

Indeed the Dean uttered an unconscious truth when he said the sacramentalists must be “natural idolaters.” He shrinks from it not only because it is idolatrous, but also because it is natural. He cannot bear to think how natural is the craving for the supernatural. He cannot tolerate the idea of it actually working through the elements of nature. Unconsciously, no doubt, but very stubbornly, that sort of intellectual does feel that our souls may belong to God, but our bodies only to the devil or the beast. That Manichean horror of matter is the only INTELLIGENT reason for any such sweeping refusal of supernatural and sacramental wonders. The rest is all cant and repetition and arguing in a circle; all the baseless dogmatism about science forbidding men to believe in miracles; as if SCIENCE could forbid men to believe in something which science does not profess to investigate. Science is the study of the admitted laws of existence; it cannot prove a universal negative about whether those laws could ever be suspended by something admittedly above them. It is as if we were to say that a lawyer was so deeply learned in the American Constitution that he knew there could never be a revolution in America. Or it is as if a man were to say he was so close a student of the text of Hamlet that he was authorised to deny that an actor had dropped the skull and bolted when the theatre caught fire. The constitution follows a certain course, so long as it is there to follow it; the play follows a certain course, so long as it is being played; the visible order of nature follows a certain course if there is nothing behind it to stop it. But that fact throws no sort of light on whether there IS anything behind it to stop it. That is a question of philosophy or metaphysics and not of material science. And out of respect for the intelligence of both these reverend gentlemen, and especially for the high intelligence of the Dean of St. Paul’s, I much prefer to think that they are opposed to what they call Magic as consistent philosophers and not as inconsistent scientists. I prefer to think that they are thinking along the lines of great Gnostics and Buddhists and other mystics of a dark but dignified historical tradition; rather than that they are blundering in plain logic in the interests of cheap popular science. I can even understand or imagine that thrill of repulsion that seizes them in the presence of the divine materialism of the Mass. But I still think they would be more consistent and complete, if they made it quite clear that they carried their principle to completion; and said, as the Moslem says about Christmas, “Far be it from Him to have a Son,” or the terrified disciples who cried, “Far be this from Thee,” when God was going up to be crucified.

WHAT WE THINK ABOUT

I WAS looking the other day at a weekly paper of the sort that is supposed to provide popular culture; in this case rather especially what may be called popular science. In practice it largely provides what its supporters optimistically call Modern Thought and what we more commonly call Modernism. It is, however, a paper by no means unfair or exclusive of the opposite point of view; it has more than once permitted me to reply to these views; and in looking at the issue in question, my eye was arrested by my own name.

It occurred in an article on the religious doctrines of Mr. Arnold Bennett. Indeed the prominence in the press of this name in this connection is one of the standing mysteries of modern journalism. I have not only a great admiration for the artistic genius, but in many ways a strong liking for the human personality of Mr. Arnold Bennett. I like his liveliness and contempt for contempt. I like his humanity and merciful curiosity about every thing human. I like that essential absence of snobbishness that enables him to sympathise even with snobs. But talking about the religious beliefs of Mr. Arnold Bennett seems to me exactly like talking about the foxhunting adventures of Mr. Bernard Shaw or the favourite vintages of Mr. Pussyfoot Johnson or the celestial visions of Sir Arthur Keith or the monastic vows of Mr. Bertrand Russell. Mr. Arnold Bennett has never disguised, as it seems to me, the essential fact that he has not got any religious beliefs; as religious beliefs were understood in the English language as I learnt it. That he has a number of highly estimable moral sentiments and sympathies I do not for a moment doubt. But the matter of Mr. Arnold Bennett is, for the moment, a parenthesis. I mention it here merely because it was in the course of such an article that I found myself mentioned; and I confess I thought the reference a little odd. It will not surprise the reader to learn that the writer found me less Modernist than Mr. Arnold Bennett. My religious beliefs did not present so pure and virgin and blameless a blank, but were defaced with definite statements about various things. But the writer professed to find something dubious or mysterious about my attitude; and what mystifies me is his mystification. He delicately implied that there was more in me than met the eye; that I had that within, which passed all these Papistical shows, but that it was hopeless to vivisect me and discover the secret. He said: "Mr. Chesterton does not mean to enlighten us; for all we know he is Modernist enough in his own thoughts."

Now it would be thought a little annoying if an atheist were to say of some harmless Protestant Christian like General Booth; "For all we know, he is atheist enough in his own thoughts." We might even venture to enquire how the atheist could possibly form any notion of what General Booth thought, in such complete contradiction to everything he said. Or I myself, on the other hand, might seem less than graceful, if I were to suggest that Mr. Arnold Bennett must be concealing his conversion out of cowardice; and were to express it in the form: "Mr. Bennett will never tell us the truth about it; for all we know he is Papist enough in his own thoughts." I might even be cross-examined about how I had come to form these suspicions about the secret thoughts of Mr. Arnold Bennett; as to whether I had hidden under his bed and heard him muttering Latin prayers in his dreams, or sent a private detective to verify the existence of his hair-shirt and his concealed relics. It might be hinted that, until I could produce some such PRIMA FACIE case for my suspicions, it would be more polite to suppose that the opinions of Mr. Bennett were what he himself said they were. And if I were sensitive on such things, I might make a rather sharp request, that people who cannot possibly know anything about me except what I say, should for the sake of our general convenience believe what I say. On the subject of Modernism, at any rate, there has never been the least doubt or difficulty about what I say. For, as it happens, I had a strong intellectual contempt for Modernism, even before I really believed in Catholicism.

But I belong, as a biological product of evolution, to the order of the pachyderms. And I am not in the least moved by any annoyance in the matter; but only by a very strong mystification and curiosity about the real reason for this remarkable point of view. I know that the writer did not mean any harm; but I am much more interested in trying to understand what he did mean. And the truth is, I think, that there is hidden in this curious and cryptic phrase the secret of the whole modern controversy about Catholicism. What the man really meant was this: "Even poor old Chesterton must think; he can't have actually left off thinking altogether; there must be some form of cerebral function going forward to fill the empty hours of his misdirected and wasted life; and it is obvious that if a man begins to THINK, he can only think more or less in the direction of

Modernism." The Modernists do really think that. That is the point. That is the joke.

Now what we have really got to hammer into the heads of all these people, somehow, is that a thinking man can think himself deeper and deeper into Catholicism, and not deeper and deeper into difficulties about Catholicism. We have got to make them see that conversion is the beginning of an active, fruitful, progressive and even adventurous life of the intellect. For THAT is the thing that they cannot at present bring themselves to believe. They honestly say to themselves: "What can he be thinking about, if he is not thinking about the Mistakes of Moses, as discovered by Mr. Miggles of Pudsey, or boldly defying all the terrors of the Inquisition which existed two hundred years ago in Spain?" We have got to explain somehow that the great mysteries like the Blessed Trinity or the Blessed Sacrament are the starting-points for trains of thought far more stimulating, subtle and even individual, compared with which all that sceptical scratching is as thin, shallow and dusty as a nasty piece of scandalmongering in a New England village. Thus, to accept the Logos as a truth is to be in the atmosphere of the absolute, not only with St. John the Evangelist, but with Plato and all the great mystics of the world. To accept the Logos as a "text" or an "interpolation" or a "development" or a dead word in a dead document, only used to give in rapid succession about six different dates to that document, is to be altogether on a lower plane of human life; to be squabbling and scratching for a merely negative success; even if it really were a success. To exalt the Mass is to enter into a magnificent world of metaphysical ideas, illuminating all the relations of matter and mind, of flesh and spirit, of the most impersonal abstractions as well as the most personal affections. To set out to belittle and minimise the Mass, by talking ephemeral back-chat about what it had in common with Mithras or the Mysteries, is to be in altogether a more petty and pedantic mood; not only lower than Catholicism but lower even than Mithraism.

As I have said before, it is very difficult to say how we can best set about these things. We and our critics have come to talk in two different languages; so that the very names by which we describe the things inside stand for totally different things in the absurd labels they have stuck upon the wall outside. Often if we said the great things we have to say, they would sound like the small things they accuse us of saying. A philosophical process can only begin at the right end; and they have got hold of everything by the wrong end. But I am myself disposed to think that we should begin by challenging one very common phrase or form of words; a thing that has become a catch-word and a caption; or in the ordinary popular phrase a headline. Because the journalists incessantly repeat it, and draw attention to it by repeating it, we may possibly draw attention by denying it.

When the journalist says for the thousandth time, “Living religion is not in dull and dusty dogmas, etc.” we must stop him with a sort of shout and say, “There — you go wrong at the very start.” If he would condescend to ask what the dogmas are, he would find out that it is precisely the dogmas that are living, that are inspiring, that are intellectually interesting. Zeal and charity and unction are admirable as flowers and fruit; but if you are really interested in the living principle you must be interested in the root or the seed. In other words, you must be intelligently interested in the statement with which the whole thing started; even if it is only to deny it. Even if the critic cannot come to agree with the Catholic, he can come to see that it is certain ideas about the Cosmos that make him a Catholic. He can see that being Cosmic in that way, and Catholic in that way, is what makes him different from other people; and what makes him, at the very least, a not uninteresting figure in human history. He will never get anywhere near it by sentimentalising against Catholic sentiment or pontificating against Catholic pontiffs. He must get hold of the ideas as ideas; and he will find that the most interesting of all the ideas are those which the newspapers dismiss as dogmas.

For instance; the doctrine of the Dual Nature of Christ is in the most genuine sense interesting; it ought to be interesting to anybody who can understand it, long before he can believe it. It has what can be called with all reverence a stereoscopic interest; the interest of having the two eyes in the head that create an object; of having the two angles in the triangle that determine the third. The old Monophysite sect declared that Christ had only the one divine nature. The new Monophysite sect declares that He had only the one human nature. But it is not a pun or a trick, but a truth, to say that the Monophysite is by nature monotonous. In either of his two forms, he is naturally on one note. The question of objective historical truth is another question, which I am not arguing here, though I am ready to argue it anywhere. I am talking about intellectual stimulation and the starting point of thought and imagination. And these, like all living things, breed from the conjunction of two, and not from one alone. Thus I read, with sympathy but a sympathy that hardly goes beyond sentiment, the studies of the modern Monophysites in the life of the limited and merely mortal Jesus of Nazareth. I respect their respect; I admire their admiration; I know that all they say about human greatness or religious genius is true as far as it goes. But it goes along one line; and cannot convince like the things that can converge. And then, after reading such a tribute to an ethical teacher in the manner of the Essenes, perhaps I turn another page of the same or some similar book; and come upon some phrase used about a real though a pagan religion; perhaps some supposed parallel of what is called a Pagan Christ. I find it said, if only of Atys or Adonis, “There was a conception that the god sacrificed himself to himself.” The man who can read those words without a thrill is dead.

The thrill is deeper for us, of course, because it is concerned with a fact and not a fancy. In that sense we do not admit that there is any such parallel with the legends of the ancient pagans as is implied in the books of the modern pagans. And indeed we are surely entitled to call it mere common sense to say that there can be no complete parallel between what was admittedly a myth or mystery and what was admittedly a man. But the point here is that the truth hidden even in myths and mysteries is altogether lost if we are confined to the consideration of a man. In this sense there is an ironic and unconscious truth in the words of the modern pagan, who sang that “the heathen outface and outlive us,” and that “our lives and our longings are twain.” It is true of the Modernists, but it is not true of us, who find simultaneously the realisation of a longing and the record of a life. It is perfectly true that there were in many pagan myths the faint foreshadowing of the Christian mysteries; though even in saying so we admit that the foreshadowings were shadows. But when all imaginative kinship has been explored or allowed for, it is not true that mythology ever rose to the heights of theology. It is not true that a thought so bold or so subtle as this one ever crossed the mind that created the centaurs and the fauns. In the wildest and most gigantic of the primitive epic fancies, there is no conception so colossal as the being who is both Zeus and Prometheus.

But I only advert to it here, not as arguing its truth against those who do not believe it, but only as insisting on its intense and intellectual interest for those who do believe it. I only wish to explain to those who are worried in this way, that a mind filled with the true conception of this Duality has plenty to think about along those lines and has no need to dig up dead gods to discredit the Everlasting Man. There is no necessity for me to be Modernist in my own thoughts, or Monophysite in my own thoughts; because I think these views much duller and more trivial than my own. In the beautiful words of the love-song in THE WALLET OF KAI LUNG, one of the few truly psychological love-songs of the world: “This insignificant and universally despised person would unhesitatingly prefer his thoughts to theirs.”

Any number of other examples could of course be given. This person (if I may use once more the graceful Chinese locution) would very soon exhaust the excitement of discovering that Mary and Maia both begin with an M, or that the Mother of Christ and the Mother of Cupid were both represented as women. But I know that I shall never exhaust the profundity of that unfathomable paradox which is defined so defiantly in the very title of the Mother of God. I know that there are not only far deeper, but far fresher and freer developments of thought and imagination, in that riddle of the perfectly human having once had a natural authority over the supernaturally divine, than in any sort of iconoclastic identification which assimilates all the sacred images by flattening all their faces. By the time that Christ is really made the same as Osiris, there can be very little left of either of them; but Christ, as conceived by the Catholic Church, is himself a complex and a combination, not of two unreal things, but of two real ones. In the same way an Ashtaroth exactly like one of Raphael’s Madonnas, or vice versa, would seem a somewhat featureless vision in any case; whereas there is something that is, in the most intellectual sense, unique about the conception of the THEOTOKOS. In short, in all this mere unification of traditions, true or false, there is something that may be quite simply described as dull. But the dogmas are not dull. Even what are called the fine doctrinal distinctions are not dull. They are like the finest operations of surgery; separating nerve from nerve, but giving life. It is easy enough to flatten out everything for miles round with dynamite, if our only object is to give death. But just as the physiologist is dealing with living tissues, so the theologian is dealing with living ideas; and if he draws a line between them it is naturally a very fine line. It is the custom, though by this time; already a rather stale custom, to complain that the Greeks or Italians who disputed about the Trinity or the Sacrament were splitting hairs. I do not know that even splitting hairs is any drearier than bleaching hairs, in the vain attempt to match the golden hair of Freya and the black hair of Cotytto. The subdivision of a hair does at least tell us something of its structure; whereas its mere discoloration tells us nothing at all. Theology does introduce us to the structure of ideas; whereas theosophical syncretism merely washes all the colours out of the coloured fairy-tales of the world. But my only purpose in this place is to reassure the kind gentleman who was troubled about the secret malady of modernity that must be eating away my otherwise empty mind. I hasten earnestly to explain that I am quite well, thank you; and that I have plenty of things to think about without falling back on a Baconian madness of pagan parallels, or establishing the connection between the tale of the bull killed by Mithras and the tune the old cow died of.

THE OPTIMIST AS A SUICIDE

FREETHINKERS are occasionally thoughtful, though never free. In the modern world of the West, at any rate, they seem always to be tied to the treadmill of a materialist and monist cosmos. The universal sceptic, in Asia or in Antiquity, has probably been a bolder thinker, though very probably a more unhappy man. But what we have to deal with as scepticism is not scepticism; but a fixed faith in monism. The freethinker is not free to question monism. He is forbidden, for instance, in the only intelligible modern sense, to believe in a miracle. He is forbidden, in exactly the same sense in which he would say that we are forbidden to believe in a heresy. Both are forbidden by first principles and not by force. The Rationalist Press Association will not actually kidnap, gag or strangle Sir Arthur Keith if he admits the evidence for a cure at Lourdes. Neither will the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster have me hanged, drawn and quartered if I announce that I am an agnostic tomorrow. But of both cases it is true to say that a man cannot root up his first principles without a terrible rending and revolutionising of his very self. As a matter of fact, we are the freer of the two; as there is scarcely any evidence, natural or preternatural, that cannot be accepted as fitting into our system somewhere; whereas the materialist cannot fit the most minute miracle into his system anywhere. But let us leave that on one side as a separate question; and agree, if only for the sake of argument, that both the Catholic and the materialist are limited only by their fundamental conviction about the cosmic system; in both thought is in that sense forbidden and in that sense free. Consequently, when I see in some newspaper symposium, like that on Spiritualism, a leading materialist like Mr. John M. Robertson discussing the evidence for spiritualism, I feel exactly as I imagine him to feel when he hears a bishop in a mitre or a Jesuit in a cassock discussing the evidence for materialism. I know that Mr. Robertson cannot accept the evidence without becoming somebody quite different from Mr. Robertson; which also is within the power of the grace of God. But I know quite well he is not a freethinker; except in the sense in which I am a freethinker. He has long ago come to a conclusion which controls all his other conclusions. He is not driven by scientific evidence to accept Materialism. He is forbidden by Materialism to accept scientific evidence.

But there is another way in which the freethinker is not only thoughtful, but useful. The man who rejects the Faith altogether is often very valuable as a critic of the man who rejects it piecemeal, or bit by bit, or by fits and starts. The man who picks out some part of Catholicism that happens to please him, or throws away some part that happens to puzzle him, does in fact produce, not only the queerest sort of result, but generally the very opposite result to what he intends. And his inconsistency can often be effectively exposed from the extreme negative as well as the extreme positive point of view. It has been said that when the half-gods go, the gods arrive; it might be said in amiable parody that when the no-goddites arrive, the half-goddites go; and I am not sure it is not a good riddance. Anyhow, even the atheist can illustrate how important it is to keep the Catholic system altogether, even if he rejects it altogether.

A curious and amusing instance comes from America; in connection with Mr. Clarence Darrow, the somewhat simple-minded sceptic of that land of simplicity. He seems to have been writing something about the impossibility of anybody having a soul; of which nothing need be said except that (as usual) it seems to be the sceptic who really thinks of the soul superstitiously, as a separate and secret animal with wings; who considers the soul quite apart from the self. But what interests me about him at the moment is this. One of his arguments against immortality is that people do not really believe in it. And one of his arguments for that is that if they did believe in certain happiness beyond the grave, they would all kill themselves. He says that nobody would endure the martyrdom of cancer, for instance, if he really believed (as he apparently assumes all Christians to believe) that in any case the mere fact of death would instantly introduce the soul to perfect felicity and the society of all its best friends. A Catholic will certainly know what answer he has to give. But Mr. Clarence Darrow does not really in the least know what question he has asked.

Now there we have the final flower and crown of all modern optimism and universalism and humanitarianism in religion. Sentimentalists talk about love till the world is sick of the most glorious of all human words; they assume that there can be nothing in the next world except the sort of Utopia of practical pleasure which they promise us (but do not give us) in this world. They declare that all will be forgiven, because there is nothing to forgive. They insist that “passing over” is only like going into the next room, they insist that it will not even be a waiting-room. They declare that it must immediately introduce us to a cushioned lounge with all conceivable comforts, without any reference to how we have got there. They are positive that there is no danger, no devil; even no death. All is hope, happiness and optimism. And, as the atheist very truly points out, the logical result of all that hope, happiness and optimism would be hundreds of people hanging from lamp-posts or thousands of people throwing themselves into wells or canals. We should find the rational result of the modern Religion of Joy and Love in one huge human stampede of suicide. Pessimism would have killed its thousands, but optimism its ten thousands.

Now, of course, as I say, a Catholic knows the answer; because he holds the complete philosophy, which keeps a man sane; and not some single fragment of it, whether sad or glad, which may easily drive him mad. A Catholic does not kill himself because he does not take it for granted that he will deserve heaven in any case, or that it will not matter at all whether he deserves it at all. He does not profess to know exactly what danger he would run; but he does know what loyalty he would violate and what command or condition he would disregard. He actually thinks that a man might be fitter for heaven because he endured like a man; and that a hero could be a martyr to cancer as St. Lawrence or St. Cecilia were martyrs to cauldrons or gridirons. The faith in a future life, the hope of a future happiness, the belief that God is Love and that loyalty is eternal life, these things do not produce lunacy and anarchy, IF they are taken along with the other Catholic doctrines about duty and vigilance and watchfulness against the powers of hell. They might produce lunacy and anarchy, if they were taken alone. And the Modernists, that is, the optimists and the sentimentalists, did want us to take them alone. Of course, the same would be true, if somebody took the other doctrines of duty and discipline alone. It would produce another dark age of Puritans rapidly blackening into Pessimists. Indeed, the extremes meet, when they are both ends clipped off what should be a complete thing. Our parable ends poetically with two gibbets side by side; one for the suicidal pessimist and the other for the suicidal optimist.

The point is that in this passage the American sceptic is answering the Modernist; but he is not answering the Catholic. The Catholic has an extremely simple and sensible reason for not cutting his throat in order to fly instantly into Paradise. But he might really raise a question for those who talk as if Paradise were invariably and instantly populated with people who had cut their throats. And this is only one example out of a long list of historical examples; in which those who tried to make the Faith more simple invariably made it less sane. The Moslems imagined that they were merely being sensible when they cut down the creed to a mere belief in one God; but in the world of practical psychology they really cut it down to one Fate. The actual effect on ordinary men was simply fatalism; like that of the Turk who will not take his wound to a hospital because he is resigned to Kismet or the will of Allah. The Puritans thought they were simplifying things by appealing to what they called the plain words of Scripture; but as a fact they were complicating things by bringing in half a hundred cranky sects and crazy suggestions. And the modern universalist and humanitarian thought they were simplifying things when they interpreted the great truth that God is Love, as meaning that there can be no war with the demons or no danger to the soul. But in fact they were inventing even darker riddles with even wilder answers; and Mr. Clarence Darrow has suggested one of them. He will be gratified to receive the thanks of all Catholics for doing so.

THE OUTLINE OF THE FALL

I HAVE remarked on the curious rearguard action of bluff that is being fought to cover the retreat of the Darwinians. An example of the same thing has appeared in connection with a much more famous name; indeed, with two famous names. Mr. H. G. Wells has replied to Mr. Belloc, who wrote a criticism of the "Outline of History," chiefly to protest against a certain tone of arbitrary generalisation and sham knowledge of the unknown. A typical case was that in which Mr. Wells said of the men who drew reindeers in caves: "There seems no scope in such a life for speculation or philosophy," and Mr. Belloc not unnaturally answered: "Why on earth not?" But the details of the various works in question do not concern me immediately here; they mostly depend on that habit of talking as if every cave-drawing had its date obligingly inscribed on it; or any stone hatchet might bear the inscription 400,000 B.C. or possibly, B.O.H., or Before the Outline of History. At the moment the only point of contact is that which affects a continuation of our previous criticism, touching the present state of Darwinism. And what strikes me is that even Mr. Wells, often a sufficiently warm controversialist, is relatively and really cold in the matter; and his defence of Darwin is much more of an apology than an apologia. Indeed, like so many other modern apologies, it almost amounts to pleading that Darwin was not a Darwinian.

The Victorian evolutionists devoted themselves to declaring how great Darwin's thesis was. The new evolutionists seem to devote themselves to explaining how small it was. They really seem to plead, as in the old anecdote, that it gave birth to a theory, but a very little one. Some of Mr. Wells's words may surely, without unfairness, be called apologetic. He does not, like the professor previously mentioned, try to get over the word "origin" by talking about "the cause of the origin." So he concentrates on the word "species," as if evolution had not only applied to a sub-division. He adds that Darwin did not at the beginning even apply it to man. What in the world would the Victorian Darwinians have said had they heard it urged in defence of Darwinism that it was not applied to man? Are we to understand that only the first book of Darwin is divinely inspired? Again, Mr. Wells says that natural selection is common sense. And doubtless, if it only means that things fitted for survival do survive, it is common sense.

We may also add that it is common knowledge. Has it come to this, that Darwin is defended because he only discovered what was common knowledge? The real question, of course, is that stated by Mr. Belloc; when he said that nobody needs to be told that in a flood fish live and cattle die. The question is, How soon do cattle turn into fish? That would be an example of the true Darwinian theory; and it is now merely minimised, represented as only one element of evolution and without even the elements of an explanation. We fancy there is a healthy prejudice behind it all. Mr. Wells indignantly repudiates the slander uttered by Mr. Belloc, who called him a patriot. But it is true; the deep English national pride has much to do with this devotion. And rather than deprive England of her Darwin, they have deprived Darwin of his discovery.

When a man is as great a genius as Mr. Wells, I admit it sounds provocative to call him provincial. But if he wants to know why anybody does it, it will be enough to point silently to the headline of one of his pages, which runs: “Where is the Garden of Eden?” To come down to a thing like that, and to think it telling, when talking to an intelligent Catholic about the Fall, that IS provinciality; proud and priceless provinciality. The French peasants of whom Mr. Wells speaks are not in that sense provincial. As Mr. Wells says, they do not know anything about Darwin and Evolution. They do not know and they do not care. That is where they are much better philosophers than Mr. Wells. They hold the philosophy of the Fall, in the form of a simple story which may be historic or symbolic, but anyhow cannot be more important than what it symbolises. In comparison with that truth, it does not matter twopence whether any evolutionary theory is true or not. Whether or no the garden was an allegory, the truth itself can be very well allegorised as a garden. And the point of it is that Man, whatever else he is, is certainly NOT merely one of the plants of the garden that has plucked its roots out of the soil and walked about with them like legs, or on the principle of a double dahlia has grown duplicate eyes and ears. He is something else, something strange and solitary; and more like the statue that was once the god of the garden; but the statue has fallen from its pedestal and lies broken among the plants and weeds. This conception has nothing to do with materialism as it refers to materials. The image might be made of wood; the wood might have come from the garden; the sculptor presumably might, and probably did, allow for the growth and grain of the wood in what he carved and expressed. But my fable fixes the two truths of the true scripture. The first is that the wood was graven or stamped with an image, deliberately, and from the outside; in this case the image of God. The second is that this image has been damaged and defaced, so that it is now both better and worse than the mere plants in the garden, which are perfect according to their own plan. There is room for any amount of speculation about the history of the tree before it was turned into an image; there is room for any amount of doubt and mystery about what really happened when it was turned into an image; there is room for any amount of hope and imagination about what it will look like when it is really mended and made into the perfect statue we have never seen. But it has the two fixed points, that man was uplifted at the first and fell; and to answer it by saying, “Where is the Garden of Eden?” is like answering a philosophical Buddhist by saying, “When were you last a donkey?”

The Fall is a view of life. It is not only the only enlightening, but the only encouraging view of life. It holds, as against the only real alternative philosophies, those of the Buddhist or the Pessimist or the Promethean, that we have misused a good world, and not merely been entrapped into a bad one. It refers evil back to the wrong use of the will, and thus declares that it can eventually be righted by the right use of the will. Every other creed except that one is some form of surrender to fate. A man who holds this view of life will find it giving light on a thousand things; on which mere evolutionary ethics have not a word to say. For instance, on the colossal contrast between the completeness of man’s machines and the continued corruption of his motives; on the fact that no social progress really seems to leave self behind; on the fact that the first and not the last men of any school or revolution are generally the best and purest; as William Penn was better than a Quaker millionaire or Washington better than an American oil magnate; on that proverb that says: “The price of liberty is eternal vigilance,” which is only what the theologians say of every other virtue, and is itself only a way of stating the truth of original sin; on those extremes of good and evil by which man exceeds all the animals by the measure of heaven and hell; on that sublime sense of loss that is in the very sound of all great poetry, and nowhere more than in the poetry of pagans and sceptics: “We look before and after, and pine for what is not”; which cries against all prigs and progressives out of the very depths and abysses of the broken heart of man, that happiness is not only a hope, but also in some strange manner a memory; and that we are all kings in exile.

Now to people who feel that this view of life is more real, more radical, more universal than the cheap simplifications opposed to it, it comes with quite a shock of bathos to realise that anybody let alone a man like Mr. Wells, supposes that it all depends on some detail about the site of a garden in Mesopotamia, like that identified by General Gordon. It is hard to find any parallel to such an incongruity; for there is no real similarity between our muddled mortal affairs and events that were divine if they were mysterious, and scriptures that are sacred even if they are symbolical. But some shadow of a comparison could be made out of the modern myths. I mean the sort of myths that men like Mr. Wells generally do believe in; such as the Myth of Magna Carta or the Myth of the Mayflower. Now many historians will maintain that Magna Carta was really nothing to speak of; that it was largely a piece of feudal privilege. But suppose one of the historians who holds this view began to argue with us excitedly about the fabulous nature of our ordinary fancy picture of Magna Carta. Suppose he produced maps and documents to prove that Magna Carta was not signed at Runnymede, but somewhere else; as I believe some scholars do maintain. Suppose he criticised the false heraldry and fancy-dress costumes of the ordinary sort of waxwork historical picture of the event. We should think he was rather unduly excited about a detail of mediaeval history. But with what a shock of astonishment should we realise at last that the man actually thought that all modern attempts at democracy must be abandoned, that all representative government must be wrong, that all Parliaments would have to be dissolved and all political rights destroyed, if once it were admitted that King John did not sign that special document in that little island in the Thames! What should we think of him, if he really thought we had no reasons for liking law or liberty, except the authenticity of that beloved royal signature? That is very much how I feel when I find that Mr. Wells really imagines that the luminous and profound philosophy of the Fall only means that Eden was somewhere in Mesopotamia. Now the only explanation of a great man like Mr. Wells having a small prejudice, like this about the snake, is that he does come of a religious tradition that regarded the text of Hebrew Scripture as the only authority and had forgotten all about the great mediaeval metaphysic and the discussion of fundamental ideas. The man who does that is provincial; and there is no harm in saying so even when he is one of the greatest men of letters and a glory to the English name.

THE IDOLS OF SCOTLAND

THE thing that strikes me most in current controversy is that our opponents are talking almost entirely in terms of the past, and that an entirely dead past; whereas we are making some sort of attempt, whether it be considered impertinent or eccentric or meddlesome or paradoxical, to deal with the practical conditions of the present. An amusing comedy on these lines seems to have arisen on the subject of Scottish Nationalism or the notion of Home Rule for North Britain. A worthy Presbyterian has warned his fellow-countrymen that the movement is tainted by the presence of Roman Catholics, and especially by that of Mr. Compton Mackenzie; and that no little degree of the deadly peril is indicated by the fact that Mr. Cunninghame Graham is interested in a book by Mr. Belloc; in which the hideous sentiment is uttered that the Reformation was the shipwreck of Christendom. Personally I should have thought it was obvious to anybody on any side, in one solid and objective sense, that it was the shipwreck of Christendom. I should imagine that it would be obvious to anybody, for instance, who desires or even discusses the Reunion of Christendom. There certainly was a united vessel or vehicle and it certainly did break up into different parts. Some people may think the ship was a rotten old-fashioned three-decker that was bound to break up; and that the people were lucky who got away from it in boats. But it is certain that it did break up and that the boats were not the same as the original ship. A man might as well resent our saying that the rise of the feudal kingdoms and the modern nationalities was part of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. This is only one of the marks of such bigotry; but it is worth noting at the outset. One of the peculiarities of this sort of bigot is that he cannot distinguish between provocative statements and plain inevitable statements. If I say that the Reformation was a relapse into barbarism, a return to all that was worst in the Dark Ages without anything of what was best in them, an idolatry of dead Hebrew documents full of visions and symbols without any Daniel to interpret the dreams, a stampede of brutal luxury and pride with a vulgar howl of hot-gospelling for an excuse, a riot of thieves and looters with a few foaming and gibbering lunatics carried in front of it like live mascots for luck; the return of the Manichee, the dirty ape of the ascetic, conspiring with the devil to destroy the world — if I were to say all this I should think that these remarks about Protestantism certainly had a slightly provocative flavour. But if I were to say, with Mr. Belloc, that Protestantism was the shipwreck of Christendom, I should regard it as an ordinary historical statement, like saying that the American War of Independence was a split in the British Empire. The bigot cannot see the difference between these two types of statement, whether made by us or by himself.

The next interesting thing to note about the protest is that the Protestant goes on to say that Mr. Compton Mackenzie and his friends are going to ruin Scotland by removing the stern teaching of John Knox, which has apparently created the Scottish character. This seems a little hard on the Scottish character. I cannot quite bring myself to believe that the character of Scott or of Stevenson, the character of Burns or Barrie, are exact and unaltered reproductions of the stern teaching of John Knox. But before we come to any such comparisons, it is worth remarking, on the face of the thing that a rather more living world, a life more in touch with modern conditions, a grasp of the actual problems of the present and the immediate future, is rather more indicated by saying the words "Compton Mackenzie" than by saying the words "John Knox." Many very modern young men have recently joined the same religion as Mr. Compton Mackenzie. No such modern young men, that I ever heard of, have ever exhibited the smallest desire to go back to the religion of John Knox. As a matter of plain fact, there is hardly one modern Scotsman in a thousand who has the smallest sympathy with the real religion of John Knox. He may vaguely respect John Knox as a Scottish hero, on the supposition (quite startlingly false) that he was a Scottish patriot. As a matter of fact, the patriotic party in Scotland was the wicked Papistical party; Knox and his Presbyterians were all for helping the pressure of England and Elizabeth. They would have justified themselves by saying that they had the one, true and only right religion. The question is, who is left even in Scotland who believes that it was the one, true and only right religion? I repeat, about one in a thousand; perhaps only a few splendidly fanatical old Wee Frees in the Highlands. Anybody who knows anything of the Scottish Presbyterian Churches, during the last fifty years, knows that the prevailing doctrine taught in them has NOT been the severe Calvinism of the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries, still less the wild Calvinism of the sixteenth. It has been a mild hash of Hegelian philosophy and Higher Criticism, all borrowed from Germany and carefully learnt by Scotch students in German Universities. And anybody who has noticed what the modern Scottish character is really like, knows that it does not by this time (thank heaven) bear the smallest resemblance to the sternness of John Knox. It is rather sentimental than otherwise, though its sentiment finds expression in more than one brilliant and admirable man of genius. Modern Scotland is not even remotely represented by John Knox. It is represented much more accurately, and much more honourably, by Sir Harry Lauder and Sir James Barrie.

This dull habit of invoking dead things, in a world in which we are surrounded by more and more interesting living things, is the second mark of the sort of bigot I am describing. It would be an extremely interesting business to write a real, respectful and sympathetic history of the remarkable episode of Scottish Puritanism; insisting on its integrity and its intellectual vigour while it lasted. But any sincere study of it must conclude with the statement that it did not last. One of the most brilliant and distinguished of Scottish professors, at Edinburgh University, himself of an origin wholly Puritan and of sympathies the very reverse of Catholic, used to me the true and forcible expression about the old Scottish Sabbatarianism, "It covered all Scotland; and then one morning, it had suddenly vanished everywhere like the snow." And though the story might be told truly from either standpoint, or from many others, it is but natural that we should draw our own moral from it. And the moral is, of course, one which we find running through the whole of our history.

The birth and death of every heresy has been essentially the same. A morbid or unbalanced Catholic takes one idea out of the thousandfold throng of Catholic ideas; and announces that he cares for that Catholic idea more than for Catholicism. He takes it away with him into a wilderness, where the idea becomes an image and the image an idol. Then, after a century or two, he suddenly wakes up and discovers that the idol is an idol; and, shortly after that, that the wilderness is a wilderness. If he is a wise man, he calls himself a fool. If he is a fool, he calls himself an evolutionary progressive who has outgrown the worship of idols; and he looks round him at the wilderness, spreading bare and desolate on every side and says, in the beautiful words of Mr. H. G. Wells: "I see no limit to it at all."

That is what happened to the Calvinistic Scotsman; and the chief comfort in the prospect is that the Scotsman is not generally a fool, even when he has ceased to be a Calvinist. But he very often becomes an atheist; and the fact that so many of the hard destructive sceptics, from Hume downwards, came from Scotland, was the early and significant evidence of the discovery of the idol and the wilderness. But in any case, that is the compact parable of what occurred. The Calvinist was a Catholic whose imagination had been in some way caught and overpowered by the one isolated theological truth of the power and knowledge of God; and he offered to it human sacrifice, not only of every human sentiment, but of every other divine quality. Something in that bare idea of all-seeing, all-searching and pitiless power intoxicated and exalted certain men for a certain period, as certain men are intoxicated by a storm of wind or some terrible stage tragedy. The more moderate Protestants, the Anglicans and to a large extent the Lutherans, had something of the same queer feeling about the King. Hence came the Cavalier doctrine of Divine Right — and the court chaplains of Prussia. Nothing is more intriguing and challenging to the imagination than the necessity of trying to understand how men in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries felt a sort of abstract altruistic joy in the mere might and triumph of the Prince; in the mere autocracy of the earthly ruler. The Calvinists, to do them justice, felt it only about the heavenly ruler. In that sense the Scots can look proudly back on their Calvinism. But they cannot look proudly forward to Calvinism. They really know, as well as anybody else, that this isolated religious idea can no longer be kept separate from all the other religious ideas to which it belongs. The Calvinism of the Puritan is as dead as the Divine Right of the Cavaliers; men can no longer worship the idol, whether it is Presbyterianism or Erastianism. They can only worship the wilderness; which is atheism — or, as the more polite say, pantheism.

Whether it be called a Catholic tendency or no, all the movements of all the sects of late have been in the direction of trying to put together again those separate pieces that were pulled apart in the sixteenth century. The main feature of our time has been the fact that one person after another has recovered one piece after another, and added it to the new scheme by borrowing it from the old. There is one sufficient proof that there has indeed been a shipwreck. And that is that Robinson Crusoe has, ever since, been continually going back to get things from the wreck.

IF THEY HAD BELIEVED

ONE of the things our enemies do not know is the real case for their own side. It is always for me a great matter of pride that the proudest, the most genuine and the most unanswerable boast, that the Protestants of England could ever make, was made for them by a Catholic. Very few of the Protestants, of his time at any rate, would have had the historical enlargement or enlightenment to make it. For it was said by Newman, when that great master of English was surveying the glorious triumphs of our tongue from Bacon and Milton, to Swift and Burke, and he reminded us firmly that, though we convert England to the true faith a thousand times over, “English literature will always HAVE BEEN Protestant.”

That generous piece of candour might well be represented as even too generous; but I think it is very wise for us to be too generous. It is not entirely, or at least not exclusively true. The name of Chaucer is alone enough to show that English literature was English a long time before it was Protestant. Even a Protestant, if he were also English, could ask for nobody more entirely English than Chaucer. He was, in the essential national temper, very much more English than Milton. As a matter of fact, the argument is no stronger for Chaucer than it is for Shakespeare. But in the case of Shakespeare the argument is long and complicated, as conducted by partisans; though sufficiently simple and direct for people with a sense of reality. I believe that recent discoveries, as recorded in a book by a French lady, have very strongly confirmed the theory that Shakespeare died a Catholic. But I need no books and no discoveries to prove to me that he had lived a Catholic, or more probably, like the rest of us, tried unsuccessfully to live a Catholic; that he thought like a Catholic and felt like a Catholic and saw every question as a Catholic sees it. The proofs of this would be matter for a separate essay; if indeed so practical an impression can be proved at all. It is quite self-evident to me that he was a certain real and recognisable Renaissance type of Catholic; like Cervantes; like Ronsard. But if I were asked offhand for a short explanation, I could only say that I know he was a Catholic from the passages which are now used to prove he was an agnostic.

But that is another and much more subtle question, which is not the question I proposed to myself in starting this essay. In starting it, I proposed to grant the whole sound and solid truth of Newman's admission; that there has indeed arisen out of the disunion of Europe a great and glorious English Protestant literature; and to make some further speculations upon the point. And I think that nothing could make clearer to the modern English, the one supreme thing that they don't know (which is what our religion really is and why we think it real) than to put this rather interesting historical question. What difference would it have made to the great masters of English literature, if they had been Catholics?

Of course, the question cannot be strictly and scientifically answered; because nobody knows what difference would be made to anybody by any change in the circumstances of his life. But taking the matter broadly, as a question of ideas or even of doctrines it is worth asking as a matter of religious history. How far did the great Protestant writers depend on Protestantism?

I have no intention of discussing it adequately here; and indeed this is not so much an essay as an essay to suggest an essay. It is, in fact, a delicate indication, to people more learned than myself, that I am in possession of a very good title and subject for an essay. But at least it will be safe to say that the common or conventional impression among English people on this point is wildly wrong. It is wrong because it imagines that purely Protestant ideas were in some vague way the same as liberal and emancipated ideas. And it is wrong in a more special sense, because it is founded on the utterly false history, which supposes that the Renaissance was the same as the Reformation. It would be very difficult to say what English literature owes to the Reformation as distinct from the Renaissance. There is the splendid sincerity that inspired the plain English of Bunyan; but even Bunyan was a sort of exception that proved the rule. He was a Puritan; but he was emphatically not a Puritan of the Puritans. He was a man actually suspected by his fellow Puritans, because he was not so much a Puritan as a Christian. It was remarked at the time, and it has often been remarked since, that his theory is not very sectarian by the standard of seventeenth century sects. Among the Calvinists he was so much of a moderate, that thousands must have read his great book without thinking about Calvinism at all. And if we take the great scenes in his great book, the battle with Apollyon, the Mission of Greatheart, the death of Valiant-for-the-Truth, when all the trumpets sounded on the other side — there is really no reason whatever why they should not have been written by a Catholic. I do not affirm that they WOULD have been written by a Catholic, if the course of history had left the common people Catholics; for that is a question which nobody can possibly answer one way or the other. But I am speaking strictly of doctrines in their relation to ideas and images; and there is no possible reason why a Catholic should be prevented by his Catholicism from writing such a story of the pilgrimage of Man and the fight to attain to God.

Milton in one way is an even stronger case; since he had much more in him of Shakespeare and the Catholic Renaissance. And I really cannot think of any deep difference that it would have made to his poetry, as poetry, if he had followed other members of his family in the old faith; I do not see that he need have been much altered, except possibly by being a much jollier man. Many will not realise this, because they insist on regarding artistic and intellectual freedom as something that was closed to the Catholic countries and open only to the Protestant. But all history is in flat contradiction to this view. The tide of culture in the seventeenth century flowed from France to England, not from England to France. Milton might have been as central as Moliere and still remained a Catholic man in a Catholic atmosphere. Descartes the Catholic was more truly than Bacon the Protestant, the PHILOSOPHER of rationalist science. The experiments, the new forms, the great names in criticism and philosophy, appeared during the last two or three centuries quite as much in the Catholic countries as in the Protestant, if not rather more. England could have produced a great English literature, as France produced a great French literature, without any change in the ancient European religion.

The real test case, to be considered in some such essay, would be a case like that of Cowper. There you do most emphatically have the Protestant theology; and there you do most emphatically have the English poetry. But the two have precious little to do with each other; until the coming of that dark hour when the theology destroyed the poetry. Poor Cowper’s Calvinism drove him mad; and only his poetry managed for some time to keep him sane. But there was nothing whatever either in the poetry or the sanity that could have prevented him from being a Catholic. On the contrary, he was exactly the sort of man who would have been very happy as a Catholic. He was the sort of man to have been devoted to the memory of St. Francis, if he had ever heard of him; and there was nothing to prevent the one any more than the other from keeping pet birds or stroking wild hares out of the woods. It was the brutal blow of Calvin, two centuries before, that broke the heart of that natural saint; and it is not the least of his crimes.

After the time of Cowper, there does indeed begin to appear another type of difficulty; but it is not the presence but rather the absence of Protestant theology. There were elements even in Burns and Byron, there were still more elements in Shelley and Swinburne, which would doubtless have been at issue with their Catholic tradition, if they had had it. But it would not have been a revolt against Catholicism half so much as it was a revolt against Protestantism. In so far as they tended to mere scepticism, they could have found their way to it more quickly from reading Rabelais and Montaigne in a Catholic country than from reading Shakespeare and Milton in a Protestant one. As soon as the Revolution has begun, in a sense as soon as the Romantic Movement has begun, the positive Puritan theology is left behind even more completely than the mediaeval theology. Indeed the Romantics did develop a faint and hazy sympathy, if not with mediaeval theology, at least with mediaeval religion. It is true that Byron or Hugo probably preferred an abbey to be a ruined abbey; but they would not have visited a Baptist chapel even for the pleasure of seeing it ruined. It is true that Scott advised us to see mediaeval Melrose by moonlight; with the delicate implication that the mediaeval religion was moonshine. But he would not in any case have wanted to see Exeter Hall by gaslight; and he would have thought its theology not moonshine but gas. The tributes which he occasionally forces himself to make to the official Puritanism of his own country are, it will be generally agreed, the most sullen and insincere words to be found in his works. On the negative side, therefore, the conclusion is altogether negative. It is very difficult to find, at least after the doubtful case of Bunyan and the deadly case of Cowper, anything that can be called a purely literary inspiration coming from the purely Protestant doctrines. There is plenty of inspiration coming more or less indirectly from Paganism; but after the first excitement, hardly any from Protestantism.

If this is true on the negative side, it is even truer on the positive side. I take it that the imaginative magnificence of Milton's epic, in such matters as the War in Heaven, would have been much more convincing, if it had been modelled more on the profound mediaeval mysteries about the nature of angels and archangels, and less on the merely fanciful Greek myths about giants and gods. PARADISE LOST is an immortal poem; but it has just failed to be an immortal religious poem. Those are most happy in reading Milton who can read him as they would read Hesiod. It is doubtful whether those seeking spiritual satisfaction now read him even as naturally as they would read Crashaw. I suppose nobody will dispute that the pageantry of Scott might have taken on a tenfold splendour if he could have understood the emblems of an everlasting faith as sympathetically as he did the emblems of a dead feudalism. For him it was the habit that made the monk; but the habit would have been quite as picturesque if there had been a real monk inside it; let alone a real mind inside the monk, like the mind of St. Dominic or St. Hugh of Lincoln. “English literature will always have been Protestant”; but it might have been Catholic; without ceasing to be English literature, and perhaps succeeding in producing a deeper literature and a happier England.

PEACE AND THE PAPACY

THERE is a famous saying which to some has seemed lacking in reverence, though in fact it is a support of one important part of religion; “If God had not existed, it would have been necessary to invent Him.” It is not at all unlike some of the daring questions with which St. Thomas Aquinas begins his great defence of the faith. Some of the modern critics of his faith, especially the Protestant critics of it, have fallen into an amusing error, chiefly through ignorance of Latin and of the old use of the word DIVUS, and have accused Catholics of describing the Pope as God. Catholics, I need not say, are about as likely to call the Pope God as to call a grasshopper the Pope. But there is a sense in which they do recognise an eternal correspondence between the position of the King of Kings in the universe and of his Viceroy in the world, like the correspondence between a real thing and its shadow; a similarity something like the damaged and defective similarity between God and the image of God. And among the coincidences of this comparison may be classed the case of this epigram. The world will more and more find itself in a position in which even politicians and practical men will find themselves saying, “If the Pope had not existed, it would be necessary to invent him.”

It is not at all impossible that they may really try to invent him. The truth is that multitudes of them would already accept the Pope if he were not called the Pope. I firmly believe that it would be quite possible, in this and many other matters, to play a sort of pious practical joke on large numbers of heretics and heathens. I fancy it would be quite feasible to describe in accurate but abstract terms the general idea of an office or obligation, which would exactly correspond to the position of the Papacy in history, and which would be accepted on ethical and social ground by numbers of Protestants and free-thinkers; until they discovered with a reaction of rage and astonishment that they had been entrapped into accepting the international arbitration of the Pope. Suppose somebody were to advance the old idea as if it were a new idea; suppose he were to say; “I propose that there be erected in some central city in the more civilised part of our civilisation the seat of a permanent official to represent peace and the basis of agreement among all the surrounding nations; let him be by the nature of his post set apart from them all and yet sworn to consider the rights and wrongs of all; Let him be put there as a judge to expound an ethical law and system of social relations; let him be of a certain type and training different from that which encourages the ordinary ambitions of military glory or even the ordinary attachments of tribal tradition; let him be protected by a special sentiment from the pressure of kings and princes; let him be sworn in a special manner to the consideration of men as men." There are not a few already, and there will soon be many more, who would be perfectly capable of proposing such an ideal international institution on their own account; there are also many who would really, in their innocence, suppose that it had never been attempted before.

It is true that as yet large numbers of such social reformers would shrink from the idea of the institution being an individual. But even that prejudice is weakening under the wear and tear of real political experience. We may be attached, as many of us are, to the democratic ideal; but most of us have already realised that direct democracy, the only true democracy which satisfies a true democrat, is a thing applicable to some things and not others; and not applicable at all to a question such as this. The actual speaking voice of a vast international civilisation, or of a vast international religion, will not in any case be the actual articulate distinguishable voices or cries of all the millions of the faithful. It is not the people who would be the heirs of a dethroned Pope; it is some synod or bench of bishops. It is not an alternative between monarchy and democracy, but an alternative between monarchy and oligarchy. And, being myself one of the democratic idealists, I have not the faintest hesitation in my choice between the two latter forms of privilege. A monarch is a man; but an oligarchy is not men; it is a few men forming a group small enough to be insolent and large enough to be irresponsible. A man in the position of a Pope, unless he is literally mad, must be responsible. But aristocrats can always throw the responsibility on each other; and yet create a common and corporate society from which is shut out the very vision of the rest of the world. These are conclusions to which many people in the world are coming; and many who would still be much astonished and horrified to find where those conclusions lead. But the point here is that even if our civilisation does not rediscover the need of a Papacy, it is extremely likely that sooner or later it will try to supply the need of something like a Papacy; even if it tries to do it on its own account. That will be indeed an ironical situation. The modern world will have set up a new Anti-Pope, even if, as in Monsignor Benson's romance, the Anti-Pope has rather the character of an Antichrist.

The point is that men will attempt to put some sort of moral power out of the reach of material powers. It is the weakness of many worthy and well-meaning attempts at international justice just now, that the international council can hardly help being merely a microcosm or model of the world outside it, with all its little things and big things, including the things that are much too big. Suppose that in the international interchanges of the future some power, say Sweden, is felt to be disproportionate or problematical. If Sweden is powerful in Europe, she will be powerful in the council of Europe. If Sweden is too powerful in Europe, she will be too powerful in the council of Europe. And because she is the very thing that is irresistible, she is the very thing to be resisted; or at any rate to be restrained. I do not see how Europe can ever escape from that logical dilemma, except by discovering again an authority that is purely moral and is the recognised custodian of a morality. It may very reasonably be said that even those dedicated to that duty may not always practise what they profess. But the other rulers of the world are not even bound to profess it.

Again and again in history, especially in mediaeval history, the Papacy has intervened in the interests of peace and humanity; just as the greatest saints have thrown themselves between the swords and daggers of contending factions. But if there had been no Papacy and no saints and no Catholic Church at all, the world left to itself would certainly not have substituted social abstractions for theological creeds. As a whole, humanity has been far from humanitarian. If the world had been left to itself, let us say in the age of feudalism, all the decisions would have been rigidly and ruthlessly on the lines of feudalism. There was only one institution in that world that had existed before feudalism. There was only one institution which could possibly carry on some faint memory of the Republic and the Roman Law. If the world had been left to itself in the time of the Renaissance and the Italian statecraft of the Prince, it would have been arranged entirely in the current fashion of the glorification of princes. There was only one institution that could at any moment be moved to repeat, "Put not your trust in princes." Had it been absent, the only result would have been that the famous settlement of CUJUS REGIO EJUS RELIGIO would have been all REGIO with precious little RELIGIO. And so, of course, our own day has its unconscious dogmas and its universal prejudices; and it needs a special, a sacred and what seems to many an inhuman separation to stand above them or to see beyond.

I know that this ideal has been abused like any other; I only say that even those who most denounce the reality will probably begin again to search for the ideal. But I do not, in fact, propose that any such spiritual tribunal should act like a legal tribunal or be given powers of practical interference with normal and national government. I am quite sure, for one thing, that it would never accept any such material entanglement. Nor do I, for that matter, desire that any of the secular tribunals now set up in the interests of international peace should thus have the power to interfere with nationality and local liberty. I would much rather give such power to a pope than to politicians and diplomatists of the sort to whom the world is giving it. But I do not want to give it to anybody and the authority in question does not want to accept it from anybody. The thing of which I speak is purely moral and cannot exist without a certain moral loyalty; it is a thing of atmosphere and even in a sense of affection. There is no space to describe here the manner in which such a general popular attachment grows up; but there is no doubt whatever that it did once grow up round such a religious centre of our civilisation; and that it is not likely to grow up again except for something which aims at a higher standard of humility and charity than the ordinary standard of the world. Men cannot have an affection for other people’s emperors, or even for other people’s politicians; they have sometimes been known to cool in affection even for their own politicians. I see no prospect of any such positive nucleus of amity except in some positive enthusiasm for something that moves the deepest parts of man’s moral nature; something which can unite us not (as the prigs say) by being entirely international, but by being universally human. Men cannot agree about nothing any more than they can disagree about nothing. And anything wide enough to make such an agreement must itself be wider than the world.

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

I HAVE rather rashly undertaken to write of the Spirit of Christmas; and it presents a preliminary difficulty about which I must be candid. People are very curious nowadays in their way of talking about “the spirit” of a thing. There is, for example, a particular sort of prig who is always lecturing us about having the spirit of true Christianity, apart from all names and forms. As far as I can make out, he means the very opposite of what he says. He means that we are to go on using the names “Christian” and “Christianity,” and so on, for something in which it is quite specially the spirit that is not Christian; something that is a sort of combination of the baseless optimism of an American atheist with the pacifism of a mild Hindoo. In the same way, we read a great deal about the Spirit of Christmas in modern journalism or commercialism; but it is really a reversal of the same kind. So far from preserving the essentials without the externals, it is rather preserving the externals where there cannot be the essentials. It means taking two mere material substances, like holly and mistletoe, and spreading them all over huge and homeless cosmopolitan hotels or round the Doric columns of impersonal clubs full of jaded and cynical old gentlemen; or in any other place where the actual spirit of Christmas is least likely to be. But there is also another way in which modern commercial complexity eats out the heart of the thing, while actually leaving the painted shell of it. And that is the much too elaborate system of dependence on buying and selling, and therefore on bustle and hustle; and the actual neglect of the new things that might be done by the old Christmas.

Normally, if anything were normal nowadays, it would seem a truism to say that Christmas has been a family festival. But it is now possible (as I have had the good or bad luck to discover) to earn a reputation for paradox simply by going on saying that truisms are true. In this case, of course, the reason, the only reasonable reason, was religious. It was concerned with a happy family because it was consecrated to the Holy Family. But it is perfectly true that many men saw the fact without specially feeling the reason. When we say the root was religious, we do not mean that Sam Weller was concentrated on theological values when he told the Fat Boy to “put a bit of Christmas,” into some object, probably edible. We do not mean that the Fat Boy had gone into a trance of mystical contemplation like a monk seeing a vision. We do not even mean that Bob Cratchit defended punch by saying he was only looking on the wine when it was yellow; or that Tiny Tim quoted Timothy. We only mean that they, including their author, would have confessed humbly and heartily that there was someone historically quite anterior to Mr. Scrooge, who might be called the Founder of the Feast. But in any case, whatever the reason, all would have agreed about the result. Mr. Wardle's feast centred in Mr. Wardle's family; and none the less because the romantic shadows of Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass threatened to break it up for the formation of other families.

The Christmas season is domestic; and for that reason most people now prepare for it by struggling in tramcars, standing in queues, rushing away in trains, crowding despairingly into tea-shops, and wondering when or whether they will ever get home. I do not know whether some of them disappear for ever in the toy department or simply lie down and die in the tea-rooms; but by the look of them, it is quite likely. Just before the great festival of the home the whole population seems to have become homeless. It is the supreme triumph of industrial civilisation that, in the huge cities which seem to have far too many houses, there is a hopeless shortage of housing. For a long time past great numbers of our poor have become practically nomadic. We even confess the fact; for we talk of some of them as Street Arabs. But this domestic institution, in its present ironical phase, has gone beyond such normal abnormality. The feast of the family turns the rich as well as the poor into vagabonds. They are so scattered over the bewildering labyrinth of our traffic and our trade, that they sometimes cannot even reach the tea-shop; it would be indelicate, of course, to mention the tavern. They have a difficulty in crowding into their hotels, let alone separating to reach their houses. I mean quite the reverse of irreverence when I say that their only point of resemblance to the archetypal Christmas family is that there is no room for them at the inn.

Now Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox; that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home. But the other sort of paradox is not intentional and is certainly not beautiful. It is bad enough that we cannot altogether disentangle the tragedy of poverty. It is bad enough that the birth of the homeless, celebrated at hearth and altar, should sometimes synchronise with the death of the homeless in workhouses and slums. But we need not rejoice in this universal restlessness brought upon rich and poor alike; and it seems to me that in this matter we need a reform of the modern Christmas.

I will now emit another brilliant flash of paradox by remarking that Christmas occurs in the winter. That is, it is not only a feast dedicated to domesticity, but it is one deliberately placed under the conditions in which it is most uncomfortable to rush about and most natural to stop at home. But under the complicated conditions of modern conventions and conveniences, there arises this more practical and much more unpleasant sort of paradox. People have to rush about for a few weeks, if it is only to stay at home for a few hours. Now the old and healthy idea of such winter festivals was this; that people being shut in and besieged by the weather were driven back on their own resources; or, in other words, had a chance of showing whether there was anything in them. It is not certain that the reputation of our most fashionable modern pleasure-seekers would survive the test. Some dreadful exposures would be made of some such brilliant society favourites, if they were cut off from the power of machinery and money. They are quite used to having everything done for them; and even when they go to the very latest American dances, it seems to be mostly the Negro musicians who dance. But anyhow, on the average of healthy humanity I believe the cutting off of all these mechanical connections would have a thoroughly enlivening and awakening effect. At present they are always accused of merely amusing themselves; but they are doing nothing so noble or worthy of their human dignity. Most of them by this time cannot amuse themselves; they are too used to being amused.

Christmas might be creative. We are told, even by those who praise it most, that it is chiefly valuable for keeping up ancient customs or old-fashioned games. It is indeed valuable for both those admirable purposes. But in the sense of which I am now speaking it might once more be possible to turn the truth the other way round. It is not so much old things as new things that a real Christmas might create. It might, for instance, create new games, if people were really driven to invent their own games. Most of the very old games began with the use of ordinary tools or furniture. So the very terms of tennis were founded on the framework of the old inn courtyard. So, it is said, the stumps in cricket were originally only the three legs of the milking-stool. Now we might invent new things of this kind, if we remembered who is the mother of invention. How pleasing it would be to start a game in which we scored so much for hitting the umbrella-stand or the dinner-wagon, or even the host and hostess; of course, with a missile of some soft material. Children who are lucky enough to be left alone in the nursery invent not only whole games, but whole dramas and life-stories of their own; they invent secret languages; they create imaginary families; they laboriously conduct family magazines. That is the sort of creative spirit that we want in the modern world; want both in the sense of desiring and in the sense of lacking it. If Christmas could become more domestic, instead of less, I believe there would be a vast increase in the real Christmas spirit; the spirit of the Child. But in indulging this dream we must once more invert the current convention into the form of a paradox. It is true in a sense that Christmas is the time at which the doors should be open. But I would have the doors shut at Christmas, or at least just before Christmas; and then the world shall see what we can do.

I cannot but remember, with something of a smile, that on an earlier and more controversial page of this book I have mentioned a lady who shuddered at the thought of the things perpetrated by my co-religionists behind closed doors. But my memory of it is mellowed by distance and the present subject, and I feel quite the reverse of controversial. I hope that lady, and all of her way of thinking, may also have the wisdom to close their doors; and discover that only when all the doors are closed the best thing will be found inside. If they are Puritans, whose religion is only based on the Bible, let it for once indeed be a Family Bible. If they are Pagans, who can accept nothing but the winter feast, let it at least be a family feast. The discordance or discomfort complained of by modern critics, in the family reunion, is not due to that mystical focal fire having been left burning, but to its having been left to go cold. It is because cold fragments of a once living thing are clumsily lumped together; it is no argument against making the thing alive. Christmas toys are incongruously dangled before heavy and heathen uncles who wish they were playing golf. But that does not alter the fact that they might become much brighter and more intelligent if they knew how to play with toys; and they are horrible bores about golf. Their dullness is only the last deadly product of the mechanical progress of organised and professional sports, in that rigid world of routine outside the home. When they were children, behind closed doors in the home, it is probable that nearly every one of them had day-dreams and unwritten dramas that belonged to them as much as Hamlet belonged to Shakespeare or Pickwick to Dickens. How much more thrilling it would be if Uncle Henry, instead of describing in detail all the strokes with which he ought to have got out of the bunker, were to say frankly that he had been on a voyage to the end of the world and had just caught the Great Sea-Serpent. How much more truly intellectual would be the conversation of Uncle William if, instead of telling us the point to which he had reduced his handicap, he could still say with conviction that he was King of the Kangaroo Islands, or Chief of the Rango Dango Redskins. These things, projected from within, were in almost all human spirits; and it is not normal that the inspiration of them should be so utterly crushed by the things without. Let it not be supposed for a moment that I also am among the tyrants of the earth, who would impose my own tastes, or force all the other children to play my own games. I have no disrespect for the game of golf; it is an admirable game. I have played it; or rather, I have played at it, which is generally regarded as the very opposite. By all means let the golfers golf and even the organisers organise, if their only conception of an organ is something like a barrel-organ. Let them play golf day after day; let them play golf for three hundred and sixty-four days, and nights as well, with balls dipped in luminous paint, to be pursued in the dark. But let there be one night when things grow luminous from within: and one day when men seek for all that is buried in themselves, and discover, where she is indeed hidden, behind locked gates and shuttered windows, and doors thrice barred and bolted, the spirit of liberty.

COME TO THINK OF IT

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Introduction

MOST of the essays printed here are republished by the kind permission of the Illustrated London News; and Mr. J. P. de Fonseka, who was kind enough to select and arrange them for me, reminds me of the coincidence that I began writing the ‘Note-Book’ in that paper exactly twenty-five years ago. I may thus be said to celebrate a sort of Silver Wedding of my association with that long- suffering periodical. A silver wedding is supposed to be commemorated by gifts of silver; but I fear these gifts are of no such precious quality, nor indeed are all gifts in that metal notably of good omen. The silver bullet that killed Dundee, according to the tradition that he was a wizard dealing with the devil, cannot be regarded as a festive form of wedding present; nor would the international agent or financier, widening his moral outlook beyond narrow national limitations, be gratified with the symbolic gift of thirty pieces of silver. To go about among the new nobility, thrusting silver spoons into their mouths, that they might hastily assume the air of having been born with them, might seem to have a hint of satire; and even to tell a modern author that he is an ornament of the Silver Age of Letters might leave him a little cold, if he imagined that he constituted a Golden Age in himself. And it is the more awkward, because these notes necessarily deal with these very subjects; I have taken a pot-shot at the Spiritualist, though not with a silver bullet, and had a dig at the plutocrat, though not with a silver spoon. I have ventured to criticize internationalism and the cosmopolitan financier, and even to write a little about writers, and men who are more worth writing about. Unfortunately my bullet is a very leaden bullet, and my wedding present to the paper or the reader is not thirty pieces of silver, but only these fifty pieces of lead.

Viewed in one aspect, however, the long association is certainly an occasion for congratulation as well as gratitude. If I have no pretence to the eloquence that was symbolized by a tongue of silver, it proves at least that the proof-readers and other readers of the Illustrated London News are equipped with nerves of steel. That the editor and the clientele of that paper have borne up under my writing for them every week, for twenty-five years, proves that the power of endurance and the unshaken patience of our race are less affected than some suppose by a new and nervous irritability. Who can say that our people have lost the resignation, the grim good humour, the stoical stubbornness that stiffened the squares at Waterloo, or preserved the unwearied discipline of Arctic and African exploration, when the sons of the bulldog breed are still capable of reading my opinions and remarks on literature steadily for a quarter of a century? I cannot be wrong in paying a tribute to the iron indifference with which they have stood up to so many of the leaden bullets; and indeed the military metaphor is, for a particular reason, not altogether inappropriate to the last stage of the story, even in its images of lead and iron. I am conscious that my articles have grown in a sense more militant and in a sense more simple; so simple that they may well appear self-evident to some of the more subtle. This is because there has indeed been a battle joined, between two long battle-lines, in which I am only a private soldier, and in which the orders or reports have to be delivered in a popular tongue. I am no longer an individual in an age of intellectual individualism — an individual whose perverse personal fancy insisted that grass is green or that God is different from the devil. Several books, with the brilliant help of Mr. E. V. Lucas, have been made of such fancies of mine. But now the public has divided itself much more clearly on these issues, turning them into general issues, and requiring a person in my position to take up a general defence. Journalism of the higher sort, in the days of my youth, was concerned, if anything, with Art; Journalism in these days is concerned, above everything, with Religion. I cheerfully admit that in one sense, in both cases, journalism is only concerned with journalism. But journalists in later days have discovered that the public is, or can be, tremendously interested in fundamental questions of faith and morals; almost as much interested as in horse-racing and murders. The old journalism lived in an atmosphere of art for art’s sake; analogous to the ordinary journalistic instinct for news for news’ sake. Just as the newspaper reporter could record that Hampstead Hairdresser Shoots Great-Aunt, without implying any ethical approval of the act (even if he never knew the aunt, as the story goes), just as he could announce Russian Trombone Player Jumps from Eiffel Tower, and reverently rejoice as a reporter, even though he duly wept as a Christian and a man — so also he could report, without reference to his own opinions on the matter, the striking fact of an author who did not believe in God, or the yet more startling fact of an author who did. It was enough that the public found such authors amusing, apart from whether it found them convincing; and this attitude was originally adopted alike towards Oscar Wilde and towards Bernard Shaw.

But there began to be serious trouble, and a considerable cooling of approval, when it was gradually discovered that Mr. Bernard Shaw does really believe in Socialism or that I do really believe in Christianity.

Thus in the more open and general public dispute we have both of us had to fall back on a some what different style, more simple and serious, and possibly more didactic and heavy. Mr. Shaw writes in educational form his Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism; having apparently despaired in his search for an Intelligent Man. And I have been driven desperately to something almost resembling a rational arrangement of ideas in the little book called The Outline of Sanity; though not (the reader will be relieved to hear) in the little book that now lies before him. Here everything is haphazard; but it is in a sense the hazard of war, since so many of these ragged fragments are fragments of larger controversies. Here everything is scrappy; but they are the scraps of a scrap. And the reason is, as I have said, that here and on higher planes, and for myself and more important people, the battle is joined; and it is not a fine preliminary flourish, but a fight to a finish. It was enough for our youth to show that our ideas were suggestive it is the task of our senility and second childhood to show that they are conclusive. But this is no more than a note of apology in the matter; and in such a place, and on so slight an occasion, the most conclusive thing I can do is to conclude.

G. K. CHESTERTON

I. On Essays

THERE are dark and morbid moods in which I am tempted to feel that Evil re-entered the world in the form of Essays. The Essay is like the Serpent, smooth and graceful and easy of movement, also wavering or wandering. Besides, I suppose that the very word Essay had the original meaning of ‘trying it on’. The serpent was in every sense of the word tentative. The tempter is always feeling his way, and finding out how much other people will stand. That misleading air of irresponsibility about the Essay is very disarming through appearing to be disarmed. But the serpent can strike without claws, as it can run without legs. It is the emblem of all those arts which are elusive, evasive, impressionistic, and shading away from tint to tint. I suppose that the Essay, so far as England at least is concerned, was almost invented by Francis Bacon. I can well believe it. I always thought he was the villain of English history.

It may be well to explain that I do not really regard all Essayists as wicked men. I have myself been an essayist; or tried to be an essayist; or pretended to be an essayist. Nor do I in the least dislike essays. I take perhaps my greatest literary pleasure in reading them; after such really serious necessities of the intellect as detective stories and tracts written by madmen. There is no better reading in the world than some contemporary essays, like those of Mr. E. V. Lucas or Mr. Robert Lynd. And though, unlike Mr. Lucas and Mr. Lynd, I am quite incapable of writing a really good essay, the motive of my dark suggestion is not a diabolic jealousy or envy. It is merely a natural taste for exaggeration, when dealing with a point too subtle to permit of exactitude. If I may myself imitate the timid and tentative tone of the true essayist, I will confine myself to saying that there is something in what I say. There is really an element in modern letters which is at once indefinite and dangerous.

What I mean is this. The distinction between certain old forms and certain relatively recent forms of literature is that the old were limited by a logical purpose. The Drama and the Sonnet were of the old kind; the Essay and the Novel are of the new. If a sonnet breaks out of the sonnet form, it ceases to be a sonnet. It may become a wild and inspiring specimen of free verse; but you do not have to call it a sonnet because you have nothing else to call it. But in the case of the new sort of novel, you do very often have to call it a novel because you have nothing else to call it. It is sometimes called a novel when it is hardly even a narrative. There is nothing to test or define it, except that it is not spaced like an epic poem, and often has even less of a story. The same applies to the apparently attractive leisure and liberty of the essay. By its very nature it does not exactly explain what it is trying to do, and thus escapes a decisive judgment about whether it has really done it. But in the case of the essay there is a practical peril; precisely because it deals so often with theoretical matters. It is always dealing with theoretical matters without the responsibility of being theoretical, or of propounding a theory.

For instance, there is any amount of sense and nonsense talked both for and against what is called medievalism. There is also any amount of sense and nonsense talked for and against what is called modernism. I have occasionally tried to talk a little of the sense, with the result that I have been generally credited with all the nonsense. But if a man wanted one real and rational test, which really does distinguish the medieval from the modern mood, it might be stated thus. The medieval man thought in terms of the Thesis, where the modern man thinks in terms of the Essay. It would be unfair, perhaps, to say that the modern man only essays to think — or, in other words, makes a desperate attempt to think. But it would be true to say that the modern man often only essays, or attempts, to come to a conclusion. Whereas the medieval man hardly thought it worth while to think at all, unless he could come to a conclusion. That is why he took a definite thing called a Thesis, and proposed to prove it. That is why Martin Luther, a very medieval man in most ways, nailed up on the door the theses he proposed to prove. Many people suppose that he was doing something revolutionary, and even modernist, in doing this. In fact, he was doing exactly what all the other medieval students and doctors had done ever since the twilight of the Dark Ages. If the really modern Modernist attempted to do it, he would probably find that he had never arranged his thoughts in the forms of theses at all. Well, it is quite an error to suppose, so far as I am concerned, that it is any question of restoring the rigid apparatus of the medieval system. But I do think that the Essay has wandered too far away from the Thesis.

There is a sort of irrational and indefensible quality in many of the most brilliant phrases of the most beautiful essays. There is no essayist I enjoy more than Stevenson; there is probably no man now alive who admires

Stevenson more than I. But if we take some favourite and frequently quoted sentence, such as, ‘To travel hopefully is better than to arrive,’ we shall see that it gives a loophole for every sort of sophistry and unreason. If it could be stated as a thesis, it could not be defended as a thought. A man would not travel hopefully at all, if he thought that the goal would be disappointing as compared with the travels. It is tenable that travel is the more enjoyable; but in that case it cannot be called hopeful. For the traveller is here presumed to hope for the end of travel, not merely for its continuance.

Now, of course, I do not mean that pleasant paradoxes of this sort have not a place in literature; and because of them the essay has a place in literature. There is room for the merely idle and wandering essayist, as for the merely idle and wandering traveller. The trouble is that the essayists have become the only ethical philosophers. The wandering thinkers have become the wandering preachers, and our only substitute for preaching friars. And whether our system is to be materialist or moralist, or sceptical or transcendental, we need more of a system than that. After a certain amount of wandering the mind wants either to get there or to go home. It is one thing to travel hopefully, and say half in jest that it is better than to arrive. It is another thing to travel hopelessly, because you know you will never arrive.

I was struck by the same tendency in re-reading some of the best essays ever written, which were especially enjoyed by Stevenson — the essays of Hazlitt. ‘You can live like a gentleman on Hazlitt’s ideas,’ as Mr. Augustine Birrell truly remarked; but even in these we see the beginning of this inconsistent and irresponsible temper. For instance, Hazlitt was a Radical and constantly railed at Tories for not trusting men or mobs. I think it was he who lectured Walter Scott for so small a matter as making the medieval mob in Ivanhoe jeer ungenerously at the retreat of the Templars. Anyhow, from any number of passages, one would infer that Hazlitt offered himself as a friend of the people. But he offered himself most furiously as an enemy of the Public. When he began to write about the Public he described exactly the same many-headed monster of ignorance and cowardice and cruelty which the worst Tories called the Mob. Now, if Hazlitt had been obliged to set forth his thoughts on Democracy in the theses of a medieval schoolman, he would have had to think much more clearly and make up his mind much more decisively. I will leave the last word with the essayist; and admit that I am not sure whether he would have written such good essays.

II. On What We Would Do with Two Million (If We Had It)

MOST of us, I suppose, have played the parlour game of wondering what we should do with our money, on the fantastic supposition that we ever had any. On the surface, some of the answers to the question are simple enough. Philanthropists would give it to the deserving poor; Christians would give it to the undeserving poor. For the first thought of the Christians, if they really were Christians, would be that they themselves were examples of the undeserving rich. Pagans, if they really were pagans, would presumably enjoy it and have a jolly time; though in fact this is hardly ever done. It is obvious that the answer to the question is not really so simple as that. Something happens to people when they become rich; and what happens generally is that they worry on a large scale instead of worrying on a small one. They haggle with a hundred people, instead of haggling with two or three people. Then there are all sorts of other curious effects of illusion — and distortion. If you and I were suddenly left a legacy of two million a year from nowhere in particular, it is by no means certain what we should do first. It appears, by analogy, that we should begin by saying that we had gained every penny of our money by industry, sobriety, business methods, and abstention from alcohol. It appears that we should then go on to purchase something obviously worthless and idiotic, such as a peerage, or a priceless trinket or curiosity, in which we took no intelligent interest whatever. That is, at least, the way in which most millionaires do actually go on. We cannot imagine why they should waste their money in this way; but then you and I are still poor, virtuous, and intelligent. But, whatever be the solution of this riddle, it is worth while to note that there are ways of getting rid of wealth that have never been tried and might possibly be useful. One of them might be described (since it is now necessary to make any such suggestion in capital letters and call it a Slogan) as Pensioning Off the Pests.

Returning for a moment to the dreadful subject of the deserving poor, it might be thought obvious that the millionaire ought to give his money, or more probably leave his money, to particular people whom he knows to be making a good fight for their family and their honour. As a matter of fact, of course, the millionaire never does do even this. The millionaire leaves his money to other millionaires. God alone knows why. But the natural course would be to leave it to poorer people who would make a good use of it. But this view, though natural, is superficial. People of that kind would generally be happy enough, if their lives were not poisoned by people of another kind. My ideal millionaire, who would of course have hundreds of highly-paid spies investigating the domestic life of his neighbours, would soon discover an almost universal social truth. In almost every family or circle of friends there is somebody so selfish or so silly or so exacting as to devour the days and destroy the vitality of better people. It is generally a case of egoism; often a case of hysteria. But it is generally a rather subtle case; and the bonds that bind the egoist to the altruists are delicate and difficult to break. It is often an economic question; the problem of perpetually discussing the affairs and patching up the monetary difficulties of impossible people.

Now a really delicate and imaginative philanthropist would thread his way through life, selecting and settling such cases with munificent endowments which would satisfy even such persons. He would provide the Pest with a magnificent mansion, with a beautiful estate, situated at a considerable distance from the family. To Aunt Susan he would toss a luxuriant island in the Canaries. For Cousin James he would provide a romantic castle on a sublime but almost inaccessible slope of the Apennines. To the lady whom the world has always misunderstood, in spite of her prolonged explanations, he would give a huge sum of money on condition of her remaining in a charming villa in the neighbourhood of Cape Horn. To the gentleman with a series of financial projects, which he offers to his special friends as special favours, he would give a real gold-mine and have done with it, on the understanding that the gentleman should really devote himself to mining. A few of these fortunate disappearances, a few of these happy gaps in the family circle, would probably enable scores of sensible and kind-hearted people to enjoy their own lives and get on with their own jobs. For there are not many of these maniacs. What is astonishing is the power and range of their raging selfishness. Two or three really intelligent millionaires between them could dispose of the lot. Only there are not two or three intelligent millionaires. If they were intelligent, they would have something better to do than to become millionaires.

Among the minor advantages I would claim for my modest scheme is the fact that it would be a humane alternative to Murder; which seems otherwise likely to be on the increase. It always amuses me to read the modern attacks upon Marriage, and observe how exactly the same arguments could be used, and probably soon will be used, as apologies for Murder. If it is true that we may sometimes solve a social problem by breaking a vow, it is equally true that we might often solve it by cutting a throat. If the immediate relaxation of an individual strain justifies everything, then Aunt Susan is indeed in danger, and the life of Cousin James trembles in the balance. For it is not true that the claims of these people on other people are necessarily compulsory or legal or even economic. They are often psychological bonds that could really be only loosened by death. They arise quite as much from the unselfishness of the one party as from the selfishness of the other. They would be solved if a third party, a benevolent and altruistic assassin, stepped in and swiftly, let us hope painlessly, eliminated the difficulty.

Now we already hear on all sides the first whispers of an apology for taking life. In America, where things are seldom said in a whisper, the apology is not even apologetic. English people are naturally more good-natured; and it is highly characteristic of them that they propose to murder only out of good nature. The cases in which it is already defended here are cases of putting people out of their pain or ending incurable maladies. I think the doctrine very dangerous myself, but I am not discussing that particular doctrine here. Anybody must surely admit that it is naked murder if done upon the opinion of the murderer; and I am very doubtful about it, even from a humanitarian standpoint, if done with the consent of the murdered. Many a person sea-sick in the Channel has verified the famous description: that he is first afraid he will die and then afraid he won’t. A lady I knew, when asked by the steward if he could do anything for her, replied, ‘Nothing, except throw me overboard.’ But she lived afterwards to a happy and serene old age; and 1 think she was glad he had not carried out her instructions, or acted on the principles of the new scientific morality.

In short, if we are to have all this new moral pathology, it must be met with a new philanthropy, or it will be met with an unpleasantly new philosophy: a new moral philosophy, or, rather, immoral philosophy. If we are to insist, as do all the realistic novelists and rationalistic moralists, on a wild and exaggerated casuistry of hard cases, we must be prepared for men sooner or later settling those hard cases, as they have so often done in history, with poison and with poignards. For under the smooth legal surface of our society there are already moving very lawless things. We are always near the breaking- point when we care only for what is legal and nothing for what is lawful. Unless we have a moral principle about such delicate matters as marriage and murder, the whole world will become a welter of exceptions with no rules. There will be so many hard cases that everything will go soft. I do not insist on my suggestion of a benevolent millionaire paying off those people who seem naturally designed to be murdered. But I do insist that they will be murdered, sooner or later, if we accept in every department the principle of the easiest way out.

III. On Boys

ONE of the old sayings repeated eternally by everybody, and rather especially by those who pride themselves on novelty and originality, is the statement that old people tend to be conservative, and that it is only the young who can really believe in change. And yet this saying seems to me to be rather less than a half-truth; so much less as to be very nearly two-thirds of a lie.

My own experience is this: that I was really much more conservative when I was a boy; though I admit that I was too conservative to be even conscious of how conservative I was. I mean that I was conservative in this sense — that I did not really believe that the fashion of this world could pass away. I had certain ideals of reforming it; and to a great extent I have the same ideals still. In so far as they have changed, it is not in the direction of being any more content with the corruption and oppression of the world. I was once what I called a Socialist; I am now what I call a Distributist. But the ideal of simplicity and small property is rather more unlike the existing condition than the ideal of Communism. It would change the world more, to turn it into what I want, than to turn it into what Mr. Philip Snowden wants. There is less difference than many suppose between the ideal Socialist system, in which the big businesses are run by the State, and the present Capitalist system, in which the State is run by the big businesses. They are much nearer to each other than either is to my own ideal; of breaking up the big businesses into a multitude of small businesses. That would be really a change; but I am still ready for that change; and I see no reason to doubt that, when I am tottering on crutches at the age of ninety, I shall still be ready for that change. What I was not ready for, in my youth, was something quite real and entirely different. I did not know that the world itself changes, long before we can change it.

Take a commonplace example for convenience. I sympathized then and I sympathize still with various claims of Labour which arose especially in connexion with the Coal Mines and with the Railways. I do not think I have weakened in this; if anything, I think I was more doubtful and groping when I was young. But there was one thing that I never really doubted when I was young. And that was that Coal would continue to support England and enrich the capitalists of England. I thought of this unique wealth as one of the conditions of the case, which might be attacked in various ways, moderate, greedy, revolutionary, and so on. But I vaguely assumed that the coal would be there, as I assumed that the sea would be there. Yet these things also can change; and even the sea is not quite so significantly and satisfactorily there, since the alteration of the relations of ships and aeroplanes. I was accustomed to the two sides of the old argument about whether coal-owners were too rich; I never really looked forward to the new argument that coal-owners are too poor. I was accustomed to the talk of heaping up riches or dividing riches or justly distributing riches; but I had forgotten the old scriptural figure, that the riches themselves take to themselves wings and fly. In a word, I could not imagine change — the real fundamental changes of this earthly life — because I was too conservative, being a boy.

In the same way I knew all about the grumbling of railway-passengers against railway-porters, and in the same way about the grumbling of railway-porters against railway-directors. I sympathized more with the latter than with the former; and I do still. But when I was a boy, which was just before the motor car burst upon the world, I never dreamed of doubting that the railway-train dominated the whole future of the world. It was the latest great locomotive that man had invented. And that conservative spirit of childhood always makes the child think of the latest as the last. To talk, as some people are now talking, of whether railways will become obsolete, or whether steam can be superseded, of whether railway stock will always be as safe as it was — all this would have been to me a prophecy as unintelligible as some of those Old Testament visions that seem a medley of wheels and wings and clouds. Railways had been firmly established before I was born; I never dreamed of doubting that they would remain exactly the same after I died. They seemed to me simply the iron framework of England, and almost of existence; as if the embankments were built before the everlasting hills or the trains of Bradshaw followed their appointed circuit like the stars. If there is any old gentleman still alive who remembers the time when there were no railways, he probably feels quite differently; he feels as I feel about motoring. I do not feel in this cosmic and conservative way about motoring; but I think it probable that the young who are younger than motoring really do. If you talk to them of a future without motoring, of a coming time when petrol will be scarcer than coal and men will walk about on their feet for want of wheels to carry them, it will seem like an unthinkable nightmare of negation. It will seem what the amputation of all legs would seem to a population of pedestrians. But they also will learn in due course what they cannot conceive now, just as I have learnt in due course what I could not have conceived then that it is the world that alters even more than we who alter it.

Of course it is a comparatively slow alteration which to some muddle-headed evolutionists seems to make it more consoling, but in fact makes it much more dangerous. It may or may not be true that petrol will replace coal or cars replace railways. But nobody supposes that Waterloo Station fell in a heap of ruins when the first taxicab went across Waterloo Bridge, or that bats and owls nested in Clapham Junction when the first petrol pump was set up on the road to Clapham Common. The point is not whether the changes are as rapid and revolutionary as the young are supposed generally to expect. The point is that they are not the changes they were expecting. Above all, the point is that they are changes in the very material they propose to treat; not changes in the manner of treating it. It is not a question of a younger generation wishing to carve the Phrygian cap or the Tree of Liberty on a stone that has been marked out for decoration with the Crown or the Cross. It is a question of the stone crumbling away before it can be carved with any thing, because they have forgotten the air they breathe, and the sky and the weather of the world.

We are always being told nowadays to allow for the natural impulses and instincts of youth. Let us be careful to allow for this most profound instinct of youth: its innocent conservatism. Let us always remember that to the very young the world they see really seems to be eternal; and that, however much they may talk a current cant about novelty and mutability, they do not really expect the externals of their world to be profoundly altered by time. Notice, for instance, what is the very phrase used in defence of any novelty. Observe what is really said in praise of the Electric Toothpick or the Petrol Pea-shooter. We are always assured that the discovery ‘has come to stay’. We, who have lived long enough to understand the real value of life, know perfectly well that nothing of that sort has ever come to stay. It may do all sorts of other things; but there is one thing that it cannot do; and that is to stay. We shall show no irritation, please God, on being repeatedly introduced to the Hat of the Future and the Umbrella of the New Age and the Goloshes of the Good Time Coming. But the only thing we really have learnt from life is that the good time will be going as well as coming, and that, in the book of fashions, the Hat of the Future will be recorded as the Hat of the Past. It is now the custom to condemn youth as too frivolous. But youth is always too serious; and just now it is too serious about frivolity. The conservatism of youth is a good thing; and it is not even necessary to conserve it.

IV. On Literary Parallels

I HAVE a deep and hearty hatred of literary parallels; especially when they have a suggestion of literary plagiarisms. I object to the parallels on many grounds; but, among others, on the ground that they are never parallel. Or, if we may (with all respectful allowance for Mr. Einstein) put the matter as a mathematical paradox, we might say that the two lines of thought are indeed parallel because they never manage to meet. In almost all the cases I come across, the resemblance between one passage and another, suggested by the ingenious critic, is really not a resemblance at all, let alone an artificial or unusual or suspicious resemblance. There is no reason why two independent poets should not think of the same image or idea quite independently. Only when the critic produces it, it is not the same idea at all. The critic insists that one poet is ‘indebted’ to the other; and nobody need deny that, in a loose and general sense, it is natural for any poet to be in debt. But his general obligation to the culture of the past is not like his particular obligation to the landlady, or possibly to the publican. It is as likely as not that his idea was original even if it is really identical; and it is even more likely, when it is examined, that it will not be identical but quite individual. Everybody mentions Villon to prove the platitude that a poet can be a thief; but I protest when they prove his literary thieving by quoting ‘Where are the snows of yesteryear?’ and then giving a list of all the poets who had previously mentioned snow.

To prove that even a good poet, as well as a good critic, can admit (or at least tolerate) this error, I will venture to remonstrate with Mr. Edmund Blunden, who can write good poetry as well as read it, upon a reading of his of the case of Keats and Horace. Mr. Blunden does not, indeed, fully endorse the alleged parallel; but he does not definitely dispute it; so that I, as very much minor poet, am goaded into doing it for him. For, indeed, the example strikes me as very illuminating, touching the hasty and misleading character of these assimilations. The suggestion is that in at least two phrases of the Ode to a Nightingale Keats echoes the Odes of Horace; which would be no very great crime; but is in fact, as it seems to me, a crime that was never committed. There is something about the mood of the critics who find comparisons, something eager and hasty and superficially satisfied, which prevents them, when considering two sayings of two poets, from really considering what the poets say. In this case the critic observes, ' "Hungry generations" appears to be a powerful and majestic translation of his (Horace's) *tempus edax*, "devouring time ".' Now it does not seem to me to be anything of the kind. Even if Keats had happened to use the expression 'devouring time', I should not have thought it necessary to suppose that he had ever even heard of the phrase *tempus edax*. It seems to me that any body, at any time, a poet as good as Mr. Blunden or a poet as minor as myself, might use the phrase 'devouring time'. We might talk about devouring time as we might talk about barking dogs; because dogs do bark and time does devour. But, over and above this preliminary objection to parallels, there is a very particular objection to this parallel; that it is not, as I have said, a parallel at all. Keats did not mean that the hungry generations were hungry as time is hungry; that they ate towers and temples and ground crowns and sceptres in their teeth till they were crushed to dust. He meant the hunger as a human attribute; the hunger which, whether mystical or material, is in a sense the chief attribute of humanity. The point was that so many generations had rushed and trampled past, all eager for their own passing needs, and left the nightingale still singing as it had sung in the beginning. I do not see any real parallel between this and the idea of the dead destructiveness of time. And I would bet my boots, or my books, or whatever may be the more appropriate wager, that Keats never thought of any such parallel at all; and certainly had no need to look up an old Latin poet for the idea.

Curiously enough, the case is very much the same with the second example given in the same criticism. I have forgotten most of the little Latin poetry I knew; but I shall not easily forget that beautiful strain of music in the *Descende Coelo*, which is rendered here

'Hearest thou? Or does a lovely hallucination
Beguile me? I think I hear thee and
Go straying through the haunted groves.'

But it seems to me quite arbitrary and fanciful to say that Keats was thinking of this because he wrote the two lines

'Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music: — Do I wake or sleep?'

What is the good of being a poet, if you are not allowed to ask, all by yourself, whether you have had a vision or a waking dream? What are poets for, except to go about asking everybody whether they wake or sleep? I should imagine that this sort of dreamy doubt could be paralleled in scores and hundreds of poems; it is the obvious poetical comment on any deep or mystifying experience. What is the poor poet to do, if he is not even permitted to say that some wonderful thing was like a dream, without being convicted of having sneaked it out of an old school-book, of the works of Quintus Horatius Flaccus? It seems to me that, before we look for a poet's reasons in somebody's else poem, we might naturally ask whether there are already any reasons in his own poem. Surely anybody must feel that the *Ode to a Nightingale*, by its own life and logic, was bound to end with that suggestion of a man waking from a trance, bemused and bewildered. I do not doubt that Horace had experienced much the same sensations after straying through the haunted groves of Italy as Keats had experienced in the woods about Burford. Poets do very often have these queer fits; and there is, of course, some similarity between them; which is why they can be described by the same name of poetry. But beyond the broad brotherhood of the poets, I cannot see any particular coincidence in these two cases. Nor, indeed, do I think the two emotions described here are exactly identical; though they are certainly less wide apart than the impersonal crumbling of time and the crowd of hungry human beings. But to draw a fine distinction between the two would undoubtedly be a delicate verbal exercise; and I do not propose to attempt it here. I am dealing here entirely in terms of common sense; and it seems to me common sense to leave original poets alone with their original ideas, and not strain logic and language to cracking in order to prove that they are not original. When I say I do not like poetical parallels, I do not mean that I dislike poetical comparisons. Some critical profit might be gained by comparing Keats and Horace, and noting the differences between their two ways of dealing with superficially similar ideas. But to see the similarities, without seeing the differences, seems to me a dangerous game.

It is especially dangerous, because behind that covert of coincidence there crouches that monster, the Baconian. By the Baconian I do not merely mean a man who thinks Bacon wrote Shakespeare, as some quite intelligent men have thought. I mean the sort of man who goes mad on Bacon and uses the mad arguments that many Baconians have used. I mean the man who searches Bacon’s Essays for some mention of the sun in connexion with the moon; and then searches Shakespeare’s Plays, triumphantly producing an allusion to the moon in actual conjunction with the sun. I mean the man who will not let Shakespeare call roses red or lilies white, without pouncing on the fact that somebody else had made the same botanical discovery. I mean the man who is proud of the quantity of his parallel quotations, and apparently indifferent to their quality. In short, I object not only to the loss of proportion but of that general sense of probability which is so considerable a part of sanity. We have to consider not only what is improbable, but what is probable; and especially the coincidences that are overwhelmingly probable. And when I see these things neglected by a good writer in a good review, I venture to raise a mild protest.

V. On a Censorship for Literature

THE recurring discussion about a Censorship for Literature or the Arts is a good example of the extreme difficulty in these days of discussing anything. Nobody seems to know where to begin. Nobody seems able to distinguish between one thing and another. For instance, to take a minor point, it is one thing to believe in A Censor and quite another thing to believe in The Censor. If I had to have my books censored, I would much rather they were censored by the Spanish Inquisition than by the British Home Office. The Spanish Inquisition was not an institution that I specially admire, but it did act on some intelligent principles; I know what the principles were and I agree with a great many of them. As to the principles of Sir William Joynson-Hicks, my difficulty is threefold. Not only do I not agree with them, but I do not know what they are. Not only do I not know what they are, but I am sure that he does not know what they are.

To begin with, supposing that the Censorship deals only with sexual decorum (which is generally far from being the case), there are at least three totally distinct things that are now generally discussed under that head. First, there is the preaching or propagating of some theory about sex considered anti-social or anarchical. Second, there is a certain sort of descriptive writing likely to excite appetites that may be anti-social or anarchical. Third, there is the use of certain terms, often merely old-fashioned, for things which later convention covers in some other way. I can understand a man wanting none of these things censored. I can understand him wanting all of these things censored. I can understand him wanting some censored and not others. But, anyhow, they have nothing to do with each other. No two of them need be found together in the same sentence or the same book. A man could preach sexual anarchy in language as cold as that of an astronomical treatise, and about as seductive as a page of Bradshaw. A man could describe sensual things with an unscrupulous appeal to the senses, without preaching any theory at all and without using any coarse words at all. Lastly, a man might use all the coarse words in Rabelais and make the theme rather repulsive than attractive. He might use all the coarse words in the Bible and be every bit as moral as the Bible, or even as Puritan as the grimmest expositor of the Bible.

One would think that the very first thing that anybody discussing the question would realize would be the distinction between these three tests. But, if we read a column in a newspaper, or a page in a popular book, professing to deal with the problem, we generally find them all mixed up together, whether the writer is denouncing the mixture or defending the mixture. The truth is that in this matter most people's moral ideas are now already mixed. To take the first section in order to suppress false doctrine, we must have a definition of true doctrine. And very few people now know exactly what doctrine is true, even if they feel a great many current ones are false. For the second, it is, after all, a moral doctrine which declares that mere appeals to mere appetites are wrong. It is a moral doctrine most decent people vaguely feel, but now a little too vaguely to be applied vigilantly. But, of these first two divisions, I may be allowed to add that they do emphatically involve immortal and unalterable truth. The fact that a chaotic and ill-educated time cannot clearly grasp that truth does not alter the fact that it always will be the truth.

There is a right relation of the sexes; there is a right rule about it; and there is a wrong appeal calculated to encourage a wrong relation. But of the third thing it is not so. It is worth remarking that this third section, of the mere use of words, is the only one of which the modern talk is true. Of this it is true to say that it is only a question of convention, of custom, of different periods of history, of different stages of progress. It was not as gross of Shakespeare to use a certain word in a playhouse as it would have been gross of Dickens to use it in a drawing-room. But it would be just as wrong for Shakespeare to neglect his wife as for Dickens to neglect his wife. I am not here raising the delicate controversy about whether either of these authors did neglect his wife. The point is that if they did they were wrong; and I will wager that they knew they were wrong; for they were traditional Christian men. The notion that, because language can change, therefore life and love can change, is one of the many muddles of a thoroughly muddled mind. We might as well say that because Shakespeare had trunkhose and Dickens bad trousers, it is but natural that the next great English author should have three legs.

So long as the modern world plays with the preposterous idea that everything changes with the fashion, it is useless for it to attempt to control the changes in anything so fanciful as fiction. People will pursue the moment that is just passing; but they will not be persecuted for the moment that has just passed. You may send a man to prison for five years for writing a silly book, if you can say to him, ‘If you were in prison for five hundred years, it would still be a silly book.’ But you cannot say to a man, ‘If you had waited fifteen years, this sort of book might have been fashionable; but, as it is, I send you to prison in the interval for being in advance of your age.’ That sort of persecution will never have any effect; for it combines injustice with indifference. It is at once an undeserved condemnation and an undeserved compliment. The fanatics of the past are sometimes blamed because they played the tyrant while appealing to eternal truth. But it is far more intolerable to play the tyrant while not appealing to eternal truth. It is most intolerable of all to play the tyrant while appealing only to temporary fiction. Nobody can be expected to stand the Inquisitor who says, ‘I am burning you alive for what you said to-day, and what I shall probably think to-morrow.’ And that is the tone of nearly all the tentative repressions and remonstrances of our time.

The plain truth is that modern society must have a morality before it can have a censor of morals. I should say that it must have a religion before it can have a morality. But that is another question which I should not discuss fully here. Anyhow, the trouble is that people are making a fuss about unreal romances when they ought to be making a fuss about real life. It is a case of taking care of the facts and the fictions will take care of themselves. If we cleanse the community, the community will cleanse its poetry and its prose. But it is absurd to expect that people who do not respect their own promises, made at their own weddings, will be horrified because every novel does not end in a Victorian manner with wedding-bells. It is ridiculous to expect that people will be stung to fury by the behaviour of Joan in Green Pyjamas or Peter in Cocktail-Time, when they have managed to get reconciled to it in their own daughters or sons-in-law. I do not mean, of course, that all our family life is like that. Nor is all our fiction like that. But many who demand a Censorship are really demanding that we should tolerate in life what we will not tolerate in literature.

VI. On Detective Story Writers

THE very first words of the story of Trent’s Last Case ought to tell any intelligent and traditional person that the whole mind of the writer moves on a higher level than the ordinary murder story. Without making any parade of being more than a story-teller, he is a story-teller understanding style and distinction and the deeper philosophy that is never a fad or an ism; and, above all, understanding that weight and movement of words, in which style and distinction and philosophy and experience are one. For the very first words of this detective story, written to be read in a railway train, are, ‘Between what matters and what seems to matter, how should the world we know judge wisely?’ I hope I may be excused if I find an interesting illustration of this very question in the public advertisements, and even the literary tributes at the back of the book. For among those who have expressed their enthusiastic thanks to Mr. Bentley for writing a real detective story that was also a real book, are some of the very finest specialists in the department of the crime novel, and also some of the first minds in the domain of general thought and culture. On the one hand, they include real experts in the scientific and exact treatment of such police problems, like Mr. R. Austin Freeman and Mr. Freeman Wills Crofts. On the other hand, they include men brilliant and distinguished in totally different fields of serious speculation and controversy, like Father Ronald Knox, and Mr. G. D. H. Cole. Last, but the very reverse of least, they include those writers, rather especially lady writers, who, without any special show of specialism, have written quite perfectly constructed crime stories that are also entertaining comedies; notably Mrs. Agatha Christie and Miss Dorothy Sayers.

In addition to these authorities it would be easy, to my personal knowledge, to quote dozens of famous writers and thinkers, dons and doctors and diplomatists and poets of the most classical turn, who have put this book along with *The Wallet of Kai Lung* or *The Diary of a Nobody* in the small and secret shelf of the Best Books. To mention only at random two of my friends, who will not resent the revelation: Mr. Hilaire Belloc, who never reads detective stories, admires this one; and Mr. Maurice Baring, who reads all the detective stories that can be had for love or money, admires this one most of all. All this being so, I cannot but be interested in one small detail of the ceremonial embassy of thanks to Mr. Bentley; I mean the fact that the first name that gets announced of all that mission and printed on top of all such names, is the name of Mr. Edgar Wallace; and that Mr. Edgar Wallace alone is thought worthy to have his proclamation printed in large letters on the occasion. Evidently, it is his compliment alone that really counts 'Between what matters and what seems to matter, how should the world we know judge wisely?

God forbid that I or anybody else should speak, ungratefully or ungraciously of Mr. Edgar Wallace. I have enjoyed hundreds of his stories and hope to enjoy hundreds more; and it seems quite likely that I shall continue to have the chance of such enjoyment. To despise such stories is of all things the most despicable. It is like despising pantomimes or public-houses or comic songs or common enjoyments of every kind that bind us into the brotherhood of man. And when we are dealing with popular literature of this sound and lively sort it is very ungracious to complain of the amazing multiplicity of the output which a man like Mr. Wallace manages to achieve. It is like complaining that a really good alehouse provides too much ale; which would seem not only a blasphemy but almost a contradiction in terms. It is like complaining that a really good popular singer can sing too many different songs; a complaint that is entirely a compliment. It is unreasonable to abuse Mr. Wallace for having entertained and excited us too much. It is ungenerous to resent generosity. It may well be a pleasure to have given pleasure to so many; and it ought to be a pleasure for them to acknowledge it.

But when all this is acknowledged, there remains a rational proportion in these things; and the selection of Mr. Edgar Wallace, out of all the other authorities, as if he were the one person who really matters, is not rational. There is no possible reason for it, except a vulgar reason connected with mere size or noise or notoriety or mass-production. The satire called *Reunion All Round* is a thing that matters and will continue to matter; it may matter to our descendants a hundred years hence as the satire called Gulliver's Travels matters to us. It is amusing and it is meant to amuse; but it is not only meant to kill time, but to kill trash and falsehood. I am glad to note that Miss Dorothy Sayers, who is one of those who do write murder stories as if they could write something else, tests her admiration of Mr. Bentley's book in this fashion, and says: 'It is the one detective story of the present century which I am certain will go down to posterity as a classic. It is a masterpiece.’ A masterpiece is a thing that matters; and a man cannot produce, and probably does not pretend to produce, masterpieces or things that matter, to be sold by the million or poured out in a perpetual stream. Thus a man like Father Ronald Knox, the author of *Reunion All Round*, in giving the laurel to a literary work, is dealing with something on his own level, and may be storing up something to be remembered; as we remember the decent pride of Pope in the compliment of his contemporaries:

‘And Congreve loved and Swift endured my lays.’

It is the same, of course, with the tributes or contributions of other serious writers to sensational romance. The general movement called Guild Socialism may matter very much a hundred years hence; at any rate, it matters now; and a man who has expounded it with the economic clarity and close ness of Mr. Cole certainly matters now. The solid, detailed, scientific argument of Dr. Thorndyke, in the romances of Mr. Austin Freeman, matters now; and may quite probably continue to matter. In that sense, pelting the world with a prodigious number of quite readable sensational romances does not matter; and most probably is not meant to matter. As a matter of fact, there is one section of Mr. Edgar Wallace’s work, some of his sketches about South Africa, that really is of a more solid and intrinsically valuable type. Perhaps he was a better writer before he was a best-seller, like Sir Hall Caine; perhaps he described real Kaffirs better than unreal Chinamen, just as Sir Hall Caine was so much better when he was confined to the Isle of Man, and not let loose on the Universe of Man.

But, in truth, there is another distinction to be made. Even at their best, Mr. Edgar Wallace’s stories are generally not detective stories, but adventure stories. The two are too much confused under the loose title of shockers or sensational novels; and the writers are often confused themselves about which of the two they are writing. But the sort of story that can be turned out in such numbers is normally the story of varied adventure; as it was turned out by Dumas, or, for that matter, by Henty. It is not so very difficult to plan out, two or three times a week, a sort of obstacle race of man-traps and ambushes, so that a hero shall be in perpetual peril. Thank the Lord it is so easy to write and so easy to read; it is no disgrace to be classed with Dumas and thanked for fertility like his. But to make one man-trap that shall be inspected by experts through the length of a book, and never found to be a man-trap at all, that is work for a different sort of man; and even Trent called it his Last Case and has refused to try again.

VII. On the New Poetry

IT is fashionable now to slate poets for being poetical. The most crushing ease against them is when they can be convicted of being musical. Mr. Walter de la Mare is caught tripping on the light fantastic toe to a tune that was alleged to be brazenly melodious and pleasing; and Mr. Humbert Wolfe is arrested in the very act of uttering harmonies in the old, vulgar fashion of Milton and Keats. Crimes of this sort our critics seem more and more bent on bringing to light; but the code of law which they administer is still in the making and appears some times to be a little vague. It is not easy for the outsider to understand why words that might be inspiring and imaginative if only they were cacophonous and clumsy can become less intelligent or suggestive merely by being sonorous or sweet. But there seems really to be an idea, in some of the critics, that the poet should avoid pleasing the ear, quite apart from his primary duty to please the mind. It seems to be akin to the idea of the Imagists, those singular idolaters, and to suggest that the worshipper must have the image but not the hymn of praise — the sound of sackbut, dulcimer, and all kinds of music before the image that the King has set up. In plain words, imaginative poetry must not appeal to the sense of sound. The futurist poet is like the Early Victorian child. He must be seen and not heard.

I have, indeed, heard of one modern critic who went even further. He is reported as having said:

‘True poetry should be invisible *and* inaudible.’ Presumably it will appeal to the sense of smell. In one sense, doubtless, we may recognize considerable truth in all this, as a description of contemporary conditions. Most of us have read rich passages of modern poetry in which the melody was quite inaudible and the vision was quite invisible. To us, unfortunately, it was also true that the poetry was quite invisible. But that is a matter of personal impression, and we cannot argue with the critic about it with any logical profit. It may be that for him the real melody of the real melodists is inaudible; and that is why he cannot appreciate people like Mr. Walter de la Mare. But it is no good for the writer and the critic to engage in a slanging match to prove which of them is deaf; which can only, at best, prove that neither of them is dumb. The only course, as in every quarrel, is to go back to first principles.

I do not know how the thing might be settled if it were left as a mere dispute about tastes. I do not know if the poets would give the lie to the critics and hotly deny that they had ever been guilty of making agreeable noises. I know not if Mr. de la Mare will furiously deny that he has an ear; or Mr. Wolfe seek, by emitting hideous sounds, to claim a stainless reputation for discord. Personally, as a mere matter of taste, I prefer them as they are. But the only possible way of debating these things in public is to ask for fundamental or first principles. If there are such principles, it is best to debate on the basis of them. If there are no such principles, it is best not to debate at all. In that case, indeed, we cannot debate at all. We can only go on making noises — if we are common and vulgar persons, tolerable or pleasing noises; if we are fastidious and futuristic persons, ugly or even unbearable noises.

The arts and crafts of man, from the beginning, have been arts and crafts of combination. They did unite the shelter of the roof and the dignity of the tower. They did unite the style of the orator with the decisions of the Forum. And they did unite the meaning of the words with the music of the tune. Now just as the whole of human culture has been combination, so the whole of the new notion of culture is separation. It really would, if it were logical, break up all these old combinations, not only in literature or even in music, but in architecture, rhetoric, and all the rest. These theorists have a much larger task than they imagine, if they are to put their own theory into practice; but that is to suppose that the theorists know what their own theory is. Thus they would really have to build a solitary tower, all alone by itself in a field, solely in order to be well proportioned and pure in outline, and serving no other purpose at all. Meanwhile, the poor progressives would have to live somewhere and huddle under some roof or other, unless they had abolished roofs by that time. Perhaps the poor devils would be driven into some hideous steel house with electric fittings — which is a more horrid fate than the harshest traditionalist could wish to bring upon them. Perhaps they will only have to live in huge fiats, like coral insects in a coral reef, only not so beautiful.

But anyhow, the point is that, on this theory, their practical dwelling-place must not be beautiful. It is as obvious and inevitable as that their solitary tower must not be useful. It is part of the implied principle that it must not be a belfry or a beacon, even if it is in the same degree a beautiful belfry or a beautiful beacon. Art must be separated from architecture, or, if the version be more correct, architecture must be separated from building.

Now, I cannot for the life of me see why architecture should be separated from building; and in the same way I cannot see why sense should be separated from sound. I am quite willing to admit that they are two things; but I say they are two things that not only complete each other, but express and exhibit each other; two things that have the power to bring each other out and emphasize each other’s existence. When I see a beautiful belfry, I know that it is possible to have the beauty without the belfry, and the belfry without the beauty. But I am also quite certain that the fact of its being a belfry makes it more beautiful, and the fact of its being beautiful makes it more of a belfry.

So, with the great lines of poetry, it would, of course, be possible to have equally melodious sounds that were mere gibberish; and it would, of course, be possible to express the same thought in words that were mere doggerel. But, though it is in this sense a combination, it is emphatically not in any sense an artificial or accidental combination. The verse sounds all the better for meaning something, and the words mean all the more for sounding well. As I have said, the two things bring each other out, as certain condiments are said to bring out certain flavours. And until that psychological fact is realized the separatist school will not have faced the real fact in the tradition. Milton’s ‘Like Teneriffe or Atlas unremoved’ actually would not sound so well if Teneriffe were only the name of a house in Golder’s Green, or Atlas were spelt with a small ‘a’. And it certainly would not mean so much if it did not sound so well. In short, the union of sound and sense is a Marriage; and this is the age of Divorce. It cannot understand that divine paradox whereby two things become one and yet remain two; or the notion of their increasing each other’s effect by something that is much more subtle than simple addition. The world has become a sort of wild divorce court, not only for individuals, but also for ideas. And even those whose beliefs or unbeliefs make them indifferent to the idea that those whom God hath joined become one flesh may be willing to consider the thesis that the thoughts which man has joined can become one fact.

For a second aspect of the new poetry, the debate about new forms in art interests me, because my reaction to it is not that of the ordinary reactionary. The first fact I feel is that all this faith in novelty is the very reverse of novel. It is also the very reverse of original. It has now been a convention for more than a century and a half; and it was originally borrowed from the stale and vulgar world of party politics. It is from the old wrangles of Rads and Reformers and True Blue Tories that modern art has borrowed this queer notion of incessant Progress and each generation crowing over the last. When I read all this confident exposition about new methods that must now supersede old methods; of how Yeats and Swinburne must yield to Mr. Eliot and Mr. Pound, just as Tennyson and Browning had to yield to Yeats and Swinburne, I heave a sigh that is full of old and tender memories. I do not feel as if I were reading some revolutionary proclamation of new anarchic hopes or ideals; I feel as if I were reading Macaulay's Essays. I read Macaulay when I was a boy and believed him, because I was a boy. I might almost say because he was a boy. For the best and heartiest thing about Macaulay was that he lived and died a boy; full of conviction, ignorant of life; cocksure and confident of the future. And in Macaulay's Essays will be found all that theory of the succession of things more and more 'advanced' which the artistic schools still repeat, still scornfully hurl against each other, and still meekly inherit from each other. Progress, said Macaulay, never stops. 'What was its goal yesterday will be its starting-point to-morrow.' I believed that simple theory when I was a boy. But I am rather surprised, by this time, that the boys have not found a new one.

Anyhow, I have now come to believe in a totally different theory about novelty, and even the necessity of novelty. What puzzles me about current culture is that it ignores the very truths which it exaggerates. It is always talking our heads off about Psychology, and then it entirely leaves out the most elementary and familiar facts of psychology, such as the fact of fatigue. It is always raving about Relativity, and then ignores the obvious fact that fatigue is relative. If a man is made to walk twenty miles between two stone walls engraved on each side with endless repetitions of the Elgin Marbles, it is not unlikely that by the end of his walk he will be a little weary of that classical style of ornament. But that is because the man is tired; not because the style is tiresome. The matter might be immediately tested by starting a fresh and enthusiastic man from the other end; a man in the mood of the early Renaissance, eager for the Greek spirit but still ill-acquainted with it. In this sense and for this reason, it is necessary to have novelty; but the novelty is not necessarily improvement. It does not necessarily give the man for whom the old things are stale any right to scorn the man for whom the old things are fresh. And there always are men for whom the old things are fresh. Such men, so far from being behind the times, are altogether above the times. They are too individual and original to be affected by the trivial changes of time. A man who really wants to write a sonnet, as Shakespeare wanted to write a sonnet, is still as spontaneous as a man who wants to sing a song. There are sonnets by Mr. Baring or Mr. Belloc that are exactly of that sort; and, so far from being staler than others, they are fresher than others, because their Renaissance joy in the classical has not gone stale. But that does not mean that everybody must go on writing sonnets, and nothing but sonnets, for ever; for everybody would not want to; and enforced repetitions would really be stale. In other words, it is sometimes hygienic to have a change, even when it is not an improvement. We may leave an old field fallow — not because it will never bear crops again, but because it will; not because it is barren, but because it is not. We may turn away for a time from a good thing — not because it is not good, but because we have, for a purely relative reason, really had too much of a good thing. That is the real reason of the continual stir and change in styles and methods; and it is (within reason) a complete justification of it. Boys will be boys; but they will not necessarily be better men.

There are at least two things to be said for this theory of change, as an alternative to the rather antiquated theory of progress. First, it does at any rate correspond to the real facts of artistic and literary history, repeated again and again. We do not see in the past a perpetual line of increasing liberation or enlargement of artistic experiment. What we see in the past is the much more human business of men first doing something badly; then doing it well; then doing it too well — or, at least, too easily and too often. Then they commonly begin to do something else; but the thing is much more often an old thing than a new thing. What we really see is the perpetual revival of what are called new things, because they are neglected things. So Raphael and the Renaissance went back to what was older than medievalism; so the Pre-Raphaelites went back to what was older than Raphael. So many modern artists have gone back to Egyptian art because it was older than Greek art. So many of them have gone back to savage art because it was supposed to be primitive and unspoilt. They have a right to seek stimulation, though stimulants should be taken in moderation. But their renewal is relative. The other point in its favour is that it gets rid of a certain element called pride or impudence; which is an east wind blowing out of dry deserts and never did good to man or beast.

For a third aspect of the new poetry, it is contended that the poet must seek to isolate an image, and even a word. He must, to use the military phrase, cut all connexions and leave it in the air. To begin with, this interests me in the most superficial sense, because what strikes me about poets is that they were all hopelessly traditional, even when they tried to be revolutionary. Nobody could be more entirely in the air, to all appearance, than Shelley. Nothing could be more entirely in the air than his little pet, the Skylark. And no mind could be more filled with the conviction that it was completely in revolt against all tradition, and especially against all religion. And yet it would be quite an amusing exercise to take Shelley's poem about the skylark, line by line and verse by verse, and show how entirely dependent it is upon traditional ideas, and even rather specially upon religious ideas. Here, perhaps, it would be rather too long an exercise to work my way through that rather long poem. But it is really true that it could be analysed, point by point, in that traditional sense. The song of the radiant young Atheist would probably turn out in the end to be a most orthodox theological tract. He begins by saying, 'Hail to thee, blithe spirit.' What does he mean by talking about spirits, if he is not in any sense a spiritualist? What would be the meaning of the remark, if he were really a materialist? He would never have had even the idea of a spirit but for the religious tradition represented in the idea of the Holy Spirit. He then says, 'Bird thou never wert,' which is obviously a lie. But it is a lie symbolizing a truth, and what he really means by it may be stated thus 'I refuse to believe that a bird is only a bird, or that there is nothing more in such things than the material facts that we know about them.' That thought is the beginning of all theology.

Shelley's next surrender to superstition is absolutely abject and appalling. He says, 'From heaven, or near it' — a remark which must make all modern and rational persons with one concerted movement cover their faces in shame. In plain words, he not only talks as if there were something divine in the mere empty space above our planet. He actually talks as if there were a paradise of saints and angels some where located, like a coloured cloud, in that space, so that a skylark could be said to be more or less near to it. The lapse is so distressing that I will not linger upon the minor barbarism of medieval physiology, by which the emotions of the bird are represented as coming from its ‘heart’, as if that organ were a centre of consciousness. I was going to say that I ‘had not the heart’ to dwell any longer on the depressing orthodoxy of Shelley, whereby I should myself have fallen into the physical image that is so superstitious and medieval. It is so very difficult to write any intelligible English without being superstitious and medieval.

Needless to say, the criticism could not only be continued through the whole poem, but it becomes conspicuously clear and true in the most poetical parts of the poem. Certainly the finest passages, and per haps the most frequently quoted passages, are those that really celebrate what is not only a Christian dogma, but one now often abandoned as an antiquated and benighted dogma. Those great movements of verse do not really correspond to the Rise of the Skylark, but rather to the Fall of Man. I dare say Shelley would have been very much surprised if he had been told that he was subscribing to the doctrine of the Fall of Man. But he certainly was; and that was why his words at that moment really become weighty and human. ‘We look before and after and pine for what is not’ has the sound of a great tolling bell. Nobody needs to be told that some spiritual tragedy has already happened to the race of him who cries aloud:

‘But if we could scorn
Hate and pride and fear;
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear—’

or to the poet who can compare such a tragedy with the more trivial bliss of a little feathered creature in the empty air.

I have already remarked that in the past all the poetry that professed to be particularly revolutionary was in fact particularly traditional. In this and in many things most of the revolutions of the past were pretty much alike; and there are some of us who rather doubt whether the revolutions of the future will be particularly different. But even if we ignore this tradition of traditionalism, and suppose that the futurists have really something novel in the way of a novelty, the logical difficulty of their position still remains. We may, for the sake of argument, treat this change as if there had been no other changes. We may isolate the Imagist as he would isolate the image. We may treat the art as if it had no history, just as the artist tells a story as if it had no beginning. But the fact still remains that, since he has to use the words of some language, he has got the words from somewhere and learned them from somebody. And the words are in fact winged or weighted with the thoughts and associations of a thousand years. If they were not, he would not use them; he might just as well say ‘Grunk’, or ‘Quoggle’.

VIII. On the Classics

IN a moment of fine frenzy a young man has stood up and declared that ‘the study of Latin and Greek is not of much use in the battle of life’, and gone on to demand that the young should be instructed chiefly in the science of Health — that is, in the facts and the functions of the body. The young man in question will be gratified to know that I, for one, consistently neglected to do any work at the school in which I was supposed to be learning Latin and Greek, though I am not sure that the mere fact of idleness and ignorance can be said to have armed and drilled me for the battle of life. But, when I consider such armour or armament, some faint memories come to me from the learning that I neglected. There flits across my mind the phrase *aes triplex*, and I remember how Stevenson used it for a title to his essay defending a cheerful contempt for medical fussing; and how he cited the example of Dr. Johnson, who dreaded death and yet disdained any vigilance against disease; and whose ‘heart, bound with triple brass, did not recoil before the prospect of twenty-seven individual cups of tea’. It is, doubtless, terrible to think that Stevenson took his Stoical image of triple brass from a Latin poet; and still more terrible to think that Johnson would have approved of Stevenson for quoting the Latin poets. But though Stevenson and Johnson were superficially about as different as any two men could be in everything except in this weak ness for traditional scholarship, I do not think that either of them can be said to have come off so badly in fighting the battle of life.

The trouble about always trying to preserve the health of the body is that it is so difficult to do it with out destroying the health of the mind. Health is the most unhealthy of topics. Those who support such hygienic culture always profess to be very practical, and compare their own healthy materialism with the visionary futilities of everybody connected with the classics from Julius Caesar to Johnson. But, in fact, it is in practice that their practical ideal breaks down. There is no difficulty about talking and writing in general terms of the facts of nature, or what are commonly called the God-given functions of man. It is when people really begin to teach these things, as if they were algebra or geography, that they discover a surprising number of difficulties — not to say diseases. Upon this point of practical application I will only mention one example out of the statement referred to above. The young man in question frankly admits that he would dislike having to read a list of hideous malformations or foul diseases to an infant school or a row of staring babies. He says that this might, doubtless, be inadvisable, and lead to morbid fears and fancies. Anyhow, he disapproves of such physiology in the nursery; every man has a sane spot somewhere. But he goes on to say that big boys, presumably towards the end of their school career, should have learnt to balance and appreciate such knowledge; and it is such knowledge which they ought above all things to know.

Now it seems to me that the argument is very much the other way. The period when many boys, we might almost say most boys, are capable of morbidly misusing a medical knowledge is exactly the period at which he proposes to give it to them. I imagine it would do, in comparison, precious little harm to a child of five. If you talk to a child about an aortic aneurism, he will not be frightened; he will only be bored. If you talk to a boy of fifteen or sixteen about it, and give only a few fragmentary hints of what it is like, he will very probably come to the rapid conclusion that he has got one. All that is necessary is to have odd sensations round the heart: and digestion, or indigestion, will do that at any time of life, but rather specially at the time when digestion is tried by unripe apples or cob-nuts before lunch. Youth is a period when the wildest external careless ness often runs parallel to the most gloomy and concentrated internal cares. An enormous number of normal youths are quite abnormal for a time. Their imagination is working inwards, and on nothing more commonly than on imaginary maladies. To throw a medical encyclopaedia at the head of a young man in this condition is simply to provide him with a handbook of One Thousand Ways of Going Mad. A doctor once told me that even among medical students there is a perceptible proportion of this medical mania; and they have all the correcting elements of a special vocation, of a scientific atmosphere, and of more complete and therefore more balanced knowledge. Ordinary people receiving an ordinary smattering of such knowledge are very likely indeed to find that little knowledge a dangerous thing.

But the essential truth is that those who talk to us about facts have not faced the chief fact of all and, indeed, the fact is also a paradox. Facts as facts do not always create a spirit of reality, because reality is a spirit. Facts by themselves can often feed the flame of madness, because sanity is a spirit. Consider the huge accumulations of detail piled up by men who have some crazy hobby of believing that Herodotus wrote Homer or that the Great Pyramid was a prophecy of the Great War. Consider the concrete circumstances and connected narratives that can often be given at vast lengths and in laborious detail by men who suffer from a delusion of being persecuted, or being disinherited, or being the rightful King of England. These men are maddened by material facts; they are lunatics not by their fancies but by having learned too many facts. What they lack is proportion: a thing as invisible as beauty, as inscrutable as God. And when we thus realize the real problem of morbidity and medicine we may begin to catch a far-off glimpse of something distant, but not quite so dispensable as we had supposed; and find ourselves once more faintly conscious of the presence of the case for Classical Education, so useless in the battle of life.

What culture does, or ought to do, is to give a health of the mind that is parallel to the health of the body. It is ultimately a matter of intellectual instincts that are almost like bodily instincts. A sane man knows when something would drive him mad, just as a man standing up knows at what angle he would fall down. He does not have to calculate the angle with a mathematical instrument, or fall flat on his nose forty times in a series of scientific experiments. The body, like the mind, knows its own equilibrium. But it knows it better than the mind; because the problem is simpler, and the physical instincts are less paralysed by false teaching. Now the true teaching, which strengthens and steadies the mind so that it knows and rejects madness at sight, has, in fact, come down to us very largely from the culture of those great languages in which were written the works of the last Stoics and the first Saints, the Greek Testament and the Roman Law.

To be of the company of such men, to have the mind filled with such words, to remember the tone of their orators or the gesture of their statues, is to feel a steadying power upon the spirit and a love of large spaces and large ideas, rather than of little lunacies and secrecies. It is something that understands at once modesty and dignity; something that is never servility and never pride. It is the power in the mind that can keep order among the virtues, often almost as dangerous as the vices. No catalogue of facts will give it; yet we can hear it instantly in the sound of some random Roman verse. That is why the great men I have named, so different in their natures, felt that the classics did count somehow in the battle of life. When Johnson says, ‘The shepherd in Virgil became acquainted with love, and found him a native of the rocks,’ we know that his rage against Chesterfield will never go beyond a grand restraint; when Stevenson says, ‘We have heard perhaps too much of lesser matters. Here is the door, here is the open air. *Itur in antiquam silvam,’* we know that for such a mind lunacies will always be lesser matters and sanity be like the open air.

IX. On Psycho-analysis

I DO not know anything about Dr. Freud, except that it is the fashion to call him the father of psycho-analysis. I do not know anything about psycho-analysis, except that it demands a great deal more than the Confessional was always abused for demanding. It is most probable that psycho analysis can do good; it is pretty certain that psycho-analysts can do harm. But all this has nothing to do with the wonderful portrait of Dr. Sigismund Freud exhibited by a devout follower in his admiring study of the prophet.

The devout follower writes: ‘The great desk is a veritable Olympus of pagan gods, statuettes from the Nile cast in green metal while the gods were still living among men, bronzes from Asia, masks and totems from the Kamerun.’

If he were a common fellow like you or I, he would be content that his totems should come from the Cameroons. But wonderful scientific progress can be made by substituting a K for a C, in reproducing a language that has neither one nor the other. These are Scholarship, and there are two more of them. Anyhow, the great man sits at his great desk; you will observe that even the desk has to be great. Any how, he sits there, for reasons best known to himself, surrounded by images of all the gods in whom he does not believe; though I rather fancy that one image is missing.

The portrait then continues: ‘The handsome little figures illustrate the master’s work in primitive religions and myths. He sits among them, lonely and aloof as they. This man among his gods has become one of them . . . a symbol.’

Passing over the dry and dusty old questions that an antiquated rationalist might advance, as to how they can be his gods if he only studies them as myths, or why they should be so lonely when they are all together, we may agree that the appeal to symbolism is somewhat deeper. The writer then startles us with a very serious question, which has just occurred to him.

‘Is Freud a forecast of the man of the future? Is he one of the race of Martians who will inherit the earth? He has purged his creed of all ideals and theories of life, be they social or religious. He is the scientist, filling his niche in life and demanding a similar perfection and limitation of function from all others. He is the mind-made Czar, stiff and arbitrary and categoric . . . victor and victim . . . the Robot of the intelligence.’

It might be suggested that, if he is a scientist, he will hardly join so confidently in the positive prediction that a race of Martians will inherit the earth. It might also be suggested that, if he is a Robot, it seems less simple and self-evident that he is a mind-made Czar; since a Robot is not a master but a servant, and is not in that sense mind-made, but machine made. But when the vision of this curiously complicated or confused animal is accompanied with the plain, practical, downright question : ‘Is Freud a forecast of the man of the future?’ I can only answer feebly: ‘I trust not. I imagine not.’

Now why do people write all this sort of nonsense in newspapers? The people who write it are almost certainly not so silly as they sound. If you meet them in Fleet Street and stand them a drink, they are quite sensible. What is the connecting thread of association, or intellectual instinct, that makes them feel that this is the sort of thing that represents the mood of the day, and must be written in the daily Press?

There are many ways of putting the rather difficult answer to that rather delicate question. One way of putting it is to say that a religious war is raging under the surface; which would be much better if it were raging on the surface. The journalist feels in a vague way that the mere name of Freud is, as he says, a symbol; that it stands for the materialistic side in that quarrel; and therefore any one sympathizing with that side will rejoice in this curious appeal to the mysticism of materialism. Therefore he talks about a man purging himself of ideals; though any man talking like that must certain1y be purging himself of a sense of humour. Therefore he entertains the weird idea that it is a compliment to a man to call him a Robot.

Thus, again, he is drugged and mesmerized into using throughout the article such sentences as this: ‘Freud’s negation of Free Will is as thorough as that of some old tragic Greek poet.’ Well, to begin with, there may be two words even about the Greek poet. I do not profess to know much about the historic problems of Hellenism. I do not even know very much about the Greek tragedies. But the psycho- analysts know nothing at all about the Greek tragedies. I gather this from the astounding fact that they talk about the Oedipus Complex, obviously without knowing who Oedipus was. Nobody familiar with the Greek play would ever have used that Greek parallel. It was the whole point of Oedipus that he did not have the Oedipus Complex. It was the whole point of him that he only knew certain things too late which our bright and breezy psycho-analysts would introduce us to much too early. Next, in so far as the old tragedy was a struggle between Fate and Free Will, it represented the defeat of Free Will and not the denial of Free Will. The struggle of man against the gods might be a hopeless struggle, but it was a struggle. It is the whole point of modern Determinism that there can be no struggle at all. In fact, the Pagans, like the Christians, had a notion of the distinction between the divine will and the human will; only that their view of the divine will was darker and more doubtful; and because they were Pagans they were tempted to be pessimists. Then, again, the whole business of Fate in the old tragedy is not so simple as it looks; one of the best Greek scholars I know said that a Greek tragedy often consisted of a lot of people doing the wildest and wickedest things in a frenzy of free will and personal perversity; and then the Chorus saying in a hollow voice, ‘It is Fate. It is Fate.’ He said he did not believe it was Greek fatalism, but only Greek irony.

But, however that may be, there is a final thing to add in answer to such Pagan parallels. In so far as there really was a tinge of irresponsibility and fatalism in the religion of the Greeks, it probably had a great deal to do with its ultimate failure before the religion of the Romans. For the Greeks were the obvious leaders of the march of mankind, and especially of the Mediterranean civilization; and to some extent it is true that what went wrong with them was their moral self-control and self-respect; so that the lordship of light and order, and the making of modern Europe, passed to the little Latin village on the Tiber. I know that the Greek tragedies were very great; so great that I doubt whether they were so fatalistic as shallow fatalists suggest. But perhaps the greatest of Greek tragedies was the tragedy of the Greeks.

Even in this one story of the father of psycho analysis I could find a dozen examples of this slipshod popular ‘science’. Freud is represented as saying that the human race will get through (whatever that may mean) ‘because development is an inevitable law of creation’. It is at least equally apparent that decay is an inevitable law of creation. Old Huxley would have hacked this sort of thing to pieces with a hatchet. There is doubtless a place for Freud’s scalpel as well as Huxley’s hatchet; but it would be a pity if science, by performing the most brilliant operations on the brain, should end by removing the brain altogether.

X. On Egoists and Egoists

MOST journalists abound in jokes on the subject of misprints — the fearful misprints that make nonsense and the far, far more fearful misprints that make sense. For only those which are reasonable can really be ruinous. There are, of course, those which are merely errors, due at the worst to carelessness and at the best, possibly, to malicious humour. The real peril appears when we have to do, not with carelessness and humour, but with carefulness and a lack of humour. The awful moment is when the intelligent interpreter decides that the sentence, as it stands, is nonsense, and proceeds to make it make sense. I was myself once felled to earth under such a blow. I wrote for a magazine story a sentence descriptive of the hero, which ran, ‘He talked a great deal about himself because he was not an egoist.’ I found it rendered on the printed page in the amended and blameless form, ‘He talked a great deal about himself because he was an egoist.’

To the obscure scribbler in the background, who merely writes the story, there is a difference. But I do not suppose it made much difference to the reader of the story, if there ever was a reader of the story. Anyhow, at some stage of the long, mechanical modern process of copying and printing and proof-reading, and so on, there must have been, I presume, a grave and careful character who thought it was obviously a mistake to say that a man talking of himself was not an egoist. He therefore made the reasonable and natural correction and said he was an egoist. As this is, by the whole depth of hell, the most hideous and infernal thing that a human being can be, it makes some little difference to the story considered as a story. But it was evidently supposed to improve the sense considered as the sense. Now, extraordinary as it may seem, I myself am under the impression that my original sentence was quite sensible. It is my experience that the egoist, or, at least, the really evil and poisonous sort of egoist, is not remarkable for talking a great deal about himself; or, indeed, for talking a great deal at all. The worst examples of the egoistic type are silent and watchful, and wait until they can say something which (as they think, and as others may possibly think) nobody could have said but themselves. But even when they do talk at large, it is not in the ordinary sense about themselves. They are much more likely to talk about a large number of different things, to show how wise and widely cultivated they are. Above all, the true egoist can generally be detected by this diabolic mark: that he is not only willing to talk on any subject, but on any side of any subject. He has no creed, no cause, no conception of truth which he thinks more important than himself. He is willing to talk like a Turk to show that he has travelled in Turkey; he is willing to talk like a Buddhist to show that he has studied Buddhism. But he will not forget himself in fighting for the Turks; he will not sacrifice himself to Buddhism like a Christian sacrificing himself to Christianity. In all his varied travels he has discovered all wonders except one most wonderful thing — something bigger than himself.

Now, simple and sincere men, however much they may seem to be talking about themselves, are almost always using their own experiences to illustrate some thing bigger and better. Such men were Johnson and Macaulay; such men in our own time are Mr. Belloc or Mr. Bernard Shaw. And the test of them is that, however pugnacious or paradoxical they may seem, we cannot imagine them seriously summing up on the side opposite to their own. We cannot imagine Johnson really labouring to convince his friends that the Whigs were right; or Macaulay really labouring to convince them that the Whigs were wrong. We cannot imagine Mr. Belloc using his own experiences to discredit Catholicism or Mr. Bernard Shaw using his to discredit Socialism. They are quite capable of enjoying the experiences, and enjoying the fun or glory of narrating the experiences; but there is always something beyond the experiences. Now, to the egoist the whole pleasure is in the experiences, because they are egoistic experiences. But, in all subtle and deep-seated cases, the more he enjoys them as egoistic experiences, the less he is likely merely to narrate them in an egoistic way. He cares far too much about the impressions he is creating; he does not want to be remembered, as the dogmatist is, as a man who talked at the top of his voice, or a man who talked all the time. That sort of error can only be made by a person who still retains a great deal of unconsciousness. And it is the point of the true egoist that he retains nothing but self-consciousness. We say in rebuke to the rude and shouting dogmatist, ‘You forget yourself.’ The rebuke is the supreme compliment.

It is recognized that egoism is akin to hysteria, and is none the less hysterical because it is calm or dignified or apparently restrained. It lies very near that mystery of unreason and untruth which the old mystics perhaps simplified too much in their stories of diabolism, but which the modern psychologists will never fully understand till they take that old mysticism into account. In popular language, there is in such a man something of a madman, of a quiet and unobtrusive madman. And, as is so often said of the madman, he can be very cunning. He will try strangely circuitous ways of emphasizing his ego; not generally the obvious and hearty way of talking about himself. He is just as likely to draw attention to himself by not talking as by talking. He is liable to utter refusals, generally without giving reasons; because the refusal is more of an event if the reason is a mystery. The other type, the talker and debater, would be sure to give the reason for the refusal; for, to the combative, controversial man, the reason is more important than the refusal. All this must have been noticed by many people long before I noticed it; and all this I took for granted, as intelligible and rather interesting, in the phrase I used in the story; that the man 'talked about himself because he was not an egoist'. But it would be rather awkward to have to explain all this to a printer or a proof-reader, in order to persuade him to print what was written down to be printed. Even in this place, it takes some little time to explain; and I prefer such simple truths in a shorter form, even if there are some who cannot see a simple truth without calling it a paradox.

XI On Mr. Epstein

THE capacity of Mr. Epstein for carving an Aunt Sally, which shall immediately serve as a sort of cockshy for controversialists, whether it bears the name of Night or Rima, or anything else, is not in itself any reflection on his genius. There have been great works of art which were provocative, especially when they were prophetic. Nevertheless, there are problems in the position of those who regard Mr. Epstein as a prophet; especially if the prophecy consists in claiming to set up to-day something that may possibly be admired in a thousand years. The truth is that nobody has, in this matter, faced the fundamental problem; which is not so much the nature of Mr. Epstein's sculpture as the nature of any sculpture. Sculpture is normally a public and monumental art; and the real question raised is whether any art can be public or ornamental. Granted that any artist may have a conviction that he is right, or even granted that any artist must be right in thinking he is right, the question still remains: why should he stick it up in stone to be stared at by all the people who are certain to think he is wrong? The truth is that the whole conception of a public monument comes down to us from times when men did not feel this immense distance between the craftsman and the crowd. If they had, they would never have set the craftsman to work solely for the crowd. In that case there would never have been any such trifles as the Parthenon or the Cathedral of Seville, let alone the more important products of the modern artists of the moment.

Even those who think that the Night of Mr. Epstein is all right would probably concede that the Night of Michelangelo is also, in its way, all right. It is quite true that Michelangelo knew it was all right, and would have maintained it against any rivals who should have said it was all wrong. It is quite true that the ordinary populace passing the monuments of the Medici did not appreciate its rightness so rightly as he. But it is not true (and this is where the modern row begins) that even the populace regarded Michelangelo's figure, with its bowed head and somnolent profile, as a sort of monster or merely a joke. If they thought about it, they thought it was all right, only they did not understand how right. There was not present that sharp, angry, popular feeling that it was all wrong; and that, as I say, is the beginning of a problem that is not solved satisfactorily either by the

Futurists or the Philistines. In other words, there was for some reason or other a community of feeling between the sculptor and the spectator, which may, in a very exact significance, be called common sense. Art involves not only sense but sensibility; but the sense was the same if the sensibility was different. That is how we know that something has really happened, in modern art and appreciation, which is not disposed of either by calling the artist a madman or by calling the public a mob. Which ever of the two we think right, there is something wrong. Either the artist has really become an anarchist, and is in merely restless and unbalanced rebellion against the traditions of civilization; or else public opinion has in some way halted or fallen behind the normal intellectual leadership which it used to follow. That is the problem of public art; and it does not seem to be understood either by the artist or the public.

The next truth that is, I think, too little realized is this. All art is religious art; and all public art should really be of the religion of the people. This will seem to many a paradox at once sweeping and narrow. But it is true; and it is the truth that was missed both by the aesthetes and the moralists in the old debate on whether ‘art is unmoral’. All art is not necessarily moral, in the sense of practical. But all art is religious, because religion includes both practice and theory, both morality and art. Religion is the sense of ultimate reality, of whatever meaning a man finds in his own existence or the existence of any thing else. It may be, and sometimes is, an evil religion; it may be even what superficial critics would call an irreligious religion. But whatever is his conception of the cosmos and the consciousness, that will be in his art, even when his practical private morality is not particularly noticeable in it. I do not say that by staring at the Great Pyramid I can discover whether the builder of the Pyramids was in the habit of paying his debts or quarrelling with his wife. But I do say that by looking at the Great Pyramid I know that the man who built it had a particular sort of religion, and a different religion from my own. I do not say that the pattern of a wall-paper will necessarily teach a moral lesson by examples, or be a woven tracery of the Ten Commandments. But I know a wall-paper pattern of Christendom from a pattern made by Moslems or Hindus or Chinamen all right.

Now, this thing which is deeper even than morality, which we may, if we like, call philosophy, is always present in a work of art; and rather specially in a powerful work of art. And if the philosophy of the public monument is different from the philosophy of the public, the public is perfectly right in saying so. The men in the street are not stupid or blind or benighted when they throw things at the alien image. On the contrary, they are subtle and penetrating and perceptive. They are art critics of the fine shades of the fine arts. They are certainly much better art critics than those who swallow anything that is alien because it is artistic, and believe that anything is artistic because it is advanced. Plain men do detect something deeper even than morals, which is metaphysics; and know the metaphysics are hostile to their own. In a sense it is true that every image is an idol; that is, about every statue there lingers something of the faint pagan tradition of sacrifice and divine honours. The people feel that, if there is to be popular art, it ought to express popular religion. The people are right; though the artist might some times retort that they have now no religion to be expressed.

Being myself a man in the street, and a mere casual figure in the crowd, I can testify to my own reactions in a case like that of the Night of Mr. Epstein. I can see that it has fine lines in it; that the broad sweep of the hand like a great flapper, as if flattening out the prostrate and already featureless sleeper, is deliberately and not clumsily flat. But when I look up at the face of the goddess, my instinctive and instantaneous comment is: ‘This man thinks that Night, that watches over a sleeping world, is a Chinese opium hag. And there are people who do think that Night, and natural cosmic laws of the kind, are of the same spiritual quality as that of a Chinese opium hag. But Night is *not* a Chinese opium hag. Michelangelo knew it was not; and I know it is not; and anybody who has seen the nightfall in a village of the Downs knows it is not.’ I should say that this was because Michelangelo and I had the same religion, and that even the villages were founded by men in the same tradition. But anyhow, that is the real root of the quarrel; and very few of those who are quarrelling ever get down to it. It is not because the disputed work of art is a meaningless monstrosity. On the contrary, it is because it has a meaning, and has it all the more if it is a masterpiece. It is not because the men in the street are blind and ignorant and cannot see the meaning. On the contrary, it is because they do see the meaning and know it is not what they mean.

Now, in this matter of Mr. Epstein’s sculpture, in connexion with which I appear in the unpopular character of a peacemaker, I may receive some criticisms questioning the principle I imply. Between the large stones the spectators throw at the sculptor, and the larger and more monstrous stone the sculptor has thrown at them, some stray chips or pebbles may naturally hit any peacemaker so imprudent as to stand inquiring what each or either of the stone-throwers imagine they are aiming at. But since such stones are flying in the stone-yard of the sculptors, I will transfer the topic and myself to quieter regions, and finish the discussion in the library. In other words, I will apply the principle to literature, about which I know more, and about which there is exactly the same argument, supported by exactly the same arguments. If we take a recent literary controversy, like that over the poetical school of the Sitwells, we find that the current controversial case is in the same sense true and in the same sense false. In none of these cases am I merely contemptuous of the innovators; or, rather, I do not refer to the innovators who can really be treated with contempt. I know there is something in the Sitwell method; I know it does sometimes really give forth the glamour of childhood, and make the imagination feel, for an immortal instant, that red clouds or green hills are like things good to eat. But I can absorb Miss Sitwell's poetry much better than Miss Sitwell's defence of her poetry. When it comes to theorizing in the matter, she generally falls back on what I may call the Theory of the Prophet's Sepulchre. Needless to say, there is a slight fallacy in the argument that, because many of the prophets were stoned, anybody who is stoned is a prophet. Montrose was a hero and was hanged, but hanging does not make a hero; and not everybody who has been in jail is either Bunyan or Cervantes. But I am not now concerned with this old and obvious answer, but with the answer concerned with historical fact and especially historical proportion. For a history may be crammed with facts and still be wholly false, if it is false in proportion. Now, Miss Sitwell was never tired of saying in the time of this controversy, that the original genius of Keats was assailed with the same uncomprehending criticism; and many critics of her school say that the new style of Swinburne staggered a world only used to the style of Tennyson. Now this historical parallel is not historical. And if we think it is, we shall miss something momentous and significant in our own particular phase of history.

To begin with, the old quarrels were quarrels of quite a different sort. The motives of the attack on Keats were almost entirely political and social. The motives of the attack on Swinburne were almost entirely moral and religious. But it is not true, of either of these great poets, that they seemed utterly unreadable or unintelligible to those who had formed their tastes on the older poets. Gifford was a low Tory hack, who hated and feared the little group of Radicals associated with Leigh Hunt and Shelley, and who regarded the very appearance of an apothecary's apprentice as a new poet in this group as a menacing sign of Jacobinism. He therefore wrote a slating review of Keats's poems in the Quarterly, as anybody could easily write a slating review of any poems anywhere. But it is not true to say that even Gifford felt that an abyss had opened between him and a new race of intellectual beings; that he could not even recognize their verse as verse or their English as English. If I have ever read any of Gifford's own poetry, I am glad to say that I have forgotten it, but I know the sort of poetry that he admired and inherited. It was that very unheroic thing then called the heroic couplet. That is, it was the dreary decasyllabic couplet, the dregs and rinsings of Pope. But it is not true that a man, passing from a theme treated by Pope to a classical theme treated by Keats, thought he had got into a howling wilderness of lunatics or chattering monkeys. He simply thought that the style was a little better or worse, as the case might be, as being looser or less dignified, or richer or more free. Or, to take the other example, a Victorian accustomed to the Tennysonian tone and imagery, in lines like:

'The sun came dazzling through the leaves
And flamed upon the brazen greaves
Of bold Sir Lancelot,'

did undoubtedly feel, either with pain or pleasure, a different sort of tone and imagery in the new and musical verse of Swinburne:

'Ringed round with a flame of fair faces
And splendid with swords.'

He might feel that a new noise of purely beautiful singing had come into the English language; and he would be right. He might feel that there was some thing vulgar in the exaggerated alliteration and a certain swagger of smoothness; and he would also be right. But he would not find the second form utterly formless. The Tennysonian would not feel, in turning from Tennyson and his flaming sun to Swinburne and his flame of fair faces, anything like what the Swinburnian would feel in turning from the Swinburnian lines to lines, let us say, like these

‘The kings and queens on the nursery wall
Are chain-armoured fish in the moat and all.’

The Victorian might think the flame of Swinburne too flamboyant, or even foolishly flamboyant. But he would know what Swinburne meant by saying that a face was a flame. And it is very doubtful if he would know what Miss Sitwell meant by saying that a queen was a fish, or that a fish was elaborately equipped with chain-armour. Still less would he necessarily understand why something on a wall was like something totally different in a moat. Some, gifted with a childish perversity (though I say it who shouldn’t) may fancy they can track the elvish connexion of ideas. But there has been a break, and the problem is different. There is not only a new sort of work, but a new sort of novelty.

I think there is an explanation. I think the subtle are seeking simplicity, because the simple have been soaked and choked with subtlety, or at least with complexity. The people, who are the right guardians of normal ideas, have been bullied and bludgeoned by bad materialistic education till they are simply stunned and stupefied. Meanwhile, the clever and complex people are trying to return to direct ideas, but can only do it in an indirect way; they long for straight lines, but cannot go for them straight.

XII On ‘Who Killed John Keats?’

IN connexion with the celebrated attack on Keats in the *Quarterly*, there has arisen the suggestion that the article in question was not written by Gifford, but by Croker. I do not profess to know the details on which the dispute must rest; I merely followed an old literary tradition, which may be only a literary legend. It is possible that the theory, or discovery, about Croker is correct, and, so far as that goes, it would be an even stronger support for the argument in which I used it. For, whether or no it is fair to call Gifford a Tory hack, I fancy it is fair to say that Croker was more of a Tory hack than Gifford. Croker was often a purely political swashbuckler, with less of the poetic or classic tradition about him than the other. Indeed, the Croker theory, whatever else it is, is of the nature of a last knock to a reputation already rather knocked about. John Wilson Croker was certainly either a very bad man or a very badly used man. Macaulay called him a disgrace to literature and politics, and added the more violent expression that he hated him more than cold boiled veal. Thackeray depicted him, by common report, under the name of Mr. Wenham, the repulsive toady of the profligate nobleman in *Vanity Fair*. Disraeli depicted him under another name, which I forget for the moment, but with the same repulsive character. And now, it would seem, according to this view, that he appeared in another capacity more famous and equally infamous. He was the Man Who Killed Keats. I use the term in the ordinary loose sense, for I am well aware that this also is a literary legend. It is one that had the support of the scornful words of Byron and the admiring words of Shelley; as the responsibility of Gifford, unless I am mistaken, had the support of the spirited words of Hazlitt. But Keats was killed by consumption and not by Croker; he was not ‘snuffed out by an article’, and it is a very poor compliment to Keats to suppose that he was.

Without pronouncing for the moment, therefore, about the authorship of the article, upon which I am quite open to conviction when I shall have studied the facts, I should like to say a word in a more general way about what I may call the world of Gifford and Croker. What I say about it may be taken as justifying my dislike or as merely explaining my bias. It is quite true that I have a dislike of, or a bias against, that particular group of Tories in the early nineteenth century. But I should not like my prejudice, if it is a prejudice, to be misunderstood. When I call them Tory hacks, I do not mean to say in my haste that they were hacks because they happened to be Tories. It was because they belonged to one curious transitional type which did not really deserve the older and nobler name. As it happens, although the only party label that has been hung somewhat loosely upon me is that of a Radical, I have always had a very warm sympathy with Tories. Those who know anything of my tastes will believe without difficulty that I prefer the Cavaliers to the Puritans. But I prefer the Puritans to their later representatives, the cynical Whig aristocrats of the Revolution. The Puritans killed the King for the glory of God; the Whigs merely betrayed and deserted the King for their own glory, or more often for their own gain. So far as that quarrel is concerned, I am a pure Tory — or, rather, a pure Jacobite. But then, as Macaulay quite truly pointed out, the Tories of the early eighteenth century were really Radicals. None was more Radical, in some ways, than Dr. Johnson. He made the very profound remark that he had never known the Whig political theory when it was not mixed up in some way with cruelty to the poor. But Johnson, and his Irish friend Goldsmith, were really something more than Tories; they were disappointed Jacobites. By the beginning of the nineteenth century that older and more generous Royalism had almost entirely died away. Bolingbroke, in his old age, had tried to revive it; but there was nothing to be done in a world with Burke on one side and only Bute on the other. The Whigs were established; they were an aristocracy; but many of them were quite genuine in their theory of liberty. It was very hard for the old Tories in Hanoverian times to be quite genuine in their theory of loyalty. And meanwhile a new thing had come into existence — a thing that was not Toryism at all, but a sort of commercial Conservatism. It came to its fullness in the time of the younger Pitt; it relied not on the country and the yeomen, or even the squires, but on the city and the bankers, not to mention the stockjobbers. Its champions were men like Croker and Gifford; and I would make all allowance for the fact that, in Macaulay’s phrase, I hate it more than cold boiled veal.

I think the root of the real objection is this. The English Tories of this transition did not stand for any cause that can be loved for its own sake. All over Europe there was raging a great religious war, between real religions. The quarrel between the vision of the Republic, the inspiration of the French Revolution, on the one hand, and the local loyalties to the old anointed monarchies and religious customs on the other, was a conflict in which a man might fling himself with a flaming sincerity and simplicity on either side. It was, if you will, a quarrel between the Prophet and the Priest. It is a quarrel that is now, I am glad to say, largely reconciled; but at the time it was as genuine as that between a good Crusader and a high-minded Saracen.

A thing like that is a quarrel, but it is not a misunderstanding. The combatants understand each other; they fight each other because they understand each other. When the knights of the Crescent and the Cross crossed swords, it was not merely a case of cross purposes. When the Royalist and Republican came in conflict, it was a contradiction and not merely a collision. It belonged to what some call the world of medieval ideas; and I prefer to call the world of ideas. But the insular Toryism of the school of Pitt and Peel belongs merely to the world of modern interests, and especially of mercantile interests. The servants of that system could not throw themselves heartily into glorifying our ancient Christian past, for it would lead them back to the very last things they wanted to find — as they could see well enough, when they beheld a distinct prospect of Melrose Abbey through the Gothic gateway of Abbotsford.

It was all very well for an Irishman like Burke to throw in a word for the old chivalry of Europe; but most of his party dared not really commit themselves to recognizing the chivalry of Ireland, or even the chivalry of Spain. The Spaniards were their allies but not their friends; the Irish by this time were definitely their foes. Indeed, it is by that test that we can best judge the change that had come over Toryism. It happened in that tragic hour when the Tories lost for ever the old Cavalier sympathy with Ireland. In the early eighteenth century the greatest minds in English tradition sympathized with Irish tragedy. It was so with the great mind of Swift. It was so with the great mind of Johnson. It was not so with the very small minds of the period of Pitt and his Union — the men who denounced Ireland for its rebellion, but detested it for its loyalty.

These men were, it seems to me, cramped by something chilly and even craven in their whole political position. They were not generously on the side of either the old world or the new. They were, in the only too exact phrase, on the side of the Powers that be. The Jacobite and the Jacobin, at opposite extremes, were yet both on the side of the Powers that ought to be. The one looked back to divine right and the other forward to democratic right. But they both appealed to abstract justice: to the King who should enjoy his own again or the People that should rule itself. But the men I mean were sophists defending injustice, merely because it was strong enough to be unjust. In calling them hacks I do not mean that they had the excuse of poverty or ignorance. I mean they were servants of a master, not lieges of a king; flunkeys whose livery had long ceased to be a uniform.

XIII. On Ingeland

THE study called England which the Dean of St. Paul’s wrote not long ago has impressed me with the curious patchwork of truth and falsehood that is usually produced by his remarkable intelligence. There are few writers in whom the contrast between the two is so abrupt; few writers who in that sense put down their meaning so definitely in black and white In the matter of truth and error, he at least does not produce a mere arrangement in grey and white; he produces something as striking as a chess-board. There is no interval between the things he understands excellently and the things he refuses to understand at all. If we compare, for instance, the passage about the quality in early English literature with the passage a little later about the history of Irish politics, we should think that one was written by a philosopher and the other by a lunatic.

He writes indeed in a spirit of patriotism which amounts to a sort of cultivated prejudice; but it is a prejudice with which I sympathize. Some of the things that he says in praise of England are true without any reference to prejudice at all. Nothing could be better, for instance, than the passage in which he points out that the English are quite exceptionally free from vindictiveness. Perhaps he does not quite adequately distinguish between a readiness to forgive and a readiness to forget. But it is perfectly true that the English have given magnificent examples of both, and that they do really shine, among the nations of Christendom, with the truly Christian flame of charity. He is right again in saying that the English are not cruel; though that is not the same as saying that they have not tolerated cruelties. The truth is that the English have tolerated cruelties out of sheer good-nature. They have allowed abominable things to be done to their enemies and their subjects. But they have allowed them, not so much because they thought too badly of their enemies and their subjects as because they thought too well of their rulers and their representatives. The weakness of Dean Inge’s exposition is that he is always missing the point in cases of that kind, through a disposition to take a true compliment and treat it too much as a compliment and too little as a truth. Thus, he admits himself that the genuine kindliness of the English is a little difficult to reconcile with the ruthlessness of a penal code that survived into a comparatively humanitarian period. But he does not see that what he thinks is the contradiction is also the explanation. It is bound up with that optimism which is the temptation of the amiable, and with a consequent disposition to avoid terrible topics and turn a deaf ear to terrible tales.

But it is also bound up with another matter, which the Dean also succeeds in mentioning without fully understanding. He recognizes, as do all intelligent observers, that the English have a way of refusing to be influenced by logic; or, as some of us might say, of refusing to listen to reason. He says truly enough that England as a nation missed the meaning of most of the modern intellectual movements in Europe; and indeed, to judge by his description of them, the Dean seems to have missed the meaning of them himself. But, anyhow, he is quite right in saying that abstract theories and speculations have seldom taken any particular hold of the English. But he does not see that this again is the explanation of the anomaly of abuses like the penal code, and of the merciless laws of a merciful people. The English did not revolt earlier against the principle of certain ancient abuses, because they had no revolutionary principle to which to revolt. The softening of the old savagery in punishment has been almost entirely due to Rousseau and the French Revolution. But Rousseau did not change the world by being a sentimentalist; he only changed it by being a theorist. Kindly people in all times and places still feel compassion for evils; but it is only a new theory that can insist that they are not necessary evils.

There is another passage in which, in somewhat the same way, he manages to miss the point. He propounds the problem that the English who affect most people, even foreign people, as being simple and natural enough, considered as individuals, have yet been accused persistently, age after age, of being ‘perfidious’ in international politics. But though he propounds the problem he does not make any attempt to solve the problem. He seems quite content to say, like the very vulgarest sort of Jingo, that the legend of the perfidy of Englishmen must be a part of the malignity of foreigners. He falls in this connexion into one of two errors, to which a man of his reading and experience should be superior. He says that our foreign policy changes too frequently to be a conspiracy; though surely that alone might have created the idea that it was a breach of contract. But, as a fact, he is wrong. He is always praising aristocracy, or government by gentlemen, and he misses here one of the real arguments for it. England has, in fact, had a remarkably consistent foreign policy as compared with the revolutionary changes of the Continent. And this continuity was largely due to the old tradition of government by one traditional class. But it has extended itself throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. That is why Radicals grumbled at the policy of Gladstone in Egypt. And that is why Tories cheered aloud the policy of Snowden at the Hague.

But I believe the real cause of the charge of perfidy is something more creditable and more comprehensible. It arises from the very fact which the Dean has already noted and I have already admitted; the fact that the English are moved less by good reasons and more by good emotions. But emotions, whether good or bad, do not always last. What puzzles the foreigner about English public opinion is that it often seems to have changed entirely in a few years, without any apparent reason at all. It has changed as the mood of a man changes; and the Englishman is a very moody man. That is where he differs, as in so many essential things, from the American. Now, when the English are accused, as they have been age after age, of tiring of a war or an alliance, it is not through treachery and most certainly not through cowardice. It is simply through being bored; or, in other words, through having had a temperamental change, without any particular rules or theories to measure or correct it. I do not say that in many cases they may not have been right, and the obstinacy of more logical nations wrong. But that, I am convinced, is the real explanation of the charge of unreliability brought against our policy, in so far as it was ever a popular policy. It goes along with all the rest, and is therefore both a weakness and a strength.

I am so warmly at one with the Dean of St. Paul’s in pure sympathy with my own very sympathetic people, that I do not feel inclined to dwell on the one or two occasions when his really rabid and ridiculous prejudices appear. There is nothing to be said about his extraordinary reference to Ireland, except that it is perfectly obvious that he never read a line of Irish history in his life. But I know very well that his hatred of Ireland is not really even a hatred of Ireland. It is a hatred of something else, associated with Ireland, and something that I have no intention of bringing up here for discussion.

XIV. On Loneliness

ONE of the finer manifestations of an indefatigable patriotism has taken the form of an appeal to the nation on the subject of Loneliness. This complains that the individual is isolated in England, in a sense unknown in most other countries, and demands that something should be done at once to link up all these lonely individuals in a chain of sociability. My first feeling, I confess, was an overwhelming desire to do a bolt, like an escaping criminal, before the gigantic drag-nets of this scheme for universal camaraderie had begun to sweep the country-side. My second thoughts and feelings were more just and sympathetic; but there remained in them a reflection that often does mingle with my reflections on contemporary hustle and publicity. It all seems to me very much behind the times.

I should have entirely agreed with the suggestion if he had made it thirty years ago. Nor is it I that have changed, but the world that has changed. But the world has changed so much, in the very direction that is desired, that I should not have imagined there was anything more to desire. It is now rather difficult in England to take a lonely walk, or to find a lonely road, or, for people living in a large circle of acquaintances, to spend a lonely evening. It is perfectly true that, not very long ago, the exaggeration in England was all the other way. English Society was largely paralysed by the combination of a gentility that was the dregs of aristocracy, and a Pharisaism that was the dregs of Puritanism. Even then the Puritanism could hardly be called Protestantism, in the sense of any personal or positive religion. It was simply the sour taste in the mouth left by the medicine, or poison, of seventeenth-century Calvinism. But it remained in the mouth, and even in the expression of the mouth. That mouth was well known to waiters, cabmen, porters, and all sorts of people, especially foreign people, and the mouth did undoubtedly express many things pride and vainglory and blindness and hardness of heart but especially hardness of hearing, and a resolution not to open it in anything resembling human conversation with other human beings But thirty years ago this stupid self sufficiency was not being blamed as the cause of loneliness. Thirty years ago it was being praised as the cause of Empire; as the strong Anglo-Saxon self-respect and self-reliance which had won the glorious battle for the Suez Canal, and explained our complete and marvellous success in Ireland. And when I suggested, in those days, that this was all nonsense, when I said that nobody can rule another race merely by shutting his own mouth and eyes and ears and heart to everything, I was derided in the sensational Press of those days as a Little Englander and a sentimental anarchist. Nevertheless, I thought then, and I think I was right in thinking then, that England suffered from the lack of that natural flow of intelligent talk and pleasant public manners that can be seen in the cities of the Continent. A café was a place where even strangers could talk; and a club was a place where even friends could not talk.

I remember throwing out a fanciful suggestion, partly for fun, but partly for the sake of symbolism, which might well form a part of the great Campaign Against Solitude. I suggested that it would be a good thing for those isolated Victorian households if they had a Human Library for circulating human beings instead of books. I suggested that Mudie's Omnibus would call once a week, depositing two or three strangers at the door; who would be duly returned when they had been adequately studied. There was a list of rules, dealing with what should happen if somebody kept Miss Brown out too long, or returned Mr. Robinson in a damaged condition. I thought that the Human Circulating Library was a good notion in those days; and I still think it was a good notion — for those days. I think that an intermittent stream of strangers through the old Victorian home would have been a good thing — for the old Victorian home. But the difficulty nowadays is not even to keep the old Victorian home. It is to keep any sort of home at all. It is to get people to see how normal and necessary and enduring, in spite of all its Victorian abuses, is the idea of the family institution and possession. Large numbers of the new generation never go about except in nameless and nomadic crowds, and profess their readiness to live anyhow and for ever in huge homeless hostels and communal camps. In the middle of all this the advocate of the Campaign Against Solitude suddenly wakes up and cries aloud that he is in a wilderness. The jazz and the saxophones answer him, but he remains in his Victorian dream, following his Anti- Victorian vision. He may be in a wilderness, but it is certainly a howling wilderness. At any rate, it must be hard for him to believe that he is in a hermitage.

All this seems to me like a man coming to life in the middle of the Great War, and declaring that he can endure no longer the Quakerish dullness of the long peace of Queen Victoria. It is like a man appearing suddenly in the streets of Bolshevist Moscow, and shouting aloud that he is going to put an end to the superstitious autocracy by blowing up the Czar. His remarks are forcible and perhaps even justifiable in themselves; but they do not seem to be fitted with any exactitude into the circumstances around him. If English people really are still frightened of society and frozen into solitude, I am entirely on the side of the gentleman who wishes to make them more sociable. But I have a suspicion that what they are really likely to lose just now is not sociability, but solitude. And I am firmly and fanatically against their losing solitude. I am furiously and savagely opposed to being robbed of my own solitude. And it seems to me that the general trend of social life at present is rather to be a great deal too social, and to forget the real social uses of solitude.

That is the advantage, if I may say so, of having for a philosophy a religion instead of a fashion. Those whose faith is only fashion always make the world much worse than it is. They always make men more solitary when they are too solitary. They always make men more sociable when they are too sociable. But I do not worship either solitude or sociability, and I am in a position of intellectual independence for the purpose of judging when either tendency goes too far. Puritanism made a man too individual, and had its horrible outcome in Individualism. Paganism makes a man too collective, and its extreme outcome is in Communism. But I am neither a Puritan nor a Pagan, and I have lived just long enough to see the whole of England practically transformed from Puritanism to Paganism. It is not surprising if the cure for the first is not exactly the same as the cure for the second. But there could not be a better example of the balance of a permanent philosophy than the present merely temporary need to insist on the case for solitude.

What is the matter with the world to-day is that it is too much with us; too much with everybody. It will not leave a man long enough by himself for him to discover that he is himself. Therefore, we have a perpetual pouring of gifts from the State to the individual, but less and less given back by the individual to the State. This is hard on all humanity; but it is especially hard on the English. They are a nation of humorists, in the old sense; which is the very opposite of a nation of Society wits. Their wits have worked best upon poetry and leisurely fiction, which grow best in lives of quiet and detachment. And I do seriously think that Englishmen ought to make some fight for that right of ancient sanctuary, before it is broken down by the mere American herd-instinct. I have never been a Jingo, or uttered political boasts about the Splendid Isolation of England, but I would do a good deal to preserve the Splendid Isolation of the Englishman.

XV. On the Importance of Why We Do (or Don’t)

ON the whole, I am rather less interested in what people do than in why they do it. Of course, there are extremes which are exceptions. I daresay that if somebody suddenly smashed my hat over my eyes, as I walked down the street, I might feel a momentary and confused resentment against the act and even the actor, in spite of the fact that he might have acted from either friendly or unfriendly motives. He might be a proof-reader of, say, The Illustrated London News, maddened by years of boredom in having to read through my articles in that paper, and resolved to be revenged at last. But he also might be a social sympathizer who, knowing that a steel and concrete Temple of Progress, in the American manner, had been built in that street that morning, was resolved to spare me the shock of beholding it, and had with that object intervened, abruptly indeed, but with no little presence of mind. Yet even here the principle holds, for it would be much more worth while to have a quiet talk afterwards with either of those two interesting lunatics than to continue in the mere bewildered irritation arising from the thing having happened at all. Moreover, though the abstract attitude will be called unpractical, the motive does make all the difference to practicality, in the sense of probability. The man who hits me because I am approaching a Temple of Progress will not hit me when I am not approaching a Temple of Progress. And, normally speaking, I am happy to say, I am not. But nothing will turn aside the pursuing vengeance of the proof-reader, who will hit me wherever and whenever he can — and quite right too.

In short, the principle is much more reasonable than it sounds; and any number of examples could be given of it. I might be selfishly vexed to find I had been poisoned with prussic acid; and this apart from the mere detached detective interest of whether it was done by an enthusiastic Darwinian, sworn to kill every Anti-Darwinian, or merely by an enthusiastic Christian Scientist, sworn to prove that poisons do not kill. But if I retained my logical faculty while writhing in my last agonies, I should still contend that there was a difference between the fanatical poisoner and the faith-healer; and I should probably add (with my dying breath) that the faith-healer is much the more dangerous of the two. For the Darwinian would only murder the small intelligent minority which has sufficient intellectual independence not to be frightened of the name of Darwin; whereas the healer might murder everybody, with every intention of healing everybody. In short, the real reason of things is every bit as important as the things themselves; and that is what ought to be meant by being a rationalist. Unfortunately, a man who is in this real sense a rationalist is generally denounced for being a mystic.

For instance, there is an ever-increasing quarrel about the license or limits of what is called Sex Literature. Mr. James Douglas made a very vigorous and (as I think) a very just protest against various poisonous passions being poured out to all and sundry. He then proceeded to consider what should be done about it. He drew up a scheme for a sort of unofficial literary licensing committee. It was by no means a bad scheme; I for one might, after due consideration, be disposed to support it; and anyhow I am not here disposed to criticize it. But I am disposed to criticize some of the philosophical remarks with which Mr. Douglas seems to think he is supporting it, when he is in fact undermining it. I am true to my perverse test; I want to know from Mr. Douglas, not what is his practical scheme, but what is his theoretical reason for it. He has himself, as I have noted, fought an admirable fight for normal morality and the resistance to moral disease. But he is not quite theoretical enough to get a grip on the thing itself; and he defends it better than he defines it. For when he comes to the general ethical problem, he surrenders the ground suddenly to the enemy. He says that the practical problem of fixing decorum in a special society is very difficult, which is very true. But he adds that morality (apparently in the real sense of right and wrong) changes continually from age to age, which is the very devil.

Now, that is where the whole mistake and the whole mischief begin. If Mr. Douglas tells some decadent or other that morality changes from age to age, the decadent will reply, as indeed he does reply, ‘Yes, and I have the morality of the new age; you have the morality of the age that is passing; I am in advance of the times, you are behind the times. I am the Superman who is expected about the end of the twentieth century, you are a dusty old Victorian and ought to have died in the nineteenth.’ Mr. Douglas may think that the decadent is more likely to decay than he is; and that he is as lively and likely to survive as the other. But if everything is perpetually changing, it is impossible to prove it, or to test how fast it is changing or how far it has changed. The truth is that Mr. Douglas, who has denounced all such decadents far more furiously and flamboyantly than I have, has yet fallen back before them exactly where he ought to stand firm. It is not true that the idea of right and wrong changes. The particular concentration on a certain sort of right changes; the relative toleration of a certain sort of wrong changes. Men in medieval times tolerated more ruthless punishments; men in modern times tolerate more reckless and irresponsible financial speculation and control. But a medieval man did not think mercy a bad thing. A modern man does not think dishonesty a good thing. The proportions differ in practice; the ethical expression differs in emphasis; but virtue is virtue and vice is vice, in all ages and for all people, except a very few lunatics.

As it is about cruelty or commercial rapacity, so it is about the basic ideas of modesty and fidelity and sexual self-control. One age does differ from another in manner of expression, and may differ for the better or the worse; but precisely what does not really differ is fundamental morality. One age does differ from another about whether certain plain words that are used in the Bible shall be used in the drawing-room. But using fashionable words in the drawing-room is not morality. One age does differ from another about whether skirts are reasonably long or short; but fashionable skirts are not morality. The motive is morality, even when the motive happens to concern these trivial things. To insult our fellow-creatures with coarse words to which they are unaccustomed may be an immoral act; it may sometimes, under certain conditions, be a highly moral act. It entirely depends on why it is done. Now, so far as this fundamental and final morality is concerned, it leaves the modern problem still to be settled; but it provides some sort of firm basis on which it can be settled. We may even say that it ends where the controversy begins; but it does make it possible for the controversy to begin — and (what is not unimportant) for it to end. It is impossible for any controversy to end, it is impossible for any to begin, in a chaos of incalculable change. But, anyhow, there is a permanent ethic, and without it nobody will effect even a temporary reform.

XVI. On the Open Conspiracy

MR. H. G. WELLS believes that the world now wants a world peace; and apparently wants it more than anything else. The world has always wanted a world peace; and often wanted it very much; only (and this is the point) it certainly did not then, and it possibly may not now, want it more than any thing else. And it is to that distinction that Mr. Wells, as it seems to me, pays too little attention. Europe felt that need for unity so strongly that it four or five times attempted it and two or three times practically achieved it. And the queer thing is that when, for once in a way, it was achieved, Mr. Wells does not think much of the achievement. It was largely achieved in the material sphere by Pagan Rome; and Mr. Wells detests Pagan Rome. It was largely achieved in the moral sphere by Christian Rome; and Mr. Wells abominates Christi Rome. Its establishment was attempted by Charlemagne; and I do not think he thinks much of Charlemagne. Its establishment was re-attempted by Napoleon; and I know he foams with rage at the very name of Napoleon. He thus finds himself in a somewhat difficult relation to the whole Outline of History; perpetually affirming that a certain thing must be done and perpetually abusing everybody who ever tried to do it. St. Augustine said in jest, ‘Confound the people who said beforehand what I wanted to say.’ Mr. Wells seems to find it necessary to say seriously, ‘Confound the people who did beforehand what I want to do.’ Of course their work was unfinished as his is untried. But it is by eliminating theirs that he reaches his own alternative idea. He suggests that there is a third way of bringing about international unification; and it is this which he calls the Open Conspiracy.

I cannot say that this entirely convinces me as a thing likely to convince mankind. It seems to me that if we cannot get a general rule accepted, like that of the Rome of Augustus, we must get a general moral philosophy accepted, like that of the Rome of Gregory. That is, we must either submit to one common culture or we must agree on one common creed; that is the nearest we can ever get to making an authority that can really arbitrate and have its arbitration accepted. Even then we cannot make conflict impossible. But we can make controversy possible. We can make it rational to argue and debate, by agreeing on the first principles we debate on, and accepting a certain standard of values. Otherwise conflict will always be possible, because controversy is impossible. Suppose there is a Prussian who thinks that nothing matters except Prussia, and a Bolshevist who thinks that nothing matters except Bolshevism. It is utterly futile to ask that they should argue and not fight. What have they got to argue about? What have they got to argue with? Where is the argument supposed to begin and how is it supposed to end? The Junker can be told that his arrogance is bad internationalism; but he does not care what happens to internationalism. The Communist can be told that his internationalism would destroy patriotism; but he wants to destroy patriotism. There can be no sort of agreement, there can be no sort of argument, there can certainly be no sort of acceptable arbitration, between people whose fundamental values are different. I take the harsh and narrow sort of patriotism that was called Prussianism and the harsh and narrow form of Collectivism that is called Bolshevism, because they happen to be the two best modern examples of entirely separatist and self-existent new philosophies. It is perhaps worth noting that they are the two philosophies, belonging to the two great communities, which were never inside the system either of Pagan or of Christian Rome.

Anyhow, Mr. Wells faces fairly enough the fact that he wants something done which several people have tried to do; and that he cannot abide their way of doing it. He therefore has to sketch out some suggestion at least of his own way of doing it. And it is this which makes the book exceedingly interesting and not very convincing. He is certainly in no sense a rigid or rabid Socialist, after the fashion of a Bolshevist. He makes it clear that he has no belief in the crude Communist simplification; that he believes, as he expresses it, that the Russian Revolution was but a blundering side-issue and an accident on the flank of true progress.

I think it is true that Bolshevism is much weaker for having won. Utopia always wins best in what is, in another than the Wellsian sense, a War in the Air. When the heavenly kingdom becomes an earthly paradise, it sometimes tends to be a hell upon earth. But it sometimes tends to be what is even worse, or at least weaker: a very earthy imitation of the earth. So long as revolution is a failure, we all feel that it holds the promise of success. It is when it is a success that it is so often a failure. In any case, Mr. Wells leaves it on one side for a failure; if only because he does not like any of these definite solutions, old or new. He dislikes the Romans became they had a military grasp, and the Popes because they had a moral grasp, and even the

Marxians because, like the Calvinists, they had at least a sort of logical grasp. It is his instinct that any sort of grasp is too grasping. It is associated in his mind with what I should call tyranny and he would probably miscall authority. And as he will not establish a universal order by grasping, he wishes to do it by groping. By a process which he frankly admits to be casual, sporadic, patchy, and even partly unconscious, there is to grow up a general tendency towards establishing a world control. But it seems to me that a good many other things might happen, if there is nothing to control the movement towards control. Ideas can be perverted only too easily even when they are strict ideas; I cannot see how we preserve them from perversion merely by making them loose ideas. A thing like the Catholic system is a system; that is, one idea balances and corrects another. A man like Mohammed or Marx, or in his own way Calvin, finds that system too complex, and simplifies everything to a single idea; but it is a definite idea. He naturally builds a rather unbalanced system with his one definite idea. But I cannot see why there should be a better chance for a man trying to build up a balanced system with one indefinite idea. And universality is not only an indefinite idea. Universality is also a narrow idea. It is all on one note; it is not the true harmony; which is the right proportion of the universal and the particular. ‘God is not infinity,’ said Coventry Patmore profoundly; ‘He is the synthesis of infinity and boundary.’

There are two other difficulties I feel in this glorification of world government. One is the very simple fact that the real difficulty of representative government is how to make it represent, even in the smallest of small nationalities, even in the nearest parish council. Why we should talk as if we should have more influence over rulers governing the whole earth from Geneva or Chicago I have never been able to see. Mr. Wells can spread himself in describing how ‘world controls’ would control us. He seems relatively vague about how we should control them. The other objection is less simple and would need a more atmospheric description; but it is even more real. Mr. Wells is driven to perpetual disparagement of patriotism and militant memories, and yet his appeal is always to the historic pride of man. Now nearly all normal men have in fact received their civilization through their citizenship; and to lose their past would be to lose their link with mankind. An Englishman who is not English is not European; a Frenchman who is not fully French is not fully human. Nations have not always been seals or stoppers closing up the ancient wine of the world; they have been the vessels that received it. And, as with many ancient vessels, each of them is a work of art.

XVII. On the Closed Conspiracy

IN a comparison of Socialism with the scheme of society going by the name of Distributism, an authoritative writer on such topics has very kindly remarked that, while Mr. Wells is working for an Open Conspiracy, there is much that is interesting in my experiment of a Closed Conspiracy. Indeed, Distributism is rather too open to be a conspiracy at all. It is comparatively easy to organize on behalf of mere organization. It is much harder to drill independent individuals to fight in defence of independence. Nothing can be less conspiratorial than a voice crying in the wilderness. And even when the wilderness begins to be dotted with hermits, they still retain some of the faults and eccentricities of hermits. Even when, in the course of history, the hermits are brigaded into brotherhoods of monks, something of the solitude and mysticism of the eremitical life lingers in the background. I am well aware of all these difficulties in any movement that springs from the liberty of the lonely human soul. Monks, though they call themselves the slaves of slaves, are never the slaves of masters. And a peasantry is never like a tenantry, or, for that matter, a trade union, individually bound to sacrifice liberty to loyalty. Wherever we have a peasantry, we shall have some pretty queer and crazy peasants. Wherever we have a Distributive State, we shall have some tolerably troublesome Distributists.

Nevertheless, the writer is correct in her use of the expression ‘closed’, in the sense that I do definitely, as a general principle, believe in Enclosures. I could not sum up my own political philosophy more compactly and completely than by saying that I do believe in Enclosures. Needless to say, I mean it in the old peasant sense of a man enclosing his own land; not in the more aristocratic and advanced sense of a man enclosing everybody else’s land. I believe, in the old Scriptural sense, that there is indeed a supreme supernatural and natural curse clinging to the man who removes his neighbour’s landmark. Of course, as the writer in question hints, this belief in Enclosure, or lines of division between this and that, rests on a more general theory of truth and falsehood than any particular principles about land or landmarks. There is in all that universal philosophy of Mr. H. G. Wells an assumption which he has never really tried to prove, and which I think it would be much easier to disprove. In all that Open Conspiracy there is the notion that the opening of all doors and windows is always an advantage; which is no more self-evidently true of a human civilization than it is of a house or a hospital. It is often highly desirable to let cool air into a room. But it is not always desirable to cool the room; it is not even always true that opening the window does cool the room. The men of the Mediterranean keep their rooms cool by shutting the windows and not by opening them. By this means they preserve the cold, refreshing air of the morning through the long, intolerant and intolerable heat of day. They turn their rooms into tanks of morning air, through hours when opening a window would be loosening the blast of a furnace. These things also are an allegory, and would explain many things that moderns do not understand about simplicity and the preservation of childhood. But, apart from any particular parable, it is obviously not common sense to say that good results from the mere mixing of anything with anything, the mere pouring in of any wind through any window, the mere pouring of any fluid into any flood.

Anyhow, some of us do disbelieve in that sort of unity. We do not think a picture will be a better picture because all the colours run, however freely and largely they run into each other. We do not believe that a dinner will always be a better dinner because all the liquors and liqueurs are successively poured into the soup; or that our taste and enjoyment will really be widened by mixing the coffee with the claret or the vermouth with the port. We believe in certain Enclosures, called ‘courses’, or appropriate selections from the *carte des vins*, being actually interposed to prevent all these separate pleasures from flowing into each other. We do not believe that every tennis-court should be flooded to turn it into a swimming-bath, and people be forced to play tennis only in the water (that the two sports may be unified and made one); we should not hesitate to erect artificial Enclosures, in the form of walls and partitions, around baths, bath-rooms, swimming-pools, and similar things, lest this one delight should end in a universal Deluge. We should not shrink even from marking out, on the grass or the ground, the severe and restricting limits of the tennis-court, discouraging enthusiasts from playing tennis all over the billiard-room and the progressive whist-party, lest one good custom should corrupt the world, as the first Lord Tennyson observed. In short, we have a curious notion, firmly fixed in our heads, that Enclosures do play a highly practical and profitable part in the real life of this world; and that the mere destruction of them is not the destruction of mere negative taboos, but the destruction of positive creations, positive achievements, positive arts and pleasures of life.

And in the same way we think that a mere philosophy of unification, of mixing sex with sex or nation with nation or style with style, is altogether a paltry, sterile, and provincial simplification; no more truly intellectual than the act of a baby in mixing all the paints in a paint-box or stirring five or six things together with a spoon.

That is the principle behind the philosophy of Enclosures; and there is no space here to develop in detail the sociological application of it, that some of us call Distributism. Mr. H. G. Wells's general philosophy, in such things, seems to be a mere desire for largeness, under the impression that it is enlargement. He has only got to get stuck firmly in the middle of a large crowd in order to learn that largeness may be the very opposite of enlargement. There is one thing that a man does in a reasonable degree want to have large — or, at any rate, to have larger. And that is elbow-room, which our pedantic political ancestors were in the habit of calling Freedom. I doubt whether the modern American advice to everybody to elbow his way has really resulted in more elbow-room. I do believe that many rude and simple social types were better in this respect, though I do not necessarily mean that they were better in every respect. And I believe that upon this alone could be founded that just and normal though now almost forgotten thing, the real defence of Private Property, which has no more to do with profiteering than with privateering. It is the essential principle that a man does not even own his own elbows unless he owns a room large enough for them, that he does not own his own legs unless he has liberty to stretch them; or own his own feet unless he owns the soil on which they stand.

XVIII. On Current Claptrap

IT is not often that we find the one book that ought to be written, written by the one man who ought to write it. The Abbé Dimnet is a distinguished French authority who has made a very lucid and most timely pronouncement on the Art of Thinking, for want of which the whole modern world was going mad. He suggests, with very sympathetic insight, that there is something not only accidental but needless about the vast amount of the dull claptrap that makes up current culture. It is not really because thinking is not a normal human function; but because so many have never been encouraged to discover how normal and human it is. Almost any man, he argues, may have a flash in which he feels ‘ ”I am in a rut, I know, but if I would make the least effort, move only one line, say: henceforth I will talk no more nonsense, in an instant I could be outside the herd of the unthinking.” . . . A trifle, a mere nothing, the buzz of a fly or the bang of a door may be enough to disturb this mood and bring back commonplace thoughts in full force; but it is no less true that, during a few moments, we have been separated from a higher mental life only by a vision which we realized was within reach and by an effort which did not seem to be an exertion. All this amounts to saying that we have a natural belief in the existence of an Art of Thinking. Some men possess it; others not; but those who do not possess it must blame themselves’.

There lies on the table before me, side by side with this luminous and temperate statement of the French thinker, an invitation to join a movement for Peace and Progress Throughout the World, which a number of men more distinguished than myself seem to have already joined. And I cannot help feeling a faint curiosity, in reading the terms of such appeals, about whether these distinguished men and their friends ever have sat down suddenly and said, ‘I am in a rut, I know, but if I would make the least effort ...’ For it seems to me that what is the matter with the modern world, distinguished men and all, is that they have allowed their minds to be completely cluttered up with a lumber of language, some of it the legacy of old blunders, some of it suited to old conditions which no longer exist. There are any number of phrases which everybody speaks and nobody hears. There are any number of phrases which when they were used the first time may have meant something, and which are now used for the millionth time because they mean nothing. I will take one example out of a thousand, an example which happens to occur in the idealistic document of which I have spoken. I mean the expression about being ready to welcome ‘men of every race and creed’.

Now the modern tragedy of man is that he does not stop and start when he has used those words, and gaze at them with a wild surmise, and cry distractedly, ‘My God! what am I saying?’ For he really does not know what he is saying. He is classing together two things as if they were obviously in the same class, when they have obviously never been in the same category. This does not mean that a man may not feel fraternity or charity for men of every race and creed, as he may for men with every sort of heaven and hat, or with every type of truthfulness and trousers, or with every variety of saintly self- sacrifice and taste in tobacco. But the things have nothing particular to do with each other; there is no sort of reason why they should go together; and the phrase is based on the assumption that they must always go together. Race and creed are linked in the language, like pots and pans, or sticks and straws, or boots and shoes, or any other recognized grouping of things of the same type. But they are no more things of the same type than adenoids and algebra.

When we talk of somebody’s creed, we mean certain convictions which must have some relation to our own convictions: either in confirming them, or contradicting them, or agreeing or disagreeing with them in various degrees. We may not burn ourselves up with missionary zeal to convert a Mormon or a worshipper of Mumbo-Jumbo; but we do regard it as conceivable that he might be converted. And we do most probably think we know of something that would be an improvement on Mormonism or Mumbo-Jumbo. Anyhow, we know he holds his creed with his mind; and he might possibly change his mind. We do not expect the Ethiopian to change his skin. We do not expect the Chinaman to cease to be a Mongolian when he ceases to be a Confucian. It is as if we were to talk about having no prejudice of colour; and then to class a Red Indian with a Red Republican. It is as if we were to extend the same loving welcome to the Yellow Peril and the Yellow Press. It is simply a confusion; but it is one of a million confusions that are now making confusion worse confounded. I only take it as a small working model, because without a working model the modern mind cannot see how things work.

The welcome we offer to men of any belief must be in its nature different from that we offer to men of any blood. If only for the simple reason that, if a man may believe anything, he may believe in the badness of all blood except his own blood. You may associate with him and his race, simply considered as a race. But if it is a Chosen Race, he may not associate with you. His thoughts, whatever they are, must determine everything about his relations with you; whereas the colour of his skin may be in most relations quite irrelevant. I rather fancy that ‘colour’ and ‘creed’ have come to be associated by mere alliteration and have no more rational relation than whiskers and wisdom. If a Chinaman and I discuss Proportional Representation (which God forbid!) it is in the hope that one or other will at least be intellectually influenced; but not in the hope that I shall turn yellow or he will turn pink.

Now, if any one will pick up a paper or a page of modern writing, and look at it carefully, he will find it is a pastiche or mosaic of meaningless combinations of that sort. As a preliminary exercise, before the more subtle exercises of the French philosopher’s manual, I recommend this experiment. The catch words are generally, indeed, used more or less unconsciously, in the service of some false philosophy. In this case it is the base and servile creed that creeds are as inevitable and incurable as black faces or Eskimo skulls. It is the theory that we must all reconcile ourselves to thinking differently, because no thinking is any good and it is better not to think at all. It is out of that unmanly despair that such unthinking expressions arise; the thoughtless phrase out of the thoughtless philosophy. But there is, after all, nothing but a contradiction in terms in a thoughtless philosophy; and especially in a philosophy directed against thought. Fortunately, we can all think, whether we are red, black, or yellow; and that is the only true beginning of Peace and Progress throughout the World.

XIX. On Evil Euphemisms

SOMEBODY has sent me a book on Companionate Marriage; so called because the people involved are not married and will very rapidly cease to be companions. I have no intention of discussing here that somewhat crude colonial project. I will merely say that it is here accompanied with sub-titles and other statements about the rising generation and the revolt of youth. And it seems to me exceedingly funny that, just when the rising generation boasts of not being sentimental, when it talks of being very scientific and sociological — at that very moment everybody seems to have forgotten altogether what was the social use of marriage and to be thinking wholly and solely of the sentimental. The practical purposes mentioned as the first two reasons for marriage, in the Anglican marriage ser vice, seem to have gone completely out of sight for some people, who talk as if there were nothing but a rather wild version of the third, which may relatively be called romantic. And this, if you please, is supposed to be an emancipation from Victorian sentiment and romance.

But I only mention this matter as one of many, and one which illustrates a still more curious contradiction in this modern claim. We are perpetually being told that this rising generation is very frank and free, and that its whole social ideal is frankness and freedom. Now I am not at all afraid of frankness. What I am afraid of is fickleness. And there is a truth in the old proverbial connexion between what is fickle and what is false. There is in the very titles and terminology of all this sort of thing a pervading element of falsehood. Everything is to be called something that it is not; as in the characteristic example of Companionate Marriage. Every thing is to be recommended to the public by some sort of synonym which is really a pseudonym. It is a talent that goes with the time of electioneering and advertisement and newspaper headlines; but what ever else such a time may be, it certainly is not specially a time of truth.

In short, these friends of frankness depend almost entirely on Euphemism. They introduce their horrible heresies under new and carefully complimentary names; as the Furies were called the Eumenides. The names are always flattery; the names are also nonsense. The name of Birth-Control, for instance, is sheer nonsense. Everybody has always exercised birth-control; even when they were so paradoxical as to permit the process to end in a birth. Everybody has always known about birth-control, even if it took the wild and unthinkable form of self-control. The question at issue concerns different forms of birth-prevention; and I am not going to debate it here. But if I did debate it, I would call it by its name. The same is true of an older piece of sentiment indulged in by the frank and free: the expression ‘Free Love’. That also is a Euphemism; that is, it is a refusal of people to say what they mean. In that sense, it is impossible to prevent love being free, but the moral problem challenged concerns not the passions, but the will. There are a great many other examples of this sort of polite fiction; these respectable disguises adopted by those who are always railing against respectability. In the immediate future there will probably be more still. There really seems no necessary limit to the process; and however far the anarchy of ethics may go, it may always be accompanied with this curious and pompous ceremonial. The sensitive youth of the future will never be called upon to accept Forgery as Forgery. It will be easy enough to call it Homoeography or Script-Assimilation or something else that would suggest, to the simple or the superficial, that nothing was involved but a sort of socializing or unification of individual handwriting. We should not, like the more honest Mr. Fagin, teach little boys to pick pockets; for Mr. Fagin becomes far less honest when he becomes Professor Faginski, the great sociologist, of the University of Jena. But we should call it by some name implying the transference of something; I cannot at the moment remember the Greek either for pocket or pocket-handkerchief. As for the social justification of murder, that has already begun; and earnest thinkers had better begin at once to think about a nice inoffensive name for it. The case for murder, on modern relative and evolutionary ethics, is quite overwhelming. There is hardly one of us who does not, in looking round his or her social circle, recognize some chatty person or energetic social character whose disappearance, without undue fuss or farewell, would be a bright event for us all, Nor is it true that such a person is dangerous only because he wields unjust legal or social powers. The problem is often purely psychological, and not in the least legal; and no legal emancipations would solve it. Nothing would solve it but the introduction of that new form of liberty which we may agree to call, perhaps, the practice of Social Subtraction. Or, if we like, we can model the new name on the other names I have mentioned. We may call it Life-Control or Free Death; or anything else that has as little to do with the point of it as Companionate Marriage has to do with either marriage or companionship.

Anyhow, I respectfully refuse to be impressed by the claim to candour and realism put forward just now for men, women, and movements. It seems to me obvious that this is not really the age of audacity but merely of advertisement; which may rather be described as caution kicking up a fuss. Much of the mistake arises from the double sense of the word publicity. For publicity also is a thoroughly typical euphemism or evasive term. Publicity does not mean revealing public life in the interests of public spirit. It means merely flattering private enterprises in the interests of private persons. It means paying compliments in public; but not offering criticisms in public. We should all be very much surprised if we walked out of our front-door one morning and saw a hoarding on one side of the road saying, ‘Use Miggle’s Milk; It Is All Cream’, and a hoarding on the other side of the road inscribed, ‘Don’t Use Miggle’s Milk; It’s Nearly All Water’. The modern world would be much upset if I were allowed to set up a flaming sky-sign proclaiming my precise opinion of the Colonial Port Wine praised in the flaming sign opposite. All this advertisement may have some thing to do with the freedom of trade; but it has nothing to do with the freedom of truth. Publicity must be praise and praise must to some extent be euphemism. It must put the matter in a milder and more inoffensive form than it might be put, however much that mildness may seem to shout through megaphones or flare in headlines. And just as this sort of loud evasion is used in favour of bad wine and bad milk, so it is used in favour of bad morals. When somebody wishes to wage a social war against what all normal people have regarded as a social decency, the very first thing he does is to find some artificial term that shall sound relatively decent. He has no more of the real courage that would pit vice against virtue than the ordinary advertiser has the courage to advertise ale as arsenic. His intelligence, such as it is, is entirely a commercial intelligence and to that extent entirely conventional. He is a shop-keeper who dresses the shop-window; he is certainly the very reverse of a rebel or a rioter who breaks the shop-window. If only for this reason, I remain cold and decline the due reverence to Cornpanionate Marriage and the book which speaks so reverentially about the Revolt of Youth. For this sort of revolt strikes me as nothing except revolting; and certainly not particularly realistic. With the passions which are natural to youth we all sympathize; with the pain that often arises from loyalty and duty we all sympathize still more; but nobody need sympathize with publicity experts picking pleasant expressions for unpleasant things; and I for one prefer the coarse language of our fathers.

XX. On Encyclopaedias

ON turning my attention to the subject of Encyclopaedias, and generally to projects for providing general information, I am struck by certain rather neglected problems in the nature of information itself. There is considerable activity at present in the scattering of a certain sort of information. Any magazine or newspaper is likely to contain a sort of examination paper, trustingly accompanied by a crib. Sometimes the paper is so printed and arranged that the answers actually come before the questions. But all that is a matter of what is called ‘make-up’ and can safely be trusted to the hard headed, practical, successful men who have made-up the paper. Sometimes they seem to have made up the answers as well as the questions. But we all know the general character of the questions. On any such page of any such paper we may encounter the challenge: ‘At what date did a dentist suffer death for his theological opinions?’ or, ‘What deadly poison is a by-product of crushed strawberries?’ or, ‘What is the income of Mr. Henry Ford reckoned in ancient Greek drachmae?’ But pressing and practical as these questions are, for any one living an active modern life, there are difficulties connected with the correct answering of many of them: difficulties not always appreciated either by those who ask or these who answer.

Two general impressions from a study of such encyclopaedic knowledge strike me at the moment. One is that there are many more things that are mere matters of opinion, and much fewer things that are mere matters of fact, than many of these people suppose. Another is that even the best information is very seldom the latest information It is a commonplace that encyclopaedias tend too rapidly to get out of date It is said that a very valuable encyclopaedia was pressed upon the public some years ago, and it was only at the last moment that somebody mildly remonstrated against an article on French history, from which it would appear that Napoleon the Third is still on the throne of France. But that was when the matter was in the hands of a really brisk and bustling business man. And things managed by hustlers are always behind the times. Things are better than that now, being largely in the hands of educated people who can afford the time for a proper comprehension of the times. But even in the very latest and lightest forms of ephemeral journalism there is some tendency for this fossilization to take place; and even to take place rather rapidly. I do not say that in all cases the delay can be avoided. I do not say that in all cases the hustlers can be blamed. Sometimes the latest news would be too late. Sometimes it would be too libellous. But, knowing what I know, or what we all know, about the realities of England to-day, I cannot but think that most of the latest news describes the England of twenty years ago. Perhaps this is defensible and makes for stability and social continuity; but it does not exactly make for people knowing where they are.

I have just opened a magazine on a page full of these questions, and I am struck by the fact that I should myself give very different answers. It is even possible in some cases that the paper would not print my answers. But I am not now provoking controversy; I am merely pointing out that many things are controversial that are supposed to be non-controversial. And I am pointing out that in almost every case the change recorded is not really the last, but rather the last but one. On the page before me one question concerns the pawnbroker’s sign; another the date of the Eiffel Tower; the third the meaning of the Parliamentary term ‘Whip’. Now, modest as is my stock of knowledge, I knew that the three balls were originally the blazonry of the Lombard merchant princes. But I should not think it the chief point of the position that what had been the coat of arms of great lords had come down to be a dingy shop-sign for dirty moneylenders. I should reverse the argument, and point out that it is even more interesting to know that the dirty moneylenders are now once more being given titles and coats of arms. I should not merely point out that the Lombard princes had lost their escutcheon to people as humble as the pawn brokers; I should point out that the pawnbrokers may now again become as proud as the princes. That is the latest news; that is the real modern information; that is what is interesting about the present practical state of affairs. The other fact is interesting enough in its way; but it is merely ancient history, and even ancient heraldry. Or, again, it is reasonably interesting to know that the Eiffel Tower was put up at the time of the Paris Exhibition. But it is even more interesting to know that the Eiffel Tower was put up just before the time of the Panama Scandal; and that Eiffel himself got into very hot water, while many of his colleagues or co-workers fled the country or became bywords for fraud. For that story is a part of the really vital and important story of the modern war against political corruption; a struggle that has already had its sequel in Rome and may yet have its sequel in Paris. I do not know whether a reaction in Paris would knock down the Eiffel Tower; though I am sure I hope so. But I do know that there may be a culmination as sensational in the life of the country as the fall of the Eiffel Tower would be in the landscape. But this sort of thing, which might be called the inner history of the Eiffel Tower, is not generally the sort of history provided in this popular information. I do not say it can be, or ought to be; but I do say that it makes a difference to popular education that it is not.

And so it is with the third example, out of our own politics. The public is duly informed that a Whip is so called from the practice of whipping-in, as applied to the mobilizing of all available party votes, and the discipline that drives them into the right Lobby. But though this is still true, and still perhaps rather unfortunately true, it is by no means the most modern truth or the most modern misfortune. The Whip nowadays is not primarily the man who merely looks after the telling of votes passing into the right Lobby. The Whip nowadays is primarily the man who looks after the Party Fund, and conducts a number of highly dubious negotiations about it in the matter of titles and political concessions. This is the latest use of the office; this is the most recent meaning of the word. But because it is really recent it is not a part of what is called Information. Because it is the latest news it is not in the latest editions. Thus there arises, in connexion with this new popular game of ‘How Much Do You Know?’ a query not about how much the public knows but about how much the questioner knows. There is also, of course, the question of how much the questioner may think it tactful to tell of what he knows.

In the case of encyclopaedias, and similar works of reference, it is perfectly natural that the writers should avoid all that seems controversial or paradoxical, or can be regarded as a matter of opinion, to say nothing of whim. But, at the best, it is very difficult to mention even common facts apart from controversial feelings. Many things which most of the readers, and even the writers, of such a book would honestly suppose to be self-evident, are very disputable indeed to those who happen to be the disputants. The truth is that there did underlie the latter half of the nineteenth century, at least in this country, a vague common agreement in philosophy. But it is by no means true to-day that all philosophers agree with that agreement. Nor was it true before the nineteenth century, any more than after the century. It may be well to remember the real history of the word Encyclopaedia; and in the dawn of what destructive revolution it appeared in the world. The Encyclopaedists were no more impartial than the

Bolshevists. They were a band of fighters determined to uproot and renew. And though the making of a dictionary sounds to us a mild occupation, Dr. Johnson was by no means a mild person, and sometimes almost made it a slang dictionary, when he had a chance of slinging abuse at the Whigs.

XXI. On Preaching

NO journalist will complain of the journalistic necessity of occasionally changing a title, or, especially, abbreviating a title. If I choose to head an article, *An Inquiry into the Conditions of Mycenaean Civilization in the Heroic Epoch, with Special Reference to the Economic and Domestic Functions of Women Before and After the Conjectural Date of the Argive Expedition against Troy* — if, I say, I choose to give my article some snappy little title like that, I really have no right to complain if (when I send it to the *Chicago Daily Scoop*) they alter the title to *How Helen Did the Housekeeping*. And even in milder cases the transformation is often unavoidable; especially if some thing intended for the serious book public has to be transferred to the more impetuous newspaper-reading public. But, however harmless the change may be, it is sometimes of a certain intellectual interest. For example, I myself was asked some time ago to write a sort of ethical essay on the theme *If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach*. When, in the course of events, it came to appear in a daily paper, it appeared under the title, *If I Were a Preacher*. I do not in the least complain of that; it was obviously a mere matter of space and simplification. All the same, there is a difference. ‘If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach’ presents the pleasing spectacle of myself gagged and rendered speechless for the greater part of my life. It consoles humanity with the prospect of my never talking at all for twenty or thirty years on end; it almost approaches to the ideal or Utopian condition of my being deaf and dumb. But it supposes that the gag is taken out of my mouth once and once only, and I am allowed a short space in which to offer the reflections of a taciturn lifetime. Taking the matter in this sense, I dealt directly with the most deadly moral danger in my experience of mankind: the danger of egoism and spiritual pride. If I had only one moment in which to shout one warning, I should shout that one, and thereafter for ever hold my peace.

But ‘If I Were a Preacher’ is quite a different idea. That presents, not the reassuring image of myself safely gagged and throttled until the inevitable hour shall come, but the menacing and unwelcome image of myself let loose to talk in a pulpit as long as I like, and to preach as a professional occupation. It offers, not the brief and salutary irritation of hearing me deliver one sermon, but the long vista of despair implied in my delivering an indefinite number of sermons. Above all, my own attitude would necessarily be entirely different in the two cases. Instead of concentrating what I really had to say in one address upon one text, I should have to proceed, like any other professional preacher, to search the Scriptures for more and more texts, and my mind for more and more sermons. And, though a great deal of nonsense has been talked about the unfair authority of the preacher (which is really much less illogical than the unfair anonymity of the pressman), it is true that in one sense the preacher has an advantage, or at least his congregation a disadvantage. While it might well be a beautiful sight to see the congregation gradually thinning away as my sermon proceeded from Fourthly to Fifthly, it is, as a matter of fact, unusual for people to rise in the front pews, with ostentatious yawns and in large numbers, and to walk out of the church to express their lack of enthusiasm for the sermon. Perhaps the best form of protest was that of the man who took off his boots and put them outside the pew, to indicate that he had had enough and was now retiring to rest. But humorists of that heroic type are very rare. The congregation is commonly kept in its place, by reverence or by convention; and in that sense everybody has to listen to the sermon. But nobody has to read this article unless he wants to; and I should not imagine that anybody ever did.

The distinction between being a preacher and having one sermon to preach is, however, of some practical interest in raising a point about preaching. I mean merely about the technical or professional aspect of preaching; which would naturally be considered by the man who was for some reason doomed to be a preacher. If I had originally written my article to fit that title, it would have been quite a different business. Preaching, in that sense, is no business of mine; but listening, or trying to listen, is the business of nearly everybody. And there really is something to be said about the probable or prefer able preliminaries of being a preacher; and even here, in another place and another connexion, it may possibly be worth while to say it. Anyhow, I propose to say it; principally because it would seem to be the exact opposite of what everybody is now saying. For the preacher, like everybody else, is receiving practical advice: and, as with everybody else, it is always exactly the wrong advice. He is told, of course, to eschew ‘creed and dogma’; which will soon, I imagine, be stereotyped and turned into one word, ‘creedanddogma’ so regularly and mechanically is it repeated. I could never discover what the journalists who use this form imagine that creeds and dogmas are. I could never understand what a prominent and successful journalist meant when he said that prayer had no sort of relation with any creed or dogma. He added that any agnostic could pray: one felt he was just about to add that any atheist could pray. What all this is supposed to mean, I have no idea. To any atheist, to any rational rationalist, it would be at once obvious that prayer does depend on two or three quite definite dogmas. First, it implies that there is an invisible being, who can hear our prayer without ordinary material communication; which is a dogma. Second, it implies that the being is benevolent and not hostile; which is also a dogma. Third, it implies that he is not limited by the logic of causation, but can act with reference to our action; which is a great thundering dogma. But I merely give this as a passing example of the first fallacy in the advice to preachers. The preacher is told to cast aside all systems and speak out of his own heart, or (in favour able cases) out of his own head. It does not seem to occur to these critics that they are making the priest or preacher much more important than he was before. They are demanding from him a genius and originality which cannot be expected from all the individual members of any profession. The poor ordinary parson is not allowed to teach what he has learnt, a certain system of religious thought. But he is expected, all by himself, to be a sort of compound of Savonarola and Swedenborg and M. Coué. All men are not born mesmerists or prose poets or persons of magnetic personality. But all men can expound a rational scheme of religion and morals, if there is one to expound.

The truth is that creed and dogma are the only things that make preaching tolerable. A system of thought can be explained by any reasonably thinking man; but it does not follow that the thinking man is a thinker. The case is very much the same as that of the medical authority of the general practitioner. We do not expect every ordinary G.P. to be a person like Pasteur or Lister or some great medical discoverer. But we do expect him to know the system he has been taught; the creed and dogma of his profession. To tell the priest to throw away theology and impress us with his personality, is exactly like telling the doctor to throw away physiology and merely hypnotize us with his glittering eye. People are very fond of making unjust complaints about preachers, as they are of making equally unjust com plaints about doctors. But they have not yet got so far as complaining of doctors because they know their business, and because they regard it as a science. And the preacher, even the very worst preacher, would be infinitely more empty and dreary than he is if he had never regarded theology as a science. What makes his preaching tolerable, at its worst, is that he is, after all, in some sense giving us the thoughts of great men like St. Paul or St. Augustine, or even Calvin, and not merely the thoughts of a small man unassisted by any tradition of greatness. I do not know what advice will be given to the preacher by most of the distinguished persons who will probably advise him. But a melancholy familiarity with most current thought, or thoughtlessness, leads me to advise him to listen to it, and then do the opposite.

XXII. On the Timid Thinkers

I SHOULD like to write a book under the general title of The Timid Thinkers. By this term I refer to those who are commonly called The Bold Thinkers. For what strikes me most about the sceptics, who are praised as daring and audacious, is that they dare not carry out any of their own acts of audacity. It is their peculiar feature that they are always starting something that is intended to be very striking, and then being willing to wound and yet afraid to strike. I do not mean that they are base enough to be merely afraid of our law; quite as often they are really afraid of their own lawlessness. But they are afraid; in the sense that they hardly ever venture to complete their own argument. Some of these men I admire, some I find rather tiresome, which is about as near as I get to really resenting them. But I think that what I say of them is true. They are emphatically not men who carry a destructive idea through to its logical consequences; they are men who throw it out like a firework, but do not really wait for it to work its full destruction like a bomb. It is typical that some types of thinkers are called suggestive thinkers. But it is easy enough to suggest something, and leave it to be found unworkable by other people; as it is easy for a little boy to ring a bell and run away. The little boy ringing the bell is doubtless in one sense a rebel defying authority. But he is not quite on a level with the paladins or heroes who blew the horn hung outside the giant's castle; because they remained to thrash things out in a thoughtful manner with the giant.

Now there are a number of nihilistic phrases wandering about in the air to-day, but those phrases are never really developed into philosophies. If they were, those particular phrases would probably be found to develop into patently absurd philosophies. A man in the time of the Schopenhauer fashion would say, over the tea-cups, that life is not worth living, and he would go on to say something equally significant; as that Pingle's rondeau in the *Yellow Book* was an immortal thing of jade and emerald; or that Jubb of the New English Art Club had erased the mistake called Michelangelo. But he would not go on to say, as a serious thesis, that prussic acid should be served out at tea-time instead of tea; or that hospitals should be blown up on the charge that they sometimes save people's lives. In short, he would talk like a pessimist, but he would not think like a pessimist; above all, he would not complete his pessimistic thinking. Pessimism of that sort is now rather old-fashioned, but it was not full or final even when it was fashionable. And exactly the same suggestive or fragmentary character belongs to the other things that have been fashionable since. A man says to-day, over the cocktails, that he is a Boishevist and believes with Marx that men must be what their economic and material origins make them. He goes on to remark casually something suitable to the same social atmosphere; as that the music of the future must consist entirely of factory-hooters and gas-explosions, or that Mossky's bust of Lady Smith is supreme in its lack of likeness and its collision of five geometric planes. But he will not go on to apply seriously his own line of logic; as that Lenin is no more to be admired than Stolypin, since both only did what they were materially fated to do. Men throw out these thoughts — if at that stage they can be called thoughts — but they do not think them out; and they soon grow tired of any thinking.

A great thinker spends half his life in explaining his theory and the other half in explaining it away. As a matter of fact, most of the advanced have thus retired; or those who strode forward stopped or stepped back. Even Mr. Bernard Shaw, who seems to grow more right every day, began so very wrong that he could not himself avoid putting himself right. He once denounced all general ideals for the testing of particular actions, and said that the only golden rule is that there is no golden rule. In theory he was purely opportunist; that is, in theory he was against all theories. But even in some of his earliest quarrels, such as that on Vivisection, he was not really opportunist at all. He was obviously acting on the general principle that the ideal of Mercy must overrule all opportunism. The good old golden rule was back in all its glory; and even frogs and guinea-pigs must profit by the universal commandment to do as we would be done by. Shaw has never carried through any Shavian philosophy; he has expanded, but at the expense of his theory not being extended. As for Wells, he has had so many theories that he would need to borrow the three hundred years of Methuselah from Shaw, in order to fulfil any of them. But, any how, he has not fulfilled any of them. Mr. Britling did not see it through: that is exactly what the Wellsian heroes do not do.

It is the same with nearly all the great men of the sceptical school. People talk of the pessimism of Thomas Hardy as ruthless; and in its artistic method it was ruthless, often at the expense of reason and probability. But if he changed spiritually, it was always towards feeling less of the ruthlessness and more of the ruth. I should be very much surprised to learn that Hardy, especially in later life, was really a pessimist at all. His theory, as a theory, is not very clear or complete; but I am sure he did not become more clear or more complete, in the sense of more convinced of a dogma of despair. Consciously or unconsciously, the tendency is almost always the other way. Hardy recoiled from the Hardy philosophy, just as Shaw recoiled from the Shaw philosophy, and most of the anarchs and atheists recoil from the anarchist and atheist philosophy. Much of their later ingenuity is employed in trying to mend with their wisdom what they have broken with their wit. It is so easy to say something to start with that sounds splendidly sensible, and so difficult afterwards to reconcile it with common sense. A man like Mr. Arnold Bennett will say that nobody should be praised or blamed, because temperamental tendencies are so inevitable. But a man like Mr. Arnold Bennett has no more intention than I have of really walking, in broad daylight, through the real world, without ever blaming or praising anybody. All this that calls itself Modern Thought is a series of false starts and belated stop pages. It starts by believing in nothing, and it ends by getting nowhere. But the point is that, even if it ever gets anywhere, it no longer even tries to get where it originally wanted to go.

The explanation, as I have said, is simple enough. Anybody can throw out a suggestion, in the sense of throwing away a suggestion. The brilliant books of Mr. H. G. Wells almost entirely consist of suggestions that he has thrown away. But it is very different if the idea comes back like a boomerang to the hand, and we do not always find it easy to handle. The negative writers of the nineteenth-century tradition were always creating a sensation by offering to abolish something, or (like Bakunin) to abolish everything. But that sort of generalization is only a sensation; it is not really a system. It is a facile triumph to reveal the great truth that all men are really quadrupeds. The difficulty is, as life goes on and love and friendship become more subtle or many-sided, to live a complete human existence while still going about on all fours. It is great fun to thrill the mob by saying it consists entirely of suicidal maniacs; the difficulty is what to do next, except commit suicide. What generally happens is that great men gradually grow sane; and, having begun ‘with the enjoyment of being extraordinary, end with the more mystical beatitude of becoming ordinary. They begin each with his own wild and generally inhuman philosophy; but by the end they have, in a sense somewhat different from that of the old phrase, joined the religion of all sensible men.

XXIII. On the Mythology of Scientists

W HAT I venture to criticize in certain men, whom some call scientists and I call materialists, is their perpetual use of Mythology. One half of what they say is so true as to be trite; the other half of what they say is so untrue as to be transparent. But they cover both their platitudes and their pretences by an elaborate parade of legendary and allegorical images. I read this in some remarks on Darwinism by one of the last surviving Darwinians: ‘Among the individuals of every species there goes on, as Malthus had realized, a competition or struggle for the means of life, and Nature selects the individuals which vary in the most successful direction.’ Now when men of the old religions said that God chose a people or raised up a prophet, at least they meant something; and they meant what they said. They meant that a being with a mind and a will used them in an act of selection. But who is Nature, and how does she, or he, or it, manage to select anything or anybody? All that the writer actually has to say is that some individuals do emerge when other individuals are extinguished. it hardly needed either Darwin or Darwinians to tell us that. But Nature selecting those that vary in the most successful direction means nothing whatever, except that the successful succeed. But this tautological truism is wrapped up in clouds of mythology, by the introduction of a mythical being whom even the writer regards as a myth. The reader is to be impressed and deluded by the vision of a vast stone goddess sitting on a mountain throne, and pointing at a particular frog or rabbit and saying, in tones of thunder, that this alone is to survive. All we know is that it does survive (for the moment), and then we pride ourselves on being able to repeat the mere fact that it does survive in half a hundred variegated and flowery expressions: as that it has survival value; or that it is naturally selected for survival; or that it survives because it is the fittest for survival; or that Nature’s great law of the survival of the fittest sternly commands it to survive. The critics of religion used to say that its mysteries were mummeries; but these things are in the special and real sense mummeries. They are things offered to a credulous congregation by priests who know them to be mummeries. It is impossible to prove that the priests know that there is no god in the shrine, or no truth in the oracle. But we know that the materialist knows that there is no such thing as a large fastidious lady, called Nature, who points a finger at a frog.

The particular case in which this mythological metaphor was used is of course another matter. It is, indeed, a matter which has involved at various times a great deal of this element of materialist mythology. To see what truth was really in it we should have to go back to the old Darwinian debate; which I have not the least intention of doing here. But I may observe, in passing, that this notion of Nature selecting things is specially incompatible with all that can really be said for their own case; and that the very name of natural selection is a most unnatural name for it. For it is their whole case that everything happened, in the ordinary human sense, by accident. We should rather call it coincidence; and some of us call it quite incredible coincidence. But, anyhow, the whole case for it is that one quadruped happened to have a longer neck, and happened to live at a moment when it was necessary to reach a taller tree or shrub. If these happenings happen to happen about a hundred times in succession, in exactly the same way, you can by that process turn some sort of sheep or goat into a giraffe. Whether this is probable or not is another question. But the whole Darwinian argument is that it is not a case of Nature selecting, any more than of God selecting, or any one else selecting, but a case of things falling out in that fashion. We are quite ready to discuss trees and giraffes in their place, without perpetual references to God. Could the materialists not so far control their rhetorical and romantic sentimentalism as to do it without perpetual reference to Nature? Shall we make a bargain: that we will for the moment leave out our theology, if they will leave out their mythology?

But the mythological habit is not entirely and exclusively confined to men of science, or even to materialists. This sort of mythology is rather generally scattered over the modern world. The popular form of the mythological is the metaphorical. Certain figures of speech are fixed in the modern mind, exactly as the fables of the gods and nymphs were fixed in the mind of pagan antiquity. It is astonishing to note how often, when we address a man with anything resembling an idea, he answers with some recognized metaphor, supposed to be appropriate to the case. If you say to him, ‘I myself prefer the principle of the Guild to the principle of the Trust,’ he will not answer you by talking about principles. He can be counted on to say, ‘You can’t put the clock back,’ with all the regularity of a ticking clock. This is a very extreme example of the mental break down that goes with a relapse into metaphor. For the man is actually understating his own case out of sheer love of metaphor. It may be that you can not put time back, but you can put the clock back. He would be in a stronger position if he talked about the abstraction called time; but an all-devouring appetite for figurative language forces him to talk about clocks. Of course, the real question raised has nothing to do with either clocks or time. It is the question of whether certain abstract principles, which may or may not have been observed in the past, ought to be observed in the future. But the point is here that even the man who means that we cannot reconstruct the past can hardly ever reconstruct his own sentence in any other form except this figurative form. Without his myth, or his metaphor, he is lost.

Another mass of metaphors is drawn from the phenomena of morning, or the fact that the sun rises; or, rather (I grovel in apology to the man of science), appears to rise. It is a perfectly natural metaphor for poets; or, indeed, for all men, in that aspect in which all men are mystics. That there is a mystery in these natural things, which the imagination understands more subtly than the reason, is true enough. Nor have I any contempt even for mythology considered as mythology. But when we want to know what somebody wants to do, when we ask a free-thinker what he thinks, and why he thinks it, it is a little tiresome to be told that he is waiting for the Dawn, or engaged at the moment in singing Songs Before Sunrise. One is tempted to retort that Dawn is not always an entirely cheerful thing, even for those who have exercised their free thought upon the conventional traditions of their own society. There is such a thing as being shot at Dawn.

I do not mean for a moment, of course, that we should do without myths and metaphors altogether. I am constantly using them myself, and shall continue to do so. But I think we ought all to be on our guard against depending on them as a substitute for reason. Perhaps it would be well to have a Fast Day, on which we undertook to abstain from every thing but abstract terms. Let us all agree that every Friday we will do without metaphors as without meat. I am sure it would be good for the intellectual digestion.

XXIV. On Change

A PROFESSOR, filled with the spirit, has delivered an oracle on the subject of The Future. I do not know what he was a professor of, but I suppose he was a Professor of Prophecy. Anyhow, he belonged to that band of enthusiasts for evolution who seem to know much more about the future than they do about the past or even the present. For he was quite as scornful of the present as of the past. We are still, he said, only half-baked savages. Anyhow, some of us are still rather half-baked philosophers; and no philosopher of this school has ever yet answered the question that must have been put again and again, and which I, for one, have often put. If everything changes, including the mind of man, how can we tell whether any change is an improvement or no?

To take a simple and even crude example. One evolutionist, like Mr. Bernard Shaw, will say he has evolved a higher morality by refusing to eat the flesh of animals; but he does so because he has retained the old ideal of pity. Another evolutionist might just as well say that he had evolved a larger morality in being free to eat the flesh of human beings; though even in talking of being free he would still appeal to the old ideal of liberty. But he could easily talk, in quite a modern manner, about the ancient horror of cannibalism being a mere prejudice, a tribal taboo, an irrational limitation of human experience. The professor's own phrase will be found charmingly apt. He complains that we are still half-baked savages. He may well look forward to the happy day when we shall be completely baked savages.

Now, nobody can possibly say which of these two evolutionary changes is the better, unless he keeps some standard that cannot be changed. He cannot tell whether he ought to evolve into the higher morality or into the larger morality, unless he has some principle of pity or of liberty that does not evolve at all. The professor gave, among his rather random examples, the suggestion that we must be changing for the better because women were burned three hundred years ago. Suppose I tell him that women will be vivisected three hundred years hence. I have as much right to tell him that as he has to tell me anything else; I also can roll myself in the prophet's mantle; I also can mount the tripod and deliver the oracle. In other words, I know as much about the future as he does, or as anybody else does; which is nothing at all. But suppose it were true, as it is most certainly tenable, that some of the vivisectionists do eventually propose to extend vivisection from beasts to men; just as I have pictured the intellectuals of the New Cannibalism extending their diet from beasts to men. It will be just as easy to use a scientific jargon in defence of that vivisection as of any other vivisection. It will be just as easy to argue, as men in all ages have argued, that a minority must suffer for the sake of a community, or that such sacrifice is a sort of martyrdom for mankind. What I want to know is, how is the evolutionist to tell whether this is a forward step or a retrograde step, if his ethics are always changing with his evolution? The Vivisectionists will say then, as they say now, that true progress demands a painful but necessary investigation. The Anti-Vivisectionists will say then, as they say now, that true progress is found in increased sensibility to suffering and renunciation of force. But how is the unhappy doubter to decide which of these two versions of true progress is really true? He can only do it if he has the test of some truth that remains true. But it is the very essence of this extreme evolutionary notion of thought that no truth can really remain true. The mind is fluid and changing, as the body is fluid and changing. On this principle we may be able to say of the future that it will be a change. But we cannot say it will be an improvement; for that implies that there will always be something in common between us and our descendants; something that we are all trying to improve. Why should that something not change like everything? Is that outside the laws of evolution? Is that a special creation? Is that a miracle? Is that common standard of conscience a thing of divine origin? Dreadful thought!

I need not say much here of the actual prophecies of the professor. They sound very like a skit or burlesque on the romances of Jules Verne or the earlier romances of H. G. Wells. Only they contain absurdities that nobody would put into a romance, or even into a burlesque. The professor was, of course, bursting with hope and progressive optimism. He thinks that everything is going very well indeed, and the world improving with wonderful rapidity. As an example of this, he says that men are losing their eyes, teeth, hair, and sense of hearing with a rapidity that raises the happiest anticipations in a humane lover of his kind. He explained that when we have got rid of all these rude and extinct organs, we should have mechanical scientific substitutes. In the simple language of our fathers, we shall have false hair, false teeth, false eyes, false ears, and everything else suitable to our false philosophy. He did not explain how soon it will be possible to manufacture that minor part of the machinery which has hitherto escaped so many inquiring mechanics; I mean the little thing that actually sees, hears, smells, speaks, and thinks. For, strange and exasperating as it seems, without that one little thing (which nobody can find anywhere) it will generally be found that telescopes cannot see by themselves, telephones can not hear by themselves, books cannot write themselves or read themselves; and a man cannot even talk entirely without thinking. Though he sometimes comes pretty near it.

XXV. On Twilight Sleep

IT has been blandly and placidly proposed by some publicists that persons accused of a crime should be subjected to some hypnotic influence, which some psychologists imagine to induce a condition they call Twilight Sleep; in which remarkable state it is said that a man will go on talking and can only tell the truth. I trust it is unnecessary for me to say what I think of the morality of all that sort of thing. Of its practical social effect, if it could ever have any practical social existence, I have very little doubt. What would happen, of course, would be simply this. In meek obedience to what Science had discovered, we should hang six or seven people on the unanswerable evidence of what they said in their Twilight Sleep. And then Science would make another discovery, establishing the principle of Twilight Dream-Distortions; pointing out that certain forms of error are specially likely to occur in Twilight Sleep; and speaking haughtily and distantly about their credulous forebears who, through ignorance of Distortion Phenomena, had imagined that Twilight Sleep was reliable. Meanwhile, the people we had hanged by the latest light of science (indeed in every sense a twilight of science) would continue to be dead. That is how Science really assists Law. It is quite true that there have been many martyrs of science; but they have not always been scientists.

Of its more general and atmospheric morality, as a matter of social tone, I can only say that, if things of that sort were ever established in England, it would be the end of a rather exceptional and very fine and honourable English tradition. Our English law has had plenty of faults, which we rather tend to forget when we are content to hear the law being praised by lawyers. But it is really true that it carried almost to a quixotic point the notion of protecting the prisoner against unfair tricks or traps. Possibly it was as much sporting as chivalrous; possibly it was more chivalrous than just. But I should be sorry to see so generous a national tradition entirely swept away, even by more logical police theories from Europe, let alone a lot of half-baked quack science from America. Law is not the most magnanimous thing in the world, in any part of the world. But it would seem, at first sight, as if even law had a better sense of honour than science. Only, as I have said, this sort of science is not science. It is simply charlatanism and boosting; the work of people who take advantage at once of the popular reverence for science and the popular ignorance of it. Charlatans arc now less criticized or cross-examined than they ever were in the world before. In the darkest days they were at least examined to see whether they were witches; but now men have not only grown sceptical about the witch, but about the witch-finder. They have not only grown to doubt the quack, but the doctor who denounces the quack. Everything has become a matter of opinion, or, rather, a matter of taste; and larger and larger crowds of people simply have a taste in quacks. They move about in a mesmerized and mechanical condition, talking and thinking merely on the authority of somebody who is not an authority. In short, they are in a condition that might very properly be described as Twilight Sleep; which, if not a state in which they tell the truth about everything, is at least a state in which they can believe anything to be true.

If anybody thinks I exaggerate the superstition of these somnambulists, or the decay of clearer and cooler ideas of justice, let me point out that the same thing is happening in conditions more crudely superstitious. We are asked to entrust legal decisions not only to mesmerists, but to mediums. We are once more being told to go to ghosts and wraiths for a legal opinion; or to put sheeted phantoms and gibbering spectres in the witness-box. It was quite seriously and warmly urged that some seance, with all the activities of its trumpets and tambourines, should be summoned like a judge and jury to give its verdict on the identity of the Ilkley murderer. I have an open mind about mediums and spirits when we are investigating or detecting them. But I do draw the line at their investigating and detecting us. I do not know that the spirits exist; I do not know whether they are reliable if they do exist; I do not know that they are not delusions; I do not know that they are not devils from hell. And yet I am asked, by people who know practically as little as I do, to turn them loose like chartered libertines to blast the honour or break the lives of men. In plain words, we may soon find ourselves hunting another human being, not with blood-hounds, but with hell-hounds.

That is what I call the Twilight; and something singularly suited to the title of Twilight Sleep. It is a breakdown at once of the idea of reason and of the idea of authority; it is a breakdown of reason because it is a breakdown of authority. Some men say that Science says this or that; when they only mean scientists, and do not know or care which scientists. Other men say that Spirits say this or that; when they do not know or care which spirits, or whether they are evil spirits. The notion that there might be a standard or tribunal of truth, which could distinguish great scientists from small, or evil spirits from good, seems to have completely vanished from a very large number of minds; and, compared with such a void of anarchy, even the old dry pedantry of the lawyers remains as some sort of link with logic and good government. Sooner than be tried by psychologists, or tried by psychic phenomena, I would even take the desperate course of going to law in an ordinary court of justice. I cannot boast that I am, in the select and special sense, known to the police. But at least, in the public and general sense, they are known to me; and, while I have no illusions about them, I have roughly adequate information about them: I know there are some things they will not do and some things they cannot legally do.

But crude and crazy psychiatrists from new Colleges of Eugenics are not in the least known to me; and vague and visionary influences from beyond the grave are not in the least known to me; and I have no information about them at all. If people around me are going to trust blindly to these things, I can only conjecture that there is creeping on them a blindness like that of barbarism. And there comes back across my mind once more their own metaphor of the Sleep of Twilight; and I remember what men used to say about the Twilight of the Gods, and wonder whether this is the Twilight of the Man.

However, I do not really take quite so depressing a view, even of these depressing developments and proposals. For I recognize that, in reality, all this sort of thing marks rather the end of a delusion than its beginning. The curse of the whole situation is expressed with terrible exactitude in the one phrase that Science has become a name to conjure with. Having worked its own wonders, which are really on the material plane comparable to miracles, it has gained a sort of glamour which is made to cover any number of trivial or disreputable conjuring tricks. There were Pretenders in the days when men believed in Princes. There were hedge-priests in the days when men believed in priesthood. Just as adventurers then claimed the sanctity of priests and kings, so to-day the only sanctity so regarded is that of the man of science; and any number of thieves will steal it from him. But as men grow more used to the science, they may grow more sensible about the superstition.

XXVI. On Vulgarity

MOST of us must have wondered if we could find a real definition of Vulgarity. For it is generally difficult to destroy, or even to defy, a thing that we cannot define. I suspect, to begin with, that we should discover, in the case of this word, a difficulty that exists with regard to a great many modern words. They were invented after the age of doctrine and definition. They are at best artistic and atmospheric. They have come to stand for strong impressions which are real enough, but to stand for them merely as symbols, sometimes poetical, sometimes arbitrary and accidental. And I rather fancy that, in the case of Vulgarity and other verbal symbols, we should find that the inquiry ended in an odd way. When we had really managed to put into other words the thing we meant by this particular word, we should probably find that it was a very incorrect word for it.

Thus Vulgarity, as a vice which we can nil feel rather vividly (I should imagine) in the affairs and fashions around us, is not really connected with the ancient *vulgus*; not even with the *profanum vulgus*. The mob has its own vices, but it is not necessarily vulgar. The mass of mankind has its own weaknesses, but we do not necessarily feel those weaknesses as vulgarizing. The particular thing we mean, or at any rate the thing I mean, when I use this word, is something much more subtle and certainly much more poisonous. But I really do not know any other word for it. I could easily give examples of it from the Press, but this would be a rather cheap and unfair way of filling the pages in this book. So, with a full sense of the rashness of the experiment, I will make an attempt to state the real nature of the thing I call Vulgarity; and I wish I knew a worse name for it.

What I mean by Vulgarity is this. When six men stand up and we suddenly see that one of them is a dwarf, we are startled to find him so stunted. We only realize that he is stunted because he is standing up; because he is stretching himself to his full height. Similarly, when the mind of man stretches itself, in order to show off, and is still stunted, that is the revelation that I mean. It is by the showing off that we see how little there is to show. When some body tries to impress us, either with his wit or assurance, or knowledge of the world, or power, or grace, or even poetry and ideality, and in the very act of doing so shows he has low ideas of all these things — that is Vulgarity. In other words, a thing is only vulgar when its best is base.

That is why many things commonly called vulgar do not seem to me vulgar at all. The red-nosed comedian, the man who sits on his hat, the joke about the drunken man, these are not the sort of thing of which I am thinking; indeed, they are the very reverse. For the man who sits on his hat is not standing up. The drunkard is not stretching him self; he is (as he will explain) enjoying relaxation. The red-nosed comedian is not pretending to be at his best. These things may have dangers or weaknesses of their own, but they do not indicate that a man is base even at his best. The man who sits on his hat on the stage may be perfectly dignified when he sits on his chair at home, or takes off his hat in church. The red-nosed comedian, when he has hung up his red nose along with his little hat, may be in private life a blend of Bayard and Socrates. We can appeal from Philip drunk to Philip sober. But we can appeal no further, if we find that even Philip sober is a boor and a brute. If he is base at his best, and baser in his attempt to impress us with his best, then we have a certain sensation for which I know no other name. It appears when the man does pretend to be Bayard, and can only manage to be Barnum. It appears when the man does go to church and take off his hat, and seems to care more about the hat than the church. It appears, in short, when there is something about him that seems to debase and flatten everything he touches; and most of all when he touches worthy and exalted things. Thus there is the man who wishes first to prove that he is a gentleman, and only proves two things; first, that he is vulgar enough to prefer being a gentleman to being a man; and second, that he has a hideously stunted and half witted notion even of being a gentleman. There is the man who wishes to show that he has lived in the best society; and shows even in showing it that he does not know the best society from the worst.

There are any number of lesser and often more excusable examples, but this is the touch that makes the difference. There is the man who is always being tactful without tact. There is the man who jokes loudly and laughs heartily, and so proves that he has no sense of humour. There is the man who talks a great deal about understanding women, and with every word helps us with a ghastly clarity to understand him. There is the man who tells stories of the wonderful affability and friendliness of very rich men he has known, and thereby reveals his secret religion — that rich men are gods and that he is a fortunate favourite of the gods. All these men have the mark that I call for convenience vulgar; the mark that they give us their own moral and spiritual measure by stretching themselves to their full stature. If they had been a little lax and casual and humble, we might never have found them out. If they had not been so clever, we might never have known that they were fools. If they had not been so gentlemanly, we should not have seen that they were cads.

XXVII. On a Humiliating Heresy

MANY modern people like to be regarded as slaves. I mean the most dismal and degraded sort of slaves; moral and spiritual slaves. Popular preachers and fashionable novelists can safely repeat that men are only what their destiny makes them; and that there is no choice or challenge in the lot of man. Dean Inge declares, with a sort of gloomy glee, that some absurd American statistics or experiments show that heredity is an incurable disease and that education is no cure for it. Mr. Arnold Bennett has said that many of his friends drink too much; but that it cannot be helped, because they cannot help it. I am not Puritanic about drink; I have drunk all sorts of things; and in my youth, often more than was good for me. But in any conceivable condition, drunk or sober, I should be furious at the suggestion that I could not help it. I should have wanted to punch the head of the consoling fatalist who told me so. Yet nobody seems to punch the heads of consoling fatalists. This, which seems to me the most elementary form of self-respect, seems to be the one thing about which even the sensitive are insensible. These modern persons are very sensitive about some things. They would be furious if somebody said they were not gentlemen; though there is really no more historical reason for pretending that every man is a gentleman than that every man is a marquis, or a man-at-arms. They are frightfully indignant if we say they are not Christians; though they hold them selves free to deny or doubt every conceivable idea of Christianity, even the historical existence of Christ. In the current cant of journalism and politics they would almost prosecute us for slander if we said they were not Democrats; though any number of them actually prefer aristocracy or autocracy; and the real Democrats in English society are rather a select few. We might almost say that the true believers in democracy are themselves an aristocracy. About all these words men can be morbidly excitable and touchy. They must not be called pagans or plebeians or plain men or reactionaries or oligarchs. But they may be called slaves; they may be called monkeys; and, above all, they may be called machines. One would imagine that the really intolerable insult to human dignity would be to say that human life is not determined by human will. But so long as we do not say they are heathen, we may say they are not human. We may say that they develop as blindly as a plant or turn as automatically as a wheel.

There are all sorts of ways in which this humiliating heresy expresses itself. One is the perpetual itch to describe all crime as lunacy. Now, quite apart from virtue, I would much rather be thought a criminal than a criminal lunatic. As a point not of virtue but of vanity, I should be less insulted by the title of a murderer than by the title of a homicidal maniac. The murderer might be said, not unfairly, to have lost the first fragrance of his innocence, and all that keeps the child near to the cherubim. But the maniac has lost more than innocence; he has lost essence; the complete personality that makes him a man. Yet everybody is talking as if it would be quite natural, and even nice, to be excused for immorality on the ground of idiocy. The principle is applied, with every flourish of liberality and charity, to personalities whom one would imagine quite proud of being personal. It is applied not only to the trivial and transient villains of real life, but to the far more solid and convincing villains of romance.

A distinguished doctor has written a book about the madmen of Shakespeare. By which he did not mean those few fantastic and manifest madmen, whom we might almost call professional madmen, who merely witnessed to the late Elizabethan craze for lurid and horrible grotesques. Ford or Webster, or some of their fellows, would hardly have hesitated to have a ballet or chorus of maniacs, like a chorus of fairies or fashionable beauties. But the medical gentleman seems to have said that any number of the serious characters were mad. Macbeth was mad; Hamlet was mad; Ophelia was congenitally mad; and so on. If Hamlet was really mad, there does not seem much point in his pretending to be mad. If Ophelia was always mad, there does not seem much point in her going mad. But anyhow, I think a saner criticism will always maintain that Hamlet was sane. He must be sane even in order to be sad; for when we get into a world of complete unreality, even tragedy is unreal. No lunatic ever had so good a sense of humour as Hamlet. A homicidal maniac does not say, ‘Your wisdom would show itself more richer to signify that to his doctor’; he is a little too sensitive on the subject of doctors. The whole point of Hamlet is that he is really saner than anybody else in the play; though I admit that being sane is not identical with what some call being sensible. Being outside the world, he sees all round it; where everybody else sees his own side of the world, his own worldly ambition, or hatred or love. But, after all, Hamlet pretended to be mad in order to deceive fools. We cannot complain if he has succeeded.

But, whatever we may say about Hamlet, we must not say this about Macbeth. Hamlet was only a mild sort of murderer; a more or less accidental and parenthetical murderer; an amateur. But Macbeth was a good, solid, serious, self-respecting murderer; and we must not have any nonsense about him. For the play of Macbeth is, in the supreme and special sense, the Christian Tragedy; to be set against the Pagan Tragedy of Oedipus. It is the whole point about Oedipus that he does not know what he is doing. And it is the whole point about Macbeth that he does know what he is doing. It is not a tragedy of Fate but a tragedy of Freewill. He is tempted of a devil, but he is not driven by a destiny. If the actor pronounces the words properly, the whole audience ought to feel that the story may yet have an entirely new ending, when Macbeth says suddenly, ‘We will proceed no further in this business.’ The incredible confusion of modern thought is always suggesting that any indication that men have been influenced is an indication that they have been forced. All men are always being influenced; for every incident is an influence. The question is, which incident shall we allow to be most influential. Macbeth was influenced; but he consented to be influenced. He was not, like a blind tragic pagan, obeying something he thought he ought to obey. He does not worship the Three Witches like the Three Fates. He is a good enlightened Christian, and sins against the light.

The fancy for reading fatalism into this play, where it is most absent, is probably due to the fallacy of a series; or three things in a row. It misleads Macbeth’s critics just as it misleads Macbeth. Almost all our pseudo-science proceeds on the principle of saying that one thing follows on another thing, and then dogmatizing about the third thing that is to follow. The whole argument about the Superman, for instance, as developed by Nietzsche and other sophists, depends entirely on this trick of the incomplete triad. First the scientist or sophist asserts that when there was a monkey, there was bound to be a man. Then he simply prophesies that something will follow the man, as the man followed the monkey. This is exactly the trick used by the Witches in Macbeth. They give him first a fact he knows already, that he is Thane of Glamis; then one fact really confirmed in the future, that he is Thane of Cawdor; and then something that is not a fact at all, and need never be a fact at all, unless he chooses to make it one out of his own murderous fancy. This false series, seeming to point at something, though the first term is trivial and the last untrue, does certainly mislead many with a fallacious sense of fate. It has been used by materialists in many ways to destroy the sense of moral liberty; and it has murdered many things besides Duncan.

XXVIII. On Original Sin

ONCE upon a time when Mr. H. G. Wells was setting forth on his varied and splendid voyage from Utopia to Utopia, he announced as a sort of watchword or war-cry that the new world would have nothing to do with the idea of Original Sin. He did not specially speak, and, indeed, there was no reason for him to speak, about his other beliefs or unbeliefs. He had not then compared the Trinity to a dance; but neither had he called adoring multitudes to the shrine of the Invisible King. But, standing at the end of the great scientific nineteenth century, he thought it time to announce that the one doctrine he did not believe in was Original Sin. Standing at the beginning of the still more scientific twentieth century, Mr. Aldous Huxley calmly announces that the one doctrine he does believe in is Original Sin. He may be a sceptic or a heretic about many things, but on that point he is quite orthodox. He may not hold many theological dogmas, but about this dogma he is quite dogmatic. There is one fragment of the ancient creed which he not only clings to, but declares to be necessary to all clear minds of the new generation. And that is the very fragment which Mr. Wells threw away thirty years ago, as something that would never be needed any more. The stone that the builder of Utopia rejected . . .

It is not a mere verbal coincidence that original thinkers believe in Original Sin. For really original thinkers like to think about origins. That should be obvious even to the negative thinkers of the nineteenth-century tradition, who for two or three generations claimed all originality, all novelty, all revolutionary change of thought for a book called *The Origin of Species*. But it is even more true of moral discovery than of material discovery; and it is even more true of the twentieth-century reaction than of the nineteenth-century revolution. Men who wish to get down to fundamentals perceive that there is a fundamental problem of evil. Men content to be more superficial are also content with a superficial fuss and bustle of improvement. The man in the mere routine of modern life is content to say that a modern gallows is a relatively humane instrument or that a modern cat-o’-nine tails is milder than an ancient Roman *flagellum*. But the original thinker will ask why any scourge or gibbet was ever needed, or ever even alleged to be needed? And that brings the original thinker back to original sin. For that is not affected as a universal thing by whether we approve or disapprove of the particular things. Whether we call it infamous tyranny or inevitable restraint, there is some sort of sin either in the scourger or the scourged.

Nevertheless, I often feel that the original thinker is not quite original enough. I mean that he does not get quite so near to the truth as the old tradition could take him. I say it without arrogance, for many of us owe the truth as much to tradition as to originality. But I am often struck by the fact that original thinkers originate trains of thought, but do not finish them. It is the great trouble with the advanced that they will not advance any further. Now, Mr. Aldous Huxley sees very clearly that medieval religion was more realistic than modern idealism and optimism. He says that the latest scientific view is more like the old Catholic view than was the intervening illusion of the Romantic Movement. But he adds that the scientific view of man necessitates a sort of original sin, if it be only the residuum of his animal ancestry.

Now, that is exactly where I should like him to advance a step further; and he does not. For sin, whatever else it is, is not merely the dregs of a bestial existence. It is something more subtle and spiritual, and is in some way connected with the very supremacy of the human spirit. Mr. Huxley must know well enough that this is so with the most execrable sins, such as often figure in his own admirable satires. It is not merely a matter of letting the ape and tiger die, for apes are not Pharisees, nor are tigers prigs. The elephant does not turn up his long nose at everything with any superior intention; and the totally unjust charge of hypocrisy might well be resented by any really sensitive and thin-skinned crocodile. The giraffe might be called a highbrow, but he is not really supercilious about his powers of Uplift. Man has scattered his own vices as well as virtues very arbitrarily among the animals, and there may be no more reason to accuse the peacock of pride than to accuse the pelican of charity.

The worst things in man are only possible to man. At least we must confine their existence to men, unless we are prepared to admit the existence of demons. There is thus another truth in the original conception of original sin, since even in sinning man originated something. His body may have come from animals, and his soul may be torn in pieces by all sorts of doctrinal disputes and quarrels among men. But, roughly speaking, it is quite clear that he did manufacture out of the old mud or blood of material origins, with whatever mixture of more mysterious elements, a special and a mortal poison. That poison is his own recipe; it is not merely decaying animal matter. That poison is most poisonous where there are fine scientific intellects or artistic imaginations to mix it. It is just as likely to be at its best — that is, at its worst — at the end of a civilization as at the beginning. Of this sort are all the hideous corruptions of culture; the pride, the perversions, the intellectual cruelties, the horrors of emotional exhaustion. You cannot explain that monstrous fruit by saying that our ancestors were arboreal; save, indeed, as an allegory of the Tree of Knowledge. The poison can take the form of every sort of culture — as, for instance, bacteria-culture. But the poison itself has always been there. Indeed it is as old as any memory of man. Wherefore, we have to posit of it that it also was of the human source and fountain head, that it was in the beginning, or, as the old theology affirms, original.

I suggest, therefore, with great respect, that it is not even now a case of having to admit that the old religion had come very near to the truths of the most modern science. It is rather a case of the most modern science having come very near to the truths of the old religion — but not quite near enough.

XXIX. On the New Religion Coming

THAT rather pleasant and even exciting cry that has been occasionally raised in recent years has been raised once again, the announcement of the New Religion. My criticism of that otherwise admirable diversion has always been, roughly speaking, a complaint that the New Religion was announced as appearing and never appeared. Even those who advertise in the magazines ‘an entirely new type of detective’ do produce some sort of detective, even if he is a detective who is rather easy to detect. Even those who say that the next issue will contain a passionate romance, involving an entirely bold and original situation between Man and Woman, do at least introduce into their disappointing anecdote some sort of objects, which might be mistaken for a woman and a man. Even cross-word puzzles are followed by complete solution, filling up all the spaces somehow; and even in a prize competition there is an answer, whether or no there is a prize. Nobody writes a mystery story about a corpse in the stoke-hole, and then simply leaves it in the stoke-hole in the last chapter, without any comment, however casual. Nobody who loses a millionaire on the first page of a sensational novel can escape the responsibility of finding him somehow or somewhere, before the last page, dead or alive. But in the case of the New Religion, there simply was no New Religion, alive or dead. There were simply a number of suggestions about how interesting it would be if there ever were a New Religion, just as it would be extremely interesting if there were a corpse in our own domestic stoke-hole; just as it would be thrilling to find a millionaire alive, or possibly even more delightful to find him dead. But we do not, in fact, in our daily walks through the world, find corpses in stoke-holes; we do not find dead millionaires, and we do not find New Religions. When we do, we do not indulge in long disquisitions about how interesting it would be if we did. When we do, we utter a loud cry, or otherwise draw attention to a definite and rather dramatic fact.

Now, the only reason given, in the case I mention, for saying that there would be a New Religion was the assertion (true or false) that the world was tired of the old religions. Even if this were true, it would be a very illogical basis for any such prophecy. I have no right to announce to the scientific world that I have discovered an entirely new animal, with a wholly extraordinary and unprecedented arrangement of horns and hooves, and then have no explanation to give, except that I am tired of eating beef and mutton. I have no right to send a telegram to the Astronomer Royal declaring that I have found a new star, and then afterwards explain to that distinguished and irritated official, with an air of fatalistic languor, that everybody is thoroughly sick of the poetry written about Mars and Venus and Jupiter, and all the pagan names of the planets. Those pagan gods and goddesses are undoubtedly ancient; they are undoubtedly in one sense out of date; they are undoubtedly a little too trite and familiar in the literature of men who have long ceased to believe in them as real deities. But simply disbelieving in them does not of itself materialize a new and enormous comet, or precipitate even a falling star.

So it is in the social and moral and philosophical world. A good many of us are sometimes a little tired of journalism, especially of the journalists. There is really very good reason for saying that the Press in its present conditions is in danger of becoming an anomalous and anonymous bore. But I cannot go about telling people that I am bringing out a new kind of newspaper, or that I have invented a new way of conveying news, merely because I do not think that the old way with news is very new. A great many of us think that education, in its modern compulsory form, has got very much into a rut and is likely to become as narrow as any other routine. But I do not call that The New Education; I do not say that I am an educationist; God forbid! But on the subject of religion it would seem that anybody is allowed to announce anything. Anybody may draw any number of blank cheques on the bank of the future. Anybody may run up any number of bills for posterity to discharge when we are all dead, and cannot be charged with anything — even with r rash prediction. So far as I can understand, the only thing that anybody knows about the New Religion is that nobody will be a priest and everybody will be a prophet.

I do not for a moment suggest that the New Religion might not exist- The world has made a fool of itself in all sorts of ways from the beginning of time, but its rich stores of foolery are by no means exhausted yet. I can easily imagine a real, vivid, veritable New Religion, which is more than the prophet of the New Religion can do. I could make up a whole list of New Religions, at a guinea apiece, which would be quite as probable and presentable as any number of old religions such as have existed and may yet exist again. There is nothing, for instance, to prevent people from worshipping the infinitesimal instead of the infinite, and subdividing the atom in the search for the indivisible dot of divinity. It would be as sensible to search for God with microscopes as to search for God with telescopes. And that was what a number of the cosmic agnostics really did in the nineteenth century. I can imagine a religion founded entirely on the psychology of contrast, so that children would be kept in coal-cellars that they might appreciate occasional sun beams. I can imagine a religion founded on the inversion of day and night, and the idea that our dreams are real and our waking life is a dream. I can understand a man holding that everything except himself is a dream. It will be truly remarked that all these New Religions are stark staring mad. They are; but they are something. They are ideas of some sort; they are statements with some meaning; they are things that could be affirmed or denied. But the New Religion in the weekly paper is Nothing; and I object to being told to bow down to Nothing, or to be bullied by Nothing, or to be made a slave of Nothing, because it is supposed to be New.

XXX. On the Great God Namse

AT last I have found the essentials of the true Faith of the Future; the creed which all thoughtful men can accept; the creed that suits itself to the best thought of the age; the religion that is purely spiritual, as Dr. Barnes would say, being purely in the spirit of the times; the religion that appeals to something deeper than creed and dogma; the religion for the plain man, for the practical man, and especially for the business man; the vital appreciation of values in which we can all agree; the formula that will unite all the Churches, reconcile all the conflicting parties in the Church of England, and finally unite, after two hundred years of civil war, the nine hundred and ninety-nine True Religions of Scotland. Need I say that I allude to that vivid religion, the worship of Namse, the God of Wealth?

A worship so modern, so rational, so much in touch with the whole spirit of the time, cannot be long in extending its full and formal establishment from Tibet to Tooting. I say its full and formal establishment, because it is obvious that the deeper, quieter, more truly spiritual influence of the god has long been prevalent in Tooting and elsewhere. But, though we have most of us seen a good many manifestations of the general affection felt for Namse, the God of Wealth, I have never seen any manifestation of him half so attractive or so jolly as his appearance in a coloured photograph reproduced from Tibet. The ordinary dingy, sulky millionaire is afraid to wear crowns and crests like the ancient tyrants; he knows in his wicked heart that he has not really got the sort of popular authority that belonged to the old princes and priests. He therefore ‘dresses with great simplicity’; and has paragraphs in all the papers to say so. There is none of that nonsense about dear old Namse. Whatever criticisms the fastidious might make on his appearance, nobody can say that he dresses with great simplicity. His face, or mask, rather suggests that of Mr. Hoover in a rage; and in this also there may be something symbolical. But would that we could hope to see the President of the United States coming out of the White House at Washington in any costume so conspicuous and so charming! Men seem to have lost the radiant expansiveness which makes such a parade possible. Anyhow, the God of Wealth is not ashamed of his wealth. There is only one snag in the situation, and possibly in the religion. The figure which follows in the procession immediately after the God of Wealth is described as the God of Hell.

These extraordinary ceremonial figures and formalities come from a celebration called the Old Dance at the Tibetan Monastery of Chord in Kansu, the photographs being taken by Dr. J. F. Rock. There has always been a great deal of talk about the religious mysteries in the interior of Tibet; but in the days of my mystical youth they were generally represented as being of a more ethereal and less entertaining character. In the days when Theosophy was at its widest moment of influence, we were often told that truth could only be found in the monasteries of Tibet. But we certainly were not told that the truth found there would be a grinning glorification of the power of Money, or a dance of a horned devil to typify the instant menace of death and hell. The monks of the real Tibet seemed to be rather more realistic than the Mahatmas of the imaginary Tibet. I, for one, would much rather take part in that pageant of pantomime masks, where everything is painted in bright colours, and is popular, and at any rate means something, than sit waiting in an esoteric *salon* for a message from a Mahatma, who had nothing to say except, ‘You have been all things; you shall achieve at last the right to be nothing.’ The jolly fellows in Choni, at any rate, say what they mean; and when they worship the God of Wealth they say so. They do not serve God and Mammon, but serve Mammon as God; and at least get something out of it in the way of glitter and colour and painting the town red and gold. They do not have to endure the worship of wealth, and then have to endure refinement as well.

How much more melancholy is the condition of those, in modernized and rationalized Western communities, who have to go about conducting secretly the cult of the Great God Namse! How much more uncomfortable it is to call on Namse morning, noon, and night, and yet never be allowed to call him by his name! How miserable is our condition in industrial Europe and America, who dare not call on Namse as Namse, but have to call him National Welfare, or International Peace, or the British Empire or the New Republic, or Progress, or Humanity, or some ghastly thing! Instead of the simple and heartfelt cry for More Money, which might come sincerely from so many of our hearts, there must be a mystification and a secret language, and the giving to the god of every other title except his own golden name. Yet even this particular Asiatic name might perhaps be useful to persons in this delicate position. The mask must be transparent in Tibet, but it might still serve to mask the mystery in Tooting. It might still be used as a polite political evasion, except to those who had profited by the information of Dr. Rock. Suppose a Member of Parliament asks as a supplementary question, ‘Can the right hon. gentle man tell the House why he bestowed a peerage on Mr. Bunk, formerly known as the Vanishing Book maker?’ It would be healthy, but all too heroic, if the Cabinet Minister rose and said simply, ‘I did it for Money.’ But nobody could complain of unparliamentary language if he rose and said with great gravity, ‘I did it for Namse.’ It would never do, if, when the orator asks the rhetorical question, ‘What is it that drives our best and boldest Empire-builders forth to establish order in the ends of the earth, what is the mysterious impulse and vision which draws out of them all their deep indomitable powers for the expansion of England?’ . . . It would never do if the whole audience answered with one approving shout, ‘Money!’ But no harm would be done if the audience were allowed to murmur and intone, as a sort of liturgical chorus, ‘Namse’. It would always be possible to exhort the young to devote their lives earnestly and laboriously to Namse, where it would sound a little crude, perhaps, to tell them to devote themselves entirely to raking in the shekels or getting hold of the dibs. Considering the strange way in which Christian traditions still linger about even in this enlightened age, it might often be safer to say that our reason and conscience required us to worship Namse, rather than that they required us to worship Mammon.

XXXI. On the Innocence of Macaulay

IN the middle of an Italian popular ceremony, or pageant of the sort some call ‘medieval’, with tools and emblems of trades like those of the old guilds, I suddenly remembered my boyhood: and a particular passage in Macaulay’s Essays. Macaulay’s Essays are now almost as distant as the Middle Ages; indeed, in some ways more dead than the Middle Ages. But they do exactly sum up and clarify the modern mood which was a reaction from the Middle Ages; and we are just sufficiently removed from it to compare the two. If Macaulay would not have understood what we mean by ‘the co-operative movement’ or ‘the unit of the trade-union’, it is because we have already grown so much more medieval than he was. There was also, of course, something that was shiny and shallow about his style, which was the very reverse of medieval. Nevertheless, Macaulay also had his medieval virtues; he knew what he meant; he had the faith of a child in the rights of reason; and his chief fault was living within his own Victorian limitations, which was also the weakness of many medieval writers, when they too confidently adorned their profound general principles with illustrations from the habits of the salamander or the moral lesson to be learnt from the unicorn.

What is interesting about each generation of men is the things they never thought of. Mandeville and his age never thought of physical science built on detailed data like our own. Macaulay and his age never thought of a creed being the creative soul of a society, giving it an art and culture. Hence they never understood things that were and are still to be found in Italy or Spain, which are still called medieval things, though they are in many ways increasing with modern developments. I know no better way of explaining what they are, and how they affect all our modern thought of religious unity or religious toleration, than by taking a single passage in Macaulay’s famous essay commonly called *Gladstone on Church and State*. Everybody knows that the great Gladstone, being then a young Tory and High Churchman, had written a book arguing that the State must have a State religion, because it must have a moral relation to other things. To this Macaulay replied with a remarkable retort, which exactly marks out the limits of his social life and its difference from the other. He answers triumphantly by saying that we might as well demand that a stage coach company, or some sort of omnibus company, should have an official religion. An omnibus company, he said, also has moral duties. It is bound to take care of the lives and the limbs of its passengers; bound to treat its employees properly; bound to keep its word in business, and so on. Therefore, he adds with a hearty laugh, we should have an omnibus company calling itself a religious body. He is quite sure that this is a complete *reductio ad absurdum*; he is quite sure that all the men of his age are laughing with him. And so they were; it is their laughter that exactly marks their limitation — the limit of their power of social imagination and construction.

I suppose it would have surprised even Macaulay, and still more his readers, to be told that, if a medieval State had an omnibus company, the omnibus company probably *would* have an official religion. It would probably have a patron saint: an advocate in heaven supposed to be protecting that particular omnibus company and no other. It would quite certainly have religious services invoking blessings on that particular omnibus company and pledging it to those social duties. It would have processions in the street on its feast day, carrying omnibuses garlanded with flowers, with the image of the patron saint of omnibuses carried above torches or lighted candles and perhaps an illuminated blazon of the company motto, whatever it might be — presumably *Quod Ab Omnibus*. They still do that sort of thing in Italy and Spain; and that is what people mean by calling those countries medieval. In that older sort of society, Continental or medieval, all sorts of other secular bodies besides the State do have a religious side and a religious function. The Church is only established in the State in the same sense in which it is established in the workshop or the market or the factory or the family. They all have separate images, separate legends, separate services and dedications. This seemed utterly fantastic to the men of the nineteenth century, in the social situation of Macaulay. And he thought he had destroyed a proposal merely by showing that it might lead to so preposterous a state of things. Well, there was doubtless much to be said for Macaulay and his mercantile phase of history, but there is one paradox about it which it might be well to note.

For instance, let us consider amicably such a problem of festive forms. This practice does, in Italy and elsewhere, really do a great deal to brighten human life, to enlarge it, and especially to vary it. Having myself grown up, in my boyhood, under the shadow of Macaulay, I reacted early against the contentment with which his age accepted daily life as prosaic. I used to amuse myself with what seemed like impossible fancies of a poetry attaching to the common objects of daily life; about the pillar-box as a red goblin or the green omnibus as a fairy-ship. But what could only be the fairy-tale of Notting Hill could be any day the reality of Rome. In Rome there easily could be, and quite possibly is, a patron saint of postmen, who would be capable on occasion of thinking the red paint on a post as symbolic as the red robe of a cardinal. What could only be dreamed of in the north is really done in the south. Nor is there the smallest difficulty about applying the poetry to modern and mechanical things. In London also, in my youth, we had begun to put poetry into such things — or at least to put such things into poetry. But it never got very much beyond putting them into little books of poems. In some thin, expensive volume, published by Mr. John Lane or Mr. Elkin Mathews (probably at the poet's expense), could be found phrases that compared the electric lamps to the beauty of lightning, or the underground railway to the caverns of the under world. But the Italians would as soon stick a statue of St. Michael before a standard lamp as on a stone pedestal. They would think no more of putting up a medallion of the Virgin in the Underground Railway than in the Catacombs. There are, I think, advantages; but there are conditions. And one of the conditions is that people cannot do this unless there really is a single-rooted popular religion, common to the whole community. Your omnibus company will have to do without its garlands and its graven images where the public is divided into different religious sects.

In Macaulay's day it was divided into a hundred sects, and therefore its public art was the worst that the world has ever seen. The few statues it did put up, of politicians and philanthropists, with whiskers and trousers complete, are still the eyesores of our streets. Its dress was the ugliest, its school of manners the dullest, its general moral tone the heaviest and most sullen, of all the periods of the past. There was any amount of variety in religious speculation of a sort; but there was less variety in social behaviour than there had ever been before or since. The truth is that men had got so far from each other in spiritual isolation that they could not join even in a joke. They did not feel sufficiently in spiritual agreement, even about omnibuses, to give them a patron saint; their feeling was not really *ab omnibus*. The problem of religious unity and religious liberty is not an easy one. But it is not irrelevant to remember that fact — that, when men were most divided in doctrine, they all wore the same top-hats, trousers, and mutton-chop whiskers; and that, where men are united in doctrine, they can turn out wearing different clothes: wearing the colours or liveries of all their various trades and occupations, with twenty quaint ceremonies peculiar to each. Religious unity can look like a carnival and religious liberty can look like a funeral. But beyond that men are free to choose, not necessarily by looks.

XXXII. On Jane Austen in the General Election

THERE was a remark about Jane Austen in connexion with the General Election. We have most of us seen a good many remarks about Jane Austen in connexion with the Flapper or the New Woman or the Modern View of Marriage, or some of those funny things. And those happy few of us who happen to have read Jane Austen have generally come to the conclusion that those who refer to her have not read her. Feminists are, as their name implies, opposed to anything feminine. But some times they disparaged the earlier forms of the feminine, even when they showed qualities commonly called masculine. They talk of Sense and Sensibility without knowing that the moral is on the side of Sense. They talk about fainting. I do not remember any woman fainting in any novel of Jane Austen. There may be an exception that I have forgotten; there is indeed a lady who falls with a great whack off the Cobb at Lyme Regis. But few ladies would do that as a mere affected pose of sentiment. But rarely does a lady dash herself from Shakespeare’s Cliff or the Monument solely to assume a graceful attitude below. Jane Austen herself was certainly not of the fainting sort. Nor were her favourite heroines, like Emma Woodhouse or Elizabeth Bennett. The real case against Jane Austen (if anybody is so base and thankless as to want to make a case against her) is not that she is sentimental, but that she is rather cynical. Allowing for the different conventions of subject-matter in the two periods, she was rather like Miss Rose Macaulay. But Miss Rose Macaulay finds herself in a world where fainting-fits would be a very mild form of excitement. There is something very amusing about this appeal to a comparison between the novels of the two periods. The heroine of many a modern novel writhes and reels her way through the story, chews and flings away fifty half-smoked cigarettes, is perpetually stifling a scream or else not stifling it, howling for solitude or howling for society, goading every mood to the verge of madness, seeing red mists before her eyes, seeing green flames dance in her brain, dashing to the druggist and then collapsing on the doorstep of the psycho-analyst; and all the time congratulating herself on her rational superiority to the weak sensibility of Jane Austen.

I do not say the new woman is like the new neurotic heroine; any more than I think the older woman was like the artificial fainting heroine. But if the critics have a right to argue from the old novels, we have a right to argue from the new. And what I say is true of the novels of some new novelists; and what they say is not true of the novels of Jane Austen. But, as I have said, we are already familiar with this sort of journalistic comment on Jane Austen's novels. It was always sufficiently shallow and trivial, being based on a vague association, connected with ladies who wore drooping ringlets and were therefore supposed to droop. But the particular example that I observed was more unique and interesting, because it has a special point of application to-day. A writer in a leading daily paper, in the course of a highly optimistic account of the new attitude of woman to men, as it would appear in the General Election, made the remark that a modern girl would see through the insincerity of Mr. Wickham, in Pride and Prejudice, in five minutes.

Now this is a highly interesting instance of the sort of injustice done to Jane Austen. The crowd (I fear, the considerable crowd) of those who read that newspaper and do not read that author will certainly go away with the idea that Mr. Wickham was some sort of florid and vulgar impostor — like Mr. Mantalini. But Jane Austen was a much more shrewd and solid psychologist than that. She did not make Elizabeth Bennett to be a person easily deceived, and she did not make her deceiver a vulgar impostor. Mr. Wickham was one of those very formidable people who tell lies by telling the truth. He did not merely swagger or sentimentalize or strike attitudes; he simply told the girl, as if reluctantly, that he had been promised a living in the Church by old Mr. Darcy, and that young Mr. Darcy had not carried out the scheme. This was true as far as it went; anybody might have believed it; most people would have believed it, if it were told with modesty and restraint. Mr. Wickham could be trusted to tell it with modesty and restraint. What Mr. Wickham could not be trusted to do was to tell the rest of the story; which made it a very different story. He did not think it necessary to mention that he had misbehaved himself in so flagrant a fashion that no responsible squire could possibly make him a parson; so that the squire had compensated him and he had become an officer in a fashionable regiment instead. Now that is a very quiet, commonplace, everyday sort of incident, and the sort of incident that does really occur. It is a perfectly sound and realistic example of the way in which quite sensible people can be deceived by quite unreliable people. And the novelist knew her business much too well to make the unreliable person obviously unreliable. That sort of quiet and plausible liar does exist; I certainly see no reason to think he has ceased to exist. I think Jane Austen was right in supposing that Elizabeth Bennett might have believed him. I think Jane Austen herself might have believed him. And I am quite certain that the Modern Girl might believe him any day.

But the rather queer application of all this to the case of the General Election is not without a moral, after all. The optimistic journalist, who gloried in the infallible intuition of the Flappers' Vote, chose a very unlucky example for his own purpose when he chose the ingenious Mr. Wickham. For Mr. Wickham was, or is, exactly the sort of man who does make a success of political elections. Sometimes he is just a little too successful to succeed. Sometimes he is actually found out, by some accident, doing very dexterous things in the art of finance; and he disappears suddenly, but even then silently. But in the main he is made for Parliamentary life. And he owes his success to two qualities, both exhibited in the novel in which he figures. First, the talent for telling a lie by telling half of the truth. And second, the art of telling a lie not loudly and offensively, but with an appearance of gentlemanly and graceful regret. It was a very fortunate day for professional politicians when some reactionaries began to accuse them of being demagogues. The truth is that they seldom dare to be demagogues; and their greatest success is when they talk with delicacy and reserve like diplomatists. A dictator has to be a demagogue; a man like Mussolini cannot be ashamed to shout. He cannot afford to be a mere gentleman. His whole power depends on convincing the populace that he knows what he wants, and wants it badly. But a politician will be much wiser if he disguises himself as a gentleman. His power consists very largely in getting people to take things lightly. It is in getting them to be content with his sketchy and superficial version of the real state of things. Nothing tends more happily to this result than the shining qualities of Mr. Wickham; good manners and good nature and a light touch. All sorts of answers are given by Ministers to questions asked in Parliament, which could only be delivered in this way. If such palpable nonsense were thundered by an orator, or shouted by a demagogue, or in any way made striking and decisive, even the House of Commons would rise in riot or roar with laughter. Nonsense so nonsensical as that can only be uttered in the tones of a sensible man.

So vividly do I see Mr. Wickham as a politician that I feel inclined to rewrite the whole of *Pride and Prejudice* to suit the politics of to-day. It would be amusing to send the Bennett girls rushing round to canvass: Elizabeth with amusement, and Jane with dignified reluctance. As for Lydia, she would be a great success in modern politics. But her husband would be the greatest success of all; and he might become a Cabinet Minister while poor old Darcy was sulking in the provinces, a decent, truthful, honourable Diehard, cursing the taxes and swearing the country was going to the dogs — and especially to the puppies.

XXXIII. On Dictatorships

I DO not object to men denouncing the Dictator ships that are everywhere springing up in Europe, as in the last instance in Serbia. But I do object to men declining even to inquire what it is they denounce.

Everybody knows that the movement for a Dictatorship began among the Italians, though hardly anybody knows why. It began where so many other things have begun — in the centre of what is sometimes called the Latin civilization. Out of that Columbus came to discover America. Out of that Napoleon came to rediscover Europe. For, though all sorts of sense and nonsense have been talked for and against Napoleon, the main thing about him was this: that, just after the age when nations had grown most exclusively national, he realized that there really is or could be one nation as large as the Roman Empire. Perhaps the most profound of his many epigrams was the statement that all European wars are civil wars. But there is another side to the truth, and Napoleon was mistaken in not allowing enough for the nationalism of Spain and of England. And this fair and balanced view of the case is very relevant to the real question about Mussolini and the new Dictators.

I think that the fair way of putting it would be something like this. It has repeatedly happened in Europe, when abuses of a stale system began to accumulate, that the men of the north and the men of the south have dealt with the subject differently. The names I give them are not exact, but they cause less confusion than talking about Teutons and Latins, let alone the hundred perils of talking about Protestants and Catholics. The more enlightened of the northerners, especially their kings and aristocracies, have generally been quite aware of the decadence and danger. But they have believed, rightly or wrongly, in delay and deliberation, and an attempt to graft the new things on to the old. Whether they were wise or no, things grew worse, and they went on thinking about how things might be made better. And then, before they had finished their wiser deliberations, if they were wiser, something happened. There came promptly and perhaps prematurely, but certainly with stunning effect, the blow of the Latins. We may say that Latins are too impatient to wait. We may also say that Latins are too intelligent to wobble. But anyhow, that is what happened in the French Revolution and that is what has happened in the Fascist Revolution.

At the end of the eighteenth century every rational person knew that a great many old things would have to be mended or ended. The despots knew it better than most people. Frederick of Prussia, Joseph of Austria, Catherine the Tsaritsa of the Russians, came afterwards to stand in some ways for the reaction; but they were all originally in favour of the reform. The aristocracy, which in England took the place of a despot, knew it equally well. The wisest Whigs compromised with the American democracy and began to talk about reforming the English representation. But, when all was said and done, it was mostly compromise when it was not mostly talk. I use the expression ‘when all was said and done’, but not very much was done, compared with what was said. And then, while this was going on, with whatever proportions of progress and procrastination, the news came like a thunderclap: the Man of the South had struck. The men from Marseilles had dragged their guns to Paris, roaring their imperishable song; the Bastille had fallen, and the mightiest of Christian monarchies was suddenly no more. That is how the thing happened. You may say that the northern moderates, left to themselves, would have done better. You may say that the northern moderates, left to themselves, would have done nothing. But anyhow, they were not left to themselves, because the hot and logical race, the men of the Mediterranean, would endure nonsense no more.

That is exactly what has happened again, before our very eyes, and still we could not see it. Parliament has in practice become a mass of nonsense, just as Versailles, with its dead etiquette and heraldry, had become a mass of nonsense. It may be that it might have been purged and saved; it may be that Parliamentarism may be purged and saved. What I complain of is that Parliamentarians are not making the smallest attempt to purge or save it. They are content to brag of all the liberties we have lost, and of all the votes that we never want to use, and of all the utterly unpopular laws passed in the interests of the people. They never talk about the abuses that have really rotted away the reputation of representative government; the capitalist backing even of collectivist professions; the secret fund that is no longer a secret. Meanwhile, all over Europe we hear the same story: that Parliamentarism is simply government by professional politicians, and that the professional politicians are profoundly corrupt. We cannot meet a universal criticism like that by jeering at Mussolini as if he were a bloodthirsty organ-grinder, or by laughing over anything that happens in Serbia, as if it happened in Ruritania.

It is, of course, exactly the same game that the Anti-Jacobins played against the Jacobins. It is the same policy that represented the French Revolution solely and entirely as a filthy mob of fields. It is the same silly spirit that would not describe Washington as General Washington, or that would describe Napoleon as General Bonaparte. In both cases, it is easier to treat a foreigner as funny, or an idealist as mad, than to understand what is really happening in the world we live in. In both cases, certain great institutions, in which the men of our blood once firmly believed, have been allowed to become muddles and mockeries. In the one case, it was the medieval idea of a King. In the other, it was the medieval idea of a Parliament. The real question, on which reasonable men may disagree, is whether a patient reform was possible, or a drastic reform was necessary. But to hear the average Liberal and Parliamentarian talk, you would think that nothing had ever heeded to be reformed since the Reform Bill. You think that the modern Parliament, which professes to be based on a popular theory, was really a popular thing. It is as if the Royalists had really expected a modern mob to feel exactly the same reverence for King Louis that a medieval mob would have felt for St. Louis. St. Louis was a good King and Washington was a good Republican; but (to use the degenerate speech of the descendants of the latter) when a thing has gone bad, it has got to make good.

XXXIV. On Abolishing Sunday

THE report that the Bolshevist Government had abolished Sunday might be read in several ways. Some of the Bolshevists were of the race which might be expected to substitute Saturday. Others have a marked intellectual affinity to the great religion which, oddly enough, selects Friday. The Moslem day of rest is Friday; and, when I was in Jerusalem, very quaint results sometimes followed from the three religious festivals coming on the three successive days. It was complained that the Jews took an unfair advantage of the fact that their Sabbath ceases at sunset; but, anyhow, it was highly significant of a universal human need that the three great cosmopolitan communions, which all disagreed about the choice of a sacred day, all agreed in having one. They had fought and persecuted and oppressed and exploited each other in all sorts of ways. But they all had the profound human instinct of a Truce of God, in which men should, if possible, leave off fighting, and even (if the thought be conceivable) leave off exploiting.

If the Bolshevists have really declared war on the intrinsic idea of a common Day of Rest, it is not perhaps the first point in which they have proved themselves much stupider than Jews, Turks, infidels and heretics. We all tend to talk naturally about antiquated pedantry. But the most pedantic sort of pedant is he who is too limited to be antiquated. He is cut off from antiquity and therefore from humanity; he will learn nothing from things, but only from theories; and, in the very act of claiming to teach by experiment, refuses to learn by experience. There could hardly be a stronger example of this sort of deaf and dull impatience than a merely destructive attitude towards Sabbaths and special days. The fact that men have always felt them necessary only makes this sort of prig more certain that they are unnecessary. Their universality, even in variety, ought to warn him that he is dealing with something deep and delicate — something at once subtle and stubborn. I do not say that he is bound to consider them right; but he is bound to consider them. And he never does consider them, because he finds it the line of least resistance to condemn them. It is almost enough for him that mankind has always desired something; he will instantly set to work to deliver mankind from anything that it has always desired. Sooner or later, we shall doubt less see a movement for freeing men from the old and barbarous custom of eating food. We have already, for that matter, seen something like a movement for delivering them from the fantastic habit of drinking drinks. We shall have revolutionists denouncing the degrading necessity of going to bed at night. Alter all, the prostrate posture might be considered servile or touched with the superstitions of the suppliant. The true active, alert, and self-respecting citizen may reasonably be expected to stand upright for twenty-four hours on end. The progressive philosopher may be required to walk in his sleep, and even to talk in his sleep; and, considering what he says and where he walks to, it seems likely enough. Anyhow, the same sort of dehumanized philosophy which destroys the recurrence of one day in seven may well disregard the recurrence of six hours in twenty-four. We may see a vast intellectual revolt against the Slavery of Sleep. I can vividly imagine the pamphlets and the posters; the elaborate statistics showing that, if people never stopped working, they would produce more than they do at present; the lucid diagrams setting forth the loss to labour by the fact that few men axe actually at work in their factor while they are asleep in their beds. These scientific demonstrations are always so close and cogent. I can almost see the rows of figures showing successively in the case of coal, cotton, butter, boot-laces, pork and pig-iron, that in every single example more work would be done if every body could only go on working. It is true that this sort of argument is generally of most ultimate use to Capitalism. But so is Bolshevism.

But these true friends of Capitalism, who still call themselves Communists, do not, of course, mean that nobody should have any leisure, any more than that nobody should have any sleep. The Communists would say that there should be shifts of labour, and frequent recurrences of leisure; but so would the capitalists. They would say that the labour should be organized for all, and the leisure given in turn to each individual; but so would the Capitalists. There is really not much difference in the general plan of the factory system presided over by the collectivism of Moscow and the individualism of Detroit. It is only fair to say that Mr. Ford has forgotten what anybody ever meant by Individualism, quite as completely as the Bolshevist leaders have forgotten what they themselves originally meant by Bolshevism. The holiday is given to the individual, but there is nothing individual about it. It is given by an impersonal power by a mechanical rotation, over which the individual himself has no power. It is not given to him on his birthday, or the day of his patron saint, or even on the day that he would personally prefer; God forbid! — or, rather (as the Bolshevists would say), Godlessness forbid!

But, even apart from the failure of the solitary holiday to be a personal holiday, there is a deeper objection to the disappearance of a social holiday. It lies deep in the mysteries of human nature, the one thing which the pedantic revolutionist is always too impatient to understand. He will study mathematics in a week and metaphysics in a fortnight; and as for economics, he has picked up the whole truth about them by looking at a little pamphlet in the lunch-hour. But he will not study Man; he dodges that science by simply dismissing all the elements he cannot understand as superstitions. Now one thing that is essential to man is rhythm; and not merely a rhythm in his own life, but to some extent in the living world around him. I will even remark, chiefly for the pleasure of annoying the scientific sociologist, that the most profound and practical truth of the matter is found in the statement that God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. In other words, there is a rhythm at the back of things, and in the beginning and nature of the universe; and there must be something of the same kind in the social and secular manifestations of the world. Men are not happy if things always look the same; it is recognized in practice in the common medical case for what is called ‘a change’. The mere fact that a man has not got to do any work himself on Tuesday is a very small part of the general sense of release or refreshment that existed in an institution like Sunday. I once ventured to use the expression (though I put it into the mouth of a bull- terrier), ‘the smell of Sunday morning’. And I am prepared to say that there is such a thing, though my own sense of smell is very deficient compared with a bull-terrier’s. There is something in the very light and air of a world in which most people are not working, or not working as much or in the same way as usual, which satisfied the subconscious craving for crisis and fulfilment. If men have nothing but an endless series of days which look alike, it would matter little whether they were days of leisure or labour. They would not give that particular sense of something achieved, or, at least, of something measured; of the image of God resting on the seventh day. it is a psychological fact that such monotony would take on a character as of mathematical insanity. It would be like the endless corridors of a nightmare. Men have always known this by instinct, Pagans as well as Christians. And when all humanity has agreed on the necessity for some thing, we may be perfectly certain that some sort of humanitarian will want to destroy it.

XXXV. On Prohibition

I AM inclined to think that stating the Prohibitionist arguments is one of the best ways of attacking Prohibition. With most of them I have been long familiar; with the familiarity which does, indeed, breed contempt. They fall under three or four general headings, some of them being material, not to say materialistic; others being moral, or rather concerned with the subject of morals. Others again are purely sentimental, in the sense of appealing to particular cases without any pretence that they make a general social case. Others are of the nature of personal recrimination and are concerned with quarrels purely local, not to say provincial. I do not profess to put them here in any strict logical order; and some of them are rather difficult to state logically, even so as to show that they are illogical. But I will take only a few of them as they come.

First, there are arguments for Prohibition that can no longer be used even by Prohibitionists. They have recoiled upon their original authors in the queerest and most grotesque fashion. When the great enactment was first enacted we were told that there would be an immense reduction of crime. Almost before the thing had got started, we were even told that there had been a great reduction of crime. There is a remarkable silence to-day about that side of the coercionist argument. At least there was a silence about it, until the first of American citizens, the President, himself of the Prohibitionist party (very much to his honour), broke the silence and the argument at one blow. Every one knows the astonishing words in which Mr. Hoover declared, not only that crime had grown to the craziest pro portions in his country, as compared with older countries like our own, but distinctly stated that it had so increased since Prohibition and apparently because of Prohibition. Any one who wishes to be more Prohibitionist than the Prohibitionist President can, if he likes, accuse Mr. Hoover of wantonly telling lies against the credit of his own country and the cause of his own party. But I shall be justified in saying, I think, that it would be impossible to find a more responsible, a more realistic, or a more reluctant witness.

Then, there is an argument which I have come across in Prohibitionist papers in England. It is very simple. It consists of accusing everybody of being brewers or whisky-distillers or wine-merchants, as the only possible explanation of their defending the use of things like wine. I am myself, no doubt, an enormously wealthy brewer in disguise; and I have little difficulty in supposing that my old antagonist Dean Inge (who has written some splendidly sensible things on this subject) is himself the proprietor of an illicit still, or possibly lives on the proceeds of wine-vaults under St. Paul's. As the thoughtful argument is stated here, by one of the Prohibitionist thinkers:

'What I should like to get hold of is the amount of money being contributed by the whisky men of England, the wine men of France, the beer men of Germany, to promote the breaking of our laws.' I only pause upon this argument because it is an excellent example of the coercionists' incapacity to argue. There is in existence a band of enthusiasts that used to be known as the Hatless Brigade, who consider it more hygienic and natural to walk about without hats. When all morality has gone as mad as it has in the age of Prohibition, it is quite easy to imagine that this fad might harden into a fanaticism. Fashionable charlatans in the scientific world might prove that some general scourge like tuberculosis could be cured by enforced hatlessness, like small pox by enforced vaccination. Cosmic moralists and makers of new religions might declare that the only church is the blue dome of heaven, and that we ought to remove our hats when standing under it. All sorts of arguments might be urged for the alleged improvement; and in the modern world of conscription and compulsory education it would be easily agreed that the improvement could only be made by force. But even in a mad world there are degrees of madness; and the crown of lunacy would still belong to a man who said that anybody who went on wearing a hat must be a hatter. We should not have to look far for somebody a good deal madder than a Mad Hatter.

The custom of drinking fermented liquor is an ancient, normal, and nearly universal custom of man kind, and rather especially of the most civilized part of mankind. Anybody who chooses to do without it is perfectly within his rights, as he is when he is a Jew and does without pork. But no Jew was ever such a fool as to say that ordinary Gentiles only continue to eat pork because they all have a commercial interest as pork-butchers. And this absurd argument is part of the larger argument which rests on the incapacity to understand the relations between a novelty and a normality: in deference to a rather doubtful Prohibitionist in the past, perhaps I should say a normalcy. This larger argument, if it can be called an argument, consists in the amazing delusion that all moral idealists must be

Prohibitionists. In other words, it consists of the incredible idea that most men are really ashamed of drinking beer. It would be as sensible for the vegetarian to suppose that most men are ashamed of eating beef. A man in a minority may think he is right; he may even turn out to be right; but if he really supposes that the majority thinks it is wrong, then he is in a minority of one; he is mad.

Then there is the argument which many think the most plausible and which I think by far the most perilous, not to say poisonous. It may be called the employers' argument; which is expressed politely in the form of output and a hundred per cent efficiency, and practically in the form of getting more work out of the worker. Our experience of the fate of Prohibitionist arguments would justify us in doubting the fact in any case, and suspecting that it would vanish under examination as completely as the argument from crime has admittedly vanished. But it is the sort of thing that I distrust quite as much when it is a fact as when it is a fable. What I distrust is the philosophy behind it; because it is the pagan philosophy of slavery. A pagan slave-owner said that slaves should be either working or sleeping. The modern pagans have extended their knowledge of hygiene, and often admit that other things are healthy besides sleep. Some of them will even admit that holidays are healthy; some of them even set up gymnasiums or encourage organized games — so long as they are allowed to organize them. But they have the same ethics as the old pagans; because the object of the slaves' health is the slaves' work. Just as the old slave had to sleep in order to work, the new slave may have to rest in order to work. But he must not do anything entirely for his own pleasure, for fun or the fulfilment of himself. And if you wish to test whether such employers are interested in model employment except as a working model, the test is easy. Ask what they think about a thing like a glass of beer; which in fact does the workman no harm, but which does the employer no good. You will find the answer decisive and enlightening.

XXXVI. On America

IT has always puzzled me to notice how little English people seem to know or care about the history of America. It is one of the most picturesque and personal of all the histories of the nations. The number of really interesting characters that figure in it is very large. The ideas and ideals for which they stood are very living. If there is a touch of wildness in it, combined curiously with modern conditions, that makes it all the more romantic, and is natural enough in the memories of a nation of pioneers. But the American people were not merely opening up a continent; they were also working out a conception. We, or for that matter they, are not yet absolutely certain how that conception will work out. But they started with a great ideal, like a law graven on stone tablets, and practical problems arose out of it as they arise out of a real creed or religion. Almost all the questions they had to settle were worth settling. For instance, there seems to me to be more vital interest about the Civil War in America than about the Civil War in England. It was more of a fight to a finish, and they were a very much finer sort of people who were finished. It is said that the English are fond of compromise; and, in spite of the killing of the King by a few fanatics, it is true to say that even on their battle-fields there was compromise, and even some elements that might be called compromising. The Stuarts were not quite such despotists as the legend makes them. The Puritans were certainly not such democrats as their own legend implies. The monarchy was not completely destroyed with the monarch. It was certainly not completely restored at the Restoration. There was a deep change in English history, but it did not entirely depend on the Civil War. In one sense it had begun nearly two generations before; in another sense it was not achieved till nearly two generations afterwards. It was, in fact, the change from a medieval monarchy to a modern plutocracy, and in that sense it is not completed yet. But, anyhow, it was not a mere fencing-match between Roundheads and Cavaliers; yet that is all that is remembered.

But the American Civil War was a real war between two civilizations. It will affect the whole history of the world. There were great and good men, on both sides, who knew it would affect the whole history of the world. Yet the great majority of Englishmen know nothing about it, or only know the things that are not true. They have a general idea that it was ‘all about niggers'; and they are taught by their newspapers to admire Abraham Lincoln as ignorantly and idiotically as they once used to abuse him. All this seems to me very strange; not only considering the importance of America, but considering how everybody is now making America so very important. America is allowed to have, if anything, far too much influence on the affairs of the rest of the world; yet those who submit to that influence, or praise that influence, or warmly welcome that influence, seem to take no interest in American affairs. They invite the American to settle our future, but they are bored with him when he is interested in his own past. It is especially so with those who say they are Anglo-Saxons, and presumably mean that they are Anglo-Americans. They believe that the first Americans went over in the *Mayflower*, which is untrue; and they believe that the best Americans come back again in the *Olympic*, which is also untrue. But between the *Mayflower* and the *Olympic* they seem to have amazingly little interest in what their beloved kinsmen were doing. I do not quite understand why America before the Civil War should be so much less interesting than America after the Great War. I need not say that I dismiss the possibility that enlightened modern people could be interested in a country because it is rich.

A book has recently been published on the sequel of the American Civil War, called *The Tragic Era*, writ ten by Mr. Claude Bowers, and published by Houghton Mifflin. It is concerned chiefly with an episode only known to Englishmen through the very fine and effective film called *The Birth of a Nation*. It is significant in some ways that what the film-producer called a national birth, the historian can only call a national tragedy. Many things that followed on wars have been rather more tragic than the wars. We know, in our own case, that it is sometimes possible to lose a war after we have won it. The American politicians lost something more valuable than a war; they lost a peace. They lost a possibility of reconciliation that would not only have doubled their strength, but would have given them a far better balance of ideas which would have vastly increased their ultimate influence on the world. Lincoln may have been right in thinking that he was bound to preserve the Union. But it was not the Union that was preserved. A union implies that two different things are united; and it should have been the Northern and Southern cultures that were united. As a fact, it was the Southern culture that was destroyed. And it was the Northern that ultimately imposed not a unity but merely a uniformity. But that was not Lincoln’s fault. He died before it happened; and it happened because he died.

Everybody knows, I imagine, that the first of the men who really destroyed the South was the Southern fanatic, John Wilkes Booth. He murdered the one man in the North who was capable of comprehending that there was a case for the South. But Northern fanatics finished the work of the Southern fanatic; many of them as mad as he and more wicked than he. Mr. Bowers gives a vivid account of the reign of terror that Stevens and Sumner and the rest let loose on the defeated rebels a pestilence of oppression from which the full promise of America has never recovered. But I have a particular reason at the moment for recommending to my countrymen some study of the book and the topic.

Every age has its special strength, and generally one in which some particular nation is specially strong. Every age has also its special weakness and deficiency, and a need which only another type could supply. This is rather specially the Age of America; but inevitably, and unfortunately, rather the America of the Northern merchants and industrialists. It is also the age of many genuine forms of philanthropy and humanitarian effort, such as modern America has very generously supported. But there is a virtue lacking in the age, for want of which it will certainly suffer and possibly fail. It might be expressed in many ways; but as short a way of stating it as any I know is to say that, at this moment, America and the whole world is crying out for the spirit of the Old South.

In other words, what is most lacking in modern psychology is the sentiment of Honour; the sentiment to which personal independence is vital and to which wealth is entirely incommensurate. I know very well that Honour had all sorts of fantasies and follies in the days of its excess. But that does not affect the danger of its deficiency, or rather its disappearance. The world will need, and need desperately, the particular spirit of the landowner who will not sell his land, of the shopkeeper who will not sell his shop, of the private man who will not be bullied or bribed into being part of a public combination; of what our fathers meant by the free man. And we need the Southern gentleman more than the English or French or Spanish gentleman. For the aristocrat of Old Dixie, with all his faults and inconsistencies, did understand what the gentle man of Old Europe generally did not. He did understand the Republican ideal, the notion of the Citizen as it was understood among the noblest of the pagans. That combination of ideal democracy with real chivalry was a particular blend for which the world was immeasurably the better; and for the loss of which it is immeasurably the worse. It may never be recovered; but it will certainly be missed.

XXXVII. On Bigness and America

IT is well known that I am an unreasonable reactionary, who refuses to face the great facts of the modern world. I have never been convinced that a giraffe is a better fireside playmate than a kitten. I cannot be got to see that a hippopotamus is certain to win a race against a greyhound. An invincible prejudice prevents me from admitting that whales served on toast are more appetizing than sardines. Nay, I cannot even persuade myself that the larger sort of sharks are, as drawing-room ornaments, necessarily improvements upon gold-fish. I cannot think that the gesture of pulling up a palm-tree is always easier or more graceful than that of picking a flower; or that it is always more enjoyable to die of thirst in the Sahara than to drink wine from a small vineyard or water from a village well. In short, I am lamentably lacking in that reverence for largeness, or for things on a Big Scale, which is apparently the religion of the age of Big Business. And, among other instances, I may venture to point out that this difference of opinion applies particularly to what was in the first instance, I suppose, the home and source of Big Business. There are a great many things which I really do admire about America; which I admire with much more sincerity than is common in those who merely flatter America. I admire America for being simple, for not being snobbish, for being still democratic in instincts, for having a respect for work and for treating the mere luxurious cynic as a lounge-lizard. But I do not admire America for being big. I do not envy America for being big. I do not even feel that it has practical and material advantages in being big. But it has a great many very big disadvantages from being big; and one of them emerged in the in tensely interesting issue of the last American Presidential Election.

There is no nation more active than the Americans, none more naturally intelligent, none more easy to move for the purpose of starting a campaign or spreading an idea. But it is obvious that the field of operations is too large even for the largest campaign. The idea cannot be spread, even spread very thin, over quite so vast a surface. It is therefore a fact, quite as familiar to enlightened Americans as to anybody else, that there are great masses of unenlightened Americans, whom none of the enlightened Americans can approach near enough to enlighten. There are superstitions that might have stagnated for centuries in impenetrable swamps; there are wild religions that might have sprung up and died in a desert; there are solid blocks of barbarous ignorance which were due not to stupidity but simply to segregation. There is no particular occasion for superiority or self-righteousness about this. If all Europe were one nation we should doubtless be saying the same about certain black belts among the Tartars or the Slavs. But though England has not yet the luck to be a small nationality, thank heaven it is not quite in that degree a great power. For, in this aspect, there is no such thing as great power. What is spread out before us is a great weakness. The system in extending its communications always decreases its efficiency; and there never was an empire upon this earth that did not go further and fare worse.

Anyhow, this queer fact of psychology and sociology has been illustrated amazingly in the outcry against Governor Smith. Such cries seem sometimes to be hardly human; and nothing like them has been heard in Europe since the rabble roared behind Titus Oates or the native Irish were driven to Hell or Connaught. But there is one peculiarity of the ignorance to which I would draw special attention, though it is probably not the one to which I am supposed chiefly to attend. I am a Catholic; but I know quite well that there are Anti-Catholics and Anti-Catholics. The extraordinary thing about these people is not that they know nothing about the Church, but that they know nothing about the world. It is not that they are ignorant of the old religion, but that they are ignorant of the modern situation, and of the things that are not only specially modern, but rather specially American. America is too large to understand its own largeness. It is not that thousands of them do not know what is meant by a Papal Bull. It is rather as if thousands of them did not know what is meant by a Ford Car.

For instance, one thing that seems to have been said over and over again is that Mr. Smith would ‘bring the Pope over’, and apparently keep him permanently in the White House at Washington; whether as a paying guest or a sort of private chaplain I cannot quite make out. Now, what interests me is this: that the very idea suggested is a simple and primitive and barbaric idea; the idea of somebody who is quite outside the modern civilized world. If we express a fear that Picasso may have too much influence on English art, we do not mean that some body will bring him over and put him into lodgings in Chelsea. When we say that Mr. Rockefeller might threaten the English interests in oil, we do not mean that Mr. Rockefeller must be living quietly near Clapham Junction, disguised as a clerk. The influence of Mussolini, the influence of Lenin, does not mean the danger of people carrying them about like luggage to different ports and custom-houses. For good or evil, and indeed very largely for evil, the international influences of the modern world do not depend on particular people going to particular places. The point is that nobody would suggest it but somebody ignorant of the modern world.

All genuine admirers of America, including all genuine Americans, will see in these symptoms a conflict of very high significance. The election was not a conflict between Democrats and Republicans, or between Drink and Prohibition, or even in the first place between Agriculture and Finance. It is, in the simplest sense of the very strongest phrase, a conflict between light and darkness; between things understood and things not understood; between people who take a certain view of the facts, and people who have never yet even heard of the facts; between principle and prejudice; between cosmos and chaos. I am well aware that Mr. Hoover him self and many high-minded Republicans altogether repudiate this bigotry and barbarism; but they cannot help the unfortunate fact that it is the strongest thing on their side. It may be that they would not use it; but it will have no such delicacy about using them. And, as a matter of calculating the actual practical proportions of things, this is the thing that defeated Mr. Smith; this is the thing he will have to defeat to avoid being defeated again. We should not think that a serious political issue about Protection for Hops was being adequately settled, if for large sections of the electorate it turned entirely on the proposition that Kentish men have tails. It is not a serious political issue about Prohibition or anything else, when for large sections of the electorate it turns on a general impression that American Catholics have horns. We should not think the problem of Imperialism adequately solved by the simple-minded few who once imagined that the Boers were black. Unfortunately in America there are people equally simple-minded, and not quite so few, who suppose that the Irish, when attached to their national religion, are all morally and spiritually black. That sort of problem has nothing to do with preference for any such race or religion; it is simply a question of whether the issue shall be decided by a delusion. A fanatical secret society of this sort existed in America before, and was called the ‘Know Nothing’ movement. The title was truer than it was meant to be. And the struggle is simply between those who know something, right or wrong, and the enormous natural strength of those who know nothing.

XXXVIII. On the American Revolt against Americanism

IT is curious to compare the American reaction against realism in literature with some of the recent English reactions against it. For the American and English journalists, as figures on the popular stage, here seem rather to have changed places. I am sorry to say it, but it is the English journalist who now often displays what were called the vices and vulgarities of the American journalists. It is the English journalist who tries to fight the new novels and notions with nothing but sob-stuff and sentimental sensations and a vague alternative of Uplift. And it is the American critic, at least in the case of Mr. Harvey Wickham, the author of two critical studies with wit on the covers and wisdom inside, who really fights such notions with better notions; who fights false ideas with true ideas; who fights sophistry with philosophy; who fights rationalism with reason.

I have criticized some aspects of America in my time, and even been rebuked for it here and in America. I need not say that I was generally rebuked for the dreadful things that I did not say. I cannot retract what I did not say; and it is not in the least my intention to retract what I did say. But I do feel that the fact of having said it lays on me an obligation of testifying to anything equally true on the other side. And I think that at this moment a great deal of the truth is on the other side — even on the other side of the Atlantic. I do think there is a considerable movement of American culture just now, from which we might really have something to learn; only that our commercial journalism is bent on learning the worst from American newspapers instead of the best from American books. The Gospel of the Go-getter is beginning to be boomed in England at precisely the moment when it is beginning to be criticized in America; and just when Babbitt the Bright Salesman is for the first time being made fun of there, he is for the first time being taken seriously here. It is entirely the business of the Americans themselves when they choose to begin to laugh at something; but it is perfectly deplorable that Englishmen should ever leave off laughing.

Thus, few of us who talk about Babbitt know that in America there are two Babbitts. They are the opposite of each other in every possible respect; even to the extent of one being real and the other mythical. The imaginary Babbitt is realistic. The real Babbitt is idealistic. He is Professor Irving

Babbitt, the leader of a movement which he calls Humanism; an appeal to the culture that can be found in tradition, not unlike that once preached by Matthew Arnold. It is extraordinarily funny that he should have the same name as Mr. Sinclair Lewis's unheroic hero; unless indeed Mr. Sinclair Lewis did it for fun. But I merely mention Professor Babbitt and Humanism here as one of many examples of the truth I mean — that America now contains a considerable amount of revolt against Americanism. There is a very strikingspirit in criticism, especially self-criticism. I am not sure that we are grappling with the present evils of England as well as some of these critics are now grappling with the special evils of America.

The attack on the literature called Impuritan is all the better because it is not merely made by a Puritan; indeed, it is in many places just the sort of attack that would have been made by the wiser sort of Pagan. It is amusing that many of our modern anarchists delight in calling themselves Pagans. They would by no means delight in the experience of being subject to Lycurgus or Cato the Censor. They would not even enjoy submitting to bear the load of dignity belonging to a Roman matron or a Roman senator or soldier. If they really experienced the awful weight of the old Pagan sense of the State, they would cry aloud for the liberty of being Christians. But there are many particular passages in which the American critic is a Christian rather than a Censor Morum. Nothing could be more penetrating, nothing could be more true, nothing (in short) could be more unlike our own maudlin rants about immoral fiction, than the passage in *The Impuritans* in which Mr. Harvey Wickham points out that Proust does not really understand the end of his own characters or the moral of his own story. Mr. Wickham goes direct to a deep reality when he says that in the last resort the exaggeration of sex becomes sexlessness. It becomes something that is much worse than mere anarchy, something that can truly be described as *malice*; a war, not against the restraints required by virtue, but against virtue itself. The old moral theology called it malice; and there will be no future for the modern psychology until it again studies the old moral theology. Sex is the bait and not the hook; but in that last extreme of evil the man likes the hook and not the bait.

Now, the trouble with nearly all modern discussions of these moral questions is not so much that they are immoral as that they are inconsistent. They lose themselves in a labyrinth of evil without having a map of the maze; and yet they go on saying that everything is good, even while they are actually exaggerating everything that is bad. The news papers are always asking novelists to act as moralists. For some reason I do not understand they always ask for articles about the religion or philosophy of novelists, and not of chemists or dentists or any other sort of specialists. As a rule, the good novelist makes a very bad moralist. But that is not what strikes me as peculiar in this case. What I think so odd is that he is generally a pessimist as a novelist and an optimist as a moralist. His stories are full of people doing unpardonable things, and his articles are empty of everything, except a vague suggestion that the unpardonable things had better be pardoned. But it never occurs to him to consider the nature of pardon, or the way in which pardon itself implies sin and spiritual responsibility. In the most worldly sort of fiction the world is made out worse and worse; certainly much worse than it is. If any unworldly person mildly attempted to defend the world, he would certainly be called a sentimentalist and an idealist. But if he were to venture to say that, if the world is really like that, it must be a pretty bad look-out for it, he would once again be reviled as a Puritan and a kill-joy. The Modern Thinker is to look at the world through jaundice-yellow spectacles when he is writing realistic fiction, and then to look at the world through rose-coloured spectacles when he is writing the Modern Morality or the New Religion. I would venture to suggest that we should smash both sorts of spectacles and look at the real spectacle of the world — but including the spiritual world.

XXXIX. On Abraham Lincoln

IT is recognized that Lincoln emerged from the lower grades of law and politics through an atmosphere in which the lowest tricks were regarded as only tricks of the trade. That queer, shabby figure, the ‘rail-splitter’, with his stove-pipe hat and clumsy cotton umbrella, did undoubtedly emerge among such tricksters as being by far the most truthful. But in the world where he began he could only have been called the least tricky. It is to his credit that he shed most of these habits with a natural shame, and for no other reason. But it is clear that, at some periods, it was not only his hat and umbrella that were shabby.

But there is another paradox about Abraham Lincoln, over and above those noticed by his recent realistic biographers, and one that has always seemed to me very noticeable. He really was a hero, but he seems exactly the wrong sort of hero for all his own hero-worshippers. We should be rather surprised if a very quiet and pacific colony of Quakers in a Pennsylvanian village had no other interest in life but the glorification of the great Napoleon, the exultant and detailed description of his battles, the lyrical salute of the cannonade of Austerlitz or the cavalry charges of Wagram. We should think it odd if a company of pagan epicureans, crowned with roses and flushed with wine, had no other thought in the world but a devotion to St. Simeon Stylites, for his austerity and asceticism in standing on a pillar in the desert. It would seem curious if the young Swinburne had been the only idol of the Nonconformist Conscience, or if the Prussian militarists had thought of nothing but the Christian Socialism of Tolstoy. And yet the sort of people who incessantly sing the praises of Abraham Lincoln have got hold of a man quite as incongruous to their own conception of a hero — if ever they could turn from imagining the hero to considering the man. The sort of people who are called Puritans perpetually glorify a man who seems to have been in his youth a rather crude sort of atheist, and was famous all his life for telling dirty and profane stories. The sort of people who are generally Prohibitionists invariably invoke the name of a man who said that habitual drunkards compared favourably with most other people of his acquaintance; and who would himself, in moments of relaxation, tip up a barrel of whisky and drink the liquor through the bung-hole. The sort of people who are perpetually talking about punctuality and propriety, and the prompt performance of duty or seizure of opportunity, are always commending to us the example of a man who never turned up at his own wedding, and who made a most horrible mess of his own domestic affairs. Yes, he was a hero all right; but his hero-worshippers would not think so.

But perhaps the most curious part of the contradiction is this. Americans of his own Yankee and Puritan following are always talking about Success. Worse still, they are always talking about men who are Bound To Succeed. It seems possible that the men Bound To Succeed were those afterwards shortened into Bounders. Certainly the portraits and descriptions of such beings richly suggest the briefer description. But Lincoln was not a Bounder. Lincoln was most certainly not a man Bound To Succeed. For the greater part of his life he looked much more like a man Bound To Fail. Indeed, for that matter, a great many of his cold and uncomprehending colleagues, right up to the very end of the Civil War, thought he really was a man bound to fail. The truth is that he was a very clear and even beautiful example of the operation of the opposite principle — that God has chosen the failures of the world to confound the successes; and the true moral of his life is that of the poets and the saints. He was one of a very rare and very valuable race, whose representatives appear from time to time in history. He was one of the Failures who happen to succeed.

What I mean is this: that, if ninety-nine out of a hundred of the people who specially praise Lincoln to-day had met him at almost any time of his life till within a few years of his death, they would have avoided him as they avoid the drunkard, the lunatic, the impecunious poet, the habitual criminal, and the man who is always borrowing money. This, of course, is even more true of General Grant than of President Lincoln; and it is a queer irony that the great Puritan and commercial power of the North should have been saved entirely by two such men. But, though Lincoln was never an habitual drunkard like Grant, he had about him in all his early days the same savour of unsuccess. The philanthropists and social reformers who now worship his name would have regarded him as belonging to the type which they think ‘unemployable’; a scallywag, a drifter and dreamer, a man who would come to no good. His casualness, his coarseness, his habit of taking up this and that and not making it pay, his changes of trade and dwelling place — all these would have sufficed to make him seem from the first fated to failure. But, whatever his weaknesses or even his vices, they would not have been so fatal to his chances as his own supreme virtue. The one great virtue of Abraham Lincoln would have seemed alone sufficient to cut him off from all hope of success in modern civilization.

For this great man had one secret vice far more unpopular among his followers than the habit of drinking. He had the habit of thinking. We might almost call it the habit of secret thinking, a dark consolation like that of secret drinking; for during his early days he must have practised it unappreciated, and it has been said that he worked out the propositions of Euclid as a relief after having been nagged by his wife. This habit of thinking was not the thoughtless thing commonly called free-thinking, though he may have picked up a little of that in his less enlightened days. It was real thinking, which means knowing exactly where to draw the line — a logic which is often mistaken for compromise.

The great glory of Lincoln is that, almost alone among politicians, he really knew what he thought about politics. He really thought slavery was bad, but he really thought the disruption of America was worse. It is perfectly possible for an intelligent person to disagree with him on either or both of these points. But he was an intelligent person when he stated them in that way, and put them in that order. In short, he had a native love of Truth; and, like every man with such a love, he had a natural hatred of mere Tendency. He had no use for progress, for evolution, for going with the stream, for letting the spirit of the age lead him onward. He knew exactly what he thought, not only about the perfection, but the proportion of truth; not only about the direction, but the distance. He was not always right; but he always tried to be reasonable, and that in exactly the sense which his special admirers have never understood from that day to this. He tried to be reasonable. It is not surprising that his life was a martyrdom, and that he died murdered.

XL. On Myself on Abraham Lincoln

AN American critic, apparently of the Baptist persuasion, has uttered a furious denunciation of me for my celebrated slander on Abraham Lincoln. And this is odd, as the poet said; because I was under the strong impression that I had written a eulogy on Abraham Lincoln. It so happens that I have a particular enthusiasm for Lincoln; and I endeavoured to state the real reasons for admiring him, and the real things in which he was admirable. But apparently all the things that I think admirable the Baptist critic thinks abominable, and vice versa. So deep are the moral divisions in this happy age of the union of all creeds and nations.

I will start with one simple and yet curious example. I said that Lincoln had the sort of mind that does not really bother about Progress or the spirit of the age. Whether or no this be a fact, I need hardly say that it was meant as a compliment. I meant that he thought for himself and had independent and indestructible convictions, unaltered by fashion and cant. But the American critic actually regards my remark as a mortal insult to his ideal Lincoln. He declares passionately that Lincoln was affected by Progress. He affirms, trembling with indignation, that Lincoln was controlled by the spirit of the age. Most extraordinary of all, he actually quotes in favour of Lincoln something that Lincoln said against himself: when he modestly observed that ‘he had not controlled events, but been controlled by them’. It is perfectly possible that Lincoln said this, in a humorous sod of humility and self-disparagement; but I do not see why, because he disparaged himself, his almost idolatrous adorer is bound to disparage him. Certainly I do not see why the critic should disparage him in so damaging a style as this. I am pretty sure that Lincoln would not have been controlled by events, or even by the spirit of the age, where ideas were concerned. I do not believe he would have admitted that Slavery was right, if the South had won the War and the slaves States had prospered ten times more than the free.

The next point that I should like to have cleared up is this. The critic is very much horrified at my suggesting that Lincoln was any more tolerant or liberal than the critic himself on the subject of strong drink. He owns that Lincoln once lifted a whisky barrel and took what he (the critic) delicately calls ‘a sip’. Unless I am much mistaken in Abe, he had rather too good a sense of humour to take a sip. But that is a trivial matter, and I will leave on one side all charges of intemperance against Abe; all the more readily because I never brought any. The case is very different touching charges of intemperance against Grant. And it is here that 1 wish to under stand clearly on what basis I am expected to argue. For the Baptist critic repeatedly reviles mc for daring to suggest such things about so historic a hero as the great Northern conqueror of the South. Am I to understand that the critic contradicts flatly all the accepted evidence that Grant, that great soldier, certainly did drink whisky rather well than wisely? Or am I to understand that, even if he did, historians are to hide it for ever, because he was a General and a President, and the country has gone Prohibitionist? I never said anything else against Grant except that he drank rather freely; because I willingly admit that there is not much else to be said. Nor do I consider it a very horrible charge against him. Nor did Abraham Lincoln. Does the critic deny the words of Lincoln himself, who went so far as to say that habitual drunkards compare well with other people in many or most important respects? If the critic is shocked at my words, he must be much more shocked at Lincoln's. I shudder to think what he would say of some remarks of my friend Mr. Christopher Hollis, in a paragraph beginning 'The fascinating question of when General Grant was drunk and when sober', and proceeding to say that he was probably sober at Appomattox, but almost certainly drunk at Shiloh; that he afterwards, on reaching the Presidency, took some sort of teetotal pledge; and concluding with the words, 'It is enough to add that he was a very good General and a very bad President.'

Such playfulness, however, is not for the Baptist critic, nor for me when I am criticizing him. I do not think drunkenness a commendable quality; but I do not think it the one specially and supremely damnable one. And that is where we come to the real difference between this American critic and myself. And that difference becomes clearer when we reach the third of his complaints against me. I stated my strong impression, from what I have read of the life of Lincoln, that he was emphatically not the type of the mere self-made man who sticks to one trade and succeeds; that there was a great deal in him of the erratic genius who either succeeds as a genius or fails at everything; that there was in him not a little of the unworldly weaknesses of the artist or the loafer, as shown in many such strange incidents as his absence from his own wedding. I do not claim to be an expert on the details of his biography, but some of these facts are universally known; some I found in a recent and responsible American Life of Lincoln; and the critic had better fight it out with the American biographer rather than with me.

But the point of the thing is this: that I thought it was a compliment to consider Lincoln unworldly; but the critic, in his heart, really thinks it a compliment to consider him worldly. That is where there is a real difference between his moral philosophy and mine. If the words ‘worldly’ and ‘unworldly’ do not convey the same meaning to him as to me, or if they seem far-fetched in relation to what I said, I will willingly substitute the words ‘success’ and ‘failure’. When I say that Lincoln was a man who easily might have been a failure, very nearly was a failure, and in some ways actually remains a failure, I mean it as in the case of poets or martyrs. But the critic cannot bear to think that his hero was not a success, and bound to be a success, and satisfied with being a success; as in the case of magnates and millionaires. He cannot bear to think that his hero was not a Go-getter, a Booster, a Best-Seller, a Bright Salesman, and a Man Born to Succeed. I can only say that it is not my impression of Lincoln that he was like that.

The important thing to realize here, much more important than his essay or mine, is that we really are becoming divided in moral ideals. I am sure that my critic is quite sincere in his hero-worship; just as I am quite sincere in mine. What is to me extraordinary beyond words is the implied system of tests which he applies to a hero. He wishes to show that Lincoln was more heroic than I had represented him; and the following seem to be the essential qualities that go to constitute a truly heroic figure. First, he must be a teetotaller; or, as I should say, he must be a Moslem rather than a Christian on the moral problem of wine. Second, he must take very seriously the business of getting on in this world, prospering in his profession and obtaining the solid rewards this world has to give. Third, he must worship Progress or the Spirit of the Age; which can only mean (so far as I can make any sense of it) that he must allow his own conscience and conviction to be twisted into any shapes that the pressure of the present state of polities and society may tend to produce. I do not think any of these things especially admirable; I do not think any of them even reason ably arguable; and I do not think any of them any more characteristic of Lincoln than of Lee or Bayard or Joan of Arc, or any hero or heroine in history.

XLI. On Foch

I AM always amused to notice that in this post-war society, when everybody is talking about internationalism, everybody seems to be more narrow and national than ever. It is gratifying to know that Foch appreciated the great military virtues of Haig; but it is not the most philosophical aspect of a historical character. It is interesting to know that Foch was a friend of Sir Henry Wilson; but for future historians it will be at least equally true to say that Sir Henry Wilson was a friend of Foch. It is doubtless impressive to be told by a professional politician that Foch could not have done more for us if he had been an English general; but perhaps it is as well to remember that he was not an English general, and that he will not be judged in future centuries entirely and exclusively by how he got on with the English. The truth is that there never was a man whose importance in history depended so much on a full understanding of the whole Continental problem as Ferdinand Foch. He was a good French man, and therefore respected those of the English who were good Englishmen. But a man can hardly measure the meaning of the story without being a good European.

I am one of those who think that a man will hardly be a good European unless he is a good Englishman or a good Frenchman, or in each several case full of his own national culture. There was a great deal about Foch that was intensely and peculiarly French. Nobody but a Frenchman would have launched that direct and yet dazzling epigram in the midst of the Battle of the Marne: ‘My right gives way; my left retreats; situation excellent; I attack.’ ‘Where that phrase was so typically French is that it has three separate meanings, and they are all true. A superficial person will take it as a fine piece of faronade, a romantic defiance and refusal to accept defeat. A more sagacious person will see that it is a piece of irony almost worthy of Voltaire, and that Foch sees the joke of the boast better than anybody. The most sagacious person of all will observe that it was also a piece of cold, hard, scientific fact. It really was true that the Germans pursuing the Allied retreat on one side, and checking the attempted envelopment on the other, created the strain and the weak point at which Foch suddenly struck. That is the French genius; to say things that only look witty and are also wise. That is the achievement of all French literature and philosophy: it is the supreme and splendid triumph of looking shallow, and being deep.

But there was also a quality in him that was more than French: a quality that was represented by his religion and his restraint and the way in which he stood apart from the politics of his country and of other countries. He was full of tradition; and the best part of tradition is unconscious. The final flower of tradition is instinct. He embodied better than anybody else the fact that is now forgotten, and without which the whole story is formless and senseless — the fact that it was a defensive war. It is always quite easy to forget the advantages gained by a defensive war. A defensive war is always the most defensible and the least easy to defend. The reason is obvious enough. If a man goes out to knock another man down and takes his watch, and if he succeeds, he will at least have the watch to show. But the other man, if he successfully defends himself, will have nothing to show; except perhaps a black eye or a broken umbrella. He will not have added to the watches in his own possession; he will only have the old slow and faulty timepiece that he always had, and everybody expected him to have.

Disappointment after a defensive war is quite inevitable, and quite irrational. But Foch represented an old morality which regarded it as the only kind of war that was really justifiable. This quiet and unadvertised man, who made no noise among the noisy controversies of post-war Europe, was nevertheless one of the fixed points, one of the calculable nuclei, of the oldest controversy in the world. He was to be counted on to stand for the ancient and normal morals of Christendom, which so many other great men have been driven either to misunderstand or to misrepresent. In the matter of the way of doing things, of the technique and science of his own profession, he was all in favour of dash and originality. But in the matter of what ought to be done, of what is the real reason for doing anything, of what we are all ultimately trying to do, he was as simple as a saint — and as sane. He might have said, like that other great Frenchman, also so daring and successful in modern applications of a science, ‘My scientific studies have left me with the faith of a Breton peasant; and I do not doubt that further studies would give me the faith of a Breton peasant’s wife.’

Something in our age prevents direct and simple genius of this sort appearing on its real scale. For about fifty or sixty years the names counted famous have been largely of those who argued about what should be done and why. The men called great — sometimes really great and sometimes only great as charlatans — were Carlyle and Nietzsche and Ibsen and

Tolstoy and Hardy and Bernard Shaw. But in history as a whole the scale of greatness was some what different. Men who did great things, granted the obvious motives of piety and patriotism and glory and the service of the gods, filled the large spaces of the story: Alexander and Caesar and Godfrey and Napoleon. Both cults are open to corruption; but when the older cult returns, as it will, it will be known that a man died quietly some time ago who delivered Europe with a single blow.

XLII. On Dickens and After

A NEW piece of work on the inexhaustible subject of Charles Dickens is an attack which takes the form of a novel. This novel is certainly an exercise in fiction. It is simply a romance about Dickens; and the writer is none the less romancing because he chooses to turn Dickens into a romantic villain instead of a romantic hero. Whether there is much advantage in these arbitrary and inevitably irresponsible revivals of the old historical novel may be questioned. But it is certain that many novelists are now doing it about many more or less modern characters, and that almost any novelist might do it about almost any character; as this novelist with Charles Dickens. But why anybody should specially wish to put so much bitterness into the version of a Victorian personality, with a family still living to testify to the affection he really inspired, I cannot imagine. The important point to realize, however, is that there has now come into fashion a new sort of novel with a purpose, which seems to be a purely personal purpose, and a rather trivial and mischievous purpose. A novelist does not write a novel merely in order to unmask his own villain, and a historian hardly writes a history merely in order to belittle a great man. But the new hybrid form or type of writing is irresponsible and can do anything. Accordingly, I confess that the first thought that flashed across my mind in the matter was a memory of Leigh Hunt, alias Harold Skimpole. An excellent critical study by Mr. Brimley Johnson, along with other studies of the sort, has led to something like a public rehabilitation of Leigh Hunt. It has been pointed out that Skimpole was quite incapable of the acts of Leigh Hunt; for instance, incapable of defying tyrants out of the pure love of liberty and going to prison for his political courage. It has also been pointed out that Leigh Hunt was incapable of the acts of Skimpole, incapable of betraying a poor little gutter-boy to his pursuers for a tip of half a crown. It is quite true that Leigh Hunt was incapable of the actions of Skimpole. It is equally true that Skimpole was incapable of the actions of Skimpole. Even the character as drawn by Dickens had to be blackened and even blotted out by Dickens, before it could be used for these purposes in the Dickensian romance. Dickens had not originally described Skimpole as a plotter, or anything resembling a plotter. He set him plotting merely to assist the plot. Now the moral of that incident is that this compound of the caprice of fiction and the responsibility of biography is an impossible and even intolerable compound. Dickens at least was happier than the latest critic of Dickens. For Dickens realized that he had blundered.

Anyhow, it might be said in this sense that Leigh Hunt is avenged. Somebody has done to Dickens very much what Dickens did to Leigh Hunt. The process is very simple. It consists of describing a man with all the notorious weaknesses which he did have; arbitrarily adding to them all the deeper and darker weaknesses which he did not have; and then suggesting that this is going deeper than the surface. The picture of Dickens is about as just to Dickens as the picture of a creeping police informer is just to Leigh Hunt. But the process itself is easy enough. It simply consists in suggesting that certain superficial faults went much deeper than they did, or much deeper than anybody can know that they did. Every man has a hundred aspects; every man can be the model of a hundred portraits; every man may have on occasion the appearance of being a hundred men.

The artist avowedly deals with the aspect, with the portrait he is to paint — not the personality God is to judge. The critic or biographer must make some attempt at judgement; though it will be well if he also distinguishes between his judgement and the Day of Judgement. But by mixing up all these things we get possibilities of caricature that amount to mere anarchy. That is what I mean by saying that Dickens discovered his blunder, if only too late. He realized that he could not be at once the creator of Skimpole and the critic of Leigh Hunt. But the new caricature of Dickens is not simply a Dickens caricature; the character is again sacrificed to the plot and to the plotter.

There was nothing the matter with Dickens, except that while he was still a very young man, a vain and not very well educated young man, he became some thing unique and universal. He became, in a sense that was special, actual, and even awful, a public man. Few realize the sense in which this was true of Dickens, because it is a thing that happens to very few. We commonly talk, for convenience, of any politician or prominent man of affairs as a public man. But to be really a public man it is necessary incidentally to be a man. The politician or plutocrat may sometimes be called a public institution. He may sometimes be called a public nuisance. Sometimes he amounts to no more than a sort of popular rumour. But it was the complete humanity of Dickens that was public property; sometimes too public and yet, as the philosopher said, all too human. Even among the great

Victorians this sort of intimate greatness was unachieved. Men knew the economics of Cobden or the foreign policy of Palmerston, but not the living men and their full view of life. But Dickens did, in the phrase too cheaply used, put his heart into his work. He lived in his characters and in the crowds that enjoyed his characters. There were a great many misfortunes arising from this vast and yet familiar public life; and one of them was that he made rather a mess of his private life. To the merits of such a muddle no man can do justice who has not actually known the persons, heard the voices, and seen the very gestures; and it does not seem to me a sufficient substitute that somebody who has not seen them should make them up. But I am pretty sure that that amazing popularity was the fountain of all the follies. Dickens suffered from a sort of premature Big Business, though the term is unworthy of him at his worst, since it was the business of making things and not of buying and selling them. But he did set himself far too much to be a sort of Universal Provider; to keep a huge factory of fiction roaring night and day; to ‘keep in touch’ with his public like a big business with its customers. From this came the sort of errors really to be imputed to him; such as his attempt to justify himself in print over the affair of the separation. He was thinking of his thousands of readers, but imaginatively and not merely meanly. He felt what a shock it would be at a thousand firesides to think that the great prophet of hearth and home had himself become a castaway. If he had thought more about one fireside, and less about a thousand, he would have been a happier man. But he was not a hollow man, or a false man, or a corrupt or cruel man; and anybody who suggests that he was is talking sensational nonsense. And there is just one thing to be added to our appreciation of his real strength and weakness. Nobody else has been thus intoxicated by such fame, simply because nobody else has achieved such fame.

There has never been a popular author since Dickens. There have been best-sellers who were read and despised, and famous authors who were respected and not read. But Dickens really was an author, in the sense of a creator. And Dickens really was famous, not like Mr. Osbert Sitwell, but like Napoleon. But, for all that, Dickens left no successor — not only of his genius, but even of his mood. Just as Walt Whitman left no successor — not only of his genius, but even of his mood. Dickens and Whitman may seem different enough, but they were one in a huge assumption that human beings must be enthusiastic for humanity. And we see their common assumption very vividly now, because it has gone. Anyhow, they left no heirs. It seems to me that this has been much more often true of original or significant works than is commonly supposed. All my generation talked, and many even of the rising generation are still talking, about progress in terms of prophecy. We were taught that somebody like Wycliffe was a Morning Star of the Reformation; and from that we slid into a habit of thinking of all the great as anticipators, all the poets as prophets, all the singers as morning stars singing together. But it seems to me that most of those morning stars were really evening stars. We were misled in this, as in most other things, by the misapplication of an old and mystical Christian idea as if it were a new and scientific social idea. All the nineteenth century was full of a noise of running feet; the feet beautiful upon the mountains; the feet of the Forerunner. If we had any patron saint, it was St. John the Baptist. But we served our patron saint as the Athenians served their unknown god; without knowing very much about him. And most people remain in that state of ignorant worship, and do not know much about the process which they call a progress.

Now, if we look at the very great works, let us say of English literature, we shall see that each of them has something of that air of beginning big things; but in fact the big thing ends where it began. Shakespeare has all the Renaissance gesture of flinging open golden gates upon a new world of sunrise and song. He is full, as was the whole sixteenth century, of those radiant vistas of wealth and treasure, which were sometimes worthy to be called, in an almost sublime sense, the dreams of avarice. He is full of all that glowing colour that belongs to the Venetian painting, as when with a touch he turns all the seas of the world to crimson. And when we compare all this breadth and glory with the stiff imitations of Seneca or the rude village plays of Quince and Bottom, we cannot but feel that Shakespeare is building a city, is making a world, is the beginning of something greater even than himself. But we have not had anything greater than himself. The Renaissance drama of blood and gold, of kings and usurpers, is not a beginning but an end; its gold and crimson are the colours of sunset and not of dawn. The same is true, in another fashion, of Milton. Milton, though he really came of a Catholic culture, deliberately took the side of all the new ideas, the new notions of the Puritans, and a good many new notions of his own, that would not have been at all approved by the Puritans. His Arian theology he probably regarded as a more enlightened theology. He believed in divorce and printing and all kinds of funny modern things. When a man in this attitude writes a sublime epic poem about the outlines of the new religion, we might naturally suppose he would found a school. We might expect it to be the beginning of a tradition of epic poems, of great, or at least reasonably good, epic poems. But it was not the first of a new school of epics. It was the last epic of the world.

We need not, therefore, be very much surprised if Dickens or Whitman did not succeed in doing what Shakespeare and Milton failed to do. But in all three cases there is a principle at work which I think has been somewhat neglected, and by many perhaps never discovered. The difficulty with art is that the artist is giving permanent expression to a passing mood. He may be, and generally is, also testifying to a truth that is permanently behind that mood. But he cannot make the mood itself as popular at one time as at another. He cannot be certain, at any given moment, of whether the mood is also the mode. Therefore, while the work may remain as a classic, it cannot remain, as does, for instance, a religion, continuing to produce its own types of saint or mystic generation after generation. That can only happen when the truths are crystallized into a creed, and are regarded by the people as truths and not as transitory moods. But such a thing as the sixteenth-century pageant of colour was really a transitory mood. It fascinated Shakespeare to watch men clad in gold on a purple dais, and under heraldic canopies, playing fantastic tricks before high heaven. But by the time we come to Milton the next generation has wearied of those golden tragedies; the king is dethroned in fact and not merely in theatricals; the purple dais has darkened to a black scaffold; and after that day there has been a fading of all the old blazonry and brilliancy of costume; and men have gone in grey and black for a century or so, as if they were in mourning for the death of the Last King.

But though, in the matter of dress, the world which turned grey with Puritanism has since turned black with Industrialism, in other ways these sterner moods were also moods that could pass. Milton did not, any more than Shakespeare, perpetuate what was heroic in his own point of view. We have thus once more the curious historical situation: that the Puritans have no sooner set about the beginning of Puritanism than they seem suddenly to come to the end of Puritanism. It seemed a naked new-born splendour for the chief enemies of Charles I. It was already a dead superstition for the chief enemies of Charles II. By that time men like Shaftesbury and Halifax no longer pretended to share the zeal of men like Cromwell and Vane. These things, that broke away from the old central tradition of culture, seemed in their first fancy to be rushing away to live their own life. But indeed it would be nearer the truth to say that they crawled away to die. The mighty things brought forth by the convulsion of the Renaissance and the Reformation are like huge cripples of wounded giants; they are works which break off abruptly and remain colossal and incomplete. The Elizabethan Drama broke off short. The Puritan Movement broke off short. The former is replaced, after an interval, by a foreign comedy with no trace of the native poetry. The latter exhibits what had once been a Puritan Parliament turning with astonishing rapidity into a Pagan oligarchy. And as this queer, abrupt breakdown happened to the Renaissance enthusiasm of the sixteenth century, and to the Puritan enthusiasm of the seventeenth century, so it happened more slowly but equally surely to Rousseau and the romantic popular spirit in the eighteenth century, and to its last great exponent in the nineteenth. Its last great exponent was Walt Whitman; and he also believed that he was opening the doors of democracy, when he was really shutting them.

Nobody understands the world to-day unless he understands that the whole ideal of democracy is now in the same direct danger that the ideal of monarchy was from the pen of Milton, or the ideal of aristocracy from the pen of Rousseau. Democracy is threatened to-day by the most diverse pens, but all notably of a new type; from the pen of Maurras in France to the pen of Mencken in America. I am perhaps among the few who realize it and also regret it. I do really believe that self-government is the most normal and the most noble sort of government, when you can get it, though it is possibly the most difficult to get. But then, I am one of those dusty and antiquated objects who have creeds and dogmas and definite beliefs with definite reasons for them. Such as my democracy is, if it was never quite so wild as the optimism of Whitman, it will remain undisturbed by the pessimism of Mencken. But this is not the way in which the free fancy of the present age floats along. The mere mood and fashion of democracy is rapidly passing; and he who wishes to preserve any idea of it must lock it up in the casket of a creed.

XLIII. On The King

A NATIONAL thanksgiving for the recovery of the King illustrates in a double fashion what we may call the whole theory of thanks. First, because of the concentration of so vast a concourse of sympathizers upon the issue of a single story, the warm respect felt for the sufferer by all who knew him, even by reputation, and the true sense in which he stood for all his subjects as a symbol of responsibility and honour. And second, because of the quite unusual intensity of the drama and nearness of the peril; as if a veritable human voice had answered announcing survival, when we had already heard, loosened and rushing, the noise of the arrow of death. There must have been very few human beings to whom that arrow had passed quite so near; even when it was not the world that was watching or a great empire that breathed again. And these two aspects of thanksgiving stand for truths as profound as the tragedy and the escape which they illustrate. Nothing more clearly illustrates how natural is natural religion, and how unnatural is mere negation, than the lifting of the heart at the end of such a vigil. It is the fashion to talk of man entangled in creeds and rituals, as in the chains of the mind. But in fact the sceptic is hampered by invisible chains, in his most human movements, more than the lowest slave of superstition. The man who cannot lift his eyes to the sky, or bend his knee to the earth, is crippled and caught in a network of negations. It was Rossetti, I think, who said that the worst moment of the atheist was when he felt thankful and had nobody to thank. All that is symbolized, at their best, by a king and a kingdom, the whole circle of order and harmony of living, should in their nature produce this great harvest of gratitude. But men are so made that something of drama and perils is commonly needed to awaken this wise amazement; and we require something of crisis to realize creation. We must see the sun and moon and all the seasons given back to a man, as though he were raised from the dead. In more vulgar language, men need thrills to produce thanks, and have to be surprised into surprise. It is the whole aim of religion, of imagination, of poetry and the arts, to awaken that sense of some thing saved from nothing. But no poem can do it as does a true story on this level of significance and solemnity; when a drama that no man has written is acted on the stage of mankind.

It is no ritual phrase to say that the King comes forth from the very gates of death as the symbol of national unity, in a nation divided upon many other things. In more senses than one he comes out into the broad daylight; into a world where monarchy grows stronger rather than weaker, for many and often unfathomable reasons, all of them illustrated in the personal story and the popular response to it. Without going deeper into such matters, we may say that men in many ages have felt, in some instinctive fashion, that the fullness of humanity was better expressed in a man than in a mob; especially if it were a mob of nobles. In England this has been profoundly modified by aristocratic traditions, both of liberty and licence; and there was a time when the life of the monarchy, like the life of this monarch, hung by a hair. In the institutional, as in the individual case, that moment seems to have passed. In the reaction of personal affection, which in this case is very personal, there is probably an under current of impersonal forces now making everywhere for more personal government. In whatever form the next generation may attempt the reunion of loyalty and liberty, there will probably be less than ever of the mere oligarchical jealousy of the popularity of the popular prince.

There is one unique and unforeseen fashion in which King George the Fifth has come to stand in the new conditions for something new. It is due partly to his own personality and partly to the strange and rather indescribable state of mind that has marked England after the War. It was always said, in recent times, that the British Sovereign is the social leader rather than the political leader. It was especially insisted on by cautious constitutional writers, of the liberal school, as a guarantee against despotism and a reconciliation between royalty and democracy. It was said of the Sovereign during the last four reigns at least; and during those four reigns it was true in a special sense, yet not exactly in the sense in which it is true now. The very language we use, about the history of fashions, manners and even morals, records it as having already been largely true. ‘When we wish to describe a certain interesting interlude, that marked the end of the eighteenth century, a period of modern but rather rococo dress, a period of florid and sometimes rather bulbous architecture, a period in which hats and houses and military uniforms exhibited many things which are still formal in a phase of being fantastic, we do not call that quaint period (beloved of Mr. Max Beerbohm) by the name of any of its natural leaders even among the dandies. We do not call it the age of Byron or even the age of Brummell.

We call it the Regency. And we are right, because the royal prince who ruled in it did really represent it. He was a social leader apart from being a political leader; indeed, before he was in a position to be fully a political leader. Other ordinary phrases illustrate the same thing; including a phrase that is now thrown backwards and forwards in controversy more than any other. Everybody is attacking or defending things that are Victorian. And when we talk of things Victorian we do really think of Victoria, and not merely of what happened in the reign of Victoria. She was in that sense a social leader even when she refused to be social, or to go into society. We still think of the old Queen as a real representative of certain notions; just as we thought of the Regent in old Regent Street, or before the Brighton Pavilion. Indeed, it has often struck me as ironic that the very people who denounce the Victorian Age as suppressing women have to refer to it by the name of a woman. And even those who call the Victorian women weak and simpering and drooping would hardly say the same of Victoria.

It is needless to note what is obvious enough — that the next reign carried on the tradition of the purely social leader. It is true that in Edward the Seventh what was social verged on being political; because he was a sort of highly successful amateur in what may be called the social side of politics: diplomacy. It is well known that, just as it was said of some Kings that one was his own Prime Minister or another his own Foreign Secretary, King Edward was in many foreign capitals his own Ambassador. But in the main the nineteenth century distinction continued to mean what it had always meant. King Edward himself encouraged the general atmospheric suggestion that social leadership was primarily some thing pleasant, while political leadership might be very unpleasant; and that in that sense even the social side of diplomacy should have an element of frivolity. But there was a new situation slowly creeping up in the modern world, which nobody in the nineteenth century understood or expected; and which has made this social function a rather different thing; not so much in itself as in its relation to the society.

What nobody expected was this: that political things could become less serious than social things. Or, in other words, that the real battle of the age could be transferred from the senate to the salon. The previous monarchs I have mentioned, who have given their names to the sort of social fashion they encouraged, lived side by side with serious political forces that were not merely fashions, and needed no encouragement. Waterloo and Peterloo and Catholic Emancipation were real turning-points of history. The Regent was the ruler of the Regency; and in that sense the uncrowned King of England; but Daniel O'Connell was the uncrowned King of Ireland. Fox and Burke and Brougham stood for the most serious tendencies of their time. Cobbett stood for all that might have happened, either in revolution or reaction. Peel stood for all that did happen, both in conversation and progress. So it was, of course, with the Age of Victoria, when Parliamentary politics were taken more seriously than ever before or since. What the world looked at was the duel of Gladstone and Disraeli; and in one sense it was really a duel to the death. Matters of mere social form and habit were counted secondary to serious controversies. People joked about the collars of Gladstone or the curls of Disraeli; but they were serious about their politics. The tradition lingered on under Edward the Seventh, and then there came slowly into existence the new and curious condition. People find it rather difficult to be serious about politics.

On the other hand, all those who are serious at all are serious about society. That is the situation which gives a new meaning to the social leadership of the King. In the party conflict he is as constitutional and impartial as his father was, and as all the modern monarchs of his house were supposed to be. But the party conflict itself has become less important. He is not living, like his forebears, in a time when something like the French Revolution or the First Reform Bill, or some political change, is supremely important. On the other hand, the social change is immeasurably important. The old question of the Rights of Man was thrashed out in Parliaments and political meetings. The new questions, like those about the Rights of Woman, are really being thrashed out in drawing-rooms and dinner-parties, not to say cabarets and night-clubs. Changes in feminine costume, changes in domestic ceremony, have become symbolic. The men arguing about Reform or Repeal did not think it particularly symbolic that Mr. Brummell had a new pair of trousers, or the Regent had patronized a new sort of hat. They did not think that the future of Woman, whom they were in the habit of describing as Lovely Wooman, would be determined by whether she wore a crinoline or an Empire skirt. But anybody who feels the atmosphere of our own age knows that all sorts of moral or immoral meanings are read into the shingling of hair or the shortening of skirts. And even those who feel these things to be incongruously frivolous have a queer feeling inside them that these frivolous things are not quite so frivolous as a great deal of serious politics.

King George the Fifth stands for something solid, clear, and consistent in social things, in a way in which the old Constitutional custom did not allow our Princes to stand for something in purely political things. And, as I have said, the sharp change is here: that most people are thinking about social change more than about political change. In the things that matter most at the moment, King George has most definitely had a policy: a policy of despising fantastic luxury and indiscriminate innovation; of preserving the old social sanity which used to be counted specially English. It has been his fate to live at exactly the moment in history when the ruin or restoration of this particular normal and national habit will certainly be accomplished. It has probably made a vast difference that the first family in the nation has been so firmly fixed on that foundation. It has made it impossible for moderation and modesty and common sense in custom and costume to die out in the lower middle classes as things entirely dowdy and discredited. A mere aristocracy is always ready for the newest thing. The aristocracy, whatever its other virtues or vices, has been quite ready to go the pace and to set the pace. Monarchy has taken on again something of its ancient leadership in matters that were once counted light and trivial, but which have become, in this strange season and in the eyes of all the wise, very weighty.

It must be nearly two hundred years since the great Bolingbroke wrote as a testament his challenge to all the tendencies of his time; his defiance of the aristocracy and his regret for the passing of the Kings. “The Parliament is the Parliament of a class; the King is the King of the whole people.” Whatever we think of that great thesis, we may agree that what he said about the Parliament is at least true about the Smart Set. In many very vital ways, the King has been able to represent all that society that is outside Society. He had had to be the protector of something at once huge and hidden; to represent the normal when the abnormal is more in evidence; to defend a mob of inarticulate decencies that cannot defend themselves. Tradition is of the populace; it never has been and it never will be really handed down through the ages except from the poor to the poor. In that sense the rich are always the revolutionists. It is so even in the trivial matters already mentioned, of etiquette and attire, for fashion is an eternal revolution. All aristocracies fling themselves into one fancy dress after another; while there are peasant costumes, not only picturesque but elaborate and even gorgeous, that have remained unaltered from before the first records of man. Now that the revolution has come to be one not merely of dress but of manners, not merely of manners but of morals, we should expect to find, and we do find, that mere pride of wealth, or even of pedigree, does not save human beings from a raving hunger of change. It is not to the gentry, even the genuine gentry, it is not to the nobles, even those that are not yet ignoble, that we can look for protection of the patient and unrecorded virtues of mankind. But in the incalculable times before us, it is not impossible that there may return to the mystical institution of the Crown something of that immemorial legend which linked it with religion, and made one baron, alone of all the barony, mysteriously responsible to God for the people.

In these days there are other forms of false and accidental distinction, besides that of privilege or wealth. Newspapers must brighten their columns with tragedies, and comfort their readers with crime and madness. Literature, now especially and always in some degree, must be a sort of poetical police-news. It is well when the central institutions or individuals of a society represent all the neglected normality. The popularity of King George will stand at least as a sort of solid reminder of the proportions of things; will tell the world that we are not all divorced, that we are not all degenerates, that we are not all pestering the world with crazy philosophies and æsthetic perversions; that human life is a thing that can in sober reality be lived; and as the royal sage added, with a noble irony: ‘Life can be lived well even in a palace.’

That is why there is about the popular sympathy, and even the popular curiosity, in the case of King George’s illness, something that is not merely vulgar like the news of the Smart Set. Indeed, it is because it is popular that it is not vulgar. It is vulgar to be frightfully excited on hearing that the Duchess of Dulwich has a diamond tiara costing half-a-million when we ourselves could not afford a stone for a stud or a cuff-link; because it is idolatry, or the worship of a stone god alien to our own household gods. But it is not vulgar to sympathize with a Queen whose house is darkened by sickness; because for that high moment her household gods and ours are the same. It is vulgar to be thrilled with joy because a millionaire has built a gigantic yacht big enough to contain a swimming-bath; because we know in our hearts that he and we would both be healthier and happier if we were content to swim in the sea. But it is not vulgar to be touched by a man sitting and looking at the sea, when he hardly thought to look again upon the sun, even if the man is a King as well as a sailor. It is because the story of this perilous recovery has come to us so much in the common outlines of countless stories of the kind that for the first time in such cases the modern curiosity is not an intrusion. ‘The King is the King of the whole people.’

ALL IS GRIST

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I. On the Prudery of Slang

WHAT puzzles me is that so many things which boast of being wild and free, which are even abused for being wild and free, are in reality rather snobbish, not to say slavish. All that sort of unconventionality seems to me a great deal too conventional. The most obvious and everyday example is the fuss about divorce; which is unfortunately a very everyday example. But the point of divorce is not that people are professing to be reckless, but that people arc pretending to be respectable. The point of it is not in the parting of wives and husbands, which has unfortunately happened in various forms in nearly all the various lands and ages. The point of it is the covering of the disunion by the use of the old label of union. Many satirists in many periods have had occasion to note the domestic dissolution that seemed to threaten a social dissolution. Many have had occasion to strike the lyre and lament in the mournful language of Mr. Bentley's Ballade:

Rupert has bolted with the children's nurse,
Claude has declared himself an Infidel.

The peculiarity of the recent social tendency is that a visiting-card inscribed 'Mr. and Mrs. Rupert' is carefully engraved to cover the fact that the children's nurse is no longer looking after the children. The peculiarity of the position is not that Claude has proclaimed himself an Infidel; but, that Claude has proclaimed himself a Christian with a higher and more purely spiritual religion, which is too exalted to believe in any creeds or sacraments, but which does permit him to remain an ordinary respectable Anglican parson — or possibly even an Anglican bishop.

In all these compromises, it seems to me that the chief feature is the saving of the ordinary social position of the persons involved. And to think first about such social position is not the act of a sceptic but simply of a snob. What matters to a man with a free intelligence is what the man and woman are actually doing, or what the parson or bishop is actually teaching. Whether in the one case somebody gets a new wedding-ring, or in the other case retains an old dog-collar, is surely a matter comparatively conventional. Yet it is at the back of nearly all the pleas for freedom, which profess to be pleas for unconventionality. But there are a great many other examples of this curious contradiction with relation to convention. It appears not only in the manners, but in the language, and especially the slang, of society. There is a queer sort of prudery about slang, and modernity shows it most in what it calls ‘facing the facts of nature’.

For instance, there was a time when it was customary to call a father a father; which seems to me a very normal example of calling a spade a spade. There were, of course, many variations, both formal and familiar, in different times and communities. But most men have used a language as ancient and traditional as that of Esau when he cried aloud, ‘Hast thou not a blessing for me, O my father?’ Now as far as I can discover from the social authorities who tell us all about the Rising Generation and the Bright Young Things, it appears to be considered a mark of advanced intelligence to call your father a bean or a scream, or possibly Tom, Dick, and Harry, in reference (or without reference) to his Christian name. Broadly speaking, the parent of the progressive age appears to answer to ‘Hi!’ or to any loud cry; and it seems to be considered in itself a proof of progress that the cries are very loud indeed. But loud cries do not make any difference to logic; and in this case the logic is all the other way. It is obvious to me that calling the old gentleman ‘father’ is facing the facts of nature. It is also obvious that calling him ‘bean’ is not facing the facts of nature. It is, so far as that example is concerned, perhaps, merely weaving a graceful fairy-tale to cover the facts of nature. It is prettily pretending for a moment that the Heavy Father is an elf of the dimensions of Moth and Mustard-Seed, capable of concealing himself in the green hood of the bean. But that is a digression without being in any way an exception. The general truth obviously is that all these phrases that evade the family relation do therefore evade the facts of life. You may call your father Tom as if he were a total stranger from Australia, whom you had come rather to like at the Empire Club. But in that case it is you who are indulging in a fiction, and ultimately in a convention. The real facts of your relation are rather more remarkable; and to ignore them is to ignore something at once natural and notable. And it is to ignore it in favour of things much more superficial and trivial; the mere society slang or fashion of the passing moment. It is, in fact, to think the rules of the Empire Club more important than the laws of Nature. That does not strike me as being natural; to say nothing of being naked. That does not impress me as being realistic, but as being ready to go through any sort of antics rather than face a reality.

There are, indeed, human and historic aspects of this problem, which would in any case be rather too real for our realists to understand. The truth is that traditional humanity has always felt these natural facts to be so real that they were best expressed in some sort of ritual. Talking about them in detail did (and does) very little good; but recognizing them in conduct and courtesy and the very carriage of the body made all men feel sane and near to nature. Men were ceremonial towards their fathers and mothers, just as they were ceremonial about the harvest or the ploughing of the ground or the scattering of the seed. They were ceremonial about these things because these things were so very real; because they are the most real of all realities. They are the things by which we live and without which we die. In the same way, their gleams of simple intelligence enabled them to perceive that their parents were things without which they would never have been alive. The recognition of that fact is entirely realistic, not to say scientific; but the best recognition of it has always been in gesture and artistic form. It has been what I, for one, should unhesitatingly describe as good form.

There are some of the innovators whom I should not expect to understand what is meant by good form. They are far too much tied to convention to understand ritual. They cannot even understand courtesy, so long as the convention of the moment is a convention of discourtesy. But these deplorable people are very rare in any generation; and the majority of the young are doubtless what they always were; and no more than normally disposed to desert normality for the sake of novelty. The trouble is that very few people encourage them really to think about these things, or thrash them out in any intelligent fashion. They are sometimes blamed for not following the conventions of the last generation; to which the obvious answer is that they are following the conventions of this generation. The real trouble is that they are following the conventions far too much. As they have no defence against their fathers except a new fashion, so they will have no defence against their sons except an old fashion. The habit of uttering loud cries (of which I am a warm and enthusiastic supporter) can seldom be carried on absolutely continuously to the age of sixty, without any pause for rest or refreshment. And what is wanted here is not only a pause for refreshment but for reflection. There is a great deal to be said for rapidity; but it is not especially a good way of grasping reality. People merely going the pace, in any age, have generally missed everything except the most artificial and external costume and custom of that age. Men need to walk a little slower to look at the earth and to face the facts of nature.

II. On Liberties and Lotteries

ALMOST alone among my contemporaries I have not been a sceptic about Liberty; but I recognize the materials for scepticism in the discussion about liberties. The difference between the liberties valued by one community and those valued by another is doubtless very great. The vulgar modern argument used against religion, and lately against common decency, would be absolutely fatal to any idea of liberty. It is perpetually said that because there are a hundred religions claiming to be true, it is therefore impossible that one of them should really be true. The argument would appear on the face of it to be illogical, if any one nowadays troubled about logic. It would be as reasonable to say that because some people thought the earth was flat, and others (rather less incorrectly) imagined it was round, and because anybody is free to say that it is triangular or hexagonal, or a rhomboid, therefore it has no shape at all; or its shape can never be discovered; and, anyhow, modern science must be wrong in saying it is an oblate spheroid. The world must be some shape, and it must be that shape and no other; and it is not self-evident that nobody can possibly hit on the right one. What so obviously applies to the material shape of the world equally applies to the moral shape of the universe. The man who describes it may not be right; but it is no argument against his rightness that a number of other people must be wrong.

As I say, the same childish argument is now extended to ordinary morality or decency. It is insisted that, because the decorum of a Roman matron is not exactly the same as that of a Sandwich Islander, therefore there can be no superiority in the one over the other; no possible way of deciding which is the better of the two; and, ultimately, no meaning or value in dignity or propriety at all. The conclusion is so unnatural that, even if the argument were apparently logical, we might be excused for suspecting it of being sophistical. But, as a matter of fact, the argument is not logical enough to be called a sophistry. It is simply transparently untenable; for it rests on the same fallacy: that one man cannot be right because a number of other men are wrong. In this case, of course, it is true that the question is conditioned by different circumstances and that the principle must be applied in different ways. In this case it is true that we cannot say that the whole world is alike, in the sense that we can say that the whole world is round. It is true, but this fashionable argument does not prove it to be true. So far as that argument goes, there might be one costume suitable to all mankind, as there is one custom of washing suitable to all mankind, though some men neglect it and are dirty. All we complain of, in that aspect, is that the sceptic always refuses to be a rationalist.

But the point here is that, if this argument is fatal to faith or modesty, it is a thousand times fatal to liberty. If we simply say that this or that practice is tolerated in this or that place, if we refuse to look for any moral or metaphysical principle by which the differences can be tested, we shall find the definition of liberty dissolving into a dust of differentiations and exceptions. And I very much fear that this is exactly what the definition of liberty will really do. I am very much afraid, as things are going at present, that the next generation will have quite as little idea of what their fathers meant by dying for liberty, as the last generation had of what their fathers meant by dying for religion or sound theology or the true faith. There is already a large number of modern writers who talk as if the old notion of independence, national or personal, were something simply inconceivable as well as impossible; exactly as the champions of liberty, a hundred years ago, spoke of the mysterious dogmas of the Church. Indeed, it is quite as easy, by the methods of the rationalistic heckler, to suggest that freedom is nonsense as that faith is nonsense. It is a great deal too easy. That is what made me suspect it from the first in both cases. But, anyhow, it is perfectly true that variation gives the sceptic an opportunity in both cases. It is easy to show that liberties are local; it is much less easy to prove that Liberty is universal.

For instance, I am writing these words in a country which many of my countrymen regard as utterly crushed by a system destructive of every liberty. There is no doubt that Italy has restrained the liberty of the Press; it can easily be argued that it has restrained the liberty of the people. But it is quite certain that the people enjoy, and take for granted, quite definite forms of liberty that do not exist in England at all. The Italians would think Mussolini was mad if he forbade Lotteries, as the English law forbids Lotteries. It would seem to them very much what forbidding Lawn Tennis would seem to us. The whole Latin world regards the notion of not being allowed to drink beer between three and six very much as we should regard the idea of not being allowed to eat buns on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It is quite inadequate to call it tyranny; because they would call it lunacy. Now I have argued often enough upon these points elsewhere, and I am not going to dwell on these particular points now. I am merely using them to point out that, even where we imagine there is a clear-cut issue against liberty, there is a considerable complexity when we come to argue about liberties. If the costume of the Sandwich Islander is an argument against abstract decency, then certainly the liberty of the lottery is an argument against abstract liberty. If the thousand and one religions make a case against religion, then the thousand and one liberties make a case against liberty. And I am very much afraid that, in the present mood of mankind, that case may carry weight. It will be very useful to the monopolist, or modern tyrant, who carries most weight in the modern world; and when he has taken away all English freedom from the Englishman and all Italian freedom from the Italian, he will smile broadly and say that, after all, men have never agreed about the definition of being free.

I am so paradoxical as to think that there is a real theory of freedom. Perhaps I may have a shot at expounding it in another essay. But the theory is bound to be rather theoretical; and the modern world, having tried in vain to be thoughtful, has fallen back on the abject alternative of being practical. And it looks to me as if liberty would suffer in that practical age much more than religion suffered in the age of the French Revolution. It can easily be derided, quite as successfully as Victorian decorum or the legend of Mrs. Grundy. But just as there are other kinds of decorum besides Victorian decorum, and yet a sense of dignity and decency behind them all, so there can be other kinds of freedom besides that of the free-born Englishman, and yet leave an ultimate significance in the ideal of being free. Broadly, I should say that the commonwealth is healthy in which all things are *not* common, but some things, in the exact sense of the phrase, ‘distinguished’. Many who talk about distinction mean only aristocratic distinction; and by that mean only fashion. But fashion is almost the opposite of distinction. A democracy can be distinguished, if its citizens are distinguishable; if each has an area of choice in which he really chooses. To keep that area of choice as large as possible is the real function of freedom. But, as there is no space here for me to develop my eleutheromaniac dogma on this page, I feel inclined to ask my readers to do it for me; or at least to think it out for themselves. I dare not offer a prize; I understand it is now likely to be classed with a Lottery. And it would be dreadful if free-born Englishmen were allowed to do what is permitted to Italian slaves. But if any one thinks he has a definition that will save Liberty, I should be interested . . . and, I will add, surprised.

III. On the Nudists

IN a great many illustrated papers there is a continuous and by this time rather monotonous stream of articles and illustrations advertising the new Gymnosophists of Germany. I mean the cult of cranks who insist in a crazy degree on certain notions connected with sun-cures; to me, more suggestive of sunstroke. An occasional article about them might be normal enough in any magazine, as being in the nature of a news-item. But the concentrated attempt to boom this barbaric sophistry is not a good sign of the turn of public opinion, and seems connected with that particular sort of glorification of the body which generally goes with a certain weakness in the head. There is, indeed, something singularly weak-minded about the sort of respect — we might almost say reverence — with which experiments of this sort are often described in our journalism. It seems quite sufficient to insist upon the seriousness of any persons engaged in such experiments, a seriousness which invariably marks faddists and fanatics and small provincial sects of every kind. Thus the admiring advertiser explains how very solemnly the German professor plays the goat, though not quite so seriously as a real goat. For goats do not laugh at anything, least of all at themselves, and in this the nature-worshippers in question are undoubtedly, as they would say, at one with Nature. Nature is inferior to man in many things, but most of all in respect of the human speciality of humour. For the rest, goatishness has often been made a sort of symbol of paganism; but even among the pagans it was not regarded as the highest form of paganism. ‘Half a beast is the great god Pan’ as the poet very truly observed; and the satyr and the faun were conceived as being half-human and half-goatish, presumably on the principle that half a goat is better than no beastliness. To a serene and philosophical judgment, it will not appear altogether inappropriate that, in the division of mankind, the goats were on the wrong side of the judgment seat.

But the fallacy in such a fashion is concerned with a certain ultimate common sense about mankind. The cult of nakedness, which used to be called the Adamite Heresy, does, in fact, reveal its falsity at the beginning, even in the merely material aspect. Man is not independent of artificial things, even in the most natural sense. Nakedness is not even practical, except on selected occasions that are entirely artificial. Even the physical conditions of the world bear witness to something in man that is strictly to be called metaphysical, that is unique and detached and raised above the obvious physical order. It is not native to man to go without clothes, unless it is native to man to die of double pneumonia in about a month. He cannot do it at all through the greater part of the year, or over the greater part of the globe. And the very fact that he has been left, as it were, without any aids to survival except what we call artificial aids, is a proof that in his case they can hardly even be called artificial. It is not a question so much of artificiality which departs from nature, but rather of art, which is the essence of human nature; art, which is almost the nature of man.

For instance, man could not exist at all, in the ordinary sense, if he had not discovered the dreadful and astonishing thing that is called fire. It would be just as easy to elaborate a philosophy against fire as a philosophy against clothes. In fact, the two things often serve the same purpose, but fire is by far the more questionable and dangerous of the two. It is not very often that a man is actually killed by a hat or tortured by a pair of trousers. There was, indeed, an instrument of torture called the Boot; it was used in seventeenth-century Scotland, and we hear a great deal about it when it was used by Royalists upon Whigs, and very little about it when it was afterwards used by Whigs upon Royalists. But even those who complain most of what Mr. H. G. Wells called the Misery of Boots would hardly compare it to being sentenced to the Boot, and certainly not to being sentenced to the fire. Yet it would be easy enough, in the accepted style of rhetoric about these things, to represent every advocate of ordinary warmth as invoking some such unnatural peril. All fuel would, in the medieval phrase, smell of the faggot, To defend the stove would be to defend the stake; and any housewife lighting a fire would be re-lighting the fires of Smithfield. Such talk would be no more ridiculous than many of the ravings of the reformers, who cry out that they arc being persecuted as by the Spanish Inquisition when they are required to wear common human clothes. There would be any number of other ways of giving the familiar element a permanent flavour of arson. Where, is it alleged, is Woman most oppressed and tormented; where is she enslaved and threatened with every type of tribal and ancestral brutality? Where but at the fireside? A little confused oratory and imagery, applied to that notion, would be quite enough to suggest a general idea that the woman was to be roasted like a leg of mutton. Indeed, the whole business of cookery would afford a most convenient and fitting parallel. Cooking is artificial, exactly as clothes are artificial. Some people do largely dispense with cookery, as some people do frequently dispense with clothes. There are prigs who live on nuts, as there are prigs who live in nakedness. But there are a good many other human beings as well, and most of them are of opinion that cookery is a part of something which we call culture. And, while we may argue for ever about whether it is natural, most of us know that it is normal.

The whole conception of culture is bound up with that first fact about man; that he is not himself, until he has added to himself certain things which are, in a sense, outside himself. As he is more powerful than any other creature with those things, so he is more helpless than any other creature without those things. It would be easy for the wild philosopher to argue that the very existence of fire is an insult to sunlight. It would be easy for him to denounce Prometheus as the rival of Apollo. I can imagine him elaborately explaining, in an endless series of lectures, that we ought not to need any such in direction or deflection of the rays of the sun; that we ought never to have come into a condition in which the sun's rays are not sufficient to us; that it is an insult to the splendid solar unity to tear away flames from it, like rags from a golden garment. It is true that, as a minor matter of fact, the sun's rays are not always there at all. But that is just as much an objection to the attack on clothes as to the attack on cooking. The point is that the whole of this philosophy is wrong at the root; is wrong in its whole conception of the nature and position of man on the earth; is wrong even in its relation to matter; and is wrong long before we come to the higher question of morals.

But when we do come to it, we shall not be surprised to find that the theory is as false in moral fact as it is in material fact. A human being is not even completely human without clothes, because they have become a part of him as the symbol of purely human things; of dignity, of modesty, of self-ownership, of property, and privacy and honour. Even in the purely artistic sense humanity would never have become human without them, because the range of self-expression and symbolic decoration would have been hopelessly limited, and there would have been no outlet even for the most primary instincts about colour and form. The Adamite heresy begins in madness, but it ends only in monotony. Some actually praise it because they think it would dull and blunt all sorts of human feelings, fancies, and shades of sentiment; and they are the sort of madmen who would actually boast of monotony. But the central civilization of mankind is not very likely to be deeply disturbed, in its immemorial intellectual instincts, by these crudities on the borderland. It takes a long time to explain such simple things; but, when a man disregards them, it is a shorter way to laugh at him and lock him up.

IV. On Business Education

A LONG time ago I pointed out the fallacy of crying out for a practical man. I noted, what should be obvious enough, that when a problem is really bad and basic, we should rather wail and pray and cry aloud for an unpractical man. The practical man only knows the machine in practice; just as many a man can drive a motor-car who could not mend it, still less design it. The more serious is the trouble, the more probable it is that some knowledge of scientific theory will be required; and though the theorist will be called unpractical, he will probably be also indispensable. What is generally meant by a business man is a man who knows the way in which our particular sort of modern business does generally work. It does not follow that he is imaginative enough to suggest something else, when it obviously does not work. And (unless I very much misread the signs of the modern transition) we are soon coming to a time when everybody will be looking for somebody who can suggest something else.

I am glad to see that what I applied to the unpractical reformer has been applied, by an unimpeachably practical man, to the unpractical instructor. Mr. John C. Parker, a hundred-per-cent American, a highly successful engineer, the vigorous agent of a company named after Edison — in short, a man with all the unquestioned stigmata of a Regular Guy, rigorous and energetic in the application of science to business, has recently astonished his friends by delivering an address with the truly admirable title, ‘Wanted — An Unpractical Education’. I have only read his remarks in an indirect form, but they seem to me quite excellent remarks. ‘My complaint would be rather that training youth to earn a living is not education at all; second, that a specific training may keep the youngster from earning the best kind of living; and third, that it can’t be done in school anyhow.’ Or, again, ‘I would infinitely prefer that education fit him for happiness and decency in poverty, than for wealth acquired through the sacrifice of himself and his character.’ These are almost startlingly sensible counsels; though what they would look like side by side with those shiny and strenuous advertisements inscribed ‘You Can Add Ten Thousand Dollars to Your Salary’, or ‘This Man Trebled his Turnover in Two Weeks’, it is not my province to conjecture.

But this extraordinary affair called Business Education, which has begun to be supported in England after having long subsisted in America, has another aspect perhaps not so easy to explain. When I say that we want to train the citizen and not the city man, or the equivocal ‘something in the city’, I mean even more than Mr. Parker’s just and rational ideal of ‘the fitting of students to live richly and fully and contribute most broadly to the welfare of the social group who have paid for their education’. Being myself a senile survival of the old republican idealism (I use the adjective to express the American political principle, not the American political party) I mean something else, as well as the mere social enjoyment of culture. I mean that to train a citizen is to train a critic. The whole point of education is that it should give a man abstract and eternal standards, by which he can judge material and fugitive conditions. If the citizen is to be a reformer, he must start with some ideal which he does not obtain merely by gazing reverently at the unreformed institutions. And if any one asks, as so many are asking: ‘What is the use of my son learning all about ancient Athens and remote China and medieval guilds and monasteries, and all sorts of dead or distant things, when he is going to be a superior scientific plumber in Pimlico?’ the answer is obvious enough. ‘The use of it is that he may have some power of comparison, which will not only prevent him from supposing that Pimlico covers the whole planet, but also enable him, while doing full credit to the beauties and virtues of Pimlico, to point out that, here and there, as revealed by alternative experiments, even Pimlico may conceal somewhere a defect.’

Now, the nuisance of all this notion of Business Education, of a training for certain trades, whether of plumber or plutocrat, is that they will prevent the intelligence being sufficiently active to criticize trade and business properly. They begin by stuffing the child, not with the sense of justice by which he can judge the world, but with the sense of inevitable doom or dedication by which he must accept that particular very worldly aspect of the world. Even while he is a baby he is a bank-clerk, and accepts the principles of banking which Mr. Joseph Finsbury so kindly explained to the banker. Even in the nursery he is an actuary or an accountant; he lisps in numbers and the numbers come. But he cannot criticize the principles of banking, or entertain the intellectual fancy that the modern world is made to turn too much on a Pythagorean worship of Numbers. But that is because he has never heard of the Pythagorean philosophy; or, indeed, of any other philosophy. He has never been taught to think, but only to count. He lives in a cold temple of abstract calculation, of which the pillars are columns of figures. But he has no basic sense of Comparative Religion (in the true sense of that tiresome phrase), by which he may discover whether he is in the right temple, or distinguish one temple from another. This is bad enough when we are dealing with the normal sense of number and quantity, the eternal foundations of rational and permanent commerce; which are in themselves as pure and abstract as Pythagoras. It becomes both preposterous and perilous when we are dealing with the mere scramble of speculation and economic illusion which is called business in America and elsewhere; with all its degrading publicity, with all its more dangerous secrecy. To begin a boy's training by teaching him to admire these things, and then call it Business Education, is exactly like teaching him to worship Baal and Baphomet, and then calling it Religious Education. And much of what is called commercial training is really of this character. Stevenson, with the assistance of Lloyd Osbourne (himself an American), gives a very vivid and amusing sketch of it in *The Wrecker*. His American hero very justly resents being laughed at merely because he leaves the *u* out of 'colour'; but adds that his critics might have had a better case had they known that his father 'had paid large sums to have him brought up in a gambling-hell'.

Anyhow, that is what is the matter with Business Education; that it narrows the mind; whereas the whole object of education is to broaden the mind and especially to broaden it so as to enable it to criticize and condemn such narrowness. Everybody ought to learn first a general view of the history of man, of the nature of man, and (as I, for one, should add) of the nature of God. This may enable him to consider the rights and wrongs of slavery in a slave community, of cannibalism in a cannibal community, or of commerce in a commercial community. If he is immediately initiated into the mysteries of these institutions themselves, if he is sworn in infancy to take them as seriously as they take themselves, if he becomes a trader not only before he becomes a traveller, but even before he becomes a true citizen of his own town, he will never be able to denounce those institutions — or even to improve them. Such a state will never have the ideas or imagination to reform itself; and hustle and bustle and business activity will have resulted in the dead fixity of a fossil.

V. On the Intellect of Yesterday

IS the present generation better educated than the last generation? Is it more intelligent than any one of any number of past generations? Most of those writing on the subject say ‘Yes’. Most of them, by a curious coincidence, belong to the present generation, or some very recent generation. I have no axe to grind in the matter; neither the ancestral axe of Brutus, red with the blood of his sons, nor the latest pattern of guillotine on which a revolutionary son can enthusiastically execute his father. There are some matters in which the world has lately veered towards my own opinions; some matters in which it has turned away from them. But I have enough intellectual curiosity to have doubts, and certainly enough to make distinctions.

I think there would be a case for maintaining this: that the world has improved in everything except intellect. In artistic sensibilities, and even in social sympathies (at least, of a certain kind), I think there has been a quickening and a response. I think it probable that the number of people who can rapidly get used to a foreign fashion or style of ornament, who can guess what an eccentric artist is driving at, who can feel the emotions evoked by unusual music, is larger than it was in mid-Victorian times. But these things do not appeal to the intellect. And I think they appeal to the modern mood because they do not appeal to the intellect. They make signals to the sentimental part of human nature, and the code of those signals is learned more quickly than it would once have been. But when it comes to anything like a strain on the intellect as such, I think that most modern people are much stupider than those in the age of my father, and probably very much stupider than those in the age of my grandfather. I have reasons for my belief, but it illustrates my point that the modern reader would hardly listen to a long process of reasoning. I believe I could even prove it, if people now were patient enough to listen to proof.

First, it must be realized that liveliness in the preacher does not mean liveliness in the congregation. On the contrary, the extreme liveliness in the preacher is produced by dullness in the congregation. I am ready to believe, for instance, that Mr. Lloyd George is a more purely entertaining speaker than Cobden. But that is because Mr. Lloyd George speaks to men who want to be entertained. Cobden spoke to men who wanted to be convinced.

The listeners provided something of the liveliness needed to carry them through a purely logical process. When there was a congregation of logicians, as there was in some of the old Scottish Calvinist kirks, the preacher could reckon on being followed when his discourse was a pure demonstration in logic. It is when the congregation is dull that it wants to be amused. Cobden stood for various views which I do not myself find convincing; but his audience was convinced, it was not merely amused. Now, a man cannot be convinced by an argument without following the argument. He can be amused, even if he goes to sleep in the middle of the argument and wakes up just in time to hear a joke about Tories drinking beer or Bolshevists sharing boots. I believe there is infinitely less of this *intellectual* attention to an argument than there used to be.

It is illustrated, for instance, in the great modern change in the Press. I am not now arguing about whether Lord Northcliffe's revolution in journalistic methods was morally or socially good. I only say it may well stand for something which is intellectually very much to the bad. When I was a boy, the papers printed long and detailed reports of speeches by Gladstone or Goschen or Asquith, on complex controversies of economies and finance. Perhaps they were not worth printing; perhaps they were not worth reading; but they were read. Now, it may be very bright and pleasant to have all Gladstone's subtle and searching logical distinctions swept away in favour of the fixed and unfailing headline of 'What Did Mr. Gladstone Say in 1885?' It may be very comfortable to forget all the luminous legal distinctions of Asquith, and agree that that statesman never said anything in this life except 'Wait and See'. But it is not a proof of increased intellectual activity that we are satisfied with the simple and soothing quotations. The minds of our fathers may have been occupied in futile and pedantic hair-splitting, but their minds were really capable of splitting a hair. It may be more cosy to be stunned with a blow on the head by a club than to have one of your hairs split by a needle, but it is not any better tribute to the quality of your head, or of anybody else's.

Or take another test from another type of inquiry. When all the drawing-rooms began to buzz suddenly with the name of Einstein, some of us were enabled to guess that they must once have buzzed quite as abruptly with the name of Darwin. Some of us are inclined to guess that Darwinism became a fashion long before anybody really thought it was a fact. Doubtless any number of society ladies went about saying that Professor Darwin was really too wonderful, just as they afterwards went about saying that Professor Einstein was really too wonderful. But, when all is said, there is no comparison between the two cases. Any number of people did really attack the study of biology, in order to agree or disagree with Darwin. Hardly one person in a thousand thought of attacking the higher mathematics in order to agree with Einstein. People did talk about Darwinism as well as about Darwin. Most of those who talk about Einstein talk about Einstein. They know nothing but the name and the notion that something very important has happened in connexion with the name. The talk about Darwin may have been popular science, but it was science, and it was popular. The talk about Einstein may rather be called popular nescience. He has not made astronomy really popular, as the other made biology really popular. And I believe that the reason is a certain increased laziness of the intellect; that fewer people are ready for a long, sustained logical demonstration, quite apart from whether we think that the demonstration really demonstrates. In my boyhood there were any number of funny little atheists running about ready and eager to prove what they had learned from the work of Darwin. So there were any number of fanatical little Free-Traders eager to *prove* what they had learned from the speeches of Cobden. I do not find men now so eager to prove things; but, at the most, to assure me that they have been proved.

One way of putting it is that this is a psychological age, which is the opposite of an intellectual age. It is not a question of persuading men, but of suggesting how they are persuaded. It is an age of Suggestion; that is, of appeal to the irrational part of man. Men discussed whether Free Trade was false or true; they do not so much discuss whether Empire Free Trade is false or true, as whether it is booming or slumping; whether it is based on an understanding of Mass Psychology, or whether its opponents or supporters have what Americans call Personality. It is all great fun, and there is doubtless a truth in it, as in other things. But, whatever else it is, it is not a mark of stronger mentality, and any old Scotch Calvinist farmer, who could follow his minister’s desolate and appalling sermon to Seventeenthly and Lastly, had an immeasurably better brain.

VI. On Travel’s Surprises

TRAVELLERS’ tales are supposed to be tall tales; but I have always found them fall short. I have nearly always felt that the real monument or landscape, when I saw it for myself, was something stranger and more striking than the indirect impression of reading. The old tale against travellers’ tales was that they magnified everything; that every lizard became a dragon and every savage tribe a race of giants. But my experience is that travellers in a strange land, especially if they have travelled in it long, tend too much to forget its strangeness. They become concerned with a dust of details, and tend to take the green lizards as casually as the green leaves. The danger is rather, I think, that a man can live in a tribe of gigantic savages, and grow to remark and record all sorts of details about their tribal taxes or their coinage of tusks or hides, and, at the end of his detailed narrative, forget even to mention that they were giants. For as there are things too big and obvious to be noticed, so especially there are things too big and obvious to be remembered.

There have, indeed, been many cases in which travellers have been accused of telling lies, which have often afterwards turned out to be truths. Modern research, which has justified so many medieval reputations, has made some reparation even to medieval travellers. It was Marco Polo, I think, who reported that he had met in Africa men who had the heads of dogs. And most modern critics treated it as a manifest fairy-tale, as if he claimed to have seen birds with the heads of elephants. But it is very likely indeed that the traveller saw baboons, or some of the larger apes; and his description is really more scientific and exact than the common popular impression about men and monkeys. For the higher apes have not that sort of hollow, half-human visage which we see in the little monkeys; they often have an aggressive and solid projection of nose and jaw, like the nozzle or muzzle of a dog. But even here the principle of comparison is true. It is one thing to read in a book about dog-headed men and believe it or not as we choose; it must have been quite another to see the first of the huge hairy anthropoids — monstrous, mysterious, erect; a premature provocation to the myth of the Missing Link. And I repeat that foreign sights have mostly affected me as the first ape must have affected the first explorer; not necessarily as something beautiful or charming, but certainly as something very surprising and entirely unexpected. When I first saw St. Mark’s, Venice, I am by no means sure that I liked it; but I am quite sure that I was surprised by it; that it was not only quite different from anything I had ever seen, but quite different from anything I had ever expected. I thought it looked like Aladdin’s Palace in a pantomime. And the impression was not altogether false for a man standing in that great merchant city of the Western Mediterranean is, by a paradox, standing deep in the golden gate of the East. There was always something a little too Oriental about the Venetian republic; and this, it has been suggested, was why it did, in a sense, fall like Carthage rather than survive like Rome. But, however that may be, the Christian who first looks at the Christian Church of St. Mark’s is as startled as if it were a Chinese pagoda. Yet I had often seen pictures of it; photographs, and even coloured photographs; but these never conveyed how extraordinary the thing really is. For the extraordinary thing is that anything so fantastic should be solid.

The queer thing is that what one would expect to be the first thing mentioned is generally the last thing mentioned. I had heard a thousand things about Jerusalem ever since my babyhood, and seen views of it, and plans of it, and read controversies about it. But, somehow or other, I had never got hold of the first fact that it is a mountain city. A city that is set upon a hill cannot be hid; but some how it seems as if the hill could be hid. All the photographs and descriptions I had seen were like glimpses of an Eastern bazaar; and suggested all the accompaniments of heat and stagnation and flat desert sands. Whereas the real city, relatively speaking, is much more like a castle on the crags of the Rhine, or set high among the rocks of Spain. From Spain itself it would be easy to take similar examples. I knew that the Escorial was a palace; I did not know that it looks much more like a prison; but especially I did not know the strange journey into the mountains by which it is reached, with the consequent sense of separation and unearthly loneliness in that huge habitation of a moody King. In short, I have sometimes positively disliked the famous spectacles of travel. But the thing I disliked was always utterly different from the thing that I was expected to like; so utterly different that I generally came at last to like it.

I had another experience of the same sort recently; I suddenly saw Canada. I had visited it before; but I had never seen it before. On the former occasion I crossed the frontier from the United States; and there is nothing particularly interesting about the frontier except the undignified fuss about Prohibition. On the second occasion I went up the St. Lawrence to Montreal. This also was a thing I had heard of often enough; but nothing I had ever heard of gave me any rumour of the reality. As is usual in such cases, the point of the experience is almost always missed. The point of the experience is that the traveller is carried far northward, almost as if he were going to the North Pole, or at least to find the North-West Passage. He sees icebergs and the Northern Lights and the whales of the northern waters; a hundred signs recall to him the Arctic adventures of which he read as a boy. Then the ship takes a sharp turn, which seems like one of the sharpest turns in navigation, and enters a new, an enormous, and yet a secret world. He feels, as the first explorers must have felt, that it is really a world set apart; that he had never guessed the earth contained anything so vast yet so concealed. And the impression is now increased when there begin to appear upon the narrowing coasts of that inland sea villages and the spires of churches that are not altogether like anything he has left behind. It is as if there were another Mediterranean, with another civilization in all its ports and shrines. So a man sails up the great St. Lawrence, wondering more and more, until the broad river seems to split about the great rock of Quebec.

I fancied that there might be here the beginning and the end of a quarrel I remember in my youth. Mr. Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem in praise of Canada, which very much annoyed the Canadians. Many of them stated with great sternness that, if he praised them any more, they would give him a good hard knock. The ground of the offence was that he had referred to the Dominion of Canada as ‘Our Lady of the Snows’. This was held to imply that Canada has no local industry except snowballing; that her principal exports are icebergs; and that the typical Canadian citizen is a sort of furry and inarticulate Eskimo. One Canadian poet haughtily replied that Canada contained glowing maple woods in which England might be lost. One Canadian painter painted an ironical allegory, representing the spirit of the Dominion sitting on a pile of gorgeous fruits and varied products of the sun, and entitled the picture, ‘Our Lady of the Snows’. I am no Imperialist in particular, but the days of my skirmishes with Mr. Kipling about Imperialism are long past, and I am affected by the thought of leaving Mr. Kipling and Canada in an embrace of reconciliation. I would therefore suggest that the impression of Arctic magnificence may be partly due to the fact that, though Canada is not made of snow, in a sense her gates are of ice.

And though her woods are really as beautiful as any Canadian painter or poet can depict them, the true traveller really does have an impression of having travelled beyond the North Pole to find them.

VII. On Flocking

THE elusive, enormous, and nameless thing, with which I have so long wrestled, as with a slippery leviathan, in such places as this, suddenly heaved in sight the other day and took on a sort of formless form. I am always getting these brief glimpses of the monster, though they seldom last long enough for me to make head or tail of it. In this ease it appeared in a short letter to the *Daily Express*, which ran, word for word, as follows:

‘In reply to your article “What Youth Wants in Church”, I assert that it does not want sadness, ceremony, or humbug. Youth wants to know only about the present and future, not about what happened 2,000 years ago. If the churches forsake these things, young people will flock to them.’

The syntax is a little shaky, and the writer does not mean that the young people will flock to the things that happened 2,000 years ago if only the churches will desert them. He does actually mean (what is much more extraordinary) that the young people will flock to the churches merely because the churches have forsaken all the original objects of their existence. Every feature of every church, from a cross on a spire to an old hymn-book left in a pew, refers more or less to certain things that happened about 2,000 years ago. If we do not want to be reminded of those things, the natural inference is that we do not want any of the buildings built to remind us of them. So far from flocking to them, we shall naturally desire to get away from them; or still more to clear them away. But I cannot under stand why something which is unpopular because of what it means should become frightfully popular because it no longer means anything. A War Memorial is a memorial of the war, and I can imagine that those who merely hate the memory might merely hate the memorial. But what would be the sense of saying that, if only all the names of the dead were scraped off the War Memorials, huge pilgrimages would be made from all the ends of the earth to visit and venerate the absence of names on a memorial of nothing?

Most of us would not devote our short summer holiday to visiting the ruin of what had once been the record of something that we did not want to think about. Nor would most people, indifferent to the Christian origin of Christian churches, waste their time in churches merely because they had ceased to be Christian. There are plenty of other places in which to spend our holidays, and plenty of other resorts to which young people can flock, without flocking to hollow shrines stripped of all traces of their history or their object. He would be a bold spirit who should hope to lure the duchess back from the Lido, or the typist from the seaside sun-cure, by offering to show them a chapel of no particular date, with no particular design, in which a total stranger had promised not to mention something that happened 2,000 years ago. Somehow I do not think there would be a flock of duchesses, or even typists, at the doors of that weirdly negative edifice. And this marks the first of the fallacies which beset this rather fashionable style of protest or proposal. Even supposing it were true that theology is unpopular, it does not follow that the absence of theology is popular. This need no more be true of the absence of theology than of the absence of conchology or bacteriology, or anything else. I may not want to hear a bore talking about bimetallism, but it does not follow that I want to go for a walking tour with the bore when he promises not to mention bimetallism. I may not wish to listen to the lecture on ‘Genetics and Genesis’ at the Co-educational Congress at Gum Springs, Ill., but neither do I want to go to the Co-educational Congress at Gum Springs, or anywhere else, even if there is to be no lecture on ‘Genetics and Genesis’. And surely those who are so innocently confident of the attraction of merely negative religion might realize that a broad-minded parson can be as much of a bore about nothing as anybody can be about anything.

But there is another, more subtle, more sunken and fundamental queerness about this way of looking at things. As I have said before, it is only occasionally that we get a real glimpse of its strange outline, as we get it for a moment in this letter. The minds of these people work backwards, from effect to cause, and not from cause to effect. The cause of the Church, the cause which produced it, the cause for which it stands, is regarded as something bad, some thing that ought to be abolished. In that case, one would naturally infer that the Church ought to be abolished. But this type of thinker does not begin with the cause; he begins with the result, and then turns on the cause and rends it, as if the cause were a disfigurement that had been added afterwards to the result, He suggests that the result must destroy its cause, and go off looking for another cause, in the hope of becoming the result of something else. It is as if the Union Jack were wandering about the world trying to mean the dragon standard of the Sacred Emperor of China, or the Blue Peter were bending all its efforts to become a flag of truce with the significance of the White Flag.

One explanation is that such people, who commonly call themselves progressive, are in the most stodgy sense conservative. They cannot bear to alter any concrete fact, but only the idea behind it. They cannot actually abolish the Union Jack or the White Flag, but only all that they stand for. So they see in front of them a solid block of brick called a church. They accept that; they cannot conceive a real revolt against that; they are even ready to throw themselves into all sorts of schemes for making this mere brick building fashionable, so that people shall 'flock' to it. It commands their strange loyalty in its own strange way, merely by being there. It is a solid fact; something must be done with it; and therefore something must be done for it. In pure reason, it is about as reasonable as saying that since we have a Post Office we had better turn it into a swimming-bath, or that the successful establishment of a tennis court necessitates our using it as a turnip field. But the practical man does not trouble about pure reason; he can confront, with an unsmiling visage, what is in reality pure unreason. For pure reason involves some degree of imagination, and not only creative but also destructive imagination. The thinker must not only be able to think things, but to unthink them; he must be imaginative enough to unimagine anything.

Now this sort of conservative cannot unthink anything that is perceptible to his senses. He can only unthink the theory on which it depends, because it is only a theory. He cannot unimagine the big brick church in front of him, as it actually bulks in the landscape. He cannot imagine the landscape without the church; he can only imagine the church without the religion, or the religion without the reason. In the world of ideas he can alter anything, however fundamental, as if it were something fanciful. But he cannot be fanciful about a fact like a brick building; that is a solid object, and must be made a solid success. People must be induced to 'flock' to it, even if it has to be turned into an aquarium or an aerodrome. In one sense, to do him justice, this melancholy materialist is the most disinterested of men. The mystic is one who will serve something invisible for his own reasons. The materialist is one who will serve anything visible for no reason. But there are a good many of him, and, even if he has not begun to flock very much into the churches of the present and future, he does already flock a good deal in the correspondence columns of the newspapers.

VIII. On the Behaviourist

EVERYBODY knows that a new school of sceptics has recently appeared, especially in America; they call themselves the Behaviourists, and the late Mr. Harvey Wickham called them the Misbehaviourists. So far as I can understand, their philosophy is rooted in a theory of physiology: the theory that thought is originally a sort of movement of the body rather than the brain. ‘There is nothing in the brain,’ I think one of them has written, ‘except a lot of neurons. We do not think with our minds. We think with our muscles.’ Those of us, that is, who are so old-fashioned as to think at all. For we have all seen vigorous representatives of the rising generation who suppose that everything can be done with the muscles, and whom nobody, not even a psychologist of the far-off nineteenth century, would accuse of merely using their minds. I am not especially concerned with the truth or falsehood of this fancy. While it is flourished, like the majority of such fancies, with a vague defiance directed towards orthodoxy or tradition, it really has no sort of importance for them. It is an excellent example of the rule about nearly all such new notions that are valued as new negations. The new scientific theory never does really deny the old religious theory. What it does do is to deny — or, rather, destroy — the old scientific theory. And it was precisely in the name of that old theory that religion was once to have been destroyed. The heretics never attack orthodoxy; the heretics only avenge orthodoxy on each other.

It does not matter to any Christian whether God has made a man to think with his brains or his big toe. But it did matter very much to the recent type of Materialist that a man could only think with his brains. He was perpetually basing all sorts of destructive arguments on an analysis of what he called the convolutions and the ‘matter’ in the brain. He was as devoted as M. Hercule Poirot to The Little Grey Cells; but, alas! with far less brilliant and entertaining results. All that the Behaviourist does is, in every sense, to dash out the brains of the old Materialist. There is no question of his touching the soul, even the soul of an old Materialist, for that escapes him as completely as it does every other kind of material analysis, including that of the old Materialist himself. What he abolishes is not the soul, but the cells on which his predecessor depended for the denial of the soul. If ever we do really come to talk about a brilliant idea flashing through our biceps, or a curious and original theory creeping up the calf of our leg, it may sound to some a little funny, or even fantastic. It will not make the slightest difference to those who believe that God made an invisible spirit as part of an invisible order. But it will make nonsense of pages and pages of recent realistic literature, in which the crumbling grey matter proved that nothing but death awaited even the primary form of mind, or in which the soul was supposed to have been tracked to its lair and killed in a cell under the cavern of the skull. Libraries of nineteenth-century scepticism would become so much lumber; but the mystical passage in St. Paul about the glorified body would not be in the least affected either way. It would be amusing to irreverent persons if men ever began to look for the Differential Calculus in their deltoid muscles or to conceal a joke somewhere near the joint of the elbow. But it would only contradict the man who said that all truths were in the human skull or all jokes a decay of brain-stuff; not the man who says that jokes come from man, or that man and mathematical truths come from God.

Nevertheless, there is another aspect of this fancy, whether or no it is anything more than a fancy, in which it may be used to suggest a rather neglected truth. If we were only allowed to accept scientific suggestion, as jokes, we could sometimes get some serious good out of them. If the young scientist would ever allow us to regard his hypothesis as anything so human as a half-truth, it might sometimes really be worth while to find the other half. If, instead of claiming that everything is covered by his explanation, he confined himself to pleading that there is something in his suggestion, he would look considerably less of a fool when the next man, with the new explanation, comes along in about thirty years. And there is something in the suggestion about mind and muscle, though there may be nothing but nonsense in an attempt to affirm muscle and deny mind. It is true, I think, that among the lesser guides to truth is a certain craving for creative movement: a longing to stretch the limbs, to smite, to scrawl, to make sweeping gestures, to lift up the hands as well as the heart. There is an instinctive movement of the body towards better and nobler things, as in the text that said, ‘I will lift up mine eyes to the hills’, or in that divine command of liberation that took the form of ‘Stretch forth thine hand’. The old ceremonial gestures of the human body are necessary to the health of the human soul: the gesture that pledged the guest in the goblet that strewed the flowers upon the grave; that drew the sword for the salute or set up the candle before the shrine. In that sense a man actually can think with his muscles; he can pray with his muscles; he can love with his muscles and lament with his muscles. All religion that is without that gesture, all Puritan or purely Intellectualist religion that rages at ritual, is raging at human nature. If an ancient pagan came from the city of Plato and the temple of Pallas, and found himself in a certain type of town of the Middle West, I admit that he would probably prefer to be a Behaviourist rather than a Baptist.

Now, if we take a fine poem of religious invocation, like that which Chaucer called his A.B.C., which consists of a series of apostrophes to the Virgin, each like the first salute at morning, we shall feel the almost physical presence of this sort of ancient or medieval Behaviourism. The words seem to carry with them a gesture; it is impossible not to feel that the poet is doing something; is bowing to a lady or standing up to salute a sovereign; is lifting an offering up or casting an offering down. Such an opening as ‘Almighty and all-mercyable Queen’ has a breadth about it beyond that of the brain, in the narrow sense, because such invocation is, among other things, one of the most ancient human habits of the body. Of course, that broad and expansive gesture can be found in other poets besides Chaucer, and other schools besides Chaucer’s. But it has not expanded with the particular modern type of expansion. Milton was capable of it:

Thine are these mighty works, Parent of Good,
Almighty, thine this everlasting frame.

But it seems to me that, after Milton, there is in literature less and less of that sort of invocation, even when there are many other sorts of inspiration. Shelley invented half a hundred goddesses, but he could not pray to them, not even as well as the old atheist Lucretius could pray to Venus, Mother of Rome. All Shelley’s deities were abstractions; they were Beauty or Liberty or Love; but they might as well have been Algebra and Long Division, so far as inviting the gesture of worship goes. In this, as in everything else, what is the matter with the new pagan is that he is not a pagan; he has not any of the customs or consolations of a pagan. There is a little more of it, I admit, in the almost ironic invocations of Swinburne. But that is precisely because Swinburne was more deeply read, not in the new paganism, but in the old. He had at least gone into the temples of the old Greeks, even if it was to curse the gods as well as invoke them. But, on the whole, this gesture of invocation has rather gone out of poetry; and even our diabolists do not wave the wand with anything like a fine flourish, when they start to raise the devil.

IX. On the Pleasures of no Longer being Very Young

THERE are advantages in the advance through middle age into later life which are very seldom stated in a sensible way. Generally, they are stated in a sentimental way; in a general suggestion that all old men are equipped with beautiful snowy beards like Father Christmas and rejoice in unfathomable wisdom like Nestor. All this has caused the young people to be sceptical about the real advantages of the old people, and the true statement of those advantages sounds like a paradox. I would not say that old men grow wise, for men never grow wise and many old men retain a very attractive childishness and cheerful innocence. Elderly people are often much more romantic than younger people, and sometimes even more adventurous, having begun to realize how many things they do not know. It is a true proverb, no doubt, which says 'There is no fool like an old fool'. Perhaps there is no fool who is half so happy in his own fool's paradise. But, however this may be, it is true that the advantages of maturity are not those which are generally urged even in praise of it, and when they are truly urged they sound like an almost comic contradiction.

For instance, one pleasure attached to growing older is that many things seem to be growing younger; growing fresher and more lively than we once supposed them to be. We begin to see significance, or (in other words) to see life, in a large number of traditions, institutions, maxims, and codes of manners that seem in our first days to be dead. A young man grows up in a world that often seems to him intolerably old. He grows up among proverbs and precepts that appear to be quite stiff and senseless. He seems to be stuffed with stale things; to be given the stones of death instead of the bread of life; to be fed on the dust of the dead past; to live in a town of tombs. It is a very natural mistake, but it is a mistake. The advantage of advancing years lies in discovering that traditions are true, and therefore alive; indeed, a tradition is not even traditional except when it is alive. It is great fun to find out that the world has not repeated proverbs because they are proverbial, but because they are practical. Until I owned a dog, I never knew what is meant by the proverb about letting a sleeping dog lie, or the fable about the dog in the manger. Now those dead phrases are quite alive to me, for they are parts of a perfectly practical psychology. Until I went to live in the country, I had no notion of the meaning of the maxim, 'It's an ill wind that blows nobody good'. Now it seems to me as pertinent and even pungent as if it were a new remark just made to me by a neighbour at the garden gate. It is something to come to live in a world of living and significant things instead of dead and unmeaning things. And it is youth in revolt, even in righteous revolt, which sees its surroundings as dead and unmeaning. It is old age, and even second childhood, that has come to see that everything means something and that life itself has never died.

For instance, we have just seen a staggering turn of the wheel of fortune which has brought all the modern material pride and prosperity to a standstill. America, which a year or two ago seemed to have become one vast Eldorado studded with cities of gold, is almost as much embarrassed as England, and really much more embarrassed than Ireland. The industrial countries are actually finding it difficult to be industrial, while the old agricultural countries still find it possible to be industrious. Now, I do not pretend to have prophesied or expected this, for a man may cheerfully call a thing rotten without really expecting it to rot. But neither, certainly, did the young, the progressive, the prosperous, or the adventurous expect it. Yet all history and culture is stiff with proverbs and prophecies telling them to expect it. The trouble is that they thought the proverbs and history a great deal too stiff. Again and again, with monotonous reiteration, both my young friends and myself had been told from childhood that fortune is fickle, that riches take to themselves wings and fly, that power can depart suddenly from the powerful, that pride goes before a fall, and insolence attracts the thunderbolt of the gods. But it was all unmeaning to us, and all the proverbs seemed stiff and stale, like dusty labels on neglected antiquities. We had heard of the fall of Wolsey, which was like the crash of a huge palace, still faintly rumbling through the ages; we had read of it in the words of Shakespeare, which possibly were not written by Shakespeare; we had learned them and learned nothing from them. We had read ten thousand times, to the point of tedium, of the difference between the Napoleon of Marengo and the Napoleon of Moscow; but we should never have expected Moscow if we had been looking at Marengo. We knew that Charles the Fifth resigned his crown, or that Charles the First lost his head; and we should have duly remarked '*Sic transit gloria mundi*', after the incident, but not before it. We had been told that the Roman Empire declined, or that the Spanish Empire disintegrated; but no German ever really applied it to the German Empire, and no Briton to the British Empire. The very repetition of these truths will sound like the old interminable repetition of the truisms. And yet they are to me, at this moment, like amazing and startling discoveries, for I have lived to see the dead proverbs come alive.

This, like so many of the realizations of later life, is quite impossible to convey in words to anybody who has not reached it in this way. It is like a difference of dimension or plane, in which something which the young have long looked at, rather wearily, as a diagram has suddenly become a solid. It is like the indescribable transition from the inorganic to the organic; as if the stone snakes and birds of some ancient Egyptian inscription began to leap about like living things. The thing was a dead maxim when we were alive with youth. It becomes a living maxim when we are nearer to death. Even as we are dying, the whole world is coming to life.

Another paradox is this: that it is not the young people who realize the new world. The moderns do not realize modernity. They have never known anything else. They have stepped on to a moving platform which they hardly know to be moving, as a man cannot feel the daily movement of the earth. But he would feel it sharp enough if the earth suddenly moved the other way. The older generation consists of those who do remember a time when the world moved the other way. They do feel sharply and clearly the epoch which is beginning, for they were there before it began. It is one of the artistic advantages of the aged that they do see the new things relieved sharply against a background, their shape definite and distinct. To the young these new things are often themselves the background, and are hardly seen at all. Hence, even the most intelligent of innovators is often strangely mistaken about the nature of innovation and the things that are really new. And the Oldest Inhabitant will often indulge in a senile chuckle, as he listens to the Village Orator proclaiming that the village church will soon be swept away and replaced by a factory for chemicals. For the Oldest Inhabitant knows very well that nobody went to church in the days of his childhood except out of snobbishness, and that it is in his old age that the church has begun once more to be thronged with believers. In my capacity of Oldest Inhabitant (with senile chuckle), I will give one instance of a kindred kind. A man must be at least as old as I am in order to remember how utterly idiotic, inconceivable, and crazily incredible it once seemed that any educated or even reasonably shrewd person should confess that he believed in ghosts. You must be nearly the Oldest Inhabitant to know with what solid scorn and certainty the squire and the parson denied the possibility of the village ghost; the parson even more emphatically than the squire. The village ghost was instantly traced to the village drunkard or the village liar. Educated people knew that the dead do not return in the world of sense. Those who remember those times, and have lived to see a man of science like Sir Oliver Lodge founding quite a fashionable religion, are amused to hear a young man say the world is moving away from the supernatural. They know in what direction it has really moved.

X. On Mr. Mencken and Fundamentalism

IT is the custom to make fun of Fundamentalism and to suggest that American religion is rather antiquated. But I sometimes think that American irreligion is much more antiquated than American religion, and that the sceptic can be more of a fossil than the sectarian. Both, of course, are sects only representing sections. America contains many other brighter and better things; and certainly America is sufficiently advanced and adventurous, especially in certain forms of scientific practice, to balance any thing belated in certain forms of scientific theory. But the belated forms exist, and seem to be still under the illusion that they are advanced forms. There seem still to be places in the world where the earth shakes if the indomitable Darrow mentions the unmentionable Darwin. I am not sure that they may not be referring to Erasmus Darwin.

Mr. H. L. Mencken is at least a brilliant man of letters and ought to know better. But he, I gather, has just been coming out in defence of the dead and buried negations of the nineteenth century, and gallantly doing his best to prevent American science from moving with the times. His way of doing it seems to be to play about with the word ‘Scientist’ in opposition to some other word like the word ‘Physicist’. ‘Scientist’ is a horrible word to be driven to use, though I have often been driven to use it; but all these terms for the study of science are in a very unscientific confusion. It would be embarrassing to summon a physician and be visited by a physicist. Yet on the parallel of physics and metaphysics, the former word would seem more logical. Few of us have ever, in desperate haste, summoned a metaphysician. But it would be far more frightful and terrifying to be visited by a metaphysicist. Subject to the further clarification of the language, I presume Mr. Mencken to mean by a scientist either a man who specializes in all sciences (a somewhat alarming figure) or else a man who really specializes in one science in a scientific way. Mr. Mencken chooses to contradict flatly the principal living physicists, who have studied physics in a strictly scientific way. I do not know if he has studied the science in any way, but I am pretty sure that he has not studied it in that way. When, therefore, he says of the distinguished men whose close study of matter has not led them to materialism, that it only shows that they can be physicists without being scientists, it throws a yet more uncanny light on that very ugly word. Apparently a scientist is a man who surveys all the sciences, without any particular study of them, and then gives expression to his own moral principles or prejudices. In this way it is proved that Mr. Mencken is a scientist. I also am a scientist; but in my time it used to be called a journalist.

It is great fun, for what it really means is that the scientific materialist never cared for science but only for materialism. So long as he supposed that material inquiry supported materialism, he roared and bellowed at us that we must 'accept the conclusions of science'. But he is not the least inclined himself to accept the conclusions of science, if they happen to go against his own crude and clumsy creed. The Darwinians would have been hysterical with horror if any Victorian journalist had told them that Darwin might be a biologist without being a scientist. Twenty years ago, it would have been atrociously antiquated to say that Haeckel was not really a scientist, though it is now much less clear that he was a scientist than that he was a monist. He was, anyhow, a propagandist, and a pretty unscrupulous propagandist; but we were all supposed to swallow what he said at once, because he was Science. The new physicists are not propagandists, but Mr. Mencken, so far from reverencing them as Science, desperately refuses to respect them even as scientists. And he takes up this extraordinary position for no reason in the world, except that they will not say exactly what he tells them to say, in the world of morals and metaphysics. But it is rather hard to ask them to drop all their scientific work for fear they should get a little ahead of Mr. Mencken.

God forbid that I should blame Mr. Mencken for being a Diehard and dying in the last ditch, even in the rather muddy ditch of a dead materialism. If he still thinks the old-fashioned science was right, he is perfectly right to be old-fashioned. But he will hardly expect us not to laugh at him, when we consider how we were derided as Diehards for being ready to die in a ditch which we thought more deep and rather less dirty. He is now, apparently, in exactly the same situation as we were, except that our principle has satisfied the intelligence of teeming populations for two thousand years, while his prejudice has broken down as soon as it was set up. So far as the teeming populations are concerned, it has ended before it had begun. For modern monism and materialism were never accepted by simple people, and are now being abandoned by scientific people. To be true to them when they lie under such a complication of disasters and disillusions may be admired as chivalric in the sense of quixotic; but Mr. Mencken would be the first to insist that it is allowable to smile at Don Quixote.

I have so warm an admiration for Mr. Mencken as the critic of Puritan pride and stupidity that I regret that he should thus try to make himself out a back number out of mere irreligious irritation. He has been the hammer of those false idealists who call themselves moral because they demand the Prohibition of a few hard drinks, and dare not say a word of the Prohibition of hard dealings, of hard bargains that break the poor, and the brutal ethics tolerated in business. I sympathize so much with this that I do not mind the hammer being flourished sometimes a little cheaply and ostentatiously, like an auctioneer's hammer; nor do I demand in the present ease that it should tap as cautiously and scientifically as a geological hammer. But I do demand that it should go somewhere near hitting the right nail on the head, even if it be hit with all the windy violence of some Nietzschean imitation of the Hammer of Thor. I do not mind Mr. Mencken being destructive, like his master Nietzsche before him. What I complain of here is that he is not destructive enough. He not only dare not destroy, but he cannot even bear to watch the destruction of a few blunders and blind dogmas of old Victorian science. The Fundamentalists are funny enough, and the funniest thing about them is their name. For, whatever else the Fundamentalist is, he is not fundamental. He is content with the bare letter of Scripture — the translation of a translation, coming down to him by the tradition of a tradition — without venturing to ask for its original authority. But Mr. Mencken, in his latest phase, is almost as superficial as a Fundamentalist. I should have expected a man of his intelligence to be something fundamental, if it were only a fundamental sceptic. But a real fundamental sceptic, as he has existed in Hellas or in India, or possibly in the cavern of Zarathustra, would never be frightened because the new scientific study of matter leads to mathematical abstractions and abysses. He would never be alarmed because the world now revealed by the physicists is not even physical. It is the business of the agnostic to admit that he knows nothing; and he might the more gracefully admit it touching sciences about which he knows precious little. As it is, it seems as if the agnostic were transformed into the atheist, and a pretty stale and provincial sort of atheist; what might be called respectfully the village atheist. Even then, I suspect that I should sympathize with him in practice, in his free fight with the village Puritans in front of the village inn. But, just as I should prefer him to admit that even the village chemist knows something about chemistry, or the village physician about physic, I would suggest that even physicists do know something about physics.

XI. On Anthony Trollope: Historian

I WAS recently reading an article on Anthony Trollope, one of the many that have appeared in literary magazines since critics have discovered that his work can be treated as literature, when they used only to treat it as fiction. He is a rather rare example of a man who has been taken more seriously after his death than in his presence. The Victorians tended to regard Trollope as light literature, and Thackeray and even Dickens as more serious literature. The modern critics, rightly or wrongly, are disposed to treat Trollope more seriously, and even Dickens and Thackeray more lightly. Of course, Trollope is treated in both fashions, according to the taste of the critic. Mr. Hugh Walpole has cultivated the Trollope style both by precept and example; and Father Ronald Knox has made a most elaborate and detailed map of Barsetshire, and annotated it with stern queries about why Dr. Thorne took so long to get to Plumstead Episcopi, or what Mr. Gresham was doing on the wrong road to Framley Parsonage. These are not the right examples; for I, alas! have not the powerful detective and documentary brain of Father Knox. But it is broadly true that Trollope has again attracted many people from many aspects. And yet there is one aspect of Trollope which I think has been entirely neglected, and which I think is of very great and vital importance to the history of England.

The critic in question says of Trollope, truly enough in the main: ‘He scarcely concerned himself with the lower orders.’ We may add that the whole system of English squirearchy scarcely concerned itself with the lower orders; or only in the same vague and well meaning way as Trollope. But when the critic adds, ‘His values were those of the middle class’, he misses the point — the point which I think important about English history. It is not really true, as a whole, that his characters were middle class. It might be said more truly that Dickens dealt largely with the middle class, though doubt less more largely with the lower middle class, and even the lower class. But Trollope really deals with the upper middle class in so far as it is attached to the upper class. Squire Gresham was not middle class; and I fancy that Archdeacon Grantly would have been very much surprised to be told he was. I draw a veil over the fury of Mrs. Proudie, who would probably, I admit, have been even more indignant at the description if it happened to be true. Dr. Thorne was, in the ordinary sense, of the professional middle class but we are never allowed to forget that his family was older and prouder than the De Courcys. Most of the Government clerks are of the more or less aristocratic class from which Government clerks were, and to some extent still are, chiefly drawn. In other words, we shall not learn the first historical lesson from Trollope till we realize that he bears witness to England as an aristocratic State; and not, as our friends the Communists would say, as a bourgeois State. But there is a further development of this historical truth, which I think rather curious. Trollope bears witness to a big historical fact about our past, and does it all the more solidly and sincerely because he has no notion that he is doing it at all.

I know it was the fashion in the Victorian times to say that England was represented by its Great Middle Class and not by its aristocracy. That was the artfulness of its aristocracy. Never did a governing class govern so completely, by saying it did not govern at all. The middle-class English man was always pushed into the foreground; while the rulers remained in the background. It was the middle-class Englishman who wrote letters to *The Times*; it was not he who informed *The Times*. It was the middle-class man who went to the political meeting; it was not he who sent down the candidate. The governing class governed by the perfectly simple principle of keeping all the important things to themselves; and giving the papers and the public unimportant things to discuss. When Earl Balfour (one of the last great survivals of the governing class) said languidly that he never read the newspapers, everybody laughed, as if he had said that he could not read the alphabet. In fact, of course, he never read the newspapers because he had read the State papers. Why should he read all the nonsense that was served out to the public, when he knew all the real secrets which were kept as secrets of State?

But when we have realized that the England of Trollope was still an aristocratic England, there is a further distinction, which Trollope never notices, but always makes clear. His evidence is alone enough to upset Macaulay and Green and the whole Whig theory of our history taught in the schools. The really interesting fact to be inferred from Trollope is this. Nineteenth-century England is not a country in which we have a populace led by a Liberal middle class on one side and a powerful Tory nobility led by Dukes and Earls on the other. The division of the parties is totally different, and unconsciously betrays the real secret, not only of the nineteenth, but of the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries. It betrays the truth about the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and the nature of the new system which it really introduced. The Crown did not pass from James II to William III. Like many stolen treasures, it was cut up: it was cut up into coronets.

Let anybody, reading Trollope carefully, note what the real division between the parties was. There is a large proportion of minor gentry, who may be called middle class, if we will, who are certainly numerous and not very rich: doctors, parsons, small squires, and yeomen and all sorts of plain and hard-working people. Now *these* people are all Tories. They inherit the old Tory tradition of loyalty to a king, which belonged to purely middle-class people like Dr. Johnson or Dr. Goldsmith.

Far above all these people, like gods on Olympus, like higher beings living on a loftier plane, there are two or three people who are of prodigious public importance, like emperors or kings. The tone of everybody else in talking about them implies the remote condescension of a sovereign. The obvious example is the Duke of Omnium. He is spoken of as playing a great princely part like a prince. We need not deny him the credit, but we need not disguise the fact that his importance rested on being what we call a millionaire. More presentable, I admit, than the millionaires who are flattered to-day. But he is ruler of all England because he is gigantically rich. Now *this* kind of man is always a Whig.

What the serious historians have disguised the frivolous novelist has detected. Their histories are fiction and his fiction is history. That is the truth; and that is Trollope’s unconscious witness to what the Whigs really did in English history; why they were able to overthrow the Stuarts; why they were able to dominate the common traditional Tories like Dr. Thorne. What the Revolution did was obviously not to establish a democracy; not even to establish a normal and national gentry; not even to establish a mere rustic squirearchy. It was to establish certain great magnates, whose wealth and power was far out of proportion to that of the ordinary gentleman, let alone the ordinary citizen. They owned every thing, and Trollope knew it. What other possible meaning is there in the title of *The Duke of Omnium*? Thackeray also knew it. What possible other meaning is there in that fine satiric flourish, ‘I am not a Whig . . . but oh, how I should like to be!’? Even the waiters and couriers on the Continent knew it. What other meaning was in the Arabian Nights legend of the English Milord? Everybody seems to have known it, except the people who taught history in the schools and universities of England.

XII. On the Way of the World

IT was Matthew Arnold, if I remember right, who invented or popularized the phrase ‘the way the world is going’, a motto for social reformers only too easily adapted into a motto for snobs. It is not really even a simple, let alone a safe, guide, as can be easily tested in his own ease. After all, if it comes to that, what way was the world going in the time of Matthew Arnold? We are far enough from it to look back to it, and, when we look back to it, the world seems to be going all ways at once. It was certainly a time when the Philistines, as he called them, the middle-class mercantile Liberals of the school of Cobden and Bright, were still marching from victory to victory. And yet the end of the Liberal century was crowned, or crushed, by the Jingo journalism of the Kipling epoch, with War, Imperialism, and everything that the old Liberals loathed. In one sense the world was more sceptical and scientific; in every sense it seemed more sceptical and scientific; and yet the mystical and religious reaction increased steadily from then till now. In short, when we look back on that time we see not a tide but an eddy, or a welter of eddies, in which each person is paddling his own canoe desperately in his own direction. Arnold wanted to go back to Athens; Newman to go back to Rome; Carlyle to go back to Scandinavia; Schopenhauer to go back to India; Nietzsche to go back to chaos. I do not say there was no predominant influence among these influences, but I do say that it was not so simple as Arnold and some other people thought it; and, so far from simplifying itself with distance, it seems with distance to grow more dizzy and distracted. Wherever that age was drifting, it was to the place where we are now. And where in the world are we?

There is one case of this complexity that always amuses me: the way in which the abstract assumptions of an age are often contradicted by its concrete customs and amusements. The superficial examples are obvious enough. In theory this is the age of Prohibition; in practice it is the age of Cocktails. In theory women are working in the world on an assumption of absolute equality with men. In practice vast numbers are reading the novels of Miss Ethel M. Dell and all sorts of rubbishy tales and essays about the fascination of sheikhs and cavemen. In theory the State has been practically secularized and theology is a dead and threadbare thing, dismissed disdainfully in every other paragraph as a lumber of ‘creeds and dogmas’. In practice no newspaper can apparently pay its way without plastering itself all over with headlines and captions about the position of Christianity, the nature of Christ, the immortality of the soul, the future of the Churches, and a whole picture-gallery of portraits of popular clergymen. But there is one particular contradiction which I would note here, between the tone of such religious journalism and something else that might rather be called spiritual literature. At a moment when the popular religion, or at least the religion preached in the popular press, all points one way, the work of the most modern and independent artists points the other. The newspapers are all God and no devil. The novels are all devils and no God. The tone of that religious journalism, or whatever we call it, is something that people call Optimism. It is a bad word, but it can sometimes stand for a good thing. I have used it myself in other days, merely in opposition to Pessimism, and as meaning the primary conviction that life is worth living and the world is worthy of our efforts for it. But nowadays it means something much more; or, rather, something immeasurably less. It means a sort of cheap cheeriness, at the back of which there is a curious sort of hollow unbelief in reality. Men boasted of being Optimists about the war; which is like being Optimists about the weather. A man may try to be cheerful even if there is a thunderstorm; but these lunatics talked as if they could prevent a thunderstorm by being cheerful. Those who pro pose to be cheerful when struck by lightning introduce a more mystical question. So people now boast of being Optimists about Trade, this is more vulgar but less irrational, precisely because trade is a less real thing than war. Some are surprised that the same American civilization should produce Christian Science and commercial salesmanship. But in fact Christian Science is very like commercial salesmanship. Both rest on the idea that facts can be conjured away by moods and mesmerism. The perfect Scientist persuades a man that he hasn’t got what he has got. The perfect Salesman persuades a man that he does want what he doesn’t want. We may call it, in a complimentary phrase, the power of spirit over matter. We may call it, in a less complimentary phrase, the power of lies over facts. But this spirit of persuasion, or illusion, does pervade our time in good and bad forms, and especially in one popular religious form. I have remarked before that Spiritualism, for instance, while it does not affirm that all Spirits are good, does rather tend to ignore the suggestion that some are bad. And it will be agreed that the general tone of all the True Christianity and New Religions that pervades the newspapers rather leaves out the possibility that anything is bad. One would infer from these lay sermons that there is no difficulty about being happy, if it be only accompanied by being hazy. Some of the writers deal with the tremendous and pulverizing paradox of the Love of God, especially in the aspect of faith in the God of Love, as if it were not only perfectly self-evident, but as if it could have no effect except to make us self-satisfied. The thunderous riddle of the '*Est Deus Caritatis*' which broke above the dying Brand after his life of agony on the peak of his perfect renunciation, seems to be uttered chirpily every morning to every clerk or stockbroker who will be sufficiently broadminded to play golf instead of going to church. Carlyle complained of people who were at ease in Zion. But the new Zion ism thinks it enough to prove that it is easier still not to be in Zion at all. Whatever else it does encourage, the dread of devilry or definite evil is admittedly a thing that it does not encourage. We could read reams and files of the new newspaper theology and not find even a mention of that fear of demons that was felt by all our fathers. Very well; that is the way the world is supposed to have gone in our time. But when we read the literature of our time, especially when it is really literary, we find something quite the contrary. The most distinguished men of letters, the novelists or the new poets, often have no more definite beliefs than the newspaper believers. They are quite as pure from the taint of creed, dogma, or intellectually intelligible statement of faith. Most of them are probably agnostics; and in that sense do not believe in God, let alone the devil. And yet they are perpetually writing about devils. They are always at it. Book after book comes out, of which the theme is some strange psychological wickedness, encouraged more or less by some more strange psychical influence. One distinguished novelist writes a book about Pan, as a positive influence and a highly unpleasant influence, fully worthy of his ancient association with Panic. Another distinguished novelist devotes another imaginative novel to a dark and terrible deity of the South Americans, worshipped in former ages with torture and blood. Among the master pieces of the last twenty or thirty years, those that stand out in my own memory with startling power arc almost all of them stories of necromancy or diabolic possession, often written by men who had no definite religious affiliations, but who had imagination carrying all the solidity of conviction. I look back over the whole of that long period, that has been littered to the sky with newspaper philosophies preaching cheerfulness and optimism, and ignorance of evil. And the two things that stand out in my memory for their solidity and sincerity and power, staring like stone gargoyles of gigantic stature, are both things that seem to face the other way from the whole recent movement of the world. I remember the real literary thrill which I felt long ago when reading *The Turn of the Screw*, and how it woke within me again long after, under the suffocating vividness of *Seaton's Aunt*.

XIII. On the New Insularity

THAT a heresy is a half-truth is a very old and familiar example of a whole truth; but a truth that is not often realized as a whole. Most mistaken people mean well, and all mistaken people mean some thing. There is something to be said for every error, but, whatever may be said for it, the most important thing to be said about it is that it is erroneous. On the principle that half a loaf is better than no bread, it ought to be true that half a truth is better than no verity. But in practice, it is not so much a case of the half loaf of the proverb as of the half apple of the fairy-tale; the apple of which one half was poisoned by the wicked stepmother for the good princess. At least, as modern mental feeding goes, to stop lathe middle of the meal is often to eat the poison without eating the antidote. And if we look back on history, we shall see it largely encumbered and crushed with half-truths; we shall wonder how it happened so often that a whole age or generation was content with a half-truth, without making the faintest effort to find the other half. We shall wonder how one fashion could be entirely set upon fame or glory, or another upon order and symmetry, or another upon discovery and adventure; and be unable to understand how men could sacrifice all other things to each of these things in turn. It may be that we shall never fully understand why our fathers did it, for we certainly do not in the least understand why we do it ourselves.

There are certain half-truths that are even now allowed to occupy the whole mind. There are certain statements that are true as far as they go, and even important and interesting as far as they go, which are yet incessantly being used to stop the mind from going any farther. One of these, for example, is the phrase we find in the phraseology of all our literature and journalism; ‘Rapid modern communications are bringing different parts of the world nearer and nearer together. It takes but a few days to go to Siberia by train; it may take but a few hours to go there by aeroplane. Instead of being at the ends of the earth, Siberia may yet be a sort of suburb like Surbiton.’ But nobody stops to ask himself whether Siberia really is like Surbiton; in what respect it is really unlike Surbiton, or, above all, whether it is not in some respects growing more unlike Surbiton. For another process is going on, parallel to the process of the connexion of routes, and it is the disconnexion of ideas. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that some bold and romantic adventurer from Surbiton had gone to Siberia a hundred years ago. Doubtless he would have found the people there something like savages; perhaps, to his too refined suburban eye, something hardly different from the beasts of the field. And yet, without claiming any antiquarian scholarship about that somewhat obscure district; I would undertake to say that there were some ideas common to the Siberian and the Suburban. I should guess, for instance, that the Asiatic savages had some rudimentary idea of private property. I suspect that a Siberian would have said, ‘This is my spear’, as confidently as the Surbitonian would have said, ‘This is my umbrella’. It is probable that there was some sort of religion in Siberia, as it is probable that there is some sort of religion in Surbiton. The traveller to-day could get ten times more quickly to the Siberian village than he could have got there a hundred ago. But it is no longer so absolutely certain that he would find these simple things if he got there. He might find it was already a Communist village, not in the old and normal sense of a communal village; but in the fixed fanatical sense of a Bolshevist village. He might find the villagers being dogmatically taught the doctrine of Bolshevism; taught that it is really wicked to own an umbrella or still more wicked to wield a spear. He might find, for almost the first time in human history, a people being systematically instructed in the theory that there is neither God nor gods. That means that the village, which is geographically so much nearer, is now philosophically much farther away. And this is due to a new division in the thoughts of man; to the rise of a new sect and the separation of a whole civilization from the general human tradition. There are many modern examples of the disproportionate size of such queer modern sects; — there is the rather comic example of Prohibition. It is only a half-truth to say that America comes nearer and nearer to Europe, as ships fly faster and faster across the Atlantic. A ship took heaven knows how long to get from England to America in the days of the American Revolution and the Fathers of the Republic. But the traveller in the ship found Washington drinking wine his house in Virginia, exactly as he had left Lord North drinking wine in his house in London. If you had told them that it was wicked to drink wine, Washington would have stared just as North would have stared at such a statement. A Moslem morality had not then arisen beyond the Atlantic, to divide America from Christendom. Wine was thicker than water. It united men of a common culture; and the English race on either side of the ocean was only divided by liquid and not by liquor.

For that matter, our own British politics have lately illustrated vividly enough the fact that a division accompanies such a unification. We have seen it, first in the case of Ireland and then in the case of India. It was exactly at the time when they were easiest to reach that they were hardest to hold. No improvement in the trains from Euston or the boats from Holyhead, can alter the fact that our folly allowed Ireland to float farther and farther away, in the sea of the spirit, till it was as remote as a South Sea Island. It was perhaps too much to expect that we should ever really understand India; but in the old days it was at least understood how much we proposed to understand. If a hostile critic likes to put it so, it was understood that we should continue to misunderstand. But at least something was understood; and in the present welter and dissolution of bonds, it is not too much to say that nothing is understood. The new India is more of a riddle than the old; and the country grows more mysterious as it grows more near, or even more new. For we are for the first time near enough to feel the full force of the differences; and that sort of silent shock of collision is occurring with the closer communications all over the world. But there is, moreover, as I have said, a moral division due to the growth of new ideas. When we dealt with the active resistance of Hyder Ali the Moslem, both sides were fighting with the same weapons and in the same world. When we deal with the passive resistance of Gandhi the Mahatma, we are in a world as unfamiliar as magic. The paradox of this parallel of contraction and expansion is really simple enough. It follows on the modern attempt to combine wild spiritual speculation with systematic scientific order. Philosophy sprouts and sprawls in every direction, and science tries in vain to tie the bundle together. Men were united by religions and loyalties, and then it did not matter how widely they were scattered. A clan or tribe would he spread thinly over a whole moorland or prairie. Each hut would be as solitary as a hermitage, but they would be hermits of the same creed. The modern method is to stick up a row of villas all exactly alike, and all close together for convenience of electricity and drainage. But the man living in the first house may be a Buddhist, and in the second a Papist, and in the third an atheist, and in the fourth a diabolist; and each villa is an isolated universe.

XIV. On Christian Science

THE friends of Christian Science say proudly that very good business men are Christian Scientists. The foes of Christian Science say, unkindly, that Christian Scientists are very good business men. I will not debate whether these are only two ways of saying the same thing, far less whether it is a nice thing to say. The former point radiantly to rows and rows of hard-headed millionaires, reverently listening to readings from *Science and Health*, under the rather extraordinary impression that the presence of millionaires helps them to prove that Christian Science is Christian. The latter explain that Mrs. Eddy, though doubtless unconscious of the existence of matter, was not wholly unconscious of the existence of money. I have no intention of entering upon these purely personal feuds here. But I should like to point out that there really is a moral connexion between the two things, that extends beyond the defined boundaries of either. Just as there are more invisible (and therefore, presumably, more spiritual) forms of money than mere material coin — such as dues, debts, expectations, dead men’s shoes, mortgage, usury, economic threats and blackmail, and all the other purer and more immaterial forms of wealth — so there are indirect and impalpable influences of Christian Science which affect many who do not profess to be Scientists and could not, without some implication of humour, pretend to be Christians.

The truth is that in one sense Christian Science has succeeded and really become the religion of the age, though it does not follow of necessity that this is a compliment to the age. I do not mean by this that most people have studied and accepted Mrs. Eddy’s original metaphysics; if, indeed, they were original, or if they were really Mrs. Eddy’s. Still less do I mean that the world accepts the original morals of Christian Science, for I am told that they are no longer accepted even by Christian Scientists. The primary principle of the cult obviously forbade them to run for a doctor if Mrs. Eddy broke her leg, since either the leg, or certainly the break, or possibly both, were illusions of Mortal Mind. Whether there really were people who would have let a man bleed to death, because the blood was a result of the mere flow of his thoughts, I have my doubts; but that did seem to be involved in some of the original definitions, though not, I understand, in some of the later modifications of them. But this practical morality about doctors does not here concern me, however practical or unpractical it may be. What I mean, when I say that this is the age of Christian Science, is not that most people living in it are in any sense Christian Scientists. I mean that the world is in a certain mood, of which Christian Science is the expression and exaggeration. It is not so much that the age could not find a more accommodating religion, as that the religion could not find a more accommodating age. Men have sometimes talked about people who were Christians before Christ, and in one sense there were certainly any number of people who were Christian Scientists before Christian Science. There was something in the whole air and movement of that time, and especially of that nation, and it was of a curious blind, sweeping, and abnormal sort. The air was rather like a whirl wind and the movement rather like a whirlpool. It had an element of formlessness that was rather that of abstraction than anarchy; that rushed head long, yet followed the curves of a tendency or a fate. Indeed, among the queer jokes so often to be found in American names, there is none more quaintly expressive than the very name of Mrs. Eddy.

The truth about the tendency was this: that the world had become a world of Commerce. And there is about Commerce an invisible thing that may be called Confidence; even if it sometimes means no more than the Confidence Trick. It depends on faith, even if it prove to be bad faith. It does not depend on plain matters of material fact and experience. The millionaires in the Church of Christ Scientist are supposed to be hard-headed; I have myself a suspicion that they are rather soft-headed. But, anyhow, they do not really deal in hardware; they do emphatically deal in what may be called soft goods. They deal in things that easily receive impressions from without, and are especially sensitive to the impressions that we call depressions. They deal in rumours, in understandings, in fictitious values, in temporary offers, in things that are never what they seem, and seldom do exactly what they promise. Business is such stuff as dreams are made on, and its little life is rounded with a slump.

This nervous and not very sane state of affairs is the origin of Optimism and the general advice to the salesman to Keep Smiling. If he left off smiling for one single second, he might blight the market for hundreds of miles around. The whole condition has now become so terribly atmospheric; not in the milder sense of men suffering from the atmosphere, but in the almost agonizing sense of men making the atmosphere. That is why the whole of this commercial world is struck by the stubborn dissatisfaction or harsh discontent of the more rooted rural populations. They say that the farmer always grumbles; and so he does, for he can afford to grumble. He thinks the weather is bad, but he knows that his grumbling will not make it worse. He knows he cannot produce a cloud in the sky by every curse that comes to his tongue; that he cannot blight his own crops, even by declaring falsely that they are blighted. He cannot create a slump in turnips merely by turning a melancholy face upon them, or frown at the cabbages until they close weak and quiet when they began brisk and strong. He is dealing with absolute and unalterable realities, and, as he is dealing with real facts, he can express his real feelings. He is, in a rather curious and eccentric sense, in a position in which the truth has made him free. He is a realist be cause he is dealing with realities. The commercial man almost has to be a romanticist because he so often deals with unrealities. And that is what Americans mean when they talk about The Romance of Salesmanship.

Now, for an atmosphere so atmospheric as that the obvious religion was Christian Science, with its general suggestion of men creating their own atmosphere. To say that there was no such thing as a headache was part of the same mentality as saying that there would be no such thing as a slump; it was of the very essence of that mythology and genealogy that the wish was father to the thought. It had all kinds of minor manifestations, apart from any acceptance of that particular creed; but it was obviously more in touch with that particular creed than with any other creed. It was closely akin to all that astonishing mass of advertisement and suggestion about Personality and Will-Power and all the rest which we see sprawling over so many American books and magazines. It is an ironic jest that the religion is revealed, or betrayed, by its images or icons. The American papers show portraits of men who have Personality; which is why they all look exactly alike.

I have remarked recently that the world is now occupied with the Study of the Mind rather than with the Use of the Mind. This is what is meant by calling it the Age of Psychology. It is also what is meant by calling it, in a somewhat sinister sense, the Age of Physical Jerks. It is a nervous and unrestful sort of optimism that is thus perpetually trying to impose a mood upon the objective universe, and the world, like Wall Street, is liable to reactions of panic. But certainly Christian Science did for a time suit the mood, if it does not for any long period suit the mind; if, indeed, we return to using the mind instead of merely doctoring it with drugs.

XV. On Rest Cures for Nations

WE certainly need a new theory of Progress, for all existing theories about the future have a very hopeless air of being things of the past. There is even a detachable grain of truth in the doctrine of Spengler, which roughly maintains that there is no such thing as Progress, but only Progresses. That is, there is such a thing as one civilization becoming completely civilized in its own way, and then getting out of the way to make room for a totally different civilization. Unfortunately, every heathen seems fated to be a fatalist, and every fatalist seems fated to be a pessimist. The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone; in other words, he is pitifully cramped and crushed by the study of botany and geology. Sometimes he even passes from botany to biology, or, worse still, to anthropology. Now, in these dead or undeveloped things, it is more or less true that there is no Progress, but only Progresses. It is not easy to compare one completed phase with another; it is idle to ask whether old red sandstone is redder than greengages are green. The fossil that was and the flower that is cannot call to each other across the ages, and though there may be, in one sense, an upward spiral of evolution, it is not a spiritual spiral, or, as the Yankees would say, a live wire. There is not, in that manifest manner, at least, a memory in nature; but there is a memory of mankind. Cultures do not so completely perish as the pessimists pretend. Men do own the cave-drawings of a Neolithic man, as birds do not own the fossil of a pterodactyl. Still, there is a truth in that substitution of Progresses for Progress.

The truth seems to me to be this: that men do from time to time make special efforts; these are often crowned with success, and when they are crowned with success they generally end in failure. But that leaves on one side the question of the ordinary human life, which existed before the effort and still exists after the effort. Rome made a great effort and civilized a great part of the world, and the effort was followed by the Dark Ages. But the Dark Ages were not sub-human, any more than the Roman Empire was superhuman. It has been said by historical scholars that the simplicity of the Dark Ages refreshed the world like a sleep. It is certainly true that nations can be notably vigorous and hopeful at the end of what is called a period of decline and might more properly be called a period of neglect. Spain is far more vigorous and hopeful at this moment than many parts of the vast industrial field of what are considered successful societies. Spain made a great effort in the sixteenth century, and opened a new world of wealth and discovery; then it began to sink slowly out of sight. But Spaniards were not stupid and stunted savages in the time of Goya any more than in the time of Velasquez. Very likely the time will soon come when the Spaniards will make another effort; and for this purpose it is likely enough that their repose or retirement will have left them healthier and happier than most other people. In fact, we need a new theory or conception in history; the conception of the historical holiday. Perhaps the Dark Ages were a holiday, if they were a little like a dull and rainy holiday. But there is something to be said for a vacation, even in the literal sense of a vacuum. Anyhow, I think it extremely probable that the Spaniards will turn up again as fresh as paint, even the paint of Velasquez. They have not been so much exhausted and depressed by our dismal industrial materialism or our vast capitalist responsibilities. They have been refreshed and rejuvenated by a little decay; and have thoroughly enjoyed themselves for three centuries as a dying nation.

I would not insist everywhere on substituting, for the respectable old theory of the Revolution, this disturbing and dangerous theory of the Rest Cure No doubt it might be overdone. People might go on decaying a little too long and degenerate more than was really good for their health. I propose only a moderate indulgence in ruin; a cautious and temperate use of a return to barbarism. There are many quite modern people in whom the merest touch of decomposition, the merest soupçon of corruption and rottenness, would be enough to reassure me. But there are some modern people who are a great deal too modern; who are quite certainly devouring and destroying themselves with the nonsense of novelty, and trying always to hear of something later than the very latest. They are visibly growing old in order to keep up with their youth. They are wasting away to nothing, for want of a little nothing to do. If only some of their friends would persuade them to go away for a few centuries of superstition and ignorance, like the people of the Dark Ages, they might come back and astonish the world by something that the world had never seen before, like Gothic architecture or the portraits in the *Canterbury Tales*.

Anyhow, there is something to be said for this theory of the periodical enterprise of humanity. One advantage of it is that it resettles in a sane proportion all that question which was discussed in an earlier article: the question of the real case for the Noble Savage and Rousseau’s conception of a return to Nature. So long as scientific men merely despised savages (much more than the missionaries who were charged with despising them), the ease seemed simple enough. If primitive people were always more cruel and vindictive, as well as more clumsy and ignorant, than we are, then it was possible to present a progressive humanity, which every day and in every way was growing better and better. But (as I remarked elsewhere) even the story of simple tribes is not so simple. There is evidence of simple tribes that are actually milder in their punishments than we are, or kinder to their children than we are; or at least than we very recently were. But though this upsets the whole progressive theory that we civilized people are better than the savages in all respects, it does not force us to the contrary conclusion that the savages are better than we are in all respects. It is arguable that when men marched out on a special enterprise, they had to adopt a special discipline. Civilization might in some ways have more severe laws, because it had more serious problems. There might be harder lessons to learn, because there was more to be learned. The progressive tribe might be under martial law, while the conservative tribe was under common law. But the former might none the less be marching to the promised land.

For instance, there is a tiresome journalistic habit of fulsomely praising ourselves, and fatuously despising our fathers, because we no longer hang a man for forgery. But, as a fact, it was not an early primitive habit, but a late progressive habit, to hang a man for forgery. The law punishing forgery with death appeared quite late in our history, and was a result of our advancing civilization. It was a highly modern sort of thing to do. For forgery did not become frightfully important until finance and commercial contracts, and banking business of all sorts, had become important. I am very glad that men are no longer hanged for forgery. But I can quite imagine a simple and artless tribe of savages among whom the habit of imitating another man’s handwriting would appear as gay and innocent as making faces in imitation of another man’s face. If Hiawatha wrote his name in picture-writing on the smooth bark of the birch-tree, there would be no particular harm in Chibiabos playfully copying his friend’s particular way of drawing a wigwam or a rising sun. No; there is something after all in the Noble Savage; there is something at least in the Happy Savage. But that does not prove that the tribe should not sacrifice some of its happiness when the Great Spirit bids it go forth to war.

XVI. On Philosophy versus Fiction

LOOKING back on a wild and wasted life, I realize that I have especially sinned in neglecting to read novels. I mean the really novel novels; for such old lumber as Dickens and Jane Austen I know fairly well. If instead of trifling away my time over pamphlets about Collectivism or Co-operation, plunging for mere pleasure into the unhealthy excitement of theological debates with dons, or enjoying the empty mirth of statistics about Poland and Czechoslovakia, I had quietly sat at home doing my duty and reading every novel as it comes out, I might be a more serious and earnest man than I am to-day. If instead of loitering to laugh over something, merely because it happened to be laughable, I had walked stiffly and sternly on to the Circulating Library, and put myself under the tuition of our more passionate lady novelists, I might by this time be as intense as they. If instead of leading a riotous life, scrapping with Mr. Shaw about Socialism, or Dean Inge about Science, I had believed everything I was told about marriage by an unmarried young woman in an avowedly imaginary story, I might now have a more undisturbed faith and simplicity. Novels are the great monument of the amazing credulity of the modern mind; for people believe them quite seriously even though they do not pretend to be true.

But it is really true, alas I that I have failed to follow adequately the development of serious fiction. I do not admit that I have entirely failed to follow the development of serious facts. Not only have I discussed Labour with Socialists, or Science with Scientists, but I have argued with myself about other things, so new and true that I cannot get anybody else to argue about them. The world wide power of trusts, for instance, is a thing that is never attacked and never defended. It seems to have been completed without ever having been proposed; we might say without ever having been begun. The small shopkeeper has been destroyed in the twentieth century, as the small yeoman was destroyed in the eighteenth century. But for the yeoman there was protest and regret; great poets sang his dirge, and great orators like Cobbett died trying to avenge his death. But the modern destructive changes seem to be too new to be noticed. Perhaps they are too enormous to be seen. No; I do not think it can be fairly said that I have neglected the most recent realities of the real world. It seems rather the real world that neglects them. Nor do I confess, thank heaven, to the more odious vice of neglecting funny or frivolous fiction; whether in the sense of reading everything from the first story of Mr. Jacobs to the last story of Mr. Wodehouse; or in that richer sense in which the joke consists entirely of a corpse, a blood-stained hat-peg, or the mysterious footprints of a three-legged man in the garden. I have been a munificent patron of fiction of that description; and have even presented the public with a corpse or two of my own. In short, the limitation of my literary experience is so altogether on the side of the modern serious novel; especially that very serious novel which is all about the psychology of flirting and jilting and going to jazz dances. I have read hundreds of books bearing titles like *Socialism: The Way Out*; or *Society: the Way In*; or *Japanese Light on the Paulus Mythus*; or *Cannibalism the Clue to Catholicism*; or *Parricide: a Contribution to Progress*; or *The Traffic Problem: The Example of Greenland*; or *Must We Drink?*; or *Should We Eat?*; or *Do We Breathe?* and all those grave and baffling questions. I have also read hundreds of books bearing titles like *Who Killed Humphrey Higgleswick?*; or *The Blood on the Blotting paper*; or *The Secret of Piccadilly Circus*; or *The Clue of the Stolen Toothbrush*; and so on and so on. But I have not read with sufficient regularity, diligence and piety all those other books that bear titles like *The Grasswidowhood of Grace Bellow*; or *The Seventh Honeymoon of Sylphide Squeak*; or *Dear Lady Divorce*; or *The Sex of Samuel Stubbin*; or *Harold Hatrack, Soul-Thief*; or *The Hypnotist of Insomnia Smith*. All these grave and laborious, and often carefully written books come out season after season; and somehow I have missed them. Sometimes they miss me, even when hurled at my head by publishers. It were vain to deny that I sometimes deliberately avoid them. I have a reason, of a reasonable sort for I do not think it is a really reasonable reason merely to say that they bore me. For I did once really try to read them; and I got lost. One reason is that I think there is in all literature a sort of purpose; quite different from the mere moralizing that is generally meant by a novel with a purpose.

There is something in the plan of the idea that is straight like a backbone and pointing like an arrow. It is meant to go somewhere, or at least to point somewhere; to its end, not only in the modern sense of an ending, but in the medieval sense of a fruition. Now, I think that many of the less intellectual stories have kept this, where the more intellectual stories have lost it. The writer of detective stories, having once asked who killed Humphrey Higgleswick, must, after all, end by telling us who did it, even by the mean subterfuge of saying it was Humphrey Higgleswick. But the serious novelist asks a question that he does not answer; often that he is really incompetent to answer. The sex of Samuel Stubbin may even remain in considerable doubt, in some of the more emotional passages, and the seventh honeymoon of Sylphide seems to have nothing to do with the probable prospect of her eighth. It is the custom of these writers to scoff at the old sentimental novel or novelette, in which the story always ended happily to the sound of church bells. But, judged by the highest standards of heroic or great literature, like the Greek tragedies or the great epics, the novelette was really far superior to the novel. It set itself to reach a certain goal — the marriage of two persons, with all its really vital culmination in the founding of a family and a vow to God; and all other incidents were interesting because they pointed to a consummation which was, by legitimate hypothesis, a grand consummation.

But the modern refusal both of the religious vow and the romantic hope has broken the backbone of the business altogether, and it is only an assorted bag of bones. People are minutely described as experiencing one idiotic passion after another, passions which they themselves recognize as idiotic, and which even their own wretched philosophy forbids them to regard as steps towards any end. The sentimental novelette was a simplified and limited convention of the thing; in which, for the sake of argument, marriage was made the prize. Of course marriage is not the only thing that happens in life; and somebody else may study another section with another goal. But the modern serious novelists deny that there is any goal. They can not point to the human happiness which the romantics associated with gaining the prize. They cannot point to the heavenly happiness which the religious associated with keeping the vow. They are driven back entirely on the microscopic description of these aimless appetites in themselves. And, microscopically studied in themselves, they are not very interesting to a middle-aged man with plenty of other things to think about. In short, the old literature, both great and trivial, was built on the idea that there is a purpose in life, even if it is not always completed in this life; and it really was interesting to follow the stages of such a purpose from the meeting to the wedding, from the wedding to the bells, and from the bells to the church. But modern philosophy has taken the life out of modern fiction. It is simply dissolving into separate fragments and then into formlessness; and deserves much more than the romantic novel the modern reproach of being ‘sloppy’.

XVII. On Logic and Lunacy

THE idea of logic is so entirely lost in this phase of philosophical history, that even those who invoke it do so rather as the Athenians once invoked the Unknown God, or the men of the Dark Ages retained a dim respect for Virgil as a conjurer. The very people who say, ‘be logical’, will generally be found to be quite illogical in their own notion of logic. One of the last men who understood logic in its full and impartial sense, died only lately: the late William Johnson of King’s College, Cambridge; one of the finest minds of the age and an exact measure of the modern contrast between notability and notoriety. I mean that somehow the glory has departed from glory, and the first men of the time are often the last men to be advertised or even adequately admired. He was as incapable of intellectual injustice as of infanticide; and while he and I differed about a thousand things, even if I had regarded his view as ultimately leading to falsehood, I should always have known that it was free from the faintest tinge of fallacy. If there had been any weed of weak logic in his own argument he would have torn it up with as much joy as any weed in the garden of the enemy. For he liked that sort of weeding as an amusement and an art — a sort of art for art’s sake. And when I wander in the jungle of journalistic nonsense in which we all live to-day, his memory again and again returns.

Let us begin with a trifle that does not matter in the least. He loved to argue about trifles that do not matter in the least. Some journalist the other day shook the foundation of the universe and the British Empire by raising the question of whether a girl ought to smoke a cigar. But what I noted about his, and about the hundred eager correspondents who pursued this great theme, was that they wrote again and again some such sentence as this: ‘If you like a girl to smoke a cigarette, why can’t you be logical and like her to smoke a cigar?’ Now I do not care an ounce of shag whether she smokes a cigarette or a cigar or a corn-cob pipe or a hubble-bubble, or whether she smokes three cigars at once, or whether she is an Anti-Tobacco crank. But it is none the less true that when a man writes that sentence telling us to ‘be logical’, he shows that he has never even heard of the nature of logic. He might just as well write: ‘You like the look of a horse; why won’t you be logical and like the look of a hippopotamus?’ The only answer is, ‘Well, I don’t; and it is not illogical, because it does not in any way invade the realm of logic. A man has a perfect right to say that he likes the look of one thing and does not like the look of another thing; or even that he likes the look of a smaller thing, but does not like the look of a larger but somewhat similar thing. It is all a question of liking; and not in the least a question of logic. There is no logical compulsion upon him whatever to go on from the smaller to the larger and like them both. The man who uses this phrase attaches some queer particular meaning to the word 'logical'; something that is dimly adumbrated in the words, 'extremist' or 'going the whole hog'. But if my appetite is so small that I only require half a hog for breakfast, I am not any less of a logician because I refuse to eat the whole hog for breakfast. The obligation to eat the whole hog, if it exists, must be a mystical or moral or transcendental obligation; but it is not a logical obligation. It is not logical, because it has not been deduced from any premises; it has simply been stated without reference to any premises.

And that is what is the matter with the modern man who says, 'be logical'. He cannot take his own advice, and therefore he cannot state his own first principles. But though his logic is nonsense as he states it, it does refer to some first principles if he could only state them. It all depends on the reason for approving of cigarettes or cigars or girls or any other strange creatures. What he really means, at the back of his muddled modernistic mind, is some thing like this: 'If I approve of Jennifer smoking a cigarette because Jennifer can jolly well do anything she likes, and does, *then* it is illogical in me to object to her liking a cigar; or for that matter an opium-pipe or a pint of laudanum or a bottle of prussic acid.' And this statement would really be quite logical, because the logical reason is given. Or if he said, 'It is my first principle that women may do anything that men do; *therefore* I am bound in logic to pass the cigars to my daughter as much as to my son,' then that also is perfectly reasonable as the application of a stated principle. But to say that a man is bound in logic to like a cigar as much as a cigarette whether in his own mouth or that of his maiden aunt or his maternal grandmother, is stark staring unreason; and shows that the speaker is entirely illogical in dealing with the two ideas of liking and logic.

This half superstitious veneration for logic, combined with a complete misunderstanding of it, is very common in those popular works of fiction which are the joy of my existence; the crime novels and the police romances and the rest. There is a queer notion that the detective, who is distinguished from all human beings by having the gift of reason, is bound in logic not to like anything or anybody. Even Sherlock Holmes (the friend of my childhood to whom I shall always pay a tribute of piety) is described somewhere, I think, as being incapable of falling in love because of his logical nature. You might as well say that he could not be expected to have much appetite for lunch, because of his proficiency in mathematics. There is nothing intrinsically illogical in having affections or admirations or appetites, so long as we recognize them reasonably as what they are. But the romantic tradition, as it exists in all the romances, is that the logician cannot be romantic. It may be remarked that the word ‘cold’ will always be found coupled with the word ‘logical’; I imagine the printers keep such words together in one block of type. But the cold logician, though be must not be romantic, is almost entirely a creature of romance. As a matter of fact and experience, most of the very logical people I have known have been very warm-blooded, affectionate or enthusiastic people. Most of the very good debaters were very warm debaters. Some of the closest reasoners in history were men of the most enthusiastic convictions; like St. Thomas Aquinas or the great French preachers and orators. The truth is, I think, that it was because the English were originally taught to have a prejudice against logic, that even when they half overcame the prejudice, there remained something alien in the admiration. They could be brought to feel a sort of awe in the presence of a really reasonable person; as if he were a sort of monster. The fact that a man could think could only be explained on the hypothesis that he was a Martian or the Man in the Moon; that he was a Clockwork Man; that he was The Thinking Machine. They began by thinking that reason is inhuman; and only gradually conceded that it is superhuman.

Is it not about time somebody preached the older doctrine; that reason is human? Is there not some thing to be said for those medieval Schoolmen and antiquated sages, who held that man is a rational animal; and even more rational than the other animals? The modern experiment of first sneering at logic for not being a practical thing, and then timidly praising it for being a priggish thing, seems to have resulted in the general loss of it as a normal function of the mind. It is as if the same Victorian English had supported their railway-trains by forbidding anybody to walk; and then, when all human limbs were paralysed, had deified two or three athletes as gods because they had the power of walking. Logic is as normal as legs; but legs can be neglected as well as logic. All that is needed is a little ordinary training and practice; the knowledge that inferences rest on their first principles, as men rest on their feet. But without it the world seems to be drifting into an intellectual dissolution and destruction, which is at its very wildest when some wild voice shrieks out of the chaos; ‘Be logical’. This strange cry apparently means that you cannot stroke a cat without stroking a tiger; or that you are bound to wish the house was on fire because you sit by the fireside.

XVIII. On the Thrills of Boredom

IT is a dogma imposed on all, by the dogmatic secularism of the modern system, that Youth needs, must have, and cannot possibly be happy without, a riot of dances, plays, or entertainments. We all know the practical truth embodied in this; and yet I am so doubtful about the fashionable assumption that I think it very nearly untrue. I have no objection to dances, plays, and masquerades: on the contrary, I enjoy them enormously; but then I am not what is commonly called a Youth. And from what I remember of being young, and what I have read of the real reminiscences of youth, I incline to think that youth never shows its glorious vividness and vitality so much as when transfiguring what might be called monotony. I feel far more sense of a creative glow, and of something passionately alive, in the description of the dreary moorland and dark mansion of the Brontës, or even of the dismal coffee-houses that were filled with the first dreams of Dickens, than I feel in the faces and conversation of half the young people I see at shows and dances to-day. Nor do I think it was a case of imagination existing in spite of dreariness; I think it existed in some degree because of dreariness. There is a psychological paradox here which perhaps only a poet can fully understand; but young people are generally poets.

I can recall in my childhood the continuous excitement of long days in which nothing happened; and an indescribable sense of fullness in large and empty rooms. And with whatever I retain of childishness (and whether it be a weakness or otherwise, I think I retain more than most) I still feel a very strong and positive pleasure in being stranded in queer quiet places, in neglected corners where nothing happens and anything may happen; in unfashionable hotels, in empty waiting-rooms, or in watering-places out of the season. It seems as if we needed such places, and sufficient solitude in them, to let certain nameless suggestions soak into us and make a richer soil of the subconsciousness. Certainly, if there is such a need, it is a need that is now being everywhere neglected. Of course, all such views of youth or childhood or the past are a matter of proportion. Children did not like thrashings or even threatenings; they did not all like thunderstorms; they did not like solitude or darkness or horrors increased beyond their capacity for supporting them. But, allowing for that, the normal little boy likes solitude and loves horrors. Only, as I say, there is a fine shade that goes even beyond this, and suggests something of sustenance even in what many would now call merely stuffy and stagnant. The imagination can not only enjoy darkness; it can even enjoy dullness. I know that men like Dickens, writing recollections, have complained of dullness. But when I read their recollections, I doubt if they were ever for one instant dull. It must have been in those very hours that there first began that dance of the Dickens characters after which the world need never be dull again.

In that dance of Dickens characters, I trust I need not explain that I do not figure either as Mr. Stiggins the Puritan or Mr. Scrooge the Utilitarian. I have not the smallest intention of interfering with anybody’s dances or dramatic entertainments; and, in due proportion, I am prepared to interfere with any interference. But there is a moral and mental fact involved, which is being neglected in the concentration on communal or convivial enjoyment; and that fact consists precisely in the real vitality and power of youth. Youth is much more capable of amusing itself than is now supposed, and in much less mortal need of being amused. The only real warning against solitude and stagnation which needs to be uttered is that you do really need to be rather young and strong in order to get the fun out of them. The same principle applies to the monastic life; a career that requires very great vigour and vivacity. No normal person is expected to be so vigorous and vivacious as that. But most normal persons are now taught to neglect far too much the sort of excitement which the mind itself manufactures out of unexciting things. And anybody who can feel the fine shades, in fiction or philosophy will agree that the old school called Romantic, or even Byronic, which we feel still volcanic in the Brontës, had really about it a curious confidence in life, an unbroken hope in the heart, which is strangely stubborn in many people who had been as badly brought up as Byron. Byron himself, with all his parade of pessimism, had a sort of glamour of life about him that he could not get rid of, and a gusto that never left his language, even when he used it to deny its existence in his life.

Now, one need not belong to the extreme school of The Nightmare of the Night Club, or Vengeance on the Vamp, in order to observe around us a certain lack of that really romantic gusto and glamour. To mention another Dickens character, it will be remembered that the Infant Phenomenon was kept short by means of gin, so that she might go on dancing as a light and airy child. It seems to me that a good many people are kept from growing by cocktails, and stunted rather than stimulated by dancing. They are not allowed to grow, because they are always pulling themselves up by the roots to see how they are growing. In the ease of those who really have a heat and force of generous youth within them, I seriously think that imprisonment in a second-rate boarding-house during a rainy day at Worthing, or enforced retirement to a faded and forgotten tea-shop off the road to Wormwood Scrubs, would lead to their returning to their friends younger than ever. As to those who are already dried up, hopeless, cynical, and filled with intellectual despair, they can continue to be gay.

This need is a normal need; like other normal needs, it can be neglected for a period; like other normal needs, it will certainly be rediscovered at a later period. Perhaps it will be discovered incidentally and individually; perhaps it will be discovered darkly and secretly, as by the conspirators of individualism or the revolutionists of tradition. Perhaps the plotters will whisper to each other, amid the whirl of the latest jazz or ragtime, the forbidden assignation and the address of the Worthing boarding house. Perhaps a solitary figure will be seen slinking from the Scarlet Cuttlefish (that exclusive night club) and grimly taking the road to Wormwood Scrubs. Perhaps, on the other hand, it will come with a communal rush like the return of a fashion; and it will be all the rage to be found sitting speechless in a waiting-room at Willesden Junction; and all the best people will leave themselves lying about, like so much lost luggage, in the parlours of dilapidated public-houses or on the steps of derelict bathing-machines at dead Victorian resorts. These are the only places I can think of in which a modern man and woman could possibly have time or opportunity to think for themselves. These are the modern equivalents of sitting among the ruins or meditating among the tombs; and both were very healthy human exercises, very improving to the spirits.

In this connexion, by the way, I must once more express my astonishment that, in an age which will have ten professors of psychology to tea, or strew the world with pamphlets and books about subconsciousness and psycho-analysis, nobody seems to notice the most normal and elementary facts of practical psychology. Otherwise, it would not be left to an irresponsible and ignorant journalist to point out the elementary fact: that dullness can be a stimulant. There is hardly any need to point out, to any one acquainted with our lighter entertainments, that amusement can be a narcotic. But, anyhow, some one with more scientific authority ought really to study these strange reactions of stale and even oppressive atmospheres on the romantic spirit of youth. Who knows? — if something suggestive were written on the subject, even youth might be young once more.

XIX. On Gossip about Heredity

A SHORT time ago a distinguished scientific expert, pleading for a more normal and less panic-stricken treatment of consumptives, summed up one aspect in the decisive words: ‘Consumption is no more hereditary than measles.’ He said, of course, that it could attack successive members of the same family, and for the same reason as measles. I have no authority to speak on the technical point; but a statement like this, which may fairly be called authoritative, turns my mind back on the vast and sprawling treatment of the topic of heredity, in popular science and public opinion. And, though I do not claim to know much about the medical facts or falsehoods set forth in this particular case, I rather think I do know something of the moral facts and falsehoods that lie behind them and are their sole and continuous motive-power. There are undoubtedly individual professors, who fight each other on tiny points out of pure impersonal curiosity, or possibly out of pure personal dislike. But when any part of the general public is drawn into a debate on physical science, we may be certain that it has already become a debate on moral science. Mobs are always moral. There never was a mob that rose to demand the squaring of the circle or the closer observation of the Transit of Venus. Professor Higgle and Professor Haggle may argue the hind-leg off a donkey, or the hundredth leg off a centipede, to settle a question that nobody can understand but themselves. But if ever the dancing donkey and the writhing centipede become heraldic figures on the flags and ensigns of the crowd, then we may be quite certain that for some sort of reason (probably quite an unreasonable reason) these biological questions have somehow been entangled with faith and morals; and that what is raging in the street is the war of two philosophies.

Now, almost as soon as the word ‘heredity’ was invented or spoken aloud, it was caught up like a cry in the market-place, and repeated in every variation of gossip and chattering comment; applied to this, that, and the other, to which it was never in any case applicable; and trumpeted aloud by men who did not even know what it meant, long before even the most learned men knew even the little about it that they know now. Mendel the monk has explained it much more fully than did Darwin and all the material scientists; but even after that it remains a very obscure and subtle subject, as the scientists would be the first to admit.

But in the great days when Science was also Fashion, when the world had to bow down not only to Darwin but to all Darwinians, when anything labelled ‘Specimens’ or ‘Sections’ passed without challenge, and all the camp-followers of materialism were sacred, like the suite of an Embassy — in those days of one idea or one tendency there arose the most amazing fashion of talking about Heredity. It was simply taken for granted, for instance, in a hundred provincial homes that what they called Drink was hereditary. If they had used language in a rational manner they might have been quite right, for the disposition to drink something is a hereditary human instinct; and the objection to doing so, when it happens to be beer, is a superficial, artificial, and self-conscious pose. But what they meant was alcoholism; and what they meant was nonsense. Nobody has ever tasted alcohol. Nobody in the normal way has ever seen it. Nobody most certainly has ever liked it. What people liked was a certain pleasure, either of excitement or serenity, which can be gained through a variety of liquids, moderately by moderate indulgence, or excessively by excessive indulgence. Alcohol is simply a name which professors give (for the present) to some elements in all these liquids which they suppose (for the present) to be the cause of this mental pleasure. Now, it is obvious on the face of it that, if anything is hereditary, it cannot be a craving for the chemical process, which most people do not even know to exist. It can only be a craving for the mental result, which is simple pleasure. Now, all men have a craving for pleasure; and, though some men are weaker or more wilful in snatching at it, I cannot for the life of me see why such men should not snatch at other pleasures as much as this one. If what is inherited is anything so vague as a lack of vigilance and self-control against pleasure itself, I cannot see why the drunkard should not have one son who was a jewel-thief and another who was always flirting with barmaids or bolting with ballet-girls. Of course, many children of drunken families are drunken; not because there is heredity, but because there are a great many other things besides heredity. There is such a thing as tradition, which is nearly half of true history; and there is such a thing as suggestion, which is nearly all of modern journalism; and there are such things as education and environment, about which a still louder yell of human folly will go up — in short, there is something in morals which corresponds to infection in measles.

But this wild romance of popular science spread wider and wider. What is odd about it is not its truth or untruth, but the unresisted smoothness with which it spread over one field after another. I know so little of the scientific study itself that I should not think of denying the possibility of some sort of inherited drunkenness; though I cannot make any sense of the theory of inherited alcoholism. But why were hundreds and thousands of people, who knew even less science than I do, instantly and calmly assured that drunkenness was hereditary? Why did they begin at once to watch the doubtful steps of the curate, because his great-uncle the Admiral was found drunk in a ditch on Trafalgar Day? Why did they eagerly watch for the fire of alcoholic craving in the eyes of the new-born infant who was remotely descended from Three-Bottle Thumpington? The question grows wilder as the application grew wider. The next thing we heard was the cheerful news that Assassination was a regular family feature, like a family nose. As in the other cases, it was not so much stated by scientific people as spread by unscientific people as the last scientific news. A brilliant lady novelist lately based a whole novel upon it, called *Red Sky at Morning*, in which a hazy, good-natured youth kills somebody for a very insufficient reason, merely because his father fifty years ago had killed somebody quite different for a totally different reason. All this seems to me highly irrational. There are almost as many motives for murdering men as there are men to murder. A man kills because he is blackmailed, or because he is jilted, or because he is a political fanatic, and so on. But how do you inherit a blackmailer, or an unreliable girl, or a political theory? There certainly is inheritance, as of physical type, perhaps of physical temperament; of being indolent or restless and so on. But the number of lazy men who will murder a valet for waking them up is about as large as the number of impatient men who will murder him for keeping them waiting. That is to say, it is very small. The mysterious moral inhibition, or its absence, by which men do or do not murder, is in the individual soul; and I defy anybody to show that it is hereditary.

What is the meaning of this popular superstition? In existing relations of religion and good taste, I can only suggest it in a parable. On the highest and hoariest of the ashpits of hell sits the oldest of all the Demons, whose name is Doom; it is he who has always blighted mankind with superstitions of the destiny and death of races; who told the old Greeks like Oedipus that they were bound to their blind crimes; who told the old feudal tribes that there was a curse on a castle or an abortion that was the burden of a family. And when modern science said ‘Heredity’ the old fiend stirred, and saw a new chance of renewing the old bondage. For however we take the symbols, it was a wise instinct by which heaven was symbolized by wings that are free as the wind, and hell symbolized by chains.

XX. On Dante and Beatrice

THE interesting, one might almost say amusing, idea of ‘The Poets on the Poets ‘, the series published by Messrs. Faber and Faber, is described by those playful publishers themselves as based ‘on the impudent maxims, “Set a Poet to catch a Poet” and “Bards of a feather flock together”’. I am not sure that the latter motto is so exact as the former. Thus Mr. Humbert Wolfe is to write on Tennyson; and it would never have occurred to me that those two excellent bards had a single feather between them. But the former maxim is sound enough, and is well supported by the second of the series, in which an illuminating sketch of Dante is presented by Mr. T. S. Eliot.

In such cases we are all of us only picking up stray feathers here and there, as Browning picked up the eagle’s feather on the heath. Mr. T. S. Eliot would be the last to pretend that he had completely plucked the eagle of Florence and Ravenna. If it is not easy to write a short book about Dante, neither is it easy to write a short article about Mr. Eliot. As he naturally picks out two or three of Dante’s ideas, I can only pick out one or two of his own ideas, and the subject-matter necessarily narrows from the poet to the critic and from the critic to the critic of the critic. But all his ideas are both stimulating and subtle, including any number I have no space to estimate here. Perhaps the most out standing matter, in a popular sense, is his very just reconstruction of the business about the story of Beatrice, as she appears not only in the *Divine Comedy*, but in the *Vita Nuova*. There has always been a controversy about Beatrice, and as so often happens (I grieve to say) in the controversies of the very learned, a mass of the most extraordinary nonsense has been talked on both sides. At one extreme there was the school of those who pretended that Beatrice was in the position of Mrs. Harris; or that she was, at best (to quote another great female authority), an allegory on the banks of the Nile: at any rate, hardly human enough to have ever been on the banks of the Arno. Some of them said she was a symbol standing for Theology or Divine Wisdom or some such thing; others, from colleges even nearer Hanwell, said she was an allegory of United Italy or Liberty or the League of Nations or heaven knows what. About that, especially in the case of the *Vita Nuova* (though I am not learned, and hardly even educated, touching Italian language and letters), I have not myself the shadow of a doubt. The man — or, rather, boy — who remembered with such scorching delight the fact that a little girl had nodded and smiled at him on a particular morning, and with such scorching despair the fact that she had not nodded or smiled at him on another morning, was most certainly in love, It was first love, calf-love, moon-calf-love, no doubt, but certainly human love; and if it wasn't I will modestly exclaim with Shakespeare, 'I never writ nor no man ever loved.' And that Dante does mean the same young woman to reappear in the *Paradiso* is obvious, not only from many phrases in the *Paradiso*, but from the quite definite words at the end of the *Vita Nuova*. But when the opposite extreme of criticism suggests that human love is the whole subject of both books, then, as Mr. Eliot shows, it makes even worse nonsense out of the whole business.

For the Romantics of the nineteenth century really implied that God and the Universe, Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory, were all one elaborate and rather laborious compliment to Beatrice Portinari. It is truer to say that, in the true sense, Beatrice is a compliment to God. She is lifted like flowers on an altar, or flames on a candlestick, to be an example of that earthly beauty which, used rightly, can lead us to heavenly beauty. And in this case the critics have missed the whole point of the comparison between the *Vita Nuova* and the *Divine Comedy*. The point is that the first slight, youthful, merely emotional story is really a sad story; it is only the completion in Paradise that is a joyful story. The former has an unhappy ending — or, rather, that most unhappy ending which consists in having no ending. It is the mere fragment of a human tragedy; it is only the religious epic that is, in the exact sense, a divine comedy. Dante is drawn as a dark and bitter spirit; but in fact he wrote the only one of the great epics that really has a happy ending.

The trouble was that the age of the Romantics was the age of the Rationalists, or those who thought they were Rationalists. Having figured as ruthless realists sweeping all spiritual visions like cobwebs out of the sky, they then suddenly became extravagant sentimentalists over some of the common or garden flowers they found growing naturally out of the earth. Having forbidden all belief in the legend of Adam and Eve, they demanded universal and absolute belief in the legend of Edwin and Angelina. They were not content with the natural sympathy we all have with such natural feelings; they really gave to them the supremacy of supernatural feelings — and (what is the real point) the *only* supernatural feelings. They did not use the coarse cant of our day; but they did, in fact, make Sex the supreme end of life for its own sake — in which they were much less sensible than the common or garden flowers. They therefore missed the whole meaning of Dante, which is that human love may indeed be a new life; but the new life must be dedicated to a supreme good as much as the old life. All other goods are only manifestations of that supreme good, and must ultimately be referred to it, as Beatrice to the Beatific Vision.

There is one comment, in this connexion, which occurred to me while reading Mr. Eliot's book. The Beatific Vision is described by Dante about as well as it could be described by anybody — that is, chiefly by saying that it cannot be described at all. But Mr. Eliot has noticed, as I have often noticed, the very extraordinary effect of the ending, when, after a few grand hints (like that about a happy but forgotten dream), the poet suddenly introduces the vast but seemingly very distant simile about how Neptune must have felt when the Argo first sailed over him. At first sight it seems quite out of the picture; and yet for the imaginative it is right on the spot. Now there seem to be a number of these abrupt and abysmal irrelevancies in Dante's poetry, and, indeed, in all great poetry. They seem to be suggesting a vivid image by suddenly introducing a totally different image. Instead of saying that Beatrice looked beautiful, Dante says that he felt like Glaucus when he ate the grass that made him seafellow of the gods. I do not know why that dim heathen dream delights me, but it does; much more, probably, than the best direct description of Beatrice's beauty. It seems as if the sudden presentation of some quite remote vision, as imaginative as the main image, completes it and makes it convincing. There are many examples in other poets, including the rather hackneyed example of Keats, when he broke off a reasonably intelligent discourse on the nightingale to talk about perilous seas and magic casements, with which nightingales have nothing whatever to do. Like Dante, he had got beyond himself, and irrelevancy was the only expression of imagination. But there is something else in it relevant to Mr. Eliot's thesis. This summoning of remote symbols, this calling of spirits from the vasty deep, like the sea-green Glaucus into the presence of Beatrice, does suggest something involved in the theology of the matter. It suggests that *all* beautiful images are shadows of the one real beauty, and can be, in a sense, shifted or interchanged for its service. It prevents *mere* fixed idolatry of one shadow in one minor, as if it were the origin of all. Beatrice is to be loved because she is beautiful; but she is beautiful because there is behind her a many sided mystery of beauty, to be seen also in the grass and the sea, and even in the dead gods. There is a promise in and yet beyond all such pictures; and the poet can see grass or the great sea or the great ship going over it, hearing a sort of whisper: ‘Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty.’

XXI. On Quacks in the Home

CAN anything be done to dam, not to say damn, the deluge of Quackery that is now being poured out everywhere to inform what is called the ignorance of the democracy? As the term implies, it is not only democracy that is ignorant. Those who would inform it are more ignorant still, or they would not invariably say the democracy when they mean the demos. Democracy does not mean the populace, or even the people; it means government by the people. Democracy is a very noble thing, and it does not exist — at any rate at present. Demos is a very jolly thing in its way, especially when it does all the things that ideal democrats generally abuse it for doing, such as drinking, shouting, and going to the Derby. But, what ever else it is doing, it is not ruling: it is not teaching, but being taught. And there might be a reasonable ease for its being taught, were it not for the unfortunate fact that it is being taught tosh. Which brings me back, after this parenthesis on the word democracy, to the more solemn and sacred subject of quackery.

Quackery is false science; it is everywhere apparent in cheap and popular science; and the chief mark of it is that men who begin by boasting that they have cast away all dogmas go on to be incessantly, impudently, and quite irrationally dogmatic. Let any one run his eye over any average newspaper or popular magazine, and note the number of positive assertions made in the name of popular science, without the least pretence of scientific proof, or even of any adequate scientific authority. It is all the worse because the dogmas are generally concerned with domes tic and very delicate human relations; with heredity and home environment; and everything that can be coloured by the pompous and pretentious polysyllables of Psychology and Education. At least many of the old dogmas, right or wrong, were concerned with cherubim and seraphim, with lost spirits and beatified souls; but these dogmas always directly attack fathers and wives and children, without offering either credentials or evidence. The general rule is that nothing must be accepted on any ancient or admitted authority, but everything must be accepted on any new or nameless authority, or accepted even more eagerly on no authority at all. It is quite satisfactory, of course, if any nobody says in any newspaper: ‘Dr. Binns, of Buffalo, has told us that, while aunts may be fond of nephews, great-aunts always have an instinctive hatred and aversion both for nephews and nieces.’ But it is even more convincing than that if the information is anonymous in every way, and the writer merely states: ‘ Recent science has shown that second cousins are naturally antagonistic, but that in second cousins once removed, the antagonism is sometimes introverted into suicidal mania. Where all these statements come from nobody knows. Where they all go to everybody ought to know, since they go to everybody. But it is in practice very difficult to discover what becomes of them, and whether they are really treated as wisdom or waste paper. On the whole, I fear it is more likely that everybody believes them than that anybody takes the trouble to check them.

This evil is wilder in America, but I doubt if it is worse in America. It is scattered all over our own Press and public speech, and is all the more insidious because it is not so much associated with the conspicuous figures of picturesque charlatans and fantastic prophets, such as strut in strange plumage about the plains of the West. Anyhow, it is scattered so widely both here and there that the difficulty is to pick up any adequate example. For the triviality of one specimen does not convey the tremendous and mountainous multitude of specimens. Here is one example, however, which I find in a periodical of considerable intellectual pretensions, to judge by its title. Like most of these professed organs of thought, it is marked by a complete incapacity for any precision in thinking. But I mention it, not because it is worse than the rest, but because it is representative of the rest and all the rest are no better. The instructor informs us that there can be between parent and child a *negative transference* (the intense italics arc his), which seems to mean, not merely that the child will hate the parent, but that the child will love somebody who is the opposite of the hated parent. ‘Thus a child who is treated coldly by his mother will come to reject all people like his mother and seek for her opposite. We will say the mother is good, honest, moral, even pious. The boy will gravitate to some one crooked, immoral, or even wicked, in short, his mother’s goodness may send him to the devil, though all the time she may be wondering why her excellent precepts, her discipline, her goodness are failing to develop like traits in her son.’

You will note the utter chaos of terminology and definition, even in these few lines. Some of us, to begin with, might hesitate to insist on the goodness of a mother who treated a child coldly. But what is meant by the mother being good, as distinct from her being moral? What is meant by the mother’s mysterious rival being immoral, as distinct from being wicked? And what in the name of goodness (or morality) is meant by the mysterious word ‘even’, which is reserved only for wickedness and for piety? The transference of these thoughts, from writer to reader, is a very negative transference indeed. However, the writer, having said that the mother’s goodness, which seems to be the same as her coldness, may send the boy to the devil, goes on to say that it may be a good thing that he should go to the devil; in which case it was presumably a good thing that the mother should be cold. Revolt, we are told, sometimes leads to new ways of life, and it may be highly satisfactory that the boy should seek for the opposite of his mother. But what is the opposite of your mother? As a point of logic, it seems rather subtle; nor does the logician here instructing us give us very much help. ‘A rebel boy may, of course, become, like the proverbial minister’s son, a good-for-naught or a crook; on the other hand, a boy like Balzac who hated his practical father, became a great novelist — his father’s opposite. Or in a different way, Beethoven, whose father was a poor fiddler, a drunkard and ne’er-do-well, became one of the great composers of the world, doggedly determined to protect his mother and be as unlike his father as possible.’ If that was his object, we can hardly say that he succeeded very well. I am not quite sure what is the opposite of a poor fiddler, but certainly it is not a great composer. There may be many a great composer who has been a poor fiddler, and many a poor fiddler who may yet be a great composer. The same mysterious use of the word ‘opposite’ darkens the other instance given from the career of Balzac. I cannot understand why, in logic, a great novelist is the exact contrary of a practical father. I do not see why any child may not happen to rejoice in the possession of a great practical novelist-father. The children of Sir Walter Scott, for instance, to a great extent did so, despite the accident which ruined his later fortunes. But it is not only false in the typical case of Scott, it is far from true even in the actual case of Balzac. Balzac had a decidedly ‘practical’ side to him; he was not only busy, but business-like, in his own way; and, anyhow, all these crude contrasts about complex characters are all nonsense. Balzac did not become a great novelist because his father had annoyed him with practicality; he became a great novelist because he was a great man. Beethoven did not succeed because his father drank; it is much more likely that he was a composer for the same reason that made his father a fiddler. These are only a few random examples of these random statements which are thrown about everywhere, that the people may learn Science from men who have never learnt Logic. Now that everybody is talking about the public being informed of this or that, is there any way of stopping the public being misinformed in this endless and exuberant fashion?

XXII. On a Generally Accepted Mistake

THE current cant, which is a cant against cant, has produced a crop of modern proverbs, or phrases, which everybody repeats for the hundredth time and nobody examines for the first time, or they would instantly be found to be false. A typical case is that which we have all heard again and again in some such form as this: ‘In every age people have thought their own time prosaic and only the past poetical. If you think the medieval or any other period picturesque, that is only the glamour of antiquity; men in those days felt about them as you do about these days. Their costumes and customs were as dull and trivial to them as yours are to you.’ The maxim appeals in many ways to the modern mind; it merges something with something else; it levels downwards; it contradicts the claims of chivalry and religious devotion; it is comforting and it is entirely untrue.

Mr. Rudyard Kipling, always the poet of this popular modernity, has summarized the notion admirably in a poem about Romance being at all times actually in the present and apparently in the past — a poem beginning, I think:

‘Farewell, Romance,’ the cavemen cried,
With bone and flint he went away.

I need hardly say that there is not a grain of anything remotely resembling evidence that the cavemen ever cried anything of the sort. It is one of the thousand things which are said about them because there is no evidence either way. But there are tons of evidence that the earliest men whose motives we can follow regarded their own rituals and traditions as reasonably dignified. There have been periods in which poets and satirists have said that society was degenerating through luxury or laxity, and many periods in which they were perfectly right in saying so. There have been some periods — not very many — in which men have been intensely interested in some special period of the past. So the men of the Renaissance vaguely regarded antiquity as a heroic age. But they did not regard their own as a prosaic age. Shakespeare might be thrilled by Plutarch’s tales of great men in togas and tunics; but that did not prevent him from conceiving Hamlet as an ordinary Elizabethan gentleman, fencing with rapier and dagger, wearing probably a ruff and almost certainly a beard. Every modern man, when he first heard of Hamlet in modern dress, felt a faint shiver of doubt; even if he was sympathetic, he feared that it might be comic. But Shakespeare probably did conceive Hamlet in modern dress — in his modern dress. And there is nothing to show that he thought it in the least comic.

The truth is that *no* other age except the nineteenth century (and perhaps our little bit of the twentieth) ever did regard its own dress and habits as ugly and undignified. The thing can be tested in a hundred ways, and one is even tolerably familiar. Sensational French artists, in the nineteenth century, deliberately and defiantly painted pictures from the Gospel in modern dress, with Christ standing among men in trousers and top-hats. It was purposely done to 'shock' the Salon; needless to say, it would have been far too shocking for the Royal Academy. Yet it was not the first time the thing had been done. It was only the first time it had been thought shocking. There is not a single one of the previous epochs of Christian art, from the stiffest primitive Byzantine to the last realism of the Venetians or Dutch, when artists had not painted the Gospel scenes with the dress and habits of their own time. It is not, in plain fact, a question of why men think the present fashion ugly and the past fashion beautiful. It is a question of why they think this of trousers and top-hats, when they did not think it of trunk-hose or togas or tunics. Many subtle explanations might be suggested; but I incline myself to suspect that the dark secret can, after all, be stated more simply. Might I tentatively suggest that top-hats and trousers give us this uncanny impression of ugliness because they are ugly? Might I suggest that the mercantile nineteenth century thought itself hideous because it was hideous? — and the perception did credit to its acumen and even to its humility.

In short, there was a moment in the middle of the nineteenth century which was the midnight of artistic instinct, just as there was a moment about the middle of the ninth century which was the midnight of law and organization. It was blackest in a commercial country like England, which was only saved by treating itself as comic because it could not treat itself as dignified. It produced, for instance, the figure of the policeman, who was so comic that he had to be put at once into a pantomime, because he could not be put into a pageant. But almost any other age or country would have clad and armed the city guard so as to be an ornament to any pageant. Our age was ugly and undignified; our nation was redeemed by the national sense of humour that at least would not pretend to be dignified. The things of that period are all stamped with the insignia of indignity. It is not true that this is affected by it being a past or a present period. Mr. Kipling himself in the poem quoted, gave the case away by saying that ‘Romance brought up the nine-fifteen’, implying that the clerks in the train did not yet realize their own romance. But since that was written steam has grown old compared to petrol, as stage-coaches grew old compared to steam. Yet taking a third-class ticket at Euston Station is not much more wildly poetic now than it was when railways ruled the land. Steam may grow stale, but it does not grow specially poetical. If the old coach was faintly poetical, it was because a faint tradition of quite another sort lingered with the ancient echoes of the horse and of the horn. If the railway carriage does not turn into a romantic ruin before our eyes, it is because there lingers in it a nameless something of the nineteenth century: something that was proud of being prosaic and rigidly refuses to be anything else. It is the stamp of that particularly barbarous interlude: the *only* age in history when men dared not put the Twelve Apostles in modern dress.

This particular matter, in which the medieval world differed from the modern, must be clearly understood to start with, for instance, as one of the conditions governing *The Canterbury Tales*. The creative imagination of Chaucer could do much; it could do much more than it is commonly credited with doing; but it could hardly have bridged the abyss between the sublime and the ridiculous which yawned in the imagination of a man of the nineteenth century. Chaucer did not regard his own age as comic and commonplace. He regarded some people in it as comic, and some, perhaps, as commonplace; but the clothes and externals of these people could be used just as easily to express what was most imaginative and ideal. The Knight as described, might have figured in any medieval picture as kneeling all clad in iron on one side of an enthroned Virgin and Child; his crusading spirit belongs altogether to that more remote region of delicate distances and golden clouds. But he is not out of the picture of *The Canterbury Tales*, nor of any medieval picture in which there might be grotesque dwarfs or gambolling dogs. But he would be out of the picture called ‘The Derby Day’, by Frith. That picture contains considerable variety; but it does not contain the Knight of *The Canterbury Tales*. For ‘The Derby Day’ was painted at that midnight moment of art when even the artist did not think that the world he saw was artistic. This unnatural sense of ugliness is so much our immediate inheritance that there are ordinary words that have never recovered from it. The very word ‘hat’ has a hazy air of farce about it; mentioned by itself it suggests first the hat of Charlie Chaplin or the admirable song of ‘Where Did You Get that Hat?’ The first lesson in medievalism is to understand that Chaucer did not feel about the word ‘hood’ as we do about the word ‘hat’. He knew there were knavish people who carried two faces under one hood; but the one face might be that of Friar Francis as well as of Friar Tuck. A halo round a hood did not seem queer, like a halo round a hat, for those who think only of modern hats. There had been plenty of preposterous fashions among the rich in Chaucer’s time, but their very limitations to the rich had left the landscape and colour-scheme of medievalism more or less what it is in the simplest medieval pictures. There was preposterous costume in that age, but he did not think all costume preposterous because it was of that age. He was as ready to be humorous in verse as any serious poet who ever lived, but his head was not filled with an endless, derisive echo of ‘Where Did You Get that Hood?’

XXIII. On the Later Portions of Poems

SOMETIMES I have a dark suspicion that there are many poems, and perhaps prose competitions also, which people think they know when they know only the first few lines. Possibly this might explain the sinister haste and eagerness with which the great Epic Poets cram into the first few lines a statement of the whole story, which they intend to tell in the ensuing twelve books. They always begin with a summary of this kind, perhaps because they have a craven fear that many of their readers will not read any more. Everybody knows the first three lines of Paradise Lost:

Of man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world and all our woe.

But I strongly suspect that there is a sudden and enormous falling off in the numbers of those who could quote the fourth line. And Milton may himself have paused at that point, and heaved a sigh of relief, to think that he had got the whole story packed pretty thoroughly into the three lines, even if all his readers refused to read him any more. He had successfully informed the public of the incident called 'The Fall of Man', had explained its connexion with the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and attached to it all the results of the doctrine of Original Sin. He did not, however, stop here, and leave this little trifle as a sort of epigram or short lyric. He went on for quite a long time; and it must have been with a sense of relief, not unmingled with fatigue, that he reached at last that quiet and beautiful ending, and saw the exiles, hand in hand, with faltering steps and slow, through Eden take their solitary way. It is perhaps an advantage to the epic poets that their story, as a rule, is already more or less known to the public; just as a considerable number of people have heard the story of Adam and Eve. All adventure stories, in Stevenson's phrase, begin to end well; and in the greatest of adventure stories Ulysses is obviously meant to get home at last; nor are there many people who need to read to the end of the *Iliad* to find out what happened to Hector. In the case of longer and more elaborate, not to say more entangled, poems, like those of Ariosto and Spenser, it is legitimate to doubt whether everybody does know what happened to anybody. Lord Macaulay was the most persistent of readers, with the most perfect of memories; yet it is admitted that he came a cropper, or fell out of the race, in the forests of the *Faërie Queene*. He said that few readers were in at the death of the Blatant Beast, and if he had been there himself he would have known that the Beast does not even die. But while this lack of final perseverance is common in the case of the complicated epics, and not uncommon in that of the simpler epics, it may seem almost cynical to suggest that it is sometimes true even of shorter poems. It seems heartless to suggest that somebody may have fainted before he got to the end of 'We Are Seven'. It is awful to think that some critic may have been so fastidious as to be unable to support more than two lines of 'The Village Blacksmith'. And yet I fancy there are cases in which something like this is true; and I came across one recently, or rather I only recently fancied that I saw the true meaning of it.

Everybody quotes the opening lines of Shelley's fine chorus of 'Hellas'. And everybody quotes them as the expression of Shelley's heroic hope for the human race, his idealism and his optimism about his ideals, his radiant faith in a final fulfilment in which humanity should be happy and free

The world's great age begins anew,
The golden years return.

And I suspect that of these a very considerable number have not read, or do not remember, or did not understand, the curious breaking-point which is the point of the poem. I have read it hundreds of times myself, but I confess that it was not until lately that I saw its full meaning, in connexion with cosmic and philosophical theories. I dare say every body else who has read it understood it much better and more immediately; I am not setting up as a discoverer, but I do think it curious that the discovery has not been more often rediscovered. Shelley's poem mounts steadily in an ascending curve of choral thanksgiving to Nature for a new and glorious renovation of all things; and then, when it comes to its highest note of triumph, it breaks. The poet cries, with something like horror, that we must look no further and foresee no more:

O, drain not to the dregs the urn
Of bitter prophecy.

It is obvious, to put it mildly, that something has occurred to him to put him out. And though all readers must have realized at least that, I fancy there have been a considerable number of quoters who were not readers. And I do not think that Shelley's name would have been so innocently and irrevocably bound up with ideas of Progress and Perfectibility and A Good Time Coming, if every body had instantly realized to what he really referred.

This very obvious reflection, which must have occurred to hundreds of people, occurred to me when I was in the act of reading that very remarkable historical study called *Progress and Religion*, by Christopher Dawson, which Messrs. Sheed & Ward published some little time ago. It contains, among many other interesting things, a very complete account of that extraordinary theory of Recurrence, which many modern as well as ancient philosophers have held, but to which the ancient philosophers gave the name of 'The Great Year'. The theory, of course, is broadly this: that when all possible permutations and combinations have been exhausted, the cosmic system will of its nature have to begin all over again and repeat everything we know exactly as we have known it. This will happen again and again for ever; for the same logic that brings the repetition must also bring the repetition of the repetition. And, indeed, it is odd to notice how the philosophers repeat themselves even in describing the repetition. Mr. Dawson quotes the case of a Greek sage who said, 'This staff that I am holding I shall hold again,' and the case of a Socialist thinker who said, 'This pen I am holding I shall hold again,' in almost exactly the same form of words. Every detail of every life will return with exactitude, and return again and again to eternity. And everybody knows how Nietzsche uttered this revelation, with something almost like a howl, from the last high and crazy peak of his strange existence; about the time, indeed, when he collapsed into complete insanity. I do not know whether he went mad because he believed the theory, or only believed the theory because he went mad. But it always struck me as an almost startling example of how a deathly fatalism overcomes the most lively sceptic. For Nietzsche's views, in his best days, were wild enough, but wild at least on the side of Will and of Liberty. To see him entangled in that old necessitarian net is like seeing a great spider's web entangle an eagle.

What interests me here is that it entangled the skylark as well as the eagle. It is surely obvious that Shelley, in the rise and fall of those remarkable lines of the Hellas Chorus, is referring to the old pagan conception of The Great Year. He feels that it justifies him in saying that the world’s great age will begin anew and the golden years return. But he does not want to drain the urn of prophecy to the dregs, because the same wheel of fate that has brought round the golden years will bring round also the leaden and the iron years; and we shall all be forced to repeat all the crimes and tyrannies of history. Without being unduly controversial, I think I may say that it is not a cheery prospect. And I am exceedingly proud to observe that it was before the coming of Christianity that it flourished, and after the neglect of Christianity that it returned.

XXIV. On the Romance of Childhood

I AM just old enough to remember the world before telephones. And I remember that my father and my uncle fitted up with their own metal and chemicals the first telephone I ever saw: a miniature telephone reaching from the top bedroom under the roof to the remote end of the garden. I was really impressed imaginatively by this; and I do not think I have ever been so much impressed since by any extension of it. The point is rather important in the whole theory of imagination. It did startle me that a voice should sound in the room when it was really as distant as the next street. It would hardly have startled me more if it had been as distant as the next town. It does not startle me any more if it is as distant as the next continent. The miracle is over. Thus I admired even the large scientific things most on a small scale. So I always found that I was much more attracted by the microscope than the telescope. I was not overwhelmed in childhood by being told of remote stars which the sun never reached, any more than in manhood by being told of the empire on which the sun never set. I had no use for an empire that had no sunsets. But I was inspired and thrilled by looking through a little hole at a crystal like a pin’s head, and seeing it change pattern and colour like a pygmy sunset.

I have already picked two quarrels with better men than myself, who were enthusiasts for childish romance, upon the reality of the romance of childhood. First, I disagree with them when they treat the infantile imagination as a sort of dream; whereas I remember it rather as a man dreaming might remember the world where he was awake. And second, I deny that children have suffered under a tyranny of moral tales. For I remember the time when it would have seemed the most hideous tyranny to take my moral tales away from me. And, in order to make this clear, I must contradict yet another common assumption in the romantic description of the dawn of life. The point is not very easy to explain; indeed, I have spent the greater part of my life in an unsuccessful attempt to explain it. Upon the cartloads of ill-constructed books in which I have completely failed to do so I have no desire to dwell. But perhaps, as a general definition, this might be useful; or, if not as a definition, at least a suggestion. From the first vaguely, and of late more and more clearly, I have felt that the world is conceiving liberty as something that merely works outwards. And I have always conceived it as something that works inwards.

The ordinary poetic description of the first dreams of life is a description of mere longing for larger and larger horizons. The imagination is supposed to work towards the infinite; though in that sense the infinite is the opposite of the imagination. For the imagination deals with an image, and an image is in its nature a thing that has an outline, and therefore a limit. Now I will maintain, paradoxical as it may seem, that the child does not desire merely to fall out of the window, or even to fly through the air or to be drowned in the sea. When he wishes to go to other places, they are still places, even if nobody has ever been there. But, in truth, the case is much stronger than that. It is plain on the face of the facts that the child is positively in love with limits. He uses his imagination to invent imaginary limits. The nurse and the governess have never told him that it is his moral duty to step on alternate paving-stones. He deliberately deprives this world of half its paving-stones, in order to exult in a challenge that he has offered to himself. I played that kind of game with myself all over the mats and boards and carpets of the house; and, at the risk of being detained during His Majesty's pleasure, I will admit that I often play it still. In that sense I have constantly tried to cut down the actual space at my disposal; to divide and subdivide, into these happy prisons, the house in which I was quite free to run wild.

I believe that there is in this psychological freak a truth without which the whole modern world is missing its main opportunity. If we look at the favourite nursery romances, or at least if we have the patience to look at them twice, we shall find that they all really support this view, even when they have largely been accepted as supporting the opposite view. The charm of Robinson Crusoe is not in the fact that he could find his way to a remote island, but in the fact that he could not find any way of getting away from it. It is that fact which gives an intensive interest and excitement to all the things that he had with him on the island; the axe and the parrot and the guns and the little hoard of grain. The tale of Treasure Island is not the record of a vague desire to go on a sea voyage for one's health. It ends where it began; and it began with Stevenson drawing a map of the island, with all its bays and capes cut out as clearly as fretwork. The eternal interest of the Noah's Ark, considered as a toy, consists in its complete suggestion of compactness and isolation; of creatures so comically remote and fantastic being all locked up in one box; as if Noah had been told to pack up the sun and moon with his luggage. In other words, it is exactly the same game that I have played myself, by piling all the things I wanted on a sofa, and imagining that the carpet around me was the surrounding sea.

This game of self-limitation is one of the secret pleasures of life. As it says in the little manuals about such sports, the game is played in several forms. One very good way of playing it is to look at the nearest bookcase and wonder whether you would find sufficient entertainment in that chance collection, even if you had no other books. But always it is dominated by this principle of division and restriction, which begins with the game played by the child with the paving-stones. But I dwell upon it here because it must be understood as some thing real and rooted, so far as I am concerned, in order that the other views I have offered about these things may make any sort of sense. If anybody chooses to say that I have founded all my social philosophy on the antics of a baby, I am quite satisfied to bow and smile.

I have no great hopes that my own private Utopia, the Utopia of subdivision and self-limitation, is likely to be rapidly established in the real world. I do not immediately expect that the landlord with five hundred acres will instantly cut it down to fifty acres, and stand in startled admiration of the fresh and pleasing shape, the entirely new and attractive map or outline of his domains. I hardly suppose that he will be romantically enraptured, all at once, at the discovery of the enchanted island that I have cut out for him, out of the dull and dreary sea of his solid landed estate. I doubt whether the simple kindly act of stealing half his books will drive him to reading the other half; I am not sure that the traditional childish present, of a little garden marked out in the middle of his large garden, will instantly change him to a little child. But I do know that great historic changes always begin at exactly the opposite end to the end the world is pursuing, and that the human search, so long turned outwards, will turn inwards very soon.

XXV. On the Renaissance

IN Rome a man feels suddenly the paradox of the Renaissance. It was a Christian miracle if it called up a Pagan god. It was in itself a Christian notion that, if the dead could return, they would not be shadows from Hades, but human beings from Heaven or Hell. But as a fact, of course, the god who rose again was not pagan. He could not be, since he was carved by Christians, even by bad and blasphemous Christians. Something that had not been in heathen antiquity had entered the very blood and bones of the human race; and it entered equally into the stone and clay of all that the human race could make. Without it, even the worst of men would now have felt suddenly cold and strange, like fishes, or, rather, like fossils. To be a Greek god was as impossible as to be a fossil, though both might be beautiful mouldings or even beautiful models in stone. To be completely heathen was no longer to be completely human.

The examples are obvious. Many people must have pointed out that Michelangelo was really more like Michael the Angel than Apollo the Archer. It was not for nothing that his very name is Hebrew and Greek as well as Italian. Every one must have noticed that there is, in some mysterious way, more colour in the monochrome marbles and bronzes of the Renaissance than in many of the cold, clay-like pigments that were called colours in the pagan houses of Pompeii. Even where the work is materially a matter of light and shade, it is not something put down in black and white: the light is richer and the shadow glows. Of course, a great part of the problem here is connected with modern religious controversies. Because modern pagans wanted to go back to paganism, in the sense of destroying Christianity, they said that the sixteenth-century artists wanted it too, though there was not one of them that would not have drawn a sword or dagger and destroyed the critic who told him that he wanted to destroy the Cross. Benvenuto Cellini would have been as prompt as Giotto; for the Christian Church is not made for good men, but for men.

The difficulty of history is that historians seldom see the simple things, or even the obvious things, because they are too simple and obvious. It is sometimes said of the pictures of the Renaissance artists, especially of the pictures of Rubens, that we ought to stand far back in order to take in the whole stupendous design, and not be annoyed because some detail is technically careless or emotionally coarse. It is probably true of more than one Renaissance picture of the Resurrection; and it is certainly true of that general Resurrection that is called the Renaissance. There has been too much bickering over bits of the astonishing business; too much casuistry about whether this or that painter in this or that point surrendered to heathenism, or merely to human nature. The whole story consists of two staggering truths. First, that these men did really raise the dead. They did call up all heathenism, which might seem about as safe as calling up all hell. And, second, that they did really in a manner convert and christen the dead; that they did baptize all that bodily manifestation and materialization into the body of Christ. Even when it had been and was no more, it did become something that it had not been. They paraded before the world a wild hypothetical pageant of what old Greece and Rome would have been if they had not been pagan. To do this with any dead society is an amazing achievement. To copy the old body in any case is amazing; to copy the old body, and also put in a new soul, is amazing beyond praise, beyond question, and certainly beyond quibbling. The fact is so familiar that it has ceased to amaze; the only chance of conveying it would be to take some fantastic parallel in modern and ancient things. We should be mildly surprised to hear that the English in Egypt had reconstructed for themselves the ancient Egyptian civilization; that all the proclamations of Lord Lloyd had been carved on obelisks in Egyptian hieroglyphics; that Lord Cromer had been preserved on the premises in the form of a mummy; or that Lord Kitchener at Cairo had religiously gone the round of worshipping a series of stuffed cats. But we should be surprised, with something less of mildness, if we were told that all this was done in such a way as to cause no embarrassment, or even amusement, to the English gentlemen who were doing it; and who managed to do it without the least sense that their code of manners was altered, or that their religion, when they had any, was suffering neglect. Just as it would be a remarkable thing for men to become ancient Egyptians and yet remain modern Englishmen, so it was a remarkable thing when these men became ancient Greeks and yet remained medieval Christians.

There are many morals to the story; but one must be manifest in the mere word I have used. If the medieval religion had really been such a silly superstition as some of its simpler enemies represent, it quite certainly would have been swallowed up for ever in such an earthquake of enlightenment as the great Renaissance. The fact that the vision of a superb and many-sided human culture did not disturb the fundamental ideas of these late medieval Christians has a simple explanation: that the ideas are true. The application of these true ideas in medieval times had been very much hampered by local ignorance and feudal prejudice. But the truths were so true that they would have survived, in really thinking men, through ten Renaissances and twenty Revivals of Learning. We see this vividly in the intensely intellectual character of the religious conviction in men like Michelangelo and even Leonardo da Vinci. Nobody knew better than they that Christianity is really wiser, and even wider, than Paganism; that Aquinas was not only better but broader than Aristotle. Not from such men came the clumsy denials of the deep dogmas of the Faith. Michelangelo was not the man to dispute that the truly divine humanity would be crucified; nor could Raphael be reckoned on for a breezy protest against the respect felt for the Madonna. But if the whole thing had been a dirty asceticism of the desert, the mere monkey tricks of the Manichees, it would have fallen like filthy rags from men who had seen the grace of the Greek athletes. If it had been only a worship of dolls with tinsel crowns, it would have looked a paltry and pygmy affair in the presence of the great head of Jupiter. But the real men of the Renaissance knew that, as a matter of fact, there was much more humanity in the rules for the brethren gathered by St. Francis than in the rules for the boys beaten before the altar of Diana; and that, as a matter of fact, the Church had a much more logical idea about the exact position of Jesus in Heaven than the heathens had ever had about the exact position of Jupiter on Olympus. It was the intellectual value of the creed that preserved it through any revolution of aesthetic values, just as it preserves it still amid the wildest changes in aesthetic taste to-day. Michelangelo went on being a Christian then, just as Mr. Eric Gill goes on being a Christian now, because a man may be original without being separated from the origins; and because a man may be able to think, even if he can also draw.

I would not be provocative, but I think this rather neglected truth is due to these great artists, when so many people imagine them to have been Pagans and some can even imagine them as Puritans. It seems clear to me that those despised medieval superstitions, suited only for barbarians like Dante and St. Francis, were exactly the ideas that did remain rooted in the most civilized centres of the world, when they were disputed in the more barbarous provinces. When we consider how exciting the destructive quest of the intellect really is (though it is generally people totally devoid of intellect who say so), it is really rather remarkable that there was comparatively so little of it in these great adventurers, who were devoted to the creative quest of the imagination. When we consider how wild they often were in the matter of morals (though it is generally the sort of moderns who have no morals at all who darkly denounce the immorality of these later men of the medieval decline) it is really rather remarkable that they kept as much as they did of the faith from which the morals grew — or ought to have grown. When we consider that it really is a fact (though the first fool in the street will tell you so) that scepticism had begun to appear here and there even among priests and bishops, it is really singular, upon the balance, that it had not appeared more among painters and sculptors. We may talk, as they sometimes may have talked, about reviving the gods of Greece. But Moses is Moses and David is David, and a Pagan would have stood puzzled before them.

XXVI. On the Laureateship

IT is often said that the office of Poet Laureate is not fitted to our times. This is true; it is perhaps the most compact condemnation of our times. If we want to know exactly what is really lacking in current culture, we had better ask why it cannot support the idea of a real Poet Laureate. It is enough merely to look at the words which make up the title. Whenever it is suggested that some little modern man of letters, in a tail-coat and trousers, should be solemnly presented with a Crown of Laurel, everybody laughs, as if it were a joke. But it is not the laurel, but the little man, that is a joke. It is not the wreath of leaves, the lines of which are still as free and rhythmic and adapted to decoration as when they decorated a hundred marble monuments or golden frescoes; it is not the wreath that is ridiculous. It is the tail-coat and trousers it is the Modern Man; it is the Spirit of Our Time, to which the Laureateship is, we have agreed, so unsuited. As is the Laurel to modern dress, so is the Laureateship to modern manners. Nobody sees anything silly in those leaves when they cluster round the hood of some bust of Dante. Nobody saw anything silly in them when, at the high moment of the medieval renaissance, they were bound about the brows of Petrarch. It was partly that the same scheme of decoration, more or less unconsciously, ran through the whole world of costume and ornament. It was much more because, in those dim and barbarous ages, people did not think it undignified to be dignified. They were so strangely constituted that they laughed at ugly things, and not only at beautiful things. A gentleman who wished to be stared at or admired dressed in purple and cloth of gold, trailing trappings that went in great curves like those of a comet or a cataract. With such fashions a crown was actually a crown; it crowned the edifice; it was a crest or culmination of lines rising to and demanding such a diadem. Nowadays, by the tradition of the nineteenth century, a gentle man dresses like a comic waiter in a third-rate farce, and is surprised that the bay-wreath looks grotesque on his head. But it is not the bay-wreath that looks grotesque.

That is a parable of the whole practical problem. And it always is a problem, whether it is worth while to keep the habit when it no longer makes the monk, or one small rag torn from the habit when the monk no longer knows how to make himself. The psychology of the Laureateship, dating as it does from the days when Petrarch was crowned with laurel, implies a number of things not now vivid to any very large number of people. It implies the notion of a crowd being excited but quite serious: like devotees before a sacrament or children before a fairy-play. There is still a certain kind of popular enthusiasm, but it is not an enthusiasm for enthusiasts. It might almost be called an affection for anti-enthusiasts; an affection for mockers and cynics and artists in the antic view of life. They might be as much thrilled by meeting Charlie Chaplin as any medieval Italians by meeting Petrarch. But though they might be cheering without jeering, they would be cheering somebody who jeers: who jeers admirably at himself and this wicked world. Nobody can expect that sort of popular artist to wear a laurel round his remarkable bowler hat. But it has been possible, and it will be possible again, for the public to rejoice seriously, and even solemnly. In those older days the very word ‘solemn’ went with the word ‘joyous’; and ‘a high solemnity’ was almost always an affair of dancing and junketing. A modern crowd would cheer the critical faculty, as in Mr. Chaplin; it would not cheer the creative faculty, as in Dante. And unless we keep the idea of a high solemnity, or public function of state, like the famous scene of the tribute to Petrarch, there is indeed little point in keeping merely an office and a name. As we do not preserve the coronation it may seem idle to preserve the crown. Nevertheless, if there were a crown, I think I should preserve it — among the Crown Jewels. I should not attach any man to it, but leave it there and wait for better times.

For my part, though I have indulged in any amount of buffoonery, I regret the new and solitary pre-eminence of the buffoon. I regret the fact that the new popular hero must not be heroic as well as popular. He must not receive from the State a serious tribute for revealing a serious truth. When, for the moment, the most intelligent art is the most flippant art, it will mean a certain abdication of the old claims of the artist. But it may mean worse things than that. When people begin to ignore human dignity, it will not be long before they begin to ignore human rights. The pagan state, in which the artist is only a buffoon, will soon resemble the ancient pagan state in which he was only a slave. I am all for playing the goat; I am charitably disposed even to those enacting the funny dog; I have myself appeared more than once in public in the character of a performing elephant. But if we allow the Image of Man to fade away altogether in these animal antics, if it vanishes amid mere mockery and scepticism, the human being will find himself something very much worse than fair game. He may ultimately be tethered like the goat, or chained up like the dog, or ridden and prodded like the elephant.

The man who has exhibited himself — as in so much of modern prose and verse — in every attitude of abject and dishonourable ignominy will find it very much harder to spring up straight of a sudden and defend his honour, if his real intellectual and spiritual honour is attacked. Among the old ways of preserving this sense of honour was the system of honours; and, though most of them are now pretty thoroughly dishonoured, nobody suggests that the Poet Laureateship has been sold. Anyhow, among the wider ways of doing it was what may be called the Pageant of Poetry; the public acknowledgment of the Poet, ‘to whom the high gods gave of right their thunders and their laurels and their light’.

XXVII On Living for Posterity

WE all remember the story of that excess of aspiration, in the sense of the use of aspirates, which led somebody to say of somebody, ‘If you give him a Hinch, he’ll take a Hell.’ Some recent extensions of social liberty have made the accident of the last word sound strangely like an omen. But what strikes me as even more curious is this: that there are some people who are perpetually demanding an ell but cannot be persuaded to accept an inch. They demand certain forms of social liberty in the large, but refuse them in the small, and especially in the solid. They are like people who should furiously demand a hundred head of cattle, and then flee in terror at the first appearance of a cow. Or they are like a king who should claim to rule the waves and be afraid to have a well or a pond in his own garden. The little more, and how little it is and how lightly they will take the larger responsibility! The little less, and what miles they will run in order to be worlds away!

For instance, I read in any number of *New Leaders* and Labour weeklies, and all sorts of papers supposed to be both progressive and popular, that the working-classes will now take over the government of the country; that the majority of manual workers will have their proper proportional right to rule in all matters of education and humanitarian reform; that the poor will at last inherit the earth. But if I say that one workman is capable of deciding about the education of one child, that he has the right to select a certain school or resist a certain system, I shall have all those progressive papers roaring at me as a rotten reactionary. Why the workman should be clever enough to vote a curriculum for everybody else's children, but not clever enough to choose one for his own children, I cannot for the life of me imagine. If I say that a decent costermonger is to be trusted with a donkey, or a decent rat-catcher with a dog, I shall be denounced as an obstacle to humanitarian legislation. But there is no objection to trusting a crowd of costermongers and rat-catchers to decide about the humanitarian legislation. And what is true of these particular cases of proprietorship is true of the whole ease of property. When the meek inherit the earth, it must only mean that the mob inherits the earth. It must not mean that the man inherits even the smallest portion of the earth. The mob is meek enough, certainly, when it is thus herded to its pastures by its sociological and educational pastors. It does not really mean that the many sheep, but that the few shepherds, will rule over all the meadows. And when the nomadic shepherd finds himself confronted with the static or domestic peasant, with the man who is actually ruling his own small meadow like a realm, there is always a collision and a sort of civil war in the country-side. In any case, the original paradox remains: that it was regarded as a simple thing that all the meadows should belong to all the men, but a frantic and fantastic thing that any man should own any meadow.

But there is another ease that is even more curious. In the works of Mr. Wells, and all the typical Utopias and futuristic world-systems of recent times, it is incessantly and impressively repeated that we must live for the Future, for the Young, for the Rising Generation or the Babe Unborn. The traditional obligations of the past are nothing, and even the temporary contracts and compromises of the present are comparatively little; but we really do have a duty to the future generations. It is apparently the only duty that remains. While we are kicking our grandfather downstairs, we must take care to be very polite to our great-great-grandson, who is not yet present; and if a more enlightened ethic should ever justify us in painlessly poisoning our mother, it will be well to distract the attention by dreaming of some perfect Woman of the Future who may never need to be poisoned. These examples are quoted but lightly and from memory, but nobody will deny that current culture is in fact full of this notion of living for posterity. It is preached as a democratic doctrine in the democratic organs to which I have referred. But it is always the People as a whole that is to live for the Posterity as a whole.

But if we present precisely the same idea, in a present and practical form, it is called antiquated. Its practical form is called Marriage or the Family. It really does demand that a man and a woman should live largely for the next generation. It does demand that they should, to some extent, defer their personal amusements, such as divorce and dissipation, for the benefit of the next generation. And whenever we suggest that, a wail goes up about the wickedness and cruelty of depriving the poor dear parents of the innocent gaieties of divorce. How can a poor father get any real fun out of being divorced, if his enjoyment is to be dashed by a morbid memory of the existence of his own son? Nay, can we even be certain that the mother will keep up her high standard of dancing all night and every night, if there is a new-born baby who (with curious taste) is crying for her all night long? When the problem of Posterity is presented in this practical form, poor old Posterity gets the knock pretty badly. The Present suddenly becomes much more important than the Future; and the rising generation is a mere drag on the risen generation, which intends to dance until it drops. In this case also, the new thinkers are only thinking of the general, and are afraid to think of the particular. Just as the Socialist must not confront a peasant with one concrete piece of land, so the Sociologist must not confront the parent with one concrete piece of Posterity. Otherwise the new parents will fly screaming, and in some cases adopt measures to ensure that there shall be next to no Posterity at all.

I grieve to say that I am not moved to a profound respect or admiration for this intellectual compromise. If the social idealist would take his inch I might be ready to trust him with his ell. If he could trust a poor man with the care of a cow or a cottage, or a common or garden child, I might believe he was sincere in wishing to trust all poor men with the destiny of all cottages and cows. As it is, I suspect that he is not going to trust that destiny to a democracy of poor men, but to an official or oligarch appointed to organize the poor men. Similarly, if the new social philosophies fervently encouraged people to think more about domesticity and less about divorce, I might believe that they really were preferring the future generation to their own. As it is, I think they want to procure all possible pleasures and amusements for their own, including the mild amusement of prophesying some Utopia that can only come long after they are dead. If their novels and newspapers were less filled with the sublime spiritual liberation of eloping with the chauffeur, and more filled with the duty and dignity of remaining with the baby, I might admit that their faces are set towards the Future and their souls full of the song of ‘A Good Time Coming’. As it is, it seems to be an impatient and even pessimistic lyric about ‘A Good Time Now’.

I am not at all pharisaical about these weaknesses considered as weaknesses, but I am rather bored with the pretence that they are strong with the strength of vigilant Watchers for the Dawn. And I am increasingly tired of the whole tone of that inverted idealism, which is terrified when told to make use of a single talent, but quite confident of its fitness to rule over ten cities. But I suspect, if I may describe the fashionable mood in terms of old-fashioned sentiment, that these people are only filling the Castle of Indolence with the Pleasures of Hope.

XXVIII On Mr Shaw’s Puritanism

THERE was a time when I was asked, with quite a curious persistence, what I thought of Mr. Bernard Shaw and what he thought of Professor Einstein. It was especially in connexion with certain remarks about the nature of Great Men, and his reasons for limiting the list to some and excluding others. I had no difficulty at the time in answering that I thought of Mr. Bernard Shaw very much as I have always thought of him, and that I should have no difficulty in admitting him to my list of Great Men, though perhaps my list might be a little longer, and perhaps a little more liberal than his. I actually wrote a book about him in the ancient days, and I am happy to say that he reviewed it himself, with the typical opening: ‘This is the best book of criticism that I have yet produced.’ And what I said then is very much what I should say still: that there is no very fundamental antagonism between Mr. Bernard Shaw and myself except in one fact — that he is a Puritan and I am at least relatively a Pagan. It is true that I have become a Christian; but that is a thing that happened to quite a large number of Pagans. Only I never became a Puritan; and it seems to me that Mr. Shaw never became anything else.

Of course I know that there are a number of things to which his actual attitude would be merely negative or sceptical as compared with my own; but those things never affect me as real or ultimate disagreements, but merely as matters which he does not happen to have understood even sufficiently to disagree. They are part of a heritage of negation from the rebels of the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries: a rebellion that has become almost respectable with age. It is almost a mark of being behind the times to go on talking merely of traditional religion. What we have to deal with in the modern world is traditional irreligion. The period between Voltaire and Bernard Shaw is merely the period of the rise and decline of something that began as a joke and ended as a prejudice. Nobody will deny the wit of Shaw, any more than the wit of Voltaire; but these sceptical or negative notions are not even the jokes of Shaw: they are merely the prejudices of Shaw. The jokes of Shaw have been much more serious and socially useful things, and have been directed against things much more modern than ecclesiastical abuses which have long ago been more than sufficiently abused. They have been directed against the spiritual pride of physical science; against the Doctor’s Dilemma and not merely against the Curate’s Egg — a rather ancient egg which, after all, was always excellent in parts. They have been directed against the worldliness of San Francisco rather than the unworldliness of St. Francis. If he made fun of America, it was at least at the moment when America was being taken most seriously, and at the moment when the seriousness was certainly a form of snobbishness. I have never been disturbed by his disbelieving the things he does not understand, and I have always been delighted with his disbelieving the things he does understand: such as the Darwinian Theory or the Capitalist State. I should never be so stupid as to mistake Mr. Bernard Shaw for an irreligious man. He seems to me, in a rather special and vivid sense, to be a religious man. But there is always that deeper difference, and it is involved in the nature of the religion. And if I wanted a profound illustration of the difference that I mean, whether or no it is a difference I could explain, I could find it in a remark made in this discussion about Einstein and Great Men: a remark that may not seem to have anything to do with religion at all. Mr. Shaw is reported, and I apologize if he is misreported, as saying that he would hesitate to admit Napoleon into his select club of heroes; and that ‘it would have been better for the world if Napoleon had never lived’. To which I answer that if Napoleon had never lived, then certainly Bernard Shaw never would have lived. At any rate, if Napoleon had not succeeded in being Napoleon, Shaw would not have succeeded in being Shaw.

For certainly if Napoleon, or some revolutionary soldier nearly as competent as Napoleon (there may have been one or two others who could have proved competent), had not appeared to save the French Revolution from the invading forces of the aristocracies and autocracies, reaction would have shut down on the first republican hopes like a trap of iron, and all the democratic dreams that have since filled the intellect and imagination would have been utterly and perhaps finally destroyed. All that we call the modern world, with all its good and evil, was made by Napoleon; at any rate was made possible by Napoleon. And among the various products of that original revolutionary expansion was the particular theory of reconstruction which we call Socialism. I will leave Mr. Shaw to decide whether that particular product is to be classed among the good or evil products of the French Revolution. But surely nobody with historical sense can doubt that all these modern ideals of revolutionary improvement, with the purpose of social justice or equality, date from the great idealistic movement at the end of the eighteenth century. Now I take it as certain that if the Revolution had not become militant, and been successfully defended by a man of military genius, it would have been easily crushed by the old oligarchies and despotic systems; and, having been easily crushed, would have been easily forgotten. There would have remained no legend of revolutionary victory; and therefore, alas for human nature, very little of revolutionary heroism. There would probably have remained, for centuries afterwards, not a gleam of revolutionary hope. I am merely stating the historical and especially the practical probabilities. I do not discuss here how far the balance would have been for evil or good. We should doubtless have avoided many annoying forms of anarchical nonsense such as still manage to live on the tradition of the triumph of France. We should have been less troubled with some mistaken mob movements, and some much more poisonous secret societies. But we should have missed some good things as well. We should have missed social reform as the serious preoccupation of the nineteenth century, we should have missed Socialism, and we should have missed Shaw.

Now I can heartily respect, and even sympathize with, some jolly old English Tory who still regards Bonaparte as Boney. I can understand the genial reactionary, like Mr. Sapsea, who continues through all continental changes to drink the toast, ‘When the French come over, may we meet them at Dover.’ But I should hardly have thought of associating Mr. Sapsea with Mr. Shaw. And whatever may be the true story of the punishment of St. Helena, it seems rather hard on Napoleon that he should endure not only an eternal punishment, but a double punishment: one from all the reactionaries he defeated and the other from all the reformers he defended. It was the expansion of Napoleonic France that established everywhere the modern theories of civic right and equal opportunity; and the very name of that justice is the Code Napoleon. In the face of these facts, I naturally ask myself: Why does a man like Mr. Shaw hate Napoleon? Why does a man like Mr. Wells hate Napoleon? The only sincere answer is that it is the mark of the Nonconformist always to hate Napoleon.

It would take a long time to explain. A vague notion that a soldier is a naughty man; that he wears a cocked hat and sometimes even a cockade or a feather in it; that bodily fighting is always a blackguardly way of dealing with any position, however provocative; that soldiering is associated with canteens and cans; these and a thousand other things have created in the mind of the modern Puritan the mood of the modern Pacifist. We can all understand, and Napoleon himself would entirely understand, the higher sense in which it may be said that glory is vanity. But the Puritan always insists, not that glory is vanity, but that glory is infamy. He thinks this sort of action, this sort of ambition, not only the worst but the most horrible; he thinks there is no smell so foul as the smell of gunpowder. I think the smell of the hair-oil of hypocritical peace-mongering infinitely more offensive. Nobody will accuse Mr. Shaw's work of smelling like that; but there does come from it sometimes, suddenly, this strange stale smell of the Puritan; and it is then that I can answer our old question: Do We Agree?

XXIX. On the Truth of Legends

I HAVE known all my life what is called the conflict between romance and realism, and I have always found that it was the realists who were romancing. I have found, in a fashion too curious to be a coincidence, that the romances were generally real after all. For instance, everybody knows how a boy is told that his boyish day-dreams are only day-dreams, and will not long survive in daylight; that his picturesque figures of the Red Indian or the Jolly Tar are only painted and pasteboard figures out of a toy-theatre, or melodramatic personalities out of a penny dreadful. It is taken for granted that he will begin by believing in them and end by disbelieving in them. In a number of solid historical cases, I myself began rather early to disbelieve them, and have come eventually to believe them. I seriously think that the popular sentiment that created those characters was often a tradition of truth, where the pedantic cynicism which destroyed them was often a much more deliberate perversion of truth. The tradition may have come down rather loosely and vaguely, through a long line of nurses and grandmothers. But the nurses and grandmothers were not paid to tell lies, and they did therefore, to a considerable and very valuable extent, tell the truth. The critics and historians were paid to tell lies though they may not have put the truth to themselves in quite so crude a fashion. They were academic officials of a certain academic system; achieving a fame which depended upon a fashion; successful or unsuccessful, according to the power of a theory; suiting themselves, consciously or unconsciously, to a certain school; and, when all is said, living by receiving salaries or selling books. They had not the disinterestedness or detachment of gossip. They were not merely mentioning the things they remembered, but remembering only the things they were supposed to mention. Their minds had formed a mechanical habit of recording only the things that were suited to the records, and writing only the records that were suited to the official record office. Some of them were stark liars; some of them, which is much more strange and uncanny, were honest men. But they were, at best, men telling untrue stories in the interest of the truth, or what they believed to be the truth. They were not ordinary people telling true stories, merely as stories that were curious because they were true. It is all the difference between the chronicler and the historian. And the difference is that the chronicler sometimes told fables; whereas the historian never tells fables, but only falsehoods. However this may be, I have known a curious number of cases in which mere sentimental gossip surrounded my childhood, and serious historical scholarship surrounded my manhood; and the sentimental gossip was right.

For instance, it was sentimental gossip that Mary Queen of Scots was very badly treated; or that Charles the First was to be pitied or even admired. I remember loving both the historical characters as legends, and then learning afterwards that the legends were entirely legendary. The historical realists of that time told me that the attraction of Mary Queen of Scots was merely that she was much prettier than Queen Elizabeth. They told me that the charm of the Cavalier consisted only in his wearing more picturesque clothes than the Puritan. Those who told me this were often learned, and those who had left me with the earlier impression were often ignorant; and I myself was unfathomably ignorant. I therefore believed what they told me; I proceeded to believe, to believe blindly, credulously, and in hopeless intellectual servitude; to believe in the much more fabulous fable, in the legend of the learned. I believed much more seriously — that is, much more superstitiously — in the school text-book than I had believed in the old wives' tale. But the old wife was an old wife by the normal process of becoming a wife and growing old, and she employed the normal habit of talking to children about her childhood. But the schoolmaster was a professional schoolmaster; the schoolmaster was tied to his school; the schoolmaster was as much under discipline as the schoolboy.

In the case of Mary Queen of Scots or Charles the First, which I have mentioned, it is, of course, perfectly true that there are two sides to the story. What I complain of in the schoolmaster is that he always taught only one side of the story. So, it may be said, did the nursery story-teller. But her story was a story in the literary sense of a legend. His story was a story in the nursery sense of a lie. It was a lie in the very real sense that he was not merely reporting what he had heard, but very care fully selecting from what he had read. Of course, as I say, it is perfectly true that there is a case for the Calvinists who opposed Mary Stuart, or the later Calvinists who opposed Charles Stuart. Of course, it is arguable that Mary Stuart killed her husband, or that Charles Stuart broke his word. Of course, it is arguable that it was better for England that the Whigs should turn it into an aristocracy than that the Stuarts should turn it into an autocracy.

But that is not the point. The point is that the ignorant legend was much more true, as far as it went, than the learned legend as far as it went. To paint a portrait of Mary Queen of Scots as a lovely, unhappy, charming, and cultured lady, brutally baited by barbarous Puritans and tragically martyred by a jealous Tudor tyrant, is a process of portraiture very far from complete; but it is in its way true, even when it is not complete. To paint a portrait of Queen Elizabeth as a prophetic lioness of Protestantism, upholding the Huguenots out of mere love of the Holy Scriptures, and brandishing a Bible to cow all the Papists of the world, is not a process of portraiture true but incomplete; it is simply completely untrue. It is contradicted by every fact in Elizabeth's history, from her continuous invalidism or ill-health to her continuous intrigues about marrying Catholic princes. And the first truth, or half-truth, was a truth of tradition. The second lie, and complete lie, was a lie of scholarship. Similarly, the popular legend was not lying about the kind of atmosphere, or even the kind of glamour, surrounding King Charles and the Cavaliers. It may have been little more than a romance; the legend really recorded little more than a romance; but it was the real romance. It was not false when it represented the Cavalier with his goblet lifted and his sword drawn; ready to drink to the King, ready to die for the King. For thousands of such men did actually drink to him and did actually die for him. It was not romancing to say that the Royalist had a romantic loyalty. It would not have been romancing to say that the Puritan had a religious loyalty. He had a loyalty to the letter of Scripture, to the logic of Calvin, to the awful duty of spreading true religion.

But my schoolmasters did not tell me that the Puritan stood for religious loyalty, which is true. They told me that he stood for religious liberty, which is a lie of that mountainous and monstrous order which ignorant traditionalists call a Whopper. They were not concerned, like the traditionalists, with gathering up, however lazily, the loose fragments of a truth. They were concerned with covering up most carefully the most accidental glimpses of the truth; with so picking their words and arranging their sentences that no suspicion of the main truth of the matter should really penetrate to the reader. It is amazing to consider how carefully and how successfully they did cover up a truth so obvious and so enormous. There is, for instance, the perfectly simple fact, written in large letters across the history of two reigns and practically two revolutions, that the last Stuarts tried to establish religious toleration and the Puritans tried to prevent religious toleration. It would seem as impossible to hide so huge and simple an historic fact as to hide the fact that Nelson fought for England and Napoleon for France. Yet men like Macaulay and Green really did manage to hide it from a whole rising generation, the generation with which I myself originally rose. But, fortunately, I had learned some truths in my childhood before I began to learn lies in my boyhood. And all my subsequent knowledge has led me to prefer the pictures which honestly professed to be picturesque to the plans and diagrams which dishonestly pretended to be accurate.

XXX. On Experience

IT will be remarked that Experience, which was once claimed by the aged, is now claimed exclusively by the young. There used to be a system of morals and metaphysics that was specially known as the Experience Philosophy; but those who advanced it were grim rationalists and utilitarians who were already old in years, or, more commonly, old before their time. We all know that Experience now stands rather for the philosophy of those who claim to be young long after their time. But they preach something that may, in a sense, be called an Experience Philosophy, though some of the experiences seem to me the reverse of philosophical. So far as I can make it out, it consists of two dogmas first, that there is no such thing as right or wrong; and secondly, that they themselves have a right to experience. How they manage to have any rights if there is no such thing as right I do not know; nor do they. But perhaps the philosophy was best summed up in a phrase I saw recently in a very interesting and important American magazine, quoted from one of the more wild and fanciful of the American critics. I have not the text before me, but the substance of the remark was this. The critic demanded indignantly to know how many ordinary American novelists had any Experiences outside those of earning their bread, pottering about in a farm or a frame-house, helping to mind the baby, and so on. The question struck me as striking at the very root of all the rot and corruption and imbecility of the times.

On the face of it, of course, the whole question is rather a joke; only that these gay pleasure-seekers and revellers in the joy of life have seldom been known to see a joke. We might politely inquire exactly how much Experience is needed to equip a novelist to write novels? How many marks does he get for being vamped or for being intoxicated and which are the particular discreditable acts by which he can get credits? How many liaisons give him this singular rank as a literary liaison officer; and how many double lives does it take to constitute Life? Is it only after his fourth divorce that he may write his first novel? For my part, I do not see why the same principle should not be applied to all the other Ten Commandments as well as to that particular Commandment. It should surely be obvious that, if love affairs are necessary to the writing of this particular sort of love story, then it follows that crime is necessary to the writing of any kind of crime story. I have myself made arrangements (on paper) for no fewer than fifty-two murders in my time; they took the form of short stories; and I shall expose myself to the withering contempt of the young sages of Experience when I confess that I am not really a murderer, and have never yet committed an actual murder. And what about all the other forms of criminal Experience? Must a writer be a forger, and manufacture other men's names before he is allowed to make his own? Must there be a journalistic apprenticeship in picking pockets as well as in picking brains; and have we to look to the establishment of an Academy of Anarchy, with the power of conferring degrees ? Novelists might proudly print after their names the letters indicating the degrees they had taken; such as F.Y.B., meaning 'Five Years for Burglary', or T.N.H., for 'Twice Nearly Hanged'. Altogether it may be said that writers do not rob, but it may be fortunate that robbers do not write. It is possible that the wild and wicked criminal might, after all, make almost as good a novelist as the novelist.

It would also be easy enough to attack the fallacy upon the facts. Everybody who has any real experience knows that good writing would not necessarily come from people with many experiences. Some of the art which is closest to life has been produced under marked limitations of living. Its prestige has generally lasted longer than the splash made by sensational social figures. Jane Austen has already survived Georges Sand. Even the most modern critic, if he is really a critic, will admit that Jane Austen is really realistic, in a sense in which Georges Sand is only romantic. She was, indeed, a flaming, fashionable figure created entirely by the Romantic Movement; but Jane Austen did not belong to any movement; she does not move, but she stays. And, though I do not agree with the too common depreciation of Byron, it is true that all his somewhat excessive Experience, in the new or juvenile sense, has not prevented people feeling him to be the very reverse of realistic, and in some ways strangely unreal.

But there is, of course, a much deeper objection to the whole of this new sort of Experience Philosophy, which is quite sufficiently exposed in the very examples I quoted from the magazine. There are certainly all sorts of experiences, some great and some small. But the small ones are those which the critic imagines to be great, and the great ones are those that he contemptuously dismisses as small. There are no more universal affairs than those which he imagines to be little and local. There are no events more tremendous than those which he regards as trivial. There are no experiences more exciting than those which he dully imagines to be dull. To take his own example, a literary man who cannot see that a baby is marvellous could not see that anything was marvellous. He has certainly no earthly logical reason for regarding a movie vamp as marvellous. The movie vamp is only what happens to the baby when it goes wrong; but, from a really imaginative and intellectual standpoint, there is nothing marvellous about either of them, except what is already marvellous in the mere existence of the baby. But this sort of moralist or immoralist has a queer, half-baked prejudice to the effect that there is no good in anything until it has gone bad. It is supposed to be a part of Experience for the woman to be a vamp, but not for the woman to be a mother; although it stares us all in the face, as a stark fact of common sense, that child-bearing really is an experience, and a highly realistic experience, while the other sort of experiment may not really be an experience at all. It may be in the exact sense mere play-acting; and, as the game is now played, the main preoccupation is to prevent its ending with an addition to the cast of characters. Whatever happens, it must not be the means of bringing on the scene a new, breathing, thinking, conscious creature like a baby. That would not be Life.

Now, if there is one thing of which I have been certain since my boyhood, and grow more certain as I advance in age, it is that nothing is poetical if plain daylight is not poetical; and no monster should amaze us if the normal man does not amaze. All this talk of waiting for experiences in order to write is simply a confession of incapacity to experience anything. It is a confession of never having felt the big facts in such experiences as babyhood and the baby. A paralytic of this deaf-and-dumb description imagines he can be healed in strange waters or after strange wanderings; and announces himself ready to drink poisons, that they may stimulate him like drugs. But it is futile for him to suppose that this sort of quackery will teach him how to be a writer, for he has been from the first admittedly blind to everything that is worth writing about. He will find nothing in the wilderness but the broken shards or ruins of what should have been sacred in his own home; and if he can really make nothing of the second he will certainly make nothing of the first. The whole theory rests on a ridiculous confusion by which it is supposed that certain primary principles or relations will become interesting when they are damaged, but are bound to be depressing when they are intact. None of those who are perpetually suggesting this view ever states it thus plainly; for they are incapable of making plain statements, just as they are incapable of feeling plain things. But the point they have to prove, if they really want their Experience Philosophy accepted by those who do not care for catchwords, is that the high perils, pleasures, and creative joys of life do not occur on the high road of life, but only in certain crooked and rambling by-paths made entirely by people who have lost their way. As yet they have not even begun to prove it; and in any case, and in every sense, it could be disproved by a baby.

XXXI. On Sightseeing

I HAVE often done my best to consider, in various aspects, what is really the matter with Sightseeing. Or rather, I hope, I have done my best to consider what is the matter with me, when I find myself faintly fatigued by Sightseeing. For it is always wiser to consider not so much why a thing is not enjoyable, as why we ourselves do not enjoy it. In the case of Sightseeing, I have only got so far as to be quite certain that the fault is not in the Sights and is not in the Sightseers. This would seem to drive the speculative philosopher back upon the dreadful and shocking conclusion that the fault is entirely in me. But, before accepting so destructive a deduction, I think there are some further modifications to be made and some further distinctions to be drawn.

The mere fact that a mob is going to see a monument ought not in itself to depress any imaginative and sympathetic mind. On the contrary, such a mind ought to perceive that there is something of the same mystery or majesty in the mob as in the monument. It is a weakness to fail in feeling that a statue standing on a pedestal above a street, the statue of a hero, carved by an artist, for the honour and glory of a city, is, so far as it goes, a marvellous and impressive work of man. But it is far more of a weakness to fail in feeling that a hundred statues walking about the street, alive with the miracle of a mysterious vitality, are a marvellous and impressive work of God. In so far as that ultimate argument affects the matter, the sightseer might almost as well travel to see the sightseers as to see the sights. There are, of course, vulgar and repulsive sightseers. There are, for that matter, vulgar and repulsive statues. But this cannot be a complete excuse for my own lamentable coldness; for I have felt it creeping over me in the presence of the most earnest and refined sightseers, engaged in inspecting the most classical and correct statues. Indeed (if I must make the disgraceful confession in the interests of intellectual discovery), I will own that I have felt this mysterious wave of weariness pass over me rather more often when the elegant and distinguished Archdeacon was explaining the tombs to the Guild of Golden Thoughts than when an ordinary shouting showman was showing them to a jolly rabble of trippers with beer bottles and concertinas. I am very much troubled with this unnatural insensibility of mind; and I have made many attempts, none of them quite successful, to trace my mental malady to its origin. But I am not sure that some hint of the truth may not be found in the first popular example that I gave — the example of a statue standing in a street.

Now, men have stuck up statues in streets as part of the general and ancient instinct of popular monumental art, which they exhibited in erecting pillars, building pyramids, making monoliths and obelisks, and such things, from the beginning of the world. And the conception may be broadly stated thus — that this sort of sight was meant for two different kinds of sightseers. First, the monument was meant to be seen accidentally; it was actually set up purposely in order to be seen accidentally. In other words, a striking tower on a hill, an arresting statue on a pedestal, a remarkable relief over an archway, or any other piece of public art, was intended for the traveller, and even especially for the chance traveller. It was meant for the passer-by, perhaps in the hope that he would not merely pass by; perhaps in the hope that he would pause, and possibly even meditate. But he would be meditating not only on something that he had never seen before, but on something that he had never expected to see. The statue would almost spring out upon him like a stage brigand. The archway would arrest him and almost bar his path like a barricade. He would suddenly see the high tower like a sort of signal; like a rocket suddenly sent up to convey a message, and almost a warning. This is the way in which many popular monuments have been seen; and this, some may agree with me in thinking, is pretty much the best way to see them. No man will ever forget the sights he really saw when he was not a sightseer. Every man remembers the thing that struck him like the thunderbolt of an instant, though it had stood there waiting for him as the memorial of an aeon. But, whether or no this be the best way of treating popular memorials, it is not the only way, and certainly has not been the only popular way. Historic relics, as a whole, have been treated differently in history as a whole. But, in history as a whole, the other way of seeing such sights was not what we commonly call sightseeing.

We might put the point this way: that the two ways of visiting the statue or the shrine were the way of the Traveller and the way of the Pilgrim. But the way of the Pilgrim almost always involved the way of the Pilgrimage. It was a ritual or ceremonial way: the way of a procession which had indeed come to see that shrine, but had not come to see anything else. The pilgrim does not feel, as the tourist does often quite naturally feel, that he has had his tour interrupted by something that does not happen to interest him. The pilgrimage must interest him, or he would never have been a pilgrim. He knows exactly what he wants to do; and, what is perhaps even more valuable, he knows for certain when he has done it. He cannot be dragged on from one thing to another; from one thing that interests him mildly to another thing that bores him stiff. He has undertaken a certain expedition with a certain logical end: an end both in the sense of a purpose and in the sense of a termination. For a certain mystical reason of his own he wanted to visit a certain monument or shrine; and, now lie has visited it, he is free to visit the nearest public-house or any other place he pleases.

But all this is altered, because we have passed from the age of monuments to the age of museums. We have been afflicted with the modern idea of collecting all sorts of totally different things, with totally different types of interest, including a good many of no apparent interest at all, and stuffing them all into one building, that the stranger may stray among a hundred distracting monuments or the pilgrim be lost among a hundred hostile shrines. When the traveller saw the statue of the hero, he did not see written on the pedestal: ‘This way to the Collection of Tropical Fungi’, in which he possibly felt no interest at all. When the pilgrim found his way to the shrine, he did not find that the priest was eagerly waving him on to a glass case filled with the specimens of the local earthworms. Fungi and earthworms may be, and indeed are, exceedingly interesting things in themselves; but they are not things which men seek in the same mood which sends them to look at the statues of heroes or the shrines of saints. With the establishment of that entirely modern thing, the Museum, we have a new conception, which, like so many modern conceptions, is based on a blunder in psychology and a blindness to the true interests of culture. The Museum is not meant either for the wanderer to see by accident or for the pilgrim to see with awe. It is meant for the mere slave of a routine of self-education to stuff himself with every sort of incongruous intellectual food in one indigestible meal. It is meant for the mere Sightseer, the man who must see all the sights.

Of course, I am only speaking of this kind of sight as it affects this kind of sightseer. I do not deny that museums and galleries and other collections serve a more serious purpose for specialists who can select special things. But the modern popular practice of which I complain is bad, not because it is popular, but because it is modern. It was not made by any of the ancestral instincts of mankind; either the instinct that erected the crucifix by the wayside, to arrest the wayfarer, or the instinct that erected the crucifix in the cathedral to be the goal of the worshipper. It is not a product of popular imagination, but of what is called popular education; the cold and compulsory culture which is not, and never will be, popular.

XXXII. On Condiments and Conduct

I HAVE always wondered why there is no New Religion forbidding the use of salt and pepper; not to mention the more monstrous case of mustard. I cannot understand how it is that no Moral Movement, no deeper stirring of social consciousness, no wave of higher citizenship and devotion to the ideal of Service, has appeared to start some people interfering with other people in the use of condiments — of all those pungent luxuries with which an effete and self-indulgent civilization has hitherto complicated its meals; taking salt with eggs, mustard with beef, pepper with mutton, and all sorts of strange, unnatural sauces with everything else. Surely there ought to be a Crusade against these things, since a Crusade is now commonly held to mean an attack upon some habit of Christian civilization. Very little would be needed to set the Puritans, who are above all Manicheans, denouncing these things exactly as they now denounce beer or tobacco, and are, indeed, already beginning to denounce coffee and tea. In contradiction of the advertisement recently so common, we should see the town plastered with the words ‘Join the No-Mustard Club’. By a slight emendation of Scripture (which is nothing to the devout Puritan) we should be told that the salt which has not lost its savour is fit only to be cast forth and trampled under foot of men.

Such a Puritan version of salt in the Gospel would be far less impudent than the Puritan version of wine in the Gospel. In a hundred ways we should be assured of the corrupting and degrading character of these condiments; and terrible stories would be told of ruined families weltering in anchovy sauce as if in gore, or darker stories of that darker drug, the sauce that bears the name of Worcester. I could myself, on the spur of the moment, easily make up all sorts of arguments and illustrations as convincing against condiments as others are against convivial liquors. I could point out that the old proverb about taking strange stories ‘with a grain of salt’ was itself an evidence of the connexion between strange substances and strange delusions, and bring out the result that salt is really a sort of opium. I could point out that the very fact of mustard being hot in the mouth is analogous to the old phrase about ginger being hot in the mouth, which has come to be a sort of euphemism for vice or violent self-indulgence. I could point out that pepper is actually used by criminals as something to fling in the faces of their pursuers, to blind and choke them. So that the pepper-pot takes its place in the police museum as being both a weapon of crime and an instrument of torture.

It seems as sensible to argue that some criminals make a bad use of pepper as to argue that some drunkards make a bad use of port wine. For those who sneer at tobacco may be expected, in the same sense, to sniff at snuff, and presumably to snivel over pepper, for a great part of their moral eloquence consists of sniffing and snivelling. Nothing is needed, for most of their moral movements, but a sort of gesture of priggish repugnance and small-minded superiority; and it would be just as easy for a moralist to make that sort of face over a jar of pickles as over a pot of porter. A curious mixture of the snobbish sneering of the middle classes against the working classes, with the more morbid snarling of the invalid against the healthy man, has made a large number of things that are simply common appear merely coarse. So perhaps we may look forward to fresh purifications of society, purging it of all the poisons of pepper and salt and sauce, and reducing it to plain living by this remarkable course of high thinking. Vinegar would be forbidden by the teetotallers, because of its wicked past when it was wine. Mustard would arouse a similar Moslem or Judaic fury, because it is generally eaten with ham. The equality of the sexes, in eternal ethics, would be asserted by saying that there shall be no sauce, either for the goose or for the gander.

By the way, though the point is a parenthesis, what a remarkable anticipation that proverb is of modern muddle-headedness about the sexes! It is, in fact, often used, in the sex controversy, as a metaphor meaning that one sex or sort must in all things be treated like the other. But nothing could be more unlucky than the metaphor, whatever we may think of the moral. If there is one thing to which this argument of sameness or assimilation does not apply, it is to the question of sex in connexion with the solemn question of supper. Suppose the sauce is egg-sauce; am I to wait patiently for eggs from the cock, as an alternative to eggs from the hen? I will not eat cow-beef if I can help it, merely on the ground that what is mustard for the bull is mustard for the cow. Nor will I look for milk from the bull, however much I may recognize the general necessity of milk rather than mustard. It is some thing rather typical of the way these things are treated that people should express their view in proverbs rather than principles. The scientific course is obviously to begin by clearing up the question of what is the real difference between a goose and a gander, and then pointing out that it does not affect the question of sauce, though it may very much affect the question of something else. But this laborious method is very unpopular with a generation which thinks that self-assertion is a complete substitute for self-criticism, or, indeed, for any other sort of criticism. In that world we are well acquainted with the sort of goose who possesses very little except sauce.

But this, as I have said, is merely a remark in brackets, in the course of other remarks about other heresies. We are chiefly concerned with the heresy of the Manichees, which has already expressed itself in the denunciation of wine and even tobacco, and might just as well express itself, I would suggest, in the denunciation of mustard or even salt. For the essence of that idea is that every pleasure as such is suspect; or that, unless a thing can be specially shown to be morally good, it is most probable that it is morally bad. There is no real defence of a luxury except to prove that it is a necessity. Now, it would be much easier to argue, in certain cases, that wine is a necessity than that vinegar is a necessity. There are certain practical good effects sometimes produced by the tobacco plant which are very seldom produced by the pepper plant. The enemies of these drinks or drugs, as they would call them, may think that the evil of them enormously outweighs the good; so enormously as to justify their extinction as pure evils. But they could not deny that the drug is a drug; in the double sense in which a drug is normally regarded as good and evil. They could not deny that such a thing is a drug, both in the sense of something consumed by a drug-fiend and of something sold by a druggist. They may think it unwise to use it for an immediate remedy, but it is used for an immediate remedy. Smoking has been known to serve for some time as a substitute for eating, and a cigarette does sometimes soothe the nerves of a neurotic. Brandy and champagne are constantly administered in illness, except among rank and raving lunatics. But I have seldom heard of an invalid leaping to life after a draught of anchovy sauce; or of anybody eating pepper for days on end; or of people in hysterics being quieted with pickles. If it ever comes to the old Manichean controversy about useless luxuries, I think it will be harder to defend the condiments than to defend the stimulants, or even the intoxicants. I am presuming that such Puritans will carry out the moral philosophy that is really at the back of their minds; it does not affect me, for I have quite a different moral philosophy at the back of my mind. It would occupy too much space to expound it here, and I have often enough expounded it elsewhere. But it might be indicated by saying that there is a truth behind the joke of the man who said: ‘Give us the luxuries of life and we will dispense with the necessities’; and the truth can be more soberly stated by saying that, in one sense, human beings are not even completely human, until they are civilized.

XXXIII. On Optimism and Scepticism

I SUPPOSE people will go on till the crack of doom saying (as somebody said the other day) that Browning expressed the opinion that God is in His heaven and therefore all is right with the world. I could mention a number of other opinions that Browning expressed, in exactly the same method and degree. I could point out that Browning said, in his gay and careless fashion: ‘Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?’ doubtless referring to Mrs. Browning. I could note that Browning observed, when brooding on his own immediate course of action: ‘Or there’s Satan . . . one might venture pledge one’s soul to him.’ It will occur to every reader of the poet that he observed on a celebrated occasion: ‘Lo! lieth flat and loveth Setebos’, presumably prostrating himself upon the carpet in Wimpole Street. It will also be recalled that Browning, after confessing to various frauds and lies, virulently cursed the patron to whom he had confessed them, saying: ‘I only wish I dared burn down the house and spoil your sniggering.’ If these incidents in the life of the poet cause any surprise, it may be well to explain that they are, in fact, incidents in the lives of his characters; and so is the much-quoted phrase about all being ‘right with the world’. It is not a remark made by Browning, but a remark made by Pippa in the dramatic work by Browning. Even those who know that the remark occurs in a lyric do not always know that the lyric occurs in a drama. It has therefore a double right to be considered dramatic. It is a remark made by a particular dramatic character on a particular dramatic occasion, and, above all, for a particular dramatic reason. And the reason is not a desire to show that all is right with the world, but to bring out in sharp contrast the fact that there is a great deal very wrong with it.

So far as that is concerned, the facts (as everybody knows, or ought to know) are these. The idea of the play called ‘Pippa Passes’ is that a very poor girl, on her one solitary holiday, goes singing through the world in a state of perfect innocence and therefore of perfect gaiety. In doing so she crosses various human groups who are the very reverse of innocent or gay, each of whom is at some crisis of crime or sin or sorrow. In each case, as she passes, she sings a song, of which the innocence tingles through them in the form of irony. She passes by a house where a wife has just seduced her lover into murdering her husband, and, by way of the last violence of contrast, sings a little song about the morning being so beautiful that all seems to be right with the world. One would have thought it would have occurred to most readers that Browning was not very likely to think that assassination and adultery were actually examples of the rightness of the world. The point was not, of course, that all was right with the world, but that all was right with Pippa, because she had kept herself unspotted from the world.

It is perhaps worth while to mention this queer old blunder about Browning, and what is called his optimism, because we have since seen a great deal of optimism that is very much less reasonable than his. Browning did, indeed, believe that God is in His heaven, though the mere fact of the song of Pippa would not prove that he did. He did believe in God; and, curiously enough, he is not entirely alone in that, and in some quarters the curious superstition is even spreading anew. But he did not believe that all was right with the world, in the sense that there is no wickedness, madness, or misery in it; his works possibly contain a larger and more varied assortment of blackguards, miscreants, maniacs, and miserably deluded people than those of any writer of his time. If you had gone to Robert Browning with the definite and deliberate doctrine, ‘There is no pain or evil’, he would certainly have classed you among the maniacs. He would very probably have written a long, ingenious, and partly incomprehensible poem about you in blank verse, but your portrait would be even less pleasing than that of Sludge the Medium or Caliban. Yet the same people who go on quoting poor Pippa’s little song as a proof that Browning was absurdly optimistic, have lived to see the preaching of an optimism that he would have thought utterly absurd.

Elsewhere I recently remarked that the new optimism, though it expresses itself in commerce and journalism, and especially in advertisement, probably has, like everything else, its roots in religion. Its essence, or at least its extreme expression, is to be found in what is called Christian Science. Anyhow, it does what Browning and the old optimists never dreamed of doing — it denies the actual reality of evil in experience. At any rate, it maintains that by ignoring evil we can expel it from experience. It is this which is the last phase of philosophy popular in America, and to some extent in England. And it has gone very much further than the human holiday cheerfulness of the poor Italian work-girl in Browning’s poem. For one thing, the American optimist especially insists that the work-girl shall sing optimistically about her work, as well as about her holiday. She must sing a new song of optimism even as she labours; to the effect that the Boss is in his office and all is right with the world.

Curiously enough, all this new sort of optimism can be traced back to a sort of scepticism which is very much nearer to pessimism. It may almost, in a sense, be traced back to a great pessimist. Nobody ever accused Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, as depicted by Shakespeare, of being an American optimist. Nobody ever reproached Hamlet with being a hustler, a go-getter, a business man with plenty of pep and sand, an active and animated member of Rotary. But these busy business men are all acting on a philosophical principle drawn from Hamlet, and thoroughly typical of Hamlet: 'There's nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.' That is the original germ of Christian Science, but also the original germ of Business Optimism. I believe that those mystics, the members of the American business clubs, go about with large labels or buttons on their coats inscribed with the words 'Trade is Good'. The savage who thinks he can hurt a man by writing his name in the dust could hardly be more superstitious. But, anyhow, for good or evil, whether it be superstition or science, it marks a belief in the power of words over things, or, if you will, of ideas over realities, which goes far beyond the dreams of the older optimists. Some of this sect of optimists, I believe, recently held a sort of religious ceremony in which they cursed an old woman dressed up as Mrs. Pessimism, and bowed down before a queen called Mrs. Optimism. That does not seem very far from lying flat and loving Setebos.

I protested a short time ago against the abominable slander of suggesting that most Americans are like these people. Most Americans laugh at them, even more derisively and destructively than we do. America may be a country of strange sects, but it is also a country of almost continuous satire on strange sects. Nobody needs to add anything to the satire of Mark Twain and some more recent writers on people like Mrs. Eddy. But it is worthy of remark that America has given birth, among many other strange sects, to this strange sect of the commercial optimist, who may perhaps be best defined as the Unrealist. The creed is perhaps the corruption of many good things, of the ancient American hope and pioneering courage gone wild. But, as there seems a tendency, even in England, to boost this mere religion of boosting, an Englishman may be allowed to protest that it is preposterously unsuited to England and is not really respected even in

America. Christian Science may or may not start with the assumption that God is in His heaven and all is right with the world; it is a subject for a respectful debate with Christian Scientists. But Christianity emphatically began with the assumptions that God has come on earth because all is wrong with the world; and from those two things the whole Christian theory proceeds.

XXXIV. On Thoughts in Canada

I NEED not say what any normal Englishman feels, or ought to feel, when he sails up the St. Lawrence, under the high trophies on the Heights of Abraham, and I have never affected any new abnormality about such feeling. My thoughts, when I was there, went back in one flash to the little town in the hills of Kent where I had been but a few weeks before: the little town where James Wolfe was born and where his statue still stands, sword in hand, in a romantic but not inappropriate swagger. For Wolfe, who was one of the most interesting of English heroes, was himself a flat contradiction to the vulgar and prosaic version of English heroism. It is strange that people should ever have talked of the English as if they must be heavy, stupid, and brutal. It is still more astounding that they should ever have been proud of being heavy, stupid, and brutal. It would be nothing to be proud of; and, in fact, it is not even there for them to be ashamed of. In historical fact, it is a very recent affectation: a mixture of the bad fashion of copying Prussia and the growth of a modern materialism which is solemn about sports because it has no other rites to solemnize.

Englishmen were more sportive about sports in the days of General James Wolfe; and the battle of the Heights of Abraham was won on the village green, with very rotten old bats and stumps. And the men who represented England, in the days when her Empire was really an adventure, were the very opposite of the sort of stuck pigs who are called strong, silent men. Nelson and Wolfe, the two noblest names of England’s action by land and sea, were both of them men of exactly the opposite kind: sensitive, poetical, even cursed with what is called the artistic temperament. Nelson suffered from something which is even worse than the artistic temperament — sea-sickness. Wolfe was of the slight and high-strung sort, and owed nothing of his bravery to brutality. He was himself, I believe, an artist with the pencil, of considerable felicity and talent: he was devoted to books, and, whether he did or did not quote Gray’s *Elegy* as he sailed up the St. Lawrence to death and glory, it was exactly the sort of thing he would have done. But there is another aspect of the fine culture and dignity in Wolfe and the earlier English heroes which seems to me to teach a sad but salutary lesson. As I sailed past Quebec, I was told by a fellow-traveller a thing I had never heard before, which moved me very much. With all our talk of globe-trotting and sightseeing, it seems to me that some of the finest sights of the globe are neglected or not appreciated. It was only by such a casual stranger that I was once told, what I hope is the truth, that on the mountain range between two South American Republics, which had made peace with each other, there stands a colossal figure of Christ; apparently one of the largest, and surely one of the most impressive, statues in the world. But it stands, if it does stand, alone and enormous upon the mountains.

Somewhat in the same way I had seen many tributes to Wolfe, of a worthy or unworthy sort. I had seen him in patriotic posters, figuring side by side with people whom he would have intensely disliked, such as Cecil Rhodes. But it was only this chance information which informed me that a monument has been set up on that high place to Wolfe and Montcalm together, with a fine Latin inscription saying that fate gave to them the same death and the same honour.

And when I thought of that worthy commemoration, of those two great and gallant soldiers, it occurred to me that they were, in truth, nearer together, even in their lifetime, than most of their kindred are to-day. There were real differences, of course; Montcalm was a noble and Wolfe a man of the middle classes, risen by merit; but their notion of the manners, the code of honour, and the necessary information of a gentleman would have been very much the same. Neither would have thought it odd for a soldier to go about quoting poetry; both would have thought it quite ordinary and obvious to be quoting Horace. I fancy there was a far wider division, at the beginning of the Great War, between French and Foch. The older generals were nearer together as enemies than the modern generals were as allies. By which I do not mean to refer to any of the quarrels about quarrels, the reports of rivalries or irritations in the higher command, which occur in all wars, and can easily occur between fellow-countrymen. I mean that the whole make-up of the mind of a man like Foch was more exclusively French, and more puzzling to a man who was exclusively English, than was a great continental noble to a scholarly Englishman like Wolfe. The Latin of Horace was a link between two eighteenth-century gentlemen, whether French or English. The Latin of the Mass, as heard by a French soldier, is not a link with the Latin of the Latin grammar as vaguely remembered by an English soldier.

We are perpetually being told to-day that nations are drawing nearer to each other; Mr. Wells is supposed to be engaged in an Open Conspiracy in the matter; I can only say that, if it is open, it is not at all obvious. I grieve to say that I gravely doubt it. I fear that the French and English, at this moment, understand each other a great deal less than they did not only when they were allies in the Great War, but even when they were enemies in the older and lesser wars. Indeed, the farther we go back the closer the French and English come together. The Black Prince and Bertrand Duguesclin were even more capable of understanding each other than Montcalm and Wolfe. That would not, of course, have prevented them from killing each other, which was all in the game. But they would have agreed much more about the rules of the game, and especially about the rules of the killing. The truth is, of course, that France and England were very nearly one nation in the Middle Ages; at least, in the early Middle Ages. The English kings especially were always trying to make them one nation; but then it must be remembered that, in a sense, even the English kings were French kings.

Now, I do not wish myself to make England and France one nation; my views on that subject are the same as those energetically advanced by St. Joan of Arc. But I do think it a fitting subject for sober and prayerful consideration, whether with invocations to St. George or St. Denis, to St. Joan the fighter or St. Francis the peacemaker, that these two great Western nations have steadily drifted further and further apart through the centuries, and are now so very far apart as they are. The national division is really dangerous when it cuts across all other differences, and is really much deeper than they. There have always been strong hatreds against special types or tendencies, such as much of the medieval world felt against the Moslem or much of the modern world feels against the Bolshevist. But, though men may hate Russia because of Bolshevism, they do not hate France because of Republicanism or Roman Catholicism, or any one definable intellectual idea.

The ordinary Englishman does not understand either the French Republican or the French Royalist; he is equally mystified by the French atheist and the French Catholic. The English Radical cannot comprehend the French Radical; the Englishman who is most loyal to his own monarch is utterly ignorant of the French case for a return to monarchy. Yet France is still what she always was, the intellectual focus and creative crater of Christendom; the place where the ideas are hammered out and tested which are to build or to destroy a world. Those who do not understand what is happening in Paris are dangerously ignorant of what will soon be happening everywhere; for all Frenchmen are Radicals in the sense of going to the roots of things, and none more Radical than the Royalist. And it seems to me a very menacing and perilous thing that we have lost, so much as we have, that one flash of the ancient Western understanding which shone for an instant on the marching armies of the Marne.

XXXV. On the Bad Word for Guild

IT is a very old controversial custom to give a dog a bad name, which is generally the more learned scientific name for a cat. It is then, of course, a comparatively easy and natural matter to nail him up as a bat or a barn-door owl. Such fantasies of logic are the commonplaces of controversial history. The most usual form of the process, as we all know, is to fix some person with a definite label, and then proceed to deduce everything from the label and nothing from the person. I have experienced this, in my own small way often enough. Somebody will write: ‘Mr. Chesterton is a medievalist; and he is therefore quite justified (from his own benighted standpoint) in indulging as he does, in the sport of tearing out the teeth of Jews, burning hundreds of human beings alive, and perpetually seeking for the Philosopher’s Stone.’ But I never said I was a medievalist; and I have only the very vaguest idea of what it would mean. But I have a very vivid and definite idea of what I mean. And what I mean does not involve providing free dentistry for Jews; though indeed there is only one doubtful tale of King John doing to one Jew what it is now considered highly hygienic to do to everybody. Nor does it include seeking for the Philosopher’s Stone; though it might involve seeking, somewhat wearily, for the Philosopher. The simple truth, which some people, seem to find it so difficult to understand or to believe, is that what a reasonable man believes in is not this or that *period*, with all its ideas, good or bad, but in certain ideas that may happen to have been present in one period and relatively absent from another period. But nothing can convince his critics that he does not think in terms of hats and coats and caps and feathers and jerkins and hooded robes. Nothing will convince them that he thinks in terms of thought.

A very good working example is in the word Guild. As a matter of fact, it is the moderns and not the medievals who use the word in a romantic and irrational way. Anything in the world may be called a Guild nowadays: a society for picking up orange-peel may be the Guild of the Golden Gleaners; or a company of pierrots performing at Margate and Ramsgate may be the Guild of the Ghostly Guitars; or a movement for muzzling cats as well as dogs may be a Guild for Equal Rights for Four-Footed Friends. But whenever *we*, who are accused of this mysterious medievalism, happen to say a word in favour of the Guild idea, nobody seems to imagine for a moment that it is really an idea. Now, as a matter of fact, it is an idea, and in that sense nothing less or more than an idea. It is an economic and ethical theory for the construction of certain parts of society; and it has nothing in the world to do with the romance or ritual externals or picturesque costume of that society. To say that you believe in Guilds is like saying that you believe in Trusts, or in State Ownership, or in Syndicalism, or in any other definite way of managing certain matters of trade and employment and exchange. In my opinion, the Middle Ages were fortunate in having begun to develop industry in this way. But the Middle Ages were extremely unfortunate in many other ways; and not least in being ultimately unable to develop it. But if anybody says that I merely behold, as in a dream, ideal craftsmen in coloured garments carving exquisite masterpieces, or happy apprentices dancing round the maypole or distributing the Christmas ale, then he is a hundred miles away from the point at issue. The case for the Guild has nothing to do with the romance of medievalism; nothing whatever.

The theory of a Guild, as distinct from Socialism as generally defined, and Capitalism as at present practised, is simply this. The men working in a particular trade remain independent tradesmen; in the sense that they are independent and therefore up to a point competitive. Each is working for himself, with his own capital or machinery, and in that sense each is working against the others. But each has entered into an agreement with the others, that he will not compete past a certain point or work against the others in certain unfair and forbidden ways. In other words, there is a competition, but it is a deliberately limited competition; or, if you will, an artificially limited competition. The object is perfectly simple: that it should remain a competition, and not merely turn into a combine. Capitalist competition, which started avowedly as unlimited competition, has only been running freely for about a hundred years, and everywhere it has turned into a combine. I use the word combine as a polite convention; for, of course, we all know that it involves no equality of combination. The true story of the thing is that when all the shops are let loose to compete anyhow and everywhere, by any method good or bad, one shop swallows all the rest. To speak more rightly and worthily, one man swallows all the rest. It is very often, by the nature of the competition, the worst shop and the worst man.

Now the Guild method is no more medieval than it is modern, in so far as it is a principle apart from time. The best proof is that it does still exist in a practical profession with which we are all acquainted. The Doctor, the ordinary general practitioner, whom most of us know and to whom many of us owe our lives, is a typical example of the member of a Guild. He is not a Socialist official; he is not a State servant; he is an example of private enterprise. That is to say, he owns his own lancet and stethoscope; he has to buy his own practice; he does in a certain degree compete with the men of his own trade. But he is forbidden to compete with them by certain methods; he is forbidden to drive another doctor out of his practice by certain expedients of self-assertion or self-advertisement.; he has to observe towards his fellow-doctor a certain respect and consideration. He has to do this because he has joined a Guild or confraternity, which exists for the maintenance of the members of his profession as a whole. Its definite and deliberate policy is to keep all the doctors in existence, as far as possible, and *prevent* one of them destroying all the rest. Once it is admitted that a man may use any methods of advancement and advertisement, the chances are that about twenty honest doctors will be swallowed up by one quack. We know this is what has happened in journalism and in commerce, and in any number of other things.

It is also to be noted that the other side of the old Guild idea, which balances this idea of preserving the small man in independence, the idea of testing him as to his claims to such independence, is also true of the modern doctor, as of the medieval Master. It is often regretted that Trade Unions do not insist, as did the Guilds, on a standard of work and finish. They cannot do so under modern conditions, because they exist to contend with another and specially modern evil. But it is quite true that, before the Guild protected a man from unfair competition, it examined him in the mastery of his craft; and all that obviously corresponds to modern medical examinations and medical degrees. Now a man may quite reasonably disapprove of this system, just as I, in my own opinion, quite reasonably approve of it. He may say quite truly that it has evils of its own. He may say quite tenably that in his view those evils outweigh the good. But his attitude is neither true nor tenable if he pretends that the case for this social system is a mass of romantic rubbish about the perfect beauty of the Middle Ages. He is simply making a fool of himself when he talks of the method by which all the most modern surgery accomplished and all the most novel medical theories advanced as if it were a mere fantastic dream of bringing back falconry and tilting-armour; or as if nobody could trust Sir Stanley

Hewett or Sir Thomas Horder without wanting to wave a pennon or wear a tabard.

XXXVI. On Sophistication

SOME are complaining that the rising generation is sophisticated; and it is true that some members of it are too sophisticated even to believe in sophistry. They believe in nothing; which I suppose is one way of returning to simplicity. The golden age of the sophists was somewhere about the last half of the nineteenth century. The Victorians were lectured and led a dance by any number of sophists; but that was because the Victorians were unsophisticated. They believed the most crazy paradoxes; as that it was more practical not to be logical; which is like saying that we should make sure of having a chain and not bother whether it consists of missing links. They believed that men must always have the same morality, though they had a new religion or no religion; that is, they said that what was done now for a definite reason would be done indefinitely for no reason. Those sturdy Saxon ideas were all sophistries; but that did not mean that the sturdy Saxon who accepted them was necessarily a sophist. What I think has really happened, in the ease of the more sophisticated youth of to-day, is that they have become sceptical of everything, including scepticism. And though two blacks do not make a white, it has sometimes been known, in grammar and philosophy, that two negatives make a positive. So that the sophisticated youth who has seen through the sophistical old men, may even yet see something worth seeing.

But there is one way in which the young seem to me not sophistical but very simple; and there is one type or section of them that is sufficiently simple to be called silly. A great deal of the current cult of pleasure, of luxury, of liberty in love, and all the rest of it, appears to me to be perfectly childish and childish in the literal sense that it is greedy without any grasp of consequences. I read novels and poems in which the seeker after pleasure simply goes on saying, over and over again: ‘I must have Happiness. I must have Life. I must have Love. Why do you reproach me because I cannot live without passing from ecstasy to ecstasy?’ This seems to me about as simple as the speech of a savage who should say: ‘I must have Gin. I like Gin. I like more and more Gin. Why will you not instantly provide me with a hundred bottles of Gin?’ It does not seem to require much intellectual strenuousness to say this. It is, like other simple things, quite true as far as it goes. But in the matter of connected thought and the sense of consequence it does not go very far. Gin does make a man happy; up to a point more gin will make him more happy; but even more gin will make him many other things as well. By a succession of phases not contemplated by the philosopher in his first phase, it will make him first drunk, then dead drunk, and then dead to the world, and then very possibly dead altogether. That also seems to be a simple truth, requiring no great subtlety; but the savage cannot see it, and the sex novelist cannot see it. He cannot see, what nearly everybody in history has hitherto seen, that there are certain laws and limits to the mind, as there are certain laws and limits to the body. There is such a thing as concentration; there is such a thing as contrast; there is such a thing as proportion; there is emphatically such a thing as boredom. Above all, there is such a thing as a contradiction in terms; and it is a contradiction in terms to have every moment a crisis, every event an escapade, every fact an exception, every person an eccentric, every day a holiday, or society an endless Saturnalia. If people try to do that, they will find it dull; just as certainly as, if they drink unlimited gin, we shall find them drunk. If you do literally paint the town red, you will not be able to use it as a background, either to the red flag of Bolshevism or the red flower of a blameful life. If you do literally go on till all is blue, you will not be able to distinguish the special and delicate blueness even of the decadents' blue roses and blue wine. These are laws of the mind, analogous to laws of the eye. And the laws of the eye are not altered by everybody putting on the same sort of horned spectacles, that each one of them may look separate and distinguished.

But there is one particular form of this modern simplicity that has always puzzled me very much. I mean the way in which those who dislike certain old things, such as war or discipline or various forms of danger, talk about ending them without asking how they begin. They always assume an association between these things, which none of us particularly likes, and other things which they particularly dislike. They say, for instance, that kings or capitalists, or some other privileged class, have invented flags and frontiers, that we may be drilled to defend them with guns and bayonets. They do not seem to see that they might need the guns and bayonets even if they were not defending the frontiers and flags. They might need them if they were defending anything. They might need them if they were defending their own ideal social state. And, as a matter of historical fact, they always do find that they need them to defend the very state that was invented to do away with them. But I am very much puzzled by the childlike simplicity with which idealists walk into this trap. It was true to some extent of the eighteenth century republicans, though those old republicans were a hundred times more intelligent than most of our twentieth century sceptics. Still, some of those charming philosophical gentlemen, of the age of Rousseau and Voltaire, did tend to talk as if the Natural Man would find it easy to break the sword when once he had broken the sceptre. They did talk as if nobody but kings would ever want cannons, and battles could only arise out of the dynastic ambitions of despotic states. We all know the ironic but very inspiring sequel. The sequel was that the Republic was born amid the roar of its own cannons; that it could only manage to survive by fighting battle after battle with merciless valour and armies growing more military every day; until the final fury of that militancy sent forth the greatest warrior of the world.

In the face of this example, the Bolshevists did exactly the same. In face even of the Bolshevist example, our own English Communists are doing exactly the same. The Russian revolutionists also began by being pacifists. They also set all their hopes on merely dissolving the discipline of the despotic armies. They also seem never to have reflected that they would want to have revolutionist armies, if only to fight the despotic armies. And of course, in an incredibly short period of time, they found out the very simple fact that revolutionists cannot be pacifists. They may set up what they call a peaceful republic, but they have to make up their minds what to do, if other people will not leave it in peace.

Suppose the Utopian has founded his Utopia, and another country makes war on Utopia. What, when all is said and done, is he to do? Is he to allow his perfect state (or what he is so simple as to think his perfect state) to be destroyed and disappear? Or is he to defend it by the only weapons that will defend it? One would think this dilemma was so staringly obvious that anybody must have seen it from the very first. That dilemma has nothing in the world to do with crowns or sceptres or capitalism or private property. Let anybody imagine any sort of simplified society, and I can imagine it being attacked. That fact seems simple enough for an infant to see. Yet I have read scores of young pacifist poets and prophets who could not see it. That is an example of what I mean by a sort of simplicity almost more exasperating than sophistry. That is a case of the same sort of simplicity as supposing that cocktails can be unlimited or gate-crashing continue when there are no gates.

XXXVII. On Dress and Decorum

THE newspapers very frequently, perhaps too frequently, describe to us the Victorian Girl, who was always covered with blushes and confusion. On the other hand, the Modern Girl has more and more of the confusion, as she has less and less of the blushes. Confusion of thought, confusion of phraseology, confusion of philosophy, deepen and darken upon her as she advances into what she regards as the daylight, or the sunlight of the Sun Cure. She and all her world seem to have got into a hopeless chaos about deciding the real principles of convention and civilization. Whatever theory we may hold, we find that she holds all the theories and none of the theories; that her theories contradict each other and cancel out. The ordinary argument in the newspapers, on the subject of Dress and Decorum, for instance, is a hash of half a hundred inconsistent philosophies. It may be worth while that some of them should be sorted out, before there are too many of them to be counted.

To begin with, there is the great contradiction that the modern person pretends to be at once too innocent and too sophisticated. First he says that certain sins are so remote and repulsive that only a low-minded spy would suspect their existence. Then he goes on to say that these sins are not so very bad, even if they exist. He shouts at the top of his voice ‘To the pure in heart all things are pure’; and then goes on to explain that there is really no such thing as purity. He calls the moralist a Puritan, as the most withering of all terms of abuse; which is very amusing to some of us, who remember how recently we were called upon to admire the Puritanism of the *Mayflower* and the execution of Charles the First, and to pardon the massacre of Wexford and the witch-smelling of Salem merely because they were Puritan. He describes any decent citizen as Nosey Parker or (with a touch of fierce anti-feminism) as Mrs. Grundy; all with the object of suggesting that nobody but a person with an impure imagination could see anything but spotless purity in the pagan habits of our time.

Well, all that is applicable enough, when there is really anybody to apply it to. I have myself protested against Puritanism and Parkerism and the sour vigilance that would arrest the amusements of the populace. I entirely agree that it is disgusting to be nosey about anything that is normal; such as dancing or swimming, considered in themselves. My position on that point is what it has always been, and my position is perfectly clear. But the position of the New Pagan is not in the least clear. For the New Pagan attempts to maintain, at the same time, that the real violation of Christian morals is unimportant to the Pagan moralist. But in that case, how can it be wrong for the Christian moralist to accuse the Pagan moralist? The Christian cannot be merely morbid in saying that sin is involved, if the Pagan says that sin is irrelevant even if it is involved. I may be mad if I accuse my friend Smith of stealing the spoons, when he is a respectable person with the ordinary respect for private property. But I cannot be morbidly and insanely malicious when I say he might steal the spoons, if he says himself that he *will* steal the spoons. I may call it being a thief, and he may call it being a Class-conscious Communist Expropriator. But it is absurd to pretend that property does not matter, and then to be indignant at the charge of thinking it does not matter. It is equally absurd to deny propriety as to deny property, and then to say that only a fiend would suspect you of disregarding the property or propriety that you deny.

This is an obvious example of the modern muddle, but it is an annoying one. Whether certain acts are wicked or no we will debate when the statement is clearly made to us. But a thing cannot be so wicked that it is insane to suggest it, and so innocent that it is blameless to do it. There are, however, a large number of other confusions which any clear-thinking man can see in the modern commentary. We talk about the pagan philosophy; but the trouble with our own pagans is that they have no philosophy. We talk, by a sort of habit, about Modern Thought, forgetting the familiar fact that moderns do not think. They only feel, and that is why they are so much stronger in fiction than in facts; why their novels are so much better than their newspapers. The current comment on all these things is not even pagan; it is the queerest sort of patchwork of pagan and purely Christian ideas.

For instance, somebody is sure to say in the debate about Decorum: ‘Is not the human body beautiful?’ To which somebody a little more sensible will be quite entitled to answer ‘No’. If he is a Scot, and therefore a Socratic philosopher, he will be entitled to answer the question with a question, and say: ‘Is the hippopotamus beautiful?’ The hippopotamus is certainly natural, even if he looks unnatural. He is certainly naked, and accepts no regulations about bathing-tents or bathing-costumes. But the mere fact that he is natural does not make us, in the ordinary sense, admit that he is beautiful.

Personally, for my own part, I think he is beautiful; but then, I have a Gothic taste for the grotesque, nourished upon gargoyles. I know what I mean by saying that gargoyles may be beautiful. But the modern materialists do not know what they mean by saying that men must be beautiful.

All that talk about the divinity and dignity of the human body is stolen from theology, and is quite meaningless without theology. It dates from the Garden of Eden, and the idea (which I happen to hold firmly) that God created Man in His own image. But, if you remove that religious idea, there is no more sense in saying that every human being is lovely than in saying that every hippopotamus is lovely. It is a matter of taste; and many of us, after watching a sufficient number of human beings at Brighton, might prefer the hippopotamus.

The old atheists had a theory of life, that could be stated as a connected train of thought. The old theologians had a theory of life, that could be stated as a connected train of thought. But the moderns who call themselves Pagans have no connected theory that can be stated at all. Their view of life is a hotch-potch of human and superhuman and subhuman ideas, collected everywhere and connected nowhere. The modern muddler likes to think he is the Superman; likes to think he is the image of God; likes to think as he pleases; but prefers not to think at all. If he had the humility to behave like a beast, we should at least be free from the obligation to regard him as a god. We should not be bound to admit that every beast is beautiful; having religious doubts, perhaps, about the hippopotamus or the hornbill. If he would clearly and consistently aspire to beauty, we might ask him to add to it a little dignity. But in fact he has returned to chaos, where there is no asking, nor is there any answer. If man comes out of chaos, by blind evolution or merely groping growth, there is no more sense in calling his body noble than in calling any lump of fungus or cactus noble. If it is noble, it is so by some patent of nobility; and nobility is conferred by a King. But I advise such writers to defer the study of the Body and begin to employ the Mind.

XXXVIII. On Algernon Charles Swinburne

I

MOST modern titles and slogans have to say the precise opposite of what they mean, for the sake of brevity. Sometimes the organizers are so sincere as to explain this immediately afterwards and use the sub-title to prove that the title is not true. A little while ago a series of short stories appeared, proclaiming in its editorial title that each author had chosen his best story. But the editor, who evidently suffered from intelligence (and it does sometimes entail suffering) was perfectly well aware that no sane author would say that any one story was absolutely and in all aspects the best; indeed, a sane author is more likely to be hag-ridden with the horrid memory of the worst. So the editor put in a note to explain his own title, which he said was necessary, because it was so much shorter. It is true that the phrase 'My Best Story' is very much shorter than the more accurate phrase, 'I think this story is one of the relatively few by which I might possibly consent that people should judge my general intelligence, such as it is.' It is also true that the phrase, 'This story is utter trash,' is very much shorter than the phrase, 'This story is not, fairly considered, quite absolute and utter trash.' But they do not, to say the least of it, mean the same thing. And selecting the shorter would be unwise, even in a publicity expert.

A rather similar problem arose about a recent selection of English essays, made and introduced by the late Lord Birkenhead; it was a very good selection, and it was not alone in suffering from the particular problem. In large letters on the title-page it had to bear the title of 'The Hundred Best English Essays'; and in the very first words of the introduction Lord Birkenhead very sensibly said that there could not possibly be any such thing as 'The Hundred Best English Essays'. He proceeded, in a very frank and sympathetic manner, to explain that it was not only impossible for anybody to do anything except make a reasonable collection of very good essays, but that he (for his part) had practically put in all the essays simply because he liked them. I really do not know what else any one can do with essays but like them — except, of course, if one has such darker reactions, dislike them. Of all forms of literature they are perhaps the least to be fitted into the old standards of judgment, by which it was in some sense possible to legislate for the drama or the ode. But, anyhow, there is something a little amusing about the claims of publicity and business requiring us to reverse all that we mean, in order to get anybody to listen to what we say. There is something comic about sacrificing everything to the headline, and letting it insist that the article should stand on its head.

I did not mention this book of essays, however, with the purpose of passing in review all its essays, still less the nature of the essay. I have to thank the compiler for bringing back many good things I may have missed or forgotten; but the one which especially caught my eye and concerns my pen is an excellent study by a critic lately dead of a poet whom he knew well and of whom he writes admirably. I refer to the essay on Swinburne by Sir Edmund Gosse. It contains any amount of matter upon which others could pronounce with much more authority than I. I only met Swinburne once; and though I met Gosse a great many times, I would never claim to have got past the guard of that polished rapier any more than anybody else. I had one letter from him about Stevenson, which I count one of the great honours of my life; for the rest, I was only one of a crowd of younger men to whom he was both ironical and kind. But there is something in the general and very vivid picture of Swinburne which he presents, which makes me inclined to linger perhaps belatedly on that name and on the poetry which, as poetry, was as straight as a singing arrow; but, considered as philosophy, has always puzzled me very much. In other words, if we consider the target of the arrow, we find that there is nothing to consider; it is not even so clear a concentric scheme as a labyrinth; it is rather a labyrinth without a centre.

In plain words, after reading Gosse’s essay again, I asked myself: ‘What on earth did Swinbume mean? Or did he mean anything?’ It is easy enough after reading some of the poems, especially the later, longer and generally lesser poems, to say that he did not mean anything; that he was simply a musician gone wrong; a lunatic with something singing in his head; a creature throbbing with suppressed dancing; a creature who could not help foaming at the mouth with flowers and flames and blood and blossoms and the sea. But it is not easy, after reading Gosse’s essay, to deny that he did in some way take something seriously; and something not himself, if his contemporaries doubted whether it was something for making righteousness. He did take counsel with Landor and Hugo as if they were grave gods making a world of justice or right reason. He did seem really to believe that some Utopia depended on the success of Cavour or the failure of Louis Bonaparte. But exactly how he connected it in his own mind with the queer licentious pessimism, like the last debauch of a suicide, which fills his other verses, I cannot make out; nor how he supposed that anything, even a Utopia, could be made of such flames and foamings. Surely he was not hoping for a republic in which all the citizens should be free to bite each other. Surely the hounds of spring, so hopefully upon winter's traces, were not all of them frothing at the mouth like mad dogs?

Yet it is his taste in virtue rather than his taste in vice that puzzles me. In the worst and most world-famous of all his lines he wrote something about the raptures and roses of vice and the lilies and languors of virtue. The obvious thing to say is that he cannot have known much about virtue, if he thought it was languid. But, to do him justice, his own appeals to public virtue were anything but languid. When talking of his own favourite type, which used to be called Republican Virtue, he seems to have understood all that Roman dignity and decency which he tore to rags in his ravings about sex. He used another nonsensical tag about somebody being 'noble and nude and antique'. So good a scholar ought to have known that, in the real world of the antique, a noble would never have desired to be nude. He would have regarded it as the mark, not of a noble, but a slave. In reality Swinburne knew all this; indeed one could hardly be a friend of so very ancient a Roman as Landor without knowing it.

Then, again, the Pagan philosophy he pitted against Christianity is a mass of such inconsistencies. In *Songs Before Sunrise* he offers Pantheism as the religion of the revolution. Pantheism may or may not be a good creed for a philosopher; Pantheism is certainly in one sense a very good creed for a Pagan philosopher. But Pantheism is a hopeless creed for a revolutionist. If all things are equally divine, then the tyrant and the bigot are as divine as the tribune and the truth-seeker. In 'Hertha' he imagines the universe as a vast tree, out of which all things in turn bud and bloom; and then takes refuge in the miserable metaphor of saying that 'creeds' are merely worms that have got into the bark — the devil knows how. If all things are equally unfolded from one natural root, the worms of oppression are as natural as the flowers of freedom. If they came otherwise, then the universe is not universal; and the worm in the tree of nature is as theological as the snake in the tree of knowledge. There might indeed be a war of spring sproutings against dead leaves or decayed fruit; but that only means that each is equally good in its season. And what is the good of a revolutionary creed that cannot denounce a tyrant in his season of strength? I believe that this folly of making Pantheism the creed of liberals has a great deal to do with the decline of liberal politics and the reactions against it to-day. Hertha, explaining (at some length) that she is everything, remarks, if I remember right:

I the mark that is missed
And the arrows that miss.

It will strike a thoughtful mind that such arrows are rather likely to miss. William Tell will not fight well for Freedom, if he thinks that he and his bow and the target and the tyrant are all the same thing.

II

When I say that Swinburne’s praise of virtue puzzles me more than his praise of vice, I do not (I may respectfully explain) mean that my natural taste in villainy makes me regard it as normal to be a villain, or that my brain reels with mystification when I contemplate any proved and public act of decency. I do not mean that crime is second nature to me, or that I set myself like a sleuth to track down a man and discover why he is not a murderer. What I mean is this: that in the case of Swinburne the loose poetry was really loose. It was flowing, both in form and spirit, and rather after the fashion of the flowing of tears. It was self-expression, but it was not self-assertion; and it certainly was not any other kind of assertion, like the assertion of a definite heresy or sophistry. In so far as there was some thing indefensible, he was not defending it. He was, perhaps, describing it, and it may be a bad thing that such things should be described; but such things are not in any case the materials of a moral or political system. Such hysterical, half-involuntary confession is not uncommon in literature, especially when (as is almost certainly the case with Swinburne) the literary man is confessing what he has never done. Anyhow, over the whole of this department of the poet’s work there is a spirit of appealing and almost engaging despair, a pessimism about the impotence of man. He does not pretend that the pagan gods are good; he only confesses that they are strong — or, in other words, that he is weak. What puzzled me was how he really reconciled this part of his work with the other part, in which he professed to see a new hope for men in the virile and universal Republic, in which men should become heroes in becoming citizens. There is hardly a hopeful line in *Songs Before Sunrise* that could not be answered with a hopeless line from *Poems and Ballads*. Perhaps the most musical and magical verse in ‘Dolores’ is that in open glorification of ‘the implacable beautiful tyrant’; and what is the use, after that, of denouncing all tyrants as implacable? What is the good of remaining rigid with horror of Napoleon, when you have flung yourself in a lyric ecstasy before Nero? What is the use of saying that you bring seed by night to sow, that men to come may reap and eat by day, when it is apparently so very easy for anybody at any moment to be tired of ‘what may come hereafter to men that sow and reap’? What is the sense of shouting about crowning man as the king of all things, if ‘the crown of his life, as it closes, is darkness; the fruit thereof dust’?

Nevertheless, there is another sense in which I would not dwell harshly upon the looser type of verse, as part of the real problem of this strange personality. I say that the poet in the poem does not defend himself. The poet in prose was less wise, and defended himself indefensibly. I do not care so much as Gosse did for the ranting and railing prose in which Swinburne accused his critics of being unjust to him; nevertheless, I think that they were unjust to him. I do not mean that he was right; but I do mean that they were wrong. The critics were wrong in the worst way in which a critic can be wrong about a poem: in being wrong about the point of it. The poem may contain a great deal that is pointless or beside the point; it may contain a great deal that is lawless and shameless and really at enmity with morals — in which case I am so old-fashioned as to think that it ought to be denounced and even destroyed as such. But even in condemning it we must condemn its point; and to condemn its point we must comprehend its point. We must understand what the man has really said, and not hang him as a heretic for saying something he never said. Now much of the wilder part of *Poems and Ballads* is not meant to describe merely a rush towards the antics of animal love, but a reaction from the tragedy of true love. The poet, in a morbid mood of mockery, is bitterly professing (we might say pretending) to prefer the gutter to the palaces of ideal enchantment, from which he has been cast forth by fickleness or pride. It is not a nice state of mind. it is a very nasty state of mind; but it is that state of mind and no other, and not the state of one who always preferred gutters because he was a gutter-snipe. To put the point shortly, we cannot understand the poem called ‘Dolores’ without reading it side by side with the poem called ‘The Triumph of Time’. For instance, I have condemned, as every sane critic has condemned, all that hydrophobiac nonsense of Swinburne about people ‘biting’ each other. But it is not quite fair, even to that infernal nonsense, to read it without remembering the verse to which it in some sense leads up, and which is the true inner burden of the poem:

In yesterday’s reach and to-morrow’s,
Out of sight though they lie of to-day,
There have been and there yet shall be sorrows
That smite not and bite not in play.

The life and the love thou despisest,
These hurt us indeed, and in vain —
O wise among women, and wisest,
Our Lady of Pain.

I do not think the heartless woman is the wisest woman; I venture to doubt whether Swinburne thought so. But Swinburne did say so; and this is what he said; and what he meant was that the pains of a nobler love are so much more terrible that perhaps the coarse person has the best of it, after all. He repeats this main theme again and again in the poem, so that it is incredible that the critics did not see the point, even if they were right to condemn it. He says it plainly in the lines

No thorns go as deep as a rose’s,
And love is more cruel than lust;
Time turns the old days to derision,
Our loves into corpses and wives,
And marriage and death and division
Make barren our lives.

And it is then only that he says, in words horrible enough, but with something of a moral horror:

And pale with the past we draw nigh thee
And satiate with comfortless hours:
And we know thee, how all men belie thee,
And we gather the fruit of thy flowers.

Or again, elsewhere:

Of languors rekindled and rallied,
Of barren delights and unclean;
Things monstrous and fruitless; a pallid
And poisonous queen.

This is not praising sin, though it may be practising it. This is rather emphasizing the disgust that is the alternative to the disappointment. It is about as idolatrous as a disappointed lover talking to a bottle of gin, and saying, ‘Damn your ugly face, I believe you’re my only friend, after all!’

I have dwelt a little on this particular point about the poet, because it involves this very vital matter of the point about a poem. Even when it is understood, the attitude may be condemned — indeed, it should be condemned. But it should not be condemned for being something else. It is a morbid view, an unmanly view, a view immoral in its practical effects. But, above all, as seems to me most striking in this connexion, it is the very worst possible view of life for anybody proposing to raise a political revolution and to found a perfect Republic. That is the question which I asked first: why it is that men who seem so keen on reforming the world equip themselves with the worst possible philosophies for doing it? It is hard to say whether poor Swinburne was a more hopeless revolutionist in being a pessimist or in being an optimist. His pantheism could only prove that the worst things are good, because they are a part of nature; and his pessimism only proved that the best things are bad, because they are doomed to disappointment and sorrow. It seems either way a weak motive for dying on a barricade for the belief that one thing is better than another. We need a fixed idea of truth to establish a reign of justice. But though Swinburne could hardly have given justice to men, he has a right to get justice from them. And I say this to show that on one point he did not receive justice — not even the justice that condemns.

III

‘I have lived long enough to have seen one thing; that love hath an end’: so runs, as every one will remember, the first line of Swinburne’s beautiful ‘Hymn to Proserpine’, the dirge of a Pagan farewell to Paganism. I have lived long enough to have seen one thing: that the love of Swinburne hath an end. Not the admiration for Swinburne, not the reasonable appreciation of Swinburne; but that particular sort of love of Swinburne which is like first love in youth; perhaps (one is sometimes tempted to think) the only sort of real love that Swinburne had ever known anything about. I mean that sort of mere magic spell or enchantment by Swinburne which so many young people had in the period when, as Mr. Maurice Baring has very truly said, Swinburne seems to them not so much the best poet as simply the only poet. That sort of love certainly hath an end, and most of us have lived long enough to have seen it. But it is symbolic of something larger; something that is connected not only with Swinburne but with Swinburnianism.

Any man who has ‘lived long enough’, and not actually stiffened with negative prejudices, must know by this time that the modern movement, and every sort of movement, revolves round and round the central pillar of the old Christian tradition. It is emphatically not leaving that pillar behind and rushing right away towards some other winning-post. He knows it, for the perfectly simple reason that he has seen it careering in two totally opposite directions, and neither of them has succeeded in getting away from the post. He knows by this time, if he is honest with himself, that the whole thing is like a Giddy-go-Round at a country fair; full of rush and romantic enjoyment, but revolving upon one centre that supports all the movement by being immovable. It is a glorious experience for children, and therefore for poets, who share some of the wisdom of children. It consists of concentric rings of hobby-horses, and a hobby-horse, like a hobby, is a very good thing to make a thinking man happy. In most Giddy-go-Rounds there are outer and inner rings of horses, nearer or farther from the centre; and this also is an allegory. In some Giddy-go-Rounds there are revolving rings going opposite ways which greatly increase the godlike quality of giddiness. In youth or childhood especially it is quite natural to be giddy, even if it sometimes begins to approximate to being sick. Of recent literature we might not unfairly say that for the first half of the time most of the modern poets were giddy; and now, in the second half of the time, most of the modern poets are sick.

Anyhow, Swinburne certainly rode his hobby-horse with great fire and galloping energy; but, when he fancied that he was leaving the central pillar of his childhood and his ancestry far behind him, he was really very far from the truth and very close to the pillar. And this is proved by the fact that both poetical and political energy has since galloped in exactly the contrary direction, and is still at about the same distance from the ancestral pillar as before. If anything, the more recent poets have tended to take their seats in the ring rather nearer to the pillar. I imagine that, if a man had gone round during the last ten years asking the young people in the literary world whom they regarded as their hope and hero and leader, as the young of my youth regarded Swinburne, it is about ten to one that most of them would mention Mr. T. S. Eliot. Wilde said that Swinburne was the only true Laureate, for the poet praised by all other poets must always wear the laurel. Laurels and Laureates are not so much in the style of our more cynical and realistic time. But the young would probably support a young writer like Mr. Eliot, even if both the young writer and the young admirers strike older people as being rather prematurely old. Anyhow, the two poets will serve very well for the purpose of the parallel about poetry, or even about polities.

Swinburne was quite certain that he and the world were galloping nearer and nearer to the new Republic and farther and farther from the old Church. If he had been right, it would follow that, by this time, a man like Mr. Eliot would be even more Republican than Swinburne. As a matter of fact, Mr. Eliot has actually walked out of a real live Republic and loudly announced that he is a Royalist. He has also declared himself an Anglo-Catholic; but I will leave the religious issue as far as possible on one side, because though even more cogent, it is much more controversial. But even in the matter of politics alone it is quite obvious that there has been a complete turn of the tide. The Giddy-go-Round is going round in the reverse direction, but, I am glad to say, almost as giddily. The wooden horses are galloping with their accustomed fervour, and I hope the children who ride on them are happy. But one who has seen this complete reversal of direction since his own childhood will not be able to believe that the horses broke loose from the post and fled farther and farther from it for ever merely because he was told so in childhood. Swinburne's hobby-horse, for instance, had a perpetual impulse to gallop away over the Alps into Italy. But suppose he were really still galloping into Italy, like Hannibal or Napoleon, what sort of Italy would he find? The political ideas of Swinburne were the ideas of the period of Mazzini. The political ideas of T. S. Eliot are the ideas of the period of Mussolini. It might be maintained that the new poet is nearer than the old poet to the old Roman pillar of the past. It is stark nonsense to pretend that he is farther away.

I am not dealing directly here with things that I myself accept or reject. Many people know that my own religion is even more Roman than Mr. Eliot's. Yet in many ways my polities are much more Republican than Mr. Eliot's; perhaps much more really Republican than Swinburne's. But I am not arguing about what is right or wrong in any of these views. I am merely remarking on an actual revolution in the ideas of a large number of other people, and noting that it is more like the real revolution of a Giddy-go-Round than the mere riot of a gallop. In one sense it has been revolution against revolution; that is, revolution in one sense reversing revolution in the other. But nobody who notes the real movements in the intellectual world just now can doubt that there has been the sort of revolution that is called a reaction. In every country there has been a reaction, either practical or theoretical, in the direction of order or authority or classical proportion. In France there has been the influence of Maurras in polities or Maritain in religion. In Germany the Dictator is a vision; in Italy he is a fact. In America, the very last place where most people would look for classicism, there has arisen an influential school of classicists. Those who most fiercely denounce the fact most clearly confess the fact, and even their denunciations are witness that it is a universal fact. The enemies of Humanism denounce it as intellectual Fascism. The enemies of Fascism make fun of its appeal to classicism. Of course a man may quite reasonably like some of these things and dislike others, or like some parts of these things and dislike others, as I do myself. But, as I say, I am not talking about likes or dislikes, and I am not talking about myself. I am talking about the way the world goes round, and pointing out that the moral world does not always go round from right to left. It is, at this moment, most certainly going round from left to right. The sort of political party that used to be called the Extreme Right contains more of the really original modern thinkers than the party called the Extreme Left. I only say that the return to traditionalism is obviously strong enough to be recognized. I think it very possible that it may soon be strong enough to be resisted. But when strange survivals of the Swinburnian epoch, imagining themselves to be young, actually come and tell me that the world is on an endless march towards wild liberty and indefinite relaxation of everything, I really do not know how to answer, except with a melancholy smile. ‘I have lived long enough to have seen one thing . . .’

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

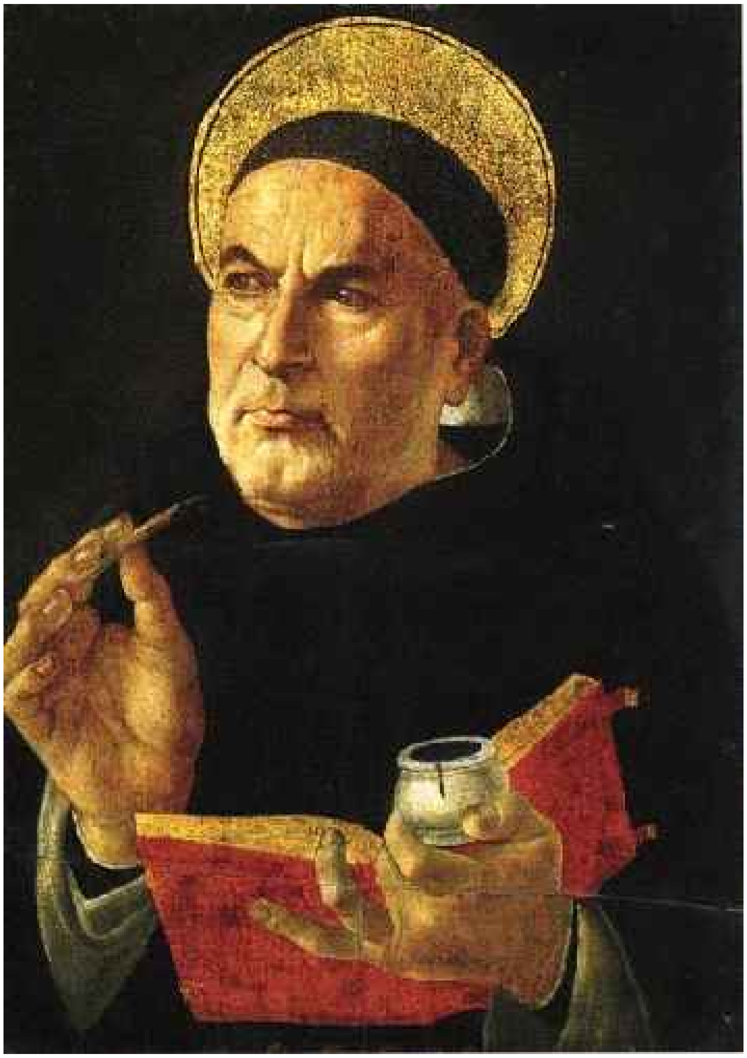

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This book makes no pretence to be anything but a popular sketch of a great historical character who ought to be more popular. Its aim will be achieved, if it leads those who have hardly even heard of St. Thomas Aquinas to read about him in better books. But from this necessary limitation certain consequences follow, which should perhaps be allowed for from the start.

First, it follows that the tale is told very largely to those who are not of the communion of St. Thomas; and who may be interested in him as I might be in Confucius or Mahomet. Yet, on the other hand, the very need of presenting a clean-cut outline involved its cutting into other outlines of thought, among those who may think differently. If I write a sketch of Nelson mainly for foreigners, I may have to explain elaborately many things that all Englishmen know, and possibly cut out, for brevity, many details that many Englishmen would like to know. But, on the other side, it would be difficult to write a very vivid and moving narrative of Nelson, while entirely concealing the fact that he fought with the French. It would be futile to make a sketch of St. Thomas and conceal the fact that he fought with heretics; and yet the fact itself may embarrass the very purpose for which it is employed. I can only express the hope, and indeed the confidence, that those who regard me as the heretic will hardly blame me for expressing my own convictions, and certainly not for expressing my hero’s convictions. There is only one point upon which such a question concerns this very simple narrative. It is the conviction, which I have expressed once or twice in the course of it, that the sixteenth-century schism was really a belated revolt of the thirteenth-century pessimists. It was a back-wash of the old Augustinian Puritanism against the Aristotelian liberality. Without that, I could not place my historical figure in history. But the whole is meant only for a rough sketch of a figure in a landscape and not of a landscape with figures.

Second, it follows that in any such simplification I can hardly say much of the philosopher beyond showing that he had a philosophy. I have only, so to speak, given samples of that philosophy. Lastly, it follows that it is practically impossible to deal adequately with the theology. A lady I know picked up a book of selections from St. Thomas with a commentary; and began hopefully to read a section with the innocent heading, “The

Simplicity of God." She then laid down the book with a sigh and said, "Well, if that's His simplicity, I wonder what His complexity is like." With all respect to that excellent Thomistic commentary. I have no desire to have this book laid down, at the very first glance, with a similar sigh. I have taken the view that the biography is an introduction to the philosophy, and that the philosophy is an introduction to the theology; and that I can only carry the reader just beyond the first stage of the story.

Third, I have not thought it necessary to notice those critics who, from time to time, desperately play to the gallery by reprinting paragraphs of medieval demonology in the hope of horrifying the modern public merely by an unfamiliar language. I have taken it for granted that educated men know that Aquinas and all his contemporaries, and all his opponents for centuries after, did believe in demons, and similar facts, but I have not thought them worth mentioning here, for the simple reason that they do not help to detach or distinguish the portrait. In all that, there was no disagreement between Protestant or Catholic theologians, for all the hundreds of years during which there was any theology; and St. Thomas is not notable as holding such views, except in holding them rather mildly. I have not discussed such matters, not because I have any reason to conceal them, but because they do not in any way personally concern the one person whom it is here my business to reveal. There is hardly room, even as it is, for such a figure in such a frame.

I

ON TWO FRIARS

Let me at once anticipate comment by answering to the name of that notorious character, who rushes in where even the Angels of the Angelic Doctor might fear to tread. Some time ago I wrote a little book of this type and shape on St. Francis of Assisi; and some time after (I know not when or how, as the song says, and certainly not why) I promised to write a book of the same size, or the same smallness on St. Thomas Aquinas. The promise was Franciscan only in its rashness; and the parallel was very far from being Thomistic in its logic. You can make a sketch of St. Francis: you could only make a plan of St. Thomas, like the plan of a labyrinthine city. And yet in a sense he would fit into a much larger or a much smaller book. What we really know of his life might be pretty fairly dealt with in a few pages; for he did not, like St. Francis, disappear in a shower of personal anecdotes and popular legends. What we know, or could know, or may eventually have the luck to learn, of his work, will probably fill even more libraries in the future than it has filled in the past. It was allowable to sketch St. Francis in an outline; but with St. Thomas everything depends on the filling up of the outline. It was even medieval in a manner to illuminate a miniature of the Poverello, whose very title is a diminutive. But to make a digest, in the tabloid manner, of the Dumb Ox of Sicily passes all digestive experiments in the matter of an ox in a tea-cup. But we must hope it is possible to make an outline of biography, now that anybody seems capable of writing an outline of history or an outline of anything. Only in the present case the outline is rather an outsize. The gown that could contain the colossal friar is not kept in stock.

I have said that these can only be portraits in outline. But the concrete contrast is here so striking, that even if we actually saw the two human figures in outline, coming over the hill in their friar’s gowns, we should find that contrast even comic. It would be like seeing, even afar off, the silhouettes of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, or of Falstaff and Master Slender. St. Francis was a lean and lively little man; thin as a thread and vibrant as a bowstring; and in his motions like an arrow from the bow. All his life was a series of plunges and scampers: darting after the beggar, dashing naked into the woods, tossing himself into the strange ship, hurling himself into the Sultan tent and offering to hurl himself into the fire. In appearance he must have been like a thin brown skeleton autumn leaf dancing eternally before the wind; but in truth it was he that was the wind.

St. Thomas was a huge heavy bull of a man, fat and slow and quiet; very mild and magnanimous but not very sociable; shy, even apart from the humility of holiness; and abstracted, even apart from his occasional and carefully concealed experiences of trance or ecstasy. St. Francis was so fiery and even fidgety that the ecclesiastics, before whom he appeared quite suddenly, thought he was a madman. St. Thomas was so stolid that the scholars, in the schools which he attended regularly, thought he was a dunce. Indeed, he was the sort of schoolboy, not unknown, who would much rather be thought a dunce than have his own dreams invaded, by more active or animated dunces. This external contrast extends to almost every point in the two personalities. It was the paradox of St. Francis that while he was passionately fond of poems, he was rather distrustful of books. It was the outstanding fact about St. Thomas that he loved books and lived on books; that he lived the very life of the clerk or scholar in *The Canterbury Tales*, who would rather have a hundred books of Aristotle and his philosophy than any wealth the world could give him. When asked for what he thanked God most, he answered simply, “I have understood every page I ever read.” St. Francis was very vivid in his poems and rather vague in his documents; St. Thomas devoted his whole life to documenting whole systems of Pagan and Christian literature; and occasionally wrote a hymn like a man taking a holiday. They saw the same problem from different angles, of simplicity and subtlety; St. Francis thought it would be enough to pour out his heart to the Mohammedans, to persuade them not to worship Mahound. St. Thomas bothered his head with every hair-splitting distinction and deduction, about the Absolute or the Accident, merely to prevent them from misunderstanding Aristotle. St. Francis was the son of a shopkeeper, or middle class trader; and while his whole life was a revolt against the mercantile life of his father, he retained none the less, something of the quickness and social adaptability which makes the market hum like a hive. In the common phrase, fond as he was of green fields, he did not let the grass grow under his feet. He was what American millionaires and gangsters call a live wire. It is typical of the mechanistic moderns that, even when they try to imagine a live thing, they can only think of a mechanical metaphor from a dead thing. There is such a thing as a live worm; but there is no such thing as a live wire. St. Francis would have heartily agreed that he was a worm; but he was a very live worm. Greatest of all foes to the go-getting ideal, he had certainly abandoned getting, but he was still going. St. Thomas, on the other hand, came out of a world where he might have enjoyed leisure, and he remained one of those men whose labour has something of the placidity of leisure. He was a hard worker, but nobody could possibly mistake him for a hustler. He had something indefinable about him, which marks those who work when they need not work. For he was by birth a gentleman of a great house, and such repose can remain as a habit, when it is no longer a motive. But in him it was expressed only in its most amiable elements; for instance, there was possibly something of it in his effortless courtesy and patience. Every saint is a man before he is a saint; and a saint may be made of every sort or kind of man; and most of us will choose between these different types according to our different tastes. But I will confess that, while the romantic glory of St. Francis has lost nothing of its glamour for me, I have in later years grown to feel almost as much affection, or in some aspects even more, for this man who unconsciously inhabited a large heart and a large head, like one inheriting a large house, and exercised there an equally generous if rather more absent-minded hospitality. There are moments when St. Francis, the most unworldly man who ever walked the world, is almost too efficient for me.

St. Thomas Aquinas has recently reappeared, in the current culture of the colleges and the salons, in a way that would have been quite startling even ten years ago. And the mood that has concentrated on him is doubtless very different from that which popularised St. Francis quite twenty years ago.

The Saint is a medicine because he is an antidote. Indeed that is why the saint is often a martyr; he is mistaken for a poison because he is an antidote. He will generally be found restoring the world to sanity by exaggerating whatever the world neglects, which is by no means always the same element in every age. Yet each generation seeks its saint by instinct; and he is not what the people want, but rather what the people need. This is surely the very much mistaken meaning of those words to the first saints, “Ye are the salt of the earth,” which caused the Ex-Kaiser to remark with all solemnity that his beefy Germans were the salt of the earth; meaning thereby merely that they were the earth’s beefiest and therefore best. But salt seasons and preserves beef, not because it is like beef; but because it is very unlike it. Christ did not tell his apostles that they were only the excellent people, or the only excellent people, but that they were the exceptional people; the permanently incongruous and incompatible people; and the text about the salt of the earth is really as sharp and shrewd and tart as the taste of salt. It is because they were the exceptional people, that they must not lose their exceptional quality. “If salt lose its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?” is a much more pointed question than any mere lament over the price of the best beef. If the world grows too worldly, it can be rebuked by the Church; but if the Church grows too worldly, it cannot be adequately rebuked for worldliness by the world.

Therefore it is the paradox of history that each generation is converted by the saint who contradicts it most. St. Francis had a curious and almost uncanny attraction for the Victorians; for the nineteenth century English who seemed superficially to be most complacent about their commerce and their common sense. Not only a rather complacent Englishman like Matthew Arnold, but even the English Liberals whom he criticised for their complacency, began slowly to discover the mystery of the Middle Ages through the strange story told in feathers and flames in the hagiographical pictures of Giotto. There was something in the story of St. Francis that pierced through all those English qualities which are most famous and fatuous, to all those English qualities which are most hidden and human: the secret softness of heart; the poetical vagueness of mind; the love of landscape and of animals. St. Francis of Assisi was the only medieval Catholic who really became popular in England on his own merits. It was largely because of a subconscious feeling that the modern world had neglected those particular merits. The English middle classes found their only missionary in the figure, which of all types in the world they most despised; an Italian beggar.

So, as the nineteenth century clutched at the Franciscan romance, precisely because it had neglected romance, so the twentieth century is already clutching at the Thomist rational theology, because it has neglected reason. In a world that was too stolid, Christianity returned in the form of a vagabond; in a world that has grown a great deal too wild, Christianity has returned in the form of a teacher of logic. In the world of Herbert Spencer men wanted a cure for indigestion; in the world of Einstein they want a cure for vertigo. In the first case, they dimly perceived the fact that it was after a long fast that St. Francis sang the Song of the Sun and the praise of the fruitful earth. In the second case, they already dimly perceived that, even if they only want to understand Einstein, it is necessary first to understand the use of the understanding. They begin to see that, as the eighteenth century thought itself the age of reason, and the nineteenth century thought itself the age of common sense, the twentieth century cannot as yet even manage to think itself anything but the age of uncommon nonsense. In those conditions the world needs a saint; but above all, it needs a philosopher. And these two cases do show that the world, to do it justice, has an instinct for what it needs. The earth was really very flat, for those Victorians who most vigorously repeated that it was round, and Alverno of the Stigmata stood up as a single mountain in the plain. But the earth is an earthquake, a ceaseless and apparently endless earthquake, for the moderns for whom Newton has been scrapped along with Ptolemy. And for them there is something more steep and even incredible than a mountain; a piece of really solid ground; the level of the level-headed man. Thus in our time the two saints have appealed to two generations, an age of romantics and an age of sceptics; yet in their own age they were doing the same work; a work that has changed the world.

Again, it may be said truly that the comparison is idle, and does not fit in well even as a fancy: since the men were not properly even of the same generation or the same historic moment. If two friars are to be presented as a pair of Heavenly Twins, the obvious comparison is between St. Francis and St. Dominic. The relations of St. Francis and St. Thomas were, at nearest, those of uncle and nephew; and my fanciful excursus may appear only a highly profane version of “Tommy make room for your uncle.” For if St. Francis and St. Dominic were the great twin brethren, Thomas was obviously the first great son of St. Dominic, as was his friend Bonaventure of St. Francis. Nevertheless, I have a reason (indeed two reasons) for taking as a text the accident of two title-pages; and putting St. Thomas beside St. Francis, instead of pairing him off with Bonaventure the Franciscan. It is because the comparison, remote and perverse as it may seem, is really a sort of short cut to the heart of history; and brings us by the most rapid route to the real question of the life and work of St. Thomas Aquinas. For most people now have a rough but picturesque picture in their minds of the life and work of St. Francis of Assisi. And the shortest way of telling the other story is to say that, while the two men were thus a contrast in almost every feature, they were really doing the same thing. One of them was doing it in the world of the mind and the other in the world of the worldly. But it was the same great medieval movement; still but little understood. In a constructive sense, it was more important than the Reformation. Nay, in a constructive sense, it was the Reformation.

About this medieval movement there are two facts that must first be emphasised. They are not, of course, contrary facts, but they are perhaps answers to contrary fallacies. First, in spite of all that was once said about superstition, the Dark Ages and the sterility of Scholasticism, it was in every sense a movement of enlargement, always moving towards greater light and even greater liberty. Second, in spite of all that was said later on about progress and the Renaissance and forerunners of modern thought, it was almost entirely a movement of orthodox theological enthusiasm, unfolded from within. It was *not* a compromise with the world, or a surrender to heathens or heretics, or even a mere borrowing of external aids, even when it did borrow them. In so far as it did reach out to the light of common day, it was like the action of a plant which by its own force thrusts out its leaves into the sun; not like the action of one who merely lets daylight into a prison.

In short, it was what is technically called a Development in doctrine. But there seems to be a queer ignorance, not only about the technical, but the natural meaning of the word Development. The critics of Catholic theology seem to suppose that it is not so much an evolution as an evasion; that it is at best an adaptation. They fancy that its very success is the success of surrender. But that is not the natural meaning of the word Development. When we talk of a child being well-developed, we mean that he has grown bigger and stronger with his own strength; not that he is padded with borrowed pillows or walks on stilts to make him look taller. When we say that a puppy develops into a dog, we do not mean that his growth is a gradual compromise with a cat; we mean that he becomes more doggy and not less. Development is the expansion of all the possibilities and implications of a doctrine, as there is time to distinguish them and draw them out; and the point here is that the enlargement of medieval theology was simply the full comprehension of that theology. And it is of primary importance to realise this fact first, about the time of the great Dominican and the first Franciscan, because their tendency, humanistic and naturalistic in a hundred ways, was truly the development of the supreme doctrine, which was also the dogma of all dogmas. It is in this that the popular poetry of St. Francis and the almost rationalistic prose of St. Thomas appear most vividly as part of the same movement. There are both great growths of Catholic development, depending upon external things only as every living and growing thing depends on them; that is, it digests and transforms them, but continues in its own image and not in theirs. A Buddhist or a Communist might dream of two things which simultaneously eat each other, as the perfect form of unification. But it is not so with living things. St. Francis was content to call himself the Troubadour of God; but not content with the God of the Troubadours. St. Thomas did not reconcile Christ to Aristotle; he reconciled Aristotle to Christ.

Yes; in spite of the contrasts that are as conspicuous and even comic as the comparison between the fat man and the thin man, the tall man and the short: in spite of the contrast between the vagabond and the student, between the apprentice and the aristocrat, between the book-hater and the book-lover, between the wildest of all missionaries and the mildest of all professors, the great fact of medieval history is that these two great men were doing the same great work; one in the study and the other in the street. They were not bringing something new into Christianity; in the sense of something heathen or heretical into Christianity; on the contrary, they were bringing Christianity into Christendom. But they were bringing it back against the pressure of certain historic tendencies, which had hardened into habits in many great schools and authorities in the Christian Church; and they were using tools and weapons which seemed to many people to be associated with heresy or heathenry. St. Francis used Nature much as St. Thomas used Aristotle; and to some they seemed to be using a Pagan goddess and a Pagan sage. What they were really doing, and especially what St. Thomas was really doing, will form the main matter of these pages; but it is convenient to be able to compare him from the first with a more popular saint; because we may thus sum up the substance of it in the most popular way. Perhaps it would sound too paradoxical to say that these two saints saved us from Spirituality; a dreadful doom. Perhaps it may be misunderstood if I say that St. Francis, for all his love of animals, saved us from being Buddhists; and that St. Thomas, for all his love of Greek philosophy, saved us from being Platonists. But it is best to say the truth in its simplest form; that they both reaffirmed the Incarnation, by bringing God back to earth.

This analogy, which may seem rather remote, is really perhaps the best practical preface to the philosophy of St. Thomas. As we shall have to consider more closely later on, the purely spiritual or mystical side of Catholicism had very much got the upper hand in the first Catholic centuries; through the genius of Augustine, who had been a Platonist, and perhaps never ceased to be a Platonist; through the transcendentalism of the supposed work of the Areopagite; through the Oriental trend of the later Empire and something Asiatic about the almost pontifical kinghood of Byzantium; all these things weighed down what we should now roughly call the Western element; though it has as good a right to be called the Christian element: since its common sense is but the holy familiarity of the word made flesh. Anyhow, it must suffice for the moment to say that theologians had somewhat stiffened into a sort of Platonic pride in the possession of intangible and untranslatable truths within; as if no part of their wisdom had any root anywhere in the real world. Now the first thing that Aquinas did, though by no means the last, was to say to these pure transcendentalists something substantially like this.

"Far be it from a poor friar to deny that you have these dazzling diamonds in your head, all designed in the most perfect mathematical shapes and shining with a purely celestial light; all there, almost before you begin to think, let alone to see or hear or feel. But I am not ashamed to say that I find my reason fed by my senses; that I owe a great deal of what I think to what I see and smell and taste and handle; and that so far as my reason is concerned, I feel obliged to treat all this reality as real. To be brief, in all humility, I do not believe that God meant Man to exercise only that peculiar, uplifted and abstracted sort of intellect which you are so fortunate as to possess: but I believe that there is a middle field of facts which are given by the senses to be the subject matter of the reason; and that in that field the reason has a right to rule, as the representative of God in Man. It is true that all this is lower than the angels; but it is higher than the animals, and all the actual material objects Man finds around him. True, man also can be an object; and even a deplorable object. But what man has done man may do; and if an antiquated old heathen called Aristotle can help me to do it I will thank him in all humility."

Thus began what is commonly called the appeal to Aquinas and Aristotle. It might be called the appeal to Reason and the Authority of the Senses. And it will be obvious that there is a sort of popular parallel to it in the fact that St. Francis did not only listen for the angels, but also listened to the birds. And before we come to those aspects of St. Thomas that were very severely intellectual, we may note that in him as in St. Francis there is a preliminary practical element which is rather moral; a sort of good and straightforward humility; and a readiness in the man to regard even himself in some ways as an animal; as St. Francis compared his body to a donkey. It may be said that the contrast holds everywhere, even in zoological metaphor, and that if St. Francis was like that common or garden donkey who carried Christ into Jerusalem, St. Thomas, who was actually compared to an ox, rather resembled that Apocalyptic monster of almost Assyrian mystery; the winged bull. But again, we must not let all that can be contrasted eclipse what was common; or forget that neither of them would have been too proud to wait as patiently as the ox and ass in the stable of Bethlehem.

There were of course, as we shall soon see, many other much more curious and complicated ideas in the philosophy of St. Thomas; besides this primary idea of a central common sense that is nourished by the five senses. But at this stage, the point of the story is not only that this was a Thomist doctrine, but that it is a truly and eminently Christian doctrine. For upon this point modern writers write a great deal of nonsense; and show more than their normal ingenuity in missing the point. Having assumed without argument, at the start, that all emancipation must lead men away from religion and towards irreligion, they have just blankly and blindly forgotten what is the outstanding feature of the religion itself.

It will not be possible to conceal much longer from anybody the fact that St. Thomas Aquinas was one of the great liberators of the human intellect. The sectarians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were essentially obscurantists, and they guarded an obscurantist legend that the Schoolman was an obscurantist. This was wearing thin even in the nineteenth century; it will be impossible in the twentieth. It has nothing to do with the truth of their theology or his; but only with the truth of historical proportion, which begins to reappear as quarrels begin to die down. Simply as one of the facts that bulk big in history, it is true to say that Thomas was a very great man who reconciled religion with reason, who expanded it towards experimental science, who insisted that the senses were the windows of the soul and that the reason had a divine right to feed upon facts, and that it was the business of the Faith to digest the strong meat of the toughest and most practical of pagan philosophies. It is a fact, like the military strategy of Napoleon, that Aquinas was thus fighting for all that is liberal and enlightened, as compared with his rivals, or for that matter his successors and supplanters. Those who, for other reasons, honestly accept the final effect of the Reformation will none the less face the fact, that it was the Schoolman who was the Reformer; and that the later Reformers were by comparison reactionaries. I use the word not as a reproach from my own stand-point, but as a fact from the ordinary modern progressive standpoint. For instance, they riveted the mind back to the literal sufficiency of the Hebrew Scriptures; when St. Thomas had already spoken of the Spirit giving grace to the Greek philosophies. He insisted on the social duty of works; they only on the spiritual duty of faith. It was the very life of the Thomist teaching that Reason can be trusted: it was the very life of Lutheran teaching that Reason is utterly untrustworthy.

Now when this fact is found to be a fact, the danger is that all the unstable opposition will suddenly slide to the opposite extreme. Those who up to that moment have been abusing the Schoolman as a dogmatist will begin to admire the Schoolman as a Modernist who diluted dogma. They will hastily begin to adorn his statue with all the faded garlands of progress, to present him as a man in advance of his age, which is always supposed to mean in agreement with our age; and to load him with the unprovoked imputation of having produced the modern mind. They will discover his attraction, and somewhat hastily assume that he was like themselves, because he was attractive. Up to a point this is pardonable enough; up to a point it has already happened in the case of St. Francis. But it would not go beyond a certain point in the case of St. Francis. Nobody, not even a Freethinker like Renan or Matthew Arnold, would pretend that St. Francis was anything but a devout Christian, or had any other original motive except the imitation of Christ. Yet St. Francis also had that liberating and humanising effect upon religion; though perhaps rather on the imagination than the intellect. But nobody says that St. Francis was loosening the Christian code, when he was obviously tightening it; like the rope round his friar’s frock. Nobody says he merely opened the gates to sceptical science, or sold the pass to heathen humanism, or looked forward only to the Renaissance or met the Rationalists half way. No biographer pretends that St. Francis, when he is reported to have opened the Gospels at random and read the great texts about Poverty, really only opened the *Aeneid* and practised the *Sors Virgiliana* out of respect for heathen letters and learning. No historian will pretend that St. Francis wrote *The Canticle of the Sun* in close imitation of a Homeric Hymn to Apollo or loved birds because he had carefully learned all the trick of the Roman Augurs.

In short, most people, Christian or heathen, would now agree that the Franciscan sentiment was primarily a Christian sentiment, unfolded from within, out of an innocent (or, if you will, ignorant) faith in the Christian religion itself. Nobody, as I have said, says that St. Francis drew his primary inspiration from Ovid. It would be every bit as false to say that Aquinas drew his primary inspiration from Aristotle. The whole lesson of his life, especially of his early life, the whole story of his childhood and choice of a career, shows that he was supremely and directly devotional; and that he passionately loved the Catholic worship long before he found he had to fight for it. But there is also a special and clinching instance of this which once more connects St. Thomas with St. Francis. It seems to be strangely forgotten that both these saints were in actual fact imitating a Master, who was not Aristotle let alone Ovid, when they sanctified the senses or the simple things of nature; when St. Francis walked humbly among the beasts or St. Thomas debated courteously among the Gentiles.

Those who miss this, miss the point of the religion, even if it be a superstition; nay, they miss the very point they would call most superstitious. I mean the whole staggering story of the God-Man in the Gospels. A few even miss it touching St. Francis and his unmixed and unlearned appeal to the Gospels. They will talk of the readiness of St. Francis to learn from the flowers or the birds as something that can only point onward to the Pagan Renaissance. Whereas the fact stares them in the face; first, that it points backwards to the New Testament, and second that it points forward, if it points to anything, to the Aristotelian realism of the *Summa* of St. Thomas Aquinas. They vaguely imagine that anybody who is humanising divinity must be paganising divinity without seeing that the humanising of divinity is actually the strongest and starkest and most incredible dogma in the Creed. St. Francis was becoming more like Christ, and not merely more like Buddha, when he considered the lilies of the field or the fowls of the air; and St. Thomas was becoming more of a Christian, and not merely more of an Aristotelian, when he insisted that God and the image of God had come in contact through matter with a material world. These saints were, in the most exact sense of the term, Humanists; because they were insisting on the immense importance of the human being in the theological scheme of things. But they were not Humanists marching along a path of progress that leads to Modernism and general scepticism; for in their very Humanism they were affirming a dogma now often regarded as the most superstitious Superhumanism. They were strengthening that staggering doctrine of Incarnation, which the sceptics find it hardest to believe. There cannot be a stiffer piece of Christian divinity than the divinity of Christ.

This is a point that is here very much to the point; that these men became more orthodox, when they became more rational or natural. Only by being thus orthodox could they be thus rational and natural. In other words, what may really be called a liberal theology was unfolded from within, from out of the original mysteries of Catholicism. But that liberality had nothing to do with liberalism; in fact it cannot even now coexist with liberalism [(footnote) I use the word liberalism here in the strictly limited theological sense, in which Newman and other theologians use it. In its popular political sense, as I point out later, St. Thomas rather tended to be a Liberal, especially for his time]. The matter is so cogent, that I will take one or two special ideas of St. Thomas to illustrate what I mean. Without anticipating the elementary sketch of Thomism that must be made later, the following points may be noted here.

For instance, it was a very special idea of St. Thomas that Man is to be studied in his whole manhood; that a man is not a man without his body, just as he is not a man without his soul. A corpse is not a man; but also a ghost is not a man. The earlier school of Augustine and even of Anselm had rather neglected this, treating the soul as the only necessary treasure, wrapped for a time in a negligible napkin. Even here they were less orthodox in being more spiritual. They sometimes hovered on the edge of those Eastern deserts that stretch away to the land of transmigration where the essential soul may pass through a hundred unessential bodies; reincarnated even in the bodies of beasts or birds. St. Thomas stood up stoutly for the fact that a man’s body is his body as his mind is his mind; and that he can only be a balance and union of the two. Now this is in some ways a naturalistic notion, very near to the modern respect for material things; a praise of the body that might be sung by Walt Whitman or justified by D H. Lawrence: a thing that might be called Humanism or even claimed by Modernism. In fact, it may be Materialism; but it is the flat contrary of

Modernism. It is bound up, in the modern view, with the most monstrous, the most material, and therefore the most miraculous of miracles. It is specially connected with the most startling sort of dogma, which the Modernist can least accept; the Resurrection of the Body.

Or again, his argument for Revelation is quite rationalistic; and on the other side, decidedly democratic and popular. His argument for Revelation is not in the least an argument against Reason. On the contrary, he seems inclined to admit that truth could be reached by a rational process, if only it were rational enough; and also long enough. Indeed, something in his character, which I have called elsewhere optimism, and for which I know no other approximate term, led him rather to exaggerate the extent to which all men would ultimately listen to reason. In his controversies, he always assumes that they will listen to reason. That is, he does emphatically believe that men can be convinced by argument; when they reach the end of the argument. Only his common sense also told him that the argument never ends. I might convince a man that matter as the origin of Mind is quite meaningless, if he and I were very fond of each other and fought each other every night for forty years. But long before he was convinced on his deathbed, a thousand other materialists could have been born, and nobody can explain everything to everybody. St. Thomas takes the view that the souls of all the ordinary hard-working and simple-minded people are quite as important as the souls of thinkers and truth-seekers; and he asks how all these people are possibly to find time for the amount of reasoning that is needed to find truth. The whole tone of the passage shows both a respect for scientific enquiry and a strong sympathy with the average man. His argument for Revelation is not an argument against Reason; but it is an argument for Revelation. The *conclusion* he draws from it is that men must receive the highest moral truths in a miraculous manner; or most men would not receive them at all. His arguments are rational and natural; but his own deduction is all for the supernatural; and, as is common in the case of his argument, it is not easy to find any deduction except his own deduction. And when we come to that, we find it is something as simple as St. Francis himself could desire; the message from heaven; the story that is told out of the sky; the fairytale that is really true.

It is plainer still in more popular problems like Free Will. If St. Thomas stands for one thing more than another, it is what may be called subordinate sovereignties or autonomies. He was, if the flippancy may be used, a strong

Home Ruler. We might even say he was always defending the independence of dependent things. He insisted that such a thing could have its own rights in its own region. It was his attitude to the Home Rule of the reason and even the senses; "Daughter am I in my father's house; but mistress in my own." And in exactly this sense he emphasised a certain dignity in Man, which was sometimes rather swallowed up in the purely theistic generalisations about God. Nobody would say he wanted to divide Man from God; but he did want to distinguish Man from God. In this strong sense of human dignity and liberty there is much that can be and is appreciated now as a noble humanistic liberality. But let us not forget that its upshot was that very Free Will, or moral responsibility of Man, which so many modern liberals would deny. Upon this sublime and perilous liberty hang heaven and hell, and all the mysterious drama of the soul. It is distinction and not division; but a man *can* divide himself from God, which, in a certain aspect, is the greatest distinction of all.

Again, though it is a more metaphysical matter, which must be mentioned later, and then only too slightly, it is the same with the old philosophical dispute about the Many and the One. Are things so different that they can never be classified: or so unified that they can never be distinguished? Without pretending to answer such questions here, we may say broadly that St. Thomas comes down definitely on the side of Variety, as a thing that is real as well as Unity. In this, and questions akin to this, he often departs from the great Greek philosophers who were sometimes his models; and entirely departs from the great Oriental philosophers who are in some sense his rivals. He seems fairly certain that the difference between chalk and cheese, or pigs and pelicans, is not a mere illusion, or dazzle of our bewildered mind blinded by a single light; but is pretty much what we all feel it to be. It may be said that this is mere common sense; the common sense that pigs are pigs; to that extent related to the earthbound Aristotelian common sense; to a human and even a heathen common sense. But note that here again the extremes of earth and heaven meet. It is also connected with the dogmatic Christian idea of the Creation; of a Creator who created pigs, as distinct from a Cosmos that merely evolved them.

In all these cases we see repeated the point stated at the start. The Thomist movement in metaphysics, like the Franciscan movement in morals and manners, was an enlargement and a liberation, it was emphatically a growth of Christian theology from within; it was emphatically *not* a shrinking of Christian theology under heathen or even human influences. The Franciscan was free to be a friar, instead of being bound to be a monk. But he was more of a Christian, more of a Catholic, even more of an ascetic. So the Thomist was free to be an Aristotelian, instead of being bound to be an Augustinian. But he was even more of a theologian; more of an orthodox theologian; more of a dogmatist, in having recovered through Aristotle the most defiant of all dogmas, the wedding of God with Man and therefore with Matter. Nobody can understand the greatness of the thirteenth century, who does not realise that it was a great growth of new things produced by a living thing. In that sense it was really bolder and freer than what we call the Renaissance, which was a resurrection of old things discovered in a dead thing. In that sense medievalism was not a Renascence, but rather a Nascence. It did not model its temples upon the tombs, or call up dead gods from Hades. It made an architecture as new as modern engineering; indeed it still remains the most modern architecture. Only it was followed at the Renaissance by a more antiquated architecture. In that sense the Renaissance might be called the Relapse. Whatever may be said of the Gothic and the Gospel according to St. Thomas, they were not a Relapse. It was a new thrust like the titanic thrust of Gothic engineering; and its strength was in a God who makes all things new.

In a word, St. Thomas was making Christendom more Christian in making it more Aristotelian. This is not a paradox but a plain truism, which can only be missed by those who may know what is meant by an Aristotelian, but have simply forgotten what is meant by a Christian. As compared with a Jew, a Moslem, a Buddhist, a Deist, or most obvious alternatives, a Christian *means* a man who believes that deity or sanctity has attached to matter or entered the world of the senses. Some modern writers, missing this simple point, have even talked as if the acceptance of Aristotle was a sort of concession to the Arabs; like a Modernist vicar making a concession to the Agnostics. They might as well say that the Crusades were a concession to the Arabs as say that Aquinas rescuing Aristotle from Averrhoes was a concessions to the Arabs. The Crusaders wanted to recover the place where the body of Christ had been, because they believed, rightly or wrongly, that it was a Christian place. St. Thomas wanted to recover what was in essence the body of Christ itself; the sanctified body of the Son of Man which had become a miraculous medium between heaven and earth. And he wanted the body, and all its senses, because he believed, rightly or wrongly, that it was a Christian thing. It might be a humbler or homelier thing than the Platonic mind that is why it was Christian. St. Thomas was, if you will, taking the lower road when he walked in the steps of Aristotle. So was God, when He worked in the workshop of Joseph.

Lastly, these two great men were not only united to each other but separated from most of their comrades and contemporaries by the very revolutionary character of their own revolution. In 1215, Dominic Guzman, the Castilian, founded an Order very similar to that of Francis; and, by a most curious coincidence of history, at almost exactly the same moment as Francis. It was directed primarily to preaching the Catholic philosophy to the Albigensian heretics; whose own philosophy was one of the many forms of that Manicheanism with which this story is much concerned. It had its roots in the remote mysticism and moral detachment of the East; and it was therefore inevitable that the Dominicans should be rather more a brotherhood of philosophers, where the Franciscans were by comparison a brotherhood of poets. For this and other reasons, St. Dominic and his followers are little known or understood in modern England; they were involved eventually in a religious war which followed on a theological argument; and there was something in the atmosphere of our country, during the last century or so, which made the theological argument even more incomprehensible than the religious war. The ultimate effect is in some ways curious; because St. Dominic, even more than St. Francis, was marked by that intellectual independence, and strict standard of virtue and veracity, which Protestant cultures are wont to regard as specially Protestant. It was of him that the tale was told, and would certainly have been told more widely among us if it had been told of a Puritan, that the Pope pointed to his gorgeous Papal Palace and said, “Peter can no longer say `Silver and gold have I none;’” and the Spanish friar answered, “No, and neither can he now say, `Rise and walk.’”

Thus there is another way in which the popular story of St. Francis can be a sort of bridge between the modern and medieval world. And it is based on that very fact already mentioned: that St. Francis and St. Dominic stand together in history as having done the same work, and yet are divided in English popular tradition in the most strange and startling way. In their own lands they are like Heavenly Twins, irradiating the same light from heaven, seeming sometimes to be two saints in one halo, as another order depicted Holy Poverty as two knights on one horse. In the legends of our own land, they are about as much united as St. George and the Dragon. Dominic is still conceived as an Inquisitor devising thumbscrews; while Francis is already accepted as a humanitarian deploring mousetraps. It seems, for instance, quite natural to us, and full of the same associations of flowers and starry fancies, that the name of Francis should belong to Francis Thompson. But I fancy it would seem less natural to call him Dominic Thompson; or find that a man, with a long record of popular sympathies and practical tenderness to the poor, could bear such a name as Dominic Plater. It would sound as if he had been called Torquemada Thompson.

Now there must be something wrong behind this contradiction; turning those who were allies at home into antagonists abroad. On any other question, the fact would be apparent to common sense. Suppose English Liberals or Free-Traders found that, in remote parts of China, it was generally held that Cobden was a cruel monster but Bright a stainless saint. They would think there was a mistake somewhere. Suppose that American Evangelicals learned that in France or Italy, or other civilizations impenetrable by Moody and Sankey, there was a popular belief that Moody was an angel but Sankey a devil; they would guess that there must be a muddle somewhere. Some other later accidental distinction must have cut across the main course of a historical tendency. These parallels are not so fantastic as they may sound. Cobden and Bright have actually been called “child-torturers,” in anger at their alleged callousness about the evils amended by the Factory Acts; and some would call the Moody and Sankey sermon on Hell a hellish exhibition. All that is a matter of opinion; but both men held the same sort of opinion, and there must be a blunder in an opinion that separates them so completely. And of course there is a complete blunder in the legend about St. Dominic. Those who know anything about St. Dominic know that he was a missionary and not a militant persecutor; that his contribution to religion was the Rosary and not the Rack; that his whole career is meaningless, unless we understand that his famous victories were victories of persuasion and not persecution. He did believe in the justification of persecution; in the sense that the secular arm could repress religious disorders. So did everybody else believe in persecution; and none more than the elegant blasphemer Frederick II who believed in nothing else. Some say he was the first to burn heretics; but anyhow, he thought it was one of his imperial privileges and duties to persecute heretics. But to talk as if Dominic did nothing but persecute heretics, is like blaming Father Matthew, who persuaded millions of drunkards to take a temperance pledge, because the accepted law sometimes allowed a drunkard to be arrested by a policeman. It is to miss the whole point; which is that this particular man had a genius for conversion, quite apart from compulsion. The real difference between Francis and Dominic, which is no discredit to either of them, is that Dominic did happen to be confronted with a huge campaign for the conversion of heretics, while Francis had only the more subtle task of the conversion of human beings. It is an old story that, while we may need somebody like Dominic to convert the heathen to Christianity, we are in even greater need of somebody like Francis, to convert the Christians to Christianity. Still, we must not lose sight of St. Dominic's special problem, which was that of dealing with a whole population, kingdoms and cities and countrysides, that had drifted from the Faith and solidified into strange and abnormal new religions. That he did win back masses of men so deceived, merely by talking and preaching, remains an enormous triumph worthy of a colossal trophy. St. Francis is called humane because he tried to convert Saracens and failed; St. Dominic is called bigoted and besotted because he tried to convert Albigensians and succeeded. But we happen to be in a curious nook or corner of the hills of history, from which we can see Assisi and the Umbrian hills, but are out of sight of the vast battle-field of the Southern Crusade; the miracle of Muret and the greater miracle of Dominic, when the roots of the Pyrenees and the shores of the Mediterranean saw defeated the Asiatic despair.

But there is an earlier and more essential link between Dominic and Francis, which is more to the immediate purpose of this book. They were in later times bracketed in glory because they were in their own time bracketed in infamy; or at least in unpopularity. For they did the most unpopular thing that men can do; they started a popular movement. A man who dares to make a direct appeal to the populace always makes a long series of enemies — beginning with the populace. In proportion as the poor begin to understand that he means to help and not hurt them, the solid classes above begin to close in, resolved to hinder and not help. The rich, and even the learned, sometimes feel not unreasonably that the thing will change the world, not only in its worldliness or its worldly wisdom, but to some extent perhaps in its real wisdom. Such a feeling was not unnatural in this case; when we consider, for instance, St. Francis's really reckless attitude about rejecting books and scholarship; or the tendency that the Friars afterwards showed to appeal to the Pope in contempt of local bishops and ecclesiastical officers. In short, St. Dominic and St. Francis created a Revolution, quite as popular and unpopular as the French Revolution. But it is very hard today to feel that even the French Revolution was as fresh as it really was. The Marseillaise once sounded like the human voice of the volcano or the dance-tune of the earthquake, and the kings of the earth trembled. some fearing that the heavens might fall; some fearing far more that justice might be done. The Marseillaise is played today at diplomatic dinner-parties, where smiling monarchs meet beaming millionaires, and is rather less revolutionary than "Home Sweet Home." Also, it is highly pertinent to recall, the modern revolutionists would now call the revolt of the French Jacobins insufficient, just as they would call the revolt of the Friars insufficient. They would say that neither went far enough; but many, in their own day, thought they went very much too far. In the case of the Friars, the higher orders of the State, and to some extent even of the Church, were profoundly shocked at such a loosening of wild popular preachers among the people. It is not at all easy for us to feel that distant events were thus disconcerting and even disreputable. Revolutions turn into institutions; revolts that renew the youth of old societies in their turn grow old; and the past, which was full of new things, of splits and innovations and insurrections, seems to us a single texture of tradition.

But if we wish for one fact that will make vivid this shock of change and challenge, and show how raw and ragged, how almost rowdy in its reckless novelty, how much of the gutter and how remote from refined life, this experiment of the Friars did really seem to many in its own day, there is here a very relevant fact to reveal it. It shows how much a settled and already ancient Christendom did feel it as something like the end of an age; and how the very roads of the earth seem to shake under the feet of the new and nameless army; the march of the Beggars. A mystic nursery rhyme suggests the atmosphere of such a crisis: "Hark, hark, the dogs do bark; the Beggars are coming to town." There were many towns that almost fortified themselves against them and many watchdogs of property and rank did really bark, and hark loudly, when those Beggars went by; but louder was the singing of the Beggars who sang their Canticle to the Sun, and louder the baying of the Hounds of Heaven; the *Domini canes* of the medieval pun; the Dogs of God. And if we would measure how real and rending seemed that revolution, what a break with the past, we can see it in the first and most extraordinary event in the life of St. Thomas Aquinas.

II

THE RUNAWAY ABBOT

Thomas Aquinas, in a strange and rather symbolic manner, sprang out of the very centre of the civilised world of his time; the central knot or coil of the powers then controlling Christendom. He was closely connected with all of them; even with some of them that might well be described as destroying Christendom. The whole religious quarrel, the whole international quarrel, was for him, a family quarrel. He was born in the purple, almost literally on the hem of the imperial purple; for his own cousin was the Holy Roman Emperor. He could have quartered half the kingdoms of Europe on his shield — if he had not thrown away the shield. He was Italian and French and German and in every way European. On one side, he inherited from the energy that made the episode of the Normans, whose strange organising raids rang and rattled like flights of arrows in the corners of Europe and the ends of the earth; one flight of them following Duke William far northward through the blinding snows to Chester; another treading in Greek and Punic footsteps through the island of Sicily to the gates of Syracuse. Another bond of blood bound him to the great Emperors of the Rhine and Danube who claimed to wear the crown of Charlemagne; Red Barbarossa, who sleeps under the rushing river, was his great uncle, and Frederick II, the Wonder of the World, his second cousin, and yet he held by a hundred more intimate ties to the lively inner life, the local vivacity, the little walled nations and the thousand shrines of Italy. While inheriting this physical kinship with the Emperor, he maintained far more firmly his spiritual kinship with the Pope. He understood the meaning of Rome, and in what sense it was still ruling the world; and was not likely to think that the German Emperors of his times any more than the Greek Emperors of a previous time, would be able to be really Roman in defiance of Rome. To this cosmopolitan comprehensiveness in his inherited position, he afterwards added many things of his own, that made for mutual understanding among the peoples, and gave him something of the character of an ambassador and interpreter. He travelled a great deal; he was not only well known in Paris and the German universities, but he almost certainly visited England; probably he went to Oxford and London; and it has been said that we may be treading in the footsteps of him and his Dominican companions, whenever we go down by the river to the railway-station that still bears the name of Black-friars. But the truth applies to the travels of his mind as well as his body. He studied the literature even of the opponents of Christianity much more carefully and impartially than was then the fashion; he really tried to understand the Arabian Aristotelianism of the Moslems; and wrote a highly humane and reasonable treatise on the problem of the treatment of the Jews. He always attempted to look at everything from the inside; but he was certainly lucky in having been born in the inside of the state system and the high politics of his day. What he thought of them may perhaps be inferred from the next passage in his history.

St. Thomas might thus stand very well for the International Man, to borrow the title of a modern book. But it is only fair to remember that he lived in the International Age; in a world that was international in a sense not to be suggested in any modern book, or by any modern man. If I remember right, the modern candidate for the post of International Man was Cobden, who was an almost abnormally national man, a narrowly national man; a very fine type, but one which can hardly be imagined except as moving between Midhurst and Manchester. He had an international policy and he indulged in international travel; but if he always remained a national person, it was because he remained a normal person; that is normal to the nineteenth century. But it was not so in the thirteenth century. There a man of international influence, like Cobden, could be also almost a man of international nationality. The names of nations and cities and places of origin did not connote that deep division that is the mark of the modern world. Aquinas as a student was nicknamed the ox of Sicily, though his birthplace was near Naples, but this did not prevent the city of Paris regarding him as simply and solidly as a Parisian, because he had been a glory of the Sorbonne, that it proposed to bury his bones when he was dead. Or take a more obvious contrast with modern times. Consider what is meant in most modern talk by a German Professor. And then realise that the greatest of all German Professors, Albertus Magnus, was himself one of the glories of the University of Paris; and it was in Paris that Aquinas supported him. Think of the modern German Professor being famous throughout Europe for his popularity when lecturing in Paris.

Thus, if there was war in Christendom, it was international war in the special sense in which we speak of international peace. It was not the war of two nations; but the war of two internationalisms: of two World States: the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire. The political crisis in Christendom affected the life of Aquinas at the start in one sharp disaster, and afterwards in many indirect ways. It had many elements; the Crusades; the embers of the Albigensian pessimism over which St. Dominic had triumphed in argument and Simon de Montfort in arms; the dubious experiment of an Inquisition which started from it; and many other things. But, broadly speaking, it is the period of the great duel between the Popes and the Emperors, that is the German Emperors who called themselves Holy Roman Emperors, the House of Hohenstaufen. The particular period of the life of Aquinas, however, is entirely overshadowed by the particular Emperor who was himself more an Italian than a German; the brilliant Frederick II who was called the Wonder of the World. It may be reminded, in passing, that Latin was the most living of languages at this time, and we often feel a certain weakness in the necessary translation. For I seem to have read somewhere that the word used was stronger than the Wonder of the World; that his medieval title was *Stupor Mundi*, which is more exactly the Stupefaction of the World. Something of the sort may be noted later of philosophical language, and the weakness of translating a word like *Ens* by a word like Being. But for the moment the parenthesis has another application; for it might well be said that Frederick did indeed stupefy the world; that there was something stunning and blinding about the blows he struck at religion, as in that blow which almost begins the biography of Thomas Aquinas. He may also be called stupefying in another sense; in that his very brilliancy has made some of his modern admirers very stupid.

For Frederick II is the first figure, and that a rather fierce and ominous figure, who rides across the scene of his cousin’s birth and boyhood: a scene of wild fighting and of fire. And it may be allowable to pause for a parenthesis upon his name, for two particular reasons: first that his romantic reputation, even among modern historians, covers and partly conceals the true background of the times and second that the tradition in question directly involves the whole status of St. Thomas Aquinas. The nineteenth century view, still so strangely called the modern view by many moderns, touching such a man as Frederick II was well summed up by some solid Victorian, I think by Macaulay; Frederick was “a statesman in an age of Crusaders; a philosopher in an age of monks.” It may be noted that the antithesis invokes the assumption that a Crusader cannot easily be a statesman; and that a monk cannot easily be a philosopher. Yet, to take only that special instance, it would be easy to point out that the cases of two famous men in the age of Frederick II would alone be strong enough to upset both the assumption and the antithesis. St. Louis, though a Crusader and even an unsuccessful Crusader, was really a far more successful statesman than Frederick II. By the test of practical politics, he popularised, solidified and sanctified the most powerful government in Europe, the order and concentration of the French Monarchy; the single dynasty that steadily increased its strength for five hundred years up to the glories of the Grand Siecle whereas Frederick went down in ruin before the Papacy and the Republics and a vast combination of priests and peoples. The Holy Roman Empire he wished to found was an ideal rather in the sense of a dream; it was certainly never a fact like the square and solid State which the French statesman did found. Or, to take another example from the next generation, one of the most strictly practical statesmen in history, our own Edward I, was also a Crusader.

The other half of the antithesis is even more false and here even more relevant. Frederick II was not a philosopher in the age of monks. He was a gentleman dabbling in philosophy in the age of the monk Thomas Aquinas. He was doubtless an intelligent and even brilliant gentleman; but if he did leave any notes on the nature of Being and Becoming, or the precise sense in which realities can be relative to Reality, I do not imagine those notes are now exciting undergraduates at Oxford or literary men in Paris, let alone the little groups of Thomists who have already sprung up even in New York and Chicago. It is no disrespect to the Emperor to say that he certainly was not a philosopher in the sense in which Thomas Aquinas was a philosopher, let alone so great or so universal or so permanent a philosopher. And Thomas Aquinas lived in that very age of monks, and in that very world of monks, which Macaulay talks of as if it were incapable of producing philosophy.

We need not dwell on the causes of this Victorian prejudice, which some still think so well advanced. It arose mainly from one narrow or insular notion; that no man could possibly be building up the best of the modern world, if he went with the main movement of the medieval world. These Victorians thought that only the heretic had ever helped humanity; only the man who nearly wrecked medieval civilisation could be of any use in constructing modern civilisation. Hence came a score of comic fables; as that the cathedrals must have been built by a secret society of Freemasons; or that the epic of Dante must be a cryptogram referring to the political hopes of Garibaldi. But the generalisation is not in its nature probable and it is not in fact true. This medieval period was rather specially the period of communal or corporate thinking, and in some matters it was really rather larger than the individualistic modern thinking. This could be proved in a flash from the mere fact of the use of the word ‘statesman’. To a man of Macaulay’s period, a statesman *always* meant a man who maintained the more narrow national interests of his own state against other states, as Richelieu maintained those of France, or Chatham of England, or Bismarck of Prussia. But if a man actually wanted to defend all these states, to combine all these states, to make a living brotherhood of all these states, to resist some outer peril as from the Mongolian millions — then that poor devil, of course, could not really be called a statesman. He was only a Crusader.

In this way it is but fair to Frederick II to say that he was a Crusader; if he was also rather like an Anti-Crusader. Certainly he was an international statesman. Indeed he was a particular type, which may be called an international soldier. The international soldier is always very much disliked by internationalists. They dislike Charlemagne and Charles V and Napoleon; and everybody who tried to create the World State for which they cry aloud day and night. But Frederick is more dubious and less doubted; he was supposed to be the head of the Holy Roman Empire; and accused of wanting to be the head of a very Unholy Roman Empire. But even if he were Antichrist, he would still be a witness to the unity of Christendom.

Nevertheless, there is a queer quality in that time; which, while it was international was also internal and intimate. War, in the wide modern sense, is possible, not because more men disagree, but because more men agree. Under the peculiarly modern coercions, such as Compulsory Education and Conscription, there are such very large *peaceful* areas, that they can all agree upon War. In that age men disagreed even about war; and peace might break out anywhere. Peace was interrupted by feuds and feuds by pardons. Individuality wound in and out of a maze; spiritual extremes were walled up with one another in one little walled town; and we see the great soul of Dante divided, a cloven flame; loving and hating his own city. This individual complexity is intensely vivid in the particular story we have here to tell, in a very rough outline. If anyone wishes to know what is meant by saying that action was more individual, and indeed incalculable, he may well note some of the stages in the story of the great feudal house of Aquino, which had its castle not far from Naples. In the mere hasty anecdote we have now to tell, we shall note in succession five or six stages of this sort. Landulf of Aquino, a heavy feudal fighter typical of the times, rode in armour behind the imperial banners, and attacked a monastery, because the Emperor regarded the monastery as a fortress held for his enemy the Pope. Later, we shall see the same feudal Lord sent his own son to the same monastery; probably on the friendly advice of the same Pope. Later still, another of his sons, entirely on his own, rebelled against the Emperor, and went over to the armies of the Pope. For this he was executed by the Emperor, with promptitude and despatch. I wish we knew more about that brother of Thomas Aquinas who risked and lost his life to support the cause of the Pope which was in all human essentials the cause of the People. He may not have been a saint; but he must have had some qualities of a martyr. Meanwhile, two other brothers, still ardent and active apparently in the service of the Emperor who killed the third brother, themselves proceeded to kidnap another brother, because they did not approve of his sympathy with the new social movements in religion. That is the sort of tangle in which this one distinguished medieval family found itself. It was not a war of nations, but it was a rather widespread family quarrel.

The reason for dwelling here, however, upon the position of the Emperor Frederick, as a type of his time, in his culture and his violence, in his concern for philosophy and his quarrel with religion, is not merely concerned with these things. He may here be the first figure that crosses the stage, because one of his very typical actions precipitated the first action, or obstinate inaction, which began the personal adventures of Thomas Aquinas in this world. The story also illustrates the extraordinary tangle in which a family like that of the Count of Aquino found itself; being at once so close to the Church and so much at odds with it. For Frederick II, in the course of these remarkable manoeuvres, military and political, which ranged from burning heretics to allying himself with Saracens, made a swoop as of a predatory eagle (and the Imperial eagle was rather predatory) upon a very large and wealthy monastery; the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino; and stormed and sacked the place.

Some miles from the monastery of Monte Cassino stood a great crag or cliff, standing up like a pillar of the Apennines. It was crowned with a castle that bore the name of The Dry Rock, and was the eyrie in which the eaglets of the Aquino branch of the Imperial family were nursed to fly. Here lived Count Landulf of Aquino, who was the father of Thomas Aquinas and some seven other sons. In military affairs he doubtless rode with his family, in the feudal manner; and apparently had something to do with the destruction of the monastery. But it was typical of the tangle of the time, that Count Landulf seems afterwards to have thought that it would be a tactful and delicate act to put in his son Thomas as Abbot of the monastery. This would be of the nature of a graceful apology to the Church, and also, it would appear, the solution of a family difficulty.

For it had been long apparent to Count Landulf that nothing could be done with his seventh son Thomas, except to make him an Abbot or something of that kind. Born in 1226, he had from childhood a mysterious objection to becoming a predatory eagle, or even to taking an ordinary interest in falconry or tilting or any other gentlemanly pursuits. He was a large and heavy and quiet boy, and phenomenally silent, scarcely opening his mouth except to say suddenly to his schoolmaster in an explosive manner, “What is God?” The answer is not recorded but it is probable that the asker went on worrying out answers for himself. The only place for a person of this kind was the Church and presumably the cloister; and so far as that went, there was no particular difficulty. It was easy enough for a man in Count Landulf’s position to arrange with some monastery for his son to be received there; and in this particular case he thought it would be a good idea if he were received in some official capacity, that would be worthy of his worldly rank. So everything was smoothly arranged for Thomas Aquinas becoming a monk, which would seem to be what he himself wanted; and sooner or later becoming Abbot of Monte Cassino. And then the curious thing happened.

In so far as we may follow rather dim and disputed events, it would seem that the young Thomas Aquinas walked into his father’s castle one day and calmly announced that he had become one of the Begging Friars, of the new order founded by Dominic the Spaniard; much as the eldest son of the squire might go home and airily inform the family that he had married a gypsy; or the heir of a Tory Duke state that he was walking tomorrow with the Hunger Marchers organised by alleged Communists. By this, as has been noted already, we may pretty well measure the abyss between the old monasticism and the new, and the earthquake of the Dominican and Franciscan revolution. Thomas had appeared to wish to be a Monk; and the gates were silently opened to him and the long avenues of the abbey, the very carpet, so to speak, laid for him up to the throne of the mitred abbot. He said he wished to be a Friar, and his family flew at him like wild beasts; his brothers pursued him along the public roads, half-rent his friar's frock from his back and finally locked him up in a tower like a lunatic.

It is not very easy to trace the course of this furious family quarrel, and how it eventually spent itself against the tenacity of the young Friar; according to some stories, his mother's disapproval was short-lived and she went over to his side; but it was not only his relatives that were embroiled. We might say that the central governing class of Europe, which partly consisted of his family, were in a turmoil over the deplorable youth; even the Pope was asked for tactful intervention, and it was at one time proposed that Thomas should be allowed to wear the Dominican habit while acting as Abbot in the Benedictine Abbey. To many this would seem a tactful compromise; but it did not commend itself to the narrow medieval mind of Thomas Aquinas. He indicated sharply that he wished to be a Dominican in the Dominican Order, and not at a fancy-dress ball; and the diplomatic proposal appears to have been dropped.

Thomas of Aquino wanted to be a Friar. It was a staggering fact to his contemporaries; and it is rather an intriguing fact even to us; for this desire, limited literally and strictly to this statement, was the one practical thing to which his will was clamped with adamantine obstinacy till his death. He would not be an Abbot; he would not be a Monk; he would not even be a Prior or ruler in his own fraternity; he would not be a prominent or important Friar; he would be a Friar. It is as if Napoleon had insisted on remaining a private soldier all his life. Something in this heavy, quiet, cultivated, rather academic gentleman would not be satisfied till he was, by fixed authoritative proclamation and official pronouncement, established and appointed to be a Beggar. It is all the more interesting because, while he did more than his duty a thousand times over, he was not at all like a Beggar; nor at all likely to be a good Beggar. He had nothing of the native vagabond about him, as had his great precursors; he was not born with something of the wandering minstrel, like St. Francis; or something of the tramping missionary, like St. Dominic. But he insisted upon putting himself under military orders, to do these things at the will of another, if required. He may be compared with some of the more magnanimous aristocrats who have enrolled themselves in revolutionary armies; or some of the best of the poets and scholars who volunteered as private soldiers in the Great War. Something in the courage and consistency of Dominic and Francis had challenged his deep sense of justice; and while remaining a very reasonable person, and even a diplomatic one, he never let anything shake the iron immobility of this one decision of his youth; nor was he to be turned from his tall and towering ambition to take the lowest place.

The first effect of his decision, as we have seen, was much more stimulating and even startling. The General of the Dominicans, under whom Thomas had enrolled himself, was probably well aware of the diplomatic attempts to dislodge him and the worldly difficulties of resisting them. His expedient was to take his young follower out of Italy altogether; bidding him proceed with a few other friars to Paris. There was something prophetic even about this first progress of the travelling teacher of the nations; for Paris was indeed destined to be in some sense the goal of his spiritual journey; since it was there that he was to deliver both his great defence of the Friars and his great defiance to the antagonists of Aristotle. But this his first journey to Paris was destined to be broken off very short indeed. The friars had reached a turn of the road by a wayside fountain, a little way north of Rome, when they were overtaken by a wild cavalcade of captors, who seized on Thomas like brigands, but who were in fact only rather needlessly agitated brothers. He had a large number of brothers: perhaps only two were here involved. Indeed he was the seventh; and friends of Birth Control may lament that this philosopher was needlessly added to the noble line of ruffians who kidnapped him. It was an odd affair altogether. There is something quaint and picturesque in the idea of kidnapping a begging friar, who might in a sense be called a runaway abbot. There is a comic and tragic tangle in the motives and purposes of such a trio of strange kinsmen. There is a sort of Christian cross-purposes in the contrast between the feverish illusion of the importance of things, always marking men who are called practical; and the much more practical pertinacity of the man who is called theoretical.

Thus at least did those three strange brethren stagger or trail along their tragic road, tied together, as it were, like criminal and constable; only that the criminals were making the arrest. So their figures are seen for an instant against the horizon of history; brothers as sinister as any since Cain and Abel. For this queer outrage in the great family of Aquino does really stand out symbolically, as representing something that will forever make the Middle Ages a mystery and a bewilderment; capable of sharply contrasted interpretations like darkness and light. For in two of those men there raged, we might say screamed, a savage pride of blood and blazonry of arms, though they were princes of the most refined world of their time, which would seem more suitable to a tribe dancing round a totem. For the moment they had forgotten everything except the name of a family, that is narrower than a tribe, and far narrower than a nation. And the third figure of that trio, born of the same mother and perhaps visibly one with the others in face or form, had a conception of brotherhood broader than most modern democracy, for it was not national but international; a faith in mercy and modesty far deeper than any mere mildness of manners in the modern world; and a drastic oath of poverty, which would now be counted quite a mad exaggeration of the revolt against plutocracy and pride. Out of the same Italian castle came two savages and one sage; or one saint more pacific than most modern sages. That is the double aspect confusing a hundred controversies. That is what makes the riddle of the medieval age; that it was not one age but two ages. We look into the moods of some men, and it might be the Stone Age; we look into the minds of other men, and they might be living in the Golden Age; in the most modern sort of Utopia. There were always good men and bad men; but in this time good men who were subtle lived with bad men who were simple. They lived in the same family; they were brought up in the same nursery; and they came out to struggle, as the brothers of Aquino struggled by the wayside, when they dragged the new friar along the road and shut him up in the castle on the hill.

When his relations tried to despoil him of his friar’s frock he seems to have laid about them in the fighting manner of his fathers, and it would seem successfully, since this attempt was abandoned. He accepted the imprisonment itself with his customary composure, and probably did not mind very much whether he was left to philosophise in a dungeon or in a cell. Indeed there is something in the way the whole tale is told, which suggests that through a great part of that strange abduction, he had been carried about like a lumbering stone statue. Only one tale told of his captivity shows him merely in anger; and that shows him angrier than he ever was before or after. It struck the imagination of his own time for more important reasons; but it has an interest that is psychological as well as moral. For once in his life, for the first time and the last, Thomas of Aquino was really *hors de lui*; riding a storm outside that tower of intellect and contemplation in which he commonly lived. And that was when his brothers introduced into his room some specially gorgeous and painted courtesan, with the idea of surprising him by a sudden temptation, or at least involving him in a scandal. His anger was justified, even by less strict moral standards than his own; for the meanness was even worse than the foulness of the expedient. Even on the lowest grounds, he knew his brothers knew, and they knew that he knew, that it was an insult to him as a gentleman to suppose that he would break his pledge upon so base a provocation; and he had behind him a far more terrible sensibility; all that huge ambition of humility which was to him the voice of God out of heaven. In this one flash alone we see that huge unwieldy figure in an attitude of activity, or even animation; and he was very animated indeed. He sprang from his seat and snatched a brand out of the fire, and stood brandishing it like a flaming sword. The woman not unnaturally shrieked and fled, which was all that he wanted; but it is quaint to think of what she must have thought of that madman of monstrous stature juggling with flames and apparently threatening to burn down the house. All he did, however, was to stride after her to the door and bang and bar it behind her; and then, with a sort of impulse of violent ritual, he rammed the burning brand into the door, blackening and blistering it with one big black sign of the cross. Then he returned, and dropped it again into the fire; and sat down on that seat of sedentary scholarship, that chair of philosophy, that secret throne of contemplation, from which he never rose again.

III

THE ARISTOTELIAN REVOLUTION

Albert, the Swabian, rightly called the Great, was the founder of modern science. He did more than any other man to prepare that process, which has turned the alchemist into the chemist, and the astrologer into the astronomer. It is odd that, having been in his time, in this sense almost the first astronomer, he now lingers in legend almost as the last astrologer. Serious historians are abandoning the absurd notion that the mediaeval Church persecuted all scientists as wizards. It is very nearly the opposite of the truth. The world sometimes persecuted them as wizards, and sometimes ran after them as wizards; the sort of pursuing that is the reverse of persecuting. The Church alone regarded them really and solely as scientists. Many an enquiring cleric was charged with mere magic in making his lenses and mirrors; he was charged by his rude and rustic neighbours; and would probably have been charged in exactly the same way if they had been Pagan neighbours or Puritan neighbours or Seventh-Day Adventist neighbours. But even then he stood a better chance when judged by the Papacy, than if he had been merely lynched by the laity. The Catholic Pontiff did not denounce Albertus Magnus as a magician. It was the half-heathen tribes of the north who admired him as a magician. It is the half-heathen tribes of the industrial towns today, the readers of cheap dream-books, and quack pamphlets, and newspaper prophets, who still admire him as an astrologer. It is admitted that the range of his recorded knowledge, of strictly material and mechanical facts, was amazing in a man of his time. It is true that, in most other cases, there was a certain limitation to the data of medieval science; but this certainly had nothing to do with medieval religion. For the data of Aristotle, and the great Greek civilisation, were in many ways more limited still. But it is not really so much a question of access to the facts, as of attitude to the facts. Most of the Schoolmen, if informed by the only informants they had that a unicorn has one horn or a salamander lives in the fire, still used it more as an illustration of logic than an incident of life. What they really said was, “If a Unicorn has one horn, two unicorns have as many horns as one cow.” And that has not one inch the less a fact because the unicorn is a fable. But with Albertus in medieval times, as with Aristotle in ancient times, there did begin something like the idea of emphasising the question: “But does the unicorn only have one horn or the salamander a fire instead of a fireside?” Doubtless when the social and geographical limits of medieval life began to allow them to search the fire for salamanders or the desert for unicorns, they had to modify many of their scientific ideas. A fact which will expose them to the very proper scorn of a generation of scientists which has just discovered that Newton is nonsense, that space is limited, and that there is no such thing as an atom.

This great German, known in his most famous period as a professor in Paris, was previously for some time professor at Cologne. In that beautiful Roman city, there gathered round him in thousands the lovers of that extraordinary life; the student life of the Middle Ages. They came together in great groups called Nations; and the fact illustrates very well the difference between medieval nationalism and modern nationalism. For although there might any morning be a brawl between the Spanish students and the Scottish students, or between the Flemish and the French, and swords flash or stones fly on the most purely patriotic principles, the fact remains that they had all come to the same school to learn the same philosophy. And though that might not prevent the starting of a quarrel, it might have a great deal to do with the ending of it. Before these motley groups of men from the ends of the earth, the father of science unrolled his scroll of strange wisdom; of sun and comet, of fish and bird. He was an Aristotelian developing, as it were, the one experimental hint of Aristotle; and in this he was entirely original. He cared less to be original about the deeper matters of men and morals; about which he was content to hand on a decent and Christianised Aristotelianism; he was even in a sense ready to compromise upon the merely metaphysical issue of the Nominalists and the Realists. He would never have maintained alone the great war that was coming, for a balanced and humanised Christianity; but when it came, he was entirely on its side. He was called the Universal Doctor, because of the range of his scientific studies; yet he was in truth a specialist. The popular legend is never quite wrong; if a man of science is a magician, he was a magician. And the man of science has always been much *more* of a magician than the priest; since he would “control the elements” rather than submit to the Spirit who is more elementary than the elements.

Among the students thronging into the lecture-rooms there was one student, conspicuous by his tall and bulky figure, and completely failing or refusing to be conspicuous for anything else. He was so dumb in the debates that his fellows began to assume an American significance in the word dumbness; for in that land it is a synonym for dullness. It is clear that, before long, even his imposing stature began to have only the ignominious immensity of the big boy left behind in the lowest form. He was called the Dumb Ox. He was the object, not merely of mockery, but of pity. One good-natured student pitied him so much as to try to help him with his lessons, going over the elements of logic like an alphabet in a horn-book. The dunce thanked him with pathetic politeness; and the philanthropist went on swimmingly, till he came to a passage about which he was himself a little doubtful; about which, in point of fact, he was wrong. Whereupon the dunce, with every appearance of embarrassment and disturbance, pointed out a possible solution which happened to be right. The benevolent student was left staring, as at a monster, at this mysterious lump of ignorance and intelligence; and strange whispers began to run round the schools.

A regular religious biographer of Thomas Aquinas (who, needless to say, was the dunce in question) has said that by the end of this interview “his love of truth overcame his humility;” which, properly understood, is precisely true. But it does not, in the secondary psychological and social sense, describe all the welter of elements that went on within that massive head. All the relatively few anecdotes about Aquinas have a very peculiar vividness if we visualise the type of man; and this is an excellent example. Amid those elements was something of the difficulty which the generalising intellect has in adapting itself suddenly to a tiny detail of daily life; there was something of the shyness of really well-bred people about showing off; there was something even, perhaps, of that queer paralysis, and temptation to prefer even misunderstandings to long explanations, which led Sir James Barrie, in his amusing sketch, to allow himself to be saddled with a Brother Henry he never possessed, rather than exert himself to put in a word of warning. These other elements doubtless worked with the very extraordinary humility of this very extraordinary man; but another element worked with his equally unquestionable “love of truth” in bringing the misunderstanding to an end. It is an element that must never be left out of the make-up of St. Thomas. However dreamy or distracted or immersed in theories he might be, he had any amount of Common Sense; and by the time it came, not only to being taught, but to being taught wrong, there was something in him that said sharply, “Oh, this has got to stop!”

It seems probable that it was Albertus Magnus himself, the lecturer and learned teacher of all these youths, who first suspected something of the kind. He gave Thomas small jobs to do, of annotation or exposition; he persuaded him to banish his bashfulness so as to take part in at least one debate. He was a very shrewd old man and had studied the habits of other animals besides the salamander and the unicorn. He had studied many specimens of the most monstrous of all monstrosities; that is called Man. He knew the signs and marks of the sort of man, who is in an innocent way something of a monster among men. He was too good a schoolmaster not to know that the dunce is not always a dunce. He learned with amusement that this dunce had been nicknamed the Dumb Ox by his school-fellows. All that is natural enough; but it does not take away the savour of something rather strange and symbolic, about the extraordinary emphasis with which he spoke at last. For Aquinas was still generally known only as one obscure and obstinately unresponsive pupil, among many more brilliant and promising pupils, when the great Albert broke silence with his famous cry and prophecy; “You call him a Dumb Ox: I tell you this Dumb Ox shall bellow so loud that his bellowings will fill the world.”

To Albertus Magnus, as to Aristotle or Augustine or any number of other and older teachers, St. Thomas was always ready, with the hearty sort of humility, to give thanks for all his thinking. None the less, his own thinking was an advance on Albertus and the other Aristotelians, just as it was an advance on Augustine and the Augustinians. Albert had drawn attention to the direct study of natural facts, if only through fables like the unicorn and the salamander but the monster called Man awaited a much more subtle and flexible vivi-section. The two men, however, became close friends and their friendship counts for a great deal in this central fight of the Middle Ages. For, as we shall see, the rehabilitation of Aristotle was a revolution almost as revolutionary as the exaltation of Dominic and Francis; and St. Thomas was destined to play a striking part in both.

It will be realised that the Aquino family had ultimately abandoned its avenging pursuit of its ugly duckling; who, as a black friar, should perhaps be called its black sheep. Of that escape some picturesque stories are told. The black sheep generally profits at last by quarrels among the white sheep of a family. They begin by quarrelling with him, but they end by quarrelling with each other. There is a rather confusing account concerning which members of his family came over to his side, while he was still imprisoned in the tower. But it is a fact that he was very fond of his sisters, and therefore probably not a fable that it was they who engineered his escape. According to the story, they rigged up a rope to the top of the tower, attached to a big basket, and it must have been rather a big basket if he was indeed lowered in this fashion from his prison, and escaped into the world. Anyhow, he did escape by energy, external or internal. But it was only an individual energy. The world was still pursuing and persecuting the Friars, quite as much as when they fled along the road to Rome. Thomas Aquinas had the good fortune to gather under the shadow of the one great outstanding Friar, whose respectability it was difficult to dispute, the learned and orthodox Albertus; but even he and his were soon troubled by the growing storm that threatened the new popular movements in the Church. Albertus was summoned to Paris, to receive the degree of a Doctor; but everyone knew that every move in that game had the character of a challenge. He made only the request, which probably looked like an eccentric request, that he should take his Dumb Ox with him. They set out, like ordinary Friars or religious vagabonds; they slept in such monasteries as they could find; and finally in the monastery of St. James in Paris, where Thomas met another Friar who was also another friend.

Perhaps under the shadow of the storm that menaced all Friars, Bonaventure, the Franciscan, grew into so great a friendship with Thomas the Dominican, that their contemporaries compared them to David and Jonathan. The point is of some interest; because it would be quite easy to represent the Franciscan and the Dominican as flatly contradicting each other. The Franciscan may be represented as the Father of all the Mystics; and the Mystics can be represented as men who maintain that the final fruition or joy of the soul is rather a sensation than a thought. The motto of the Mystics has always been, “Taste and see.” Now St. Thomas also began by saying, “Taste and see;” but he said it of the first rudimentary impressions of the human animal. It might well be maintained that the Franciscan puts Taste last and the Dominican puts it first. It might be said that the Thomist begins with something solid like the taste of an apple, and afterwards deduces a divine life for the intellect; while the Mystic exhausts the intellect first, and says finally that the sense of God is something like the taste of an apple. A common enemy might claim that St. Thomas begins with the taste of fruit and St. Bonaventure ends with the taste of fruit. But they are both right; if I may say so, it is a privilege of people who contradict each other in their cosmos to be both right. The Mystic is right in saying that the relation of God and Man is essentially a love-story; the pattern and type of all love-stories. The Dominican rationalist is equally right in saying that the intellect is at home in the topmost heavens; and that the appetite for truth may outlast and even devour all the duller appetites of man.

At the moment Aquinas and Bonaventure were encouraged in the possibility that they were both right; by the almost universal agreement that they were both wrong. It was in any case a time of wild disturbance, and, as is common in such times, those who were trying to put things right were most vigorously accused of putting things wrong. Nobody knew who would win in that welter: Islam, or the Manichees of the Midi; or the two-faced and mocking Emperor; or the Crusades; or the old Orders of Christendom. But some men had a very vivid feeling that everything was breaking up; and that all the recent experiments or excesses were part of the same social dissolution; and there were two things that such men regarded as signs of ruin; one was the awful apparition of Aristotle out of the East, a sort of Greek god supported by Arabian worshippers; and the other was the new freedom of the Friars. It was the opening of the monastery and the scattering of the monks to wander over the world. The general feeling that they wandered like sparks from a furnace hitherto contained; the furnace of the abnormal love of God: the sense that they would utterly unbalance the common people with the counsels of perfection; that they would drift into being demagogues; all this finally burst out in a famous book called *The Perils of the Latter Times*, by a furious reactionary, William de St. Amour. It challenged the French King and the Pope, so that they established an enquiry. And Aquinas and Bonaventure, the two incongruous friends, with their respectively topsy-turvy universes, went up to Rome together, to defend the freedom of the Friars.

Thomas Aquinas defended the great vow of his youth, for freedom and for the poor; and it was probably the topmost moment of his generally triumphant career; for he turned back the whole backward movement of his time. Responsible authorities have said that, but for him, the whole great popular movement of the Friars might have been destroyed. With this popular victory the shy and awkward student finally becomes a historical character and a public man. After that, he was identified with the Mendicant Orders. But while St. Thomas may be said to have made his name in the defence of the Mendicant Orders against the reactionaries, who took the same view of them as his own family had taken, there is generally a difference between a man making his name and a man really doing his work. The work of Thomas Aquinas was yet to come; but less shrewd observers than he could already see that it was coming. Broadly speaking, the danger was the danger of the orthodox, or those who too easily identify the old order with the orthodox, forcing a final and conclusive condemnation of Aristotle. There had already been rash and random condemnations to that effect, issued here and there, and the pressure of the narrower Augustinians upon the Pope and the principal judges became daily more pressing. The peril had appeared, not unnaturally, because of the historical and geographical accident of the Moslem proximity to the culture of Byzantium. The Arabs had got hold of the Greek manuscripts before the Latins who were the true heirs of the Greeks. And Moslems, though not very orthodox Moslems, were turning Aristotle into a pantheist philosophy still less acceptable to orthodox Christians. This second controversy, however, requires more explanation than the first. As is remarked on an introductory page, most modern people do know that St. Francis at least was a liberator of large sympathies; that, whatever their positive view of medievalism, the Friars were in a relative sense a popular movement, pointing to greater fraternity and freedom; and a very little further information would inform them that this was every bit as true of the Dominican as of the Franciscan Friars. Nobody now is particularly likely to start up in defence of feudal abbots or fixed and stationary monks, against such impudent innovators as St. Francis and St. Thomas. We may therefore be allowed to summarise briefly the great debate about the Friars, though it shook all Christendom in its day. But the greater debate about Aristotle presents a greater difficulty; because there are modern misconceptions about it which can only be approached with a little more elaboration.

Perhaps there is really no such thing as a Revolution recorded in history. What happened was always a Counter-Revolution. Men were always rebelling against the last rebels; or even repenting of the last rebellion. This could be seen in the most casual contemporary fashions, if the fashionable mind had not fallen into the habit of seeing the very latest rebel as rebelling against all ages at once. The Modern Girl with the lipstick and the cocktail is as much a rebel against the Woman's Rights Woman of the '80's, with her stiff stick-up collars and strict teetotalism, as the latter was a rebel against the Early Victorian lady of the languid waltz tunes and the album full of quotations from Byron: or as the last, again, was a rebel against a Puritan mother to whom the waltz was a wild orgy and Byron the Bolshevist of his age. Trace even the Puritan mother back through history and she represents a rebellion against the Cavalier laxity of the English Church, which was at first a rebel against the Catholic civilisation, which had been a rebel against the Pagan civilisation. Nobody but a lunatic could pretend that these things were a progress; for they obviously go first one way and then the other. But whichever is right, one thing is certainly wrong; and that is the modern habit of looking at them only from the modern end. For that is only to see the end of the tale; they rebel against they know not what, because it arose they know not when; intent only on its ending, they are ignorant of its beginning; and therefore of its very being. The difference between the smaller cases and the larger, is that in the latter there is really so huge a human upheaval that men start from it like men in a new world; and that very novelty enables them to go on very long; and generally to go on too long. It is *because* these things start with a vigorous revolt that the intellectual impetus lasts long enough to make them seem like a survival. An excellent example of this is the real story of the revival and the neglect of Aristotle. By the end of the medieval time, Aristotelianism did eventually grow stale. Only a very fresh and successful novelty ever gets quite so stale as that.

When the moderns, drawing the blackest curtain of obscurantism that ever obscured history, decided that nothing mattered much before the Renaissance and the Reformation, they instantly began their modern career by falling into a big blunder. It was the blunder about Platonism. They found, hanging about the courts of the swaggering princes of the sixteenth century (which was as far back in history as they were allowed to go) certain anti-clerical artists and scholars who said they were bored with Aristotle and were supposed to be secretly indulging in Plato. The moderns, utterly ignorant of the whole story of the medievals, instantly fell into the trap. They assumed that Aristotle was some crabbed antiquity and tyranny from the black back of the Dark Ages, and that Plato was an entirely new Pagan pleasure never yet tasted by Christian men. Father Knox has shown in what a startling state of innocence is the mind of Mr. H. L. Mencken, for instance, upon this point. In fact, of course, the story is exactly the other way round. If anything, it was Platonism that was the old orthodoxy. It was

Aristotelianism that was the very modern revolution. And the leader of that modern revolution was the man who is the subject of this book.

The truth is that the historical Catholic Church began by being Platonist; by being rather too Platonist. Platonism was in that golden Greek air that was breathed by the first great Greek theologians. The Christian Fathers were much more like the Neo-Platonists than were the scholars of the Renaissance; who were only Neo-Neo-Platonists. For Chrysostom or Basil it was as ordinary and normal to think in terms of the Logos, or the Wisdom which is the aim of philosophers, as it is to any men of any religion today to talk about social problems or progress or the economic crisis throughout the world. St. Augustine followed a natural mental evolution when he was a Platonist before he was a Manichean, and a Manichean before he was a Christian. And it was exactly in that last association that the first faint hint, of the danger of being *too* Platonist, may be seen.

From the Renaissance to the nineteenth century, the Moderns have had an almost monstrous love of the Ancients. In considering medieval life, they could never regard the Christians as anything but the pupils of the Pagans; of Plato in ideas, or Aristotle in reason and science. It was not so. On some points, even from the most monotonously modern standpoint, Catholicism was centuries ahead of Platonism or Aristotelianism. We can see it still, for instance, in the tiresome tenacity of Astrology. On that matter the philosophers were all in favour of superstition; and the saints and all such superstitious people were against superstition. But even the great saints found it difficult to get disentangled from this superstition. Two points were always put by those suspicious of the Aristotelianism of Aquinas; and they sound to us now very quaint and comic, taken together. One was the view that the stars are personal beings, governing our lives: the other the great general theory that men have one mind between them; a view obviously opposed to immortality; that is, to individuality. Both linger among the Moderns: so strong is still the tyranny of the Ancients. Astrology sprawls over the Sunday papers, and the other doctrine has its hundredth form in what is called Communism: or the Soul of the Hive.

For on one preliminary point, this position must not be misunderstood. When we praise the practical value of the Aristotelian Revolution, and the originality of Aquinas in leading it, we do not mean that the Scholastic philosophers before him had not been philosophers, or had not been highly philosophical, or had not been in touch with ancient philosophy. In so far as there was ever a bad break in philosophical history, it was not before St. Thomas, or at the beginning of medieval history; it was after St. Thomas and at the beginning of modern history. The great intellectual tradition that comes down to us from Pythagoras and Plato was never interrupted or lost through such trifles as the sack of Rome, the triumph of Attila or all the barbarian invasions of the Dark Ages. It was only lost after the introduction of printing, the discovery of America, the founding of the Royal Society and all the enlightenment of the Renaissance and the modern world. It was there, if anywhere, that there was lost or impatiently snapped the long thin delicate thread that had descended from distant antiquity; the thread of that unusual human hobby; the habit of thinking. This is proved by the fact that the printed books of this later period largely had to wait for the eighteenth century, or the end of the seventeenth century, to find even the names of the new philosophers; who were at the best a new kind of philosophers. But the decline of the Empire, the Dark Ages and the early Middle Ages, though too much tempted to neglect what was opposed to Platonic philosophy, had never neglected philosophy. In that sense St. Thomas, like most other very original men, has a long and clear pedigree. He himself is constantly referring back to the authorities from St. Augustine to St. Anselm, and from St. Anselm to St. Albert, and even when he differs, he also defers.

A very learned Anglican once said to me, not perhaps without a touch of tartness, “I can’t understand why everybody talks as if Thomas Aquinas were the beginning of the Scholastic philosophy. I could understand their saying he was the end of it.” Whether or no the comment was meant to be tart, we may be sure that the reply of St. Thomas would have been perfectly urbane. And indeed it would be easy to answer with a certain placidity, that in his Thomist language the end of a thing does not mean its destruction, but its fulfilment. No Thomist will complain, if Thomism is the end of our philosophy, in the sense in which God is the end of our existence. For that does not mean that we cease to exist, but that we become as perennial as the *philosophia perennis*. Putting this claim on one side, however, it is important to remember that my distinguished interlocutor was perfectly right, in that there had been whole dynasties of doctrinal philosophers before Aquinas, leading up to the day of the great revolt of the Aristotelians. Nor was even that revolt a thing entirely abrupt and unforeseen. An able writer in the *Dublin Review* not long ago pointed out that in some respects the whole nature of metaphysics had advanced a long way since Aristotle, by the time it came to Aquinas. And that it is no disrespect to the primitive and gigantic genius of the Stagirite to say that in some respects he was really but a rude and rough founder of philosophy, compared with some of the subsequent subtleties of medievalism; that the Greek gave a few grand hints which the Scholastics developed into the most delicate fine shades. This may be an overstatement, but there is a truth in it. Anyhow, it is certain that even in Aristotelian philosophy, let alone Platonic philosophy, there was already a tradition of highly intelligent interpretation. If that delicacy afterwards degenerated into hair-splitting, it was none the less delicate hair-splitting; and work requiring very scientific tools.

What made the Aristotelian Revolution really revolutionary was the fact that it was really religious. It is the fact, so fundamental that I thought it well to lay it down in the first few pages of this book; that the revolt was largely a revolt of the most Christian elements in Christendom. St. Thomas, every bit as much as St. Francis, felt subconsciously that the hold of his people was slipping on the solid Catholic doctrine and discipline, worn smooth by more than a thousand years of routine; and that the Faith needed to be shown under a new light and dealt with from another angle. But he had no motive except the desire to make it popular for the salvation of the people. It was true, broadly speaking, that for some time past it had been too Platonist to be popular. It needed something like the shrewd and homely touch of Aristotle to turn it again into a religion of common sense. Both the motive and the method are illustrated in the war of Aquinas against the Augustinians.

First, it must be remembered that the Greek influence continued to flow from the Greek Empire; or at least from the centre of the Roman Empire which was in the Greek city of Byzantium, and no longer in Rome. That influence was Byzantine in every good and bad sense; like Byzantine art, it was severe and mathematical and a little terrible; like Byzantine etiquette, it was Oriental and faintly decadent. We owe to the learning of Mr. Christopher Dawson much enlightenment upon the way in which Byzantium slowly stiffened into a sort of Asiatic theocracy, more like that which served the Sacred Emperor in China. But even the unlearned can see the difference, in the way in which Eastern Christianity flattened everything, as it flattened the faces of the images into icons. It became a thing of patterns rather than pictures; and it made definite and destructive war upon statues. Thus we see, strangely enough, that the East was the land of the Cross and the West was the land of the Crucifix. The Greeks were being dehumanised by a radiant symbol, while the Goths were being humanised by an instrument of torture. Only the West made realistic pictures of the greatest of all the tales out of the East. Hence the Greek element in Christian theology tended more and more to be a sort of dried up Platonism; a thing of diagrams and abstractions; to the last indeed noble abstractions, but not sufficiently touched by that great thing that is by definition almost the opposite of abstraction: Incarnation. Their Logos was the Word; but not the Word made Flesh. In a thousand very subtle ways, often escaping doctrinal definition, this spirit spread over the world of Christendom from the place where the Sacred Emperor sat under his golden mosaics; and the flat pavement of the Roman Empire was at last a sort of smooth pathway for Mahomet. For Islam was the ultimate fulfilment of the Iconoclasts. Long before that, however, there was this tendency to make the Cross merely decorative like the Crescent; to make it a pattern like the Greek key or the Wheel of Buddha. But there is something passive about such a world of patterns, and the Greek Key does not open any door, while the Wheel of Buddha always moves round and never moves on.

Partly through these negative influences, partly through a necessary and noble asceticism which sought to emulate the awful standard of the martyrs, the earlier Christian ages had been excessively anti-corporeal and too near the danger-line of Manichean mysticism. But there was far less danger in the fact that the saints macerated the body than in the fact that the sages neglected it. Granted all the grandeur of Augustine’s contribution to Christianity, there was in a sense a more subtle danger in Augustine the Platonist than even in Augustine the Manichee. There came from it a mood which unconsciously committed the heresy of dividing the substance of the Trinity. It thought of God too exclusively as a Spirit who purifies or a Saviour who redeems; and too little as a Creator who creates. That is why men like Aquinas thought it right to correct Plato by an appeal to Aristotle; Aristotle who took things as he found them, just as Aquinas accepted things as God created them. In all the work of St. Thomas the world of positive creation is perpetually present. Humanly speaking, it was he who saved the human element in Christian theology, if he used for convenience certain elements in heathen philosophy. Only, as has already been urged, the human element is also the Christian one.

The panic upon the Aristotelian peril, that had passed across the high places of the Church, was probably a dry wind from the desert. It was really filled rather with fear of Mahomet than fear of Aristotle. And this was ironic, because there was really much more difficulty in reconciling Aristotle with Mahomet than in reconciling him with Christ. Islam is essentially a simple creed for simple men; and nobody can ever really turn pantheism into a simple creed. It is at once too abstract and too complicated. There are simple believers in a personal God; and there are atheists more simple-minded than any believers in a personal God. But few can, in mere simplicity, accept a godless universe as a god. And while the Moslem, as compared with the Christian, had perhaps a less human God, he had if possible a more personal God. The will of Allah was very much of a will, and could not be turned into a stream of tendency. On all that cosmic and abstract side the Catholic was more accommodating than the Moslem — up to a point. The Catholic could admit at least that Aristotle was right about the impersonal elements of a personal God. Hence, we may say broadly of the Moslem philosophers, that those who became good philosophers became bad Moslems. It is not altogether unnatural that many bishops and doctors feared that the Thomists might become good philosophers and bad Christians. But there were also many, of the strict school of Plato and Augustine, who stoutly denied that they were even good philosophers. Between those rather incongruous passions, the love of Plato and the fear of Mahomet, there was a moment when the prospects of any Aristotelian culture in Christendom looked very dark indeed. Anathema after anathema was thundered from high places; and under the shadow of the persecution, as so often happens, it seemed for a moment that barely one or two figures stood alone in the storm-swept area. They were both in the black and white of the Dominicans; for Albertus and Aquinas stood firm.

In that sort of combat there is always confusion; and majorities change into minorities and back again, as if by magic. It is always difficult to date the turn of the tide, which seems to be a welter of eddies; the very dates seeming to overlap and confuse the crisis. But the change, from the moment when the two Dominicans stood alone to the moment when the whole Church at last wheeled into line with them, may perhaps be found at about the moment when they were practically brought before a hostile but a not unjust judge. Stephen Tempier, the Bishop of Paris, was apparently a rather fine specimen of the old fanatical Churchman, who thought that admiring

Aristotle was a weakness likely to be followed by adoring Apollo. He was also, by a piece of bad luck, one of the old social conservatives, who had intensely resented the popular revolution of the Preaching Friars. But he was an honest man; and Thomas Aquinas never asked for anything but permission to address honest men. All around him there were other Aristotelian revolutionaries of a much more dubious sort. There was Siger, the sophist from Brabant, who learned all his Aristotelianism from the Arabs; and had an ingenious theory about how an Arabian agnostic could also be a Christian. There were a thousand young men of the sort that had shouted for Abelard; full of the youth of the thirteenth century and drunken with the Greek wine of Stagira. Over against them, lowering and implacable, was the old Puritan party of the Augustinians; only too delighted to class the rationalistic Albert and Thomas with equivocal Moslem meta-physicians.

It would seem that the triumph of Thomas was really a personal triumph. He withdrew not a single one of his propositions; though it is said that the reactionary Bishop did condemn some of them after his death. On the whole, however, Aquinas convinced most of his critics that he was quite as good a Catholic as they were. There was a sequel of squabbles between the Religious Orders, following upon this controversial crisis. But it is probably true to say that the fact, that a man like Aquinas had managed even partially to satisfy a man like Tempier, was the end of the essential quarrel. What was already familiar to the few became familiar to the many; that an Aristotelian could really be a Christian. Another fact assisted in the common conversion. It rather curiously resembles the story of the translation of the Bible; and the alleged Catholic suppression of the Bible. Behind the scenes, where the Pope was much more tolerant than the Paris Bishop, the friends of Aquinas had been hard at work producing a new translation of Aristotle. It demonstrated that in many ways the heretical translation had been a very heretical translation. With the final consummation of this work, we may say that the great Greek philosophy entered finally into the system of Christendom. The process has been half humourously described as the Baptism of Aristotle.

We have all heard of the humility of the man of science; of many who were very genuinely humble; and of some who were very proud of their humility. It will be the somewhat too recurrent burden of this brief study that Thomas Aquinas really did have the humility of the man of science; as a special variant of the humility of the saint. It is true that he did not himself contribute anything concrete in the experiment or detail of physical science; in this, it may be said, he even lagged behind the last generation, and was far less of an experimental scientist than his tutor Albertus Magnus. But for all that, he was historically a great friend to the freedom of science. The principles he laid down, properly understood, are perhaps the best that can be produced for protecting science from mere obscurantist persecution. For instance, in the matter of the inspiration of Scripture, he fixed first on the obvious fact, which was forgotten by four furious centuries of sectarian battle, that the meaning of Scripture is very far from self-evident and that we must often interpret it in the light of other truths. If a literal interpretation is really and flatly contradicted by an obvious fact, why then we can only say that the literal interpretation must be a false interpretation. But the fact must really be an obvious fact. And unfortunately, nineteenth century scientists were just as ready to jump to the conclusion that any guess about nature was an obvious fact, as were seventeenth-century sectarians to jump to the conclusion that any guess about Scripture was the obvious explanation. Thus, private theories about what the Bible ought to mean, and premature theories about what the world ought to mean, have met in loud and widely advertised controversy, especially in the Victorian time; and this clumsy collision of two very impatient forms of ignorance was known as the quarrel of Science and Religion.

But St. Thomas had the scientific humility in this very vivid and special sense; that he was ready to take the lowest place; for the examination of the lowest things. He did not, like a modern specialist, study the worm as if it were the world; but he was willing to begin to study the reality of the world in the reality of the worm. His Aristotelianism simply meant that the study of the humblest fact will lead to the study of the highest truth. That for him the process was logical and not biological, was concerned with philosophy rather than science, does not alter the essential idea that he believed in beginning at the bottom of the ladder. But he also gave, by his view of Scripture and Science, and other questions, a sort of charter for pioneers more purely practical than himself. He practically said that if they could really prove their practical discoveries, the traditional interpretation of Scripture must give way before those discoveries. He could hardly, as the common phrase goes, say fairer than that. If the matter had been left to him, and men like him, there never would have been any quarrel between

Science and Religion. He did his very best to map out two provinces for them, and to trace a just frontier between them.

It is often cheerfully remarked that Christianity has failed, by which is meant that it has never had that sweeping, imperial and imposed supremacy, which has belonged to each of the great revolutions, every one of which has subsequently failed. There was never a moment when men could say that every man was a Christian; as they might say for several months that every man was a Royalist or a Republican or a Communist. But if sane historians want to understand the sense in which the Christian character has succeeded, they could not find a better case than the massive moral pressure of a man like St. Thomas, in support of the buried rationalism of the heathens, which had as yet only been dug up for the amusement of the heretics. It was, quite strictly and exactly, because a new kind of man was conducting rational enquiry in a new kind of way, that men forgot the curse that had fallen on the temples of the dead demons and the palaces of the dead despots; forgot even the new fury out of Arabia against which they were fighting for their lives; because the man who was asking them to return to sense, or to return to their senses, was not a sophist but a saint. Aristotle had described the magnanimous man, who is great and knows that he is great. But Aristotle would never have recovered his own greatness, but for the miracle that created the more magnanimous man; who is great and knows that he is small.

There is a certain historical importance in what some would call the heaviness of the style employed. It carries a curious impression of candour, which really did have, I think, a considerable effect upon contemporaries. The saint has sometimes been called a sceptic. The truth is that he was very largely tolerated as a sceptic because he was obviously a saint. When he seemed to stand up as a stubborn Aristotelian, hardly distinguishable from the Arabian heretics, I do seriously believe that what protected him was very largely the prodigious power of his simplicity and his obvious goodness and love of truth. Those who went out against the haughty confidence of the heretics were stopped and brought up all standing, against a sort of huge humility which was like a mountain: or perhaps like that immense valley that is the mould of a mountain. Allowing for all medieval conventions, we can feel that with the other innovators, this was not always so. The others, from Abelard down to Siger of Brabant, have never quite lost, in the long process of history, a faint air of showing off. Nobody could feel for a moment that Thomas Aquinas was showing off. The very dullness of diction, of which some complain, was enormously convincing. He could have given wit as well as wisdom; but he was so prodigiously in earnest that he gave his wisdom without his wit.

After the hour of triumph came the moment of peril. It is always so with alliances, and especially because Aquinas was fighting on two fronts. His main business was to defend the Faith against the abuse of Aristotle; and he boldly did it by supporting the use of Aristotle. He knew perfectly well that armies of atheists and anarchists were roaring applause in the background at his Aristotelian victory over all he held most dear. Nevertheless, it was never the existence of atheists, any more than Arabs or Aristotelian pagans, that disturbed the extraordinary controversial composure of Thomas Aquinas. The real peril that followed on the victory he had won for Aristotle was vividly presented in the curious case of Siger of Brabant; and it is well worth study, for anyone who would begin to comprehend the strange history of Christendom. It is marked by one rather queer quality; which has always been the unique note of the Faith, though it is not noticed by its modern enemies, and rarely by its modern friends. It is the fact symbolised in the legend of Antichrist, who was the double of Christ; in the profound proverb that the Devil is the ape of God. It is the fact that falsehood is never so false as when it is very nearly true. It is when the stab comes near the nerve of truth, that the Christian conscience cries out in pain. And Siger of Brabant, following on some of the Arabian Aristotelians, advanced a theory which most modern newspaper readers would instantly have declared to be the same as the theory of St. Thomas. That was what finally roused St. Thomas to his last and most emphatic protest. He had won his battle for a wider scope of philosophy and science; he had cleared the ground for a general understanding about faith and enquiry; an understanding that has generally been observed among Catholics, and certainly never deserted without disaster. It was the idea that the scientist should go on exploring and experimenting freely, so long as he did not claim an infallibility and finality which it was against his own principles to claim. Meanwhile the Church should go on developing and defining, about supernatural things, so long as she did not claim a right to alter the deposit of faith, which it was against her own principles to claim. And when he had said this, Siger of Brabant got up and said something so horribly like it, and so horribly unlike, that (like the Antichrist) he might have deceived the very elect.

Siger of Brabant said this: the Church must be right theologically, but she can be wrong scientifically. There are two truths; the truth of the supernatural world, and the truth of the natural world, which contradicts the supernatural world. While we are being naturalists, we can suppose that Christianity is all nonsense; but then, when we remember that we are Christians, we must admit that Christianity is true even if it is nonsense. In other words, Siger of Brabant split the human head in two, like the blow in an old legend of battle; and declared that a man has two minds, with one of which he must entirely believe and with the other may utterly disbelieve. To many this would at least seem like a parody of Thomism. As a fact, it was the assassination of Thomism. It was not two ways of finding the same truth; it was an untruthful way of pretending that there are two truths. And it is extraordinarily interesting to note that this is the one occasion when the Dumb Ox really came out like a wild bull. When he stood up to answer Siger of Brabant, he was altogether transfigured, and the very style of his sentences, which is a thing like the tone of a man’s voice, is suddenly altered. He had never been angry with any of the enemies who disagreed with him. But these enemies had attempted the worst treachery: they had made him agree with them.

Those who complain that theologians draw fine distinctions could hardly find a better example of their own folly. In fact, a fine distinction can be a flat contradiction. It was notably so in this case. St. Thomas was willing to allow the one truth to be approached by two paths, precisely *because* he was sure there was only one truth. Because the Faith was the one truth, nothing discovered in nature could ultimately contradict the Faith. Because the Faith was the one truth, nothing really deduced from the Faith could ultimately contradict the facts. It was in truth a curiously daring confidence in the reality of his religion: and though some may linger to dispute it, it has been justified. The scientific facts, which were supposed to contradict the Faith in the nineteenth century, are nearly all of them regarded as unscientific fictions in the twentieth century. Even the materialists have fled from materialism; and those who lectured us about determinism in psychology are already talking about indeterminism in matter. But whether his confidence was right or wrong, it was specially and supremely a confidence that there is one truth which cannot contradict itself. And this last group of enemies suddenly sprang up, to tell him they entirely agreed with him in saying that there are two contradictory truths. Truth, in the medieval phrase, carried two faces under one hood; and these double-faced sophists practically dared to suggest that it was the Dominican hood.

So, in his last battle and for the first time, he fought as with a battle-axe. There is a ring in the words altogether beyond the almost impersonal patience he maintained in debate with so many enemies. “Behold our refutation of the error. It is not based on documents of faith, but on the reasons and statements of the philosophers themselves. If then anyone there be who, boastfully taking pride in his supposed wisdom, wishes to challenge what we have written, let him not do it in some corner nor before children who are powerless to decide on such difficult matters. Let him reply openly if he dare. He shall find me then confronting him, and not only my negligible self, but many another whose study is truth. We shall do battle with his errors or bring a cure to his ignorance.”

The Dumb Ox is bellowing now; like one at bay and yet terrible and towering over all the baying pack. We have already noted why, in this one quarrel with Siger of Brabant, Thomas Aquinas let loose such thunders of purely moral passion; it was because the whole work of his life was being betrayed behind his back, by those who had used his victories over the reactionaries. The point at the moment is that this is perhaps his one moment of personal passion, save for a single flash in the troubles of his youth: and he is once more fighting his enemies with a firebrand. And yet, even in this isolated apocalypse of anger, there is one phrase that may be commended for all time to men who are angry with much less cause. If there is one sentence that could be carved in marble, as representing the calmest and most enduring rationality of his unique intelligence, it is a sentence which came pouring out with all the rest of this molten lava. If there is one phrase that stands before history as typical of Thomas Aquinas, it is that phrase about his own argument: “It is not based on documents of faith, but on the reasons and statements of the philosophers themselves.” Would that all Orthodox doctors in deliberation were as reasonable as Aquinas in anger! Would that all Christian apologists would remember that maxim; and write it up in large letters on the wall, before they nail any theses there. At the top of his fury, Thomas Aquinas understands, what so many defenders of orthodoxy will not understand. It is no good to tell an atheist that he is an atheist; or to charge a denier of immortality with the infamy of denying it; or to imagine that one can force an opponent to admit he is wrong, by proving that he is wrong on somebody else's principles, but not on his own. After the great example of St. Thomas, the principle stands, or ought always to have stood established; that we must either not argue with a man at all, or we must argue on his grounds and not ours. We may do other things instead of arguing, according to our views of what actions are morally permissible; but if we argue we must argue "On the reasons and statements of the philosophers themselves." This is the common sense in a saying attributed to a friend of St. Thomas, the great St. Louis, King of France, which shallow people quote as a sample of fanaticism; the sense of which is, that I must either argue with an infidel as a real philosopher can argue, or else "thrust a sword through his body as far as it will go." A real philosopher (even of the opposite school) will be the first to agree that St. Louis was entirely philosophical.

So, in the last great controversial crisis of his theological campaign, Thomas Aquinas contrived to give his friends and enemies not only a lesson in theology, but a lesson in controversy. But it was in fact his last controversy. He had been a man with a huge controversial appetite, a thing that exists in some men and not others, in saints and in sinners. But after this great and victorious duel with Siger of Brabant, he was suddenly overwhelmed with a desire for silence and repose. He said one strange thing about this mood of his to a friend, which will fall into its more appropriate place elsewhere. He fell back on the extreme simplicities of his monastic round and seemed to desire nothing but a sort of permanent retreat. A request came to him from the Pope that he should set out upon some further mission of diplomacy or disputation; and he made ready to obey. But before he had gone many miles on the journey, he was dead.

IV

A MEDITATION ON THE MANICHEES

There is one casual anecdote about St. Thomas Aquinas which illuminates him like a lightning-flash, not only without but within. For it not only shows him as a character, and even as a comedy character, and shows the colours of his period and social background; but also, as if for an instant, makes a transparency of his mind. It is a trivial incident which occurred one day, when he was reluctantly dragged from his work, and we might almost say from his play. For both were for him found in the unusual hobby of thinking, which is for some men a thing much more intoxicating than mere drinking. He had declined any number of society invitations, to the courts of kings and princes, not because he was unfriendly, for he was not; but because he was always glowing within with the really gigantic plans of exposition and argument which filled his life. On one occasion, however, he was invited to the court of King Louis IX of France, more famous as the great St. Louis; and for some reason or other, the Dominican authorities of his Order told him to accept; so he immediately did so, being an obedient friar even in his sleep; or rather in his permanent trance of reflection.

It is a real case against conventional hagiography that it sometimes tends to make all saints seem to be the same. Whereas in fact no men are more different than saints; not even murderers. And there could hardly be a more complete contrast, given the essentials of holiness, than between St. Thomas and St. Louis. St. Louis was born a knight and a king; but he was one of those men in whom a certain simplicity, combined with courage and activity, makes it natural, and in a sense easy, to fulfil directly and promptly any duty or office, however official. He was a man in whom holiness and healthiness had no quarrel; and their issue was in action. He did not go in for thinking much, in the sense of theorising much. But, even in theory, he had that sort of presence of mind, which belongs to the rare and really practical man when he has to think. He never said the wrong thing; and he was orthodox by instinct. In the old pagan proverb about kings being philosophers or philosophers kings, there was a certain miscalculation, connected with a mystery that only Christianity could reveal. For while it is possible for a king to wish much to be a saint, it is not possible for a saint to wish very much to be a king. A good man will hardly be always dreaming of being a great monarch; but, such is the liberality of the Church, that she cannot forbid even a great monarch to dream of being a good man. But Louis was a straight-forward soldierly sort of person who did not particularly mind being a king, any more than he would have minded being a captain or a sergeant or any other rank in his army. Now a man like St. Thomas would definitely dislike being a king, or being entangled with the pomp and politics of kings; not only his humility, but a sort of subconscious fastidiousness and fine dislike of futility, often found in leisurely and learned men with large minds, would really have prevented him making contact with the complexity of court life. Also, he was anxious all his life to keep out of politics; and there was no political symbol more striking, or in a sense more challenging, at that moment, than the power of the King in Paris.

Paris was truly at that time an *aurora borealis*; a Sunrise in the North. We must realise that lands much nearer to Rome had rotted with paganism and pessimism and Oriental influences of which the most respectable was that of Mahound. Provence and all the South had been full of a fever of nihilism or negative mysticism, and from Northern France had come the spears and swords that swept away the unchristian thing. In Northern France also sprang up that splendour of building that shine like swords and spears: the first spires of the Gothic. We talk now of grey Gothic buildings; but they must have been very different when they went up white and gleaming into the northern skies, partly picked out with gold and bright colours; a new flight of architecture, as startling as flying-ships. The new Paris ultimately left behind by St. Louis must have been a thing white like lilies and splendid as the oriflamme. It was the beginning of the great new thing: the nation of France, which was to pierce and overpower the old quarrel of Pope and Emperor in the lands from which Thomas came. But Thomas came very unwillingly, and, if we may say it of so kindly a man, rather sulkily. As he entered Paris they showed him from the hill that splendour of new spires beginning, and somebody said something like, “How grand it must be to own all this.” And Thomas Aquinas only muttered, “I would rather have that Chrysostom MS. I can’t get hold of.”

Somehow they steered that reluctant bulk of reflection to a seat in the royal banquet hall; and all that we know of Thomas tells us that he was perfectly courteous to those who spoke to him, but spoke little, and was soon forgotten in the most brilliant and noisy clatter in the world: the noise of French talking. What the Frenchmen were talking about we do not know; but they forgot all about the large fat Italian in their midst, and it seems only too possible that he forgot all about them. Sudden silences will occur even in French conversation; and in one of these the interruption came. There had long been no word or motion in that huge heap of black and white weeds, like motley in mourning, which marked him as a mendicant friar out of the streets, and contrasted with all the colours and patterns and quarterings of that first and freshest dawn of chivalry and heraldry. The triangular shields and pennons and pointed spears, the triangular swords of the Crusade, the pointed windows and the conical hoods, repeated everywhere that fresh French medieval spirit that did, in every sense, come to the point. But the colours of the coats were gay and varied, with little to rebuke their richness; for St. Louis, who had himself a special quality of coming to the point, had said to his courtiers, “Vanity should be avoided; but every man should dress well, in the manner of his rank, that his wife may the more easily love him.”

And then suddenly the goblets leapt and rattled on the board and the great table shook, for the friar had brought down his huge fist like a club of stone, with a crash that startled everyone like an explosion; and had cried out in a strong voice, but like a man in the grip of a dream, “And *that* will settle the Manichees!”

The palace of a king, even when it is the palace of a saint, has it conventions. A shock thrilled through the court, and every one felt as if the fat friar from Italy had thrown a plate at King Louis, or knocked his crown sideways. They all looked timidly at the terrible seat, that was for a thousand years the throne of the Capets: and many there were presumably prepared to pitch the big black-robed beggarman out of the window. But St. Louis, simple as he seemed, was no mere medieval fountain of honour or even fountain of mercy but also the fountain of two eternal rivers: the irony and the courtesy of France. And he turned to his secretaries, asking them in a low voice to take their tablets round to the sear of the absent-minded controversialist, and take a note of the argument that had just occurred to him; because it must be a very good one and he might forget it. I have paused upon this anecdote, first, as has been said, because it is the one which gives us the most vivid snapshot of a great medieval character; indeed of two great medieval characters. But it also specially fitted to be taken as a type or a turning-point, because of the glimpse it gives of the man’s main preoccupation; and the sort of thing that might have been found in his thoughts, if they had been thus surprised at any moment by a philosophical eavesdropper or through a psychological keyhole. It was not for nothing that he was still brooding, even in the white court of St. Louis, upon the dark cloud of the Manichees.

This book is meant only to be the sketch of a man; but it must at least lightly touch, later on, upon a method and a meaning; or what our journalism has an annoying way of calling a message. A few very inadequate pages must be given to the man in relation to his theology and his philosophy; but the thing of which I mean to speak here is something at once more general and more personal even than his philosophy. I have therefore introduced it here, before we come to anything like technical talk about his philosophy. It was something that might alternatively be called his moral attitude, or his temperamental predisposition, or the purpose of his life so far as social and human effects were concerned: for he knew better than most of us that there is but one purpose in this life, and it is one that is beyond this life. But if we wanted to put in a picturesque and simplified form what he wanted for the world, and what was his work in history, apart from theoretical and theological definitions, we might well say that it really was to strike a blow and settle the Manichees.

The full meaning of this may not be apparent to those who do not study theological history and perhaps even less apparent to those who do. Indeed it may seem equally irrelevant to the history and the theology. In history St. Dominic and Simon de Montfort between them had already pretty well settled the Manichees. And in theology of course an encyclopaedic doctor like Aquinas dealt with a thousand other heresies besides the Manichean heresy. Nevertheless, it does represent his main position and the turn he gave to the whole history of Christendom.

I think it well to interpose this chapter, though its scope may seem more vague than the rest; because there is a sort of big blunder about St. Thomas and his creed, which is an obstacle for most modern people in even beginning to understand them. It arises roughly thus. St. Thomas, like other monks, and especially other saints, lived a life of renunciation and austerity; his fasts, for instance, being in marked contrast to the luxury in which he might have lived if he chose. This element stands high in his religion, as a manner of asserting the will against the power of nature, of thanking the

Redeemer by partially sharing his sufferings, of making a man ready for anything as a missionary or martyr, and similar ideals. These happen to be rare in the modern industrial society of the West, outside his communion; and it is therefore assumed that they are the whole meaning of that communion. Because it is uncommon for an alderman to fast for forty days, or a politician to take a Trappist vow of silence, or a man about town to live a life of strict celibacy, the average outsider is convinced, not only that Catholicism is nothing except asceticism, but that asceticism is nothing except pessimism. He is so obliging as to explain to Catholics why they hold this heroic virtue in respect; and is ever ready to point out that the philosophy behind it is an Oriental hatred of anything connected with Nature, and a purely Schopenhauerian disgust with the Will to Live. I read in a "high-class" review of Miss Rebecca West's book on St.. Augustine, the astounding statement that the Catholic Church regards sex as having the nature of sin. How marriage can be a sacrament if sex is a sin, or why it is the Catholics who are in favour of birth and their foes who are in favour of birth-control, I will leave the critic to worry out for himself. My concern is not with that part of the argument; but with another.

The ordinary modern critic, seeing this ascetic ideal in an authoritative Church, and not seeing it in most other inhabitants of Brixton or Brighton, is apt to say, "This is the result of Authority; it would be better to have Religion without Authority." But in truth, a wider experience outside Brixton or Brighton would reveal the mistake. It is rare to find a fasting alderman or a Trappist politician, but it is still more rare to see nuns suspended in the air on hooks or spikes; it is unusual for a Catholic Evidence Guild orator in Hyde Park to begin his speech by gashing himself all over with knives; a stranger calling at an ordinary presbytery will seldom find the parish priest lying on the floor with a fire lighted on his chest and scorching him while he utters spiritual ejaculations. Yet all these things are done all over Asia, for instance, by voluntary enthusiasts acting solely on the great impulse of Religion; of Religion, in their case, not commonly imposed by any immediate Authority; and certainly not imposed by this particular Authority. In short, a real knowledge of mankind will tell anybody that Religion is a very terrible thing; that it is truly a raging fire, and that Authority is often quite as much needed to restrain it as to impose it. Asceticism, or the war with the appetites, is itself an appetite. It can never be eliminated from among the strange ambitions of Man. But it can be kept in some reasonable control; and it is indulged in much saner proportion under Catholic Authority than in Pagan or Puritan anarchy. Meanwhile, the whole of this ideal, though an essential part of Catholic idealism when it is understood, is in some ways entirely a side issue. It is not the primary principle of Catholic philosophy; it is only a particular deduction from Catholic ethics. And when we begin to talk about primary philosophy, we realise the full and flat contradiction between the monk fasting and the fakir hanging himself on hooks.

Now nobody will begin to understand the Thomist philosophy, or indeed the Catholic philosophy, who does not realise that the primary and fundamental part of it is entirely the praise of Life, the praise of Being, the praise of God as the Creator of the World. Everything else follows a long way after that, being conditioned by various complications like the Fall or the vocation of heroes. The trouble occurs because the Catholic mind moves upon two planes; that of the Creation and that of the Fall. The nearest parallel is, for instance, that of England invaded; there might be strict martial law in Kent because the enemy had landed in Kent, and relative liberty in Hereford; but this would not affect the affection of an English patriot for Hereford or Kent, and strategic caution in Kent would not affect the love of Kent. For the love of England would remain, both the parts to be redeemed by discipline and the parts to be enjoyed in liberty. Any extreme of Catholic asceticism is a wise, or unwise, precaution against the evil of the Fall; it is *never* a doubt about the good of the Creation. And *that* is where it really does differ, nor only from the rather excessive eccentricity of the gentleman who hangs himself on hooks, but from the whole cosmic theory which is the hook on which he hangs. In the case of many Oriental religions, it really is true that the asceticism is pessimism; that the ascetic tortures himself to death out of an abstract hatred of life; that he does nor merely mean to control Nature as he should, but to contradict Nature as much as he can. And though it takes a milder form than hooks in millions of the religious populations of Asia, it is a fact far too little realised, that the dogma of the denial of life does really rule as a first principle on so vast a scale. One historic form it took was that great enemy of Christianity from its beginnings: the Manichees.

What is called the Manichean philosophy has had many forms; indeed it has attacked what is immortal and immutable with a very curious kind of immortal mutability. It is like the legend of the magician who turns himself into a snake or a cloud; and the whole has that nameless note of irresponsibility, which belongs to much of the metaphysics and morals of Asia, from which the Manichean mystery came. But it is always in one way or another a notion that nature is evil; or that evil is at least rooted in nature. The essential point is that as evil has roots in nature, so it has rights in nature. Wrong has as much right to exist as right. As already stated this notion took many forms. Sometimes it was a dualism, which made evil an equal partner with good; so that neither could be called an usurper. More often it was a general idea that demons had made the material world, and if there were any good spirits, they were concerned only with the spiritual world. Later, again, it took the form of Calvinism, which held that God had indeed made the world, but in a special sense, made the evil as well as the good: had made an evil will as well as an evil world. On this view, if a man chooses to damn his soul alive, he is not thwarting God's will but rather fulfilling it. In these two forms, of the early Gnosticism and the later Calvinism, we see the superficial variety and fundamental unity of Manicheanism. The old Manicheans taught that Satan originated the whole work of creation commonly attributed to God. The new Calvinists taught that God originates the whole work of damnation commonly attributed to Satan. One looked back to the first day when a devil acted like a god, the other looked forward to a last day when a god acted like a devil. But both had the idea that the creator of the earth was primarily the creator of the evil, whether we call him a devil or a god.

Since there are a good many Manicheans among the Moderns, as we may remark in a moment, some may agree with this view, some may be puzzled about it, some may only be puzzled about why we should object to it. To understand the medieval controversy, a word must be said of the Catholic doctrine, which is as modern as it is medieval. That "God looked on all things and saw that they were good" contains a subtlety which the popular pessimist cannot follow, or is too hasty to notice. It is the thesis that there are no bad things, but only bad uses of things. If you will, there are no bad things but only bad thoughts; and especially bad intentions. Only Calvinists can really believe that hell is paved with good intentions. That is exactly the one thing it cannot be paved with. But it is possible to have bad intentions about good things; and good things, like the world and the flesh have been twisted by a bad intention called the devil. But he cannot make *things* bad; they remain as on the first day of creation. The work of heaven alone was material; the making of a material world. The work of hell is entirely spiritual.

This error then had many forms; but especially, like nearly every error, it had two forms, a fiercer one which was outside the Church and attacking the Church, and a subtler one, which was inside the Church and corrupting the Church. There has never been a time when the Church was not torn between that invasion and that treason. It was so, for instance, in the Victorian time, Darwinian "competition," in commerce or race conflict, was every bit as brazen an atheist assault, in the nineteenth century, as the Bolshevist No-God movement in the twentieth century. To brag of brute prosperity, to admire the most muddly millionaires who had cornered wheat by a trick, to talk about the "unfit" (in imitation of the scientific thinker who would finish them off because he cannot even finish his own sentence — unfit for what?) — all that is as simply and openly Anti-Christian as the Black Mass. Yet some weak and worldly Catholics did use this cant in defence of Capitalism, in their first rather feeble resistance to Socialism. At least they did until the great Encyclical of the Pope on the Rights of Labour put a stop to all their nonsense. The evil is always both within and without the Church; but in a wilder form outside and a milder form inside. So it was, again, in the seventeenth century, when there was Calvinism outside and Jansenism inside. And so it was in the thirteenth century, when the obvious danger outside was in the revolution of the Albigensians; but the potential danger inside was in the very traditionalism of the Augustinians. For the Augustinians derived only from Augustine, and Augustine derived partly from Plato, and Plato was right, but not quite right. It is a mathematical fact that if a line be not perfectly directed towards a point, it will actually go further away from it as it comes nearer to it. After a thousand years of extension, the miscalculation of Platonism had come very near to Manicheanism.

Popular errors are nearly always right. They nearly always refer to some ultimate reality, about which those who correct them are themselves incorrect. It is a very queer thing that "Platonic Love" has come to mean for the un-lettered something rather purer and cleaner than it means for the learned. Yet even those who realise the great Greek evil may well realise that perversity often comes out of the wrong sort of purity. Now it was the inmost lie of the Manichees that they identified purity with sterility. It is singularly contrasted with the language of St. Thomas, which always connects purity with fruitfulness; whether it be natural or supernatural. And, queerly enough, as I have said, there does remain a sort of reality in the vulgar colloquialism that the affair between Sam and Susan is “quite Platonic.” It is true that, quite apart from the local perversion, there was in Plato a sort of idea that people would be better without their bodies: that their heads might fly off and meet in the sky in merely intellectual marriage, like cherubs in a picture. The ultimate phase of this “Platonic” philosophy was what inflamed poor D. H. Lawrence into talking nonsense, and he was probably unaware that the Catholic doctrine of marriage would say much of what he said, without talking nonsense. Anyhow, it is historically important to see that Platonic love did somewhat distort both human and divine love, in the theory of the early theologians. Many medieval men, who would indignantly deny the Albigensian doctrine of sterility, were yet in an emotional mood to abandon the body in despair; and some of them to abandon everything in despair.

In truth, this vividly illuminates the provincial stupidity of those who object to what they call “creeds and dogmas.” It was precisely the creed and dogma that saved the sanity of the world. These people generally propose an alternative religion of intuition and feeling. If, in the really Dark Ages, there had been a religion of feeling, it would have been a religion of black and suicidal feeling. It was the rigid creed that resisted the rush of suicidal feeling. The critics of asceticism are probably right in supposing that many a Western hermit did *feel* rather like an Eastern fakir. But he could not really *think* like an Eastern fakir; because he was an orthodox Catholic. And what kept his thought in touch with healthier and more humanistic thought was simply and solely the Dogma. He could not deny that a good God had created the normal and natural world; he could not say that the devil had made the world; because he was not a Manichee. A thousand enthusiasts for celibacy, in the day of the great rush to the desert or the cloister, might have called marriage a sin, if they had only considered their individual ideals, in the modern manner, and their own immediate feelings about marriage. Fortunately, they had to accept the Authority of the Church, which had definitely said that marriage was not a sin. A modern emotional religion might at any moment have turned Catholicism into Manichaeism. But when Religion would have maddened men, Theology kept them sane.

In this sense St. Thomas stands up simply as the great orthodox theologian, who reminded men of the creed of Creation, when many of them were still in the mood of mere destruction. It is futile for the critics of medievalism to quote a hundred medieval phrases that may be supposed to sound like mere pessimism, if they will not understand the central fact; that medieval men did not care about being medieval and did not accept the authority of a mood, because it was melancholy, but did care very much about orthodoxy, which is not a mood. It was because St. Thomas could *prove* that his glorification of the Creator and His creative joy was more orthodox than any atmospheric pessimism, that he dominated the Church and the world, which accepted that truth as a test. But when this immense and impersonal importance is allowed for, we may agree that there was a personal element as well. Like most of the great religious teachers, he was fitted individually for the task that God had given him to do. We can if we like call that talent instinctive; we can even descend to calling it temperamental.

Anybody trying to popularise a medieval philosopher must use language that is very modern and very unphilosophical. Nor is this a sneer at modernity; it arises from the moderns having dealt so much in moods and emotions, especially in the arts, that they have developed a large but loose vocabulary, which deals more with atmosphere than with actual attitude or position. As noted elsewhere, even the modern philosophers are more like the modern poets; in giving an individual tinge even to truth, and often looking at all life through different coloured spectacles. To say that Schopenhauer had the blues, or that William James had a rather rosier outlook, would often convey more than calling the one a Pessimist or the other a Pragmatist. This modern moodiness has its value, though the moderns overrate it; just as medieval logic had its value, though it was overrated in the later Middle Ages. But the point is that to explain the medievals to the moderns, we must often use this modern language of mood. Otherwise the character will be missed, through certain prejudices and ignorances about all such medieval characters. Now there is something that lies all over the work of St. Thomas Aquinas like a great light: which is something quite primary and perhaps unconscious with him, which he would perhaps have passed over as an irrelevant personal quality; and which can now only be expressed by a rather cheap journalistic term, which he would probably have thought quite senseless.

Nevertheless, the only working word for that atmosphere is Optimism. I know that the word is now even more degraded in the twentieth century than it was in the nineteenth century. Men talked lately of being Optimists about the issue of War; they talk now of being Optimists about the revival of Trade; they may talk tomorrow of being Optimists about the International Ping-pong Tournament. But men in the Victorian time did mean a little more than that, when they used the word Optimist of Browning or Stevenson or Walt Whitman. And in a rather larger and more luminous sense than in the case of these men, the term was basically true of Thomas Aquinas. He did, with a most solid and colossal conviction, believe in Life: and in something like what Stevenson called the great theorem of the livableness of life. It breathes somehow in his very first phrases about the reality of Being. If the morbid Renaissance intellectual is supposed to say, "To be or not to be — that is the question," then the massive medieval doctor does most certainly reply in a voice of thunder, "To be — that is the answer." The point is important; many not unnaturally talk of the Renaissance as the time when certain men began to believe in Life. The truth is that it was the time when a few men, for the first time, began to disbelieve in Life. The medievals had put many restrictions, and some excessive restrictions, upon the universal human hunger and even fury for Life. Those restrictions had often been expressed in fanatical and rabid terms; the terms of those resisting a great natural force; the force of men who desired to live. Never until modern thought began, did they really have to fight with men who desired to die. That horror had threatened them in Asiatic Albigensianism, but it never became normal to them — until now.

But this fact becomes very vivid indeed, when we compare the greatest of Christian philosophers with the only men who were anything like his equals, or capable of being his rivals. They were people with whom he did not directly dispute; most of them he had never seen; some of them he had never heard of. Plato and Augustine were the only two with whom he could confer as he did with Bonaventure or even Averrhoes. But we must look elsewhere for his real rivals, and the only real rivals of the Catholic theory. They are the heads of great heathen systems; some of them very ancient, some very modern, like Buddha on the one hand or Nietzsche on the other. It is when we see his gigantic figure against this vast and cosmic background, that we realise, first, that he was the only optimist theologian, and second, that Catholicism is the only optimist theology. Something milder and more amiable may be made out of the deliquescence of theology, and the mixture of the creed with everything that contradicts it;

but among consistent cosmic creeds, this is the only one that is entirely on the side of Life.

Comparative religion has indeed allowed us to compare religions — and to contrast them. Fifty years ago, it set out to prove that all religions were much the same; generally proving, alternately, that they were all equally worthy and that they were all equally worthless. Since then this scientific process has suddenly begun to be scientific, and discovered the depths of the chasms as well as the heights of the hills. It is indeed an excellent improvement that sincerely religious people should respect each other. But respect has discovered difference, where contempt knew only indifference. The more we really appreciate the noble revulsion and renunciation of Buddha, the more we see that intellectually it was the converse and almost the contrary of the salvation of the world by Christ. The Christian would escape from the world into the universe: the Buddhist wishes to escape from the universe even more than from the world. One would uncreate himself; the other would return to his Creation: to his Creator. Indeed it was so genuinely the converse of the idea of the Cross as the Tree of Life, that there is some excuse for setting up the two things side by side, as if they were of equal significance. They are in one sense parallel and equal; as a mound and a hollow, as a valley and a hill. There is a sense in which that sublime despair is the only alternative to that divine audacity. It is even true that the truly spiritual and intellectual man sees it as a sort of dilemma; a very hard and terrible choice. There is little else on earth that can compare with these for completeness. And he who will not climb the mountain of Christ does indeed fall into the abyss of Buddha.

The same is true, in a less lucid and dignified fashion, of most other alternatives of heathen humanity; nearly all are sucked back into that whirlpool of recurrence which all the ancients knew. Nearly all return to the one idea of returning. That is what Buddha described so darkly as the Sorrowful Wheel. It is true that the sort of recurrence which Buddha described as the Sorrowful Wheel, poor Nietzsche actually managed to describe as the Joyful Wisdom. I can only say that if bare repetition was his idea of Joyful Wisdom, I should be curious to know what was his idea of Sorrowful Wisdom. But as a fact, in the case of Nietzsche, this did not belong to the moment of his breaking out, but to the moment of his breaking down. It came at the end of his life, when he was near to mental collapse; and it is really quite contrary to his earlier and finer inspirations of wild freedom or fresh and creative innovation. Once at least he had tried to break out; but he also was only broken — on the wheel.

Alone upon the earth, and lifted and liberated from all the wheels and whirlpools of the earth, stands up the faith of St. Thomas weighted and balanced indeed with more than Oriental metaphysics and more than Pagan pomp and pageantry; but vitally and vividly alone in declaring that life is a living story, with a great beginning and a great close; rooted in the primeval joy of God and finding its fruition in the final happiness of humanity; opening with the colossal chorus in which the sons of God shouted for joy, and ending in that mystical comradeship, shown in a shadowy fashion in those ancient words that move like an archaic dance; "For His delight is with the sons of men."

It is the fate of this sketch to be sketchy about philosophy, scanty or rather empty about theology, and to achieve little more than a decent silence on the subject of sanctity. And yet it must none the less be the recurrent burden of this little book, to which it must return with some monotony, that in this story the philosophy did depend on the theology, and the theology did depend on the sanctity. In other words, it must repeat the first fact, which was emphasised in the first chapter: that this great intellectual creation was a Christian and Catholic creation and cannot be understood as anything else. It was Aquinas who baptised Aristotle, when Aristotle could not have baptised Aquinas; it was a purely Christian miracle which raised the great Pagan from the dead. And this is proved in three ways (as St. Thomas himself might say), which it will be well to summarise as a sort of summary of this book.

First, in the life of St. Thomas, it is proved in the fact that only his huge and solid orthodoxy could have supported so many things which then seemed to be unorthodox. Charity covers a multitude of sins; and in that sense orthodoxy covers a multitude of heresies; or things which are hastily mistaken for heresies. It was precisely because his personal Catholicism was so convincing, that his impersonal Aristotelianism was given the benefit of the doubt. He did not smell of the faggot because he did smell of the firebrand; of the firebrand he had so instantly and instinctively snatched up, under a real assault on essential Catholic ethics. A typically cynical modern phrase refers to the man who is so good that he is good for nothing. St. Thomas was so good that he was good for everything; that his warrant held good for what others considered the most wild and daring speculations, ending in the worship of nothing. Whether or no he baptised Aristotle, he was truly the godfather of Aristotle, he was his sponsor; he swore that the old Greek would do no harm; and the whole world trusted his word.

Second, in the philosophy of St. Thomas, it is proved by the fact that everything depended on the new Christian *motive* for the study of facts, as distinct from truths. The Thomist philosophy began with the lowest roots of thought, the senses and the truisms of the reason; and a Pagan sage might have scorned such things, as he scorned the servile arts. But the materialism, which is merely cynicism in a Pagan, can be Christian humility in a Christian. St. Thomas was willing to begin by recording the facts and sensations of the material world, just as he would have been willing to begin by washing up the plates and dishes in the monastery. The point of his Aristotelianism was that even if common sense about concrete things really was a sort of servile labour, he must not be ashamed to be *servus servorum Dei*. Among heathens the mere sceptic might become the mere cynic; Diogenes in his tub had always a touch of the tub-thumper; but even the dirt of the cynics was dignified into dust and ashes among the saints. If we miss that, we miss the whole meaning of the greatest revolution in history. There was a new *motive* for beginning with the most material, and even with the meanest things.

Third, in the theology of St. Thomas, it is proved by the tremendous truth that supports all that theology; or any other Christian theology. There really was a new reason for regarding the senses, and the sensations of the body, and the experiences of the common man, with a reverence at which great Aristotle would have stared, and no man in the ancient world could have begun to understand. The Body was no longer what it was when Plato and Porphyry and the old mystics had left it for dead. It had hung upon a gibbet. It had risen from a tomb. It was no longer possible for the soul to despise the senses, which had been the organs of something that was more than man. Plato might despise the flesh; but God had not despised it. The senses had truly become sanctified; as they are blessed one by one at a Catholic baptism. “Seeing is believing” was no longer the platitude of a mere idiot, or common individual, as in Plato’s world; it was mixed up with real conditions of real belief. Those revolving mirrors that send messages to the brain of man, that light that breaks upon the brain, these had truly revealed to God himself the path to Bethany or the light on the high rock of Jerusalem. These ears that resound with common noises had reported also to the secret knowledge of God the noise of the crowd that strewed palms and the crowd that cried for Crucifixion. After the Incarnation had become the idea that is central in our civilisation, it was inevitable that there should be a return to materialism, in the sense of the serious value of matter and the making of the body. When once Christ had risen, it was inevitable that Aristotle should rise again.

Those are three real reasons, and very sufficient reasons, for the general support given by the saint to a solid and objective philosophy. And yet there was something else, very vast and vague, to which I have tried to give a faint expression by the interposition of this chapter. It is difficult to express it fully, without the awful peril of being popular, or what the Modernists quite wrongly imagine to be popular; in short, passing from religion to religiosity. But there is a general tone and temper of Aquinas, which it is as difficult to avoid as daylight in a great house of windows. It is that *positive* position of his mind, which is filled and soaked as with sunshine with the warmth of the wonder of created things. There is a certain private audacity, in his communion, by which men add to their private names the tremendous titles of the Trinity and the Redemption; so that some nun may be called “of the Holy Ghost;” or a man bear such a burden as the title of St. John of the Cross. In this sense, the man we study may specially be called St. Thomas of the Creator. The Arabs have a phrase about the hundred names of God; but they also inherit the tradition of a tremendous name unspeakable because it expresses Being itself, dumb and yet dreadful as an instant inaudible shout; the proclamation of the Absolute. And perhaps no other man ever came so near to calling the Creator by His own name, which can only be written I Am.

V

THE REAL LIFE OF ST. THOMAS

At this point, even so crude and external a sketch of a great saint involves the necessity of writing something that cannot fit in with the rest; the one thing which it is important to write and impossible to write. A saint may be any kind of man, with an additional quality that is at once unique and universal. We might even say that the one thing which separates a saint from ordinary men is his readiness to be one with ordinary men. In this sense the word ordinary must be understood in its native and noble meaning; which is connected with the word order. A saint is long past any desire for distinction; he is the only sort of superior man who has never been a superior person. But all this arises from a great central fact, which he does not condescend to call a privilege, but which is in its very nature a sort of privacy; and in that sense almost a form of private property. As with all sound private property, it is enough for him that he has it, he does not desire to limit the number of people who have it. He is always trying to hide it, out of a sort of celestial good manners; and Thomas Aquinas tried to hide it more than most. To reach it, in so far as we can reach it, it will be best to begin with the upper strata; and reach what was in the inside from what was most conspicuous on the outside.

The appearance or bodily presence of St. Thomas Aquinas is really easier to resurrect than that of many who lived before the age of portrait painting. It has been said that in his bodily being or bearing there was little of the Italian; but this is at the best, I fancy an unconscious comparison between St. Thomas and St. Francis; and at worst, only a comparison between him and the hasty legend of vivacious organ-grinders and incendiary ice-cream men. Not all Italians are vivacious organ-grinders, and very few Italians are like St. Francis. A nation is never a type, but it is nearly always a tangle of two or three roughly recognizable types. St. Thomas was of a certain type, which is not so much common in Italy, as common to uncommon Italians.

His bulk made it easy to regard him humorously as the sort of walking wine-barrel, common in the comedies of many nations: he joked about it himself. It may be that he, and not some irritated partisan of the

Augustinian or Arabian parties, was responsible for the sublime exaggeration that a crescent was cut out of the dinner-table to allow him to sit down. It is quite certain that it was an exaggeration; and that his stature was more remarked than his stoutness; but, above all, that his head was quite powerful enough to dominate his body. And his head was of a very real and recognisable type, to judge by the traditional portraits and the personal descriptions. It was that sort of head with the heavy chin and jaws, the Roman nose and the big rather bald brow, which, in spite of its fullness, gives also a curious concave impression of hollows here and there, like caverns of thought. Napoleon carried that head upon a short body. Mussolini carries it today, upon a rather taller but equally active one. It can be seen in the busts of several Roman Emperors, and occasionally above the shabby shirt-front of an Italian waiter; but he is generally a head waiter. So unmistakable is the type, that I cannot but think that the most vivid villain of light fiction, in the Victorian shocker called *The Woman in White*, was really sketched by Wilkie Collins from an actual Italian Count; he is so complete a contrast to the conventional skinny, swarthy and gesticulating villain whom the Victorians commonly presented as an Italian Count. Count Fosco, it may be remembered (I hope) by some, was a calm, corpulent, colossal gentleman, whose head was exactly like a bust of Napoleon of heroic size. He may have been a melodramatic villain; but he was a tolerably convincing Italian — of that kind. If we recall his tranquil manner, and the excellent common sense of his everyday external words and actions, we shall probably have a merely material image of the type of Thomas Aquinas; given only the slight effort of faith required to imagine Count Fosco turned suddenly into a saint.

The pictures of St. Thomas, though many of them were painted long after his death, are all obviously pictures of the same man. He rears himself defiantly, with the Napoleonic head and the dark bulk of body, in Raphael’s “Dispute About the Sacrament.” A portrait by Ghirlandajo emphasises a point which specially reveals what may be called the neglected Italian quality in the man. It also emphasises points that are very important in the mystic and the philosopher. It is universally attested that Aquinas was what is commonly called an absent-minded man. That type has often been rendered in painting, humorous or serious; but almost always in one of two or three conventional ways. Sometimes the expression of the eyes is merely vacant, as it absent-mindedness did really mean a permanent absence of mind. Sometimes it is rendered more respectfully as a wistful expression, as of one yearning for something afar off, that he cannot see and can only faintly desire. Look at the eves in Ghirlandajo’s portrait of St. Thomas; and you will see a sharp difference. While the eyes are indeed completely torn away from the immediate surroundings, so that the pot of flowers above the philosopher’s head might fall on it without attracting his attention, they are not in the least wistful, let alone vacant. There is kindled in them a fire of instant inner excitement; they are vivid and very Italian eyes. The man is thinking about something; and something that has reached a crisis; not about nothing or about anything; or, what is almost worse, about everything. There must have been that smouldering vigilance in his eyes, the moment before he smote the table and startled the banquet hall of the King.

Of the personal habits that go with the personal physique, we have also a few convincing and confirming impressions. When he was not sitting still, reading a book, he walked round and round the cloisters and walked fast and even furiously, a very characteristic action of men who fight their battles in the mind. Whenever he was interrupted he was very polite and more apologetic than the apologizer. But there was that about him, which suggested that he was rather happier when he was not interrupted. He was ready to stop his truly Peripatetic tramp: but we feel that when he resumed it, he walked all the faster.

All this suggests that his superficial abstraction, that which the world saw, was of a certain kind. It will be well to understand the quality, for there are several kinds of absence of mind, including that of some pretentious poets and intellectuals, in whom the mind has never been noticeably present. There is the abstraction of the contemplative, whether he is the true sort of Christian contemplative, who is contemplating Something, or the wrong sort of Oriental contemplative, who is contemplating Nothing. Obviously St. Thomas was not a Buddhist mystic; but I do not think his fits of abstraction were even those of a Christian mystic. If he had trances of true Christian mysticism, he took jolly good care that *they* should not occur at other people’s dinner-tables. I think he had the sort of bemused fit, which really belongs to the practical man rather than the entirely mystical man. He uses the recognised distinction between the active life and the contemplative life, but in the cases concerned here, I think even his contemplative life was an active life. It had nothing to do with his higher life, in the sense of ultimate sanctity. It rather reminds us that Napoleon would fall into a fit of apparent boredom at the Opera, and afterwards confess that he was thinking how he could get three army corps at Frankfurt to combine with two army corps at Cologne. So, in the case of Aquinas, if his daydreams were dreams, they were dreams of the day; and dreams of the day of battle. If he talked to himself, it was because he was arguing with somebody else. We can put it another way, by saying that his daydreams, like the dreams of a dog, were dreams of hunting; of pursuing the error as well as pursuing the truth; of following all the twists and turns of evasive falsehood, and tracking it at last to its lair in hell. He would have been the first to admit that the erroneous thinker would probably be more surprised to learn where his thought came from, than anybody else to discover where it went to. But this notion of *pursuing* he certainly had, and it was the beginning of a thousand mistakes and misunderstandings that pursuing is called in Latin Persecution. Nobody had less than he had of what is commonly called the temper of a persecutor; but he had the quality which in desperate times is often driven to persecute; and that is simply the sense that everything lives somewhere, and nothing dies unless it dies in its own home. That he did sometimes, in this sense, urge in dreams the shadowy chase even in broad daylight, is quite true. But he was an active dreamer, if not what is commonly called a man of action; and in that chase he was truly to be counted among the *domini canes*; and surely the mightiest and most magnanimous of the Hounds of Heaven.

There may be many who do not understand the nature even of this sort of abstraction. But then, unfortunately, there are many who do not understand the nature of any sort of argument. Indeed, I think there are fewer people now alive who understand argument than there were twenty or thirty years ago; and St. Thomas might have preferred the society of the atheists of the early nineteenth century to that of the blank sceptics of the early twentieth. Anyhow, one of the real disadvantages of the great and glorious sport, that is called argument, is its inordinate length. If you argue honestly, as St. Thomas always did, you will find that the subject sometimes seems as if it would never end. He was strongly conscious of this fact, as appears in many places; for instance his argument that most men must have a revealed religion, because they have not time to argue. No time, that is, to argue fairly. There is always time to argue unfairly; not least in a time like ours. Being himself resolved to argue, to argue honestly, to answer everybody, to deal with everything, he produced books enough to sink a ship or stock a library; though he died in comparatively early middle age. Probably he could not have done it at all, if he had not been thinking even when he was not writing; but above all thinking *combatively*. This, in his case, certainly did not mean bitterly or spitefully or uncharitably; but it did mean combatively. As a matter of fact, it is generally the man who is not ready to argue, who is ready to sneer. That is why, in recent literature, there has been so little argument and so much sneering.

We have noted that there are barely one or two occasions on which St. Thomas indulged in a denunciation. There is not a single occasion on which he indulged in a sneer. His curiously simple character, his lucid but laborious intellect, could not be better summed up than by saying that he did not know how to sneer. He was in a double sense an intellectual aristocrat: but he was never an intellectual snob. He never troubled at all whether those to whom he talked were more or less of the sort whom the world thinks worth talking to: and it was apparent by the impression of his contemporaries that those who received the ordinary scraps of his wit or wisdom were quite as likely to be nobodies as somebodies, or even quite as likely to be noodles as clever people. He was interested in the souls of all his fellow creatures, but not in classifying the minds of any of them; in a sense it was too personal and in another sense too arrogant for his particular mind and temper. He was very much interested in the subject he was talking about; and may sometimes have talked for a long time, though he was probably silent for a much longer time. But he had all the unconscious contempt which the really intelligent have for an intelligentsia.

Like most men concerned with the common problems of men, he seems to have had a considerable correspondence; considering that correspondence was so much more difficult in his time. We have records of a great many cases in which complete strangers wrote to ask him questions, and sometimes rather ridiculous questions. To all of these he replied with a characteristic mixture of patience and that sort of rationality, which in some rational people tends to be impatience. Somebody, for instance, asked him whether the names of all the blessed were written on a scroll exhibited in heaven. He wrote back with untiring calm; “So far as I can see, this is not the case; but there is no harm in saying so.”

I have remarked on the portrait of St. Thomas by an Italian painter, which shows him alert even in abstraction; and only silent as if about to speak. Pictures in that great tradition are generally full of small touches that show a very large imagination. I mean the sort of imagination on which Ruskin remarked, when he saw that in Tintoretto’s sunlit scene of the Crucifixion the face of Christ is dark and undecipherable; but the halo round his head unexpectedly faint and grey like the colour of ashes. It would be hard to put more powerfully the idea of Divinity itself in eclipse. There is a touch, which it may be fanciful to find equally significant, in the portrait of Thomas Aquinas. The artist, having given so much vividness and vigilance to the eyes, may have felt that he stressed too much the merely combative concentration of the saint; but anyhow for some reason he has blazoned upon his breast a rather curious emblem, as if it were some third symbolic and cyclopean eye. At least it is no normal Christian sign; but something more like the disk of the sun such as held the face of a heathen god; but the face itself is dark and occult, and only the rays breaking from it are a ring of fire. I do not know whether any traditional meaning has been attached to this; but its imaginative meaning is strangely apt. That secret sun, dark with excess of light, or not showing its light save in the enlightenment of others, might well be the exact emblem of that inner and ideal life of the saint, which was not only hidden by his external words and actions, but even hidden by his merely outward and automatic silences and fits of reflection. In short, this spiritual detachment is not to be confused with his common habit of brooding or falling into a brown study. He was a man entirely careless of all casual criticism of his casual demeanour; as are many men built on a big masculine model and unconsciously inheriting a certain social splendour and largesse. But about his real life of sanctity he was intensely secretive. Such secrecy has indeed generally gone with sanctity; for the saint has an unfathomable horror of playing the Pharisee. But in Thomas Aquinas it was even more sensitive, and what many in the world would call morbid. He did not mind being caught wool-gathering over the wine-cups of the King’s banquet; for that was merely upon a point of controversy. But when there was some question of his having seen St. Paul in a vision, he was in an agony of alarm lest it should be discussed; and the story remains somewhat uncertain in consequence. Needless to say, his followers and admirers were as eager to collect these strictly miraculous stories as he was eager to conceal them; and one or two seem to be preserved with a fairly solid setting of evidence. But there are certainly fewer of them, known to the world, than in the case of many saints equally sincere and even equally modest, but more preoccupied with zeal and less sensitive about publicity.

The truth is that about all such things, in life and death, there is a sort of enormous quiet hanging about St. Thomas. He was one of those large things who take up little room. There was naturally a certain stir about his miracles after his death; and about his burial at the time when the University of Paris wished to bury him. I do not know in detail the long history of the other plans of sepulture, which have ultimately ended with his sacred bones lying in the church of St. Sernin in Toulouse: at the very base of the battle-fields where his Dominicans had warred down the pestilence of pessimism from the East. But somehow, it is not easy to think of his shrine as the scene of the more jolly, rowdy and vulgar devotion either in its medieval or modern form. He was very far from being a Puritan, in the true sense; he made a provision for a holiday and banquet for his young friends, which has quite a convivial sound. The trend of his writing especially for his time, is reasonable in its recognition of physical life; and he goes out of his way to say that men must vary their lives with jokes and even with pranks. But for all that, we cannot somehow see his personality as a sort of magnet for mobs: or the road to the tomb of St. Thomas at Toulouse having always been a long street of taverns like that to the tomb of St. Thomas at Canterbury. I think he rather disliked noise; there is a legend that he disliked thunderstorms; but it is contradicted by the fact that in an actual shipwreck he was supremely calm. However that may be, and it probably concerned his health, in some ways sensitive, he certainly was very calm. We have a feeling that we should gradually grow conscious of his presence; as of an immense background.

Here, if this slight sketch could be worthy of its subject, there should stand forth something of that stupendous certitude, in the presence of which all his libraries of philosophy, and even theology, were but a litter of pamphlets. It is certain that this thing was in him from the first, in the form of conviction long before it could possibly have even begun to take the form of controversy. It was very vivid in his childhood; and his were exactly the circumstances in which the anecdotes of the nursery and the playground are likely enough to have been really preserved. He had from the first that full and final test of truly orthodox Catholicity; the impetuous, impatient intolerant passion for the poor; and even that readiness to be rather a nuisance to the rich, out of a hunger to feed the hungry. This can have had nothing to do with the intellectualism of which he was afterwards accused; still less with any habit of dialectic. It would seem unlikely that at the age of six he had any ambition to answer Averrhoes or that he knew what Effective Causality is; or even that he had worked out, as he did in later life, the whole theory by which a man's love of himself is Sincere and Constant and Indulgent; and that this should be transferred intact (if possible) to his love of his neighbour. At this early age he did not understand all this. He only did it. But all the atmosphere of his actions carries a sort of conviction with it. It is beautifully typical for instance, of that sort of aristocratic *ménage*, that his parents seem to have objected mildly, if at all, to his handing out things to beggars and tramps; but it was intensely disliked by the upper servants.

Still, if we take the thing as seriously as all childish things should be taken, we may learn something from that mysterious state of innocence, which is the first and best spring of all our later indignations. We may begin to understand why it was that there grew steadily with his growing mind, a great and very solitary mind, an ambition that was the inversion of all the things about him. We shall guess what had continuously swelled within him, whether in protest or prophecy or prayer for deliverance, before he startled his family by flinging away not only the trappings of nobility, but all forms of ambition, even ecclesiastical ambition. His childhood may contain the hint of that first stride of his manhood, from the house onto the highway; and his proclamation that he also would be a Beggar.

There is another case of a sort of second glimpse or sequel, in which an incident well known in the external sense gives us also a glimpse of the internal. After the affair of the firebrand, and the woman who tempted him in the tower, it is said that he had a dream; in which two angels girded him with a cord of fire, a thing of terrible pain and yet giving a terrible strength; and he awoke with a great cry in the darkness. This also has something very vivid about it, under the circumstances; and probably contains truths that will be some day better understood, when priests and doctors have learned to talk to each other without the stale etiquette of nineteenth-century negations. It would be easy to analyse the dream, as the very nineteenth-century doctor did in *Armadale,* resolving it into the details of the past days; the cord from his struggle against being stripped of his Friar's frock; the thread of fire running through the tapestries of the night, from the firebrand he had snatched from the fireside. But even in *Armadale* the dream was fulfilled mystically as well, and the dream of St. Thomas was fulfilled very mystically indeed. For he did in fact remain remarkably untroubled on that side of his human nature after the incident; though it is likely enough that the incident had caused an upheaval of his normal humanity, which produced a dream stronger than a nightmare. This is no place to analyse the psychological fact, which puzzles Non-Catholics so much: of the way in which priests do manage to be celibate without ceasing to be virile. Anyhow, it seems probable that in this matter he was less troubled than most. This has nothing to do with true virtue, which is of the will; saints as holy as he have rolled themselves in brambles to distract the pressure of passion; but he never needed much in the way of a counter-irritant; for the simple reason that in this way, as in most ways, he was not very often irritated. Much must remain unexplained, as part of the mysteries of grace; but there is probably some truth in the psychological idea of "sublimation;" that is the lifting of a lower energy to higher ends; so that appetite almost faded in the furnace of his intellectual energy. Between supernatural and natural causes, it is probable that he never knew or suffered greatly on this side of his mind.

There are moments when the most orthodox reader is tempted to hate the hagiographer as much as he loves the holy man. The holy man always conceals his holiness; that is the one invariable rule. And the hagiographer sometimes seems like a persecutor trying to frustrate the holy man; a spy or eavesdropper hardly more respectful than an American interviewer. I admit that these sentiments are fastidious and one-sided, and I will now proceed to prove my penitence by mentioning one or two of the incidents that could only have come to common knowledge in this deplorable way.

It seems certain that he did live a sort of secondary and mysterious life; the divine double of what is called a double life. Somebody seems to have caught a glimpse of the sort of solitary miracle which modern psychic people call Levitation; and he must surely have either been a liar or a literal witness, for there could have been no doubts or degrees about such a prodigy happening to such a person: it must have been like seeing one of the huge pillars of the church suspended like a cloud. Nobody knows, I imagine, what spiritual storm of exaltation or agony produces this convulsion in matter or space; but the thing does almost certainly occur. Even in the case of ordinary Spiritualist mediums, for whatever reason, the evidence is very difficult to refute. But probably the most representative revelation of this side of his life may be found in the celebrated story of the miracle of the crucifix; when in the stillness of the church of St. Dominic in Naples, a voice spoke from the carven Christ, and told the kneeling Friar that he had written rightly, and offered him the choice of a reward among all the things of the world.

Not all, I think, have appreciated the point of this particular story as applied to this particular saint. It is an old story, in so far as it is simply the offer made to a devotee of solitude or simplicity, of the pick of all the prizes of life. The hermit, true or false, the fakir, the fanatic or the cynic, Stylites on his column or Diogenes in his tub, can all be pictured as tempted by the powers of the earth, of the air or of the heavens, with the offer of the best of everything; and replying that they want nothing. In the Greek cynic or stoic it really meant the mere negative; that he wanted nothing. In the Oriental mystic or fanatic, it sometimes meant a sort of positive negative; that he wanted Nothing; that Nothing was really what he wanted. Sometimes it expressed a noble independence, and the twin virtues of antiquity, the love of liberty and the hatred of luxury. Sometimes it only expressed a self-sufficiency that is the very opposite of sanctity. But even the stories of real saints, of this sort, do not quite cover the case of St. Thomas. He was not a person who wanted nothing; and he was a person who was enormously interested in everything. His answer is not so inevitable or simple as some may suppose. As compared with many other saints, and many other philosophers, he was avid in his acceptance of Things; in his hunger and thirst for Things. It was his special spiritual thesis that there really are things; and not only the Thing; that the Many existed as well as the One. I do not mean things to eat or drink or wear, though he never denied to these their place in the noble hierarchy of Being; but rather things to think about, and especially things to prove, to experience and to know. Nobody supposes that Thomas Aquinas, when offered by God his choice among all the gifts of God, would ask for a thousand pounds, or the Crown of Sicily, or a present of rare Greek wine. But he might have asked for things that he really wanted: and he was a man who could want things; as he wanted the lost manuscript of St. Chrysostom. He might have asked for the solution of an old difficulty; or the secret of a new science; or a flash of the inconceivable intuitive mind of the angels, or any one of a thousand things that would really have satisfied his broad and virile appetite for the very vastness and variety of the universe. The point is that for him, when the voice spoke from between the outstretched arms of the Crucified, those arms were truly opened wide, and opening most gloriously the gates of all the worlds; they were arms pointing to the east and to the west, to the ends of the earth and the very extremes of existence. They were truly spread out with a gesture of omnipotent generosity; the Creator himself offering Creation itself; with all its millionfold mystery of separate beings, and the triumphal chorus of the creatures. That is the blazing background of multitudinous Being that gives the particular strength, and even a sort of surprise, to the answer of St. Thomas, when he lifted at last his head and spoke with, and for, that almost blasphemous audacity which is one with the humility of his religion; "I will have Thyself."

Or, to add the crowning and crushing irony to this story, so uniquely Christian for those who can really understand it, there are some who feel that the audacity is softened by insisting that he said, "*Only* Thyself."

Of these miracles, in the strictly miraculous sense, there are not so many as in the lives of less immediately influential saints; but they are probably pretty well authenticated; for he was a well-known public man in a prominent position, and, what is even more convenient for him, he had any number of highly incensed enemies, who could be trusted to sift his claims. There is at least one miracle of healing; that of a woman who touched his gown; and several incidents that may be variants of the story of the crucifix at Naples. One of these stories, however, has a further importance as bringing us to another section of his more private, personal or even emotional religious life; the section that expressed itself in poetry. When he was stationed at Paris, the other Doctors of the Sorbonne put before him a problem about the nature of the mystical change in the elements of the Blessed Sacrament, and he proceeded to write, in his customary manner, a very careful and elaborately lucid statement of his own solution. Needless to say he felt with hearty simplicity the heavy responsibility and gravity of such a judicial decision; and not unnaturally seems to have worried about it more than he commonly did over his work. He sought for guidance in more than usually prolonged prayer and intercession; and finally, with one of those few but striking bodily gestures that mark the turning points of his life, he threw down his thesis at the foot of the crucifix on the altar, and left it lying there; as if awaiting judgment. Then he turned and came down the altar steps and buried himself once more in prayer; but the other Friars, it is said, were watching; and well they might be. For they declared afterwards that the figure of Christ had come down from the cross before their mortal eyes; and stood upon the scroll, saying "Thomas, thou hast written well concerning the Sacrament of My Body." It was after this vision that the incident is said to have happened, of his being born up miraculously in mid-air.

An acute observer said of Thomas Aquinas in his own time, "He could alone restore all philosophy, if it had been burnt by fire." That is what is meant by saying that he was an original man, a creative mind; that he could have made his own cosmos out of stones and straws, even without the manuscripts of Aristotle or Augustine. But there is here a not uncommon confusion, between the thing in which a man is most original and that in which he is most interested; or between the thing that he does best and the thing that he loves most. Because St. Thomas was a unique and striking philosopher, it is almost unavoidable that this book should be merely, or mainly, a sketch of his philosophy. It cannot be, and does not pretend to be, a sketch of his theology. But this is because the theology of a saint is simply the theism of a saint; or rather the theism of all saints. It is less individual, but it is much more intense. It is concerned with the common origin; but it is hardly an occasion for originality. Thus we are forced to think first of Thomas as the maker of the Thomist philosophy; as we think first of Christopher Columbus as the discoverer of America, though he may have been quite sincere in his pious hope to convert the Khan of Tartary; or of James Watt as the discoverer of the steam-engine, though he may have been a devout fire-worshipper, or a sincere Scottish Calvinist, or all kinds of curious things. Anyhow, it is but natural that Augustine and Aquinas, Bonaventure and Duns Scotus, all the doctors and the saints, should draw nearer to each other as they approach the divine units in things; and that there should in that sense be less difference between them in theology than in philosophy. It is true that, in some matters, the critics of Aquinas thought his philosophy had unduly affected his theology. This is especially so, touching the charge that he made the state of Beatitude too intellectual, conceiving it as the satisfaction of the love of truth; rather than specially as the truth of love. It is true that the mystics and the men of the Franciscan school, dwelt more lovingly on the admitted supremacy of love. But it was mostly a matter of emphasis; perhaps tinged faintly by temperament, possibly (to suggest something which is easier to feel than to explain), in the case of St. Thomas, a shadowy influence of a sort of shyness. Whether the supreme ecstasy is more affectional than intellectual is no very deadly matter of quarrel among men who believe it is both, but do not profess even to imagine the actual experience of either. But I have a sort of feeling that, even if St. Thomas had thought it was as emotional as St. Bonaventure did, he would never have been so emotional about it. It would always have embarrassed him to write about love at such length.

The one exception permitted to him was the rare but remarkable output of his poetry. All sanctity is secrecy; and his sacred poetry was really a secretion; like the pearl in a very tightly closed oyster. He may have written more of it than we know; but part of it came into public use through the particular circumstance of his being asked to compose the office for the Feast of Corpus Christi: a festival first established after the controversy to which he had contributed, in the scroll that he laid on the altar. It does certainly reveal an entirely different side of his genius; and it certainly was genius. As a rule, he was an eminently practical prose writer; some would say a very prosaic prose writer. He maintained controversy with an eye on only two qualities; clarity and courtesy. And he maintained these because they were entirely practical qualities; affecting the probabilities of conversion. But the composer of the Corpus Christi service was not merely what even the wild and woolly would call a poet; he was what the most fastidious would call an artist. His double function rather recalls the double activity of some great Renaissance craftsman, like Michelangelo or Leonardo da Vinci, who would work on the outer wall, planning and building the fortifications of the city; and then retire into the inner chamber to carve or model some cup or casket for a reliquary. The Corpus Christi Office is like some old musical instrument, quaintly and carefully inlaid with many coloured stones and metals; the author has gathered remote texts about pasture and fruition like rare herbs; there is a notable lack of the loud and obvious in the harmony; and the whole is strung with two strong Latin lyrics. Father John O’Connor has translated them with an almost miraculous aptitude; but a good translator will be the first to agree that no translation is good; or, at any rate, good enough. How are we to find eight short English words which actually stand for “*Sumit unus, sumunt mille; quantum isti, tantum ille*”? How is anybody really to render the sound of the “*Pange Lingua*,” when the very first syllable has a clang like the clash of cymbals?

There was one other channel, besides that of poetry, and it was that of private affections, by which this large and shy man could show that he had really as much *Caritas* as St. Francis; and certainly as much as any Franciscan theologian. Bonaventure was not likely to think that Thomas was lacking in the love of God, and certainly he was never lacking in the love of Bonaventure. He felt for his whole family a steady, we might say a stubborn tenderness; and, considering how his family treated him, this would seem to call not only for charity, but for his characteristic virtue of patience. Towards the end of his life, he seems to have leaned especially on his love of one of the brethren, a Friar named Reginald, who received from him some strange and rather startling confidences, of the kind that he very seldom gave even to his friends. It was to Reginald that he gave that last and rather extraordinary hint, which was the end of his controversial career, and practically of his earthly life; a hint that history has never been able to explain.

He had returned victorious from his last combat with Siger of Brabant; returned and retired. This particular quarrel was the one point, as we may say, in which his outer and his inner life had crossed and coincided; he realised how he had longed from childhood to call up all allies in the battle for Christ; how he had only long afterwards called up Aristotle as an ally; and now in that last nightmare of sophistry, he had for the first time truly realised that some might really wish Christ to go down before Aristotle. He never recovered from the shock. He won his battle, because he was the best brain of his time, but he could not forget such an inversion of the whole idea and purpose of his life. He was the sort of man who hates hating people. He had not been used to hating even their hateful ideas, beyond a certain point. But in the abyss of anarchy opened by Siger’s sophistry of the Double Mind of Man, he had seen the possibility of the perishing of all idea of religion, and even of all idea of truth. Brief and fragmentary as are the phrases that record it, we can gather that he came back with a sort of horror of that outer world, in which there blew such wild winds of doctrine, and a longing for the inner world which any Catholic can share, and in which the saint is not cut off from simple men. He resumed the strict routine of religion, and for some time said nothing to anybody. And then something happened (it is said while he was celebrating Mass) the nature of which will never be known among mortal men.

His friend Reginald asked him to return also to his equally regular habits of reading and writing, and following the controversies of the hour. He said with a singular emphasis, “I can write no more.” There seems to have been a silence; after which Reginald again ventured to approach the subject; and Thomas answered him with even greater vigour, “I can write no more. I have seen things which make all my writings like straw.”

In 1274, when Aquinas was nearly fifty, the Pope, rejoicing in the recent victory over the Arabian sophists, sent word to him, asking him to come to a Council on these controversial matters, to be held at Lyons. He rose in automatic obedience, as a soldier rises; but we may fancy that there was something in his eyes that told those around him that obedience to the outer command would not in fact frustrate obedience to some more mysterious inner command; a signal that only he had seen. He set out with his friend on the journey, proposing to rest for the night with his sister, to whom he was deeply devoted; and when he came into her house he was stricken down with some unnamed malady. We need not discuss the doubtful medical problems. It is true that he had always been one of those men, healthy in the main, who are overthrown by small illnesses; it is equally true that there is no very clear account of this particular illness. He was eventually taken to a monastery at Fossanuova; and his strange end came upon him with great strides. It may be worth remarking, for those who think that he thought too little of the emotional or romantic side of religious truth, that he asked to have The Song of Solomon read through to him from beginning to end. The feelings of the men about him must have been mingled and rather indescribable; and certainly quite different from his own. He confessed his sins and he received his God; and we may be sure that the great philosopher had entirely forgotten philosophy. But it was not entirely so with those who had loved him, or even those who merely lived in his time. The elements of the narrative are so few, yet so essential, that we have a strong sense in reading the story of the two emotional sides of the event. Those men must have known that a great mind was still labouring like a great mill in the midst of them. They must have felt that, for that moment, the inside of the monastery was larger than the outside. It must have resembled the case of some mighty modern engine, shaking the ramshackle building in which it is for the moment enclosed. For truly that machine was made of the wheels of all the worlds; and revolved like that cosmos of concentric spheres which, whatever its fate in the face of changing science, must always be something of a symbol for philosophy; the depth of double and triple transparencies more mysterious than darkness; the sevenfold, the terrible crystal. In the world of that mind there was a wheel of angels, and a wheel of planets, and a wheel of plants or of animals; but there was also a just and intelligible order of all earthly things, a sane authority and a self-respecting liberty, and a hundred answers to a hundred questions in the complexity of ethics or economics. But there must have been a moment, when men knew that the thunderous mill of thought had stopped suddenly; and that after the shock of stillness that wheel would shake the world no more; that there was nothing now within that hollow house but a great hill of clay; and the confessor, who had been with him in the inner chamber, ran forth as if in fear, and whispered that his confession had been that of a child of five.

VI

THE APPROACH TO THOMISM

The fact that Thomism is the philosophy of common sense is itself a matter of common sense. Yet it wants a word of explanation, because we have so long taken such matters in a very uncommon sense. For good or evil, Europe since the Reformation, and most especially England since the Reformation, has been in a peculiar sense the home of paradox. I mean in the very peculiar sense that paradox was at home, and that men were at home with it. The most familiar example is the English boasting that they are practical *because* they are not logical. To an ancient Greek or a Chinaman this would seem exactly like saying that London clerks excel in adding up their ledgers, because they are not accurate in their arithmetic. But the point is not that it is a paradox; it is that parodoxy has become orthodoxy; that men repose in a paradox as placidly as in a platitude. It is not that the practical man stands on his head, which may sometimes be a stimulating if startling gymnastic; it is that he *rests* on his head; and even sleeps on his head. This is an important point, because the use of paradox is to awaken the mind. Take a good paradox, like that of Oliver Wendell Holmes: “Give us the luxuries of life and we will dispense with the necessities.” It is amusing and therefore arresting; it has a fine air of defiance; it contains a real if romantic truth. It is all part of the fun that it is stated almost in the form of a contradiction in terms. But most people would agree that there would be considerable danger in basing the whole social system on the notion that necessities are not necessary; as some have based the whole British Constitution on the notion that nonsense will always work out as common sense. Yet even here, it might be said that the invidious example has spread, and that the modern industrial system does really say, “Give us luxuries like coal-tar soap, and we will dispense with necessities like corn.”

So much is familiar; but what is not even now realised is that not only the practical politics, but the abstract philosophies of the modern world have had this queer twist. Since the modern world began in the sixteenth century, nobody’s system of philosophy has really corresponded to everybody’s sense of reality: to what, if left to themselves, common men would call common sense. Each started with a paradox: a peculiar point of view demanding the sacrifice of what they would call a sane point of view. That is the one thing common to Hobbes and Hegel, to Kant and Bergson. to Berkeley and William James. A man had to believe something that no normal man would believe, if it were suddenly propounded to his simplicity; as that law is above right, or right is outside reason, or things are only as we think them, or everything is relative to a reality that is not there. The modern philosopher claims, like a sort of confidence man, that if once we will grant him this, the rest will be easy; he will straighten out the world, if once he is allowed to give this one twist to the mind.

It will be understood that in these matters I speak as a fool; or, as our democratic cousins would say, a moron; anyhow as a man in the street; and the only object of this chapter is to show that the Thomist philosophy is nearer than most philosophies to the mind of the man in the street. I am not, like Father D'Arcy, whose admirable book on St. Thomas has illuminated many problems for me, a trained philosopher, acquainted with the technique of the trade. But I hope Father D'Arcy will forgive me if I take one example from his book, which exactly illustrates what I mean. He, being a trained philosopher, is naturally trained to put up with philosophers. Also, being a trained priest, he is naturally accustomed, not only to suffer fools gladly, but (what is sometimes even harder) to suffer clever people gladly. Above all, his wide reading in metaphysics has made him patient with clever people when they indulge in folly. The consequence is that he can write calmly and even blandly sentences like these. "A certain likeness can be detected between the aim and method of St. Thomas and those of Hegel. There are, however, also remarkable differences. For St. Thomas it is impossible that contradictories should exist together, and again reality and intelligibility correspond, but a thing must first be, to be intelligible."

Let the man in the street be forgiven, if he adds that the "remarkable difference" seems to him to be that St. Thomas was sane and Hegel was mad. The moron refuses to admit that Hegel can both exist and not exist; or that it can be possible to understand Hegel, if there is no Hegel to understand. Yet Father D'Arcy mentions this Hegelian paradox as if it were all in the day's work; and of course it is, if the work is reading all the modern philosophers as searchingly and sympathetically as he has done. And this is what I mean saying that all modern philosophy starts with a stumbling-block. It is surely not too much to say that there *seems* to be a twist, in saying that contraries are not incompatible; or that a thing can “be” intelligible and not as yet “be” at all.

Against all this the philosophy of St. Thomas stands founded on the universal common conviction that eggs are eggs. The Hegelian may say that an egg is really a hen, because it is a part of an endless process of Becoming; the Berkeleian may hold that poached eggs only exist as a dream exists; since it is quite as easy to call the dream the cause of the eggs as the eggs the cause of the dream; the Pragmatist may believe that we get the best out of scrambled eggs by forgetting that they ever were eggs, and only remembering the scramble. But no pupil of St. Thomas needs to addle his brains in order adequately to addle his eggs; to put his head at any peculiar angle in looking at eggs, or squinting at eggs, or winking the other eye in order to see a new simplification of eggs. The Thomist stands in the broad daylight of the brotherhood of men, in their common consciousness that eggs are not hens or dreams or mere practical assumptions; but things attested by the Authority of the Senses, which is from God.

Thus, even those who appreciate the metaphysical depth of Thomism in other matters have expressed surprise that he does not deal at all with what many now think the main metaphysical question; whether we can prove that the primary act of recognition of any reality is real. The answer is that St. Thomas recognised instantly, what so many modern sceptics have begun to suspect rather laboriously; that a man must either answer that question in the affirmative, or else never answer any question, never ask any question, never even exist intellectually, to answer or to ask. I suppose it is true in a sense that a man can be a fundamental sceptic, but he cannot be anything else: certainly not even a defender of fundamental scepticism. If a man feels that all the movements of his own mind are meaningless, then his mind is meaningless, and he is meaningless; and it does not mean anything to attempt to discover his meaning. Most fundamental sceptics appear to survive, because they are not consistently sceptical and not at all fundamental. They will first deny everything and then admit something, if for the sake of argument — or often rather of attack without argument. I saw an almost startling example of this essential frivolity in a professor of final scepticism, in a paper the other day. A man wrote to say that he accepted nothing but Solipsism, and added that he had often wondered it was not a more common philosophy. Now Solipsism simply means that a man believes in his own existence, but not in anybody or anything else. And it never struck this simple sophist, that if his philosophy was true, there obviously were no other philosophers to profess it.

To this question "Is there anything?" St. Thomas begins by answering "Yes"; if he began by answering "No", it would not be the beginning, but the end. That is what some of us call common sense. Either there is no philosophy, no philosophers, no thinkers, no thought, no anything; or else there is a real bridge between the mind and reality. But he is actually less exacting than many thinkers, much less so than most rationalist and materialist thinkers, as to what that first step involves; he is content, as we shall see, to say that it involves the recognition of Ens or Being as something definitely beyond ourselves. Ens is Ens: Eggs are eggs, and it is not tenable that all eggs were found in a mare's nest.

Needless to say, I am not so silly as to suggest that all the writings of St. Thomas are simple and straightforward; in the sense of being easy to understand. There are passages I do not in the least understand myself; there are passages that puzzle much more learned and logical philosophers than I am; there are passages about which the greatest Thomists still differ and dispute. But that is a question of a thing being hard to read or understand: not hard to accept when understood. That is a mere matter of "The Cat sat on the Mat" being written in Chinese characters: or "Mary had a Little Lamb" in Egyptian hieroglyphics. The only point I am stressing here is that Aquinas is almost always on the side of simplicity, and supports the ordinary man's acceptance of ordinary truisms. For instance, one of the most obscure passages, in my very inadequate judgment, is that in which he explains how the mind is certain of an external object and not merely of an impression of that object; and yet apparently reaches it through a concept, though not merely through an impression. But the only point here is that he does explain that the mind is certain of an external object. It is enough for this purpose that his conclusion is what is called the conclusion of common sense; that it is his purpose to justify common sense; even though he justifies it in a passage which happens to be one of rather uncommon subtlety. The problem of later philosophers is that their conclusion is as dark as their demonstration; or that they bring out a result of which the result is chaos.

Unfortunately, between the man in the street and the Angel of the Schools, there stands at this moment a very high brick wall, with spikes on the top, separating two men who in many ways stand for the same thing.

The wall is almost a historical accident; at least it was built a very long time ago, for reasons that need not affect the needs of normal men today; least of all the greatest need of normal men; which is for a normal philosophy. The first difficulty is merely a difference of form; not in the medieval but in the modern sense. There is first a simple obstacle of language; there is then a rather more subtle obstacle of logical method. But the language itself counts for a great deal; even when it is translated, it is still a foreign language; and it is, like other foreign languages, very often translated wrong. As with every other literature from another age or country, it carried with it an atmosphere which is beyond the mere translation of words, as they are translated in a traveller's phrase-book. For instance, the whole system of St. Thomas hangs on one huge and yet simple idea; which does actually cover everything there is, and even everything that could possibly be. He represents this cosmic conception by the word *Ens*; and anybody who can read any Latin at all, however rudely, feels it to be the apt and fitting word; exactly as he feels it in a French word in a piece of good French prose. It ought to be a matter of logic; but it is also a matter of language.

Unfortunately there is no satisfying translation of the word *Ens*. The difficulty is rather verbal than logical, but it is practical. I mean that when the translator says in English 'being', we are aware of a rather different atmosphere. Atmosphere ought not to affect these absolutes of the intellect; but it does. The new psychologists, who are almost eagerly at war with reason, never tire of telling us that the very terms we use are coloured by our subconsciousness, with something we meant to exclude from our consciousness. And one need not be so idealistically irrational as a modern psychologist, in order to admit that the very shape and sound of words do make a difference, even in the baldest prose, as they do in the most beautiful poetry. We cannot quite prevent the imagination from remembering irrelevant associations even in the abstract sciences like mathematics. Jones Minimus, hustled from history to geometry, may for an instant connect the Angles of the isosceles triangle with the Angles of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; and even the mature mathematician, if he is as mad as the psychoanalyst hopes, may have in the roots of his subconscious mind something material in his idea of a root. Now it unfortunately happens that the word 'being', as it comes to a modern Englishman, through modern associations, has a sort of hazy atmosphere that is not in the short and sharp Latin word. Perhaps it reminds him of fantastic professors in fiction, who wave their hands and say, “Thus do we mount to the ineffable heights of pure and radiant Being:” or, worse still, of actual professors in real life, who say, “All Being is Becoming; and is but the evolution of Not-Being by the law of its Being.” Perhaps it only reminds him of romantic rhapsodies in old love stories; “Beautiful and adorable being, light and breath of my very being.” Anyhow it has a wild and woolly sort of sound; as if only very vague people used it; or as if it might mean all sorts of different things.

Now the Latin word *Ens* has a sound like the English word *End*. It is final and even abrupt; it is nothing except itself. There was once a silly gibe against Scholastics like Aquinas, that they discussed whether angels could stand on the point of a needle. It is at least certain that this first word of Aquinas is as sharp as the point of a pin. For that also is, in an almost ideal sense, an End. But when we say that St. Thomas Aquinas is concerned fundamentally with the idea of Being, we must not admit any of the cloudier generalisations that we may have grown used to, or even grown tired of, in the sort of idealistic writing that is rather rhetoric than philosophy. Rhetoric is a very fine thing in its place, as a medieval scholar would have willingly agreed, as he taught it along with logic in the schools; but St. Thomas Aquinas himself is not at all rhetorical. Perhaps he is hardly even sufficiently rhetorical. There are any number of purple patches in Augustine; but there are no purple patches in Aquinas. He did on certain definite occasions drop into poetry; but he very seldom dropped into oratory. And so little was he in touch with some modern tendencies, that whenever he did write poetry, he actually put it into poems. There is another side to this, to be noted later. He very specially possessed the philosophy that inspires poetry; as he did so largely inspire Dante’s poetry. And poetry without philosophy has only inspiration, or, in vulgar language, only wind. He had, so to speak, the imagination without the imagery. And even this is perhaps too sweeping. There is an image of his, that is true poetry as well as true philosophy; about the tree of life bowing down with a huge humility, because of the very load of its living fruitfulness; a thing Dante might have described so as to overwhelm us with the tremendous twilight and almost drug us with the divine fruit. But normally, we may say that his words are brief even when his books are long. I have taken the example of the word *Ens*, precisely because it is one of the cases in which Latin is plainer than plain English. And his style, unlike that of St. Augustine and many Catholic Doctors, is always a penny plain rather than twopence coloured. It is often difficult to understand, simply because the subjects are so difficult that hardly any mind, except one like his own, can fully understand them. But he never darkens it by using words without knowledge, or even more legitimately, by using words belonging only to imagination or intuition. So far as his method is concerned, he is perhaps the one real Rationalist among all the children of men.

This brings us to the other difficulty; that of logical method. I have never understood why there is supposed to be something crabbed or antique about a syllogism; still less can I understand what any-body means by talking as if induction had somehow taken the place of deduction. The whole point of deduction is that true premises produce a true conclusion. What is called induction seems simply to mean collecting a larger number of true premises. or perhaps, in some physical matters, taking rather more trouble to see that they are true. It may be a fact that a modern man can get more out of a great many premises, concerning microbes or asteroids than a medieval man could get out of a very few premises about salamanders and unicorns. But the process of deduction from the data is the same for the modern mind as for the medieval mind; and what is pompously called induction is simply collecting more of the data. And Aristotle or Aquinas, or anybody in his five wits, would of course agree that the conclusion could only be true if the premises were true; and that the more true premises there were the better. It was the misfortune of medieval culture that there were not enough true premises, owing to the rather ruder conditions of travel or experiment. But however perfect were the conditions of travel or experiment, they could only produce premises; it would still be necessary to deduce conclusions. But many modern people talk as if what they call induction were some magic way of reaching a conclusion, without using any of those horrid old syllogisms. But induction does not lead us to a conclusion. Induction only leads us to a deduction. Unless the last three syllogistic steps are all right, the conclusion is all wrong. Thus, the great nineteenth century men of science, whom I was brought up to revere (“accepting the conclusions of science,” it was always called), went out and closely inspected the air and the earth, the chemicals and the gases, doubtless more closely than Aristotle or Aquinas, and then came back and embodied their final conclusion in a syllogism. “All matter is made of microscopic little knobs which are indivisible. My body is made of matter. Therefore my body is made of microscopic little knobs which are indivisible.” They were not wrong in the form of their reasoning; because it is the only way to reason. In this world there is nothing except a syllogism — and a fallacy. But of course these modern men knew, as the medieval men knew, that their conclusions would not be true unless their premises were true. And that is where the trouble began. For the men of science, or their sons and nephews, went out and took another look at the knobby nature of matter; and were surprised to find that it was not knobby at all. So they came back and completed the process with their syllogism; “All matter is made of whirling protons and electrons. My body is made of matter. Therefore my body is made of whirling protons and electrons.” And that again is a good syllogism; though they may have to look at matter once or twice more, before we know whether it is a true premise and a true conclusion. But in the final process of truth there is nothing else except a good syllogism. The only other thing is a bad syllogism; as in the familiar fashionable shape; “All matter is made of protons and electrons. I should very much like to think that mind is much the same as matter. So I will announce, through the microphone or the megaphone, that my mind is made of protons and electrons.” But that is not induction; it is only a very bad blunder in deduction. That is not another or new way of thinking; it is only ceasing to think.

What is really meant, and what is much more reasonable, is that the old syllogists sometimes set out the syllogism at length; and certainly that is not always necessary. A man can run down the three steps much more quickly than that; but a man cannot run down the three steps if they are not there. If he does, he will break his neck, as if he walked out of a fourth-story window. The truth about this false antithesis of induction and deduction is simply this; that as premises or data accumulated, the emphasis and detail was shifted to them, from the final deduction to which they lead. But they did lead to a final deduction; or else they led to nothing. The logician had so much to say about electrons or microbes that he dwelt most on these data and shortened or assumed his ultimate syllogism. But if he reasoned rightly, however rapidly, he reasoned syllogistically.

As a matter of fact, Aquinas does not usually argue in syllogisms; though he always argues syllogistically. I mean he does not set out all the steps of the logic in each case; the legend that he does so is part of that loose and largely unverified legend of the Renaissance; that the Schoolmen were all crabbed and mechanical medieval bores. But he does argue with a certain austerity, and disdain of ornament, which may make him seem monotonous to anyone specially seeking the modern forms of wit or fancy. But all this has nothing to do with the question asked at the beginning of this chapter and needing to be answered at the end of it; the question of what he is arguing for. In that respect it can be repeated, most emphatically, that he is arguing for common sense. He is arguing for a common sense which would even now commend itself to most of the common people. He is arguing for the popular proverbs that seeing is believing; that the proof of the pudding is in the eating; that a man cannot jump down his own throat or deny the fact of his own existence. He often maintains the view by the use of abstractions; but the abstractions are no more abstract than Energy or Evolution or Space-Time; and they do not land us, as the others often do, in hopeless contradictions about common life. The Pragmatist sets out to be practical, but his practicality turns out to be entirely theoretical. The Thomist begins by being theoretical, but his theory turns out to be entirely practical. That is why a great part of the world is returning to it today.

Finally, there is some real difficulty in the fact of a foreign language; apart from the ordinary fact of the Latin language. Modern philosophical terminology is not always exactly identical with plain English; and medieval philosophical terminology is not at all identical even with modern philosophical terminology. It is not really very difficult to learn the meaning of the main terms; but their medieval meaning is sometimes the exact opposite of their modern meaning. The obvious example is in the pivotal word “form.” We say nowadays, “I wrote a formal apology to the Dean,” or “The proceedings when we wound up the Tip-Cat Club were purely formal.” But we mean that they were purely fictitious; and St. Thomas, had he been a member of the Tip-Cat Club, would have meant just the opposite. He would have meant that the proceedings dealt with the very heart and soul and secret of the whole being of the Tip-Cat Club; and that the apology to the Dean was so essentially apologetic that it tore the very heart out in tears of true contrition. For “formal” in Thomist language means actual, or possessing the real decisive quality that makes a thing itself. Roughly when he describes a thing as made out of Form and Matter, he very rightly recognises that Matter is the more mysterious and indefinite and featureless element; and that what stamps anything with its own identity is its Form. Matter, so to speak, is not so much the solid as the liquid or gaseous thing in the cosmos: and in this most modern scientists are beginning to agree with him. But the form is the fact; it is that which makes a brick a brick, and a bust a bust, and not the shapeless and trampled clay of which either may be made. The stone that broke a statuette, in some Gothic niche, might have been itself a statuette; and under chemical analysis, the statuette is only a stone. But such a chemical analysis is entirely false as a philosophical analysis. The reality, the thing that makes the two things real, is in the idea of the image and in the idea of the image-breaker. This is only a passing example of the mere idiom of the Thomist terminology; but it is not a bad prefatory specimen of the truth of Thomist thought. Every artist knows that the form is not superficial but fundamental; that the form is the foundation. Every sculptor knows that the form of the statue is not the outside of the statue, but rather the inside of the statue; even in the sense of the inside of the sculptor. Every poet knows that the sonnet-form is not only the form of the poem; but the poem. No modern critic who does not understand what the medieval Schoolman meant by form can meet the Schoolman as an intellectual equal.

VII

THE PERMANENT PHILOSOPHY

It is a pity that the word Anthropology has been degraded to the study of Anthropoids. It is now incurably associated with squabbles between prehistoric professors (in more senses than one) about whether a chip of stone is the tooth of a man or an ape; sometimes settled as in that famous case, when it was found to be the tooth of a pig. It is very right that there should be a purely physical science of such things; but the name commonly used might well, by analogy, have been dedicated to things not only wider and deeper, but rather more relevant. Just as, in America, the new Humanists have pointed out to the old Humanitarians that their humanitarianism has been largely concentrated on things that are *not* specially human, such as physical conditions, appetites, economic needs, environment and so on — so in practice those who are called Anthropologists have to narrow their minds to the materialistic things that are not notably anthropic. They have to hunt through history and pre-history something which emphatically is not *Homo Sapiens*, but is always in fact regarded as *Simius Insipiens*. *Homo Sapiens* can only be considered in relation to *Sapientia* and only a book like that of St. Thomas is really devoted to the intrinsic idea of *Sapientia*. In short, there ought to be a real study called Anthropology corresponding to Theology. In this sense St. Thomas Aquinas, perhaps more than he is anything else, is a great anthropologist.

I apologise for the opening words of this chapter to all those excellent and eminent men of science, who are engaged in the real study of humanity in its relation to biology. But I rather fancy that they will be the last to deny that there has been a somewhat disproportionate disposition, in popular science, to turn the study of human beings into the study of savages. And savagery is not history; it is either the beginning of history or the end of it. I suspect that the greatest scientists would agree that only too many professors have thus been lost in the bush or the jungle; professors who wanted to study anthropology and never got any further than anthropophagy. But I have a particular reason for prefacing this suggestion of a higher anthropology by an apology to any genuine biologists who might seem to be included, but are certainly not included, in a protest against cheap popular science. For the first thing to be said about St. Thomas as an anthropologist, is that he is really remarkably like the best sort of modern biological anthropologist; of the sort who would call themselves Agnostics. This fact is so sharp and decisive a turning point in history, that the history really needs to be recalled and recorded.

St. Thomas Aquinas closely resembles the great Professor Huxley, the Agnostic who invented the word Agnosticism. He is like him in his way of starting the argument, and he is unlike everybody else, before and after, until the Huxleyan age. He adopts almost literally the Huxleyan definition of the Agnostic method; "To follow reason as far as it will go;" the only question is — where does it go? He lays down the almost startlingly modern or materialist statement; "Every thing that is in the intellect has been in the senses." This is where he began, as much as any modern man of science, nay, as much as any modern materialist who can now hardly be called a man of science; at the very opposite end of enquiry from that of the mere mystic. The Platonists, or at least the Neo-Platonists, all tended to the view that the mind was lit entirely from within; St. Thomas insisted that it was lit by five windows, that we call the windows of the senses. But he wanted the light from without to shine on what was within. He wanted to study the nature of Man, and not merely of such moss and mushrooms as he might see through the window, and which he valued as the first enlightening experience of man. And starting from this point, he proceeds to climb the House of Man, step by step and story by story, until he has come out on the highest tower and beheld the largest vision.

In other words, he is an anthropologist, with a complete theory of Man, right or wrong. Now the modern Anthropologists, who called themselves Agnostics, completely failed to be Anthropologists at all. Under their limitations, they could not get a complete theory of Man, let alone a complete theory of nature. They began by ruling out something which they called the Unknowable. The incomprehensibility was almost comprehensible, if we could really understand the Unknowable in the sense of the Ultimate. But it rapidly became apparent that all sorts of things were Unknowable, which were exactly the things that a man has got to know. It is necessary to know whether he is responsible or irresponsible, perfect or imperfect, perfectible or unperfectible, mortal or immortal, doomed or free, not in order to understand God, but in order to understand Man. Nothing that leaves these things under a cloud of religious doubt can possibly pretend to be a Science of Man; it shrinks from anthropology as completely as from theology. Has a man free will; or is his sense of choice an illusion? Has he a conscience, or has his conscience any authority; or is it only the prejudice of the tribal past? Is there real hope of settling these things by human reason; and has *that* any authority? Is he to regard death as final; and is he to regard miraculous help as possible? Now it is all nonsense to say that these are unknowable in any remote sense, like the distinction between the Cherubim and the Seraphim, or the Procession of the Holy Ghost. The Schoolmen may have shot too far beyond our limits in pursuing the Cherubim and Seraphim. But in asking whether a man can choose or whether a man will die, they were asking ordinary questions in natural history; like whether a cat can scratch or whether a dog can smell. Nothing calling itself a complete Science of Man can shirk them. And the great Agnostics did shirk them. They may have said they had no scientific evidence; in that case they failed to produce even a scientific hypothesis. What they generally did produce was a wildly unscientific contradiction. Most Monist moralists simply said that Man has no choice; but he must think and act heroically as if he had. Huxley made morality, and even Victorian morality, in the exact sense, supernatural. He said it had arbitrary rights above nature; a sort of theology without theism.

I do not know for certain why St. Thomas was called the Angelic Doctor: whether it was that he had an angelic temper, or the intellectuality of an Angel; or whether there was a later legend that he concentrated on Angels — especially on the points of needles. If so, I do not quite understand how this idea arose; history has many examples of an irritating habit of labelling somebody in connection with something, as if he never did any thing else. Who was it who began the inane habit of referring to Dr. Johnson as “our lexicographer;” as if he never did anything but write a dictionary? Why do most people insist on meeting the large and far-reaching mind of Pascal at its very narrowest point: the point at which it was sharpened into a spike by the spite of the Jansenists against the Jesuits? It is just possible, for all I know, that this labelling of Aquinas as a specialist was an obscure depreciation of him as a universalist. For that is a very common trick for the belittling of literary or scientific men. St. Thomas must have made a certain number of enemies, though he hardly ever treated them as enemies. Unfortunately, good temper is sometimes more irritating than bad temper. And he had, after all, done a great deal of damage, as many medieval men would have thought; and, what is more curious, a great deal of damage to both sides. He had been a revolutionist against Augustine and a traditionalist against Averrhoes. He might appear to some to have tried to wreck that ancient beauty of the city of God, which bore some resemblance to the Republic of Plato. He might appear to others to have inflicted a blow on the advancing and levelling forces of Islam, as dramatic as that of Godfrey storming Jerusalem. It is possible that these enemies, by wax of damning with faint praise, talked about his very respectable little work on Angels: as a man might say that Darwin was really reliable when writing on coral-insects; or that some of Milton’s Latin poems were very creditable indeed. But this is only a conjecture, and many other conjectures are possible. And I am disposed to think that St. Thomas really was rather specially interested in the nature of Angels, for the same reason that made him even more interested in the nature of Men. It was a part of that strong personal interest in things subordinate and semidependent, which runs through his whole system: a hierarchy of higher and lower liberties. He was interested in the problem of the Angel, as he was interested in the problem of the Man, because it was a problem; and especially because it was a problem of an intermediate creature. I do not pretend to deal here with this mysterious quality, as he conceives it to exist in that inscrutable intellectual being, who is less than God but more than Man. But it was this quality of a link in the chain, or a rung in the ladder, which mainly concerned the theologian, in developing his own particular theory of degrees. Above all, it is this which chiefly moves him, when he finds so fascinating the central mystery of Man. And for him the point is always that Man is not a balloon going up into the sky nor a mole burrowing merely in the earth; but rather a thing like a tree whose roots are fed from the earth, while its highest branches seem to rise almost to the stars.

I have pointed out that mere modern free-thought has left everything in a fog, including itself. The assertion that thought is free led first to the denial that will is free; but even about that there was no real determination among the Determinists. In practice, they told men that they must treat their will as free though it was not free. In other words, Man must live a double life; which is exactly the old heresy of Siger of Brabant about the Double Mind. In other words, the nineteenth century left everything in chaos: and the importance of Thomism to the twentieth century is that it may give us back a cosmos. We can give here only the rudest sketch of how Aquinas, like the Agnostics, beginning in the cosmic cellars, yet climbed to the cosmic towers.

Without pretending to span within such limits the essential Thomist idea, I may be allowed to throw out a sort of rough version of the fundamental question, which I think I have known myself, consciously or unconsciously since my childhood. When a child looks out of the nursery window and sees anything, say the green lawn of the garden, what does he actually know; or does he know anything? There are all sorts of nursery games of negative philosophy played round this question. A brilliant Victorian scientist delighted in declaring that the child does not see any grass at all; but only a sort of green mist reflected in a tiny mirror of the human eye. This piece of rationalism has always struck me as almost insanely irrational. If he is not sure of the existence of the grass, which he sees through the glass of a window, how on earth can he be sure of the existence of the retina, which he sees through the glass of a microscope? If sight deceives, why can it not go on deceiving? Men of another school answer that grass is a mere green impression on the mind; and that he can be sure of nothing except the mind. They declare that he can only be conscious of his own consciousness; which happens to be the one thing that we know the child is not conscious of at all. In that sense, it would be far truer to say that there is grass and no child, than to say that there is a conscious child but no grass. St. Thomas Aquinas, suddenly intervening in this nursery quarrel, says emphatically that the child is aware of *Ens*. Long before he knows that grass is grass, or self is self, he knows that something is something. Perhaps it would be best to say very emphatically (with a blow on the table), “There *is* an Is.” That is as much monkish credulity as St. Thomas asks of us at the start. Very few unbelievers start by asking us to believe so little. And yet, upon this sharp pin-point of reality, he rears by long logical processes that have never really been successfully overthrown, the whole cosmic system of Christendom.

Thus, Aquinas insists very profoundly but very practically, that there *instantly* enters, with this idea of affirmation the idea of contradiction. It is instantly apparent, even to the child, that there cannot be both affirmation and contradiction. Whatever you call the thing he sees, a moon or a mirage or a sensation or a state of consciousness, when he sees it, he knows it is not true that he does not see it. Or whatever you call what he is supposed to be doing, seeing or dreaming or being conscious of an impression, he knows that if he is doing it, it is a lie to say he is not doing it. Therefore there has already entered *something* beyond even the first fact of being; there follows it like its shadow the first fundamental creed or commandment, that a thing cannot be and not be. Henceforth, in common or popular language, there is a false and true. I say in popular language, because Aquinas is nowhere more subtle than in pointing out that being is not strictly the same as truth; seeing truth must mean the appreciation of being by some mind capable of appreciating it. But in a general sense there has entered that primeval world of pure actuality, the division and dilemma that brings the ultimate sort of war into the world; the everlasting duel between Yes and No. This is the dilemma that many sceptics have darkened the universe and dissolved the mind solely in order to escape. They are those who maintain that there is something that is both Yes and No. I do not know whether they pronounce it Yo.

The next step following on this acceptance of actuality or certainty, or whatever we call it in popular language, is much more difficult to explain in that language. But it represents exactly the point at which nearly all other systems go wrong, and in taking the third step abandon the first. Aquinas has affirmed that our first sense of fact is a fact; and he cannot go back on it without falsehood. But when we come to look at the fact or facts, as we know them, we observe that they have a rather queer character; which has made many moderns grow strangely and restlessly sceptical about them. For instance, they are largely in a state of change, from being one thing to being another; or their qualities are relative to other things; or they appear to move incessantly; or they appear to vanish entirely. At this point, as I say, many sages lose hold of the first principle of reality, which they would concede at first; and fall back on saying that there is nothing except change; or nothing except comparison; or nothing except flux; or in effect that there is nothing at all. Aquinas turns the whole argument the other way, keeping in line with his first realisation of reality. There is no doubt about the being of being, even if it does sometimes look like becoming; that is because what we see is not the fullness of being; or (to continue a sort of colloquial slang) we never see being being as much as it can. Ice is melted into cold water and cold water is heated into hot water; it cannot be all three at once. But this does not make water unreal or even relative; it only means that its being is limited to being one thing at a time. But the fullness of being is everything that it can be; and without it the lesser or approximate forms of being cannot be explained as anything; unless they are explained away as nothing.

This crude outline can only at the best be historical rather than philosophical. It is impossible to compress into it the metaphysical proofs of such an idea; especially in the medieval metaphysical language. But this distinction in philosophy is tremendous as a turning point in history. Most thinkers, on realising the apparent mutability of being, have really forgotten their own realisation of the being, and believed only in the mutability. They cannot even say that a thing changes into another thing; for them there is no instant in the process at which it is a thing at all. It is only a change. It would be more logical to call it nothing changing into nothing, than to say (on these principles) that there ever was or will be a moment when the thing is itself. St. Thomas maintains that the ordinary thing at any moment is something; but it is not everything that it could be. There is a fullness of being, in which it could be everything that it can be. Thus, while most sages come at last to nothing but naked change, he comes to the ultimate thing that is unchangeable, because it is all the other things at once. While they describe a change which is really a change in nothing, he describes a changelessness which includes the changes of everything. Things change because they are not complete; but their reality can only be explained as part of something that is complete. It is God.

Historically, at least, it was round this sharp and crooked corner that all the sophists have followed each other while the great Schoolman went up the high road of experience and expansion; to the beholding of cities, to the building of cities. They all failed at this early stage because, in the words of the old game, they took away the number they first thought of. The recognition of something, of a thing or things, is the first act of the intellect. But because the examination of a thing shows it is not a fixed or final thing, they inferred that there is nothing fixed or final. Thus, in various ways, they all began to see a thing as something thinner than a thing; a wave; a weakness; an abstract instability. St. Thomas, to use the same rude figure, saw a thing that was thicker than a thing; that was even more solid than the solid but secondary facts he had started by admitting as facts. Since we know them to be real, any elusive or bewildering element in their reality cannot really be unreality; and must be merely their relation to the real reality. A hundred human philosophies, ranging over the earth from Nominalism to Nirvana and Maya, from formless evolution to mindless quietism, all come from this first break in the Thomist chain; the notion that, because what we see does not satisfy us or explain itself, it is not even what we see. That cosmos is a contradiction in terms and strangles itself; but Thomism cuts itself free. The defect we see, in what is, is simply that it is not all that is. God is more actual even than Man; more actual even than Matter; for God with all His powers at every instant is immortally in action.

A cosmic comedy of a very curious sort occurred recently; involving the views of very brilliant men, such as Mr. Bernard Shaw and the Dean of St. Paul's. Briefly, freethinkers of many sorts had often said they had no need of a Creation, because the cosmos had always existed and always would exist. Mr. Bernard Shaw said he had become an atheist because the universe had gone on making itself from the beginning or without a beginning; Dean Inge later displayed consternation at the very idea that the universe could have an end. Most modern Christians, living by tradition where medieval Christians could live by logic or reason, vaguely felt that it was a dreadful idea to deprive them of the Day of Judgment. Most modern agnostics (who are delighted to have their ideas called dreadful) cried out all the more, with one accord, that the self-producing, self-existent, truly scientific universe had never needed to have a beginning and could not come to an end. At this very instant, quite suddenly, like the look-out man on a ship who shouts a warning about a rock, the *real* man of science, the expert who was examining the facts, announced in a loud voice that the universe *was* coming to an end. He had not been listening, of course, to the talk of the amateurs; he had been actually examining the texture of matter; and he said it was disintegrating: the world was apparently blowing itself up by a gradual explosion called energy; the whole business would certainly have an end and had presumably had a beginning. This was very shocking indeed; not to the orthodox, but rather specially to the unorthodox; who are rather more easily shocked. Dean Inge, who had been lecturing the orthodox for years on their stern duty of accepting all scientific discoveries, positively wailed aloud over this truly tactless scientific discovery; and practically implored the scientific discoverers to go away and discover something different. It seems almost incredible; but it is a fact that he asked what God would have to amuse Him, if the universe ceased. That is a measure of how much the modern mind needs Thomas Aquinas. But even without Aquinas, I can hardly conceive any educated man, let alone such a learned man, believing in God at all without assuming that God contains in

Himself every perfection including eternal joy; and does not require the solar system to entertain him like a circus.

To step out of these presumptions, prejudices and private disappointments, into the world of St. Thomas, is like escaping from a scuffle in a dark room into the broad daylight. St. Thomas says, quite straightforwardly, that he himself believes this world has a beginning and end; because such seems to be the teaching of the Church; the validity of which mystical message to mankind he defends elsewhere with dozens of quite different arguments. Anyhow, the Church said the world would end; and apparently the Church was right; always supposing (as we are always supposed to suppose) that the latest men of science are right. But Aquinas says he sees no particular reason, in reason, why this world should not be a world without end; or even without beginning. And he is quite certain that, if it were entirely without end or beginning, there would still be exactly the same logical need of a Creator. Anybody who does not see that, he gently implies, does not really understand what is meant by a Creator.

For what St. Thomas means is not a medieval picture of an old king; but this second step in the great argument about *Ens* or Being; the second point which is so desperately difficult to put correctly in popular language. That is why I have introduced it here in the particular form of the argument that there must be a Creator even if there is no Day of Creation. Looking at Being as it is now, as the baby looks at the grass, we see a second thing about it; in quite popular language, it *looks* secondary and dependent. Existence exists; but it is not sufficiently self-existent; and would never become so merely by going on existing. The same primary sense which tells us it is Being, tells us that it is not perfect Being; not merely imperfect in the popular controversial sense of containing sin or sorrow; but imperfect as Being; less actual than the actuality it implies. For instance, its Being is often only Becoming; beginning to Be or ceasing to Be; it implies a more constant or complete thing of which it gives in itself no example. That is the meaning of that basic medieval phrase, “Everything that is moving is moved by another;” which, in the clear subtlety of St. Thomas, means inexpressibly more than the mere Deistic “somebody wound up the clock” with which it is probably often confounded. Anyone who thinks deeply will see that motion has about it an essential incompleteness, which approximates to something more complete.

The actual argument is rather technical; and concerns the fact that potentiality does not explain itself; moreover, in any case, unfolding must be of something folded. Suffice it to say that the mere modern evolutionists, who would ignore the argument do not do so because they have discovered any flaw in the argument; for they have never discovered the argument itself. They do so because they are too shallow to see the flaw in their own argument for the weakness of their thesis is covered by fashionable phraseology, as the strength of the old thesis is covered by old-fashioned phraseology. But for those who really think, there is always something really unthinkable about the whole evolutionary cosmos, as they conceive it; because it is something coming out of nothing; an ever-increasing flood of water pouring out of an empty jug. Those who can simply accept that, without even seeing the difficulty, are not likely to go so deep as Aquinas and see the solution of his difficulty. In a word, the world does not explain itself, and cannot do so merely by continuing to expand itself. But anyhow it is absurd for the Evolutionist to complain that it is unthinkable for an admittedly unthinkable God to make everything out of nothing and then pretend that it is *more* thinkable that nothing should turn itself into everything.

We have seen that most philosophers simply fail to philosophise about things because they change; they also fail to philosophise about things because they differ. We have no space to follow St. Thomas through all these negative heresies; but a word must be said about Nominalism or the doubt founded on the things that differ. Everyone knows that the Nominalist declared that things differ too much to be really classified; so that they are only labelled. Aquinas was a firm but moderate Realist, and therefore held that there really are general qualities; as that human beings are human, amid other paradoxes. To be an extreme Realist would have taken him too near to being a Platonist. He recognized that individuality is real, but said that it coexists with a common character making some generalisation possible; in fact, as in most things, he said exactly what all common sense would say, if no intelligent heretics had ever disturbed it. Nevertheless, they still continue to disturb it. I remember when Mr. H. G. Wells had an alarming fit of Nominalist philosophy; and poured forth book after book to argue that everything is unique and untypical as that a man is so much an individual that he is not even a man. It is a quaint and almost comic fact, that this chaotic negation especially attracts those who are always complaining of social chaos, and who propose to replace it by the most sweeping social regulations. It is the very men who say that nothing can be classified, who say that everything must be codified. Thus Mr. Bernard Shaw said that the only golden rule is that there is no golden rule. He prefers an iron rule; as in Russia.

But this is only a small inconsistency in some moderns as individuals. There is a much deeper inconsistency in them as theorists in relation to the general theory called Creative Evolution. They seem to imagine that they avoid the metaphysical doubt about mere change by assuming (it is not very clear why) that the change will always be for the better. But the mathematical difficulty of finding a corner in a curve is not altered by turning the chart upside down, and saying that a downward curve is now an upward curve. The point is that there is no point in the curve; no place at which we have a logical right to say that the curve has reached its climax, or revealed its origin, or come to its end. It makes no difference that they choose to be cheerful about it, and say, "It is enough that there is always a beyond;" instead of lamenting, like the more realistic poets of the past, over the tragedy of mere Mutability. It is not enough that there is always a beyond; because it might be beyond bearing. Indeed the only defence of this view is that sheer boredom is such an agony, that any movement is a relief. But the truth is that they have never read St. Thomas, or they would find, with no little terror, that they really agree with him. What they really mean is that change is not mere change; but is the unfolding of something; and if it is thus unfolded, though the unfolding takes twelve million years, it must be there already. In other words, they agree with Aquinas that there is everywhere potentiality that has not reached its end in act. But if it is a definite potentiality, and if it can only end in a definite act, why then there is a Great Being, in whom all potentialities already exist as a plan of action. In other words, it is impossible even to say that the change is for the better, unless the best exists somewhere, both before and after the change. Otherwise it is indeed mere change, as the blankest sceptics or the blackest pessimists would see it. Suppose two entirely new paths open before the progress of Creative Evolution. How is the evolutionist to know which Beyond is the better; unless he accepts from the past and present some standard of the best? By their superficial theory everything can change; everything can improve, even the nature of improvement. But in their submerged common sense, they do not really think that an ideal of kindness could change to an ideal of cruelty. It is typical of them that they will sometimes rather timidly use the word Purpose; but blush at the very mention of the word Person.

St. Thomas is the very reverse of anthropomorphic, in spite of his shrewdness as an anthropologist. Some theologians have even claimed that he is too much of an agnostic; and has left the nature of God too much of an intellectual abstraction. But we do not need even St. Thomas, we do not need anything but our own common sense, to tell us that if there has been from the beginning anything that can possibly be called a Purpose, it must reside in something that has the essential elements of a Person. There cannot be an intention hovering in the air all by itself, any more than a memory that nobody remembers or a joke that nobody has made. The only chance for those supporting such suggestions is to take refuge in blank and bottomless irrationality; and even then it is impossible to prove that anybody has any right to be unreasonable, if St. Thomas has no right to be reasonable.

In a sketch that aims only at the baldest simplification, this does seem to me the simplest truth about St. Thomas the philosopher. He is one, so to speak, who is faithful to his first love; and it is love at first sight. I mean that he immediately recognised a real quality in things; and afterwards resisted all the disintegrating doubts arising from the nature of those things. That is why I emphasise, even in the first few pages, the fact that there is a sort of purely Christian humility and fidelity underlying his philosophic realism. St. Thomas could as truly say, of having seen merely a stick or a stone, what St. Paul said of having seen the rending of the secret heavens, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” For though the stick or the stone is an earthly vision, it is through them that St. Thomas finds his way to heaven; and the point is that he is obedient to the vision; he does not go back on it. Nearly all the other sages who have led or misled mankind do, on one excuse or another, go back on it. They dissolve the stick or the stone in chemical solutions of scepticism; either in the medium of mere time and change; or in the difficulties of classification of unique units; or in the difficulty of recognising variety while admitting unity. The first of these three is called debate about flux or formless transition; the second is the debate about Nominalism and Realism, or the existence of general ideas; the third is called the ancient metaphysical riddle of the One and the Many. But they can all be reduced under a rough image to this same statement about St. Thomas. He is still true to the first truth and refusing the first treason. He will not deny what he has seen, though it be a secondary and diverse reality. He will not take away the numbers he first thought of, though there may be quite a number of them.

He has seen grass; and will not say he has not seen grass, because it today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven. That is the substance of all scepticism about change, transition, transformism and the rest. He will not say that there is no grass but only growth. If grass grows and withers, it can only mean that it is part of a greater thing, which is even more real; not that the grass is less real than it looks. St. Thomas has a really logical right to say, in the words of the modern mystic, A. E.: "I begin by the grass to be bound again to the Lord."

He has seen grass and grain; and he will not say that they do not differ, because there is something common to grass and grain. Nor will he say that there is nothing common to grass and grain, because they do really differ. He will not say, with the extreme Nominalists, that because grain can be differentiated into all sorts of fruitage, or grass trodden into mire with any kind of weed, therefore there can be no *classification* to distinguish weeds from slime or to draw a fine distinction between cattle-food and cattle. He will not say with the extreme Platonists, on the other hand, that he saw the perfect fruit in his own head by shutting his eyes, *before* he saw any difference between grain and grass. He saw one thing and then another thing and then a common quality; but he does not really pretend that he saw the quality before the thing.

He has seen grass and gravel; that is to say, he has seen things really different; things not classified together like grass and grains. The first flash of fact shows us a world of really strange things not merely strange to us, but strange to each other. The separate things need have nothing in common except Being. Everything is Being; but it is not true that everything is Unity. It is here, as I have said, that St. Thomas does definitely one might say defiantly, part company with the Pantheist and Monist. All things are; but among the things that are is the thing called difference, quite as much as the thing called similarity. And here again we begin to be bound again to the Lord, not only by the universality of grass, but by the incompatibility of grass and gravel. For this world of different and varied beings is especially the world of the Christian Creator; the world of created things, like things made by an artist; as compared with the world that is only one thing, with a sort of shimmering and shifting veil of misleading change; which is the conception of so many of the ancient religions of Asia and the modern sophistries of Germany. In the face of these, St. Thomas still stands stubborn in the same obstinate objective fidelity. He has seen grass and gravel; and he is not disobedient to the heavenly vision.

To sum up; the reality of things, the mutability of things, the diversity of things, and all other such things that can be attributed to things, is followed carefully by the medieval philosopher, without losing touch with the original point of the reality. There is no space in this book to specify the thousand steps of thought by which he shows that he is right. But the point is that, even apart from being right he is real. He is a realist in a rather curious sense of his own, which is a third thing, distinct from the almost contrary medieval and modern meanings of the word. Even the doubts and difficulties about reality have driven him to believe in more reality rather than less. The *deceitfulness* of things which has had so sad an effect on so many sages, has almost a contrary effect on this sage. If things deceive us, it is by being more real than they seem. As ends in themselves they always deceive us; but as things tending to a greater end, they are even more real than we think them. If they seem to have a relative unreality (so to speak) it is because they are potential and not actual; they are unfulfilled, like packets of seeds or boxes of fireworks. They have it in them to be more real than they are. And there is an upper world of what the Schoolman called Fruition, or Fulfilment, in which all this relative relativity becomes actuality; in which the trees burst into flower or the rockets into flame.

Here I leave the reader, on the very lowest rung of those ladders of logic, by which St. Thomas besieged and mounted the House of Man. It is enough to say that by arguments as honest and laborious, he climbed up to the turrets and talked with angels on the roofs of gold. This is, in a very rude outline, his philosophy; it is impossible in such an outline to describe his theology. Anyone writing so small a book about so big a man, must leave out something. Those who know him best will best understand why, after some considerable consideration, I have left out the only important thing.

VIII

THE SEQUEL TO ST. THOMAS

It is often said that St. Thomas, unlike St. Francis, did not permit in his work the indescribable element of poetry. As, for instance, that there is little reference to any pleasure in the actual flowers and fruit of natural things, though any amount of concern with the buried roots of nature. And yet I confess that, in reading his philosophy, I have a very peculiar and powerful impression analogous to poetry. Curiously enough, it is in some ways more analogous to painting, and reminds me very much of the effect produced by the best of the modern painters, when they throw a strange and almost crude light upon stark and rectangular objects, or seem to be groping for rather than grasping the very pillars of the subconscious mind. It is probably because there is in his work a quality which is Primitive, in the best sense of a badly misused word; but anyhow, the pleasure is definitely not only of the reason, but also of the imagination.

Perhaps the impression is connected with the fact that painters deal with things without words. An artist draws quite gravely the grand curves of a pig; because he is not thinking of the *word* pig. There is no thinker who is so unmistakably thinking about things and not being misled by the indirect influence of words, as St. Thomas Aquinas. It is true in that sense that he has not the advantage of words, any more than the disadvantage of words. Here he differs sharply, for instance, from St. Augustine who was, among other things a wit. He was also a sort of prose poet, with a power over words in their atmospheric and emotional aspect; so that his books abound with beautiful passages that rise in the memory like strains of music; the *illi in vos saeviant*; or the unforgettable cry, “Late I have loved thee, O Ancient Beauty!” It is true that there is little or nothing of this kind in St. Thomas; but if he was without the higher uses of the mere magic of words, he was also free from that abuse of it, by mere sentimentalists or self-centred artists, which can become merely morbid and a very black magic indeed. And truly it is by some such comparison with the purely introspective intellectual that we may find a hint about the real nature of the thing I describe, or rather fail to describe; I mean the elemental and primitive poetry that shines through all his thoughts; and especially through the thought with which all his thinking begins. It is the intense rightness of his sense of the relation between the mind and the real thing outside the mind.

That *strangeness* of things, which is the light in all poetry, and indeed in all art, is really connected with their otherness; or what is called their objectivity. What is subjective must be stale; it is exactly what is objective that is in this imaginative manner strange. In this the great contemplative is the complete contrary of that false contemplative, the mystic who looks only into his own soul, the selfish artist who shrinks from the world and lives only in his own mind. According to St. Thomas, the mind acts freely of itself, but its freedom exactly consists in finding a way out to liberty and the light of day; to reality and the land of the living. In the subjectivist, the pressure of the world forces the imagination inwards. In the Thomist, the energy of the mind forces the imagination outwards, but because the images it seeks are real things. All their romance and glamour, so to speak, lies in the fact that they are real things; things *not* to be found by staring inwards at the mind. The flower is a vision because it is not only a vision. Or, if you will, it is a vision because it is not a dream. This is for the poet the strangeness of stones and trees and solid things; they are strange because they are solid. I am putting it first in the poetical manner, and indeed it needs much more technical subtlety to put it in the philosophical manner. According to Aquinas, the object becomes a part of the mind; nay, according to Aquinas, the mind actually becomes the object. But, as one commentator acutely puts it, it only becomes the object and does not create the object. In other words, the object *is* an object; it can and does exist outside the mind, or in the absence of the mind. And *therefore* it enlarges the mind of which it becomes a part. The mind conquers a new province like an emperor; but only because the mind has answered the bell like a servant. The mind has opened the doors and windows, because it is the natural activity of what is inside the house to find out what is outside the house. If the mind is sufficient to itself, it is insufficient for itself. For this feeding upon fact *is* itself; as an organ it has an object which is objective; this eating of the strange strong meat of reality.

Note how this view avoids both pitfalls; the alternative abysses of impotence. The mind is not merely receptive, in the sense that it absorbs sensations like so much blotting-paper; on that sort of softness has been based all that cowardly materialism, which conceives man as wholly servile to his environment. On the other hand, the mind is not purely creative, in the sense that it paints pictures on the windows and then mistakes them for a landscape outside. But the mind is active, and its activity consists in following, so far as the will chooses to follow, the light outside that does really shine upon real landscapes. That is what gives the indefinably virile and even adventurous quality to this view of life; as compared with that which holds that material inferences pour in upon an utterly helpless mind, or that which holds that psychological influences pour out and create an entirely baseless phantasmagoria. In other words, the essence of the Thomist common sense is that two agencies are at work; reality and the recognition of reality; and their meeting is a sort of marriage. Indeed it is very truly a marriage, because it is fruitful; the only philosophy now in the world that really is fruitful. It produces practical results, precisely because it is the combination of an adventurous mind and a strange fact.

M. Maritain has used an admirable metaphor, in his book *Theonas*, when he says that the external fact *fertilises* the internal intelligence, as the bee fertilises the flower. Anyhow, upon that marriage, or whatever it may be called, the whole system of St. Thomas is founded; God made Man so that he was capable of coming in contact with reality; and those whom God hath joined, let no man put asunder.

Now, it is worthy of remark that it is the only working philosophy. Of nearly all other philosophies it is strictly true that their followers work in spite of them, or do not work at all. No sceptics work sceptically; no fatalists work fatalistically; all without exception work on the principle that it is possible to assume what it is not possible to believe. No materialist who thinks his mind was made up for him, by mud and blood and heredity, has any hesitation in making up his mind. No sceptic who believes that truth is subjective has any hesitation about treating it as objective.

Thus St. Thomas’ work has a constructive quality absent from almost all cosmic systems after him. For he is already building a house, while the newer speculators are still at the stage of testing the rungs of a ladder, demonstrating the hopeless softness of the unbaked bricks, chemically analysing the spirit in the spirit-level, and generally quarrelling about whether they can even make the tools that will make the house. Aquinas is whole intellectual aeons ahead of them, over and above the common chronological sense of saying a man is in advance of his age; he is ages in advance of our age. For he has thrown out a bridge across the abyss of the first doubt, and found reality beyond and begun to build on it. Most modern philosophies are not philosophy but philosophic doubt; that is, doubt about whether there can be any philosophy. If we accept St. Thomas's fundamental act or argument in the acceptance of reality, the further deductions from it will be equally real; they will be things and not words. Unlike Kant and most of the Hegelians, he has a faith that is not merely a doubt about doubt. It is not merely what is commonly called a faith about faith; it is a faith about fact. From this point he can go forward, and deduce and develop and decide, like a man planning a city and sitting in a judgment-seat. But never since that time has any thinking man of that eminence thought that there is any real evidence for anything, not even the evidence of his senses, that was strong enough to bear the weight of a definite deduction.

From all this we may easily infer that this philosopher does not merely touch on social things, or even take them in his stride to spiritual things; though that is always his direction. He takes hold of them, he has not only a grasp of them, but a grip. As all his controversies prove, he was perhaps a perfect example of the iron hand in the velvet glove. He was a man who always turned his full attention to anything; and he seems to fix even passing things as they pass. To him even what was momentary was momentous. The reader feels that any small point of economic habit or human accident is for the moment almost scorched under the converging rays of a magnifying lens. It is impossible to put in these pages a thousandth part of the decisions on details of life that may be found in his work; it would be like reprinting the law-reports of an incredible century of just judges and sensible magistrates. We can only touch on one or two obvious topics of this kind.

I have noted the need to use modern atmospheric words for certain ancient atmospheric things; as in saying that St. Thomas was what most modern men vaguely mean by an Optimist. In the same way, he was very much what they vaguely mean by a Liberal. I do not mean that any of his thousand political suggestions would suit any such definite political creed; if there are nowadays any definite political creeds. I mean, in the same sense, that he has a sort of atmosphere of believing in breadth and balance and debate. He may not be a Liberal by the extreme demands of the moderns for we seem always to mean by the moderns the men of the last century, rather than this. He was very much of a Liberal compared with the most modern of all moderns for they are nearly all of them turning into

Fascists and Hitlerites. But the point is that he obviously preferred the sort of decisions that are reached by deliberation rather than despotic action; and while, like all his contemporaries and coreligionists, he has no doubt that true authority may be authoritative, he is rather averse to the whole savour of its being arbitrary. He is much less of an Imperialist than Dante, and even his Papalism is not very Imperial. He is very fond of phrases like “a mob of free men” as the essential material of a city; and he is emphatic upon the fact that law, when it ceases to be justice, ceases even to be law.

If this work were controversial, whole chapters could be given to the economics as well as the ethics of the Thomist system. It would be easy to show that, in this matter, he was a prophet as well as a philosopher. He foresaw from the first the peril of that mere reliance on trade and exchange, which was beginning about his time; and which has culminated in a universal commercial collapse in our time. He did not merely assert that Usury is unnatural, though in saying that he only followed Aristotle and obvious common sense, which was never contradicted by anybody until the time of the commercialists, who have involved us in the collapse. The modern world began by Bentham writing the Defence of Usury, and it has ended after a hundred years in even the vulgar newspaper opinion finding Finance indefensible. But St. Thomas struck much deeper than that. He even mentioned the truth, ignored during the long idolatry of trade, that things which men produce only to sell are likely to be worse in quality than the things they produce in order to consume. Something of our difficulty about the fine shades of Latin will be felt when we come to his statement that there is always a certain *inhonestas* about trade. For *inhonestas* does not exactly mean dishonesty. It means approximately “something unworthy,” or, more nearly perhaps, “something not quite handsome.” And he was right; for trade, in the modern sense, does mean selling something for a little more than it is worth, nor would the nineteenth century economists have denied it. They would only have said that he was not practical; and this seemed sound while their view led to practical prosperity. Things are a little different now that it has led to universal bankruptcy.

Here, however, we collide with a colossal paradox of history. The Thomist philosophy and theology, quite fairly compared with other philosophies like the Buddhist or the Monist, with other theologies like the Calvinist or the Christian Scientist, is quite obviously a working and even a fighting system; full of common sense and constructive confidence; and therefore normally full of hope and promise. Nor is this hope vain or this promise unfulfilled. In this not very hopeful modern moment, there are no men so hopeful as those who are today looking to St. Thomas as a leader in a hundred crying questions of craftsmanship and ownership and economic ethics. There is undoubtedly a hopeful and creative Thomism in our time. But we are none the less puzzled by the fact that this did not immediately follow on St. Thomas's time. It is true that there was a great march of progress in the thirteenth century; and in some things, such as the status of the peasant, matters had greatly improved by the end of the Middle Ages. But nobody can honestly say that Scholasticism had greatly improved by the end of the Middle Ages. Nobody can tell how far the popular spirit of the Friars had helped the later popular medieval movements; or how far this great Friar, with his luminous rules of justice and his lifelong sympathy with the poor, may have indirectly contributed to the improvement that certainly occurred. But those who followed his method, as distinct from his moral spirit, degenerated with a strange rapidity; and it was certainly not in the Scholastics that the improvement occurred. Of some of the Scholastics we can only say that they took every thing that was worst in Scholasticism and made it worse. They continued to count the steps of logic; but every step of logic took them further from common sense. They forgot how St. Thomas had started almost as an agnostic; and seemed resolved to leave nothing in heaven or hell about which anybody could be agnostic. They were a sort of rabid rationalists, who would have left no mysteries in the Faith at all. In the earliest Scholasticism there is something that strikes a modern as fanciful and pedantic; but, properly understood, it has a fine spirit in its fancy. It is the spirit of freedom; and especially the spirit of free will. Nothing seems more quaint, for instance, than the speculations about what would have happened to every vegetable or animal or angel, if Eve had chosen *not* to eat the fruit of the tree. But this was originally full of the thrill of choice; and the feeling that she might have chosen otherwise. It was this detailed detective method that was followed, without the thrill of the original detective story. The world was cumbered with countless tomes, proving by logic a thousand things that can be known only to God. They developed all that was really sterile in Scholasticism, and left for us all that is really fruitful in Thomism.

There are many historical explanations. There is the Black Death, which broke the back of the Middle Ages; the consequent decline in clerical culture, which did so much to provoke the Reformation. But I suspect that there was another cause also; which can only be stated by saying that the contemporary fanatics, who controverted with Aquinas, left their own school behind them; and in a sense that school triumphed after all. The really narrow Augustinians, the men who saw the Christian life only as the narrow way, the men who could not even comprehend the great Dominican’s exultation in the blaze of Being, or the glory of God in all his creatures, the men who continued to insist feverishly on every text, or even on every truth, that appeared pessimistic or paralysing, these gloomy Christians could not be extirpated from Christendom; and they remained and waited for their chance. The narrow Augustinians, the men who would have no science or reason or rational use of secular things, might have been defeated in controversy, but they had an accumulated passion of conviction. There was an Augustinian monastery in the North where it was near to explosion.

Thomas Aquinas had struck his blow; but he had not entirely settled the Manichees. The Manichees are not so easily settled; in the sense of settled forever. He had insured that the main outline of the Christianity that has come down to us should be supernatural but not anti-natural; and should never be darkened with a false spirituality to the oblivion of the Creator and the Christ who was made Man. But as his tradition trailed away into less liberal or less creative habits of thought, and as his medieval society fell away and decayed through other causes, the thing against which he had made war crept back into Christendom. A certain spirit or element in the Christian religion, necessary and sometimes noble but always needing to be balanced by more gentle and generous elements in the Faith, began once more to strengthen, as the framework of Scholasticism stiffened or split. The Fear of the Lord, that is the beginning of wisdom, and therefore belongs to the beginnings, and is felt in the first cold hours before the dawn of civilisation; the power that comes out of the wilderness and rides on the whirlwind and breaks the gods of stone; the power before which the eastern nations are prostrate like a pavement; the power before which the primitive prophets run naked and shouting, at once proclaiming and escaping from their god; the fear that is rightly rooted in the beginnings of every religion true or false: the fear of the Lord, that is the beginning of wisdom; but not the end.

It is often remarked as showing the ironical indifference of rulers to revolutions, and especially the frivolity of those who are called the Pagan Popes of the Renaissance, in their attitude to the Reformation, that when the Pope first heard of the first movements of Protestantism, which had started in Germany, he only said in an offhand manner that it was “some quarrel of monks.” Every Pope of course was accustomed to quarrels among the monastic orders; but it has always been noted as a strange and almost uncanny negligence that he could see no more than this in the beginnings of the great sixteenth century schism. And yet, in a somewhat more recondite sense, there is something to be said for what he has been blamed for saying. In one sense, the schismatics had a sort of spiritual ancestry even in mediaeval times.

It will be found earlier in this book; and it *was* a quarrel of monks. We have seen how the great name of Augustine, a name never mentioned by Aquinas without respect but often mentioned without agreement covered an Augustinian school of thought naturally lingering longest in the Augustinian Order. The difference, like every difference between Catholics, was only a difference of emphasis. The Augustinians stressed the idea of the impotence of man before God, the omniscience of God about the destiny of man, the need for holy fear and the humiliation of intellectual pride, more than the opposite and corresponding truths of free will or human dignity or good works. In this they did in a sense continue the distinctive note of St. Augustine, who is even now regarded as relatively the determinist doctor of the Church. But there is emphasis and emphasis; and a time was coming when emphasising the one side was to mean flatly contradicting the other. Perhaps, after all, it did begin with a quarrel of monks; but the Pope was yet to learn how quarrelsome a monk could be. For there was one particular monk in that Augustinian monastery in the German forests, who may be said to have had a single and special talent for emphasis; for emphasis and nothing except emphasis; for emphasis with the quality of earthquake. He was the son of a slatecutter; a man with a great voice and a certain volume of personality; brooding, sincere, decidedly morbid; and his name was Martin Luther. Neither Augustine nor the Augustinians would have desired to see the day of that vindication of the Augustinian tradition; but in one sense, perhaps, the Augustinian tradition was avenged after all.

It came out of its cell again, in the day of storm and ruin, and cried out with a new and mighty voice for an elemental and emotional religion, and for the destruction of all philosophies. It had a peculiar horror and loathing of the great Greek philosophies, and of the scholasticism that had been founded on those philosophies. It had one theory that was the destruction of all theories; in fact it had its own theology which was itself the death of theology. Man could say nothing to God, nothing from God, nothing about God, except an almost inarticulate cry for mercy and for the supernatural help of Christ, in a world where all natural things were useless. Reason was useless. Will was useless. Man could not move himself an inch any more than a stone. Man could not trust what was in his head any more than a turnip. Nothing remained in earth or heaven, but the name of Christ lifted in that lonely imprecation; awful as the cry of a beast in pain.

We must be just to those huge human figures, who are in fact the hinges of history. However strong, and rightly strong, be our own controversial conviction, it must never mislead us into thinking that something trivial has transformed the world. So it is with that great Augustinian monk, who avenged all the ascetic Augustinians of the Middle Ages; and whose broad and burly figure has been big enough to block out for four centuries the distant human mountain of Aquinas. It is not, as the moderns delight to say, a question of theology. The Protestant theology of Martin Luther was a thing that no modern Protestant would be seen dead in a field with; or if the phrase be too flippant, would be specially anxious to touch with a barge-pole. That Protestantism was pessimism; it was nothing but bare insistence on the hopelessness of all human virtue, as an attempt to escape hell. That Lutheranism is now quite unreal; more modern phases of Lutheranism are rather more unreal; but Luther was not unreal. He was one of those great elemental barbarians, to whom it is indeed given to change the world. To compare those two figures hulking so big in history, in any philosophical sense, would of course be futile and even unfair. On a great map like the mind of Aquinas, the mind of Luther would be almost invisible. But it is not altogether untrue to say, as so many journalists have said without caring whether it was true or untrue, that Luther opened an epoch; and began the modern world.

He was the first man who ever consciously used his consciousness or what was later called his Personality. He had as a fact a rather strong personality. Aquinas had an even stronger personality; he had a massive and magnetic presence; he had an intellect that could act like a huge system of artillery spread over the whole world; he had that instantaneous presence of mind in debate, which alone really deserves the name of wit. But it never occurred to him to use anything except his wits, in defence of a truth distinct from himself. It never occurred to Aquinas to use Aquinas as a weapon. There is not a trace of his ever using his personal advantages, of birth or body or brain or breeding, in debate with anybody. In short, he belonged to an age of intellectual unconsciousness, to an age of intellectual innocence, which was very intellectual. Now Luther did begin the modern mood of depending on things not merely intellectual. It is not a question of praise or blame; it matters little whether we say that he was a strong personality, or that he was a bit of a big bully. When he quoted a Scripture text, inserting a word that is not in Scripture, he was content to shout back at all hecklers: “Tell them that Dr. Martin Luther will have it so!” That is what we now call Personality. A little later it was called Psychology. After that it was called Advertisement or Salesmanship. But we are not arguing about advantages or disadvantages. It is due to this great Augustinian pessimist to say, not only that he did triumph at last over the Angel of the Schools, but that he did in a very real sense make the modern world. He destroyed Reason; and substituted Suggestion.

It is said that the great Reformer publicly burned the *Summa Theologica* and the works of Aquinas; and with the bonfire of such books this book may well come to an end. They say it is very difficult to burn a book; and it must have been exceedingly difficult to burn such a mountain of books as the Dominican had contributed to the controversies of Christendom. Anyhow, there is something lurid and apocalyptic about the idea of such destruction, when we consider the compact complexity of all that encyclopaedic survey of social and moral and theoretical things. All the close-packed definitions that excluded so many errors and extremes; all the broad and balanced judgments upon the clash of loyalties or the choice of evils; all the liberal speculations upon the limits of government or the proper conditions of justice; all the distinctions between the use and abuse of private property; all the rules and exceptions about the great evil of war; all the allowances for human weakness and all the provisions for human health; all this mass of medieval humanism shrivelled and curled up in smoke before the eyes of its enemy; and that great passionate peasant rejoiced darkly, because the day of the Intellect was over. Sentence by sentence it burned, and syllogism by syllogism; and the golden maxims turned to golden flames in that last and dying glory of all that had once been the great wisdom of the Greeks. The great central Synthesis of history, that was to have linked the ancient with the modern world, went up in smoke and, for half the world, was forgotten like a vapour.

For a time it seemed that the destruction was final. It is still expressed in the amazing fact that (in the North) modern men can still write histories of philosophy, in which philosophy stops with the last little sophists of Greece and Rome; and is never heard of again until the appearance of such a third-rate philosopher as Francis Bacon. And yet this small book, which will probably do nothing else, or have very little other value, will be at least a testimony to the fact that the tide has turned once more. It is four hundred years after; and this book, I hope (and I am happy to say I believe) will probably be lost and forgotten in the flood of better books about St. Thomas Aquinas, which are at this moment pouring from every printing-press in Europe, and even in England and America. Compared with such books it is obviously a very slight and amateurish production; but it is not likely to be burned, and if it were, it would not leave even a noticeable gap in the pouring mass of new and magnificent work, which is now daily dedicated to the *philosophia perennis*; to the Everlasting Philosophy.

ALL I SURVEY: A BOOK OF ESSAYS

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I

On the Child

THERE was recently reported in the papers the meeting of certain eminent ladies, of a political and philanthropic sort, who discussed the great modern problem of what is to be done with The Child. I need not say that The Child is always discussed as if he were a monster, of immense size, vast complexity, and strange and startling novelty. Nor need I remind the reader that The Child is not a child: any child we comfortable people have ever seen. The Child is not Jack or Joan or Peter; he is not Cousin Ethel's child or one of Uncle William's children. He is a creature entirely solitary and sui generis; and he lives in the slums.

A great many remarks were made, most of them sincere, some of them sensible, and several of them highly comic. I think the passage I like best is one in which a particular female philanthropist said that any poor child would feel happy at the sight of a policeman, so long as he was dressed like a policeman; but that the child might be filled with maniacal terror if he were dressed like an ordinary man. It would seem, that is, that not only are all policemen always kind to all poor people, but that they are the only men who are ever kind to any poor people. I am not The Child, and therefore I was not brought up in the slums. But I know a little more about the slums than that. All these other sayings, however, sink into a second place, in my opinion, compared with one simple remark, which will seem to most people as innocent as it is simple. Nevertheless, in that one artless observation — I might almost say, in that one unconscious confession — was contained the whole complex of contradictions and falsehoods which have in our time ruined the relation of social classes and destroyed the common morals of the community. A very famous political lady, who certainly believes that what she says represents the most lofty luminous idealism, uttered on this occasion the following words: “We must care for other people's children as if they were our own.”

And when I read those words, I smote the table with my hand, like one who has suddenly located and smashed a wasp. I said to myself: “That's it! She's got it! She's got the exactly correct formula for the worst and most poisonous of all the political wrongs that rot out the entrails of the world.

That is what has wrecked democracy; wrecked domesticity through the breadth and depth of democracy; wrecked dignity as the only prop and pillar of domesticity and democracy. That is what has taken away from the poor man the pride and honour of the father of a household, so that he can no longer really feel any pride or honour in being a citizen; still less in being merely a voter. The Englishman's house is no longer his castle, nor is he king of the castle; the *charbonnier* is no longer maître chez lui; his hut is not his hut; his children are not his children; and democracy is dead. She means no harm. She knows not what she does. She does not even understand what she says. She does not comprehend a word of the terrible sentence that she has spoken. But it is spoken." And the sentence that is spoken is this: "We, the rich, can take care of poor people's children as if they were our own. As we have abolished their parents, they are all orphans."

The ideal is sufficiently familiar in fact, of course; and there is nothing very much against it, except that it is utterly and grossly immoral. A man saying that he will treat other people's children as his own is exactly like a man saying that he will treat other people's wives as his own. He may get a certain amount of poetic or sentimental pleasure out of the children, but so he may out of the wives. The question is whether any human rights whatever remain to the other man, who is made legally responsible for his children and his wife. If he ill-treats them, it is perfectly right to put the exceptional legal machinery, which exists for such exceptional evils, in motion against him. But it is not right, by any code of common morals yet recognized among men, to start from the very first with the assumption that his children belong to you as much as they belong to him. If there is an adequate case against him, it must be proved against him; but we are not dealing here with any such case. We are dealing with a profound plutocratic assumption, accidentally revealed by a chance phrase. The poor children are born under the power and protection of a governing class, as wards in Chancery are born under the power and protection of the Lord Chancellor; they inherit that status, whether our own conscience inclines us to call it a status of slavery or of safety. Note that the lady does not say — though she doubtless would say— "When I hear of a child being beaten with a red-hot poker, the common human bond makes me feel as angry as if it were my own child." She does not deal with hard cases, or even individual cases; she generalizes from the start. She assumes that she will, in fact, manage, she assumes that she will be allowed to manage, any other children as if they were her own. And in practice she is probably right; it is the supreme and final proof that in theory she is entirely wrong. Our society has unconsciously and unresistingly admitted this great heresy against humanity. The notion of making the head of a humble family really independent and responsible, like a citizen, has really vanished from the mind of most of the realists of our real world. It is the less wonder that it has never even entered the head of an idealist.

The trouble is that in our society the ideal is more wrong than the real. Old Tories used to insist on teaching to the poor the principles of respect for private property, lest they should revolt and despoil the rich. As a fact, it is the rich who have to be taught about the existence of private property, and especially about the existence of private life. No ragged mob is likely to storm the nurseries of Mayfair, or steal the perambulators from the French nurses, or the pupils from the German governesses, parading in Kensington Gardens. But philanthropists, under various excuses, do really raid the playgrounds of the poor. They regard such a raid as a reform; and, in truth, it is a revolution. Modern writers are very ready to cover great historic events with sweeping denunciations of crime; to say the Great War was murder on a large scale or that the Russian Revolution was theft on a large scale. They hardly realize how much of educational and philanthropic reform has been kidnapping on a large scale. That is, it has shown an increasing disregard for the privacy of the private citizen, considered as a parent. I have called it a revolution; and at bottom it is really a Bolshevist revolution. For what could be more purely and perfectly Communist than to say that you regard other people’s children as if they were your own?

True, as yet the man who treats other people’s dogs as if they were his own is called a dog-stealer. The man who is caught, caring for somebody else’s horse as if it were his own, is called a horse-thief. But even that is only true if the thieves are poor and too ignorant to plead excuses of humanitarianism. The wealthy Communist who so treats a child is not called a kidnapper. Which only shows that Communism, anyhow *our* Communism, would not be the rule of the poor, nor even the unruliness of the poor; but only the extension of the existing unruliness of the rich.

II

On the Standardization of Stevenson

THIS generation, which is charged with being frivolous, often strikes me as being much too serious. And its culture, which seems in one aspect to verge on anarchy, retains in another aspect a queer weakness for authority. I call it a weakness, because it is not so much an appeal to authority as to authorities. In every scientific or sociological discussion the fact has long been flagrant and farcical. If I mention a piece of elementary common sense, as that, when I find a tooth in Tooting, I am not justified in calling it The Tooting Man, or saying I have “reconstructed” him, I shall certainly get no answer except the stern retort that The Tooting Man was reconstructed by no less a person than Dr. Pidge. If I say (exercising my poor human reason) that to explain Mind as a form of Matter is simply meaningless, like explaining eyes in terms of spectacles, I shall be duly informed that I must give up my poor human reason and accept such mysteries on the authority of Professor Snorter, an authority whose authority is perhaps of greater authority than even all the other authorities. But, while we had grown used to this old joke in the fields of science and philosophy, I cannot but grieve to see it appearing here and there in the milder but more flowery fields of literature and artistic criticism. Doubtless there was a period, in the more remote past, when there was too much weight given in literary criticism to authority and authorities. But one or two recent critics seem to have revived this fault, with a change that makes it even more faulty. If the old critic appealed to writers who were old and forgotten, the new critic thinks it enough to appeal to writers who are new and neglected. But I would just as soon be referred to an antiquity known only to the learned as to a novelty known only to the “cultured.” I would rather accept the authority of Aristotle, even at a time when he is known to be unpopular with muddle-headed people, than accept the authority of Mr. Nibbsky, who would be equally unpopular, but is not even known.

I have even found a savour of this spirit in the case of critics better known than Mr. Nibbsky, and better worth knowing. There was a comparatively slight and innocent instance of it in a criticism by Mr. James Agate on a book by Mr. Sidney Dark, writers who have both added to my enjoyment in various ways at various times. The book in question was about Stevenson, who has added to my enjoyment even more. But, as I have only read Mr. Agate's criticism and not Mr. Dark's book, I will not claim to judge in a general way between them. Only it seems funny to me that the critic should so solemnly make it a condemnation, in itself, of Mr. Dark's book on Stevenson, that it was not piously and reverently founded on Mr. Swinnerton's book on Stevenson. For the critic, apparently, Mr. Swinnerton is the one and only authority on Stevenson, and his sacred name must be invoked, like that of a Muse or a god of inspiration, at the beginning of any literary exercise on the subject. This strikes me as carrying the idolatry of Authority extravagantly far. Mr. Swinnerton is an excellent writer, and doubtless the book in question was an excellent book. But I would still meekly suggest that a man writing on Stevenson should be judged by his appreciation of Stevenson, and not by his appreciation of Swinnerton. But the critic talks with horrible solemnity about "The Pre-Swinnerton" period of Stevensonian criticism. Which really seems to be making too much even of Stevenson, let alone Swinnerton. Men may well be a little mystical in speaking of what is Pre-Adamite, or even Pre-Raphaelite; but I hardly think any of our little text-books of taste and letters will rank with the Renaissance, let alone the Creation.

Of the making of books on Stevenson there is no end; as poor Cranmer observed, "This hath offended; this unworthy hand." But I really doubt whether it was Mr. Dark's moral duty to read all of them before daring to write one of his own. I should as soon think it impertinent of a painter to paint a pine-tree before he had studied all the pine-trees in all the pictures in the world. After all, what we want is direct and individual impressions of primary objects, whether poets or pine-trees, and not an endless succession of critics learning from critics how to criticize. With some parts of Mr. Agate's criticism, whether it be of the book or of the subject of the book, I entirely agree. I should never, for instance, think of resting my real admiration for Stevenson on the slight, and indeed rather thin, essays on the relation of the sexes called Virginibus Puerisque. I take them to have been examples of those early exercises in elegant prose, with a preference of manner to matter, to which Stevenson himself humorously confessed in later life. They belong to what is called the "sedulous ape" period, which the yet more sedulous apes of the Press have quoted and re-quoted sedulously ever since. But Stevenson was not a sedulous ape, any more than

Dickens was Boz or Byron was the author of the remarkable poem called "A Tear."

After all, Stevenson died at about the time of life when Dickens had only just written *David Copperfield,* and had not yet attempted so new a departure as *Hard Times* or Great Expectations; at an age when any number of great men had still their fullest and most mature work to do. And when he died he was already writing what is quite obviously a much fuller and more mature work, and in many ways quite a new departure. The fragments of *Weir of Hermiston* are like the fragments of a colossal god lying broken in the desert, compared with many of the slender ivory statuettes that he had carved before. But it is an error even to associate him, in his previous work, with things like ivory statuettes. Mr. Huish with his little vitriol-bottle, in The Ebb-Tide, would make a very unsuitable ivory statuette. The critic mentioned above falls into this fallacy, I think, when he says that Stevenson "turned all to favour and to prettiness." It is not altogether a fortunate quotation, for it is taken from a scene of grisly tragedy; where the Queen utters it, her voice breaking upon the phrase, when Ophelia wanders half-witted between her lover's murder of her father and her own murder of herself. Many of Stevenson's trifles are quite equally tragic. Many of his pretty phrases accentuate ugly situations. Many of them are not pretty at all. I cannot imagine that any critic rushes to the dreary and bedraggled leavings of The Ebb-Tide with a mere childish desire to see the pretty pictures; or that even Mr. Agate would read the account, in *Weir of Hermiston*, of how the oaf, with his neck swathed in flannel, was "hunted gallows-wards with jeers," and have merely the sentiments of the infant who kicks his legs and cries: "Oh, pretty, pretty!" These passages strike me as revealing rather too brutal a streak in the writer, due, I think, to the Calvinist pessimism of his original background.

What Stevenson had, and what Stevenson's critics often have not and mistake for mere finesse, was a certain sharpness of focus. He did not deal merely with pretty figures, whether they were figures of speech or figures of fiction. On the contrary, he dealt oftener with ugly figures, and certainly enjoyed the ugly figures most. But all the figures are figures, and not merely presences or influences. Mr. Huish is a deformity, but he is a definite form. This may not be the highest artistic quality, but it is not turning everything to prettiness. It is turning everything to beauty, even to the terrible beauty that is made out of a harmony of ugly things. And that is surely not very far off from the primary purpose of art.

III

On Turnpikes and Mediævalism

OPENING my newspaper the other day, I saw a short but emphatic leaderette entitled “A Relic of Mediævalism.” It expressed a profound indignation upon the fact that somewhere or other, in some fairly remote corner of this country, there is a turnpike-gate, with a toll. It insisted that this antiquated tyranny is insupportable, because it is supremely important that our road traffic should go very fast; presumably a little faster than it does. So it described the momentary delay in this place as a relic of mediævalism. I fear the future will look at that sentence, somewhat sadly and a little contemptuously, as a very typical relic of modernism. I mean it will be a melancholy relic of the only period in all human history when people were proud of being modern. For though today is always today and the moment is always modern, we are the only men in all history who fell back upon bragging about the mere fact that today is not yesterday. I fear that some in the future will explain it by saying that we had precious little else to brag about. For, whatever the mediæval faults, they went with one merit. Mediæval people never worried about being mediæval; and modern people do worry horribly about being modern.

To begin with, note the queer, automatic assumption that it must always mean throwing mud at a thing to call it a relic of mediævalism. The modern world contains a good many relics of mediævalism, and most of us would be surprised if the argument were logically enforced even against the things that are commonly called mediæval. We should express some regret if somebody blew up Westminster Abbey, because it is a relic of mediævalism. Doubts would trouble us if the Government burned all existing copies of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, because they are quite certainly relics of mediævalism. We could not throw ourselves into unreserved and enthusiastic rejoicing even if the Tower of Giotto were destroyed as a relic of mediævalism. And only just lately, in Oxford and Paris (themselves, alas! relics of mediævalism), there has been a perverse and pedantic revival of the Thomist Philosophy and the logical method of the mediæval Schoolmen. Similarly, curious and restless minds, among the very youngest artists and art critics, have unaccountably gone back even further into the barbaric period than the limit of the Tower of Giotto, and are even now telling us to look back to the austerity of Cimabue and the Byzantine diagrams of the Dark Ages. These relics must be more mediæval even than mediævalism.

But, in fact, this queer phase would not cover only what is commonly called mediævalism. If a relic of mediævalism only means something that has come down to us from mediæval times, such writers would probably be surprised at the size and solidity of the relics. If I told these honest pressmen that the Press is a relic of mediævalism, they would probably prove their love of a cliché by accusing me of a paradox. But it is at least certain that the Printing Press is a relic of mediævalism. It was discovered and established by entirely mediæval men, steeped in mediæval ideas, stuffed with the religion and social spirit of the Middle Ages. There are no more typically mediæval words than those noble words of the eulogy that was pronounced by the great English printer on the great English poet; the words of Caxton upon Chaucer. If I were to say that Parliament is a relic of mediævalism, I should be on even stronger ground; for, while the Press did at least come at the end of the Middle Ages, the Parliaments came much more nearly at the beginning of the Middle Ages. They began, I think, in Spain and the provinces of the Pyrenees; but our own traditional date, connecting them with the revolt of Simon de Montfort, if not strictly accurate, does roughly represent the time. I need not say that half the great educational foundations, not only Oxford and Cambridge, but Glasgow and Paris, are relics of mediævalism. It would seem rather hard on the poor journalistic reformer if he is not allowed to pull down a little turnpike-gate till he has proved his right to pull down all these relics of mediævalism.

Next we have, of course, the very considerable historic doubt about whether the turnpike-gate is a relic of mediævalism. I do not know what was the date of this particular turnpike; but turnpikes and tolls of that description were perhaps most widely present, most practically enforced, or, at least, most generally noted, in the eighteenth century. When Pitt and Dundas, both of them roaring drunk, jumped over a turnpike-gate and were fired at with a blunderbuss, I hope nobody will suggest that those two great politicians were relics of mediævalism. Nobody surely could be more modern than Pitt and Dundas, for one of them was a great financial statesman, depending entirely on the bankers, and the other was a swindler. It is possible, of course, that some such local toll was really mediæval, but I rather doubt whether the journalist even inquired whether it was mediæval. He probably regards everything that happened before the time of Jazz and the Yellow Press as mediæval. For him mediæval only means old, and old only means bad; so that we come to the last question, which ought to have been the first question, of whether a turnpike really is necessarily bad.

If we were really relics of mediævalism — that is, if we had really been taught to think — we should have put that question first, and discussed whether a thing is bad or good before discussing whether it is modern or mediæval. There is no space to discuss it here at length, but a very simple test in the matter may be made. The aim and effect of tolls is simply this: that those who use the roads shall pay for the roads. As it is, the poor people of a district, including those who never stir from their villages, and hardly from their firesides, pay to maintain roads which are ploughed up and torn to pieces by the cars and lorries of rich men and big businesses, coming from London and the distant cities. It is not self-evident that this is a more just arrangement than that by which wayfarers pay to keep up the way, even if that arrangement were a relic of mediævalism.

Lastly, we might well ask, is it indeed so certain that our roads suffer from the slowness of petrol traffic; and that, if we can only make every sort of motor go faster and faster, we shall all be saved at last? That motors are more important than men is doubtless an admitted principle of a truly modern philosophy; nevertheless, it might be well to keep some sort of reasonable ratio between them, and decide exactly how many human beings should be killed by each car in the course of each year. And I fear that a mere policy of the acceleration of traffic may take us beyond the normal modern recognition of murder into something resembling a recognition of massacre. And about this, I for one still have a scruple; which is probably a relic of mediævalism.

IV

On Mammoth Portraiture

WHEN I first heard of the scheme for carving colossal heads of American heroes out of the everlasting hills, the scheme (I think) of the American sculptor, Mr. Borglum, I felt again the thrill first given to me in childhood in reading Nathaniel Hawthorne's fantasy of The Great Stone Face. It is not unnatural that two great American artists, in different departments, should have dreamed similar dreams; for the whole conception not only rises out of but really requires the vast American background of prairies and mountain-chains. Anyone will feel, I think, that it would be rather too big for England. It would be rather alarming for the Englishman returning by boat to Dover, to see that Shakspere's Cliff had suddenly turned into Shakspere. We had a distinguished portrait-painter named Beechey, but none of his portraits is quite on the scale of Beachy Head. And the most intrepid mountaineer might well be staggered if, when scaling the steep face of Snowdon, he saw the cold and stony face of Lord Snowden, that far from extinct volcano. Though the heads in the American experiment are those of statesmen, they are mostly those of statesmen who have passed to where politicians cease from troubling and, at any rate, cease from taxing. But this does not altogether get rid of a further difficulty, even in the more appropriate and spacious American atmosphere.

It is unlucky that at the moment when America can carve permanent historical monuments there has been some loss of permanence in historical theories. America is stronger than any other State just now in certain kinds of architecture and architectural sculpture, suggestive of the stark and starry altitudes of Egypt and Assyria. But the ideas in those ancient designs are either dead or indestructible. In modern history, however, one man has been trying to "debunk" Washington in a book, while another man has been moulding him out of a mountain. What does the "debunker" do in this contest? Does he buy another mountain; and carve another and less pleasing portrait of Washington? Will he prove that the great man was small, by exhibiting his smallness on a large scale? There remains a very fine head of Rameses III, the Pharaoh of the Exodus. But we have not got a colossal caricature of him — by Moses.

That is the mischief with the modern world. We might make more permanent records of our opinions. But we have not got more permanent opinions to record. In every sense we are strong in the concrete; but very wobbly in the abstract. But that is a larger matter than the largest statue, and we cannot conclude upon it here. For my part, I sometimes think public monuments ought to be too large to be seen. I suggest that there should be a new art, plotting out large spaces of the earth in coloured pictures of turf or clay, only to be seen from a skyscraper or a flying-ship. Instead of disfiguring the sky with aviators writing advertisements that everybody can see, let us plan out the earth in gigantic figures that only aviators can see. Then anybody who wants to be an æsthete, and talk about Art, can pay a stiff sum to go up to a dizzy and uncomfortable height, and see his own very exclusive portrait gallery spread out before him, over hill and dale, or even over county and province. For things can be kept secret by being large as well as by being small. Hitherto it has been assumed that size and scale in the arts belonged only to things vertical and solid; to architecture or at least to sculpture; and that pictures painted in the flat belong to a world of smaller things, in some cases even concentrating in illuminated missals or in miniatures. By the trifling reform or experiment which I suggest, it would be possible to make pictures more colossal than the most colossal buildings. I will even confess to a weakness for the fancy; there is something faintly stirring to the imagination in the notion of the whole earth traced out in the shapes of Titans, the earth's huge but forgotten children; or in using the raw colours of geology and the vaster forms of vegetation to fit together into the unity of a sprawling figure or a staring face. It would hardly be safe, of course, to assume that geological areas are plainly coloured like a map; I do not know whether Yellowstone Park is really yellow or the Black Forest really black; in spite of my simple and romantic mind, I am aware that the Red Sea is not red. But, the reds and browns and purples of the desert beside the Red Sea would make excellent material for a certain style of portrait-painting; an admirable if not an enviable complexion. Only, as I say, the æsthete would have to be an aviator, and this alone would probably diminish the number of æsthetes. So that, in a sort of way, I should be a reformer after all. As these vast portraits would be invisible, in a general sense, I suppose it would not matter very much whose portraits they were. But, as a general principle of propriety, I suppose they should only represent men whose names have really gone to the ends of the earth: figures of great national and international power. Meanwhile, the rest of us would never see them and never trouble about them. We should go on living happily and innocently in the woodlands of Abraham Lincoln's whiskers, or in the pleasant shady district not far from the eyebrow of Charles James Fox, without being pestered about Art at all.

It is a fine, large scheme, and more sensible than most large schemes I know. For that would appear to be the logical end of all that pursuit of pure largeness, as such, which has been so much the mark of our time; and has even intoxicated some of the finest intellects of our time, like that of Mr. H. G. Wells. The end of the process of expansion would seem to be disappearance; the vanishing of these vast things from the restricted senses and calculations of man. It is the ultimate upshot of the skyscraper; and upshot seems to be an oddly appropriate term. It is the end that the edifice should tower so high that we cannot see its towers; that the sky-sign should sprawl so wide that we cannot read its lettering; that we should be left, exactly like the people in my parable of the painted earth, living too close to things that are too large. I do not say it is very probable that things will ever go as far as that; chiefly because I think it much more probable that, long before that happens, people will have developed a taste for something totally different; perhaps for things that are microscopically small. But the builders of the big buildings, and the painters of the huge hoardings, do not propose to themselves any logical process except that of making things larger and larger, and therefore have no logical end except to make them too large to bother about.

There is another way in which the parable is really a plain truth; and, indeed, a practical problem. Our relation to modern schemes and systems, to the institutions under which we live and the international influences by which they are extended, is very like the relation of a man living like a pigmy in a city of giants. We have lost the power to control things, largely because we have lost the power to oversee them; that is, to see them as a whole. The economic disasters we suffer are largely due to the operations having grown too large even for the operators. We are all dotted about like little pins stuck in a vast map of financial statesmanship, or rather, financial strategy; it is a plan or chart far too voluminous and bewildering to be at present mastered by any public opinion, and the pins cannot use their pin's-heads. If there are any persons who do understand it, they are much fewer than the aviators who would mount aloft to see the picture of the whole earth.

V

On War Memorials

I HAPPENED recently to renew my acquaintance with Edinburgh Rock; I refer to the remarkable fortress and not the more remarkable foodstuff of that name. The latter, indeed, I am far from despising. There seems even to be something terrible in giving that stark and rugged title to a sweetmeat; as if a child were invited to nibble at Gibraltar or take a big bite out of St. Michael's Mount. Anyhow, that citadel, which is like a city within a city, contains a new and unique building, which is like a castle within a castle. It is the War Memorial of Scotland, and, to my mind, one of the few great War Memorials that are worthy of the greatness of the War. And the train of rambling reflections which it started left me with a profound renewal of all my own original belief in what would now, by comparison, be called little and local things. I have lived through the times when many intelligent and idealistic men hoped that the World War would be an introduction to the World State. But I myself am more convinced than ever that the World War occurred because nations were too big, and not because they were too small. It occurred especially because big nations wished to be bigger, or, in other words, because each State wanted to be the World State. But it occurred, above all, because about things so vast there comes to be something cold and hollow and impersonal. It was *not* merely a war of nations; it was a war of warring Internationalists.

Now, the Scottish War Memorial has a personality. It is the personality of a people, not merely the impersonality of people. I would not raise here, least of all in any unsympathetic spirit, the purely æsthetic debates about, the Cenotaph. But, after all, a Cenotaph is by definition an empty tomb, and it affects me individually as a very empty tomb. I would not call it cold and hollow and impersonal in any abusive sense. But it is by its very nature hollow; it is by a deliberate artistic policy impersonal; and the effect of this, on some people at least, is that it is rather cold. The point is that this effect was produced intentionally, and almost inevitably, by the avoidance of anything that could be distinctive of any creed, any province, any profession or branch of the service. It is in that sense cosmopolitan, and therefore colourless; in being the meeting-place of so many races and religions, it can hardly help having something of the hollowness of the heart of the whirlpool, or reminding us of a temple of the winds, offering an intermediate and cold hospitality to all the winds of the world. I know all that there is to be said for such severities of classic architecture; but as least those who most admire the Cenotaph must admire it as architecture, and not as sculpture. Now, the Edinburgh War Memorial is full of sculpture, as a mediæval church is full of such carving and craftsmanship; and the word "full" does really correspond to a sense of fullness. And one effect of that sort of Gothic fullness is that a thing can be great when it is small.

Now, a thing like the Cenotaph can hardly be great when it is small. Even as it is, to my instinct, it is too small. What I fancy I really feel about it is that it might be very fine, in its own way, if it were as big as the Great Pyramid and stood against a background as bare as the great desert. It might then be entirely artistic and appropriate, for the artist's own purpose, that it should be as bare as the sky or as inhuman as the wilderness. But if we are talking about the human and historical quality of these things, then there will be surely more value in a piece of varied and yet concentrated craftsmanship, such as that which has been achieved by this group of Scottish craftsmen. A carving must be a carving of something, if not of somebody. And the peculiar liveliness of local life and work lies in the fact that it is always dealing with something, describing something, struggling with the particular difficulties of something or somebody. There is a spirit that can only be called Gossip about a Gothic cathedral and its carvings. It may deal in caricatures, but it does not deal much in those abstract diagrams that can be much more misleading than caricatures. And, without at all narrowing my artistic tastes to this one type or school of work, I will confess to an undiminished partiality for it, because of its extraordinary vitality and vivacity. It is the liveliness of localism, even the liveliness of littleness. It arises when craftsmen have particular positive traditions of the work-shop or the shrine, or when there is, for instance, as there still is in Scotland, a living memory of the lineage of particular families, and not only the families of the rich. For no family that is really respected consistently, as a family, can ever be entirely snobbish. The vast voting majority of the very richest family consists of poor relations.

These rambling reflections first began to ramble at the sight of a stone Unicorn, the ancient bearer of the Scottish arms, which stands outside the entrance to the memorial chapel. I thought it was a strong piece of work, simplified, but far from conventional, even in the artistic sense. But what took the eye, as typical of the spirit of which I speak, was the bold but harmonious way in which the artist had dealt with the difficulty of the conventional spike sticking out of the forehead of the sacred monster. The artist had bent the horn back by sheer strength, so to speak — at least by sheer strength of imagination — so that it followed with a wilder curve of its own the strong curve of the horse's neck. And I thought to myself that this was typical of the true spirit of craftsmanship, especially of craftsmanship dealing with definite and traditional symbols. The sculptor had really wrestled with the Unicorn, like a legendary hero wrestling with a fabulous animal. That is, she had really wrestled with a problem of presenting something positive that had to be presented, and yet in a new and more perfect form of presentation. She had made something new out of the old Unicorn; but she had not made any thing else except a Unicorn. There was something symbolic in the fact that she had taken that wild, unearthly horse by the horn and forced it back into the contours of her own design. This is only one example out of many, and there are hundreds of such examples, wherever good workmen are doing real work with real images and ideas. Because they are real images and ideas, they can be treated; but they must be treated with. They must be taken on certain terms, and partly on their own terms. Because they are wild things, they can be tamed, but only by the true Unicorn-tamer, who is even more daring than the Lion-tamer.

That is why the traditional art is the truly creative art. That is why it is truly more creative than the negative abstractions which tend, of their nature, not merely to anarchy, but to nothingness. And that is why a glimpse of these things encouraged me in my own lifelong belief in particularism, and the tales and traditions of a people. Where there are traditions there are tests; where there are traditions there are tasks and practical problems; but they are always stimulants to the spirit and cunning and imagination of man. They are always more fruitful, in the long run, than the work of those who strike outwards to draw a design of nothing on the dark canvas of night. The Unicorn brings forth Unicorns, and all sorts of new and varied Unicorns, and one of them will be different because it is a stone Unicorn and another because it is a bronze Unicorn. But there are no foals born to the Nightmare.

VI

On Old Men Who Make Wars

A STALE and stupid but still poisonous phrase has been buzzing about for the last ten years, as difficult to catch as a wasp in the warm weather. It is already very old, but is always said as if it were something new; everybody has heard it said, and hardly anybody has stopped to ask what it meant. It has many forms, but the commonest form of it is something like this: “Of course the young were embittered when they realized how their elders had brought the world into a horrible catastrophe and a hideous mess.” I, for one, am tired of hearing it, and therefore I propose to be the first person who ever thought about it.

First, I happen to remember that exactly the same argument, if you can call it an argument, was used more than twenty years ago, when the fashion was not so much the Appeal to Youth as the Appeal to Woman. Then, also, we were always told that Woman (who had apparently only been born yesterday) looked around her and saw a world of sin and sorrow. This, she promptly declared, was a Man-Made World. Her supporters were not content to say that she was unjustly treated, as in many ways she was; they were not content to say that she had as much claim as man to this or that legal or social privilege: which was very arguable, and about which, in any case, I am not now going to argue. They did definitely declare that the wickedness and misery of the world were clearly due to the fact that it had been managed by males. If the wasp came in at the window and stung somebody, this was due to the fact that it was a Man-Made window, if not actually a Man-Made wasp. If Woman had been in control of the world, there would have been no wasps; or all the wasps would have been trained in such tact and social discipline that they never stung anybody. If the poor were underpaid or overworked, it was solely because men and not women had the paying of them, though some of us had known women who were hard on their subordinates, almost in the manner of men. If nations went to war, it was because women had not votes to stop them, though some of us knew women who waved flags and shouted war-songs and were far more passionately patriotic than the males whom they sent to war. Whatever evil there was on the earth, it was due to the fact that humanity, for reasons best known to itself, had given all power to the sex that always supported evil, and no power at all to the sex which invariably, and in every situation, supported the highest possible good. I remember all that sort of talk, that started nearly thirty years ago, and attributed all misfortunes to Men. I still hear the other sort of talk, that started nearly twenty years ago, and attributes all misfortunes to Old Men.

Since then, the first batch of Young Men have themselves almost become Old Men; but they are still saying it. They are still saying it without seriously thinking about it. Anyone who will examine the statement will see that it really rests on three assumptions which, as is usual in these cases, are not only accepted, but accepted unconsciously. The speakers not only assume them without proving them, but assume them without knowing they are assuming them. The first is this: That terrible and desolating tragedy is so abnormal in human life, and so utterly out of the nature of things, that it can only be attributed to the staggering and scandalous stupidity of some special individual or individuals. Without going off into an argument about human life, we may note that there is at least an element which is here ignored for the first time in history; for that tragic character of living was a commonplace to all the sages and the poets. To put it shortly, if it is terrible that two million men should die together in a campaign, it is also terrible that all men without exception must die separately somewhere. It is not self-evident that the tragic phase of life only follows on exceptional folly, and the fallacy was noted some time ago by the Tower of Siloam and the Ash-heap of Job.

The second assumption is this: That a tragedy like the Great War must have been not only a blunder, but a blunder made by everybody at the same moment. It must have been a blind collision in the dark, and therefore can only have been due to mere negligence in all those in control. Now you may or may not agree that there was an aggressor in the quarrel, but it is nonsense to assume it as self-evident that there was not, or talk as if there could not be. If there was, the affair would not be a result of negligence, but emphatically a result of vigilance. We may say it was a wicked vigilance on the part of the aggressor; but, by the same stroke, we are forced to admit that it was therefore a just and honourable vigilance on the part of the defenders. Anyhow, the whole nightmare of mere negligence has disappeared as a necessity of logic; it has disappeared because it was not a necessity but a mere assumption.

Thirdly (though this point is less easy to limit and define properly): It is an assumption to suppose that statesmen or national leaders *are* necessarily wrong even when they do risk great catastrophes, for the sake of creating or preserving some cultural system associated with all that makes life worth living. A man might admit that his efforts to avert catastrophe might fail, that the catastrophe might follow, and still maintain his course, being resolved at least to avoid the worst catastrophe of the loss of the main hope of humanity. Certainly every reform or reconstruction in human history has been followed by calamities, if wars are the chief calamities. The democratic ideal of Athens involved it in a welter of wars; the universal civilization of Rome was spread by a long routine of wars; every national culture owes something to the national wars. If you accept the French Revolution, it covered Europe with the Napoleonic Wars. If you accept the Protestant Reformation, it devastated the Germanies with the longest and weariest of all wars. If you accept the Russian Revolution, it has already produced endless internal wars, one external war, and the end is not yet. I am not expressing admiration for war, nor, for that matter, for the Russian Revolution or the Reformation. I am only saying that nobody has a right to assume at the start that no statesman has any right to risk war, for the sake of ideals that change or preserve civilization. In short, there was nothing grotesquely doddering and decadent about the Old Men who, twenty years ago, tried to rule the troubled and troublesome race of men. Some were right and some were wrong; but most were vigilant, and all were bound in any case to take a risk.

I think this worth mentioning now, for a simple reason. We are already drifting horribly near to a New War, which will probably start on the Polish Border. The Young Men have had nineteen years in which to learn how to avoid it. I wonder whether they do know much more about how to avoid it than the despised and drivelling Old Men of 1914. How many of the Young Men, for instance, have made the smallest attempt to understand Poland? How many would have anything to say to Hitler, to dissuade him from setting all Christendom aflame by a raid on Poland? Or have the Young Men been thinking of *nothing* since 1914 except the senile depravity of the Old Men of that date?

VII

On Vachel Lindsay

M. PAUL CLAUDEL'S play, *The Satin Slipper,* translated with admirable subtlety and flexibility by the Rev. John O'Connor, is a work of rich and almost bewildering fantasy, and has any number of aspects that could not adequately be treated here. But it has one particular aspect, in which it is related to recent events in other fields, and rather specially calls for a particular comment just now. Though nobody could be more French than M. Claudel, and nothing could be more French than the particular kind of wit and fighting logic that pursues this theme or thesis to its end, yet the whole background of the drama is the background of the Spanish civilization. Even at this moment the Spanish civilization is something very much larger than the civilization of Spain. It was infinitely more so in the days of the external glory of Spain, the days of the alliance with Austria and the conquest of America. About all that culture there was a character which runs through this drama like a decorative pattern, and will be found more and more, I think, to be a pattern for the art of today.

Thus, no two poets could possibly be more different in every tradition or test of historical type than Paul Claudel and Vachel Lindsay, the spirited American singer. In external and formal attachment, they would seem utterly foreign to each other. Vachel Lindsay was a Puritan in the personal sense; one might almost say in the political sense. He was even a Prohibitionist, and it is only fair to say that his orgiastic verse does demonstrate how very drunk a man can be without wine when he drinks the American air. Occasionally, even, a critic might be tempted to call it the American hot-air. For though Vachel Lindsay was a natural artist, and went right by the clue of the imagination, there are passages of his finest writing which would have been finer still if he had not lived in the land of the megaphone rather than the ivory horn; or if his traditions had not given him the choice of two trumpets — the brazen trumpet of publicity as well as the golden trumpet of poetry. He was himself a wholly simple, sincere, and therefore humble man; but the people around him did not believe in humility; no, not even when they practised it. But they did believe in go and gusto and the big noise; and to a certain extent Vachel Lindsay even at his best did practise that. I have myself a huge sympathy with his special gift for describing men banging their gongs to the glory of their gods; but it were vain to deny that in some ways their gods were not our gods. Most certainly, anyhow, they were not M. Claudel's gods. M. Claudel is not only a Catholic, but a French Catholic; with the particular French dislike of orgiastic religion and the fads that invade domesticity. I should imagine that there are no two things that M. Claudel would be more completely puzzled to comprehend than (1) a free man being a Prohibitionist, and (2) a fine poet selecting from all human history the subject of "General Booth Enters Heaven."

And yet both poets, the Frenchman and the American, illustrate this third element that is neither American nor French. For truly Vachel Lindsay was something more than an American; he was (wildly as the term would be misunderstood) a Spanish-American. He was, spiritually speaking, a Californian. He did not get drunk only on the American air; he drank the air of a strange paradise, which is in some way set apart and unlike anything in the New World or the Old; a fairy sea, calmed as by a spell, that stretches far away into fantastical China and of which even the nearer coast is ruled by ghosts rather than by its modern rulers. For there is spread all along that Pacific Coast, in some fashion too vivid for definition, the presence and the pressure and the splendour of Spain. It was something in this rich sunset air that got into the verse of a Puritan like Vachel Lindsay, and made it so much more instinctively ornate and gorgeous than that of a mere Pagan like Walt Whitman. Whitman was a great man; but he was a man of the Eastern States and of the Northern sun, and therefore his passion was colourless even when it was not cold. The Puritanism of Lindsay was more glowing than the Paganism of Whitman. And the reason was, I think, this unconscious influence which possesses all the West of America, as the old Celtic romance possesses all the West of England. The poetry of Vachel Lindsay proves, in every sort of broken and unconscious fashion, how much he was haunted by this presence; how much he felt under his feet this Spanish subsoil of American States. It was, to quote the words of his own vision, the Wrecks of the Galleons of Spain that towered and swelled above him in a sort of glowing monstrosity, and gave their real symbolic outline to the Golden Whales of California.

In other words, it is worth while to realize that there is spread over great spaces of the earth a sort of Spanish magic. The Spanish settlements are not what is called dead-alive places, in the sense of places in which the living are dead; they are places in which the dead are alive. But the dead are alive, even where nobody else is alive. Even the deserted parts of that coast are not a desert; and even the dead parts of that empire cannot die. And it is the vast vitality of that dead empire that attracts a French northerner like M. Claudel, just as it unconsciously attracted an American like Mr. Lindsay. The dramatic narrative of M. Claudel, as I have said, covers a vast field of universal ideas and individual problems. It is full of what is found in the very name of The Golden Whales of California, and it is a whale of a book. But it is also golden, in the sense of being full of things that are truly as good as gold. It even rather excels in the description of things shapeless or of incalculable shape, like such gigantic monsters; indeed, as it happens, there is a typically grotesque description of the actual animals called whales. "Their head, which is like a whole mountain full of liquid sperm, shows in the corner of the jaw a little eye no bigger than a waistcoat-button." There is the same sort of imaginative sense of the shape of something shapeless in this fine phrase about the amorphous Germanies of Central Europe. "To know it you must look at its heart, for it has got no face."

All that dark and yet exuberant imagery belongs to a tradition that can be seen in the art and ornament of Spain. It can be seen in the special Spanish love of black; the black which is not the negation of colour, but rather the accumulation of colour. It can be seen in the rich darkness of Spanish churches, fretted with the golden fire of countless candles. But it can be seen fully and completely only in the world-wide spreading of the Spanish culture in the sixteenth century, when it met on its borders monsters stranger than whales; red men and golden mountains and a new world. It had many crimes, which are not hidden in Claudel's poem, but it had this very enviable greatness: that strange stars and new sciences were then opened to a Christian world that was still full of chivalry. Then wicked men colonized for greed, but good men did not colonize only for commerce; when the white man was as romantic a figure as the red man, and trade had not destroyed the Red Indian to replace him by the Regular Guy.

VIII

On the Staleness of Revolt

IT is an eternal truth that the fathers stone the prophets and the sons build their sepulchres; often out of the same stones. For the reasons originally given for execution are often the same as the reasons given later for canonization. But it might be added that there is often a third phase, in which the grandsons wreck and reduce to ruins the sepulchres that the sons have made. The process of the acceptation or rejection of prophets, true and false, is not quite so simple a progress as it appeared to the progressive philosophy of the nineteenth century. It is full of ups and downs; even for a dead prophet, who is not generally allowed to remain dead in peace. And nothing is more curious than to note the way in which this change does affect great reputations, and especially revolutionary reputations.

The curious thing is that, when the rebellion comes, it is generally a rebellion against rebels. It is generally *not* a rebellion against reactionaries. Men in the past who particularly praised the past may in some cases have faded into the past which they praised. But they have not often been singled out for special attack by the future which they despised. Those who were, in fact, doomed to dethronement in the future were generally the futurists of the past. It was those who were promising men a future of greater glory, who had really before themselves a future of greater discredit and neglect. The old dusty and musty *laudator temporis acti* may sometimes be neglected, but he is seldom discredited. He is never dethroned, possibly because he has never been enthroned. But he seems to outlast any number of the enthroned prophets of progress.

I am noting this as a singular historical fact, quite apart from my own sympathies, which are sometimes with the revolutionary and sometimes with the reactionary. For instance: suppose a man were asked which were the two greatest Englishmen, or rather the two greatest British subjects, alive at the end of the eighteenth century. Opinions might differ; but a man would not be very far wrong if he said Byron and Burke. At that time Burke stood, as he stands in all his most important work, as the champion of Conservative ideas; the man who urged us to preserve even irrational traditions; the man who lamented over the loss of even older traditions. He was then emphatically the Burke who lamented aloud that the age of chivalry was past, or wept over the vanished beauty of the French Queen. On the other hand, Byron was at that time emphatically the voice of the Revolution. He openly regretted that it had been defeated at Waterloo; he lashed all the Tories with a scourge of satire, which he flourished like a flag of Liberty. Well, they were both great men, and, if I have a purely personal preference, it is for Byron. It is certainly, in most respects, for the political party of Byron. And yet it cannot be denied that the subsequent relations of the two reputations, to fame or at least to fashion, have illustrated this curious advantage of the reactionary over the revolutionary. Byron has been, I think rather underrated ever since. Burke has been, I think, rather overrated ever since. That is a matter of opinion; but it is a matter of fact that Burke has not been very specially denounced or derided, whereas Byron has been incessantly denounced and derided. It came to be almost the mark of a modern and advanced intellectual to be always sniffing and sneering at the mere rhetoric and melodramatic romance of Byron. Nobody specially insisted that Burke's rhapsodies about Marie Antoinette were mere rhetoric, as they undoubtedly were. Certainly there is something, which it were mild to call melodrama, in saying about that hearty German lady: "And surely never lighted upon this orb, which she scarcely seemed to touch, a more delightful vision." That florid phraseology is not allowed to return to the mind when Mr. Buckle or Mr. Garvin are describing the debt of our Constitution to the subtle and statesmanlike philosophy of Burke. Burke never became a sort of cockshy for the critics, and Byron did. And it does seen rather to suggest that, if you are a prophet of resurrection and revolution, of the future and of the dawn, your sepulchre is likely to be pelted and defaced even after it has been built. But if you were only a builder of sepulchres, your sepulchre will be left in peace.

Then consider the next and still more singular stage in the story. The whole story was repeated over again, towards the end of the Victorian era, when Swinburne arose to dispute the mild constitutional monarchy of Tennyson and in some sense to fill once more the revolutionary throne of Byron. The first thing to notice is that there is no sympathy, certainly no continuity, between the old rebel and the new rebel. Swinburne was just as ready to dismiss or despise Byron as all the other people of his æsthetic time and school, or rather readier than the rest. There was no sympathy between revolution and revolution, simply because there was no sympathy between fashion and fashion. "Farewell, ye gay something, ye gardens of roses" (I regret to say that I forget what the gay something was) sounded at once florid and frigid to a generation which did not feel that "If love were what the rose is, and I were like the leaf," might be not only unnatural, but very nearly nonsensical. Every novelty has its own nonsense, and never sees that it is nonsense, and always sees that the older novelty was nonsense. But Swinburne himself is already becoming an older novelty, and there are any number of people who are beginning to say that his poetry is nonsense. It seems highly probable that he, in his turn, is in for a period of reaction and ridicule; in which his work will be underrated exactly as Byron's was underrated. But he will be underrated for the same reason — simply because he was overrated; but, above all, because he was especially overrated as a rebel and a reformer and a new force making for the future. The man who sits down to compose *Songs Before Sunrise* is apt to find the sun, when it rises, rather too hot for him.

But the point is that what seems to attract this strange revolt is not being an ancient king, but being an ancient rebel. The world swung back on Byron in proportion to the strength with which he had swayed it as a fashionable demagogue; and the same thing that happened to Byron is now obviously happening to Swinburne. It is not so obviously happening to those of Swinburne's contemporaries, who, though they shared the artistic methods of the time, were really interested in the artistic models of an earlier time. I have mentioned the only too recurrent subject of roses. I have noted how remote were the full-blown rose-gardens of Byron from the "mystical rose of the mire" so much celebrated by Swinburne. I fear it is only too likely that, in the anti-Swinburnian reaction, a great many people will make fun of shamelessly alliterative lines like "The raptures and roses of vice," which certainly does not mean very much. But I doubt if they will trouble to make game of William Morris's line, "Two red roses across the moon," though it means absolutely nothing at all. But then Morris, in spite of his revolutionary side, was saved by his reactionary side. He was really more interested in the past than in the future, so the future may leave him alone.

I could give a great many other instances of how the Pagans of yesterday are being mocked by the Pagans of today. A man speaking of fine English prose in my boyhood would probably have mentioned both Pater and Newman. I have lately heard an amazing number of people sneering at

Pater; I have not heard many people, or indeed any people, sneering at Newman. Yet it would certainly have been said that the Pagan looked to the future and the Papist to the past. I draw no moral from this curious habit of humanity. I am content to be, for once, an utterly unmoral critic of the Swinburne period, or a cold, rationalist scientist of the Victorian Age.

IX

On Dependence and Independence

I CAME across a lady quite lately who leapt up in a flame of noble indignation at the suggestion that her husband should pay for her dresses, though she did not apparently object to his paying for her dinners. I admit that there was something fine and generous about such perversity, and that she was an improvement on other ladies who leap up in a flame of indignation because their husbands will *not* pay for a hundred dresses a month. It is sometimes the husband who leaps up in a flame of indignation, and in neither case is the indignation so noble. All the same, it seems to me an instance of the queer welter of inconsequent and inconclusive notions that make it so difficult for the modern world to establish a normal social rule.

Some of us (who cannot be called conservative in the sense of content with social conditions, and who have even been called revolutionary for our attempts to improve those conditions) have nevertheless come to have a profound suspicion of what is called Progress. And the reason is this: that there does not seem to be a principle, but only principles, and these conflicting principles, of Progress. There is not a stream, but a sort of eddy or whirlpool. There could not be a stronger case than this particular ideal of Independence. It is not made the principle of social reform. Even the social reformers would be the first to say that they depend on dependence; on the mutual dependence of comrades and fellow-citizens, as distinct from the individualistic independence they would denounce as mere isolation. It is not made the ideal of the proletarian or wage-earner, either by the Communist or the Capitalist system. Both the Communist and the Capitalist are alike in *not* thinking of the individual worker as independent. They will discuss whether he is well paid, whether he is well treated, whether he works under good or bad conditions, whether he is dependent on a good or bad business or a good or bad government; but *not* whether he is independent. Independence is not made the ideal of the normal man. It is only suddenly and abruptly introduced, in one particular relation, in the case of the exceptional woman. She is only independent of her husband; not independent in any other real relation of life. She is only independent of the home — and not of the workshop or the world. And it is supremely characteristic of this confusion that one well-meaning individual should make a yet finer distinction, and resolve to be independent in the dressing-room, but not in the dining-room.

Now, the modern trouble is that moral scraps and fragments of this sort are floating about like icebergs, and nobody knows when he will bump into one of them. In one case somebody will make an excuse of the ideal of Service, even if it means servility. In another case somebody will make an excuse of the ideal of Individuality, even if it means insanity. People will make attempts at despotism, or demands for freedom, successively or even simultaneously, according to a quite arbitrary program of opportunism. And we feel that they are not submitting a variety of actions to one test; they are applying a variety of tests to one action, which is for them already a fixed and settled action. They do what they want, and make up reasons for it afterwards; but even the reasons are rather too cunning to be reasonable. In a word, it is this chaos, in the creed and code of conduct, that prevents a man from finding in it any sort of guide, even a guide to progress. Thus, in the present case, we could at least settle down to discussing seriously the Independence of Woman, if it were regarded by anybody as part of a real philosophy of the Independence of Man. What we find, as in the case mentioned, is that one woman has made one claim to one curious and rather capricious form of independence. She is independent of the breadwinner, but not of the bank or the employer — not to mention the moneylender.

Thus, to begin with, it would be well to note what economic independence means: as distinct, that is, from what it ought to mean. It might mean that the lady went out into a primeval forest to slay lions and leopards and clothe herself with their skins, like Diana. It might mean that she sewed together the leaves of the forest and made herself a green garment, like Eve. It might mean that she held herself independent in owning her own spinning-wheel and her own store of thread, and weaving strips of simple drapery, like Mr. Gandhi. In a word, she might be really independent of the dress allowance, in the sense of being independent of the dressmaker. It is not very likely that it does mean this; but it is not the dependence on the dressmaker that is the serious inconsistency in the idea. It is the fact that modern woman, in the condition of modern society, will herself have to work, if not for a dressmaker, then probably for somebody else who is primarily the money-maker. And the question is, why is it any better to be a proletarian in the shop than to be a Communist in the home? For the only truly and legitimately Communist institution is the home. "With all my worldly goods I thee endow" is the only satisfactory Bolshevist proclamation that has ever been made about property. It is, therefore, of course, the one proclamation which Bolshevists would be the first to attack. The twisted and unnatural posture of the modern controversy, like that of a serpent with its tail in its mouth, biting and tearing at itself, is excellently illustrated in this queer revolt of Communism in the wrong place against Communism in the right place. We no longer make the normal attempt to break up society into homes. We only make an attempt to break up homes, and even that by a principle of division which we dare not apply to anything else in society. The crack or fissure is to run across the hearth or the roof-tree, but to be concealed as far as possible from the forum or the street.

We hear a great deal of the evil passions of Class War and the suggestion that the master and man must of necessity be natural enemies. But surely there is a far more perverse implication pervading the modern world; that the wife and the husband are natural enemies. They are, apparently, such mortal enemies that it is enough for one of them to be freed from the other, even in one trumpery particular, though she is not freed from anything or anybody else. The whole of the rest of the world in which she lives, whether for good or evil, is one network of necessitarian dependence. People have left off even talking the language of independence; the old language about the thrift that leads to independence or the self-respect that comes from independence. Anybody may find himself almost abjectly dependent upon anybody; any woman may do the same. And apparently it does not matter, so long as it is not her own husband and not concerned with her own hats. I should very much like to see some of these good-natured groping people draw up something like a plan or table of their real conception of a social structure, and of the necessary commandments of society. The newspapers talk about the danger of Bolshevism, and the Red Peril. But I am afraid of the Patchwork Peril, which is all colours and none; I am afraid of bits of Bolshevism and bits of insane individualism and bits of independence in the wrong place, floating hither and thither and colliding with they know not what; the icebergs whose very shapelessness, or incalculable shape, has always been the cause of shipwreck.

X

On the Teutonic Theory

EVERYBODY knows, or ought to know, that making a universal theory about human society is the easiest thing in the world. The reason is not always so apparent, but I think there is a reason which can be stated rationally. The logical weakness in this sort of superficial social theory is this: that the social values are not fixed like mathematical values, and can themselves be moulded to fit the theory. If I say that red-haired men are always the tallest men in the world, I can probably be very rapidly refuted; because measuring men with a six-foot rule is a matter of mathematical fact. But if I say that red-haired men are always the men who sway the destinies of the world, I can always make out a case, by taking all the red-haired men who were important and making them out more important than they were. I can invent an ingenious theory that it was William Rufus rather than William the Conqueror who really confirmed the Norman monarchy which became the English nation. I shall have an easier task in showing that Henry the Second, the first Plantagenet, really was a great man who in some sense ruled a great empire. I can argue that General James Wolfe, who (I believe) had red hair, was the greatest of England's heroes, by arguing that Canada is really the greatest of England's possessions. I can say that the only man who really influenced the intellectual life of our time was Bernard Shaw. I might make out quite a good case; but my motive is merely in the fact that Mr. Shaw had a red beard not so very long ago; though presumably he has grown less wise as he has grown more white. But the point is that I must maintain the general proposition of his wisdom; and I may find myself committed to defending a large number of rather extraordinary propositions, normally remote from my own mental habits; not through a disinterested conviction that Mr. Shaw is wise as well as witty, but because I am committed to a general dogma that the red-haired man is always right.

It will be well illustrated in the case of Queen Elizabeth, a topic almost as controversial as Bernard Shaw. For the sake of my theory, I must cling desperately to the old-fashioned view that I was taught at school; the theory that the red-haired Queen Bess was a sort of tawny lioness of royal magnanimity and heroic religious convictions, shaking the earth with her roarings on behalf of the Reformation. I must not listen to the later and more realistic historians, who tell us that Elizabeth was personally an invalid and politically very much of a tool; that her real religious attachments are very doubtful, and her external political actions mostly forced on her by Cecil and his gang. In the ordinary way, I might be quite indifferent, and therefore quite impartial. But I must fight to the death for the old theory of the Froude and Freeman period; not so much for the cause of the lady as for the colour of her hair. I need her for my general plan of painting the map red; or, rather, of tying it up in red hair instead of red tape. This is how it happens that perverse and pedantic fancies so often harden into fanaticism among professors and professional historians. They will maintain any paradox rather than lose any point that supports their pet generalization, even if they do not personally care very much about the point itself. There was a mediæval tradition that Judas had red hair; and this sort of don would not shrink from saying that Judas and not Jesus was the real founder of Christianity.

I may seem to dwell on an arbitrary and absurd example. But it is not so. I myself grew up under the gigantic shadow of the Teutonic Theory. It was essentially a theory that everything valuable had been done by fair-haired men, which is quite as ludicrous as the same assertion about red-haired men. But I am not now interested in attacking that theory, or any other theory. I only remark that such theories, whether true or false, do affect the truthfulness of historians, and more often in the direction of falsehood than of truth. When we find professors quibbling and quarrelling about the number of men living on a farm mentioned in Doomsday Book, or the terms of a dispatch sent to a French marshal before the Battle of Arcola, we may be pretty certain that, though these are the things about which they are quibbling, they are not the things about which they are quarrelling. There lies behind some much larger quarrel about some much larger theory; probably some theory about the religion of the Middle Ages or the motives of the French Revolution. History and sociology can never be “scientific” in the sense of subject to exact measurement, because there is always the mystery and doubt inherent in moral evidence affecting one half of the equation, and generally both. In the thesis that red-haired men are great men, there are shades of difference even in red hair, and infinite shades of difference in greatness or the pretence of greatness. And not a few modern theorists seem to me to be strangely lacking in the instinct of what is really great.

It is amusing to notice how these theories pursue each other, and how the last almost always devours and destroys the last but one. Generally, in fact, the last is the flat contradiction of the last but one. Generally they are equally extreme, equally exaggerated, and, so far, equally untrue. For instance, the general theory implied in a book like *The Outline of History* is that the outline is a continuous and ascending line, a single upward curve with very few breaks in it. I do not mean that the author denies decay and reaction, but that the main moral he would like to draw is that the host of humanity has advanced, with a few halts, along the high road of history. Above all, he implies a human unity, and the idea that the host that has halted is the same as the host that has advanced. I think myself that he greatly exaggerates this continuity; leans too heavily on the alleged links, and especially misses the missing links. He makes the amoeba and the anthropoid much nearer to us than they really are. At the same time, he makes the ancient Greek or the mediæval Christian much more inferior to us than they really are. He makes the progress too recent, too rapid, and too clear. For instance, he assumes that the mediæval idea of education was inferior to ours, simply because it involved the teaching of a positive philosophy. But there is something to be said for the idea of teaching everything to somebody, as compared with the modern notion of teaching nothing, and the same sort of nothing, to everybody. For what we force on all families, by the power of the police, is not a philosophy but the art of reading and writing un-philosophically. I am not, however, contesting the world-theory of Mr. Wells at this moment. I am only contrasting the world-theory of Mr. Wells with the world-theory which instantly followed it across the world.

For the next thing we heard was that all Europe and America were full of a new fuss made about the general theory of a German writer, whose whole point was that human history was *not* continuous, and *not* progressive, and *not* a thing presenting points of comparison between one stage and another. According to this new theory, there is only a series of closed cycles of different cultures, so separate that they can hardly be compared. We may say that there is no progress, but only progresses. We might almost say that there is no history, but only histories. When the Greek and Roman culture commonly called Antiquity had ended, it broke off without any bridge connecting it with the mediæval or the modern. It is the fossil of a lost world, and no more of a lesson to us than a pterodactyl to a bird-fancier or Eohippus to a horse-breeder. Now, this also is certainly a gross exaggeration. There is a great deal more continuity, and in that sense a great deal more progress, than is allowed for in that historical theory. For instance, nobody understands the Middle Ages without realizing that the mind of Aristotle was still labouring in its midst like a mighty mill; and it is absurd to say that Augustine and Aquinas were not parts of the same continuous communion. But what interests me is not the truth or falsehood of the first or second theory. It is that they so flatly contradict each other, and that they so rapidly followed each other. And I fall back on my first reflection: that theories of that sort must be rather easy to make up — if you leave out more than half the facts.

XI

On Phases of Eccentricity

THERE is still a fashion of making fun of the Victorians as very solemn people, but on that point I rather fancy they are still making fun of us. I am very far from being a mere apologist for Victorianism. But it seems to me that in many ways it is they who were frivolous and their descendants who are serious; quite unduly serious. For instance, what is hailed as a new style or a new school in literature often consists of doing as a novelty what a Victorian did long ago as a joke. Thus we have, in Mr. James Joyce or Miss Gertrude Stein, the coining of new words by the confusion of old words; the running of words together so as to suggest some muddle in the sub-consciousness. I do not recall the particular examples, but they would think nothing of saying that somebody was “drurgling,” meaning “gurgling when drunk,” or that somebody else was “widaslepe,” meaning that he had fallen asleep at the moment of saying he was wide awake. I do not doubt that they really do this much more cleverly than I can imitate it. In expressing confused ideas, the moderns have great subtlety and sympathy. It is in expressing clear ideas that they generally find their limitations. All that concerns me here is that this literary style is offered to us, with unimpeachable solemnity; as a rebirth of language or a new power in the mind of man.

Now, Lewis Carroll was a very Victorian Victorian. But he did identically the same thing; only he happened to know that it was funny, and therefore he did it for fun. He invented what he called “portmanteau words,” with the sense of two words telescoped into one. Thus he explained that “brillig” is a combination of “brilliant” and “grilling”; or that “slithy” is a portmanteau of “lithe” and “slimy.” This particular instance happens to illustrate what I mean when I say that I am not a mere partisan. The author of *Alice in Wonderland* is not an ideal being whom I revere, or hold up to be revered. In some respects he was much too Victorian a Victorian. On some matters he really was much too solemn. But he was not solemn about portmanteau words; and the admirers of Miss Stein are quite solemn about them. On an all-round view of cultural traditions and spiritual potentialities, I think it probable that I should very much prefer Mr. Joyce to

Mr. Dodgson. But there is no getting over the historical fact that the Victorians could, in fact, invent these fancies, and could enjoy them for the fun of the thing. Whereas, in the general view of life suggested by the later schools, there is no fun and precious little enjoyment.

Over and above the light nonsense of the nineteenth century, which anticipated so much of the heavy nonsense of the twentieth, it is curious to note that the whole record is hardly encouraging to the more solemn sort of experiments. For the Victorian Age also had its experiments. The Victorian Age also contained men of letters, and even men of genius, who wrote in new styles regarded as uncommon, ugly, obscure, *outré*, or over-subtle. And the extraordinary thing is that it is exactly those writers who have faded out of fashion and favour. There is much less intellectual excitement than there used to be about Browning. There is a quite startling silence and indifference about Meredith. Here again I am in no sense dealing with my own preferences, or discussing whether I regret or rejoice in these changes. It so happens that I always have been, and still am, very fond of Browning's work. It so happens that I never did become a pure and perfect Meredithian in the appreciation of Meredith's work. But I am talking about the facts of fashion and appreciation. And I confess I think it much more likely that there will be a rapid revival of Tennyson than a rapid revival of Browning. I know, as everybody knows, that there is a sort of worship (I am tempted to say a sort of idolatry) of the comparatively straightforward novels of Hardy, and something rather like a negative iconoclasm following the select idolatry once dedicated to Meredith. I do not know why this is so; I do not especially rejoice that it is so; I rather prefer the pantheism of Meredith to the pessimism of Hardy. But it does suggest that there is a mistake somewhere in the current theory that the eccentric of one age is the centre of the next. Browning has not left a dynasty of Browning's writing in Browningese. Meredith has not left a new literature, full of the typical fancies and freedoms, twists and turns, of the true Meredithian dialect. There is a moral to the Victorian Age, and it is a lesson of something to avoid. But it is rather a warning against being unconventional than merely against being conventional. We have many odd writers, writing in odd styles, in our own time; and they may or may not retain influence in later times. But I cannot remember a single Victorian with an odd style whose odd style is now of any advantage to him: not Carlyle; not Browning; not Meredith; not Doughty. The one solitary exception I remember, whose name has somewhat floated to the surface again of late, is that of Gerard Hopkins.

Thus I have a purely intellectual doubt of the future of fads, and even of fancies, unless they are treated frankly in a fanciful manner. I do not think any such experiment succeeds in twisting the tradition of language out of its common tendency. I can easily believe that a book like *Ulysses* is a striking and original book in its place and time; like *Sartor Resartus* in its place and time. But I do not believe that Mr. Joyce has added a new range or direction to literary expression, any more than Carlyle succeeded in turning the English language into a bastard barbaric version of the German language. I can easily suppose that Miss Stein likes having her little joke, especially at the expense of the reader; just as George Meredith certainly liked having his little joke at the expense of the reader. But the fact remains that, at the present moment, the trouble is not that the reader does not understand him, but that the reader does not read him. I grieve to say, from what I know of human nature and history, that I doubt whether posterity will even try to understand Miss Stein. So that she will share her little joke with her Creator until the end; which may be quite a good joke too. But the theory that has been so common of late, the theory that the evolution of literature branches out into new experiments, and always follows the line of those experiments, seems to me to be flatly contradicted by all the facts of literary history. It seems to me an objective fact quite apart from my own preferences; indeed, it sometimes goes against my own preferences. Crashaw and the Cavalier mystics were, in the best sense of the word, fantastics. They were fantastics of whose fantasy I am very fond. But they did not lead away English literature indefinitely to be more and more fantastic; to indulge more and more in topsy-turvy tropes and far-fetched conceits. In a generation or so, English literature was back in the channel that was normal; indeed, rather too normal. It was that poetry of good sense which began in the maturity of Dryden and died on the birthday of Burns.

Nobody knows what will be the fashion a hundred years hence, except that it will almost certainly not be anything that is considered the newest fashion today. If I know that a river has wandered in winding curves from its original fountain, I may be quite unable to guess where it eventually wanders after it has passed where I stand. The one thing I can be fairly sure of is that it will not suddenly begin to go quite straight like a canal. As a mere matter of guess-work, given the tendencies of our time, I should think it would be extremely probable that literature will give up all this notion of experiment, and not only return to type, but even to the classical type. I think it much more likely that there will then be a worship of Landor, for instance, or some rather neglected classical classic, than that the whole world will be looking back to Miss Stein as the mother of modern English prose. We see the tendency in the Thomists of France, in the Humanists of America, and I think it is likely to become rather more classical than I like. For I am a romantic person myself; and I also like my little joke, just like Miss Stein.

XII

On Bad Poetry

I WAS recently enjoying a book published some little time ago, under the name of The Stuffed Owl; an Anthology of Bad Verse. The specimens were selected, I think, by Mr. D. B. Wyndham Lewis and Mr. Lee; but I am not reviewing the work, which must have been reviewed everywhere long ago, and has, I trust, received the admiration it certainly deserves. For the moment it has merely sent my wits wandering in the wide and rich and many-coloured fields of inferior literature. Much have the editors of the anthology travelled in these realms of gold; and I do not dream of competing with their deep scholarship touching the monumental classics of bad writing, or their exquisite and delicate artistic instinct for the finest and freshest shades of imbecility. If I may reverently adapt Matthew Arnold's definition of culture, they do indeed know the worst that has been said and thought in the history of humanity. Of course, any critic can complain of any anthology that some of his own favourites have been left out. He may sometimes even claim that some that are not on the high level of the anthology have been put in. As the critic skims an ordinary anthology to find an item which he can condemn as a blemish, so here the critic may pounce upon something that is not sufficiently half-witted to satisfy his high standard, and sternly point to several passages that are not so bad as they should be. Glimmerings of almost human intelligence, gleams of more than merely bestial reason, spasms of something almost resembling speech, relieve the monotony of the Imperial poems of Alfred Austin or the pagan passions of the more fearless, not to say shameless, imitators of Swinburne. Every now and then, after wading through a hubbub of hundreds of words, we find a word that seems to have gone right by accident. We must not complain; nothing in this mortal life is perfect; not even bad poetry.

Of course, there is one real difficulty in the classification of such classics. They necessarily divide themselves into at least two distinct types, which have really a rather different status and value. They raise two questions, which are hardly of equal intellectual importance. The first is: "Why do people who are not poets try to write poetry?" The second is: "Why do people who are poets fail to write poetry?" It is the second question which is the more difficult to answer and therefore the more worth answering. The first class consists of any number of accidents of ignorance and inexperience and vanity and egotistical self-deception; but beyond that there is nothing very extraordinary about it. A mysterious proverb declares that little birds who can sing and won't sing must be made to sing; though I never could imagine how. But evidently nobody ever had the courage to suggest what should be done with little birds who can't sing and do sing. There seems no suggestion possible, except that they should be shot; against which, in the name of St. Francis, the patron of all birds, poets, and other minor nuisances, I warmly protest. Of this sort of merely provincial limitation, the poetry of the Village Bard who looks dreadfully like the Village Idiot, the sort of thing that Oliver Wendell Holmes playfully satirized in the character of Gifted Hopkins, there is, of course, a great deal in such an anthology as this. There is a lot of it in the book; but there is also such a lot of it in the world that the examples must almost necessarily be accidents. Each one of us has probably found his own favourite piece of folly, in an advertisement or an epitaph or a corner of a newspaper; and the thing has remained almost as private as a family joke. To keep a record of all these individual discoveries would need not an anthology but a library of lunacy; a Bodleian of Bad Verse.

I cannot resist the temptation of telling Mr. D. B. Wyndham Lewis, and all other true lovers of bad poetry, of one poet to whom I know they would not refuse the laurel. He was so famous a person as the Rev. Patrick Brontë, the father of the great Brontë sisters; and his verses are actually printed along with theirs at the end of one edition of their works. He has often been called harsh and inhuman; but he deserves a place in literature since he invented a metre that is an instrument of torture. It consists of a rhyming verse finally ending on a word which ought to rhyme and does not. He is describing, if I remember right, the ideal virtues of the Village Maiden, and one verse runs —

To novels and plays not inclined
Nor aught that can sully her mind;
Temptations may shower,
Unmoved as a tower
She quenches the fiery arrows.

It is long since I have sat at the feet of this minstrel; and I quote from memory; but I think another verse of the same poem thus illustrated the same paraprosdokian, or concluding jerk of disappointment —

Religion makes beauty enchanting; And even where beauty is wanting, The temper and mind Religion-refined Will shine through the veil with sweet lustre.

If you read much of it, you will reach a state of mind in which, even though you know the jolt is coming, you can hardly forbear to scream. We have read much of the gloomy life of the Brontë sisters in their dark and narrow house, on their sombre and savage moor-lands. We have heard a great deal of how their souls were attuned to the storm, whether of wild winds or of stern words. But I can imagine no storm so paralysing as the noise of a reverend gentleman reading that poem; no torture so savage as the ruthless repetition of that metre; no inhuman cry so awful or so freezing to the blood, even out of the very heart of the hell of Wuthering Heights. In spite of all the educationists, it is a kindness to children to teach them nursery rhymes. But a man ought to be imprisoned for Cruelty to Children, if he recited to them rhymes that do not rhyme.

But the problem is much more interesting if we leave the bad poetry written by bad poets, and come to the bad poetry written by good poets. It is an old story; it was Horace, I think, who said that Homer sometimes nods; and Horace, though a wide-awake sort of person, sometimes indulged in a wink. The Swan of Avon, the Nightingale of Burford, the Skylark for whom we can name no habitation but the sky, all these famous birds occasionally threatened to stiffen into the Stuffed Owl. Even Milton, who lived for the grand style, had lapses of good taste; at least, I, for one, never liked Satan inventing gunpowder or spreading an extra special champagne supper, in the style of the Ritz-Carlton, to stay the hunger of the human Christ for bread. It is, therefore, no disrespect to great poets to make them figure in this book of bad poetry; for there is hardly a single good poet who has not at some time been a bad poet. I am not sure of the meaning of this, but I am fairly sure, for practical purposes, of the moral of it. First of all, it is wholesome to note that the poet generally came a cropper when he was moving most smoothly on the butter-slide of praise and progress and the prevailing fashion. It is when the classical poet is most classical that he strikes us as pompous and vapid. It is when the romantic poet is most romantic that he strikes us as sloppy and sentimental. And it will be when the modern poet is most modern, when he is most arrestingly in the modern style, that he will strike posterity as merely dowdy and dull. The only two really bad lines in Swinburne are the most Swinburnian; that couplet about lilies and languors and raptures and roses. By being in a sense perfect Swinburnian, it shows up Swinburne as imperfect. And the other moral is that poets are men; and that men can no longer be worshipped as gods. Carlyle did his worst work when he resurrected the pagan term of Hero-Worship. The Pagans, indeed, put up a statue to Achilles; but they did not whitewash the statue. They had an objective way with them, which needed no moral self-deception. But Carlyle could not be a Pagan; he could only be a bad Christian; or, as some say, a Puritan. And he did whitewash Cromwell and Frederick, as nobody whitewashed Achilles. Shakspere and Shelley were better than Cromwell and Frederick; but they also were men and not statues. Even their bad poetry may be productive of good philosophy.

XIII

On Negative Morality

IT was said of Miss Arabella Allen, that pioneer of Feminism, that she didn’t know what she did like, but did know what she didn’t like. Many very recent pioneers resemble her, which is odd. A little while ago, all liberal and cultured persons were expected to agree that negative morality was nothing as compared with positive morality. Enlightened clergymen took a pride in removing the Ten Commandments from their altars and their sermons, and substituting those two great mystical commands concerning the positive duties of the love of God and Man. Famous and fashionable writers, like Stevenson, spoke for their generation in saying: “Christ would not hear of negative morality; ‘Thou shalt’ was ever his word.” Some enthusiasts carried the distinction to rather fantastic lengths, elaborately framing sentences from which negatives were excluded. When Tommy twisted the cat’s tail, they twisted the English tongue to invent a dissuasion that should not be in the form of a negative. Instead of saying, “Do not twist the cat’s tail,” they said, “Do, do show a positive benevolence to animals,” or words to that effect. Rushing into the nursery, just in time to prevent the new toy chisel from the little tool-card being driven into the little sister’s eye, they yet had time hastily to rearrange their words and sentences, to avoid saying, “Don’t do that,” and say instead, “Occupy yourself in some other fashion,” or “Employ your tools in the delightful craft of carpentry.”

But, though the theory had its extremists, like other theories, it was no doubt a healthy reaction at the time it occurred. It was a reaction from Puritanism, and especially from dead Puritanism, which had dried up into a few negative commands and nothing else. Even when it was at its best, I confess I had some doubts about it. Indeed, I sometimes feared that it might mask the return of a positive Puritanism more terrible than negative Puritanism. At least if the authority only said, “Do not burn down the house,” we may lawfully infer that we are allowed to do anything else with it; as, for instance, to paint it sky-blue with yellow stripes; or turn it into a public house or a castle defended by cannon. If no other veto is laid upon us except “Do not wake the baby,” it follows that any silent and stealthy occupation, such as directing a smooth and soundless flow of treacle into the works of the piano, or cutting off all the hair of all the little girls next door and turning it into artificial beards for private theatricals — it follows, I say, that all these mute but active forms of energy were tacitly permitted.

I am not sure that the very fact that negative morality has a narrower scope does not sometimes mean that it leaves a wider liberty. If there are only Ten Commandments, it means that there are only ten things forbidden; and that means that there are ten million things that are not forbidden. Let us do justice to our ancestors, if they found it easier and shorter to describe what they forbade than what they permitted. Nevertheless, with all these correctives and criticisms, the idea was fundamentally sound; it was, as I have said, the very right instinct that a religion is dead when it has ceased to dwell on the positive and happy side of its visions, and thinks only of the stern or punitive side. Anyhow, right or wrong, it was prevalent through the whole of what may be called the progressive period. It was almost the mark of an emancipated and hopeful person that he insisted that we must think first of positive good, rather than of negative evil.

And that is what makes the present position so very queer. In the very latest phase of literature, especially in the literature of satire or social criticism, we find exactly the contrary. We find the most modern writers have lost exactly what progress promised to give them, and have kept exactly what progress threatened to destroy. What I mean, for instance, is something roughly like this. Charles Dickens was not a philosopher; he most certainly was not a theologian, not even a moral theologian; only, it may be said, in a casual and popular sense a moralist. But suppose we took in detail all the destructive fun and farce of Dickens, all his devastating portraits of oily philanthropists and bumptious social bullies; all the prigs and privileged bigwigs and blustering obstructive officials whom he pilloried in a hundred places. Suppose in any such time and place we had stopped him and said, “But what do you want? What is your ideal? What would you substitute for all this? Under whom would you put Oliver Twist, if not under Bumble? Where would you send Smike except to Squeers? What ought Mrs. Jellyby to consider, if not Africa? To whom ought Mrs. Welter to listen, if not to Mr. Stiggins? What politics are right, if Dedlock’s are wrong? What morals are right, if Gradgrind’s are wrong?” I think it practically certain that Dickens would answer, and even answer promptly. Some of his remarks would strike some of his hearers as having the limits or illusions of his time; as, for instance, he might believe more in the

Radical reforms and education which were then beginning than some of us do who have seen them in their ending. Other remarks might shock other hearers, by their still more shocking and disgusting devotion to barbarous idolatries and superstitions; as, for instance, to the idea of the Family or even the institution of Marriage. For I fear it is only too probable that Dickens would advance the grotesque plea that Mrs. Jellyby ought to think about Mr. Jellyby, and that even Mrs. Weller might occasionally listen to Mr. Weller. But whether his replies were revoltingly reactionary in this way, or merely a little too contented with the jog-trot reforms of his own day, I say that Dickens would reply, and would find no difficulty in replying.

Now, if we take a satirist of the modern moment, even a man of genius or genuine intellectual activity, like Mr. Aldous Huxley or Mr. Percy Wyndham Lewis, I am not so certain that they could reply. Some of them see with extraordinary vividness the humbug or imprudence or intellectual cruelty of this or that social type, in this or that social situation. But suppose we answered them by saying, "This moralist is a humbug, but what morality should a man preach, in order not to be a humbug? This positive claim is impudent, but can you be positive without being impudent? Many situations are cruel to many people; state briefly how you would be kind to these people." I have a very strong suspicion that our modern moral satirists would be entirely stumped. Things are very complex, and everybody is doing the wrong thing; but I suspect they really think that things are too complex for anybody to do the right thing. Therefore there is a hollow in the heart of their whirlwind of destructive criticism, as there is a hollow in the heart of the whirlpool. I do not mean it metaphorically, as suggesting that they are hollow in the sense of false. I mean it almost actually; that they are hollow and know they are hollow, and even admit they are hollow, as a hungry man would admit he was hollow. They have not enough solid sustenance; not enough food for the mind, as distinct from acrobatic exercise for the mind. I do not, as some do, denounce all these modern moralists as immoral. I only say that the most modern moralists are now at one with the most antiquated moralists. Like their Puritan great-grandfathers, they have nothing but negative morality.

XIV

On Jonathan Swift

THE greatness of the great Jonathan Swift grows upon me as I go on through life, like a man travelling nearer and nearer to a mountain. I did not understand him when I was very young; which is not to be wondered at, seeing that most people understood him so little as to give me his Gulliver’s Travels as a book written for children. Also he was hidden from me by the rather hypocritical haze of literary sentiment which pervaded the Victorian time. It was, in this case, very largely a stale political prejudice, due to the fact that Swift had been a Tory and that the whole Victorian legend was a sort of triumph of the Whigs. I began to learn better the more I learned about his period, and to learn better still, the more I learned about my own. For Swift stood at the beginning of something of which (it may be) we stand at the end; the whole of that cycle of commercial Imperialism and commercial Parliamentarianism which he already distrusted at its very beginning, or before it had really begun. Anyhow, I learned to like Swift for all the things for which Macaulay and Thackeray disliked him. I liked him for liking Bolingbroke; for despising Marlborough; for showing up the Glorious Hanoverian Succession in Ireland as a very low and dirty job; for treating the wit of the Freethinkers with contempt; for giving the first place to the virtue of Honour, which practically disappeared from politics and financial affairs about this time. It is doubtless true that he was too bitter and exclusive, but that is no reason why we should be. And the final phase of true philanthropy is not complete until it can love the misanthrope.

But I have often noticed a rather curious fact or fancy. Whenever there is a sort of proverb or anecdote or allusion, always connected with a literary man in literary gossip, that proverb always misses the point. So many people could hardly mention Dr. Johnson without the highly irrelevant remark that he wrote a Dictionary. So the favourite or fashionable phrase about Dean Swift seemed to be that he “wrote an essay on a Broomstick.” Indeed, the literary gossip managed to miss the point even here. The real point of the essay on a Broomstick is not merely that it is on a Broomstick, but that it is an essay in parody or satire upon the essays of Boyle, the most fashionable writer of the day. As for broomsticks, I imagine that Swift could have written a hundred essays on a hundred broomsticks. Nor do I see any particular reason why it should be difficult; many people could do it; I could do it myself. For, to begin with, almost any subject, considered as a subject, contains stuff and substance enough for an essay, when we consider that its origin and object, and material and design, and relation to other things, are all subjects in themselves. And secondly, a broomstick does not strike me as being intrinsically a dull subject, but rather a romantic one. The picturesque aspects of it, that leap into sight at once, so to speak, would suffice for an essay much longer than Swift's. A broom, and consequently, a broomstick, are connected with religious ideas of purification, and with other ideas which are rather the reverse. George Herbert dedicated the broom especially to the service of God. The witches dedicated the broomstick especially to the service of Satan. And if the essayist is so fastidious as to find the subject of devil-worship merely mild and tame, we might well ask what subjects he finds sensational or exciting. There are a hundred other things to be said, of course, even without plagiarizing from Swift. The image applied to politics, in some places, might even be alarmingly significant. The broomstick is a bundle of twigs decidedly suggestive of the *Fasces,* and quite a number of things might be written about that.

But this rather misleading though traditional trifle has another interest for the imagination. Swift, as I have said, was a man who could write what nobody else could have written, and often at a time when nobody else would have dared to write it. He could write the truth about a time in which perhaps more lies were told, and about which perhaps more lies have since been taught, than any other episode in English history. He could say the right thing, and say it exactly rightly; with a deadly detachment or a stunning understatement unmatched in the satires of mankind. But Swift was not a man gifted with the particular grace with which this literary legend would distinguish him. He was not a man who specially saw a spiritual significance in common things, or learned great lessons from small objects, or had anything about him of the poet who finds poetry in prose. He was a religious man in an irreligious age; but only because he was really too intellectual a man to be merely an irreligious man. He had nothing about him of the mystic, who sees divine symbols everywhere, who turns a stone and starts a wing. There were only too many stones, and not half enough wings, in poor Jonathan Swift's existence, and I fear he was largely saved from scepticism by a contempt for the sceptics. He did not see the glory of

God in a broomstick; but he did see something very like a broomstick in the stuck-up wooden-headed young atheist who denied the glory of God. He did see that the ideas in the head of that philosophical broomstick were all tied together as loosely as a bundle of sticks, and that these borrowed notions bore the same relation to real sincerity and originality as the twigs tied on to a broomstick bear to the branches growing on a tree. In short, his approach to such central truths was noble indeed, but somewhat narrow and negative; he was wise by the follies of others; or at any rate, not merely out of the wisdom that is at one with charity. And because he was partly deficient in charity he was really deficient in poetry, though certainly not deficient in fancy. He was the last person in the world to write a poem about a broomstick; yet a hundred minor poets, so long as they were poets, could easily imagine a poem about a broomstick. Why, even the Nursery Rhymes have already set us a most spirited example, in that imaginative flight that swept the starry spiders’ webs out of the very corners of the sky.

It is perhaps worth while to note this incongruity about the literary legend, because it will soon be necessary to insist that each of these talents exists and each is valuable to truth. In the somewhat acid mood that is coming upon men of letters just now, it is likely enough that they will return to the realism of the great satirist, and accept his limitations along with his liberties. They will begin to be just to Swift, and immediately begin to be unjust to Blake or Wordsworth or Walt Whitman. For they seem unable to believe that different literary virtues are needed to balance each other; and a great deal of contemporary criticism reads to me like a man saying: “Of course I do not like green cheese; I am very fond of brown sherry.”

XV

On the Creative and the Critical

I HAVE already remarked on the American cult called Humanism. It is the creation of certain critics who, broadly speaking, would substitute a certain classicism, such as is found in the ancients, for both the romanticism and realism of the moderns. There are those, of course, who call classicism cold, especially those who like their own realism or romanticism hot and strong. As a matter of fact, classicism is by no means the vital thing in Humanism. It is especially not the human thing in Humanism. I am by no means sure that I should myself agree with the Humanist leaders in everything. But I do most heartily agree with them in one thing, and it seems to me very much the most important thing. It is substantially this. The Humanist says to the Humanitarian, "You are always telling me to forget divine things and think of human things. And then you talk to me eagerly and earnestly about the pathetic helplessness of human beings, their faulty environment, their fatal heredity, their obvious animal origins, their uncontrollable animal instincts, ending with the old fatalist cry that we must forgive everything because there is nothing to forgive. But these things are not the *human* things. These are specially and specifically the sub-human things; the things we share with nature and the animals. The specially and outstandingly human things are exactly the things that you dismiss as merely divine things. The human things are free will and responsibility and authority and self-denial, because they exist only in humanity."

Upon this pivotal point I am entirely at one with Humanism, but I do not propose to discuss that particular point here. I only wish to record an impression about some of the more violent opponents of Humanism, and especially upon one phrase which abounds in their phraseology and presumably means something in their philosophy. Many who can look back on long and happy lives passed in the character of Young Rebels are very much annoyed at the appearance of this antiquated classicism, especially when it appears (as it generally does) in people rather younger than themselves. And I notice that the slogan to be used against the Humanist is to consist in saying that they are merely Critical, whereas all the people who happen to dislike them are Creative. And, though I have no intention of getting into a quarrel about the word Humanism, I do feel somewhat attracted to an attempt to consider what we mean, and especially what they mean, by the words Creative and Critical.

I take it that the disparagement of the Critical, as compared with the Creative, does not mean that nobody must be allowed to write unless he writes novels; that it is a sufficient condemnation to say that Professor Paul Elmer More has not yet written a murder story, or Professor Babbitt knocked the town endways with a roaring farce. The Humanists are human beings; that, at least, may be tentatively conceded to them; and human beings are allowed to think, even while they do not carve, paint, build, or play the fiddle. But when we consider Creation with a significance a little deeper, we find it a little more difficult. It is much too difficult to dogmatize about; nor am I dogmatizing: I am only asking questions, like Socrates, of people whom I suspect of not knowing what their own dogmas are. What exactly do these exquisitely modern moderns mean when they say that their modern literature is Creative? I strongly suspect that, even when it is clever, it is emphatically not Creative. It is exactly what it accuses its enemies of being: it is Critical. For instance, I have a hearty admiration for the amazing vitality and veracity of much of the work of Mr. Aldous Huxley. I think he is the most brilliant of the moderns; and he is admittedly one of the most modern of the moderns. But his work, considered as an intellectual process, seems to me almost entirely Critical.

Of course, it is not easy to point to anything that is entirely Creative. In ultimate philosophy, as in ultimate theology, men are not capable of creation, but only of combination. But there is a workable meaning of the word, which I take to be this: some image evoked by the individual imagination which might never have been evoked by any other imagination, and adds something to the imagery of the world. I call it Creative to write "the multitudinous seas incarnadine." I call it Creative by three real and even practical tests: first, that nobody need ever have thought of such a thing if Mr. William Shakspere had not happened to think of it; second, that while it is an apocalyptic, or titanic, it is not really an anarchic idea; it is gigantic, but it does not merely sprawl; it fits into the frame of thought exactly as the sea fits into all the fretted bays and creeks of the world. Also, in passing, with all its tragic occasion, it is a *jolly* image: it gives the mere imagination a positive and passionate joy of colour, like the joy of drinking a purple sea of wine. But, thirdly and most essentially, it does reveal the moral mystery that is the whole meaning of such a tragedy; expressed by the knocking without which startles the assassins within; the notion of the thin partition between the crime that is hidden in the house and the sin that fills the universe; what was meant by saying that things said in the inner chamber should be proclaimed from the housetops; the true idea of the Day of Judgment, in which the world is, really and truly, turned inside out. It may also be added that that astonishing phrase is not only a speech, but a gesture. It is dramatic, in the vital sense, to suppose that dipping a finger could suddenly turn all the seas of the world to scarlet. But this very drama is a morality, and it would mean nothing that the seas were scarlet unless the sins were scarlet. ... But what is all this? This is not Modern. This is not Scientific. This is not in the purely experimental and realistic manner in which the Young Rebels have been writing for the last thirty or forty years. They all say they are Creative, and they ought to know. And, according to their theory of purely Creative art, there ought to be an entirely detached and unmoral attitude on the part of everybody involved. It ought not to matter whether the spot on Lady Macbeth's finger was blood or red ink; or whether she turned the multitudinous seas the colour of carnage or tomato soup. It is evidently a very soothing and insulated condition of intellect, and avoids all the disturbing currents of ethical and theological criticism. There is nothing to be said against it; except that, if everybody were in that scientific state of mind, nobody could write Macbeth.

And there, as it seems to me, the whole theory of uncritical and uncriticized creative art breaks down. As a mere matter of fact, you cannot make any sense of *Macbeth* unless you not only recognize but share a decided horror of murder. And how you can be shocked by Murder and not moved by Morality I do not know. And if being Critical means the tracing of these electric wires or burglar-alarms, these live wires of the laws of life which do, in fact, give shocks when they are touched or transgressed, then it is not merely the classical critics who are critical. It is Shakspere who is critical; nay, it is Lady Macbeth who is critical; she is extremely critical of Lady Macbeth. If the recognition of the real Ten Commandments of life and death is only being critical, then all the great creative artists are critical; and they would not be creative if they were not critical. Lady Macbeth would never see that blasting vision of a bloodshot world, except in the last agony of self-criticism.

XVI

On a New Tax

IN these times when everybody is talking about taxation, many must have indulged in the dream that there might be a tax on talking. I hasten (nay, rush in a rage of self-immolation) to add that the same may be said of a tax on writing. We have endeavoured to preserve the old liberal ideal of free speech and free printing, at least in its legal form, if sometimes as a legal fiction. I fear that the truth is not so much that repression is entirely removed, as that repression is not responsible repression. Like so many other things, it has begun to act outside the limits of law, and tyranny as well as liberty has broken loose. Repression is irresponsible, and therefore repression itself is irrepressible. Private powers acting as public powers, monopolies, boycotts, big shops, publishing syndicates, and similar things do, in fact, inflict restriction which we should not allow the State or the Church to inflict. But even the most earnest eleutheromaniac may allow himself a day-dream of abstract possibilities. And, if we agree that the State must not attack expression with the old weapon of punishment, we might toy with the fancy of attacking it with the new method of monetary rating. Nobody now wishes men to be tortured for talking nonsense, but they might be taxed for talking nonsense. Indeed, in these days, when so many schools give Lessons in Citizenship, most people seem to be so vague about such things that they would hardly know the difference. A citizen can hardly distinguish between a tax and a fine, except that the fine is generally much lighter.

Of course, there is a sort of paradox in taxation, anyhow. In such a tax, there is often the notion of checking something, and yet the hope that it will not be checked. A lover of birds might wish to have a tax on cats, with the idea that there would be fewer cats. But the statesman imposing the tax would presumably hope that the streets would be thronged with thousands and thousands of cats, each bringing its little subscription to the embarrassed Exchequer. Now, it seems illogical to wish to moderate the influx of cats and not to wish to moderate the influence of tigers. Yet it is very unlikely that the State will ever put a tax on tigers; because, alas! these beautiful creatures are rare in our English lanes and still rarer by our

English firesides. Any lover of nature who has seen the first tiger appearing somewhat prematurely in early spring will almost certainly (if he survives) write a letter to the newspapers about it, as an event even more exceptional than the cuckoo. There is not enough money in tigers to make it worth while to tax them; so that in cases of that sort we cannot act upon the principle of the check or public protection alone.

But, for the sake of argument, we will leave out in this light speculation all the purely economic considerations arising from the width of the taxable area. It would obviously be impossible, as well as iniquitous, to tax the sort of remarks that are made as a part of the ordinary round of social life. To impose even a light tax on every repetition of the expression “It’s a fine day,” or “It’s a strange world,” or “Nothing doing in the City,” or “Pint of bitter, Miss,” or any of those great pivotal utterances on which all human life revolves, would be outside the sphere of practical politics. The sort of talk to be taxed must be something sufficiently wide-spread to be worth taxing, but something sufficiently superfluous to suffer even a prohibitive tax without the world being much the worse.

In fact, the tax on talk may well follow the rough distinction already recognized about necessities and luxuries. The pint of bitter, the word about the weather, are necessities. For the poor, beer is a necessity, as tobacco is very nearly a necessity; it is only for people sufficiently rich and fashionable to be faddists that either is really a luxury. In the same way, a certain sort of primeval and eternal gossip is a necessity. But there are all sorts of things that are not necessities. The mention of mere names seen in the newspapers; the oppressive presence of science, combined with the absence of knowledge; the habit we all have of talking about what we do not understand; all these might be smartly interrupted by the tax-collector coming round as the tram conductor comes round for fares.

For instance, suppose everybody was instantly fined a small sum for mentioning the name of Einstein. The money would be refunded if he could afterwards demonstrate, to a committee of mathematicians and astronomers, that he knew anything about Einstein. What a salutary check it would be on the public speaker, criticizing the Budget or the latest economic panacea, who would be just in the very act of saying: “Makes the brain reel. Reminds one of—” and would sharply catch himself up, with a holy fear of losing half a crown, and hastily substitute Alice in Wonderland. On the other hand, it would be equally valuable in arresting the headlong pen of the journalist announcing Brighter Brotherhood or reverently praising The Revolt of Youth: "The new year opens before us new faiths, new ideals, and the young will no longer be content with the dead shibboleths of creed and dogma. New light has been thrown on all the daily problems of life by the great scientific genius of our time; the name of—": and then he will stop suddenly and be most horribly stumped, for Einstein is the only man of science he has heard of, and Einstein costs two-and-six.

It is a luxury, in the strict sense of a superfluity, to mention Einstein. He is not a part of any ordinary human argument, because any ordinary human being does not know where his argument leads or what it can really be used to prove. It may be, for all I know, a perfectly good argument for those who really follow it; but those who drag in the name without the argument cannot know what an argument means. We should not be interfering with the freedom of debate by eliminating it, for the men who only deal in such unknown quantities are not debating. They are simply showing off. The distinguished name is stuck into the sentence as the diamond tie-pin is stuck into the tie, for the sake of swagger or snobbishness. And diamond tie-pins are quite legitimate objects for a tax on luxuries. Of course, the argument does not only apply to science; there are any number of cases of the same sort of pedantry in literature. There are certain quotations from poetry which are always dragged in as if they were texts of Scripture, professedly to prove something that obviously proves itself, but really to prove that the writer is well acquainted with the Hundred Best Authors.

The tax would have a refreshing and reviving effect upon literature, because it would drive writers to think of a few new examples. The man who writes to show that Science was always persecuted in the past will be driven to the dreadful necessity of writing about somebody else besides Galileo. And who knows what a new life of brighter and brisker research into the elements of history the change may not mean for him! The man who is writing to show that poets always die young, or are killed by the critics, if he is absolutely forbidden (at the rate of five shillings) to say that the *Quarterly* was tartarly and ask, "What are Keats?" might discover all sorts of neglected poets; or, better still, discover that there were some poets who were not neglected. Those who can never separate Spain from the Spanish Inquisition, or America from the similar institution of Prohibition, or Russia from the German Jew called Karl Marx, might, at the price of a temporary tax on these topics, find out a good many other truths about these nations. They might find, for example, what Spain did in America; what America is doing in Russia; and whether all Russian peasants have really turned into German Jews.

XVII

On Sense and Sound

ON re-reading something I wrote about the most modern poetry, especially touching the ancient riddle of Sense and Sound, I am not sure that I made myself clear. And, as I am not now writing the most modern poetry, I may be allowed to be clear. Clarity will be permissible, or at least pardonable. By the way (if I may mention it in parenthesis) does anybody know why it is now the fashion to be very extravagant in poetry and very sober in prose? There are individuals, of course, like Mr. James Joyce or Miss Gertrude Stein, whose prose may be said to be of doubtful sobriety. But some of the ablest of the rising, or recently risen, authors seem to have something like a dual personality in prose and verse. The prose-writing of Mr. Osbert Sitwell is not especially Sitwellian, as the term is applied to his poetry. It is well written, but rather on the old principle that a book well written should be as unobtrusive as a man well dressed. It is in the Sitwellian poesy that the average reader is apt to be startled by strange sights; by woolly roses or hairy clouds. Mr. T. S. Eliot's wildest verses do, indeed, have rhythm, too much rhythm; really (as the phrase goes) making the head go round, and suggesting a cosy life in the hollow heart of a cyclone or a whirlpool. But there is nothing of this in his essays; which are rather contained and reticent than otherwise. Indeed, when he does make an epigram (and a very good one) he is so ashamed of it that he hides it at the end of a minute footnote, for fear some critic or other should accuse him of brilliancy.

The same is largely true even of Mr. Aldous Huxley, so far as essay-writing is concerned. His diaries of real travel are quite sensible and unpretentious; while some of his poems are like imaginary travels in the Tropics, almost negro in their barbaric dance of death. The Victorians, who are accused of primness, had much more all-round extravagance. George Meredith was as perverse and fanciful in prose as in verse; indeed, more so. Diana of the Crossways seemed to sit not so much at the cross-roads as in the heart of the labyrinth; and the Egoist juggled much more deceptively than Juggling Jerry. Some of Browning's friends complained that he was cryptic, not only in prose but in private correspondence. I am not complaining of this new method of making extremes meet. There may be a great deal to be said for it; but perhaps it means some decay of the Victorian naturalness, which was much more typical than the Victorian decorum. There is something to be said for Browning and Meredith, if only that they could not help writing like Meredith and Browning.

But this (as I say) is all in brackets. The matter I meant to raise concerns sense and sound in poetry. And their relation is much more subtle than even the most insanely subtle of the critics seem to understand. I took the familiar example of a famous line in Milton, which has always had that inexplicable fascination so often found in the purely classical style. Oddly enough, it is in the rational lines of Virgil or Milton, much more than in the extra-rational lines either of the Merediths or the Sitwells, that we feel the final mystery of song; the something that instantly gives delight and escapes from definition; the thing of which we say: "I cannot tell, for the life of me, why that is so good as it is." I cannot tell, for the life of me, why the line "Like Teneriffe or Atlas unremoved" is as good as it is. Yet it is perfectly straightforward; it merely mentions a cape and a mountain, and adds the somewhat superfluous information that they are not removed. The only thing I am quite sure about is that the sense depends on the sound and the sound depends on the sense. It actually would not sound the same, if another meaning were expressed by the same sound. It actually would not mean as much, if other words expressed the same meaning. It would be easy enough to try the experiment in a rough and ready way. It is obvious that, if we wrote "Like Beachy Head or Snowdon unremoved," it would not be within a thousand miles of the thing; though Beachy Head is a cape and Snowdon is a mountain. What is not quite so obvious is that the converse is also true. It might be too lightly inferred that the mere noise of the names is alone majestic. It might be even suggested that the down-rushing dactyl of "Teneriffe" has some faint echo of words like "terrible" or "towering," and that the sound is the secret. But it is not so, though the alternative experiment might be a little more elaborate to construct. Let us have a stab at it, as Mr. P. G. Wodehouse's young man said when asked if he would be a reasonable being.

Thackeray mentions somewhere, in one of his essays, that in some old cookery-book or book of etiquette he had come on the fact that men in the eighteenth century drank a wine called Teneriffe, apparently an alternative to port or Madeira. Thackeray says, I think, that it sounds like having to swallow the Matterhorn. But if it were something quite familiar, like port wine, it would sound like any other detail of the dinner-table. As for the word “Atlas,” we have only to knock out the capital letter, and it means a commonplace work of reference, an ordinary book of maps. Now, suppose somebody were writing a very mild and jog-trot domestic poem in decasyllabics, rather like those poems in which Cowper celebrated the tea-urn or the cat. And suppose the particular passage explained how somebody’s after-dinner table was left in a litter by negligent servants; books and wine and everything in a hugger-mugger —

His pipe and napkin, like his spectacles, Like snuff and toast and pen and ink or books, Like teneriffe or atlas, unremoved.

It would not make the same noise. It actually would not sound in the ear, as a matter of mere acoustics, the same. The fact of talking only about two trivial objects would, in fact, alter the actual impact of the sound upon the ear and the nerves. Nobody would be looking for a great sonorous effect, and nobody would find it. The fact that the two objects are mountains, mysterious and remote and legendary mountains, does enter irrevocably into the merely physical process; and it is the largeness of those mountains that fills the lungs and the ear.

This being so, I think there are much deeper difficulties than are now generally understood about breaking with the traditions of rhythm. I do not say it should not be done, but I do say that it is doubtful whether those who do it know what they are doing. If my own original use of this quotation was obscure, I am well aware that the whole problem is one of the deepest obscurity. But this is more or less what I meant; that I do not think we have got to anything like the bottom of the psychology — we might even say the physiology — of poetical effects; and that the old conventions of verse rested upon instincts which are perhaps indestructible, but which at least cannot be casually destroyed. It would seem that one growth can grow into another, even if they did originally have separate roots, in such a fashion as to form a single life and a new creation; and that new creation is none the less unique because it is now old. It is really beside the mark to talk about experiments which are only explosions; for, though explosions ought to be expansions, it is certain at least that they are disruptions. I do not object to experiments as such. I willingly agree that Mr. Sitwell has as much right to talk about a hairy cloud as an old poet to talk about a fleecy cloud; as much right to do what he can with the hair of a cloud as the other with the hair of a comet. But something much deeper and more mysterious is involved. The old poets had a power of mixing with their fleecy clouds and hairy comets some ancestral magic of the nature of music; by which even the quaintest of Cavalier conceits, or the most newly coined of Renaissance Latinisms, came weighted with harmonies and a historic richness that prevented them from being crude, even when they were new. It seems to me that the new poets do not try to recover that ancient wedding of sound and sense. Some of them seem to have only passed from the old Swinburnian phase of sound without sense to the later phase of nonsense without sound. But even the best of them seem to be seeking a divorce rather than a wedding.

XVIII

On Literary Cliques

MANY are complaining of the cliques in the literary world; and they are right for a particular reason, though I am not sure that they know it. The discontent, like so many of the present discontents, has a certain disadvantage; that it does not distinguish between the normal nuisances of human life and the special nuisances of modern life. Under no conditions should we all be equally in touch with each other, or distributing dispassionate justice to every human being like a Day of Judgment. It is natural for men to belong to a club, as it is natural for other men who do not belong to a club to call it a clique; and a great deal of what is called log-rolling is as easy as falling off a log. I have generally found that it was precisely because a man was generously and enthusiastically rolling the log of a friend that he complained so bitterly of the log-rolling among his enemies. But I am not forbidden to find that a writer is intelligent, even if he is my friend. I am permitted, perhaps, the vanity of supposing that he is my friend because he is intelligent; or at least that he became my friend partly because I thought he was intelligent. The relation is obviously open to abuse; and the method which I myself have always chosen is to praise the merit of a friend's public work as warmly as I felt inclined, but always to mention the private friendship as well as the public merit. Then anybody is free to discount it, if he thinks it ought to be discounted. But there is another and more neglected evil in the clique; in the club that cultivates some special variety in culture. The artists of such a group have a tendency not only to talk shop, but to talk workshop. They talk more about methods of production than about products of perfection. Like talkative art-students, they show each other their work before it is finished; and, like lazy art-students, they often find this an excellent excuse for not finishing it at all.

Perfect work is for the world; yes, for the stupid world. Imperfect work is for the class, for the club, for the clique; in a word, for the sympathizers. We show our worst efforts to the intelligent; we reserve our best efforts for the dull — that is, for the supreme and sacred duty of all creative expression; that of being sufficiently pointed to pierce at last even the mind of the dull. For, whatever be the nature of creation, it is certainly of the nature of translation; it is translating something from the dumb alphabet and dim infantile secret language in our own souls into the totally different public language that we talk with our tongues. If that translation were perfect if the ideas and idioms did really correspond correctly, it would all be as plain to the man in the street as to the man in the club. It certainly would not be necessary to show it in fragmentary hints to the man in the clique. But because our expression is imperfect we need friendship to fill up the imperfections. A man of our own type or tastes will understand our meaning before it is expressed; certainly a long time before it is perfectly expressed. Thus we rather tend to lose the old idea that it is the business of the author to explain himself. We tend to adopt the idea that it is the business of the clique to understand the author; and even to explain the author, when he refuses to explain himself.

A famous æsthete of the ‘nineties said that the poet who was admired by poets must be the greatest of poets. I will take the liberty to doubt it. I fancy that in such a case the poets are in fact collaborating with the poet. The beauty they behold in his work is partly their work as well as his. Just as the poets may see more than others see in every bush or cloud, so they may see more than others see in every epithet or metaphor. Above all, if they are poets of his own particular school of poetry, they will guess something of what he means by the queerest epithet or the maddest metaphor. But it does not follow that those words are the full and perfect expression of what he means; if they were, they probably would not seem mad or even queer. In short, the poet has not really travelled the whole of his pilgrimage from Paradise to Putney (with apologies to the ghost of Swinburne); an embassy of select and fastidious souls of Putney has gone out and met him halfway. He has not performed the full literary function of translating living thoughts into literature. He still needs an interpreter; and a crowd of interpreters has officiously rushed between the poet and the public. The crowd is the clique; and it does do a certain amount of harm, I think, by thus intercepting the true process of the perfecting of human expression. It is not wrong because it encourages the great man to talk. It is wrong because it actually discourages the great man from talking plainly. The priests and priestesses of the temple take a pride in the oracle remaining oracular. That vast but vague revolution that we call the modern world largely began about the time when men demanded that the Scriptures should be translated into English. It has ended in a time when nobody dares to demand that English poets should be translated into English. It has ended in a new race of pedants who are only too proud of reading the poet in the original, and merely murmur as they read, in a tantalizing fashion, that the original is so very original.

This is the paradox of the clique; that it consists of those who understand something and do not wish it to be understood; do not really wish it to be understandable. But such a group must in its nature be small, and its tendency is to make the range or realm of culture smaller. It consists of those who happen to be near enough to some unique or perverse mentality to guess that a man means something that as yet he cannot really say; just as a detective might be legitimately proud of having extracted some sort of valuable evidence from a lunatic who was deaf and dumb. But this does not make for the enlargement of the poet's power of expression or of the public's power of appreciation. The ideal condition is that the poet should put his meaning more and more into the language of the people, and that the people should enjoy more and more of the meaning of the poet. That is true popular education; and, if we really possessed that sort, we should hardly need any other. One party in the quarrel will insist that the public ought to take more trouble to understand the poet; and so it ought. But the other party can answer that the poet should take more trouble to finish his poems; and so he should. It is not a question of petty or conventional or finicking finish. It is a question of not leaving three-quarters of the poem inside the poet, with the rest of it hanging out, generally tail-foremost.

At present, even good poets often do not write good poems, but rather notes for poems. They think it enough to record, as in a sort of disjointed diary, that they *did* feel a sense of poignant futility on seeing an old hat on a deserted hat-peg; or an indescribable surge of rebellion on observing a broken vase in a suburban dust-bin. And then comes the sympathetic critic, saying (no doubt quite truly) that he can imagine a man shuddering at the hat-peg or shedding tears into the dust-bin. But that is only saying that one individual can imagine the imagination. It is not completely communicating the imagination by means of the image. I am far from denying that a great poet might achieve a great turn of style, which would make something sublime out of a hat-peg or a dust-bin, as Shakspere did out of a bodkin or a bung-hole. But if such passages be examined, it will be found that nowhere did the great poet study the grand style more subtly than when dealing with such mean objects. Anyhow, he did not merely mention the mean objects, and then mention that they had filled him with feelings indescribable. He set out seriously to describe the indescribable. That is the whole business of literature, and it is a hard row to hoe.

XIX

On the Simplicity of Asia

I WAS recently asked to write a prologue to a composite detective story, which demanded a detailed and vivid description of the streets of Hong Kong. I have never seen Hong Kong, and I have not the least notion of what it looks like. But he would be a very faint-hearted journalist who should allow himself to be restrained from realism and photographic exactitude by a trifle like that. But, in the course of considering the matter, I fell into a more general train of thought, to which Hong Kong serves as a gate of entry, as it serves as a gate of entry to China. Though I have never seen the mixed cosmopolitan ports of the Far East, I have seen some of the yet more mixed and cosmopolitan ports of the Near East. I have been in Port Said and Suez; and between these and Hong Kong lies the whole vast and still partly unknown thing that we call Asia. But my meditations have overflowed upon this page, because they are obviously too vague and general to be developed before the innocent and happy spirits full of a beautiful eagerness to get on with the murder.

Whatever else the scribes have written about Asia, they have all agreed in the statement that it is mysterious. It may seem perverse to say that this statement is a mis-statement, or even that it is an over-statement. Yet I think there is an aspect in which it can be contradicted. We may even say that the whole point of Asia is that it is not mysterious; not half so mysterious as Europe; to say nothing of America, which is the most mysterious of all. By which I mean that there are in Europe and America compromises and complexities, a blend or balance of one thing with another, which is really rather less apparent in the stark passions, the strict rituals, and the ancient appetites of Asia. For instance, a Christian is perpetually balanced between a Christian ideal of loving his enemies, a Pagan ideal of punishing his enemies, and a chivalric ideal of only fighting his enemies fairly. In Asia, I imagine, both love and hate have been much more unmixed and undisguised. Both in poetry and in policy, a man would be much more simple in his purpose to pursue his love or to persecute his foe. And, while there is truth in the tradition that the Asiatic has thus sometimes become an artist in sensuality and an artist in cruelty, he might well make out a case for the view that he was an artist with less artifice and more sincerity. Somebody said, with considerable truth, that Russia lacks the cement of hypocrisy. This might well be quoted to support the not uncommon view that Russia is a part of Asia.

It might be said that Asia is too old to be mysterious. It might at least be said that Asia is too old to be hypocritical. There are a thousand veils and disguises; but the disguises have worn very thin in thousands of years, and the veils are rather like the veils worn by loose women in Cairo and Port Said: ritual, but transparent. Those who would give a juvenile thrill by combining the occult and the obscene do still talk about the Mysteries of the Harem; the secrets behind the veils and curtains of the seraglio. But I imagine there is very little mystery about the harem, at any rate the Moslem harem; and no secret except the open secret. I imagine that the sentiments of the seraglio, whether domestic or servile or sensual, are often dull to that extreme point of dullness which the revolutionary West describes as respectable. I suspect that there is far more mystery, in the sense of mysticism, in the feelings of two common lovers in an English lane. It is only fair to add that, with all the ceremonial of reticence or invisibility, there is probably much less cant than there is in many an English novel or newspaper. But, whether it be subtlety or sophistry, whether it be hypocrisy or only human complexity, it is really in the West and not in the East that there is the mystery. The Occidental is always saying that he cannot understand the Oriental; but the truth is that he cannot understand himself. It is the Christian culture that is woven of many strands, of many fabrics and colours, and twisted into the single knot, the knot that holds the world together, but the knot that is of all knots the most difficult to trace out or untie. Compared with that, there is something simple and smooth and all of a piece about the ancient silks of China or the peasant weaving of India. It is on the head of the Christian that the ends of the earth are come, even from the beginning, the arrows of the Persians or the stone clubs of the Celts. And if the eyelids are, after all, less weary than those of a Buddha or a Brahmin god, it may be that there is a slight fallacy in the familiar quotation, and that being hit on the head incessantly by the corners of the world does not merely send one to sleep. Anyhow, it is the Christian who is the real cosmic mystery; the cross made by the cross-lights of the shafts of the sunrise and the sunset; the true crux of the world. But it is only just to say that this complexity, which produces the highest philosophy, does also produce humbug. It produces the worst kind; in which the humbug hardly knows he is a humbug. I suspect that there is far less humbug in the East, and that, compared with such rooted and humanized humbug, all its cunning is a sort of simplicity.

In Asia things have worn too thin to be padded with such self-deception; it is old and its bones stick out. There the harlot is a harlot, and not a society actress whom the divorce court hands from one rich man to another. There the slave is a slave, and not a scheduled employee having less than the income nominated in the Act. There the king is a king, and the tyrant is a tyrant, and not a banker threatening to make nations bankrupt, or a private person holding all the shares in a public company. We have doubtless by our example introduced these blessings into Asia, but they are not Asiatic. There the usurer was a usurer, and the thief a thief; and this, which was the best thing about Asia, will probably be the one thing really altered by the influence of Europe. But it is worth while to say a word for the simplicity of Asia, and against the mystery of Asia. For on that supposed mystery of the East there has been erected every sort of quackery in the West. Every sham religion, every shabby perversion, every blackguard secret society, has claimed to feed on the strange fruits of that garden of Asia. And we may well hint that the garden itself is a little more decent, even if it is a desert.

There are any number of examples, both good and evil, of the sort of rigid simplicity that I mean, and the sense in which the Orient has more simplicity than secrecy. The Caste System of India, for instance, seems to me to be a tyranny; and the worst sort of tyranny, which is not conducted by a tyrant, but by an aristocracy: but it is not a hypocrisy. It is not even that more confused and unconscious sort of hypocrisy that we call humbug. It is not confused at all; its very cruelty is in its clarity. You cannot play about with the idea of a Brahmin as you can with the idea of a Gentleman. You cannot pretend that Pariahs were made Pariahs entirely as a compliment to them, and in the interests of True Democracy. At least, if the Indians are talking like that now, it is only too true that they have been infected with the worst vices of the West. I wish I were sure they were also being influenced by the real merits of the West; and, above all, by this great merit of the West, the name of which is Mystery. But it is they, the simple, who do not understand us, the mystical. A brilliant and distinguished Hindu told me that the problem of the world is to unite all things; that the things in which they differ are indifferent, and only that things in which they are the same are solid. I could not explain to him that the problem of the Christian is not merely to unite all things, but to unite union with disunion. The differences are not indifferent; and the problem is to let things differ while they agree. In short, the Western man seeks after Liberty, which is a real mystery. Compared with that Unity is a platitude. It is the White Man who is the Dark Horse; and ourselves who are riddles to ourselves.

XX

On Fate and a Communist

IT often happens that by-products are bigger than big production, and that side-issues are larger than the main issue. Much of the political muddle and squabble comes from people trying to reach what they call a practical agreement. It is a very unpractical thing to trust to practical agreement. Two people may agree to keep a cat; but if they only agree because one is a lover of animals, and the other has a fiendish pleasure in watching cruelty to birds, it is probable that the practical agreement will not last very long. Other occasions will arise, in which it will be found to suffer from the absence of a theoretical agreement. There is at this moment many a parley between two politicians, seeking to find a practical agreement about a Tax on Tobacco or the dumping of Danish bacon, who are, in fact, forbidden for ever to come to any kind of real agreement, for the simple reason that they live in two different worlds; as, for instance, one in the globe that is picked out in red patches of the British Empire, and the other in the great grey *orbis terrarum* in which all lands are alike. These men would really have to settle the big question before they settled the small question. But, in what we call practical politics, it is the small question that is called the big question. And the big question would only be permitted as a small parenthesis in the middle of the small question.

I happened lately to have a small debate with a very distinguished modern writer, Mr. Middleton Murry, on a book that he has written about Communism. I only mention it here because I soon discovered that I was not arguing against Communism but against Fatalism. I will not discuss the social and economic thesis, because, in truth, Mr. Middleton Murry’s sort of Communism is rather a curious sort of Communism, which he alone would have the spirit and originality to explain. I do not agree with Communism; but I do not disagree with it because it would break up the existing system of commercialism. That, I think, is breaking itself up without any assistance from anybody. I disagree with Communism because I think it involves the sacrifice of Liberty. And the curious thing is that Mr. Middleton Murry does distinctly admit, in so many words, that it would involve the sacrifice of Liberty. So that he and I are so far in a state of blissful agreement; not practical agreement, but real or theoretical agreement. It is true that he adds to this a mystical paradox about losing freedom in order to be free, but he would have to explain that for himself. Where I found myself in much more fundamental disagreement with him was in this very ancient business about Fate; or, as he prefers to call it, Necessity. God forbid that we should go once more into the trampled labyrinth of Fate and Freewill. It is enough for me that the second is at least as fundamental an idea as the first; and really a more fundamental idea than the first. It is quite certain that I *feel* as if I could leave off writing this essay whenever I like. Nobody can prove that feeling to be an illusion, except by a universal scepticism which might equally hold fate to be an illusion, or even law to be an illusion. The Determinists of my youth used to boast that Science supported them, because some scientists talked about the Determinism of Matter. I do not know what they are saying now, when several scientists are actually talking about the Indeterminism of Matter. But, anyhow, the idea of choice is an absolute, and nobody can get behind it.

What interests me here especially is this. It seems that many, who do probably feel they have freedom of action in the present or in the future, are ready to talk in a fatalistic way about the past. Mr. Middleton Murry, though fatalistic in a general way, is especially fatalistic about the past. He repeats again and again that whatever did happen was “necessary.” He seems to think it proved its necessity merely by happening. Now, I do not feel this about the past, any more than about the future. I admit necessity, in the sense of logical necessity. I admit that if I am heavier than Mr. Middleton Murry, it is necessary that Mr. Middleton Murry is lighter than I am. I admit that if three feet make a yard, it is necessary that six feet make two yards. In that sense I must concede that if (physically) six Murrys make one Chesterton and even (spiritually) six Chestertons make one Murry, any further calculations about the multiplication of these persons must be founded on the principles of the multiplication table. But I do not feel in the least as if it had been inevitable that I should have turned from an art student to a journalist; or inevitable that Mr. Murry should have turned to Bolshevism; or inevitable that Bolshevism should have ever turned up at all. In every historical event I feel the thrill of uncertainty and the suspense of the human choice, and I cannot understand why my feeling is not as reasonable as his feeling; which seems also to be a feeling and no more.

For what I really complain of in this brilliant and ingenious writer is that, whenever he does try to give ultimate reasons for his fixed fatalism and materialism, and consequent denial of miracle, he lets me down. I well remember how I came down with a crash, in the middle of the most exalted speculations, when he actually said he could not believe in something as a man "of the twentieth century." I know there are people who talk like that, but I had not classed him among them. I thought I was high up in the air arguing with Aristotle and Abelard, with Buddha and Spinoza, with Pythagoras or Confucius; and I came to earth with a bump, opposite a man who wanted to be known by a number. Can anybody imagine Spinoza presenting his cosmos as specially fitted to the eighteenth century? Would Abelard base his argument on the twelfth century, as the other on the twentieth century? Would even Confucius say that truth and wisdom must be reconciled with the requirements of his own particular date previous to the Han Dynasty? So far from saying this in disparagement of the writer's work as a whole, I remark on it as an incongruous interruption in his work as a whole. It seems to me that a number of these twentieth-century writers rebel not too much, but not half enough, against the nineteenth-century conventions. One of the Victorian conventions was that all was for the best, or at any rate that all was as it had to be. The Victorians were all convinced that William the Conqueror was bound to conquer; that Wellington was bound to beat Napoleon; that Canada was bound to cleave to England; that America was bound to cut herself off from England. And it seems to me that the mechanical optimism of Marx, and the necessitarian notion of history in moderns like Mr. Murry, is but a continuation in that optimistic groove. To me all the past is alive with alternatives, and nobody can show, nobody has really attempted to show, that they were not real alternatives. I think it quite possible that if Harold's northern campaign had been a week earlier, William the Norman's southern campaign might have been launched too late; that if Napoleon had decided, after his hesitation, to throw in the Old Guard at Borodino, there would have been no Moscow and no Waterloo; that there was a time when a few wise words might have saved the American Colonies or a few foolish words lost Canada; and so on. In short, I believe that, again and again, man was at the cross-roads and might have taken another road. Nobody can prove or disprove it metaphysically; but I am the more content with a philosophy which permits of occasional miracles, because the alternative philosophy does not even permit of alternatives. It forbids a man even to dream of anything so natural as the Ifs of History.

XXI

On St. George Revivified

THE disadvantage of men not knowing the past is that they do not know the present. History is a hill or high point of vantage, from which alone men see the town in which they live or the age in which they are living. Without some such contrast or comparison, without some such shifting of the point of view, we should see nothing whatever of our own social surroundings. We should take them for granted, as the only possible social surroundings. We should be as unconscious of them as we are, for the most part, of the hair growing on our heads or the air passing through our lungs. It is the variety of the human story that brings out sharply the last turn that the road has taken, and it is the view under the arch of the gateway which tells us that we are entering a town.

Yet this sense of the past is curiously patchy among the most intelligent and instructed people, especially in modern England. Among a hundred such scraps and snippets, I saw this morning a literary competition in an exceedingly highbrow weekly, a prize being awarded for a conversation between a modern interviewer and St. George. And I was struck by the fact that clever, and even brilliant, contributors missed much of the point, even about the modern interviewer, by missing the point about the ancient saint. I am not setting up as an authority on either. I am not pretending to be learned; nor is there here any question of learning. It is a question of quite superficial information, but of information that is fairly well spread over the whole surface. I have not been right slap-bang through *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* lately, any more than had Mr. Silas Wegg; I have not read every word of the *Acta Sanctorum* within the last week or so; I have not even read very closely the relatively modern romance of The Seven Champions of Christendom. I have nothing but general information; but it is fairly general. What surprises me in people younger, brighter, and more progressively educated than myself is that their general information is very patchy.

Now, it is unfair to say that they know nothing about St. George, because it may fairly be answered that there is nothing to be known about St. George. In one sense, nobody knows who St. George was; we only know who he was not. The only clear and solid fact about him is that he certainly was *not* what Gibbon said he was; the contractor of Cappadocia. He was merely recorded as a common soldier of the legions martyred with multitudes under Diocletian; nor is there any particular reason to doubt that he was. All the rest is legend, though legend is often very valuable to history. And I mean by general information the sense of the life in legends; how they grow; where they come from; why they remain. I know what saints were supposed to be; what patron saints were supposed to do; how they often did it for the most diverse groups ages after their death; how other saints besides George dealt with dragons; how other nations besides England invoked St. George; how the saints were before the knights; how the knights were before the nations; and so on. In short, I have picked up quite crudely what Mr. Wells calls an Outline of History; but a more scientifically educated generation still seems to have only snippets of history: the lie out of Gibbon; the legend about the dragon; the phrase "St. George for Merry England," and such isolated items. The result is a curious sort of narrowness, even about the problem of the present or the immediate past. For instance, one quite intelligent contributor apparently identified "St. George" as somebody supposed to have lived in "Merry England," and explained that his period (whatever it was supposed to be) was not really merry, because there was a great deal of mud in the streets, or people lived in mud hovels. Apart from everything else, I call it narrow for a man to suppose that Mud is the opposite of Merriment. Did he never make any mud-pies? Was he not much merrier making them than contributing to intellectual weeklies?

But the essential point is this. Everybody thought the joke must be found in showing how unlike St. George's time was to ours. I think it would be a much better joke to show how extremely like St. George's time was to ours. But the writers are hampered in this by being extremely vague about what was St. George's time. Now, a man in the later Roman Empire, like George the Martyr, would have seen all round him an ancient world that was astonishingly like the modern world. Whether or no Merry England was a suitable phrase for mediævalism, whether or no mediævalism was all mud, it is quite certain that the Empire of Diocletian was not all mud. Imperial Rome was not all mud, but all marble, all mortar and massive building, all pipes and tanks and engineering, all sorts of elaborate equipments of luxury or hygiene. And among all those palatial baths and towering aqueducts, George would probably be thinking pretty much what many an intelligent man is thinking now — that man does not live by soap alone; and that hygiene, or even health, is not much good unless you can take a healthy view of it — or, better still, feel a healthy indifference to it.

Suppose, for instance, that the soldier George had read some of the satires on fashionable society that were produced in that old Pagan world. He would find fact after fact and fashion after fashion exactly parallel to our own. He would find Juvenal making fun of fashionable ladies who join in masculine sports or adventures in a spirit of self-advertisement. The Roman satirist describes how grand Roman ladies would appear as gladiators in the arena, sacrificing not only modesty, but the manners of their rank, in order to be in the limelight. That exact fashionable blend of Feminism and Publicity did really exist in the real epoch of the real St. George: almost exactly as it exists today. Or suppose the Roman soldier read the religious and philosophical literature circulating through the Roman Empire. He would find all that we call New Religions now already called New Religions then. He would find idealists who were Vegetarians, like Apollonius of Tyana; theosophists who had learned all about Reincarnation from Brahmins and Hindu seers; prophets of the Simple Life in the drawing-rooms of duchesses, talking about the secrets of health, wealth, and wisdom; promises of a new Universal Religion, which should include all beliefs without any particular belief in any of them. If the real original St. George did find himself interviewed by a modern newspaper man, he would think that hardly anything in the newspaper was new. He would not think primarily that he had come into a strange world, far away from dragons and princesses and mediæval armour. He would think he had got back into the old bewildered and decaying world of the last phase of Paganism, loud with denials of religion and louder with the howlings of superstition. He would find everything in Juvenal — except Juvenal. He would find quite as many absurd lady gladiators — only not so many people calling them absurd. He would be quite at home, thinking himself back in the old Diocletian Empire — and he would prepare for death.

XXII

On Journalistic Philosophy

THERE appears at regular intervals in the Sunday Press, like the article on the Cuckoo or Christmas Shopping, an article on the supposed superstition of the Good Old Times, laboriously alleging that they were really Bad Old Times. This article appeared in due course, in a popular weekly, under the title of “What is Right with the World”; but, except for the title, the article was the same. The same examples, the same hackneyed historical details, the same comfortable moral in almost exactly the same words. There are several things that are rather curious about this well-known journalistic feature. One is that the article professes to be an answer to another article which does not exist. I have never in my life seen the first original offending statement, that the Good Old Times really were Good Old Times. I have never heard any rational human being talking about the Good Old Times. I have heard a great many rational and highly intellectual and instructed people talking about the advantages of certain particular institutions that existed at certain particular periods. Thus I have heard political economists of the first rank saying that the Apprenticeship System was the best training for trades and the world would be wise to return to it. Or I have heard historians of high authority say that it was easier to create international understanding and peace in the days when all the nations knew Latin ... and pronounced it in the same way. I have heard very modern experts wish there were more people back on the land, and regret that for a hundred years they had poured into the overcrowded towns. I have even listened to daring thinkers who thought our position was more financially regular before we went off the Gold Standard; who positively regretted the process of lowering wages in order to start businesses; who would have it that our big industries were better off when they lived on a profit and not on an overdraft, and who stuck to their old paradox that banking was safer when there were not so many banks going bust. In short, I have known many perverse persons who held that, in this or that particular respect, we were better off in this or that particular period. But this visionary man who walks about the streets in funereal garb, wailing aloud, and at large over the disappearance of some undefined and undated Good Old Days — I have never met him, I rather doubt whether anybody has ever met him; and I doubt still more whether it is necessary to reprint the same article so many hundreds of times in order to check his pestilential influence.

The second curious thing about the article is this: that, though it is always introduced in the very vaguest terms, it always does gravitate eventually in the direction of one particular period, and it is always practically the same period. It is always, I may add, the very worst period that could possibly be chosen, for any purpose of practical comparison. It is (as in the present example) the period of about a hundred and fifty years ago. It is a very bad selection, because that date does not mark any other or older system; it only marks the most crude and clumsy beginnings of our present or modern system. It is not like saying that there was another world, for better or worse, before Rousseau or before Luther or before Christ, in the ancient Pagan world. At the date chosen we already had machinery, but much cruder machinery; we already had big towns, but much more unfinished and disorderly big towns; we already had a complete dependence on commerce, but as yet on a much more cut-throat competitive commerce. It is naturally not difficult to show that we are better than our great-grandfathers, when we are doing in a finished way what they were also doing, but in an unfinished way. The only question is whether, in another sense, we are not something that they most certainly were not: and that is, finished.

Everyone knows the list of examples. Our fathers hanged men for petty thefts, whereas we only exalt and ennoble men or put them in the House of Lords for really large and impressive thefts. But I am not troubled here by such questions, but only by the sameness and the lack of any lively curiosity about questions on the other side. Thus it begins with drunkenness; how typical of that type of moralist to begin with drunkenness ... as if nothing else could be quite so immoral! “In those days there was undoubtedly more drunkenness.” I wonder. There was certainly more drunkenness among those who could stand it best; strong men who rode hard in country air and drank before they slept. Was there more drunkenness among schoolgirls than there is in America, or more drunkenness among Society girls than there now is in Mayfair? I wonder. But I wonder, most of all, why this sort of questioner is always content with his one fixed question. Suppose I were to ask him a question. Does he think there was a bigger trade in cocaine and drugs before the Battle of Waterloo than there is now?

After mentioning the one really dreadful thing, which is drunkenness, the writer goes on more vaguely about brutality and ignorance and injustice and the rest. It is difficult to test these things, because there are different moral standards in different people and different periods. For instance, I think it is just that every man should be a free owner of primary property, like land and tools. I therefore think a just commonwealth will have a multitude of peasant proprietors and small shopkeepers. The writer must know, if he knows anything, that these small men were steadily disappearing — or rather, being destroyed — all through what he considers the great period of progress. I do not say there were not other things in which our forefathers were unjust. I only wonder, by this time somewhat wearily, why the story of the Yeoman never even occurs to the writers of the perennial article.

Then the writer gives an astonishing example. “The press-gang was still a favourite method of recruiting members for His Majesty’s Army or Navy.” The press-gang was a black blot on Britain; a thoroughly mean piece of brutality; but why? Because until then it was universally held that English fighters were all volunteers and enlisted freely. The press-gang was a piece of illegal and treacherous Conscription, used by men who were ashamed to use legal and universal Conscription. But the men of the modern world are not ashamed to use legal and universal Conscription. All the enlightened modern States used it in the last war, and they will use it more in the next war. It is a specially and particularly modern thing. In short, a gigantic Press-Gang, crimping and crushing not somebody but everybody, is one of the most towering and typical creations of the last hundred and fifty years.

That is what I complain of in this sort of regular journalistic philosophy. Not that it criticizes conditions a hundred years ago, when there were, heaven knows, plenty of things to criticize. But that it is intellectually incapable of criticizing conditions now, when there are new and different things to criticize. Nobody can take in the scale of the modern changes, let alone feel free enough of them to note what is sinister or dubious about them. For instance, nobody has yet measured the meaning of State education, with its practical elimination of the parent; at least of the poor parent. In a real study of modern and relatively recent things it would be necessary to go into these questions. But if somebody merely says that my grandfather used candles and I use electric light, I am content to answer that when I was in the most modern American hotels, it was the very latest fashion to lower all the electric lights till they gave rather less light than a candle.

XXIII

On Industrialism

IT grows plainer, every day, that those of us who cling to crumbling creeds and dogmas, and defend the dying traditions of the Dark Ages, will soon be left alone defending the most obviously decaying of all those ancient dogmas: the idea called Democracy. It has taken not quite a lifetime, roughly my own lifetime, to bring it from the top of its success, or alleged success, to the bottom of its failure, or reputed failure. By the end of the nineteenth century, millions of men were accepting democracy without knowing why. By the end of the twentieth century, it looks as if millions of people will be rejecting democracy, also without knowing why. In such a straight, strictly logical and unwavering line does the Mind of Man advance along the great Path of Progress.

Anyhow, at the moment, democracy is not only being abused, but being very unfairly abused. Men are blaming universal suffrage, merely because they are not enlightened enough to blame original sin. There is one simple test for deciding whether popular political evils are due to original sin. And that is to do what none or very few of these modern malcontents are doing; to state any sort of moral claim for any other sort of political system. The essence of democracy is very simple and, as Jefferson said, self-evident. If ten men are wrecked together on a desert island, the community consists of those ten men, their welfare is the social object, and normally their will is the social law. If they have not a natural claim to rule themselves, which of them has a natural claim to rule the rest? To say that the cleverest or boldest will rule is to beg the moral question. If his talents are used for the community, in planning voyages or distilling water, then he is the servant of the community; which is, in that sense, his sovereign. If his talents are used against the community, by stealing rum or poisoning water, why should the community submit to him? and is it in the least likely that it will? In such a simple case as that, everybody can see the popular basis of the thing, and the advantage of government by consent. The trouble with democracy is that it has never, in modern times, had to do with such a simple case as that. In other words, the trouble with democracy is not democracy. It is certain artificial anti-democratic things that have, in fact, thrust themselves into the modern world to thwart and destroy democracy.

Modernity is not democracy; machinery is not democracy; the surrender of everything to trade and commerce is not democracy. Capitalism is not democracy; and is admittedly, by trend and savour, rather against democracy. Plutocracy by definition is not democracy. But all these modern things forced themselves into the world at about the time, or shortly after the time, when great idealists like Rousseau and Jefferson happened to have been thinking about the democratic ideal of democracy. It is tenable that the ideal was too idealistic to succeed. It is not tenable that the ideal that failed was the same as the realities that did succeed. It is one thing to say that a fool went into a jungle and was devoured by wild beasts; it is quite another to say that he himself survives as the one and only wild beast. Democracy has had everything against it in practice, and that very fact may be something against it in theory. It may be argued that it has human life against it. But, at any rate, it is quite certain that it has modern life against it. The industrial and scientific world of the last hundred years has been much *more* unsuitable a setting for the experiment of self-government than would have been found in old conditions of agrarian or even nomadic life. Feudal manorial life was not a democracy; but it could have been much more easily turned into a democracy. Later peasant life, as in France or Switzerland, actually has been quite easily turned into a democracy. But it is horribly hard to turn what is called modern industrial democracy into a democracy.

That is why many men are now beginning to say that the democratic ideal is no longer in touch with the modern spirit. I strongly agree; and I naturally prefer the democratic ideal, which is at least an ideal, and therefore, an idea, to the modern spirit, which is simply modern and, therefore, already becoming ancient. I notice that the cranks, whom it would be more polite to call the idealists, are already hastening to shed this ideal. A well-known Pacifist, with whom I argued in Radical papers in my Radical days, and who then passed as a pattern Republican of the New Republic, went out of his way the other day to say, “The voice of the people is commonly the voice of Satan.” The truth is that these Liberals never did really believe in popular government, any more than in anything else that was popular, such as public-houses or the Dublin Sweepstake. They did not believe in the democracy they invoked against kings and priests. But I did believe in it; and I do believe in it, though I much preferred to invoke it against prigs and faddists. I still believe it would be the most human sort of government, if it could be once more attempted in a more human time.

Unfortunately, humanitarianism has been the mark of an inhuman time. And by inhumanity, I do not mean merely cruelty; I mean the condition in which even cruelty ceases to be human. I mean the condition in which the rich man, instead of hanging six or seven of his enemies because he hates them, merely beggars and starves to death six or seven thousand people whom he does not hate, and has never seen, because they live at the other side of the world. I mean the condition in which the courtier or pander of the rich man, instead of excitedly mixing a rare, original poison for the Borgias, or carving an exquisite ornamental poignard for the political purposes of the Medici, works monotonously in a factory turning out a small type of screw, which will fit into a plate he will never see; to form part of a gun he will never see; to be used in a battle he will never see, and about the merits of which he knows far less than the Renaissance rascal knew about the purposes of the poison and the dagger. In short, what is the matter with industrialism is indirection; the fact that nothing is straightforward; that all its ways are crooked even when they are meant to be straight. Into this most indirect of all systems we tried to fit the most direct of all ideas. Democracy, an ideal which is simple to excess, was vainly applied to a society which was complex to the point of craziness. It is not so very surprising that such a vision has faded in such an environment. Personally, I like the vision; but it takes all sorts to make a world, and there actually are human beings, walking about quite calmly in the daylight, who appear to like the environment.

XXIV

On Mr. Thomas Gray

A NEWSPAPER appeared with the news, which it seemed to regard as exciting and even alarming news, that Gray did not write the “Elegy in a Country Churchyard” in the churchyard of Stoke Poges, but in some other country churchyard of the same sort in the same country. What effect the news will have on the particular type of American tourist who has chipped pieces off trees and tombstones, when he finds that the chips come from the wrong trees, or the wrong tombstones, I do not feel impelled to inquire. Nor, indeed, do I know whether the new theory is proved or not. Nor do I care whether the new theory is proved or not. What is most certainly proved, if it needed any proving, is the complete lack of imagination, in many journalists and archæologists, about how any poet writes any poem.

In such a controversy it is implied, generally on both sides, that what happens is something like this. The poet comes and sits on a tombstone, or wherever he was supposed to sit, in the one and only churchyard of Stoke Poges, or whatever place be the rival of Stoke Poges. He hears the Curfew; and there is a dreadful doubt and dispute about whether anybody sitting among the tombs of Stoke Poges can hear the Curfew, which does really ring from Windsor, though I imagine it sounds pretty much like any other bell at evening. Then the poet produces a portable pen and ink, preferably a large quill and a scroll (the poet in question lived before the time of fountain-pens), and writes down the first line: “The curfew tolls the knell of parting day.” Then he looks round to make quite sure that there are some lowing herds winding over that particular lea, that the ploughman is present and doing his duty in plodding homeward his weary way, and that all the other fittings are in the offing. Later, he will have to insist peremptorily on an ivy-mantled tower being in the immediate neighbourhood, inhabited by an (if possible) moping owl. It will not be the only owl involved in the business. If there are not all these correct conditions provided on the spot, he will not be able to write the Elegy. If, on the other hand, they are all there and everything has been properly provided, he will then write the whole of the Elegy, steadily, right through, and not roll up his scroll or rise from his tombstone until he has left the unfortunate young man in the poem finally safe in the bosom of his Father and his God. Then he will go home to tea; and I should imagine he would need it, after so prolonged and sustained a literary effort achieved in such damp and clammy conditions. That, with very little exaggeration, is what is really suggested by those who talk about Gray writing the poem in this place or that place, and under this or that condition of local colour.

Now, I should have thought that anybody would know that poetry is not written like that. But perhaps, in this case, even a bad poet is better than a good critic. Anybody who has ever written any verse, good, bad, or indifferent, will know that calculations of this sort are calculations about the incalculable. Gray might have written the poem, or any part of the poem, in any place on the map; he might have visited the New Stoke Poges or the Old Stoke Poges, or quite probably both, or possibly neither. But, if I may be allowed to pick out one thread of speculation from a thousand threads of possibility, I would suggest that the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," even if it did refer to one particular churchyard, is very likely to have been begun, continued, and ended rather like this:

Mr. Thomas Gray was sitting one evening in a coffee-house; let us hope a coffee-house that did not confine itself to coffee. Something or other, a fiddle or a few glasses of wine, or a good dinner, had thrown him into a mood of musing, of pleasant musing, though touched with a manly and generous melancholy. His thoughts turned round and round, as they do at such times, the tantalizing old riddle of what we really feel about life and death; about the toy God gave us which is beautiful and brittle, yet certainly not trivial. He said to himself: "After all, who doesn't really feel that it really matters, with all its botherations? ... A queer business ... pleasing ... anxious. ..." Then something stirred quicker within him, and he said to himself, in warm poetic emotion —

For who tytumpty tumpty tumpty turn, This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned.

Then his impulse gathered speed and power; and he struck the table and said the next line straight off —

Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day.

He said that line several times. He liked it very much. Then it was almost a matter of form, certainly a matter of facility, to put the tail on the verse —

Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind.

Then he got up and put on his hat. He left the warm precincts of the cheerful coffee-house, and went home and forgot all about it.

Some time afterwards, perhaps quite a long time afterwards, he was walking in the countryside at dusk. It is quite possible that he was walking in Stoke Poges, or through Stoke Poges, or through any number of other places in the neighbourhood. Perhaps he did hear the Curfew, or what he thought was the Curfew, or what he pretended was the Curfew. He made up another verse or two about the twilight landscape, full of the same spirit of stoical thankfulness and genial resignation. Then he noticed, with great joy, that they would work into the same metre as the lines he had made up in the coffee-house. They were very much in the same mood. But he did not write many of the verses in the churchyard. Possibly he did not write any of the verses in the churchyard. It is more likely that the third act has for its scene Mr. Gray's private study, lined with the classics in old leather bindings, and adorned with the celebrated cat and the bowl of goldfish. There he jotted down disjointed verses, and began to put them together; until it looked as if they might some day make a poem. But, subject to any information that may exist on the subject, it would not in the ordinary way surprise me to learn that it was a devil of a long time before they did make a poem. It is most likely, in the abstract, that he got sick of it half-way through, and chucked it away, and found it again years afterwards. It is extremely likely that there was another very long interval, when he was just finishing it, but could not finish finishing it. Many a man writing such a poem has held it up for a year for want of one verse. Nor would the newspaper assist him, in such a difficulty, by pointing out that there was another churchyard much more suitable than that of Stoke Poges.

Now, it is possible — nay, it is probable — that there is not one word of truth in this particular description of the proceedings of Mr. Gray. I have not read any of the literary and biographical records of Mr. Gray, at least for a long time; and there are plenty of records to read. It is quite likely that there are details of his daily life that destroy altogether the details I have here suggested. It is even possible that, by some amazing eccentricity, he did write the whole thing in a churchyard; or, by some unscrupulous exaggeration, pretended that he had done so. But my story is a great deal nearer to the normal story of the production of a poem than any story that supposes particular places and conditions to be *necessary* to the poem. Even if Gray did write with all the stage properties stuck up around him, the lowing cow, the plodding ploughman, the moping owl, they were not the materials of the poem; and he would probably have written pretty much the same sort of poem without them. All this business of clues and tests is not criticism. It is a very good thing that people are applying literature to detective stories and detectives. But it is not a good thing to apply detectives to literature. Gray's unmistakable foot-mark or favourite tobacco-ash may be found in Stoke Poges or anywhere else. But it is not in those ashes that there lived his wonted fires.

The real relation of Gray's great poem to the present stage of our history will probably not be understood until a later stage. Yet the poem is a monument, a trophy, and, at the same time, a beacon or signal, standing up as solid and significant as the monument stands up in the Stoke Poges fields. Many poems have been written since, and grown more fashionable, if not more famous, which have not the particular meaning for the modern world stored up in this very storied urn. For Gray wrote at the very beginning of a certain literary epoch of which we, perhaps, stand at the very end. He represented that softening of the Classic which slowly turned it into the Romantic. We represent that ultimate hardening of the Romantic which has turned it into the Realistic. Both changes have, of course, been criticized in their time by the more conservative critics. Dr. Johnson said, probably with a partly humorous impatience, that Gray had only proved that he "could be dull in a new way." And most of us will agree that the modern realistic writers, who have in their turn replaced the romantic writers, have indubitably discovered a marvellous and amazing number of new ways of being dull.

But the change, as it hung uncompleted in Gray, strangely resembled the twilight changes of that landscape which the poem describes. Indeed, the whole episode has a curious, almost uncanny, harmony that even includes coincidence. Concerned as he was with a fine shade of twilight, it is even odd that his name was Gray. The whole legend is like that of something colourless and classical fading into mere shadow. For something was, indeed, fading before the eyes of Thomas Gray, the poet, and it was something that he did not wish to see fade. It may be noted that the first impression, especially in the first verses, is one of things moving away from the poet and leaving him alone. We see only the back of the ploughman, so to speak, as he plods away into the darkness; the herds of cattle have the perspective of vanishing things; for a whole world was indeed passing out of the sight and reach of that learned and sensitive and secluded gentleman, who represented the culture of eighteenth-century England, and could only watch a twilight transformation which he could not understand. For when the ploughman comes back out of that twilight, he will come back different. He will be either a scientific works-manager or an entirely new kind of agrarian citizen great as in the first days of Rome; a free peasant or a servant of alien machinery; but never the same again.

I am not very fond of committees and societies of specialists or amateurs who sit upon this or that sort of problem; but in the particular problem of the preservation of the rural and cultural traditions of our own countryside, I cannot see at the moment that any other machinery is possible. And it seems to me that the Penn-Gray Society is a good example of a machine suited to its work and doing work that is wanted. The trouble is that the typical cultured Englishman, like Gray or the traditional admirer of Gray, was generally a certain kind of gentleman, of the sort that had some kind of country seat. Since then, to continue the figure, the gentleman with the country seat has rather fallen between two stools. He is no longer so rich and powerful as a landlord. He generally has not become rich and powerful as a local politician. There were any number of men, of course, who appreciated the country without owning a country seat. But if they were not the sort of men to own a country seat, still less were they the sort of men to stand for a county council. And, as the old organization of England went, the organization that has been gradually dying since the days of Gray, men of this artistic sort were mostly attached in some more or less indirect way to the gentry. That is the point; that, for good or ill, it was the system peculiar to a gentry. It was never, for instance, the system peculiar to a peasantry. When there is anything like a peasantry, even as there is in Scotland, it was possible to produce a peasant poet like Burns. And the memory of a peasant like Burns would be preserved by other peasants, even if there were nobody else to preserve it. But nobody could expect the agricultural labourers to preserve the memory of a scholar like Gray. It is amusing to remember that Burns put a verse from the Elegy as a motto to his own homely and pungent picture of peasant life; as some have thought, consciously stressing the contrast between his own realism and the scholar's classicism:

Let not ambition mock their useful toil, Their humble joys, and destiny obscure; Nor grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile, The short and simple annals of the poor.

Indeed, I rather fancy that, in citing those rather patronizing lines, it was the poor poet who had the disdainful smile.

But we must take the rough with the smooth in that noble aristocratic story that has made South England like a garden among the nations. And with it weakened the only organization for protecting the art and antiquities of rural life. Gray could not be a popular poet like Burns; at least, not in that sort of rural life. Perhaps there is a hint of it in his own phrase; that the Village Milton would have remained mute and inglorious. Perhaps he deliberately did not finish the tale of the Village Hampden, who was possibly a poacher, but could not possibly be a peasant. Anyhow, the old organization of culture has weakened; and the new organization of local politics is not an organization of culture. There can be a culture of peasants, but not a culture of petty politicians. In this dilemma there is nothing to be done except to work through groups of sympathetic individuals, students or artists or lovers of landscape, who take the trouble to support each other in defending the tradition of the national history and poetry. Otherwise the whole country will be swept bare for the sort of motorist to whom every object is an obstacle to rushing from nowhere to nowhere. Roads will not be roads, for there will be no places for them to go to; there will be only those ominously called arterial, and resembling, indeed, those open and spouting arteries that are an inevitable sign of death. I should say the ultimate moral is that we ought to have made up our minds between real aristocracy and real democracy, and should have either preserved a gentry or created a peasantry. But the immediate moral is that we must preserve what we can of all that reminds us that rural life was a civilization and not a savagery, and especially support such groups as the society here in question, which is defending the great tradition of Gray.

XXV

On Evolutionary Educators

WITH the high priests of Mumbo-Jumbo I am on friendly terms; with the worshippers of the Green Monkey and the Seven-headed Snake I can chat cheerfully if we meet by chance in society; with the Blood-drinkers of Baphomet I have tactfully agreed to differ; with the Howling Dervishes of the Red Desert I see the road open to reunion; from those who offer their babies to the Most Ancient Crocodile I differ only in opinion; of those who consider it a sign of divine favour that their mother's head is bitten off by a Bengal tiger, I am willing to believe that they are better than their creed; to those who believe the sea to be the green blood of a great giant whose anæmic visage is exhibited in the moon, I am ready to concede that we may be looking at two different aspects of truth; in those who sincerely hope to gratify the god of their fathers by eating nothing but live scorpions, I respectfully salute a counsel of perfection which I am not myself called upon to follow; in those who paint themselves scarlet all over and dance before the Nine-headed Elephant, I recognize a ritualistic practice which franker and fuller discussion might well commend even to less advanced schools of thought in the Universal Church; of Thugs I think hopefully; of Bashi-Bazouks I hear the most reassuring news; and to Christian Scientists I extend Christian charity. But there is one way of writing about such things and such people which seems to me to suggest something utterly subhuman and much less than half-witted; something so stunted that we can hardly recognize it as the stature of manhood; something so stupid that we can hardly call it the mind of man; something so flat and unlifting that it might possibly be the mind of one of those flat, pale fishes that lie on the floor of the deep dark sea and live only in two dimensions. And this mentality is the mentality of a large number of people who write educational works on evolutionary history, and are so grossly benighted that they really believe themselves to be enlightened.

For the depths of a superstition, even the depths of a degradation, are at least depths. They do not shout with shallow conceit at finding nothing but shallows. There is something in the grossest idolatry or the craziest mythology that has a quality of groping and adumbration. There is more in life than we understand; some have told us that if we ate a scorpion or worshipped a green monkey we might understand it better. But the evolutionary educator, having never since his birth been in anything but the dark, naturally believes that he is in the daylight. His very notion of daylight is something which is so blank as to be merely blind. There are no depths in it, either of light or darkness. There a no dimensions in it; not only no fourth, but no third no second, and hardly a first; certainly no dimension in which the mind can move. Therefore the mind remains fixed, in a posture that is called progressive. It never looks back, even for remembrance; it never looks the other way, even for experiment; it never looks at the other side, even for a paradox; it never winks the other eye. It simply knows all there is; and there does not seem to be much to know. I have recently been looking through a specimen of this sort of scientific summary of the story of man; and I am relieving my feelings.

Those writers sometimes say they are agnostic about God. Would to God they would consent to be agnostic about Man! Would they would leave the love of beauty or mystery as mysterious as they really are. Every child is born facing some open questions. He finds them open just as he finds his ears or his lungs or his nostrils open; and he knows by instinct that through these open questions he draws in the air and life of the universe. Why dreams are different from daylight, why dead things are different from live things, why he himself is different from others, why beauty makes us restless and even love is a spring of quarrels, why we cannot so fit into our environment as to forget it and ourselves; all these things are felt vaguely by children on long, empty afternoons; or by primitive poets writing the epics and legends of the morning of the world. And all legends, however barbaric, are filled with the wind of all this wider questioning. They all refer back to these ancient unfathomable wells which go down deeper than the reason into the very roots of the world, but contain the springs that refresh the reason and keep it active for ever. The object of the rationalist historian is to choke up those wells. He puts in a sort of plug, like a stupid plumber, to stop the flowing of the fountain of youth. The plug is generally a word; a stupid word used as a stopper upon thought. It does not solve the mystery; it only stupefies or paralyses the power to realize that it is a mystery. When a boy wants to walk about, he knows it is mixed up with feelings he has not fathomed and a song called “Over the Hills and Far Away.” When a poet walks about, he realizes something strange in the fact that he can walk about, and that a tree or a mountain cannot walk about. But the object of the pseudo-scientist is to utter a sort of formula of enchantment which will chill and freeze these wanderers for ever. If their bodies still move about, at least their minds will never move again. He utters the magic words “Man has evolved powers of locomotion”; and man loses them on the spot. Those who were previously walking about remain stuck like statues in the garden of the wizard.

To take one case: the book I read repeated for the millionth time that modesty must be meaningless because the amount of clothing varies among various races. As if any theologian or moralist of standing ever said that the divine plan of the universe dictated a particular length of skirt! All they dictated was decent acquiescence in whatever was regarded as a reasonably unobtrusive length of skirt. But the writer did not think much of modesty as a reason for clothing; it was mentioned in Genesis and therefore could not be true. Now it is quite true that ornament is a very early element in this mysterious human behaviour; though the ornament often refers to taboos about sex. But this writer could not be content to say that dress began with ornament. He must insist on saying that dress began with ostentation. That is to say, he was bound to begin with a word that belittles and depreciates; even when it is inapplicable. A whole tribe could not wear the same clothes out of ostentation; and in our modern tribe it is commoner to wear no clothes with that object. Besides, ornament began with all sorts of things other than clothes; pottery and walls and weapons and so on. And if the writer supposes that one superior baboon could say to another slightly inferior baboon, “Paint or weave me an ornament that coils like the whirlpool or dances like the waves, that catches the stars in a net or branches into suns like a rose-tree into roses; because I am feeling ostentatious this morning,” and that the common workman would then carry out the task — why then the writer considerably underrates the subtlety even of the most primitive and prehistoric art. But he must have a word that shrivels and cheapens something; so he calls the whole mystery of the human thirst for beauty “ostentation.” But anybody, who has read many books of this swaggering scientific sort, knows that there can be a good deal of ostentation with no beauty at all.

XXVI

On the Contiguous Past

ALMOST immediately after the end of the Great War a German wrote a highly successful or widely boomed book called The Decline of the West. The most human inference (in the opinion of many) was that the German, having assisted at the spectacle of the Decline and Fall of the German Empire, naturally wanted all the rest of us to decline and fall with him. He felt it would be obviously a breach of taste and tact for any nation to flourish if Germany had declined; if, indeed, he was even aware of the existence of such fringes of his Empire as France or Flanders or England. Anyhow, he applied his doctrine to all that is most active in our civilization, whether we are so constituted as to call it the Indo-Germanic race or prefer to call it Christendom. But there was more in this theory of his about a general collapse; which was also a theory of a recurrent collapse. In this, indeed, and in his general idea of a modern phase of decline, his view was quite reasonable and very persuasively stated. But there was bound up with it another set of ideas which are not necessarily any part of the theory, either that civilizations periodically weaken or that our civilization has weakened in our period. Those two theses may quite well be true; but the thesis of the book was false.

For me, at least, it was false because it was fatalist; false because it was unhistoric; and false because it involved a particular falsity about the very spirit of the great culture which the critic criticized. It is the whole point of that culture that it has been continuous; it was the whole point of the critic that it had been discontinuous and disconnected. He was not content to say that civilizations revolve in separate cycles, in the sense in which we might be said to belong to a different civilization from the Druids. He cut up ordinary European history into chunks, that were supposed to have no more to do with each other than Chinese history and Aztec history. He chopped ordinary Christian history in two in the middle, in order to deny that either part of it was Christian. So far as I remember, he attributed the first half of it entirely to the Moslem Arabs, because they were not Christians; and the second half of it to people of the type of Faust, because they were rather fishy sort of Christians, and German as well. And he talked about these divisions as if they were like the abysses that might separate a stratum full of primordial crystals from a stratum, æons afterwards, containing the first fantastic traces of marsupial life.

Now, I am quite certain, as a matter of mere common sense, that the history of Christendom, or even the history of Europe, was never so fragmentary as that. We are much more connected with the ancient Greeks than the German writer would allow us to be with the later mediævals, or even the earlier moderns. The sort of distinction he suggested only happens when a cycle of civilization really dies, and then fossilizes and remains as inscrutable as an ammonite. We have no idea what was the religion of the Cro-Magnans, though we infer from certain pictures of ritual dances (as well as from our own common sense) that they had one. We do not know the significance of the Cup and Ring Stones, though the fortunate and civilized of us still use rings, as in the case of wedding-rings, or cups even in the sense of wine-cups. We do not even know if we interpret the signs rightly, or whether they are signs at all. Now, the Greek gods have never died in that fashion; and the Roman Empire has never died at all. Of the most modern industrial cities in England, many have in their very names the title of the Roman Camp; and wherever there stood the Roman Camp, there stood afterwards the Christian Cathedral. There was never one moment, in the long history from Herodotus to Herr Spengler, when all the men who counted in any age did not talk of The Fall of Troy; there was never a generation when young poets did not make that old tale a topic for new poems. I wonder whether a poem by Heredia about Antony, or a poem by Morris about Arthur, belongs to the dead Greek period or the dead Arabic period? There was never a generation when poets did not invoke Virgil, if only to imitate him. There was never a generation in which philosophers did not refer to Aristotle, if only to contradict him. The thread of our cultural continuity has never been broken.

I think the fact worth recording at the moment for two reasons. The first is that the same energetic German author has launched yet another book, of much less dignity and of much more dogmatism, reaffirming his theory, and especially the most gloomy and barbaric parts of it. The other is that there is a horrible possibility that what he says falsely about our past may be said truly about our present and our future. I mean that, hitherto, the men of our ancient tradition have done everything except forget. Whatever might be fanatical or ill-balanced about their religions or their revolutions, they have each, in turn, taken particular care to remember the deeds of their fathers. Even when they poisoned the purer Paganism of Homer and Pindar, they did not destroy it; they left it standing for ever against them as a reproach. Even when they dethroned the Greek gods they did not dismiss them; in the first just fury they denounced them as devils, but in the long run they let them remain as elves. They let them remain as fanciful and fabulous figures, for literary metaphor or plastic decoration, so that Christendom has left the nymph in poetry or the cupid in sculpture. It is true that now, for the first time, the race that has always remembered is invited on every side to forget.

Yes; it is true that today, for the first time, our newspapers and our new politicians have asked us to forget, not what happened a thousand years ago or a hundred years ago, but what happened twenty years ago. When it is a question of shifting a policy or rehabilitating a politician, they will ask us to forget what happened two years ago or two months ago. Here, indeed, we have the great Spengler System, of total separation of one historical episode from another. Here is the true trick of regarding ourselves as divided by æons and abysses, not only from our fathers, but from ourselves. Thus, by reading the daily paper every day, and forgetting everything that it said on the previous day, we can divide human history into self-contained cycles; each consisting, not of five hundred years, but of twenty-four hours. By this means we can regard the politician we trusted last week as we regard the cave-man whose carvings we could not decipher in a hundred years. By this means we can consider the slogans and swaggering policies which we ourselves cheered only recently, as if they were hieroglyphics as unintelligible as the Cup and Ring Stones. This new quality of forgetfulness, in our current culture, does give some justification to the pessimism of the German professor; and if we accept such oblivion, then doubtless our “cycle” will really curl up like a worm on the floor and lie still for ever.

XXVII

On the Merry Monarch

MR. ARTHUR BRYANT recently published, through Messrs. Longmans, a very thoughtful and interesting study of King Charles II. It was certainly a favourable portrait; but it was a portrait, and not an effigy or an idol or a whitewashed statue, any more than a caricature. There is room for difference of opinion about the proportions of the picture, but it was a picture of a real object. It has been the curse of our waxwork history that to each historical figure was attached some more or less legendary saying like a label, and even when the saying was partly true it always missed the point of the truth. The point, the peculiar truth, about Charles II always seems to me to be this — that he was an amazing coincidence. He was a prince born to inherit a crown; and he was an extremely able man and, on a lower level, a sort of genius. The label, or literary allusion, officially attached to Charles II is almost always that epigram by one of his intimates to the effect that he "never said a foolish thing and never did a wise one." But indeed it was the epigrammatist who said the foolish thing. It was, in reality, nearly the reverse of the truth. Charles II, being a man who had maintained fashionable light conversation down to his very deathbed, being, moreover, a man who must have made love to about forty women, must surely have gone to his grave having said a very large number of foolish things. But he had also done a very large number of wise things; and some things which a critic might well criticize as too wise, as having rather the wisdom of the serpent than the harmlessness of the dove. Indeed, I cannot recall at the moment that he ever did a thing that was unwise, though on some occasions he may have done a thing that was unworthy. Mr. Belloc, in his book on James II, has in some sense emphasized this aspect. He has in some sense set James II against Charles II; the former as the thoroughly sincere man who always has the appearance of being stupid and stubborn, the latter as the complex, compromising, and less heroic man who always seems to be tactful and reasonable. Mr. Arthur Bryant's version might almost be called a defence of Charles II against this implied comparison. He has no difficulty in showing that Charles was in a desperately difficult position, that the main fault lay with the fools, frauds, and bigots who pressed upon him; but I am not sure whether he entirely disposes of the appeal to the heroic made by Mr. Belloc, who wrote: “If he had resisted, he would have lost his Crown? He should have resisted and lost his Crown. For there are other things that a man may lose.”

But, whatever we may think of the man’s moral quality, I am still surprised that nobody has taken anything like adequate notice of his mental quality. None of the Stuarts was stupid, in the sense that the term might be applied to the first German Georges. Mary Queen of Scots was brilliant and accomplished; James I was a learned man; Charles I was a cultivated man; James II was a capable man, especially as an administrator of the Navy; and whatever be the truth about the rather dim and dismal figure of the First Pretender, it is obvious that Charles Edward of the ‘45 was a fighter and no fool. But it seems to me that Charles II stands out from the Stuarts in really having the sort of brain that might have brought him into prominence if he had not been a prince. Much of the mistake arises from the blind and blundering trick of talking as if that sort of man were merely a “wit,” and talking as if “wit” were only a sort of silly spangle or tinsel ornament that any fool could flaunt. In fact, there is much more wisdom in the old use of the word “wit” than in the new. In the old phrases about a man setting his wits to work, or having wit enough to do this or that, the word was really used as a synonym for mind. It does almost always stand for mind, but especially for presence of mind. Many, who quote the cheeky courtier’s carefully prepared couplet about never saying a foolish thing and never doing a wise one do not mention Charles’s much more piercing and quite impromptu reply to it, in that passage in which he is reported as answering: “I am an English King; and my words are my own, but my actions are my Ministers’.” The man who talked like that did not merely have wit, or what these people mean by wit; he had brains.

Now, if we read the detailed, dramatic, and thrilling account, in Mr. Bryant’s book, of Charles II’s long game of political Poker against the politicians of the Opposition, really brilliant men like Shaftesbury and Halifax, we shall be watching a pure battle of brains, in which his brains were certainly the best. He, began with no cards at all; at least, he never had anything but bad cards in the worst time of the battle; he had all the ablest men of the age holding all the cards of the game against him; and he beat them all. He weathered a Revolution; which is only not classed with the Glorious Revolution or the American Revolution because he weathered it. And James II and George III did not. And he achieved a Restoration; not as a young prince coming back by the chance of birth or the choice of Parliament, but as an old, weary, and entirely lonely politician, in spite of Parliament, and by sheer unflagging intelligence. For the Restoration did not happen at the beginning of Charles's reign, but at the end.

It would be difficult to decide here on the merits of his cause, on which men will differ according to their religious and political partialities. It is well to note, however, that here again most people who discuss the politics miss the point. Thus they often read into the factions and fanaticisms of the period a modern democratic ideal that did not then exist either in the Whigs or in the King, but, if anything, rather more in the King than in the Whigs. When, for instance, Charles said that he thought his people would rather have one King than five hundred Kings, it is often taken, even by those who agree with it, as the usual Tory taunt at the formless tyranny of a mob. Certainly Charles, or any Tory of the period, might quite probably have uttered a taunt against the tyranny of the mob. But, in fact, in this case he meant much more exactly what he said, and what he said was perfectly correct. The Parliament was not the people, not even in the rather mechanical and clumsy way in which it is now supposed to be the people. It was based on a narrow suffrage, was honey-combed with nepotism, and mostly nominated by nobles and squires. But the case was much stronger than that. It was, in its whole attitude and action, a privileged class; a ruling class; a thing like a house of Peers and Princes. It really was, as Charles said, a House of Five Hundred Kings. It had a special Parliamentary privilege, just as he had a special Royal prerogative; and it is true to say that the King strove with the Kings. All this comes out very clearly in Mr. Bryant's narrative of the nightmare controversy of the Popish Plot. I am not going to deal here with the Popish Plot in its other aspects, least of all in its Popish aspect. My interest for the moment is not even moral, let alone religious. It is entirely intellectual, and concerned only with an intellectual admiration, in the real sense of astonishment, for that one melancholy humorist who lived through the whole of that Bedlam and remained at least the sanest of English Kings.

XXVIII

On Suicide: North and South

IN a recent discussion on Suicide, an interesting comparison was made between what is loosely called the Latin culture and what is still more loosely, and less consistently, called the Nordic or Teutonic or Germanic, according to the foreign policy at the moment. A learned writer pointed out, very truly, that for some reason or other Nordic men are more liable to kill themselves than are the men of the Mediterranean. The men of the Mediterranean are more likely to relieve their feelings by killing somebody else. And in this, I grieve to say, they have a certain half-involuntary support in my sympathies. I admit that murder must be classed among acts distinctly improper and, indeed, morally wrong. But suicide seems to me the supreme blasphemy against God and man and beast and vegetables; the attack not upon a life, but upon life itself; the murder of the universe. But that is another question, which I do not debate here. What interests me about the criticism of the two cultures is this. The critic who was sufficiently acute to notice that Latins are less prone than Teutons to this particular sort of depression and despair, naturally cast about for a cause or an explanation. And, being a modern critic, he was at once tempted to be a materialist. There is something strange in the modern mind, by which a material cause always seems more like a real cause. In the science of the nineteenth century, the material cause was generally found in physical heredity; that is to say, in Race. But Race has been rather blown upon lately; like most of the science of the nineteenth century. The critic whom I criticize took the other alternative materialistic cause; the same that has generally been favoured by Mr. Bernard Shaw. He said that most or much of the difference was due to Climate.

Now, I believe material causes count for much less in history than is now supposed. I believe that moral causes count for much more than is now supposed. I believe that the supreme factor is not even the bodily framework, or the framework of environment, but the frame of mind. I could ask for no better case, for my own argument, than this case of the suicides of all nations. It was raised on this occasion in connexion with the sad end of two famous financiers or capitalists; but that aspect need not concern us now; except, perhaps, upon one particular point. I should have thought that if there was one person to whom the argument about Climate does not apply, it is a modern millionaire. The most Nordic millionaire has no need to live in the North. An American plutocrat could live as easily in Florida as in Maine, or pay a permanent visit to Naples instead of to Niagara. The very fact that no amount of sunshine could make him sunny, is sufficient evidence that the dark cloud was within. This, however, is a personal and even painful matter, which is no part of my argument, and with which I had not intended to deal. The point is that the critic attributes the suicide statistics to a difference of climate; and I attribute them to a difference of culture.

And it strikes me that there is a very simple test. Compare the number of suicides when the Latin world was Pagan with the number of suicides after it became Christian. The same sun shone on Brutus falling on his sword; the same blue sea smiled on Cato stabbing himself to avoid capture; the same glittering landscape of the olive and the vine was the background to the ten thousand tragedies of self-inflicted death that end the stories of the heroes of Pagan antiquity. There is no doubt that the life of those flowery lands always led to a more florid external gaiety and grace. Cleopatra blazed with blossoms and gems, and smiles, but that did not prevent her from finding an asp among the flowers. But the same fact is obvious about people considerably more respectable than Cleopatra. Those who have seen any adequate reproduction of *Julius Cæsar* will have been reminded of that sublime but alien atmosphere of the Stoic and the Republican which the imagination of Shakspere, though captive in the courtly world of the Tudors, could manage to reconstruct from the ruins of Plutarch. These Pagans of the old Latin world committed suicide not because they were prone to it as a vice, but because they were proud of it as a virtue. To explain their view of it, it would be necessary to analyse the whole tendency of their heathen mythology and philosophy. They killed themselves partly because they had too much, as the modern world has too little, of the notion of personal dignity. They killed themselves partly because they had a vaguer or more negative notion about the future life. They killed themselves because of a sort of hard despair that lies in the heart even of the heroism of the Stoic. But, anyhow, they did not kill themselves because the sun was shining or the grapes growing in clusters on the vine. Whatever is the cause of the change, it is not to be found in the climate which has not changed.

No; the test of the contrast between modern Latins and modern Teutons is exactly like the test of the contrast between modern Latins and ancient Latins. It is to be found in a frame of mind. Ever since Christianity came into the world, the Latins have been in a fighting frame of mind. Indeed, they have been, and still are, engaged in a fight; a fight about whether Christianity shall continue or no; a fight that has its ups and downs, as in the Vatican City or the secularization of Spain. But there is something in the atmosphere of the affirmation itself, even for those who prefer the denial, which has made everybody too keen on killing the enemy to retire to their tents and kill themselves. In the whole Mediterranean civilization there is a *positive* spirit. Men are either confident that they can be content with this world, or else confident that they can be convinced about the other world. Both these certainties result in relative cheerfulness and a resolve to hang on for the duration of the war. Now, in the Germanies, and generally in the northern Continental countries, the whole mental atmosphere is different. It is an atmosphere of introspective melancholy and a sort of spiritual sulks. It is exactly described in a phrase used by Mr. Augustine Birrell about Hazlitt: in the midst of the mind a black pool of metaphysics. It is a world in which men are not so much fighting religion as wandering away from it, into wildernesses of subjective speculation. It is full of scepticism, but it is not without sentimentalism; and the combination produces pessimism. It is not surprising that the pessimism sometimes produces suicide. It is the world of isolated sages, not of anti-clerical mobs or clerical congregations. From the North come the Nietzsches and the Schopenhauers, and all who, in defiance of the old name of natural philosophy, insist on inventing an unnatural philosophy. That unnatural philosophy is a third thing, quite different from natural Paganism or supernatural Christianity. It is a mood, a somewhat morbid mood, but it is the result of certain ideas in the mind; and an Eskimo does not become a suicidal maniac because he lives in the north, nor a negro a Provençal troubadour because he has a place in the sun.

XXIX

On Modern “Paganism”

THERE is a section, perhaps a small section, of Modern Youth which certainly strikes its elders as hard and sceptical and selfish. And of these it is customary to say that they are Pagans. It suddenly flashed across me yesterday (as one of those obvious truths that evade us even when they are obvious) that of course what is really the matter with them is that they have lost their Paganism.

I do not say, as so many journalists say, that they have lost their Christianity. For it is the quite simple and sober truth that most of them never had any. It is not their fault, though every day that passes convinces me more and more that it is their misfortune. But the notion, so common in novels and newspapers, that this new generation has rebelled against old-fashioned orthodoxy is sheer stark historical ignorance. It is the worst of all kinds of historical ignorance; ignorance of the historical events we have seen ourselves. It is absurd to say that a young man of nineteen who mixes cocktails and Communism in a studio rag in Chelsea is rebelling against Victorian Virtue or the Family Bible. You might as well say that a young buck of the Regency who wrenched off door-knockers and fought with watchmen was rebelling against the Puritans of 1649 or the tyranny of Oliver Cromwell. You might as well say that the Cavaliers who revelled at The Cock in the reign of Charles II were rising in just revolt against the usurpation of Richard III. No very laborious historical learning will be needed to perceive that there is something wrong in the calculation somewhere, if only because it skips about four or five generations that come in between. So does the cant explanation about Youth breaking away from grim old religious dogmas skip several generations in between. The boys and girls who are painting the town piebald today are not the children of the old Puritan bankers with their Family Prayers or the old Protestant parsons with their Family Bibles. They are the children of fathers and mothers who themselves grew up on Bernard Shaw and felt like infants in the presence of Thomas Hardy. The Young today are themselves the children of a whole generation of sceptics and agnostics; fathers and mothers themselves still relatively young, and themselves brought up to all such talk. All the talk about free thought and free love; all about Tess and Truth; all about Candida and Candour. Even the grandfathers and grandmothers of the children now just beginning to play the goat were mostly of a generation that conceived itself as liberal and progressive; like the old Radical who argues with Tanner in Man and Superman. Even his generation thought itself advanced; Tanner and the next generation thought itself more advanced. And we are dealing now with the children of Tanner; perhaps with the grandchildren of Tanner.

Of course, these young people do not know anything about historical Christianity; they are rather limited sort of people in a good many ways. They have heard only the latest jargon of their own generation; the last heresy that has rebelled against the last heresy but one. They are so innocent that some of them, especially the more intelligent, are actually beginning to get into touch with orthodoxy without even knowing it is orthodox. It can be seen in many casual journalistic allusions to the study of Thomism in Oxford or Paris. But it remains true that there is the other section; by no means the most intelligent, but certainly the most impudent. And of these it is true to say, as I have already said, that the whole story has moved a stage forward; or perhaps a stage back. There is no question at all of their losing Christianity. There is no question at present of their finding Christianity. But the reason why they all look as miserable as monkeys (and they do) is in this tragic and deplorable disaster: that they have all lost their Paganism.

Paganism may be compared to that diffused light that glows in a landscape when the sun is behind a cloud. So when the true centre of worship is for some reason invisible or vague, there has always remained for healthy humanity a sort of glow of gratitude or wonder or mystical fear, if it were only reflected from ordinary objects or natural forces or fundamental human traditions. It was the glory of the great Pagans, in the great days of Paganism, that natural things had a sort of projected halo of the supernatural. And he who poured wine upon the altar, or scattered dust upon the grave, never doubted that he dealt in some way with something divine; however vague or fanciful or even sceptical he might be about the names and natures of the divinities. Wine was more than wine; it was a god. Corn was more than corn; it was a goddess. There is much doubt and dispute about how literally they understood these statements; but they certainly understood the first half of the sentence as meaning exactly what it said. They were not satisfied with realism, because they never quite lost the sense of something more real than realism. They were not content to call a spade a spade, because it was almost always a sacred spade; not only when it dug the graves of the dead, but even when it dug the garden to grow fruit for the living. They were not content with the dead certainty that eggs are eggs, because they were full of divine uncertainty about the birds, which were their signals and auguries. And this natural magic in things, mixed and modified with things greater and things less, has descended through the civilized centuries to men of every sort; not only to the mass of men who are traditionalists, but generally also to the few men who are revolutionists. Men like Shelley or Heine might get rid of religion, but they would not get rid of this great glamour of natural things, which seemed to make them preternatural. That legend still lingers from Shelley to Swinburne, from Heine to Wilde, and after that something begins to go wrong with it. It is what has gone wrong with a whole section of the rising generation.

They are not the first generation of rebels to be Pagans. They are the first generation of rebels not to be Pagans. The young fool, the flower of all our cultural evolution, the heir of all the ages, and the precious trust we have to pass on to posterity — the young fool can no longer be trusted to be a Pantheist, let alone a good hearty Pagan. He does not realize in the least that Bacchus has mixed his cocktail, and Pomona dropped the cherry into it. He is under the strange delusion that eggs are eggs and that spades are only spades. He entertains a perfectly extraordinary idea that wine is wine and that women are just women. He is cut off from all the secret secondary meanings and messages of things; the truths that come to the sensitive in silence; the atmosphere around every object, that is almost visible like a halo. He has lost the traditions of humanity, and rather especially the traditions of heathenry. I suppose it would not do to send out missionaries to convert him to Paganism. But he is a much more stupid and stunted and limited person since he left off being a Pagan.

XXX

On Brevity and Wit

SOMEBODY once said that brevity is the soul of wit, when he obviously meant to say that wit is the soul of brevity. It is obvious that the brevity is only the body, and the wit the spirit. And mere brevity, as in the statement “Cats eat rats,” when left to itself, seems still to await some awakening visit of the divine fire. The proverb, however, like many other widely quoted maxims, is really as true as is consistent with meaning nearly the opposite of what it says. Economy of every kind has a great deal to do with effect of every kind. And it has often been more to the advantage of a man to say one good thing in one sentence than to say twenty good things in two thousand sentences. For the rest, the general statement of the principles of brevity would itself be brief. There would certainly be no need to discuss at length the rather obvious disadvantages of being lengthy. Most people would agree that even good writers can write too much, and that bad writers cannot write too little. Nevertheless, a particular problem has arisen in our own epoch, apart from the obvious practical complications that may arise in any epoch. Those who earn their living by writing, as I do, always write too much; on the other hand, there are writers at once more leisured and more laborious who write the same poem a hundred times, or even bring out three or four entirely different editions of the same book. Mr. George Moore has been an example of this paradox, and such writers may not unfairly be said to write at once too little and too much. But the practical problem I mean is more recent than the realism of Mr. George Moore. It is the question whether we more unduly increase the mass of literature by making it difficult to stop, or by making it easy to stop — and to begin again.

The mere forms of the older literature committed a man to carry on for a considerable time, like a man enlisting for the duration of the war. The modest youth who proposed to write an epic in twelve books may have felt epical, but hardly epigrammatical. The simple poet who produced a tragedy in five acts could not at the last moment turn the five-act tragedy into a three-act farce. But now that poetry, and literature in general, is free to appear in any form, it may naturally run to any length or stop at any point. This may lead to brevity in the poem, but it does not necessarily lead to brevity in the poet. Two hundred years ago, let us say, an English poet would sit down with the laudable intention of writing a long didactic poem on the correct cultivation of onions, or the most advisable construction of pig-sties; all set forth in beautiful rhymed decasyllabics, brightened by entirely original selections from the Georgics and decorated by many fine flights of mythological fancy, about Ceres spreading her maternal mantle over the first onion, or Circe standing amid her pig-sties of ivory and gold. Everybody knows that the very latest poetical style has gone to the other extreme, and is not only brief, but abrupt. It is sometimes almost tactless in its introduction of the onion into the drawing-room, or the pig into the parlour. The modern poet goes straight to the point, in some short and simple lyric that runs —

The hair of a hundred women chokes me   With a gluttonous smell of garlic ...

and there you are; a simple human emotion described in two spontaneous lines. Or he will write of the pig question —

The world wobbles sickeningly,   Like the old grey sow in the greasy morning light.

And if brevity is really the soul of wit, this must be much wittier than the long eighteenth-century poem with its classical analogies. But, considering the problem in a practical way, I should hesitate about whether the new method will be really more brief than the old. Supposing that it is our simple, manly, and public-spirited purpose to stop both the poets from producing such a vast amount of poetry, I have a notion that, in the long run, the new poet will outstrip even the old poet in giving the world whole libraries of poetry to burn. After all, when the eighteenth-century poet was producing his interminable Georgic about pigs or onions, it kept him busy; but it also kept him quiet. Quite a long and restful period would elapse before it would even be finished, let alone printed; there would be plenty of time for his friends to rest and recuperate and get up their strength to read it, or their moral strength to pretend to have read it. He did not rush about in the interval hurling isolated onions in the faces of individual strangers. He did not bring the great grey sow with him into society, like a lap-dog, or let loose wild herds of Gadarene swine in the public streets. But the modern poet’s assaults on his inoffensive fellow-creatures, being more brief and disjointed, can also be more numerous and continuous. If he is so much intoxicated by an onion, he may be similarly maddened by a turnip; and if pigs for him so easily take to themselves wings and fly, the sky they populate may soon be raining cats and dogs. I mean that this modern habit of taking a detached image, with or without the elucidation of its indwelling idea, is to supersede the old reasoned arrangement of themes and thoughts. There is nothing to be said against it, except that there seems to be no end to it. And the epic of the mythological origin of onions did at least, somehow and somewhere, come at last to an end.

Granted that the old formal folios of epic and tragedy were too formal, it sometimes looks nowadays as if there would be no books except note-books or sketch-books. The notes may be short, but the note-book may be fairly long. The sketches may be smaller, but the sketch-book may be larger. Above all, the very smallness of the sketches establishes a standard which makes them more facile and therefore more frequent. I was looking the other day through a large anthology, or collection, of the most modern and advanced American poems. Most of them consisted of short impressions, with one or two arbitrary details in irregular verse; and that was all. I do not mean that they were worthless; a thousand things of the sort are worth seeing and may be worth saying. A brown trickle from a gutter makes a pool in the street, reflecting half a window and a scrap of sky; a black cluster of lamp-posts and top-hats is relieved against a strip of cold green sunset; the passing lights of a tram paint one side of a grey horse in a field a golden colour; a splash of green slime on a wall looks like sprawling fingers; and so on. Now, whether it sound egotistical or no, it is a fact that if I began to write little paragraphs in free verse on such things, I should never stop writing them. I should write thousands and thousands of them. I do not deny the truth of such sights; I am always seeing them. I do not deny the suggestiveness of such sights; I am often moved by them. I only say that if the mere recording of them constitutes poetry, there ought to be a vast amount more poetry and a great many more poets. But whether that prospect be a glorious or an alarming one, I will not venture, on my own isolated example, to decide.

XXXI

On Education

WE all know that Mr. Smiles dedicated the modern world to Self-Help. Since then it has dedicated itself to Self-Hindrance, of the strangest sort, amounting often to self-strangling or self-hanging; the individualistic theory of liberty having truly given it rope enough to hang itself. It is amazing to note in how many matters the modern world started out to do one thing and has done exactly the opposite. The ethics of the economist, in the early nineteenth century, enormously exaggerated the sanctity and pride of private property. This led to a race for wealth which has not only led recently to a relapse into poverty, but to a change by which, even for the few who had more property, the property was much less private. In the nineteenth century the Northern Farmer was described as hearing the comfortable sound of "property, property, property" in the very canter of his horse's legs. Nowadays the Northern Farmer probably travels in a motor and ploughs by machinery; I know not whether strange noises from the bowels of his iron monster seem to resemble the words "mortgage" or "bankruptcy," but I am pretty certain that they do not now soothe him with the dulcet dactyls of the cantering hooves. In plain fact the Northern Farmer has much less property than he had when he started out to look for it in the presence of Mr. Alfred Tennyson. And even the property he has is much less private property, being sunk in vast semi-public undertakings or international combines, over which he certainly has no control, as he had control over his horses. The same industrial individualism which set out with no thought except private property has produced a new world in which private property is hardly ever thought of, or at least not primarily as private.

I was looking at a recent collection which contains the opinions of many famous free-thinkers about Jesus Christ. It is amusing to note how all of them differ among themselves; how one of them contradicts another and the last is always repudiated by the next. And I was specially amused to note that the earlier sceptics, like Strauss, blamed Jesus of Nazareth for his contempt for commerce and capital (then the gods of the hour), while the later sceptics, like Shaw and Wells, praised the same Jesus of Nazareth for the same contempt for the same commerce, because in the interval the sceptic had turned from an earnest Individualist to an earnest Socialist. Anyhow, it was not Christ or the Christian idea that had changed; it was only all the criticisms of all their critics. And the later sceptic actually became more orthodox than the earlier sceptic, simply by going Bolshevist. This is merely an example, for the moment, of how the whole tone of the world has changed about property in relation to privacy. The modern capitalist is more of a communist than was the old revolutionist. The real Radicals had a horror of centralization, and one of the most popular and prominent of the demagogues described a Communist as a man who "always was willing to give you his penny and pocket your shilling." The moral of this vast overturn and disappointment is obvious enough: that when private property only means private enterprise, and private enterprise only means profiteering, it will soon cease even to produce profits, and become in every sense unprofitable.

The way the world has changed about private property is proved by the fact that it is regarded as a private fad. Mr. Belloc and I, when we said first that we really did believe that private property should be private, were mildly chaffed, as if we were seeking solitude like hermits, or hoarding halfpence like misers. But I am not concerned with our particular thesis here, or with any such personal matters; I only mention this one as the most obvious of many examples of the modern world rushing one way and rebounding the other. Another example is the tangle of education. In one sense, this is supremely the educational age. In another sense, it is supremely and specially the anti-educational age. It is the age in which the Government's right to teach everybody's children is for the first time established. It is also the age in which the father's right to teach his own children is for the first time denied. It is the time in which experimentalists earnestly desire to teach a jolly little guttersnipe everything; even Criminology and Cosmic Poise and the Maya system of decorative rhythm. But it is also the time in which earnest philosophers are really doubting whether it is right to teach anybody anything; even how to avoid taking poison or falling off precipices.

But the practical difficulty of our present education is even worse. It is attempting to conduct a process, and yet it has produced a world which incessantly interrupts and reverses that process. Education is initiation; it is in its nature a progression from one thing to another; the arrangement of ideas in a certain order. A child learns to walk before he learns to skip; he learns his own alphabet before he learns the Greek alphabet. Or, if any educationist now reverses this process, he must at least have a reason for reversing it, and must therefore refuse to reverse the reversal. But the real life of our time reverses everything and has no reason for anything. The real world, that roars round the poor little gutter-boy as he goes to school, is an utterly anti-educational world. If the school is really giving any education, the world is certainly engaged day and night in ruining his education. For the world gives him things anyhow, in any order, with any result; the world gives him things without knowing that he gets them; the world gives him things meant for somebody else; the world throws things at him from morning till night, quite blindly, madly, and without meaning or aim; and this process, whatever else it is, is the exact opposite of the process of education. The gutter-boy spends about three-quarters of his time in getting uneducated. He is educated by the modern State School. He is uneducated by the modern State.

Because, as I have already ventured very delicately to hint, the modern State is in a devil of a state. It is itself the chaos and contradiction produced by that very unbalanced race after private profit that has produced its own opposite in a sort of communal confusion. Educationists have the task of putting the school in order before anybody has put the State in order. It is arguable that we ought to put the State in order before there can really be such a thing as a State School. But I will not discuss my own remedies here, which would involve indecent allusions to a third thing called the Family; now never mentioned in respectable circles. Only I think there is something wrong with a system that thus throttles itself and cuts its own throat; a world in which we cannot even paint the town red without turning it green, or set the Thames on fire without freezing it.

XXXII

On Romanticism and Youth

ROMANTICISM is usually criticized as if it were a very ancient thing; whereas it is really a very recent thing, and especially a very revolutionary thing. It was the very latest Revolt of the Young, previous to the Revolt of the Young which now attacks it. Of course, there is a difference between Romanticism and Romance. Romance, in its healthiest sense, is as old as the world; and even in a more special sense it is inspired by that particular intensity of colouring and pointed energy of outline which belonged to the shields, the windows, and the pennons of mediævalism. Mediæval romance, which was a sort of pattern for modern romance, came from the vividness of visionary or spiritual experience leaving a sort of glamour or glory around all experience. But it did throw that coloured light especially on the experience of love, and, in some sense, modelled romance on religion; as Chaucer called the legendary lovers The Saints of Cupid. In that sense we may say that romance belonged to the Middle Ages; and in a deeper sense that it belonged to any ages. Romanticism, however, was a particular modern movement, and it was in most ways particularly modern.

It was akin to Feminism, in what is now called “putting Woman upon a pedestal.” It was also akin to ideal democracy; which might well be called “putting Man upon a pedestal.” Indeed, there is a curious and illuminating historical parallel between these two ideas, that seemed both new and true in the nineteenth century. I am far from saying they are not true merely because they are no longer new. I have a great deal of sympathy with both of them. I am merely noting the historical fact that, if they are not new, they were very recently regarded as new. The Republican who wore the Red Cap talked, if not as if there had never been any Republicans in the past, at least as if there were going to be nothing else except Republicans in the future. The Romantic who wore the Red Waistcoat talked as if the old world had been imprisoned in Classicism and the new world would be thrown open only to Romanticism. Each believed himself to be an extremist; but each was, in fact, a moderate who had only reached the middle of his own road, and had no real idea to what extreme it would lead. Each was a bridge hung between two ages. Each was bringing with him a living thing out of the old world, which could only perish in the new.

For one very simple thing was true both of Love and Liberty: the gods of the Romantics and the Republicans. They were both simply fragments of Christian mysticism, and even of Christian theology, torn out of their proper place, flung loosely about and finally hurled forward into an age of hard materialism which instantly destroyed them. They were not really rational ideas, still less rationalistic ideas. At least, they were never rational ideas after they had left off being religious ideas. One of them was a hazy human exaggeration of the sacramental idea of marriage. The other was a hazy human exaggeration of the brotherhood of men in God. When the Romantic laid his hand on his Red Waistcoat, and swore to George Sand or some other lady that their souls were two affinities wedded before the world was made, he was drawing on the Christian capital of the old ideas of immortality and sanctity. When he explained to his mistress in his garret the delicacy and dignity of cutting her throat and his own, and called it "the world well lost for love," he was really appealing to the old tradition of the martyr and the ascetic, who lost the world to save his soul. He was not, in any very exact sense of the word, talking sense. He was not uttering purely rational remarks; certainly not remarks that our more rationalistic generation would call rational. Often, when he had done himself particularly well with champagne and old brandy, he would let the cat out of the bag rather badly by calling the *blanchisseuse* or the artist's model "his bride in the sight of God."

Anyhow, he could not make the sort of appeals to deific faith or demoniac jealousy, which constituted the vigorous love poetry of the age of Hugo and Alfred de Musset, without implying an immortal significance in passion, which the modern realists refuse to see in mere appetite. He could not so praise love without also praising loyalty. He might not admit that there was a sacred bond between Guinevere and Arthur; but he could not write at all without assuming that there was a sacred bond between Guinevere and Lancelot. The later sex writers would refuse to admit that there is any sacred bond between anybody and anybody else. The truth is that this mystical feeling about the love of man and woman was treated so clumsily that it fell between two stools. When it was really mediæval, it could be preserved for ever in a story like that of Dante and Beatrice. When it was really modern, it simply fell to pieces, into little decaying scraps rather like wriggling worms, the hundred little loves and lusts of the modern sex novel. But the Romantics of the nineteenth century held it up in a sort of indeterminate pre-eminence; a dizzy and toppling idolatry; trying to make it at once as sacred as they thought good and as free as they found convenient. They wanted to eat their wedding-cake and have it. They wanted to make their wild wedding sacred without making it secure. They did put woman upon a pedestal; but they did not look to see if it was a solid pedestal.

Now, oddly enough, it was the same with Liberty as with Love. It was the same with the democratic ideal of political freedom for all. And Democracy is being criticized just now for exactly the same reason that Romance is being criticized just now. It is that all the sense there ever was in either of them rested on a religious idea. The nineteenth century took away the religious idea and left a sense that rapidly turned into nonsense. All men are equal because God loves all equally; and nothing can compare with that equality. But in what other way are men equal? The vague Liberals of the nineteenth century cut away the divine ground from under Democracy, and Democracy was left to stand by itself. In other words, it is left to fall by itself. Jefferson said that men were given equal rights by their Creator. Ingersoll said they had no Creator, but had received equal rights from nowhere. Even in the democratic atmosphere of America, it began to dawn on a great many people that it is very difficult to prove that men ever received the equal rights at all. In short, the Republican theory will turn out to be another form of Romance; and will be classed with the illusion of the too idealistic lover, unless it can be reconnected with the positive beliefs from which it was originally borrowed. The Red Cap will follow the Red Waistcoat into the old clothes' shop, unless it can be made something more than a fashion, or dipped in that enduring dye that coloured the red roses of St. Dorothy or the red cross of St. George.

Mr. Philip Carr recently published a picturesque and interesting sketch of the French Romantics in the great period of Romanticism. It appeared at an appropriate time — at about the time when we could fairly say that artistic Paris, in that sense, had at last ceased to be gossip and had begun to be history. The admirable "Beachcomber," in the *Daily Express*, has often made fun of the fussy and confused "reminiscences" of men who claim to have lived the Bohemian life of the French capital; exulting in an orgy of anarchy and anachronism; and describing how he drank absinthe with Zola and Chateaubriand or shared a garret with Gauguin and Montalembert. But time sets a limit even to anachronism; it would hardly do for the most venerable journalist, writing “Ninety-eight Years in Fleet Street” to claim to have met Milton as well as Keats; and even Mr. Frank Harris did not profess to have been the intimate friend of Swift as well as Carlyle. We are now far enough away from the French Romantics of the nineteenth century to judge them as we should the Pléiade in the sixteenth century. In both cases, of course, a good many English people will entirely misjudge them and absurdly underrate them; many through a cultural, educational or acquired characteristic: a complete ignorance of French; many others by a profound, primitive, natural gift: a complete ignorance of poetry. It would be very easy to make English jokes about the French Romantics; the sort of jokes that might be made about them in Punch. There is even some excuse for a superficial reader, accustomed to such superficial satire, if he gains such a general impression. I mean the impression that the great geniuses of nineteenth-century Paris were all marked by three characteristics: that they all went about in crowds, frequently riotous crowds; that they each of them complained in verse that they were dwelling in a desert of unbearable loneliness; and that each of them had to be (or professed to be), for however short a period, in love with George Sand. But the weakness of all such superior Victorian patronage is that the Romantic often lived a life that was more real, not to say realistic, in its tests and risks and even privations, than the life of the patronizing Victorian. The Victorian humorist would not have liked to starve in a garret because he was a Republican or a Royalist; he would not have liked to face a Paris mob even, when it was out to kill, for a fine point of literary criticism; he certainly would not have liked to be challenged to a duel by all the dreamy, ineffective æsthetes in Paris; and even having a love affair with George Sand, though to some not much more alluring than having a heart-to-heart talk with the rhinoceros at the Zoo, was certainly almost as dangerous. In truth it was the jolly humorous Victorian, of the type of Thackeray or Trollope, who was the Romantic. It was he who lived in a world of his own; in a happy land that was a happy dreamland; in that prosperous and peaceful England that was a day-dream and had its day. The French Romantics made fools of themselves in all sorts of ways, as very clever men always do. But they were much nearer to the taste of certain terrible things: death and desperate faith and the fury of the poor and abstract certitudes and even despair. They were dramatic, and even melodramatic, in their gestures; but, after all, they were not on a stage. They lived through real revolutions, and not unreal reforms; they lived within striking distance of the duellist's pistol and the rioter's pike. They followed women or visions perhaps not worth dying for; but some of them might really have died. Because their cries were sometimes childish, people forget that the burnt child dreads the fire only when it is a real fire; and the Victorian nursery always had an efficient fireguard.

The true intellectual interest of Romanticism, now that it has been so completely replaced by Realism, is that everybody has completely forgotten how a very recent rebellion of the young produced the first quite as much as the second. It is amusing to find the young writers of today looking back disdainfully on what they consider old-fashioned "sentiment" or "sentimentalism" or "sensibility" or "putting woman on a pedestal" or "romantic illusions about love" — all apparently under the impression that these are very venerable moral traditions of mankind that no man has ever dared to disturb till now. The truth is that all this sentiment is still a new thing; and only yesterday was *the* new thing. The romance of drooping love-locks or flowing ringlets, the fainting and the feminine sensibility, the pressed flowers and the pink albums, the Books of Beauty and the Gems of Loveliness — only yesterday, all these things were not only Youth but the Revolt of Youth. Only yesterday all these things were not only the fashion; they were even the rebellion against fashion; in the sense of the rebellion against convention. Only yesterday all these were the freaks of that Freedom by which the rising generation shocked its elders. Only yesterday all these things were Tomorrow.

Anyone who will consider the facts will see that this is no exaggeration. The albums and the keepsakes were inscribed with endless quotations from Byron; because Byron had been a revolutionist. We cannot now realize the wild novelty, nay, crudity, of the young lady who insisted on copying out Byron, instead of copying out Cowper. We cannot feel the fact that she was gate-crashing; that she was going the pace; that she was running around with a pretty hot crowd; but it was the fact. And the moral of it is that nothing grows old so quickly as what is new. The real comment upon the simpering smile of the lady with the ringlets, as revealed reclining with mandolin and bulbul, in the Book of Beauty, is to send her portrait to the most modern of all modern girls, engaged in detaching her mouth from her face by the latest optical illusion of lip-stick, with the old inscription: "Get you to my lady’s chamber; and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come.”

More ironic than the grinning skull, more dissolvent than dust and ashes, slower and more certain in its vengeance than mere death, this destiny has decreed that The Young of every generation shall not die, but shall live on as specimens of The Old; and especially as types of the old-fashioned. Each generation of rebels in turn is remembered by the next, not as the pioneers who began the march, or started to break away from the old conventions; but as the old convention from which only the very latest rebels have dared to break away. The moral seems to be that there may be a reward for rebels in heaven, if the Bright Young Things are looking in that direction; but there is precious little reward on earth.

XXXIII

On Mr. Geoffrey Chaucer

THE challenge of Chaucer is that he is our one mediæval poet, for most moderns; and he flatly contradicts all that they mean by mediæval. Aged and crabbed historians tell them that mediævalism was only filth, fear, gloom, self-torture and torture of others. Even mediævalist æsthetes tell them it was chiefly mystery, solemnity and care for the supernatural to the exclusion of the natural. Now Chaucer is obviously *less* like this than the poets after the Renaissance and the Reformation. He is obviously more sane even than Shakspere, more liberal than Milton; more tolerant than Pope; more humorous than Wordsworth; more social and at ease with men than Byron or even Shelley. Nay, some have doubted whether he is not still more humane than the very latest humanists; whether his geniality does not exceed the rosy optimism of Aldous Huxley or the ever-bubbling high spirits of T. S. Eliot.

Chaucer was, above all, an artist; and he was one of that fairly large and very happy band of artists who are not troubled with the artistic temperament. Perhaps there was never a less typical poet, as a poet was understood in the Byronic tradition of dark passions and tempestuous raiment. But, indeed, that Byronic generalization was largely founded upon Byron, or rather, on a blunder about Byron. It would be much truer to say that practically every type of human being has been also a poet, and that Byron was a Regency Buck plus poetry. Similarly, Goethe was a German professor plus poetry, and Browning was a rather commercial-looking bourgeois plus poetry, and Heine was a cynical Jew plus poetry, and Scott was a rather acquisitive gentleman farmer plus poetry, and Villon was a pickpocket plus poetry, and Wordsworth was a noodle plus poetry, and Walt Whitman was an American loafer plus poetry — for, in the art of loafing, Weary Willie could never have stood up against Unweary Walt. I have not yet heard of an American dentist or a shop-walker in a large draper’s who is a poet, and I have no doubt that both of these deficiencies will soon be supplied. Anyhow, the general rule is that almost any trade or type of man can be an artist — yes, even an æsthete.

But once or twice there appears in history the artist who is the extreme antithesis of the æsthete. An artist of this kind was Geoffrey Chaucer. He was a man who always made himself useful, and not only ornamental. People trusted him, not only in the moral, but in the more purely practical sense. He was not the sort of poet who would forget to post a letter, or post an unstamped ode to the cuckoo instead, had the penny postage existed in his day. He was not only given many responsible posts, but responsible posts of many kinds. At one time he was sent to negotiate the delicate finances of ransom and peace with a great prince. At another time he was sent to oversee the builders and workmen in the construction of a great public building. It has been conjectured that he had some technical knowledge of architecture, and I think the descriptions of various pagan temples and royal palaces in his poems support the conjecture. It is certain that he knew a good deal about the official precedence and etiquette of the Chamberlain's Office; he was a witness upon a point of heraldry in an important trial. Though his relations to the Court, during and after the *débâcle* of Richard II, are covered with some obscurity, it is certain that, for the greater part of his life at least, he performed job after job, of the most quaintly different kinds, to the increasing satisfaction of his employers. He was emphatically, as the vulgar phrase goes, a man of the world.

But through all these tasks the lyric element flowed out of him quite naturally, as a man will whistle or sing while he is potting a shrub or adding up a column of figures. He never seemed to have felt any particular strain or dislocation between the world in which he was a man of the world and that other world of which he was one of the immortals. He had that sort of temper in which there is no antithesis of Sense and Sensibility. He does not seem to have quarrelled with many people, even in that very quarrelsome transition time; and he does not seem to have quarrelled with himself. Being a Christian, he was ready to accuse himself when he was seriously considering the question; but that is something quite different from the sort of constant unconscious friction between different parts of the mind which has marred the happiness of so many artists and poets.

I do not mean merely that the poetry of Chaucer, like the poetry of Dante, was in the higher sense a harmony. I mean that it was in the ordinary human sense a melody. It remained not only unspoilt, but unmixed; uncomplicated by the complexities of living, whether they were actually there or no. It is unfortunate that the word "mood" is almost always used of a sombre or secretive mood; and that we do not convey the idea that a man was in merry mood when we say merely that he was moody. For there was truly a special thing that may be called the Chaucerian mood, and it was essentially merry. There are any number of passages of pathos, and one or two passages of tragedy, but they never make us feel that the mood has really altered, and it seems as if the man speaking is always smiling as he speaks. In other words, the thing which is supremely Chaucerian is the Chaucerian atmosphere, an atmosphere which penetrates through all particular persons and problems; a sort of diffused light which lies on everything, whether tragic or comic, and prevents the tragedy from being hopeless or the comedy from being cruel. No art critic, however artistic, has ever succeeded in describing an atmosphere. The only way to approach it is to compare it with another atmosphere. And this Chaucerian mood is very like the mood in which (before it became merely vulgarized by cant or commercialism) some of the greatest of modern English writers have praised Christmas.

Chaucer was wide enough to be narrow; that is, he could bring a broad experience of life to the enjoyment of local or even accidental things. Now, it is the chief defect of the literature of today that it always talks as if local things could only be limiting, not to say strangling; and that anything like an accident could only be a jar. A Christmas dinner, as described by a modern minor poet, would almost certainly be a study in acute agony: the unendurable dullness of Uncle George, the cacophonous voice of Aunt Adelaide. But Chaucer, who sat down at the table with the Miller and the Pardoner, could have sat down to a Christmas dinner with the heaviest uncle or the shrillest aunt. He might have been amused at them, but he would never have been angered by them, and certainly he would never have insulted them in irritable little poems. And the reason was partly spiritual and partly practical; spiritual because he had, whatever his faults, a scheme of spiritual values in their right order, and knew that Christmas was more important than Uncle George’s anecdotes; and practical because he had seen the great world of human beings, and knew that wherever a man wanders among men, in Flanders or France or Italy, he will find that the world largely consists of Uncle Georges. This imaginative patience is the thing that men want most in the modern Christmas, and if they wish to learn it I recommend them to read Chaucer.

XXXIV

On Monsters

I SAW in an illustrated paper — which sparkles with scientific news — that a green-blooded fish had been found in the sea; indeed, a creature that was completely green, down to this uncanny ichor in its veins, and very big and venomous at that. Somehow I could not get it out of my head, because the caption suggested a perfect refrain for a Ballade: A green-blooded fish has been found in the sea. It has so wide a critical and philosophical application. I have known so many green-blooded fish on the land, walking about the streets and sitting in the clubs, and especially the committees. So many green-blooded fish have written books and criticisms of books, have taught in academies of learning and founded schools of philosophy, that they have almost made themselves the typical biological product of the present stage of evolution. There is never a debate in the House of Commons, especially about Eugenics or The Compulsory Amputation of Poor People, without several green-blooded fishes standing up on their tails to talk. There is never a petition, or a letter to the Press, urging the transformation of taverns into teashops or local museums, without a whole string of green-blooded fish hanging on to the tail of it, and pretty stinking fish too. But for some reason the burden of this non-existent Ballade ran continually in my head, and somehow turned my thoughts in the direction of poisonous monsters in general; of all those dragons and demi-dragons and devouring creatures which appear in primitive stories as the chief enemies of man. It has been suggested that these legends really refer to some period when prehistoric man had to contend with huge animals that have since died out. And then the thought occurred to me: Suppose the primitive heroes killed them just when they were dying out. I mean, suppose they would have died out, even if the Cave Man had sat comfortably in his Cave and not troubled to kill them.

Suppose Perseus turned the sea-monster into a rock at the very moment when it was well on its way to becoming a fossil. Suppose St. George arrived, not only just before the death of the Princess, but just before the death of the Dragon. Suppose he burst in, rather tactlessly, so to speak, on the deathbed of the dragon, and only finished him off with a lance when the dragon-doctor had done the real work with a lancet. In short, is it possible that the heroes might have saved themselves the trouble of fighting, if they had only felt the pulse or taken the temperature of the expiring foe of mankind? The dragon is always represented with wide-open jaws, darting out a forked and flaming tongue. But perhaps he is only putting his tongue out to be examined by his private physician. Perhaps all the monsters, when they appear in song and story, were in a bad way, physically as well as morally. Now I come to think of it, that might explain the green-blooded fish that was found in the sea. Perhaps he is not a species, but a disease. Perhaps the green-blooded fish was suffering, if not exactly from anæmia, at least from some subtle form of chloræmia pisciana, or whatever this obscure malady will be called when it is discovered. I suppose a fish in the sea could hardly be green with seasickness. And anyhow, there are biological theorists even on land, who have lately begun to look rather fishy.

The fancy might make many variants in the fairy-tales. They always narrate how the cavern of the monster or giant is surrounded by the bones of thousands of victims. We can imagine the hero carefully counting them and making calculations about the stage of indigestion at which any monster must have arrived after such a meal. In the special department of Giants there is a story about Jack the Giant-Killer and a hasty-pudding, which the Giant at least devoured. I do not know what a hasty-pudding is, but I gather that in this case the meal was somewhat hasty. All this could not be good for the health of Giants as a class. And Dickens, who had known several Giants, as they appear in travelling-shows, testifies to their delicate constitutions. But I admit that, while my rambling subconsciousness ran on this ancient theme, I was beginning to think of its modern application. I sometimes wonder whether it is worth while to attack every monster of modern anarchy and absurdity as it appears in the realm of thought, or whether they would kill themselves even if they were not killed. Sometimes they seem to kill themselves almost too fast to be killed. Some I can remember making war on for months who have now been dead for years. I can remember giants of blasphemy or barbaric philosophy; giants so gigantic that they seemed not only to darken the earth, but block out the heavens. They defied the world like Goliath, and all were warned against accepting the challenge, in sight of all the bones about their caverns. But now it is their own bones that are scattered, and even a rag-and-bone man will hardly stoop to pick them up.

For instance, there was Haeckel and the hard concrete Materialism of his day. For years on end I filled my life with fighting Mr. Blatchford and others about it, and pointing out the fallacies, not to say falsehoods, of Haeckel. And where is he now? Mr. Blatchford has forgotten all about Haeckel, and so has everybody else. The new men of science have completely repudiated him. But I remember when every new man of science, and especially of the new science of sociology or eugenics (a green-blooded fish has been found in the sea), accepted him as the founder of a new religion. And when Mr. Belloc wrote the envoi of another Ballade —

Prince, if you meet upon a bus   A man who makes a great display   Of
Dr. Haeckel, argue thus,   The wind has blown them all away —

it really sounded like an audacity or a daring prophecy. Whereas now it sounds like a truism, because it has come true.

Then there was Lombroso, and all the quackery that was called Criminology. I can remember when the name of Lombroso was like the name of Newton or of Faraday; but I do not often see it mentioned now, least of all among men of science. It is to the enduring glory of Mr. H. G. Wells that even in those days, though on the materialist side in many matters, he protested against the premature dogmatism of the prigs who talked about “the criminal skull” or “the criminal ear,” and who called the young and earnest to stamp out hereditary criminal tendencies by selection or segregation (a green-blooded fish has been found in the sea). Was it worth while to argue against the great Science of Criminology in the later nineteenth century? The dragon would have died a natural death, if anything about him could be natural.

I could give any number of other cases; of other controversies with things I thought dominant which were in fact dying; which are in fact dead. There was the proposal that people too poor to bring actions for libel should be put on a Black List as blackguards who were too fond of beer (a green-blooded fish has been found in the sea); there was the absurd theory that being too fond of beer is hereditary, and the proposal (moved by the fish) that the beer-drinker should be forbidden children. There was the whole assumption that anything done by a State Department would be perfect and that Supervisors are Supermen. That was once our nightmare; but flogging it was flogging a dead horse, or at least a dying horse, and I rather repent of my inhumanity.

XXXV

On Love

THERE used to be, and possibly is, a mysterious institution for young ladies known as a finishing-school. The chief case against it was that, in certain instances, it meant finishing an education without ever beginning it. In any case, this is what is the matter with a great many modern institutions, and with none more than those delivering judgment on the history of feminine education and generally of feminine affairs. The curse of nearly all such judgments is the journalistic curse of having heard the latest news; that is, of having heard the end of the story without having even heard of the beginning. We talk of people not knowing the A B C of a subject, but the trouble with these people is that they do know the X Y Z of a subject without knowing the A B C.

This morning I read an article in a very serious magazine in which the writer quoted the remark of Byron that a certain sort of romantic love "is woman's whole existence." The writer then said that the first people who ever challenged this view were the revolutionary Suffragettes at the end of the nineteenth century. The truth is that the first people who ever maintained this view were the revolutionary Romantics at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The habit of giving to romantic love this extravagant and exclusive importance in human life was itself an entirely modern and revolutionary thing, and dates from the romantic movement commonly traced to Rousseau, but I think much more truly to be traced to the influence of the German sentimentalists. Most people who curse Rousseau have never read Rousseau, or have only read the *Confessions* and not the Contrat Social. *The critics read the* Confessions, if only to condemn them; because the critics themselves are modern romantics and sentimentalists; men who like Confessions and dislike Contracts. The critics hate or avoid the *Contrat Social*, not because it is sloppy and sentimental (for it is not), but because it is hard and clear and lucid and logical. Rousseau had his emotional weaknesses as an individual, like other individuals, but he was not an eighteenth-century philosopher for nothing. What the moderns dislike about him is not the silliness of his confessions, but the solidity of his convictions, and the fact that, like the old theologians, he could hold general ideas in a hard-and-fast fashion. When it comes to defining his fundamentals, Rousseau is as definite as Calvin. They were both ruthless theorists from Geneva, though one preached the theory of pessimism and the other the theory of optimism. I am not maintaining that I agree with either, but Rousseau would be as useful as Calvin, in teaching some of his critics how to criticize.

But Rousseau is a parenthesis. Wherever the real Romantic Movement came from, whether from the German forests or the Genevan lake, it was a recent and revolutionary business as compared with history as a whole. But it is obvious that the ordinary modern critic is entirely ignorant of history as a whole. He knows that his mother read Tennyson and his grandmother read Byron. Beyond that, he can imagine nothing whatever; he supposes that his great-great-grandmothers and their great-great-great-grandmothers had gone on reading Byron from the beginning of the world. He imagines that Byron, who was a disinherited and disreputable rebel to the last, has been an established and conventional authority from the first. He therefore supposes that all women, in all ages, would have accepted the prehistoric Byronic commandment: that the Byronic sort of romantic passion was the sole concern of their lives. Yet it is certain that women have had a great many other concerns, and have been attached to a great many other convictions. They have been priestesses, prophetesses, empresses, queens, abbesses, mothers, great housewives, great letter-writers, lunatics founding sects, blue-stockings keeping salons, and all sorts of things. If you had said to Deborah the mother in Israel, or Hypatia the Platonist of Alexandria, or Catherine of Siena, or Joan of Arc, or Isabella of Spain, or Maria Theresa of Austria, or even to Hannah More or Joanna Southcott, that Byronic love was “woman’s whole existence,” they would all have been very indignant and most of them flown into a towering passion. They would have asked in various ways whether there was no such thing as honour, no such thing as duty, no such thing as glory, no such thing as great studies or great enterprises, no such thing as normal functions and necessary labours; incidentally, we may add, no such thing as babies. They differed a great deal in their type of vocation and even in their theory of virtue, but they all had some theory of virtue that went a little further than that. Up to a particular moment in the eighteenth century, practically every thinking person would have accepted the colossal common sense expressed by a

French poet of the seventeenth century: “L’amour est un plaisir; l’honneur est un devoir.”

Then came the extreme emphasis on romance among the Victorians; for the Victorians were not notable for their emphasis on virtue, but for their emphasis on romance. But Queen Victoria lived so long, and the Victorian Age was such an unconscionably long time dying, that by the time Mr. Bernard Shaw and others began what they called a realistic revolt against romance, the sentimental German movement seemed to be not only as old as Victoria, but as old as Boadicea. It is highly typical, for instance, that Mr. Bernard Shaw, in one of his earliest criticisms, complained of the convention according to which anybody was supposed to have “penetrated into the Holy of Holies” so long as he was content to say that “Love is Enough.” But, as a matter of fact, the very phrase “Love is Enough” did not come to him from any conventional or classical authority; not even from any conventional or conservative Victorian. It came from a book by a Socialist and Revolutionist like himself; from a book recently published by William Morris, who held then the exact position that Mr. Shaw himself holds now: the position of the Grand Old Man of Socialism.

Of course, the anti-romantic movement led by Shaw, like the romantic movement led by Byron, had gone forward blindly and blundered in every sort of way. The modern world seems to have no notion of preserving different things side by side, of allowing its proper and proportionate place to each, of saving the whole varied heritage of culture. It has no notion except that of simplifying something by destroying nearly everything; whether it be Rousseau breaking up kingdoms in the name of reason, or Byron breaking up families in the name of romance, or Shaw breaking up romances in the name of frankness and the formula of Ibsen. I myself value very highly the great nineteenth-century illumination of romantic love, just as I value the great eighteenth-century ideal of right reason and human dignity, or the seventeenth-century intensity, or the sixteenth-century expansion, or the divine logic and dedicated valour of the Middle Ages. I do not see why any of these cultural conquests should be lost or despised, or why it is necessary for every fashion to wash away all that is best in every other. It may be possible that one good custom would corrupt the world, but I never could see why the second good custom should deny that the first good custom was good. As it is, those who have no notion except that of breaking away from romance are being visibly punished by breaking away from reason. Every new realistic novel serves to show that realism, when entirely emptied of romance, becomes utterly unreal. For romance was only the name given to a love of life which was something much larger than a life of love, in the Byronic sense. And anything from which it has passed is instantly corrupt and crawling with worms of death.

XXXVI

On Fictional Conventions

IT is now much discussed among the learned whether art should abolish morality by calling it convention. It might well be discussed among the wise whether art should even abolish convention. But what seems very queer to me is this: that modern art has so often abolished morality without abolishing convention. I mean that very tame and timid conventions, the remains of rather fragile and artificial styles of writing, do still manage to run side by side with complete licence or laxity about much more important things. It seems as if people could get rid of the commandments, but not of the conventions. I will give only one small example, which has struck me again and again in reading the most modern novels.

In those modern novels there are types of women, and descriptions of women, which might have brought a blush to the cheek of Petronius or been considered a little too coarse for the refinement of Rabelais. But in those descriptions there are still certain conventions, really unreal conventions, exactly as they were in the Victorian works of Miss Porter or Miss Procter. Again and again, the modern reader may read a sentence like this: “Peter had already noticed a smiling, blue-eyed girl, with a bright, shingled head, slip in among the new-comers, suspected of being gate-crashers, who thronged the door.” Or the sentence may run: “Slim, lithe, and brown-eyed, with a delicate and fiery tan, Joan stood poised on the distant rock, about to dive.” There are a hundred other examples; but all habitually assume that the first thing that anybody notices about a woman is the colour of her eyes. Now, it is perfectly possible to be on tolerably intimate terms with a person for a long time and yet to be quite unable to recall suddenly the colour of his or her eyes. And certainly nobody ever saw the colour of a stranger’s eyes all the way across a ball-room in Mayfair, a big studio in Chelsea, or the wide sands of the Lido. One would suppose that a girl’s blue eyes were enormously big blue lanterns, and shone afar off like the green and red lanterns of a railway signal. That one little sentimental trick or tradition makes hundreds of literary descriptions of human beings ring quite false, and the most lavish and generous supply of general moral barbarism and baseness cannot wholly make up the loss.

What a man sees first about a woman, or anybody else, is the type; whether it is, for instance, the type that flows in long lines, with long features, the type that an artist would draw in profile; or whether it has the face that is most itself when seen fully in front, flat against a background; especially the sort of square and open face, the face that is generally that of a fighter, and, however beautiful it may be, has always a touch of the monkey. A man can distinguish those two types from each other across the largest hall or the widest sands, almost as easily as he could distinguish a horse from a cow or a stag. He might distinguish a hundred things about the rank or the culture or even the character; he could make inferences from the poise and the walk and the gesture. He could do it all at a distance, at which it would be as impossible to see blue eyes in the girl's head as to see blue stones in the girl's engagement ring. Yet I have seen that little artificiality of description a hundred times in a day's reading, in turning over the tales even of able and ambitious modern novelists. It is a small matter; indeed, it is the point that it is a small matter; it is too small to be seen, and yet it is always reported. But it happens to illustrate a curious sort of concealed convention that runs underneath much modern writing that considers itself most unconventional. In more showy things the realists remember to be shameless; but in these little things they do not remember to be realistic.

I knew a lady, with a very hearty sense of humour, whose business it happened to be to write frankly conventional romances for the old frankly conventional Press, the Press that provided healthy but somewhat sentimental serials and novelettes. She got great fun out of her functions; and she told me once that she had written a long serial romance, with a stately and tragic heroine, only to be told at the end that the public, or at least the publishers, insisted on a *petite* and sparkling heroine. With a noble calm, disdaining to alter a single incident in the narrative, she merely went through the whole manuscript, altering black eyes to blue eyes. When she came to the line, "He gazed into Amanda's dark, unfathomable eyes," she merely crossed out the adjectives and wrote "blue and sparkling" on the top. Of course, it was not all a matter of eyes; she had to make some modification about dress and demeanour. Where she had written "Amanda swept across the lawn, the alteration of one word made it "Amanda tripped across the lawn." That, by the way, is another of the old conventions that linger even in the new unconventionality. Girls still sometimes trip in the grimmest realistic studies. Novelists still sometimes trip over that antiquated booby trap. I never saw anybody trip, except somebody who tripped over a hassock and fell on his nose, to the satiric enlivenment of the human race. Anyhow, Amanda's large and shady hat grew less large and shady, and was turned up with a rose or something; her raiment grew less sweeping and severe; but nothing else needed any alteration. And it sometimes seems to me that many who write in the most revolutionary fashion write quite as much according to a revolutionary formula. They merely go through their own story and put in the terms which are supposed to make the heroine chic or distinguished, according to the momentary modern conventions of unconventionality. The heroine has no more real individuality, amid all the fuss of individualism, than the adaptable Amanda whose eyes turned so easily from black to blue.

Perhaps what we call realistic descriptions are bound to be conventional because they are bound to be fashionable. They are bound to emphasize exactly the points which one particular period thinks important; which will be exactly the points which the next period will think unimportant. Hence we have the paradox that the noblest compliments to women have not been direct descriptions, but indirect descriptions. The direct compliment would deal with all the details that pass; the indirect compliment with the impression which does not pass. Archæologists have worked out a complete theory of the costume of Helen of Troy, which seems to have consisted of a straw sun-bonnet, a Zouave jacket, and high-heeled shoes. If Homer had written a realistic description, it would have seemed to us a rather vulgar description. The dress of the fourteenth century was more dignified, but not more natural; and if Dante had described Beatrice in the exact garb she wore it might have seemed to us at once extravagant and stiff. But ages shall pass and civilizations shall perish, and time shall never turn the keen edge of that great indirect compliment, that older and wiser fashion of describing the effect and not the external instruments. As when Dante, seeing his lady upon the height, felt only like the legendary monster whom the taste of a strange food had turned into a god. Or Homer was content to let us listen to the grumbling of the Trojans against the cause of the Trojan War, and then to that great sudden silence that fell upon them, full of light and understanding, when Helen came forth upon the wall.

XXXVII

On Sweepstakes and Gambling

The debate about legalizing Sweepstakes dies slowly away, like the galloping echoes of the Derby; and even where it continues, it is rather typical of the time and country that it is more concerned with law than with logic. It is clear that in practice the nation has largely abandoned the Puritan sentiment that was behind some of its older laws; but it has been rather a change of sentiment than a change of statement. Few people really remember what was the actual ethical theory that gave to all betting the bad name of gambling. But fewer still, I fancy, could state their own new ethical theory in favour of betting, or distinguish it from the gambling that is really bad. Even when we were Puritans we were not really precisians. In other words, England, even when it was strict in discipline, was not really strict in doctrine. Certainly, at least, it was not really strict in definition. Consequently, I do not really know what the moral theory of the anti-betting men was; and I do not believe they knew themselves. My own morality, which is not my own, but that of the ancient moral culture of Christendom, is of course simple enough. I have a right to bet what I have a right to lose. If I choose to sit on the wild seashore and occupy my whole holiday in throwing stones into the sea, I am also entitled, if I choose, to vary the monotony by throwing into the sea the large moon-stone tie-pin which is the ornament of my neckties and the admiration of my neighbours, or to hurl into the same sea-waves the heavy cairn-gorm brooch bequeathed by my Aunt Jemima; always supposing I can do the latter without unjustly lacerating Aunt Jemima’s feelings, here or in heaven. I have as much right to throw the more expensive stones into the sea as to throw the cheaper ones; so long as it is only at my own expense and not something beyond my lawful expenditure; which would probably turn out to be at somebody else’s expense. So far as that goes, I am perfectly justified in throwing away my celebrated tie-pin or my aunt’s brooch for the mere momentary pleasure of one sublime gesture; for the satisfaction of feeling like Polycrates or the great Doge of Venice wedding the sea. It is a mere luxury to chuck them, as it is a mere luxury to cherish them; I only keep them for a lark, and I only lose them for a lark. If a man is justified in throwing a pearl like a pebble into the sea at Margate, knowing it will not return, he is justified in throwing it on the table at Monte Carlo or putting it on a horse at Ascot: with a chance that it may return. But he is not justified, for instance, in throwing the baby into the sea, though many at Margate have felt tempted to do so. Nor is he justified in risking the baby's milk or the money for the baby's clothes at Ascot or Monte Carlo; and nobody will deny that many have done this, and that much evil has come of it. But the principle is at least clear, and presents no problem to those who hold it.

I have sometimes thought that the philosophy of betting bears some resemblance to something else, which may be called the philosophy of guessing. There is in the literary or intellectual world an operation which is somewhat similar to that of honest betting in the sporting world. It occurs especially in the case of English literature; because in England it so often happens that the author is the amateur. It often happens, also, that the amateur can give valuable hints to the professional. But those hints ought always to be given in a certain light and sporting spirit, not unlike the guesses of the better sort of gambler. The outsider ought not to give the whole weight of his word or reputation to suggestions he could not substantiate in all their details. If he does, he tends to become the crank or even the quack, the awful and appalling sort of amateur who sits down to prove to you that Mary Queen of Scots wrote Shakspere or that the name of Lord Kitchener is inscribed in the measurements of the Great Pyramid. But I have often thought there might be a place for intelligent guesswork which admits that it is guesswork. There might even be a place for a fanciful theory, if it was avowedly fanciful. I confess I have suffered many things from the sort of man who has a theory that Bacon wrote Shakspere, when he does really believe it. But I had great fun in working out a theory that Shakspere wrote Bacon, because I did not in the least believe it. In the course of turning it into a sketch, which was no more than a skit, I found myself discovering much more than I had known before of the real truth about the Elizabethan and Jacobean epoch. In the same way, many a man has really put hard cash in his pocket at Newmarket, or the Grand National from a bet that he made merely as a joke; and my contention is that he deserved his luck, so long as he really made it as a joke. In the case of history and similar sciences, it might be possible to draw up a rich and flattering analogy to the Turf. The dons of Oxford and Cambridge, the professors and professional historians, who are often, indeed, bookmakers, may be compared to bookies. The dream or fancy thrown out by the mere literary amateur may be compared to the dark horse in the very loose box of his light and irresponsible brain. But the dark horse always gives him a good run for his money. And it is justified, so long as it does not run away with the whole of his money; that is, with the whole of his serious reputation and peace of mind. I think there ought to be a special class of spirited and fanciful guesses; potshots at the possibilities of history; suggestions that should only suggest, but might be really suggestive. They would form a third type of literature, between the solemn stolidity of the academies and the solemn lunacy of cranks.

For instance, I once had a notion of writing an essay, making a suggestion about King Arthur. Now I am not in the least qualified to maintain an entirely serious and solid thesis about King Arthur. A man would really have to be an exceptional scholar and specialist, in about five different departments, before he could deal in that fashion with King Arthur. He would have to know all about Celtic legend and literature, Welsh and Cornish and all the rest; he would have to have a thorough grasp of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, its military maps and methods; he would have to be steeped in French chivalry and romance to separate the mediæval from the older elements; he would have to understand the real Christian and Catholic origins, and date and distinguish between the Glaston Thorn and the Grail; he would have to be a nailer at strategy and a whale at place-names. I am none of these things, and yet I had quite a nice little notion about King Arthur. It would afford a pleasant evening’s amusement for a party of dons, pulling it to pieces. And, for all I know, something might come out of it; even out of its refutation. I will not describe the theory here beyond saying that it began with the curious fact, that the first three or four chroniclers who mention King Arthur do not even call him King Arthur. But I will reserve it for some dull and rainy afternoon, in some quiet isolated country house, where there are dons who want something to play with.

XXXVIII

On Making Good — I

THE other day I was stricken by a great grief; I will not go so far as to say that I burst into tears at the breakfast table, but I believe I must have uttered a deep and hollow groan, to the surprise and alarm of my family. For I found that no less a person than the Dean of St. Paul's had used the now common phrase about people "making good." He said, in support of his recognized preference for the produce of the super-villas over that of the slums, that there is "nothing snobbish" in recognizing the superiority of "those who have made good" over the wastrels and misfits, whom he seems to conceive as constituting the whole population of the poorer quarters of the modern city. Talking about "making good" seems to me much worse than snobbish, for it is not even English. And if, as satirists have said, the English have some tendency to be snobs, they might at least be content to be English snobs. Now, this is very sad and strange; hence my outburst of emotion at the breakfast table. For, in the ordinary way, Dean Inge writes most beautiful English; sometimes really splendid English. He writes the sort of strong English that is founded on strong Latin, not the more modern sort that is in theory Nordic and in practice Yankee — or sometimes even Cockney. This again is curious, for in a way his practice is better than his precept; and it does not so much matter if he is Nordic in his theory of history, since he is entirely Mediterranean in his practice of scholarship. He is always cursing the Latin culture, and no man's culture is more entirely Latin.

But I am not dealing here with the many matters on which I differ from the Dean, or even those on which the Dean differs from himself. I will not pause here to attempt to dispel that extraordinary nightmare that appears to brood upon his brain; the general notion that all the inhabitants of West Ham or Hoxton are hunch-backs, homicidal maniacs, or hereditary cripples, every man born with one leg and one eye. I will not stop to explain that the Old Kent Road is not exclusively inhabited by wealthy men who have wasted their fortunes and become "wastrels," and that if poor men, as well as rich men, may sometimes be "misfits," it is the business of a philosopher to criticize not only them, but the framework in which they were expected to fit. But all this is an old argument, and my present concern with the Dean is not to express a difference from his opinions, but rather a tender solicitude for his style. I write not in a spirit of antagonism, but of admiration; of admiration tinged with alarm. By all means let him defend, in his own brilliant and lucid fashion, what he calls the upper middle class. Let him indulge in the most spirited, sparkling, and daring paradoxes about these ladies and gentlemen. Let him say that they do good, that they are good; but not, 0 not, in the name of our noble tongue and heritage, that they make good!

I know not where that man hides and cowers, probably among the millions who had fled to the criminal dens and lairs of the United States, who actually originated the phrase about "making good." If I knew who he was, I would write a life of him; having first killed him, of course, to make the biography complete. He must have been rather a great man in his own perverted and repulsive fashion, for he managed to sum up the supreme essential falsehood of a whole century and a whole civilization in one exactly appropriate phrase, a phrase that is all the more appropriate because it is idiotic. He must be rather like one of the great poisoners, for indeed he has poisoned the whole modern mind. He must be much more than one of the great conspirators, for, as Mr. Wells would say, it is an entirely open conspiracy. He has managed to put all the current contemporary philosophies into one phrase that means nothing. Everybody whose instincts are on the side of such sophistry instantly seizes on it, because of its ambiguity. With one single twist of bad grammar or bad logic, it tangles up together the two things that have been in sharp contrast and contradiction in every decent religion or moral system in history — the idea of moral greatness and the idea of mere material success. And yet making good is not even making sense. It will not really serve to make a sentence, let alone a good sentence or a true sentence.

Thus we can say of one of these abject beings who happen to live in Hoxton or the Harrow Road that he makes good beer-barrels; that he makes good drain-pipes; that he makes good penny-whistles or good pork-pies; but not that he makes good. It does not make sense; it does not make a sentence. And this ambiguous phrase about making good was invented because it was ambiguous; it was invented by the man who did not make pies or pipes or barrels or anything in the East End, but only scooped the profit on other men's work and went off with it to live in the West End. That is all that is meant by making good. It did not matter so much so long as people refrained from describing it as making good; so long as they were content to describe it as making money. Considered merely as one of the mild forms of rascality very common among human beings, it might really be described as mild or even as human. But by the fatal and blasting hypocrisy of this one American catchword, it was transformed from a matter of unmoral adventure to a matter of thoroughly immoral morality. The phrase "making good," merely because it contains the word "good," always carries some shadowy suggestion that the man who has merely done well for himself must also have really done well; done well as in the old creeds and codes of morals; done well in the sight of God and humanity. And that is not merely immorality, it is blasphemy; for it is practically saying that the selfish man is the saint, and that Judas with the bag is greater than Jesus with the cross.

Meanwhile, nothing but this fog of a phrase, like a real London fog choking the streets round St. Paul's Cathedral, could have so completely hidden the facts of the modern social situation from the Dean of St. Paul's. If making good meant making good things, pipes or barrels or what not, it would be obvious that people go on doing it, generation after generation, as much in the lower class as in his favourite upper middle class. I wonder how often these sages of the upper middle class stop to think what London would be like, if all the lower classes were really such fools as they suppose. What would London in a fog be like, for instance, if enormous numbers of cabmen and carmen, and men controlling traffic, were most of them drunken or incompetent? The fact is that the wastrels and the misfits, or in other words the working classes, are making good all the time. They are making good day and night; they are making good from minute to minute; or none of us would get to the end of an hour's journey. The Dean is quite entitled to praise the sort of clerical or academic family that he himself comes of; to note the virtues they really possess; and doubtless there are virtues which are easier for such a clergyman than for such a cabman. But it is very far from being self-evident that every clergyman is more successful with his sermon than any cabman with his service. Both the clergyman and the cabman may be good men; but the more they are really good men, the less they will be attracted by the ideal of making good.

XXXIX

On Making Good — II

A VERY eminent and distinguished critic has done me the honour to criticize, in a private letter, the remarks I made recently in disparagement of the phrase “making good.” He agrees with me, or at least he disagrees with Dean Inge, in so far as to admit that the Dean’s controversial use of the term was a sophistry. We should not differ very much about the social views involved. But about the verbal and grammatical matter my correspondent does not agree, and he is prepared to maintain that the phrase “making good” can be defended as a form of English idiom. He says, very truly, that it is possible to use it in a much more natural and ordinary way than it is used in the particular argument of the Dean of St. Paul’s. He says that the ordinary honest plumber, of whom I spoke, might be said to have made good in carrying out a small job or contract, and that there would be nothing odd about the phrase. It is possible, of course, that the Dean would decline to accept the arbitration of the plumber, as much as I should decline to accept the arbitration of the Dean. But the point seems to me worth a word or two of further elucidation and explanation.

First, upon the primary point, I am disposed to stand firm; I mean the point of the logic of grammar. For I am, I confess, so degenerate a Latin type of mind that I think there ought to be some logic in grammar. And it seems to me a simple fact that “to make” is a transitive verb, and must have an object or accusative. We can make a plumber good, or make a Dean good, or even make a poor bewildered and overwrought journalist, writing in a weekly illustrated paper, good; but we cannot make good. If it is an allowable idiom, it must be an exception and not a rule; and it must be an exception by some exceptional process, such as that of depending upon words that are “understood.” I know that this practice does exist; nor can the most logical Latin wholly condemn it, for it exists even in the logical Latin language. There is a form, which I remember learning laboriously in the Latin grammar as a boy, by which some such word as *officium*, for instance, could be understood. It is allowable to say in Latin: “It is of a good man to worship the gods,” or “It is of a good father to feed his children.” Here certainly there is some word, such as “part” or “duty,” left to be understood.

But the worst of these words that are understood is that they are not understood. Even in face of the few Latin precedents I rather doubt whether it is wise to follow such precedents, and certainly whether it is wise to create new precedents. But it is particularly undesirable at the present day, at a period in which things are emphatically not understood; a period in which they are, beyond all previous precedent, misunderstood. For men do not now agree, even as much as the Romans did, about the relations of a good man to the gods or the relation of a father to the children. At the best, there is some ambiguity in saying: “It is of a good man to go to church.” For one man will read it in the form “It is the duty of a good man to go to church.” Another may read it, in a cynical spirit, in the form “It is the interest of a good man to go to church.” A third will read it in the form “It is the infernal bore inflicted on a good man to go to church.” Now, that ambiguity did not so often happen in older and simpler social systems. There is less of that ambiguity in the Latin phrase. But there is nothing but ambiguity in the modern English phrase. There is only blank, unadulterated ambiguity in that English phrase — if you can call it an English phrase. And that is the root of my unrepentant revolt against it.

I mean that we may forgive the plumber (a form of Christian charity which many seem to find difficult) when he says that, in some small job, he has made good. But we only forgive him because we think that he, being poor and honest, really means “I have made good my word” or “I have made good my compact.” But it is still true that a less honest plumber, and possibly a richer plumber, *might* mean by the phrase: “I have made good my intention to swindle this old fool,” or “I have made good money out of this business, and much more than I had any right to receive.”

Now, that is the moral ambiguity that I complain of, to start with, in the very nature of the phrase. But, in its actual modern use in any ordinary newspapers or novels, it goes far beyond ambiguity and becomes anarchy. It is bad policy, at the best, to allow a word to be understood; because it is first of all misunderstood, and afterwards mistaken or betrayed or supplanted by some baser word in the minds of baser people. Even if the man did originally mean: “I have made good my word,” he will be unwise to leave out the word. It will be better, in every sense, if he keeps his word. A man’s word is only too easy to forget. And, after a time, some meaner notion, such as making good his plan or plot or conspiracy, will have crept into the vacuum of that silence. But in the vulgar use of the phrase, in the modern world at this moment, there is not the remotest notion of anything so honest. Those who say that Hiram Q. Hogswash made good in Wall Street never did mean, and never were even supposed to mean, that he had made good any word or any contract or any honest purpose of any sort. Saying that Hiram made good simply means that Hiram made money, and never means anything else. Now, Hiram is not necessarily to be blamed for making money; but neither certainly is he to be praised for it. And this twisted and stunted form of words was invented so that he might be praised for it. By dragging in the word “good” where it is neither good grammar nor good ethics, a falsification of moral standards is created, tending to suggest that there is some connexion between making money and being good. So that, while we may invoke the ancient Roman to excuse the primary habit of leaving out logically necessary words, and while we may invoke the modern plumber to excuse the simpler sort of language about making good a job or a contract, we shall still lament over the larger and more desolating calamities that the Roman and the plumber, between them, have let loose upon the modern world. We shall recognize that this piece of phraseology is now, in fact, identified with a philosophy which teaches snobbish self-interest as a sort of ideal. If it is permissible to use a phrase like having made good, it is permissible to say that this particular phrase has most unmistakably made bad.

XL

On Eyebrows

I DO not follow the fashions; I know little of that new wild world, where women can be wholly natural by constructing masks of grease-paint, or prove their freedom by strictly following the mode. I become conscious, or half-conscious, of some change in dress or deportment when it has already become general. In this manner, for instance, it was lately borne in upon me that another change has taken place in the human countenance.

It is already a commonplace, I suppose, that the ideal and immortal Lover, as conceived by Shakspere, "sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad made to his mistress' eyebrow," must now go away and sigh about something else. His mistress has no eyebrows; and it might be inferred that he would produce no ballads. Anyhow, it suggests a sort of metaphysical duel between the Lover and the Poet, rather attractive to the metaphysical poets of that period. Would the balladist still cling to his ballad, pursuing the abstract and archetypal image of an Eyebrow, even when it was entirely detached from a face? Would he prefer the lady's eyebrow to the lady, leaving the rest of the lady behind like so much lumber, and pursuing only that peculiar vision of vanished hair? Or would he make the supreme sacrifice of tearing up the ballad and taking up with the lady, however strangely disfigured, resolving henceforward to write ballads only about her nose, her ears, or some portion of her which it seemed improbable that she would be in any immediate hurry to cut off? Even about those, of course, he could never be quite safe, if amputation were really the fashion.

In fact, touching that famous phrase, I have often wondered why modern poets do not more often amuse themselves by reproducing the imaginary Ballad to an Eyebrow. Shakspere is full of hints that could be used as the basis of all sorts of games and experiments; Browning accepted such a challenge in expanding the suggestive line of "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came"; and my own father, who was a man of many crafts and hobbies he had no ambition to exploit, made a table ornament modelled in every detail on the Three Caskets of Portia. Surely some of us might have a shot at a really Elizabethan address to the supercilious feature. Surely any modern writer, after sighing like a furnace for a few minutes, might be able to attempt something appropriate in the sixteenth-century manner:

As seven-dyed Iris doth o'erarch the spheres, Love made that bridge that doth o'erarch thine eyne Bright as that bonded bow enskied; a sign Against the crystal Deluge of thy tears As line on line, so brow to brow appears ...

At this point the poet looks up at the lady's eyebrow and finds that it disappears. The pen drops from his fingers, and this immortal fragment (if I may so modestly describe it) remains for ever fragmentary. Shakspere, especially the Shakspere of the Sonnets, knew more than most people about the law of change and dissolution spread over all earthly things, even those that seem the most natural:

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea, But sad mortality o'ersways their power, How with this rage shall Beauty hold a plea, Whose action is no stronger than a flower.

I quote from memory. Anyhow, even this argument does not force us to a premature plucking of the flower or plucking out of the eyebrow. But, in spite of Shakspere's somewhat excessive preoccupation, at one period, with the images of mutability and mortality, I very gravely doubt whether he ever did expect that sonnets or ballads to eyes, eyebrows, ears, noses, and the rest would ever become impossible by a general obliteration of these features. But what is stranger still, and what would have struck Shakspere as very strange indeed, is the fact that this negative and destructive operation should take place in a society devoted to pleasure, and in an age commonly supposed to be even more pagan than his own.

For the real moral is rather interesting. I challenge anybody to deny that this custom, if it had not been adopted as hedonism, would have been denounced as hideous asceticism. Suppose people had been told twenty years ago, say in the great Suffrage period, that in some ancient societies women were made to shave off their eyebrows after marriage. Would it not have been instantly classed with the cruel disfigurements imposed by masculine jealousy, as in the Oriental wives who are made to black their teeth after marriage? Suppose that some Puritan fanatic had indignantly declared that nuns were made to shave their eyebrows. Should we ever have heard the last of the unnatural defacement of the human face at the command of superstition? Would not everybody have quite instinctively connected it with Fasts and Flagellants? Would it ever have occurred to anybody to connect it with fashion and pleasure? If anybody had told the

Suffragette that the women in the harem liked having their hair pulled out an inch above their eyeballs, how the Suffragette would have yelled with derision of the cowardly masculine excuse! If anybody had told the late Mr. Kensit that a fashion of going bald above the eyes was started merely for fun among the nuns and novices themselves, how he would have snorted with incredulity! Yet the fashion has, to all appearance, been started merely for fun among the ladies themselves; and it may be presumed that they like it. I do not particularly care whether they have no eyebrows or three eyebrows, or green or triangular eyebrows, in those select circles where such things presumably start. But there is a certain intellectual interest in the way in which they seem nowadays, in so many cases, to start in the opposite direction from what one would normally call the pursuit of pleasure and beauty.

In short, the only real interest of such a trifle is that which connects it with some of the serious arts and decorative schools of our day. It is, I suppose, an unconscious expression, parallel to many other such expressions, of an artistic movement towards something that is more or less severe and harsh and even dehumanized. It is part of a tendency to turn people into patterns rather than into pictures. As a reaction against the deliquescent sentimentalism that was the end of the old humanitarian sentiment, it is comprehensible enough: but it is comprehensible rather than commendable.

Anyhow, one thing is certain; that, though many periods in the past have a certain grim and grandiose solemnity, through the hardness of externals or the mathematical severity of lines, these periods always appear to us to be oppressive and inhuman. So that the age of the Bright Young Things may yet have to look forward to its own appearance in history, as a type of tyranny and slavery and stiff as the mummies of the dead.

XLI

On Eating and Sleeping

SOME time or other, I think, I will write a really thoughtful and educational article about Bed or Breakfast or Baths or Breathing, or some of those simple things, or things that seem simple to simple people. And it shall be written in the exact and peculiar style of a modern article on Marriage or the Family or Patriotism or Religion. I have read such multitudes of these modern articles, especially leading articles and articles in the lighter style of popular science; there are so many of them, and they are all so exactly alike, that I believe I could reproduce the manner pretty correctly and the type of argument, in so far as there is one. We will suppose, for the sake of argument, that I have selected the subject of "Food: Human Habit of Consuming." In which case I should be entirely safe, and even successful, if I wrote something like this:

"The progress of enlightenment, it must be admitted, tends to rob us of some of the emotional consolations which were possible to our ancestors in simpler times. Thinking men can no longer accept the ancient creeds and ecclesiastical dogmas which taught them that the virtues of an enemy whom they had eaten passed into their own bodies; the belief lingers in various forms in the common practice of eating beef and mutton, in the hope of thus absorbing the energy of the bull and the innocence of the sheep. And the modern Englishman, eating eggs and bacon at breakfast, hardly guesses that his real motive for doing so is a desire to partake mystically of the higher virtues of the pig or the bolder qualities of the chicken. It is not to be expected that these habits, resting as they do on such quaint survivals of savage superstition, should long survive the myths out of which they came; and the frequent appearance of Fasting Men at the World's Fair, in Barnum's Show, and other arenas of scientific experiment, is enough to show that science is again sending forth her pioneers to show humanity the better way. So long as the mediæval Church could impose her Feasts upon a faithful and obedient populace, the half-barbaric habit of having meals seemed almost to be a natural part of social life. There are many traces of the once-powerful tradition that bringing men together in love-feasts, or banquets of reconciliation, had a more or less magical effect of making them more friendly and more at peace with each other. And it may be that in ruder times even food itself was often useful for this psychological purpose, and was perhaps the only instrument that ignorant and primitive peoples could employ. Since the foundation of the League of Nations, men have learned the lesson that Peace Conferences can be successfully held without any of the old ceremonial gestures of eating or drinking, and any social use that such motions may once have served is now superseded by more direct and rational methods. The habit of eating may linger, here and there, among remote peasantries or rigid and reactionary individuals; but it is so clearly bound up with a whole world of ancient mystery and mummery, with the saying of grace, with the giving of thanks, with the proposing of patriotic sentiments over glasses of wine, that there can be little or no future for it now that man has reached his intellectual manhood. Gruncke, by the way, has pointed out that the cannibal notion of devouring and digesting the bodily vigour of an enemy is actually attested in the surviving popular phrase of 'drinking his health.'"

Now that is exactly like any number of newspaper and magazine articles I have read on the evolution of Marriage or Religion, only a little more sensible. The suggestion of Professor Gruncke about the anthropophagous meaning of drinking a health (though I have only just this moment made it up) is immeasurably more sensible than the suggestion of many professors on the subject of Marriage by Capture; proving that a bridegroom must be a brigand by the institution of the Best Man. They say solemnly that a chief always went out to the proposed abduction with some leading and distinguished man of his tribe. It never seems to dawn on them that he would have gone out in any case to any wedding, whether it were an abduction or not (or, indeed, to any occasion of any importance), with the leading men of his tribe. He would not be likely to select the most unpresentable and disreputable object in his tribe, when he went to visit his father-in-law. This ghastly and gaping lack of common sense, in all the attempted reconstructions of primitive humanity, is the commonest mark of all this sort of popular science and fashionable rationalism. But it would be just as easy to use it to discredit Food as to discredit Family Life, or any of the basic human things that it is used to discredit. All that is necessary is to give a string of suggestions (such as I have just reeled off without stopping for breath) in the case of the Savage Custom of Supper. Mention a number of myths that have some connexion with meals; mix them all up like a soup;

leave out all the joints and bones of argument; and you can easily leave the reader with a general impression that a meal is a myth. Above all, you must keep on praising the reader, as a progressive fellow superior to his father; and you can easily make him feel superior to meals — until next meal-time.

There is no space here for my powerful and cogent exposure of the Superstition of Sleep. It is set forth (or it might be some day) with all the exact process of thought and careful citation of facts and scientific authorities essential to this sort of work; the footnotes fill up most of the pages and the appendices are in five volumes. The recognized scientific method in such cases consists of two parts. First the writer points out that Sleep has a perfectly simple, single, and obvious origin in mythology, and then (second) he proceeds to trace it to about ten totally contradictory mythological origins. In the epoch of the Sun Myth, he will say that sleep was a sort of negative worship of the Sun God. In order to emphasize the idea that men only lived by the life and inspiration of Apollo, the priests of Apollo (acting as mesmerists or medicine-men) succeeded in making their dupes literally lose consciousness after the sun's disappearance; induced them to die daily and lie like corpses until the dawn. That is quite a good one; but there will be plenty more. When poor old Herbert Spencer still had influence, it was often suggested that Dreams were the origin of Religion. To such thinkers, it would be a mere trifle to amend it by saying that Religion was the origin of Dreams. Sleep was only the hypnosis (how fortunate and illuminating that the word hypnosis only means sleep!) imposed by the priests on the credulous savages; in which state all sorts of mythical suggestions could be made to them, thus producing what we call the phenomena of dreams. Therefore, as the world casts off priestly vestments and pontifical mitres it will also throw away bed-clothes, night-gowns and nightcaps, and everything that reminds it of the mystical trance once called sleep. Or it would be easy to show that sleep was produced among primitive men by means of a vegetable drug (still used in the Solomon Islands) that they might not spy on the secret practices of the priests before they themselves had passed the Seventh Initiation. Or there is the obvious explanation that the sacrifices demanded at the harvest ... but we need not go on with the theories of the professors for ever, even if they do. Perhaps you do not find this convincing. Perhaps you do not propose instantly to abandon the habit of eating or of sleeping at night. You say, defensively, that food and sleep are necessary to normal men. I fear it will be only too easy to apply the same argument to a belief in Free Will, to a concept of Right and Wrong, and to the perilous habit of humanity of marrying and having children.

XLII

On Sir Walter Scott

DURING a brief but enforced leisure which has lately befallen me I have read a great part of what was written and spoken on the subject of Sir Walter Scott, during the various celebrations of his Centenary. As a matter of course, much of it was highly eulogistic, perhaps rather too much as a matter of course. On the other hand, a great part of it had a very unnecessary air of apology, or a still more absurd air of patronage. Some of it was flatly crude and uncomprehending. One journalist not only announced jauntily that he could see nothing in the literary legend or authority of Walter Scott, but actually appealed against him to the authority of Mark Twain. This affects me very much in the same way as being told suddenly that Charlie Chaplin has never got much pleasure out of Homer. I have no idea, of course, of whether this is the case; Mr. Chaplin, for all I know, may be a Homeric scholar and a deep student of Scott; he may have better taste than Mark Twain. Mark Twain was certainly something of a man of genius in his own way; and so, for that matter, is Charlie Chaplin. But there is such a thing as artistic tradition and cultural grasp, and I should never have dreamed of expecting Mark Twain to understand the greatness of the Waverley Novels, any more than he understood the greatness of the Arthurian Romances. What he called The Yankee at the Court of King Arthur was, of course, a very clumsy version of King Arthur being tried in the court of the Yankee, and the findings of the court were about as conclusive as those of the court of Dayton, Tennessee.

Again, it may be true of Scott at the moment that he is neglected, upon a merely numerical estimate of readers; and the same, by this time, may very probably be true of Mark Twain. But that sort of calculation makes no difference to literary genius in the long run. There were also, of course, spirited defences; perhaps a little too much on the defensive. Mr. John Buchan stood resolutely with dirk and claymore before the shrine; but even in his excellent address one or two phrases suggested that he was not only defending a sanctity, but defending a secret. There was just a touch of that spirit with which the Scotsman sometimes seems to be almost forbidding the Englishman to understand Burns or to enjoy haggis. There is doubtless a truth in this tradition, for every writer who is really universal is also national; but Scott was not merely national, but very universal. Continental poets, like Goethe and Victor Hugo, would hardly have been themselves without Scott. Byron, perhaps the most Continental of all poets, would not have been himself without Scott. Scott made Scottish Romances, but he made European Romance.

I think the two points about Scott that are the most vivid and vital are now the most invisible. They are points naturally neglected in our time, but the defect is in our time and not in Scott. One concerns the fact that he wrote historical novels, in the sense of stories full of historical characters. The other concerns the fact that he was himself a historical character. He really tells us much more about his own age than about the previous ages. It is too often forgotten that his best books, like *The Antiquary,* are actually about his own age. Some among the best are those very close to his own age, like *Rob Roy,* or the admirable ending of Guy Mannering. But there was something which Scott specially shared with his own epoch which he was always reading backwards into other epochs. It was not merely a vague thing that is called romance; it was also a very clear and classical thing that is called rhetoric. He was not an eighteenth-century man for nothing. He was, almost as much as he was anything, a great orator. It is one of the limitations of our own very limited time to sneer at oratory. But it is chiefly because our politicians cannot rise to it that our critics will not condescend to it. At the end of the eighteenth century there was a sort of glowing atmosphere of great speech, and in none more than in the men of action. Nelson and Napoleon were really as rhetorical as Danton and Fox.

Now, Scott possessed this sort of eloquence in the very highest degree. It would be well worth while to make an anthology of the mere speeches out of Scott's novels and metrical romances. From the retort of the Saxon Franklin upon De Bracy to the curse of Meg Merrilees upon the Laird of Ellangowan, from the speech with which the crabbed Louis XI rises into dignity in the face of death to the rude refusal of Douglas in Tantallon to give his hand to Marmion, all the speeches are spirited and telling, considered as speeches, whatever they may be considered as writings. This is much of the error about the rhymed romances. They are not always poetry, but they are always literature. They are literature of that particular kind that expresses itself in direct and militant oratory; in the speech that lies nearest to action. The reply of the Lady of Branksome, to the foes who hold her son as a hostage is almost doggerel considered as poetry; but it is direct and even deadly considered as oratory. Everything is apt and telling, from the sneer at Lord Dacre's courage to the abrupt turn of defiant invocation:

For the young heir of Branksome's line God be his aid and God be mine.

That is the sort of way that men like Danton and Fox did debate, through riots and revolutions that filled Scott's own epoch. And he was more of a man of his own epoch than he knew.

One thing he did find in the past, not yet quite destroyed in the present, and it was his chief inspiration. He knew nothing of the religion of the past, and his notion of Gothic was more barbarous than that of any Goth. But he had extracted from his feudal traditions something on which his spirit truly fed; something without which the modern world is starving. He found the idea of Honour, which is the true energy in all militant eloquence. That a man should defend the dignity of his family, of his farm, of his lawful rank under the King, even of his mere name, of something at least that was larger than himself — this was the fire that Scott found still burning out of fourteenth-century feudalism and expressed in eighteenth-century oratory. Of all moral ideals it is the most neglected and misunderstood today. It is not strange that the eloquence which sprang from it is misunderstood and neglected also. We see that hollow gaping around us everywhere; in the fact that marriage is discussed as everything except what it is, a vow; or that property is discussed as everything except what it ought to be, an independence. But the modern world is not so happy in its oblivion of honour, or the eloquence that springs from honour, as to force us to believe in the permanent oblivion of Scott.

XLIII

On the Solar System

THE Sun has made a fitful and what may fairly be called a meteoric appearance in my garden this afternoon. And since, by a curious coincidence, this portent has occurred at a time not very distant from Midsummer Day (which, as you truly remark, is the Feast of St. John the Baptist and the date of the Battle of Bannockburn), the symbolical character of the sun flamed all the more mysteriously in the imagination. This luminary, which has been seldom observed of late in our country, can nevertheless be to a large extent calculated by astronomers, touching its actual though invisible relations to the earth. It would be an exaggeration to say that the sun visits England in the manner of a rare and very remote comet. It occurs in our literature; some say more often in our literature than our life, and I have even read a literary theory according to which The Merry Month of May was a purely classical convention, taken wholesale by the English poets from the Provençal poets. So that Chaucer and Dunbar, huddled up in mackintoshes and cowering over stoves, wrote the praises of spring and summer with freezing fingers, and made purely ritual salutations to invisible flowers and impassable fields. I do not believe in this bitter interpretation, but then, I happen to be one of the few and rather unpopular persons who like the cool and troubled temper of the English climate. It was said that Germany wanted a place in the sun; I cannot sufficiently congratulate myself that England succeeded in finding a place in the shade. Not many people in England have agreed with me, this summer; though it is possible that I might find a few sympathizers in America, where there is a heat-wave. I remember once there was a heat-wave in England, and I found myself walking about on the Sussex Downs under that tropical oppression. And I remember that the rather hackneyed quotation from Browning came back to me; and I said with a groan: “Oh to be in April, now that England’s here.”

Anyhow, the sun has been made a symbol of all sorts of things, good, bad, and indifferent; and it would be easy to fill a page with all the significant parts it has played in human history; of what it meant to the Heretic Pharaoh and what to the Parsees; of why the rays of its rising are displayed on the blazon of Japan; of how it has been arrested by Joshua, worshipped by Julian, theorized about by Copernicus, quarrelled about by Galileo, pointed at by Napoleon, put in its proper place by Newton, and seriously disturbed and doubted about by Einstein — all this would give fascinating opportunity for that habit of wandering from the point which is the essence of an essay of this kind. For the moment, however, I prefer to regard the sun merely in the light of a strange star that has startled me by visiting my garden in the middle of summer, and rather to dwell upon the catastrophic and unearthly character of the event than to seek for any strictly scientific or merely rationalistic explanation of it.

One reason for reconciling oneself cheerfully to regarding the sun as a strange star is that it seems likely, in the light of the latest science, that we shall find it illuminating a very strange world. I am a child in these things; and so long as the child is allowed to play in the garden, he does not bother very much about the rules regulating the visits of that shining stranger, who has of late been very much of a stranger. But he does know enough about recent revolutions, in the ideas about space and light, and atomic structure, to know that not only the sun, but also the garden, grows more mysterious every day. We may come to regarding the sun almost as a secret; like the sun that wore the mask of the moon in Mr. Max Beerbohm’s fairy-tale; a deceptive luminary; almost, if the contradiction be allowed, a dark luminary; with crooked rays; with invisible violet rays; with something resembling black rays, beyond the dreams of the blind. It seems to be anything but the simple golden globe with which the simple Victorian naturalists dealt so easily, when they taught us the use of the globes. Some of the things that are now said about it astonish me very much. For instance, Mr. René Fülop-Miller, the highly intelligent and impartial historian of the Bolshevist Revolution, has recently written a book about the Jesuits. The writer is equally detached about the Jesuits; he is entirely detached from the religion of the Jesuits. He is an ordinary modern rationalist; very emphatic upon the need to keep abreast of modern science. He narrates, as any rationalist would, as any reasonable man would, the victory of Galileo and the Copernican astronomy, with its earth going round the sun, over the old Ptolemaic astronomy, with its sun going round the earth. I should, of course, entirely accept that Copernican victory; it never would occur to me to do anything else. But I was considerably startled when Mr. Fülop-Miller, after stating the ordinary view of the Solar System, which everybody accepts, and I have naturally accepted, goes on calmly to write as follows:

"It is true that the most recent mathematical and physical theories necessitate a revision of this commonly held opinion, for no longer does the teaching of Ptolemy appear 'wholly false,' nor that of Copernicus 'alone true,' as Galileo thought. Rather does it appear that both the systems have fundamentally an equal claim to recognition, and that the superiority of the Copernican system rests solely on the greater simplicity of the astronomical calculations effected with its help. Cardinal Bellarmine had, however, already recognized this when he warned Galileo's pupils to regard the Copernican doctrine only as hypothetical and not as the sole truth."

In other words, the scientific rationalist, invoking the very latest scientific views, says something that I for one should never have dreamed of saying: that Galileo was as wrong as he was right; or at least that he was no more right than he was wrong, and no more right than his opponents were right. This seems to me a very amazing remark to appear in a book by an ordinary modern sceptic. Anyhow, it is a remark that will not be found in any book by me, or any of those who are regarded as religious reactionaries.

Let nobody go away and say that I made the remark. Let nobody wail aloud that I say the Solar System is a Solar Myth. I never interfered with the Solar System. I never disorganized the sun and moon; I never in my life gave the planets or the fixed stars the least cause for uneasiness. Copernicus and Newton are good enough for me. I only say the sun must be a very strange star, and must stand in a very strange relation to a very strange planet or satellite, if any sane sceptic can really say that it is just as true that the sun goes round the earth as that the earth goes round the sun. The real truth, which he has in mind, is probably some very subtle mathematical relation, to which both of those contrary images are merely relative. The only effect on me, at the moment, is a merely imaginative, or even a merely artistic effect. It makes the sun much more extraordinary; and it was extraordinary enough before. I have not the faintest intention of meddling with these problems in the higher world of mathematics. I only say that the immediate effect of them on the fancy is almost to bring back the sun into the world of mythology. In that sense, the sun is much more of a Sun Myth; it is at least a Sun Mystery. Phoebus Apollo, worshipped with such superb prayer and sacrifice, is still at least like that other pagan god whom St. Paul saluted as the Unknown God. And because I love everything that adds at least to the wonder of the world, and because I hate familiarity as I hate contempt, I am glad that the strange god in the garden grows stranger every day. For we need mystery to console and encourage us. And, like Voltaire, and other pious and devout characters, I quite agree that we must cultivate the garden.

XLIV

On Thoughtless Remarks

IT is doubtless disrespectful to the reader, nor indeed does it tend greatly to the aggrandizement or dignity of the writer, to say that my occupation in life is catching flies. And when I recently referred to a certain type of Feminist as a wasp, I received remonstrances from one who doubtless considered her to have all the highest and most royal attributes of a queen bee. Nevertheless, this unfortunate metaphor frequently returns to my mind, and I am conscious of a truth that I could not easily express without it. What I mean is this: that one of the chief nuisances of our time is a swarm of little things, in the form of little thoughts, or little sayings largely divorced from thoughts, which pervade the whole atmosphere in a manner only comparable to that of the most minute insects: insignificant and almost invisible but innumerable and almost omnipresent. I am not thinking of real thought; even of false or destructive thought. I am not referring to the real bodies of moral and philosophical opinion, based on principles I think wrong, or producing results I think mischievous. The views of this kind, with which I have sometimes dealt, differ very much in their power or promise or capacity for doing harm. I disagree with Communism as I disagree with Calvinism; but nobody would say this is the hour of Calvinism, and I admit, in a sense, it is the hour of Communism. There is a very strong intellectual temptation to the Bolshevist simplification because of the unquestionable collapse of the old commercial complexity. On the other hand, other theories I have quarrelled with in my time are less and less prominent in the modern quarrel. Many men of science have abandoned Darwinism. All men of science have abandoned Materialism. But Materialism and Darwinism were none the less thorough systems supported by thinking men, with arguments to be answered as well as assumptions to be questioned. The kind of thing of which I am speaking now is something at once atmospheric and microscopic, like a cloud of midges, and not like the serious scientific theories and philosophies of the nineteenth century, which may rather be compared, according to taste, to lions, elephants, tigers, vultures, vipers, or scorpions.

The matter in question is the prevalence of a sort of casual and even conversational scepticism, making even the idle thoughts of an idle fellow busy in the interests of doubt and despair. I mean that a man, without thinking at all, will throw off some flippant phrase which is always (by a strange fatality) a sort of feeble revolt against all traditional truth. It may be anything, an aside on the stage or a joke on the political platform; it may be a mere flourish at the start of a magazine story or a mere word dropped into an inconvenient silence; something said for the sake of saying something. The whole point of it is that it is, in this sense, pointless. The philosophy is not expressed when people are talking about philosophy, but when they are talking about anything else. I have just this moment started reading an ordinary modern story, quite well written considered as a story; and it begins by saying that there is not much difference between stupidity and courage, and, in fact, that courage is really only a form of stupidity.

That is exactly typical of the thing I mean. It is merely a casual remark; it is only very casually meant to be a clever remark; it is actually rather a silly remark; but the point is that a fatality of fashion causes a myriad such remarks to be made, always on the side of cowardice and never on the side of courage. In point of fact, of course, it would be easy to demonstrate its falsehood. History is full of examples of intellectual men who have been courageous, even of highly subtle and penetrating intellectuals who have accepted death courageously. It even contains any number of cases of thoughtful men who have thought a great deal about the act of accepting death; who have thought about it for a long time, and with complete composure, and then deliberately accepted it. Socrates is an obvious example. Sir Thomas More is a still more obvious example. Boëthius and many other philosophers; St. Paul and many other saints; all kinds of mystics, missionaries, religious founders and social reformers have proved the point over and over again. But I am interested here, not so much in the point, as in the pointless remark. What is that itch of intellectual irritation which makes a modern man, even in a moment of indolence, say the cynical thing even when it is obviously false; or kick against the heroic thing, even when it is self-evidently true? Why do we find today this vast and vague mass of trivialities, which have nothing in common except that they are *all* in reaction against the very best of human traditions? Why has this cheap and really worthless sort of scepticism got into such universal circulation? In other words, I am not now thinking of the Gold Standard of the highest truth, or the Bimetallism of the higher scepticism, which discusses whether there can be a rivalry in truth; or any of the more or less precious metals which may bear the image and superscription of this or that moral authority. I am puzzled by the circulation of all these millions of brass farthings, hardly more valuable than bad pennies; I am wondering where they all come from, and why they can be produced in such handfuls; and whether there is not something wrong with the mint of the mind. I am wondering what has debased the currency of current thought and speech, and why every normal ideal of man is now pelted with handfuls of such valueless pebbles, and assailed everywhere, not by free thought, but by frank thoughtlessness.

There seems to be no normal motive for a human being feeling a hostility to the human virtue of courage. He may disapprove of this or that excuse or occasion for calling it forth, but surely not of the thing itself. If the writer had said that the bravery of brave men is used by the stupidity of stupid men, he would have said something perfectly tenable, and, indeed, frequently true. When he says that a brave man must be a stupid man, he wantonly says something that can instantly be disproved and dismissed as impudent and idiotic. Why does he say it, except to relieve his feelings; and in that case what are his feelings? We only know that they have never yet been the normal feelings of men, yet they seem just now to be the almost involuntary feelings of a vast number of men. That is the problem that I find practically pestering us on every side today; and that is what I mean by comparing that buzz of dull flippancy to the swarming of gnats or flies. It is all concerned with the same paradox, with what may be called the omnipresence of the insignificant. A fly is a small thing, but flies can be a very big thing. In some tropical countries, I am told, they can appear like great clouds on the remote horizon or vast thunder-storms filling the whole sky. The plague of locusts which afflicts many lands is something much more destructive than the passage of a pack of wolves or the ruin wrought by a stampede of wild bulls or wild elephants. So the seemingly insignificant individual irritation produced by these insignificant individual perversities may be, in its cumulative effect, more corrupting to a whole culture than the great heresies that have been hardened and hammered into a certain intellectual solidity. The spirit of anarchy does not work only by monsters. Even the sages and visionaries of the East have seen a spiritual significance in the fact that even almost invisible insects can be a plague or carry a pestilence; and the ancient name of Beelzebub has the meaning of the Lord of Flies.

THE WELL AND THE SHALLOWS

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

I WAS monstrously attracted by a suggestion that these essays should bear the general title of “Joking Apart.” It seemed to me a simple and sensible way of saying that the reader of these pages must not look for many jokes, certainly not merely for jokes, because these are controversial essays, covering all subjects on which a controversialist is challenged, and not particular subjects chosen as they are chosen by an essayist. It is an awful revelation of the world of unreason into which we have wandered, that people more practical than I are convinced that if I say that this is apart from joking, everyone will think it is a joke. To my simple mind it seems very much as if I wanted to call a book, “Away from Jericho,” and everybody assumed that I had accepted a very general recommendation to go to Jericho. Many essays could be written on this strange modern sensibility to mere verbal allusion, or the introduction of certain words, even to repudiate them. But the only point here involved is that these essays are all under the conditions of controversy, which involve the absolute necessity of disgusting those with whom we disagree on any subject, and boring those who are indifferent to that subject. I have had, if I may say so, a very happy and lucky literary life; and have often felt rather the indulgence than the impatience of critics; and it is in a perfectly amiable spirit that I note that it has involved a certain transition or change. Up to a certain point, I was charitably chaffed for saying what I could not possibly mean; and I was then rather more sharply criticised, when it was discovered that I did really mean it. Now anybody driven to the defence of what he does really mean must cover all the strategic field of the fight, and must fight at many points which he would not have chosen in fancy, but only in relation to fact. He cannot hope to deal only with heresies that amuse him; he must, in common fairness, deal seriously with heresies that bore him. He must settle down to stating his real reasons for contradicting real statements, which are not made by him as statements, and not chosen by him as subjects. All this seems to me, with my mild rationalistic mind, excellently summarised in the words, “Joking Apart.”

Anyhow, this is why I have opened this series with an essay called “An Apology for Buffoons,” because it is in some sense, I will not say a swan-song (that ornithological metaphor would not occur to me in relation to myself), but at least a sort of summary of my more frivolous mode of writing, and all that I still think may be fairly advanced for it. Unfortunately, a man fighting what he honestly believes to be false can hardly preserve the glorious immunity of a buffoon. He is forced to be serious, and even those who despise him most are driven desperately to take him seriously. But there is one other reason for adding this preliminary note, in connection with the preliminary essay. Since I wrote it, I have come to appreciate much more warmly the admirable work of Mr. T. S. Eliot; and I should like to offer an apology to him for some errors that occurred accidentally in the article itself. It was not he, but another critic, with whom I confused him, who made the particular point against alliteration; and the quotation from him was made from memory; and I have not been able to trace it so as to reproduce the exact order of words, the inaccuracy, if any, does not affect the argument; but the article which I had already planned to put in the same magazine, called “Apology to T S Eliot” would have gone far beyond any such verbal point. It would be adding impudence to injury to dedicate a book to an author merely on the claim of having misquoted him; but I should be proud to dedicate this book to T. S. Eliot, and the return of true logic and a luminous tradition to the world.

AN APOLOGY FOR BUFFOONS

THERE was a time when I appeared in the Mercury, covered with blushes, to acknowledge a friendly criticism which asked if my journalism held enough of autobiography; and I attempted with great embarrassment to give thanks for the criticism — and the compliment. My blush has faded; my sense of decency has departed; and I appear now with the shameless purpose of being, not merely autobiographical, but grotesquely egotistical. In a spirit of brazen contradiction, I even propose to be egotistical in disproving the charge of egotism. Nay, in a yet wilder illogicality, I claim to be egotistical in the interests of other people. It is a contradiction in terms; but as the higher mathematics, the higher morality, the higher religion and the rest now entirely consist of contradictions in terms, I go on with a ghastly calm. And I do it because I cannot think of any other way of drawing attention to a real problem of literature, and especially of popular literature (if I may dare to dream of that contradiction also) except this particular line of argument, which inevitably involves the mention of my own case — let us hope along with more amusing ones.

It is commonly alleged of writers that they resent mild criticisms as infamous personal imputations, taking them as seriously as slanders. Without affectation, I fancy my own case to be rather different and even opposite. Most of the adverse criticisms written about me strike me as quite true. Where I am in invincible ignorance, I suppose, is in a proper sense of the importance of the things thus rightly reproved. For instance, a very sympathetic reviewer said that I used too much alliteration; and quoted Mr. T. S. Eliot (see apology in Introduction) as saying that such a style maddened him to the point of unendurance; and a similar criticism of my English was made, I think, by another American writer, Mr. Cuthbert Wright. Now I think, on fair consideration, that it is perfectly true that I do use a great deal too much alliteration. The only question on which these gentlemen and I would probably differ is a question of degree; a question of the exact importance or necessity of avoiding alliteration. For I do strongly maintain that it is a question of avoiding alliteration — and even that phrase does not avoid it! If an English writer does not avoid it, he is perpetually dragged into it when speaking rapidly or writing a great deal, by the whole trend and current of the English speech; perhaps that is why the Anglo-

Saxon poetry even down to Piers Plowman (which I enjoy hugely) was all alliteration. Anyhow, the tendency in popular and unconscious speech is quite obvious, in phrases and proverbs and rhymes and catchwords and a thousand things. Time and tide, wind and water, fire and flood, waste not, want not, bag and baggage, spick and span, black and blue, deaf and dumb, the devil and the deep sea, when the wine is in the wit is out, in for a penny, in for a pound, a pig in a poke, a bee in a bonnet, a bat in a belfry, and so on through a myriad fantastic changes of popular imagery. What elaborate art, what sleepless cunning even, must these more refined writers employ to dodge this rush of coincidences; and run between the drops of this deluge! It must be a terrible strain on the presence of mind to be always ready with a synonym. I can imagine Mr. T. S. Eliot just stopping himself in time, and saying with a refined cough, “Waste not, require not.” I like to think of Mr. Cuthbert Wright, in some headlong moment of American hustle, still having the self-control to cry, “Time and Fluctuation wait for no man!” I can imagine his delicate accent when speaking of a pig in a receptacle or of bats in the campanile. It is a little difficult perhaps to image the latter critic apparently confining himself to the isolated statement, “Mr. Smith is spick,” while his mind hovered in momentary hesitation about how to vary the corresponding truth that Mr. Smith is span. But it is quite easy to conceive an advanced modern artist of this school, looking for some sharp and graphic variation in the old colour scheme of black and blue. Indeed, we might almost invent a sort of colour test, like that which somebody suggested about red grass and green sky as a test of different schools of painting. We might suggest that Decadents beat people black and yellow, Futurists beat them black and orange, Neo-Victorians beat them black and magenta; but all recoil from the vulgar alliteration of beating them black and blue. Nor indeed is the reference to these new and varied styles irrelevant. Some of the more bizarre modern methods seem to me to make it rather difficult to have any fixed criticism at all, either of their style or mine. Take, for instance, the case of Mr. T. S. Eliot himself. I recently saw a poem of his praised very highly and doubtless very rightly; though to some extent (it seemed) because it was a poem of profound “disillusionment and melancholy.” But the passage specially quoted for commendation ran, if I remember right:

“the smell of steak in passages.”

That quotation is enough to indicate the difficulty I mean. For even style of this severe and classic sort is after all to some extent a matter of taste. It is not a subject for these extreme controversial passions. If I were to say that the style of that line maddened me to the point of unendurance, I should be greatly exaggerating its effect on the emotions. I should not like everything to be written in that style; I should not like to wander for ever in passages stuffy with steak (there we go again!) but I cannot think these questions of style are quite so important as these pure stylists suppose. We must be moderate in our reactions; as in that verse specially headed "The Author's Moderation" in the Bab Ballad about Pasha Bailey Ben — another great poem written in a tone of melancholy and disillusion.

To say that Bailey oped his eyes   Would feebly paint his great surprise;
To say it almost made him die   Would be to paint it much too high.

I may be allowed to open my eyes for a moment at some of the literary models thus commended to me; but I shall soon close them again in healthful slumber. And when the more refined critic implies that my own manner of writing almost makes him die, I think he over-estimates my power over life and death.

But I have begun with this personal example of alliteration; because a question like that of alliteration is not so simple as it looks; and the answer to it applies to much more important things than my own journalistic habits. Alliteration is an example of a thing much easier to condemn in theory than in practice. There are, of course, many famous examples in which an exaggerated alliteration seems quite wrong. And yet those are exactly the examples which it would be most difficult for anybody to put right. Byron (a splendid example of the sort of writer who does not bother much about avoiding anything) did not hesitate to say of his hero at Quatre Bras that he "rushed into the field and foremost fighting fell." That is so extreme that we might well suppose it described the end of the life and adventures of Peter Piper. But I will trouble anybody to alter one word in the line so as to make it better; or even so as to make it sense. Byron used those words because they were the right words; and you cannot alter them without deliberately choosing the wrong words. This is more often the case in connection with alliteration than many people imagine. I do not mean to claim any such exalted company when I say that, on this particular point of conduct, I agree with Byron. But Byron does not stand alone; Coleridge, a person of some culture, could burst out boisterously and without stopping for breath:

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew, The furrow followed free.

and I do not see that he could have done anything else. I do not think anybody could interfere with that foaming spate of Fs, if the verse that followed was really “to follow free.”

There is a problem behind all this which is also illustrated in other ways. It is illustrated in the other much controverted question of puns. I know all about the judgments regularly cited as if from dusty law-books in the matter. I know all about the story that Dr. Johnson said, “The man who would make a pun would pick a pocket.” How unlucky that the lexicographer and guardian of our language, in the very act of purging himself of puns, should have plunged so shamelessly deep into the mire of alliteration! His example, in that very instance, would alone be enough to prove the first part of my case, even when it is brought forward against the second. Johnson spluttered out all those p’s because he was an Englishman with a sense of the spirit and vigour of the English language; and not a timid prig who had to mind his p’s and q’s by using them in exact alternation with a pattern. But if it came to the old joke of invoking authorities, it would be equally easy to invoke even greater authorities on the side of the pun. Also there is something that is more important to my purpose here. It would not only be easy to quote the puns of the poets; it would be easy to quote the very bad puns of the very good poets. But the question I wish to ask is wider and more essential than all this hotch-potch of snobbery and legalism and A Hundred Familiar Quotations, which goes to make up the modern invocation of authorities. I wish to point out that there is a general attitude of mind, which is defensible; or rather two attitudes of mind, which are both defensible. It is a question of style; but there are here two different styles; because there are two different motives. If one is now criticising the other, I do not merely wish to retort the criticism; but rather to proclaim liberty for both.

It might be roughly suggested thus. It is not merely a question of a man who makes a pun; we might almost ask what is to happen to a man who meets a pun. Is he to cut it dead; is he always to pass by on the other side; is he to disown such disreputable company, as of course our refined stylists would do? I am presupposing that he is not out hunting for puns or similar monsters; I presuppose that he is walking down the street on some legitimate business of his own. But if the grotesque animal actually comes to meet him, if it stands obviously in his path, I think it is natural for him to take it in his stride. At least it is natural to one sort of man engaged in one sort of business; and it is the man and the business that I am here concerned to defend. This is quite a different sort of question from the elaborate construction of such fireworks as a form of art for art's sake; though many men of genius, Hood for example, have occupied themselves even with that. But I am not talking about that. When I was a Pauline, an assistant master received a testimonial on leaving the school for a fellowship at Peterhouse. A solemn upper master made on this occasion the first and last joke of his life by observing in a deep voice, "We are robbing Paul to pay Peter." An old schoolfellow of mine, now a journalist but cynical even at that early age, declared that the older master must have engineered the whole career of the younger, and made him a teacher at that particular school and then a don at that particular College, solely in order to enjoy one moment of supreme triumph in making that single pun. It is not in the sense of such a triumph of engineering that I am here apologising for the pun. I am not speaking of the man whose life's purpose, or even whose purpose, is to make a pun; but of the man who is ready to make puns to serve his purpose. And there is a whole atmosphere and appetite involved here; which we may call if we like the spirit of the demagogue or of the buffoon or of the popular minstrel or of the orator; but which cannot be understood merely in terms of style as style, any more than of art for art's sake.

In any case, things of this sort do exist; coincidences or combinations like alliteration or punning; repetitions or conjunctions that have in prose something of the effect of rhyme in poetry. The only question is how to deal with them when they offer themselves very obviously; as they often do. There are, I think in a general view, three different ways of dealing with them. First, a man may reject them consciously; as the stylist of the serious school of Mr Wright does when he speaks of wind and H_2O_2, or instinctively writes, "In for a penny in for a Treasury note of the value of twenty shillings." I do not say that these examples are taken from the text; but it is quite a mistake to suppose that such fastidiousness is not a real literary problem. I remember a critic pointing out, even in a master of such direct and telling English as Mr A. E. Housman, a case in which the poet had obviously written "The chestnut cast her flambeaux," simply and solely to avoid writing, "The chestnut cast her candles" — which is twenty times better in every possible way. Second, he can accept them consciously as I very often do; largely because it is not worth the trouble to reject them. I said a moment ago “disown disreputable company,” because I do not propose to search in a dictionary for an unnatural alternative to “disown”. Third, he may accept them unconsciously; and that is a great deal more dangerous than anything else, and a great deal more common than most people imagine. Nobody has yet made an adequate study of the effect of mere phonetics in confusing logic and misleading philosophers. And the worst of that sort of danger is that it is deep and subtle. To decorate an argument with puns and verbal tricks may be a superficial folly. But it is better than the sort of folly that is not superficial.

I am almost certain that many moderns suffer from what may be called the disease of the suppressed pun. I mean that, in men who would disdain to make anything so vulgar as a joke out of a verbal coincidence, there is a subconscious movement of the mind to meet the sound of the word. Thus those who would denounce creeds (a Latin word for anything that anybody believes) are seldom or never, you will notice, moved to describe them by any milder name; they must have a word that sounds like a portmanteau of “crank” and “crabbed” and “greed.” They cannot really let themselves go in reviling doctrine. It must be in reviling dogma. They would never sink so low as to make a positive pun about it, as might some poor Popish buffoon like Erasmus or Crashaw. They would not say of the Dominicans, “The dogs of God are always dogmatic.” But they are in fact affected all the time by a vague verbal association between a dogma and a mad dog. It is the accidental sound of the word that makes them use it so incessantly, and so monotonously, in preference to all other terms, even terms of abuse. On re-reading the end of Stevenson’s not consciously unsympathetic sketch of the Trappists, in the Travels with a Donkey, I could swear that he was involuntarily influenced by the suggestion that Trappists are caught in a trap. He cries out, like one who has escaped, that he thanks heaven he is free to hope, to wander and to love. The logic of it would suggest that somebody had been trying to capture and imprison him; a notion which would certainly have surprised the monks very much. He seems to forget that they also were all free to wander, to love, to do anything they liked, including going into a monastery; and that they had gone into the monastery exactly as he had gone into the mountains. Suppose some burgess of Balham, contemplating the wanderer in the Cevennes, had said, “Thank heaven, I am free to dine properly, sit in an armchair and sleep in a bed.” Stevenson might have replied that he also was free to do these things, but preferred to do something else. But he never saw the parallel between the journey to the mountain and the journey to the monastery. The terror of old words and traditional associations choked him like a nursery nightmare. And I believe he quailed inwardly at the terrible pun of La Trappe.

Now I for one greatly prefer the sort of frivolity that is thrown to the surface like froth to the sort of frivolity that festers under the surface like slime. To pelt an enemy with a foolish pun or so will never do him any grave injustice; the firework is obviously a firework and not a deadly fire. It may be playing to the gallery; but even the gallery knows it is only playing. But to associate an enemy always with certain ugly-sounding words, and never with their logical synonyms that sound a little better, is in a very real sense to poison our own minds. And that is the case with the man who is subconsciously moved by the sound of words, without realising that the very assonance is a sort of pun. He must describe a Socialist as a Bolshevist; because the word Bolshie has a vague savour of Boshy. He must refer to a Liberal as a Radical, because there is a hard sound about Rads as there is about Cads. It is a sound heard in many English names for foreigners, from the time that we first talked about Rapparees to the time when we began, more faintly, to talk about Yankees. The criticism of these foreigners is not in question; but the point is this. If a man can say about a Yankee what he would hardly say about an American, or even about a Northern American, then he is allowing this shadow of a pun, or sound of a word, to spoil his sense of justice and reality. He is obscurely confusing the word Yank with the word Swank. If he can speak of a Froggy more scornfully than he could really speak of a Frenchman, then he is being verbally affected by the word frog, as was the other man by the word dog. 1 do not think it matters how much we play about with these puns or rhymes or resemblances, or echoes of sound, so long as we are obviously doing it on the surface for the sake of the sound. Exactly when this sort of style becomes dangerous to the sense is when it is concealed, as these more sensitive stylists would conceal it. It is so that class-consciousness is worse than ever when it is class subconsciousness. It is so that the professed impartiality of certain academic historians stinks with their buried prejudice. Compared with this, I do think there is something sporting about conscious buffoonery. As it is embarrassing to use the egotistic example, I will take the example of a very much more distinguished person, who is in this respect of the same type or temper as I; I mean Mr. Bernard Shaw.

There used to be at one time a great fashion of arguing about Shaw and Shakespeare, and, by the way, that must surely have been an artificial trick of alliteration. Yet it would be dangerous to suggest to Shaw that he copied Shakespeare, and there are difficulties even in telling Shakespeare he copied Shaw. Anyhow, one of the few things in which there is a real resemblance between Shaw and Shakespeare is this; that they both seem so very often to make jokes that are not worth making. When Polonius says he was Julius Caesar; whom Brutus killed in the Capitol; and Hamlet is made to answer, “It was a brute part of him, to kill so capital a calf there,” I do not imagine that Shakespeare, any more than anybody else, thought that the two puns were the most perfect and pointed specimens of wit. But he did think it vital to the story that Hamlet should make a flippant remark of some sort at that moment; and he thought it a very probable sort of flippant remark for him to make. There are any number of flippancies in Shaw’s plays that are no better than this, and serve no other purpose than this. But the point is that flippancies of this sort are only used by a very serious person; and Mr. Bernard Shaw is a very serious person. He wants to say something. He has something to say. If ever the perfect stylistic critics should find themselves in such a peculiar position, they will discover the nature of these temptations to flippancy.

It is not an idle contradiction to say that Mr. Shaw is flippant because he is serious. A man like Mr. Shaw has the deliberate intention of getting people to listen to what he has to say; and therefore he must be amusing. A man who is only amusing himself need not be amusing. Generally, when he is a perfect and polished stylist, he is not. And there is a good deal of misunderstanding about the relative moral attitude of the two types; especially in connection with the old morality of modesty. Most persons, listening to these loud flippancies would say that Mr. Bernard Shaw is egotistical. Mr. Bernard Shaw himself would emphatically and violently assert that he is egotistical; and I should emphatically and violently assert that he is not. It is not the first time we have somewhat tartly disagreed. And perhaps I could not more effectively perform the just and necessary public duty of annoying Mr. Shaw than by saying (as I do say) that in this matter he really inherits an unconscious tradition of Christian humility. The preaching friar puts his sermon into popular language, the missionary fills his sermon with anecdotes and even jokes, because he is thinking of his mission and not of himself It does not matter that Mr. Shaw’s sentences so often begin with the pronoun “I.” The Apostles Creed begins with the pronoun “I”; but it goes on to rather more important nouns and names.

Father Ronald Knox, in his satire on Modernism, has described the courteous vagueness of the Oxford manner which

.... tempering pious zeal Corrected, “I believe” to “One does feel.”

And though I have much of such courtesy to be thankful for, both in conversation and criticism, I must do justice to the more dogmatic type, where I feel it to be right. And I will say firmly that it is the author who says, “One does feel,” who is really an egoist; and the author who says, “I believe,” who is not an egoist. We all know what is meant by a truly beautiful essay; and how it is generally written in the light or delicate tone of, “One does feel.” I am perfectly well aware that all my articles are articles, and that none of my articles are essays. An essay is often written in a really graceful and exquisitely balanced style, which I doubt if I could imitate, though I might try. Anyhow, it generally deals with experiences of a certain unprovocative sort in a certain unattached fashion; it begins with something like. . . .

“The pond in my garden shows, under the change of morning, an apprehension of the moving air, hardly to be called a wave; and so little clouding its lucidity as to seem rather vacuity in motion. Here at least is nothing to stain the bright negation of water; none of those suburban goldfish that look like carrots and do but nose after their tails in a circle of frustration, to give some sulky gardener cause to cry ‘stinking fish’. The mind is altogether carried away upon the faint curve of wind over water; the movement is something less solid than anything that we can call liquid; the smoke of my light Virginian cigarette does not mount more unsubstantially towards the sky. Nor indeed inaptly: it needs some such haven of patriarchal mildness to accent sharply the tang of mild tobacco; alone perhaps, of all the attributes of Raleigh’s red-haired mistress, rightly to be called virginal.”

I think I might learn to do it some day; though not by a commercial correspondence course; but the truth is that I am very much occupied. I confess to thinking that the things which occupy me are more important; but I am disposed to deny that the thing I think important is myself. And in justice not only to myself but to Mr. Shaw and Mr. Belloc and Mr. Mencken and many another man in the same line of business, I am moved to protest that the other literary method, the method of, “One does feel,” is much more really arrogant than ours. The man in Mr. Shaw's play remarks that who says artist says duellist. Perhaps, nevertheless, Mr. Shaw is too much of a duellist to be quite an artist. But anyhow, I will affirm, on the same model, that who says essayist says egoist. I am sorry if it is an alliteration, almost a rhyme and something approaching to a pun. Like a great many such things, it is also a fact.

Even in the fancy example I have given, and in a hundred far better and more beautiful extracts from the real essayists, the point could be shown. If I go out of my way to tell the reader that I smoke Virginian cigarettes, it can only be because I assume the reader to be interested in me. Nobody can be interested in Virginian cigarettes. But if I shout at the reader that I believe in the Virginian cause in the American Civil War, as does the author of The American Heresy, if I thunder as he does that all America is now a ruin and an anarchy because in that great battle the good cause went down — then I am not an egoist. I am only a dogmatist; which seems to be much more generally disliked. The fact that I believe in God may be, in all modesty, of some human interest; because any man believing in God may affect any other man believing in God. But the fact that I do not believe in gold-fish, as ornaments in a garden pond, cannot be of the slightest interest to anybody on earth, unless I assume that some people are interested in anything whatever that is connected with me. And that is exactly what the true elegant essayist does assume. I do not say he is wrong; I do not deny that he also in another way represents humanity and uses a sort of artistic fiction or symbol in order to do so. I only say that, if it comes to a quarrel about being conceited, he is far the more conceited of the two. The one sort of man deals with big things noisily and the other with small things quietly. But there is much more of the note of superiority in the man who always treats of things smaller than himself than the man who always treats of things greater than himself. The latter at least must be very small if he does not feel that they are greater.

Now the next two steps bring us to the climax of the matter. First, this dogmatist is always something of a demagogue. Second, this demagogue is always something of a buffoon. I am very far from denying that he becomes too much of a demagogue and too much of a buffoon. But he does not do so because he prefers superficial things, but rather because he is concerned with fundamental things. If I may illustrate my meaning by one of those deplorable verbalisms over which we are all lamenting, I would say that it is exactly because he is concerned with fundamentals that he is tempted to tickle the groundlings. He is interested in primary facts; and one of those primary facts is the people. He may make jokes and play to the gallery; but there is something more than a joke for him in the phrase which calls the gallery the gods.

I also am a tub-thumper; and I exaggerated my meaning a moment ago, in the necessity of defending myself, of defending Mr. Shaw and (most exciting of all) of defending Mr. Shaw against Mr. Shaw. I do not really mean, of course, that the essayist is an egoist in any selfish sense. Nobody in the world, I imagine, gets more good than I do out of good essays like those of Mr. Max Beerbohm or Mr. E. V. Lucas or Mr. Robert Lynd. I only ask, in all seriousness, that they should understand the necessities of our sort of self-assertion as well as recognising the existence of their own. And I do ask them to believe that when we try to make our sermons and speeches more or less amusing, it is for the very simple and even modest reason that we do not see why the audience should listen unless it is more or less amused. Our mode of speech is conditioned by the fact that it really is what some have fancifully supposed the function of speech to be; something addressed by somebody to somebody else. It has of necessity all the vices and vulgarities attaching to a speech that really is a speech and not a soliloquy.

I have come to the conclusion that this last point is too plain to be understood. Some of the simplest things of human history are now quite invisible to minds that have grown accustomed to sub-division or specialism. Thus the idea of the vow, one of the first facts about our social foundation, is not disputed or denied; it is simply nibbled out of existence by people who do not know that it exists. It is so with the gesture of the sacrifice, without which man is hardly human; and it is so with the gesture of the speaker or the singer dealing directly with the people. I found a case of this confusion in connection with this point, after I had tried to suggest it in an article in the Mercury called, “The True Case Against Cliques.” A critic in the American Bookman immediately assumed that it was only the old and conventional case against cliques. He got it into his head that I had merely been grumbling about log-rolling; and he said that Aristophanes and Euripides had their cliques and backers like anybody else. It seems to me that American criticism, so far from being merely crude, is rather too traditional. It has a curious conservative way with it and labels things in the manner of a museum; indeed I found in the same number a very Victorian article called, “Science and Religion,” in which these two forces were studied under the representative figures of Charles Darwin and Mr. Moody. Many things have been written about Science and Religion; but I should not feel myself overwhelmed by the onward rush of a new world which had never considered any science later than Darwin or any religion better than Moody and Sankey. Many things have also been written against log-rolling and literary clannishness; but I did not write anything against them or indeed anything about them. What I was trying, I fear rather clumsily, to express was that there is now an entirely new danger in the clique; because it is not merely a clique. It has taken on the character of an interpreter; by hypothesis the interpreter of something unintelligible; and its existence encourages the artist to be unintelligible, when it is his whole function to be intelligible. The artist is the man who is more and not less intelligible than other men; it is the mass of men whose feelings remain relatively incomprehensible, even to themselves.

Aristophanes undoubtedly had his faction and in that sense his clique. But I gravely doubt whether his audience needed anybody to explain to them that when the dead man said, “May I come to life if I do,” it was a joke and a parody of the phrase, “May I die if I do.” In other words, the jokes of Aristophanes, like the jokes of Bernard Shaw, were good jokes; but they were obvious jokes. There was not normally any question of a new and secretive sense of humour, which only a certain school of aesthetes or critics could understand. The buffoonery of Bernard Shaw is in this respect like the buffoonery of Aristophanes; or if it be difficult to make sure of the conditions in the time of Aristophanes, the element of obviousness is equally obvious in the best jokes of Molière or the best jokes of Dickens. The whole case for buffoons is that jokes ought to be obvious. We may even say that they are not really jokes unless they are obvious. There are, of course, special conditions for the thing called irony; in which it is the joke that somebody does not see the joke. But even there that person is not the audience; or if he is, the irony has failed. But in any case there is here a joke that the critics cannot apparently see; and a joke which is also something of a tragedy. There is under the surface of all this conspiratorial culture, a fantastic notion of new and even disparate psychologies breaking up the brotherhood of the common human mind; incommunicable or at least without communication between one and another. As Mr. Wells imagined man evolving into two animals, we are really called on to imagine mind breaking up not so much into cliques as into species. The buffoon may make bad jokes; I myself, who am a very minor buffoon to be mentioned with Mr. Shaw, let alone Aristophanes, do regularly and as a matter of business make a multitude of bad jokes. I do it for reasons connected with the duties of demagogy, and I am not defending it here, but rather something much more important. Buffoons may make bad jokes; but it is quite another thing that a man should make a joke and another man really not know that it is a joke at all. The first man may think it a good joke and the second a bad joke; that is normal and has always been; in the case above-mentioned my critic and I can embrace in agreeing that it is a bad joke. But if aberration and mystery be so deliberately cultivated that the jest of one school is not a jest at all but only a riddle to another, we are at the beginning of a schism more perilous than any in the past. We are suffering Taste to tear men asunder as they have never been torn asunder by religion or revolution or the wars of the world. In other times there were other and nobler examples of this direct relation between the maker and mankind. The orator could make a mob feel like an army of heroes; the prophet or preacher could isolate every soul in a crowd and make each feel immortal. To make what is now called a popular speech it is indeed necessary to make it only too like what is called an after-dinner speech; to keep our connection with the normal life only by a thin thread of flippancy. But at least the connection is kept; and something remains of what is really the archetypal relation implied in the very existence of the arts. It is not altogether our fault if a chasm has opened in the community of beliefs and social traditions, which can only be spanned by the far halloo of the buffoon.

MY SIX CONVERSIONS

I. THE RELIGION OF FOSSILS

AT least six times during the last few years, I have found myself in a situation in which I should certainly have become a Catholic, if I had not been restrained from that rash step by the fortunate accident that I was one already. The point is not merely personal but has some representative interest, because our critics constantly expect the convert to suffer some sort of reaction, ending in disappointment and perhaps desertion. As a rule, the most that they will concede to us is that we have found peace by the surrender of reason; which generally means in practice that we pass the rest of our lives in interminable controversies with a perpetual appeal to logic. But, as a fact, it is in a rather peculiar sense, the other way about. The strongest sort of confirmation often comes to the convert after he has received enough to establish conviction. In these articles I propose to discuss some examples of this singular sort of post-conversion conversion. I mean that things have happened, since I was received into the Church, which would in any case have rendered impossible any intellectual position outside the Church, and especially the position in which I originally found myself. One occasion was the Parliamentary settlement of the controversy on the Prayer-Book — or Prayer-Books. Another was the Lambeth decision, or indecision, about Birth-Control. But I will take first the example of the latest turn of political events in Europe. I take it first because it is both typical and topical; that is, it gives perhaps the clearest and simplest example of the sort of thing I mean, and it is a thing of which the facts are fresh and familiar to everybody, even those who live only from day to day with the assistance of the daily Press; that very synthetic substitute for daily bread. But in order to explain what I think has really happened, rather more lucidly than the daily Press explains it, it is necessary to say a preliminary word about the Protestant Reformation and the sense in which its consequences, rather than itself, continue to bewilder and mislead Christendom.

Men of the type or school of Bishop Barnes or Dean Inge are, as we know, very fond of appealing to the discoveries of science; generally the not very recent discoveries of nineteenth-century science. They delight in dealing with what my grandfather would have called the Testimony of the

Rocks; the geological record of natural development; and they often treat fossils and similar traces as if they were sacred hieroglyphics, by which some priesthood had symbolised the secret of the universe. And yet it is doubtful, it is more than doubtful, whether one of the Broad Church ecclesiastics would be soothed and flattered if I addressed him personally as an Old Fossil. Nor indeed should I dream of indulging in this playful form of social address; since there are truths, or half-truths, that cannot be coarsely stated without giving rise to misunderstanding even about their true meaning.

In one sense these liberal theologians are interested in fossils. They continue to demonstrate the Darwinian theory from the geological record, by means of all the fossils that ought to be found in it. They will even explain luminously why the geological evidence does not apparently exist; and they seem to think that this is quite as convincing as if it did exist. But I doubt whether they have really thought profoundly and delicately about what a fossil is, or there would be no danger of their resenting so innocent and inoffensive a comparison. For a fossil is really a very curious thing. A fossil is not a dead animal, or a decayed organism, or in essence even an antiquated object. The whole point of a fossil is that it is the form of an animal or organism, from which all its own animal or organic substance has entirely disappeared; but which has kept its shape, because it has been filled up by some totally different substance by some process of distillation or secretion, so that we might almost say, as in the medieval metaphysics, that its substance has vanished and only its accidents remain. And that is perhaps the very nearest figure of speech we can find for the truth about the New Religions, which were started only three or four hundred years ago. They are Fossils.

It is easy to see the sense in which they are now dying. But in a much deeper sense, they have long been dead. The extraordinary thing about them was that they really died almost as soon as they were born. And this was due to a fact not always emphasised, but which always strikes me as the most outstanding fact of the mysterious business; the incredible clumsiness of the Reformers. The real Protestant theologians were such very bad theologians. They had an amazing opportunity; the old Church had been swept out of their way, along with many things that were really unpopular, and some things that were deservedly unpopular. One would suppose it was easy enough to set up something that would at least look a little more popular. When they tried to do it, they made every mistake that they could make. They waged an insane war against everything in the old faith that is most normal and sympathetic to human nature; such as prayers for the dead or the gracious image of a Mother of Men. They hardened and fixed themselves upon fads which anybody could see would pass like fashions. Luther lashed himself into a sort of general fury, which obviously could not last; Calvin was logical, but used his logic for a scheme which humanity manifestly would not long find endurable. Perhaps the most successful were those who really had no ideas to offer at all; like the founders of the Anglican Church. They at least did not exasperate human nature; but even they showed the same blindness, in binding themselves instantly to the Divine Right of Kings, which was almost immediately to break down.

For this reason, there is really no historical doubt about what Protestantism did; it died. It did not die because the Protestants were wrong; Mahomet, for instance, was a far shrewder person, and his heresy has not died. The creed of the Protestants died, not because they were wrong, but because they were wrong-headed. They did not really think what they were doing; and this was chiefly because the real driving force behind them was the impatient insolence and avarice of new nobles and rebellious princes. But, anyhow, the theological and theoretical part of their work withered with extraordinary rapidity; and the void that was left was almost as rapidly filled with other things. What those things were is clear enough in many cases, including cases much more apparently harmless; but it is clearest of all in what is confronting us to-day; the Race Religion of the Germans.

Needless to say, there was no such nonsense talked in Luther’s time, or for long after his time; and, least of all, to do him justice, by Luther. Germans were turbulent and a little barbaric, as he was himself; but it is only fair to him to say that he was a Christian, in the sense that he believed that nothing could be done except in the strength of Christ. A superbly typical story reaches me from Germany; that some of the Nazis started out to sing the great reformer’s famous hymn, “A strong fortress is our God” (which sounds quite promisingly militaristic), but found themselves unable to articulate the very words at the beginning of the next verse, which ran, “Of ourselves we can do nothing.” Luther did, in his own mad way, believe in humility; but modern Germany believes simply, solely and entirely in pride. That is an example of what I mean by a void being filled up, not only by another substance, but actually by an antagonistic substance.

Luther was subject to irrational convulsions of rage, in one of which he tore out the Epistle of St. James from the Bible, because St. James exalts the importance of good works. But I shudder to imagine into what sort of epileptic convulsion he would have fallen if anybody had told him to tear out the Epistles of St. Paul, because St. Paul was not an Aryan. Luther, if possible, rather exaggerated the weakness of humanity, but at least it was the weakness of all humanity. John Knox achieved that queer Puritan paradox, of combining the same concentrated invocation of Christ with an inhuman horror and loathing for all the signs and forms and traditions generally characteristic of Christians. He combined, in the way that puzzles us so much, the adoration of the Cross with the abomination of the Crucifix. But at least John Knox would have exploded like dynamite, if anybody had asked him to adore the Swastika. All this new Nordic nonsense would seem to have nothing whatever to do with Protestant theology; or rather to be completely contrary to it. No one is more sincerely glad than we are to know that some of the German Protestants are still most consistent and courageous Christians; and that a definite number of the Lutherans still have some sort of remote connection with Luther. But, taking the development simply as an historical development, as a part of the science and philosophy of history, it is obvious by this time that the hollow places that were once tilled with the foaming fanaticism of the first Reformation doctrines are now filled with a foaming fanaticism of a totally different kind. Those who are rebelling like Luther are rebelling against Luther.

The main moral of this is so large and simple and striking, that it will soon be impossible to conceal it from the world. It is the simple fact that the moment men began to contradict the Church with their own private judgment, everything they did was incredibly ill-judged; that those who broke away from the Church’s basis almost immediately broke down on their own basis; that those who tried to stand apart from Authority could not in fact stand at all. Islam stood by being stagnant; it is not unfair to say it stood up by lying down. But Protestantism could not stand in the staggering rush of the West; it could only maintain itself by ceasing to be itself, and announcing its readiness to turn into anything else.

II. WHEN THE WORLD TURNED BACK

FOR the first forty years of my life, practically no man in the world, and certainly no man of the world, had any doubt whatever about what Matthew Arnold called, “the way the world is going.” A man did not necessarily agree with Matthew Arnold, who seemed to think that he must necessarily go the way the world was going. Some regretted ages that were gone; some again were prepared to go farther than others, some to go faster than others; some almost passionately desired to go slow. But all agreed that it was, in the vulgar phrase, going it; and still going strong. It was, very broadly, the demand for freedom and fraternity flowing from the French Revolution and the American Revolution, making towards an ideal of democracy. Elements were indeed mixed in it, which logically had very little to do with each other. There was a tendency to materialism, to monism or to scepticism, which I rejected long before I was a Catholic. There was an element of equal justice, and the dignity of all citizens, which I accepted long after I was a Catholic; and which I accept still. But I assumed, like everybody else, that the main movement was still moving; and would presumably go on moving. There were three ways in which it could be recognised by a Catholic, or a man of increasingly Catholic sympathies, (1) He could say that this was the way the world was going; and so much the worse for the world. He could say the world would certainly go further and fare worse. (2) He could say, with considerable truth, that no such movement that was purely secular really touched the question that was purely spiritual. To take a simple example, the most ideal Republicans could not somehow get out of the human habit of dying; and generally of wondering whether dying meant being completely dead. Democracy could not satisfy all desires, even if it could purge itself enough to satisfy all democratic desires. (3) He could look forward, with some historical justification, to a time when any temporal quarrel between the Church and the Republic should end in a real and reasonable reconciliation of the truths in both; as St. Thomas reconciled the philosophy of Aristotle with the religion of Augustine. Something like this has largely been done, in recent Papal pronouncements; but the point is here that whether or no the Church could close this particular quarrel with the world, every one was certain that a quarrel with democracy was a quarrel with the world. In short, a Catholic might reject the present progress; or say his creed was independent of the present progress; or say his creed would find a place for the present progress. But everybody believed that the progress of the present would be the progress of the future.

Then came the astounding judgments; the strange signs of Apocalypse. First the Great War; then the paradox of Fascism in Italy; then the parody of Fascism in Germany. Now these things have left in the minds of all thinking men (as the Rationalist Press Association would say) an enormous overturn or reversal of thought, which has nothing whatever to do with thinking any of these movements right or wrong. It is very vital to realise that the change is something more fundamental than agreement or disagreement with the factions concerned. A man may think the war waged by the Allies justifiable, as I did and do; he may think that the stroke of Mussolini had considerable justification, or even that the stroke of Hitler achieved many things that were just. Or he may think exactly the opposite, and regard the whole militant epoch as a relapse into blood and barbarism, from the first recruit of Kitchener's Army to the last ruffian dripping with the blood of Dollfuss. But there is a changed landscape at the back of all these fighting figures; and it is a landscape like an earthquake. What a man knows, now, is that the whole march of mankind can turn and tramp backwards in its tracks; that progress can start progressing, or feeling as if it were progressing, in precisely the contrary course from that which has been called progress for centuries. It can not only lose but fling away all that its fathers fought for and valued most; it can not only restore but restore exclusively all that its grandfathers were forced to abandon, or felt themselves unable to defend. The whole world is moving again; but it is moving the other way.

To-day this is the way the world is going, if there is any such thing. But in fact there is no such thing. A Catholic perhaps should have seen it from the first; but many a Catholic has only seen it in a flash at the last. There is no way the world is going. There never was. The world is not going anywhere, in the sense of the old optimist progressives, or even of the old pessimist reactionaries. It is not going to the Brave New World which Mr. Aldous Huxley described with detestation, any more than to the New Utopia which Mr. H. G. Wells described with delight. The world is what the saints and the prophets saw it was; it is not merely getting better or merely getting worse; there is one thing that the world does; it wobbles. Left to itself, it does not get anywhere; though if helped by real reformers of the right religion and philosophy, it may get better in many respects, and sometimes for considerable periods. But in itself it is not a progress; it is not even a process; it is the fashion of this world that passeth away. Life in itself is not a ladder; it is a see-saw.

Now that is fundamentally what the Church has always said; and for about four hundred years has been more and more despised for saying. The Church never said that wrongs could not or should not be righted; or that commonwealths could not or should not be made happier; or that it was not worth while to help them in secular and material things; or that it is not a good thing if manners become milder, or comforts more common, or cruelties more rare. But she did say that we must not count on the certainty even of comforts becoming more common or cruelties more rare; as if this were an inevitable social trend towards a sinless humanity; instead of being as it was a mood of man, and perhaps a better mood, possibly to be followed by a worse one. We must not hate humanity, or despise humanity, or refuse to help humanity; but we must not trust humanity; in the sense of trusting a trend in human nature which cannot turn back to bad things. "Put not your trust in princes; nor in any child of man." That is the precise point of this very practical sort of politics. Be a Royalist if you like (and there is a vast amount to be said, and a vast amount being said, just now, for more personal and responsible rule); try a Monarchy if you think it will be better; but do not trust a Monarchy, in the sense of expecting that a monarch will be anything but a man. Be a Democrat if you like (and I shall always think it the most generous and the most fundamentally Christian ideal in politics); express your sense of human dignity in manhood suffrage or any other form of equality; but put not your trust in manhood suffrage or in any child of man. There is one little defect about Man, the image of God, the wonder of the world and the paragon of animals; that he is not to be trusted. If you identify him with some ideal, which you choose to think is his inmost nature or his only goal, the day will come when he will suddenly seem to you a traitor.

He seems a traitor to-day to all that world of liberal and enlightened opinion, which had made up its mind about the way the world was going, in the path of progress and of peace; the world of Wells and Webb and the Pacifists of America and the social reformers of Cambridge. Most of them are reduced to muttering, like the villain in the old melodrama, "a time will come." But it is in a very different tone from that in which they were crying quite lately, like the man in the comic song, "Now we shan't be long!" The most hopeful of them admit that we shall probably be very long, in reversing all that the reaction in Europe has done already. If, that is, it is ever reversed; and these people really have nothing except a purely mystical faith to suggest that it ever will be reversed. I am really more hopeful in being what they would call more hopeless; for I suspect that pretty nearly everything is eventually reversed. But it was exactly because they would not see this, that they were startled when their own reform or revolution was reversed before their own eyes. The point here, however, is that if there is something stable and not subject to reversal, it is not like anything that they imagine. Its habitation is not in the future or necessarily in any development of ideas peculiar to the present; we are not at the beginning of any endless and expanding dawn, but only of the ordinary daily dawns each followed by its own darkness; and the Faith, as Mr. Belloc said, "is the only beacon in this night, if beacon there be."

In the heart of Christendom, in the head of the Church, in the centre of the civilisation called Catholic, there and in no movement and in no future, is found that crystallisation of commonsense and true traditions and rational reforms, for which the modern man mistakenly looked to the whole trend of the modern age. From this will come the reminders that mercy is being neglected or memory cast away, and not from the men who happen to make the next batch of rulers on this restless and distracted earth. That is the fact that we have all found at last; and that is why I have put it first. It is not the first in order, but it is the first in importance, of the facts I have discovered after I had discovered the truth; and if I had still been out in the darkness, it would in this dark hour have brought me to the door.

III. THE SURRENDER UPON SEX

I HAVE explained that these are sketches of six separate occasions, on which I should have become a Catholic, if I had not been the one and only kind of human being who cannot become a Catholic. The excitement of conversion is still open to the atheist and the diabolist; and everybody can be converted except the convert. In my first outline, I mentioned that one of the crises, which would in any case have driven me the way I had gone already, was the shilly-shallying and sham liberality of the famous Lambeth Report on what is quaintly called Birth Control. It is in fact, of course, a scheme for preventing birth in order to escape control. But this particular case was only the culmination of a long process of compromise and cowardice about the problem of sex; the final surrender after a continuous retreat.

There is one historical human fact which now seems to me so plain and solid, that I think that even if I were to lose the Faith, I could not lose sight of the fact. It has rather the character of a fact of chemistry or geology; though from another side it is mysterious enough, like many other manifest and unmistakable facts. It is this: that at the moment when Religion lost touch with Rome, it changed instantly and internally, from top to bottom, in its very substance and the stuff of which it was made. It changed in substance; it did not necessarily change in form or features or externals. It might do the same things; but it could not be the same thing. It might go on saying the same things; but it was not the same thing that was saying them. At the very beginning, indeed, the situation was almost exactly like that. Henry VIII was a Catholic in everything except that he was not a Catholic. He observed everything down to the last bead and candle; he accepted everything down to the last deduction from a definition; he accepted everything except Rome. And in that instant of refusal, his religion became a different religion; a different sort of religion; a different sort of thing. In that instant it began to change; and it has not stopped changing yet. We are all somewhat wearily aware that some Modern Churchmen call such continuous change progress; as when we remark that a corpse crawling with worms has an increased vitality; or that a snow-man, slowly turning into a puddle, is purifying itself of its accretions. But I am not concerned with this argument here. The point is that a dead man may look like a sleeping man a moment after he is dead; but decomposition has actually begun. The point is that the snow-man may in theory be made in the real image of man. Michelangelo made a statue in snow; and it might quite easily have been an exact replica of one of his statues in marble; but it was not in marble. Most probably the snow-man has begun to melt almost as soon as it is made. But even if the frost holds, it is still a stuff capable of melting when the frost goes. It seemed to many that Protestantism would long continue to be, in the popular phrase, a perfect frost. But that does not alter the difference between ice and marble; and marble does not melt.

The same sort of progressives are always telling us to have a trust in the Future. As a fact, the one thing that a progressive cannot possibly have is a trust in the Future. He cannot have a trust in his own Future; let alone in his own Futurism. If he sets no limit to change, it may change all his own progressive views as much as his conservative views. It was so with the Church first founded by Henry VIII; who was, in almost everything commonly cursed as Popery, rather more Popish than the Pope. He thought he might trust it to go on being orthodox; to go on being sacramentalist; to go on being sacerdotalist; to go on being ritualist, and the rest. There was only one little weakness. It could not trust itself to go on being itself. Nothing else, except the Faith, can trust itself to go on being itself.

Now touching this truth in relation to Sex, I may be permitted to introduce a trivial journalistic anecdote. A few years before the War, some of my fellow-journalists, Socialists as well as Tories, were questioning me about what I really meant by Democracy; and especially if I really thought there was anything in Rousseau's idea of the General Will. I said I thought (and I think I still think) that there can be such a thing, but it must be much more solid and unanimous than a mere majority, such as rules in party politics. I applied the old phrase of the Man in the Street, by saying that if I looked out of the window at a strange man walking past my house, I could bet heavily on his thinking some things, but not the common controversial things The Liberals might have a huge majority, but he need not be a Liberal; statistics might prove England to be preponderantly Conservative, but I would not bet a button that he would be Conservative. But (I said) I should bet that he believes in wearing clothes. And my Socialist questioners did not question this; they, too, accepted clothes as so universal an agreement of common sense and civilisation, that we might attribute the tradition to a total stranger, unless he were a lunatic. Such a little while ago! To-day, when I see the stranger walking down the street, I should not bet that he believes even in clothes. The country is dotted with Nudist Colonies; the bookstalls are littered with Nudist magazines; the papers swarm with polite little paragraphs, praising the brownness and braveness of the special sort of anarchical asses here in question. At any given moment, there may be a General Will; but it is an uncommonly weak and wavering sort of will, without the Faith to support it.

As in that one matter of modesty, or the mere externals of sex, so in all the deeper matters of sex, the modern will has been amazingly weak and wavering. And I suppose it is because the Church has known from the first this weakness which we have all discovered at last, that about certain sexual matters She has been very decisive and dogmatic; as many good people have quite honestly thought, too decisive and dogmatic. Now a Catholic is a person who has plucked up courage to face the incredible and inconceivable idea that something else may be wiser than he is. And the most striking and outstanding illustration is perhaps to be found in the Catholic view of marriage as compared with the modern theory of divorce; not, it must be noted, the very modern theory of divorce, which is the mere negation of marriage; but even more the slightly less modern and more moderate theory of divorce, which was generally accepted even when I was a boy. This is the very vital point or test of the question; for it explains the Church's rejection of the moderate as well as the immoderate theory. It illustrates the very fact I am pointing out, that Divorce has already turned into something totally different from what was intended, even by those who first proposed it. Already we must think ourselves back into a different world of thought, in order to understand how anybody ever thought it was compatible with Victorian virtue; and many very virtuous Victorians did. But they only tolerated this social solution as an exception; and many other modern social solutions they would not have tolerated at all. My own parents were not even orthodox Puritans or High Church people; they were Universalists more akin to Unitarians. But they would have regarded Birth-Prevention exactly as they would have regarded Infanticide. Yet about Divorce such liberal Protestants did hold an intermediate view, which was substantially this. They thought the normal necessity and duty of all married people was to remain faithful to their marriage; that this could be demanded of them, like common honesty or any other virtue. But they thought that in some very extreme and extraordinary cases a divorce was allowable. Now, putting aside our own mystical and sacramental doctrine, this was not, on the face of it, an unreasonable position. It certainly was not meant to be an anarchical position. But the Catholic Church, standing almost alone, declared that it would in fact lead to an anarchical position; and the Catholic Church was right.

Any man with eyes in his head, whatever the ideas in his head, who looks at the world as it is to-day, must know that the whole social substance of marriage has changed; just as the whole social substance of Christianity changed with the divorce of Henry VIII. As in the other case, the externals remained for a time and some of them remain still. Some divorced persons, who can be married quite legally by a registrar, go on complaining bitterly that they cannot be married by a priest. They regard a church as a peculiarly suitable place in which to make and break the same vow at the same moment. And the Bishop of London, who was supposed to sympathise with the more sacramental party, recently submitted to such a demand on the ground that it was a very special case. As if every human being's case were not a special case. That decision was one of the occasions on which I should have done a bolt, if I had delayed it so long. But the general social atmosphere is much the most important matter. Numbers of normal people are getting married, thinking already that they may be divorced. The instant that idea enters, the whole conception of the old Protestant compromise vanishes. The sincere and innocent Victorian would never have married a woman reflecting that he could divorce her. He would as soon have married a woman reflecting that he could murder her. These things were not supposed to be among the daydreams of the honeymoon. The psychological substance of the whole thing has altered; the marble has turned to ice; and the ice has melted with most amazing rapidity. The Church was right to refuse even the exception. The world has admitted the exception; and the exception has become the rule.

As I have said, the weak and inconclusive pronouncement upon Birth-Prevention was only the culmination of this long intellectual corruption. I need not discuss the particular problem again at this point; beyond saying that the same truth applies as in the case of Divorce. People propose an easv way out of certain human responsibilities and difficulties; including a way out of the responsibility and difficulty of doing economic justice and achieving better payment for the poor. But these people propose this easy method, in the hope that some people will only use it to a moderate extent; whereas it is much more probable that an indefinite number will use it to an indefinite extent. It is odd that they do not see this; because the writers and thinkers among them are no longer by any means optimistic about human nature, like Rousseau; but much more pessimistic about human nature than we are. Considering mankind as described, for instance, by Mr. Aldous Huxley, it is hard to see what answer he could possibly give, except the answer which we give, if the question were put thus: "On the one side, there is an easy way out of the difficulty by avoiding childbirth: on the other side, there is a very difficult way out of the difficulty, by reconstructing the whole social system and toiling and perhaps fighting for the better system. Which way are the men you describe more likely to take?" But my concern is not with open and direct opponents like Mr. Huxley; but with all to whom I might once have looked to defend the country of the Christian altars. They ought surely to know that the foe now on the frontiers offers no terms of compromise; but threatens a complete destruction. And they have sold the pass.

IV. THE PRAYER-BOOK PROBLEM

ONE of the events which would have made me a Catholic, if I had not already been a Catholic, was the curious affair of the New Prayer-Book. It revealed to me a reality I had not hitherto realised. There really was a Church of England; or rather there really was an England which largely imagined that it possessed and controlled a Church. But this Church was not the Church I thought I had belonged to; the keen, cultivated and sincere group of men who claimed to be Catholic. It was a much vaster and vaguer background of men; who did not believe in anything in particular, but who claimed to be Protestant. But the vital point was that, whether they claimed to be Protestants or clamorously bragged of being atheists, they all seemed to have this fixed idea; that they owned the Church of England; and could turn it into a Mormon temple if they liked. I could not, in any case, have gone on being owned in that way.

But in order to understand all that was involved, it is necessary to say a word about the Anglican Prayer-Book itself. The Book of Common Prayer is the masterpiece of Protestantism. It is more so than the work of Milton. It is the one positive possession and attraction; the one magnet and talisman for people even outside the Anglican Church, as are the great Gothic cathedrals for people outside the Catholic Church. I can speak, I think, for many other converts, when I say that the only thing that can produce any sort of nostalgia or romantic regret, any shadow of homesickness in one who has in truth come home, is the rhythm of Cranmer’s prose. All the other supposed superiorities of any sort of Protestantism are quite fictitious. Tell a Catholic convert that he has lost his liberty, and he will laugh. A distinguished literary lady wrote recently that I had entered the most restricted of all Christian communions, and I was monstrously amused. A Catholic has fifty times more feeling of being free than a man caught in the net of the nervous compromises of Anglicanism; just as a man considering all England feels more free than a man obeying the Whips of one particular party. He has the range of two thousand years full of twelve-hundred thousand controversies, thrashed out by thinker against thinker, school against school, guild against guild, nation against nation, with no limit except the fundamental logical fact that the things were worth arguing, because they could be ultimately solved and settled. As for Reason, our monopoly is practically admitted in the modern world. Except for one or two dingy old atheists in Fleet Street (for whom I have great sympathy), nothing except Rome now defends the reliability of Reason. Much stronger is the appeal of unreason; or of that beauty which perhaps is beyond reason. The English Litany, the music and the magic of the great sixteenth-century style — that does call a man backwards like the song of the sirens; as Virgil and the poets might have called to a Pagan who had entered the Early Church. Only, being a Romanist and therefore a Rationalist, he does not go back; he naturally does not forget everything else, because his opponents four hundred years ago had a stylistic knack which they have now entirely lost. For the Anglicans cannot do the trick now, any more than anybody else. Modern prayers, and theirs perhaps more than any, seem to be perfectly incapable of avoiding journalese. And the Prayer-Book prose seems to follow them like a derisive echo. Lambeth or Convocation will publish a prayer saying something like, "Guide us, 0 Lord, to the solution of our social problems"; and the great organ of old will groan in the background. ... "All who are desolate and oppressed." The first Anglicans asked for peace and happiness, truth and justice; but nothing can stop the latest Anglicans, and many others, from the horrid habit of asking for improvement in international relations.

But why has the old Protestant Prayer-Book a power like that of great poetry upon the spirit and the heart? The reason is much deeper than the mere avoidance of journalese. It might be put in a sentence; it has style; it has tradition; it has religion; it was written by apostate Catholics. It is strong, not in so far as it is the first Protestant book, but in so far as it was the last Catholic book. As it happens, this can be proved in the most practical manner from the actual details of the prose. The most moving passages in the old Anglican Prayer-Book are exactly those that are least like the atmosphere of the Anglicans. They are moving, or indeed thrilling, precisely because they say the things which Protestants have long left off saying; and which only Catholics still say. Anybody who knows anything of literature knows when a style lifts itself to its loftiest efforts; and in these cases it is always to say strongly what we still endeavour to say, however weakly; but which nobody else ever endeavours to say at all. Let anyone recall for himself the very finest passages in the Book of Common Prayer, and he will soon see that they are concerned specially with spiritual thoughts and themes that now seem strange and terrible; but anyhow, the reverse of common; " ... in the hour of death and in the day of Judgment." Who talks about the hour of death? Who talks about the Day of Judgment?

Only a litter of shabby little priests from the Italian Mission. Not certainly the popular and eloquent Dean of Bumblebury, who is so Broad and yet so High. Certainly not the charming and fashionable Vicar of St. Ethelbald's, who is so High and yet so Broad. Still less the clergyman helping in the same parish, who is frankly Low. It is the same on every page, where that spirit inspires that style. "Suffer us not, for any pains of death, to fall from Thee."... "Ah, that's what gets you" (or words to that effect), as Lord Peter Wimsey truly said of this phrase, in the detective tale of Miss Dorothy Sayers; who, like Lord Peter, knows a good deal about other things besides poisons; and understands her hero's historical traditions very well. But did you ever hear the curate fresh from the cricket-field, or the vicar smiling under the Union Jacks of the Conservative Rally, dwell upon that penultimate peril; or the danger of falling from God amid the pains of death? Very morbid. Just like those Dago devotional books. So very Roman.

I do not think the old Anglo-Catholics who were my friends, or the many who are still my friends, would deny that there has been a modern vulgarisation of religion, largely through the spread of this official optimism. But though they themselves are often quite free from the vulgar form of it, they could hardly deny that it is largely official and very widely spread. Yet it came as a great shock to me to discover how official and widespread it was. I had exaggerated the importance of an intelligent minority, because it was important to me. But the public and the world without were given up to Arian and Pelagian demagogues like Dean Inge and Dr. Barnes; and a sort of negative Protestantism could still sweep the field. It swept the whole field in the matter of the Prayer-Book. The proposal of an amended Prayer-Book, or rather two alternative Prayer-Books, was not decided for the Church by the Churchy or by the communicants; or by the congregation. It was settled by a mob of politicians, atheists, agnostics, dissenters, Parsees; avowed enemies of that Church or of any Church, who happened to have M.P. after their names. If the whole thing had any historic motto, or deserved anything higher than a headline, what was written across all that Anglican story was not Ecclesia Anglicana, or Via Media, or anything of the sort; it was Cujus Regio Ejus Religio; or rendering unto Caesar the things that are God's.

I add one incident to contrast Style, among men who had been Catholics for fourteen-hundred years, with that among men who have been

Protestants for four-hundred years. A Protestant organisation presented all the atheists, etc., who had voted Protestant, with a big black Bible or Prayer-Book, or both, decorated outside with a picture of the Houses of Parliament. In hoc signo vinces. It would be very idolatrous to put a cross or crucifix outside a book; but a picture of Parliament where the Party Funds are kept, and the peerages sold — . That is the temple where dwell the gods of Israel... We know the world progresses, and education is certainly extended, and there are fewer illiterates; and I suppose it is all right. But those four strong centuries of Protestant England begin with a Book of Common-Prayer, in which, even amid the treachery and panic of Cranmer, and in the very moment of men rending themselves from Rome and Christendom, they could lift in such sublime language so authentic a cry of Christian men: "By Thy precious death and burial; by Thy glorious resurrection and ascension; and by the coming of the Holy Ghost." Those centuries begin with that speech of men still by instinct and habit of mind Catholic; and the Protestant civilization evolves and the education spreads, and widens in wealth and power and towns and colleges; until at last the ripe and final fruit of its culture is produced, in the form of a fat black book of a cushiony sort, with a real photo-view, a view of one of the Sights, nicely tucked in to its neat black padded binding or frame... A Present from Ramsgate... anyhow, four-hundred years march from Rome.

V. THE COLLAPSE OF MATERIALISM

SOME little time ago Dr. David Forsyth delivered to the Section of Psychiatry (Royal Society of Medicine) an address which was certainly a psychological curiosity; of considerable interest to psychologists, pathologists, alienists and all other students of the mental breakdown in the modern world. It was a perfect and compact illustration of the very common combination of a superiority complex with arrested development, and inhibitions on almost all forms of intelligent curiosity. But I mention it here, not because of its narrowness, but of its direct negation of all that is really new in scientific discovery. It is no news to us that a materialist can be bigoted; but we do not always come upon so startling an example of his being antiquated.

It is not worth while to take any particular notice of all the diseased stuff about sadism and masochism being the sources of religion. We may note in passing, with a rather dreary amusement, that this sort of writer can never sustain a connected train of thought; and that he gets even these dismal technical terms hopelessly entangled; for he declares that Islam stands for sadism and Christendom for masochism, having just argued that the Christian persecution of heretics was typically sadistic. But all this judgment of great human events, good or bad, in terms of some obscure streak of lunacy, is itself an amusement for lunatics. It is exactly as if a man were to argue: “There is a special sort of madman who thinks he is made of glass; I will call this disease Vitreosity; and I will then show that anybody anywhere, who for any reason had anything to do with glass was a victim of vitreosity. The desert merchants who were said to have invented glass, the medieval craftsmen who so successfully coloured glass, the early astronomers who first fitted telescopes with lenses of glass, all showed Vitreosity in various stages of that disease; it is akin to subconscious libido because Peeping Tom looked through a window, which may have been made of glass; it is the root impulse of alcoholism, because people drink out of glasses; and Prince Albert and Queen Victoria were obviously stricken with raving and uncontrolled Vitreosity; because they built the Crystal Palace.” The slight defect in this theory (which is quite as scientific as Dr. Forsyth’s) is that in order to theorise, it is sometimes useful to think. It is obvious that all these people had a thousand other reasons for doing all they did, besides being mad on glass; and it is equally obvious that the great religions, true or false, had a thousand reasons for doing all they did, without being mad on masochism or sadism.

Only, as I say, we may well emerge from this slime and consider the real case of Dr. Forsyth, and his strange ignorance of the very elements of modern thought, and even rather specially of modern science. Now on the larger matter, his thesis was essentially this; that science and religion, so far from being reconciled or even reconcilable, were divided by the vital contradiction that science belongs to what he called "reality-thinking," or we call objective truth; while religion belonged to what he called "pleasure-thinking," or what most people call imagination. I need not mention the hundred obvious objections to this crude division; as, for instance, that religion has not confined itself to imagining pleasurable things, but has often been blamed by people like Dr. Forsyth for imagining unpleasant ones; or that it is arguing in a circle to prove at the end that religion is inconsistent with science merely by assuming at the beginning that it is inconsistent with truth. I am only concerned here to insist, not merely that the view is the reverse of the truth, but that the view is actually the very reverse of the modern view.

If there are two staring and outstanding facts about science and religion at this particular moment, they are these. First, that science is claiming much less than it did to show us a solid and objective reality. And second, that religion is claiming much more than it did (at least for centuries past) that its miracles and marvels of mystical experience can be proved to exist as a solid and objective reality. On the one side, the Atom has entirely lost the objective solidity it had for the nineteenth-century materialists. On the other side, the Ascension is accepted as a case of Levitation by many who would not accept it as an Ascension. On the one hand, the science of physics has almost become a science of metaphysics. For it is not merely, as is often said, that the Atom has become an abstract mathematical formula; it is almost as true to say that it has become a mere algebraic symbol. For the new physicists tell us frankly that what they describe is not the objective reality of the thing they observe; that they are not examining an object as the nineteenth century materialists thought they were examining an object. Some of them tell us that they are only observing certain disturbances or distortions, actually created by their own attempt to observe. Eddington is more agnostic about the material world than Huxley ever was about the spiritual world. A very unfortunate moment at which to say that science deals directly with reality and objective truth.

On the other hand, on the other plane, the plane of historical and practical argument, it is the very moment at which religion really is appealing to reality and objective truth. The Church throws down the unanswered challenge of Lourdes; the Spiritualists positively claim to prove their new religion by experiments, like a thesis in chemistry or electricity; and a vast number of independent intellectuals, who are neither Catholics nor Spiritualists, have begun to show an entirely new interest in the logical, or even the legal case for some of the great historic miracles. For instance, there have been two or three books following on the line of the brilliant but strictly scientific book called Who Moved The Stone; and the tendency of the most detached writers is to admit more and more that the evidence for such events has been underrated. The youngest school of Catholic apologists, such as Father Knox and Mr. Christopher Hollis and Mr. Arnold Lunn, attack almost entirely with the weapons of proof and practical evidence; and it is no longer pretended that they always have the worst of it. A very unfortunate moment at which to say that religion deals only with pleasant fancies and imaginations.

Dr. Forsyth’s antiquated style of thought interests me here, however, only as drawing attention to the familiar modern facts of which he seems never to have heard. And most relevant here is the fact of that extraordinary scientific change in the attitude to facts. It has its place in this series, because it is one of the great changes which had not developed in any full and public fashion, even by the time that I finally sought admission to the Church; and, at the much earlier time when I had already begun to think about it, all the popular science that a layman heard of was dominated by the now dead materialism of Haeckel. It is, therefore, true to say that this huge revolution in the philosophy of physical science was one of the world events which came after my conversion; but would have hugely hastened it, if it had come before my conversion. Only the exact nature of the effect, of this scientific revolution upon personal religion, is often misstated and widely misunderstood.

It is not, as some seem to fancy, that we think there is anything particularly Christian about electrons, any more than there is anything essentially atheistic about atoms. It is not that we propose to base our philosophy on their physics; any more than to base our ancient theology on their most recent biology. We are not “going to the country” with a set of slogans or party-cries, like Electrons for the Elect, or For Priest and Proton. The catastrophic importance for Catholics, of this collapse of materialism, is simply the fact that the most confident cosmic statements of science can collapse. If fifty years hence the electron is as entirely exploded as the atom, it will not affect us; for we have never founded our philosophy on the electron any more than on the atom. But the materialists did found their philosophy on the atom. And it is quite likely that some spiritual fad or other is at this moment being founded on the electron. To a man of my generation, the importance of the change does not consist in its destroying the dogma (which was after all a detail, though a very dogmatic dogma), “Matter consists of indivisible atoms.” But it does consist in its destroying the accepted, universal and proclaimed and popularised dogma: “You must accept the conclusions of science.” Scores and hundreds of times I have heard, through my youth and early manhood, the repetition of that ultimatum: “You must accept the conclusions of science.” And it is that notion or experience that has now been concluded; or rather excluded. Whatever else is questionable, there is henceforth no question of anybody “accepting” the conclusions of science. The new scientists themselves do not ask us to accept the conclusions of science. The new scientists themselves do not accept the conclusions of the new science. To do them justice, they deny vigorously that science has concluded; or that it has, in that sense, any conclusion. The finest intellects among them repeat, again and again, that science is inconclusive.

Which is all very well, and all very wise, and all very true to the gradual adjustment of truths on their own plane. But meanwhile-there is such a thing as human life. The Victorian agnostics waited hopefully for science to give them a working certainty about life. The new physicist philosophers are in no way different, except that they wait hopelessly instead of hopefully. For they know very well the real meaning of relativity; that their own views may pass from being relatively right to being relatively wrong. And meanwhile, as I say, there is such a thing as wanting a working rule as to whether we should pay our debts or murder our enemies. We would not wait for a nineteenth-century enlightenment that might come. We certainly will not wait for a twentieth-century enlightenment that cannot come. If we want a guide to life, it seems that we must look elsewhere.

VI. THE CASE OF SPAIN

The point of the recent political story in Spain has never been put clearly in the English papers; perhaps not quite clearly even in the Catholic papers. It is a very striking example of how the world has really moved, since my own most important change of conviction occurred. There is a paradox in every story of conversion; which is perhaps the reason why the records of it are never ideally satisfactory It is in its very nature the extinction of egoism: and yet every account of it must sound egoistic. It means, at least in the case of the Religion in question, a recognition of reality which has nothing to do with relativity. It is as if a man said, "This inn really exists, even if I have never found it"; or, "My home is actually in this village; and would be there, if I had never reached it." It is the recognition that the truth is true, apart from the truth-seeker; and yet the description must be the autobiography of a truth-seeker; generally a rather depressing sort of person. It will therefore sound egotistical, if I preface these remarks by saying that I was for a long time a Liberal in the sense of belonging to the Liberal Party. I am still a Liberal; it is only the Liberal Party that has disappeared. I understood its ideal to be that of equal citizenship and personal freedom; and they are my own political ideals to this day. The point here, however, is that I worked for a long time with the practical organization of Liberalism; I wrote for a great part of my life for the old Daily News; and I knew of course that it identified political liberty, rightly or wrongly, with representative government. Then came the breach, on which I need not insist; except by saying that I became quite convinced of two facts. First, that representative government had ceased to be representative. Second, that Parliament was in fact gravely menaced by political corruption. Politicians did not represent the populace, even the most noisy and vulgar of the populace. Politicians did not deserve the dignified name of demagogues. They deserved no name except perhaps the name of bagmen; they were travelling for private firms. If they represented anything, it was vested interests, vulgar but not even popular.

For this reason, when the Fascists' revolt appeared in Italy, I could not be entirely hostile to it; for I knew the hypocritical plutocracy against which it rebelled. But neither could I be entirely friendly to it; for I believed in the civic equality in which the politicians pretended to believe. For the present purpose, the problem can be put very briefly. The whole of the real case for Fascism can be put in two words never printed in our newspapers: secret societies. The whole case against Fascism could be put in one word now never used and almost forgotten: legitimacy. For the first, the Fascist was justified in smashing the politicians; for their contract with the people was secretly contradicted by their secret contracts with gangs and conspiracies. For the second, Fascism could never be quite satisfactory; for it did not rest on authority but only on power; which is the weakest thing in the world. The Fascists said in effect, "We may not be the majority, but we are the most vigorous and intelligent minority." Which is simply challenging any other intelligent minority to show that it is more vigorous. It may well end in the very anarchy it attempted to avoid. Compared with this, despotism and democracy are legitimate. I mean there is no doubt about who is the King's eldest son or about who has most votes in the most mechanical election. But a mere competition of intelligent minorities is a rather dreadful prospect. That, it seems to me, is a fair statement of the case for and against the Fascist movement. And now I should like to apply it to the curious case of Spain; and note how Liberalism met the issue.

For weeks and months on end my old organ the Daily News (now the News-Chronicle) had warned the public of all these doubtful and dangerous implications of Fascism. It had reviled Fascism for its vices; and rather more virulently for its virtues. But anyhow it had furiously denounced the notion of a minority imposing its will by mere violence, by weapons or military training, in contempt of the constitutional democracy in which the people expressed its will through Parliament. I think there is a great deal to be said for that view; especially in England, where Parliament is really normal and national as it never was in Italy or Germany. I could write much for and much against the Liberal theory as enunciated in the News-Chronicle, And then, suddenly, the whole case was thrown over, and turned upside down, in face of the simple situation in Spain.

First it must be remembered that the Church is always in advance of the world. That is why it is said to be behind the times. It discussed everything so long ago that people have forgotten the discussion. St. Thomas was an internationalist before all our internationalists; St. Joan was a nationalist almost before there were nations; Blessed Robert Bellarmine said all there is to be said for democracy before any ordinary worldling dared to be a democrat; and (what is to the purpose here) the Christian social reform was in full activity before any of these quarrels of Fascists and Bolshevists appeared. The Popular Party was working out the ideas of Leo XIII before a single Blackshirt had been seen in Italy. The same popular ideals had been moving in Spain; with the result that they had really become popular. There were other complications, of course; the Court had never been quite popular; the Dictatorship had not, I think, been imaginative about the curious problem of Catalonia; but all this did not effect the profound and popular Catholic change. The Pope particularly insisted that he had no objection to the Republic as such; there was no opposition to anything but to certain inhuman ideals, by which men would lose humanity in losing personal liberty and property. Well, in the perfectly fair and open intellectual interchange, in which all Liberals are supposed to believe, the Catholic ideals won. At an entirely peaceful and legal election, exactly like any English election, a vast majority voted in various degrees for the traditional truths, which had been normal to the Nation for much more than a thousand years. Spain spoke; if indeed elections do speak; and declared constitutionally against Communism, against Atheism, against the negation that starved normality in our time. Nobody said that this majority had been achieved by military violence. Nobody pretended that an armed minority had imposed it on the State. If the Liberal theory of Parliamentary majorities was just, this was just. If the Parliamentary system was a popular system, this was popular. And then the Socialists suddenly jumped up and did exactly everything that the Fascists have been blamed for doing. They used bombs and guns and instruments of violence to prevent the fulfilment of the will of the people, or at least of the will of the Parliament. Having lost the game by the rules of democracy, they tried to win it after all entirely by the rules of war; in this case of Civil War. They tried to overthrow a pacific Parliament by a militarist coup d'état. In short, they behaved exactly like Mussolini; or rather they did the very worst that has ever been attributed to Mussolini; and without a rag of his theoretical excuse.

And what did Liberalism say? What did my dear old friends of liberty and peaceful citizenship say? Naturally, I assumed on opening the paper that it would rally to the defence of Parliament and peaceful representative government and rebuke the attempt to make a minority dominant by mere military violence. Judge of my astonishment, when I found Liberals lamenting aloud over the unfortunate failure of these Socialistic Fascists to reverse the result of a General Election. I had been a Liberal in the old Liberal days; we were not unacquainted with Tory and Unionist victories at the polls; we had often gone contentedly into Opposition. It had never been suggested that when Balfour or Baldwin constitutionally became Prime Ministers, all the Nonconformists should go out with guns and bayonets to reverse the popular vote; or the Leader of the Opposition begin to throw dynamite at the elected Leader of the House. The only inference was that Liberalism was only opposed to militarists when they were Fascists; and entirely approved of Fascists so long as they were Socialists.

Now that is a small and purely political point. But to me it was very awakening. It showed me quite clearly the fundamental truth of the modern world. And that is this: there are no Fascists; there are no Socialists; there are no Liberals; there are no Parliamentarians. There is the one supremely inspiring and irritating institution in the world; and there are its enemies. Its enemies are ready to be for violence or against violence, for liberty or against liberty, for representation or against representation; and even for peace or against peace. It gave me an entirely new certainty, even in the practical and political sense, that I had chosen well.

VII. THE WELL AND THE SHALLOWS

IN numberless novels and newspaper articles, we have all read about a process which is still apparently regarded as novel or new; though it has been described in almost exactly the same terms for nearly a hundred years; and in slightly different terms for hundreds of years before that. I mean what is called the growth of doubt or the disturbance of faith; and the only point about it which is pertinent here is this; that it is always described as a revolt of the deeper parts of the mind against something that is comparatively superficial. We need not deny that modern doubt, like ancient doubt, does ask deep questions; we only deny that, as compared with our own philosophy, it gives any deeper answers. And it is a general rule, touching what is called modern thought, that while the questions are often really deep, the answers are often decidedly shallow. And it is perhaps even more important to remark that, while the questions are in a sense eternal, the answers are in every sense ephemeral. The world is still asking the questions that were asked by Job. The world will not long be contented with the answers that are given by Joad.

The chances of the Book of Joad being as permanent as the Book of Job are limited by certain perfectly practical calculations. Mr. Joad is an able and sincere man; and nobody doubts that his opinions are the product of his own mind; but they are very unmistakably the product of his own age. In this case it would be more correct to say, of his own generation. For the sceptics throughout the ages inherit nothing except a negation. Their positive policy or ideal varies, not only from century to century, but even from father to son. A free-thinker like Bradlaugh, coming out of the individualistic nineteenth century and the mercantile spirit of the Midlands, was careful to explain that he was an Individualist. A free-thinker of the next generation, like Mr. Joseph McCabe, was careful to explain that he was a Socialist. A free-thinker wanting to make a splash to-day would almost certainly insist that he was not a Socialist; which has come to mean something as mild as Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. For those who can believe in each of these social moves in turn, as they happen to turn up, the matter may be irrelevant. But some of us will simply draw the moral which determines the whole question of this issue between the traditions of truth and doubt. Those who leave the tradition of truth do not escape into something which we call Freedom. They only escape into something else, which we call Fashion.

That is really the crux of the controversy between the two views of history and philosophy. If it were true that by leaving the temple we walked out into a world of truths, the question would be answered; but it is not true. By leaving the temple, we walk out into a world of idols; and the idols of the marketplace are more perishable and passing than the gods of the temple we have left. If we wished to test rationally the case of rationalism, we should follow the career of the sceptic and ask how far he remained sceptical about the idols or ideals of the world into which he went. There are very few sceptics in history who cannot be proved to have been instantly swallowed by some swollen convention or some hungry humbug of the hour, so that all their utterances about contemporary things now look to us almost pathetically contemporary. The little group of Atheists, who still run their paper in Fleet Street and frequently honour me with hearty but somewhat hasty denunciation, began their agitation in the old Victorian days, and selected for themselves a terribly appropriate title. They did not call themselves Atheists, they called themselves Secularists. Never was a more bitter and blighting confession made in the form of a boast. For the word "secular" does not mean anything so sensible as "worldly." It does not even mean anything so spirited as "irreligious." To be secular simply means to be of the age; that is, of the age which is passing; of the age which, in their case, is already passed. There is one tolerably correct translation of the Latin word which they have chosen as their motto. There is one adequate equivalent of the word "secular"; and it is the word "dated."

In the essays in this series, I have considered some of the effects of this continuous process of time and change, as it has affected the world, even after I myself ceased to look to its changes for essential guidance. I have noted that the changes, which continue to occur, point more and more to the truth of the unchanging philosophy which stands apart from them. I could add, of course, a long list of other examples of exactly the same truth. I could point, for instance, to the collapse of Prohibition; not so much in the narrow sense of Prohibition as in the general sense of Prohibitionism. For what failed with the American experiment was not merely a particular chemical experiment with some alleged chemical constituent, which they chose to call alcohol. It was a whole attitude towards all the complex uses and abuses of human things. The great outstanding principle of the modern materialistic world has been Prohibition; even Prohibition in the abstract. Where we say that a social element is dangerous or doubtful, that it must be watched, that it may on due occasion be restrained, the thing that was called the Modern Mind always cried aloud with a voice of thunder that it must be forbidden. The Prohibitionist declares that there must be no wine; the Pacifist that there must be no war; the Communist that there must be no private property; the Secularist that there must be no religious worship. The failure of Prohibition in the one country in which it was a favourite, in which it was a popular ideal in so far as anything so inhuman can be popular, was the collapse of the whole conception of wiping out entirely the temptations of man and the trials of mortal life. After that, it is tacitly agreed that there is no such simple way out of moral problems; it is almost admitted that they must be referred to the moral sense. We were actually driven back on the desperate and tragic duty of our fathers, of deciding for ourselves whether we were drinking too much, or whether we were fighting in a just quarrel, or whether we were only defending our own lawful property, or getting other people’s property by lawless usury. Such a demand was naturally a great strain on the Modern Mind. For the Modern Mind is not at all accustomed to making up its mind. It finds the task almost as unfamiliar as working its own farm or practising its own craft; or doing a hundred other things, that human beings had done from the foundations of the world. In short, it would not accept the Catholic doctrine that human life is a battle; it only wanted to have it announced, from time to time in the newsapers, that it was a victory.

There are, I say, a number of other more general defeats of the attack on the Faith, on each of which it would be easy to write a long essay; the longer as the essential truth in the matter was more subtle and more universal. But I will close this series with the examples which I have given, because I think they suffice to show the general trend of the truth which I desire to suggest. The simplest summary of my meaning is to throw my mind back to all the things that seemed in my youth to be the rivals or reasonable alternatives to my religious conviction, and consider whether they could still play even the part which they did. The answer is that not one of them could now even remotely resemble a rival; or be even reasonable as an alternative. There was a time when men of my sympathies felt even tragically the quarrel between the Republic and the Church; the apparent misunderstanding between political equality and mystical authority. It is a commonplace to-day that the world has reacted much more against equality than against authority. But that in itself would not have disposed of the democratic ideals of any sincere democrat. It is the thing called democracy that has itself disappointed the democrat. However much I might hate the Fascists, heartily as I do indeed despise the Hitlerites, that would never restore the mere abstract faith in the Republicans. If I lost my religion to-morrow, I could not again believe that the mere fact of turning Kamchatka from a Monarchy to a Republic would solve all its social sins. I have seen too many Republicans, with their greasy platform promises and their guzzling secret societies. I can remember when being a Socialist was a real inspiration to youth; but anybody who thinks it could be an inspiration to the more elderly phase of maturity, has only to look at the more elderly Socialists. In short, the point I mentioned at the beginning of this article is the point of the whole matter; that while the questions are still deep and tragic enough, the recent answers have not really been revolutionary, but only superficial. I could not abandon the faith, without falling back on something more shallow than the faith. I could not cease to be a Catholic, except by becoming something more narrow than a Catholic. A man must narrow his mind in order to lose the universal philosophy; everything that has happened up to. this very day has confirmed this conviction; and whatever happens to-morrow will confirm it anew. We have come out of the shallows and the dry places to the one deep well; and the Truth is at the bottom of it.

THE RETURN TO RELIGION

IN the days when Huxley and Herbert Spencer and the Victorian agnostics were trumpeting as a final truth the famous hypothesis of Darwin, it seemed to thousands of simple people almost impossible that religion should survive. It is all the more ironic that it has not only survived them all, but it is a perfect example (perhaps the only real example) of what they called the Survival of the Fittest. It so happens that it does really and truly fit in with the theory offered by Darwin; which was something totally different from most of the theories accepted by Darwinians. This real original theory of Darwin has since very largely broken down in the general field of biology and botany; but it does actually apply to this particular argument in the field of religious history. The recent re-emergence of our religion is a survival of the fittest as Darwin meant it, and not as popular Darwinism meant it; so far as it meant anything. Among the innumerable muddles, which mere materialistic fashion made out of the famous theory, there was in many quarters a queer idea that the Struggle for Existence was of necessity an actual struggle between the candidates for survival; literally a cut-throat competition. There was a vague idea that the strongest creature violently crushed the others. And the notion that this was the one method of improvement came everywhere as good news to bad men; to bad rulers, to bad employers, to swindlers and sweaters and the rest. The brisk owner of a bucket-shop compared himself modestly to a mammoth, trampling down other mammoths in the primeval jungle. The business man destroyed other business men, under the extraordinary delusion that the eohippic horse had devoured other eohippic horses. The rich man suddenly discovered that it was not only convenient but cosmic to starve or pillage the poor, because pterodactyls may have used their little hands to tear each other’s eyes. Science, that nameless being, declared that the weakest must go to the wall; especially in Wall Street. There was a rapid decline and degradation in the sense of responsibility in the rich, from the merely rationalistic eighteenth century to the purely scientific nineteenth. The great Jefferson, when he reluctantly legalised slavery, said he trembled for his country, knowing that God is just. The profiteer of later times, when he legalised usury or financial trickery, was satisfied with himself; knowing that Nature is unjust.

But, however that may be (and of course the moral malady has survived scientific mistake) the people who talked thus of cannibal horses and competitive oysters, did not understand what Darwin's thesis was. If later biologists have condemned it, it should not be condemned without being understood, widely as it has been accepted without being understood. The point of Darwinism was not that a bird with a longer beak (let us say) thrust it into other birds, and had the advantage of a duellist with a longer sword. The point of Darwinism was that the bird with the longer beak could reach worms (let us say) at the bottom of a deeper hole; that the birds who could not do so would die; and he alone would remain to found a race of long-beaked birds. Darwinism suggested that if this happened a vast number of times, in a vast series of ages, it might account for the difference between the beaks of a sparrow and a stork. But the point was that the fittest did not need to struggle against the unfit. The survivor had nothing to do except to survive, when the others could not survive. He survived because he alone had the features and organs necessary for survival. And, whatever be the truth about mammoths or monkeys, that is the exact truth about the present survival of religion. It is surviving because nothing else can survive.

Religion has returned; because all the various forms of scepticism that tried to take its place, and do its work, have by this time tied themselves into such knots that they cannot do anything. That chain of causation of which they were fond of talking seems really to have served them after the fashion of the proverbial rope; and when modern discussion gave them rope enough, they quite rapidly hanged themselves. For there is not a single one of the fashionable forms of scientific scepticism, or determinism, that does not end in stark paralysis, touching the practical conduct of human life. Take any three of the normal and necessary ideas on which civilisation and even society depend. First, let us say, a scientific man of the old normal nineteenth-century sort would remark, "We can at least have common sense, in its proper meaning of a sense of reality common to all; we can have common morals, for without them we cannot even have a community; a man must in the ordinary sense obey the law; and especially the moral law." Then the newer sceptic, who is progressive and has gone further and fared worse, will immediately say, "Why should you worship the taboo of your particular tribe? Why should you accept prejudices that are the product of a blind herd instinct? Why is there any authority in the unanimity of a flock of frightened sheep?" Suppose the normal man falls back on the deeper argument: "I am not terrorised by the tribe; I do keep my independent judgment; I have a conscience and a light of justice within, which judges the world." And the stronger sceptic will answer: "If the light in your body be darkness — and it is darkness because it is only in your body — what are your judgments but the incurable twist and bias of your particular heredity and accidental environment? What can we know about judgments, except that they must all be equally unjust? For they are all equally conditioned by defects and individual ignorances, all of them different and none of them distinguishable; for there exists no single man so sane and separate as to be able to distinguish them justly. Why should your conscience be any more reliable than your rotting teeth or your quite special defect of eyesight? God bless us all, one would think you believed in God!" Then perhaps the normal person will get annoyed and say rather snappishly, "At least I suppose we are men of science; there is science to appeal to and she will always answer; the evidential and experimental discovery of real things." And the other sceptic will answer, if he has any sense of humour: "Why certainly. Sir Arthur Eddington is Science; and he will tell you that science cannot destroy religion, or even defend the multiplication table. Sir Bertram Windle was Science; and he would tell you that the scientific mind is completely satisfied in the Roman Catholic Church. For that matter. Sir Oliver Lodge was Science; and he reached by purely experimental and evidential methods to a solid belief in ghosts. But I admit that there are men of science who cannot get to a solid belief in anything; even in science; even in themselves. There is the crystalographer of Cambridge who writes in the Spectator the lucid sentence: ' We know that most of what we know is probably untrue.' Does that help you on a bit, in founding your sane and solid society?"

We have of course seen just lately the most dramatic exit of great material scientists from the camp of Materialism. It was Eddington I think, who used the phrase that the universe seems to be more like a great thought than a great machine: and Dr. Whitney as reported, has declared that there is no rational description of the ultimate cosmic motion except the Will of God. But it is the perishing of the other things, at least as much as the persistence of the one thing, that has left us at last face to face with the ancient religion of our fathers. The thing once called free thought has come finally to threaten everything that is free. It denies personal freedom in denying free will and the human power of choice. It threatens civic freedom with a plague of hygienic and psychological quackeries; spreading over the land such a network of pseudo-scientific nonsense as free citizens have never yet endured in history. It is quite likely to reverse religious freedom, in the name of some barbarous nostrum or other, such as constitutes the crude and ill-cultured creed of Russia. It is perfectly capable of imposing silence and impotence from without. But there is no doubt whatever that it imposes silence and impotence from within. The whole trend of it, which began as a drive and has ended in a drift, is towards some form of the theory that a man cannot help himself; that a man cannot mend himself; above all, that a man cannot free himself. In all its novels and most of its newspaper articles it takes for granted that men are stamped and fixed in certain types of abnormality of anarchical weakness; that they are pinned and labelled in a museum of morality or immorality; or of that sort of unmorality which is more priggish than the one and more hoggish than the other. We are practically told that we might as well ask a fossil to reform itself. We are told that we are asking a stuffed bird to repent. We are all dead, and the only comfort is that we are all classified. For by this philosophy, which is the same as that of the blackest of Puritan heresies, we all died before we were born. But as it is Kismet without Allah, so also it is Calvinism without God.

The agnostics will be gratified to learn that it is entirely due to their own energy and enterprise, to their own activity in pursuing their own antics, that the world has at last tired of their antics and told them so. We have done very little against them; non nobis, Domine; the glory of their final overthrow is all their own. We have done far less than we should have done, to explain all that balance of subtlety and sanity which is meant by a Christian civilisation. Our thanks are due to those who have so generously helped us by giving a glimpse of what might be meant by a Pagan civilisation. And what is lost in that society is not so much religion as reason; the ordinary common daylight of intellectual instinct that has guided the children of men. A world in which men know that most of what they know is probably untrue cannot be dignified with the name of a sceptical world; it is simply an impotent and abject world, not attacking anything, but accepting everything while trusting nothing; accepting even its own incapacity to attack; accepting its own lack of authority to accept; doubting its very right to doubt. We are grateful for this public experiment and demonstration; it has taught us much. We did not believe that rationalists were so utterly mad until they made it quite clear to us. We did not ourselves think that the mere denial of our dogmas could end in such dehumanised and demented anarchy. It might have taken the world a long time to understand that what it had been taught to dismiss as mediaeval theology was often mere common sense; although the very term common sense, or communis sententia, was a mediaeval conception. But it took the world very little time to understand that the talk on the other side was most uncommon nonsense. It was nonsense that could not be made the basis of any common system, such as has been founded upon common sense.

To take one example out of many; the whole question of Marriage has been turned into a question of Mood. The enemies of marriage did not have the patience to remain in their relatively strong position; that marriage could not be proved to be sacramental, and that some exceptions must be treated as exceptions, so long as it was merely social. They could not be content to say that it is not a sacrament but a contract, and that exceptional legal action might break a contract. They brought objections against it that would be quite as facile and quite as futile, if brought against any other contract. They said that a man is never in the same mood for ten minutes together; that he must not be asked to admire in a red daybreak what he admired in a yellow sunset; that no man can say he will even be the same man by the next month or the next minute; that new and nameless tortures may afflict him if his wife wears a different hat; or that he may plunge her into hell by putting on a pair of socks that does not harmonise with somebody else’s carpet. It is quite obvious that this sort of sensitive insanity applies as much to any other human relation as to this relation. A man cannot choose a profession; because, long before he has qualified as an architect, he may have mystically changed into an aviator, or been convulsed in rapid succession by the emotions of a ticket-collector, a trombone-player and a professional harpooner of whales. A man dare not buy a house for fear a fatal stranger with the wrong sort of socks should come into it; or for fear his own mind should be utterly changed in the matter of carpets or cornices. A man may suddenly decline to do any business with his own business partner; because he also, like the cruel husband, wears the wrong necktie. And I saw a serious printed appeal for sympathy for a wife, who deserted her family because her psychology was incompatible with an orange necktie. This is only one application, as I say; but it exactly illustrates how the sceptical principle is now applied; and how scepticism has recently changed from apparent sense to quite self-evident nonsense. The heresies not only decay but destroy themselves; in any case they perish without a blow.

For the reply, not merely of religion but of reason and the rooted sanity of mankind, is obvious enough. "If you feel like that, why certainly you will not found families; or found anything else. You will not build houses; you will not make partnerships; you will not in any fashion do the business of the world. You will never plant a tree, lest you wish next week you had planted it somewhere else; you will never put a potato into a pot or stew, because it will be too late to take it out again; your whole mood is stricken and riddled with cowardice and sterility; your whole way of attacking any problem is to think of excuses for not attacking it at all. Very well; so be it; the Lord be with you. You may be respected for being sincere; you may be pitied for being sensitive; you may retain some of the corrective qualities which make it useful on occasion to be sceptical. But if you are too sceptical to do these things, you must stand out of the way of those who can do them; you must hand over the world to those who believe that the world is workable; to those who believe that men can make houses, make partnerships, make appointments, make promises — and keep them. And if it is necessary in order to keep a promise or boil a potato or behave like a human being, to believe in God making Man, in God being made Man, or in God made Man coming in the clouds in glory — well, then you must at least give a chance to these credulous fanatics who can believe the one and who can do the other." That is what I mean by the spiritual Survival of the Fittest. That is why the old phrase, which is probably a mistake in natural history, is a truth in supernatural history. The organic thing called religion has in fact the organs that take hold on life. It can feed where the fastidious doubter finds no food; it can reproduce where, the solitary sceptic boasts of being barren. It may be accepting a miracle to believe in free will; but it is accepting madness, sooner or later, to disbelieve in it. It may be a wild risk to make a vow; but it is a quiet, crawling and inevitable ruin to refuse to make a vow. It may be incredible that one creed is the truth and the others are relatively false; but it is not only incredible, but also intolerable, that there is no truth either in or out of creeds, and all are equally false. For nobody can ever set anything right, if everybody is equally wrong. The intense interest of the moment is that the Man of Science, the hero of the modern world and the latest of the great servants of humanity, has suddenly and dramatically refused to have anything more to do with this dreary business of nibbling negation, and blind scratching and scraping away of the very foundations of the mastery of man. For the work of the sceptic for the past hundred years has indeed been very like the fruitless fury of some primeval monster; eyeless, mindless, merely destructive and devouring; a giant worm wasting away a world that he could not even see; a benighted and bestial life, unconscious of its own cause and of its own consequences. But Man has taken to himself again his own weapons; will and worship and reason and the vision of the plan in things; and we are once more in the morning of the world.

THE REACTION OF THE INTELLECTUALS

I HAVE been asked if I think there is a reaction against the tendencies called “ultra-modern” and in favour of many things blasted by the term, “Victorian” and “virtuous” and “respectable,” and other wild and wicked words. I answer that there is a reaction, and I am glad of it; but it is a reaction of a very peculiar kind. It is not what I expected. It is not even particularly what I wanted. But anything is a relief from the desolate dullness and staleness of the Bright Young Thing.

First, it will clear the human mind (and save the advanced mind from many disappointments) if we realise that there always can be a reaction, right or wrong, against anything, good or bad. Life is far too complex not to leave some desirable or defensible things behind with every movement it makes. We have reactions in favour of things much more remote than Victorianism. I always remember a confident and contemptuous phrase in one of Macaulay’s speeches for the Reform Bill, which abolished Rotten Boroughs. “There has been no reaction. There will be no reaction. I no more expect a reaction in favour of Gatton and Old Sarum than a reaction in favour of Odin and Thor.” I will not discuss whether there is a reaction in favour of Gatton and Old Sarum; there most certainly is a reaction against Reform Bills and Representative Government. But what amuses me is that, even while Macaulay said the words, there was beginning a most unmistakable reaction in favour of Odin and Thor. Carlyle already had pen in hand and his Northern genius was slowly turning into Nordic insanity. He was already telling us to go back to the stark Scandinavian beginnings. A little while afterwards Nietzsche took the next step by throwing over Christian ethics as well as theology, and invoking the old gods of violence and war. And it ended with a great German General (who had led through the Great War and might have had enough of it) actually filling Germany with pagan propaganda and a publicity campaign in favour of Odin and Thor. So much for reactions in general. The most modern art finds the Ancient Greeks too modern and goes back to the Ancient Egyptians. We revive Primitive Art and may revive Prehistoric Art. We may paint on rock with red ochre, for all I know, or discover special qualities in stone hatchets and flint arrows.

There is a reaction; but that would not alone prove that the reaction is right. I think it is right; because it is a reaction in favour of civilisation; and against the destruction of civilisation. But with that word "civilisation" we come to the rather curious quality which this particular reaction shows. It is not, as I myself might have hoped or expected, a revolt of plain, old-fashioned people against the sophisticated. It is a revolt of the sophisticated. It is, at any rate, a revolt of the highly civilised; perhaps of the over-civilised. But if they are over-civilised, they are still highly intelligent. That is why they are kicking the Bright Young Thing down the street.

I will take one particular case which is rather a parable. Some time ago all the fine old English critics, Constant Readers and Conservative people generally, were in a ferment of fury and mockery against the impudent innovations of "the Sitwells"; that is, the three poets of that family. They were a proof that being modern means going mad. They were the very latest and loudest anarchists, destroying both rhyme and reason. I will not discuss their merits here. When Miss Sitwell accused the Dawn of "creaking," there were discussions as to her meaning. Her foes said it was random nonsense, like describing the sun as sneezing or the grass as blowing its nose. Her friends said it was a bold and novel way of suggesting something harsh and reluctant about the cold morning light. But everybody agreed that it was the very latest and newest experiment, whether in liberty or in lunacy. The Sitwells were accused of beating the big drum, or blowing their own trumpet; but it was agreed that their drums and trumpets were the newest musical instruments of the queerest shape; and that they used the newest methods of shrieking for what they wanted. But what did they want?

Now, what the Sitwells want is Victorianism. What they do definitely desire, demand and incessantly describe, is a reaction to Victorian habits; to Victorian manners; and even to Victorian morals. As certainly as Shelley wanted a lot of wind and light and the rise of the pure pagan republic, as surely as Walt Whitman wanted democratic breadth and a sort of bodily brotherhood among men out-of-doors, so certainly what the Sitwells want is Victorian flower-beds and hot-houses, Victorian coloured patchwork and curios under glass; and, in no small degree, Victorian etiquette, distance and dignity. This may be a fad but it is a fact; and it is a fact that vividly illustrates the real revolt against recent moral, or immoral, tendencies. The

Victorian revolt is not a revolt of Victorians. It is a revolt of Post-Victorians or rather of Post-Post-Victorians. They are going back to something remote, as much as the Pre-Raphaelites in going back to the Middle Ages. In both cases the reason is the same; because the modern ages have become too unbearably stupid for intelligent people. But the more modern case is the more acute case of this revolt against modernity among the moderns. To understand it, we must take a more general view of the singular situation in the world to-day.

Those specially called the Moderns, who are now most of them Ancients, conceived of human history as a progress in the sense of a procession. That is, they said that some slower people might bring up the rear, but all were moving onward. They also supposed that certain bold spirits, whom they called the Pioneers of Progress, went on in front and made a path for mankind. I have a great admiration for Walt Whitman; but it cannot be denied that he did exclaim, in a moment of weakness, "Pioneers, 0 Pioneers!" It was characteristic of all that world; first, that it relied upon a metaphor; and second, that it got the metaphor quite wrong. Whitman seems to associate his intellectual pioneers with the practical pioneers of the American Civil War. But a pioneer is not a person who leads the army, or decides where it shall go. The pioneers in front are as much under orders as any camp-followers in the rear. If Sherman had thrown out pioneers to clear his road to Atlanta; and if the pioneers had seen a futuristic vision and gone off to found the future city of Oklahoma, Sherman would have been very much surprised; nay, vexed. And the moral is that the marching column of mankind must have some kind of notion of where it wants to go, before it can decide whether a pioneer is a useful pioneer or not.

Now, at this moment, the marching column of mankind is in an extraordinary position. For one thing, it is not marching. But it is marking time; because it still has the general notion that it ought to march. It may seem quaint to recur to Macaulay as well as Whitman; but it is better described in Macaulay's poem of Horatius than in Whitman's poem about the Pioneers; though to many, I fear, Whitman is now as distant as Macaulay. But it is really true that the exact and very extraordinary position of the procession at this moment is expressed with precision in the familiar lines:

"And those behind cried 'Forward!' And those before cried 'Back!'"

The camp-followers may be charging; but the pioneers are retreating. In other words, it is exactly the sort of bold and enquiring spirits, who were always said to be in advance of the age, who are now most doubtful about the desirability of advancing. It is exactly those who are content to follow tradition or convention or familiar fashions who are still following (as they suppose, at least) the tradition of progress, the convention of movement and the hundred fashions, familiar to the nineteenth-century, of appealing to the hope of change. Men are progressive because they are a little behind the times. They are reactionary because they are a little in advance of the times. It sounds like a paradox; but it is really a very practical and even inevitable state of things, given certain conditions. Those behind will still cry "Forward!"; and only those far in front will cry "Back!"; when the vanguard of the army has come suddenly to the edge of a precipice.

In short, I maintain that it is the Intellectuals (for want of a more intellectual term) who have now suddenly discovered the dangers of mere novelty, of mere anarchy, of mere negation. It is not all the Intellectuals, of course; and certainly not those who modestly gave themselves that name in the middle of the nineteenth-century. For these, by the ironic operation of their own favourite argument, are now old and venerable and established and respected; and, therefore, of no importance whatever. Men like Bertrand Russell, and H. G. Wells, are left behind by the advance; and are, therefore, under the illusion that it is still advancing. The particular state of mind I mean (which is not always a very pretty state of mind at present) is peculiar to a section of the younger Intellectuals. And, whatever it is, it is not a positive faith in the promise of the future or the tendencies of the present. If we take any typical contemporary poetry of the sort that is sensitive and critical, say the poems of Mr. Osbert Sitwell, it is quite obvious that they are not merely in revolt against the nineteenth-century; though the progressive theory was bound up with the nineteenth-century. They are in revolt against the twentieth-century; and potentially more in revolt against the twenty-first.

But the point is that it is because they are so very Modern that they have rebelled against Modernism. It is because they have themselves seen all the new tricks, and in many cases played all the new tricks, that they have realised before anybody else that the whole bag of tricks may soon be played out. Mr. Humbert Wolfe may be justified in beginning every line with a small letter; indeed, in that he is classical rather than revolutionary;

for the old Latin texts were always printed so. But he is far too intelligent a man not to see that those who would prove themselves progressive, by abandoning all capital letters, can only prove themselves still more progressive by abandoning all small letters; and that this sort of destructive reform can only end in a blank page. So this kind of destructive progress ends in a blank wall. Mr. Sitwell may think himself right, in this or that case, in attaching a musical adjective to an entirely visual or pictorial substantive. But he can see, as well as anybody else, that if a hundred howling imitators come in and claim the right to attach any adjective to any substantive, it is not so much a question of literature being lawless as of its ceasing to be anything at all. And we see more and more every day, this curious sort of new alarm spreading among the most intelligent of the new schools' which is almost unintelligible to many of the old schools; and especially to that very old school which supposes that the young have no business to be anything but reckless and revolutionary.

I will take the case of two of the most acute and individual among contemporary writers, one probably younger than the other, at least in fashion and fame; one American and the other English, and the inheritor ot a name already famous for a very English style I will take the cases of Mr. T. S. Eliot and Mr Aldous Huxley. They are different enough of course; but they exactly express two different ways of recoiling from the recent riot and vulgarity of the merely "modern" world. Mr. Eliot, who began like a child of his age with the recognised stark and jagged experiments in free verse, has come to have something like a suspicion of every sort of freedom. He had come to stand for an almost cloistered refinement, full of the virginal traditions of old religion and repudiating not only the demagogy of to-day but even the democracy of yesterday. There are passages in the works of Mr. Aldous Huxley which few will call cloistered, which few, perhaps, will call virginal. But he is none the less a representative ol the same reaction against recent vulgarity and vice. Only he reacts more in the manner of Swift; showing the ugly their own ugliness; even pelting the filthy with samples of their own filth. But he is, if not on the side of the angels, at least horribly bored with the devils. Anyone who will read his admirable account of Hollywood, which he calls, "The City of Dreadful Joy," will find it more dreadful than joyful. There is a fight against the recent licence; but what is fighting it is a sort of fierce fastidiousness. I am not imagining this reaction because I want it; for, indeed, it is not especially the reaction that I want. I should have hoped for a popular revolt against perversions and pedantries of vice, which have never, in fact, been popular. I should have liked the ordinary, old-fashioned, obstinate people, who still stick to the notion of some connection between themselves and their own babies, to rise and bash in the heads of the inhuman prigs whose ideal is a sort of prophetic infanticide. I should like a howling rabble of really respectable people (and the rabble is still really respectable) to burn down the houses where Luxury takes on its true Latin sense of Luxuria. I should like the normal people, who live on beef and beer, to make war on the hypocritical cranks who take their vegetarianism in the form of vegetable cocktails less wholesome than the fruit of the vine. I should prefer the Intellectuals to be slaughtered by what may be called the Morals; and the mob is still very moral. But the great point is that they should be slaughtered; if not by the clubs of the crowd, then by the rapier of the more intellectual Intellectual. God moves in a mysterious way and does not disdain the strangest or the humblest instruments; and we must not be ashamed of finding ourselves, if necessary, on the side of the cultivated and the clever.

Or again, it might have been that picturesque paradox; a revolt of the old against the young. It might have been a rebellion of oppressed parents breaking the yoke of servile obedience now laid on them by their tyrannical sons and daughters. It might have been the heavy father breaking out of the coal-cellar with the original big stick, or the maiden aunt emerging from the bedroom armed with the poker; and the joyous spectacle of their smashing the gramophones and the saxophones and the ukuleles, hurling away the cocktails, wrecking the racing cars and generally showing that there is life in the old dog yet. But, as a fact, it does not seem to be coming through the fury of the father or the grandfather but rather with the slowly maturing disgust of the great-grandson with the manifest idiocy of the grandson.

It is not coming by the big stick or the cudgels of the populace; but by something which I have compared to a rapier; and might compare to a razor. Some young men of the school of Mr. Aldous Huxley have, indeed, a touch of pessimism that is only too suggestive of a razor; at once the symbol of elegance and of suicide. And yet there is a broader sense in which this is, perhaps, rather too true. When the Victorians rebuked little boys for playing with razors or rapiers, or such acute instruments and arguments ensued, the elders often used a proverbial expression here very relevant: “If you get so sharp as that, you will cut yourself” The minority of the most intelligent, in the younger generation, has really become very sharp; and it has really discovered the peril of cutting itself. Men like Mr. Huxley and Mr. Eliot have the sense to see that the half-truths of the sceptic are not only edged tools, but double-edged tools. They cut the ground from under rationalism as well as from under religion; they can be used to wound democracy as easily as despotism; in the last resort they can inoculate the mind with doubts about doubt itself. More and more the really clever young man will find that he has grown sharp enough to cut himself; and, if he does not try something beyond scepticism, he will grow sceptical enough to cut his throat.

Lastly, why do I think this small minority of rather fastidious and over-refined persons will finally have an effect? I answer, with a profound sigh, because of the great social institution which we call Snobbery. As soon as the quite brainless mob of Bright Young Things discovers that it is really being despised, as a mob of dull old things (though it were only by two well-educated minor poets) there will be a panic. The mass of the immoralists never believed in immorality or in anything else. They never really thought that wrong was right, because they never really thought at all. They merely believed what they were told; that being lawless was the latest thing. If once they hear that there is something later still, even later than the latest, they will rush for it and roll in the mud in front of it, though it were a Hermit out of the desert like St. Anthony. If it is a humorous, but slightly superior young man, who regards all their vulgar and raucous games as vieux jeu, and will only condescend to talk about Humanism and St. Thomas Aquinas, they will grovel before him. I know them. They play the goat; but they none the less do it like sheep. For they are sheep that have not a shepherd, and the shepherd named Pan is dead.

LEVITY — OR LEVITATION

I DO not see why a man should not sometimes have a holiday, even while he is doing his work, and write about something merely because it amuses him. I know I should be doing my duty as a Distributist, doing it dismally with the pen when others are already doing it more nobly with the plough. But, for once in a way, I am going to write merely for fun; and about something only because it is funny. And the funniest thing I can find for miles round is in a paper called the Psychic News, a past issue of which was adorned with a portrait of me, accompanied with the extraordinary and rather mysterious caption, "G. K.C., the Catholic who goes up in the air." Believing as I do in miracles, I have never claimed levitation as a power particularly likely to be manifested in my own case. But though not at present drawn irresistibly towards levitation, I am much tempted to levity. The charges are rather vague, except that they all seem to be equally unfortunate in relation to the facts of the case. The writer seemed to take it for granted that an article quite plainly signed by somebody else must really have been written by me, and written by me from no other motive but a fanatical Catholicism, although the man who really wrote is not a Catholic at all and said nothing whatever to suggest in any way that he was. He, however, is supremely capable of looking after himself, and the mere facts about this absurd muddle I have dealt with elsewhere. At the moment I only wish to wallow in sheer shameless enjoyment of the way in which the Psychic News attacks the Catholic Church and attacks me. I admit that this is mere self-indulgence on my part. I know that numbers of judicious friends will tell me that I ought not to take any notice of such an article. But nothing that can be called human is uninteresting, and this involves, to begin with, one puzzle which always interests me very much. And that is why people who fly into a rage with the Catholic Church always use an extraordinary diction, or verbal style, in which all sorts of incommensurate things are jumbled up together, so that the very order of the words is a joke. "Spiritualism depends only on the evidence which people receive in their own homes. It does not require priests. Neither do enquirers have to buy rosaries or beads, or crucifixes, or pay for candles or masses." It must be a dreadful moment of indecision for the enquirers, when they have to make up their minds whether they will buy rosaries or beads. But the last term is the best; and here the order of words is especially significant. Apparently the first object of a Catholic is to get a candle. If once he can get hold of a candle, and walk about everywhere clasping his candle, he is all right. But if he cannot get a candle, he has the alternative of purchasing a mass; an instrument that is a sort of substitute for a candle.

Now I did not, as it happens, launch any grand persecuting personal spiritual attack on Spiritualism, as this writer imaginatively described. But if I did, as of course I might, I do think I could make a better job of attacking Spiritualism than he does of attacking Catholicism. I should not talk as if a Spiritualist hung suspended between the two divine dogmas of the Sacredness of Tambourines and the Return of the Dead. I should not talk as if men chose between a planchette and a Ouija-board. I should not talk about "tables or furniture," or imply that a trumpet was the same sort of thing as a seance. But I never read an attack on Catholicism without finding this ignorant gabble of terms all topsy-turvy. There is always some such medley of misused words, in which mitres, misereres, nones, albs, croziers, virgins and viaticums tumble over each other without the wildest hope that anybody could possibly know what any of them mean. That is the first curiosity about this kind of writing. We can now go back to the only sentence in the paragraph in which anything like a meaning is apparent. It is that passage in which, we are told, Spiritualism does without a priesthood.

It does not require priests. It only requires a spiritual aristocracy really much more exclusive and privileged than priests; seeing they have direct access to new revelations, and their superiority is in their personal spiritual structure; they are abnormal as priests are not necessarily abnormal. But, however that may be, the paper in question reveals some remarkable impressions about spiritual functions and degrees. There is an astonishing caption under a picture of St. Joan of Arc; saying that she did not care whether she was a saint or a witch, because "she had a job to do and did it." How refreshing this language is. How full of the fifteenth century! Joan was just all out to get that job. She reckoned she could hold down that job. Gee! Joan wasn't the sort of skirt to bother about whether it came from God or the Devil, when there was a good job to hold down. The paper informs us that its religion is entirely founded on facts; but it seems possible to manufacture a good deal of abstract vulgarity without employing them. It were vain, I suppose, to point out the historical fact that Joan debated desperately for days and days to prove she was not a witch, long after it was obvious that her job, as a job, was either done or done for. But might not the suggestion, that it does not matter whether one is a witch or a saint, explain something of the distrust that some of us feel about Spiritualism?

As I am writing this for fun, I would not say very much about the central mystery of my own religion, or the laboriously offensive terms in which the writer asks me to "prove" Transubstantiation, as he apparently claims to "prove" Spiritualism. To him I am content to say one thing. Suppose the Church had tried to give such proofs, and with such results. Suppose Pope after Pope, and Priest after Priest, had stood up at the altar rails promising on the spot to prove Transubstantiation. And suppose Pope after Pope, and Priest after Priest, had been exposed as proving it by a faked apparatus in the Communion Table, by hidden wires in the cross and candles, and all the apparatus of fraud. Suppose, while many priests were doubtless honest men and perhaps honest dupes, it was a plain, palpable historical fact that the miracle had again and again been a mere conjuring trick, and the most famous Catholic saints had been caught and exposed doing the trick. If that had happened, I venture to say that the Eucharistic Congress would not now be so much respected by the whole civilised world; or by everybody except the hooligans of Portadown and journalists of the Psychic News.

THE CASE FOR HERMITS

ANYONE who has ever protected a little boy from being bullied at school, or a little girl from some childish persecution at a party, or any natural person from any minor nuisance, knows that the being thus badgered tends to cry out, in a simple but singular English idiom, “Let me alone!” It is seldom that the child of nature breaks into the cry, “Let me enjoy the fraternal solidarity of a more socially organised group-life.” It is rare even for the protest to leap to the lips in the form, “Let me run around with some crowd that has got dough enough to hit the high spots.” Not one of these positive modern ideals presents itself to that untutored mind; but only the ideal of being “let alone.” It is rather interesting that so spontaneous, instinctive, almost animal an ejaculation contains the word alone.

There are now a great many boys and girls, both old and young, who are really in that state of mind; not only through being teased, but also through being petted. Most of them will fiercely deny it, since it contradicts the conventions of their new generation; just as a child kept up too late at night will more and more indignantly deny the desire to go to bed. Indeed I am always expecting to hear that a scientific campaign has been opened against Sleep. Sooner or later the Prohibitionists will turn their attention to the old tribal traditional superstition of Sleep; and they will say that the sluggard is merely encouraged by the cowardice of the moderate sleeper. There will be tables of statistics, showing how many hours of output are lost by miners, smelters, plumbers, plasterers, and every trade in which (it will be noted) men have contracted the habit of sleep; tables showing the shortage of aconite, alum, apples, beef, beetroot, bootlaces, etc., and other statistics carefully demonstrating that work of this kind can only rarely be performed by sleep-walkers. There will be all the scientific facts, except one scientific fact. And that is the fact that if men do not have Sleep, they go mad. It is also a fact that if men do not have Solitude, they go mad. You can see that, by the way they go on, when the poor miserable devils only have Society.

The incident of Miss Fitzpatrick, the lady who really liked to be alone, challenges all recent fashions, which are all for Society without Solitude. We must Get Together; as the gunman said when he ran his machine-gun into two other machine-guns and killed all the children caught between them. And we know that this sociability and communal organisation has already produced in fashionable society all that sweetness and light, all that courtesy and charity, all that True Christianity of pardon and patience, which we see in the modern organisers of gangs or “group-life.” In contrast with this happy mood now pervading our literature and conversation, it is customary to point to hermits and solitaries as if they were savages and man-haters.

But it is not true. It is not true in History or human fact. The line that ran, “Turn, gentle hermit of the Vale,” was truer to the real tradition about the real hermits. They were doubtless, from a modern standpoint, lunatics; but they were nice lunatics. Twenty touches could illustrate what I mean; for instance, the fact that they could make pets of the wild animals that came naturally to them. But many of them really had charity — even to human beings. They felt more kindly about men than men in the Forum or the Mart felt about each other. Doubtless there have been merely sulky solitaries; unquestionably there have been sham cynics and cabotins, like Diogenes. But he and his sort are very careful not to be really solitary; careful to hang about the market-place like any demagogue. Diogenes was a tub-thumper, as well as a tub-dweller. And that sort of professional sulks remains; but it is sulks without solitude. We all know there are geniuses, who must go out into polite society in order to be impolite. We all know there are hostesses who collect lions and find they have got bears. I fear there was a touch of that in the social legend of Thomas Carlyle and perhaps of Tennyson. But these men must have a society in which to be unsociable. The hermits, especially the saints, had a solitude in which to be sociable.

St. Jerome lived with a real lion; a good way to avoid being lionised. But he was very sociable with the lion. In his time, as in ours, sociability of the conventional sort had become social suffocation. In the decline of the Roman Empire, people got together in amphitheatres and public festivals, just as they now get together in trams and tubes. And there were the same feelings of mutual love and tenderness, between two men trying to get a seat in the Colosseum, as there are now between two men trying to get the one remaining seat on a Tooting tram. Consequently, in that last Roman phase, all the most amiable people rushed away into the desert, to find what is called a hermitage; but might almost be called a holiday. The man was a hermit because he was more of a human being; not less. It was not merely that he felt he could get on better with a lion than with the sort of men who would throw him to the lions. It was also that he actually liked men better when they let him alone. Now nobody expects anybody, except a very exceptional person, to become a complete solitary. But there is a strong case for more Solitude; especially now that there is really no Solitude.

The reason why even the normal human being should be half a hermit is that it is the only way in which his mind can have a half-holiday. It is the only way to get any fun even out of the facts of life; yes, even if the facts are games and dances and operas. It bears most resemblance to the unpacking of luggage. It has been said that we live on a railway station; many of us live in a luggage van; or wander about the world with luggage that we never unpack at all. For the best things that happen to us are those we get out of what has already happened. If men were honest with themselves, they would agree that actual social engagements, even with those they love, often seem strangely brief, breathless, thwarted or inconclusive. Mere society is a way of turning friends into acquaintances, rhe real profit is not in meeting our friends, but in having met them. Now when people merely plunge from crush to crush, and from crowd to crowd, they never discover the positive joy of life. They are like men always hungry, because their food never digests; also, like those men, they are cross. There is surely something the matter with modern life when all the literature of the young is so cross. That is something of the secret of the saints who went into the desert. It is in society that men quarrel with their friends; it is in solitude that they forgive them. And before the society-man criticises the saint, let him remember that the man in the desert often had a soul that was like a honey-pot of human kindness, though no man came near to taste it; and the man in the modern salon, in his intellectual hospitality, generally serves out wormwood for wine.

In conclusion, I will take one very modern and even topical case. I do not believe in Communism, certainly not in compulsory Communism. And it is typical of this acrid age that what we all discuss is compulsory Communism. I often sympathise with Communists, which is quite a different thing; but even these I respect rather as bold or honest or logical than as particularly genial or kindly. Nobody will claim that modern Communism is a specially sweet-tempered or amiable thing. But if you will look up the legends of the earliest Hermits, you will find a very charming anecdote, about two monks who really were Communists. And one of them tried to explain to the other how it was that quarrels arose about private property. So he thumped down a stone and observed theatrically, “This stone is mine.” The other, slightly wondering at his taste, said, “All right; take it.” Then the teacher of economics became quite vexed and said, “No, no; you mustn’t say that. You must say it is yours; and then we can fight.” So the second hermit said it was his; whereupon the first hermit mechanically gave it up; and the whole lesson in Business Methods seems to have broken down. Now you may agree or disagree with the Communist ideal, of cutting oneself off from commerce, which those two ascetics followed. But is there not something to suggest that they were rather nicer people than the Communists we now meet in Society? Somehow as if Solitude improved the temper?

KILLING THE NERVE

IT is now generally agreed, with great cheerfulness and good temper, that one of the chief features of the state of Peace we now enjoy is the killing of a considerable number of harmless human beings. We are not wild and reckless and pugnacious in such things, even as these Latins. Relatively, we seem almost reconciled to the general notion of killing; so long as we can feel a real assurance that it is aimless and purposeless and fruitless. If an old woman is knocked down dead in the quiet village street where she played as a child, if a gutter-boy is not quite quick enough in getting out of the gutter and suffers the death penalty for his negligence, we all agree that it is very regrettable. But it does not withdraw the attention of some of us from a quite exclusive concentration upon the horrors of war, because nobody could confuse an old woman crossing the road with an old-world romance in any way connected with adventure or valour; and the boy has not ventured into the road (thank God) under any delusion that he is sacrificing himself for his native land. If death strikes down suddenly somebody who does not expect to die, and is not deceived by any nonsense about being faithful unto death ... 0 death, where is thy sting? If a tramp is taken to a pauper's grave unstained by any hopes or dreams of war or revolution, or any vision of justice victorious. ... 0 grave, where is thy victory? It is obvious that death is a very different thing when it is the product of such peaceful surroundings. The modern version of Killing No Murder is that only militarism is murder; and there is nothing wrong with killing when it is not military.

But I have here introduced the word killing in a lighter sense; even lighter than that in which some progressives take the killing in the streets. For there are other things, though they are things less vivid and less sacred, which are killed in the streets. Even as it is we use the word "kill" in a more metaphorical sense. For instance, we talk of colours killing each other. And, as one example out of many, it may be noted that we do live in a scheme of social life in which colours kill each other. That is, we live in a world which gives us a vast exhibition of that vividness which is symbolised by colour, but which is wholly without that concerted unity of rule or tradition which is symbolised by harmony in colour. The illuminated advertisements of a big city like London, which is now in this respect almost indistinguishable from New York, exhibit exactly that contradiction between colour and design. The design, even in the sense of the purpose, is patchy and personal and not only vulgar but essentially venal. The colour is often the best and most beautiful experience given to the senses of man, if only man were in a position to make the best of it. The psychological effect produced by random commercial illumination is something which is to the real possibilities of colour what a drunken slumber is to the divine gift of wine. Or rather, it should be compared to that habit, which springs up so easily in Prohibitionist or semi-Prohibitionist countries, of trying to get the best out of the divine gift of wine by preceding it with excessive quantities of whisky, following it by equally excessive quantities of beer, or possibly beginning the whole banquet with liqueurs and ending it with cocktails. In short, Prohibitionists get drunk because they have never been taught to drink; and commercial advertising wastes its artistic materials, even when it possesses them, because it has never been taught to colour or even to enjoy colours. Colours are being killed; and they are being killed by being worked to death. The nerve is being killed; and it is being killed by being overstimulated and therefore stunted and stunned.

When I was a child, I had a toy-theatre, illuminated in those days by candles (to which perhaps the psycho-analyst will trace my subsequent downfall into ecclesiastical crypts and cloisters) and in the ordinary way I was quite content with this type of illumination, the candles seeming to my barbarous mind to be themselves like a forest of fairy trees, with flames for flowers. There were also yet more rich and rare delights, which were sufficiently rare to those not sufficiently rich. It was sometimes possible to purchase a sort of dark red powder, which when ignited burst into a rich red light. Fire was wonderful enough — but red fire! But then I was only a dull Victorian infant somewhere between five and seven; and I only used red fire rarely; when it was effective. Living under such limitations, my immature brain perceived that it was more suitable to some things than to others; as, for instance, to a goblin coming up through a trap-door out of the cavern of the King of the Copper Mines, or to the final conflagration that made a crimson halo round the dark mill and castle of the execrable Mad Miller. I should not even then have used red fire in a scene showing the shepherd (doubtless a prince in disguise) piping to his lambs in the pale green meadows of spring; or in a scene in which glassy gauzes of green and blue waved in the manner of waves round the cold weeds and fishes at the entrance to Davy Jones’s Locker. Science and progress and practical education and knowledge of the world are necessary before people can make blunders like that. Therefore, that red fire of the nursery still glows in my memory as an inward imaginative revelation, in spite of years, in spite of time, in spite even of passing through the streets of modern London.

In the London streets to-day, in what Mr. Cuthbert Baines has so vividly called, “the floodlit, bloodlit street,” the rare effect of red fire is wholly wasted and ruined, by the loss of its rarity and by the loss of its suitability. The child who has been made too familiar with all that redhot lettering will probably never have the romance that I remember in my childhood; and it is perhaps strictly true to say that he will never see red fire in his life. First, of course, because he has seen too much of it. For this is not the decorative process of using red in a scheme of colour; it is simply the dull process of painting the town red. But second, also, because the toy-theatre showed him little pictures of large things; and the town signs show him large pictures of little things. He will very soon discover that the ideas associated with these signs, the motives of the men who put them up, the mood of the men who accept them, are things connected entirely with dreary money-grubbing or shoddy luxury. He will be unable to get any great vista or vision out of a glimpse; he will know nothing but a glaring wilderness of proclamations that have emphasis without significance; and will grow up without any poetical associations with a colour he has only seen used to sell a cosmetic or a quack medicine.

THE CASE OF CLAUDEL

I HAVE heard a story, which I have never verified either by history or topography, otherwise known as being on the spot, to the effect that the French Academy accepted the accident of the absence of Molière from its records with a magnificent gesture. It may have been only a tradition about something that somebody planned to do; it may even have been only a tale of somebody about what ought to be done; but it is exactly the sort of tradition that would represent the nation; and it is exactly the sort of thing that Frenchmen would or could have done. The French Academy, founded by Richelieu for the establishment of classical literature in the country, naturally passed over a wandering play-actor and playwright like Molière; just as Oxford and Cambridge would have passed over a wandering play-actor and playwright like Shakespeare. But here the story, even if it is only a story, strikes the note that only the French can strike. For it was said that the French Academy erected in its inner courts a special statue of Molière, with the inscription "Rien ne manque à sa gloire; il manque à la notre" ... and if you want to know what is the difference between the atmosphere of France and England, both of them very jolly atmospheres in their way, you have only to imagine anybody making, or even anybody suggesting, a public apology of that sort to Shakespeare. Can you imagine a huge statue of Shakespeare in Balliol Quod, inscribed with the statement, "Shakespeare never went to Balliol." Can you conceive even Cambridge rearing a colossal monument to Dickens, to celebrate the fact that he never had a University education — or indeed any other education? If that story about Molière is true, or even if it is a true parable or fable, there is an obvious moral to the fable. The English rather ignore defeats; the French rather exaggerate defeats; but the French do sometimes have the talent of snatching victories out of defeats.

A little while ago, to my great regret, the French Academy suffered a very serious defeat. It was when it preferred a clever writer of rather decadent verse to Paul Claudel; but nobody supposes, I hope, that it was M. Claudel who was defeated. If we are to talk about anybody really great being defeated, let us say that Richelieu was defeated. A man of the first rank of French Letters, which the great Cardinal loved, and the Catholic culture which he also loved, with all his diplomatic and even unscrupulous encouragement of those who hated it, has been met with a sort of mute resistance; presumably by those who hated more than the most unscrupulous Cardinal could ever do. Without presuming to pronounce upon the literary comparison, it is enough to say that even if the Academy were right, it would here prove itself entirely academic. It would be proved in the fact that nobody in the literary world has heard of Claudel's rival; and everybody in the literary world, has heard of Claudel. He is recognised as standing for something quite literally from China to Peru; at least from Japan to Washington. It looks as if the Academy has made one of its rather rare mistakes; and without the obvious excuses which applied to the case of Molière. And it looks as if there might some day be another statue, with another inscription: "Nothing is wanting to his glory; but he is wanting to ours."

There is no space here even to suggest the sumptuous wealth of images and ideas in the work of Paul Glaudel. It is only important to note the fact, as a fact of history rather than of literature, that it is on his side, and not on the other side, that the wealth of ideas can now be found. It might very well happen, at one time it probably did happen, that the historic culture he represents had dwindled down to narrow channels and rare and isolated notes; like the last pipe of the pastoral poets that sounded from the eighteenth-century clerics imitating the innocence of the Georgics; or that Irish harp of which a single string snapped whenever a heart had broken for liberty. But to-day it is exactly the other way. It is the rationalistic tradition of the nineteenth century that has narrowed into monotony and repetition. It is the artist who is an atheist who has taken refuge in a garden, to escape from the cry of all the ancient Christian civilization for the ploughing of all the fields of the earth. It is the musical instrument of the modernist that has broken all its strings but one, like the lute in the agnostic picture of Hope; and continues to strike the same few chords of truth remaining to it, but drearily and all on one note. Nobody denies, and certainly I do not deny, that the truths of the emancipated epoch are still true, even when thus isolated and irrelevant; just as the spiritual truths were still true, even when repeated mechanically by the court chaplains or stale preachers of the eighteenth century. But in the matter of fullness, of richness, and of variety, the whole advantage is now with the ancient cause. The thoughts that throng in a sort of hubbub, in a work like The Satin Slipper, are like a crowd of living men bursting the barriers of a deserted fortress. It is

Claudel or the same type of man who is now storming the Bastille; a prison with all the harshness and inhumanity of a prison, except that it now contains fewer and fewer prisoners. An empty prison may be almost more depressing than a full prison; and such an empty prison is the tradition of academic scepticism to-day. Prejudice, the very spirit of a prison, alone shuts out the new generation from the full realization of the greater fruitfulness promised by the revival of Christendom. In one sense we may agree with all the old and weary journalists who say that the age is to be the age of Youth; but its most youthful manifestation is in something that renews its youth like the eagle.

THE HIGHER NIHILISM

MR. MIDDLETON MURRY has written a generous, a stimulating and rather a strange book. It is called The Necessity of Communism: and my own first feelings about it may be expressed by saying that I have much more sympathy with the Communism than with the Necessity. I cannot but feel that Mr. Middleton Murry is caught in a sort of net of necessity; that his spirited and active mind is actually hampered by his queer religion of destiny. The reader trips over it, as if it were barbed wire, when striding through what is otherwise an open field of freedom and fair-mindedness. To take one example; no Catholic could possibly ask for a more just or even generous judgment on the Middle Ages, and their relation to the Reformation, than that given in Mr. Murry's chapter called "The Pattern of History"; and yet it ends with a twist of phrase so abrupt and perverse that I almost cried out aloud at the inconsequence. "In England the Church was expropriated, by men who had not as individuals the faintest ethical superiority over those they expropriated, but who had the impersonal justification of being instruments of economic destiny." Now, with all respect, I do not know in the least what the last words of that sentence mean. What is "impersonal justification"? How can anything except a person be justified, and how can he be justified except by another person judging him to be just? What are "instruments of economic destiny" or any other destiny? Instruments mean tools chosen by some person for some purpose. Who is Destiny; and in what sense can he have a purpose? It always seems to me that all this sort of thing is not even metaphysics, far less metabiology, but simply metaphor. It is all the more difficult to deal with, because the ideas for which it stands are delivered quite dogmatically as dogmas. Mr. Middleton Murry tells us at the very beginning that a man must be a complete materialist; that it is mere shilly-shallying to be only a behaviourist. But he does not give a man like me any reason for being either; and I have not the smallest intention of being either. He says that any reversion to the past is "forbidden," and I can only say "By whom?" It would be a mere wanton veto on all art and action to forbid us to take materials from the past. But as a fact it is impossible for anybody to avoid using the past. In reality, it is impossible to use anything except the past. And why is it any more forbidden to me to say that the Catholic Church is a thing of the future and the present, as well as the past, than it is to Mr. Murry to say that Karl Marx fulfilled the purpose of the Hebrew Prophets or that Jesus of Nazareth became the supreme type of disinterestedness? But in logic there is no need even to go back to Jesus or the Jewish prophets. Karl Marx is as much a part of the past as King John Sobieski; and the Russian Revolution is as past as the Roman Empire. The book is full of violent affirmations of this sort, entirely unsupported by arguments ot any sort. Nevertheless, there is an argument running through the book; and a very curious and interesting one it is.

The writer starts, as he starts with so many unexplained things, with the very dangerous word, "disinterested." It is dangerous because a mere touch will make it mean "uninterested"; in the sense of the Buddhist and the pessimist. We all know it has a sane sense, as meaning sincerely unselfish, self-sacrificing for a faith, and so on. But Mr. Murry does not mean merely giving up our pleasures for the sake of our ideals. In some places, he really seems to mean giving up our ideals, or some of our ideals, for a sort of super-ideal which has sometimes precious little to say for itself, except that it is Destiny. There really is a wild cry from Asia in his classic speech; an altruism that is almost nihilism; a sacrifice that is nearly suicide. We are to give up liberty; we are to give up everything. This passionate paradox is undoubtedly sincere; and yet it conceals another paradox which it will be well to watch and suspect. Morally, it is all very heroic; but intellectually, it actually contains too much caution; it is more cautious than wise. It has behind its position two alternative lines of retreat. For the logical reader will at once perceive that, by thus rising into wild renunciation, the controversialist really has it both ways. Wherever Communism can be made attractive, he will make it attractive. Wherever Communism is quite obviously repulsive, he will say it proves the selfless hardihood of Communists who embrace so repulsive a thing. When it is human, it is in sympathy with all humanity; when it is inhuman, it calls for a superhuman sympathy. When it is good it is good; and when it is bad, they are very good to swallow it. This form of Necessity might be found in that proverb from the mouldering past: "Heads I win, tails you lose."

What Mr. Middleton Murry wants, of course, is real religion; and in parts of this book he seems to be growing desperate, or almost going mad, under the limitations of his unreal religion. He has got authority in the wrong place and asceticism in the wrong place. He is more limited by the idea of

Destiny than we are by the idea of Deity. And he wants man to sacrifice civilisation as monks sacrifice luxury. He seems almost satisfied with it as a giant gesture of renunciation; there is really uncommonly little in this book about what will be the practical advantages of Communism when established. Reading between the lines, we almost find the meaning to be merely this: that he and the rest of us have come to breaking point; and this is the obvious point at which to break. There are other aspects of the book, with many of which I warmly agree, but I will conclude by saying that my fundamental objection to his Communism is that it consents to be the heir of Capitalism. His unfortunate necessitarianism narrows the possibilities of politics; and is content to say that industrialism has turned the world into One Man, who is aching in all his limbs. No doubt; and so would you and I, if we were all unnaturally tied to each other neck and heels, that we might make up together the monstrous and tottering figure of a pantomime ogre. But I do not want the ogre; I only want to cut him up. I am more revolutionary than Mr. Middleton Murry. I do not believe the unnatural monster will ache any the less, because he calls himself a Communist. I am more sceptical than Mr. Middleton Murry. I deny the pantomime myth of the One Man; and I should like to break him up again into men.

THE ASCETIC AT LARGE

MY note on the Communism of Mr. Middleton Murry reads to me as rather too hasty and hostile; because I had no space to mention some strong and substantial parts of the book; notably those expressing contempt for the respectable sort of Socialist who will not call himself a Communist. The study of ‘parasitic’ Parliamentary Labour is masterly, and my own sympathies would be all with a man like Mr. Maxton as compared with a man like Mr. Thomas. But the sequel is still puzzling; for in the last short note there is no practical programme except a Minimum Wage for all, which is said to obviate the need of expropriation of land and property. I suppose this means that employers would be taxed till they were too poor to employ; and then the State would employ. But what State — and, my God, what statesmen! Why, presumably (if nothing is needed but a new wage raised by a new tax) just the jolly statesmen the world produces at present, the parasitic Parliamentarians turned into omnipotent bureaucrats. I should refuse it, of course; first, because it preserves the wage-system; second because the worst wage-system is one with only one employer, who may be an omnipresent enemy; and third because, in the purely practical statement, there is no provision for any change in the type of tyrant. But this is unfair to the unpractical part; which of course is the better part. Mr. Murry does demand a terrific change of heart, though his scheme hardly ensures it. We may well struggle on as Distributists, when Communism seems so steep even to Communists; and they must endure the same abnormal austerity in order to be abnormal, that we endure to be normal.

In theory, or this part of his theory at least, Mr. Middleton Murry is an ascetic who wishes to transfer asceticism from the individual life, where it may be noble and beautiful, to the whole social and historical life, where it becomes simply vandalism or barbaric destruction. In this he is undoubtedly at one with the Puritan or the Prohibitionist or the more mechanical sort of Pacifist; in short he is entirely at one with that sort of modern world which he most justly detests. Broadly considered, the fact that bulks biggest in the modern industrial world is this: that its moral movements are much more utterly and ruthlessly repressive than the past forms of mysticism or fanaticism that commonly affected only the few. Mediaeval men endured frightful fasts; but none of them would have dreamed of seriously proposing that nobody anywhere should ever have wine any more. And Prohibition, which was accepted by a huge modern industrial civilisation, did seriously propose that nobody should ever have wine any more. Cranks who dislike tobacco would utterly destroy all tobacco; I doubt whether they would even allow it medically as a sedative. Some Pagan sages and some Christian saints have been vegetarians, but nobody in the ancient world would ever have prophesied that flocks and herds would utterly vanish from the earth. But in the Utopia of the true vegetarian, I suppose they would utterly vanish from the earth. The more pedantic Pacifist has the same view of fighting, even for justice, and disarmament is as universal as conscription. For both conscription and disarmament are very modern notions. And modern notions of the sort are not only negative but nihilist; they always demand the absolute annihilation or "total prohibition" of something.

Now I am as adamant against Mr. Murry in this notion of mutilating our whole culture in a frenzy of moral renunciation. I admit that a saint may cut off his hand and enter heaven, and have a higher place there than the rest of us. But a plea for the amputation of the hands of all human beings, the vision of a Handless Humanity as the next evolutionary stage after that of the tailless ape, leaves me cold, however much it is commended as a splendid corporate self-sacrifice. These things are an allegory, in more ways than one. We may say indeed that the inhuman industrial era did really abolish the Hand, since it did abolish the Handicraft. I admit that monks have their own reasons for shaving their heads or nuns for cutting off their hair; but my advice to humanity outside such ecstasies would be to remain calm and keep its hair on. That a man should surrender his luxury is one thing; that mankind should surrender its liberty to deal with the problem of luxury is quite another. It is one thing to impoverish oneself; it is quite another responsibility to impoverish a whole cultural system of its culture. I might or might not be the better for giving up wine; I am absolutely certain that the world would not be better for giving up wine. Mr. Middleton Murry may be moved by a noble impulse to give up private property, but I do not for one single moment believe that humanity would be happier for giving up private property.

As a matter of fact, it is exactly this sort of sweeping destruction that has made it unhappy. The modern Capitalist world, which we unite to curse, actually came out of that notion of utterly abandoning the old for the promise of the new. Men said about the business of scarring English hills with rails or rolling English villages in smoke, exactly what Mr. Murry is now saying about sacrificing ancient faith or freedom and taxing moderate property out of existence. They said, as he does, that it was sad, that it was hard, that it called for a heroic sacrifice; but that we must not be sentimentalists clinging to the past, but must look to the brighter and broader future. And the brighter future was the epoch of Mr. Carnegie and Mr. Ford. Capitalism was actually founded by urging a new realism against an old romanticism. The answer is that it was not necessary for a whole society to give up beauty; and it is not necessary for a whole society to give up liberty. And if we look back at history, we shall see that these sweeping social renunciations have done nothing but harm. Over all America lies like an incubus the cold corpse of Puritanism, because one fervid generation thought that man must say farewell for ever to priests as well as play-actors, to sacraments as well as feasts. In short, men were asked to sacrifice everything for Calvinism as they are now asked to sacrifice everything for Communism. But though man may sacrifice anything, Everyman must not sacrifice everything. Individual men must sacrifice their own liberties, but only to restore liberty. And it is a grand irony that, while the cultured Communist (with all respect to him) is rending everybody else’s garments and scattering ashes on other people’s heads, away in many quiet places, on the hills of Lanark or deep in my own Buckingham beech-woods, priests and friars who have themselves renounced private property are rebuilding the farms and families of Distributism.

THE BACKWARD BOLSHIE

AFTER all, the Bolshevist is really a Victorian. His is a nineteenth-century dream, even if it be a twentieth-century reality. It is notably so in the aspect which now makes the dream a nightmare; I mean the mad optimism about the advantages of machinery. What was offered to us as a Five Years Hence Plan ought really to have been called a Fifty Years Ago Plan. For they are only trying to do with Russia exactly what the Victorians did actually do with England; turn it into the workshop of the world and fill it with dirty tools and dismal mechanics. Marx was much more of a Victorian than Morris. He may not have been technically a subject of Queen Victoria, though it is quite likely that he was. By geographical extraction I suppose he was a German — like Queen Victoria's husband and more remotely, Queen Victoria herself. By real or racial extraction he was a Jew; like Queen Victoria's favourite Prime Minister and a good many other persons unnecessary to mention. But the late Victorian period was the very period at which the Jews, and especially the German Jews, were at the very top of their power and influence. From the time when they forced the Egyptian War to the time when they forced the South African War, they were imperial and immune. Certainly much more so than they are now; for the Jews are now being jumped on very unjustly in Germany itself, and old Victorians like Mr. Belloc and myself, who began in the days of Jewish omnipotence by attacking the Jews, will now probably die defending them. Anyhow, Karl Marx did not differ from any number of Victorian Jews in type or externals. He lived mostly in England, and launched his world religion from something more British than the British Empire: the British Museum. The Beard which moves Mr. Wells to impatience was simply the beard of Victorian romance; the beard of Tennyson and Longfellow and Trollope. And though his plan has been very imperfectly applied in the one place in the world where he would have said it could not be applied at all (for this true Victorian saw the great commercial cities of Western Europe as the only possible battlefields of the future) it has all the character of a new and rather barbaric people imitating something that is already stale, not to say stinking, for civilised people. It was exactly like the very Victorian incident of the industrialising of Japan. That is, it was and is something essentially behind the times. The Japanese wear billycock hats presumably under the impression that we admire billycock hats. But, whatever just vengeance may fall upon our hats, this is to do an injustice to our heads. Now, as a matter of fact, our heads have in many ways advanced a little, since the days when our own Five Year Plan filled England with filth and smoke. Some rather deeper questions have arisen; questions about the individual, about the purpose of life, about religion in history, and so on. Philosophy, even Thomist philosophy, is heard again in Paris and Oxford.

Now Marx had no more philosophy than Macaulay. The Marxians therefore have no more philosophy than the Manchester School. It was enough for Macaulay to rejoice in the mere excitement of extension, in the hope that "the roofs and chimneys of a new Manchester may rise in the wilds of Connemara." Similarly, it is enough for the Moscow Marxians to hope that the roofs and chimneys of a new Manchester may rise in the wilds of Siberia. It is true that the original Manchester men desired competition while the Marxians desire combination; or the Combine of All Combines. But the competition ended in a Combine and the Combine has not really ended in a Communist State. For it seems clear that grades of unequal wages do exist in Bolshevist Russia, and the Bolshevist rulers can only explain that it is a temporary necessity at this political stage and that true, pure, perfect Communism will come in the future. It might be the Labour Party, mightn't it?

But to carry competition to any lengths, because it is the fashion, or to carry combination to any lengths because it is the fashion, is not a Philosophy. A philosophy begins with Being; with the end and value of a living thing; and it is manifest that a materialism that only considers economic ethics, cannot cover the question at all. If the problem of happiness were so solved by economic comfort, the classes who are now comfortable would be happy, which is absurd. This humourless hammering on one note is like the worst Victorian fads; Temperance or Feminism. It is especially like that very old-fashioned Feminism that hated to be feminine. I am told that in Russia men and women dress roughly alike. But, mark you, that does not mean that men wear flowers in their hair or trail about in those noble pontifical robes with which tradition clothed every woman like a queen. It means that women dress like men; not that men dress like women. Now that is sheer stark, stale, dead Victorianism. That is the only original Woman's Rights Woman, who deliberately made herself hideous with bloomers and goggles. By the following reigns, even the Suffragettes had learned better than that; but while the Suffragettes are things of the past for us, they are still far in the rosy future for the backward and belated Bolshevist. He is still plodding through that foggy factory twilight that was supposed to be the enlightened daylight of the nineteenth century; and it is truer now than in the time of the Czars to say that Russia is the most backward of the nations.

THE LAST TURN

THE only difficulty about the evident reawakening of Catholicism in modern England, is that conversion calls on a man to stretch his mind, as a man awakening from a sleep may stretch his arms and legs. It calls on the imagination to stretch itself, for instance, over a wider area than England, and a longer period than English history. And, for certain rather curious reasons, the stretching of the mind generally stops short of anything like a complete comprehension of any great historical or philosophical process. This is what Bernard Shaw meant when he said that the world will never really progress, until every man lives for three hundred years. I remember remarking at the time that there was a sort of truth symbolised in this; and that, most certainly, if Bernard Shaw had lived for three hundred years he would be a Catholic.

This preliminary point can be quite sufficiently proved even from this particular case. Three hundred years would mean that he would remember, as part of the positive poetry of childhood, the first phase of the Reformation. The first phase of the Reformation in England was the Divine Right of Kings. It was a romantic enthusiasm for Royalty itself, and the duty of an utterly prostrate passive obedience to it. This was the first effect of the New Religion; but before the child was barely a boy it would be overthrown by another New Religion. The Calvinist killed the sacred King, who had been sacred enough to kill the Church; and darkened the land with a creed of Total Depravity and the Scottish Sabbath. By the time Mr. Shaw was a growing lad of only a hundred years old, the world would have rebelled against this tyranny in turn. The Scottish Mr. Hume would soon be preparing to burst up the Scottish Sabbath. The ingenious Mr. Rousseau would be denying Total Depravity and asserting Total Innocence, Naturalness and Niceness. Out of this, as he grew to maturity, nearing a century and a half, there would grow gradually the most pleasant and plausible, the most happy, healthy and exhilarating of all the purely human visions: the vision of Liberty. Let men be only free from their feudal chains and theological gags; let them speak as they like, write as they like, buy and sell as they like, trade and travel and enquire as they like; and the race will waken from the nightmare of ages into the broad brotherhood of reason and justice. About the time when Mr. Shaw's first grey hair appeared, in the year 1832, when he was barely two hundred, there was much talk about a Reform Bill in England; but I do not think Mr. Shaw would have been taken in, even then. Already, for a long time, men had been buying and selling as they liked, and trading and travelling as they liked. And already the result stood up solid and enormous, in the thing called Capitalism: that is the dispossession of the populace of all forms of real productive property; all instruments of production in the hands of the few; all the millions merely the servants of the few, working for a wage, always an insecure wage, generally a mean and inhuman wage. It was when this process had gone even further that the real historical Mr. Bernard Shaw was born; with the natural consequence that Mr. Bernard Shaw has devoted his life to making war on Capitalism. He has done so because the special evil of his own lifetime was Capitalism. But shall we not guess that he would have done it rather differently, if he had already spent two or three lifetimes warring against Divine Right, and then against the Calvinism that attacked Divine Right, and then against the Rousseauan prostration before Liberty, which destroyed Calvinism — and produced Capitalism. Would he not conclude that the whole State had been staggering about in a most extraordinary and irrational manner, ever since he was first born under the Elizabethan Settlement? Would it not be obvious that the mind of man had been filled with nothing but frantic exaggerations, crude simplifications, provincial panaceas and quack medicines and sheer raving monomania, ever since it had broken away from the central civilisation and the philosophy which the Saints had handed down from the Ancients? Would it not interest him to find that, all the time, there had been written in the open books of Aquinas or Bellarmine or Suarez, a perfectly reasonable apportionment of the authority of princes, the claims of peoples, the possibilities of democracy, the use and abuse of property, and the right function of freedom?

Three hundred years felt with their full weight, really measured out in time and experience, endured as a man actually endures the passage of his days, would prove the whole Protestant story to have been the most preposterous and disproportionate detour, or straggling a chapter of accidents, that ever set out in the wrong direction and came back to the same place. For we have in a hundred ways come back to the same place; even to the detail of an exaggerated reaction, like that of the Action Française, renewing the absolute appeal to The King. And nothing is more amusing than to note the way in which those who regard themselves as the most advanced leaders, of the most modern groups, are already rearing and bucking against the whole tendency of liberal and humanitarian progress, which the last revolutionary leaders marked out for them. Nobody is less in the spirit of Walt Whitman than Wyndham Lewis or T. S. Eliot; nobody less a real heir of H. G. Wells than Aldous Huxley; nobody less disposed to follow the humanitarian paths of Mr. Nevinson the adventurous journalist, than his son Mr. Nevinson the Futurist painter. All these of the most recent school of rebels are rebelling against rebellion; that is, against the Revolution and all its heritage of liberty, equality and fraternity. Mr. Eliot, though an American, is an avowed Royalist. Mr. Nevinson has become a quite ferocious Kiplingite Imperialist. Mr. Wyndham Lewis seems to prefer a Dictatorship, in so far as he may be said to prefer anything. All this last turn of the twisting road of progress is pointing back towards what we have called for a hundred years reaction. It is apparent in the Fascists; in the Hitlerites; and even in the open anti-democracy of the Bolshevists.

Now the great danger of the moment is that young men will go on being content with these revolts against revolt, these reactions against reactions; so that we have nothing but an everlasting seesaw of the Old Young and the New Young; the last always content with its fleeting triumph over the last but one. And the only way to avoid that result is to teach men to stretch their minds and inhabit a larger period of time. It is to insist, not that we now feel inclined to stress this or stress that, in mere fashion or mere fatigue, but that there really does exist somewhere a reasonable plan of the proportions of things, which, at least in its general outline, is true all the time. The moment men, so intelligent as those I have named, begin to realise that this permanent plan is necessary, they will certainly realise that the only existing plan, that has any plausible claim to look like it, is the plan of the Catholic Faith. For the present, they seem to be quite content to continue the old squabble of fathers and sons; even if the fathers are very young fathers, or the sons actually appeal to the grandfathers against them. But this merely modern squabble is after all local and therefore provincial; it can never satisfy the thirst of thinking people for the reality of things. Nevertheless, as I stated at the beginning, the great difficulty is whether a man can stretch his mind, or (as the moderns would say) can broaden his mind, enough to see the need for an eternal Church.

And yet surely this is only the last lap in the long race in which the ancient truth, so heavily handicapped, has one by one outdistanced all the runners who prided themselves on their youth or their advance positions. If a man could have learned it by a process of elimination, merely by living through the last three hundred years, he would learn the same lesson even more clearly by living through the next three hundred years. By that time it will be more apparent than ever that these jerks of novelty do not create either a progress or an equilibrium. The very newest of the intellectuals have already learnt not to trust to mere progress, in the sense of a process of change; they already know that they have sometimes more in common with some antique authority than with some merely modern rebellion. Some of them would set up Dictators to enforce obedience; it is hard if we may not obey willingly, when they would have men obey even unwillingly. They would set up violent authority in the hands of individuals; they can hardly complain if we recognise merely moral authority in a merely mystical office. For that mystical office contains all the liberties and all the philosophies, and judges only upon their right balance and proportion; and every other thing that the moderns call a movement is only securing for a monomania the brief life of a sect.

THE NEW LUTHER

IT seems that there is some movement or other of a religious sort; which, being founded by a Lutheran of German race and American origin, naturally connects itself with the name of Oxford. Some people say it is called the Oxford Group Movement. Other people seem to be somewhat needlessly alarmed, lest it be identified by historians with the Oxford Movement. I would suggest, in a friendly spirit, that it should be called the Oxford Street Movement. Oxford Street does actually contain the name of the University town, which seems to be all that is required; and at the same time, it is a long way from Oxford. I think the atmosphere there would be more congruous and comfortable; and somehow I feel that Mr. Gordon Selfridge, being in the neighbourhood, would be more really sympathetic and spiritually helpful than the Master of Balliol.

When I had made some such idle jest I received a letter of remonstrance against what I had written of the Buchman Group Movement. The letter was written in a pained and almost pathetic tone, expressing regret that I should depreciate anything that brought men back to the reality of religion; and I ought at least to assure the writer that I am not insensible to any such plea. In this as in many things, however religion is treated in a curious manner, as distinct from politics or ethics or economics. Nobody says that because all political parties may be presumed to contain many well-wishers to the public good, therefore we must not resist Communism or attack Capitalism, or express our trust or. distrust of Fascism. The roads which lead to different social solutions are recognised as divergent. It is only the paths to hell and heaven of which it is enough to say that they are paved with good intentions. Let me say at once that I do sympathise with any sinners who seek such an outlet; even with the rather exclusive and arrogant spiritual aristocracy which writes over its gates, “For Sinners Only.” I sympathise with them, not so much as I sympathise with the ignorant fishermen bawling hymns in any dingy old chapel in any Devonshire fishing village; not quite so much as I sympathise with a company of Holy Rollers rolling on the ground in the neighbourhood of Dayton, Tennessee, to avert the curse of Evolution; and not half so much as I sympathise with Moslem fakirs howling in the desert and shaking their splendid spears and dying on the British bayonets. But I do sympathise with all these people;

since they are all seeking God. And I am sufficiently orthodox to know that, in some mystical way beyond our measurement, it is true that seeking is finding.

But if my correspondent, or anybody else, wishes to know why I rather prefer the followers of the Mad Mullah to the followers of Herr Buchman, he will find it perfectly summed up in an interview and article which appeared in the News-Chronicle and was headed in huge letters with the words, "Vision of a New Reformation: Group Leader's Hope from Germany." He will find it exquisitely and exactly concentrated, as in the crystallization of a gem, in these words; read them; re-read them; ponder them. They contain the whole substance of the subject. "These Groupers think on a large scale. The Canadians, for instance, have not only booked the Chateau Frontenac for a house-party of 3,000 at Quebec next year, but have already chartered a C.P.R. liner to bring their contingent to England for the next Oxford house-party."

That, you will observe, is thinking largely. To rude, rustic, Distributist minds, it would not appear that it is thinking at all. There have been any number of sectarians and Puritan fanatics who have very genuinely thought; some who have thought and thought until they went mad. But I should say that the sanity and solidity of the Group Movement was quite safe from any such danger as that. Note that it is not a question of whether religion may think too much about pomp and grandeur. It is a question of whether religion is to boast of having pomp without thinking at all. There is a real case to be made out both for and against the most Pagan phase of the Papacy, which filled Rome with trophies that might have stood for the triumphs of Trajan or Augustus. But it does need some thought to build even a Pagan temple or erect even an Imperialistic monument. The dome which Michelangelo made the culmination of St. Peter's is not only a large dome. It is a dome made by a man who was thinking largely. Nay, it might have been less large if it had been larger. Lift it a little higher in the air and the curve is constricted; spread it a little wider and the curve is flattened. That is what is meant by thinking; and especially by thinking largely. At any rate, it is a rather different operation from buying up somebody else's steamboat, or securing all the beds in somebody else's hotel.

Finally, what shall we say in the light (or twilight) of all this, of the magnificent claim made in such large letters that they would cover a whole paragraph of this essay; the "Vision of a New Reformation: Group Leader's

Hope from Germany?" We may say this to begin with; that here, as in every single thing I have read about the Group Movement, as in every page and paragraph of the book called For Sinners Only, there is an extraordinary ambiguity. What is meant by a New Reformation? What is it that is to be reformed? Is it just possible that it is the Reformation that is to be reformed? And, for those who have a pedantic fancy for looking at the structure of the words they write or speak, into what form is it to be reformed? Can it be into the old original form? Certainly in all this there is no trace or outline of any new form. Or does it mean by a New Reformation, a repetition of the Reformation? Does it mean an extension of the Reformation? Does it mean that we are to look for somebody who shall be more Lutheran than Luther? I suppose the real doctrine of the great Reformer might possibly be pushed further than he pushed it. It is very difficult to imagine any doctrine that could make man more base, describe human nature as more desperately impotent, blacken the reason and the will of man with a more utterly bottomless and hopeless despair than did the real doctrine of Luther. But it may be that there are depths below the depths and that it is possible to damn the dignity of Adam more completely than Luther damned it. Is that what is meant by a New Reformation? That is the only Reformation that would bear the remotest resemblance to the old Reformation. But that is just the difficulty; and that is just the point. I cannot accuse the Buchmanites of repeating the Lutheran pessimism. I cannot accuse them of revolting against the Lutheran pessimism. The very language they use is so loose and vague and journalistic, that it might mean either that the New Reformation is to restore Luther or reverse Luther. All they are sure about is that it will come from Germany, like Luther — or like Hitler. There is a certain intellectual courage, which some would call impudence, about saying at this moment that the Vision of a New Reformation is of necessity a Hope from Germany. It is amusing to read it at the very moment when even the Pro-Germans have begun to think that Germany is hopeless. Anyhow, the religious leader in question is welcome, so far as I am concerned, to any New Reformation which puts the Swastika above the Cross and teaches men first to be very arrogant Germans before it allows them to be very apologetic Christians. All that may be a reformation in the sense of a new form; but it seems to me, on the side of religious thought, to be the very essence of formlessness.

BABIES AND DISTRIBUTISM

I HOPE it is not a secret arrogance to say that I do not think I am exceptionally arrogant; or if I were, my religion would prevent me from being proud of my pride. Nevertheless, for those of such a philosophy, there is a very terrible temptation to intellectual pride, in the welter of wordy and worthless philosophies that surround us to-day. Yet there are not many things that move me to anything like a personal contempt. I do not feel any contempt for an atheist, who is often a man oflimited and constrained by his own logic to a very sad simplification. I do not feel any contempt for a Bolshevist, who is a man driven to the same-negative simplification by a revolt against very positive wrongs. But there is one type of person for whom I feel what I can only call contempt. And that is the popular propagandist of what he or she absurdly describes as Birth-Control.

I despise Birth-Control first because it is a weak and wobbly and cowardly word. It is also an entirely meaningless word; and is used so as to curry favour even with those who would at first recoil from its real meaning. The proceeding these quack doctors recommend does not control any birth. It only makes sure that there shall never be any birth to control. It cannot, for instance, determine sex, or even make any selection in the style of the pseudo-science of Eugenics. Normal people can only act so as to produce birth; and these people can only act so as to prevent birth. But these people know perfectly well that they dare not write the plain word Birth-Prevention, in any one of the hundred places where they write the hypocritical word Birth-Control. They know as well as I do that the very word Birth-Prevention would strike a chill into the public, the instant it was blazoned on headlines, or proclaimed on platforms, or scattered in advertisements like any other quack medicine. They dare not call it by its name, because its name is very bad advertising. Therefore they use a conventional and unmeaning word, which may make the quack medicine sound more innocuous.

Second, I despise Birth-Control because it is a weak and wobbly and cowardly thing. It is not even a step along the muddy road they call Eugenics; it is a flat refusal to take the first and most obvious step along the road of Eugenics. Once grant that their philosophy is right, and their course of action is obvious; and they dare not take it; they dare not even declare it. If there is no authority in things which Christendom has called moral, because their origins were mystical, then they are clearly free to ignore all difference between animals and men; and treat men as we treat animals. They need not palter with the stale and timid compromise and convention called Birth-Control. Nobody applies it to the cat. The obvious course for Eugenists is to act towards babies as they act towards kittens. Let all the babies be born and then let us drown those we do not like. I cannot see any objection to it; except the moral or mystical sort of objection that we advance against Birth-Prevention. And that would be real and even reasonable Eugenics; for we could then select the best, or at least the healthiest, and sacrifice what are called the unfit. By the weak compromise of Birth-Prevention, we are very probably sacrificing the fit and only producing the unfit. The births we prevent may be the births of the best and most beautiful children; those we allow, the weakest or worst. Indeed, it is probable; for the habit discourages the early parentage of young and vigorous people; and lets them put off the experience to later years, mostly from mercenary motives. Until I see a real pioneer and progressive leader coming out with a good, bold, scientific programme for drowning babies, I will not join the movement.

But there is a third, reason for my contempt, much deeper and therefore much more difficult to express; in which is rooted all my reasons for being anything I am or attempt to be; and above all, for being a Distributist. Perhaps the nearest to a description of it is to say this: that my contempt boils over into bad behaviour when I hear the common suggestion that a birth is avoided because people want to be “free” to go to the cinema or buy a gramophone or a loud-speaker. What makes me want to walk over such people like doormats is that they use the word “free.” By every act of that sort they chain themselves to the most servile and mechanical system yet tolerated by men. The cinema is a machine for unrolling certain regular patterns called pictures; expressing the most vulgar millionaires’ notion of the taste of the most vulgar millions. The gramophone is a machine for recording such tunes as certain shops and other organisations choose to sell. The wireless is better; but even that is marked by the modern mark of all three; the impotence of the receptive party. The amateur cannot challenge the actor; the householder will find it vain to go and shout into the gramophone; the mob cannot pelt the modern speaker, especially when he is a loud-speaker. It is all a central mechanism giving out to men exactly what their masters think they should have.

Now a child is the very sign and sacrament of personal freedom. He is a fresh free will added to the wills of the world; he is something that his parents have freely chosen to produce and which they freely agree to protect. They can feel that any amusement he gives (which is often considerable) really comes from him and from them, and from nobody else. He has been born without the intervention of any master or lord. He is a creation and a contribution; he is their own creative contribution to creation. He is also a much more beautiful, wonderful, amusing and astonishing thing than any of the stale stories or ijingling jazz tunes turned out bv the machines. When men no longer feel that he is so, they have lost the appreciation of primary things, and therefore all sense of proportion about the world. People who prefer the mechanical pleasures, to such a miracle, are jaded and enslaved. They are preferring the very dregs of life to the first fountains of life. They are preferring the last, crooked, indirect, borrowed, repeated and exhausted things of our dying Capitalist civilisation, to the reality which is the only rejuvenation of all civilisation. It is they who are hugging the chains of their old slavery; it is the child who is ready for the new world.

THREE FOES OF THE FAMILY

IT was certainly a very brilliant lightning-flash of irony by which Mr. Aldous Huxley lit up the whole loathsome landscape of his satirical Utopia, of synthetic humanity and manufactured men and women, by the old romantic quotation of “Brave New World”. The quotation comes, of course, from that supreme moment of the magic of youth, nourished by the magic of old age, when Miranda the marvellous becomes Miranda the marvelling, at the unique wonder of first love. To use it for the very motto of a system which, having lost all innocence, would necessarily lose all wonder, was a touch of very withering wit. And yet it will be well to remember that, in comparison with some other worlds, where the same work is done more weakly and quite as wickedly, the Utopia of the extremists really has something of the intellectual integrity which belongs to extremes, even of madness. In that sense the two ironical adjectives are not merely ironical. The horrible human, or inhuman, hive described in Mr. Huxley’s romance is certainly a base world, and a filthy world, and a fundamentally unhappy world. But it is in one sense a new world; and it is in one sense a brave world. At least a certain amount of bravery, as well as brutality, would have to be shown before anything of the sort could be established in the world of fact. It would need some courage, and even some self-sacrifice, to establish anything so utterly disgusting as that.

But the same work is being done in other worlds that are not particularly new, and not in the least brave. There are people of another sort, much more common and conventional, who are not only working to create such a paradise of cowardice, but who actually try to work for it through a conspiracy of cowards. The attitude of these people towards the Family and the tradition of its Christian virtues is the attitude of men willing to wound and yet afraid to strike; or ready to sap and mine so long as they are not called upon to fire or fight in the open. And those who do this cover much more than half, or nearly two-thirds, of the people who write in the most respectable and conventional Capitalist newspapers. It cannot be too often repeated that what destroyed the Family in the modern world was Capitalism. No doubt it might have been Communism, if Communism had ever had a chance, outside that semi-Mongolian wilderness where it actually flourishes. But, so far as we are concerned, what has broken up households and encouraged divorces, and treated the old domestic virtues with more and more open contempt, is the epoch and Power of Capitalism. It is Capitalism that has forced a moral feud and a commercial competition between the sexes; that has destroyed the influence of the parent in favour of the influence of the employer; that has driven men from their homes to look for jobs; that has forced them to live near their factories or their firms instead of near their families; and, above all, that has encouraged, for commercial reasons, a parade of publicity and garish novelty, which is in its nature the death of all that was called dignity and modesty by our mothers and fathers. It is not the Bolshevist but the Boss, the publicity man, the salesman and the commercial advertiser who have, like a rush and riot of barbarians, thrown down and trampled under foot the ancient Roman statue of Verecundia. But because the thing is done by men of this sort, of course it is done in their own muggy and muddle-headed way; by all the irresponsible tricks of their foul Suggestion and their filthy Psychology. It is done, for instance, by perpetually guying the old Victorian virtues or limitations which, as they are no longer there, are not likely to retaliate. It is done more by pictures than by printed words; because printed words are supposed to make a some sense and a man may be answerable for printing a them. Stiff and hideous effigies of women in crinolines or bonnets are paraded, as if that could possibly be all there was to see when Maud came into the garden, and was saluted by such a song. Fortunately, Maud’s friends, who would have challenged the pressman and photographer to a duel, are all dead; and these satirists of Victorianism are very careful to find out that all their enemies are dead. Some of their bold caricaturists have been known to charge an old-fashioned bathing-machine as courageously as if it were a machine-gun. It is convenient thus courageously to attack bathing-machines, because there are no bathing-machines to attack. Then they balance these things by photographs of the Modern Girl at various stages of the nudist movement; and trust that any thing so obviously vulgar is bound to be popular. For the rest, the Modern Girl is floated on a sea of sentimental sloppiness; a continuous gush about her frankness and freshness, the perfect naturalness of her painting her face or the unprecedented courage of her having no children. The whole is diluted with a dreary hypocrisy about comradeship, far more sentimental than the old-fashioned sentiment. When I see the Family sinking in these swamps of amorphous amorous futility, I feel inclined to say, “Give me the

Communists.” Better Bolshevist battles and the Brave New World than the ancient house of man rotted away silently by such worms of secret sensuality and individual appetite. “The coward does it with a kiss; the brave man with a sword.”

But there is, curiously enough, a third thing of the kind, which I am really inclined to think that I dislike even more than the other two. It is not the Communist attacking the family or the Capitalist betraying the family; it is the vast and very astonishing vision of the Hitlerite defending the family. Hitler’s way of defending the independence of the family is to make every family dependent on him and his semi-Socialist State; and to preserve the authority of parents by authoritatively telling all the parents what to do. His notion of keeping sacred the dignity of domestic life is to issue peremptory orders that the grandfather is to get up at five in the morning and do dumb-bell exercises, or the grand mother to march twenty miles to a camp to procure a Swastika flag. In other words, he appears to interfere with family life more even than the Bolshevists do; and to do it in the name of the sacredness of the family. It is not much more encouraging than the other two social manifestations; but at least it is more entertaining.

THE DON AND THE CAVALIER

MR. CHRISTOPHER HOLLIS has written an excellent book on John Dryden. It is an instructive book; it is also an amusing book; but not so amusing as some of the reviews of it. And it concerns me here, at the moment mainly in relation to the general position to-day of the school of academic critics, who have upheld for so long a time the historical theory which is often called Parliamentarism and is in fact Plutocracy. It is of some moment to the Distributist movement because it was the official defence of this policy which made possible the dispossession of the populace. Now about the present position of that official criticism there are several rather curious things to note. The first is its tone; which is quite queer in its difference from the tone used in my youth, when historians were as simple as Macaulay; I might almost say when scholars were as ignorant as Macaulay. For a man can be very learned and very ignorant; and Macaulay achieved the combination to the admiration of heaven and earth. Macaulay would make short work, or imagine that he could make short work, of any young man who played at being a Jacobite; he was impatient with him as with a crank; but he was honestly impatient; his impatience was a sort of innocence. The critics on the same side to-day have lost their innocence. They know perfectly well that they have been defeated in battle after battle upon the big facts; and they have a curious carefulness in dealing only with very small facts. Anybody who said thirty years ago that Charles the First was not in fact a tyrant, dethroned by an indignant democracy, could really be treated as a sort of Mr. Dick, with a weakness for weeping over King Charles's Head. The modern critic does not really dare to-day to appear as the executioner (even though the critic, like the executioner, can wear a mask and remain nameless); he has not now the nerve to shake King Charles's Head at the people and shout confidently, "Behold the Head of a Traitor." So he becomes more fussy and particular than ever over the ancient, profound, pressing and all-important question: "Out of which window in Whitehall did Charles the First step to have his head cut off?" And that, as Disraeli very truly observed, is one of the two or three quite infallible ways of becoming a bore.

And the new professor of the old history is rather a bore; but what is much worse, he is a nervous bore. He not only drawls, but he also stammers. And his tone, as I have said, has achieved a most peculiar accent of acrid timidity. I read one criticism of Mr. Hollis's book, in a highly learned and authoritative weekly; and it largely left me wondering whether the critic who wrote it had read that particular passage in it, in which Mr. Hollis, contrasting the methods of Dryden and Pope, quotes the whole of the latter poet's famous satire upon Addison. Whether or no it was like Addison, it was exactly like the critic.

"Willing to wound and yet afraid to strike, Just hint a doubt and hesitate dislike; Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer, And without sneering teach the rest to sneer."

Again, over and above this unmistakable tone, there is the change in the method which I have compared to the change from laughing at Mr. Dick over King Charles's Head to quarrelling about which window-sill had the honour to be bestridden by King Charles's legs. There was an excellent example in this review, of the method of avoiding battle on the main issue and picking a quarrel about a trifle. Mr. Hollis made the general remark, which is a true and valuable remark, that it is rather a disadvantage of revolutions that they often have to be followed by new and rigid repressions, set up by the revolutionists themselves. He gives the example that William of Orange's government censored a sort of controversy which under the last Stuarts was much more free. The critic then suggested that the whole book and its author were historically unreliable, upon some verbal interpretation of William of Orange's government; because the censorship was removed later; I think in 1695. The point of general interest is that there was a new censorship; and the critic's way of proving that there was not a censorship is to say that there was a censorship, that lasted for about eight years. Now Mr. Hollis's general philosophy may be right or wrong; but Mr. Hollis's general remark was perfectly philosophical and a quite reasonable comment on this and many other cases of the same truth. The critic's correction, if his correction is correct, is not of the slightest philosophical or rational interest to anybody; it has no relation to the point that was really raised; it only says that somebody did something, but did not do it all the time. That is what I mean by the one side being concerned with triviality and the other side with truth. Mr. Hollis's suggestion is of some intelligent importance to us, who are living among real revolutions; Bolshevist revolutions or Hitlerite revolutions. It is not necessarily a complete condemnation of revolutions. It is simply a note on the natural history of revolutionists. But his history really is natural history, and the academic and pedantic history has become utterly unnatural.

There is a saying that a great silence broods over the great battlefields. There is certainly a very astounding silence over the great recent defeats of the Orangemen's theory of history. Mr. Hollis begins his book by noting the picturesque coincidence that Dryden sat fishing in the river upon which Mary Stuart had looked out from the Tower of Fotheringay. The storming and taking of that Tower, with all its secrets, was a struggle that once made an amazing noise, that has now been followed by a more amazing stillness. Hardly anything is said about its sensational termination; simply because the main part of the old accepted case against the Catholic Queen has completely broken down. Considering how frightfully important it was that the Casket Letters were all certainly genuine, it is very funny to find how unimportant it is that they are most of them probably forgeries. The war was so fierce and ruthless while they thought they were winning it; it is so very quiet and casual and gentlemanly, now that they know they are losing it. That intellectual interlude at least is over; England is returning to her own past, and could hardly march under a better battle-sign than what Macaulay himself had the magnanimity to call "the towering crest of Dryden."

I also came upon another critique of the book on Dryden; and one which goes far beyond the sort of negative hostility in the critics which I have criticised. That was, after all, only the confession that the Whig and Puritan school of history is fighting the rearguard action of a retreat, and that it mostly consists of rather futile sniping. Instead of the old uproarious cannonade of Macaulay, we do now in practice only "hear the distant and random gun that the foe is sullenly firing." But the later criticism involved something more universal and significant than that. It really did represent the amazing, mystifying and in some ways almost exciting muddle, in what calls itself the Modern Mind. I say exciting, because when a mystification becomes as mad as that, it has almost the character of a mystery story; it is as if the modern man must have had a knock on the head, and we were all detectives trying to find out who really did it. How did it really happen that the cultivated, sometimes even the classical critic of this particular period, suffers from a heavy blow from some blunt instrument, so that he thinks and writes in the following fashion?

The critic in question said in these words, or almost these words: "We have no reason to doubt the sincerity of Dryden's conversion to Roman

Catholicism; but, after all, in the case of so great a man as Dryden, does the question matter very much?" That is the Modern Mind. This is the forest primeval, the murmuring pines and the hemlocks. This is the Jungle. This is the thickest of all thickets and the thorniest of all earthly briar-patches; and though I was born and bred in that briar-patch, like Brer Rabbit, I found it difficult to discover a path out of it; and I did not know how we are really to make a path through it.

Of course we can always begin by using the primitive implement of reason; and try to let in a little light merely by letting in a little logic. So far as I understand the argument as an argument, it is this. If John Dryden had been born half-witted, or if he had been a dunce and a dull fellow entirely insignificant in the intellectual and social life of his time-then it would have been frightfully and sensationally important to know whether he was or was not sincere, with a soul-searching sincerity, in his intellectual acceptance of the complete Catholic philosophy. But as he was not a dunce but a poet, as he was not a half-wit but a wit, as he was not a mindless person but a very great mind, then it must be a matter of indifference whether such an intellect can accept such an intellectual philosophy. Dryden was so great a thinker that it does not matter what he thought; he was almost certainly in search of the truth, but he was so capable of searching for it that nobody can take any interest in whether he found it; and it is only in the case of a small man that we could take a great interest in the great truth that he thought he found. How, I ask you, do people get their minds into a tangle like that? How could a man be sincere in his Catholicism, and yet think himself superior to his Catholicism? How could his greatness be detached from anything so great as a belief in a universal order of life, death and eternity; if he really had the greatness and really had the belief? It might make some sense if Dryden was not sincere; but it is practically admitted that he was sincere. It might make some sense if Dryden was small; but it is actually based on the view that he was great.

While the world has been talking about removing Victorian taboos, I have been resolved from the first to remove that one Victorian taboo; which really was a senseless and strangling taboo: the taboo on the topic of real religion, and its real and inevitable place in practical life. Most of the things the Moderns call Victorian taboos are about as Victorian as the Ten Commandments or the maxims of Confucius. But this really was Victorian, in the sense of having arisen recently in a vulgar, commercial and cowardly social system. It is not the notion that it is right or wrong to be a Moslem; it is the notion that it cannot really matter even to a Moslem that he is a Moslem. What is totally intolerable is the idea that everybody must pretend, for the sake of peace and decorum, that moral inspiration only comes from secular things like Distributism, and cannot possibly come from spiritual things like Catholicism. That is the fixed idea like a fossil that lies under all the labyrinthine wrappings or coil of contradictory conventions, in the mind of the reviewer whose words I quote.

It has nothing to do with what he would call being religious; or forcing religion upon him or anybody else. No Catholic thinks he is a good Catholic; or he would by that thought become a bad Catholic. I for one am not even tempted to any illusion in that matter; I fear that very often, when I have got up early to go to Mass, I have said with a groan, Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum, which, I may explain to the Moslem, is not a quotation from the Mass. But the critic here in question does not say, in the grand Lucretian manner, “Religion alone can persuade men to such evils.” He says, “Religion alone cannot really have persuaded anybody to anything.” He stands for a stupid interlude of intellectual history, in which men would not recognise religion either as a friend or an enemy, which supposed that a great. man must be great, not merely in spite of it, but even without reference to it. That intellectual interlude was never very intellectual; and anyhow, it is over.

THE CHURCH AND AGORAPHOBIA

THE erection of a great cathedral in a great city, and especially in a great port, that is a city that is also a wide gate of the world, recalls certain truths that are curiously forgotten, or sometimes still more astonishingly contradicted or reversed. Before we come to count the million mistakes and misunderstandings which separate men from the Catholic Church, there is one enormous and elementary mistake, which has to do with this question of scale and position in the world. To put it shortly; the man who fears to enter the Church commonly fancies that what he feels is a sort of claustrophobia. As a fact, what he really feels, is rather a sort of agoraphobia. Some silly little historical accidents, almost entirely peculiar to the particular way in which Catholicism survived in England, have given many Englishmen an extraordinary notion that it is a sort of hole and corner affair. These honest Protestants, like the imaginary nuns in the impossible romances, walk about in perpetual fear of being "walled up." For them the typical Catholic act is not going into a great thing like a church, but into a small thing like a confessional box. And to their nightmare fancy a confessional box is a sort of man-trap; and presents in its very appearance some combination of a coffin and a cage. The same notion is reinforced by the use of the word "cells," which in a Protestant community means prison-cells, and not monastic cells. The same is suggested by the word "crypt," about which there must obviously be something cryptic. These and many other tags of tradition have preserved in this country the custom of talking as if the danger of being a Catholic was the danger of being buried in a deep dark hole. And yet even the tradition was, not only a legend, but very nearly a pretence. Even the man who said these things knew in his heart, or at least had a vague knowledge at the back of his mind, that his fear was really a fear of something larger than himself and his tribal traditions; that he was really, as it was sometimes stated from both points of view, leaving a national for an international church. As I have said, it was not claustrophobia, the fear of the crypt or the cell; it was agoraphobia, or the fear of the forum, of the market-place, of the open spaces and the colossal public buildings. To the really insular and individualistic type of sectarian, even the fear of the Church was also partly a fear of the world. It can be seen in the terror which some of the English Tories, in the old times, felt towards the cosmopolitan culture of the Jesuits; who honestly seemed to them a sort of universal anarchists. It can be seen in the exaggerated revulsion from the very varied experiments, failures and successes of the Baroque. Of nearly all the non-Catholic types of our time we can truly say, that any such type must broaden his mind to become a Catholic. He must grow more used than he is at present to the long avenues and the large spaces. This is really what is meant by the Puritans who say that the Church is Pagan; that it does open a very long avenue, which is the only avenue left connecting us with Pagan antiquity. That is largely what is meant by insisting that the Church covers all sorts of dubious or disreputable people; all the motley mobs of tramps and pedlars and beggars, who do make up the life of an open market-place. Quicquid agunt homines; which even Matthew Arnold wisely saw was the true motto of the practical life of the Roman Catholic Church.

Now a great deal has been said by Protestants, naturally enough, and not a little even by Catholics, about the danger of displaying before the world a pomp and triumph that may easily be called worldly. Undoubtedly some harm was done, and some misunderstandings did arise, when the Popes of the Renaissance filled Rome with trophies that might have marked the triumphs of the Caesars, and permitted the slander that the father of Christian man had usurped the title of King of Kings and forgotten his own actual title of Servant of Servants. But, taking human nature as a whole, the method is justified; because it is some sort of proclamation of the profound truth mentioned above; that the Faith belongs to the heights and the open spaces, and the circle of the whole world, and is not the one thing which its enemies go on desperately calling it; a conspiracy. There could not be a better way of suggesting the very reverse of that suggestion, than by the continual use in public buildings of what is large in design and hospitable in gesture. Art, and especially architecture, can here express actualities that are at once too large and too elusive to be expressed in words. St. Mark’s Cathedral at Venice is in some ways a very curious building, and to some northern eyes does not look like a cathedral at all; but it does look like a thing coloured with the sunrise and the sunset, in touch with the very ends of the earth; open like a harbour and full of popular poetry like a fairy-palace. That is, it does express the first essential fact that Catholicism is not a narrow thing; that it knows more than the world knows about the potentialities and creative possibilities of the world, and that it will outlast all the worldly and temporary expressions of the same culture. Christianity has gone northward and established richer ports in colder seas; it has been changed and chilled for a time by colder heresies; but the same principle still stands for its expansion and exaltation; that which is expressed in the expansion and exaltation of great buildings; in the breadth of great gates declaring the brotherhood of men or the lifting of great domes pointing the way of their destiny. To-day another such building is being reared in what Mr. Belloc's fantasy once called a Harbour in the North; and its scope and scale would indeed be idle things, if they did not remind us of the two essential truths: first, that even within the world the boundaries of the Faith are being enlarged; and second, and much more important, that the Faith itself enlarges the world; which would be a small thing without it.

BACK IN THE FOG

THE dome of sky above Dublin was clear with the awful clarity of a burning-glass, and such a glaring gap or rent in the grey skies of Ireland was itself a portent, with some savour of a miracle. But though it was very rare in the Dublin climate, it was curiously representative of the Dublin mentality. It was none the less Irish weather because it is almost unknown in Ireland. It corresponded to the Irish brilliancy of intercourse; to the continual blend of lucidity and levity. And it was all the more Irish because there was, as there always is, in the intensity of summer, a faint thrill of thunder. It was as if the very light were lightning, and shone between two storms.

And I, who love both countries, but my own best and with most anxiety, could not help saying to myself, “This is always the real Dublin daylight. And the moment I return home, I shall find myself in the London fog.”

The difference is indescribable; but that is the nearest description. There is more hatred in Dublin; and yet there is a harder sense of the obligation of justice. There is even more slander in Dublin; and yet in some strange way there is more truth. What there is in London is something that is not so much falsehood as falsification; and not so much falsification as simply fog. After a week in Ireland, the newspaper politics of England seem to be like a vast vapour, inhabited only by phantoms. There is no question of hating men or slandering men; for they are not the same men for ten weeks together; and they are never the real men at all. I will take two examples; the two men who happened to be the heads of the two Parliamentary systems of the two countries at that moment. I will not take the case of Jim Thomas; because it is beneath the seriousness of this subject. Jim Thomas is a joke; and I am sorry to say that the joke is against us. He is not a person in the same historical world as de Valera, even as seen by those who hate de Valera, of whom there are probably more in Ireland than in England. But I will take the relatively dignified figure of Mr. Thomas’s revered leader; and point out as respectfully as possible that he is a ghost. He is an apparition. He is not really there. At least the figure that is recognised is not really there. Londoners live in a fog of journalism, out of which there looms from time to time a figure, who strikes certain spectral attitudes, and then vanishes in the fog and is forgotten. Not many years ago we saw start out of the mist, like the pale face of a fiend, the face of a traitor. He was reeling and ragged as if torn by patriot mobs; a golf-club was broken in his hand; as if it had been broken across his head, when he was expelled for treason from his club of fashionable golfers. He had been detected in a dastardly effort to escape to Stockholm and make a treacherous peace, and was only frustrated by the gallantry of our British tars. He was the wildest ruffian of the I.L.P. and wore a red tie, which had certainly been sent to him secretly from Moscow. Well, this person, after throwing himself into a few bodily postures expressive of moral baseness and political perfidy, vanished in the fog and was never seen again. This was the infamous James Ramsay MacDonald, of atrocious memory. Only, as it happens there has been a slight lapse in the memory. The crowd waiting in the fog, however, has had other diversions. There even burst upon it just recently a beautiful and ennobling vision: a stately and handsome presence, clad almost entirely in Union Jacks, with a few patches of tartan, and wearing the ancient Civic Crown; ob cives servatos: the Saviour of the State. For this being was indeed that noble statesman who became the head of the National Government, sacrificing Party to Patriotism, and triumphantly routing the traitor Henderson. This was the heroic James Ramsay MacDonald, of immortal memory, so long as he is remembered. There had once been another person called Henderson who had been a Patriot; when the other person called MacDonald was a Traitor; but neither of these persons could possibly be remembered. Perhaps it is quite right that they should none of them be remembered; for none of them ever really existed at all. There never was any traitor named MacDonald who betrayed his country to its enemies, any more than there ever was any patriot called MacDonald who preferred his country to his party. All these shadows in the shadow-pantomime of London politics have no reference to the respectable, rather vain, very serious, self-respecting “Scotsman on the make” who has risen in the profession of politics rather less scandalously than most. That is what I mean by the London fog, and that is what I mean by the Dublin daylight.

In Dublin there are men who would kill de Valera; and there are men who would die for de Valera. But there are no men who do not know the main facts for or against him. That he is not a native Irishman, in the normal sense; that he came from America, is admitted as much by his friends as his foes. It had to be, in Ireland; for there the family is everything; and a man could not even announce himself as Mr. Brown, without provoking the most sweeping generalisations about the Browns. That he helped the guerilla war which some would call the murder of English soldiers is, of course, a matter of pride and not of apology; but at least it is not a matter of mystification. That he was anti-clerical, in the sense that the bishops and priests mostly opposed his irreconcilable indignation, is known to everybody; even to the clerics or clericals who may afterwards come to support him. There is nobody in Dublin who does not know the story of de Valera; and there is next to nobody in London who does know the story of MacDonald. That is what I mean by the London Fog.

THE HISTORIC MOMENT (1)

THE Eucharistic Congress in Dublin has one aspect which most Englishmen will almost certainly miss altogether. It is not the Irish aspect. The English have thought too much of Ireland, even when they thought too little for Ireland; or thought only against Ireland. When debaters are informed that they must not debate on politics or religion, the more spirited and intelligent naturally retort that there is nothing else to debate about. And yet there is a third thing, which is not identical with the debate about politics and religion in Ireland, which has filled all the debating-clubs of England. That third thing is History; and it sums up the whole problem to say that the average Englishman will hardly know what is meant by mentioning it.

The average Englishman once had a hearty and even heroic hatred of the Roman Catholic religion; it has long since turned into something much milder and more tolerant. It has slowly broadened down, if not from precedent to precedent, at least from prejudice to prejudice. At worst a morbid and malignant curiosity has been replaced by a more Christian condition of ignorance. But the point is that the religious hostility has been softened; and that the special political hostility has been softened too. The average Englishman once had a passionate patriotic distrust of the political Irish; he regarded their hope of national self-expression as a mere mad mutinous breaking up of his own Empire. That also has since turned into something much milder and more tolerant. The average Englishman probably does not understand the Irish any better, if so well, as in the time of Gladstone and Parnell; but he is much less disposed to punish them for being different. The Englishman no longer execrates Mr. Gladstone; he is not very likely to attend the anniversary celebration of the Boyne; and is the less anxious to incur the curse of Cromwell, because he has lately begun rather to curse the Puritans himself. But there is one thought that will hardly cross his mind. And that is — how very small a part of History is that which divides us from Gladstone, or from William of Orange, or even from Oliver Cromwell.

Ages before Englishmen had any notion of being Protestants, ages before Irishmen had any need to be Nationalists, there moved across the world the great searchlights of Rome; the omnipresence of those historic and hieratic things now enthroned on their two thousand years. What corresponds to the Congress is the Council; that ancient assembly of Christendom which shifted so swiftly from Athens to Spain, or from Arabia to Gaul. Any man whose mind has been magnified by History, the greatest of all the works of the imagination, can feel the futility of allowing lesser and later quarrels entirely to obliterate the memory of that marching capital; the winged and Flying City. Wherever was that presence there was Rome; Rome was set up in the sands of the African desert; Rome in the rocky plains about Toledo. And but a few years ago, Rome was in Australia, a raw and remote colony under the Southern Cross; and to-day Rome is in Ireland, the most ancient of the Celtic cultural countries of the West. That presence was already old when Ireland civilised stood up and taught England barbarous; or rather taught something still too barbarous to be called England. It was already old when England converted Germany; when St. Boniface went forth from among our own people, to baptize the barbarians of the Rhine. It is this sense of the grandeur of the great distances of human history, and the huge changes they have made between nation and nation, that is the true manner of assuaging and healing the tribal quarrels of men.

It is Ancient History that will unite the nations. It is certainly not Modern History; which has only managed to divide them. It is, least of all, Future History, of which nobody knows anything at all; which is described in a series of Utopias discarded in turn by the Utopians. The best hope for the relations of England and Ireland is that they should both acknowledge the human authority of history; and the fact which is a fact, whether we call it Europe or Christendom, The difficulty of the English is to understand that they come out of the old religion. The difficulty of the Irish is to understand that they come out of the old civilisation. Ireland was Roman in religion but never Roman in rule. England was always Roman in rule and suddenly ceased to be Roman in religion. The essential for both is to find something deep and distant enough to be shared without the exasperation of recent political memories. To say that new things like wireless and aviation have united nations is simply false. England and Ireland are only two out of many now much more divided. It is not new but old things that unify mankind; it is at the back of history that we rediscover humanity; it is quite strictly, in Genesis or the beginnings that we find the brotherhood of men; even if some controversy continues about which was Abel or Cain.

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1. Written at the Eucharist Congress in Dublin.

MARY AND THE CONVERT

I WAS brought up in a part of the Protestant world which can best be described by saying that it referred to the Blessed Virgin as the Madonna. Sometimes it referred to her as a Madonna; from a general memory of Italian pictures. It was not a bigoted or uneducated world; it did not regard all Madonnas as idols or all Italians as Dagoes. But it had selected this expression, by the English instinct for compromise, so as to avoid both reverence ana irreverence. It was, when we came to think about it, a very curious expression. It amounted to saying that a Protestant must not call Mary "Our Lady," but he may call her "My Lady." This would seem, in the abstract, to indicate an even more intimate and mystical familiarity than the Catholic devotion. But I need not say that it was not so. It was not untouched by that queer Victorian evasion; of translating dangerous or improper words into foreign languages. But it was also not untouched by a certain sincere though vague respect for the part that Madonnas had played, in the actual cultural and artistic history of our civilisation. Certainly the ordinary reasonably reverent Englishman would never have intended to be disrespectful to that tradition in that aspect; even when he was much less liberal, travelled and well-read than were my own parents. Certainly, on the other hand, he was entirely unaware that he was saying "My Lady"; and if you had pointed out to him that, in fact, he was generally saying "a My Lady," or "the My Lady," he would have agreed that it was rather odd.

I do not forget, and indeed it would be a very thankless thing in me to forget, that I was lucky in this relative reasonablenesss and moderation of my own family and friends; and that there is a whole Protestant world that would consider such moderation a very poor-spirited sort of Protestantism. That strange mania against Mariolatry; that mad vigilance that watches for the first faint signs of the cult of Mary as for the spots of a plague; that apparently presumes her to be perpetually and secretly encroaching upon the prerogatives of Christ; that logically infers from a mere glimpse of the blue robe the presence of the Scarlet Woman — all that I have never felt or known or understood, even as a child; nor did those who had the care of my childhood. They knew nothing to speak of about the Catholic Church; they certainly did not know that anybody connected with them was ever likely to belong to it; but they did know that noble and beautiful ideas had been presented to the world under the form of this sacred figure, as under that of the Greek gods or heroes. But, while putting aside all pretence that this Protestant atmosphere was actively an anti-Catholic atmosphere, I may still say that my personal case was a little curious.

I have here rashly undertaken to write on a subject at once intimate and daring; a subject which ought indeed, by its own majesty, to make it impossible to be egotistical; but which does also make it impossible to be anything but personal. "Mary and the Convert" is the most personal of topics, because conversion is something more personal and less corporate than communion; and involves isolated feelings as an introduction to collective feelings. But also because the cult of Mary is in a rather peculiar sense a personal cult; over and above that greater sense that must always attach to the worship of a personal God. God is God, Maker of all things visible and invisible; the Mother of God is in a rather special sense connected with things visible; since she is of this earth, and through her bodily being God was revealed to the senses. In the presence of God, we must remember what is invisible, even in the sense of what is merely intellectual; the abstractions and the absolute laws of thought; the love of truth, and the respect for right reason and honourable logic in things, which God himself has respected. For, as St. Thomas Aquinas insists, God himself does not contradict the law of contradiction. But Our Lady, reminding us especially of God Incarnate, does in some degree gather up and embody all those elements of the heart and the higher instincts, which are the legitimate short cuts to the love of God. Dealing with those personal feelings, even in this rude and curt outline, is therefore very far from easy. I hope I shall not be misunderstood if the example I take is merely personal; since it is this particular part of religion that really cannot be impersonal. It may be an accident, or a highly unmerited favour of heaven, but anyhow it is a fact, that I always had a curious longing for the remains of this particular tradition, even in a world where it was regarded as a legend. I was not only haunted by the idea while still stuck in the ordinary stage of schoolboy scepticism; I was affected by it before that, before I had shed the ordinary nursery religion in which the Mother of God had no fit or adequate place. I found not long ago, scrawled in very bad handwriting, screeds of an exceedingly bad imitation of Swinburne, which was, nevertheless, apparently addressed to what I should have called a picture of the Madonna. And I can distinctly remember reciting the lines of the "Hymn To

Proserpine,” out of pleasure in their roll and resonance; but deliberately directing them away from Swinburne’s intention, and supposing them addressed to the new Christian Queen of life, rather than to the fallen Pagan queen of death.

“But I turn to her still; having seen she shall surely abide in the end; Goddess and maiden and queen, be near me now and befriend.”

And I had obscurely, from that time onwards, the very vague but slowly clarifying idea of defending all that Constantine had set up, just as Swinburne’s Pagan had defended all he had thrown down.

It may still be noted that the unconverted world, Puritan or Pagan, but perhaps especially when it is Puritan, has a very strange notion of the collective unity of Catholic things or thoughts. Its exponents, even when not in any rabid sense enemies, give the most curious lists of things which they think make up the Catholic life; an odd assortment of objects, such as candles, rosaries, incense (they are always intensely impressed with the enormous importance and necessity of incense), vestments, pointed windows, and then all sorts of essentials or unessentials thrown in in any sort of order; fasts, relics, penances or the Pope. But even in their bewilderment, they do bear witness to a need which is not so nonsensical as their attempts to fulfil it; the need of somehow summing up “all that sort of thing,” which does really describe Catholicism and nothing else except Catholicism. It should of course be described from within, by the definition and development of its theological first principles; but that is not the sort of need I am talking about. I mean that men need an image, single, coloured and clear in outline, an image to be called up instantly in the imagination, when what is Catholic is to be distinguished from what claims to be Christian or even what in one sense is Christian. Now I can scarcely remember a time when the image of Our Lady did not stand up in my mind quite definitely, at the mention or the thought of all these things. I was quite distant from these things, and then doubtful about these things; and then disputing with the world for them, and with myself against them; for that is the condition before conversion. But whether the figure was distant, or was dark and mysterious, or was a scandal to my contemporaries, or was a challenge to myself — I never doubted that this figure was the figure of the Faith; that she embodied, as a complete human being still only human, all that this Thing had to say to humanity. The instant I remembered the Catholic Church, I remembered her; when I tried to forget the Catholic

Church, I tried to forget her; when I finally saw what was nobler than my fate, the freest and the hardest of all my acts of freedom, it was in front of a gilded and very gaudy little image of her in the port of Brindisi, that I promised the thing that I would do, if I returned to my own land.

A CENTURY OF EMANCIPATION

WHEN we really wish to know how the world is going, it is no bad test to take some tag or current phrase of the press and reverse it, substituting the precise contrary, and see whether it makes more sense that way. It generally does; such a mass of outworn conventions has our daily commentary become. An excellent example occurred recently concerning the prospects of Protestantism and Catholicism. The editor of the Sunday Express, once better known as a sympathetic critic of letters, summed up the matter by saying that he had no prejudice against Catholicism or Anglo-Catholicism, that he had every respect for them, but that England (evidently including himself) was solidly Protestant. This is a very neat and convenient statement of the exact opposite of the truth. I have most friendly feelings to the gentleman in question; and it is without the least animosity to him that I say that what is sincere and alive and active in him is Anti-Catholicism and nothing else. What is really working in the world to-day is Anti-Catholicism and nothing else. It certainly is not Protestantism; not half so much as it is Pelagianism. And if the religion of modern England is to be called Protestant, there is at least one other adjective which cannot conceivably be applied to it. Whatever else it is, it is not solid Protestantism. There might perhaps be a case for calling it liquid Protestantism.

Now this marks the chief change of the century since Catholic Emancipation. The political circumstances of the final Tory surrender to Emancipation were, of course, complex. Emancipation seemed to some a sort of mongrel and monster; produced by two opposites; the survival of the Old Religion and the principles of the French Revolution. But in such things there are complex harmonies as well as contradictions. In some ways the ultimate quarrel of Rome with the French Revolution was rather like the recent quarrel of Rome with the French Royalists. It was resistance to a pagan extreme; but there had been not a little Catholic sympathy before the thing reached that extreme. There had been countless liberal clerics in the first movements of the reform; Pius IX had begun by being the reverse of reactionary; and the atmosphere was such that the gigantic protagonist of Catholic Emancipation himself, the great Daniel O’Connell, could combine passionate Ultramontanism with the largest political Liberalism without any division in the simplicity of his mind or the general humanity of his ideals. Those who hated him both as a Radical and a Roman Catholic would have seen no inconsistency in those two hated things. The truth to seize about all that earlier situation is that the bigotry was on the other side; in one sense the theology was on the other side. We cannot see it clearly in the statesmen; for they were either freethinkers or opportunists. Wellington met his Waterloo; but he was a good soldier and therefore retreated when it was futile to stand. But if we look at the mass of the people, we find a real religious resistance — because there was a real religion. That resistance is now only found in America where just such a Democrat as Daniel O'Connell is still threatened with political exclusion solely for being a Catholic. In some points the Americans are a hundred years behind the times.

But this sort of purely political exclusiveness will not be the chief problem of the future. Whatever be the relation of Rome to the new world, her authority will not be transferred to Dayton, Tennessee. The political effects of the political emancipation are relatively simple and in a sense the easiest part of the speculation. Everybody knows that Catholic Emancipation has never led, and will never lead, to the direct political disasters that some foretold. The Duke of Norfolk was never actually caught in the act of imitating Guy Fawkes; and Lord Russell of Killowen seldom if ever invited a Spanish Armada to these shores. Outside certain local Puritan fevers, chiefly in America, there is no reason to suppose that the world will be so unreasonable as to repent having elected Catholic Mayors or sent out Catholic Ambassadors. The cant about a foreign allegiance is still heard; but that is because a cant can long outlive a cause. Men who are wide awake are well aware that the Catholic internationalism, which bids men respect their national governments, is considerably less dangerous than the financial internationalism which may make a man betray his country, or the revolutionary internationalism which may make him destroy it. It is, of course, possible that, under the pressure of Catholic conversions, the world may return to older and rougher types of persecution; but it is not immediately probable. But when we turn from the political to the spiritual prospect, we find a change which is exactly represented by the reversal of the journalistic maxim mentioned above. We must realise what England has become, under all titles and terminology, if we would make a guess about what she is next destined to be.

If we want to measure the distance between the date of emancipation and the day in which we live, between Catholic Emancipation and its consequences after a century, we shall find this newspaper quotation very important. If we want to describe the conditions a hundred years ago in this country, we could not do it better than by saying that then England was solidly Protestant; or the Protestantism of England was solid. And we shall still better understand the modern change, if we ask what is meant by that solidarity. It had a very definite meaning, which has now so completely disappeared that even those who most frequently invoke it are least able to imagine it. There is nothing like that sort of solid confidence to-day. It meant this: that the types and ranks of society really and sincerely interested in religion did really and sincerely believe that Protestant religion had been proved superior to Catholic religion. It was strongest in the middle class, especially the wealthier middle class; but that middle class had been steadily growing stronger and wealthier, as was natural in a specially mercantile and capitalist community. It covered a multitude of healthy, hard-headed and even clear-headed professional and commercial men; I say "even clear-headed" because, though the English had the name of not being logical, they were far more logical in those days than they are now. If they sat longer over their wine, they argued longer over their politics; they did not live on hurried cocktails and hurried headlines. Their mercantile politics might be narrow; but the number of them who could expound some connected thesis, such as Free Trade, was very large. And as their politics consisted of certain definite theories, right or wrong, so their religion consisted of certain definite doctrines, true or false. If you had asked any such Protestant why he was a Protestant, or what he meant by being a Protestant, he would have instantly stated or explained those doctrines; just as a Free Trader would explain Free Trade. There were Englishmen, of course, for whom the whole business was vaguer or more indifferent; but they did not make the tone of that solid mercantile England. The populace made the Pope a guy, just as they made Guy Fawkes a guy; but the poor were at the best treated like children and left, like children, to make a guy or a game of anything. A great part of the higher aristocracy had been quite sceptical and pagan throughout the eighteenth century, or even from the seventeenth century; but the same tact and informal secrecy, which keeps such a class together, kept it from any public insult to the Protestant religion of England. And that religion was a religion; it was

Protestant, and it was national; that is, it was the religion of the normal citizen.

Now if you had asked an educated English Protestant in 1828 why Protestantism was right, or why Popery was wrong, he would not have had the smallest difficulty in answering. Of course the first thing to be emphasised would have been what has since been the first thing to be doubted or denied. It was the literal inspiration and inerrancy of the Hebrew Scriptures, and sometimes even of the English translation of those Scriptures. It was the view that still lingers in provincial corners and is called Fundamentalism.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, practically all Protestantism was Fundamentalism. But it is a great mistake to suppose that the true Protestant of history had nothing better to do for men than to throw a Bible at their heads. What he valued was the theological Scheme of Salvation supposed to be set forth in that work; as the Free Trader valued Adam Smith as the instrument of a theory. Of that theological theory there were two main versions; one, universal in Scotland and very prevalent in England, that God chose some to receive the benefits of redemption and rejected others even in the act of creating them; the other, that men could accept God but only by accepting this theological scheme of salvation, and that their good works had no effect on the result. This was the great doctrine of Faith independent of Works, which was so universally recognised as the chief mark and test of Protestantism that we might almost say that it was the whole of Protestantism, except indeed where Protestantism took the very fiercest form of Calvinism. It is not a question of making points against Protestantism; this was the chief point that could be made for Protestantism. It was especially the popular point; the most persuasive point, the most sympathetic point. From this idea of instantaneous individualist acceptance of the Atonement, by a pure act of faith, came the whole system of appeals on which this form of Christianity relied. That was why it was so easy, so personal, so emotional; that was why the whole of Christian’s burden fell off at the foot of the Cross. There were no degrees of sin or details of penance; because works were not in question at all. That is why they needed no Confessor or Sacrament of Penance; because there was nothing they could do to diminish sins either hopeless or already abolished or ignored. That was why it was wicked to pray for the dead; for the dead could not be anything but instantly beatified by dogmatic faith alone, or lost for lack of it. That was why there could be no progress of further enlightenment in the life to come; or, in other words, no Purgatory. And that was what was meant by being a Protestant; disapproving of prayers for the dead, disapproving of progress after death; disapproving of any religion that relied on good works. That was the great Protestant religion of Western Europe, of which we would speak as respectfully as we would of the virility and equality of Islam; and a hundred years ago it was normal and national. It was, in the newspaper phrase, solid.

To-day, as a national and normal thing, it has utterly vanished. Not one man in ninety really disapproves of praying for the dead. The War, in killing many million men, killed that pedantry and perversity. Not one man in ninety is either a Calvinist or an upholder of Faith against Works. Not one man in ninety thinks he will go to hell if he does not instantly accept the theological theory of redemption; perhaps it would be better if he did. Not one man in ninety believes the Bible infallible, as real Protestants believed it infallible. Of all that wonderful system of religious thought, thundered against Rome in so many sermons, argued against Rome in so many pamphlets, thrown out scornfully against Rome in so many Exeter Hall meetings and Parliamentary debates, nothing remains. Of all that, as it affects the forward movement of the educated classes, and the future of the world, nothing remains.

But there is something that remains. Anti-Catholicism remains; though it is no longer Protestantism, any more than it is Albigensianism or Donatism. And that is the factor we must grasp and estimate, if we are to estimate the outlook to-day. Protestantism is now only a name; but it is a name that can be used to cover any or every “ism” except Catholicism. It is now a vessel or receptacle into which can be poured all the thousand things that for a thousand reasons react against Rome; but it can only be full of these things because it is now hollow; because it is itself empty. Every sort of negation, every sort of new religion, every sort of moral revolt or intellectual irritation, that can make a man resist the claim of the Catholic Faith, is here gathered into a heap and covered with a convenient but quite antiquated label. When the journalists sav that there is solid Protestantism, all they mean is that there is a pretty heavy reluctance or resistance in the matter of any return of the English to their ancient religion; and this, up to a point, may be quite true. But the heap is a hotch-potch; the resistance is not a rational resistance, in the sense of having a clear and commonly accepted reason; and in so far as it has a prevailing colour, it is quite the contrary colour to that which prevailed in Protestantism. It is even more against Calvinism than against Catholicism; it is even more insistent on works than were the Catholics; it would make a future life far less final and more purely progressive than did the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory; it would make the Bible far less important than it is to a Catholic. On every single point on which the Protestant attacked the Pope, he would now say that the modern spirit was a mere exaggeration of the Popish errors. In so far as there is such a vague modern spirit, common to all these things, a spirit that may be called either liberality or laxity, it never was at any time the spirit of Protestantism. It came from the Revolution and the Romantic Movement, indirectly perhaps from the Renaissance of men like Rabelais and Montaigne; and ultimately much more from men like More and Erasmus than from men like Calvin and Knox. When the Protestant orators in the present crisis repeat rather monotonously, “We will not lose the freedom we gained four hundred years ago,” they show how little they share the religion which they defend. Men gained no freedom four hundred years ago; there was no particular freedom about creating the Scottish Sabbath or preaching nothing but Predestination or even yielding to the Tudor Terror or the Cromwellian Terror. But it is arguable that they gained freedom a hundred years ago, as Catholics gained it a hundred years ago. It is tenable that such freedom was the expanding effect of the American and French Revolutions and the democratic idealism which came with the nineteenth century and seems in some danger of declining with the twentieth. Above all, it is arguable that they have a certain kind of freedom now, not because they are Protestants, for they are not; but because they are anything they like and nothing if they like that better; because they are theists, theosophists, materialists, monists or mystics on their own. How much such freedom is worth, or how much chance it has of bearing any fruit in anything positive or creative, is another matter; but in order to anticipate the next phase, it is necessary to realise that this phase is one of negative liberty, not to say anarchy. Whatever it is, it is not Protestantism; and whatever it is, it is not solid.

This is the truth symbolised in the remark on the Prayer-Book Debate; that a crowd of Free-Thinkers and Noncomformists and people of any opinions dictated the affairs of the Church of England. I am very proud of the fact that Catholics abstained from doing so and avoided a very obvious piece of bad taste. But the fact itself contains fine shades that have hardly been noticed. It is not sufficiently realised that even a congregation at the City Temple, or a crowd hearing a Dean or Canon in St. Paul's Cathedral, is often in fact almost as mixed and dubious in religion as the members of the House of Commons. Many Nonconformists are not conforming to Nonconformity; and a churchman often means only a man who never goes to chapel. Such differences exist in the same sect or even in the same man. If we would grasp the modern problem, we must simply take at random some fairly typical English man and note how little he really is anything. He has, let us say, been brought up a Congregationalist and drifted away; he is by normal and rather negative habit an Anglican; he has become by unanswered doubts and vague popular science an Agnostic; he has often wondered if there is anything in being a Theosophist; he has attended one or two seances and might be persuaded to be a Spiritualist. That is the man we have got to deal with; and not some rigid Protestant labelled Methodist or even some rigid Atheist labelled Materialist. It is that man whom we have to set out to convert, after a hundred years of relative political liberty have left the old Protestant England far behind us and the new Catholic England still far away.

It is only fair to say, of course, that events have falsified almost as much the prophecies of those who promoted Catholic Emancipation as of those who resisted it. Many Liberals hardly disguised the idea that to emancipate Catholicism would be to extinguish Catholicism. Many thought they were tolerating a dying superstition; some thought they were killing it. It is the other superstition that has been killed. But there are always new superstitions; or, to put it more moderately, new religions. And a general estimate of the chances will see them chiefly affected, I think, by the presence of these new religions side by side with that very ancient thing called Agnosticism. The real interest of the speculation is in the question of which of the two will turn out to be the really formidable opponent of the Faith in the future.

We know what is really meant by saying that the Church is merely conservative and the modern world progressive. It means that the Church is always continuous and the heresies always contradictory. We have already noted it in the case of Protestantism; and the men who now completely contradict Protestantism, even in order to contradict Catholicism. But one effect of this contrast between continuity and bewildering variety is that the

Church is generally seen in the light of the last heresy. The Church is supposed to consist chiefly of the things of which that heresy happens to disapprove. So much of the Protestant tradition still remains that a great many people suppose that the chief marks of Catholicity are those which stood out as stains in the eyes of the last school of critics. Romanism is supposed to be made up of Popery and Purgatory and the Confessional, with the queerest things thrown in, such as incense and rosaries and the images of saints. But these were often the things most important to Protestants, not most important to Catholics; and not most important to the other opponents of Catholics. A Mahommedan would not connect Rome with Purgatory, because he himself believes in Purgatory; a Buddhist would not connect her with images, because he himself has images; an old pagan would not have been horrified at incense, because he used it himself. In the same way the new religions will not attack the old religion for the old reasons. A Christian Scientist will not assume that all stories of miraculous healing must have been frauds. A Spiritualist will not assume that all supernatural messages received through men must be impossible. It will be an entirely new list of charges or challenges that will come from the new mystics, who have imitated so many of the old marvels. In so far as the new religions become the leaders of the opposition, a new class of controversies will arise; with the faith-healers, for instance, upon the mystery of matter; with the psychic investigators upon the influences of evil. All this will bring us further and further from the special Protestant problems; and a hundred years hence the Church may look to her enemies something utterly different from what she looked like a hundred years ago. She will look different because she will be the same.

But if no new religion becomes important enough to be the main issue, the immediate change will be much simpler. The two centuries will probably have completed the full transition from Protestantism to Paganism. The Church will be facing once more her first and her most formidable enemy; a thing more attractive because more human than any of the heresies. This condition that can only be called Paganism is not easily defined and has often been misrepresented. In one aspect, it may be called practical materialism without the narrowness of theoretical materialism. The Pagan looks for his pleasures to the natural forces of this world; but he does not insist so strictly upon dry negations about the other; he has commonly admitted a vague borderland of the unknown, providing him with possibilities of inspiration or of awe which are forbidden to the cheap modern atheist with his clock-work cosmos. The worshippers of the Unknown God could at least build an altar, though they could not inscribe it with a name. But I fancy that men who have once been Christians, or whose fathers have been Christians, will not be long in discovering, or rather rediscovering, the profound defect that destroyed Paganism and filled centuries with a horror of its final phase. The natural forces, when they are turned into gods, betray mankind by something that is in the very nature of nature-worship. We can already see men becoming unhealthy by the worship of health; becoming hateful by the worship of love; becoming paradoxically solemn and overstrained even by the idolatry of sport; and in some cases strangely morbid and infected with horrors by the perversion of a just sympathy with animals. Unless all these things are subject to a more centralised and well-balanced conception of the universe, the local god becomes too vivid, we might say too visible, and strikes his worshippers with madness. The pantheist is always too near to the polytheist and the polytheist to the idolater; the idolater to the man offering human sacrifice. There is nothing in Paganism to check its own exaggerations; and for that reason the world will probably find again, as it found before, the necessity of a universal moral philosophy supported by an authority that can define. In any case, that quarrel between Paganism and Catholicism will again be one raising issues very unfamiliar to many even now; and issues that would have very much mystified the men who debated a hundred years ago the issue of Catholic Emancipation.

In any case, this emergence of new issues will reveal more and more one of the advantages of an old religion. Whole aspects of Catholic doctrine and tradition, hidden by historical accident and the special quarrels of recent times, will be revealed to the world when it begins to address new questions to the Church. This is a point that has not been sufficiently stressed in the relations between Protestantism and Catholicism. Very often a Protestant was not only a man merely protesting, but a man merely protesting against a particular thing. He sometimes thought that thing was Rome; but it was really only one of the thousand aspects of Rome. When new aspects appear under new searchlights, he will be not so much defeated as simply outside the affair. A Baptist disapproves of baptising babies; a Presbyterian disapproves of bishops; a Prohibitionist disapproves of beer, and so on. But a Presbyterian, as such, has nothing very special to say about the

Subconscious Mind. A Baptist as such has nothing special to say to a Behaviourist as such. But a Catholic may have a great deal to say to these people. For the Catholic commentary on life has gone on so much longer, it has covered so many different social conditions, has dealt so carefully with countless fine shades of metaphysics or casuistry, that it really has a relation to almost any class of speculation that may arise. Thus, in the matter of psycho-analysis and the study of the subconscious, the Church will probably be found sooner or later defending certain essentials about Will and Conscience against a welter of wild impersonality. Catholics remembering Catholicism will have a right and reason to do this. But Calvinists who have half forgotten Calvinism have no particular reason to do it.

There is, for instance, one influence that grows stronger every day, never mentioned in the news papers, not even intelligible to people in the newspaper frame of mind. It is the return of the Thomist Philosophy; which is the philosophy of commonsense, as compared with the paradoxes of Kant and Hegel and the Pragmatists. The Roman religion will be, in the exact sense, the only Rationalistic religion. The other religions will not be Rationalist but Relativist; declaring that the reason is itself relative and unreliable; declaring that Being is only Becoming or that all time is only a time of transition; saying in mathematics that two and two make five in the fixed stars, saying in metaphysics and in morals that there is a good beyond good and evil. Instead of the materialist who said that the soul did not exist, we shall have the new mystic who says that the body does not exist. Amid all these things the return of the Scholastic will simply be the return of the sane man. There will perhaps be belated and benighted modernists, lingering from the nineteenth century, who will repeat the jaded journalistic catchword that the Schoolman only cared to ask how many angels could stand on the point of a needle. But it will be difficult to make even that fancy appear very fantastic, in a world where men deny that it hurts a man to stick the point of the needle in his leg. If there are angels, they have presumably some intellectual relation to place and space; and if there are no angels, there are still men and presumably sane men. But to say that there is no pain, or no matter, or no evil, or no difference between man and beast, or indeed between anything and anything else — this is a desperate effort to destroy all experience and sense of reality; and men will weary of it more and more, when it has ceased to be the latest fashion; and will look once more for something that will give form to such a chaos and keep the proportions of the mind of man. Millions of men are already at least wondering whether this solution is not to be found in the Catholic order and philosophy. Above all, the Church has regained that unique position in the world in a fair field and under the very reverse of favour; having had tor a hundred years no more than the common right of speaking and publishing and voting in popular assemblies; and as her Master affirmed his divinity by becoming a man among men, she has become for a season a sect among sects, to emerge at the end as something separate or supreme.

TRADE TERMS

IT is grimly significant that the Organ of Empire has already begun to call its Imperial policy by the cheerful name of “The Empire Merger.” The sort of combine, which all free peoples have punished as a conspiracy, is now so fashionable that it is considered quite a compliment to apply this commercial term instead of a political title. Courtiers in the future, instead of saying “Your Majesty” will say “Your Monopoly”; especially when addressing Moritz IV, of the historic House of Mond, by that time Emperor of the World State. But indeed we rather doubt whether there will be even so much dignity as this in such a despotism as that. The man who prefers to say, “Imperial Merger” rather than Imperial Protection or Imperial Free Trade, is already in this curious modern mood which actually thinks mercantile terms higher than moral or social ones. The whole system of a great nation will be remodelled on the habits of a big business. The national envoy in Paris, instead of being called, “His Excellency the British Ambassador,” will be called “Our Mr. Honey-bubble,” and he will travel with samples and be proud of being called a commercial traveller. The monopolist newspapers never weary of telling us that the world ought to have outgrown the stilted and pompous language of the old Protocols and Ultimatums, and all the formal statements of the treaties which have so often been denounced as Secret Diplomacy. Doubtless the great statesmen of the great states, the heirs of Richelieu and Canning, will correspond in a brighter and brisker English, running “Yrs. rcd. and conts: noted,” when indeed it is necessary to put the arrangements into writing at all. After all, it will be even more business-like to make the international arrangements in a husky and confidential voice, in the intervals of observing “What’s yours?” and “Say when.” That is the great advantage of the New Diplomacy over the old Secret Diplomacy. The old was so very secret as to write down all its secrets in laborious documents and send them round to about fifty people in Government offices. The New Diplomacy need never be written down at all; indeed, it is better not.

We are prepared, of course, to be told that all this ugly and undignified school of manners is very practical, and that the old stately or stilted school of manners was very unpractical. After all, the old theory of dignity did only trivial and incidental things, such as creating the Roman Empire, creating the French Monarchy and the French Revolution, founding the American Republic and establishing by personal adventure that very Empire, which our hustlers and hucksters can only help by impersonal advertisement. These are slight achievements compared with that of insuring that the same bad ginger-beer shall be sold everywhere, to the exclusion and extinction of good ginger-beer, or that over some thousand square miles of God's green earth nobody shall have anything but one kind of hat or one kind of house. But though these arguments are undoubtedly cogent and persuasive, and bear a certain appearance of practicality and realism, we are disposed to supplement them by a suggestion or reminder; the hint of something which even thinkers so lucid seem to have overlooked. Nowadays, it is considered very horrible to mention it; and it is indeed very horrible to test it or experience it. Nevertheless, it is a thing that may be tested or experienced; and, even to be avoided, had much better be mentioned.

Authority ruling men must be respected; it must even be loved. Men must in the last resort love it; for the simple reason that men must in the last resort die for it. No community or constitution can survive and retain its identity at all, that has not in the minds of its subjects enough of an ideal identity, to appear to them in certain extremes of peril as the vision of something to be saved. It is on that ideal, inhering in the reality, that every state will depend when there is a struggle of life and death. Men must feel something more about England than that she is commercial, something more about France than that Frenchmen are practical and careful about money, something more about America than that she happens at the moment to be monstrously rich, before any healthy and humorous human being will kill somebody else or be killed himself, and go out from the sunlight and the sane loves of this world, for the sake of any such abstraction. It will be found, therefore, that the practical theory fails at the most practical moment. It is useful while there is question of whether the commonwealth shall continue to be rich, or continue to be imperial, or continue to be monopolist. It is useless when there is question of whether the commonwealth shall continue to be. The materialistic state, cemented only with money as with mud, will fall apart under the blow of any people who have love or loyalty to their leaders or their cause; for the simple reason that those who care most for money care more for life. One may like or dislike the Fascism of Italy, the fiery nationalism of the Poles, the deep

Catholicism of the Irish; but there is no doubt that their ideals can be idealised. They are conceptions for which real men can be worked up into a real rapture of sacrifice. The images under which they are presented to the world, and especially the world of their worshippers, the golden or the silver eagle, the breastplate of St. Patrick, the Roman salute, are things that do in fact lift up the heart, and were made by the mind so that they should uplift the heart. In short there is in them poetry; and that poetry is the most practical thing in the world.

But easier to die for, now she is poor.

Now if the new Imperialists insist on talking of everything in terms of the counter and the commercial room, if they insist on calling Imperial Preference a Merger, as Lord Beaverbrook did, if they insist on comparing a General Election to a Company Flotation, as Mr. Amery did, they will make men familiar indeed with their government, and in a sense at home with it, but no more capable of loving it than of loving any unlucky investment. The time will come when its existence will depend on its power on the imagination; and it will be dignity or death. Nor will that dignity come solely from an Imperial Isolation; which seems merely to mean, “How we may think in continents without thinking of the Continents.”

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FROZEN FREE THOUGHT

I BELIEVE I am in possession of a piece of news which, as we say in Fleet Street, has a certain news-value. It is hardly fitted to be flashed along the telegraph wires or blazoned on the big posters; it does not definitely involve an individual, but rather generally a school; it is an historical event; something that has happened and has hardly been noticed among the many changes of the day. The substance of the news is this. The sort of man we once knew as a Secularist has become a religious maniac.

Of course he is not actually mad, in the medical sense; nor, for that matter, is he religious in the religious sense, or perhaps in any sense. Yet the words I have used, to cover very varying stages of the malady in a fairly loose group, are the only words that convey the sharpness and importance of the incident. I mean that the tone of the old Fleet Street atheism, which I knew and loved of old, has entirely altered. It has come to resemble almost exactly the tone of the Seventh Day Adventists or the Millennial Dawnists, or all those queerly prosaic and even prim fanatics who wander about handing out pamphlets, crowded with texts and vivid with italics, in which a new heaven and a new earth can be made out of a neglected cloud in the Book of Daniel or an unusually Little Horn in the Apocalypse. Perhaps the shortest way of distinguishing between the two literary styles is to record that the first was readable and the second is unreadable. The old atheist arguments, inherited from Bradlaugh and Foote, were always crude and therefore a little heavy, even for any agnostic with some background of history and philosophy. But they were at least as clear as they were crude; and we should all of us have agreed that a paper like the Freethinker was easy to read; even if some of us would have added that it was easy to answer. The Freethinker as it is to-day is not easy to read. I know, because I have just been reading it. Its editor has kindly sent me a copy, containing what appears from the frequent mention of my name to be an attack on myself; and when I am thus personally addressed I think it only polite to answer. If it is now not so easy to answer, it is simply because it is now not so easy to understand. It seems to be about a book I wrote on Victorian Literature several years before the War; but the Freethinkers of Fleet Street, ever on the alert for fresh developments, have pounced upon it already. I have read the critique over patiently several times, and am still somewhat puzzled by what the critic can possibly mean by some of his allusions and complaints. I remember that in that very able book The Flight from Reason, Mr. Arnold Lunn narrates a similar experience with the same paper. He prints the whole of the Freethinker's criticism on him, and, naturally not being able to make head or tail of it, simply leaves it to the reader in despair. It was something about how anybody, who thinks there is good historical evidence for the Resurrection, is logically bound to believe the story of Aladdin in the Arabian Nights. I have no idea why. But what I would first emphasise, before trying to explain my critic's remarks to myself and him, is the curious character of this change in the Secularist Press, from a tone that was crude to a tone that is really crazy.

We might take a working parallel; fortunately outside the sphere of religion. I can imagine a jolly old Radical working man talking in the old mutinous manly fashion against the King or the House of Lords, saying with surly geniality and some repetition; "What we want with a King?' Why should 'e 'ave a golden crown on 'is 'ead and me only my old boko? What's 'e blasted well doing in Buckingham Palace — -" and so on. Now I like that sort of man. I like him very much. I know what he means. I think there is, in the last resort, a lot to be said for it. It is not in the style of the De Monarchia; it hardly appreciates the subtleties of Mr. Charles Maurras. But it has truths behind it; the equality of men and something that is right in republican simplicity. But suppose that man, who begins by saying he is as good as the King, broods and eventually goes mad saying that he is the King. Suppose his grievance becomes a personal grievance about his great-grandfather, and he goes about boring people with plans and pedigrees to prove his Plantagenet blood. We know the whole atmosphere will alter; but chiefly in clarity. Everybody knew what the grumbler meant; nobody will listen to what the lunatic means. That is very like the difference between the Old Secularist and the New Secularist or the Millennial Dawnist.

Take some puzzles out of this page about me. "Chesterton uses his talents tyrannously in the service of the most reactionary of all Churches," — to which he didn't belong at the time. And how do you use talents tyrannously? I wish I knew. "He has nothing but the crudest insults for the great intellectuals." Well, there is the book; anybody can see what I really said about Mill, about Meredith, about Matthew Arnold, about Huxley, even supposing that nobody is an intellectual unless he is an agnostic. To say I had "nothing" but crude insult for them is — well, something that could be described still more crudely. Swinburne, it seems "is accused of composing a learned and sympathetic and indecent parody on the Litany of the Blessed Virgin." And the critic adds mysteriously, "an ironical suggestion in a Protestant country." I do not know what the word "accused" means here. If the critic has read Swinburne he knows that an early verse in Dolores is a parody of the Litany of the Virgin. It is hardly an accusation to call it learned and sympathetic; by which I meant artistically sympathetic in an archaic Gothic mode; as were the profane Pre-Raphaelites as well as the pious ones. Whether such a thing is indecent may be discussed; but the critic is quite wrong in fancying that only Papists thought it indecent. The indecency of Dolores was denounced, more harshly than I dreamed of doing it, by the first Freethinker in English public life; the late John Morley.

Finally, here is one wonderful example of how the Freethinker gets hold of the wrong end of the stick, even when I actually offer him the right end. He writes the amazing sentence, "Even the great authors of the nineteenth century do not escape his Romish censure, and are dubbed, spitefully, 'lame giants'." It is not very spiteful to call an author a giant; but anyone consulting the book will see that the men I called "lame giants" were not "the great authors of the nineteenth century," but specially the English authors of the Victorian time; whom I compared unfavourably with the franker and bolder Freethinkers of France and the Continent. Thus I praised Renan as a more logical sceptic than Tennyson, who was a lame sceptic, hampered by respectability and provincial religion. You would think a Freethinker would recognise that as an obvious concession to Freethinkers. But the new Freethinker does not read a book. He looks through it feverishly for texts to be twisted in favour of a prejudice, like the religious maniac with the Bible.

To take another instance. I wrote an article, which appeared in the London Mercury and was called "The End of the Moderns," in which I tried to describe a certain quality in works like Brave New World, and in much of the cult of D. H. Lawrence; a quality (not necessarily a bad quality) of being near the end of its tether, or having nearly run through its resources: of having stretched something very nearly as far as it will go. It was a psychological and literary note upon certain literary psychologists of recent years; it had nothing directly to do with religion, still less with irreligion; it had nothing in the world to do with any attack on atheism. Now the Freethinker reads through all this stuff about Lawrence and Aldous Huxley, all terribly modern to him, of course; but the point is that he cannot believe that any article I write can be anything except an attack on atheism; and especially on his own antediluvian sort of atheism. That anybody should want to write an article about modern authors, and their psychological, sociological and ethical difficulties, he cannot conceive. Therefore he runs his eye through my article, until it brightens suddenly at the sight of the word "blasphemy". At last he has found something that he understands; something that he knows all about. Blasphemy brings back Bradlaugh and the brave days of old; and, by a pardonable optical illusion, I appear to him in the form of Lord Randolph Churchill in the '80s, moving the expulsion of the Senior Member for Northampton. I am, after all, making my unscrupulous Attack on Atheism, though (for some dark reasons best known to myself) I prefer to stick it into the middle of an article stuffed with all sorts of strange nonsense about literature and a man named Lawrence.

Why, and in what connection, as a matter of fact, did I use the sacred word "blasphemy?" The point was this; I wished to give the reader a rough working example, to begin with, of what I meant by saying that a literary process or argument could be doomed to an early exhaustion; could be of a kind that was fated to come to a finish. And I gave the example of the purely literary and artistic effect of blasphemy. I was careful to state, in so many words, that I was only talking of the literary and artistic effect. I said the particular shock or thrill, given by breaking the silence about a sanctity, cannot be repeated indefinitely, when the sanctity is no longer there. I never said a word about whether it would be a good thing, on general social grounds, that the sanctity should be no longer there. I was not discussing that question, but another question about short-lived literary effects, of which blasphemy happens to be a good working example. But the monomaniac solemnity of the Freethinker leads him to come blundering out with a very heavy club, against the blasphemer who has blasphemed the sanctity of blasphemy. He labours a ludicrous comparison, according to which saying, "there is no sense in blasphemy when there is nothing sacred to blaspheme" is no more sensible than saying "there is no sense in sanitation, when there are no enemies of sanitation to attack." What has become of the reasoning power of atheists, I cannot think. This comparison is obviously rubbish; because sanitation is supposed to be useful whether it is opposed or no; and all I said was that blasphemy was not startling or thrilling unless there was something to which it was opposed. Whether secularism would be a good thing, when once established and unopposed, as sanitation is supposed to be a good thing when established and unopposed, was a question which I simply did not raise in that particular article at all. I only said that such a settled secular state could not enjoy eternally the artistic excitement of blasphemy; and this the secularist, after beating wildly about the bush is eventually forced to admit. "What Mr. Chesterton ought to have said is that the defiance of God, the criticism of God, or ridiculing God, can only exist so long as men believe in God. That is quite true." That is also, as it happens, exactly what Mr. Chesterton said, and all that Mr. Chesterton said; and Mr. Chesterton is very much gratified to learn that it is also what he ought to have said. But Mr. Chesterton also said a lot more, on literary and psychological matters of the moment, in which he happens to be interested; and he is now mildly interested in the fact that The Freethinker is not in the least interested in them. The atheist is not interested in anything except attacks on atheism, so he insists that I am attacking atheism, even when I explain elaborately that I am doing something else. He therefore blames me for saying what he himself declares to be true; or for not proving what I had never set out to prove.

But the queerest thing of all is this. I was not then attacking atheism, and I was actually defending rationalism. I was doing the poor old Freethinker's job for him; and defending the Reason that he ought to defend. I was defending it against the more modern mysticism of D. H. Lawrence, who said that we should rebel against reason: and rely entirely upon instinct and emotion. And this, I pointed out, was an instance of something which, like blasphemy in literature, may be stimulating at the very start, but cannot run very long. An attempt really to conduct life, without constant reference to reason, would quite certainly break down. That was my point about all these modern social suggestions; that they would break down. For the rest, he repeats at intervals with hissing emphasis that I am a Roman Catholic; he is so much out of touch with the twentieth century that he really seems to imagine that a Roman Catholic is now at an intellectual disadvantage among other Christians. But I want to know why the Roman Catholic is left to do the work of the Rationalist; and attack the really recent upheaval of Unreason in the world, and why the Rationalist actually attacks him for attacking it.

SHOCKING THE MODERNISTS

How do we manage to stagger on blinded by the blaze of wit and starry brilliancy, that is showered upon us like everlasting fireworks every day in the daily papers? The writers in those papers who so often remind us, with never-failing freshness, that things that were once rare luxuries are now multiplied and minutely and exactly imitated everywhere, surely will not fail to apply this same striking truth to the intellectual world. They will doubtless point out that those perfect and pointed epigrams, which were once heard only from exceptional individuals, like Voltaire and Talleyrand, are now invented by the hundred in every column of every newspaper, and it is hardly possible to find a single dull sentence wedged between the witty repartees and immortal jests, which can now, like everything else of any value, be produced in any quantity by mass production.

However this may be, there can be no doubt that our journalism, and the world it describes, has reached an acute sensibility to wit and verbal brilliance, which has never been known before; and is so vividly alert and alive to any such ringing and rapier-like logical fencing as to cry "a hit! a palpable hit!" in circumstances in which it is only too likely that our duller forefathers would have remained deaf or indifferent. I once read a paragraph in a daily paper, about a notable outburst among the most advanced intellects in the Church of England, which bears witness to the promptitude with which such triumphs are appreciated. Under the two headlines of "Youth Finds Church a Bore," and "A Girl Tells Clergy," the paragraph, or rather series of paragraphs was arranged in a suitably sensational way as follows:-

"Youth finds church a bore — and stays away from it. This contention, put forward by a girl of eighteen from the platform at Girton College, Cambridge, yesterday, made the elderly delegates to the Modern Churchman's Conference sit up sharply in their seats.

"The speaker was the attractive daughter of a Portsmouth naval chaplain. Her most telling passage was this: 'I don't think public worship has any attraction whatsoever for the young. Religion is supposed to express God through truth and beauty, we are told, but in this age of specialisation people turn to science, art and philosophy to satisfy those needs'."

I wonder what her least telling passage was.

Of course the fun really begins with the astounding and staggering effect produced by the original thunderbolt of thought "Youth Finds Church a Bore," on all those admittedly elderly delegates who were sufficiently ancient to be described as Modern Churchmen. Dr. Major leapt to his feet with a howl; Dean Inge bounced up to the ceiling like a ball. Dr. Rashdall uttered one piercing shriek and fainted; for not one of these venerable doctors, in all their long experience of the Modernist Movement, had ever heard one human being articulate with human lips the star-staggering blasphemy that youth finds church a bore. Not one of them had ever heard so much as a rumour of young people yawning during a sermon; to none had any voice dared to whisper that little boys have been known to catch flies or dig penknives into pews during Divine service; not one of them had ever in his life heard a baby begin to squeal in church; none had ever listened to the hideous slander that youths and maidens in church had been known to look at each other instead of keeping their eyes fixed rigidly on the lectern (for nobody in the church of a Modern Churchman would condescend to look at the altar); none of them ever knew before that there had ever been any friction between the fits and moods of youth and the routine of religion. Never, until the attractive daughter of a Portsmouth naval chaplain made this stupendous discovery in modern psychology, had they even thought of the possibility that a long religious service might be rather a bore to a boy.

But yet, even about that discovery, it seems as if there might be more to be said. Some of the elderly Modern Churchmen have been schoolmasters. It seems just possible that some of them had discovered that the Sixth Book of the AEneid can be a bore to a boy. But in those cases it was not invariably assumed that the boy was right and the poet was wrong. It was not taken for granted that the boredom of the boy in itself proves that Virgil is a bad poet; still less did anyone ever propose that a simplified and modernised version of Virgil must be substituted for the old one. Nobody proposed that passages from Kipling about the British Empire should be substituted for the more austere salutations of Virgil to the Roman Empire, because such education would be more modern, compact and convenient to a truly National Church. Nobody proposed that a really smart and snappy up-to-date description of the Derby, taken from an evening paper, should be regarded as a complete substitute for that thundering line in which the very earth shakes with the horsehoofs of the charioteers. And, if I may venture to hint a disagreement with the Prophetess of Girton College, Cambridge, I think it will be found that the same argument applies even to the substitutes that she herself proposes. She says that people turn to science, art and philosophy. Will she swear by the Death of Nelson, or whatever oath binds the daughter of a Portsmouth naval chaplain, that no science student ever shirks or plays truant in a science school? It will be vain for her to swear any such thing in the case of an art school; for I have been to an art school myself, and I can assure her that there were quite as many art students who found application to art a bore as there could possibly be divinity students who found divinity a bore. As for young philosophers, I have known a good many of them; at an age when nearly all of them were much more fond of philosophising than of learning philosophy. And I might hint that there are other young agitators, of the sort that seem to agitate so strangely the Modern Churchmen and the modern newspapers, who seem to have a certain spirited and spontaneous preference for saying things rather than for thinking what they are saying. Is it really necessary that we should toil through all this tiresome repetition about the perfectly obvious difficulty of getting young people to work when they naturally want to play, before we even begin to discuss the mature problem of the relation of doctrine to the mind? It is perfectly natural that the boy should find the church a bore. But why are we bound to treat what is natural as something actually superior to what is supernatural; as something which is not even merely supernatural, but is in the exact sense super-supernatural?

A GRAMMAR OF KNIGHTHOOD

I THINK it very likely that many have never even heard of The Broadstone of Honour, the manual of chivalry written by Kenelm Digby early in the nineteenth century; unless they remember one contemptuous reference to it in Macaulay's Essays. The reference is not much of a criticism on the Broadstone of Honour, but it is a very damaging criticism of Macaulay's Essays. It illustrates, not only his spirited superficiality, but that considerable element of ignorance that went along with his remarkable reputation for omniscience. Just as his celebrated sneer at Spenser shows that he had not read Spenser, so his less famous sneer at Kenelm Digby shows that he had not read Kenelm Digby. He set himself to belittle certain old tales of courtesy, which is the wedding of humility with dignity. He scoffed at such stories as that of the Black Prince waiting like a servant on his helpless captive; and he thought he could not scoff at them more effectively than by saying they would be suitable to Kenelm Digby; or, as he put it, to "those who think, like the author of The Broadstone of Honour, that God made the world for the use of gentlemen." One is tempted to reply, in some moods, that there will always be enough bounders, even among the learned, to redress the balance.

Now Kenelm Henry Digby was, as his name implies, a member of an old Catholic family, established in Ireland; and, as with the other branches of such old families established in England, it would not be very unnatural if he did attach some importance to being a gentleman. If the weakness has sometimes been too apparent in the old Catholics of England, it is at least pardonable and rather pathetic. When you are an honest and perfectly patriotic squire, and all your countrymen regard you as a liar, a traitor, a poisoner and a devil-worshipper, it must be something of a sentimental comfort to you that they cannot deny you are a gentleman. Poor human nature being what it is, you may be excused if you come to think a little too much of it. And Kenelm Digby might have been excused if he really had thought too much of it; and talked nonsense about gentlemen, as if God had made the world for them. But as a simple fact, it was not Digby who talked nonsense about gentlemen, but Macaulay who talked nonsense about Digby.

What would Macaulay have said if after writing his epigram about a universe created for the gentry, he had made the bold experiment of opening the book at random, as I did, and reading a paragraph like this:

"The noble Italian Arnigio shows how truly generous and heroic peasants and men of the lowest rank of life may become." "The glorious nativity of the Redeemer of the world," he observes, "was revealed to shepherds, as to men pure, just and vigilant. When our adorable Saviour was to be born blessed Mary and the devout Joseph were so little possessed of worldly grandeur that the stable of an inn was their only place of refuge. For mark, says a holy man, the evangelists do not say that there was no room in the inn, but there was no room for them. Oh what a noble school is poverty! What a temple of sovereign honour! Pope Urban IV was so little ashamed of being the son of a shoemaker that he ordered the pulpit of the church of St. Urban, at Troyes, his native city, to be adorned on great festivals with tapestry representing his father's stall. There is even an example of legislation, on the principles of the romances, which places Chivalry before nobility, for the state of Pistoja, in the thirteenth century ennobled men as a punishment for their crimes."

Do you think that perhaps even Macaulay would have felt slightly ashamed of himself?

Anyhow the author of The Broadstone of Honour did not think the world was made only for gentlemen He thought in his simplicity that it was made for man; and he could not escape from a prejudice in favour of brave men and honest men and (I am so antiquated as to add) men who felt a special consideration for women. The book has some of the faults of its type and time; in that sense it is now rather dated; nearly as much dated as Macaulay. We must read it, or at least parts of it, rather as we read a song of Tom Moore or a patriotic poem of Thomas Davis, or all that rather rhetorical yet very red-blooded tradition ot talking and writing that derived from the mishty melodrama of Byron or was sympathetically satirised in Micawber. But when we have allowed for variations in the taste for purple patches, a matter entirely relative in our taste as in his, the book is sustained from first to last by what can only be called a sustained energy of virtue. It does anybody good to meet a man so little ashamed of an enthusiasm for mere goodness. Many of his gestures are as noble as any of those that make the decisive moments in the Chansons de Geste. Many of his concessions are as graceful as any that he himself praises in the chronicles of the tournament or the tented field. But he was very far from being merely an amiable old antiquary haunting Melrose by moonlight; or even a dazed Don Quixote with his head hidden in folios about Arthur and Amadis of Gaul. I cannot resist making another quotation which will serve to show that Kenelm Digby was not by any means unconscious of what was going on in his own time — and, I will add, is still going on in ours.

After speaking of St. Francis and of many knights who would feed the poor and eat with them and carry their coffins, he says, “Oh! is it for the rich of the nineteenth century to talk of the inhumanity of the Middle Ages? To give alms, with them, is to encourage idleness. He is hungry, he is naked? Let him work. But he is old? There are employments for all. But he is a child? Do not teach him to beg. It is the mother of a large family? Perhaps she does not tell the truth. We have institutions on a new system. Yes truly, and woe to the unhappy ones who are doomed to receive relief from them! In order that the children of pleasure may not be incommoded by the sight of poverty the poor are shut up within high walls and condemned to confinement for the crime of being poor and miserable. When they are thus secluded from the enjoyment of nature an odious Board of Governors takes care that they should be provided with what is sufficient to support life. And then they have to endure the countenances of ferocious barbarians who are the officers to administer this horrible humanity.”

That is the testimony of Digby, as it is the testimony of Dickens, who did not presumably labour under the illusion that God made the world only for gentlemen. That is also the testimony of Cobbett, of Carlyle, of Hood, of Ruskin, of everybody who actually watched the modern industrial movement with his eyes open; but the fact that Digby wrote that paragraph may alone be my apology for writing this note on his neglected name.

REFLECTIONS ON A ROTTEN APPLE

OUR age is obviously the Nonsense Age; the wiser sort of nonsense being provided for the children and the sillier sort of nonsense for the grown-up people. The eighteenth century has been called the Age of Reason; I suppose there is no doubt that the twentieth century is the Age of Unreason. But even that is an understatement. The Age of Reason was nicknamed from a famous rationalist book. But the rationalist was not really so much concerned to urge the rational against the irrational; but rather specially to urge the natural against the supernatural. But there is a degree of the unreasonable that would go even beyond the unnatural. It is not merely an incredible tale, but an inconsistent idea. As I pointed out to somebody long ago, it is one thing to believe that a beanstalk scaled the sky, and quite another to believe that fifty-seven beans make five.

For instance, a man may disbelieve in miracles; normally on some a priori principle of determinist thought; in some cases even on examination of the evidence. But on being told of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, he is told something that is logical if it is not natural. He is not told that there were fewer fishes because the fishes had been multiplied. Multiplication is still a mathematical term; and a mob all feeding on miraculous fishes is a less mysterious or monstrous sight than a man saying that multiplication is the same as subtraction. Such a story, for such a sceptic, does not carry conviction; but it does make sense. He can recognise the logical consequence, if he cannot understand the logical cause. But no pope or priest ever asked him to believe that thousands died of starvation in the desert because they were loaded with loaves and fishes. No creed or dogma ever declared that there was too little food because there was too much fish. But that is the precise, practical and prosaic definition of the present situation in the modern science of economics. And the man of the Nonsense Age must bow his head and repeat his credo, the motto of his time. Credo quia impossibile.

Or again, the term unreason is sometimes used rather more reasonably; for a sort of loose or elliptical statement, which is at least illogical in form. The most popular case is what was called the Irish Bull; often suspected of resembling the Papal Bull, in being a supernatural monster bred of credulity and superstition. But even this old sort of confusion stopped short of the new sort of contradiction. If any Irishman really does say, “We are not birds, to be in two places at once,” at least we know what he means, even if it is not what he says. But suppose he says that one bird has been miraculously multiplied into a million birds, and that in consequence there are fewer birds in the world than there were before. We should then be dealing, not merely with an Irish Bull but with a Mad Bull, and concerned not with the incredible but with the incomprehensible. Or, to apply the parable, the Irish have sometimes been accused of unbalanced emotion or morbid sentiment. But nobody says that they merely imagined the Great Famine, in which multitudes starved because the potatoes were few and small. Only suppose an Irishman had said that they starved because the potatoes were gigantic and innumerable. I think we should not yet have heard the last of the wrong-headed absurdity of that Irishman. Yet that is an exact description of the economic condition to-day as it affects the Englishman. And, to a great extent, the American. We learn that there is a famine because there is not a scarcity; and there is such a good potato-crop that there are no potatoes. The Irishman, with his bull or his bird, is quite a hard-headed realist and rationalist compared to that. Thus, the old examples of the fantastic fell far short of the modern fact; whether they were mysteries supposed to be above reason or merely muddles supposed to be below it. Their miracles were more normal than our scientific averages; and the Irish blunder was less illogical than the actual logic of events.

For it seems that we live to-day in a world of witchcraft, in which the orchards wither because they prosper, and the multitude of apples on the apple-tree of itself turns them into forbidden fruit, and makes the effort to consume them in every sense fruitless. This is the modern economic paradox, which is called Over-Production, or a glut in the market, and though at first sight it sounds like the wildest fantasy, it is well to realise in what sense it is the most solid of facts. Let it be clearly understood, therefore, that as a description of the objective social situation at this instant in this industrial society, the paradox is perfectly true. But it is not really true that the contradiction in terms is true. If we take it, not as a description but as a definition, if we take it as a matter of abstract argument, then certainly the contradiction is untrue, as every contradiction is untrue. The truth is that a third element has entered into the matter, which is not mentioned in this abstract statement of it. That element might be stated in many ways; perhaps the shortest statement of it is in the fable of the man who sold razors, and afterwards explained to an indignant customer, with simple dignity, that he had never said the razors would shave. When asked if razors were not made to shave, he replied that they were made to sell. That is A Short History of Trade and Industry During the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries.

God made a world of reason as sure as God made little apples (as the beautiful proverb goes); and God did not make little apples larger than large apples. It is not true that a man whose apple-tree is loaded with apples will suffer from a want of apples; though he may indulge in a waste of apples. But if he never looks upon apples as things to eat, but always looks on them as things to sell, he will really get into another sort of complication; which may end in a sort of contradiction. If, instead of producing as many apples as he wants, he produces as many apples as he imagines the whole world wants, with the hope of capturing the trade of the whole world — then he will be either successful or unsuccessful in competing with the man next door who also wants the whole world's trade to himself. Between them, they will produce so many apples that apples in the market will be about as valuable as pebbles on the beach. Thus each of them will find he has very little money in his pocket, with which to go and buy fresh pears at the fruiterer's shop. If he had never expected to get fruit at the fruiterer's shop, but had put up his hand and pulled them off his own tree, his difficulty would never have arisen. It seems simple; but at the root of all apple-trees and apple-growing, it is really as simple as that.

Of course I do not mean that the practice is at present simple; for no practical problem is simple, least of all at the present time, when everything is confused by the corrupt and evasive muddlers who are called practical politicians. But the principle is simple; and the only way to proceed through a complex situation is to start with the right first principle. How far we can do without, or control, or merely modify the disadvantages of buying and selling is quite another matter. But the disadvantages do arise from buying and selling, and not from producing: not even from over-producing. And it is some satisfaction to realise that we are not living in a nightmare in which No is the same as Yes; that even the modern world has not actually gone mad, with all its ingenious attempts to do so; that two and two do in fact make four; and that the man who has four apples really has more than the man who has three. For some modern metaphysicians and moral philosophers seem disposed to leave us in doubt on these points. It is not the fundamental reason in things that is at fault; it is a particular hitch or falsification, arising from a very recent trick of regarding everything only in relation to trade. Trade is all very well in its way, but Trade has been put in the place of Truth. Trade, which is in its nature a secondary or dependent thing, has been treated as a primary and independent thing; as an absolute. The moderns, mad upon mere multiplication, have even made a plural out of what is eternally singular, in the sense of single. They have taken what all ancient philosophers called the Good, and translated it as the Goods.

I believe that certain mystics, in the American business world, protested against the slump by pinning labels to their coats inscribed, “Trade Is Good,” along with other similar proclamations, such as, “Capone Is Dead,” or “Cancer Is Pleasant,” or “Death Is Abolished,” or any other hard realistic truths for which they might find space upon their persons. But what interests me about these magicians is that, having decided to call up ideal conditions by means of spells and incantations to control the elements, they did not (so to speak) understand the elements of the elements. They did not go to the root of the matter, and imagine that their troubles had really come to an end. Rather they worshipped the means instead of the end. While they were about it, they ought to have said, not “Trade is Good,” but “Living Is Good,” or “Life Is Good.” I suppose it would be too much to expect such thoroughly respectable people to say, “God Is Good”; but it is really true that their conception of what is good lacks the philosophical finality that belonged to the goodness of God. When God looked on created things and saw that they were good, it meant that they were good in themselves and as they stood; but by the modern mercantile idea, God would only have looked at them and seen that they were The Goods. In other words, there would be a label tied to the tree or the hill, as to the hat of the Mad Hatter, with “This Style, 10/6.” All the flowers and birds would be ticketed with their reduced prices; all the creation would be for sale or all the creatures seeking employment; with all the morning stars making sky-signs together and all the Sons of God shouting for jobs. In other words, these people are incapable of imagining any good except that which comes from bartering something for something else. The idea of a man enjoying a thing in itself, for himself, is inconceivable to them. The notion of a man eating his own apples off his own apple-tree seems like a fairy-tale. Yet the fall from that first creation that was called good has very largely come from the restless impotence for valuing things in themselves; the madness of the trader who cannot see any good in a good, except as something to get rid of. It was once admitted that with sin and death there entered the world something that we call change. It is none the less true and tragic, because what we called change, we called afterwards exchange. Anyhow, the result of that extravagance of exchange has been that when there are too many apples there are too few apple-eaters. I do not insist on the symbol of Eden, or the parable of the apple-tree, but it is odd to notice that even that accidental image pursues us at every stage of this strange story. The last result of treating a tree as a shop or a store instead of as a store-room, the last ettect ot treating apples as goods rather than as good, has been in a desperate drive of public charity and in poor men selling apples in the street.

In all normal civilisations the trader existed and must exist. But in all normal civilisations the trader was the exception; certainly he was never the rule; and most certainly he was never the ruler. The predominance which he has gained in the modern world is the cause of all the disasters of the modern world. The universal habit of humanity has been to produce and consume as part of the same process; largely conducted by the same people in the same place. Sometimes goods were produced and consumed on the same great feudal manor; sometimes even on the same small peasant farm. Sometimes there was a tribute from serfs as yet hardly distinguishable from slaves; sometimes there was a cooperation between free-men which the superficial can hardly distinguish from communism. But none of these many historical methods, whatever their vices or limitations, was strangled in the particular tangle of our own time; because most of the people, for most of the time, were thinking about growing food and then eating it; not entirely about growing food and selling it at the stiffest price to somebody who had nothing to eat. And I for one do not believe that there is any way out of the modern tangle, except to increase the proportion of the people who are living according to the ancient simplicity. Nobody in his five wits proposes that there should be no trade and no traders. Nevertheless, it is important to remember, as a matter of mere logic, that there might conceivably be great wealth, even if there were no trade and no traders. It is important for the sort of man whose only hope is that Trade Is Good or whose only secret terror is that Trade Is Bad. In principle, prosperity might be very great, even if trade were very bad. If a village were so fortunately situated that, for some reason, it was easy for every family to keep its own chickens, to grow its own vegetables, to milk its own cow and (I will add) to brew its own beer, the standard of life and property might be very high indeed, even though the long memory of the Oldest Inhabitant only recorded two or three pure transactions of trade; if he could only recall the one far-off event of his neighbour buying a new hat from a gipsy's barrow; or the singular incident of Farmer Billings purchasing an umbrella.

As I have said, I do not imagine, or desire, that things would ever be quite so simple as that. But we must understand things in their simplicity before we can explain or correct their complexity. The complexity of commercial society has become intolerable, because that society is commercial and nothing else. The whole mind of the community is occupied, not with the idea of possessing things, but with the idea of passing them on. When the simple enthusiasts already mentioned say that Trade is Good, they mean that all the people who possess goods are perpetually parting with them. These Optimists presumably invoke the poet, with some slight emendation of the poet's meaning, when he cries aloud, 'Our souls are love and a perpetual farewell.' In that sense, our individualistic and commercial modern society is actually the very reverse of a society founded on Private Property. I mean that the actual direct and isolated enjoyment of private property, as distinct from the excitement of exchanging it or getting a profit on it, is rather rarer than in many simple communities that seem almost communal in their simplicity. In the case of this sort of private consumption, which is also private production, it is very unlikely that it will run continually into overproduction. There is a limit to the number of apples a man can eat, and there will probably be a limit, drawn by his rich and healthy hatred of work, to the number of apples which he will produce but cannot eat. But there is no limit to the number of apples he may possibly sell; and he soon becomes a pushing, dexterous and successful Salesman and turns the whole world upside-down. For it is he who produces this huge pantomimic paradox with which this rambling reflection began. It is he who makes a wilder revolution than the apple of Adam which was the loosening of death, or the apple of Newton which was the apocalypse of gravitation, by proclaiming the supreme blasphemy and heresy, that the apple was made for the market and not for the mouth. It was he, by starting the wild race of pouring endless apples into a bottomless market, who opened the abyss of irony and contradiction into which we are staring to-day. That trick of treating the trade as the test, and the only test, has left us face to face with a piece of stark staring nonsense written in gigantic letters across the world; more gigantic than all its own absurd advertisements and announcements; the statement that the more we produce the less we possess.

Oscar Wilde would probably have fainted with equal promptitude, if told he was being used in an argument about American salesmanship, or in defence of a thrifty and respectable family life on the farm. But it does so happen that one true epigram, among many of his false epigrams, sums up correctly and compactly a certain truth, not (I am happy to say) about Art, but about all that he desired to separate from Art; ethics and even economics. He said in one of his plays: "A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing." It is extraordinarily true; and the answer to most other things that he said. But it is yet more extraordinary that the modern men who make that mistake most obviously are not the cynics. On the contrary, they are those who call themselves the Optimists; perhaps even those who would call themselves the Idealists; certainly those who regard themselves as the Regular Guys and the Sons of Service and Uplift. It is too often those very people who have spoilt all their good effect, and weakened their considerable good example in work and social contact, by that very error: that things are to be judged by the price and not by the value. And since Price is a crazy and incalculable thing, while Value is an intrinsic and indestructible thing, they have swept us into a society which is no longer solid but fluid, as unfathomable as a sea and as treacherous as a quicksand. Whether anything more solid can be built again upon a social philosophy of values, there is now no space to discuss at length here; but I am certain that nothing solid can be built on any other philosophy; certainly not upon the utterly un-philosophical philosophy of blind buying and selling; of bullying people into purchasing what they do not want; of making it badly so that they may break it and imagine they want it again; of keeping rubbish in rapid circulation like a dust-storm in a desert; and pretending that you are teaching men to hope, because you do not leave them one intelligent instant in which to despair.

SEX AND PROPERTY

IN the dull, dusty, stale, stiff-jointed and lumbering language, to which most modern discussion is limited, it is necessary to say that there is at this moment the same fashionable fallacy about Sex and about Property. In the older and freer language, in which men could both speak and sing, it is truer to say that the same evil spirit has blasted the two great powers that make the poetry of life; the Love of Woman and the Love of the Land. It is important to observe, to start with, that these two things were closely connected so long as humanity was human, even when it was heathen. Nay, they were still closely connected, even when it was a decadent heathenism. But even the stink of decaying heathenism has not been so bad as the stink of decaying Christianity. The corruption of the best....

For instance, there were throughout antiquity, both in its first stage and its last, modes of idolatry and imagery of which Christian men can hardly speak. “Let them not be so much as named among you.” Men wallowed in the mere sexuality of a mythology of sex; they organised prostitution like priesthood, for the service of their temples; they made pornography their only poetry; they paraded emblems that turned even architecture into a sort of cold and colossal exhibitionism. Many learned books have been written of all these phallic cults; and anybody can go to them for the details, for all I care. But what interests me is this:

In one way all this ancient sin was infinitely superior, immeasurably superior, to the modern sin. All those who write of it at least agree on one fact; that it was the cult of Fruitfulness. It was unfortunately too often interwoven, very closely, with the cult of the fruitfulness of the land. It was at least on the side of Nature. It was at least on the side of Life. It has been left to the last Christians, or rather to the first Christians fully committed to blaspheming and denying Christianity, to invent a new kind of worship of Sex, which is not even a worship of Life. It has been left to the very latest Modernists to proclaim an erotic religion which at once exalts lust and forbids fertility. The new Paganism literally merits the reproach of Swinburne, when mourning for the old Paganism: “and rears not the bountiful token and spreads not the fatherly feast.” The new priests abolish the fatherhood and keep the feast-to themselves. They are worse than

Swinburne's Pagans. The priests of Priapus and Cotytto go into the kingdom of heaven before them.

Now it is not unnatural that this unnatural separation, between sex and fruitfulness, which even the Pagans would have thought a perversion, has been accompanied with a similar separation and perversion about the nature of the love of the land. In both departments there is precisely the same fallacy; which it is quite possible to state precisely. The reason why our contemporary countrymen do not understand what we mean by Property is that they only think of it in the sense of Money; in the sense of salary; in the sense of something which is immediately consumed, enjoyed and expended; something which gives momentary pleasure and disappears. They do not understand that we mean by Property something that includes that pleasure incidentally; but begins and ends with something far more grand and worthy and creative. The man who makes an orchard where there has been a field, who owns the orchard and decides to whom it shall descend, does also enjoy the taste of apples; and let us hope, also, the taste of cider. But he is doing something very much grander, and ultimately more gratifying, than merely eating an apple. He is imposing his will upon the world in the manner of the charter given him by the will of God; he is asserting that his soul is his own, and does not belong to the Orchard Survey Department, or the chief Trust in the Apple Trade. But he is also doing something which was implicit in all the most ancient religions of the earth; in those great panoramas of pageantry and ritual that followed the order of the seasons in China or Babylonia; he is worshipping the fruitfulness of the world. Now the notion of narrowing property merely to enjoying money is exactly like the notion of narrowing love merely to enjoying sex. In both cases an incidental, isolated, servile and even secretive pleasure is substituted for participation in a great creative process; even in the everlasting Creation of the world.

The two sinister things can be seen side by side in the system of Bolshevist Russia; for Communism is the only complete and logical working model of Capitalism. The sins are there a system which are everywhere else a sort of repeated blunder. From the first, it is admitted, that the whole system was directed towards encouraging or driving the worker to spend his wages; to have nothing left on the next pay day; to enjoy everything and consume everything and efface everything; in short, to shudder at the thought of only one crime; the creative crime of thrift. It was a tame extravagance; a sort of disciplined dissipation; a meek and submissive prodigality. For the moment the slave left off drinking all his wages, the moment he began to hoard or hide any property, he would be saving up something which might ultimately purchase his liberty. He might begin to count for something in the State; that is, he might become less of a slave and more of a citizen. Morally considered, there has been nothing quite so unspeakably mean as this Bolshevist generosity. But it will be noted that exactly the same spirit and tone pervades the manner of dealing with the other matter. Sex also is to come to the slave merely as a pleasure; that it may never be a power. He is to know as little as possible, or at least to think as little as possible, of the pleasure as anything else except a pleasure; to think or know nothing of where it comes from or where it will go to, when once the soiled object has passed through his own hands. He is not to trouble about its origin in the purposes of God or its sequel in the posterity of man. In every department he is not a possessor, but only a consumer; even if it be of the first elements of life and fire in so far as they are consumable; he is to have no notion of the sort of Burning Bush that burns and is not consumed. For that bush only grows on the soil, on the real land where human beings can behold it; and the spot on which they stand is holy ground. Thus there is an exact parallel between the two modern moral, or immoral, ideas of social reform. The world has forgotten simultaneously that the making of a Farm is something much larger than the making of a profit, or even a product, in the sense of liking the taste of beetroot sugar; and that the founding of a Family is something much larger than sex in the limited sense of.current literature; which was anticipated in one bleak and blinding flash in a single line of George Meredith; “And eat our pot of honey on the grave.”

ST. THOMAS MORE

MOST would understand the phrase that the mind of More was like a diamond that a tyrant threw away into a ditch, because he could not break it. It is but a metaphor; but it does sometimes happen that the metaphor is many-sided, like the diamond. What moved the tyrant to a sort of terror of that mind was its clarity; it was the very reverse of a cloudy crystal filled only with opalescent dreams or visions of the past. The King and his great Chancellor had been companions as well as contemporaries; in many ways, both were Renaissance men; but in some ways, the man who was the more Catholic was the less medieval. That is, there was perhaps more in the Tudor of that mere musty fag-end of decayed medievalism, which the real Renaissance reformers felt to be the corruption of the time. In More's mind there was nothing but clarity; in Henry's mind, though he was no fool and certainly no Protestant, there was something of confused conservatism. Like many a better man who is an Anglo-Catholic, he had a touch of the antiquary. Thomas More was a better rationalist, which was why there was nothing in his religion that was merely local, or in that sense merely loyal. More's mind was like a diamond also in a power like that of cutting glass; of cutting through things that seemed equally transparent, but were at once less solid and less many-sided. For the true consistent heresies generally look very clear indeed; like Calvinism then or Communism now. They sometimes even look very true; they sometimes even are very true, in the limited sense of a truth that is less than the Truth. They are at once more thin and more brittle than the diamond. For a heresy is not often a mere lie; as Thomas More himself said, "Never was there a heretic that spoke all false." A heresy is a truth that hides all the other truths. A mind like More's was full of light like a house made of windows; but the windows looked out on all sides and in all directions. We might say that, as the jewel has many facets, so the man had many faces; only none of them were masks.

Thus there are so many aspects of this great story, that the difficulty of dealing with it in an article is one of selection, and even more of proportion. I might attempt and fail to do justice to its highest aspect; to that holiness which now stands beyond even Beatitude; I might equally fill the whole space with the homeliest of the jokes in which the great humorist delighted in daily life; perhaps the biggest joke of all being the book called

Utopia. The nineteenth century Utopians imitated the book without seeing the joke. But among a bewildering complexity of such different aspects or angles, I have decided to deal only with two points; not because they were the most important truths about Thomas More, though their importance is very great; but because they are two of the most important truths about the world at this present moment. One appears most clearly in his death and the other in his life; one, perhaps we should rather say, concerns his public life and the other his private life; one is far beyond any adequate admiration and the other may seem in comparison an almost comic bathos; but one hits exactly the right nail on the head in our present discussions about the State; and the other about the Family.

Thomas More died the death of a traitor for defying absolute monarchy; in the strict sense of treating monarchy as an absolute. He was willing, and even eager, to respect it as a relative thing, but not as an absolute thing. The heresy that had just raised its head in his own time was the heresy called the Divine Right of Kings. In that form it is now regarded as an old superstition; but it has already reappeared as a very new superstition, in the form of the Divine Right of Dictators. But most people still vaguely think of it as old; and nearly all of them think it is much older than it is. One of the chief difficulties to-day is to explain to people that this idea was not native to medieval or many older times. People know that the constitutional checks on kings have been increasing for a century or two; they do not realize that any other kind of checks could ever have operated; and in the changed conditions those other checks are hard to describe or imagine. But most certainly medieval men thought of the king as ruling sub deo et lege; rightly translated, “under God and the law,” but also involving something atmospheric that might more vaguely be called, “under the morality implied in all our institutions.” Kings were excommunicated, were deposed, were assassinated, were dealt with in all sorts of defensible and indefensible ways; but nobody thought the whole commonwealth fell with the king, or that he alone had ultimate authority there. The State did not own men so entirely, even when it could send them to the stake, as it sometimes does now where it can send them to the elementary school. There was an idea of refuge, which was generally an idea of sanctuary. In short, in a hundred strange and subtle ways, as we should think them, there was a sort of escape upwards. There were limits to Caesar; and there was liberty with God.

The highest voice of the Church has pronounced that this hero was in the true and traditional sense a Saint and Martyr. And it is appropriate to remember that he does indeed stand, for a rather special reason, with those first Martyrs whose blood was the seed of the Church in the very earliest pagan persecutions. For most of them died; as he did, for refusing to extend a civil loyalty into a religious idolatry. Most of them did not die for refusing to worship Mercury or Venus, or fabulous figures who might be supposed not to exist; or others like Moloch or Priapus whom we might well hope do not exist. Most of them died for refusing to worship somebody who certainly did exist; and even somebody whom they were quite prepared to obey but not to worship. The typical martyrdom generally turned on the business of burning incense before the statue of Divus Augustus; the sacred image of the Emperor. He was not necessarily a demon to be destroyed; he was simply a despot who must not be turned into a deity. That is where their case came so very close to the practical problem of Thomas More; and so very near to the practical problem of mere State-worship to-day. And it is typical of all Catholic thought that men died in torments, not because their foes "spoke all false"; but simply because they would not give an unreasonable reverence where they were perfectly prepared to give a reasonable respect. For us the problem of Progress is always a problem of Proportion: improvement is reaching a right proportion, not merely moving in one direction. And our doubts about most modern developments, about the Socialists in the last generation, or the Fascists in this generation, do not arise from our having any doubts at all about the desirability of economic justice, or of national order, any more than Thomas More bothered his head to object to a hereditary monarchy. He objected to the Divine Right of Kings.

In the very deepest sense he is thus the champion of Liberty in his public life and his still more public death. In his private life he is the type of a truth even less understood to-day; the truth that the real habitation of Liberty is the home. Modern novels and newspapers and problem plays have been piled up in one huge rubbish-heap to hide this simple fact; yet it is a fact that can be proved quite simply. Public life must be rather more regimented than private life; just as a man cannot wander about in the traffic of Piccadilly exactly as he could wander about in his own garden. Where there is traffic there will be regulation of traffic; and this is quite as true, or even more true, where it is what we should call an illicit traffic; where the most modern governments organize sterilization to-day and may organize infanticide to-morrow. Those who hold the modern superstition that the State can do no wrong will be bound to accept such a thing as right. If individuals have any hope of protecting their freedom, they must protect their family life. At the worst there will be rather more personal adaptation in a household than in a concentration camp; at the best there will be rather less routine in a family than in a factory. In any tolerably healthy home the rules are at least partly affected by things that cannot possibly affect fixed laws; for instance, the thing we call a sense of humour.

Therefore More is vividly important as the Humorist; as representing that special phase of the Humanist. Behind his public life, which was so grand a tragedy, there was a private life that was a perpetual comedy. He was, as Mr. Christopher Hollis says in his excellent study, “an incorrigible leg-puller.” Everybody knows, of course, that the comedy and the tragedy met as they meet in Shakespeare, on that last high wooden stage where his drama ended. In that terrible moment he realized and relished the grand joke of the human body, as of a sort of lovable lumber; gravely discussed whether his beard had committed treason; and said in hoisting himself up the ladder, “See me safely up; coming down I can take care of myself.”

But Thomas More never came down that ladder. He had done with all descents and downward goings, and what had been himself vanished from men’s eyes almost in the manner of his Master, who being lifted up shall draw all men after Him. And the dark closed over him and the clouds came between; until long afterwards the wisdom that can a read such secrets saw him fixed far above our heads like a returning star; and established his station in the skies.

THE RETURN OF CAESAR

WHETHER or no it be an example of first and second childhood, I sometimes have a whimsical fancy that I shall end as I began, trying to make some sense out of what is called Liberalism in politics. There is a Fleet Street story about me, which may be a fact though I have entirely forgotten it, that when I was asked if I was a Liberal, I answered, "I am the only Liberal." It will be agreed that, in these days, I should be very nearly the only Liberal. But I hope nobody will accuse me of wanting to be a Liberal leader. The Liberal Party now consists entirely of leaders — or rather mis-leaders. And all they want, all they have left to pray for, is one single simple solitary human being who is willing to be misled. On second thoughts, I rather doubt whether I will offer myself even to fulfil this humble office; whatever may be my qualifications for filling all the seats at a public meeting, and constituting the whole audience, while my five leaders address me from the platform, urging me to five urgent but incompatible courses of action. No, the sense in which I have again become conscious of the existence of purely political Liberalism is not so much due to what remains of it, as to what has vanished from it; not to what the Liberals say as to what they do not say. In the face of fashionable Fascism, and the toppling simplifications of the Totalitarian State, there really is a great deal that ought to be said for Liberalism; or, in clearer language, for Liberty.

Many things return; and thank God we live now in a time when we can talk once more about Church and State; though nowadays it generally means the Catholic Church and the Totalitarian State. But at least we have abolished the most illiberal of the illiberal limitations of Liberalism. We can recognise religion in history at the back of European ideas, including modern ideas; and in this connection the story of Church and State is very strange indeed. Of course, the one thing that has really confused the story of Church and State is the thing called the State Church. But that is a mere illogical interlude; in which God holds his authority from Caesar; instead of Caesar holding it from God. The normal relation between Church and State, through most of the varied phases of history, has not been exactly an establishment, but something more like what we have seen reappear in Germany. When there was not a conflict, there was a Concordat. It will be noted that the Church generally had a Concordat with her enemies rather than her friends. There was a dispute with Napoleon and a Concordat with Napoleon: a dispute with Mussolini and a Concordat with Mussolini; a dispute with Hitler and a Concordat with Hitler. And though the word would not perhaps have been used, and would not perhaps have been correct, something of the same paradox broods like a suspended storm over the State and Church in their relations in even earlier times. It marks the Church in her relation with the Roman Emperors; in her relation witn tne Greek Emperors; in her relation with the German Emperors. There was always some sort of Concordat, and there was never any complete concord.

It needs nearly a lifetime to trace the curve or orbit of the Church, and the rhythm of things returning. But to one growing up as a Liberal, and in many ways still a Liberal, the chief interest of the last days is in this. The Church, roughly speaking, almost always remains at about the same distance from the State and its experiments. There are exceptions, of course; when an Emperor persecutes the Church or the Church excommunicates an Emperor. The Church could hardly be expected to concord very much, even in the coldest manner, with Nero or the No-God Movement in Moscow. But it is most often found at about the same distance from the State as it is now from the Totalitarian State. Leo XIII stood at about that distance from the French Republican State. Few Catholics need originally have stood at any much greater distance even from the French Revolution. But the very names will serve to remind us of the vital point at issue. It is the State that changes; it is the State that destroys; it is nearly always the State that persecutes. The Totalitarian State is now making a clean sweep of all our old notions of liberty, even more than the French Revolution made a clean sweep of all the old ideas of loyalty. It is the Church that excommunicates; but, in that very word, implies that a communion stands open for a restored communicant. It is the State that exterminates; it is the State that abolishes absolutely and altogether; whether it is the American State abolishing beer, or the Fascist State abolishing parties, or the Hitlerite State abolishing almost everything but itself.

Now suppose, for the sake of argument, that I did become again merely an ordinary Liberal, as the term was understood when I was active in Liberal politics. Suppose I thought the time had come to remind men that there really is an intellectual advantage in hearing all sides; a help to order in a measure of liberty; a healthy irritation in government by debate.

Suppose I said (as I do say) that every government ought to be checked by an opposition; suppose I said (as I do not say) that free international exchange is demonstrably better than all this economic nationalism. Suppose I said that recognised majority rule is better than random minority rule; suppose I said that Democracy as a failure is better than Dictatorship as a success. I could say all this, and much more, and remain a quite ordinary and orthodox member of the ancient Church. But I could not say it, over a great part of the modern world, without being punished by the modern State. Rome with its religious authority would not silence me. But Fascism with its secular authority would silence me. Bolshevism with its secular authority would silence me. Hitlerism with its secular authority would silence me. When I began to live and (alas) to write, all the other Liberals had inherited a huge legend that all persecution had come from the Church. Some of them still mumble old memories about the Spanish Inquisition (a thing started strictly by the State); with the fact staring them in the face that the actual persecution now going on in Spain is the spoliation of Spaniards, simply because they are Catholic priests and schoolmasters. But anyhow, it was supposed that what was called superstition was somehow the mother of persecution. I appeal to all my fellow-Liberals to admit that the facts have flatly contradicted this idea. Every Catholic enjoys much more freedom in Catholicism than any Liberal does under Bolshevism or Fascism. I might have been a Liberal and belonged to the Centrum in Germany or the Parti to Populare in Italy; it is not the Church but the State that would stop me. For the State has returned with all its ancient terrors out of antiquity; with the Gods of the City thundering from the sky and, marching with the pageant in iron panoply the ghosts of a hundred tyrants; and we have begun to understand in what wide fields and playgrounds of liberty, the Faith that made us free has so long allowed us to wander and to play.

AUSTRIA

LAST year, the representative of all that remains of the Holy Roman Empire was murdered by the barbarians. As an atrocity it has been adequately denounced; and it breeds in some of us rather a dumb sort of disgust, almost as if it had been done not by barbarians but by beasts. Perhaps the only further fact to be noted, on that side, is the fact that this is the only kind of effort in which these clumsy people are not merely clumsy.

The Nordic man of the Nazi type in Germany is a very slow thinker, and incredibly backward and behind the times in science and philosophy. That is why, for instance, he clings to the word "Aryan," as if he were his own great-grandfather laboriously poring over the first pages of Max Muller, under the concentrated stare of the astounded ethnologists of later days. He is slow in a great many things; as, for instance, in releasing prisoners who are admittedly innocent; or in answering questions put by foreign critics or Catholic bishops. We have good reason to know that he is slow in paying his debts; to the point of ceasing to pay them. He is very slow in bringing about the Utopia that he promised to the German people; the complete financial stability and the total disappearance of unemployment. He is slow in a thousand things, from the length of his meals to the lengthiness of his metaphysics. But in one thing he is not slow but almost slick. He is swift to shed innocent blood; he really has a certain technique in the matter of murdering other people; and the prospect of this sport alone can move him to an animation that is almost human. Hitler really killed quite a creditable number of people for one week-end holiday; and the assassination of Dollfuss did show some touch of that efficiency, which the Nazis once promised to display in other fields of activity.

But it is much more important to insist on the large human and historic matters mentioned at the beginning of this article. Dollfuss died like a loyal and courageous man, asking forgiveness for his murderers; and the souls of the just are in the hands of God, however much their enemies (with that mark of mere mud that is stamped over all they do) take a pleasure in denying them the help of their religion. But Dollfuss dead, even more than Dollfuss living, is also a symbol of something of immense moment to mankind, which is practically never mentioned by our politicians or our papers. We call it for convenience Austria; in a sense we might more truly call it Europe; but, above all (for this is the vital and quite neglected fact), it would be strictly correct and consistent with history to call it Germany. The very fact that the name of "Germany" has been taken from the Austrians and given to the Prussians sums up the tragedy of three hundred years. It was the tale of the war waged by the barbarians against the Empire; the real original German Empire. It began with the first Prussian shot in the Thirty Years' War; it ended with the shot that killed the Austrian Chancellor.

Whether we call it the Empire, or the Old Germany or the culture of the Danube, what Austria meant and means is this. That it is normal for

Europeans, even for Germans, to be civilised; that it is normal for Europeans, even for Germans, to be Christians; and, we must in historic honesty add, normal for them to be Catholics. This culture always incurred the hatred of the barbarians to the north-east; and in the nineteenth century a barbarian of genius, named Bismarck, actually managed to transfer to Prussia the prestige that had always normally belonged to Austria. That is the broad fact which is always left out in all modern enlightened discussion; for it involves two things; an elementary knowledge of history, which is rare, and an elementary knowledge of recent history, which is much rarer than a knowledge of ancient history. There is always a chance that about six politicians have heard of the Roman Empire; and perhaps two and a half politicians have even heard of the Holy Roman Empire. Among the scholarly leader-writers who have hitherto hardly noticed the existence of the Austrians, there are some who have read something about the Ostro-Goths or perhaps (if they are very scholarly) really do know much more about Austrasians than about Austrians. It is sometimes possible to arouse faint interest in anything remotely historic and always possible to arouse a fashionable fuss about anything prehistoric. But the facts which led up to the facts which stare us in the face, those are known practically to nobody in the age of newspapers. And perhaps next to nobody among our rulers will know what is meant by saying that the filthy butchery at Vienna was but the continuation of a policy, expressed in the invasion of Silesia and the victory of Sadowa.

We have at least learned one lesson to-day; that old things return. This is simply that very old remembrance of our race; the barbarian invasion. This is not the Corporative State; or the Fascist Theory; or the thousand theories, including our own, for improving our ancient civilisation. This is the Turks besieging Vienna. If indeed it be not an injustice to the stately, the stable and the reverent religion of Mahomet to compare it with the feverish fads and fallacies that chase each other across the half-baked and half-baptized Teutonism of the North. This is, at least, what all men meant by the Turks besieging Vienna. It is the centre of our civilisation in peril; it is the blow of the barbarian when for once, in his blindness, he happens to aim at the heart.

THE SCRIPTURE READER

MR. BERNARD SHAW has written a very Protestant tract, on the paramount duty of reading the Bible, and especially of re-reading the Bible; of course in the light of Private Judgment. For Private Judgment is never wrong, just as Private Property is never right. It is something of a triumph to have carried principles so entangled and contradictory, unchanged, untroubled and unenlightened, through a long and valuable life. Some technical difficulties may still prevent Mr. Shaw's Bible tract from being included in the literature of the British and Foreign Bible Society; but I should imagine that they would soon be overcome; now that the old stuff that calls itself the Modern Mind has become such a muddy amalgam of Puritanism and Modernism that it does not matter, so long as a man reads his Bible, whether he denies his God. But I, who love and admire Bernard Shaw, cannot help being sorry that he should have returned from the land of the Boers so completely transformed into a Baptist missionary beginning to have doubts about Habakkuk. Perhaps it is a judgment on him for having supported the Imperialists in the Boer War; because the Webbs had the truly wonderful notion that it was "practical."

Of course, like every other sectarian "Scripture-reader," Mr. Shaw re-reads the Bible and finds something different from what the last sectarian found. That is the whole fun and futility of this "Sunday game," which has now been played for nearly four hundred years, and is about played out. But the old sectaries, who discovered Calvinism or Quakerism or Mormonism in the Bible, at least had the tenacity to keep hold of what they found; and finish their programme logically. But, alas, Mr. Shaw is a true Modernist in the fact that he cannot complete even his own argument, for fear it should end by proving something. His new theory of Holy Scripture is broadly this; that the Old Testament Prophets were each of them dealing with a different God; though they seem to have been under the impression that it was the same God. Thus the God of Job is better than the God of Noah; the God of Micah is better than the God of Job and therefore ... therefore what? The obvious logical conclusion of the argument would be that the God-Man of the Christians, the Second Person of the Trinity, was better than the God of Micah; and rightly replaced him on progressive principles. But here, of course, Mr. Shaw goes all to pieces; wildly reverses the whole of his own theory of theistic improvement, and collapses, muttering some nonsense about the psychological misfortunes of Jesus. That is only one part of the book; but it is typical of the whole of this jointless inconsequent modern way of writing. Pages upon pages are devoted to showing that primitive gods were leading up to something greater and more splendid; and it is perfectly obvious what they did actually lead up to. But the moment the Modernist sees it, he runs away from it.

The actual story of the Black Girl seems to be modelled on Candide; indeed much of it takes place in the famous garden of Voltaire. It was not really a very wide garden; indeed, it was a narrow garden, but it was a neat garden, according to the Dutch gardening of the period: and it is almost a relief after the jungle of journalese that is now called modern thought. Voltaire, unlike Shaw, had a straightforward and logical plan for his story. Candide is a youth brought up by a German professor in a very nonsensical philosophy called Optimism; like many nonsensical philosophies taught by German professors. It was to the effect that everything in this world fits in with our peace and comfort; whatever else it was, it was almost the opposite of Catholicism, or even Protestantism; for Christians had, if anything, rather exaggerated the truth that life is a vale of tears and a place of trial; that peace could only be found in the monastery or justice on the Day of Judgment. But Voltaire has no difficulty in showing how real life knocked this Teutonic heresy of Optimism to pieces. But it marks the more muddled modern mentality that we do not really know, at the end of Mr. Shaw’s parable, what it is that has been knocked to pieces; or whether the Black Girl has found God, or failed to find God, or found that there is no God to find. Anyhow, she has found Mr. Bernard Shaw, who is acting as Voltaire’s gardener, but has not yet learnt the lucid style and thought of his employer. It must be a comfort to Mr. Shaw at least to know that he is truly a Proletarian. Voltaire said that a man should cultivate his garden. It is the measure of Progress that he has since apparently become a servant cultivating his master’s garden.

For the rest, I know there are many simple people who will console and gratify my old friend by being duly shocked at various passages in his book. It would be almost cruel to deprive him of such comfort; but I confess that I myself remained cold, and could not get anything resembling a decent shock out of the whole business. It always seems to me that we must face the question of whether we are dealing with believers or unbelievers; and only a believer can be a blasphemer. We Catholics must realise that by this time we are living in pagan lands; and that the barbarians around us know not what they do. Of course, those who think Jesus was an ordinary man will talk of Him in an ordinary way. What I complain of is that, even then, they cannot talk of Him in a sensible way. For instance, Mr. Shaw has a long dialogue in which his imaginary Jesus feebly implies the idea that everything can be solved by love, and apparently love of any kind. Now there is not a grain of evidence that the historical Jesus of Nazareth ever said that any such emotion, selfish or sensual or sentimental, must be a substitute for everything else everywhere. Rousseau and the Romantics, in the time of Voltaire, sometimes said something a little like it; and the Church resisted it from the beginning, just as Bernard Shaw wakes up to resist it in the end. It is much more important for us to point out that the attack on the Faith breaks down, by its own folly on its own ground, than to express our own feelings about some of the random results of its invincible ignorance, when it stumbles upon ground more sacred.

AN EXPLANATION

THE last two essays in this collection have so obviously the character of newspaper correspondence, that a word must be added about the circumstances of their appearance. At the request of the B.B.C., I gave an address in their series on Freedom about the Catholic view of the matter; an address which was very much criticised; but I sometimes fancy that the most deadly criticism was involuntary and unconscious. For I could not help feeling that some of my critics must have gone to sleep, and snatched a brief respite from the recital, only to wake again with a start and all the bewilderments of nightmare, to hear the ruthless infliction still going on. I should be the last to blame them; I sometimes nearly go to sleep myself when listening to myself, let alone to anybody so remote from me as I must naturally be from them. But the actual effect, anyhow, was that most of the agonised questions which they asked me afterwards I had already answered before they were asked. At the beginning of the whole address, I explained the beginning of the whole business; that I had been specially asked to speak as a Catholic and therefore as a controversialist. If they asked Sir Oswald Mosley to explain why he was a Fascist, it might or might not be popular; but it would be a little hard on Sir Oswald to complain that he had dragged the subject of Fascism into politics, or the subject ot politics into the B.B.C. Yet to read some of the innocent criticism I have read, one would really suppose I had been asked to give a literary lecture on Milton or Shelley, and had seized the opportunity to deliver a wild eulogy upon Torquemada and Guy Fawkes. If indeed, in this free country where (I am assured) all views can be expressed, it is unpardonable to suggest that the Protestant view of Freedom is wrong, some responsibility must be shared by those who ask the Catholic to explain why the Catholic view is right. For that peculiar diplomatic and tactful art of saying that Catholicism is true, without suggesting for one moment that anti-Catholicism is false, is an art which I am too old a Rationalist to learn at my time of life.

The second legend that arose out of hearing, or not hearing, my wireless speech, was an extraordinary delusion that I made a speech about drink. Out of nineteen hundred words, the newspapers seemed to have selected three words, in the form of the polished epigram, “I like beer.” Now I fear I am so constituted by cultural tradition, that I cannot for the life of me see anything more comic, or eccentric, or provocative, or sensational, about saying, “I like beer,” than about saying, “I like bananas.” But I do most certainly see that there would be something both egotistical and trivial about saying, “I like bananas,” if it were not a part of an ordinary objective argument. And my remark was a part of an objective argument. Only I was arguing for the exact opposite of what they imagine. I said it was well to remember, to start with, that an ordinary poor man from Catholic countries would find what he regarded as ancient universal popular liberties forbidden in Protestant countries. The obvicus instances are Prohibition and the veto on the Irish Sweepstake. I then said that these lighter instances were balanced indifferently for me, because “I like beer; there is nothing that bores me quite so much as horse-racing. But I have some sense of human rights.” In short it is self-evident that I only said I like beer in order to show that it did not matter a curse what I liked. Yet in face of this fact, an excellent cultivated weekly paper declared that I should not like Liberty if I did not like beer. The editor handsomely admitted the fact when I drew his attention to it, and my quarrel is not here with him. But further comments were made in the matter, which are the text of one these two essays.

For the rest if any one doubts that there is such a thing as Catholic liberty, I think it can do no harm to let him realise that there is such a thing as Catholic controversy; I mean controversy between Catholics. I have, therefore, included here my reply to some frank and friendly but very definite doubts about my action, that were expressed in one of the very best of the modern Catholic papers. For I feel it would not be fair to answer somewhat controversially a criticism in an Anglican organ, while in any way concealing the fact that I have been criticised also in an organ of my own communion. It will also be clear from the context, I think, that a distinguished Italian, Dr. Crespi, who speaks specially as an opponent of Fascism, attacked me at a slightly different angle. And this alone would illustrate the main fact; that the substance of my speech was concerned with all sorts of large modern problems, and had no more to do with my taste in beer than with my familiar appearance as a fashionable figure at Ascot. I pointed out that, by limiting liberty to preaching and printing, we had given a huge advantage to cranks over common Christian people; that we had lost a peasantry and were living under a plutocracy. Indeed, some critics combined the contradictory accusations; having proved that I was wholly concentrated upon booze and betting, they rushed on to rend the sky with cries against my sweeping slanders on the Press, the Parliament, the Landlord System and the British Empire. If they will try compressing all these topics into twenty minutes, they will understand how easy it is for the hearer (even if he manages to keep awake) to miss the proportion and the point.

WHY PROTESTANTS PROHIBIT (1)

IT is with mingled respect and regret that I differ from a paper I admire so much as I do the Catholic Herald, or a critic for whom I have so much sympathy as I have for Dr. Crespi. I have already said that the Herald is nearly the best, or the only newspaper we have; and my confidence in Dr. Crespi’s sincerity is so complete that I unhesitatingly accept his assurance that he has both read and heard my address on Liberty; for without that assurance, I might be tempted now and then to think he had done neither. But this distressing exhibition of mine seems to have been such a shock to him as to leave him with a strange impression that I uttered some sort of eulogy, or at least apology, touching Italian Fascism, or more generally, the new dictatorships in Europe. Now as a fact, I was very careful to explain that I did nothing of the sort. I said of such a system that I detested some forms of it, that I did not defend any form of it; that it practically proclaimed itself a tyranny, and that I was quite ready to treat it as a tyranny. What I said was that this tyranny, even if it was a tyranny, had not in fact torn up certain traditions of popular freedom in Catholic countries, which have been, and are being, more and more ruthlessly and rapidly torn up and uprooted in Protestant countries. If I say, “Even Nero never forbade people to grow corn,” I am not uttering a eulogy on Nero; and that is the sort of thing I might say about the Prohibitionists who forbade men to drink wine. But there is indeed a curious irony about my two friendly critics on this occasion. My own friendly feeling for the Herald is largely founded on the fact that it does print solid blocks of information about what wicked foreigners have to say for themselves, including Fascists and Hitlerites; so that we can judge for ourselves how wicked the foreigners are. And my unfriendly criticism of British plutocracy is largely founded on the fact that its monopolist newspapers never do this; being owned by one or two millionaires ignorant of Europe and interested only in some silly stunt or slogan. In short, I only say that if dictators suppress newspapers, newspaper proprietors suppress news. And yet I am rebuked for disliking this, even by those who avoid it.

Similarly, I warmly respect Dr. Crespi for trying to free his country from what he regards as oppression and wrong. But apparently he will not allow me to do the same thing for my country. I fear, on this point, I must be firm with him. I respectfully refuse to allow my native land to be ruined by blindness and pride and hypocrisy, and its heart eaten out by corruption and the worship of wealth; merely in order that Dr. Crespi may have a wholly imaginary England to flourish in the face of Signor Mussolini.

I need not in this space destroy the delusion in detail; because for most English economists (especially Catholics) it is already destroyed. I will only say that his paean in praise of nineteenth-century capitalism would have been very welcome to the rich in the nineteenth century; and greatly encouraged those who laid on the millions a yoke little better than slavery. But I will give him a tip: from one who knows (I make bold to say) more about England than he does. Whenever he sees our newspapers announcing revival of trade it simply means that employers have found out how to cut down the wage bill. All recent industrial history here has been a scheme to lower wages; beginning with the triumph of the lock-out that crushed the miners, followed by vindictive laws against Labour after the general strike, and ending by taking advantage of the default on gold, to pay every workman a pound that is not a pound. That is how we do it here. I did not argue whether it is worse when done by a despot or by this anonymous conspiracy. But the tragedy (and to me despotism instead of democracy, even theoretical democracy, is a tragedy) is largely due to reaction against commercial conspiracies. For the rest let not your Wireless Expert weep for me; or imagine that all will be bewildered who "have not the key." I happen to have stacks of letters from very poor people thanking me for pointing out how the small men are now crushed in England if they attempt independence. They are turned out of house and shop by the hundred, by modern monopolist aggression. They have the key all right; it is called in slang the key of the street. None of them has heard ot the Keys of Peter; but, being poor like St. Peter, they know how poor men are goaded in the House of the Governor; and what rage rises in them against the servant of Caiaphas. They support me sufficiently, thank you, in not encouraging the Englishman to play the Pharisee.

The fact is that Protestant tyranny is totally different from Catholic tyranny; let alone Catholic liberty. It is ineradicably rooted in a totally opposite motive and moral philosophy. You seem to suggest that, where Protestant restrictions are really excessive it is but a part of the normal temptation of officials to magnify their office.

Under your favour, it is nothing of the sort. That is just the point of the whole business. Protestantism is in its nature prone to what may be called Prohibitionism. I do not mean prohibition of drink (though it happens to be a convenient comparison: that none ot the ten thousand tyrants of Mediterranean history would ever have dreamed of uprooting the vine since Pentheus was torn in pieces); I mean that the Protestant tends to prohibit, rather than to curtail or control. His theory of Prohibition is rooted in his theory of progress; which began with expectation of the Millennium; but has ended in similar expectations ot the Superman. I have no notion what Dr Crespi means by my golden age: after Eden I know of no golden age in the past. But Protestant progress does imply a golden age in the future — and one utterly cut off or altered from the past. By now this Dawnism is deeply affected by Darwinism. Man is a monkey who has lost his tail and does not want it back. It is not a question of docking his tail, because it takes up too much room; or telling him to curl up his tail and only wave it on festive occasions; as in the Catholic view of discipline and recreation. No men need tails; so they need amputation.

Now the modern Protestant applies this absolute idea of amputation to all parts of problematical human nature; to all popular customs or historic traditions. He does not mean that men should be restrained in them just now; he means that men should drop them for ever, like the monkey's tail. When puritans abolish ritualism, it means there shall be no more ritual. When prohibitionists abolished beer, they swore that a whole new generation would grow up and never know the taste of it. When Protestants look to the solution of Socialism, most of them do not merely mean to attack the contemporary congestion called capitalism; they mean to abolish for ever the very idea of private property.

Thus there is a fanatical quality, sweeping, final, almost suicidal, in Protestant reforms which there is not even in Catholic repressions. Once Puritanism pervaded America, once Prussianism pervaded Germany, there appeared a new type of law; sterilization or compulsory eugenics, from which even the dictators ot the Latin tradition would shrink. There have been any number of good Catholics who might be called puritans, from Savonarola to Manning who made their little bonfires of the vanities; but they never mistook them for the everlasting bonfire.

There have been any number of bad Catholics who might be called tyrants from Borgia to Bomba, who drilled or destroyed from hate or ambition; but even when torturing men they never thought they were twisting or altering Man. Therefore their prohibitions were never so prohibitionist. Mussolini may be wrong to suppress newspapers; but who can imagine Mussolini saying, “The world will never again be cursed with printed leaves,” as Jennings Bryan would say, “We shall never again be cursed with alcoholic liquor”? I think some of the recent Fascist schemes for drilling children reach the ridiculous; but they do not reach the point of saying that children should be kept from their mothers; a point which numberless Protestant progressive followers of Wells or Shaw would reach in one wild bound. In short, apart from Catholic liberty, Catholic tyranny is either temporary in the sense of a penance or a fast, or temporary in the sense of a state of siege or a proclamation of martial law. But Protestant liberty is far more oppressive than Catholic tyranny. For Protestant liberty is only the unlimited liberty of the rich to destroy an unlimited number of the liberties of the poor.

The B.B.C., much to the credit of its own relatively sound sense of liberty, having asked me specially for what I thought about Catholicism, I did certainly divulge the secret that I thought it was true; and that, therefore, even great cultures falling away from it, in any direction, had fallen into falsehood. I fully appreciate the desire to be fair or friendly that may lead anyone to deplore this disclosure; but I do not myself believe it will do an atom of good to anyone, least of all to the English, to whitewash or conceal the bad results of heresy in history. I was, therefore, a little puzzled when a contributor called it “a sectarian note.” Somehow, I had not expected anybody on the Catholic Herald to call the Catholic Church a sect.

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1. Letter to the Catholic Herald.

WHERE IS THE PARADOX?

A WRITER on a High Church paper, being full of the lyric muse, recently described me as a “prolix Papist professor of paradox”; a line which it is my firm intention to extend into a poem of no less than nine verses depending upon the letter p; by which alliterative industry the unaccountable absence of any allusion to polygamous Popes, poisoning Pontiffs, piratical prelates and pestilent peasantries, will be supplied and made good at my own expense. And though the editor very gracefully apologised for having been accidentally prevented, doubtless by my prolixity, from discovering what I actually said in the passage he criticised, another critic has since then broken out on the same paper in the same literary style; and described the same statement as going “beyond such terminological inexactitude as is permissible in the most putrid paradox”; and saying I devote myself to the propaganda of the gutter. I rather wish I knew what it is that makes the most distant prospect of me (of me, a mere dot on the crowded horizon) throw an honest gentleman at the Faith House, Tufton Street, into such astonishing convulsions. It is all the more mysterious because, so far as I am concerned, it is entirely unprovoked. I have never made any particular attack on the Anglo-Catholic theory, or the Anglican Church, or upon any Anglicans, as such. I know the Anglo-Catholic theory can be honestly held; for I held it myself for many years. I have the greatest respect for those who are in such a state of conviction; as well as the greatest sympathy for those who are in any stage of doubt. I still have a large number of Anglo-Catholic friends, who do not find me so very putrid and prolix, and, though of course I differ from them, I have always rather avoided mere dispute with them; partly because there are so many things much more in need of being disputed; and partly because I know from experience that it often does more harm than good. I used to read the paper in question because it was a good paper; and until quite recently a good-humoured paper. Why so innocuous a reader should have this extraordinary effect on the other readers and writers, I do not clearly understand. But the effect is so extraordinary that the critic falls back desperately on a sort of half-defence of Puritanism, of Protestantism and of Prussianism; though these are things which all the old Anglo-Catholics used to denounce, and which I used to denounce quite as much when I was myself an Anglo-Gatholic. On a former occasion, for instance, in the same strained way, it picked a particular personal quarrel with me merely because I joined with the whole civilised world in deploring the assassination of Dollfuss. If it were only a matter of personal quarrels, it would not be worth referring to again; for I am quite content with the admission already made about the facts in dispute; and all is gas and gaiters. But there are much more important quarrels, which concern all Christendom and especially this country, about which I can hardly leave an important organ of opinion under so false an impression.

Touching Mr. C. E. Douglas, the smeller out of putrid paradoxes, I need only record that he complains of "an unhistorical use of the word Catholic," and assures us that we should be content with the fact that clergy of the national church are attached to nearly all our institutions, as a guarantee that "in theory, the Catholic religion is the official religion of the nation." I can only say that if he used his imagination about our point of view, as much as I try to use my imagination about his, it would, I think, dawn upon him that it is not altogether unreasonable in a real Catholic, or even a real Anglo-Catholic, to find this official reassurance a little thin. Certainly, in that sense, there are "Catholic" priests attached to all sorts of things; there is a "Catholic" bishop preaching that science has destroyed the whole original Christian scheme; there is a "Catholic" dean who booms Birth-Prevention like a quack medicine; there is a "Catholic" canon who is ready to "break bread" apparently with anybody from Mormons to Moslems; at least I myself should rather prefer the Moslems. But I cannot believe that either Mr. Douglas or the Editor of the paper really regards that retrospective breakfast as a substitute for the Blessed Sacrament. But though Mr. Douglas's view of our scruples is not highly sympathetic or discerning, there is one point on which Mr. Douglas endears himself to me, though I dare not hope that I am likely to endear myself to him. He may think what he likes about me, so long as he will go on thinking what he now thinks about Prussia. Because I classed Prussia with England among the Protestant countries, he protests against anything like a suggestion that they are the same sort of countries; and there I am warmly with him. They have certain negative things in common; but even in these it would be true to say that the Prussian prefers to be bullied where the Englishman only submits to be blinded. But England is a thousand times jollier and more human as a national culture than Prussia; the disease is milder and the mood more healthy. But it is a mood which is weakened by the absence of a militant creed of Christian morals, and the power to define and defend. The test could best be made by the introduction of some of the new abnormal laws already threatening the world in the name of science. Suppose something of the type of Compulsory Sterilisation or Compulsory Contraception really stalks through the modern State, leading the march of human progress through abortion to infanticide. If the heathens in North Germany received it, they would accept it with howls of barbaric joy, as one of the sacred commands of the Race Religion; the proceedings very probably terminating (by that time) with a little human sacrifice. If the English received it, they would accept it as law-abiding citizens; that is, as something between well-trained servants and bewildered children. There is a great difference; but not so great as the certainty that the Irish would not accept it at all.

Now the real reason why I have taken the text of these two High Church critics, is that their views happily cancel out upon a point of immense international importance. Mr. Douglas preserves his healthy instinct against Prussia, as being not improbably the source of Prussianism; though he might not admit my view that the error had its original source in Protestantism. But the other writer would protect Protestantism from any such criticism; and falls back on the jolly old catchword of calling Hitler a Catholic. Of course there are countless Catholics whom I think wrong in politics; and countless Catholics who think me wrong in politics. But I wonder if it is much truer to call Hitler a Catholic than to call Bertrand Russell an Anglo-Catholic. He was quite probably christened in an Anglican Church. But the much more important point is the historic and cultural origin of the whole movement of the more admittedly heathenish Hitlerism. The Anglican critic says that this tribal cult of triumph began in Bavaria. It would be as sensible to say that it began in England; because it was popularised, long before anybody had ever heard of Hitler, by Houston Stewart Chamberlain. In fact, the movement began before the Great War; before the Franco-Prussian War; and has its origins far back in history, in the fact that the Protestant edges of Germany only partly emerged from barbarism and soon relapsed into paganism. But in its present practical form, it is simply the tail-end, we might say the rag-tag-and-bobtail of the nineteenth-century Prussianism; the camp-followers of the far better disciplined army of Bismarck. Nobody understands its very rowdy revivalism who does not understand that it is merely a revival. To suppose it began with recent headlines about Hitler is newspaper history, which is knowing no history but only news; and that frequently untrue. The movement that has actually abolished Bavaria, and left no State alive except the Bismarckian Empire, is but the last phase of the Bismarckian plan to Prussianise Germany, by crushing and outnumbering the Catholics of the Rhine; and stealing the old Imperial Crown from the other Catholics of the Danube. In short, he set up a new Protestant Empire, to dwarf and depose the old Catholic Empire; and Hitler is his heir and his executor.

These things can easily be shown to be facts, to anybody who knows anything of what happened before the newspapers of a few months ago. We need merely ask what Bavaria was like when it was Bavaria; before it felt the pressure from Prussia. When Bavaria was allowed to be Bavarian, all sorts of things were said against the Bavarians; that they were dreamy, that they were drunken, that they were ridiculously romantic, that they were mad on music, and so on. But nobody ever said that they were stiff or rigid or ruthless or inhuman or mad on mere official centralisation and militaristic discipline. That particular sort of cold brutality came from Prussian prestige; it could not possibly have come from anything else. And that Prussianism came from Protestantism; not, of course, in the sense that it came to infect all Protestants, or that there are not millions of good Protestants free from this error, or suffering from other errors. But it was a historical fruit of Protestantism; and that is not merely a historical fact; it can also be clearly traced as a philosophical truth. The racial pride of Hitlerism is of the Reformation by twenty tests; because it divides Christendom and makes all such divisions deeper; because it is fatalistic, like Calvinism, and makes superiority depend not upon choice but only on being of the chosen; because it is Caesaro-Papist, putting the State above the Church, as in the claim of Henry VIII; because it is immoral, being an innovator of morals touching things like Eugenics and Sterility; because it is subjective, in suiting the primal fact to the personal fancy, as in asking for a German God, or saying that the Catholic revelation does not suit the German temper; as if I were to say that the Solar System does not suit the Chestertonian taste. I do not apologise, therefore, for saying that this catastrophe in history has been due to heresy; and I cannot see that even an Anglo-Catholic supports his own claim to orthodoxy by denying it.

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Naturally, I have never expected that people would agree with these views. Among the remarks which I must have spoken so badly that hardly;

anybody heard them, was my preliminary remark that I would very much prefer to talk to my countrymen about the things on which we should agree, about Dickens or the great comic culture of the English tradition; but that any man challenged on his allegiance to a Church must disagree with those who definitely disagree with it. I said on that occasion: "If I say these things, I cannot ask most of you to agree with me; if I did anything else, I could not ask any of you to respect me." But it does strike me, in amiable retrospect, that the whole situation is a little amusing. We live in an age in which anybody may teach anywhere, by any scientific instrument of instruction, that such a trifle as God was tossed up out of a tribal quarrel about incest or parricide, and so religion poisoned the first springs of progress; in which the Communist can claim that humanity went wrong when private property first appeared among prehistoric men; when anything, however real, in its beginning, however remoter can be called an enormous delusion darkening the whole history of man. But when I choose to think that one island, in one corner of one continent, took the wrong turning in thought at the end of one century, hardly four hundred years ago, when I attribute to that relatively recent and local fad the collapse and despair that has actually fallen on one commercial culture, a cry of protest goes up against an intolerable blasphemy; accompanied with the assurance that those who are thus horrified have, alone among all peoples, the power to tolerate all opinions.

I confess I found a faint whiff of paradox (though by no means putrid) in the fact of these few fanatics telling me in one breath that they were devoted to liberty of thought and that I had disgraced myself by saying what I thought so plainly. But they were only a few; and I ought not to close this episode without bearing testimony to the vast number of messages I received from Protestants, or even from Pagans, quite fairly recognising or quite fairly discussing, what I had really said. Above all, I know well that I could have proved my case, more clearly than appears in this hasty correspondence, if I had merely printed a correspondence far more valuable; the letters I received from very poor people, who had suffered the silent aggression and enslavement by modern monopoly; and who thanked me with only too much of the truly English generosity, for exposing the wrongs they endure with only too much of the truly English good humour.

THE GLASS WALKING STICK

Selections from the Illustrated London News, 1905-1936

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THE GLASS WALKING-STICK

PRACTICAL politics are in this world continually coming to grief; for the truth is that practical politics are too practical for this world. This world is so incurably romantic that things never work out properly if you base them on the sound business principle. For instance, it is always assumed in modern social philosophy that ornaments, curiosities, *objets d'art* etc., are things that people add to their lives when they have procured all that is solid and sensible. The actual fact is quite otherwise. The savage wears an *objet d'art* in his nose before he discovers that clothes are of any use at all. Man discovered that dress was a luxury before he discovered that dress was a necessity. It is not only true that luxuries are more noble than necessities; it really seems as if they were more necessary than necessities.

I see that the vicar of a very poor district has made an experiment of quite extraordinary interest. He suggested that the poor should bring out all the objects of interest that they had in their houses; and he undertook to see that they got the best possible price for them, if they cared to sell. There is a wonderful irony and significance about his offer. He asked the poor to produce expensive things; and they did. He demanded diamonds, so to speak, from the men who had no bread. He asked the starving what treasure was hidden in their houses. He knew human nature. The incredible fact fell out exactly in accordance with his demand. The people who could hardly keep the rags together on their backs brought out of their houses things which were not only genuinely worth study, but were genuinely worth money. They were all curiosities, numbers of them were expensive curiosities. Several of them had that unique quality which more than either use or beauty draws out money in torrents and maddens the hearts of millionaires. One poor woman, for instance, had a patchwork quilt made out of fragments of the French and English uniforms at Waterloo. Words are absolutely inadequate to express the poetry of such a quilt as that; to express all that is involved in the colours of that strange reconciliation. The hope and hunger of the great Revolution, the legend of isolated France, the starry madness of the Man of Destiny, the nations of chivalry that he conquered, the nation of shopkeepers that he did not conquer, their long and dull defiance, the lost agony of Europe at war with a man, the fall that was like the fall of Lucifer — all those things were on that poor old woman's quilt, and every night she drew over her poor old bones the heraldry of a thousand heroes. On her coverlet two terrific nations were at peace at last. That quilt ought to be strung up on to a great pole and carried in front of King Edward and the French President in every celebration of the Entente Cordiale. But a poor householder owned it and never thought of its value.

The other exhibits had, in one way or another, this same quaint and picturesque and unexpected character. One man had a walking-stick made of glass and filled with sweets. If there were children in the house, the preservation of that glass stick has something of the insane sublimity of a religion. Many had weapons of undoubted antiquity. Several had weapons with definite and ascertainable historical associations. A boot of the Duke of Marlborough was (I think) one of the exhibits. I do not know how this boot became detached from its fellow; but when I recall the clear intellect and fine financial genius of the Conqueror of Blenheim, together with that liberal disdain of the pedantries of personal dignity which also distinguished him — in short, when I reconstruct the whole moral character of Marlborough, I think it highly probable that he sold one of his boots for threepence and hopped home. Another of the vicar's parishioners had an old picture of the Flood, so old that quite competent authorities described it literally as 'priceless'. I do not know how old this picture of the Flood really was; but it is a mere matter of fact that the owner received for it a sum such as he had never seen in his life. Yet he had let the thing hang on his walls quite undisturbed probably through many periods of acute economic distress. Some of the exhibits were entirely wild and odd; but I am not sure that I did not like them as well as any. One was a stuffed lamb with an unnatural number of heads or legs or something, which had really been born on some country estate. Simple and uneducated people have no horror of physical monstrosities; just as educated people have no horror of moral monstrosities. But the broad characteristic of all the things described was emphatically the fact that they were interesting things. And this is particularly a quality of them as things collected by the poor. The cultivated people go in for what is beautiful; but the uncultivated for what is interesting. For example, the more refined people concern themselves with literature — that is, with beautiful statements. But simple people concern themselves with scandal — that is, with interesting statements. Interest often exists apart from beauty; and interest is immeasurably better and more important than beauty. I myself know a man who is beautiful and remarkably uninteresting. The distinction is one that affects religion and morals and the practical philosophy of living. Existence often ceases to be beautiful; but if we are men at all it never ceases to be interesting. This divine creation in the midst of which we live does commonly, in the words of the good books, combine amusement with instruction. But dark hours will come when the wisest man can hardly get instruction out of it; but a brave man can always get amusement out of it. When we have given up valuing life for every other reason, we can still value it, like the glass stick, as a curiosity. For the universe is like the glass stick in this, at any rate; it is unique.

HISTORY IN STONE

THERE is a kind of war between bricks and books; I mean between the tradition of materials and the tradition of theories. In so many places the church contradicts the parson and the castle contradicts the earl; the Parliament says one thing and the parliament house another. Anyone who has gone rambling in England must have noticed a strange thing often only half perceived and generally wholly unexplained. I mean the entire difference between English history, especially early English history as it is in the ordinary history books, and the same English history in so far as it remains in buildings, in local customs, or in popular associations in England. The old kings, bishops, and soldiers seem to be entirely different people when they appear in stone and when they appear in print. I do not mean that the school histories are untrue; I do not even mean that they contradict the other impressions or are inconsistent with them in any particular. But the two are two different worlds; in the second is revealed a whole universe of interests and activities, about which the first was literally deaf and dumb. It is as if we had heard of Tennyson’s peerage but never of his poetry; or as if we had heard of Wellington’s premiership but never of his generalship; or as if a biographer of Columbus had been explanatory about the egg but silent about the American Continent.

Let me take a typical example. The story of the dynastic violence of fifteenth-century England is, in the school really picturesque. We see the Lion of Agincourt dying with a doom upon his usurping house, leaving all that it had gained in England to the intrigue and audacity of Gloucester, all that it had gained in France to the exterminating nationalism of Joan of Arc. The only staff on which Lancaster can lean is King Harry’s daughter-in-law, Margaret of Anjou, a woman almost as militant as Joan of Arc herself: Among these strong and sinister figures, somewhat diseased but intensely dramatic, one scarcely looks at the poor pale-faced lad, said not to be quite right in his head, who actually inherits the crowns of England and France. Battles are fought round him, as round the wooden pole of a flagstaff; councils are held round him, as round the dead mace on the table of Parliament. He always seems to be locked up somewhere and forgotten; and we do not even remember his foolish face as we watch Margaret defying the outlaws in the forest, or Richard Crookback red with the rout of

Tewkesbury. We scarcely know when he dies. His murder is quieter than most men’s natural deaths. That is how King Henry VI appears in the written English histories — or rather how he does not appear. It bears no resemblance, it contains no hint of how he still appears, not in English histories, but in England. I do not mean that his character appears particularly different; I mean that one discovers a new field of activity for such a character. It is not that the face or figure of the feeble youth is contradicted — it is as if we walked into fairyland, where such a youth may gain all the omnipotence of the fairies. It is like finding that a housemaid is a medium or the village idiot a magician.

Walk westward out of London along the Valley of the Thames and you will find a huge educational foundation which has passed almost into a synonym for the British Empire and the aristocracy that administers that Empire. It is enormously wealthy; it is enormously powerful; it is known all over the world as much, or more, than Oxford or Cambridge; and every boy or man who has anything to do with it is reminded morning and evening in all the prayers and ceremonies of the place that the wealth and power by which he lives is the wealth and power of King Henry VI. The most successful of soldiers declares that he won Waterloo by the influence that lost Tewkesbury. The timid and impotent boy is still (even after a profound change of religion) the patron saint and benefactor of hundreds of the athletic or ambitious boys that make up the great legend of Eton and the English public-schools. Walk eastward out of London into the flat counties till you come to one of the two Universities that are the two fountains of the national life and letters. You will find one College of which the chapel towers in beauty and tradition above all the roofs of that beautiful and traditional town; the whole world of culture has come to it for its architecture or its music or its stained glass. It is one of the wonders of the English world. And there is not a porter so ignorant nor an undergraduate so frivolous, that he has not been told twenty times and repeated twenty times that it is the half-witted Henry who through five centuries sustains this palace of God. This weakest of Kings is the King par excellence, for the place is called ‘King’s College’, not King Henry’s. The difference of impression is very strange; it is a difference, it is not a contradiction. Little of what the history-book says is untrue; but the history-book says so little. Henry VI was not an effective fighter or a sagacious statesman; and if we see the Middle Ages as a gory tangle like Tewkesbury, we shall see him as very small. But if we take a turn or two down an English lane and see the Middle Ages as an ancient and rich civilization, creative and systematic, with fruitful sciences and masterful arts — then we shall see him as gigantic.

Numerous other instances, of course, could be given. An intelligent boy reading at school of the quarrel between St Thomas Becket and Henry II naturally sympathizes, on the whole, with the latter: the King seems at worst an impatient man of action; the saint seems at best an aggravating sacerdotalist. Let the boy shut the History of England and open (let us say) the poems of Chaucer, written by an ordinary Englishman for Kings and Queens not so very long after the King was scourged in the cathedral. He will have great difficulty in making head or tail of the world in which he finds himself. He will find himself in medieval England in which every man, woman, and child utterly and entirely takes it for granted that St Thomas justly opposed the King, as utterly and entirely as that St George justly opposed the Dragon. The same bewildering impression which the boy would find in Chaucer he would also find in Canterbury. These atmospheres never depend upon any detail and are always impossible to describe; but he will feel the whole cathedral rising like one roar of unanimous assent, the very stones crying out that the blood of a just man was shed. These are things that modern books of history do not explain. You must steep yourself in the atmosphere of many old towns and old books before you begin to under stand them.

So there hangs over all England this singular double impression of political history and of popular institution. Men who are remembered only for their cruelties in Hume or Hallam, are remembered only for their charities in Somerset or Sussex. From the marches of Scotland to the old kingdom of Cornwall, the English soil is loaded with the pieties of blasphemers, with the almsgiving of oppressors, with the ascetical enthusiasms of gluttons and drunkards, with the high artistic culture of barbarians. William Rufus perished in Hampshire by his hunting, but he remains in Westminster by his building. Henry VII hammered together a huge machine of practical despotism; nothing remains of him but a chapel. It looks as if there were a whole aspect of the lives of these people that is perpetually overlooked in dealing with them; and, indeed, such an oversight is common enough in the criticism of human life. I fancy that we must begin to fill in these void places in history with the vivid, though visible, thoughts of the men that worked there; otherwise it will be like watching men dancing and not hearing the tune.

THE OLD NURSE

I WAS recently reading a very interesting study which set my thoughts rambling on many themes; and not least on the theme of old nurses. For many other reasons it should be of interest to English people; especially those of them who have had the rudimentary intelligence to be interested in Irish people. For it is clear that the memories with which the mind of this old nurse were filled, and almost choked, were the memories of the great Irish Famine, which she had known in her childhood and which she communicated so vividly to an American child. The Irish Famine was more than an earthquake; it was an explosion. As an explosion scatters the arms and legs of a single man, so this catastrophe scattered the separated parts of a single people; and that most tragically, before our own people had attempted any real justice to that people. For that reason, the ruin of Ireland simply strewed the whole earth with the enemies of England. What region in the world, cried the Trojan after the Fall of Troy, is not full of our ruin? What region in the world is not now full of that wrong which we remedied so late? The testimony of the old nurse in America is all the more forcible, because of the patient simplicity with which she narrated such wrongs. Nobody is blamed for an earth quake; and nobody is of necessity blamed for an explosion; but people are blamed for their conduct during an earthquake or after an explosion. And it is the ugly truth that the blight of the Famine was not merely a blight upon a particular order of vegetables; among the blighted, not to say the blighters, were to be found a higher order of animals; even including politicians. The old Irish nurse meekly witnessed to the wickedness of a neighbouring landlord who would not give food to starving men unless they were of his own faction. And everyone knows that a hundred juries handed down Lord John Russell as a murderer. For that part of the record alone it would have been well worth recording. But I confess that I was very much interested in this Irish-American nurse merely considered as a nurse. She was a pattern of that paradox of submission and supremacy which belonged to that sort of old-fashioned servant. And it set me thinking about some thing that was lost, when the nurse gave place to the governess and the governess gave place to the school mistress. Bad and good abound in both; but something organic gave place to something official.

What is the matter with English Education is that it is discussed in Educational English. Even criticisms of Education, even complaints of Education, even confessions by educationists of the inadequacy of education, are all uttered in educational English. Educational English is not at all the same as educated English. It is a curious sort of technical jargon, possibly necessary and suitable to a science or a trade, but casting, as do all such terminologies, a curious air of coldness and unreality upon all that is discussed. It is not the style in which anybody talks; even when it is the style in which somebody unfortunately speaks. It is not the style in which the educationists themselves talk, when they are talking as educated people and not as educationists. This can be felt in the way in which the very words used tend to contradict their own meaning; as in the word, ‘individual’, in some sweeping generalization about ‘giving individual attention’.

It never occurred to the Victorian child, when his nurse was talking to him in his infancy, that she was giving him ‘individual attention’. It might have been quite a large family; but in that sense there were no relations except individual relations. Nor need a nurse of the old sort always consciously individualize; she was quite capable of packing all the children off to bed on the probably sound generalization that the children, as children, were becoming a nuisance. But the point is that the philosophy of the nurse began with one baby and went on to other babies as they arrived. The philosophy of the teacher be gins with one class, or one school, and then goes on to decide, with a sigh, that it must give a little more individual attention. The individual is discovered in the mass, as the atom was discovered in the familiar mass that we call matter. But the nurse was nearer to the father and mother, in the fact that the relation was organic and not official. The nurse may have been a mere shadow of the mother; but that sort of shadow is of the same shape. Nay, that sort of shadow is of some substance. Because it is very close to the creative realities of birth and babyhood, it has a quality that can never be described in Educational English. It will never be named at any educational congress. It is difficult enough to name it anywhere; and in most cases it remains nameless because it is natural. And men, especially modern men, are even more afraid of the natural than of the supernatural. But anyhow, if ever we did want to name it, we should never find even a word for it in all those wordy generalizations. It belongs to quite a different sort of English from any Educational English; to that world of words in which men wrote, ‘Hast thou not a blessing for me, O my father?’ or, ‘The smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed.’ Or in which men said, ‘Unto us a Child is born.’

PLAYING WITH AN IDEA

THE serious magazines, without having any convictions to speak of, are just sufficiently stern or bigoted to forbid irreverence. The frivolous magazines are even more stern and bigoted; for they forbid reverence. They actually veto the instinctive mention of mighty and holy things. Thus the sincere journalist is kept constantly in a state of roaring inaction; having been forced to make his theology dry he plunges with a far more boyish ardour into the pleasures of pure folly. But the swing of the pendulum is some times rather wild and dizzy. My meaning is this: that a good man ought to love nonsense; but he ought also to see nonsense — that is, to see that it is not sense. Our very pleasure in pure fancies should consist partly in the certainty that they are not facts. Nothing is more perilous and unmanly in modern thought than the way in which people will be led a dance by some dexterous and quite irresponsible suggestion, some theory in which even the theorist does not believe, some intellectual levity which is not honest enough even to be called a lunacy. They hear some flying notion — as that Cromwell wrote Milton, or that Christianity was stolen from the Aztecs; they receive it first laughingly, then fancifully, then speculatively, then seriously, then idolatrously, even to slaying; and yet all the time with nothing to go on but the fourth-hand version of a few entertaining coincidences. Exactly that sort of neat and fantastic solution which would make a glorious detective story is employed to make an utterly preposterous book of history or criticism.

No, I do not think it is wrong to play with these nonsensical hypotheses; I have had great fun out of fitting them together. One of my friends maintains that Tacitus never lived and that his works are a forgery of the sixteenth century; another explains the whole life of St Paul in terms of an unabated hatred for Christianity. I am not against playing the fool with these fancies, but I am against letting them play the fool with me. To take one case at random, one could certainly make a huge theory, upheld by many coincidences, that men’s surnames have constantly suited them. It really is a remarkable thing to reflect how many frightfully fine men have had frightfully fine names. How could we have rounded off our sentences without such names as ‘Hannibal’ and ‘Napoleon’, or ‘Attila’ and ‘Charlemagne’? But there are more startling cases. There is one great artist whose art was ultimately sacred and seraphic, yet in its labour and technique peculiarly strenuous and military; if one looked at his work only one would think of a harsh angel, an angel in armour. How comes it that this man actually bore the name of the Archangel Michael — Michelangelo? How comes it that a contemporary and more gracious artist happened to be christened after a more gracious archangel — Raphael?

Or take another case. If you or I had to invent out of our own heads a really shattering and shining name, a name fit for some flaming hero defying the stars, a name on horseback and high in the saddle — could we think of any so chivalrous or so challenging as Shakespeare? The very word is like Lancelot at his last tournament with a touch of the divine impotence of Don Quixote. In fact, I know only one surname that is really finer than Shakespeare, and that is Brakespear, the only English Pope. A pleasing lyric in prose might be built up about the two of them; the one Englishman who rose to the highest of all official places, and the other who rose to the highest of all unofficial. Much eloquence and irony (if I had time to write them) might be uttered about the contrast between the English Pope, so humble and silent in his splendid publicity, and the English poet, so hearty and swaggering in his obscurity and neglect. It is at least certain that there was only one Englishman on the highest platform of priests, and only one on the highest platform of poets; and it is certain that each of their names is the only exact rhyme to the other one.

That is what you might call a coincidence; but the coincidence goes further. The actual meaning of the two names is appropriate to the two men in their two positions. If there was one thing more than another that the Renaissance did it was to shake the spear, to brandish the lance even more than to use it, to value the lance more for its flapping pennon than its point. If there was one thing, on the other hand, that a Pope in the twelfth century had to do, it was to break the spear — to bend the thick necks of the throned fighters who could not otherwise have conceived anything so fine as fighting. William Shakespeare is really very like the exultant monster in the Old Testament, who laughs at the shaking of the spear. But Nicholas Brakespear stood in the Dark Ages for a simpler and more searching reminder, of Him who snappeth the spear in twain and takes off the wheel of the chariot.

The above is an impromptu instance of what I call playing with an idea; but the question is, what does one think of the idea? I will tell you what I think of it; I think it is complete bosh. I am almost certain that Raphael and Michelangelo are a coincidence. I am almost certain that Shakespeare and Brakespear are an accidental rhyme. I will carry the fancy as far as I choose; but if it tries to carry me as far as it chooses, I will remind it of several things. I will point out to it that in plain fact the names of literary men are often quite arrestingly unsuitable. Newman was by no means a worshipper of novelty; and one of the most energetic and intelligent atheists of my acquaintance is saddled with the surname of Priest.

Or take a classic example. Can anyone read the cold and cutting work of Swift without feeling that his surname should have been Steele? Can anyone read the impetuous work of Steele without feeling that his surname should have been Swift? We should really feel much happier if we could talk of the brilliant blunders of Dick Swift and the cool, saturnine strength of Jonathan Steele. In other words, my speculation about surnames is just large enough to fill a magazine article, but is not large enough to fill even a moderate-sized brain. It is this power of recovery after extravagance that I urgently recommend. Indulge in all the most decadent or futile fantasies, as long as you can curb the indulgence, like that of alcohol. Ride on the nightmare, if you prefer such horse flesh; only do not let the nightmare ride on you. Find the mare’s nest which rocks on the tallest and darkest trees, and steal the addled eggs; but do not make your breakfast off them every morning for ever. Learn to be nonsensical and then to be sensible again; to create strange things and still to be independent of them. Learn to suggest a thing, to urge it, to prove it, and still to disbelieve it. For the very few things that are really worth believing are not worth proving.

THE WALKING PARADOX

THE English People have a peculiar appetite for paradox. I suppose such a statement will itself be called a paradox; for the phrase is commonly applied, for some reason or other, not to Englishmen generally, but to the one sad and solitary Englishman who bears alone, in this column, the doom or judgement upon his race. Both he and his race, however, remain reasonably cheerful under it; and, though it is rather a bore to be called paradoxical, it is rather a compliment to be recognized as national. Nevertheless, there are shades of variety, and the mad English man may wear his wild rose with a difference. The curious thing about the representative Englishman of the last few centuries is that he instinctively pursued the wildest paradox and then accepted it as a solid truism. He said he was hard-headed, and stood on his head to prove it.

For instance, saying, ‘We may not understand political theories, but our constitution works well in practice’, is a piece of wild paradox and only loved as such, like a non sense rhyme of Lear or Lewis Carroll. It is exactly like saying, ‘We cannot add up figures correctly; we are quite Content if the result comes out right.’ It is like saying, ‘It is true that we got the wrong longitude and the wrong latitude; but what does that matter when it means that we find the place we are looking for?’ There is no answer to this beautiful nonsense, except to say that we do not get the right result or find the right place, except in the Great Gromboolian Plain or the Land Where the Jumblies Live. But it is a beautiful land to live in, and it is remarkably like England. Of course, anything in England that was really practical was achieved in spite of neglecting the theoretical, and not because of it. But anything in England that was poetical, as distinct from practical, really did owe something to this taste for paradox. In this sense the other name of England is Elfland. From this spirit comes all that quaintness in the names of places or in the very plan of towns which is so delightful a feature of England and which is now being steadily destroyed.

Even in the nonsense rhymes to which I have referred, there is a constant unconscious groping after this native tradition. Not for nothing did even the nonsense rhymer bear a name out of ancient British legend and literature; so that the merry madman was a sort of parody of the melancholy madman. One might almost write another grim and grotesque scene of madness, of the meeting between the tragic Lear and the comic Lear. But both are full of that quality of quaintness; that quality that pre vents the tragic hero, even when he is most tragic, from being entirely heroic; or, at any rate, from being entirely classic. The height from which a man in King Lear looks dizzily down is not a mountain or a Tower of Babel, but only one of those chalk cliffs that are to us the white walls of home. And when the nonsense rhymer invents a nonsense place and calls it The Chankley Bore, we feel by the very sound of it that it might be in Sussex.

Or, again, there is nothing but paradox in the whole legend of the Strong Silent Man, as in the legend of the Dong with the Luminous Nose. Indeed, I remember suggesting that historical students may some day explain the inexplicable lyric by calling it a contemporary satire on Oliver Cromwell, who was jeered at in his own time for having a red nose, and revered in our time, far less reason ably, for being a Strong Silent Man. As a matter of fact, he may have been strong, but he was the very reverse of silent. He talked a great deal; and that is one of the things that makes me think there was really something in him. But anyhow, it is nonsense to assume that a man must have something in him merely because you cannot get anything out of him. It is a pure paradox itself. The natural and sensible assumption would be that a man who has anything to say will want to say it. And, nine times out of ten, anybody who really has anything to say does want to say it. He would be rather an unpleasant fellow if he did not. Indeed, he would be not much more reputable than a miser. It is no more admirable to have valuable suggestions to make and not put them into circulation than it is to have valuable coin of the realm and keep it stuffed into a greasy old stocking.

Of course it is quite true that various accidents or conditions may keep a worthy man silent when he really is in the right; such as his being shy, his being born deaf and dumb, his being gagged by burglars and left alone in the coal-cellar, his being entrusted with a secret, or his being afflicted with a stammer. But these are exceptions. There may be strong silent men, as there may be strong deaf men, or strong short-sighted men. But deafness does not strengthen anybody; nor does strength in itself obscure the eyesight. The truth is that the whole of this notion is, if not entirely nonsensical, at least entirely poetical. The fancy fascinates the English temper, because there is in it a purely romantic effect of transition and surprise. It is obvious that it makes a better story, and especially a better play, if the quiet man in the corner suddenly takes the centre of the stage and reveals the secret of the drama. It is not unnatural that the nation which produced the greatest of dramatists should have a taste for such effects of drama.

What is curious about the English psychology is this; that it has this purely artistic appetite and then persuades itself that it is practical. The notion of the vainglorious person, with his heart on his sleeve, defeated by the strong man, who has something more valuable up his sleeve, is a story that had been the foundation of a hundred farces and fanciful comedies and romantic melodramas before it was made the basis of a scientific theory of races or a scheme of the British Constitution. The strong silent gentleman had been in all sorts of shoddy or shabby theatrical parts; he had been the good brother and the bad baronet and the stranger and the first walking gentleman, and even Charles's Friend, before it was discovered by science that he was the Nordic man and the sane and practical Anglo-Saxon.

In other words, we have as a nation got our ideas out of novels and plays and poetical romances, much more than out of economic textbooks or even commercial ledgers. That sort of fiction is naturally full of paradox; or, in other words, full of surprise. It is the whole point of a fairy-tale to say that the fool found a windfall of amazing good fortune. Therefore we said that a politician who did not think about politics would somehow or other muddle through. It is the whole point of a melodrama that the man whose lips have been sealed until the last moment comes forward and declares the innocence of the heroine or the hiding-place of the will. Therefore we said that any politician who was incompetent to speak must always be competent to act.

All this belongs to a world of wild and yet subtle in version with which I can sympathize; which, in its proper place, I am even prepared to defend. But practical politics is not its proper place; and our politics have not been more practical for following only this flying gleam of paradox. In this matter we really do need a little more of the iron common sense of the Latins, who know that schemes and systems are made with logic, just as machines and engines are made with mathematics. Just as they know that two and two make four, so they know that thinking is really necessary to acting. There is really some thing to be said for platitudes and plain intellectual processes; and the French peasant has remained very invincible in his own kitchen garden by dint of knowing how many beans make five. But it takes all sorts to make a world; and France has not produced Shakespeare or a nonsense rhyme.

THE COLOUR OF SPAIN

IT is to be hoped that people will realize that Spain is not so black as it was painted by those who only painted the black hoods of the Inquisitors or the Tennysonian dualism of Don and Devil. Spain in one sense is quite as black as it is painted, for the painters were particularly fond of painting in black. But being in black is by no means the same as being in mourning. We might almost say that the Spaniards are fond of bright colours and that black is the brightest of all their colours. They are very fond of it in art and decoration but the effect is not necessarily what the English used to call gloomy but rather what the French have called chic. It throws up all the other colours, especially the typically Spanish colours of gold and orange and copper and dark red. There are aspects in which all Spain seems to be striped with red and gold like the legendary shield of Aragon. But nothing could make that glowing shield glow more vividly than to be worn by a knight in black armour or carried by a page in black velvet.

The well-known picture of the Spanish lady wearing a black mantilla and a red rose would be sufficient to make us recognize the tradition. The mantilla alone shows that black is a gay colour and almost the colour of frivolity. For the Spanish ladies who keep the old custom in this respect look far more like what the old ballads call ‘ladies gay’, the dames of a joyous Court, or the dancing girls of a jovial festival, than do the more modernized ladies who have obediently hidden their heads in the helmets of the last Parisian fashion. The colour of the Spanish scarf or veil is dark, but it is not dismal; it is bright because it is brisk; it can shift and change with posture and gesture and mood; it is alive like a black snake or a black bird or a black butterfly. The accident that some of Velasquez’s great portraits have a sombre dignity that is almost Satanic, and that Goya made black-and-white studies that are like the sketch-book of a goblin, should not lead us to exaggerate the sombre side of this use of black. The Spaniards do indeed use it where nobody else I know of has ever used it. I have actually seen black patches in a coloured church window. This is contrary to the very conception of windows, but it is quite consistent with the Spanish conception of colours.

The same impression, and perhaps the same illusion, is doubtless produced by the Spanish churches which are kept unusually and to us unnaturally dark. It would seem as if the architect, like the artist, wished to produce great blocks of black and did it with great blocks of shadow. The altars and the altar-screens are prodigiously high and heavy like the portals of the palaces of giants. They seem to make the darkness darker, throwing a shadow even upon shade. Yet even here we find the triumph of contrast which is really the triumph of colour. The stained-glass windows are turned to swords of flame of an indescribable incandescence. The church is dark with the very density of its colour. The Spanish gold may be partly buried in the gloom, just as the Spanish gold of romance was so often buried in the green sea. But in the reality, as in the romance, we always think of the treasure as tremendously costly and complex and covering vast areas. Indeed, there is sometimes a sensation in these twilight churches of walking as if in the depths of the sea; as if the hundreds of little candles were a phosphorescence or the great canopies and banners the shapes of flat and floating fishes of gigantic size.

The contrast struck me very sharply when I had crossed the Pyrenees, and found again the French Spirit in the church and castle of Carcassonne, in an open lantern of lofty windows luminous as the soul of St Louis. But though the French spirit has more clarity it has not more colour; it has not really more gaiety. There are all sorts of gaiety even in the Spanish churches, when once we understand them; there is any amount of it in the Spanish Streets and houses. There is all that spirit that is so puzzling to many people in the religious processions associated with Seville. I say associated with Seville because, as a matter of fact, the association is much too arbitrary and limited. Most people imagine that the fantastic dance of dwarfs and giants is something that can be seen only at Seville, as the Eiffel Tower can be seen only in Paris. I, for one, did not even go to Seville but I saw, and heard any amount about, such dances and processions in any number of other towns and villages. These ancient games and gaieties have been preserved in the past all over the Spanish peninsula; yet I fear that there are very few tourists who trouble much about them in their less famous habitations. They are few indeed compared with the number of tourists who deliberately rush to see bull-fights in order to boast that they cannot bear the sight.

I may remark, in passing, that I did not go to see any bull-fights, for a reason which I explained to my Spanish friends on the spot. I said I should be very much annoyed if one of my Spanish friends came to England and instantly put on pink that he might rush to the meet and be in at the death of a poor little fox and then turn round and say, ‘How hideous! How repulsive! What brutes in human form are the English whose whole lives are passed in this degrading sport!’ We can indulge in all sorts of controversy and casuistry about bull-fighting or fox-hunting and there is a great deal to be said against both. All countries have anomalies that strike us as abnormalities or even abominations; but it is not seeing a country to look for the things that you abominate. Now I know that the Spaniards I saw are a kind people; they are astonishingly kind to children; they are not normally unkind to animals. There is a home for stray cats actually kept in the cloisters of the cathedral of Tarragona; and I have seen crowds of cats gathered round the image of St Ramon Nonato like the crowds of birds round St Francis. There are plenty of ordinary people making friends with dogs and horses in the ordinary way. But if I had preferred a Grand Guignol thrill to a great experience of a great nation, I might have allowed it to get between me and all these things.

But this is a parenthesis; I was remarking that the celebrated procession at Seville is only the special and supreme example of a custom that is scattered all over these southern lands. The way in which religious mysteries are mixed with merry-making is very shocking to some people — especially, I have noticed, to the people who do not believe in the religious mysteries. Sceptics are so very sensitive on the point of reverence. But as I came in contact with these things, I could not but smile at the thought of those who have again been trying to prove to me that religion has no function but to make men sad. Those who gradually built up the ancient customs of mankind had a better sense of proportion and decoration. They knew, if only by instinct, how things grave and gay can be combined and distributed and where flippancy is fitting and where solemnity fits in with it; what contrast will best bring out a real severity and what is the psychological meaning of that profound phrase ‘comic relief’; just as the people of that southern land have always known, in dress and decoration, how a great blot of black brings out their crimson and their gold.

THE TRADITION OF TOLEDO

ONE of the first impressions created by a visit to Spain, in, any person with any historical imagination, is the sense of a world that runs round the Mediterranean rather than of three separate worlds which the sea divides. It is, I suppose, what the old world meant by talking of the round or circle of the lands. The point is that a man might sail from port to port round the whole of that inland sea and find something at least linking all those places together. If he pierced further into the various continents he would doubtless find things very different: very different if he plunged into what we call the African forests; very different if he set out on what we call the Asiatic plains. But a great deal that we imagine to be Asiatic in Lebanon, or African in Algiers, is really of the mixed central civilization, and at least as much European as the more Moorish parts of Spain. I think it is because people see this when they are not expecting it that they can make nothing of it and their descriptions are so unconvincing and conventional. For when people see what they do not understand they do not even believe what they see.

Thus Toledo looked to me much more like Jerusalem than Jerusalem ever looked like most of the pictures of it. It has a wall crowning a hill whose steep sides have an indefinable look of a ruin and even a rubbish-heap. It is in the sort of country that is spotted with hardy olives or striped with hardy vines. It has that look that we never know in the rich rain and deep grasses of our northern islands — the look of vegetation being an exception. It is a green object and not merely a green background. For we owe our green fields to our grey clouds; and perhaps do not thank them often enough for it. In those splendid Spanish ruins a man feels immediately that he is within a circle or radius of something that lay to the south, and that the same radius also touched Jerusalem at the ends of the earth.

It is not easy to define what that circle is. Those unduly discontented with the grey clouds may be inclined to say that it is simply the circle of the sun. But I am inclined to think it is also the circle of a culture and a historical tradition, which touches all these places though it varies from place to place. There is something in common between those opposite ends of the earth, or at least of the sea. The Crusaders have been in Jerusalem; the Moors have been in Toledo. But the conventional conception that cut up the world into four quarters in the old style does not look for such a similarity. It does not expect it; it cannot be expected to expect it. It expects Jerusalem to be only an Asiatic bazaar like Baghdad or even Bombay. It expects Toledo to be concentrated on Toledo swords like Sheffield on Sheffield cutlery. In many ways Toledo is very like a sword, steely and of a stern sort of chivalry; but it is warmed from the south; it is in the circle of the sun.

I know it is customary to talk about the Moorish influence, as if what is really the Mediterranean influence was always a Moslem influence. This I believe to be a complete mistake. The indefinable connexion that links a town like Toledo to a town like Jerusalem existed long before Mahomet was born. It remained essentially a Christian connexion long after Mahomet's religion had first swept over these places and at last retreated from them. We may call it, if we like, the Roman influence, though even that is insufficient. We may connect it with our own view of the Christian unity, though that will naturally be a matter of dispute. But whatever it is, it did not come out of the desert with the dry negations of a desert creed. It did not plant all those vineyards with the veto of Islam upon wine. It did not carve all those images with the veto of Islam upon statues. It did not find the chivalric devotion to the lady by looking for it in the harem, or all the legends of the Mother and the Holy Child from the arid Arabian dogma of the isolation of God.

The tradition for which Toledo still lifts its riven crown of roofs and battlements may have been stirred to life by movements out in the East, or mingled to advantage with strange and remote things; it may have gained as well as given something in its contact with the Arab conquerors of Africa; but it is certain, if anything is certain, that when that spirit of Spain and of Western Christianity was touched to new life, it was in the form of its own life that it unfolded and to the height of its own destiny that it rose again; and Islam did not make a new world in such places, but only awakened a world that was asleep. That world is now very wide awake; and if the cathedral of Toledo was not merely modelled on a mosque even when the world was swept by the Moslem, it is now even less likely that featureless mosques will be the only churches of the future.

TOM JONES AND THE ESCORIAL

I WONDER how many people have noticed that a famous quotation from Gibbon can now be classed with the fulfilled prophecies — or rather, what is even more mystic and oracular, with the half-fulfilled prophecies. I say a quotation from Gibbon, for I fear it would be more misleading to call it a passage in Gibbon. Gibbon is now a classic; that is, he is quoted instead of being read. The thing most commonly quoted is an unusually stark and startling lie; the story which identifies St George with an Arian who was a swindling contractor. It is still sometimes quoted as a truth; though it is hard to understand how anybody with even the most superficial sense of history could ever have thought it true. Supposing, for the sake of argument, that the Church had been enthusiastically eager to canonize a swindler, it would have been quite impossible for her to canonize a heretic. But more often nowadays it is quoted as a lie; for the historian's cold hatred of the Christian tradition has begun to be felt and allowed for; but, as it is one of the few things quoted at all, it might be held to imply that the whole history was a tissue of lies. And this would be quite as unjust to Gibbon as Gibbon was to George. But there has been a reaction against that Age of Reason, in which we may lose even those parts of it that were really reasonable. Whatever else we may say of our own age, for good or evil, nobody is likely to call it an Age of Reason. The later French Pantheists called Voltaire a barbarian, exactly as Voltaire had called Shakespeare a barbarian. And in the same way even the 'Decline and Fall' has already declined and fallen.

But there is one other quotation from it that still deserves to be called a popular quotation. Being a popular quotation, it is probably a popular misquotation. Such a thing is normally misquoted; and I will here, to the best of my humble ability, misquote it. I have not got the book within reach; and I would not be bothered to look through the whole six volumes even if I had. But it is a passage in which he remarks, in a sort of parenthesis, that the family of Henry Fielding was connected in some way with the Imperial House of the Holy Roman Empire; and admits that the great princes of the dynasty might smile at the connexion; 'but the romance of Tom Jones, that exquisite picture of life and manners, will outlive the palace of the Escorial and the imperial eagle of Austria'.

Well, it has already outlived the imperial eagle of Austria. That half of the defiant prediction has already become a definite and rather dull fact; almost in the way of an anti-climax. And it could not but cross my mind, like a cloud of some strange shape crossing the sky, when I stood recently under the ranked and rigid columns of the Escorial, that strange Spanish palace built by the harsh whim of one of the strangest of Spaniards and of men. Philip the Second not only dedicated it to St Laurence, but built it in the shape of a gridiron. And I realized something appropriate in the image, beyond the suggestion of something in the King's own life of stiffness and of suffering. Señor Junoy, the distinguished Catalan writer, said to me, with great imaginative insight: 'It seems so cold, and yet it is so ardent.' Philip's gridiron, almost like Pickwick's warming-pan, was a cover for hidden fire. The very coldness of the surroundings accentuates that contained intensity.

Others besides myself have often remarked on the curious fact that the guide-books and note-books of travel, and all the countless sketches and photographs and similar records, never seem to tell us the thing which seems most striking when it strikes the eye. I had heard about Philip the Second and the Escorial, and other elements in the picture; but I conceived a picture of Spain rather as if it must be a picture of Seville. I thought vaguely that everything would happen in the summer and there would be a background of orange-trees and a hint of Moorish architecture. I had seen hundreds and hundreds of sketches and pictures of Spanish scenes, often probably of these identical Spanish scenes; and yet somehow the primary point of the whole impression had never pierced.

Nobody had ever told me — at least, nobody had ever told me so that I realized and remembered it — that the Spanish King had done something altogether unique and even unnatural when he built in such a place and in such a style his grim gridiron of stone. Nobody had made me understand that he had built a palace almost on the top of a mountain, far away upon naked and sterile heights only approached by rocky and ruinous roads like mountain passes. He had built a palace where anyone else would have built a hermitage. Like a madman, he had reared his tower of pomp and pride in a howling wilderness, where he might literally hear the wolves howl.

Yet there was nothing extravagant or fantastic in his architectural achievement; it was too sternly classical to be classed even with the Baroque. It is said that he sat outside watching it being built, with the plans in his hand and his gouty foot on a stool; jealously vigilant to see that not a curve of too much exuberance should soften that terrible triangle. A curious and not very pleasant person though genuine in his way; but he did great harm in one respect. He was a Puritan on the wrong side; that is, he was on what I should call the right side, but it was not the side of the Puritans. He was very unlike most Spaniards but he has come to stand as a type of all of them. And under the shadow of his mere individuality we forget the real light and shade in the whole picture. We forget that his religious enemies were mostly Calvinists and men even more gloomy than he, and gloomy on principle as well as by accident. In his unlucky version of the legend of St Laurence, he was himself so much more like a persecutor than a martyr that he made any martyr look like a saint. We forget that most of the martyrs were Calvinists, who would have built something much more inhuman than the Escorial, only they were too inhuman to build anything at all. Perhaps he also forgot that, in the original legend, St Laurence joked on the gridiron.

I think the prophecy of Gibbon, like the prayer of somebody in Virgil, will be half fulfilled and half scattered to the winds. I do not anticipate the decline and fall of the Escorial; I think it would take a good deal to remove that formidable object, a good deal more than is needed for the rather artificial revolution that altered an Austrian postage stamp. For Spain is fortunate in having had her decline and fall, and being now (I think) quite clearly rising once more. The Escorial has survived the fall, and there seems no reason why it should fall with the resurrection. But I do certainly hope that in another sense its shadow may grow a little less, as has the shadow of the imperial eagle. For a long time past the Escorial had stood for Philip the Second and Philip the Second had stood for Spain. Whatever is harsh or sombre in this one particular palace of this one particular prince has been associated with a whole people, who are not, in fact, in the least harsh or sombre, but in many ways exceedingly genial and generous. He was not at all a typical Spaniard, any more than Louis XI was a typical Frenchman, or Henry VII a typical Englishman — or even Welshman. But the imperial eagle has come to seem a bird of ill omen, and his castle a ruin fit for the nesting of such fowls of night. I certainly hope that, as an international impression, that error will pass away, and that Gibbon’s prophecy may yet serve to remind us that Spain is the home of the picaresque romance, or rambling comedy, and is not as gloomy as the Escorial, but as jolly as Tom Jones.

POETRY IN ACTION

IF I were asked why I think our whole industrial society is cursed with sterility and stamped with the mark of the slave, I could give a great many answers, but one will serve for the moment: because it cannot create a custom. It can only create a fashion. Now a fashion is simply something that has failed to be a custom. It is changed as a fashion because it is a failure as a custom. The rich, who are the most restless of mankind, do one thing after another and prove in the very process that they cannot create anything that is good enough to last. Their succession of fashions is in itself a succession of failures. For when men have made really dignified and humane things they have always desired that they should remain or, at least, that some relic of them should remain.

We have statues of all schools of statuary and buildings of all periods of architecture. But fashion, in the feverish sense that exists today, is a totally different thing, a merely destructive thing; indeed, an entirely negative thing. It is as if a man were perpetually carving a statue and smashing it as soon as he carved it; as if he were always clumsily fumbling with the day and had never modelled it to his liking. It is as if people began to dig up the foundations of a house before they had finished putting the roof on. This is not activity or energy or efficiency; it is certainly not efficiency, for it never achieves its effect; it never regards it as either effective or effectual. It is simply instability and discontent; and one of the marks of it is that it cannot create a custom. It cannot, for instance, create a ceremonial, still less a legend. It can sometimes attempt a rag or a practical joke; it can attempt that very dismal sort of dinner that the millionaires in America call a Freak. But the thing cannot be repeated; even the stupidest millionaire could not stand that.

When the traveller visits a place like Spain, the first thing that strikes him is a change from this atmosphere of hard and barren frivolity to the atmosphere of grave and solemn festivity. The Spaniards still have customs rather than fashions; and their customs come natural to them. They do not need to be changed, because to fresher minds they are always fresh. This is particularly true, for instance, about the sort of ceremonial that everywhere gathers round childhood. In such places it is not only children who understand childhood. Grown-up people understand it so thoroughly that they themselves become what the wise call childlike and the foolish call childish. It can be seen in a hundred things that make a system of communication between two generations. But it can be seen in this above all; that the grown-up people are still capable of inventing a ceremony, as children invent a game. The ceremonies vary, not only from place to place, but from century to century. They are not all old, as antiquaries like things to be old; for antiquaries only like things to be antiquated. Just as these living peasantries renew their fields and farms, so they renew their habitations and habits. Just as they restore their churches, by putting new patches on to old buildings, so they renew their games and jokes, putting in many elements in one place which are not found in another.

What is called the Seville procession exists in many different places besides Seville. But as it is done in many different places, so it is done in many different ways. There are often elements that are in their nature new, that are unexpected in the sense that nobody could possibly expect them. I have heard it said that, sometimes, a man will rush out into the path of the procession and pour out a stream of absurdly spontaneous poetry, like an improvisation on a musical instrument; and that sometimes somebody else (also rather abruptly moved by the Muse) will answer him from a window with appropriate poetical repartees. But the point is that the old framework allows of these new things, just as the old orchard bears fresh fruit or the old garden fresh flowers. These old civilizations give us the sensation of being always at the beginning of things; whereas mere modern innovation gives us the sensation, even in its novelty, of drawing nearer and nearer to the end.

There is one custom in Spain, and probably in other southern countries, which might be a model of the popular instinct for poetry in action. It is what corresponds to our idea of Santa Claus, who is, of course, St Nicolas, and in the North the patron of children and the giver of gifts at Christmas. In the South this function is performed by the Three Kings, and the gifts are given at the Epiphany. It is in a sense more logical, which, perhaps, is why it is common among the Latins. The Wise Men are in any case bringing gifts to the Holy Child, and they bring them at the same time to the human children. But there is in connexion with it an excellent example of how people who retain this popular instinct can actually act a poem.

The mysterious Kings arrive at the end of the holiday, which again is really very reasonable. It is much better that the games and dances and dramas, which are fugitive, should come first and the children be left with the presents, or permanent possessions, at the end. But it is also the occasion of a process very mystical and moving to the imagination. The Kings are conceived as coming nearer and nearer every day; and, if there are images of these sacred figures, they are moved from place to place every night. That alone is strangely thrilling, either considered as a child's game or as a mystic's meditation on the mysteries of time and space. On the last night of all, when the strange travellers through time are supposed to arrive, the children carefully put out water and green stuff for the camels and the horses of that superhuman cavalcade out of the depths of the East. Even the touch of putting water, so necessary to purely Eastern animals, is enough to suggest that reach of the imagination to the ends of the earth.

Now, that is only one example, out of hundreds that can be collected in any valley or countryside, of something which people in simpler times had the power to create; a complete and concrete drama perfectly plain and unfathomably profound. What I want to know about modern civilization, which in many ways cares so much for beauty, which in some ways cares far too much for beauty, is why it cannot produce these beautiful things. I do not want it to copy Spain and the Three Kings, or to copy Scandinavia and St Nicolas, or to copy any particular local ritual. But why can it never invent anything of its own? I have long paused for a reply.

THE ROMANCE OF HISTORY

THE signs of the resurrection of Spain of which I think there are many to be seen lately, have turned my thoughts to certain subtleties in the tradition of that land. They are things so subtle that they always appear to be simple. One of them is the tradition of chivalry and the double attitude towards it which we connect with the name of Don Quixote. There is no more fantastic paradox in all history than the life and work of Cervantes. He is generally recognized as having written a book to show that romantic adventures are all rubbish and do not really happen in this world. As a matter of fact, the one man in this world to whom romantic adventures were incessantly happening was the author of ‘Don Quixote’. He covered himself with glory and lost his right hand at the most romantic battle in history — when the Crescent and the Cross met in the blue Mediterranean by the Isles of Greece, trailing all their pageants of painted and gilded ships with emblazoned sails. He was just about to receive public recognition from the victor, Don John of Austria, when he was kidnapped by pirates. He organized a series of escapes, each like the ideal adventure of a schoolboy; he organized supplies and comforts for his fellow-prisoners with the laborious altruism of a saint. As men go, he was really a pretty perfect pattern of the knight of chivalry; eventually he escaped and returned home to write a book showing that chivalry was impossible. At least, that is what three rationalistic centuries have taken it as showing. But I think the time has come to dig a little deeper in that stratified irony and show the other side of Cervantes and chivalry.

Hero-worship has fallen out of fashion with Carlyle, who forced it into fashion. But in the case of Carlyle there were circumstances that were a needless handicap of hero worship and even to heroism. Carlyle set himself the impossible task of making heroes out of the successful men of history and politics. It was not much more hopeful than that of making heroes out of the successful men in soap or petrol. In one sense that sort of hero-worship is heroic, in the sense of being impossible. The task is heroic be cause the subject is unheroic. In Carlyle’s characteristic work it soon ran into absurdity. It reached the point of praising Frederick the Great — a form of hero-worship which is clearly a *reductio ad absurdum,* and even almost a contradiction in terms. The character of Cromwell had more human elements; but what was best in it was human and emphatically not heroic. The best case for Cromwell is that he was a moderately sane man in a very insane age. His best work was done as a moderator and maker of compromises, not as an originator or inspirer of enthusiasms. He saved works of art which the wilder Puritans would have destroyed, but we cannot picture him as a great patron of art in the sense of a friend of artists. He insisted that there must be good pay for good soldiers; but he was not the sort of man to be a romance to his own soldiers, like Napoleon. He was a seventeenth-century English squire whose family had grown rich in the great pillage; and morally he was no worse than most of his kind and perhaps better than many of them. He was certainly much better than Frederick the Great whom Carlyle made even more of a hero, and even a god.

The worship of Frederick the Great can hardly be called hero-worship. It is rather devil-worship softened by a touch of monkey-worship. It is superstition and therefore heresy to say such things seriously, but we may say symbolically that if a demon could enter the body of a monkey the result might be something like Frederick II of Prussia. It is not only true that he had a large mind and a small soul, it might almost equally truly be said that he had a large brain and a small mind. Even his intellectual pride was petty. Moreover, he was in another sense curiously like a monkey. He was an imitator. As the old mystics used to say that the devil was the ape of God, we might more literally say that Frederick II was the ape of Louis XIV. But just as the monkey imitates the man without understanding the man, just as the ape can copy an action that he cannot comprehend, so the Prussian had nothing of the national and civilized quality of the Frenchman. He substituted a new impudence and malignity for the last trailing tradition of medieval chivalry and Roman law. But Carlyle had to make a hero out of him, on his own theory of the heroism of success. Frederick had nothing else except success — not even the power to enjoy it.

But when we have got rid of this sort of hero-worship we may really come back to heroes. There really were heroes who were historical characters though they were not generally successful men. More often the true hero was a tragic hero. But while his tale was often a tragedy in so far as he failed, it was often a wildly impossible romance in the moments when he triumphed. The curious thing is that real history is much more romantic, and not less romantic, than Carlyle made it out. The hero may sometimes have lost his campaign, but he won his battles. And he can often be seen winning his battles single handed like the most legendary knight winning his spurs. Chivalry really did succeed in doing the impracticable things, even when it failed to do the practical things. We may differ or feel doubtful about the ultimate success or even the ultimate value of various policies pursued in the past; but nobody can doubt the thrill and enthusiasm and courage of the pursuit. The only really reliable part of history is the romance of it.

For instance, Godfrey de Bouillon died young, wasted by a fever that might have been cured in more sanitary conditions and wearied with a problem which was perhaps almost insoluble. That is a tragedy of the modern sort; it may well be said that his life was a failure; it might be said that the Crusades were a failure. We might argue about whether he was a maker, a builder, a man who can, or any of the Carlylean descriptions. For those depend on elaborate historical results which arise later; and the end of everything arrives sooner or later. It is disputable whether Richelieu was a successful man, since the French monarchy went down in the French Revolution. It is disputable whether Frederick the Great was a successful man, since Prussianized Germany went down in the Great War. So it is disputable whether Godfrey was a successful man, since the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem went down in the disaster of Hattin. What is quite indisputable is that Godfrey was a hero of romance, a hero of the wildest and most improbable romance, a hero behaving as heroes behave in the extravagant romances of chivalry. What is certain is that he, the Commander-in-Chief of the whole military system of Europe in the East, did really behave in the manner of Dick Dauntless among the Redskins or How a Powder-Monkey Foiled the Pirates. It is a cold and concrete fact that he was himself the first to leap from the battle-tower on to the Saracenic turrets, exactly as the boy who ran away to sea is the first to leap from his baffle-ship on to the slaver’s deck. All that part of the business that was a statesman’s calculation may or may not have been falsified. All that part of it that was like a schoolboy’s daydream came true.

There are any number of other examples of the kind. Nelson is too near to us for us to be certain of the duration of his practical achievement; but the nearer we are to him the less doubt we have of his purely poetical achievement. Near as he is to us, he is nearer still to the morning of the world, and has the colour and the clear outline that belongs to the primitive legends of the dawn. We do not know how long the naval leadership of England will last, but we do know that the legend will last. We do not know how far aviation has altered everything or how far politicians would go in the direction of scrapping the British Navy. But we do know that Nelson could hardly have been a more mythical figure if he had flown upon wings; or that his ship might have been a fairy-ship and hardly shone more strangely on the storied sea. The things that are quite certain about Nelson are all the improbable things; that he died in the very hour of triumph; that he died on a vessel that bore the very name of victory; that he was shot through wearing the flaming stars with which he had just offered to die in honour — all the coincidences that would be called crude and far-fetched in a story. They are the fancies that are considered a little too romantic for historical fiction. They are also the only fixed facts of history.

THE HERALDIC LION

SIR THOMAS BROWNE was, as everybody knows, a medical man. He was a rather curious kind of medical man; and there are a great many points in which he presents a somewhat singular contrast to our doctors of today. For instance, he wrote an eloquent and exhaustive work on urn-burial, churchyards, and death generally; a subject which doctors are now understood to avoid. But in nothing is he so permanently interesting as in his relations with the remarkable zoology of his time. His superb religious rhetoric and the whole literary side of him are obviously immortal. Nothing finer has ever been said about the soul than that phrase of Browne's that it is a thing in man 'which owes no homage unto the sun'. But a more delicate defence is needed of his quaint science, and, indeed, of all the medieval science from which he drew his ideas. We know that his theology was true. We know that his zoology was untrue; but do not let us too readily assume that it is therefore unimportant. The whole of that old, fantastic science is misunderstood. It made every creature rather a symbol than a fact. But, then, it thought that all material facts were valuable as symbols of spiritual facts. It did not really very much mind whether the lion was a noble animal who spared virgins. What it did want to make clear was that, if the lion was a noble animal, it would spare virgins.

Let me take this example of what I mean. Every modern person of intelligence can see quite easily that the heraldic lion is very different from the real lion. But what we moderns do not quite realize is this: that the heraldic lion is much more important than the real lion. Words positively fail me to express the unimportance of the real lion. The real lion is a large, hairy sort of cat that happens to be living (or rather happens to be dying) in useless deserts that we have never seen and never want to see; a creature that never did us any good, and, in our circumstances, cannot even do us any harm; a thing as trivial, for all our purposes, as the darkest of the deep-sea fishes or as the minerals in the moon. There is no earthly reason to suppose that he has any of the leonine qualities as we ordinarily understand them. There is no ground for imagining that he is generous or heroic, or even proud. Some people who have fought him say that he is not even brave. He does not touch human life at any point at all. You cannot turn him, as you can the ox, into a labourer: nor can you turn him, as you can the dog, into a sportsman and a gentleman. He can share neither our toils nor our pleasures: you cannot harness a lion to a plough, nor can you, with a pack of lions, go hunting an elephant. He has no human interest about him. He is not even good to eat. From the fringe of his mangy and overrated mane to the tip of his tail (with which, I understand, he hits himself in order to overcome the natural cowardice of his disposition), from his mane to his tail, I say, he is one mass of unimportance. He is simply an overgrown stray cat. And he is a stray cat that never comes into our street. He is living his commonplace existence in regions where no white man can live without going mad with monotony and heat. We have to put him in our museums and such places, just as we have to put tiny little chips of grey stone that look as if you could pick them up in the street, or homely-looking brown beetles at which no self-respecting child could look twice. But the only kind of lion that is of any earthly practical importance is the legendary lion. He really is a useful thing to have about the place. He holds up the shield of England, which would otherwise fall down, despite the well-meant efforts of the Unicorn, whose hoofs are deficient in a prehensile quality. The African lion does not matter to anyone. But the British Lion, though he does not exist, does matter. He means something; it is the only true object of existence to mean something; and the real African lion has never succeeded in meaning anything at all. The legendary lion, the lion that was made by man and not by Nature, he is indeed the king of beasts. He is a great work of art, a great creation of the genius of man, like Rouen Cathedral or the Iliad. We know his character perfectly well, as we know the character of Mr Micawber, or many other persons who have never taken the trouble to exist in a mere material way. His virtues are the virtues of a grand European gentleman; there is nothing African about his ethics. He has the sense of the sanctity and dignity of death which is behind so many of our ancient rites. He will not touch the dead. He has that strange worship of a bright and proud chastity which is the soul of our Europe, in Diana, in the Virgin Martyrs, in Britomart, which left a single white star in the sensual storms of the Elizabethan Drama, and which is reconquering the world in its new form — the worship of children. The lion will not hurt virgins. In an innumerable number of the old legends and poems you will find the description of the refusal of some eminent lion to touch some eminent young lady. Some say that this sense of delicacy is mutual; and that young ladies also refuse to touch lions. This may be true: but even if it is true it probably only applies to the lower or actual lion, the mere lion of Africa, a negligible creature whom we have already dismissed to wander in his deserts, deserts which are as futile as himself and which form the dustbin of the universe. The valuable lion, we have agreed, is a creature made entirely by man, like the chimaera and the hippogriff, the mermaid and the centaur, the giant with a hundred eyes, and the giant with a hundred hands. The lion on one side of the royal shield is as fabulous as the unicorn on the other side. In so far as he is not merely fantastic and impossible, he consists of all the aggregate good qualities of a kind of super-celestial country gentleman. The heraldic lion is fading, I fear, upon our escutcheons. He still swings valiantly, how ever, over certain places of entertainment where so many of the kindlier traditions of our ancient civilization have taken refuge. If you see the Red Lion, which should be on the shield of a knight, painted only on the signboard of an inn, remember all the great truths that you have read in this article; remember that this heraldic lion on the sign is the symbol of all that has lifted our Christian civilization into life and energy and honour — magnanimity, valour, a disdain of easy victories, a scorn for all the scorners of the weak. The heraldic lion has, perhaps, sprawled rather too widely over this article. A great many other examples might be taken. The heraldic leopard is not without his good points. The dog-headed men in Africa were full of interest; nor must we forget Jehan de Mandeville’s memorable description of a hippopotamus, that it was ‘half man and half horse’. That is what may be called an impressionist or symbolist sketch of it; it avoids teasing details, and gives a sense of mass and atmosphere. I have often looked at the hippopotamus in his cage at the Zoological Gardens, and wondered which part of his appearance or physiognomy impressed the incisive Mandeville as being contributed by some human person of his acquaintance. Had he seen a very human class of hippopotamus, or had he mixed with a hippopotamic class of men? But the general remarks which I have made about the medieval lion, the heraldic lion, apply equally well to all these other medieval monstrosities or combinations. They were all fictitious. They were all entirely different from and independent of, the living creature upon which they were supposed to be modelled. And those who wrote about them and talked about them, and gravely disputed about all their characteristics, physical, mental, and moral, were, at the bottom of their hearts and the back of their minds, totally indifferent to whether they were true or not. The Middle Ages were full of logic. And logic in its examples and symbols is in its nature entirely indifferent to fact. It is as easy to be logical about things that do not exist as about things that do exist. If twice three is six, it is certain that three men with two legs each will have six legs between them. And if twice three is six, it is equally certain that three men with two heads each will have six heads between them. That there never were three men with two heads each does not invalidate the logic in the least. It makes the deduction impossible, but it does not make it illogical. Twice three is still six, whether you reckon it in pigs or in flaming dragons, whether you reckon it in cottages or in castles-in-the-air. And the object of all this great medieval and Renaissance science was simply to find everywhere and anywhere examples of its philosophy. If the hippopotamus illustrated the idea of justice, well and good; if it did not, so much the worse for the hippopotamus. These ancients sought to make the brutes the mere symbol of the man. Some moderns seek to make Man a mere symbol of the brutes. These old scientists were only interested in the human side of the beasts. Some new scientists are only interested in the beastly side of the men. Instead of making the ape and tiger mere accessories to the man, they make man a mere accessory, a mere afterthought to the ape and tiger. Instead of employing the hippopotamus to illustrate their philosophy, they employ the hippopotamus to make their philosophy, and the great fat books he writes you and I, please God, will never read.

THE COURT OF CAMELOT

SOMEBODY recently asked me what I meant by a reference to the myth of Arthur; or, rather, a reference to the myth of the myth of Arthur. For in my opinion it is only a modern myth that he is only an ancient one. The chief difference between ancient and modern times seems to be that formerly legends grew very slowly and now they grow very fast. The old legends generally grew more slowly and always had a more historical basis; and it seems to me overwhelmingly probable that the story of King Arthur had a very solid historical basis. This must in a sense be mere guesswork, for I am not competent to judge of the details; but I think I am as competent as anyone else to judge of the theories, in the sense of seeing whether they hang together and are inherently probable and consistent. Now the theory that treats Arthur entirely as a fairy-tale seems to me more fantastic than any fairy-tale. It sometimes takes the form of saying that there was some prehistoric Celtic god or other who afterwards came to be described in more detail as a king in Camelot. I have never been very clear, by the way, about how this vague transition from divinity to humanity is supposed to present itself to human nature. A particular story of an incarnate god or a fallen angel one can imagine easily enough. But I am a little confused about how the mere act of the Pimlico populace continually calling upon heaven in their human difficulties, would of itself become a story that a Mr Heaven had lived in a particular street in Pimlico. It seems rather more likely that a simple people would exaggerate a hero into a god, rather than deliberately diminish a god into a hero. But this is something of a side issue and I do not insist on it. Anyhow, they say there must have been a Celtic god and doubtless there was; doubtless there were many Celtic gods — too many Celtic gods for a fastidious monotheistic taste. I might respectfully inquire what had become of all the others; and why they have not all turned into Christian kings with orders of chivalry? And then the critics complete the confusion by saying, as a sort of after-thought, that Arthur may also have been the name of a king, but implying that this can have nothing to do with the idea of King Arthur.

Now all this seems to me mythical in the worst sense; that it is concentrated on myths and wholly careless of history. If we are studying a historical problem, it would be well to begin with the historical part of it;

and if we want to know more, it is best to grasp what we know already. Now we do know as a historical fact that the beginning of the Dark Ages was a time when the north west corner of the Roman Empire was ruined by barbarian invasions. We do know that those who successfully defended civilization everywhere became great legendary yet historic heroes and that in this respect the story of Arthur is just like the story of Alfred. There was certainly a legendary Alfred as well as a historical Alfred; and every common-sense comparison would lead one to think there was a historical Arthur as well as a legendary Arthur. But the question is one of proportion; and the saving of Christendom by the heroes of the Dark Ages does seem to me a sufficient cause for so huge a legend: the last trickle of tradition from some lost Welsh polytheism does not seem to me a sufficient cause. There are a dozen parallel cases of Christian heroes; there are not a dozen parallel cases of Welsh gods.

Then we come to the old suggestion that Arthur was not Arthur but another person of the same name. Here again people seem to forget that a legend requires a story as well as a name. A legend is about something; it is not started by a word but by some true or false event. The earliest historical references to Arthur are references to what he did. What he did was to defend Britain, as a Christian and civilized State, against the heathen invasion. The very first references to him deal with stories like that of the Battle of Mount Badon, in which Arthur drove the heathen before him and carried a holy image, some say on his shield and some on his shoulders. If I remember right, William of Malmesbury, soon after the Norman Conquest, refers to Arthur not as a wild Welsh demigod or even a doubtful Welsh saint, but as a solid historical character whose name needs to be cleared from the later accretions of Welsh fancy. Now there is no doubt at all that battles similar to the Battle of Mount Badon did in all sorts of countries stem or turn the tide of barbarism. There is no doubt whatever that when they did, they left an enormous impression on the imaginations of men, like a story of the Deluge or the Day of Judgement. If the result was a myth, it was like some myth about a man who had saved the sun and stars.

But there is another historical truth that is here forgotten. Many doubts about the Court of Camelot are founded on the notion that anything so far back in time must itself have been barbaric. The truth is, that, if it was far enough back, it would almost certainly have been civilized. It would have been in the last phase of the old Roman civilization. The fallacy is like that of a man who should say at daybreak that if it was darker four hours before, it must have been darker still fourteen hours before. He would forget that fourteen hours might bring him back into the previous day. And the fascination of this study of the Dark Ages is precisely that the darkness does hide a buried day; the last lost daylight of the great culture of antiquity.

Much of the dullness of modern history came from the idea of progress. For history must be progress reversed. If things have always automatically grown brighter and better, then to trace things backwards is to go further and further not only into darkness but into dullness. It is to go from gold to lead and from lead to mud; from beautiful novelties to dreary negations. But, as a fact, these beautiful novelties have never appeared except when this negative theory of the past was itself negatived. They have come when people were quarrying in an older civilization, because it was more civilized than their own civilization. That is obviously what happened at the Renaissance, but it happened in many cases where it is less obvious. I believe that the peculiar magic and mastery still belonging to the Arthurian story is largely due to the long period during which men looked back to Roman Britain as some thing more rich and subtle and artistic than the barbarous centuries that succeeded it. They were not wrong in believing that Arthur and Lancelot were more courtly and cultured than Hengist and Horsa. If Arthur and Lancelot existed at all, they almost certainly were. The same has been true, of course, ever since people began to study the medieval civilization with any intelligence. Some sentimentalists in the eighteenth century may have begun by thinking ruined abbeys (especially by moonlight) merely interesting as rugged and barbaric, ‘with shapeless sculpture decked’. But since we have begun to search out the scheme and science of medieval architecture, we have realized that it is the very reverse of barbaric, that it is especially organized and orderly. We have recognized that Gothic architecture was certainly not made by Goths; and that the shapeless sculpture was anything but shapeless, and had a very deliberate shape. But we do not remember that, as we have groped for an understanding of the medieval system, so the men of the Dark Ages may well have groped for an understanding of the old Roman system. And it is natural that the last monuments of it should have appeared enormous in the twilight; and one of these monuments was the memory of Arthur.

WOLFE AND THE MIDSHIPMAN

THERE are people in the world who really hate the heroic. Granted that there is an extravagance always tending to overrate human achievements, there is an extravagance of triviality also, tending to underrate achievement, to take pleasure in a change from the poetic to the prosaic. That is why realistic novels are sometimes as interesting as romantic novels. It is simply because realistic novels are quite as arbitrary and fantastic as romantic novels. In the romance the hero is always jumping and perpetually falls on his feet. In the realistic story the hero is always plodding and perpetually falls on his nose. But in ordinary life it is unusual either to alight on a distant crag or to fall flat over a too proximate door-scraper. The romancer collects every instance of a beautiful triumph; the realist selects every case of an ugly cropper; but the bias of the realist is as extreme and as unscrupulous as that of the wildest romantic fabulist. If you throw enough mud, some of it will stick, especially to that unfortunate creature Man, who was originally made of mud. A realistic novel is written by stringing together all the tag-ends of human life — all the trains we miss, all the omnibuses we run after without catching, all the appointments that miscarry, and all the invitations that are declined; all the wasted half-hours at Clapham Junction, and all the infant prodigies that grow up into stupid men; all the rainy days and all the broken engagements; all the Might-Have-Beens and all the Hardly Weres. Realism is the art of connecting everything that is in its nature disconnected. But to do this properly a man must be a great artist and rather a good liar.

There are, then, partisans of the prosaic. They are not in the least facing life as it is: life as it is, is almost too splendid — nay, too beautiful to be faced. No man shall see life and live. They are making a special and personal selection, just as the aesthete or the optimist is making a special and personal selection. They nose about for the meannesses of mankind. They hunt for mortal humiliation. We know that they have this prosaic pugnacity in matters of fiction. But it is an interesting fact that they have it also about history. In history itself there is a school which may be called anti-romantic; and it is perpetually occupied in trying to explain away the many romances that have really happened.

When I was a boy I was told that General Wolfe before the assault on Quebec had recited the great lines of Gray about glory and the grave, and declared he would rather have written them than take Quebec. The story is a fine one, full of the eighteenth-century feeling of stoicism and heathen happiness before death, of the kinship of arts and arms, and of the soldier's splendid contempt for mere soldiering. When I was a man I was told to put away this childish legend and I put it away. It had been disproved. Wolfe had never said anything of the sort. And now, with a great jump, I read that the thing is substantially true after all.

I will take this story of General Wolfe and Gray's Elegy as a working instance of the way that the historical sceptics do the trick. They will discredit a story for which there is excellent evidence on the ground of certain omissions or discrepancies in that evidence. But they never make the least reference to whether these are of the kind that occur in true stories or of the kind that occur in false. Some slips are obviously the slips of a liar; other confusions arise in honest narration, and in honest narration alone. Some blunders prove falsehood; other blunders prove truth. Let us take this Quebec story and go into it a little. The sceptics, it seems, begin by making the story manifestly ridiculous in order to deny it. 'Is it likely', they say, 'that General Wolfe would have quoted Gray while he was leading his troops in deadly silence to surprise the French?' Why, of course not; and nobody I ever heard of — certainly not I myself in my infancy — ever imagined that Wolfe talked about literature within earshot of the enemy; or selected the occasion of a steep and silent ascent to recite the whole of Gray's Elegy. Picture the soldiers crawling and clambering through the darkness hardly daring to pant too loud; and imagine the General putting his mouth to the ear of a midshipman and shouting in a hoarse whisper:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day.
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight —

— and all the rest of the verses. Of course Wolfe said it, if he ever said it at all, on some occasion previous to the actual assault — at some distance of time and place at which it was possible for people to speak out loud. Do the critics think that during the whole Canadian campaign the English soldiers conversed by talking on their fingers?

Well, the popular story is that some time before the assault, perhaps on the previous day, Wolfe recited a good part of the Elegy (chiefly the part about ‘the paths of glory’ and ‘the grave’) to a midshipman named Robinson. But, apparently, the only person who can be referred to was a Scotchman named Robison; which, of course, is a perfect example of the mistakes that only the truthful can make. Any ignorant Englishman, seeing the Scotch name Robison, might think it was merely a misprint for Robinson. As it does not matter a rap to the story whether his name was Robinson or Rehoboam, of course men would tell the tale in its familiar form. If there is in Westmorland a person whose name is spelt Smiph, he must not complain if he is turned into Smith in stories in which he is a secondary figure. If there is in North Cornwall a fine old family of Jomes, it will probably become Jones for the purposes of popular narrative. Those are things which are modified, not in order to complicate a fraud, but in order to simplify the truth. And it is the whole case against the pedantic opponents of the romantic element in history that they do not seem able to distinguish between this instinctive omission of the irrelevant, which is simply the art of telling stories, and the introduction of ingenious and over-elaborate detail which is the whole art of telling lies. If popular traditions change, it is rather by dropping things out than by putting things in. The story grows simpler through the ages, not more complex.

Then the massive sceptical mind moves on to the next great difficulty in the story. Not only is it the awful truth that the midshipman Robinson was really Robison, but he was not really a midshipman. ‘Robison was rated as a midshipman in accordance with the usual convention that gives every gentleman employed on a ship of war an official rank, as he was afterwards rated as a colonel when Professor of Mathematics in the C. Cadet Corps at St Petersburg.’ Now, these are very interesting facts, but the insistence on them seems again to betray a singular ignorance of the way in which an honest man tells a true story. A man says, ‘Wolfe said to a midshipman.’ He does not say, ‘Wolfe said to a person rated as a midshipman in accordance with the usual convention that gives to every gentleman employed on a ship of war an official rank, as he was afterwards rated as a colonel when Professor of Mathematics in the C. Cadet Corps at St Petersburg.’ I can quite imagine Mrs Nickleby telling the story in that way, but nobody else.

It does not affect the story in the slightest degree whether Mr Robison was a midshipman, or a music-master, or a boot-black, or an Ethiopian king, or a person rated as a midshipman in accordance with the usual convention which gives, &c. But it does affect that story that we should get to the story with some reasonable speed and hear what was said by Wolfe, the only person in whom we are interested at all. Therefore, of course, the popular narrator said ‘midshipman’, simply because one can say ‘midshipman’ quicker than one can say ‘Jack Robinson’ or ‘Jack Robison’.

ABOUT CHRISTIANITY

A CURIOUS chance led me lately to stumble over an incident which happened some time ago. It was concerned with one of the most interesting men of our time; and also one of the problems which are peculiar to our civilization and our time. I give the story as I heard it; it reflects on nobody, whether it is true or untrue.

It seems that Mr Eric Gill, the distinguished sculptor, was engaged to erect a sculptural memorial for the League of Nations, expressing that need for Peace which is now the most direct and vital, not to say deadly, necessity, for all Christians and for all sane men. Apparently he planned a design which involved a Christian symbol; and this was resisted, on the ground that non-Christians might not accept it. I suspect that it was not so much a question of the non-Christians outside Europe as of the Anti-Christians inside Europe. It is very unlike all the little I know of the intellectual leaders of those who follow Confucius or Buddha to object especially to a mystical emblem connected with Christ; and nobody supposes that any body except leaders and intellectuals has very much to say in such modern political problems. And as for Islam, it is enough to say that Christ is already given at least as high a place by all Moslems as He is by many Modernists.

What produces a practical embarrassment in this case is the sincere and savage hatred felt by many Europeans for the religion of their own European past. And this interests me, simply as a historical comparison, because it is really a historical curiosity. It is a difficulty quite peculiar to Christendom. There does not seem to have been anything like it in Paganism. In the last phase of Paganism there was every sort of doubt; there was every sort of denial; but there was not this particular sort of difficulty. The old gods were once perhaps really worshipped as gods; they were then enjoyed as legends; they were even treated lightly as jokes; but they were never hated as symbols. There may have been a time, though I rather doubt it, when people did actually believe that Apollo drove a golden chariot through the sky; but, anyhow, long after Apollo had become an abstraction, an allegory of music or poetry, a tradition that nobody but the most remote rustics took quite seriously, there was most certainly no sculptor from one end of the Roman Empire to the other who would have felt any difficulty, or found any difficulty, in carving Apollo as driving a chariot. The heathens grew cold towards their religion, or even contemptuous of their religion, but they never had any irritation against it that could make them refuse to use its images, or its imagery, in the realm of imagination.

There must have been multitudes of intellectuals, living on the tradition of Euripides or Lucian, who took even a bitter or mocking or pessimistic view of the gods; or simply thought there were no such things as gods in the world; but they would never have objected to gods as graven images. I never heard of any case of any heathen sceptics becoming iconoclasts; and going out and smashing the popular deities as a protest on behalf of abstract truth. They accepted the lyre of Apollo or the wand of Mercury, just as we still accept a Cupid on a Valentine or a nymph on a stone fountain. We may say that the cupid has been vulgarized and is no longer truly a god. We may say that the nymph has met the gorgon, and been turned to stone. And they may have known in their hearts that their religion was dead. But because it was dead, they had even less desire to make exhausting efforts to kill it. If Christianity were really one of the cults studied in comparative religion, if it were really, as its critics sometimes say, a thing made up of materials borrowed from Pagan ism, if it were really only the last myth or ritual of the long undying death of the Roman Empire, then there is no reason why its symbolism should not be used forever by anybody; as the symbolism of nymphs and cupids is still used forever by anybody. The real reason is that this religion does differ in one detail from all those ancient and beautiful religions. It is not dead. Everybody knows in his heart that it is not dead; and none better than those who want it to die.

The people arranging for the Peace Memorial of the League of Nations would not have the slightest objection to covering it with signs and symbols which were once religious. They would not object to a statue of Peace holding the olive branch like a statue of Minerva; they would not object to a symbolic figure of Sunrise which had the lyre or the horses of Apollo; they would not be annoyed if somebody conceived womanhood under the form of Diana hunting or manhood under the form of Hercules at rest. All these things are now really an allegory. And if Christians could accept so trifling a modernist modification of their view as to agree that Christianity is dead, they could safely go on using all their great historical and hagiological wealth of imagery and illustration; and nobody would object to ten thousand angels or a million martyrs or any number of crosses and haloes.

But the ground of the resistance is that the whole modern comparison between the decline of Paganism and the decline of Christianity is false. Paganism, in the historic sense of Polytheism, did decline once and for all. Christianity has declined twenty times; but nobody who hated it was ever quite certain that it was dead. The rationalist historians of the nineteenth century found it easy to trace in a curve the rise and fall of a religion. They showed very lucidly, to their own satisfaction, that such a historical monstrosity was first a myth, and then a superstition, and then a tradition, and then an abstraction and an allegory. And what they wrote was largely true, if they had happened to be writing the history of Jupiter-Ammon. But as a history of post-Pagan Europe, commonly called Christendom, it is simply not true. It is not the story of something that ruled the whole world, as a pagan deity ruled the whole city. It is not the story of something which was lost when a man left his own city, and enlarged his mind by considering the gods of other cities. It did not begin by being so powerful as Paganism; it never came to being so impotent as Paganism. It was the story of some thing that was unsafe at its safest and living still at its lowest; something which is always coming out of the Catacombs and going back again; something that is never entirely acceptable when it appears; and never entirely forgotten when it disappears.

It is this utterly unique and even unnatural vigilance that can alone explain a difficulty like that raised about the graven image of Peace. It is that even in proclaiming political peace it proclaims spiritual war. Its things cannot be used as dead things to deck out any alien triumph; we will not be the skeleton at any pagan feast or the corpse for any scientific body-snatching. But, quite apart from our various individual views on such questions of philosophy, there remains a very practical problem of history. These mysteries are the background of the modern European's past, just as those myths were the background of the most sceptical Pagan's past. And the matter can be put to a perfectly practical test. If you had told one of the last Greek sculptors that he must not represent anything out of the great Greek myths, he would probably have answered, 'What shall I represent?' These things were the whole imagery of his imagination. If you tell an artist of the Christian culture, whatever his opinions, that he is to represent peace or charity or universal love by a familiar and obvious emblem — what is the poor devil to do? Pause and think of that point; for it is a perfectly practical point. What *are* the popular emblems of peace, if we are to cut out all that comes from myths or mysteries or the past?

ST GEORGE FOR ENGLAND

I AM informed on fairly good authority that the day upon which I write these words is St George’s Day. It is very characteristic of our country that we make far more fuss about St Patrick’s Day than we do about St George’s. It is a part of that curious elephantine modesty of the English in some matters: a modesty so heavy and helpless that foreigners mistake it for pride. It is true that within recent years there have been some signs in us of mere boasting. But even they are mainly glorifications of things that are not strictly ourselves; things that, as a general rule, we know nothing about — such as Australia. Even when the English do brag they seem to brag of anything except England. Something prevents us from becoming poetical and dithyrambic about ourselves. Some people will tell you that this is because we are so stern and practical, but that is all talk, and un-English talk at that. As a matter of fact, we are not nearly so practical as we were when we were much more dithyrambic. I do not know why it is, but the English really have got a certain kind of embarrassment and dislike of show; but whatever it is, it certainly is not because they are not sufficiently roman tic; their magnificent romantic literature can answer for that; for they are (I think) the only nation in the world whose absolutely first-class literature is rather romantic than classical. Sometimes I think that the Englishman is undemonstrative because he is much too romantic to be demonstrative. Like all sentimentalists, he is secretive. He does not tell you his feelings because they are too romantic to tell.

But the neglect of St George is an example of that lack of animated ritual which Irishmen or Italians in judging us mistake for a vital lack of romance. It may be urged by some that the neglect of St George (as compared, for instance, with St Patrick) may be easily explained by the fact that the historical St Patrick was a great man whose life is largely known and whose work can be definitely admired; whereas the historical St George is chiefly remarkable for having no history. We know nothing about his life and only one thing about his death, that he was martyred for the faith. For I suppose that everyone has realized that Gibbon, in identifying the saint with the fraudulent financier who was an Arian and bore the same name, was merely letting his anti-Christian enthusiasm run away with him and wallowing in the charming thought of a saint who rigged the market. To suppose that that amiable financier could ever have become the patron saint of England is to misunderstand the whole atmosphere not merely of the morals, but of the theology and hagiology of the early Church. I take it then that the historic St George, if there was one at all (to which I am extremely indifferent), was the Christian of whom we know nothing but his death.

But those who suggest that the remote and impersonal quality in the historic St George accounts for the English indifference to him know little of patron saints or of the essential nature of saint-worship. Saint-worship is not the same as hero-worship; it is a much less dangerous thing than hero-worship. For hero-worship generally means the absorption or transmutation of some part, at any rate, of one's own original ideas of goodness under the heat and hypnotism of some strong personality. But saint-worship, especially when it is a worship of saints whom we know little or nothing about, is simply the worship of that tradition of goodness in which the saint's name has been embalmed; and into that empty mould our own natural idealism can much more easily be poured. The invocation of saints is much less idolatrous than the invocation of historical heroes after the manner of Carlyle. For you can only admire the goodness of the saint, whereas you may come to admire the badness of the hero. You may get all kinds of dangerous bias and sophistry and bad advice from the man in history whom you know something about. You can get nothing but good advice from the man you know nothing about. Thus, to take the historical St George; if all we know about him is that he was killed for his opinions, that fact is, properly considered, so staggering that it might send us all singing into battle. Or take rather the legendary St George, who is (I need hardly say) very much more important than the real one. As it is, St George the dragon-slayer stands to I us simply and sufficiently as the symbol of courage. He does not stand in our minds connected with any of those silly epigrams which great men in their old age utter to misguided youth. St George never told anybody what was his 'method' or what was 'the secret of his power'. He made no remarks, he merely killed the dragon. He did not say that the dragon was killed on Eton playing-fields. He did not say that he had never met a dragon with whom he couldn't do a deal. He never called the death of the dragon inevitable; while he was fighting the dragon he had thoroughly discovered that it was not. He never said that the way to kill a dragon was to work hard in early youth, or to start with twopence a day, or to avoid: tobacco, or to know your own mind, or any of those inane tips. For

St George knew very well what all real soldiers know; that the only way to be even approximately likely to kill a dragon is to give the dragon a heavy chance of killing you. And this method, which is the only one, is much too unpleasant to be talked about. You see, I am making a character of St George at my own will and fancy. That is the whole point and advantage of the unknown saint. That is why saint-worship is so much more free than hero-worship.

I think myself that something might be done by the English nation with the legend of St George and the Dragon. It has still a lingering hold on the people in some counties, where the mummers at Christmas or Easter still perform a rude drama in which the English champion overcomes the evil principle in single combat. In almost all these little ritual plays, so far as I have noticed, the same singular and picturesque episode occurs. I mean that when the arch-enemy (sometimes the Dragon, sometimes a Turkish Knight, sometimes some other alien figure) is thrown to the ground by St George, he always calls out for a doctor. A doctor is always provided by the Christian conqueror, and the fight recommences. This episode might be made to mean a great deal if any English poet philosophized the legend of St George, as Goethe philosophized the legend of Faust. For it is true that the chivalrous and Christian character (which St George typifies) fights under that disadvantage of the doctor. He has to contend at once against the mercilessness of his enemy and the mercifulness of himself. But again the legendary drama is right when it makes St George conquer. When modern cynics (utterly ignorant of courage and, therefore, utterly ignorant of war) say that we must be more brutal if we are to be efficient, they forget that the most brutal civilizations are the least efficient. Oriental nations that torture their captives are themselves captive. Savages that eat men do not seem to thrive on it. Our European civilization has faults enough, but it is on the whole the most merciful and it is on the whole the most strong. For the mind that can imagine sufferings is the same that can imagine a new gun.

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

I SEE that there is a movement in many influential quarters for cutting out the best verse in the National Anthem. This is very typical of many of our ‘reforms’ that arise out of a sense of refinement and not out of a sense of right. When I say the best verse, I mean the one that confounds the tricks of all the enemies of the State. And I call it the best verse because, in a work that no one particularly praises or preserves for literary reasons, it is the most quaintly national, the most unique, the most sincere and vigorous, and by far the most democratic. One does not hold up ‘God Save the King’ as a poem like the ‘Mariners of England’, any more than one holds up the picture of John Bull as something beautiful and well-proportioned, like the St George of Donatello. The thing is a patriotic curiosity; and the most curious and patriotic part of it is exactly the part that these people want to cut out. And, ethically, it is excellent.

Confound their politics,
Frustrate their knavish tricks,

may not be very good poetry, but it is very good, sound Christian morals. If there are any knavish tricks, I hope we all pray they may be frustrated. And as for confounding politics, a good many of us have been in sympathy with the idea ever since we made a study of the ways of the confounded politicians. The poem does not define the people denounced, except in so far that they are the enemies of the King, who is in all such symbolic songs made a symbol of the commonwealth. I happen to think that the King’s worst enemies often sit at his own Council-board, and that England’s worst invaders and destroyers often have the high places in the senate; but all this does not prevent me from singing the anthem with heartiness and relish.

What the refined people (confound their knavish tricks!) will not see is that, if you are loyal to anything and wish to preserve it, you must recognize that it has or might have enemies; and you must hope that the enemies will fail. The real insolence, if there were any, would lie in saying, ‘God save the King’ — in calling the Universal and Eternal to take care of a particular tribal chief on a trivial little island. But undoubtedly, if you have a right to ask God to save him, you have a right to ask God to frustrate those who seek to destroy him; the two sentences simply mean the same thing. The oblivion of so obvious a fact is only a part of that foolish forgetfulness of the real ethics of fighting which is equally perilous today, whether it takes its Jingo or its Pacifist form. Not only is the army the chief business of our processions; but processions seem to be considered the chief business of the army. From no point of view ought armaments to be ornaments. I have no respect for that chronic war-fever, or love of conquest, which (as the phrase goes) draws the sword and throws away the scabbard. But I have even less respect for that arrogant etiquette that keeps the scabbard when it has thrown away the sword. And among the results of this masquerade style of militarism is a neglect of the most naked and structural principles of fighting.

Nothing is baser in our time than the idea that we can have special enthusiasms for things, so long as they are secure, without pledging ourselves to uphold them if they are ever in peril. You cannot have a devotion that is not a boundary. You cannot have a boundary that is not a barricade. If you do not think mankind a sacred brother hood to be everywhere saluted and saved, then do not say so. But if you do say so, then you must certainly be ready to save it from sharks or tigers, from monsters or from microbes. If you do not think your nation a solid entity and a holy soil, then do not call it your nation. But if you do, you must admit that it might be as much hated by others as it is loved by you. If it is really individual, it is just as likely to be hated as it is to be loved.

There is another obvious moral ground upon which we should continue to ‘confound their politics’. The refined people (confound, &c.) seem to think that there is something unpleasant and profane about making a war religious. I should say that there ought to be no war except religious war. If war is irreligious, it is immoral. No man ought ever to fight at all unless he is prepared to put his quarrel before that invisible Court of Arbitration with which all religion is concerned. Unless he thinks he is vitally, eternally, cosmically in the right, he is wrong to fire off a pocket-pistol. If he does think he is in the right, he is surely justified in praying that the right may prevail. The separation between war and the Church, like the separation between business and the Chapel, would only mean that the religion would grow much too thin, while the cynicism would grow much too fat. It would be a good thing if religion thought a little more about this world — and if politics thought a little more about the other.

And lastly, no one seems to notice that this verse of the National Anthem (if my memory serves me right) is the only one that contains the popular note of comradeship as well as the popular note of conflict. I quote from memory, but I think the verse runs —

O Lord, our God, arise,
Scatter his enemies,
And make them fall.
Confound their politics,
Frustrate their knavish tricks;
On Thee our hopes we fix:
God save us all.

It is the only verse that begins with something like fine Biblical diction, as of a whirlwind rising. It is the only verse that ends with a universal and democratic benediction. I do not wonder that the Moderns want it removed.

KING GEORGE IV

I HAVE just been reading what is not only a very excellent biography, but a very much-needed book. It. is a study of ‘George the Fourth’ by Mr Shane Leslie. It is in no sense what even shallow people would call a whitewashing of George IV, though it is the restoration of a blackened portrait. It has not the tone of an advocate for the defence any more than for the prosecution. But it is a criticism of the critics of George. And it is a very dam aging criticism too.

The truth is that poor George has been the victim of a prolonged effort of Propaganda. It was partly Whig and partly Victorian propaganda. But because it went on for a very long time and enlisted many literary men of what may be called the Whig patronage, it has come to seem to many of my generation and the next a normal truth of English history. It is quite obvious that, long before we come to the really fine qualities of the man, even his ordinary qualities were caricatured in the most unscrupulous and scandalous fashion. In weakness and in strength he was very much of a man — of what we call a man’s man. He has not only been represented as a ladies’ man — which perhaps he was; he has been talked of as a lady-killer almost in the literal sense of Bluebeard. The truth is that George’s conduct, while wrong by a Christian standard, was very far from being exceptionally wrong by the ordinary heathen standard of hundreds of such men of the world. Very few of those men have risked so much as he did for the one heroic love of his life; and, if he had risked more, he might well have been called a hero. But he was not a hero; he was a very human being; a man, but not a monster. Yet it certainly is as a monster, swollen, bloated, and abominable, that he haunted even our nurseries like a nightmare.

A coincidence of two causes, I think, produced this lurid transformation and tradition. The first was aristocratic and the second democratic; and together they turned both the Whig and the Radical against the King’s memory. The first was that he had been in every sense, and even remained in some sense, a Radical himself. At least he was once a Liberal even with a large ‘L’, and was always a liberal with a small one But he had changed sides in the ordinary party sense, and joined in the ordinary shuffling and inconsistency of the party system. The Whigs hated him for having been a Whig more than for being a Tory. But the aristocrats who had known him knew he was intelligent, knew he had understood what he was doing and what he was undoing His very intelligence let him in for a charge of intellectual treason. That was the sort of monster he was — a constitutional monarch who could not act for himself, and yet could think for himself.

The second cause that coincides with this was the genuine popular legend of the pathos and innocence of Queen Caroline. Now about that the King may have been wrong, but he certainly was not inhumanly or inconceivably wrong; and the wrong certainly was not all on one side. George was really wrong not in divorcing Caroline, but in marrying Caroline. In divorcing her, as a matter of fact, he was simply ceasing to be a bigamist. For he was already married to a much better woman. But the mob has a mysterious sort of power of hitting the right nail with the wrong hammer. George was very properly pelted for being false to his wife; only he was really being false to quite another wife. Anyhow, his popularity with posterity was killed by those two combining forces. It was killed by the horror of the populace who knew nothing about him, and the jealousy of the gentry who knew too much about him. But the time has come when a more rational and reliable estimate can be made than was possible to the Whig tradition which Thackeray inherited from Macaulay; and with admirable wit, sympathy, and compact criticism, Mr Shane Leslie has made it.

In truth, there is a great deal to praise in George IV. At any rate, there was a very great deal to praise in the Prince Regent. It was not entirely his fault if there was less to praise in the King than there had been in the Prince. If ever a man’s life was broken and brutally mismanaged by other people, it was his. His father was a fool who repeatedly relieved the monotony of that fact by becoming a lunatic. If anything, he was quieter and less mischievous as a lunatic than he was as a fool. He pestered and oppressed his children, and drove them into dark and devious ways. Yet even here there is a good example of the way in which the world is unjust to the Prince Regent. It has often been repeated that he wanted his child to be trained to be truthful, and admitted that he had fallen into lax ways in such matters, through the false position into which the old family tyranny had forced him in his youth. This is used as evidence against him — that he had himself confessed to being a liar. But no real liar ever confesses to being a liar. The confession is not a proof of how false he was, but of how candid he was.

He was forbidden by bigots and tyrants to call his wife his wife, and that is a situation which no man’s sense of honour will ever perfectly survive. It broke George’s career across the middle; and the second half was a crippled thing. Yet even as a cripple he did things that the active and ambitious around him did not think of doing. Mr Shane Leslie, among his many admirable phrases, uses one that is especially vivid and veracious; George had ‘a fierce streak of humanity’. His acts of mercy were abrupt, angry, and even militant. They had the flash of finality; they were absolute renunciations or abject apologies. He was devoted to pugilism; but when a pugilist was killed in the ring at Brighton he took a vow never to see a prize-fight again. He had a profoundly Christian hatred of the callous spirit in the criminal law, which executes men as if by clockwork, and he paved the world with pardons for condemned men. He pardoned them not in a patronizing and facile fashion, as much meaner enemies have implied, but, on the contrary, with vigilance and vivid worry and a sort of insomnia of responsibility. He sat up all night looking for a loophole in the law by which he could let some obscure criminal free. He took trouble in exactly the type of cases in which most men (especially men of his position) would never think of taking it. He happened to turn down a street where a man stood in pillory for a political offence — having, indeed, been put there by the police and the lawyers for a libel upon George himself. George was so much distressed at the thought that he might conceivably be supposed to have triumphed ungenerously over his slanderer that he wrote a personal letter apologizing for the ‘indelicacy’ of his conduct. A man moved in such a case to such an apology ought not to be called, merely with a sneer, the First Gentleman of Europe.

George’s liberality was anything but a mere party pose and the making of a cabal against his father. He was liberal about the very things on which most party Whigs were not liberal at all — for instance, he sympathized with the point of view of the Irish. If he could have come to the throne with his real wife as a Queen, it is possible that the whole tragedy of a hundred years might have been averted. There are a great many good things that might have happened if the younger and more generous George could have become a normal and national King. There is nothing that can be done now except do reasonable justice to his memory; and it was long before anybody thought of doing it. But nobody who reads Mr Shane Leslie’s lively and pointed paragraphs has any excuse for thinking that Thackeray exhausted the subject or that there is no picture of George except in the cartoons of Gilray. He will know well enough that the man who kept a complete set of

Jane Austen in each of his houses, that he might read at any moment, was not a coarse and comic drunkard understanding nothing but bruisers and cock-fighting. He will know that the man who endangered his crown out of chivalrous devotion to a devout and religious woman was not an utterly selfish satyr whose very appetite was cold. He will know that the friend of Fox and Sheridan cannot possibly have been a mere dummy dressed up as a dandy; and that the man whom Canning and Castlereagh often thought too clever for them can hardly have been entirely a fool.

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KING EDWARD VII

I

ON the very night that King Edward died, it happened that the present writer experienced some of those trivialities that can bring about one’s head all the terrors of the universe. The shocking news was just loose in London, but it had not touched the country where I was, when a London editor attempted to tell me the truth by telephone. But all the telephones in England were throbbing and thundering with the news; it was impossible to clear the line; and it was impossible to hear the message. Again and again I heard stifled accents saying something momentous and unintelligible; it might have been the landing of the Germans or the end of the world. With the snatches of this strangled voice in my ears I went into the garden and found, by another such mystical coincidence, that it was a night of startling and blazing stars — stars so fierce and close that they seemed crowding round the roof and tree-tops. White-hot and speechless they seemed striving to speak, like that voice that had been drowned amid the drumming wires. I know not if any reader has ever had a vigil with the same unreasoning sense of a frustrated apocalypse. But if he has, he will know one of the immortal moods out of which legends rise and he will not wonder that men have joined the notion of a comet with the death of a King.

But besides this historic stroke, this fall of a national monument, there is also the loss of a personality. Over and above the dark and half-superstitious suggestion that the fate of our country has turned a corner and entered a new epoch, there is the pathetic value of the human epoch that has just closed. The starting-point for all study of King Edward is the fact of his unquestionable and positive popularity. I say positive, because most popularity is negative; it is no more than toleration. Many an English landlord is described as popular among his tenants, when the phrase only means that no tenant hates him quite enough to be hanged for putting a bullet in him. Or, again, in milder cases, a man will be called a popular administrator because his rule, being substantially successful, is substantially undisturbed; some system works fairly well and the head of the system is not hated, for he is hardly felt. Quite different was the practical popularity of Edward VII. It was a strictly personal image and enthusiasm. The French, with their talent for picking the right word, put it best when they described King Edward as a kind of universal uncle. His popularity in poor families was so frank as to be undignified; he was really spoken of by tinkers and tailors as if he were some gay and prosperous member of their own family. There was a picture of him upon the popular retina infinitely brighter and brisker than there is of any politician. There was something in him that appealed to those strange and silent crowds that are invisible because they are enormous. In connexion with him the few voices that really sound popular, sound also singularly loyal. Since his death was declared there have already been many written and spoken eulogies.

If you dig deep enough into any ancient ceremony, you will find the traces of that noble truism called democracy, which is not the latest but the earliest of human ideas. Just as in the very oldest part of an English church you will unearth the level bricks of the Romans, so in the very oldest part of every royal or feudal form you will unearth the level laws of the Republic. In that complex and loaded rite of Coronation, which King Edward underwent, there is distinct trace of the ancient idea of a King being elected like a President. The Archbishop shows the King to the assembled people and asks if he is accepted or refused. Edward VII, like other modern Kings, went through a ritual election by an unreal mob. But if it had been a real election by a real mob — he would still have been elected. That is the really important point for democrats.

The largeness of the praise of King Edward in the popular legend was fundamentally due to this, that he was a leader in whom other men could see themselves. The King’s interest in sport, good living, and Continental travel was exactly of the kind that every clerk or commercial traveller could feel in himself on a smaller scale and in a more thwarted manner. Now, it emphatically will not do to dismiss this popular sympathy in pleasure as the mere servile or vulgar adoration of a race of snobs. To begin with, mere worldly rank could not and did not achieve such popularity for Ernest Duke of Cumberland or Alfred Duke of Edinburgh or even for the Prince Consort; and to go on with mere angry words like snobbishness is an evasion of the democratic test. I fancy the key to the question is this; that, in an age of prigs and dehumanized humanitarians, King Edward stood to the whole people as the emblem of this ultimate idea — that however extraordinary a man may be by office, influence, or talent, we have a right to ask that the extraordinary man should be also an ordinary man. He was more representative than representative government; he was the whole theme of Walt Whitman — the average man enthroned.

His reputation for a humane normality had one aspect in which he was a model to philanthropists. Innumerable tales were told of his kindness or courtesy, ranging from the endowment of a children's hospital to the offer of a cigar, from the fact that he pensioned a match-seller to the mere fact that he took off his hat. But all these tales took the popular fancy all the more because he himself was the kind of man to share the pleasures he distributed. His offer of a cigar was the more appreciated because he offered himself a cigar as well. His taking off his hat was the more valued because he himself was by no means indifferent to decent salutations or discourteous slights. Philanthropists too frequently forget that pity is quite a different thing from sympathy; for sympathy means suffering with others and not merely being sorry that they suffer. If the strong brotherhood of men is to abide, if they are not to break up into groups alarmingly like different species, we must keep this community of tastes in giver and received. We must not only share our bread, but share our hunger.

King Edward was a man of the world and a diplomatist; but there was nothing of the aristocrat about him. He had a just sense of the dignity of his position; but it was very much such a sense as a middle-class elective magistrate might have had, a Lord Mayor or the President of a Republic. It was even in a sense formal, and the essence of aristocracy is informality. It is no violation of the political impartiality of the Crown to say that he was, in training and tone of mind, liberal. The one or two points on which he permitted himself a partisan attitude were things that he regarded as common-sense emancipations from mere custom, such as the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill. Both in strength and weakness he was inter national; and it is undoubtedly largely due to him that we have generally dropped the fashion of systematically and doggedly misunderstanding the great civilization of France. But the first and last thought is the same: that there are millions in England who have hardly heard of the Prime Minister to whom King Edward was a picture of paternal patriotism; and in the dark days that lie before us it is, perhaps, just those millions who may begin to

II

The calamity of the King's death was unofficially acknowledged almost before it was officially acknowledged. The people were prompter in mourning than the officers of state in bidding them mourn. The national mourning — taken as a whole, of course — is all the more universal for being irregular, all the more unanimous for being scrappy or even intermittent. Armies of retainers clad in complete black, endless processions of solemn robes and sable plumes, could not be a quarter so impressive as the cheap black band of a man in corduroys or the cheap black hat of a girl in pink and magenta. The part is greater than the whole. Nevertheless, the formal side of funeral customs, as is right and natural, is already engaging attention. Sir William Richmond, always prominent in any question of the relation of art to public life, has already sketched out a scheme of mortuary decoration so conceived as to avoid the inhuman monotony of black. He would have a sombre, but still rich, scheme of colour, of Tyrian purple, dim bronze, and gold. Both artistically and symbolically, there is much that is sound in the conception. Indeed, Sir William Richmond, consciously or unconsciously, is in this matter following an ecclesiastical tradition. The world mourns in black, but the Church mourns in violet — one of the many instances of the fact that the Church is a much more cheerful thing than the world. Nor is the difference an idle accident; it really corresponds by chasms of spiritual separation. Black is dark with absence of colour; violet is dark with density and combination of colour; it is at once as blue as mid night and as crimson as blood. And there is a similar distinction between the two ideas of death, between the two types of tragedy. There is the tragedy that is founded on the worthlessness of life; and there is the deeper tragedy that is founded on the worth of it. The one sort of sadness says that life is so short that it can hardly matter; the other that life is so short that it matters for ever.

But though in this, as in many other matters, it is religion alone that retains any tradition of a freer and more humane popular taste, it may well be doubted whether in the present instance the existing popular taste should not be substantially gratified, or, at least, undisturbed. King Edward was not the kind of man in whose honour we should do even beautiful things that are in any sense eccentric. His sympathies in all such matters were very general sympathies; he stood to millions of people as the very incarnation of common-sense, social adaptability, tact, and a rational conventionality. His people delighted in the million snapshots of him in shooting-dress at a shooting-box, or in racing clothes at a race-meeting, in morning-dress in the morning or in evening-dress in the evening, because all these were symbols of a certain sensible sociability and readiness for everything with which they loved to credit him. For it must always be remembered in this connexion that masculine costume is different at root from feminine costume — different in its whole essence and aim. It is not merely a question of the man dressing in dull colours or the woman in bright; it is a question of the object. A Life Guardsman has very splendid clothes; an artistic lady may have very dingy clothes. But the point is that the Life Guard only puts on his bright clothes so as to be like other Life Guards. But the artistic lady always seeks to have some special, delicate, and exquisite shade of dinginess different from the dinginess of other artistic ladies. Though gleaming with scarlet and steel, the Life Guard is really invisible. Though physically, no doubt, of terrific courage, he is morally cowardly, like nearly all males. Like the insects that are as green as the leaves or the jackals that are as red as the desert, a man generally seeks to be unseen by taking the colour of his surroundings, even if it be a brilliant colour. A female dress is a dress; a male dress is a uniform. Men dress smartly so as not to be noticed; but all women dress to be noticed — gross and vulgar women to be grossly and vulgarly noticed, wise and modest women to be wisely and modestly noticed.

Now, of this soul in masculine ‘good form’, this slight but genuine element of a manly modesty in conventions, the public made King Edward a typical and appropriate representative. They like to think of him appearing as a soldier among soldiers, a sailor among sailors, a Freemason at his Lodge, or a Peer among his Peers. For this reason they even tolerated the comic idea of his being a Prussian Colonel when he was in Prussia; and they took a positive pleasure in the idea of his being a Parisian boulevardier when he was in Paris. Since he was thus a public symbol of the more generous and fraternal uses of conventionality, we may be well content with a conventional scheme of mourning; especially when in this case, as in not a few other cases, the conventional merely means the democratic. King Edward’s popularity was such a very popular kind of popularity that it would be rather more appropriate to make his funeral vulgar than to make it aesthetic. It is true that legend connects his name with two or three attempts to modify the ungainliness and gloom of our modern male costume; but he hardly insisted on any of them, and none of them was of a kind specially to satisfy Sir William Richmond. The aesthetes might perhaps smile on the notion of knee breeches; but I fear that brass buttons on evening coats would seem to them an aggravation of their wrong. Even where King

Edward was an innovator, he was an innovator along popular and well-recognized lines; a man who would have liked a funeral to be funereal, as he would have liked a bail to be gay. We need not, therefore, feel it so very inappropriate even if in the last resort the celebrations are in the most humdrum or even jog-trot style, if they satisfy the heart of the public, though not the eye of the artist.

And yet again, in connexion with those aspects of the late King which may be and are approved on more serious and statesmanlike grounds (as, for instance, his international attitude towards peace), this value of a working convention can still be found. It is easy to say airily, in an ethical textbook or a debating club resolution, that Spaniards should love Chinamen, or that Highlanders should suddenly embrace Hindus. But, as men are in daily life, such brotherhood is corrupted and confused, though never actually contradicted. It is the fundamental fact that we are all men; but there are circumstances that permit us to feel it keenly and other circumstances that almost prevent us from feeling it at all. It is here that convention (which only means a coming together) makes smooth the path of primal sympathy, and by getting people, if only for an hour, to act alike, begins to make them feel alike. I have said much against aristocracy and 3iiall continue to do so, but I will never deny that aristocracy has certain queer advantages, not very often mentioned. One of them is that which affects European diplomacy: that a gentleman is the same all over Europe, while a peasant or even a merchant, may be very different. A Dutch gentleman and an Irish gentleman stand on a special and level platform; a Dutch peasant and an Irish peasant are divided by all dynastic and divine wars. Of course, this means that a peasant is superior to a gentle man — more genuine, more historic, more national; but that, surely, is obvious. Nevertheless, for cosmopolitan purposes, such as diplomacy, a gentleman may be used — with caution. And the reason that has made aristocrats effective as diplomatists is the same that made King Edward effective; the existence of a convention or convenient form that is understood everywhere and makes action and utterance easy for everyone. Language itself is only an enormous ceremony. King Edward completely understood that nameless Volapuk or Esperanto on which modern Europe practically reposes. He never put himself in a position that Europe could possibly misunderstand, as the Kaiser did by his theocratic outbursts, even if they were logical; or the Tsar by his sweeping repressions, even if they were provoked. Partly a

German, by blood, partly a Frenchman, by preference, inter-married with all the thrones of Europe and quite conscious of their very various perplexities, he had the right to be called a great citizen of Europe. There are only two things that can bind men together; a convention and a creed. King Edward was the last, the most popular, and probably the most triumphant example of Europe combining with success upon a large and genial convention. Tact and habit and humanity had in him their final exponent in all the Courts, reviews, race-courses, and hotels of Christendom. If these are not enough, if it is not found sufficient for Europe to have a healthy convention, then Europe must once more have a creed. The coming of the creed will be a terrible business.

KING GEORGE V

THE passing of King George the Fifth from the scene of his labours, labours admittedly among the most devoted and unselfish of the public duties of our time, marks in more ways than one a special achievement in our national history. It is self-evident, and has therefore been said by many and seen by all, that through all this lifetime the English Crown has remained popular and secure, in a time when Crowns were falling on every side. But the remotest rim of this rending storm never even touched the outer coasts of this country, or raised anything worth calling a whisper about the continuity of our historic compromise. This is a historical fact, whether men rejoice in it or no; and a very remarkable and impressive fact too, when we come to consider it. But, though this is obvious, what may be called the converse is almost equally obvious. The world is coming to a conflict of extremes, and the popularity of King George had as little to do with the one sort of extreme as the other. The Republican had grown accustomed to a monarch; the Royalist had grown accustomed to a constitutional monarch; the monarch owed little to the new cult of monarchy. Continental States which have already been shaken by revolutions are under constant fear of being shaken again by restorations. But it is simply the fact touching our selves, and our own unique insular tradition, that, when we have all said with deep and sincere sorrow, ‘The King is dead,’ not a soul thinks seriously of saying any thing except ‘Long live the King!’

The virtues of King George were rather specially of a sort to correct the confusions and corruptions that have made modern government so insecure. What has most harmed modern government, including what we call representative government, is a certain quality that is seldom mentioned, though I think I have mentioned it, for I think it very serious. It is the loss of the old ideal which associated a love of liberty with a scorn of luxury. The first and best of the democratic idealists were always definite on this point. They demanded that a republican senator should show a republican simplicity. It was that which was to distinguish the senator from the courtier, and from the effeminacy of the Court. We have lived to see the Court set something of an example to the Senates. The King had considerably more republican simplicity, in that sense, than a good many republican plutocrats and millionaires. Nobody ever accused him of being a leader of the Smart Set, or of frequenting those bizarre night clubs where he might have found not a few of the popularly elected politicians. He had little appetite for luxury; he can hardly have had a very definite itch even for leisure. The declaration of abstinence which he made at the beginning of the War was very typical of him. It was not merely ritual or royal gesture; if he had been born in any other station there would have been something about him that was thus thrifty and vigilant and ready to renounce. And whether we agree or not with the theory of this or that renunciation, it is certain that this sort of thing was in trenchant contrast with the general use of social emancipation around him. There can be no doubt that it provided what has been very badly needed in our time, a sort of core of orderly and sensible living, in the very midst of a society which, like some pagan societies of the past, is in many ways not far from madness.

The popular suspicion which poisons so much of popular government today is directly connected with the exaggerated pursuit of pleasure. It is a suspicion, not only of wealth, but of the waste of wealth. It is a suspicion that almost anything may be a mere ladder to the life of the rich, even an attack on the rich. A friend of mine expressed it long ago, on the occasion of a political election, in lines which I hope are familiar —

The evil power that buttressed privilege
And went with women and champagne and bridge,
Broke, and Democracy resumed her reign
Which went with bridge and women and champagne.

Against this sort of impression, the whole attitude of the late King was a very valuable corrective. It reminded us, in a permanent personal manifestation, of the other and better side of English administration; and especially of the patience and loyalty of the public services, and of those great permanent officials of whom he was the first. Upon this side of public business and bureaucratic devotion there is a general testimony to his thoroughness. I myself, though not in the way of such things, have met many men who were impressed by his knowledge of detail in departments which they had imagined to be almost private experiences of their own. He had certainly learned much more, in all departments of life, than he ever presented as pretensions to the public; and in that sense it might be said that his public life was only too private, and had hardly enough of the old parade of popular monarchy.

As a patriotic ruler and a public servant, especially in the matter of responsibility and hard work, his reputation, was a thing universally assured. But as a private individual, I rather fancy that he was a good deal misunderstood. He had not, as his father had, the gesture of public life, the presence that seems to fill platforms, the smile that includes crowds; and therefore he adopted in such things a less expansive dignity not without a touch of doggedness, and produced on some strangers an impression of being stolid. But, as a social personality, he was not stolid. Those who met him for the first time, with nothing but this previous impression of public occasions, were almost startled by his vivacity. He spoke frankly, sometimes very frankly, and did not disguise his healthy likes and dislikes. He was probably of the kind that would always prefer talking in private to speaking in public, but not because he had any inherent reluctance to speak. As is often the case with what would seem a mere popular sentiment, there was a certain instinctive accuracy about the phrase that called him the Sailor King. For his personality most immediately recalled a certain sort of lively though experienced naval officer; animated, anecdotal, fond of talking about important things in a casual way. Naturally, this aspect could not be known to most of us, except by accident or incidental privilege; but the in direct effects of it can be felt in innumerable stories even at second and third hand. If he was unfitted for the flamboyant kingcraft of Potsdam, he was the very reverse of a man who merely adopted the pose of the impenetrable, or tried to suggest significance by silence. He had views on a great variety of things, and did not hesitate to express them; only his self-expression was naturally conversational rather than oratorical. There is one thing, however, which is universally attested, both by the direct and the indirect impressions. He was quite unusually considerate; not only in the loose sense of being kindly, but in the literal sense of considering how to be kind. The strongest impressions of his thoughtfulness for others came from those who had been in the closest relation with him for many years, under conditions of Court life which generally breed an endless crop of complaints and rivalries and bitter recollections. ‘Even in a palace life can be lived well,’ said the emperor of the world; and in one or two cases, such as King George’s, it can be added that it could hardly be lived anywhere more simply, or with less evil of pride.

ON LYING IN STATE

BEFORE the funeral of that good and faithful servant who had inherited the Crown of the Confessor and the Conqueror, the body lay in state, in the ceremonial phrase, in that most historical hall which the Conqueror’s son had built, and in which an English King had once been tried for his life. The fact that the first King was murdered and the second executed, and this third King venerated as he actually was in death, may give cause for thought to those who simplify all history into a mere advancing antagonism against principalities and powers. But the ceremonial phrase itself is of some interest; precisely because such simplifiers would have called it ‘merely’ ceremonial. In recent times, especially at the end of the eighteenth century, when royal ritual and etiquette had piled up to the top of their complexity, as things always do before they crash, there was a widespread reaction against ceremonial; not merely among rationalists, but also among reasonable men. In that reaction the real meaning of such ceremonial was largely lost. Popular anger was aroused against those very pageants that had originally been instituted because they were popular.

This truth can be traced in the treatment, remote and recent and present, of the very phrase ‘lying in state’. In the recent rationalistic interlude, now largely passing, the tendency was to insist with some irritation on the words ‘in state’. The rational emancipators of humanity insisted that such pageantry was mere pomp; that such pomp was mere pomposity. The only defect of those admirable friends of humanity was that they knew no history. As a fact, the notion of a King lying in state was a part of the popular and not the pompous side of royalty. It was connected with the very ancient idea of the accessibility of the King; not on any later idea, even any new but necessary idea, of the privacy of the King. In the matter of a merely arrogant stateliness, the King was much less ‘in state’ when he showed himself to his people dead or alive, than when he did all his less recognized duties in dealing with State secrets. It meant that the mob might be excluded from the Council-Chamber; but it was admitted to the Death-Chamber.

To use an old phrase, such customs were founded upon the profound popular proverb that a cat may look at a king; not on any notion that a king would not look at a common man. That this was the historic truth, about the actual history of monarchy, good or bad, is proved by all the other facts of the case. When kingship had risen to its most extraordinary and even exaggerated eminence, as in the great France of the Grand Siècle, people were admitted, not merely to the death-chamber when the King was dead, but to the bed-chamber when he was alive. Crowds poured through the dressing-room of Louis XIV, that almost almighty monarch, and saw him washing and dressing and even drinking emetics. He could be an autocrat, a conqueror, a controller of parliaments; he could be everything but a private person. Buried deep, in the very depths of this singular human institution, was the idea that the people possessed their monarch, like a public monument, or even a public park. He ruled them, but they owned him.

That this popular vision of the Monarch had grown out of proportion by the time of the Roi Soleil is probably proved by the reaction that followed soon after; the reaction that we call the Revolution. But it had been primarily a popular idea. In fact, it was perhaps more purely popular than most, or many of the best, of the Revolutionists, who were often aristocrats and generally intellectuals. Anyhow, we can see it forming far back in medieval times; and it is always concerned with this almost sacramental conception of access to the body of the King. In the wildest wars of the feudal times, in France and England, and especially in Scotland, we find factions attaching enormous importance to the mere material fact of having the King among them; even as a child or a captive or an imbecile. They carried the King about with them, as if he were a sort of sacred relic or fetish or mascot; and they seem to have felt that the presence even of reluctant royalty gave them an advantage over their rivals. And the reason was, fundamentally, that the King was always popular; as no feudal lord was popular. That submerged instinct of history, which exists in the ignorant in the form of tradition, and is often much truer than history, remembered something that the most wicked kings could not entirely destroy; that far back in the foundations of Christendom, saints and missionaries of the old civilization had dedicated this man to be the father of the people. There had never been any such definite dedication of any mere feudal fighter or raider. He was Dominus Rex, and different from other men; even if he were a tyrant. It has been truly remarked that no medieval Regent was ever a success. King John is our own typical tyrant; but it is only fair to him to remember that he had been a Regent. And in those remote times of the roots of national or modern monarchy, there is perpetually the emphasis upon the bodily presence of the responsible prince. It was so strong that it extended to the idea of a body even when it was only a body.

It is perhaps a deep criticism of the modern mind that we have fallen into the habit of only talking about a body when we mean a corpse. Even the old phrase Habeas Corpus, as well as older and more sacred and sacramental phrases, recalls a world of feeling in which a living body was also described as a body. But in any case, this old mystical tradition extended from the living body to the dead. As the companions of the Cid brought out even his dead body in battle-armour and on horse-back, that it might be an ensign for the Christians and a trumpet of defiance against the Moors, so the old traditional feeling of the royal presence always extended to the presence of death. It always had this character of a direct popular appeal. Sometimes, for various reasons, it was used for a political appeal. The old Kings were sometimes shown with their faces uncovered; in some cases, for a practical proclamation to the crowd; as, for instance, to show that the King was really dead. But always the idea of a crowd passing before his coffin, when he was dead, was part of the same idea as the right of personally offering petitions when he was alive. It was the idea that the palace was not merely a private house; that it was, in fact, the public's house. It was a house where the doors stood open. The people owned the King.

THE ALPHABET OF GIANTS

IN one sense the most impressive building at Wembley Exhibition was probably the Queen’s Dolls-House. The sense in which I say this refers to, the value of small models of big things. It seems to me that man has made things almost too great for his own imagination to measure. He is too much at home in his house, and sometimes he can not see the city any more than he can see the earth. It may be easier to use the copy rather than the real thing as a working model for real education. For about the remains or ruins of the great art of building there is a curious paradox of popular misconception, which is not easy to describe.

Architecture is the alphabet of giants; it is the largest system of symbols ever made to meet the eyes of men. A tower stands up like a sort of simplified statue, of much more than ‘heroic size’. A façade is rightly called a face; it has something of the character of a huge human face fading or simplifying itself into the formality of a diagram; we see it in the childish sketches of a cottage with windows for eyes and the front-door for a mouth. We feel as if architecture were a simplified art of statuary and portraiture, just as the statuary and portraiture of ancient Egypt or Nineveh really were simplified and stiffened almost to the severity of architecture. It is as if a monolith were a headless body, or a dome were a hairless skull. Seen for a moment in this light, or this twilight, all architecture takes on mysterious lines of life and a movement as of signals. Nor is this merely fanciful, for it inheres in much of our habitual language on the subject. We say that a spire points to the sky, as if it really lifted a finger. We say that windows look over a landscape, as if windows were really eyes.

There is, then, a universal instinct that architecture has something to say; that it is, as it were, trying to say it. Some aesthetes still maintain that art is unmoral — or, in that it is unmeaning. But they ought really to be pursuing the opposite line of progress and finding more meanings instead of less. Instead of treating religious pictures as decorative patterns, they would have much better fun proving that even patterns are religious. They would have much better fun looking for their religion in the wallpaper or the Turkey carpet. But this is a digression. The point is that architecture also, like the more obvious arts of representation, has about it something that suggests a proclamation or a message; but that its speciality is the size or scale upon which the message can be given. The message is given on a megaphone; the proclamation is distributed by a loudspeaker. The size of a building is the most obvious thing to say about it; it is meant to be the most obvious thing to see in it. Mere size is meant to be self-evident and therefore simple; a colossal common ice. Yet, strangely enough, while this art presents its symbols on a vast scale, and staring at the sun, they remain in many ways more elusive and delicate than a drawing in silverpoint or a light tracery in lace. The hieroglyphs are as huge as Assyrian bulls; but they are not hieroglyphs that everybody can read. Strangely enough, they are not only things that few can read, they are sometimes things that few can see. It would almost seem that they are too large to be seen.

It is certainly strange that the historical lessons of architecture have not always been easily understood. Things have been dismissed as trifles when the very litter and leavings of them were terrific. Things have been neglected as naked or barbarous when the smallest scrap of them was complex and ornate. Civilizations have been loosely lumped together when the very skyline of their cities wrote the difference upon the sky. The vulgar example, a very vulgar example, is that of the insular English gentleman or still more frequently, I grieve to say, the insular English lady — who travels in India with out any idea about the Indian races and religions, except that they are all one dim mob to be described as ‘natives’. Yet one would fancy, for instance, that the difference between the Moslem and the Brahmin tradition was something almost as obvious to the eye as the difference between a wigwam and a Wimbledon villa. The one tradition prides itself on carrying through a scheme of the most colossal scale while remaining almost appallingly impersonal. All that ornament may be literally called featureless in the sense of faceless; it must contain no portraiture of man or beast or bird. We are not to look for it any more than for a human figure in the most complicated figures of Euclid. This element is emphasized wherever the Moslem creed is most emphatic. Round the great Mosque of Omar in Jerusalem the most apparently florid decoration consists only of handwriting, of elaborate Arabic script, defining the unity of God. The heraldic symbol of the Caliphate does not rival the eagle of Rome or the lion of England, or even the lilies of France, except with the cold horns of the hollow moon.

It is this austerity that makes a miracle even of Moslem luxury. The magnificence of a thing like the Taj Mahal is increased by a great abnegation. The other Eastern tradition is at the very opposite extreme. It boils, one might say it bubbles, with bodily representations. There are patterns made out of swaying figures with monstrous hips. There are gods many-headed as if everything were doubling and trebling; gods who wave wild arms to us like the numberless arms of a forest. Some have represented Asia as a nightmare of the over-population of the earth; and it would seem as if the very heavens were over populated. Taken by itself, this would be a superficial view of Indian polytheism. But the point is that the supercilious tourist could not see even the startling contrast between the iconoclast and the idolater. Therefore, he could never see the really reconciling truth about Islam — that it was much more of a war against the gods of Asia than against the God of Christendom.

It is hardly surprising that the superior person could learn no history from the architecture of Asia, for he could not learn it from the architecture of England. From the Renaissance to the Ruskinian epoch he went on talking of the Middle Ages as merely benighted and barbaric. Yet in every other English village a colossal contrast contradicted him flatly. A great medieval building stood up among the more modern buildings like a mountain among molehills. It stood up like a mountain; but people could not see it. They still went on saying that tumbledown cottages had been made in an age of progress and the eternal tower had been made in an age of ignorance. Perhaps that also was too large to be seen; and perhaps that also might be seen better in a smaller space or on a smaller model. But for that we must wait for another exhibition — not of the Empire, but of the English story; and perhaps it may be even more enlightening.

BAROQUE AND GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE

MUCH has been written recently about a revival of interest in what is called the Baroque — the rather riotous sort of Renaissance architecture which broke out all over Europe, largely in connexion with the Counter-Reformation and largely leading up to what the French call the Great Century, the noontide glory of the *Roi Soleil*. Critics are saying, with some justice, that the very medievalists who rightly condemned the reckless Renaissance contempt for the Gothic have since exhibited a quite equally reckless contempt for all the results of the Renaissance. As the one was called Gothic merely in the sense of the barbaric, so the other is called Rococo merely in the sense of florid or absurd. The classical foundations of Rome are not necessarily bad because the pointed shrines in Normandy are good; and if it is hard to imagine how anyone ever thought that a savage had designed St Ouen’s, we have even more detailed evidence that it was not exactly a fool who designed St Peter’s.

We all have our preferences, we all probably have our prejudices about these things; but even medievalists like myself may well admit that some of us have shown prejudice as well as preference. We may well admit that, even when we are illuminated with all the windows of Chartres, even when we are rejoicing in some glorious Gothic lantern of flamboyant glass, we are in a sense living in glass houses and should not throw stones. Certainly we should not cast the first stone at every stonemason who does not happen to be a medieval stonemason. To take that position is to be every bit as ignorant and stupid as those great Renaissance classicists who thought themselves so enlightened and so wise. Certainly they were Vandals when they thought they were attacking Goths. But the Gothicists are really Goths when they march only to sack the temples of Rome. So much even a man of medieval sympathies may well concede to those who condemn anything as Pagan if it is not Pugin. But we will probably add that the worst weakness of the medievalists is that they fall short of the medievals. The real trouble has been that even those who admired Gothic most could not revive the part of it that was most admirable. The most wonderful thing about Gothic was the spontaneous individual craftsmanship, especially in its sanctification of the grotesque. But there was nothing specially spontaneous, there was nothing specially individual, there was certainly nothing specially grotesque, about the pallid and pointed church architecture that began with the Victorian High Churchman and is now the pattern of every Wesleyan or Congregationalist chapel in Surbiton or Streatham. The worthy Wesleyan would be gravely surprised if he saw his pew decorated with some of the carvings found on the Miserere seats of the monks. The speculative builder in Surbiton would be distinctly pained if he found an ordinary bricklayer chipping a brick about to make a hideous face, certainly to suit the fancy of the labourer, and possibly to be a caricature of the foreman. This sort of variety within a framework of unity was the real merit of the medieval world, and it is nearly impossible in the modern world. Anyhow, it is quite as impossible in the Gothic chapel in Streatham as it is in the classical temple in Rome. That is what I mean by saying that the modern stained glass attitudinizer is living in a glass house or is open to a *tu quoque*; he is not really carving his own gargoyles any more than the classicist, and anybody who dared to cast a real stone devil among us might be killing two birds with one stone. He might be not only rebuking classicism for not being Gothic, but even more sharply rebuking Gothic for not being Gothic. In other words, the real objection to revivals of medievalism is that they are not medieval enough.

The Baroque in art and architecture, however, had its own sort of freedom and fantasy; and, as it was produced under social conditions more like our own; it is natural that some of us should turn to it with a new understanding and sympathy. Nevertheless, the understanding and sympathy are quite new, and that for a reason that is rather interesting in itself. It arises from the fact that the full civilization in which this expanded and even extravagant form of classicism flourished is one from which we in England have been cut off by a curious historical accident. The period which was most positive in French history was curiously negative in English history. It is like the case of one of those florid classical masks so often seen in the sculpture and decoration of the Baroque period. Only the French beheld it solid and in the round; a full and featured lace; the noble mask of Comedy or of Tragedy; for the smile was the smile of Molière and the frown was the frown of Racine. But we were on the concave and not the convex side of that mould or protuberance. At that particular period, we saw it as something hollow and empty; even when we imitated it, we used it as a mask and hardly saw it as a face.

Indeed, we imitated the French without admiring them — or, at any rate, we admired them without praising them. They were at once our enemies and our models; but that very fact shows that they were at that moment at their best and we almost at our worst. Wycherley wrote an English version of the noblest of all the plays of Molière, and it is pretty ignoble. It is almost enough to ask where Molière has stood among French writers and where Wycherley has stood among English. Anyhow, it will be agreed that our great period was rather the age of Shakespeare than the age of Wycherley. The reasons for this contrast are probably political and may be very roughly suggested by saying that the natural outcome and climax of the Renaissance, good or bad, was the thing which Charles I failed in achieving and which Henry VIII only seemed to achieve. It was the replacing of a strong Church by a strong State and even by a strong King.

In France this strong State was established, with such advantages as that conception has, in all sorts of things down to the leadership of fashion and the patronage of art and architecture. In England it was thwarted and broken up, for good or evil, by factions, and especially by the faction of the Whig aristocrats. Therefore, if we want to judge that strong State which was the spirit of the time, and balance its good and evil, England happens to be a very unfortunate corner of Europe in which to study it. The English Puritans had their own virtues; the English Whigs had their own case; but they do not tell us much of what was happening in the world just then, or of that positive and constructive culture whose architectural symbol was the Baroque. It seems to me very odd that internationalists, who rebuke the narrowness of national things, seldom sympathize with really international things. Thus the man who is always hoping that a Europe without flags or frontiers will exist in the future, is quite annoyed to discover that a Europe without flags or frontiers really existed in the past. He wants to get nearer to a World State and he hates the nearest that the world ever came to a World State — the Roman Empire. I find the most enlightened Englishmen strangely blind to the positive European importance of the Grand Siècle. They seem to be as jealous of Louis XIV as if he were still alive. But a good historian will feel something of the magnificence of the legend of Louis, just as he will feel something of the magnificence of the legend of Elizabeth. You can not understand France without one, or England without the other — or Europe without both.

ROBERT BRUCE AND HIS AGE

IN 1314, on the Vigil of John the Baptist, a long and magnificent war-array under the banner of the great Plantagenets, and of an epoch when chivalry was already a pageant, came rolling out of the south over the lowlands that lie around the crag and castle of Stirling. They reached a small and marshy brook called the Bannock, behind which were posted forces of uncertain but certainly far inferior numbers, clumps of spearmen, mainly infantry, under the command of a tall gentleman of Norman extraction whom many regarded as an adventurer. There was an unconscious creative quality in him and a simplicity in good and evil which is almost incomprehensible to those who have not the key of that older Christendom. He had become a sincere patriot by accident or (one might almost say) by mistake. He be came an excellent King by something like usurpation. He was probably prouder of his strong body than of his very strong brain. Murder and sacrilege and all sorts of indefensible things had brought him at last to the defence of his country — or, if you will, to the creation of it. The great host swept on and struck the smaller one here and there, but unsuccessfully; it was entangled in rude man-traps and muddy river banks and hung there, fighting heavily; and on the second day it broke.

There are three stages through which the mind of a modern man should pass in connexion with what may be called the romance of the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages were, in some ways, romantic. The Scots are wildly romantic. And the purely romantic aspect of the period has been excellently symbolized in the cult of Bannockburn. There are all the romantic ingredients — the triumph against odds, the defence of the soil, and above all, the bodily peril of the prince and leader. Yet even the Scots are not always romantic; nor were the Middle Ages. I repeat, therefore, that there are three stages through which a thinking man goes in his consideration of such a romance as that of Robert Bruce, 'the third best knight in Christendom'. They say that second thoughts are best, but I incline to disagree. I think that third thoughts are sometimes best. But I think that first thoughts are much better than second thoughts, and have more resemblance to the real ripeness of third thoughts. In the first stage we act merely on instinct; and are sometimes right. In the second stage we act merely on reason, and are fairly frequently wrong. In the third and truly reasonable stage we use our reason until we understand our instincts. And if we do that with romance we shall come pretty near reality.

The first stage might be symbolized in Miss Jane Porter’s ‘Scottish Chiefs’, in which, as Thackeray said, William Wallace goes into battle with a tear in his eye and a cambric handkerchief in his hand. In other words, it is a romance of no particular age or country, but certainly more modern than medieval; and with no complexity of human nature, but only a war between heroes and villains. It is in this stage that boys die daily for Mary Queen of Scots, or girls make short work of the constitutional complications that enmeshed Charles I. But in so far as the feeling is idealistic, it really is medieval; and, what is much more important, right. And just as it associated loyalty with the House of Stuart, it associated liberty with the House of Bruce. Bruce drew the sword for Scottish freedom, and there is an end of it. It is true that most of those young people would be puzzled to define the position either of freedom or Scotland in connexion with the controversy about the Suzerainty. But all the same the young people are right, much more right than they are when they learn a little more.

The second stage begins about the time that we begin to read Carlyle and Kingsley. We learn that the great men of the Middle Ages were not waxwork heroes, but statesmen, and even diplomatists; that the wicked things they did were designed to great ends of policy and dominion. In this intellectual phase, and especially under these intellectual influences, it is common to consider the consolidation of great States, the spreading of unified systems, as the great triumph in politics. In this stage, therefore, it is common to regret the death of Edward I and the failure of Edward II; and to regard Bruce somewhat as a sentimental obstacle. It leads sometimes to that excusing of tyranny which is the weakest tendency in human nature. It even leads sometimes to maintaining that all wars were fought for economic and industrial reasons; but into that mire of mental decay we need not follow it. But certainly, if I have to choose between Miss Jane Porter and such historical philosophers as Carlyle and Froude, I am for Miss Jane Porter. Bring me my claymore — and my cambric handkerchief. Miss Porter may have been ignorant of the cruelties alleged against Wallace in his Northumbrian raid, or she may not have believed in them. But she would never have excused, still less admired them, as Froude does the cruelties of the Tudors. Nor would Wallace himself have admired them, even if he’d done them. Miss Jane Porter is more manly than Froude.

At the third stage the student, if he is lucky enough to get so far, comes to a view much more subtle and experienced than the first, but one by which he sees that the first had a great deal in it after all. He has learned that all men are mean, but especially great men. He knows that no valour and inspiration can save a man from the rebuke of Nathan; that no faith and holiness can insure him against the crowing of the cock. He knows that the best you can say of any man is to compare him to the curate's egg. But though he will know that only parts of Bruce and Wallace were heroic, he will also know that such parts as were heroic were more akin to the hero-worship of 'Frederick the Great'. Whatever the real knight held in his hand (a letter to a money-lender, as like as not), the ideal knight did hold the handkerchief of sensibility. And the student will conclude, though not with the old cut-and-dried conclusion, that there really was a meaning in fighting for the freedom of Scotland.

This second reversal of the vision generally comes if or when the student takes the startling course of reading what was written about medieval characters by the people who knew them. If Miss Porter's book stands for the first stage and Carlyle's essays for the second, the third begins with any three lines of any original chronicle or charter really written in the fourteenth century. The impression is indescribable, but it is instantaneous. The spirit that loathes the past as savage and inhuman, the much viler spirit that actually admires it as savage and inhuman, will not survive the reading of three average pages that were written when that past was present. Cruelties can be found in page after page; but cruelties of human reaction and complex legality and tangled retaliation; but never indifference to kindness. There are other indescribable things, the much stronger presence and bustle of the populace in the picture than the modern reader expects; and all the popular things being specially soaked in religion. If a superstition means something superimposed on people, medieval religion was the opposite of superstitious. You might as well say farmers' apples were superimposed on boys; it was the adventure of their lives. They are always trying to get back to the subject even when they are supposed to be talking about something else — say Bannockburn. But there is another impression which grows more slowly, but more surely, from even a very few seeds of fact, for I do not claim any but a fragmentary reading of the records. And that is the impression that what the struggling and mysterious Middle Ages were getting at was, first and last, Freedom. But they attempted freedom always through division and definition, rights and privileges, orders, guilds, colleges — among other things, nations. For the nations did emerge. The Imperialism that tried to hold half Europe did break up before more independent — or, if you will, more jealous — loyalties. And some of the thanks we give to the great heart that fell in ashes at Rouen. I will not withhold from that much faultier heart that Douglas flung among the Moors.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

THE test of a man’s culture and liberality is his attitude towards the things that never happened. The test of historians especially, and of their possession of the true historical spirit, is the depth of their absorption, and the vividness of theft vision, of the things that never happened. It is the things that never happened which enlarge the mind. Nobody who understands them can be narrow. Some of the historians have never heard of what never happened. In their case the test has been decisive indeed.

By the things that never happened, I mean the things that nearly happened. I do not mean fables or romances or legends that are obviously legendary. I mean the things that might have been, but which for some reason could not be. I mean the alternative history of England or France or Rome. Now the provincial person, even when he is a provincial professor, lives in a prison of what really happened. He may be prodigiously learned about what really happened; but because of his dense and disgusting ignorance on the subject of what never happened, he is doomed always to be as limited as he is learned. Certain things having taken place, he cannot unthink them, or get behind them, or escape from them into the wider possibilities of the world. For instance, if he is an Englishman he is quite right to be an English patriot; for loyalty and affection naturally belong to the department of the thing that really exists. But the English professor is often much more than an English patriot. The English professor is an English prisoner; the walls of the national castle, when once it has been built, shut off from him altogether the wide plains of the world, in which other things might have been built.

Thus we hear a great deal of discussion for and against the Middle Ages. One fact, which is not especially for or against, must surely be obvious to anybody who knows anything at all about the Middle Ages. And that is that one of the things that nearly happened was a single, solid United Kingdom of Anglo-France. From the time when the first Norman soldier disembarked before Hastings, to the time when the last English soldier marched out of Calais, it appeared a perfectly natural thing to thousands of people that the two nations might be one nation. At this moment the two nations are rather less like one nation than any two nations of the world. Most English internationalists seem to interpret universal brotherhood as the duty of loving Humanity and hating France. I, not being an English internationalist (thank God), am very fond of France and the French. I am capable of loving foreigners; but I love the French as the most foreign of all foreigners. The sharp and abrupt difference between the English and the French is rather more obvious to those who really love the French than to those who only stupidly hate them.

The educated English all talked and thought in French almost down to the time of Agincourt; and even after Agincourt whole sections of the French supported the attempt of the English to unite the two crowns by conquest. The other spirit was already in the field, and I doubt not it was the better spirit; the spirit of St Joan that was like a flaming sword; the sword of an angel but a sword that smote asunder. I, for one, am national and rejoice that the nations were born. But a man is not merely national, but also narrow, if he cannot realize that something larger and more imperial might have been born; a great Western State that would have been no more French than English, and no more English than French. It might have made all sorts of extraordinary differences to the subsequent story of mankind; and heaven knows what would have happened to the Puritans and the French Revolution and the British Empire, and all sorts of things to which we pay such solemn respect merely because they have managed to happen. It is a good thing, every now and then, to turn from them and listen to the fascinating and thrilling story of the things that did not happen.

Of course one could give any number of other examples. But it is my whole point here to avoid hackneyed examples. I am dealing with the things the provincial person has not thought of. It is easy enough to ask what would have happened if Waterloo had gone the other way; it is easy to ask because it is idle to answer. It would not have made much difference if Waterloo had gone the other way. Napoleon had not enough forces, anyhow, to crush all that was now on the march against him. But it would be interesting to ask what would have happened if Wattignies had gone the other way. And that is why the ordinary Englishman who speculates about Waterloo has hardly ever heard of Wattignies.

Now these speculations affect one aspect of a current controversy: the perpetual debate in the newspapers about Progress and Decadence or the Decline of the West. One class of popular writers are perpetually telling us that the world has always been growing better and better; others, rather less popular, that it has for some time been growing steadily worse. Personally, I cannot understand anybody thinking it has ever grown steadily anything. If Humanism was an advance, I cannot see how Calvinism can have been an advance on that advance. If the crowds rushing to the Amphitheatre were rushing in the right direction, the hermits rushing to the desert cannot have been rushing in the same direction. But, anyhow, in this dispute, the disputants generally compare some old cause with some new cause, or some hypothetical good old times with some equally hypothetical good new times. But the general impression which history produces on my own mind is neither of these. In most cases, it seems to me, the right thing was not the thing that ruled and not the thing that rebelled, but a third thing that was never quite strong enough either to rebel or rule. The thing that haunts the historical imagination most, I think, is not Atlantis or Utopia, not the Golden Age or the New Jerusalem, not the Good Old Days or the Good Time Coming, but the gold that men missed or rejected and the good time that might have come.

Whether or no the world is travelling towards the right goal, it seems to me to have almost invariably taken the wrong turning. Whether or no it is now rather nearer to it, I am sure it has come nearer by a vast needless detour, and missed any number of short cuts that were much nearer. I doubt if any thinking person, of any belief or unbelief, does not wish in his heart that the end of medievalism had meant the triumph of the Humanists like Erasmus and More, rather than of the rabid Puritans like Calvin and Knox. Indeed, the name of Thomas More is not inappropriate here, for more reasons than one. It was he who invented the very word Utopia; and then, finding the changes he saw so different from the changes he desired, would not have the book translated into English. Utopia is not at the beginning of the world or the end of the world. Utopia has been something always near and never discovered.

THE AGE OF REASON

I

THE eighteenth century is an excellent illustration of a false historical fashion. It is the fashion of abusing a thing, first for one obvious reason, then for another quite opposite reason; and then leaving it alone with all its incompatible vices unreconciled and unexplained. Any one can describe that age as the age of powder and patches and high-heeled shoes and elaborate bows and mincing compliments. Anybody can describe it as the age of bludgeons and bloody noses and black patches over the eye, as in the pictures of Hogarth; of dirt and drunkenness and brutal sports. As details, they are both true; as generalizations, they cannot be both true. As philosophical explanations, they cannot come within a thousand miles of being true. As explanations, they can not explain anything; for they cannot explain each other.

We may call eighteenth-century people's dressing and barbering and behaviour artificial, but that gets us no nearer to explaining why we have to complain of them the next moment for being a great deal too natural. For they were virile to the point of violence and anarchy. If it was the age of wigs, it was also the age of wigs on the green. It was not only concerned with the nice conduct of a clouded cane, but often with the nasty conduct of a loaded cudgel. If we only want to make a case against the eighteenth century, we can throw all these ill-matched things at it and leave them there in a heap. But that does not explain anything; not even our own antagonism or our own action.

I have had to deal with a similar fallacy in relation to religious history. I have pointed out that the people who only wanted to make a case against Christianity or the Middle Ages, or what not, were content simply to say that monks were too meek and Crusaders too fierce, and feudalism too crude and heraldry too complicated. In other words, they blamed the age for being as mild as the Confessor and as violent as Coeur de Lion, but they gave no reason for the same thing being two opposite things at once. Many of them, in criticizing what I said, have thought it quite enough to say that the two statements were quite true; and this in itself is also quite true. But you have not understood the thing until you have understood its contradiction; until (especially) you under stand even its misunderstanding.

The only way to understand an age, whether it be the Age of Reason or the Age of Faith, is to get behind these mere criminal charges, which are used to support each other and really destroy each other. It is to find some common spirit that can be polished in that particular way and coarse in that particular way. A mystical conviction is the cause both of the Franciscan being friendly and the Crusader being hostile. A rational conviction is the cause both of Dr Johnson being ceremonious and Dr Johnson being rude. But it is necessary to realize something of what that rational conviction really was; and the only spirit in which it is worth while to study history is the spirit which can feel a certain enthusiasm for the ideal of each time in turn.

The eighteenth century itself is not a century, as centuries go, that is specially attractive to me. There were not enough fairy-tales in it for my taste; certainly there were not anything like so many people believing in fairies then as there are now. It had no great understanding of children. The men of that time had forgotten the Holy Child of medieval times and had not yet heard of the Happy Child of modern literature. They could not imagine a Peter Pan, for they had lost the religious traditions both of Pan and of Peter. They had silenced all those subconscious voices which speak to simple people of the wonders hidden in this world. In short, they were ignorant of all the thousand things that only the ignorant ever know.

But though I should not be individually drawn to wards the Age of Reason as compared with many ages I think really much more reasonable, if I had to deal with that age I should deal with it more reasonably. I should not criticize it as its own rationalistic critics do. I should not pick out things here and there that happened to offend our modern taste, though in totally opposite ways. I should not blame Chesterfield for being foppish and Johnson for being slovenly; call a minuet stilted and a cockfight vulgar; and then heave a sigh and thank God that I live in better days. That is the way in which the stupidest sort of tourist criticizes a foreign country; he thinks everything is being done badly, be cause he has never tried to find out what people are trying to do.

I should begin at the other end and try to find out what the eighteenth century was trying to do. I should ask what spirit really prompted their more spirited efforts. The true historian does not want to be told the realities of the eighteenth century; that is, that they had stuffier bedrooms or stuffier cravats. The true historian wants to be told the ideal of the eighteenth century; the things that a man dreamed of in his stuffy bedroom or thought about when he had forgotten his stock. The mere facts about their vesture or ventilation are not really facts about them; they are rather facts about us. They are the things that we notice, because to us they are new even in being old. It may throw some light on our character or conditions that this or that detail stands out in a startling fashion from the other details. But it does not throw much light on the minds of our ancestors. The really valuable sort of historical imagination is to guess the things they were thinking about.

The religion of the eighteenth century was finely expressed in the motto of a group of Scottish debating societies famous as the Associated Societies of Edinburgh University. It was *Gloria hominis ratio et oratio*: the glory of man is reason and speech. Their ideal was public spirit in the true sense of the publishing of things; the power of declaring aloud in the forum the secrets of the palace or the corruptions of the senate. There were secrets and corruptions enough, of course, as there are in all times; not so many, I think, as there are in our own time. But this was the vision, the ambition, the daydream. This was what an honest man wanted to be and a dishonest man pretended to be. The ideal type of that time was what Walpole called a Boy; what the Boy called a Patriot. He was to be a lucid orator denouncing courtiers and placemen; a tribune. He can only be under stood in the light of that great Latin literature which these men loved and studied.

We sneer at the old gentlemen quoting Horace while hobnobbing over their port; as if they only quoted Horace when he was hobnobbing over his Falernian. We forget that quoting Horace meant more often quoting great lines about Regulus defying torture for the Republic or the poet returning to the temples of the gods of Rome. Judged by its own moral ideal, which is the only just judgement, the eighteenth century was not so bad as we make out; possibly was not so bad as we are. We talk of its political corruption, but we talk of it because it was talked about. It was exposed and even punished. Great men like Marlborough, powerful men like Dundas, were really forced to resign; often even forced to disgorge. They were much less completely protected than corrupt politicians in our own time; and it is no very satisfactory proof of their artificiality and our realism that they powdered heads while we whitewash reputations.

II

It seems to me that it would be an extraordinarily interesting study of the mind of the eighteenth century to picture what that mind would really expect to see in the twentieth. There would be something very subtle in the comedy of a gentleman of the eighteenth century dealing with ladies of the twentieth century. It would be curious to note how he would be in some ways more coarse and in some ways more polished. He would probably be plainer in his speech, but more ceremonious in his movements. He would say things to the lady while bowing over her hand which the most sprightly hero of our recent fiction would hardly say to her while sitting on her head. When Marie Antoinette and her courtiers posed in the manner of the shepherds of Watteau, they were already talking about the dawn of a more enlightened and liberal age, and may well have wondered about the world in the twentieth century. When Hogarth was drawing some satiric series like the Stages of Cruelty, he may well have wondered whether the world would still be as barbarous in the twentieth century, or whether by that time reason and philanthropy would have prevailed. Naturally it would depend a great deal on the sort of individual who was precipitated from their age to ours; there were doubtless many commonplace cock-fighting squires who knew as little about the future then as our earnest social prophets know now. But there were already in the eighteenth century some idealists who would have been delighted to see the future triumph of humanity. They would also be a good deal disappointed if they saw it.

What is really interesting about the Age of Reason is that the political economists and practical reformers would every one of them believe what nobody now believes at all. They would not only have believed, most probably, that England would be more prosperous, more happy, and more equal in the twentieth century than in the eighteenth or nineteenth. They would also have believed that it would become more prosperous, free, and equal *through* commercial competition, *through* scientific selfishness, *through* the removal of all restrictions on trading, talking, or anything else. Nothing would have surprised a man like Bentham or a man like Godwin more completely than the discovery that liberty or *Laissez Faire* had not made a huge addition to human happiness by the beginning of the twentieth century. As a matter of fact, as applied, they have made a huge addition to human muddle and misery, and taken us round by a long detour (and a very dusty road) back to very much where we were before. We have to consider anew the nature of Liberty and its relation to Governments. In that sense we are all of us really back in the eighteenth century.

III

Unless I am much mistaken, modern people are going to have a reaction against democracy before they have tried it. We are always being told that the present system in highly organized industrial states is democracy; and that being so, it is hardly to be wondered at that democracy has become unpopular. But it is not really true that popular government has become unpopular. It is rather that people have ceased to think that in either sense our government is popular. The truth is that those who developed the democratic doctrine in modern times did not intend it for anything at all resembling the modern world, perhaps the most ancient of all possible worlds. They thought of the agricultural commonwealths of antiquity, and went back past even the Roman Empire to find the Roman Republic. But Rome was a republic when Rome was a village. Those eighteenth-century idealists often actually lived in villages; always in countries that were dotted with villages. They did not know what sort of a world of steam and steel their descendants were going to inherit. The French Revolution came before the Industrial Revolution. They were perpetually talking about the citizen, but they thought of him as a citizen and not merely as something in the city. They certainly had no conception of the colossal and complicated thing that we now mean by a city.

It is highly characteristic of the tone of the eighteenth century that they generally talked of London as ‘the town’. They said: ‘All the town is talking about my Lord Banglebury’s duel with Mr Pickles.’ In the sound and sense of the word there was something compact and comfortable; as of a world still small enough to know itself, like a village. When these people talked about democracy they did indeed mean the government of the people, by the people, for the people. But they meant the government of people they knew, by people they knew, for people they knew. They meant the government of people who knew each other, by people who knew each other, for people who knew each other. I think it highly doubtful whether any of the eighteenth-century democratic theorists, whether Payne or Jefferson or Condorcet, would have expected a vast and vague society like ours to be a democracy. I think they would have thought it, however reluctantly, a case for Caesar and the *panem et circenses*. But it is not, of course, merely the material side of society that has upset such calculations.

It is much more the moral factor; which is also, in every sense, alas! a very material factor. It is what the scientific, or those who think themselves scientific, always call the economic factor. It can be expressed better in one word; and that word is not democracy but plutocracy.

It must always be remembered that the scale of financial action was then smaller even for the rich. The Court of Versailles did not handle such sums as any stockjobber will now waste on a week’s luxury. Kings and queens were richer relatively and not positively. And the size of economic operations today is a new and abnormal power in the history of the world. It covers much more of the surface of the world. It is international where the old luxury was almost local. But this vulgar and sprawling plutocracy does not deserve to be called a democracy, even by one who uses it as a term of abuse. The old classic spirit of democracy is much more present in the independent citizen who is ready to resist it, who in this respect is much more like the Stoic and Tribune admired by the Fathers of the Republic.

THE VICTORIANS

I HAVE been wandering about in the South of France, reading hardly anything except French newspapers; which, by the way, are almost invariably worth reading. It is doubtless a Latin eccentricity; but they attach more importance to how a thing is written than to how it is printed. But everyone will understand, and certainly the French themselves would be the first to understand, that anything coming to such a wanderer, however indirectly, from his own country has an instant and imperious challenge to the emotions, which mere internationalism can never destroy or even define. And I found in a remote hotel, with a reaction amounting to tears, an ancient copy of a very modern London weekly paper, largely devoted to literary reviews; and raising a question for which I am always seeking the answer. I have no idea how old the issue was; but it was certainly subsequent to Queen Victoria's Coronation, and even to her death; because a prominent feature was a review on a book about 'The Victorians'. And naturally we never called ourselves Victorians while we really were Victorians. On the other hand, since I neglected to note the date, it may really have been a quite recent date; and the book in question may be the very latest work on the subject. At least it may be the latest; but I rather doubt whether it will be the last. For the Victorians, whatever else they were, were people whom the new generation may have managed to despise, but have certainly never managed to dismiss. The same age which boasts of having broken away finally from Victorianism is the age which it seems impossible to restrain from writing plays about Browning, books about Brontës, lives of such very limited and localized Victorians as Palmerston and Disraeli; and, above all, a permanent Victorian torrent of books about Queen Victoria herself. In the days dismissed as Victorian, nobody could ever have dreamed that Prince Albert would ever become so important an historical figure again. Look up the early volumes of Punch, and see what the writers made of the Prince Consort then; and you will hardly find it credible to read what Miss Sitwell, or Mr Laurence Housman, or even the late Lytton Strachey, have made of him now.

That is perhaps the first and queerest thing about the present phase. It set out avowedly to be anti-Victorian, and on many points it has become more Victorian than the Victorians. Of course the arbitrary title covers such a vast variety of names and types and tendencies, that it may be said that it is futile in any case to treat it as a whole; but I think myself that in this respect there is more intelligence in the instinct both of its antagonists and its admirers. I fancy that there really was something human and historic that can really be called Victorianism; though it is very difficult to define rightly; and almost invariably defined wrongly. Certainly, in the mere modern impatience which calls it stale and stuffy, it is defined utterly wrongly. There is a wonderfully wide spread impression that the Victorian Age was very solid or stolid; either in virtue or else in hypocrisy. This is, especially over the great part of the period, quite surprisingly untrue. Whatever most of the Victorians were, they were not at rest. Of course they had their virtues, and most certainly they had their hypocrisies; but the whole point about them was that they were not at rest in either. They still had a religion; but they were always excusing it; explaining it; and very frequently explaining it away. They already had religious doubt; but only in a very few of them was the doubt ever allowed to become denial. The Englishman was patriotic even to excess; but not to the point of ease in excess; like the eighteenth-century farmer who still figures in our caricatures as John Bull. He boasted against foreigners; but he had become conscious of the existence of these horrid little creatures; and the Victorian authors really plagued him with foreigners, like a scourge of locusts or wasps. Carlyle was always throwing Germany at him; Browning was always throwing Italy at him; Matthew Arnold really threw all Europe at him, as if he were the least instructed person in Europe. He did not lose his self-satisfaction; I fear he has not lost it yet. But it was not satisfaction in the sense of security of mind. The Englishman was already puzzled, if only subconsciously, even in the time of Thackeray and Bulwer Lytton; and it seems to me that he has gone on being more and more puzzled ever since.

In short, it was a time of tradition; and most emphatically not a time of stagnation. That is not to say that it might not have been happier in stagnation; but anyhow it was not really happy in transition. It was a very curious mixture of two things; the remains of what had hitherto been a system of Puritanism, with the incessant infiltration of what may be called Romanticism. The notion of summing up half the nineteenth century with the name of Mrs Hemans will be instantly corrected by merely mentioning the name of Mrs Browning. Mrs Browning’s verse was never completely strong and it was sometimes decidedly weak; but, whatever it was, it was not prim or pallid or composed of prunes and prisms. Sometimes she rather resembles Victor Hugo in being weak through sheer violence; through straining too much after emotional emphasis or pictorial sensationalism. She was simply one of those Victorians of Puritan origin who were swept away on the flood of the Romantics. Another great woman of the period illustrates exactly the same combination. For this is why *Jane Eyre* remains as a real red-hot testimony to the time; precisely because of the contrast between the prim and prosaic little governess that she was supposed to be, and the wild and almost anarchic emotion that filled her from within. But though I have used the word ‘anarchic’, it is not the right word; for she was one of those who might break a law but could not ignore it. And she recognized right and wrong, not only because she had been a Puritan; but also because she was a Romantic. That was the point about romanticism, as compared with much modern realism. A fine French critic, M. Mauriac, has said, ‘The Romantics were the corrupt children of Christianity.’ I should not put it so harshly; but it is very much more true than talking of the Victorians as smug contented Christians. The Victorian Age was really a violent collision and struggle; a meeting-place of two furious onslaughts, but so interlocked and straining, that at this distance from it, it seems to be standing still.

THE NATIONAL SPIRIT

THIS is written amid fields of snow within a few days of Christmas. And when last I saw snow it was within a few miles of Bethlehem. The coincidence will serve as a symbol of something I have noticed all my life, though it is not very easy to sum up. It is generally the romantic thing that turns out to be the real thing, under the extreme test of realism. It is the sceptical and even rational legend that turns out to be entirely legendary. Everything I had been taught or told led me to regard snow in Bethlehem as a paradox, like snow in Egypt. Every rumour of realism, every indirect form of rational ism, every scientific opinion taken on authority and at third hand, had led me to regard the country where Christ was born solely as a sort of semi-tropical place with nothing but palm-trees and parasols. It was only when I actually looked at it that it looked exactly like a Christmas card. It was only by the sight of my bodily eyes and against all my mental training that I realized how true is the tradition handed down in a Christmas carol. The birth and death of Christ, the whole early Christian drama, did not take place on a flat stage called the desert, covered with sand like a circus and decorated with a few pantomime palm-trees. To begin with the desert is not flat and, to go on with, the Palestinian hills are not the desert. It might well have been far more like the traditional Christmas scene than any of the learned reconstructions that conceive it as a conventional Oriental scene. The whole background was so mountainous as to be in many ways northern. The shepherds were shepherds of the hills as certainly as if they had fed their flocks on the Grampian hills, like the father of Norval. In truth, Palestine is really a strange and symbolic country; and in nothing more than its series of levels and climates. It is not so much a land as a ladder. Degrees of altitude take the place of degrees of latitude. The Jordan Valley really has the atmosphere of those tropics which seem like the suburbs of hell. But the holy mountain of Jerusalem has really an air of something lifted nearer to heaven. It has the clearness and coldness not of being nearer to the poles but of being nearer to the stars.

Now this nameless northern element in the first landscapes of Christianity has had a certain effect on our own history. As the great creed and philosophy which united our fathers swept westward over the world, it found its different parts peculiarly fitted to different places. The men of the

Mediterranean had, perhaps, a more intimate sense of the meaning of the imagery of the vine. But it succeeded in making its own imagery equally out of the northern holly and even the heathen mistletoe. And while the Latins more especially preserved the legends about the soldiers, we in the North felt a special link with the legend of the shepherds. We concentrated on Christmas, on the element of winter and the wild hills in the old Christian story. Thus Christmas is, in a special sense, at once European and English. It is European because it appeals to the religion of Europe. It is English because it specializes in those religious customs that can make even our own landscape a holy land.

The tragedy of England is that she has in these things been growing less English. This would be painfully plain if we could discuss these matters in a detached and dispassionate manner, like an abstract question of art. A recognizable and recognized national character in literature and manners appears long before the end of the Middle Ages. Anybody who recognizes that Dickens is English as compared with Balzac, can also recognize that Chaucer is English, as compared with Boccaccio. As to the moment when that national soul was most supreme and secure of itself, there might be differences of opinion. But no serious observer can doubt that it has since lost its security. The fads that so easily become fashions in our own time would be choked with laughter in their very birth, if that spirit were present in its ancient strength. We recognize an Englishman in Chaucer’s Franklin in whose house ‘it snowed meat and drink’. But he would not recognize an England in which anyone could suggest that it should snow nut cutlets and temperance beverages. He would think he was in a foreign country, not to say another planet.

When we step across the centuries from Chaucer to Dickens we find the same identical snowstorm raging in the Christmas household of Mr Wardle at Dingley Dell. And we recognize, in exactly the same way, and neither more nor less, that Mr Wardle is an Englishman. But though Wardle feels equally secure, Dickens does not feel equally secure. Though the Squire is as comfortable as the Franklin, the modern novelist is not so comfortable as the medieval poet. Dickens is already on the defensive; for he has something to defend. Dickens is not only potentially but positively scornful, for he has something to scorn. The unnatural notions have already begun to eat away the national tradition. Dickens lived to see people proposing to enforce universal teetotalism. If he had survived to see the proposals which some scientific idealists are already drawing up on paper, it may be that his feelings would have been beyond even his own powers of expression. It may be that the modern world has outstripped satire. I doubt whether even Dickens could have made it funnier than it is.

But the point for the moment is that all this nonsense is in a special sense the loss of a national spirit. Though the progress has largely been peculiar to England, it is none the less a progress away from England. The national movement has been away from the national idea. It will be noted that nearly all the greatest Englishmen, especially the most English Englishmen, were more or less conscious of this. The other great figures between Chaucer and Dickens are nearly all figures with their faces turned to the past. It is what makes men call Shakespeare monarchical and medieval; it is what made Johnson a Tory; it is what made Cobbett so singularly reactionary a Radical. Even the exceptions have exceptional moments when they are conscious of it; a Puritan like Milton in the rustic reminiscences of ‘L’Allegro’; a Whig like Addison in the Christmas ceremonies of Sir Roger de Coverley. Those Christmas ceremonies, coming down from a time when Chaucer and his Franklin could enjoy them, have nevertheless suffered all sorts of damage from new and less liberal philosophies. They were attacked by the Puritans on theological, by the Utilitarians on economic, and now by the new Sociologists on hygienic grounds. The new Scrooge wishes to give every one else gruel.

A nation may exaggerate itself or fall short of itself; but a nation must not contradict itself. We should all feel it if the French were to lose all concern about logic; but there is a real danger of the English losing all concern about liberty. There is a real danger that the broad farce and broad freedom which we feel in Chaucer or Dickens will actually be less apparent among us than among foreign peoples which have always had more officialism in their law and more classicism in their literature. The farce is already being thinned by a sort of tenth-rate idealism bearing the detestable American name of ‘uplift’. The freedom is already being lost in a network of police prohibition. Between the ideality and the efficiency the English liberty may well be entirely lost. I should not write this if I did not think that it may also be saved. But I could not write it without recording my own conviction that there is only one way of saving it. We have lost our national instincts because we have lost the idea of that Christendom from which the nations came. In freeing ourselves from Christianity we have only freed ourselves from freedom. We shall not now return to a merely heathen hilarity, for the new heathenism is any thing but hilarious. If we do not recover Christmas, we shall never recover Yule.

THE RIGHTS OF RITUAL

ST AUGUSTINE, if I remember right, said, among many other shrewd things about the relation of religious cited to social custom: ‘Funeral ceremonies are not a tribute to the dead, but to the living.’ it is part of a truth that is constantly forgotten in controversy about ceremonial and symbol. Yet it is a point upon which the Puritan is really less religious than the Pagan. If you had gone up to an ancient Greek in the time of Plato, as he stood offering sacrifice to Athene, you might very well have asked with some curiosity the question about the ancients that has never been quite satisfactorily answered by any of the moderns: ‘Do you really believe that the pure goddess of wisdom wishes you to kill or burn something on this particular stone? Does she really require this above all other things?’ But the Athenian, if he were as intelligent as most Athenians, might very well answer you by saying: ‘Whether or no Athene requires it, I am sure that I require it.’ If you went into the household temple of a Chinaman and found him burning pieces of paper to appease his great-grandfather, you might ask him what good his great-grandfather would get by that. But the Chinaman would really have the best of the argument if he answered, ‘I do not fully understand the good it does to my great-grandfather, but I do understand the good it does to me.’

To find expression in emblem and established ritual for feelings that are most difficult to express in words is not merely a salute to the departed; it is also a liberating gesture for the living. It is even especially an expression of the life of the living. The practical alternative to it is not speech but silence; not simplicity, but merely embarrassment. Not one man in a thousand ever says any thing worthy of the dead, or even at all adequate to his own emotions about the dead. It is a far fuller release for his feelings to do something; and especially something that is not too unusual or unnatural to do. The motions that men have always made, uncovering, bowing the head, scattering flowers on the grave, are in the real sense individual actions. They are not only more dignified, but more direct than official speech or extempore prayer. They are not only more serious, but more spontaneous than the ghastly mummery of ‘saying a few appropriate words’. A man would be more likely to do such things than to say such things even if he were left entirely to himself, without tradition or culture, even if he were a savage or an utterly unlettered peasant. Ritualism is more natural than rationalism about these things. It is a living necessity for those who survive; sometimes almost a necessity to enable them to survive. It is almost the first gesture of awakening, by which they show that they have not also been struck by the thunderbolt. ‘Funeral ceremonies are not a tribute to the dead, but to the living.’

Christmas is a festival of joy and a national funeral is a festival of sorrow; but they both bring in this problem of the present which has always been the practice of the past. And indeed there is more connexion between the two ideas than many suppose, especially of those who are largely out of touch with the present, through being entirely out of touch with the past. For a man without history is almost in the literal sense half-witted. He is only in command of a part even of his own mind. He does not know what half his own words mean, or what half his own actions signify. And in the great human past there was a profoundly human connexion between days of mourning and days of merriment. The same words were used about both — or, what will seem to some still more strange, the words were interchanged and the phrase that seems to us appropriate to one was specially applied to the other. In ancient times a funeral had many of the elements of a feast. In ancient times a dance could have much of the gravity of a divine service. They used the word ‘banquet’ about the tragic occasion. They used the word ‘solemnity’ about the frivolous occasion. Achilles, mourning over Patroclus, summons the heroes to take part in games, as on a school holiday devoted to sports. Theseus in ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’, cracking jokes and watching burlesques, at his wedding feast, says; ‘A fortnight keep we this solemnity.’ And though our civilization has grown in some ways more complex and cannot express these truths with quite the same unconscious sincerity and natural tact, it is well not to forget altogether that our fathers felt this comradeship in their grief and this religion in their merriment.

The ancient world conceived that pagan gods presided over every social function and every activity of daily life; and much of the position that had been given to pagan gods was afterwards very wisely given to patron saints. But there has arisen in modern times a mood that is not so much influenced by pagan gods as by godless paganism. Its funerals are not feasts; and, in a very different sense, its feasts are funerals. The old Christian saint bade men be sorry, not as men without hope. The new pagan sage rather bids them to be merry as men without hope. The frivolity of the pessimists, of the sceptics, and the decadents has been something that connects gaiety with piety by getting rid of both of them. It cannot create any of those symbolic forms of beauty that remain permanent as ritual or even as revelry. Funeral ceremonies are a tribute not to the dead but to the living. But these men are not living; they are of the sort that would scorn equally the little pieties of the poor about mourning, even public mourning, and the traditional games and jokes of a festival like Christmas. Just as they do not understand how much life there is in the cult of the dead, so they do not understand how much truth there is in the repetition of the joke. They are not subtle enough to understand what is simple, nor have they the insight or intelligence to understand the plain and popular things.

The tamest person following tradition is a little more in the main stream of life than that. He may not be an exceptional person, but at least he understands what is meant by an exceptional occasion. He may be a little like a vegetable or a plant that only flowers or comes to life at certain regular seasons. But at least he is not like a stone that never comes to life at all. And the cheap stoic or superior person is none the less as lifeless as a stone, because he generally regards himself as a precious stone and falls into the not uncommon geological error of sup posing that he is the only pebble on the beach. Compared with him, there is something like movement in the mere mass of pebbles that are rolled to and fro by the sea.

When, therefore, we watch some popular pomp go by, especially a pomp of lamentation, let us think not only of the virtues of the dead, but of the living; and above all of that universal human virtue of veneration for the dead. Grief is a thing really popular; that fact, if we consider it, will appear very notable and impressive; and when we have understood it we may understand why the great voice that said of old upon the mountain ‘Blessed are the poor,’ added but a moment afterwards: ‘Blessed are ye that mourn.’

THE INSIDE OF LIFE

THE news that some Europeans have been wrecked on a desert island is gratifying, in so far as it shows that there are still some desert islands for us to be wrecked on. Moreover, it is also interesting because these, the latest facts, also support the oldest stories. For instance, superior critics have often sniffed at the labours of Robinson Crusoe, specifically upon the ground that he depended so much upon stores from the sunken wreck. But these actual people shipwrecked a few weeks ago depended entirely upon them; and yet the critics might not have cared for the billet. A few years ago, when physical science was taken very seriously, a clever boys' book was written, called 'Perseverance Island'. It was written in order to show how 'Robinson Crusoe' ought to have been written. In this story, the wrecked man gained practically nothing from the wreck. He made everything out of the brute materials of the island.

As a matter of fact, of course, it is quite unfair to compare 'Robinson Crusoe' with such boys' books as 'Perseverance Island', or even 'The Swiss Family Robinson', not only because it is much greater literature, but because it is literature with an entirely different aim. To lump it with the others because they all occurred on a desert island is no better than comparing 'Wuthering Heights' with 'Northanger Abbey' because both concern an old country house; or bracketing 'Salem Chapel' with 'Notre Dame de Paris' because they are both about a church. 'Robinson Crusoe' is not a story of adventure; rather it is a story of the absence of adventure — that is, in the first and best part of it. Twice Crusoe runs away to sea in disobedience, and twice escapes with wreck or other peril; the third time we feel that he is set apart for some strange judgement by God. And the strange judgement is the great central and poetical idea of 'Robinson Crusoe'. It is a visitation not of danger but of a dreadful security. The salvage of Crusoe's goods, the comparative comfort of his life, the natural riches of his island, his human relations with many of the animals — all this is an exquisitely artistic setting for the awful idea of a man whom God has cast out from among men. A mere scurry of adventures would have left Crusoe no time for thinking; and the whole object of the book is to make Crusoe think. It is true that, later in the story, Defoe entangles him with Indians and Spaniards; and for that very reason I think the story loses the naked nobility of its original idea. It is absurd to compare a book like this with ordinary stories about schooners and palm-trees, cutlasses and scalps. It was not an adventurous life but an unadventurous life that was the doom and curse of Crusoe.

But this, perhaps, is wandering from the subject — if there is a subject. Let us try to get back to the desert island and the moral to be drawn from all the happy Australians and their adventure. The first and most important point is this: that when one reads of these forty-five persons tipped out into an empty island in the Pacific, one's first and instantaneous flash of feeling is one of envy. Afterwards one remembers that there would doubtless be inconveniences; that the sun is hot, that awnings give you no shelter until you have put them up; that biscuits and tinned meat might begin to taste monotonous, and that the most adventurous person, having got on to the island, would before very long begin to turn his thoughts to the problem of getting off again. But the fact remains that before all these reflections the soul of man has said like the snap of a gun, 'How jolly!' I think this instinct in humanity is somewhat interesting; it may be worth while to analyse this secret desire to be wrecked on an island.

The feeling partly arises from an idea which is at the root of all the arts — the idea of separation. Romance seeks to divide certain people from the lump of humanity, as the statue is divided from the lump of marble. We read a good novel not in order to know more people, but in order to know fewer. Instead of the humming swarm of human beings, relatives, customers, servants, postmen, afternoon callers, tradesmen, strangers who tell us the time, strangers who remark on the weather, beggars, waiters, and telegraph-boys — instead of this bewildering human swarm which passes us every day, fiction asks us to follow one figure (say the postman) consistently through his ecstasies and agonies. That is what makes one impatient with that type of pessimistic rebel who is always complaining of the narrowness of his life and demanding a larger sphere. Life is too large for us as it is: we have all too many things to attend to. All true romance is an attempt to simplify it, to cut it down to plainer and more pictorial proportions. What dullness there is in our life arises mostly from its rapidity; people pass us too quickly to show us their interesting side. By the end of the week we have talked to a hundred bores; whereas, if we had stuck to one of them, we might have found ourselves talking to a new friend, or a humorist, or a murderer, or a man who had seen a ghost.

I do not believe that there are any ordinary people. That is, I do not believe that there are any people whose lives are really humdrum or whose characters are really colourless. But the trouble is that one can so quickly see them all in a lump, like a land surveyor, and it would take so long to see them one by one as they really are, like a great novelist. Looking out of the window, I see a very steep little street, with a row of prim little houses breaking their necks downhill in the most decorous single file. If I were landlord of that street, or a visiting philanthropist making myself objectionable down that street, I could easily take it all in at a glance, sum it all up and say, ‘Houses at £40 a year.’ But suppose I could be father confessor to that Street, how awful and altered it would look! Each house would be sundered from its neighbour as by an earthquake and would stand alone in a wilderness of the soul. I should know that in this house a man was going mad with drink, that in that a man had kept single for a woman, that in the next a woman was on the edge of abysses, that in the next a woman was living an unknown life which might in more devout ages have been gilded in hagiographies and made the fountain of miracles. People talk much of the quarrel between science and religion; but the deepest difference is that the individual is so much bigger than the average, that the inside of life is much larger than the outside.

Often when riding with three or four strangers on the top of an omnibus I have felt a wild impulse to throw the driver off his seat, to drive the omnibus far out into the country and tip them all out into a field, and say, ‘We may never meet again in this world; come, let us under stand each other.’ I do not affirm that the experiment would succeed, but I think the impulse to do it is at the root of all the tradition of the poetry of wrecks and islands.

TRICKS OF MEMORY

THERE are many books which we think we have read when we have not. There are, at least, many that we think we remember when we do not. An original picture, perhaps, was imprinted upon the brain, but it has changed with our own changing minds. We only remember our remembrances. There is many a man who thinks he can recall the works of Swift or of Goldsmith; but, indeed, he himself is the principal author of ‘Gulliver’s Travels’ or ‘The Vicar of Wakefield’, which he recalls. Macaulay, with his close reading and miraculous memory, was quite certain that the Blatant Beast was killed at the end of ‘The Faerie Queene’; but it was not. A brilliant and scholarly friend of mine quoted a stanza as one in which not one word could safely be altered — and quoted it wrong. Hundreds of highly educated people are quite fixed in false versions touching facts that they could easily verify. The editor of a Church newspaper (in rebuking Radicals) asseverated again and again, after contradiction and challenge, that the Catechism commands a child ‘to do his duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call him’. Of course the Catechism says no such thing, but the editor was so certain that he would not even open his prayer-book to see. Hundreds of people are sure that Milton wrote, ‘Tomorrow to fresh fields and pastures new’. Hundreds of people are sure that Jesuits preached that the end justifies the means; many of them are sure that they have seen some Jesuit’s statement to that effect; but they have not.

But it is a stranger thing still that memory can thus trick us about the main artistic effect of really fine books. Until about a year ago I believed that I had a vivid recollection of ‘Robinson Crusoe’, So, indeed, I had, of certain images of the wreck and island; above all of the admirable fact that Crusoe had two swords instead of one. That is one of the touches of the true Defoe; the very inspired poetry of the accidental and the rough-and-tumble; the very romance of the unromantic. But I found I had completely forgotten the really sublime introduction to the tale, which gives it all its spiritual dignity — the narrative of Crusoe’s impiety; his two escapes from shipwreck and opportunities for repentance; and, finally, the falling upon him of this strange judgement: food, security, silence — a judgement stranger than death.

With this case in mind I am in no position to exult over my fellow-critics when they prove that they have not read properly the books that, as it happens, I have read properly. But I have been somewhat singularly impressed with the most cultivated and authoritative criticisms of the dramatic version of ‘Jekyll and Hyde’, in so far as they refer to Stevenson’s original romance. Of the play I cannot speak, but with the romance I am very well acquainted, which is more than can be said of those who have lightly and gracefully criticized it on the present occasion. Most of them said that Stevenson was a charming artist but no philosopher; that his inadequacy as a thinker was well represented in the tale of ‘Jekyll and Hyde’, which they proceeded to describe with the wildest inaccuracy of detail and a complete oblivion of the design. One idea, above all, has established itself firmly in their minds and I daresay in many other people’s. They think that in Stevenson’s tale Jekyll is the good self and Hyde the bad self; or, in other words, that the protagonist is wholly good when he is Jekyll and wholly bad when he is Hyde.

Now, if Hamlet had killed his uncle in the first act, if Othello had appeared as a *mari complaisant*, it could not have upset the whole point of Shakespeare’s story more than this upsets the whole point of Stevenson’s story. Stevenson’s story has nothing to do with pathological pedantries about ‘dual personality’. That was mere machinery; and as he himself seems to have thought, even unfortunate machinery. The business of the powders I think he himself thought clumsy; but he had to make the tale a modern novel and work the transformations by medicine, unless he was prepared to tell it as a primeval fairy-tale and make them by magic. But he did not care a jot about either compared with the mystical idea in the transformation itself; and that had nothing to do with powders or dual personalities, but only with heaven and hell — like ‘Robinson Crusoe’.

Stevenson goes out of his way to emphasize the fact that Jekyll, as Jekyll, was by no means perfect but was rather a morally damaged piece of goods. He had ‘a sly cast’, in spite of his handsome presence; he was nervous and secretive though not ill-natured. Jekyll is not the good man; Jekyll is the ordinary mixed, moderately humane man, whose character has begun to suffer from some evil drug or passion. Now, that which is thus sucking and draining him is the habit of being Hyde; and it is here that the fine moral of Stevenson comes in, a moral as superior as it is opposite to that popularly put into his mouth. So far from preaching that man can be success fully divided into two men, good and evil, he specifically preached that man cannot be so divided, even by monstrosity and miracle; that, even in the extravagant case of Jekyll, the good is still dragged down by the mere existence of the bad. The moral of ‘Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’ is not that man can be cut in two; it is that man cannot be cut in two.

Hyde is the innocence of evil. He stands for the truth (attested by a hundred tales of hypocrites and secret sins) that there is in evil, though not in good, this power of self-isolation, this hardening of the whole exterior, so that a man becomes blind to moral beauties or deaf to pathetic appeals. A man in pursuit of some immoral mania does attain an abominable simplicity of soul; he does act from one motive alone. Therefore he does be come like Hyde, or like that blood-curdling figure in Grimm’s fairy-tales, ‘a little man made of iron’. But the whole of Stevenson’s point would have been lost if Jekyll had exhibited the same horrible homogeneity. Precisely because Jekyll, with all his faults, possesses goodness, he possesses also the consciousness of sin, humility. He knows all about Hyde, as angels know about devils. And Steven son specially points out that this contrast between the blind swiftness of evil and the almost bewildered omniscience of good is not a peculiarity of this strange case, but is true of the permanent problem of your conscience and mine. If I get drunk I shall forget dignity; but if I keep sober I may still desire drink. Virtue has the heavy burden of knowledge; sin has often something of the levity of sinlessness.

THE CODE NAPOLEON

I

WHILE being what many would call a fanatic for the French alliance, I cannot bring myself to admire the suggestion that we should alter such names as that of Waterloo Station, out of delicacy towards the French. If once the memory of a national victory is to be regarded as an international insult, France herself would have to apologize to nearly every country in Europe. There is scarcely a city on the Continent the French have not entered in triumph; there is scarcely a flag in the civilized world that the French have not hung on their temples or their triumphal arches; there is scarcely a kingdom or a province that has not the name of a French victory that might be or is the name of a Paris street. If such a reminder to the victors is a reproach to the vanquished, England, as well as Europe, has a right to complain of the monuments of France. Every statue of Joan of Arc is a memorial of English defeat. In short, if we, the English, did really desire to glorify the memory of the Battle I of Waterloo, it would seem that we have adopted a rather dingy and ineffectual way of doing it. We have never been very fortunate with our public monuments, and Waterloo Station would certainly seem to be one of the least felicitous. The great figure on the Colonne de Vendôme can afford to smile at the artistic effort.

But there is another reform, connected with the same set of ideas, which I would very respectfully urge as a substitute. I fear it is a much more radical and even revolutionary reform than the alteration of a name connected with the defeat of Napoleon. It is that we should leave off talking nonsense about Napoleon, and especially talking nonsense against Napoleon. It is, that instead of bothering about whether a large railway shed is named after the Battle of Waterloo, we should actually try to learn something about the Battle of Waterloo and about the real merits and demerits of the European adventure which finally failed there. So drastic and even dramatic a change in our historical habits is certainly more of an undertaking than the alteration of a luggage label from Waterloo to Stockholm or Brest-Litovsk, or some name which our Pacifists might prefer. Men will certainly not forget Waterloo any more than they will forget Napoleon; and since we cannot forget them, we are almost driven back on the desperate expedient of understanding them.

In looking over a large number of English articles and essays touching Napoleon I was astonished to find how insular and even ignorant our national tradition still is on the subject. So far as moral atmosphere is concerned, nothing seems to have changed. Bonaparte is still Boney; nobody denies his genius now; but nobody denied it then. Even those whose very natural emotions at the moment made them insist that he was a great tyrant, a great murderer, a great monster, did not dispute that he was a great man. But what he was doing, what he was driving at, why he was what he was and what the whole terrific business was all about, none of us seems to have had any notion then, and none of us seems to have any notion now. What is wanted is not glorification of Napoleon, still less glorification of him as a demi-god, which is even worse than denunciation of him as a demon. What is wanted is a calm and candid consideration of him as a historical human being, and of the things he stood for, which were much more important than himself. This is the one thing that nobody will do for Napoleon; and the trick by which his reasonable fame still suffers is simple enough.

The trick consists of first artificially attiring him in all the terrors of a superman, and on that ground denying him the rights of a man. Somebody said the devil was a gentleman; and somebody else said that Napoleon was not a gentleman. The trick consists in expressing surprise that he was not a gentleman when we have settled to our own satisfaction that he was the devil. But if we need sanity touching Napoleon in his personal aspect, we need it much more in his public aspect. For the things for which Napoleon really fought were the very contrary of those cloudy and fatalistic things with which his legends have been clothed. If ever a man stood for the strong southern sun against the clouds and the confusing twilight, it was he. What Napoleon stood for was common sense — *le bon sens français*. That French common sense can sometimes be cruel, but never fatalistic. It despises dooms and omens and hereditary curses and chosen races and all the superstitious necessitarianism of the North. In short, he stood for French freedom and in this sense for French free thought. But if there was another thing he stood for, it was French respectability. He represented a mass of customs and conceptions, of which his English enemies seemed to know nothing and his English admirers to know less. His laws cannot be understood without the French key of domesticity. All his legislation and social reform revolved round the very thing which all our legislation and social reform are seeking to destroy — the family. It was the very reverse of what we call grandmotherly legislation, but it might in one sense be called legislation for grandmothers. The central figure of its family council was that terrible person the French grandmother. If Napoleon was not always a Christian, he was always a pagan, and what paganism would call a pious pagan. He understood the thing that so many French poets express, the veneration of the soil and the invocation of the dead. In all this he was doubt less merely the leader of Latin culture; and all the more because all forms of that culture are rooted in the form we call agriculture. It desires the human family to stand on its own feet, within the frontiers of its own land. With that object it was revolutionary. With that object it is conservative. The French Revolution cannot be under stood, till we realize that it is exactly where the Jacobins went that the Bolshevists cannot follow.

II

Napoleon did once say, among many other random and cynical remarks in a busy life, that he doubted whether he really loved anybody. If human beings in history were treated with half the sympathy and sobriety given to human beings in novels, we should all understand that this was probably the bitter and brief expression of some mood of hardening, common in middle age, but faced with all the realism of a Latin. Napoleon, in early life, had quite certainly loved not wisely but too well. So much for the remark itself. And now let me draw attention to something that went along with it. Immediately after Napoleon had said in his haste that he loved nobody, he corrected himself and added as an after thought some such words as these: ‘Except perhaps Joseph, from a sort of habit; because he is the eldest of us.’ Now, those who regard Napoleon either as Satan or a Superman would never have dreamed of his saying that. It is the very last thing they would expect him to say; it is the very last exception they would expect him to make. They would understand the sinister hero being faithful to one faithless woman; or worshipping some *Princesse Lointaine* of legendary beauty; or having his weary heart refreshed by a golden-haired child or beggar maid; or taking the advice of some wild prophet or jester in whom anything was tolerated. But that he should still have a humdrum and almost humble attachment to the head of the family, bigger than he in the nursery and the playground, and for no other reason whatever, is an anti-climax to all anarchical romance. The Superman is still actually looking up to his elder brother, simply be cause he is his elder brother. We look for Napoleon and we find Buonaparte *ainé*. In Thackeray and nearly all English fiction, it is taken for granted, with a laugh, that a fellow can hardly be expected to be very fond of his elder brother. In the Code of the Corsican Ogre it is taken for granted, with entire innocence, that a fellow cannot help being fond of his elder brother, even if it is only a habit. That is what I mean when I say that if we wanted to find the virtues of men like Napoleon we should look for them in the wrong place. That is what I mean when I say that we do not understand even what such a Latin would mean by trying to be good, if he did try to be good. His virtues would startle us by their staleness. The devil would hardly become anything so romantic as a monk; but rather a bourgeois. He would be domestic and almost dowdy.

In short, Napoleon may or may not have had all these fancy virtues and vices of the strong man; but, anyhow, there was something that was stronger than Napoleon. There was something that he served and did not really pretend to rule. He served his own family; and he served the whole institution of the family. Much of the Code Napoléon turns upon it, and its economic expression in a peasantry. It is the supreme and sacred institution of Latin society; and whether we are to be friends or foes of that society, we shall be wise to understand it better. The men who are professing to reconcile all nations do not attempt to understand it at all.

CYRANO AND CHANTECLER

I HEAR that an attack is being made by some of the French critics upon ‘Chantecler’ and the Rostand reputation generally — an attack taking the form of a charge of ‘mere rhetoric’ and a protest against extravagant and even insolent puns. That some such hostile impression might exist in England I could well understand. To begin with the simplest reason, the little I have happened to see in the way of English translation of Rostand has been laughably inadequate. I even remember seeing a version of ‘Cyrano de Bergerac’ in which the last line of the Ballade of the Duel was translated quite literally. As everybody knows, each verse of that impromptu poem ends with the line, ‘A la fin de l’envoi je touche’ — that is, ‘I hit you at the end of the *envoi*’, or last verse. Obviously, it should be roughly rendered ‘I hit you when the ballad ends’ or ‘And at the ballad’s end the blow’, or anything of that kind. In this learned translation, Cyrano was made to say at the end of every stanza, ‘And at the envoy’s end I touch’. Not one person in ten in an English theatre would know that ‘touch’ is a French technical term for a hit in fencing. Not one person in twenty would know that the *envoi* is the ritual last verse of the old French ballade. If therefore Cyrano said ‘At the envoy’s end I touch’, it is impossible to conceive what an English crowd would think he meant.

But, of course, this verbal mistranslation is only the emblem of a much deeper sort of misunderstanding. It is no disgrace to an intelligent Englishman of a certain type that he cannot care for Rostand’s military brilliancy; just as it would be no disgrace to a classically-minded Frenchman that he could see nothing beautiful in the tangled forest of Browning. There is an English temper in which the violence of French rhetoric seems merely stiff and thin. Such a type of Englishman would be annoyed both ways by a Rostand drama. The nose of Cyrano de Bergerac seems to him as gross as the nose of Ally Sloper. The rhetoric of Cyrano de Bergerac seems to him as artificial as that of Bombastes Furioso. The two spiritual roots of difference lie in two French qualities which the English scarcely possess at all; first the power of feeling that hatred is something holy; and second the power, not merely of laughing at oneself, but of laughing unmercifully. Our English idea of a hero is built upon the sailor, the accessible and open-hearted fellow who kills everybody with the kindest feelings. Our hero is Nelson or Harry V — I mean the genial and magnanimous Henry V of Shakespeare, not the morbid and cruel Henry of history. Nelson wears his heart on his sleeve, as he wears his Orders on his coat. Shakespeare’s King Henry broods over his beloved subjects and seeks to give them (in a splendid line) ‘a little touch of Harry in the night’ But Cyrano, though he fills the stage, is by no means a universal gentlemen. Cyrano, though he lives and dies for love, is by no means, in the general sense, a loving or a lovable character. It is his vice, he says, to wish everybody to hate him. He compares love to the loose Vandyck collars that are coming into fashion, and hatred to the stiff Elizabethan ruff which he still retains; it is uncomfortable, but it holds a man’s head up: ‘La Haine est un carcan, mais c’est une auréole.’ To be a bitter and exact critic of society, to lash the age, to demand that acting, writing, fencing should reach a severe standard, to wage a lonely war on stupidity — this is a French idea; it is the idea of Rostand’s Cyrano, just as it is the idea of Molière’s Misanthrope. It is hard for an Englishman (at least, it is hard for me) heartily to like this idealistic cruelty. It is hard for us to imagine scorn as something fruitful and ever-festive; to behold that bitter tree bearing lovely blossoms and delightful fruit. It is hard for us to realize a pageant of blazing wit and romantic activity all produced by such stiff anger as has produced an anchorite or a suicide. It is as if all the gay Athenian comedies had been written by Timon of Athens. But though this sentiment of sacred hate is not easy to us, that is no reason why we should not do justice to it. And France may fairly claim that much philanthropy has been founded by the Misanthrope.

The other un-English quality is best represented in ‘Chantecler’ itself. The Englishman can laugh at himself, but the Frenchman can sneer at himself, can laugh at himself till himself gets cross. It was very French to parade the fierce satiric poet Cyrano, the very romance of unpopularity, defying human society and taunting death. It was very French to devote a whole tragedy (as in ‘L’Aiglon’) to the mere memory of Napoleon, the mere size of his shadow. It had the same heroic impossibility as that great Spanish legend in which two knights led out the corpse of the Cid on horseback and all the armies of the Moors fled before it. But it was most French of all, after exhibiting these towering heroes, suddenly to exhibit them again as clucking fowls in a farm-yard and a cock crowing on a dunghill. First, Cyrano’s ‘panache’, his high unbroken feather, brushes the stars; next, it is only the feather of a chicken waddling about a yard. First, Napoleon’s trumpet is like the trumpet of the Resurrection, calling to the quick and the dead; next, it is only cock-a-doodle-doo from the ragged hero of a hundred cock-fights.

Precisely because Rostand, a romantic and patriotic Frenchman, laughs at the omnipotence of the Gallic cock, many foreigners are enabled to laugh at it who by no means laugh at equally foolish things of their own. The phrase, for instance, that the sun never sets on the British Empire, is quite as intrinsically ludicrous as the idea that the sun cannot rise without the Gallic cock. That measureless, unthinkable furnace which flings its remoter firelight over such stardust as our earth and many like it, is not much more insulted by one idea than by the other. There is mockery in the notion that those awful ancestral fires are encouraged when they hear the cock; there is surely equal mockery in the suggestion that they are discouraged if they do not see the Union Jack. But the difference is that no patriotic English poet will write a romantic drama to point out the cosmic comicality of supposing that the distant and fiery star needs, for its comfort, a little touch of John Bull in the night. But it is French satire that always scores off French heroism; it is the same nation in the two moods; sometimes, as in Rostand’s case, it is even the same individual. France has claimed, not without reason, to be the Roman Eagle; she has claimed the eagle and earned it. But she has always gone back on herself to the admission that she is not the eagle, but the cock.

PASSING THROUGH THE CUSTOMS

THE more a man thinks and travels, the more plainly it will appear that nearly every Christian nation, like nearly every Christian marriage, is a kind of passionate compromise that no one else can understand. Just as in one family the man may collect snakes because he may not smoke cigars, or in another house the woman may be a shrew because she is not a Suffragette, so every great European people achieves a practical equilibrium in some particular and almost secret manner. It is a mistake to suppose that this equilibrium is peculiar to certain people — to talk about Germany as ‘efficient’, or England as ‘businesslike’. In a superficial sense, all the great white nations are efficient; in a deeper and grander sense, the whole human race is as inefficient as an idiot school. But the peoples of Europe are not so much seeking different things as seeking the same things in different ways.

I passed lately through the Custom Houses of three countries — England, France, and Germany. They were as different as a lecture, a massacre, and a morning call; they might have been done in three different planets or by three different races of animals. But they were all equally efficient, they were all a nuisance and they all took almost exactly the same time to a tick of the clock. The French *douane* impressed an English lady who was unfamiliar with travel with the idea that she had got into some particularly squalid and sanguinary corner of the French Revolution. Bullet-headed men barging and hanging into everybody, bawling at the top of their voices and throwing luggage about like lumber — this vision struck her simple mind as having in it some element of confusion. She asked how we should ever get to the end of such anarchy. Almost as she said the words the thing was over; everyone had the right luggage, passed with the proper form of examination; everyone was free again and happy. ‘These people’, I said to her, ‘do not bang and bawl because they are confused or lawless, nor because they are inefficient, nor yet because they are efficient. They bang and bawl because they are French; they like it; it seems to soothe them.’

The French Custom House had been a small, dusty, wooden room like a shed The German Custom House was a vast twilight temple, inlaid with gold and mosaic, like the roof of St Paul’s Cathedral. Vast spaces of its echoing floors were not used or even inhabited. Numbers of its officials, standing about in uniforms of an aesthetic peacock green, seemed to have nothing to do at all. There is nothing specially ‘practical’ about peacock green. One was, indeed, handed about from one official to another and permitted, with silent pomp, to pass from one large waiting-room into another exactly like it. But it was not really oppressive, any more than the French *mêlée* was really brutal: the whole thing was a national sport. And the luggage was inspected and passed, the travellers marshalled and set free, in exactly the same space of time as they had been at Boulogne.

The atmosphere of the English port and Custom House is yet a third thing; less describable, but, I think, even more national than the others. Its spirit is expressed in the English porter; and the nearest definition of the spirit is that it is confidential and comic. Everybody is received off an English boat or train as if he were rather a scapegrace son returning to the family and being met by the old coachman. Even the Custom House officers have a sort of grin. The smell of my country smacked me in the face as I stepped on the Dover Pier. I asked a short, rather beery-looking porter if the train was coming in. He gave an extraordinary sort of roll of the shoulder and jerk of the thumb and said roguishly, ‘Yers, Sir; she’s comin’ in in ‘ere ... ar, she’s a-comin’ in.’ And he went off grinning, as if it were the greatest joke in the world that the ordinary train should come in at the ordinary place. German officials stare at you. French officials scowl at you. English officials wink at you. But they all pass the luggage.

HIS SIGH IS A HULLABALLOO

I BELIEVE our false notion of the French character has been very largely founded on the French cabman. And I believe that being to be a subtle if not sensitive spirit who is much misunderstood. Not all English travellers, perhaps, fall into the merely verbal error of the old lady who observed a certain coldness in the *cocher* whom she had ceremoniously addressed as *cochon* The type has been better appreciated in that admirable mystery tale, ‘Trent’s Last Case’. Mr Bentley’s hero did justice to the French cabman’s cultured vocabulary, safeguarding himself with the remarkable quotation from Keats: ‘Happy is England, sweet her artless cabmen; enough their simple loveliness for me.’ That deep-minded democrat, Mr Dooley, said that if he were a Frenchman he would be afraid of nobody but the cabdrivers; ‘and I wouldn’t be afraid of them long, for I’d be a cab-driver meself’. But it has not yet fallen in the way of any social philosopher to analyse the French cabman; if any had done so, he would have destroyed many false ideas about the French citizen For instance, the three main impressions formed by the poor old woman about her *cochon* probably were: (1) that he drove wildly; (2) that he shouted, cracked his whip and kicked up a general shindy; (3) that he was rude. The old woman reported this to the other old women who write authoritative books on foreign policy and imperial travel, and the result was a picture of the Frenchman as merely excitable and undisciplined; so that to speak of the French calm still seems like a paradox. But in truth our old mistake about France falls under three heads which exactly correspond to the three facts mentioned. First, many differences are accidents. They are mentally unfamiliar, but morally colourless. Thus much of the impression of wild driving (though not all) comes from the fact that the rule of the road is reversed and he who is on the right is in the right. This mere unfamiliarity has bred many fictions.

All kinds of jests, criticisms, suggestions of vanity, looseness, stinginess, slackness, gaudiness, have been deduced from the French soldier’s red trousers. Even Mr Dooley had a fling at them. But after all there could hardly be a very profound spiritual chasm between the soldier who wore a blue coat with red trousers and the soldier who wore a red coat with blue trousers. Or again, it is a French custom to keep the windows of a restaurant mostly closed. I do not know the reason; very likely there is no reason. But certainly the reason cannot be a cloistered terror of the open air, for the same Frenchman will take his dinner and dinner-table bodily out into the street, at which the English old lady, while untravelled, might possibly faint. A man cannot be hiding behind windows when he can do without walls. Much of the misunderstanding, then, is local custom, like the rule of the road.

Next comes the matter of noise. To some it will seem a paradox, but the noise does not come from the Frenchman being ruffled, but rather from his being unruffled. He has no nerves, as we say when we mean that he has very good ones. His amazing howls do not amaze him. Noise is the normal, like the murmur of breezes or the roll of the distant river. His sigh is a hullaballoo, his whisper a horrible yell. His fathers have followed the cannon in a hundred campaigns and he conducts his daily life like a cannonade. It is true that there mingles with this nervous immunity a touch of fierceness that is not so much emotion as merely impatience. Often it is an intellectual impatience — one might almost say a cold impatience. It is the impatience of a chess-player who cannot be bored with a long game when he already foresees the last move. But this abruptness, sometimes approaching to brutality, has less to do with the noisiness than that other element of invulnerability in the nerves. The streets of Paris do not solely or primarily prove what a racket the French can raise; they prove even more what a racket the French can endure.

And in the matter of politeness, the truth will again appear paradoxical. What makes a poor Frenchman uncivil is the same thing that makes him civil. It is the civil or civic idea — the idea of human equality. Many rich old ladies from more aristocratic countries do really talk as if *cochon* were pretty much the same as *cocher*. If the poor man strikes back it is not to destroy the social structure, but rather to preserve it. He keeps his end up, that the floor may be level. But it is quite true, of course, since human nature is imperfect, that the combination of the democratic instinct I describe with the temperamental impatience I have already noted does produce on occasion an appearance of insolence. This charge against the French is far more well founded than the opposite charge, which it was the fashion of our fathers to bring against them. Indeed, the old stage Frenchman, with his monkeyish excitability, concealed from us the real French defects as much as the real French virtues. We missed the fact, for instance, that the French have some of the harder faults of the Scotch. But, whatever they are, they are not a nation of dancing-masters — rather of cab-drivers.

I am profoundly persuaded that the French are going to lead Europe yet again. Their faults come from being in the core of reality, in the place where things happen. It is their misfortune that they have not the poetry of the islands, the mysticism that comes from living on the edges of things. But they are the better placed for purging democracy of some of the dreamy pedantries into which more exclusive societies have perverted it, and showing what can really be done with liberty, equality, and fraternity. As it happens, the Allies rather specially illustrate that famous trinity. Few have loved liberty so much as the English; none has understood fraternity so well as the Russians. Both have still to grasp the real meaning of equality — that mankind has been made by men.

THE NARROWNESS OF NOVELTY

IT is easy to miss the point of certain modern quarrels, in which I have occasionally intervened; quarrels about things that are labelled Ancient and Modern, like the hymns. Or perhaps, in the case of some of the things, not very like the hymns. Anyhow, the point of the position is this. The real objection to certain novelties is not novelty. It is something that most people do not very much associate with novelty; something which might rather be called narrowness. It is something that fixes the mind on a fashion, until it forgets that it is a fashion. Novelty of this sort narrows the mind, not only by forgetting the past, but also by forgetting the future. There is a certain natural relief and refreshment in altering things, but a wise man will remember that the things that can be altered will be altered again. There is a certain type of Modernist who manages to accept a thing at the same time as fashionable and as final. Indeed, there is a fine shade of difference between something new and something fresh. The former word may be used of something like the New Testament, which is new for ever. But the idea of Something Fresh belongs rather to the exhilarating but less stable world of Mr P. G. Wodehouse.

We pick up a novelty as we pick up a novel; because we think we shall enjoy it, especially if it is a novel by Mr P. G. Wodehouse. But these things are fresh as the flowers of spring are fresh; that is, they are delightful when they come; but we do not disguise from ourselves that they will eventually go. Now it seems to me that much of the modern mind is narrowed by seeing some thing sacred in the mode or mood of the moment. Thus critics are not content to say that they are not in the mood for Wordsworth or for Tennyson; they talk as if Wordsworth had become worthless, intrinsically and finally worthless, because of the appearance of the stark and ruthless Mr Binks, who does happen to answer at the moment to their mood, and perhaps to the mood of the world. Thus a younger generation, which is now rapidly becoming an older generation, revolted against the Victorian poets, with a sort of illogical logic in their minds; to the effect that they could not really have been poets because they were Victorians. They were not content to say, what is perfectly reasonable, that they were tired of Tennyson. They tried to imply, what is something totally different, that Tennyson is always tiresome. But as between the man who is alleged to be tiresome and the man who is admitted to be tired, there is always the possible inference that he is too tired to enjoy anything. I am not a special worshipper either of Wordsworth or Tennyson; the point is that such merits as they have are unaffected by the accidental nervous fatigue of somebody else. Mr Binks also will some day be a venerable and traditional figure looming out of the past. He also will gain, by respectability and repetition, the formidable power of fatiguing people, and new generations shall rise up and call him tiresome. But surely we cannot admit for a moment that the brilliant — nay, blazing — qualities of Mr Binks, his stabbing actuality, his subversive subconscious attack, his instant vortical violence, his cold incandescence of intellectuality, his death-ray of blank hiatus, his dynamite explosion of dots . . . surely we cannot admit for a moment that our own Mr Binks is worthless, or ever will be worthless, merely because the world will probably pass into some other emotional atmosphere, to which his terrific talents will be less suited; in which his unique type of truth will be less seen; or in which his dazzling but concentrated spotlight will be less on the spot. Yet these tides and times of mood and fashion are moving even as we talk about them. I have already seen here and there notes written by a new generation, newer than the generation that was tired of Tennyson. I have seen critics beginning once more to praise Tennyson and strangely enough to show a most extraordinary contempt for Swinburne. I do not complain of the change to admiration; I do not even complain of the change to contempt. What I complain of is the shallowness of people who only do things for a change, and then actually talk as if the change were unchangeable. That is the weakness of a purely progressive theory, in literature as in science. The very latest opinion is always infallibly right and always inevitably wrong. It is right because a new generation of young people are tired of things, and wrong because another generation of young people will be tired of them.

I do not call any man imaginative unless he can imagine something different from his own favourite sort of imagery. I do not call any man free unless he can walk backwards as well as forwards. I do not call any man broadminded unless he can include minds that are different from his own normal mind, let alone moods that are different from his own momentary mood. And I do not call any man bold or strong or possessed of stabbing realism or startling actuality unless he is strong enough to resist the merely neurotic effects of his own fatigue, and still see things more or less as they are; big mountains as big, and great poets as great, and remarkable acts and achievements as remarkable, even if other people are bored with them, or even if he is bored with them himself. The preservation of proportion in the mind is the only thing that keeps a man from narrow-mindedness. And a man can preserve the proportion of great things in his mind, even if they do not happen at a particular moment to be tickling his senses or exciting his nerves. Therefore I do not mind the man adoring novelties, but I do object to his adoring novelty. I object to this sort of concentration on the immortal instant, be cause it narrows the mind, just as gazing at a minute object, coming nearer and nearer, narrows the vision.

What is wanted is the truly godlike imagination which makes all things new, because all things have been new. That would really be something like a new power of the mind. But the modern version of broadening the mind has very little to do with broadening the powers of the mind. It would be a great gift of historical imagination to be able to see everything that has happened as if it were just happening, or just about to happen. This is quite as true of literary as of political history. For literary history is full of revolutions, and we do not realize them unless we realize them as revolutionary. To admire Wordsworth merely as an antiquity is stupid, and to despise Wordsworth as an antiquity is worse than stupid; it is silly. But to admire Wordsworth as a novelty — that would be a real vision and re-creation of the past. For it is solid fact, if any fact be solid, that nearly all the young who were most alert and alive, and eager for a sort of revolutionary refreshment, men like Lamb and Hazlitt and the rest, did feel something in the first fresh gust of the new naturalism; something even in the very baldness and crudity of Wordsworth’s rural poetry, which made them feel that he had flung open the gates of freedom more widely than the French Revolution. I do not think it will be any injustice to Mr Binks (always supposing we give him also his proper welcome when he arrives) if we try to understand some of those feelings of our fathers about their favourite authors, and so learn to see those authors as they really ought to be seen. For poets are not stale; it is only critics who are stale; often excusably enough, but even then they need not brag of their own staleness.

THE MERITS OF SHAKESPEARE’S PLOTS

I SEE that Mr John M. Robertson has written a book about the problem of ‘Hamlet’, round which the critics still revolve with all the irresolution of which they accuse the hero. I have not read Mr Robertson’s book and am thus inhibited by a fine fantastic scruple from reviewing it. But I gather from one of the shrewdest and sanest of critics, Mr J. C. Squire, that it explains the inconsistencies of the play as mainly the rugged remains of the old romances or chronicles. It may be suggested that in truth a hero is made human when he is made inconsistent. This is true; but the explanation is at least a great improvement on the insane seriousness of the German psychologists. They talked of Hamlet not merely as a human character but as a historical character. They talked as if he had secrets not only hidden from Shakespeare’s readers, but hidden from Shakespeare. This is madness; it is merely staring at a portrait till you think it is alive. It is as if they undertook to tell me the real truth about the private life of Oberon.

Moreover, the case of Hamlet does happen to be one in which Mr Robertson’s theory seems relatively right. I should deny any inconsistency in a dreamer doing sudden things like stabbing Polonius; they are just the sort of things a dreamer would do. But it is true that some things out of the old story seem harsh and irrelevant and it is truer still that the old story contains less than usual of the soul of the new story. I say ‘less than usual’, for I should like to point out that the general rule is rather the other way. Mr Robertson’s thesis may be true of ‘Hamlet’, but it is not so true of Shakespeare.

Of course, much can be said by this time both for and against the national poet. But if it be hopeless to denounce Shakespeare, it may appear almost as impertinent to defend him. And yet there is one point on which he has never been defended. And it is one on which I think he should not only be defended but admired. If I were a Shakespearean student or any kind of student (the improbability of which prospect words wholly fail me to express), I should specialize in the part of Shakespeare that is certainly not Shakespeare. I mean I should plead for the merit of Shakespeare’s plots; all the more because they were somebody else’s plots. In short, I should say a word for the poet’s taste; if only his taste in theft. It is the fashion to abuse Shakespeare as a critic, if only to exalt him the more as a creator. It is the fashion to say that he built on a foundation of mere rubbish and that this lifts to a greater glory the cloud-capped pinnacles he reared upon it. I am not sure that it is such pure praise for a practical architect to say that he was totally in different to the basement and cellars, and interested exclusively in the roof and chimney-pots. But, anyhow, I am sure that Shakespeare did not forget the foundation or despise the basement or the cellars.

Shakespeare *enjoyed* the old stories. He enjoyed them as tales are intended to be enjoyed. He liked reading them as a man of imagination and intelligence today likes reading a good adventure story, or still more a good detective story. This is the one possibility that the Shakespearean critics never seem to entertain. Probably they are not simple enough and therefore not imaginative enough to know what that enjoyment is. They cannot read an adventure story or indeed any story. For instance, nearly all the critics apologize, in a prim and priggish manner, for the tale on which turns the Trial Scene in ‘The Merchant of Venice’. They explain that poor Shakespeare had taken a barbarous old story and had to make the best of it. As a matter of fact, he had taken an uncommonly good story; one of the best that he could possibly have had to make the best of. It is a clear, pointed, and practical parable against usury; and if a large number of modern people do not appreciate it, it is because a large number of modern people are taught to appreciate and even admire usury. The idea of a man forfeiting part of his body (it might have been an arm or leg) is a highly philosophical satire on unlimited recovery of ruinous debts. The idea is embodied in all those truly Christian laws about wainage and livelihood which were the glory of the Middle Ages. The story is excellent, simply as an anecdote working up to a climax and ending in an unexpected retort. And the end is a truth and not merely a trick. You do prove the falsity of pedantic logic by a *reductio ad absurdum*.

While we have had masses of learned work about the Shakespearean origins, we have had very little about the Shakespearean origin. I mean we have had very little on the main matter of his human and natural inheritance of the whole civilization of Christendom from which he came. It is a commonplace that Shakespeare was a result of the Renaissance; but the Renaissance itself was a result of the Middle Ages; nor was it by any means merely a revolt against the Middle Ages. There are a thousand things in which Shakespeare would be much better understood by Dante than he was by Goethe. I will take one example, all the stronger for being always taken the other way. English patriotism is one of the more manly realities of the modern world; and Shakespeare was a passionate patriot. But in that very passage in praise of England which is hackneyed without ceasing to be holy, about half is a medieval memory of the sort called a medieval superstition. It is not about the spacious days of Elizabeth, but the cloistered days of Peter the Hermit. It is not about the Armada but about the Crusades—

As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry
Of the world’s ransom, blessed Mary’s Son.

That note was neglected and nearly lost in the whole modern world; and scarcely any modern critic would have cared to notice it. Only the prodigious events of yesterday have brought us back, half-bewildered, into the footsteps of our fathers; and the vision of John of Gaunt was fulfilled in the hour when a great English soldier entered Jerusalem on foot.

A PLEA FOR THE HEROIC COUPLET

I SHOULD like to see a real poet write again in the heroic couplet of the didactic eighteenth century. Of course (it may be added) we should all like to see a real poet write anything, if he would only do it. But the couplet in question has been under-valued. We have got so used to considering it didactic that we forget that it could be heroic. When the Romantics raised their revolt against the school of Pope, they were probably justified in abandoning it; but they were not justified in representing it as merely neat, still less as merely mechanical. It did lend itself to mere neatness, to the epigram with the sting in the tail. But it was not fair to imply that it was like a Limerick, a thing that could have nothing but a neat ending — a creature that was all tail. It did lend itself to flippancy, as in lines like —

Die and endow a college or a cat.

It did lend itself to compact contradiction, in lines like —

And so obliging that he ne'er obliged.

But the notion that it had never done anything but this sort of thing is a fallacy left behind by a forgotten quarrel. Things were written in that restrained metre that have a real epic sublimity. They are not the less imaginative because they left much to the imagination. I use the word epic in the sense that an epic is a sort of gigantic gesture — as when the old French epic was called a *Chanson de Geste*. It is a deed rather than a word; its very words suggest something beyond them, like a blessing or a blow. Let anyone who can feel the wind and shadow of that mighty movement say whether he does not feel it unmistakably in certain moments of these great poets of the Age of Reason —

Still raise for good the supplicating voice,
But leave to heaven the measure and the choice,

in which, to my fancy, the words 'still raise' seem to rise like a lifted hand; or those splendid prophecies of doom —

Princes and lords may flourish or may fade;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made

not to mention that deep and indestructible truth for present and future —

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay.

These words do not deserve to be condemned as neat. They do not deserve to be despised as witty. We might as well call a speech of Satan or of Samson, as rendered by Milton, merely neat and witty because those who do not appreciate the classic might call it cold. The great gesture may seem to some to be rather that of an orator than an oracle of which the priestess writhes and foams at the mouth in a frenzy; but the same might be said of the speech in Milton. But, even while we agree that a warmer colour or a wilder imagery made more purely poetical the poets before and the poets after Pope, there is no reason why these elements should not enrich the heroic couplet as much as any other metre, or why that which was once used to express reason should not be used again to express imagination. I believe myself that it would be found to be a very full and even a very free form of diction, allowing of a great many good effects old and new, and none the worse if these included among other things the ringing conclusiveness of the printed statement, at once an epic and an epigram.

But whether or no the old form could be used for the highest moods of wisdom, one real advantage attached to it when used for the lower purpose of wit. It did not permit of mystification — nor, therefore, did it permit of mere bluff. There is such a thing as sham wisdom; but there cannot be any such thing as sham wit. There can be a bad pun or a good one; but we do so far see the point that we see the pun. There can be a bad joke or a good one; but we must see the joke even in judging it to be bad. There can be a poor epigram or a powerful one; but we know where to look for the sting, and it is still in the tail. Hence the brain has at least to be at work in some way in order to produce even the worst couplets of the old rationalistic poetry. The brain may be even more magnificently at work in Shelley or Coleridge than in Goldsmith or Pope. But it is much easier to be a sham Shelley than to be a sham Pope. If you want to rival or parody lines like ‘Damn with faint praise . . . and without sneering teach the rest to sneer’, you must endure for a few moments at least the abnormal agony of thinking. But you can affirm positively that a line you have just written, which runs ‘Maniac moonshine sways and staggers,’ is quite as good as the line, ‘The sanguine sunrise with its meteor eyes’ leaping on the back of the cloud, like a large glaring cat, in the lines of Shelley. There is, therefore, no check or limit to the production of purely imaginative poetry — a dark and disturbing thought. Men need only go on repeating that all poetry has been called nonsense, and deducing from this that all nonsense can be called poetry.

One of the thousand things which thinkers of this school never think of is this: that, even if it be true that the old poets were similarly criticized by the yet older critics, the wise man will by no means take it entirely for granted that the older critics were wrong. When we are told, ‘We heard the same old-fashioned outcry at the beginning of the Romantic movement,’ we shall take the liberty of answering ‘Yes; and we have not yet seen the end of the Romantic movement.’ If the Romantic movement ends in a mad-house, people will say there was a great deal to be said for those old family physicians, the original classical critics. To most of us, born in the intervening time, it would normally seem natural to prefer the romantic to the rationalistic. We find it difficult to believe that ‘Hernani’ must be a bad play if it violates the unities of time and place as observed in ‘Hecuba’. But if the next play we see preserves the unities by exhibiting as its first scene a section of the interior of the diseased brain of a dipsomaniac, a scene in which all the characters are maggots (or possibly snakes), we shall find our selves unable to deny that the violation of the unities has in fact led to the violation of the sanities. And if the author of this quiet little idyll of snakes and maggots turns on us scornfully and says, ‘The old critics told Victor Hugo the same sort of thing; they told him he was letting in a flood of folly and anarchy to drown the world,’ why, there will come upon us a very strong temptation to answer, ‘And apparently he was.’

Nevertheless, I do not feel bound to support the old classical critics. I only feel free to support them. That is exactly the difference; and a difference which cannot apparently be made clear to those who talk the cant of novelty. They tell me that they are not to be browbeaten by the established tyrannies of the past. I answer that neither am I to be browbeaten by the successful revolutions of the past. The innovator boasts that he is free to show how time has justified the rebel; but I hold my self equally free to speculate on how a little more time may justify the rebuke to the rebel. Indeed, the rebuke may be justified even when it is not just. I should heartily agree that Keats was a very great man and that Gifford was a very small man. But I might claim the right to defend a small man in the right against a great man in the wrong. The case of Keats is indeed unfair and unrepresentative, which is why it is always taken as typical. Gifford was not merely a small poet or critic; he was a paltry political hack with a personal spite, such as may exist in any age or any school. But if a classical critic said that Keats' early work contained elements capable of dissolving the dignity and severity of poetry, was he wrong? I fancy the admirers of Keats who say so are rather admirers of Keats than readers of Keats. I doubt whether most of them have a habit of reading steadily through 'Endymion'.

When we really welcome the next poet, I doubt whether he will be at all like our notion of the new poet. It may be questioned whether he will really cover the page with sprawling, irregular rhythms or leave it spotted with isolated words and images and symbols. It is quite likely that he will sit down and write in rhymed decasyllabics, or some other old form; and will observe all the old rules and preserve all the old unities — and say all he has to say and hardly know that he has done it.

TO PRAISE, EXALT, ESTABLISH, AND DEFEND

THERE is a big blank in the cleverest contemporary literature; and it is always difficult to draw a picture of a blank. Nobody finds it easy to define a negative, or to analyse the exact texture of a hole. But I can best begin by quoting certain lines of a friend of mine, not because he is a friend of mine, but because he does give a vivid description of what is not there. Mr Belloc, belonging to older traditions, wrote a Poem in Praise of Wine, of which the first two lines are these —

To praise, exalt, establish, and defend,
To welcome home mankind’s mysterious friend.

That is the note which, for some reason, has disappeared from most modern writing. There is any amount of sensibility to things, of subtle response to things, of delicate description of how the particular poet is affected by things; but he is never affected in this way. He will tell us that a pool with green scum on it partly depressed and partly delighted him; but he will not decide; he will not pronounce upon whether there ought to be any pond; or whether any pond ought to have any scum; or whether any scum ought to be green rather than peacock-blue; or whether, in short, he thanks God for a good green pond, or merely feels inclined to drown himself in it. And as is his aesthetic attitude towards the scum of the pond, so is his moral attitude towards the scum of the population.

He will tell us, to vary the figure, that the glimpse of a girl’s mocking face in a crowd left him disturbed and doubtful; but he will not say, as did the great poets of old, that it left him either despairing or resolved. Dante had very little more than a glimpse of Beatrice on this earth; but he instantly perpetuated it in a perspective as solid as architecture, stretching away into the corridors and halls of heaven. Some great poets in the past, when the girl’s mocking face was a little too mocking, hardened and fixed and fossilized the memory in exactly the opposite fashion. Catullus came to a very harsh and savage and ungentlemanly conclusion about Lesbia; but he came to a conclusion. There was something in the whole tremendous tradition of the great tragic and comic poets of the past, which tended of its nature to be monumental. Dante set up a stone over Beatrice and Catullus threw a stone at Lesbia; but they were both big stones and they. have remained upon the graves. Both felt sure that their gesture was final; and that it really represented what they felt. The very sound of song, the very nature of the opening phrase, was something like that; 'To praise, exalt, establish, and defend'. Or else it was, 'To curse, confound, destroy, and leave for dead'. But that full throated and final utterance is somehow lacking amid the many and varied voices of modern self-expression, though they claim to have an unprecedented liberty and often do, in fact, have an almost intolerable anarchy. That is the one limit that is really, though silently recognized in current culture and philosophy; and not even the most thoughtful obscenity, or the most fastidious form of madness, can be altogether a substitute for that fullness of life and that firmness of language. It is the new orthodoxy that a man may be uncertain of every thing; so long as he is not certain of anything.

I have taken a text from a particular poem; because it so happens that the very terms of that text cover almost every point in the particular case. I will even take those terms in turn, in order to show exactly what I mean. The first words are, 'To praise'. Men have praised all sorts of worthy and unworthy things; they have praised God and golden calves and gold-diggers; tyrants and trivial fops and fashionable leaders; and women dead, like Beatrice, or false, like Lesbia. But even if this praise was false as the lady, it always took on the tone of true and triumphant praise; it always tried to blow the trumpet, though it were the brazen and not the golden trumpet. But the modern poet, though not wholly unaware of his own existence, has not the breath to blow a trumpet; not even his own trumpet. The very noises that come from his musical instrument are of a wavering and inconclusive sort; and if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle? For that matter, even the trumpets of the most triumphant wedding march fail to make that sort of person prepare himself for the wedding. It is a very queer feature of current poetry that there is hardly anywhere such a thing as a love poem; though there is really rather too much poetry about love. The truth is that the poetry is not really about t love, or even about lust. It is about something that they call Sex, which is considered from the outside rather than the inside, being at best a subject rather for science than for literature. At the best, they produce a certain amount of psychology, even when it is not psychopathy; and psychology is not poetry.

The second term, ‘exalt’ is equally essential, but rather more mystical. It is concerned with a process that has accompanied praise, whenever it was great enough to be also poetry. It is connected with the idea of lifting a thing on to a plane in some way analogous at least to that of sacred things. This was the secret of a certain heroic quality in more primitive forms of patriotism. It is not altogether a legend that the patriotism of the City States of Antiquity was a statelier sort of business than the patriotism of the Industrial City of modern times. And the reason was that the heroes were not only praising themselves; they were not even praising only the City; they were praising the gods of the City. That is very different from the modern tribal pride, according to which all the citizens are gods. The modern clerk or stock broker, who is ‘something in the City’, may be very patriotic and read a very patriotic newspaper. But he does not praise the gods of the City, he would have some difficulty in finding any gods in the City to praise. The real danger of that parody of patriotism, is that the patriots themselves are supposed to be gods. To all real praise must be added something of that exaltation of the thing worshipped, which is also separation and withdrawal.

But if we insist on the word ‘exalt’, we must equally insist on the word ‘establish’. There seems to be a crazy tradition from the Byronic or Bohemian culture, that poetry must be revolutionary in the sense of destructive. It would seem obvious that poetry can only be creative. But poetry can also be, in a way of its own, constructive. The lover wishes to establish what he loves; whether to establish a woman in a household, or a just law in a city, or a type of life or landscape which he wishes to see endure; but his attitude must be one not of doubt but of demand. The poet is by derivation the Maker, and wishes, not only to imagine but to make.

Lastly, it is only fair to say, even for the poor distracted patriots of these distracting days, that all this will be utterly meaningless, unless modern morality can bring itself to add to it the ringing and decisive word ‘defend’. That is where so much of the Pacifist argument never ends, because it never begins. Multitudes of modern men unconsciously shirk the perfectly obvious point that, whatever they want to do, they cannot do it unless they are ready to defend it. You cannot have any ideal, whether political or poetical, without wanting to ‘establish’ it; and the moment you establish it, somebody else can make you defend it. ‘To praise, exalt, establish, and defend'; I do not apologize for repeating the words; for they are much needed in these times.

ON THE TRUE ARTIST

IT has lately been noted that the artists who started with entirely new artistic methods have now themselves returned to more realistic methods, and what some would call more reasonable methods. According to the pioneer theory of progress, of which we have all heard so much, they ought by this time to have shot far out of sight, and be enjoying the society of our great-great-grandchildren. For it is supposed to be the duty of this singular sort of pioneer to lose sight entirely of the army which he leads.

Of course, the whole metaphor is a muddle; most of that modern theory of progress is a muddle of metaphors. A pioneer does not lead an army; he is merely a man who walks in front of it and is as much under the orders of the general command as the last man who walks behind it. But, accepting the vague imagery of those who talk of a pioneer when they mean a prophet, it is clear that the pioneer sometimes falls back on the main body of the advance. In other words, the prophet sometimes gets tired of the society of the babe unborn (who may be an uncommunicative companion) and seeks for companions even among contemporaries. I cannot pronounce upon the case of pictorial art, but in the parallel case of literature there is perhaps something to be said about the tests of such a return to society, and of whether and when it is a return to sanity.

The first truth involved is a truism, but a truism often as little understood as any mystery. It is that the artist is a person who communicates something. He may communicate it more or less easily and quickly; he may communicate it to a larger or smaller number of people. But it is a question of communication and not merely of what some people call expression. Or rather, strictly speaking, unless it is communication it is not expression. I know that for some time past it has been the custom to talk of the artist expressing something as if it only meant his getting rid of something. It may be natural that the artist should want to get rid of his art; especially when we consider what it is sometimes like. But it is not his business only to deliver himself; It is, I say very solemnly, his business to deliver the goods. This, as I say, is a truism, but it is one that is strangely forgotten in a great deal of the fashionable fuss about artistic self-expression. The artist does ultimately exhibit himself as being intelligent by being intelligible. I do not say by being easy to understand, but certainly by being understood.

Yet there is still a vast amount of talk about the isolated and incommunicable spirit of the man of genius; about how he has in him things too deep for expression and too subtle to be subject to general criticism. I say that that is exactly what is *not* true of the artist. That is exactly what is true of the ordinary man who is not an artist. That is exactly what is true of the man who is called a Philistine. *He* has subtleties in his soul which he cannot describe; *he* has secrets of emotion which he can never show to the public. He it is who dies with all his music in him. But it should obviously be the aim of the musician to die with all his music out of him; even if this ideal state of things can seldom be achieved.

The point is here; however, that it is not enough that the musician should get his music out of him. It is also his business to get his music into somebody else. We should all be reasonable enough to recognize that the somebody else will depend to some extent on the sort of music. But if all he can say is that he has a secret of sealed-up power and passion, that his imagination is visited by visions of which the world knows nothing, that he is conscious of a point of view which is wholly his own and is not expressed in anything common or comprehensible — then he is simply saying that he is not an artist, and there is an end of it.

The real truth to be recognized on the other side is this. The expression of a unique point of view, so that somebody else shall share it, is a very difficult and delicate matter. It will probably take the artist some time, and a number of experiments, to make his meaning clear. And it seems to me that the moment when he returns to a more normal style is, very often, simply the moment when he has managed to make it clear. The time when he is wild and revolutionary and unfathomable and ferociously original is the time when he is trying to do it. The time when he is called ordinary is the time when he has done it.

It is true that there is a sort of bad parody of this good process. There generally is of all good processes; *diabolus simius Dei*. It does sometimes happen that a man who had revolutionary ideals in his youth sells them for a merely snobbish conformity. But I do not think this is true of the modern artists whose return to a more normal manner has recently been remarked in this connexion. Theft work has still an individual character, even when it becomes intelligible as well as individual.

I am only pointing out that the moment when artists become intelligible is the moment when they become truly and triumphantly individual. It is the time when the individual first appears in the world with which art is concerned; the world of receptivity and appreciation. Every individual is an individual; and I am one of those who think that every individual is an interesting individual. But, anyhow, there are a very large number of individuals who would be interesting if they had the power of arousing our interest. But the moment of creation is the moment of communication. It is when the work has passed from mind to mind that it becomes a work of art.

ON THE ESSAY

THERE are dark and morbid moods in which I am tempted to feel that Evil re-entered the world in the form of Essays. The Essay is like the Serpent, smooth and graceful and easy of movement, also wavering or wandering. Besides, I suppose that the very word Essay had the original meaning of ‘trying it on’. The serpent was in every sense of the word tentative. The tempter is always feeling his way, and finding out how much other people will stand. That misleading air of irresponsibility about the Essay is very disarming though appearing to be disarmed. But the serpent can strike without claws as it can run without legs. It is the emblem of all those arts which are elusive, evasive, impressionistic, and shading away from tint to tint. I suppose that the Essay, so far as England at least is concerned, was almost invented by Francis Bacon. I can well believe it. I always thought he was the villain of English history.

It may be well to explain that I do not really regard all Essayists as wicked men. I have myself been an essayist; or tried to be an essayist; or pretended to be an essayist. Nor do I in the least dislike essays. I take perhaps my greatest literary pleasure in reading them; after such really serious necessities of the intellect as detective stories and tracts written by madmen. There is no better reading in the world than some contemporary essays, like those of Mr E. V. Lucas or Mr Robert Lynd. If I may myself imitate the timid and tentative tone of the true essayist, I will confine myself to saying that there is something in what I say: there is really an element in modern letters which is at once indefinite and dangerous.

What I mean is this. The distinction between certain old forms and certain relatively recent forms of literature is that the old were limited by a logical purpose. The Drama and the Sonnet were of the old kind; the Essay and the Novel are of the new. If a sonnet breaks out of the sonnet form, it ceases to be a sonnet. It may become a wild and inspiring specimen of free verse; but you do not have to call it a sonnet because you have nothing else to call it. But in the case of the new sort of novel, you do very often have to call it a novel because you have nothing else to call it. It is sometimes called a novel when it is hardly even a narrative. There is nothing to test or define it, except that it is not spaced like an epic poem, and often has even less of a story. The same applies to the apparently attractive leisure and liberty of the essay. By its very nature it does not exactly explain what it is trying to do and thus escapes a decisive judgement about whether it has really done it. But in the case of the essay there is a practical peril; precisely because it deals so often with theoretical matters. It is always dealing with theoretical matters without the responsibility of being theoretical or of propounding a theory.

For instance, there is any amount of sense and nonsense talked both for and against what is called medievalism. There is also any amount of sense and nonsense talked for and against what is called modernism. I have occasionally tried to talk a little of the sense, with the result that I have been generally credited with all the nonsense. But if a man wanted one real and rational test, which really does distinguish the medieval from the modern mood, it might be stated thus. The medieval man thought in terms of the Thesis, where the modern man thinks in terms of the Essay. It would be unfair, perhaps, to say that the modern man only essays to think — or, in other words, makes a desperate attempt to think. But it would be true to say that the modern man often only essays, or attempts, to come to a conclusion. Where as the medieval man hardly thought it worth while to think at all, unless he could come to a conclusion. That is why he took a definite thing called a Thesis, and proposed to prove it. That is why Martin Luther, a very medieval man in most ways, nailed up on the door the thesis he proposed to prove. Many people suppose that he was doing something revolutionary and even modernist in doing this. In fact, he was doing exactly what all the other medieval students and doctors had done ever since the twilight of the Dark Ages. If the really modern Modernist attempted to do it, he would probably find that he had never arranged his thoughts in the form of theses at all. Well, it is quite an error to suppose, so far as I am concerned, that it is any question of restoring the rigid apparatus of the medieval system. But I do think that the Essay has wandered too far away from the Thesis.

There is a sort of irrational and indefensible quality in many of the most brilliant phrases of the most beautiful essays. There is no essayist I enjoy more than Stevenson; there is probably no man now alive who admires Stevenson more than I. But if we take some favourite and frequently quoted sentence, such as ‘To travel hopefully is better than to arrive’, we shall see that it gives a loophole for every sort of sophistry and unreason. If it could be stated as a thesis, it could not be defended as a thought. A man would not travel hopefully at all, if he thought that the goal would be disappointing as compared with the travels. It is tenable that travel is the more enjoyable; but in that ease it cannot be called hopeful. For the traveller is here presumed to hope for the end of travel, not merely for its continuance. Now, of course, I do not mean that pleasant paradoxes of this sort have not a place in literature; and because of them the essay has a place in literature. There is room for the merely idle and wandering essayist, as for the merely idle and wandering traveller. The trouble is that the essayists have become the only ethical philosophers. The wandering thinkers have become the wandering preachers, and our only substitute for preaching friars. And whether our system is to be materialist or moralist, or sceptical or transcendent we need more of a system than that. After a certain amount of wandering the mind wants either to get there or to go home. It is one thing to travel hopefully, and say half in jest that it is better than to arrive. It is another thing to travel hopelessly, because you know you will never arrive.

I was struck by the same tendency in re-reading some of the best essays ever written, which were especially enjoyed by Stevenson — the essays of Hazlitt. ‘You can live like a gentleman on Hazlitt’s ideas,’ as Mr Augustine Birrell truly remarked: but even in these we see the beginning of this inconsistent and irresponsible temper. For instance, Hazlitt was a Radical and constantly railed at Tories for not trusting men or mobs. I think it was he who lectured Walter Scott for so small a matter as making the medieval mob in ‘Ivanhoe’ jeer ungenerously at the retreat of the Templars. Anyhow, from any number of passages, one would infer that Hazlitt offered him self as a friend of the people. But he offered himself most furiously as an enemy of the Public. When he began to write about the Public, he described exactly the same many-headed monster of ignorance and cowardice and cruelty which the worst Tories called the Mob.

Now, if Hazlitt had been obliged to set forth his thoughts on Democracy in the theses of a medieval schoolman, he would have had to think much more clearly and make up his mind much more decisively. I will leave the last word with the essayist; and admit that I am not sure whether he would have written such good essays.

AS I WAS SAYING

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I About Mad Metaphors

OVER and above the horrible rubbish-heap of the books I have written, now filling the pulping-machines or waste-paper baskets of the world, there are a vast number of books that I have never written, because a providential diversion interposed to protect the crowd of my fellow-creatures who could endure no more. Among these, I remember, there was one particularly outrageous narrative, something between a pantomime and a parable on a variation of what the new psychologists would call a wish-fulfilment. Like most of the notions of the new psychologists, it is a notion familiar to the most far-off and antiquated fabulists. It is found in every book of folk-lore under the title of “The Three Wishes”; especially that excellent essay on the Vanity of Human Wishes, in which a man had to waste the brief omnipotence of a god in establishing right relations with a black pudding. But in my story, the black pudding was not so black or so indigestible as that producing the nightmares of Freud. Mine, like his, was such stuff as dreams are made of; but mine was only stuff and nonsense and not that perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart. So far as I remember it, it was an exceedingly mad sort of story; but *that* would not have saved it from the serious libraries of modern mental science.

It was something about some people who had reached so sensitized and transparent a state of imagination that when they mentioned anything it materialized before their eyes; and this applied even to metaphors or figures of speech which they had not consciously conceived as material. Thus, if two lovers were talking and taking tea in a rose-covered cottage in a quiet English village, and one of them happened to say, “Of course, it may be rather a white elephant,” a huge and hulking white elephant immediately strode up the street, trampled down the roses, and put his head in at the rose-wreathed window. Or if the genial old squire, walking under the quiet elms of his ancestral park, crumpled up a newspaper containing a political scandal, and said impatiently, “The man’s got hold of a mare’s-nest,” he would instantly behold, high above him in the tossing top of the elm tree, the familiar form of Black Bess out of the stables, kicking and plunging in a well-meant effort to lay eggs. The most harmless comic man would be unable to say “Strike me sky-blue scarlet,” without a complex change in his complexion, or even to say “Till all is blue,” without transforming the whole landscape to a monochrome tint, with blue cows or blue babies disporting themselves under a blue moon.

The effect of this, I conceive, would be to introduce a certain austerity and restraint into human speech. A plain and unadorned style would prevail in literary circles. Fastidious writers would be even more in terror of introducing a mixed metaphor; for a mixed metaphor walking down the street would be even more terrifying than such hybrids as a centaur or a griffin. But he would observe considerable economy even in making metaphors, let alone mixing them. For him, as for Mrs. Malaprop, an allegory would be as devouring as an alligator. It is a very old moral that when we get what we want we sometimes find that we do not want it; but it would be an alarming addition to the prospect if we always got anything, not only when we wanted it, but whenever we mentioned it. And the vague idea at the back of my undeveloped vision was to describe a sort of dizzy whirlwind of wish-fulfilments and dreams come true; and to suggest how intolerable such imaginative omnipotence would really be. It would be like walking upon ever-sinking and shifting shingle; on ground in which we could get no purchase for our movements or activities. A world in which the whole solidity of things had gone soft would be the essential environment of softening of the brain. We should end by shrieking aloud for the resistance of reality; ready to give up all our paradise of magic powers for the pleasure of planting our foot on a sharp nail or barking our shins upon a box. Something very like that nightmare of luxury and liberty may be felt in much of the more irresponsible or lawless literature of our own time, in which a man is driven to deny everything because he has been denied nothing; and discovers in an omnipotence to which he has no claim, an impotence for which he has no cure.

It may seem rather far-fetched to connect the nonsense about the physical metaphors with the notion about the philosophical despair. Figures of speech are risky; for in art, as in arithmetic, many have no head for figures. I will meekly claim more suitability in my symbols than there is in some of those wonderful modern analyses of the meaning of dreams; in which digging up a cabbage and putting it in a hat-box is the spontaneous spiritual expression of a desire to murder your father; or watching a green cat climb a yellow lamp-post the clearest possible way of conveying that you want to bolt with the barmaid. And metaphor does really play a special part in the sort of mad metaphysics that I have in mind. Those who suffer this particular sort of modern softening of the brain have a great tendency to preserve the metaphor long after they have lost the meaning. The figures of speech are like fossil figures of archaic fowls or fishes, made of some stonier deposit and set in the heart of more sandy or crumbling cliffs. The abstract parts of the mind, which should be the strongest, become the weakest; and the mere figures of the fancy, which should be the lightest, become the most heavy and the most hard.

Many must have noticed this in a newspaper report, and still more in a newspaper criticism. Images that are used as illustrations are repeated without any reference to anything that they illustrate. If the incident of the Rich Young Man in the Gospels had been reported by a local newspaper, we should only be told that the Teacher had called him a camel, and invited him to jump through a needle. We should know nothing of the point of the needle — or the story. If the Death of Socrates were condensed into a journalistic paragraph, there would be no room for the remarks on immortality, and not much even for the cup of hemlock; but only a special mention of a request to somebody to buy a cock — perhaps turned by the report into a cocktail. This often makes the art of illustrative argument a somewhat delicate and even dangerous occupation. When we know that people will remember the metaphor, even when they cannot realize the meaning, it is a little perilous to choose metaphors with mere levity, even if they are quite consistent with more logic. Suppose I say in some political case that England had better go the whole hog, as did, indeed, some of those followers of Tariff Reform who were called Whole-Hoggers. I shall have to be very careful to explain, somehow, that I am not really identifying the English with hogs, but that it is only some bright facets of the hog that I compare with my beloved country, and that the quality in question is only a special and spiritual sort of hoggishness. Otherwise the audience, remembering everything I said about the pig, and forgetting ever thing I said about the point, will go away under the impression that I addressed them all as swine. They will attribute to me certain familiar and even old-fashioned depreciations of the English; as that England is stupid, or England is stubborn; in short, that England is, in the apt and appropriate phrase, pig-headed. There will go along with this other notions, equally true and trustworthy; as that England has four trotters and a snout, not to mention a little curly tail behind. But, in fact, I may, in a pure spirit of lyric praise, compare my country to a pig, so long as I explain it is in the noble and exalted aspects of a pig; as that he gives us the glorious gift of bacon, or that he is said to be highly delicate and chivalrous in his relations to his lady-love; or that, being rejected by Turks and Jews, he has almost become a sacred emblem of Christendom. Otherwise, if you talk about hogs, even Hampshire hogs, you will sound like a traitor to Hampshire.

You think the mere mention of hogs could raise no such storm. I mention that the mere mention of dogs really did. I once remarked that a new religion sometimes dies before the old one; and used Goldsmith's phrase for the unexpected: "The dog it was that died." A publicist denounced me in public for calling all my religious opponents dogs! It marks the folly of fixing on figures of speech. For had he followed the meaning, and not the metaphor, he might have made a real repartee, by retorting that it was the man who survived who was mad.

II About Loving Germans

WHY is it that those who admire foreign nations always ask us to admire them for the nastiest things about them? Those who abuse foreign nations are mostly mere fools, as distinct from those who abuse the abuses of foreign nations. That is quite allowable; but it is well to balance it by occasionally abusing the abuses of our own nation. In my own jog-trot journalistic existence, I have generally tried to keep this balance, and to distribute abuse and vituperation in such elegant and well-chosen proportions, that nobody can be offended or feel that he has been left out of the fun. Those who abuse abuses are right; and even those who stare at strange uses are not very wrong. The rude forefathers of the hamlet do not always mean to be rude. Unfamiliarity breeds contempt. But not the most contemptible sort of contempt. I mean the man who laughs at a *gendarme,* when he has never in his life ventured to laugh at the much more pantomimic costume of a policeman. These people, in a sense, abuse foreign nations; but it is their great glory that they admit that they laugh at them because they do not understand them, and not because they pretend that they do. But neither of these two types, the reformer who rebukes on principle or the rustic who laughs out of mere surprise, throws any light on the problem of the third kind of critic, who concerns me just now. Why, I repeat, do those who urge us to love our enemies, or merely like our neighbours, seem to have no notion of what it is that men really love or like? Why do they always point out as supreme merits the things that most normal men, if they do not actually hate, tend more or less to dislike?

We all know that one of the real Opportunities of Travel is the chance of escaping the guide and being able to contradict the guide-book. And this really is a benefit that can only be obtained by travel. If you merely stay at home, you will probably read books, and books with all the prejudices of guide-books; if not, you will read newspapers, often containing pronouncements upon Europe or America far below the mental level of any tout who tries to get a tip by showing you round an Italian ruin. In short, we all know that the real pleasures of the tripper are those that are not supposed to be part of the trip; the small, touching, humanizing sights that really do tell us that all human beings are parts of one humanity; such as the domestic scene I beheld in the most Moslem part of Palestine, the episode of a Moslem woman shouting and yelling abuse of her husband across the breadth of a small lake, while the husband stood helpless and evidently unable to think of any repartee. This made me feel, with a warm touch of sentiment, that home is home everywhere, and is not so very much altered even where a home may be a harem. Now, you cannot arrange a tour with a view to little things like that. I could no more have planned that this particular woman should boil over at this particular moment than I could pay a few *lire* to obtain an eruption of Vesuvius. But it was immeasurably more forcible and impressive than Vesuvius. For it is the little things and not the large things that touch this tricky international nerve which reminds us that we are all made on the same anatomical plan and that the Image of God is everywhere. What I complain of in the internationalist interpreters is that they seem to have no notion of what these small and attractive things are. Bring me the ordinary international pamphlet on the claims of Ruthenia, with maps and statistics and all the rest, and I shall probably end the perusal by hating the poor Ruthenians, whom I never saw and hardly ever heard of, simply because the international reconcilers do not understand why men hate or love.

I will take the hardest cases of the two nations with which, in a political sense, I am perhaps least in sympathy: Germany and Japan. The Germany praised by the Pro-Germans is much nastier than the Germany abused by the Anti-Germans. The former generally contrive to convey the impression of a human hive, of all horrible things, which very soon and very naturally becomes an inhuman hive. They give me stiff and bristling statistics about exports and imports, manufacture and machinery, strictly enforced regulations, very advanced scientific legislation, and everything else that stinks to heaven. They suggest that the German is alone industrious; by which they mean industrial. As a matter of fact, that industrial type is not generally any more industrious, if so much, as what we used to call the idle and lounging peasant of the South, who works hours before any of us dream of waking up, and sometimes hours after we go to bed; but rests in the heat of the middle of the day, not being a born fool. But, anyhow, in so far as it is true that the Germans are very industrious, did you ever hear of anybody loving anybody merely because he was industrious?

In short, it is thought an insult to call Germans sausages; but it is a compliment to call them sausage-machines. But many people like sausages, and nobody particularly likes sausage-machines. A British statesman, in the very middle of the war, solemnly told us that there are two Germanies: the bad Germany of despotism, militarism, and armed aristocracy; and the good Germany of science and commerce and chemicals used for various purposes. I remember thinking at the time, and even saying at the time, that I had much more sympathy with a soldier dying for the Kaiser than with an expert working for the Krupps. Again, one does not love experts; especially experts in poison-gas. One may fear them, and, in consequence, one may fight them. But international idealists are even now talking of Germany as the land of science and industry and technical improvement.

Now Germany is not as bad as all that. It has temptations of barbarism, and especially of mythology, but it has touches of the better mythology which is not a myth. My examples of small things would doubtless sound very small indeed. Summoned before the International Peace Conference, I should cause general disappointment if I said: "The Germans have produced one particular kind of Christmas Card which is unlike anything in the world. It really mingles the natural mystery of the forests with the preternatural mystery of the Christmas tree, and truly sets the Star of Bethlehem in a northern sky. To look at the best of these little pictures is to feel at once like a man who has received a sacrament and a child who has heard the whole of a fairy-tale. And when I look at those queer little coloured pictures, full of a sort of holy goblins, I *know* there is something in Germany that can be loved, and that perhaps is not yet lost."

I have no space to say much about the parallel of Japan, but the moral, it may be noted, is the same. Publicists have sometimes praised Japan for possessing all the qualities of Prussia, as if Prussianism were a term of praise. But I once crossed the Atlantic and watched a little Japanese playing with his little goblins of children, and I have never been quite so Anti-Japanese since.

My phrase that the Germans have a weakness for Mythology, has been queried; but I do not use it as a mere term of abuse; for, indeed, I think I have a weakness for Mythology myself. Only I try not to regard my weakness as my strength. I could never read some huge, primitive myth about how the world was made out of a dead giant, the sky being his skull, or the sun and moon his eyes, or the sea his green blood, without wishing for one wild moment that I were the infant Hottentot or Eskimo who heard some such story from his grandmother and stood drinking it all in as innocently as I should like to do. I can never read of one of those baffling and fascinating totem-heroes who seems at once to be a man and a bald-headed eagle, or what not; and how he stole fire from the sun for the use of men, or cracked the sky to let in the upper sea, which is the rain, without wishing faintly that I were in the first morning of the world, when such things could be believed. Perhaps the Germans are still in the morning of the world. Perhaps there is that streak of truth in all their talk about their race as one descended from gods and heroes. I am well aware, however, that they have another side, which may seem paradoxically opposite; a literal and laborious side which deals with details very much in detail. And, lest some German professor should take my mythological weakness too seriously, I hasten to explain that there are no such myths as the two I have mentioned, though there are myths very similar. I made them up out of my own head. But the curious thing is that, in certain other departments, this is exactly what the Germans do.

There are certain primitive elements in the German people which are in truth faintly suggested in the very fact that they call the people a folk. To do it justice, it is a folk that is still producing folk-lore. A very agreeable product; but it must be admitted that, as in the case of the bald-headed eagle who cracked the sky, folk-lore is not always identical with fact. There are other elements that have this rather indescribable quality. We see it, for instance, in the particular *kind* of unity which the Germans exhibit from time to time. It is not, despite all their discipline, merely a disciplined unity. It is a gregarious unity. Civilization, like religion, is a thing many people are explaining, in the hope of explaining away. These connect the Commonwealth with the Herd Instinct. But I think Germany is the only nation in which it is a Herd Instinct. In a word, there is something about them that is prehistoric. Even their learned professors, in a very special sense, are often prehistoric. I mean that, learned as they are, they seem never to have heard of history.

But I repeat that this quality is not in itself odious, but sometimes almost lovable. On the whole, Mythology is a much better thing than Propaganda. Mythology is simply believing whatever you can imagine. Propaganda is, more often, believing that other people will believe whatever you can invent. There is something more than a mere manufacture of lies about the unexhausted Teuton power in the production of myths. That is why I try to be polite to the German professor, and call him prehistoric, when ruder spirits might be content to call him unhistorical. But I take it as certain that the *spirit* in the German way of telling the German story is entirely unhistorical. With all their external parade of science, their motive is not scientific. Their motive is that of a tribal tradition magnifying and exaggerating the heroes and victories of the tribe. Nobody denies that they have had heroes and victories; but the way of dealing with them is utterly out of proportion. It is quite natural that they should tell us how the spirited skirmish of Arminius cut off a few legions of Augustus. But to hear some of them telling it, one would think that Arminius had defeated the whole Roman Army and even menaced the whole Roman Empire. I doubt whether there was ever any moment in history when it could truly be said that the Teutons had conquered the Roman Empire. But it is idle to speculate about events of those remote times, when the whole point of the position is that the same thing is going on in our own time.

The extraordinary thing about Germany is that it can still produce modern myths like the ancient myths. There is something almost innocent in their spontaneity, and especially in their suddenness. They created out of nothing the story that all Teutonic barbarians, unlike all Celtic or Slavonic barbarians, were, for some mysterious reason, a race of golden-haired gods. They have created stories quite as stupendous within the last year or two. And, above all, they have credited what they created. The Teuton doubles the part of the creative poet and the credulous listener. He tells himself tales and believes them. He lives in a different world from ours; perhaps at once an older and a younger one. He explains to us, to some extent, how it was that primitive men could worship images that were obviously only imaginations. It does not matter, for the purposes of this argument, whether we think such a world of imagination lower or higher than reality. We have already heard the saying of a great German who must have really understood the Germans: “In the beginning God gave to the French the land and to the English the sea and to the Germans the clouds.”

Thus there is a New Myth spread quite recently and rapidly over all Germany, almost in a few months. The New Myth is that Germany was never defeated in the Great War. You could not have a more astounding and catastrophic collision than that, between mythology and history. But the point is that the mythology is actually more modern than the history. All Germans apparently find it easy to believe it; though I can imagine few things more difficult to believe than a statement like that: that a great and somewhat arrogant Empire consented to sink the whole of its fleet and give up all its colonies, as well as nearly all its conquests in foreign countries, when it had not really been defeated. But this cloud, as it lies on the mind of a whole people, now looks as solid as a mountain. It may remain as a legend quite as fixed as that which makes Arminius rather more important than Augustus. The other part of the New Myth is that the complete surrender of all the German armies was somehow or other brought about by the Jews. I have never underrated the real problem of the international position of the Jews; but I should say that this was just about the sort of thing that the Jews alone could not possibly do. Judas could betray the Redeemer of the world; but he could hardly bribe Caesar to surrender the Empire of the world to the Parthians.

But the point is not that you and I could never believe it in a thousand years. The point is that the Germans themselves did not believe it until within about two years. There is no evidence that the average German, for the first five or six years after his defeat, had even the faintest doubt that he had been defeated. He might think he was unjustly defeated, or unjustly treated after defeat; and he would have a right to his opinion, though there are others whose opinion I think more sound. But most of such men would have thought it sheer madness to deny the very calamity from which they suffered. These people are not the only people among whom a theorist may throw out a theory that might well appear mad. But they are the only people among whom that theory can be instantly and universally believed. To make up history after it has happened, and to make it up all different, may seem to some to have something even wildly poetical and attractive about it. But in practical politics these immense international illusions are very dangerous; and the clouds in which these people live have broken before now about us, not only in rain, but in lightning and falling fire.

III About Impenitence

WELL aware of how offensive I make myself, and with what loathing I may well be regarded, in this sentimental age which pretends to be cynical, and in this poetical nation which pretends to be practical, I shall nevertheless continue to practise in public a very repulsive trick or habit — the habit of drawing distinctions; or distinguishing between things that are quite different, even when they are assumed to be the same. I cannot be content with being a Unionist or a Universalist or a Unitarian. I have again and again blasphemed against and denied the perfect Oneness of chalk and cheese; and drawn fanciful distinctions, ornithological or technological, between hawks and handsaws. For in truth I believe that the only way to say anything definite is to define it, and all definition is by limitation and exclusion; and that the only way to say something distinct is to say something distinguishable; and distinguishable from everything else. In short, I think that a man does not know what he is saying until he knows what he is not saying.

At this moment, if we were to judge by a general direction, by a vague unanimity existing in very varying degrees, and consisting of opinions rather similar but not the same, we should certainly say there was a universal wave of pacifism, just as in 1914 there was a general wave of patriotism. And when I say pacifism, I do not mean peace. It is possible, as I happen to know, to think pacifism a very direct menace to peace. But I am not debating these political points here. My thesis here is made up of very varied materials, and also of distinctly different views. Now, whatever we may think of those views, regarded as general political views, it will be well to pick out of them certain really preposterous propositions, as one would weed a patch of soil. Neither side of any controversy can be the better for mere confusion and delusion; still less for the confusion of one delusion with another, or of a delusion with a defensible opinion. There are many forms of pacifism which are quite defensible opinions, though I personally might be more inclined to attack than to defend them. There are any number of forms of peace policy which I should profoundly respect; and some with which I entirely agree. But one or two fancies have begun to form in the chaos which are simply fragments of fixed and frozen nonsense.

I have explained that I believe in drawing distinctions; or what is called splitting hairs. I do not believe in saying breezily that a fungus is pretty much the same as a fungoid, even if you are hungry and in a hurry to have mushrooms for breakfast; or agreeing heartily that a rhombus is the same as a rhomboid, because you have to hustle the geometricians in some plans for housing or surveying. I think the first sort of practicality will probably end with a number of people being poisoned with toadstools, or worse; and the latter with ungeometrical houses falling down on ungeometrical though practical men of action. And I wish to point out that you cannot conduct a policy of pacifism, or of anything else, unless you will consent to distinguish one idea from another; and to find out where your own ideas came from, and with what other ideas they conflict. This weeding of the weaker or wilder ideas out of the mind is simply a practical piece of gardening which applies to any sort of garden, even the garden of peace; even to a garden planted with nothing but olives, and undefiled with a single leaf of the laurel.

For instance, there is a wild hypothesis now hardening in the minds of many which has nothing to do with any philosophical case of pacifism, let alone peace. It is the notion that not fighting, as such, would prevent somebody else from fighting, or from taking all he wanted without fighting. It assumes that every pacifist is some strange sort of blend of a lion-tamer and a mesmerist, who would hold up invading armies with his glittering eye, like the Ancient Mariner. The pacifist would paralyse the militarist in all his actions, both militant and post-militant. Now, there is no sort of sense or even meaning in this notion at all. It is a muddle and mixture of a number of other and older pacific traditions, all of them much more reasonable and some of them quite right. Some of them are ancient attitudes of the saint or sage towards all sorts of misfortune; some of them are more or less mystical experiments in psychology, suitable to exceptional cases; some of them are mere dregs of dramatic or romantic situations, out of particular novels, plays, or short stories. There have been many great and good men in the past who have said that they would never need to resist spoliation or invasion, or would not care if it were irresistible. But they were almost always one of two types, and were thinking only of one or two truths. In some of them it meant: “My mind to me a kingdom is. The inner life is so deep and precious that I do not care if I am beggared or made an outlaw or even a slave.” In the others it meant: “I know that my avenger liveth. The judgment of this world may beggar or enslave me, but I shall have justice when I appeal to a higher court." Both these moral attitudes mean something and something worthy of all possible respect. But neither of these two types was ever such a fool as to say that he *could* not be beggared or enslaved, merely because he stood stock still like a post and did not resist beggary or enslavement. Neither of them was so silly as to suppose that there were not men in the world, wicked or resolute or fanatical or mechanically servile enough, to do unpleasant things to them, while they were content to do nothing. The Stoic claimed to endure pain with patience; but he never claimed that his patience would prevent anybody from causing him pain. The martyr endured tortures to assert his belief in truth; but he never asserted his disbelief in torture. The hazy notion, that has been gathering more and more substance in the modern mind, is quite different and is really unreasonable. Men who have no intention of abandoning their country's wealth, not to mention their own, men who rightly insist on comfort for their countrymen and not infrequently for themselves, still seem to have formed a strange idea that they can keep all these things in all conceivable circumstances, solely and entirely by refusing to defend them. They seem to fancy they could bring the whole reign of violence and pride to an end, instantly and entirely, merely by doing nothing. Now it is not easy to do anything by doing nothing.

Oddly enough, the only exceptional hint of truth in this theory of establishing Peace is the same notion which made rude barbaric groups sometimes establish Trial by Battle. It was the notion that, under some very vivid and awful conditions, the man who knew he was in the wrong might lose his nerve. There was a story about that wicked man, Godwin the father of Harold, which illustrates the idea; and Scott used it as a dramatic turn in the death of the Templar. It did occasionally happen then; it might just conceivably happen now. But it happened because everybody believed in God, everybody thought the same about perjury and blasphemy, and a theory of justice was common to those who vindicated and those who violated it. In the present utter severance in fundamental ideas, I cannot see why even this exceptional trick should work at all. The pacifists are only a sect; and Europe is boiling over with equally sincere militarist and imperialist sects. Does anybody believe that Hitler or Stalin or Mussolini would ruin all his plans because a Quaker did not propose to interfere with them?

IV About Traffic

HISTORIANS will probably mark the present epoch by the problem of the Traffic. Unless, indeed, the historians, who are an absent-minded race of men, have all been killed by the traffic before they can write any histories of it. It seems an almost fitting fate for almost any literary man in such a chaos. I hope there is no irreverence to one of the most beautiful spiritual lyrics in the world if I say that that starry and blazing phrase of Francis Thompson, “Shall shine the traffic of Jacob’s ladder pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross,” has sometimes raised in me an irrelevant wondering about whether a man could now safely fix his eyes on the angelic ladder in the middle of Charing Cross and its more earthly traffic; especially if he were a man like Francis Thompson. Anyhow, we are now primarily confronted with a problem of Traffic as Traffic; in the most ordinary meaning of the term. Social reformers of the last generation used the term as referring to the Drink Traffic; a little later there was a moral but slightly morbid panic about the White Slave Traffic; and the writers of detective stories, that blameless and industrious race, still frequently make their murders and mysteries turn upon the Drug Traffic. I may say, in passing, that I rather regret this recent habit of criminological romancers. I like a murder to be committed by a murderer for the serious moral and spiritual reasons which make the murder immediately, though erroneously, satisfactory to his soul and his inner life. I do not like to think that he is a mere proletarian, dealing out poisons in the impersonal manner of a wholesale chemist. I dislike official organization even in real life; and it is dreadful to think of it invading romantic and imaginative life. It is profoundly disappointing to suspect that somebody, let us say a curate or a governess, is torn with seven devils of hate or pride or fear or envy; and then discover that this promising demoniac is only a bright and efficient salesman, receiving a commission for delivering the goods — if they can be so described. But this is only a parenthesis, called forth by my permanent passion for the topic of detective stories. I only mentioned the drug traffic in incidental comparison with the driving traffic; and the latter has become a problem quite as big and practically quite as deadly.

I am not going to propound here any practical solution for the traffic problem. I am not a rising politician; and not from my hand, or the waving of my wand, will there ever arise all over London a new forest of fantastic posts, surmounted by pumpkins or pineapples. But there is an inference from these things, which is none the less practical because most practical people will call it theoretical. Indeed, when matters are in such a muddle as the modern traffic, the only really practical thing is to find the right theory. Or, at any rate, to be able to detect the wrong theory; and to form a general judgment upon how far a particular theory is right or wrong. When these difficulties first appeared, there was always a bustling, business-like person who went about cursing and swearing and saying that all that is wanted is organization. But in one sense it is easy enough to have organization, so long as you have obedience; and especially obedience to the police. But the limits of this theoretical truth can be seen at once if we pass from the case of policemen to the case of soldiers. There must be organization and obedience in an army. But battles are lost as well as won by concerted movements of disciplined troops. The question still remains in what order things are organized; or what orders men have to obey. In the traffic problem there are now complications of strategy that would have staggered Hannibal or Napoleon. But we are not yet certain whether they are part of a victory or a defeat. It is easy to organize traffic, by ordering that vehicles making the difficult advance from Piccadilly to Charing Cross had better make a detour round Hampstead Heath and turn up again somewhere in Cheapside. It is strictly systematic that every wheeled thing which is to pass from the Strand to Fleet Street should cross Waterloo Bridge, visit the charming suburbs of South London, look in on Croydon, and return triumphantly by the Tower Bridge. That is organization all right; bless its heart — and improve its head. But neither in military nor in social strategy is there much advantage in the unity and discipline that means making everybody make the same mistake at the same moment. The comment I would make is more casual and general; but it is not without its importance in other problems besides the problem of traffic.

Just now, for instance, it has a great deal to do with what may be called the problem of Progress. Many have accused people of my way of thinking of being merely hostile to Progress; especially in such scientific forms as petrol traffic. Many, but ill-acquainted with my habits, seem to suppose that I recoil in horror from a motor-car and insist on being wheeled about, like Mr. Pickwick, in a wheel-barrow. But that is not at all the part of Progress that I find problematical. I have no particular objection to people going about in cars; though I may regret the curious evolution of the human form in America, where wheels have completely taken the place of legs. What was not adequately realized, by those who merely talked about Progress, is simply this: that Progress is never merely the solving of problems, it is always also the setting of problems.

Men of the philosophic phase represented by Mr. H. G. Wells always tended to talk as if we should soon disentangle the knots of past problems merely by more science and experiment. What they did not see is that we are always tying new knots and making new tangles, actually because of science and experiment. Progress is the mother of Problems. I do not say that Progress is therefore undesirable; or that the problems are therefore insoluble. I only say there will always be numberless new problems to solve. Mr. Wells himself has uttered a magnificently defiant faith that his scientific Utopianism will win through and survive the reaction against it all over Europe; because, as he says, intelligence cannot ultimately be defeated. I might say, in passing, that I see no purely rationalist proof that intelligence cannot be defeated. And I should rather like to know who decides that Mussolini and Maurras of the *Action Francaise* are unintelligent. But the point at the moment is that men like Mr. Wells did talk as if Progress would be so intelligent as to relieve us of one problem after another; and did not allow enough for the fact that Progress itself might add yet another problem. We may, as a scientific prophet lately said, fly to the stars; though I for one find the earth far more mysterious. But if we do fly to the stars, there will be a traffic problem about flying-ships, exactly as there is now a traffic problem about taxicabs.

That is perhaps the most lasting lesson of the petrol traffic problem. The problem may disappear. The petrol traffic may disappear. But meanwhile we pass through what is a nightmare of mere nonsense; everybody made to have motor-horns; everybody forbidden to use motor-horns; everybody going round in circles as something straighter than a straight line; all the utter unreason of the mind when fronted with a riddle that seems insoluble. By all means go on progressing, if it amuses you; go on inventing machines for anything or everything. But always remember that you are not only inventing machines; you are inventing riddles.

Few people, I fancy, can feel very happy about motoring conditions in this country of late; unless it be in the rather curious sense which Matthew Arnold attributed to Goethe, in a very obvious imitation of Virgil:

And he was happy, if to know Causes of things and far below His feet to see the insensate flow Of folly and insane distress And headlong fate, be happiness.

The above lines embody a very exact description of the condition of motoring on our roads during recent years. There has been plenty of folly and headlong fate; and not a little insane distress and, what is perhaps more terrible, entirely sane distress. But I doubt if even the most detached could regard the contemplation of it as a condition of happiness. Nevertheless, I confess that I have a fancy for thinking about the causes of things; if I may presume so far to put myself in the company of Virgil or Goethe or Matthew Arnold. For the rest, I am not a motorist or a motor, or one specially to be described by any term indicating rapid or frequent motion. I am not enough of a traveller to find that traffic problem a very pressing problem; still less the problem which is not so much the motion as the stopping of traffic. In fact, I fear I never like the traffic quite so much as when it stands still. In the middle of a prolonged block in the Uxbridge Road, I have been known to exhibit a gaiety and radiant levity which has made me loathed and detested for miles round. I always feel a faint hope, after a few hours of it, that the vehicles may never move on at all; but may sink slowly into the road and take on the more rooted character of a large and prosperous village. Perhaps, after all, it is thus that our culture may return to the stability and sanity of the earth, which is now its only hope. I have sometimes felt inclined to get out of the car and make a little garden just outside it, staking out a claim and symbolically renouncing all hope of any further advance.

V About the Censor

ALL my life long the noise of battle rolled, chiefly between dramatic critics and theatrical managers, about the rights and wrongs of the Censorship of Plays; and I have no doubt the noise is still going on over any corresponding Censorship of Films. But though there were incessant differences between those who agreed with the Censor and those who disagreed with him, none of the differences were so great as the difference between two reasons for disagreeing. There were some who seemed to hold that any artistic experiment, however anarchical or abnormal, or manifestly and even medically insane, had a mysterious right of its own to override any social custom or convenience, any common-sense or ordinary civic dignity. The artistic experiment had this right because it was an artistic experiment; not even because the art was artistic; still less because the experiment was successful. Even the worst play must take precedence of the best law. If the artists had wanted to have real blood in their murders, as some other artists used real mud on their landscapes, one can only suppose that these critics would have agreed to sacrifice a few human lives to the thrill of realism. If the actor-manager were working on the old lavish scale, he might be encouraged to turn the theatre into an amphitheatre. He might make a feature of real lions, which would be expensive; and real Christians, who would be rare.

Anyhow, the theory of the thing seemed to be that supreme spiritual authority in this world belongs to art, or rather, to anybody who chooses to say that he is attempting something new in art. I was never able to accept this highly modern and credulous conception; because I am unable to imagine any human being accepting any authority that he has not originally reached by reason. And I cannot conceive what reason there could possibly be for accepting the authority of artists; not to mention bad artists. But it was a very common attitude thirty or forty years ago; and it covers large spaces of society still. There is a great deal that is amusing about this arbitrary sort of artist, as well as the more obvious joke of his art. Perhaps the funniest thing of all about him is that he sometimes calls himself a Pagan. He is the sort of man who might be murdered almost anywhere, even in an English Socialist revolution; but if there is one place where he would be killed quite instantly for defying the gods and disregarding the dignity of the republic, it is in a city of the Pagans.

But there always was, and there still is, an exactly contrary case against the Censor and the Censorship. It is that the rules of the Censorship encourage anarchy, and that the worst sort of anarchy, which is anarchy in the mind. There is an obvious example, which I mentioned long ago, when this debate was more topical. By the old rule of Censorship, we must not put Jesus on the stage. It would be much easier to put Judas on the stage. It would be perfectly easy to justify Judas on the stage. There is now no form of blasphemy or bad morals that anybody is really forbidden to justify on the stage. A modern drama may be one wild dance of all the devils and all the swine. It may contain anything or anybody, except anybody who can cast out devils or destroy swine. Generally speaking, in the whole spirit of the thing, the one thing that the Censor can really cut out is God. He has no particular reason to cut out Satan; and no reason at all to cut out Satanism. No doubt the actual wielders of such powers try to soften their insane regulations by behaving as sanely as they can. But I am not talking about the Censor, but about the rules of the Censorship. And though they are by this time an old example, they are still perhaps the most distinct and disputable example of a certain moral muddle into which this country has managed to stumble during the last half-century. One other example is "Divorce Law Reform." One may think Divorce wrong; and yet feel it almost worse if men cannot even do wrong without a tangle of quibbles and lies.

Now, since the days when the Censorship quarrel existed in that form, the whole social situation has changed. I was about to say that much water has flowed under the bridges; but it would perhaps be truer to say that it has flowed over the bridges and overwhelmed the world with a flood. In those earlier days to which I have just referred, there was any amount of the artistic revolt and riot I have just described. But the revolt of artists was almost entirely a revolt of artists; or, rather, of a minority of artists. There was also, as I have said, a still smaller minority of those who rebelled, as I did, not so much because we revered art as because we respected reason. But all the rest of the people, that is the overwhelming majority of the people, were still traditional in their ethics though rather vague in their religion. Allowing for all exaggeration, we may fairly say of the new generation that it is the ethics that are vague; except in certain cases where they are decidedly vivid. And a real problem arises, about what we should do, in face of such a change of proportion even in the vague moral opinion of modern society. When I say a problem, I do not in the least mean what is meant by a doubt. I do not mean that I have a shadow of doubt about what we personally should do; and especially what we should not do. We should not do as they do; any more than we should beat Jews because we are in Prussia, or murder priests because we are in Mexico. There is no question of doubt about what is right for us to do, or to say; it is rather a question of what it is possible for us to prevent. Now, I think those who hold the old view of right should stand firm, stand apart and even realize they stand alone. They should attack. England looks much more hopeful as a Pagan country calling for conversion than as a Christian country calling for compromise. The roast beef of Old England will last longer when it is salted beef. But if the salt lose its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?

We may fall back on the historic base of modern progress, on the fundamentals not yet formally reversed; and there is a case for it. We might say that if six undiscovered murders this year become sixty undiscovered murders next year, the commonwealth none the less rests on the idea that murder is wrong. We may say that three thieves to-day and thirty to-morrow and three hundred the day after to-morrow do not turn us into a Communist society. On the other hand, we may admit that, though not a Communist society, it is no longer a Christian society. And then, if we are Christians, we can launch a crusade to convert or conquer it. Now I think, after some sincere thought, that this latter course is by far the better. I do not believe in ignoring the Pagan morals all around us: it does not diminish the Paganism; and it only deprives us of the pleasure and advantage of denouncing it as Pagan. The assumption that tradition, and even convention, that virtue and even Victorian virtue, is still the rule, and anything else an exception, is all on the side of the sophists who defend vice. It is a rule by which we carry all the unpopular emblems of power, while they enjoy all the practical fruits of victory. They can flout us, because they profess that there is nothing to conceal; and we cannot fight them, because we pretend that there is nothing to fight. But, above all, from the point of the honest orthodox, the present one-sided truce has this enormous disadvantage: it prevents us from pointing out the one solid, staring, stupendous fact which is before all our eyes. It is the fact that we have not only seen a modern materialist civilization rise, but we have seen it fall. We have seen industrial imperialism and individualism a *practical* failure. It is no longer a question of using the modern machinery; but of cutting loose from the wreck of it.

VI About Shamelessness

THERE are some who actually like the Country dialects which State education is systematically destroying. There are some who actually prefer them to the Cockney dialect which State education is systematically spreading. For that is perhaps the most practical and successful effect of our present scheme of public instruction, that the village children no longer talk like ignorant inhabitants of Sussex or Suffolk; they now talk like enlightened inhabitants of Hoxton and Houndsditch. Among the eccentric reactionaries who have actually observed this change with regret, a further and more curious fact has also been remarked more than once. An Anglican country parson, a friend of mine, once told me that it was not only a loss of pronunciation, but also of perception. “They not only can’t say the word, but they can’t hear it,” was the way he put it. Supposing that the virtuous vicar in question had been so ill-advised as to teach his infant school to recite, let us say, the “Dolores” of Swinburne — which, I admit, is not extremely probable — their intonation would be different, but without any intention to differ. The vicar would say, “Ringed round with a flame of fair faces.” And the Sunday School children would obediently repeat, “Ringed rarnd with a flime of fair fices,” with a solid certainty and assurance that this was exactly what he had said. However laboriously he might entreat them to say “faces,” they would say “fices,” and it would sound to them exactly like “faces.”

In short, this sort of thing is not a variation or a form of variety; on the contrary, it is an inability to see that there is any variety. It is not a difference in the sense of a distinction; on the contrary, it is a sudden failure in the power to make any distinction. Whatever is distinct may possibly be distinguished. And Burns and Barnes did manage to be distinguished, in the particular form of distinction commonly called dialect. But the change here in question is something much more formless and much more formidable than anything that could arise from the most uncouth or unlucky of local or rustic accents. It is a certain loss of sharpness, in the ear as well as the tongue; not only a flattening of the speech, but a deadening of the hearing. And though it is in itself a relatively small matter, especially as compared with many parallel matters, it is exactly this quality that makes it symbolic in the social problems of to-day. For one of the deepest troubles of the day is this fact: that something is being commended as a new taste which is simply the condition which finds everything tasteless. It is sometimes offered almost as if it were a new sense; but it is not really even a new sensibility; it is rather a pride in new insensibility.

For instance, when some old piece of decorum is abolished, rightly or wrongly, it is always supposed to be completely justified if people become just as dull in accepting the indecency as they were in accepting the decency. If it can be said that the grandchildren "soon get used" to something that would have made the grandfathers fight duels to the death, it is always assumed that the grandchildren have found a new mode of living, whereas those who fought the duel to the death were already dead. But the psychological fact is exactly the other way. The duellists may have been fastidious or even fantastic, but they were frightfully alive. That is why they died. Their sensibilities were vivid and intense, by the only true test of the finer sensibilities, or even of the five senses. And that is that they could feel the difference between one thing and another. It is the livelier eye that can see the difference between peacock-blue and peacock-green; it is the more fatigued eye that may see them both as something very like grey. It is the quicker ear that can detect in any speech the shade between innocence and irony, or between irony and insult. It is the duller ear that hears all the notes as monotone, and therefore monotonous. Even the swaggering person, who was supposed to turn up his nose at everything, was at least in a position to sniff the different smells of the world, and perhaps to detect their difference.

There is the drearier and more detached sort of pride of the other sort of man, who may be said to turn his nose down at everything. For that also is only a more depressing way of turning everything down. It is not a mark of purity of taste, but of absence of taste, to think that cocoa is as good as claret; and in the field of morals it may well have the ultimate Nemesis of thinking cocaine as good as cocoa. Even the mere senses, in the merely sensual sense, attest to this truth about vivacity going with differentiation. It is no answer, therefore, to say that you have persuaded a whole crowd of hygienic hikers to be content with cocoa any more than to say that you have persuaded a whole crowd of drug-fiends to be content with cocaine. Neither of them is the better for pursuing a course which spoils the palate, and probably robs them of a reasonable taste in vintages. But what most modern people do not see is that this dullness in diet, and similar things, is exactly parallel to the dull and indifferent anarchy in manners and morals. Do not be proud of the fact that your grandmother was shocked at something which you are accustomed to seeing or hearing without being shocked. There are two meanings of the word "nervous," and it is not even a physical superiority to be actually without nerves. It may mean that your grandmother was an extremely lively and vital animal, and that you are a paralytic.

We are constantly told, for instance, by the very prosaic paralytics who call themselves Nudists, that people "soon get used" to being degraded, in that particular, to the habits of the beasts of the field. I have no doubt they do; just as they soon get used to being drunkards or drug-fiends or jail-birds or people talking Cockney instead of talking English. Where the argument of the apologist entirely fails is in showing that it is *better* to get used to an inferior status after losing a superior one. In a hundred ways, recent legislation has ridden roughshod over the instincts of innocent and simple and yet very sensible people. There was a feeling, strangely enough, that men and women might not feel very comfortable when they met as total strangers to discuss some depraved and perhaps disgusting aspect of their natural sex relation. This has already given a good deal of quiet trouble on juries, and we have not seen the end of the trouble yet. Now, it will be noted that the objection to female juries never was an objection to juries being female. There always were female juries. From the first days of legislation a number of matrons were empanelled to decide certain points among each other. The case against mixed juries was a case of embarrassment; and that embarrassment is far more intelligent, far more civilized, far more subtle, far more psychological than the priggish brutality that disregards it. But, in any case, it will serve here as an illustration of what I mean. The question is not whether the embarrassment can be so far overcome somehow that a good many people can discharge the duty somehow. The question is whether the blunting of the sentiment really is a victory for human culture, and not rather a defeat for human culture. Just as the question is not whether millions of little boys, in different districts with different dialects, can all be taught the same dialect of the Whitechapel Road, but whether that dialect is better than others; and whether it is a good thing to lose the sense of difference between dialects.

For what we do at least know, in the most fundamental fashion, is that man is man by the possession of these fastidious fancies; from which the freethinking haddock is entirely emancipated, and by which the latitudinarian turnip is never troubled. To lose the sense of repugnance from one thing, or regard for another, is exactly so far as it goes to relapse into the vegetation or to return to the dust. But for about fifty or sixty years nearly all our culture and controversial trend has been conducted on the assumption that, as long as we could get used to any sort of caddishness, we could be perfectly contented in being cads. I do not say that all the results of the process have been wrong. But I do say that the test of the process has been wrong from first to last; for it is not a case against the citizen that a man can grow *accustomed* to being either a savage or a slave.

VII About Puritanism

IN dealing with such things as Prohibition, I have sometimes had occasion to mention Puritanism. Disputes have arisen about this word, and about how far it is fair to associate it at least with a mild shade of pessimism. Sporadic attempts are made to modify this strong popular impression; and I saw an article the other day which largely turned upon a statement that Calvin was allowed to play with darts. As I have not the least desire to be unfair to Puritans, I think I should like to sum up what seems to me the substantial historical truth of the matter, and the real point of the whole story. So far as I am concerned, the point is not so much against Calvin as against Calvinism; and not so much even against Calvinism as against that much less logical Modernism which has taught everybody in our time that religious error does not matter. It matters very much in two ways; and Puritanism is a striking historical example of both. First: something that might well seem to sensible people to be only a fine shade of thought, merely theoretical and theological, does, in fact, change the mind. It produces a mood which does darken the world, or some particular part of the world. About the degree of the darkness or the density of the cloud, we may well differ; but it is a matter of common sense to see where the cloud did or does rest. Nobody will dare to maintain that the Scottish Sabbath has not in fact been more strict than the English Sunday, let alone the Continental Sunday. Every one knows that it was the Puritans who objected to Archbishop Laud's famous publication on the subject; every one knows that they objected to his Book of Sports because it was a book of sports; every one knows that they thought the sports too sportive. Attempts to explain away solid outstanding historical facts of this kind are altogether fanciful. But it does not follow that every founder of every sect involved attached supreme importance to this particular point; some of them did; some of them did not. The whole movement grew gradually from various roots, but this is what it grew to be. A man alive in the middle of the Renaissance, speculating about a system of Presbyters which he had not yet begun to found, amid a thousand others speculating about a thousand other things, would not, of course, become instantly identical with a Presbyterian minister of modern times. He would not begin on the spot to grow the black top-hat and bushy whiskers of a Scottish elder or precentor in one of

Sir James Barrie’s plays or stories. Nemo repente fit turpissimus. Which it would doubtless be very unfair to translate as “No one suddenly becomes a precentor.”

But there is another historical process involved. It is much more curious, and it has been much more curiously neglected. One special form of the harm done by the extreme sects in the seventeenth century was this: that they really died young, and that what has infected our culture since has not been their life, or even their death, but rather their decay. In most cases the Puritans lost their religion and retained their morality; a deplorable state of things for anybody. If the special narrow theologies had not perished as rapidly as they did, the atmospheric moral mood would not have lingered on exactly in the way it did. But, above all, it permitted of a process which seems to me one of the strangest and most interesting in human history, but does not seem as yet to have been noticed by historians. It is rather like the geological process of the formation of a fossil. Every one knows that a fossil fish is not a fish; nor a fossil bird a bird. I do not mean merely in the obvious sense; that we should be surprised — nay, annoyed — in a restaurant, if we asked for a fish and they gave us a stone. I mean that a fossil is a form in which remains no actual fragment of a fish. It in a hollow mould or image of a fish, which is very gradually filled up by the infiltration of something else, after the actual fish has decayed. Thus we find the general outline of these stony and very literal faiths filled up by something else when the old fanaticism has decayed. There are two great modern examples of that creepy and uncanny historical transmutation. One is what we call Prohibition, and the other is what we call Prussianism.

The point is perhaps clearest in the case of Prohibition. The old original Puritans were not Prohibitionists. Oliver Cromwell was a brewer; but he was not inspired or intoxicated by beer, nor (like the teetotallers) inspired and intoxicated by the absence of beer. Whatever his faults, he did most certainly have a real religion, in the sense of a creed. But it was a sombre creed, one which had been made intentionally, more stern and ruthless than the other creeds; and this created a new mood and moral atmosphere which ultimately spread all over the great plains of Puritan America. Now, the point is this: that as the creed crumbled slowly as a creed, its place was taken by something vaguer but of the same general spirit. The sombre theological system was replaced by a sombre social theory. You can put it another way if you like, and say that America tolerated Prohibition; not because America was Puritan, but because America had been Puritan. The idea of morality that came to prevail till lately at least was in every sense a survival of Puritanism, even if it was also in a sense a substitute for Puritanism. That is the essential history of that curious episode; the teetotal ethic of modern times. Prohibition was not a part of the origin of Puritanism; none the less, Prohibition was a thing of Puritan origin.

The same is true of the religious fanaticism that filled Germany in the Thirty Years War; as compared with the national or tribal fanaticism that now fills Germany after the Great War. The old fanatics who followed Gustavus Adolphus and William of Orange were not ethnologists or evolutionists. They did not imagine that they belonged to a Nordic Race; they most certainly did not imagine that they or theirs had ever been bothered with a Swastika. They saluted the cross or they smashed the cross; but it had not occurred to them to tap the four ends of it so as to turn it into a fragment of Chinese or Red Indian decoration. They were thinking about their own strictly religious scruples and schisms. They were really fighting fiercely and savagely for points of doctrine; and I should be the last to blame them for it. But those doctrines did not last; they were the very doctrines that have now long been dissolving in the acids of German scepticism, in the laboratories of the Prussian professors. And the more they evaporated and left a void, the more the void was filled up with new and boiling elements; with tribalism, with militarism, with imperialism, and (in short) with that very narrow type of patriotism that we call Prussianism.

Most of us would agree that this kind of patriotism is a considerable peril to every other kind of patriotism. That is the whole evil of the ethnological type of loyalty. Settled States can respect themselves and also respect each other, because they can claim the right to defend their own frontiers and yet not deny their duty to recognize other people’s frontiers. But the racial spirit is a restless spirit; it does not go by frontiers but by the wandering of the blood. It is not so much as if France were at war with Spain, but rather as if the Gipsies were more or less at war with everybody. You can have a League of Nations, but you could hardly have a League of Tribes. When the Tribe is on the march, it is apt to forget leagues — not to mention frontiers. But my immediate interest in this flood of tribalism is that it has since poured into the empty hollows left by the slow drying-up of the great Deluge of the Thirty Years War; and that all this new and naked nationalism has come to many modern men as a substitute for their dead religion.

VIII About Sir James Jeans

PERHAPS the quaint old tradition that the village cobbler is always the village atheist may have had something to do with the equally quaint old proverb that the cobbler should stick to his last. *Ne sutor ultra crepidam* may have been a pagan proverb; but an atheist was probably as rare among polytheists as he is among monotheists. And it seems rather to suggest a mild complaint among customers that their favourite expert in footwear was rather neglecting their feet in his irrelevant efforts to influence their heads. And whereas their feet might have been shod with the gospel of peace, by a more pious and traditional cobbler, it was found that their heads were turned into watch-towers loud with the tocsins and alarums of war, by the challenges of the atheistic cobbler. It may seem at first a little hard on the cobbler to condemn him to an eternal ritual of repeating that there is nothing like leather. But there is a truly historic half-truth in the idea of such a limitation. And the truth is this: that a really good cobbler might be really interesting about leather, and still be capable of being rather a bore about God; and still more of a bore about Godlessness. And the reason is this: that in the trade that a man really understands he often has ideas that are really his own; he is fresh and inventive and even (in the rare but good sense) up to date.

Whereas, in a theoretical thing like atheism, he is almost certain to have picked up stale ideas that are not his own; that are not even in the vulgar sense up to date; that are generally likely to be all the more ancient because he fancies they are modern. A true craftsman of St. Crispin, a great and glorious cobbler in the best tradition of the Guilds, might mean much more than we imagine in saying that there is nothing like leather. He might be thinking that leather is not one thing but a thousand things; that he himself had a score of schemes for the extension and variation of its use; that the world was only at the beginning of the vast possibilities and scientific applications of leather. He might see in a vision, not only the forest of the fantastic elongations of the late mediaeval shoe, but all the other historic applications that still live in legend; from the Leather Bottel to the complete costume of leather that was worn by the first Quaker. He might see new shapes cut out of leather, new patterns stamped on leather, new ways in which the use of leather might extend from hats to hangings, curtains or carpets, as the use of lead extends from bullets to church windows. If he had these new notions about leather, it would be largely because he had studied leather, and not stuck behind in the first alphabet of his craft. But as an atheist he would be an amateur, and would probably have stuck very stupidly at the first alphabet of atheism; asking how the God who made a fig tree grow could stop it from growing; or whether God was not alone responsible for all a man did, because he had made a man free to do what he liked. Anyhow, he would probably say things we have all heard a thousand times from cosmic theorists, and do not specially want to hear all over again from cobblers.

Certainly no one would compare Sir James Jeans to an atheist; for no man has, in fact, done more to change the tone of the most modern science from atheism to theism. Nor would it be strictly correct, or in accordance with the dull details of biography as given in Who’s Who, to describe him as a cobbler. But in one way he does raise some of the same questions as are suggested in the two proverbs about the cobbler, or the faintly implied speculations about the atheist. I was listening recently to conversations which still continue about a recent lecture of Sir James Jeans to the British Association, not to mention the echoes of it that still rumble in the popular Press. And I was struck in both these cases, especially in the case of the newspapers, with the much greater space and attention given to his general peroration about science in relation to ethics and politics and religion (about which studies he is, after all, an amateur like the rest of us), than to the masterly analysis of his own original ideas about matter of the mathematics of energy, about which he is possibly the chief authority of the age. The cosmic cobbler is listened to less respectfully when he talks about leather, about the substance or material of which the cosmos is made, than when he talks about the problem of unemployment or armament, or the need of a new religion, or all the familiar topics well within the range of the village atheist, or at least of the village agnostic. And yet his hypothesis about matter is full of new ideas, which are really his own; while his defence of the morality of modern science is necessarily full of old ideas which would have been much the same in the mouths of the scientific men of sixty years ago.

Nor, indeed, are they altogether satisfactory, and they have become rather less so by mere repetition, in a world that has been revolutionized in the interval. No religious person, unless he is a religious maniac, has any particular reason to resist the advance of physical science; least of all the physical science of the new physicists. But since Sir James goes out of his way to counter or contradict the evil that has accompanied the good, we may fairly point out that the contradiction is not a refutation. The harnessing of science to hellish engines of destruction has not grown better, because a great deal of blood has flown under the bridges since old Huxley idealized the social use of science. And to say that if machinery creates unemployment it also creates new industries and new employment, is simply to be stone blind to the staring and outstanding fact of the hour. That fact is that, even allowing for every effort to make new industries, unemployment has, on the balance, enormously increased. And this particular defence of machinery is so very far from being new that it would have sounded very much more true if it had been made (as it was made) in the middle of the nineteenth century, during the triumph of the Manchester manufacturers. In those Early Victorian days, it really was much more arguable that we were putting as many men into new enterprises as we were throwing out of old ones. To-day it is not true at all, as a matter of the facts and even the statistics. But, anyhow, we do not go to the most brilliant scientist of our own time to hear things that might be excused in an Early Victorian.

Or, again, in a man of so much scientific originality, there is the same strange staleness in the statement that we must make a modern religion to suit modern scientific knowledge. Here he seems to forget, not only all that has been done since the age of dogmatic materialism, but even all that he has done himself. He seems strangely oblivious of the actual nature of that “knowledge” which he has just been revealing in his own lecture. For, according to his own vivid and fascinating description, that knowledge largely consists of a sort of radiant and luminous ignorance. The whole point of his address was that he had come to the conclusion that something, in the very nature of our observance of phenomena, forbids us to feel sure that it is the ultimate fact which we observe. Whether this be true or no, it is surely not the sort of truth of which anybody could make a religion; or on which we could build any system of sacrifice or confidence or obedience. There was at least some sense in Haeckel and the old materialists saying that we must fit our moral philosophy to the facts. But why should we fit it to a fancy-picture of the cosmos, that may have hardly any relation to the facts? If it points to anything, it would seem to point back to the old idea that, if we really want a religion, we must seek it with our own reason, with our moral convictions and our conception of the metaphysics of being. But if men could not find faith among the atoms of which they were sure, they will hardly find it among the electrons of which they are not sure. But my main purpose is merely to protest against the treatment of this great man of science by the world of journalism and gossip, which thinks him so much more important when he happens to use a few familiar phrases from the old freethinkers than when his phraseology is really unfamiliar and his thought is really free.

IX About Voltaire

ALL Christian history began with that great social occasion when Pilate and Herod shook hands. Hitherto, as everybody knew in Society circles, they had hardly been on speaking terms. Something led them to seek each other's support, a vague sense of social crisis, though very little was happening except the execution of an ordinary batch of criminals. The two rulers were reconciled on the very day when one of these convicts was crucified. That is what many people mean by Peace, and the substitution of a reign of Love for one of Hatred. Whether or no there is honour among thieves, there is always a certain social interdependence and solidarity among murderers; and those sixteenth-century ruffians who conspired to assassinate Rizzio or Darnley were always very careful to put their names, and especially each other's names, to what they called a "band," so that at the worst they might all hang together. Many political friendships — nay, even broad democratic comradeships, are of this nature; and their representatives are really distressed when we decline to identify this form of Love with the original mystical idea of Charity.

It sometimes seems to me that history is dominated and determined by these evil friendships. As all Christian history begins with the happy reconciliation of Herod and Pilate, so all modern history, in the recent revolutionary sense, begins with that strange friendship which ended in a quarrel, as the first quarrel had ended in a friendship. I mean that the two elements of destruction, which make the modern world more and more incalculable, were loosened with the light of that forgotten day when a lean French gentleman in a large wig, by name M. Arouet, travelled north with much annoyance to find the palace of a Prussian King far away in the freezing Baltic plain. The strict title of the King in dynastic chronicles is Frederick the Second, but he is better known as Frederick the Great. The actual name of the Frenchman was Arouet, but he is better known as Voltaire. The meeting of these two men, in the mid-winter of eighteenth-century scepticism and secularism, is a sort of spiritual marriage which brought forth the modern world; monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum. But because that birth was monstrous and evil, and because true friendship and love are not evil, it did not come into the world to create one united thing, but two conflicting things, which, between them, were to shake the world to pieces. From Voltaire the Latins were to learn a raging scepticism. From Frederick the Teutons were to learn a raging pride.

We may note at the start that neither of them cared very much about his own country or traditions. Frederick was a German who refused even to learn German. Voltaire was a Frenchman who wrote a foul lampoon about Joan of Arc. They were cosmopolitans; they were not in any sense patriots. But there is this difference; that the patriot does, however stupidly, like the country: whereas the cosmopolitan does not in the least like the cosmos. They neither of them pretended to like anything very much. Voltaire was the more really humane of the two; but Frederick also could talk on occasion the cold humanitarianism that was the cant of his age. But Voltaire, even at his best, really began that modern mood that has blighted all the humanitarianism he honestly supported. He started the horrible habit of helping human beings only through pitying them, and never through respecting them. Through him the oppression of the poor became a sort of cruelty to animals, and the loss of all that mystical sense that to wrong the image of God is to insult the ambassador of a King.

Nevertheless, I believe that Voltaire had a heart; I think that Frederick was most heartless when he was most humane. Anyhow, these two great sceptics met on the level, on the dead solid plain, as dull as the Baltic Plain; on the basis that there is no God, or no God who is concerned with men any more than with mites in cheese. On this basis they agreed; on this basis they disagreed; their quarrel was personal and trivial, but it ended by launching two European forces against each other, both rooted in the same unbelief. Voltaire said in effect: “I will show you that the sneers of a sceptic can produce a Revolution and a Republic and everywhere the overthrowing of thrones.” And Frederick answered: “And I will show you that this same sneering scepticism can be used as easily to resist Reform, let alone Revolution; that scepticism can be the basis of support for the most tyrannical of thrones, for the bare brute domination of a master over his slaves.” So they said farewell, and have since been sundered by two centuries of war; they said farewell, but presumably did not say “adieu.”

Of every such evil seed it may be noted that the seed is different from the flower, and the flower from the fruit. A demon of distortion always twists it even out of its own unnatural nature. It may turn into almost anything, except anything really good. It is, to use the playful term of affection which Professor Freud applies to his baby, “a polymorphous pervert.” These things not only do not produce the special good they promise; they do not produce even the special evil they threaten. The Voltairean revolt promised to produce, and even began to produce, the rise of mobs and overthrow of thrones; but it was not the final form of scepticism. The actual effect of what we call democracy has been the disappearance of the mob. We might say there were mobs at the beginning of the Revolution and no mobs at the end of it. That Voltairean influence has not ended in the rule of mobs, but in the rule of secret societies. It has falsified politics throughout the Latin world, till the recent Italian Counter-Revolution. Voltaire has produced hypocritical and pompous professional politicians, at whom he would have been the first to jeer. But on his side, as I have said, there does linger a certain humane and civilized sentiment which is not unreal. Only it is right to remember what has really gone wrong on his side of the Continental quarrel when we are recording the much wilder and wickeder wrong on the other side of it.

For the evil spirit of Frederick the Great has produced, not only all other evils, but what might seem the very opposite evil. He who worshipped nothing has become a god who is quite blindly worshipped. He who cared nothing for Germany has become the battle-cry of madmen who care for nothing except Germany. He who was a cold cosmopolitan has heated seven times a hell of narrow national and tribal fury which at this moment menaces mankind with a war that may be the end of the world. But the root of both perversions is in the common ground of atheist irresponsibility; there was nothing to stop the sceptic from turning democracy into secrecy; there was nothing to stop him interpreting liberty as the infinite licence of tyranny. The spiritual zero of Christendom was at that freezing instant when those two dry, thin, hatchet-faced men looked in each other’s hollow eyes and saw the sneer that was as eternal as the smile of a skull. Between them, they have nearly killed the thing by which we live.

These two points of peril or centres of unrest, the intellectual unrest of the Latins and the very unintellectual unrest of the Teutons, do doubtless both contribute to the instability of international relations, and threaten us all the more because they threaten each other. But when we have made every allowance for there being, in that sense, dangers on both sides, the main modern fact emerges that the danger is mostly on one side, and that we have long been taught to look for it only on the other side. Much of Western opinion, especially English and American, has been trained to have a vague horror of Voltaire, often combined with a still vaguer respect for Frederick. No Wesleyans are likely to confuse Wesley with Voltaire. No Primitive Methodist is under the impression that Voltaire was a Primitive Methodist. But many such Protestant ministers really were under the impression that Frederick the Great was a Protestant Hero. None of them realized that Frederick was the greater atheist of the two. None of them certainly foresaw that Frederick, in the long run, would turn out to be the greater anarchist of the two. In short, nobody foresaw what everybody afterwards saw: the French Republic becoming a conservative force, and the Prussian Kingdom a purely destructive and lawless force. Victorians like Carlyle actually talked about pious Prussia, as if Blucher had been a saint or Moltke a mystic. General Goring may be trusted to teach us better, till we learn at last that nothing is so anarchical as discipline divorced from authority; that is, from right.

X About Beliefs

SOME time ago, when a stir was made by a rather striking book called Who Moved the Stone? which might almost be described, with all reverence, as a divine detective story and almost a theological thriller, a pugnacious little paper in Fleet Street made a remark which has always hovered in my memory as more mysterious than any mystery story in the world. The writer said that any man who believes in the Resurrection is bound to believe also in the story of Aladdin in the Arabian Nights. I have no idea what he meant. Nor, I imagine, had he. But this curious conjunction of ideas recurs to my mind in connexion with a rather interesting suggestion made by Mr. Christopher Dawson about what we may call the History of Science. On the face of it, the remark I have quoted from the pugnacious paper seems to have no quality whatever except pugnacity. There is no sort of logical connexion between believing in one marvellous event and believing in another, even if they were exactly alike and not utterly different. If I believe that Captain Peary reached the North Pole, I am not therefore bound to believe that Dr. Cook also reached the North Pole, even if they both arrived with sledges and dogs out of the same snows. It is a fallacy, therefore, even where the two things are close enough to be compared. But the comparison between the Gospel miracle and the Arabian fairy-tale is about the most unfortunate comparison in the world. For in the one case there is a plain and particular reason for thinking the thing true, or at least meant to be true. And in the other case there is a plain and particular reason for realizing that the tale is not only untrue, but is not even meant to be true.

The historical case for the Resurrection is that everybody else, except the Apostles, had every possible motive to declare what they had done with the body, if anything had been done with it. The Apostles might have hidden it in order to announce a sham miracle, but it is very difficult to imagine men being tortured and killed for the truth of a miracle which they knew to be a sham. In the case of the Apostles' testimony, the general circumstances suggest that it is true. In the case of the Arabian tale, the general circumstances avow and proclaim that it is false. For we are told in the book itself that all the stories were told by a woman merely to amuse the king and distract his attention from the idea of cutting off her head. A romancer in this personal situation is not very likely to confine herself strictly to humdrum accuracy, and it would be impossible more plainly to warn the reader that all the tales are taradiddles. In the one case, then, we have witnesses who not only think the thing true, but do veritably think it is as true as death, or truer than death. They therefore prefer death to the denial of its truth. In the other case we have a story-teller who, in trying to avoid death, has every motive to tell lies. If St. John the Baptist had wished to avoid being beheaded, and had saved his life by inventing a long string of Messianic or Early Christian legends on the spur of the moment, in order to hold the attention of King Herod, I should not regard any "resurrection myth" he might tell as a strong historical argument for the Resurrection. But, as the Apostles were killed as St. John was killed, I think their evidence cannot be identified by sound scholarship as a portion of the Arabian Nights.

I merely pause for a moment upon this wild and preposterous parallel as a passing example of the queer way in which sceptics now refuse to follow an argument and only follow a sort of association or analogy. But the real reason for recalling this strange remark about the Arabian Nights is to be found in a much more genuine analogy between Western Science and Eastern Sorcery. Nobody but a lunatic would look either for his facts or his faith in the Arabian Nights. But, oddly enough, there really was a touch of the Arabian magicians in the Arabian mathematicians. There really was a faint flavour of the Oriental wizardry about the quite genuine Oriental wisdom; even when that wisdom was really doing work for which the world will always be grateful, in geometry or chemistry, in mathematics or medicine. Thus we find the paradox: that a man might, after all, look for some of the elements of science in the Arabian Nights, though he would hardly look there for anything very edifying or elevating in the way of the elements of religion. In short, the old dim, or even dark, connexion between Medicine and Magic has a sort of hidden meaning of great historical interest. It is developed by Mr. Dawson in an essay on the Eastern element in early mediaeval science, and occurs in a book of essays called Mediaeval Religion.

But this particular point is not concerned with religion, but is connected in a curious way with science. The point is this: that Magic (in the ancient sense) and Medicine (in the modern sense) are really in one way very like each other, because they are both very unlike the pure and abstract idea of

Science as conceived by the Ancient Greeks. Science only means knowledge; and for those ancients it did only mean knowledge. They wanted nothing but the pleasure of knowing; they were particularly proud of knowing a great deal of utterly useless knowledge. Thus the favourite science of the Greeks was Astronomy, because it was as abstract as Algebra. And when the Philistine among them said: “What are the Pleiades to me?” the Philosopher really answered the Philistine by saying: “They are all the more to me because they are nothing to me.” We may say that the great Greek ideal was to have no use for useful things. The Slave was he who learned useful things; the Freeman was he who learned useless things. This still remains the ideal of many noble men of science, in the sense that they do desire truth as the great Greeks desired it; and their attitude is an eternal protest against the vulgarity of utilitarianism. But there was and is another side of science, also to be respected, which was from the first represented by things like Medicine. And if there were some association of Medicine with Magic, it was because Magic was always extremely practical.

The modern Magician, often a most respectable gentleman, may have altered his opinion that sticking pins in the wax image of a politician would be a practical act of social utility. But so the modern Medicine-Man may have altered his opinion that the blood of badgers mixed with wine and salt is always an immediate cure for rheumatism. But there is nothing in this change of opinion on the mere fact or details that differs from any other modern change in medical method, as in curing consumption first by shutting all the windows and then by opening all the windows. The point is that both types of Medicine-Man were employed by people who wanted something prompt and practical, such as killing politicians or curing rheumatism. And the note of this sort of science, which Mr. Dawson traces to the East, is that it always boasts of possessing Power, as distinct from the other sort set upon enjoying Truth. We have most of us met the kind of theosophical mystic who is always whispering that he can show us the Path to Power; that if we will only say “I am Wisdom; I am Power” seventy-seven times before the looking-glass we shall control the cosmos. There was some such note even in mediaeval medicine. Mediaeval science was really more practical than Pagan science, but sometimes it did really sound a little too practical to be quite wholesome. So some modern hygienic idealists are rather more concerned about health than is quite healthy. It is hard to dwell perpetually on this element of power without poisoning it with some element of pride. So, queerly enough, Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp really has some remote relation with the miracles of science, though hardly any with the miracles of religion.

XI About Modern Girls

THE present position of the Bright Young Thing, or Brilliant Young Cynic of a hard and realistic epoch, is so heartrendingly sad and pitiable that aged sentimentalists can only gaze at it through floods of senile tears. The cynics themselves, of course, do not believe in sentiment, but they embody a most poignant example of pathos. No orphan child, sprinkled with stage snow in a Victorian melodrama, was ever more obviously out in the cold; no Mariana in a moated grange, or highborn maiden in a palace tower, had ever so conspicuously got left.

The stages of the strange and tragic story are worthy of some sort of simple summary. To begin with, the modern cynic was in the position of a man whose father has quarrelled with his grandfather; and who is himself filled with a pious and filial yearning to quarrel with them both. The yearning is indeed pious in the sense of traditional, in so far as this family quarrel seems to be a tradition in the family. But for him the practical problem is the double problem of quarrelling with them both. And it is not easy to quarrel with them both. If in wandering about the moated grange or the ancestral garden, he is struck with horror at the sight of some feature recalling the peculiar tastes of his grandfather in his Classical or his Pre-Raphaelite period, he may perhaps break out into curses against his ancestor, and express his disagreement with his grandfather in the most disagreeable language he can command. And just as he is beginning to enjoy himself, he will realize with a shock that he is in the shameful and unnatural position of agreeing with his father. In a desperate attempt to balance this, he will fall back on the more natural and genial occupation of recalling in detail all the more repulsive vices and follies of his own father. And then he will realize abruptly that he is only repeating the catalogue of curses and crimes once uttered by the more quavering voice of his aged grandfather.

This curious tragicomedy is always being re-enacted, especially in recent times, when any debate turns on philosophy as displayed in history. Thus, the young man who associated himself with the famous Pacifist vote at Oxford will, of course, affirm the ideal of Internationalism, and treat Nationalism as a prehistoric superstition handed down from anthropoid ages. He may often be heard saying that arms and armaments (two rather different things) are a relic of mediaevalism, and that an internationalist of the twentieth century cannot be expected to go back to the Middle Ages. And then, perhaps, some friend of his who happens to know something about history will point out to him that going forward to Internationalism is going back to the Middle Ages. For the very deep chasms that now divide the different nations only appeared like cracks when the mediaeval system broke up. It is absurd to class modern armaments with mediaeval armaments, for gunpowder even did more to destroy the mediaeval system than to preserve it. And the indignant intellectual cannot make up his mind whether to admire gunpowder because it was a scientific discovery or to deplore gunpowder because it is a patriotic weapon. He is dizzy with the effort to keep at an equal distance from his thirteenth-century grandfather and his seventeenth-century father. We see a compact case of this contradiction in the rather morbid talk that may be heard here and there in connexion with what is called "the next war." Oddly enough, it is the same people who always teach us, in their Outlines of History and Encyclopaedias of Everything, that everything is always getting better and better, and that even our most miserable contemporaries are more happy than their fathers — it is these same people who always tell us that one slip in modern diplomacy, or one falsehood in modern journalism, may precipitate a towering and toppling horror of torture and panic far worse than anything the world has ever known before. It might well be asked, with a certain abstract curiosity, why our civilization must produce the very worst in the way of war, if it must produce the very best in the way of everything else.

I found another example of this strange parable of son, father, and grandfather in a book I happen to have read on a totally different subject. It is by Mr. Don Marquis, the eminent American writer, and contains many quaint and amusing ideas; though it rather tends to get into the rut of that sort of ridicule, by way of flippancies about Jehovah and Satan and saints and angels, which was rather funnier when it began in Voltaire than when it ended in Mark Twain. But what interests me about the book is this: that, while it resembles Mr. Shaw's *Black Girl in Search of God* in this sort of professional profanity, the writer is much more in earnest, and, therefore, much more lively and amusing, in emphasizing another idea, which has also been adumbrated by Mr. Shaw. I mean all that notion of Woman the Huntress, with terrified males fleeing before her nets and darts, or reluctant captives of her bow and spear. All of which is supposed to sound very modern, though in itself it is rather anti-feminist than anti-clerical. But I do not suppose it ever occurred to the anti-clerical author that this is exactly the attitude for which the world has reproached the more fanatical sort of clerics. It was precisely this "modern" view of Woman that really was expressed, and often exaggerated, by the first hermits fleeing into the desert, or the most fanatical monks only too near the borderline of the madness of the Manichees. To regard Woman wildly as an Unholy Terror, instead of rightly as a Holy Terror, was the abuse of asceticism; but it seems to have become quite useful and usual in modernity.

Here, again, the brilliant modern is bringing in as modernity something that was rather like one of the antics of antiquity; he is rushing back to his ascetical grandfather to escape from his romantic father. And the confusion in both cases is due to the same pathetic quality in his whole position. He is staggering about from century to century, because he has no real standing-ground of his own; and he has no standing-ground because he has destroyed anything on which he could stand. Modern youth has been blamed for bringing in a fashion of negro dances; but the one nigger antic I really regret is the dance which was once called "The Breakdown," which breaks down the dancing-floor and ends with the disappearance of the dancer and the dance. The objection to all this merely destructive thought is that eventually such destruction is self-destruction. The game of "breaking up the happy home," even when it is, really a bright and breezy pastime, is necessarily a brief pastime; and in the end it is the players who come out of the ruins, houseless and homeless, to become broken men. That is why the first thing to be felt for them is a profound and genuine pity; a pity that is not in the least an ironic term for patronage. As we should be genuinely sorry for tramps and paupers who are materially homeless, so we should be sorry for those who are morally homeless, and who suffer a philosophical starvation as deadly as physical starvation. Not only is it true that some of the most modern philosophers are only trying to prove that we cannot have a philosophy; it is even more true that the most modern among the physical scientists are only trying to prove that science is not physical. It would be even truer to say that some of them are trying to prove that science is not science. For science is only an old word for knowledge; and knowledge is exactly what some of the new scientists say we can never obtain. All this, right or wrong, has left that generation in an unprecedented degree unprepared with any axioms on which to act, or any tests on which it could really rely. And it is especially awkward, when the young man who has never learned anything except how to hate his own father and grandfather, is suddenly called upon to love all men like brothers.

XII About Poetry

THERE was printed recently a very reasonable and well-poised criticism on the subject of Modern Poetry. Perhaps it took some examples of Modern Poetry a little more seriously than I can manage to do; for the Moderns, who talk about irresistible temptations to love, do not always realize that they themselves torture us with irresistible temptations to laughter. But, on the whole, the critic justified himself in preserving his gravity; keeping a straight face (as the Chinese would say) in the presence of some extracts of a gravity-removing nature. He did not merely despise the past; he justified the present by appeals to the past. His thesis was broadly this: that when the particular inspiration of a poetical period is exhausted, those who begin the next period are almost bound to begin it with very bare and even bald forms of expression. He based a plausible argument on the case of Wordsworth, pointing out that the poet's first attempts to find a more natural style appeared as a very naked style — or lack of style. If we accept the assumption that it was no longer possible for a man to write in the style of Dryden, even if "he had the mind," it is certainly true in that case that a more direct and unadorned manner appeared very crude and clumsy.

It did strike Wordsworth's most cultured contemporaries as being not so much the appearance of a manner as the disappearance of manners. Wordsworth's new ballads were far less classical than the old ballads. Lines like "The more did his thick ankles swell" had not the natural dignity that belonged to most verses in "Chevy Chase" or "Sir Patrick Spens." It did seem like a change from natural dignity to natural indignity. And it is quite true, as the critic suggested, that this is very much the impression produced upon people of a more traditional culture by the ugliness of some modern verse. But it is perhaps an exaggeration to make Wordsworth a father and founder of the whole Romantic Movement, seeing that his friend Coleridge wrote a real old ballad in "The Ancient Mariner," with only one line "for which he was indebted to Mr. Wordsworth"; and seeing that Burns had already written and Byron was not far behind. And it marks something misleading in such sweeping classifications as "the Romantic School" that we have to class the jewelled casements of Keats with the blank and almost dead daylight of the first Lyrical Ballads. In short, the argument involves an ingenious suggestion, which in some aspects is really suggestive. But it is rather a gloomy and blasting prophecy to say that anybody who is to renew the life of English poetry must of necessity begin with writing such abominably bad poetry as some of the first poems of Wordsworth.

But another doubt stirred within me, after reading all such scientific analysis about the exhaustion of classic poetry in the eighteenth century, or of romantic poetry in the nineteenth century. My own early education, such as it was, dates from the very end of the nineteenth century; and it was a period in which people talked a great deal about religious doubt. Religious doubt produced a good deal of doubtful religion. We are now in a time when the world is more definitely divided into denials and affirmations, and is no longer merely enjoying its doubts. But I, for one, have found that one advantage of a man ceasing to doubt about religion is that he is much more free to doubt about everything else. All the nineteenth-century sceptics about the other world were dupes about this world. They accepted everything that was fashionable as if it were final; and the revolutionary romantics, who thought they would see the end of religion, never thought they would see the end of romance. Hence they encouraged this excessive habit of setting one style or school against another, and treated the victory of romanticism over classicism as the final victory of light over darkness. When there came in turn a victory of realism over romanticism, no people were more perplexed and irritated at the new revolution than the old revolutionists. Between them, it seems to me, they made far too much of all this grouping of literature under labels; and as they made too much of the label of Classical Poetry, and the label of Romantic Poetry, so they are now making far too much of the label of Modern Poetry.

What the world wants, what the world is waiting for, is not Modern Poetry or Classical Poetry or Neo-Classical Poetry — but Good Poetry. And the dreadful disreputable doubt, which stirs in my own sceptical mind, is a doubt about whether it would really matter much what style a poet chose to write in, in any period, so long as he wrote Good Poetry. Criticisms like that which I am criticizing always abound in phrases like “We can no longer use the romantic form,” or “The atmosphere of the age forbids us to appeal to the eighteenth-century tradition,” or “Modern poets, being forced to avoid the Pre-Raphaelite appeal,” and so on. Now it is certainly true that we cannot write like Keats or Rossetti; at least I cannot, and it is just barely possible that you cannot. But the diabolical doubt still haunts me, about whether we would not if we could. Suppose a man were to produce, let us say, an imaginative fragment that was really as good as “Kubla Khan,” and more or less in the same diction as “Kubla Khan” — is it really true that we should not admire it? Is it not even probable, on the whole, that he would admire it? Would he really say to himself: “Well, I have written these lines that seem haunting and resounding; I have created these images that seem magnetic and full of beckoning significance; I have composed something that would have made me as great as Coleridge, if I had lived in the time of Coleridge. But, of course, I shall instantly put it on the fire, because it is not obviously dated 1936-7. I should not dream of publishing it, because the atmosphere of the age forbids me to write good poetry in that particular manner. It is my duty to leave off, and begin to write bad poetry, in the hope that it may evolve into a real twentieth-century style”?

I am sorry, but the doubt still hagrides me about whether any human being would actually behave like that. Suppose somebody did write something that was melodious in the manner of “The Garden of Proserpine,” or moving in the manner of “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” or even pictorial in the manner of “The Lady of Shalott,” would he really drop all his dreams and be deaf to all his voices, for fear somebody should call him a Pre-Raphaelite? I have a dark and horrid suspicion that most modern poets have not resisted any such temptations, because they have not had any such inspirations. But if the inspirations were real inspirations of their kind, or of any kind, would anybody who loves poetry care a curse about whether the modern poets were being sufficiently modern?

Note that I am not saying for a moment that new writers must not try new styles. I am resisting the veto that they must not try old styles. I am questioning this incessantly repeated suggestion, that certain particular images or cadences or conceptions have become impossible to any literary man, because he has the misfortune to live at this particular moment by the clock. It seems to me to exaggerate our slavery to a season or a fashion, and to be a part of that sullen fatalism which may certainly be found in much modern poetry, but which is not poetical, but only modern. It is an irony that those who would most isolate art, in the manner that used to be called art for art’s sake, are generally those who are most soaked and stagnantly drugged by the philosophy of their time. After all, “Lucy Gray” is not better than “Lycidas” even now; and I suspect some classic lines by Binyon or Belloc will last till they are no longer old. What about the new verses when they are no longer new?

XIII About Blondes

PRESENTED in very large letters on the leader page of a leading daily paper, I find the statement that “the problem that besets the most limpid of all America’s blonde actresses . . . is too many riches.” Gazing at this announcement, I fell into a trance of reflection, like those in which many modern writers have seen visions of the future. But I was only wondering in a vague way what an average society, supposing it to be restored to an average sanity, would really make of a sentence like that — if it were preserved like a papyrus or a hieroglyphic in some museum of the future. It is true, and our remote descendants might from other sources have discovered it to be true, that Americans in the nineteenth and even twentieth century have had a curious passion for competitions. Nothing is more popular as a topic in the transatlantic Press than the action of somebody who has been insane enough to select the Six Best Songs or the Seven Best Sonnets or the Ten Best Tales of True Romance. In some moral matters Americans have a real enthusiasm for equality; and their democratic instincts are very deep and will not easily be uprooted, even in these undemocratic days. But in other intellectual matters, perhaps because they really care less about intellectual matters, they may be said to have a passion for inequality. That is, they have a passion for classification; and they treat it as a sort of prodigiously and portentously solemn sport. Some complain that their sport is not sporting. I would not go so far; but I think it is even truer of them than of us that their sport is not sportive. Therefore they enter with excitement upon these scientific sports, which are supposed to deal with statistics and averages, but draw their inner life from an intense love of comparison and competition. All these scientific judgments are really modelled on the simple artistic judgment, which I once heard from a most charming American amid the landscape of the Alps: “Well, I can’t see, when you’ve seen the highest mountain in Switzerland, what you want to see any more for.” In his view the various Alpine peaks had run a sort of race, and the peak that reached the highest point was superior in that and every other respect. When we really understand that, we can sympathize with pie-eating contests or men sitting for weeks on end in a tree — or even with less intelligent enterprises, like committees for Eugenic legislation or

Intelligence Tests designed to discover whether immigrants from the countries of Dante or Copernicus are or are not human beings.

So far all is clear; or shall we say limpid? This appetite for competition and comparison is a national characteristic like any other; sometimes inspiriting, sometimes amusing; we can sympathize with it, and our posterity might in some degree sympathize with it. So long as it measures the height of foreign mountains or the contour of foreigners' skulls, it is at least measuring things that are measurable. And there is a good deal of innocent fun in it, even when it is applied where it is obviously inapplicable; to measure things that are in their nature immeasurable. It might be quite amusing to capture every wandering Pegasus, ridden by every lonely poet, and organize them all with weights and handicaps as a horse-race. It might be entertaining to record that the sea-shanty of The Drunken Sailor has closed in a dead heat with the *Dies Irae*, or that "Sally in Our Alley" has beaten "I'll Sing Thee Songs of Araby" by a length and a half. I have no very clear idea what it means, but those who organize it certainly mean no harm. Also, to do them justice, they are generally thinking about things that are to some extent practical and real; such as popularity or power of emotional effectiveness on particular occasions; sometimes, I fear, they are thinking about things still more practical, such as money. Up to a point, I am willing to be excited when they discuss what is the most popular song or the most beautiful woman; though I never saw the picture of a prizewinner in any Beauty Competition without thinking that I knew several better-looking women living in my own street. I should therefore accept, with a slight sigh, the statement that somebody was the most beautiful of all America's blonde actresses. But surely it is by some more curious convolutions of thought that anybody can reach so firm and fixed a belief that she is "the most limpid of all America's blonde actresses."

It seems to be assumed that all America's blonde actresses are engaged in a fierce competition for limpidity — whatever that may be. Not without bitter rivalries and breathless jealousies has the peculiar palm been won. Challenges have been issued to the multitudinous towns and villages of the vast prairies and the wide, open spaces where blondes are blondes. Indignant families have declared that our Sadie is as limpid as any of these dames down east; and Clytie has told her sisters that she means to be just as limpid as she knows how. The cry of "Limpid is my middle name" has resounded from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and numberless aspirants have assured themselves that they are just too limpid to live — before this tremendous trial of strength was decided. Possibly its echoes may have been heard even in foreign lands, and inspired the blondes of other races; except, I presume, the negro race, among whom blondes are said to be comparatively rare. The French soldier, sinking to repose to the charming tune of “Aupres de ma blonde qui fait bon dormi,” may rouse himself with a start of suspicion and hiss the fatal question: “But is she limpid?” The German Hitlerite, now prostrate in worship of the Blonde Beast, which is his version of the Blonde Beauty, may wonder for a moment whether it is wholly, utterly, and completely limpid; which, to judge by the new German ideals as explained in the old German literary style, it is not. But in that respect the most obscure German diction is not much more bewildering than our own journalistic diction. What are we to say about that indescribable sort of newspaper writing to be noted in the example I have given? What in the world does all this sort of thing mean; and what are the vague and vast implications behind it? Why is the writer so frightfully certain that the lady is the most limpid of all American blondes, and what precisely does he mean by the epithet? The present age may be producing the most limpid blondes, but hardly the most limpid writers.

The truth is that the sort of journalism which now specially professes to be fresh, up to date, on the spot, and as new as the latest news, is, in a very peculiar sense, a residuum of stale things out of the past; an accumulation of antiquated associations of which the very origin is lost, and more like the end of everything than the beginning of anything. It is always using terms that have grown colourless through oblivion of their original context, which are now used rather with a hazy appreciation of their sound than a logical appreciation of their sense. I have called it indescribable; and it is really very difficult to describe. It goes far beyond what was once condemned as journalese, in the sense of being jaunty and even vulgar. It is a sort of jargon drawn from all sorts of languages, some of them aesthetic or scientific in origin; all these scraps of culture are now loose in the world; but, though everything is loose, nothing is lost, except the tradition of how to treat them reasonably. We have turned scientific language into a sort of slang; the sort of slang that is used to save trouble. Anybody can talk about problems and nobody need bother about solutions; anybody is free to talk about a complex so long as he can ignore its complexity; anybody can borrow a word from the studios or the workshops, so long as he does not pay it back by making any study or doing any work.

Some people seem ready to call this limpid; but I should be inclined to call it limp. The increasing inconclusiveness of most articles in the Press and elsewhere seems to me the most disquieting mark of our mental development. It is not found only in sentimental and sensational headlines, such as that I have quoted; indeed, the end of such an article is even more limp than the beginning. We may yet live to regret the passing of the political party slanging-match or the mere newspaper sensation. They were at least limpid.

XIV About S.T.C.

AT this time many are writing about Coleridge; and there is no writer about whom it is so difficult to write. Coleridge was a remarkable man in many departments, about which writing would not be so difficult; the difficulty is in dealing with the department in which he did certain things, a very few things, that make it essential to write about him at all. He was and he achieved many things that could be criticized with some fruitfulness and profit. He was a transcendental theorist who came to be of some importance as a theologian; and he is the fountain of some very fine thinking among the liberal theologians of the old school, like Maurice and Robertson. He was a figure of some political and historical interest, since he began with an enthusiasm for the French Revolution and ended with an enthusiasm for the German metaphysics; and, of the two great catastrophes, I personally prefer the first. He was a great Character; one of those men of whom numberless anecdotes are told, chiefly to the effect that his conversation was fascinating and continuous; some found it too fascinating; some even found it too continuous. There is the famous story of the man whom Coleridge buttonholed in the street and proceeded to talk to about Plato at some length; whereupon the man, having an appointment, delicately and tactfully cut off the button and went about his business. Returning later by the same street, he saw Coleridge still holding the button and still talking about Plato. He wrote a number of minor works, generally dismissed in the discussion of his genius, which are decidedly clever and ought not to be dismissed so easily. For instance, in the days of his French Revolutionary enthusiasm, he wrote a satiric poem against Pitt, which I still think very fine; but partly perhaps because I am all in favour of people writing satiric poems against Pitt. This poem, as everybody knows, is a masque of Fire, Famine and Slaughter; in which these plagues of mankind attribute their power to Pitt, but two of them eventually turn upon him. Fire, however, amiably observes:

I alone am faithful; I Cling to him everlastingly.

There is no liberal theology about that.

I repeat, therefore, that there are many things about him that could be profitably criticized. Unfortunately, there are one or two things that cannot be criticized. They can only be quoted. Nor have I any intention of filling up the blanks of this essay by quoting them. But the point about Coleridge is that the peaks of his imagination, though few and rare, are absolutely above criticism. They live by that mysterious life of the imagination, which is something much more terrible than an anarchy. For it has laws of its own which man has never been able to turn into a code. But anybody who understands poetry knows when poetry has fulfilled those laws; as certainly as a mathematician knows when a mathematical calculation is correct. Only, the mathematician can explain, more or less, why the answer is exactly right; and the lover of poetry can never explain why the word or the image is exactly right. It is obvious, on the face of it, that “Kubla Khan” is a piece of pure nonsense. There is no earthly connexion — we might perhaps accentuate the phrase no *earthly* connexion — between the architectural tastes of Kubla and the misfortunes of a lady who was wailing for her demon lover; and still less connexion between this tragedy and the rejoicings round a gentleman who on honey-dew had fed and drunk the milk of paradise. Yet any mind moving by the laws of the imagination knows that all these three things are one thing, and the poem is one poem. The poet is riding the air on the imagination alone; and his Pegasus has wings and no feet. But almost all that has been attempted, in the way of analysing those imaginative laws, has been done by some metaphysician, who has feet and no wings.

It seems to me that the central genius of a man like Coleridge is not a thing to be dealt with by critics at all. If they really had anything worth saying about such a poet, they would write it in poetry. It is the curse upon all critics that they must write in prose. It is the specially blighting and blasting curse upon some of them, that they have to write in philosophical or psychological or generally analytical prose. I have never read a page of such criticism, however clear and clever, which brought me the most remote echo of the actual sound of the poetry or the power of poetical images, which are like magic talismans. Therefore, in writing about a man like Coleridge, we are driven back upon secondary things; upon his second best work, or upon the second- or third-rate controversies aroused by that work. In that sense, of course, there are any number of second-rate things to be said of Coleridge. It is suggested, for instance, that the abnormal or enormous enlargement of his imagination was due to a dirty habit he had of taking opium. I will confess that I am sceptical about the divinity of the drug; or the power of any drug to act like a god, and make a man other than he really is. I will merely suggest that if exactly the same quantity of opium had been given to a number of Coleridge's contemporaries — let us say to George the Third, to Mr. Bentham, to the Duke of Wellington, to Mr. Gifford, to Beau Brummel or to William Pitt himself, not to mention Mr. Perceval — I gravely doubt whether any or all of these persons together would have produced a line of "Kubla Khan." It was a pity that Coleridge took opium; because it dissolved his great intellect in dreams, when he was perhaps more fitted than most men of his time to have made some structural logical system, that should have reconciled Revolution and Religion. But "Christabel" and "The Ancient Mariner" were written by Mr. Coleridge and not by Mr. Opium. The drug may have accelerated or made easy a work which some weaknesses in his moral character might have made him avoid or delay, because they were laborious; but there is nothing creative about a narcotic. The point is perhaps worthy of remark; for nobody who knows the nineteenth-century literature can fail to notice that there was a curious effort, under the surface, to make such Asiatic drugs as normal as European drinks. It is a sort of subterranean conspiracy that ranges from the *Confessions* of De Quincey to the *Moonstone* of Wilkie Collins. Fortunately, tradition was too strong for it; and Christian men continued to prefer the grape of life to the poppy of death.

Then it would be easy to add, upon this secondary plane, that Coleridge did really suffer from other misleading influences besides opium. "The Ancient Mariner" is probably one of the most original poems that were ever written; and, like many original things, it is almost antiquarian. Like most Romantics reviving the Gothic without understanding the mediaeval, he carried archaism to lengths that were almost comic. I am not sure that he did not call the Mariner a Marinere. All that affects us as too reminiscent of the Olde English Tea-Shoppe. A more serious difficulty was that he turned too sharply from France to Germany. It was very natural that a Romantic should take refuge in the German forests, and still more in the German fairy-tales. It was a more unfortunate adventure that he took refuge with the German philosophers. They encouraged him, as did the drug, in a sort of misty infinity, which confused his real genius for definition and deduction. It was in every way excellent, of course, that the great German literature of the great German age, the age of Goethe and of Lessing, should be opened up to English readers; and perhaps it could have been done by Coleridge more calmly and luminously than it was afterwards done by Carlyle. But if

Goethe was the great and good influence of Germany, Kant was on the whole the great and bad influence. These two great Germans offer any number of aspects to be admired or criticized; but, on the whole, Goethe made Germany a part of Europe, while Kant cut it off from Europe, following a wild light of its own, heaven knows where. Coleridge the philosopher can be criticized on various grounds; including the ground that he did not know the great philosopher of Christendom that was behind him. But Coleridge the poet cannot be criticized at all.

XV About the Past

NEW movements in literature are those which copy the last century but one. If they copy the last century, they are old-fashioned; but if it is quite clear that they are much more than a hundred years old, they are entirely fresh and original. It is true that there are certain literary men, claiming to inaugurate literary movements, who try to avoid the difficulty by various methods; as by writing their poetry upside down, or using words that consist entirely of consonants; or publishing a book of entirely blank pages, with a few asterisks in the middle to show that there is a break in the narrative. These or similar scribes are conjectured to be trying to copy the literature of the next century. They may freely be left for that century — to forget. Moreover, parallel perversities, if not exactly the same ones, are also to be found scattered through the centuries of the past. Of such a kind, for instance, were the Renaissance games or sports which consisted of shortening or lengthening the lines of poetry, so as to make the whole poem a particular shape, such as the shape of a heart or a cross or an eagle. Anyhow, if we eliminate a few such eccentric experimentalists, who think they anticipate the intelligence of the future by being unintelligible in the present, the general rule about change and rejuvenation in literature is much as I have stated it. It is essential for the pioneer and prophet, not so much to go forward very far, as to go back far enough. The general rule is to skip a century, as some hereditary features are said to skip a generation. There is something very odd about this system of alternation, black and white like a chessboard. It is as if every man always hated his father and adored his grandfather.

About some epochs of culture, all this is fairly well known and fairly widely admitted. Most people realize, for instance, that the Romantics of the nineteenth century were appealing back to the more purely poetical poets of the seventeenth century, against the almost prosaic poets of the eighteenth. Indeed, Romanticism, though it so often went with Revolutionism, was in its very nature a more general appeal to the past. Perhaps the most genuinely and practically effective popularizer of the new Romanticism was Sir Walter Scott, whose truest title is The Antiquary. But the same is true, of course, of the other Romantics who were not, as Scott was, personally Tory and traditional. Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" was taken as the very type of a new and original and even fantastic form in literature. Yet the “Ancient Mariner” has a form, and it happens to be an entirely antiquated form. The Ancient Mariner was a very Ancient Mariner. Even Byron was always looking backward, and he died not for the modern Liberals, but for the ancient Greeks. Had he been a true Progressive, and observed the gradual improvement in all things, by the substitution of higher for lower civilization, he would, of course, have preferred to reverence the more recent phenomenon of the Turks. But, generally speaking, it is true to say that the modern Romantics were not really looking to the sunrise; they were pursuing a most gorgeous and glorious sunset, of which the last trail and after-glow vanished with Crashaw and the Cavalier mystics. The men of the nineteenth century were following the men of the seventeenth century; the last century but one. Anyhow, the last century is the last century men will follow.

What is not so clearly seen is that the same is true of the twentieth century; and the twentieth century also is copying the last century but one. In short, it is copying the eighteenth century, and especially all that was most hated and condemned in the work of the eighteenth century. This is specially true of two outstanding features which many have thought to be a great deal too outstanding. They specially imitate, among the elements of the eighteenth century, its coarseness and its coldness. I do not necessarily use these terms merely as terms of abuse; it is much more important that the new writers themselves will use them as terms of praise. They would describe the coarseness as candour and the coldness as detachment; and in this again the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries would meet. But we get no farther in such a matter by selecting terms of praise or blame for an objective fact of history. A young writer to-day does not admit that he is less educated because he uses the words which old writers learned in the gutter and the greasy tavern. He does not admit that he is less humanistic because his characters behave in as inhuman a manner as the tricky and treacherous and heartless lovers in the old cynical comedies.

These new writers are making a new attempt to find civilization along the old rationalistic road, which is now nearly two hundred years old, rather than along the romantic road, which is only a hundred. Allowing for the inevitable but incidental difference in the details of the day, which have to be discussed, the spirit of the Very Modern Young Man is the spirit of a man in a three-cornered hat and a powdered wig. Much as may be said about disorder in the arts, there is another side to the recent realism of literature. It has its own kind of neatness, just as it has its own kind of nastiness. The same can be said of the detailed drawings of Hogarth. Even its extravagances are more often satires and less often visions. Mr. Aldous Huxley much more clearly suggests a return to Swift than an extension of Yeats. Mr. Yeats will not care about that, partly because he is too great a man to care, and partly because nobody has a finer admiration for Swift than he. But obviously the ruthlessness of *Brave New World* is more like the ruthlessness of Gulliver's Travels than it is like the more optimistic ruthlessness of the nineteenth-century visits to Utopia or the Earthly Paradise, in books like *News from Nowhere* or New Worlds for Old. It is equally obvious, in the debates about sex, that men like Mr. Aldous Huxley, following on men like Mr. Bernard Shaw, have been merely rebelling against that Romance which was itself a rebellion; rebellion against the realism and common sense of the age of rapiers and snuff-boxes. Much that is called immoral in a modern novel might have been called highly moral in an eighteenth-century tract, warning the young of the close connexion between the girls and the gallows. Sentimentalism is a mere catchword; but, anyhow, we do not entirely solve the puzzle we call Progress by looking at the pictures of The Rake's Progress or The Harlot's Progress. Those who despise sentimentalism now have rather a tendency to talk as if nobody had ever despised sentimentalism before. And so the rather feverish youthful genius in Chelsea or Bloomsbury feels that he alone has flung off all the fetters of all the ages when he braces himself with a bold effort to say something daring and destructive and then says exactly what Dr. Johnson would have said.

Nobody supposes such parallels are complete. Nobody supposes that such comparisons are concerned with mere copies. It does not follow that the new writer has not something in him that is really new; or, what is much more important, something that is really his own. The point is that such inspiration as he does invoke does not come from the newer things, but rather from the older things. The poets of the Sitwell family, for instance, have been both chaffed and flattered for introducing newer things; but, in fact, they are particularly fond of the older things. Their taste in gimcracks is exactly the eighteenth-century taste; when one of them gives Apollo a "golden peruke," we see a hundred embroidered pictures or painted tiles in old mansions and museums; and Miss Edith Sitwell has written what would be the best, if it were not the only, sustained eulogy on Pope.

XVI About Meredith

I HAPPENED to meet again, recently, after many years, a very brilliant and distinguished Italian professor who specializes in the study of English literature. And almost the first words he spoke to me, with more than Italian vivacity, and even agitation, were: “What has happened to George Meredith?”

He said it as if George Meredith were still alive, but had been missing for three days from his Surrey home; as if fears were entertained that he might have fallen off Box Hill or been battered featureless by the traffic in Guildford High Street; as if all England were searching for the missing novelist and Scotland Yard was believed to be in possession of a clue. But I knew my Italian friend’s meaning much better. What puzzled him was not that all England was searching for George Meredith, but rather that all England was not searching for George Meredith; or even searching for George Meredith’s books. And it gave me an increased respect for the acumen and vigilance with which he followed our island literature, to know that he had noticed this very curious blank and even oblivion that has followed on so much admitted brilliance and fame. To any one who remembers, as I do, the days when Meredith was not merely the idol of the intellectuals, but regarded by all the intelligent as one out of the two or three really great men who could be regarded as leaders of the literature of England in the face of Europe, there is something very extraordinary about this capricious and sudden silence. It is all the more extraordinary because of the ideas for which Meredith stood and the qualities which his admirers chiefly admired. It seemed to most of us, in our boyhood, that he was not only the greatest literary artist then present, but that he was prophetically the first literary artist of the future. He was not only the greatest English author alive, but the only English author who would live. And yet he has not really lived; certainly he has not yet really triumphed. He was the champion of all the things that were expected to triumph; nay, the things that many people tell us have already triumphed. He was, for instance, the champion of Feminism. I do not say that his “Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt” could actually have been sung as a marching song by the well-drilled battalions of Mrs. Pankhurst. For Meredith’s literary style did not always lend itself to being used as a roaring chorus for the march or the camp-fire. But, in its philosophy, it expressed almost everything that the Suffragettes wanted to say, and was, in form, more philosophical and intellectual than most of the things they did say. He anticipated the reaction against the Rhodes and Rudyard Kipling type of Imperialism, and urged the sympathetic comprehension of the Celt against the more arrogant nineteenth-century nonsense about the universal superiority of the Anglo-Saxon. True, he was enough of a nineteenth-century man to trace these differences almost entirely along the lines of race, and to be entirely ignorant, for instance, of the extent to which they followed the lines of religion. But that was not so much because he had the limitations of a nineteenth-century man as because he had the even narrower limitations of a free-thinker.

Anyhow, in a score of ways, the modern world has followed the Meredithean model for the world, and one could have sworn that he was safe for a much frequented shrine in the Pantheon of Progress. A much more frequented shrine, in fact, is that of Thomas Hardy, who was also a free-thinker, but a much less practical friend to freedom. Hardy was, indeed, full of the sense of numberless things that ought to be done, but it was somewhat softened and mellowed by a persistent doubt about whether they could be done. But Meredith was the sort of nineteenth-century Liberal who was full of a flaming certainty that they would be done; and they were done. But he has no particular credit now for having helped to do them. And it seems, in some strange sense, that it is Meredith himself who is done. I would not disgrace my own older generation by saying for a moment that he is done for, but there seem to be large numbers of the newer generation who act on the assumption that he is done with.

I am well aware, of course, that these political and sociological aspects are quite secondary in the estimate of a great master of imaginative fiction; a man who could create men, and especially women. But such things as his failure to figure, even as a memory, in what many would call the victory of women really is part of a whole comparison that is something of a puzzle. Nothing was more puzzling, for instance, than the strange story of the two funerals, the funeral of Meredith and the funeral of Hardy. Enthusiasts, if I remember rightly, demanded a grave for Meredith in Westminster Abbey; and it was refused. Enthusiasts demanded a grave for Hardy in Westminster Abbey; and it was at least partially, or by some compromise, granted. I cannot imagine why. If it were a question of literary fame, Meredith stood then even higher than Hardy. If it were a question of incongruity of religion or irreligion, the objection was infinitely stronger against Hardy than against Meredith. Hardy, with all his virtues, or possibly as one of his virtues, was quite frankly provocative atheist and pessimist. Meredith was not a provocative atheist and not a pessimist at all. A man might read five volumes of Meredith and not find a single direct taunt like that about the President of the Immortals delighting in the torture of Tess.

It was not so much that Meredith did not worship God as that he did worship Nature. And perhaps that is where the breach has come between him and the new sceptics, who are often more bitterly at war with Nature than with God. There are even hints in the work of later sceptics, like Mr. Aldous Huxley and others, that, if they were absolutely driven to the alternative, they would rather take refuge with the supernatural than with the natural. Perhaps Meredith inherited even too much of that sentiment, which was spread all over that century, from Wordsworth to Whitman, that the earth is itself a healer and all its green and growing things are a hope. Yet Meredith was sound and sincere in his own particular version of this vision — that of the wilderness as a sort of garden of medicinal herbs; nor is he proved wrong by the mere fact of another generation of the young, with quite exceptionally sour stomachs, thinking that the physic is nasty. But even if this be granted as a fair difference of opinion, it does not explain the decline of interest in all that once made Meredith most interesting. It does not explain the lack of memory or allusion concerning the real business of the novelist as a novelist. His character drawing surely remains unquestionably lively and sympathetic. Moreover, though he delighted in a sort of sophistication, it is by no means true that he only wrote about the sophisticated. Following the sad habit of the times, it is long since I have read the greater part of Meredith; but I think the thing that stands out with most startling veracity in my memory is his description of ordinary schoolboys. I shall never forget the moment when some boy — Harry Richmond, I think — is challenged by another boy to repeat the word “fool,” and then to repeat it twenty times. And, “with a seriousness of which only boys and such barbarians are capable,” Harry actually recited the word with precisely the required number of repetitions. There is nothing perverse or euphuistic about that; and we are always certain, in Meredith’s books at least, that boys will be boys. The truth is that Meredith was both full-blooded and also foppish and even foolish. He was affected because he was vain, but he was vain because he was natural. We might understand him better as an artist of the Renaissance.

XVII About Political Creeds

As I am myself a Liberal without any Liberal Party; a Little-Englander in the sense that I care more about England than about Newfoundland or Tasmania; a Radical in all my instincts in the general social quarrels of our plutocracy; an ex-Socialist who is still enough of a Socialist to be a sort of revolutionist, and to regret that the Socialists have become as respectable as the Prime Minister; a Distributist who denies that any of the nineteenth-century parties of squires and merchants had the remotest notion of what was wrong with the nineteenth century, especially in England (for what was wrong was the absence of peasants, who are equally opposed to merchants and squires) — in short, since I am a disreputable demagogic sort of person, holding that most reforms are too slow rather than too fast — from all this it will be easily and naturally deduced that my favourite politician is Mr. Baldwin. The deduction may not be swift and obvious; but it is sound. When I say my favourite politician, I mean in so far as any politician can be anybody's favourite. I do not take the taste with tremendous solemnity; because our politicians do not control our politics. Even the best of them are forced to a continuous compromise by the pressure of private interests, which are also public monopolies; and it is these commercial monopolies that rule the State. But if I were in practical politics (which God forbid), and if they involved me in that particular problem of party allegiance, I should support Mr. Baldwin for all I was worth, or rather for all he is worth — which is not a little. I should support him even though I disagree with him; on the ground that at least he is more liberal than the Liberals, more social than the Socialists, and immeasurably more patriotic than the Imperialists. I should support him through thick and thin; for I think the opposing theories are pretty thin and the impudence a bit thick. I should support him especially against his loyal and devoted followers.

But I value him very specially for this: that I do think he is the one politician alive who has some inner understanding of the English people. They are exceedingly difficult to understand. So far from being merely bluff and sturdy, as they used to imagine, they are by far the most subtle and complex of all the great nations of Christendom. Since the fall of the Stuarts, with the beginning of the eighteenth century, their system has worked with a quite abnormal sort of anonymity and evasiveness. At that date they set up a king who was not allowed to govern anything and an aristocracy which in reality governed everything, but which went on saying louder and louder that it governed nothing and was not an aristocracy at all. All our chief official figures are unofficial; they are in that sense outsiders. The Prime Minister is an outsider, for he is unknown to the British Constitution. The Speaker is so called because he is the one Member who never speaks. The Cabinet carries with it the suggestion of a secret meeting; or men hiding in a corner, or even locked up in a box. For the only lawful power was in the Privy Council, which never meets at all. The power has passed to something much privier than a Privy Council. These are only instances taken at random; these and a thousand other things illustrate the strange quality I have mentioned; the quality of evasiveness; we might say of escape. And the most singular form of it is that to which I have already referred, the curious anonymity of aristocracy. For two centuries, and at least up to very lately, England has been a State of a special historical type. It was a type very common in mercantile and seafaring States; as in the Republic of Venice and the Republic of Holland. One feature of these Republics was that they were not republican — in the modern sense of democratic. But the feature of England was more odd and unique. It was, in effect, that aristocrats could do anything except call themselves aristocrats. They must be very careful only to call themselves gentlemen. It may seem a very vague and irrational understanding, but upon that understanding rested the safety of a vast and often victorious system; and, for some time at least, the greatness of England.

Now when the quarrel began about the Black-shirts and the Red Peril in England, Mr. Baldwin said one very profound and penetrating thing. Nobody else said it; and nobody seems to have taken any particular notice of it. What he said was, in substance, this, or words to the same effect. Whatever you may think about rival theories or systems, the fact will remain that Communists generally are poor men and Fascists generally are not. He was right; and it is unfortunately the fact, in England, that a fight between them will seem to be simply a fight of rich men as such against poor men as such. And *that* is precisely the one thing that the policy of a popular gentry must avoid as a matter of life and death. Cynically speaking, it may have any amount of general injustice, in the impersonal pressure of one economic class upon another. But if you can actually take a snapshot of the squire kicking the poacher, if you can prove the practical occurrence of a banker bashing a beggar on the head — then you explode the whole generous fiction on which the popularity of a gentry reposes. Anybody who does not understand that does not understand the English people; and Mr. Baldwin does.

It is not so with the same factions of Fascists and Communists on the Continent. For on the Continent the traditions of a conflict of ideas have come down continuously from the Crusades and the religious wars and the wars of the French Revolution. And the intellectual vision, even the enemy's intellectual vision, is often vivid enough to make men forget the mere facts of wealth and poverty. When a Crusader fought with a Saracen, it might happen that the Crusader was a poor knight or squire driven to the wars by sheer poverty and the other a great Sheik with whole processions of camels and concubines. Or it might equally happen that the Crusader was a rich and powerful baron and the Moslem a poor and ragged Bedouin. But it was in the whole temper of the time to think of it first as a fight between Christendom and Islam. So, even in England, as late as the genuine struggle of Roundheads and Cavaliers, the Cavalier might be a great noble like Newcastle, or he might be a nameless yeoman from loyal Hereford or Cornwall. The Roundhead might be a tinker like Bunyan, though he was quite as likely to be a Puritan aristocrat rich with the abbey lands, or a wealthy London merchant. But there remained some true feeling that it was the anointed King against the Parliament — or the Saints. So in Europe still, whatever be the facts, it is felt as a fight between a Fascist who does believe in the Corporative State and a Communist who does believe in the Communist State. But, for good or evil, we have never got ideas worked into the popular intelligence, as on the Continent. We have forgotten the fight about ethics, and are left with the depressing substitute of economics. With us it would really be a Class War; but with them it is only the last of the Wars of Religion.

XVIII About Shirts

NOBODY seems to have seen, in the current tendency to express party politics by means of Shirts, a new opportunity for expressing them in the shades of Shirts. Hitherto colours have been used heraldically, in the manner of people blazoning or brandishing flags; and not aesthetically, in the manner of people choosing or matching neckties. Yet it would seem an excellent opportunity for a thoughtful citizen to suggest the idea that he is Rather Nazi or Not Quite Communist. A wise and well-balanced Hitlerite, if such a monster is allowed to survive, might express his doubts by having his new brown shirt fade faintly into the old field-grey, or having it shot with the richer colour of the Red International. An Irishman disposed towards compromise (if such a creature be among the varieties of nature) might very well gratify General O'Duffy by wearing a blue shirt, but introduce into it a tint of peacock-blue, verging upon, peacock-green, to indicate his essentially unbroken loyalty to the more normal national badge and to the Wearing of the Green. I fear it is only too true that a great many people now calling themselves Socialists ought to be dressed not in red, but in pink. And though I am no admirer of Bolshevism, I am still less of an admirer of pink. Pink seems to me the essentially false and negative colour; because it is the dilution of something that is rich and glowing or nothing. I do not object to pale blue, because it is sky-blue, and I graciously grant permission to the University of Cambridge to continue to employ the emblem of its traditional tint. But the sky is in its nature pale and translucent; it is the vehicle of light; it is sometimes actually white and blank; and the infusion of a faint and rather cold colour like blue is appropriate to it. But pink suggests nothing but the horrible and blasphemous idea of wine with too much water in it. Pink is the withering of the rose and the fading of the fire; pink is mere anaemia in the blood of the universe. And there is a merely pink humanitarianism which I dislike even more than the real Red Communism. It is not so honest; it is not so genuinely angry or so justly angry; and it is ultimately every bit as negative and destructive of the strong colours and definite shapes of any great historical culture. It will not weaken civilization the less because it is too watery to burn it in a night; for you cannot set fire to a town with pink torches or pink artillery. This cold and colourless sentimentalism none the less threatens the world like a slow and crawling Deluge. It especially threatens the colours of the world. It is a wash-out.

With this melancholy exception of the pink social reformers, however, it is curious to notice that the difference of shirts, with its opportunity for the difference of shades, has appeared at the very moment when such fine shades are most furiously and impatiently disregarded. The old rosettes of Buff and Blue were all cut to one pattern and coloured with one dye; as if to make it impossible for men to express personality in party politics or to effect compromise in party divisions. There was no green in the Orangeman's eye, or in the fine shades of the Tory True Blue. And yet, in the actual centre of our parliamentary politics, the colours ran into each other much more easily than the vivid patches of the patchwork Europe of to-day. Men were solemnly brought up as Whigs and Tories; but there was much less difference between the Whig and the Tory than there is to-day between a Fascist who has been a Syndicalist and a Communist who has been an Anarchist. Our rigid party system did not need to stretch; because the two parties were already stationed in close proximity. An older analogy than the comparison of flags and shirts, of uniforms and underclothing, can be found in the more or less unique architectural structure of the English House of Commons. I do not refer to what is, perhaps, the most English thing about it; that it is actually built on the assumption that a large number of its members will never turn up. I mean that we have again the paradox that there is most apparent division of parties exactly where there is least real division of principles. The Continental Parliaments are nearly all of them arranged on the principle of a Curve of Relativity; almost like that of Einstein. The seats are arranged in a crescent only tending to two extremes at its two horns; the positions known as the Extreme Right and the Extreme Left. But any number of people can sit left of the Right and right of the Left. And I believe these intermediate seats are or were chosen in a more or less symbolic manner, to show that a member is more Radical than one group, but less Radical than another; as a man might say he was more Socialist than Mr. Lansbury but less Socialist than Mr. Maxton. For nobody could possibly be less Socialist than Mr. MacDonald.

This method of relative Left and Right really is the sort of thing that bears some resemblance to a Communist having a red shirt and a Socialist a pink shirt. That is, it allows of degree and fine shades of individuality. On the other hand, the very shape of the British Houses of Parliament seems designed for the most drastic party discipline and the most unwavering party choice. There are only two sides in the parliamentary chamber; as there were primarily only two sides in the parliamentary system. They face each other stiffly, like two lines deployed in battle; yet, as a matter of fact, there has been very much less battle. It was in the Continental council chambers, curved to follow every gradation of thought and allowing for all compromises between all extremes, that desks have been most frequently broken, ink-bottles most vigorously hurled, riots most frequently prolonged into the night, and duels most eagerly appointed for the morning.

I think this worth noting just now, because it confirms something I said recently about a real fallacy in the particular fashion now seeking to improve upon Parliament. I hope nobody will accuse me of the fatuous official optimism which still talks as if Parliament could not be improved. Whatever else we may think of the practical architecture of St. Stephen’s chamber, I trust no sane people differ about the vastness and vista of the room for improvement. Indeed, one of the very worst things about Parliament is the parliamentary defence of Parliament. Politicians are using the same silly tricks of smug secrecy and evasion, which they used over the most trivial intrigues in the institution, as a belated and blundering defence of the institution itself. They have never had any notion of defending a thing, except proving it to be indefensible by leaving it undefended. They say nothing about the real distrust now so widely felt, when financial corruption has been followed by financial collapse. But there is something to be said for Parliament; at least there is something to be said against the Fascists who would merely destroy Parliament.

And it is expressed in the paradox that the very mildest of all party systems was expressed in the military regimentation of its benches or the heraldic fixity of its badges. Foreigners had fights, which were not designed and occurred from time to time. We had a sham fight, which was designed, and which occurred all the time. But behind that sham fight was much more of unity; possibly far too much unity. Therefore the Totalitarian State, with its one badge, its one bench and its one party, is not a cure for the old evils of the English party system. It was much too Totalitarian a State already. Its apparent party divisions were merely a popular sport, like the Boat Race; which is also the one and only example I know of shirts, ties, and badges being differentiated only by two shades of the same colour.

XIX About White Fronts

A TREMENDOUS international truth dawned upon me the other day in connexion with the subject of dress clothes, which we rather incorrectly call evening dress. For in that shade of difference there is a deep and strange division, and a sort of abyss yawns between England and Europe. The occasion of the thought may appear somewhat trivial for so vast and solemn a matter. I met an educated and experienced Englishman, in a great Italian city in which he had apparently lived for about fifteen years. But the power of detachment in some English exiles is extraordinary. This honest gentleman was snorting with fury and contempt because a very famous foreign author had just given a lecture in the town; and this benighted foreigner had outraged the primary laws of the cosmos by wearing a white shirt-front, though it was only five o’clock in the afternoon. Now, I have not lived in Italy for fifteen years; but I had not lived in London up to the age of fifteen without hearing from somebody who knew something about the world that white shirt-fronts do not mean the same thing in Europe that they mean in England. They do not stand for evening dress; they only stand for full dress; for formal or official dress. Sometimes, I believe, they are worn by students going in for important examinations. When I had a private audience with the Pope, I wore what we call evening dress, though it was eleven o’clock in the morning. I did the same when I had an interview with Mussolini. It is simply the recognized uniform worn to express any sort of special respect for a special occasion; as Englishmen would wear Court dress at Court. But in England it has had a particular evolution and adaptation to a particular social purpose, doubtless for various local reasons. I suspect that one cause was the common habit of the English gentry of hunting and riding for long stretches; so that when they returned weary and muddy they naturally wished to change into something, and fell into the habit of changing into full ceremonial dress.

But there is nothing central or essential about this particular use of the thing. What we call evening dress has nothing about it especially suggestive of the evening. Rather, we might say, its black and white effects suggest the strong light and shade of broad daylight, and might be a fitting uniform for noon. Anyhow, it is not specially suggestive of twilight. So poetical a people as the English, if they had wanted to invent vestments full of the subdued glow of the gloaming, could surely have invented something richer and softer than that. A single gleam of golden shirt-front, a touch of crimson tie, and the rest sinking into dimmer shades of purple and violet trousers would be more suggestive of the tints of an English sunset. But the English did not invent evening dress to symbolize the evening, because the English did not invent evening dress at all. They took some modification of the general European form of full dress; and, being rather specially fond of comfort and cleanliness and such eccentricities, they made it a sort of luxury to change in the evening. There is nothing wrong about that, and there may be much that is right about it. The customs which I have conjectured to be connected with it are quite good customs in their way. It is a very jolly thing to ride horses; it is even a laudable thing to please ladies. But it is only one of the ten thousand good customs there are in the world; and it is a local variation of something that existed before in a more general and formal form. But so completely had my friend succeeded in living spiritually in Surbiton, while living physically in Florence, that he had never so much as heard in all those fifteen years that foreigners wore shirt-fronts on a different system of etiquette. He regarded the poor foreign gentleman as some sort of impossible swaggering snob, whose raging vanity and vulgarity could not be restrained from beginning to put on evening dress immediately after lunch. This seems to me a very extraordinary state of things; very comic and rather tragic, in these days when so much may depend upon Christian nations understanding each other.

I do not want the English or anybody else to be international in the sense of cosmopolitan. Christendom has developed in a national form; and men who have no patriotism are not inside Europe but rather outside it. A Frenchman who does not love France, an Englishman who does not love England, is a bad European and not a good European. He has no sympathy with some of the strongest motives of all other Europeans. But the case I mean is something quite different from the case for cosmopolitanism. Indeed, the case is exactly the other way. Bigotry of the kind I mean does not arise from feeling vividly the points of difference, but rather from not realizing that there can be any differences at all. It does not come from valuing a local thing as local, but from exactly the opposite error of supposing that it must be universal.

The English are not Nationalist enough. They love their nation; but they love it almost without knowing that it is a nation. And even when such an emotion is both natural and noble, there is always some miscalculation or confusion when things are not loved strictly according to their own nature; as there are people who cannot be persuaded to love a dog as a dog or a child as a child. An attachment to particular variations of custom or humour is weakened when it is watered down to a sort of false generalization. Now, the common English error is excellently illustrated in that trivial topic of dress clothes. The English do not say, “This is the English way and a jolly good way it is.” They say, “This is the only way; and it is a curious fact that, wherever we go in our travels, we notice that it is only the English who really observe it.” Instead of saying that their custom is a good custom, or even that it is the best custom, they say that nobody except themselves seems to bother about observing the custom which every one must admit is the best. And this blunder comes from blindness to national differences, rather than from exaggeration of them. It does not come from being too vivid, but rather from being too vague, about the difference between an Englishman and an Italian.

I am inclined to think that this vague prejudice is now much more dangerous than a more violent prejudice. It is not the old problem of softening almost savage prejudices in the provinces of Europe; it is not that Englishmen have any particular tendency to hate Frenchmen or Germans; for the English have very little natural tendency to hate anything. It may well be said that there are many things, such as some of their own abuses and falsifications, which they do not hate enough. The nature of the error lies in this: that they never by any chance think of an English thing as a variation of a European thing. Only too often they think of a European thing as a mere misapplication of an English thing. If they saw a portrait of Francis I in a wide flat cap and a square-cut jacket, they would not unnaturally say that Francis I was dressed like Henry VIII. The trouble is that they never think, even experimentally or fancifully, that Henry VIII was dressed like Francis I. There would always remain with them a shadowy, fantastic idea that Louis Napoleon had borrowed the top-hat of Lord Palmerston, and that it could not possibly be the other way round. They do not distinguish, for instance, between certain modern inventions which really did originate in this country and others which have equally certainly originated in other countries. They think of a railway train as an

English thing, and they are right; for it did actually spread from England to Europe. But they would hardly think of a motor-car as a French thing, though it actually originated in the same sense in France and spread to England. Even the familiar name of the Italian inventor would hardly make them think of wireless sets as Italian, although the word “Marconi” is almost a synonym for “wireless.” True, for some of us it is still a synonym for other things.

XX About Impermanence

ONE of the queer puzzles of modern politics might be stated in this way. That when power was permanent, it was always reminded that it was passing; but when power was really supposed to be passing, it was actually treated as if it were permanent. In the days when kings could really cut off anybody's head, they were incessantly informed by seers and sages that they themselves would soon be cut off. When they were real despots with the power of life and death, there were real prophets or satirists who told them that death would be the end of their own life. But nobody ever said this, since democratic and liberal ideas were supposed to prevail in the State. Nobody told the really temporary ruler that he was temporary, or even that he was temporal. From the beginning of historic things, and almost of prehistoric things, there has been this warning against worldly power. The Egyptian rulers feasted with the skeleton at the feast. The Roman conqueror, in his triumph, had a slave towering behind his chariot and whispering "Remember that you are mortal." The mediaeval Norman king of Sicily, as described in the story, was reminded by the religious service that God had put down the mighty from their seat. The later mediaeval princes were familiar with the habit of feasting under frescoes and mosaics of the Dance of Death, which showed a squalid skeleton carrying away kings in a bag. Through the whole of the four thousand years of our recorded history in Europe, Pagan and Christian, has sounded that sublime and subversive dirge —

The glories of our blood and state   Are shadows, not substantial things.

The very Court chaplains of the great French monarchy preached before the *Roi Soleil*, telling him that even his own sun would set. And then, by some quite unaccountable change, there came with the nineteenth century the notion of men talking as if they alone could live in an everlasting sunrise.

Nobody ever did these things to modern politicians. Nobody insisted on a skeleton sitting at Table A, on the right hand of the Lord Mayor introducing the Prime Minister. Nobody insisted on the large and terrific Toast-Master, after he had, in a voice of thunder, craved silence for the Right Honourable the Lord Bundlebury, K.G., K.C.M.G., leaning forward and in a low and vibrant voice hissing in the ear of that statesman:

"Remember that you are mortal." Even in the days of constitutional monarchy, pulpit orations before the king do not remind us so much of funeral orations over the king. But in the case of politicians, as distinct from kings, the whole tradition of this truth has totally disappeared. No artist covers walls and ledges with decorative designs of Death carrying away Cabinet Ministers in a bag. No poet writes a mournful ode about newspaper proprietors, even when they wear coronets, with the ancient burden —

The glories of our scoop and stunt   Are shadows, not substantial things.

With the nineteenth century there came in a new and unnatural optimism about the duration of earthly fashions, political and even philosophical. Shakespeare, living under the Tudors, who could (and did) kill anybody they wanted to kill, could write in a detached way about man who, "dressed in a little brief authority, plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven as make the angels weep." The modern elected politician is in theory dressed in even more brief authority. And, heaven knows, he plays fantastic tricks enough; not only to make the angels weep, but even possibly to make the angels laugh. And yet no poets or dramatists of the last hundred years ever wrote in that fashion about him. Nobody ever told the popular Prime Minister that he also would pass away, not even six months before he did pass away. Nobody ever told politicians that they would be food for worms, even when the worms were almost indistinguishable from the politicians. That long, literary lamentation and protest against the powers of this world, which has gone on through the ages, and includes a thousand things from the *Magnificat* to Gulliver's Travels, did in some strange way stop with the epoch of parliamentary rule, which was supposed to be popular rule. Of all the questions asked by hecklers at a political meeting to support a parliamentary candidate, I gravely and grievously doubt whether any man ever rose from the back benches, a sad and saturnine figure, to say: "Mr. Chairman, I should like to ask our candidate whether it has ever occurred to him that he will one day die."

All this, I fear, will sound very fantastic in modern ears; and even especially in parliamentary ears, which are often rather long ears. But I do sincerely believe that it contains the essential point about the essential evil that has ruined parliamentary institutions, considered as popular institutions. That sort of optimism is alone enough to cut men off from common human happiness. All the old rulers of mankind, in one way or another, were steeped in this grand and tragic tradition. The king was constantly reminded that he would die; the priest existed to remind him that he would die; the soldier was, by hypothesis, a man permanently ready to die. But this sense of the mortal brotherhood of mortals in some way disappeared when the modern world began to teach brotherhood. Since that time every General Election has been regarded as a Last Judgment. Since then, every democratic experiment has been a New Deal. People were taught to look only to the future, or at least every part of it except their own future. They were taught never to look at the past, because the past had borne unbroken testimony to this element of time and change. And that is the real reason why the world has been, as they say just now, disappointed with democracy. There is no necessary depression or despair about democracy. What is depressing is optimism. There is nothing false in the idea of the equality of man; but there is something utterly false in denying the thing in which men are most obviously equal, which is death.

If the modern democratic experiment had been a mediaeval democratic experiment — if it had been, for that matter, a Moslem democratic experiment — it would not have made this mistake or got into this mess. The nuisance of the nineteenth century was that it tried to combine the common sense of the fellowship that men have in common, which is all perfectly sound and true, with an artificial expectation of Utopia; an entirely new notion that everything that was bad yesterday, and worse to-day, will inevitably be right to-morrow. That large and ludicrous illusion has nothing to do with the idea of men feeling their fellow-men as fellows — or even as good fellows. It was an illusion of the intellectuals, who happened to be prigs and dictated the Victorian idea of progress. There is nothing wrong with democracy; there is nothing wrong with the people ruling, except what is wrong with anybody out of the people ruling; what is wrong is forgetting that people are only people. They will make mistakes, as you and I make mistakes; and as all our superiors, the supermen, the dictators, the makers of modern systems, will also make them. There was only one supreme modern mistake, which was that men forgot for a hundred years that they are liable to make mistakes.

XXI About Morris

I CONFESS that to me the celebration of the Centenary of William Morris seems to have been both inadequate and inappropriate. The world seems to be divided in this respect into two very unequal sections. The first are those who owe everything to Morris and have forgotten him. The second are those who owe nothing to Morris but still desire to claim him. They claim him mostly on the excuse of the word “Socialist”; a word which was not really very applicable to him, and is now pretty well applicable or inapplicable to anybody. Morris certainly called himself a Socialist; but that hardly seems sufficient reason for people of a totally opposite type calling him a Communist; in the face of the quite different and quite definite modern meaning of Communism. Mr. Middleton Murry makes what I cannot but think a delicate insinuation that the conversion of a literary man like himself to Communism is more or less comparable to the conversion of the older literary man to Socialism. But it is precisely by the test of literature, that is the test of imagination, that it is quite impossible to get the two things into the same picture. It would be difficult to maintain that Milton was a belated mediaeval ballad-monger, caring only for the rude old rhymed ballads and loathing the influence of classical dignity and a stately style. It would be difficult to maintain that Coleridge was a cold and mechanical imitator of Pope, concentrated on wit and reason and utterly hostile to vision and imagination. It would be hard to represent Walt Whitman as caring for nothing except the classical cameos of Landor. But it would be much harder than any of these, as an effort of imagination, to imagine William Morris worshipping modern machinery as the highest form of “rhythm,” in accordance with the ugly Proletarian art of the modern Bolshevists. Of course, when once a man is dead, you can say anything you choose about what he would have done if he were alive. Dead men tell no tales and contradict no tales; and there is nothing to prevent the tale-bearers from writing a post-mortem sequel full of amazing conversions and contradictions. But a man has just as much right to say that Shelley would have become a True Blue Tory and High Churchman, or that Hurrell Froude, of the Oxford Movement, would soon have turned into a Radical secularist of the Manchester School, as to say that the human, historical

William Morris, as he really was, would have tolerated for ten seconds the vast industrial materialism of the Five-Year Plan.

The great achievement of William Morris was this: that he nearly convinced a whole generation that the nineteenth century was not normal. In this he was years and years ahead of the Communists of the twentieth century, who still really believe that the nineteenth century was normal. Otherwise, they would not believe that all this nightmare of machinery is normal; still less that it is new. When the Bolshevist of to-day tells us that through the impersonal power and massed material force of machinery we shall reach a more rational civilization, he is talking exactly as Mr. Gradgrind, Mr. Bounderby, Mr. Podsnap, and Mr. Bottles talked in fiction; and exactly as Sir Robert Peel, Mr. Roebuck, Mr. Bright, and Mr. Brown, of Victoria Villas, West Brixton, talked in real life. Both existed under the superstition or delusion that machines and machine-made goods are a part of the necessities of a humane culture or a common comfortable life. The Marxians, of course, have got all these notions, partly from Marx, who was a nineteenth-century man if ever there was one, and partly from the accident by which Russia was necessarily nearly a century behind the other nations, and was still looking for a panacea in what the rest of us have already found to be a quack medicine. But Morris was far ahead of Marx. Morris was not a nineteenth-century man; or he was the one nineteenth-century man who really saw through the nineteenth century.

It is true that the most widespread effect of his revolution was in the comparatively superficial matter of domestic ornament or personal adornment. But precisely because the example is simple, or even because it is superficial, it serves as a very clear and popular example to prove the fact. What was the matter with the nineteenth century, at the height of its commercial triumph, was precisely this illusion of normality in a thing thoroughly abnormal. The satirists of the Victorian merchant said that he was commonplace. But the satirists were even more kind to him than his flatterers. What was the matter with the Victorian merchant was, not that he was commonplace, but that he thought he was commonplace. And in this he was totally in error. He had got it fixed in his mind that wearing a chimney-pot hat, an ugly pair of trousers, an ugly pair of whiskers was sane and sensible and even ordinary. Compared with these, he thought that wearing a cocked hat or a cloak or a turban or a sombrero, or a neat pair of knee-breeches or a fierce pair of moustaches were all various eccentricities, like the fancies of a fancy-dress ball. He did not realize that he looked much funnier to the fantastic foreigners than the fantastic foreigners looked to him. And, as it was with his dress, so it was with his furniture and even his architecture; with the repp curtains and red plush sofas and bad pictures in heavy gilded frames. It would have been all right if he had said, “This is my taste”; but what he did say was, “This is everybody’s common sense.” Now, to upset a public prejudice like that is much more difficult than to murder an emperor or seize the government offices of a republic.

Morris is still occasionally reproached with the fact that he largely selected, as his counter-example of a more common and human background, the stretch of centuries that we call the Middle Ages. But in truth, one does not need even to be a mediaevalist in order to see that he was right to choose the mediaeval. If, for instance, he had tried to make his revolution a return to the classic freedom of Greek and Pagan antiquity, his revolution would have been no revolution at all. It was precisely from the too-crushing convention derived from classic antiquity that art in his time had suffered most. For him it was not only the antique, but the antiquated; even in the ordinary recent sense of the old-fashioned. It was already the mere conventionalism of the Academy and the Academy School. It could not be really the Renaissance of the Hellenic at the very moment when it was the death and dregs of the Renaissance. But there is a further subtlety not sufficiently noticed. Few have really looked quite straight at the Greek beauty of the Gorgon; and most of them have been turned to stone. The Renaissance of the sixteenth century saw it, quite as much as did the Pre-Raphaelitism of the nineteenth century, in the mirror of its own mood. Morris did deal with Jason as well as John Ball; but he saw Jason through a mediaeval medium. So did the Victorian classicists see Jason through a modern medium. A Renaissance style, filtered through Rubens and Reynolds, was no more Greek than a classical theme rendered by Botticelli or Burne-Jones. Both were modern versions; but the mediaeval version had this advantage: that mediaevalism marked a period really noted for forms of craftsmanship needed to correct the mechanism of the nineteenth century. Thus William Morris stands between two mechanical heresies; testifying that true art is always manual labour. In spite of the Victorians, it is not normal that work should be mass production. In spite of the Bolshevists, their imitators, it is not normal that it should be mass possession.

XXII About Widows

WIDOWS have always been regarded as an alarming and avenging tribe. In the background of history, back to the time of barbarism, they stand like rigid statues with uplifted arms, calling down the vengeance of heaven upon slayers and spoilers; it was especially their wrongs that the knight was pledged to vindicate when he received the accolade; it is still to the righting of their grievances that the King is bound by the Coronation Oath. They have been nobly treated in ancient tragedy and even in more recent romance; as in that story of the Highland Widow, which is always classed with Scott's worst works, apparently because it is one of his best. The atmosphere changed from tragedy to comedy, with the coming of the more comfortable sentimentality of the nineteenth century. The conception of the comic widow, as distinct from the tragic widow, a conception started long before by the arresting originality of Chaucer, touching that recurrent widow, the Wife of Bath, underwent another broadening and flattening in passing from the comedy of Chaucer to the comedy of Dickens. Tony Weller became the voice of mankind, uttering its ancient fear of widows. And now the widow has entered on a third phase in relation to literature: after the tragedy of Sophocles and Scott, the comedy of Chaucer and Dickens. The widow has become literary herself; and reminded us that we might have had the memoirs of Mrs. Chaucer or the autobiography of Mrs. Dickens. Hitherto, the method has been simple enough. As next to nothing is known about Philippa Chaucer, and there is nothing very much to be said about her, there has been a mysterious assumption that there was nothing to be said for her. It has been oddly assumed that any Chaucerian jokes about wives must be jokes against his own wife; in defiance of the obvious fact that most of the same sort of jokes against wives were made by mediaeval clerics who had no wives at all. On the other hand, as the wife of Charles Dickens wrote nothing to speak of about the story of her life, a modern critic has been so obliging as to write it for her, entirely out of his own head.

But the third and most formidable phase of the widow in literature requires special and rather grave consideration. At least two, if not three or four, of the wives of distinguished men of letters recently dead have almost simultaneously published their impressions of their own and their husbands' private lives. It is not my primary purpose here to discuss the propriety of this new domestic habit beyond saying that nothing would ever induce me personally to have anything to do with it. But the deeper causes of this difference of opinion are here rather more interesting than the difference itself. For the causes seem to me to go rather deep into a new and even unnatural view of life and art. The question might be put for debate in many forms; but perhaps the simplest form of all, to which it ultimately works back, can be found in the old debating-club query of Is Life Worth Living? For there seem to be more and more people who put it to themselves, consciously or unconsciously, in the form of Is Life Worth Writing About?

In other words, it is supposed that all this publicity of self-revelation represents an interest in private life. Sometimes, it may be admitted perhaps, an excessive interest in private life. But it seems to me to indicate a lack of interest in private life. That is, it is a lack of intensity of interest in life as a thing to be lived, and a limitation of the interest to a biography as a thing to be written. If we happen to object to “the sale of Keats’s love-letters by auction,” as did Oscar Wilde; or to the clown and knave who would not let the bones of Shakespeare rest, as did Alfred Tennyson; or to those who would cut a man’s house in two to watch him in his parlour or bedroom, as did Robert Browning . . . if you happen to express some of the regrets felt by these eminent Victorians, you will now always find yourself confronted with one general idea. It is the idea that the love-letters were *wasted* if they were not sold to an illiterate millionaire from Nebraska; or that the poet’s private emotions and meditations are *wasted* if somebody does not spy upon him walking in his garden; or that life inside the house is *wasted* if people outside the house know nothing about it. And this seems to me to mean a lack of appreciation, not only of private life, but of life itself. Literary expression is a very valuable part of human experience; but this is making human experience merely a part of literary expression. And though it is done by the most refined persons, and often from really fine motives, it seems to me to drift unconsciously with the whole of that modern tide of mere sale and exchange that has been the curse of all our recent history. I do not mean, of course, that there is any need to denounce every woman who happens to be a widow who may happen to write something about some man who happens to be an artist, even if he also happens to be her husband. It is a question of the way in which the thing is done; and above all of the way in which the thing is defended. And where it is defended on the ground that anything left private is merely buried and lost, that defence is utterly indefensible. It does really imply that nobody has any inner life; that human happiness is not the need of human beings; that man is not an end in himself, subject only to the glory of God; or, in short, that biography was not made for man but man for biography.

What amuses me about this fallacy of the intellectual and the superior persons is how very near it is to the fallacy of the hucksters and the go-getters and the most vulgar sort of capitalist exploiters. For they hold as their chief heresy, in a coarser form, the fundamental falsehood that things are not made to be used but made to be sold. All the collapse of their commercial system in our own time has been due to that fallacy of forcing things on a market where there was no market; of continually increasing the power of supply without increasing the power of demand; or briefly, of always considering the man who sells the potato and never considering the man who eats it. And just as we need much more of the subsistence farm, or the worker who simply produces for his own consumption, so we need much more of what may be called in moral matters the subsistence family; that is, the private family that can be really excited about its own private life; the household that is interested in itself. It is all nonsense to say that such a thing is impossible. Even by the test of literature, there is a whole mass of literature which witnesses both to its actuality and to its attractiveness. But life is much more real than literature. What Stevenson called the great theorem of the livableness of life can be solved without incessant distractions either of publicity or dissipation. It cannot be conducted without reasonable holidays and changes of scene or occupation; nor can anything else. But it can certainly be conducted; and it can certainly be interesting and even exciting. Now, to suggest that a love-letter or a family joke or a secret language among children is never really important until it is edited and published, is to imply only too much of the suggestion of so many memoirs: that a man is only interesting when he is dead. For the whole world of mere stunts and scoops and trading and self-advertisement is spiritually a world utterly dead; although it is very noisy. It is, in the precise and literal meaning of the phrase, a howling wilderness.

XXIII About Relativity

WHEN we hear one particular word such as “Relativity” repeated about a hundred times a week, and scattered over scores of newspapers and novels and ordinary publications, we may deduce with almost practical certainty that nobody who is using the word has any notion of what it means. I do not mean merely that few of them have read about Relativity in some new and technical sense, in which it may be found necessary for explaining an abstruse theory of Professor Einstein. I do not even mean that most people are unacquainted, as they naturally are, with the various forms of ancient scepticism, dating at least from the earliest Greek philosophers, to which the term “Relativity” might be reasonably applied. I mean that people do not consider even the common meaning of the word that has become so common. They do not realize even what they themselves mean, or have always meant, by the word considered as a part of the English language. It is as if there were suddenly a universal mania for talking about hats, without the faintest memory that they had ever had anything to do with heads; or as if everybody were extravagantly excited about cats, while nobody knew whether they were the same as crocodiles.

In the English language, as in any national language capable of normal logic, anything relative is relative to something positive. We describe it by saying it stands in a certain relation to something already known. This is so in the practical popular use of “relative” or “relation.” You may say with gloom, “I’m going to stay with relations”; or you may say with complacency, “Admiral Sir Caradoc Valencourt Vere de Vere is a relative of mine”; or you may say in a Parliamentary manner (if you are in the House of Lords, as I assume that you are), “My noble relative will find it difficult to reconcile the baseness and trickery of his treatment of the pickled-onion problem with his professions as an Englishman and a Christian”; or you may say sardonically, “I suppose Mrs. Boulger-Buckett regards us as her poor relations.” But in all these cases, however different the emotion, there is no difference in the reason, as it defines the nature of a relation. In all cases the other objects are regarded as being in various relations to a fixed object; and in this case the object is what is called the subject. In other words, for a large proportion of fallen humanity the fixed point is oneself; and this is reasonable, in so far as there is a fixed certainty of the reality of oneself. You do really know that you really exist; even in some wild mood in which Admiral Sir Caradoc Vere de Vere might seem to be only a beautiful dream; or Mrs. Boulger-Buckett one of those dark fancies that flit across the brain upon the borderland of nightmare. You therefore speak of them as relative to yourself; if only because you know more about yourself than you know about them. But when people begin to talk about universal relativity, as if everything were as relative as everything else, so that presumably the very notion of relativity is itself relative, only relative to nobody knows what, they are simply knocking the bottom out of the world and the human brain, and leaving a bottomless abyss of bosh. You say, with airy grace, that Sir Caradoc Vere de Vere is a relation of yours. You do not say he is a relation, as if it were a profession or a post or a position in itself. There is no such thing as a relation wandering about the world with nobody to be related to. And if your philosophy talks of relations in that sense, the philosopher will decide that they are very poor relations indeed.

A somewhat similar use has been made lately of the word “hypothesis.” There has been a correspondence in *The Times* about the nature of belief, or unbelief, or incidentally of make-believe. This was enriched by a somewhat pompous letter from a very superior person, who said he was entirely Modern; and proceeded to set forth as much as he could understand of the early sceptical sages of ancient Hellas, to whom I have referred; and proceeded to adorn the theme with things so exclusively modern as the exact meaning of dialectic in the dialogues of Plato. But his scepticism was much more archaic than Plato; indeed it was the sort of nihilistic nonsense that Socrates existed largely in order to chaff out of existence. The form it took here was the repeated suggestion that a Modern person cannot believe in anything except as a hypothesis. In other words, that he cannot believe in anything at all. For you cannot believe in a hypothesis; you can only give it a fair chance to prove itself a thesis that can be believed.

Now, even the Modern Man is not necessarily a madman; and this would hopelessly ruin and destroy every modern use of hypothesis; especially the whole scientific idea of a hypothesis holding the field. It would merely mean ensuring that what is called a working hypothesis would not work. For a man could not even construct a hypothesis if he could only construct it out of hypothetical things. There can be no hypothesis if there is nothing but hypothesis. Anybody can see that, if he will merely consider any actual example. For instance, the Darwinian theory of Natural Selection was a hypothesis; and it is still only a hypothesis. Popular science insists on repeating that it is a hypothesis that has been confirmed; with the result that responsible science is more and more treating it as a hypothesis that has been abandoned. But it can be quite rightly treated as a reasonable hypothesis, by anybody who believes in it, if he can support it with other things in which he believes; or preferably things in which everybody believes. He is quite entitled to say, “We suggest that a monkey, probably living in a tree, became the ancestor of a man, apparently living in a cave, by a process of adaptations beginning with slight varieties of feature in his family, by which it survived only in those cases where the features favoured the finding of food. It may not yet be finally confirmed by the fossils found in the rocks or the habits of the monkeys still found in the trees; but we still think it the most probable hypothesis and confidently await proof.” But he could not even say that, if he were compelled to explain his suggestion in some such form as this: “We suggest that a monkey (if there are any monkeys) living in a tree (if there are any trees) became the ancestor of a man (if we may risk the speculative supposition that there is such a thing as a man) through certain variations enabling certain types to find food (granted the truth of the traditional dogma that food is favourable to life), and we look to the hypothetical fossils which may or may not be found in the hypothetical rocks which may or may not be found in the world; or to the behaviour of monkeys we cannot actually believe in, in trees we cannot actually believe in, and faintly trust to a larger hope that something may somehow make some sense out of the whole caboodle. But even if something does happen, by which this hypothesis seems to fit in better with all the other hypotheses, we can never believe it even at the end as anything except the hypothesis that it was at the beginning; because the good kind gentleman in *The Times* tells us it would not be Modern.”

This would be enough to show the futility of this relative and sceptical style of thinking, even for the pure purposes of thought. It is only because the reflection adds something to the fun of the thing, that I even refer to the unthinkable effects which such thought would have upon action. One thing is at least certain whatever our national or international views: that, in practice, over large parts of Europe that sort of scepticism has already perished under terrible tests. The world resounds with iron convictions, some sinister, some sublime, but all only too ready to bring forth the fruits of martyrdom or of murder. We also may yet suffer or defy; and I fear *The Times* sceptic will discover that he is not so very Modern.

XXIV About Changing Human Nature

MANY modern debates are still revolving round the old question, even if it is put in new forms, which was generally expressed in the form: “Can you alter human nature?” Like many such questions, which were at least accepted as questions, whatever might be the answer, the question was wrongly asked, even if it was rightly answered. In strict logic and philosophy, if you could actually alter the nature of human beings, they would cease to be human beings. So you could not really point to them as human beings whose nature had been altered. It would be better to put the question in some such form as this: “What are the elements in humanity which are changeable; and what are the elements that are unchangeable, if any of them are unchangeable?” But the question has almost always been debated between two extreme types of humanity, neither of whom could be said to specialize in logic or philosophy.

At the one extreme there was the blustering, not to say blundering, type of Tory who answered almost any proposal for the improvement of social law and custom by shouting at the reformer: “You can’t change human nature.” If, for instance, a reformer proposed to resist the concentration of capital in combines and corners, the dear old gentleman would declare that nothing could stop the growth of monopolies and money-rings, because we could not alter human nature. This only serves to prove that he was himself singularly ignorant of human nature, if only because he was singularly ignorant of human history. By a queer irony, the Conservative who thought he was a traditionalist was defending the most modern of innovations against all the old traditions of mankind. And the joke of it is that in this he was himself a living proof that you can alter human nature, if you call that sort of thing altering human nature. His moral theory was entirely modern, and was in flat contradiction to the moral theory that is really ancient. Most of his ancestors regarded making a corner simply as a crime, like that of cutting a throat or picking a pocket. Forestallers, as our fathers called them, were often put in a pillory, or even hanged on a gallows, to stop them from doing what he declares they cannot be stopped from doing. If he regards monopoly with patience or approval, while his fathers regarded it with fury and condemnation, that is alone sufficient evidence of a change in human nature, in the sense of human theories about human nature. In fact, that sort of man regards the peculiar vices of the new age as the permanent vices of every age; that is, when his complacency does not go further, and regard them as virtues rather than vices. If that is what is meant by change in the nature of man, it is quite certain that we could change a monopolist society into an anti-monopolist society, as we have already changed an anti-monopolist society into a monopolist society. The real answer is that this sort of thing is not really a change in the nature of man. It is simply an unchanging quality in the nature of man that he is fickle, moody, and one-sided; that he stresses now one point in morals and now another, neglects one virtue and then goes on in progressive triumph to neglect another; that he is overpowered by whatever is recent and generally ignorant of whatever is remote; and, above all, that he mistakes experience for existence, and supposes that what he sees is all that there is to see. There certainly is in human nature this changing quality; and it is an unchanging quality.

On the other side, and at the other extreme, is the eager evolutionist or progressive who cries aloud: "But we can alter human nature. We have altered human nature." I happened to meet a young man of this type recently, a rising and promising man of letters, who used almost exactly these words, and followed them by the (to me) still more intriguing words: "In the past, people used to burn witches, to own slaves, to persecute heretics, and all the rest. Don't you admit that human nature must have changed?" To which I answered: "No; it has not changed; it has only been changeable." That is, the young gentleman ignored exactly what the old gentleman ignored: that there is all the difference in the world between a man liking different things, like a man, and the man ceasing to be like a man.

I have not the slightest difficulty in imagining the world of the future taking a turn which would bring back the fact, if not the form, of witch-hunting and slavery and the persecution of heresies. These things might grow out of entirely modern things, without any conscious reference to the ancient things. For instance, Spiritualism is in origin a modern thing; and the desire for a certain sort of scientific system of psychical phenomena is certainly a modern thing. If Spiritualism did become a world-wide religion, it is not hard to see that divisions would begin between the more and the less scientific people. Some would denounce a medium as a fraud, while others would still cling to him as a seer.

For Spiritualism differs from most religions in this: that its scriptures are not a scroll or book recognized from the beginning; they are potentially *all* the scribblings of all the planchettes and spirit-pens in a thousand private houses. It is inevitable that some disputes should arise about which come from good spirits, which from evil spirits, which from evil men. The moment the element of evil spirits enters, you have the material for horrible panics about their power and their picked instruments. In a few centuries, a more sombre psychic sect would be quite capable of regarding others as diabolists to be cast out like devils. Modern mystics have said some extraordinary things in that way. A Spiritualist whose book was published when I was a boy, a certain Dr. Anna Kingsford, proudly proclaimed that she had killed, not to say murdered, men by an act of will, when they differed from her on certain points, as on vivisection. That spirit is not far from that of mystics killing each other, as agents of the mystery of iniquity. Supposing that large parts of civilization turned to that sort of mysticism, I do not think it would be long before we had something resembling the war upon witches. Whether it will take that turn, of course, I cannot tell; I hope not. But nobody, at this moment, can tell what turn the spiritual history of the future will take.

Of the other two things my friend thought unthinkable in a changed humanity, one can speak much more positively. It is inadequate to say that they might be done in the future; it would be truer to say that they are being done in the present. There are many indications of men going back to everything connected with Slavery, except the name of Slavery. Half the new systems of the hour are now dealing in conscripted labour, in forced labour of every kind, in which there is no pretence of a free contract. Strictly speaking, if you keep private property and forbid strikes, or even individual refusal of work, you do establish slavery. You even establish a Fugitive Slave Law. But my young friend, his eyes fixed on the future, had apparently not noticed anything that has been beginning in the last few years. He had been taught that human nature had changed; he had not been told that it has changed again.

As for persecution, it has become a grim joke in the case of the Jews; nor is it less persecution if we call it the persecution of a race and not the persecution of a religion. The truth is that the whole of the old original theory of persecution has been openly proclaimed and practised, not in the old, but in the new political systems. Doubtless those political systems deal even more in political persecution than in religious persecution. But that does not make them less persecuting, but more. The whole point of the last political theory is that sectional parties and programs must be forcibly effaced; that the opposition press must be abolished, and only one party allowed. I am not saying that there is nothing to be said for persecution. It is a much more profound problem than progressives have ever found out. But it does measure the exact sense and degree in which humanity does change, that it should disappear in the nineteenth century to reappear in the twentieth.

XXV About Historians

I AM happy to say that there seems to be a real revival of interest in history; but, oddly enough, it does not mainly express itself in histories. It seems to express itself almost entirely in biographies.

There are, of course, several distinguished exceptions; it is good news that so great a scholar as Mr. H. A. L. Fisher has published a History of Europe; and I think that few more compact and convincing pieces of work have been done than Mr. Belloc's abridged History of England. But the fashion of the moment, or the feature of the movement, seems to me to be the publication of separate monographs on separate historical characters. We do not see, for instance, at least in any prominent example, the reappearance of the old full and formal narrative of the great national legend of the Cavaliers and Roundheads; a complete history of the Civil War, with its causes and consequences, set out like a section of a long, complete history of the nation. What we do see on every bookstall, and in every bookcase, is a number of new biographies of the men who once figured almost entirely in such histories. We find that Mr. Belloc writes a book on Charles I; that Mr. Buchan writes a book on Oliver Cromwell; that Mr. Belloc writes another book on Oliver Cromwell; and that another historical student has just written another book on the great Earl of Strafford. I have no doubt that, if I looked through the literary lists in a more systematic manner than it is within the power of my patience and virtue to look through anything, I should find that somebody had written a book on Sir Henry Vane; that somebody else had written a book on Lord Falkland; that somebody else had made a most learned study of Clarendon, but had not imitated Clarendon in writing a history of the Civil War. Now I come to recall it, there was recently a book, if not two books, on John Hampden; and I trust and believe there will always be any number of books on John Milton.

Between them, one would suppose these books would pretty well cover the whole ground that could be covered by a complete history. But, in fact, as compared with a complete history, any number of them must still remain incomplete. There is no conspectus of all these contrasted characters, seen together in the light of the same mind or general philosophy of history; and some of them naturally contradict each other so flatly as to lead rather to confusion than conclusion. A man has some reason for selecting the subject of another man; and the chances are that his reason, even if perfectly reasonable, will be highly personal; and sometimes personal to the point of being perverse. There is always a possible association of a monograph with a monomania. And though many of these books, and especially those I have mentioned, are filled with a real sense of history which goes far beyond mere biography, in the sense of mere gossip, these personal studies may easily involve a certain amount of mere scandal; sometimes involving a temptation to mere slander. Anyhow, either in the best examples or the worst, we can hardly find in biography a substitute for history; or be completely satisfied by looking at the program for the *dramatis personae* as an alternative to seeing the play.

I wonder nobody has ever written a History of the Histories of England. The historians would themselves be characters in a very entertaining play. Summaries of their treatment of the same subject would have something of the unexpected variety of the versions of the same story in Browning's experiment of The Ring and the Book. Anyhow, the historians would be very vivid characters; some of them, to tell the truth, rather comic characters. And we should possess a rather important outline of the actual evolution of political thought or patriotic sentiment, through periods which are none the less important to our national destiny because nearly all of us have forgotten all about them. A very good example of what would strike us as a new truth, merely by being a neglected truth, can be found in the case of David Hume, when he wrote as a historian and not as a philosopher. Huxley revived Hume as a philosopher, in the days of his own fight for Agnosticism and quarrel with Comtism, calling the Scotch sceptic "that prince of agnostics." But I rather doubt whether Huxley would have bothered much about Hume as a historian; for Huxley was very Victorian in many ways, including the Victorian virtues. And, by his time, the whole Victorian world had undergone a profound change in the whole attitude towards history; a change that has rather falsified the whole perspective of the history of history, even of history so recent as Hume's.

Macaulay, after all, was something of a magician, even if he was also something of a cheap and popular conjurer. He was a romancer rather than a liar; at the worst, he was a romancer as well as a liar. That is, he was sincere in his enjoyment of romance, even where it departed furthest from reality. And he did do what the poets can do, though it was said to be what the gods themselves could not do. He did chance the past; he did throw a retrospective glamour over the past of his own Puritan and Parliamentary party; a light that looked like broad daylight, but which had not really shone upon it in its own day. There was a case for the Puritans; but it was a Puritan case. There is still a case for a few fanatics who drink to the Immortal Memory of William of Orange, but it is a fanatical case. It is ending very much as it began, and as it continued to be up to the moment when the magic of Macaulay made it look like mere practical politics or the religion of all sensible men. I mean that, while there was a true enthusiasm in the seventeenth-century sects, it was a sectarian enthusiasm. We may perfectly well sympathize with the heroic virtue of a Brownite or the martyrdom of a Muggletonian, but it must be as we sympathize with a dancing dervish or a wild prophet in the wilderness; and that was about the best that the bulk of England ever felt for the very best of the Puritans. The English, as the English, thought about them as the Romans thought about the Zealots; as the Rationalists thought about the Methodist preachers. One result of this was that the common-sense — or, if you will, commonplace — opinion of the country, for most of the time, was rather Royalist than Roundhead. It was not in the least necessary to be a romantic Cavalier, an old-world Jacobite, a High Churchman, or even a High Tory, in order to be a Royalist. Again and again we find that a Rationalist was a Royalist. Hobbes was a Rationalist, hating every trace and tradition of the old religious sentiment. But Hobbes was a Royalist, in the sense that his despotic theory of the State involved the implication of a royal despot. Indeed, Hobbes was a Hitlerite, and his whole theory of the Totalitarian State turns on a pivot of personal government. Hume was a Rationalist; but in his History of England he was a Royalist.

The most famous or fashionable of the recent monographs is the *Marlborough* of Mr. Winston Churchill. The author has to sacrifice the Whig historian to the Whig hero. I do not share Mr. Churchill’s innocent and child-like piety in the matter of his trust in Marlborough, but I entirely share his distrust of Macaulay. But the matter in which Macaulay has most falsified the past is that I have mentioned; the fashion of supposing that the solid sense of the nation was solid for the Puritans and the Parliament men, with nothing against it but a chivalric but childish memory of the past. Down to very late indeed, it was still the Roundhead who was the crank and the Cavalier who was the regular guy. Dr. Johnson was a Jacobite suspected of being out in the ‘45; but, right or wrong, he was a more solid and sensible sort of Englishman than Horace Walpole worshipping the Regicides and the death-warrant of Charles I. But the test is Hume. He would have seemed a horrible atheist to the doctor; but he, too, was a Royalist; because he seemed to himself a sensible man.

XXVI About Bad Comparisons

I HAVE never quite understood the phrase that comparisons are odious; but anybody can see that even the very best of comparisons is only comparatively complimentary. A literal interpretation could turn most compliments into insults. It would not do to treat the poet as a botanist when he says “My love is like the red, red rose.” There are roses which would suggest rather too apoplectic a complexion and be rough on the lady. There are ladies of whom we might say that it was rough on the rose. The line in the modern version of “Annie Laurie,” “Her neck is like the swan,” always suggested to me a very startling and somewhat alarming alteration in the human form; but I believe that this line was a fake put in by the false modesty of somebody who was shocked by the beautiful simplicity of the older version. But there is another sense of the word “comparative” in which it is liable to another somewhat parallel abuse or error. It is that grammatical classification of a thing in the three degrees of positive, comparative, and superlative; as illustrated in the bright little boy who gave the extension of an adverb in the form of “Ill; worse; dead.” It will be noted that this, though founded on highly practical experience, is not exact as an example of grammatical logic.

Now, there are a great many phrases used in practice as comparatives which are not nearly so truly comparative as the triad of the little boy. I mean that many people suppose one thing to be an extension of another thing or an excess of another thing when it is really a totally different thing; and sometimes almost a contrary thing. For instance, some people have an instinctive itch of irritation against the word “authority.” Either they suppose that authority is a pompous name for mere bullying, or else, at the best, they think that mere bullying is an excess of authority. But bullying is almost the opposite of authority. Tyranny is the opposite of authority. For authority simply means right; and nothing is authoritative except what somebody has a right to do, and therefore is right in doing. It often happens in this imperfect world that he has the right to do it and not the power to do it. But he cannot have a shred of authority if he merely has the power to do it and has not the right to do it. If you think any form of mastery unjust, it is enough to say that you do not like injustice; but there is no need to say that you do not like authority. For injustice, as such, cannot have any authority at all. Moreover, a man can only have authority by admitting something better than himself; and the bully does not get his claim from anybody but himself. It is not a question, therefore, of there being authority, and then tyranny, which is too much authority; for tyranny is no authority. Tyranny means too little authority; for though, of course, an individual may use wrongly the power that may go with it, he is in that act disloyal to the law of right, which should be his own authority. To abuse authority is to attack authority. A policeman is no longer a policeman when he is bribed privately to arrest an innocent man; he is a private criminal. He is not exaggerating authority; he is reducing it to nothing.

Another example of the false comparative, which is really not a comparative but a contrary, is the distinction between avarice and thrift. Here, again, it is of course possible for an individual to pass from one to the other; but it is only by violating the other, not by exaggerating it. The two things are really opposites; but things do sometimes produce their opposites. Love may turn to hate; a man may begin by wanting to marry a woman and end by wanting to murder her. But love is none the less the opposite of hate; and even our most advanced thinkers would hardly say that marriage is the same as murder. A man, profligate in youth, may so poison himself as to become Puritan in old age. But the reaction is none the less a reaction because it is a morbid and exaggerated reaction. In the same way a thrifty man may turn into a miser, but in turning into a miser he is ceasing to be a thrifty man. He is most emphatically not becoming more of a thrifty man. A miser is a man who is intercepted and misled in his pursuit of thrift and betrayed into turning to the pursuit of money. Madness of that sort always haunts the life of man, as a possible temptation and perversion. Idolatry is always a danger to the soul, and idolatry is the worship of the instrument. A man who thinks he is justified in drawing the sword for justice may be tempted of the devil and come to worship not the justice but the sword. That is what happened to poor Nietzsche, leading him to write that sentence which is still the motto of Prussianism and Prussia: “You say a good cause justifies any war; but I say a good war justifies any cause.” The peasant who follows the plough may fall into the same temptation as the soldier who follows the sword; but both will be turning against their original purpose, even against their own purpose in using their own tools. For the peasant who thinks more of the money-bags than he does of the flour-sacks becomes less of a peasant in becoming more of a miser. And the real soldier does not follow the sword, but follows the flag.

Thrift by derivation means thriving; and the miser is the man who does not thrive. The whole meaning of thrift is making the most of everything; and the miser does not make anything of anything. He is the man in whom the process, from the seed to the crop, stops at the intermediate mechanical stage of the money. He does not grow things to feed men; not even to feed one man; not even to feed himself. The miser is the man who starves himself, and everybody else, in order to worship wealth in its dead form, as distinct from its living form. He is occasionally found among peasants, as the bully is occasionally found among soldiers. But in that very fact, the one is a bad peasant and the other a bad soldier. In the rather morbid modern culture of the industrial towns there has arisen a habit of denouncing both these two types, as if they always yielded to these temptations. But the towns also have their temptations; and the town critics have generally yielded to all of them. They do not understand either the peasants' sense of liberty or the soldiers' sense of loyalty; and they always assume that there is nothing but avarice in the economic independence of the one, and nothing but brutality in the militant obedience of the other. An actual experience, either of peasants or of soldiers, will soon teach anybody that the aberrations of avarice or arrogance are exceptional. The general effect of discipline on decent soldiers is to make them very pleasant companions and rather more modest and placable than the majority of men. The actual effect of thrift on most peasants is to make them inventive and intelligent in their ordinary hospitality and human intercourse. There is no difference between them and other simple and sociable human beings, except that they understand the rather important thing which economists call "economy of consumption."

A French or Flemish peasant woman will make much more out of the scraps in the kitchen, or the very weeds in the garden, than a proletarian will make out of the tinned food and advertised wares of a commercial city. But normally she will be quite as pleased, not to say proud, to put the results of her cookery before other people as if she were presiding over a fatigued cocktail-party in Mayfair. But the test of her pretensions, of her pride — one might almost say of her profession — is concerned entirely with the practical product. For the healthy-minded peasant, more than for anybody, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. She may become an unhealthy-minded peasant and think of nothing but the money; for the diseases of the soul are in the very air. Therefore, it will probably happen that every village will contain a miser — that is, a madman. But his madness has nothing to do with the sanity of thrift. Thrift in itself is always a thirst to make all things thrive, animal, vegetable, or mineral; to make them prosper and produce; to prevent their being wasted, or, in other words, destroyed. Whether particular people need to be warned of particular dancers touching the avarice that perverts thrift is a matter of moral education and religion; but the first principle is that the miser is not a more thrifty man but a much less thrifty man, for he wastes money more than a spendthrift.

XXVII About Change

THIS would be no place to inquire too closely why those bright youths who are so superior to eternity seem to be so subject and submissive to time; why they proclaim with such wild pagan gestures that they can pull down the cross; but assure us, with such anxious and agitated motions, that we cannot put back the clock. They seem to suppose that it is a sort of new religion to worship the clock; and that without even noticing that it is generally a grandfather’s clock. For Time, whatever else he is, is rather an old gentleman by now; his hour-glass is a very antiquated sort of clock, and his scythe a rustic and archaic instrument quite unworthy of an exhibition of agricultural machinery. In other words, all this talk about things being suited to the times must, by its very nature, have been uttered hundreds of times before. And any one who listens in a meditative mood to the grandfather’s clock will find it difficult to say that there is so very much difference between one tick and another; and may perhaps suspect that there was not quite so much difference between one time and another. I am well aware that some have hyphenated the name of Father Time, and that calling him Space-Time may make him seem rather more spacious. But, for all that, there is a little trick of logic, like a trick of clockwork, by which the young philosopher is caught in time as in a trap. His own time closes on him with a click; as in a creepy murder story I once read, in which a man was caught and crushed in an old clock. For the fallacy which entraps him is this: that he cannot apparently resist the temptation to base his argument on the mere moment of time at which the argument takes place.

I have just read a very vivid short story about an aged *grande dame* in a country place and a young novelist whom she regarded as an upstart and a revolutionist. I hold no brief for the old lady; I entirely decline to become the grim and gaunt family solicitor who must certainly have been attached to her aristocratic family. I think she must have been a decidedly unpleasant old lady; and I think, as strongly as the strongest of youthful novelists or revolutionists, that she was stupidly priding herself upon the accident of birth. But what the young ass of a novelist could not see, and what the author of that author also could not see, was that he also was priding himself, and quite as stupidly, on the mere accident of birth. For she was only proud of having been born in a particular place; and he was only proud of having been born at a particular time. For what he said, and all he could apparently say, again and again and waving his arms about, was: "Your day is past; can't you see that your day is past? To-day is ours; to-morrow is ours," and so on; as repeatedly and relentlessly as the ticking of a clock. But this does not affect, in the smallest degree, the actual question of whether his day was worse or better than her day. If I advance the thesis that the weather on Monday was better than the weather on Tuesday (and there has not been much to choose between most Mondays and Tuesdays of late), it is no answer to tell me that the time at which I happen to say so is Tuesday evening, or possibly Wednesday morning.

It is vain for the most sanguine meteorologist to wave his arms about and cry: "Monday is past; Mondays will return no more; Tuesday and Wednesday are ours; you cannot put back the clock." I am perfectly entitled to answer that the changing face of the clock does not alter the recorded facts of the barometer. Doubtless, the old lady, when she was a young lady, declared that the present and future were hers, and that her aged aunt was very aged. But these pleasant and polite comparisons do not make it impossible to establish objective historical comparisons. And anybody is intellectually entitled to say, if he thinks so, that there was better social weather on the old woman's Monday than on the young man's Tuesday; or even on the quiet Sunday of the aged aunt. I do not say so; anyhow not about that old woman; and, as Archbishop Temple said, "I never knew her aunt." But to be rude and contemptuous to the old woman, merely on the ground that she was old, is even more unworthy of a philosopher than it is of a gentleman. And all this assumption of the superiority of the advancing hours, based on the accident of the hour that is passing, is in its nature unintelligent; in the sense in which a gross error in mathematics is unintelligent. The theory of progress may be argued; but it must be proved. It is necessary to show that certain social stages are superior to previous social stages on their own merits; and in many cases it may be possible to prove it. In some cases it is certainly possible to disprove it. But it is absurd for a young man to base his argument upon the mere fact that he began to join in the discussion in the year 1930 instead of the year 1830. That is no more valid than the fact that he joined up with his controversial companions at Turnham Green, when they had been arguing all the way from Hammersmith. The one is a mere point in time; as the other is a mere point in space; and each of them is as idle and irrelevant as any tick of the clock.

Naturally, in this tale here taken as a text, the novelist regarded himself as novel. But some study, even of the history of novelists, would have shown him that there is no such simple issue between novelty and antiquity. The novelist claims to be a realist; and he has as much right to defend realism as other novelists had to defend romanticism. But he is out by a thousand miles if he supposes that there has been a general progress from romanticism to realism; or, indeed, from anything to anything else. The great history of the great English novelists would alone be enough to show that the story was never a pure story of progress; but of rebellions and reactions; revolutions and counter-revolutions. When England began to escape from a Puritanism which forbade all romances, the great Richardson rejoiced in being able to pour out floods of tears and tenderness about the most delicate forms of love. When he had done it, the great Fielding rejoiced even more to pour out floods of derision, believing that his coarse candour and common sense was a part of enlightenment and liberty; though often concerned with less delicate forms of love.

A generation later, the great Jane Austen confessed herself disgusted by the coarseness even of Addison, and created a restrained comedy of which half the humour is its deliberate decorum. Then we went on to Dickens and Thackeray, the latter especially dismissing as barbarism what Swift and Smollett had regarded as realism, and even as liberalism. Nothing is now important about these great English novelists except that they were all great. Nobody discusses whether they were all novel; yet each in turn believed himself to be novel. Any one who goes by dates may find himself defending brutality against Richardson or prudery against Fielding. The worst argument in the world is a date. For it is actually taking as fixed the one thing that we really know is fugitive and staking all upon to-day at the moment when it is turning into yesterday. The clock-worshipper has a heavy creed of predestination; and it is only as the tavern closes that its priest cries aloud upon his god; saying, like all the sad modern sages: “Time, gentlemen, time!”

XXVIII About the Workers

IT is often said truly, though perhaps not often understood rightly, that extremes meet. But the strange thing is that extremes meet, not so much in being extraordinary, as in being dull. The country where the East and the West are one is a very flat country. For such extremes are generally extreme simplifications; and tend to a type of generalization flattening out all real types, let alone real personalities. Two of the dreariest things in the world, for instance, are the way in which the snobs among the rich talk about the poor; and the way in which the prigs who profess to have an economic cure for poverty themselves talk about the poor. On the one side, we have the class of people who are always talking about “the lower classes,” thereby proving that they belong to a class very much lower; a class so low that it almost deserves to be called classy. It is sufficiently weak-minded to be proud; but this type is generally merely purse-proud; and, as Thackeray said, “It admires mean things meanly”; for example, it admires itself. To hear such people talking about servants or about working men will be enough to send the wise and good away with a wild impulse to make, if not a barricade, at least a butter-slide. But, curiously enough, there is something that produces almost exactly the same impression on my own feelings; and that is the pedantic way in which all people who happen to be poor are classified by some professors of Socialism or social reform; and even by some who are supposed to be working-class representatives themselves. Somehow they seem to talk about the Proletariat in exactly the same tone of voice in which the wealthier snobs talk about the lower classes. Why, for instance, is it never correct to call them “the workmen” or “the working men” but always crushingly correct to call them “the workers”? Somehow that word alone, and the ritual repetition of it, seems to discolour and drain the whole subject of any human interest. To be a workman is perhaps the noblest of all human functions; and I was delighted the other day to hear a speaker describe Mr. Eric Gill, the great sculptor, as “the first workman in the land.” But the person swallowed up in these sociological generalizations is no more the last than the first. He is not a working man because he is not a man; he is not any workman anybody has ever known; he is not the funny Irish bricklayer you talked to when you were a little boy; he is not the plumber or the mysterious plumber’s mate; he is not the gardener, who was rather cross; he is not the needy knife-grinder or the romantic rat-catcher. He is The Workers; a vast grey horde of people, apparently all exactly alike, like ants; who are always on the march somewhere; presumably to the Ninth or Tenth International. And this de-humanizing way of dealing with people who do most of the practical work on which we depend, merely because they unfortunately have to do it for a wage, is really quite as irritating to anybody with any real popular sympathies as the ignorant contempt of the classes that are established and ought to be educated. And both fail upon the simple point that the most important thing about a workman is that he is a man; a particular sort of biped; and that two of him are not a quadruped nor fifty of him a centipede.

These amusing but annoying habits are but the outer expression of a social truth, which will grow more and more obviously true; but which very few people of any political or social group have yet seen to be true at all. Talking as if I were myself a wild Communist, the voice of the rough and simple masses of the poor, and therefore using the longest words I can and putting what I mean as pedantically and polysyllabically as possible, I might state the matter thus. The sociology of capitalistic industrialism began with an identification with individualism; but its ultimate organization has corresponded to a complete loss of individuality. So far so bad. But what is even worse, the sort of constructive discontent in revolt against it, which is still most common in the varieties of popular opinion, has itself inherited and carried on this indifference to individuality. For Communism is the child and heir of Capitalism; and the son would still greatly resemble his father even if he had really killed him. Even if we had what is called the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, there would be the same mechanical monotony in dealing with the mob of Dictators as in dealing with the mob of wage-slaves. There would be, in practice, exactly the same sense of swarms of featureless human beings, swarms of human beings who were hardly human, swarms coming out of a hive, whether to store or to sting. And when I thought of that word, I suddenly realized why I so intensely disliked the other words I have mentioned; for, now I come to think of it, I believe there is one whole section of such insects that is called “the workers.”

Upon this similarity, generally called a conflict, between an industrial order and an equally industrial revolution, is largely founded that third thesis, on which I have sometimes touched in this place; the insistence on true individualism instead of false individualism; the distribution of private property to the individual citizens and individual families. I am not now arguing about its political prospects or economic effectiveness; though they are much more hopeful than most modern people suppose. I am thinking of it merely in relation to the sweeping criticism and the swarming crowd; the general tendency of people at both extremes to simplify the problem either by contempt or by pedantry. I mean that some of us think the Irish bricklayer might be even funnier if he were as free as the Irish peasant; that if the plumber always owned his own tools, he might sometimes neglect to leave them behind; that though a man can be cross as well as contented with his own garden, the fact of ownership itself tends on the whole to contentment; and that even discontent of that sort does not mean that a man is at once discontented and indistinguishable or invisible; or reduced to making a vague noise out of the voices of many nameless men, like the buzzing of bees in his back garden. For I do not believe that any human being is fundamentally happier for being finally lost in a crowd, even if it is called a crowd of comrades. I do not believe that the humorous human vanities can have vanished quite so completely from anybody as that; I think every man must desire more or less to figure as a figure, and not merely as a moving landscape, even if it be a landscape made of figures. I cannot believe that men are quite so different that any of them want to be the same. I admit that the beginning of men for the purposes of social protest may have some of the justification of a just war. I even admit that the menace of such a war may palliate the panic-stricken arrogance of some of the ignorant rich, who do not know what the war is about. But I repeat that in both cases I think that habit of dealing with men in the mass, not merely on abnormal occasions, as in a war or a strike, but in normal circumstances and as a part of ordinary social speech, is a very bad way of trying to understand the human animal. There are only a few animals, and they are not human animals, who can be best judged or best employed in packs or herds. Some may compare the workers of a Communist state to a pack of wolves; I should very strongly suspect that they bear more resemblance to a flock of sheep. But neither of these animals can be said to have a very complex or entertaining type of mentality; few of us would be eager to listen, even if we could, to the flowing and continuous reminiscences of a sheep; and St. Francis seems to have been the only man who was ever on intimate terms with a wolf. It is precisely because man is the most interesting of the creatures that he finds his proper place among those creatures who dig a domestic hole or hang up an individual nest; and the disgrace of our society is not when he has not a hive or an ant hill; but when, among so many nests and holes, he has not where to lay his head.

XXIX About Education

I HAVE dared to suggest that it would be rather a good thing if educated Englishmen knew a little history. I am not worrying about uneducated Englishmen. They do know a little history; a very little history, perhaps, but genuine so far as it goes; they do remember what their father and grandfather said; in what town or village they were born; what was the tone of the society round them; and their testimony, so far as it goes, is true. Any lawyer will tell you that uneducated witnesses are much better than educated witnesses, because they have not been elaborately educated to see what is not there. But it is a bad thing that an educated man, trained to have a taste for many good things, such as music or landscape, should know nothing of the songs of his fathers, and should appreciate the landscape without appreciating the land. Now, the nuisance of it is this: that if I say that people should be taught history, I shall have the horrible appearance of presenting myself as a historian. But that is almost the contrary of my contention. I only know a very little history; and even that very little is enough to tell me that much more important and powerful and successful persons than myself know no history at all.

It is not a question of somebody being a scholar; it is a question of something not being taught in the school. If I found that educated people were not aware that there is any difference between addition and subtraction, I should think myself justified in saying that something had happened to arithmetic in the schools; but it would not imply that I am a mathematician, which is absurd; still less that I could discuss the higher mathematics with Professor Einstein. If I found my most cultivated acquaintances alluding to Vienna as the capital of Spain, or the Volga as the chief river of America, I should feel the geographical studies had become a little vague; in spite of the fact that my own knowledge of geography is very vague indeed. In short, an ordinary man is only justified in complaining of the neglect of a subject when he realizes that the schools neglect even the very little that he knows. He may himself have had heavy and laborious difficulties even in mastering the alphabet; but he still has the right to consider it rather odd that people do know the alphabet of arithmetic and do not know the alphabet of history. For the question concerns, in the most emphatic sense, the alphabet of history; the elements of history; or what has been called, in a famous title, the outline of history. I know nothing whatever about electricity, except that it lights bulbs and rings bells, and does all sorts of fantastic things round me, to which I do not happen to attach much importance, as compared with candles or gongs. I know the name comes from the ancient Greek word for amber; but I also know that its modern use has been mainly modern. I mean that, until it was analysed and utilized in the last few centuries by scientific men like Volta or Galvani, few people appreciated the importance of electricity; except those who had the brief but brilliant experience of being struck by lightning. In other words, I mean that, though I know next to nothing about electricity, I know something about the history of electricity, since I know that, before Volta and the rest, it had no history at all.

Now compare that sort of rudimentary information possessed by one ignorant Englishman about a branch of physics with the complete ignorance of almost all Englishmen about a parallel point of history. Millions of men who know much more about electricity than I do (and nobody could know less) are at this moment convinced that internationalism is a new ideal; and that this kind of ethics is as recent as electricity — or, rather, as recent as electricians. Talk to almost anybody in a train or a tram, and you will find he believes that we all emerged out of savage separate tribes, and that the idea of friendship with foreigners is part of a modern ideal of fraternity. Perhaps he will vaguely suppose that the Communists were the first Cosmopolitans; that nothing can link up nations but the Third or Fourth or Fifth or Sixth international, and the alliance of the Proletarians Of All Lands. But that is only a possibility; for the Communists are still a small minority. But even if he is quite a mild and moderate citizen, of the older parties, you will find he believes that national bigotry is merely a thing of the past; or perhaps that international brotherhood can only be a thing of the future. He will say it is due to the growth of liberal ideas, which have widened the narrow sympathies of the nation and the tribe. He may even hold that Mr. Wells invented the World State; even if he has not exactly founded the World State. But, anyhow, he will almost certainly believe, in one way or another, that going back into the past means going back into more and more partisan patches of patriotism; that the world began by being jingo and has gradually grown more sympathetic with justice to the foreigner.

Now, that is a black-and-white blunder about the outline of history; just as it would be a blunder to say that any prehistoric man was an electrician if he was struck by a thunderbolt. It is completely and colossally the contrary of the fact. Europe is now very national, and some may say very narrow. But certainly it was once much less national and much less narrow. Personally, I rather like nationalism; and I know there are much worse things than narrowness. But I am talking about a historical fact, a plain and primary historical fact; a fact that stands in history exactly as addition and subtraction stand in arithmetic. Nobody who does not know it knows the alphabet of our human history. The fact is, of course, that a narrow nationality has grown steadily and strongly for the last six hundred years; and European nations are much more divided now than they were in the time of the Holy Roman Empire, to say nothing of the Pagan Roman Empire. The French and English who fought each other at Crecy were more like each other than the French and English who supported each other at Mons. Our nationalities, whether good or bad (and they are good enough for me) did in historical fact emerge into separate existence out of a common cosmopolitan civilization, dating from the days of the Caesars, and still recognized in the days of the mediaeval Popes. Now, I am not arguing here about what importance is to be attached to this historical fact; still less about what deductions are to be drawn from it. I only say that the fact is not popularly recognized as a fact like the fact of electricity. I only say that I should be universally regarded as an idiot if I were quite so ignorant of electricity as most of my countrymen are of history.

I think it rather important to press the point; because it is at this moment a point of peril. Everybody is asking in a distracted fashion whether the great nations can understand each other; and nearly everybody is insisting that it must be an entirely new sort of understanding. Now, it is surely not unimportant to point out that all these great nations formed part of one common and completely united civilization for about sixteen hundred years. I do not want them to fade back into the pagan unity of the first century or the feudal unity of the fourteenth. But if anybody says that they cannot find a unity, it is not irrelevant to say that they did find it, for much more than a thousand years. It is more hopeful to say that international brotherhood was the whole historic background from which we came than to say that it may or may not appear as an untried Utopia.

XXX About the Telephone

I READ a chance phrase in a daily paper the other day; indeed, I had read it in a great many other daily papers on a great many other days. But it suddenly revealed to me the deep disagreement that divides most modern people about the nature of progress; even those who are so superficial as to imagine that they all agree. The sentence ran something like this: "The time will come when communicating with the remote stars will seem to us as ordinary as answering the telephone."

To which I answer, by way of a beginning: "Yes, that is what I object to." Now, if you could say to me: "The time will come when answering the telephone will seem to us as extraordinary as communicating with the remote stars...," then I should admit that you were a real, hearty, hopeful, encouraging progressive. Though a progressive, you would still be a prophet; which some have considered to be a rather antiquated trade. It would still be very arguable that a prophet is either a man divinely inspired or a man who, by the nature of the case, is talking about things he does not understand. But, assuming, for the sake of argument, that a progressive can be sufficiently convinced and assured to talk like a prophet, I should say that this prophet was really prophesying the coming of the kingdom of heaven, and this progressive was promising us a real and substantial progress. To tell us that we shall find as much joy in a telephonic voice as we might find in a starry vision — that would be a gospel in the very practical sense of good news. But to tell us that we shall be as much bored by the stars as we are by the telephone — that is not good news at all. It only means that something which is still a sort of vague inspiration will become, in due course, a very ordinary irritation. When the morning stars sing together and the sons of God shout for joy, when the mightiest music of the spheres reaches our earth as a new revelation of the depths and heights of sound, we should not exactly wish that the starry choir should cry in one united chorus: "Sorry you've been troubled." For in that pathetic cry from the exchange, the tragedy of our human lot is philosophically conceded. It is admitted, in the very words, that being called upon to answer the telephone *is* being troubled.

It is admitted, even by the official mind, that in this sense man is born for trouble as the electric sparks fly upward, or wherever the electric sparks may fly; it is even hinted, though perhaps mystically and indirectly, that a life of peace, perfect peace, would be one in which the telephone ceased from troubling and the subscribers were at rest. But the truth goes deeper than any incidental irritations that might arise from the mismanagement of the instrument; it implies some degree of indifference even in the management of it. We are incessantly told, indeed, that the modern scientific appliances, even those like the telephone, which are now universally applied, are the miracles of man, and the marvels of science, and the wonders of the new world. But though the inventions are talked of in this way, they are not treated in this way. Or, rather, if they are so talked of in theory, they are not so talked of in practice. There has certainly been a rush of discovery, a rapid series of inventions; and, in one sense, the activity is marvellous and the rapidity might well look like magic. But it has been a rapidity in things going stale; a rush downhill to the flat and dreary world of the prosaic; a haste of marvellous things to lose their marvellous character; a deluge of wonders to destroy wonder. This may be the improvement of machinery, but it cannot possibly be the improvement of man. And since it is not the improvement of man, it cannot possibly be progress. Man is the creature that progress professes to improve; it is not a race of wheels against wheels, or a wrestling match of engines against engines. Improvement implies all that is commonly called education; and education implies enlargement; and especially enlargement of the imagination. It implies exactly that imaginative intensity of appreciation which does not permit anything that might be vivid or significant to become trivial or vulgar. If we have vulgarized electricity on the earth, it is no answer to boast that, in a few years more, we can vulgarize the stars in the sky.

Tell me that the bustling business man is struck rigid in prayer at the mere sound of the telephone-bell, like the peasants of Millet at the Angelus; tell me that he bows in reverence as he approaches the shrine of the telephone-box; tell me even that he hails it with Pagan rather than with Christian ritual, that he gives his ear to the receiver as to an Oracle of Delphi, or thinks of the young lady on an office-stool at the Exchange as of a priestess seated upon a tripod in a distant temple; tell me even that he has an ordinary poetical appreciation of the idea of that human voice coming across hills and valleys — as much appreciation as men had about the horn of Roland or the shout of Achilles — tell me that these scenes of adoration or agitation are common in the commercial office on the receipt of a telephone call, and *then* (upon the preliminary presumption that I believe a word you say), *then* indeed I will follow your bustling business man and your bold, scientific inventor to the conquest of new worlds and to the scaling of the stars. For then I shall know that they really do find what they want and understand what they find; I shall know that they do add new experiences to our life and new powers and passions to our souls; that they are like men finding new languages, or new arts, or new schools of architecture. But all they can say, in the sort of passage I quoted, is that they can invent things which are generally commonplace conveniences, but very often commonplace inconveniences. And all that they can boast, in answer to any intelligent criticism, is that they may yet learn how to make the sun and moon and the everlasting heavens equally commonplace, and probably equally inconvenient.

Let it be noted that this is *not*, as is always loosely imagined, a reaction against material science; or a regret for mechanical invention; or a depreciation of telephones or telescopes or anything else. It is exactly the other way. I am not depreciating telephones; I am complaining that they are not appreciated. I am not attacking inventions; I am attacking indifference to inventions. I only remark that it is the same people who brag about them who are really indifferent to them. I am not objecting to the statement that the science of the modern world is wonderful; I am only objecting to the modern world because it does not wonder at it. It is true that, in connexion with certain other political or moral questions, I doubt whether these mechanical tricks can be used as moral tests. But that has nothing to do with the question of the dazzling brilliancy of the conjuring trick, considered as a conjuring trick. Whether such a thing is an ultimate social test is really a question of whether it is a necessity or a luxury. And nobody ever doubted that a conjuring trick is a luxury. The ideal of a peasantry, enunciated by a French king, that there should always be a chicken in the pot, is doubtless different from the ideal that there should always be a rabbit in the hat. But there is no reason to doubt that the French king and the French peasant are capable of enjoying the purely artistic and scientific pleasure of seeing the rabbit rapidly and dexterously produced from the hat. Now I may, and do, doubt whether there is very much purely *practical* superiority in the extraordinary rabbit over the ordinary chicken. I doubt whether great masses of men will get much more food off the magical rabbit than greyhounds will get off the mechanical hare. I doubt whether rabbit tastes any nicer out of the hat of a professor in evening dress than out of the pot of a French peasant’s wife who happens to know how to cook it. In short, my doubts about modern materialistic machinery are doubts about its ultimate utility in practice. But I never questioned its poetry, its fantasy; the fitness of so sublime a conjuring trick for a children’s party. What I complain of is that the modern children have forgotten how to shriek.

XXXI About the Films

THE time has come to protest against certain very grave perils in the cinema and the popular films. I do not mean the peril of immoral films, but the peril of moral ones. I have, indeed, a definite objection to immoral films, but it is becoming more and more difficult to discuss a definite morality with people whose very immorality is indefinite. And, for the rest, merely lowbrow films seem to me much more moral than many of the highbrow ones. Mere slapstick pantomime, farces of comic collapse and social topsy-turvydom, are, if anything, definitely good for the soul. To see a banker or broker or prosperous business man running after his hat, kicked out of his house, hurled from the top of a skyscraper, hung by one leg to an aeroplane, put into a mangle, rolled out flat by a steam-roller, or suffering any such changes of fortune, tends in itself rather to edification; to a sense of the insecurity of earthly things and the folly of that pride which is based on the accident of prosperity. But the films of which I complain are not those in which famous or fashionable persons become funny or undignified, but those in which they become far too dignified and only unintentionally funny.

In this connexion, it is especially the educational film that threatens to darken and weaken the human intelligence. I do not mean the educational film in the technical or scientific sense; the presentation of the definite details of some science or branch of study. In these innocent matters, even education can do comparatively little harm to the human brain. There are a number of really delightful films, for instance, dealing with exploration and local aspects of biology or botany. Nothing could be more charmingly fanciful than such natural history; especially when its monsters seem to emulate the Snark or the Jumblies, and become figures of unnatural history. But in that sort of unnatural history there is nothing unnatural. The Loves of the Penguins are doubtless as pure as the Loves of the Triangles; and to see a really fine film in which an elephant playfully smashes up four or five flourishing industrial towns or imperial outposts only realizes a daydream already dear to every healthy human instinct. Where the real peril begins to appear is not in natural history, but in history. It is in the story of those talkative and inventive penguins of whom M. Anatole France wrote in the tale of that terrible and incalculable creature, who is so much more ruthless and devastating than the wildest rogue elephant, since he does not destroy industrial cities, but builds them.

In short, it is in relation with the story of Man, the monster of all monsters and the mystery of all mysteries, that our natural history may become in the dangerous sense unnatural. And everybody knows that the commonest way in which history can grow crooked, or become unnatural, is through partisanship and prejudice, and the desire to draw too simple a moral from only one side of the case. Now, it is just here that the most successful films are in some danger of becoming actually anti-educational, while largely professing to be educational. In this connexion, it will be well to recall two or three determining facts of the general situation of society and the arts to-day. The first fact to realize is this: that only a little while ago the more thick-headed prejudices of provincial history were beginning to wear a little thin. Men would still take, as they were entitled to take, their own side according to their own sympathies. But they were beginning to realize that history consists of human beings, and not of heroes and villains out of an old Adelphi melodrama. Whether men were for or against Queen Elizabeth, they did begin to understand that she was something a little more complex than Good Queen Bess; and that even her unfortunate sister was in a situation not to be completely simplified by the use of a popular expletive, as in Bloody Mary.

It began to be admitted that the great seventeenth-century struggle, about whether England should be a Monarchy or an Aristocracy, could not be used merely to prove that Cromwell was never anything but a saint or Charles I never anything but a martyr. This great change for the good was very largely connected with the passing of the old Two-Party System. There had been a time when people were told to choose, not so much between Gladstone and Disraeli, as between a popular figure who was not Gladstone and another popular figure who was not Disraeli. The wary Old Parliamentary Hand, with his Tory traditions of the Oxford Movement, was represented as a wild, revolutionary idealist, everywhere demanding that the heavens should fall, that some Utopian justice might be done. The cynical cosmopolitan adventurer, with his romantic loyalty to Israel and his open contempt for the common Conservative point of view, was praised as a hearty English country gentleman, innocently interested in crops which consisted chiefly of primroses. These fatuous electioneering fictions were beginning to fade away; partly through a reaction towards the rather acid

Lytton Strachey biographies, partly through a more sane and liberal historical interest in historical characters who really were very interesting human beings. And then, when the truth was beginning to pierce through in books, and even in newspapers, the whole light was blotted out by a big, fashionable film, cunningly written and brilliantly performed, in which Disraeli appeared once more as God's Englishman covered with primroses and breathing the innocent patriotism of our native fields.

The second fact to remember is a certain privilege almost analogous to monopoly, which belongs of necessity to things like the theatre and the cinema. In a sense more than the metaphorical, they fill the stage; they dominate the scene; they create the landscape. That is why one need not be Puritanical to insist on a somewhat stricter responsibility in all sorts of play-acting than in the looser and less graphic matter of literature. If a man is repelled by one book, he can shut it and open another; but he cannot shut up a theatre in which he finds a show repulsive, nor instantly order one of a thousand other theatres to suit his taste. There are a limited number of theatres; and even to cinemas there is some limit. Hence there is a real danger of historical falsehood being popularized through the film, because there is not the normal chance of one film being corrected by another film. When a book appears displaying a doubtful portrait of Queen Elizabeth, it will generally be found that about six other historical students are moved to publish about six other versions of Queen Elizabeth at the same moment. We can buy Mr. Belloc's book on Cromwell, and then Mr. Buchan's book on Cromwell; and pay our money and take our choice. But few of us are in a position to pay the money required to stage a complete and elaborately presented alternative film-version of Disraeli. The fiction on the film, the partisan version in the movie-play, will go uncontradicted and even uncriticized, in a way in which few provocative books can really go uncontradicted and uncriticized. There will be no opportunity of meeting it on its own large battlefield of expansive scenario and multitudinous repetition. And most of those who are affected by it will know or care very little about its being brought to book by other critics and critical methods. The very phrase I have casually used, "brought to book," illustrates the point. A false film might be refuted in a hundred books, without much affecting the million dupes who had never read the books but only seen the film. The protest is worth making, because provincial prejudice of this kind is frightfully dangerous in the present international problem of the hour. It is perfectly natural for nations to have a patriotic art, and even within reason a patriotic education. It naturally teaches people, especially young people, to be proud of the great heroes of their great history; and to conceive their own past in a sort of poetic way like legends. But this is exactly where we may test the difference between a legend and a lie. The outlines of a real hero, like Nelson or Sarsfield, are not altered when the figure is filled up, in maturer stages of knowledge, by the facts about failure or weakness or limitation. The hero remains a hero; though the child, being now grown up, knows that a hero is a man. But the figure of the fictitious Beaconsfield will not support the intrusion of the real Disraeli. It would be destroyed by all that was most interesting in Disraeli; even by all that was most genuine in Disraeli. A dummy of that sort does no good to national credit or glory; all foreigners laugh at it, knowing more about it than we do; and we ourselves can only preserve our solemnity by not going near enough to laugh. That is to make the thing a mere “film” on the eyes of official obscurantism; and to give a new secretive meaning to the title of “The Screen.”

XXXII About Darwinism

WHATEVER else was evolved, evolution was not evolved. I mean evolution as a part of education; as an idea more or less accepted for the last forty years by most thinking people; and perhaps even more by most unthinking people. Those who supported it were always talking about growth and gradual change; but their own movement was not at all gradual. They popularized an evolution that was far too much of a revolution; that came with far too much of a rush; that became as the phrase goes, all the rage; with some of its exponents rather unmistakably raging. It was opposed to ideas of supernatural or even special creation; but the theory itself was created in a very special sense; and it was boomed and advertised like a miracle. Many of the recent revolts and reactions and belated questionings have been due to that original journalistic hustle; and yet they are themselves likely to be treated in turn in too hustling and journalistic a fashion. Darwin's individual industry was indeed minute and patient; and he was personally the very reverse of an impetuous or impatient character. It is none the less true that Darwinism was much too hastily thrust down everybody's throat, including Darwin's. Old Huxley had all the passions of a pamphleteer and a partisan; also he was individually and intensely interested in certain ethical and philosophical attitudes of his own, which Darwinism supported more perhaps than he himself would otherwise have supported Darwinism. Huxley and Herbert Spencer really valued Darwinism, as an argument for agnosticism. It would have been much better if they had cultivated a little more agnosticism about Darwinism.

All the memoirs and memories of that time are full of that curious atmosphere of brand-new prejudice and premature pugnacity. Popular science loved to put the spotlight on special occasions; party combats and particular challenges of particular champions. Everybody talked about the repartee of Huxley to Wilberforce as something as theatrical as a thunderbolt. Everything was supposed to stand or fall by a particular debate between Huxley and Gladstone about the Gadarene Swine. Nobody seems to have remarked on the fact that a theory like Darwinism, advanced by a man like Darwin, was about the most unsuitable subject on earth to be settled by a retort in a debating club. Nobody noticed that Gladstone was about the worst person in the world either to teach a man like Huxley the truths of theology or to detect in him the errors of science. Humanity knew that Gladstone was an eloquent orator, and Huxley said he was a copious shuffler; but he was neither a philosopher nor a historian suited to deal with the theory of evidence of miracles. He was simply the Prime Minister, past, present, or to come; and his appearance on that platform only made it a fashionable occasion. That was what was the matter with the whole occasion. Darwin became much too fashionable; and Darwinism prevailed only as a fashion.

If the great biological speculations of the later nineteenth century had remained speculative, they would have been much more slow and very much more sure. We might by this time have really taken stock of what is actually known about the variation of species and what can only be plausibly guessed and what is quite random guesswork. Instead of that, a hypothesis was allowed to harden into a habit of thought; and any alternative hypothesis creates unnecessary excitement as a violent paradox. A distinguished scientific man, in another branch of science, has recently contradicted Darwinism with the same emphasis and eagerness with which the Darwinians affirmed it. This is news in the newspapers, but in this country we grossly exaggerate the extent to which it is new in the scientific world. When Sir Arthur Keith and Mr. H. G. Wells tried to treat Anti-Darwinism as an unheard-of paradox, Mr. Belloc had not the least difficulty in naming fifty scientific men of the first rank, throughout Europe, who were avowed Anti-Darwinians. And Sir Arthur Keith could say nothing in reply, except that one out of the fifty, the distinguished Professor Dwight, had never at any time accepted the Darwinian hypothesis. The argument was, apparently, that Dwight could not be right, because he had been right all the time. There is nothing new about the purely scientific attack on the Darwinian theory; it began very soon after the Darwinians advanced the theory. But the Darwinians advanced it with so sweeping and hasty an intolerance that it is no longer a question of one scientific theory being advanced against another scientific theory. It is no longer a question of fairly comparing what Darwin said with what Dwight said; indeed, it is not a question at all. It is treated as an answer; and a final and infallible answer. Now nobody need know any more than the mere rudiments of the biological controversy in order to know that, touching twenty incidental problems, it is in some ways a very unsatisfactory answer. This does not necessarily mean that it was not valuable as a suggestion; or that it may not help to suggest the real answer. Darwin did a mass of very fine work, accumulated a multitude of facts, and set them in a certain light by subjecting them to a general suggestion. Such work need not have been thrown away if the thing had been treated in a reasonable manner. The Victorian evolutionists were wrong; not because they opened the evolutionary question, but because they closed it.

For the Victorian evolutionists were very Victorian indeed. They really did deserve the sort of criticism which the realists of a younger generation have brought against Victorian virtue or hypocrisy, in the matter of closed doors. Yet the evil did not really come from hypocrisy; it did really come from virtue. But it was virtue of a certain Puritanical type; and especially of a political type. The men of whom Thomas Huxley was the greatest were, above all, controversialists; because they were, above all, moralists. They conducted their debates, even their abstract scientific debates, in the spirit of a sort of idealistic General Election. It was Darwin against Gladstone; just as it was Disraeli against Gladstone. They were always going to the country, appealing to the public, expecting an immediate decision of the whole commonwealth, even on the most specialist speculations, as if they were the most spiritual elements of right and wrong. Thus they identified Free Trade with Freedom; insisting on it with an ethical simplicity wholly inapplicable to an economic science. And so they identified Natural Selection with Nature; with a dogmatic finality wholly inapplicable to a biological science. The Darwinian Theory was the Dawn; and any other shade of fact or fancy was only part of the opposing darkness. We can see the difference in a flash if we merely compare those great and grim grey-whiskered men with the Greeks or the men of the Renaissance, when they speculated in a free-and-easy fashion about some theory of the stars, or the flight of birds, or the movements of the sea. The greater moral seriousness of the Victorians gave them all the advantage that industry and conscientious record can give; but there is a sense in which the scientific spirit was lost in the very triumphs of the scientific age. They were so fond of having convictions that they came prematurely to conclusions. Having grown doubtful about the things on which conviction is most valuable, they then expected the speculative imagination to answer as promptly and practically as the conscience. The consequence was that they answered much too soon; and then yielded to the temptation of all moralists, to veto any kind of answer to the answer. Anyone who reads the account of how the orthodox officials of Darwinism dealt with a real free-thinker like Samuel Butler will recognize by unmistakable signs that the Darwinian free-thinkers were no longer thinking freely; we might say they were no longer free to think. The consequence is that, by this time, when that rigid and respectable Victorian front door is suddenly burst open, it has the effect of a resurrection or the rending of a tomb. But there is no need for such excitement; and it is quite possible that the reaction following such a resurrection may go too far. It will be worse still if the world is again converted without being convinced.

XXXIII About Shockers

IT is well that students sternly devoted to that science should issue bulletins, from time to time, upon the state of the Detective Story; the stage it has recently reached in its present alleged progress or decline. Some hold that the possibilities of the detective story will soon be exhausted. They take the view that there are only a limited number of ways of murdering a man, or only a limited number of men who might plausibly and reasonably be murdered. But surely this is to take too gloomy and pessimistic a view of the case. Some hold that the detective story will, indeed, progress and evolve, but it will evolve into something else; and I always think that sort of evolution is a form of extinction. They seem to think that it will become so good that it will cease to exist; will die of sheer goodness, like the little choir-boy. What used to be called the police novel will expand into the novel where the problems are too subtle to be solved by calling in the police. For my part, as a matter of taste, I can do very well without the police; but I cannot do without the criminals. And if modern writers are going to ignore the existence of crime, as so many of them already ignore the existence of sin, then modern writing will get duller than ever.

Here, however, my only duty, as a dry recorder of scientific facts, is to note a few of the recent changes in the police novel, which do roughly correspond to changes in the social history of our time. I shall also venture, in my capacity of earnest ethical adviser to the young student of blood and thunder, to point out some dangers and disadvantages in these new forms and fashions in crime. For, though modern society has given us in some ways a wider range, and provided us with varieties of incident or implement not known to our fathers and mothers, and all the other simple and homely assassins of our childhood's days, yet this enlargement and variety is not an unmixed advantage for the artist in murder. There are several ways, in this as in other arts of life, in which the modern appearance of liberty is very misleading. Many a happy family, innocently priding itself on an uncle who was hanged in the quiet old Victorian days, would, in fact, find that their relative's career made a much better story, considered as a story, than some of these larger and looser studies of loose living, where there are so many new vices to cover the track of ancient crime.

I would therefore lay down this canon first of all: that the people in a really gory murder mystery should be good people. Even the man who is really gory should be good, or should have a convincing appearance of being good. Now, many of the very best of the modern writers in this style have partly failed through neglecting this maxim. They start out with another maxim, which is also in itself a perfectly sound maxim. They start out with the very reasonable idea of giving the reader a wide choice of suspects, that the imagination may hover long over them all before it swoops (if it ever does swoop) upon the really guilty person. Unfortunately, it is exactly here that the laxity of modern manners, not to say morals, actually comes in to spoil the effect. The writer begins with somebody doing what (I believe) is known as throwing a party; as a preliminary to the more private act of throwing another party, in the sense of another person, out of a window or down a well. The whole business begins in a rather heated atmosphere of cocktails, with occasional whiffs of cocaine. And the charming freedom and variety of such a social set, in these days, enables the author to crowd the room with all sorts of people who, in the older story, could only have escaped from Dartmoor or returned by ticket-of-leave from Botany Bay. The chief ornaments of these aristocratic salons are conspicuous, not merely by being cads, but by having every appearance of being criminals. In short, the suspects are so very suspect that we might safely call them guilty; not necessarily of the crime under discussion, but only of about half a hundred others.

But there is an obvious snag in this convenient way of spreading suspicion over a number of characters. It can be put in a word: such cases may cause suspicion, but they cannot cause surprise. It is the business of a shocker to produce a shock. But these modern characters are much too shocking ever to produce a shock. These dubious dopers, these suspected dope-traffickers, these alleged or half-alleged heroes of horrible scandals in the past — all these livers of the wild life have one inevitable touch of tameness. They all have one element that must make any ending of the story tame. And that is, that no reader would be even mildly astonished to learn that any one of them, or all of them, had committed the crime. It is true that, in some of the very best recent *romans policiers*, this rout of rather bestial revellers is often introduced, not in order to convict any of them, but to distract attention from some seemingly conventional person who is ultimately convicted. But the method is wrong, even at the best; a hint of guilt should be thrilling; but there is nothing particularly thrilling about the safe bet that some of these social ornaments are capable of being thieves or thugs. If what we want is a thrill, the thrill could only be found in the virtuous Victorian household, when it was first realized that Grandmama's throat had been cut by the curate or by the rather too well-behaved nursery-governess. Even the love of murder stories, like other moral and religious tendencies, will lead us back to home and the simple life.

I think there is another weak point, which is the worst thing even in the best shockers. This also is connected with some recent social changes; as with the scientific fashion of Psychoanalysis, which is generally more of a fashion than a science. It is also connected with a certain mechanical or materialistic interpretation of human interests, which often goes along with it. I mean the expedient of distracting attention from the real criminal by suspecting him at the beginning and not merely at the end. It generally takes the form of some apparent conviction or confession, first dismissed as impossible, and finally found, by some unsuspected ingenuity, to have been possible after all. Often the first accusation is dismissed by some of the dogmas of the new psychology. The curate, let us say, confesses that he jumped over an incredibly high wall to murder the grandmother; and the professor of psychology (with the piercing eyes) points out that a theological training had repressed instead of liberated the *libido* of the curate in the direction of trespass and burglary. He had dreamed he jumped over a high wall; or perhaps the height symbolized levitation and ascending into heaven; it is an accommodating science. Then when we think that the curate is cleared and out of it, we are relieved to find in the last chapter that he is the criminal after all; both he and the author having concealed up to this moment the fact that the curate held the International Championship for the High Jump, and had concealed a jumping-pole among the poles used for the punt.

This method, again, has every quality of ingenuity, and pursues the highly legitimate aim of shifting the spot light from the guilty to the innocent. And yet I think that it fails, and that there is a reason for its failure. The error is the materialistic error; the mistake of supposing that our interest in the plot is mechanical, when it is really moral. But art is never unmoral, though it is sometimes immoral; that is, moral with the wrong morality. The only thrill, even of a common thriller, is concerned somehow with the conscience and the will; it involves finding out that men are worse or better than they seem, and that by their own choice. Therefore, there can never be quite so much excitement over the mere mechanical truth of how a man managed to do something difficult as over the mere fact that he wanted to do it. In these cases we have already considered the criminal as a criminal; we are only asked to consider him anew as a cracksman or crafty and clever criminal. The effect of this is always a sort of bathos; an anticlimax. I say it with regret, for it figures in some of the finest mystery stories I know. But, even if the book is of the best, it always makes me feel that the last page is the worst; when the last page should be the best of all.

I notice a curiously modern and sullen realism beginning to settle on some of the recognized tales of murder, once so gay, innocent, and refreshing. Once our detective art really was almost an unmoral art; and therefore the one which managed to remain almost a moral art. But shades of the prison-house — or, worse still, of the humane reformatory and the psychological clinic — begin to close upon the growing boy and the hopeful butcher of his kind. We are given detailed descriptions of depressing domestic interiors, as if being dumbly asked whether a wife so involved in the washing or the dusting or the spring-cleaning was not eventually bound to murder or be murdered in any case. It is all very well, but I would point out to the sanguinary sophist that the argument can be turned the other way. If it be true that a misguided wife may begin thoughtlessly by doing the washing, and find all sorts of vexatious consequences, possibly including death by violence, so it is equally true that she may begin by using murder as a minor gadget in the domestic machinery, taking death by violence in her stride as a plain, practical solution; and then, after all, find herself involved in a most inordinate amount of washing.

There could not be a grimmer example of this tragedy than poor Lady Macbeth. She had her faults, perhaps, but there is no ground for accusing her of any rooted or aboriginal taste for hygiene. When she was young and innocent, her imagination seems to have been quite unpolluted by the impure image of soap. I should even hesitate to accuse her of spring-cleaning in the serious, anti-social, and sinful sense of the term. Anyhow, a number of very different birds seem to have nested undisturbed over the main entrance to the reception-rooms; which looks as if she was once a human being, and more interested in spring-broods than in spring-cleaning. Unfortunately, like such a very large number of people living in dark, barbarous, ignorant, and ferocious times, she was full of modern ideas. She intended especially to maintain the two brightest and most philosophical of modern ideas; first, that it is often extremely convenient to do what is wrong; and second, that whenever it is convenient to do what is wrong, it immediately becomes what is right. Illuminated by these two scientific search-lights of the twentieth century in her groping among the stark trees and stone pillars of the Dark Ages, Lady Macbeth thought it quite simple and business-like to kill an old gentleman of very little survival value, and offer her own talents to the world in the capacity of Queen. It seems natural enough; to most of us who are used to the morals of modern novels, it will seem almost humdrum and tiresomely obvious. And yet see what a snag there was in it after all!

On this one doomed and devoted woman, who had done nothing but a little bit of a murder which she thought little enough of at the time (as De Quincey says), there fell from heaven like the Deluge the deathly curse of Cleanliness. She, who seems never to have known such morbidities before, was tortured with horrid suggestions of washing her hands, and pursued by furies who seem to have taken the form of modern salesmen offering different brands of soap. Those ambitions of the housewife, which seem to the modern moralist so obvious a cause of murder, were, in fact, wildly exaggerated in her case as a consequence of murder. It was the worst doom of the murderess that she wanted to do the washing, not on Monday, but at midnight; that she wanted to have a spring-cleaning, not in the spring of the year, but in the middle of the night. Who shall say lightly that a murder or two does not matter, when it may lead to the murderess becoming as hygienic as all that?

Sinister minds may be clouded by dark and unworthy suspicions that the views here discussed are not wholly serious; but some of the modern moralists favouring murder and other simple solutions of social difficulties are serious with a dry-throated earnestness that no satire could simulate. And even my own lighted prejudices on the negative side are not without spasms of sincerity. I certainly do not like that Religion of Ablutions which has always really been the Religion of Pharisees; even when it masqueraded as the Religion of Anglo-Saxons or the Religion of Muscular Christians. I made fun of it when it was blindly worshipped, though I have lived to see it too blindly and sweepingly derided, as the Religion of Pukka Sahibs or the Religion of Public School Men. And I know that in its domestic form it can sometimes produce a Puritanism that is very close indeed to Pharisaism. But I should still regard it rather as a symptom of social evil than as a necessary cause of social crime. Miss Miggs will sometimes make almost as much fuss about a spot of grease as Lady Macbeth about a spot of blood. But to infer from this that we are bound to murder Miss Miggs, and that Lady Macbeth was bound to murder Duncan, and that everybody is bound to murder everybody whom he happens to find troublesome for any reason for any considerable length of time — that is one of the dubious and creeping deductions which are beginning to appear, more or less tentatively, in many of the tragedies published in our time; and I should like to protest against all such savage fatalism, before it becomes more explicit. It is, of course, only the logical consequence, as applied to the problem of murder, of what is now everywhere applied to the problem of marriage. It is the theory that there is no such thing as an intolerable solution of a problem, but only an intolerable acceptance of a problem. It is the theory that nothing can possibly be unendurable except having to endure. It is interesting to see how rapidly and quietly the same ethical spirit is already beginning to work in other fields of thought. It does really seem to me far less fantastic to say that a mania for washing was a mild and merciful punishment for murder than to say that murder is a just and reasonable punishment for a mania for washing. But, in any case, I protest against that arbitrary gesture of self-ablution and self-absolution with which some characters in modern stories conclude the confession of their crimes; like that weak tyrant who tried to combine the contraries of despotism and irresponsibility by washing his hands when he had delivered the innocent to death.

XXXIV About Beggars and Soldiers

IT amuses me to think that, amid all the invocations of Christmas and invocations to Christmas charity, I am probably in a minority in uttering any particular and positive eulogy of Christmas waits. It is common enough to celebrate the jovial season by making jokes about Christmas waits, but they are generally in the same vein as the jokes about Christmas bills. It is constantly said in the newspapers (and therefore it must be true) that we have everywhere increased in social sympathies and sentiments of human brotherhood, and it is sometimes even said that all classes are drawing together in mutual understanding. I am sure I hope it may be so; and indeed I think that in certain special social aspects it is so. But I notice that, in many houses where a previous generation accepted waits and carol-singers, even if they grumbled at them in secret, with all the external courtesy and resignation of Duke Theseus listening to the play of Pyramus and Thisbe in A Midsummer Night's Dream, many of a later generation have grown less patient and less polite. I also notice that, over vast districts of the modern urban civilization, whole streets are plastered with placards forbidding hawkers and street cries; lest the ancient institution of the pedlar or the last of the old music of London should disturb those within who are intently occupied, let us hope, in studying books on evolutionary ethics by Cambridge economists, which demonstrate so radiantly the need of social contacts and the removal of all barriers between class and class. Having read a vast number of books of that sort in my time, I am still not entirely satisfied that, in every respect, they are invariably more human and amusing than the talk of Autolycus or the tune of "Cherry-Ripe."

But there is a special case for carol-singers, because they come at a time when our whole tradition has always told us to be charitable to strangers, even to beggars. Of course, carol-singers are not in any sense whatever beggars. They are people offering something in return for money; we may not happen to think it is worth the money, and I happen to think exactly the same of about three-quarters of the things that are most boomed and pushed in the modern business market. But in so far as many of us do pay for the entertainment, even when we do not particularly want the entertainment, and do it from motives of charity, the waits or carol-singers can in that sense be put into the same class as beggars, and sink instantly to the abject and degraded condition of Homer or St. Francis of Assisi. And it is about this problem of beggars, or of those who in one aspect are in the position of beggars, that I am disposed to raise a very general question and remark on a general comparison.

I happen myself to represent, more or less, a general moral philosophy which until very lately was the general moral philosophy of most nations and even most confessions in Europe. And in nothing was that general tradition of our fathers more criticized by our contemporaries than in its alleged contentment with casual and sporadic charity; or, in other words, the habit of giving money to beggars. Now, there is a rather interesting parallel here, between the nineteenth-century attitude towards the problem of the beggar and the twentieth-century attitude towards the problem of the soldier. Only too often, and to the deep disgrace of governments, they were the same individuals. There was a beggars' rhyme in my boyhood that ran: "Here comes a poor soldier from Botany Bay; What have you got to give him to-day?" In the eyes of many modern scientific humanitarians and philanthropists (who certainly would have nothing to give him), he would be blasted with a sort of series and crescendo of crimes; horrible because he was a beggar; horrible because he was a convict, from Botany Bay or any other convict settlement; and most horrible of all because he was a soldier. But both in his character of a beggar and his character of a soldier he offers an opportunity for explaining a certain old-fashioned point of view, which I fancy the majority of modern people do not understand at all.

Those modern people who, much more than any ancient people, have refused and repulsed beggars as such were not merely brutal or stingy. The thing was perhaps at its worst in the blackest time of industrial individualism, when even the theories were brutal and stingy; we might almost say, in some cases, that the ideals were brutal and stingy. But this would be unjust to a very large number of the theorists and idealists who really did believe in plausible theories and ideals. The first theory that held the field was something like this: that it was uneconomic and therefore unethical to patch up the position of people who were in the wrong position and even in the wrong place. The theory was that such a person could eventually find his place when the whole economic community could find its level, and each person was achieving the cheapest production at the proper profit or price. The ideal, however vague, was that of a community in which everybody was living productively and profitably, and nobody was living unproductively and unprofitably. Given that ideal, or any real belief in that ideal, it is not difficult to see that the beggar appears an anomaly that ought to disappear. Unfortunately, the ideal has disappeared and the beggar has remained. Nobody now believes that mere individualism and competition will ever, of themselves, work out to that economic paradise of give and take. The death of that delusion was hastened by the Socialists. And whatever be wrong with Socialism, it was entirely right about what is wrong with Individualism. But the Socialist, quite as much as the Individualist, necessarily and naturally regarded the beggar as an anomaly to be abolished. His way of abolishing him was to plan out a series of Utopias in which the State would find everybody the best work and pay everybody the best wages. I am not criticizing those Utopias just now, or rather I am only criticizing them on one small point. So far as this argument goes there is nothing against them, except that they have not happened. Even among the Bolshevists, where something happened, it was not the abolition of beggary, whether this was the fault of the Bolshevists or no. A rich man in the Ukraine famine would be faced with just the same problem of beggars as a rich man in the Irish famine. Now, when one theory after another thus rises and falls, and one Utopian promise after another is made and broken, is it not comprehensible that some of us think it well to save even a solitary man from starvation, while the world is making up its mind how many centuries it will take for starvation to disappear?

As I have hinted, there is something of the same notion in tolerating the soldier as in tolerating the beggar. Nobody wants anybody to beg or anybody to fight. But when promise after promise of universal peace is broken, and conference after conference abandons the task of establishing international justice, is it so very odd that some people should still want something to defend national justice, in the sense of justice to their own nation? And if the beggar and the soldier seem to remain, *since* they seem to remain — then I do most strongly feel that it is better that they should not be regarded merely as blots or pests, but rather in the light of the traditional virtues associated with the tragedy; the one in the light of charity and the other of chivalry. I do not expect every one, or possibly even any one, to agree entirely with this view, but I hope that somebody will at least accept the compromise in the case of Carol-Singers or Waits.

XXXV About Sacrifice

THE world has not yet had the happiness of reading my great forthcoming work, *The Case for Human Sacrifice,* or Moloch the Modern World's Hope, in nine volumes, with plates and diagrams illustrating all the advantages of Ritual Murder, and the religious side of cannibalism. It is even possible, alas! that the reader will never have the rapture of reading this great scientific monograph; for I have a great many other jobs on hand, in the distraction and excitement of which it is possible that my first fiery and youthful enthusiasm for Human Sacrifice may have somewhat faded, with the passage of years and the consolidation of more moderate convictions. But though I doubt whether I could, by this time, bring myself to sacrifice a baby to Moloch, and though my first boyish impatience at the tame compromise adopted in the cases of Isaac and Iphigenia has long died away, I still think Human Sacrifice is infinitely more decent and dignified than some scientific operations proposed at the present time. At least Human Sacrifice is human; a great deal more human than humanitarianism. And when modern medical men gravely get up and propose that human beings should be put in lethal chambers, when there is any reason to fancy that they are tired of life, I am still (relatively) prepared to cry: "Give me Moloch and the cannibals."

First consider the fundamental point: that the pagan altar at least treated a man's life as something valuable, while the lethal chamber treats a man's life as something valueless. A man's life was offered to the gods because it was valuable; more valuable than the best bull or the finest ram, or the choice things from the flocks and herds which were always chosen because they were choice. But the moderns, who do not believe in the existence of gods, tend at last not to believe even in the existence of men. Being scientific evolutionists, they cannot tell the difference between a man and a sheep. And being highly civilized townsmen, they would probably be very bad judges of the difference between a good sheep and a bad one. Therefore, there is in their sacrificial operations a sort of scornful and indifferent quality contrary to the idea of sacrifice, even at its blackest and bloodiest. They are always talking about eliminating the unfit, getting rid of the surplus population, segregating the feeble-minded, or destroying the hopeless; and this gives all their work a character of contempt. Now, in the very vilest blood-rites of barbarians, there may have been cruelty, but there was not contempt. To have your throat cut before an ugly stone idol was a compliment; though perhaps a compliment that you would have politely disclaimed and waved away.

It would have implied that you were, in the words of the old feudal custom of rent, the Best Beast. And however beastly you might think the people around you, and their religious views and liturgical habits, there would be some satisfaction in being the best beast among them. Human Sacrifice had this great though fallen splendour clinging about it; that at least it was the very contrary of the Survival of the Fittest. Like all the deaths of the martyrs and the heroes, it was the Surrender of the Fittest. The scientific destroyers necessarily talk in the opposite terms and spread the opposite tone. They sacrifice the black sheep of the flock; the mad bull of the herd; the unfortunates of the human community whom they choose to regard as mad or merely as weak-minded. They do not merely kill, but annihilate; not only in the sense of reducing people to nothing, but even of regarding them as nobodies. The sacrificial victim was always regarded as something; he was even respected as somebody. The victim was often a princess whose beauty was admired, or a great enemy whose courage was envied. Some have said that the latter was the origin of cannibalism; in which case it would be quite a handsome compliment to be cooked and eaten; and something of a snub or sneer, to any sensitively constituted gentleman, to be spared and left alive. The reader may be relieved to learn, however, that I do not really recommend the inclusion of cannibalism and human sacrifice among the ritualistic innovations of the Advanced School in the Church.

The truth remains, however, even in the literal and Latin meaning of sacrifice. It means to make a thing sacred; or, in this case, to make a man sacred. And to make him sacred is to make him separate; something set apart, and not to be confused with flocks and herds and the beasts that perish. Now the opposite evil, as it exists in so much scientific philanthropy, is the tendency to deal with men in herds; to treat them like sheep; and not only to class them with the beasts that perish but to take particular care that they do perish. And this is tyranny of a new kind, as compared even with the old despotic execution, let alone the old hieratic sacrifice. Even the public executions, now conventionally condemned, had this sort of wild justice about them: that they did not deprive the chief actor of the limelight. But the new death-ray of scientific destruction would not pick out personalities and individuals as does the limelight. And there is danger that the very fact of dealing with lives that are supposed to be futile or featureless or merely uncomfortable and unpleasant, instead of with great crimes or blasphemies, may bring into the business a spirit which is worse than merely cruel; because it is merely callous.

It is a favourite joke among the more solemn historians that Robespierre, credited or discredited with the guillotining of thousands of enemies of his own theory, actually began his political life with an argument for the abolition of Capital Punishment. It is less often noticed, though it is really a better joke, that he used the only really good argument for the abolition of Capital Punishment. He said: “Every time you kill a man by law, you diminish something of the sacredness of Man.” But human sacrifice, whatever its other little weaknesses, did not diminish anything of the sacredness of Man. From the point of view of that particular pagan heresy, it even increased the sacredness of Man. For it was founded on the opposite principle, that the best thing must be sacrificed or made sacred. And though this particular form of the sentiment is barbarous and benighted, and in moral practice abominable, the sentiment itself is one which ought to be understood better than it is in what is commonly called an age of enlightenment. Unfortunately, the enlightened are also benighted. They never seem to throw any light on these most mysterious and interesting parts of the nature and history of Man; and since they cannot understand the idea in its highest and purest manifestations, it is natural that they should be merely puzzled by it in its basest and most brutal. But a huge part of human history will remain permanently unintelligible to those who cannot even entertain this idea: the idea of giving up a thing not because it is bad, but because it is good.

Speaking seriously, of course, most human sacrifice tends to be inhuman, because it tends to be diabolist. The line is not always drawn at first, or drawn easily, between a somewhat dark and ruthless deity and an actual demon. But one thing at least we may learn from the real history of the world, and that is how to avoid a blunder made by more than half the histories in the world. Whatever else is true, it is not true that blood-rites belong entirely to prehistoric or even primitive peoples. The progressive historians, of a school no longer very obviously progressing, did their very best to hint and imply that complex civilization is a complete safeguard against unnatural creeds or cruel ceremonies. It is nothing of the kind. Some of the most civilized and highly organized cultures, like Carthage at its wealthiest, had human sacrifice at its worst. Culture, like science, is no protection against demons. And poor Robespierre was nearer the truth than the later progressives when he said that there was no protection for the commonwealth but Virtue and the Worship of God.

XXXVI About Royal Weddings

I MAY explain that I am one of the people who really like weddings. Or, rather, to speak more strictly, I am one of the few people who admit, and even boast, that they like weddings. If I took quite simply and seriously the testimony of a long succession of individuals whom I have met, and with whom I have conversed on the topic, I should be bound to deduce that they all of them detest weddings. They always describe them as orgies of futility and fatigue; as occasions of flaunting vulgarity or sickly sentimentalism; as crushes and crowds of stuffy relations, made more insupportable by the intolerable presence of priests or parsons in churches or chapels; for it is generally agreed that having to have parsons is an even more horrible calamity than the horror of having any relations. In short, it may logically and definitely be deduced that most human beings abhor and repudiate weddings, especially these important weddings; which is why the church is always crowded to the roof with a mob big enough to burst all the doors and windows.

In fact, I have noticed that the person who claims to hate weddings is generally the person who makes them hateful. It is precisely the sort of lady who stands on a chair to count the duchesses, or talks in a loud voice about who might have married whom, who eventually staggers out of the crowd, laden with snapshots of all the wealthiest people and autographs of all the more vulgar celebrities, to cry aloud in utter weariness how much she loathes weddings. But all these loathsome things, including the lady herself, are not a wedding. When I say I like a wedding, I do not mean that I like what interrupts a wedding, stifles a wedding, obscures all sight or sound of a wedding, or distracts everybody's mind from the very idea of a wedding. I mean I like the idea of a wedding. This will be quite enough of a paradox for my fiendish critics to digest. The actual words of the Anglican Marriage Service, for instance, seem to me to be a triumph of the English tongue at least as great as anything in Milton or Shakespeare; and it can be said of them more than of most poems and even great poems that to any one who can feel them they are always fresh and even surprising. And they deal with things that have nothing whatever to do with the paltry frivolities or passing fashions of our particular state of society; which (let us hope) is passing too.

They are really worthy to have been spoken over Adam and Eve, in a voice that breathes o’er Eden, not merely in a breath, but a thunder-clap.

Next, we may consider the aspect of one recent special occasion, in the sense in which it is quite truly called a historic occasion. The old forms of heraldry and chivalry, the ancient emblems of feudal or dynastic dedication, the varied colours of nationality, or the tremendous traditions of religion, which are by custom resurrected in such a ritual, are not merely false or merely futile things. They are generally a more genuine record of history than we find in the books of history; and certainly not so false, and not so futile, as the sort of journalistic history which is now popularized by the prigs who are the only educators of our uneducated plutocracy. They represent, of course, particular traditions and not the whole truth, particular loyalties and not all to which men should be loyal. But they represent them correctly and historically, and as they really were. They represent them much more truly than they are represented in the cheap educational works now so widely advertised, in which it is suggested that popular monarchies must have been unpopular because they had monarchs; or that ancient priesthoods must have been indefensible, because they defended themselves long enough to be called ancient. We hear a great deal in the historical world about the necessity of consulting contemporary documents. It is not sufficiently remembered that every costume or coat-of-arms, every flag or escutcheon, always is a contemporary document. Education itself might be educated, the happiest yet most helpless dream of our time, if people would only learn so much as the real history of a few uniforms or liveries.

Or again, the international aspect of such an occasion ought to interest any man who is, as every man obviously ought to be, both an internationalist and a nationalist. The fact that the bride represented the Royal House of Greece is alone enough to bring us back to a more liberal interest in Europe, which was one of the really marked superiorities of what is now derided as the liberal epoch. The queer provincial imperialism, now preached in so many parts of the Press, does not strike me as in any way superior to those hopes about the resurrection of Hellas, for which Byron died and Gladstone pleaded. Whatever agreements or disagreements there may be about details of diplomacy, every educated person must agree that the re-establishment of Greece was a landmark of history. It was the first modern constructive check, or obstacle, to the long unlimited and fatalistic landslide of Islam. Or again, the presence of the Greek priest and the grand

Byzantine tradition of the Orthodox Church, side by side with the national tradition of Westminster, though neither is of my own cult, is a real reminder of the universal part played by religion in the past. It is certainly of far more interest to any thinking person than the unthinking ramblings about modern religion to be found in the modern newspapers. And the fact that the lady whom we all welcomed to the ruling family of our country is also connected with the heroic story of a Balkan people, may serve to remind us that epics and empire and a great peasant culture belonged to Serbia before politicians and pressmen had the fancy of calling it Yugoslavia.

Some of our journalists want to jockey us into a sort of Jingo pacifism; an insularity which essentially denies that we are a civilized country and a part of civilization. They would assure us feverishly that Dover can have no possible relation to Calais. They would insist that no single Englishman, in all history, has ever pronounced or mispronounced the name of Wipers. They must wonder artlessly why a seventeenth-century cannon in the Castle at Edinburgh still bears the name of Mons Meg. They may possibly be puzzled by the fact of an English country-house being called Blenheim or a London railway-station being called Waterloo. I do not know where they draw the line; but I must confess to a certain glee and gratification in the fact that this Royal Marriage did not even confine itself to a Channel-tunnel between Dover and Calais, but actually built a bridge that stretches across all Europe from the western extreme of Great Britain to the eastern extreme of Greece. It is the great defect of a mere mechanical machinery of majorities that it always leaves out that great democracy of the dead who are truly described as the great majority. Rituals and festivals, like those of a great national or international wedding-day, contain a thousand things to remind us that our countrymen inherit an experience much more lively and complex than any such local and temporary solution; and warn us against allowing the present to become more narrow than the past.

THE COMMON MAN

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THE COMMON MAN

The explanation, or excuse, for this essay is to be found in a certain notion, which seems to me very obvious, but which I have never, as it happens, seen stated by anybody else. It happens rather to cut across the common frontiers of current controversy. It can be used for or against Democracy, according to whether that swear-word is or is not printed with a big D. It can be connected, like most things, with religion; but only rather indirectly with my own religion. It is primarily the recognition of a fact, quite apart from the approval or disapproval of the fact. But it does involve the assertion that what has really happened, in the modern world, is practically the precise contrary of what is supposed to have happened there.

The thesis is this: that modern emancipation has really been a new persecution of the Common Man. If it has emancipated anybody, it has in rather special and narrow ways emancipated the Uncommon Man. It has given an eccentric sort of liberty to some of the hobbies of the wealthy, and occasionally to some of the more humane lunacies of the cultured. The only thing that it has forbidden is common sense, as it would have been understood by the common people. Thus, if we begin with the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we find that a man really has become more free to found a sect. But the Common Man does not in the least want to found a sect. He is much more likely, for instance, to want to found a family. And it is exactly there that the modern emancipators are quite likely to begin to frustrate him; in the name of Malthusianism or Eugenics or Sterilisation or at a more advanced stage of progress, probably, Infanticide. It would be a model of modern liberty to tell him that he might preach anything, however wild, about the Virgin Birth, so long as he avoided anything like a natural birth; and that he was welcome to build a tin chapel to preach a twopenny creed, entirely based on the text, “Enoch begat Methuselah”, so long as he himself is forbidden to beget anybody. And, as a matter of historical fact, the sects which enjoyed this sectarian freedom, in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, were generally founded by merchants or manufacturers of the comfortable, and sometimes of the luxurious classes. On the other hand, it is strictly to the lower classes, to use the liberal modern title for the poor, that such schemes as Sterilisation are commonly directed and applied.

It is the same when we pass from the Protestant world of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the Progressive world of the nineteenth and twentieth. Here the form of freedom mostly claimed, as a boast and a dogma, is the freedom of the Press. It is no longer merely a freedom of pamphlets but a freedom of papers; or rather, it is less and less a freedom at all, and more and more a monopoly. But the important point is that the process, the test and the comparison are the same as in the first example. Modern emancipation means this: that anybody who can afford it can publish a newspaper. But the Common Man would not want to publish a newspaper, even if he could afford it. He might want, for instance, to go on talking politics in a pothouse or the parlour of an inn. And that is exactly the sort of really popular talk about politics which modern movements have often abolished: the old democracies by forbidding the pothouse, the new dictatorships by forbidding the politics.

Or again, it is the boast of recent emancipated ethics and politics not to put any great restraints upon anybody who wants to publish a book, especially a scientific book, full of psychology or sociology; and perhaps unavoidably full of perversions and polite pornography. As that modern tendency increased, it was less and less likely that the police would interfere very much with a man publishing the sort of book that only the wealthy could publish with sumptuous artistic plates or scientific diagrams. It is much more probable, in most modern societies, that the police would be found interfering with a man singing a song, of a coarse and candid description, bawling out a ballad of the grosser sort, or even using the more restrained medium of prose with a similar lack of restraint. Yet there is a great deal to be said for song, or even speech, of the old ribald sort, as compared with writing of the new sort, when it is at once analytic and anarchic. The old obscenity had a gusto and a great virility even in its violence, which is not easily rendered in a diagram or a table of statistics and the old was always normal and never had any of the horrors of abnormality. The point is that, here again, the Common Man does not generally want to write a book, whereas he may occasionally want to sing a song. He certainly does not want to write a book on psychology or sociology — or to read, it. But he does want to talk, to sing, to shout, to yell and howl on due and suitable occasions; and, rightly or wrongly, it is when he is thus engaged that he is much more likely to fall foul of a policeman than when he is (as he never is) writing a scientific study of a new theory of sex. The upshot of uplift, in the modern sense, is the same in practice as in the previous examples. In the actual atmosphere of the age, men will still be arrested for using a certain kind of language, long after they cannot be arrested for writing a certain kind of literature.

It would be easy to give other examples; but these contemporary examples are already too continuous to be a coincidence. It is equally true, for instance, that the liberating movement of the eighteenth century, the life in the American and French Revolutions, while it did really vindicate many virtues of republican simplicity and civic liberty, also accepted as virtues several things that were obviously vices: that had been recognised as vices long before, and are now again beginning to be recognised as vices so long afterwards. Where even ambition had once been a pardonable vice, avarice became an utterly unpardonable virtue. Liberal economics too often meant merely giving to those already rich the liberty to grow richer, and, magnificently granting to the poor the permission to remain rather poorer than before. It was much more certain that the usurer was released to practise usury than that the peasant was released from the practices of the usurer. It was much more certain that the Wheat Pit was as big as the Bottomless Pit, than that the man who grew wheat would ever be found anywhere except at the bottom.

There was a sense in which “liberal economics” were a proclamation of freedom, for the few who were rich enough to be free. Nobody thought there was anything queer about talking of prominent public men “gambling” in the Wheat Pit. But all this time, there were laws of all kinds against normal human gambling; that is, against games of chance. The poor man was prevented from gambling, precisely because he did not gamble so much as the rich man. The beadle or the policeman might stop children from playing chuck-farthing; but it was strictly because it was only a farthing that was chucked. Progress never interfered with the game of chuck-fortune, because much more than a farthing was being chucked. The enlightened and emancipated age especially encouraged those who chucked away other people’s fortunes instead of their own. But anyhow, the comparison remains continuous and clear. Progress, in the sense of the progress that has progressed since the sixteenth century, has upon every matter persecuted the Common Man; punished the gambling he enjoys and permitted the gambling he cannot follow; restrained the obscenity that might amuse him and applauded the obscenity that would certainly bore him; silenced the political quarrels that can be conducted among men and applauded the political stunts and syndicates that can only be conducted by millionaires; encouraged anybody who had anything to say against God, if it was said with a priggish and supercilious accent; but discouraged anybody who had anything to say in favour of Man, in his common relations to manhood and motherhood and the normal appetites of nature. Progress has been merely the persecution of the Common Man.

Progress has a hagiology, a martyrology, a mass of miraculous legends of its own, like any other religion; and they are mostly false and belong to a false religion. The most famous is the fancy that the young and progressive person is always martyred by the old and ordinary person. But it is false. It is the old and ordinary person who is almost always the martyr. It is the old and ordinary person who has been more and more despoiled of all his old and ordinary rights. In so far as this progress progresses, it is far more likely that six million men will be forbidden to go to sleep, because six men say that certain breathing exercises are a substitute for slumber, than that any of the six million somnambulists will wake up sufficiently to clout the six men over their highbrowed but half-witted heads. There is no normal thing that cannot now be taken from the normal man. It is much more likely that a law will be passed to forbid the eating of grain (notoriously the parent of poisons like beer and whisky) than that it will be even faintly suggested, to men of that philosophy, that the economic evil is that men cannot grow grain, and that the ethical evil is that men are still despised for growing it. Given the purely progressive principle, and nothing else as a guide to our future, it is entirely possible that they may be banged or buried alive for growing it. But of course, in a scientific age, they will be electrocuted — or perhaps only tortured by electricity.

Thus far my thesis is this: that it is not the Uncommon Man who is persecuted; but rather the Common Man. But this brings me into direct conflict with the contemporary reactions, which seems to say, in effect, that the Common Man had much better be persecuted. It is quite certain that many modern thinkers and writers honestly feel a contempt for the Common Man; it is also quite certain that I myself feel a contempt for those who feel this contempt. But the actual issue must be faced more fully; because what is called the reaction against democracy is at this moment the chief result of democracy. Now on this quarrel I am democratic, or at least defiant of the attacks of democracy. I do not believe that most modern people have seen the real point of the advantage or disadvantage of popular rule; and my doubt can be very largely suggested and summarised under this title of the Common Man.

To put it briefly; it is now the custom to say that most modern blunders have been due to the Common Man. And I should like to point out what appalling blunders have in fact been due to the Uncommon Man. It is easy enough to argue that the mob makes mistakes; but as a fact it never has a chance even to make mistakes until its superiors have used their superiority to make much worse mistakes. It is easy to weary of democracy and cry out for an intellectual aristocracy. But the trouble is that every intellectual aristocracy seems to have been utterly unintellectual. Anybody might guess beforehand that there would be blunders of the ignorant. What nobody could have guessed, what nobody could have dreamed of in a nightmare, what no morbid mortal imagination could ever have dared to imagine, was the mistakes of the well-informed. It is true, in a sense, to say that the mob has always been led by more educated men. It is much more true, in every sense, to say that it has always been misled by educated men. It is easy enough to say the cultured man should be the crowd’s guide, philosopher and friend. Unfortunately, he has nearly always been a misguiding guide, a false friend and a very shallow philosopher. And the actual catastrophes we have suffered, including those we are now suffering, have not in historical fact been due to the prosaic practical people who are supposed to know nothing, but almost invariably to the highly theoretical people who knew that they knew everything. The world may learn by its mistakes; but they are mostly the mistakes of the learned.

To go back no further than the seventeenth century, the quarrel between the Puritans and the populace was originally due to the pride of a few men in being able to read a printed book, and their scorn for people who had good memories, good traditions, good stories, good songs, and good pictures in glass or gold or graven stone, and therefore had less need of books. It was a tyranny of literates over illiterates. But it was the literates who were narrow, sullen, limited and often oppressive; it was the illiterates who were, at least relatively, gay and free and fanciful and imaginative and interested in everything. The Uncommon Men, the elect of the Calvinist theory, did undoubtedly lead the people along the next stretch of the path of progress; but what it led to was a prison. The book-reading rulers and statesmen managed to establish the Scottish Sabbath. Meanwhile, a thousand traditions, of the sort they would have trampled out, yet managed to trickle down from the medieval poor to the modern poor, and lingering as legends in countless cottages and farmhouses, were collected by Scott (often repeated orally by people who could not read or write) to combine in the construction of the great Scottish Romances, which profoundly moved and partly inspired the Romantic Movement throughout the world.

When we pass to the eighteenth century, we find the same part played by a new and quite contrary party; differing from the last in everything except in being the same sort of rather dried up aristocracy. The new Uncommon Men, now leading the people, are no longer Calvinists, but a dry sort of Deists drying up more and more like Atheists; and they are no longer pessimists but the reverse; only their optimism is often more depressing than pessimism. There were the Benthamites, the Utilitarians, the servants of the Economic Man; the first Free-Traders. They have the credit of having first made clear the economic theories of the modern state; and the calculations on which were mainly based the politics of the nineteenth century. It was they who taught these things scientifically and systematically to the public, and even to the populace. But what were the things, and what were the theories? Perhaps the best and broadest of them was a most monstrous and mythical superstition of Adam Smith; a theological theory that providence had so made the world that men might be happy through their selfishness; or, in other words, that God would overrule everything for good, if only men could succeed in being sufficiently bad. The intellectuals in this epoch taught definitely and dogmatically that if only men would buy and sell freely, lend or borrow freely, sweat or sack freely, and in practice, steal or swindle freely, humanity would be happy. The Common Man soon found out how happy; in the Slums where they left him and in the Slump to which they led him.

We need not continue, through the last two centuries, all the tale of the frenzy and folly inflicted by the fickleness of the educated class on the relative stability of the uneducated. The fickle intellectuals next rushed to the other extreme, and became Socialists, despising small property as they had despised popular tradition. It is quite true that these intellectuals had a lucid interval in which they proclaimed some primary truths along with many priggish falsehoods. Some of them did rightly exalt liberty and human dignity and equality, as expressed in the Declaration of Independence. But even that was so much mishandled that there is now a disposition to deny the truth along with the falsehood. There has been a reaction against Democracy; or, in plain words, the prigs are now too bored even to go on with their normal routine about the Common Man; the familiar routine of oppressing him in practice and adoring him in theory.

I do not adore him, but I do believe in him; at least I believe in him much more than I believe in them. I think the actual history of the relations between him and them, as I have narrated it, is enough to justify my preference. I repeat that they have had all the educational advantages over him; they have always led him; and they have always misled him. And even in becoming reactionaries, they remain as raw and crude as when they were revolutionaries. Their anti-democracy is as much stuffed with cant as their democracy. I need only allude to the detestable new fashion of referring to ordinary men as morons. First, it is pedantry, the dullest form of vanity; for a moron is only the Greek for a fool; and it is mostly sham pedantry, for most of those who mention morons hardly know they are talking Greek, still less why on earth they should. It also involves this moral evil: that a man who says that men are mostly fools knows at least that he has often made a fool of himself; whereas the morons are thought of like monkeys; as if they were a fixed tribe or caste. The Common Man may well be the victim of a new series of tyrannies, founded on this scientific fad of regarding him as a monkey. But it is doubtful whether he can be much more persecuted for having the instincts of a moron, than he has already been for having the instincts of a man.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM

The greatest of Shakespeare’s comedies is also, from a certain point of view, the greatest of his plays. No one would maintain that it occupied this position in the matter of psychological study if by psychological study we mean the study of individual characters in a play. No one would maintain that Puck was a character in the sense that Falstaff is a character, or that the critic stood awed before the psychology of Peaseblossom. But there is a sense in which the play is perhaps a greater triumph of psychology than Hamlet itself. It may well be questioned whether in any other literary work in the world is so vividly rendered a social and spiritual atmosphere. There is an atmosphere in Hamlet, for instance, a somewhat murky and even melodramatic one, but it is subordinate to the great character, and morally inferior to him; the darkness is only a background for the isolated star of intellect. But A Midsummer Night’s Dream is a psychological study, not of a solitary man, but of a spirit that unites mankind. The six men may sit talking in an inn; they may not know each other’s names or see each other’s faces before or after, but night or wine or great stories, or some rich and branching discussion may make them all at one, if not absolutely with each other, at least with that invisible seventh man who is the harmony of all of them. That seventh man is the hero of A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

A study of the play from a literary or philosophical point of view must therefore be founded upon some serious realisation of what this atmosphere is. In a lecture upon As You Like It, Mr. Bernard Shaw made a suggestion which is an admirable example of his amazing ingenuity and of his one most interesting limitation. In maintaining that the light sentiment and optimism of the comedy were regarded by Shakespeare merely as the characteristics of a more or less cynical pot-boiler, he actually suggested that the title “As You Like It” was a taunting address to the public in disparagement of their taste and the dramatist’s own work. If Mr. Bernard Shaw had conceived of Shakespeare as insisting that Ben Jonson should wear Jaeger underclothing or join the Blue Ribbon Army, or distribute little pamphlets for the non-payment of rates, he could scarcely have conceived anything more violently opposed to the whole spirit of Elizabethan comedy than the spiteful and priggish modernism of such a taunt. Shakespeare might make the fastidious and cultivated Hamlet, moving in his own melancholy and purely mental world, warn players against an over-indulgence towards the rabble. But the very soul and meaning of the great comedies is that of an uproarious communion between the public and the play, a communion so chaotic that whole scenes of silliness and violence lead us almost to think that some of the "rowdies" from the pit have climbed over the footlights. The title "As You Like It", is, of course, an expression of utter carelessness, but it is not the bitter carelessness which Mr. Bernard Shaw fantastically reads into it; it is the god-like and inexhaustible carelessness of a happy man. And the simple proof of this is that there are scores of these genially taunting titles scattered through the whole of Elizabethan comedy. Is "As You Like It " a title demanding a dark and ironic explanation in a school of comedy which called its plays "What you Will", "A Mad World, My Masters", "If It Be Not Good, the Devil Is In It", "The Devil is an Ass", "An Humorous Day's Mirth", and "A Midsummer Night's Dream"? Every one of these titles is flung at the head of the public as a drunken lord might fling a purse at his footman. Would Mr. Shaw maintain that "If It Be Not Good, the Devil Is In It", was the opposite of "As You Like It", and was a solemn invocation of the supernatural powers to testify to the care and perfection of the literary workmanship? The one explanation is as Elizabethan as the other.

Now in the reason for this modern and pedantic error lies the whole secret and difficulty of such plays as A Midsummer Night's Dream. The sentiment of such a play, so far as it can be summed up at all, can be summed up in one sentence. It is the mysticism of happiness. That is to say, it is the conception that as man lives upon a borderland he may find himself in the spiritual or supernatural atmosphere, not only through being profoundly sad or meditative, but by being extravagantly happy. The soul might be rapt out of the body in an agony of sorrow, or a trance of ecstasy; but it might also be rapt out of the body in a paroxysm of laughter. Sorrow we know can go beyond itself; so, according to Shakespeare, can pleasure go beyond itself and become something dangerous and unknown. And the reason that the logical and destructive modern school, of which Mr. Bernard Shaw is an example, does not grasp this purely exuberant nature of the comedies is simply that their logical and destructive attitude have rendered impossible the very experience of this preternatural exuberance. We cannot realise As You Like It if we are always considering it as we understand it. We cannot have A Midsummer's Night Dream if our one object in life is to keep ourselves awake with the black coffee of criticism. The whole question which is balanced, and balanced nobly and fairly, in A Midsummer Night's Dream, is whether the life of waking, or the life of the vision, is the real life, the sine quâ non of man. But it is difficult to see what superiority for the purpose of judging is possessed by people whose pride it is not to live the life of vision at all. At least it is questionable whether the Elizabethan did not know more about both worlds than the modern intellectual; it is not altogether improbable that Shakespeare would not only have had a clearer vision of the fairies, but would have shot very much straighter at a deer and netted much more money for his performances than a member of the Stage Society.

In pure poetry and the intoxication of words, Shakespeare never rose higher than he rises in this play. But in spite of this fact, the supreme literary merit of A Midsummer Night's Dream is a merit of design. The amazing symmetry, the amazing artistic and moral beauty of that design, can be stated very briefly. The story opens in the sane and common world with the pleasant seriousness of very young lovers and very young friends. Then, as the figures advance into the tangled wood of young troubles and stolen happiness, a change and bewilderment begins to fall on them. They lose their way and their wits for they are in the heart of fairyland. Their words, their hungers, their very figures grow more and more dim and fantastic, like dreams within dreams, in the supernatural mist of Puck. Then the dream-fumes begin to clear, and characters and spectators begin to awaken together to the noise of horns and dogs and the clean and bracing morning. Theseus, the incarnation of a happy and generous rationalism, expounds in hackneyed and superb lines the sane view of such psychic experiences, pointing out with a reverent and sympathetic scepticism that all these fairies and spells are themselves but the emanations, the unconscious masterpieces, of man himself. The whole company falls back into a splendid human laughter. There is a rush for banqueting and private theatricals, and over all these things ripples one of those frivolous and inspired conversations in which every good saying seems to die in giving birth to another. If ever the son of a man in his wanderings was at home and drinking by the fireside, he is at home in the house of Theseus. All the dreams have been forgotten, as a melancholy dream remembered throughout the morning might be forgotten in the human certainty of any other triumphant evening party; and so the play seems naturally ended. It began on the earth and it ends on the earth. Thus to round off the whole midsummer night's dream in an eclipse of daylight is an effect of genius. But of this comedy, as I have said, the mark is that genius goes beyond itself; and one touch is added which makes the play colossal. Theseus and his train retire with a crashing finale, full of humour and wisdom and things set right, and silence falls on the house. Then there comes a faint sound of little feet, and for a moment, as it were, the elves look into the house, asking which is the reality. "Suppose we are the realities and they the shadows." If that ending were acted properly any modern man would feel shaken to his marrow if he had to walk home from the theatre through a country lane.

It is a trite matter, of course, though in a general criticism a more or less indispensable one to comment upon another point of artistic perfection, the extraordinarily human and accurate manner in which the play catches the atmosphere of a dream. The chase and tangle and frustration of the incidents and personalities are well known to every one who has dreamt of perpetually falling over precipices or perpetually missing trains. While following out clearly and legally the necessary narrative of the drama, the author contrives to include every one of the main peculiarities of the exasperating dream. Here is the pursuit of the man we cannot catch, the flight from the man we cannot see; here is the perpetual returning to the same place, here is the crazy alteration in the very objects of our desire, the substitution of one face for another face, the putting of the wrong souls in the wrong bodies, the fantastic disloyalties of the night, all this is as obvious as it is important. It is perhaps somewhat more worth remarking that there is about this confusion of comedy yet another essential characteristic of dreams. A dream can commonly be described as possessing an utter discordance of incident combined with a curious unity of mood; everything changes but the dreamer. It may begin with anything and end with anything, but if the dreamer is sad at the end he will be sad as if by prescience at the beginning; if he is cheerful at the beginning he will be cheerful if the stars fall. A Midsummer Night's Dream has in a most singular degree effected this difficult, this almost desperate subtlety. The events in the wandering wood are in themselves, and regarded as in broad daylight, not merely melancholy but bitterly cruel and ignominious. But yet by the spreading of an atmosphere as magic as the fog of Puck, Shakespeare contrives to make the whole matter mysteriously hilarious while it is palpably tragic, and mysteriously charitable, while it is in itself cynical. He contrives somehow to rob tragedy and treachery of their full sharpness, just as a toothache or a deadly danger from a tiger, or a precipice, is robbed of its sharpness in a pleasant dream. The creation of a brooding sentiment like this, a sentiment not merely independent of but actually opposed to the events, is a much greater triumph of art than the creation of the character of Othello.

It is difficult to approach critically so great a figure as that of Bottom the Weaver. He is greater and more mysterious than Hamlet, because the interest of such men as Bottom consists of a rich subconsciousness, and that of Hamlet in the comparatively superficial matter of a rich consciousness. And it is especially difficult in the present age which has become hag-ridden with the mere intellect. We are the victims of a curious confusion whereby being great is supposed to have something to do with being clever, as if there were the smallest reason to suppose that Achilles was clever, as if there were not on the contrary a great deal of internal evidence to indicate that he was next door to a fool. Greatness is a certain indescribable but perfectly familiar and palpable quality of size in the personality, of steadfastness, of strong flavour, of easy and natural self-expression. Such a man is as firm as a tree and as unique as a rhinoceros, and he might quite easily be as stupid as either of them. Fully as much as the great poet towers above the small poet the great fool towers above the small fool. We have all of us known rustics like Bottom the Weaver, men whose faces would be blank with idiocy if we tried for ten days to explain the meaning of the National Debt, but who are yet great men, akin to Sigurd and Hercules, heroes of the morning of the earth, because their words were their own words, their memories their own memories, and their vanity as large and simple as a great hill. We have all of us known friends in our own circle, men whom the intellectuals might justly describe as brainless, but whose presence in a room was like a fire roaring in the grate changing everything, lights and shadows and the air, whose entrances and exits were in some strange fashion events, whose point of view once expressed haunts and persuades the mind and almost intimidates it, whose manifest absurdity clings to the fancy like the beauty of first-love, and whose follies are recounted like the legends of a paladin. These are great men, there are millions of them in the world, though very few perhaps in the House of Commons. It is not in the cold halls of cleverness where celebrities seem to be important that we should look for the great. An intellectual salon is merely a training-ground for one faculty, and is akin to a fencing class or a rifle corps. It is in our own homes and environments, from Croydon to St. John’s Wood, in old nurses, and gentlemen with hobbies, and talkative spinsters and vast incomparable butlers, that we may feel the presence of that blood of the gods. And this creature so hard to describe, so easy to remember, the august and memorable fool, has never been so sumptuously painted as in the Bottom of A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

Bottom has the supreme mark of this real greatness in that like the true saint or the true hero he only differs from humanity in being as it were more human than humanity. It is not true, as the idle materialists of today suggest, that compared to the majority of men the hero appears cold and dehumanised; it is the majority who appear cold and dehumanised in the presence of greatness. Bottom, like Don Quixote. and Uncle Toby and Mr. Richard Swiveller and the rest of the Titans, has a huge and unfathomable weakness, his silliness is on a great scale, and when he blows his own trumpet it is like the trumpet of the Resurrection. The other rustics in the play accept his leadership not merely naturally but exuberantly; they have to the full that primary and savage unselfishness, that uproarious abnegation which makes simple men take pleasure in falling short of a hero, that unquestionable element of basic human nature which has never been expressed, outside this play, so perfectly as in the incomparable chapter at the beginning of Evan Harrington in which the praises of The Great Mel are sung with a lyric energy by the tradesmen whom he has cheated. Twopenny sceptics write of the egoism of primal human nature; it is reserved for great men like Shakespeare and Meredith to detect and make vivid this rude and subconscious unselfishness which is older than self. They alone with their insatiable tolerance can perceive all the spiritual devotion in the soul of a snob. And it is this natural play between the rich simplicity of Bottom and the simple simplicity of his comrades which constitutes the unapproachable excellence of the farcical scenes in this play. Bottom’s sensibility to literature is perfectly fiery and genuine, a great deal more genuine than that of a great many cultivated critics of literature— “the raging rocks, and shivering shocks shall break the locks of prison gates, and Phibbus’ car shall shine from far, and make and mar the foolish fates”, is exceedingly good poetical diction with a real throb and swell in it, and if it is slightly and almost imperceptibly deficient in the matter of sense, it is certainly every bit as sensible as a good many other rhetorical speeches in

Shakespeare put into the mouths of kings and lovers and even the spirits of the dead. If Bottom liked cant for its own sake the fact only constitutes another point of sympathy between him and his literary creator. But the style of the thing, though deliberately bombastic and ludicrous, is quite literary, the alliteration falls like wave upon wave, and the whole verse, like a billow mounts higher and higher before it crashes. There is nothing mean about this folly; nor is there in the whole realm of literature a figure so free from vulgarity. The man vitally base and foolish sings "The Honeysuckle and the Bee"; he does not rant about "raging rocks" and "the car of Phibbus". Dickens, who more perhaps than any modern man had the mental hospitality and the thoughtless wisdom of Shakespeare, perceived and expressed admirably the same truth. He perceived, that is to say, that quite indefensible idiots have very often a real sense of, and enthusiasm for letters. Mr. Micawber loved eloquence and poetry with his whole immortal soul; words and visionary pictures kept him alive in the absence of food and money, as they might have kept a saint fasting in a desert. Dick Swiveller did not make his inimitable quotations from Moore and Byron merely as flippant digressions. He made them because he loved a great school of poetry. The sincere love of books has nothing to do with cleverness or stupidity any more than any other sincere love. It is a quality of character, a freshness, a power of pleasure, a power of faith. A silly person may delight in reading masterpieces just as a silly person may delight in picking flowers. A fool may be in love with a poet as he may be in love with a woman. And the triumph of Bottom is that he loves rhetoric and his own taste in the arts, and this is all that can be achieved by Theseus, or for the matter of that by Cosimo di Medici. It is worth remarking as an extremely fine touch in the picture of Bottom that his literary taste is almost everywhere concerned with sound rather than sense. He begins the rehearsal with a boisterous readiness, "Thisby, the flowers of odious savours sweete." "Odours, odours," says Quince, in remonstrance, and the word is accepted in accordance with the cold and heavy rules which require an element of meaning in a poetical passage. But "Thisby, the flowers of odious savours sweete", Bottom's version, is an immeasurably finer and more resonant line. The "i" which he inserts is an inspiration of metricism.

There is another aspect of this great play which ought to be kept familiarly in the mind. Extravagant as is the masquerade of the story, it is a very perfect aesthetic harmony down to such coup-de-maître as the name of

Bottom, or the flower called Love in Idleness. In the whole matter it may be said that there is one accidental discord; that is in the name of Theseus, and the whole city of Athens in which the events take place. Shakespeare’s description of Athens in A Midsummer Night’s Dream is the best description of England that he or any one else ever wrote. Theseus is quite obviously only an English squire, fond of hunting, kindly to his tenants, hospitable with a certain flamboyant vanity. The mechanics are English mechanics, talking to each other with the queer formality of the poor. Above all, the fairies are English; to compare them with the beautiful patrician spirits of Irish legend, for instance, is suddenly to discover that we have, after all, a folk-lore and a mythology, or had it at least in Shakespeare’s day. Robin Goodfellow, upsetting the old women’s ale, or pulling the stool from under them, has nothing of the poignant Celtic beauty; his is the horse-play of the invisible world. Perhaps it is some debased inheritance of English life which makes American ghosts so fond of quite undignified practical jokes. But this union of mystery with farce is a note of the medieval English. The play is the last glimpse of Merrie England, that distant but shining and quite indubitable country. It would be difficult indeed to define wherein lay the peculiar truth of the phrase “merrie England”, though some conception of it is quite necessary to the comprehension of A Midsummer Night’s Dream. In some cases at least, it may be said to lie in this, that the English of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, unlike the England of today, could conceive of the idea of a merry supernaturalism. Amid all the great work of Puritanism the damning indictment of it consists in one fact, that there was one only of the fables of Christendom that it retained and renewed, and that was the belief in witchcraft. It cast away the generous and wholesome superstition, it approved only of the morbid and the dangerous. In their treatment of the great national fairy-tale of good and evil, the Puritans killed St. George but carefully preserved the Dragon, And this seventeenth-century tradition of dealing with the psychic life still lies like a great shadow over England and America, so that if we glance at a novel about occultism we may be perfectly certain that it deals with sad or evil destiny. Whatever else we expect we certainly should never expect to find in it spirits such as those in Aylwin as inspirers of a tale of tomfoolery like the Wrong Box or The Londoners. That impossibility is the disappearance of “merrie England” and Robin Goodfellow. It was a land to us incredible, the land of a jolly occultism where the peasant cracked jokes with his patron saint, and only cursed the fairies good-humouredly, as he might curse a lazy servant. Shakespeare is English in everything, above all in his weaknesses. Just as London, one of the greatest cities in the world, shows more slums and hides more beauties than any other, so Shakespeare alone among the four giants of poetry is a careless writer, and lets us come upon his splendours by accident, as we come upon an old City church in the twist of a city street. He is English in nothing so much as in that noble cosmopolitan unconsciousness which makes him look eastward with the eyes of a child towards Athens or Verona. He loved to talk of the glory of foreign lands, but he talked of them with the tongue and unquenchable spirit of England. It is too much the custom of a later patriotism to reverse this method and talk of England from morning till night, but to talk of her in a manner totally un-English. Casualness, incongruities, and a certain fine absence of mind are in the temper of England; the unconscious man with the ass's head is no bad type of the people. Materialistic philosophers and mechanical politicians have certainly succeeded in some cases in giving him a greater unity. The only question is, to which animal has he been thus successfully conformed?

ON READING

The highest use of the great masters of literature is not literary; it is apart from their superb style and even from their emotional inspiration. The first use of good literature is that it prevents a man from being merely modern. To be merely modern is to condemn oneself to an ultimate narrowness; just as to spend one's last earthly money on the newest hat is to condemn oneself to the old-fashioned. The road of the ancient centuries is strewn with dead moderns. Literature, classic and enduring literature, does its best work in reminding us perpetually of the whole round of truth and balancing other and older ideas against the ideas to which we might for a moment be prone. The way in which it does this, however, is sufficiently curious to be worth our fully understanding it to begin with.

From time to time in human history, but especially in restless epochs like our own, a certain class of things appears. In the old world they were called heresies. In the modern world they are called fads. Sometimes they are for a time useful; sometimes they are wholly mischievous. But they always consist of undue concentration upon some one truth or half-truth. Thus it is true to insist upon God's knowledge, but heretical to insist on it as Calvin did at the expense of his Love; thus it is true to desire a simple life, but heretical to desire it at the expense of good feeling and good manners. The heretic (who is also the fanatic) is not a man who loves truth too much; no man can love truth too much. The heretic is a man who loves his truth more than truth itself. He prefers the half-truth that he has found to the whole truth which humanity has found. He does not like to see his own precious little paradox merely bound up with twenty truisms into the bundle of the wisdom of the world.

Sometimes such innovators are of a sombre sincerity like Tolstoi, sometimes of a sensitive and feminine eloquence like Nietzsche, and sometimes of an admirable humour, pluck, and public spirit like Mr. Bernard Shaw. In all cases they make a stir, and perhaps found a school. But in all cases the same fundamental mistake is made. It is always supposed that the man in question has discovered a new idea. But, as a fact, what is new is not the idea, but only the isolation of the idea. The idea itself can be found, in all probability, scattered frequently enough through all the great books of a more classic or impartial temper, from Homer and Virgil to

Fielding and Dickens. You can find all the new ideas in the old books; only there you will find them balanced, kept in their place, and sometimes contradicted and overcome by other and better ideas. The great writers did not neglect a fad because they had not thought of it, but because they had thought of it and of all the answers to it as well.

In case this point is not clear, I will take two examples, both in reference to notions fashionable among some of the more fanciful and younger theorists. Nietzsche, as every one knows, preached a doctrine which he and his followers regard apparently as very revolutionary; he held that ordinary altruistic morality had been the invention of a slave class to prevent the emergence of superior types to fight and rule them. Now, modern people, whether they agree with this or not, always talk of it as a new and unheard-of idea. It is calmly and persistently supposed that the great writers of the past, say Shakespeare for instance, did not hold this view, because they had never imagined it; because it had never come into their heads. Turn up the last act of Shakespeare's Richard III and you will find not only all that Nietzsche had to say put into two lines, but you will find it put in the very words of Nietzsche. Richard Crookback says to his nobles:

Conscience is but a word that cowards use, Devised at first to keep the strong in awe.

As I have said, the fact is plain. Shakespeare had thought of Nietzsche and the Master Morality; but he weighed it at its proper value and put it in its proper place. Its proper place is the mouth of a half-insane hunchback on the eve of defeat. This rage against the weak is only possible in a man morbidly brave but fundamentally sick; a man like Richard, a man like Nietzsche. This case alone ought to destroy the absurd fancy that these modern philosophies are modern in the sense that the great men of the past did not think of them. They thought of them; only they did not think much of them. It was not that Shakespeare did not see the Nietzsche idea; he saw it, and he saw through it.

I will take one other example: Mr. Bernard Shaw in his striking and sincere play called "Major Barbara", throws down one of the most violent of his verbal challenges to proverbial morality. People say, "Poverty is no crime." "Yes," says Mr. Bernard Shaw, "poverty is a crime, and the mother of crimes. It is a crime to be poor if you could possibly rebel or grow rich. To be poor means to be poor-spirited, servile or tricky." Mr. Shaw shows signs of an intention to concentrate on this doctrine, and many of his followers do the same. Now, it is only the concentration that is new, not the doctrine. Thackeray makes Becky Sharp say that it is easy to be moral on £1,000 a year, and so difficult on £100. But, as in the case of Shakespeare I have quoted, the point is not merely that Thackeray knew of this conception, but that he knew exactly what it was worth. It not only occurred to him, but he knew where it ought to occur. It ought to occur in the conversation of Becky Sharp; a woman shrewd and not without sincerity, but profoundly unacquainted with all the deeper emotions which make life worth living. The cynicism of Becky, with Lady Jane and Dobbin to balance it, has a certain breezy truth. The cynicism of Mr. Shaw's Undershaft, preached alone with the austerity of a field preacher, is simply not true at all. It is simply not true at all to say that the very poor are as a whole more insincere or more grovelling than the very rich. Becky's half-truth has become first a crotchet, then a creed, and then a lie. In the case of Thackeray, as in that of Shakespeare, the conclusion which concerns us is the same. What we call the new ideas are generally broken fragments of the old ideas. It was not that a particular notion did not enter Shakespeare's head; it is that it found a good many other notions waiting to knock the nonsense out of it.

MONSTERS AND THE MIDDLE AGES

I do not remember to have read anywhere an adequate and comprehensive account of the fabulous monsters so much written of in the Middle Ages. Such studies as I have seen suffered from the three or four strange and senseless blunders which throttle all our thought on such subjects. The primary blunder, of course, is that comic one to which students like Mr. Frazer have lent, or rather pawned, their authority. I mean the absurd notion that in matters of the imagination men have any need to copy from each other. Poems and poetic tales tend to be a little alike, not because Hebrews were really Chaldeans, nor because Christians were really Pagans, but because men are really men. Because there is, in spite of all the trend of modern thought, such a thing as man and the brotherhood of men. Anyone who has really looked at the moon might have called the moon a virgin and a huntress without ever having heard of Diana. Anyone who had ever looked at the sun might call it the god of oracles and of healing without having heard of Apollo. A man in love, walking about in a garden, compares a woman to a flower, and not to an earwig; though an earwig also was made by God, and has many superiorities to flowers in point of education and travel. To hear some people talk, one would think that the love of flowers had been imposed by some long priestly tradition, and the love of earwigs forbidden by some fearful tribal taboo.

The second great blunder is to suppose that such fables, even when they really are borrowed from older sources, are used in an old tired and customary spirit. When the soul really wakes it always deals directly with the nearest things. If, let us say, a man woke up in bed from a celestial dream which told him to go on painting till all was blue, he would begin by painting himself blue, then his bed blue, and so on. But he would be using all the machinery that came to hand; and that is exactly what always happens in real spiritual revolutions. They work by their environment even when they alter it.

Thus, when professors tell us that the Christians “borrowed” this or that fable or monster from the heathens, it is as if people said that a bricklayer had “borrowed” his bricks from clay, or a chemist had “borrowed” his explosives from chemicals; or that the Gothic builders of Lincoln or

Beauvais had “borrowed” the pointed arch from the thin lattices of the Moors. Perhaps they did borrow it, but (by heaven!) they paid it back.

Five or six other similar errors need not detain us now. For upon these two rests the essential error about, let us say, unicorns; which, after all, is our chief affair in life. The mystical monsters talked of in the Middle Ages had most of them, no doubt, a tradition older than Christianity. I do not admit this because many of the most eminent authorities would say so. As Swinburne said in his conversation with Persephone, “I have lived long enough to have known one thing”; that eminent men mean successful men, and that successful men really hate Christianity. But it is evident from the general tradition of life and letters. I think that someone in the Old Testament says that the unicorn is a very difficult animal to catch; and certainly it has not been caught yet. If nobody has yet said that in this case “unicorn” must mean rhinoceros, somebody soon will, but it shall not be I. But though it is probably true that many of these medieval monsters were of pagan origin, this truth, which is always repeated, is far less startling than another truth that is always ignored.

The monster of the pagan fables was always, so far as I can see, an emblem of evil. That is to say, he was really a monster; he was abnormal; or as Kingsley put it in those fine and highly heathen hexameters:

Twi-formed strange, without like, who obey not the golden-haired rulers. Vainly rebelling, they rage till they die by the swords of the heroes.

Sometimes the monster, once killed, could be used to kill other monsters; as Perseus used the Gorgon to kill the dragons of the sea. But this is a mere accident of material. I can imagine, in the same way, that if I could put the head of a folk-lore professor on the end of a stick, in the French Revolutionary manner, it might serve very excellently as a heavy wooden club for beating in the heads of other and less hardened folk-lore professors. Or, again, the hydra, which grew two heads for every one that was cut off, might have been praised as an emblem of branching evolution and the advantage of an increasing population. But, as a fact, the hydra was not praised. He was killed, amid general relief. The minotaur might have been admired by moderns as the meeting-place of men and animals; the chimera might have been admired by moderns as an instance of the principle that three heads are better than one. I say that the hydra and chimera might have been admired by moderns. But they were not admired by ancients. Among the pagans the grotesque, fabulous animal was thought of only as something you ought to kill. Sometimes it killed you, like the sphinx; but even when it had done that, you did not really love it.

Now the case of the reappearance of such unearthly animals after Europe became Christendom is the thing I have never seen properly described. In one of the oldest of the legends of St. George and the Dragon, St. George did not kill the Dragon, but led it captive and sprinkled it with holy water. Something of the same sort happened to that whole department of the human mind which creates violent and unnatural images. Take the griffin for example. In our time the griffin, like most other medieval symbols, has been made a mean and farcical thing for fancy-dress balls: in twenty pictures from Punch, for instance, we can see the griffin and the turtle as supporters of the civic arms of London. For the modern "citizen" the arrangement is excellent; the griffin, which eats him, does not exist; the turtle, which he eats, does exist. But not only was the griffin not always trivial, but he was not always even bad. He was a mystical incorporation of two animals held wholly sacred: the lion of St. Mark, the lion of generosity, valour, victory; the eagle of St. John, the eagle of truth, of aspiration, of intellectual liberty. Thus the griffin was often used as the emblem of Christ; as combining the eagle and the lion in that mysterious and complete compound in which Christ combined the divine and human. But even if you thought of the griffin as good, you were not less afraid of him. Perhaps more.

But the strongest case is that of the unicorn, which I intended to figure prominently in this article but which seems to have evaded my thought in a most miraculous manner, and which up to this time I seem to have practically omitted. He is a terrible creature, the unicorn; and though he seems to live rather vaguely in Africa, I could never be surprised if he came walking up one of the four white roads that lead to Beaconsfield; the monster whiter than the roads, and his horn higher than the church spire. For all these mystical animals were imagined as enormously big as well as incalculably fierce and free. The stamping of the awful unicorn would shake the endless deserts in which it dwelt; and the wings of the vast griffin went over one's head in heaven with the thunder of a thousand cherubim. And yet the fact remains that if you had asked a medieval man what the unicorn was supposed to mean, he would have replied "chastity".

When we have understood that fact we shall understand a great many other things, but above all the civilisation out of which we come. Christianity did not conceive Christian virtues as tame, timid, and respectable things. It did conceive of these virtues as vast, defiant, and even destructive things, scorning the yoke of this world, dwelling in the desert, and seeking their meat from God. Till we have understood that no one will really understand even the “Lion and the Unicorn” over a pastry cook’s shop.

WHAT NOVELISTS ARE FOR

A long time ago, when I happened to be living in Rye in Sussex, I had the honour of being visited by two very distinguished men; they were both Americans, indeed, they were brothers; but the type of their success seemed oddly different. One was Henry James, the novelist, who lived next door; the other was William James, the philosopher, who had just crossed the Atlantic and seemed as breezy as the sea. In fact, there was an almost fantastic contrast between the two men: the one so solemn about social details often considered trivial; the other so hearty about abstract studies generally considered dry. Henry James talked about toast and teacups with the impressiveness of a family ghost; while William James talked about the metabolism and the involution of values with the air of a man recounting his flirtations on the steamer. But though I had and have the greatest possible regard for them both, I cannot but think that a certain relative completeness, and incompleteness, in the contrast between them reveals a certain truth about two different types of letters.

I was recently rereading one of the late Harvey Wickham's exceedingly clever studies of modern thought; including the study of William James. I think the critic was mainly just about the philosophy, but not quite just about the philosopher. I do not myself think that Pragmatism can ever stand up as a serious rival to the permanent philosophy of Truth and the Absolute. But I do think that William James did really stand up as a rattling good fighter and cleaner-up of the particular sort of solemn nonsense most current in his time. He may have only indirectly served the cause of belief in belief. But he did a lot to serve the cause of unbelief in unbelief; a very wholesome object. But that is not my main point. It seems to me that where William James failed was exactly where Henry James succeeded; in making a whole scheme out of fine shades and doubtful cases. Now that can be done with a novel; for it only claims to be exceptional. It cannot be done with philosophy; for it must claim to be universal.

Pragmatism fails because it is a cosmos made out of odds and ends. But stories are better for being made out of odds and ends; especially if the ends are very odd. Recalling at random some Henry James stories, there was one about an intelligent youth who unaccountably became a sort of tame cat in the house of a couple of rich but unspeakably dull people. But it is not because he is a snob or a plate-licker; but because he is really touched by a devotion and delusion of the old couple, about their dead daughter, whose life they continue in a sort of waking dream, in which the young man figures as her lover. It is beautifully and delicately done; and it does not seem impossible. Now if we apply to this any moral philosophy on earth, however modern, however mad, we shall all shrink from laying it down as a general rule that young men ought to cadge on old men, that they ought to encourage delusions; that this ménage is a model for the normal home. But that is exactly what a novelist is for. He is not bound to justify human beings, but only to humanise them. It is for him and not the philosopher to deal with all this chapter of accidents; in which “things work out differently in practice”. William James’s mistake was that he did not put his notions into novels, like his brother; where such opportunism is quite appropriate. He tried to make a cosmic system out of these accidents and this opportunism; and the system is not systematic. The comparison carries a faint hint that novelists may be some use after all.

THE SONG OF ROLAND

MOST OF us remember reading, in the school histories of our childhood, that at the Battle of Hastings Taillefer the Jongleur went in front of the Norman Army, throwing his sword in the air and singing the Song of Roland. They were naturally histories of a very Victorian sort, which passed lightly over the Roman Empire and the Crusades on the way to serious things, such as the genealogy of George I or the administration of Addington. But that one image emerged in the imagination as something alive in its dead surroundings; like finding a familiar face in a faded tapestry. The song he sang was presumably not the noble and rugged epic which Major Scott Moncrieff has done so solid and even historic a service to letters in rendering in its entirety. The Jongleur must at least have selected extracts or favourite passages, or the battles would have been unduly delayed. But the tale has the same moral as the translation; since both have the same inspiration. The value of the tale was that it did suggest to the childish mind, through all the deadening effects of distance and indifference, that a man does not make such a gesture with a sword unless he feels something, and that a man does not sing unless he has something to sing about. Dull avarice and an appetite for feudal lands do not inspire such jugglery. In short the value of the tale was that it hinted that there is a heart in history, even remote history. And the value of the translation is that if we are really to learn history we must, in a double sense of the word, learn it by heart. We must learn it at length and as it were at large; lingering over chance spaces of contemporary work, for love of its detail, and one might almost say for love of its dullness. Even a random reader like myself, only dipping here and there into such things, so long as they are really things of the period, can often learn more from them than from the most careful constitutional digests or political summaries by modern men more learned than himself. A modern man, educated on the modern histories, may find here the things he does not expect. I have here only space for one example, out of many that I could give to show what I mean. Most of the stock histories tell the young student something of what Feudalism was in legal form and custom; that the subordinates were called vassals, that they did homage, and so on. But they do it somehow in such a way as to suggest a savage and sullen obedience; as if a vassal were no more than a serf. What is left out is the fact that the homage really was homage; a thing worthy of a man. The first feudal feeling had something ideal and even impersonal, like patriotism. The nations were not yet born; and these smaller groups had almost the soul of nations. The reader will find the word “vassalage” used again and again on a note which is not only heroic but even haughty. The vassal is obviously as proud of being a vassal as anybody could be of being a lord. Indeed the feudal poet uses the word “vassalage” where a modern poet would use the word “chivalry”. The Paladins charging the Paynim are spurred on by vassalage. Turpin the Archbishop hacks the Moslem chieftain rib from rib; and the Christians, beholding his triumph, cry aloud in their pride that he has shown great vassalage; and that with such an Archbishop the Cross is safe. There were no Conscientious Objections in their Christianity.

This is a type of the truths that historical literature ought to make us feel; but which mere histories very seldom do. The one example I have already given, of the Jongleur at Hastings, is a complexity of curious truths that might be conveyed and which very seldom are. We might have learned, for instance, what a Jongleur was; and realised that this one may have had feelings as deep and fantastic as the Jongleur celebrated in the twelfth-century poem, who died gloriously of dancing and turning somersaults before the image of Our Lady; that he was of the trade taken as a type by the mystical mirth of St. Francis, who called his monks the Jugglers of God. A man must read at least a little of the contemporary work itself before he thus finds the human heart inside the armour and the monastic gown; the men who write the philosophy of history seldom give us the philosophy, still less the religion, of the historical characters. And the final example of this is something which is also illustrated by the obscure minstrel who threw up his sword as he sang the Song of Roland, as well as by the Song of Roland itself. Modern history, mainly ethnological or economic, always talks of a thing like the Norman adventure in the somewhat vulgar language of success, but it is well to note, in the real Norman story, that the very bard in front of their battle-line was shouting the glorification of failure. It testifies to a truth in the very heart of Christendom that even the court poet of William the Conqueror was celebrating Roland the conquered.

That high note of the forlorn hope, of a host at bay and a battle against odds without end, is the note on which the great French epic ends. I know nothing more moving in poetry than that strange and unexpected end; that splendidly inconclusive conclusion. Charlemagne, the great Christian emperor, has at last established his empire in quiet, has done justice almost in the manner of a day of judgment, and sleeps as it were upon his throne with a peace almost like that of Paradise. And there appears to him the angel of God crying aloud that his arms are needed in a new and distant land, and that he must take up again the endless march of his days. And the great king tears his long white beard and cries out against his restless life. The poem ends, as it were with a vision and vista of wars against the barbarians; and the vision is true. For that war is never ended which defends the sanity of the world against all the stark anarchies and rending negations which rage against it for ever. That war is never finished in this world; and the grass has hardly grown on the graves of our own friends who fell in it.

THE SUPERSTITION OF SCHOOL

It is an error to suppose that advancing years bring retrogressing opinions. In other words, it is not true that men growing old must be growing reactionary. Some of the difficulties of recent times have been due to the obstinate optimism of the old revolutionary. Magnificent old men like Kropotkin and Whitman and William Morris went to their graves expecting Utopia if they did not expect Heaven. But the falsehood, like so many falsehoods, is a false version of a half-truth. The truth, or half-truth, is not that men must learn by experience to be reactionaries; but that they must learn by experience to expect reactions. And when I say reactions I mean reactions; I must apologise, in the world of current culture, for using the word in its correct sense.

If a boy fires off a gun, whether at a fox, a landlord or a reigning sovereign, he will be rebuked according to the relative value of these objects. But if he fires off a gun for the first time it is very likely that he will not expect the recoil, or know what a heavy knock it can give him. He may go blazing away through life at these and similar objects in the landscape; but he will be less and less surprised by the recoil; that is, by the reaction. He may even dissuade his little sister of six from firing off one of the heavy rifles designed for the destruction of elephants; and will thus have the appearance of being himself a reactionary. Very much the same principle applies to firing off the big guns of revolution. It is not a man's ideals that change it is not his Utopia that is altered; the cynic who says, "You will forget all that moonshine of idealism when you are older", says the exact opposite of the truth. The doubts that come with age are not about the ideal, but about the real. And one of the things that are undoubtedly real is reaction: that is, the practical probability of some reversal of direction, and of our partially succeeding in doing the opposite of what we mean to do. What experience does teach us is this: that there is something in the make-up and mechanism of mankind, whereby the result of action upon it is often unexpected, and almost always more complicated than we expect.

These are the snags of sociology; and one of them concerned with Education. If you ask me whether I think the populace, especially the poor, should be recognised as citizens who can rule the state, I answer in a voice of thunder, "Yes". If you ask me whether I think they ought to have education, in the sense of a wide culture and familiarity with the classics of history, I again answer, “Yes”. But there is, in the achievement of this purpose, a sort of snag or recoil that can only be discovered by experience and does not appear in print at all. It is not allowed for on paper, even so much as is the recoil of a gun. Yet it is at this moment an exceedingly practical part of practical politics; and, while it has been a political problem for a very long time past, it is a little more marked (if I may stain these serene and impartial pages with so political a suggestion) under recent conditions that have brought so many highly respectable Socialists and widely respected Trade Union officials to the front.

The snag in it is this: that the self-educated think far too much of education. I might add that the half-educated always think everything of education. That is not a fact that appears on the surface of the social plan or ideal; it is the sort of thing that can only be discovered by experience. When I said that I wanted the popular feeling to find political expression, I meant the actual and autochthonous popular feeling as it can be found in third-class carriages and bean-feasts and bank-holiday crowds; and especially, of course (for the earnest social seeker after truth), in public-houses. I thought, and I still think, that these people are right on a vast number of things on which the fashionable leaders are wrong. The snag is that when one of these people begins to “improve himself” it is exactly at that moment that I begin to doubt whether it is an improvement. He seems to me to collect with remarkable rapidity a number of superstitions, of which the most blind and benighted is what may be called the Superstition of School. He regards School, not as a normal social institution to be fitted in to other social institutions, like Home and Church and State; but as some sort of entirely supernormal and miraculous moral factory, in which perfect men and women are made by magic. To this idolatry of School he is ready to sacrifice Home and History and Humanity, with all its instincts and possibilities, at a moment’s notice. To this idol he will make any sacrifice, especially human sacrifice. And at the back of the mind, especially of the best men of this sort, there is almost always one of two variants of the same concentrated conception: either “If I had not been to School I should not be the great man I am now”, or else “If I had been to school I should be even greater than I am”. Let none say that I am scoffing at uneducated people; it is not their uneducation but their education that I scoff at. Let none mistake this for a sneer at the half-educated; what I dislike is the educated half. But

I dislike it, not because I dislike education, but because, given the modern philosophy or absence of philosophy, education is turned against itself, destroying that very sense of variety and proportion which it is the object of education to give. No man who worships education has got the best out of education; no man who sacrifices everything to education is even educated. I need not mention here the many recent examples of this monomania, rapidly turning into mad persecution, such as the ludicrous persecution of the families who live on barges. What is wrong is a neglect of principle; and the principle is that without a gentle contempt for education, no gentleman's education is complete.

I use the casual phrase casually; for I do not concern myself with the gentleman but with the citizen. Nevertheless, there is this historic half-truth in the case for aristocracy; that it is sometimes a little easier for the aristocrat, at his best, to have this last touch of culture which is a superiority to culture. Nevertheless, the truth of which I speak has nothing to do with any special culture of any special class. It has belonged to any number of peasants, especially when they were poets; it is this which gives a sort of natural distinction to Robert Burns and the peasant poets of Scotland. The power which produces it more effectively than any blood or breed is religion; for religion may be defined as that which puts the first things first. Robert Burns was justifiably impatient with the religion he inherited from Scottish Calvinism; but he owed something to his inheritance. His instinctive consideration of men as men came from an ancestry which still cared more for religion than education. The moment men begin to care more for education than for religion they begin to care more for ambition than for education. It is no longer a world in which the souls of all are equal before heaven, but a world in which the mind of each is bent on achieving unequal advantage over the other. There begins to be a mere vanity in being educated whether it be self-educated or merely state-educated. Education ought to be a searchlight given to a man to explore everything, but very specially the things most distant from himself. Education tends to be a spotlight; which is centred entirely on himself. Some improvement may be made by turning equally vivid and perhaps vulgar spotlights upon a large number of other people as well. But the only final cure is to turn off the limelight and let him realise the stars.

THE ROMANCE OF A RASCAL

It was Thackeray, I think, somewhere in the dizzy mazes of his Roundabout Papers, who made a remark which throws some light on literary fashions and the fate of Smollett's Peregrine Pickle. He described very vividly the fervour he felt as a boy for the Waverley Novels; and how those great romances filled the boyhood of those, like himself, who were to make the literature of that most romantic epoch which we call in England the Victorian era. He adds an interesting comment to this effect: "Our fathers used to talk about Peregrine Pickle, telling us (the sly old boys) that it was capital fun. But I think I was rather bewildered by it."

That, I fear, may be the immediate effect upon many either of Thackeray's period or even of our own period, where it has inherited the great literary tradition, which many learnt in youth from Thackeray, and which Thackeray learnt in youth from Scott. Most of those who grew up under such standards of fiction, as did the present writer, may be disposed to say at first that they find Smollett's novel rather bewildering. Not quite so bewildering as some of the most modern novels, of course. But many people seem to have a singular literary test, by which they like being bewildered by a new book, but dislike being bewildered by an old one. As I shall point out presently, this is very largely because the new book is not so new as it pretends to be. And the old book is not so very old, as the real stages of history go. In short, the real moral of all these things is the astonishing rapidity with which moods and standards change and change again; often changing back from the third condition to the first. There is nothing so mystifying as the rapidity with which new literary methods harden, except the brittleness with which they break. Each traveller who turns the corner thinks it will lead him into a straight road of progress; but really it leads him, in about ten minutes, to another corner which turns into another and equally crooked road. The point about a book like Peregrine Pickle can be fixed fairly precisely, by considering what are the changes that separated him from Thackeray, or that separate Thackeray from us.

In that little phrase from the Roundabout Papers there are, to begin with, some interesting and even amusing points. For instance, we are always told that the Victorian parent, or, even more, the early nineteenth-century parent, was a Puritan who forbade his family the idle as well as the improper forms of light literature; a Heavy Father who sat very heavily even on ordinary love-stories or romantic plays. Even so eighteenth-century a type as Macaulay identified the opinion of most sober and responsible parents with so extraordinary a parent as Sir Anthony Absolute in the comic play. “A circulating library is an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge.” Even a modern so steeped in the eighteenth century as Mr. Max Beerbohm has described the typical papa of a generation that might well have been that of Thackeray’s papa, as a gloomy and ponderous person who talked to his children about nothing but Hell. Surely that one little glimpse from Thackeray’s own essays might lead one to guess that there is something wrong in all this. It is difficult to imagine the Puritan papa, who commonly talked about Hell, winding up with a recommendation to read Peregrine Pickle. It is difficult to suppose that a race of Sir Anthony Absolutes, disapproving of all novels, would have gone out of their way to select this novel, out of all earthly novels, on the ground that it was “capital fun”. The parent must have been a very sly old boy indeed if he really thrust Peregrine Pickle on the attention of a little boy, whose head was full of ideals of chivalry, like those of Quentin Durward and Ivanhoe.

The truth is that the elements were too mixed, and, above all, the fashions too fugitive, for any of these generalisations. Men who lose traditions abandon themselves to conventions; but the conventions are more fleeting than fashions. There were papas who would have been almost as much shocked at their daughters reading Pride and Prejudice as at their reading Peregrine Pickle. But they were the papas and not the grand-papas. There was a sort of household where Hell was the brightest topic of chat; but it was not the old-fashioned household but rather the new-fashioned household. It came in with the Methodists, who were regarded as innovators and rebels. That episode of extreme severity, which was the beginning of the highly expurgated Victorian fiction, need not here be traced to its historical causes. Broadly speaking, it came from the rapid increase of wealth and power among the Nonconformists of the north, who vetoed the frankness both of the old gentry and the old peasantry of the south. The point here is that the work of these Puritans, from Lancashire or Yorkshire, was so very rapidly done that men forgot that it was so very recent. All this has to be understood before anybody, looking back through the nineteenth century, can do justice to the work of Smollett. The point of it is that not only did the changes come, but each generation accepted them as if they had always been unchangeable. Thus, in the case just mentioned, Thackeray began to write novels long after Dickens; he was still an artist, or art student, when he offered to illustrate Pickwick. Dickens, in the flood of his popularity that followed Pickwick, had already accepted and popularised what we call the Victorian conventions. This has been somewhat harshly expressed by Mr. Aldous Huxley when he said that a writer like Dickens writes as if he were a child, while a writer like Smollett writes as if he were a grown man. But indeed there is a considerable link between a writer like Smollett and a writer like Aldous Huxley. For the road has taken another sharp turn backwards; and the interlude of Victorian innocence is again out of sight. There is one instance of this, which dominates and largely explains the whole story of Peregrine Pickle.

When Thackeray called Vanity Fair "a novel without a hero", or even when he made the relatively realistic Pendennis a novel with a rather unheroic hero, he was doubtless by that time so accustomed to Victorian fiction as to feel that he was doing something new, and even "cynical". For Victorian fiction had already returned to the old romantic idea that the hero should be heroic, even if it did not understand him so well as did the old romances. Nicholas Nickleby vanquishes Squeers as St. George vanquishes the dragon; and John Ridd is a knight without fear or reproach, like Ivanhoe. But in fact Thackeray was only slightly reacting towards what had been universal in the time of that sly old boy, his papa.

All novels like Peregrine Pickle, all novels up to the time of Pickwick, were written frankly on a far more cynical convention: that the hero should not be heroic. The enterprising Mr. Pickle is certainly not heroic. He is many things that are good; not only brave, but often warm-hearted and considerate; and, above all, capable of recognising better men than himself. But, for the rest, by Victorian and even by normal standards, he is simply a coarse and rapacious rascal; nor does Smollett really pretend that he is anything else. This tendency to follow with delight the tricks and triumphs of somebody little better than a swindler comes from the historical origin of this type of story, which began in what is called the picaresque novel. It is the romance of a wanderer, apt to turn from the romance of a peddler to that of a highway robber. It is a curious coincidence that Smollett translated Gil Blas, in which this new cynical romance made its first triumph; and also translated Don Quixote, in which the road was cleared for it by the rout of the old romances which had made their heroes impossibly heroic. But about this sort of rambling tale, of the Romance of a Rascal, there are certain modern misunderstandings to be avoided. It would be complete misunderstanding of men like Tobias Smollett to suppose that because the heroes are immoral the authors are even unmoral. It is a peculiar characteristic of all that stalwart school, which represented this picaresque element in England that they do believe in heroism for anybody except heroes. Both in Fielding and Smollett and others we find a sort of fixed habit of thought, by which virtue is represented, and is even preached, and is often preached vehemently and in terms of authority; but never by the principal character, who is a young man of the world apparently not expected either to preach it or to practise it. Parson Adams is a serious picture of a good man, and Joseph Andrews is only a bad joke; but Joseph gives his name to the book. Fielding is more concerned with Tom Jones than with Alworthy; but be agrees with Mr. Alworthy and not with Tom Jones. And if anyone wishes to note exactly how this habit expresses itself in Smollett, let him turn to the typical scene in which Peregrine Pickle provokes a duel with Mr. Gauntlet. By all possible standards Peregrine is to behave like a vulgar and low-minded cad, actually sneering at the poverty of the soldier whom he has insulted, and being ignominiously defeated by the man he has so coarsely despised. Certainly no Victorian romancer would have dragged his hero through the mud of such a meeting. And yet the whole incident brings out in glowing colours all that is really good and lovable about Peregrine Pickle. He does vividly realise that the other man is more virtuous than himself; he acts as impetuously on the moral as on the immoral impulse;. he apologises after defeat, which is more difficult than apologising before it. In other words, Mr. Gauntlet, like Parson Adams, stands for something fixed and recognised; a virtue which the other characters venerate even while they violate. In this incident Peregrine is represented in the course of an hour or so as behaving almost incredibly badly and then almost incredibly well; and yet it is quite credible. Why do we thus feel that there is something solid in it after all? First, no doubt, because Smollett was a real novelist, and the character of Peregrine Pickle was a real character. He does convey what later sentiment would have called the contradiction: that Peregrine was a scoundrel, but a warm-hearted scoundrel; that lie was very near to being a swindler, but always an impetuous swindler. But it is due, almost as much, to the sense of firmness produced by the fact that vice and virtue are still treated as facts. Our sense of sincerity is founded on the fact that Tobias Smollett, as well as Peregrine Pickle, did really believe in right and wrong, and thought the principal character wrong and the secondary character right.

It is here that we find the chief difference between old writers like Smollett and many modern writers who set themselves successfully to produce the same convincing smell of dirt, the same unmistakable ugliness in the details of life, the same slippery and sometimes slimy irresponsibility about sex, the same heroic persistency in avoiding heroism. The difference is that Smollett's hero, or villain, does know exactly where he is in the moral world, even if it is where he ought not to be. The modern adventurer of the same type occupies all his adventures in trying to discover where he is. He is not so much breaking laws with bravery and cunning, as trying to learn the laws, with constant bewilderment and despair. Virtue does not rebuke him; the best that can be said for him is that vice generally bores him. Therefore he is not wholly successful in copying the older writers in their two gifts of lucidity and grossness; because he lacks the third angle of the triangle: their confidence.

Considered as a series of chapters, Peregrine Pickle is simply a chapter of accidents. Curiously enough the splash it made in its own day, especially in the sparkling world of wit and fashion, was almost entirely due to what almost anybody would now call the dullest part of the book. The insertion called "Memoirs of a Lady of Quality" was supposed to have some scandalous allusiveness to aristocratic society at the time; but it is not typical of the author, or even of the book. Nor can we in practice class this patchy and parenthetical style with the similar irregularity of a book like Pickwick. Most people, at least most mature people, have read Pickwick. Comparatively few, even among the most aged people, have read Peregrine Pickle. There cannot be very many sly old boys still going about the street, and advising modern youth to read it and find it capital fun. To many it must now be introduced as a new book rather than an old one; and the method of approach is sharply divergent. In writing of Dickens, we are writing for our fellow Dickensians, and can prove any point or illustrate any theory by examples they know as well as we. I do not think it is unfair to say that if I were to begin by referring the average reader to the well-known attitude of Mr. Metaphor, or the incident of Mr. Hornbeck, he would hardly be so suddenly illumined as by a reference to Mr. Stiggins or Mr. Weller. In cases like this, where an historic work by a man of genius is not now widely popular, or in immediate contact with the reading public, the cause and the problem can almost always be found in certain changes of taste which, rapid as they are, do correspond largely to changes of ideas. A man who opens Peregrine Pickle must not expect what he gets from a good Victorian novel, or a good modern novel; and only by some explanation of principles can he ever discover that it may contain things quite as good. It is well, therefore, to emphasise some general qualities that are even better. The novel of Smollett's time was better than the novel of the Victorian time, in so far as it recognised more clearly that good and evil exist and are entangled even in the same man. The novel of Smollett's time was better than the novel of our own time, in so far as it recognised that, even when they are entangled in the same man, they can still be distinguished and are very different, and at war till death.

PAYING FOR PATRIOTISM

Somebody was recently remonstrating with me in connection with certain remarks that I have made touching the history of English misgovernment in Ireland. The criticism, like many others, was to the effect that these are only old unhappy far-off things and battles long ago; that the present generation is not responsible for them; that there is, as the critic said, no way in which he or I could have assisted or prevented them; that if anyone was to blame, he had gone to his account; and we are not to blame at all. There was mingled with his protest, I think, a certain suggestion that an Englishman is lacking in patriotism when he resurrects such corpses in order to connect them with crime.

Now the queer thing is this: that I think it is I who am standing up for the principle of patriotism; and I think it is he who is denying it. As a matter of fact, I am one of the few people left, of my own sort and calling, who do still believe in patriotism; just as I am among the few who do still believe in democracy. Both these ideas, were exaggerated extravagantly and, what is worse, erroneously, or entirely in the wrong way, during the nineteenth century; but the reaction against them today is very strong, especially among the intellectuals. But I do believe that patriotism rests on a psychological truth; a social sympathy with those of our own sort, whereby we see our own potential acts in them; and understand their history from within. But if there truly be such a thing as a nation, that truth is a two-edged sword, and we must let it out both ways.

Therefore I answer my critic thus. It is quite true that it was not I, G. K. Chesterton, who pulled the beard of an Irish chieftain by way of social introduction; it was John Plantagenet, afterwards King John; and I was not present. It was not I, but a much more distinguished literary gent, named Edmund Spenser, who concluded on the whole that the Irish had better be exterminated like vipers; nor did he even ask my advice on so vital a point. I never stuck a pike through an Irish lady for fun, after the siege of Drogheda, as did the God-fearing Puritan soldiers of Oliver Cromwell. Nobody can find anything in my handwriting that contributes to the original drafting of the Penal Laws; and it is a complete mistake to suppose that I was called to the Privy Council when it decided upon the treacherous breaking of the Treaty of Limerick. I never put a pitchcap on an Irish rebel in my life; and there was not a single one of the thousand floggings of ‘98 which I inflicted or even ordered. If that is what is meant, it is not very difficult to see that it is quite true.

But it is equally true that I did not ride with Chaucer to Canterbury, and give him a few intelligent hints for the best passages in The Canterbury Tales. It is equally true that there was a large and lamentable gap in the company seated at the Mermaid; that scarcely a word of Shakespeare’s most poetical passages was actually contributed by me; that I did not whisper to him the word “incarnadine” when he was hesitating after “multitudinous seas”; that I entirely missed the opportunity of suggesting that Hamlet would be effectively ended by the stormy entrance of Fortinbras. Nay, aged and infirm as I am, it were vain for me to pretend that I lost a leg at the Battle of Trafalgar, or that I am old enough to have seen (as I should like to have seen), ablaze with stars upon the deck of death, the frail figure and the elvish face of the noblest sailor of history.

Yet I propose to go on being proud of Chaucer and Shakespeare and Nelson; to feel that the poets did indeed love the language that I love and that the sailor felt something of what we also feel for the sea. But if we accept this mystical corporate being, this larger self, we must accept it for good and ill. If we boast of our best, we must repent of our worst. Otherwise patriotism will be a very poor thing indeed.

THE PANTOMIME

Mr. Maurice Baring, the chief Puppet-Master of the Puppet-Show of Memory, has included in a recent reprint, I am glad to see, an item that I have loved long since and lost awhile, in the form of a scene from the old Drury Lane sort of Harlequinade, recast in the manner of the mystical plays of Maeterlinck. It was probably written when Maeterlinck was very much the fashion, and when people had long been saying that the Harlequinade was hopelessly old-fashioned. In one sense it would be difficult to say which of the two is more old-fashioned now. But, to judge by current criticism and conversation, there are many who remember Pantaloon and Harlequin who hardly even remember Pélleas and Mélisande. It is a queer thing to note the extent to which the world has become silent about Maeterlinck; though it may be the more impressive to the remaining followers of so eloquent an admirer of silence. Whatever be the cause, it certainly was not that his work was devoid of a very individual imaginative quality. Personally, I should guess that he had shared the fate of many modern attempts to refound mysticism on something less real rather than something more real than this world. But the matter only arises here in relation to this little literary jest about the Pantomime, which I always felt to be one of Mr. Baring's most charming fancies. Of course it is a very good burlesque of Maeterlinck; it is also in a sense a very good burlesque of the Pantomime; and the latter is the more delicate achievement. Every healthy person wishes to make fun of a serious thing; but it is generally almost impossible to make fun of a funny thing. But in this case the notion of fun or burlesque must not be confused in either case with any idea of hostility, or even of satire. Parody does not consist merely of contrast; at its best it rather consists of a superficial contrast covering a substantial congruity. The bitter sort of burlesque may exist, and have a right to exist; but it is doubtful whether in this particular form the bitterest is the best. The one sort of parodist will naturally parody the sort of style he dislikes. But the other sort of parodist will always prefer to parody the style he likes. I remember in my boyhood, when Swinburne was our (rather too bubbly) champagne, I for one wrote almost as many conscious travesties of Swinburne as unconscious copies of him.

Now in this case of the Pantomime the paradox has a sort of moral. For I know that the real reason why I return with unwearied joy to Mr. Baring's little Maeterlinckian Harlequinade is because the atmosphere of the harlequinade really was for me, if not exactly Maeterlinckian, at least in some mysterious sense mystical. I need not dwell on the points in the parody which were witty considered as contrasts as well as coincidences. The policeman repeats at intervals, like the tolling of a funeral bell (a lost and wandering bell attached to no church and uttering in its hollow throat an awful agnosticism), "It was not on my beat." The Pantaloon, one of the shivering old men of Maeterlinck, babbles not of green fields but of grey and ghostly sausages, as of things he will never find, or is not certain that he ever did find. But my point here is that, in spite of the comic contrast between the hilarity of the Pantomime and the hopelessness of the Maeterlinckian atmosphere, there really is something that, for me at least, melts the two into a sort of mystical unity; so that the top-heavy house of the Harlequinade is even here like my home. For I am quite certain, as a fact of psychology, that I did even in childhood regard the knockabout part of the Pantomime with its pokers and sausages, as being none the less a poetical part of the Pantomime; and as unmistakably within the frontiers of fairyland as the palace of the Fairy Queen. Never on earthly anvil, never in earthly fireplace, did that red poker gleam: never those clattering milkcans brim with an earthly cream. The Policeman was perfectly right about both scenes and in both senses. He was not on his beat. He was a stray and estranged policeman; a policeman stolen by the fairies; a constable wandering far away from his constabulary duties, if he ever had any. The joke depended on the very Victorian accident that the costume of a London policeman seemed both commonplace and comic; and yet, although he was comic, he was not really commonplace. He was not merely befooled but bewitched; and his blue uniform revisited the glimpses of a blue moon. Still, it is curious to reflect how completely different the whole drama would have seemed if he had been any sort of foreign gendarme, with a cocked hat and a sword.

Now my interest in the matter is this; that I know many will say that this sense of glamour is an effect of distance, like the colour of blue hills or crimson clouds; and that in this romantic aspect it is only a puppet-show of memory. They would say that I saw it in this mystical manner through the intervening veils of time, through the mists of Maeterlinck, through the mockeries of Mr. Baring, and, above all, through that depth of delicate melancholy with which the remote past is remembered. But I am certain that this is not so. Apart from the fact that the memory of childish joys does not make me melancholy (it is perhaps a fine shade of theology) and apart from the fact that I suspect that Mr. Baring himself remembers the thing very much as I do, I am quite sure that I am remembering a reality that was real then as well as now. You could as soon persuade me that the taste of toffee was an illusion that only came to me in later years, or that I think I liked roast chestnuts then only because I like them now, as convince me that I did not have, even as a child, an overwhelming impression that this farcical world was fantastic, not merely in the sense of being comic, but also in the sense of being mystic. Though the scene might superficially seem completely constructed out of objects made as much as possible prosaic, I had an instant inward certainty that they were all poetic. The sky above those staggering chimneys was not the sky above the chimneys in the street outside; its stars would have been strange stars; for I had looked round another corner of the cosmos. To wander in the streets of that strange town would have been as unearthly an experience as to wander in the Blue Forest round Bluebeard's Sapphire Palace, or along the Golden Orange-Groves in the gardens of Prester John. Not verbally, but quite vividly, I knew then, exactly as I know now, that there is something mysterious and perhaps more than mortal about the power and call of imagination. I do not think this early experience has been quite rightly understood, even by those modern writers who have written the most charming and fanciful studies of childhood; and I am not so presumptuous as to think that I can scientifically succeed where I think they have somehow vaguely failed. But I have often fancied that it might be worth while to set down a few notes or queries about this difficult and distant impression. For one thing, the ordinary phrases used about childish fancies often strike me as missing the mark, and being in some subtle way, quite misleading. For instance, there is the very popular phrase, "Make-believe." This seems to imply that the mind makes itself believe something; or else that it first makes something and then forces itself to believe in it, or to believe something about it. I do not think there is even this slight crack of falsity in the crystal clearness and directness of the child's vision of a fairy-palace — or a fairy-policeman. In one sense the child believes much less, and in another much more than that.

I do not think the child is deceived; or that he attempts for a moment to deceive himself. I think he instantly asserts his direct and divine right to enjoy beauty; that he steps straight into his own lawful kingdom of imagination, without any quibbles or questions such as arise afterwards out of false moralities and philosophies, touching the nature of falsehood and truth. In other words, I believe that the child has inside his head a pretty correct and complete definition of the whole nature and function of art; with the one addition that he is quite incapable of saying, even to himself, a single word on the subject. Would that many other professors of aesthetics were under a similar limitation. Anyhow, he does not say to himself, "This is a real street, in which mother could go shopping." He does not say to himself, " This is an exact realistic copy of a real street, to be admired for its technical correctness." Neither does he say, "This is an unreal street, and I am drugging and deceiving my powerful mind with something that is a mere illusion." Neither does he say, "This is only a story, and nurse says it is very naughty to tell stories." If he says anything, he only says what was said by those men who saw the white blaze of the Transfiguration, "It is well for us to be here."

This is the beginning of all sane art criticism: wonder combined with the complete serenity of the conscience in the acceptance of such wonders. The purity of the child largely consists in its entire absence of morality in the sense of Puritan morality, and all the modern and muddled moralities that have sprung from it, scientific and provincial and equivocal, especially the confusions about different meanings of words like "fact" and "fable" and falsehood. The problem is very close to the real problem about images. A child knows that a doll is not a baby; just as clearly as a real believer knows that a statue of an angel is not an angel. But both know that in both cases the image has the power of both opening and concentrating the imagination. Stevenson, whom I shall always count a fountain of fine inspiration, and certainly a man gifted with the eye that sees the daydreams of childhood in broad daylight, was nevertheless not quite sound on this example, possibly because he was not quite sound on the other. He talks too often of the child having his head in a cloud of confusion and indifference to fact or fancy. I believe that our difficulty with the child has the directly opposite cause. It comes because the child is perfectly clear about the difference, not only between truth and falsehood but between fiction and falsehood. He understands the two essential types of truth: the truth of the mystic, which turns a fact into a truth where it should be turned into a truth, because the alternative is a triviality; and the truth of the martyr, which treats a truth as a fact, where it should be treated as a fact, because the alternative is a lie. In other words, the child knows perfectly well without being told the difference between saying he has seen the policeman cut in two in the pantomime, and saying he has seen his little brother break the jug in the nursery, when he really broke it himself. It is we who have grown confused about these categories, and cannot realise the swiftness and clarity with which the child accepts what we call the convention of art. Looking at the street down which the clown pursues the policeman with a poker he would never dream of saying in the ordinary sense, indeed he would never dream of saying at all, "That is a real street." But still less would he ever dream of saying, "That is an unreal street." He has a better understanding of dreams — and visions.

In the case of the Pantomime there is one plain fact which clenches this conviction for me. I know I knew that the scenery and costume were "artificial", because I deeply rejoiced that they were artificial. I liked the notion that things were made of painted wood or plastered by hand with gold and silver. These were the vestments and ornaments of the ritual; but they were not the rite, still less the revelation. I liked the magic-box called a stage, because there, for some reason, the light that never was on sea or land was on paint and paste-board. But I knew perfectly well that it was paint and paste-board. It would be impossible for anybody not to know that who had a toy-theatre of his own. In the Pantomime of my childhood, with its somewhat simpler scenery, there were tricks of mere stage carpentry which I enjoyed as much as if I were working them myself. There was one way of representing tossing waves, by rank behind rank of escaloped blue walls as groundpieces, moved in opposite directions so that the crests seemed to cross and dance. I knew how it was done, because my father did it himself before my very eyes, in my own toy-theatre at home. But it gave me such ecstasy that even now when I think of it for an instant my heart leaps up like the wave. I knew it was not water, but I knew it was sea; and in that flash of knowledge I had passed far beyond those who suffer the fixed and freezing illusion, uttered by the pessimistic poet, that "the sea's a lot of water that happens to be there." In imagination there is no illusion; no, not even an instant of illusion. For no split second even then did I believe that people had cut in two a live man — even if he was only a policeman. If I had believed it, I should have felt very different. What I felt was that it was right; that it was a good and enlarging and inspiriting thing to see; that it was an excellent thing to look down on the strange street where such things could be seen; in short, I could say then, with a quite undivided mind, that it was a very good Christmas present to go to the Pantomime.

READING THE RIDDLE

An infinite number of years ago, when I was the chief weakness of a publisher's office, I remember that there was issued from that establishment a book of highly modern philosophy: a work of elaborate evolutionary explanation of everything and nothing; a work of the New Theology. It was called "The Great Problem Solved" or some such title. When this book had been out for a few days it began to promise an entirely unexpected success. Booksellers sent to ask about it, travellers came in and asked for it, even the ordinary public stood in a sort of knot outside the door, and sent in their bolder spirits to make inquiries.

Even to the publisher this popularity seemed remarkable; to me (who had dipped into the work, when I should have been otherwise employed) it appeared utterly incredible.

After some little time, however, when they had examined "The Great Problem Solved", the lesser problem was also solved. We found that people were buying it under the impression that it was a detective story. I do not blame them for their desire, and most certainly I do not blame them for their disappointment. It must have exasperated them, it would certainly infuriate me, to open a book expecting to find a cosy, kindly, human story about a murdered man found in a cupboard, and find instead a lot of dull, bad philosophy about the upward progress and the purer morality. I would rather read any detective book than that book. I would rather spend my time in finding out why a dead man was dead than in slowly comprehending why a certain philosopher had never been alive.

But this little incident has always stuck to me as a symbol of what is really wrong with modern popular religion. Why is a work of modern theology less startling, less arresting to the soul, than a work of silly police fiction? Why is a work of modern theology less startling, less arresting to the soul than a work of old theology? When those unfortunate clients bought "The Great Problem Solved", perhaps it was inevitable that they should feel slightly cooled and lowered in their vitality; perhaps no philosophical work can really be so good as a good detective story. But at any rate there need not have been such an absolute abyss between them. People need not have felt that they had paid for the most exciting kind of book and got the least exciting kind of book. It cannot be right that religion should be the dullest of subjects. There must be something wrong if the most important human business is also the least exciting. There must be something wrong if everything is not interesting.

A man called Smith goes out for a walk, and stops by a bookstall, where he sees a book called “The Great Problem Solved”. If Smith finds that this book solves a problem in crime, he is entranced. If Smith finds that it solves a problem in chess, he is interested. If Smith finds that it solves the problem in the last issue of Answers, he is genuinely excited. But if Smith finds that it solves the problem of Smith, that it explains the stones under his feet, and the stars over his head, that it tells him suddenly why it really is that he likes chess or detective stories, or anything else; if I say, Smith finds that the book explains Smith — then we are told he finds it dull. It may be a democratic prejudice, but I do not believe this. I think that Smith likes modern chess problems more than modern philosophical problems for the very simple reason that they are better. I think he likes a modern detective story better than a modern religion simply because there are some good modern detective stories and no good modern religions. In short, he buys “The Great Problem Solved” as a police novel, because be knows that in a police novel, in some shape or form, the great problem will be solved. And he does not buy it as a book of modern philosophy, because he knows that in a book of modern philosophy, the great problem will certainly not be solved. This title as the title of a police romance is a sensation, but as the title of a metaphysical work it is a swindle. Those early friends of mine bought the book when they thought that it solved the mystery of Berkeley-square, but dropped it like hot bricks when they found that it professed only to solve the mystery of existence. But if those people had really believed for a moment that it did solve the mystery of existence they would not have dropped it like hot bricks. They would have walked over hot bricks for ten miles to find it.

That forgotten book may stand as a type of all the new theological literature. What is wrong with it is not that it professes to state the paradox of God, but that it professes to state the paradox of God as a truism. You may or may not be able to reveal the divine secret; but at least you cannot let it leak out. If ever it comes, it will be unmistakable, it will kill or cure. Judaism, with its dark sublimity, said that if a man saw God he would die. Christianity conjectures that (by an even more catastrophic fatality) if he sees God he will live for ever. But whatever happens will be something decisive and indubitable. A man after seeing God may die; but at least he will not be slightly unwell, and then have to take a little medicine and then have to call in a doctor. If any of us ever do read the riddle, we shall read it in brutal black and blazing white, exactly as we do read the riddle of some sixpenny mystery of murder. If we ever do find the solution, we shall know that it is the right solution.

This dark and drastic quality there has been certainly in all real religions. The ordinary detective story has one deep quality in common with Christianity; it brings home the crime in a quarter that is unsuspected. In any good detective story the last shall be first and the first shall be last. The judgment at the end of any silly sensational story is like the judgment at the end of the world; it is unexpected. As the sensational story always makes the apparently blameless banker, the seemingly spotless aristocrat, the author of the incomprehensible crime, so the author of Christianity told us that in the end the bolt would fall with a brutal novelty, and he that exalted himself would be abased.

The actual records of great religions are so terribly theatrical that Mr. Bernard Shaw recently said that the story of the Crucifixion in the Gospels was too dramatic to be true. This is sufficiently characteristic of the Fabian political philosophy, which has never lived in the heart of any heroic politics. The story of Danton and Robespierre (to take an accidental example) with its "speeches", "eternal daring", "If we do this our names are never forgotten among men", "The blood of Danton chokes you", "There is a God" — shows what men do say. These things were said, and said suddenly, because the heart of man was high. When man is at his utmost he is in a state indescribable; he tells the truth or dies.

It is not in your lot or mine to live in a great or an ecstatic age. Men talk of the noise and unrest of our age; but I think that all that age is really very sleepy; all the wheels and the traffic send one to sleep. The shrieking pistons and the shattering hammers are one enormous and most soothing lullaby. But even in our quiet life I think we can feel the great fact that is the core of all religion. However quiet may be the skies, or however cool the meadows, we always feel that if we did know what they meant the meaning would be something mighty and shattering. About the weakest weed there is still a sensational difference between understanding and not understanding. We stare at a tree in an infinite leisure; but we know all the time that the real difference is between a stillness of mystery and an explosion of explanation. We know all the time that the question is whether it will always continue to be a tree or turn suddenly into something else.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

A Tale of Two Cities was written in the later part of Dicken's literary development, and in one respect stands absolutely alone among all his works. It is, I think, the one solitary instance, from which a critic in distant days could possibly deduce that this very great literary man had ever read any literature at all. This generalisation may be subject to certain partial modifications, to be considered when we consider the course of his life; but as a matter of proportion, which is the essential of truth, it is true. In a thousand ways, ranging from the most depressing destitution to the most pantomimic parade and luxury, Dickens showed that he had studied life, and could turn life into literature. In a thousand moods, ranging from the rankest vulgar farce to the most stagey and melodramatic morality, he showed that he had within himself the powers and passions and appetites to stock the whole world with stories. But very seldom indeed, in enjoying the world of Dickens, do we feel that there was really any writer but Dickens in the world. Like all very creative men, he unfixes the dates of history, and stands as a sort of immortal anachronism. It is sometimes with a sort of start that we remember that his Hogarthian farce and tragedy went on long after Keats had written "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and well into the time when Tennyson was writing the poems of his best period, which was his Pre-Raphaelite period. Dickens, in practice and in private life, was a very great admirer of Tennyson. Forster, his biographer, says that his literary tastes touching his contemporaries varied very much, but that he never failed in his admiration of Tennyson. But I do not honestly believe that anybody could guess, from any printed word — from the first words about Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Blotton of Aldgate, to the last broken and doubtful sentences that hint at the identity of Datchery or the destruction of Drood — that Dickens had taken any particular pleasure in "The Lady of Shalott", or "Sir Galahad". It is partly a tribute to the strength of Dickens that his mind was so teeming with images that he never needed to borrow mere ideas. It is partly, also a real weakness in his position, that he had never valued the great culture of the past, and therefore could not fully understand its developments all around him in the culture of the present. But, for good or evil, it is true that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred nobody (to use a popular phrase) ever made a bulge in Dickens; nobody even made a dent in him. He remained, with all his gifts and glories, solidly and almost insolently himself. The one example, among all works of his authorship, in which we feel even faintly the presence, or perhaps the shadow, of another author, is A Tale of Two Cities; and that other author is Thomas Carlyle.

As I have said, the normal human conditions necessary to his normal human life, involved some modification of this statement. He was very largely what is called a self-taught man, which means that be was taught, not by himself, but by other people; by other people acting as they really act in the real world, and not as they pose before pupils they are paid to teach. His domestic circumstances from the first were very insecure, so that he saw more of books than of school-books; he learned more from tattered volumes left about in a tavern than from grammars provided primly in an educational establishment. But it is quite true that among the tattered volumes in the tavern, or elsewhere, there were some with titles not yet entirely forgotten: titles like Robinson Crusoe and Tom Jones and Roderick Random and Tristram Shandy. In this sense it is true that he, like every other human being who ever wrote or even read, owed something to what had already been written. And indeed the great comic classics, which were the glory of eighteenth-century England, did leave a certain trend or track in his mind, which is an utterly trackless waste as regards all the things that anybody could ever have tried to teach him in school. It is evident, however, from the very nature of the story itself, that school in his case must have been almost as intermittent as truancy. Charles Dickens was born in Portsea, adjoining Portsmouth, in 1812, and was promptly carried away from it at the age of two. He then became a Londoner for a few years, equally infantile; and then his wandering family settled down in Chatham, which was about the nearest approach it ever made to settling down anywhere. Thus we find first the two facts, that are both determining and important: one, that his family was one of very varied economic fortunes, such as leads to frequent change of abode, and has indeed made the modern poorer middle class almost as nomadic as Arabs; and the other, that such background as a child of genius will always feel and value (if he has half a chance to do it) was for Charles Dickens, to the day of his death, the great roads of Kent that go down to Dover; and the gardens and hopfields and the towers of Rochester Cathedral. In so far as he had any traditions, that was his traditional environment; just as in so far as he had any culture, it was that of the great comic novelists of England a hundred years before. He was so far traditional by instinct that he never forgot either of the influences; he named one of his sons after Henry Fielding; and, when he came to comfort and affluence, he made his home on Gad's Hill, on that great Kentish road where Falstaff had played the glorious fool long ago.

The private life of Dickens, however, is of little importance to the outline of criticism here involved, and is indeed in its own nature somewhat irrelevant and accidental. Its chief tragedy was almost an accident, and its premature close was a sort of defeat brought about by an excess of triumphs. It is well known that in his early youth, while he was still a parliamentary reporter living in London after his boyhood in Chatham, he married the daughter of one of his literary patrons named Hogarth, and that by a long process of disagreement, about which critics can always disagree, he came to be alienated from his wife; though, curiously enough, remaining on terms of perfectly sober and fraternal friendship with one of her sisters. There is no need to pronounce upon a problem which was really kept private, by the not undignified prejudice of the Victorian time; it is enough to say that no very grave charge was ever brought against either party by any of the small group of people who knew the truth. It is more relevant here to remark that at almost the same moment as his marriage occurred his first and perhaps most triumphant entry into literature. His first book, commonly called Pickwick or the Pickwick Papers, is supreme among his works in many ways, but especially in the way here in question: that it is a purely personal creation and owes nothing to any other book. It is all the more amusing to remember that a spiteful attempt was made by some of his enemies to suggest that it owed everything to its original illustrator, an artist named Seymour, who drew spirited sporting sketches of the sort then fashionable. It is a peculiarly false insinuation, in a literary sense. For it is the whole point of Pickwick that its rush of inspiration not only leaves Seymour's first ideas behind, but leaves Dickens' first ideas quite as far behind. We might say that the whole point of Pickwick is that it does not stick to the point; or at least that the point is not Pickwick, in the sense of the President of the Pickwick Club. The best things in Pickwick have nothing to do with the principal characters, still less with the preliminary chapters, and least of all with the early illustrations. It is an exceptional case in which the story grows better the more it strays from the story. Dickens did not preserve this limpid and perfect liberty in his later stories. He produced better novels, but never so good a book. Still, we can say of the ensuing series of books that, whatever else they were, they were not bookish. They showed Dickens interested in different things, but never any other authors influencing Dickens. Thus, in his next book Oliver Twist, which he seemed resolved to make as grim and lurid as Pickwick had been gay and luminous, he was in fact protesting against many social evils, which had already produced noble protests from great men of that age. The workhouse he hated had been hated as healthily by Cobbett or by Hood, by Cartwright or by Carlyle. But nobody could say that one word of Oliver Twist sounds as if it were suggested by the style of Cobbett or by the style of Carlyle. Nicholas Nickleby and Martin Chuzzlewit show him even more obviously walking down his own street, in some ways even a narrow and Cockney street; the same applies to The Old Curiosity Shop; and, though Barnaby Rudge is a sort of experiment in the way of a historical novel, it is not much more really historical than the Old Curiosity Shop or its Wardour Street curiosities. Dombey and Son has the same now established balance of perfect comedy and rather imperfect melodrama; and though David Copperfield strikes far deeper, and releases a much finer spring of inspiration, it is even more personal than the rest. Dickens has found a new source of inspiration, but not by reading anybody else's book; rather by reading his own diary. The same statement applies to that fine book, Great Expectations, and a much sharper social criticism, still extorted by contemporary facts rather than contemporary culture, appears in the unconscious or unclassifiable Socialism of Hard Times. It mixes his own observations less with mere fancies than did his first protest in Oliver Twist; but it is always his own observations and nobody else's. There is little to vary this verdict in the other two novels of Bleak House and Little Dorrit. It is only when we come to the book which is here specially in question, A Tale of Two Cities, which appeared in 1859, that we have anything like the particular impression of which I speak; that Dickens has felt the pressure of an imaginative atmosphere outside his own bursting sufficiency and energy, that energy from whose centrifugal fury all fancies but his own had been spurned away.

This compact and competent, and some would say conceited, sense of self-expression does in A Tale of Two Cities, for the first time, seem to admit something external, something that might be called an echo. Indeed, in one way, it might be called the echo of an echo. It is Carlyle's French Revolution rather than Michelet's French Revolution; in other words, it is not entirely or exactly the French Revolution of the French Revolutionists. Dickens does tend to neglect, as Carlyle did tend to neglect, the extent to which the revolutionists themselves regarded it not as an explosion of unreason, or even an explosion of passion, but as an inevitable explosion of reason. They themselves might almost have said that the explosion was an explanation; as is the explosion that occurs during a chemical lecture. Carlyle, who had laboriously studied all the documents and historical literature of the French Revolution, never quite understood this. It is small blame by comparison to Dickens, who had never studied any documents or any history or any literature, or hardly any books except his own, if he did not understand it either. But he had studied one book, and that was Carlyle's book; and the shadow of that luminous but lurid cloud lies over the whole landscape and scenery of his story. It is very difficult to define or prove these merely atmospheric things. A short if clumsy way of putting it is to compare the general tone of Dickens towards the mere notion of a mob, as it is in Barnaby Rudge, with his tone towards such a mob in A Tale of Two Cities. The comparison, of course, is not quite fair. Even a man so little in touch with history as he, could tell that the second was more historic than the first; that the second was at least an outbreak of liberty, by comparison with an outbreak of bigotry. But there is more in the contrast than that; we feel that he could never have taken a Gordon Rioter seriously, even if he had liked him, as he did so often seem to like his most ludicrous and indefensible characters; as the reader does really, in a way, like Sim Tappertit. He did not like Madame Defarge, but he did take her seriously. If she had occurred in Barnaby Rudge, she would have been a vulgar villainess; as she occurred in A Tale of Two Cities, she is a Fate. In other words, there is not only a romantic but a mystical element that has entered the story; and though Dickens was in one sense always a romantic, he was certainly never a mystic. In some sense the comparison involves a paradox. Carlyle, as a reactionary, declared that the mob, being made of most men, was made mostly of fools. But Carlyle also allowed for a mystical suggestion that the folly of men was the wisdom of God. Dickens, as a radical, regarded the mob, in so far as it meant most ordinary men, as being composed of reasonable and responsible citizens, whose votes were all valuable and whose intellects were all capable of benefiting by education and discussion. But, in practice, when Dickens did see a mass of men in any sort of elemental disorder, acting in anger or by some accident lawless or unlettered, he was deeply disgusted in every corner of his compact and sensible intelligence, and hated that very wildness which Carlyle half admired. Dickens felt like this, for instance, towards the sprawling licence and spasmodic ferocity of the more wild and western elements of the American Republic. He would, if subjected to the real experience, have been quite as much horrified by the ferocious pugnacity and spontaneous militarism of the mob of the French Republic. Nevertheless, the Carlylean sense of a sort of savage symbolism in the great struggles of history does make the atmosphere of this book, or perhaps of half this book, different from the whole bulk of his other books.

Perhaps it is really impossible for any good citizen to write A Tale of Two Cities. He will always see one from the outside and the other from the inside; and the line of relative reality and unreality in this case runs fairly clear. Thus the description of the old-fashioned London bank is unmistakably written by the old London Dickens. The story of the sacrifice of Sydney Carton, though genuinely touching and nobler especially as compared with some of the Dickensian melodramas, is still in a sense a London melodrama, with the larger background of a Paris tragedy. The hero is being heroic for private reasons; whereas nobody understands or does justice to the French Revolution, who forgets that half its leaders lost their heads by really being heroic for public reasons. It is easy enough to make fun of their classical rhetoric about Brutus who killed his sons, or Timoleon who killed his brother; but it is not so easy to deny that, if they had too much of this notion of sacrificing private good to public good, we have far too much of the corruption and cowardice that comes of sacrificing public good to private good. The ideals for which that war was waged were insufficient but largely just; and it is curious and rather moving to note that the author is so far exalted by the atmosphere that he turns in the end to an older and in truth a larger ideal, which exists before and after and affirms the same justice in public and in private life. I know nothing in all the works of this man of genius which is, in the true sense, so imaginative as that last strange voice, coming from nowhere, those great timeless words put into the mouth of no mortal character, spoken suddenly as by a trumpet out of the empty sky, between the click of the knitting-needles and the crash of the guillotine: “I am the Resurrection and the Life . . .”

GOD AND GOODS

It is often noted, and generally truly enough, that Bolshevism is necessarily connected with atheism. It is not so much realised, perhaps, that atheism is now under an increasing necessity of connecting itself with Bolshevism. For Bolshevism is at least partly positive, even if it is largely destructive. And the history of the purely negative notion, of an abstract attack on religion, has been in this respect a rather curious history. Taken as a whole, indeed it is at once melancholy and comic. Those who in modern times have tried to destroy popular religion, or a traditional faith, have always felt the necessity of offering something solid as a substitute. The queer part of it is that they have offered about a dozen totally different things; some of them entirely contradictory things; that the promises perpetually varied, and only the negative threat remained the same.

Just before the French Revolution, among the first eighteenth-century philosophers, it was generally assumed that Liberty was not merely a good thing, but the one and only origin of all good things. The man living according to Nature, the Natural Man or the Noble Savage, would find himself immediately free and happy so long as he never went to church, and was careful to cut the parish priest in the street. These philosophers soon discovered, what the parish priest could have told them at the start, that it is rather more difficult to be a happy animal, than to be a happy man. Indeed, a man cannot be an animal for the same reason that he cannot be an angel; because be is a man. But for some time the philosophers who did not believe in God, whom they regarded as a myth, managed to believe in Nature without realising that she is a metaphor. And they assured those whom they waved on to the burning down of churches, that after that they would be eternally happy in their fields and gardens.

Then after the political revolution came the industrial revolution; and with it an enormous new importance attached to science. The amiable atheists went back to the people, smiled at them, coughed slightly, and explained that it was still necessary to burn down churches, but that a slight error had been made about the substitute for churches. The second atheist philosophy was founded, not on the fact that Nature is kind, but on the fact that Nature is cruel; not that fields are free and beautiful, but that scientific men and industrialists are so energetic, that they will soon cover all the fields with factories and warehouses. Now there was a new substitute for God; which was gas and coal and iron and the privilege of turning wheels in order to work these substances. It was now positively stated that economic liberty, the freedom to buy and sell and hire and exploit, would make people so blissfully happy that they would forget all their dreams of the fields of heaven; or for that matter of the fields of earth. And somehow that also has been a little disappointing.

Two Earthly Paradises had collapsed. The first was the natural paradise of Rousseau; the second the economic paradise of Ricardo. Men did not become perfect through being free to live and love; men did not become perfect through being free to buy and sell. It was obviously time for the atheists to find a third inevitable and immediate ideal. They have found it in Communism. And it does not trouble them that it is quite different from their first ideal and quite contrary to their second. All they want is some supposed betterment of humanity which will be a bribe for depriving humanity of divinity. Read between the lines of half a hundred new books — outlines of popular science and educational publications on history and philosophy — and you will see that the only fundamental feeling in them is the hatred of religion. The only positive thing is negative. But they are forced more and more to idealise Bolshevism, simply because it is the only thing left that is still new enough to be offered as a hope, when every one of the revolutionary hopes they have themselves offered has in its turn become hopeless.

FROM MEREDITH TO RUPERT BROOKE

The title of the Age of Reason has been given to the eighteenth century, though the typical eighteenth-century man who invented it probably meant it as a prophetic and optimistic description of the nineteenth century or the twentieth century. Certainly if Thomas Paine had foreseen the actual nineteenth century, he would have called it the Age of Romanticism. If he had foreseen the actual twentieth century, he would have called it the Age of Nonsense, the Age of Unreason, especially in the departments originally identified with rationalism, such as the department of science. To him Einstein would have been merely a contradiction in terms and Epstein a disease afflicting bronze and marble. It is therefore not altogether misleading to measure modern developments, for good or evil, as from a sort of datum line of simple or self-evident rationality to be found in the eighteenth century. Whatever else is false, it is false to say that the world has increased in clarity and intelligibility and logical completeness. Whatever else is true, it is true to say that the world has grown more bewildering, especially in the scientific spheres supposed to be ruled by law or explained by reason. The simplification of the older rationalists may have been, and indeed was, an over-simplification. But it did simplify and it did satisfy; above all, it satisfied them. It would not be altogether unfair to say that it filled them not only with satisfaction but with self-satisfaction. And, as historical divisions are never clean-cut, this rationalistic self-satisfaction descended in part to their children; in many ways it may be found pervading the nineteenth century, and, in the case of some rather old-fashioned persons, even our own century.

Nevertheless, the nineteenth century was very different; and the Victorian Age was vividly different. And it was different from the eighteenth century chiefly in this: that the old clarity of rationalism and humanitarianism was more and more coloured and clouded by certain waves of specially modern imagination or hypothesis or taste and fancy. These new notions had been unknown in the Age of Reason and even in the Age of Revolution. These sentiments had never disturbed the generalisations of Jefferson and the Jacobins any more than they had disturbed the doctrines of Johnson and the Jacobites. These sentiments colour everything in the Victorian Age, and they must be understood before attempting any survey of it.

It is generally difficult to illustrate this truth without being involved in a discussion about religion. But there is, as it happens, another outstanding example, which does not directly involve any interest in religion. I mean the enormous interest in race. That would alone be enough to stamp the nineteenth century as something sharply different from the eighteenth century. That would alone be enough to mark off the Victorian from the older Georgian frame of mind. In the eighteenth century, both the reactionaries and the revolutionaries inherited the ancient religious and philosophic habit of legislating for mankind. A man like Johnson thought of men everywhere as under certain religious conditions, though he thought them happier under conditions of subordination. A man like Jefferson thought of men everywhere as under certain moral conditions, though he thought them happiest in a condition of equality. A man like Gibbon might doubt both the moral systems of Johnson and Jefferson. But it never occurred to Gibbon to explain the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire by exalting the Teuton as such against the Latin as such, or vice versa. Gibbon had religious prejudices, or, if you will, irreligious prejudices. But the notion of having racial prejudices in a quarrel between some brutal Vandal or Visigoth and some petty Byzantine official would have seemed to him as nonsensical as taking sides among Chinese tongs or Zulu tribes. Similarly, the eighteenth-century Tories were traditional but not tribal. Even a man as late as Metternich, while he might be on the watch against French atheism or even Russian orthodoxy disturbing the Austrian Empire, would have troubled his head very little over the fact that the Austrian Empire contained a mixture of Teutons and Slavs. The rise of this romance of race, or, as some would say, of this science of race, was one of the distinct and decisive revolutions of the nineteenth century, and especially of the Victorian Age.

It will be well to mark in what way these colossal clouds of historical imagination or theory actually coloured or discoloured the dead daylight, which an earlier rationalism thought to have dawned upon the world. In the case of Victorian literature, perhaps it is best tested by noting how it affected even the Victorians who might have been expected to escape its effect. Carlyle was not merely affected by it we might almost say that he was made by it. Anyhow, he was inspired and intoxicated by it; he was at once overwhelmed and made overwhelming. All his history and philosophy was full of this one idea: that all that is good in our civilisation comes, not from the older civilisation, but from a yet older thing that might be called a benevolent barbarism. All light as well as fire, all law as well as liberty, was supposed to be derived from a sort of ethnic energy originally called Germanic, afterwards more prudently called Teutonic; and now, with almost an excess of caution, called Nordic. The merits of this racial theory, as against the old Roman theory, of European culture, are difficult to discuss without trenching on controversial themes. Personally I should say that when certain European provinces broke with the Roman tradition, they set up certain Puritan theologies of their own, which could not last, or at any rate have not lasted. Anyhow, it is curious that in each of these provinces the place of both the new and the old religion has really been taken by a stark and rather narrow national pride. The Prussian is more proud of being a Prussian than of being a Protestant, in the sense of a Lutheran. The Orangeman is more proud of being what he calls an Ulsterman than of being a Calvinist, in the sense of studying the strict Calvinist theology. And even in England, where the atmosphere was more mild and the elements more mixed, the same type of intense insular self-consciousness has in some degree developed; and it has been not untruly said that patriotism is the religion of the English. In any case, to take the same test, an Englishman is normally more proud of being an Englishman than of being an Anglican. It was therefore not unnatural that when these lands, that were the extinct volcanoes of the great Puritan fire, sought for a more modern and general bond of association, they should seek it in that sort of pride in the race, which is the extension of the pride in the tribe. It is right to say that there is much in the idea of race that stirs the imagination and lends itself to the production of literature. The ideal of race, like the ideal of religion, has its own symbols, prophecies, oracles and holy places. If it is less mystical, it is equally mysterious. The riddle of heredity, the bond of blood, the doom which in a hundred human legends attends certain houses or families, are things quite sufficiently native to our nature to lend a sincerity to the sense of national or even international kinship. Many may quite honestly have felt that race was as religious as religion. But one thing it certainly was not. It was not as rational as religion. It was not as universal or philosophical as religion. At its best it involved a sort of noble prejudice; and its romanticism clouded the old general judgments upon men as men, whether dogmatic or democratic. Carlyle was the most romantic of all these romantic Victorian writers, and largely owed to this his predominance in the romantic Victorian age. But his popular champions, like Froude and Kingsley, were even more romantic; though in the case of Kingsley the romancing was really honest romancing, while in the case of Froude (I cannot but think) the word romancing is something of a euphemism.

Only, as I have said, the way in which this racial romance penetrated the Victorian culture can best be seen, not in an obvious case like Carlyle, but in much more remote cases like Matthew Arnold or Meredith. To take the latter case first: George Meredith was in one sense an entirely international intellectual; a Liberal humanist; a true child of the French Revolution, which he celebrated in sumptuous odes. But he illustrates the indirect effect of the racial craze, which is that the other side often accepted the distinction. Not only did the Teutonist talk about being a Teuton, but the Celt talked about being a Celt. A great mass of Meredith's social judgment is modified, and, to my taste, a little falsified, by his insistence on setting the Saxon against the Celt, when he has to set the Englishman against the Irishman or the Welshman. He often satirised in the Englishman exactly what the Teutonist praised in the Englishman; and it was often something that the Englishman does not happen to possess. So in the other case: Matthew Arnold made himself specially and supremely the apostle of a cosmopolitan culture; he did a vast amount of real good by insisting on the truism that England is a part of Europe. He was at his best in a contempt for the contempt that was felt for Frenchmen or Irishmen or Italians. But he could not bring himself to treat them simply as Frenchmen or Irishmen or Italians. He was affected by the universal fashion of ethnology and worried by the racial generalisations. When he talked what was relatively excellent sense about the senseless treatment of Ireland, he thought of such things too much as Celtic Studies and too little as Irish Studies. He also tried to explain the English faults as part of "the German paste in us", and wasted on anthropology what was meant for the study of mankind. We might take a third example. William Morris was on one side a Communist and almost bound to be an internationalist; he was on the other side a medievalist, appealing to that ancient beauty that belonged to all Europeans alike. But he was encumbered with a clumsy desire to be Saxon, to treat English as if it were merely the rudimentary language of the Angles; and moved his admirer, Stevenson, to an intense irritation by writing "whereas" when he only meant "where".

I have mentioned this particular Victorian fashion, the racial theory of history, as a primary and prominent thing, because it is not generally mentioned at all. We are so accustomed, in reading modern records of recent or ancient things, to gain an impression of an ever-expanding world, called in the only too typical Victorian expression, “the thoughts of men being widened by the process of the suns”, that we often forget the many periods when the world contracted into a new narrowness or exclusiveness, or the thoughts of men visibly shrank and shrivelled under some fresh influence of isolation or distinction. This was certainly true of the tribalism and imperialism that the nineteenth century developed, out of a romance of races, as compared with the first revolutionary generalisations about the human race. The fact is plain, for instance, in the story of the first revolutionary experiment — the American Republic. In the time of Jefferson, many of those who held slaves disapproved of slavery; many of those who approved of slavery did not specially approve of it as negro slavery. The notion of the negro as something peculiarly perilous or pestilent is not an ancient prejudice but a very recent and largely anthropological fashion. It is akin to all that dates from Darwin; and the popularisation by Huxley of an almost pessimistic type of evolution. Modern Southerners are much more hostile to negroes than they were when they owned slaves. As there rose recently in America the anthropological theory that the negro is only an ape, so there rose recently in Europe the anthropological notion that the Pole is only a Slav, or that the Irishman is only a Celt. People were so proud of discovering these larger groups that they failed to notice that they are really looser groups. They belonged to what the eminent Victorian truly called the fairy-tales of science. They had neither the precision that belongs to doctrinal definition nor the practicality that belongs to daily experience. In religion and morals we all really know what we mean by a man, and in the stress of real life we all really know what we mean by an Irishman. It is by no means certain that we all know what we mean by a Celt. Hence something large and imaginative, but formless and partly imaginary, began to spread over popular sentiment with the spread of popular science. It was darker and more dubious than either the humanitarianism of the eighteenth century or the nationalism of the nineteenth. It was not so clean-cut; indeed I will venture to say that it was not so clean. It was mixed with the mud and mist, the chaotic clay and cloud, of primitive and even bestial beginnings; it had only vague visions of barbaric migrations and massacres and enslavements. It started all our recent preference for the prehistoric to the historic. All this must be remembered as an influence overshadowing the second half of the nineteenth century, because it eventually took a more pointed and controversial form which involved not only materialism but pessimism. The earlier rationalists may or may not have been materialists; but they certainly were not pessimists. They were, I admit, rather exaggerated and excessive optimists. It is none the less curious that the general revolutionary tradition, of revolt and criticism of conditions, which began with the philosophy of Rousseau, should have ended with the philosophy of Thomas Hardy.

So much for one side of this later Victorian change. But the mere mention of Hardy and the realistic rebels will remind us that it had another side, which was a very good side. Probably speaking, it consisted in turning the attention from purely political wrongs to fundamental economic wrongs. In this also Carlyle, who belongs to the earlier period, continues to colour and even control the destinies of the later. In the matter of dates Carlyle and Macaulay covered the same period. In the matter of destinies they lived in two different centuries. Macaulay was, for good and evil, entirely a man of the eighteenth century. He was a Whig as Fox had been a Whig; a patriot as Pitt had been a patriot; a Protestant as any Erastian latitudinarian Georgian parson had been a Protestant; a logician as Dr. Johnson was a logician; a historian as Gibbon was a historian. Carlyle, who had brought into history the doubtful romance of blood, also brought into politics the very real tragedy of bread. He stands at the beginning of all the best efforts of the later Victorians to face the problems of labour and hunger that had developed in the depths of the new industrial civilisation. With the great exception of Cobbett, who had stood apart and alone, misunderstood and abused by all parties, it is fair to say that Carlyle started much of the merely social unrest of conscience which has modified the evils of the later nineteenth century. It is needless here to weigh the evil against the good; or to discuss how much of a certain disinterested dignity, in the old Republicans, was lost in his practical and impatient clamour for captains and for kings. It is only necessary to insist on the reality of the contrast and the change. Grattan, a great and typical orator of the eighteenth-century ideal, had said that the Irishman might go in rags, but he must not go in chains. Ruskin and the social reformers reversed the principle, until some of the extreme Socialists, like the Marxian Communists, are now inclined to say that a man must go in chains so that he may not go in rags.

Ruskin was the heir and representative of Carlyle in this later and better Victorian development. It is unnecessary to react against romanticism to such an extent as a recent critic, who summed up Ruskin in a book on the Victorians by saying that at least his economics were all scientifically sound though he could not write for toffee. He certainly could not write in that stately modern style in which toffee figures as the prize of writing. When the critic suggests that he could not write, it merely means that the critic does not like that particular sort of writing, which proves rather the limitations of the critic than the incapacities of the writer. Ruskin certainly wrote poetical prose, which may not for the moment be fashionable in an age of prosaic poetry. But to say that it is not good poetical prose is simply to be ignorant of the varied possibilities of good writing. It is also true that what he did he overdid, which is largely true of the whole of this highly coloured and romantic final development of Victorianism. Even those few who deliberately tried to correct it by understatement managed somehow to overstate their understatement. Matthew Arnold deliberately endeavoured to introduce a French classical balance and critical detachment into English letters. The consequence was that he was called a prig, which was unjust but not unthinkable; whereas no Frenchman reading Saint-Beuve ever thought of thinking that he was a prig. Walter Pater wished to create an art criticism more detached than that of Ruskin; but he did in fact manage to create the impression of being artificial as well as artistic. It was very difficult to be classic in the later Victorian atmosphere. There was a romantic unrest about it, so that even the umpires were competitive and combative. The loss of a natural repose, in Latin logic or French clarity, was one of the penalties of parting with the spirit of the eighteenth century. Another mark of it was the growth of an intellectual individualism which expressed itself, not only in being outré, but actually in being obscure. Browning and Meredith were among the very greatest of Victorians; and over both of them brooded that cloud I have described as coming up to over-shadow the epoch; and though it was coloured gorgeously like a cloud of sunset, it none the less came between many people and the sun.

George Meredith largely stood alone; but he stood as it were representing many others who had also a taste for standing alone. All this last phase is full of men whom it is interesting to remember and yet very easy to forget. It was because of the individualistic isolation of their talents and even their topics. An example is Richard Jefferies, who was "The Gamekeeper At Home"; or T. E. Brown, who made a niche for himself that is somehow at once obscure and popular: or William de Morgan, who with English eccentricity took up literature as a hobby for old age. The danger of all grouping is that we may miss too many of these men who did not fit into groups. Nevertheless, there are two or three groups which may be said to bulk biggest in the period — the period after the triumph of Tennyson and Browning in poetry, or Dickens and Thackeray in fiction. First there appears, primarily through the influence of Ruskin, what was called the Pre-Raphaelite Group; which began with a Ruskinian version of Christian medievalism and shaded off into later forms of aestheticism, not to say Paganism. The leader, who was also the link, was Rossetti, who accepted with delight the medieval pattern, but blazoned it with bolder and warmer colours than some of the literal Pre-Raphaelites would have approved. With him went his sister Christina, who was medieval in the more orthodox sense; and, in a manner very much his own, William Morris, who made the medieval form the expression of modern discontents and social ideals, instead of Christina Rossetti's religious ideals. The queer transition of the Pre-Raphaelites from a revival of Christianity to a revival of Paganism is complete in the poet Swinburne, who belonged to the set, yet had little in common with the sect. That it had Ruskin at one end and Swinburne at the other illustrates how loose a thing a group is, especially in English literature. Swinburne had three phases; one in which he wrote the best poetry in the worst spirits, or mood or frame of mind for his beautiful boyish singing is not merely in praise of Paganism, but definitely of Pessimism. There is a second period when his spirits are a little better and his poetry a little worse; the period of his political enthusiasm for United Italy and Victor Hugo and the resounding qualities of the word Republic. There is, unfortunately, a third period, in which he imitated himself and did it badly. But the point to seize is that, in his great hour, Swinburne was a spell; he held people like a magic flute, till they forgot that there was any other melody in the world. It is thoroughly typical of such glamours that there has been a violent and very unreasonable reaction against his unreasonable power. With him and Walter Pater the movement ends in its last pagan phase; save perhaps for the queer aestheticism that later became a decadent dandyism in Oscar Wilde.

But already new groups were making this one look old. One was what may be called the Picaresque or Adventurous Group, but may be more recognisable as the group of Stevenson and Henley. Both for good and evil, they reacted into a robust blood-and-thunder literature, which, in the case of Stevenson, who was not only the greater but much the more amiable and balanced of the two, was as blameless as it was bloody. There was, however, a dangerous double use of the very word "blood". And, quaintly enough, the more dubious element is to be found rather in blood than in bloodshed. The blood that spatters the pages of Treasure Island can only promote a respect for the real virtues of courage or loyalty. The blood that is not shed at all, but remains in the human body, was used to encourage a respect for the real vices and weaknesses of pride and racial contempt. For one important point about this group is this: that through them, or some of them, there came into full power and possession that curious religion of Race, which I have described as developing from Teutonic sources a little time before. It is not to be confused with patriotism or the unselfish love of one's country. It is a mere pride in being oneself of a certain real or imaginary race or stock. The Frenchman loves France as if she were a woman; the Nordic Man merely loves himself for being a Nordic Man. This weakness did to some extent spoil the spirited attempt of Henley and his school of masculine critics; I mean their very just attempt to show that letters should be red-blooded, as against the green-blooded pessimism of the decadents. But whatever their weaknesses, they did fill the age with a new change and stir, and gave to the pessimists something which if not a cure, was at least an antidote and a counter-irritant. The earliest and best work of Mr. Rudyard Kipling came to them like a new breath of prophecy and promise; Sir Henry Newbolt supported the chorus with two or three of the very finest modern English lyrics. There was a general fashion of patriotic poetry, as well as of Jingo journalism — in verse or otherwise. It was the only point on which that strongest and most virile of the pessimists, the Shropshire Lad, could be moved for a moment to a slightly blasphemous cheerfulness. John Davidson, a dark Scot in a dark and even dim state of revolt against everything, also was ready to follow the flag and revolt against everything except the Empire. The point of all this is not that patriotism revived, for the older poets and critics took patriotism for granted: but that the special type of tribal imperialism sprang out of that rather barbaric root of Race, already noted as a romance of science, which reacted against the rationalism of the Revolution.

Fortunately, from the same Stevenson and Henley stock of ideas, came another idea that also filled the age. It came from Stevenson alone, as distinct from Newbolt, Henley, Kipling and the rest, and may be called the cult of the child, but especially of the boy. It would be putting it too harshly, perhaps, to say that Stevenson wanted to go on playing at robbers; whereas Henley and the Imperialists wanted to be robbers. Anyhow, Stevenson saw the fun of what he was doing when be made the child say that he was the captain of a tidy little ship; whereas it is, I believe, the inscrutable fact that Henley did not see any fun in what he was doing when he adjured John Bull to "Storm along, John", and assured that public character that the whole world would soon be his own. Through Stevenson's truly magic lantern, which he described in The Lantern-Bearers, there shone a true reillumination of the mystical melodrama of childhood. And in that light many followed to the same sort of fairyland; notably Sir James Barrie, who introduced a sort of irony into fairyland. He continued what may be called the Stevensonian stereoscopic view; the looking at the same object in a double fashion, with the eye of the adult and of the child. But it was mostly through a string of accidental friendships that this fantastic element was connected with the more realistic of the robust school, though of course there were many brilliant individuals who could only be placed with or near that group. Thus Joseph Conrad, though a Pole, was connected with it by his record of hard or violent adventure at sea; and Mr. John Masefield, though he wrote later and longer poems of rural sport or religion, began with rousing sea songs of the buccaneers.

Already, however, a new voice had been heard, and a new influence balanced or rebuked an influence like that of Kipling; and it was a voice from a more remote elfland than the elfland of Peter Pan. Stevenson himself said that he had twice in poetry heard a new note or a unique and arresting voice: once when he read Love In A Valley by George Meredith; and once again when he read some verses called The Lake Island of Innisfree by William Butler Yeats. Yet it is worth remarking that there still remained this curious persistence of the romance of race, even in what was so naturally hostile to the popular romance of the Anglo-Saxon race. The appearance of a new cultural nucleus in Dublin, while it derived something from the Pre-Raphaelites, and therefore something from the Victorians, was so far

Victorian in this special respect, that it managed to get entangled like all the rest with an ethnological term: the term “Celtic”. It did not even substitute the old Irish term “Gaelic”. It is true that Mr. Yeats himself, the founder of the school and one of the first poets of recent times, did not really base his own case on anthropology, but rather on history and (very rightly) even more on legend. But it marks the racial influence already described that the word “Celtic” stuck to the movement, which was really a revival of remote legend and a gentle heathenism of the hills. It also explains why there was some reaction against it even in its own home. There are many who came not to care very much about the Celtic Twilight, who have lived to see the Irish Dawn.

About this time, or a little later, in England, there appeared a group formally called Minor Poets; though one of them was certainly a Major Poet. He was classed at the time with John Davidson and Sir William Watson, both of them very genuine poets in their own style; and there is some charming lyricism in their contemporaries, Norman Gale and Richard le Gallienne. Two other writers of fine verse really belong to this period: Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson. But I think it fair to say that Francis Thompson, thus classed as one of them, was of another and altogether higher class. He owed something to Coventry Patmore, one of the most really original Victorians, and something to Alice Meynell, a woman who was a poet (not a poetess) of the sort that women were least supposed to be; an intrinsically intellectual poet. But even of these friends he was free; with all the freedom of a creative and supremely productive or fertile genius. His imagery was so imaginative as to be almost crowded; and, in a different sense from the more analytical Victorians, dark with excess of light. Because he was Catholic many would expect him to be Gothic; but there was something in his exuberance that resembled rather the very best of the Baroque.

The necessity of marking the period by moods has led us here to mark it too exclusively by poets, who are the only permanent record of moods. It need not be said that work of another and what some think a more solid sort had been going forward in those last years; some of it very solid indeed, certainly in the best and perhaps also in the more questionable sense. Fiction, for instance, had followed other guides besides romance. The immense influence of Thomas Hardy was there; with his strong sense of the truth of the earth, as also of the tragedy of the dust. It had set many able men working in a mine of realism. The two ablest and most typical in this tradition were Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy. If I do not speak here at length of men of genius like H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw, it is because they are in a sense the opening of another world, and are most vividly lit up by the glare of the Great War and the existing social perils; and these things really mark the close of the period. For an appalling apocalypse came upon all life, and therefore upon all literature; and the most fitting emblems of such splendour and terror, and the arts of peace torn across, and youth going to its death singing, remain with the last few poems of Rupert Brooke.

THE DANGERS OF NECROMANCY

We often lament that the world is divided into sects, all with different narrow ideas. The real trouble is that they all have different broad ideas. It is when it comes to being broadminded that they are most narrow, or at any rate most different. It is their generalisations that cut across each other. The Buddhist believes he is broadminded when he says that all efforts at personal achievement and finality, east or west, Christian or Buddhist, are equally vain and hopeless. But I think that is a narrow negation, sprung from special spiritual conditions in Upper India. A modern agnostic thinks he is broadminded when he says that all religions or revelations, Catholic or Protestant, savage or civilised, are alike mere myths and guesses at what man can never know. But I think that is a narrow negation, sprung from special spiritual conditions in Upper Tooting. My idea of broadmindedness is to sympathise with so many of these separate spiritual atmospheres as possible; to respect or love the Buddhists of Tibet or the agnostics of Tooting for their many real virtues and capacities, but to have a philosophy which explains each of them in turn and does not merely generalise from one of them. This I have found in the Catholic philosophy; but that is not the question here, except in so far as there is, I think, just this difference: that the largeness of the other schemes is an unreal largeness of generalisation, whereas the largeness of our scheme is a real largeness of experience. Anybody can say that all Africans are black, but it is not the same as having a wide experience of Africa.

This difference about the obvious in generalisation struck me sharply, and with some amusement, in a debate on Spiritualism in the Daily News. A well-known secularist said that it is all very well to say that scientific men and intelligent people accept Spiritualism; but (he added, as with a sort of hiss) remember that wise men for ages actually accepted Witchcraft. He returned more than once to this biting and blasting word; and the argument obviously was, “Modern spirit-rapping by men like Lodge may look very plausible and scientific; but a ghastly fate awaits you; you will be the derision of history; you will be compared to the brutal, brainless, bestially ignorant people who believed in Witchcraft. Ha, ha, how will you like that?”

Now all this makes me smile in a sad but broad-minded manner. Because it seems to me to be quite the other way. I am not by any means certain, one way or the other, that there is really such a thing as Spirit-rapping. I am absolutely certain that there is such a thing as Witchcraft. I impute a belief in it to common sense, to experience and the records of experience, and to a broad view of humanity as a whole. I impute disbelief in it to inexperience, to provincial ignorance, to local limitations, and all the vices that balance the virtues of Tooting. Common sense will show that the habit of invoking evil spirits, often because they were evil, has existed in far too vast a variety of different cultures, classes and social conditions to be a chance piece of childish credulity. Experience will show that it is not true that it disappears everywhere before the advance of education; on the contrary, some of its most evil ministers have been the most highly educated. Record will show that it is not true that it marks barbarism rather than civilisation; there was more devil-worship in the cities of Hannibal and Montezuma than among the Esquimaux or the Australian bushmen. And any real knowledge of modern cities will show that it is going on in London and Paris today.

The truth is that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had their little local limitations, which are already breaking down. Wishing to expel the superhuman and exalt the human, they grossly simplified the human. The great Huxley (on whose name be praise) said in the innocence of his heart, "It may be doubted if any man ever really said, 'Evil, be thou my good.'" He could not believe that any scepticism could touch common morality, by which he really meant Christian morality. But such innocence is also ignorance. Nothing is more certain than that certain highly lucid, cultivated and deliberate men have said, "Evil, be thou my good"; men like Gilles de Rais and the Marquis de Sade. Please God they repented in the end, but the point is that they did pursue evil; not pleasure, or excess of pleasure, or sex or sensuality, but evil. And it is quite certain that some pursued it beyond the bounds of this world; and called evil forces from beyond. There is very good evidence that some of them got what they asked for.

Now a Catholic starts with all this realistic experience of humanity and history. A Spiritualist generally starts with the recent nineteenth-century optimism, in which his creed was born, which vaguely assumes that if there is anything spiritual, it is happier, higher, lovelier and loftier than anything we yet know; and so opens all the doors and windows for the spiritual world to flow in. But we think this is just as simple an ignorance as if an eighteenth-century sentimentalist, reading into Rousseau a notion that savage man is like Adam in Eden, had gone to live in the Cannibal Islands to be surrounded with happiness and virtue. He would be surrounded, perhaps, but in a more bodily and unpleasant sense. One sentimental fashion may assume there are no cannibals; another optimistic fashion that there are no devil-worshippers — or no devils. But there are. That is the fact of experience that is the key to many mysteries, including the mysterious policy of the Roman Catholic Church.

GIOTTO AND ST. FRANCIS

St. Francis of Assisi has been for ages a popular saint; in our own age he has for the first time been in some danger of being a fashionable saint. That sort of distinction of the drawing-rooms, which is said to have been a temptation rejected by many saints in their lifetime, which is certainly a peril besetting most popular preachers all their lives, has come at last to this popular preacher six hundred years after his death. It is natural that artists should be interested in the poet who was practically the founder of medieval and therefore of modern art. And it is only too true that, wherever we admit the artist, it is very difficult to exclude the aesthete. This sort of light literary fuss, though often sincere as a sentiment and even valuable as a tribute, is the very opposite of that sort of solid and traditional popularity which St. Francis had among countless generations of peasants. There is something about peasant traditions, and even about peasant legends, which knows how to keep close to the earth. It is a mark of true folklore that even the tale that is evidently wild is eminently sane. We see this in the most extravagant stories of the saints, if we compare them with the extravagant theories of the sophists and the sentimentalists. Take, for instance, that most beautiful attribute for which St. Francis is rightly loved throughout the modern world: his tenderness towards the lower animals. It is illustrated in medieval folklore by fancies but not by fads. It is impossible to imagine any fable more fabulous, in the sense of fantastic and frankly incredible, than the story of St. Francis making a business bargain with a very large and dangerous wolf; drawing up a legal document with carefully numbered promises and concessions from the party of the first part and the party of the second part; the wild beast solemnly lodging a legal affidavit by the number of times he nodded his head. And yet there is in that fairy-tale a rustic and realistic sagacity that comes from real relations with animals, and is therefore perhaps called by the picturesque name of horse-sense. It was not written by the modern monomaniac animal-worshipper. It is a pleasant story because the saint is considering the peasants as well as the wolf. St. Francis was not the sort of man to agree with the hypothetical Hindoo who would be slowly devoured by a Bengal tiger, and remain in a state of philosophical absent-mindedness, because tigers are quite as cosmic as Hindoos. The Christian common sense of St. Francis, even in this wild fable, seized on the vital fact; that men must be saved from wolves as well as wolves from hunger, or even more so, and that this could only be done by some sort of definite arrangement. And it does put its finger upon the difficulty; in the absence of communication and therefore of contract between men and beasts. It realises that a moral obligation must be a mutual obligation. St. Francis contemplating the mountain wolf, hits on the same point as Job contemplating the monstrous Leviathan: "Will he make a pact with thee?" That is a sort of solid popular instinct, which was never lost by the really popular saint, in spite of anything which strangers might stare at as his antics or his agonies. Men remembered that he had been a good friend to them as well as to birds and beasts; and the fact is still apparent in the most remote and extravagant rumours of him. It is in this that he differs from some of the rather unbalanced and unnatural humanitarians of modern times. As a matter of fact, St. Francis does not by any means stand alone among medieval or other saints in this protest and protection of animals against men; though he probably does stand alone in his poetical and imaginative power of stamping the memory of it in picturesque images on the popular mind. Some of the greatest medieval priests long before St. Francis, St. Anselm, for instance, were famous for demanding kindness to the brute creation; many of them, St. Hugh of Lincoln, for instance, had an even more eccentric taste in pets; for St. Hugh, instead of preaching to the birds, seems to have allowed a large bird to accompany him everywhere like a curate. But what is notable about this medieval theory of mercy is something ultimately mild and reasonable, however freakish was its expression; a comprehension of the common needs of common people, and a humanitarianism that did not exclude humanity. In that sense, it is the modern age that is the age of fanatics.

This fact of St. Francis becoming a modern fashion, after having been for so long a medieval tradition, might well arouse in his real admirers a fear of his cult becoming merely artistic in the sense of merely artificial. And yet, in spite of one or two incongruous interventions, this has not really taken place. It is perhaps the highest tribute to the truth and sincerity of St. Francis that even now he can keep his simplicity in the face of fashionable admiration; as the Franciscan in the story kept the fashionable crowd at a distance by playing antics on a seesaw. And this remarkable escape from the suffocation of sophistication is nowhere better expressed than in what still remains, even to the eye of the traveller — the naked nobility of his native town.

A traveller at all experienced in the ways of travellers, not to say of trippers, will approach the steep city of Assisi with some feelings of doubt and even of fear. He will know that the modern discovery of the medieval saint may yet be followed by disasters, more subtle than those which superstition has traced in the modern disinterment of the Egyptian king. He will know that there are things to which guide-books are not the best guides; which are seen better by solitary pilgrims than by sociable tourists; and, without any sort of superiority let alone misanthropy, he will have had experience already of places which crowds of visitors have made less worth visiting. He will know that quarrels not untouched by quackeries have insulted the great silence of Glastonbury; he will know that there is some truth in the report that a bustle of sight-seeing and a bawling for baksheesh has spoiled for many the spiritual adventure of Jerusalem. Knowing how many aimless aesthetes, how many irresponsible intellectuals, how many mere sheep of show and fashion follow this track through Italy, he may well fear to find obliterated the ancient simplicity of Assisi. But when he sees it, if I may answer for at least one among many such travellers, he will receive what I can only describe as a cool shock of consolation.

The city is founded upon a rock; the city is a rock; and it is too simple for anybody to spoil. It has proved practically impossible to paint or gild or pad or upholster or even to scratch that rock. In the main lines of it an austerity alone remains in the memory; and even the beauty of the milder landscape is itself austere. There may be, indeed there is, the usual accumulation in corners of the popular trinkets or traditional toys of devotion, which some people are so unfortunately fastidious as to resent; but that is not the sort of peril of which I am thinking, even from the point of view of those who would admit it to be in other ways perilous. It is not a question of any abuses among the ignorant or the innocent who look up to the saint; it is a question of the condescending culture that looks down to him; not a matter of importing idolatry into the institution of a patron saint; but a matter of patronising the patron. And though multitudes in this rather snobbish state of mind must have passed through so established a station of the Italian pilgrimage, they have not in fact left any trail behind them, as they have in so many similar places; the hills have forgotten them and their personalities have passed away with the smell of their petrol. St. Francis is still left alone with his own friars and mostly with his own friends; and especially with that great first friend who was his interpreter to the expanding civilisation that came after him; the friend who could express in images what Francis himself had always felt as imagery, or what we call imagination; the painter who translated the poet — Giotto.

The advance of art criticism is a continual retreat; it would seem in some strange manner destined to march perpetually backwards into older and older periods. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the critics had finally accepted the normality of the Ancient Greeks. By the end of the nineteenth century the critics were already inaugurating the novelty of the Ancient Egyptians. We must all, by this time, be familiar with expressions of admiration for the art of the Caveman, scrawled in rock and red ochre with an unmistakable spirit and even distinction of draughtsmanship; the cult of the prehistoric which has given a new meaning to the cult of the Primitives. It will soon seem perfectly natural to be talking about the modernised and decadent sophistication of the Second Stone Age as compared with the rich but well-balanced civilisation of the First Stone Age. The further we go back to explore, the more we find that is really worth exploring; and the nearer we are to the real primitive man, the further we are from the ape or even the savage. This being true even of the tremendous scope of the whole history of the human tribe, it is not to be wondered at that men have made the same discovery about the high and complex culture of Christendom. The spotlight of artistic interest and concentration has been steadily travelling backwards ever since I was a child. I can remember faintly that in my first years it was still felt as something of a paradox to maintain that the quaintness of Botticelli could be taken as seriously as the solid finish of Guido Reni; that Ruskin was still a revolutionist for preferring the dayspring of the Renaissance in the fourteenth century to the dregs of the Renaissance in the eighteenth. Even as late as that, for most people, Giotto was still not so much a Primitive as a primitive man. He was a sort of savage who had done some service by discovering that it was possible to scratch something resembling a rudimentary human figure on the walls of his cave. For most people all serious art still lay between Raphael and Reynolds. As I grew up, the Ruskinian revolution prevailed, and most men came to realise that Giotto was a great painter; but even those men generally regarded him as the first great painter. But now, in yet more recent times, the artists are yet more like archaeologists, in the sense of going back to what is yet more archaic. The change that has passed over the most recent phase of art criticism can be sufficiently suggested by this one case of Giotto. I referred somewhere, in the Ruskinian manner, to Giotto as the figure who stands at the beginning of Christian art. One of the most creative of modern sculptors, whom many would call a medievalist, wrote to assure me that Giotto stands at the end of Christian art; with something like a broad hint that Giotto brought it to an end.

The spotlight has moved further back, and is now illuminating what even Ruskin and the romantic medievalists would have regarded as a desert of dead and barbaric formalism; the true Dark Ages. Our Progressives are now bound with golden chains to the decline of Byzantium, rather than to the rise of Florence. It is quaint to think how little harm a blundering nickname need do in the long run. All the admirers of Gothic call it Gothic, though it was originally meant to stamp it as barbaric. And all the admirers of Byzantine call it Byzantine; though the very adjective is already in use as a symbol of stiff degradation and decline. The new theories about rhythm and design have done justice to the old pictures which the romantics regarded merely as diagrams or patterns. The change from Cimabue to Giotto is at least not so certainly an unmixed improvement as it appeared to the Victorian medievalists. There is, as it were, a new school of Pre-Raphaelites, who are not only pre-Raphael, but pre-Giotto. The shining figure of the shepherd no longer stands against a background of black and barbarous darkness; but in a sort of double light, in itself involving some of these subtler problems of balance and recurrence; having on his right hand the wide white daybreak of Rome and Assisi and Paris and all the West, and on his left the long and gorgeous golden sunset of the great city of Constantine.

But in truth this double light may make for a better enlightenment, both about Giotto and his master St. Francis. The two artistic movements, coming one after the other, have between them done some justice to two halves of medieval history, and an earlier and a later period of Christendom, both of which had been underrated and misunderstood. There is a sort of mathematical beauty in the harshness of Byzantine art which is only beginning to be understood; but there is none the less another and livelier kind of beauty in the more humanised art of the later Middle Ages; something suggestive of a moment when a dead design comes to life, or a pattern begins to move, or even to dance. Some humorist wrote a work called "The Loves of the Triangle", and a mystical theologian might find in it a profound significance touching the loves of the Trinity. In other words, the old abstract expression of divine beauty was the expression of a truth, but the other truth of its expression in the concrete was none the less true. Now what is true of the early abstract art and the humanistic revolution of Giotto, is equally true of the abstract theology and the humanistic revolution of Francis. Some modern writers on the first Franciscans talk as if Francis was the first to invent the idea of the Love of God and the God of Love; or at least was the first to go back and find it in the Gospels. The truth is that anybody could find it in any of the creeds and doctrinal definitions of any period between the Gospels and the Franciscan movement. But he would find it in the theological dogmas as he would find it in the Byzantine pictures, drawn out in stark and simple lines like a mathematical diagram, asserted with a sort of dark clarity for those who can appreciate the idea of logical content and balance. In the sermons of St. Francis, as in the pictures of Giotto, it is made popular by pantomime. Men are beginning to act it as in a theatre, instead of representing it as in a picture or a pattern. Thus we find that St. Francis was in many ways the actual founder of the medieval miracle play; and there is all this suggestion of a stiff thing coming to life in the tale of his contact with the Bambino, illustrated in one of Giotto's designs. And thus we find in Giotto himself a quality unique and hardly to be repeated in history. It is a sense, not only of movement, but of the first movement. There is still something in his figures that suggests that they are like the pillars of a church moved by the spiritual earthquake of a divine visitation, but even so moved slowly and with a sort of reluctant grandeur. The figures are still partly architectural while the faces are alive with portraiture. This first moment of motion has much to do with that sense of morning and youth which so many admirers of medievalism have felt, and which I shall continue to feel, with all respect to the medievalist sculptor. Nothing is nearer to the nerve of primal wonder, which is the soul of all the arts, than that strange saying of the blind man in the Gospels, that when he was half awakened to sight, he saw "men as trees walking." There is something about the figures of Giotto that suggests men as trees walking. The Byzantine School will not permit me to say that before his eyes were thus opened, the artist had been wholly blind. But I will still maintain that there was something like a miracle, in the transition from treating trees as tracery and men as trees, to the realisation of the new shock of liberation; and how, at the word of God, they could arise and walk.

And here again we strike the parallel between the artist and the saint. The followers of St. Francis were, above all things, men who could walk. Many of them even walked with that sort of dazed unfamiliarity and doubtful balance, being suddenly robbed by a whirlwind of all the props of property. But they walked, because a new spirit of walking, and even of wandering, had entered into the static scheme of medieval Christianity; just as a new spirit of gesture and drama had entered into the static scheme of decorative art. The difference between the Friars and the Monks was, after all, that the Friars now walked like men where the Monks had once stood like statues. I mean nothing but admiration for the Benedictine monks, as for the Byzantine mosaics: or, for that matter, the grand and almost grim rationality of the great abstract dogmas. But there had come upon these flat and spacious things, carved in stone or ordered like statues, a new depth or dimension; a new quality of drama and motion. The popular propaganda of St. Francis, throwing thousands of wandering friars out into roads of the world, was the beginning of what we call the modern spirit; the spirit of romance and experiment and earthly adventure. For once a modern phrase which is much misused, may be rightly used. The Benedictines were, in the exact sense, an Order; as the plan of a cathedral is an Order. The Franciscans were, in the exact sense, a movement. Historically, perhaps, the most interesting of the great pictures by Giotto which are displayed in the Upper Church of Assisi, is that which commemorates the famous dream of the great Pope Innocent the Third; in which he saw the strange beggar, from whom he had almost turned away in the street, upholding the whole toppling load of St. John Lateran, and indeed, in a larger symbolism, the whole load of St. Peter and the Church founded on a rock. More than one historian has suggested that, humanly speaking, it was St. Francis who prevented all Christendom from coming to an end under the double destructive drive and drag of Islam without and the pessimist heresies within. This particular picture is also worth noting, as a perfect example of that solidity which marked the simplicity of the medieval mind. Modern writers have referred often enough to medieval dreams and dark clouds and dim mystical fancies. But in fact the medievals never dealt in these things, even where they would have been justified in dealing in them. There is scarcely any modern of any school, who could deliberately draw a picture of a vision in the watches of the night, especially a vision so very visionary, so transcendental and so tremendously symbolic, as that of an unknown saint upholding a universal church, without bringing into the picture some shadow of unreality, or remoteness, of a lurid halo of the preternatural; at least of mystery and the tints of twilight. But the medieval dream is more solid than the modern reality. The medieval artist has dealt with it with a directness which belongs to the vigorous realism of innocence and of childhood; the sort of actuality which has been wholly untouched by the many sorts of scepticism which masquerade as mysticism. The dream is full of something very extraordinary, something which did indeed, for those who can understand it, shine on the evil and the good throughout the epoch that we call the Dark Ages: broad daylight.

In another sense, however, the spirit illuminating these great medieval designs is not so much generally the spirit of daylight as in a rather curious and peculiar sense, the spirit of daybreak. Of that highly medieval design it is true to say something of what Keats said of the highly classical design of his Grecian Urn. It is a sort of immortal moment of morning, and that which is a mere transition in time fixed as an absolute for eternity. We are so accustomed, in modern times, to think in terms of what we call progress, that we seldom admit, except in a poetical parenthesis, that there is such a thing as a perfect moment which is better than what comes after, as well as better than what went before. Yet it might well be maintained that art in all its history had no better moment, either before or after, than this in which all that was good in the old framework and formalism still remained with the upstanding strength of a great building, but in which there had already entered that rush of life and growth, which had turned it into something like a forest, without having as yet turned it into anything like a jungle. The naturalistic spirit of the nineteenth century, when it first began to understand the genius of Giotto or St. Francis, as interpreted by the talent of Ruskin or of Renan, was bound to fasten especially on the fanciful and charming episode of the Sermon to the Birds. For that generation was less concerned about the preservation of churches and more about the preservation of birds, even if it were in the equivocal sense of the preservation of game. It would be easy to illustrate the whole development, we might even say, the whole ascent and descent, under the emblem or example of the bird. The birds of the primal and symbolic epoch were simplified and somewhat terrible: as in the Eagle of the Apocalypse or the Dove of the Holy Ghost. All other birds in the Byzantine scheme would have been as abstract and typical as the birds of an Egyptian hieroglyphic. The birds of the later realistic epoch, when the painters of the nineteenth century had brought to the last perfection, or the last satiety, the studies of optics or of physics begun in the sixteenth, might well have been a most detailed and even bewildering display of ornithology. But the birds to whom St. Francis preached, in the vision of the thirteenth-century art, were already birds that could fly and sing, but not yet birds that could be shot or stuffed; they had ceased to be merely heraldic without becoming merely scientific. And as, in all studies of St. Francis, we always return to that great comparison which he at once denied with all his humility and desired with all his heart, we may say that they were not wholly unlike those strange birds in the legend, which the Holy Child pinched into shape out of scraps of clay, and then started into life and swiftness with a clap of His little hands.

THE NEW GROOVE

The Poet Tennyson, like a true Victorian, must have written a good many of his poems in the train; travelling by railroad being the chief invention and institution of his age. Indeed he confesses to have written the poem of Lady Godiva while waiting for the train; and to judge by the careful construction of the blank verse the train must have been very late. But there are other Tennysonian lines which Tennyson would seem to have written while he was asleep in the train. They have that peculiar mixture of jumble and jingle familiar to those who go to sleep in trains and only feel the metallic rhythm of the wheels mingling with the most shapeless and senseless dreams. It was at some such moment of profound slumber that Lord Tennyson composed the more progressive and prophetic portions of Locksley Hall; and this is clearly proved by the convincing, nay, damning, fact that one of the lines does really and truly run:

Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.

Psychologists will be interested in the curious displacement of words and disorder of ideas, which is characteristic of sentences invented in a dream. To the ordinary waking intelligence the words would appear to have no meaning. Grooves do not change; they do not necessarily ring; they do not even ring the changes. But, just as a sleeper in a railway-carriage will murmur, in the shock of awakening, some sentence betraying a secret he would probably have concealed if awake; as that he is travelling first-class with a third-class ticket, or that the corpse of a creditor is concealed under the seat — so Tennyson, in this very extraordinary line of verse, did really betray the secret, and even the crime, of his own intellectual world and most of the world that has come after it.

For what is the matter with most of what calls itself the modern mind is simply grooves; and our habit of being content in the grooves, because we are told that they are grooves of change. And it is, as I say, a revealing fact that even when the modern poet wishes to describe change, even when he wishes to glorify change, he does still instinctively describe it as a groove. This is a mark that has been left on very much of the modern world, ever since the beginning of the mechanical and industrial epoch. But it had its first and clearest form in this fixed conception of travelling by rail. It may be specially noted that we speak of the modern mind being in a groove rather than in a rut. A rut was a term commonly used of a cart-track; in the simple times when we did not put the cart before the horse. When a living thing went before us there was something of doubt or adventure or hesitation in the tracks it made for itself, even if they became grooves for others. There were strange curves in his course who hitched his wagon even to a horse, and who had not yet given up horses for horsepower. There were sometimes very wild and fantastic tracks in his, who hitched his wagon to a star. But, apart from all such figures or fancies, the essential peculiarity of the groove is that there can be nothing new about it except that it may take us to new places, or possibly take us past new places, at an entirely new rate of speed. That is the essential of what I mean by the modern groovings; that its only form of progress is going quicker and quicker along one line in one direction. It has not the curiosity to stop, nor the adventurous courage to go backwards.

Let us take, for the sake of clarity, this familiar case of the railway-train. A history of the locomotive steam-engine has often been presented in all its stages of improvement; the evolution of the modern train from the first clumsy models of Puffing Billy. But the engine did not produce anything but faster and faster engines; and the vital point is that nobody ever expected that it would. Nobody, even in a flight of fancy, wondered whether it would develop in any other direction, except the direction of its own groove. For instance, nobody ever suggested that it might develop its own type of architecture, so that the building of cars or carriages should be like the building of temples or town-halls. Yet there might perfectly well have been four or five schools of architecture for the designing of trains, as there are for the designing of temples. It would be a pleasing fancy if the architectural style of the train varied according to the country it was crossing or visiting. The Pennsylvania Railway Station in New York is a noble and serious piece of architecture; and it is really a sort of salute to the great city of Philadelphia towards which its gates are set. It might quite well have fallen out that what was done for the station could be done for the steam-engine; and the very design and colour of the vehicle vary according to whether it was going to the old French cities or the Red Indian plains; to the snows of Alaska or the orange-groves of Florida. Indeed I think there would have been much poetic symbolism in a hundred forms, probably guarded by rituals and dedicated to gods or patron saints, if it had so happened that the steam-engine was discovered by ancient Greeks or medieval Christians, and not by the Philistines of the Victorian time. But the point is here that nobody ever thought of such things; and certainly nobody thought of testing the progress of the train by such tests. There was only one test of the train and that was the test of the groove; of the smoothness of the groove; of the straightness of the groove; of the swiftness with which it travelled along the groove. There was something, in the tone of the whole thing, that prevented even mere fancy from breaking away in any other direction; or wondering, even vainly, if it could ever carry a castle like an elephant or a figurehead like a ship.

Now, in spite of the wildest claims to independence, the intellectual life of today still strikes me as being mainly symbolised by the train or the track or the groove. There is any amount of fuss and vivacity about certain fixed fashions or directions of thought; just as there is any amount of rapidity along the fixed rails of the railway-track. But if we begin to think about really getting off the track, we shall find that. what is true of the train is equally true of the truth. We shall find it is actually harder to get out of the groove, when the train is going fast, than when the train is going slowly. We shall find that rapidity is rigidity; that the very fact of some social or political or artistic movement going quicker and quicker means that fewer people have the courage to move against it. And at last perhaps nobody will make a leap for real intellectual liberty, just as nobody will jump out of a railway-train going at eighty miles an hour. This seems to me the primary mark of what we call progressive thought in the modern world. It is in the most exact sense of the term limited. It is all in one dimension. It is all in one direction. It is limited by its progress. It is limited by its speed.

I have said that it has not the curiosity to stop. If the train-dwellers were really travellers, exploring a strange country to make discoveries, they would always be stopping at little wayside stations. For instance, they would always be stopping to consider the curious nature of their own conventional terms; a thing which they never do, by any chance. Their catchwords are regarded solely as gadgets or appliances for getting them where they are going to; they never cast back a thought upon where the catchword comes from. Yet that is exactly what they would do if they were really thinking, in any thorough and all-round sense. Of course it will be understood, touching these intellectual fashions, that great masses, probably the mass of mankind, never travel on the train at all. They remain in their villages and are much happier and better; but they are not regarded as the intellectual leaders of the time. What I complain of is that the intellectual leaders can only lead along one narrow track; otherwise known as "the ringing groove of change". Take, in this matter of current phrases, the example of the controversy about advanced and futuristic art. I do not mean to consider the art but to consider the controversy; as illustrating what has been said about the advisability of stopping and the stupidity of the non-stop train.

Now although, of course, the actual masses are quite unconverted to Picasso or Epstein, yet the terms of controversy, the only tags of argument known to the newspapers, the only familiar and almost popular sophistries outside mere popular abuse, are on the side of the new schools. I mean that modern men are not familiar with the rational arguments for tradition; but they are familiar, and almost wearily familiar, with the rational arguments for change. Whichever side may be really right in the question of art (which obviously depends largely on the particular artists), the whole modern world is verbally prepared to regard the new artist as right and the old artist as wrong. It is prepared to do so by the whole progressive philosophy; which is often rather a phraseology than a philosophy. The language which comes most readily to everyone's mind is the language of innovation; but it is a language that is rather exercised than examined. For instance, it is probable that more people are even now acquainted with the poems of Mr. W. B. Yeats than with the poems of Miss Edith Sitwell. But many, many more people understand what Miss Sitwell means, when she simply says that she is criticised in her day as Keats was criticised in his day, than could possibly understand what Mr. Yeats means, when he says that nothing quite new can be used in poetry; or that innocence is only born out of ceremony and custom. For the former argument is a familiar argument of all modern progressives and reformers; the latter sayings are very profound sayings of a man who really thinks for himself. I agree that in many other things, and especially in the best examples of her poetry, Miss Sitwell also can think for herself. I only say that this particular argument ("John the Baptist was laughed at and I am laughed at"; "Galileo was disbelieved and I am disbelieved") — this particular argument is part of the regular recognised bag of tricks of reformers and revolutionists; it is a part of the very old apparatus of the New Movement. Now if we apply this, for instance, to the quarrels about painting or sculpture we shall find the same situation: that, whichever side is right, the whole apparatus of modern talk favours the idea that the new thing is always right. There are a definite selection of phrases used, but not often examined. For instance, should any Philistine faintly protest against Helen of Troy being sculptured with a head of the exact shape of the Great Pyramid, or Titania with a figure following the grand simple lines of the hippopotamus at the zoo, or even perhaps his own favourite daughter presenting herself to the public in the appealing and even touching condition of having her nose and eyelids cut off — whenever such a criticism is heard, whether it be right or wrong, it will be answered with the precision of clockwork, by a phrase to the effect that some people want art to be "pretty-pretty". Now the first act of any independent mind will be to criticise this criticism; and especially to feel a curiosity about the curious form of it. Why does everybody say, "pretty-pretty"? Why not say that some people do not like what is "ugly-ugly", or possibly what is "beastly-beastly"? What is the meaning of this weird repetition, like a recurring decimal? If you have the sort of independent curiosity that stops at wayside stations, if (in short) you are not merely in a hurry to get to the fashionable terminus, you may well pause upon a phrase like that, not without profit. You will perceive that the phrase is, in fact, a rather pathetic attempt to reproduce the wondering exclamation of a child. And that would be alone enough to destroy the argument. For a child has a very sound sense of wonder at what is really wonderful; and by no means merely a vulgar and varnished taste in what is conventionally beautiful. The thing that a genuine child might call "pretty-pretty" is not the soapy portrait of a débutante or an upholstered group of a royal family; it is much more likely to be a flash of red fire or the strong colours of a great garden flower or something that really is elemental and essential; something in its way quite as "stark" (as our dear friends would say) as the Great Pyramid or the great pachyderm. Children are not snobs in art any more than in morals. And if they often have also a pleasure in things that are really "pretty", in the sense of a graceful girl by Greuze or a cloud of pink blossom in spring, it is simply because there is a perfectly legitimate place in art for what is pretty; and it is not in the least disposed of by jabbering the same word twice over and calling it "pretty-pretty". Anyhow, the more supercilious moderns make a bad blunder in imputing childishness in defence of some things that could only be defended as being in the higher sense childish. It was Cezanne himself who said, "I am trying to recover the direct vision of a child."

It is the same with all the cant phrases already in circulation, for the purpose of defending any eccentricity, even before it exists. Thus everybody is familiar with the phrase that art is not photography, and that only photography is required to be realistic. Everybody is familiar with the phrase, and nobody is familiar with the holes or errors in the phrase. As a matter of fact nothing is less realistic than photography. At the very start it is cut away from all reality exactly as marble sculpture is cut away from reality, by being conventionally colourless; by divorcing the great optical union of colour and form. But it is not really realistic even about form. The thing it does reproduce more or less realistically is light and shade, and the light often falsifies the form and always falsifies the colour. If we want true form it must be drawn for us more or less abstractedly by a draughtsman; and when it is so drawn by Leonardo or Michelangelo, it cannot be dismissed as photographic, any more than as "pretty-pretty". The modern artist may have his own reasons for drawing legs as if they were bolsters or sausages; but that does not make the strong sweeping lines, of sloping bone or gripping muscle, in a great Florentine drawing, a dull mechanical reproduction, valuable only as the vulgar snapshot of a trivial fact. Those lines are strong and beautiful, as the lines of waterfall and whirlpool are beautiful. In fact, they are exactly like the beautiful abstract forms, which the modern artist would like to invent — if he could.

I have taken only this one type, of the talk about new schools of art, to illustrate what I mean by saying that the world is in such a hurry to be new that it does not even pause upon the truths of the new school, let alone of the old. Of the million men and women who have heard those two phrases, how many have heard any phrases out of the opposite phraseology and philosophy? I mean any which offer a philosophical defence of the other philosophy? Of all those who have been told (somewhat needlessly) that Epstein does not profess to be pretty, how many have heard that case for civilisation, in which its very strength is shown in being able to rear and poise and protect prettiness? The very cyclopean massiveness of the foundations of the city is best proved in the fact that no earthquake can shake the ivory statuette upon the pedestal or the china shepherdess upon the shelf. How many have considered the more ancient argument, of a culture that is sufficiently athletic to be elegant? Or, to take another example, how many have understood the scientific and psychological arguments for antiquity itself? Of all those who can recall being told to admire a modern picture, merely because it is even more unlike life than a photograph, or being told to admire modern poetry, for no reason whatever except that it is more prosaic than slang — of all those, how many even remember the sound remark made long ago by Oliver Wendell Holmes; that the grand Latin poets actually grow grander by being quoted again and again; that the words actually grow together with time, as do the sections of a seasoned violin? I am not saying that the truth is all on the side of tradition; I am only saying that the publicity is all on the side of innovation. Until the recent rise of the Humanist group in America, hardly anybody, even of the educated classes, possessed even the vocabulary for a defence of tradition. The very words in use, the very structure of the sentences, the ordinary tone of the whole public Press, prevented me from using the real and reasonable arguments against mere novelty. England, strangely enough, has even less of a working Humanist vocabulary than America. Here also working journalistic ethics have been too much cut down and simplified to a few crude ideas, of commercial activity or continuous reform. I shall be completely misunderstood if I am supposed to be calling for a return ticket to Athens or to Eden; because I do not want to go on by the cheap train to Utopia. I want to go where I like. I want to stop where I like. I want to know the width as well as the length of the world; and to wander off the railway-track in the ancient plains of liberty.

THE REAL DR. JOHNSON

It is possible that there are still people in England who do not adore Dr. Johnson. These persons must be removed, if possible, by persuasion. A short and plain attempt to persuade them must take precedence of subtler questions in every discussion of the great man. Now this old and superficial misunderstanding of Johnson (now nearly extinct) expresses itself in two main popular notions — that he was pedantic and that he was rude. He occasionally was rude; he never was pedantic. He was probably the most unpedantic man that ever lived; certainly you and I are much more pedantic than Dr. Johnson. For pedantry means the worship of dead words; and his words, whether long or short, were always alive. He played long words and short words against each other with impromptu but infallible art. I am far from books, and I quote from memory, but I think that a Scotchman, vexed at the ritual jeers of Johnson against his country, said: "Do you remember that God made Scotland?" Johnson replied promptly: "Sir, you are to remember that he made it for Scotchmen." Then, after a pause, he said in grave meditation: "Comparisons are odious; but God made hell." Now the vague popular opinion of Johnson would concentrate on long words like "comparisons" and "odious", and retain the impression that he was pedantic. It would be just as easy to concentrate on words like "hell" and give the impression that he was vulgar. The only true way of testing the matter is to look at the whole sentence and ask oneself if there is a single word, long or short, out of its place. Johnson was the reverse of pedantic, for he used long words only where they would be effective. Generally it came to this, that he spoke pompously when Boswell spoke flippantly and flippantly when Boswell spoke pompously — a very sound rule. When Boswell confronted him with the brute facts of a lonely tower and a baby, he answered, with distant dignity: "Sir, I should not much like my company." But when Boswell justified some morally backsliding bishop or vicar with that elaborate hash of sophistry and charity which is still used to excuse the rich, Johnson answered him with a few short words, so full of Christianity and common sense that I should not be allowed to print them.

The charge of rudeness is much more real; but about this also an impression still surviving requires a great deal of correction. Taken in conjunction with the charge of pedantry, it has created the image of a bullying schoolmaster, a superior person who thinks himself above good manners. Now Johnson was sometimes insolent, but he was never superior. He was not a despot, but exactly the reverse. It was his sense of the democracy of debate that made him loud and unscrupulous, like a mob. It was exactly because he thought the other men as clever as himself that he sought in desperate cases to bear them down by clamour. Everyone knows the brilliant description of him by one of his best friends: "If his pistol misses fire he knocks you down with the butt of it." But few realise that this is the act of a simple and heroic fellow fighting against a superior force. Johnson was a man of great animal impulsiveness and of irregular temper, but intellectually he was humble. He always went into every conflict with the idea that the other man was as good as he was, and that he might be defeated. His bellowings and bangings of the table were the expressions of a fundamental modesty. We can feel this element, I think, in everything he said, down to those last awful words upon his death-bed, when he spoke of Burke, the one man who had really excited and arrested him, "If I saw him now it would kill me." His fate in these respects has been strange. He has been called the pedant par excellence because he was the one thoroughly unpedantic person of a pedantic age. He has been called a conversational tyrant, because he was the one man of his mental rank who was ready to argue with his inferiors. On the one hand it is often said that he translated English into Johnsonese. But let it be remembered that he was the only man of his time who could translate Johnsonese back into English. Half a hundred critics in that age might have said of a play, "It does not possess sufficient vitality to preserve it from putrefaction", but only Johnson could have said also, "It has not wit enough to keep it sweet." There were numerous great men in the eighteenth century who kept a club or court of dependents, where they had things entirely their own way. I need not prove the point; the greatest satirist of that age has made the image immortal.

Like Cato gave his little Senate laws, And sat attentive to his own applause.

But Johnson was the reverse of attentive to people who were applauding him. Johnson was furiously deaf to people who were contradicting him. So far from being a stately and condescending king like Atticus, Johnson was a kind of Irish member in his own Parliament. All these are but broken and incidental examples; everything about the man rang of reality and honour; he never thought he was right without being ready to give battle; he never thought he was wrong without being ready to ask pardon. We have all heard enough to fill a book about Dr. Johnson’s incivilities. I wish they would compile another book consisting of Dr. Johnson’s apologies. There is no better test of a man’s ultimate chivalry and integrity than how he behaves when he is wrong; and Johnson behaved very well. He understood (what so many faultlessly polite people do not understand) that a stiff apology is a second insult. He understood that the injured party does not want to be compensated because he has been wronged; he wants to be healed because he has been hurt. Boswell once complained to him in private, explaining that he did not mind asperities while they were alone, but did not like to be torn to pieces in company. He added some idle figure of speech, some simile so trivial that I cannot even remember what it was. “Sir,” said Johnson, “that is one of the happiest similes I have ever heard.” He did not waste time in formally withdrawing this word with reservations and that word with explanations. Finding that he had given pain, he went out of his way to give pleasure. If he had not known what would irritate Boswell, he knew at least what would soothe him. It is this gigantic realism in Johnson’s kindness, the directness of his emotionalism, when he is emotional, that gives him his hold upon generations of living men. There is nothing elaborate about his ethics; he wants to know whether a man, as a fact, is happy or unhappy, is lying or telling the truth. He may seem to be hammering at the brain through long nights of noise and thunder, but he can walk into the heart without knocking.

RABELAISIAN REGRETS

There has arisen in our time an extraordinary notion that there is something humane, open-hearted or generous about refusing to define one's creed. Obviously the very opposite is the truth. Refusing to define a creed is not only not generous, it is distinctly mean. It fails in frankness and fraternity towards the enemy. It is fighting without a flag or a declaration of war. It denies to the enemy the decent concessions of battle; the right to know the policy and to treat with the headquarters. Modern "broad-mindedness" has a quality that can only be called sneakish; it endeavours to win without giving itself away, even after it has won. It desires to be victorious without betraying even the name of the victor. For all sane men have intellectual doctrines and fighting theories; and if they will not put them on the table, it can only be because they wish to have the advantage of a fighting theory which cannot be fought.

In the things of conviction there is only one other thing besides a dogma, and that is a prejudice. If there is something in your life for which you will hold meetings and agitate and write letters to the newspaper, but for which you will not find the plain terms of a creed, then that thing is properly to be described as a prejudice, however new or noble or advanced it may seem to be. But indeed I think that when these ages are seen in proper perspective, men will say that the chief mark of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth was the growth of vast and victorious prejudices. I give, in passing, some instances of what I mean. Thus, for instance, it is a brave and logical creed which declares, like Mahomet and some modern Puritans, that the drinking of fermented liquor is really wrong. But the modern world has not adopted this clear creed and never will. What it has done has been to spread everywhere a strong but vague prejudice against certain forms of drinking, particularly those adopted by the poor. We have not made it wicked to drink ale, but we have made it slightly disreputable to go into a public-house. In other words, we have made it slightly disreputable, if you drink ale, to be poor or to be sociable. What it comes to is this: that any one wishing to sneer at me can get a laugh by saying I am a beer-drinker, but he will not commit himself to the statement that the thing that he has sneered at is wrong. He may hit me, because he is appealing to a prejudice; but I may not hit him because he is not appealing to a creed. He will not set anything up for me to hit. He wants, somehow or other, to avoid calling liquor wrong and yet to call me wrong for touching liquor. This is not latitudinarianism; it is ordinary human cowardice.

There are a great many other instances which could be given. For instance, fashionable opinion does not actually declare (as do, I believe, certain Eastern religions) that ablutions and bodily cleanliness are primary things, above even ordinary morals; but it does create a loose popular impression that it has scored off a personality or a nation more by saying that it is dirty than by saying that it is avaricious or timid or unchaste. No new creed is preached about cleanliness, but a strong sentimental emphasis and partiality is attached to the thing, making it more important than other things. Of course cleanliness is only made so very important at present because it happens to be a thing quite easy for the rich and very difficult for the poor. My only concern here, however, is to point out the method by which it has been made important; never by explaining or defining its importance, as in a creed; always by assuming its importance, as in a prejudice. I have no space to go at length into other examples, but the reader can easily put the cases to himself; and he can employ this general test: that in the case of half the most typical movements of the last thirty years, nobody can say how or when they really began. In no barbaric twilight or tangled forest or confusion of the dark ages did huge forces ever come so silently or secretly into the world as they come to-day. No one knows or can name the real beginning of Imperialism or of the popularity of the Royal Family (a thing quite recent yet quite untraceable), or of the taking for granted, in so many minds, of the materialist philosophy or of the practical imposition of teetotalism as a discipline on the Nonconformist public ministry. These things come out of the night and are formless even when they are forming everything else.

But discussions on the subject of the Censor and other theatrical problems have brought before the public a supreme instance of what I mean. We have been asked for the hundredth time to find some solution of that problem of the combination in art of truth with sexual modesty; and the result of considering this has been that we find ourselves face to face with a profound and most important change in public opinion on this subject; a change that has been going on, perhaps, for the last twenty years, perhaps ever since the coming of the Puritans; but a change which is, at any rate, of the utmost import to the wholesomeness of ethics, and a change which has proceeded in the same powerful silence as the growth of a tree. It is this difference between new English and old English ethics in the matter of verbal delicacy of which I wish to speak here. The subject is difficult, it is even emotional and painful; and I think it will do no harm to begin with some of the general human principles of the problem, even if they are as old and obvious as the alphabet.

There is not really much difference of opinion among normal men about the first principles of decency in expression. All healthy men, ancient and modern, Western and Eastern, hold that there is in sex a fury that we cannot afford to inflame; and that a certain mystery must attach to the instinct if it is to continue delicate and sane. There are people, indeed, who maintain that they would talk of this topic as coldly or openly as of any other; there are people who maintain that they would walk naked down the street. But these people are not only insane people, they are in the most emphatic sense of the word stupid people. They do not think; they only point (as children do) and say "Why?" Even children only do it when they are tired; but exactly this tired quality is most of what passes in our time not only for thought but for bold and disturbing thought. To ask, "Why cannot we discuss sex coolly and rationally anywhere?" is a tired and unintelligent question. It is like asking, "Why does not a man walk on his hands as well as on his feet?" It is silly. If a man walked systematically on his hands, they would not be hands, but feet. And if love or lust were things that we could all discuss without any possible emotion they would not be love or lust, they would be something else — some mechanical function or abstract natural duty which may or may not exist in animals or in angels, but which has nothing at all to do with the sexuality we are talking about. All the ideas of grasp or gesture, which to us make up the meaning of the word "hand", depend upon the fact that hands are loose extremities used not for walking on but for waving about. And all that we mean when we speak of "sex" is involved in the fact that it is not an unconscious or innocent thing, but a special and violent emotional stimulation at once spiritual and physical. A man who asks us to have no emotion in sex is asking us to have no emotion in emotion. He has forgotten the subject-matter with which he deals. He has lost the topic of the conversation. It may be said of him, in the strict meaning of the words, that he does not know what he is talking about.

And if men have never doubted that there should be a decorum in such things, neither have they ever doubted that that decorum might be carried much too far; that courage and laughter and wholesome truth might be sacrificed to the proprieties. So far, I say, humanity is essentially unanimous. It is in the discussion as to which thing shall be suppressed and which permitted, in the selection of the more harmless from the more harmful types of candour, that we begin to find the difference between different civilisations and different religions among men. And it is exactly upon the point of such a difference as this that I wish to speak here. Among other societies and ages our own society and age has made a choice in this matter. We have said, substantially by a general feeling, that one kind of expression shall be allowed and another rendered impossible. We have chosen, and I think we have chosen wrong.

Before going deeper into this most difficult subject there is at least one general statement to be made. The evil of excess in this matter really consists of three quite separate evils. Verbal impropriety or excess can spring from three quite different motives, three quite different states of mind, which have really very little to do with each other. It is necessary to unpick these three strands before we go any further. Ordinary popular discussion of the problem always hopelessly mixes them up. Briefly, they may be stated thus: impropriety arises either from a really vicious spirit, or from the love of emphasis, or from the love of analysis.

The first can be dismissed with brevity and with relief. There is such a thing as pornography; as a system of deliberate erotic stimulants. That is not a thing to be argued about with one's intellect, but to be stamped on with one's heel. But the point about it to be noted for our purpose is that this form of excess is separated from the other two by the fact that the motive of it must be bad. If a man tries to excite a sex instinct which is too strong already, and that in its meanest form, he must be a scoundrel. He is either taking money to degrade his kind or else he is acting on that mystical itch of the evil man to make others evil, which is the strangest secret in hell.

But when we come to the two motives of emphasis and of analysis, it is essential to observe that in both cases the motive may be beautiful, even when the result is most disastrous. The motive for impropriety arising out of emphasis can be best illustrated by a comparison with the habit of swearing. Swearing is, of course, the strongest possible argument for the religious view of life. A man cannot satisfactorily affirm anything about this world except by getting out of this world. The things commonly called fables are so true that they alone can give final ratification even to the things commonly called facts. A man in Balham cannot even call his dog a good dog without summoning to his aid either the angels or the devils. The Balhamite, like the Roman, if he cannot bend the gods will move Acheron; but he never thinks of trying to move Balham. Religion is his only resort for purposes of real emphasis; and often, even when he is attacking religion, his instinctive way of attacking it is to say that it is a damned lie. The most natural way of talking is the supernatural way of talking. And indeed this may be considered a good working test for all modern fads and philosophies which pretend to be religions. The new faiths founded on evolution or an impersonal ethic are always claiming, that they also can produce holiness; and no Christian has any right in Christian charity to deny that possibility. But if the question really is whether the things in question are religions in the sense that Christianity or Mohammedanism are religions, then I should suggest a different test. I should not ask whether they can produce holiness, but whether they can produce profanity. Can any one swear by ethics? Can any one blaspheme evolution? Many men now hold that a mere adoration of abstract morality or goodness is the core and sole necessity of religion. I know many of them; I know that their lives are noble, and their intellects just. But (I say it with respect and even hesitation) would not their oaths be a little mild? I do not mean that they ought to swear, or that anybody ought to swear, I mean that if it comes to swearing one can see in such a competition the vast difference in actuality between the new sham religion which talks about the holiness within, and an old practical religion which worshipped a real holiness without. You can see the difference in the weakness of the oaths considered as literature. The man of the Christian Churches said (occasionally), “Oh, my God!” The man of the ethical societies says (presumably), “Oh, my goodness!”

It is generally true, I say, that the whole circle of this physical universe does not contain anything strong enough for the purposes of a man who really means what he says; even about a small dog. Yet there is one exception to this generalisation. There is one thing which belongs to this world, but which is yet so fierce and startling, so full of menace and ecstasy, that it seems at times to partake of the character of miracle. This thing is the thing called sex; and on this also from time to time the man with the small dog in Balham will call in his dire need. Men used to swear by their heads; they still in a manner swear by their bodies. Sex is actual enough to swear by. To take but one coarse democratic test, people scribble about it on walls as they do about religion. Nobody ever scribbled on a wall about ethics. Above all, the language of sex can be used as a kind of violent invocation; a reinforcement of common words by the strongest words. I will not pause here to ask the reason of this; whether saying "damn" and saying other things unprintable have something to do with the fact that sex is the great business of the body, and salvation the great business of the soul. It is enough to say that any one can read the thing I mean and any one can hear it. He can read the thing best perhaps in Aristophanes or in Rabelais. He can hear the thing best in the street outside.

But though he can find it in the street outside, he cannot find it in any of the books or newspapers sold in the street. There is no law against indecent ideas; but there is a quite efficient and practical law against indecent words. Slowly throughout the eighteenth century word after word was dropped until by the Victorian time it was insisted that no coarse phrases should be used even in defending coarseness. I am myself under the limitations of this very local prejudice. I am compelled to prove my case in many pages because I have to talk as one talks in a respectable magazine. I could prove my case in ten minutes if I could talk as two respectable married men really talk on the top of an omnibus. It is sufficient, however, to put the matter thus: When a navvy uses what is called obscene language it is almost always to express his righteous disgust at obscene conduct. And here the navvy is at one with all the most really masculine poets or romancers; he is at one with Rabelais, with Swift, and even with Browning. Browning uses a foul metaphor to express the foulness of those who profess sympathy with human sorrows merely out of their own morbidity. You can find the phrase in "At the Mermaid." Browning uses the same foul metaphor to express the foulness of those who cannot understand a man's prompt grasp of the presence of a good woman. You can find the phrase in the speech of Capponsacchi. In short, the emphatic use of sexual language has this great advantage that it is commonly used purely in the interests of virtue. The virtuous cabman may (and does) call a man a blank, in a state of furious and innocent horror at the idea of any one being a blank. But this is not true in the case of the third impulse to indecorum. The third impulse is that which I have called the analytical; the mere curiosity of the mind about how the relations of the sexes are to be considered and classified. This covers all that we now call the Problem Play, and all that we associate with the realistic and psychological novel, and all the millions of proposals for the rearrangement of marriage. The dialogue in The Little Eyolf horrified many people; but it did not contain a single coarse word. Mr. George Moore, Mr. Richard Le Gallienne, and the lady called “Victoria Cross” have in turn been accused of being needlessly daring; but not one of them dare use words straight out of Bunyan or the Bible. The analytic indecency is now more free than it ever was among free men. The emphatic indecency is more stifled than it ever was among free men; more stifled than it ever was among slaves.

I am not concerned here to deny that the modern fashion of analysing sex is in general a good thing. Certainly there is grossly too much hypocrisy about sex; not in the English people, but in the literature and journalism which the English people, for some incomprehensible reason, permit to speak for them. There is no hypocrisy on the top of an English omnibus; but I warmly agree that there is really too much hypocrisy in the front page of an English newspaper, or within the covers of an English book. Let us agree that Ibsen had a right to suggest that marriage is an unpleasant fact as well as a pleasant one; that as well as the more chivalrous side of sex which is exaggerated by the Victorian poets, there is also the realistic and scientific side of sex, which was exaggerated by the old monks. Let me concede altogether and at once the fact that the modern tendency to dissect sex and to subdivide it, to put it into pigeon-holes, is a just and necessary measure. I will not even say here that the tendency has gone too far. But I will say this: what will you do if it does go too far? Suppose you wake up some fine morning and find indecencies which are quite ludicrous being taken quite seriously. Suppose you find certain sins put in a pigeon-hole when they ought to be put in a dust-hole. Suppose that after twenty years of scientific study you find that you have all the dirty jokes back again, the only difference being that you must enjoy them without laughing at them. Suppose, in short, that you are confronted with the exasperating spectacle of people chewing sins, instead of spitting them out of their mouths like their fathers; what will you do then? How will you express your feelings if you are faced with that horrible fashion of taking sex seriously — of which the true name is Phallic Worship? I know what you will do: you will call upon the shades of Rabelais and Fielding to deliver you out of that foul idolatry; and perhaps the English people will answer you and speak. It is common enough to talk of the English people speaking; but if ever they do speak they will speak as Rabelais spoke, and as English cabmen speak now.

THE HOUND OF HEAVEN

“The Hound of Heaven”, the greatest religious poem of modern times and one of the greatest of all times, was produced under certain peculiar historical conditions, which accentuate its isolation. To begin with, the religious poem is a religious poem, not only in what we should call the real sense, but in what some would call the limited sense. The word “religion” is used in these days in an expansive or telescopic fashion, sometimes inevitable, sometimes nearly intolerable. It is used of various realms of emotion or spiritual speculation more or less lying on the borders of religion itself; it is applied to other things that have nothing to do with religion; it is applied to some things that are almost identical with irreligion. But the line between legitimate and illegitimate expansion of a word is so difficult to draw, that there is little to be gained by questioning it except that mere quarrel about a word that is called logomachy. There always are some confusions about a definition or exceptions to a rule. The great principle that Pigs is Pigs does not dispose entirely of the existence of pig-iron, or of cannibals calling a man a long pig. We all know the plain practical man, the sceptic in the crowd, the atheist on the soap-box, who boasts that he calls a spade a spade, and generally calls it a spyde. But even he may have to deal with the learned and sophisticated man, who will prove to him, that even in the case of the ace of spades which he planks down in playing poker, the spade is not really a spade; being derived from the Spanish espada, a sword. If once we begin to quibble and quarrel about what words ought to mean or can be made to mean we shall find ourselves in a mere world of words, most wearisome to those who are concerned with thoughts. For the latter it will be enough to realise that there certainly was and is a certain thing, to which our fathers found it more practical to attach and limit the name of religion; that they recognised that the thing had many forms, and that there were many religions; but that they were equally certain of what things were not religions, including much that modern moralists call a wider religious life. They recognised a Protestant religion and a Catholic religion, and probably thought one or other of them true; they recognised a Mohammedan religion, even if they thought it false; they recognised a Jewish religion, which had once been true and by a sort of treason had become false; and so on. But they did not recognise a religion of

Humanity; or a “religion of the Life Force”: or a religion of creative evolution; or a religion which has the object of ultimately producing a god who does not yet exist. And the distinction is better preserved by noting these examples than by an attempt to fix the elusive evasions of the verbal sophists of today.

What we mean when we say that “The Hound of Heaven” is a real religious poem is simply that it would make no sense if we supposed it to refer to any of these modern abstractions, or to anything but a personal Creator in relation to a personal creature. It may be, and indeed is, a generous and charitable mood to look out on all the multitudes of men with sympathy and social loyalty. But it was not the multitudes of men that were pursuing the hero of this poem “down the nights and down the days”. It may be a good thing for men to look forward to mankind someday producing a superior being, thousands of years hence, who will be like a god compared with the common mass of men. But it was not some superior person born a thousand years hence, who drove the sinner in this story from refuge to refuge. He was not running away from the Life Force, from a mere summary of all natural vitality, which would be expressed equally in the pursued or the pursuer. For it requires quite as much Life Force to run away from anybody as to run after anybody. He was not swiftly escaping from a slow adaptive process called evolution, like a man pursued by a snail. He was not alarmed at a gradual biological transformation, by which a Hound of Heaven might be evolved out of a Hound of Hell. He was dealing with the direct individual relations of God and Man, and the story would be absolutely senseless to anybody who thought that the service of Man is a substitute for the service of God. This is where the practical habit of speech, among our religious ancestors of all religions, proves its validity and veracity. Francis Thompson was a Catholic, and a very Catholic Catholic. In some aspects of art, poetry and pomp, the Catholic is more akin to the pagan; in some aspects of philosophy and logic (though this is little understood), he has more sympathy with the sceptic or the agnostic. But in the solid central fact of the subject or subject-matter he is still something utterly separate from sceptics and even from pagans; and all Christians have their part in him. A perfectly simple and straightforward member of the Salvation Army knows what “The Hound of Heaven” is about, even if he knows it better without reading it, and would recognise its central theology as promptly as the Pope. But the mere humanist, the mere humanitarian, the universal aesthete, the patroniser of all religions, he will never know what it is about, for he has never been near enough to God to run away from Him.

Now the next point of interest is that this poem of purely personal religion, so directly devotional, so dogmatically orthodox, appeared at a time when it might least be expected, and at the end of an historical process that might have seemed to make it impossible. The nineteenth century had been, at least on the surface, one triumphal procession of progress, away from these theological relations, which were accounted narrow, towards ideals of brotherhood or natural living which seemed to be more and more broad. We might say that the poets had led the procession, for even at the beginning of the nineteenth century Shelley and Landor and Byron and Keats had moved in various ways towards a pantheistic paganism; and the tendency was continued by Victor Hugo in Europe and by Walt Whitman in America. There were, of course, continual cross-currents and confusions. Even an appeal to pantheism is something like an appeal to theism, and it was difficult to imitate the pagans without discovering, like St. Paul, that they were very religious. The contradiction came out quaintly in the case of Swinburne, who was always trying to prove that he was an atheist by invoking about ten different gods in a style exactly copied from the Old Testament.

Roughly speaking, however, I myself remember fairly well the curious cultural conditions in which the genius of Francis Thompson arose; for, though I was a boy at the time, a boy can sometimes absorb the atmosphere of a society, with the same subtle subconscious instinct with which a child can absorb the atmosphere of a house. I read all the minor poets; and it was specially an age of minor poets. The curious thing is that Francis Thompson was considered, criticised, appreciated or admired as one of the minor poets. I can remember Mr. Richard Le Gallienne, who is one of the survivors of that epoch, defending himself with spirit, but with a certain air of audacity, against the charge of fulsome exaggeration in saying that there was in the poems of this Mr. Thompson an Elizabethan richness and sometimes almost a Shakespearian splendour. Mr. Le Gallienne was quite right; but the main point is that his defence was a general defence of minor poets, and of this poet as a minor poet. It had hardly occurred to the world in general that Francis Thompson was a major poet; we might almost say a major prophet. There was in all that world of culture an atmosphere of paganism that had worn rather thin. But hardly anybody thought that the future of poetry could be anything but a future of paganism. It was then, in the slowly deepening silence, as in the poem of Coventry Patmore, that there was first heard, afar off, the baying of a hound.

That is the primary point about the work of Francis Thompson; even before its many-coloured pageant of images and words. The awakening of the domini canes, the Dogs of God, meant that the hunt was up once more; the hunt for the souls of men; and that religion of that realistic sort was anything but dead. In Patmore's poem the dog is "an old guard-hound"; and we may say, without irreverence, that the first impression or lesson was that there is life in the old dog yet. In any case, it was an event of history, as much as an event of literature, when personal religion returned suddenly with something of the power of Dante or the Dies Irae, after a century in which such religion had seemed to grow more weak and provincial, and more and more impersonal religions appeared to possess the future. And those who best understand the world know that the world is changed, and that the hunt will continue until the world turns to bay.

THE FRIVOLOUS MAN

By one of those queer associations that nobody can ever understand, a large number of people have come to think that frivolity has some kind of connection with enjoyment. As a matter of fact, nobody can really enjoy himself unless he is serious. Even those whom we commonly regard as belonging to the butterfly classes of society really enjoy themselves most at the crises of their lives which are potentially tragic. Men can only enjoy fundamental things. In order to enjoy the lightest and most flying joke a man must be rooted in some basic sense of the good of things; and the good of things means, of course, the seriousness of things. In order to enjoy even a pas de quatre at a subscription dance a man must feel for the moment that the stars are dancing to the same tune. In the old religions of the world, indeed, people did think that the stars were dancing to the tunes of their temples; and they danced as no man has danced since. But thorough enjoyment, enjoyment that has no hesitation, no incidental blight, no arrière pensée, is only possible to the serious man. Wine, says the Scripture, maketh glad the heart of man, but only of the man who has a heart. And so also the thing called good spirits is possible only to the spiritual.

The really frivolous man, the frivolous man of society, we all know, and any of us who know him truthfully know that if he has one characteristic more salient than another it is that be is a pessimist. The idea of the gay and thoughtless man of fashion, intoxicated with pagan delights, is a figment invented entirely by religious people who never met any such man in their lives. The man of pleasure is one of the fables of the pious. Puritans have given a great deal too much credit to the power which the world has to satisfy the soul; in admitting that the sinner is gay and careless they have given away the strongest part of their case. As a matter of fact, Puritanism commonly falls into the error of accusing the frivolous man of all the wrong vices. For instance, it says (and it is a favourite phrase) that the frivolous man is "careless". In truth the frivolous man is very careful. Not only does he spend hours over dressing and similar technical matters, but a great part of his life is passed in criticising and discussing similar technical matters. At any odd hour of the day we may find him talking about whether one man has the right kind of coat or another man the wrong kind of dinner-service; and about these matters he is far more solemn than a Pope or a General

Council. His general air about them might be described as rather sad than serious, as rather hopeless than severe. Religion might approximately be defined as the power which makes us joyful about the things that matter. Fashionable frivolity might, with a parallel propriety, be defined as the power which makes us sad about the things that do not matter.

Frivolity has nothing to do with happiness. It plays upon the surface of things, and the surface is almost always rough and uneven. The frivolous person is the person who cannot fully appreciate the weight and value of anything. In practice he does not appreciate even the weight and value of the things commonly counted frivolous. He does not enjoy his cigars as the gutter boy enjoys his cigarette; he does not enjoy his ballet as the child enjoys "Punch and Judy". But, in fairness to him, it must be admitted that he is not alone in being frivolous: other classes of men share the reproach. Thus, for instance, bishops are generally frivolous, moral teachers are generally frivolous, statesmen are generally frivolous, conscientious objectors are generally frivolous. Philosophers and poets are often frivolous; politicians are always frivolous. For if frivolity signifies this lack of grasp of the fullness and the value of things, it must have a great many forms besides that of mere levity and pleasure-seeking. A great many people have a fixed idea that irreverence, for instance, consists chiefly in making jokes. But it is quite possible to be irreverent with a diction devoid of the slightest touch of indecorum, and with a soul unpolluted by a tinge of humour. The splendid and everlasting definition of real irreverence is to be found in that misunderstood and neglected commandment which declares that the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain. This again is supposed vaguely to have some connection with buffoonery and jocularity and play upon words. But surely that is not the plain meaning of the phrase. To say a thing with a touch of humour is not to say it in vain. To say a thing with a touch of satire or individual criticism is not to say it in vain. To say a thing even fantastically, like some fragment from the scriptures of Elfland, is not to say it in vain. But to say a thing with a pompous and unmeaning gravity; to say a thing so that it shall be at once bigoted and vague; to say a thing so that it shall be indistinct at the same moment that it is literal; to say a thing so that the most decorous listener shall not at the end of it really know why in the name of all things you should have said it or he should have listened to it — this is veritably and in the weighty sense of those ancient Mosaic words to take that thing in vain.

The Name is taken in vain many times more often by preachers than it is by secularists. The blasphemer is, indeed, fundamentally natural and prosaic, for he speaks in a commonplace manner about that which he believes to be commonplace. But the ordinary preacher and religious orator speaks in a commonplace manner about that which he believes to be divine.

This is the breach of one of the Commandments; it is the sin against the name. Take, if you will, the name wildly, take it jestingly, take it brutally and angrily, take it childishly, take it wrongly; but do not take it in vain. Use a sanctity for some strange or new purpose and justify that use; use a sanctity for some doubtful and experimental purpose and stake your act on your success; use a sanctity for some base and hateful purpose and abide the end. But do not use a sanctity for no purpose at all; do not talk about Christ when you might as well talk about Mr. Perks; do not use patriotism and honour and the Communion of Saints as stopgaps in a halting speech. This is the sin of frivolity, and it is the chief characteristic of the great majority of the conventionally religious class.

Thus we come back to the conclusion that real seriousness is at a discount alike among the irreligious and the religious, alike in the worldly and in the unworldly world.

TWO STUBBORN PIECES OF IRON

In discussing such a proposal as that of the co-education of the sexes it is very desirable first of all to realise clearly what it is that we want the thing to do. The thing might be upheld for quite opposite reasons. It might be supposed to increase delicacy or to decrease it. It might be valued because it was a sphere for sentiment or because it was a damper for sentiment. My sympathies would move me in a discussion entirely according to what difference its upholders thought it would make. For myself, I doubt whether it would make much difference at all. Everyone must agree with co-education for very young children; and I cannot believe that even for elder children it would do any great harm. But that is because I think the school is not so important as people think it nowadays. The home is the really important thing, and always will be. People talk about the poor neglecting their children; but a little boy in the street has more traces of having been brought up by his mother than of having been taught ethics and geography by a pupil teacher. And if we take this true parallel of the home we can see, I think, exactly what co-education can do and what it cannot do. The school will never make boys and girls ordinary comrades. The home does not make them that. The sexes can work together in a school-room just as they can breakfast together in a breakfast-room; but neither makes any difference to the fact that the boys go off to a boyish companionship which the girls would think disgusting, while the girls go off to a girl companionship which the boys would think literally insane. Co-educate as much as you like, there will always be a wall between the sexes until love or lust breaks it down. Your co-educative playground for pupils in their teens will not be a place of sexless camaraderie. It will be a place where boys go about in fives sulkily growling at the girls, and where the girls go about in twos turning up their noses at the boys.

Now if you accept this state of things and are content with it as the result of your co-education, I am with you; I accept it as one of the mystical first facts of Nature. I accept it somewhat in the spirit of Carlyle when somebody told him that Harriet Martineau had “accepted the Universe”, and he said, “By God, she’d better.” But if you have any idea that co-education would do more than parade the sexes in front of each other twice a day, if you think it would destroy their deep ignorance of each other or start them on a basis of rational understanding, then I say first that this will never happen, and second that I (for one) should be horribly annoyed if it did.

I can reach my meaning best by another route. Very few people ever state properly the strong argument in favour of marrying for love or against marrying for money. The argument is not that all lovers are heroes and heroines, nor is it that all dukes are profligates or all millionaires cads. The argument is this, that the differences between a man and a woman are at the best so obstinate and exasperating that they practically cannot be got over unless there is an atmosphere of exaggerated tenderness and mutual interest. To put the matter in one metaphor, the sexes are two stubborn pieces of iron; if they are to be welded together, it must be while they are red-hot. Every woman has to find out that her husband is a selfish beast, because every man is a selfish beast by the standard of a woman. But let her find out the beast while they are both still in the story of "Beauty and the Beast". Every man has to find out that his wife is cross — that is to say, sensitive to the point of madness: for every woman is mad by the masculine standard. But let him find out that she is mad while her madness is more worth considering than anyone else's sanity.

This is not a digression. The whole value of the normal relations of man and woman lies in the fact that they first begin really to criticise each other when they first begin really to admire each other. And a good thing, too. I say, with a full sense of the responsibility of the statement, that it is better that the sexes should misunderstand each other until they marry. It is better that they should not have the knowledge until they have the reverence and the charity. We want no premature and puppyish "knowing all about girls". We do not want the highest mysteries of a Divine distinction to be understood before they are desired, and handled before they are understood. That which Mr. Shaw calls the Life Force, but for which Christianity has more philosophical terms, has created this early division of tastes and habits for that romantic purpose, which is also the most practical of all purposes. Those whom God has sundered, shall no man join.

It is, therefore, a question of what are really the co-educators' aims. If they have small aims, some convenience in organisation, some slight improvement in manners, they know more about such things than I. But if they have large aims, I am against them.

HENRY JAMES

An artist who is at once individual and complete attracts a type of praise which is a sort of disparagement; and even those who overrate him underrate him. For the tendency is always to insist on his art; and by art is often meant merely arrangement. Because a very few colours can be harmoniously arranged in a picture, it is implied that he has not many colours on his palette. And as a study by Henry James was often in its tones something of a nocturne in grey and silver, even his eulogists managed to imply something slight or even thin about his work. Before attempting to touch upon what was really peculiar in the tone of it, it is necessary to correct, and even to contradict, this tenuous impression by the reminder of what he had in common with other great writers. For Henry James must be considered as a great man of letters; and the greatness itself is something which existed in geniuses utterly unlike him. It might seem startling and even comic to compare him to Dickens or even to Shakespeare; but what makes him great is what makes them great, and what alone can make a literary man in the ultimate sense great. It is ideas; the power of generating and making vivid an incessant output of ideas. It is untrue to say that what matters is quality and not quantity. Most men have made one good joke in their lives; but to make jokes as Dickens made them is to be a great man. Many forgotten poets have let fall a lyric with one really perfect image; but when we open any play of Shakespeare, good or bad, at any page, important or unimportant, with the practical certainty of finding some imagery that at least arrests the eye and probably enriches the memory, we are putting our trust in a great man. We are taking at random from a whole store of what are truly to be called great inventions when we think of Mrs. Todgers' wooden leg, or Mr. Fledgby's nose, or Mr. Pecksniff's pinions, or Mr. Swiveller's double-bedded room.

And wide as the distance may seem, it is true, in exactly the same sense, that we are taking at random from a treasury of unique inventions when we think of any two or three of the numberless new ideas of Henry James; of the two people who grew afraid of the mystical coincidence of never meeting; of the man who ceased to exist when he was left alone; of the mysterious unity that ran through all a writer's books like “the figure in the carpet”; of the pearls that were counted false for purposes of respectability and real for purposes of sale; of the sudden supernatural calm created like a garden in the skies by the breakdown of the brain at its busiest; of the wife who would not justify herself to her husband because his whole life was in his chivalry; and so on through a thousand more. Such an idea, though it may be as delicate as an atmosphere, is nevertheless as precise as a pun. It cannot be a coincidence; it is always a creation. He has been attacked for making a great deal of small things; but most of those who attacked him were making a great deal of large nothings. The point that is important about him is not whether the things with which he dealt were as small as some think them, or as large as he could make them; whether it was a fine shade in vulgarity or an occult tenacity of vice; whether it was the restless ten minutes of a visitor coming too early, or the restless ten years of a lover moved too late. The point is that the things were things; that we should have lost them if he had not given them; that no mere perfections of prose would have been a substitute for them; in short, that he never wrote about nothing. Each small notion had the serious thing called value — like a jewel, or, like what is both smaller and more valuable than a jewel, a seed.

His greatness is the greatest thing about him, therefore, and it is of a kind with that of other creative men. But when this large and rather neglected aspect has first been allowed for, it is possible to consider him as a peculiar and fastidious writer. Certainly his work is of a sort to which it is difficult to do justice amid the pulsation of the direct public energies with which most of us who are at all public-spirited feel ourselves concerned today. We should need to be at leisure in those large and vague spaces of gardens and great neglected houses which are the background of so many of his spiritual dramas, to grow fond of the fine shades of a whole science of shadows and slowly appreciate the multitudinous colours of what seems at first monochrome. Some of his finest stories were ghost stories; and one must be alone to meet a ghost. And yet even the phrase I use indicates its own limitations, for no one seized more swiftly than Henry James the greatness of this awful time, in which we have to think even of ghosts in crowds. He had always been in his innermost being a mystic, and the dead were near to him; and he rose more magnificently, perhaps, than any other to that hour in which the dead were so living and so near to us all. A unique purity and disinterestedness had always attended his pen, and he had the reward of it in realising moral proportion. He had never failed to see small things; nor did he fall into the more modern and enlightened error of failing to see big ones. He had no difficulty in adjusting his subtlety to the stupendous simplicity of a war for justice; his brain, like a Nasmyth hammer, had not unlearnt in a long course of tapping how to fall and shatter.

That he should feel the prodigy of the Prussian insult to mankind will only surprise those who have read him superficially; or perhaps only read his more superficial sketches. He by no means exhibits manners as more than morals; though he may exhibit manners as more than many would think them. In a story like The Turn of the Screw he has rather the character of a divine detective. The woman who probes the stagnant secret of the depraved boy and girl is resolved to forgive and, therefore, unable to forget. She is a kind of inquisitor; and her morality is altogether of the old thorough and theological sort. It is a summons to repent and die, rather than a vague capacity to die and repent. And when at the last the deliverance of the boy's soul seems to be delayed by the appearance at the window of his evil genius, "the white face of the damned", it is perhaps the one place in all modern literature where that monosyllable is not a joke. And it is strongly significant that men of any belief and no belief have universally fallen back on such phraseology to find terms for the sneering savagery of the present enemy of Christendom. Honest grey-haired atheists are found judging the Prussian upon the paradoxical principle that there may be heaven, there must be hell. And the nations can find nothing but the language of demonology to describe a certain poison of pride, which is none the less a tyranny because it is also a temptation.

Henry James always stood, if ever a man did, for civilisation; for that ordered life in which it is possible to tolerate and to understand. His whole world is made out of sympathy; out of a whole network of sympathies. It is a world of wireless telegraphy for the soul; of a psychological brotherhood of men of which the communications could not be cut. Sometimes this sympathy is almost more terrible than antipathy; and his very delicacies produce a sort of promiscuity of minds. Silence becomes a rending revelation. Short spaces or short speeches become overweighted with the awful worth of human life. Minute unto minute uttereth speech, and instant unto instant showeth knowledge. It is only when we have realised how perfect is the poise of such great human art that we can also realise its peril, and know that any outer thing which cannot make it must of necessity destroy it.

It has been customary to talk of Henry James's American origin as something almost antagonistic to the grace and rarity of his art. I am far from sure that this is not to miss a fine and serious strain in it. There is an element of idealism in the American tradition, which is very well typified in the sincere and sometimes exaggerated external deference to women. This particular sort of purity in the perceptions, very marked in him, he had originally owed, I think, to something other than the more mellow and matured European life in which he came afterwards to take his deepest pleasures. The older civilisation gave him the wonderful things he wanted; but the wonder was his own. His attitude in private life remains for anyone who has seen it as something infinitely higher than politeness; an attitude towards things, and something that can only be called an impersonal reverence. Despite all their modernism, some of his love stories have a dignity that might be dressed in the clothes of an antique time. They should have moved upon high-terraced lawns among great and gentle ladies, and their squires who were something more than gentlemen. As Mr. Yeats says somewhere:

There have been lovers whose thought love should be So much compounded of high courtesy, That they would sigh and quote with learned looks Precedents out of beautiful old books.

The books of Henry James will always be beautiful; and I believe they are young enough to be old.

THE STRANGE TALK OF TWO VICTORIANS

The Faith always returns in a counter-attack; and it is generally not only a successful attack but almost always a surprise attack.

Here more than anywhere it is the unexpected that happens; the religion supposed to be rotting away slowly in unlettered peasantries was found present in pressing numbers in the new industrial towns; the creed compassionately tolerated in a few old sentimentalists is today making converts among the young almost entirely of the hard-headed logicians.

But this tendency to a reconciliation with intellectuals, once regarded as a reconciliation with irreconcilables, has produced, among other queer points in the position, this fact; that the newest group consists rather too much of those who are in a position to teach, while there is not yet a sufficient crowd, or larger public, of those who are in a position to learn. There is, for instance, a huge mass of material in Catholic history for very good novels or plays; and there are a considerable proportion of Catholics capable of writing them; but there is not yet a sufficient number of ordinary readers capable of reading them, in the sense of understanding them. This is especially true of the high historic quality of irony.

An Englishman realising the real religious history of his country constantly comes upon small social and political episodes, of which the irony is as grand as Greek tragedy; and then he remembers most of the other Englishmen, and has to own that it would be Greek to them. The very ironic point which gives him grim gratification would be quite pointless, because the public at large would probably take the suggestion quite seriously and never even see the joke.

So, till very lately at least, the public hardly saw the joke of talking about the Virgin Queen or the Glorious Revolution. You cannot have drama without a public; you cannot have irony without an instructed public.

I was wondering the other day whether anybody had thought of a play, or rather a scene, which could be a very fine scene written by anybody well read in eighteenth-century England. It might be called “Five Irishmen.”

Seated round a table in a coffeehouse (but conspicuously not drinking coffee) would be Goldsmith, an old Tory almost a Jacobite; Sheridan, a younger Whig almost a Jacobin; Burke, a Whig more alarmist than any Tory about disturbing the balance of the British Constitution (which he had largely made up out of his own highly imaginative head); Grattan, a Whig orator also, but native to the Irish Parliament; and (if he could be dragged in somehow) somebody more dangerous, like Lord Edward of Tone, foreshadowing the Irish Rebellion. All these men were Protestants. All, either in their own persons or through their families, could be traced back in some way to the time when it seemed that the heart of Ireland was broken; and for a man who did not abandon the Faith there was no normal hope on earth.

I think somebody could make a fine study, in several stages, of how layer after layer began to crack and that awful forbidden ancestral Thing rose slowly to overshadow them like a ghost. They would begin decorously, of course, probably discussing Catholic Emancipation with cold pagan liberality; and the wine and the words and the Irish passion for personal recrimination, and especially for family reminiscence, would bring strange things spouting from the depths; and through a wild scene I actually seemed suddenly to hear the high voice of Sheridan, shrill with intoxication, crying out some taunt: "Have ye forgotten that, O'Bourke?" And then I remembered that an audience in a London theatre would probably make nothing of the notion of that great eternal Thing terribly returning; because any number of them do not know that it is eternal and hardly that it is great.

In Edith Sitwell's very graceful sketch of Queen Victoria, I came on another quaint little drama, which in this case would be a duologue. Also, in this case, the thing really happened. It is there described briefly and impartially; but anyone knowing persons and period can easily understand and expand it; and to me it is enormously amusing; amusing and also enormous. It has exactly that grim Greek irony of the contrast between great things known and the greater thing that is not known. It was a discussion, and even a dispute between two very eminent Victorians. It was concerned with the news of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

They were both good men; they were both men of the first prominence in the public eye. Both had the finest culture of the Protestant; both had a faint streak of the prig; but both had a warmth of generous conviction for their own favourite causes; neither certainly was a fool; neither was a No-Popery man in the narrow and vulgar sense; both believed themselves flooded with the full daylight of the age of enlightenment and liberty; and, at the same time, both had hobbies and intelligent interests that might soften them toward older religious traditions.

One was a great reader of the Fathers and the first devotional literature; the other had a genuine taste in what was still often regarded as the childish cheap jewellery of medieval painting. One was a High Churchman of the Oxford Movement; the other was a liberal Lutheran. One was the great Gladstone; the other was Albert, the Prince Consort.

The two men talked and disagreed. They sharply disagreed. The point on which they disagreed was extraordinary. But it was not a hundredth part as extraordinary as the part on which they agreed.

Mr. Gladstone was greatly grieved because he had found the Prince Consort in a state of indecent hilarity, he thought, over the news about the Immaculate Conception. Indecent hilarity is not a vice conspicuously staining Prince Albert's name, any more than Gladstone's; two more solemn disputants would be hard to find. But Prince Albert was the more cheerful, because (he said in effect) it is always a good thing when an evil system tottering to its fall, does some one wildly insane and frantic act of arrogance; which will quite certainly bring it to a final crash. Rome had staggered along somehow till now; but, obviously, Rome would never have a leg to stand on after this.

But Mr. Gladstone (of the Oxford Movement) could not join in this simple German triumph over the disaster and disgrace that had at last destroyed the Eternal City. In those deep tones of reproach he could command so well, he rebuked the Prince for his insensibility to this blasting and blackening of a name that had meant so much in history; no Christian, he felt, could be insensible to the utter downfall of so large a section of the Christian world. He meant it. He was tremendously upset about it. He returned to the subject afterwards; repeatedly imploring Prince Albert to drop at least one tear upon the ruins of St. Peter's, now lying as desolate as Stonehenge.

But the Prince also was firm; and remained in his somewhat rare state of high spirits over the news that the unduly protracted business was finished; and the Pope had done himself in at last.

And all this was because — of what? Because one more crown had been added to that tower of crowns that crowd after crowd, city after city, nation after nation, age after age, have reared higher and higher on the image which is of all others most strongly based and founded and built, as regards this earth, in the affection of the universal people. And Prince Albert, with his unselfish labours for the education of the working classes, and Gladstone, with his confident appeal to the great heart of the people, understood so little of what that crown and image really meant to millions of ordinary poor people, in all the countrysides and cities of half the world, that they actually expected that it would be dethroned like a tyranny, for this last toppling insolence in the demands of a tyrant.

The one extraordinary thing on which these extraordinary men agreed, it seems, was that the decision would be unpopular. ... One of Belloc's Ballades had a refrain chiefly remembered by the Envoi, which ran:

Prince, is it true that when you met the Czar   You said that English people think it low   To coax to life a half-extinct cigar?   Good Lord, how little wealthy people know!

Anyhow, the one assumption shared by these admirable public men seems to have been wrong somewhere. Apple-women did not rush madly out of church; seamstresses in garrets did not dash their little images of Mary to the ground, on learning that she was named Immaculate.

Four years after these potentates had their regrettable difference, while the Bishop still frowned and the parish priest feared to believe, little knots of poor peasants began to gather round a strange starved child before a crack in the rocks, from whence was to spring a strange stream and almost a new city; the rocks she had heard resound with a voice crying, "I am the Immaculate Conception. . . ."

"Good Lord, how little wealthy people know!"

LAUGHTER

If we in any sense propose for discussion the subject of Laughter, we shall normally notice that our neighbours receive it in one of two ways. Either they laugh, which is perhaps the best thing they could do with a proposal for the analysis of laughter; since practice is better than precept; and anyone sitting down, as I do here, to write a whole article on this subject is a very proper object for the derision of mankind. But if they have sense enough to laugh, they will also probably have sense enough to go away; the colloquy will be cut short and exhibit only the kind of wit which is identified with brevity.

If, on the other hand, we mention Laughter to them and they do not laugh, what they always do is this; to twist their silly faces into expressions of ferocious gravity and gloom and begin to talk about Primitive

Psychology, and the automatic reflexes of Pithecanthropus; and after a month or two of this cheery little chat, they practically always bring out the result (which is an unmistakable sign and a symptom of their dying minds) that "laughter is, after all, founded on some form of the instinct of cruelty". The whole being a neat and polished exposition of the great modern habit of being as unscientific as possible in the use of scientific words. They have not yet proved that there is any instinct of cruelty, any more than there is an instinct of chewing glass. Some lunatics do chew glass; even some eminent men have done it; I think the famous Sir Richard Grenville had the habit. Some men have a perversion called cruelty; but if primitive men develop a talent for humour from a perversion of cruelty, it is quite as difficult to explain how they developed the perversion as how they developed the talent. We might as well explain the beginning of poetry by saying that Pithecanthropus was addicted to cocaine. The whole thing is one of those impudent insinuations of popular science, quite unsupported by serious science, but having a very strong moral or anti-moral motive; to suggest by innumerable irresponsible hints that human beings owe everything to semi-human beings called primitive men; and that these were utterly degraded creatures, dwelling in a darkness of hatred and fear.

On the face of it, all this theory of laughter is laughable. Anybody can make a child laugh by some simple inversion or incongruity; such as putting spectacles on the teddy bear. Are we asked to believe that a dark troglodyte stirs in the cave of the infant's skull, and takes pleasure in torturing the teddy bear with unfamiliar optical conditions; or fiendishly rejoices in the agony of an aged uncle when temporarily deprived of his goggles? The sort of literature at which children really laugh is the simplest sort of nonsense like "the cow jumped over the moon". Are we to suppose children lie awake and laugh to think of the long and chilly journey of the lost quadruped, in the cold altitudes wholly unsuited to warm-blooded mammals? It is obvious that the mind is amused with incongruity, when there is no direct or indirect idea of discomfort. Why it is amused with incongruity is indeed a very deep question, and we shall get no further with such questions until we adopt a totally different attitude to the whole story of man; until we have the patience to respect a great many of the mysteries as mysteries, and wait for an explanation which really explains; instead of jumping at any explanation that merely explains away. But I suspect it will be found connected with the idea of human dignity rather than indignity; and rather related to the strangeness of man on this strange earth, than to the mere dull brutalities connecting him with the dull mud.

It is not surprising that an age exhibiting this monstrous spectacle, of men being sombre and pessimistic about the origin of Laughter, should also exhibit some loss of the simpler sort of laughter in its literature and art. And I fancy even those who might claim that we produce more humour would admit that we produce less laughter. But the poison of the anti-human heresy I have mentioned works back in a curious fashion into the practice of those who have heard the theory; and the ideas of cause and effect act and react on each other. It may be that only in a dry age could pedants be found to trace back all mirth to malignity; it may be that the atmospheric suggestion of that origin has made the mirth less mirthful, and more dry if not more malignant. But certainly, at the best, the tendency of recent culture has been to tolerate the smile but discourage the laugh. There are three differences involved here. First, that the smile can unobtrusively turn into the sneer; second, that the smile is always individual and even secretive (especially if it is a little mad), while the laugh can be social and gregarious, and is perhaps the one genuine surviving form of the General Will; and third, that laughing lays itself open to criticism, is innocent and unguarded, has the sort of humanity which has always something of humility. The recent stage of culture and criticism might very well be summed up as the men who smile criticising the men who laugh. We may read in any current novel, “Grigsby stroked his chin and smiled a rather superior smile.” We seldom read, even in a novel, “Grigsby flung back his head and howled at the ceiling with a slightly superior laugh.” The moment Grigsby abandons himself so far as to laugh he has lost something of that perfect superiority of the Grigsbys, for which they are famous in fashionable circles, and for which so many of their fellow-creatures would love to kick them, as old Weller kicked Mr. Stiggins. For it is a complete mistake to suppose that there is less cruelty since we abandoned the good old custom of kicking Mr. Stiggins. The only difference is that it is Mr. Grigsby who is allowed to be cruel; because of the lack of simpler and humbler men to enjoy the innocent pleasure of kicking him. In the mind of Mr. Grigsby, at that exquisite moment when he smiles, there is infinitely more cruelty, in the sense of mere malice, than there was in the mind of Weller when he applied the boot, or Dickens when he wrote the book. The chief mark of the most modern change in the world is that milder social manners do not go with warmer social feelings. The chief fact we have to face today is the absence of even that amount of democratic comradeship which was involved in coarse laughter or merely conventional ridicule. The men of the older fellowship may have sometimes unjustly disliked a scapegoat or an alien, but they liked each other much more than a good many literary men now like each other. It is obvious in a thousand ways that there was more communal sentiment, or if you will sentimentality, in the camps where Bret Harte's ruffians brandished bowie-knives and revolvers, or in the public-house cellar where Mr. Bardell was knocked on the head with a quart pot, than in many a modern intellectual circle in which the soul is at last finally isolated, like the heads in hell held apart in their rings of ice. Therefore, in this modern conflict between the Smile and the Laugh, I am all in favour of laughing. Laughter has something in it in common with the ancient winds of faith and inspiration; it unfreezes pride and unwinds secrecy; it makes men forget themselves in the presence of something greater than themselves; something (as the common phrase goes about a joke) that they cannot resist. The saint is he who enjoys good things and refuses them. The prig is he who despises good things and enjoys them. But when he hears a really good thing, which he really enjoys, then he can no longer despise it. On that awful and apocalyptic occasion, he does not smile; he laughs.

TALES FROM TOLSTOI

In one sense there is a real and actual law of progress by which we grow simpler as we grow more civilised, for the more we scan and study the phenomena around us the more they tend to unify themselves with the power behind them, and the whole of existence thus seen for the first time seems something of an entirely new shape and colour, a fresh and surprising thing. And all the great writers of our time represent in one form or another this attempt to re-establish communication with the elemental or, as it is sometimes more roughly and fallaciously expressed, to return to nature. Some think that the return to nature consists in drinking no wine ; some think that it consists in drinking a great deal more than is good for them. Some think that the return to nature is achieved by beating swords into ploughshares; some think it is achieved by turning ploughshares into very ineffectual British War Office bayonets.

It is natural, according to the Jingo, for a man to kill other people with gunpowder and himself with gin. It is natural, according to the humanitarian revolutionists, to kill other people with dynamite and himself with vegetarianism. It would be too obviously Philistine a sentiment, perhaps, to suggest that the claim of either of these persons to be obeying the voice of nature is interesting when we consider that they require huge volumes of paradoxical argument to persuade themselves or anyone else of the truth of their conclusions. But the giants of our time are undoubtedly alike in that they approach by very different roads this conception of the return to simplicity. Ibsen returns to nature by the angular exterior of fact, Maeterlinck by the eternal tendencies of fable. Whitman returns to nature by seeing how much he can accept, Tolstoi by seeing how much he can reject.

Now, this heroic desire to return to nature is, of course, in some respects, rather like the heroic desire of a kitten to return to its own tail. A tail is a simple and beautiful object, rhythmic in curve and soothing in texture; but it is certainly one of the minor but characteristic qualities of a tail that it should hang behind. It is impossible to deny that it would in some degree lose its character if attached to any other part of the anatomy. Now, nature is like a tail in the sense that it is vitally important if it is to discharge its real duty that it should be always behind. To imagine that we can see nature, especially our own nature, face to face is a folly; it is even a blasphemy. It is like the conduct of a cat in some mad fairy tale who should set out on his travels with the firm conviction that he would find his tail growing like a tree in the meadow at the end of the world. And the actual effect of the travels of the philosopher in search of nature when seen from the outside looks very like the gyrations of the tail-pursuing kitten, exhibiting much enthusiasm but little dignity, much cry and very little tail. The grandeur of nature is that she is omnipotent and unseen, that she is perhaps ruling us most when we think that she is heeding us least. “Thou art a God that hidest Thyself,” said the Hebrew poets. It may be said with all reverence that it is behind a man’s back that the spirit of nature hides.

It is this consideration that lends a certain air of futility even to all the inspired simplicities and thunderous veracities of Tolstoi. We feel that a man cannot make himself simple merely by warring on complexity; we feel, indeed, in our saner moments that a man cannot make himself simple at all. A self-conscious simplicity may well be far more intrinsically ornate than luxury itself. Indeed, a great deal of the pomp and sumptuousness of the world’s history was simple in the truest sense. It was born of an almost babyish receptiveness; it was the work of men who had eyes to wonder and men who had ears to hear.

King Solomon brought merchant men Because of his desire With peacocks, apes and ivory, From Tarshish unto Tyre.

But this proceeding was not a part of the wisdom of Solomon; it was a part of his folly — I had almost said of his innocence. Tolstoi, we feel, would not be content with hurling satire and denunciation at “Solomon in all his glory”. With fierce and unimpeachable logic he would go a step further. He would spend days and nights in the meadows stripping the shameless crimson coronals off the lilies of the field.

Any collection of Tales from Tolstoi is calculated to draw particular attention to this ethical and ascetic side of Tolstoi’s work. In one sense, and that the deepest sense, the work of Tolstoi is, of course, a genuine and noble appeal to simplicity. The narrow notion that an artist may not teach is pretty well exploded by now. But the truth of the matter is that an artist teaches far more by his mere background and properties, his landscape, his costume, his idiom and technique — all the part of his work, in short, of which he is probably entirely unconscious, than by the elaborate and pompous moral dicta which he fondly imagines to be his opinions. The real distinction between the ethics of high art and the ethics of manufactured and didactic art lies in the simple fact that the bad fable has a moral, while the good fable is a moral. And the real moral of Tolstoi comes out constantly in his stories, the great moral which lies at the heart of all his work, of which he is probably unconscious, and of which it is quite likely that he would vehemently disapprove. The curious cold white light of morning that shines over all the tales, the folklore simplicity with which “a man or a woman” are spoken of without further identification, the love — one might almost say the lust — for the qualities of brute materials, the hardness of wood, and the softness of mud, the ingrained belief in a certain ancient kindliness sitting beside the very cradle of the race of man — these influences are truly moral. When we put beside them the trumpeting and tearing nonsense of the didactic Tolstoi, screaming for an obscene purity, shouting for an inhuman peace, hacking up human life into small sins with a chopper, sneering at men, women, and children out of respect to humanity, combining in one chaos of contradictions an unmanly Puritan and an uncivilised prig, then, indeed, we scarcely know whither Tolstoi has vanished. We know not what to do with this small and noisy moralist who is inhabiting one’s corner of a great and good man.

It is difficult in every case to reconcile Tolstoi the great artist with Tolstoi the almost venomous reformer. It is difficult to believe that a man who draws in such noble outlines the dignity of the daily life of humanity regards as evil that divine act of procreation by which that dignity is renewed from age to age. It is difficult to believe that a man who has painted with so frightful an honesty the heartrending emptiness of the life of the poor can really grudge them every one of their pitiful pleasures from courtship to tobacco. It is difficult to believe that a poet in prose who has so powerfully exhibited the earth-born air of man, the essential kinship of a human being with the landscape in which he lives, can deny so elemental a virtue as that which attaches a man to his own ancestors and his own land. It is difficult to believe that the man who feels so poignantly the detestable insolence of oppression would not actually, if he had the chance, lay the oppressor flat with his fist. All, however, arises from the search after a false simplicity, the aim of being, if I may so express it, more natural than it is natural to be. It would not only be more human, it would be more humble of us to be content to be complex. The truest kinship with humanity would lie in doing as humanity has always done, accepting with a sportsmanlike relish the estate to which we are called, the star of our happiness, and the fortunes of the land of our birth.

THE NEW CASE FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Any amount of nonsense has been talked about the need of novelty, and in that sense there is nothing particularly meritorious about being modern. A man who seriously describes his creed as Modernism might just as well invent a creed called Mondayism, meaning that he puts special faith in the fancies that occurred to him on Monday; or a creed called Morningism, meaning that he believed in the thoughts that occurred to him in the morning but not in the afternoon.

Modernity is only the moment of time in which we happen to find ourselves, and nobody who thinks will suppose that it is bound to be superior, either to the time that comes after it or to the time that went before. But in a relative and rational sense we may congratulate ourselves on knowing the news of the moment, and having realised recent facts or discoveries that some people still ignore.

And it is in that sense that we may truly call the fundamental concept of Catholic Education a scientific fact, and especially a psychological fact. Our demand for a complete culture, based on its own philosophy and religion, is a demand that is really unanswerable, in the light of the most vital and even the most modern psychology. For that matter, for those who care for such things, there could hardly be a word more modern than atmosphere.

Now, so long as they are engaged in doing anything whatever except arguing with us, our modern and scientific friends are never tired of telling us that education must be treated as a whole; that all parts of the mind affect each other; that nothing is too trivial to be significant and even symbolic; that all thoughts can be coloured by conscious or unconscious emotions; that knowledge can never be in watertight compartments; that what may seem a senseless detail may be the symbol of a deep desire; that nothing is negative, nothing is naked, nothing stands separate and alone.

They use these arguments for all sorts of purposes, some of them sensible enough, some of them almost insanely silly; but this is, broadly speaking, how they argue. And the one thing they do not know is that they are arguing in favour of Catholic education, and especially in favour of Catholic atmosphere in Catholic schools. Perhaps if they did know they would leave off.

As a matter of fact, those who refuse to understand that Catholic children must have an entirely Catholic school are back in the bad old days, as they would express it, when nobody wanted education but only instruction. They are relics of the dead time when it was thought enough to drill pupils in two or three dull and detached lessons that were supposed to be quite mechanical. They descend from the original Philistine who first talked about “The Three R.s”; and the joke about him is very symbolic of his type or time. For he was the sort of man who insists very literally on literacy, and, even in doing so, shows himself illiterate.

They were very uneducated rich men who loudly demanded education. And among the marks of their ignorance and stupidity was the particular mark that they regarded letters and figures as dead things, quite separate from each other and from a general view of life. They thought of a boy learning his letters as something quite cut off, for instance, from what is meant by a man of letters. They thought a calculating boy could be made like a calculating machine.

When somebody said to them, therefore, “These things must be taught in a spiritual atmosphere”, they thought it was nonsense; they had a vague idea that it meant that a child could only do a simple addition sum when surrounded with the smell of incense. But they thought simple addition much more simple than it is. When the Catholic controversialist said to them, “Even the alphabet can be learnt in a Catholic way”, they thought he was a raving bigot, they thought he meant that nobody must ever read anything but a Latin missal.

But he meant what he said, and what he said is thoroughly sound psychology. There is a Catholic view of learning the alphabet; for instance, it prevents you from thinking that the only thing that matters is learning the alphabet; or from despising better people than yourself, if they do not happen to have learnt the alphabet.

The old unpsychological school of instructors used to say: “What possible sense can there be in mixing up arithmetic with religion?” But arithmetic is mixed up with religion, or at the worst with philosophy. It does make a great deal of difference whether the instructor implies that truth is real, or relative, or changeable, or an illusion. The man who said, “Two and two may make five in the fixed stars”, was teaching arithmetic in an anti-rational way, and, therefore, in an anti-Catholic way. The Catholic is much more certain about the fixed truths than about the fixed stars.

But I am not now arguing which philosophy is the better; I am only pointing out that every education teaches a philosophy; if not by dogma then by suggestion, by implication, by atmosphere. Every part of that education has a connection with every other part. If it does not all combine to convey some general view of life, it is not education at all. And the modern educationists, the modern psychologists, the modern men of science, all agree in asserting and reasserting this — until they begin to quarrel with Catholics over Catholic schools.

In short, if there is a psychological truth discoverable by human reason, it is this; that Catholics must either go without Catholic teaching or possess and govern Catholic schools. There is a case for refusing to allow Catholic families to grow up Catholic, by any machinery worth calling education in the existing sense. There is a case for refusing to make any concessions to Catholics at all, and ignoring their idiosyncrasy as if it were an insanity. There is a case for that, because there is and always has been a case for persecution; for the State acting on the principle that certain philosophies are false and dangerous and must be crushed even if they are sincerely held; indeed that they must be crushed, especially if they are sincerely held.

But if Catholics are to teach Catholicism all the time, they cannot merely teach Catholic theology for part of the time. It is our opponents, and not we, who give a really outrageous and superstitious position to dogmatic theology. It is they who suppose that the special “subject” called theology can be put into people by an experiment lasting half an hour; and that this magical inoculation will last them through a week in a world that is soaked through and through with a contrary conception of life.

Theology is only articulate religion; but, strange as it seems to the true Christians who criticise us, it is necessary to have religion as well as theology. And religion, as they are often obliging enough to remind us when this particular problem is not involved, is a thing for every day of the week and not merely for Sunday or Church services.

The truth is that the modern world has committed itself to two totally different and inconsistent conceptions about education. It is always trying to expand the scope of education; and always trying to exclude from it all religion and philosophy. But this is sheer nonsense. You can have an education that teaches atheism because atheism is true, and it can be, from its own point of view, a complete education. But you cannot have an education claiming to teach all truth, and then refusing to discuss whether atheism is true.

Since the coming of the more ambitious psychological education, our schools have claimed to develop all sides of human nature; that is, to produce a complete human being. You cannot do this and totally ignore a great living tradition, which teaches that a complete human being must be a Christian or Catholic human being. You must either persecute it out of existence or allow it to make its own education complete.

When schooling was supposed to consist of spelling, of counting and making pothooks and hangers, you might make out some kind of case for saying that it could be taught indifferently by a Baptist or Buddhist. But what in the world is the sense of having an education which includes lessons in “citizenship”, for instance; and then pretending not to include anything like a moral theory, and ignoring all those who happen to hold that a moral theory depends on a moral theology.

Our schoolmasters profess to bring out every side of the pupil; the aesthetic side; the athletic side; the political side, and so on; and yet they still talk the stale cant of the nineteenth century about public instruction having nothing to do with the religious side. The truth is that, in this matter, it is our enemies who are stick-in-the mud, and still remain in the stuffy atmosphere of undeveloped and unscientific education; while we are, in this at any rate, on the side of all modern psychologists and serious educationists in recognising the idea of atmosphere. They sometimes like to call it environment.

VULGARITY

Vulgarity is one of the great new modern inventions; like the telephone or the wireless set. It may be plausibly maintained that the telephone is less of an instrument of torture than the thumbscrew or the rack, and in the same way that other ages had other vices that were worse than this new or modern vice. As we may find fanciful sketches of aeroplanes in the sketchbooks of Leonardo da Vinci, or speculations very near to modern physics in the philosophers of ancient Greece, so we may find here and there in history a hint or foreshadowing of the great and golden vision of vulgarity that was later to burst on the world. We may find it in the smell of Punic plutocracy that stank in the nostrils of Greeks and Romans, or in a certain touch of bad taste in an aesthete like Nero.

Nevertheless, the thing is so new that the new world has not yet really found a name for it, but has had to borrow a rather misleading name, which is really the Latin word for something else. So we have to go on using the Greek name of amber as the only name of electricity because we have no notion what is the real name or nature of electricity. And so we have to go on using the Latin word vulgus, which only meant the common people, to describe something that is not particularly common among the common people.

Indeed, through long stretches of human history, and over wide spaces of the habitable globe, it is very uncommon among the common people. Farmers living by long agricultural traditions, peasants in normal villages, even savages in savage tribes, are hardly ever vulgar. Even when they massacre and enslave, even when they offer human sacrifice or eat human flesh, they are hardly ever vulgar. All travellers attest to the natural dignity of their carriage and the ceremonial gravity of their customs. Even in the more complex modern cities and civilisations the poor as such are not particularly vulgar.

No; there is a new thing, which really needs a new name, and still more, a new definition. I do not say I can define vulgarity; but, having just been reading a modern book about love, I feel inclined to throw out a few suggestions.

In so far as I can get near to its essence, it consists largely of two elements, which I should describe as facility and familiarity. The first means that a man does really, as the phrase goes, “gush”; that is, his self-expression flows without effort, selection or control. It does not come from him like picked and pointed words, passing through an articulate organ; it simply streams from him like perspiration. He need never stop explaining himself, for he understands neither himself nor the limits of explanation. He is the sort of man who understands women; he is the man who can always get on with the boys; he finds it easy to talk, easy to write, easy to speak in public, for his own self-satisfaction carries with it a sort of huge cloud and illusion of applause.

And the second element is familiarity, which, if understood, would be called profanity. Horace spoke of the “profane vulgar”, and it is true that this familiarity is the loss of holy fear and a sin against the mystical side of man. In practice it means handling things confidently and contemptuously, without the sense that all things in their way are sacred things. Its most recent mode is the readiness to write torrents of tosh on either side of any serious subject, for you hardly ever get real vulgarity on a frivolous subject.

The point is that the fool is so subjective that it never occurs to him to be afraid of the subject. For instance, he can be a Pagan fool, as well as a Puritan fool, in the debate on modern morals; but in the first case there will be torrents of tosh about love and passion and the right to live and in the other, exactly similar torrents of tosh about Christian manhood and healthy boyhood and noble motherhood and the rest. The trouble is that they are so infernally familiar with these things.

Never do you find that note in a real lover writing of the woman he loves or in a real saint writing of the sin he hates. Both say the right thing, because they would rather say nothing at all.

THE REVIVAL OF PHILOSOPHY — WHY?

The best reason for a revival of philosophy is that unless a man has a philosophy certain horrible things will happen to him. He will be practical; he will be progressive; he will cultivate efficiency; he will trust in evolution; he will do the work that lies nearest; he will devote himself to deeds, not words. Thus struck down by blow after blow of blind stupidity and random fate, he will stagger on to a miserable death with no comfort but a series of catchwords; such as those which I have catalogued above. Those things are simply substitutes for thoughts. In some cases they are the tags and tail-ends of somebody else's thinking. That means that a man who refuses to have his own philosophy will not even have the advantages of a brute beast, and be left to his own instincts. He will only have the used-up scraps of somebody else's philosophy; which the beasts do not have to inherit; hence their happiness. Men have always one of two things: either a complete and conscious philosophy or the unconscious acceptance of the broken bits of some incomplete and shattered and often discredited philosophy. Such broken bits are the phrases I have quoted: efficiency and evolution and the rest. The idea of being "practical", standing all by itself, is all that remains of a Pragmatism that cannot stand at all. It is impossible to be practical without a Pragma. And what would happen if you went up to the next practical man you met and said to the poor dear old duffer, "Where is your Pragma?" Doing the work that is nearest is obvious nonsense; yet it has been repeated in many albums. In nine cases out of ten it would mean doing the work that we are least fitted to do, such as cleaning the windows or clouting the policeman over the head. "Deeds, not words" is itself an excellent example of "Words, not thoughts". It is a deed to throw a pebble into a pond and a word that sends a prisoner to the gallows. But there are certainly very futile words; and this sort of journalistic philosophy and popular science almost entirely consists of them.

Some people fear that philosophy will bore or bewilder them; because they think it is not only a string of long words, but a tangle of complicated notions. These people miss the whole point of the modern situation. These are exactly the evils that exist already; mostly for want of a philosophy. The politicians and the papers are always using long words. It is not a complete consolation that they use them wrong. The political and social relations are already hopelessly complicated. They are far more complicated than any page of medieval metaphysics; the only difference is that the medievalist could trace out the tangle and follow the complications; and the moderns cannot. The chief practical things of today, like finance and political corruption, are frightfully complicated. We are content to tolerate them because we are content to misunderstand them, not to understand them. The business world needs metaphysics — to simplify it.

I know these words will be received with scorn, and with gruff reassertion that this is no time for nonsense and paradox; and that what is really wanted is a practical man to go in and clear up the mess. And a practical man will doubtless appear, one of the unending succession of practical men; and he will doubtless go in, and perhaps clear up a few millions for himself and leave the mess more bewildering than before; as each of the other practical men has done. The reason is perfectly simple. This sort of rather crude and unconscious person always adds to the confusion; because he himself has two or three different motives at the same moment, and does not distinguish between them. A man has, already entangled hopelessly in his own mind, (1) a hearty and human desire for money, (2) a somewhat priggish and superficial desire to be progressing, or going the way the world is going, (3) a dislike to being thought too old to keep up with the young people, (4) a certain amount of vague but genuine patriotism or public spirit, (5) a misunderstanding of a mistake made by Mr. H. G. Wells, in the form of a book on Evolution. When a man has all these things in his head, and does not even attempt to sort them out, he is called by common consent and acclamation a practical man. But the practical man cannot be expected to improve the impracticable muddle; for he cannot clear up the muddle in his own mind, let alone in his own highly complex community and civilisation. For some strange reason, it is the custom to say of this sort of practical man that “he knows his own mind”. Of course this is exactly what he does not know. He may in a few fortunate cases know what he wants, as does a dog or a baby of two years old; but even then he does not know why he wants it. And it is the why and the how that have to be considered when we are tracing out the way in which some culture or tradition has got into a tangle. What we need, as the ancients understood, is not a politician who is a business man, but a king who is a philosopher.

I apologise for the word “king”, which is not strictly necessary to the sense; but I suggest that it would be one of the functions of the philosopher to pause upon such words, and determine their importance and unimportance. The Roman Republic and all its citizens had to the last a horror of the word “king”. It was in consequence of this that they invented and imposed on us the word “Emperor”. The great Republicans who founded America also had a horror of the word “king”; which has therefore reappeared with the special qualification of a Steel King, an Oil King, a Pork King, or other similar monarchs made of similar materials. The business of the philosopher is not necessarily to condemn the innovation or to deny the distinction. But it is his duty to ask himself exactly what it is that he or others dislike in the word “king”. If what he dislikes is a man wearing the spotted fur of a small animal called the ermine, or a man having once had a metal ring placed on the top of his head by a clergyman, he will decide one way. If what he dislikes is a man having vast or irresponsible powers over other men, he may decide another. If what he dislikes is such fur or such power being handed on from father to son, he will enquire whether this ever occurs under commercial conditions today. But, anyhow, he will have the habit of testing the thing by the thought; by the idea which he likes or dislikes; and not merely by the sound of a syllable or the look of four letters beginning with an “R”.

Philosophy is merely thought that has been thought out. It is often a great bore. But man has no alternative, except between being influenced by thought that has been thought out and being influenced by thought that has not been thought out. The latter is what we commonly call culture and enlightenment today. But man is always influenced by thought of some kind, his own or somebody else’s; that of somebody he trusts or that of somebody he never heard of, thought at first, second or third hand; thought from exploded legends or unverified rumours; but always something with the shadow of a system of values and a reason for preference. A man does test everything by something. The question here is whether he has ever tested the test.

I will take one example out of a thousand that might be taken. What is the attitude of an ordinary man on being told of an extraordinary event: a miracle? I mean the sort of thing that is loosely called supernatural, but should more properly be called preternatural. For the word supernatural applies only to what is higher than man; and a good many modern miracles look as if they came from what is considerably lower. Anyhow, what do modern men say when apparently confronted with something that cannot, in the cant phrase, be naturally explained? Well, most modern men immediately talk nonsense. When such a thing is currently mentioned, in novels or newspapers or magazine stories, the first comment is always something like, “But my dear fellow, this is the twentieth century!” It is worth having a little training in philosophy if only to avoid looking so ghastly a fool as that. It has on the whole rather less sense or meaning than saying, “But my dear fellow, this is Tuesday afternoon.” If miracles cannot happen, they cannot happen in the twentieth century or in the twelfth. If they can happen, nobody can prove that there is a time when they cannot happen. The best that can be said for the sceptic is that he cannot say what he means, and therefore, whatever else he means, he cannot mean what he says. But if he only means that miracles can be believed in the twelfth century, but cannot be believed in the twentieth, then he is wrong again, both in theory and in fact. He is wrong in theory, because an intelligent recognition of possibilities does not depend on a date but on a philosophy. An atheist could disbelieve in the first century and a mystic could continue to believe in the twenty-first century. And he is wrong, in fact, because there is every sign of there being a great deal of mysticism and miracle in the twenty-first century; and there is quite certainly an increasing mass of it in the twentieth.

But I have only taken that first superficial repartee because there is a significance in the mere fact that it comes first; and its very superficiality reveals something of the subconsciousness. It is almost an automatic repartee; and automatic words are of some importance in psychology. Let us not be too severe on the worthy gentleman who informs his dear fellow that it is the twentieth century. In the mysterious depths of his being even that enormous ass does actually mean something. The point is that he cannot really explain what he means; and that is the argument for a better education in philosophy. What he really means is something like this, “There is a theory of this mysterious universe to which more and more people were in fact inclined during the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries; and up to that point at least, this theory did grow with the growing inventions and discoveries of science to which we owe our present social organisation — or disorganisation. That theory maintains that cause and effect have from the first operated in an uninterrupted sequence like a fixed fate; and that there is no will behind or within that fate; so that it must work itself out in the absence of such a will, as a machine must run down in the absence of a man. There were more people in the nineteenth century than in the ninth who happened to hold this particular theory of the universe. I myself happened to hold it; and therefore I obviously cannot believe in miracles." That is perfectly good sense; but so is the counter-statement; "I do not happen to hold it; and therefore I obviously can believe in miracles."

The advantage of an elementary philosophic habit is that it permits a man, for instance, to understand a statement like this, "Whether there can or can not be exceptions to a process depends on the nature of that process." The disadvantage of not having it is that a man will turn impatiently even from so simple a truism; and call it metaphysical gibberish. He will then go off and say: "One can't have such things in the twentieth century"; which really is gibberish. Yet the former statement could surely be explained to him in sufficiently simple terms. If a man sees a river run downhill day after day and year after year, he is justified in reckoning, we might say in betting, that it will do so till he dies. But he is not justified in saying that it cannot run uphill, until he really knows why it runs downhill. To say it does so by gravitation answers the physical but not the philosophical question. It only repeats that there is a repetition; it does not touch the deeper question of whether that repetition could be altered by anything outside it. And that depends on whether there is anything outside it. For instance, suppose that a man had only seen the river in a dream. He might have seen it in a hundred dreams, always repeating itself and always running downhill. But that would not prevent the hundredth dream being different and the river climbing the mountain; because the dream is a dream, and there is something outside it. Mere repetition does not prove reality or inevitability. We must know the nature of the thing and the cause of the repetition. If the nature of the thing is a Creation, and the cause of the thing a Creator, in other words if the repetition itself is only the repetition of something willed by a person, then it is not impossible for the same person to will a different thing. If a man is a fool for believing in a Creator, then he is a fool for believing in a miracle; but not otherwise. Otherwise, he is simply a philosopher who is consistent in his philosophy.

A modern man is quite free to choose either philosophy. But what is actually the matter with the modern man is that he does not know even his own philosophy; but only his own phraseology. He can only answer the next spiritual message produced by a spiritualist, or the next cure attested by doctors at Lourdes, by repeating what are generally nothing but phrases; or are, at their best, prejudices.

Thus, when so brilliant a man as Mr. H. G. Wells says that such supernatural ideas have become impossible “for intelligent people”, he is (for that instant) not talking like an intelligent person. In other words, he is not talking like a philosopher; because he is not even saying what he means. What he means is, not “impossible for intelligent men”, but, “impossible for intelligent monists”, or, “impossible for intelligent determinists”. But it is not a negation of intelligence to hold any coherent and logical conception of so mysterious a world. It is not a negation of intelligence to think that all experience is a dream. It is not unintelligent to think it a delusion, as some Buddhists do; let alone to think it a product of creative will, as Christians do. We are always being told that men must no longer be so sharply divided into their different religions. As an immediate step in progress, it is much more urgent that they should be more clearly and more sharply divided into their different philosophies.

VANDALISM

Vandalism is of two kinds, the negative and the positive; as in the Vandals of the ancient world, who destroyed buildings, and the Vandals of the modern world, who erect them. A long procession of those typically modern thinkers, who are too tired to think, has already left behind a trail or tradition of language; by which it is vaguely suggested that whatever is constructive is good and only what is destructive is bad. Anyone wishing to lose himself in mazes of such logic, or rather illogicality, may put to himself some particular proposition; as that it is good to construct a stake, with faggots, for burning a man alive, and yet bad to destroy a growing plantation or cut down trees, which is the only possible way of doing it. But in the particular case of Vandalism, it is very specially necessary to remember that the real argument is all the other way. Of two bad things, it is better to be the barbarian who destroys something, which for some reason he dislikes or does not understand, and who may yet sincerely like other things that he does understand, rather than to be the vulgarian who erects something exactly expressive of what he likes; and in that act rears a colossal image of the smallness of his soul. Destructive Vandalism, though a very great evil at the present time, and indeed through all history, has not been in all history so bad as it is now; and certainly not so bad as many more constructive things that exist now.

It is important to remember that there are two kinds of mere destructiveness; neither on the noblest level of human culture, but neither on the most ignoble. First, of course, the Vandal may be the Iconoclast. He may destroy certain artistic creations because they are really opposed to his moral convictions. Thus a Puritan fanatic from America might conceivably think himself commanded by the Lord to dynamite Westminster Abbey, because it is full of idols; that is of images with a religious character. Curiously enough, he would be half right. It is full of idols; but they are not images of a religious character. Anybody can see at a glance that medieval figures of saints and angels are not worshipped; for the perfectly simple reason that they are themselves represented in the act of worshipping. But the eighteenth-century statues of statesmen and generals really are idols. They are manifestly set up, not to the glory of God, but to the glory of the men there represented; who are to be directly worshipped for their own sake; as the Pagans worshipped demigods and heroes. Lord Polkerton and Admiral Bangs are not themselves represented in the act of worshipping; but in the act of being worshipped. For the eighteenth century, which has been called the Age of Reason, was the real Age of Idolatry. This, however, is a parenthesis. The point is that the American fanatic would be a much finer fellow than the American chain-store man who finds half London in the chains of his cheap and tawdry stores. If the dynamite of the Iconoclast caved in the whole front of Westminster Abbey, I should be far less horrified than I am at a project of a Yankee shopkeeper for building a tower with bells, taller than Westminster Cathedral. It is curious to reflect on the few stray nerves of criticism and sensibility that still remain. I fancy that if an American erected immediately opposite Windsor Castle, on the other side of the river, another castle of exactly the same castellated form and plan, only a little bigger (being made of cheap and rotten material) and then flew the flag of his own ancient family in direct defiance of the personal flag of the King, there would be a good many people in society who would tell the American, however rich he was, that this was going a bit too far. Which shows how much safer it is to insult religion than to insult royalty.

Secondly, in the great moral philosophy of being fair to Vandals, we must remember that there is a certain element in life which has even a right to its place in life, though that place may not always be easy to find, without displacing better things. We talk of positive and negative, of creation and destruction; but in a sense the association is incorrect. Destruction is not negation; at least it is not always and of necessity negation. There is a positive pleasure in destruction, which can be harmless and is certainly real. It is innocent, for it is felt strongly by children when they first tear up paper or break sticks. But I trust that few of us have so entirely lost our innocence, as to be unable to drink deep joy from smashing up the happy home. Breathes there a man with soul so dead that he has never, when standing in a respectable parlour, felt a wild desire to seize a pot and plant and send it crashing through the bow windows into the front-garden or the street? These things are not entirely to be sterilised; these things also are from God. It is all explained in a ballade which my friends and I composed years ago, after I had shattered a great tumbler all over the carpet. It has the refrain: "I like the noise of breaking glass." And though I should not like the glass of Chartres Cathedral to be broken merely to gratify this taste, I can imagine two types of human beings who might break it and remain human. A lunatic might do it because he thought it unChristian to make pictures of the life of Christ; and a boy might do it because he liked the noise of breaking glass. So much for the defence of the more dignified Vandal — the Destroyer.

But the new sort of Vandal is much more indefensible. The crude creative Vandal is much more of a pestilence and a peril. There is more to be said for the conqueror, who makes a solitude and calls it peace, than for the other who makes a pandemonium and calls it progress. For he brands upon the eye in memory the positive and vivid picture of his own meanness and stupidity. The barbarians who laid waste the world may have prevailed in so far that some good things were forgotten, but they did not insist that their own base and barbarous things should be remembered. But that is exactly what the "constructive" vulgarian does. That is exactly what the Modern Vandal does. It is a gloomy pleasure to think that if a dissolving civilisation brings in forces more like those of the Ancient Vandals, if vagabond tribes from Asia or Eastern Europe drift in with the old-world, animal, almost automatic destructiveness of the Huns or the Bashi-Bazouks, they at least will wreck and ruin all the new Civilisation without any pretence of reconstructing it; and that towering and glaring flats, or long leagues of flashy glass shop-windows, will lie in rubbish-heaps side by side with better things.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

Mrs. Browning was a great poet, and not, as is idly and vulgarly supposed, only a great poetess. The word poetess is bad English, and it conveys a particularly bad compliment. Nothing is more remarkable about Mrs. Browning's work than the absence of that trite and namby-pamby elegance which the last two centuries demanded from lady writers. Wherever her verse is bad, it is bad from some extravagance of imagery, some violence of comparison, some kind of debauch of cleverness. Her nonsense never arises from weakness, but from a confusion of powers. If the phrase explain itself, she is far more a great poet than she is a good one.

Mrs. Browning often appears more luscious and sentimental than many other literary women, but this was because she was stronger. It requires a certain amount of internal force to break down. A complete self-humiliation requires enormous strength, more strength than most of us possess. When she was writing the poetry of self-abandonment she really abandoned herself with the valour and decision of an anchorite abandoning the world. Such a couplet as —

Our Euripides, the human, With his dropping of warm tears.

gives to most of us a sickly and nauseous sensation. Nothing can be well conceived more ridiculous than Euripides going about dropping tears with a loud splash, and Mrs. Browning coming after him with a thermometer. But the one emphatic point about this idiotic couplet is that Mrs. Hemans would never have written it. She would have written something perfectly dignified, perfectly harmless, perfectly inconsiderable. Mrs. Browning was in a great and serious difficulty. She really meant something. She aimed at a vivid and curious image, and she missed it. She had that catastrophic and public failure which is as much as a medal or a testimonial, the badge of the brave.

In spite of the tiresome half-truth that art is unmoral, the arts require a certain considerable number of moral qualities, and more especially all the arts require courage. The art of drawing, for example, requires even a kind of physical courage. Any one who has tried to draw a straight line and failed knows that he fails chiefly in nerve, as he might fail to jump off a cliff. And similarly all great literary art involves the element of risk, and the greatest literary artists have commonly been those who have run the greatest risk of talking nonsense. Almost all great poets rant, from

Shakespeare downwards. Mrs. Browning was Elizabethan in her luxuriance and her audacity, and the gigantic scale of her wit. We often feel with her as we feel with Shakespeare, that she would have done better with half as much talent. The great curse of the Elizabethans is upon her, that she cannot leave anything alone, she cannot write a single line without a conceit:

And the eyes of the peacock fans Winked at the alien glory,

she said of the Papal fans in the presence of the Italian tricolour.

And a royal blood sends glances up her princely eye to trouble. And the shadow of a monarch's crown is softened in her hair,

is her description of a beautiful and aristocratic lady. The notion of peacock feathers winking like so many London urchins is perhaps one of her rather aggressive and outrageous figures of speech. The image of a woman's hair as the softened shadow of a crown is a singularly vivid and perfect one. But both have the same quality of intellectual fancy and intellectual concentration. They are both instances of a sort of ethereal epigram. This is the great and dominant characteristic of Mrs. Browning, that she was significant alike in failure and success. Just as every marriage in the world, good or bad, is a marriage, dramatic, irrevocable, and big with coming events, so every one of her wild weddings between alien ideas is an accomplished fact which produces a certain effect on the imagination, which has for good or evil become part and parcel of our mental vision for ever. She gives the reader the impression that she never declined a fancy, just as some gentlemen of the eighteenth century never declined a duel. When she fell it was always because she missed the foothold, never because she funked the leap.

"Casa Guidi Windows" is, in one aspect, a poem very typical of its author. Mrs. Browning may fairly be called the peculiar poet of Liberalism, of that great movement of the first half of the nineteenth century towards the emancipation of men from ancient institutions which had gradually changed their nature, from the houses of refuge which had turned into dungeons, and the mystic jewels which remained only as letters. It was not what we ordinarily understand by revolt. It had no hatred in its heart for ancient and essentially human institutions. It had that deeply conservative belief in the most ancient of institutions, the average man, which goes by the name of democracy. Their ideal, like the ideal of all sensible people, was a chaotic and confused notion of goodness made up of English primroses and Greek statues, birds singing in April, and regiments being cut to pieces for a flag. They were neither Radicals nor Socialists, but Liberals, and a liberal is a noble and indispensable lunatic who tries to make a cosmos of his own head.

Mrs. Browning and her husband were more liberal than most Liberals. Theirs was the hospitality of the intellect and the hospitality of the heart, which is the best definition of the term. They never fell into the habit of the idle revolutionists of supposing that the past was bad because the future was good, which amounted to asserting that because humanity had never made anything but mistakes it was now quite certain to be right. Browning possessed in a greater degree than any other man the power of realising that all conventions were only victorious revolutions. He could follow the medieval logicians in all their sowing of the wind and reaping of the whirlwind with all that generous ardour which is due to abstract ideas. He could study the ancients with the young eyes of the Renaissance and read a Greek grammar like a book of love lyrics. This immense and almost confounding Liberalism of Browning doubtless had some effect upon his wife. In her vision of New Italy she went back to the image of Ancient Italy like an honest and true revolutionist; for all true revolutions are reversions to the natural and the normal. A revolutionist who breaks with the past is a notion fit for an idiot. For how could a man even wish for something which he had never heard of? Mrs. Browning's inexhaustible sympathy with all the ancient and essential passions of humanity was nowhere more in evidence than in her conception of patriotism. For some dark reason, which it is difficult indeed to fathom, belief in patriotism in our day is held to mean principally a belief in every other nation abandoning its patriotic feelings. In the case of no other passion does this weird contradiction exist. Men whose lives are mainly based upon friendship sympathise with the friendships of others. The interest of engaged couples in each other is a proverb, and like many other proverbs sometimes a nuisance. In patriotism alone it is considered correct just now to assume that the sentiment does not exist in other people. It was not so with the great Liberals of Mrs. Browning's time. The Brownings had, so to speak, a disembodied talent for patriotism. They loved England and they loved Italy; yet they were the very reverse of cosmopolitans. They loved the two countries as countries, not as arbitrary divisions of the globe. They had hold of the root and essence of patriotism. They knew how certain flowers and birds and rivers pass into the mills of the brain and come out as wars and discoveries, and how some triumphant adventure or some staggering crime wrought in a remote continent may bear about it the colour of an Italian city or the soul of a silent village of Surrey.

THE ERASTIAN ON THE ESTABLISHMENT

Dean Inge is so obviously the most acute, the most cultivated and the most individual of the sceptical school which he represents, that there is sometimes inevitably an appearance of singling him out, when the singularity is only due to his own distinction. It is due, if we must put it more roughly, to there being so very few intellectuals of that school who are worth answering. I have often myself, perhaps, put it more roughly than I intended; but the double duty involved presents a problem not easily solved. The trouble is that he is really in such a false position that the true statement of it sounds itself like a taunt. Yet it may not be meant for a taunt, but only for a truth. His own position certainly does not seem as false to him as it does to us; but to excuse it requires a long explanation which is impossible in so short an expression. For instance, he wrote the other day a severe condemnation of those of the Anglican clergy who favour the Disestablishment of the Church of England. It may seem curt to retort, as I should be first inclined to do, that the Dean naturally hesitates to sever the one very slender strip of red tape that still connects him with Christianity. Yet it is quite true; and it is not necessarily merely hostile.

To understand the curious case of Dean Inge, in a spirit of Christian charity, we must leave for the moment all questions of creed and definition and call up another image before the mind. It is the image that was in the mind of Matthew Arnold when he openly said that, being almost an agnostic himself, he yet wished to preserve the institutions of religion, and especially the literature of religion; that he found these best preserved in the Church of England and advised nobody to leave it. We must call up the image of a historic hierarchy of priests who are also professors, and whose main business is scholarship and the study of letters; it was not for nothing that both Arnold and Inge had connections with Oxford. Most of such men would probably be Christian in hereditary sentiment and subject-matter; but their Christianity would not, so to speak, be the point. We can even imagine the institution better if we think of it as a Confucian rather than a Christian foundation. The idea of it is a classical culture that is undisturbed. But it has this further essential point; that if its traditions and rites must be undisturbed, so also must its doubts and negations be undisturbed. It must be so traditional that a sceptic is safe there.

Something like this may really have existed in Chinese and other pagan parallels. Something like it probably did exist among the last pagan priests of antiquity. A jolly old heathen Flamen or Pontifex Maximus did not want to be disturbed in explaining away the gods to his friends; and certainly did not want to make himself responsible for drawing the exact line between truth and fable in the metamorphoses of Ovid or the genealogies of Jupiter. And something of the same sort did exist in the Academic Anglicanism of the Erastian age in England, when scholarly Whigs and rather worldly bishops quoted indifferently Horace and Augustine and Gibbon over the nuts and wine. That is the Establishment which Dean Inge really likes to see established; that is the civilised institution which he does really and sincerely believe to be a good thing; a traditional home of learning and liberal education, though mainly for the few; a thing that to the outer world shall be as authoritative as the medieval abbots, but in its inner life be as casual as the Greek philosophers; a thing that need not exclude the heretical, but does exclude the ignorant; a thing that can admit all questions so long as it is never questioned itself.

Now a cultural tradition of that kind can have many marks of dignity and national value; and a man may without absurdity or falsity wish to preserve it as a national thing. But there are a number of conditions to be remembered, which Dean Inge now seems continually to forget. For one thing, the nation must continue in the same mood of respect towards the college of professors, or whatever it is to be called. The modern mood is changing very rapidly; and I think it would be an exaggeration to say that all England is now filled with an affection and veneration for Dons. Another difficulty is that whatever this sort of Chinese synod can do, it cannot exist side by side with a real and passionate religion. It was defeated by the Christians at the end of the Roman era. It was defeated even by the Methodists at the end of the eighteenth century. It is often quoted of poor Charles II that he said that Puritanism was no religion for a gentleman. It is not so often added that he also said that Anglicanism was no religion for a Christian.

This, I fancy, is what the Dean really means; and it explains why be is at once such a conservative and such an iconoclast; such a sceptic and such a Tory. It is not, of course, in so many words what he says. When driven to defend his bunch of bigwigs, with their libraries and endowments, he characteristically takes an old book out of those dusty shelves, and quotes from Burke the thesis that the Church was only the State seen in one light and the State was only the Church seen in another light. Burke always struck me as, of all men, the man with the most imaginative and the most utterly unreal mind. Even as he uttered such a phrase, he must have known that the Church was packed with people who did not believe in it, and that the leaders of the State had almost ceased to pretend to do so. All the time, it is worth remarking, Burke was gravely discussing the admission to the Church of Dissenters whose whole enthusiasm was admittedly concerned with making their Calvinist God if possible more of a devil than he was before. He knew the world around him was crowded with such fanatics and with such blasphemers; and yet he could bring himself to imagine that the actual secular condition of all England was the Church of Christ, if one only slightly shifted one's point of view. But it was rather odd to maintain this even in Burke's time; it is perfectly crazy to maintain it in our time. Dean Inge admits, that two great calamities might really ruin his plan, and make the position of the Church of England impossible. But he thinks that neither is likely enough to be worth considering. One is — what would happen if a large body of England really abandoned Christianity? The other is what would happen if England went over to Rome? The answer to both these impossibilities is very simple. It is that the second might happen any day, and the first has happened already.

Of course it is possible to play an endless game with the word "Christian" and perpetually extend its epoch by perpetually diminishing its meaning. By the time that everybody has agreed that being a Christian only means thinking that Christ was a good man, it will indeed be true that few persons outside lunatic asylums can be denied the name of Christian. But it is really a mere alteration in the meaning of a word that prevents us saying frankly that a great mass, probably a majority, of our modern people are Pagans. Many of them make a mock of standards of family piety or public dignity that were generally accepted by the Pagans. But most of them, if they have any religion at all, have a religion of pantheism or pure ethics which most of the great Christian characters of history, Catholic or Protestant would have instantly stamped as pagan. If you had asked Wesley, or Swedenborg, or Dr. Johnson, or Baxter, or Luther, they would have called the modern mood heathen more promptly, if possible, than would Bossuet or Bellarmine. If it is true that the Church is simply the religion of the State, we have got precious near to saying that it is simply the irreligion of the State.

There was a bitter and cynical man (also, I am sure, an Oxford man) who said, “The Church of England is our last bulwark against Christianity”. This is quite unjust as a description of the Church of England. But it is not altogether unjust as a description of Dean Inge. What is really at the back of his mind is this image of a great academic and cultural tradition, established as a national need but not specially as a spiritual need. It is to have religious texts — to criticise; religious ceremonial — to reform slightly and rather pompously from time to time; a sort of assumption on religion, in the sense that it could not tolerate the horrors of anything like the Russian denial of religion. But all through, it will be subject to one unmistakable test. It can coexist with Doubt; but it cannot coexist with Faith.

At the end of his article, Dean Inge tries to toss aside as impertinent the term Erastianism; the term is too obviously true not to irritate. But in any case he absurdly underrates its meaning at the moment. It is not a question of whether those who form a nation by being Englishmen could in the abstract form a religion by being Anglicans. It is a question of whether a Church which does at least exist, with some who belong to it and some who do not belong to it, should be ruled by those who do not belong to it. Erastianism exists today in the perfectly practical sense that any Jew, Holy Roller or Hyde Park atheist may dictate what that Christian Church shall do on any matter whatever, however intimate and sacred. Bradlaugh was a Member of Parliament; he might well have become a Cabinet Minister and appointed Bishops. Mr. Saklatvala was a Socialist leader and might quite well be a Labour Minister, with a majority in the House and might by Act of Parliament make the Prayer Book anything he chose. That is State Establishment, as now universally understood; that is what Dean Inge desires and presumably defends; or must set about the delicate task of defending.

THE END OF THE MODERNS

All schools of thought, moderate or revolutionary or reactionary, are agreed that the future is full of new possibilities or perils, that the various forms of revolt in art or thought are the beginning of big changes, and especially that certain geniuses, creative or destructive, have opened the gates of a new world. The Communist may think they are the gates of heaven, or the Conservative that they are the gates of hell. But both substantially agree that they mark not only the end of the world, but the beginning of another world. The modern writers who have been hailed alternatively as dynamic or demoniac are, for good or evil, but the forerunners of others yet more dynamic or more demoniac. Both sides are heartily agreed about this; and I have the misfortune to disagree with both of them.

I think the first fact about what may roughly be called Futurism is that it has no future. It has still a very lively and interesting present. Indeed, it has already a picturesque and romantic past. The life of D. H. Lawrence, for instance, has already become a mere legend, which might be of any antiquity; and the romantic and rather sentimental glamour that has already gathered about him is now quite as distant and diffused as that which gathered round Byron or Burns. As for the present, no period could be entirely dull when Mr. Aldous Huxley was writing in it; but it is significant to notice what he writes. In Brave New World he shows that however grimly he may enjoy the present, he already definitely hates the future. And I only differ from him in not believing that there is any such future to hate.

I take these two names as typical of what has been called in the last decade modernity or revolt; but the thesis I would seriously suggest covers something larger and perhaps simpler. The revolutionary elements in our epoch do not mark the beginning, but the end, of an epoch of revolution. I should hesitate to describe a number of distinguished and often honest literary gentlemen as Dregs; or I would have given that short and convenient title to this article. I prefer to put the same meaning, or even the same metaphor, into the words of a revolutionary poet (whose present unpopularity is enough to show how insecure is the future of revolutionary poetry) and while I drink to the memory of Lawrence or the health of Huxley, murmur the words:

All thine the last wine that I pour is The last in the chalice I drain.

That will suggest the same idea in less offensive language. In short, it is doubtless true, in the words of Mr. Jefferson Brick (that pioneer of revolt), that the Libation of Freedom must sometimes be quaffed in Blood; but whether it be in blood or wine, that cup is very nearly dry.

My reason for thinking this has nothing to do with likes or dislikes or the wish being father to the thought; it is the sort of logic that is more like mathematics or chess. To almost all the modern moral and metaphysical systems, as stated by the moderns themselves, I should be content to add the comment, “Mate in three moves.” That is, these thinkers have landed themselves in positions which are already doomed by the laws of thought; or, to change the mathematical to the military figure, their positions are outflanked, their communications cut and their ammunition very obviously running short. In many cases, their form of revolt is one that can only be a sort of temporary formation.

Merely to explain what I mean, I will take an extremely crude and even clumsy example first. It does not touch the more distinguished types I have mentioned; but it does show in a very clear and plain shape the sense in which such things are intrinsically fugitive. I mean what may be called the literary use of blasphemy. Earlier, when the spirit of revolt was younger, it was used by some men of genius; by Swinburne, in whose work it seems now to have entirely lost its sting. Recently a modern writer, actually appointed to make a special study of Swinburne, asked wearily how anybody could get excited about the verses which said that the Galilean also would go down to the dead. It also disturbed the fine literature and very confused cosmic philosophy of Thomas Hardy, who tried to say (at the same time) that God did not exist, and that He ought to be ashamed of existing; or possibly that He ought to be ashamed of not existing.

This irritable profanity, which is already rather stale among cultivated people, is apparently still quite fresh to the Communists; but that is because Bolshevist Russia is the most backward State in Europe. It is even said that attempts were made to print atheistic assertions on match-boxes and sell them in England as propaganda. If it is true, they must have a very queer idea of England, to suppose that its somewhat too inert populace could be roused to universal civil war by bad language printed on a match-box. But the only point here is that this sort of bad language, like all bad language, necessarily weakens itself by use. The literature of atheism is bound to fail, exactly in proportion as it succeeds. The Bolshevists have not merely tried to abolish God, which some think a trick needing some ingenuity. They have tried to make an institution of the abolition of God; and when the God is abolished, the abolition is abolished. There can never be any future for the literature of blasphemy; for if it fails, it fails; and if it succeeds, it becomes a literature of respectability. In short, all that sort of effect can only be an instantaneous effect; like smashing a valuable vase that cannot be smashed again. The heaven-defying gesture can only be impressive as a last gesture. Blasphemy is by definition the end of everything, including the blasphemer. The wife of Job saw the common sense of this, when she instinctively said, "Curse God and die." The modern poet, by some thoughtless oversight, so often neglects to die.

This is a very crude and popular instance; but it exactly defines what I mean when I say that all these death-dealing dynamic motions carry the seeds of their own death. And when we turn to the more subtle and suggestive writers, such as those I have named, we shall find that this is exactly their own condition. They are not opening the gates either of heaven or hell; they are in a blind-alley, at the end of which there is no door. They are always philosophising and they have no philosophy. They have not reached that reality, that reason of things, or even that fully realised unreason of things, for which they are obviously and indeed avowedly seeking. But, what is here more to the point, they do not (like the old revolutionists) even know the direction in which they are to seek it. They have failed to discover, not only any purpose in the world, but even any purpose in the will. They are witty, brilliant and fashionable bankrupts. They have come to an end; and they have not come to an End. The earlier rebels were happy in being pioneers of the actual forward movements of their time; as Walt Whitman, axe in hand, walked before the actual march of industrial democracy. But Mr. Aldous Huxley can hardly be roused by the word Democracy. D. H. Lawrence, on the other hand, could be roused by the word Industrialism.

So far as that is concerned, the case is simple enough. Lawrence, whom so many moderns have made a sort of test of modernity, was in fact in violent revolt against anything and everything that can be called modern. He did not merely hate industrial machinery and the servile society it has produced. He hated practically all the effects of science and public education and even political progress. All that is very right and proper; but he also hated intellectualism along with industrialism; though why anybody should think industrialism particularly intellectual, I cannot imagine. But he was perfectly right in his revolt against these things; only they are all in their very nature modern or very recent things. He himself was in favour of very ancient things, and notably of one of the most ancient things on the earth, the worship of the earth itself; the Great Mother: Demeter. But he could not, by his own admission, even do this, without almost literally cutting off his own head. It may be regarded, in a thinker, as at least equivalent to cutting his own throat. He confessed himself, in effect, that he could only worship Demeter from the neck downwards. He could only do it by setting the subconsciousness against the consciousness, or in other words, the dreams against the daylight. It is surely a remarkable gospel for an age of realism. In a famous passage he wrote, "In my dark heart gods are," but added that in his "white mind" they were not, having been washed or whitewashed out by elementary education. But the modern educated mind is not white; it is only pale.

The point is that from every point of view, ancient or modern, his solution is not a solution. A man cannot leave his head at home and send his body dancing through the world and doing as it likes; and there is no earthly reason for supposing that it will do what it ought, from a modern or any other point of view. For instance, if it fancies food, it will steal, and it will steal quite as readily from Communist Stores as from private houses. This is not the beginning of a new life; a gorgeous jungle opening before man as a sort of Mowgli. It is the end of an utterly impossible argument, which cannot be carried any further. A man wallowing in the earth with the animals would not be an animal. He would only be a lunatic; which is the exact opposite of an animal. There was no way out of the intellectual or anti-intellectual impasse into which Lawrence had got himself; except the third road which he never thought of . . . possibly because it leads to Rome. If mere rationalism is insufficient, we must get above the reason and not below it. The direct appeal to Nature is utterly unnatural. I admit it was weakly conceded by the Pantheists of the first revolutionary phase; now very remote; and many who would pass for pious accepted it. Professor Babbitt has pointed out some of the dangerous concessions in Wordsworth. Another even more orthodox writer expressed the error of that period. He said that we must rise through Nature up to Nature's God. He was wrong. We must descend from God down to God's Nature. Nature is only right when seen in the light of the highest right; whether it be, as some

Humanists would say, in the mind of Man, or as Christians would say, in the mind of God. But they really believe in their God; and Lawrence did not really believe in his Goddess. He passionately disbelieved in everything, except something in which he could not really believe.

Mr. Aldous Huxley, whom I have taken as the other outstanding talent of that time, sees this impossibility and avoids it. But he can only avoid it by cutting down his own standard to something so thin that it can hardly stand. In one of his novels a character sums up much of the general teaching of the author, by saying that Man must not hope to be either an animal or an angel. He adds, significantly, that it is a tight-rope sort of business. Now walking on a tight-rope is both difficult and dangerous; and the author makes the good life really more difficult than it is for an ascetic. He has not only to avoid being an animal, but he must guard against any unlucky accident that might turn him into an angel. That is, he is forbidden to have the enthusiasms and spiritual ambitions that have sustained the saints, and yet he has got to become in cold blood something much more exceptional than a saint. Nobody asks such a realist as Mr. Huxley to idealise the real. But such a realist must surely know that human nature cannot show, at every instant, the valour and vigilance of a spiritual tight-rope walker, cannot suffer more for this ideal than all the heroes, and yet be forbidden even to idealise its own ideal. The plan of life is simply obviously unworkable; where the plans of the wildest mystics and martyrs have proved workable.

I say that I do not abhor these men as the first figures of an advancing anarchist army. On the contrary, I admire these men as the last figures of a defeated anarchist army. I take these two original and forcible writers as types of many others; but the point is that they are not, like the anarchists of history, at the head of an army marching in a determined direction. That is exactly what they are not. Lawrence rushed out against almost everything; Huxley, being more sensitive, recoils from almost everything. But, however valuable be the vivid description of the one or the sharp criticism of the other, they are not valuable as guides; and certainly not as guides to a revolution. They had not the simplification given either by religion or irreligion. There was something grand about D. H. Lawrence groping blindly in the dark; but he really was in the dark, not only about the Will of God, but about the will of D. H. Lawrence. He was ready to go anywhere; but he did not really know where to go next. Aldous Huxley is ideally witty; but he is at his wit’s end.

Now of course there are numberless copyists and followers calling themselves revolutionary, who would say that they knew where to go; simply because they are content with some conventional word like Communism. For Communism is almost the same word as convention; it means people getting "together", and nothing else. But that very fact illustrates what I say, when I say that the army is short of ammunition and the end is near. When the great democratic movement began, it was supported by real democratic emotions. Only Comradeship can be the soul of Communism; for otherwise it has no soul. But the more we note the actual temper of the new rebels, the more we shall note that all that is gone. The men who call themselves Communists are not Comrades. Their tone is bitterly individualistic, and bitterly critical. When Walt Whitman looked at a crowd, it is really true to say that he loved the crowd. When a modern poet, imitating the free verse of Whitman (which was the least free thing about him), describes a crowd, it is always to describe his disgust with the crowd. They have none of the natural sentiments that would correspond with their unnatural dogmas. In other words, the army is short of powder, short of passion, short of the primary impulses that make such an army act. For they are not a vanguard advancing, they are the end of a revolutionary adventure, both for good and evil, which began more than a hundred years ago; and they are fighting the rearguard action of a retreat. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity really meant something to the emotions of those who first used the phrase. But Fraternity is the last emotion anyone is likely to find in an acrid article or poem by a modern rebel; Liberty is lost in both systems, old and new; and Equality only remains in the form of a dull attempt at uniformity, copied from that very mechanical capitalism which the rebels would reject.

Along with those who accept the thing as a label, or hope fallaciously that they may accept it as a fashion, there are some who accept it in a more noble but very negative way; for the very reasons I have urged in this article. I mean that they accept it desperately, as the only way out of an intellectual impasse. It is not too much to say that Mr. Middleton Murry accepts Soviets with the gestures of a great heathen accepting suicide. He seems to exult in the thought of it being the end of everything, or at least the end of nearly everything he likes. That is yet another example of the psychology I have attempted to describe; the psychology of men who have come to the end. I do not want to confuse this distinct impression with jaded journalistic talk about pessimism. People will call Mr. Aldous Huxley a pessimist; in the sense of one who makes the worst of it. To me he is that far more gloomy character; the man who makes the best of it. He gives the best advice he can; in conditions of converging impossibility. I do not write here in a hostile spirit about any of these recent realistic or revolutionary writers; on the contrary, I sincerely sympathise with them, because, unlike the earlier revolutionists, they know they are in an intellectual hole. Doubtless, there are thousands of gay and buoyant innovators, who are not intelligent enough to know it. But the same plan of defeat is spread over the whole situation. It can be seen, for instance, in the thousands of thoughtless "sexual" novels, the writers of which are evidently unconscious that they have got into a logical contradiction about the whole position of sex. They inherit the notion that sex is a serious crux and crisis; for indeed this is necessary to the very nature of a novel. In this they are living on the last legacy of Romanticism; which, in its turn, was living on the last legacy of religion. But their new and simple philosophy teaches them that sex is only the sort of necessity that is also a triviality; that sex is no more crucial than smoking. So that the modern novelist, torn between two ideas, has to attempt to write a story about a man who smokes twenty cigarettes and tries to think that each of them is a crisis. In all these things there is an intellectual tangle; the sort of thing that eventually tightens and throttles. Of this sort of philosopher it is exactly and literally true to say that, if you give him rope enough, he will hang himself. It is consoling to reflect that suicide holds a sublime place in his philosophy.

WALTER DE LA MARE It has not always been sufficiently understood that a critic of poetry should be a poetical critic. Literary history is littered with the disasters of good critics who become bad critics, merely by colliding with good poets. But one of the first facts which a good poetical critic will realise, is one which the poet of necessity realises: the limitation of language, and especially the poverty and clumsiness of the language of praise. There is hardly any praise of poets that does not sound as if they were all the same sort of poets, and this is true even when the praise is intended to say precisely the opposite. Thus the habit of calling somebody "unique" has become universal, and we may insist that a man is original, and still leave the impression that originality is about as rare as original sin.

But this difficulty applies in a special way to Mr. Walter de la Mare and his poetry, because the common poetical terms of praise for that poetry are also applied to a totally different sort of poetry. He stands very close, in time and place and appearance, to a group of writers, most of them good writers and some of them great writers, from whom he is really quite free and distinct. Only the epithets applied to him are also applied to them. When we say that he is a dreamy and fantastic poet, an interpreter of elfland, a singer of strange rhymes that have a witchery and wild charm for children, and the rest, we are driven to use a number of terms that have now become a little trite, perhaps, as applied to other talented persons who are utterly different. The fountains, the foundations, the primary principles of imagination and the view of life, are really quite different in a man like Mr. de la Mare from all that they are, let us say, in a man like Sir James Barrie or a man like Mr. A. A. Milne. This, I need hardly say, has nothing to do with depreciating these authors, but only with appreciating each author for his own sake. Yet there is a sort of tangle of tradition, and a recognised traffic in certain subjects, which may well confuse a modern reader about all this sort of literature of fancy. For instance; we might start by saying that the tradition of Treasure Island and its pirates was continued in Peter Pan and its pirates. We might say that the elvish children of Peter Pan were continued in the elvish children of When We Were Very Young. And then we might imagine vaguely that all this sort of thing, the bottle of rum and the crocodile's dinner and the king's breakfast, were all somehow stuffed or stirred up together in a hotch-potch called Peacock Pie. But this is to miss the whole point about the poet, and especially where he is rather more than a poet. It would be easy to link him up with the tradition of Treasure Island; for he has himself written a very fascinating fantasia about Desert Islands. But the association would be an error, for he has not really laid up for himself treasure in the same sort of treasure islands. There is really a sort of dynasty, a Scottish dynasty, of Stevenson and Barrie. But it descended on the infantile side to Scots like Kenneth Graham and on the manly, or at least boyish side to Scots like John Buchan. It has nothing to do with Walter de la Mare; because his philosophy is different. One way of putting it would be to say that, poetic as are the fairy-tales of the Scots, they are the fairy-tales of the Sceptics. The fairy-tales of de la Mare are not those of the Sceptic but of the Mystic. Take the primary idea with which all the best work for imaginative infancy, as supplied by Stevenson and Barrie, really began. It began with an idea which is called "make-believe". That is, strictly speaking, it is written by men who do not believe; and even written for children who do not believe; children who quite logically and legitimately make believe. But de la Mare's world is not merely a world of illusion; it is in quite another sense a world of imagination. It is a real world of which the reality can only be represented to us by images. De la Mare does not, in the material sense, believe that there is an ogre who crawls round houses and is turned back by the influence of the Holy Child; any more than Barrie believes that there is an immortal little boy who plays physically in Kensington Gardens. But de la Mare does believe that there is a devouring evil that is always warring with innocence and happiness; and Barrie does not believe that innocence and happiness go on having an uninterrupted legal occupation of Kensington Gardens. Stories of the school of Peter Pan are radiant and refreshing dreams; but they are dreams. They are the dreams of somebody taking refuge from real life in an inner life of the imagination; but not necessarily of somebody believing that there is also a larger universal life corresponding to that imagination. The first is a fabulist but the second is a symbolist; as if we were to compare the talking animals of La Fontaine with the typical animals of Blake. Blake (though certainly mad in a quiet way) probably did not believe that golden lions and tigers walked about on the hills of Albion; and La Fontaine did not believe that garrulous lions engaged in chatty conversation with foxes. But Blake did believe that certain tremendous truths, only to be shown under the types of golden lions, were really true; and, what is most important of all, were not only within him, but beyond him. So the conversation of Mr. Milne's funny little pigs and bears is as delightful as La Fontaine, and only deceptive in the same sense as La Fontaine. That is to say, it is not false, because it is fictitious; or what was called fabulous. But the rhymes of the Mad Prince, though they would be called fantastic, are not merely fabulous. The Mad Prince, like the Mad Poet, in the person of poor Blake, is, after all, something essentially different from The Mad Hatter. There are hollow undertones in his queer questions, about green grass for graves, which do really re-echo from things deep and secret as the grave.

Many who remember the apparently nonsensical nursery rhymes which figure among Walter de la Mare's verses for children may imagine that I am drawing a fine distinction; but it is not a distinction of degree but of direction. The parrot and the monkey who attended the dwarfs on the Isle of Lone, may seem quite as disconnected from normal natural history as the owl and the pussy-cat who went to sea. But there remains a real distinction, outside all natural history, between unnatural history and supernatural history. Mr. de la Mare's parrots and monkeys are as symbolical as the strange beasts in the Book of Apocalypse. Only they are symbolical in a sense that means something better than the allegorical. Symbolism is superior to allegory, in so far that the symbol exactly fits; and there is therefore no superfluous explanation that needs to pass through ordinary language, or need be, or indeed can be, translated into other words. If a parrot only means speech, or a monkey only means mischief (as he generally does) then nothing beyond pictorial elegance is gained by not dealing directly with mischief, or speaking plainly about speech. And the mere allegory never gets beyond a pictorial elegance, adorning what might well be unadorned. But the great mystic can sometimes present to us a purple parrot or a sea-green monkey, in exactly such a manner as to suggest submerged or mysterious ideas, and even truths, that could not possibly be conveyed by any other creature of any other colour. The meaning fits the symbol and the symbol the meaning; and we cannot separate them from each other, as we can in the analysis of allegory. And there is a side of spiritual life, so to speak, which might well be represented by sea-green monkeys, whose colouring is not merely arbitrary colouring like that of the mysterious monsters in that admirable but purely nonsensical rhyme about the Jumblies, whose heads were green and whose hands were blue. The colour scheme here is pleasing, but it is no disrespect to the great Mr. Lear of the Nonsense Rhymes, to say that his cosmic philosophy would not have been convulsed even if their hands had been green and their heads had been blue. Walter de la Mare's nonsense is never nonsensical in that sense. If his monkey is sea-green, it is for some reason as deep and significant as the sea; even though he cannot express it in any other way except by patient and uncomplaining greenness. And he would never mention even a green weed, a dock or nettle in a ditch, without meaning it to bear the same witness in the same way.

It is the first paradox about him that we can find the evidence of his faith in his consciousness of evil. It is the second paradox that we can find the spiritual springs of much of his poetry in his prose. If we turn, for instance, to that very powerful and even terrible short story called Seaton's Aunt, we find we are dealing directly with the diabolic. It does so in a sense quite impossible in all the merely romantic or merely ironic masters of that nonsense that is admittedly illusion. There was no nonsense about Seaton's

Aunt. There was no illusion about her concentrated and paralysing malignity; but it was a malignity that had an extension beyond this world. She was a witch; and the realisation that witches can occasionally exist is a part of Realism, and a test for anyone claiming a sense of Reality. For we do not especially want them to exist; but they do. Now the wonderland of the other charmers of childhood consists entirely of things that we want to exist or they want to exist. Whether they are of the older English or Victorian school of Lewis Carroll and Lear, or of the later Scottish school of Stevenson and Barrie, their whole aim is to create a sort of cosmos within the cosmos, which shall be free from evil; a crystal sphere in which there shall be no cracks or flaws or clouds of evil. Peter Pan is a wonderful evocation of the happy daydreams of childhood. There is plenty of fighting and ferocity; because fighting and ferocity are among the very happiest dreams of a really innocent and Christian childhood. But Captain Hook the Pirate is not really wicked; he is only ferocious; which, after all, it is his simple duty as an honest and industrious pirate to be. But there are rhymes, even nursery rhymes, of Walter de la Mare in which the shiver is a real shiver, not only of the spine but of the spirit. They have an atmosphere which is not merely thrilling, but also chilling. They lay a finger that is not of the flesh on a nerve that is not of the body; in their special way of suggesting the chill of change or death or antiquity. To do this was against the whole purpose and origin of the fairyland of the later Victorians. Like all literature, it cannot really be understood without reference to history; and, like all history, it cannot really be understood without reference to religion. As scepticism gradually dried up the conventional religion of the English, and even of the Scotch, poetic and humane spirits turned more and more to the construction of an inner world of fancy, that should be both a refuge and a substitute. William Morris, one of the most large and humane of these later Victorians, admitted it in acknowledging the purely decorative vision in his own work:

So with this earthly Paradise it is, If you will read aright and pardon me Who strive to build a shadowy isle of bliss Midmost the beating of the steely sea.

And it is the irony of the case that these men, who were rationalists and realists about the real world, were for that very reason resolved to be radiant optimists when once they were inside the city of dreams which was their city of refuge. The pessimists insisted on having happy dreams; the sceptics insisted on having omnipotent drugs. But the mystic does not deal in dreams but in visions; that is, in things seen and not seeming. The mystic does not desire drugs but the drinking of that wine that wakes the dead; different in nature from any opiate that soothes the living.

In short, we may say that the early twentieth century presented two movements towards the fanciful or fantastical, and away from the merely rational or material: a centripetal movement and a centrifugal movement. The one spiritual spiral worked inwards, towards the secret subjective dreams of man; the other worked outwards towards the spiritual powers or truths that seemed beyond the reach of man. The new world made by the first was the great, glowing, iridescent bubble of the Barrie daydream; the world revealed by the second was that world of strange skies, at the ends of the earth and the corners of the sea, that appears in the far-off flashes of the de la Mare imagination. We might say shortly that Stevenson and Barrie could produce grisly buccaneers dripping with gore without frightening the children; whereas de la Mare could produce pollarded willows or whitewashed barns with an imminent risk of frightening the children, and even the grownup people. But it is only fair to say that there is a subtlety only possible to the first method, as well as a subtlety possible to the second. It is, as has been already suggested, the subtlety of an irony which at once accepts and discounts illusion. It is the whole point of the best work of Barrie, for instance, that somebody is deceiving himself, but also that somebody is looking on at somebody who is deceiving himself; and if they are both deceiving themselves, so much the better for the third person who is looking on from a third angle. Much of this sort of work is like a world of mirrors reflected in mirrors; the reduplication of reflection; the shadow of a shade. To name but one instance: a fairy-tale palace is itself only a fancy; but the court scene in A Kiss for Cinderella is not merely the fairy-tale fancy, but a child's fancy about the fancy. This sort of intensive imaginative delicacy is in theory a thing of infinite possibilities; and this does belong to the merely subjective school of symbolism. But what I have called the truly symbolic school of symbolism does still belong altogether to another and, I cannot but think, a larger world. It is all that world of the powers and mysteries beyond mankind which even the sceptic would consent to cover with the celebrated label: "Important, If True". Perhaps as good an example as can be found is in that truly extraordinary sketch by de la Mare called "The Tree". I can imagine multitudes of quite intelligent people totally unable to make head or tail of it. It is concerned with a fruit merchant and his brother, who was an artist, and with a Tree, which is talked of in a manner utterly indescribable; as if it were not only more important than anything, but were outside the world. Now Barrie might have dealt admirably with a theme like that; and probably made the human comedy clearer. But the difference is precisely this. Even the reader who cannot understand anything else about de la Mare’s story does definitely understand this: that somehow the fruit merchant was wrong, and the artist was right; and, above all, the Tree was right. Now if Barrie had told the tale, he would have taken a gentle pride in leaving us in doubt on that very point; of suggesting that the sceptic might be the sane man, and the Tree might be a delusion. But the Tree is not a delusion.

THE MEANING OF METRE

Did Bret Harte imitate Swinburne? Or (more pleasing thought) did Swinburne imitate Bret Harte? Did Swinburne wrestle in spirit with the admirable poem called “The Heathen Chinee”, and then start up from his reading inspired and inflamed to write the great Greek tragedy of “Atalanta in Calydon”? To some academic and pedantic minds I know that this will not appear an exact literary comparison; though it covers a small point that may be called a curiosity of literature. To them it will sound as if I suggested that John Ruskin was merely a plagiarist of Josh Billings. Anyhow, it is a rather curious coincidence that there is one particular poetical metre, consisting of a quatrain and one long line at the end, which is found nowhere else in all literature, so far as I know, except in the finest and most tragic chorus of Swinburne’s Atalanta and in the poem of the Heathen Chinee. It would be possible to get quite a pleasing poetical effect by interleaving the verses of the one with the verses of the other and thus producing a complete and continuous poem, all to the same beautiful tune and combining (as only the greatest masterpieces can do) the qualities of the humanist and the humorist; the elements of the grave and gay. There is no space here to weave the whole of the two narratives together; but a verse or two will show that they move with the same melody in the same metre.

0 would that with feet Unsandaled, unshod, Over-bold, over-fleet, I had swum not nor trod From Arcadia to Calydon northward a blast of the envy of God.

Which expressions are strong, Yet would feebly imply Some account of a wrong Not to call it a lie That was worked upon William my pardner, and the same being W. Nye.

It may be urged maliciously, by the unmelodious, that the identity is a mere accident of arrangement on the page; since the long line could be divided or the short lines linked up. But this is not true. That last long rolling line is really unique, like a wave sweeping away all that went before. And the moral is that metre is not artificial but elemental; it is smooth like Niagara. That long rushing line does express the sea-worship of Swinburne; that long meandering line does express the detached lucidity of Truthful James. Since then, writers have broken writing to bits to make it explosive. The other Truthful James — I allude to Henry James — began it with a shower of commas; the more modern poets are quite capable of keeping the commas and leaving out the words. Others would make an explosion, or at least a noise, by some line like, “Burst. Blast. Burst-Blast back-blasted. Bang!” But it is not really even so noisy as a line like, “Where the thundering Bosphorus answers the thunder of Pontic seas”; because it somehow suggests, not a natural noise that cannot be stopped, but an artificial noise that actually is stopped, if only by full stops. Metre is more natural than free verse; because it has more of the movement of nature, and the curves of wind and wave.

CONCERNING A STRANGE CITY

Everyone has his own private and almost secret selection among the examples of the mysterious power of words, the power which a certain verbal combination has over the emotions and even over the soul. It is a commonplace that literature sometimes has a charm, not merely in the sense of the charm of a woman, but of the charm of a witch. Historical scholars question how the ignorant imagination of the Dark Ages distorted the poet Virgil into a magician; and one answer to the question, possibly, is that he was one. Theologians and philosophers debate about the inspiration of scripture; but perhaps the most philosophical argument, for certain scriptural sayings being inspired, is simply that they sound like it. The great lines of the poets are like landscapes or visions; but the same strange light can be found not only in the high places of poetry but in quite obscure corners of prose. And, in my own personal case, there are no words in literature that more directly produce this indescribable effect than a few that appear, almost accidentally, in one episode of Malory's romance of Arthur. They occur in one of the visions of Sir Galahad; or it may be Sir Percivale, for the rest of the scene has rather faded from my memory, save for the constellation of words that shines in the midst of it. But I think that St. Joseph of Arimathea shows the knight a vision of a veiled object; presumably the Holy Grail. And he adds the sentence: "But you shall see it unveiled in the city of Sarras, in the spiritual place."

The soul of this, of course, escapes analysis; but for all that, an attempt at analysis has certain aspects of interest. I can only express what I mean by saying that it is the finite part of the image that really suggests infinity. Most worthy and serious people, instead of saying the spiritual place, would say the spiritual world. Some dismal and disgusting people, instead of saying the spiritual place, would say the spiritual plane. And the immediate chill and disenchantment of these changes is due to a vague but vivid sense that the spiritual thing has become less real. A world sounds like an astronomical diagram, and a plane sounds like a geometrical diagram; and both these are abstractions. But a place is not an abstraction, but an actuality. And the writer not only says definitely that it is a place, but he gives it a definite name like the name of a place. Sarras is not an abstraction; it is not even an allegory. It is not even as if he had said the City of Heaven or the City of Paradise. These, though not unreal, are at least universal. But the name given has identity, which is something much more intense than universality. Sarras only means Sarras, as Sarum only means Sarum, or (for that matter) as Surbiton only means Surbiton. But the very fact that we have never heard of it before, and that it is never mentioned again, that it is referred to in passing and without explanation, gives a curious intensity to the hint of something at once distant and definite. The spiritual thrill is all in the idea that the place is a place, however spiritual; that it is some strange spot where the sky touches the earth, or where eternity contrives to live on the borderland of time and space.

I wish there were a real philosophy of comparative religion, and one that was not full of inhuman nonsense. I wish it did not tend to one particular trick of unreason, as for instance when Mr. Wells says that the Christian sacrament of bread and wine was a break-back to primitive blood sacrifices. Or sometimes a man will say that the feeling about a Madonna is only the revival of the worship of Isis, or that the idea of St. Michael smiting Satan is the same as that about Mithras who slew a bull. Now there are many other more historical objections to this sort of thing, but my primary objection to it is that it not only puts the cart before the horse, but gives me directions for finding my own horse in my own stable, by looking for a primitive Mycenaean chariot of which no traces remain. Instead of explaining x by saying it is equal to 5, it undertakes to explain 5 by saying it is equal to x. It is as if a man said, “You may not be aware that your feelings about your wife are best described as those of the Missing Link at the sight of an oyster shell.” I know what a Christian feels about the idea that Michael smote a rebel angel. I do not in the least know what a Mithraist felt about the idea that Mithras killed a bull. It may really have been something like the Christian feeling, for all I know; it may also have been the worst sort of heathen feeling, for all I know. But to have the thing that I do know explained to me by the thing that I don’t know, is like nonsense out of Alice in Wonderland. It is offering something inexplicable to explain something that needs no explanation. I cannot tell whether anybody really felt anything about Isis comparable to what men feel about Mary; if anybody did, I am sure I congratulate him. But I decline to have my own feelings revealed to myself, in the light of some remote alleged feelings that no man alive has ever felt. But though there is this abyss of agnosticism between dead faiths and living ones, and between religions that are experienced and religions that are only explored, it might be possible to establish some human connection if the people who did it were more human. If they took the simple things that really are similar, instead of merely trying to assimilate the civilised things to the barbaric things, they might really bridge some of those abysses in the name of the brotherhood of men. If they were not so anxious to say that the sacrament and the sacrifice were both cannibal orgies (which is nonsense) they might say that they were both sacrifices, and had something to do with the philosophy of sacrifice, which is sense. And then, instead of having less respect for the Christians, we might have more respect for the cannibals. If they were not so anxious to compare the Virgin to a heathen goddess, they might possibly compare them both to a human mother, and at least get near to something human, if not to something divine. And in the same way, if they were not so eager to compare a shrine or a sacred soil to fetishism and taboo, they might get some sort of glimpse of what all men mean by making a deity local, or talking of a spiritual place.

At least in the mind of man, if not in the nature of things, there seems to be some connection between concentration and reality. When we want to ask, in natural language, whether a thing really exists or not, we ask if it is really “there” or not. We say “there”, even if we do not clearly understand where. A man cannot enter a house by five doors at once; he might do it if he were an atmosphere; but he does not want to be an atmosphere. He has a stubborn subconscious belief that an animal is greater than an atmosphere. In proportion as a thing rises in the scale of things, it tends to localise and even narrow its natural functions. A man cannot absorb his sustenance through all his pores like a sponge or some low sea-organism; he cannot take in an atmosphere of beef or an abstract essence of buns. Any buns thrown at him, as at the bear at the zoo, must be projected with such skill as to hit a particular hole in his head. In nature, in a sense, there is choice even before there is will; the plant or bulb narrows itself and pierces at one place rather than another; and all growth is a pattern of such green wedges. But however it be with these lower things, there has always been this spearlike selection and concentration in man’s conception of higher things. And compared with that there is something not only vague but vulgar in most of the talk about infinity. The pantheist is right up to a certain point, but so is the sponge.

Both vitally and verbally, this infinity is the enemy of all that is fine. Such philological points are sometimes more than mere pedantries or mere puns. And it is more than a pedantic pun to say that most things that are fine are finite. We testify to it when we talk of a beautiful thing having refinement or having finish. It is brought to an end like the blade of a beautiful sword; not only to its end in the sense of its cessation but to its end in the sense of its aim. All fine things are in this sense finished, even when they are eternal. Poetry is committed to this concentration fully as much as religion; for fairyland has always been as local, one might say as parochial, as Heaven. And if religion in the recognised sense were removed tomorrow, the poets would only begin to act as the pagans acted. They would begin to say, “Lo, here”, and “Lo, there”, from the incurable itch of the idea that the something must be somewhere, and not merely anywhere. Even if it were in some sense found to be in everything, it would still be in everything and not merely in all. And if men did indeed seek the secret in primitive sacrifices, it was a secret and not a superficiality like fetish-worship. If they did indeed look for it behind the veil of Isis, it was a secret and not a platitude like nature-worship. And if indeed it is better sought in another fashion, it will be a secret, and therefore a real revelation, for those who see it unveiled in the city of Sarras, in the spiritual place.

THE EPITAPH OF PIERPONT MORGAN

It is obvious enough that whitewashing a man is quite the opposite of washing him white. The curious thing is that people often try to whitewash a man, and fail, when it might be possible to wash him, and to some limited extent, succeed. The real story, if the culprit only had the courage to tell it, would often be much more human and pardonable than the stiff suspicious fiction that he tells instead. Many a public man, I fancy, has tried to conceal the crime and only succeeded in concealing the excuse. Many a man has sought to bury the sin and only buried the temptation. Suppose that Nelson had covered his relations with Lady Hamilton so discreetly that he left about his movements only a vague suspicion that he had a wife in every port. We should think him a far worse man than we think him, knowing the whole truth. Suppose Parnell had kept his secret so well that his disappearances were put down to an unmarried man's most vulgar and purchased type of vice, instead of an unmarried man's comparatively pardonable fault of infatuation. That great man would seem far less great to us than he does now. In our craven commercial public life there are not many of the Parnell or Nelson sort: but even among our lords and millionaires there are men, I dare say, who are less despicable than they look. If we had the key of their souls we might come upon virtues quite unexpected — or at least upon vices more generous. In many a complex human scandal, I fancy, the first real slander is the acquittal.

But there is another form of this dehumanising defence: and that is the defence of the dead. The idea of observing restraint, if not respect, in speaking of the recently departed rests on a human instinct altogether deep and free: but in modern practice it is turned exactly the wrong way. A dead man should be sacred because he is a man — perhaps a man for the first time. A baby says he is a man; a boy often thinks he is a man; a man takes for granted he is a man, and often finds out his mistake. Perhaps one never knows what being a man means until the instant of death. Perhaps in a very manly and even military sense all life is a learning to die. If I were asked to say something by the grave of a man like Pierpont Morgan, I would say: "I will not remember his name. He has fought the great unequal fight; and is of more value than he was."

Now turn to the modern newspaper method; the method of weak whitewash. The Christian Commonwealth is a paper with a perfectly genuine, though hazy and patronising, concern for social improvement. Its intentions are certainly not servile, though I think its upshot would be. But it feels as we all do, that the day after poor Morgan's death is not the time for kicking his corpse about: so, being modern, it contrives to speak well of him in the following extraordinary fashion. "It is easy to denounce the methods by which such men amass their vast fortunes, but, making every allowance for the injury done to individuals by the often ruthless methods such men adopt to gain their ends, the great fact stands out, that they are the human agents working out certain economic movements. . . . These men are helping to prepare industry for a new form of control and ownership. In the transition stage they amass huge fortunes for themselves, and ruin many who are too weak to withstand them, but it is doubtful if the sum of their harmful inflections is as great as the evils in the same period caused by the great number of small competing capitalists."

I shall have much to say of this as a social doctrine in a moment. At the start I am only concerned with it as an epitaph. In the mere matter of respect for the dead, I say this. I am ready to pass the grave of Morgan in a decent silence, as a Christian grave. The Christian Commonwealth can only think of sacrificing a thousand slaves upon it, as if it were a pagan and prehistoric grave. For to justify or palliate the capitalist today is to sacrifice a thousand slaves. My epitaph on Morgan need not even contain his name; I would write over his grave what I would over my own, "Have mercy upon us, miserable sinners." But just think how the Christian Commonwealth epitaph reads, merely as an epitaph! "Sacred to the Memory of J. Pierpont Morgan: Who, By Methods Peculiarly Easy to Denounce, Amassed a Large Fortune. Having a Preference for Ruthless Methods For the Gaining of His Ends, He Selected for Ruin Such Persons as Were Too Weak To Withstand Him. He Thus Became The Human Instrument of An Economic and Inhuman Movement. He Also Formed Trusts. For of Such is the Kingdom of Heaven." That is the amount of tenderness for the terrible dead that can be reached in the modernist manner. The sacred death is forgotten, but the profane life is excused.

And now for the excuse. In order to write a polite paragraph about a poor old man whose only superiority over any of us is that he has passed what we all must fear, this paper digs up the dusty and discredited rubbish of Bellamy: and maintains the proposition that millionaires bring us nearer to Socialism. The obvious deduction for a Socialist is that he ought to be, in every hour and instant, on the side of the millionaires. No man's wage must be increased by a penny, no man's working day must be shortened by an hour; for this might delay the swift, sweet process by which the whole earth will soon be owned by its six most unscrupulous inhabitants. Then we shall get Socialism. I don't see why. I never did. But it is self-evident that, if this is the case, every capitalist must be exalted and every workman brought low. The whole argument means nothing unless it means that the rich had better smash us all as soon as possible. There are some who doubt this concept. I am one of them. We say it would not have been Napoleon's best policy to wait till the Allies had conquered him utterly, so that he might only have to write one letter, asking them to give him back the whole of Europe. We say, in our simple way, that it would not have been wise in Montenegro to wait till all the Moslems in Asia were marching upon them; so as to abolish Islam in one well-expressed proclamation. We entertain similar doubts about the sanity of making capitalists stronger than any of the past emperors of this earth, and then asking them to hand over the only thing for which they have lost their souls.

The final fact is that anyone who subscribes to this epitaph must league himself with the forces of evil until something like the Last Judgment. He must not merely give up Socialism, which is a doctrine. He must also give up Social Reform — which is a dissipation. He must not only abandon the duty of helping the poor; he must even tear from his heart the pleasure of tormenting them. I see that one paper (the name of which I forget) has even addressed an open letter to me on this matter, asking whether any of my words (which, I sadly confess, have been many) have born any fruit in practice — by which, of course, it means Westminster. Well, I am afraid I must confess that my efforts have been barren, that I have brought forth no fruit fit for the field of social reform. In all the most powerful modern movements I have been impotent. I have never segregated anybody, or tortured anybody, or unsexed anybody, or buried anybody alive — to my knowledge. I am not a philanthropist. I do not think any words of mine have led to one single man being kept in prison beyond his lawful term. I doubt if I have succeeded in adding a single lash to the torture at the triangles. I question whether I have succeeded in deducting so much as a penny from the tiny fortunes of grooms and housemaids. I have cropped no hair off the heads of other people’s daughters. I have drawn no blood from poorer men’s backs. My claim to be a Progressive is gone for ever; and I know it well. But I am not quite so bitterly opposed to all possible Social Reform as the Christian Commonwealth is. I agree that men like Morgan should be pardoned. I even agree that, for purposes of debate, men like Morgan should be excused. But I shall deny till death and damnation that men like Morgan should be encouraged. And if that epitaph does not mean that men like Morgan should be encouraged, it means nothing whatever.

THE NEW BIGOTRY

I notice with some amusement, both in America and English literature, the rise of a new kind of bigotry. Bigotry does not consist in a man being convinced he is right; that is not bigotry, but sanity. Bigotry consists in a man being convinced that another man must be wrong in everything, because he is wrong in a particular belief; that he must be wrong, even in thinking that he honestly believes he is right. The last occasion is one applied mostly to literature and the ability of literary men. And it is all the more like the old bigotry because it is in opposition to it.

We all know what used to happen sometimes in the Puritan period; or the more critical classicism of the eighteenth century. A young idealistic poet would write a copy of verses; mostly verses somewhat in this style:

O'er rushing waterfall and verdant grove The languid moonlight throws a light of love.

The poet was considered quite respectable; perhaps the poem was even a prize poem. Then it was discovered that the poet, when slightly drunk, had expressed doubts about the exact date of the Book of Habakkuk. There was a terrible scandal; the youth was hurled from his college as an atheist; and then the learned critics went back and looked at his poem with a new darkling and suspicious eye. The "rushing waterfall", after all, had a very revolutionary sound and hinted at pantheistic anarchy. The phrase "languid moonlight" was an appeal to all the most profligate passions. "Light of love" was a term notoriously of loose significance.

Today it is just the opposite; only equally bigoted. A young idealistic poet, full of the new visions of beauty, writes verses appropriate to such vision; as, for instance:

Bug-house underbogies belch daybreak back-firing. Daylight's a void-vomit; steadying legs to stump.

And all the young critics know he is all right; he has got cosmic rhythm; he is a regular guy.

And then a horrid whisper goes round that he was seen outside an Episcopal Church near Vermont. The whole horrid truth is soon known. He has admitted to a newspaper man that he believes in God. Then the young critics go back gloomily and stare at his poetry; and, strangely enough, see for the first time that there was something awfully old-fashioned in saying “daylight” when Binx might have said “sky-blank”; and, after all, bogies are just the sort of thing Episcopalians are forced by their bishops to believe in.

This, though some of the worst examples have occurred in England, is a strictly correct biography of a man of genius who has come to us from America — Mr. T. S. Eliot. It would be an exaggeration to say that Mr. Eliot was expelled from Harvard for being a High Churchman, as Shelley was expelled from Oxford for being an atheist. Mr. Eliot’s character was not blasted by a religion until later in life, and after he had said all that can be said for modern scepticism and despair.

But this makes it all the funnier. An English critic actually accused him of asking us “to believe the unbelievable”. Whatever is the sense of calling a thing unbelievable when a man like Eliot already believes it. The author of The Waste Land knows all there is to know about scepticism and pessimism; why not admit that his beliefs are beliefs, and go back to a proper criticism of his literature?

BOOKS FOR BOYS

A recent correspondence upon what is called pernicious literature has given rise to several declarations to the effect that the popular literature which is sold to boys in our day is greatly inferior to that of two or three decades ago. At first sight a reflective person might be inclined to suggest that perhaps there were more psychological elements involved in that far-off boyish enjoyment, and in that, as in many other instances of our youthful pleasures, we were not so much enjoying the stories as enjoying ourselves. It is at least possible that the laudator temporis acti of whom we are speaking would regard the actual task of reading through those lost romances very much in the same way that he would regard the action of a waiter in a restaurant who brought him fourteen penny buns and a plate of bull's-eyes.

The mental digestion of boys is as strong as their physical digestion. They do not heed the cookery of art any more than the art of cookery. They can eat the apples of the tree of knowledge, and they can eat them raw. It is a great mistake to suppose that boys only read boyish books. Not only do they privately revel in their sisters' most sentimental novels, but they absorb cartloads of useless information. One boy in particular, with whose career from an early age we have the best reasons for being familiar, used to read whole volumes of Chamber's Encyclopaedia, and of a very musty and unreliable History of English Trade. The thing was a mere brute pleasure of reading, a pleasure in leisurely and mechanical receptiveness. It was the sort of pleasure that a cow must have in grazing all day long.

But when all allowance has been made for the omnivorousness of youth, we incline to think that there is probably a considerable amount of truth in the idea that boys' books have to some extent degenerated. They have degenerated probably for the reason that all forms of art degenerate, because they are despised. Probably they were less despised in the days when they still had upon them, as it were, the glamour of the great masters of historical romance. The spirit of Scott and Ainsworth and Fenimore Cooper remained in them even if it was only the reflection of a hundred reflections and each in a distorting mirror.

No one will ever understand the spirit at the back of popular and juvenile literature until he realises one fact, that a large amount of it is the result of that enthusiasm of the young reader which makes him wish to hear more and more about certain heroes, and read more and more of certain types of books. He dowers the creatures of fiction with a kind of boyish immortality. He is not surprised if Dick Deadshot or Jack Harkaway renews his youth through a series of volumes which reaches further than the length of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. These books have the vital philosophy of youth, a philosophy in which death does not exist, except, indeed, as an external and picturesque incident which happens to villains.

The serious student of this class of books and papers will go on to observe that a very large mass of such works has arisen directly out of the interest taken in some of the creations of great masters. An irresponsible writer for boys early in the century continued the adventures of Pickwick. An interminable book of Oriental adventure which we read in our boyhood was avowedly a supplement to the Arabian Nights, and mingled Aladdin, Sinbad, and Ali Baba in one inexhaustible tale. To take a more vulgar example, it is said that “Ally Sloper” is simply an infinitely degraded version of Mr. Micawber; the literary zoologist will trace the same rudimentary organs, the hat, the tie, and the bald head. All this amounts to one of the great laws of the question, the fact that the youthful mind takes hold of certain figures, insists upon them, tears them, as it were, out of the covers of the story, and could follow their adventures in any number of day dreams. Hence one of the essential qualities of this cheap literature — its astonishing voluminousness. A library keeping a record of it would need a dome vaster than the Bodleian.

From this, as we have said, it may be inferred that there is likely enough to have been some decadence of late years, since we are becoming further and further removed from the great historical novelists, who left a kind of glow upon all historic fiction. New literary fashions have arisen, but they are scarcely likely to be imitated in the literature of boys. No publisher has yet brought out with gaudy-coloured illustrations “The Further Adventures of Jude the Obscure”. No penny dreadfuls have been devoted to what eventually happened to Pelleas and Melisande. And in this manner we reach once more the inevitable conclusion about debased forms of art; that they are debased because they are not respected. Everything in the world, from a child to a form of fiction, will be bad until we consent to treat it as good. And of all forms of literature in the world, the one most grossly neglected, from an artistic point of view, is the boys’ book of adventure.

It is a very peculiar fact, that while the educated middle-class at the present day expends infinite money and trouble upon surrounding the child with the noblest works of art and literature, the boy is in this matter treated as if he were a half-witted and inconsiderable savage. The wretched infant of four years old is expected to drink in the verses of Stevenson and the decorative curves of Walter Crane. But when he has imbibed this atmosphere, when his aesthetic hunger has by hypothesis been aroused, when his mind has developed with the rapid development of boyhood, he is suddenly put off with books and papers which are not literature at all. A child's love for what is pretty is sedulously cultivated as the dawn of an aesthetic sense, but no one seems to realise that a boy's love of adventure is another aesthetic sense quite equally noble and appropriate. A child's love of colour is treated as a spiritual thing, a sort of hint of heaven, but a boy's love of adventure is spoken of as if it were a mere brute appetite, excusable in a growing lad. If a child says, "I like the pretty flowers", he is applauded for his poetic instinct, but if a boy says, "I like a story about pirates", he is treated as if he had asked for another slice of pork.

As long as this view continues there can be no worthy school of adventurous fiction. It must be realised that both the child's love of the pretty and the boy's love of the bold are sound and admirable artistic instincts. Neither of them shows that the individual is a cherub who cannot be long for this world, but both of them show that he is a well-equipped and healthy human soul. The child in the fairy-tale is canonised for running after a butterfly. The boy in the penny dreadful is denounced for running away to sea. But the sea is more beautiful than any butterflies.

If, then, we are agreed that the first need of the problem is to understand once and for all that the love of adventure is not a temporary savagery to be satisfied, but an essential artistic tendency to be crowned and brought to consummation, it cannot but seriously affect our view of boys' literature as a whole. We want to realise that the instinct of day dream and adventure is a high spiritual and moral instinct, that it requires neither dilution nor excuse, that it has been the mother of all great travellers and missionaries and knights errant and the patroness of all the brave. The one essential of a writer for boys is that he should not write down to them. He should rather write up, arduously and reverently, as well he may, to the mysterious spirit of youth.

THE OUTLINE OF LIBERTY

There is a quality needed today for the spread of all truth, and especially religious truth, which is very simple and vivid, but which I find it very difficult to fit with a word. So many words have become catchwords.

I suppose that our critics, in their learned way, would have recourse to the little-known Greek word paradox, if I were simply to say that they are not quite broad-minded enough to be Catholics. In their own jargon, being broad-minded so often means being blank-minded.

If I were to say that they suffer from a lack of imagination, they might suppose (heaven help them) that I meant that what we believe is all imaginary. Nor indeed do either of these two terms define the definite thing I intend. It would be nearer the mark if I said that they cannot see all round a subject; or that they cannot see anything against the background of everything else.

The learned man, of what I may call the Cambridge type, is like a man who should spend years in making a minute ordnance map of the country between Cork and Dublin, and never discover that Ireland is an island. It is not a question of understanding something difficult. It is rather a question of opening the mind wide enough to understand something easy. It is not to be attained by years of labour; it is more likely to be attained in a moment of laziness; when the map-maker who has long been poring over the map with his nose close to Cork, may lean back for a moment and suddenly see Ireland. It is much more difficult to get such men to lean back for a moment and see Christendom.

The Catholic Church is always being defined in terms of the particular quarrel that she happens to have with particular people in a particular place. Because the Protestant sects in Northern Europe, for one or two centuries, disapproved of rosaries and incense and candles and confessional boxes, there was a widespread impression that Roman Catholics were simply people who liked confessional boxes and candles and incense and rosaries. But that is not what a Manichee or a Moslem or a Hindoo or an ancient Greek philosopher would say about Roman Catholics.

Buddhists have incense; Moslems have something very like rosaries; and hardly any healthy heathen human being on earth could conceive why anybody should have any particular hatred of candles. Buddhists would say that Catholics were people who insisted on a personal God and personal immortality. Moslems would say that Catholics were people who believed that God had a Son who assumed human form, and who did not think it idolatrous that He should afterwards assume pictorial or sculptural form. Every group in the world would have its own angle or aspect; and the Protestant would hardly recognise the same object which he had only considered in his own aspect.

Nevertheless, each of these, taken in itself, is in a sense narrow; and to dwell upon it narrows the issue. What we want is to have some general impression of the whole background of humanity, especially of heathen humanity, against which we can see the outline of the object, as, in the map of Ireland, the island is seen against the sea.

Now the real background of all that human heathenry is rather a grey background. There are particular patches, which happen to be close to us in place and time, which have been freshly painted in various ways. So freshly painted that nobody knows yet how long the colours will last. As the Imperialists wanted to paint the map red, so the Internationalists and Idealists now want to paint the map pink. But none of them has painted half so much of the map anything as they, in their optimism, have sometimes supposed. And even in the areas where a sort of official optimism prevails, as in parts of America, there is a great deal more of the old ordinary melancholy of men than anyone could gather from newspaper headlines or political programmes. And I believe that the most general philosophy of men left to themselves, and perhaps the most practical illustration of the Fall of Man, is a vague impression of Fate.

If a man will really talk to the poor, in almost any country, I think he will generally find that they are either Christians or fatalists. This fatalism is more or less varied or complicated, of course, in various places by various mythologies or philosophies. It will generally be found that the mythology is a sort of poetry, embodying a worship of the wild forces of nature; a nature-worship which, when broken up, is called polytheism, and, when united, is called pantheism. But there is sometimes very little left of theism in pantheism.

Then there are whole districts where there is true theism which is, nevertheless, permeated with a mood of fatalism. That, I suppose, is true at least of large areas of Islam. Then there are what may be called the philosophies of resignation, which probably cover equally large areas of the ancient civilisation of Asia.

We need not insist here on any controversial points against or even about these things. But I take it as certain that all those notes of recurrence and cosmic rhythm, and a cycle beginning and ending with itself, which repeat themselves so frequently in connection with Buddhism and Brahminism and Theosophy, are in a general sense allied to an almost impersonal submission to an ultimately impersonal law. That is the tone of the whole thing; and, as I have said, the tone or tint of it strikes us as rather grey; or at least, neutral and negative.

It is the same with almost all we know of the pagan myths and metaphysics of antiquity. It is a modern slander on pagans to represent paganism as almost identical with pleasure. But anyhow, nobody acquainted with the great Greek and Latin literature, even in the smallest degree, will ever dream of identifying paganism with optimism. It would at least be a great deal nearer the truth to say that there, as everywhere else, the fundamental character of paganism is pessimism. But in any case, it can quite fairly be said that it is fatalism.

Upon this grey background there is one splash or star of silver or gold; a thing like a flame. It is quite exceptional and extraordinary. Of its many extraordinary characters, this is perhaps the chief; that it proclaims Liberty. Or, as the only true meaning of that term, it proclaims Will. In a strange voice, as of a trumpet from heaven, it tells a strange story, of which the very essence is that it is made up of Will, or of a free divergence of Wills.

Will made the world; Will wounded the world; the same Divine Will gave to the world for the second time its chance; the same human Will can for the last time make its choice. That is the real outstanding peculiarity, or eccentricity, of the peculiar sect called Roman Catholics. And if anyone objects to my limiting so large a conception to Roman Catholics, I willingly agree that there are many who value it so much that they obviously ought to be Roman Catholics. But if anyone says that it is not in fact and history bound up with the Faith of Roman Catholicism, it is enough to refer him to the history and the facts.

Nobody especially emphasised this spiritual liberty until the Church was established. People began instantly to question this spiritual liberty, when the Church began to be broken up. The instant a breach, or even a crack, had been made in the dyke of Catholicism, there poured through it the bitter sea of Calvinism, or in other words, of a very cruel form of fatalism. Since that time, it has taken the much duller form of Determinism. This sadness and sense of bondage is so general to mankind that it immediately made its appearance, when the special spiritual message of liberty was silenced or interrupted anywhere. Wherever that message is heard, men think and talk in terms of will and choice; and they see no meaning in any of the philosophies of fate, whether desperate or resigned.

It is idle to talk to a Catholic about optimism or pessimism; for he himself shall decide whether the universe shall be, for him, the best or the worst of all possible worlds. It is useless to tell him that he might be more at one with the universal life as a Buddhist or a pantheist; for he knows that, in that sense, he might be more at one with the universal life as a turnip or a tree. It is his whole hope and glory that he is not at one with the universal life; but stands out from it, an exception and even a miracle.

There is a great passage in the “Paradiso” of Dante, which I wish I knew enough Italian to appreciate or enough English to translate. But I would commend it to those who may fancy that my emphasis on this exceptional quality is a mere modern whitewashing of a medieval superstition; and especially to those who have been taught in laborious detail, by learned and very stupid historians, to regard medievalism as narrow and enchained. For it runs roughly like this:

The mightiest gift that God of his largesse Made in creation, perfect even as He, Most of His substance, and to Him most dear, He gave to the Will and it was Liberty.

A NOTE ON NUDISM

There is one little habit of some of the most intelligent modern writers against which I should like to protest. It consists of flatly refusing to state somebody else's opinion as it stands; and consider it on its own merits. The modern writer must always assume that it is a choice between his own extreme opinion and something at the other extreme. I found a curious example in a very excellent book by Miss Cicely Hamilton called Modern Germanies. She was referring to the sect of the Nudists, who have revived the ancient heresy of the Adamites and go about without any clothes, taking themselves very seriously; as if nakedness were a new invention. I think Miss Hamilton really hesitated a little, being moved by her instincts as a civilised person to laugh, and by her instincts as a progressive person to applaud. What then does she do? She immediately repeats the old story that in Paul et Virginie, the very artificial sentimental novel of the eighteenth century, the heroine is drowned because she refuses to take off her clothes. She then adds that "if she has to choose" between Virginie and some German flapper who finds it more comfortable to have no clothes to flap, she will choose the latter. But, first of all, why should she "have to choose"? Why should she not consider Nudism on its own merits; and the normal view of clothes, among sane people, also on its own merits? If I have to judge a drunkard, I will judge him without dragging in the comparison of a mad fakir who deliberately died of thirst in the desert. If I have to judge a miser, I will call him a miser; despite the possible existence of an insane and intoxicated nobleman in Vienna, who poured ten thousand gold coins down a drain. I cannot see why Miss Hamilton should call in one extravagance merely to justify another.

Next, if she really does suppose that normal, traditional or Christian morality are represented by Virginie, she is probably quite wrong. Most Christian authorities would say that her notion of sacrifice came very near to the sin of suicide. For Paul et Virginie was not written in a Christian period but in a very pagan period, when pre-Revolutionary France was in love with the pagan Stoics who did not disapprove of suicide. The story itself is largely founded on an old classical romance. It cannot be taken as typical of modern Christianity, or even of medieval Christianity. It is only fair to remember that in this sense Virginie is a heathen heroine; and Godiva was a Christian heroine.

Lastly, I am not sure I should choose the German flapper, even if I were driven to the choice. We may think a sacrifice is made to a mistaken code of honour; but there is the sacrifice; and there is the honour. We have no reason to suppose that the Nudist even knows what we mean by honour. We know nothing about her, except that she does not know what we mean by dignity. As a plain piece of practical psychology, I think it extremely likely that the poor mistaken maiden, who would die for her dignity, would also die for her country, would die for her friends, would die for her faith or promise, or any worthy obligation. We know nothing about the other woman, except that (like the pig and other animals), she feels more comfortable without clothes. It seems to me an insufficient basis for moral confidence.

CONSULTING THE ENCYCLOPAEDIA

The Historical Student will raise his refined eyebrows if I say that a Catholic is an Encyclopaedist. The name of Encyclopaedism was given in the eighteenth century to the most coldly eager of the enemies of Catholicism. And even now it is generally believed that we bow submissively before the storm of the ephemeral Encyclical, but dare not open the scientific and solid Encyclopaedia — which, by the way, is generally at any given moment much more out of date than the Encyclical.

It is none the less true that the Catholic Church presents itself, though on a higher plane and plan, in a certain double character to which perhaps the nearest natural parallel is the use of an encyclopaedia. For it is the test of a good encyclopaedia that it does two rather different things at once. The man consulting it finds the thing he wants; he also finds how many thousand things there are that he does not want. It advises the particular man upon his particular problem, though it were quite a private problem, almost as if it were giving private advice. And the man must be so far touched to some tinge of healthy humility, if it be only the admission that he does not know everything, and must seek outside himself for something. Even if he is so ill-advised as to consult a medical work of reference for the proper proportions of hyoscine for the poisoning of an aunt, he must be so far in a pious and respectful attitude and accepting something upon a sort of authority.

I remember a man who told me he never accepted anything on any sort of authority; I also remember asking him whether he ever consulted Bradshaw, or whether he insisted on travelling by every train first, to see whether it was safe to travel by it. The journey itself might be highly private, the visit to the aunt almost pressingly private, but he would not evolve a railway train entirely out of his private judgment.

But a work of reference works in another way also. It reminds the traveller in the train that there are a good many other trains full of travellers. It reminds the neoethical nephew that there are a good many different words in the dictionary. In his search for hyoscine he will pass carelessly over the honey of Hymettus, and think it needless to dwell on the life of Heliogabalus or the science of hydraulics. And thus he will learn the same lesson in another way; the somewhat difficult lesson that he is nobody except himself.

Those two discoveries commonly combine in a conversion; and this is perhaps the most workable framework in which to state the two chief elements of my own. There was first the relation of Catholicism to my own original and personal problem; and there was a second rather curious and illuminating illustration of the necessity of keeping it in proportion to all the other problems, the problems of all the other people.

Now all the very varied types of people who sooner or later draw near to the Catholic Faith have moved towards it from the most widely different standpoints, across most varying distances, and rejecting or renewing or reshaping the most queerly contrasted types of non-Catholic thought. My own thought, when it was not yet Catholic, was often blasted with the name of Optimist; but it was not quite so bad as that sounds today. It was an attempt to hold on to religion by the thread of thanks for our creation; by the praise of existence and of created things. And the curious part of it is that I found that this piece of private judgment, or private nonsense, was really much more true than I ever thought it was; and yet, if that truth were left to stand alone, it would be a complete falsehood.

For the sake of illustration, or in a rather special sense of illumination, I will take the metaphor of a window; a thing which always had, and still has, an almost weirdly vivid effect on my own imagination. My own original view, which would originally have been an entirely non-Catholic if not anti-Catholic view, might be roughly stated thus. “After all, what could be more mystical or magical than ordinary daylight coming in through an ordinary window? Why should anybody want a new heaven shining on a new earth; why need they dream of strange stars or miraculous flames, or the sun and moon turned to blood and darkness, in order to imagine a portent? The mere fact of existence and experience is a perpetual portent. Why should we ever ask for more?”

There is an old literary joke or game, familiar I think among the transcendental tricks of the Cavalier poets; a game that is called echo verses. It is a sort of punning upon the last syllable of a word; by which Echo is made to answer mockingly the question asked in the line of verse. Thus, to transfer it to a modern topic, the poet might ask, “Say, what high hope is founded on eugenics?” And the obliging echo would answer, “Nix”; or a paean in praise of some Socialist or ex-Socialist statesman would begin with the line, “Labour’s great leader; mighty Democrat”, and end with the repetition, “Rat”.

I am haunted by this parallel in the curious logical answer to my own question; which was at once a repetition and a contradiction and a completion. For it seemed to me that when I asked that question, “Why is not the daylight enough?” the ancient voice of some mystery such as an old religion answered my words merely by repeating them, “Why is not the daylight enough?” And when I said, “Why should not that wonderful white fire, breaking through the window, inspire us every day like an ever-returning miracle?” the echo out of that old crypt or cavern only answered, “Why not indeed?”

And, the more I thought of it, the more I thought that there was the hint of some strange answer in the very fact that I had to ask the question. I had not lost, and I have never lost, the conviction that such primal things are mysterious and amazing; but if they were amazing, why did anybody have to remind us that they were amazing? Why was there, as I had already realised that there certainly was, a sort of daily fight to appreciate the daylight; to which we had to summon all imagination and poetry and the labour of the arts to aid us? If the first imaginative instinct was right, it seemed clearer and clearer that something else was wrong. And as I indignantly denied that there was anything wrong with the window, I eventually concluded that there was something wrong with me.

In this case, the divine dictionary had answered my own personal question as directly and even personally as if the answer had been written for me. It justified the instinct that inspired me to accept the daylight as a divine reality; but it also solved the problem that puzzled me about the difficulty of thus accepting the daylight all day and every day. Creation was of the Creator and declared as good; the power in it could be praised by angels forever and by the sons of God shouting for joy. If we were ourselves only occasionally overheard in the act of shouting for joy, it was because we were only partially or imperfectly the sons of God; not indeed wholly disinherited, but not wholly domesticated. In short, we suffered by the Fall or Original Sin; but it is important to note that this is not an answer to the particular question, except in the form of the more moderate Catholic doctrine, and not the old pessimist Protestant doctrine of the Fall.

This particular problem arose entirely out of the fact that man is imperfect; but not, in the pessimist sense, perfectly imperfect. The whole paradox is in the fact that a part of his mind remains almost perfect; and he can perpetually perceive what he cannot perpetually enjoy. I was as certain that existence is ecstatically more excellent than non-existence as I was that plus two is different from minus two. Only there is a practical psychological difficulty about always going into ecstasies over this fact. Man is not symmetrically unsymmetrical; he is a sort of one-eyed creature ever since he fought a duel with the devil; and the one eye sees the eternal light eternally, while the other has grown tired and blinks or is almost blind. Thus the authority solved this private problem, not by denying the truth of my private judgment, but by adding to it the larger and more general judgment of the Fall.

And then, in the very act of understanding my own little private problem, I understood the public authority which I have compared to an encyclopaedia. Here there were thousands of other private problems solved for thousands of other private persons; masses of them had nothing to do with my own case at all; but one of them turned and confronted my own case in a curious way. I began to realize that it would not do to act as so many of the most brilliant men of my time had acted. It was not enough for a man to value a truth merely because he had picked it up by himself; to take it away with him and turn it into a private system; at the best into a philosophy and at the worst into a sect. He was very proud of answering his own question without the help of an encyclopaedia; but he did not even pretend to answer all the other questions in the encyclopaedia.

Now I felt very strongly that there ought to be answers, not only to all the other questions which all the other people were asking, but also answers to other questions which I should ask myself. And the moment I began to think about these other problems I saw at once that I could not even satisfy myself with the solution of one of those problems. The practical example which occurred to me was this. I said to myself; it is all very well to say that the miracle of daylight coming through a window ought to be enough to make a man dance with joy. But suppose another man uses your argument as a justification for putting innocent men in prison for life, in a cell with one window, and then leaving them to dance. What will become of all your own denunciations of slavery and the oppression of the poor, when that highly practical statesman has founded a new commonwealth on your new creed?

And then I think there spread out before me, like a vast dazzling plan with innumerable details, some vision of the thousand things that have to be interrelated and balanced in Catholic thought; justice as well as joy; liberty as well as light; and I felt certain that the mere proportion of all these things, not the negation of any of them, needed, to harmonize it and hold it steady, a power and a presence mightier than the mind of any mortal man.

IF I HAD ONLY ONE SERMON TO PREACH

If I had only one sermon to preach, it would be a sermon against Pride. The more I see of existence, and especially of modern practical and experimental existence, the more I am convinced of the reality of the old religious thesis; that all evil began with some attempt at superiority; some moment when, as we might say, the very skies were cracked across like a mirror, because there was a sneer in Heaven.

Now the first fact to note about this notion is a rather curious one. Of all such notions, it is the one most generally dismissed in theory and most universally accepted in practice. Modern men imagine that such a theological idea is quite remote from them; and, stated as a theological idea, it probably is remote from them. But, as a matter of fact, it is too close to them to be recognised. It is so completely a part of their minds and morals and instincts, I might almost say of their bodies, that they take it for granted and act on it even before they think of it. It is actually the most popular of all moral ideas; and yet it is almost entirely unknown as a moral idea. No truth is now so unfamiliar as a truth, or so familiar as a fact.

Let us put the fact to a trifling but not unpleasing test. Let us suppose that the reader, or (preferably) the writer, is going into a public-house or some public place of social intercourse; a public tube or tram might do as well, except that it seldom allows of such long and philosophical intercourse as did the old public house. Anyhow, let us suppose any place where men of motley but ordinary types assemble; mostly poor because the majority is poor some moderately comfortable but rather what is snobbishly called common; an average handful of human beings. Let us suppose that the enquirer, politely approaching this group, opens the conversation in a chatty way by saying, “Theologians are of opinion that it was one of the superior angelic intelligences seeking to become the supreme object of worship, instead of finding his natural joy in worshipping, which dislocated the providential design and frustrated the full joy and completion of the cosmos”. After making these remarks the enquirer will gaze round brightly and expectantly at the company for corroboration, at the same time ordering such refreshments as may be ritually fitted to the place or time, or perhaps merely offering cigarettes or cigars to the whole company, to fortify them against the strain. In any case, we may well admit that such a company will find it something of a strain to accept the formula in the above form. Their comments will probably be disjointed and detached; whether they take the form of “Lorlumme” (a beautiful thought slurred somewhat in pronunciation), or even “Gorblimme” (an image more sombre but fortunately more obscure), or merely the unaffected form of “Garn”; a statement quite free from doctrinal and denominational teaching, like our State compulsory education. In short, he who shall attempt to state this theory as a theory to the average crowd of the populace will doubtless find that he is talking in an unfamiliar language. Even if he states the matter in the simplified form, that Pride is the worst of the Seven Deadly Sins, he will only produce a vague and rather unfavourable impression that he is preaching. But he is only preaching what everybody else is practising; or at least is wanting everybody else to practise.

Let the scientific enquirer continue to cultivate the patience of science. Let him linger — at any rate let me linger — in the place of popular entertainment whatever it may be, and take very careful note (if necessary in a note-book) of the way in which ordinary human beings do really talk about each other. As he is a scientific enquirer with a note-book, it is very likely that he never saw any ordinary human beings before. But if he will listen carefully, he will observe a certain tone taken towards friends, foes and acquaintances; a tone which is, on the whole, creditably genial and considerate, though not without strong likes and dislikes. He will hear abundant if sometimes bewildering allusion to the well-known weaknesses of Old George; but many excuses also, and a certain generous pride in conceding that Old George is quite the gentleman when drunk, or that he told the policeman off proper. Some celebrated idiot, who is always spotting winners that never win, will be treated with almost tender derision; and, especially among the poorest, there will be a true Christian pathos in the reference to those who have been “in trouble” for habits like burglary and petty larceny. And as all these queer types are called up like ghosts by the incantation of gossip, the enquirer will gradually form the impression that there is one kind of man, probably only one kind of man, perhaps, only one man, who is really disliked. The voices take on quite a different tone in speaking of him; there is a hardening and solidification of disapproval and a new coldness in the air. And this will be all the more curious because, by the current modern theories of social or anti-social action, it will not be at all easy to say why he should be such a monster; or what exactly is the matter with him. It will be hinted at only in singular figures of speech, about a gentleman who is mistakenly convinced that he owns the street; or sometimes that be owns the earth. Then one of the social critics will say, "'E comes in 'ere and 'e thinks 'e's Gawd Almighty." Then the scientific enquirer will shut his note-book with a snap and retire from the scene, possibly after paying for any drinks he may have consumed in the cause of social science. He has got what he wanted. He has been intellectually justified. The man in the pub has precisely repeated, word for word, the theological formula about Satan.

Pride is a poison so very poisonous that it not only poisons the virtues; it even poisons the other vices. This is what is felt by the poor men in the public tavern, when they tolerate the tippler or the tipster or even the thief, but feel something fiendishly wrong with the man who bears so close a resemblance to God Almighty. And we all do in fact know that the primary sin of pride has this, curiously freezing and hardening effect upon the other sins. A man may be very susceptible and in sex matters rather loose; he may waste himself on passing and unworthy passions, to the hurt of his soul; and yet always retain something which makes friendship with his own sex at least possible, and even faithful and satisfying. But once let that sort of man regard his own weakness as a strength, and you have somebody entirely different. You have the Lady-Killer; the most beastly of all possible bounders; the man whom his own sex almost always has the healthy instinct to hate and despise. A man may be naturally slothful and rather irresponsible; he may neglect many duties through carelessness, and his friends may still understand him, so long as it is really a careless carelessness. But it is the devil and all when it becomes a careful carelessness. It is the devil and all when he becomes a deliberate and self-conscious Bohemian, sponging on principle, preying on society in the name of his own genius (or rather of his own belief in his own genius) taxing the world like a king on the plea that he is a poet, and despising better men than himself who work that he may waste. It is no metaphor to say that it is the devil and all. By the same fine old original religious formula, it is all of the devil. We could go through any number of social types illustrating the same spiritual truth. It would be easy to point out that even the miser, who is half-ashamed of his madness, is a more human and sympathetic type than the millionaire who brags and boasts of his avarice and calls it sanity and simplicity and the strenuous life. It would be easy to point out that even cowardice, as a mere collapse of the nerves, is better than cowardice as an ideal and theory of the intellect; and that a really imaginative person will have more sympathy with men who, like cattle, yield to what they know is panic, than with a certain particular type of prig who preaches something that he calls peace. Men hate priggishness because it is the driest form of pride.

Thus there is a paradox in the whole position. The spiritual idea of the evil of pride, especially spiritual pride, was dismissed as a piece of mysticism not needed by modern morality, which is to be purely social and practical. And, as a fact, it is very specially needed because the morality is social and practical. On the assumption that we need care for nothing except making other human beings happy, this is quite certainly the thing that will make them unhappy. The practical case against pride, as a mere source of social discomfort and discord, is if possible even more self-evident than the more mystical case against it, as a setting up of the self against the soul of the world. And yet though we see this thing on every side in modern life, we really hear very little about it in modern literature and ethical theory. Indeed, a great deal of modern literature and ethics might be meant specially for the encouragement of spiritual pride. Scores of scribes and sages are busy writing about the importance of self-culture and self-realisation; about how every child is to be taught to develop his personality (whatever that may be); about how every man must devote himself to success, and every successful man must devote himself to developing a magnetic and compelling personality; about how every man may become a superman (by taking Our Correspondence Course) or, in the more sophisticated and artistic type of fiction, how one specially superior superman can learn to look down on the mere mob of ordinary supermen, who form the population of that peculiar world. Modern theory, as a whole, is rather encouraging egoism. But we need not be alarmed about that. Modern practice, being exactly like ancient practice, is still heartily discouraging it. The man with the strong magnetic personality is still the man whom those who know him best desire most warmly to kick out of the club. The man in a really acute stage of self-realisation is a no more pleasing object in the club than in the pub. Even the most enlightened and scientific sort of club can see through the superman; and see that he has become a bore. It is in practice that the philosophy of pride breaks down; by the test of the moral instincts of man wherever two or three are gathered together; and it is the mere experience of modern humanity that answers the modern heresy.

There is indeed another practical experience, known to us all, even more pungent and vivid than the actual unpopularity of the bully or the bumptious fool. We all know that there is a thing called egoism that is much deeper than egotism. Of all spiritual diseases it is the most intangible and the most intolerable. It is said to be allied to hysteria; it sometimes looks as if it were allied to diabolic possession. It is that condition in which the victim does a thousand varying things from one unvarying motive of a devouring vanity; and sulks or smiles, slanders or praises, conspires and intrigues or sits still and does nothing, all in one unsleeping vigilance over the social effect of one single person. It is amazing to me that in the modern world, that chatters perpetually about psychology and sociology, about the tyranny with which we are threatened by a few feeble-minded infants, about alcoholic poisoning and the treatment of neurotics, about half a hundred things that are near the subject and never on the spot — it is amazing that these moderns really have so very little to say about the cause and cure of a moral condition that poisons nearly every family and every circle of friends. There is hardly a practical psychologist who has anything to say about it that is half so illuminating as the literal exactitude of the old maxim of the priest; that pride is from hell. For there is something awfully vivid and appallingly fixed, about this madness at its worst, that makes that short and antiquated word seem much more apt than any other. And then, as I say, the learned go wandering away into discourses about drink or tobacco, about the wickedness of wine glasses or the incredible character of public-houses. The wickedest work in this world is symbolised not by a wine glass but by a looking-glass; and it is not done in public-houses;, but in the most private of all private houses which is a house of mirrors.

The phrase would probably be misunderstood; but I should begin my sermon by telling people not to enjoy themselves. I should tell them to enjoy dances and theatres and joy-rides and champagne and oysters; to enjoy jazz and cocktails and night-clubs if they can enjoy nothing better; to enjoy bigamy and burglary and any crime in the calendar, in preference to this other alternative; but never to learn to enjoy themselves. Human beings are happy so long as they retain the receptive power and the power of reaction in surprise and gratitude to something outside. So long as they have this they have as the greatest minds have always declared, a something that is present in childhood and which can still preserve and invigorate manhood. The moment the self within is consciously felt as something superior to any of the gifts that can be brought to it, or any of the adventures that it may enjoy, there has appeared a sort of self-devouring fastidiousness and a disenchantment in advance, which fulfils all the Tartarean emblems of thirst and of despair.

Difficulties can easily be raised, of course, in any such debate by the accident of words being used in different senses; and sometimes in quite contrary senses. For instance, when we speak of somebody being "proud of" something, as of a man being proud of his wife or a people proud of its heroes, we really mean something that is the very opposite of pride. For it implies that the man thinks that something outside himself is needed to give him great glory; and such a glory is really acknowledged as a gift. In the same way, the word will certainly be found misleading, if I say that the worst and most depressing element in the mixed elements of the present and the immediate future, seems to me to be an element of impudence. For there is a kind of impudence that we all find either amusing or bracing; as in the impudence of the guttersnipe. But there again the circumstances disarm the thing of its real evil. The quality commonly called "cheek" is not an assertion of superiority; but rather a bold attempt to balance inferiority. When you walk up to a very wealthy and powerful nobleman and playfully tip his hat over his eyes (as is your custom) you are not suggesting that you yourself are above all human follies, but rather that you are capable of them, and that he also ought to have a wider and richer experience of them. When you dig a Royal Duke in the waistcoat, in your playful manner, you are not taking yourself too seriously, but only, perhaps, not taking him so seriously as is usually thought correct. This sort of impudence may be open to criticism, as it is certainly subject to dangers. But there is a sort of hard intellectual impudence, which really treats itself as intangible to retort or judgment; and there are a certain number among the new generations and social movements, who fall into this fundamental weakness. It is a weakness; for it is simply settling down permanently to believe what even the vain and foolish can only believe by fits and starts, but what all men wish to believe and are often found weak enough to believe; that they themselves constitute the supreme standard of things. Pride consists in a man making his personality the only test, instead of making the truth the test. It is not pride to wish to do well, or even to look well, according to a real test. It is pride to think that a thing looks ill, because it does not look like something characteristic of oneself. Now in the general clouding of clear and abstract standards, there is a real tendency today for a young man (and even possibly a young woman) to fall back on that personal test, simply for lack of any trustworthy impersonal test. No standard being sufficiently secure for the self to be moulded to suit it, all standards may be moulded to suit the self. But the self as a self is a very small thing and something very like an accident. Hence arises a new kind of narrowness; which exists especially in those who boast of breadth. The sceptic feels himself too large to measure life by the largest things; and ends by measuring it by the smallest thing of all. There is produced also a sort of subconscious ossification; which hardens the mind not only against the traditions of the past, but even against the surprises of the future. Nil admirari becomes the motto of all nihilists; and it ends, in the most complete and exact sense, in nothing.

If I had only one sermon to preach, I certainly could not end it in honour, without testifying to what is in my knowledge the salt and preservative of all these things. This is but one of a thousand things in which I have found the Catholic Church to be right, when the whole world is perpetually tending to be wrong; and without its witness, I believe that this secret, at once a sanity and a subtlety, would be almost entirely forgotten among men. I know that I for one had hardly heard of positive humility until I came within the range of Catholic influence; and even the things that I love most, such as liberty and the island poetry of England, had in this matter lost the way, and were in a fog of self-deception. Indeed there is no better example of the definition of pride than the definition of patriotism. It is the noblest of all natural affections, exactly so long as it consists of saying, “May I be worthy of England.” It is the beginning of one of the blindest forms of Pharisaism when the patriot is content to say, “I am an Englishman.” And I cannot count it an accident that the patriot has generally seen the flag as a flame of vision, beyond and better than himself, in countries of the Catholic tradition, like France and Poland and Ireland; and has hardened into this heresy of admiring merely his own breed and bone and inherited type, and himself as a part of it, in the places most remote from that religion, whether in Berlin or Belfast. In short, if I had only one sermon to preach, it would be one that would profoundly annoy the congregation, by bringing to their attention the permanent challenge of the Church. If I had only one sermon to preach, I should feel specially confident that I should not be asked to preach another.

IF DON JOHN OF AUSTRIA HAD MARRIED MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS

Why is it that the world’s most famous love story, after the archetypal story of Adam and Eve, is the story of Antony and Cleopatra? I for one should answer, to begin with, because of the solid truth of the story of Adam and Eve. I have often wondered whether, when the moderns have done playing with that story, burlesquing it, and turning it upside down and tacking on a modern moral like a new tail, or expanding it into an evolutionary fantasia that nobody can make head or tail of, it will ever occur to anybody to see bow sensible it is, exactly as it stands. Even if it is an old fable, the old fable is much truer with the old moral. Christians are not constrained, and least of all Christians of my own confession, to treat Genesis with the heavy verbalism of the Puritan — the Hebraiser who knows no Hebrew. But the curious thing is that the more literally we take it the truer it is; and even if it were materialised and modernised into a story of Mr. and Mrs. Jones, the old moral would still be the sound one. A man naked and with nothing of his own is given by a friend the free run of all the fruits and flowers of a very beautiful estate; and only asked to promise that he will not interfere with one particular fruit-tree. If we all talk till we are as old as Methuselah, the moral remains the same for any honourable man. If he breaks his word he is a cad; if he says, “I broke my word because I believe in breaking all limitations and expanding into infinite progress and evolution, he is ten times more of a cad; and has, moreover, become a bore as well as a bounder. But it is this modern suggestion, that Man was right to be bored with Eden and to demand evolution (otherwise mere change), that is very relevant to the question I have asked about Antony and Cleopatra. It is also very relevant to the question I am going to ask about two other famous figures in history: a woman and a man.

For upon this modern theory the Fall really was the Fall; for it was the first action that had only tedium as a motive. Progress began in boredom; and, heaven knows, it sometimes seems likely to end in it. And no wonder; for of all utter falsehoods the most false, I think, is this notion that men can be happy in movement, when nothing but dullness drives them on from behind. Children, and such happy people, can go on from something they really like to something they will like more. But if ever there was a whisper that might truly come from the devil, it is the suggestion that men can despise the beautiful things they have got, and only delight in getting new things because they have not got them. It is obvious that, on that principle, Adam will tire of the tree just as he has tired of the garden. "It is enough that there is always a beyond"; that is, there is always something else to get tired of. All progress based on that mood is truly a Fall; man did fall, does fall, and we can today see him falling. It is the great progressive proposition; that he must seek only for enjoyment because he has lost the power to enjoy.

Now this shadow of failure on all fame and civilisation which the agnostic poet preferred to call "the something that infects the world," and I shall cause general pain by calling Original Sin, does manifest itself markedly in the sort of historical legends that exist. But I would urge here that it appears in the historical legends that do not exist. I refer especially to that grand historical episode of the heroic honeymoon, otherwise called the marriage of pure minds, which I study here as closely as is possible in a case that does not exist. It is a remarkable fact, when we consider how much happiness love has doubtless given to mankind as a whole, that mankind has never pointed to any great historical example of a hero and a heroine wedded in a way entirely worthy of them; of a great man and a great woman united by a great love that was entirely supreme and satisfying, as in the tradition of the gigantic loves of Eden. Anybody who imagines that I am talking pessimism, about ordinary people in love, will impute to me the very reverse of what I mean. Millions of people have been happy in love and marriage, in the ordinary way of human happiness; but then that precisely consists in a certain commonsense admission of original sin; in humility and pardon and taking things as they come. But there has not been any example on the grand scale, of a perfect marriage — that has remained in human memory like a great monument. All those monuments, though often of the purest marble, hewn from the loftiest mountain, have very clearly across them the crack from the earthquake in the beginning. The noblest knight of the Middle Ages, St. Louis, was less happy in his marriage than in all other relations. Dante did not marry Beatrice; he lost his love in infancy and found her again in Paradise or in a dream. Nelson was a great lover, but we cannot say that his love made him more great, since it made him do in Naples the only mean action of his life. These historic examples have become legends or traditions; but they have become tragic traditions. And the central literary tradition of all is that typically tragic one I have named, in which even perfect love was whimsically imperfect, and certainly suffered by very imperfect people; in which the hero learned no lesson except delay; in which the heroine inspired nothing except defeat; in which romance made him less than a Caesar and has unkindly compared her to a snake; in which the man was weakened by love and the woman by lovers. Men have taken Antony and Cleopatra as the perfect love story, precisely because it is the imperfect love story. It mirrors the thwarting, the unworthiness, the disproportion which they have felt as spoiling so many splendid passions and divine desires; and mirrors them all the more truly because the mirror is cracked. I imagine that poets will never leave off writing about Antony and Cleopatra; and all they write will be in the mood of that great French poet of our own time, who describes the Roman warrior gazing into the unfathomable eyes of the Egyptian queen, and seeing beneath a spinning and sparkling light the eddies of a vast sea, filled with the rout of all his ships.

I have here dared to call up out of the dust another warrior, whose destiny turned also with the topsails and high poops of the galleys; and another woman, whose legend also has been sometimes twisted into the legend of a snake. There was never any doubt about the beautiful colours or graceful curves of the snake; but, in fact, the woman was not a snake, but very much of a woman; even by the account of those who call her a wicked woman. And the man was not only a warrior, but a conqueror; and his great ships sweep through history not merely to defeat, but to a high deliverance, in which he did not lose the empire, but saved the world. Whatever else we may think of the woman, none can doubt where her heart would have been in that battle, or what sort of song of praise she would have sent up after that victory. There was much about her that was militant, though her life might well have sickened her of militancy; there was much about him that was sensitive and sympathetic with that wider world of culture for which her soul sickened till she died. They were made for each other; they were in fact the heroic lovers, or perfect human pair, for whom we have looked elsewhere in history in vain. There was only one small defect in their purple and impassioned love story; and that is that they never met.

In truth, this dream began to drift through my mind when I first read a parenthetical remark by Andrew Lang, in a historical study about Philip of Spain. Referring to the King’s half-brother, the famous Don John of

Austria, Lang remarked casually: “He intended to carry off Mary Queen of Scots,” and added caustically: “He was incapable of fear.” Of course nobody is incapable of fear. He was certainly, in the common sense, incapable of obeying fear: but, if I understand the type, he was not incapable of enjoying fear as an element in a mystery like that of love. It is exactly because love has lost that slight touch of fear, that it has become in our time so flat and flippant and vulgar; when it has not become laboriously biological, not to say bestial. And Mary was dangerous as well as in danger; that heart-shaped face looking out of the ruff in so many pictures was like a magnet, a talisman, a terrible jewel. There was, even then, in the idea of eloping with the tragic yet attractive Franco-Scottish princess, all the ancient savour of the romances about delivering a lady from dragons, or even disenchanting her out of the shape of a dragon. But though the idea was romantic, it was also in a sense what is now called psychological; for it exactly answered the personal needs of two very extraordinary personalities.

If ever there was a man who ought to have rounded off his victorious career by capturing something more human and spiritual and satisfying than wreaths of laurel or flags of defeated foes, it was Don John of Austria. Because his actual historical life rises on a wave of conquest in relation to these things, and then sinks again into something less epical and simple, his life has something of the appearance of an anti-climax; and reads like a mere stale maxim that all victories are vanities. He tried to crown his chief exploit by founding a kingdom of his own, and was prevented by the jealousy of his brother; he then went, somewhat wearily, I imagine, as the representative of the same brother to the Flemish fields laid waste by the wars of the Dutch and the Duke of Alva. He set out to be more merciful and magnanimous than the Duke of Alva; but he died in a net or tangle of policies; of which the only touch of poetry was a suggestion of poison.

But in that broad and golden dawn of the Renaissance, full of classical legends, carrying off Mary Stuart would have been like carrying off Helen of Troy. In that red sunset of the old chivalric romance (for the sunrise and the sunset were both in that bewildering sky) it would have seemed a magnificent materialisation of one of those strange and stately public love affairs, or knightly services, which preserved something of the Courts of Love and the pageant of the Troubadours; as when Rudel publicly pledged himself to an unknown lady in a castle in the east, almost as distant as a castle east of the sun; or the sword of Bayard sent across the mountains its remote salute to Lucretia. That one of these great loves of the great should actually be achieved in the grand style, that, I fancy, would have been a wildly popular episode in that epoch. And to the career of Don John it would have given a climax and a clue of meaning which its merely military successes could not give; and handed his name down in history and (what is much more important) in legend and literature, as a happier Antony married to a nobler Cleopatra. And when he looked into her eyes he would not have seen only bright chaos and the catastrophe of Actium, the ruin of his ships and his hopes of an imperial throne; but rather the flying curve and crescent of the Christian ships, sweeping to the rescue of the Christian captives, and blazed upon their golden sails the sunburst of Lepanto.

The converse is also true. If ever there was a woman who was manifestly meant, destined, created, and as it were crying aloud to be carried off by Don John of Austria, or some such person, it was Mary Queen of Scots. If ever there was a woman who went to seed for want of meeting any sort of man who was anything like her equal, it was she. The tragedy of her life was not that she was abnormal, but that she was normal. It was the crowd all round her that was abnormal. There is almost a sort of antic allegory, in that sense, in such accidents as the fact that Rizzio had a hump and Bothwell some sort of a squint. If her story seems now to be steeped in morbidity, it was because the mob was morbid. Unfortunately for this ill-fated queen, she was not morbid. It is the other characters, each in his own way, which pass before us in misshapen outlines like the dwarfs and lunatics in some tropic tragedy of Ford or Webster, dancing round a deserted queen. And, by a final touch, all these ungainly figures seem more tolerable than the one that is externally elegant, the hollow doll, Darnley; just as a handsome waxwork can seem more uncanny than an ugly man. In that sense she had seen handsome men and ugly men and strong men and clever men; but they were all half-men; like the hideous cripples imagined by Flaubert, living in their half-houses with their half-wives and half-children. She never met a complete man; and Don John was very complete. In that sense she had been given many things; the crown of Scotland, the prospect of the crown of France; the prospect of the crown of England. She had been given everything except fresh air and the sunlight treatment; and all that is typified by the great ships with their golden castles and their leaping flags, that go forth to meet the winds of the world.

We know why Mary Stuart was killed. She was not killed for having killed her husband, even if she had killed her husband; and recent study of the Casket Letters suggests that her enemies are more clearly convicted of forgery than she was ever convicted of murder. She was not killed for trying to kill Elizabeth, even if the whole story of trying to kill Elizabeth was not a fiction employed by those who were trying to kill Mary. She was not killed for being beautiful; that is one of the many popular slanders on poor Elizabeth. She was killed for being in good health. Perhaps she was the only person who was ever condemned and executed merely for being in good health. The legend which represented Elizabeth as a lioness and Mary as a sort of sickly snake is largely abandoned; anyhow, it is the very reverse of the fact. Mary was very vigorous; a strong rider, and as a dancer almost ready to outrun the Modern Girl. Curiously enough, her contemporary portraits do not convey much of her charm, but do convey a great deal of her vigour. But, as anyone may have noticed in the animal spirits of some of the finest actresses, vigour has sometimes a great deal to do with charm. Now it was essential to the policy of Cecil, and the oligarchs rich with the loot of the old religion, that Mary should die for Elizabeth, and Mary, despite her misfortunes, did not show the smallest disposition to die. Elizabeth, on the other hand, was still dying rather than still living. And when the Catholic heir inherited, it might go ill with the Protestant lords. They therefore applied to Mary, at Fotheringay, one of the sharpest possible remedies for good health, which has seldom been known to fail.

Her energy, which had thus brought her to her death, had also brought her through her life; and may be the key to many of the riddles of her life. It may be that her repeated ill-luck in marriage embittered her more than it might a woman less normal and elemental; and that the very levities, which led to her being painted as a harlot or a vampire, sprang from her primary fitness to be a mother and a wife. It may be (for all I know) that a fairly healthy person, in such a horrible experience, might have wasted her natural instincts on some violent adventurer like Bothwell; those things are always possible; but I confess I could never see that in this case they were necessary. I have often fancied that the alliance may have been more politic, and even cynical, than appeared to that fine romantic novelist, the forger of the Casket Letters. Or it might have been surrender to a sort of blackmail; it might have been many things. Anyhow, being surrounded by brutes, she chose the best brute; though he is always represented as the worst. He was the only one of them who was a man as well as a brute; and a Scotsman as well as a man. He at least never betrayed her to Elizabeth; and all the others did nothing else. He kept the borders of her kingdom against the English like a good subject and a normal soldier; and she might very well have thrown herself under his protection for that alone. But whether or no she sought satisfaction in such a marriage, I am sure that she never found satisfaction in it; I am sure she found only a new phase of the long degradation of living with her inferiors.

There was always in her heart a hunger for civilisation. It is an appetite not easily appreciated now, when people are so over-civilised that they can only have a hunger for barbarism. But she loved culture as the Italian artists of the previous century had loved it; as something not only beautiful but bright and shining and new; like Leonardo's first sketches of flying-machines or the full revelations of perspective and light. She was the Renaissance chained up like a prisoner; just as Don John was the Renaissance roaming the world like a pirate. This was, of course, the perfectly simple explanation of her frequent and friendly toleration of a hunchback like Rizzio and a young lunatic like Chastelard. They were Italy and France; they were music and letters; they were singing-birds from the South who had happened to perch on her window-sill. If there are still any historians who suppose that they were anything more to her than that, especially in the case of the Italian secretary, I can only say that such learned old gentlemen must be pretty much on the moral and mental level of Darnley and his company of cut-throats. Even if she was a wicked woman, there is no sense in supposing that she was not an intelligent woman, or that she never wished to turn from her laborious and life-long wickedness for a little intelligent conversation. The apology for my own (somewhat belated) experiment in matchmaking is that she might have been very different, when married to a man who was quite as brave as Bothwell and quite as intelligent as Rizzio, and, in a more practical and useful fashion, at least as romantic as Chastelard.

But we must not be romantic; that is, we must not concern ourselves with the real feelings of real and recognisable human beings. It is not allowed. We must now sternly turn our attention to scientific history; that is, to certain abstractions which have been labelled The Elizabethan Settlement, the Union, the Reformation, and the Modern World. I will leave the Romantics, those unpresentable Bohemians (with whom, of course, I would not be seen for worlds), to decide at what date and crisis they would like Don John finally to fulfil his design; whether his shining ship is to appear in the wide waters of the Forth as the mad mob in Edinburgh is waving scurrilous scrolls and banners before the window of the Queen; or, on the contrary, a dark boat with a solitary figure is to slide across the glassy stillness of Loch Leven; or a courier hot with haste in advance of a new army hurl a new challenge into the bickering parleys of Carberry, or a herald emblazoned with God knows what eagles and castles and lions (and presumably a bar sinister) blow a trumpet before the barred portals of Fotheringay. I leave that to them; they know all about it. I am an earnest and plodding student of the dry scientific details of history; and we really must consider the possible effect on such details as England, Scotland, Spain, Europe, and the world. We must suppose, for the sake of argument, that Don John was at least sufficiently strong to assert Mary's claim to sovereignty in Scotland to begin with; and, despite the unpleasant moralising of the mob in Edinburgh, I think such a restoration would have been generally successful in Scotland. Professor Phillimore used to say that the tragedy of Scotland was that she had the Reformation without the Renaissance. And I certainly think that, while Mary and the southern prince were discussing Plato and Pico della Mirandola, John Knox would have found himself a little out of his depth. But on the assumption of popular rulers and a strong Spanish backing, which is the essence of this fantasy, I should say that a people like the Scots would have gobbled up the strong meat of the Revival of Learning quicker than anybody else. But in any case, there is another point to be considered. If the Scots did not figure prominently in the Renaissance, they had, in their own way, figured most brilliantly in the Middle Ages. Glasgow was one of the oldest universities; Bruce was counted the fourth knight in Christendom; and Scotland, not England, continued the tradition of Chaucer. The chivalrous side of the regime would surely have awakened noble memories, even in that ignoble squabble. I must here unfortunately omit a very fine chapter from the unpublished Romance, in which the lovers ride down to Melrose (if necessary by moonlight) to the reputed resting-place of the Heart of Bruce; and recall (in ringing phrases) how Spanish and Scottish spears had once charged side by side upon the Saracen, and hurled far ahead, like a bolt above the battle, the heart of a Scottish King. This fine piece of prose must not delay us, however, from facing the next fact; which is that Mary, once safe, would survive as the Queen of England as well as Scotland. It is enough to say that medieval memories might have awakened in the North; and the Scots might even have remembered the meaning of Holyrood.

Don John died trying to keep his temper with Dutch Calvinists, about ten years before the affair of the Armada; and, much as I admire him, I am glad he did. I do not want my individual dream or romance, about the rescue and elopement of Mary Stuart, mixed up with that famous international collision, in which as an Englishman I am bound to sympathise with England and as an Anti-Imperialist with the smaller nation. But, it may be said, how can an Englishman in any case reconcile himself to a romance that would involve the Elizabethan policy being overthrown by a Spanish prince, the throne occupied by a Scottish queen; or some part at least of the Armada's purposes achieved? To which I answer that such a question recoils ruinously on those who ask it. Let them merely compare what might have happened with what did happen. Was Mary a Scot? We endured one in her son. Was Don John a foreigner? We submitted to one when we expelled the grandson of her son. Mary was as English as James the First. Don John was as English as George the First. The fact is that, whatever else our policy of insular religion (or whatever we call it) may have done, it certainly did not save us from alien immigration, or even from alien invasion. Some may say we could not accept a Spaniard, when we had been recently fighting the Spaniards. But, when we did accept a Dutch prince, we had been recently fighting the Dutch. Blake as well as Drake might complain that his victories had been reversed; and that we had, after all, allowed the broom of Van Tromp to sweep not only the English seas, but the English land. A whole generation before the first George came from Hanover, William of Orange had marched across England with an invading army from Holland. If Don John had really brought an Armada with him (and Armadas are often awkward during elopements) he could hardly have inflicted a heavier humiliation on us than that. But, of course, the truth is that I am sensitive on the point of patriotism; much more sensitive than anybody was in those days. Extreme nationalism is a relatively new religion; and what these people were thinking of was the old sort of religion. It really made a great difference to them that Dutch William was a Calvinist while Don John was a Catholic; and that whatever George the First was (and he was nearly nothing) he was not a Papist. That brings me to a much more vital phase of my vision of what never happened. But those who expect me to break forth into thunders of theological anathema, will here be rather abruptly disappointed. I have no intention, I have no need, to argue here about Luther and Leo and the rights and wrongs of the revolt of new sects in the North. I need not do so, for the simple reason that I do not believe, in the case here imagined, that we should have been primarily concerned about the North. I believe we should have realised instead the enormously important position in the South; and even more so in the East. All eyes would have been turned to a far more central battle of civilisation; and the hero of that battle was Don John of Austria.

It has been remarked, and not untruly, that the Papacy seemed curiously negligent of the northern danger from Protestantism. It was; but chiefly because it was not at all negligent of the eastern danger from Islam. Throughout all that period Pope after Pope issued appeal after appeal to the princes of Europe to combine in defence of all Christendom against the Asiatic attack. They had hardly any response; and only a scratch fleet of their own galleys with some Venetian, Genoese, and others, could be sent to stop the Turk from sweeping the whole Mediterranean. This is the huge historic fact which the northern doctrinal quarrels have concealed; and that is why I am not concerned here with the northern doctrinal quarrels. That age was not the age of the Reformation. It was the age of the last great Asiatic invasion, which very nearly destroyed Europe. About the time the Reformation was beginning, the Turks, in the very middle of Europe, destroyed at a blow the ancient kingdom of Bohemia. About the time the Reformation had finished its work, the hordes out of Asia were besieging Vienna. They were foiled by the stroke of Sobieski the Pole, as a hundred years before by the stroke of Don John of Austria. But they came as near as that to submerging the cities of Europe. It must also be remembered that this last Moslem thrust was really a savage and incalculable thing, compared with the first thrust of Saladin and the Saracens. The high Arab culture of the Crusades had long perished; and the invaders were Tartars and Turks and a rabble from really barbarous lands. It was not the Moors but the Huns. It was not Saladin against Richard or Averroes against Aquinas; it was something much more like the worst and wildest shocker about the Yellow Peril.

I have a great respect for the real virtues and the sane if sleeping virility of Islam. I like that element in it that is at once democratic and dignified; I sympathise with many elements in it which most Europeans (and all

Americans) would call lazy and unprogressive. But when all allowance has been made for these moral merits, of the simpler sort, I defy anybody with a sense of cultural comparison to tolerate the image of Europe of the Renaissance given up to Bashi-Bazouks and the wild Mongol mobs of the decline. But it is almost as bad if we consider only the vetoes of primitive Islam; and most of its virtues were vetoes. When all is said, to the eyes of Mediterranean men especially, there passed across their shining sea merely the shadow of a great Destroyer. What they heard was the voice of Azrael rather than Allah. Theirs was the vision that would have been the background of my dream; and lifted all its nobler figures, English, Spanish, or Scottish, into the altitudes of defiance and martyrdom. The dry wind that drove before it a dust of broken idols was threatening the poised statues of Angelo and Donatello, where they shine on the high places around the central sea; and the sand of the high deserts descended, like moving mountains of dust and thirst and death, on the deep culture of the sacred vines; and the songs and the deep laughter of the vineyards. And above all, those clouds that were closing round them were like the curtains of the harem, from whose corners look out the stony faces of the eunuchs; there spread like a vast shadow over shining courts and closing spaces the silence of the East, and all its dumb compromise with the coarseness of man. These things, above all, were closing in upon that high and thwarted romance of the perfect Knight and Lady, which men of the Christian blood can never attain and never abandon; but which these two alone, perhaps, might have attained and made one flesh.

Historians quarrel about whether the English under Elizabeth preferred the Prayer-Book or the Mass-Book. But surely nobody will quarrel about whether they preferred the Crescent or the Cross. The learned dispute about how England was divided into Catholics and Protestants. But nobody will dispute what England would have felt, when told that the whole world was now desperately divided into Christians and Mohammedans. In short, I think that under this influence England would have simply broadened her mind; even if it were only broadened to take in a big battle instead of a small battle. Of that broader battle, and our best chances in it, Don John of Austria was universally regarded as the incarnation and the uplifted sign. Not only the praise due to heroes, but the flattery inevitably paid to princes, would have carried that triumph before him wherever he went like a noise of trumpets. Everybody would have felt in him both the Renaissance and the Crusade; as those two things are warp and woof in the golden tapestries of Ariosto. Everybody would have felt both the rebirth of Europe and its all-but death. Nor need the praise have come merely from any common flatterers. All good Englishmen could have become good Europeans; I should express my meaning better if I said great Europeans. In all that crowd, perhaps, only Shakespeare could not have been greater. And yet I am not so sure; for he might certainly have been gayer. Whatever his politics were (and I suspect they were much like those of his friend the Catholic Southampton) there is no doubt that his tragedies are eternally twisted and tortured with something like an obsession about usurpation and slain kings and stolen crowns; and all the insecurity of royal and every other right. Nobody knows how his heart, if not his mind, might have expanded in that truly "glorious summer" of a sovereignty which satisfied his sixteenth-century hunger for a heroic and high-hearted sovereign. He at least would not have been indifferent to the significance of the great triumph in the Mediterranean. Supporters of the extreme spiritual insularity have often quoted the great lines in which Shakespeare praised England, as something separate and cut-off by the sea. They rather tend to forget what he really praised her for.

This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings, Feared by their breed and famous by their birth, Renowned for their deeds as far from home, For Christian service and true chivalry, As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's Son.

I really think that the man who wrote those lines would have welcomed the victor of Lepanto almost as warmly as he must have welcomed a Scotch Calvinist who was frightened of a drawn dirk.

About Mary I imagine there would have been no difficulty at all. Mary was the perfectly legitimate heir to the throne of England, which is more than can be said for Elizabeth. The general sense of loyalty to the legitimate sovereign, which was enormously strong in England, would have flowed towards her more freely than towards Elizabeth; because she was a more popular and approachable sort of person. She who had so often, and perhaps too often, kindled love even in the very house of hatred, might surely have been loved sufficiently in a happier household of love enthroned; as in the glowing palace of René of Provence. I see no difficulty about her popularity; but even her husband, whether he were called Consort or King, might surely, to say the least of it, have been as popular as any other king-consort. I will not say he would be more popular than William of Orange; for he could not be less. But the English can be polite to foreigners, even foreign consorts. Tennyson, as Poet Laureate, was struck by the resemblance between Prince Albert and an ideal knight of the Round Table. Ben Jonson, as Poet Laureate, would not have to stretch politeness quite so far, in order to compare Don John to an Arthurian knight. At least nobody could say he was a carpet-knight. But, what is much more important, Britain would have been in another and more real sense back in Arthurian times. It would be defending the whole tradition of Roman culture and Christian morals against heathens and barbarians from the ends of the earth. If that had been fully realised, do you think anyone would have gone about asking whether a good Calvinist ought to be a Supralapsarian or a Sublapsarian? It would no longer be a provincial question of whether some Puritan trooper had knocked the nose off a stone saint in Salisbury Cathedral; it would be a question of whether some dervish out of the desert should dance among the shattered fragments of the Moses of Michelangelo. All normal Christians, if they had understood the peril, would have closed up in defence of Christendom. And England would have got glory in the battle, as she did when that ship with crimson sails carried the English leopards to the storming of Acre.

It might, I fear, have meant a certain amount of hostility to France: the rival of the Spanish-Austrian combination; though even here there are reconciling influences and Mary’s sympathies would always have been with the country of her youth and her most famous poem. But, anyhow, it would not have been like the hostility to France, or rather blind hatred of France, which we did inherit from the victory of the Whigs. It would have been more like the medieval wars with the French, waged by men who were half French themselves. The English conquests in France were a sort of eddy and backwash of the original French conquest in England; the whole business was almost a civil war. For there was more internationalism in medieval war than there is in modern peace. The same was true of the actual wars which did break out between France and Spain; they did not break the inner unity of the Latin culture. Louis the Fourteenth was guilty of a slight exaggeration in saying that the mountains called the Pyrenees have entirely disappeared from the landscape. Many careful tourists have verified their existence and reported the royal error. But there was this truth in it; that the Pyrenees were in every sense a natural division. The Straits of

Dover soon became a very unnatural division. They became a spiritual abyss, not between different patron saints but between different gods; perhaps between different universes. The men who fought at Crecy and Agincourt had the same religion — to disregard. But the men who fought at Blenheim and at Waterloo had this entirely novel feature — that the English had an equal hatred for French religion and for French irreligion. They could not understand the ideals of either side in the great civil war of all civilisation. The limitation was really rather like the Straits of Dover, being both narrow and bleak and dangerous enough to be decisive; bitter as the sea and aptly symbolised by sea-sickness. Perhaps, after all, there was a point in the tale told in our nursery histories — that it was the last Catholic queen who felt the loss of the last French possession, and had “Calais” written on her heart. With her died, perhaps, the last of that spirit which had somewhere in its depths a spiritual Channel Tunnel.

But this linking up of Europe in the Renaissance would have made easier and not harder the linking up of Europe in the Revolution; in the sense of the general Reform that was really rational and necessary in the eighteenth century. It would have been larger and clearer in its tests and ideals, if it had not been anticipated by a mere triumph of the richest aristocrats over the English crown. If England had not become entirely a country of squires, it might have become, like Spain, a country of peasants; or at any rate remained a country of yeomen. It might have stood the siege of commercial exploitation and commercial decline, of mere employment followed by mere unemployment. It might have learned the meaning of equality as well as liberty. I know at least one Englishman who wishes to-day that he were as hopeful about the immediate future of England as about the immediate future of Spain. But in my vision they might have learned from each other and produced, among other things, one prodigious consequence; America would be a very different place.

There was a moment when all Christendom might have clustered together and crystallised anew, under the chemistry of the new culture; and yet have remained a Christendom that was entirely Christian. There was a moment when Humanism had the road straight before it; but, what is even more important, the road also straight behind it. It might have been a real progress, not losing anything of what was good in the past. The significance of two people like Mary Stuart and Don John of Austria is that in them Religion and the Renaissance had not quarrelled; and they kept the faith of their fathers while full of the idea of handing on new conquests and discoveries to their sons. They drew their deep instincts from medieval chivalry without refusing to feed their intellects on the sixteenth-century learning; and there was a moment when this spirit might have pervaded the whole world and the whole Church. There was a moment when religion could have digested Plato as it had once digested Aristotle. For that matter, it might have digested all that is soundest in Rabelais and Montaigne and many others; it might have condemned some things in these thinkers; as it did in Aristotle. Only the shock of the new discoveries could have been absorbed (to a great extent indeed it was absorbed) by the central Christian tradition. What darkened that dawn was the dust and smoke from the struggles of the dogmatising sectaries in Scotland, in Holland, and eventually in England. But for that, on the Continent, the heresy of Jansenism had never so much over-shadowed the splendour of the Counter-Reformation. And England would have gone the way of Shakespeare rather than the way of Milton; which latter degenerated rapidly into the way of Muggleton.

There is perhaps, therefore, something more than a fancy, certainly something more than an accident, in this connection between the two romantic figures and the great turning-point of history. They might really have turned it to the right rather than the left; or at least prevented it from turning too far to the left. The point about Don John of Austria is that, like Bayard and a few others in that transition, he was unmistakably the original medieval knight, with the wider accomplishments and ambitions of the Renaissance added to him. But if we look at some of his contemporaries, as for instance, at Cecil, we see an entirely new type, in which there is no such combination or tradition. A man like Cecil is not chivalrous, does not want to be chivalrous, and (what is most important of all) does not pretend to be chivalrous. Of course there was sham chivalry, as there is a sham of everything; and mean and treacherous medieval men made a false parade of it with pageants and heraldry. But a mean man like Cecil did not make any parade of it, or any pretence of it. So far as he knew or cared, it had gone clean out of the world. Yet in fact it had not gone; and a great rally of it among his foes would still have commanded the natural loyalty of Europeans. That is what makes this story so strange; that the forces were there for the deliverance. The Romance of the North could really have replied to the Romance of the South, the rose crying to the laurel; and she who had changed songs with Ronsard, and he who had fought side by side with Cervantes, might truly have met by the very tide and current of their time. It was as if a great wind had turned northward, bearing a gallant ship; and far away in the North a lady opened her lattice upon the sea.

It never happened. It was too natural to happen. I had almost said it was too inevitable to happen. Anyhow, there was nothing natural, let alone inevitable, about what did happen. Now and again Shakespeare, with a horror almost bordering on hysteria, will thrust into the limelight some clown or idiot, to suggest, against the black curtain of tragedy, this incongruity and inconsequence in the things that really do happen. The dark curtains open and there comes forth something; certainly not the Lion of Lepanto clad in gold, nor the Heart of Holyrood, the queen of the poets, who called up the songs of Ronsard and Chastelard; but something quite different and doubtless a sort of comic relief: Jacobus Rex, the grotesque king; clumsy, querulous, padded like an armchair; pedantic; perverted. He had been brought up carefully by the elders of the True Kirk, and he did them credit; piously explaining that he could not bring himself to save his mother’s life because of the superstition to which she was attached. He was a good Puritan; a typical Prohibitionist; intolerant of tobacco; more tolerant of torture and murder and things yet more unnatural. For though he shook with terror at the very shape of the shining sword, he had no difficulty about consigning Fawkes to the rack, and when death had merely been attained by the art of poisoning, he was ready with a pardon, as he cowered under the threats of Carr. What things lay behind those threats and that pardon there is here, I am glad to say, no need to inquire; but the stink of that court, as it reaches us through the purlieus of the Overbury Murder, is such as to make us turn for fresh air. I will not say to the ideal loves of Mary and Don John of Austria, which I have merely imagined, but to the very worst version of the bloody loves of Mary and Bothwell which their most furious enemies have denounced. Compared with all that, loving Bothwell would be as innocent as plucking a rose, and killing Darnley as natural as pulling up a weed.

And so, after that one wild glimpse of the possibility of the impossible, we sink back at the best into a series of third-rate things. Charles the First was better, a man sad and proud, but good so far as a man can be good without being good-humoured. Charles the Second was good-humoured without being good; but the worst of him was that his life was a long surrender; James the Second had his grandfather's virtues, so far as they went, and was therefore betrayed and broken. Then came William the Dutchman, with whom there again enters the savour of something sinister and alien. I would not suggest that such Calvinists were Antinomian Calvinists; but there is something strange in the thought that twice, in that time, there entered with that unnatural logic the rumour and savour of unnatural desire. But by the time we come to Anne and the first featureless George, it is no longer the King that counts. Merchant princes have superseded all other princes; England is committed to mere commerce and the capitalist development; and we see successively established the National Debt, the Bank of England, Wood's Halfpence, the South Sea Bubble, and all the typical institutions of Business Government. I will not discuss here whether the modern sequel, with its cosmopolitan trusts, its complicated and practically secret financial control, its march of machinery and its effacement of private property and personal liberty, be on the whole good or bad. I will only express an intuition that, even if it is very good, something else might have been better. I need not deny that in certain respects the world has progressed in order and philanthropy; I need only state my suspicion that the world might have progressed much quicker. And I think that the northern countries, especially, would have progressed much quicker, if the philanthropy had been from the first guided by a larger philosophy, like that of Bellarmine and More; if it had drawn directly from the Renaissance and not been deflected and delayed by the sulky sectarianism of the seventeenth century. But in any case the great moral institutions of modern times, the Straddle, the Wheat Corner, the Merger, and the rest will not be affected by my little literary fancy; and I need feel no responsibility if I waste some hours of my inefficient existence in dreaming of the things that might have been (which the determinists will tell me could never have been) and in weaving this faded chaplet for the prince of heroes and the queen of hearts.

Perhaps there are things that are too great to happen, and too big to pass through the narrow doors of birth. For this world is too small for the soul of man; and, since the end of Eden, the very sky is not large enough for lovers.

THE SPICE OF LIFE

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ON FRAGMENTS

THE ESSAY

THE ESSAY is the only literary form which confesses, in its very name, that the rash act known as writing is really a leap in the dark. When men try to write a tragedy, they do not call the tragedy a try-on. Those who have toiled through the twelve books of an epic, writing it with their own hands, have seldom pretended that they have merely tossed off an epic as an experiment. But an essay, by its very name as well as its very nature, really is a try-on and really is an experiment. A man does not really write an essay. He does really essay to write an essay. One result is that, while there are many famous essays, there is fortunately no model essay. The perfect essay has never been written, for the simple reason that the essay has never really been written. Men have tried to write something, to find out what it was supposed to be. In this respect the essay is a typically modern product and is full of the future and the praise of experiment and adventure. In itself it remains somewhat elusive, and I will own that I am haunted with a faint suspicion that the essay will probably become rather more cogent and dogmatic, merely because of the deep and deadly divisions which ethical and economic problems may force upon us. But let us hope there will always be a place for the essay that is really an essay. St. Thomas Aquinas, with his usual common sense, said that neither the active nor the contemplative life could be lived without relaxation, in the form of jokes and games. The drama or the epic might be called the active life of literature; the sonnet or the ode the contemplative life. The essay is the joke.

Extract from introductory essay by G. K. Chesterton to Essays of the Year. See pp. 173-5 for all sources.

PART ONE: LITERATURE IN GENERAL

SENTIMENTAL LITERATURE

WE SHALL never attain to a serious and complete school of criticism so long as the word `sentimental’ is regarded as a term of depreciation. That `passionate’ should be a complimentary form and `sentimental’ a hostile one is as utterly unmeaning and ridiculous as it would be if `blue’ were complimentary and `green’ hostile. The difference between passion and sentiment is not, as is so often assumed, a difference in sincerity or wholesomeness or reality of feeling. It is a difference between two ways of looking at the same unquestionable facts of life. True sentiment consists in taking the central emotions of life not as passion takes them, personally, but impersonally, with a certain light and open confession of them as things common to us all. Passion is always a secret; it cannot be confessed; it is always a discovery; it cannot be shared. But sentiment stands for that frame of mind in which all men admit, with a half-humorous and half magnanimous weakness, that they all possess the same secret, and have all made the same discovery. *Romeo and Juliet,* for example, is passionate. *Love’s Labour’s Lost is* sentimental. No man, perhaps, was more sentimental than Thackeray; a certain kind of cynicism is akin to sentiment in that it treats the emotions openly and lightly. To the man of passion, love and the world are new; to the man of sentiment they are infinitely old.

It is absolutely necessary to have some such clear idea as this in our heads before we can do justice to the immense flood of sentimentalism which is one of the heaviest items in the actual output of popular literature. If sentimental literature is to be condemned it must emphatically not be because it is sentimental, it must be because it is not literature. To complain that such literature is sultry and relaxing, that it melts the character for a time into mere receptivity, that it has scarcely more practical nourishment in it than the sugar off a wedding-cake - to say all this is to complain that Othello is tragic or that the *Mikado* degenerates into frivolity. Sentimentality ought not to be anything but a passing mood; people who are sentimental day and night are among the most atrocious of the enemies of society. Dealing with them is like seeing an interminable number of poetical sunsets going on in the early morning. If sentimental literature is a curse, it is not so much because it is read widely, as because it is read exclusively.

There is a certain class of human feelings which must be indulged, but which must not be trusted; to deny them is to become a prig, but to confide in them is to cease to be a man. There has, for example, arisen of late years in literature and philosophy that craving for the strong man which is the mark of weakness. To jeer at the philosophy of force and supremacy would be abominable, it would be like jeering at biliousness or toothache. One of the most brilliant men of the nineteenth century was the philosopher of force and supremacy, Nietzsche, and he died in a madhouse. There have been many things, friendly and hostile, said about Nietzsche's philosophy, but few so far have pointed out the basic fact that it is sentimental. It yields utterly to one of the oldest, most generous, and most excusable of the weaknesses of humanity, the hunger for the strong man. If any of Nietzsche's followers wish to find the fullest and heartiest acceptance of their master's doctrines, the most unrestrained prostration before masculine pride and violence, they will always find it in the novelettes. In these slight and periodical forms of sentimental fiction we find pre-eminently developed the tendency to give to the hero that kind of humour which dishonours the giver. Just as nations crown their despots in their periods of weakness, so human nature in its periods of weakness craves for despots, more than it ever craved for liberty. It is a foolish feeling, and, perhaps an immoral one, but it has one quality which may slightly interest us, it is absolutely universal: nor are the most advanced or intellectual of mankind in this respect one scrap less sentimental than the rest.

Indeed, there are, perhaps no circles in which women are so sentimental and subservient as in unconventional circles. The tendency which leads the popular novelette to deify mere arrogance and possession is emphatically one of those kindly sins which must be repudiated without being despised. It is Literary Imperialism, and it is as old as the fear of life, which is older and much wiser than the fear of death. To the same class as this idolatry of bone or brain belongs the idolatry of title or class or calling, which is exhibited in sentimental literature. It is snobbish, and it is a snobbishness which is vital as the blood, and seems almost as old as the stars. It is vulgar, but this kind of vulgarity at least fulfils its name, and is indeed common. The problem of sentimental literature is the problem of whether there must not be somewhere an outlet for these follies which one would call pardonable if they did not seem too mighty and eternal to be pardoned. It is the problem whether one must not expect that people will be sentimental if they are neither old enough nor wise enough to be passionate.

This much, then, can be said about the vices of popular sentimentalism: that at least they are old and wholesome vices. Sentimentality, which it is fashionable to call morbid, is of all things most natural and healthy; it is the very extravagance of youthful health. Whatever may be said against the novelettes and serials which foster the profound sentimentalism of the man in the street, there is no count against them which bears any resemblance to the heavy responsibility of the polished and cynical fiction fashionable among the educated class. It does not bring into the world new sins or sinister levities or passions at once savage and artificial. The novelette may basely grovel before strength, but at least it does not basely grovel before weakness. It may speak openly and without reticence of emotions that are sacred and ! should be kept in the heart, but at least it does not speak openly and without reticence of emotions that are despicable and should be spewed out of the mouth. Its snobbery and autocracy are kindlier than many forms of emancipation; it is at least human even where it fails to be humane.

And of its merits there is surely something to be said: that the tired sempstress or the overworked shopgirl should only have as it were to open a door and find herself in a new room in which new and outrageously elegant figures are performing new and outrageously dignified actions is a gift that outweighs many stories of magic. That the actions of the figures are singularly languid and inevitable, that the characters are endowed with a very simple stock of virtues and vices, that the morality of the story is never for a moment mingled or perplexed, that over the whole scene broods the presence of an utterly fatalistic optimism, all this only makes the matter richer and quieter for tired intellects and tortured nerves.

That these dreams sometimes lead the dreamers to exaggerate and blunder, to overestimate or to underestimate life, may well be. The same troubles arose in connection with Christianity, that stupendous triumph of sentiment. Christianity also has led the weak, who were its care, to expect both too much and too little of life. But the supreme fact remains, that we can never estimate the value of a dream; that we can never know whether the ascetics, who drugged themselves with visions and scourged themselves with rods, were not the happiest of all the children of men.

HOW TO WRITE A DETECTIVE STORY

From G. K.’s Weekly, October 17, 1925

Let it be understood that I write this article as one wholly conscious that he has failed to write a detective story. But I have failed a good many times. My authority is therefore practical and scientific, like that of some great statesman or social thinker dealing with Unemployment or the Housing Problem. I do not pretend that I have achieved the ideal that I set up here for the young student; I am, if you will, rather the awful example for him to avoid. None the less I believe that there are ideals of detective writings, as of everything else worth doing; and I wonder they are not more often set out in all that popular didactic literature which teaches us how to do so many things so much less worth doing; as, for instance, how to succeed. Indeed, I wonder very much that the title at the top of this article does not stare at us from every bookstall. Pamphlets are published teaching people all sorts of things that cannot possibly be learnt, such as personality, popularity, poetry, and charm. Even those parts of literature and journalism that most obviously cannot be learnt are assiduously taught. But here is a piece of plain straightforward literary craftsmanship, constructive rather than creative, which could to some limited extent be taught and even, in very lucky instances, learnt. Sooner or later I suppose the want will be supplied, in that commercial system in which supply immediately answers to demand, and in which everybody seems to be thoroughly dissatisfied and unable to get anything he wants. Sooner or later, I suppose, there will not only be text-books teaching criminal investigators, but text-books teaching criminals. It will be but a slight change from the present tone of financial ethics, and when the shrewd and vigorous business mind has broken away from the last lingering influence of dogmas invented by priests, journalism and advertisement will show the same indifference to the taboos of today as does today to the taboos of the Middle Ages. Burglary will be explained like usury, and there will be no more disguise about cutting throats than there is about cornering markets. The bookstalls will be brightened with titles like ‘Forgery in Fifteen Lessons,’ and ‘Why Endure Married Misery?’ with a popularization of poisoning fully as scientific as the popularization of Divorce and Birth-Control.

But, as we are so often reminded, we must not be in a hurry for the arrival of a happy humanity; and meanwhile, we seem to be quite as likely to get good advice about committing crimes as good advice about detecting them, or about describing how they could be detected. I imagine the explanation is that the crime, the detection, the description, and the description of the description, do all demand a certain slight element of thought, while succeeding and writing a book on success in no way necessitate this tiresome experience. Anyhow, I find in my own case that when I begin to think of the theory of detective stories, I do become what some would call theoretical. That is, I begin at the beginning, without any pep, snap, zip or other essential of the art of arresting the attention, without in any way disturbing or awakening the mind.

The first and fundamental principle is that the aim of a mystery story, as of every other story and every other mystery, is not darkness but light. The story is written for the moment when the reader does understand, not merely for the many preliminary moments when he does not understand. The misunderstanding is only meant as a dark outline of cloud to bring out the brightness of that instant of intelligibility; and most bad detective stories are bad because they fail upon this point. The writers have a strange notion that it is their business to baffle the reader; and that so long as they baffle him it does not matter if they disappoint him. But it is not only necessary to hide a secret, it is also necessary to have a secret; and to have a secret worth hiding. The climax must not be an anti-climax; it must not merely consist of leading the reader a dance and leaving him in a ditch. The climax must not be only the bursting of a bubble but rather the breaking of a dawn; only that the daybreak is accentuated by the dark. Any form of art, however trivial, refers back to some serious truths; and though we are dealing with nothing more momentous than a mob of Watsons, all watching with round eyes like owls, it is still permissible to insist that it is the people who sat in darkness who have seen a great light; and that the darkness is only valuable in making vivid a great light in the mind. It always struck me as an amusing coincidence that the best of the Sherlock Holmes stories bore, with a totally different application and significance, a title that might have been invented to express this primal illumination; the title of “Silver Blaze”.

The second great principle is that the soul of detective fiction is not complexity but simplicity. The secret may appear complex, but it must be simple; and in this also it is a symbol of higher mysteries. The writer is there to explain the mystery; but he ought not to be needed to explain the explanation. The explanation should explain itself; it should be something that can be hissed (by the villain, of course) in a few whispered words or shrieked preferably by the heroine before she swoons under the shock of the belated realization that two and two make four. Now some literary detectives make the solution more complicated than the mystery, and the crime more complicated than the solution.

Thirdly, it follows that so far as possible the fact or figure explaining everything should be a familiar fact or figure. The criminal should be in the foreground, not in the capacity of criminal, but in some other capacity which nevertheless gives him a natural right to be in the foreground. I will take as a convenient case the one I have already quoted; the story of Silver Blaze. Sherlock Holmes is as familiar as Shakespeare; so there is no injustice by this time in letting out the secret of one of the first of these famous tales. News is brought to Sherlock Holmes that a valuable race-horse has been stolen, and the trainer guarding him murdered by the thief. Various people, of course, are plausibly suspected of the theft and murder; and everybody concentrates on the serious police problem of who can have killed the trainer. The simple truth is that the horse killed him. Now I take that as a model because the truth is so very simple. The truth really is so very obvious.

At any rate, the point is that the horse is very obvious. The story is named after the horse; it is all about the horse; the horse is in the foreground all the time, but always in another capacity. As a thing of great value he remains for the reader the Favourite; it is only as a criminal that he is a dark horse. It is a story of theft in which the horse plays the part of the jewel until we forget that the jewel can also play the part of the weapon. That is one of the first rules I would suggest, if I had to make rules for this form of composition. Generally speaking, the agent should be a familiar figure in an unfamiliar function. The thing that we realize must be a thing that we recognize; that is it must be something previously known, and it ought to be something prominently displayed. Otherwise there is no surprise in mere novelty. It is useless for a thing to be unexpected if it was not worth expecting. But it should be prominent for one reason and responsible for another. A great part of the craft or trick of writing mystery stories consists in finding a convincing but misleading reason for the prominence of the criminal, over and above his legitimate business of committing the crime.

Many mysteries fail merely by leaving him at loose ends in the story, with apparently nothing to do except to commit the crime. He is generally well off, or our just and equal law would probably have him arrested as a vagrant long before he was arrested as a murderer. We reach the stage of suspecting such a character by a very rapid if unconscious process of elimination. Generally we suspect him merely because he has not been suspected. The art of narrative consists in convincing the reader for a time, not only that the character might have come on the premises with no intention to commit a felony, but that the author has put him there with some intention that is not felonious. For the detective story is only a game; and in that game the reader is not really wrestling with the criminal but with the author.

What the writer has to remember, in this sort of game, is that the reader will not say, as he sometimes might of a serious or realistic study: "Why *did* the surveyor in green spectacles climb the tree to look into the lady doctor's back garden?" He will insensibly and inevitably say, "Why did the author *make* the surveyor climb a tree, or introduce any surveyor at all?" The reader may admit that the town would in any case need a surveyor, without admitting that the tale would in any case need one. It is necessary to explain his presence in the tale (and the tree) not only by suggesting why the town council put him there, but why the author put him there. Over and above any little crimes he may intend to indulge in, in the inner chamber of the story, he must have already some other justification as a character in a story and not only as a mere miserable material person in real life. The instinct of the reader, playing hide-and-seek with the writer, who is his real enemy, is always to say with suspicion, Yes, I know a surveyor might climb a tree; I am quite aware that there are trees and that there are surveyors, but what are you doing with them? Why did you make this particular surveyor climb this particular tree in this particular tale, you cunning and evil-minded man?"

This I should call the fourth principle to be remembered, as in the other cases, people probably will not realize that it is practical, because the principles on which it rests sound theoretical. It rests on the fact that in the classification of the arts, mysterious murders belong to the grand and joyful company of the things called jokes. The story is a fancy; an avowedly fictitious fiction. We may say if we like that it is a very artificial form of art. I should prefer to say that it is professedly a toy, a thing that children 'pretend' with. From this it follows that the reader, who is a simple child and therefore very wide awake, is conscious not only of the toy but of the invisible playmate who is the maker of the toy, and the author of the trick. The innocent child is very sharp and not a little suspicious. And one of the first rules I repeat, for the maker of a tale that shall be a trick, is to remember that the masked murderer must have an artistic right to be on the scene and not merely a realistic right to be in the world. He must not only come to the house on business, but on the business of the story; it is not only a question of the motive of the visitor but of the motive of the author. The ideal mystery story is one in which he is such a character as the author would have created for his own sake, or for the sake of making the story move in other necessary matters, and then be found to be present there, not for the obvious and sufficient reason, but for a second and a secret one. I will add that for this reason, despite the sneers at ‘love-interest’ there is a good deal to be said for the tradition of sentiment and slower or more Victorian narration. Some may call it a bore, but it may succeed as a blind.

Lastly the principle that the detective story like every literary form starts with an idea, and does not merely start out to find one, applies also to its more material mechanical detail. Where the story turns upon detection, it is still necessary that the writer should begin from the inside, though the detective approaches from the outside. Every good problem of this type originates in a positive notion, which is in itself a simple notion; some fact of daily life that the writer can remember and the reader can forget. But anyhow, a tale has to be founded on a truth; and though opium may be added to it, it must not merely be an opium dream.

HUMOUR

HUMOUR, in the modern use of the term, signifies a perception of the comic or incongruous of a special sort; generally distinguished from Wit, as being on the one side more subtle, or on the other side more vague. It is thus a term which not only refuses to be defined, but in a sense boasts of being indefinable; and it would commonly be regarded as a deficiency in humour to search for a definition of humour. The modern use of the term, however, is by no means the primary or necessary use of it; and it is one of the cases, rarer than is commonly supposed, in which derivation offers at least an approach to definition. Everybody knows that `Humor', in the Latin sense of `moisture' was applied here as part of the old physiological theory, by which the characters of men varied according to the proportions of certain different secretions in the human body; as, for instance, that the predominance of phlegm produced the phlegmatic humour. By the time of the full consolidation of the English language, it had thus become possible for Ben Jonson and others to use the word `humour' rather in the sense of `the ruling passion'. With this there necessarily went an idea of exaggeration; and by the end of the process the character of a humorist was more or less identical with what we should call an eccentric. The next stages of the development, which are rather slow and subtle correspond to the various degrees in which the eccentric has become conscious of his eccentricity. England has always been especially rich in these eccentrics; and in England, where everything was less logical and more casual than in other countries, the eccentric long remained, as we should say, half unconsciously and half consciously humorous. The blend, and the beginnings of the modern meaning, may perhaps be dated at about the time of Walter Scott's Waverley Novels; when Guy Mannering complains of Councillor Pleydell as `a crack-brained humorist'. For Pleydell is indeed laughed at for his little vanities or whims; but he himself joins in the laugh and sees the humour of his humour. Since then the word has come to be used more and more exclusively of conscious humour; and generally of a rather deep and delicate appreciation of the absurdities of others.

Nevertheless there clings to the word Humour, especially when balanced against the word Wit, a sort of tradition or atmosphere that belongs to the old eccentrics whose eccentricity was always wilful and not infrequently blind. The distinction is a fine one; but one of the elements remaining in this blend is a certain sense of being laughed at, as well as of laughing. It involves some confession of human weakness; whereas wit is rather the human intellect exerting its full strength, though perhaps upon a small point. Wit is reason on its judgment seat; and though the offenders may be touched lightly, the point is that the judge is not touched at all. But humour always has in it some idea of the humorist himself being at a disadvantage and caught in the entanglements and contradictions of human life. It is a grave error to underrate Wit as something trivial; for certain purposes of satire it can truly be the sword of the spirit, and the satirist bears not the sword in vain. But it is essential to wit that he should bear the sword with ease; that for the wit the weapon should be light if the blow be heavy; that there should be no question of his being encumbered with his instrument or laying open his guard. But humour can be of the finest and yet lay open the guard or confess its inconsistency. When Voltaire said, commenting on the judicial murder of Byng, “In England they kill one Admiral to encourage the others,” it would immediately be recognized as humour. But we rightly class Voltaire as a wit, because he represents the consistent human reason detesting an inconsistency. We shall be very wrong if we despise him as a wit, for that French clearness has depths of irony; there is, for instance, more than is seen at a glance in the very word `encourage’. But it is true that the wit is here a judge independent of the judges, unaffected by the King or the Admiral or the English Courtmartial or the mob. He is abstract justice recording a contradiction. But when Falstaff (a model of the humorist become or becoming conscious) cries out in desperate bravado, “They hate us youth,” the incongruity between the speech and the corpulent old humbug of a speaker is present to his own mind, as well as to ours. He also discovers a contradiction, but it is in himself; for Falstaff really did bemuse himself with youthful companionship which he knew to be like a drug or a dream; and indeed Shakespeare himself, in one at least of the Sonnets, becomes bitterly conscious of the same illusion. There is therefore in humour, or at least in the origins of humour, something of this idea of the eccentric caught in the act of eccentricity and brazening it out; something of one surprised in disarray and become conscious of the chaos within. Wit corresponds to the divine virtue of justice, in so far as so dangerous a virtue can belong to man. Humour corresponds to the human virtue of humility and is only more divine because it has, for the moment, more sense of the mysteries.

If there be so much of enlightenment to be gathered from the history of the word, there is very little to be gathered from any of the attempts at a scientific history of the thing. The speculations on the nature of any reaction to the risible belong to the larger and more elementary subject of Laughter and are for the department of psychology; according to some, almost for that of physiology. Whatever be their value touching the primitive function of laughter, they throw very little light on the highly civilized product of humour. It may well be questioned whether some of the explanations are not too crude even for the crudest origins; that they hardly apply even to the savage and certainly do not apply to the child. It has been suggested, for example, that all laughter had its origin in a sort of cruelty, in an exultation over the pain or ignominy of an enemy; but it is very hard even for the most imaginative psychologist to believe that, when a baby bursts out laughing at the image of the cow jumping over the moon, he is really finding pleasure in the probability of the cow breaking her leg when she comes down again. The truth is that all these primitive and prehistoric origins are largely unknown and possibly unknowable; and like all the unknown and unknowable are a field for furious wars of religion. Such primary human causes will always be interpreted differently according to different philosophies of human life. Another philosophy would say, for instance, that laughter is due not to an animal cruelty but to a purely human realization of the contrast between man’s spiritual immensity within and his littleness and restriction without, for it is itself a joke that a house should be larger inside than out. According to such a view, the very incompatability between the sense of human dignity and the perpetual possibility of incidental indignities, produces the primary or archetypal joke of the old gentleman sitting down suddenly on the ice. We do not laugh thus when a tree or a rock tumbles down; because we do not know the sense of self-esteem or serious importance within. But such speculations in psychology, especially in primitive psychology, have very little to do with the actual history of comedy as an artistic creation.

There is no doubt that comedy existed as an artistic creation many thousands of years ago, in the case of peoples whose life and letters we can sufficiently understand to appreciate the fine shades of meaning; especially, of course, in the case of the Greeks. It is difficult for us to say how far it existed in civilizations more remote of which the records are for us more stiff and symbolic; but the very limitation of symbolism which makes it hard for us to prove its existence should warn us against assuming without evidence that it did not exist. We know more about Greek humour than about Hittite humour, at least partly for the simple reason that we know Greek better than we know any sort of colloquial Hittite; and while what applies to Hittite applies too in a less degree to Hebrew, a case like that of early Hebrew presents something of the same problem of limitation. But without any attempts to settle such problems of scholarship, it is hard to believe that the highest sense of human satire was not present in the words of Job. "Truly you are wise and wisdom will die with you"; or that no perception of a poetic contrast was felt by so great a poet when he said of Behemoth, commonly identified with the hippopotamus; "Canst thou play with him as with a bird?" It is probable that the Chinese civilization, in which the quality of the quaint and the fantastic has flowered with a beautiful luxuriance for many centuries, could also quote fairly early examples of the same order of fancy.

In any case, humour is in the very foundations of our European literature, which alone is quite sufficiently a part of ourselves for the full appreciation of so subtle and sometimes sub-conscious a quality. Even a schoolboy can see it in such scenes of Aristophanes as that in which the dead man sits up in indignation at having to pay the toll of the Styx, and says he would rather come to life again; or when Dionysus asks to see the wicked in hell and is answered by a gesture pointing at the audience. Before the period of intellectual controversies in Athens, indeed, we generally find in Greek poetry, as in the greater part of all human folk lore, that the joke is a practical joke. To a robust taste, however, it is none the less of a joke for that. For the joke of Odysseus calling himself Noman is not, as some suppose, a sort of trivial pun or verbalism; the joke is in the gigantic image of the raging Cyclops, roaring as if to rend the mountains, after being defeated by something so simple and so small. And this example is worth noting; as representing what is really the fun of all the fairy-tales; the notion of something apparently omnipotent made impotent by some tiny trick. This fairy-tale idea is undoubtedly one of the primitive fountains from which flows the long winding stream of historic humour. When Puss in Boots persuades the boastful magician to turn into a mouse and be eaten, it almost deserves to be called wit.

After these two early expressions, the practical joke of the folk-tale and the more philosophic fun of the Old Comedy, the history of humour is simply the history of literature. It is especially the history of European literature; for this sane sense of the incongruous is one of the highest qualities balancing the European spirit. It would be easy to go through the rich records of every nation and note this element in almost every novel or play, and in not a few poems or philosophical works. There is naturally no space for such a survey; but three great names, one English, one French and a third Spanish, may be mentioned for their historical quality; since they opened new epochs and even their few superiors were still their followers. The first of these determining names is that of Chaucer, whose urbanity has done something to conceal his real originality. Medieval civilization had a very powerful sense of the grotesque, as is apparent in its sculpture alone; but it was in a sense a fighting sentiment; it dealt with dragons and devils; it was alive, but it was very decidedly kicking. Chaucer brought into this atmosphere a cool air of true comedy; a sort of incongruity most incongruous in that world. In his personal sketches we have a new and very English element, of at once laughing at people and liking them. The whole of humorous fiction, if not the whole of fiction, dates from the Prologue of the Canterbury Tales. Rather later, Rabelais opened a new chapter by showing that intellectual things could be treated with the energy of high spirits and a sort of pressure of physical exuberance, which was itself humorous in its very human abandon. He will always be the inspiration of a certain sort of genial impatience; and the moments when the great human mind boils over like a pot. The Renaissance itself was, of course, such a boiling, but the elements were some of them more poisonous; though a word should be said for the tonics of that time, the humour of Erasmus and of More. Thirdly, there appeared with the great Cervantes an element new in its explicit expression; that grand and very Christian quality of the man who laughs at himself. Cervantes was himself more chivalrous than most men when he began to mock at chivalry. Since his time, humour in this purely humorous sense, the confession of complexity and weakness already remarked upon, has been a sort of secret of the high culture of the West. The influence of Cervantes and Rabelais, and the rest runs through all modern letters, especially our own; taking on a shrewd and acid tang in Swift, a more delicate and perhaps more dubious taste in Sterne, passing on through every sort of experiment of essay or comedy, pausing upon the pastoral gaiety of Goldsmith or going on finally to bring forth, like a great birth of giants, the walking caricatures of Dickens. Nor is it altogether a national accident that the tradition has here been followed in our own nation. For it is true that humour, in the special and even limited sense here given to it, humour as distinct from wit, from satire, from irony or from many things that may legitimately produce amusement, has been a thing strongly and specially present in English life and letters. That we may not in turn depreciate the wit and logic of the rest of the world, it will be well to remember that humour does originate in the half-conscious eccentric, that it is in part a confession of inconsistency, but, when all is said, it has added a new beauty to human life. It may even be noted that there has appeared especially in England a new variety of humour, more properly to be called Nonsense. Nonsense may be described as humour which has for the moment renounced all connection with wit. It is humour that abandons all attempt at intellectual justification; and does not merely jest at the incongruity of some accident or practical joke, as a by-product of real life, but extracts and enjoys it for its own sake. Jabberwocky is not a parody on anything; the Jumblies are not a satire on anybody; they are folly for folly’s sake on the same lines as art for art’s sake, or more properly beauty for beauty’s sake; and they do not serve any social purpose except perhaps the purpose of a holiday. Here again it will be well to remember that even the work of humour should not consist entirely of holidays. But this art of nonsense is a valuable contribution to culture; and it is very largely, or almost entirely, an English contribution. So cultivated and competent a foreign observer as M. Emile Cammaerts has remarked that it is so native as to be at first quite unmeaning to foreigners. This is perhaps the latest phase in the history of humour; but it will be well even in this case to preserve what is so essential a virtue of humour; the virtue of proportion. Humour, like wit, is related however indirectly, to truth and the eternal virtues; as it is the greatest incongruity of all to be serious about humour, so it is the worst sort of pomposity to be monotonously proud of humour; for it is itself the chief antidote to pride; and has been, ever since the time of the Book of Proverbs, the hammer of fools.

FICTION AS FOOD

I have been asked to explain what I meant by saying that “Literature is a luxury; fiction is a necessity.” I have no notion when I said it or where I said it, or even whether I said it; in the sense that I do not now remember ever saying it at all. But I do know why I said it; if I ever said it at all. That is the advantage of believing in what some call dogma and others call logic. Some people seem to imagine that a man being sceptical and changing his beliefs, or even a man being cynical and disregarding his beliefs, is a sort of advantage to him in liberality and flexibility of mind. The truth is exactly the other way. By the very laws of the mind, it is more difficult to remember disconnected things than connected things; and a man is much more in control of a whole range of controversy if he has connected beliefs than if he had never had anything but disconnected doubts. Therefore I can immediately understand the sentence submitted to me, as if it were a sentence made up by somebody else; as perhaps it was.

Literature is a luxury, because it is part of what is popularly called "having the best of everything". Matthew Arnold would have been pained to be called popular; but he said what is really the same thing as the popular saying; that Culture is knowing the best that has been said and thought. Literature is indeed one of those nobler luxuries which a wellgoverned state would extend to all, and even regard as necessities in that nobler sense. But it is a luxury in the plain sense that human beings can do without it and still be tolerably human, or even tolerably happy. But human beings cannot be human without some field of fancy or imagination; some vague idea of the romance of life; and even some holiday of the mind in a romance that is a refuge from life.

Every healthy person at some period must feed on fiction as well as fact; because fact is a thing which the world gives to him, whereas fiction is a thing which he gives to the world. It has nothing to do with a man being able to write; or even with his being able to read. Perhaps its best period is that of childhood, and what is called playing or pretending. But it is still true when the child begins to read or sometimes (heaven help him) to write. Anybody who remembers a favourite fairy-story will have a strong sense of its original solidity and richness and even definite detail; and will be surprised, if he re-reads it in later life, to find how few and bald were the words which his own imagination made not only vivid but varied. And even the errand-boy who reads hundreds of penny-dreadfuls, or the lady who read hundreds of novels from the circulating library, were living an imaginative life which did not come wholly from without.

Now nobody supposes that all those things which feed the hunger for fiction would commend themselves to the palate of literature. Literature is only that rare sort of fiction which rises to a certain standard of objective beauty and truth. When a child, almost as soon as he can speak, has invented the imaginary family of Pubbles, with father and mother and naughty child all complete, nobody supposes that the psychology of the house of Pubbles is differentiated as delicately as that of the family of Poynton, in a story by Henry James. When the lady has followed and forgotten a hundred heroines in their wanderings through mysterious suburban flats or murderous country rectories, nobody supposes that each of them remains even for her a portrait, as vivid as Elizabeth Bennet or Becky Sharp. It is not a thing like having an appreciation of a good wine; it is a thing like

having an appetite for a square meal; it is not a vintage but a viand.

Now this general need is connected with the deepest things in man; and the strangest thing about him, which is being a man. As a large mirror will make one room look like two rooms, so the mind of man is from the first a double mind; a thing of reflection and living in two worlds at once. The caveman who was not content that reindeers should be real - did something that no other animal ever has done or apparently ever will do. Of course, we cannot prove that the animal has not imagination in the inferior sense. For all we can prove, the rhinoceros may have an Invisible Playmate; and yet realize with his reason that “it is but a rhinoceros of air; that lingers in the garden there.”

Scientifically speaking, we cannot demonstrate that the rabbit has not an imaginary family of rabbits, on the lines of Brer Rabbit, as well as the somewhat large and increasing family which the rabbit produces in the ordinary way of business. But there is such a thing as common sense; and I think our common sense inclines us to suppose that any such artistic daydream, if it exists in beasts and birds, is much more rudimentary and stationary; and has certainly never advanced to the point of expression, even in fairy-tales or penny-dreadfuls. But for man some form of this fanciful experience is essential as a mere fact of experience. If he has not that daydream all his day, he is not man; and if he is not man, there is nobody to write about and nobody to write about him.

I was a great reader of novels until I began to review them. when I naturally left off reading them. I do not mean to admit that I did them any injustice; I studied and sampled them with the purpose of being strictly fair; but I do not call that `novel reading’ in the old enchanting sense. If I read them thoroughly I still read them rapidly; which is quite against my instincts for the mere luxury of reading. When I was a boy and really had a new adventure story, when I was a young man and read my first few detective stories, I did not enjoy precipitation, but actually enjoyed delay. The pleasure was so intense that I was always putting it off. For it is one of the two or three big blunders in modern morality to suppose that the strongest eagerness expresses itself in extravagance. The strongest eagerness always expresses itself in thrift. That is why the French Revolution was French and not English; why the careful peasants have turned the world upside-down, while the careless labourers have cheerfully left it as it was. When a child's soul is in the most starry ecstasy of greed he desires to have his cake, not to eat it. I am English myself, and I have never managed to be thrifty about anything else.

But about my early novel reading I was as thrifty as a French peasant - and as greedy. I loved to look at the mere solid bulk of a sensational novel as one looks at the solid bulk of a cheese; to open the first page, dally with the first paragraph, and then shut it again, feeling how little pleasure I had lost as yet. And my favourite novelists are still those great nineteenth-century novelists who give an impression of bewildering bulk and variety, Scott or Dickens or Thackeray. I have artistic pleasure as keen or keener, I have moral sympathy as intense or more intense with many latex writers; with the hard-hitting *mot juste* of Stevenson's stories or the insurgent irony of Mr. Belloc's. But Stevenson has one fault as a novelist, that he must be read quickly. Novels like Belloc's *Mr. Burden* must not only be read quickly but fiercely; they describe a short, sharp struggle; the mood both of writer and reader is heroic and abnormal, like that of two men fighting a duel. But Scott, Thackeray, and Dickens had the mysterious trick or talent of the inexhaustible novel.

Even when we have come to the end of the story we somehow feel that it is endless. People say they have read *Pickwick* five times or fifty times or five hundred times. For my part I have only read *Pickwick* once. Since then I have lived in *Pickwick;* walked into it when and where I chose, as a man walks into his club. But whenever I have walked in, it seemed to me that I found something new. I am not sure that stringent modern artists like Stevenson or Mr. Belloc do not actually suffer from the strictness and swiftness of their art. If a book is a book to be lived in, it should be (like a house to be lived in) a little untidy.

Apart from such chaotic classics as these, my own taste in novel reading is one which I am prepared in a rather especial manner, not only to declare, but to defend. My taste is for the sensational novel, the detective story, the story about death, robbery and secret societies; a taste which I share in common with the bulk at least of the male population of this world. There was a time in my own melodramatic boyhood when I became quite fastidious in this respect. I would look at the first chapter of any new novel as a final test of its merits. If there was a murdered man under the sofa in the first chapter, I read the story. If there was no murdered man under the sofa in the first chapter, I dismissed the story as tea-table twaddle, which it often really was. But we all lose a little of that fine edge of austerity and idealism which sharpened our spiritual standard in our youth. I have come to compromise with the tea-table and to be less insistent about the sofa. As long as a corpse or two turns up in the second, the third, nay even the fourth or fifth chapter, I make allowance for human weakness, and I ask no more. But a novel without any death in it is still to me a novel without any life in it. I admit that the very best of the tea-table novels are great art - for instance, Emma or *Northanger Abbey.* Sheer elemental genius can make a work of art out of anything. Michelangelo might make a statue out of mud, and Jane Austen could make a novel out of tea - that much more contemptible substance. But on the whole I think that a tale about one man killing another man is more likely to have something in it than a tale in which, all the characters are talking trivialities without any of that instant and silent presence of death which is one of the strong spiritual bonds of all mankind. I still prefer the novel in which one person does another person to death to the novel in which all the persons are feebly (and vainly) trying to get the others to come to life.

But I have another and more important quarrel about the sensational novel. There seems to be a very general idea that the romance of the tomahawk will be (or will run the risk of being) more immoral than the romance of the teapot. This I violently deny. And in this I have the support of practically all the old moral traditions of our civilization and of every civilization. High or low, good or bad, clever or stupid, a moral story almost always meant a murderous story. For the old Greeks a moral play was one full of madness and slaying. For the great medievals a moral play was one which exhibited the dancing of the devil and the open jaws of hell. For the great Protestant moralists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a moral story meant a story in which a parricide was struck by lightning or a boy was drowned for fishing on a Sunday. For the more rationalistic moralists of the eighteenth century, such as Hogarth, Richardson, and the author of *Sandford and Merton,* all agreed that shocking calamities could properly be indicated as the result of evil doing; that the more shocking those calamities were the more moral they were. It is only in our exhausted and agnostic age that the idea has been started that if one is moral one must not be melodramatic.

But I believe that sensational novels are the most moral part of modern fiction, and I believe it upon two converging lines, such as make all real conviction. It is, I think, the fact that melodramatic fiction is moral and not immoral. And it is, I think, the abstract truth that any literature that represents our life as dangerous and startling is truer than any literature that represents it as dubious and languid. For life is a fight and is not a conversation.

THE SOUL IN EVERY LEGEND

I THINK it was that very fine and subtle writer, Vernon Lee, who lapsed into literary heresy by saying that a poet is always a pantheist. I could only accept this in the amended form that no poet, by any possibility, has ever been or ever will be a pantheist. It was precisely because Walt Whitman sometimes tried on principle to be a pantheist, that so great a genius just missed being a poet. Shelley did not miss being a poet; but he did miss being a pantheist. A deep imaginative instinct, beyond all his cheap philosophies, made him always do something which is the soul of imagination, but the very opposite of universalism. It made him *insulate* the object of which he wrote; making the cloud or the bird as solitary as possible in the sky. imagination demands an image. An image demands a background. The background should be equal and level, or vast and vague, but only for the sake of the image. In writing of the skylark Shelley compares that unfortunate wild fowl to a lady in a tower, to a star, to a rose, to all sorts of things that are not in the least like a skylark. But they all have one touch, the touch of separation and solitude. Now pantheism means that nothing is thus separated; that the divine essence is equally distributed at any given moment in all the atoms of the universe; and that he who would see it imaginatively must see it as a whole. I deny that this was done by Shelley the poet; whatever may have been done by Shelley the prig. When he heard the skylark speaking to him like a spirit out of heaven, I deny that he heard at the same moment the crowing of cocks, the screaming of cockatoos, the gobbling of turkeys, the cawing of rooks, the clucking of hens and the pandemonium of the parrot-house at the Zoo; or that for him, at that moment, all these things mingled in one harmony or music of the spheres.

I do not deny that the poet may write an ode to a parrot as well as to a skylark; or for that matter a serenade to a penguin or a pelican. But he will prefer the parrot outside the parrothouse. He will prefer the pelican in the wilderness. In short, he will aim at seeing the object against a background, as one sees a star in the sky or an island in the sea. He will aim at seeing the object in the strict sense of *distinguishing* the object. And this element of distinction would alone distinguish such a poet from the vulgar universality of the ordinary pantheist. For the rest, Shelley’s poetry very seldom expressed Shelley’s philosophy. When once he began to sing, he generally sang the creeds that he refused to say. In the skylark, for instance, he does not in the least proclaim the doctrine of Universal Nature or the Immanence of God. What he does proclaim is the doctrine of Original Sin, or the Fall of Man. When the skylark ceases merely to flutter and begins really to fly, to sweep and to soar; when the verse takes on the swing and powerful pulsation of great poetry, it is not even about the isolation of the bird but the stranger isolation of the man. “We look before and after . . . our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.”

But if we could scorn
Hate and pride and fear,
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear –

There the pantheistic poet is telling a tale not told by all the parrots in the Zoological Gardens; but rather by the Bird of Paradise that came with us out of the Garden of Eden.

Mr. Bernard Shaw, in a preface to one of his plays, advances a thesis in science and then propounds it as a thesis in philosophy. It might well be described as a progressive pantheism, as compared with the static pantheism more commonly associated with pantheists. The current criticism will probably be that it is all very well for Mr. Shaw to talk philosophy, but he knows nothing about science. To me this seems the exact contrary of the fact. He has always been very well equipped with facts in his scientific controversies; and his logic, of which I can judge better, seems to me very conclusive on the purely scientific question. He is strictly scientific in refusing the test of cutting off a mouse's tail, for instance, as affecting the question of acquired characteristics. As he very sensibly points out, an arbitrary amputation by somebody else is not an acquired characteristic at all; any more than we can talk of a man acquiring a railway accident. The Lamarckian suggestion is that the will counts; and nobody wills a railway accident. I think Mr. Shaw is entirely successful in his science; where I begin to doubt is precisely in his philosophy, and especially when he propounds it as a religion. And I doubt it because it ignores, as the more static pantheism ignores the same rather indescribable element which I can only call identity. I can only dimly describe it as the conviction that it is It.

Mr. Shaw suggests that we should all pool our legends and treat them all equally as legends; that is, as allegories. This, I fancy, is very much what was really done by the Neo-Platonists and other syncretists of the pagan sunset on the Mediterranean. They made a pool of all the legends; and it was rather a stagnant pool. Indeed the Mediterranean itself would henceforth have been little more than a stagnant pool, but for the wind of the spirit that blew on it from Bethlehem and Calvary; that is from real places alive with stories at least believed to be real. When the new world found something to follow, it had to be a man and not a myth, a tragedy and not a mummery. If the new world finds a new religion now, it is much more likely to be in Spiritualist miracles and a Spiritualist plan of heaven and earth, all to be believed s down to the last detail, than in the weary impartiality of the pool of the Neo-Platonists. That pool may be a sea into which all religions ultimately run. It is certainly not a spring in which any religions originally rise. We shall never make a new legend by advertising for an allegory. The great myth comes from men who believe they have found a great truth, at least at first and that a vivid and final truth. If there be, as I believe, such a central truth, this is the only way in which men can receive that truth. But even if it be only a delusion, this is the only way in which it can be denied.

In short, it is not enough for a religion to include everything. It must include everything and something over. That is it must include everything and include something as well. It must answer that deep and mysterious human demand for everything; even if the nature of that demand be too deep to be easily defined in logic. It will never cease to be described ,in poetry. We might almost say that all poetry is a description of it. Even when you have only natural religion, you will still have supernatural poetry. And it will be poetic be, cause it is particular, not because it is general. The new priest may proclaim, “The sea is God, the land is God and the sky is God; but yet there are not three Gods, but one God.” But even if the old priest be silenced, the old poet will always answer, “God is in a cave; God is in a stable; God is disguised and hidden. I alone know where he is; he is herding the cattle of Admetus; he is pouring out the wine of Cana.” The new republic may make the philosophical declaration, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all trees were evolved equal and endowed with the dignity of creative evolution.” But if in the silence that follows we overhear the poor nurse or the peasant mother telling fairy-tales to the children, she will always be saying, “And in the seventh garden beyond the seventh gate was the tree with the golden apples”, or “They sailed and sailed till they came to an island, and in the island was a meadow, and in the meadow the tree of life.”

Now according to the old rationalistic criticism, it was enough to say of a fancy that it was fanciful. It was enough to say that a religion was a romance, and a romance a delusion. But men like Mr. Shaw have already left that behind, in the years of wandering starting from the Dublin of the Protestants and the Darwin of the Professors. They already realized that there is “a soul in every dogma”, that religion cannot be left out of account, that rationalism cannot be left in control. Now if we are to look sympathetically for the soul in every dogma, surely we must look for that something in the soul which makes it clothe itself in every case in a particular and personal body. If this particularism always stubbornly recurs even in poetry, how can it be left out of philosophy? What is the *meaning* of this incurable itch to give to airy nothing, or still more airy everything, a local habitation and a name? Why is it always something at once odd and objective, a precious fruit or a flying cup or a buried key, that symbolizes the mystery of the world? Why should not the world symbolize the world? Why should not a sphere sufficiently represent universalism; so that the faithful might be found adoring a plum-pudding or a cannon-ball? Why should not a spiral sufficiently represent progress; and the pious bow down before a corkscrew? In practice we know that it would be impossible to dissociate a Christmas pudding from the sacramental specialism of Christmas; and the worship of the corkscrew, that hieratic serpent, would probably be traced to the mysteries of Dionysius. In a word, *why* are all mysteries concerned with the notion of finding a particular thing in a particular place? If we are to find the real meaning of every element in mythology, what is the real meaning of *that* element in it? I can see only one possible answer that satisfies the new more serious and sympathetic study of religion, even among sceptics; and that is that there really is something to which all these fancies are what forgeries are to a signature; that if the soul could be satisfied with the truth it would find it a tale as particular, as positive and as personal; that the light which we follow first as a wide white star actually narrows as we draw nearer to it, till we find that trailing meteor is something like a light in a window or a candle in a room.

PART TWO: PARTICULAR BOOKS AND WRITERS

THE MACBETHS

IN STUDYING any eternal tragedy the first question necessarily is what part of tragedy is eternal. If there be any element in man's work which is in any sense permanent it must have this characteristic, that it rebukes first one generation and then another, but rebukes them always in opposite directions and for opposite faults. The ideal world is always sane. The real world is always mad. But it is mad about a different thing every time; all the things that have been are changing and inconstant. The only thing that is really reliable is the thing that has never been. All very great classics of art are a rebuke to extravagance not in one direction but in all directions. The figure of a Greek Venus is a rebuke to the fat women of Rubens and also a rebuke to the thin women of Aubrey Beardsley. In the same way, Christianity, which in its early years fought the Manicheans because they did not believe in anything but spirit, has now to fight the Manicheans because they do not believe in anything but matter. This is perhaps the test of a very great work of classic creation, that it can be attacked on inconsistent grounds, and that it attacks its enemies on inconsistent grounds. Here is a broad and simple test. If you hear a thing being accused of being too tall and too short, too red and too green, too bad in one way and too bad also in the opposite way, then you may be sure that it is very good.

This preface is essential if we are to profit by the main meaning of *Macbeth.* For the play is so very great that it covers much more than it appears to cover; it will certainly survive our age as it has survived its own; it will certainly leave the twentieth century behind as calmly and completely as it has left the seventeenth century behind. Hence if we ask for the meaning of this classic we must necessarily ask the meaning for our own time. It might have another shade of meaning for another period of time. If, as is possible, there should be a barbaric return and if history is any kind of guide, it will destroy everything else before it destroys great literature. The high and civilized sadness of Virgil was enjoyed literally through the darkest instant of the Dark Ages. Long after a wealthier generation has destroyed Parliament they will retain Shakespeare. Men will enjoy the greatest tragedy of Shakespeare even in the thick of the greatest tragedy of Europe.

It is quite possible that Shakespeare may come to be enjoyed by men far simpler than the men for whom he wrote. Voltaire called him a great savage; we may come to the time far darker than the Dark Ages when he will really be enjoyed by savages. Then the story of Macbeth will be read by a man in the actual position of Macbeth. Then the Thane of Glamis may profit by the disastrous superstitions of the Thane of Cawdor. Then the Thane of Cawdor may really resist the impulse to be King of Scotland. There would be a very simple but a real moral if Macbeth could read *Macbeth.* “Do not listen to evil spirits; do not let your ambition run away with you; do not murder old gentlemen in bed; do not kill other people’s wives and children as a part of diplomacy; for if you do these things it is highly probable that you will have a bad time.” That is the lesson that Macbeth would have learnt from *Macbeth;* that is the lesson that some barbarians of the future may possibly learn from *Macbeth.* And it is a true lesson. Great work has something to say quite simply to the simple. The barbarians would understand *Macbeth* as a solid warning against vague and violent ambition; and it is such a warning, and they would take along with it this lesson also, which is none the worse because perhaps only the barbarians could adequately understand it. “Distrust those malevolent spirits who speak flatteringly to you. They are not benevolent spirits; if they were they would be more likely to beat you about the head.”

Before we talk then of the lesson of a great work of art, let us realize that it has a different lesson for different ages, because it is itself eternal. And let us realize that such a lesson will be in our own day not absolute but suited to the particular vices or particular misfortunes of that day. We are not in any danger at the moment of the positive and concrete actions which correspond to those of *Macbeth.* The good old habit of murdering kings (which was the salvation of so many commonwealths in the past) has fallen into desuetude. The idea of such a play must be for us (and for our sins) more subtle. The idea is more subtle but it is almost inexpressibly great. Let us before reading the play consider if only for a moment what is the main idea of *Macbeth* for modern men.

One great idea on which all tragedy builds is the idea of the continuity of human life. The one thing a man cannot do is exactly what all modern artists and free lovers are always trying to do. He cannot cut his life up into separate sections. The case of the modern claim for freedom in love is the first and most obvious that occurs to the mind; therefore I use it for this purpose of illustration. You cannot have an idyll with Maria and an episode with Jane; there is no such thing as an episode. There is no such thing as an idyll. It is idle to talk about abolishing the tragedy of marriage when you cannot abolish the tragedy of sex. Every flirtation is a marriage; it is a marriage in this frightful sense; that it is irrevocable. I have taken this case of sexual relations as one out of a hundred; but of any case in human life the thing is true. The basis of all tragedy is that man lives a coherent and continuous life. It is only a worm that you can cut in two and leave the severed parts still alive. You can cut a worm up into episodes and they are still living episodes. You can cut a worm up into idylls and they are quite brisk and lively idylls. You can do all this to him precisely because he is a worm. You cannot cut a man up and leave him kicking, precisely because he is a man. We know this because man even in his lowest and darkest manifestation has always this characteristic of physical and psychological unity. His identity continues long enough to see the end of many of his own acts; he cannot be cut off from his past with a hatchet; as he sows so shall he reap.

This then is the basis of all tragedy, this living and perilous continuity which does not exist in the lower creatures. This is the basis of all tragedy, and this is certainly the basis of *Macbeth.* The great ideas of *Macbeth*, uttered in the first few scenes with a tragic energy which has never been equalled perhaps in Shakespeare or out of him, is the idea of the enormous mistake a man makes if he supposes that one decisive act will clear his way. Macbeth’s ambition, though selfish and someway sullen, is not in itself criminal or morbid. He wins the title of Glamis in honourable war; he deserves and gets the title of Cawdor; he is rising in the world and has a not ignoble exhilaration in doing so. Suddenly a new ambition is presented to him (of the agency and atmosphere which presents it I shall speak in a moment) and he realizes that nothing lies across his path to the Crown of Scotland except the sleeping body of Duncan. If he does that one cruel thing, he can be infinitely kind and happy.

Here, I say, is the first and most formidable of the great actualities of *Macbeth.* You cannot do a mad thing in order to reach sanity. Macbeth’s mad resolve is not a cure even for his own irresolution. He was indecisive before his decision. He is, if possible, more indecisive after he has decided.

The crime does not get rid of the problem. Its effect is so bewildering that one may say that the crime does not get rid of the temptation. Make a morbid decision and you will only become more morbid; do a lawlesss thing and you will only get into an atmosphere much more suffocating than that of law. Indeed, it is a mistake to speak of a man as `breaking out.’ The lawless man never breaks out; he breaks in. He smashes a door and finds himself in another room, he smashes a wall and finds himself in a yet smaller one. The more he shatters the more his habitation shrinks. Where he ends you may read in the end of *Macbeth.*

For us moderns, therefore, the first philosophical significance of the play is this; that our life is one thing and that our lawless acts limit us; every time we break a law we make a limitation. In some strange way hidden in the deeps of human psychology, if we build our palace on some unknown wrong it turns very slowly into our prison. Macbeth at the end of the play is not merely a wild beast; he is a caged wild beast. But if this is the thing to be put in a primary position there is something else that demands at least our second one. The second idea in the main story of *Macbeth is,* of course, that of the influence of evil suggestion upon the soul, particularly evil suggestion of a mystical and transcendental kind. In this connection the mystical character of the promptings is not more interesting than the mystical character of the man to whom they are especially sent. Mystical promptings are naturally sweet to a mystic. The character of Macbeth in this regard has been made the matter of a great deal of brilliant and futile discussion. Some critics have represented him as a burly silent soldier because he won battles for his country. Other critics have represented him as a feverish and futile decadent because he makes long practical speeches full of the most elaborate imagery. In the name of commonsense let it be remembered that Shakespeare lived before the time when unsuccessful poets thought it poetical to be decadent and unsuccessful soldiers thought it military to be silent. Men like Sidney and Raleigh and Essex could have fought as well as Macbeth and could have ranted as well as Macbeth. Why should Shakespeare shrink from making a great general talk poetry when half the great generals of his time actually wrote great poetry?

The whole legend, therefore, which some critics have based on the rich rhetoric of *Macbeth:* the legend that Macbeth was a febrile and egotistical coward because he liked the sound of his own voice, may be dismissed as a manifestation of the diseases of later days. Shakespeare meant Macbeth for a fine orator for he made fine speeches; he also meant him for a fine soldier because he made him not only win battles bravely but what is much more to the point, lose battles bravely; he made him, when overwhelmed by enemies in heaven and earth, die the death of a hero. But Macbeth is meant to be among other things an orator and a poet; and it is to Macbeth in this capacity that the evil supernatural appeal is made. If there be any such thing as evil influences coming from beyond the world, they have never been so suggestively indicated as they are here. They appeal, as evil always does, to the existence of a coherent and comprehensible scheme. It is the essence of a nightmare that it turns the whole cosmos against us. Two of their prophecies have been fulfilled; may it not be assumed then that the third will also be fulfilled?

Also they appeal, as evil always does (being slavish itself and believing all men slaves) to the inevitable. They put Macbeth's good fortune before him as if it were not so much a fortune as a fate. In the same way imperialists sought to salve the consciences of Englishmen by giving them the offer of gold and empire with all the gloom of predestination. When the devil, and the witches who are the servants of the devil, wish to make a weak man snatch a crown that does not belong to him, they are too cunning to come to him and say "Will you be King?" They say without further parley, "All hail, Macbeth, that shall be king hereafter". This weakness Macbeth really has; that he is easily attracted by that kind of spiritual fatalism which relieves the human creature of a great part of his responsibility. In this way there is a strange and sinister appropriateness in the way in which the promises of the evil spirits end in new fantasies; end, so to speak, as mere diabolical jokes. Macbeth accepts as a piece of unreasoning fate first his crime and then his crown. It is appropriate that this fate which he has accepted as external and irrational should end in incidents of mere extravagant bathos, in the walking forest and strange birth of Macduff. He has once surrendered himself with a kind of dark and evil faith, to a machinery of destiny that he can neither respect nor understand, and it is the proper sequel of this that the machinery should produce a situation which crushes him as something useless.

Shakespeare does not mean that Macbeth's emotionalism and rich rhetoric prove him to be unmanly in any ordinary sense. But Shakespeare does mean, I think, to suggest that the man, virile in his essential structure, has this weak spot in his artistic temperament; that fear of the mere strength of destiny and of unknown spirits, of their strength as apart from their virtue, which is the only proper significance of the word superstition. No man can be superstitious who loves his God, even if the god be Mumbo Jumbo. Macbeth has something of this fear and fatalism; and fatalism is exactly the point at which rationalism passes silently into superstition. Macbeth, in short, has any amount of physical courage, he has even a great deal of moral courage. But he lacks what may be called spiritual courage; he lacks a certain freedom and dignity of the human soul in the universe, a freedom and dignity which one of the scriptural writers expresses as the difference between the servants and the sons of God.

But the man Macbeth and his marked but inadequate manliness, can only be expressed in connection with the character of his wife. And the question of Lady Macbeth immediately arouses again the controversies that have surrounded this play. Miss Ellen Terry and Sir Henry Irving acted *Macbeth* upon the theory that Macbeth was a feeble and treacherous man and that Lady Macbeth was a frail and clinging woman. A somewhat similar view of Lady Macbeth has been, I believe, consistently uttered by a distinguished American actress. The question as commonly stated, in short, is the question of whether Macbeth was really masculine, and second, of whether Lady Macbeth was not really feminine. The old critics assumed that because Lady Macbeth obviously ruled her husband she must have been a masculine woman. The whole inference of course is false. Masculine women may rule the Borough Council, but they never rule their husbands. The women who rule their husbands are the feminine women and I am entirely in accord with those who think that Lady Macbeth must have been a very feminine woman. But while some critics rightly insist on the feminine character of Lady Macbeth they endeavour to deprive Macbeth of that masculine character which is obviously the corollary of the other. They think Lady Macbeth must be a man because she rules. And on the same idiotic principle they think that Macbeth must be a woman or a coward or a decadent or something odd because he is ruled. The most masculine kind of man always is ruled. As a friend of mine once said, very truly, physical cowards are the only men who are not afraid of women.

The real truth about Macbeth and his wife is somewhat strange but cannot be too strongly stated. Nowhere else in all his wonderful works did Shakespeare describe the real character of the relations of the sexes so sanely, or so satisfactorily as he describes it here. The man and the woman are never more normal than they are in this abnormal and horrible story. *Romeo and Juliet* does not better describe love than this describes marriage. The dispute that goes on between Macbeth and his wife about the murder of Duncan is almost word for word a dispute which goes on at any suburban breakfast-table about something else. It is merely a matter of changing “Infirm of purpose, give me the daggers”, into “infirm of purpose, give me the postage stamps”. And it is quite a mistake to suppose that the woman is to be called masculine or even in any exclusive sense strong. The strengths of the two partners differ in kind. The woman has more of that strength on the spot which is called industry. The man has more of that strength in reserve which is called laziness.

But the acute truth of this actual relation is much deeper even than that. Lady Macbeth exhibits one queer and astounding kind of magnanimity which is quite peculiar to women. That is, she will take something that her husband dares not do but which she knows he wants to do and she will become more fierce for it than he is. For her, as for all very feminine souls (that is, very strong ones) selfishness is the only thing which is acutely felt as sin; she will commit any crime if she is not committing it only for herself. Her husband thirsts for the crime egotistically and therefore vaguely, darkly, and subconsciously, as a man becomes conscious of the beginnings of physical thirst. But she thirsts for the crime altruistically and therefore clearly and sharply, as a man perceives a public duty to society. She puts the thing in plain words, with an acceptance of extremes. She has that perfect and splendid cynicism of women which is the most terrible thing God has made. I say it without irony and without any undue enjoyment of the slight element of humour.

If you want to know what are the permanent relations of the married man with the married woman you cannot read it anywhere more accurately than in the little domestic idyll of Mr. and Mrs. Macbeth. Of a man so male and a woman so female, I cannot believe anything except that they ultimately save their souls. Macbeth was strong in every masculine sense up to the very last moment; he killed himself in battle. Lady Macbeth was strong in the very female sense which is perhaps a more courageous sense; she killed herself, but not in battle. As I say, I cannot think that souls so strong and so elemental have not retained those permanent possibilities of humility and gratitude which ultimately place the soul in heaven. But wherever they are they are together. For alone among so many of the figures of human fiction, they are actually married.

THE TRAGEDY OF KING LEAR

THE TRAGEDY of *King Lear*, on some of its elements perhaps the very greatest of all the Shakespearian tragedies, is relatively seldom played. It is even possible to have a dark suspicion that it is not universally read; with the usual deplorable result; that it is universally quoted. Perhaps nothing has done so much to weaken the greatest of English achievements, and to leave it open to facile revolt or fatigued reaction, than the abominable habit of quoting Shakespeare without reading Shakespeare. It has encouraged all the pompous theatricality which first created an idolatry and then an iconoclasm; all that florid tradition in which old playgoers and after dinner-speakers talked about the Bard or the Swan of Avon, until it was comparatively easy, at the end of the Victorian era, for somebody like Bernard Shaw to propose an Edwardian massacre of Bards and almost to insinuate that the swan was a goose. Most of the trouble came from what are called `Familiar Quotations', which were hardly even representative or self-explanatory quotations. In almost all the well known passages from Shakespeare, to quote the passage is to miss the point. It is almost needless to note what may be called the vulgar examples; as in the case of those who say that Shakespeare asks, “What is in a name?”; which is rather like saying that Shakespeare says murder must be done, and it were best if it were done quickly. The popular inference always is that Shakespeare thought that names do not matter; there being possibly no man on God’s earth who was less likely to think so, than the man who made such magnificent mouthfuls out of mandragora and hurricanes, of the names of Hesperides or Hercules. The remark has no point, except in the purely personal circumstances in which it has poignancy, in the mouth of a girl commanded to hate a man she loves, because of a name that seems to her to have nothing to do with him. The play now under consideration is no exception to this disastrous rule. The old woman who complained that the tragedy of *Hamlet* was so full of quotations would have found almost as many in the tragedy of *King Lear.* And they would have had the same character as those from *Hamlet* or *Romeo and Juliet:* that those who leave out the context really leave out the conception. They have a mysterious power of making the world weary of a few fixed and disconnected words, and yet leaving the world entirely ignorant of the real meaning of those words.

Thus, in the play of *King Lear,* there are certain words which everybody has heard hundreds of times, in connections either intentionally or unintentionally absurd. We have all read or heard of somebody saying, “How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child.” Somehow the very words sound as if they were mouthed by some tipsy actor or silly and senile person in a comic novel. I do not know why these particular words, as words, should be selected for citation. Shakespeare was a casual writer; he was often especially careless about metaphors, careless about making them and careless about mixing them. There is nothing particularly notable about this particular metaphor of the tooth; it might just as well have been a wolf’s tooth or a tiger’s tooth. The lines quoted only become remarkable when we read them with the rest of the scene, and with a very much more remarkable passage, which is never quoted at all. The whole point of Lear’s remark is that, when buffeted by the first insult of Goneril, he breaks forth into a blasting bodily curse upon the woman, praying first that she may have no children, then that she may have horrible and unnatural children, that she may give birth to a monstrosity, *that she may feel how,* etc. Without that terrible implication, the serpent is entirely harmless and his teeth are drawn. I cannot imagine why only the weakest lines in the speech are everlastingly repeated, and the strongest lines in it are never mentioned at all.

A man might well harden into the horrid suspicion that most people have hardly read the play at all, when he remembers how many things there are in it that are not repeated, and yet would certainly be remembered. There are things in it that no man who has read them can ever forget. Amid all the thunders of the storm, it comes like a new clap of thunder, when the thought first crosses the mad king’s mind that he must not complain of wind and storm and lightning, because they are not his daughters. “I never gave you kingdoms, called you children.” And I imagine that the great imaginative invention of the English, the thing called Nonsense, never rose to such a height and sublimity of unreason and horror, as when the Fool juggles with time and space and tomorrow and yesterday, as he says soberly at the end of his rant: “This prophecy Merlin shall make; for I live before his time.” This is one of the Shakespearian shocks or blows that take the breath away. But in the same scene of the storm and the desolate wandering, there is another example of the sort of thing I mean in the matter of quotation. It is not so strong an example, because the words are very beautiful in themselves; and have often been applied beautifully to pathetic human circumstances not unworthy of them. Nevertheless, they are something not only superior, but quite startlingly different, in the circumstances in which they really stand. We have all of us heard a hundred times that some unlucky law-breaker, or more or less pardonable profligate, was “more sinned against than sinning”. But the words thus used have not a hundredth part of the point and power of the words as used by Lear. The point of the passage is that he himself challenges the cosmic powers to a complete examination; that he finds in his despair a sort of dizzy detachment of the intellect, and strikes the balance to his own case with a kind of insane impartiality. Regarding the storm that rages round him as a universal rending and uprooting of everything, something that will pluck out the roots of all things, even the darkest and foulest roots of the heart of man deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, he affirms in the face of the most appalling self-knowledge, clear and blasting as the lightning, that his sufferings must still be greater than his sins. It is possibly the most tremendous thing a man ever said; whether or no any man had the right to say it. It would be hard to beat it even in the Book of Job. And it does weaken the particular strength of it that it should be used, however sympathetically, as a cheerful and charitable guess about the weaknesses of other people.

There are certain abstractions very strong in Shakespeare’s mind, without which his plays are much misunderstood by modern people, who look to them for nothing whatever except realistic details about individuals. For instance, there runs through the whole play of King *Lear,* as there runs through the whole play of *Richard the Second,* an abstraction w>hich was an actuality of awful vividness to the man of Shakespeare’s time; the idea of the King. Under the name of Divine Right, a very unlucky name, it was mixed up with Parliamentary and sectarian quarrels which afterwards altogether dwarfed and diminished its dignity. But Divine Right was originally much more human than that. It resolved itself roughly into this; that there are three forms in which men can accept the idea of justice or the authority of the commonwealth; in the form of an assembly, in the form of a document, or in the form of a man. King Lear is a man; but he is or has been a sacramental or sacred man; and that is why he can be a desecrated man. Even those who prefer to be governed by the scroll of the law, or by the assembly of the tribe, must understand that men have wished, and may again wish, to be governed by a man; and that where this wish has existed the man does become, not indeed divine, but certainly different. It is not an accident that Lear is a king as well as a father, and that Goneril and Regan are not only daughters but traitors. Treason, or what is felt as treason, does break the heart of the world; and it has seldom been so nearly broken as here.

THE EVERLASTING NIGHTS

No one has any business with the *Arabian Nights* who objects to bulk in literature. It is a curious thing which may be noticed by all literary critics, that literature is the only thing in which bulk is considered a defect. The truth is, of course, that size is an element of value in literature. If the quality be really ascertained, the amount, even if indefinitely increased, becomes a merit. A man would as soon think of saying that the field was over-crowded with flowers, that the sky had a surplus population of stars, as of saying that there were too many good stories. The *Arabian Nights is* a collection of extraordinarily good stories, and while the modern aesthetic critic will probably find the book too long, the person with a taste for literature will find it too short. Surely the greatest compliment we can pay to it or any other book is to find it too short. This defect is the highest of all possible perfections.

Now length in the case of the *Arabian Nights is* not a mere material accident; it is one of the essential qualities, one of the essential virtues of the book. A short *Arabian Nights is* as unthinkable as a neat wilderness or a snug cathedral. The whole plan of the book is one vast conspiracy to entrap the reader into a condition of everlasting attention. By a supreme stroke of genius the compiler expressed this in the primary framework and outline. He made the teller of the stories a person inspired to prolong the stories infinitely by the devouring desire of life. It made the wish for an everlasting story one with the wish for an everlasting earthly existence. He made Scheherezade suddenly paralyze the tyrant when the sword was uplifted by a vision of all the stories that remained to be told in the world. She lured him into the golden and enchanted chamber of the first story and then the work was done. He could not get away from the puzzling and alluring sequence of that chain of tales, that endless series of delightful mantraps. Rooms within rooms opened their tempting and tantalizing doors, stories within stories promised a complicated and even confusing pleasure. The tyrant can sway kingdoms, and command multitudes, but he cannot discover exactly what happened to a fabulous prince or princess unless he asks for it. He has to wait, almost to fawn upon a wretched slave for the fag-end of an old tale. Never in any other book, perhaps, has such a splendid tribute been offered to the pride and omnipotence of art.

This is the real idea behind the *Arabian Nights*. The richness which first strikes the imagination in reading it is a mere symbol. The richness of gold, silver and jewels is a mere figure and representation of that which is the essential idea, the deep and enduring richness of life. The preciousness of emerald and amethyst and sandalwood is only the parable and expression of the preciousness of stones, dust, and dogs running in the streets. In the *Arabian Nights* everything has a story to tell. Three men come together; one is leading a gazelle, another a dog, another a mule. But the gazelle is an enchanted human being, the dog is a transformed brother, the mule is a man in unhuman shape. There is no traveller so dusty and commonplace that he may not have stories to tell of the terrible continents that lie upon the borderland of the world. There is no beggar so bent and abject that he may not have possession of a talisman which gives him power over the palaces and temples of princes. The possibilities of life are not to be counted. That is the profoundly practical moral buried in the *Arabian Nights*.

In our early Biblical lessons we were told that the Eastern teacher sat down to teach. There are not, perhaps, many points of resemblance between two such products of Oriental literature as *The Book of Job* and the *Arabian Nights*. But there is this in common between them, that we feel that both must have been narrated by somebody who was sitting down, while Ulysses the typical Greek, was toiling with oar and rudder to discover new isles and peninsulas, Job, the typical Jew, was reviewing the whole of heaven and earth while sitting on a dust-heap. Similarly, the Sultan of the Indies heard the tales of the four quarters of the earth while sitting on a cushion. The essential point, the essential lesson of these Oriental literatures is the clear and most moral lesson of idleness. Idleness is not a vice; in the old Chaucerian form of `idlesse' it is a pleasure, and almost a virtue. Its true name is leisure. It is not a trifling with unimportant things, but a vision of all the innumerable important things in the universe which are in themselves even more important than bread and cheese.

Here again, therefore, we come near to one of the essential ideas which give their perennial charm to the *Arabian Nights*. It is the idea that idleness is not an empty thing. Idleness can be, and should be a particularly full thing, rich as it is in the *Arabian Nights* with invaluable jewels and incalculable stories. Idleness, or leisure, as the Eastern chronicler would probably prefer to call it, is indeed our opportunity of seeing the vision of all things, our rural audience for hearing, as the Sultan of the Indies heard them, the stories of all created things. In that hour, if we know how to use it, the tree tells its story to us, the stone in the road recites its memoirs, the lamp-post and the paling expatiate on their autobiographies. For as the most hideous nightmare in the world is an empty leisure, so the most enduring pleasure is a full leisure. We can defend ourselves, even on the Day of Judgment, if our work has been useless, with pleas of opportunity, competition and fulness of days.

AESOP’S FABLES

Aesop EMBODIES an epigram not uncommon in human history; his fame is all the more deserved because he never deserved it. The firm foundations of common sense, the shrewd shots of uncommon sense, that characterize all the Fables, belong not to him but to humanity. In the earliest human history, whatever is authentic is universal; and whatever is universal is anonymous. In such cases there is always some central man who had first the trouble of collecting these stories, and afterwards the fame of creating them. He had the fame; and, on the whole, he earned the fame. There must have been something great and human, something of the human future and the human past, in such a man; even if he only used it to rob the past or deceive the future. The story of Arthur may have been really connected with the most fighting Christianity of falling Rome or with the most heathen traditions hidden in the hills of Wales. But the word `Mappe’ or `Malory’ will always mean King Arthur; even though we find older and better origins than the Mabinogian; or write later and worse versions than the `Idylls of the King.’ The nursery fairy-tales may have come out of Asia with the Indo-European race, now fortunately extinct; they may have been invented by some fine French lady or gentlemen like Perrault: they may possibly even be what they profess to be. But we shall always call the best selection of such tales, `Grimm’s Tales’; simply because it is the best collection.

The historical Aesop, in so far as he was historical, would seem to have been a Phrygian slave, or at least one not to be specially and symbolically adorned with the Phrygian cap of liberty. He lived, if he did live, about the sixth century before Christ, in the time of that Croesus whose story we love and suspect like everything else in Herodotus. There are also stories of deformity of feature and a ready ribaldry of tongue; stories which (as the celebrated Cardinal said) explain, though they do not excuse, his having been hurled over a high precipice at Delphi. It is for those who read the Fables to judge whether he was really thrown over the cliff for being ugly and offensive, or rather for being highly moral and correct. But there is no kind of doubt that the general legend of him may justly rank him with a race too easily forgotten in our modern comparisons; the race of the great philosophic slaves. Aesop may have been a fiction like Uncle Remus; he was also, like Uncle Remus, a fact. It is a fact that slaves in the old world could be worshipped like Aesop, or loved like Uncle Remus. It is odd to note that both the great slaves told their best stories about beasts and birds.

But whatever be fairly due to Aesop, the human tradition called Fables is not due to him. This had gone on long before any sarcastic freedman from Phrygia had or had not been flung off a precipice; this has remained long after. It is to our advantage, indeed, to realize the distinction; because it makes Aesop more obviously effective than any other fabulist. Grimm's Tales, glorious as they are, were collected by two German students; at least we know more about them than we know about a Phrygian slave. The truth is, of course, that *Aesop's Fables* are not Aesop's fables, any more than *Grimm's Fairy-Tales* were ever Grimm's fairy-tales. But the fable and the fairy-tale are things utterly distinct. There are many elements of difference; but the plainest is plain enough. There can be no good fable with human beings in it. There can be no good fairy-tale without them.

Aesop, or Babrius (or whatever his name was), understood that, for a fable, all the persons must be impersonal. They must be like abstractions in algebra, or like pieces in chess. The lion must always be stronger than the wolf, just as four is always double of two. The fox in a fable must move crooked, as the knight in chess must move crooked. The sheep in a fable must march on, as the pawn in chess must march on. The fable must not allow for the crooked captures of the pawn; it must not allow for what Balzac called “the revolt of a sheep.” The fairy-tale, on the other hand, absolutely revolves on the pivot of human personality. If no hero were there to fight the dragons, we should not even know that they were dragons. If no adventurer were cast on the undiscovered island - it would remain undiscovered. If the miller's third son does not find the enchanted garden where the seven princesses stand white and frozen - why then, they will remain white and frozen and enchanted. If there is no personal prince to find the Sleeping Beauty she will simply sleep. Fables repose upon quite the opposite idea: that' everything is itself, and will in any case speak for itself. The wolf will be always selfish; the fox will be always foxy. Something of the same sort may have been meant by the animal worship, in which Egyptian and Indian and many other great people have combined. Men do not, I think, love beetles or cats or crocodiles with a wholly personal love; they salute them as expressions of that abstract and anonymous energy in nature which to any one is awful, and to an atheist must be frightful. So in all the fables that are or are not Aesop's all the animal forces drive like inanimate forces, like great rivers or growing trees. It is the limit and the loss of all such things that they cannot be anything but themselves; it is their tragedy that they could not lose their souls.

This is the immortal justification of the Fable; that we could not teach the plainest truths so simply without turning men into chessmen. We cannot talk of such simple things without using animals that do not talk at all. Suppose, for a moment, that you turn the wolf into a selfish baron, or the fox into a foxy diplomatist, you will at once remember that even barons are human, you will be unable to forget that even diplomatists are men. You will always be looking for that accidental good humour that should go with the brutality of any brutal man; for that allowance for all delicate things, including virtue, that should exist in any good diplomatist. Once put a thing on two legs instead of four and pluck it of feathers and you cannot help asking for a human being, either heroic, as in the fairy-tales, or unheroic, as in the modern novels.

But by using animals in this austere and arbitrary style as they are used on the shields of heraldry or the hieroglyphics of the ancients, men have really succeeded in handing down those tremendous truths that are called truisms. If the chivalric lion be red and rampant, it is rigidly red and rampant; if the sacred ibis stands anywhere on one leg, it stands on one leg for ever. In this language, like a large animal alphabet, are written some of the first philosophic certainties of men. As the child learns A for Ass or B for Bull or C for Cow, so man has learnt here to connect the simpler and stronger creatures with the simpler and stronger truths. That a flowing stream cannot befoul its own fountain, and that any one who says it does is a tyrant and a liar; that a mouse is too weak to fight a lion, but too strong for the cords that can hold a lion; that a fox who gets most out of a flat dish may easily get least out of a deep dish; that the crow whom the gods forbid to sing, the gods nevertheless provide with cheese; that when the goat insults from a mountain-top it is not the goat that insults, but the mountain; all these are deep truths deeply graven on the rocks wherever men have passed. It matters nothing how old they are, or how new; they are the alphabet of humanity, which like so many forms of primitive picture-writing employs any living symbol in preference to man. These ancient and universal tales are all of animals; as the latest discoveries in the oldest prehistoric caverns are all of animals. Man, in his simpler stories, always felt that he himself was something too mysterious to be drawn. But the legend he carved under these cruder symbols was everywhere the same; and whether fables began with Aesop or began with Adam, whether they were German and medieval as Reynard the Fox, or as French and Renaissance as La Fontaine, the upshot is everywhere essentially the same; that pride goes before a fall; and that there is such a thing as being too clever by half. You will not find any other legend but this written upon the rocks by any hand of man. There is every type and time of fable; but there is only one moral to the fable; because there is only one moral to everything.

BOTH SIDES OF THE LOOKING-GLASS

WE ALL say comparisons are odious, and I wonder whether any of us know why. In the abstract, comparison is only a way of testing degrees and qualities, like the zoologist who thought it an exact and exhaustive description of a *giraffe* to say that “he is taller than an elephant, but not so thick”. There is nothing in this to indicate any odium - to suggest that he was cruel to wild elephants or unduly spoiled and petted his giraffes. But when we pass from nature to human nature, comparison does always sound like a depreciation. I think the reason is this: that for some cause, possibly original sin, we have a very weak supply of words of praise as compared with our rich and varied output of terms of abuse. We can call the unpleasant scholar or intellectual a pedant or a prig, but we have no special word for the pleasant sort of scholar or intellectual. We can call the wrong sort of society person a snob, but we have no special name for the right sort of society person. Thus we are driven to the ghastly necessity, for instance, of calling our friends `nice’. Fancy calling Dr. Johnson `nice’, and Fox `nice’, and Nelson `nice’. It does not present very vivid or varied portraits.

I have been reading, side by side, two books about men who were both `nice’, and whose books were `nice’. They were the two great nineteenth-century tellers of tales to children. They were also as flatly contrary to each other at every point as two men could be, but if I go beyond calling them both `nice’ and try to compare them or say what they were like, it will quite certainly sound as though I were praising one and blaming the other. This is simply because we cannot vary praise as we vary blame. One of these men was Charles Dodgson, commonly known as Lewis Carroll, a don at Oxford and a very Victorian English clergyman, the other was Hans Christian Andersen, a queer, cranky and visionary Danish peasant, and the author of immortal tales.

When I say that Lewis Carroll was very Victorian, that will sound like a reproach, though it ought to be a compliment as well as a reproach - only it is so much more difficult to find words to fit what was good in Victorian England than what was bad in it. If I say that Dodgson the don was conventional or comfortable or respectable, compared with Andersen the peasant, those words will sound like unfriendly words, but only because there are no friendly words to express the really friendly things that often do go along with conventions and comforts.

It is abominably stupid to call the Victorian Age merely conventional and comfortable, and to forget the fact that it produced a new kind of poetry which was supremely wild and supremely innocent. It was the poetry of pure nonsense, which has never been known in the world before and may never be known again. Lewis Carroll was not the only example: Edward Lear, I think, was a better one; and I would put in a word for the `Katawampus' and other stories of Judge Parry, that children loved at least as much. Lewis Carroll's letters to children prove that not only did he love children, but that children loved him; nevertheless I believe his intellectual attacks were directed to adults. Everything in Lewis Carroll is part of what he called the Game of Logic; it is very Victorian, by the way, to think of logic as a game. The Victorians had to invent a sort of impossible paradise in which to indulge in good logic: for all serious things they preferred bad logic. This is not paradoxical, or at any rate, it was they who made the paradox. Macaulay and Bagehot and all their teachers taught them that the British Constitution ought to be illogical - they called it being practical. Read the great Reform Bill and then read *Alice in Wonderland* - you will be struck by the resemblance of *Alice in Wonderland.* They had to go to fairyland to be logical. Thus I suspect that the very best of Lewis Carroll was not written by a man for children, but by a don for dons. The most brilliant strokes are not only mathematical, but mature. Ten lectures against the heresy of mere Relativity could be based on that one perfect sentence, "I have seen hills compared with which that would be a valley."

But it may be questioned whether the little girls he wrote for were tortured by relativist scepticism. And, in a way, this is part of the glory of Lewis Carroll. He was not only teaching children to stand on their heads; but he was also teaching dons to stand on their heads. It is a good test of a head to stand on it. When the Victorians wanted a holiday, they made one, a real intellectual holiday. They did create a world which, to me at least, is still a sort of strange home, a secret holiday, a world in which monsters, terrifying in other fairy-tales, were turned into pets. Nothing will deprive them of the glory of it. It was nonsense for nonsense's sake. If we ask where this magic mirror was found the answer is that it was found among very padded Victorian furniture: in other words, it was due to the historical accident by which Dodgson and Oxford and England were, at that moment, very comfortable and secure. They knew there would be no fighting, except the party system, in which Tweedledum and Tweedledee agreed to have a battle, the battle being much less obvious than the agreement. They knew their England could not see invasion or revolution; they knew it was growing richer by commerce; they did not realize that agriculture was dying, possibly because it was already dead; they had no peasants.

They found their flat contrary in that other great lover of children, whose story is told admirably in *The Life of Hans Christian Andersen* by Signe Toksvig. Hans Andersen was himself a peasant, and came of what is still a country of peasants. In a thousand ways, Hans Andersen represented the exact opposite of the sheltered don in his cushioned Victorian drawing-room. Hans was open to all the winds that blew, like a peasant on his fields, like a peasant on the European battlefields. He grew up anyhow, full of a sort of pathetic and greedy ambition, such as dons at Oxford do not show. He had experienced all realities, including his own weakness and his own desires. He did a hundred things, idiotic things, which Mr. Dodgson would have found unthinkable; but because he was a peasant he had his compensations. He remained in touch with the enormous tradition of the earth in the matter of mystery and glamour - he did not have to make a new and rather artificial sort of fairy-tale out of triangles and syllogisms.

Hans Andersen was not only an uncle loved by children, he was a child. He was one of those great children of our Christian past who have had the Divine favour which is called arrested development. His faults were the faults of a child - and very annoying faults they were. Why do aged men after reading this book, love Hans Andersen? I answer, because the most lovable thing in the world is humility. Now Hans Andersen had a vast vanity, which was founded on humility. I know that modern psychologists have called the combination an inferiority complex - but there is always an element of humility in the man who does not conceal his vanity.

Nobody ever made it so naked and shameless as poor Hans Andersen. But my intention here is only to stir such thoughts as are aroused by those contrasted types, neither of which, I hope, will ever be forgotten as nursery classics. Both had many imitators, I hope I shall not be misunderstood if I say that Hans Andersen was perhaps even greater, because he was himself an imitator. That great peasant, that great poet in prose, had the peasant quality which the Victorians had lost - the old mystical feeling about the ordinary materials of life. Hans Andersen would have found more on this side of the looking-glass than Alice found on the other. Beyond are fantastic mathematical projections; but why go through the looking-glass when all the rest of the furniture, all the chairs and tables, can be animated by elves?

My comparisons are becoming odious. It is because there is no variation in verbal praise. Differentation sounds like depreciation. Which is better; to have distilled from the dense commercial solidity of the modern world a wild new wine or honey of intellectual nonsense, or to have enlarged that large and magnificent accumulation of popular imagination in the past, and to have made again, with an original note, the great fairy-tale that is really a folk-tale? I only know that if you try to deprive me of either of them, there will be a row.

AND SO TO BED

I WILL not say that the Englishman is the most subtle of all the beasts of the field; for he is obviously not a beast, still less a snake, and least of all a devil. But it is true that he is in many ways the most complex type in Christendom. He is never so complex as when he is not entirely conscious; and especially when the last twist of his labyrinthine complexity takes the form of claiming to be simple; to be rough and tough and bluff like Major Bagstock. And one of the weirdest things about him is the subconscious or semi-conscious art and skill, with which he arranges history and human facts so as to soothe and satisfy himself, without quite clearly realising what he is doing or why he is doing it. In truth, the Englishman is the one man really made for psycho-analysis. He really does instinctively erect screens and scenery, half symbolic and half secretive, to protect a hidden thought. All these things filtered through my mind in reading Mr. Arthur Bryant's excellent last volume on Pepys: *Samuel Pepys: The Years of Peril.*

Nine men out of ten in this country, above the most unlettered class, could tell you with some confidence who Pepys was. He was a funny fellow who kept a Diary. He was a roguish fellow, and the fun of his Diary consists chiefly in his confessions of infidelity to a wife, or flirtations with a chambermaid. He wrote in quaint short sentences, often parodied in the newspapers; and he ended as many entries as possible with the phrase, "and so to bed". Now it is a very queer thing that this should be so universally known, and that nothing else about the same man should be known at all. For this mildly scandalous journal was only kept for a short time, comparatively early in his life; and even so the proportion of scandal is exaggerated. There were not many men in England then, or possibly now, whose sincere confessions in youth would be very different. Meanwhile, the rest of his life was a public life of practical usefulness and profound importance. He, with about one other man, made modern England a great naval power. The reply, it will be generally supposed, is that the public heard of the Diary first, long ago, while curious scholars have lately dug up the details about the permanent official. But in mere common sense, the case is exactly the other way. The Diary was kept in a close cipher, apparently impenetrable and long unpenetrated. But the political life of Pepys had been no more private than the public life of Cromwell or

Cardinal Wolsey. Political foes tried to impeach him as openly as Warren Hastings in Westminster Hall; that he might be executed as openly as Charles I at Whitehall. In the famous phrase of the Regicide, this thing was not done in a corner. His foes were the first men of the age, like Shaftesbury and Halifax; and they filled the streets with mobs of the Brisk Boys with the Green Ribbons, roaring for the blood of such servants of the Crown. And the roguish little fellow of the Diary stood up under that storm and steered like a ship the policy that has launched the ships of England. He fought for a fighting fleet, more or less of the modern model, exactly as Cobden fought for Free Trade or Gladstone for Home Rule. And he did not write anything corresponding to "and so to bed" till he had seen those ships make their harbour. Now why is that most exciting passage in patriotic history practically left out of our rather too patriotic histories? Why is the hero of it known only as a buffoon winking at a maidservant? There is no reason that can be called simple, in the sense of superficial. Pepys was a very normal national man; Protestant like any other and as insular as most. Englishmen, especially English historians, are excessively devoted to what is national and very particularly to what is novel. And it is hardly exaggerative to say he could have written "Samuel Pepys", like the signature of a craftsman or architect, under the word Victory where it shone upon the ship of Nelson.

There is only one explanation. There can be no other; and it is simply this. You cannot praise the patriotism of Pepys without also praising the patriotism of James II, then James, Duke of York. You cannot tell the story at all, without letting it stand out with startling clearness that Samuel Pepys the Protestant might never have started work, and would certainly never have done the work, without the devoted practical support, and even prompting, of James Stuart the Papist. And his story had to be told so as to enforce only one moral; that Papistry was the enemy of Patriotism. In plain words, you have to admit that the prince, who did more than any other to enable Britannia to rule the waves, was the same Prince who was driven across the same waves into exile, simply and solely because he was a Roman Catholic. And that was more than the English historians dared to admit; merely to do justice to the patriotism of a poor little Government official. That single catastrophe, in the way of letting the Catholic cat out of the Protestant bag, would have turned upside-down the whole orthodox official academic History of England.

But the point is, as I have said, that the thing is almost unthinkably subtle, often semi-conscious; and at once collective and secretive. It is a sort of vague but repeated gesture (like that of somebody stroking the cat) which has gradually put all this lively part of history to sleep; and moulded the story so as to soothe the successful side. There is no veto on studying the period; no overt official command to take a certain line; there was simply an instinct to take the line of least resistance. The main facts of the time were seldom even contradicted; they were only neglected. And I can imagine with what a stare of simple wonder I should be regarded, by the man in the street, who is quite willing to talk to me about Pepys, if I said there was a sort of conspiracy to connect Pepys only with his Diary. Is not the Diary a very amusing book? Yes. Was not Pepys a Protestant? Yes. Do we not generally praise patriots, especially Protestant patriots? Yes. But if Pitt or Palmerston or Disraeli had written a very amusing Diary, people would discuss each statesman with reference to his statesmanship; and then say, “I always think he is most delightful in his Diary. Have you read his Diary?”

By this vast vague corporate craft or silent strategy, there has been built up in this country a quite abnormal condition of mental and moral Comfort. And we know, because Mr. Winston Churchill tells us in the *Strand Magazine*, that we have a noble Parliament and more freedom than any foreigners; and a poor man has as much chance as a rich man in our courts of law. And so to bed.

AS LARGE AS LIFE IN DICKENS

NOTHING IS more characteristic of Dickens, nothing has so handicapped him with the languid modern reader as the vast crowding of his stage with innumerable and bewilderingly well-painted characters. He has passed through a period in which it has been customary among certain people to deride him; but the whole indifference to Dickens has arisen from the strange idea that literature should copy life. While realism was in full swing it was easy to point out that no person ever existed so horrible as Quilp, or so grandiloquent as Snodgrass, or unscrupulous as Ralph Nickleby, so entirely pathetic as Little Nell. But we have tired of realism. We have suddenly awakened to the fact that art has nothing to do with copying. It is strange, but true, that the same movement and discovery which has been the justification of Aubrey Beardsley has been the justification of Dickens.

Dickens, of course, has been a great deal handicapped by the common habit among his admirers of praising him for the wrong things. He is praised for being `true to life’, while his true merit is not that he is true to life, but alive. It is common to hear a man say when Dickens is accused of exaggeration, “I have met a man exactly like Pecksniff” Of course, to begin with, he has not met a person like Pecksniff any more than he has met one like Caliban. And further, if he had met a man exactly like Pecksniff, it would go far to show that Dickens was not a great novelist. Since no two men in real life are exactly like each other, so no fictitious character ought to be exactly like a real character. He ought to be an addition to the existing stock of real characters. His passions and traditions, his instincts and memories, should be blended together in entirely new quantities into an entirely new colour never seen before from the beginning upon the palette of life. If it be true (as I believe it is) that no person precisely like Mrs. Micawber ever existed or ever will exist in the whole domain of the universe, then we know that Mrs. Micawber is like life. We know that Dickens created as Life itself creates.

This is the far higher sense in which great art is `like life’, far higher, that is, than the ordinary sense in which the phrase is used. Great literature is like life. Not because it is accurate to the leaves on the tree and the pattern on the carpet and the words men actually employ; it is like life because it has in it the exuberant energy of life, its power of production, its sense of hope and memory, its consciousness of an almost immortal vitality. Great literature, in short, is like life because it also is living. An admirer of Dickens, therefore, ought to be ashamed of defending the great master by pretending that he did not exaggerate. He exaggerated by the same living law which makes the birds chatter in pairing time or the kitten fight with its own tail. The passion behind all his work was joy, and the final touch of exaggeration is the absolute necessity of the great literature of joy.

This mistake about Dickens arose, of course, because a critical generation had forgotten altogether that there even was such a thing as the great literature of joy. We have fallen into the way of thinking that literature is a refuge for weak temperaments, that literature may express all the darker and quainter moods, all the moods of regret or rebellion or hesitation, but never that one universal mood, streaming like a river through heaven and earth, by which alone all things consent to live. Dickens has seemed to us vulgar and impossible, and sprawlingly inartistic, for the simple reason that he is too strong for us. His bewildering crowds and mobs of characters, his vast mazy travels over England and America, his endless banquets and conversations, his intense realism and his frantic unreality, are all manifestations of a quite insatiable and omnivorous power of mental pleasure to which our period has lost the key. He was the last of the great comic writers; since his time we have lost the power of realizing the connection between the words `great’ and `comic’. We have forgotten that Aristophanes and Rabelais stand with Aeschylus and Dante; that their folly was wiser and more solid than our wisdom, and that their levity has outlasted a hundred philosophies. Dickens exaggerates, and it is not a fault but a merit; it is of the same kind as the exaggerations of the great French humorist, whose vigorous and almost monstrous power of happiness was only contented with a giant who could lift his head above Notre Dame and ride away with the bells upon his bridle. Therefore Dickens has become to the orthodox artistic world of today what Rabelais has become to many of the modern schools - a thing obscure with excess of jesting, a positive darkness of joy.

There are many evidences that the great truth and passion behind the work of Dickens was this sense of joy in things; just as much as the great truth and passion behind Thackeray was a sense of their almost sacred pathos, or the great truth and passion behind Hawthorne a sense of their weird significance. But the best evidence of all lies in the fact that Dickens was never so triumphantly successful as in describing the type of man whose existence in this world, in which he has neither money nor honour, seems to depend entirely on his high spirits and his capacity for realizing the magnificence of the flying moment. All Dickens’ sticks of heroes and dolls of heroines may, of course, be thrown aside: the real ideal figure of Dickens is William Micawber. Dick Swiveller, his next best character, is a man of the same type; they both represent a kind of shabby poet, whose continual lack of money and utter antagonism to the order of society can never kill him, because of his everlasting pleasure in old memories and very old quotations. They have alike the same mutability, the same impecuniosity, the same florid, but genuine, taste in literature, the same continual and crushing misfortunes, the same mysterious, but unbreakable, immortality. They are never ended, because, fools and rascals as they are they hold on to something which belongs, not to society but to the soul: the power of joy. And note here that Dickens, describing these men who are nearest to his heart, is not only vigorous, living and entertaining, as he always is, but far truer to the facts even than is his wont. Pecksniff is a spirited and amusing bogey for a pure farce, but such a hypocrite never lived in this mean earth; we shall meet him in a better and bolder world. Mr. Squeers is a good, black grotesque figure from the outside, but he has no inside. But Micawber and Swiveller (especially the latter) are true to the tenor life; they see the humour of their own exaggerations, they live avowedly on their own good spirits. And in them Dickens really touches problems and elements of greatness which are as old as the world and as great as any tragedy. He touches, for example, the great tragedy of Ireland, which after innumerable sorrows still lives upon an outrageous gaiety. Above all he touches the case of the great masses of the poor, whom he loved. He saw deeper than a hundred statisticians and philanthropic economists. No man on earth was ever a more fierce and mutinous Radical than he; but he saw that all calculations of the mortal hours of men left out the everlasting moment..

DISPUTES ON DICKENS

AN INTERESTING little controversy began some time ago in the *Academy* on the position of Dickens, and it throws a flood of light on the real character of the temporary reaction against that great novelist's fame. `E.A.B.', the able and decisive *Academy* critic is a typical representative of the school devoted to `Art' in its more technical sense, and like all the critics of that school he has a clear, hard and almost scientific critical method of critical test. Dickens falls in his eyes because of what he calls his `artistic ignorance and indifference' and his lack of `feeling for literature', all of which means that Dickens was not an artist of the particular pattern which French fiction in the nineteenth century has made essential and even popular.

Of course, this particular scheme of criticism will say what it has to say and pass, as so many other schemes of criticism have passed. We shall never, thank Heaven, have a sound and conclusive scheme of literary art, any more than we shall have a scheme of theology which makes the universe as obvious as a figure in geometry. If there were produced a really final and satisfactory justification of religion on logical grounds, most healthy-minded people would immediately cease to believe in religion; and if there were such a justification of art, most healthy-minded people would cease to believe in art. Touching these high matters we can endure anything except that they should turn out to be so small that we can even understand them. And so the `Art for Art's Sake' school of criticism will be found to be merely relative and in a century or so Flaubert the critic will be as dead and as interesting as Aristotle. But Flaubert the novelist will remain impeccable and also Dickens the novelist. For it is only the things which are deliberately built to last for ever which cannot do so.

The real reason of the temporary eclipse of the fame of Dickens is not that he was a faulty artist but that he expressed almost faultlessly a certain class of thoughts and emotions which happen at this moment to be almost absent from the cultivated class. It was not that he expressed badly but that we know nothing at all about the kind of thought and sentiment that he expressed well. It was not that he had a deficiency in his art, it is we that have a deficiency in our experience. The work of Dickens appears to us rambling and shapeless for precisely the same reason that the work of

Maeterlinck would have appeared to Dickens rambling and shapeless. There is a mood at the back of the whole work of Dickens as much as there is a mood at the back of the whole work of Maeterlinck; and it must be confessed with shame, as far as I am concerned, that our mood is the mood of Maeterlinck and not the mood of Dickens. To `E.A.B.' and his school, `Pickwick' is not exactly either good or bad; it is simply not a novel at all. To the very best critics of Dickens' time, `Pelleas and Melisande' would have been something not exactly good or bad but simply not a drama at all. If they had seen it acted they would not have thought that the drama was deteriorating. They would only have thought that they themselves were going mad.

The truth is that whole schools of art and of great art can become merely mysterious and imbecile to the most enlightened generations if those generations do not cultivate the particular emotions by which those schools of art are inspired. Thus, for example, the whole of the Italian art, from Giotto to Botticelli would have appeared and did appear to the critics of the eighteenth century an ugly and infantile exhibition like the scrawlings of a child upon a slate. To the eighteenth century it was quite obvious that these medieval pictures were mere despicable beginnings. Their lines were drawn wrong, their colours were arranged wrong, their figures were anatomical monstrosities, their landscapes had the absurdity of Noah's Ark, their saints had the grimness of an army of idiots. No blasphemer had ever dared to draw upon his darkest page a picture so impious as this picture of an insane universe with its grinning angels, its gaping saints. Not the most secret volume of eighteenth-century atheism had conceived in its wrath and satire such a celestial parody as these painters had conceived in their humility and faith. Such was the impression which Christian art produced on the whole of the *`age des philosophes':* that it was an example of an almost shocking innocence like a baby's picture of God.

Then came the nineteenth century when man felt again the same emotions which had been felt in the time of Giotto. Men of the boldest and most liberal intellects began to dream the great medieval dream of a united and devout Christendom. Men of the ripest taste and opinion began to join celibate brotherhoods and school themselves with fast and flagellation. Poets, painters and musicians went back to the splendid superstitions of medieval Europe, and collected tales and delusions as industriously as a scientist could collect facts. Upon the whole nation descended again the great mood of mystery, the nameless convictions, the certainties that have no origin and the hopes that have no end. And with a start of indescribable surprise men found themselves looking at those dark old Italian pictures with new eyes. The lines that went wrong now went right; they perfectly expressed a quaint and delicate severity. The landscapes that looked absurd now looked enchanted; they were lit with the morning of the world. The faces that had been hideous had grown beautiful like the face of a good man when we have come to know him and cannot imagine any other features being the perfect picture of his soul. This is what has happened again and again in the world and will continue to happen until the end. When a set of emotions are unfamiliar to a people, the art which expresses them will appear not only superstitious but obviously inartistic. When a set of emotions become familiar to a people, the art which expresses them will appear not only philosophical but obviously artistic.

People who do not share the sentiment of Maeterlinck do not say that he is not moral or true to life, they say he does not write plays. People who do not share the sentiment of Whitman do not say that he is not right or not worthy, they say that he does not write poetry. People who do not share the sentiment of Dickens do not say that he is too optimistic or too conventional, they say that he had “absolutely no feeling for literature”.

When we come to examine the case of Dickens carefully, we find that this is exactly what has happened. The characteristics which `E.A.B.’ and other critics note as the defects of Dickens are in a great many instances the proper and inevitable modes of expressing a certain gigantic conviviality and cordiality. For example, `E.A.B.’ speaks of the formlessness of `Pickwick’, but he does not notice that what he calls formlessness was in fact a well-known and celebrated artistic form among the elder and more convivial writers. The sprawling and seemingly disconnected novel of comic adventure was a recognized and excellent form of art. Recent criticism I believe is accustomed to describe it as the `picaresque’ novel. For when we come to think of it, the whole point is very simple. The new impressionist method of brevity, restraint, and an adhesion to one central image or incident is the right and proper literary form to express the kind of things which the new Impressionist novel wishes to express; the little ironies, the sad small stories that end without an ending; the faces that are too bitter for tears. About these sort of things it may be said, not as a commonplace phrase, but as a sound and telling rule of art, that the less said about them the better. One flash of literary lightning revealing a woman dead in a garret with a victorious army marching by is enough if the sentiment concerned is the sentiment of a pitiful irony. But it is not enough if the sentiment is that of the ancient camaraderies and immortal enterprises of the `picaresque’ novel.

You cannot exhibit Sam Weller in a flash of lightning. The whole emotional significance of Sam Weller depends upon the idea that like some warrior of the mythic ages, he has passed unscathed through infinite adventures and will pass unscathed through innumerable adventures. The reason of the whole matter is that of misfortune we all desire to say little and that the words in a French short story should be few, like the words in a house of mourning. But the moment we come into the atmosphere of positive delight and exultation a new element enters in, the desire to linger. Books like `Pickwick’ are the most lingering. Men linger over their walks, over their talks, over their stories, over their dinners. All the characters seem friends who are talking together far into an immortal night to which no grey morning ever comes.

The formlessness of `Pickwick’ is therefore its form. This mood of exuberance has two natural expressions, the desire to linger and the desire to ramble. If Pickwick and his friends were not continually crossing a crowded stage which was for ever changing like a transformation scene and of which they only were the constant factors, it would not be a better book but a worse. If the whole story revolved round one incident like a story by Guy de Maupassant, if everything turned on the Fancy Dress Ball at Eatonswill or the Cricket Match at Dingley Dell, if the central symbol of the whole story were Mr. Sawyer’s red handkerchief or Mr. Winkle’s horse; if the *Pickwick Papers* in short were only a brilliant fragment of psychology about the fat boy, or a sad sea-green little idyll about Mr. Stiggins, it would not be a better book but a worse, for it would have lost its supreme meaning even as we have lost its sense of a world almost choked with adventure and a hero constant only in the mutability of a comic Ulysses, faithful only to his own omnivorous fickleness.

CHARLOTTE BRONTE AS A ROMANTIC

THE GENIUS OF Charlotte Bronte is unique in the only valuable sense in which the word can be applied; the only sense which separates the rarity of some gift in a poet from the rarity of some delusion in an ayslum. However complex or even grotesque an artistic power may be, it must be as these qualities exist in a key, which is one of the most complex and grotesque of human objects, but which has for its object the opening of doors and the entrance into wider things. Charlotte Bronte's art was something more or less than complex; and it was not to be described as grotesque; except rarely - and unintentionally. But it was temperamental and, like all things depending on temperament, unequal; and it was so personal as to be perverse. It is in connection with power of this kind, however creative, that we have to discover and define what distinguished it from the uncreative intensity of the insane. I cannot understand what it was that made the Philistines of a former generation regard *Jane Eyre* as morally unsound; probably it was its almost exaggerated morality. But if they had regarded it as mentally unsound, I could have understood their prejudice, while perceiving the nature of their error.

Jane Eyre is, among other things, one of the finest detective stories in the world; and for any one artistically attuned to that rather electric atmosphere, the discovery of the mad wife of Rochester is, as that type of sensation should always be, at once startling and suitable. But a stolid reader, trained in a tamer school of fiction, might be excused if he came to the conclusion that the wife was not very much madder than her husband, and that even the governess herself was a little queer. Such a critic, however, would be ill-taught, as people often are in tame schools; for the mildest school is anything but the most moral. The distinction between the liberating violence that belongs to virtue, as distinct from the merely burrowing and self-burying violence that belongs to vice, is something that can only be conveyed by metaphors; such as that I have used about the key. Some may feel disposed to say that the Bronte spirit was not so much a key as a battering ram. She had indeed some command of both instruments, and could use the more domestic one quietly enough at times; but the vital point is that they opened the doors. Or it might be said that Jane Eyre and the mad woman lived in the same dark and rambling house of mystery, but for the maniac all doors opened continually inwards, while for the heroine all doors, one after the other, opened outwards towards the sun.

One of these universal values in the case of Charlotte Bronte is the light she throws on a very fashionable aesthetic fallacy: the over-iterated contrast between realism and romance. They are spoken of as if they were two alternative types of art, and sometimes even as if they were two antagonistic directions of spiritual obligation. But in truth they are things in two different categories; and, like all such things, can exist together, or apart, or in any degree of combination. Romance is a spirit; and as for realism, it is a convention. To say that some literary work is realistic, not romantic, is to be as inconsequent as the man who said to me once, "The Irish are warm-hearted, not logical." He, at any rate, was not logical, or he would have seen that his statement was like saying that somebody was red-haired rather than athletic.

There is no reason why a man with strong reasoning power should not have strong affections; and it is my experience, if anything, that the man who can argue clearly in the abstract generally does have a generosity of blood and instincts. But he may not have it, for the things are in different categories. This case of an error about the Irish has some application to the individual case of Charlotte Bronte, who was Irish by blood, and in a sense, all the more Irish for being brought up in Yorkshire. An Irish friend of mine, who suffers the same exile in the same environment, once made to me the suggestive remark that the towering and over-masculine barbarians and lunatics who dominate the Bronte novels, simply represent the impression produced by the rather boastful Yorkshire manners upon the more civilized and sensitive Irish temperament. But the wider application is that romance is an atmosphere, as distinct as a separate dimension, which co-exists with and penetrates the whole work of Charlotte Bronte; and is equally present in all her considerable triumphs of realism, and in her even greater triumphs of unreality.

Realism is a convention, as I have said; it is generally a matter of external artistic form, when it is not a matter of mere fashion or convenience, how far the details of life are given, or how far they are the details of the life we know best. It may be rather more difficult to describe a winged horse than a war horse; but after all it is as easy to count feathers as to count hairs; it is as easy and as dull. The story about a hero in which the hairs of his horse were all numbered would not be a story at all; the line must be drawn a long while before we come to anything like literal reality; and the question of whether we give the horse his wings, or even trouble to mention his colour, is merely a question of the artistic form we have chosen. It is the question between casting a horse in bronze or carving him in marble; not the question of describing a horse for the purposes of a zoologist or for the purposes of a bookie. But the spirit of the work is quite another thing. Works of the wildest fantasticality in form can be filled with a rationalistic and even a sober spirit; as are some works of Lucian, of Swift and of Voltaire. On the other hand, descriptions of the most humdrum environments, told with the most homely intimacy, can be shot through and through with the richest intensity, not only of the spirit of sentiment but of the spirit of adventure.

Few will be impelled to call the household of Mr. Rochester a humdrum environment, but it is none the less true that Charlotte Bronte can fill the quietest rooms and corners with a psychological romance which is rather a matter of temperature than of time or place. After all, the sympathetic treatment of Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre is* not more intrinsically romantic and even exaggerative than the sympathetic treatment of Mr. Paul Emanuel in *Villette;* though the first may be superficially a sort of demon and the second more in the nature of an imp. To present Mr. Emanuel sympathetically at all was something of an arduous and chivalric adventure. And Charlotte Bronte was chivalric in this perfectly serious sense; perhaps in too serious a sense, for she paid for the red-hot reality of her romance in a certain insufficiency of humour. She was adventurous, but in an intensely individualistic and therefore an intensely womanly way.

It is the most feminine thing about her that we can think of her as a knight-errant, but hardly as one of an order or round table of knights-errant. Thackeray said that she reminded him of Joan of Arc. But it is one of the fascinating elements in the long romance of Christendom that figures like Joan of Arc have an existence in reality. This vision of the solitary virgin, adventurous and in arms, is very old in European literature and mythology; and the spirit of it went with the little governess along the roads to the dark mansion of madness as if to the castle of an ogre. The same rule had run like a silver thread through the purple tapestries of Ariosto; and we may willingly salute in our great country-woman, especially amid the greatest epic of our country, something of that nobility which is in the very name of Britomart.

PART THREE: THOUGHT AND BELIEF

ANTI-RELIGIOUS THOUGHT IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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The eclipse of Christian theology during the rationalist advance of the eighteenth century is one of the most interesting of historical episodes. In order to see it clearly, we must first realize that it was an episode and that it is now historical. It may be stating it too strongly to say that it is now dead; it is perhaps enough to say that it is now distant and yet distinct; that it is divided from our own time as much as any period of the past. Neither reason nor faith will ever die; for men would die if deprived of either. The wildest mystic uses his reason at some stage; if it be only by reasoning against reason. The most incisive sceptic has dogmas of his own; though when he is a very incisive sceptic, he has often forgotten what they are. Faith and reason are in this sense co-eternal; but as the words are popularly used, as loose labels for particular periods, the one is now almost as remote as the other. What was called the Age of Reason has vanished as completely as what are called the Ages of Faith.

It is essential to see this fact first, because if we do not see its limitations we do not see its outline. It has nothing to do with which period we prefer, or even which we think right. A rationalist is quite entitled to look back to the eighteenth century as a golden age of good sense, as the medievalist looks back to the thirteenth century as a golden age of good faith. But he must look back, and look back across an abyss. We may like or dislike the atmosphere of the modern world, with its intense interest in anything that is called psychological, and in much that is called psychical. We may think that speculation has gone more deep or that it has grown more morbid. We may like or dislike the religions of faith-healing or spirit-rapping; or a hundred other manifestations of the same mood, in fields quite remote from the supernatural or even the spiritual. We may like or dislike, for instance, that vast modern belief in “the power of suggestion” expressed in advertising or publicity and educational methods of all sorts. We may like or dislike the appeal to the non-rational element; the perpetual talk about the Sub-conscious Mind or the Race Memory or the Herd Instinct. We may deplore or we may admire all these developments. But we must fix it in our minds as a historical fact that to any one of the great ‘Infidels’ or Freethinkers of the eighteenth century, this whole modern world of ours would seem a mere madhouse. He might almost be driven, in pursuit of the reasonable, to take refuge in a monastery.

We are dealing therefore with an episode and even an interlude; though the man who likes it has as much right to say that it was an hour of happy daylight between the storms as a Christian has to say it of primitive Christianity or medieval Christendom. From about the time that Dryden died a Catholic to about the time that Newman began to write a little less like a Protestant, there was a period during which the spirit of philosophy filling men’s minds was not positively Protestant any more than it was positively Catholic. It was rationalist even in Protestants and Catholics; in a Catholic like Pope or a Protestant like Paley. But it can be seen at the clearest when the last clinging traditions or presences were dropped; when the most stolid specimen of the Protestant middle classes is found busily scribbling sneers in the footnotes and even the index of a great history of the Fall of Rome; when a brilliant pupil going forth out of the Jesuit seminary turns back over his shoulder the terrible face of Voltaire.

In order to exhibit the essential quality, let us first compare the period with that which preceded it. Touching its historical causes, no man with a sense of human complexity will offer anything but contributory causes. But I think there are contributory causes that have been strangely overlooked. On the face of it, it refers back to the Renaissance, which refers back to the old pagan world. On the face of it, it also refers back to the Reformation, though chiefly in its negative aspect or branch in the old Christian world. But both these things are connected with a third, that has not, I think, been adequately realized. And that is a feeling which can only be called futility. It arose out of the disproportion between the dangers and agonies of the religious wars and the really unreasonable compromise in which they ended; <cujus regio ejus religio>: which may be translated, “Let every State establish its State Church”, but which did mean in the Renaissance epoch, “Let the Prince do what he likes.”

The seventeenth century ended with a note of interrogation. Pope, the poet of reason, whom some thought too reasonable to be poetical, was once compared to a question mark, because he was a crooked little thing that asked questions. The seventeenth century was not little, but it was in some ways crooked, in the sense of crabbed. But anyhow it began with the ferocious controversies of the Puritans and it ended with a question. It was an open question, but it was also an open wound. It was not only that the end of the seventeenth century was of all epochs the most inconclusive. It was also, it must be remembered, inconclusive upon a point which people had always hoped to see concluded. To use the literal sense of the word ‘conclude’, they expected the wound to close. We naturally tend to miss this point today. We have had nearly four hundred years of divided Christianity and have grown used to it; and it is the Reunion of Christendom that we think of as the extraordinary event. But they still thought the Disunion of Christendom an extraordinary event. Neither side had ever really expected it to remain in a state of Disunion. All their traditions for a thousand years were of some sort of union coming out of controversy, ever since a united religion had spread all over a united Roman Empire. From a Protestant standpoint, the natural thing was for Protestantism to conquer Europe as Christianity had conquered Europe. In that case the success of the counter-Reformation would be only the last leap of a dying flame like the last stand of Julian the Apostate. From a Catholic standpoint the natural thing was for Catholicism to reconquer Europe, as it had more than once reconquered Europe; in that case the Protestant would be like the Albigensians: a passing element ultimately reabsorbed. But neither of these natural things happened. Prussia and the other Protestant principalities fought against Austria as the heir of the Holy Roman Empire in the Thirty Years War. They fought each other to a standstill. It was utterly and obviously hopeless to make Austria Protestant or Prussia Roman Catholic. And from the moment when that fact was realized the nature of the whole world was changed. The rock had been cloven and would not close up again, and in the crack or chasm a new sort of strange and prickly weed began to grow. The open wound festered.

We have all heard it said that the Renaissance was produced or precipitated by the Fall of Constantinople. It is true in a sense perhaps more subtle than is meant. It was not merely that it let loose the scholars from the Byzantine Court. It was also that it let loose the sceptical thoughts of the scholars, and of a good many other people when they saw this last turn of the tide in the interminable strife between Christ and Mahomet. The war between Islam and Christendom had been inconclusive. The war between the Reformation and the counter-Reformation was inconclusive. And I for one fancy that the former fact had a good deal to do with the full sceptical expansion of the eighteenth century. When men saw the Crescent and the Cross tossed up alternately as a juggler tosses balls, it was difficult for many not to think that one might be about as good or bad as the other when they saw the Protestant and the Catholic go up and down on the seesaw of the Thirty Years War. Many were disposed to suspect that it was six to one and half-a-dozen to the other. This addition involved an immense subtraction; and two religions came to much less than one. Many began to think that, as they could not both be true, they might both be false. When that thought had crossed the mind the reign of the rationalist had begun.

The thought, as an individual thought, had of course begun long before. It is, in fact, as old as the world; and it is quite obviously as old as the Renaissance. In that sense the father of the modern world is Montaigne; that detached and distinguished intelligence which, as Stevenson said, saw that men would soon find as much to quarrel with in the Bible as they had in the Church. Erasmus and Rabelais and even Cervantes had their part; but in these giants there was still a great gusto of subconscious conviction, still Christian; they mocked at the lives of men, but not at the life of man. But Montaigne was something more revolutionary than a revolutionist; he was a relativist. He would have told Cervantes that his knight was not far wrong in thinking puppets were men, since men are really puppets. He would have said that windmills were as much giants as anything else; and that giants would be dwarfs if set beside taller giants. This doubt, some would say this poison in its original purity, did begin to work under the surface of society from the time of Montaigne onwards and worked more and more towards the surface as the war of religions grew more and more inconclusive. There went with it a spirit that may truly be called humane. But we must always remember that even its refreshing humanity had a negative as well as a positive side. When people are no longer in the mood to be heroic, after all, it is only human to be humane. Some men were really tolerant, but others were merely tired. When people are tired of the subject, they generally agree to differ.

But against this clear mood, as against a quiet evening sky, there stood up the stark and dreadful outlines of the old dogmatic and militant institutions. Institutions are machines; they go on working under any sky and against any mood. And the clue to the next phase is the revolt against their revolting incongruity. The engines of war, the engines of torture, that had belonged to the violent crises of the old creeds, remained rigid and repellent; all the more mysterious for being old and sometimes even all the more hideous for being idle. Men in that mellow mood of doubt had no way of understanding the fanaticism and the martyrdom of their fathers. They knew nothing of medieval history or of what a united Christendon had once meant to men. They were like children horrified at the sight of a battlefield.

Take the determining example of the Spanish Inquisition. The Spanish Inquisition was Spy Fever. It produced the sort of horrors such fevers produce; to some extent even in modern wars. The Spaniards had reconquered Spain from Islam with a glowing endurance and defiance as great as any virtue ever shown by man; but they had the darker side of such warfare; they were always struggling to deracinate a Jewish plot which they believed to be always selling them to the enemy. Of this dark tale of perverted patriotism the humanitarians knew nothing. All they knew was that the Inquisition was still going on. And suddenly the great Voltaire rose up and shattered it with a hammer of savage laughter. It may seem strange to compare Voltaire to a child. But it is true that though he was right in hating and destroying it, he never knew what it was that he had destroyed.

There was born in that hour a certain spirit, which the Christian spirit should be large enough to cover and understand. In relation to many things it was healthy, though in relation to some things it was shallow. We may be allowed to associate it with the jolly uncle who does not believe in ghosts. It had an honourable expression in the squires and parsons who put down the persecution of witches. The uncle is not always just to Spiritualists; but he is rather a comfort on a dark night. The squire did not know all there is to know about diabolism, but he did stop many diabolical fears of diabolism. And if we are to understand history, that is humanity, we must sympathize with this breezy interlude in which it seemed natural for humanity to be humane.

The mention of the squire is not irrelevant; there was in that humanity something of unconscious aristocracy. One of the respects in which the rational epoch was immeasurably superior to our own was in the radiant patience with which it would follow a train of thought. But it is only fair to say that in this logic there was something of leisure, and indeed we must not forget how much of the first rational reform of the age came from above. It was a time of despots who were also deists or even, like Frederick the Great, practically atheists. But Frederick was sometimes humanitarian if he was never human. Joseph of Austria, offending his people by renouncing religious persecution, was very like a squire offending the village by repressing witch-burning. But in considering the virtues of the age, we must not forget that it had a very fine ideal of honourable poverty; the Stoic idea of Jefferson and Robespierre. It also believed in hard work, and worked very hard in the details of reform. A man like Bentham toiled with ceaseless tenacity in attacking abuse after abuse. But people hardly realized that his utilitarianism was creating the new troubles of Capitalism, any more than that Frederick of Prussia was making the problem of modern militarism.

Perhaps the perfect moment of every mortal thing is short, even of mortal things dealing with immortal, as was the best moment of the Early Church or the Middle Ages. Anyhow the best moment of rationalism was very short. Things always overlap, and Bentham and Jefferson inherited from something that had already passed its prime. Not for long did man remain in that state of really sane and sunny negation. For instance, having covered the period with the great name of Voltaire, I may well be expected to add the name of Rousseau. But even in passing from one name to the other, we feel a fine shade of change which is not mere progression. The rationalist movement is tinged with the romantic movement, which is to lead men back as well as forward. They are asked to believe in the General Will, that is the soul of the people; a mystery. By the time the French Revolution is passed, it is elemental that things are loose that have not been rationalized. Danton has said, “It is treason to the people to take away the dream”. Napoleon has been crowned, like Charlemagne, by a Pope. And when the dregs of Diderot’s bitterness were reached; when they dragged the Goddess of Reason in triumph through Notre Dame, the smouldering Gothic images could look down on that orgy more serenely then than when Voltaire began to write; awaiting their hour. The age was ended when these men thought it was beginning. Their own mystical maenad frenzy was enough to prove it: the goddess of Reason was dead.

One word may be added, to link up the age with many other ages. It will be noted that it is not true, as many suppose, that the rational attack on Christianity came from the modern discoveries in material science. It had already come, in a sense it had already come and gone, before these discoveries really began. They were pursued persistently partly through a tradition that already existed. But men were not rationalistic because they were scientists. Rather they became scientists because they were rationalists. Here as everywhere the soul of man went first, even when it denied itself.

THE CAMP AND THE CATHEDRAL

IT MUST always be something of a problem how far the private amateur may venture merely to guess that the professional specialist is mistaken. On the other hand it is quite certain that the man who knows most about a thing is often quite wrong about it. He is often quite wrong in fact, and still more wrong in spirit. On the other hand, the fact that the learned man has lost humility is no reason why the unlearned man also should lose that humorous and healthy gift. On the whole, I think the test of the question is in the size and simplicity of the mistake. It depends on whether the scholar is blind to something because it is too small to be seen, or because it is too large to be seen. I cannot draw the learned man's attention to something recondite, for he knows far more of such obscure details than I do. But I may sometimes draw his attention to something obvious, for that is the sort of thing that the learned man has a way of falling over in the street.

History is the only hobby in which I have dabbled even in this tentative fashion; and it is to history that I should specially apply the test. I mean the test of whether the truth has been missed because it is small and hidden, or actually because it is big and plain. Cobbett, for instance, was an amateur historian in somewhat the same sense, though less amateurish than myself. And when he was right, as I think he generally was, it was because he had an eye for large and obvious things. His eye went across a great landscape like a bird, and was master of the lie of the land. Thus his broadest deduction was simply from the big churches in England, and especially from the very fact of their bigness. It was a fact filling the sky; a thing whose shadow lay at evening on the whole landscape. But it never seems to have occurred to anybody but Cobbett at that time, to ask whether a sparse remnant of ignorant savages were likely to have raised a sort of sacred tower of Babel to the stars, in half the hamlets of England.

The obscurantism of the Reformation, and the rationalists who were its heirs, was in this way quite unique. Nobody before or since ever kept a people quite so much in darkness as those who put out all the candles in the sixteenth century. In this, for instance, the anti-Catholic reaction in the sixteenth century was quite different from the first Catholic movement in the fourth or fifth century. The Early Christians had a great moral horror of the last phase of the great civilization of Rome; but they never attempted to pretend that it was not a great civilization, or that it had not been made by Rome. Their moral horror was in most matters justified; in some matters considerably exaggerated. But in its wildest exaggerations of fanaticism, it never talks as if the heathen had not built bridges or produced poetry. They did not call the classical architecture the Vandal architecture, as if it had been built only by the barbarians who destroyed it. Yet that would have been a parallel to the very word `Gothic' which we are still compelled by custom to use. The medieval world did not talk about Plato and Cicero as fools occupied with futilities; yet that is exactly how a more modern world talked of the philosophy of Aquinas and sometimes even of the purely philosophic parts of Dante. The Christians recognized an awful spiritual chasm dividing them from their great ancestors; but they recognized that their ancestors were great. At no moment in all those two thousand years was the legend lost that Virgil was something magnificent, whether as a magician in the Dark Ages or a model classic in the Middle Ages. In religion and morals there had indeed been a shuddering recoil; but it was a recoil from over-civilization, not a complacent contempt for savagery. They thought the Coliseum had been the arena of bestial abominations; of beasts, employed by men in a spirit too base to be called beastly; and so it had. But they did not think the Coliseum had been made by beasts; or look at its labyrinth of arches with contemptuous curiosity, as at the rude instinctive architecture of an ant-hill. In all that mixture of regret and pain and fascination, with which paganism has haunted the Christian centuries, there was never a touch of the innocent vulgarity with which even the Victorians sometimes talked of monks as if they were monkeys.

Now the lifting of this load of obscurantism was a thing largely done by the light of nature, by men like William Cobbett or William Morris. And the light of nature showed them very simple and solid things like the large churches in the English countrysides. These things are the unanswerable arguments of the amateur. These are the big guns that he can really bring up in order to outflank the specialist. Constitutional historians like Hume and Hallam and Robertson might have read many things that the adventurous amateur could not read, but it was impossible to pretend that he could not have access to his own huge empty parish church. It required no spectacles to see a church spire; and the stones of Winchester needed no interpreter to translate them from the Latin. These facts were soon found sufficient, to anyone who would use his senses; and it became more and more self-evident that men had been about some very big business in medieval times. The researches of later and more learned scholars confirmed the random commonsense of Cobbett or Morris. But ignorant men had originally made the right guess; and made it merely because they refused to explain away a mountain, or ignore the presence of a whale.

I have remarked that nobody ever tried to do with Roman remains what was once done with Gothic remains. I mean the attempt to treat them not merely as ruins but as rudiments. I mean the attempt to look at the stone arches as we look at stone hatchets, or regard carved pillars as we regard chipped flints. Nobody ever condescended to heathen architecture, as they condescended to Christian architecture. As a matter of fact it is far more impossible for us to build a Gothic abbey than a Roman aqueduct. The engineering work of the pagan empire does in many ways resemble the works of more modern times. It resembles them largely because the method is scientific. It resembles them still more because the labour is servile. You could build a Roman aqueduct and improve on a Roman aqueduct with scientific appliances. But you cannot build a Gothic cathedral with servile labour. People who want to work in that way must put up with the Pyramids and the Eiffel Tower. And this brings me to a final consideration, in this matter of Roman and medieval remains, which has often intrigued and attracted me as an amateur in historical guesswork. It is a yet larger though somewhat looser application of the same principle, that the things that are hid from the wise and understanding are the things that are too large for them to see.

I have often wondered whether the vastness and vitality of the legends that descend from the Dark Ages, such as the legends of King Arthur and the Round Table, were due to this comparative continuity between the last strength of the Empire and the first strength of the Church. I mean that there may have been a moment, even in Britain, when that majesty of the old pagan civilization still stood unchanged, save that it was no longer pagan. The combination of the old pride in being Roman with the new pride in being Christian may have created a militant morality really not unlike its later form of medieval chivalry. In other words, the popular tradition may not be so far wrong when it talks of some dim fighter in the fifth century as a knight. It may not be so far wrong when it talks of the table where those fighters feasted as the original model of knighthood. It is only by a sort of symbol that we clothe the body of that British king in thirteenth century armour; but it may be something more than a symbol which clothes his spirit with the thirteenth century conception of arms. If ever history did repeat itself, the mood of the first Crusaders who fought with the Saracens might really very well have repeated, as in a mirror, the mood of the last baptized Romans and Romanized Britons who fought with the Saxons. It is really a historical fallacy to say that the courtliness and polish of Sir Lancelot would not have existed in that barbarous time. Courtliness and polish are exactly the things that would have existed in one of the last of the Romanized Christians in comparison with his barbarous time. It is a blunder to say that the virginity and the vision of Sir Galahad are a later romantic fiction added to a half-heathen struggle. Virginity and visions are exactly the ideas that would have shone among the last champions of a Catholic culture in a half-heathen struggle. In this matter of Arthurian legend, I am disposed to suspect that the romantic view is really the realistic view, and the right view. If others doubt it, it will not be because of any realistic arguments of history against it. It will be because others do not feel as I do the enormous argument from the scale of popular stories; the sense that a story we have all heard from childhood is something solid and colossal, like a Gothic cathedral or a Roman camp.

THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY

EVERY NOW and again in the long and weary history of literature and journalism something is said that is important, something that blows a trumpet and calls a halt. For the first time, perhaps for many years we have suddenly to stop and think. There remains the essential difference between a sentence that is read once and a sentence that is read twice. Now, one of these arresting and transfiguring hints can be found in Hilaire Belloc's *The Historic Thames*. He says it was a mere accident of history that the phrase Westminster Abbey does not sound to us today like the phrase Welbeck Abbey. It would give the modern English a great shock if Westminster Abbey were turned into a suite of rooms for the Duke of Westminster. Yet it gives them no shock that Welbeck Abbey should be turned into a suite of rooms for the Duke of Portland. Yet God was worshipped, I suppose, in Welbeck Abbey as well as in Westminster Abbey. The first fact about Westminster Abbey, considered as a religious institution, is as simple as it is sardonic. It is the great religious institution of the Middle Ages that managed to survive.

The whole of this theme is, of course, subject to exaggeration on both sides. One of the ablest men I have ever known summed up all the tombs at Westminster which tourists go to see in the curt and confident formula: "Westminster Abbey is to be venerated, not because of those that sleep therein, but rather in spite of them." Many may call this a harsh paradox; but if they walk round the Abbey seriously and slowly, and really observe what petty politicians and third-rate generals have cumbered the ground there with their cold and clumsy monuments, I do not think that they will wholly deny the truth of that idle but bitter jest. A very great part of the funereal art in the Abbey can really be expressed only by one of those colossal epigrams which can be found in the Gospels more than anywhere else. It is, indeed, such statuary as would be made by the dead burying their dead.

It is true that anyone knowing the savour either of England or Christianity will have the religious emotion as well as the patriotic by the low Gothic tomb of Chaucer. But this, if it be examined, is an exception that proves the rule. For Chaucer was buried there when the popular Christianity of the Middle Ages still coloured this church like all others. It would be appropriate in any case that Chaucer should be in Westminster Abbey, even if it were exactly what it was when he used to look out of his London window at its towers. But it would be far more appropriate if men like Pitt or Macaulay were buried in St. Paul's Cathedral; the new Renaissance St. Paul's, which seems built as a pantheon for the heathen but heroic aristocrats of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Florid pillars and posturing statues are appropriate to them; most of them died rather defying death than looking for immortality. And it is really a part of their patriotic, but not Christian spirit that their figures should, as it were, stand frozen for ever in some gesture of eloquence or pride. No imaginative person will wholly fail to respond to the emotion expressed about a murdered Renaissance prince by a great English Renaissance poet:

He is there
Up like a Roman statue and will stand
Till dawn has made him marble.

But to Chaucer all this would have been utterly incomprehensible in connection with a church. In that connection he would have thought it as insolent and vulgar as a waxwork show. For he lived before the great lords had become the legend of England, instead of the great saints. Chaucer, whatever his own faults or vanities might be, would certainly have been the first to admit that it was the Abbey that sanctified his dust and not his dust that sanctified the Abbey. He would not have thought of it as a gallery or public record office where the names and deeds of great poets could be found, though it is likely enough that he knew he was a great poet, and even, among his worldly acquaintances, warmly insisted on the fact. He would have thought of the Abbey as a refuge, where a poor old sinner named Geoffrey Chaucer might feel a little more comfortable in the *Dies Irae. I* am not here choosing by ethical preference between the two attitudes; still less do I despise either one or the other. The name of Nelson, for instance, will always be not only an inspiring but, properly understood, a purifying name. And it seems quite appropriate for Nelson, in his own time, type, station and tradition, to cry out, “A peerage or Westminster Abbey!” meaning by Westminster Abbey merely glory and death. But I doubt if Chaucer could have been made to understand what a peerage could possibly have to do with Westminster Abbey. Warriors at least as valiant and victorious as Nelson were buried in Chaucer's day - the Black Prince, for instance. Warriors at least as valiant and victorious as Nelson were buried at Westminster in the Middle Ages - Henry V, for instance. But when their images were carved on their tombs at all they were carved with closed eyes and hands pointed in prayer. And I have seen one such monument, in Salisbury Cathedral, I think, in which the man lies in dumb supplication, but the dog at his feet has risen erect and watchful, having heard the trumpet of God. It has nothing to do with men being religious men in the modern sense, or even with their being good men. It is a matter of a great popular religion which never affects anybody except when it affects everybody. King John would have been quite incapable of imagining himself exhibited in a church in any other attitude.

I am not here discussing, of course, anything about the ecclesiastical changes as they affect theology; still less should I dream of saying that the spirit Chaucer would have understood did not continue at all in the Anglican Church after the spoliation of the monasteries. It continued markedly in George Herbert, and most unmistakably in Bishop Ken. But all that is a controversy with which, fortunately, we are not here concerned. My point for the moment is purely political; I say that the rise of England into a great modern nation, the particular kind of aristocracy that ruled it while it rose; the greater severance for various reasons from the other European nations, and everything that culminated in the victorious war against Napoleon and the established peace of Queen Victoria - I say that all this did, in fact, produce a type of public spirit and public art in which the old religious significance of the Abbey sometimes almost disappeared. The idea increased that Westminster Abbey was a pantheon, more sensible, but no less secular, than the absurd Valhalla that the Kaiser had at Berlin, where some petty Teuton prince was represented as a giant and Goethe put beside him as a pigmy. That singular mixture of humour and shame which is the English temperament, saved us from doing anything so bad as that. Our statues, at the worst, were only conspicuous by being bad statues, like the old statue of the Duke of Wellington. At the best, they are conspicuous by not being there at all, like the new statue of Shakespeare. But there was enough of this parade of pompous sculpture to confuse or hide the spiritual meaning of Westminster Abbey, and sometimes even its architectural style. We talk of not being able to see the wood for the trees. It may be said that people cannot in this case see the church for the tombs.

All that the Abbey meant to the ethics and atmosphere of this island from its earliest foundations is a thing not easy to state to the average modern reader. For the average modern reader, however well educated, is always taught the tale of the early Middle Ages in such a way that it makes no sense. This is because the main concern of the Middle Ages was the same as the main concern of this article; and it is almost always entirely left out. To take one working instance at random, the ordinary schoolboy of a good school, such as the school I went to, is always told, and therefore naturally believes, that Richard Coeur de Lion was a romantic and irresponsible ne'er-do-well who went away to the Crusades for the same reason that an adventurer takes the King's shilling or a schoolboy runs away to sea - an itch for fighting or an impatience of honest work. Now, whatever Richard's temperament may have been (and, no doubt, it was adventurous) this explanation simply does not cover the facts. Especially it does not cover these two facts - that John, who stopped to rule, was quite as fond of fighting as Richard, and did it very well; and that Philip Augustus of France, who went on the Crusade with Richard, was not particularly fond of fighting, and would very much have liked to stop and rule. The key that is lost here is simply a little thing called the Christian religion, in which all these men, good and bad, believed, and which was in a mortal peril from which the Christian peoples simply expected their Kings to defend it. Now, we could find a somewhat similar instance of the religious element being missed, and the whole business being therefore unmeaning, in the earlier history of Westminster Abbey. The usual way of writing in England about the times before and after the Norman Conquest is to represent it at best as what Carlyle called a "rude stalwart age"; an age of crowned freebooters, who neither asked nor gave mercy; an age of race conquering race with a sort of savage fair play and a more or less useful settlement; in short, a time when instincts laid a foundation on which ethics had yet to build. Anyone taking this ordinary heathen and dynastic view of the business would see something very fierce and final in the coincidence which Freeman maintained, that the Saxon Harold was crowned in Westminster Abbey almost immediately before he was killed at Hastings, and that the victorious Duke of Normandy was certainly crowned in Westminster Abbey almost immediately afterwards. The blood and iron theory of the Dark Ages would see in this the overwhelming of a race by a race; the soft, unguarded Saxons with their soft, unguarded King, Edward the Confessor, swept to nowhere by a raid of aliens clad in iron, appealing to nothing but force, and caring nothing for England. But the person holding this theory would instantly be pulled up short, and extremely puzzled by the discovery that the next really important thing that happened in Westminster Abbey after the Normans were in full possession of it was the canonization of Edward the Confessor. Stated in the modern manner, his difficulty would stand something like this: What made a number of William's own Norman bishops, French gentlemen like any other, join in glorifying the memory of an old fool who had failed to save the Saxons from the victorious arms of their own uncles and cousins? Why should mere strong men, mere victors, bow down to the very weakest man of the defeated party and the subject race? Here, again, the key is always left out; the real explanation is never given. It will be found in the title of this article.

It was based, in short, on one broad and simple fact, which will seem almost incredible to people living in an age when religion is generally the product of a specially religious temperament. The fact was, to put it shortly, that though William the Conqueror had taken Edward the Confessor's land, he did, in all probability, really regard Edward the Confessor as his superior. These fighting men of the Dark Ages were very fierce; but they did really think, ideally speaking, that it would be better if they were very gentle.

They were all soldiers; they would all have agreed that soldiers were inferior to saints. If we say of the men in the ages during which the Abbey was first erected, that they did not curb their coarse and cruel appetites, that in so far as they were tyrants and usurpers they went on being tyrants and usurpers, we shall probably be right. But if we read into them a modern philosophy of force, and imagine that they despised monks or despised meekness, we shall be exactly as wrong as if we supposed that all City men despise a soldier for having been fool enough to have gone under fire. Christianity was to these men exactly what patriotism is to modern Englishmen; the one sacred bond which even the most evil men would not like to own they had betrayed.

This fact of the old and real religious sentiment about the Abbey can be illustrated by any one out of the ten or twenty most famous things in it. Take the case of two celebrated men of the later Middle Ages, a father and a son, who were perhaps as responsible as anyone for the last turn taken by the medieval civilization in England, and who are both more or less connected with the place. I mean Henry IV, called Bolingbroke, and his son, the victor of Agincourt. There is nobody who has heard of Westminster Abbey who has not heard of the Jerusalem Chamber. There may even be few who have heard of the Jerusalem Chamber who have not been told by some guide-book or cicerone that Henry of Bolingbroke died there. But I think there are very much fewer people who would instantly remember (though the fact is known, of course, to all students of such things) that this very selfish, cynical and materialistic usurper found a strange spiritual comfort in dying in the Jerusalem Chamber, because it seemed to him a half fulfillment of a vow which had haunted his life, a vow to die or recover Jerusalem. The sentiment, in fact, was almost exactly the same as had moved a much more heroic man in a much more heroic medieval period, King Robert Bruce, to send his best warrior out of a much-menaced country, to carry his heart to the Holy Land, since he himself had never managed to carry there his powerful body and his powerful brain. To such men Westminster Abbey was not a national and finally satisfying thing. To such men Westminster Abbey was even a *pis aller*. When we have understood that, we have some glimpse of that burning concentration of the Christian conscience which made the Christendom of the Middle Ages almost one nation. But when modern humanitarians talk of international solidarity and the need for a United States of Europe, I do not notice that they give much praise to the Popes and the Crusades who so nearly made it a reality.

The case of Henry V carries me back to an instance of which I am not so sure, and of which I have not the details by me. But I am certain that I read in some quarter of competent learning and authority that Henry V’s entry into Paris was marked by proceedings which would very much astonish any good modern English poet, if he were called upon to write a patriotic poem on the event. To do these modern men of genius justice, I think it would have considerably surprised Shakespeare himself, for though Shakespeare was unquestionably in sympathy with the medieval type of religion in such vital matters as the admission or the purgation of sin, the note of international and European Christianity had been somewhat lost even by his time. In the account I read, so far as I remember, the principal interest displayed by Henry V entering Paris after Agincourt was a strong desire to pay homage to the various relics of celebrated saints which were preserved in that city. So that the conqueror of France, though in many ways a rather exceptionally rude and ruthless conqueror may almost be said to have passed a considerable part of his triumphal progress on his knees. These are the things (and I could give twenty other instances with more certainty and exactitude than I can give this one) which really strike the note of the extraordinary and universal conviction of medieval men, and exactly what the men who really made the Abbey would have meant by its religious aspect.

I am not writing controversially and I do not desire in this place to diminish the credit of the Imperial type of patriotism, but in the matter of spiritual atmospheres it is not untrue to say that if Chaucer or even Sackville, had read Mr. Kipling's poetry and understood it they would simply not have been able to make head or tail of what he meant when he said:

The hush of the dread high altar
Where the Abbey makes us We.

They would not have been able to understand how a vague Darwinian like Cecil Rhodes, who called a lonely hill in Africa "his church", could have anything to do with the Abbey at all. It is not necessary to take so extreme a view in order to see that the two alternative courses which the religion of Western Europe may take are in a certain sense symbolized in the position of the Abbey today. At this moment the secular and the religious aspects of the institution are still more or less balanced. But under the searching light of spiritual tragedies, which more and more divide the nations into the friends and the enemies of the old proclamation of Constantine, the institution will almost certainly become more of one thing or more of the other. Our religion will either become more and more what the religion of the old Roman poets and historians so largely became, a certain savour of sanctity clinging round the emblems of patriotism and civic pride, so that the tattered flags above the altar will be at last more sacred than the altar itself. Or it will become more and more what that mysterious energy was before which the Roman religion of the poets and the historians perished - a voice out of the catacombs and a cry from the Cross.

THE RELIGIOUS AIM OF EDUCATION

From *The Torchbearer*, 1925

IT IS only by a definite and even deliberate narrowing of the mind that we can keep religion out of education. I do not deny that it may in certain cases be the least of many evils; that it may be a sort of loyalty to a political compromise; that it is certainly better than a political injustice. But secular education is a limitation, if it be only a self-limitation. The natural thing is to say what you think about nature; and especially, so to speak, about the nature of nature. The first and most obvious thing that a person is interested in is what sort of world he is living in; and why he is living in it. If you do not know, of course, you will not be able to say; but the mere fact of not being able to answer the question that the other person is most likely to ask, may or may not be what some people call education, but it is not a very brilliant exhibition of instruction. If you have convictions upon these cosmic and fundamental things, whether negative or positive, you are an instructor who is on one most important point refusing to instruct. Your motive may be generous, or it may be merely timid; but certainly it is not in itself educational.

It is sometimes said that the devotees of a doctrinal religion, who are so often depicted as donkeys, are in matters of this kind wearing blinkers. The word is not wisely chosen by the critics; and in one sense is much more applicable to the critic himself. The man who teaches authoritative answers to ultimate questions, even if he only says that Mumbo Jumbo made the world out of a pumpkin, may be dogmatizing or persecuting or tyrannically laying down the law about everything, but he is not blinking anything. He is not wearing blinkers, which implies deliberately limiting the field of his own vision. His vision may be in our view an illusion; but if it is very vivid to him, we cannot blame him for describing it; and anyhow he is describing the whole of it. If there is such a thing in the world as a donkey deliberately wearing blinkers, it is the enlightened educationist who is always making a nervous effort to keep out of his task of imparting knowledge any reference to the things that men from the beginning of the world have most wanted to know. Nor are those things mere hole-and-corner objects of a special curiosity. Whether or no they can ever be known, they are not only worth knowing, but they are the simplest and most elementary sort of knowledge.

It is a good thing that children should fully realize that there is an objective world outside them, as solid as the lamp-post out in the street. But even when we make the lamp-post quite objective, it is not unnatural to ask what is its object. A naturalist, noting the common objects of the street, may observe many facts and put them down in a note-book. A bicyclist may bump into a lamp-post; a tramp may lean against a lamp-post; a drunkard may embrace a lamp-post or even in a lighter moment try to climb a lamp-post. But it is not a strange or specialist sort of knowledge to note about a lamp-post that it has a lamp.

Now secular education really means that everybody shall make a point of looking down at the pavement, lest by some fatal chance somebody should look up at the lamp. The lamp of faith that did in fact illuminate the street for the mass of mankind in most ages of history, was not only a wandering fire seen floating in the air by visionaries; it was also for most people the explanation of the post. If a low cloud like a London fog must indeed cover that flame, then it is an objective fact that the object will remain chiefly as an object to be bumped into. I am not blaming anybody who can only manage to regard the world in that highly objective light. Even if the lamp-post appears as a post without a lamp, and therefore a post without a purpose, it may be possible to take different views of it. The stoic, like the tramp, may lean on it; the optimist, like the drunkard, may embrace it; the progressive may attempt to climb it, and so on. So it is with those who merely bump into a headless world as into a lampless post; to whom the world is a large objective obstacle. I only say that there is a difference, and not a small or secondary difference, between those who know and those who do not know what the post is for.

The deepest of all desires for knowledge is the desire to know what the world is for and what we are for. Those who believe they can answer that question must at least be allowed to answer it as the first question and not as the last. A man who cannot answer it has a right to refuse to answer it; though perhaps he is rather too prone to comfort himself with the very dogmatic dogma that nobody else can answer it if he can’t. But no man has a right to answer it, or even to arrange for it being answered, as if it were a sort of peculiar and pedantic additional question, which only a peculiar and pedantic sort of pupil would be likely to ask. Secular education is more sensible than making religion one of the extras; like learning fret-work or Portuguese. And this principle is important in the controversy about religious education, because it involves the whole question which was so prominent in the controversy, the question of what is called ‘atmosphere’. All that it means is, that anybody who has a right to answer this question has a right to answer it as if it were the sort of question that it is; a question affecting the nature of the whole world and the purpose of every part of human life. If a man is to teach religion, it is absurd to ask him to teach it as if it were something else, that did not apply to all the activities of man. The expression ‘a religious hour’ is something very like a contradiction in terms. And it is amusing to note that the same casual sceptic who is always sneering at the orthodox for their forms and limitations, who is always talking of their Sunday religion and their separation of things sacred and profane, is generally the very man who is most ready to make fun of the idea of a religious atmosphere in the schools. That is to say he of all people objects most to sacred and profane things being united and to a religion that works on week-days as well as on Sundays. The truth is that the idea of atmosphere is simply a piece of the elementary psychology of children. In any other matter, these people would be the first to tell us that education must take note of all the influences forming the mind, however apparently light or accidental. They will go wild with dismay if the child has to look at the wrong wall-paper; they will set themselves seriously to see that he has the right picture of the wombat; but they tell us not to trouble whether he has the right picture of the world.

I am not implying, of course, that there is no value in a secular social enthusiasm; or even that, in the language that some use sincerely and even usefully, it may not deserve to be called religion. What I doubt is whether it can in this sense deserve to be called reason. It does not satisfy the primary intellectual hunger about the meaning of life, that certain people may mean well, even when they doubt whether it means anything. The truth is that there is implied in almost all idealism a number of ideas which the idealists have seldom really followed out as ideas. There is the notion of a choice that is mysteriously offered and followed by equally mysterious consequences; of a mystical value attached to one part of our nature without any authority to value it; of a sort of ultimate tryst with nobody in particular; in short all the rich tints of a London fog surrounding a lamp-post without a lamp. I am very far from lacking in respect for all this groping idealism; I only say, that by its own confession, it is very incomplete compared with that of anybody who has a complete philosophy, because he has a creed. And I mean no offence when I say that anybody who has this sort of education is literally a half-educated person.

But there is another aspect of the case, which illustrates the real truth in the rather rustic Puritanism of the people who made a fuss about Darwinism in Dayton. To some of us it seems strange that such very antiquated Protestantism should be supposed to represent religion. It seems stranger that such very antiquated Darwinism should be supposed to represent science. But as a matter of fact the protest and prosecution on that occasion did represent something. It stood for a strong popular instinct, not without justification, that science is being made to mean more than science ever really says. An evolutionary education is something very different from an education about evolution. Just as a religious school openly and avowedly gives a religious atmosphere, as a scientific class does sometimes covertly or unconsciously give a materialistic atmosphere. A secularist teacher has just as much difficulty as a priest would have, in not giving his own answer to the questions that are most worth answering. He also is a little annoyed at not being allowed to put the first things first. He tends more and more to turn his science into a philosophy. It makes the matter too disputable and provocative perhaps to call that philosophy materialistic. It is more polite and equally pointed to call it monistic. But the point is that this philosophy has in it something altogether alien, not only to all religions that refer back to the will of God, but even to all moralities that revolve upon the will of man. Rightly or wrongly, its image of the universe is not that of a post put up with the design of having a lamp on it; it is rather that of a post that grew like a tree; a lamp-post that eventually grew its own lamp. Now considering this vision of vague growth simply as an atmosphere and an impression on the minds of the young, (apart from its truth or falsehood) there is no doubt that it tends so far as it goes to the notion of most things being much of a muchness, being all equally inevitable fruits of the same tree; and certainly not towards the idea of moral choice and conflict; of a contrast between black and white or a battle between light and darkness.

I am not writing controversially or trying to pin anybody with this as an individual necessity. I am writing educationally and considering the probable psychological impression of certain atmospheres and fine shades. I say that a great deal of evolution in education would not make that education very insistent on the ideas of free will and fighting morality; of dramatic choice and challenge. Why should one fruit challenge another fruit on the same tree; or how can there be a black and white choice between its slow gradations of green? So that even if we ignore the primary question of religion in the sense of the purpose of creation, there is the same sort of problem about religion even if we use it in the sense of the purpose of doing good. If a man believes that there is between vice and virtue a chasm like that of life and death, he will want to say so. And if other people only say that everything is a growth of evolution, he will not admit that they have said what he wishes to say. It is not merely a question of secular education that seems indifferent to religion, but of scientific education that seems rather indifferent to ethics. I am talking about educational effects, as educationists do; and decline any sort of sentimental recrimination about the pure and noble aims of men of science. Many who would despise anything so classical as the teaching of rhetoric, are always ready with any amount of rhetoric in praise of the teaching of science. I am not attacking the teaching of science, still less the teachers of science; I am saying the teaching of evolution, if it becomes an atmosphere, cannot be an atmosphere favourable to moral fire or a fighting spirit. To put it shortly, the teaching of evolution is hardly the training for revolution.

It is hardly likely to give a special strength to the feeling that some things are intrinsically intolerable or other things imperatively just. When a reformer can only say to a slave-driver, "You are evolving too slow; you ought to have emerged from the slave-state," the slave-driver has only to answer, "You are evolving too fast; you ought to wait for the twenty-first century." Such an argument will hardly set in a flame the fanaticism of Harper's Ferry. It seems to me, therefore, that the poor Puritans of Tennessee are not altogether wrong, as a matter of educational psychology, if they say that evolutionary education, even if it is not an attack on Christian doctrine, may become an atmosphere very alien to Christian morals; or indeed any manly and combative sort of morals. After the doctrine that existence is a thing of design, the next most interesting doctrine is that life is a thing of choice; and even if men were all taught to be atheists, I doubt whether mere evolutionism would have taught them to be really spirited and warlike atheists. And to see atheists lose their one great virtue of ferocity would indeed be a serious loss to religion.

The Philosophy of Islands

From *The Venture Annual*, 1903

Suppose that in some convulsion of the planets there fell upon this earth from Mars, a creature of a shape totally unfamiliar, a creature about whose actual structure we were of necessity so dark that we could not tell which was creature and which was clothes. We could see that it had, say, six red tufts on its head, but we should not know whether they were a highly respectable head-covering or simply a head. We should see that the tail ended in three yellow stars, but it would be difficult for us to know whether this was part of a ritual or simply a tail. Well, man has been from the beginning of time this unknown monster. People have always differed about what part of him belonged to himself, and what part was merely an accident. People have said successively that it was natural to him to do everything and anything that was diverse and mutually contradictory; that it was natural to him to worship God, and natural to him to be an atheist; natural to him to drink water, and natural to him to drink wine; natural to him to be equal, natural to be unequal; natural to obey kings, natural to kill them. The divergence is quite sufficient to justify us in asking if there are not many things that are really natural, which really appear early and strong in every normal human being, which are not embodied in any of his after affairs. Whether there are not morbidities which are as fresh and recurrent as the flowers of spring. Whether there are not superstitions whose darkness is as wholesome as the darkness that falls nightly on all living things. Whether we have not treated things essential as portents; whether we have not seen the sun as a meteor, a star of ill-luck.

It would at least appear that we tend to become separated from what is really natural, by the fact that we always talk about those people who are really natural as if they were goblins. There are three classes of people, for instance, who are in a greater or less degree elemental: children, poor people, and to some extent, and in a darker and more terrible manner, women. The reason why men have from the beginning of literature talked about women as if they were more or less mad, is simply because women are natural, and men, with their formalities and social theories, are very artificial. It is the same with children; children are simply human beings who are allowed to do what everyone else really desires to do, as for instance, to fly kites, or when seriously wronged to emit prolonged screams for several minutes. So again, the poor man is simply a person who expends upon treating himself and his friends in public houses about the same proportion of his income as richer people spend on dinners or cabs; that is, a great deal more than he ought. But nothing can be done until people give up talking about these people as if they were too eccentric for us to understand, when, as a matter of fact, if there is any eccentricity involved, we are too eccentric to understand them. A poor man, as it is weirdly ordained, is definable as a man who has not got much money; to hear philanthropists talk about him one would think he was a kangaroo. A child is a human being who has not grown up; to hear educationists talk one would think he was some variety of a deep-sea fish. The case of the sexes is at once more obvious and more difficult. The stoic philosophy and the early church discussed woman as if she were an institution, and in many cases decided to abolish her. The modern feminine output of literature discusses man as if he were an institution, and decides to abolish him. It can only timidly be suggested that neither man nor woman is an institution, but things that are really quite natural and all over the place.

If we take children, for instance, as examples of the uncorrupted human animal, we see that the very things which appear in them in a manner primary and prominent, are the very things that philosophers have taught us to regard as sophisticated and over-civilized. The things which really come first are the things which we are accustomed to think come last. The instinct for a pompous intricate and recurring ceremonial, for instance, comes to a child like an organic hunger; he asks for a formality as he might ask for a drink of water.

Those who think, for instance, that the thing called superstition is something heavily artificial, are very numerous; that is those who think that it has only been the power of priests or of some very deliberate system that has built up boundaries, that has called one course of action lawful and another unlawful, that has called one piece of ground sacred and another profane. Nothing it would seem, except a large and powerful conspiracy could account for men so strangely distinguishing between one field and another, between one city and another, between one nation and another. To all those who think in this way there is only one answer to be given. It is to approach each of them and whisper in his ear: “Did you or did you not as a child try to step on every alternate paving-stone ? Was that artificial and a superstition? Did priests come in the dead of night and mark out by secret signs the stones on which you are allowed to tread? Were children threatened with the oubliette or the fire of Smithfield if they failed to step on the right stone? Has the Church issued a bill “<Quisquam non

pavemente>?” No! On this point on which we were really free, we invented our servitude. We chose to say that between the first and the third paving-stone there was an abyss of the eternal darkness into which we must not fall. We were walking along a steady and safe and modern road, and it was more pleasant to us to say that we were leaping desperately from peak to peak. Under mean and oppressive systems it was no doubt our instinct to free ourselves. But this truth written on the paving-stones is of even greater emphasis, that under liberal systems it was our instinct to limit ourselves. We limited ourselves so gladly that we limited ourselves at random, as if limitation were one of the adventures of boyhood.

People sometimes talk as if everything in the religious history of man had been done by officials. In all probability things like the Dionysian cult or the worship of the Virgin were almost entirely forced by the people on the priesthood. And if children had been

sufficiently powerful in the State, there is no reason why this paving-stone religion should not have been accepted also. There is no reason why the streets up which we walk should not be emblazoned so as to commemorate the memory of a superstition as healthy as health itself.

For what is the idea in human nature which lies at the back of this almost automatic ceremonialism? Why is it that a child who would be furious if told by his nurse not to walk off the kerbstone, invents a whole desperate system of footholds and chasms in a plane in which his nurse can see little but a commodious level? It is because man has

always had the instinct that to isolate a thing was to identify it. The flag only becomes a flag when it is unique; the nation only becomes a nation when it is surrounded; the hero only becomes a hero when he has before him and behind him men who are not heroes; the paving-stone only becomes a paving stone when it has before it and behind it things that are not paving stones.

There are two other obvious instances, of course, of the same instinct; the perennial poetry of islands, and the perennial poetry of ships. A ship like the Argo or the Fram is valued by the mind because it is an island, because, that is, it carries with it, floating loose on the desolate elements, the resources, and rules and trades, and treasuries of a nation, because it has ranks, and shops and streets, and the whole clinging like a few limpets to a lost spar. An island like Ithaca or England is valued by the mind because it is a ship, because it can find itself alone and self-dependent in a waste of water, because its orchards and forests can be numbered like bales of merchandise, because its corn can be counted like gold, because the starriest and dreariest snows upon its most forsaken peaks are silver flags flown from familiar masts, because its dimmest and most inhuman mines of coal or lead below the roots of things are definite chattels stored awkwardly in the lowest locker of the hold.

In truth, nothing has so much spoilt the right artistic attitude as the continual use of such words as ‘infinite’ and ‘immeasurable’. They were used rightly enough in religion, because religion, by its very nature, consists of paradoxes. Religion speaks of an identity which is

infinite, just as it spoke of an identity that was at once one and three, just as it might possibly and rightly speak of an identity that was at once black and white.

The old mystics spoke of an existence without end or a happiness without end, with a deliberate defiance, as they might have spoken of a bird without wings or a sea without water. And in this they were right philosophically, far more right than the world would now admit because all things grow more paradoxical as we approach the central truth. But for all human imaginative or artistic purposes nothing worse could be said of a work of beauty than that it is infinite; for to be infinite is to be shapeless, and to be shapeless is to be something more than mis-shapen. No man really wishes a thing which he believes to be divine to be in this earthly sense infinite. No one would really like a song to last for ever, or a religious service to last for ever, or even a glass of good ale to last for ever. And this is surely the reason that men have pursued towards the idea of holiness, the course that they have pursued; that they have marked it out in particular spaces, limited it to particular days, worshipped an ivory statue, worshipped a lump of stone. They have desired to give to it the chivalry and dignity of definition, they have desired to save it from the degradation of infinity. This is the real weakness of all imperial or conquering ideals in nationality. No one can love his country with the particular affection which is appropriate to the relation, if he thinks it is a thing in its nature indeterminate, something which is growing in the night, something which lacks the tense excitement of a boundary. No Roman citizen could feel the same when once it became possible for a rich Parthian or a rich Carthaginian to become a Roman citizen by waving his hand. No man wishes the thing he loves to grow, for he does not wish it to alter. No man would be pleased if he came home in the evening from work and found his wife eight feet high.

The dangers upon the side of this transcendental insularity are no doubt considerable. There lies in it primarily the great danger of the thing called idolatry, the worship of the object apart from or against the idea it represents. But he must surely have had a singular

experience who thinks that this insular or idolatrous fault is the particular fault of one age. We are likely to suffer primary painful resemblance to the men of Thermopylae, the Zealots, who raged round the fall of Jerusalem. If we are rushing upon any destruction it is not, at least, upon this.

PART FOUR: AT HOME AND ABROAD

ON HOLIDAYS

THERE ARE epochs of history which their enemies call rude and which their friends call simple. My difficulty is that they seem to me not simple, but subtle. They understood much better than we do the idea of variety and reaction. For them emancipation was a recoil and not merely a release. The world must be turned upside down at absolute intervals, as a bucket must be turned upside down in order to empty it. It is the essence of a holiday that it must be a revolution, and it is the essence of a revolution that it must revolve. A revolution far more frightful and overwhelming than any of the revolutions of history happens every twelve hours. We do, quite seriously, die daily. We trust ourselves in utter dark and dissolution; in such black sleep as has killed many men by a drug or by the drifting snow. Each of us has every night an enormous negative holiday. But most will agree, I think, that the essence of that holiday is its irresponsibility. The legal authorities would be kept busy if we could be indicted for the crimes we have committed in dreams. Now the whole point of a holiday was to be, within certain rational restraints, irresponsible. Interfering with a holiday was almost like interfering with a dream. And the whole project of using holidays as anything else but holidays was really absent from the mind. The notion of `combining amusement with instruction’ would have seemed like the notion of combining sleep with insomnia. Great spiritual authorities have told us to watch and pray. Great spiritual influences, I think, also tell us to believe and sleep. But neither god nor priest nor devil ever had the impudence to tell us to watch and sleep.

And that is the contradiction made by the modern cranks about holidays. It would be a typical and triumphant work of modern science to take charge of a child day and night; to give him the drugs that would keep him half asleep all day, and the dreams that would keep him half awake all night.

In this connection I think the educational arrangement about holidays has long been a ludicrous mistake. Holiday tasks are a mistake. Home-work is a mistake. Give the boy or girl less holidays if you think they need less. But be sufficiently businesslike to get the best out of the boy or girl for whatever concession you make to them. If you can excuse anyone from work, you can excuse him from worry. Leisure is a food, like sleep; liberty is a food, like sleep. Leisure is a matter of quality rather than quantity. Five minutes lasts longer when one cannot be disturbed than five hours when one may be disturbed. Restrict the liberty in point of time; restrict it in point of space; but do not restrict it in point of quality. If you give somebody only three seconds' holiday - then, by all the remains of your ruined sense of honour, leave him alone for three seconds.

Let me take an example which involves a particular sort of holiday that is fairly popular and national. During the summer, the big railway stations will be found thronged with the bags and babies of innumerable families going to seaside resorts. Each traveller is (I need hardly say) murmuring to himself the lines of Swinburne:

"I will go down to the great white mother ...
Mother and maker of men, the sea;
I will go down to her, I and none other . . ."

A friend of mine regards these lines as unreasonable, declaring that Swinburne, however much he liked sea-bathing, should not insist on all the seas of the world being locked up like his private bathroom. But certainly the request, whether reasonable or not, would be very difficult to enforce, say, at Margate or Broadstairs. But even if it be true, as I were loth to believe, that some holiday-makers do not murmur Swinburne's lines as they start, I am still firmly convinced that most holiday-makers like the sea because it is some kind of outlook upon some kind of loneliness and liberty. It is the only kind of loneliness and liberty. It is the only plain, straight line in Nature. It is the only empty place on earth. It is the one open window; to Jones, as it was to Keats.

I think it was Richard Jefferies who said that all men ought to be idle; and that we should get all the work we wanted done by harnessing to our machinery the tremendous tides of the sea. Something analogous was suggested by Mr. Wells; but I disagree with it. I think it would destroy the holiday. We should have removed all the use of the seaside by removing the uselessness of the sea. Men jaded or dazed with duties wish to look out across that fruitless field, in which God has sown we know not what seed and shall raise we know not what harvest. They wish to behold how enormous is their irresponsibility. The sea blows upon the cashier at Margate the great good news that he is not God. But this holiday sentiment will continue to weaken so long as men try to make all our holidays duties, or all our days holidays; and cannot understand that when anything is being woven the shuttle flies back and forth.

THE PEASANT

THE GENIUS who shall write a real philosophical pantomime (a thing untried, I think, since Aristophanes) should find many handy symbols in the harlequinades of our youth. The donkey who comes in two suggests infinite speculations about organic unity and by divergent evolution. The policeman made into sausages would be excellent machinery either for a Socialistic satire or for a satire on Socialism. And the red-hot poker quite exactly expresses that most terrible and profound thing in human affairs - a fierce domesticity.

But there is another trick of the old pantomimes which happens to offer the only parallel I can think of to the strange state of our society today. We all remember that beginning of the Transformation Scene when the front scene is still there, but the back scene begins to glow through it. The heroine is still in the dungeon; but the walls grow more and more transparent; and something else (probably the Garden of the Fairy Volatile) is apparent at the same time.

I have exactly the same sensations about our old Victorian political methods and the social realities that are now behind them. I do not ignore the old front scene of Privy Council or Parliament; I can still see it there; it is the England of my boyhood, and I rather like it. But simultaneously with these symbolic figures, these representatives and estates of the realm, I can see the Things that are behind. Another England is shining through political England; whether it will be very like the Garden of the Fairy Volatile remains to be seen. This fact, that the Government and the Commonwealth are often on two different planes of reality, has one peculiar result, too little noticed, on our attitude towards foreigners. There are the same names all over Europe - Parliament, Army, Church, Land, and so on. But these words often stand for astonishingly different things; for widely varying degrees of realism or ritual or memory or conspiracy or indifference. When a man has even one concrete experience of some foreign thing, he will generally find it to be in quite another world from that foreign country as it appears in the newspapers. A man reading the best English journals would have the general impression that the chief event in France is the sudden fall of the Ministry which came as abruptly as that tragic blow out of the air which a few weeks before had struck one of its members dead where he stood.

Now I happened to be in France when the news of this tragedy was scattered abroad, and I want to try and convey an atmosphere which I felt, and which I felt to be France itself. To us in England France seemed to be full of all this crisis and disaster. This was something like what one felt upon the actual scene of it.

I was away in those eastern highlands, where France (so to speak) clings to the rising mountains, till they break away and shoot up into the sky as Switzerland. More to the north was that gap that is the great gate into Germany and is guarded by the Lion of Belfort. Among these hills I met a peasant who was like thousands of the peasants all round: a Jack-of-all-trades. Among other things he owned a ramshackle carriage with an excellent horse, with which he could drive me anywhere; and he was, as far as appearance goes, rather like a very rude beggar. His clothes were coarse and threadbare, his face was rugged, but sharp; he was always in a sweat from drudgeries. A man who looked like that would be `moved on’ in London if he tried to open the door of a cab. Well, I got him to drive me away over the hills, and, finding that the mountains grew taller, grander, and (one might say) more incredible at every turn of the road, I persuaded him to make a day’s journey of it, and to rest the horse in a high village where (as everywhere in that country) one could get good wine and bread and an omelette at least.

Now, when I stopped before the cottage that could thus become an impromptu inn, I did exactly what every Englishman of my unfortunate class would have done in my place. I addressed the driver with nervous cordiality and extreme vagueness and said that I supposed he would like to have some lunch too, offering him a few francs for the purpose. He did not understand what it meant. He said I had better pay for the carriage at the end. I said it again, and still it was a puzzle to him. I said it again, in French which, however bad, was at least unmistakable; and this time I made myself clear. Whereupon this amazing scarecrow burst into an ungovernable fit of laughter, and slapped his trouser pocket about six times with his squat spread hand, exclaiming, “Money! I have much! I have mountains! I am rich! I am very rich!” And after the conversation I had with him on the road home, I think it perfectly possible that he was considerably richer than I am.

He talked about his dog, which was the best dog in the world; his son, who was the most promising cook in the world; his horse, which was the most astonishing horse in the world; he seemed to find inexhaustible glories in his patch of property. At the end of the journey, warned by that prodigy of the noon, I offered him no extra tip, but only two good cigars that somebody had given me. He at once replied by giving me a bottle of the wine he manufactured himself. It was, he assured me, the best wine in the world.

That is all that happened; only as we drove into the town the papers were flaring with the dreadful death of the French Minister of War and the narrow escape of the French Premier. My friend had never heard of either of them; he took no interest in politics. I think he thought politics a sort of mutiny among slaves. He was a free man. I think my sociological friends really ought to remember that there are many millions of him in Europe.

THE LOST RAILWAY STATION

I AM writing this as best I may in a Scottish railway station; and my thoughts go back, with all the pathos of the patriot, to an English railway station. Trucks and rails may seem to lack the fine shades of variety to be felt in the trees and hills of home; but my fancy really flies to an English railway station where I once dreamed a dream.

There is in the north of London an important station, which is by comparison as quiet and comfortable as the courtyard of an old inn. I do not know why this repose rests upon it, for a considerable train service is connected with it. It has the usual bookstall, at which I have bought all the bloodiest detective stories I could find; various refreshment bars at which I have bought various other things; and all the usual fittings of such a place. But in the centre there stands a fountain, and not far from it a large model of an ocean liner. Something about the look of the fountain and the surrounding hostelries, jutting out on opposite sides, reminds me absurdly of the market-place of a village; though perhaps something of a pantomime village. I can imagine the village maiden leaning gracefully on the fountain with a jar or jug or bucket; though I hasten to admit that I have never seen her do so. I can even conceive that the little boy who ran away to sea (that picturesque figure, whose presence, or rather absence, is so essential to the health of the happy village) drank in all his desire of seafaring adventure at the ends of the earth by looking at the toy liner. His white-haired mother would still be waiting for him - presumably in the waiting room. In short, I have always felt that I could fill this place with all the recognized romantic figures of rural life, in fiction if not in fact.

I wonder what would really happen if in some special convulsion that station were really cut off and left to live its own simple life, like a farm surrounded by floods, or a hamlet snowed up in the mountains. It pleases me to fancy that a railway strike might go on so long that people forgot the very purpose of a railway station. Railway porters would not even know that they were railway porters; and even the stationmaster would be ignorant of the mysterious secret of his mastery. Most of us have had a fancy that all society is like that strange railway station; that its social actions have some hieratic significance lost before the beginning of history; that it was made it knows not why; and is waiting for it knows not what. For the end of such a play or parable would be something truly terrific, like the Day of Judgment. When the signals changed colours at last, it would truly be like the moon turning to blood in the Apocalypse. Something utterly unthinkable, like the thunder and the seals and trumpets of the Last Day, would transform my quiet railway-station. A train would come in at last.

But my fancy chiefly rests on the remote generations of the future in this simple community, descended from the original primitive marriages between a few railway porters and a few barmaids. By that time the little commonwealth ought to have a whole tangle of traditions ultimately to be traced back to the lost idea of a train. Perhaps people would still go religiously to the ticket-office at intervals, as to a kind of confessional box; and there recite the names of far-off and by this time fabulous places; the word `Harrow’ sounding like the word `Heaven’ or the word `Ealing’ like the word `Eden’. For this society would of course, like every other, produce sceptics; that is men who had lost their social memory. All sorts of quaint ceremonials would survive, and would be scoffed at as irrational, because their rational origin had been obscured. At a date centuries hence, the clock in the refreshment room would still be kept a little fast, as compared with the clock in the station. There would be most complicated controversies about this custom; turning on things behind the times and things in advance of the age. The bookstall would have come to be something like the Bodleian or the great lost library of Alexandria; a storehouse of ancestral documents of primitive antiquity and profound obscurity; and learned men would be found spelling their way through a paragraph in one of our daily papers, deluded with the ever-vanishing hope of finding a sort of human meaning in it. The fountain seems to be the only possible religious centre of the village; though I think the mysterious image of the great ship should be the type of some faint adventurous memory and adventurous hope; a vague hint of things beyond; perhaps a great legend like that of the Argo. But a fountain is clearly the more human and historic site for a shrine. It would be dedicated, I hope, to a saint; as are so many springs and wells all over Christendom. And now I come to think of it, the very name of this railway station, like so much also that sounds cockney and commonplace, has an origin presumably religious. There could hardly be a more beautiful combination of words and ideas than that which I imagine to lie behind the prosaic name of Marylebone.

I had intended to draw a moral, or many morals from this vision. I had intended to point out how much our own society suffers from a similar paradox; not that its institutions are meaningless; but on the contrary, that they have a meaning, which would be found again if the society woke up and went to work again. It is only because they are asleep that they seem to be senseless. If the trains were running, if the traditions were working, the traditions would be instantly recognized as reasonable. Thus the modern world does not really suffer from scurry, but rather from slumber. I had in mind especially what I may call the Allegory of the Lost Luggage, or of the Cloak Room, which is concerned with the philosophy of property. Property is still being defended by a dim sense of duty; though it is really held up in transit and accumulated in the wrong place. But I cannot pursue my guess; for something has happened in the Scotch railway station which dissipates all my dreams of the happier English railway station. My train has come in.

BETHLEHEM AND THE GREAT CITIES

I WAS once at the same dinner-table with a newspaper proprietor who regarded himself, and was regarded, as the dictator of Europe and who really was by far too great an extent the dictator of England. He also was interested in Palestine, and in the course of conversation I learned that he had never even heard of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem. I suppose he had seen Crusaders in pictures or at fancy-dress balls; but he had no notion of what they did, and certainly no notion that what they did was to conquer and make Palestine a part of Europe for a hundred years, filling it with abbeys like those of Glastonbury or St. Andrew's and castles like those of Conway and Caernarvon. Now that is a point that interests me a great deal because the traces of it are very obvious to any traveller who happens to have been there. The first fact that strikes him about Jerusalem is that it is a medieval town; long before it strikes him specially as an oriental town. It has that curious combination of cosiness and defiance that belongs to the walled cities and painted pales and fences of the life of the Middle Ages. The latest walls were built by the successors of the Saracens but they are not in our sense Saracenic. Most of the windows and gates are in their whole spirit Gothic. The Franciscan going by with his beard and brown habit under those grey Gothic walls seems to be entirely in the picture, and even in the conventional picture. It is rather the Arab coming in with his coloured turban or burnous who seems for the moment, if only by a sort of optical illusion, to be a stranger and one straying from a far-off eastern land.

I had a rather parallel experience when I first saw Rome. In the case of Rome, as in the case of Jerusalem, people seem to have lost their own first impressions in the disproportionate emphasis of detail among guides and guide-books. The general impression of Rome is not the Forum or even the Coliseum. We might almost say that they are to St. Peter's what Stonehenge is to Salisbury Cathedral. The overwhelming impression is not that of Pagan but of Papal Rome; but especially Rome of the Renaissance Popes. I say it is the overwhelming impression; it could not be to everybody a pleasing impression. It might annoy a man, not only if he were narrowly Puritan, but also if he were too narrowly medieval. It did annoy Ruskin and might well have annoyed William Morris. Nor is their criticism a thing merely to be criticized; there is in that classical exuberance much that is really florid and false. But that is the impression; and it is quite certainly the stamp and imprint of the great Popes of the Renaissance. Renaissance Rome is not merely heathen, any more than Jerusalem is merely Jewish or merely Moslem. In those huge fountains where the Tritons look like Titans in the twilight, they have none the less been really baptized by these waters. The cross on top of the primeval obelisks is not a contradiction but a culmination. The culmination culminates on that high column where Our Lady stands at once vanquishing and exalting the symbol of Diana, with her foot upon the horns of the moon.

I have mentioned these two cases for the sake of a truth which any real traveller will have found out for himself. Our recent and rather provincial tradition greatly exaggerated the proportion of such places that is pagan or barbaric or even merely primeval. There is much more than we were taught to suppose of the traces of civilization, and even of our own civilization. But as my memory returns to Palestine by this rambling path, I remember what may really be called, in a deeper and more subtle sense, an exception. Palestine itself was filled, so to speak, with Norman castles and Catholic shrines; and in so far as Jerusalem does often suggest the Moslem, it is chiefly because the Moslem does suggest the Crusaders. But there was one experience in Palestinian travel that really is something more than merely historical; something that is too human to be historical. It is certainly not pagan but it is in a sense primeval. It is the one thing that really does seem to be connected with Christianity and not with Christendom. I have called it primeval, because there is in this greatest of all origins an atmosphere truly to be called original. This one vision really does not primarily suggest pilgrimages and shrines and medieval spires or medieval spears. It does rather suggest ancestral dawns and mystical abysses and the end of chaos and the creation of light. I mean the experience of Bethlehem.

The heart of Bethlehem is a cavern; the sunken shrine which is the traditional scene of the Nativity. Nine times out of ten these traditions are true, and this is wholly ratified by the truth about the countryside; for it is into such subterranean stables that the people have driven their cattle, and they are by far the likeliest places of refuge for such a homeless group. It is curious to consider what numberless and varied versions of the Bethlehem story have been turned into pictures. No man who .understands Christianity will complain that they are all different from each other and all different from the truth, or rather the fact. It is the whole point of the story that it happened in one particular human place that might have been any particular human place; a sunny colonnade in Italy or a snow-laden cottage in Sussex. It is yet more curious that some modern artists have prided themselves on merely topographical truth; and yet have not made much of this truth about the dark and sacred place underground. It seems strange that they have hardly emphasized the one case in which realism really touches reality. There is something beyond expression moving to the imagination in the idea of the holy fugitives being brought lower than the very land; as if the earth had swallowed them; the glory of God like gold buried in the ground. Perhaps the image is too deep for art, even in the sense of dealing in another dimension. For it might be difficult for any art to convey simultaneously the divine secret of the cavern and the cavalcade of the mysterious kings, trampling the rocky plain and shaking the cavern roof. Yet the medieval pictures would often represent parallel scenes on the same canvas; and the medieval popular theatre, which the guildsmen wheeled about the streets, was sometimes a structure of three floors, with one scene above another. A parallel can be found in those tremendous lines of Francis Thompson:

East, ah, east of Himalay
Dwell the nations underground,
Hiding from the shock of Day;
From the sun’s uprising sound.

But no poetry even of the greatest poets will ever express all that is hidden in that image of the light of the world like a subterranean sun; only these prosaic notes remain to suggest what one individual felt about Bethlehem.

THE SACREDNESS OF SITES

IT IS impossible to make a list of the things that humanitarians do not know about humanity. On thousands of things the men who talk most of the common bond are ignorant of what is really common. Among a thousand of such things may be mentioned the instinct about the sacredness of sites. If there is one thing that men have proved again and again it is that even when they furiously burn down a temple, they like to put another on top of it. They do not, generally speaking, want to worship St. George except on the very spot where they once worshipped the Dragon. And even when they have altered the universe they do not alter the situation. What is the reason for this, and whether it is some hitherto nameless need of human nature, or whether there be indeed something behind those ancient legends of the *genius loci*, or spirit of the place, need not now be discussed. But it is certain that throughout all history there has been a rhythm of expansion and contraction from certain centres; and that, unless we would be as superficial as the shallowest journalists, we can see under all changes that these centres remain. It is commonplace that empires pass away, because empires were never very important. Empires are frivolous things, the fringes of a sprawling culture that has sprawled too far. Cities do not pass away, or very seldom pass away, because the city is the cell of our organic formation; and even those living in the vast void of empire can find no phrase for social duty, save to tell men to be good citizens.

Empires pass away almost as if to accentuate the fact that cities do not pass away. At least five empires have successively claimed suzerainty over little Jerusalem upon the hill; and they are all now mere names - Egypt and Babylon and Persia and Macedonia and Rome; and for those unaffected by names these are unimportant. But Jerusalem is not unimportant; it is, at this very moment when I write, the scene of surging and threatening conflict. There was a Byzantine Empire and there is still a Turkish Empire, and one may soon be as dead as the other; but it will always matter who holds San Sophia and the town of Constantine upon the Golden Horn. Paris is older than France and York is older than England; and Cologne is immeasurably older than Germany. These centres of civilization have something in them more magnetic and immortal even than nationality, let alone mere vulgar imperialism. Ghosts haunt houses, they say, and the ghosts of whole people haunt whole cities, till half Europe is like a haunted house. It is only dull materialists who can wander away into any material environment. The spirit and all that is spiritual returns to its own environment. The world ebbs back again to its cities, to its centres; it is true, as I have said, of many cities; it is most true of the most central city of Rome.

Everything was done to take away the Roman character from Rome. The Emperor was taken away, but the Pope remained. The Pope was taken away, but the Pope returned. The former could not make a new Rome at Byzantium. The latter could not make a new Rome at Avignon. The former experiment had behind it the great civilization of the Greeks, the latter had behind it the great civilization of the French. The Greek Emperors thought they could move it easily to the East and the French Kings that they could move it easily to the West. But Rome, especially Christian Rome, is a rock not easily to be moved; and in the course of but a few centuries, as history goes, she had seen the French Monarchy go down before the Jacobins as she had seen the Greek Empire go down before the Moslems.

I am now about to utter a sentence of familiar and horrid cant, which I fear may be respectfully received. It is said everywhere, in a sense that is quite false; and yet, strangely enough, it is quite true. I am going to say that the world is not yet ready for enforced international peace and disarmament in Europe. In all the welter of wordy hypocrisy that makes so much of modern culture and moral science, I know nothing so contemptible, as a rule, as that evolutionary excuse about the world not being ripe. It is said by Socialists who do not want to leave off being Capitalists. It is said by war-profiteers who would like one more war to make them millionaires, and then eternal peace; or by high-minded gluttons and epicures who would like their grandchildren to be vegetarians. So the employer may go on sweating because the world is not ready for Communism; or the huckster may go on swindling because the social evolution of man has not yet reached the point of common honesty; or the politician may bribe and be bribed at leisure, because the social prophets have calculated an exact and distant date for Utopia. But they can all sweat and swindle, and bribe hopefully, happily, with radiant faces, because Utopia is sure to come some time - and for somebody else. Ninety times out of a hundred this moral distinction is false and cowardly; but in this special case, for one special reason, it does really apply. I doubt very much whether there will ever be a time when there will be no war. I cannot imagine how there can be a time in which there can be no war. But I do believe that, if the life of Europe evolves in one particular way, there may yet be something very like real European unity; an international understanding that would really prevent many international misunderstandings. But of that development it really is true to say that it has not happened yet, and that, until it has happened, we must not act as if it had.

Human unity is a huge and overwhelming truth, in the face of which all differences of continent or country are flattened out. European unity is an ancient fundamental and sometimes invisible truth, which every white man will discover if he meets another white man in Central Africa or unpenetrated Tibet. But national unity is a truth; and a truth which cannot, must not, and will not be denied, but chiefly for these very reasons - that nationality is human and that nationality is European. The man who forgets nationality instantly becomes less human and less European. He seems somehow to have turned into a walking abstraction, a resolution of some committee, a programme of some political movement, and to be by some unmistakable transformation, striking chill like the touch of a fish, less of a living man. The European man is a man through his patriotism and the particular civilization of his people. The cosmopolitan is not a European, still less a good European. He is a traveller in Europe, as if he were a tourist from the moon. In other words, what has happened is this; that for good or evil, European history has produced European nations by a European process; they are the organs of the organic life of our race, at least in recent times; and unless we receive our natural European inheritance through those natural organs, we do not really receive it at all. We receive something else; a priggish and provincial abstraction, invented by a few modern and more or less ignorant men. So long as those organs are the only organs of a living tradition, we must live by them; and it is true to say that the time has not yet come for all the nations living by a tradition that they can all hold and inherit together. It means finding something that good men love even more than they love their country. And modern Europe has not got it yet.

I will not argue here about how Europe is to get it; but I would suggest that it might possibly begin by returning to the civic origins. I mean that the countries may not expand to the continents, but rather return to the cities. Humanity may find in the cities what might yet become a universal citizenship, as it did with the cities of antiquity. But it could only happen with the cities that are really antique. It would mean the sort of cities which we only call ancient because they are still alive. But it would repose on the real and profoundly human sentiment about sites, for sites are generally shrines.

SCIPIO AND THE CHILDREN

I HAVE lately found myself in the town of Tarragona; famous for its vinegar, which it wisely sends abroad, rather than the wine, which it still more wisely drinks at home. I have myself ordered a fair amount of the wine; I omitted to order any of the vinegar. These things are an allegory; for there is something of the same contrast between the acid taste of party politics, especially anti-clerical politics, which is all that is exported to the English papers from Spain, and the rich and joyful vintage of popular life and humour, of which nobody can get the gusto except by going to Spain. I have always noted that there is never anything new in the news; and the things which the traveller recognizes are never the things that the journalist reports. For instance, the thing that struck me first and last in Spain was the Spanish children; especially the Spanish little boys, and their relation to the Spanish fathers of the Spanish little boys. The love of fathers and sons in this country is one of the great poems of Christendom; it has, like a bewildering jewel, a hundred beautiful aspects, and especially that supremely beautiful aspect; that it is a knock in the eye for that nasty-minded old pedant Freud.

I was sitting at a cafe table with another English traveller, and I was looking at a little boy with a bow and arrows, who discharged very random shafts in all directions, and periodically turned in triumph and flung himself into the arms of his father, who was a waiter. That part of the scene was repeated all over the place, with fathers of every social type and trade. And it is no good to tell me that such humanities must be peculiar to the progressive and enlightened Catalans, in that this incident happened in a Catalan town, for I happen to remember that I first noticed the fact in Toledo and afterwards even more obviously in Madrid. And it is no good to tell me that Spaniards are all gloomy and harsh and cruel, for I have seen the children; I have also seen the parents. I might be inclined to call them spoilt children; except that it seems as if they could not be spoilt. I may also remark that one element whch specially haunts me, in the Spanish Peninsula, is the very elusive element called Liberty. Nobody seems to have the itch of interference; nobody is moved by that great motto of so much social legislation; “Go and see what Tommy is doing, and tell him he mustn’t.” Considering what this Tommy was doing, I am fairly sure that in most progressive countries, somebody would tell him he mustn’t. He shot an arrow that hit his father; probably because he was aiming at something else. He shot an arrow that hit me; but I am a BROAD target. His bow and his archery were quite inadequate; and would not have been tolerated in the scientific Archery School into which he would no doubt have been instantly drafted in any state in which sport is taken as seriously as it should be. While I was staring at him, and at some other little boys who had assembled, also to stare at him, the English traveller interrupted my dream by saying suddenly:

“What is there to *see* in Tarragona?”

I was instantly prompted to answer, and almost did answer,

“Why, of course, the boy with the bow and arrows! There is also the waiter.”

But I stopped myself in time, remembering the strange philosophy of sightseeing; and then I found my mind rather a blank. I knew next to nothing about the town, and said so. I said the Cathedral was very fine; and then added with increasing vagueness; “I’m afraid I don’t know anything at all about Tarragona. I have a hazy idea that Scipio got buried here or born here. I can’t even remember which.”

“Who was it who was buried or born?” he inquired patiently.

“Scipio,” I said, with an increasing sense of weakness; then I added as in feeble self-defence, “Africanus.”

He inquired whether I meant that the man was an African. I feared, in any case, that the word `African’ would not instantly summon up before his imagination the figure of St. Augustine; or even of Hannibal. It would more probably suggest to him a coal-black negro. So I said that I was sure he was not an African; I believed he was a Roman; certainly he was a Roman General; and I thought it was too early in history for a Roman General to have really belonged to what were afterwards the Roman Provinces. I had always understood that Carthage, or the Carthaginian influence, practically prevailed over all these parts at that time. And even as I said the words a thought came to me, like a blinding and even a blasting light.

The traveller was very legitimately bored. After the mysterious manner of his kind, he was not bored with sightseeing, but he was bored with history; especially ancient history. I do not blame him for that; I only puzzle upon why a man bored with history should take endless trouble to visit historic sites. He was patently one of those who think that all those things happened such a long time ago that they cannot make much difference now. But it had suddenly occurred to me that this rather remote example really might, perhaps, make a great deal of difference now. I tried to tell him so; and he must have formed the impression that I was raving mad.

"Would it be all the same," I asked, "if that little boy were thrown into a furnace as a religious ceremony, when his family went to church on Sunday? That is what Carthage did; it worshipped Moloch; and sacrificed batches of babies as a regular religious ritual. That is what Scipio Africanus did; he defeated Carthage, when it had nearly defeated the world. Somehow, I seem to feel a fine shade of difference."

My companion did not reply; and I continued to watch the archer; and though Apollo was a Pagan god, I am glad that such a sun-god slew the Punic Python; and that even before the Faith, those ancient arrows cast down Moloch for us all.

THE REAL ISSUE

THE FOLLOWING incident took place the other day outside a crowded cafe in Paris. It also took place outside half a hundred other cafes in Paris and half a million other cafes scattered through about two-thirds of Christendom. The incident or something like it, was so natural as to seem trivial in such places; and probably nobody noticed it except two persons seated near that one small table. One of them was a wealthy American lady who had seen the sights of Paris. The other was a journalist, astray in foreign parts, who had resolutely refused to see them.

There sat at this small table a poor Frenchman with his wife and child; he was rather shabbier than what we should call an artisan, but he was probably a small shopkeeper; he was independent; it had never occurred to him to pretend to be a gentleman. He and his wife each proceeded to sip a very tall glass of very light beer, called a bock, and to look out cheerfully at the coloured lights and the motley procession of mankind passing under them. The little boy threw his arms round his father's neck with sudden affection; for he was quite ignorant, had never read even the most elementary text-book of Psycho-Analysis and did not know anything about Oedipus. Then his father gave him, equally impulsively, a gulp out of his glass of beer. The little boy then turned and embraced his mother, who also, moved by a sense of symmetry and equality, gave him another gulp out of her glass of beer. At that moment a lame man came by begging; and the man at the table (who would have been turned away from many of our respectable houses as a beggar himself), took some small coins from his pocket and gave them to the child, with a few words in an undertone. The child then gave them to the beggar. That was all. But one of the two strangers in that city knew he had been looking at the palladium and high citadel, round which rages the whole human war of our civilization and our century; and that all men are divided precisely and sharply by what they think of that one thing. Those who understand it are on one side and those who do not understand it on the other. The former see a thousand things and generally say very little about them. They understand that ritual is natural and not artificial. They understand what is really meant by the equality of the sexes: “In this we both have a part and he in us, equally.”

They understand that the world ends when that trinity is really broken, whether by confounding the persons or dividing the substance. They understand the word `sacrament', which is simply senseless gibberish to everybody else. They understand that politics and economics and everything practical means providing the huge human cafe with such tables - but separate tables. They understand that when this has been done as fully and fairly as possible, there will still always be somebody limping by; and that he must not be forgotten. Above all, they understand the impulse that makes the most innocent the intermediary and the almoner; they understand propitiation and the priest.

There are also other kinds of people. For the well-dressed American rose from her table with a sort of snort and went on her way to see the sights of Paris. We must not be hard on her; in truth the poor lady suffered from delusions; for she laboured under the extraordinary notion that she had seen ignorant people giving a child Alcohol; and she was ridden with a sort of nightmare, to the effect that a beggar is a horrible thing.

PART FIVE: THE SPICE OF LIFE

THE COMIC CONSTABLE

SOME LITTLE time ago a small, strange incident occurred to me which is not without its application to the history and quality of this country. I was sitting quietly in rustic retirement, endeavouring to feel as bucolic as possible, when I was summoned to the telephone, not perhaps the most bucolic of institutions. Nor, indeed, was it the voice of any other alehouse gaffer that addressed me through the instrument, but the voice of a man I know on one of the big London dailies.

He said, “We hear you’ve been made Constable of Beaconsfield.”

I said, “Then your hearing is defective.”

He said after a pause. “Well, but *haven’t you* been made Constable of Beaconsfield?” “Why, of course not,” I said. “Have you been made Pope of Rome? Am I a person whom any sane men (except perhaps the criminals) would want to have for a constable?”

“Well,” replied my friend doubtfully, “It’s down in the `Daily Gazette’, anyhow. `Mr. G. K. Chesterton has been nominated as a Parish Constable of Beaconsfield.”’

“And a jolly good joke, too,” I answered. “I thought you had a more vivid and vulgar sense of humour.”

“We may take it, then, that the thing is a hoax?” said the inquisitor. “You may indeed,” I said, “and apparently a successful one.” I then hung up the receiver and went back and tried to feel bucolic again.

When I had tried for three minutes the telephone rang again. A well-known weekly illustrated paper had important business with me.

“We hear,” said a grave voice, “that you are now Parish Constable of Beaconsfield, and any experiences of yours in that capacity -”

“I am not Parish Constable of Beaconsfield,” I cried in a tearful rage, “nor am I Senior Wrangler, nor Gold Stick in Waiting, nor the Grand Lama, nor the Living Skeleton, nor the Derby Favourite, nor the Queen of Love and Beauty at an approaching tournament. Has the human race lost all notion of a joke?”

I went back somewhat impatiently to my bucolic efforts; and then another bell rang, this time the front-door bell. I was informed that the representative of yet a third paper (an illustrated daily this time) had come down all the way from London with a camera to photograph me as a Parish Constable. I do not know whether he thought to find me in some flamboyant uniform, with feathers and epaulettes, or whether he merely wished to snapshot the new and rapturous expression of my face after receiving the appointment. Anyhow, I told him he was welcome to photograph me as much as he chose in the character of “The Man Who is not Parish Constable of Beaconsfield.” He photographed me in a number of highly unconstabulary attitudes (calculated in themselves to refute the slander), and then he went away.

It happened that about a quarter of an hour afterwards a local Beaconsfield acquaintance dropped in for ten minutes’ talk, and to him I recounted with mingled entertainment and fury how all these experienced journalists had been taken in by a joke that seemed to me as obvious as anything in a comic paper. “I suppose,” I said, “that whenever *Punch* playfully suggests I caused the earthquake at San Francisco by sitting down in Beaconsfield, I shall have to write to *The Times* about it, and clear my character.

My local friend listened with interest to the farce, laughed at the inquiring newspaper, was amiably amused at the disappointed photographer, and at the end said very quietly and casually, “All the same, you know, you *are* nominated as a Parish Constable of Beaconsfield.”

I turned, stiff with astonishment; I saw the shocking sincerity in his eyes,

“But this is madness,” I cried, “It must be a joke.”

“If it is,” he said, apologetically, “it is a joke written up on the church door.”

My wits were scattered to the four winds; I collected them with difficulty. I could not fancy that those who go to a modern parish church would permit such a thing as a practical joke in the porch. It was no time for half measures, but rather for desperate ones. It was clearly necessary to go to church.

My friend and I walked to the stone entrance of that strong and fine building, and there, sure enough, stood in cold print the openly crazy statement that some five men, including Mr. G. K. Chesterton, had been nominated as Parish Constables, and that objections to them would be entertained. Unless Englishmen have lost their historic fire, those objections should be prompt and overwhelming. On the way back my friend fortified and consoled me by describing the institution which had thus forcibly descended on me like an extinguisher. I have since received a letter from a kind correspondent including much the same technicalities, for which I am very grateful; but at the time the explanation was a little confusing. The only thing I clearly remember out of the tangle of rules is this; that I must not go officially beyond the bounds of my Constablewick, “except in hot pursuit of a fugitive.” I may be enticed to toss myself over a spiked wall into Middlesex; but only if a fleet-footed burglar has tossed himself over it before my eyes. I may be observed any day leaping across the Thames into Berkshire, but only when some panting bigamist has leapt it just before me. I can most earnestly and even austerely promise that on ordinary occasions I shall permit myself no such impetuous trespass.

But we will not dwell upon the duties, because there are no duties; nor upon the salary, because there is no salary; nor upon the uniform (the only thing I really regret) because, alas! there is no uniform. But if we consider the thing itself, and why so wild a joke ever came to be possible as the present writer being a constable, we may find ourselves facing some rather curious and interesting elements in the old life of England. The institution of the Parish Constable dates from the time when there was no official and efficient police; but when there was a great deal of incidental local sentiment and local self-government. In short, the Parish Constable belongs to another age, when there was not really such a thing as a constable, but when there was such a thing as a parish. The very form of his appointment breathes of a somewhat breezier age; for (as in my own case) he is not even asked if he will stand. This suggests the jolly time when there was no nonsense about wanting to serve your country; no buying of peerages by breeding cattle; no climbing into rich idleness by means of `polite work’.

Doubtless it is august and dignified to be a constable. So it is august and dignified to be a juryman; for to be a juryman is to be a judge, but in nothing is the jury system more medieval (that is, more human) than in the fact that it takes for granted that every good man will primarily care more for his babies or his bullocks than for the codes and thrones of legality; and that, therefore, he must be *summoned* to a jury. That is perhaps what Christ meant when he described the Kingdom of Heaven as sending into the highways and byeways, and compelling them to come in; perhaps He meant that if you want the simple and modest mortal you must call him. However this may be with the Kingdom of Heaven, it is assuredly so with the

Kingdom of Earth. The other method leaves us open to that offensive class which comes without being called, the vulgarly and basely ambitious, who are already destroying England.

The other element in the case is so very long that I will here make it very short. The Parish Constable, nominated by a District Council, is one of the very few reminders of a certain natural notion of self-government which modern science and modern discipline have made very difficult to retain. For the present I will put it merely in this way: What would any six streets in Hoxton or Whitechapel give if they could elect (however indirectly) the policeman who should stand at the street corner?

CAPONE'S PAL

I HAVE sometimes shocked the conventions of our time by defending Private Property; and pointing out that Private Property has really been destroyed by Private Enterprise. In connection with this paradox, that our common conscience does really disapprove of a thief, I came upon a very curious case the other day; an actual incident which I will leave to speak for itself. It seemed to me to combine amusement with instruction.

I had wandered out of a famous Spanish port and found myself in a sort of seaside suburb. I could not speak the language; but Latins are so intelligent that they do without language. I turned, as I had done twenty times, into a little cafe, which was empty, except for a sturdy man on a stool, with his broad back to me; and he jumped down with a kind of alertness which is neither Spanish nor English. He was evidently the proprietor, and he spoke English fluently, but with a blended accent I could not define; till I realized that he was not a Spaniard speaking English, but a Spaniard speaking American. Some accident of talk led me to admit that I followed the low trade of literature; whereupon he leapt into new life and proclaimed that he also had written a book. He showed me the book. It seemed to me on a hasty glance, rather a good book, written with spirit and humour; but it was simply his own memoirs as a gunman and a gangster under Al Capone. It was a perfectly honest record of dishonesty; and described robbing and racketeering without any of the cant that excuses capitalism. Still, there was something warming to a melodramatic mind in being alone with a gunman. He was dark and brooding and suddenly broke off to say, “I shan’t write another book.”

“No,” I said applauding warmly, “keeping a bar is much better than writing a book. Many an Englishman has wished he kept a pub instead of keeping a publisher.”

And at this he was transfigured into tremendous and vibrant vitality. He shouted till the tavern shook with the crimes of his publisher. He said that his publisher had cheated him at every turn. He said he had to rush round the world to see that all his publishers and translators were not doing him out of his well-earned money. I think it quite likely that they were. I also have no illusions about publishing or other phases of modern plutocracy.

But I thought it was faintly ironical. I reminded him of Byron’s saying that Barrabas was a publisher.

“In short,” I said firmly, “it was sheer robbery.”

“Sure,” he said with explosive emphasis; and we parted excellent friends. “It was just Robbery!”

ON LOSING ONE’S HEAD

WHEN I was a little boy I had an imagination, though this has long been washed out of me by the wordy abstractions of politics and journalism. For imagination, real imagination, is never a vague thing of vistas. Real imagination is always materialistic; for imagination consists of images, generally graven images. There is a mad literalism about imagination; and when I had it I turned everything that any one mentioned into a concrete body and a staring shape. Thus, I would hear grown-up people using ordinary proverbs and figures of speech; pale, worn-out proverbs, battered and colourless figures of speech. But every one of these phrases sprang out for me as fierce and vivid as a motto written in fireworks. For some reason I had a particularly graphic visual concept in the case of nautical metaphors. Thus, when I heard that my uncle on a sea voyage “had got his sea legs” I pictured the most horrible bodily transformations in my uncle. Had my uncle now got four legs? Or had it been necessary for his two original and (to my eye) unobjectionable legs to be amputated by the ship’s doctor? Did the new legs arrive as a sort of extra luggage, or did they loathsomely grow upon him, like hair or fungoids, with all the awful unnaturalness of Nature? I pictured my uncle’s sea legs as two green and glittering members, covered with scales like fishes, and bearing some resemblance to the two fish tails with which exuberant Renaissance artists sometimes provided Tritons and mermaids. Again when I heard (in some seafaring connection) that “the Captain kept his weather eye open,” I assumed with faultless infantile logic that he kept the other one quite shut. And in some dreams I rather pictured the Captain’s weather eye as being some separate and eccentric kind of eye, like that of a Cyclops; an eye of blue sky or lightning that opened suddenly in his hat or his coat-tails and blazed through black fantastic tempests; a strange star of the storm.

But there were many cases, even among more terrestrial and commonplace metaphors, where the material metaphor photographed itself on my fancy. One of them was the phrase about a man “Losing his heart.” A man, considered as a material envelope, seemed so securely done up that how the heart could get out of the body was a problem analogous to that of how the apple could get into the dumpling. Perhaps, I mused, the phrase about a man having his heart in his mouth might throw some light on the somewhat revolting phrase, which spoke of a man with his heart in his boots; where there was clearly no thoroughfare. From this my childish taste turned with a certain relief to the easier and more popular picture of a man losing his head; which seemed the sort of thing that might happen to anybody. Indeed, by this dream of symbolic decapitation I was much haunted in infancy and am not infrequently inspired and comforted even to this day. Whatever other metaphors may mean, this metaphor of the lost head has some primary and poetic meaning; and I have written many bad poems, bad fairy tales, and bad apologues in my industrious attempt to find it out and declare it. The connection between the animal and intellectual meaning of it became close and even confused. I vaguely thought of Charles I as having lost his head equally in both senses; which is not perhaps wholly untrue. When I read of the miracle of St. Dennis, who carried his head in his hand, it seemed to me quite a soothing and graceful proceeding, like a gentleman carrying his hat in his hand. St. Dennis did not lose his head anyhow; he carried it in his hand so as not to lose it; as ladies do their ridiculous handbags.

Indeed, this drifting and dancing dream of decapitation, in which kings and saints figured with gothic fantasticality, had a kind of allegory in the core of it. The separation of body and head is a sort of symbol of that separation of body and soul which is made by all the heresies and the sophistries, which are the nightmares of the mind. The mere materialist is a body that has lost its head; the mere spiritualist is a head that has mislaid its body. Under the same symbol can be found the old distinction between the sinner and the heretic about which theology has uttered many paradoxes, more profitable to study than some modern people fancy. For there is one kind of man who takes off his head and throws it in the gutter, who dethrones and forgets the reason that should be his ruler and witness; and the horrible headless body strides away over cities and sanctuaries, breaking them down and treading them into mire and blood. He is the criminal; but there is another figure equally sinister and strange. This man forgets his body, with all its instinctive honesties and recurrent sanities and laws of God; he leaves his body working in the fields like a slave; and the head goes away to think alone. The head, detached and dehumanized, thinks faster and faster like a clock gone mad; it is never heated by any generous blood, never softened by any healthy fatigue, never checked or warned by any of the terrible tocsins of instinct. The head thinks because it cannot do anything else; because it cannot feel or doubt or know. This man is the heretic; and in this way all the heresies were made. The anarchist goes off his head and the sophist goes off his body; I will not renew the old dispute about which is the worse amputation; but I should recommend the prudent reader to avoid both.

THE SPICE OF LIFE

FORGIVE ME if I begin by enacting the part which I have played at so many dinner-parties, I mean the part of the skeleton at the feast. Pardon me if the first few words that reach you resemble a hollow voice from the tomb. For the truth is that the very title of this series makes me feel a little funereal. When I was asked to speak on the Spice of Life, I am sorry to say that the first thought that crossed my perverse and morbid mind was that spices, as spices, are quite as much associated with death as with life. Corpses embalmed and preserved were always swathed amid spices; mummies also, I suppose. I am no Egyptologist to decide the point. But even if they were, you would hardly go sniffing round a mummy in the British Museum, drawing deep breaths and saying, “This is indeed the spice of life.” Egypt was almost a civilization organized as a funeral procession; it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the living lived to serve the dead. And yet I suppose that an actual Egyptian walking about alive, was in no hurry to be spiced. Or take a homelier scene nearer home. Suppose you are chased by a mad bull; we will not debate which animal enjoys more of the spice of life; but both at the moment will give unmistakable signs of life. But the quadruped must wait until he is killed and cut up into cold beef, before he can have the pride and privilege of being spiced beef. In short, I want you to remember first of all that there has been in history, not only the spice of life, but something else that may fairly be called the spice of death. And I mention it first because it is a sort of parable; and there are a good many things in the modern world that seem to me to be dead, not to say damned, and yet are considered very spicy.

I will not dwell on this morbid parallel. Heaven forbid that I should suggest that some ladies are rather like mummies walking about, with very beautiful faces painted on the mummy-cases: or that some young gentlemen going the pace exhibit all the culture and selective subtlety of mad bulls. I am concerned with a much more important question at the back of this one. It seems to me that a great many people, whom I am far from calling mummies or mad bulls, are at this moment paying rather too much attention to the spice of life, and rather too little attention to life. Do not misunderstand me. I am very fond of spiced beef and all the spices; I always dread that the Puritan reformers will suddenly forbid mustard and pepper as they did malt and hops; on the absurd ground that salt and mustard are as unnecessary as music. But while I resist the suggestion that we must eat beef without mustard, I do recognize that there is now a much deeper and more subtle danger that men may want to eat mustard without beef. I mean that they may lose their appetite; their appetite for beef and bread and cheese and the broad daylight of life; and depend entirely on spices and condiments. I have even been blamed for defending the spices of life against what was called the Simple Life. I have been blamed for making myself a champion of beer and skittles. Fortunately, if I was a champion of skittles, there was never any danger of my being a champion at skittles. But I have played ordinary games like skittles, always badly; but all healthy people will agree that you never enjoy a game till you enjoy being beaten at the game. I have even played golf in Scotland before Arthur Balfour brought it to England and it became a fashion and then a religion. I have been since inhibited by a difficulty in regarding a game as a religion, and the horrid secret of my failure is that I never could quite see the difference between cricket and golf, as I played them when I was a boy, and puss-in-the-corner and honey-pots as I played them when I was a child. Perhaps those nursery games are now forgotten; anyhow, I will not reveal what good games they were, lest they should become fashionable. If once they were taken seriously in that most serious world, the world of Sport, enormous results will follow. The shops will sell a special Slipper for Hunt-the-Slipper, or a caddy will follow the player with a bag full of fifteen different slippers. Honey-pots will mean money-pots; and there will be a `corner’ in puss-in-the-corner.

Anyhow, I have enjoyed like everybody else those sports and spices of life. But I am more and more convinced that neither in your special spices nor in mine, neither in honey-pots nor quart-pots, neither in mustard nor in music, nor in any other distraction from life, is the secret we are all seeking, the secret of enjoying life. I am perfectly certain that all our world will end in despair, unless there is some way of making the mind itself, the ordinary thought we have at ordinary times, more healthy and more happy than they seem to be just now, to judge by most modern novels and poems. You have to be happy in those quiet moments when you remember that you are alive; not in those noisy moments when you forget. Unless we can learn again to enjoy life, we shall not long enjoy the spices of life. I once read a French fairy-tale that expressed exactly what I mean. Never believe that French wit is shallow; it is the shining surface of French irony, which is unfathomable. It was about a pessimist poet who decided to drown himself; and as he went down to the river, he gave away his eyes to a blind man, his ears to a deaf man, his legs to a lame man, and so on, up to the moment when the reader was waiting for the splash of his suicide; but the author wrote that this senseless trunk settled itself on the shore and began to experience the joy of living: la joie de vivre. The joy of being alive. You have to go deep, and perhaps to grow old, to know how true that story is.

If I were to ask myself where and when I have been happiest, I could of course give the obvious answers, as true of me as of everybody else; at some dance or feast of the romantic time of life; at some juvenile triumph of debate; at some sight of beautiful things in strange lands. But it is much more important to remember that I have been intensely and imaginatively happy in the queerest because the quietest places. I have been filled with life from within in a cold waiting-room in a deserted railway junction. I have been completely alive sitting on an iron seat under an ugly lamp-post at a third-rate watering place. In short, I have experienced the mere excitement of existence in places that would commonly be called as dull as ditch-water. And by the way, is ditch-water dull? Naturalists with microscopes have told me that it teems with quiet fun. Even that proverbial phrase will prove that we cannot always trust what is proverbial, when it professes to describe what is prosaic. I doubt whether the fifteen gushing fountains to be found in your ornamental garden contain creatures so amusing as those the miscroscope reveals; like the profiles of politicians in caricature. And that is only one example out of a thousand, of the things in daily life we call dull that are not really so dull after all. And I am confident that there is no future for the modern world, unless it can understand that it has not merely to seek what is more and more exciting, but rather the yet more exciting business of discovering the excitement in things that are called dull.

What we have to teach the young man of the future, is how to enjoy himself. Until he can enjoy himself, he will grow more and more tired of enjoying everything else. What we have to teach him is to amuse himself. At this moment he is more and more dependent upon anything which he thinks will amuse him. And, to judge by the expression of his face, it does not amuse him very much. When we consider what he receives, it is indeed a most magnificent wonder and wealth and concentration of amusement. He can travel in a racing-car almost as quick as a cannon-ball; and still have his car fitted up with wireless from all the ends of the earth. He can get Vienna and Moscow; he can hear Cairo and Warsaw; and if he cannot see England, through which he happens to be travelling, that is after all a small matter. In a century, no doubt, his car will travel like a comet, and his wireless will hear the noises in the moon. But all this does not help him when the car stops; and he has to stand stamping about in a line, with nothing to think about. All this does not help him even when the wireless stops and he has to sit still in a silent car with nothing to talk about. If you consider what are the things poured into him, what are the things he receives, then indeed they are colossal cataracts of things, cosmic Niagaras that have never before poured into any human being are pouring into him. But if you consider what comes out of him, as a result of all this absorption, the result we have to record is rather serious. In the vast majority of cases, nothing. Not even conversation, as it used to be. He does not conduct long arguments, as young men did when I was young. The first and startling effect of all this noise is silence. Second, when he does have the itch to write or say something, it is always an itch in the sense of an irritation.

Everything has its better and baser form; and there is irritation and irritation. There is a great deal of difference between the irritation of Aldous Huxley and the irritation of some nasty little degenerate in a novel by Aldous Huxley. But honestly I do not think I am unfair to the whole trend of the time, if I say that it is intellectually irritated; and therefore without that sort of rich repose in the mind which I mean, when I say that a man when he is alone can be happy because he is alive. For instance, a man of genius of the same generation, for whom I have a very special admiration, is Mr. T. S. Eliot. But nobody will deny that there was a sense in which, originally, even his inspiration was irritation. He began with pure pessimism; he has since found much finer and more subtle things; but I hardly think he has found repose. And it is just here that I will have the effrontery to distinguish between his generation and mine. It used to be thought impudent for a boy to criticize an old gentleman, it now requires far more sublime impudence for an older man to criticize a younger. Yet I will defend my own idea of the spiritual spice of life against even the spirituality that finds this ordinary life entirely without spice. I know very well that Mr. Eliot described the desolation he found more than the desolation he felt. But I think that `The Waste Land' was at least a world in which he had wandered. And as I am describing the recent world, I may as well describe it as he has described it, in `The Hollow Men' - though nobody would describe him as a hollow man. This is the impression of many impressions.

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

Now forgive me if I say, in my old-world fashion, that I'm damned if I ever felt like that. I recognize the great realities Mr. Eliot has revealed; but I do not admit that this is the deepest reality. I am ready to admit that our generation made too much of romance and comfort, but even when I was uncomfortable I was more comfortable than that. I was more comfortable on the iron seat. I was more happy in the cold waiting-room. I knew the world was perishable and would end, but I did not think it would end with a whimper, but if anything with a trump of doom. It is doubtless a grotesque spectacle that the great-grandfathers should still be dancing with indecent gaiety, when the young are so grave and sad; but in this matter of the spice of life, I will defend the spiritual appetite of my own age. I will even be so indecently frivolous as to break into song, and say to the young pessimists:

Some sneer; some snigger; some simper;
In the youth where we laughed and sang,
And they may end with a whimper
But we will end with a bang.

ON FRAGMENTS

As I have said before I am a believer in staring blankly at things; if you do it something always happens. For instance, I am staring blankly at this sheet of paper and I firmly believe that something more or less intelligible will happen soon. Men stared at the blank blue sky and invented a million mythologies. Staring stupidly at live people is more dangerous; but even this has its fascination; and if you ever see your companion’s face turned towards you with the rounded and complete expression of a congenital idiot, you may be certain again that he is nearer at that moment than at any other to knowing what you really are; which I fancy is the last thing that you desire. When we cast `an intelligent look’ (as they say in books) at a thing, it only means that we stamp our own significance upon it. When we look wisely at a post we see what we mean by a post. But when we look stupidly at a post we see what a post means.

In such a trance of divine imbecility I remember once staring at the paving-stones under my feet, until I went off into a sort of dream of paving-stones. They passed perpetually under my feet like flat and silent waves of stones, and all the time I was asking myself what they were. Street after street I passed, looking at the ground like a cow. And then it suddenly seemed to me that they were all gravestones; the gravestones of innumerable and utterly forgotten men. For under every one of them, almost certainly, there was human dust. I seemed to see fantastic epitaphs on them, commemorating the deeds of heroes who are too old and too great to be remembered. There, for instance, was the man who found fire and the man who made the first wheel; men too necessary to be ever named. There were the dim poets who gave names to the flowers, and have utterly lost their own.

And among those imaginary benefactors in all ages I seemed to see one class especially predominant. I mean the people who in the dim beginning of time united one thing artificially, but permanently, with another. What primeval priest, for instance, married bread and cheese? Who was the wild visionary (of later times) who, after ransacking all the forests, and counting all the fruits of the earth, discovered that almonds and raisins had been looking for each other since the world began? Who, above all, discovered such a thing as the happy marriage between music and literature? The men who are least known from the past are certainly the men who made this combination. And the men who are best known at the present day are certainly those who are tearing such combinations in pieces.

This is the worst element in our anarchic world of today. The whole is one vast system of separation - an enormous philosophical Divorce Court. The theory of art for art's sake, for instance, as applied to painting, was a proposal to separate a picture from the subject of the picture. Sentiment would be better without art, art would be better without sentiment. In other words, a picture would be a better picture if it were not a picture of anything. And a subject would be all the better subject if you did not paint it. Such moderns easily might, I think some moderns really have, applied the same principle to that ancient combination called a song. A very modern poet might easily say that the words would convey their own natural rhythms much better without a tune. A very modern musician might easily say that the only perfectly musical songs would be songs without words. No one has yet had the star-defying audacity to hint at a separation between bread and cheese. But we must be prepared to have it said before long by some profligate aesthete that bread would be more breadish without cheese, and that cheese would be more exquisitely and penetratingly cheesy without bread. We must be prepared, I say, for a perpetual tendency towards such cleavages; and we must be prepared to answer them by insisting on the immemorial right of mankind to perpetuate such alliances. Man has from the beginning joined spoken words to an air, and the two have grown old and wise together. Those whom man hath joined let no man sunder.

This endless process of separation of everything from everything else has a good example, for instance, in the case of religion. Religion, a human and historic religion, like Christianity or Buddhism or some great periods of Paganism was, as a matter of fact, a combination of all the important parts of life. Every one of the main human interests was in old times made a part of the creed. Every one of those human interests is now put apart by itself, as if it were a monomania like collecting stamps. A religion, as understood by humanity in the past, always consisted at least of the following elements. First, of a theory of ultimate truth and of the nature of the universe. That is now put by itself and called Metaphysics. Second, of a groping communication with some being other than man. This is now put by itself and called Psychical Research. Third, of a strict rule of behaviour, with many irritating vetoes. This is now put by itself and called Ethics. Fourth, of a certain flamboyant tendency to break out into colours and symbols, to do wild and beautiful things with flowers or with garments or with fire. This is now put by itself and called Art. Fifth, of a tendency to feel that matter and locality can be sacred, that certain soils or features of the landscape can be a part of the peace of the soul. This is now put by itself and called Patriotism. And the typically modern men are mainly proud of having thus torn up the original unity of the religious idea. Ethics for ethics' sake, and art for art's sake are like the tatters of what was once the seamless robe. They have parted his garments among them, and for his vesture they have cast lots.

THE APOSTLE AND THE WILD DUCKS AND OTHER ESSAYS

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IN GENERAL

A Sermon on Cheapness

It is really time that the absurd pretence of the vices to be romantic were given up. Ever since the time of Byron there has been vague and foolish conception clinging to all men’s minds that there is some connection between lawlessness and poetry, between orderly images and disorderly acts. A thousand instances might be given to show the shallowness of this idea. For instance, blasphemy has been regarded as something bold and splendid, as if the very essence of blasphemy were not the commonplace. It is the very definition of profanity that it thinks and speaks of certain things prosaically, which other men think and speak of poetically. It is thus a defeat of the imagination, and a volume full of the wildest pictures and most impious jests remains in its essential character a piece of poor literalism, a humdrum affair. The same general truth might be pursued through all the Ten Commandments. Murder, for instance, is quite overrated, aesthetically. I am assured by persons on whose judgment I rely, and whose experience has, presumably, been wide, that the feelings of a murderer are of a quite futile character. What could be stupider than kicking to pieces, like a child, a machine you know nothing about, the variety and ingenuity of which should keep any imaginative person watching it delightedly day and night? Say we are acquainted with such a human machine; let us say, a rich uncle. A human engine is inexhaustible in its possibilities; however long and unrewarding has been our knowledge of the avuncular machine, we never know that the very moment that we lift the assassin’s knife the machine is not about to grind forth some exquisite epigram which it would make life worth living to hear, or even, by some spasm of internal clockwork, produce a cheque. To kill him is clearly prosaic. Alive, he is a miracle; dead, he is merely a debris, a debris of unpleasant gore and quite inappropriate and old-fashioned clothes. Objection is sometimes brought against the absolute legal and medical doctrine that life should under all circumstances and at all costs be kept burning. It may or may not be moral and humane but there can be no doubt of its impressiveness as a purely poetical ideal. It is the desire, so natural in an imaginative man of science, to preserve the only thing that can really be of any interest to anyone.

I have taken these two instances, as the first that come to hand, of the general fact of the mean and matter-of-fact character of the vices, the wild and thrilling character of the virtues. Many other examples might be taken of the raptures and roses of virtue, the lilies and languors of vice. But an example, stranger both in its truth and in its unfamiliarity than any other, chiefly occupies my mind. Of all the conventional virtues there is none that is so completely despised by the aesthetic and Bohemian philosophers as economy. It is represented as the very meanest of human standards, a merit for cowards and greasy burgesses, a thing that is even base when it is a virtue and dull when it is a vice. But in truth there is no quality so truly romantic as economy.

Economy is essentially imaginative because it is a realisation of the value of everything. The real objection to murder, aesthetically speaking, is that it is uneconomical. It is a failure in efficiency (I want to write that word down and look at it) to waste a whole man in order to procure a momentary emotion which is often disappointing. And the real objection to waste is that all waste is a kind of murder, a merely negative and destructive thing, the obliteration of something which we can neither value nor understand. We slay an uncle because we do not realise the strange dumb poetry of an uncle; we fling away a penny because we cannot realise the gorgeous possibilities of a penny. I have murdered many pennies, many trusting halfcrowns, in my life. For let it be clearly understood that I do not maintain for a moment that this poetry of economy is an easy thing for any of us to keep up. We tend to forget the poetry of pennies just as we tend to forget the poetry of skies and woods and great buildings, because we see them so often. In practice it is most difficult to be the Economic Man. We have all heard of the clergyman who spoke in defence of teetotalism, saying that for twenty years he had tried to teach drunkards to drink moderately, and had never once succeeded. The reporters, with unintentional kindness, described him as having said that for twenty years he had tried to drink moderately and had never once succeeded. So it is with this great question of economy.

For a long period the writer of the present article has tried to be economical and has never once succeeded. But I impute this entirely to a lack of true poetry in myself. I do not for a moment dream of shielding myself behind so transparent and canting a plea as the notion that there is anything artistic or romantic in being extravagant. The man who does not look at his change is no true poet. To give away a penny deliberately is indeed one of the highest triumphs of imagination: it means that the giver can realise the meaning of the existence of some ragged family herded in the lairs of East London. But to throw away a penny is sheer lack of imagination; it means that the giver cannot realise even the meaning of a penny. It means that he forgets the first and most thrilling of all the lessons of the universe, the lessons of every seed and germ, the lesson of the infinite and terrible power that may be found in small things. The French, the most poetical of all peoples, are also the most economical. The English working man, with his sterling, solid common sense, throws away every rag and bone that does not appear to him useful at the first glance; the French cottager turns those rags and bones into exquisite and civilised dishes. Economy is only another name for universalism; the true poet regards every earthly object as having some value and secret utility — with the possible exception of a dust-cart. The old romance of life was held to consist in expense — in the jewels and perfumes of the `Arabian Nights', in the cushion and cigars of Ouida. The newer and truer romance will be the romance of cheapness. It will address itself to the truly imaginative task of realising what is the real worth (a worth running into millions) of the penny cup of coffee to the tired pedestrian at midnight or the pennyworth of tobacco, to the poor man in his half-hour holiday. It will celebrate the cheapness of ecstasy.

My bosom friend the Pessimist and I were standing outside a small toy shop, glueing our noses to the glass, when the long silence was broken by my remarking on the beauty of a solid stick of blue chalk, which was offered for sale (in some tempest of generosity) for a halfpenny. `Have you considered,' I asked, `all that this stick of blue chalk means? For a halfpenny I am possessed of it. I go home at night under the stars, between dark walls and through mazy streets. I shall be free to write upon those walls beautiful or stern sentiments, arraigning the powers of the earth, and write them in the very colour of heaven. At home I may beguile the evening in a thousand innocent sports, designing barbaric patterns upon the new table-cloth, drawing dreamy and ideal landscapes upon the note-paper, decorating my own person in the manner of our British predecessors, sketching strange and ideal adventures for strange and ideal characters. And all this blue river of dreams is loosened by a halfpenny.'

The Pessimist replied, in his sad, stern way, `Drivel. It is only the blue chalk you buy for a halfpenny. You do not buy the stars for a halfpenny; you do not buy the streets for a halfpenny; you do not buy your dreams or your love of drawing or your tastes and imaginations for a halfpenny.'

`True,' I replied. `The stars and the dreams and myself are cheaper than chalk: for I bought them for nothing.'

He burst into tears and became immediately convinced of the basis of true religion. For our very word for God means Economy: is not improvidence the opposite of Providence?

On Manners

One of the greatest difficulties in any philosophical discussion of manners is the fact that the presence of bad manners and the absence of any manners are treated as identical. We say indifferently of a man of a more or less repulsive social ineptitude either that he has no manners or that he has bad manners. How entirely different these two things are may be tested by the fact that in no other affairs do we treat these phrases as synonymous. There is all the difference in the world between saying that a man has no wine and saying that he has bad wine. There is all the difference in the world between the comparatively trifling biographical statement, `He has no sons,' and the really disquieting one, `He has bad sons'. If, when we were about to breakfast with a friend, a common acquaintance were to approach us and whisper impressively, 'You will eat no eggs,' the expression would amount to little more than an interesting detail; if he were to whisper, 'You will eat bad eggs,' an element of tragedy would at once appear. But the difference between no manners and bad manners is quite as definite and important as the difference between no eggs and bad eggs.

The absence of manners is an unconscious and chaotic thing, the product of vagueness, of monomania, of absence of mind, of ignorance of the world. But the presence of bad manners is a perfectly solemn, deliberate, and artificial thing, the result of pride and vainglory, hypocrisy and blindness and hardness of heart. A great mass of human society may thus be simply and satisfactorily divided into two definite sections. But the actual nature of the bad manners which constitute the chief characteristic of good society is worthy, it may be, of somewhat more profound examination and definition. For the manners which we see in the centres of social life such as the House of Commons are really bad, not in the sense that they are insufficient or ignorant, but in the sense that they violate what is the whole object and meaning of manners.

Courtesy is a mystical thing; it may be defined as a spontoneous worship. Politeness is, indeed, even more fantastically reverential than religion itself, for it treats a landlady's parlour as the religionist treats a temple. To him all houses are holy, and whenever or wherever it be found, the covered place demands the uncovered head. Politeness is thus a thing mysterious and elemental, going down to the foundations of the world.

Since no man can express how surprising and terrifying and beautiful is every object upon which we gaze, on the day when we all become truly primitive we shall all become extravagantly polite; we shall take off our hats to the sparrows, and apologise for treading on the daisies. Politeness of this kind is simply imagination. That is the inevitable result of realising that things are there. Here, as in so many other cases, we see the singular dullness of all those sections of society who call themselves unconventional. They imagine that unconventionality is a mark of being artistic or imaginative. It is, of course, a mark of being especially prosaic and limited. For the great conventions are, as their name grammatically implies, simply the great agreements, and agreement is essential to all art, and to all ceremony, and, indeed, to everything, except mere rowdy competition and free fights. If a man is ceremonious he is conventional, and if he is poetical he is ceremonious.

In so far, therefore, as the artistic classes believe in a lounging and Bohemian existence, they are fighting against the very nature of art, and also against the very nature of a vivid realisation of things. If once we realised things vividly, and saw how valuable they are, we should become more elaborately urbane than any dandy of the old school. What was wrong with the dandies of the old school was not the fact that their politeness was extravagant, but the fact that they did not really believe in it. The Brummell type was wrong, not because it bowed repeatedly over a lady's hand, but because it did not respect her either in act or conversation. The bowing was entirely right; if we saw things for one moment as they are we should stand bowing for several minutes over the hand of the news-boy or the crossing-sweeper, thus creating some sensation in the neighbourhood.

Now if it be once granted that politeness is reverence, an expression of reverence for our environment, it does not particularly matter by what actual physical pantomime it is expressed. It may be expressed, as in the case of the Christian and Jewish religions, by taking off your hat, or by putting it on. In many Oriental countries it is expressed by taking off one's boots, and in some of the great Republics of the Antipodes it may, for all I know, be expressed by taking off your collar or your waistcoat. Certain savages rub each other's noses when they meet, and I have no doubt that they rub them reverentially. The form matters nothing, so long as the spirit which it is meant to convey is a spirit of chivalry and of a poetic humility. But the great central and remarkable thing about society manners in this decade is that they are not intended to express the idea of courtesy, the idea, that is to say, that we are impressed with our surroundings, but, on the contrary, specially and elaborately intended to express the idea that we do not care a brass farthing for anyone for a mile round. The old-fashioned bowing and scraping may have been ludicrous and hypocritical, when taken in conjunction with the materialistic or immoral practices which went along with it, but at least the form itself, the actual bow and scrape, did express deference and self-subordination. But the modern manners of the richer class are actually framed, like a careful artistic work, to express indifference to everything and everybody.

The modern gentleman is not the man who knows how to be polite; he is the man who knows how to be rude in an entirely gentlemanly manner. His only scruple is that he must not be rude in the same way that an omnibus conductor is rude — that is to say, in an amusing way. It is the object of modern urbanity not to cultivate the hypocritical subservience of the old bucks and beaux, but to cultivate a way of bowing to a lady which is a great deal more personally offensive than hitting her in the face. It is not, in short, courtesy at all; it is not an awkward and clownish attempt to indicate that we care for our surroundings; it is a perfectly polished, deliberate and successful attempt to indicate that we care for nothing in earth or Heaven. Uneducated people, that is to say, have no manners, educated people have bad manners.

Nobody can visit the House of Commons without coming away with the general impression that the art cultivated by the young country gentleman is the art of doing his worst elegantly; and to do one’s worst, however elegantly, remains what it is, the one and solitary supreme insult. If a man throws his worst or his tenth best to anything, it matters nothing if the thing he throws be the Iliad or a casket of sapphires, it still remains an insult. And this insult to the ancient English Parliament is expressed in every line of the figures of the well-dressed Members of the House. A man with a million genuine and intellectual charms, is supposed to be a man with good manners. This simply means that he exhibits an unusual degree of physical grace in the act of putting his boots within a foot or two of the Mace of the King of England. It is a terrible thing that while true courtesy is a transcendental virtue and involves admiration, the most courteous man in modern politics is also the incarnation of indifference.

For Persons of the Name of Smith

Some time ago Mr C. F. G. Masterman led a vigorous attack upon my timid and humble optimism, and declared in effect that when I maintained a poetry in all things it was I who supplied it. I wish I could claim that I had ever supplied poetry to anything; it seems to me that I am at the very best a humdrum scientific student noting it down. The sentimentalists, the sons of a passionate delusion, are those who do not think everything poetical. For they are wholly under the influence of words, of the vague current phraseology, which thinks `castle' a poetical word and 'Post-office' an unpoetical word, which thinks `knight' a poetical word and `policeman' an unpoetical word, which thinks `eagle' a poetical ward and `pig' an unpoetical word. I do not say that there is not truth in this as a matter of literature; I do not say that in pure technical style there is not a difference between eagles and pigs. All I wish to point out is that the ordinary man in the street when he says that there is no poetry in a pig or a post-office is, in fact, merely intoxicated with literary style. He is not looking at the thing itself; if he did that he would see that it was not only poetical, but obviously and glaringly poetical. He thinks a railway-signal, let us say, must be prosaic, because the word sounds funny, and there is no rhyme in it. But if he looked straight and square at what a railway-signal is, he would realise that it was, to take a casual case, a red fire or light kindled to keep people from death, as poetical a thing as the spear of Britomart or the lamp of Aladdin. It is, in short, the man who thinks ordinary things common who is really the man living in an unreal world.

But of all the examples of this general fact that have recently been called to my notice, there is none more peculiar and interesting than that of the family name of Smith, in which we have a splendid example of the fact that the poetry of common things is a mere fact, while the commonplace character of common things is a mere delusion. For, if we look at the name Smith in a casual and impressionable way, remembering how we commonly hear it, what is commonly said about it, we think of it as something funny and trivial; we think of pictures in Punch, of jokes in comic songs, of all the cheapness and modernity which seem to centre round a Mr Smith. But, if we look at the plain word itself, we suddenly behold a poem. It is the name of a great rugged and primeval craft, a trade that is in the bones of every great epic of antiquity, a trade on which the `arma virumque' have everlastingly depended, and which they have repeatedly acclaimed. It is a craft so poetical that even the babies of village yokels stand and stare into the cavern of its creative violence, with a dim sense that the dancing sparks and the deafening blows are in some way wonderful, as the shops of the village cobbler and the village baker are not wonderful. The mystery of flame, the mystery of metals, the fight between the hardest of earthly things and the weirdest of earthly elements, the defeat of the unconquerable iron by its only conqueror, the brute calm of Nature, the passionate cunning of man, the origin of a thousand sciences and arts, the ploughing of fields, the hewing of wood, the arraying of armies, and the whole beginning of arms, these things are written with brevity indeed, but with perfect clearness, on the visiting card of Mr Smith. The Smiths are a house of arrogant antiquity, of prehistoric simplicity. It would not be at all remarkable if a certain contemptuous carriage of the head, a certain curl of the lip, marked people whose name was Smith. Yet novelists, when they wish to describe a hero as strong and romantic, persistently call him Vernon Aylmer, which means nothing, or Bertrand Vallance, which means nothing; while all the time it is in their power to give him the sacred name of Smith, this name made of iron and fire. From the very beginnings of history and fable this clan has gone forth to battle; their trophies are in every hand, their name is everywhere; they are older than the nations, and their sign is the Hammer of Thor.

Anyone whose name is Smith may be connected with a Smith who was a lawyer in the reign of Henry VIII, or a Smith who was a Colonel in the British army at Blenheim, or a Smith who was a Cavalier, or a Smith who was a Puritan, or a Smith who was a Bishop, or a Smith who was hanged. All this kind of historic information exists in a very perfect form. But it must be remembered that the origin of a great family should be not merely historic, but also prehistoric. Every single practical and triumphant thing in this world has begun, not with an accuracy, but with a legend. These dim, gigantic fables are the origins of all practical things. And behind the dimmest and most gigantic Smith, we may see the more tremendous outlines of the formless and fabulous Smith who was the son of Vulcan and the first conqueror of iron. The shame which many people seem to feel about owning to such a patronymic or tracing its origin, is an extraordinary thing, but it is part of a very deep and general evil which has been going on for some time back. The interest in race, the interest in genealogy, which were professed by the ancient aristocratic world, were not bad things; they were in themselves good things. It is, at least, as reasonable to investigate the origin of a man as to investigate the origin of a cowslip, or a periwinkle, or a prairie dog; the herald with his tabard and trumpet holds his perfectly legitimate place beside the botanist and the conchologist and the natural history expert. What was wrong with the old heraldic speculations was not that they existed, but that they did not go far enough. They did not interest themselves in the blood of the yokel and the mystic paternity of the tinker. In other words, the evil was not that there was too much genealogy, but that there was not enough. And the real work to which democracy ought to address itself is that of extending this racial interest to the case of all ordinary men, of teaching the butcher to be proud of his grandfather, and the railway porter to remember his name with pride. For the single case of the name `Smith' is sufficient to indicate what profundities of origin and significance lie in all our names. The case of Smith is no mere accident; the case would be the same with any one of the common names which we account prosaic or absurd. `Jones' is more mean and preposterous even than Smith, and even those who bear the name of Jones do not probably remember that it is but a corruption of the name that Christ loved. There is not one of us that is not noble in origin, whatever we may be in essence.

The True Vanity of Vanities

It will not, I imagine, be disputed that the one black and inexcusable kind of pride is the pride of the man who has something to be proud of. It is true that you often do hear people saying, as they say other idle and unmeaning things while they are really watching a bird fly or expecting the dinnerbell, that such and such a person is vain, but has some right to be. But you do not find these people actually regarded with anything short of the most delightful loathing; whereas the nice old donkeys who are vain without any earthly ground for vanity at all, are not only universally and rightly beloved, but are made Cabinet Ministers and Bishops, and covered with a continual admiration. And this popular feeling is right. The universal objection to the people who are proud of genuine calibre is not any mere jealousy of them; it is not a paltry or panic-stricken resentment of their admitted superiority. It is, like a great many other things which ordinary people feel in a flash and could not possibly defend, entirely philosophical. The instinct of the human soul perceives that a fool may be permitted to praise himself, but that a wise man ought to praise God. A man who really has a head with brains in it ought to know that this head has been gratuitously clapped on top of him like a new hat. A man who by genius can make masterpieces ought to know that he cannot make genius. A man whose thoughts are as high as the stars ought to know that they roll almost as regardless of his power. A man who possesses great powers ought to know that he does not really possess them.

So it certainly does in practice come about that the more right a man has to vanity the less the sensible human race permits him to be vain. The most really ennobling, the most really health-giving orders of conceit are those that concern something of which a man has no obvious right at all to be conceited, the things over which he exercises no control, which he did not create and which he could not terminate. If we want what we should all regard as the very kindliest and most harmless kind of pride a man could have, the kind of pride that does not in effect make him offensive and unbrotherly, we should all mention something like the love of country or the dim pride of some very ancient race. The people who, profess these are mostly dear old buffers, because they are proud of something they have not procured. Far more brutal than these are the people who have in some sort of way deserved their position — the capitalists, the parvenus, the children of the modern mercantile ferocity. Yet they, too, in their way have a silvery thread of graciousness, because they are stupid, and have been, like the aristocrats, the acceptors of some beautiful accident.

The sin of pride blackens into an unbearable infamy when we came to the artistic and literary people who are proud of their intellects. They are worse than the scientific people, because the scientific people have far less reason to be proud than the artistic and literary people. The scientists to a great extent inherit, like the aristocrats, and are thus kept tolerable; the literary people — such, for instance, as the present writer — create, and are too disgusting for words. The literary arrogance is very nearly the worst, but is not the worst. Those who swagger because they have intellects suppose that intellect is the most important thing on earth, and theirs would be an easy existence only that it happens that it is not. Those who pride themselves on intelligence are priding themselves on a quite subordinate and suburban sort of excellence. The highest thing in the world is goodness. It is so high that, fortunately, the great majority of people who have it are horribly frightened of it, and keep their own virtue as they would keep some sort of wild horse or griffin. But every now and then there do appear people who are good and who know they are good, and who are proud of being good. And if there be any reality burning through the written phrase, if there be any passion which strains at the strings of language, if there be any emotion which, through translations and re-translations and versions and diversions, is still alive, these were the people whom Jesus Christ could hardly forbear to scourge.

This is, I suppose, the whole subtlety of the sin of pride; all other sins attack men when they are weak and weary; but this attacks when men are happy and valuable and nearer to all the virtues. And when it attacks most easily the results are vilest. The whole difference betwen the religion of Christianity and such a religion, for instance, as that of Brahminism, is merely this. The castes of Christian Europe are insolent, abominable, unendurable things, which have been endured, as a matter of fact, for centuries; but they have one great virtue, they are irreligious. But in Brahminism the castes are religious things; it is a virtue to be aristocratic. And against any people who claim to rule me by spiritual superiority, I will everlastingly and happily rebel, conscious of that image of deity which equalises us all.

Written in the Sand

In the mid-way of this our mortal life, I find myself (as in one of the changes of a dream) at a watering-place on the East Coast. I find among other things that it is raining and that my fellow creatures, or at least my fellow visitors, are in a state of irrational indignation over that circumstance. `How paradoxical it is in you,' I say to them with astonishment, `to come to a watering-place and exhibit distress when it waters you.' I explain to them how unjust, how fundamentally unpoetic is the current prejudice against rain.

I point out to them how singular an example this prejudice affords of the perverse and artificial nature of our modern English patriotism... All Englishmen join in reviling that lovable and admirable English thing, the English climate. Everybody blasphemously rails against those mutable and magnificent skies which are a perpetual transformation scene. Everybody vilifies this land of violent and benignant clouds, the only land that could have produced the stormy summers of Constable or the red apocalypse of Turner. Of these mysterious phases rain is only one, and not the least beautiful. When I point this out to my fellow Englishmen their spirit takes on something of the turbid transformations of the English sky. `How colossal, how cosmic a vision,' I say to them, `is the rain upon the sea. Worms, you are permitted to gaze upon a reversal of the fifth day of creation. The waters below the firmament were divided from the waters that were above the firmament. And lo! they are wedded again.' This kind of conversation naturally makes me popular.

I am particularly beloved by those who are frustrated in their desire for sea-bathing. `What,' I exclaim, `your whole heart is set on wetting yourself in that silly pool of salt. Give me,' I cry ecstatically, `the Baths of Heaven!' After thus discussing the matter with various groups of people, I find myself thrown back on a gentle solitude. I wander along the lean sands by the bright, bleak sea. The weather is clearing, and sky and sea shine like pale steel, as if they had been washed and rubbed by the rain. Along the empty sands two small boys are trailing their feet disconsolately. They do not know what to do; they do not know where to go. Only a dim and blind gregarious instinct, a brotherhood as deep as the brutes, leads them to do nothing together and to go nowhere together. They do not speak, they are too weary even to quarrel, though they have made no exertion; they are sunk in that strange and sudden and very occasional boredom which belongs to boyhood, and which is like all boyhood's experiences, like its love and its fear, pure and intense, the undiluted essence of ennui.

At last, after what seems like leagues of drifting, something happens. Either the sun paints one strip of silver on the leaden sea, or, more likely, the soul itself, with its mysterious silences and activities, rebels and flashes; but one of the boys bounds suddenly into an excavation in the sand, the remains of some other boy's fortress, and begins to bank it up again furiously, as if he were walling the wild sea out of the flats of England. The other stares a little while with a stupid curiosity, as at a trifle; then on him also comes the primeval will to action which drives metaphysicians to madness, and he also leaps, like Remus, over the wall and begins to build the city. Three minutes afterwards they are talking; six minutes afterwards, still happier sign, they are fighting.

I will not go so far as to say that these two boys were some dark and dreadful cherubim sent to act before my eyes a spiritual mystery, however fine a background for it would have been the grey edge of the sea and that strange blank light so white and wet which grows in the clearing sky. But it is certainly true that the episode of the two little boys depicts as in a small miracle play one of the least of the truths that lie behind our modern civilisation, and constitute the answer to that question which is asked in large letters all over the newspapers, `What is Wrong?'

The thing that is wrong is a certain fallacy with which we English have comforted ourselves for same decades, which may be called the fallacy of unity, or in another and slighter form, the fallacy of sociability. What I mean is this, that we have fallen into a habit of regarding the fact that some school or nation is full of quarrelling as a sign that it is weak. And we have fallen into the more dangerous habit of regarding the fact that some school or nation is not full of quarrelling as a sign that it is strong or energetic. The reason that the Irish fight each other, and even hate each other, is not that they are Celts. It is not even that they are Irish. It is simply that they have something to do. The reason that the French groups split and fight is not that they are Latins; it is not even that they are French. It is simply that they have something to do. And the reason that English politicians work together in unity is certainly not that they are English. It is that they have nothing to do; when, for instance, they had James II to dethrone, or when they had Walpole to howl against, or when they had Napoleon to fight, they behaved exactly as the French and the Irish do; parties were broken by secessions; heads were broken by sticks.

We are like the two little boys walking along the sands. We go together easily enough as long as we are going nowhere. We can do as others do cheerfully enough, as long as we are doing nothing. But the moment we agree to do anything we begin to disagree about it.

A Case of Comrades

There was once a lady of a very beautiful character (delicate, yet decisive, for that is the definition of a lady) who asked me whether I did not believe in the possibility of a simple comradeship between the sexes. Being somewhat in a corner, I replied that, as I understood the word comradeship, I did not.

I gave some of my reasons. I did not give my first and firmest and most unhesitating reason, which was this: that I knew quite well that if I had treated the lady herself for four consecutive minutes as a comrade she would have ordered me out of the house. But I gave some other reasons. I remarked that comradeship was a quite special thing; that it was quite different from friendship. I said (and this, oddly enough, I believe to be profoundly true) that a man can be the friend of a woman, but not her comrade. For friendship implies individuality; whereas comradeship really implies the temporary subordination, if not the temporary swamping of individuality. Friends are the better for being two; but comrades are the better for being two million.

In the Greek grammar, which I learnt with difficulty and forgot with ease, there was one thing, I remember, which would by itself prove that the Greeks were a great people. I mean the fact that there is in Greek a dual as well as a plural. Two is quite different from any other number, just as one is quite different from any other number: that truth is the basis of marriage. When I knew there was a Greek dual I could easily realise that the Greeks gave philosophy to the world.

My concern here is that comradeship is essentially plural. Now, women are not plural. The very word `women’ has about it, I think, a sort of bad taste: it smacks of polygamous Turks or tired and cynical men-about-town. There are no such things as women. There is only the woman you are at this particular moment afraid of or in love with, or inclined to reverence or inclined to assassinate. I think a real crowd of women would be like fifty suns or half a hundred moons — it would be weaker for its numbers. The sun would not have room to shine.

In any case, what I had to say about comradeship to this particular lady was tolerably clear. I merely pointed out that comradeship is a particular sort of human association; and the essential paradox of it is this; that it is at once violent and cool. People talking in twos talk gently, because they feel emphatically: people talking in tens or twenties talk emphatically because they do not care a dump about anything. Friendship becomes comradeship when you have forgotten the presence of your friend. You are addressing the abstract thing, the club, which, when two or three are gathered together (of the male sort at least) is always in the midst of them. Men's debating clubs have a pedantic phrase which exactly expresses this truth: they talk of `speaking to the motion'. It is true; men do speak to a motion, not about it; they talk to a topic. Women talk to each other; that is why their conversations are frightfully fascinating, but too terrible for us to listen to for long without running away.

Do you remember how Thackeray cries out, `O les laches que les hommes!' when George Warrington and Lord Castlewood rush from the room merely because the young American girl has begun a sweet satiric conversation with old Beatrix Esmond? It is almost the truest thing in Thackeray. Our sex is not strong or bold enough to endure that agony of directly personal conversation in which women are supreme. We must have a topic — an impersonal one. And as I told my admirable lady friend, a male friend becomes a comrade when one has forgotten him. To forget a male friend is only to behave like a comrade. But to forget a woman friend is only to behave like a cad. She is herself; he is the club.

But if either that lady or any other lady really wants to know whether she and her sex should share masculine camaraderie; whether they would really be stronger and happier by doing so; whether, in short, we are in such a matter keeping them out of something they would naturally enjoy, I am just now in a position to enlighten them, by giving them an instance, realistically exact and universally typical, of what our masculine comradeship really is.

If any lady wants to know what she is letting herself in for if she goes in for Comradeship, what really happens when comrades meet together, this is what happens. It happened yesterday morning. I was breakfasting with a mob of undergraduates of one of our great Universities, and the whole company was broken up into groups of two or three extravagantly engaged in some argument. I myself was engaged in two arguments. I was trying to prove to an Agnostic on my right that there was such a place as Heaven, and to an Imperialist on my left that there was such a place as England: when suddenly all our minor clamours were cloven with a monstrous and crashing noise from the other end of the table. Ten men were talking at once, three were beating on the table in pure passion, one was screaming above the din, and then (as is common in such crises) there was, for an instant, an unmeaning silence, and then the voice of one of the best orators of the Union rose, piercing and pathetic, throbbing to the echoes of the roof, alone:

`I do not say that the corridor ran the whole length of the train. What I say, what I say emphatically and with the full responsibility of my intellect, is that it ran on the left-hand side of our carriage. And I know that I speak the truth.'

We all rushed to the spot. I dropped England with one hand and Heaven with the other. I craned my neck to find out what it was all about. It was about this very profound and urgent question: whether when three persons present travelled to Scotland about two years ago in a luncheon car, the shape of that car had been such that there was a corridor down the left-hand side or a kind of passage down the middle. Only three persons present had ever seen the car, and they could not agree; but we soon took it out of their puny hands. We argued it in the abstract. We discussed whether in the nature of things the passage would have been in the middle. I founded a sect of my own, midway between the Orthodox Passagist position and the Extreme Corridorians' position. Some held that the nature of the luncheon should be taken into account in all evidence of the shape of the luncheon-car. We made maps of the car with forks and spoons on the table, and little lumps of sugar to show where the people sat. The whole discussion took nearly two hours.

But, indeed, temporal measurements cannot express the length, for we talked as if we were the immortal Gods and had all eternity before us: for to be outside time is one of the strange elements of fraternity. We were only interrupted by some academic custom which required that the Union officials should be photographed. And even then one of them moved. He kept on quivering and stirring until the photographer broke into pathetic complaint. Then he, in return, broke out, `I never denied that there was a case for the corridor at the side. What I said—' But we crushed him, reluctantly. All this is, to the best of my recollection, quite true.

I fancy that I do not see any very approving expression on the faces of my lady friends. They are not moved by this Homeric war. They feel, perhaps, that the question of whether one luncheon-car two years ago was of a particular shape was not an urgent question. They feel that when argued by eighteen youths for two hours it might even have become a tiring question. O mightiest of all things, O mothers of the gods, they are only little things that you do not understand, only a few sports and follies of the stags of the herd. Be you content as you are secure: you understand everything except comradeship.

Something

It is customary for cultivated people from century to century to set up some artistic fashion and pretend to be more old-world or natural than they are. Thus the French noblesse played at being old Greek shepherds and shepherdesses; for the rich are always craving for barbarism while the poor are always pushing (rather blindly) for more civilisation. Within our own memory drawing-rooms have been full of dismal people in dingy garments who were supposed (I hardly know why) to recall the gay colours and coarse virtues of the Middle Ages. If ever I adopted one of these barbaric affectations it would be one which has been, I think, undeservedly neglected. In the British Museum, while others are admiring the bleak busts of Caesars or the placid horrors of Assyria, I always stray to a kindlier and more homely department. I am found worshipping the hairy and goggle-eyed images from the Sandwich Islands; idols to which I really feel a man might bow down. For the beautiful Gods of Greece are cruel; but one always feels that an ugly god might be kind. If therefore I ever arrange my house on one artistic plan (which God forbid) it shall be on a rugged Polynesion plan; it shall be on a goggle-eyed and hairy sort of plan. Everything I hear about these savages attracts me to them more and more. It is vain to tell me that under such a regime the man will be lazy and fond of pleasure while the woman is hard-working and practical; for that is already the case in the house which I inhabit at present. I do not mind painting myself; in fact, I never can paint anything else without doing so. If I colour so much as a cardboard figure for a toy theatre, I emerge painted like the leaves of autumn, painted like the sky of morning, as it says in Hiawatha.

I cannot imagine how the strange notion arose that ignorance is the origin of superstitions. It is true indeed, if we mean ignorance in the same sense that Plato and Bacon were ignorant; the common ignorance of all men about the meaning of their monstrous destiny. But if this be intended, the phrase that ignorance is the origin of all superstitions is a coarse and misleading way of stating the case. It would be much truer to say that agnosticism is the origin of all religions. That is true; the agnostic is at the beginning not the end of human progress. But those who speak of superstitions born of ignorance generally mean that myths and mystical assertions have arisen from mere accidental or animal incapacity to realise all the circumstances of the case. The old Victorian scientific theory was that men invented fairy tales because they had not yet grasped facts. They thought the moon was a woman because they had not the sense enough to see it was a moon. They thought the sea was a god because no kind scientist had ever passed by and pointed out that it was really the sea. They worshipped a stone as a fetish because their lack of geological knowledge prevented them from noting that it was a stone. They were so dull, inexperienced and narrowly materialistic that they could see no difference between a crackle in the clouds and a ringing hammer hurled by a red-headed giant; between a spat of yellow fire in the sky and a young god driving horses.

That is the materialistic theory of myths, and it is manifest nonsense. Nobody could ever have thought that the moon looked like a woman, even of the amplest contours. Nobody can ever have thought that the sun looked like a carriage and pair, because it doesn't. If they used these terms in connection with sun or moon, mountain or river, rock or tree, they were certainly not using them because they knew no better. On the contrary, they were using them because they knew something much better; because a woman is more beautiful than moonlight and a young man more splendid than the sun.

This is essentially admitted about such fables as those of Phoebus and Artemis; or even Balder and Thor; here it is vaguely conceded that `poets' and not mere ignorant savages, have had something to do with the matter. But what the folklorists of the Fraser type will not see is that the ruder savages also are poets; even if they are minor poets. All that they say about their totems, their taboos, their dances, and services to the dead must be understood with a certain poetic sympathy, as meant to be weird, glorious, shocking, or even impossible. They are the abrupt expressions of unique spiritual experiences, quiet and queerly coloured moods; dreams and glimpses that do really lie on the borderline between this existence and some other. If a savage says that a pepper-plant is his divine great-grandmother, he is not speaking from ignorance, for ignorance would leave him with the bare knowledge that it was a pepper-plant. Rather he is speaking from knowledge, fragmentary and perhaps dangerous knowledge. He may have seen something about a pepper-plant that it is better not to see.

There is one really tremendous question. The savage respecting the pepper-plant, the idolator adoring the stone, the sage choosing his star, the patriot dying for a boundary, all do unmistakably mean something — something far down in the abysses of the universe and the soul. Do they mean that everything is sacred? Or do they perhaps mean that something is sacred — something they have not found?

Asparagus

At about twenty-one minutes past two today I suddenly saw that asparagus is the secret of aristocracy. I was trying to put long limp stalks into my mouth, when the idea came into my head; and the stalk failed to do so. I do not refer to any merely metaphorical and superficial comparisons which could easily be made between them. We might say that most of the organism was left dead white; merely that a little button at the top might be bright green. We might draw the moral that average aristocrats are made out much stronger than they are; and illustrate it from average asparagi. They say that any stick is good enough to beat a dog with; but did anyone ever try to beat a dog with a stick of asparagus? We might draw the moral that aristocratic traditions are made out much more popular than they really were. ‘Norman’ gets mispronounced as English. In this way three French leopards were somehow turned into British lions. And in this way also the solemn word Asparagus, which means nothing so far as I know, was turned by the populace into `sparrowgrass’, which means two of the most picturesque things in the world. Asparagus, which I presume to have been the name of a Roman pro-consul, Marcus Asparagus Esculens, or what not, never deserved such luck as to lose its origin in two things so true and common as the bold birds of the town or the green democracy of the fields. Or again, we might say of sticks of asparagus that they have often lost their heads, and we might say the same of aristocrats. Both heads have been bitten off by the guillotine before now. But to complete the parallel we must maintain that the head of the aristocrat was the best part of him; and this is often hard to maintain. But, indeed, I do not base the view upon any such fancies from phraseology. Far deeper in earth are the roots of asparagus.

The one essential of an aristocracy is to be in advance of its age. That is, there must be something new known to a few. There must be a password; and it must always be a new password. Moreover, it must be by its nature, an irrational password, for anything quite rational might rapidly be calculated even by the uninitiated. In the same way it is essential to any social observance that involves a social distinction, that the observance should be, in this sense at least, artificial. That is, you can only know the observance as the soldier knows the password, because he has been told.

The working instance best known to us of the middle classes is the old arbitrary distinction about how to eat asparagus. Now, excluding cannibalism and the habit of eating sand (about which I can offer no opinion) there is really nothing one can eat which is less fitted to be eaten with the fingers than asparagus. It is long; it is greasy; it is loose and liable to every sort of soft yet sudden catastrophe; it is always eaten with some sort of oily sauce; and its nice conduct would involve the powers of a professional juggler confirmed with some practice in climbing the greasy pole. Most things could easily be eaten with one's fingers. Cold beef could quite easily be eaten with one's fingers; or simply with one's teeth. I have seldom seen a noble cheese without an impulse merely to fix my fangs in it. New potatoes could be eaten with the fingers as cleanly as Easter eggs; and whitebait might as well be shovelled into our open mouths by a Whitebait Machine, for all the use we make of a knife and fork to dissect them. We could easily eat fish cakes as we eat seed cake. Cold Christmas pudding is a substance with all the majesty of coloured marble; far cleaner, stronger and more coherent than any ordinary bread or biscuit. Yet all these we are supposed to approach through the intervention of a little stunted sword or a stumpy trident. Only this one tiresome, toppling vegetable, I eat between my finger and thumb. I should be better off as a giraffe eating the top of a palm-tree: it doesn't want any holding up.

We will not exaggerate. Eating soup with the fingers the young student should not attempt; and sauces, custards and even curries are no field for the manual labourer. I would not eat stewed rhubarb with my fingers, or, indeed, with any instrument that science could devise. Even with things involving treacle, I have not a good touch. But, while strictly avoiding anything like exaggeration or frivolity, I still note that the point of asparagus is that it is not the food — among other foods, specially fitted for the fingers. In other words, the principle could not have been deduced from abstract reason, or have grown out of the general instincts of men. It could not have been custom: that is why it was etiquette.

The brotherhood of man is a fact which in the long run wears down all other facts. Therefore, a privileged class, if it would avoid sliding naturally back into the body of mankind must keep up an incessant excitement about new projects, new cultures and new prejudices, new skirts and stockings. It must tell a new tale every day or perish, like the lady of the Arabian Nights. Tennyson, who was too much touched with this aristocratic — or snobbish — Futurism, wrote, `Lest one good custom should corrupt the world', which really means lest everybody should learn the right way of eating asparagus. And so, out of luxury and waste and weariness, the fever they call Progress came into the world.

Do you tell me they don't eat asparagus with their fingers now? Do I not know that in some of the best houses they have little tongs for each person, which are charming? Have I not heard that asparagus is now lowered into the open mouth on a string, or shot into the mouth with a small gun, or eaten with the toes, or not eaten at all? No; I do not know, that is what I wish to point out. They have changed the password.

The English Spirit and the Flea

I met a man who was awaiting a letter from his family in the Eastern Counties. Before the letter came he learnt that the place where his family lived had been singled out specially as one of the places where the Germans have lately made hell in heaven with their colossal and destructive flying ships. He did not show much perturbation; but when the letter from his nearest relatives at last arrived, he naturally opened it with some interest.

It was all about a flea. I will not develop the topic, though Swift allegorised infinity under that image, and William Blake thought it worthwhile to paint a most careful portrait of the Ghost of a Flea. In the East Anglian household, anyhow, there had never before been the ghost of a flea. The solitary specimen was by the householder connected in some way with the imprudence of his relative in some slumming adventure: and it was held up before him, as it were, in derision and pursued with a wealth of detail. Its arrival, adventures, and personal eccentricities were scientifically set forth. Any entomologist writing on the habits and habitat of the East Anglian flea would find it a most careful compilation. It contained no reference to the war. There is another animal, not the East Anglian flea, on which the entomologist might gradually have gained a little light. I do not refer to the Zeppelin. Zeppelins did not occur in the letter. I refer to a little-known animal called the Englishman, whose habits, habitat, and other curious constituent elements the German entomologists might find it worthwhile to study, and of which this letter is a fragmentary but not quite valueless record.

I do not idolatrize this animal. I do not expect the German to fall dawn and worship the East Anglian inhabitant any more than the East Anglian flea — like an ancient Egyptian worshipping a beetle. The qualities he displays in such cases are characteristics rather than abstract virtues. No good ever came of merely flattering one's nation: a man flatters the land he fears, but not the land he loves. The Englishman does not neglect war merely because he is calm and wise and strong; there are many respects in which he can be wayward and foolish and weak. Like the other animal, he can be at his best an irritant and at his worst a parasite. The Englishman is not simply calm and wise and strong; but he is English. I do not set my country above human temptations, like an allegory on a ceiling; I do not say that enemies could not conceivably perturb the British Lion or fluster the British Bulldog. I do say that I am not, as a fact, perturbed, and specially not perturbed by people who say `The British Lion is drawing in his horns' — I perceive that they have no vivid mental picture of a lion. I am not flustered by people who say `The British Bulldog will soon have his wings clipped', because I know such curtailment to be both unnecessary and impossible. And the distinction is important. Our very weaknesses are strengths so long as they are undiscovered weaknesses. It is possible to remind my own countrymen very generally of whereabouts the strengths and weaknesses lie. I would not do even that if there were the smallest chance of a German understanding it.

Some of the best things the English have done were the things they didn't do. For instance, in spite of a seething fuss of small leagues and committees, they cannot really be induced to 'do anything for Shakespeare'. Lord Melbourne (who was almost as English as Shakespeare) used to solve the most intense diplomatic crises by saying, `Can't we let it alone?' We can. We let Shakespeare alone. Just as we have an enormous negative monument to Shakespeare, so we have an enormous negative victory over Count Zeppelin. As a nation we receive his flaming visitations with something more insulting than defiance — absentmindedness. Such absence of mind can co-exist with considerable presence of mind at particular moments. It did in Hamlet, who always struck me as a particularly English character — which was, no doubt, the reason why he could not get on with the Danes, and had to be sent to England. His sudden lunge at the curtain was very like the sudden rush our mob sometimes makes at the alien. But, on the whole, it is the other attitude that is our ultimate strength. Not anything we have done against the Zeppelins, but all that we have not done against them, is our monument aere perennius. Let us continue not to notice Zeppelins. I do not mean this with a dull literalism;

and I disclaim responsibility for anyone who should take it so. Notice them, of course — but not so much as fleas.

There is one kindred characteristic of the English which is very subtle and easily expressed wrongly, but which plays a very great part in practical things of this kind. I know not what to call it, except perhaps, somewhere-elseness. It is a sort of distant optimism. It is a refusal to accept as final the facts immediately in front of us — a strong belief in the other side of the world, or even the other side of the moon. It was rather pompously expressed by the phrase about the sun never setting on the British Empire. The same thought was much more sincerely expressed in the popular ejaculation, ‘Somewhere the sun is shining!’ This came, I think, from one of our noble comic songs, and used to be uttered by people when they broke valuable teapots, or put their feet into cucumber-frames. Its excess was well satirised by Mr John Burns when he summed up Imperialism under the text, `The eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth’. And it is true, as of every true national characteristic, that it has the defect of its quality, and often goes with an undue laxity about the rights of our own field or the laws of our own parish. But it goes also with more imaginative generosity about remote lands like Bulgaria or Japan than is common in more closely logical countries. And there really exists many a City clerk who is more concerned for bombs in Belgium than bombs in the City.

I repeat that I will have nothing to do with bragging about these good qualities as if they were the only good qualities. It is not a good quality, but a defect in us that we do not understand the French revanche; it only means that we have not long enough memories to make tyrants and enemies keep their promises. Our people are courageous, not because of pride and praise, but rather in spite of it. In spite of our education we are still intelligent; and it was often in spite of our athletics that we were strong. The Battle of Waterloo was not won on Eton playing fields. The Battle of Waterloo (as the same authority said, and he certainly knew something about it) was won by the scum of the earth. And today also we are largely saved by the people whom we have failed to educate, failed to rule, failed to provide with land or religion, and very nearly failed to save from starvation. It is these people who in the travail and agony of the hour, provide the note which is most needed and most unexpected; the note of frivolity. And it is they, even more than their social superiors, who have seen the heavens filled with fire; and thought it less than a flea-bite.

The Hobby and the Head Waiter

In the matter of property we may find an obvious but useful parable in the difference between living in a house and living in an hotel. There are some practical conveniences in the hotel; but there is first of all a sort of megalomaniac glamour of great spaces and gilded ceilings that is not practical at all. At best there is the romance of personal adventure and accident; but there is no corporate and communal life.

It is when we pass to the practical difference between a house and an hotel that we come to the creative nature of property. I have taken this figure of speech for convenience and clarity, because I do not think everybody understands what we mean by this creative quality. Now a man in an hotel is entirely receptive. He may receive as many things as an average man in an average house. He may receive more things than most modern men in most modern houses. But these things must all be of a certain recognised and conventional character. He cannot add anything to the hotel. If he were to attempt to improve the hotel in any sweeping and striking fashion, his adventures would be somewhat sensational. Rich people in a rich hotel are in one sense protected and too much protected; but though they have protection they have not property. The point, however, is this; that nobody can provide beforehand for the creative needs, as people can provide for the protective need. It is in the nature of any creation that it is in some sense original; and it is in the nature of anything original that it cannot be foreseen. There is no prophecy of poetry; there is not even any prophecy of prophecy. A Futurist cannot predict a song even if he can produce a song; which is not always the case. He cannot foresee a poem or foresee a picture; he cannot even foresee a practical joke. If he did, indeed, it might possibly not occur.

In some hotels of the American sort there used to be an instrument erected in the bedroom; it had rather the general appearance of a clock, with a finger pivoted so as to point at various inscriptions on the dial, and these were supposed to be a complete list of the needs of man, in his highest capacity of an American hotel-frequenter. Whenever he wanted a Prairie Oyster or a Horse’s Neck, a secretary or a sandwich, or anything (for all I know) from a daily paper to a dentist, he had only to move the hand on the clock and a bell rang and the person or object was somehow produced from the interior mechanism of the hotel. Now it is quite true that even the real list was long and detailed, and that it could be extended and applied to almost any length along certain lines. It would no doubt include not only a dentist but a detective.

But we may here turn from the fancies about what a man might desire to the facts about what he does desire. The simplest course is for each man to take himself as an example; as a typical and not necessarily an egotistic example. I am not a person especially prone by nature to be a nuisance in an hotel; I am not a vegetarian; I am not an epicure; I can eat and drink and smoke the ordinary things provided in ordinary places. But if it came to living my life in an hotel, especially that part of my life that is creative in the sense of being personal, I think I should find the list of things on the bedroom clock a little insufficient. For instance, if I have a hobby or a potential hobby, it is probably a toy theatre. Hobbies imply holidays; and while it is very arguable that journalists do no real work; it is also true that they have no real holidays. But if I had no need to earn my bread and cheese, and no country and no conscience and none of all those nonsensical things, I should settle down with a serious aim in life, which would be working a toy theatre. It is to me almost as much a box of miracles today, as it was when I first saw it as a baby; and I feel as if I knew that mimic world before I knew the real one. The gilded figures of a prince and princess glow in my memory against black oblivion, almost before the memory of my father who had made them for me; which things may be an allegory. Now this example is an understatement. I am in no sense alone in this taste; Stevenson and my father and many others evidently shared it. But it is an excellent example of something which, without being exactly eccentric, is just sufficiently out of the ordinary way to make it most improbable that any practical organizer would see it; or provide it, or put it into any definite class of things. I do not think I could say carelessly to a waiter, over my shoulder, `Just get me a black coffee and Benedictine and a toy theatre, will you?' I cannot imagine the headwaiter roaring down the speaking tube, `Three Manhattan cocktails and a toy theatre'. I cannot imagine it was mentioned among the minor luxuries printed on the piece of clockwork in the bedroom. But even if it was, it would not meet the case. Even if the waiter returned laden with toy theatres, as he sometimes comes laden with cigar-boxes, it would not solve the problem. For a hobby implies work as well as play; a process as well as a result. It would be a little nearer the mark if the head waiter brought me trays of tinsel and cardboard and that glorious metallic paper as intoxicating as all his wines, a crimson richer even than his burgundy and a green better than the greenest Chartreuse. Even then it would only work if the head waiter would sit down on the floor with me and help to cut the things out; and of this one could never be absolutely certain.

As these reflections pass through my mind, my abstracted eye is riveted on an ordinary wooden chair such as they make at Wycombe from the woods of South Bucks. And I see, as in a vision, that if one were to saw off the back of the chair, knock its bars out and screw it like a frame on to the four feet, the whole would make an almost exact model of a toy theatre, the bars between the legs forming the slips for the wings. I cannot pause for the experiment just now, having something worse to do; but the fancy happens to be an exact example of the sort of thing I mean; a fancy that could not possibly be foreseen, yet which might quite possibly be fulfilled. No great organizing mind would say, `See that seven thousand chairs are ordered from High Wycombe in case somebody wishes to turn them into toy theatres.’ It is a hundred to one that nobody ever thought of this nonsensical notion before, and that nobody will ever think of it again. I do not say the world would have lost anything, but I do say I should have lost something, and that something is my own. It is private property.

Now, when I am in my sumptuous and select suite of apartments at the Hotel Beelzebub, reclining on rugs of leopard and tiger skin under tapestries of cloth of gold, it is quite certain that I shall not be encouraged to rush at one of the hotel chairs and begin cutting it up with a chopper or a saw. My explanation that I am turning it into a toy theatre will be coldly received. It may even lead to my being removed from that cushioned apartment to a still more cushioned apartment, commonly called a padded cell. But the point here is that the two forms of human comfort and convenience run distinct and parallel; and no increase of the one comes an inch nearer to the other. The hotel might multiply its chairs by the million, it might vary its pattern of chairs by the thousand, but it would never come into the same world as that perverse and personal day-dream of turning a chair, first into a stool and then into a stage. In that world are all the wonders of the creative side of property; and though I have taken for convenience the lighter and more portable types of property, the same psychology applies to the larger business of production. A man wishes to own his field, primarily because its productiveness is the protection of his honour and independence; but partly also because he wishes to do things with his field which he cannot explain to anybody, and is only vaguely shaping for himself. He is considering a balance between particular necessities and particular luxuries which escapes classification; he is ready, so to speak, to live on turnips on a chance of growing tobacco. I mean he is ready to act on a calculation exactly like the turning of a wooden chair into a wooden stage; something at once fantastic and thrifty. Where that power is democratically distributed men are more than citizens, they are all artists.

With this note on the purely creative or spiritual side of property I conclude the sketch I have here attempted against communism. I need not repeat for the hundredth time that the case against communism is not a case for capitalism; indeed the case against communism is that it is much too like capitalism. It matters little whether our allegorical hotel is called by capitalists an hotel or by communists a hostel. The case against it is that it is not a home, and that the spirit of man will never feel at home in it. It can only be a home when it has a sense of something at once restful and capricious, which is the mood of all creative action. It is only by narrowing itself to locality and privacy that the soul can broaden itself with real imagination and novelty. To listen to all the modern talk about organization and trade and transport is like watching a man wandering about carrying an uprooted tree. The tree is intended for transplantation; it is involved in problems of transport; it enjoys all the educational improvements of travel. It is carried by cosmopolitan trains through various countries with marvellous speed; it is unpacked or carted about in colossal railway stations with marvellous organization. But there are only two things worth saying about it. One is that the tree may be already dead. The other is that there is only one possible way of seeing it again alive. Only when it is planted finally in one fixed place on the face of the earth, will it ever bear fruit or blossom or become a greenhouse of birds.

In Praise of Pie

We should like to utter our fervid and enthusiastic thanks to the clergyman who wrote to The Times the other day to protest against the neglect, both as a title and an Institution, of the glorious English possession known to our fathers as `Apple Pie'; and shamefully described by various degraded outcasts and aliens as Apple Tart. As he very acutely pointed out, nobody says that a room is in apple tart order. As he warmly affirmed, no practical joker ever made an apple tart bed. Whether in the arrangements of rooms or the disarrangement of bedrooms, the traditions of our fathers testify to the true form of the word. A hundred inspiring battle-hymns rise to inspire the march; as in that truly national anthem which says

`I'm not a glutton
But I do like pie.'

as well as those lyrics that form the foundation of all education and told us that A was an apple pie. `Pie' is a full and powerful word, like pig or pork; which fills the mouth with an appropriate and anticipatory fullness; it is impossible to say the words `I do like tart' and produce the desired effect of talking with your mouth full.

It is not a light or trivial matter. There are questions, seemingly accidental, that divide Society by a spiritual chasm far more real than the artificial frontiers of the factions. The armies of Piemen and Tarters confront each other across an abyss. The passionate consumers of Pie are divided from the frigid triflers with Tart by something far more essential than ever divided Whigs from Tories or Liberals from Conservatives. We could almost guess a man's religion, or at least the religion towards which he tends, by his ignorant instincts on this solemn and profound matter. It is not only that he who says Pie, and disdains to say Tart, is preserving the language of Shakespeare and the legend of the English and pure religion, breathing household laws. There are in it yet more subtleties of doctrine. He who says `Pie' is he who, being assured that a bodily thing is lawful is not ashamed merely because it is bodily; but finds far more of Christian humility in the frank confession of the body. But he, who shrinks from the old gross word, feeling in it a suggestion of greed or ignominy, is of the tribe that turn into Theosophists and Esoteric Buddhists and end as mere Manichees and haters of the creative word. They, who would insinuate that they are merely toying with a sort of light confectionery, when confronted with the solid duty of eating pie, are of the sort who complains of the coarseness of the Marriage Service or the clamour of church bells or the habit of singing carols at Christmas. We do not mean to blame those who, being in invincible ignorance, happen to say `tart' through habit and the teaching of ill-advised pastors and masters; but when the question is fairly faced, it would be found true that the obstinate and unrepentant are of this order. They are also of the kind that turn pale at a pun; or, what is worse, gravely discuss whether the example of Shakespeare makes it permissible. For the pleasure of annoying them, we utter in a loud voice this protest on behalf of the `Pie' as a symbol of Piety.

Culture Versus Civilisation

An interesting distinction, which is almost a contradiction, has recently been drawn between Culture and Civilization. Two leading writers of the day, the one a Russian and the other a German, have accepted this difference, even if they use it rather differently. The German, being a freethinker and an agnostic, is, of course, rigidly bound by the iron rivets of the dogmas of materialism. The Russian, being a Greek Orthodox Christian and the relic of a ruined and persecuted Church, is a little more cheerful, and seems to think there is some such thing as human freedom and a chance for human liberty. But both agree, more or less, in a certain theory of the relation between Culture and Civilization; and it is roughly that Civilization is the end of Culture, even in the sense of the death of Culture.

Restating the matter roughly here, for my own purposes, the conception is that Culture is growth; the original sprouting of man's spiritual or artistic nature, as it appears in the native folklore or primitive architecture of a whole people. Civilization is rather the limit or compromise laid upon this by the discovery that there are other peoples or other methods of production. In following Culture, a man develops his arts; that is to say, his tastes. Consequently, true Culture, like true Charity, begins at home. With Civilization there appears something that is not only purely public, but a little homeless. Culture is growing such flowering trees as you prefer in your own front garden, and planting them where you like. Civilization is having a lawsuit with the next-door neighbour about whether your trees overshadow his garden, or calling in the policeman to throw him out if he becomes violent upon the question.

It is possible to recognise a certain rough truth in this distinction, without committing oneself to the fatalistic and rather pessimistic view which Spengler takes of his geological epochs with their human fossils. It is enough to say that we are not fossils; and that Isaiah and Pythagoras and Augustine are not fossils. Spengler tends to treat the coming of a complete Civilization as the coming of an Ice Age, freezing all human life as the ice freezes all animal life. Berdyaev, the Russian, is, as I have said, rather more free and easy, but especially more free. It is not my purpose here, however, to adjudicate on the theory or on the two theorists. I am only concerned with one particular angle or aspect of it, which affects the Civilization in which most of my countrymen actually have to live — the Civilization of London and the big industrial towns — if you can call it a Civilization.

Here, for instance, is a doubt that troubles me. If there was one thing which we did suppose was done for us by Civilization, it was to make us civil. The very word politeness is really the Greek for civilization, just as the very word civilization is really the Latin for politeness. It is a pleasing thought that the word `policeman' and the word 'politeness' not only have the same meaning, but are almost the same word. But the Romans inheriting from the Greeks had no sooner established the idea of what is civic, or belonging to a citizen, than there became somewhat vaguely attached to it the idea of civility. Up to a point, Civilization, or even public life, probably does act in this way. Men begin to feel a new and strange restraint, making them feel a little shy and bashful about knocking off the hats or pulling the noses of total strangers to whom they have not been introduced. A new delicacy, a new sense of what is tactful and fitting, leads them to beat, bash and kick only their nearest and dearest and their most intimate friends. But there is another side to the story, and it is becoming rather a tragic story, in the light of that thesis about Civilization as the fossilization and final end of the truly creative life of a culture. I think we have reason for grave criticism and apprehension when there is a tendency for civic and public life to become more coarse and brutal than private and educational life. It is a dark and sinister omen when men begin to be ruder to strangers than they are to friends.

After all, the home, insofar as any ruins of it are left standing, is still the school of good manners. Many make very great efforts, and most make some sort of effort, to train their children at least in some standard of social behaviour. Little trivial gestures of impatience in which you or I may have indulged — the soup-tureen hurled across the table, the carving-knife brandished with motions mistaken by the superficial for those prefatory to murder — do not alter the fact that, even in the same household, babies are still instructed with some care about spreading the jam or spilling the milk. The old traditions of behaviour, so far as they still exist, are still largely traditions of a household; they concern opening the door to a lady or passing the mustard to a guest. Almost all that remains of the forms of courtesy are the forms of hospitality. Whether you call it behaving like a gentleman or behaving like a snob, it is still inside a human house that the man generally tries to live up to his highest standards, and to perform what are, in fact, the ancient rites and ceremonies of his Culture.

But in public things have altered a good deal. There you have the sharp test and truth; that the man is generally not living up to the highest standards, even of his own family; but often abandoning them in despair, owing to the crush and crowding of modern street life. The man who would bow somebody else into a drawing room is content himself with barging into a tram. The man who would make room for his guest in a tiny villa will leave no room at all for his fellow-citizen in a great big Tube train. In other words, public life, the life that the Greeks called polite, the life that the Romans called civil, has become a great deal more barbarous than the solitary life or the life of the tribe.

We might tolerate the notion that civilization makes our culture more cold or official. But we cannot easily tolerate the notion that our civilization makes us more barbaric. Culture, in the connotation used by the writers I mention, is something interior and imaginative and almost sacred, which, when it takes form, we recognise as the characteristic work of a particular people; as we recognise certain art as the characteristic work of a certain artist. It is a growth of the English culture, for instance, that the poorest cottagers love to have a mass of flowers in their front gardens. It is even a growth of English culture, in a way, that English cottages and villages have a certain peculiar beauty, and are picturesque even when they are inconvenient. It would be with a certain sorrow, whatever our opinions, that we should yield to a more orderly civilization, which should make the village streets straight, or even the village buildings stately. But it does not do anything of the kind. Our civilization today does not make anything straight or anything stately. The romantic rubbish-heap of cottages and cottage gardens would not be replaced by ordered avenues or classical colonnades. They would be replaced by a patchwork of hoardings and a litter of bungalows. That is one aspect of the doom of civilization, over which these literary men lament. Civilization makes us more uncivil — like the man in the Tube.

The Winter Feast

These modern men, who are less anxious to be men than to be moderns, have one little habit that has not been spotted as it should be. They are very fond of first painting the lily, and then proving from the painted surface that it was always a paper flower. Nothing delights these intelligent little creatures more than gilding refined gold, and then scraping it furiously, on the plea of taking the gilt off the gingerbread. I mean that they will first take a natural thing, then daub it and disguise it and deface it with artificial things, and then complain that it is an unnatural thing and throw it away. At the beginning, such alteration must be accepted as an improvement. By the end, each improvement is used to show that the thing should be not so much altered as abolished.

Thus the seed of Democracy, the assembly of the village or the tribe, is as old as the world, and may perhaps go back to the similar assemblies of rooks or wolves. It still exists in many peasant communities, especially in the mountains, and when it is reasonably civilised, that is humanised, and above all when it is Christian, it is still about as just and decent and dignified a government as any, in a world whose governments are hardly its happiest products. Now we men of the modern and Western world took this ancient thing, and proceeded to improve it. We improved democracy by demagogy, that is by professional politicians; we improved election by electioneering, that is by organised lying; we improved announcement by advertisement; that is, we substituted for the horn blown to assemble men round the village tree the megaphone through which a statesman could speak like a salesman; facilitating every exchange in which the voters could sell their votes or the statesmen could sell his soul. We have been positively proud of it as a technical dexterity; that we could turn an act of representation into an art of misrepresentation. And then, when the whole idea has been improved out of recognition in this cynical fashion, we generally find that the cynics have become sceptics; and sceptics about the democratic idea itself. These men, with their wonderful progressive improvements, have themselves turned popular government into unpopular government. But since they also have probably become rather unpopular, they will now often turn round with a fine fastidious aristocratic pride, and express their contempt for popular opinion.

The same sort of ironic injustice is applied to any old popular festival like Christmas. Moving step by step, in the majestic march of Progress, we have first vulgarised Christmas and then denounced it as vulgar. Christmas has become too commercial; so many of these thinkers would destroy the Christmas that has been spoiled, and preserve the commercialism that has spoiled it. They will think me but a belated and bemused being, if I here am found roaming or drifting backwards to consider what Christmas is when it is defined, or what it was before it was spoiled. And it is not surprising that the same modern gentlemen, who have performed this peculiar feat of first pelting a thing with mud and then complaining that it is muddy, have also made a similar muddle about the actual history of the thing which they bury with insults, because they have killed it with improvements.

Thus, the first thing that such people will probably tell you today is that Christmas is really a Pagan festival; because many traditional features of it were taken from Pagans. What they do not seem to see is that, in so far as this is in any sense true, it only proves that the ancient Pagans were much more sensible than the modern Pagans. There are many psychological truths about such a human habit, which are hidden from those who talk day and night about psychology; but who do not really care about any psychology except what they call the psychology of salesmanship. The old Pagans knew that such a ritual must be old, that it must be religious, that it must be concerned fundamentally with simple elements like wood or water or fire, but that it must also be, in a queer way of its own, revolutionary: exalting the humble or putting down the mighty from their seat. That was expressed in a hundred ways, both among heathens and Christians. The Saturnalia was made for a society of slaves; but it gave one wild holiday to those slaves. The medieval Christmas had to exist in a feudal society; but all its carols and legends told again and again a story in which angels spoke to shepherds and a devil inspired a king. An ancient revolt is enshrined in an ancient ritual. Now the reason why Christianity found it quite easy to absorb these Pagan customs is that they were in this way almost Christian customs. The man who does not see that the Saturnalia was almost Christian is a man who has never read the Magnificat.

It is thoroughly bad history to suppose that it was the Paganism that absorbed the Christianity; when there are a thousand things to show that it was the Christianity that absorbed the Paganism. For instance, anything that the Early Church really regarded as horrible among the heathens did completely disappear. The butchery of human beings in amphitheatres, which had been the huge uproarious popular sport of all the vast populace of antiquity, completely disappeared. Doubtless, it disappeared partly because Christian martyrs had suffered there; partly because St Telemachus, the heroic hermit, had hurled himself into the arena to cry aloud to God and the human conscience, against human blood being poured out in festivity like wine. But anyhow, and for whatever reason, it did disappear. If various old Pagan popular customs, like the Winter Feast, did not disappear, it was quite certainly because they did not so insult the innocence and indignation of Christianity in its youth. When Constantine had made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire, that religion could have suppressed any heathen thing it really wanted to suppress. The interesting point to note is how very few heathen things it really did want to suppress. There is, for instance, the whole great glorious mass of the Pagan literature, in which there are hardly ten pages without something that a Christian might be excused for wanting to suppress. The mere fact that that mass of culture has come down to us at all, is to me much more remarkable than a few random examples of alleged suppression. For instance, the first generations of the saints might surely be excused for drawing the line at Sappho if she did really preach Sapphism. But in fact, there is hardly a rag of historical evidence either that she did preach it or that they did suppress her. To anybody with a general view of history, the really remarkable and interesting thing is the toleration of the last Pagans by the first Christians. The Church certainly never swept away all record of the ancient gods as Mahomet swept away the ancient idols. It never merely burned books as the Iconoclasts destroyed statues. The attitude of Augustine towards Plato, as of Aquinas towards Aristotle, is really much more respectful and understanding than the attitude of Hobbes or Hume towards Aquinas. In short, Christians have always committed countless crimes; but these Christians did not commit this one crime. They were not unhistorical. Christianity failed in practice in many ways; but this was one thing it did not fail to do; to preserve continuity. The Christians were often criminals; but they were not Vandals. Platonists like St Augustine, living in besieged cities, knew too much about Vandals.

It is, therefore, the greatest glory of the Christian tradition that it has incorporated so many Pagan traditions. But it is most glorious of all, to my mind, when they are popular traditions. And the best and most obvious example is the way in which Christianity did incorporate, in so far as it did incorporate, the old human and heathen conception of the Winter Feast. There are, indeed, two profound and mysterious truths to be balanced here. The first is that what was then heathen was still human; that is, it was both mystical and material; it expressed itself in sacred substances and sacramental acts; it understood the mystery of trees and waters and the holy flame. And the other, which will be a much more tactless and irritating assertion, is that while a thing is heathen it is not yet completely human. But the point here is that the Pagan element in Christmas came quite natural to Christians, because it was not in fact very far from Christianity.

Take, for example, the whole fundamental idea of a Winter Feast. There is a perfectly natural parallel between a religion that defies the world and a ritual that defies the weather. Heathenism in the sense of hedonism, the concentration of the mind on pure pleasure as such, would chiefly concentrate on the conception of a Summer Feast. But in winter even a rich man receives some faint hint of the problem of a poor man; he may avoid being hungry, but he cannot always avoid being cold. To choose that moment of common freezing for the assertion of common fraternity is, in its own intrinsic nature, a foreshadowing of what we call the Christian idea. It involves the suggestion that joy comes from within and not from without. It involves the suggestion that peril and the potentiality of pain are themselves a ground of gratitude and rejoicing. It involves the suggestion that even when we are merely Pagans we are not merely Pantheists. We are not merely Nature-worshippers; because Man smiles when Nature frowns. It has always involved, under varying limitations in varying societies, the idea of hospitality; especially hospitality to the stranger and generally to the poor. Of course, there are perfectly natural reasons for wanting to drink wine or warm ourselves at the fire in winter; but that is not an answer, except to those who already have the ill-informed prejudice that Christianity must be opposed to things merely because they are natural. The point is in making a point of it; the special interest is in the special occasion; in the fact that during the Winter Feast, whether Pagan or Christian, there always was, in some degree, the idea of extending the enjoyment to others; of passing round the wine or seating the wanderer by the hearth. It is no controversial point against the Christians that they felt they could take up and continue such traditions among the Pagans; it only shows that the Christians knew a Christian thing when they saw it.

It may seem a gloomy sentiment for the festive season; but the plain truth is that the old original Christians would have more reasons to quarrel with the new Christian Christmas than they had to quarrel with the old Pagan Christmas. In the congested commerce of our time, it has come to stand rather for goods being sold than for gifts being given. But if any revolutionary critic complains of it on this score, he must complain of his own revolutionary criticism; or at least of the previous revolutionary critics. I remember that Mr Bernard Shaw, the chief spokesman of the Socialism of the later nineteenth century, declared that Christmas is now only kept up for the sake of the tradesmen. I think he would find it hard to prove that every little boy or girl has hung up a stocking, or slept with one eye open on Christmas Eve, solely because they calculated that Santa Claus going his round would be Good for Trade. But if the complaint contains any truth, it is not to the disadvantage of the old tradition; but rather to the disadvantage of the recent revolutions. It is strangely forgotten that it was radicals and reformers who set up the Capitalism they now desire to pull down. It was done, if not by Socialists, certainly by revolutionists; in the sense of extreme pioneers of progress. For instance, it was precisely the progressive prophet of new things who brought Christmas, and everything else, out of the country into the town. It was he who told the young man that the streets of London were paved with gold; and that in great cities like Chicago and Philadelphia there was work for all. It was he who said that life on the farm was not life but death; that the rustics were all turnips and that their creeds were all turnip ghosts. Hence it was he who was responsible for making the old Christmas mysteries and mummeries relatively unmeaning; by taking them away from the fields where they grew to the markets where they could only be bought and sold. He took away the Yule Log from the place where it had really been part of a tree, to the place where it was only a lump of dead wood; he took away the mistletoe from where it was really gathered from the oak, to the store where it was only stacked like dead sticks; he would have brought in the Boar’s Head (supposing that he dealt at all in that delicacy) under conditions that made it highly improbable that he had himself slain the boar with a boar-spear in the forest, in the old heroic style of hunting, when men slew beasts stronger than themselves. All this genuine and even generous savour in the old Christmas symbols did undoubtedly suffer by being half-digested by the industrial town; but it was the same sort of reformer who built the town. True, he then called himself an Individualist and not a Socialist; and by this time he probably calls himself something else. But under all names, he is always exactly what the old Pagans and Christians would have called a profane person. He does not understand Christmas; he does not even understand the Saturnalia. Mr Scrooge hated Christmas because he was a Utilitarian; that is, he thought that economics only meant being economical. Mr Gradgrind of the Manchester School began by hating Christmas; but his partner Mr Bounderby soon perceived that he could make money by selling turkeys and toys, as well as coal or cotton. But these men in their day were all Reformers; they all called themselves Radicals. Perhaps it is time we ceased to concentrate on the Reform and went back again to the Form.

This real history of Christmas is very relevant to the real crisis of Christendom. We live in a terrible time of war and rumour of war; with a barbaric danger of the real reaction, that goes back not to the old form but to the old formlessness. International idealism in its effort to hold the world together, in a peace that can resist wars and revolutions, is admittedly weakened and often disappointed. I should say simply that it does not go deep enough. Christianity could draw life out of the depths of Paganism; but mere Modernism cannot draw on the depths of either. Charity is too much of a manufactured article; and too little of a natural product. The League of Nations is too new to be natural. The modern materialistic humanitarianism is too young to be vigorous. If we really wish to make vivid the horrors of destruction and mere disciplined murder, we must see them more simply as attacks on the hearth and the human family; and feel about Hitler as men felt about Herod. If we want to talk about poverty, we must talk about it as the hunger of a human being, a pain as positive as toothache; and not as the fall in wages or the failure of imports, or even the lowering of the economic standard of living. We must say first of the beggar, not that there is insufficient housing accommodation, but that he has nowhere to lay his head. We must say first of the human family, not that there are no jobs for them in the factory, but that there is no room for them in the inn. That is, we must talk of the human family in language as plain and practical and positive as that in which mystics used to talk of the Holy Family. We must learn again to use the naked words that describe a natural thing; and dispense for a moment with all those sociological polysyllables, with which an artificial society has learned to talk of it as an artificial thing.

Then we shall draw on the driving force of many thousand years; and call up a real humanitarianism out of the depths of humanity.

They Tell a Story

The statement that the work of the Old Masters can be effective for popular education is not such a platitude as it will at first appear. It is both more disputable and more true than it seems. For the truth is that the great art of the past can be used for this purpose where a great many other methods now generally adapted are quite clumsy and futile. Something of this utility is shared by the plays of Shakespeare; and by no other agency I know except the paintings of such men as Titian and Leonardo.

To explain this peculiar kind of public value one must understand one of the deepest differences, and perhaps diseases, of our time. It was the mark of the art of the past, especially the art of the Renaissance, that the great man was a man. He was an extraordinary man, but only in the sense of being an ordinary man with something extra. Shakespeare or Rubens went with the plain man as far as the plain man went; they ate and drank, and desired and died as he did. That is what people mean when they say that these Gods had feet of clay; their giant boots were heavy with the mire of the earth. That is what people mean when they say that Shakespeare was often coarse; that is what people mean when they say that he was often dull. They mean that a great poet of the elder kind had spaces which were idle and absent-minded; that his sub-consciousness often guided him; that he sprawled; that he was not `artistic'. It is not only true that Homer sometimes nodded; but nodding was part of the very greatness of Homer. His sleepy nod shakes the stars like the nod of his own Jupiter.

The old artists, then, were plain and popular in the more fundamental or (if you will) lower parts of their personality. But the typical modern artist sets out to be a separate and fantastic sort of creature, who feeds and feels in a strange manner of his own. Compare Velazquez with Whistler; compare Shakespeare with Shaw; compare even Addison with Stevenson. Whistler professed to be a butterfly, feasting on strange flowers and following incalculable flights; Stevenson was called by many of his friends an elf; and though this did not mean that he was inhumane, it did mean that he was in a manner disembodied. Bernard Shaw is certainly a fairy: and an Irish fairy, which is worse. Shakespeare, like the Shepherd in Iolanthe, was only a fairy down to the waist. He would undoubtedly, to quote the same work of art, have left his legs kicking behind if he had tried to get through the keyhole.

Now this distinction between two conceptions of genius, the Something more and the Something different, very deeply influences the effect of painting upon the public. The great painters had all the things which we call weaknesses in the great poets; they constantly pot-boiled, they occasionally pandered. They often seemed to care little for glory, and sometimes not quite enough for honour; they threw things off, and as Ruskin truly said, gave their great frescoes 'to be blasted by the sea wind, or wasted by the worm'. But if they had the everyday vices, they had the everyday virtues also; and whether they were good men or no, their idea of a good man was the same as everybody else's. If they too seldom attempted to reform their conduct, they never attempted to reform their conscience. The consequence is that they preserved a mass of primitive intuitions, appetites, and unconscious instincts, which are the same as those of the common people even in our corrupt modern cities; and which in our corrupt modern cities have now a great part to play.

For without raising, even in parentheses, the old argument of Swift's and Temple's time about the relative merits of Ancients and Moderns, we may be quite certain that for democratic purposes the ancients are better. A few scratches of grey and green on a piece of brown paper may really be as good in its own way as a `still life' by a Flemish painter or a Holy Family by an Italian painter. But it must be perfectly obvious to anybody that the two latter are more likely to make a plain man understand what painting means. We talk somewhat lightly about 'schools' of art. Whether or no the art of Raphael be better as an art it is certainly better as a school. Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Post-post-Impressionism and the rest, are developments which may be credited or criticised according to every man's aesthetic philosophy. It may be the end of art, in the sense of the object of art. It may be the end of art in the sense of the abolition of art. But anyhow it is not the beginning of art; it is not the initiation, the origin, the introductory motive. What art is to begin with, what it obviously is, what is the reason that anyone ever made it, that people can learn today from the Old Masters. And they can learn it from nobody else.

A hundred cases could be taken, but take the case of a common phrase: a common sneer with the art critics. I mean the phrase `a picture that tells a story'. There could not be a sharper instance of the difference between the old hero who was man and more than man and the new hero who is not man at all. A picture by Leonardo da Vinci tells a story. A picture by Paul Veronese tells a story. A picture by Titian or Tintoretto tells a story. The first and most important question is, what story? Most medieval and Renaissance pictures tell the story; the story on which all our European civilisation is founded, and is founded as finally if the thing is a fairy tale or if the thing is a truth. The objection to pictures which `tell a story' only began in our time, for the very simple reason that the story was a dull story. I will not discuss here whether the great story of God made Man has been destroyed. I will confine myself to saying that it has certainly not been replaced.

There are other qualities in which the Old Masters are demagogues as well as demi-gods. I mean there are other elements in which they eternally appeal to a popular instinct which was in them and in their patrons and in their populace. I should select the two examples of clarity and solidity. In Michelangelo's `Vision of Judgment' a real man appears in the real skies. The man is solid. The skies are lucid. To the cultured it may appear incredible; but it will be much more credible to mankind, that universal church of which culture is a small and doubtful sect. To mankind, to men as they ordinarily are, a complete man appearing in a clear sky, will not be incredible. It will be much more credible than an impressionist portrait of a real person or a post-impressionist picture of a real place.

I should therefore urge the re-publication of old and good pictures as a real part of that grossly neglected thing — public education. Our historians lie much more than our journalists; our fashionable conceptions of the past change with every fashion; and like most fashions, are fantastic and hideous. But the old colours and the old canvases do not lie; they were really achieved in the ages which we parody or pervert; and the squareness of their drawing, the brightness of their colours, the substantial sincerity of their subject, will still tell us something of the fathers we have forgotten. I do not go so far as to say we have relapsed into barbarism. But I do say that we can just now learn best from picture writing.

HERE AND THERE

Walking Tours

The close of the holiday season sets most of us reflecting on the philosophy of travel, and many of us upon the simplest form of it, the philosophy of walking tours. Among serious and imaginative pedestrians there are only two schools or parties, and one school maintains that the pedestrian should go forth without map or compass, and wander until a wood beckons to him or a pathway points like a finger. The other school maintains that he should map out with every circumstance of detail the place he is going to, and then go somewhere else. The idea of having a fixed intention on such an occasion, and adhering to it through thick and thin would make an excellent medieval religious vow, but makes a very poor holiday. Some people set out upon walking tours with the most horrible indifference to that idea of loneliness and liberty which is the essence of such an enterprise. Some even send a bag on before them to the hotels to which they intend to go: a dark and depraved aspect in which to regard human nature. They might as well station footmen in livery at intervals of every three miles carrying coffee and liqueurs. The whole beauty and meaning of pedestrianism vanishes if the pedestrian is once tied to a particular hotel, even if it is thirty miles away. Then he is no longer a wild thing like the hawk or the hare, he is only a cow on a particularly long tether. The sending on of bags is predestination: it is a sort of holiday Calvinism, when the very soul of walking is free will. If a travelling companion is sought he should always be sought among those lovers of the errant and the spontaneous. He should be sought among those true worshippers of liberty who feel a certain degradation whenever they take a return ticket. Those who are interested in antiquities should be avoided, but those who are interested in what they call nature are worse. Great public buildings were after all in some sense made to be stared at, but to regard our mother earth merely as a thing to be stared at is like exhibiting one’s maiden aunt in a cage. A man should walk in the country in order to become a part of the country, not in order to get to the top of a particular hill and see a distressing number of counties.

The man who goes upon a walking tour should be open to all the usual interests. He should enjoy the country and enjoy the churches and enjoy the beetles, but also, and as a very important item, he should enjoy the walk. He should not be consumed with any devouring preference for going anywhere. His desires should be no more fixed upon the end of the walk than the desire of a child upon the end of a sugarstick. The walk should be a work of art, the real colour and value of which do not appear until it is completed. The objects of a walk are often disappointing, but the accidents are magnificent. The true adventurer does not walk so much in the hope of finding cities or mountains as in the hope of discovering by the end of his journey why he came out. The darkness of this great mystery will always be present to his mind. Every twist of roadway, every knot of trees may conceal behind it the explanation of his own superb folly. He is in search of the central incident of his journey, and it may be a strange sunset or a fight with a foot-pad, a patch of primroses or a lunatic with a green umbrella. Just as some primitive hero trusted himself upon the back of a dragon or hippogriff, the traveller trusts himself upon that wildest of steeds — a runaway road. Upon the whole, it may be admitted that the pedestrian should carry a map, but he should not consult it often, and he should always cherish the thrilling and secret thought that it may be all wrong. In fact, a map should be taken chiefly because it is such a particularly beautiful thing in itself. A great many other things should be selected and retained on the same principle. A walking tour, for example, is unthinkable without a walking-stick, though the experienced will have the strongest internal doubts whether it is any use, and the walking-stick of all walking-sticks for such a purpose is one cut in the woods, as being the most rough and crooked and inconvenient. Carrying such a staff a man feels himself a thing of the earth. He is almost a walking portion of the woods, he carries a tree like the army which brought Birnam to Dunsinane. And if he has walked well and cheerfully, by the time he sticks his staff in the ground and sits down to rest in the evening he will do it in such a state of inward glory that he would scarcely be surprised if the staff broke into flower before him like the Pope’s rod in Tannhäuser. The essential ground of the unwisdom and unprofitableness of planning a walk too systematically with maps and guide books is a thing easy to feel, but not quite so easy to analyse. One point, however, may be noticed. In our days, when we have names for everything and accurate plans of everywhere, we tend very much to forget that there does exist a place called the world. The world was the place, for example, into which the heroes of the fairy tales went out to seek their fortune. It began at the end of their father's garden, and it stretched away into infinity full of everything from birds' nests to dragons, from apple trees to ogres. This remarkable place, the world, is the only place that is not marked even upon the latest and most accurate geographical charts. We have so cut up the face of the earth into our own arbitrary divisions, that it is always Sussex, or Essex, or Kent, or Norway, or Patagonia, and never simply the earth. Science has given us a vulgar familiarity with the earth, a familiarity without knowledge. We have set the seal of the commonplace upon inaccessible peaks that no man has ever trodden, and unfathomable seas inhabited by monsters that have never risen to the surface. We have names and tickets for sights and regions which we no more possess than if they existed only in someone else's dreams. Thousands and thousands of leagues beyond the farthest limit of our possible personal experience the earth contains things as marvellous as any fairy tale. But we have not the wisdom as the men of the fairy tales had, the wisdom to call these places fairyland or the castle east of the sun and west of the moon. We call them Jonestown, and Smith's River, and Snooksville, U.S.A.

The perfect pedestrian should always set forth like the third son in the fairy tale. It is a mystic and beautiful dispensation of Providence that every person in this world has an inward conviction that in the cosmic system he himself is the third son. He should go into Kent if he likes, or Buckinghamshire if he likes, or Normandy, or Italy, or China if he likes, but first and foremost into the world. He should go forth with any object he pleases: to shoot lions, or pick flowers, or collect fossils, or find a desert island, or find a wife, but first and foremost he should go out, in the old fairy tale phrase, to seek his fortune. In the life of industrial civilisation, where everything is done by a kind of clockwork, most of us have forgotten that we have a fortune. Most of us have forgotten that somewhere in the nooks and corners of the world there has, perhaps, been waiting for us all our lives a neglected destiny. When we praise the order of Nature it is only as we might praise a mangle or a mincing machine, useful for our own practical purpose, just as the old silversmiths cried 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians'. Like them we have forgotten the true identity of the moon who was the patroness of lunatics and the goddess of crossroads.

The Blindness of the Sightseer

I once had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of an American, a very intelligent and inspiriting person, who, during a pause in a discussion on scenery, said, with the inimitable accent, `Well, I can’t see when you have seen the highest mountain in Switzerland what you want to see the rest for’. So completely obsessed was he with this American sense of competition that he admitted competition even among mountains, and judged of some hundreds of the towering crests of the earth as he would have judged of six American hotel servants who struggled at the station for his bag. There is a very general idea — how general I cannot imagine — that competition is productive of or conducive to individuality. The defenders of the extreme forms of competition invariably insist upon this argument, that the struggle develops personality and variety. Of course, it does nothing of the sort. Competition is simply imitation, and however fierce and ruthless competition may be it only becomes a fierce and ruthless imitation. When the most important object in a landscape must be the thing which is down in the guidebook — the highest hill, the largest tree, the roundest hole in the wall — thousands of other beauties for miles round waste themselves like the neglected talents of humanity. People see the Madeleine and the Louvre, but they do not see Paris. They see the Pfalz Castle and the Drachenfels, but they do not see the Rhine. They see Westminster Abbey and Stratford-on-Avon, but they have never seen England; England is still to them an undiscovered Atlantis. They see pyramids, dolmens, sloping towers, great walls, hanging gardens, catacombs, colossal statues; but they have never seen that one miracle to which all these are nothing. They have seen the seven wonders of the world, but they have never seen the world.

Let me hasten to say at once that I have not a gleam of sympathy with that contempt which is sometimes expressed by the languid for those who travel. My complaint is not that people are enthusiastic about the Drachenfels, but that they are not enthusiastic about other things. The real evil is that which takes these sights out of their setting and holds them up as the reason for travel. A man of any imagination gains enormously by travelling in France or Germany. My only suggestion is that he would gain scarcely an atom less if he never saw any one of the places to which such tours are universally and systematically directed. If a man could come upon these places suddenly and naturally the effect would be magnificent. Statues and cathedrals would waylay him like a patch of blossom in the hedges or a shape in the clouds. To walk across the magnificent hills of Sussex, to come upon the long lines of a great forest and a great fortress, and to be told that it is the Castle of the Howards. To walk along the sands of the great Norman coast, and behold out at sea a village clinging upon a spire of rock, and to know that it is the Mountain of St Michael; this would indeed be to be educated by travel. But, then, the great sights would come as the culmination of a series of lesser ones, enjoyed and admired in the same manner. The man who did not enjoy the Sussex Downs would not really enjoy the Castle of Arundel. The man who was not impressed by mere sand and sea would not be impressed by the awful crag of the Archangel. But the system of modern travel takes these things out of their environment, makes them prodigies, valuable in themselves. There is not a pin to choose in essential superstition between the medieval pilgrim who would walk miles that for a moment he might touch a particular stone and the modern tourist who will drive leagues that for a moment he may stare at it. We can all feel this essential difference between seeing a sight as an example of its environment and seeing a sight as an exception to its environment, if we merely imagine the principle applied to other forms in nature. If we walked down a long lane in Surrey, and saw, let us say, an incomparable hedge of wild roses extending apparently for miles, we might be stricken still with an exceptionable wonder at the height and splendour of some exceptionable branch or bloom. But if, because this branch was the highest in the lane, it was suddenly given a name, and advertised through the country; if we heard that a station had been opened near it, that omnibuses and excursion trains were run down to it on Bank Holidays, and that by these facilities some hundreds of harmless human beings were dragged out of London, dropped down in front of it for a minute or two to stare, and then dragged back again, we should say that the magic had departed. And if we were wise, we should see that the magic had not departed, as some superfine people suppose, because trains and trippers are ugly. Trains are very poetical things, and so are trippers; for only the wildest kind of poetry can furnish any explanation of why they trip. But the magic would have gone from that branch of wild roses for the very simple reason that the magic had not resided in that alone; the magic was partly the magic of the lane itself and of loneliness, of the combination of the two strangest and most impressive of things — silence and life. Now, steamers and conducted tours have done precisely this very thing for places like the Rhine: they have found the wild rose and they have lost the lane. It is better a hundred times to wander about the lane and never see its most glorious and natural product than to see that product and regard it as a monstrosity. In so far as a thing is what people call marvellous it is not and cannot be representative. To judge of Italy by the leaning tower is like judging of the human race by the bearded woman at a fair. That type of wonders of the world is based upon the principle that the wonderful consists in things going wrong: to a somewhat more essential imagination the genuine wonder is that things go right. The leaning tower of Pisa is, if we realise man's history seriously, by no means so astonishing as the nearest waterworks tower. The marvel is that all our turrets and tenements do not reel this way and that, like a scene from the Day of Judgment.

In one sense, the great buildings and great cities which we labour to visit are less worth the labour than those common scenes and figures in the street which we pass easily by. For great buildings belong to great traditions of European civilisation which are akin throughout Europe, and whether or no a man could get as much education from Westminster Abbey as from Cologne Cathedral, at least it would be education upon the same lines. It is in a chance strip of landscape, a chance group in the street that we see the real difference which it is worth while to cross the sea to find. The architecture of a German cathedral and that of an English one belong to the same school; but the architecture of a German and that of an Englishman exhibit the most fascinating differences. Every land, every town, has its dark and sacred individuality. The man who has found this out, and he alone, has visited that land or town. And, perhaps, when we have wandered, in obedience to modern culture, among all the kingdoms of the earth, and gathered the knowledge of them, we may begin to penetrate into that most unexplored of all territories, our own country. We may realise what it is that consitutes an English landscape, and in the wild developments of some future century, may begin to be patriots.

The Aesthetes in the Kitchen Garden

When, a week or two ago, I came down among the hills of Kent, the country looked ancient and innocent enough. Save for birds and old men lapping hedges the visitor seemed to be in solitude. But all this was a mask — a delusion. This green England of ours is really bursting with literary men. Short story writers leap from behind hedges, minor poets drop from the trees like ripe fruit; you cannot walk through deep grass without stumbling over Sociologists. On dark, windy nights wild voices mingle with the wind, and the words ‘reactionary’, `superman’, `the Philistines’, and `raise the drama’ echo desolately from hill to hill. We see the vision of Fitz-James in `The Lady of the Lake’ which Scott describes in words (which I quote from memory):

At once from copse and heath arose   Roundels and fugues and lyric prose,   From shingles grey their nocturnes start,   The bracken bush cries, `Art is Art’,   And every tuft of broom is rife   With highly beastly views of life.

I have met in meadows here some of the most terrible and beautiful people of Fleet Street. I have seen a cottage, decent and quiet on the outside, inside which, as I hope for heaven, there were Burne-Jones’s on the wall. In short, we are in the presence of a peculiar phenomenon. The people are not going `back to the land’ but the cultivated classes are.

But there is something about these intellectual people in flannel shirts who come out and live in the country, where they play tennis and read Thoreau which gives me a haunting notion that they do not really belong to the country; they dwell rather than live in it.

Now this is very false. Go into the country for your health; go into the country for your children; go into the country because the police are after you; go into the country because you like painting in water-colours, or because you like keeping chickens, or because you like spearing otters, or because you want beauty or contentment or the continual presence of cows. But do not go into the country because you like liberty, for there is of necessity less liberty in the country than anywhere else. The pressure of society on the individual must be much greater in a village than in a city. Public opinion must be much stronger; personal eccentricity much more difficult. And if the aesthetic people in the flannel shirts do not feel this pressure it is because they are not really living in the life of the village — that is to say, not really living in the life of the country. Liberty is a thing of the town; any Roman or Greek would have understood that. It is in the places where men live an intense and complicated life that they find the necessity for liberty, and that which is almost the same as liberty — loneliness. The routine of rural life, happy, dignified, sensible, but not inventive, and not free, has been going on almost unchanged from the beginning of the world.

Amid all these philosophers and artists who run like rabbits about the woods of Kent I met one who really loved the country. He was driving a sort of wagonette which was plastered all over with little bills and placards announcing that now for the first time people could go from Westerham or Limpsfield to various places that I have never heard of for some singularly small price which I did not read. He was trotting his coach up and down the country roads by way of a preliminary pageant or advertisement, giving free lifts to highly amused pedestrians, or proclaiming the nature and glories of the route to dazed stonebreakers or wild-eyed gypsies. Something led me to make the acquaintance of this individual, and I discovered that driving a coach was by no means the first of his adventures, nor the most amusing. He has written books; he has stood for Parliament; he has conducted, I believe, a kind of wild newspaper. His name is Stuart Gray, and will probably be familiar to many of my readers, especially if they are interested in the movement for the colonisation of England, the return of the people to the land. It was a single sentence of his that convinced me that he had that really poetic feeling which the minor poets in the neighbourhood tend to lack. Before us lay a roll of country like the back of an unbroken wave, spacious, silent, meeting the sky. He stretched out his whip towards it, and said in what I can only call an awestruck voice, `If this were all kitchen gardens! Then you’d have people — people — people.’ Three times he said the sacred word of the republic. This article, you will perceive, is also written in a kitchen garden, and a witchery of onions is wafted with it.

While standing in this kitchen garden I perceived what many of my readers must have perceived long ago, that of all things on earth the one perfectly beautiful thing is a kitchen garden. It has a hundred kinds of beauty richly blent into a solemn harmony. It has the beauty of an embroidery, for all the colours are quiet and yet varied infinitely. It has the beauty of an army, for all the vegetable regiments are set in ranks as if they had been drilled by God for the great battle against Nonentity. It has the beauty of a sepulchre, because so many of the shapes and colours that are seen are but the coloured crests or monuments upon the more precious bodies underground. It has the beauty of a store-cupboard, the beauty of a fairy tale. Cabbages alone have all the colours of the sea. I am forced, I find, to conclude these reflections for the moment. But I trust that before I resume my reflections on kitchen gardens someone will have brought out a book of amatory poems in which all the similes shall have been drawn from this nobler and more fruitful Eden. I do not see why he should not say that in a lady’s cheek the turnip and the carrot fought for supremacy. Such a description is far truer to the mellow and tawny quality in the human complexion than the violent similes of the rose and the lily. These latter, I may be fastidious, offend me as fantastic.

The Need of Personalities in Politics

The village I now inhabit (as a locum tenens in the temporary absence of the Village Beauty) was in a great stir last night, owing to the arrival of the Liberal Van, which was regarded with more gravity than I should have thought possible. It drew up on the village green; its speakers opened a meeting, and everything would have gone smoothly and respectably if it had not happened that among the promoters of the meeting, standing beside the van, was a man with that air of strained intellectuality which marks a reader of The Daily News. He heard my name by some social accident; and remembered seeing it in the paper. `I have read your articles,' said this excellent Liberal, with a friendly smile, while I faintly condoled with him. Then he said, after a pause of some length, `I think I know what some of them mean'. I implored him to share with me this secret and painful knowledge, but he refused, and I shall go to my grave without it. But my encounter with the man had drawn me into the dangerous circle. And when the Chairman, a local Liberal magnate, was obliged to leave halfway through the meeting, they hoisted me into the chair instead of him. The chair was a kind of wooden ledge a little way above the shafts; and I took the chair with so dignified a decisiveness as almost to wreck the van. Then, I regret to say, the proceedings took on a more turbulent character. My rising to say anything was greeted (I cannot explain this phenomenon) with loud shouts coming exclusively from little boys. I think I somehow stirred in them a sickening hope that after all it was going to be a circus.

Then there was a sombre Conservative on the outskirts of the crowd, who interrupted so consistently and continuously that it came to be a rather delicate logical question whether he was interrupting our speeches or we were interrupting his. But it was not so much the quantity as the quality of his interruptions that pleased and at the same time perplexed me. One thing was firmly embedded in his mind, the fruitful seed of continuously flowering satire. This was the conviction that all of us in the van were persons of enormous wealth. He even professed to know the sources of that wealth. When I was making some remarks about poverty, he hurled at my head, with a deadly aim, this mysterious sarcasm: 'Ha! We ain't all on the Civil List.' I made, of course, the somewhat obvious retort, that some of us seemed to be on the Uncivil List; but to this moment I cannot imagine what was the meaning of that unfathomable sneer. Is there something in my air and manner, something of official dignity and decorum, touched with a servile prosperity, that suggests that I am in receipt of a bloated pension? Or has somebody really given or left me some money (poignant and improbable thought) since I have been away from town?

Let us leave this merely personal enigma and pass on to the final development, which from a deeper point of view, at any rate, was the most interesting. The temperature of the meeting, I am proud to say, rose higher and higher: a perfect rattle of repartees, the sympathisers on each side rocked and roared, a large fat farmer of Conservative opinions was beginning with a dreadful and dangerous slowness to think of something to say; and when I wound up the meeting and thanked everybody for their patience, politeness, and good temper, they were ready to kick each other round the green.

And then an interesting thing happened. Ten minutes after the end of the meeting the large, deliberate farmer of Conservative opinions was delivered of the thing that he wanted to say; and eclipse and thunder accompanied that portentous birth. The thing he wanted to say was — Could anybody there say he'd ever cut down any man's wages? This seemed to me a very essential, a very serious, and a very manly challenge, immeasurably more important not only than anything said at our meeting, but than anything that is ever said in the House of Commons.

It was followed by a kind of restless silence, such as occurs in such mobs at such moments, and in the next instant there was drama. A pale, coarse-looking lad, his arm half out of his coat with eagerness and anger, thrust his face forward. His wages had been cut down, he said; he had been underpaid, and underpaid by this man. The farmer, staring at him through the darkness, at first denied all knowledge of his face. Then a voice broke out of him, a loud and wrathful and decisive voice, crying, `Why, I know yer now. I know yer now, I sacked yer for—'. Then the sense of English respectability awoke suddenly in everybody, and the men were torn apart and soothed wildly by their friends. Whatever happened, we must not be asked to decide on a matter of real and diurnal right and wrong. Whatever happened we must not have a plain personal challenge answered by a plain personal reply. The farmer went away, shaking with his furious secret; the lad went away shaking with his. Yet here was present on that dark green, in that dim group, what is often the eternal substance and whole meaning of society and government. Two men were calling upon their neighbours to give judgment on their wrongs. This is politics. We had fixed the frontiers of India; we had examined the imports of Canada; we had meditated on the quarrels between Dutchmen and German Jews; we had criticised kindly but firmly the condition of the Prussian working classes; we had thought imperially and also in continents; we had seen the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them.

But this doing of justice between one angry man and another never crossed our minds as a public duty. This was the last business that could be expected of us — this which would be the first business of a primitive community, this which would be the first business of a tribe of Zulus. Our politics for the night had ended. Our politics had ended exactly at the point where all politics ought to begin.

It seemed to me that on this little green, as on a green baize stage, was acted an allegory of the whole situation of our contemporary statesmanship. Everything goes on gaily as long as we are dealing with things. Everything stops abruptly the moment we come to men. We are allowed to say: ‘The supporters of the Blue-nosed Monkeys Modification and Improvement Act are corrupt scoundrels.’ We are allowed to say, ‘Sir William Guppy is a supporter of the Blue-nosed Monkeys Modification and Improvement Act’. We are not allowed to complete the syllogism. Everybody says with one accord in our English Parliament: `Let us have no personalities in politics.’ Every Briton says at his breakfast table: ‘At least, we are not like the French and the Irish; we have no personalities in our politics.’ And because we have no personalities we have no responsibilities.

The Largest Window in the World

It is a terrible thing to have trod on battlefields before they were fought. It gives a man a cold and ghostly shiver, as of being the babe unborn. But I was a boy, and almost a babe, when I was first in Belgium; and I can only write down the reality that impressed me then. Beyond some streets burning with brassware, which seemed perpetually on sale, almost out of sight of the great Belfry, there is (or was) a sort of museum of the great Memlinc. Among the pictures was one which even as a boy I could not forget; and very few poets or prophets can even imagine how much a boy can forget. It was a picture in which the window seemed hardly wider than the crack of a door. Yet through that crack the human eye could almost, in the strong Scripture rhetoric, take the wings of the morning and abide in the uttermost parts of the sea.

And I remember a voice near me speaking in an accent that was neither French nor Flemish nor my own: `You see how narrow the windows were in those days.'

I did. I also began to see, for the first time, how narrow the minds are in these days. I looked at the little window again and I thought it the largest window in the world. Simply because the aperture was narrow, I knew the landscape was wide. If modern artists had swept it in a larger style, I should have noticed it no more than some hundred miles of wallpaper. Then note not only the pride of a small nation, but the pride of the rich peasantry. Look from the slit of a turret in Cumberland or Calabria and there is a chance that your eye may strike something slightly depressing. But any strip of Belgium will be a string of jewels. Note, thirdly, that the thinness of the outlook is largely due to the thickness of the walls. There is no trace of what vulgar people call `a vista': the house does not open up indefinitely to the world outside. The man of Memlinc sees the world from his window. But it is still the final fact that the window was his window and the world is not his world. I should have thought it, then, quite inconceivable that any one would assail that turret. But I should have thought it equally inconceivable that any one should fail to defend it. A man living in such a house might almost shut the front door to protect the beauty of the window.

I have never been in Belgium since; I have never met any who would possibly be in connection with any revolutionary or anti-national idea. Yet for me Belgium has continued to mean that small field of vision, making certain so vast a field of prosperity. That keyhole is still the largest window in the world.

Since then I have not seen the country, except in frightful photographs. I have gradually begun to understand what was meant by my alien friend when he spoke of the needless narrowness of the medieval window. To judge by the photographs, he has broadened architectural effects very much; he has blown window into window and enlarged the premises; he has left long lines of street in which it is impossible to say whether he has combined the windows that exist, or spared the windows that never existed. He cannot make anything except a window; for a window is simply a hole. When he has blown everything to atoms, when no stack or stone stands about us for many miles, he will say, with an insane simplicity: `I have made the largest window in the world.'

The Apostle and the Wild Ducks

Last week I learned a historical lesson in some sense by going on a wild-goose chase. Perhaps it might more correctly be described as a wild-duck chase. Not that I had any intention of shooting wild ducks, though the country I visited was, I believe, specially suited to the sport; the country round about the Fens of Lincoln and the Broads of Norfolk. Those eastern flats generally are famous for such wild-fowl, as also for the remains of the rich medieval civilisation founded on the Flemish trade, and for expansive opportunities for the admiration of the sunset; or, for those of suitable habits, of the sunrise. Yet the wild duck I pursued was not entirely symbolical, though he was among other things a symbol. What happened in my own case was merely this: that a friend of mine told me that far in the interior of the Fens, in the heart of a labyrinth of lanes and dykes there was a little church which contained some medieval paintings in remarkable preservation. These pictures were said to represent scenes of medieval sport, dealing especially with ducks. After wanderings which might have led to the other end of nowhere, only that the endless road seemed to be perpetually turning inward instead of outward, we came at last to the place, in a wilderness of dusty grass and stunted and sprawling trees; with one of the great square towers of fine flints, that mark the Norfolk churches, alone filling the empty sky and dwarfing everything at its feet. And it was here that I found the feature that seemed to me a sort of symbol or summary for our understanding of the Middle Ages.

Incidentally, of course that great tower was something of a symbol itself. It was not only a beacon or thing to be seen; it is a symbol of blindness as well as sight. Nothing is so strange in human history as the things men do not see. Over all those flat lands the only mountains were made by men; and they were made by medieval men. For that matter, in a thousand little villages all over England there has been for centuries only one tall, stately ornate and orderly building; all the rest was obvious patchwork and poverty. Yet the Puritans could successfully teach five generations of English people, and especially of East Anglian people, that the men who built the big systematic building were living in savagery and superstition, while the men who still tolerated the little hovels had emerged into liberty and enlightenment. In this case it is curiously true that faith can remove mountains; it can remove the mountain opposite a man’s door, if his prejudice has taught him that a mountain is only a myth. But this is a parenthesis; for my purpose here is not concerned with the old English churches in general, but with something that is to be found in this old Norfolk church in particular.

I say it is something that can be found, though at first it seemed rather like something that could not be found. In truth, in that remarkable little fane of the flats, we might be said to have found everything but what we were looking for. There were indeed medieval paintings; and very fine ones, by no means hidden but splendidly displayed. Fronting us as we entered the church door, in a great row across the rood-screen, stood the Twelve Apostles, six on each side, with their rich colours somewhat darkened but their gold in full glow, and their emblems and tools of martyrdom unmistakable. Facing inwards, opposite each other, were two figures of St Michael and St George, treated somewhat in a heraldic manner. I mean the manner that looks arbitrary until we realise that it is decorative. The armament of St George seemed fantastic and top-heavy even for the tilting armour of the fourteenth century; the feathers of St Michael seemed to be sprouting from strange parts of him, as from the body of a monster. Only when we consider it as we do a coat of arms, as a pattern more than a picture, we suddenly realise that every line of it is in exactly the right place. High above all these there was a much more faded figure of St Etheldreda, the great Christian foundress and patron of those parts; looking down perhaps the more impressively for seeming more like a ghost or a great shadow on the wall.

This was, in the strict sense of the word, all very fine; but it was not what we had come to see. The attitude of the Apostles however darkly traced, could not be mistaken for the postures of gentlemen when duck-shooting. St George was clearly occupied in killing a dragon and not a duck. St Michael’s wings might seem to be sticking out of him in an arbitrary and ornamental fashion; but they did not recall the wings of a duck, or even what the Psalmist coveted as the wings of a dove. Besides, St Michael is more associated with a goose. Nobody would venture to call St Etheldreda a duck. We concluded that the rumour about pictures of duck-hunting in the Fens must have been a rumour without foundation. In short, the duck was only a canard.

Just as we were trailing out of the church in disappointment and even despair, so far as our duck-hunting expedition was concerned, my friend gave a cry; and I turned in the very porch to look back at him. He was bending over the figure representing St Paul, which wore a long inner garment elaborately embroidered with gold; we had both passed it over as a pattern merely adding richness to the general design. But on looking closer, I found that the Apostle of the Gentiles was all over ducks. He was, so to speak, crawling with ducks, with ducks and dogs pursuing them in one pantomimic dance all over the gilded pattern. It was here that the artist had crowded all his comic sketches of the sports of his native fens. It was a very good pattern, but it was made of quite grotesque pictures. It might have been the design for the fancy waistcoat of a fat gentleman in one of the Dickens novels. The first of all the Dickens novels, by the way, was originally written to illustrate some grotesque sketches of sport. It is not too much to say that, in the original scheme of the publishers, Mr Pickwick merely existed for the sake of Mr Winkle. Mr Winkle might very well have gone duck-shooting in the fens, as he went skating on the ice or riding on the famous horse that went sideways. The sporting artist employed on that occasion would doubtless have been ready to depict him surrounded by any number of ducks and dogs. But he would have been mildly surprised if he had been asked to depict them as part of the decoration of the parish church, to say nothing of the vestments of the parson. But the older artist saw nothing incongruous in depicting them thus in mazy detail between the massive book and the mighty sword, that stood for that terrible convert who was struck down upon the road to Damascus.

Now that is the answer to the question I have already asked and that is why this pointless anecdote is also a parable. People were able to shut their eyes to the big church because it was only a church, however big; and they did not think of deducing anything from it about the number of houses or the nature of households. Because the framework of so much of medieval life was a religious framework, they never even looked at the picture in the frame. They passed it over exactly as anyone looking at the painted figures of the Twelve Apostles passed over all the lively little animals of which its ornament was made up. Thus, to take only one example, popular history seldom takes account of the large numbers of medieval people more or less loosely attached to the Church without being in the full sense either priests or monks: students, members of lay orders and men who were merely clerks in the sense of pleading benefit of clergy; that is, being under the milder law of the Church rather than the harsher law of the State. All this popular life, I suspect, moved normally within more or less clerical enclosures, as the details of the decoration seemed to dance within the enclosure of the main lines of the design. In the gradual revival of the study of such a period, we have had to investigate the religious life in order to discover the secular life. We have had to search the cathedrals to find the guilds; as my friend had to scrutinise the saint in order to find the hounds and the birds. There is no way to those things except through that Gothic porch; and this was realised even by the great men like Morris and Rossetti who might well have wished, for some other reason, to come in by some other way. But none ever came in by any other way except the thieves and the robbers.

There are thousands of little things like that to be found in every corner of what is left of medieval craft and culture. I have taken this small instance because it is small, and because it is the last that has occurred to me. The study of these old things has to be intensive study; just as the cultivation of them anew would have to be an intensive cultivation.

Travellers' Joys

Once when I was wandering about in the beautiful city of Bath, I fell into a vein of meditation not concerned with any of the antiquities of the place, as such things are counted in a guidebook. My reflections, though profound and philosophical, were not concerned with the Bath of Bath, which recalls the Roman foundation of Britain. They were not concerned with the Abbey of Bath, which recalls the Middle Ages; nor with the Pump Room or Assembly Room which recall the stately frivolity of the eighteenth century. I was not even thinking of that noble theme, the Wife of Bath, a medieval monument which seems even more gigantic than an abbey.

If anyone really wants to know why some of us have a taste for what is called `medievalism', he can find a great deal of it in that grand and grotesque personality. But the point is that the Wife of Bath was coming from Bath, and not going to Bath. When we consider what her errand was, and then what she was, we realise the wide reach and grasp of religion upon the motley mob of mankind. The Wife of Bath is a sort of caricature carved in brass; as brazen as Mrs Gamp and with as broad a grin. But who can imagine Dickens, who described so many wanderings in Kent, describing Mrs Gamp as going on a pilgrimage to the shrine of a saint? I suppose the whole stretch of history from the medieval to the modern world, might be summed up in the reversal of that journey. It is the change from the time when the Wife of Bath went to sprinkle herself with holy water at Canterbury, to the time when the Archbishop of Canterbury probably went to sprinkle himself with medicinal water at Bath. But it was not of such trifles as the towers of Canterbury or the Roman floors of Bath that I was musing mystically at the moment.

My mind was uplifted and attuned to the subject of buns. I was reflecting upon the remarkable fact that, to a great extent, it is still necessary to go to Bath for Bath buns. I have, indeed, encountered in my travels in less civilised places something apparently intended for food, to which is attached the name of the Roman city of Somerset. But, after tasting it, I have come to the conclusion that the derivation is different. These other objects, I conceive, are very legitimately called Bath buns because they are made of soap and flannel. But to a great extent, in spite of the modern network of communications and dead level of standardisation, a Bath bun still means a bun of Bath. The same is true in its degree, I believe, in the case of Chelsey buns. It may be true, for all I know, of those unique cakes of Richmond, gloriously described as Maids of Honour. It may be that, before standardisation began, there were these local luxuries in nearly every locality. Perhaps there were Pimlico Pancakes which were the rich reward of crossing the meadows to the picturesque hamlet of Pimlico. Perhaps Clapham produced a sweetmeat as well as a sect; and Mayfair was famous for toffee before it was famous for toffs. But over all districts that have been surrounded and swallowed by the big industrial cities, there runs the rule of the great commercial combinations, and all such individual things have perished.

I do not insist that nobody must be allowed to eat Brussels sprouts except in Brussels. I do not demand that everyone who likes Jerusalem artichokes should take staff and scrip and make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. I do not say that Turkish delight should delight none but Turks or travellers in Turkey. I do not even insist (though it would be a fine heroic idea, worthy of a romance of Scott or Stevenson) that no person should be permitted to taste Edinburgh Rock until he has earned it by scaling the steep and splendid facade of the Rock of Edinburgh. Some of these are merely names; and some of them do still carry with them something of the savour and the pride of nations. But in England, in those exquisitely English centres, the old provincial towns, we did manage to produce good things whose very glory was in being provincial.

It was worth a man’s while to go from one town to another, and even from one county to another, to find things that he could not find at home. Thus there was a very real romance of travel, for romantic as well as for religious pilgrims. The traveller plodded along the Bath Road sustained from afar by the vista of the Bath Bun. He saw the cake peculiar to Richmond shining like a guiding star more brilliant than the Star and Garter. And though this may not seem the loftiest sort of star for a wise man to follow, yet these material luxuries had their moral significance, and stand in social criticism today as the symbols of something much deeper and wider than themselves. They illustrate something that is not only wanting in our latest social development, but something not immediately likely to be developed.

Thus travel in the true sense has become impossible in the large urban or urbanised districts. There are twenty ways of going everywhere, and there is nowhere to go. There are a hundred improved means of communication and there is nothing to communicate. A traveller in simpler times travelled with two legitimate and even estimable objects; first to see strange things in the places he went to; and second, to boast about the country he came from. Both these admirable arts are bound to suffer neglect and negation under existing conditions, when the place he finds is exactly like the place he leaves. All such places are alike, plastered with the same advertisements, blocked up with the same big shops, selling the same newspapers, attending the same schools.

There is therefore no real meaning in his travels, apart from the permanent personal interest of humanity. But the general spirit of travel, the desire to see new folk or new customs, all that has been ruined by the commercial concentration of modern times. I do not object to a reasonable number of things being scattered over the whole world, to remind the traveller of home and of the bond of mankind. I have seen The Illustrated London News for instance, in remote mud villages of Spain, or in caravanserais on the edge of the desert; and I am quite prepared to find it in the dark forests of Africa or the islands of the Southern Seas. But the Spanish villages and the Arab settlements were themselves quite different from London and the London News.

If each of our separate towns and villages were cut off by some happy catastrophe such as being snowed up or turned into an island by a flood, that town or village might begin to produce its own magazines, It might produce its own style of architecture, its own school of poets. It might produce something of its own out of the soil, instead of passing on something from somewhere else to somewhere else; as if every human town were no more than a railway junction It might be encouraged to use all the talent within its reach; instead of having that talent swamped and swept away by mere floods of fashion and rumour, from the ends of the earth. Then the true type of the traveller and the pilgrim might reappear upon the earth. Then it would really be worth while to cross the hills from one valley to another; for, entering a new valley, he would enter a new world. There would be more fun to wander over a part of England than it is today to wander over all the earth. The old fairy-tales, that told of a man coming to one kingdom where the houses were built of gold, or another where the fountains ran with wine, were but the legitimate literary exaggeration of the experience of real travellers, who found one peasantry wearing gilded headdresses or another brewing golden ale. But in our present phase travel has destroyed the traveller; and there is nowhere for the pilgrim to go save on a spiritual journey — the only possible pilgrim's progress.

Understanding France

It is curious, but very obvious, that internationalists are never interpreters between nations. It is what their name almost implies; it is what we should logically expect them to be, or at any rate try to be. And yet they do not do it, and I rather doubt whether they really try. What happens is that the internationalist, while he is often mildly but sincerely horrified at the nationalism of his own nation, is almost always even more horrified at the nationalism of some other nation. And it so happens, as the history of humanity has in fact developed, that very often the nationalism is the nation.

Take the nearest and clearest case; the ancient but by no means primeval rivalry between England and France. In the early Middle Ages they were very nearly one nation. In the later Middle Ages, they were the first of the new and clearly distinguishable nations: on the one side by the splendid accident of Agincourt; on the other by something rather too splendid to be called an accident: St Joan. But ever since then, roughly speaking the two nations drifted further and further apart. And for anybody who is content with nations as nations, or with a very crude and clean-cut sort of nationalism, that might be natural enough. But what has the internationalist been doing? What about the man who talks with particular earnestness about the need for peace among the peoples, for mutual understanding among men of every race and realm, about friendliness to foreigners or humanity to natives? Has he, for instance, ever attempted to explain France to England? The extraordinary fact is that he has never done anything of the kind. He has always been the very last to do anything of the kind.

Few ordinary Englishmen, whether Imperialist or Internationalist, have ever really grasped even what was meant by the greatness of France. But the Internationalist has grasped it much less than the Imperialist. There is much more sense of it in the poems of Mr Kipling than in the pamphlets of Mr Wells. But what is really needed is a widening of English culture, so as to understand what was really valued in French culture. Passing over all that earlier French history, in which the King of Paris had not yet fully become the King of France, we may note even in passing that the Crusades were a French affair; and we only fail to realise the fact because at that time our own monarchy and nobility were as French as the French. St Louis did not succeed in his Crusade; not even with the abortive success of Coeur de Lion. But St Louis does explain the Crusades, while Coeur de Lion rather confuses them. The main modern matter of which I speak, however, begins with the Renaissance and all that gigantic tradition that springs from Rabelais. Does it strike you that the worthy Nonconformist minister, who preaches against militarism and in favour of international pacifism, would be the very best man in the world to translate Rabelais?

Then follows what the French call with a pride that is perfectly logical in a Frenchman but has been allowed to remain almost unintelligible to an Englishman, the Great Century. Nobody knows anything about France, or even about Europe, who does not know that the Great Century was great. Our historians have seen nothing but bombast in the instinct or imagination which compared Louis the Fourteenth to the Sun. But there is no historical truth without historical imagination. And it is much nearer the truth to compare him to a sun-god than to compare him to a pompous dancing-master, in the manner of the narrow national bigotry of Macaulay. Some English literary men have begun to do justice to the great age of Racine and Pascal and the fullness of the Golden Age of classicism. Mr Sacheverell Sitwell, in an excellent study of the Baroque, has a truly imaginative and therefore understanding description of one of those great pageants in which royalty was such a reality that it could carry any load of artifice; and in which it seemed something quite spiritual and spontaneous, like a song, that the King should not only go clad in gold, but clothed with the sun. Mr Maurice Baring has repeatedly insisted with great force and humour, that the notion that Racine is merely stilted and dull is worth as much as the impression of a Breton fisherman that Milton is only stilted and dull: it arises from the rather simple cause of incapacity to read a foreign language.

There have been some good English translations of good French books on the tremendous and even tragic religious quarrel, the Jansenists and the Jesuits and the rest; a huge hinge or turning point in the whole history of Christianity. There have even been a few English critics capable of reading and reviewing the English translations. But the Rev. Timothy Tooting, who is a pacifist because he disapproves of all fights except bun-fights, who serves out cocoa but has never touched `alcohol’, and who holds meetings to promote the peace of the world — do you suppose that he has contributed very much to the understanding of the procession of the great Kings and the pride in the glory of Gaul? But until we understand that pride we shall never understand the point of view of a Frenchman. Again, the odd thing is that the Rev. Timothy Tooting was equally shocked at the great Kings and at the great rebellion against the great Kings. His remarks about the French Revolution and especially about Napoleon are just as silly and sniffy as his remarks about the French Monarchy, and especially about Louis the Fourteenth. And the remarks made about Napoleon by Mr Wells, who has some prejudices in common with Mr Tooting, are of the sort that might be excusable in a very stupid half-pay Tory captain who had served under Nelson, but are certainly not worthy either of Napoleon or of Mr Wells. Yet it is precisely men like Mr Wells who set out elaborately to reconcile the nations; to bring about what they call a better understanding between them. I suggest that he begin by reconciling England and France, and achieving a better understanding, or any sort of understanding, of France.

It has often been said that signs and portents will accompany the advent of the Millennium, or the coming of the heavenly kingdom upon earth. Oliver Wendell Holmes demanded that certain miracles should precede that apocalypse; as that raspberries and strawberries should grow bigger downwards through the box; or that lawyers should take what they would give and doctors give what they would take. I would respectfully suggest that before peace, perfect peace, reigns in the United States of Europe, we shall probably have seen some strange things. We shall see that particular sort of pacifist in our country no longer content with being at peace with the same particular sort of pacifist in every other country. We shall see him do what is really needed to avert war: attempt to understand the patriots of the other country. We shall see Earl Russell explaining the ideals of Fascism as clearly and fairly and sympathetically as he would explain the ideals of Socialism. We shall see Mr H. G. Wells fighting o’er again the hundred battles of Napoleon, shouting the war-songs of the Revolutionary War, and beginning to realise how much of the modern world which he admires, and the European unity he values, are due to those who carried the Code Napoleon to the palaces of Vienna or Madrid. We shall see the Rev. Tooting himself, of whose soul no Christian must despair, sitting down to write some rousing and romantic record of the charging chivalry of Poland. It is barely possible that all this, at the moment, may appear slightly improbable. But it is the only way in which we shall ever have international peace, and the only way in which these men can work for international peace. What they are doing at present is to consolidate all the people of one particular philosophy against all the people of the opposite philosophy. They are drawing them up like two long lines of battle. It may be defensible to prepare for war; anyhow, the peacemakers of this school are preparing for it very thoroughly.

Salute to New York

I said to somebody, as I was leaving New York and looking back at its aerial towers, that it was very lovely. I found I had only conveyed the impression that it was a very lovely place to leave. These double meanings or misunderstandings are common in such cases, and the stranger in America often feels that, while his blame sounds like insolence, his praise sounds like insincerity; or at least like irony. I remembered that I had myself been criticised, first for whitewashing Main Street in defiance of the Menckenites, and afterwards for saying that American villages were unsightly as compared with English villages. The general tendency is, however, to overrate the subtlety of the wicked foreigner. I said the skyline of New York was beautiful, because it is; and I said the ruck of the villages are ugly, because they are. The whole labyrinthine plot of perfidious Albion being thus laid bare, it occurred to me that there really is a parallel between the case of the city and of the villages; and that it offered a good opportunity of explaining to some of the more quarrelsome persons something which they did not seem to know; I mean what the quarrel was all about.

The queer thing about New York is that it goes on being new. It is the only case in which the name has not come to mean the very opposite of what it says. Nova Scotia does not sound particularly novel or particularly Scottish. New Orleans sounds older than Old Orleans. And if you meet anywhere a progressive prophet announcing the New Religion or the New Theology, you may be sure that they are about as recent and revolutionary as the New Forest. But New York is unique. It is truly to be called a vision; because a vision means something that is hardly ever visible. It is the dwelling place of a Spirit; which men may like or dislike in all kinds of ways, but which does express itself in a particular art; in an architecture that is akin to aviation. It is built out of winged stones; its architecture is like the law of gravity turned upside down. And those starry heights, those palaces riding the air like rainbows, those pale opalescent spears piercing the sky, lighter than the very light of heaven, have a meaning and are a sign. They do stand for something which the stranger, if he is wise, will recognise; however many things he may find alien to his own civilisation, however many he may think evil for any civilisation. It is a spirit not easy to name without cant, but much more real than all the cant with which it is covered... Lift up your heads, O ye gates... Lift up your hearts, O ye people.... It is a sursum corda in the national soul that is not merely false or affected.

So that even all the old rant about the Starry Flag or the Bird of Freedom was right in its instinct for images exalted and far up in air; and a man in a sort of dream, grown dizzy with that dance of towers, may somewhere against the blinding sun, see suddenly the unblinded eagle.

Now suppose somebody said to me that New York was nothing but muck and money; that it might as well be carted away; that industrial capitalism is the same everywhere, I should tell him he was wrong. Industrialism began in England; but it never ended in anything like New York. The pilgrim approaching Pudsey does not behold palaces like rainbows. The traveller leaving Wigan does not look back on opalescent loveliness. The clerk in a poor suburb of Sheffield is not necessarily dizzy with stars and starry towers. This case is unique; it is a special spiritual expression; it probably could not be replaced. That is what I should say to them about New York. And that is what I said, to the protectors of rural England, about the English village.

The point was that a thing like English country life does not spring up merely out of living in the country. It does not spring up in America, or for that matter in Asia or Africa or a great part of Europe. It is the perfect artistic expression of something English, just as the best American architecture is the expression of something American. But you will not find the first in anything called a village or the second in anything called a city. And if you let it perish, you are like men who should look on at the ruin of the last Greek god or the last Christian cathedral.

The British Beech

I am happy to say that I live in Beaconsfield; I mean, of course, that I live in Bekonsfield. I believe that there are some people who live in Beaconsfield, but I do not know where it is, and I cannot imagine why anybody should live there. By the sound of it, I should suppose that it is in some Colony, and was probably named after Disraeli who ought to have called himself Earl of Hughenden if he had followed out his own rustic, rugged and feudal dreams and not been led astray by the temptation to pick up the abandoned coronet of Burke. Now about the origin of the name of this town there is some dispute; but about the pronunciation of the name, there is no dispute whatever. There is only knowledge as possessed by those who know; and the often invincible and therefore innocent ignorance of the world outside. I need hardly say that those who know are those who are now commonly called ignorant and uneducated people. When you have heard the name of your own town for twenty years on the tongues of hedgers, ditchers, rat-catchers, gamekeepers, poachers and village idiots, then you know absolutely for certain that it is the correct pronunciation. When the intellectual aristocracy comes down to such a place and pronounces it as it is spelt, you know for a simple fact that they are wrong. If you have any real education, you know that spelling was never in the past a great part of education; that it is now treated by these people as the whole of education; simply because it is the whole of their education; or the only education they have. It never occurs to them that, while Shakespeare would write his own name in two or three totally different but equally illegible scrawls, he trusted the whole great load of his glory to the sound of words, to be spoken by living men. In dealing therefore with a word like `Beaconsfield’, they do not know how to choose between the men who can speak and the men who can only spell. It was always pronounced right. Only it is still spelt wrong.

Subject to this philological parenthesis, it is true that some at least maintain that the name is derived from an old word for a beech tree. Certainly there could be no more appropriate name and no more symbolic and inspiring thing. For the beech tree has a special representative quality in all this rolling wooded landscape, which makes up the central and southern parts of Buckinghamshire; and through the county a real relation to the country. A Sussex man, himself boiling over with enthusiasm for

Sussex, once said to me of the beech-woods about my Beaconsfield home, `This is really the most English part of England; I confess that compared with this, Sussex is a thing quite separate and apart.'

We have all heard about the British oak; and I am traditional enough not to quarrel with a tradition full of many heroic memories; of Nelson dying under the low oaken beams, or Collingwood scattering the acorns that they might grow into battleships. A modern naval enthusiast, by the way, would find it difficult to scatter screws and bolts in the hope that they would turn themselves into the war-machines of today. There is something in that parable of the organic and mechanic growth. But detaching my mind as much as possible, I am forced to feel that the oak has qualities less intimately national. The oak, dedicated to Jupiter of the Romans, has the jagged angular branches that are like the bolts of Jove. Its hard texture and rectangular corners belong almost to the logic of the Latins. If I were choosing an entirely English emblem, I should choose the beech-tree. It is equally strong and expressive of strength; but the smoothness is also expressive of a certain slowness that is akin to mercy and mildness. Its curves are of the gradual sort found in everything in these parts; in the slow speech of the rustics; in the gradual curves in the hills; even far away to the downs of Hampshire and Sussex, that are the only mountains of the South. They have a power like that of lazy waves that are lifted slowly; and allow villages to grow up in their hollows, only because they are too lazy to fall. There is nothing in them of the oak-blasting thunderbolts and very little of the oaks. But here especially, in this section of Bucks, the beeches surround and overshadow us and cover our home; so that it is no accident that has called this particular stretch of England the Home Counties.

Perhaps there is something profane and unhistorical in thus suggesting the belated substitution of the British Beech for the British Oak. And yet there is an important truth in this, if used as a literary symbol; even if we would never wish it to be actually used as a pictorial emblem. For much of the English error about England, which has misled us ever since our real origins were shut off by the obscurantism of the Reformation, is expressed in the undue emphasis on the oak and the neglect of the nobler qualities of the beech. The tendency to turn John Bull into a braggart, and from that into a bully, was only too readily represented by giving him a great oaken cudgel, supposed to be as invincible as the club of Hercules. It left out all the better elements in the native temperament; the humour, the good humour and especially the good nature. These would have been much better expressed in the smoothness that can co-exist with the strength of the beech. Moreover, noble as was the Nelson legend and all the earlier part of our maritime romance, the consideration of oaks only with reference to ships did turn English thoughts too exclusively outwards to the ends of the earth, and too little inwards to England. Thus Britannia became merely a statue to be seen from afar, rather than a real woman and mother, to be made happy in her own home. Hence the dangerous neglect of agriculture and internal economic conditions from which we are already suffering. The whole thing was altogether too emblematic. The British Oak was a thing like the British Lion; but lions are really rather rare in our Buckinghamshire lanes. On the other hand, the British Beech could not suggest anything except the British Pig. The swine feed on the beech-mast; and the pig is more realistic, even if he is growing almost equally rare. The return to a real England, with real pigs for real Englishmen, would be a return to the beech-woods; which still make this town like a home.

At least, they did until recently. I shall probably be told tomorrow that several beech-forests have been removed to enable a motorist temporarily deaf and blind to go from Birmingham to Brighton.

Public Monuments

I happened to have occasion recently to behold again the celebrated monument of King Victor Emmanuel in Rome, and it turned my thoughts backwards to monuments in general, and to the controversies about our own Cenotaph. They are, as I shall suggest in a moment, rather controversies about the place, the scale, and the formal use of the Cenotaph than controversies about the Cenotaph. It might be argued that the thing itself fulfils it own laws — and limitations. It may be unfair to complain that it is thin, when it is inherent in its intentional proportions to be thin. It may be unjust to object that it is naked and negative, when it was obviously meant to be naked and negative; it may be illogical to protest that it contains no symbol of any special spiritual significance, when it was obviously most carefully designed to contain nothing of the sort. But touching the emplacement and employment of the memorial, there is a great deal more to be said.

Nobody can complain that the Victor Emmanuel monument is too thin. Its thickness has the effect of a huge fortified wall which it is difficult to get round and unthinkable to get over. What is worse, this new Citadel actually bars the way to the old and real Citadel. The original rock of Rome, the high place from which the eagles flew, is practically overshadowed by this new wall of white marble. Victor Emmanuel of Savoy appears in the perspective of topography, if not precisely of history, as a considerably more important person than Julius Caesar. The road to the temple of Capitoline Jove, up which Caesar went with his roaring Triumphs, the place of the Capitol, where he met the end of the greatest human glory, seems no longer to dominate Rome, as I believe it did before the excited Liberals of the nineteenth century planned a mountain of marble that seemed ambitious to rise higher than the Seven Hills. And somehow, with all respect and sympathy, the purpose and the ambition seem hardly to fit. A particular Piedmontese prince, not without many virtues, and certainly not without most distressing difficulties, considerable as were, doubtless, his services to United Italy, does not now, in fact, bulk quite so big in history as Julius Caesar or even many a great Latin leader like Scipio or Marius. Its proportions in relation to the Capitol and the streets of Rome may yet need some explaining. It will probably be very difficult to convince our immediate posterity that it is not a monument to Mussolini.

Those whom in England we call Victorians, or, more properly, the men of the last two-thirds of the nineteenth century, are more completely misunderstood by most modern writers than if they were Ancient Britons. They are now always represented as stodgy and slow and paralysed by mere caution. The fact is that in most ways they were far too impetuous and enthusiastic. As romantic love was almost their religion, so in other ways they worshipped things, worthy indeed, but without enough discrimination between the sort of love that is fleeting and the sort of love that is lasting. They fell in love with public heroes, instead of merely following them. It is true that some return of this passion has appeared in some parts of Europe which were always specially prone to it, but I doubt whether even now the idolatries are so great as the noble idolatries of the English Victorians, and certainly not so great in England. Even in England we hear much of new movements and a need for leadership. But, with the greatest possible respect to all concerned, I doubt whether any mob actually makes a god out of Sir Oswald Mosley, as the middle-class Victorian mobs made a huge heroic legend out of Garibaldi or General Gordon. Remember that Victorianism was much more affected by its romantic side than by the later claims made on its scientific side. It was much more really moved by Carlyle than by Mill, let alone Herbert Spencer. And it did largely accept, among the apparent decay of many forms of religion, the form of religion which Carlyle invented and called ‘Hero-Worship’. And it acted on this religion, which it did not always do in relation to the other religions. The trouble is that it acted much too swiftly and ardently. It acted with a blind impetuosity which was the very reverse of stodgy. The evidence for it can be seen in many eyesores that we call public monuments. It is true that in England this is as far as their rage and madness went. In Europe as a whole, a great part of the nineteenth century might be called, and was called, the age of revolutions. It is true that the Victorians in England prided themselves on not being destructive, but only constructive. But those who have gazed on certain sculptured memorials, dedicated to eternal fame, have sometimes been tempted to think that construction can be more devastating than destruction.

By the way, may I be here excused if I enter once more a protest against that most meaningless distinction? If a man cuts down a tree and makes a mast, is he destructive or constructive? The emotional effect depends entirely on whether you happen to want a woodland shade or a sea-voyage. Except some of the Manichee heretics who attacked the Early Church, an Albigensian or two, and perhaps some of the old Russian Nihilists, I know of no political group which admits that it is destroying for the sake of destroying. And all political groups, if they are doing anything (a large assumption), are constructing by means of destroying. Compare this journalese jargon with the shrewd proverbs of popular life. It must have been a French peasant, I think, who invented the much wiser phrase: `You can’t make omelettes without breaking eggs.’

Victor Emmanuel’s monument has one great merit not easily to be found in London. It may seem to some merely to block the traffic, but it can seem to others to be really the goal of the traveller. The very fact that it fills the whole view, like a back-scene, does enable it to play the part of a great temple or theatre to which processions can march and seem to find their final goal. In other words, it is a shrine. It is a place to receive pilgrimages, if only patriotic pilgrimages. And when I saw an army of Italian Scouts grounding their poles or lowering their flags, like pilgrims laying down their staves, I thought they did really convey, by that halt and that salute, some sense of having come to the heart of their country.

Now, what is primarily the matter with the Cenotaph in London is simply what the Londoners did with it. They did not put it on a height or in an enclosure or with a background of finality, where it could possibly look like a national shrine to be the goal of pilgrimages. They put it down at random in the middle of the road, a road running both ways; and turned it into a mere stage in the traffic, one of many other objects, like a lamp-post. In fact, the Cenotaph looks like an unfortunate pedestrian who has started from one side of the street and is very doubtful of his chances of reaching the other. Under these disadvantages, he has even something a little weak-minded about his hesitation; as if, by some inversion of Einstein, the Hollow Tomb could be hollow outside as well as inside. But the fault is really in a lack of the sense, the true sense, of town-planning. And the moral is that we cannot make public monuments unless we recover the old imaginative instinct of public life; which did not mean sitting on committees, but marching in processions, organising into effective crowds, and learning how to salute the altar or the tomb.

THE MAKING OF HISTORY

Statues

Monuments last for ever. Therefore the mistakes of monuments last forever. That is what the modern world does not understand about the ancient dignity of marble or of stone. If I make a mistake in writing an article, I can cross it out. But if I make a mistake in carving a colossal figure of Rameses the Seventh (if there was a Rameses the Seventh) there is a tendency for that mistake to remain, and become unalterable; you cannot cross it out. If in carving Rameses you have given that slight curl to the nostril which suggests that his cynicism was cruel (as his enemies unreasonably maintained) rather than kindly (as those who knew him best are quite prepared to assert emphatically), in that case it is to be feared that your mistake about Rameses will remain, and be perpetuated for ever in that face of marble. If you have done him any injustice, you have done him an eternal injustice. If you have slandered him at all, you have slandered him forever.

Of course there is the method of smashing every statue you see. Personally I am in favour of it. I agree with the ancient Jews that the graven image has too hypnotic and horrible an influence on mankind. That is, it has too hypnotic and horrible an influence on mankind if mankind has no religion; and I am speaking of the modern world. Moreover, the ordinary statue has a curious power of falsifying the ordinary person. There was a great deal to be said for the old eighteenth century method of making monumental statues of great men. The eighteenth century method of making a statue of a great man was quite simple. You simply made the statue of the great man as unlike the great man as possible; you then gave him bare shoulders and a Roman toga, and you called it the classical style, which perhaps it was. There is something to be said for this classical style. There is also something to be said for the modern realistic style of Monsieur Rodin, in which you leave out a man’s leg or arm at random, to indicate that you have forgotten it in the frenzy of your genius. Both these styles have real ideas behind them; but I think there was an unfortunate period between them, especially in England, and that this period gave rise to the general disposition to smash statues which exists in all the healthy-minded English.

I wonder if all the statues were as bad at the time when the army of Oliver Cromwell had finally defeated the army of Charles I. If they were as bad it would go a long way to explain the iconoclasm of the Puritans. We feel reasonably angry with them because they smashed to pieces many beautiful and celebrated images. Still, we never saw the images.

Perhaps the most pathetic instance of this English sculpture applied to the wrong purpose can be found in the five or six statues which stand in the square opposite the Houses of Parliament. The personality of the politician is there not expressed even in the smallest degree. Punch's caricatures of Palmerston make him more dignified than his statue makes him. Punch, which hated Disraeli, represented him as a more real and admirable creature than the shapeless one before whom bunches of primroses are offered on Primrose Day. If the spirit of these statesmen could return they would prefer the fleeting caricatures of the comic papers to these everlasting caricatures in stone. They would prefer the thing drawn in ill-nature by their enemies to this thing conceived in adoration by their friends. And yet the definition of the deficiency is not quite easy to state. The figures are reasonably well designed; reasonably well dressed. There are no mistakes in costume or in anatomy that the eye of a layman can detect or denounce. Lord Palmerston wears a frock-coat; I suppose he did wear a frock-coat. He holds out his hand; I suppose that from time to time in the course of his animated and interesting career he did sometimes hold out his hand. He has whiskers; I presume he had whiskers. Sometimes, in a dark dream of ecstasy, I venture to hope not such whiskers; still I never saw him, and it may be so. There is nothing essentially unreasonable or unlikely about any part of his appearance or the appearance of the other stone statesmen who share with him that sacred and most impressive place. And yet when one thinks what a place it is, one suddenly sees that all those figures are hopelessly and incurably comic. If there is any England, this is the high historic Senate of England. If there is any England, there runs the sacred English river. And when we think of England as anything everlasting, even when we think of England as anything moderately lasting, those Victorian stone figures become suddenly like silly dolls. There must be some reason for this. And I think the reason is exactly that the men who put up those statues did not really feel as if they were putting up anything permanent at all; as if there was nothing in Palmerston (or at least, in their view of Palmerston), as if there was nothing in Beaconsfield (or at least, in their admiration of Beaconsfield), that suggested any line that was eternal, any grouping or massing that seemed able to endure the open day. For this is the real and final test of a statue. Its test is in two forms of trial. First, it must be able to endure publicity. Second, it must be able to endure solitude. One must be able to think of it as abandoned. The epic of war is for the feast of great princes; the old wives' tale is for the circle of gossips and rustics; the picture is for the inhabited room; the miniature is for the locket. Even the carved church is mostly conceived for a common need, and even a common comfort. But the stone statue is something that one can leave alone under the stars.

It would be a strange thing if, after all, those four or five stone figures expressed all that has been wrong with England for so long a time. It would be strange if the bad carving of Lord Palmerston's frock-coat were the only thing that really expressed what is wrong with the Party system. Yet I fancy that it is exactly there or thereabout that the truth lies. We admire our Party leaders. We do not believe in them. We praise them for making so much of our case, as if all the time it were really a bad case. They are all advocates and they were better in the eighteenth century, when they all wore wigs. You cannot make an enduring statue of an advocate, for you cannot make a statue unless you have an idea; and the essence of an advocate is that he has any ideas or all ideas. Exactly what men admired in Palmerston is exactly what men cannot carve in stone; his easy variety, his quickness to leap, which seemed almost like omnipresence. `What a faculty that fellow has,' said Macaulay admiringly, `for falling on his feet!' It is a splendid capacity, doubtless, to fall on one's feet; but if one is a statue it is dangerous to fall on anything else.

What people admired in Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, was simply his jumpiness. But jumpiness cannot be expressed in stone. I am aware that Monsieur Rodin and others have brought the eccentricity of statuary to a high point; but even they have not yet succeeded in making a statue of a man who has jumped clean off the ground. It was the whole point of Beaconsfield that he jumped clean off the ground. Seriously speaking, I am not sure that he had ever been on the ground; hence he was a subject inappropriate for statuary, and his statue in front of the Houses of Parliament is simply a great gown with a goatish face on top of it. But indeed the sculptors are scarcely to be blamed if they showed inadequate results, for their art can only express eternal ideas, and they were called upon to deal with personalities whose whole boast was that no ideas could be eternal. What could the best sculptors do when they were told to make characteristic statues of six acrobats?

A Theory of Tyrants

I have come to be convinced of late of a certain theory of the nature of tyranny. It may be right or wrong, but I think it is at least worthy of thought in connection with a highly interesting matter. Broadly speaking, the common theory of tyranny has been this: That men have groaned under some system for centuries, and have at last rebelled against it. But I think that men have actually done quite otherwise; they have rebelled against the system against which they have not groaned. But the matter is so mixed and also so acute that I may be permitted to state it in a more explanatory manner.

Let us take, for the sake of argument, the two risings against tyranny most commonly considered in current literature — the English rebellion of the early seventeenth century and the French Revolution. According to the common theory, Charles I should have been the heir of at least twenty intolerable despots. The truth is that he was the heir of one tolerable despot (who had not quite effected despotism), and beyond that everything was different. Queen Elizabeth was not tolerable, and she was not tolerated. In so far as she was endured she was adored. Cavaliers and Puritans alike looked back to her reign (most mistakenly, doubtless, but most certainly) as a midsummer of popular monarchy.

In short the English Puritans did not rebel against an old system; whatever else it was it was not old. Even if Charles I had been a much worse king than he was there would not have been enough time for him to have created a complete and cruel tradition against the tradition of Elizabeth. A few years before Charles' head was cut off, most Englishmen would have died to keep Elizabeth's on. If you turn to the case of the French Monarchy before the French Revolution you will find exactly the same thing. A very short time before the Revolution the French Monarchy was the generally accepted French symbol. The King before Louis the Guillotined was Louis the Well Beloved. The Monarchy (in France as in England) became the most unpopular thing very soon after it had been the most popular thing. There was no weakness, there was no long decline: the defeat of the thing followed swiftly on its first victory. Charles I was not the last of the English despots. He was one of the first of the English despots — only there happened to have been no more of them. Encouraged by the arrogance and popularity of Elizabeth, who had stood for patriotism and Protestantism and the defiance of Spain, Charles tried to work with Elizabethan England and found that Elizabethan England was not there. It was not too old to last, it was too new to last. Louis XVI was not the last of a line of unpopular kings. On the contrary, he was the first of a line of popular kings to be unpopular.

I can only explain all this by my private theory of tyrants; which is this. Men do not rebel against the old; rather they rebel against the new. They turn upon something when they find that it has them in a trap. They do not revolt against something that has been unpopular. They revolt (and very rightly) against something that has been popular. They hated Charles I because they had loved Elizabeth. They killed Louis XVI because they had been killed for Louis XIV. In fact, this is probably what is meant by that seemingly meaningless phrase, the fickleness of the mob. It probably means that the mob is quicker than other people in discovering that man has walked into a man-trap. England went mad with joy for the English Monarchy, because the Armada had not conquered England. And then England suddenly went mad with rage because it discovered that (during that exciting interlude) the English Monarchy had conquered England. We had escaped the snare of Philip; we walked into the snare of Elizabeth; we broke out of the snare of Charles I.

This is the essential mark of tyranny: that it is always new. Tyranny always enters by the unguarded gate. The tyrant is always shy and unobtrusive. The tyrant is always a traitor. He has always come there on the pretence that he was protecting something which people really wanted protected — religion, or public justice, or patriotic glory. Men staring at the Armada; did not watch the King; so they strengthened the King. Later when they watched the King they unconsciously strengthened the aristocracy. Again, when they attacked the aristocracy, they did not watch the big merchants who were attacking it — and who wanted watching. All tyrannies are new tyrannies. There are no such things really as old tyrannies; there are hardly any such things as old superstitions.

There is one moral to these evident facts of history. When you look for tyrants, do not look for them among the obvious types that have oppressed men in the past — the king, the priest, or the soldier. If you do, you are merely looking at the Spanish Armada while England is being turned into a despotism behind your back. Monarchy was once a popular organ; yet it was turned against the people. Remember that newspapers are popular organs that may be turned against the people. Whatever the new tyrant is, he will not wear the exact uniform of the old tyrant.

An Anecdote of Persecution

There are many tales in Joinville's reminiscences of St Louis which would be worth retelling; I will, however, be reasonable, and retell only one of them. I will tell it with strict reference to the record; I will only expand it in so far as obvious inference and historical circumstances are clear in the case; whenever I am ornamenting it I will say so, and anybody can buy the book and bowl me out. But it is a tale which seems to me to tell in the most vivid and everyday style how it is in practice that persecution arises. It is common talk in these days that we ought to be imaginative, if only in order to be charitable. If a man commits forgery we must try to understand his temptations and his original trend. But no such mercy is generally shown to the enthusiast for ideas. The sins of the intolerant are seldom considered with any intellectual tolerance. It seems that we are to find excuses for the crimes of good men.

Wherever we have read history we have noticed one class of statements or allegations. I mean simply incredible allegations; and statements that cannot be believed. For instance, it cannot be believed (at least, I cannot believe it) that the French Jacobins who ran the Terror were diseased and hysterical doctrinaires. They fought all Europe and beat it; the thing is impossible. Now exactly in this sense it is impossible to believe the ordinary modern version of the position of the Jew in the Middle Ages. Whatever else the Jew was, he was important. If he had really lived like Isaac in Ivanhoe he could not have been important; he could not have been at all. A man from whom anybody could steal money would not have any money to steal. A man utterly outlawed must perish. Now I will tell a little tale out of Joinville. The Monastery of Our Lady at Cluny was prosperous and charitable; when the snow was on the ground in winter it showed a maze of footprints of the poor folk who came to its doors. Most of these, of course, were not only poor but of plain rank; but it sometimes happened that a man of good estate was so impoverished as to receive such aid. Among the many figures familiar at the door was one especially who crawled to it more slowly than the others, for he was crippled and hung upon a crutch. He was an old knight with white hair, quite disabled, and entirely penniless; but his eyes (I think) were fierce and restless, as are the eyes of all those. whose activity has been shifted from the body to the mind. His clothes were dropping off his back; he was a perfect gentleman, and very much of a nuisance.

Now it happened that he came to the Monastery on a day that was somewhat solemnly set apart for one of those intellectual tournaments which the men of the Middle Ages loved as much as bodily tournaments. The Abbot was presumably something of a philosopher as well as a philanthropist, and he was liberal in his mental interests as well as liberal with his corn. In the exact words of Joinville's Chronicle, `There was a great disputation between clergy and Jews at the Monastery of Cluny.' That single sentence knocks flat for ever the whole picture and conception of the medieval Jew which we all have from Scott's romances or from general report. Ignorant fools who insult a strange sect merely because it is strange, do not arrange public debates to give it a chance of explaining itself. People bent on rooting out a tribe ruthlessly like rats or weeds do not invite the heads of the tribe to make speeches about themselves on a platform. The truth is, of course, that the medievals, like all other sane human beings, started with a preference for reasonable argument and peaceable settlement. It is always afterwards, if at all, that these excellent intentions break down. And they did, unfortunately, break down in the philanthropic and philosophical Monastery of Cluny; as you shall hear.

I think we can call up some rude and dim conception of the scene. The architecture would still be Norman with the low, almost sullen arch and short, almost brutal columns; for though no date is given to the story, the Gothic can hardly have been greatly spread. Such laymen as were present would be people of all conditions; and while there would be more initial ceremony of precedence between these classes, there would be far less practical shyness or contemptuous shrinking than at the present day. Prominently, and probably in a row, would sit the Christian theologians, eager with the eagerness of all men who live much with their own sex in schools and clubs and universities, for an unending war of words. Like all men who have a complete theory of things, they would be fretting and on fire with the chance of expounding it, many of them stirring and stamping. For men who have much to say are more nervous than men who have nothing to say.

Over against them, probably calmer, probably more prosperous in appearance, certainly more observant of all that was going on, would sit the great Rabbis of the mysterious race. In their hands they would hold parchments undecipherable to all the children of the West; but their very faces would be more undecipherable parchments. Their smiles would seem carved like hieroglyphics. Into that place of plain arches and Latin logicians with shaven heads they brought the memory of things cloudy and monstrous, as of many-headed cherubim or winged bulls walking enormous in the desert. For though both theologies were by this time twisted and elaborate, each worked back like a tangled tree to its original root. All the arabesque of Rabbinical riddle and commentary referred eventually to the ultimate Jewish idea; the idea of the awful distance between man and God. All the roaring and grinding syllogisms of the Schoolmen were tools and symbols of the awful union of God and man. The Jewish angel had ten eyes or twelve wings to express the idea that if ever we saw the beauty and wisdom of God it would seem to us outrageous or frightful. The Christian angel often had two wings only, in addition to eyes and two arms; to show that human beauty and dignity were divine realities which would survive and break the doors of death. Two sublime creeds were in collision; the creed that flesh is grass, and the creed that flesh was God. And at the moment, before any of the philosophers could move, the old man of the crutch stood up and asked to speak.

Joinville in his Chronicle gently says that this was received `with doubt’. Human life is so startlingly the same in all ages that one can see the scene as clearly as if it were a modern meeting when some peppery and impractical Colonel insists on addressing the meeting. One can imagine the whispers between the Abbot and his chief supporters. `If he speaks there will be a row,’ and the unanswerable answer, `If we stop him there will be a worse row’. The assembled philosophers, who had been about to pose the Rabbis with the awful rationalism of medieval argument, `Why do you believe in God if He is not manifest?’ or `Could anyone believe in Heaven except through revelation?’ stood for a moment aside. The old cripple said, `At least you admit that Our Lady was the Mother of God.’

The Rabbi who was addressed smiled, perhaps, that rich smile which some find repulsive even when it is benevolent, and said that he did not admit this. The old man said steadily, `Then if you do not love Our Lady you were very silly to come into her house.’ He plucked the crutch from under his arm, and whirling it suddenly aloft, caught the Jew a stunning crack behind the ear, bringing him to the ground. Instantly, of course, there was a scuffle, and the Jews were driven from the place. The Abbot rushed up to the old Knight and told him in no measured terms that he had made a horrible fool of himself. The old gentleman, still panting and blowing, no doubt from his exertion, told the Abbot that he thought him the greater fool of the two. Thus unfortunately ended the great experiment of religious inquiry in the Monastery of Cluny. I leave it to anyone to say whether it is not as human a tale as any that might have happened in Surbiton during the War.

The Return of Pageantry

The Puritans, in their hours of pride, seem actually to claim that our nation is fundamentally Puritan, was made by the Puritan spirit. They put Cromwell in the place of Alfred; they put him not only at the head of English patriotism, but at the beginning of English history. They make old England a sort of Puritan colony like New England. All this is, of course, a ludicrous delusion. The first facts or names that jump to the mind will remind any Englishman that his country had a splendid national literature and a very unmistakable type of national life before the hat of a single Puritan had been seen and hooted in England. Chaucer is even more English than Bunyan; Shakespeare is certainly more English than Milton. The Tabard and the Mermaid, Lady Godiva and St George, Robin Goodfellow and Robin Hood, belong to a national tradition that has not even been touched by Puritanism; yet which is quite different from the tradition of Spain, of Scotland, or of France. Chaucer's Franklin, whose beard was white as a daisy, and in whose house `it snewed meate and drinke', was as certainly an Englishman as he most certainly was not a Puritan.

Puritanism was something put into the Englishman after he had grown to his full national stature. Some hated it as an alien poison; some praised it as a violent medicine. But nobody pretended that it was the natural bread and ale that had built up the countrymen of Colet or Ben Jonson. It might indeed be maintained that in all the three cases of nations thus raided by Puritanism, the Scotch, the English and the Dutch, this religion has been rather a sort of spell or possession than a true change of personality. It might be suggested that in each case a merrier and more medieval nation went alive into that land of bondage and is now coming alive out of it. Thus the Scotch romance and witchery which Scott and Stevenson have brought to life is only the return of a spirit most marked in the old Scottish ballads and chronicles, in the tales of Tamlane in the Forest, and Thomas the Rhymer among the fairies; and in that almost Arthurian romance of the roving court of Robert Bruce, which left, like a gypsy blood for generations, a tradition of wandering Scottish kings. Even in Scotland, I believe, Calvinism has only been an episode. The Scotch are taking off their `blacks' and appearing again in the purple of their ancient poetry. We may yet hear the twang of the last precentor before we really hear the Lay of the Last Minstrel.

Even in the third case of Holland, of which I know far less, something of the same kind could be suggested. Before the coming of the Puritan, the people of the flat country had already shown that talent for a certain detail and domesticity in art which fills so many galleries with their quaint interiors and their convincing still life. It might well be maintained that the same note of half religious realism, of an almost mystical silence and solidity, is being sounded in much of the new literature of the Netherlands. It is marked in Maeterlinck's love of interiors and the unconscious shapes of things; in the way in which he writes of a window standing open or a passage leading to a door. He lives in a dumb fairyland of furniture. Nothing could be more like the almost conventual quietude and neatness of the pre-Reformation art among the Flemings. And nothing certainly could be more unlike the somewhat vulgar yet really demonic energy, the curious mixture of bourgeois smugness and visionary anarchy that marked the mighty days of the Puritan. Nothing could be further from the sensational art and literature of the Protestant extremists, as you may see it in old Bibles or illustrations of Bunyan; an atmosphere at once monstrous and prosaic, mixed of a mild view of this world, and a mad view of the other; the earth an endless Clapham and the sky a permanent apocalypse. It left on the mind a confused sense that angels had whiskers and saints had top hats; and certainly the dull energy in it was at the opposite extreme from the spirit of a small room either described by Maeterlinck or painted by Memlinc.

But the case of England at least admits of no mistake. Not only did England produce a most anti-Puritan literature before the Puritans existed, but it went on, under the Puritans and in spite of the Puritans, producing a literature that was quite anti-Puritan. There is as little that is Puritan about Fielding and Dickens as there is about Chaucer and Shakespeare. Dickens quite obviously existed to champion everything that the Puritans existed to destroy; when Mr Scrooge is converted to Christmas, the Puritan would have thought that Scrooge was relapsing and not repenting. When Scrooge and his clerk sit down to `a bowl of smoking Bishop', the Puritan would have been equally disgusted with the spirit and with the name. Nevertheless the Ironside element, though alien to England, was to a certain extent mixed with it; and I myself believe that it is to this partial mingling of a foreign and a native idea that we owe the curious attitude of the English, until lately, towards processions and pomps.

The Calvinist colour, mixing with each separate national colour, made in each case a different blend or tint. The Scotch had been restless, rebellious, fond of mystery, valiant, and sometimes cruel. The combinations of Calvinism with this produced a sort of sombre romanticism which one can feel very strongly in Burns and in the blacker tales of Stevenson. The Dutch, I imagine, were domestic and devout; the combination of Calvinism with this produced a slight dullness and a rage for keeping things clean. The English certainly were lusty, casual and fond of broad fun. The combination of Calvinism with this produced a curious kind of bourgeois embarrassment, part humour, part respectability and part good sense. Since the Englishman was not to wear crimson clothes carelessly, the next most English thing was to wear black clothes casually and unobtrusively. Where the Catholic Englishman had been modest enough to make a fool of himself, the Protestant Englishman had only that lower sort of modesty that will not make a show of itself. He objected to making a Pageant, because it is, literally speaking, `making a scene'. It is said that the Frenchman shrugs his shoulders; but the Victorian Englishman was born with his shoulders shrugged. His whole attitude until lately has been `What's the good of making a fuss?' It is a sensible and pleasant temper; it is the remains of the real Englishman who gave its patient Pickwickian cheerfulness to the Canterbury Pilgrimage. But it will be gain and not loss if this minor humility of drab and grey can give place to that higher, and much more humble humility, which can forget itself in flowers and fireworks and in the colours of Carnival.

Rational History

There is a sort of phrase or joke about `whitewashing' the villains of history; but to be quite just there ought to be some phrase such as `blackwashing' also. For the truth is that such rehabilitations are of two very different kinds. One is a mere anarchist itch to upset a traditional and universal verdict. The other is a reasonable petition to appeal against a very hasty and sectarian verdict. In other words, we may appeal for whitewashing if we can prove that there has been blackwashing. There are men in history who may rationally be held to be better than they appear in history. And they are those who have been, for fairly obvious reasons, blackened immediately after their death. We have a right to doubt in every case where it was indispensable (to a new dynasty or regime) that a man who was dead should also be damned. Two very interesting cases of such rational rehabilitation have appeared of late. An American writer has written a romantic sketch of the sympathetic view of Richard III. A French writer has written a scholarly and historic study of the sympathetic view of Napoleon. In both cases there is the same real and intellectual reason for a reconsideration. We are right to remember that these victorious soldiers were at the mercy of their ultimate victors. It is common sense to ask ourselves what tales would most probably be set about by the enemies of one after Bosworth or of the other after Waterloo.

Shakespeare was a very English type of genius; but so was Gillray. And it may fairly be said that Shakespeare's version of Richard is pretty much like Gillray's version of Napoleon. He is a diabolic dwarf, far less temperately and sanely conceived than Quilp. But Richard of Gloucester was not a dwarf, either physically or morally. And Napoleon was not a devil, either in incredible crime or incredible capacity. He made many concessions — and many mistakes. It was his normality that succeeded not his abnormality. In so far as he conquered Europe, it was as Man not as Superman. The Rights of Man formed his only working and real droits de seigneur. He was popular with soldiers not only because he was a conqueror, but also because he was a soldier. He ruled France not because he had conquered it, but because he had conquered its enemies. A great French writer put the truth in its unfavourable form by saying that men of the world sympathise with Napoleon because he had no internal life. He did not think about himself; he was not a Higher Thinker, a Buddhist. He was a creator — that is, a Christian. He did not know his own portrait till he saw it in his own works.

The sins of the Superman are unpardonable. But the sins of man are as the hairs of his head. So long as we regard Napoleon as a Superman, we are bound to regard all his cruelties as cold-blooded, all his pride as blasphemous, all his diplomacy as `black causeless duplicity’ (as Stevenson said of his own Master of Ballantrae), all his sins, in short, as sins against the Holy Ghost — and, above all, all his misfortunes as deserved. But if we regard him as Man, we pretty soon find that his sins were the sins of a selfish, simple, generous, crude Corsican officer of artillery. His few cruelties were of the half-constrained kind — the kind that twenty other officers of artillery would have committed if they had been in the same hole. His pride was pure vanity; as innocent and as active as the vanity of a schoolboy. His diplomacy was at once less secret and less bullying than nearly all the diplomacy before and after his time. Compared with Metternich or with Bismarck, he was a straightforward but persuasive person. Unlike these other diplomatists, he did appeal to the reason and conscience of other nations and other Kings. He did not merely try to conceal; he did not merely try to convict. He did not even merely try to conquer. He did really try to convert — that is, to convince. And as for his misfortunes, he may have deserved to be called the Corsican Ogre, but he never really deserved to be called the Man of Destiny. It was a slander of which his misfortunes should have purged him for ever.

Much of the same is true, as I have said, of the last stand of the remote Plantagenet at Bosworth: when Henry Tudor rode as best he could into battle, making up his pedigree as he went along. The real medieval king was the man who died calling out `Treason’ and killing men on every side of him. Richard III was doing exactly what would have been expected of Richard I. But nothing was ever expected of the Tudors except the unexpected. They were the first English monarchs who were Sultans instead of Kings. They acted by a caprice, and not by a creed. It was owing to their brief and impatient despotism that England, ever since, has been capricious and creedless. One can almost see the lean, long face of the Welsh usurper, as he rode with the great nobles who had deserted to his standard; one can see his smile as he entered London; and one can guess what kind of tale he would tell of the fallen King.

The Unknown Warrior

The recent ritual of Armistice Day was overshadowed, as everyone knows, by the shadowy figure of the Unknown Warrior. And this was well; for that figure, however like a shadow, alone possesses something of the character of a statue. It is one of the very few monumental things in modern civilisation. The world will never forget that altar which St Paul saw as he passed by, where the Greeks had built a shrine to the Unknown God. So it is in this case, almost alone among all modern cases; it is really possible that the world may never forget that we built a shrine to the Unknown Man.

For whatever the future is like, it will not be Futurist. The very notion of always talking in terms of tomorrow is a passing taste that will soon be a thing of yesterday. Those who are concerned for the coming thing are really rather concerned for the vanishing thing, concerned to catch a fashion before it vanishes. Most of the artistic experiments and social prophecies which appeal to the next age, are in fact stamped with all the special marks and limitations of this age. Our Utopian predictions may not be very easily fulfilled, but they will be very easily dated. Our Futurist pictures may be mistaken at the first glance for the primitive drawings of the Sandwich Islanders, but a more expert examination will certainly reveal the characteristic conventions of the twentieth century. This is as true of War Memorials as of everything else; and those who insisted on things of immediate usefulness were mostly denying and destroying the whole of their ultimate use. Whatever else might be said of such War Memorials, they do not happen to discharge the function of being memorials of the war. With a changing Society these practical things will become impracticable; these useful things will be disused. The building of cottages, let us say, is vital to the present shortage of housing; but it might become almost unintelligible in a society with a decently distributed power over the means of production, where a common man could afford to build his own cottage. A club or institute may be established with enthusiasm and applause; it may be regarded as a mere saving of wealth and life by `keeping people out of the public house’. But it may be regarded as a meaningless waste by people who will, perhaps, have restored the public house to the proper public dignity, and made the old Christian inn a place for Christian men. These things are at best modern medicines for modern maladies. They will appear to another age like some special provisions against the Black Death, or some particular warning against the Norse pirates. But though the advanced ideas of our own age are the very last that are likely to endure into another age, neither is it enough to express common ideas in the sense of conventional ideas. That is, it is not enough to express common ideas in a conventional way.

If there are many mad pamphlets and queer pictures and fantastic flags of revolt in the dust-bin of the ages, it is equally true that there are whole rubbish-heaps of lost Latin epitaphs and dead English epics, and pompous monuments like the urns and nymphs in a deserted garden. The thing that survives is that which has a certain combination of normality with distinction. It has simplicity with a slight touch of strangeness; as has the style of Milton or Michelangelo. It is a tale just sufficiently unusual to be worth telling, and yet immediately intelligible when told. It is what the hero is to the human being; a thing magnified but made to scale. Of this really enduring quality I know no other modern example except the burial of the Unknown Warrior, with a King for his chief Mourner.

It is a tale that could be told in any future society, and remain simple and striking. It is a monument that could be looked at by any future generation, with any customs or costumes, and looked at with the same mixture of mystery and familiarity. If we wish to imagine the feelings of the future, the best approximation to it is not to trust the fancies of our own futurism, but to note the facts of our own attitude towards the past, especially the remote past. Now this story of the Unknown Warrior would have a point and a pathos if it were told about a prehistoric tribe burying a man in a barrow, or an ancient Egyptian procession bearing a faceless mummy to a pyramid. If we read that a nameless legionary was buried high upon the Capitol, and that the Roman Emperor offered some sacrifice or libation to his manes, we should understand what was meant. If we were told that some great medieval king spent wealth on masses to be sung in some great cathedral for the soul of some unknown archer, picked up at random on the field of Courtrai or Crecy, we should feel what we were meant to feel. We should feel what we felt on Armistice Day in London. It is something perhaps better expressed, in any age, by the silent symbol of gesture and action than by any definition of a thing so deep. It is strange that the same thinkers who disapprove of dogma often disapprove of ritualism. For ritualism is the only possible alternative to dogma. In this case the dogma is so deep and vital that its verbal definition invariably leads to disputes and absurd misunderstandings. It is a truth that worries people when put into words; so that they talk the wildest nonsense about it, and especially against it. Perhaps, therefore, it is just as well that their subconscious faith in this dogma should only be expressed in a grave and graceful ceremonial action. But the dogma itself, the truth symbolised itself, is something that was almost rediscovered in the realities of war: it is that in the darkness of battle, and in the very heart of the whirlwind of death, is discovered that mystery whose name is the quality of men.

Men are not equal in their realisation of equality. They are really equal in many other essentials of the true egalitarian idea, but they are not equal in that. Certain conditions favour the growth of plutocratic fashions obscuring our brotherhood; certain other conditions make intensely vivid the great things we have in common, as compared with the small things that divide us. And anyone who understands the real doctrine of equality (there are not very many in the modern world who do) will understand that some sense of it vaguely but invariably comes to the surface under the hideous conditions of war. An army, which in one sense would seem the very home of subordination, has nevertheless an ultimate tendency to encourage equality; because, whatever may be the rule or the orders, the facts are those of an intense independence. If any man really fails to understand the mystical dogma of the equality of man, he can immediately test it by thinking of two men, of totally different types and fortunes, falling on the same field at some terrible crisis in the war which saved our country. One might be, and often was, a gentleman of the finer tradition, fortunate in his friends, in his tastes, in his culture as well as his character.

Another might be some stunted serf of our servile industrial slums, a man whom all modern life conspired to crush and deform. In the hour when the flag of England was saved, there was no man who dared to say, or would have dreamed of saying, that one death was less glorious than the other.

William Penn and His Royalist Friends

The Americans have established a Thanksgiving Day to celebrate the fact that the Pilgrim Fathers reached America. The English might very well establish another Thanksgiving Day to celebrate the happy fact that the Pilgrim Fathers left England. I know this is still regarded as a historical heresy by those who have long ceased to worry about a religious heresy. For while these persons still insist that the Pilgrim Fathers were champions of religious liberty nothing is more certain than the fact that an ordinary modern liberal sailing with them would have found no liberty and would have intensely disliked almost all that he found of religion. Even Thanksgiving Day itself, though it is now kept in a most kindly and charming fashion by numbers of quite liberal and large-minded Americans, was originally intended, I believe, as a sort of iconoclastic expedient for destroying the celebration of Christmas, which does not encourage me, for one, to develop a special and spiritual fervour for Puritanism. Oddly enough, however, the Puritan tradition in America has always celebrated Thanksgiving Day by often eliminating the Christmas Pudding but preserving the Christmas Turkey. I do not know why, unless the very name of Turkey reminded them of the Prophet of Islam, who was also the first Prophet of Prohibition.

It is not, however, in connection with either Thanksgiving Day or Christmas Day, that I recur for a moment to the somewhat controversial question of the Pilgrim Fathers. It is merely to note anew that there has always seemed to me too much emphasis on the Pilgrim Fathers, as compared with many others who were at least as truly Fathers of the Republic. There has certainly been in recent times a considerable combination between Puritanism and Publicity. The Puritans may not always have approved of the stage, but for all that they got a great deal of the limelight. Somebody managed to make the Mayflower as legendary as the Ark or the Argo; indeed, it is legendary in more ways than one, so far as the aim and atmosphere of the expedition are concerned. But I doubt whether most people even know the names of the ships in which many of the other devoted or heroic colonists of America sailed; I, for one, most certainly do not. I will not insist especially on the very noble example of Lord Baltimore and the founders of the State of Maryland, who established the first system of religious toleration in history, for there I might be accused of favouring my own religious sympathies and ideas. But I am at least detached and impartial in the subsequent and somewhat similar story of the founding of the State of Pennsylvania. And whatever ship brought the great Quakers to that settlement has a rather better right than the Mayflower to be called a Peace Ship.

These reflections occurred to me when I was recently standing in the city of Philadelphia, on which looks down the great statue of William Penn, whose unmarked grave lies a mile or two from my own house at home. And it struck me as very strange that all the millions of men with modern humanitarian sympathies have said so little of the immense superiority of that intellectual and spiritual leader to the clamorously advertised Calvinists of the Mayflower. I gravely fear that a great many of them do not see much difference between the two.

Among the most curious of all curiosities of literature or of legend, I have actually heard a sort of romantic rumour (which I have never been able either to trace or test) that portions of the timber of the Mayflower were found in some strange way attached to the old Quaker meeting-house which stands beside Penn's grave. I cannot imagine what the story could possibly mean, or how the incident can possibly be supposed to have come about; unless, indeed, some enthusiastic American globetrotter merely threw fragments of Mayflower furniture (said to be rather suspiciously common in the States) at any house that had any connection with any founder of any American State. Anyhow, he might just as well have said that Sir Walter Raleigh sailed in the Mayflower as connect William Penn and his people with the fanaticism that filled that famous vessel. He might as well have hung the first Calvinistic meeting-house with rosaries and relics and scapularies belonging to the Catholic Calverts as pretend to have patched up the house of the first Friends with the relics of their mortal enemies and persecutors, the Old Puritans.

An American Puritan in the seventeenth century would have regarded a Quaker very much as an American Puritan in the twentieth century would regard a Bolshevist. And, though Bolshevists are supposed to be fierce and Quakers were supposed to be meek, they were at least like each other in this: they were what modern America would call Radical, in the sense of going to the real root of the question and answering it rightly or wrongly. In short, they were really Fundamentalists, and most Fundamentalists are not

Fundamentalists. For whatever we think of the thing now called Fundamentalism, it is not fundamental. It is not particularly fundamental to throw a big Bible at people's heads (or rather, a particular translation of the Bible, with a lot of books left out as Apocrypha) any more than to throw the Encyclopaedia Britannica or the Institutes of Calvin. Even if it be a truth, it is not a first principle. But it is fundamental and it is a first principle, right or wrong, to go back, as William Penn did, to the doctrine of the Inner Light. For William Penn really was a great man and not merely a seventeenth-century sectarian; his thoughts, whether we think with him or no, having a meaning in the twentieth century or any century; and he founded something much larger than Pennsylvania and much greater than Philadelphia — a faith that has not yet failed.

I think I know why Penn has been thrown into the shade by the Pilgrim Fathers. It was his politics; and for some they are still a dreadful secret. I was once asked by some worthy modern pacifists, of the Nonconformist culture, to lecture on something in one of the oldest meeting-houses of the Society of Friends. I agreed to lecture upon William Penn and with secret and malignant joy drew up an elaborate plan for a eulogium on that Quaker hero. I set myself specially to express boundless admiration for all those parts of his life and opinion which his modern Puritan admirers do not admire. I proposed to praise extravagantly his loyal and devoted sympathy with the House of Stuart. I intended to point out eagerly how worthy he was of the gracious and glorious friendship of a man like Charles the Second. I meant to rub in every detail of his diplomatic and political support of the admirable political designs of James the Second. I intended to insist on the intellectual amity, almost amounting to intellectual alliance which so often bound him to Cavaliers and even to Catholics. In short, it was my evil intention to praise him for everything for which Macaulay blamed him. Then, I thought, when I had explained how intimately identified was Penn with Royalists, and especially with Papists, then surely all the Nonconformist ministers would be frightfully pleased. Then should I be acclaimed and admired by all the modern Puritans for my perfect understanding of the great seventeenth-century sectary. Then should I become the idol of all the people who glorify the Pilgrim Fathers and talk enthusiastically about the Mayflower. Then it would be admitted that I also was a grand, grim old Puritan, like all the rest of them. Unfortunately, I fancy I must have boasted of my intention, and some rumour of it must have reached them. For I received at the eleventh hour a hurried request to give a lecture on Dickens. And from this we may learn that, if Dickens was an enemy of the Puritans, he was not so much of an enemy as Penn.

ON LITERATURE

Ruskin: the Humorist

I do not think any one could find any fault with the way in which Mr Collingwood has discharged his task in The Life of John Ruskin except, of course, Mr Ruskin himself, who would certainly have scored through all the eulogies in passionate red ink and declared that his dear friend had selected for admiration the very parts of his work which were vile, brainless and revolting. That, however, was merely Ruskin’s humour, and one of the deepest disappointments with Mr Collingwood is that he, like every one else, fails to appreciate Ruskin as a humorist. Yet he was a great humorist: half the explosions which are solemnly scolded as `one-sided’ were simply meant to be one-sided, were mere laughing experiments in language. Like a woman, he saw the humour of his own prejudices, did not sophisticate them by logic, but deliberately exaggerated them by rhetoric. One-tenth of his paradoxes would have made the fortune of a modern young man with gloves of an art yellow. He was as fond of nonsense as Mr Max Beerbohm. Only . . . he was fond of other things too. He did not ask humanity to dine on pickles.

But while his kaleidoscope of fancy and epigram gives him some kinship with the present day, he was essentially of an earlier type: he was the last of the prophets. With him vanishes the secret of that early Victorian simplicity which gave a man the courage to mount a pulpit above the head of his fellows. Many elements, good and bad, have destroyed it, humility as well as fear, camaraderie as well as scepticism, have bred in us a desire to give our advice lightly and persuasively, to mask our morality, to whisper a word and glide away. The contrast was in some degree typified in the House of Commons under the last leadership of Mr Gladstone: the old order with its fist on the box, and the new order with its feet on the table. Doubtless the wine of that prophesy was too strong even for the strong heads that carried it. It made Ruskin capricious and despotic, Tennyson lonely and whimsical, Carlyle harsh to the point of hatred, and Kingsley often rabid to the ruin of logic and charity. One alone of that race of giants, the greatest and most neglected, was sober after the cup. No mission, no frustration could touch with hysteria the humanity of Robert Browning.

But though Ruskin seems to close the roll of the militant prophets, we feel how needful are such figures when we consider with what pathetic eagerness men pay prophetic honours even to those who disclaim the prophetic character. Ibsen declares that he only depicts life, that as far as he is concerned there is nothing to be done, and still armies of `Ibsenites' rally to the flag and enthusiastically do nothing. I have found traces of a school which avowedly follows Mr Henry James: an idea full of humour. I like to think of a crowd with pikes and torches shouting passages from The Awkward Age. It is right and proper for a multitude to declare its readiness to follow a prophet to the end of the world, but if he himself explains, with pathetic gesticulations, that he is only going for a walk in the park, there is not much for the multitude to do. But the disciple of Ruskin had plenty to do. He made roads; in his spare moments he studied the whole of geology and botany. He lifted up paving stones and got down into early Florentine cellars, where, by hanging upside down, he could catch a glimpse of a Cimabue unpraisable but by divine silence. He rushed from one end of a city to the other comparing ceilings. His limbs were weary, his clothes were torn, and in his eyes was that unfathomable joy of life which man will never know again until once more he takes himself seriously.

Mr Collingwood's excellent chapters on the art criticism of Ruskin would be better, in my opinion, if they showed more consciousness of the after revolutions that have reversed, at least in detail, much of Ruskin's teaching. We no longer think that art became valueless when it was first corrupted with anatomical accuracy. But if we return to that Raphaelism to which he was so unjust, let us not fall into the old error of intelligent reactionaries, that of ignoring our own debt to revolutions. Ruskin could not destroy the market of Raphaelism, but he could and did destroy its monopoly. We may go back to the Renaissance, but let us remember that we go back free. We can picnic now in the ruins of our dungeon and deride our deliverer.

But neither in Mr Collingwood's book nor in Ruskin's own delightful Praeterita shall we ever get to the heart of the matter. The work of Ruskin and his peers remains incomprehensible by the very completeness of their victory. Fallen for ever is that vast brick temple of Utilitarianism, of which we may find the fragments but never renew the spell. Its records read with something of the mysterious arrogance of Chinese: hardly a generation away from us, we read of a race who believed in the present with the same sort of servile optimism with which the Oriental believes in the past. It may be that banging his head against that roof for twenty years did not improve the temper of the prophet. But he made what he praised in the old Italian pictures— ‘an opening into eternity’.

Literature of Information

It is natural and proper enough that the masses of explosive ammunition stored up in detective stories, and the replete and solid sweet-stuff shops which are called sentimental novelettes, should be popular with the ordinary customer. It is not difficult to realise that all of us, ignorant or cultivated, are primarily interested in murder and love-making. The really extraordinary thing is that the most appalling fictions are not actually so popular as that literature which deals with the most indisputed and depressing facts; men are not apparently so interested in murder and love-making as they are in the number of different forms of latch-key which exist in London, or the time it would take a grasshopper to jump from Cairo to the Cape. The enormous mass of fatuous and useless truth which fills the most widely circulated papers, such as Tit Bits, Science Siftings, and many of the illustrated magazines, is certainly one of the most extraordinary kinds of emotional and mental pabulum on which man ever fed. It is almost incredible that these preposterous statistics should actually be more popular than the most blood-curdling mysteries and the most luxurious debauches of sentiment. To imagine it is like imagining the humorous passages in Bradshaw's Railway Guide read aloud on winter evenings. It is like conceiving a man unable to put down an advertisement of Mother Seigel's Syrup, because he wished to know what eventually happened to the young man who was extremely ill at Edinburgh. In the case of cheap detective stories and cheap novelettes we can most of us feel, whatever our degree of education, that it might be possible to read them if we gave full indulgence to a lower and more facile part of our natures. But the literature of information is absolutely mysterious to us. We can no more think of amusing ourselves with it than of reading whole pages of a Surbiton local directory. To read such things would not be a piece of vulgar indulgence; it would be a highly arduous and meritorious enterprise. It is this fact which constitutes a profound and almost unfathomable interest in this particular branch of popular literature.

Primarily, at least, there is one rather peculiar thing which must, in justice, be said about it. The readers of this strange science must be allowed to be, upon the whole, as disinterested as a prophet seeing visions or a child reading fairy tales. Here, again, we find, as we so often do, that whatever view of this matter of popular literature we can trust, we can trust least of all the comment and censure current among the vulgar educated. The ordinary version of the ground of this popularity for information, which would be given by a person of greater cultivation, would be that common men are chiefly interested in those sordid facts that surround them on every side. A very small degree of examination will show us that whatever ground there is for the popularity of these insane encyclopaedias, it cannot be the ground of utility. The version of life given by a penny novelette may be very moonstruck and unreliable, but it is at least more likely to contain facts relevant to daily life than compilations and the subject of the number of cows' tails that would reach the North Pole. There are many more people who are in love than there are people who have any intention of counting or collecting cows' tails. It is evident to me that the grounds of this widespread madness of information for information's sake must be sought in other and deeper parts of human nature than those daily needs that lie so near the surface that even social philosophers have discovered them, somewhere in that profound and eternal instinct for enthusiasm and minding other people's business which made great popular movements like the Crusades or the Gordon Riots.

I once had the pleasure of knowing a man who actually talked in private life after the manner of these papers. His conversation consisted of fragmentary statements about height and weight and depth, and time and population, and his conversation was a nightmare of dullness. During the shortest pause he would ask whether his interlocutors were aware how many tons of rust were scraped every year off the Menai Bridge, and how many rival shops Mr Whiteley had bought up since he opened his business. The attitude of his acquaintances towards this inexhaustible entertainer varied according to his presence or absence between indifference and terror. It was frightful to think of a man's brain being stocked with such inexpressibly profitless treasures. It was like visiting some imposing British Museum and finding its galleries and glass cases filled with specimens of London mud, of common mortar, or broken walking sticks, and cheap tobacco. Years afterwards I discovered that this intolerable prosaic bore had been in fact a poet. I learnt that every item of this multitudinous information was totally and unblushingly untrue, that for all I knew he had made it up as he went along, that no tons of rust are scraped off the Menai Bridge, and that the rival tradesmen and Mr Whiteley were creatures of the poet’s brain. Instantly I conceived consuming respect for the man who was so circumstantial, so monotonous, so entirely purposeless a liar. With him it must have been a case of art for art’s sake. The joke sustained so gravely through a respected lifetime was of that order of joke which is shared with omniscience. But what struck me more cogently upon reflection was the fact that these immeasurable trivialities, which had struck me as utterly vulgar and arid when I thought they were true, immediately became picturesque and almost brilliant when I thought they were inventions of the human fancy. And here, as it seems to me, I laid my finger upon a fundamental quality of the cultivated class which prevents it, and will, perhaps, always prevent it, from seeing with the eyes of popular imagination. The merely educated can scarcely ever be brought to believe that this world is itself an interesting place; when they look at a work of art, good or bad, they expect to be interested, but when they look at a newspaper advertisement or a group in the street, they do not, properly and literally speaking, expect to be interested. But to common and simple people this world is a work of art, though it is, like many great works of art, anonymous. They look to life for interest with the same kind of cheerful and ineradicable assurance with which we look for interest at a comedy, for which we have paid money at the door. To the eyes of the ultimate school of contemporary fastidiousness, the universe is indeed an ill-drawn and over-coloured picture, the scrawling in circles of a baby upon the slate of night; its starry skies are a vulgar pattern which they would not have for a wallpaper, its flowers and fruits have a Cockney brilliancy, like the holiday hat of a flower-girl. Hence, degraded by art to its own level, they have lost altogether that primitive and typical taste of man, the taste for news. By this essential taste for news, I mean the pleasure in hearing the mere fact that a man has died at the age of one hundred and ten in South Wales, or that the horses ran away at a funeral in San Francisco. Large masses of the early faiths and politics of the world, numbers of the miracles and heroic anecdotes, are based primarily upon this love of something that has just happened, this divine institution of gossip. When Christianity was named the good news, it spread rapidly, not only because it was good, but also because it was news. So it is that if any of us have ever spoken to a navvy in a train about the daily paper, we have generally found the navvy interested, not in those struggles of Parliaments and trades unions which sometimes are, and are always supposed to be, for his benefit, but in the fact that an unusually large whale has been washed up on the coast of Orkney, or that some leading millionaire like Mr Harmsworth is reported to break a hundred pipes a year. The educated classes, cloyed and demoralised with the mere indulgence of art and mood, can no longer understand the idle and splendid disinterestedness of the reader of Pearson's Weekly. He still keeps something of that feeling which should be the birthright of men, the feeling that this planet is like a new house into which we have just moved our baggage. Any detail of it has a value, and with a truly sportsmanlike instinct the average man takes most pleasure in the details which are most complicated, irrelevant, and at once difficult and useless to discover. Those parts of the newspaper which announce the giant gooseberry and the raining frogs are really the modern representatives of the popular tendency which produced the hydra and the were-wolf and the dog-headed men. Folk in the Middle Ages were not interested in a dragon or a glimpse of the devil because they thought that it was a beautiful prose idyll, but because they thought that it had really just been seen. It was not like so much artistic literature, a refuge indicating the dullness of the world; it was an incident pointedly illustrating the fecund poetry of the world.

That much can be said, and is said, against the literature of information, I do not for a moment deny. It is shapeless, it is trivial, it may give an unreal air of knowledge, it unquestionably lies along with the rest of popular literature under the general indictment that it may spoil the chance of better work, certainly by wasting time, possibly by ruining taste. But these obvious objections are the objections which we hear so persistently from everyone that one cannot help wondering where the papers in question procure their myriads of readers. The natural necessity and natural good underlying such crude institutions is far less often a subject of speculation; yet the healthy hungers which lie at the back of the habits of modern democracy are surely worthy of the same sympathetic study that we give to the dogmas of the fanatics long dethroned and the intrigues of commonwealths long obliterated from the earth. And this is the base and consideration which I have to offer: that perhaps the taste for the shreds and patches of journalistic science and history is not, as is continually asserted, the vulgar and senile curiosity of a people that has grown old, but simply the babyish and indiscriminate curiosity of a people still young, and entering history for the first time. In other words, I suggest that they only tell each other in magazines the same kind of stories of commonplace portents and conventional eccentricities which, in any case, they would tell each other in taverns. Science itself is only the exaggeration and specialisation of this thirst for useless fact, which is the mark of the youth of man. But science has become strangely separated from the mere news and scandal of flowers and birds; men have ceased to see that a pterodactyl was as fresh and natural as a flower, that a flower is as monstrous as a pterodactyl. The rebuilding of this bridge between science and human nature is one of the greatest needs of mankind. We have all to show that before we go on to any visions or creations we can be contented with a planet of miracles.

Eulogy of Robin Hood

The notion that the historic past, and particularly the Middle Ages, was a mass of negligible darkness is pretty well gone by this time; and there are quite a large number of people engaged in collecting the original costumes, and the genuine ballads, and the authentic frying pans of the twelfth century. The only thing that I never can understand about these people is why instead of admiring the doings of these ages, they do not merely do them. If ever there does appear a valid instance of these ancient observances continuing in actual operation at the present day, the antiquarians simply faint in the street at the sight of it. For example, most of my aesthetic friends lie awake at night dreaming of the reinstitution of some beautiful pagan festival, and yet none of them (for I have tempted them all) can eat four helpings of Christmas pudding. Christmas, with its sausages and its stars, is the very historic thing that they are talking about, but they resent it merely because it is still alive.

Another and much stronger instance of this truth occurred to me the other day. I was walking down a small and ugly street and happened to be reading the first printed version of a ballad of Robin Hood. Raising my eyes (I had just knocked over a man selling matches) I found myself staring at a glaring stack of `penny dreadfuls’ in a dirty paper shop. They were inscribed, `The Adventures of Robin Hood’. `Here,’ I said, `I have at last an unbroken English tradition, known in the time of Edward I, known in the time of Mr Harmsworth.’ And the more I compared the old ballad with the `penny dreadful’, the more I saw their resemblance to each other. Both were traditional; both contained repetitions; both were multiplied endlessly; both were adventurous; both were popular; both were anonymous. In both cases the great bulk of the work was not interesting from a literary, but most interesting from an ethical and historic point of view. Both kinds of work were profoundly English; both were profoundly, and almost depressingly, moral. In one point only they differed; that the antiquarians and the aesthetes adore the one without any reason, and despise the other without any reason. Both stand as an everlasting protest of the human spirit against the modern idolatry of art; and in nothing more than in their most fascinating characteristic, their inordinate length. The modern world thinks short stories artistic, mistaking a weak digestion for a fine palate. So has arisen the preposterous paradox that the old spirit exhibited in the long books and the long ballads was not literary, because it liked to have so much literature. It is somewhat parallel to the equally strange assertion that religion was at enmity with life because it refused to believe in the finality and victory of death. Sceptics say that the saints were the foes of life because they desired life to last for ever. And pedants say that the old story-tellers were the foes of literature because they desired a book to last for ever.

In these Robin Hood ballads there is almost every bracing and popular element; there is one above all, the moral and melodramatic. We can all remember when we began first to feel that there was something pompous and ludicrous in the morals of the melodrama, began to feel uncomfortable when the heroine said, `Would you have me sell my child?' or when the burglar spared the infant because of the little ones at home. Then we read Kipling and the realists, and were refreshed and invigorated with their salt and stinging candour; we wept sacred tears when we read of a woman whose personal affection expressed itself not by saying, `How can I sell my own child?' but by saying, `Took for a common drunk. Gawd send they don't look at 'is boots.' Artistically we were quite right. The Kipling story, with its savage pleasantry and its colossal cynicism, is immeasurably superior in almost everything there is to the strained romantic melodrama; but it has one inferiority. It is not so like life. The Adelphi play gives a much more accurate version of the solemn, magnanimous, vainglorious pose which the average man really adopts in matters he thinks important. The poor do, indeed, employ a gross fantasy of speech (such as `Gawd send', etc.) when they wish to be satiric or frivolous; but that is simply their literature; slang is a kind of deliberate song. But when they are talking seriously they do talk pompously. A man has only to walk down the Battersea Highroad on a Saturday night to hear round him one universal chatter of such things as `How can I sell my own child?' And as for the burglar who thinks of the little ones at home, every evidence in life and the newspapers seems to support the hypothesis that criminals are sentimental, and I can readily believe in that burglar.

Now, these Robin Hood ballads, as I say, show among other things an amusing proof of this popularity, this antiquity, this intense realism of sentimental melodrama. Let me give an example. Mr W. S. Gilbert (perhaps the most brilliant Rationalist writer of the nineteenth century) made admirable fun in The Pirates of Penzance of the preposterous tradition of the generosity of freebooters. He represented the pirate as making it a rule to spare orphans, and being in consequence somewhat perplexed to find them apparently crossing the sea in shiploads. But when we look at these rude and bloody legends of a rude and bloody age, the ballads of Robin Hood, we find an altruism wilder than that of the Pirate of Penzance. The capering satire of the nineteenth century is positively less fantastic than the reality of the thirteenth. For while Mr Gilbert’s pirate only marked off one class, that of orphans, the oldest ballad of Robin Hood (which I was reading in the street) depicts that hero as giving a whole catalogue of people who are not to be molested. And it is scarcely any exaggeration to say that the catalogue includes almost everyone whom it would occur to an outlaw to molest. No honest yeoman working his plot of land, no good farmer, no brave knight kind to his people, etc., etc., is to be touched by these discriminating bandits. What is the use of denouncing sentimentalism as something artificial and protected when we have it here plainly written in the black letter of a brutal and naked age? No, it is realism that is artificial and melodrama that is human. The slangy short stories are written by pale men in libraries; the melodramas are written by men of the people. The case of the people is very like the similar case of schoolboys. Stalky and Co. is undoubtedly a much more artistic creation than Eric or Little by Little. But Eric is immeasurably more like school life, and more like it precisely because it is crude, because it is precocious, because it is moral.

I may be carried away by an excessive patriotism (I hope I am), but I cannot help fancying that there is something about this egregious nobility in the old ballads that is peculiarly English. There is certainly in these Robin Hood tales an element which can only be described as a sort of stupid magnanimity, a certain kind of generosity which is quite distinct in its colour from the chivalry of France or the tenderness of Ireland. It consists in a great natural gusto in the recognition of opponents. The collected records of Robin Hood become perfectly monotonous at last, as they relate the number of people who vanquished the hero, and whom he warmly commended. There is, of course, a great deal of English vanity about these admissions; the implication is, `How splendid you must be, as you have conquered such a one as I’. But this self-satisfaction is an eternal English trait. The great English generosity is really in these ballads. There is nothing that Robin Hood seems to like so much as being knocked down by somebody, and getting up and telling him how fine a fellow he must be. It is useless for Mr Henley and such prophets of revenge to go back to our old English literature; they will not find what they want. Here are songs written by a rude people in an age of bludgeons and gibbets, here is the rawest and plainest utterance of primitive England, and if there be one truth that runs from one end of it to the other, it is `the policy of Majuba'.

A Plea for Hasty Journalism

My last week’s article, which reads worse in print than anything I have ever had the misfortune to read, was written under an opulent beech-tree on a walking tour, and only just caught the post. I do not mention this fact merely in order to introduce the adjective `opulent’ — admirable as it is — nor do I do it out of mere egotism; for egotism is even more of a nuisance to the ego than it is to other people. The precept `know thyself’ did not fall from heaven; it fell upstairs from the other place. I decline to know myself; he is not in my set. He is an unknown benefactor of mine, who prefers to remain anonymous. Nor do I mention it out of any pride in the walking tour; for, to tell the truth, my walking tour chiefly consisted of sitting under opulent beech-trees for very long periods and at very short intervals. I state the circumstances under which the article was written because I am convinced that this is the only moral thing to do. Journalism would be far more honest if it dropped its tone of monastic meditation and Papal gravity, and talked a little more about the commonplace conditions of muddle and procrastination and flurry and scurry in which it is really produced. And I wish that at the beginning or end of all the articles we read, there were a brief note stating the situation in which the work was written. Thus we should read, `Will Australia adopt Bimetallism?’ then, in small letters, `Top of Omnibus’; or some such place in which we journalists do most of our learned research and compilation. We should see in some excited morning paper the headlines, `Battle at Ping Cho still in Progress, by an Eyewitness. Latest’. Then in the usual place would be the note, `A.B.C. shop, Strand’. The title, `Should Spinsters Marry Widowers?’ would be annotated with `Swan and Elephant, 12.15’, and so on. Perhaps, as rather longer descriptions would often be required, it might be as well to confine the matter to a system of easily recognised initials. Thus, for instance, `How England could be Invaded. L.S.R.D.’ (Lodgings at the Seaside. Rainy Day); or `Buddhism and the German Pessimists: a Parallel. C.W.P.P.S.’ (Cottage. Wallpaper with Pink Spots). The thing would throw a kind of flush of colour into our articles. Nature would creep into them as she creeps into the colour of flowers and wine.

Of course I am for righteousness, and all that. But, as I say, I think this plan of talking about the way the thing is done is really a vast deal more righteous than the present habit of keeping up an enormous pomposity of veil and temple. A good many people who say they want journalism to be honest really want it to be solemn. But honesty is never solemn; it is only hypocrisy that can be that. Honesty always laughs, because things are so laughable. It remembers what a queer thing is man — a creature that picks up objects lying all round him (eggs, water-melons, sheep, and so on), and packs them into himself as if he were a carpetbag. It remembers that the very bones of our heads are grinning. And so you will always find in every age that very sincere men are accused of what is called `blasphemy' (it was Caiaphas's charge) — blasphemy, which means taking things too lightly. The people who can be consistently and entirely solemn are the people who have no convictions at all. Look at them, as they walk down Band Street, in their burnished hats. No belief on any earthly subject has ever broken into the perfection of that innocent and colossal gravity. It is the same, I fear, with most of the great bigwigs of our trade, with the men who write leading articles especially. They are not sincere enough to take anything lightly. If the leader-writer on The Times were sincere (intellectually sincere, I mean), if he became in his own mind serious and real for a second, the consequences would be awful. The terrified sub-editors would peer into his room and see him rolling about on the floor in an agony of laughter, curled up, screaming and kicking — a new problem in the office.

The first step in the making and keeping of journalism an honest thing, is to confess that it is journalism and nothing more. It is a thing produced in a violent hurry, generally in the middle of the night, by men who (terrible as it may sound to say so) are commonly of the average human intelligence. It cannot be accurate. It can be honest; and if it is honest it will own — nay, vaunt — its ingrained and necessary inaccuracy. Its object is not to tell the absolute truth about Russian gunnery or Canadian finance. But its object is, or ought to be, to tell the absolute truth about the minds and convictions of the men who write it.

The real journalistic sin is not that the leading article should misrepresent history (for who will ever be certain what represents history?); the real sin is that the articles should misrepresent the journalist's own soul. This is vile and by no means uncommon. But it is less likely, obviously, to happen when a man writes hastily than when he writes carefully. The slap-dash style is all on the side of morality.

A paper ought not to be an encyclopaedia — nor, perhaps, to puff one. Both the paper and the encyclopaedia have, of course, eventually the same fate. They are both proved wrong. But the difference is this: that the paper comes out so quickly that even its mistakes are important, while the encyclopaedia comes out so late that even its discoveries do not matter. The newspaper should be the best account of the daily impressions of an intelligent man on one side or the other. If it is anything else but this, it is, or tends to be, a fraud. Honest milk is milk that is milky; honest wine is wine that is wine, and nothing else; honest journalism is journalism that is journalistic. To be journalistic is to be daily, to be constantly receiving impressions vividly and expressing them with absolute fidelity. Give us a frivolous journalism, and we will save England.

The Voice of Shelley

I have recently been remonstrated with upon two points — first, that I called Nero an artist; and second, that I called Shelley a typical aristocrat. The first query is somewhat easily answered. I called Nero an artist because he was an artist. He loved art in every form all his life, and his last words were a poetical quotation. If he fiddled while Rome was burning, he thought quite as much of the fiddle as he did of the fire. And if he thought a great deal of the fire, it was from the simple, and from his point of view unanswerable, reason that a fire is a very artistic thing. Mr Max Beerbohm in one of his most delightful and absurd essays has denounced the fire brigade as a band of vandals who destroy a `fair thing'. He has threatened to start an opposition fire brigade whose pipes shall be filled not with water but with oil. Nero was only Max made serious; Nero was only Max without his good nature; Nero was only Max in action.

But the aim I had in mentioning him is very simple. A defender of undenominationalism spoke of giving his hand to every man who was working for his highest, thereby implying, as it seemed to me, that if a man put something or other highest it did not in practice matter very much what it was. To this I replied that it seemed to me a very awful and urgent matter whether a man put the right thing or the wrong thing highest; that to put the right thing highest was very difficult, and to put the wrong thing very deadly. A salient example of this is the pursuit of mere art or beauty. The moment a man puts beauty higher than love Nero becomes a logical possibility.

The other matter, it may be, is less obvious, but not, I think, less true. When I call Shelley a typical aristocrat; I have fully in remembrance all his revolutionary ardour and his almost anarchic ideality; I do not call Shelley an aristocrat in spite of these things; I call him an aristocrat because of them. The true aristocrat is by nature an anarchist. The aristocrat was and is the person desiring to do as he liked. His castle was a defiance of the decent orders of the king. His motorcar was a defiance of the decent orders of the democracy. The gentlemen of real history were never anything but rowdy. They were admired for being rowdy. They were hanged for being rowdy. They are no longer hanged which seems to me to mark a considerable falling-off in the fullness of the control of the democracy. They are still admired.

Now all this patrician rebelliousness seems to me to have been built into the blood and bone of Shelley, as into the blood and bone of Byron. It was the subconscious foundation upon which he erected his republican idealism. Shelley loved liberty as all aristocrats love liberty. Shelley hated kings as all aristocrats hated kings; the feud between them has flamed since the beginning of the world. Shelley hated priests, and hated them most of all; for priests represent a startling and supernatural denial of the gradations of mankind; an aristocracy can submit to a king or humour a democracy, but another aristocracy is too much for them. Of course, Shelley, a man of quite crystalline sincerity, did not know that his anarchism had this feudal foundation; he imagined, I have no doubt, that he was a veritable voice of the people. His voice is the voice of liberty, it is the voice of beauty, it is the voice of change, and even the voice of revolution, but whatever it is it is never the voice of the people. There is not enough pain in it, and there is not enough laughter. There is not enough of that clean thing which Shelley and many other fine gentlemen would call coarseness. Shelley was idealistic; he was lyric; he was a hundred things, but there were two things that he never was. He was never comic and he was never tragic. Everything that comes out of the common heart, the heart of the real people, is comic and tragic.

There are only two kinds of ballads, recurrent and permanent, coming from the community itself. There are sad ballads about broken hearts and cheerful ballads about broken heads. There is not a trace of this popular quality in Shelley anywhere. It is not necessary, however, in order to indicate this truth to compare Shelley with any folk literature of other times or places. We can compare him with another poet, another democratic idealist, another man moved by the French Revolution, living almost in Shelley’s time, and almost in Shelley’s country, a man who differed from Shelley in nothing except that he was really a man of the people. To think of him after Shelley is like swallowing fire after swallowing water. It is not so easy to get out of one’s mouth the stinging taste of the sweetness and bitterness of Burns.

Shelley never came to that queer common place where grand passion meets the grotesque; where the cross is a sublime gibbet and the gibbet a caricature of the cross. That is the first and best reason why he was never of the people. But there were other reasons as well. One wholly non-popular element in him was his anarchism. The poor are not anarchists, and never can be anarchists. They live too close to life for such artistic trifling. When I speak of anarchism, of course I do not use the term in the exact sense which indicates a political programme. I do not mean that Shelley disapproved of all government though he sometimes used phrases which might be taken in this sense. But his trend and tone was to offer liberty and an escape from rule as a panacea for the misfortunes of the people; and this is not a genuine popular trend or tone. The people know that life cannot be conducted without rules. The people is the maker and keeper of all custom, tradition and convention, just as it is the maker and (except, perhaps, in modern England) the keeper of all religion. Shelley never understood any of these deep tides in the profanum vulgus. And with all his many princely virtues I do not think I am doing him any injustice if I say that he never tried to understand them.

The Great Translation

The Jacobean translation of the Bible has one real claim to be English. Many of the eulogies about its Protestant purity and its Anglo-Saxon empire building are partisan and fantastic. But it is in this immense sense national, that it is anonymous. The translation, as a translation, is as English as the ballads about Robin Hood, which were written by everybody and nobody. It is true that the learned bishops and dons who translated it were far from regarding themselves as nobodies. But in the history of English literature they are nobodies; only they are immortal nobodies. It is impossible to point to a single great man who is responsible for this masterpiece of verbal music. At the very time when the translation was being made there were in England greater literary men than she is ever likely to see again. But by no conceivable trick or turn of circumstance can Bacon or Burton, Jonson or Shakespeare, have had anything to do with the translation of the Bible. It was done by a mob of bishops; that is, a mob of simple and well-meaning men. The enemies of the Bible have been heard to describe it as Jewish folklore; of course, in a bad sense. In any case, our translation is English folklore — and that in the best sense. England wrote it; no mere Englishman could have done so.

`How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good news.' That is as light and as leaping and as classically pure as Spenser. But Spenser had nothing to do with it; some ordinary parson wrote it.

`And his driving is as the driving of Jehu, the son of Nimshi; for he drives furiously.' That is far more vigorous than Chapman or Ford. But Chapman and Ford had nothing to do with it; it was done by some common clergyman.

`Where there is no vision the people perish.' That is as plain and picturesque as Bunyan. But Bunyan had nothing to do with it; in fact, he was not born. It may seem a strange matter that these pompous big-wigs summoned by so stiff a Scotch pedant as James I should be ultimately urged as an argument for popularism and the populace. And yet they are one of its strongest arguments. They show how well quite commonplace people can write when they are writing about something that is not commonplace.

That is the plain element of patriotic importance in the translation. It is the last collective creation of our people. It is the last case in which everybody reads the book and nobody asks the author. After that England left off writing. Englishmen rushed into the breach and tried to write, not altogether without success. Milton, Dryden, Addison, Dr Johnson, made a very good show of it. But almost at once they were flooded by forces not English; by Irishmen like Swift and Goldsmith, by Scotchmen like Hume and Scott. We are right to treat this book, even as an English book, as authoritative. It may or may not record the real origin of the Jews; but I am sure that it records the real end of the English.

There comes a perfect moment when there is no difference between language and literature. Prose is poetry without knowing it; it is as if an absentminded poet always said good morning in metre, or asked us to pass the potatoes in impromptu and unconscious rhyme. Imagine that we all talked poetry all day long; suppose we asked for a ticket with a triolet; suppose we used a post-card only for the purpose (which its shape obviously suggests) of writing a sonnet. Suppose, whenever we talk about the weather, we talk as Shelley wrote about the weather. Suppose, whenever we use a term of affection, it is like one of the great love songs. If we fancy some such condition, we may begin to imagine what really happens when a language is in its perfection. Everything said goes to an inaudible tune; as to a march of totally muffled drums. The poetry has got inside the prose of life, and moves all its limbs into a rhythm and beat of beauty.

The English of the English Bible is not merely splendid about splendid things; it is splendid about everything. In any modern leading article we might see the words `We cannot understand why English watering-places like Bath or Brighton are not as adequate as foreign watering-places like Baden or Dieppe; nor why those who seek the one should not as reasonably seek the other.' And that would be perfectly good modern English. It is not mere religious association that makes us see better English in `Are not Pharpar and Abanah, the waters of Damascus, better than all the waters of Jordan, and may I not wash in them and be clean?' It is really the perfection of style; it is poetry inside prose.

Any magazine article might contain the paragraph: `The enthusiast must always be discouraged by certain perishability in all popular things. The mass of mankind seems so plainly a mere part of nature, that it is hard to believe that all their ideas are not at once as monotonous and as fickle as the physical universe; nevertheless, the best philosopher will always return to the idea of an order and a reason in things.’ That would be perfectly sound, intelligent modern English.

It is not mere religious tradition that makes us think that this is better: `The voice said, Cry; and he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.’

And then, as in an answer across an abyss: `The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever.’

It is not the glamour of an ancient language. It is simply a much better use of the modern one.

In one of those tremendous passages that pierce through all languages and belong to the sacred Scripture itself, one of the prophets speaks of the perfect time as a time when all the vessels shall be as vessels before the altar, and on every pot in Jerusalem shall be written `Holy unto the Lord’. That is what the English translation, by a literary accident, really managed to achieve. The phrase `verbal inspiration’ may be orthodox or unorthodox about the Bible in its supernatural sense. But it is very nearly true about the English translation in a secondary and merely human sense. The dull parts of the narrative are not dull; the trivial details are not trivial, because they are all lifted up on this last great wave of the poetical English language. Everyone, revolutionist and reactionary, is in our time saying that domestic things must be dull, that common things must be commonplace. Everyone is saying, though with much less literary brevity, `Surely the people is grass’. But in our sterile time we have never guessed how tall the grass can grow.

Jane Austen’s Juvenilia

In a recent newspaper controversy about the conventional silliness and sameness of all the human generations previous to our own, somebody said that in the world of Jane Austen a lady was expected to faint when she received a proposal. To those who happen to have read any of the works of Jane Austen, the connection of ideas will appear slightly comic. Elizabeth Bennet, for instance, received two proposals from two very confident and even masterful admirers; and she certainly did not faint. It would be nearer the truth to say that they did. But in any case it may be amusing to those who are thus amused, and perhaps even instructive to those who thus need to be instructed, to know that the earliest work of Jane Austen might be called a satire on the fable of the fainting lady. `Beware of fainting fits . . . though at times they may be refreshing and agreeable yet believe me they will in the end, if too often repeated and at improper seasons, prove destructive to your Constitution.’ Such were the words of the expiring Sophia to the afflicted Laura; and there are modern critics capable of adducing them as a proof that all society was in a swoon in the first decade of the nineteenth century. But in truth it is the whole point of this little skit that the swoon of sensibility is not satirised solely because it was a fiction. Laura and Sophia are made ludicrously unlike life by being made to faint as real ladies do not faint. Those ingenious moderns, who say that the real ladies did faint, are actually being taken in by Laura and Sophia, and believing them against Jane Austen. They are believing, not the people of the period but the most nonsensical novels of the period, which even the people of the period who read them did not believe. They have swallowed all the solemnities of The Mysteries of Udolpho, and never even seen the joke of Northanger Abbey.

For if these juvenilia of Jane Austen anticipate especially any of her after works, they certainly anticipate the satiric side of Northanger Abbey. Of their considerable significance on that side something may be said presently; but it will be well to preface it by a word about the works themselves as items of literary history. Everyone knows that the novelist left an unfinished fragment, since published under the name of The Watsons, and a finished story called Lady Susan, in letters, which she had herself apparently decided not to publish. These preferences are all prejudices, in the sense of matters of unmanageable taste; but I confess I think it a strange historical accident that things so comparatively dull as Lady Susan should have been printed already, while things so comparatively lively as Love and Friendship should never have been printed until now. It is at least a curiosity of literature that such curiosities of literature should have been almost accidentally concealed. Doubtless it was very rightly felt that we may go much too far in the way of emptying the waste-paper basket of a genius on the head of the public; and that there is a sense in which the waste-paper basket is as sacred as the grave. But without arrogating to myself any more right in the matter than anybody has to his own taste, I hope I may be allowed to say that I for one would have willingly left Lady Susan in the waste-paper basket, if I could have pieced together Love and Friendship for a private scrap-book; a thing to laugh over again and again as one laughs over the great burlesques of Peacock or Max Beerbohm.

Jane Austen left everything she possessed to her sister Cassandra, including these and other manuscripts; and the second volume of them containing these was left by Cassandra to her brother, Admiral Sir Francis Austen. He gave it to his daughter Fanny, who left it in turn to her brother Edward, who was the Rector of Barfrestone in Kent, and the father of Mrs Sanders, to whose wise decision we owe the publication of these first fancies of her great-aunt; whom it might be misleading here to call her great great-aunt. Everyone will judge for himself; but I myself think she has added something intrinsically important to literature and to literary history; and that there are cartloads of printed matter, regularly recognised and printed with the works of all great authors, which are far less characteristic and far less significant than these few nursery jests.

For Love and Friendship, with some similar pages in the accompanying fragments, is really a rattling burlesque; something much better than what the ladies of the time called an agreeable rattle. It is one of those things that can be the more readily read with enjoyment through being written with enjoyment; in other words, it is all the better for being juvenile in the sense of being joyful. She is said to have written these things at the age of seventeen, evidently in much the same spirit in which people conduct a family magazine; for the medallions included in the manuscript were the work of her sister Cassandra. The whole thing is full of the sort of high spirits that are always higher in private than in public; as people laugh louder in the house than in the street. Many of her admirers would not expect, perhaps many of her admirers would not admire, the sort of fun to be found in the letter to the young lady `whose feelings were too strong for her judgment', and who remarks incidentally `I murdered my father at a very early period in my life, I have since murdered my mother, and I am now going to murder my sister'. Personally, I think it admirable; not the conduct, but the confession. But there is much more than hilarity in the humour, even at this stage of its growth. There is almost everywhere a certain neatness in the nonsense. There is not a little of the true Austen irony. 'The noble Youth informed us that his name was Lindsay — for particular reasons, however, I shall conceal it under that of Talbot.' Did anyone really desire that to disappear into the waste-paper basket? `She was nothing more than a mere good-tempered, civil and obliging young woman; as such we could scarcely dislike her — she was only an object of contempt.' Is not that something like the first faint line in the figure of Fanny Price? When a loud knocking is heard on the door of the Rustic Cot by the Uske, the heroine's father enquires the nature of the noise, and by cautious steps of inference they are enabled to define it as somebody outside striking the door. `"Yes" (exclaimed I) "I cannot help thinking it must be somebody who knocks for admittance." "That is another point" (replied he) "we must not pretend to determine on what motive the person may knock — tho' that some one does rap at the door I am partly convinced".' In the aggravating leisure and lucidity of that reply, is there not the foreshadowing of another and more famous father; and do we not hear for a moment, in the rustic cottage by the Uske, the unmistakable voice of Mr Bennet?

But there is a larger critical reason for taking pleasure in the gaiety of these various travesties and trifles. Mr Austen-Leigh seems to have thought them not sufficiently serious for the reputation of his great relative; but greatness is not made up of serious things, in the sense of solemn things. The reason here, however, is as serious as even he or anyone else could desire; for it concerns the fundamental quality of one of the finest talents in letters.

A very real psychological interest, almost amounting to a psychological mystery, attaches to any early work of Jane Austen. And for that one reason, among others, which has hardly been sufficiently emphasised. Great as she was, nobody was likely to maintain that she was a poet. But she was a marked example of what is said of the poet; she was born, not made. As compared with her, indeed, some of the poets really were made. Many men who had the air of setting the world on fire have left at least a reasonable discussion about what set them on fire. Men like Coleridge or Carlyle had certainly kindled their first torches from the flambeaux of equally fantastic German mystics or Platonic speculators; they had gone through furnaces of culture where even less creative people might have been inflamed to creation. Jane Austen was not inflamed or inspired or even moved to be a genius; she simply was a genius. Her fire, what there was of it, began with herself; like the fire of the first man who rubbed two dry sticks together. Some would say that they were very dry sticks which she rubbed together. It is certain that she by her own artistic talent made interesting what thousands of superficially similar people would have made dull. There was nothing in her circumstances, or even in her materials, that seems obviously meant for the making of such an artist. It might seem a very wild use of the wrong word to say that Jane Austen was elemental. It might even seem even a little wanton to insist that she was original. Yet this objection would come from the critic not really considering what is meant by an element or an origin. Perhaps it might be as well expressed in what is really meant by an individual. Her ability is an absolute; it cannot be analysed into influences. She has been compared to Shakespeare; and in this sense she really does recall the joke about the man who said he could write like Shakespeare if he had the mind. In this case we seem to see a thousand spinsters sitting at a thousand tea-tables; and they could all have written Emma, if they had the mind.

There is therefore, in considering even her crudest early experiments, the interest of looking at a mind and not at a mirror. She may not be conscious of being herself; yet she is not, like so many more cultivated imitators, conscious of being somebody else. The force, at its first and feeblest, is coming from within and not merely from without. This interest, which belongs to her as an individual with a superior instinct for the intelligent criticism of life, is the first of the reasons that justify a study of her juvenile works; it is an interest in the psychology of the artistic vocation. I will not say of the artistic temperament; for nobody ever had less of the tiresome thing commonly so described than Jane Austen. But while this alone would be a reason for finding out how her work began, it becomes yet more relevant when we have found out how it did begin. This is something more than the discovery of a document; it is the discovery of an inspiration. And that inspiration was the inspiration of Gargantua and of Pickwick; it was the gigantic inspiration of laughter.

If it seemed odd to call her elemental, it may seem equally odd to call her exuberant. These pages betray her secret; which is that she was naturally exuberant. And her power came, as all power comes, from the control and direction of exuberance. But there is the presence and pressure of that vitality behind her thousand trivialities; she could have been extravagant if she liked. She was the very reverse of a starched or a starved spinster; she could have been a buffoon like the Wife of Bath if she chose. This is what gives an infallible force to her irony. This is what gives a stunning weight to her understatements. At the back of this artist also, counted as passionless, there was passion; but her original passion was a sort of joyous scorn and a fighting spirit against all that she regarded as morbid and lax and poisonously silly. The weapons she forged were so finely finished that we might never have known this, but for these glimpses of the crude furnace from which they came. Finally there are two additional facts involved which I will leave the modern critics and correspondents in newspapers to ponder and explain at their leisure. One is that this realist, in rebuking the romantics, is very much concerned with rebuking them for the very thing for which revolutionary sentiment has so much admired them; as for their glorification of ingratitude to parents and their easy assumption that the old are always wrong. ‘No!’ says the noble Youth in Love and Friendship, `never shall it be said that I obliged my father.’ And the other is that there is not a shadow of indication anywhere that this independent intellect and laughing spirit was other than contented with a narrow domestic routine, in which she wrote a story as domestic as a diary in the intervals of pies and puddings, without so much as looking out of the window to notice the French Revolution.

The Countrymen of Mary Webb and Thomas Hardy

The work of Mary Webb had an aspect distinct from all the debate about it merely as a case of something first neglected because it was not advertised and then advertised because it was neglected. I am not claiming to be one of the discoverers: nor am I one of those who hastened to discover the thing after it had been discovered. I only read one of the writer's books, Precious Bane, and that struck me as strangely and very individually beautiful; but I thought it unique in every sense of the word, and never even knew if the writer's name were known, or if she had written anything else. But the book left a very strong impression on my mind, and especially in one respect. It is very vivid and at the same time indescribable. Perhaps the hint is in the word 'precious' in Precious Bane. Not that Mrs Webb was in the least precious in the priggish sense. I mean in the things of price: a richness in things commonly connected with bareness and poverty. Something of what is spoken of as the gorgeous East, rested like the transparent colours of a rainbow, upon a landscape very typical of the West. Perhaps we sometimes forget, when we talk of Orient pearls and gold, that the sunset can be rich as well as the sunrise.

The romance described rustics in an age when they were even ruder than they were in the tales of Hardy or the poems of Housman. Nor was there the smallest attempt to idealise the life in the sense of suiting it to the rather low ideal of modern sentiment and comfort. The country was not turned into an Arcadia even of the really natural grace of Virgil or Theocritus; still less are the peasants turned into stage peasants or the shepherdess to a china shepherdess. The thing I mean by riches is something more subtle even than happiness. These peasants live a hard life; they probably on occasion live a hungry life; they are quite capable in some circumstances of living a gross or ferocious life. But they do, in a very deep sense, live a full life. And that is where the very atmosphere of the book differs from that of Hardy or of many striking and valuable books upon the same theme; books that have, indeed, found grandeur and even beauty in such a primitive existence, but have found only the beauty of bare rocks or the grandeur of the desert. The atmosphere of such books is that of stoicism, if not pessimism. The atmosphere of this book is that of mysticism; and we feel that the rustics themselves are not only the mysteries but also the mystics. It is inadequate to say, by one of those critical phrases which become only too quickly cant phrases, that the story is full of colour. The stories of Thomas Hardy, for instance, are undoubtedly full of colour. Men have used the metaphors of cloud and darkness in talking, whether justly or unjustly, of his metaphysical and moral ideas. But whatever may be true of his ideas, this is certainly not true of his imagery. The pictures that remain in my own memory, and I imagine in most other memories, of a first reading of the Wessex Tales, are rather specially picked out in strong sunlight. Nothing could be clearer than the outlines or brighter than the hues of some of those bright and cruel comedies of love and hate, along the white roads or on the great green hills. If his characters were indeed only puppets of destiny, they were often very gaily dressed puppets. There is no lack of light, if it be sometimes as deadly as lightning; and though he insisted too much that there is no rose without a thorn, he never failed to give very rich tints to the roses.

But there is in Hardy’s work, as in all work really belonging to a pagan world, this character: that all the light is shining on things and not through them. It is all the difference between the gaiety of an old pagan painting or mosaic and the burning clarity of a medieval window. And we do sometimes feel, in mere poverty, as in medieval austerity, that things may be bright by being transparent and transparent by being thin. If Hardy made a tragedy out of a tree and a well and a thunderstorm, he wanted to turn the strong sunlight on the scene almost like a theatrical limelight. He wanted the daylight to explore the well, we might almost say that he wanted the daylight to shine on and show up the darkness. But he did not mean, at any rate, not as the mystics can mean, that there was a mystery within the tree, making it truly a tree of life; or a special providence even in a falling thunderbolt. And if he thought that truth lay at the bottom of the well, I think it was commonly in the form of a corpse. At any rate, it was not in the form of a goddess or a nymph of the spring. He did not specially feel that a positive life, still less that a joyful life, was irradiating outwards through these things. He did not think that they meant something; he only thought that he meant something in saying that they meant nothing. The whole irony of his meaning is in that unmeaning world.

Now, Mary Webb and her peasants live in a very meaning world. Life, quite apart from the proportions of its sadness or gladness, is stuffed with significance. There is the silent pressure of a second sense in things; and a sort of halo round every object, whether of horror or tenderness. Thunderstorms are more than thunderstorms, and trees are more than trees, and the well is deeper than any man has known. This is expressed, merely externally, in a tangle of associations and traditions about all sorts of things; so that candles or cabbages or common objects of the kitchen may have dark properties. But it is the expression of a sense of fullness, as in the rain-cloud or even the thundercloud; and richness not only in the soul, but in the dark subsoil of existence. And I think this atmosphere is true, touching simple people, and all those who are near to the earth. Stupid people, hopelessly, hideously stupid people, generally call it superstition.

I mean that the more grimly realistic school is not wrong in being realistic, certainly not wrong in being tragic, but it is wrong, touching humanity of this type, in not being mystic. Common country folk like Tess or Jude the Obscure might well have been hurt as much as they were hurt, and cried out when they were hurt in a human fashion, and died when they were hurt too much, in the manner of all tragedy. But they would not have seen themselves in such hard and naked outline as the pessimistic novelist sees them. The whole thing would have been at once enriched and confused by the mystical traditions of mankind; by the remains of religion, by the hints of superstition, by the mystery of death which cuts both ways, like the two-edged sword of the angel. They would have felt desperate, but they would not have felt insignificant; they would have felt significant. That is the quality that clings to my memory out of that remarkable story, which I read so long ago — the story called Precious Bane. And it is connected with another quality in it, a quality very rare in recent literature; something which I can only call the note of nobility. Here again, there is something even in the title that suggests the truth. A precious thing does not merely mean a sumptuous thing, in the sense of something connected with gross luxury and wealth. A precious thing means something that is bought with a price; and in this case there is present the whole of that idea of the ancient price of sacrifice. That a bane can be precious is not a fashionable doctrine just now. Nor do I propose to debate its moral implications in this passing literary note. But it is certain that, wherever that conception is present in literature, there is made possible a poetic height and the breathing of a spiritual air that are never known where it is neglected; that even in the world of what is purely artistic, that degree of dignity is only attainable through something moral; and that, if there be art critics who care only for art, they would do well to keep martyrdom in the world, if only by making other people the martyrs.

The Words of Strong Poetry

The writing of Free Verse is currently compared to talking, as in the accepted French phrase about a causerie. And indeed any one who has conducted it so continuously and so long is apt to forget that anything he says may be taken down and used in evidence against him. I have always done my best to remember that I am rather in the dock than in the pulpit, and that I have very little to say, though I have said a good deal, to show why sentence of death should not be passed on me. When Science has really completed all these comforts which it promises mankind, and when all conversations are automatically taken down on a dictaphone or repeated on a phonograph, I rather doubt whether many people will want to put on the records. But, just as many a man has said that he hardly knew his own voice when it came back to him out of a gramophone, so I often wonder, when I chance to come in contact with some of the cracked and dreary records, how I failed to make my voice properly heard or my meaning sufficiently clear. Sometimes it arises from unavoidable hurry or pressure of work; sometimes from neglecting to explain things in their proper order and to put first things first. Sometimes I find I have taken things for granted, used words that have six or seven meanings, left out important steps of the argument, jumped to conclusions, and acted in short as if I were a Professor of Universal Science expounding an Outline of Universal History for Neglected Aunts and Uncles.

Many of these things are merely the inevitable disadvantages of the causerie; but there is one very real advantage in a causerie, even in the literal sense of a talk. Oliver Wendell Holmes expressed it excellently when he said that writing to a man was like firing at him with a gun, while talking to him was like playing on him with a garden-hose. In the first case it is hit and miss; in the second a man can correct his mistakes and correct his line of fire, or rather of water. In such a case, this kind of causerie has really some of the advantages of conversation. I will, therefore, have a shot at the free versifier; or rather (being too humane to shoot him, and very likely to miss him) I will continue to play on him benevolently with the hose, till he is soaked and dripping with the refreshing waters of Helicon, the true fount of free verse, with which I have the joy of sprinkling or asperging him.

I think the first truth about traditional metres is that there is a sort of speech that is stronger than speech. Not merely smoother or sweeter or more melodious or even more beautiful; but stronger. Words are jointed together like bones; they are mortared together like bricks; they are close and compact and resistant; whereas, in all common conversational speech, every sentence is falling to pieces. Perhaps we recognise this latter fact when we talk about letting fall a remark or dropping a hint or throwing out an observation. All conversational speech or writing is under the curse of the Fall; it is under the law of gravitation; it is perpetually falling down, like the universe of Lucretius. But great poets do not drop hints or let observations fall; they lift them and hold them aloft, as the keystone of a strong arch thrusts up the stones, defying the law of gravity and the devil and all his angels. The words of strong poetry are packed as tight and solid as the stones of the arch. The lines of a good sonnet are like bridges of sound across abysses of silence. The boast of the bridges is that you could march armies across them; that a man can rest his weight on every word. The awful cry out of the last tragic trance of Othello, when he realises that death is as real as love, finds words worthy of itself; megalithic words; words not only of weight but weight-bearing; words strong enough to support him above the abyss. `If I quench thee, thou flaming minister . . .' The address to the candle might almost be called obscure, but it is not doubtful; it is not hesitant or wavering in words or the sound of words; it is rather as if a man were granted a greater thing than speech. And the effect is gained by this firmness in the words and the weight that can rest on them. `I know not where is that Promethean heat.' You could stand an elephant on that line. It is true, first of all, as a mere fact of acoustics, that there is not one weak syllable in the line. At the same time, there is also that strength of style that is like the strength of gesture. `I know not where' is the essential elemental cry of man, eternally ignorant of the beginning of life, or of how it may truly be renewed. And it is a plain and simple fact, whether we like it or not, that the words `I know not where' do sound like some such ancestral city; while the words, `I don't know where' certainly do not.

Now half the current case for free against traditional verse turns simply on that. It consists in calling `I know not where' pompous and theatrical; and calling `I don't know where' natural and sincere. It is not more natural and it is not more sincere; it is only more conversational. And the fact that it is conversational only means that it is conventional. In our time, especially, slang is merely the most conventional mode of address. But it is not a mode of expression, as poetry is a mode of expression, for the emotions and indescribable imaginations of men, for the simple reason that it does not express them. Common speech is not the thing by which men express their emotions; it is only the thing by which they fail to express them.

The distinction does not necessarily exclude all free verse; nor, indeed, do I wish to exclude it. But it does indicate why many poets, who would seem capable of writing good free verse, do in fact write bad free verse. They are misled by this fallacy of verse being free in the sense in which conversation is free. But conversation is not free; that is to say it is not free to sing and it is not free to satisfy. Above all, as above explained, it is not free to build; to pick words for their permanent and massive character; or to recast or rearrange them so, as to weld them closer together. A gentleman lighting a cigarette, in talk over the tea-table, would rather unduly suspend social intercourse if he refused to blow out the match until he had composed a line as full and satisfying as `If I quench thee, thou flaming minister'. In truth, of course, it would apply to tragic occasions as well as trivial occasions in real life. A man, after murdering a woman, would not talk about Prometheus; he is more likely to confess to the nearest policeman that he has done Desdemona in. But it is none the less true that `done in' is a very weak description of what he has done. It is that weakness in the mere words, and especially in the relation of words, which seems to me to paralyse in practice a vast amount of what is called free verse. If anyone asks why free verse should not be written which included this close grip and gravity and resistant strength in a sentence, I am content to answer: `Why indeed!' But the real repartee of the free versifier in such a case is not to ask why it should not be done, but to do it.

The Refrain of the Rover

A modern man of genius, Gauguin I think, said that an artist must be either a revolutionist or a plagiarist. He might, in fairness, have added that most of the very great artists were plagiarists. Antiquated authors of the type of Chaucer and Shakespeare were quite enthusiastic for copying; until more modern authors became more enthusiastic for copyright. But there runs through all poetry, through medieval down even to modern times, something like an everlasting echo that has in it an element of enchantment. There are refrains that recur in any sort of song; such as `Over the Hills and Far Away', or `On Christmas Day in the Morning', or `Under the Greenwood Tree'. But I was recently rather amused to note two or three cases in which two or three poets had repeated the same sentence, as well as the same sentiment. I mean that they had avowedly used a verbal repetition, which the vulgar might really call plagiarism. One series began, as I imagined, with that spirited song of Byron, `We'll go no more a-roving'. Its chief beauty is that Byronic beauty of swiftness, which is often neglected. It consists of three verses of four lines each; but it could all be said in a breath. The one great quality which Byron always retained was exactly the duality which he was always boasting that he had lost. It was Gusto; a boyish power of enjoyment, especially of his own poetry. Now, it reappears in almost the same words, in the works of W. E. Henley, who professed the widely different creed of a rather stormy optimism; though its storminess sometimes led him to throw his crutch at his friends, when they differed on some fine shade of criticism. He is probably best known by the poem in which he thanks whatever gods there be for his unconquerable soul; though I have my private doubts about the unconquerable soul which goes with the unconquerable temper. Still, he was a fine fellow in his way, and his friends loved him, though he did throw his crutch at them. He wrote a lyric which simply changes, ‘We'll go no more a-roving', to `We'll go no more a-roaming'. It might at least be called an echo; but I am now defending echoes. And now I discover, from the recent and most fascinating memoirs of a common sailor, that both the poems may have been echoes; and both the poets plagiarists. For he quotes a sea-shanty, as sung by common sailors, which I myself like better than either of the literary productions. I can imagine a seaman singing with the proper doleful boom:

A-roving — , a-roving — , since roving’s been my ru-u-in
I’ll go no more a-roving
With you, fair maid!

The small coincidence is worth noting; because it is well to remember that there is a whole literature which is lucky in being quite unconnected with literary men.

ON REFLECTION

What is Right With the World

The above excellent title is not of my own invention. It was suggested to me by the Editor of this paper, and I consented to fill up the bill, partly because of the pleasure I have always had from the paper itself, and partly because it gives me an opportunity of telling an egotistical story, a story which may enlighten the public about the general origin of such titles.

I have always heard of the brutality of publishers and how they crush and obscure the author; but my complaint has always been that they push him forward far too much. I will not say that, so far from making too little of the author, they make too much of him; that this phrase is capable of a dark financial interpretation which I do not intend. But I do say that the prominent personalities of the literary world are very largely the creations of their publishers, in so far as they are not solely the creations of their wives. Here is a small incident out of my own existence. I designed to write a sort of essay, divided into sections, on one particular point of political error. This fallacy, though small and scholastic at first sight, seemed to me to be the real mistake in most modern sociological works. It was, briefly, the idea that things that have been tried have been found wanting. It was my purpose to point out that in the entanglements of practice this is untrue; that an old expedient may easily be the best thing for a new situation; that its principle may be useful though its practice failed; that its practice may have failed because its principle was abandoned; and so on. Therefore, I claimed, we should look for the best method, the ideal, whether it is in the future or the past. I imagined this book as a drab-coloured, decorous little philosophical treatise, with no chapters, but the page occasionally broken by section-headings at the side. I proposed to call my analysis of a radical error `What is wrong’, meaning where the mistake is in our logical calculation. But I had highly capable and sympathetic publishers, whose only weakness was that they thought my unhappy monologue much more important than I did. By some confusion of ecstasy (which entirely through my own fault I failed to check) the title was changed into the apocalyptic trumpet-blast `What’s Wrong With the World’. It was divided up into three short, fierce chapters, like proclamations in a French riot. Outside there was an enormous portrait of myself looking like a depressed hairdresser, and the whole publication had somehow got the violence and instancy of a bombshell. Let it be understood that I do not blame the publishers in the least for this. I could have stopped it if I had minded my own affairs, and it came out of their beautiful and ardent souls. I merely mention it as an instance of the error about publishers. They are always represented as cold and scornful merchants, seeking to keep your writers in the background. Alas (as Wordsworth so finely says), alas! the enthusiasm of publishers has oftener left me mourning.

Upon the whole, I am rather inclined to approve of this method of the publisher or editor making up the title, while the author makes up the remarks about it. Any man with a large mind ought to be able to write about anything. Any really free man ought to be able to write to order. Some of the greatest books in the world — Pickwick, for instance — were written to fulfil a scheme partly sketched out by a publisher. But I only brought together these two cases of titles that came to me from outside because they do illustrate the necessity of some restatement in such a case. For these two titles are, when it comes to the fulfilment, at once too complex and too simple. I would never have dreamed of announcing, like some discovery of my own, what is wrong with the world. What is wrong with the world is the devil, and what is right with it is God; the human race will travel for a few more million years in all sorts of muddle and reform, and when it perishes of the last cold or heat it will still be within the limits of that very simple definition. But in an age that has confused itself with such phrases as `optimist’ and `pessimist’, it is necessary to distinguish along more delicate lines. One of the strangest things about the use of the word `optimist’ is that it is now so constantly used about the future. The house of man is criticised not as a house, but as a kind of caravan; not by what it is; but by where it is going to. None are more vitally and recklessly otherworldly than those modern progressives who do not believe in another world.

Now, for the matter of that, I do think the world is getting very much better in very many vital respects. In some of them, I think, the fact could hardly be disputed. The one perfectly satisfactory element at the present crisis is that all the prophecies have failed. At least the people who have been clearly proved to be wrong are the people who were quite sure they were right. That is always a gratifying circumstance. Now why is it that all these prophecies of the wise have been confounded and why has the destiny of men taken so decisive and so different a course? It is because of the very simple fact that the human race consists of many millions of two-legged and tolerably cheerful, reasonably unhappy beings who never read any books at all and certainly never hear of any scientific predictions. If they act in opposition to the scheme which science has foreseen for them, they must be excused. They sin in ignorance. They have no notion that they are avoiding what was really unavoidable. But, indeed, the phrases loosely used of that obscure mass of mankind are a little misleading. To say of the bulk of human beings that they are uneducated is like saying of a Red Indian hunter that he has not yet taken his degree. He has taken many other things. And so, sincerely speaking, there are no uneducated men. They may escape the trivial examinations, but not the tremendous examinations of existence. The dependence of infancy, the enjoyment of animals, the love of woman, and the fear of death — these are more frightful and more fixed than all conceivable forms of the cultivation of the mind. It is idle to complain of schools and colleges being trivial. Schools and colleges must always be trivial. In no case will a college ever teach the important things. For before a man is twenty he has always learnt the important things. He has learnt them right or wrong, and he has learnt them all alone.

We therefore come back to the primary truth, that what is right with the world has nothing to do with future changes, but is rooted in original realities. If groups or peoples show an unexpected independence or creative power; if they do things no one had dreamed of their doing; if they prove more ferocious or more self-sacrificing than the wisdom of the world had ever given them credit for, then such inexplicable outbursts can always be referred back to some elementary and absolute doctrine about the nature of men. No traditions in this world are so ancient as the traditions that lead to modern upheaval and innovation. Nothing nowadays is so conservative as a revolution. The men who call themselves Republicans are men walking the streets of deserted and tiny city-states, and digging up the great bones of pagans. And when we ask on what republicanism really rests, we come back to that great indemonstrable dogma of the native dignity of man. And when we come back to the Lord of creation, we come back of necessity to creation; and we ask ourselves that ultimate question which St Thomas Aquinas (an extreme optimist) answered in the affirmative: Are these things ultimately of value at all?

What is right with the world is the world. In fact, nearly everything else is wrong with it. This is that great truth in the tremendous tale of Creation, a truth that our people must remember or perish. It is at the beginning that things are good, and not (as the more pallid progressives say) only at the end. The primordial things — existence, energy, fruition — are good so far as they go. You cannot have evil life, though you can have notorious evil livers. Manhood and womanhood are good things, though men and woman are often perfectly pestilent. You can use poppies to drug people, or birch trees to beat them, or stones to make an idol, or corn to make a corner; but it remains true that, in the abstract, before you have done anything, each of these four things is in strict truth a glory, a beneficent specialty and variety. We do praise the Lord that there are birch trees growing amongst the rocks and poppies amongst the corn; we do praise the Lord, even if we do not believe in Him. We do admire and applaud the project of a world, just as if we had been called to council in the primal darkness and seen the first starry plan of the skies. We are, as a matter of fact, far more certain that this life of ours is a magnificent and amazing enterprise than we are that it will succeed. These evolutionary optimists who call themselves Meliorists (a patient and poor-spirited lot they are) always talk as if we were certain of the end, though not of the beginning. In other words, they don’t know what life is aiming at, but they are quite sure it will get there. Why anybody who has avowedly forgotten where he came from should be quite so certain of where he is going to I have never been able to make out; but Meliorists are like that. They are ready to talk of existence itself as the product of purely evil forces. They never mention animals except as perpetually tearing each other in pieces; but a month in the country would cure that. They have a real giddy horror of stars and seas, as a man has on the edge of a hopelessly high precipice. They sometimes instinctively shrink from clay, fungoids, and the fresh young of animals with a quivering gesture that reveals the fundamental pessimist. Life itself, crude, uncultivated life, is horrible to them. They belong very largely to the same social class and creed as the lady who objected that the milk came to her from a dirty cow, and not from a nice clean shop. But they are sure how everything will end.

I am in precisely the opposite position. I am much more sure that everything is good at the beginning than I am that everything will be good at the end. That all this frame of things, this flesh, these stones, are good things, of that I am more brutally certain than I can say. But as for what will happen to them, that is to take a step into dogma and prophecy. I speak here, of course, solely of my personal feelings, not even of my reasoned creed. But on my instincts alone I should have no notion what would ultimately happen to this material world I think so magnificent. For all I know it may be literally and not figuratively true that the tares are tied into bundles for burning, and that as the tree falleth so shall it lie. I am an agnostic, like most people with a positive theology. But I do affirm, with the full weight of sincerity, that trees and flowers are good at the beginning, whatever happens to them at the end; that human lives were good at the beginning, whatever happens to them in the end. The ordinary modern progressive position is that this is a bad universe, but will certainly get better. I say it is certainly a good universe, even if it gets worse. I say that these trees and flowers, stars and sexes, are primarily, not merely ultimately, good. In the Beginning the power beyond words created heaven and earth. In the Beginning He looked on them and saw that they were good.

All this unavoidable theory (for theory is always unavoidable) may be popularly pulled together thus. We are to regard existence as a raid or great adventure; it is to be judged, therefore, not by what calamities it encounters, but by what flag it follows and what high town it assaults. The most dangerous thing in the world is to be alive; one is always in danger of one's life. But anyone who shrinks from this is a traitor to the great scheme and experiment of being. The pessimist of the ordinary type, the pessimist who thinks he would be better dead, is blasted with the crime of Iscariot. Spiritually speaking, we should be justified in punishing him with death. Only, out of polite deference to his own philosophy, we punish him with life.

But this faith (that existence was fundamentally and purposely good) is not attacked only by the black, consistent pessimist. The man who says that he would sooner die is best answered by a sudden blow with the poker, for the reply is rightly logical, as well as physically very effective. But there has crept through the culture of modern Europe another notion that is equally in its own way an attack on the essential rightness of the world. It is not avowedly pessimistic, though the source from which it comes (which is Buddhism) is pessimistic for those who really understand it. It can offer itself — as it does among some of the high-minded and distinguished Theosophists — with an air of something highly optimistic. But this disguised pessimism is what is really wrong with the world — at least, especially with the modern world. It is essential to arrest and to examine it.

There has crept into our thoughts, through a thousand small openings, a curious and unnatural idea. I mean the idea that unity is itself a good thing; that there is something high and spiritual about things being blended and absorbed into each other. That all rivers should run into one river, that all vegetables should go into one pot — that is spoken of as the last and best fulfilment of being. Boys are to be `at one' with girls; all sects are to be `at one' in the New Theology; beasts fade into men and men fade into God; union in itself is a noble thing. Now union in itself is not a noble thing. Love is a noble thing; but love is not union. Nay, it is rather a vivid sense of separation and identity. Maudlin, inferior love poetry does, indeed, talk of lovers being `one soul', just as maudlin, inferior religious poetry talks of being lost in God; but the best poetry does not. When Dante meets Beatrice, he feels his distance from her, not his proximity; and all the greatest saints have felt their lowness, not their highness, in the moment of ecstasy. And what is true of these grave and heroic matters (I do not say, of course, that saints and lovers have never used the language of union too, true enough in its own place and proper limitation of meaning) — what is true of these is equally true of all the lighter and less essential forms of appreciation of surprise. Division and variety are essential to praise; division and variety are what is right with the world. There is nothing specially right about mere contact and coalescence.

In short, this vast, vague idea of unity is the one `reactionary' thing in the world. It is perhaps the only connection in which that foolish word `reactionary' can be used with significance and truth. For this blending of men and women, nations and nations, is truly a return to the chaos and unconsciousness that were before the world was made. There is, of course, another kind of unity of which I do not speak here; unity in the possession of truth and the perception of the need for these varieties. But the varieties themselves; the reflection of man and woman in each other, as in two distinct mirrors; the wonder of man at nature as a strange thing at once above and below him; the quaint and solitary kingdom of childhood; the local affections and the colour of certain landscapes — these actually are the things that are the grace and honour of the earth; these are the things that make life worth living and the whole framework of things well worthy to be sustained. And the best thing remains; that this view, whether conscious or not, always has been and still is the view of the living and labouring millions. While a few prigs on platforms are talking about `oneness’ and absorption in `The All’, the folk that dwell in all the valleys of this ancient earth are renewing the varieties forever. With them a woman is loved for being unmanly, and a man loved for being unwomanly. With them the church and the home are both beautiful, because they are both different; with them fields are personal and flags are sacred; they are the virtue of existence, for they are not mankind but men.

The rooted hope of the modern world is that all these dim democracies do still believe in that romance of life, that variation of man, woman and child upon which all poetry has hitherto been built. The danger of the modern world is that these dim democracies are so very dim, and that they are especially dim where they are right. The danger is that the world may fall under a new oligarchy — the oligarchy of prigs. And if anyone should promptly ask (in the manner of the debating clubs) for the definition of a prig, I can only reply that a prig is an oligarch who does not even know he is an oligarch. A circle of small pedants sit on an upper platform, and pass unanimously (in a meeting of none) that there is no difference between the social duties of men and of women, the social instruction of men or of children. Below them boils that multitudinous sea of millions that think differently, that have always thought differently, that will always think differently. In spite of the overwhelming majority that maintains the old theory of life, I am in some real doubt about which will win. Owing to the decay of theology and all the other clear systems of thought, men have been thrown back very much upon their instincts, as with animals. As with animals, their instincts are right; but, as with animals, they can be cowed. Between the agile scholars and the stagnant mob, I am really doubtful about which will be triumphant. I have no doubt at all about which ought to be.

Europe at present exhibits a concentration upon politics which is partly the unfortunate result of our loss of religion, partly the just and needful result of our loss of our social inequality and iniquity. These causes, however, will not remain in operation forever. Religion is returning from her exile; it is more likely that the future will be crazily and corruptly superstitious than that it will be merely rationalist.

On the other hand, our attempts to right the extreme ill-balance of wealth must soon have some issue; something will be done to lessen the perpetual torture of incompetent compassion; some scheme will be substituted for our malevolent anarchy, if it be only one of benevolent servitude. And as these two special unrests about the universe and the State settle down into more silent and enduring system, there will emerge more and more those primary and archaic truths which the dust of these two conflicts has veiled. The secondary questions relatively solved, we shall find ourselves all the more in the presence of the primary questions of Man.

For at present we all tend to one mistake; we tend to make politics too important. We tend to forget how huge a part of a man's life is the same under a Sultan and a Senate, under Nero or St Louis. Daybreak is a never-ending glory, getting out of bed is a never-ending nuisance; food and friends will be welcomed; work and strangers must be accepted and endured; birds will go bedwards and children won't, to the end of the last evening. And the worst peril is that in our just modern revolt against intolerable accidents we may have unsettled those things that alone make daily life tolerable. It will be an ironic tragedy if, when we have toiled to find rest, we find we are incurably restless. It will be sad if, when we have worked for our holiday, we find we have unlearnt everything but work. The typical modern man is the insane millionaire who has drudged to get money, and then finds he cannot enjoy even money. There is danger that the social reformer may silently and occultly develop some of the madness of the millionaire whom he denounces. He may find that he has learnt how to build playgrounds but forgotten how to play. He may agitate for peace and quiet, but only propagate his own mental agitation. In his long fight to get a slave a half-holiday he may angrily deny those ancient and natural things, the zest of being, the divinity of man, the sacredness of simple things, the health and humour of the earth, which alone make a half-holiday even half a holiday or a slave even half a man.

There is danger in that modern phrase `divine discontent'. There is truth in it also, of course; but it is only truth of a special and secondary kind. Much of the quarrel between Christianity and the world has been due to this fact; that there are generally two truths, as it were, at any given moment of revolt or reaction, and the ancient underlying truism which is nevertheless true all the time. It is sometimes worth while to point out that black is not so black as it is painted; but black is still black, and not white. So with the merits of content and discontent. It is true that in certain acute and painful crises of oppression or disgrace, discontent is a duty and shame could call us like a trumpet. But it is not true that man should look at life with an eye of discontent, however high-minded. It is not true that in his primary, naked relation to the world, in his relation to sex, to pain, to comradeship, to the grave or to the weather, man ought to make discontent his ideal; it is black lunacy. Half his poor little hopes of happiness hang on his thinking a small house pretty, a plain wife charming, a lame foot not unbearable, and bad cards not so bad. The voice of the special rebels and prophets, recommending discontent, should, as I have said, sound now and then suddenly, like a trumpet. But the voices of the saints and sages, recommending contentment, should sound unceasingly, like the sea.

UNCOLLECTED ESSAYS

in chronological order

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HALF HOURS IN HADES

AN ELEMENTARY HANDBOOK OF DEMONOLOGY

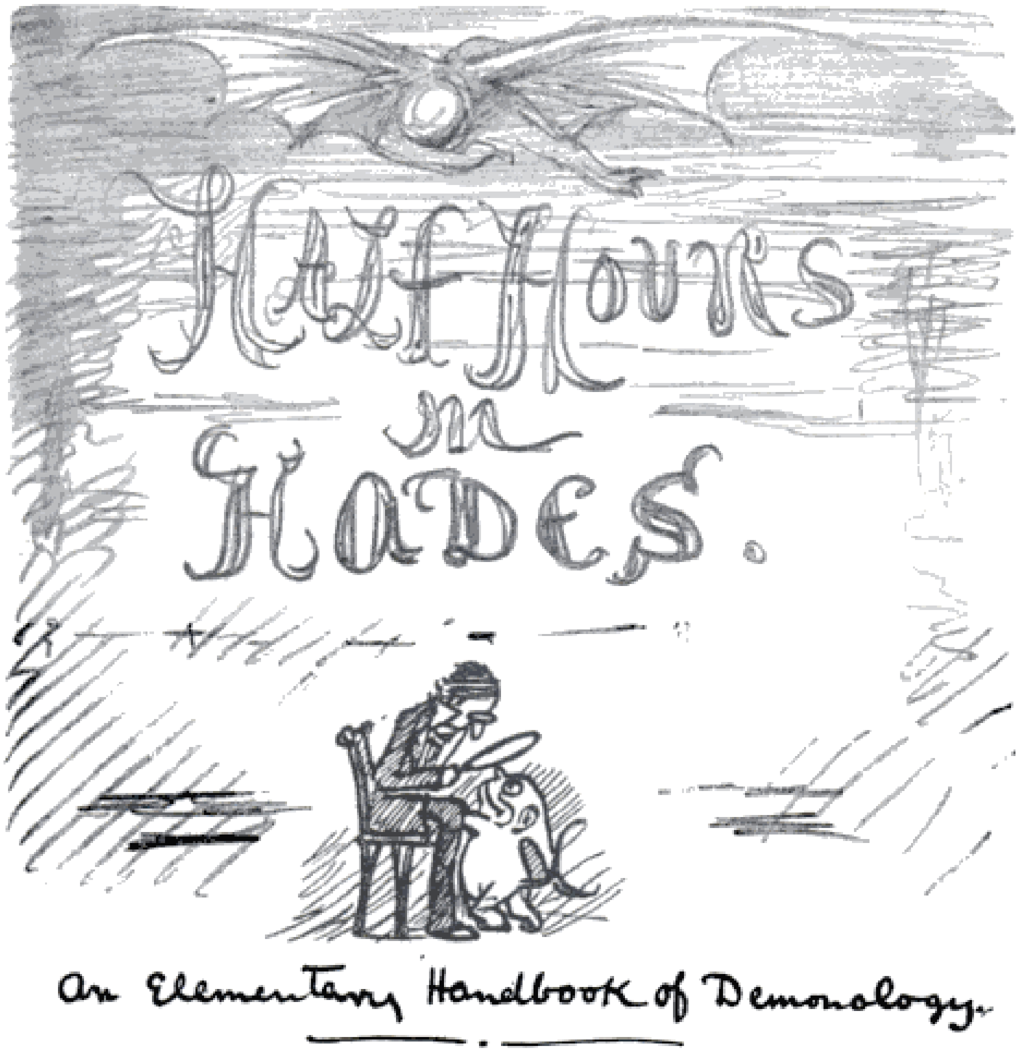
Half Hours in Hades.
An Elementary Handbook of Demonology.

PREFACE

In the autumn of 1890, I was leaving the Casino at Monte Carlo in company with an eminent Divine, whose name, for obvious reasons, I suppress. We were engaged in an interesting discussion on the subject of Demons, he contending that they were an unnecessary, not to say prejudicial, element in our civilisation, an opinion which, needless to say, I strongly opposed. Having at length been so fortunate as to convince him of his error, I proceeded to furnish him with various instances in which Demons have proved beneficial to mankind, and at length he exclaimed. “My dear fellow, why do you not write a book about ...” Here he coughed. The idea took so strong a hold upon me, that from that time I have taken more careful note of the habits and appearance of such specimens as come in my way, and my studies have resulted in the production of this little work, which will, I trust, prove not uninteresting to the youthful seeker after knowledge.

In my capacity as Professor of Supernatural Science at Oxford University, it has often been my duty to call upon an individual who probably knows more about all branches of the subject with which I am about to deal than any man on earth, although no one has yet persuaded him to give his knowledge to the world; and with his permission I have dedicated these pictures to him, as some slight recognition of the wisdom and experience which he had brought to my assistance in the compiling of this modest treatise.

Baron’s Court House, London
October 1891
To that mature personage,
the cimmerian nature of whose aspect
is popularly supposed to be greatly overrated,
this volume is affectionately dedicated.

HALF-HOURS IN HADES

I The Five Primary Types

It is not wonderful that so few persons should know anything about the habits and appearance of those whose names are so often on their lips, and who exert so great an influence over all our lives? For those who love the study of Demonology (and I pity the man or woman who does not) it possess an interest which will remain after health, youth and even life have departed.

It is not my intention in this simple little work to puzzle the young student with any of those dark technicalities of the Science which are only intelligible to such as have studied it for some time. I merely try to put before him, in language as simply as possible, the various species of Demon with which he is most likely to meet, and to explain the organism of any he may have already encountered.

To proceed at once to business, I will first introduce to my young readers the Common, or “Garden” serpent, so called because its first appearance in the world took place in a garden. Since that time its proportions have dwindled considerably, but its influence and power have largely increased; it is found in almost everything.

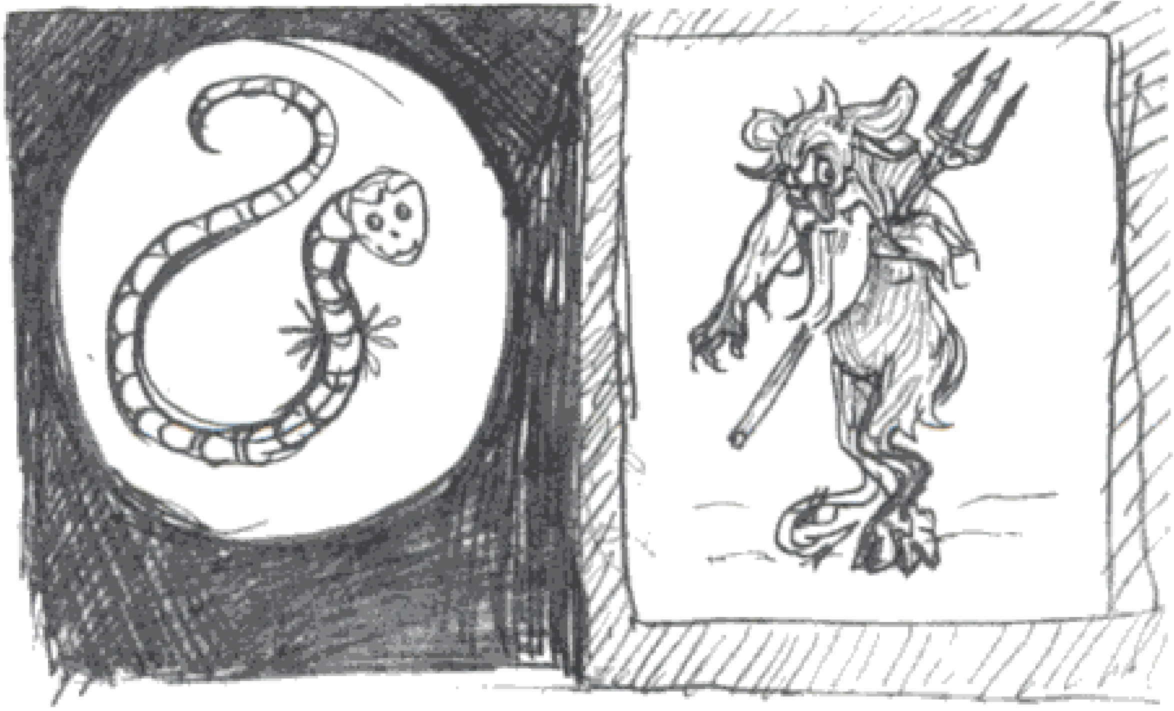

Plate I. The Common or “Garden” Serpent (Tentator hortensis)
Plate II. The Mediaeval Devil (Diabolus faunalius)

The prejudice entertained by clergymen and others against this insect is most unreasonable and cruel. Were it not for the creature they destroy, their occupation would be gone, like Othello’s. Yet they do all they can to stamp out and crush down this little creature, wherever he may show his hoof.

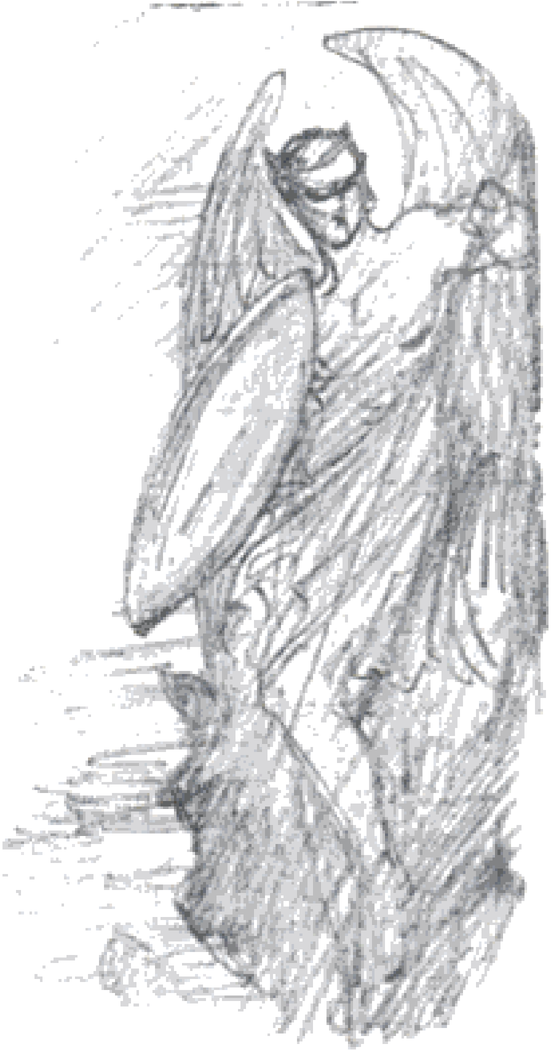

Fig. A. Diabolus paradisi perditi

The next in imporance of the specimens of this interesing branch of science is the Mediaeval Demon, whose horns, tail and claws form a remarkable constrast to the serpentine formation of our first type. So wide is the divergence between the two that many modern authorities on the subject put it in an entirely different class to the Common or Garden species, connecting it with an extinct animal of similar formation known as the Faun or Pan, which found its home in many parts of Arcadia. Be this as it may, the Mediaeval Demon is, of all the species, perhaps the one with which we are most familiar; in fact so accustomed are we to the traits and appearance of this remarkable creature that we have more or less taken it under our patronage. It is in a domesticated state the subject rather of playfulness and household merriment than of abhorrence, while the far cleverer and more graceful serpent is the object of a cruel and unreasoning persecution. But useful as the mediaeval species is found at the present day as a general source of amusement, it has of late somewhat failed to stir public interest, which is turned towards newer and more elegant varieties: some of which we shall pass briefly in review. Mr. J. Milton, in his interesting and valuable work on this subject, has discussed at some length the leading characteristics of a fine species of which he was primarily the discoverer, and of which Fig. A. is a sketch. This magnificent animal measures at least four roods, and when floating full length on the warm gulf, of which it is an inhabitant, has been compared by its discoverer to a whale.

According to Mr. Milton's theory, this animal is practically identical with the creature represented in Plate I, but, however ably supported, his view has been abandoned by most later authorities. This species is an inhabitant of warm latitudes like most of its kind, being originally found in the burning lakes and dark wildernesses of the most remote parts of the world. Its colour is, generally speaking, dark, but, like most of these creatures, this peculiarity has been much overrated, and Mr. Milton has justly pointed out the "faded splendour wan" which imparts a lighter shade to many parts of its exterior.

We now come to the discussion of a very remarkable species which are vulgarly known for the most part by their colour.

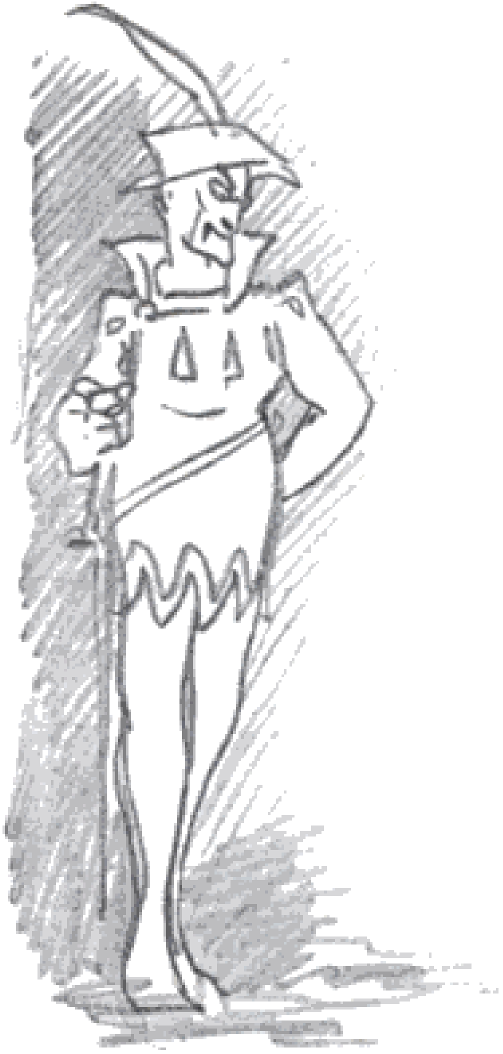

Fig. B. The Red Devil (Diabolus mephistopheles)

The Red Devil (Diabolus Mephistopheles) was discovered by that learned and enterprising German naturalist, Mr. Wolfgang von Goethe, who has published an interesting story of a specimen kept in a domesticated state in the house of his learned fellow-countryman, Dr. Faust. In a domestic state this creature is playful and active, but mischievous and impossible to trust. The learned doctor found it a useful and entertaining companion for many years, but was finally persuaded to part with it, on which it sought the seclusion of its native surroundings. Its colour, as suggested by its name, is, with the exception of its face and hands, a uniform red. Its height is about six feet.

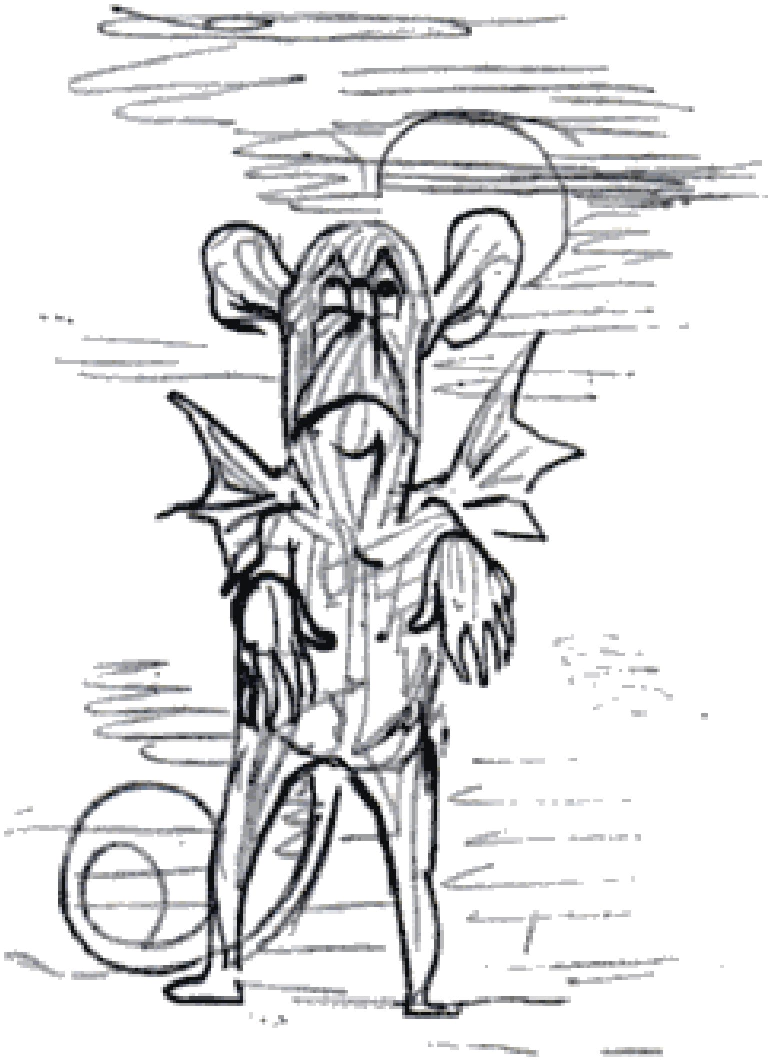

The Blue Devil

(Caeruleus lugubrius)

Very different in appearance, yet possessed of one or two of the same habits, is the Blue Devil (Caeruleus Lugubrius). These creatures are gregarious, being usually seen and spoken of in the plural. Though formed by Super-Nature in their habits and exterior apparently for the filling of waste moors, mountains, churchyards and other obsolete places, these animals, like the Red Devil, have frequently been domesticated in rich and distinguished houses, and many of the wealthiest aristocrats and most successful men of commerce may be seen with a string of these blue creatures led by a leash in the street or seated round him in a ring on his own fireside. The noise made by this creature is singularly melancholy and depressing, and its general appearance is far from lively. But though less agile and intelligent than the Red Devil, the sobriety of its habits and demeanour have made it a suitable pet for the houses of clergymen and other respectable persons. To such an extent indeed has this domestication of the Blue Devil been carried, that many persons have denied its connection with the great class we are discussing. There can, however, be no doubt about its origin.

II The Evolution of Demons

On what perhaps is the most intricate and interesting part of Demonology it is impossible to say much in a work of small size and pretensions. It is unnecessary to go through the elaborate proof given by Mr. Darwin and transfer it to the supernatural world, but only to make a few remarks on some of the most interesting examples of diabolical evolution. When the young student grows older he will meet with others in his own experience.

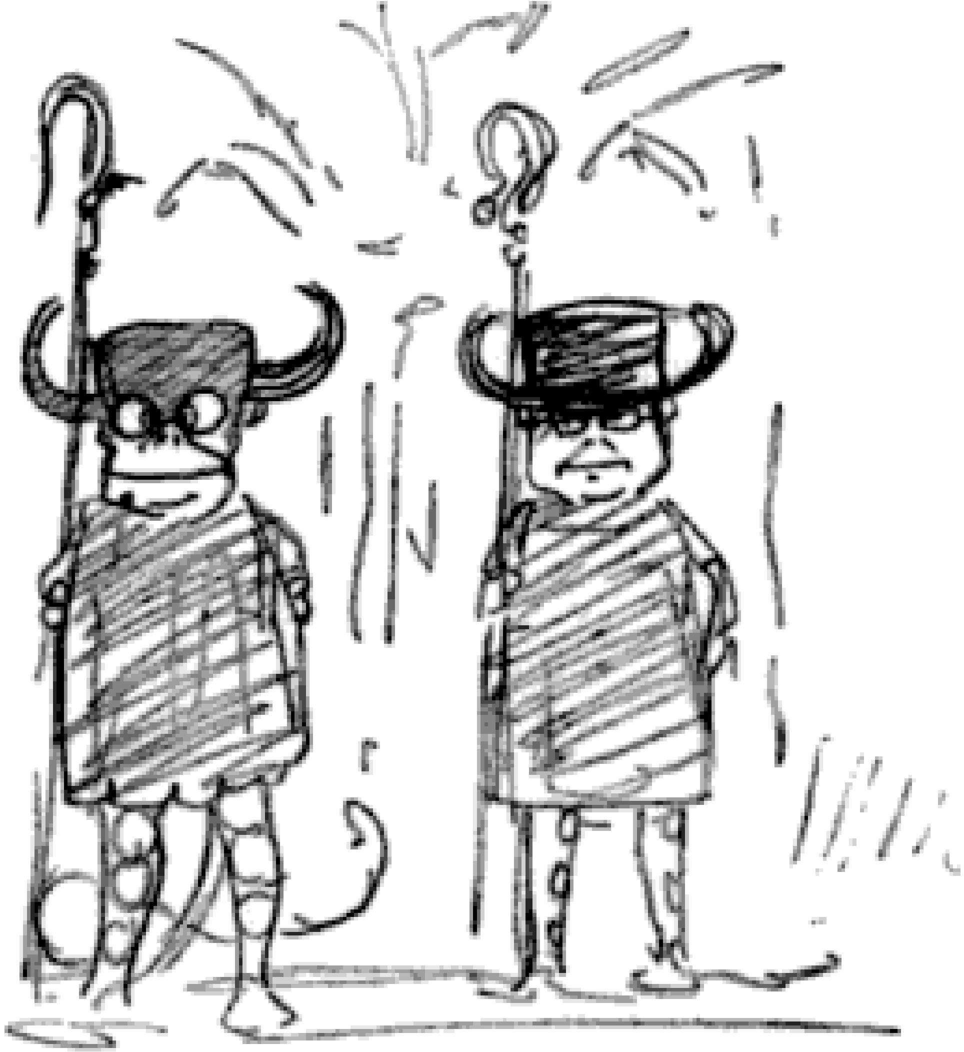

Instances of Evolution I

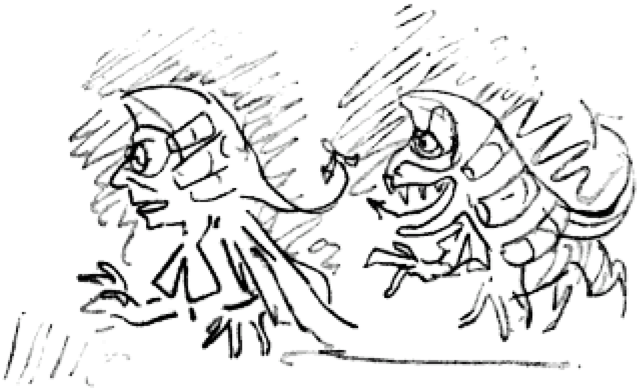

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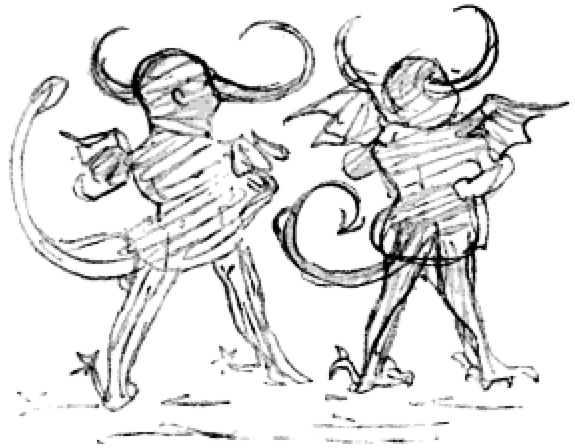

Instances of Evolution III

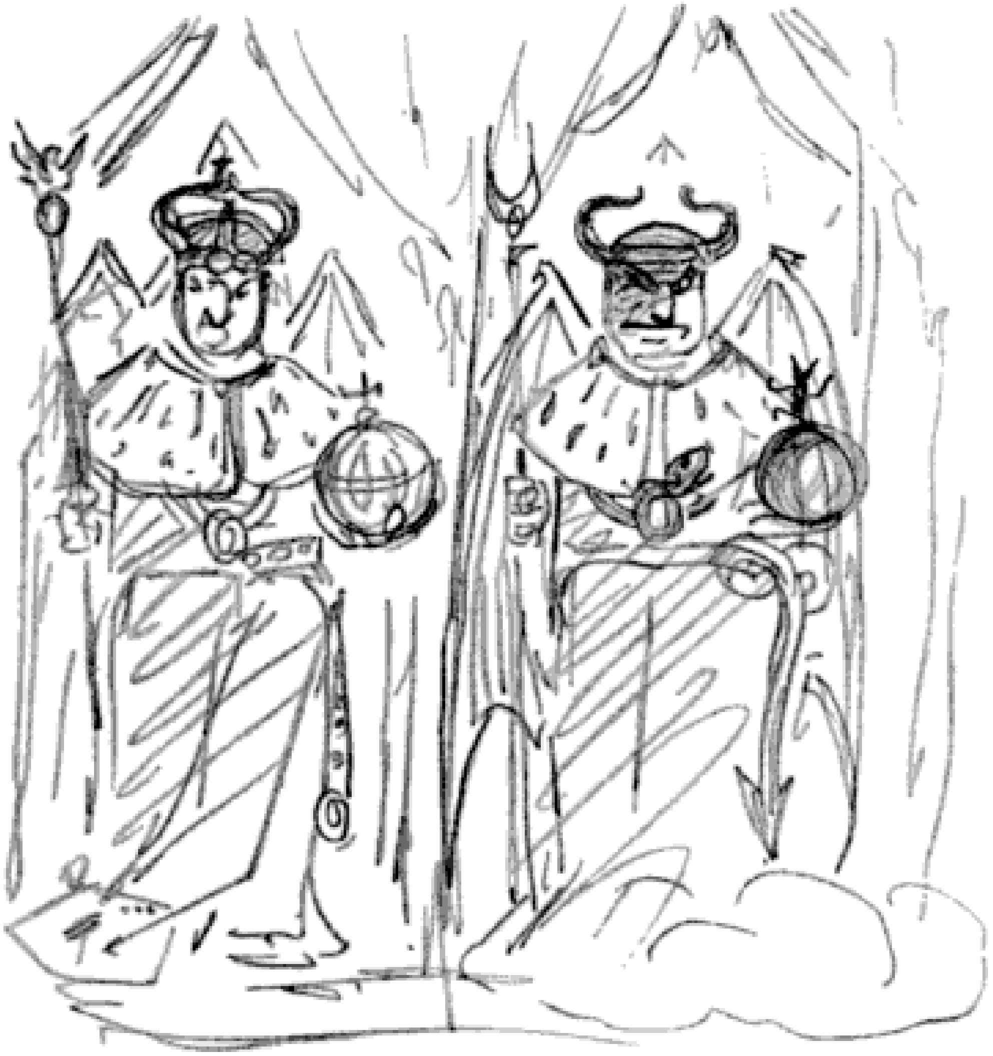

Instances of Evolution IV

“But, mamma, can we all see devils?”

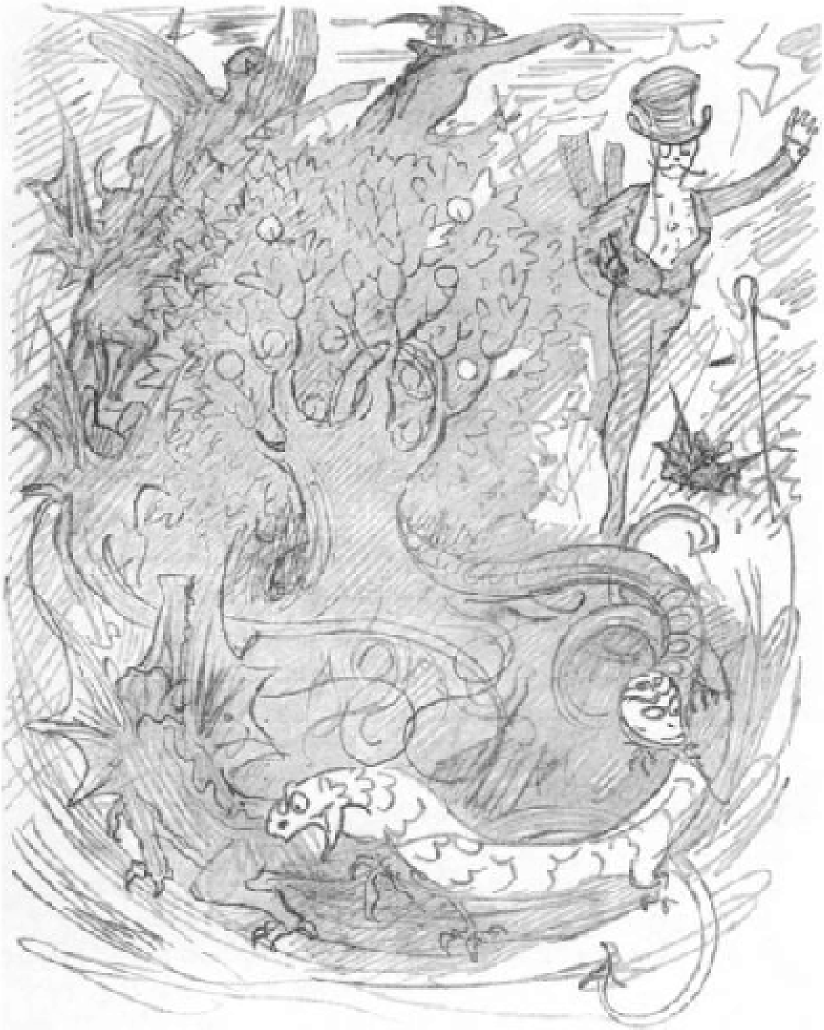

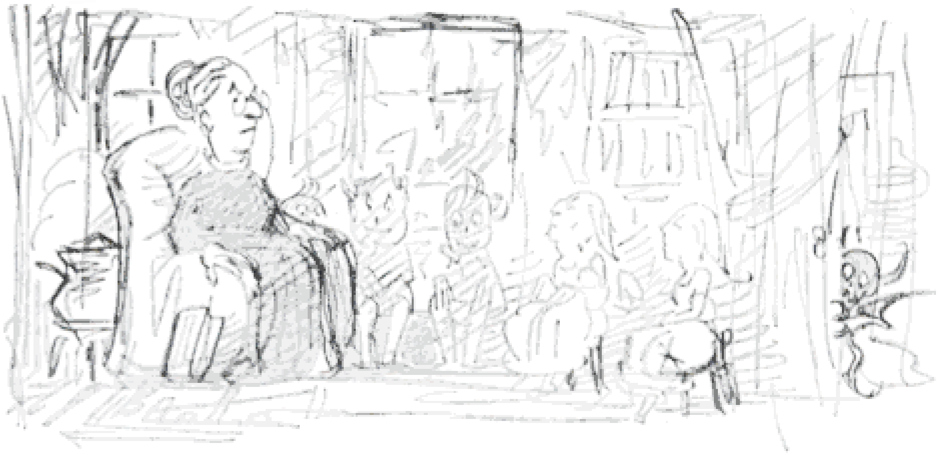

III What We Should All Look For

“But, mamma, can we all see devils?”

"Certainly, Charlotte, if we will take the trouble. They are constantly in our path and it is only the lazy and careless that pass them by. The human race might well learn a lesson from these little creatures, and in fact it not infrequently does. Harry here will tell you that only this morning he found a most interesting specimen while coming from church, and how pleased I was that he should have been so diligent. We can all see the common varieties in any country walk, or even in the city, where they are occasionally found, but at the same time it is to be remembered that we cannot expect to see *all* this great field of interest in this life. Dr. Brown, the vicar, who knows more about these things than you or I, children, will, I am sure, take great pleasure in some day showing you over his collection, where you will see some very rare species, not to be found in everyday life, and which are the fruits of a long career of diligent research. He possess, I believe, the only known variety of the Pelagian ever seen in this country and will be pleased to show it you and make it vainly talk. The Boasting Anabaptist (Anabaptiste Falsegloriator) has also its representatives in his collection and he is the author of many clever works on the subject."

"But, mamma, does Dr. Brown love his little pets?"

"I have reason to believe that he is fondly attached to them. They are never out of his sight and he has often said that he has gleaned many useful lessons from their habits. In fact he says that he would not be the man he is but for them, and one glance at Dr. Brown will make it clear that this is no exaggeration."

"Mamma, dear, do you remember what Cousin George found when he was staying with us last summer?"

"I recollect it extremely well, Albert, and I am glad indeed to find that your memory is as vivid as mine. It had always been my belief that Cousin George would alight upon some such discovery, for I well know him as a keen observer of Supernature and I hope, my children, that you may ever be as clever Demonologists as he. I remember even as a little boy he would be always found in the haunts of these creatures among which he may almost be said to have been brought up. I predict a great future for Cousin George."

"And, mamma dear, remember that you promised to show us some experiments this evening."

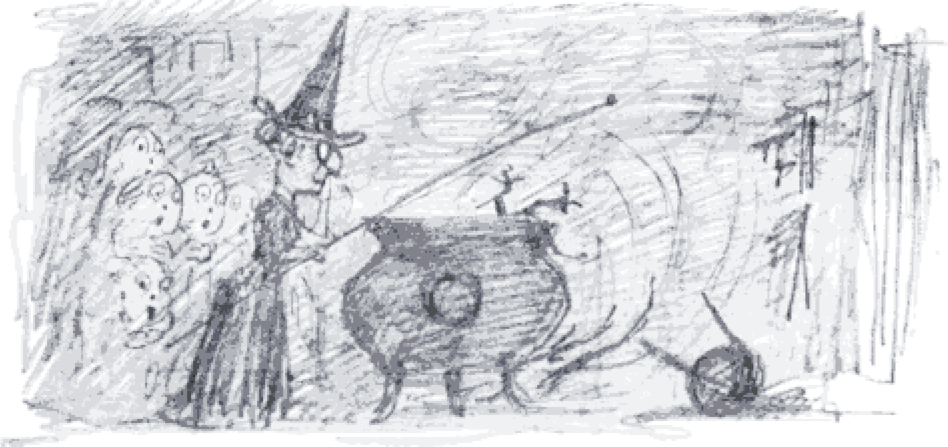

“Well, children, you shall have some. Will you turn out the gas, Albert? while you, Jane, will ask cook to lend us the large kettle. Harry will fetch the long wand from its place in the umbrella stand. Thank you, that is right. Now, children, for our first experiment I have here the eye of the common newt or eft, the left toe of the edible frog, the jaw of one or the blue sharks, a portion of the root of the hemlock plant, which I took no little trouble to dig up quite late last night, the liver of a blaspheming Jew, and other interesting specimens: round about the cauldron go, children, in the poisoned entrails throw. That is right. Now we will see what happens ... Ah, I thought so. Do you see those two round green orbs of light, Jane? Those are the eyes of a very interesting species, and its form will soon become apparent to us. Do not scream, Charlotte, for that would be naughty, and would perhaps frighten the little creatures, as they are very timid. By this time, children, you may perceive the outline of an attenuated figure, resembling in some respects that of a skeleton, though the ears, which you can now see moving, show that this is not the case. Lift little Harry up, James, since he is too small to see over the edge of the cauldron.”

TO FRANCES

Extracts from a letter to Frances Blogg, c. 1895

...I am looking over the sea and endeavouring to reckon up the estate I have to offer you. As far as I can make out my equipment for starting on a journey to fairyland consists of the following items.

1st. A Straw Hat. The oldest part of this admirable relic shows traces of pure Norman work. The vandalism of Cromwell's soldiers has left us little of the original hat-band.

2nd. A Walking Stick, very knobby and heavy: admirably fitted to break the head of any denizen of Suffolk who denies that you are the noblest of ladies, but of no other manifest use.

3rd. A copy of Walt Whitman's poems, once nearly given to Salter, but quite forgotten. It has his name in it still with an affectionate inscription from his sincere friend Gilbert Chesterton. I wonder if he will ever have it.

4th. A number of letters from a young lady, containing everything good and generous and loyal and holy and wise that isn't in Walt Whitman's poems.

5th. An unwieldy sort of a pocket knife, the blades mostly having an edge of a more varied and picturesque outline than is provided by the prosaic cutler. The chief element however is a thing 'to take stones out of a horse's hoof.' What a beautiful sensation of security it gives one to reflect that if one should ever have money enough to buy a horse and should happen to buy one and the horse should happen to have stone in his hoof — that one is ready; one stands prepared, with a defiant smile!

6th. Passing from the last miracle of practical foresight, we come to a box of matches. Every now and then I strike one of these, because fire is beautiful and burns your fingers. Some people think this waste of matches: the same people who object to the building of Cathedrals.

7th. About three pounds in gold and silver, the remains of one of Mr. Unwin's bursts of affection: those explosions of spontaneous love for myself, which, such is the perfect order and harmony of his mind, occur at startingly exact intervals of time.

8th. A book of Children's Rhymes, in manuscript, called the 'Weather Book' about 3/4 finished, and destined for Mr. Nutt. I have been working at it fairly steadily, which I think jolly creditable under the circumstances. One can’t put anything interesting in it. They’ll understand those things when they grow up.

9th. A tennis racket — nay, start not. It is a part of the new regime, and the only new and neat-looking thing in the Museum. We’ll soon mellow it — -like the straw hat. My brother and I are teaching each other lawn tennis.

10th. A soul, hitherto idle and omnivorous but now happy enough to be ashamed of itself.

11th. A body, equally idle and quite equally omnivorous, absorbing tea, coffee, claret, sea-water, and swimming. I think, the sea being a convenient size.

12th. A Heart — mislaid somewhere. And that is about all the property of which an inventory can be made at present. After all, my tastes are stoically simple. A straw hat, a stick, a box of matches and some of his own poetry. What more does man require?....

...The City of Felixstowe, as seen by the local prophet from the neighbouring mountain-peak, does not strike the eye as having anything uncanny about it. At least I imagine that it requires rather careful scrutiny before the eerie curl of a chimney pot, or the elfin wink of a lonely lamp-post brins home to the startled soul that it is really the City of a Fearful Folk. That the inhabitants are not human in the ordinary sense is quite clear, yet it has only just begun to dawn on me after staying a week in the Town of Unreason with its monstrous landscape and grave, unmeaning customs. Do I seem to be raving? Let me give my experiences.

I am bound to admit that I do not think I am good at shopping. I generally succeed in getting rid of money, but other observances, such as bringing away the goods that I’ve paid for, and knowing what I’ve bought, often pass over as secondary. But to shop in a town of ordinary tradesmen is one thing: to shop in a town of raving lunatics is another. I set out one morning, happy and hopeful with the intention of buying (a) a tennis racket (b) some tennis balls (c) some tennis shoes (d) a ticket for a tennis ground. I went to the shop pointed out by some villager (probably mad) and went in and said I believed they kept tennis rackets. The young man smiled and assented. I suggested that he might show me some. The young man looked positively alarmed. ‘Oh’, he said, ‘We haven’t got any — not got any here.’ I asked ‘Where?’ ‘Oh, they’re out you know. All round,’ he explained wildly, with a graphic gesture in the direction of the sea and the sky. ‘All out round. We’ve left them all round at places.’ To this day I don’t know what he meant, but I merely asked when they would quit these weird retreats. He said in an hour: in an hour I called again. Were they in now? ‘Well not in — not in, just yet,’ he said with a sort of feverish confidentialness, as if he wasn’t quite well. ‘Are they still — all out at places?’ I asked with a a restrained humor. ‘Oh, no!’ he said with a burst of reassuring pride. ‘They are only out there — out behind, you know.’ I hope my face expressed my beaming comprehension of the spot alluded to. Eventually, at a third visit, the rackets were produced. None of them, I was told by my brother, were of any first-class maker, so that was outside the question. The choice was between some good, neat first-hand instruments which suited me, and some seedy-looking second-hand objects with plain deal handles, which would have done at a pinch. I thought that perhaps it would be better to get a good-class racket in London and content myself for the present with economising on one of these second-hand monuments of depression. So I asked the price. ‘10/6’ was the price of the second-hand article. I thought this large for the tool, and wondered if the first-hand rackets were much dearer. What price the first-hand? ‘7/6’ said the Creature, cheery as a bird. I did not faint. I am strong.

I rejected the article which was dearer because it had been hallowed by human possession, and accepted the cheap, new crude racket. Except the newness there was no difference between them whatever. I then asked the smiling Maniac for balls. He brought me a selection of large red globes nearly as big as Dutch cheeses. I said, ‘Are these tennis-balls?’ He said, ‘Oh, did you want tennis-balls?’ I said Yes — they often came in handy at tennis. The goblin was quite impervious to satire, and I left him endeavouring to draw my attention to his wares in general, particularly to some zinc baths which he seemed to think should form part of the equipment of a tennis player.

Never before or since have I met a being of that order and degree of creepiness. He was a nightmare of unmeaning idiocy. But some mention ought to be made of the old man at the entrance to the tennis ground who opened his mouth in parables on the subject of the fee for playing there. He seemed to have been wound up to make only one remark, ‘It’s sixpence.’ Under these circumstances the attempt to discover whether the sixpence covered a day’s tennis or a week or fifty years was rather baffling. At last I put down the sixpence. This seemes to galvanise him into life. He looked at the clock, which was indicating five past eleven and said, ‘It’s sixpence an hour — so you’ll be all right till two.’ I fled screaming.

Since then I have examined the town more carefully and feel the presence of something nameless. There is a claw-curl in the sea-bent trees, an eye-gleam in the dark flints in the wall that is not of this world.

When we set up a house, darling (honeysuckle porch, yew clipt hedge, bees, poetry and eight shillings a week), I think you will have to do the shopping. Particularly at Felixstowe. There was a great and glorious man who said, ‘Give us the luxuries of life and we will dispense with the necessities.’ That I think would be a splendid motto to write (in letters of brown gold) over the porch of our hypothetical home. There will be a sofa for you, for example, but no chairs, for I prefer the floor. There will be a select store of chocolate-creams (to make you do the Carp with) and the rest will be bread and water. We will each retain a suit of evening dress for great occasions, and at other times clothe ourselves in the skins of wild beasts (how pretty you would look) which would fit your taste in furs and be economical.

I have sometimes thought it would be very fine to take an ordinary house, a very poor, commonplace house in West Kensington, say, and make it symbolic. Not artistic - Heaven - O Heaven forbid. My blood boils when I think of the affronts put by knock-kneed pictorial epicures on the strong, honest, ugly, patient shapes of necessary things: the brave old bones of life. There are aesthetic pattering prigs who can look on a saucepan without one tear of joy or sadness: mongrel decadents that can see no dignity in the honourable scars of a kettle. So they concentrate all their house decoration on coloured windows that nobody looks out of, and vases of lilies that everybody wishes out of the way. No: my idea (which is much cheaper) is to make a house really (allegoric) really explain its own essential meaning. Mystical or ancient sayings should be inscribed on every object, the more prosaic the object the better; and the more coarsely and rudely the inscription was traced the ! better. ‘Hast thou sent the Rain upon the Earth?’ should be inscribed on the Umbrella-Stand: perhaps on the Umbrella. ‘Even the Hairs of your Head are all numbered’ would give a tremendous significance to one’s hairbrushes: the words about ‘living water’ would reveal the music and sanctity of the sink: while ‘Our God is a consuming Fire’ might be written over the kitchen-grate, to assist the mystic musings of the cook - Shall we ever try that experiment, dearest. Perhaps not, for no words would be golden enough for the tools you had to touch: you would be beauty enough for one house...”

... By all means let us have bad things in our dwelling and make them good things. I shall offer no objection to your having an occasional dragon to dinner, or a penitent Griffin to sleep in the spare bed. The image of you taking a sunday school of little Devils is pleasing. They will look up, first in savage wonder, then in vague respect; they will see the most glorious and noble lady that ever lived since their prince tempted Eve, with a halo of hair and great heavenly eyes that seem to make the good at the heart of things almost too terribly simple and naked for the sons of flesh: and as they gaze, their tails will drop off, and their wings will sprout: and they will become Angels in six lessons....

I cannot profess to offer any elaborate explanation of your mother’s disquiet but I admit it does not wholly surprise me. You see I happen to know one factor in the case, and one only, of which you are wholly ignorant. I know you ... I know one thing which has made me feel strange before your mother - I know the value of what I take away. I feel (in a weird moment) like the Angel of Death.

You say you want to talk to me about death: my views about death are bright, brisk and entertaining. When Azrael takes a soul it may be to other and brighter worlds: like those whither you and I go together. The transformation called Death may be something as beautiful and dazzling as the transformation called Love. It may make the dead man ‘happy,’ just as your mother knows that you are happy. But none the less it is a transformation, and sad sometimes for those left behind. A mother whose child is dying can hardly believe that in the inscrutable Unknown there is anyone who can look to it as well as she. And if a mother cannot trust her child easily to God Almighty, shall I be so mean as to be angry because she cannot trust it easily to me? I tell you I have stood before your mother and felt like a thief. I know you are not going to part: neither physically, mentally, morally nor spiritually. But she sees a new element in your life, wholly from outside - is it not na! tural, given her temperament, that you should find her perturbed? Oh, dearest, dearest Frances, let us always be very gentle to older people. Indeed, darling, it is not they who are the tyrants, but we. They may interrupt our building in the scaffolding stages: we turn their house upside down when it is their final home and rest. Your mother would certainly have worried if you had been engaged to the

Archangel Michael (who, indeed, is bearing his disappointment very well): how much more when you are engaged to an aimless, tactless, reckless, unbrushed, strange-hatted, opinionated scarecrow who has suddenly walked into the vacant place. I could have prophesied her unrest: wait and she will calm down all right, dear. God comfort her: I dare not....

... Gilbert Keith Chesterton was born of comfortable but honest parents on the top of Campden Hill, Kensington. He was christened at St. George’s Church which stands just under that more imposing building, the Waterworks Tower. This place was chosen, apparently, in order that the whole available water supply might be used in the intrepid attempt to make him a member of Christ, a child of God and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Of the early years of this remarkable man few traces remain. One of his earliest recorded observations was the simple exclamation, full of heart-felt delight, ‘Look at Baby. Funny Baby.’ Here we see the first hint of that ineffable conversational modesty, that shy social self-effacement, which has ever hidden his light under a bushel. His mother also recounts with apparent amusement an incident connected with his imperious demand for his father’s top-hat. ‘Give me that hat, please.’ ‘No, dear, you mustn’t have that.’ ‘Give me that hat.’ ‘No, dear - ‘ ‘If you don’t give it me, I’ll say ‘At.’ An exquisite selection in the matter of hats has indeed always been one of the great man’s hobbies.

When he had drawn pictures on all the blinds and tablecloths and towels and walls and windowpanes it was felt that he required a larger sphere. Consequently he was sent to Mr. Bewsher who gave him desks and copy-books and Latin grammars and atlases to draw pictures on. He was far too innately conscientious not to use these materials to draw on. To other uses, asserted by some to belong to these objects, he paid little heed. The only really curious thing about his school life was that he had a weird and quite involuntary habit of getting French prizes. They were the only ones he ever got and he never tried to get them. But though the thing was quite mysterious to him, and though he made every effort to avoid it, it went on, being evidently a part of some occult natural law.

For the first half of his time at school he was very solitary and futile. He never regretted the time, for it gave him two things, complete mental self-sufficiency and a comprehension of the psychology of outcasts.

But one day, as he was roaming about a great naked building land which he haunted in play hours, rather like an outlaw in the woods, he met a curious agile youth with hair brushed up off his head. Seeing each other, they promptly hit each other simultaneously and had a fight. Next day they met again and fought again. These Homeric conflicts went on for many days, till one morning in the crisis of some insane grapple, the subject of this biography quoted, like a war-chant, something out of Macaulay's Lays. The other started and relaxed his hold. They gazed at each other. Then the foe quoted the following line. In this land of savages they knew each other. For the next two hours they talked books. They have talked books ever since. The boy was Edmund Clerihew Bentley. The incident just narrated is the true and real account of the first and deepest of our hero's male connections. But another was to ensue, probably equally profound and far more pregnant with awful and dazzling consequences. Bentley always had a habit of trying to do things well: twelve years of the other's friendship has not cured him of this. Being seized with a particular desire to learn conjuring, he had made the acquaintance of an eerie and supernatural young man, who instructed him in the Black Art: a gaunt Mephistophelian sort of individual, who our subject half thought was a changeling. Our subject has not quite got over the idea yet, though for practical social purposes he calls him Lucian Oldershaw. Our subject met Lucian Oldershaw. 'That night,' as Shakespeare says, 'there was a star.'

These three persons soon became known through the length and breadth of St. Paul's School as the founders of a singular brotherhood. It was called the J.D.C. No one, we believe, could ever have had better friends than did the hero of this narrative. We wish that we could bring before the reader the personality of all the Knights of that eccentric round table. Most of them are known already to the reader. Even the subject himself is possibly known to the reader. Bertram, who seemed somehow to have been painted by Vandyck, a sombre and stately young man, a blend of Cavalier and Puritan, with the physique of a military father and the views of an ethical mother and a soul of his own which for sheer simplicity is something staggering. Vernede with an Oriental and inscrutable placidity varied every now and then with dazzling agility and Meredithian humour. Waldo d'Avigdor who masks with complete fashionable triviality a Hebraic immutability of passion tried in a more ironical and bitter service than his Father Jacob. Lawrence and Maurice Solomon, who show another side of the same people, the love of home, the love of children, the meek and malicious humour, the tranquil service of a law. Salter who shows ho beautiful and ridiculous a combination can be made of the most elaborate mental cultivation and artistic sensibility and omniscience with a receptiveness and a humility extraordinary in any man. These were his friends. May he be forgi ven for speaking of them at length and with pride? Some day we hope the reader may know them all. He knew these people; he knew their friends. He heard Mildred Wain say ‘Blogg’ and he thought it was a funny name. Had he been told that he would ever pronounce it with the accents of tears and passion he would have said, in his pride, that the name was not suitable for that purpose. But there are [Greek letters]....

He went for a time to an Art School. There he met a great many curious people. Many of the men were horrible blackguards: he was not exactly that: so they naturally found each other interesting. He went through some rather appalling discoveries about human life and the final discovery was that there is no Devil - no, not even such a thing as a bad man.

One pleasant Saturday afternoon [his friend] Lucian said to him, ‘I am going to take you to see the Bloggs.’ ‘The what?’ said the unhappy man. ‘The Bloggs,’ said the other, darkly. Naturally assuming that it was the name of a public-house he reluctantly followed his friend. He came to a small front-garden; if it was a public-house it was not a businesslike one. They raised the latch - they rang the bell (if the bell was not in the close time just then). No flower in the pots winked. No brick grinned. No sign in Heaven or earth warned him. The birds sang on in the trees. He went in.

The first time he spent an evening at the Bloggs there was no one there. That is to say there was a worn but fiery little lady in a grey dress who didn’t approve of ‘catastrophic solutions of social problems.’ That, he understood, was Mrs. Blogg. There was a long, blonde, smiling young person who seemed to think him quite off his head and who was addressed as Ethel. There were two people whose meaning and status he couldn’t imagine, one of whom had a big nose and the other hadn’t.... Lastly, there was a Juno-like creature in a tremendous hat who eyed him all the time half wildly, like a shying horse, because he said he was quite happy....

But the second time he went there he was plumped down on a sofa beside a being of whom he had a vague impression that brown hair grew at intervals all down her like a caterpillar. Once in the course of conversation she looked straight at him and he said to himself as plainly as if he had read it in a book: ‘If I had anything to do with this girl I should go on my knees to her: if I spoke with her she would never deceive me: if I depended on her she would never deny me: if I loved her she would never play with me: if I trusted her she would never go back on me: if I remembered her she would never forget me. I may never see her again. Goodbye.’ It was all said in a flash: but it was all said....

Two years, as they say in the playbills, is supposed to elapse. And here is the subject of this memoir sitting on a balcony above the sea. The time, evening. He is thinking of the whole bewildering record of which the foregoing is a brief outline: he sees how far he has gone wrong and how idle and wasteful and wicked he has often been: how miserably unfitted he is for what he is called upon to be. Let him now declare it and hereafter for ever hold his peace.

But there are four lamps of thanksgiving always before him. The first is for his creation out of the same earth with such a woman as you. The second is that he has not, with all his faults, ‘gone after strange women.’ You cannot think how a man’s self restraint is rewarded in this. The third is that he has tried to love everything alive: a dim preparation for loving you. And the fourth is — but no words can express that. Here ends my previous existence. Take it: it led me to you.

DREAMS

There can be comparatively little question that the place ordinarily occupied by dreams in literature is peculiarly unreal and unsatisfying. When the hero tells us that “last night he dreamed a dream,” we are quite certain from the perfect and decorative character of the dream that he made it up at breakfast. The dream is so reasonable that it is quite impossible. An angel came to him and opened before him a scroll inscribed with some tremendous moral truth; a knight in armour rode past him declaring some ideal quest; the phantom of his mother arose to warn him from some imminent sin. Dreams like these are (with occasional exceptions) practically unknown in the lawless kingdoms of the night. A dream is scarcely ever rounded to express faultlessly some faultless ideas. An angel might indeed open a scroll before the dreamer, but it would probably be inscribed with some remark about excursion trains to Brighton; a knight in armour might ride by him, but it would be impossible to deny that the most salient fact about that warrier was the fact that he was wearing three hats; his mother might indeed appear to the dreamer, and give him the tenderest and most elevated counsel, but it would be impossible for the loftiest ethical comfort to entirely obscure the fact that her nose was growing longer and longer every minute. Dreams have a kind of hellish ingenuity and energy in the pursuit of the inappropriate; the most omniscient and cunning artist never took so much trouble or achieved such success in finding exactly the word that was right or exactly the action that was significant, as this midnight lord of misrule can do in finding exactly the word that is wrong and exactly the action that is meaningless. The object of art is to subordinate the detail that is incidental to the tendency which is general. The object of a dream appears to be so to develop itself that some utterly futile and half-witted detail shall gradually devour all the other details of the vision. The flower upon the wall-paper just behind the head of Napoleon Buonaparte becomes brighter and brighter until we see nothing but a flower; the third waistcoat button of our best friend grows larger and larger until it is the great round sun of a revolving cosmos.

Thus at first sight it would seem that the lord of dreams was the eternal opponent of art. He seems to be to the Ã¦sthetic system what Satan is to the religious system, an unconquerable enemy, an irreducible minimum. The prigs of art who in this period erect their impeccable edifice, with even more than the gravity of the prigs of religion, have to deal with this mighty underworld of man in which their new rules are set as much at naught as the old ones, which is as careless of the modern canons of pleasure as of the ancient canons of pain. Asleep the artist is in the hands of an enchantress of ugliness who makes him love the discordant and hate the beautiful. In that realm the landscape painter paints monstrous landscapes, mingling scarlet and purple; in that realm the musician devises torturing melodies, and the architect top-heavy cathedrals.

So far as the forms and modes of art are concerned this is indeed true. The translucently allegorical dreams so often narrated in romance are essentially inconceivable. When the aged priest in a story narrates his dream, in which the imagery is dignified and the message plain, we are free to yield finally to a conviction that must have long been growing on us, and conclude that he is a somewhat distinguished liar. Dreams may have infinite meanings, but those meanings are not conveyed obviously by communicative mothers and candid angels. The Bible is an excellent place to look for a wisdom and morality older than mere words and ideals, and there is certainly far more truth in the old Biblical version of the nature of dreams which made them inscrutable and somewhat grotesque parables requiring particular persons to interpret them. If great spiritual truths are conveyed by dreams, they must certainly be conveyed as they were to Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar by farcical mysteries of clay-footed images and lean cows eating fat ones.

But there is another and far deeper manner in which dreams definitely correspond to art. Nothing is more remarkable in some of the great artistic masterpieces of the world than their startling deficiency in much of that sense of grace and proportion which goes nowadays by the name of art. If art were really what some contemporary critics represent it, a matter of the faultless arrangement of harmonies and transitions, Shakespeare would certainly not be anything like so great an artist as the last poetaster in Fleet Street who published a series of seven sonnets on seven varieties of grey sunset. Shakespeare often suffers from too much inventiveness; that which clogs us and trips us up in his masterpieces is not so much inferior work as irrelevant brilliancy; not so much failures as fragments of other masterpieces. Dickens was designless without knowing or caring; Sterne was designless by design. Yet these great works which mix up abstractions fit for an epic with fooleries not fit for a pantomime, which clash the sword with the red-hot poker, which present such a picture of literary chaos as might be produced if the characters in every book from *Paradise Lost* to *Pickwick* broke from their covers and mingled in one mad romance “ these great works have assuredly a unity of their own or they would not be works of art. The unity which they have is a unity which when properly understood gives us the key of almost the whole of literary Ã¦sthetics: it is the same unity that we find in dreams. There is one unity which we do find in dreams. It binds together a their brutal inconsequence and all their moonstruck anti-climaxes. It makes the unimaginable nocturnal farce which begins with a saint choosing parasols and ends with a policeman shelling peas, as rounded and single a harmony as some poet’s roundel upon a passion flower. This unity is the absolute unity of emotion. If we wish to experience pure and naked feeling we can never experience it so really as in that unreal land. There the passions seem to live an outlawed and abstract existence, unconnected with any facts or persons. In dreams we have revenge without any injury, remorse without any sin, memory without any recollections, hope without any prospect. Love, indeed, almost proves itself a divine thing by the logic of dreams; for in a dream every material circumstance may alter, spectacles may grow on a baby, and moustaches on a maiden aunt, and yet the great sway of one tyrannical tenderness may never cease. Our dream may begin with the end of the world, and end with a picnic at Hampton Court, but the same rich and nameless mood will be expressed by the falling stars and by the crumbling sandwiches. In a dream daisies may glare at us like the eyes of demons. In a dream lightning and conflagration may warm and soothe us like our own fireside. In this subconscious world, in short, existence betrays itself; it shows that it is full of spiritual forces which disguise themselves as lions and lamp-posts, which can as easily disguise themselves as butterflies and Babylonian temples. The essential unity of a dream, which is never broken or impaired, is the unity of its attitude towards God, wistful or vacant, or grateful, or rebellious or assured.

Surely this unity of dreams was the unity which underlay the old wild masterpieces of literature. The plays of Shakespeare, for example, may be full of incidental discords, but not one of them ever fails to convey its aboriginal sentiment, that life is as black as the tempest or as green as the greenwood. It is said that art should represent life. So indeed it should, but it labours under the primary disadvantage that no man has seen life at any time. Long records of Whitechapen crime, long rows of Brixton villas, the words which one clerk says to another clerk, the despatches that one diplomatist writes to another diplomatist, none of these things even approach to being life. For life the man of science, even if he lives in the very heart of Brixton, is still searching with a microscope. Life dwells alone in our very heart of hearts, life is one and virgin and unconquered, and sometimes in the watches of the night speaks in its own terrible harmony.

LEO TOLSTOY

IF any one wishes to form the fullest estimate of the real character and influence of the great man whose name is prefixed to these remarks, he will not find it in his novels, splendid as they are, or in his ethical views, clearly and finely as they are conceived and expanded. He will find it best expressed in the news that has recently come from Canada, that a sect of Russian Christian anarchists has turned all its animals loose, on the ground that it is immoral to possess them or control them. About such an incident as this there is a quality altogether independent of the rightness or wrongness, the sanity or insanity, of the view. It is first and foremost a reminder that the world is still young. There are still theories of life as insanely reasonable as those which were disputed under the clear blue skies of Athens. There are still examples of a faith as fierce and practical as that of the Mahometans, who swept across Africa and Europe, shouting a single word. To the languid contemporary politician and philosopher it seems doubtless like something out of a dream, that in this iron-bound, homogeneous, and clockwork age, a company of European men in boots and waistcoats should begin to insist on taking the horse out of the shafts of the omnibus, and lift the pig out of his pig-sty, and the dog out of his kennel, because of a moral scruple or theory. It is like a page from some fairy farce to imagine the Doukhabor solemnly escorting a hen to the door of the yard and bidding it a benevolent farewell as it sets out on its travels. All this, as I say, seems mere muddle-headed absurdity to the typical leader of human society in this decade, to a man like Mr. Balfour, or Mr. Wyndham. But there is nevertheless a further thing to be said, and that is that, if Mr. Balfour could be converted to a religion which taught him that he was morally bound to walk into the House of Commons on his hands, and he did walk on his hands, if Mr. Wyndham could accept a creed which taught that he ought to dye his hair blue, and he did dye his hair blue, they would both of them be, almost beyond description, better and happier men than they are. For there is only one happiness possible or conceivable under the sun, and that is enthusiasm — that strange and splendid word that has passed through so many vicissitudes, which meant, in the eighteenth century the condition of a lunatic, and in ancient Greece the presence of a god.

This great act of heroic consistency which has taken place in Canada is the best example of the work of Tolstoy. It is true (as I believe) that the Doukhabors have an origin quite independent of the great Russian moralist, but there can surely be little doubt that their emergence into importance and the growth and mental distinction of their sect, is due to his admirable summary and justification of their scheme of ethics. Tolstoy, besides being a magnificent novelist, is one of the very few men alive who have a real, solid, and serious view of life. He is a Catholic church, of which he is the only member, the somewhat arrogant Pope and the somewhat submissive layman. He is one of the two or three men in Europe, who have an attitude towards things so entirely their own, that we could supply their inevitable view on anything — a silk hat, a Home Rule Bill, an Indian poem, or a pound of tobacco. There are three men in existence who have such an attitude: Tolstoy, Mr. Bernard Shaw, and my friend Mr. Hilaire Belloc. They are all diametrically opposed to each other, but they all have this essential resemblance, that, given their basis of thought, their soil of conviction, their opinions on every earthly subject grow there naturally, like flowers in a field. There are certain views of certain things that they must take; they do not form opinions, the opinions form themselves. Take, for instance, in the case of Tolstoy, the mere list of miscellaneous objects which I wrote down at random above, a silk hat, a Home Rule Bill, an Indian poem, and a pound of tobacco. Tolstoy would say: “I believe in the utmost possible simplification of life; therefore, this silk hat is a black abortion.” He would say: “I believe in the utmost possible simplification of life; therefore, this Home Rule Bill is a mere peddling compromise; it is no good to break up a centralised empire into nations, you must break the nation up into individuals.” He would say: “I believe in the utmost possible simplification of life; therefore, I am interested in this Indian poem, for Eastern ethics, under all their apparent gorgeousness, are far simpler and more Tolstoyan than Western.” He would say: “I believe in the utmost possible simplification of life; therefore, this pound of tobacco is a thing of evil; take it away.” Everything in the world, from the Bible to a bootjack, can be, and is, reduced by Tolstoy to this great fundamental Tolstoyan principle, the simplification of life. When we deal with a body of opinion like this we are dealing with an incident in the history of Europe infinitely more important than the appearance of Napoleon Buonaparte.

This emergence of Tolstoy, with his awful and simple ethics, is important in more ways than one. Among other things it is a very interesting commentary on an attitude which has been taken up for the matter of half a century by all the avowed opponents of religion. The secularist and the sceptic have denounced Christianity first and foremost, because of its encouragement of fanaticism; because religious excitement led men to burn their neighbours and to dance naked down the street. How queer it all sounds now. Religion can be swept out of the matter altogether, and still there are philosophical and ethical theories which can produce fanaticism enough to fill the world. Fanaticism has nothing at all to do with religion. There are grave scientific theories which, if carried out logically, would result in the same fires in the market-place and the same nakedness in the street. There are modern esthetes who would expose themselves like the Adamites if they could do it in elegant attitudes. There are modern scientific moralists who would burn their opponents alive, and would be quite contented if they were burnt by some new chemical process. And if any one doubts this proposition — that fanaticism has nothing to do with religion, but has only to do with human nature — let him take this case of Tolstoy and the Doukhabors. A sect of men start with no theology at all, but with the simple doctrine that we ought to love our neighbour and use no force against him, and they end in thinking it wicked to carry a leather handbag, or to ride in a cart. A great modern writer who erases theology altogether, denies the validity of the Scriptures and the Churches alike, forms a purely ethical theory that love should be the instrument of reform, and ends by maintaining that we have no right to strike a man if he is torturing a child before our eyes. He goes on, he develops a theory of the mind and the emotions, which might be held by the most rigid atheist, and he ends by maintaining that the sexual relation out of which all humanity has come, is not only not moral, but is positively not natural. This is fanaticism as it has been and as it will always be. Destroy the last copy of he Bible, and persecution and insane orgies will be founded on Mr. Herbert Spencer’s “Synthetic Philosophy.” Some of the broadest thinkers of the Middle Ages believed in faggots, and some of the broadest thinkers in the nineteenth century believe in dynamite.

The truth is that Tolstoy, with his immense genius, with his colossal faith, with his vast fearlessness and vast knowledge of life, is deficient in one faculty and one faculty alone. He is not a mystic: and therefore he has a tendency to go mad. Men talk of the extravagances and frenzies that have been produced by mysticism: they are a mere drop in the bucket. In the main, and from the beginning of time, mysticisrn has kept men sane. The thing that has driven them mad was logic. It is significant that, with all that has been said about the excitability of poets, only one English poet ever went mad, and he went mad from a logical system of theology. He was Cowper, and his poetry retarded his insanity for many years. So poetry, in which Tolstoy is deficient, has always been a tonic and sanative thing. The only thing that has kept the race of men from the mad extremes of the convent and the pirate-galley, the night-club and the lethal chamber, has been mysticism — the belief that logic is misleading, and that things are not what they seem.

G. K. CHESTERTON.

LEO TOLSTOY AS WRITER

HALF the ignorance or misunderstanding of this greatest living figure in literature comes of the attempt to judge him as we judge the specialised Western novelist — an utterly futile method of approach. He is a Russian, in the first place. Had he come to Paris with Turguenieff, he might have been similarly re-nationalised, might possibly have developed into a writer pure and simple; the world might so have gained a few great romances — it would have lost infinitely in other directions. Turguenieff wished it so. “My friend,” he wrote to Tolstoy from his deathbed, “return to literature! Reflect that that gift comes to you whence everything comes to us. Ah! how happy I should be if I could think that my prayers could influence you.... My friend, great writer of our Russian land, hear my entreaty!” For once, the second greatest of modern Russians took a narrow view of character and destiny. Genius must work itself out on its own lines. Tolstoy remained a Russian from tip to toe — that is one of his supreme values for us; and he remained an indivisible personality. The artist and the moralist are inseparable in his works. “We are not to take ‘Anna Karenina’ as a work of art,” said Matthew Arnold; “we are to take it as a piece of life.” The distinction is not very satisfactorily stated, but the meaning is clear. So, too, W. D. Howells, in his introduction to an American edition of the “Sebastopol Sketches”: “I do not know how it is with others to whom these books of Tolstoy’s have come, but for my part I cannot think of them as literature in the artistic sense at all. Some people complain to me when I praise them that they are too long, too diffuse, too confused, that the characters’ names are hard to pronounce, and that the life they portray is very sad and not amusing. In the presence of these criticisms I can only say that I find them nothing of the kind, but that each history of Tolstoy’s is as clear, as orderly, as brief, as something I have lived through myself. I cannot think of any service which imaginative literature has done the race so great as that which Tolstoy has done in his conception of Karenina at that crucial moment when the cruelly outraged man sees that he cannot be good with dignity. This leaves all tricks of fancy, all effects of art, immeasurably behind.” So much being said, however, we may be allowed to emphasise in this qualities and achievements of Tolstoy as artist, rather than the expositions of Christian Anarchism and the social philippics under which those achievements have been somewhat hidden in recent years.

Morbid introspectiveness and the spirit of revolt inevitably colour what is best in nineteenth-century Russia. Born at Yasnaya Polyana (“Clear Field”), Tula, in 1828, and early orphaned, Tolstoy’s youth synchronised with the period of reaction that brought the Empire to the humiliating disasters of the Crimean War. No hope was left in the thin layer of society lying between the two mill-stones of the Court and the serfs; none in the little sphere of art where Byronic romanticism was ready to expire. The boy saw from the first the rottenness of the patriarchal aristocracy in which his lot seemed to be cast. Precocious, abnormally sensitive and observant, impatient of discipline and formal learning, awkward and bashful, always brooding, not a little conceited, he was a sceptic at fifteen, and left the University of Kazan in disgust at the stupid conventions of the time and place, without taking his degree. “Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth” — which appeared in three sections between 1852 and 1857 — tells the story of this period, though the figure of Irtenieff is probably a projection rather than a portrait of himself, to whom he is always less fair, not to say merciful, than to others. This book is a most uncompromising exercise in self-analysis. It of great length, there is no plot, and few outer events are recorded.

The realism is generally morbid, but is varied by some passages of great descriptive power, such as the account of the storm, and occasionally with tender pathos, as in the story of the soldier’s death, as well as by grimly vivid pages, such as the narrative of the mother’s death. In this earliest work will be found the seeds both of Tolstoy’s artistic genius and of his ethical gospel.

After five years of mildly benevolent efforts among his serfs at Yasnaya Polyana (the disappointments of which he related a few years later in “A Landlord’s Morning,” intended to have been part of a full novel called “A Russian Proprietor”), his elder brother Nicholas persuaded him to join the army, and in 1851 he was drafted to the Caucasus as an artillery officer. On this favourite stage of Russian romance, where for the first time he saw the towering mountains and the tropical sun, and met the rugged adventurous highlanders, Tolstoy felt his imagination stirred as Byron among the isles of Greece, and his early revulsion against city life confirmed as Wordsworth amid the Lakes, as Thoreau at Walden, by a direct call from Nature to his own heart. The largest result of this experience was “The Cossacks” (1852). Turguenieff described this fine prose epic of the contact of civilised and savage man as “the best novel written in our language.” “The Raid” (or “The Invaders,” as Mr. Dole’s translation is entitled), same year, “The Wood-Cutting Expedition” (1855), “Meeting an Old Acquaintance” (1856), and “A Prisoner in the Caucasus” (1862) are also drawn from recollections of this sojourn, and show the same descriptive and romantic power. Upon the outbreak of the Crimean War the Count was called to Sebastopol, where he had command of a battery, and took part in the defence of the citadel. The immediate product of these dark months of bloodshed was the thrilling series of impressions reprinted from one of the leading Russian reviews as “Sebastopol Sketches” (1856). From that day onward Tolstoy knew and hateful truth about war and the thoughtless pseudo-patriotism which hurries nations into fratricidal slaughter. From that there was expunged from his mind all the cheap romanticism which depends upon the glorification of the savage nature. These wonderful pictures of the routine of the battlefield established his position in Russia as a writer, and later on created in Western countries an impression like that of the canvases of Verestchagin.

For a brief time Tolstoy became a figure in the old and new capitals of Russia by right of talent as well as birth. His very chequered friendship with Turguenieff, one of the oddest chapters in literary history, can only be mentioned here. In 1857 he travelled in Germany, France, and Italy. It was of these years that he declared in “My Confession” that he could not think of them without horror, disgust, and pain of heart. The catalogue of crime which he charged against himself in his salvationist crisis of twenty years later must not be taken literally; but that there was some ground for it we may guess from the scenic and incidental realism of the “Recollections of a

Billiard Marker” (1856), and of many a later page. Several other powerful short novels date from about this time, including “Albert” and “Lucerne,” both of which remind us of the Count’s susceptibility to music; “Polikushka,” a tale of peasant life; and “Family Happiness,” the story of a marriage that failed, a most clear, consistent, forceful, and in parts beautiful piece of work, anticipating in essentials “The Kreutzer Sonata” that was to scandalise the world thirty years afterward.

After all, it was family happiness that saved Leo Tolstoy. For the third time the hand of death had snatched away one of the nearest to him — his brother Nicholas. Two years later, in 1862, he married Miss Behrs, daughter of the army surgeon in Tula — the most fortunate thing that has happened to him in his whole life, I should think. Family responsibilities, those novel and daring experiments in peasant education which are recorded in several volumes of the highest interest, the supervision of the estate, magisterial work, and last, but not least, the prolonged labours upon “War and Peace” and “Anna Karenina” fill up the next fifteen years. “War and Peace” (1864-9) is a huge panorama of the Napoleonic campaign of 1812, with preceding and succeeding episodes in Russian society. These four volumes display in their superlative degree Tolstoy’s indifference to plot and his absorption in individual character; they are rather a series of scenes threaded upon the fortunes of several families than a set novel; but they contain passages of penetrating psychology and vivid description, as well as a certain amount of anarchist theorising. Of this work, by which its author became known in the West, Flaubert (how the name carries us backward!) wrote: “It is of the first order. What a painter and what a psychologist! The two first volumes are sublime, but the third drags frightfully. There are some quite Shakespearean things in it.” The artist’s hand was now strengthening for his highest attainment. In 1876 appeared “Anna Karenina,” his greatest, and as he intended at the time (but Art is not so easily jilted), his last novel. The fine qualities of this book, which, though long, is dramatically unified and vitally coherent, have been so fully recognised that I need not attempt to describe them. Mr. George Meredith has described Anna as “the most perfectly depicted female character in all fiction,” which, from the author of “Diana,” is praise indeed. Parallel with the main subject of the illicit love of Anna and Vronsky there is a minor subject in the fortunes of Levin and Kitty, wherein the reader will discover many of Tolstoy’s own experiences. Matthew Arnold complained that the book contained too many characters and a burdensome multiplicity of actions, but praised its author’s extraordinarily fine perception and no less extraordinary truthfulness, and frankly revelled in Anna’s “large, fresh, rich, generous, delightful nature.” “When I had ended my work ‘Anna Karenina,’” said Tolstoy in “My Confession” (1879-82), “my despair reached such a height that I could do nothing but think of the horrible condition in which I found myself.... I saw only one thing — Death. Everything else was a lie.” Of that spiritual crisis nothing need be said here except that it only intensified, and did not really, as it seemed to do, vitally change, principles and instincts which had possessed Tolstoy from the beginning. His subsequent ethical and religious development may be traced in a long series of books and pamphlets, of which the most important are “The Gospels Translated, Compared, and Harmonised” (1880-2), “What I Believe” [“My Religion”], produced abroad in 1884, “What is to be Done?” (1884-5), “Life” (1887), “Work” (1888), “The Kingdom of God is Within You” (1893), “Non-Action” (1894), “Patriotism and Christianity” (1896) — crusade, in the foreign and the clandestine presses at least, against all Imperial authority and social maladjustments. Mr. Tchertkoff, Mr. Aylmer Maudej the “Brotherhood Publishing Co.,” and the “Free Age Press” deserve praise for their efforts to popularise these and other works of the Count in thoroughly good translations. In “What is Art?” (1898), not content with the bare utilitarian argument that it is merely a means of social union, he launched a jehad against all modern ideas of Art which rely upon a conception of beauty and all ideas of beauty into which pleasure enters as a leading constituent. A short but luminous essay on “Guy de Maupassant and the Art of Fiction” is a scathing attack upon militarism in general and the Franco-Russian Alliance in particular— “The Christian Teaching” (1898), and “The Slavery of our Times” (1900). Various letters on the successive famines and on the religious persecutions in Russia deserve separate mention; they remind us that since the failure of the revolutionary movement miscalled “Nihilism” Tolstoy has gradually risen to the position of the one man who can continue with impunity a public more satisfactory contribution to the subject.

It is more to our purpose to note that in this volcanic and fecund if fundamentally simple personality the artist has dogged the steps of the evangelist to the last. “Master and Man” (1895) is one of the most exquisite short stories ever written. “The Death of Ivan Ilyitch” (1884) and “Resurrection” (1899) are in some ways the most powerful of all his works.

The much condemned “Dominion of Darkness” (1886) and “Kreutzer Sonata” (1889) will be more fairly judged when the average Englishman has learned the supreme merit of that uncompromising truthfulness which gives nobility to every line the grand Russian ever wrote. To submit a work like “Resurrection” to the summary treatment which the ordinary novel receives and merits is absurd. It is a large picture of the fall and rise of man done by the swift and restless hand of a master who stands in a category apart, with an eye that sees externals and essentials with like accuracy and rapidity. Because the dramatic quality of these living pictures lies, not in their organisation into a conventionally limited plot, but first in the challenging idea upon which they are founded, then the inexorable development of individual characters, and ever and anon in the grip of particular episodes, the little critics scoff. The idea, the characters, the episodes are all too real and precious British self-complacency. The grandmotherly Athenoeum permits some person to describe this Promethean figure as “a precious vase that has been broken,” and can now only be pieced together to make “the ornament of a museum,” — which reminds me that I heard a lecturer before a well-known literary society in London describe him lately as a “scavenger,” and that a city bookseller assured me the other day that there was something almost amounting to a boycott against his fiction in the shops. The publisher who is preparing a complete edition of Tolstoy — enormous work! — knows better, knows that Tolstoy is one of the world-spirits whose advance out of the obscurity of a benighted land into the largest contemporary circulation is but a foretaste of an influence that will soon be co-extensive with the commonwealth of thinking men and women.

His service to literature is precisely the same as his service to morals. Like Bunyan and Burns, Dickens and Whitman, he throws down in a world of decadent conventions the gauge of the democratic ideal. As he calls the politician and the social reformer back to the land and the common people, so he calls the artist back to the elemental forces ever at work beneath the surface-show of nature and humanity. With an extraordinary penetration into the hidden recesses of character, he joins a terrible truthfulness, and that absolute simplicity of manner which we generally associate with genius. He is a realist, not merely of the outer, but more especially of the inner life. There is no staginess, no sentimentality, in his work. He has no heroes in our Western sense, none, even, of those sensational types of personality which glorify the name of his Northern contemporary, Ibsen. His style is always natural, direct, irresistible as a physical process. He has rarely strayed beyond the channel of his own experience, and the reader who prefers breadth to depth of knowledge must seek elsewhere. He has little humour, but a grimly satiric note has sometimes crept into his writing, as Archdeacon Farrar will remember. Of artifice designed for vulgar entertainment he knows nothing; in the world of true art, which is the wine-press of the soul of man, he stands, a princely figure. Theories, prescriptions, and discussions are forgotten, and we think only with love and reverence of this modern patriarch, so lonely amid the daily enlarging congregation of the hearts he has awakened to a sense of the mystery, the terror, the joy, the splendour of human destinies.

G. H. PERRIS.

Tolstoy’s Place in European Literature

The justness of the word *great* applied to a nation’s writers is perhaps best tested by simply taking each writer in turn from out his Age, and seeing how far our conception of his Age remains unaffected. We may take away hundreds of clever writers, scores of distinguished creators, and the Age remains before our eyes, solidly unaffected by their absence; but touch one or two central figures, and lo! the whole framework of the Age gives in your hands, and you realise that the World’s insight into, and understanding of that Age’s life has been supplied us by the special interpretation offered by two or three great minds. In fact, every Age seems dwarfed, chaotic, full of confused tendencies and general contradiction till the few great men have arisen, and symbolised in themselves what their nation’s growth or strife signifies. How many dumb ages are there in which no great writer has appeared, ages to whose inner life in consequence we have no key!

Tolstoy’s significance as the great writer of modern Russia can scarcely be augmented in Russian eyes by his exceeding significance to Europe as symbolising the spiritual unrest of the modern world. Yet so inevitably must the main stream of each age’s tendency and the main movement of the world’s thought be discovered for us by the great writers, whenever they appear, that Russia can no more keep Tolstoy’s significance to herself than could Germany keep Goethe’s to herself. True it is that Tolstoy, as great novelist, has been absorbed in mirroring the peculiar world of half-feudal, modern Russia, a world strange to Western Europe, but the spirit of analysis with which the creator of Anna Karenina and War and Peace has confronted the modern world is more truly representative of our Age’s outlook than is the spirit of any other of his great contemporaries. Between the days of Wilhelm Meister and of Resurrection what an extraordinary volume of the rushing tide of modern life has swept by! A century of that “liberation of modern Europe from the old routine” has passed since Goethe stood forth for “the awakening of the modern spirit.” A century of emancipation, of Science, of unbelief, of incessant shock, change, and Progress all over the face of Europe, and even as Goethe a hundred years ago typified the triumph of the new intelligence of Europe over the shackles of its old institutions, routine, and dogma (as Matthew Arnold affirms), so Tolstoy today stands for the triumph of the European soul against civilisation’s routine and dogma. The peculiar modernness of Tolstoy’s attitude, however, as we shall presently show, is that he is inspired largely by the modern scientific spirit in his searching analysis of modern life. Apparently at war with Science and Progress, his extraordinary fascination for the mind of Europe lies in the fact that he of all great contemporary writers has come nearest to demonstrating, to realising what the life of the modern man is. He of all the analysts of the civilised man’s thoughts, emotions, and actions has least idealized, least beautified, and least distorted the complex daily life of the European world. With a marked moral bias, driven onward in his search for truth by his passionate religious temperament, Tolstoy, in his pictures of life, has constructed a truer whole, a human world less bounded by the artist’s individual limitations, more mysteriously living in its vast flux and flow than is the world of any writer of the century. War and Peace and Anna Karenina, those great worlds where the physical environment, mental outlook, emotional aspiration, and moral code of the whole community of Russia are reproduced by his art, as some mighty cunning phantasmagoria of changing life, are superior in the sense of containing a whole nation’s life, to the world of Goethe, Byron, Scott, Victor Hugo, Balzac, Dickens, Thackeray, Maupassant, or any latter day creator we can name.

And not only so, but Tolstoy’s analysis of life throws more light on the main currents of thought in our Age, raises deeper problems, and explores more untouched territories of the mind than does any corresponding analysis by his European contemporaries.

It is by Tolstoy’s passionate seeking of the life of the soul that the great Russian writer towers above the men of our day, and it is because his hunger for spiritual truth has led him to probe contemporary life, to examine all modern formulas and appearances, to penetrate into the secret thought and emotion of men of all grades in our complex society, that his work is charged with the essence of nearly all that modernity thinks and feels, believes and suffers, hopes and fears as it evolves in more and more complex forms of our terribly complex civilisation. The soul of humanity is, however, always the appeal of men from the life that environs, moulds, and burdens them, to instincts that go beyond and transcend their present life. Tolstoy is the appeal of the modern world, the cry of the modern conscience against the blinded fate of its own progress. To the eye of science everything is possible in human life, the sacrifice of the innocent for the sake of the progress of the guilty, the crushing and deforming of the weak so that the strong may triumph over them, the evolution of new serf classes at the dictates of a ruling class. All this the nineteenth century has seen accomplished, and not seen alone in Russia. It is Tolstoy's distinction to have combined in his life-work more than any other great artist two main conflicting points of view. He has fused by his art the science that defines the way Humanity is forced forward blindly and irresponsibly from century to century by the mere pressure of events, he has fused with this science of our modern world the soul's protest against the earthly fate of man which leads the generations into taking the ceaseless roads of evil which every age unwinds.

Let us cite Tolstoy's treatment of War as an instance of how this great artist symbolises the Age for us and so marks the advance in self-consciousness of the modern mind, and as a nearer approximation to a realisation of what life is. We have only got to compare Tolstoy's "Sebastopol" (1856) with any other document on war by other European writers to perceive that Tolstoy alone among artists has realised war, his fellows have idealised it. To quote a passage from a former article let us say that: "Sebastopol" gives us war under all aspects — war as a squalid, honourable, daily affair of mud and glory, of vanity, disease, hard work, stupidity, patriotism, and inhuman agony. Tolstoy gets the complex effects of "Sebastopol" by keenly analysing the effect of the sights and sounds, dangers and pleasures, of war on the brains of a variety of typical men, and by placing a special valuation of his own on these men's actions, thoughts, and emotions, on their courage, altruism, and show of indifference in the face of death. He lifts up, in fact, the veil of appearances conventionally drawn by society over the actualities of the glorious trade of killing men, and he does this chiefly by analysing keenly the insensitiveness and indifference of the average mind, which says of the worst of war’s realities, “I felt so and so, and did so and so: but as to what those other thousands may have felt in their agony, that I did not enter into at all.” “Sebastopol,” therefore, though an exceedingly short and exceedingly simple narrative, is a psychological document on modern war of extraordinary value, for it simply relegates to the lumber-room, as unlife-like and hopelessly limited, all those theatrical glorifications of war which men of letters, romantic poets, and grave historians alike have been busily piling up on humanity’s shelves from generation to generation. And more: we feel that in “Sebastopol” we have at last the skeptical modern spirit, absorbed in actual life, demonstrating what war is, and expressing at length the confused sensations of countless men, who have heretofore, recognising this man Tolstoy as the most advanced product of our civilisation, and likening him to a great surgeon, who, not deceived by the world’s presentation of its own life, penetrates into the essential joy and suffering, health and disease of multitudes of men; a surgeon who, face to face with the strangest of Nature’s laws in the constitution of human society, puzzled by all the illusions, fatuities, and conventions of the human mind, resolutely sets himself to lay bare the roots of all its passions, appetites, and incentives in the struggle for life, so that at least human reason may advance farther along the path of self-knowledge in advancing towards a general sociological study of man.

Tolstoy’s place in nineteenth-century literature is, therefore, in our view, no less fixed and certain than is Voltaire’s place in the eighteenth century. Both of these writers focus for us in a marvelously complete manner the respective methods of analysing life by which the rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the science and humanitarianism of the nineteenth century have moulded for us the modern world. All the movements, all the problems, all the speculation, all the agitations of the world of today in contrast with the immense materialistic civilisation that science has hastily built up for us in three or four generations, all the spirit of modern life is condensed in the pages of Tolstoy’s writings, because, as we have said, he typifies the soul of the modern man gazing, now undaunted, and now in alarm, at the formidable array of the newly-tabulated cause and effect of humanity’s progress, at the appalling cheapness and waste of human life in Nature’s hands. Tolstoy thus stands for the modern soul’s alarm in contact with science. And just as science’s work after its first destruction of the past ages’ formalism, superstition, and dogma is directed more and more to the examination and amelioration of human life, so Tolstoy’s work has been throughout inspired by a passionate love of humanity, and by his ceaseless struggle against conventional religion, dogmatic science, and society’s mechanical influence on the minds of its members. To make man more conscious of his acts, to show society its real motives and what it is feeling, and not cry out in admiration at what it pretends to feel — this has been the great novelist’s aim in his delineation of Russia’s life. Ever seeking the one truth — to arrive at men’s thoughts and sensations under the daily pressure of life — never flinching from his exploration of the dark world of man’s animalism and incessant self-deception, Tolstoy’s realism in art is symbolical of our absorption in the world of fact, in the modern study of natural law, a study of ultimately without loss of spirituality, nay, resulting in immense gain to the spiritual life. The realism of the great Russian’s novels is, therefore, more in line with the modern tendency and outlook than is the general tendency of other schools of Continental literature. And Tolstoy must be finally looked on, not merely as the conscience of the Russian world revolting against the too heavy burden which the Russian people have now to bear in Holy Russia’s onward march towards the building-up of her great Asiatic Empire, but also as the soul of the modern world seeking to replace in its love of humanity the life of those old religions which science is destroying day by day. In this sense Tolstoy will stand in European literature as the conscience of the modern world.

THE RETURN OF THE ANGELS

Daily News, March 14th, 1903

I write these remarks with one great hope, that of arousing controversy. It is really a singular matter that amid all the talk of the great work of physical science and its alleged victory over religious dogmatism, no one has noticed what the greatest of all the triumphs of science really was. It was a discovery far greater than that of evolution. It was the discovery, not of a fact, but of a method, the mother of innumerable facts. That method is, of course, what is known in scientific theory as the method of the hypothesis. It can be most clearly and simply conveyed in common language by saying that it is the principle that the best way to see if a coat fits a man is not to measure both of them, but to try it on. It is the replacing of the very slow, logical method of accumulating, point by point, an absolute proof by a rapid, experimental and imaginative method which gives us, long before we can get absolute proof, a very good working belief. I hear, let us say, of a certain theory about the universe. As a trial, I assume it to be true; then, if I discover with a start that, once assumed, it explains the boots on my feet and the nose on my face, that my umbrella has a new and radiant meaning, that my front door suddenly explains itself, that truths about my cat and dog and wife and hat and sideboard crowd upon me all day and everyday, I believe that theory and go on believing it more and more.

On the other hand, if the theory be not true, I may be perfectly certain that ten minutes after I have experimentally assumed it, I shall break my shins over some contradiction. We have buttoned the coat round the world (that rotund and patient old gentleman) and it has split down the back. It is surely quite obvious that this is the method on which we base all our real beliefs and that on this, above all, we base our belief in evolution. Of the thousands of brilliant and elegant persons like ourselves who believe roughly in the Darwinian doctrine, how many are there who know which fossil or skeleton, which parrot’s tail or which cuttle-fish’s stomach, is really believed to be the conclusive example and absolute datum of natural selection? We know scarcely anything of the Darwinian facts that lead to conversion. What we know is much more important: the Darwinian facts that come after conversion. What we know, to use a higher language, are the fruits of the spirit. We know that with this idea once inside our heads a million things become transparent as if a lamp were lit behind them: we see the thing in the dog in the street, in the pear on the wall, in the book of history we are reading, in the baby in the perambulator and in the last news from Borneo. And the fulfilments pour in upon us in so natural and continual a cataract that at last is reached that paradox of the condition which is called belief. We have seen so many evidences of the theory that we have forgotten them all. The theory is so clear to us that we can scarcely even defend it, If we walked up to the nearest rationalist we know and asked him to prove evolution, he would be dazed, like a man asked to defend justice.

Now it ought to be clearly stated at this stage of philosophical development that it is most emphatically by this method of the successful hypothesis, of the theory that justifies itself, that so large a number of the young in this generation have returned to a certain doctrine of the spiritual. What this doctrine is it may be right to state as baldly and as briefly as possible; it is the view that the world, closely examined, does point with an extreme suggestiveness to the existence of a spiritual world, of a world of agencies not apparently produced by matter, capable to some extent of controlling and inspiring, capable to some extent of being known. It ought, I say, to be plainly stated that numbers of us have returned to this belief; and that we have returned to it, not because of this argument or that argument, but because the theory, when it is adopted, works out everywhere; because the coat, when it is tried on, fits in every crease. It ought to be stated because the old rationalists are rightly indignant with us, in so far as they fancy that we base such a tremendous doctrine on a few desperate quibbles; in so far as they fancy, as they do, that we are hanging on to religion by sticks and straws.... The return to the spiritual theory rests on none of these things. It rests, like the movement towards evolution, on the fact that the thing works out. We put on the theory like a magic hat and history becomes translucent like a house of glass.

Let us begin at the beginning. A startling and sensational event occurred recently; I allude to the emergence of the creature called man. It is a recent event, cosmically considered; it is, comparatively speaking, only a little too old to have been headlined in the evening papers. The newness, suddenness and utter uniqueness of the rise of man reminds one of Japan in the East; only it is more so.... There may be a hundred explanations of this. No sane man would say that it involved a spiritual deduction. But it fits in with it, and fits in with it very well, to suppose that there is another atmosphere of life besides the animal and that this spiritual world irrupted in some way into that creature at the moment. The phenomenon does not prove Religion, but religion explains the Phenomenon. The Phenomenon is quite as solitary as the Incarnation. It can be explained by saying that in a sense it was the Incarnation. Then we go on. There is one thing which the whole human race, without any exception at all, attests. From the dimmest ages and lands, wherever the seed of man is found, it declares this that such an irruption did take place in the beginning, that they or their fathers have had dealings with a darker or more wonderful being. If human evidence means anything at all, this is perhaps the only thing on which we have overwhelming evidence.

We have nearly overwhelming human witness to the necessity of morality; we have quite overwhelming human witness to the reality of the spiritual life. We are ready enough to quote the evidence of all mankind in support of police regulations or the data of ethics; but we think mankind must be talking nonsense when, with one universal shout it cries out to this thing which is older than sin. That Marcus Aurelius and the Red Indians, that Hindu sages and Italian brigands and Mr Spurgeon and Sir William Crookes should all by various roads come to this conclusion, this is an important thing. A more important thing still is that this belief in spirit, so far from being a morbid thing, is held by almost all people who are physically strong and live in the open air. Powerful peasants and farmers six feet high all believe in fairies. Rationalism is a disease of the towns, like the housing problem. All this is, of course, only suggestive, but it is very suggestive. The Phenomenon does not prove Religion; but Religion explains the Phenomenon.... We have not returned to the spiritual theory because of this or that triviality — because of a justification of the Fourth Gospel or a rap on the table. We have returned to it because, by the rejection of rationalism, the world becomes suddenly rational.

CHRISTIANITY AND RATIONALISM

My friend, Mr. George Haw, has asked me to state, in one or two articles, my general belief on the subject of Christianity, to be inserted in the Clarion. I will not pretend to any particlular reluctance to do so; but I ought not to do it without first of all offering to Mr. Blatchford our gratitude, and something which is better than gratitude, our congratulations, upon the very magnanimous action which he has taken in thus putting this paper into the hands of the religious opponents. In doing so he has scored, in a generous unconsciousness, a real point.

Most of the awful revelations of Christian evil and ignorance do not, I am afraid, affect me in quite so serious a manner as they ought to. When I hear that a German professor has found the four-hundreth accurate origin of protoplasm, I try in vain to feel excitement; when I read that savages paint their faces green to please the ghosts (or what not), I have no feeling beyond a vague pleasure and sympathy. Both the German professor and the green-faced savage seem to me to be doing the same thing — that is, falling under the influence of that starry impulse which leads men to take a vast deal of trouble about quite useless things.

But such things do not make much difference to my view of Christianity. In the whole of this controversy I have felt the force of one thing, which has really hit practical Christianity; I think it is a good argument; I think it is a terrible argument. It is not that this controversy is being conducted in a non-Christian paper. It certainly is a fair point scored against a religion that the people who seem to be most interested in it are those who believe it to be a fraud. I think, therefore, that Mr. Blatchford's magnanimity, like all magnanimity, is profoundly philosophical and wise.

Nor do I blame him, as some have done, for having discussed it at great length; as the subject is the nature of the Universe, it is necessarily as large as the Universe, and as rich as the Universe, and I may add, as amusing as the Universe.

In fact, I fancy there must be such a thing as Immortality, merely that Mr. Blatchford and I may have time to discuss whether it is true.

Before I give an outline of my view, there is one other thing to be said in which I cannot avoid the personal note. I have begun to realise that there are a good many people to whom my way of speaking about these things appears like an indication that I am flippant or imperfectly sincere. Since, as a matter of fact, I am more certain of myself in this affair than I am of the existence of the moon, this naturally causes me some considerable regret; but I think I see the naturalness of the mistake and how it arose in people for removed from the Christian atmosphere. Christianity is itself so jolly a thing that it fills the possessor of it with a certain silly exuberance, which sad and high-minded Rationalists might reasonably mistake for mere buffoonery and blasphemy; just as their prototypes, the sad and high-minded Stoics of old Rome, did mistake the Christian joyousness for buffoonery and blasphemy.

This difference holds good everywhere, in the cold Pagan architectrure and the grinning gargoyles of Christendom, in the preposterous motley of the Middle Ages and the dingy dress of this Rationlistic century. And if Mr. Blatchford wishes to know why we should be surprised if the Duke of Devonshire walked about with one leg red and the other yellow (as a nobleman might have done in the thirteenth century), I can obligingly inform him that it is because of the decay of our faith. Nowhere in history has there ever been any popular brightness and gaiety without religion.

The first of all the difficulities that I have in controverting Mr. Blatchford is simply this, that I shall be very largely going over his own ground. My favourite text-book of theology is God and my Neighbour but I cannot repeat it in detail. If I gave each of my reasons for being a Christian, a vast number of them would be Mr. Blachford’s reasons for not being one.

For instance, Mr. Blatchford and his school point out that there are many myths parallel to the Christian story; that there were Pagan Christs, and Red Indian Incarnations, and Patagonian Crucifixions, for all I know or care. But does not Mr. Blatchford see the other side of this fact? If the Christian God really made the human race, would not the human race tend to rumours and perversions of the Christian God? If the center of our life is a certain fact, would not people far from the center have a muddled version of that fact? If we are so made that a Son of God must deliver us, is it odd that Patagonians should dream of a Son of God?

The Blatchfordian position really amounts to this — that because a certain thing has impressed millions of different people as likely or necessary therefore is connot be true. And then this bashful being, veiling his own talents, convicts the wretched G. K.C. of paradox! I like paradox, but I am not prepared to dance and dazzle to the extent of Nunquam, who points to humanity crying out to a thing, and pointing to it from immemorial ages, as a proof that it cannot be there.

The story of a Christ is very common in legend and literature. So is the story of two lovers parted by Fate. So is the story of two friends killing each other for a woman. But will it seriously be maintained that, because these two stories are common as legends, therefore not two friends were ever separated by love or no two lovers by circumstances? It is tolerably plain, surely, that these two stories are common because the situation is an intensely probable and human one, because our nature is so built as to make them almost inevitable.

Why should it not be that our nature is so built as to make certain spiritual events inevitable? In any case, it is clearly ridiculous to attempt to disprove Christianity by the number and variety of Pagan Christs. You might as well take the number and variety of ideal schemes of society, from Plato’s Republic to Morris’ News from Nowhere, from More’s Utopia to Blatchford’s Merrie England, and then try and prove from them that mankind cannot ever reach a better social condition. If anything, of course, they prove the opposite; they suggest a human tendency towards a better condition.

Thus, in this first instance, when learned skeptics come to me and say, “Are you aware that the Kaffirs have a story of Incarnation?” I should reply: “Speaking as an unlearned person, I don’t know. But speaking as a Christian, I should be very much astonished if they hadn’t.”

Take a second instance. The Secularist says that Christianity has been a gloomy and ascetic thing, and points to the procession of austere or ferocious saints who have given up home and happiness and macerated health and sex. But it never seems to occur to him that the very oddity and completeness of the men’s surrender make it look very much as if there were really something actual and solid in the thing for which they sold themselves. They gave up all human experiences for the sake on one superhuman experience. They may have been wicked, but it looks as if there were such an experience.

It is perfectly tenable that this experience is as dangerous and selfish a thing as drink. A man who goes ragged and homeless in order to see visions may be as repellent and immoral as a man who goes ragged and homeless in order to drink brandy. That is a quite reasonable position. But what is manifestly not a reasonable position what would be, in fact not far from being an insane position, would be to say that the raggedness of the man, and the homelessness of the man, and the stupefied degradation of the man proved that there was no such thing as brandy.

That is precisely what the Secularist tries to say. He tries to prove that there is no such think as supernatural experience by pointing at the people who have given up everything for it. He tries to prove that there is no such thing by proving that there are people who live on nothing else.

Again I may submissively ask: “Whose is the paradox?” The frantic severity of these men may, of course, show that they were eccentric people who loved unhappiness for its own sake. But is seems more in accordance with commonsense to suppose that they had really found the secret of some actual power or experience which was, like wine, a terrible consolation and a lonely joy.

Thus, then, in the second instance, when the learned sceptic says to me: “Christian saints gave up love and liberty for this one rapture of Christianity, I should have been surprised if they hadn’t.”

Take a third instance. The Secularist says that Christianity produced tumult and cruelty. He seems to suppose that this proves it to be bad. But it might prove it to be very good. For men commit crimes not only for bad things, far more often for good things. For no bad things can be desired quite so passionately and persistently as good things can be desired and only very exceptional men desire very bad and unnatural things.

Most crime is committed because, owing to some peculiar complication, very beautiful or necessary things are in some danger. For instance, if we wanted to abolish thieving and swindling at one blow, the best thing to do would be to abolish babies. Babies, the most beautiful things on earth, have been the excuse and origin of almost all the business of brutality and financial infamy on earth.

If we could abolish monogamic or romantic love, again the country would be dotted with Maiden Assizes. And if anywhere in history masses of common and kindly men become cruel it almost certainly does not mean that they are serving something in itself tyrannical (for why should they?). It almost certainly does mean that something that they rightly value is in peril such as the food of their children, the chasity of their women, or the independence of their country. And when something is set before them that is not only enormously valuable, but also quite new, the sudden vision, the chance of winning it, the chance of losing it, drive them mad. It has the same effect in the moral world that the finding of gold has in the economic world. It upsets values, and creates a kind of cruel rush.

We need not go far for instances quite apart from the instances of religion. When the modern doctrines of brotherhood and liberty were preached in France in the eighteenth century the time was ripe for them, the educated classes everywhere had been growing towards them, the world to a very considerable extend welcomed them. And yet all that preparation and openness were unable to prevent the burst of anger and agony which greets anything good. And if the slow and polite preaching of rational fraternity in a rational age ended in the massacres of September, what an a fortiori is here! What would be likely to be the effect of the sudden dropping into a dreadfully evil century of a dreadfully perfect truth? What would happen if a world baser than the world of Sade were confronted with a gospel purer than the gospel of Rousseau?

The mere flinging of the polished pebble of Republican Indealism into the artificial lake of eighteenth century Europe produced a splash that seemed to splash the heavens, and a storm that drowned ten thousand men. What would happen if a star from heaven really fell into the slimy and bloody pool of a hopless and decaying humanity? Men swept a city with the guillotine, a continent with the sabre, because Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity were too precious to be lost. How if Christianity was yet more maddening because it was yet more precious?

But why should we labour the point when One who knew human nature as it can really be learnt, from fishermen and women and natural people, saw from his quiet village the track of this truth across history, and, in saying that He came to bring not peace but a sword, set up eternally His colossal realism against the eternal sentimentality of the Secularist?

Thus, then, in the third instance, when the learned sceptic says: “Christianiaity produced wars and persecutions,” we shall reply: “Naturally.”

And, lastly, let me take an example which leads me on directly to the general matter I wish to discuss for the remining space of the articles at my command. The Secularist constantly points out that the Hebrew and Christian religions began as local things; that their god was a tribal god; that they gave him material form, and attached him to particular places.

This is an excellent example of one of the things that if I were conducting a detailed campaign I should use as an argument for the validity of Biblical experience. For if there really are some other and higher beings than ourselves, and if they in some strange ways, at some emotional crisis, really revealed themselves to rude poets or dreamers in very simple times, that the rude people should regard the revelation as local, and connect it with the particular hill or river where it happened, seems to me exactly what any reasonable human being would expect. It has a far more credible look than if they had talked cosmic philosophy from the beginning. If they had, I should have suspected "priestcraft" and forgeries and third-century Gnosticism

If there be such a being as God, and He can speak to a child, and if God spoke to a child in the garden the child would, of course, say that God lived in the garden. I should not think it any less likely to be true for that. If the child said: "God is everywhere: an impalpable essence pervading and supporting all constituents of the Cosmos alike" — if, I say, the infant addressed me in the above terms, I should think he was mouch more likely to have been with the governess than with God.

So if Moses had said God was an Infinite Energy, I should be certain he had seen nothing extraordinary. As he said He was a Burning Bush, I think it very likely that he did see something extraordinary. For whatever be the Divine Secret, and whether or no it has (as all people have believed) sometimes broken bounds and surged into our work, at least it lies on the side furthest away from pedants and their definitions, and nearest to the silver souls of quiet people, to the beauty of bushes, and the love of one's native place.

Thus, then in our last instance (out of hundreds that might be taken), we conclude in the same way. When the learned sceptic says: "The visions of the Old Testament were local, and rustic, and grotesque," we shall answer: "Of course. They were genuine."

A PIECE OF CHALK

The Daily News, November 4, 1905

I remember one splendid morning, all blue and silver, in the summer holidays when I reluctantly tore myself away from the task of doing nothing in particular, and put on a hat of some sort and picked up a walking-stick, and put six very bright-colored chalks in my pocket. I then went into the kitchen (which along with the rest of the house, belonged to a very square and sensible woman in a Sussex village), and asked the owner and occupant of the kitchen if she had any brown paper. She had a great deal; in fact she had too much; and she mistook the purpose and the rationale of the existence of brown paper. She seemed to have an idea that if a person wanted brown paper he must be wanting to tie up parcels; which was the last thing I wanted to do; indeed it is a thing which I have found to be beyond my mental capacity. Hence she dwelt very much on the varying qualities of toughness and endurance in the material. I explained to her that I only wanted to draw pictures on it, and that I did not want them to endure in the least; and that from my point of view, therefore, it was a question, not of tough consistency, but of responsive surface, a thing comparatively irrelevant in a parcel. When she understood that I wanted to draw she offered to overwhelm me with note-paper, apparently supposing that I did my notes and correspondence on old brown paper wrappers from motives of economy.

I then tried to explain the rather delicate logical shade, that I not only like brown paper, but I liked the quality of brownness in paper, just as I liked the quality of brownness in October woods, or in beer, or in the peat-streams of the North. Brown paper represents the primal twilight of the first toil of creation, and with a bright-colored chalk or two you can pick out points of fire in it, sparks of gold, and blood-red, and sea-green, like the first fierce stars that sprang out of divine darkness. All this I said (in an off-hand way) to the old woman; and I put the brown paper in my pocket along with the chalks, and possibly other things. I suppose every one must have reflected how primeval and how poetical are the things that one carries in one’s pocket; the pocket-knife, for instance, the type of all human tools, the infant of the sword. Once I planned to write a book of poems entirely about the things in my pockets. But I found it was too long and the age of great epics is past.

With my stick, my knife, my chalks, and my brown paper, I went out on to the great downs. I crawled across those colossal contours that express the best quality of England, because they are at the same time soft and strong. The smoothness of them has the same meaning as the smoothness of great cart-horses, or the smoothness of the beech-tree; it declares in the teeth of our timid and cruel theories that the mighty are merciful. As my eye swept the landscape, the landscape was as kindly as any of its cottages, but for power it was like an earthquake. The villages in the immense valley were safe, one could see, for centuries: yet the lifting of the whole land was like the lifting of one enormous wave to wash them all away.

I crossed one swell of living turf after another, looking for a place to sit down and draw. Do not, for heaven’s sake, imagine I was going to sketch from Nature. I was going to draw devils and seraphim, and blind old gods that men worshipped before the dawn of right, and saints in robes of angry crimson, and seas of strange green, and all the sacred or monstrous symbols that look so well in bright colors on brown drawing paper. They are much better worth drawing than Nature; also they are much easier to draw. When a cow came slouching by in a field next to me, a mere artist might have drawn it; but I always get wrong in the hind legs of quadrupeds. So I drew the soul of the cow; which I saw there plainly walking before me in the sunlight; and the soul was all purple and silver, and had seven horns and the mystery that belongs to all beasts. But though I could not with a crayon get the best out of the landscape, it does not follow that the landscape was not getting the best out of me. And this, I think, is the mistake that people make about the old poets who lived before Wordsworth, and were supposed not to care very much about Nature because they did not describe it much.

They preferred writing about great men to writing about great hills; but they sat on the great hills to write about it. They gave out much less about Nature, but they drank it in, perhaps, much more. They painted the white robes of their holy virgins with the blinding snow, at which they had stared all day. They blazoned the shields of their paladins with the purple and gold of many heraldic sunsets. The greenness of a thousand green leaves clustered into the live green figure of Robin Hood. The blueness of a score of forgotten skies became the blue robes of the Virgin. The inspiration went in like sunbeams and came out like Apollo.

But as I sat scrawling these silly figures on the brown paper, it began to dawn on me, to my great disgust, that I had left one chalk, and that a most exquisite and essential chalk, behind. I searched all of my pockets, but I could not find any white chalk. Now, those who are acquainted with philosophy (nay, religion) which is typified in the art of drawing on brown paper, know that white is positive and essential. I cannot avoid remarking here on a moral significance. One of the wise and awful truths which this brown-paper art reveals, is this, that white is a color. It is not a mere absence of color; it is a shining and affirmative thing, as fierce as red, as definite as black. When, so to speak, your pencil grows red-hot, it draws roses; when it grows white-hot, it draws stars. And one of the two or three defiant verities of the best religious morality, of real Christianity, for example, is exactly this same thing; the chief assertion of religious morality is that white is a color. Virtue is not the absence of vices or the avoidance of moral dangers; virtue is a vivid and separate thing, like pain or a particular smell. Mercy does not mean not being cruel or sparing people revenge or punishment; it means a plain and positive thing like the sun, which one has either seen or not seen. Chastity does not mean abstention from sexual wrong; it means something flaming, like Joan of Arc. In a word, God paints in many colors; but He never paints so gorgeously, I had almost said so gaudily, as when He paints in white. In a sense our age has realized this fact, and expressed it in our sullen costume. For if it were really true that white was a blank and colorless thing, negative and non-committal, then white would be used instead of black and grey for the funeral of this pessimistic period. We should see city gentlemen in frock coats of spotless silver linen, with top hats as white as wonderful arum lilies. Which is not the case.

Meanwhile, I could not find my chalk.

. . . .

I sat on the hill in a sort of despair. There was no town nearer than Chichester at which it was even remotely probable that there would be such a thing as an artist’s colorman. And yet, without white, my absurd little pictures would have been as pointless as the world would be if there were no good people in it. I stared stupidly round, racking my brain for expedients. Then I suddenly stood and roared with laughter, again and again, so that the cows stared at me and called a committee. Imagine a man in the Sahara regretting that he had no sand for his hourglass. Imagine a gentleman in mid-ocean wishing that he had brought some salt water with it with him for some chemical experiment. I was sitting in an immense warehouse of white chalk. The landscape was made entirely out of white chalk. White chalk was piled more miles until it met the sky. I stooped and broke a piece off the rock I sat on; it did not mark so well as the shop chalks do; but it gave the effect. And I stood there in a trance of pleasure, realizing that this Southern England is not only a grand peninsula, and a tradition and a civilization; it is something even more admirable. It is a piece of chalk.

ON MENDING AND ENDING THINGS

Illustrated London News, December 23, 1905

A certain politician (whom I would not discuss here on any account) once said of a certain institution (which wild horses shall not induce me to name) that “It must be mended or ended.” Few people who use this useful phrase about reform notice the important thing about it. The important thing about it is that the two methods described here are not similar but opposite; between mending and ending that is not a difference of degree but of vital antagonism of kind. Mending is based upon the idea that the original nature of a thing is good; ending is based upon the idea that the original nature of a thing is bad or at least, has lost all power of being good.

If I “mend” an armchair it is because I want an armchair. I mend the armchair because I wish to restore it to a state of more complete armchairishness. My objection to the armchair in its unmended state is that its defects prevent it from being in the fullest sense an armchair at all. If (let us say) the back has come off and three of the legs have disappeared, I realize, in looking at it, not merely that it presents a sense of general irregularity to the eye; I realize that in such and such respects it does definitely fall short of the Divine and Archetypal Armchair, which, as Plato would have pointed out, exists in heaven.

But it is possible that I might possess among my drawing room furniture some object, let us say a rack or a thumbscrew, of which the nature and raison d’être was repellent to my moral feelings. If my thumbscrew fell into slight disrepair, I should not mend it at all; because the more I mended my thumbscrew the more thumbscrewy it would be. If my private rack were out of order, I should be in no way disturbed; for my private code of ethics prevents me from racking anyone, and the more it was out of order the less likely it would be that any casual passer-by could get racked on it.

In short, a thing is either bad or good in its original aims and functions. If it is good, we are in favor of mending it; and because we are in favor of mending it, we are necessarily opposed to ending it. If it is bad, we are in favor of ending it; and because we are in favor of ending it, we ought to fly into a passion at the mere thought of mending it. It is the question of this fundamental alternative, the right or wrong of the primary idea, which we have to settle in the case of receiving money for charity from members of dubious or disputed trades, from a publican or a pirate.

This is an extremely good example of the fact I have often enunciated, the fact that there is nothing so really practical and urgent as ideal philosophy. If being a publican is a bad thing in its nature, the quickest way of getting a good settlement is to punish the man for being a publican, to suppress him like a smuggler, to treat the man who administers beer like a man who administers poison. But if being a publican is a good thing in itself, the quickest way of getting a good publican is to admire the man because he is a publican, to follow him in great crowds, and crown him with laurel because he is a publican. It is a practical course to destroy a thing; but the only other practical course is to idealize it. A respected despot may sometimes be good; but a despicable despot must always be despicable. If you are going to end an innkeeper, it can be done quite easily with a hatchet. But if you are going to mend an innkeeper, you must do it tenderly, you must do it reverently. You must nail an extra arm or leg on his person, keeping always before you the Platonic image of the perfect innkeeper, to whose shape you seek to restore him.

So I would deal with the seller of whiskey or of battleships, whose contributions to charity were spurned for conscience’ sake by Mr. Bernard Shaw’s latest dramatic creation. Certainly Major Barbara’s rejection of the alms cannot rationally be imitated unless we suppress the trades. If we think these tradesmen wrong, it is absurd merely to refuse their contributions to charities. To do so amounts merely to this: that we tolerate them all the time they are doing evil, and only begin to insult them when they begin to do good.

SKEPTICISM AND SPIRITUALISM

The Illustrated London News, April 14, 1906)

Glancing over several papers of late, I see such headings as “Another Medium Exposed,” and “Another Spiritualistic Fraud.” The easy and conventional comments made upon the matter by the journalists seem to me to be singularly lacking in a logical sense, and there seems to be an underlying assumption in all such comments that the more often you discover a dishonest medium or a fraudulent seance, the more you have diminished the credit or probability of spiritualism. I have never been at a seance in my life, and I never had, and probably never shall have, anything to do with the specific set of people who call themselves spiritualists. But as a mere matter of intellectual justice or mental lucidity, it is desirable to protest against this confused argument which connects the proved falsity of knaves with the probable falsity of psychic phenomena. The two things have no logical connection whatever. No conceivable number of false mediums affects the probability of the existence of real mediums one way or the other. This is surely obvious enough. No conceivable number of forged bank-notes can disprove the existence of the Bank of England. If anything, the argument might as well be turned the other way,; we might say with rather more reason that as all hypocrisies are the evil fruits of public virtue, so in the same way the more real spiritualism there is in the world the more false spiritualism there is likely to be.

In fact, the mere abstract rationality of this problem is very wrongly discussed. For instance, it is always considered ludicrous and a signal for a burst of laughter if the spiritualists say that a seance has been spoiled by the presence of a skeptic, or that an attitude of faith is necessary to encourage the psychic communications. But there is nothing at all unreasonable or unlikely about the idea that doubt might discourage and faith encourage spiritual communications, if there are any. The suggestion does not make spiritualism in abstract logic any more improbable. All that it does make it is more difficult. There is nothing foolish or fantastic about the supposition that a dispassionate person acts as a deterrent to passionate truths. Only it happens to make it much harder for any dispassionate person to find out what is true. There are a thousand practical parallels. An impartial psychologist studying the problem of human nature could, no doubt, learn a great deal from a man and woman making love to each other in his presence. None the less, it is unfortunately the fact that no man and woman would make love to each other in the presence of an impartial psychologist. Students of physiology and surgery might learn something from a man suddenly stabbing another man on a platform in a lecture-theater. But no man would stab another man on a platform in a lecture-theater. A schoolmaster would learn much if the boys would be boys in his presence; but they never are boys in his presence. An educationalist studying infancy might make important discoveries if he could hear the things said by a baby when absolutely alone and at his ease with his mother. But it is quite obvious that the mere entrance of a great ugly educationalist (they are an ugly lot) would set the child screaming with terror.

The problem, then, of skepticism and spiritual ecstacies is a perfectly human and intelligible problem to state, though it may be a difficult problem to solve. It is exactly as if a man pointed at some lady (you can choose the lady out of your own acquaintance at your own discretion) and said with marked emphasis, “Under no circumstance could I address a sonnet to that lady.” We might reply, “Oh, yes; if you fell in love with her you might feel inclined to do so.” He would be fully justified in replying (with tears in his eyes), “But I cannot fall in love with her by any imaginable process.” But he would not be logically justified in replying “Oh, that is all nonsense. You want me to give up my judgment, and become a silly partisan.” The whole question under discussion is what would happen if he did become a partisan. In the same way, the skeptic who is expelled with bashed hat and tattered coat-tails from a spiritualistic seance has a perfect right to say (with or without tears in his eyes) “But why blame me for unbelief? I cannot manage to believe in such things by any imaginable process.” But he has no logical right to say that it could not have been his skepticism that spoilt the seance, or that there was anything at all unphilosophical in supposing that it was. An impartial person is a good judge of many things, but not of all. He is not (for instance) a good judge of what it feels like to be partial.

For my own part, what little I resent in what little I have seen of spiritualism is altogether the opposite element. I do not mind spiritualism, in so far as it is fierce and credulous. In that it seems to me to be akin to sex, to song, to the great epics and the great religions, to all that has made humanity heroic. I do not object to spiritualism in so far as it is spiritualistic. I do object to it in so far as it is scientific. Conviction and curiosity are both very good things. But they ought to have two different houses. There have been many frantic and blasphemous beliefs in this old barbaric earth of ours; men have served their deities with obscene dances, with cannibalism, and the blood of infants. But no religion was quite so blasphemous as to pretend that it was scientifically investigating its god to see what he was made of. Bacchanals did not say, “Let us discover whether there is a god of wine.” They enjoyed wine so much that they cried out naturally to the god of it. Christians did not say, “A few experiments will show us whether there is a god of goodness.” They loved good so much that they knew that it was a god. Moreover, all the great religions always loved passionately and poetically the symbols and machinery by which they worked — the temple, the colored robes, the altar, the symbolic flowers, or the sacrificial fire. It made these things beautiful: it laid itself open to the charge of idolatry. And into these great ritual religions there has descended, whatever the meaning of it, the thing of which Sophocles spoke, “The power of the gods, which is mighty and groweth not old.” When I hear that the spiritualists have begun to carve great golden wings upon their flying tables, I shall recognize the atmosphere of a faith. When I hear them accused of worshipping a planchet made of ivory and sardonyx (whatever that is) I shall know that they have become a great religion. Meanwhile, I fear I shall remain one of those who believe in spirits much too easily ever to become a spiritualist. Modern people think the supernatural so improbable that they want to see it. I think it so probable that I leave it alone. Spirits are not worth all this fuss; I know that, for I am one myself. . .

PHILOSOPHY FOR THE SCHOOLROOM

Daily News, June 22, 1907

What modern people want to be made to understand is simply that all argument begins with an assumption; that is, with something that you do not doubt. You can, of course, if you like, doubt the assumption at the beginning of your argument, but in that case you are beginning a different argument with another assumption at the beginning of it. Every argument begins with an infallible dogma, and that infallible dogma can only be disputed by falling back on some other infallible dogma; you can never prove your first statement or it would not be your first. All this is the alphabet of thinking. And it has this special and positive point about it, that it can be taught in a school, like the other alphabet. Not to start an argument without stating your postulates could be taught in philosophy as it is taught in Euclid, in a common schoolroom with a blackboard. And I think it might be taught in some simple and rational degree even to the young, before they go out into the streets and are delivered over entirely to the logic and philosophy of the Daily Mail.

Much of our chaos about religion and doubt arises from this — that our modern sceptics always begin by telling us what they do not believe. But even in a sceptic we want to know first what he does believe. Before arguing, we want to know what we need not argue about. And this confusion is infinitely increased by the fact that all the sceptics of our time are sceptics at different degrees of the dissolution of scepticism.

Now you and I have, I hope, this advantage over all those clever new philosophers, that we happen not to be mad. All of us believe in St. Paul's Cathedral; most of us believe in St. Paul. But let us clearly realize this fact, that we do believe in a number of things which are part of our existence, but which cannot be demonstrated. Leave religion for the moment wholly out of the question. All sane men, I say, believe firmly and unalterably in a certain number of things which are unproved and unprovable. Let us state them roughly.

1. Every sane man believes that the world around him and the people in it are real, and not his own delusion or dream. No man starts burning London in the belief that his servant will

soon wake him for breakfast. But that I, at any given moment, am not in a dream, is unproved and unprovable. That anything exists except myself is unproved and unprovable.

2. All sane men believe that this world not only exists, but matters. Every man believes there is a sort of obligation on us to interest ourselves in this vision or panorama of life. He would think a man wrong who said, “I did not ask for this farce and it bores me. I am aware that an old lady is being murdered down-stairs, but I am going to sleep.” That there is any such duty to improve the things we did not make is a thing unproved and unprovable.
3. All sane men believe that there is such a thing as a self, or ego, which is continuous. There is no inch of my brain matter the same as it was ten years ago. But if I have saved a man in battle ten years ago, I am proud; if I have run away, I am ashamed. That there is such a paramount “I” is unproved and unprovable. But it is more than unproved and unprovable; it is definitely disputed by many metaphysicians.
4. Lastly, most sane men believe, and all sane men in practice assume, that they have a power of choice and responsibility for action.

Surely it might be possible to establish some plain, dull statement such as the above, to make people see where they stand. And if the youth of the future must not (at present) be taught any religion, it might at least be taught, clearly and firmly, the three or four sanities and certainties of human free thought.

THE ROOTS OF THE WORLD

The Daily News (August 17, 1907)

Once upon a time a little boy lived in a garden in which he was permitted to pick the flowers but forbidden to pull them up by the roots. There was, however, one particular plant, insignificant, somewhat thorny, with a small, star-like flower, which he very much wanted to pull up by the roots. His tutors and guardians, who lived in the house with him, were worthy, formal people, and they gave him reasons why he should not pull it up. They were silly reasons as a rule. But none of the reasons against doing the thing were quite so silly as the little boy’s reason for wanting to do it; for his reason was that Truth demanded that he should pull the thing up by the roots to see how it was growing. Still it was a sleepy, thoughtless kind of house, and nobody gave him the real answer to his argument, which was that it would kill the plant, and that there is no more Truth about a dead plant than about a live one. So one dark night, when clouds sealed the moon like a secret too good or too bad to be told, the little boy came down the old creaking stairs of his farmhouse and crept into the garden in his nightgown. He told himself repeatedly that there was no more reason against his pulling this plant off the garden than against his knocking off a thistle top idly in a lane. Yet the darkness which he had chosen contradicted him, and also his own throbbing pulse, for he told himself continually that next morning he might be crucified as the blasphemer who had tom up the sacred tree.

Perhaps he might have been so crucified if he had so torn it up. I cannot say. But he did not tear it up; and it was not for want of trying. For when he laid hold of the little plant in the garden he tugged and tugged, and found the thing held as if clamped to the earth with iron. And when he strained himself a third time there came a frightful noise behind him, and either nerves or (which he would have denied) conscience made him leap back and stagger and stare around. The house he lived in was a mere bulk of blackness against a sky almost as black. Yet after staring long he saw that the very outline had grown unfamiliar, for the great chimney of the kitchen had fallen crooked and calamitous. Desperately he gave another pull at the plant, and heard far off the roof of the stables fall in and the horses shriek and plunge. Then he ran into the house and rolled himself in the bedclothes. Next morning found the kitchen ruined, the day’s food destroyed, two horses dead, and three broken loose and lost. But the boy still kept a furious curiosity, and a little while after, when a fog from the sea had hidden home and garden, he dragged again at the roots of the indestructible plant. He hung on to it like a boy on the rope of a tug of war, but it did not give. Only through the grey sea-fog came choking and panic-stricken cries; they cried that the King's castle had fallen, that the towers guarding the coast were gone; that half the great sea-city had split away and slid into the sea. Then the boy was frightened for a little while, and said no more about the plant, but when he had come to a strong and careless manhood, and the destruction in the district had been slowly repaired, he said openly before the people, "Let us have done with the riddle of this irrational weed. In the name of Truth let us drag it up." And he gathered a great company of strong men, like an army to meet invaders, and they all laid hold of the little plant and they tugged night and day. And the Great Wall fell down in China for forty miles. And the Pyramids were split up into jagged stones. And the Eiffel Tower in Paris went over like a ninepin, killing half the Parisians; and the Statue of Liberty in New York harbour fell forward suddenly and smashed the American fleet; and St. Paul's Cathedral killed all the journalists in Fleetstreet, and Japan had a record series of earthquakes and then sank into the sea. Some have declared that these last two incidents were not calamities properly so called; but into that I will not enter. The point, was that when they had tugged for about twenty-four hours the strong men of that country had pulled down about half of the civilized world, but had not pulled up the plant. I will not weary the reader with the full facts of this realistic story, with how they used first elephants and then steam engines to tear up the flower, and how the only result was that the flower stuck fast, but that the moon began to be agitated and even the sun was a bit dicky. At last the human race interfered, as it always does at last, by means of a revolution. But long before that the boy, or man, who is the hero of this tale had thrown up the business, merely saying to his pastors and masters, "You gave me a number of elaborate and idle reasons why I should not pull up this shrub. Why did you not give me the two good reasons: first, that I can't; second, that I should damage everything else if I even tried it on?"

All those who have sought in the name of science to uproot religion seem to me very like the little boy in the garden. Skeptics do not succeed in pulling up the roots of Christianity; but they do succeed in pulling up the roots of every man's ordinary vine and fig tree, of every man's garden and every man’s kitchen garden. Secularists have not succeeded in wrecking divine things; but Secularists have succeeded in wrecking secular things. A religion cannot be shown to be monstrous at the last; a religion is monstrous from the beginning. It announces itself as extraordinary. It offers itself as extravagant. The sceptics at the most can only ask us to reject our creed as something wild. And we have accepted it as something wild. So far one would think there would be a mere impasse, a block between us and those who cannot feel as we do. But then follows the curious practical experience which has ratified religion in our reason for ever. For the enemies of religion cannot leave it alone. They laboriously attempt to smash religion. They cannot smash religion; but they do smash everything else. With your queries and dilemmas you have made no havoc in faith,: from the first it was a transcendental conviction; it cannot be made any more transcendental than it was. But you have (if that is any comfort to you) made a certain havoc in common morals and common sense.

The opponents of our religion do not commit us to accepting their axioms; our axioms remain what they were before; but they do commit themselves to every doctrine of insanity and despair. They do not hit us, but they do plunge past us into the marsh and the abyss. Mr. Blatchford cannot commit us to the comment that man is not the image of his maker for that statement is as dogmatic as its denial. But he can and does commit himself to the statement, humanly ludicrous and intolerable, that I must not blame a bully or praise the man who knocks him down. Evolutionists cannot drive us, because of the nameless gradation in Nature, to deny the personality of God, for a personal God might as well work by gradations as in any other way; but they do drive themselves, through those gradations, to deny the existence of a personal Mr. Jones, because he is within the scope of evolution and his edges are rubbed away. The evolutionists uproot the world, but not the flowers. The Titans never scaled heaven, but they laid waste the earth.

TWO KINDS OF PARADOX

Illustrated London News, 11 March 1911

There is nothing that needs more fastidious care than our choice of nonsense. Sense is like daylight or daily air, and may come from any quarter or in any quantity. But nonsense is an art. Like an art, it is rarely successful, and yet entirely simple when it is successful. Like an art, it depends on the smallest word, and a misprint can spoil it. And like an art, when it is not in the service of heaven it is almost always in the service of hell. Numberless imitators of Lewis Carroll or of Edward Lear have tried to write nonsense and failed; falling back (one may hope) upon writing sense. But certainly, as the great Gilbert said, wherever there has been nonsense it has been precious nonsense. Les Précieuses Ridicules might be translated, perhaps, in two ways. No one doubts that serious artists are absurd; but it might also be maintained that absurdity is always a serious art.

I have suffered as much as any man from the public insult of the misprint. I have seen my love of books described as a love of boots. I have seen the word “cosmic” invariably printed as “comic”; and have merely reflected that the two are much the same. As to Nationalists and Rationalists, I have come to the conclusion that no human handwriting or typewriting can clearly distinguish them; and I now placidly permit them to be interchanged, though the first represents everything I love and the second everything I loathe. But there is one kind of misprint I should still find it hard to forgive. I could not pardon a blunder in the printing of “Jabberwock.” I insist on absolute literalism in that really fine poem of Lear,— “TheDong with the Luminous Nose.” To spoil these new nonsense words would be like shooting a great musician improvising on the piano. The sounds could never be recovered again. “And as in uffish thought he stood.” If the printer had printed it “affish” I doubt if the first edition would have sold. “Over the Great Gromboolian Plain.” Suppose I had seen it printed “Gromhoolian.” Perhaps I should never have known, as I know now, that Edward Lear was a yet greater man than Lewis Carroll.

The first principle, then, may be considered clear. Let mistakes be made in ordinary books — that is, in scientific works, established biographies, histories, and so on. Do not let us be hard on misprints when they occur merely in time-tables or atlases or works of science. In works like those of

Professor Haeckel, for example, it is sometimes quite difficult to discover which are the misprints and which are the intentional assertions. But in anything artistic, anything which avowedly strays beyond reason, there we must demand the exactitude of art. If a thing is admittedly not possible, then the next best thing it can do is to be beautiful. If a thing is nonsensical, it ought to be perfectly nonsensical.

This, which applies to the nonsensical borderland of words, as in Lear and Carroll, applies also to the nonsensical borderland of thoughts, as in Oscar Wilde or Bernard Shaw. There also the difficulty is not to find nonsense, but to find any precious nonsense. Many accuse Mr. Shaw and others of merely saying anything opposite to the current view. But if these critics have detected such a scheme of success, why do they not merely profit by it? If they have got the key, let them use it. If they know the trick, let them do it. If a man can achieve prominence and prosperity merely by saying that the sun shines at night and the stars by day, that every man has four legs and every horse two — surely the path to success is open, for there must be many such things to say. But the truth is that, while we can all wallow in commonplaces (a thoroughly healthy thing, like a mud bath), we must all be particular in our selection of paradoxes. Here, for once, taste is really important.

For there are two kinds of paradoxes. They are not so much the good and the bad, nor even the true and the false. Rather they are the fruitful and the barren; the paradoxes which produce life and the paradoxes that merely announce death. Nearly all modern paradoxes merely announce death. I see everywhere among the young men who have imitated Mr. Shaw a strange tendency to utter epigrams which deny the possibility of further life and thought. A paradox may be a thing unusual, menacing, even ugly — like a rhinoceros. But, as a live rhinoceros ought to produce more rhinoceri, so a live paradox ought to produce more paradoxes. Nonsense ought to be suggestive; but nowadays it is abortive. The new epigrams are not even fantastic finger-posts on the wild road: they are tablets, each set into a brick wall at the end of a blind alley. So far as they concern thought at all, they cry to men, “Think no more,” as the voice said “Sleep no more” to Macbeth. These rhetoricians never speak except to move the closure. Even when they are really witty (as in the case of Mr. Shaw), they commonly commit the one crime that cannot be forgiven among free men. They say the last word.

I will give such instances as happen to lie before me. I see on my table a book of aphorisms by a young Socialist writer, Mr. Holbrook Jackson; it is called “Platitudes in the Making,” and curiously illustrates this difference between the paradox that starts thought and the paradox that prevents thought. Of course, the writer has read too much Nietzsche and Shaw, and too little of less groping and more gripping thinkers. But he says many really good things of his own, and they illustrate perfectly what I mean here about the suggestive and the destructive nonsense.

Thus in one place he says. “Suffer fools gladly: they may be right.” That strikes me as good; but here I mean specially that it strikes me as fruitful and free. You can do something with the idea, it opens an avenue. One can go searching among one´s more solid acquaintances and relatives for the fires of a concealed infallibility. One may fancy one sees the star of immortal youth in the somewhat empty eye of Uncle George; one may faintly follow some deep rhythm of nature in the endless repetitions with which Miss Bootle tells a story; and in the grunts and gasps of the Major next door may hear, as it were, the cry of a strangled god. It can never narrow our minds, it can never arrest our life, to suppose that a particular fool is not such a fool as he looks. It must be all to the increase of charity, and charity is the imagination of the heart.

I turn the next page, and come on what I call the barren paradox. Under the head of “Advices,” Mr. Jackson writes, “Don’t think — do.” This is exactly like saying “Don’t eat — digest.” All doing that is not mechanical or accidental involves thinking; only the modern world seems to have forgotten that there can be such a thing as decisive and dramatic thinking. Everything that comes from the will must pass through the mind, though it may pass quickly. The only sort of thing the strong man can “do” without thinking is something like falling over a doormat. This is not even making the mind jump; it is simply making it stop. I take another couple of cases at random. “The object of life is life.” That affects me as ultimately true; always presuming the author is liberal enough to include eternal life. But even if it is nonsense, it is thoughtful nonsense.

On another page I read, “Truth is one’s own conception of things.” That is thoughtless nonsense. A man would never have had any conception of things at all unless he had thought they were things and there was some truth about them. Here we have the black nonsense, like black magic, that shuts down the brain. “A lie is that which you do not believe.” That is a lie; so perhaps Mr. Jackson does not believe it.

THE PUN

The Daily News, 1911

A PIECE of peculiarly bad advice is constantly given to modern writers, especially to modern theologians: that they should adapt themselves to the spirit of the age. If there is one thing that has made shipwreck of mankind from the beginning it has been the spirit of the age, which always means exaggerating still further something that is grossly exaggerated already. The spirit of the age always means taking the crinolines that are already inconvenient and widening them till they become impossible. But if anyone wants a good minor example he could hardly find a better one than the ancient and often barbaric kind of humour that goes by the name of the pun.

For the pun has two distinct functions; a rare function, which is eternal, and a fashionable function, which is dead. If we take first the last and least of the two we must put ourselves for a moment into an ancestral atmosphere now utterly forgotten. In the Bohemian half of the Early Victorian world wit reigned as a kind of institution. Wit was to these intellectual people something like what sport is to simpler people; it was a permanent open competition, free but yet formal lists in which young men could win their spurs.

Wit, which is in this sense warlike (as compared with humour, which may be accidental or even partly unconscious), must of necessity tend to fixed and perhaps even pedantic forms of flippancy. Capping verses, retorting in rhymed couplets, making anagrams or acrostics on any chance word or phrase, fill all the social chronicles of that time. Two eminent lawyers exchange rhymed epigrams instantaneously at a dinner table; Lamb is proud of having written impromptu a preposterous conceit about pink stockings; Douglas Jerrold goes about like some notorious duellist, always ready to impale somebody on a point. In this atmosphere it is not surprising that one of the most popular entertainments should have been the fantastic yet precise one of punning.

But though the wit was formal the fellowship was frank and uproarious. Many such men, from Lamb to Dickens, or from Sydney Smith to Leigh Hunt, were men whose ingenuity had in it a certain poetry and elemental humour. Hence followed what must always follow when high spirited people are playing a game with rules. The limitations are enjoyed, but the limitations are strained to their utmost, each player is proud of getting a preposterous exception just inside the rule. The laughter was highest when the shot was wildest; and in this atmosphere arose the cardinal maxim of Charles Lamb, “that the worst pun is the best”. It was the aim of the ideal punster that people should admire his ingenuity but in the same breath somewhat damn his impudence. This first sort of punning in pure high spirits was indeed a fashion, like singing at the dinner table. We may be permitted a partial fear that in ceasing to sing at the dinner table too many people have ceased to sing altogether, and we may be disposed to warn ourselves and each other against losing the good spirits as well as the bad puns of our fathers.

In a primary sense puns are a perfect type of literary art. That is, they briefly embody the chief essence of art; that completeness of form should confirm completeness of idea. But while all art aims at this forcing form and meaning to go on all fours, there are three special and sharp forms of the thing which do it most clearly and defiantly. One is rhyme; another is what is called simile and metaphor, and the third is the pun. Let us take, for the sake of argument, the simile first.

Suppose a man criticising the current journalistic system wrote as follows: “When we speak of the freedom of the Press we should remember that the individual Pressman writes under considerable restrictions in the form of his work, and still more in the bias he is bound to assume.” That expresses a very vivid fact, but it does not, perhaps, express it very vividly. Mr. Zangwill has expressed the same thing thus: “A public question is like a piece of paper. Much may be written on both sides; but a journalist must only write on one side.” Then anyone can feel how the pungency of the intellectual protest is perfected and emphasised by a pungency in the mere verbal form. The same sense of hitting the right nail on the head can be conveyed by the coincidence called rhyme. A man writing prose in a passion of righteous indignation might perhaps say, “One can at least get rid of such a human insect, a creature who is malodorous and poisonous at once.” But it would not have the special sort of ringing energy and emphasis of a couplet to the same effect:

Yet let me flap this bug with gilded wings,
This painted child of dirt that stinks and stings.

This is in one way a specially good example, because it shows the proximity of assonance to other verbal tricks. If wings and stings is only a rhyme, stinks and stings is something very like a pun. And when we come to the great puns of Hood or of any other writer, we note first of all this use of the pun in sharpening and clinching a thought. Suppose (to adopt the same method) that Hood, writing a journalistic report of one of the last duels, had written: “Both principals fired in the air; and we cannot too strongly express our hope that those who think it incumbent on them to use this old form of self-vindication, may imitate such a sensible and humane interpretation of it.” That is sound enough; but it is a little laborious, and does not express either the detachment or the decision of such a critic of duelling. Hood, as a fact, did write:

So each one upwards in the air
His shot he did expend.
And may all other duels have
That upshot at the end.

Here the verbal jest, falling so ridiculously right, does express, not merely the humanity of the critic, but also his humorous impartiality and unruffled readiness of intellect. Or again, on the proposal to shut the Zoological Gardens on Sunday, Hood might well have written in some newspaper: “It is difficult to see where our Puritan legislators draw the line in natural pleasures; they forbid the sight of God’s works when they are animal, yet they cannot forbid them when they are vegetable or mineral.” That is rational but it has the note of plea. What is wanted for such fanatacisms is the note of scorn; and you get it with the double ring of a real argument and a verbal gibe:

Once let the sect triumphant to their text
Shut Nero up from Saturday till Monday;
And sure as fate they will deny us next
To see the dandelions on a Sunday.

That is the literary use of the trick, and is poetic as well as pointed: a landscape as well as a trap.

THE GREAT SHIPWRECK AS ANALOGY

The Illustrated London News, May 11, 1912

The tragedy of the great shipwreck is too terrific for any analogies of mere fancy. But the analogy which springs to the mind between the great modern ship and our great modern society that sent it forth — this analogy is not a fancy. It is a fact; a fact perhaps too large and plain for the eyes easily to take in. Our whole civilization is indeed very like the TITANIC; alike in its power and its impotence, it security and its insecurity. Technically considered, the sufficiency of the precautions are a matter for technical inquiry. But psychologically considered, there can be no doubt that such vast elaboration and system induce a frame of mind which is inefficient rather than efficient. Quite apart from the question of whether anyone was to blame, the big outstanding fact remains: that there was no sort of sane proportion between the provision for luxury and levity, and the extent of the provision for need and desperation. The scheme did far too much for prosperity and far too little for distress — just like the modern State. Mr. Veneering, it will be remembered, in his electoral address, "instituted a new and striking comparison between the State and a ship"; the comparison, if not new, is becoming a little too striking. By the time you have made your ship as big as a commonwealth it does become very like a ship — rather like a sinking ship.

For there is a real connection between such catastrophes and a certain frame of mind which refuses to expect them. A rough man going about the sea in a small boat may make every other kind of mistake: he may obey superstitions; he may take too much rum; he may get drunk; he may get drowned. But, cautious or reckless, drunk or sober, he cannot forget that he is in a boat and that a boat is as dangerous a beast as a wild horse. The very lines of the boat have the swift poetry of peril; the very carriage and gestures of the boat are those of a thing assailed. But if you make your boat so large that it does not even look like a boat, but like a sort of watering-place, it must, by the deepest habit of human nature, induce a less vigilant attitude of the mind. An aristocrat on board ship who travels with a garage for his motor almost feels as if he were travelling with the trees of his park. People living in open-air cafes sprinkled with liqueurs and ices get as far from the thought of any revolt of the elements as they are from that of an earthquake under the Hotel Cecil. The mental process is quite illogical, but it is quite inevitable. Of course, both sailors and passengers are intellectually aware that motors at sea are often less useful than life-boats, and that ices are no antidote to icebergs. But man is not only governed by what he thinks but by what he chooses to think about; and the sights that sink into us day by day colour our minds with every tint between insolence and terror. This is one of the worst evils in that extreme separation of social classes which marks the modern ship — and State.

But whether or no our unhappy fellow-creatures on the TITANIC suffered more than they need from this unreality of original outlook, they cannot have had less instinct of actuality than we have who are left alive on land: and now that they are dead they are much more real than we. They have known what papers and politicians never know — of what man is really made, and what manner of thing is our nature at its best and worst. It is this curious, cold, flimsy incapacity to conceive what a THING is like that appears in so many places, even in the comments on this astounding sorrow. It appears in the displeasing incident of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst, who, immediately after the disaster, seems to have hastened to assure the public that men must get no credit for giving the boats up to women, because it was the “rule” at sea. Whether this was a graceful thing for a gay spinster to say to eight hundred widows in the very hour of doom is not worth inquiry here, Like cannibalism, it is a matter of taste. But what chiefly astonishes me in the remark is the utter absence which it reveals of the rudiments of political thought. What does Miss Pankhurst imagine a “rule” is — a sort of basilisk? Some hundreds of men are, in the exact and literal sense of the proverb, between the devil and the deep sea. It is their business, if they can make up their minds to it, to accept the deep sea and resist the devil. What does Miss Pankhurst suppose a “rule” could do to them in such extremities? Does she think the captain would fine every man sixpence who expressed a preference for his life? Has it occurred to her that a hundredth part of the ship’s population could have thrown the captain and all the authorities into the sea? But Miss Pankhurst’s remark although imbecile, is informing. Now I see the abject and idolatrous way in which she uses the word “rule,” I begin to understand the abject and idolatrous way in which she uses the word “vote.” She cannot see that wills and not words control events. If ever she is in a fire or shipwreck with men below a certain standard of European morals, she will soon find out that the existence of a rule depends on whether people can be induced to obey it. And if she ever has a vote in the very low state of European politics, she will very soon find out that its importance depends on whether you can induce the man you vote for to obey his mandate or any of his promises. It is vain to rule if your subjects can and do disobey you. It is vain to vote if your delegates can and do disobey you.

But, indeed, a real rule can do without such exceptions as the Suffragettes; de minimis non curat lex. And if the word “rule” be used in the wider sense of an attempt to maintain a certain standard of private conduct out of respect for public opinion, we can only say that not only is this a real moral triumph, but it is, in our present condition, rather a surprising and reassuring one. It is exactly this corporate conscience that the modern State has dangerously neglected. There was probably more instinctive fraternity and sense of identical interests, I will say, not on an old skipper’s vessel, but on an old pirate’s, than there was between the emigrants, the aristocrats, the journalists, or the millionaires who set out to die together on the great ship. That they found in so cruel a way their brotherhood and the need of man for the respect of his neighbour, this is a dreadful fact, but certainly the reverse of a degrading one. The case of Mr. Stead, which I feel with rather special emotions, both of sympathy and difference, is very typical of the whole tragedy. Mr. Stead was far too great and brave a man to require any concealment of his exaggerations or his more unbalanced moods; his strength was in a flaming certainty, which one only weakens by calling sincerity, and a hunger and thirst for human sympathy. His excess, we may say, with real respect, was in the direction of megalomania; a childlike belief in big empires, big newspapers, big alliances — big ships. He toiled like a Titan for that Anglo-American combination of which the ship that has gone down may well be called the emblem. And at the last all these big things broke about him, and somewhat bigger things remained: a courage that was entirely individual; a kindness that was entirely universal. His death may well become a legend.

WONDER AND THE WOODEN POST

Black night had shut in my house and garden with shutters first of slate and then of ebony; I was making my way indoors by the fiery square of the lamplit window, when I thought I saw something new sticking out of the ground, and bent over to look at it. In so doing I knocked my head against a post and saw stars; stars of the seventh heaven, stars of the secret and supreme firmament. For it did truly seem, as the slight pain lessened but before the pain had wholly passed, as if I saw written in an astral alphabet on the darkness something that I had never understood so clearly before: a truth about the mysteries and the mystics which I have half known all my life. I shall not be able to put the idea together again with the words upon this page, for these queer moods of clearness are always fugitive: but I will try. The post is still there; but the stars in the brain are fading.

When I was young I wrote a lot of little poems, mostly about the beauty and necessity of Wonder; which was a genuine feeling with me, as it is still. The power of seeing plain things and landscapes in a kind of sunlight of surprise; the power of jumping at the sight of a bird as if at a winged bullet; the power of being brought to a standstill by a tree as by the gesture of a gigantic hand; in short, the power of poetically running one’s head against a post is one which varies in different people and which I can say without conceit is a part of my own human nature. It is not a power that indicates any artistic strength, still less any spiritual exaltation; men who are religious in a sense too sublime for me to conceive are equally without it. Of the pebble in the pathways of the twig on the edge, it may truly be said that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see these things and have not seen them. It is a small and special gift, but an innocent one.

As my little poems were mostly bad poems, they attracted a certain amount of attention among modern artists and critics; I was told that I was a mystic and found myself being introduced to whole rows and rows of mystics; most of them much older and wiser than I. Of course, there were professional quacks and amateur asses among them; but not in much larger proportion than would have appeared among politicians or men of science or any other mixed convention. There was the long-faced, elderly man, who said, in a deep bass voice like distant thunder: “What we want is Love”; which was true enough, if to want means to lack. There was the little, radiant man, who radiated all his fingers outwards and cried: “Heaven is here! Is is now!” as if he were selling something, as he probably was. There was the chirpy little man who took one confidentially into a corner and said quietly: “There is no true difference between good and bad, false and true; they are alike leading us upwards.” He was easily disposed of; merely by asking, if there was no difference between good and bad, what was the difference between up and down? But it would be gravely and grossly unjust to suggest that any of these represented the modern mystics whose acquaintance I made. I met many men whom history and literature will rightly remember. I met the man who was and is by far the greatest poet who has written in English for decades. For I will not call Mr. Yeats an English poet; I will only say that I should be sorry to see him translated into any other language. I met a man like Mr. Herbert Burrows who, almost alone among men in my knowledge, contrived to combine an Oriental and impersonal religion with that hard fighting and hot magnanimity which we in the west mean when we are speaking of a man. There were great poets and great fighters, then, among these modern mystics whom I met; and their genius and sincerity, as well as their mysticism, led me to conclude that they were quite right. And yet there was something inside me telling me, which what I can only call a stifled scream, that they were quite wrong. It was the same for that matter with my early economic opinions. I was a Socialist in my youth; because the attack on Socialism, as then conducted, left a man no choice except to be a Socialist or a scoundrel. But, even then, long before I ceased to be a Socialist, long before I heard of peasant ownership or any other escape from our present disgrace, I had felt by a sort of tug in my bones that the Fabians and the Marxians were pulling the world one way when I wanted it to go the other. So I felt about great mystics like Mr. Yeats; about sane thosophists like Mr. Burrows. I felt, not merely that their mysticism was in flat contradiction to mine...more even than materialism. I went on feeling this; it took me a long time to give it even an obscure expression. I never found a really vivid expression until I knocked my head against the post. The expression that leapt to my lips then, I am (as I say) forgetting slowly.

Now what I found finally about our contemporary mystics was this. When they said that a wooden post was wonderful (a point on which we are all agreed, I hope) they meant that they could make something wonderful out of it by thinking about it. “Dream; there is no truth,” said Mr. Yeats, “but in your own heart.” The modern mystic looked for the post, not outside in the garden, but inside, in the mirror of his mind. But the mind of the modern mystic, like a dandy’s dressing-room, was entirely made of mirrors. Thus glass repeated glass like doors opening inwards for ever; till one could hardly see that inmost chamber of unreality where the post made its last appearance. And as the mirrors of the modern mystic’s mind are most of them curved and many of them cracked, the post in its ultimate reflection looked like all sorts of things; a waterspout, the tree of knowledge, the sea-serpent standing upright, a twisted column of the new natural architecture, and so on. Hence we have Picasso and a million puerilities. But I was never interested in mirrors; that is, I was never primarily interested in my own reflection...or reflections. I am interested in wooden posts, which do startle me like miracles. I am interested in the post that stands waiting outside my door, to hit me over the head, like a giant’s club in a fairy tale. All my mental doors open outwards into a world I have not made. My last door of liberty opens upon a world of sun and solid things, of objective adventures. The post in the garden; the thing I could neither create nor expect: strong plain daylight on stiff upstanding wood: it is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

When the modern mystics said they liked to see a post, they meant they liked to imagine it. They were better poets than I; and they imagined it as soon as they saw it. Now I might see a post long before I had imagined it...and (as I have already described) I might feel it before I saw it. To me the post is wonderful because it is *there*; there whether I like it or not. I was struck silly by a post, but if I were struck blind by a thunderbolt, the post would still be there; the substance of things not seen. For the amazing thing about the universe is that it exists; not that we can discuss its existence. All real sprituality is a testimony to this world as much as the other: the material universe does exist. The Cosmos still quivers to its topmost star from that great kick that Dr. Johnson gave the stone when he defied Berkeley. The kick was not philosophy...but it was religion.

Now the mystics around me had not this lively faith that things are fantasies because they are facts. They wanted, as all magicians did, “to control the elements”; to *be* the Cosmos. They wished the stars to be their omnipresent eyes and winds their long wild tongues unrolled; and therefore they favoured twilight, and all the dim and borderland mdeiums in which one thing melts into another...in which a man can be as large as Nature and (what is worse) as impersonal as Nature. But I never was properly impressed with the mystery of twilight, but rather with the riddle of daylight, as huge and staring as the sphinx. I felt it in big bare buildings against a blue sky, high houses gutted or still empty, great blank walls washed with warm light as with a monstrous brush. One seemed to have come to the back of everything. And everything had that strange and high indifference that belongs only to things that are... You see I have not said what I meant: but if you admit that my head and the post were equally wonderful, I give you leave to say they were equally wooden.

ASPARAGUS

New Witness, 18th June 1914

At about twenty-one minutes past two today I suddenly saw that asparagus is the secret of aristocracy. I was trying to put long limp stalks into my mouth, when the idea came into my head; and the stalk failed to do so. I do not refer to any merely metaphorical and superficial comparisons which could easily be made between them. We might say that most of the organism was left dead white, merely that a little button at the top might be bright green. We might draw the moral that average aristocrats are made out much stronger than they are; and illustrate it from average asparagi. They say that any stick is good enough to beat a dog with; but did anyone ever try to beat a dog with a stick of asparagus? We might draw the moral that aristocratic traditions are made out much more popular than they really were. ‘Norman’ gets mispronounced as English. In this way three French leopards were somehow turned into British lions. And in this way also the solemn word Asparagus, which means nothing so far as I know, was turned by the populace into ‘sparrowgrass’, which means two of the most picturesque things in the world. Asparagus, which I presume to have been the name of a Roman pro-consul, Marcus Asparagus Esculens, or what not, never deserved such luck as to lose its origin in two things so true and common as the bold birds of the town and the green democracy of the fields. Or again, we might say of sticks of asparagus that they have often lost their heads, and we might say the same of aristocrats. Both heads have been bitten off by the guillotine before now. But to complete the parallel we must maintain that the head of the aristocrat was the best part of him; and this is often hard to maintain. But, indeed, I do not base the view upon any such fancies from phraseology. Far deeper in earth are the roots of asparagus.

The one essential of an aristocracy is to be in advance of its age. That is, there must be something new known to a few. There must be a password; and it must always be a new password. Moreover, it must be, by its nature, an irrational password, for anything quite rational might rapidly be calculated even by the uninitiated. In the same way it is essential to any social observance that involves a social distinction, that the observance should be, in this sense at least, artificial. That is, you can only know the observance as the soldier knows the password, because he has been told.

The working instance best known to us of the middle classes is the old arbitrary distinction about how to eat asparagus. Now, excluding cannibalism and the habit of eating sand (about which I can offer no opinion) there is really nothing one can eat which is less fitted to be eaten with the fingers than asparagus. It is long; it is greasy; it is loose and liable to every sort of soft yet sudden catastrophe; it is always eaten with some sort of oily sauce; and its nice conduct would involve the powers of a professional juggler confirmed with some practice in climbing the greasy pole. Most things could quite easily be eaten with one’s fingers. Cold beef could quite easily be eaten with one’s fingers; or simply with one’s teeth. I have seldom seen a noble cheese without an impulse merely to fix my fangs in it. New potatoes could be eaten with the fingers as cleanly as Easter eggs; and whitebait might as well be shovelled into our open mouths by a Whitebait Machine, for all the use we make of a knife and fork to dissect them. We could easily eat fish-cakes as we eat seed cake. Cold Christmas pudding is a substance with all the majesty of coloured marble; far cleaner, stronger and more coherent than any ordinary bread or biscuit. Yet all these we are supposed to approach through the intervention of a little stunted sword or a stumpy trident. Only this one tiresome, toppling vegetable, I eat between my finger and thumb. I should be better off as a giraffe eating the top of a palm tree: it doesn’t want any holding up.

We will not exaggerate. Eating soup with the fingers, the young student should not attempt; and sauces, custards and even curries are no field for the manual labourer. I would not eat stewed rhubarb with my fingers, or, indeed, with any instrument that science could devise. Even with things involving treacle, I have not a good touch. But, while strictly avoiding anything like exaggeration or frivolity, I still note that the point of asparagus is that it is not the food, among other foods, specially fitted to the fingers. In other words, the principle could not have been deduced from abstract reason, or have grown out of the general instincts of men. It could not have been custom: that is why it was etiquette.

The brotherhood of man is a fact which in the long run wears down all other facts. Therefore, a privileged class, if it would avoid sliding naturally back into the body of mankind, must keep up an incessant excitement about new projects, new cultures and new prejudices, new skirts and stockings. It must tell a new tale every day or perish, like the lady of the Arabian Nights. Tennyson, who was too much touched with this aristocratic — or snobbish — Futurism, wrote, ‘Lest one good custom should corrupt the world’, which really means lest everybody should learn the right way of eating asparagus. And so, out of luxury and waste and weariness, the fever they call Progress came into the world.

Do you tell me they don’t eat asparagus with their fingers now? Do I not know that in some of the best houses they have little tongs for each person, which are charming? Have I not heard that asparagus is now lowered into the open mouth on a string, or shot into the mouth with a small gun, or eaten with the toes, or not eaten at all? No; I do not know, that is what I wish to point out. They have changed the password.

DIVORCE VERSUS DEMOCRACY

PREFACE

I have been asked to put forward in pamphlet form this rather hasty essay as it appeared in "Nash's Magazine"; and I do so by the kind permission of the editor. The rather chaotic quality of its journalism it is now impossible to alter. The convictions upon which it is based are unaltered and unalterable. Indeed, in so far as circumstances have since affected them, they are greatly strengthened. In so far as there was something sporadic and seemingly irrelevant in the writing, it was partly because I was contending against an evil that was diffused and indefinable, at once tentative and ubiquitous. Since then that disease has come to a head and burst; primarily in the North of Europe. By that historic habit which generally makes one European people the standard bearer of a social tendency, which made the Empire a Roman Empire and the Revolution a French Revolution, the North Germans have become the peculiar champions of that modern change which would make the State infinitely superior to the Family. It is even asserted that Prussian political authority is now encouraging the abandonment of common morality for the support of population; and even if this horrible thing be untrue, it is highly significant that it can be plausibly said of Prussia and certainly of no other Christian State. And in the new light of action it is possible to trace more clearly the trend towards divorce, as also that trend towards the other pagan institution of slavery, which would certainly have accompanied it. But the enslaving force in Europe struck too early; and the whole movement has been brought to a standstill.

The same circumstances have given an importance to a formula of my own which I still think rather important. It may be summarised as the patriotism of the household. In the experience of nationality we do not admit that any excess of despair can come into the same logical world as desertion. No amount of tragedy need amount to treason. The Christian view of marriage conceives of the home as self-governing in a manner analogous to an independent state; that is, that it may include internal reform and even internal rebellion; but because of the bond, not against it. In this way it is itself a sort of standing reformer of the State; for the State is judged by whether its arrangements bear helpfully or bear hardly on the human fullness and fertility of the free family. Thus the Wicked Ten in Rome were condemned and cast down because their public powers permitted a wrong against the purity of a private family. Thus the mediaeval revolt against the Poll Tax began by the authority of an official insulting the authority of a father. Men do not now, any more than then, become sinless by receiving a post in a bureaucracy; and if the domestic affairs of the poor were once put into the hands of mere lawyers and inspectors, the poor would soon find themselves in positions from which there is no exit save by the sword of Virginius and the hammer of Wat Tyler. As for the section of the rich who are still seeking a servile solution, they, of course, are still seeking the extension of divorce. It is only ‘“divide et impera”; and they want the division of sex for the division of labour. The very same economic calculation which makes them encourage tyranny in the shop makes them encourage licence in the family. But now the free families of five great nations have risen against them; and their plot has failed.

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DIVORCE VERSUS DEMOCRACY

On this question of divorce I do not profess to be impartial, for I have never perceived any intelligent meaning in the word. I merely (and most modestly) profess to be right. I also profess to be representative: that is, democratic. Now, one may believe in democracy or disbelieve in it. It would be grossly unfair to conceal the fact that there are difficulties on both sides. The difficulty of believing in democracy is that it is so hard to believe — like God and most other good things. The difficulty of disbelieving in democracy is that there is nothing else to believe in. I mean there is nothing else on earth or in earthly politics. Unless an aristocracy is selected by gods, it must be selected by men. It may be negatively and passively permitted, but either heaven or humanity must permit it; otherwise it has no more moral authority than a lucky pickpocket. It is babytalk to talk about “Supermen” or “Nature’s Aristocracy” or “The Wise Few.” “The Wise Few” must be either those whom others think wise — who are often fools; or those who think themselves wise — who are always fools.

Well, if one happens to believe in democracy as I do, as a large trust in the active and passive judgment of the human conscience, one can have no hesitation, no “impartiality,” about one’s view of divorce; and especially about one’s view of the extension of divorce among the democracy. A democrat in any sense must regard that extension as the last and vilest of the insults offered by the modern rich to the modern poor. The rich do largely believe in divorce; the poor do mainly believe in fidelity. But the modern rich are powerful and the modern poor are powerless. Therefore for years and decades past the rich have been preaching their own virtues. Now that they have begun to preach their vices too, I think it is time to kick.

There is one enormous and elementary objection to the popularising of divorce, which comes before any consideration of the nature of marriage. It is like an alphabet in letters too large to be seen. It is this: That even if the democracy approved of divorce as strongly and deeply as the democracy does (in fact — disapprove of it — any man of common sense must know that nowadays the thing will be worked probably against the democracy, but quite certainly by the plutocracy. People seem to forget that in a society where power goes with wealth and where wealth is in an extreme state of inequality, extending the powers of the law means something entirely different from extending the powers of the public. They seem to forget that there is a great deal of difference between what laws define and what laws do. A poor woman in a poor public-house was broken with a ruinous fine for giving a child a sip of shandy-gaff. Nobody supposed that the law verbally stigmatised the action for being done by a poor person in a poor public-house. But most certainly nobody will dare to pretend that a rich man giving a boy a sip of champagne would have been punished so heavily — or punished at all. I have seen the thing done frequently in country houses; and my host and hostess would have been very much surprised if I had gone outside and telephoned for the police. The law theoretically condemns any one who tries to frustrate the police or even fails to assist them. Yet the rich motorists are allowed to keep up an organised service of anti-police detectives — wearing a conspicuous uniform — for the avowed purpose of showing motorists how to avoid capture. No one supposes again that the law says in so many words that the right to organise for the evasion of laws is a privilege of the rich but not of the poor. But take the same practical test. What would the police say, what would the world say, if men stood about the streets in green and yellow uniforms, notoriously for the purpose of warning pickpockets of the presence of a plain-clothes officer? What would the world say if recognised officials in peaked caps watched by night to warn a burglar that the police were waiting for him? Yet there is no distinction of principle between the evasion of that police-trap and the other police-trap — the police-trap which prevents a motorist from killing a child like a chicken; which prevents the most frivolous kind of murder, the most piteous kind of sudden death.

Well, the Poor Man's Divorce Law will be applied exactly as all these others are applied. Everybody must know that it would mean in practice that well-dressed men, doctors, magistrates, and inspectors, would have more power over the family lives of the ill-dressed men, navvies, plumbers, and potmen. Nobody can have the impudence to pretend that it would mean that navvies, plumbers, and pot men would (either individually or collectively) have more power over the family lives of doctors, magistrates, and inspectors. Nobody dare assert that because divorce is a State affair, therefore the poor citizen will have any power, direct or indirect, to divorce a duchess from a duke or a banker from a banker's wife. But no one will call it inconceivable that the power of rich families over poor families, which is already great, the power of the duke as landlord, the power of the banker as money-lender, might be considerably increased by arming magistrates with more powers of interference in private life. For the dukes and bankers often are magistrates, always the friends and relatives of magistrates. The navvies are not. The navvy will be the subject of the new experiments; certainly never the experimentalist. It is the poor man who will show to the imaginative eye of science all those horrors which, according to newspaper correspondents, cry aloud for divorce — drunkenness, madness, cruelty, incurable disease. If he is slow in working for his master, he will be "defective." If he is worn out by working for his master, he will be "degenerate." If he, at some particular opportunity, prefers to work for himself to working for his master, he will be obviously insane. If he never has any opportunity of working for any master he will be "unemployable." All the bitter embarrassments and entanglements incidental to extreme poverty will be used to break conjugal happiness, as they are already used to break parental authority. Marriage will be called a failure wherever it is a struggle, just as parents in modern England are sent to prison for neglecting the children whom they cannot afford to feed.

I will take but one instance of the enormity and silliness which is really implied in these proposals for the extension of divorce. Take the case quoted by many contributors to the discussion in the papers — the case of what is called "cruelty." Now what is the real meaning of this as regards the prosperous and as regards the struggling classes of the community? Let us take the prosperous classes first. Every one knows that those who are really to be described as gentlemen all profess a particular tradition, partly chivalrous, partly merely modern and refined — a tradition against "laying hands upon a woman, save in a way of kindness." I do not mean that a gentleman hates the cowing of a woman by brute force: any one must hate that. I mean he has a ritual, taboo kind of feeling about the laying on of a finger. If a gentle man (real or imitation) has struck his wife ever so lightly, he feels he has done one of those things that thrill the thoughts with the notion of a border-line, something like saying the Lord's Prayer backwards, touching a hot kettle, reversing the crucifix, or "breaking the pledge." The wife may forgive the husband more easily for this than for many things; but the husband will find it hard to forgive himself. It is a purely class sentiment, like the poor folks' dislike of hospitals. What is the effect of this class sentiment on divorce among the higher classes?

The first effect, of course, is greatly to assist those faked divorces so common among the fashionable. I mean that where there is a collusion, a small pat or push can be remembered, exaggerated, or invented; and yet seem to the solemn judges a very solemn thing in people of their own social class. But outside these cases, the test is not wholly inappropriate as applied to the richer classes. For all Gentlemen feeling or affecting this special horror, it does really look bad if a gentleman has broken through it, it does look like madness or a personal hatred and persecution. It may even look like worse things. If a man with luxurious habits, in artistic surroundings, is cruel to his wife, it may be connected with some perversion of sex cruelty, such as was alleged (I know not how truly) in the case of the millionaire Thaw. We need not deny that such cases are cases for separation, if not for divorce.

But this test of technical cruelty, which is rough and ready as applied to the rich, is absolutely mad and meaningless as applied to the poor. A poor woman does not judge her husband as a bully by whether he has ever hit out. One might as well say that a school-boy judges whether another schoolboy is a bully by whether he has ever hit out. The poor wife, like the schoolboy, judges him as a bully by whether he is a bully. She knows that while wife-beating may really be a crime, wife-hitting is sometimes very like just self-defence. No one knows better than she does that her husband often has a great deal to put up with; sometimes she means him to;

sometimes she is justified. She comes and tells this to magistrates again and again; in police court after police court women with black eyes try to explain the thing to judges with no eyes. In street after street women turn in anger on the hapless knight-errant who has interrupted an instantaneous misunderstanding. In these people’s lives the rooms are crowded, the tempers are torn to rags, the natural exits are forbidden. In such societies it is as abominable to punish or divorce people for a blow as it would be to punish or divorce a gentleman for slamming a door. Yet who can doubt, if ever divorce is applied to the populace, it would be applied in the spirit which takes the blow quite seriously? If any one doubts it, he does not know what world he is living in. It is common to meet nowadays men who talk of what they call Free Love as if it were something like Free Silver — a new and ingenious political scheme. They seem to forget that it is as easy to judge what it would be like as to judge of what legal marriage would be like. “Free Love” has been going on in every town and village since the beginning of the world; and the first fact that every man of the world knows about it is plain enough. It never does produce any of the wild purity and perfect freedom its friends attribute to it. If any paper had the pluck to head a column “Is Concubinage a Failure?” instead of “Is Marriage a Failure?” the answer “Yes” would be given by the personal memory of all. Modern people perpetually quote some wild expression of monks in the wilderness (when a whole civilisation was maddened by remorse) about the perilous quality of Woman, about how she was a spectre and a serpent and a destroying fire. Probably the establishment of nuns, situated a few miles off, described Man also as a serpent and a spectre; but their works have not come down to us.

Now all this old-world wit against Benedick the married man was sensible enough. But so was the bachelorhood of the old monks, who said it, sensible enough. It is perfectly true that to entangle yourself with another soul in the most tender and tragic degree is to make, in all rational possibility, a martyr or a fool of yourself. Most of the modern denunciations of marriage might have been copied direct from the maddest of the monkish diaries. The attack on marriage is an argument for celibacy. It is not an argument for divorce. For that entanglement which celibacy avowedly avoids, divorce merely reduplicates and repeats. It may have been a sort of solemn comfort to a gentleman of Africa to reflect that he had no wife. It cannot be anything but a discomfort to a gentleman of America to wonder which wife he really has. If progress means, as in the ludicrous definition of Herbert Spencer, “an advance from the simple to the complex,” then certainly divorce is a part of progress. Nothing can be conceived more complex than the condition of a man who has settled down finally four or five times. Nothing can be conceived more complex than the position of a profligate who has not only had ten liaisons, but ten legal liaisons. There is a real sense in which free love might free men. But freer divorce would catch them in the most complicated net ever woven in this wicked world.

The tragedy of love is in love, not in marriage. There is not unhappy marriage that might not be an equally unhappy concubinage, or a far more unhappy seduction. Whether the tie be legal or no, matters something to the faithless party; it matters nothing to the faithful one. The pathos reposes upon the perfectly simple fact that if any one deliberately provokes either passions or affections, he is responsible for them as long as they go on, as the man is responsible for letting loose a flood or setting fire to a city. His remedy is not to provoke them, like the hermit. His punishment, when he deserves punishment, is to spend the rest of his life in trying to undo any ill he has done. His escape is despair — which is called, in this connection, divorce. For every healthy man feels one fundamental fact in his soul. He feels that he must have a life, and not a series of lives. He would rather the human drama were a tragedy than that it were a series of Music-hall Turns and Potted Plays. A man wishes to save the souls of all the men he has been: of the dirty little schoolboy; of the doubtful and morbid youth; of the lover; of the husband. Re-incarnation has always seemed to me a cold creed; because each incarnation must forget the other. It would be worse still if this short human life were broken up into yet shorter lives, each of which was in its turn forgotten.

If you are a democrat who likes also to be an honest man — if (in other words) you want to know what the people want and not merely what you can somehow induce them to ask for — then there is no doubt at all that this is what they want. You can only realise it by looking for human nature elsewhere than in election reports, but when you have once looked for it you see it and you never forget it. From the fact that every one thinks it natural that young men and women should carve names on trees, to the fact that every one thinks it unnatural that old men and women should be separated in work houses, millions and millions of daily details prove that people do regard the relation as normally permanent; not a vision, but as a vow.

Now for the exceptions, true or false. I would note a strange and even silly oversight in the discussion of such exceptions, which has haunted most arguments for further divorce. The ordinary emancipated prig or poet who urges this side of the question always talks to one tune. “Marriage may be the best for most men,” he says, “but there are exceptional natures that demand a more undulating experience; constancy will do for the common herd, but there are complex natures and complex cases where no one could recommend constancy. 1 do not ask (at the present Stage of Progress) for the abolition of marriage; I hereby ask that it may be remitted in such individual and extreme examples.”

Now it is perfectly astounding to me that any one who has walked about this world should make such a blunder about the breed we call mankind. Surely it is plain enough that if you ask for dreadful exceptions, you will get them — too many of them. Let me take once again a rough parable. Suppose I advertised in the papers that I had a place for any one who was too stupid to be a clerk. Probably I should receive no replies; possibly one. Possibly also (nay, probably) it would be from the one man who was not stupid at all. But suppose I had advertised that I had a place for any one who was too clever to be a clerk. My office would be instantly besieged by all the most hopeless fools in the four kingdoms. To advertise for exceptions is simply to advertise for egoists. To advertise for egoists is to advertise for idiots. It is exactly the bore who does think that his case is interesting. It is precisely the really common person who does think that his case is uncommon. It is always the dull man who does think himself rather wild. To ask solely for strange experiences of the soul is simply to let loose all the imbecile asylums about one’s ears. Whatever other theory is right, this theory of the exceptions is obviously wrong — or (what matters more to our modern atheists) is obviously unbusinesslike. It is, moreover, to any one with popular political sympathies, a very deep and subtle sort of treason. By thus putting a premium on the exceptional we grossly deceive the unconsciousness of the normal. It seems strangely forgotten that the indifference of a nation is sacred as well as its differences. Even public apathy is a kind of public opinion — and in many cases a very sensible kind. If I ask every body to vote about Mineral Meals and do not get a single ballot-paper returned, I may say that the citizens have not voted. But they have.

The principle held by the populace, against which this plutocratic conspiracy is being engineered, is simply the principle expressed in the Prayer Book in the words “for better, for worse.” It is the principle that all noble things have to be paid for, even if you only pay for them with a promise. One does not take one’s interest out of England as one takes it out of Consols. A man is not an Englishman unless he can endure even the decay and death of England. And just as every citizen is a potential soldier, so every wife or husband is a potential hospital nurse — or even asylum attendant. For though we should all approve of certain tragedies being mitigated by a celibate separation — yet the more real love and honour there has been in the marriage, the less real mitigation there will be in the parting. But this sound public instinct both about patriotism and marriage also insists that the first vow or obligation shall be mitigated, not merely erased and forgotten. Many a good woman has loved and refused a doubtful man, with the proviso that she would marry no one else; the old institution of marriage has the same feeling about the tragedy that is post-matrimonial. The thing remains real; it binds one to something. If I am exiled from England I will go and live on an island somewhere and be as jolly as I can. I will not become a patriot of any other land.

DICKENS (ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA ARTICLE)

DICKENS, Charles John Huffam (1812-1870), certainly the most popular and perhaps the greatest of the great English novelists, was born in Landport, a division of Portsea; in a house in Mile End terrace, Commercial road. The house can be identified and is in some sense a popular shrine or memorial, enabling the sightseer to link up in one journey two of the most romantic national names, associating Dickens with Portsea and Nelson with Portsmouth. But beyond this symbolic and almost legendary local interest, the actual address indicates little more than the drifting and often decaying fortunes of the class and family from which he came. It would be an exaggeration to compare it to Lant street, in the Borough, of which, it will be remembered, "the inhabitants were migratory, disappearing usually towards the verge of quarter-day." But there is the note of something nomadic about the social world to which he belonged. We talk of the solid middle class; he belonged, one might almost say, to the liquid middle class; certainly to the insecure middle class. His father, John Dickens, was a clerk in the Navy-Pay Office, and all through life a man of wavering and unstable status, partly by his misfortunes and partly by his fault. It is said that Dickens sketched him in a lighter spirit as Micawber and in a sadder and more realistic aspect as Dorrit. The contrast between the two men, as well as the two moods, should be a warning against the weakness of taking too literally the idea of Dickensian "originals." The habit has done grave injustice to many people, such as Leigh Hunt; and it may involve a grave injustice to John Dickens; and perhaps an even greater injustice to Mrs. John Dickens, nee Elizabeth Barrow, whom a similar rumour reports as the real Mrs. Nickleby. Some may question, not without grief, whether there really could be a real Mrs. Nickleby. But in any case there certainly could not be a man who was both Dorrit and Micawber. The truth is that we shall misunderstand from the beginning the nature of the Dickensian imagination, if we suppose these things to be mechanical portraits in black and white, taken by "the profeel machine," as Mr. Weller said. It is the whole point of Dickens that he took hints from human beings; and turned them, one may say, into superhuman beings. But it is true that John Dickens was of the type that is often shifted from place to place; and this is the chief significance of Charles Dickens's connection with Portsea, or rather of his lack of connection with it. He can only have been two years old when the household moved for a short time to London and then for a longer time to Chatham. It was perhaps lucky that the formative period of his first childhood was also the most fortunate period of his not very fortunate family. The dockyard of Chatham, the towers of Rochester, the gardens and the great roads of Kent remained to him through life as the only normal memory of a nursery and a native soil; his house in later years looked down on the great road from Gads hill and the cathedral tower rose again in his last vision, in the opium dream called "Edwin Drood." Here he had leisure to learn a little from books, who was so soon to learn only from life; first in the stricter sense of school-books, from a Mr. Giles, a Baptist minister in Chatham; and second, and probably with greater profit, from a random heap of old novels that included much of the greatest English literature and even more of the type of literature from which he could learn most; Roderick Random and Robinson Crusoe and Tom Jones and The Vicar of Wakefield.

He can hardly have been ten years old when the household was once more upon the march. John Dickens had fallen heavily into debt; he continued the tendency to change his private address; and his next private address was the Debtors' Prison of the Marshalsea. His wife, the mother of eight children of whom Charles was the second, had to encamp desolately in Camden Town and open a dingy sort of "educational establishment." Meanwhile the unfortunate Charles was learning his lessons at a very different sort of educational establishment. After helping his mother in every sort of menial occupation, he was thrown forth to earn his own living by tying and labelling pots of blacking in a blacking warehouse at Old Hungerford Stairs. The blacking was symbolical enough; Dickens never doubted that this piece of his childhood was the darkest period of his life; and he seems indeed to have been in a mood to black himself all over, like the Othello of the Crummles Company. Of his pessimistic period, of the heartrending monotony and ignominy, he has given little more than a bitter abbreviation in David Copperfield. But he was storing up much more than bitterness; it is obvious that he had already developed an almost uncanny vigilance and alertness of attention. By the time his servitude came to an end, by his father falling into a legacy as he had fallen into a jail (there was really a touch of Micawber in the way in which things turned up and turned down for him) the boy was no longer a normal boy, let alone a child. He called his wandering parent "the Prodigal Father"; and there was something of the same fantastic family inversion in the very existence of so watchful and critical a son. We are struck at once with an almost malicious maturity of satire; some of the best passages of the prison life of the Pickwicks and the Dorrits occur in private letters about his own early life. He had shared, of course, the improvement in the family condition; which was represented in his case by a period of service as a clerk to a Mr. Blackmore, a Grays Inn solicitor, and afterwards in the equally successful, and much more congenial, occupation of a newspaper reporter and ultimately a Parliamentary reporter. His father had taken up the trade; but his son was already making a mark in it, as reporter to The True Sun, The Mirror of Parliament and The Morning Chronicle. In all these aspects and attitudes, at this time, he appears as alert, sharp-witted and detached; recalling that sort of metallic brightness which an observer at this period so often saw flash upon his face. It is worthy of note, because certain healthy social emotions which he always championed have somewhat falsified his personality in the eyes of the prigs whom he loved to rap over the head. He was a genuine champion of geniality; but he was not always genial; certainly not only genial. One of his earliest sketches, published not long after this time, was a defence of the Christian festivity of Christmas against the Puritans and the Utilitarians; it was called “Christmas Under Three Heads.” All his life he defended valiantly the pleasures of the poor; and insisted that God had given ale and rum, as well as wine, to make glad the heart of man. But all this has clouded his character with fumes of mere conviviality and irresponsibility which were very far from being really characteristic. Even in youth, which is the period of irresponsibility, Dickens appears in some ways as highly responsible. He was in sharp reaction against the futility of his family; he was both ambitious and industrious; and there were some who even found him hard. In many moods he had as angry a dislike of the Skimpoles as of the Gradgrinds.

Indeed he had come in more ways than one to the high turning-point of his fortunes. His marriage and his first real literary work can be dated at about the same time. He had already begun to write sketches, chiefly in The Old Monthly Magazine, which were in the broadest sense caricatures, of the common objects of the street or the market-place. They were illustrated by Cruikshank; and in these early stages of the story the illustrator is often more important than the author. This was notoriously true of his next and perhaps his greatest experiment; but it is typical in any case of his time and his time of life. The prose sketches were signed "Boz" and the signature had become a recognized pseudonym when Messrs. Chapman and Hall, the publishers, approached him with the suggestion of a larger scheme. A well known humorous artist of that epoch, Seymour, was to produce a series of plates illustrating the adventures, or misadventures, of the Nimrod Club, a group of amateur sportsmen, destined to dwindle and yet to grow infinitely greater in the single figure of Mr. Nathaniel Winkle. Dickens consented to write the letter-press, which was little more than a running accompaniment like an ornamental border around the drawings; and in that strange fashion, secondary, subordinate and even trivial, first formed itself in the human fancy the epic and pantomime of Pickwick (1837). Dickens persuaded the publishers to let the Pickwick Club represent more varied interests or eccentricities, retained Mr. Winkle to represent or misrepresent the original notion of sport; and by that one stroke of independence cut himself free from a stale fashion and started a new artistic adventure and revolution. He gave as one of his reasons the fact that he had no special knowledge of sports or games, and proceeded to drive his argument home triumphantly by his description of the cricket-match at Dingley Dell. And yet that cricket-match alone might illustrate exactly the game which Dickens so gloriously won; and why that wild and ill-instructed batsman has had so many thousand runs and is not out. What did a few mistakes in the description of cricket, or even in the description of real life, matter in a man who could invent that orator at the cricket-dinner, who complimented the defeated eleven by saying, with the gesture of Alexander, "If I were not Dumkins, I would be Luffey; if I were not Podder, I would be Struggles"? Men do not read that sort of thing to learn about cricket, or even about life, but to find something more living than either. There had broken through the entanglements of that trumpery bargain a force of comic genius which swallowed up its own origin and excuses; a wild animal big enough to eat all its direction labels. People forgot about Seymour; forgot about sport; forgot about the Nimrod Club; soon forgot about the Pickwick Club. They forgot all that he forgot and followed whatever he followed; much bigger and wilder game than any aimed at by the mere gun of Mr. Winkle. The track of the story wandered; the tone of the story changed; a servant whom Pickwick found cleaning boots in an inn-yard took the centre of the stage and towered even over Pickwick; Pickwick from being a pompous buffoon became a generous and venerable old English gentleman; and the world still followed that incredible transformation-scene and wishes there were more of it to this day. This was the emergence of Dickens into literature. It had, of course, many secondary effects in life. One was the first and almost the most bitter of his quarrels; Seymour may be excused for having been annoyed at the relations of artist and author being thus turned upside down in a whirlwind; but Seymour was not therefore necessarily justified in saying, as he did say and his widow long continued to say, that Dickens had gained glory from another man's ideas. Nobody, we may well imagine, believes that the oration of Sergeant Buzfuz or the poem of Mrs. Leo Hunter, were Mr. Seymour's ideas. Dickens had an inexhaustible torrent of such ideas; and no man on earth could pretend to have provided them. But it is true that in this quarrel, as in others, some found a touch of sharpness and acid self-defence in Dickens; and he was never without his enemies. His ideal was certainly the leisure and geniality of Pickwick; but he was fighting rather too hard for his own hand and had too much at stake and too pressing a knowledge of poverty to be anything but practical.

As Pickwick was the foundation of his public life, his marriage was naturally the foundation of his private life; and in this also he has been an object of criticism as he was certainly an object of sympathy. Very little good is done by making guesses about a story of which the spiritual balance and proportion were probably never known to more than three or four people. It is sufficiently significant that those who were nearest to it, and who survive to speak or rather to be silent, agree in laying no very heavy blame upon anyone involved. One of the principals of the Morning Chronicle, George Hogarth, had been so much struck by the "Boz" sketches as to insist on an improvement in the payment of the writer; he introduced Dickens to his family and especially (we may say) to his daughters, with all of whom the young journalist seems to have been on very friendly and even affectionate terms. One of them, Catherine, he married, and certainly married for love; but not perhaps with the sort of love which gives a man a full and serious realization of what he is doing. It is the pathos of the story that in a sense the friendship outlasted the love; for another sister, who understood him better, remained his friend long after his marriage had become a prolonged misunderstanding. All this, however, happened long afterwards; for the moment his marriage may be taken as marking his step into security and success; especially as he was probably stimulated and, as it were, intoxicated, by a romance that brought him into more refined social surroundings than his own. From that moment he was launched as a popular writer and a power in the world; and he never went back, until he died of popularity thirty years afterwards.

It is notable that his next work was Oliver Twist (1838); which might be meant for a contrast to Pickwick. If the first trick had succeeded, nobody could accuse the conjurer of trying the same trick twice. He was probably proud of proving his range; but he was certainly courageous in testing his popularity. It is true that Oliver Twist consists of a queer mixture of melodrama and realism; but both the realism and the melodrama are deliberately dark and grim. Nevertheless it is fortunate that with his second book he thus brought into play what may be called his second talent. It is too common to compare his humour with his pathos; for indeed there is no comparison. But there really is a comparison between his humour and his horror; and he really had a talent for a certain sort of horror, which is exactly rendered by the popular phrase of supping on horrors. For there is a sort of lurid conviviality that accompanies the panic; as if the nightmare could accompany and not follow the heavy meal. This suppressed vitality is due to his never for an instant losing the love of life; the love of death, which is despair and pessimism, was meaningless to him till he died. The sort of horror which afterwards conceived the death of Krook is already found in Oliver Twist; as in that intolerable repetition throbbing in the murderer's ears; "will wash out mud-stains, blood-stains" and so on. For the rest, the plot is preposterous and the flashes of fun excellent but few; yet there is another aspect of the book which makes it important in the story of Dickens. It is not only the first of his nightmare novels, but also the first of his social tracts. Something of social protest could be read between the lines of Pickwick in prison; but the prison of Pickwick was very mild compared with the charitable almshouse of Oliver. Dickens is witness, with Hood and Cobbett and many others, that the workhouse was felt by all generous people as something quite unnaturally new and hard and inhuman. It is sometimes said that he killed Bumble; it would be easier to say that, by making Bumble live, he created something by which it will always be possible to kill bureaucracies.

Whether we call the transition from Pickwick to Oliver Twist a change from comedy to tragedy, or merely a change from farce to melodrama, it is notable that the next act of Dickens is to mix the two in about equal proportions. Having shown how much he can vary, he tries to show how well he can combine. It is worth noting because it explains much of the failure as well as the success of his art as a whole. We may even say that, to the last, this sort of exhibition of power remained his principal weakness. When the critics, like those of The Quarterly, called him vulgar, it meant nothing except that the critics themselves were snobbish. There is nothing vulgar about drinking beer or describing the drinking of beer, or enjoying the humours of really humorous people who happen to black boots, like Sam Weller. But there is something just a little vulgar about professing to be a Universal Provider; a man who writes not only something that he wants to write, but anything that anybody wants to read. Anything in his work that can really be called failure is very largely due to this appetite for universal success. There is nothing wrong about the jester laughing at his own jokes; indeed they must be very poor jokes if even he cannot laugh at them. Dickens, in one of those endless private letters which are almost more entertaining than his published novels, describes himself as “a if he thought he was very funny indeed”; and so he was. But when he set out to prove that he was not only very funny, but very pathetic, very tragic, very powerful, he was not always enjoying the sense of power over his work, he was enjoying the sense of power over his audience. He was an admirable actor in private theatricals; and sometimes, unfortunately, they were public theatricals. And on this side of his character he had the proverbial itch of Toole to act Hamlet. When he was rendering the humours of the crowd, he was that rather rare thing, a real democrat. But when he was trying to command the tears and thrills of the crowd, he was something of a demagogue; that is, not one mingling with the crowd, but one trying to dazzle and to drive it. One of the ways in which he displayed this attribute, if not of vulgarity at least of vanity, was in his habit, from this time onwards, of running side by side in the same book about five different stories in about five different styles. It pleased the actor in him to show his versatility and his ease in turning from one to the other. He did not realize clearly enough that in some of the parts he was a first-rate actor and in some a second-rate and in some a fifth-rate actor. He did not remind himself that though he turned to each topic with equal ease, he did not turn to each with equal effect. But, whatever the disadvantages of the universal ambition, it definitely dates from the period of his next book. Pickwick has a prevailing tint of gaiety and Oliver Twist of gravity, not to say grimness; but with

Nicholas Nickleby (1839) we have the new method, which is like a pattern of bright and dark stripes. The melodrama is if possible even more melodramatic than in Oliver Twist; but what there is of it is equally black and scowling. But the comedy or farce has already displayed the rapid ripening of his real genius in letters. There is no better company in all literature than the strolling company of Mr. Vincent Crummles; though it is to be hoped that in any convivial meeting of it, Miss Snevellicci will remember to invite her incomparable papa. Mr. Mantalini also is one of the great gifts of Dickens to the enduring happiness of humanity. For the rest, it is very difficult to take the serious part of the story seriously. There is precious little difference between the rant and claptrap of the Crummles plays, which Dickens makes fun of, and the rant and claptrap of Ralph Nickleby and Mulberry Hawke which Dickens gravely narrates to us. All that, however, was of little consequence either immediate or permanent. Dickens was not proving that he could write smooth and probable narratives, which many people could do. He was proving that he could create Mantalini and Snevellicci, which nobody could do.

Nevertheless, this pretence of providing for all tastes, which produced the serio-comic novel, is also the explanation of the next stage of his career. There runs or recurs throughout his whole life a certain ambition to preside over a more or less complex or many-sided publication; a large framework for many pictures; a system of tales within tales like the Arabian Nights or the tales of the Tabard. It is the ambition that he afterwards gratified by becoming the editor of two magazines, Household Words and All the Year Round. But there is here something of a shadow of the original meaning of the word magazine, in the sense of a shop; and another hint of that excessive desire to keep a shop that sells everything. He had been for a time editor of something of the sort in Bentley’s Miscellany, but the final form taken by this mild and genial megalomania (if we may so describe it) was the plan which Dickens formed immediately after the success of Nicholas Nickleby. The serial scheme was to be called, “Master Humphrey’s Clock,” and was to consist of different stories told by a group of friends. With the idea of making them the more friendly he turned some of them into old friends; reintroducing Mr. Pickwick and the two Wellers, though these characters were hardly at their best, the author’s mind being already on other things. One of these things was a historical novel, perhaps conceived more in the romantic manner of Scott than the prosaic manner of

Smollett, which Dickens generally followed. It was called Barnaby Rudge (1840) and the most interesting part of it perhaps is the business of the Gordon Riots; and the mob that has a madman for its mascot and penny-dreadful prentice for its comic relief. But there is also a plot as complicated as, though rather clearer than, that of Oliver Twist; a plot that intensely interested the detective mind of Poe. Barnaby Rudge, however, is not so directly Dickensian as the romance that preceded or the romance that followed it. The second story, somewhat insecurely wedged into the framework of Master Humphrey's Clock, was The Old Curiosity Shop (1841), as the opening and some of the references in the story still vaguely attest. The public reception of this story very sharply illustrates what has been said about the double character of his success. On the one side was his true success as a craftsman carving figures of a certain type, generally gargoyles and grotesques. On the other side was his inferior success as a jack-of-all-trades tending only too much to be a cheapjack. As a matter of fact, The Old Curiosity Shop contains some of the most attractive and imaginative humour in all his humorous work; there is nothing better anywhere than Mr. Swiveller's imitation of the brigand or Mr. Brass's funeral oration over the dwarf. But in general gossip and association, everything else in the story is swallowed up in the lachrymose subject of Little Nell. There can be no doubt that this unfortunate female had a most unfortunate effect on Dickens's whole conception of his literary function. He was flattered because silly people wrote him letters imploring him not to let Little Nell die; and forgot how many sensible people there were, only hoping that the Marchioness would live for ever. Little Nell was better dead, but she was an unconscionable long time dying; and we cannot altogether acquit Dickens of keeping her lingering in agony as an exhibition of his power. It tended to fix him in that unfortunate attitude, of something between a showman and a magician, which explains almost all the real mistakes of his life.

About this time a very determining event interrupted his purely literary development, his first visit to America. It was destined to have, apart from any other results, a direct effect upon his next book, which was Martin Chuzzlewit (1844). There were, of course, many purely practical and personal elements in the criticism which he directed against the western democracy. An unjust copyright law, or one which he at any rate thought very unjust, had enabled Americans to pirate his most popular works; and it would seem that the people he met were, in their breezy way, but little inclined to apologize for the anomaly. But it would be very unjust to Dickens to deny that his sense and sensibility were alike irritated by some real divisions in the international relation. There were things in the American culture, or lack of culture, which he could not be expected to understand but which he might reasonably be expected to dislike. His English law-abiding liberalism would in any case have been startled by a certain streak of ferocity and persecution that there really is in the Americans; just as he might have recoiled from the same fierceness in the Irish or the Italians. But in the Americans it was also connected with something crude and incomplete in the society, and was not softened by tradition or romance. He was also both annoyed and amused at the American habit of uttering solemn idealistic soliloquies and of using rhetoric very rhetorically. But all these impressions are important chiefly as they changed the course of his next important narrative; and illustrated a certain condition or defect of his whole narrative method.

All these early books of Dickens, from Pickwick onward, appeared, it must always be remembered, serially and in separate parts. They were anticipated eagerly like bulletins; and they were often written up to time almost as hastily as newspaper reports. One effect of this method was that it encouraged the novelist in a sort of opportunism and something of a hand to mouth habit of work. And a character that always belonged, in varying degrees, to his novels is first and most sharply illustrated in Martin Chuzzlewit. The earlier numbers, though they contained the two superb caricatures called Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp, had not for some reason been so popular as the caricatures called Pickwick and Miss Squeers. Dickens was already beginning to show something of that feverish fatigue which was the natural reaction of his fervid industry. He feared that the public was bored with the book; he became perhaps subconsciously a little bored with it himself. He conceived the bold idea of breaking the story in the middle and putting in a purple patch woven from his wild memories of the Yankees. It was completely successful, in the comedy sense; but it is worth noting that Dickens did something curiously Dickensian in thus suddenly sending Martin Chuzzlewit across the sea to America. It is not easy to imagine Thackeray suddenly hurling Pendennis from Mayfair into the middle of Australia; or George Eliot dislodging Felix Holt and flinging him as far as the North Pole. The difference was partly the result of the

Dickensian temper and partly of the method of publication. But it will be well to remember it: for there is more than one example of what looks like a positive change of plan in the Dickens stories, made more possible by this early habit of not producing the work of art as a whole. Some have suggested that the degeneration of Boffin was originally meant to be real, and his rather clumsy plot an afterthought: and the same idea has figured in the reconstructions of Edwin Drood.

At this point there is a break in the life of Dickens, in more ways than one. It is represented by his decision to live abroad for a time, chiefly on grounds of economy; the last lingering results of the relative failure of Martin Chuzzlewit. He took a villa in the neighbourhood of Genoa in 1844; and he and his family, already a fairly large one, settled down there with a certain air of finality that deserved for a time the name of exile. But it is curious to note that the literary work done there has something of the character of an interlude, and indeed of a rather incongruous interlude. For it was in that Italian landscape that he concentrated on a study so very domestic, insular and even cockney as The Chimes (1845); and industriously continued the series of short Christmas stories which had recently begun in the very London fog of A Christmas Carol (1843). Whatever be the merits or demerits of the Christmas Carol, it really is a carol; in the sense of being short and direct and having the same chorus throughout. The same is true in another way of The Chimes; and of most things that occupied him in his Italian home. He had not settled down to another long and important book; and it soon became apparent that he had not settled down at all. He returned to London, the landscape which for him was really the most romantic and even historic; and did something so ominously typical of the place and time as almost to seem like tempting Providence. He became the first editor of the Daily News, a paper started to maintain those Liberal, if not Radical opinions of which he always shared the confident outlook and the humane simplicity. He did not long remain attached to the editorial chair or even to the metropolis, for this was the most restless period in all his restless life. He immediately went back to Lausanne and immediately wanted to go back to London. It seems probable that this break in his social life corresponded to a break in his artistic life: which was in a sense just about to begin all over again and begin at the other end. He did indeed write one more full-size novel of the earlier type, Dombey and Son (1846-48); but it has very much the character of the winding up of an old business, like the winding up of the Dombey firm at the end of it. It is comic as the earlier books were comic, and no praise can be higher; it is conventional as the earlier plots were conventional, and never really pretended to be anything else; it contains a dying child upon the pattern of Little Nell; it contains a very amusing major much improved from the pattern of Mr. Dowler. But underneath all this easy repetition of the old dexterity and the old clumsiness the mind of the conjurer is already elsewhere. Dombey and Son was more successful in a business sense than Martin Chuzzlewit; though really less successful in many others. Dickens settled again in England in a more prosperous style; sent his son to Eton and, what was more sensational, took a rest. It was after a long holiday at Broadstairs, in easier circumstances more favourable to imaginative growth and a general change of view, that there appeared in 1849 an entirely new novel in an entirely new style.

There is all the difference between the life and adventures of David Copperfield and the life and adventures of Nicholas Nickleby, that there is between the life of Charles Dickens and the life of Amadis of Gaul. The latter is a good or bad romance; the former is a romantic biography, only the more realistic for being romantic. For romance is a very real part of life and perhaps the most real part of youth. Dickens had turned the telescope round or was looking through the other end of it; looking perhaps into a mirror, looking in any case out of a new window. It was life as he saw it, which was somewhat fantastically; but it was his own life as he knew it, and even as he had lived it. In other words, it is fanciful but it is not fictitious; because not merely invented in the manner of fiction. In Pickwick or Nickleby he had in a sense breathed fresh imaginative life into stock characters, but they were still stage characters; in the new style he may be extravagant, but he is not stagey. That vague glow of exaggeration and glamour which lies over all the opening chapters of David Copperfield, which dilates some figures and distorts others, is the genuine sentimentalism and suppressed passion of youth; it is no longer a convention or tradition of caricature. There are men like Steerforth and girls like Dora; they are not as boys see them; but boys do see them so. This passionate autobiography, though it stiffens into greater conventionality at the real period of passion, is really, in the dismally battered phrase, a human document. But something of the new spirit, more subtle and sympathetic but perhaps less purely creative, belongs to all the books written after this date. The next of the novels in point of time was Bleak House (1853), a satire chiefly directed against Chancery and the law’s delay, but containing some brilliant satire on other things, as on the philanthropic fool whose eyes are in the ends of the earth. But the description of the feverish idleness of Rick has the new note of one for whom a well-meaning young man is no longer merely a “first walking gentleman.” After a still more severe phase in Hard Times (1854) (historically important as the revolt of a Radical against the economic individualism which was originally identified with Radicalism) he continued the same tendency in Little Dorrit (1857), the tone of which is perhaps as sad as anything illustrated by Dickensian humours can be; broke off into an equally serious and more sensational experiment in historical romance in The Tale of Two Cities (1859), largely an effect of the influence of Carlyle; and finally reached what was perhaps the height of his new artistic method in a purely artistic sense. He never wrote anything better, considered as literature, than the first chapters of Great Expectations (1861). But there is, after all, something about Dickens that prevents the critic from being ever quite content with criticizing his work as literature. Something larger seems involved, which is not literature, but life; and yet the very opposite of a mere recorded way of living. And he who remembers Pickwick and Pecksniff, creatures like Puck or Pan, may sometimes wonder whether the work had not most life when it was least lifelike.

The stretch of stories following on David Copperfield, from 1850 onwards, fall into the framework of another of Dickens’s editorial schemes; and this time a much more successful one. He began to edit Household Words, in which some, though not all of his later tales appeared; and continued to do so until he exchanged it in 1859 for another and similar periodical called All the Year Round. Just as we find him about this time induced at last to settle down finally in a comparatively comfortable editorial chair, so we find him at last settled more comfortably in a domicile that could really be called a home, when, returning at last to his beloved Rochester district on the great road of Kent, he set up his house at Gads hill. It is sad to realize that this material domestic settlement had followed on a moral unsettlement; and the separation of Dickens and his wife, by agreement (of which the little that needs saying has already been said) had already taken place in 1856. But indeed, even apart from that tragedy, it is typical of Dickens that his repose could never be taken as final. His life was destined to end in a whirlwind of an entirely new type of activity; which none the less never interrupted that creative work which was the indwelling excitement of all his days. He wrote one more complete novel, Our Mutual Friend (1864-65), and it is more complete than most. Indeed it is one of the best though not one of the most Dickensian of the Dickens novels. He then turned his restless talent to something in the nature of a detective story, more in the manner of his friend Wilkie Collins; the sort of story which begins by asking a question; in this case a question about the secret and the sequel of the fate of the hero, Edwin Drood. The question will never be answered; for it was cut short by the only thing that could be more dramatic than the death of the hero; the death of the author. Charles Dickens was dead.

He died very suddenly, dropping from his chair at the dinner-table, in the year 1870 at the comparatively early age of fifty-eight. A death so abrupt, and essentially so premature, could not but raise doubts about the wisdom of his impetuous industry and debates almost as varied as those round the secret of Edwin Drood. But without exaggerating any one of the elements that contributed to it, we may note that the very last phase of his life was a new phase; and was almost entirely filled with his new activity in giving public readings from his works. He had gone to America once more in the November of 1867, with this particular purpose; and his campaign of public speaking in this style was truly American in its scope and scale. If he had indeed been unjust to America as a writer, it is curious that he should have reached his final popularity and perhaps his final collapse, in a character so supremely American. Differences exist about how far he exaggerated the function or how far his biographer exaggerated the danger; but his own letters, ragged with insomnia and impatience, full of desperate fatigue and more desperate courage, are alone enough to show that he was playing a very dangerous game for a man approaching sixty. But it is certainly true, as is alleged on the other side, that this was nothing new in the general conduct of Dickens; that he had long ago begun burning the candle at both ends; and there have been few men, in the matter of natural endowments, with so great and glorious a candle to burn.

He was buried in the Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey; and new and vulgar as many critics had called his work, he was far more of a poet than many who were buried there as poets. He left a will commending his soul to God, and to the mercy of Jesus Christ, and leaving his works to the judgment of posterity; and in both respects the action was symbolic and will remain significant in history. Intellectually limited as he was by the rather cheap and cheery negations of an age of commercial rationalism, he had never been a bitter secularist or anti-clerical; he was at heart traditional and was drawn much more towards Anglican than Puritan Christianity; and his greatest work may yet prove to be the perpetuation of the joyful mystery of Christmas. On the other side, he has suffered and may suffer again the changes in the mere fashions of criticism; but his work was creative, it added something to life; and it is hard to believe that something so added will ever be entirely taken away. The defects of his work are glaring; they hardly need to be detected; they need the less to be emphasized because, unfortunately, he always emphasized them himself. It may be a fault, it is certainly a fact, that he enjoyed writing his worst work as much as his best.

The charge of exaggeration is itself exaggerated. It is also, which is much more important, merely repeated mechanically, without any consideration of its true meaning. Dickens did exaggerate; but his exaggeration was purely Dickensian. In this sense his very vulgarity had the quality of distinction. Mere overstatement, to say that a tall man is ten feet high, to say that a frosty morning froze Niagara; this is something relatively easy to do, though sometimes very cleverly done, especially by Americans. But the distinction of Dickens can be stated even in the common charge against him. He is said to have turned men into monsters of humour or horror, whereas the men were really commonplace and conventional persons in shops and offices. If any critic depreciates the Dickensian method as mere overstatement, the answer is obvious: let him take some of these commonplace people and overstate them. He will soon discover that he has not the vaguest notion of what to overstate. He will soon realise that it is not a simple matter of mere exaggeration, in the sense of mere extension. It is not a matter of making a man a little taller or a morning a little colder; the challenge to imagination is not whether he can exaggerate, but whether he can find anything worth exaggerating. Now the genius of Dickens consisted in seeing in somebody, whom others might call merely prosaic, the germ of a sort of prose poem. There was in this or that man’s attitude, or affectation, or habit of thought, something which only needed a touch of exaggeration to be a charming fantasy or a dramatic contradiction. The books of Dickens are in fact full of bores; of bores who do not bore us, merely because they did not bore him. We have all of us heard a hundred times the tiresome trick of public speakers, of asking themselves rhetorical questions which they do not want answered. Any of us might have heard a fat Dissenting minister doing it at a tea-party and thankfully forgotten all about him. But Dickens seized on the fallacy and turned it into a fantasy; into Mr. Chadband's demands to know why he could not fly, or his wild and beautiful apologue about the elephant and the eel. We talk of the power of drawing people out; and that is the nearest parallel to the power of Dickens. He drew reels and reels of highly coloured caricature out of an ordinary person, as dazzlingly as a conjurer draws reels and reels of highly coloured paper out of an ordinary hat. But if anybody thinks the conjuring-trick is easy to perform, let him try it with the next ordinary person he sees. The exaggeration is always the logical extension of something that really exists; but genius appears, first in seeing that it exists, and second in seeing that it will bear to be thus exaggerated. That is something totally different from giving a man a long nose; it is the delicate surgical separation or extension of a living nerve. It is carrying a ludicrous train of thought further than the actual thinker carries it; but it requires a little thinking. It is making fools more gloriously foolish than they can be in this vale of tears; and it is not every fool who can do it.

There were other reasons for the injustice in the particular case of Dickens. Though his characters often were caricatures, they were not such wild caricatures as was supposed by those who had never met such characters. And the critics had never met the characters; because the critics did not live in the common life of the English people; and Dickens did. England was a much more amusing and horrible place than it appeared to the sort of man who wrote reviews in The Quarterly; and, in spite of all scientific progress or social reform, it is still. The poverty and anarchy of Dickens's early life had stuffed his memory with strange things and people never to be discovered in Tennysonian country houses or even Thackerayan drawing-rooms. Poverty makes strange bedfellows, the same sort of bedfellows whom Mr. Pickwick fought for the recovery of his nightcap. In the vivid phrase, he did indeed live in Queer street and was acquainted with very queer fish. And it is something of an irony that his tragedy was the justification of his farce. He not only learnt in suffering what he taught in song, but what he rendered, so to speak, in a comic song.

It is also true, however, that he caught many of these queer fish because he liked fishing in such troubled waters. A good example of this combination of opportunity and eccentricity is to be found in his affection for travelling showmen and vagabond entertainments of all sorts, especially those that exhibited giants and dwarfs and such monstrosities. Some might see in this truth a sort of travesty of all his travesties. It would be easy to suggest a psychological theory, by which all his art tended to the antics of the abnormal; it would also be entirely false. It would be much truer to say that Dickens created so many wild and fantastic caricatures because he was himself commonplace. He never identifies himself with anything abnormal, in the more modern manner. In his travelling show, the Giant always falls far short of being a Superman. And though he was tempted only too easily to an obvious pathos, there was never anything particularly pathetic about his dwarfs. His fun is more robust; and even, in that sense, more callous. The truth is that Dickens's attitude to the abnormal has been misunderstood owing to the modern misunderstanding of the idea of the normal. He was in many ways a wild satirist, but still a satirist; and satire is founded on sanity. He has his real Cockney limitations. But his moderation was not a limitation but a liberty; for it allowed him to hit out in all directions. It was precisely because he had an ordinary and sensible view of life that he could measure the full madness both of Gradgrind's greed or Micawber's improvidence. It was because he was what we call commonplace that Dombey appeared to him so stiff or Jellaby so slovenly. In a later generation a real person often assumed such an unreal pose and lost the power of merely laughing at it; as, for example, when Oscar Wilde said seriously all that Skimpole had said absurdly. The Victorian commonsense was not a complete commonsense; and Dickens did suffer from having a narrower culture than Swift or Rabelais. But he did not suffer from being sensible; it was even more from his sense than his sensibility, it was from a sort of inspired irritation and impatience of good sense, that he was able to give us so radiant a fairyland of fools.

His literary work produced of course much more than a literary effect. He was the last great poet, in the true sense of maker, who made something for the people and was in the highest sense popular. He still gives his name, not to a literary clique, but to a league or fellowship numbering thousands all over the world. In this connection it is often noted that he achieved many things even considered as a practical political and social reformer. He let light into dark corners, like the dens of dirt and brutality often called schools, especially in Yorkshire; he probably had much to do with making the professional nurse a duller but more reliable person than Mrs. Gamp; it is likely enough that his vivid descriptions, assisted by the whole trend of the time, hastened the extinction of ordinary imprisonment for debt and clarified much of the original chaos of Chancery. But precisely because this has often been said, it will be well not to say it too often. It has the effect of making his satire appear much more superficial and utilitarian than it really was; for the great satirist is concerned with things not so easily destroyed. We do more honour to Dickens in noting the evils he did not destroy than those he did. The eager worship of a man merely wealthy, however dull and trivial, which appears in the affair of Merdle, has by no means disappeared from our own more recent affairs. The pompous old Barnacle and the agreeable young Barnacle are still almost as much alive as in Dickens's day. The sweeping away of a genuine gentry, in the person of Mr. Twemlow, on the tide of a new plutocracy, represented by Mr. Veneering, has gone much further than in Dickens's day. But this makes Dickens's satire the more rather than the less valuable to posterity. The other mood, which pictures all such abuses as things of the past, tends not to reform but only too much to repose; and to the perpetuation of a rather snobbish and paltry version of the Dickensian tradition. In that spirit we may hear to this day a Stiltstalkings telling the House of Commons that Stiltstalkings have perished before the march of progress; or in the law courts a Buzfuz quoting Buzfuz and jeering at himself as an extinct monster.

The future of the fame of Dickens is no part of the Dickens record and a very dubious part of the Dickens criticism. Some have suggested that his glory will fade as new fashions succeed those he satirized; others have said, at least equally reasonably, that the difference itself fades when all the fashions have grown old; and that Aristophanes and Cervantes have outlived their descendants as well as their contemporaries. But there can be no question of the importance of Dickens as a human event in history; a sort of conflagration and transfiguration in the very heart of what is called the conventional Victorian era; a naked flame of mere natural genius, breaking out in a man without culture, without tradition, without help from historic religions or philosophies or from the great foreign schools; and revealing a light that never was on sea or land, if only in the long fantastic shadows that it threw from common things.

MILTON: MAN AND POET

1917

All the mass of acute and valuable matter written or compiled about Milton leaves eternally an unanswered question; a difficulty felt by all, if expressed by few, of his readers. That difficulty is a contrast between the man and his poems. There exists in the world a group of persons who perpetually try to prove that Shakespeare was a clown and could not have written about princes, or that he was a drunkard and could not have written about virtue. I think there is a slight fallacy in the argument. But I wonder that they have not tried the much more tempting sport of separating the author of L' Allegro *from the author of the* Defensus Populi Anglicani. For the contrast between the man Milton and the poet Milton is very much greater than is commonly realized. I fear that the shortest and clearest way of stating it is that when all is said and done, he is a poet whom we cannot help liking, and a man whom we cannot like. I find it far easier to believe that an intoxicated Shakespeare wrote the marble parts of Shakespeare than that a marble Milton wrote the intoxicated, or, rather, intoxicating, parts of Milton. Milton's character was cold; he was one of those men who had every virtue except the one virtue needful. While other poets may have been polygamists from passion, he was polygamous on principle. While other artists were merely selfish, he was egoistic.

The public has a quick eye for portraits, a very keen nose for personality; and across two centuries the traditional picture of Milton dictating to his daughters till they were nearly dead has kept the truth about Milton; it has not taken the chill off. But though the mass of men feel the fact Milton after two hundred years, they seldom read the poetry of Milton at all. And so, because Milton the man was cold, they have got over the difficulty by saying that the poet Milton is cold too; cold, classical, marmoreal. But the poetry of Milton is not cold. He did in his later years, and in a fit of bad temper, write a classical drama, which is the only one of his works which is really difficult to read. But taken as a whole he is a particularly poetical poet, as fond of symbols and witchery as Coleridge, as fond of colored pleasures as Keats. He is sometimes sufficiently amorous to be called tender; he is frequently sufficiently amorous to be called sensual. Even his religion is not always heathen in his poetry. If you heard for the first time the line,

By the dear might of Him that walked the waves,

you would only fancy that some heart of true religious heat and humility, like Crashaw or George Herbert, had for a moment achieved a technical triumph and found a faultless line. If you read for the first time,

But come, thou Goddess fair and free,
In heaven yclept Euphrosyne,

you would think that the most irresponsible of the Elizabethans had uttered it as he went dancing down the street, believing himself in A ready. If you read,

Blossoms and fruits at once of golden hue
Appeared, with gay enamelled colors mixed,

or

Silence was pleased. Now glowed the firmament
With living sapphires,

you would think that all the rich dyes of the Orient and the Middle Ages had met, as they do in some quite modern poet, such as Keats or even Swinburne. If you read the account of the ale and the elf and the Christmas sports in L'Allegro, you might think them written by the most rollicking of rustic poets; if you read some lines about Eve in Paradise Lost, you might think them written at once by the most passionate and the most chivalrous of lovers. Paradise Lost is not dull; it is not even frigid. Anyone who can remember reading the first few books as a boy will know what I mean; it is a romance, and even a fantastic romance. There is something in it of *Thalabe the Destroyer*; something wild and magical about the image of the empire in the abyss scaling the turrets of the magician who is king of the cosmos. There is something Oriental in its design and its strange colors. One cannot imagine Flaxman illustrating Milton as he illustrated Homer.

Nor is it even true that the rich glimpse of tropical terrors are conveyed in a clear outline of language. No one took more liberties with English, with metre, and even with common sense than Milton; an instance, of course, is the well-known superlative about Adam and his children.

Milton was not a simple epic poet like Homer, nor was he even a specially clear epic poet like Virgil. If these two gentlemen had studied his verse, they would have certainly acknowledged its power; but they would have shrunk from its inversions, its abrupt ellipses, its sentences that sometimes come tail foremost. I might even say that Homer reading Milton might have much the same feelings as Milton reading Browning. He would have found

Or of the eternal coeternal beam

a trifle obscure, and

nor sometimes forget,
Those other two, equalled with me in fate, etc., etc.,

almost entirely unintelligible. In this sense it is absurd to set up Milton as a superlatively clear and classic poet. In the art of turning his sentences inside out he never had an equal; and the only answer is to say that the result is perfect; though it is inside out, yet somehow it is right side out.

Nevertheless, the tradition which puts Milton with Virgil and the large and lucid poets, must possess and does possess some poetic significance. It lies, I think, in this: the startling contrast between Milton and the century in which he lived. He was not supremely classical; but he was classical in a time when classicism was almost forgotten. He was not specially lucid; but he was moderately intelligible in an age when nearly all poets were proud of being unintelligible; an age of one hundred Brownings gone mad. The seventeenth century was a most extraordinary time, which still awaits its adequate explanation. It was something coming after the Renaissance which developed and yet darkened and confused it, just as a tree might be more tangled for growing. The puns that had been in Shakespeare few and bad became numberless and ingenious. The schisms of thought which under Wickliffe and Luther had at least the virtue of heartiness, and were yet full of a human hesitation, became harsh, incessant, exclusive; every morning one heard that a new mad sect had excommunicated humanity. The grammars of Greek and Latin, which the young princes of the Renaissance had read as if they were romances, were now being complicated by bald-headed pedants until no one on earth could read them. Theology, which could always in light moments be given the zest of an amusement, became a disease with the Puritans. War, which had been the sport of gentlemen, was now rapidly becoming the ill-smelling science for engineers it still remains. The air was full of anger; and not a young sort of anger; exasperation on points of detail perpetually renewed. If the Renaissance was like a splendid wine, the seventeenth century might be compared to the second fermentation into vinegar. But whatever metaphor we use the main fact is certain; the age was horribly complex; it was learned, it was crabbed, and in nearly all its art and utterance, it was crooked.

Remember the wonderfully witty poets of Charles I.; those wonderfully witty poets who were incomprehensible at the first reading and dull even when one could comprehend them. Think of the scurrilous war of pamphlets, in which Milton himself engaged; pages full of elaborate logic which no one can follow, and elaborate scandals which everyone has forgotten. Think of the tortured legalities of Crown and Parliament, quoting against each other precedents of an utterly different age; think of the thick darkness of diplomacy that covers the meaning (if it had any) of the Thirty Years' War. The seventeenth century was a labyrinth; it was full of corners and crotchets. And against this sort of background Milton stands up as simple and splendid as Apollo. His style, which must always have been splendid, appeared more pure and translucent than it really was in contrast with all the mad mystification and darkness.

A riddle itself, that time is full of minor riddles; and one of the most inexplicable of them involves the whole position of Milton. How far was there really a connection between Calvinism and the idea of liberty, or the idea of popular government? There is much to be said on both sides; indeed there is no more perplexing question than whereabouts at the Reformation, or just after the Reformation, lay the real seed of modern self-government and freedom, or, to speak more strictly, of the modern belief in them; for we rather praise these things than possess them.

The first and fundamental fact is certainly against the liberalizing character of Puritanism. It did not profess to be merely a moral movement; its whole point was that it was strictly a theological movement; its chief objection to its enemies was that they tried to exalt (as the Scotch Puritans said) "the cauld banes of morality" above the sustaining and comfortable doctrine of predestination. To a Calvinist the most important thing was Calvinism; to a Puritan the most important thing was the Puritan creed; and this in itself certainly did not favor the vague sentiments either of emancipation or fraternity. Calvinism took away a man's liberty in the universe; why, then, should it favor his liberty in the State? Puritanism denied free will; why should it be likely to affirm free speech? Why should the Calvinist object to an aristocracy? The Calvinists were an aristocracy; they were the most arrogant and awful of aristocracies by the nature of their own belief: they were the elect. Why should the Puritans dislike a baby being born a nobleman? It was the whole philosophy of the Puritans that a baby is born a celestial nobleman; and he is at birth and before birth a member of the cosmic upper classes. It should have been a small matter to the Puritans to admit that one might be born a king, seeing that they maintained the much more paradoxical position that one might be born a saint. Nor is it easy to see upon their own ideal principles why the Puritans should have disliked despotism or arbitrary power; though it is certainly much more the fact that they did dislike despotism than that they did dislike oligarchy. The first conception of Calvinism is a fierce insistence on the utterly arbitrary nature of power. The King of the Cavaliers was certainly not so purely willful, so sublimely capricious a sultan, as the God of the Puritans.

But we can add something much more plain and practical. It is not merely that despotism or oligarchy might well have pleased the Puritans in theory: it is also true that they did please the Puritans in practice. Of the democratic element that did honestly exist in Puritanism I will speak in a moment; but the oligarchic and despotic elements were not merely things that logically ought to have appeared, but things that actually did appear. It is no longer denied, I think, by serious historians that the whole business of the Puritan revolt or triumph was anti-popular; that is to say, that at almost any given moment of the struggle, universal suffrage would have been a clear victory for the king. The really brilliant triumph of Cromwell was not his triumph over the monarchy, but his triumph over the democracy; the fact that he somehow kept the enormous crowd called England quiet. In short, his great glory was not in heading the Great Rebellion, but in avoiding the Great Rebellion. For the really Great Rebellion was the one that never happened. But, indeed, it is unnecessary even to urge so generally accepted a conjecture as this. Whatever may be true of the rebellion as a whole, no one will deny that at certain moments Puritanism appeared in politics as arrogant, fastidious and anti-popular; full of the pride of predestination and the scorn of all flesh. Even the most enthusiastic upholder of the Whig or Republican theory of Puritanism will hardly pretend that when Colonel Pride drove out of Parliament at the point of the pike all the members that ventured to disagree with him, his soul was at that moment inflamed with an enthusiasm for free discussion or representative government. It was by no means democratic; but it was highly Calvinistic. It was a sort of public pantomime of the doctrine of election; of election in the theological, but by no means the political sense. It is still called "Pride's Purge;" and the phrase has quite a fine allegorical flavor, as if it came out of Pilgrim's Progress. In fact, one of the really happy coincidences of the historical epoch was that one distinguished officer at any rate had somehow got hold of the right surname. And upon larger grounds the alliance between oligarchy and Protestantism has become only too plain. For all we know the Reformation may have tried to make a democracy; all that we do know for certain is that it did make an aristocracy, the most powerful aristocracy of modern times. The great English landlords, who are the peers, arose after the destruction of the small English landlords, who were the abbots. The public schools, which were for the populace in the Middle Ages, became aristocratic after the Reformation. The universities, which were popular in the Middle Ages, became aristocratic after the Reformation. The tramp who went to a monastic inn in the Middle Ages, went to jail and the whipping-post after the Reformation. All this is scarcely denied.

Yet against all this must be put in fairness certain important facts; especially two facts illustrated in the figure and career of Milton. When we have clearly seen that Calvinism always favors aristocracy in theory and often favors it in practice, two great facts remain to be explained or to be explained away. First, that the Puritans did favor a deliberate or sy nodical method of church government, a government by debate; and, second, that most of the abstract republicans of the seventeenth century were either Puritans or upon the Puritan side. I am not, of course, discussing the synod as a mode of church government, nor a republic as a mode of national government. I only say that the clamor for these things must have corresponded to some kind of enthusiasm for liberty and equality alien to the more obvious lessons of Calvinism. But the republicanism was of a peculiar and frigid kind; there was very little human fraternity about it.

Fletcher of Saltown was the author of some epigrams about the public good that read like those of some great pagan; but he was also the author of a proposal to reduce the poorer inhabitants of Scotland to a condition of personal slavery. There was a flavor of Fletcher of Saltown about Milton. Shakespeare puts into the mouth of some character (generally a silly character) some contemptuous talk about the greasy rabble, talk which is common to all literary work, but especially common in work which like Shakespeare's was intended to please the greasy rabble. Whenever this happens critics point to it and say, "Look at the Tory prejudices of the Royalist Shakespeare! Observe the Jacobite servility of the follower of James I.!" But as a matter of fact Milton despised the populace much more than Shakespeare; and Milton put his contempt for common men not into the mouth of silly or stupid characters, but into that of the one wise character, the Chorus, who is supposed to express the moral of a play:

Nor do I name of men the common rout...
But such as thou hast solemnly elected.

I cannot help thinking that Milton was successful with Satan, because he was rather like Satan himself. I mean his own Satan: I will not be so intemperate as to say that he resembled the genuine article. The kind of strength which supported Milton in blindness and outlawry was very like the kind of strength that supported Satan on the flaming marl; it is the same quality, and for merely literary purposes we need not quarrel about whether it should be called spiritual nobility or spiritual pride. It was almost wholly intellectual; it was unsmiling and it was empty of affection. And in justice to the genial, if somewhat vague, people who made up the bulk of the Royalist party and probably the bulk of the English people, we must remember that there was about the high republican type, the type of Vane, or Sydney, or Milton, something of this austerity which chilled and even alarmed. There was something in these republicans which was not brotherly; there was something in these republicans which was not democratic. The compound of the new Puritan and the old pagan citizen produced none of those hearty or homely drinkers, soldiers, or ruffians, men like Danton or Dumouriez, who lent laughter to the terrors of the French Revolution. The deepest dislike which the Cavaliers felt for the Puritans, and no unjust dislike either, had reference to this nameless feeling.

It is possible, I fancy, to frame a fair statement that shall admit this element of the pride of the elect while doing justice to the democratic germ in Puritanism. It was the misfortune of that age that the synodic or debating club idea was applied, not to the whole people as among the pagans, but to small groups or sections among the people. Equality appeared in the form of little separate chapels, not in the form of a great national temple. Thus the Puritan movement encouraged the sense of the equality of members without encouraging the sense of the equality of men. Each little sect was a democracy internally considered, but an oligarchy externally considered. For an aristocracy is none the less aristocratic because its members are all on a level; indeed this is rather a mark of aristocracy; in this sense most aristocracies have been levelers. Even the House of Lords is called the House of Equals: the House of Peers. Thus arose a spirit which had the plainness and much of the harshness of democracy without any of its sympathy or abandon. Thus arose the great race of the aristocratic republicans, half pagan and half Puritan, the greatest of whom was Milton.

The effect of this great type has been immense; but it has been largely a negative effect. If the English peoples have remained somewhat inaccessible to the more ideal aspect of the republican idea, and they certainly have; if, through failing to understand it, they have done gross injustice to the heroisms and even the crimes of the French Revolution, it is in no small degree due to this uncongenial element in the only great school of English republicans. The ultimate victory of Shakespeare over Milton has been very largely due to the primary victory of *Il Penseroso* over L'Allegro. The return of Charles II. was the return of a certain snobbish compromise which has never been shaken off, and which is certainly far less heroic than the dreadful patriotism of the great regicides; but the balance and excuse of that snobbishness was that it was the return of English humor and good nature. So we see it in Milton, in the one great Elizabethan who became a Puritan. His earlier poems are the dying cries of Merry England. England, like his own Samson, lost its strength when it lost its long hair. Milton was one of the slayers; but he was also of the slain. The mystery of his strange mind confronts us forever; we do not know of what god or demon or destiny he had really caught sight afar off; we do not know what he really saw with his sightless eyes. We only know that it turned him to stone.

ON DARWINISM AND MYSTERY

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Mr. Edward Clodd, the distinguished student of Folklore, has asked me a question touching a passage which appeared in this paper. He was writing with reference to the larger question of Darwinism, to which I may return more fully at some other time. But as the sentence he quoted from these columns stands somewhat separate it may be proper to treat it separately. The words he wishes more fully explained are: “Even the Evolutionist is now shy of explaining Evolution. To-day the scientific temper is... scientific doubt of science, not scientific doubt of religion.” He especially wishes to know what I mean by the phrase “scientific doubt of religion.”

Now I take it that my negative statement at least is evident enough; I mean that the most recent revolutionary scientific suggestions do not happen to throw any doubt on any religion. The Book of Genesis does not say that God formed the substance of the world out of atoms, and therefore a scientist cannot be rebuked as a Bible-smasher if he says it is formed not of atoms, but of electrons. The Council of the Church which laid down the dogma of the Co-eternity of Father and Son did not lay down any dogma on the Conservation of Energy. Therefore Mme. Curie could not be burned as a heretic even if, as some said, her discovery disturbed our ideas about the Conservation of Energy. The Athanasian Creed does not say that parallel straight lines never meet, so it would be unaffected by Professor Einstein saying, if he does really say, that they are not parallel or even straight. The prophets did not prophesy that a man would never fly, and are, therefore, not discredited when he does fly. The saints certainly never said there was no such thing as wordless talking, and therefore have nothing to retract if there is such a thing as wireless telegraphy. In many ways it would be far easier to maintain that the modern inventions have verified the ancient miracles. Now in these technical and utilitarian examples it is still true to say that, if they do not disturb religious doctrines, they also do not disturb scientific doctrines. But the former class of more theoretic discoveries do disturb scientific doctrines. It is the doctrines about gravity and energy, about atoms and ether, about the very foundations of the purely scientific universe, that have been affected or threatened by purely scientific research.

Hence I was led to say that the scientific men are pulling to pieces their own scientific universe. It was something relative to this that I said they were not primarily concerned now with doubt about religion. The phrase (in a positive as distinct from a relative sense) refers, of course, to various spiritual and teleological ideas that were supposed, rightly or wrongly, to be disturbed by an earlier phase of science. Some seem to suppose that I am here arguing for these doctrines; but that is a complete mistake. Of the pre-Darwinian doctrines of the popular Protestantism in England, there are some that I believe and some that I heartily disbelieve; but none that I have made the basis of my remarks on Darwinism. They are based on the inconsistencies and illogicalities of the Darwinians themselves. Many sincere critics seems to find it very difficult to believe this. One of them asked me quite sharply why the wing of the bat had not been divinely designed with feathers like the wings of the owl — almost as if I myself had culpably neglected to provide the animal with proper plumage. All this is to miss my whole purpose in this particular discussion. If I do personally believe in design, it is for somewhat deeper reasons which have nothing to do with the wings of bats; and certainly I never dreamed of demonstrating it from the wings of bats. I never professed to trace the causes of these things at all. I have not written a book called "The Origin of Species." I have not conducted detailed researches or proclaimed dogmatic conclusions. I do not know the true reason for a bat not having feathers; I only know that Darwin gave a false reason for its having wings. And the more the Darwinians explain, the more certain I become that Darwinism was wrong. All their explanations ignore the fact that Darwinism supposes an animal feature to appear first, not merely in an incomplete stage, but in an almost imperceptible stage. The member of a sort of mouse family, destined to found the bat family, could only have differed from his brother mice by some minute trace of membrane; and why should that enable him to escape out of a natural massacre of mice? Or even if we suppose it did serve some other purpose, it could only be by a coincidence; and this is to imagine a million coincidences accounting for every creature. A special providence watching over a bat would be a far more realistic notion than such a run of luck as that.

But as for the positive conclusions to be drawn, I am perfectly content to accept Mr. Clodd's basis of "an area of the unknowne where, as he quotes from George Eliot, "men grow blind, though angels know the rest." But I still think that the Darwinians, being men, were blind leaders of the blind. There must have been a real greatness about Darwin's science, of the detailed accumulations of which I should not claim to judge. There certainly was a real greatness about Huxley's literature, of which I can judge rather better. Nobody says that either was not a great man, but merely that he made a great mistake. And as to what remains when that mistake is admitted, I repeat that I am content with Mr. Clodd's phrase. It is not my theology, or the old Puritan theology any more than the old Darwinian biology. What remains is mystery — an unfathomed and perhaps unfathomable mystery. What remains after Darwin is exactly what existed before Darwin — a darkness which I, for quite other reasons, believe to be divine. But whether or no it is divine, it is certainly dark. What is the real truth, what really happened in the variations of creatures, must have been something which has not yet suggested itself to the imagination of man. I for one should be very much surprised if that truth, when discovered, did not contain at least a large element of evolution. But even that surprise is possible where everything is possible, except what has been proven to be impossible.

For the first time, in short, the agnostics will become agnostic. That is the point of my reply to Mr. Clodd's question about the "scientific doubt of religion." The doubt to-day is a real doubt; before it was an inference from some dogma like Darwinism. The Victorian agnostics were not really agnostics. At the back of their minds was a materialistic, or at least a monistic, universe. But that monistic universe is in its turn becoming mystical, or at least very mysterious. The next time of transition will probably be one of real agnosticism, or of more or less exciting ignorance. And Mr. Clodd and I can than agree about the borderland in which men are blind and angels know the rest, though he may be more content to rest in the blindness of men, and I in the knowledge of the angels. But I never advanced this argument as a way of being on the side of angels. I am so far merely on the side of men; of the great mass of reverent and reasonable human beings, who would rather admit that they are blind in the dark than be burdened in the dark with old-fashioned scientific spectacles, and told by a quack that they can see.

DOUBTS ABOUT DARWINISM

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Since objections have been raised against remarks of mine, here and elsewhere, on the subject of science and the system of evolution, I feel it may be fair to acknowledge them here by explaining my meaning more fully. To begin with, of course, I am confronted with a very reasonable retort that I know nothing about the subject. I am not a biologist; I am not even the most amateur sort of naturalist. There is a not unnatural disposition to remark on this fact, when I use phrases indicating that the Darwinian idea has suffered defeat. It is true, and it would be equally true if I ventured to throw out the suggestion that the Kaiser has suffered a defeat. If I were to insinuate that the armies of the German Empire were ultimately out-manoeuvred and forced to a surrender, it might be said that I was wholly ignorant of the technical strategy of soldiering, and did not know what half the manoeuvres meant; and this would be perfectly true. I am sorry to say that I was unable to be a soldier; and I am very glad to say that I refused to be a critic of the details of soldiering. Or again, if I dared to hint that there is now a rather difficult financial situation, that prices are rather high and housing rather hard, I might be reminded that I am not an expert in financial matters; that I am not a professor of political economy, or even a close student of political economy. And this also would be quite true. I am sorry to say I am not an economist; and I very glad I am not a financier. But these cases alone will be sufficient to suggest, to anybody of the smallest commonsense, that there is a fallacy somewhere in the simple argument that only an expert in detail can perceive that there is a difficulty, or declare that there is a defeat.

Now, I will roughly arrange in order the facts of common knowledge that seem to me to support my conclusions as a matter of common-sense. First of all, there is something that will be very suggestive to anybody with a sense of human nature; I mean the tone of the Darwinians themselves. We may well begin with the first and greatest of the Darwinians. Huxley said, in his later years, that Darwin's suggestion had never been shown to be inconsistent with any new discovery; and anybody acquainted with the atmosphere will be struck by the singular note of negation in that. When Huxley began to write, he certainly expected that, by the end of his life, Darwin’ suggestion would have been confirmed by a crowd of positive discoveries. Now nobody talks of it at present as a settled scientific law. Even the critic who complained of my own remark called Darwinism a “hypothesis,” and admitted that it had been “profoundly modified.” And he added the very singular and significant phrase: that the Darwinian hypotheses was still “that most sound at bottom.” If anyone does not hear the negative note in that, I think he does not know the sound of human voice. In short, this Darwinian is already on the defensive, as even Huxley, at an earlier stage and in a lesser degree, was already on the defensive. There is evidently, at least, a subconscious disappointment that the hypothesis is still a hypothesis at all. Putting aside the positive points made against it, it ought long ago to have had a hundred positive points made for it. The one out of that hundred which Huxley did try to make, the genealogy of the horse, will be found on examination to be singularly slender and shaky. My concern for the moment, however, is only with a certain controversial tone; the tone of a gentleman who remarked to me, in a stoic and almost tragic voice: “I am the Last Darwinian.” I do not for a moment suggest that these Darwinians are no longer Darwinians. But if this is how the Darwinians talk while they are still Darwinians, how do you suppose the anti-Darwinians are talking?

Next I will take another suggestion. I will take the instances selected in order to expound the hypothesis, by those who are still content to expound it. There is always a conscious or unconscious effort of selection. And it is by no means a Natural Selection. It is generally, in spite of the phrase that is their motto, a very unnatural selection. The simple and natural thing to do, if you think you can explain biological variations, is to explain the variations where they are most obviously varied. If you were explaining to a child, for instance, you would take things like the horn of the rhinoceros or the hump of the dromedary. In fact, you would give a correct and scientific version of the “Just-So Stories.” And so they would, if they had anything more correct and scientific than the “Just-So Stories.” But these horns and humps, these high outstanding features of variation, are exactly the things that are generally not chosen for examples, and not explained by this universal explanation. And the truth is that it is very often precisely these obvious things that the explanation cannot explain. In almost every case it may be noticed that the exponent, consciously or unconsciously, selects one single and special case of his own, as Huxley selected the horse; the one case in which he thinks, or hopes, that the hypothesis really WILL hold water.

Thus Mr. H. G. Wells, in his wonderfully interesting and valuable “Outline of History,” takes one unnaturally simplified case of the growing of fur, or the change of the color of fur. He then implies that all other cases of natural selection are of the same kind. But they are not of the same kind, but of an exceedingly different and even opposite kind. If fur protects from cold, the longer fur will be a protection in the stronger cold. But any fur will be a protection in any cold. Any fur will be better than no fur; any fur will serve some of the purposes of fur. But it is not certain that any horn is better than no horn; it is very far from certain that any hump is better than no hump. It is very far from obvious that the first rudimentary suggestion of a horn, the first faint thickening which might lead through countless generations to the growth of a horn, would be of any particular use as a horn. And we must suppose, on the Darwinian hypothesis, that the hornless animal reached his horn through unthinkable gradations of what were, for all practical purposes, hornless animal. Why should one rhinoceros be so benevolent a Futurist as to start an improvement that could only help some much later rhinoceros to survive? And why on earth should its mere foreshadowing help the earlier rhinoceros to survive? This thesis can only explain variations when they discreetly refrain from varying very much. To the real riddles that arrest the eye, it has no answer that can satisfy the intelligence. For any child or man with his eyes open, I imagine, there is no creature that really calls for an answer, like a living riddle, so clearly as the bat. But if you will call up the Darwinian vision, of thousands of intermediary creatures with webbed feet that are not yet wings, their survival will seem incredible. A mouse can run, and survive; and a flitter-mouse can fly, and survive. But a creature that cannot yet fly, and can no longer run, ought obviously to have perished, by the very Darwinian doctrine which has to assume that he survived.

There are many other signs of this confession of failure, for which I have hardly left myself space. There is a chorus of Continental doubts; there is a multitude of destructive criticisms with which alone I could fill this article, even from my own very loose and general reading. But I will add a third reason of the same more general sort. The Darwinians have this mark of fighters for a lost cause, that they are perpetually appealing to sentiment and to authority. Put your bat or your rhinoceros simply and innocently as a child might put them, before the Darwinian, and he will answer by an appeal to authority. He will probably answer with the names of various German professors; he will not answer with any ordinary English words, explaining the point at issue. God condescended to argue with Job, but the last Darwinian will not condescend to argue with you. He will inform you of your ignorance; he will not enlighten your ignorance.

And I will add this point of merely personal experience of humanity: when men have a real explanation they explain it, eagerly and copiously and in common speech, as Huxley freely gave it when he thought he had it. When they have no explanation to offer, they give short dignified replies, disdainful of the ignorance of the multitude.

NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE MORALITY

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A vast amount of nonsense is talked against negative and destructive things. The silliest sort of progressive complains of negative morality, and compares it unfavorably with positive morality. The silliest sort of conservative complains of destructive reform and compares it unfavorably with constructive reform. Both the progressive and the conservative entirely neglect to consider the very meaning of the words “yes” and “no”. To give the answer “yes” to one question is to imply the answer “no” to another question. To desire the construction of something is to desire the destruction of whatever prevents its construction. This is particularly plain in the fuss about the “negative” morality of the Ten Commandments. The truth is that the curtness of the Commandments is an evidence, not of the gloom and narrowness of a religion but of its liberality and humanity. It is shorter to state the things forbidden than the things permitted precisely because most things are permitted and only a few things are forbidden. An optimist who insisted on a purely positive morality would have to begin by telling a man that he might pick dandelions on a common and go on for months before he came to the fact that he might throw pebbles into the sea. In comparison with this positive morality the Ten Commandments rather shine in that brevity which is the soul of wit.

But of course the fallacy is even more fundamental than this. Negative morality is positive morality, stated in the plainest and therefore the most positive way. If I am told not to murder Mr. Robinson, if I am stopped in the very act of murdering Mr. Robinson, it is obvious that Mr. Robinson is not only spared, but in a sense renewed, and even created. And those who like Mr. Robinson, among them my reactionary romanticism might suggest the inclusion of Mrs. Robinson, will be well aware that they have recovered a living and complex unity. And similarly, those who like European civilisation, and the common code of what used to be called Christendom, will realize that salvation is not negative, but highly positive, and even highly complex. They will rejoice at its escape, long before they have leisure for its examination. But, without examination, they will know that there is a great deal to be examined, and a great deal that is worth examination. Nothing is negative except nothing. It is not our rescue that was negative, but only the nothingness and annihilation from which we were rescued.

On the other side there is the same fallacy about merely destructive reform. It could be applied just as easily to the merely destructive war. In both cases destruction may be essential to the avoidance of destruction, and also to the very possibility of construction. Men are not merely destroying a ship in order to have a shipwreck; they may be merely destroying a tree in order to have a ship. To complain that we spent four years in the Great War in mere destruction is to complain that we spent them in escaping from being destroyed. And it is, once again, to forget the fact that the failure of the murderer means the life of a positive and not a negative Mr. Robinson. If we take the imaginary Mr. Robinson as a type of the average modern man in Western Europe, and study him from head to foot, we shall find defects as well as merits. And in the whole civilisation we have saved, we shall find defects that amounts to diseases. Its feet, if not of clay, are certainly in clay, stuck in the mud of a materialistic industrial destitution and despair. To say it is a positive good and glory to have saved Mr. Robinson from strangling is to miss the whole meaning of human life. It is to forget every good as soon as we have saved it, that is, to lose it as soon as we have got it. Progress of that kind is a hope that is the enemy of faith, and a faith that is the enemy of charity.

When our hopes for the coming time seem disturbed or doubtful, and peace chaotic, let us remember that it is really our disappointment that is an illusion. It is our rescue that is a reality. Our grounds for gratitude are really far greater than our powers of being grateful. It is in the mood of a noble sort of humility, and even a noble sort of fear, that new things are really made. We adorn things most when we love them most. And we love them most when we have nearly lost them.

MORMONISM

THERE is inevitably something comic (comic in the broad and vulgar style which all men ought to appreciate in its place) about the panic aroused by the presence of the Mormons and their supposed polygamous campaign in this country.

It calls up the absurd image of an enormous omnibus, packed inside with captive English ladies, with an Elder on the box, controlling his horses with the same patriarchal gravity as his wives, and another Elder as conductor callling out “Higher up,” with an exaulted and allegorical intonation. And there is something highly fantastic to the ordinary healthy mind in the idea of any precaution being proposed; in the idea of locking the Duchess in the boudoir and the governess in the nursery, lest they should make a dash for Utah, and become the ninety-third Mrs. Abraham Nye, or the hundredth Mrs. Hiram Boke.

But these frankly vulgar jokes, like most vulgar jokes, cover a popular prejudice which is but the bristly hide of a living principle. Elder Ward, recently speaking at Nottingham, strongly protested against these rumours, and asserted absolutely that polygamy had never been practised with the consent of the Mormon Church since 1890. I think it only just that this disclaimer should be circulated; but though it is most probably sincere, I do not find it very soothing. The year 1890 is not very long ago, and a society that could have practised so recently a custom so alien to Christendom must surely have a moral attitude which might be repellent to use in many other respects. Moreover, the phrase about the consent of the Church (if correctly reported) has a little the air of an official repudiating responsibility for unofficial excesses. It sounds almost as if Mr. Abraham Nye might, on his own account, come into church with a hundred and fourteen wives, but people were supposed not to notice them. It might amount to little more than this, that the Chief Elder may allow the hundred and fourteen wives to walk down the streeet like a girls’ school, but he is not officially expected to take off his hat to each of them in turn. Seriously speaking, however, I have little doubt that Elder Ward speaks the substantial truth, and that polygamy is dying, or has died, among the Mormons. My reason for thinking this is simple; it is that polygamy always tends to die out. Even in the east I believe that, counting heads, it is by this time the exception rather than the rule. Like slavery, it is always being started, because of its obvious conveniences. It has only one small inconvenience, which is that it is intolerable.

Our real error in such a case is that we do not know or care about the creed itself, from which a people's customs, good or bad, will necessarily flow. We talk much about "respecting" this or that person's religion; but the way to respect a religion is to treat it as a religion: to ask what are its tenets and what are their consequences. But modern tolerance is deafer than intolerance. The old religious authorities, at least, defined a heresy before they condemned it, and read a book before they burned it. But we are always saying to a Mormon or a Moslem— "Never mind about your religion, come to my arms." To which he naturally replies— "But I do mind about my religion, and I advise you to mind your eye."

About half the history now taught in schools and colleges is made windy and barren by this narrow notion of leaving out the theological theories. The wars and Parliaments of the Puritans made absolutley no sense if we leave out the fact that Calvinism appeared to them to be the absolute metaphysical truth, unanswerable, unreplaceable, and the only thing worth having in the world. The Crusades and dynastic quarrels of the Norman and Angevin Kings make absolutely no sense if we leave out the fact that these men (with all their vices) were enthusiastic for the doctrine, discipline, and endowment of Catholicism. Yet I have read a history of the Puritans by a modern Nonconformist in which the name of Calvin was not even mentioned, which is like writing a history of the Jews without mentioning either Abraham or Moses. And I have never read any popular or educational history of England that gave the slightest hint of the motives in the human mind that covered England with abbeys and Palestine with banners. Historians seem to have completely forgotten the two facts — first, that men act from ideas; and second, that it might, therefore, be as well to discover which ideas. The medievals did not believe primarily in "chivalry," but in Catholicism, as producing chivalry among other things. The Puritans did not believe primarily in "righteousness," but in Calvinism, as producing righteousness among other things. It was the creed that held the coarse or cunning men of the world at both epochs. William the Conqueror was in some ways a cynical and brutal soldier, but he did attach importance to the fact that the Church upheld his enterprise; that Harold had sworn falsely on the bones of saints, and that the banner above his own lances had been blessed by the Pope. Cromwell was in some ways a cynical and brutal soldier; but he did attach importance to the fact that he had gained assurance from on high in the Calvinistic scheme; that the Bible seemed to support him — in short, the most important moment in his own life, for him, was not when Charles I lost his head, but when Oliver Cromwell did not lose his soul. If you leave these things out of the story, you are leaving out the story itself. If William Rufus was only a red-haired man who liked hunting, why did he force Anselm's head under a mitre, instead of forcing his head under a headsman's axe? If John Bunyan only cared for "righteousness," why was he in terror of being damned, when he knew he was rationally righteous? We shall never make anything of moral and religious movements in history until we begin to look at their theory as well as their practice. For their practice (as in the case of the Mormons) is often so unfamiliar and frantic that it is quite unintelligible without their theory.

I have not the space, even if I had the knowledge, to describe the fundamental theories of Mormonism about the universe. But they are extraordinarily interesting; and a proper understanding of them would certainly enable us to see daylight through the more perplexing or menacing customs of this community; and therefore to judge how far polygamy was in their scheme a permanent and self-renewing principle or (as is quite probably) a personal and unscrupulous accident. The basic Mormon belief is one that comes out of the morning of the earth, from the most primitive and even infantile attitude. Their chief dogma is that God is material, not that He was materialized once, as all Christians believe; nor that He is materialized specially, as all Catholics believe; but that He was materially embodied from all time; that He has a local habitation as well as a name. Under the influence of this barbaric but violently vivid conception, these people crossed a great desert with their guns and oxen, patiently, persistently, and courageously, as if they were following a vast and visible giant who was striding across the plains. In other words this strange sect, by soaking itself solely in the Hebrew Scriptures, had really managed to reproduce the atmosphere of those Scriptures as they are felt by Hebrews rather than by Christians. A number of dull, earnest, ignorant, black-coated men with chimney-pot hats, chin bears or mutton-chop whiskers, managed to reproduce in their own souls the richness and the peril of an ancient Oriental experience. If we think from this end we may possibly guess how it was that they added polygamy.

CHILD PSYCHOLOGY AND NONSENSE

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In this age of child-psychology nobody pays any attention to the actual psychology of the child. All that seems to matter is the psychology of the psychologist and the particular theory or train of thought that he is maintaining against another psychologist. Most of the art and literature now magnificently manufactured for children is not even honestly meant to please children. The artist would hardly condescend to make a baby laugh if nobody else laughed, or even listened. These things are not meant to please the child. At best they are meant to please the child-lover. At the worst they are experiments in scientific educational method. Beautiful, wise, and witty lyrics like those of Stevenson’s “Child’s Garden of Verses” will always remain as a pure lively fountain of pleasure — for grown up people. But the point of many of them is not only such that a child could not see it, it is such that a child ought not to be allowed to see it —

The child that is not clean and neat,
With lots of toys and things to eat,
He is a naughty child, I’m sure,
Or else his dear papa is poor.

No child ought to understand the appalling abyss of that after-thought. No child could understand, without being a snob or a social reformer or something hideous, the irony of that illusion to the inequalities and iniquities with which this wicked world has insulted the sacred dignity of fatherhood. The child who could really smile at that line would be capable of sitting down immediately to write a Gissing novel, and then hanging himself on the nursery bed-post. But neither Stevenson or any Stevensonian (and I will claim to be a good Stevensonian) ever really dreamed of expecting a child to smile at the poem. It was the poet who smiled at the child, which is quite a different thing, though possibly quite as beautiful in its way. And that is the character of all this new nursery literature. It has the legitimate and even honourable object of educating the adult in the appreciation of babies. It is an excellent thing to teach men and women to take pleasure in children, but it is a totally different thing from giving children pleasure.

Now the old nursery rhymes were honestly directed to give children pleasure. Many of them have genuine elements of poetry, but they are not primarily meant to be poetry, because they are simply meant to be pleasure. In this sense “Hey Diddle Diddle” is something much more than an idyll. It is a masterpiece of psychology, a classic and perfect model of education. The lilt and jingle of it is exactly the sort that a baby can feel to be a tune and can turn into a dance. The imagery of it is exactly what is wanted for the first movements of imagination when it experiments in incongruity. For it is full of familiar objects in fantastic conjunction. The child has seen a cow and he has seen the moon. But the notion of the one jumping over the other is probably new to him and is, in the noblest word, nonsensical. Cats and dogs and dishes and spoons are all his daily companions and even his friends, but it gives him a sort of fresh surprise and happiness to think of their going on such a singular holiday. He would simply learn nothing at all from our attempts to find a fine shade of humour in the political economy of the poor papa, even if the poor papa were romantically occupied, not in jumping over the moon, but at least in shooting it.

Of course there is much more than this in “Hey Diddle Diddle.” The cow jumping over the moon is not only a fancy very suitable to children, it is a theme very worthy of poets. The lunar adventure may appear to some a lunatic adventure, but it is one round which the imagination of man has always revolved, especially the imagination of romantic figures like Ariosto, and Cyrano de Bergerac. The notion that cattle might fly has received sublime imaginative treatment. The winged bull not only walks, as if shaking the earth, amid the ruins of Assyrian sculpture, but even wheeled and flamed in heaven as the Apocalyptic symbol of St. Luke. That which combines imaginations so instinctive and ancient, in a single fancy so simple and so clear, is certainly not without the raw material of poetry. And the general idea, which is that of a sort of cosmic Saturnalia or season when anything may happen, is itself an idea that has haunted humanity in a hundred forms, some of them exquisitely artistic forms.

It would be easy to justify a vast number of the other nursery rhymes, in the same vein of a more serious art criticism. If I were asked to quote four lines which sufficed to illustrate what has been called the imaginative reason, when it rises almost to touch an unimaginative unreason (for that point of contact is poetry), I should be content to quote four lines that were in a picture book in my own nursery —

The man in the wilderness asked of me,
How many strawberries grow in the sea?
I answered him, as I thought good:
“As many red herrings as grow in the wood.”

Everything in that is poetical; from the dark unearthly figure of the man of the desert, with his mysterious riddles, to the perfect blend of logic and vision which makes beautiful pictures even in proving them impossible. But this artistic quality, though present, is not primary; the primary purpose is the amusement of children. And we are not amusing children; we are amusing ourselves with children.

Our fathers added a touch of beauty to all practical things, so they introduced fine fantastic figures and capering and dancing rhythms, which might be admired even by grown men, into what they primarily and practically designed to be enjoyed by children. But they did not always do this and they never thought mainly of doing it. What they always did was to make fun fitted for the young; and what they never did was turn it into irony only intelligible to the old. A nursery rhyme was like a nursery table or a nursery cupboard — a thing constructed for a particular human purpose. They saw their aim clearly and they achieved it. They wrote utter nonsense and took care to make it utterly nonsensical.

For there are two ways of dealing with nonsense in this world. One way is to put nonsense in the right place; as when people put nonsense into nursery rhymes. The other is to put nonsense in the wrong place; as when they put it into educational addresses, psychological criticisms, and complaints against nursery rhymes or other normal amusements of mankind.

GOVERNMENT AND THE RIGHTS OF MAN

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I could never see why a man who is not free to open his mouth to drink should be free to open it to talk. Talking does far more direct harm to other people. The village suffers less directly from the village drunkard than it might from the village tale bearer, or the village tub-thumper, or the village villain who seduces the village maiden. These and twenty other types of evil are done simply by talking; it is certain that a vast amount of evil would be prevented if we all wore gags. And the answer is not to deny that slander is a social poison, or seduction a spiritual murder. The answer is that, unless a man is allowed to talk, he might as well be a chimpanzee who is only able to chatter. In other words, if a man loses the responsibility for these rudimentary functions and forms of freedom, he loses not only his citizenship, but his manhood.

But there are other personal liberties still permitted us, more elaborate and civilized than that simple human speech which is still closely akin to the chatter of the chimpanzees. By some official oversight, which I am quite unable to explain, we are still allowed to write private letters if we put them in public pillar-boxes. The Postmaster-General does not write all our letters for us; even the local postman has as yet no such local powers. I cannot conceive how it is that reformers have failed to note the need for uniting, reorganizing, coordinating, codifying, and linking up all this complex, chaotic, and wasteful system, or lack of system. There must be vast amounts of overlapping, with some six young gentlemen writing letters to one young lady. There must be a terribly low educational standard, with all sorts of poor people allowed to put into a private letter any spelling or grammar they like. There must be a number of bad psychological habits being formed, by foolish people writing their sons in the Colonies or their mothers in the workhouse. And all this anarchy and deterioration could be stopped by the simple process of standardisation of all correspondence. I know if I use the word “standardisation,” Mr. H.G. Wells will welcome it and begin to think of it seriously [indeed there opens before me a vista of vast social reform].

On the face of it, the first and most obvious method would be for the Government to send round official forms for our friendly correspondence, to be filled up like the forms about insurance or Income Tax. Here and there, even in the most model communication, there would be words left blank, which the individual might be allowed to fill out himself. I have a half-formed ideal of an official love letter, printed in the manner of “I you,” so that the citizen might insert “love,” or “like,” or “adore,” with a view to the new civil marriage; or “renounce,” or “repudiate,” or “execrate,” with a view to the newer and more civil divorce. But even these blanks for verbal variation must be admitted with caution; for the aim of the whole reform is to raise the general level of all correspondence to a height unattainable by the majority of the people as yet.

It may be hinted that I plead for this reform with the passion of self interest, for it would enable me to neglect my correspondence in theory as I already neglect it in practice. I very seldom write to anybody; and I never write to the people I like best. About them I do not trouble, for they understand. But there are unanswered letters from total strangers about which I feel a remorse. Some day I shall make a list of the people I should have liked to answer, or advertise for them by such details as I can remember them. If I had any money I should like to leave them millions of it when I die. It may be said that I should get off cheaply, if the government would sent round to all these people an official card in my name [instead].

But I am not really converted to my own project, even by my own failure. I am not really convinced of the necessity of standardised correspondence, either by the existence of criminal letters or my own criminal neglect of letters. If or when, in some strange mood at some distant date, I should actually answer a letter, I should still prefer to answer it myself. even if I had nothing to write except an apology for not writing, I should prefer my self-abasement to have the character of self-determination.

It is a most extraordinary fact that all modern talk about self-determination is applied to everything except the self. It is applied to the State but it is not applied to the very thing to which its verbal formula professes to apply. I, for one, do believe in that mystical doctrine of democracy, which pre-supposes that England has a soul, or that France has a self. But surely it is much more obvious and ordinary fact that Jones has a self and Robinson has a self. And the question I have here discussed under the parable of the Post Office is not the question of whether there are abuses in drink or diet, as there are calumny and blackmail in any pillar-box or postman’s bag. It is the question of whether in these days the claims of government are to leave anything whatever of the rights of man.

FRENCH AND ENGLISH

It is obvious that there is a great deal of difference between being international and being cosmopolitan. All good men are international. Nearly all bad men are cosmopolitan. If we are to be international we must be national. And it is largely because those who call themselves the friends of peace have not dwelt sufficiently on this distinction that they do not impress the bulk of any of the nations to which they belong. International peace means a peace between nations, not a peace after the destruction of nations, like the Buddhist peace after the destruction of personality. The golden age of the good European is like the heaven of the Christian: it is a place where people will love each other; not like the heaven of the Hindu, a place where they will be each other. And in the case of national character this can be seen in a curious way. It will generally be found, I think, that the more a man really appreciates and admires the soul of another people the less he will attempt to imitate it; he will be conscious that there is something in it too deep and too unmanageable to imitate. The Englishman who has a fancy for France will try to be French; the Englishman who admires France will remain obstinately English. This is to be particularly noticed in the case of our relations with the French, because it is one of the outstanding peculiarities of the French that their vices are all on the surface, and their extraordinary virtues concealed. One might almost say that their vices are the flower of their virtues.

Thus their obscenity is the expression of their passionate love of dragging all things into the light. The avarice of their peasants means the independence of their peasants. What the English call their rudeness in the streets is a phase of their social equality. The worried look of their women is connected with the responsibility of their women; and a certain unconscious brutality of hurry and gesture in the men is related to their inexhaustible and extraordinary military courage. Of all countries, therefore, France is the worst country for a superficial fool to admire. Let a fool hate France: if the fool loves it he will soon be a knave. He will certainly admire it, not only for the things that are not creditable, but actually for the things that are not there. He will admire the grace and indolence of the most industrious people in the world. He will admire the romance and fantasy of the most determinedly respectable and commonplace people in the world. This mistake the Englishman will make if he admires France too hastily; but the mistake that he makes about France will be slight compared with the mistake that he makes about himself. An Englishman who professes really to like French realistic novels, really to be at home in a French modern theatre, really to experience no shock on first seeing the savage French caricatures, is making a mistake very dangerous for his own sincerity. He is admiring something he does not understand. He is reaping where he has not sown, and taking up where he has not laid down; he is trying to taste the fruit when he has never toiled over the tree. He is trying to pluck the exquisite fruit of French cynicism, when he has never tilled the rude but rich soil of French virtue.

The thing can only be made clear to Englishmen by turning it round. Suppose a Frenchman came out of democratic France to live in England, where the shadow of the great houses still falls everywhere, and where even freedom was, in its origin, aristocratic. If the Frenchman saw our aristocracy and liked it, if he saw our snobbishness and liked it, if he set himself to imitate it, we all know what we should feel. We all know that we should feel that that particular Frenchman was a repulsive little gnat. He would be imitating English aristocracy; he would be imitating the English vice. But he would not even understand the vice he plagiarised: especially he would not understand that the vice is partly a virtue. He would not understand those elements in the English which balance snobbishness and make it human: the great kindness of the English, their hospitality, their unconscious poetry, their sentimental conservatism, which really admires the gentry. The French Royalist sees that the English like their King. But he does not grasp that while it is base to worship a King, it is almost noble to worship a powerless King. The impotence of the Hanoverian Sovereigns has raised the English loyal subject almost to the chivalry and dignity of a Jacobite. The Frenchman sees that the English servant is respectful: he does not realise that he is also disrespectful; that there is an English legend of the humorous and faithful servant, who is as much a personality as his master; the Caleb Balderstone, the Sam Weller. He sees that the English do admire a nobleman; he does not allow for the fact that they admire a nobleman most when he does not behave like one. They like a noble to be unconscious and amiable: the slave may be humble, but the master must not be proud. The master is Life, as they would like to enjoy it; and among the joys they desire in him there is none which they desire more sincerely than that of generosity, of throwing money about among mankind, or, to use the noble mediaeval word, largesse - the joy of largeness. That is why a cabman tells you you are no gentleman if you give him his correct fare. Not only his pocket, but his soul is hurt. You have wounded his ideal. You have defaced his vision of the perfect aristocrat. All this is really very subtle and elusive; it is very difficult to separate what is mere slavishness from what is a sort of vicarious nobility in the English love of a lord. And no Frenchman could easily grasp it at all. He would think it was mere slavishness; and if he liked it, he would be a slave. So every Englishman must (at first) feel French candour to be mere brutality. And if he likes it, he is a brute. These national merits must not be understood so easily. It requires long years of plentitude and quiet, the slow growth of great parks, the seasoning of oaken beams, the dark enrichment of red wine in cellars and in inns, all the leisure and the life of England through many centuries, to produce at last the generous and genial fruit of English snobbishness. And it requires battery and barricade, songs in the streets, and ragged men dead for an idea, to produce and justify the terrible flower of French indecency.

When I was in Paris a short time ago, I went with an English friend of mine to an extremely brilliant and rapid succession of French plays, each occupying about twenty minutes. They were all astonishingly effective; but there was one of them which was so effective that my friend and I fought about it outside, and had almost to be separated by the police. It was intended to indicate how men really behaved in a wreck or naval disaster, how they break down, how they scream, how they fight each other without object and in a mere hatred of everything. And then there was added, with all that horrible irony which Voltaire began, a scene in which a great statesman made a speech over their bodies, saying that they were all heroes and had died in a fraternal embrace. My friend and I came out of this theatre, and as he had lived long in Paris, he said, like a Frenchman: “What admirable artistic arrangement! Is it not exquisite?” “No,” I replied, assuming as far as possible the traditional attitude of John Bull in the pictures in Punch - “No, it is not exquisite. Perhaps it is unmeaning; if it is unmeaning I do not mind. But if it has a meaning I know what the meaning is; it is that under all their pageant of chivalry men are not only beasts, but even hunted beasts. I do not know much of humanity, especially when humanity talks in French. But I know when a thing is meant to uplift the human soul, and when it is meant to depress it. I know that Cyrano de

Bergerac (where the actors talked even quicker) was meant to encourage man. And I know that this was meant to discourage him." "These sentimental and moral views of art," began my friend, but I broke into his words as a light broke into my mind. "Let me say to you," I said, "what Jaurès said to Liebknecht at the Socialist Conference: `You have not died on the barricades.' You are an Englishman, as I am, and you ought to be as amiable as I am. These people have some right to be terrible in art, for they have been terrible in politics. They may endure mock tortures on the stage; they have seen real tortures in the streets. They have been hurt for the idea of Democracy. They have been hurt for the idea of Catholicism. It is not so utterly unnatural to them that they should be hurt for the idea of literature. But, by blazes, it is altogether unnatural to me! And the worst thing of all is that I, who am an Englishman, loving comfort, should find comfort in such things as this. The French do not seek comfort here, but rather unrest. This restless people seeks to keep itself in a perpetual agony of the revolutionary mood. Frenchmen, seeking revolution, may find the humiliation of humanity inspiring. But God forbid that two pleasure-seeking Englishmen should ever find it pleasant!"

ON HOUSEHOLD GODS AND GOBLINS

Sometime ago I went with some children to see Maeterlinck’s fine and delicate fairy play about the Blue Bird that brought everybody happiness. For some reason or other it did not being me happiness, and even the children were not quite happy. I will not go so far as to say that the Blue Bird was a Blue Devil, but it left us in something seriously like the blues. The children were party dissatisfied with it because it did not end with a Day of Judgment; because it was never revealed to the hero and heroine that the dog had been faithful and the cat faithless. For children are innocent and love justice; while most of us are wicked and naturally prefer mercy.

But there was something wrong about the Blue Bird, even from my more mature and corrupt point of view. There were several incidental things I did not like. I did not like the sentimental passage about the love-affair of two babes unborn; it seemed to me a piece of what may be called bad Barrie; and logically it spoilt the only meaning of the scene, which was that the babes were looking to all earthly experiences as things inconceivable. I was not convinced when the boy exclaimed, “There are no dead,” for I am by no means sure that he (or the dramatist) knew what he meant by it. “I heard a voice from Heaven cry: Blessed are the dead. ...” I do not know all that is meant in that; but I think the person who said it knew. But there was something more continuous and clinging in the whole business which left me vaguely restless. And I think the nearest to a definition was that I felt as if the poet was condescending to everything; condescending to pots and pans and birds and beasts and babies.

The one part of the business which I really felt to be original and suggestive was the animation of all the materials of the household, as if with familiar spirits; the spirit of fire, the spirit of water and the rest. And even here I felt a faint difference which moved me to an imaginary comparison. I wonder that none of our medievalists has made a Morality or allegorical play founded on the Canticle of Saint Francis, which speaks somewhat similarly of Brother Fire and Sister Water. It would be a real exercise in Gothic craftsmanship and decoration to make these symbolic figures at once stiff and fantastic. If nobody else does this I shall be driven to spoil the idea myself, as I have spoiled so many other rather good ideas in my time. But the point of the parallel at the moment is merely this: that the medieval poet does strike me as having felt about fire like a child while the modern poet felt about it like a man talking to children.

Few and simple as are the words of the older poem, it does somehow convey to me that when the poet spoke of fire as untameable and strong, he felt it as something that might conceivably be feared as well as loved. I do not think the modern poet feared the nursery fire as a child who loved it might fear it. And this elemental quality in the real primitives brough back to my mind something I have always felt about this conception, which is the really fine conception in the Blue Bird: I mean something like that which the heathens embodied in the images of the household gods. The household gods, I believe, were carved out of wood; which makes them even more like the chairs and tables.

The nomad and the anarchist accuse the domestic ideal of being merely timid and prim. But this is not because they themselves are bolder or more vigorous, but simply because they do not know it well enough to know how bold and vigorous it is. The most nomadic life to-day is not the life of the desert but of the industrial cities. It is by a very accurate accident that we talk about a Street-Arab; and the Semitic description applies to not a few gutter-snipes whose gilded chariots have raised them above the gutter. They live in clubs and hotels and are often simply ignorant, I might say innocent, of the ancient life of the family, and certainly off the ancient life on the farm.

When a townsman first sees these things directly and intimately, he does not despise them as dull but rather dreads then as wild, as he sometimes takes a tame cow for a wild bull. The most obvious example is the hearth which is the heart of the home. A man living in the lukewarm air of centrally-heated hotels may be said to have never seen fire. Compared to him the housewife at the fireside is an Amazon wrestling with a flaming dragon. The same moral might be drawn from the fact that the watchdog fights while the wild dog often runs away. Of the husband, as of the house-dog, it may often said that he has been tamed into ferocity.

This is especially true of the sort of house represented by the country cottage. It is only in theory that the things are petty and prosaic; a man realistically experiencing them will feel them to be things big and baffling and involving a heavy battle with nature. When we read about cabbages or cauliflowers in the papers, and especially the comic papers, we learn to think of them as commonplace. But if a man of any imagination will merely consent to walk round the kitchen-garden for himself, and really looks at cabbages and cauliflowers, he will feel at once that they are vast and elemental things like the mountains in the clouds. He will feel somehing almost monstrous about the size and solidity of the things swelling out of that small and tidy patch of ground. There are modds in which that everyday English kitchen plot will affect him as men are affected by the reeking wealth and toppling rapidity of tropic vegetation; the green bubbles and crawling branches of a nightmare.

But whatever his mood, he will see that things so large and work so laborious cannot possibly be merely trivial. His reason no less than his imagination will tell him that the fight here waged between the family and the field is of all things the most primitive and fundamental. If that is not poetical, nothing is poetical, and certainly not the dingy Bohemianism of the artists in the towns. But the point for the moment is that even by the purely artistic test the same truth is apparent. An artist looking at these things with a free and fresh vision will at once appreciate what I mean by calling them wild rather than tame. It is true of fire, of water, of vegetation, of half a hundred other things. If a man reads about a pig, he will think of something comic and commonplace, chiefly because the word “pig” sounds comic and commonplace. If he looks at a real pig in a pigsty, he will have the sense of something too large to be alive, like a hippopotamus at the Zoo.

This is not a coincidence or a sophistry; it rests on the real and living logic of things. The family is itself a wilder thing than the State; if we mean by wildness that it is born of will and choice as elemental and emancipated as the wind. It has its own laws, as the wind has; but properly understood it is infinitely less subservient than things are under the elaborate and mechanical regulations of legalism. Its obligations are love and loyalty, but these are things quite capable of being in revolt against merely human laws; for merely human law has a great tendency to become merely inhuman law. It is concerned with events that are in the moral world what cyclones and earthquakes are in the material world.

People are not born in an infant-school any more than they die in an undertaker’s shop. These prodigies are private things; and take place in the tiny theatre of the home. The public systems, the large organisation, are a mere machinery for the transport and distribution of things; they do not touch the intrinsic nature of the things themselves. If a birthday present is sent from one family to another all the legal system, and even all that we call the social system, is only concerned with the present so long as it is a parcel. Nearly all our modern sociology might be called the philosophy of parcels. For that matter, nearly all our modern descriptions of Utopia or the Great State might be called the paradise of postmen. It is in the inner chamber that the parcel becomes a present; that it explodes, so to speak, into its own radiance and real popuarity; and it is equally true, so far as that argument is concerned, whether it is a bon-bon or a bomb. The essential message is always a personal message; the important business is always private business. And this is, of course, especially with the first of all birthday presents which presents itself at birth; and it is no exaggeration to talk of a bomb as the symbol of a baby. Of course, the same is true of the tragic as the beatific acts of the domestic drama; of the spadework of the struggle for life or the Damoclean sword of death.

The defence of domesticity is not that it is always happy, or even that it is always harmless. It is rather that it does involve, like all heroic things, the possibilities of calamity and even of crime. Old Mother Hubbard may find that the cupboard is bare; she may even find a skeleton in the cupboard. All that is involved here is the insistence on the true case for this intimate type of association; that in itself it is certainly not commonplace and most certainly is not conventional. The conventions belong rather to those wider worldly organisations which are now set up as rivals to it; to the club, to the school and above all to the State. You cannot have a successful club without rules; but a family will really do without any rules exactly in proportion as it is a successful family. What somebody said about the songs of a people could be said much more truly about the jokes of a household. And a joke is in its nature a wild and spontaneous thing; even the modern fanaticism for organisation has never really attempted to organise laughter like a chorus. Therefore, we may truly say that these external emblems or examples of something grotesque and extravagant about our private possessions are not mere artistic exercises in the incongruous; they are not, as the phrase goes, mere paradoxes. They are really related to the aboriginal nature of the institution itself and the idea that is behind it. The real family is something as wild and elemental as a cabbage.

PICKWICK AND THE ENGLISH PEOPLES

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The English character has been wronged more by praise than by blame. It has been wronged most of all by accepting one sort of blame as if it were a sort of praise. The irony of such an incident is in itself rather curious and interesting. It is as if a man were wrongly accused of being a murderer, and was faintly flattered because the charge made: him look like a desperado. An entertaining little comedy might be written about such a respectable householder, who had a delicacy about entirely clearing his character, because he could not help hankering after the chance of looking as picturesque as a pirate. The comedy is common enough in real life, I imagine, in connection with the lighter vices of a man of the world. Many a young man has allowed himself to be thought immoral; and locked in his bosom the dark secret that he was perfectly moral. Now, the misunderstanding about the Englishman is of the same type but in the opposite direction. He has allowed himself to be considered much less gay and picturesque than he really is, because there was something more insidiously flattering in the way in which he was called grave and prosaic.

Continental criticism, broadly speaking, has made a mistake about England. It was a very natural mistake, founded on certain superficial truths, such as those which have so long hidden from England the thrift and the tenacity of France. It largely arose out of the religious quarrel and the rise of the Puritans. And the Puritan was the sort of solitary figure which, when it happens to appear in one particular country, frequently falsifies international impressions. Such a person is associated with such a place, not so much because he is often found there as because he is never found anywhere else. Foreign critics have presented the Englishman as a Puritan with a long face, very much as foreign caricaturists have presented the English soldier as a Scotchman with a short kilt. Most British soldiers are not Highland soldiers, but all Highland soldiers are British soldiers. Highlanders are not seen in any other army; and therefore nobody else except Highlanders are seen in that army. In the same way the Puritan is an exception in England; only he is more of an exception in Europe. Nowhere else has the Puritan been dominant as he was in this island; for his presence there was despotic rather than democratic. His original power was due to militarism. His more modern power is due to plutocracy. But the English populace has never been Puritan, even in the sense in which the Scotch populace has been Puritan; still less in the sense in which the Irish populace has been Catholic. Nobody who thinks in terms of real popularity, right or wrong, can have the smallest doubt about whether our democracy is normally on the march to Exeter Hall or to the Derby.

Along with this historical accident of the Puritan aristocracy went several other things equally accidental. A certain shyness and moody embarrassment that come from much more complex causes; the fact that like most northern peoples, including the northern French, we have not the rapid gestures of the South, an exaggerated reputation for roughness, curiously compounded of the legend of physical exercise and the legend that business is business, combined with the puzzle of Protestanism to create on the Continent an imaginary Englishman as stiff and stern as a Prussian. So far the mistake need not have troubled us very much. Nations normally do misunderstand each other; and it is not worse than the notion that the Frenchman is immoral or that the Irishman does not know what he wants. Unfortunately, this slander had in it something horribly like a compliment. Still more unfortunately, some Englishmen were so weak as to accept the compliment. They liked to be called stiff because they thought it meant that they were strong. They liked to be called solemn because they thought it meant that they were responsible. Vanity of this sort is not of course peculiar to them; it is common to the whole human race. But it was simply out of the weakness of vanity that they confessed to the sin of pride. In reality, they are not particularly proud and certainly not in the least stern; they are an exceptionally kindly and even soft-hearted people. They do not even take their pleasures sadly; they only take an incidental and I think regrettable pleasure in being called sad.

The meaning of Merry England was in this old original character of the English. In mediaeval times their public and proverbial character was festive and full of fun; and even in modern times their private and personal character is the same. The witness to it is the wonderful English literature; but of late years it has been overlaid by the cross-purposes about the Continental criticism and the false ideal thus imposed. It is not only a false but even a foreign ideal. The Englishman actually dresses up as the French picture of himself. To get clear of this complication, the right course is to appeal to the authority of that great national literature, especially as it was when it was still entirely normal, and had not been crossed and confused by the self-conscious poses of more recent times. The last full and free manifestation of this normal and national spirit is represented by the name of Pickwick. It is the last expression of the complete freedom and fullness, not only in the literature of England, but even in the literature of Dickens. Though the work of Dickens continued to be great, though in some matters of subtlety and reality it became much greater, there was something that it never quite recovered again; and it was something that can only be called the liberty of our fathers. The author of "Our Mutual Friend" was not quite so free as the author of "Pickwick"; not even so free as the author of "Oliver Twist." Though his insight into the growth of modern plutocracy was far deeper than that of any of his contemporaries, he has himself suffered a little from passing successfully into more plutocratic circles. He no longer represents quite so realistically the inspired prejudices of the whole people. He is touched a little with the newspaper notion of good taste. There has fallen on him a little of that fatal sort of broad-mindedness which looks at maps rather than places. He has no longer the wisdom of the uneducated man, who says what he thinks. He has begun to have too much of the knowledge of the half-educated man, who says what he thinks he ought to think.. Wild and fantastic as the first books of Dickens may appear, they are in one sense more realistic than his realistic books. The young Dickens describes things because they are real, and laughs at them because they are laughable. He may exaggerate them, but it is because they are there to be exaggerated. He describes the Eatonswill election as comic and corrupt because it was comic and corrupt. He is not concerned, or is only very incidentally concerned, with the consequences of his argument as affecting representative government, as affecting an existing oligarchy or a possible democracy. Similarly the young Dickens described Fagin the Jew exactly as any poor man in a poor street would have described him, and would still describe him. The older Dickens of "Our Mutual Friend" had grown faintly afraid of being an anti-Semite. I do not mean that he was insincere or intimidated; on the contrary, he was much bolder and franker than anybody else. But his mind had been modified by a modern refinement and lost the old popular realism of Ben Jonson or Fielding. The Puritan in "Pickwick" is just like the Puritan in "Bartholomew Fair." But if Mr. Stiggins had intruded on the domestic happiness of Mr. Wilfer instead of

Mr. Weller, I doubt if that Free Church Minister’s nose would have been quite so red or his character quite so black as it was painted.

In short, Dickens gained only liberality when he lost liberty. It is a melancholy exchange; and though Dickens, as has been said, kept his superiority to his own rather snobbish generation to the very last, it is in his first books, and especially in “Pickwick,” that we must seek the full and frank expression of that old traditional truth about the English people. That truth certainly bears no resemblance to the image of the stern inarticulate stoic which foreigners have invented as a criticism and we have accepted as a compliment. On the other hand, it does bear a marked resemblance to the mediaeval tradition about England as we have it in Chaucer or in the ballads about Robin Hood. That spirit is not at all stoical and is certainly the very reverse of Puritan. It is full of precisely that almost illogical indulgence, that charity to the indefensible, that made possible the sympathy for the Wife of Bath, for Falstaff, and for Friar Tuck.

And that is the truth about the English adventure even outside England. Its type of endurance has not been stoicism but rather tolerance. We might say it was much too tolerant, if it had not the rare virtue of tolerating the intolerable. What has really made the English, apart from mere jingo journalistic flatteries, a success in colonies and in campaigns in savage countries, was a certain comic acceptance of the incongruous; a certain capacity in the English cockney or yokel of continuing to be absurdly like himself even when, in the ritual formula, he don’t know where he are. This is a national merit which, like other national merits, is gained at the expense of missing other things; of missing, for instance, the full status of the citizen and the full inherited experience that comes of remaining rooted in very old civilisations. But it is perhaps the most humorous and attractive of all national virtues; and men who really know from the inside the various nations of European humanity have found nothing more human than the ordinary English comic song or the talk of the Tommies in the trenches. Of all that great popular tradition “Pickwick” is the supreme artistic sympathetic masterpiece and even the miracle. Its very faults are its merits; since they correspond to this particular national morality. If the story is chaotic, it is because the philosophy of the people has long been chaotic, and indeed even perilously chaotic. If it is even in one sense superficial, as being a skimming of the surface of a vast and varied society, it is because it is true. In that sense the English spirit really has a certain superficiality of which the very deep motive is sociability. It loses something, indeed, it loses a great deal, in not thinking its way back to first principles or facing fundamental truths. But it also gains a great deal in the great virtue of charity; both in the form of patience with comrades and hospitality to strangers. Friendships are not broken up by the feuds of the intellect; and if there is far too little recognition of the idea of truth, there is a very valuable recognition of the idea of trust.

Nothing is more English or more characteristic in the Pickwick epic than the fact that the band of comrades are comic in their incongruity. They differ and do not quarrel; or they quarrel and do not part. There is an assumption and atmosphere of absurd toleration spread over the whole story, so that we never expect ridicule to be anything except ridiculous. Mr. Pickwick calls Mr. Winkle an imposter; but he does not seem to object to impostors. He denounces his followers for trifling with feminine feelings and then only laughs when the denunciation is turned against himself. There runs through the whole story an implication that the absurd company will go through with its absurd adventure; and that implication has been tacit in many companies of English people. There must have been many groups of Englishmen in camps and colonial holes and corners, consisting of men who got on with each other somehow, though each was regarded lightly enough as an individual. They were comic characters, if not to themselves, at least to each other. And even in isolation, any one of them who had with him (as he often had) a tattered volume of Pickwick, must have felt that he carried his country in his pocket.

THE PERSECUTION OF RELIGION

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Most of us feel something rather arresting, not to say alarming, about the case of the man who was locked up in a lunatic asylum for eight years for being religious, or for taking a reasonable interest in the word "parallelogram," and the idea of the end of the world. The persecution of science by religion is something of which we hear a good deal, and a good deal more than is historically accurate. But, in any case, it has pretty well come to an end. The persecution of religion by science has relatively, perhaps, only begun; but it is already at work, in we know not how many obscure cases of pedantry and cruelty. The mystics are very likely to be the martyrs when the psychologists become the kings. But there is involved a paradox that is still more peculiar. It is not merely that anything religious may be persecuted on the ground that it is not rational. It is also that anything irrational may be tolerated so long as it is also irreligious. It is only lunacy to assert religion; it is no longer lunacy to deny reason. If it were, all the professors of pragmatism would be locked up. The very incidents in this case afford an illustration. A man may be represented as mad and as making a mystical riddle of the word "parallelogram." But a man is not regarded as mad because he says that parallel lines always meet. Our fathers would have called him a rank, raving madman; denying the self-evident and uttering a contradiction in terms. We only call him a mathematician of the newer school of relativity or the fourth dimension. The man who said: "Two and two may make five in the fixed stars" was a lunatic; and none the less a lunatic for being a literary man. I willingly admit that men of science have not a monopoly of this mental breakdown. But certainly the man who could talk as if the stars were fixed, and the numbers unfixed, was suffering from a complete mental breakdown. It is not half so crazy to expect the end of the world to come soon as to expect the Superman to come soon. Yet how many earnest evolutionists in our time have written gravely as if the Superman was to be expected next week! Things do come to an end; and a thing designed is generally reviewed by the designer when it has come to an end. A man planting a rhododendron bush sees it bloom and wither and pronounces on the experiment; and there is nothing irrational in a day of judgement, assuming a design. But there is nothing in the world to show that a rhododendron all by itself will sprout into a super-rhododendron all the colors of the rainbow, merely because that would be a superior plant. The Superman was simply and solely a phantom called out of the void by the imagination of a lunatic; a quite literal lunatic named Nietzche. Yet how vivid that utterly unreasonable vision became for many of our wavering and weak-minded generation! And the strangest thing of all is that it was some of the best brains that were thus bewitched. They also have their word "parallelogram," like the blessed word "Mesopotamia"; but, while few soldiers want to go back to Mesopotamia, there are evidently sages who want to go back to Methuselah.

I need hardly say that I am not arguing that Mr. Bernard Shaw has a tile loose; I am only pointing out that there are far more tiles loose on the Hall of Science than on the parish church, or even the revivalist's chapel. On the contrary, it is my desire here to penetrate past the superficial oddities of Mr. Shaw's dramatic experiment, and consider whether the idea itself is in fact as sane as it is certainly serious. Mr. Shaw has suffered as a subject of criticism from two classes of critics. The first are those who say they do not know what he means, and think it necessary to infer that he means nothing. The second are those who think they do know what he means, and think it necessary to agree with it. Few people seem to see that it is quite possible to understand it pretty completely and disagree with it altogether. But, as a matter of fact, it is only by taking it seriously that anybody can disagree with it seriously. The man who says that Shaw's play is all nonsense is really lending valuable support to the man who says it is all sense. By confessing his inability to make anything of it, he is precluding himself from arguing with the man who makes everything of it. He is like a man who should defend Christianity against Renan's "Vie de Jesu" by saying he thanked God he could not read the lingo. Or he is like a man who should reply to a detailed political denunciation by saying that the fellow gabbled too fast for him to follow. It would be impossible to pay a more complete tribute to the truth of a philosophy than to say that nobody understands it except the few people who have found it to be true. It would be impossible to pay Mr. Shaw a more complete compliment than to suggest that he mystifies the stupid and convinces the wise. Yet that is exactly the impression that is necessarily left by merely sneering at the eccentricity or extravagance or the extraordinary length or any other fantastic but merely external feature of the play like “Back to Methuselah.” I have, therefore, always tried to do in criticisms what Mr. Shaw himself does in prefaces, and discussed the doctrine which is the backbone of the whole business. For Mr. Bernard Shaw, of all men in the world, leaves the critics the least right to say they do not know what he means; for he elaborately explains it beforehand. Alone among the most fantastic fabulists, he not only adorns the fable with moral, but he actually puts the moral before the fable.

The preface to this particular play deals first with a more particular point; about which Mr. Shaw seems to me completely to prove his case. It is that the Darwinian version of evolution is, in the most emphatic sense of the phrase, not like life. It is impossible to believe that life has been so completely separated from will as it is implied in the notion of natural selection producing all the varieties of nature. It is far too much of a fortuitous concourse of animals like a fortuitous concourse of atoms. In that sense, every chapter of the “Origin of Species” may be precisely described as a chapter of accidents. Natural selection is the most unnatural thing we can conceive. It is an eternal coincidence. But it is not only that the natural selection is not natural at all; it is the whole point of it that it is not selection at all. Nobody selects; and nothing cannot select. It seems to me in the largest and most luminous sense a matter of commonsense to say that, if there was not a clear design from above, then there was some sort of design from below; and it is quite possible, of course, that there was both. All this preliminary part of the preface and the argument is sound and on solid ground; because it is dealing with a definite theory and giving reasons for differing from the theory. In other words, it is trying to do in the case of Darwin what I am trying to do in the case of Shaw.

Mr. Shaw’s notion is not meant to be nonsensical, but it is nonsensical; not as a term of abuse, but in the exact sense in which I have said that most sensible people would have called the modern talk about pragmatism and parallelism nonsensical. Any rational person, and especially any rational person, would have called it irrational. Any sceptic, from Lucretius or Lucian to Hume and Huxley, would have thought it far more rational to say that the world was coming to an end in a hundred years than to say that the life of a man was not coming to an end for three hundred years. The mere scale or scope of the modern prophecies would have seemed utterly unbalanced and bewildering to all the philosophies of civilized history. I think they would be right; but not merely because of anything externally extravagant about the scale or scope. What is unnatural about this philosophy is that it will not accept the only norm it can ever get; that which Aristotle called the measure of all things. A good and happy humanity is, humanly speaking, the idea by which we test political and social ideas; it is a test; it is in that sense the ideal. This futurist religion will not accept it as normal, and goes forth hunting for a new normal that it can never find. It can never find it because it can never fix it. It is obvious, of course, that a permanent ideal is absolutely necessary to anything like progress or reform. You cannot reform what is eternally formless; and you cannot march towards what is always moving about. What is the good of the progressive making certain that the children of the future shall have better boots, when the prophet is already saying that they will have no feet? It may seem a crazy comparison to say that children will have no feet. But it is not half so crazy as saying that people will have no children. And it actually is one part of this futurist scheme that the new generation will be born mature, without passing through childhood. That is an excellent working model of the whole issue. To us a world without children would not be a better world, but a very much worse world. It would not be an impossible Utopia, but simply an intolerable nightmare. And this is simply because we have kept in view, what the evolutionary lunatics have lost sight of, that there can be nothing more ideal that the ideal; and the only thing that affects humanity as an ideal at all is that which is fully human in being divine. For some of us it is fixed by a divine humanity, and even by a divine child.

AMERICAN FUNDAMENTALISTS AND THE ENGLISH JOURNALISTS

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By this time, we have all had our laughs over “Monkeyville” and the public execution of the Missing Link, not least the Americans, who are fully alive to the fun of the fair, and most of all, perhaps, those astute Americans who are said to have used the whole scientific and philosophical controversy as a means of advertising the little town of Dayton in Tennessee. I have heard it stated, I know not how truly, that certain of those too restless, not to say rampant, publicity agents who are prepared to run anything and anybody in the United States had solemnly promised the municipal authorities, that the name of their town should be in the front page of every newspaper in the world. I do not know if this is true, but if the promise was given, it was certainly kept. Perhaps the fulfillment is a little too like Mark Twain’s story of how he doubled the circulation of an agricultural paper. It will be remembered that, being a temporary editor of that quiet rural organ, he raised it, by his own account, into the wildest popularity by advising people not to pull turnips, but to send up a boy to shake the tree; and assuring them that clams would lie quiet if music were played. The story of “Monkeyville” may be as mythical as the story of Mark Twain, but if it is true, it is at least highly evolutionary. In one sense the small American towns which are least ready to preach evolution are most ready to practise it. I have myself seen a tiny little hamlet of wooden houses on the empty plains, outside which stood a notice in enormous letters: “Watch Us Grow.” This might be regarded as a highly biological conception of the germ and the organism. But if it was evolution, it was one of the sort founded on will and in that sense on design. It was certainly Lamarckian and not Darwinian evolution. But we may be permitted to doubt whether the sturdy Fundamentalists who probably inhabit its frame-houses drew any fine distinction between Darwin and Lamarck. Anyhow, as I say, we have had our laughs over the affair; and indeed I fear, to tell the truth, that a great many of the English journalists who laughed loudest knew just as much about evolution as the Fundamentalists in the little houses of that wooden village in the wilderness.

All my life, or at least the latter part of it, I have been trying to discover the meaning of the word “paradox.” It seems to have two meanings - a statement that seems to contain a contradiction or to be intrinsically improbable, and a statement that happens to be different from the catchwords common at a particular moment. Now, as a fact, these catchwords themselves often are paradoxes. These catchwords themselves are often intrinsically contradictory or improbable. So that, by the simple operation of stating the dull and obvious truth, one may gain quite a picturesque reputation for dashing and dazzling paradox. For instance, it is a pure paradox to say, as the modern English have said for so long, that it is more practical not to be logical. Its exactly like saying that book-keeping is more practical if it ignores simple addition, and assumes that two and two make five. It is exactly like saying that carriage-building is more practical when we abandon the attempt to make circular wheels and are content with wheels of any rough and approximate outline, like that of an ellipse or an egg. In other words, it is not only paradoxical, but nonsensical. Yet all the books and papers and patriotic poems and stories I read in my youth repeated again and again this paradox: that our conclusions would be right if our reasoning was wrong. I ventured to say, in my humdrum and prosaic fashion, that I did not think this was so; and instantly all those thousands of paradox-mongers accused me of paradox. Or again, it was pure paradox in the old Utilitarians to say that if everybody was egotistical the result would somehow be social. Yet the men who, like Ruskin, merely pointed out the fantasy of this fantasy, were themselves called fantastic. By a sober and industrious attention to this little rule, I also have managed to get myself called fantastic or paradoxical. But I have always found that, whenever one of these truisms was thus criticised, the truism very soon came true.

So it was in this case of the journalistic joke in England about the Fundamentalist in America. I pointed out long time ago in these columns that what was the matter with America and Americans was not that they were bad or good, or wise or foolish, or corrupt or public-spirited, but simply that they were almost incredibly backward and behind the times. I pointed out that this involved virtues as well as vices. It is sometimes just as well to be behind the times, when they are such bad times as modern progress is apparently in for. But, for good or evil, America is a generation behind. Yet when I said that, any number of people cried out in protest against such a provocative absurdity, asking me if I knew more about electricity than Edison, or whether I had seen the labour-saving appliances in the New York apartments. By this time journalists who have joked about “Monkeyville” may be disposed to admit that, if I know less about electricity than Edison, I know more about evolution than the late William Jennings Bryan. Now Mr. Bryan was not only an orator of genius, he was a public figure who had been the Secretary of State and might have been President. Suppose we imagine a British statesman of Cabinet rank, let us say Earl Balfour, intervening in a scientific and religious debate. Who can imagine him going back fifty years, dressing up as Disraeli, in order to defy Professor Huxley with the words: “I am on the side of the Angels”? That is practically what Mr. Bryan did, because his whole world was fifty years old. Earl Balfour’s intervention would quite certainly be about something new, like Einstein; certainly not about something as old as Darwin. Earl Balfour is supposed to be a Tory and Mr. Bryan was supposed to be a Radical; the former is an aristocrat, the latter was a Democrat. But do not let us forget that tradition is one of the true virtues of democracy. Do not let us forget that curiosity and innovation, the appetite for anything new, are among the vices of aristocracy. England has suffered a great deal from the progressive spirit of all aristocrats. It has been hurried into fashion after fashion, and folly after folly, in every department from Dress to Religion. There is a great deal too much Einstein in the English governing class. Exactly what England has lacked for the last few centuries has been the strong family traditions that exist in farmers and rooted social types; England has not enough tenacity in religion and morals. In another and far more fundamental sense, what she lacks is Fundamentalism.

And now that the journalists have had their joke, perhaps it would be well to realise that the joke is partly against them. In so far as some of them seem to imagine that Darwinism is a final scientific discovery, like the circulation of the blood, the joke is entirely against them. It is rather old-fashioned to fly into a fuss about the sudden appearance of Mr. Charles Darwin in the scientific world. But it is almost as old-fashioned to be completely overwhelmed by the appearance of that rising young biologist. It is almost antiquated to fancy Darwin has proved his case merely because he has presented his case. From the point of view of a REALLY rising biologist today, the fun of the Darwinian leading articles must be even funnier that the fun of the Fundamentalists. A French or Italian scientist would probably be as much amused at the assumption that nobody can contradict Darwin as the Darwinian is at the assumption that nobody must contradict Moses. But if we are, in some ways, a little behind the main march of European knowledge, at least we are a long way ahead of the New World and its pioneers. O pioneers! This naturally gives us a certain gratification in the case of commercial pretensions; but do not let us forget the other side. In one sense Darwin is still a rising and recent and youthful figure. And that is in the sense that his theory is still a juvenile hypothesis and has never come of age as a law. The child has not yet been successfully reared; nor is it certain that the suggestion of the survival of the fittest will be the fittest to survive. Now it is likely that the English were much too eager to swallow it. A mere craze tied us to Darwin, as it might now tie us to Einstein. It might have been better for science if we had shown a little more of the spirit of Dayton versus Darwin. For even Fundamentalism is better god than Fashion.

COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND THE MONKEY TRIAL

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My remarks last week about the Dayton controversy were written just before, though they were published just after, the sensational news of the sad death of Mr. Bryan. I should like to state this fact, in case there should have been any unreasonable touches of flippancy, on a matter about which most people in this country were flippant. And indeed, in any case, I think that many people in this country were rather too flippant. There really was a moral to "Monkeyville," and it was not the moral that most of us were tempted to draw; still less the joke that most of us were tempted to make. It is something that remains after the comedy of Dayton and after the tragedy of Bryan. Indeed, it is something that was there before this comic and tragic crisis came, and would still have been there if it had never come. When all is said and done, there really was and is a modern problem, which was the real problem troubling the honest jurymen of Tennessee.

For the problem is likely to prove a nuisance. It will be none the less a nuisance in the future because nobody is taking any particular trouble to face it in the present. In practical politics the survival of the fittest frequently means only the survival of the fussiest. And I fancy I can foresee a very considerable fuss, in the near future, about the Dayton difficulty, which some ridiculed as merely a thing of the past. The particular question of whether Americans are on the side of the angels or on the side of the apes, in the single scandal of alleged materialism at "Monkeyville," may indeed be a thing of the past. Anyhow, journalists may now be excused for treating it as a thing of the past; though, curiously enough, there are two quite contrary reasons for calling it so. One set of scientists will say it is an old business because Natural Selection is established. Another set of scientists will say it is an old business because Natural Selection is exploded. The old biologists may still think Darwinism too new to be disputed. The young biologists will often think it too old to be defended. But those who think Darwin too right to be questioned, and those who think Darwin too questionable to be followed, may well join in thinking him a very old subject to be discussed. They may well, therefore, decline any further discussion; and, even if they are not bored with Darwin, they may well be bored with Dayton.

But the real problem that remains has nothing necessarily to do with either Dayton or Darwin. It is a real problem because it has to do with the real world of existing education and politics. It is not concerned with professors of fifty years ago, but with the schoolmasters of to-day. It is a problem of the schools; a problem of education; it is not concerned with monkeys, but with men. And if “Monkeyville” did not exactly solve it, most of those who make fun of “Monkeyville” do not seem even to know that it exists to be solved. So far from having discovered the solution, they have not yet discovered the problem. And in that respect , all enlightened Evolutionists who have smiled over the affair are really much less advanced, much less in touch with the time, much less aware of the new world of the twentieth century, than the wild Fundamentalists of Tennessee.

The problem arises out of compulsory education. It is the great paradox of the modern world. It is the fact that at the very time when the world decided that people should not be coerced about their form of religion, it also decided that they should be coerced about their education. Queen Elizabeth made an Act of Conformity by which all populace had to go to church; Queen Victoria saw the making of another Act of Conformity by which all the populace had to go to school. Now in pure reason it is quite clear and quite certain that both were in the same sense persecution. Both assumed certain things to be true, and punished anybody who acted as if they were false. But this rational recognition was covered and confused for some time by two facts - or fictions. The first was what may be called the Theory of the Three R’s. That is, it was a theory that instruction could be confined to things so simple and so self-evident that nobody but a lunatic would be in the least likely to dispute them. The other was what may be called the Theory of Secular Education, which people with more confused minds called Unsectarian Education, or Undenominational Education. That is, it was a theory that religion, in the strict sense of theology, was the only thing about which even the lunatics would be likely to quarrel. In short, the theory was that a Christian and a Mahometan might learn the same lessons in the same class, on ninety-nine subjects out of a hundred, so long as nobody mentioned Mahomet or mentioned Christ. It seems strange that nobody noticed the limitations of such a view. Men do not, indeed, talk incessantly at every dance or dinner-party on the subject of Mahomet. But men do occasionally talk about wine. Men do even in their wilder moments talk about wives. And the Moslem and the Christian must either be taught separately about wine and wives; or they must be taught together at the expense of one religion or the other; or they must never be taught about wine or wives at all. The latter is what ought logically to follow from unsectarian education, though it seems a little defective as a detailed scheme of instruction about life. In practice, few people do exclude these topics as theological. Few people say, when offered a glass of sherry: “Do not be so denominational.” Few consider a remark: “My wife is at Brighton,” as a provocative and wounding reflection on the Koran. But this was not because religious disagreements do not matter, but because on these points most Englishmen did not really disagree in religion. But with the growth of new philosophies and theories, they do really disagree in religion. The Prohibitionist does think it not only denominational, but disgraceful, to drink the glass of sherry. The Free Lover does not think it disgraceful, or perhaps even denominational, to be connected with five women instead of one. In other words, we can no longer feel that religious controversy will only arise out of religious conversation. In that sense, we can no longer be sure that religion can only arise out of religion.

Now it is nonsense to say that such a philosophy cannot be inculcated except through theology. It is nonsense to say that you have kept such things out of the schools merely by keeping the priest out of the school, when you admit the professor into the school. The professor can preach any sectarian idea, not in the name of a sect, but in the name of a science. The professor can preach the devilish destructiveness of the glass of sherry, and call it a lesson in psychology or pathology. The professor can preach the advantages of polygamy, and call it a lesson in anthropology or history. The professor can insinuate any ideas about life because biology is the study of life. The professor can suggest any view of the nature of man because history is the story of man. And the case is complicated by the fact that the educationists are teaching more and more subjects, even while pretending to preach fewer and fewer creeds. It is impossible to use the old argument of the self-evident character of the Three R’s when the Three R’s really stand for Reason, Religion, and Rationalism. It is impossible to argue at once that the schoolmaster ought to teach everything, and to argue that he will teach nothing that will not please everybody. In practice he need only teach whatever pleases somebody; that somebody being himself. And if his own private opinions happen to be of the rather crude sort that are commonly contemporary with, and connected with, the new sciences or pseudo-sciences, he can teach any of them under cover of those sciences. That is what the people of Dayton, Tennessee, were really in revolt against. And that is where the people of Dayton, Tennessee, were really and completely right.

It is obviously most unjust that the old believer should be forbidden to teach his old beliefs, while the new believer is free to teach his new beliefs. It is true that the Bible-worship of the Fundamentalists is not really very old. It is true that the Natural Selection of the Darwinians is not really very new. But in those American conditions the things stand in some such relation; and, however they stand, the general argument is left standing. It is obviously unfair and unreasonable that secular education should forbid one man to say a religion is true and allow another to say it is untrue. It is obviously essential to justice that unsectarian education should cut both ways; and that if the orthodox must cut out the statement that he has a Divine origin, the materialist must cut out the statement that man has a wholly and exclusively bestial origin. The difficulty arises from the combination of the widening of education with the exclusion of religious education. But if the Fundamentalists say that some secularists abuse the right of secular education, they say what is exceedingly probable — and, if they say it is intolerable, they tell the truth.

THE IDEAL OF A LEISURE STATE

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Among the strange and rather stiff antics of the rather antiquated art of party journalism is the duty laid upon the good party man of trying to disagree with his opponents when they have the impudence to agree with him. He not only has to insist that they are wrong; he has to deny their right to be right. Even when you have to admit that your antagonist is talking sense, even when you pride yourself on talking exactly the same sense, you have to deny that it is sensible of him to talk sense. Or you deny that it is sense in the same sense; or sense in the true sense of the word. More often you simply imply that it is inconsistent and irrational in him to talk sense, because it is his whole duty and high function in State to talk nonsense. It is his business to be wrong; it is his business to be beaten; he is the invisible playmate, who sides with the Frenchman and never can win. That he should suddenly side with his own country, or win the approval of his own critics, is regarded as a form of cheating. Twice lately I have noticed a party leader saying things that any sensible person would say, but not allowed by the Opposition Press to say them, because he was not supposed to be a sensible person. One of them was when Mr. Baldwin pointed out the appalling peril of directly declaring war on all Trade Unionists at the very moment when we are supposed to be persuading them not to be Bolshevists. The other was when Mr. George Lansbury said to the effect that the dole was a deplorable necessity, because every man in the world ought to grow up expecting to work. But the conventional journalists, instead of agreeing with Mr. Landsbury, sneered at him for agreeing with them.

Well, that way of working against Bolshevism will have its Nemesis; the Nemesis of all nonsense, which is neglect. A new generation will go straight to the problems and forget all about the party quarrels. If we want to know what the future will be like, as far as anybody can know it, we must begin at the springs of thought and theory, the sources of the river, and not merely potter about in the swamps where it straggles away into its last labyrinthine delta of lobbying and intrigue. We must consider what ideas there are in the world at present, and in what way they are likely to mould the future. Now Mr. George Lansbury, whether consciously or not, really touched on one of the most important of these intellectual conflicts, which so often precede political and even military conflicts. And the position which he took up upon that matter was that of a conservative or a traditionalist; or as some on the otherside would say, of a Tory.

The controversy I mean has nothing to do with Socialism or Capitalism. It is a question about the nature of human life, even of ideal human life, which cuts across all these things and would probably divide Socialism into two camps. It is something which some speculators have already begun to discuss under the name of "The Leisure State." It is something which was suggested, perhaps, in the title and work of Mr. H.G. Wells called "The World Set Free." It does not mean the world set free from the sceptre or the sabre; it means the world set free from the spade and the ploughshare. It means that it might be possible so to organize machinery that the whole life of man on the earth should be one of leisure and not of labour. I will not pretend to discuss whether it would be mechanically possible. But it is time we began to discuss whether it is morally desirable. I am entirely at one with the Socialists in wishing to give most men less work and some men more work. But the abstract question propounded here is not that question; it is whether, if we could, we would give nobody any work. It assumes for the sake of argument the dark and dubious principle that labour-saving devices will save labour. It asks whether, even then, we always want to save labour. We talk of paying too much for labour; should we or should we not pay too much for idleness?

Many of the idealists can only conceive of an idle humanity as an ideal humanity. They talk as if no man could ever rest until he reached Utopia; or as if a really long holiday were something like heaven, utterly distant and divine. Their social philosophy is that of the hearty and humorous epitaph of the charwoman, who had gone on to do nothing for ever and ever. But even now it is by no means certain that those who are not charwomen really become any more hearty and humorous by doing nothing for ever and ever. A vast amount of stuffy and sentimental humbug has been uttered in favour of the Gospel of Work. As it was said that Carlyle talked a great deal in praise of silence, it may also be respectfully affirmed that he idled away a great deal of his time meditating on the virtues of labour. Work is not necessarily good for people; overwork is very bad for people; and both often begin with a bad motive and come to a bad end. Many a modern industrialist has prided himself on being as industrious as he was industrial. And it meant little more than that he was ready to sweat himself, as well as his neighbors, when he wanted to swindle his neighbors. Many a modern man has lived by the Gospel of Work, when it meant the spirit that will always work against the Gospel. A great deal of harm has been done by setting up these oily machines as models for mankind. I would not point to these ideal industrious men; I would turn away men's eyes from the painful picture of the Industrious Apprentice; I would veil their faces lest they should be disturbed by the repulsive appearance of the man who Attended These Classes and Is Making Big Money Now. I would hastily remove this deplorable person; but would gently remind the Utopians that he is not the only kind of person who is deplorable.

Now, the Leisure State exists already. It can be represented at any sort of function such as is called a State Banquet or State Ball. The World Set Free exists already. It exists in the world that specially claims to call itself the world. It exists in the world which Socialists and Utopians specially claim to call worldly. We are in a position even now to judge pretty well, in a general fashion, what is the effect on human beings having nothing particular to do. The "world" is already set free, if that is freedom; but is it exactly what the Utopians want to demand as freedom? It is undoubtedly an idle society, but is it an ideal society? Is Utopia to be found in Belgravia any more than in Bohemia? Are the rich all good or better than anybody else? Are they all clever or cleverer than anybody else? Are they even all free and happy, or all freer and happier than anybody else? And though there are good and clever and free and happy people among the idle rich, as there are among the idle poor, not to mention the industrious poor, I think it is broadly true that most of us have found that the most sincere and sensible people were people who earned their own living. I agree therefore with Mr. Landbury in differing from those who would perpetuate eternal unemployment combined with universal doles, and who call that ignominious combination The World Set Free.

But there is another strong objection which I, one of the laziest of all the children of Adam, have against the Leisure State. Those who think it could be done argue that a vast machinery using electricity, water-power, petrol, and so on, might reduce the work imposed on each of us to a minimum. It might, but it would also reduce our control to a minimum. We should ourselves become parts of a machine, even if the machine only used those parts once a week. The machine would be our master; for the machine would produce our food, and most of us could have no notion of how it was really being produced. A free man would rather be a peasant rising at dawn to put more work on his own field. In other words, in the social formula to which we are all accustomed, the peasant has control over the means of production. The occasional adjunct to the intermittent machine would have no control whatever over his own leisure, but less over his own life. Machinery organized in that fashion would have to be organized from an official centre; and no more controlled by its adjuncts than the tiniest of the little wheels can wind a watch. The leisured persons might be many things in their long hours of leisure. It is not impossible, by the parallel of plutocracy, that they might be profligates, perverts, drugtakers, dram-drinkers, pessimists, and suicides. But they might all be poets and artists and philosophers. They would not be citizens.

WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE - AND AT HOME

The Illustrated London News, 18th December, 1926

The recent controversy about the professional position of married women was part of a much larger controversy, which is not limited to professional women or even to women. It involves a distinction that controversialists on both sides commonly forget. As it is conducted, it turns largely on the query about whether family life is what is called a "whole-time job" or a "half-time job." But there is also another distinction between a whole job and a half job, or a hundredth part of a job. It has nothing to do with the time that is occupied, but only with the ground that is covered. An industrial expert once actually boasted that it took twenty men to make a pin; and I hope he sat down on the pin. But the man making the twentieth part of the pin did not only work for the twentieth part of an hour. He might perfectly well be working for twelve hours - indeed, he might have been working for twenty-four hours for all the happy industrial expert generally cared. He might work for the whole of a lifetime, but he never made the whole of a pin.

Now, there are lingering still in the world a number of lunatics, among whom I have the honour to count myself, who think it a good thing to preserve as many whole jobs as possible. We congratulate ourselves, in our crazy fashion, whenever we find anybody personally and completely doing anything. We rejoice when we find remaining in the world any cases in which the individual can see the beginning and the end of his own work. We are well aware that this is often incompatible with modern scientific civilization, and the fact has sometimes moved us to say what we think about modern scientific civilization. But anyhow, whether we are right or wrong, that is an important distinction not always remembered; and that is the important distinction that ought to be most remembered, and is least remembered, in this modern debate about the occupation of women.

Probably there must be a certain number of people doing work which they do not complete. Perhaps there must be some people doing work which they do not comprehend. But we do not want to multiply those people indefinitely, and then cover it all by shouting about emancipation and equality. It may be emancipation to allow a woman to make part of a pin, if she really wants to make part of a pin. It may be equality if she is really filled with a furious jealousy of her husband, who has the privilege of making part of a pin. But we question whether it is really a more human achievement to make part of a pin than to make the whole of a pinafore. And we even go further, and question whether it is more human to make the whole of a pinafore than to look after the whole of a child. The point about the "half-time job" of motherhood is that it is at least one of the jobs that can be regarded as a whole, and almost as an end in itself. A human being is in some sense an end in himself. Anything that makes him happy or high-minded is, under God, a thing directed to an ultimate end. It is not, like nearly all the trades and professions, merely a machinery and a means to an end. And it is a thing which can, by the constitution of human nature, be pursued with positive and unpurchased enthusiasm. Whether or no it is a half-time job, it need not be a half-hearted job.

Now, as a matter of fact, there are not so many jobs which normal and ordinary people can pursue with enthusiasm for their own sakes. The position is generally falsified by quoting the exceptional cases of specialists who achieve success. There may be a woman who is so very fond of swimming the Channel that she can go on doing it until she breaks a record. There may be, for that matter, a woman who is so fond of discovering the North Pole that she goes on doing it long after it has been discovered. Such sensational successes naturally bulk big in the newspapers, because they are sensational cases. But they are not the question of whether women are more free in professional or domestic life. To answer that question, we must assume all the sailors on the Channel boats to be women, all the fishermen in the herring fleet to be women, all the whalers in the North Sea to be women, and then consider whether the worst paid and hardest worked of all those workers were really having a happier or a harder life. It will be at once apparent that the vast majority of them must be under orders; and that perhaps a considerable minority of them would be under orders which they did not entirely understand. There could not be a community in which the average woman was in command of a ship. But there can be a community in which the average woman is in command of a house.

To take a hundred women out of a hundred houses and give them a hundred ships would be obviously impossible, unless all the ships were canoes. And that would be carrying to rather fanatical lengths the individualist ideal of people paddling their own canoe. To take the hundred women out of the hundred houses and put them on ten ships, or more probably on two ships, is obviously to increase vastly the number of servants and diminish the number of mistresses. The only ship I remember that was so manned (or perhaps we should say womanned) was the ship in the Bab Ballad commanded by Lieutenant Bellaye: [Note: The lieutenant is the hero of Gilbert’s “The Bumboat Woman’s Story”. He is so loved that numbers of young women disguised as sailors stow away on his ship.] even there it might be said that the young ladies who sailed with him had ultimately rather a domestic than a professional ideal. But that naval commander was not very professional himself, and it will be remembered, excused his sailors from most of their duties and amused himself by firing off his one big gun.

I fear that the experience of most subordinate women in shops and factories is a little more strenuous. I have taken an extremely elementary and crude example, but I am not the first rhetorician who has found it convenient to discuss the State under the bright and original similitude of a ship. But the principle does apply quite as much to a shop as to a ship. It applies with especial exactitude to the modern shop, which is almost larger than the modern ship. A shop or a factory must consist of a very large majority of servants; and one of the few human institutions in which there need be no such enormous majority of servants is the human household. I still think, therefore, that for the lady interested in ships the most supreme and symbolical moment is the moment when her ships come home. And I think there are some sort of symbolical ships that had much better come home and stay there.

I know all about the necessary modifications and compromises produced by the accidental conditions of to-day. I am not unreasonable about them. But what we are discussing is not the suggestion that the ideal should be modified. It is the suggestion that the ideal should be abolished. It is the suggestion that a new test or method of judgment should be applied to the affair, which is not the test of whether the thing is a whole job, in the sense of a self-sufficing and satisfactory job, but of whether it is what is called a half-time job - that is, a thing to be measured by the mechanical calculation of modern employment.

There have been household gods and household saints and household fairies. I am not sure that there have yet been any factory gods or factory saints or factory fairies. I may be wrong, as I am no commercial expert, but I have not heard of them as yet. And we think that the reason lies in the distinction which I made at the beginning of these remarks. The imagination and the religious instinct and the human sense of humour have free play when people are dealing with something which, however small, is rounded and complete like a cosmos.

The place where babies are born, where men die, where the drama of mortal life is acted, is not an office or a shop or a bureau. It is something much smaller in size and much larger in scope. And while nobody would be such a fool as to pretend that it is the only place where people should work, or even the only place where women should work, it has a character of unity and universality that is not found in any of the fragmentary experiences of the division of labour.

A SHY BIRD

From “A Handful of Authors”, 1927

I

THE problem of presenting the English culture to that general European culture, of which it must always be a part, is made more problematical by one practical fact; which is partly an accident. It is the coincidence that the very best English things have to be translated. And anybody who has ever tried to translate anything knows there is continual danger of a sort of despair; he is tempted to say that what has to be translated is always what cannot be translated. From the standpoint of anyone who can see it from the inside, but see it sanely, the best things in England are poetry and humour; and it so happens that they are both locked up in a language. The Continent can be more cosmopolitan, partly because Continental countries have produced masterpieces in more cosmopolitan arts. You do not need an Italian dictionary or a Spanish phrase-book in order to appreciate a statue of Donatello or a painting of Velasquez. And the other two great cultures of Western Europe both in some sense escape from language, though they escape, so to speak, at opposite ends or at opposite extremes; one at the extreme of reason and the other at the extreme of emotion. France has affected and altered all nations by a logic almost as abstract as mathematics; and Germany has moved all nations by the wordless might of music. Now scientific argument can be translated; and music does not need to be translated. But some slight acquaintance with the tongue talked in one particular corner of the Continent of Europe is necessary in order to realise that “night’s candles are burnt out” is rather fine poetry, or that Mr. Swiveller’s gazelle who married a market-gardener is distinctly funny.

But this has a sort of secondary result, even in contacts necessarily cosmopolitan or international. We also, of course, must have a diplomatic language; but we have never had the knack of putting much of what is national into what is official. It is a paradox; or it would seem to the more logical nations a paradox, for it means that there is less of what is national in what is said in the name of the nation. It is a paradox to say that what is responsible is not representative. But the English are the most paradoxical of all the peoples of the earth. And whatever be the reason, it is certainly the fact that the organs of the State are very seldom the really organic organs of the people. Of all peoples we English are possibly the most purely patriotic, possibly excessively and narrowly patriotic, but anyhow tacitly taking the nation as a sort of religion or substitute for religion. And yet we have hardly a decent patriotic song to our name, and nothing whatever in the way of a National Anthem or official patriotic song that any of the singing or marching nations would tolerate for ten lines. If any intelligent foreigner would get a glimpse of the paradox that is the secret of the English, let him compare the astonishingly low literary level of the patriotic music-hall song, about waving the flag, with the exceedingly high literary level of the domestic music-hall song, about hanging out the washing. As has been said, poetry and humour are the good fairies of England; and the poetry may be found in the poor man's front-garden and the humour in the poor man's backyard. By another quaint perversity we alone retain a Poet Laureate, when we have lost touch with those ancient classical or medieval traditions which would make much more comprehensible to the Continent the idea of an official ode or a national bard or a minstrel singing before the king. One or two of our best poets have been Laureates, and one or two of their very worst poems have been Laureate Odes. But our very best poet came from nowhere, and very much resembles our very greatest humorist; for in that sense both Shakespeare and Dickens were poets, and poets coming from nowhere and even going nowhere. Neither of them can be quite conceived as going into the Government service and becoming the official voice of the English State. They lacked something of that classic solidity which can alone give dignity to a completely collective institution like the French Academy or even the Comedie Francaise. Even when talents of that classical type exist among us, they exist under conditions that are so individualistic or patchy or sectarian that it is difficult to use them as they were used in the great classical century in France by a classic dramatist who could command a chorus. We have had perhaps two poets, of very different scale, who had by nature that sort of impersonal grandeur that might have given dignity, as did the French classic poets, to an accepted loyalty to a great monarchy. And Landor was a Radical and Milton was a regicide.

Now it cannot be denied that in many merely international relations we have to remove an impression of pomposity. But pomposity is only the failure of pomp. So we say that an actor is too theatrical, because he is not sufficiently at home in the theatre to be dramatic. We fail in official poetry, or official prose, or official proclamations, because it is not our job and we do not do it well. But we fail in common intelligence if we do not realise that other nations often do do it well. We must not underrate the achievement of France in making drama a public institution, or of Germany in making music a public institution, merely because we ourselves are not very bright about institutions. We must not make a superiority out of an incapacity; but we must, and the increasing international pressure forces us to repeat most emphatically that we must, make other nations understand the nature of our capacity and the things of which we are really capable.

We all recognise the curse on those who say that charity begins at home; that they so often mean that charity ends at home. But by various historical accidents it is unfortunately true that English charity has had no obvious duty except to begin and end at home, not because England would not have sympathised with Europe, but because England knew hardly anything about anything but England. This fact has unfortunately hidden the much more important fact that English charity is really quite exceptionally charitable. When seen from the inside the English are of all the peoples the most soft-hearted; I shall not deny that it sometimes bears a resemblance to being soft-headed. On the other hand there is an international impression at least a hundred years old that the Englishman is cold and proud and insensitive. The problem of explaining the English culture is the problem of explaining these two things together and inducing the foreigner to look at the inside rather than the outside. In other words, in some way or other he must come and find us at home, not necessarily by coming to our country, but by reading the books or knowing the circumstances in which we are most at home. It is exactly the humanity of England that has never been explained to humanity.

Now it is exactly here that a sort of rescue comes with a real experience of some of the finest foreign culture. For it is not only the finest but even the most fastidious foreign critic who can sometimes appreciate our coarsest or most comic creations. He can often appreciate what we do not appreciate because it is too popular to be fashionable. I live in dread that some European judge will discover the vigour of our Cockney Comic Songs; and publish them, as we should have done, in a companion volume to the Golden Treasury. Anyhow, it is a very practical clue to the right method in the matter. We might well suppose, for instance, that of all thinkable things Pickwick would be most essentially and exclusively a sort of family joke. But large numbers of Frenchmen know it is a good joke. Any number of

Frenchmen would have seen the fun of the jokes of Pickwick who would have seen nothing but the cant of the speeches of Pitt. Daudet almost modelled himself on Dickens; Maurois might be called a Dickensian; and there is a real imprint of Dickens on French literature, precisely because it is the imprint of entirely genuine English literature. It is interesting to note in international influence the difference between Dickens and Thackeray. Thackeray, with all his merits, was only too much the English gentleman who represents us abroad. But Dickens really works for us abroad, precisely because Dickens was only at home when he was at home. Thackeray, Anglo-Indian by birth and Anglo-European by travel, never quite understood Europe, just as the Anglo-Indian never quite understood India. Dickens never tried to understand either of them; but the result is that Europeans who love sincerity do want to understand Dickens.

Now the Englishman at home is almost the exact opposite of the Englishman abroad, or at least the legend of the Englishman abroad. Daudet, whom I have mentioned as an admirer of Dickens, expressed surprise when he visited England to find the people so different from what he had expected. For he had expected “men with all the vices of conquerors”. Of course the English, being weak and human like other people, love to be told that they have the vices of conquerors. Indeed, I almost feel a sort of traitor to my country in giving them away by saying that they very often have the virtues of saints. Especially the patience of saints. But if anybody wants to understand that patience he will find it much more genuine in Pickwick than in any Pacifist pamphlets. Note how Dickens takes for granted the patience of old Weller with his preposterous wife and her preposterous pastor, whom he nevertheless shows himself capable afterwards of ducking in a horse-trough, and you will be very near the nerve of something that is really English. The question is, how can we explain so secret a virtue to those who have other virtues, and cannot directly perceive that we have this one? Only one thing is certain; that we cannot do it by perpetually calling ourselves virtuous.

It is vital that we should avoid the appearance of offering ourselves as moral models, not because we have not moral advantages, in this or that respect, even as compared with others, but because we have not the intellectual advantages that would enable us to make the comparison or anyhow to make it correctly. In other words, our difficulty in helping them to know us has been, not only that we did not know them, but also that we did not know how much they knew already. There are some features about which some foreigners know much more about us than we do ourselves, but they are not the most genuine or the most general features. For instance, the fact that our populace does not really care much about politics, especially foreign politics, really acquits such a people of many charges that foreigners might bring, even if it might be a charge in itself. Our newspapers never tell us very much of what really is said about us, or against us, by responsible opinion; but the fact remains that the most genuine truth about England is to be found in England and not in what Europe says about England or England says about Europe. The former may be a muddle or a misunderstanding, but there still remains something much more worthy of being understood; and concerning that we come back to what may seem the same somewhat frivolous moral, that it is much more likely to be found in our novels than in our newspapers.

II

Continental criticism, broadly speaking, has made a mistake about England. It was a very natural mistake, founded on certain superficial truths, such as those which have so long hidden from England the thrift and the tenacity of France. It largely arose out of the religious quarrel and the rise of the Puritans. And the Puritan was the sort of solitary figure which, when it happened to appear in one particular country, frequently falsified international impressions. Such a person is associated with such a place, not so much because he is often found there as because he is never found anywhere else. Nowhere else has the Puritan been dominant as he was in this island; for his presence here was despotic rather than democratic. His original power was due to militarism. His more modern power is due to plutocracy. But the English populace has never been Puritan even in the sense in which the Scottish populace has been Puritan; still less in the sense in which the Irish populace has been Catholic. Nobody who thinks in terms of real popularity, right or wrong, can have the smallest doubt about whether our democracy is normally on the march to Exeter Hall or to the Derby.

Along with this historical accident of the Puritan aristocracy went several other things equally accidental. A certain shyness and moody embarrassment that come from much more complex causes; the fact that, like most Northern peoples, including the Northern French, we have not the rapid gestures of the South; an exaggerated reputation for roughness, curiously compounded of the legend of physical exercise and the legend that business is business, combined, with the puzzle of Protestantism, to create on the Continent an imaginary Englishman as stiff and stern as a Prussian. So far the mistake need not have troubled us very much. Nations normally do misunderstand each other; and it is not worse than the notion that the Frenchman is immoral or that the Irishman does not know what he wants. Unfortunately, this slander had in it something horribly like a compliment. Still more unfortunately, some Englishmen were so weak as to accept the compliment. They liked to be called stiff because they thought it meant that they were strong. They liked to be called solemn because they thought it meant that they were responsible. Vanity of this sort is not of course peculiar to them; it is common to the whole human race. But it was simply out of the weakness of vanity that they confessed to the sin of pride. In reality, they are not particularly proud and certainly not in the least stern; they are an exceptionally kindly and even soft-hearted people. They do not even take their pleasures sadly; they only take an incidental and I think regrettable pleasure in being called sad.

The meaning of Merry England was in this old original character of the English. In medieval times their public and proverbial character was festive and full of fun; and even in modern times their private and personal character is the same. The witness to it is the great national literature, especially as it was when it was still entirely normal, and had not been crossed and confused by the self-conscious poses of more recent times. The last full and free manifestation of this normal and national spirit is represented by the name of Pickwick. It is the last expression of the complete freedom and fullness, not only in the literature of England, but even in the literature of Dickens.

The truth about the English adventure even outside England, is that the type of endurance has not been stoicism but rather tolerance. We might say it was much too tolerant, if it had not the rare virtue of tolerating the intolerable. What has really made the English, apart from mere jingo journalistic flatteries, a success in colonies and in campaigns in savage countries, was a certain comic acceptance of the incongruous; a certain capacity in the English Cockney or yokel of continuing to be absurdly like himself even when, in the ritual formula, he don’t know where he are. This is a national merit which, like other national merits, is gained at the expense of missing other things; of missing, for instance, the full status of the citizen and the full inherited experience that comes of remaining rooted in very old civilizations. But it is perhaps the most humorous and attractive of all national virtues; and men who really know from the inside the various nations of European humanity have found nothing more human than the ordinary English comic song or the talk of the Tommies in the trenches.

Nothing is more English than the fact that a band of comrades are comic in their incongruity. They differ and do not quarrel; or they quarrel and do not part. There must have been many groups of Englishmen in camps and colonial holes and corners, consisting of men who got on with each other somehow, though each was regarded lightly enough as an individual. They were comic characters, if not to themselves, at least to each other.

The English spirit is really a shy bird, and differs therein from both the American and the German Eagle. And the shyness is mixed up with that misunderstanding by which a people very poetic have come to be called prosaic; and the bird is indeed as shy as the nightingale in the dark wood of Keats or the albatross flying over the desolate seas of Coleridge. We must above all things be the reverse of vulgar, and therefore the reverse of vainglorious, if we are really to convey what freedom, what humour and what greatness of heart are hidden in the very seclusion of England.

THE POLISH IDEAL

The Illustrated London News, July 2, 1927

There are certain things in this world that are at once intensely loved and intensely hated. They are naturally things of a strong character, and either very good or very bad. They generally give a great deal of trouble to everybody, and a special sort of trouble to those who try to destroy them. But they give most trouble of all to those who try to ignore them. Some hate them so insanely as to deny their very existence; but the void made by that negation continues to exasperate those who have made it till they are like men choked with a vacuum. They declare that it shall be nameless, and then never cease to curse its name. This curious case is perhaps best illustrated by example. One example of it is Ireland. Another example is Poland.

Within ten minutes of my stepping from the train on to Polish territory I had heard two phrases — phrases which struck the precise note which thus inspires one-half of the world and infuriates the other half. We were received by a sort of escort of Polish cavalry, and one of the officers made a speech in French — a very fine speech in very good French. In the course of it he used the first of these two typical expressions: "I will not say the chief friend of Poland. God is the chief friend of Poland." And he afterwards said, in a more playful and conversational moment: "After all, there are only two trades for a man — a poet and a soldier of cavalry." He said it humorously, and with the delicate implication, "You are a poet and I am a soldier of cavalry. So there we are!" I said that, allowing for the difficulty of anybody having anything to eat if this were literally true, I entirely accepted the sentiment, and heartily agreed with it. But I know there are some people who would not understand it even enough to disagree with it. I know that some people would furiously refuse even to see the joke of it. There is something in that particular sort of romance, or (if you will) in that particular sort of swagger, which moves them quite genuinely to a violent irritation. It is an irritation common among rationalists, among the drier sort of dons, and among the duller sort of public servants.

Now, if all those Polish officers had been Prussian officers, if their swagger had consisted of silently pushing people off the kerbstone, if their ceremony had consisted not in making good speeches but in standing in a row quite speechless, if their faces had been like painted wood and their heads and bodies puffed up with nothing but an east wind of pride, they would not have irritated this sort of critic in this sort of way. They would have soothed him, with a vague sense that this is what soldiers must be. I do not say he would approve of everything they did, but he would accept what they were. It would not anger him or even seem to him absurd, as it does to me, who belong to the other half of mankind. But what does anger him, what does seem to him absurd, is the idea of a soldier civilized; the man who is no more ashamed of the military art than of any other art, but who is interested in other arts — and interested in them all like an artist. That the man in uniform should make a speech, and, worst of all, a good speech, seems comic — like a policeman composing a sonnet. That he should connect a horse-soldier with a poet appears meaningless, like connecting a butcher with a Buddhist monk. In one historic word, these people hate and have always hated the Cavalier. They hate the Cavalier especially when he writes Cavalier songs. They hate the knight when he is also a troubadour. They can understand Ironsides solemnly killing people in the fear of the Lord, as they can understand Prussian soldiers solemnly killing people in the fear of the War-Lord. But they cannot tolerate the combination of wit and culture and courtesy with this business of killing. It seems especially preposterous when the Cavalier adds to all his other dazzling inconsistencies by being quite as religious as the Ironside. The last touch is put to their angry bewilderment when the man who has talked gaily as if nobody mattered except lancers and lyric poets says, with the same simplicity and gaiety, “the only friend of our country is God.”

These critics commonly say that they are irritated with this romantic type because it always fails; so they are naturally even more irritated when it very frequently succeeds. People who are ready to shed tears of sympathy when the windmills overthrow Don Quixote are very angry indeed when Don Quixote really overthrows the windmills. People who are prepared to give a vain blessing to a forlorn hope are not unnaturally annoyed to find that the forlorn hope is comparatively hopeful and not entirely forlorn. Even the most genial of these realists, Mr. Bernard Shaw, would be a little vexed if he had to reverse the whole moral of “Arms and the Man” and admit that the Arms counted for a little less and the Man for a little more. He would be slightly put out, perhaps, if the celebrated artillery duel really took place, and the sentimental Sergius blew the realistic Bluntzschli to pieces. But that is almost exactly what has really happened in modern Europe to-day. That is what happened, for instance, when the practical Mr. Broadbent went bankrupt in his Other Island.

When the Poles defeated the Bolshevists in the field of battle, it was precisely that. It was the old chivalric tradition defeating everything that is modern, everything that is necessitarian, everything that is mechanical in method and materialistic in philosophy. It was the Marxian notion that everything is inevitable defeated by the Christian notion that nothing is inevitable — no, not even what has already happened. Mr. Belloc has put the Polish ideal into lines dedicated to a great Polish shrine —

Hope of the Half-Defeated; house of gold; Shrine of the sword and tower of ivory.

Before I leave these Polish cavaliers I may remark that I had another chance of seeing them at the jumping competitions in the Concours Hippique, and I will only mention one incident and leave it, for it is something of a parable. The course consisted of the usual high obstacle, but there was one which was apparently of a novel pattern and practically insuperable. Anyhow, one after another in that long procession of admirable riders, French, Polish, and Italian, failed at this final test till failure came to be treated as a matter of course; even experts on such occasions differ about the degrees of merits and misfortunes, and I am not an expert at a horse show. One of the Lancers playfully asked me if I was going to compete. I made the obvious answer that, mounted on my favorite elephant, I would undertake to step over many of the fences, though certainly no the last fence of all, which I doubt if a giraffe could bestride. But the general feeling seemed to be that I should be more useful as an obstacle than a surmounter of obstacles, and that, if I lay down on the course, it might be even worse than the worst obstacle.

There was some amusement and some pity for one young Pole — who was, I believe, a novice or relatively untried person — whose mount in some fashion stumble so that the rider was shot over the horse’s head. At least, I thought he was shot over the horse’s head, and then discovered, amid some amazing and jerky gyrations, that he was what can only be called clinging to the horse’s ears. While the horse danced about the course in a dégagé manner, the rider seemed to crawl down his neck in some incredible way and rolled back into the saddle. He found one stirrup and tired in vain to find the other. Then he gave it up — the stirrup, not the race. He cleared a fairly low obstacle before him, and then, seeming to gather a wild impetus from nowhere, with one stirrup flying loose and swaying in the saddle, he charged the last impossible barrier, and, first of all that company, went over it like a bird. And someone said at my elbow with a sharp exclamation, in English: “That’s just like the Poles!”

Hope of the Half-Defeated; house of gold...

HUMOUR

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Humour, in the modern use of the term, signifies a perception of the comic or incongruous of a special sort; generally distinguished from Wit, as being on the one side more subtle, or on the other side more vague. It is thus a term which not only refuses to be defined, but in a sense boasts of being indefinable; and it would commonly be regarded as a deficiency in humour to search for a definition of humour. The modern use of the term, however, is by no means the primary or necessary use of it; and it is one of the cases, rarer than is commonly supposed, in which derivation offers at least an approach to definition. Everybody knows that `Humor', in the Latin sense of `moisture' was applied here as part of the old physiological theory, by which the characters of men varied according to the proportions of certain different secretions in the human body; as, for instance, that the predominance of phlegm produced the phlegmatic humour. By the time of the full consolidation of the English language, it had thus become possible for Ben Jonson and others to use the word `humour' rather in the sense of `the ruling passion'. With this there necessarily went an idea of exaggeration; and by the end of the process the character of a humorist was more or less identical with what we should call an eccentric. The next stages of the development, which are rather slow and subtle correspond to the various degrees in which the eccentric has become conscious of his eccentricity. England has always been especially rich in these eccentrics; and in England, where everything was less logical and more casual than in other countries, the eccentric long remained, as we should say, half unconsciously and half consciously humorous. The blend, and the beginnings of the modern meaning, may perhaps be dated at about the time of Walter Scott's Waverley Novels; when Guy Mannering complains of Councillor Pleydell as `a crack-brained humorist'. For Pleydell is indeed laughed at for his little vanities or whims; but he himself joins in the laugh and sees the humour of his humour. Since then the word has come to be used more and more exclusively of conscious humour; and generally of a rather deep and delicate appreciation of the absurdities of others.

Nevertheless there clings to the word Humour, especially when balanced against the word Wit, a sort of tradition or atmosphere that belongs to the old eccentrics whose eccentricity was always wilful and not infrequently blind. The distinction is a fine one; but one of the elements remaining in this blend is a certain sense of being laughed at, as well as of laughing. It involves some confession of human weakness; whereas wit is rather the human intellect exerting its full strength, though perhaps upon a small point. Wit is reason on its judgment seat; and though the offenders may be touched lightly, the point is that the judge is not touched at all. But humour always has in it some idea of the humorist himself being at a disadvantage and caught in the entanglements and contradictions of human life. It is a grave error to underrate Wit as something trivial; for certain purposes of satire it can truly be the sword of the spirit, and the satirist bears not the sword in vain. But it is essential to wit that he should bear the sword with ease; that for the wit the weapon should be light if the blow be heavy; that there should be no question of his being encumbered with his instrument or laying open his guard. But humour can be of the finest and yet lay open the guard or confess its inconsistency. When Voltaire said, commenting on the judicial murder of Byng, “In England they kill one Admiral to encourage the others,” it would immediately be recognized as humour. But we rightly class Voltaire as a wit, because he represents the consistent human reason detesting an inconsistency. We shall be very wrong if we despise him as a wit, for that French clearness has depths of irony; there is, for instance, more than is seen at a glance in the very word `encourage’. But it is true that the wit is here a judge independent of the judges, unaffected by the King or the Admiral or the English Courtmartial or the mob. He is abstract justice recording a contradiction. But when Falstaff (a model of the humorist become or becoming conscious) cries out in desperate bravado, “They hate us youth,” the incongruity between the speech and the corpulent old humbug of a speaker is present to his own mind, as well as to ours. He also discovers a contradiction, but it is in himself; for Falstaff really did bemuse himself with youthful companionship which he knew to be like a drug or a dream; and indeed Shakespeare himself, in one at least of the Sonnets, becomes bitterly conscious of the same illusion. There is therefore in humour, or at least in the origins of humour, something of this idea of the eccentric caught in the act of eccentricity and brazening it out; something of one surprised in disarray and become conscious of the chaos within. Wit corresponds to the divine virtue of justice, in so far as so dangerous a virtue can belong to man. Humour corresponds to the human virtue of humility and is only more divine because it has, for the moment, more sense of the mysteries.

If there be so much of enlightenment to be gathered from the history of the word, there is very little to be gathered from any of the attempts at a scientific history of the thing. The speculations on the nature of any reaction to the risible belong to the larger and more elementary subject of Laughter and are for the department of psychology; according to some, almost for that of physiology. Whatever be their value touching the primitive function of laughter, they throw very little light on the highly civilized product of humour. It may well be questioned whether some of the explanations are not too crude even for the crudest origins; that they hardly apply even to the savage and certainly do not apply to the child. It has been suggested, for example, that all laughter had its origin in a sort of cruelty, in an exultation over the pain or ignominy of an enemy; but it is very hard even for the most imaginative psychologist to believe that, when a baby bursts out laughing at the image of the cow jumping over the moon, he is really finding pleasure in the probability of the cow breaking her leg when she comes down again. The truth is that all these primitive and prehistoric origins are largely unknown and possibly unknowable; and like all the unknown and unknowable are a field for furious wars of religion. Such primary human causes will always be interpreted differently according to different philosophies of human life. Another philosophy would say, for instance, that laughter is due not to an animal cruelty but to a purely human realization of the contrast between man's spiritual immensity within and his littleness and restriction without, for it is itself a joke that a house should be larger inside than out. According to such a view, the very incompatability between the sense of human dignity and the perpetual possibility of incidental indignities, produces the primary or archetypal joke of the old gentleman sitting down suddenly on the ice. We do not laugh thus when a tree or a rock tumbles down; because we do not know the sense of self-esteem or serious importance within. But such speculations in psychology, especially in primitive psychology, have very little to do with the actual history of comedy as an artistic creation.

There is no doubt that comedy existed as an artistic creation many thousands of years ago, in the case of peoples whose life and letters we can sufficiently understand to appreciate the fine shades of meaning; especially, of course, in the case of the Greeks. It is difficult for us to say how far it existed in civilizations more remote of which the records are for us more stiff and symbolic; but the very limitation of symbolism which makes it hard for us to prove its existence should warn us against assuming without evidence that it did not exist. We know more about Greek humour than about Hittite humour, at least partly for the simple reason that we know Greek better than we know any sort of colloquial Hittite; and while what applies to Hittite applies too in a less degree to Hebrew, a case like that of early Hebrew presents something of the same problem of limitation. But without any attempts to settle such problems of scholarship, it is hard to believe that the highest sense of human satire was not present in the words of Job. "Truly you are wise and wisdom will die with you"; or that no perception of a poetic contrast was felt by so great a poet when he said of Behemoth, commonly identified with the hippopotamus; "Canst thou play with him as with a bird?" It is probable that the Chinese civilization, in which the quality of the quaint and the fantastic has flowered with a beautiful luxuriance for many centuries, could also quote fairly early examples of the same order of fancy.

In any case, humour is in the very foundations of our European literature, which alone is quite sufficiently a part of ourselves for the full appreciation of so subtle and sometimes sub-conscious a quality. Even a schoolboy can see it in such scenes of Aristophanes as that in which the dead man sits up in indignation at having to pay the toll of the Styx, and says he would rather come to life again; or when Dionysus asks to see the wicked in hell and is answered by a gesture pointing at the audience. Before the period of intellectual controversies in Athens, indeed, we generally find in Greek poetry, as in the greater part of all human folk lore, that the joke is a practical joke. To a robust taste, however, it is none the less of a joke for that. For the joke of Odysseus calling himself Noman is not, as some suppose, a sort of trivial pun or verbalism; the joke is in the gigantic image of the raging Cyclops, roaring as if to rend the mountains, after being defeated by something so simple and so small. And this example is worth noting; as representing what is really the fun of all the fairy-tales; the notion of something apparently omnipotent made impotent by some tiny trick. This fairy-tale idea is undoubtedly one of the primitive fountains from which flows the long winding stream of historic humour. When Puss in Boots persuades the boastful magician to turn into a mouse and be eaten, it almost deserves to be called wit.

After these two early expressions, the practical joke of the folk-tale and the more philosophic fun of the Old Comedy, the history of humour is simply the history of literature. It is especially the history of European literature; for this sane sense of the incongruous is one of the highest qualities balancing the European spirit. It would be easy to go through the rich records of every nation and note this element in almost every novel or play, and in not a few poems or philosophical works. There is naturally no space for such a survey; but three great names, one English, one French and a third Spanish, may be mentioned for their historical quality; since they opened new epochs and even their few superiors were still their followers. The first of these determining names is that of Chaucer, whose urbanity has done something to conceal his real originality. Medieval civilization had a very powerful sense of the grotesque, as is apparent in its sculpture alone; but it was in a sense a fighting sentiment; it dealt with dragons and devils; it was alive, but it was very decidedly kicking. Chaucer brought into this atmosphere a cool air of true comedy; a sort of incongruity most incongruous in that world. In his personal sketches we have a new and very English element, of at once laughing at people and liking them. The whole of humorous fiction, if not the whole of fiction, dates from the Prologue of the Canterbury Tales. Rather later, Rabelais opened a new chapter by showing that intellectual things could be treated with the energy of high spirits and a sort of pressure of physical exuberance, which was itself humorous in its very human abandon. He will always be the inspiration of a certain sort of genial impatience; and the moments when the great human mind boils over like a pot. The Renaissance itself was, of course, such a boiling, but the elements were some of them more poisonous; though a word should be said for the tonics of that time, the humour of Erasmus and of More. Thirdly, there appeared with the great Cervantes an element new in its explicit expression; that grand and very Christian quality of the man who laughs at himself. Cervantes was himself more chivalrous than most men when he began to mock at chivalry. Since his time, humour in this purely humorous sense, the confession of complexity and weakness already remarked upon, has been a sort of secret of the high culture of the West. The influence of Cervantes and Rabelais, and the rest runs through all modern letters, especially our own; taking on a shrewd and acid tang in Swift, a more delicate and perhaps more dubious taste in Sterne, passing on through every sort of experiment of essay or comedy, pausing upon the pastoral gaiety of Goldsmith or going on finally to bring forth, like a great birth of giants, the walking caricatures of Dickens. Nor is it altogether a national accident that the tradition has here been followed in our own nation. For it is true that humour, in the special and even limited sense here given to it, humour as distinct from wit, from satire, from irony or from many things that may legitimately produce amusement, has been a thing strongly and specially present in English life and letters. That we may not in turn depreciate the wit and logic of the rest of the world, it will be well to remember that humour does originate in the half-conscious eccentric, that it is in part a confession of inconsistency, but, when all is said, it has added a new beauty to human life. It may even be noted that there has appeared especially in England a new variety of humour, more properly to be called Nonsense. Nonsense may be described as humour which has for the moment renounced all connection with wit. It is humour that abandons all attempt at intellectual justification; and does not merely jest at the incongruity of some accident or practical joke, as a by-product of real life, but extracts and enjoys it for its own sake. Jabberwocky is not a parody on anything; the Jumblies are not a satire on anybody; they are folly for folly’s sake on the same lines as art for art’s sake, or more properly beauty for beauty’s sake; and they do not serve any social purpose except perhaps the purpose of a holiday. Here again it will be well to remember that even the work of humour should not consist entirely of holidays. But this art of nonsense is a valuable contribution to culture; and it is very largely, or almost entirely, an English contribution. So cultivated and competent a foreign observer as M. Emile Cammaerts has remarked that it is so native as to be at first quite unmeaning to foreigners. This is perhaps the latest phase in the history of humour; but it will be well even in this case to preserve what is so essential a virtue of humour; the virtue of proportion. Humour, like wit, is related however indirectly, to truth and the eternal virtues; as it is the greatest incongruity of all to be serious about humour, so it is the worst sort of pomposity to be monotonously proud of humour; for it is itself the chief antidote to pride; and has been, ever since the time of the Book of Proverbs, the hammer of fools.

ON AMERICAN MORALS

Generally Speaking, 1929

America is sometimes offered to us, even by Americans (who ought to know better), as a moral example. There are indeed very real American virtues; but this virtuous attitude is hardly one of them. And if anyone wants to know what a welter of weakness and inconsequence the moral mind of America can sometimes be, he may be advised to look, not so much to the Crime Wave or the Charleston, as to the serious idealistic essays by highbrows and cultural critics, such as one by Miss Avis D. Carlson on `Wanted: A Substitute for Righteousness.' By righteousness she means, of course, the narrow New England taboos; but she does not know it. For the inference she draws is that we should recognize frankly that `the standard abstract right and wrong is moribund.' This statement will seem less insane if we consider, somewhat curiously, what the standard abstract right and wrong seems to mean — at least in her section of the States. It is a glimpse of an incredible world.

She takes the case of a young man brought up `in a home where there was an attempt to make dogmatic cleavage of right and wrong.' And what was the dogmatic cleavage? Ah, what indeed! His elders told him that some things were right and some wrong; and for some time he accepted this strange assertion. But when he leaves home he finds that, `apparently perfectly nice people do the things he has been taught to think evil.' Then follows a revelation. `The flowerlike girl he envelops in a mist of romantic idealization smokes like an imp from the lower regions and pets like a movie vamp. The chum his heart yearns towards cultivates a hip-flask, etc.' And this is what the writer calls a dogmatic cleavage between right and wrong!

The standard of abstract right and wrong apparently is this. That a girl by smoking a cigarette makes herself one of the company of the fiends of hell. That such an action is much the same as that of a sexual vampire. That a young man who continues to drink fermented liquor must necessarily be `evil' and must deny the very existence of any difference between right and wrong. That is the `standard of abstract right and wrong' that is apparently taught in the American home. And it is perfectly obvious, on the face of it, that it is not a standard of abstract right or wrong at all. That is exactly what it is not. That is the very last thing any clear-headed person would call it. It is not a standard; it is not abstract; it has not the vaguest notion of what is meant by right and wrong. It is a chaos of social and sentimental accidents and associations, some of them snobbish, all of them provincial, but, above all, nearly all of them concrete and connected with a materialistic prejudice against particular materials. To have a horror of tobacco is not to have an abstract standard of right; but exactly the opposite. It is to have no standard of right whatever; and to make certain local likes and dislikes as a substitute. We need not be very surprised if the young man repudiates these meaningless vetoes as soon as he can; but if he thinks he is repudiating morality, he must be almost as muddle-headed as his father. And yet the writer in question calmly proposes that we should abolish all ideas of right and wrong, and abandon the whole human conception of a standard of abstract justice, because a boy in Boston cannot be induced to think that a nice girl is a devil when she smokes a cigarette.

If the rising generation were faced with no worse doubts and difficulties than this, it would not be very difficult to reconcile them to the traditions of truth and justice. But I think the episode is worth mentioning, merely because it throws a ray of light on the moral condition of American Culture, in the decay of Puritanism. And when next we are told that the idealism of America is to set a `standard’ by which England must transform herself, it will be well to remember what is apparently meant by a standard and an ideal; and that the fire of idealism seems both to begin and end in smoke.

Incidentally, I must say I can bear witness to this queer taboo about tobacco. Of course numberless Americans smoke numberless cigars; a great many others eat cigars, which seems to me a more occult pleasure. But there does exist an extraordinary idea that ethics are involved in some way; and many who smoke really disapprove of smoking. I remember once receiving two American interviewers on the same afternoon; there was a box of cigars in front of me and I offered one to each in turn. Their reaction (as they would probably call it) was very curious to watch. The first journalist stiffened suddenly and silently and declined in a very cold voice. He could not have conveyed more plainly that I had attempted to corrupt an honorable man with a foul and infamous indulgence; as if I were the Old Man of the Mountain offering him hashish that would turn him into an assassin. The second reaction was even more remarkable. The second journalist first looked doubtful; then looked sly; then seemed to glance about him nervously, as if wondering whether we were alone, and then said with a sort of crestfallen and covert smile: `Well, Mr. Chesterton, I’m afraid I have the habit.’

As I also have the habit, and have never been able to imagine how it could be connected with morality or immorality, I confess that I plunged with him deeply into an immoral life. In the course of our conversation, I found he was otherwise perfectly sane. He was quite intelligent about economics or architecture; but his moral sense seemed to have entirely disappeared. He really thought it rather wicked to smoke. He had no `standard of abstract right or wrong’; in him it was not merely moribund; it was apparently dead. But anyhow, that is the point and that is the test. Nobody who has an abstract standard of right and wrong can possibly think it wrong to smoke a cigar. But he had a concrete standard of particular cut and dried customs of a particular tribe. Those who say Americans are largely descended from the American Indians might certainly make a case out of the suggestion that this mystical horror of material things is largely a barbaric sentiment. The Red Indian is said to have tried and condemned a tomahawk for committing a murder. In this case he was certainly the prototype of the white man who curses a bottle because too much of it goes into a man. Prohibition is sometimes praised for its simplicity; on these lines it may be equally condemned for its savagery. But I myself do not say anything so absurd as that Americans are savages; nor do I think it would matter much if they were descended from savages. It is culture that counts and not ethnology; and the culture that is concerned here derives indirectly rather from New England than from Old America. Whatever it derives from, however, this is the thing to be noted about it: that it really does not seem to understand what is meant by a standard of right and wrong. It is a vague sentimental notion that certain habits were not suitable to the old log cabin or the old hometown. It has a vague utilitarian notion that certain habits are not directly useful in the new amalgamated stores or the new financial gambling-hell. If his aged mother or his economic master dislikes to see a young man hanging about with a pipe in his mouth, the action becomes a sin; or the nearest that such a moral philosophy can come to the idea of a sin. A man does not chop wood for the log hut by smoking; and a man does not make dividends for the Big Boss by smoking; and therefore smoking has a smell as of something sinful. Of what the great theologians and moral philosophers have meant by a sin, these people have no more idea than a child drinking milk has of a great toxicologist analyzing poisons. It may be a credit of their virtue to be thus vague about vice. The man who is silly enough to say, when offered a cigarette, `I have no vices,' may not always deserve the rapier-thrust of the reply given by the Italian Cardinal, `It is not a vice, or doubtless you would have it.' But at least the Cardinal knows it is not a vice; which assists the clarity of his mind. But the lack of clear standards among those who vaguely think of it as a vice may yet be the beginning of much peril and oppression. My two American journalists, between them, may yet succeed in adding the sinfulness of cigars to the other curious things now part of the American Constitution.

I would therefore venture to say to Miss Avis Carlson that the quarrel in question does not arise from the Yankee Puritans having too much morality, but from their having too little. It does not arise from their drawing too hard and fast a line of distinction between right and wrong, but from their being much to loose and indistinct. They go by associations and not by abstractions. Therefore they classify smoking with vamping or a flask in the pocket with sin in the soul. I hope at least that some of the Fundamentalists will succeed in being a little more fundamental than this. The men of Tennessee are supposed to be very anxious to draw the line between men and monkeys. They are also supposed by some to be rather too anxious to draw the line between black men and white men. May I be allowed to hope that they will succeed in drawing a rather more logical line between bad men and good men? Something of the the difference and the difficulty may be seen by comparing the old Ku Klux Klan with the new Klu Klux Klan. The old secret society may have been justified or not; but it had a definite object: it was directed against somebody. The new secret society seems to have been directed against anybody; often against anybody who drank; in time, for all I know, against anybody who smoked. It is this sort of formless fanaticism that is the great danger of the American Temperament; and it is well to insist that if men must persecute, they will be more clear-headed if they persecute for a creed.

MYTHS AND METAPHORS

The Illustrated London News, 26th January 1929

What I venture to criticize in certain men, whom some call scientists and I call materialists, is their perpetual use of Mythology. One half of what they say is so true as to be trite; the other half of what they say is so untrue as to be transparent. But they cover both their platitudes and their pretenses by an elaborate parade of legendary and allegorical images. I read this in some remarks on Darwinism by one of the last surviving Darwinians: "Among the individuals of every species there goes on, as Malthus had realised, a competition of struggle for the means of life, and Nature selects the individuals which vary in the most successful direction." Now when men of the old religions said that God chose a people and raised up a prophet, at least they meant something; and they meant what they said. They meant that a being with a mind and a will used them in an act of selection. But who is Nature, and how does she, or he, or it, manage to select anything or anybody? All that the writer actually has to say is that some individuals do emerge when other individuals are extinguished. It hardly needed either Darwin or Darwinians to tell us that. But Nature selecting those that vary in the most successful direction means nothing whatever, except that the successful succeed. But this tautological truism is wrapped up in clouds of mythology, by the introduction of a mythical being whom even the writer regards as a myth. The reader is to be impressed and deluded by the vision of a vast stone goddess sitting on a mountain throne, and pointing at a particular frog or rabbit saying, in tones of thunder, that this alone is to survive. All we know is that it does survive (for the moment), and then we pride ourselves on being able to repeat the mere fact that it does survive in half a hundred variegated and flowery expressions: as that it has survival value; or that it is naturally selected for survival; or that it survives because it is the fittest for survival; or that Nature's great law of the survival of the fittest sternly commands it to survive. The critics of religion used to say that its mysteries were mummeries; but these things are in the special and real sense mummeries. They are things offered to a credulous congregation by priests who know them to be mummeries. It is impossible to prove that the priest knows that there is no god in the shrine, or no truth in the oracle. But we know that the materialist knows that there is no such things as a large fastidious lady, called Nature, who points a finger at a frog.

The particular case in which this mythological metaphor was used is of course another matter. It is, indeed, a matter which has involved at various times a great deal of this element of materialist mythology. To see what truth was really in it we should have to go back to the old Darwinian debate; which I have not the least intention of doing here. But I may observe, in passing, that this notion of Nature selecting things is specially incompatible with all that can really be said for their own case; and that the very name of natural selection is a most unnatural name for it. For it is their whole case that everything happened, in the ordinary human sense, by accident. We should rather call it coincidence; and some of us call it quite incredible coincidence. But, anyhow, the whole case for it is that one quadruped happened to have a long neck, and happened to live at a moment when it was necessary to reach a taller tree or shrub. If these happenings happen to happen about a hundred times in succession, in exactly the same way, you can by that process turn some sort of sheep or goat into a giraffe. Whether this is probable or not is another question. But the whole Darwinian argument is that it is NOT a case of Nature selecting, any more than of God selecting, or anyone else selecting, but a case of things falling out in that fashion. We are quite ready to discuss trees and giraffes in their place, without perpetual references to God. Could the materialists not so far control their rhetorical and romantic sentimentalism as to do it without perpetual reference to Nature? Shall we make a bargain; that we will for the moment leave out our theology, if they will leave out their mythology?

But the mythological habit is not entirely and exclusively confined to men of science, or even to materialists. This sort of mythology is rather generally scattered over the modern world. The popular form of the mythological is the metaphorical. Certain figures of speech are fixed in the modern mind, exactly as the fables of the gods and nymphs were fixed in the mind of pagan antiquity. It is astonishing to note how often, when we address a man with anything resembling an idea, he answers with some recognised metaphor, supposed to be appropriate to the case. If you say to him, “I myself prefer the principle of the Guild to the principle of the Trust,” he will not answer you by talking about principles. He can be counted on to say: “You can’t put the clock back,” with all the regularity of a ticking clock. This is a very extreme example of the mental breakdown that goes with a relapse into metaphor. For the man is actually understanding his own case out of sheer love of metaphor. It may be that you cannot put time back, but you can put the clock back. He would be in a stronger position if he talked about the abstraction called time; but an all-devouring appetite for figurative language forces him to talk abut clocks. Of course the real question raised has nothing to do with either clocks or time. It is the question of whether certain abstract principles, which may or may not have been observed in the past, ought to be observed in future. But the point is here that even the man who means that we cannot reconstruct the past can hardly ever reconstruct his own sentence in any other form except this figurative form. Without his myth, or his metaphor, he is lost.

Another mass of metaphors is drawn from the phenomena of morning, or the fact that the sun rises; or, rather (I grovel in apology to the man of science), appears to rise. It is a perfectly natural metaphor for poets; or indeed, for all men, in that aspect in which all men are mystics. That there is mystery in these natural things, which the imagination understands more subtly than the reason, is true enough. Nor have I any contempt even for mythology considered mythology. But when we want to know what somebody wants to do, when we ask a free-thinker what he thinks, and why he thinks it, it is a little tiresome to be told that he is waiting for the Dawn, or engaged at the moment in singing Songs Before Sunrise. [Footnote 1] One is tempted to retort that Dawn is not always an entirely cheerful thing, even for those who have exercised their free thought upon the conventional tradition of their own society. There is such a thing as being shot at Dawn.

I do not mean for a moment, of course, that we should do without myths and metaphors altogether. I am constantly using them myself, and shall continue to do so. But I think we ought all to be on guard against depending on them as a substitute for reason. Perhaps it would be well to have a Fast Day, on which we undertook to abstain from everything but abstract terms, Let us all agree that every Friday we will do without metaphors as without meat. I am sure it would be good for the intellectual digestion.

ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS ARTICLE

Illustrated London News, April 19, 1930

As it seems to be generally understood that nine-thousand-nine-hundred-and-fifty-seven novels, twelve-thousand-five-hundred-and-eighty-three plays, and several million reminiscences in prose, verse, and free verse, are shortly to appear on the virgin and untouched topic of the Great War, it will perhaps be well to be prepared with some general principles for the criticism of the problem, as well as for the criticism of the particular solutions of it. Should any books or plays appear during the next few years on any other topic except that of the Great War, such daring departures and exceptional experiments will of themselves be sufficiently conspicuous. But we need something like a general rule of reading to correct the general tendency of writing; and I will venture to offer some suggestions for it here.

When the old popular complaint was made against the Novel with a Purpose, it was almost always based on the idea that the purpose would hurt the novel. It was not sufficiently realised that the novel can also hurt the purpose. When jolly old playgoers protested against the Problem Play, it was always on the ground that the play was spoiled by the problem. It was not enough emphasised that the problem can be spoiled by the play. There is a very good case for those who really are concerned about purposes and problems, and who find that they are very falsely and crookedly presented in dramas and stories. There is always a moral idea of some sort inhering in any great play or romance, because man is a moral being in his inmost and not merely in his external existence. But a play or a story is often an exceedingly bad way of presenting any practical moral problem that requires a practical solution. The writer either exhibits a sham fight of dialogue, taking care that the Whig dogs shall not have the best of it; or else he is almost forced to leave the moral of his story much more obscure and doubtful than a clear call to public duty or social justice ought to be. If we have really come to hold a strong moral conviction, we want to shout it much more loudly than is artistic in any work of art. Since the world has discarded Rhetoric as something false, it has lost the only natural expression of anything that is true. We want more of the orator, and even more of the demagogue; but not the demagogue masked and muffled by the disguise of a dramatist.

I would suggest, therefore, that, when hundreds of suggestions and half-suggestions are thus made to us on the subject of war, peace, and patriotism, we should keep certain maxims in mind as a corrective to mere suggestion: which, by itself, is as undignified as mesmerism. In these things we want to have reasons that can be stated as reasons, and not as catchwords or phrases or fragments of dialogue. We want to beware of certain fallacies that could not be maintained in argument but can easily be implied in art. Here are a few of these fallacies, which do not cease to be fallacies because they become fashions.

First, if we really desire peace or any other good thing, let us make a pious resolution that we will not talk nonsense. In other words, let us agree that we will not use newspaper mottoes like “War Is Unthinkable. “ Slogans of that sort are invented because they are nonsense. A man gets up and says that war is unthinkable at the very moment when everybody is thinking about war, and because everybody is thinking about war. They are, as we have already noted, writing, preaching, scribbling, and screaming about war, and almost about nothing else. Let us say that war is unbearable, or that war is unjustifiable, or that war is invariably indefensible, if we think so. But to say that it is unthinkable is to say that we refuse to think.@ Second, do not let us be satisfied with the sort of argument that can be made very vivid, not to say horrid, in fiction: the sort of argument that says, “If only you knew what war is really like!” If we were logically limited to that argument, it would be easy to apply it to all sorts of things. You could make large numbers of refined maiden aunts living in Bath and Cheltenham feel very ill with a realistic novel having the motto, “If you only knew what surgery is like!” You could send shudders all over Upper and Lower Tooting with a detailed and documentary novel headed “If You Only Knew What Scavenging Is Like!” If there are any people silly enough to suppose that all wounds on the battlefield are elegant and picturesque, they may be capable of supposing that all wounds in a hospital are elegant and picturesque. There may have been soldiers who mistakenly entered the army on the former assumption; there have probably been nurses who mistakenly entered the hospital on the latter. But that does not prove by itself that nobody has a noble vocation of nursing; nor does it prove by itself that nobody has a noble vocation of soldiering. Whether war attains its object, whether it is a legitimate object, whether war is a legitimate means - all those are different questions, lying beyond this particular question. But if armed conflict can be as useful or necessary as amputation, it is no answer to say that it is as ugly as amputation.

Third, I would respectfully remind most of those who have written, are writing, and will resolutely and unceasingly continue to write novels and plays about the War and the Armistice and Ten Years After, that they should try to encourage a real friendship with foreigners. And a friendship with foreigners does not mean a friendship with Germans. It means a friendship with Germans and with everybody else, including those who are extremely likely to quarrel with Germans. I would suggest to them, what they seem to have entirely forgotten, that if they describe the reaction towards Peace as if it were solely and entirely a reaction towards Prussians, they will not be encouraging Peace but very definitely encouraging War. They will be doing, in a much more dangerous form, exactly what they themselves denounced the Government for doing when it tied us up in a one-sided alliance; with the addition (as I should say) of our being tied to the wrong side instead of the right. But the point is that, whatever their romantic suggestions of reconciliation may favour, they do not favour the cause of Peace. The same sort of man who could only fight by writing sentimental lies against all Germans is now writing sentimental fiction in favour of all Germans. But he is not writing it in favour of Peace. The only chance of peace in the world lies in the possibility of our understanding the other side also. And so long as it is the fashion of the moment to talk as if all Italians were bullies, all Frenchmen braggarts, all Poles futile lunatics, and the rest, it is perhaps something of a stretch of language to say that we are making friends with foreigners. In fact, we are not making friends at all. We are doing something much more terrible and ominous. We are making Allies.

Lastly, let us remember as a general principle that opinions should be stated as opinions and convictions as convictions. We must not be impatient because these statements are called abstract. Whereas some charming romance about mud and blood and disembowelled horses is in comparison beautifully concrete. We are not savages, to express ourselves only in picture-writing. We are civilised men, acquainted with mathematics and metaphysics, and presumably capable of thinking in terms of thought. Certainly if we ever lose that power, it will be a worse relapse into barbarism than the worst war in the world.

THE EQUALITY OF SEXLESSNESS

GK’s Weekly, July 26, 1930

In almost all the modern opinions of women it is curious to observe how many lies have to be assumed before a case can be made. A young lady flies from England to Australia; another wins an air race; a Duchess creates a speed record in reaching India; others win motoring trophies; and now the King’s prize for marksmanship has gone to a woman. All of which is very interesting and possibly praiseworthy as means of spending one’s leisure time; and if it were left to that, even if no more were added than the perfectly plain fact that such feats could not have been achieved by their mothers and grandmothers, we would be content to doff our hats to the ladies with all courtesy and respect which courage, endurance and ability have always rightly demanded.

But it is not left to that; and considerably more is added. It is suggested, for example, that the tasks were beyond the mothers and grandmothers, nor for the very obvious reason that they had no motorcars and airplanes in which to amuse their leisure hours, but because women were then enslaved by the convention of natural inferiority to man. Those days, we are told, “in which women were held incapable of positive social achievements are gone forever.” It does not seem to have occurred to this critic that the very fact of being a mother or grandmother indicates a certain positive social achievement; the achievement of which, indeed, probably left little leisure for travelling airily about the hemispheres. The same critic goes on to state, with all the solemn emphasis of profound thought, that “the important thing is not that women are the same as men — that is a fallacy — but that they are just as valuable to society as men. Equality of citizenship means that there are twice as many heads to solve present-day problems as there were to solve the problems of the past. And two heads are better than one.” And the dreadful proof of the modern collapse of all that was meant by man and wife and the family council, is that this sort of imbecility can be taken seriously.

The London Times, in a studied leading article, points out that the first emancipators of women (whoever they were) had no idea what lay in store for future generations. “Could they have foreseen it they might have disarmed much opposition by pointing to the possibilities, not only of freedom, but of equality and fraternity also.”

And we ask, what does it all mean? What in the name of all that is graceful and dignified does fraternity with women mean? What nonsense, or worse, is indicated by the freedom and equality of the sexes?

We mean something quite definite when we speak of a man being a little free with the ladies. What definite freedom is meant when the freedom of women is proposed? If it merely means the right to free opinions, the right to vote independently of fathers and husbands, what possible connection does it have with the freedom to fly to Australia or score bulls-eyes at Bisley? If it means, as we fear it does, freedom from responsibility of managing a home and a family, an equal right with men in business and social careers, at the expense of home and family, then such progress we can only call progressive deterioration.

And for men too, there is, according to a famous authoress, a hope of freedom. Men are beginning to revolt, we are told, against the old tribal custom of desiring fatherhood. The male is casting off the shackles of being a creator and a man. When all are sexless there will be equality. There will be no women and no men. There will be but a fraternity, free and equal. The only consoling thought is that it will endure but for one generation.

OUR BIRTHDAY

G. K.s Weekly, 21st March, 1935- written for the magazine's tenth anniversary

As this is a Birthday Number, I propose to write about birthdays in a futile and irresponsible manner, as befits a festive occasion; and to leave for a later issue some of the serious questions that are raised in this one. I remember that long ago, in one of my countless controversies with Mr. Bernard Shaw, I commented on a scornful remark of his that he did not keep his own birthday and would not be bothered with anybody else's; and I argued that this exactly illustrates the one point upon which he is really wrong; and that if he had only kept his birthday, he might have kept many other things along with it. It will be noted that, with the magnificent magnanimity in which he has never failed, especially in dealing with me and my romantic delusions, he has contributed to this special number an article dealing with very vital matters. I hope to answer that article, in greater detail, in due course; here I will only give a very general reply upon the particular aspect which is excellently and exactly represented by Birthdays.

For one happy hour, in talking about Birthdays, I shall not stoop to talk about Birth-Control. But when Mr. Shaw asks why I doubt that he and I, not to mention Mr. H. G. Wells and Mr. Bertrand Russell, can form a committee to produce a creed, not to say a cosmos — my general answer is that the difference begins with the very birth of the conception. A Birthday embodies certain implicit ideas; with some of which he agrees and is right; with others of which he disagrees and is wrong. In some matters the difference between us seems to amount to this: that I very respectfully recognize that he disagrees with me; but he will not even allow me to disagree with him. But there is one fundamental truth in which I have never for a moment disagreed with him. Whatever else he is, he has never been a pessimist; or in spiritual matters a defeatist. He is at least on the side of Life, and in that sense of Birth. When the Sons of God shout for joy, merely because the creation is in being, Mr. Shaw's splendid Wagnerian shout or bellow will be mingled with my less musical but equally mystical song of praise. I am aware that in the same poem the patriarch Job, under the stress of incidental irritations, actually curses the day he was born; prays that the stars of its twilight be dark and that it be not numbered among the days of the year; but I am sure that G.B.S. will not carry his contempt for birthday celebrations to that length. The first fact about the celebration of a birthday is that it is a way of affirming defiantly, and even flamboyantly, that it is a good thing to be alive. On that matter, and it is a basic matter, there really is a basis of agreement; and Mr. Shaw and I, giving our performance as morning stars that sing together, will sing in perfect harmony if hardly with equal technique.

But there is a second fact about Birthdays, and the birth-song of all creation, a fact which really follows on this; but which, as it seems to me, the other school of thought almost refuses to recognize. The point of that fact is simply that it is a fact. In being glad about my Birthday, I am being glad about something which I did not myself bring about. In being grateful for my birth, I am grateful for something which has already happened; which happened, sad as it may seem to some, quite a long time ago. Now it seems to me that Mr. Shaw and his school start almost everything in the spirit of people who are saying, I shall myself select the 17th of October as the date of my birth. I propose to be born at Market Harborough; I have selected for my father a very capable and humane dentist, while my mother will be trained as a high-class headmistress for the tremendous honor and responsibility of her position; before that, I think I shall send her to Girton. The house I have selected to be born in faces a handsome ornamental park, etc., etc.” In other words, it seems to me that modern thinkers of this kind have simply no philosophy or poetry or possible attitude at all, towards the things which they receive from the real, world that exists already; from the past; from the parent; from the patriotic tradition or the moral philosophy of mankind. They only talk about making things; as if they could make themselves as well as everything else. They are always talking about making a religion; and cannot get into their heads the very notion of receiving a revelation. They are always talking about making a creed; without seeing that it involves making a cosmos. But even then, we could not possibly make the cosmos that has made us. Now nobody who knows anything about my little tastes and prejudices will say that I am not in sympathy with the notion of making things. I believe in making thousands of things; making jokes, making pictures, making (as distinct from faking) goods, making books, and even articles (of which, as the reader will sadly perceive, there is no end), making toys, making tools, making farms, making homes, making churches, making sacred images; and, incidentally also, making war on people who would prevent me from doing these things. But the workshop, vast as it is, is only one half of the world. There is a whole problem of the human mind, which is necessarily concerned with the things that it did not make; with the things that it could not make; including itself. And I say it is so with any view of life, which leaves out the whole of that aspect of life; all receptivity, all gratitude, all inheritance, all worship. Unless a philosopher has a philosophy, which can make tolerable and tenable his attitude towards all the actualities that are around him and before him and behind him — then he has only half a philosophy; blind, though he is the wittiest man in the world, he is in that sense half-witted.

Mr. Bernard Shaw is certainly one of the wittiest men in the world, and about whole huge aspects of life, one of the wisest. But if I am to sit down with him at a committee of evolutionists, to draw up a creed for humanity, I fancy I foresee that this is the line along which I shall eventually come to issue my Minority Report. I shall find myself the representative, and I suspect the only representative of the implications of my Birthday. I do not even mind calling it the pride of birth, which of course has nothing to do with the pride of rank; so long as it involves the humility of birth also.

HOW NOT TO DO IT

G. K.’s Weekly, 16th May, 1935

There are two recognised ways of arguing with a Communist; and they are both wrong. There is also a third way which is right but which is not recognised. Now I have a notion that, for one reason or another, a considerable part of our time will be taken up soon by arguing with Communists. And I should like to sketch very roughly this notion of mine about the right way to do it. Curiously enough, the two commonest ways of contradicting Communism also contradict each other. The first consists of convicting the Bolshevist of all vices. The second, curiously enough, consists of convicting him of all the virtues. It actually consists of pitting all our vices against his virtues; or his supposed virtues.

This is very much the more dangerous and even suicidal trick of the two; but its nature needs a little explanation. The first common or conventional method is at least simple enough. The Capitalist says to the Communist, “You shall not enter my house, for I know you would burt it down; you shall not speak to my family, for I know you would blow them up; you are a common thief and murderer and I am a highly respectable and moral person; and not as this Russian.” Now I do not like talking like that to a Bolshevist; because I should not like talking like that to a burglar. It is Pharisaical; and the Pharisee is a more ancient enemy of the Christian than the Marxian.

But I rather prefer it to the other method, which I find extremely common, among those who profess to defend property or individualism against the Marxian heresy. It really consists of telling the Communist that he is an idealist, or, in other words, that he must be wrong because he has ideals. In this second case, the Capitalist says to the Communist, “You believe in a lot of nonsense about the brotherhood of men; but I tell you, as a practical man, that every man wants to get as much as he can for himself, and will beat his own brother in business if he can. Every man must obey his acquisitive instinct.” (I read these very words recently in an attack on the Bolshevist theory.) “You cannot keep things humming and hustling without private enterprise; and you cannot produce private enterprise unless you bribe or reward it with the glittering prizes of private property.” People use these arguments against Communism, as if they were the only arguments against Communism; and then they are surprised that a number of more generous and spirited young people become Communists.

They do not seem to see that, to such young people, the Capitalist in question only seems to be saying, “I am a greedy old scoundrel, and I forbid you to be anything else.”

Now the true, full and final argument against Communism is that private property is much more important than private enterprise. A pickpocket represents private enterprise, but we should hardly say that he supports private property. Private property is not a bribe that exists for the sake of private enterprise. On the contrary, private enterprise is only a tool or weapon, that may sometimes be useful to preserve private property. And it is necessary to preserve private property; simply because the other name of it is liberty. On the one hand, it is not merely a conventional respectability; on the contrary, it is only the man with some property and privacy who can live his own life freely. On the other hand, it is not a mere licence to trade, still less a mere licence to cheat; on the contrary, the whole point of property is that in that alone can be naturally nourished the sentiment of honour. It would need some space to expound it here and might take some time to expound it to the Communist. But the Communist would listen at least longer than he would to a man merely boasting of self-righteousness or a man merely boasting of avarice.

CHRISTMAS AND THE FIRST GAMES

I have sometimes been haunted with a vague story about a wild and fantastic uncle, the enemy of parents and the cause of revolution in nurseries, who went about preaching a certain theory; I mean the theory that all the objects which children use at Christmas for what we call riotous or illegitimate purposes, were originally created for those purposes; and not for the humdrum household purposes which they now serve. For instance, we will suppose that the story begins with a pillow-fight in a night nursery; and boys buffeting and bashing each other with those white and shapeless clubs. The uncle, who would be a professor of immense learning and even greater imagination and inventiveness, would proceed to make himself unpopular with parents and popular with children, by proving that the pillow in prehistoric art is obviously designed to be a club; that the sham-fight in the night nursery is actually more ancient and authoritative than the whole institution of beds or bedclothes; that in some innocent morning of the world such cherubim warred on each other with such clouds, possibly made of white samite, mystic, wonderful, and stuffed with feathers from the angels' wings; and that it was only afterwards, when weariness fell upon the world and the young gods had grown tired of their godlike sports, that they slept with their heads upon their weapons; and so, by a gradual dislocation of the whole original purpose of the pillow, it came to be recognized as having its proper place on a bed.

It is obvious that any number of these legends could be launched with ease and grace and general gratification. It would be urged, to eagerly assenting little boys, that catapults are really older and more majestic than windows. Windows were merely targets set up for catapults, clear and fragile that such archaic archers might be rewarded with a crash and sparkle of crystal; that it was only after the oppressive priesthood of the Middle Paleolithic had ruthlessly suppressed the Catapult Culture, that people had gradually come to use the now useless glass targets for purposes of light or ventilation. Similarly, butter was originally used solely to make butter-slides in the path of parents and guardians and it was only by a late accident in the life of some prominent though prostrate citizen, who happened to lick the pavement, that its edible qualities were discovered.

The subversive principle can be applied to almost every childish game; it may be said that primitive hunters hunted the slipper, long before that leaping and elusive animal was duplicated and worn as furry spoils upon the feet of the hunter. It might be said that no handkerchief was ever used to blow the nose, as in our degenerate day, till it had been used for centuries to blind the eyes, as in the hierarchic mystery of Blind-Man's-Buff.

True, I cannot set forth here in any great detail any actual proofs of these prehistoric origins; but I never heard of anybody bothering about historic proofs in connection with prehistoric origins. There is quite as much evidence for my favorite uncle's theory of the primitive pillow as there is for Mr. H.G. Wells's detailed account of the horrible Old Man, who ruled by terror over twenty or thirty younger men who could have thrown him out of the cave on his apelike ear; there is as much scientific proof as there is for Dr. Freud's highly modern and morbid romance about a whole race of sexual perverts making a whole religious service out of parricide; there is as much in the way of data for demonstration as in Mr. Gerald Heard's sentimental film-scenario about arboreal anthropoids kissing the stones which they throw at lions. Nobody expects any historic evidence for things of this sort, because they are prehistoric; and nobody dreams of attempting to found them on any scientific facts; they are simply Science. I do not see why my favorite uncle and I should not be Science too. I do not see why we should not simply make things up out of our own heads; things which cannot possibly be contradicted, just as they cannot possibly be proved. The only difference is that my uncle and I, especially when we set out with a general intention of talking about Christmas, cannot manage to work up that curious loathing of the human race, which is now considered essential to any history written for humanitarians. Dr. Freud (as is perhaps natural after a heavy day of psychopathic interviews) seems to have taken quite a dislike to human beings. So when he makes up the story of how their first forgotten institutions arose in utterly unrecorded times, he makes the family story as nasty as he can; like any other modern novelist. But my uncle and I (especially at Christmas) happen to feel in a more cheerful and charitable frame of mind; and, as there are no iron creeds or dogmas to restrain anybody from anything, we have as much right to imagine cheerful things as he has to imagine gloomy ones. And we beg to announce, with the same authority, that everything began with a celestial pillow fight of cherubs, or that the whole world was made entirely for the games of children.

The two or three truths, of which my uncle's hypothesis is at least symbolic or suggestive, may be conveniently arranged thus. First, it must always be remembered that there really is a mystery, and something resembling a religious mystery, in the origin of many things which have since become (very rightly) practical and (very wrongly) prosaic. If my uncle in a festive moment declared that fireworks came before fires, and were used to blazon the blackness of night with ceremonial illuminations, before it was even noticed that they could cook our food or warm our hands, he might not be speaking with pedantic precision; but he would not be far off from a considerable historic truth. There are many strange traces of the ritual side of tilling or tending animals preceding the practical side. Second, it must be remembered that these rituals, including Christmas, have been on the whole preserved by the populace; for a true populace is far more traditional than an aristocracy. They have been preserved by poor people, though generally by poor people who possessed some small property, in short, most markedly by a peasantry. Thus, if my uncle, rising hilariously once more, were to propound to the company the opinion that the Christmas stocking stuffed with gifts and strung onto the bedpost, was a thing far more ancient and authoritative than mere common human stockings as degraded to be the livery of common human legs, I should soothe him by assuring him that I saw his point, though I might not accept this literal illustration of it.

Now it is very interesting to remember that there is another proverb, or traditional truth, about stockings in connection with peasants. It has often been said that the peasant put his small property into his stocking, stuck his little hoard of gold into his stocking, so that it might be safe from thieves and bankers. And the peasant was lectured about this, by no less than nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine lecturers on political economy and professional professors of economics or high finance. It was patiently pointed out to him that metal coins do not breed like maggots when left in a stocking; that guineas do not have little families of guineas as guinea-pigs do; that a stocking is not a nest in which a sovereign can lay half-sovereigns as a bird lays eggs; or, in more learned but less sensible language, that his money was not bringing him any interest. So that the only way to make money do what money cannot do, and the only true scientific scheme for proving there is a guinea-and-a-half when there is only a guinea, is to put it in a bank. A bank, as the nine thousand professors of economics explained to the stupid or stupefied peasant can never fail to pay interest. A stocking may wear out or have holes in it; thieves may break in and steal; but it is manifestly impossible for bankers to steal; and even a violation of nature's laws for things in banks to be stolen; much more for them to disappear altogether, in so brisk and busy a center of speculation. Since banks cannot conceivably fail, argued the professors, you would obviously be a richer man, with somebody else's money from somewhere somehow mysteriously added to your own, if you would take it out of the stocking and put it into the bank. The peasant was still dazed; but he was strangely stubborn. Since then, the situation has been modified in various ways; and a good many of the professors are wishing they had imitated the peasant.

THE ANGRY STREET

I cannot remember whether this tale is true or not. If I read it through very carefully I have a suspicion that I should come to the conclusion that it is not. But, unfortunately, I cannot read it through very carefully because, you see, it is not written yet. The image and idea of it clung to me through a great part of my boyhood; I may have dreamt it before I could talk; or told it to myself before I could read; or read it before I could remember. On the whole, however, I am certain that I did not read it. For children have very clear memories about things like that; and of the books of which I was really fond I can still remember not only the shape and bulk and binding, but even the position of the printed words on many of the pages. On the whole, I incline to the opinion that it happened to me before I was born.

At any rate, let us tell the story now with all the advantages of the atmosphere that has clung to it. You may suppose me, for the sake of argument, sitting at lunch in one of those quick-lunch restaurants in the City where men take their food so fast that it has none of the quality of food, and take their half-hour's vacation so fast that it has none of the qualities of leisure. To hurry through one's leisure is the most unbusiness-like of actions. They all wore tall shiny hats as if they could not lose an instant even to hang them on a peg, and they all had one eye a little off, hypnotised by the huge eye of the clock. In short, they were the slaves of the modern bondage, you could hear their fetters clanking. Each was, in fact, bound by a chain; the heaviest chain ever tied to a man-it is called a watch-chain.

Now, among these there entered and sat down opposite to me a man who almost immediately opened an uninterrupted monologue. He was like all the other men in dress, yet he was startlingly opposite to them all in manner. He wore a high shiny hat and a long frock coat, but be wore them as such solemn things were meant to be worn; he wore the silk hat as if it were a mitre, and the frock coat as if it were the ephod of a high priest. He not only hung his hat up on the peg, but he seemed (such was his stateliness) almost to ask permission of the hat for doing so, and to apologise to the peg for making use of it. When he had sat down on a wooden chair with the air of one considering its feelings and given a sort of slight stoop or bow to the wooden table itself, as if it were an altar, I could not help some comment springing to my lips. For the man was a big, sanguine-faced, prosperous-looking man, and yet he treated everything with a care that almost amounted to nervousness.

For the sake of saying something to express my interest I said, “This furniture is fairly solid; but, of course, people do treat it much too carelessly.”

As I looked up doubtfully my eye caught his, and was fixed as his was fixed, in an apocalyptic stare. I had thought him ordinary as he entered, save for his strange, cautious manner; but if the other people had seen him they would have screamed and emptied the room. They did not see him, and they went on making a clatter with their forks, and a murmur with their conversation.

But the man’s face was the face of a maniac.

“Did you mean anything particular by that remark?” he asked at last, and the blood crawled back slowly into his face.

“Nothing whatever,” I answered. “One does not mean anything here; it spoils people’s digestion.”

He leaned back and wiped his broad forehead with a big handkerchief; and yet there seemed to be a sort of regret in his relief. “I thought perhaps,” he said in a low voice, “that another of them had gone wrong.”

“If you mean another digestion gone wrong,” I said, “I never heard of one here that went right.

This is the heart of the Empire, and the other organs are in an equally bad way.”

“No, I mean another street gone wrong,” and he said heavily and quietly, “but as I suppose that doesn’t explain much to you, I think I shall have to tell you the story. I do so with all the less responsibility, because I know you won’t believe it. For forty years of my life I invariably left my office, which is in Leadenhall Street, at half-past five in the afternoon, taking with me an umbrella in the right hand and a bag in the left hand. For forty years two months and four days I passed out of the side door, walked down the street on the left-hand side, took the first turning to the left and the third to the right, from where I bought an evening paper, followed the road on the right-hand side round two obtuse angles, and came out just outside a Metropolitan Station, where I took a train home. For forty years two months and four days I fulfilled this course by accumulated habit: it was not a long street that I traversed, and it took me about four and a half minutes to do it. After forty years two months and four days, on the fifth day I went out in the same manner, with my umbrella in the right band and my bag in the left, and I began to notice that walking along the familiar street tired me somewhat more than usual. At first I thought I must be breathless and out of condition; though this, again, seemed unnatural, as my habits had always been like clockwork. But after a little while I became convinced that the road was distinctly on a more steep incline than I had known previously; I was positively panting uphill.

"Owing to this no doubt the corner of the street seemed farther off than usual; and when I turned it I was convinced that I had turned down the wrong one. For now the street shot up quite a steep slant, such as one only sees in the hilly parts of London, and in this part there were no hills at all.

"Yet it was not the wrong street. The name written on it was the same; the shuttered shops were the same; the lamp-posts and the whole look of the perspective was the same; only it was tilted upwards like a lid. Forgetting any trouble about breathlessness or fatigue I ran furiously forward, and reached the second of my accustomed turnings, which ought to bring me almost within sight of the station. And as I turned that corner I nearly fell on the pavement. For now the street went up straight in front of my face like a steep staircase or the side of a pyramid. There was not for miles around that place so much as a slope like that of Ludgate Hill. And this was a slope like that of the Matterhorn. The whole street had lifted itself like a single wave, and yet every speck and detail of it was the same, and I saw in the high distance, as at the top of an Alpine pass, picked out in pink letters, the name over my paper shop.

"I ran on and on blindly now, passing all the shops, and coming to a part of the road where there was a long grey row of private houses. I had, I know not why, an irrational feeling that I was on a long iron bridge in empty space. An impulse seized me, and I pulled up the iron trap of a coal-hole. Looking down through it I saw empty space and the stars. When I looked up again a man was standing in his front garden, having apparently come out of his house; he was leaning over the railings and gazing at me. We were all alone on that nightmare road; his face was in shadow; his dress was dark and ordinary; but when I saw him standing so perfectly still I knew somehow that be was not of this world. And the stars behind his head were larger and fiercer than ought to be endured by the eyes of men.

"'If you are a kind angel,' I said, 'or a wise devil, or have anything in common with mankind, tell me what is this street possessed of devils.'

“After a long silence he said, ‘What do you say it is?’

“‘It is Bumpton Street, of course,’ I snapped. ‘It goes to Oldgate Station.’

“‘Yes,’ he admitted gravely, ‘it goes there sometimes. Just now, however, it is going to heaven.’

“‘To heaven?’ I said, ‘Why?’

“‘It is going to heaven for justice,’ he replied. ‘You must have treated it badly. Remember always there is one thing that cannot be endured by anybody or anything. That one unendurable thing is to be overworked and also neglected. For instance, you can overwork women- everybody does. But you can’t neglect women-I defy you to. At the same time, you can neglect tramps and gipsies and all the apparent refuse of the State, so long as you do not overwork them.

“‘But no beast of the field, no horse, no dog can endure long to be asked to do more than his work and yet have less than his honour.

“‘It is the same with streets. You have worked this street to death, and yet you have never remembered its existence. If you had owned a healthy democracy, even of pagans, they would have hung this street with garlands and given it the name of a god. Then it would have gone quietly. But at last the street has grown tired of your tireless insolence; and it is bucking and rearing its head to heaven. Have you never sat on a bucking horse?’

“I looked at the long grey street, and for a moment it seemed to me to be exactly like the long grey neck of a horse flung up to heaven. But in a moment my sanity returned, and I said, ‘But this is all nonsense. Streets go to the place they have to go to. A street must always go to its end.’

“‘Why do you think so of a street?’ he asked, standing very still.

“‘Because I have always seen it do the same thing,’ I replied, in reasonable anger. ‘Day after day, year after year, it has always gone to Oldgate Station; day after. . . .’

“I stopped, for he had flung up his head with the fury of the road in revolt.

“‘And you?’ he cried terribly. ‘What do you think the road thinks of you? Does the road think you are alive? Are you alive? Day after day, year after year, you have gone to Oldgate Station . . .’ Since then I have respected the things called inanimate!”

And bowing slightly to the mustard-pot, the man in the restaurant withdrew.

DOGS

Cynics often speak of the disillusioning effects of experience, but I for one have found that nearly all things not evil are better in experience than in theory. Take, for example, the innovation which I have of late introduced into my domestic life; he is a four-legged innovation in the shape of an Aberdeen terrier. I have always imagined myself to be a lover of all animals, because I have never met any animal that I definitely disliked. Most people draw the line somewhere. Lord Roberts disliked cats; the best woman I know objects to spiders; a Theosophist I know protects, but detests, mice; and many leading humanitarians have an objection to human beings.

If the dog is loved he is loved as a dog; not as a fellow-citizen, or an idol, or a pet, or a product of evolution. The moment you are responsible for one respectable animal, that moment an abyss opens as wide as the world between cruelty and the necessary coercion of animals. There are some people who talk of what they call "Corporal Punishment", and class under that head the hideous torture inflicted on unfortunate citizens in our prisons and workhouses, and also the smack one gives to a silly boy or the whipping of an intolerable terrier. You might as well invent a phrase called "Reciprocal Concussion" and leave it to be understood that you included under this head kissing, kicking, the collision of boats at sea, the embracing of young Germans, and the meeting of comets in mid-air.

That is the second moral value of the thing; the moment you have an animal in your charge you soon discover what is really cruelty to animals, and what is only kindness to them. For instance, some people have called it inconsistent in me to be an anti-vivisectionist and yet to be in favour of ordinary sports. I can only say that I can quite imagine myself shooting my dog, but cannot imagine myself vivisecting him.

But there is something deeper in the matter than all that, only the hour is late, and both the dog and I are too drowsy to interpret it. He lies in front of me curled up before the fire, as so many dogs must have lain before so many fires. I sit on one side of that hearth, as so many men must have sat by so many hearths. Somehow this creature has completed my manhood; somehow, I cannot explain why, a man ought to have a dog. A man ought to have six legs; those other four legs are part of him. Our alliance is older than any of the passing and priggish explanations that are offered of either of us; before evolution was, we were. You can find it written in a book that I am a mere survival of a squabble of anthropoid apes; and perhaps I am. I am sure I have no objection. But my dog knows I am a man, and you will not find the meaning of that word written in any book as clearly as it is written in his soul.

It may be written in a book that my dog is canine; and from this it may be deduced that he must hunt with a pack, since all canines hunt with a pack. Hence it may be argued (in the book) that if I have one Aberdeen terrier I ought to have twenty-five Aberdeen terriers. But my dog knows that I do not ask him to hunt with a pack; he knows that I do not care a curse whether he is canine or not so long as he is my dog. That is the real secret of the matter which the superficial evolutionists cannot be got to see. If traceable history be the test, civilization is much older than the savagery of evolution. The civilized dog is older than the wild dog of science. The civilized man is older than the primitive man of science. We feel it in our bones that we are the antiquities, and that the visions of biology are the fancies and the fads. The books do not matter; the night is closing in, and it is too dark to read books. Faintly against the fading firelight can be traced the prehistoric outlines of the man and the dog.

THE RUNAWAY ABBOT

Some miles from the monastery of Monte Cassino stood a great crag or cliff, standing up like a pillar of the Apennines. It was crowned with a castle that bore the name of The Dry Rock, and was the eyrie in which the eaglets of the Aquino branch of the Imperial family were nursed to fly. Here lived Count Landulf of Aquino, who was the father of Thomas Aquinas and some seven other sons. In military affairs he doubtless rode with his family, in the feudal manner; and apparently had something to do with the destruction of the monastery. But it was typical of the tangle of the time, that Count Landulf seems afterwards to have thought that it would be a tactful and delicate act to put in his son Thomas as Abbot of the monastery. This would be of the nature of a graceful apology to the Church, and also, it would appear, the solution of a family difficulty.

For it had been long apparent to Count Landulf that nothing could be done with his seventh son Thomas, except to make him an Abbot or something of that kind. Born in 1226, he had from childhood a mysterious objection to becoming a predatory eagle, or even to taking an ordinary interest in falconry or tilting or any other gentlemanly pursuits. He was a large and heavy and quiet boy, and phenomenally silent, scarcely opening his mouth except to say suddenly to his schoolmaster in an explosive manner, “What is God?” The answer is not recorded but it is probable that the asker went on worrying out answers for himself. The only place for a person of this kind was the Church and presumably the cloister; and so far as that went, there was no particular difficulty. It was easy enough for a man in Count Landulf’s position to arrange with some monastery for his son to be received there; and in this particular case he thought it would be a good idea if he were received in some official capacity, that would be worthy of his worldly rank. So everything was smoothly arranged for Thomas Aquinas becoming a monk, which would seem to be what he himself wanted; and sooner or later becoming Abbot of Monte Cassino. And then the curious thing happened.

In so far as we may follow rather dim and disputed events, it would seem that the young Thomas Aquinas walked into his father’s castle one day and calmly announced that he had become one of the Begging Friars, of the new order founded by Dominic the Spaniard; much as the eldest son of the squire might go home and airily inform the family that he had married a gypsy; or the heir of a Tory Duke state that he was walking tomorrow with the Hunger Marchers organised by alleged Communists. By this, as has been noted already, we may pretty well measure the abyss between the old monasticism and the new, and the earthquake of the Dominican and Franciscan revolution. Thomas had appeared to wish to be a Monk; and the gates were silently opened to him and the long avenues of the abbey, the very carpet, so to speak, laid for him up to the throne of the mitred abbot. He said he wished to be a Friar, and his family flew at him like wild beasts; his brothers pursued him along the public roads, half-rent his friar’s frock from his back and finally locked him up in a tower like a lunatic.

It is not very easy to trace the course of this furious family quarrel, and how it eventually spent itself against the tenacity of the young Friar; according to some stories, his mother’s disapproval was short-lived and she went over to his side; but it was not only his relatives that were embroiled. We might say that the central governing class of Europe, which partly consisted of his family, were in a turmoil over the deplorable youth; even the Pope was asked for tactful intervention, and it was at one time proposed that Thomas should be allowed to wear the Dominican habit while acting as Abbot in the Benedictine Abbey. To many this would seem a tactful compromise; but it did not commend itself to the narrow medieval mind of Thomas Aquinas. He indicated sharply that he wished to be a Dominican in the Dominican Order, and not at a fancy-dress ball; and the diplomatic proposal appears to have been dropped.

Thomas of Aquino wanted to be a Friar. It was a staggering fact to his contemporaries; and it is rather an intriguing fact even to us; for this desire, limited literally and strictly to this statement, was the one practical thing to which his will was clamped with adamantine obstinacy till his death. He would not be an Abbot; he would not be a Monk; he would not even be a Prior or ruler in his own fraternity; he would not be a prominent or important Friar; he would be a Friar. It is as if Napoleon had insisted on remaining a private soldier all his life. Something in this heavy, quiet, cultivated, rather academic gentleman would not be satisfied till he was, by fixed authoritative proclamation and official pronouncement, established and appointed to be a Beggar. It is all the more interesting because, while he did more than his duty a thousand times over, he was not at all like a Beggar; nor at all likely to be a good Beggar. He had nothing of the native vagabond about him, as had his great precursors; he was not born with something of the wondering minstrel, like St. Francis; or something of the tramping missionary, like St. Dominic. But he insisted upon putting himself under military orders, to do these things at the will of another, if required. He may be compared with some of the more magnanimous aristocrats who have enrolled themselves in revolutionary armies; or some of the best of the poets and scholars who volunteered as private soldiers in the Great War. Something in the courage and consistency of Dominic and Francis had challenged his deep sense of justice; and while remaining a very reasonable person, and even a diplomatic one, he never let anything shake the iron immobility of this one decision of his youth; nor was he to be turned from his tall and towering ambition to take the lowest place.

The first effect of his decision, as we have seen, was much more stimulating and even startling. The General of the Dominicans, under whom Thomas had enrolled himself, was probably well aware of the diplomatic attempts to dislodge him and the worldly difficulties of resisting them. His expedient was to take his young follower out of Italy altogether; bidding him proceed with a few other friars to Paris. There was something prophetic even about this first progress of the travelling teacher of the nations; for Paris was indeed destined to be in some sense the goal of his spiritual journey; since it was there that he was to deliver both his great defence of the Friars and his great defiance to the antagonists of Aristotle. But this his first journey to Paris was destined to be broken off very short indeed. The friars had reached a turn of the road by a wayside fountain, a little way north of Rome, when they were overtaken by a wild cavalcade of captors, who seized on Thomas like brigands, but who were in fact only rather needlessly agitated brothers. He had a large number of brothers: perhaps only two were here involved. Indeed he was the seventh; and friends of Birth Control may lament that this philosopher was needlessly added to the noble line of ruffians who kidnapped him. It was an odd affair altogether. There is something quaint and picturesque in the idea of kidnapping a begging friar, who might in a sense be called a runaway abbot. There is a comic and tragic tangle in the motives and purposes of such a trio of strange kinsmen. There is a sort of Christian cross-purposes in the contrast between the feverish illusion of the importance of things, always marking men who are called practical; and the much more practical pertinacity of the man who is called theoretical.

Thus at least did those three strange brethren stagger or trail along their tragic road, tied together, as it were, like criminal and constable; only that the criminals were making the arrest. So their figures are seen for an instant against the horizon of history; brothers as sinister as any since Cain and Abel. For this queer outrage in the great family of Aquino does really stand out symbolically, as representing something that will forever make the Middle Ages a mystery and a bewilderment; capable of sharply contrasted interpretations like darkness and light. For in two of those men there raged, we might say screamed, a savage pride of blood and blazonry of arms, though they were princes of the most refined world of their time, which would seem more suitable to a tribe dancing round a totem. For the moment they had forgotten everything except the name of a family, that is narrower than a tribe, and far narrower than a nation. And the third figure of that trio, born of the same mother and perhaps visibly one with the others in face or form, had a conception of brotherhood broader than most modern democracy, for it was not national but international; a faith in mercy and modesty far deeper than any mere mildness of manners in the modern world; and a drastic oath of poverty, which would now be counted quite a mad exaggeration of the revolt against plutocracy and pride. Out of the same Italian castle came two savages and one sage; or one saint more pacific than most modern sages. That is the double aspect confusing a hundred controversies. That is what makes the riddle of the medieval age; that it was not one age but two ages. We look into the moods of some men, and it might be the Stone Age; we look into the minds of other men, and they might be living in the Golden Age; in the most modern sort of Utopia. There were always good men and bad men; but in this time good men who were subtle lived with bad men who were simple. They lived in the same family; they were brought up in the same nursery; and they came out to struggle, as the brothers of Aquino struggled by the wayside, when they dragged the new friar along the road and shut him up in the castle on the hill.

When his relations tried to despoil him of his friar’s frock he seems to have laid about them in the fighting manner of his fathers, and it would seem successfully, since this attempt was abandoned. He accepted the imprisonment itself with his customary composure, and probably did not mind very much whether he was left to philosophise in a dungeon or in a cell. Indeed there is something in the way the whole tale is told, which suggests that through a great part of that strange abduction, he had been carried about like a lumbering stone statue. Only one tale told of his captivity shows him merely in anger; and that shows him angrier than he ever was before or after. It struck the imagination of his own time for more important reasons; but it has an interest that is psychological as well as moral. For once in his life, for the first time and the last, Thomas of Aquino was really hors de lui; riding a storm outside that tower of intellect and contemplation in which he commonly lived. And that was when his brothers introduced into his room some specially gorgeous and painted courtesan, with the idea of surprising him by a sudden temptation, or at least involving him in a scandal. His anger was justified, even by less strict moral standards than his own; for the meanness was even worse than the foulness of the expedient. Even on the lowest grounds, he knew his brothers knew, and they knew that he knew, that it was an insult to him as a gentleman to suppose that he would break his pledge upon so base a provocation; and he had behind him a far more terrible sensibility; all that huge ambition of humility which was to him the voice of God out of heaven. In this one flash alone we see that huge unwieldy figure in an attitude of activity, or even animation; and he was very animated indeed. He sprang from his seat and snatched a brand out of the fire, and stood brandishing it like a flaming sword. The woman not unnaturally shrieked and fled, which was all that he wanted; but it is quaint to think of what she must have thought of that madman of monstrous stature juggling with flames and apparently threatening to burn down the house. All he did, however, was to stride after her to the door and bang and bar it behind her; and then, with a sort of impulse of violent ritual, he rammed the burning brand into the door, blackening and blistering it with one big black sign of the cross. Then he returned, and dropped it again into the fire; and sat down on that seat of sedentary scholarship, that chair of philosophy, that secret throne of contemplation, from which he never rose again....

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JOB

THE Book of Job is among the other Old Testament Books both a philosophical riddle and a historical riddle. It is the philosophical riddle that concerns us in such an introduction as this; so we may dismiss first the few words of general explanation or warning which should be said about the historical aspect. Controversy has long raged about which parts of this epic belong to its original scheme and which are interpolations of considerably later date. The doctors disagree, as it is the business of doctors to do; but upon the whole the trend of investigation has always been in the direction of maintaining that the parts interpolated, if any, were the prose prologue and epilogue and possibly the speech of the young man who comes in with an apology at the end. I do not profess to be competent to decide such questions. But whatever decision the reader may come to concerning them, there is a general truth to be remembered in this connection. When you deal with any ancient artistic creation do not suppose that it is anything against it that it grew gradually. The Book of Job may have grown gradually just as Westminster Abbey grew gradually. But the people who made the old folk poetry, like the people who made Westminster Abbey, did not attach that importance to the actual date and the actual author, that importance which is entirely the creation of the almost insane individualism of modern times. We may put aside the case of Job, as one complicated with religious difficulties, and take any other, say the case of the Iliad. Many people have maintained the characteristic formula of modern scepticism, that Homer was not written by Homer, but by another person of the same name. Just in the same way many have maintained that Moses was not Moses but another person called Moses. But the thing really to be remembered in the matter of the Iliad is that if other people did interpolate the passages, the thing did not create the same sense of shock as would be created by such proceedings in these individualistic times. The creation of the tribal epic was to some extent regarded as a tribal work, like the building of the tribal temple. Believe then, if you will, that the prologue of Job and the epilogue and the speech of Elihu are things inserted after the original work was composed. But do not suppose that such insertions have that obvious and spurious character which would belong to any insertions in a modern individualistic book. Do not regard the insertions as you would regard a chapter in George

Meredith which you afterwards found had not been written by George Meredith, or half a scene in Ibsen which you found had been cunningly sneaked in by Mr. William Archer. Remember that this old world which made these old poems like the Iliad and Job, always kept the tradition of what it was making. A man could almost leave a poem to his son to be finished as he would have finished it, just as a man could leave a field to his son, to be reaped as he would have reaped it. What is called Homeric unity may be a fact or not. The Iliad may have been written by one man. It may have been written by a hundred men. But let us remember that there was more unity in those times in a hundred men than there is unity now in one man. Then a city was like one man. Now one man is like a city in civil war.

Without going, therefore, into questions of unity as understood by the scholars, we may say of the scholarly riddle that the book has unity in the sense that all great traditional creations have unity; in the sense that Canterbury Cathedral has unity. And the same is broadly true of what I have called the philosophical riddle. There is a real sense in which the Book of Job stands apart from most of the books included in the canon of the Old Testament. But here again those are wrong who insist on the entire absence of unity.

Those are wrong who maintain that the Old Testament is a mere loose library; that it has no consistency or aim. Whether the result was achieved by some supernal spiritual truth, or by a steady national tradition, or merely by an ingenious selection in after times, the books of the Old Testament have a quite perceptible unity. To attempt to understand the Old Testament without realizing this main idea is as absurd as it would be to study one of Shakespeare’s plays without realizing that the author of them had any philosophical object at all. It is as if a man were to read the history of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, thinking all the time that he was reading what really purported to be the history of an old Danish pirate prince. Such a reader would not realize at all that Hamlet’s procrastination was on the part of the poet intentional. He would merely say, “How long Shakespeare’s hero does take to kill his enemy.” So speak the Bible smashers, who are unfortunately always at bottom Bible worshippers. They do not understand the special tone and intention of the Old Testament; they do not understand its main idea, which is the idea of all men being merely the instruments of a higher power.

Those, for instance, who complain of the atrocities and treacheries of the judges and prophets of Israel have really got a notion in their head that has nothing to do with the subject. They are too Christian. They are reading back into the pre-Christian scriptures a purely Christian idea the idea of saints, the idea that the chief instruments of God are very particularly good men. This is a deeper, a more daring, and a more interesting idea than the old Jewish one. It is the idea that innocence has about it something terrible which in the long run makes and re-makes empires and the world. But the Old Testament idea was much more what may be called the common-sense idea, that strength is strength, that cunning is cunning, that worldly success is worldly success, and that Jehovah uses these things for His own ultimate purpose, just as He uses natural forces or physical elements. He uses the strength of a hero as He uses that of a Mammoth without any particular respect for the Mammoth. I cannot comprehend how it is that so many simple-minded sceptics have read such stories as the fraud of Jacob and supposed that the man who wrote it (whoever he was) did not know that Jacob was a sneak just as well as we do. The primeval human sense of honour does not change so much as that. But these simple-minded sceptics are, like the majority of modern sceptics, Christians. They fancy that the patriarchs must be meant for patterns; they fancy that Jacob was being set up as some kind of saint; and in that case I do not wonder that they are a little startled. That is not the atmosphere of the Old Testament at all. The heroes of the Old Testament are not the sons of God, but the slaves of God, gigantic and terrible slaves, like the genii, who were the slaves of Aladdin.

The central idea of the great part of the Old Testament may be called the idea of the loneliness of God. God is not the only chief character of the Old Testament; God is properly the only character in the Old Testament. Compared with His clearness of purpose all the other wills are heavy and automatic, like those of animals; compared with His actuality all the sons of flesh are shadows. Again and again the note is struck, “With whom hath he taken counsel?” “I have trodden the wine press alone, and of the peoples there was no man with me.” All the patriarchs and prophets are merely His tools or weapons; for the Lord is a man of war. He uses Joshua like an axe or Moses like a measuring-rod. For Him Samson is only a sword and Isaiah a trumpet. The saints of Christianity are supposed to be like God, to be, as it were, little statuettes of Him. The Old Testament hero is no more supposed to be of the same nature as God than a saw or a hammer is supposed to be of the same shape as the carpenter.

This is the main key and characteristic of the Hebrew scriptures as a whole. There are, indeed, in those scriptures innumerable instances of the sort of rugged humour, keen emotion, and powerful individuality which is never wanting in great primitive prose and poetry. Nevertheless the main characteristic remains; the sense not merely that God is stronger than man, not merely that God is more secret than man, but that He means more, that He knows better what He is doing, that compared with Him we have something of the vagueness, the unreason, and the vagrancy of the beasts that perish. “It is he that sitteth above the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers.” We might almost put it thus. The book is so intent upon asserting the personality of God that it almost asserts the impersonality of man. Unless this gigantic cosmic brain has conceived a thing, that thing is insecure and void; man has not enough tenacity to ensure its continuance. “Except the Lord build the house their labour is but lost that build it. Except the Lord keep the city the watchman watcheth but in vain.”

Everywhere else, then, the Old Testament positively rejoices in the obliteration of man in comparison with the divine purpose. The Book of Job stands definitely alone because the Book of Job definitely asks, “But what is the purpose of God? Is it worth the sacrifice even of our miserable humanity? Of course it is easy enough to wipe out our own paltry wills for the sake of a will that is grander and kinder? But is it grander and kinder? Let God use His tools; let God break His tools. But what is He doing and what are they being broken for?” It is because of this question that we have to attack as a philosophical riddle the riddle of the Book of Job.

The present importance of the Book of Job cannot be expressed adequately even by saying that it is the most interesting of ancient books. We may almost say of the Book of Job that it is the most interesting of modern books. In truth, of course, neither of the two phrases covers the matter, because fundamental human religion and fundamental human irreligion are both at once old and new; philosophy is either eternal or it is not philosophy. The modern habit of saying, “This is my opinion, but I may be wrong,” is entirely irrational. If I say that it may be wrong I say that is not my opinion. The modern habit of saying “Every man has a different philosophy; this is my philosophy and its suits me”; the habit of saying this is mere weak-mindedness. A cosmic philosophy is not constructed to fit a man; a cosmic philosophy is constructed to fit a cosmos. A man can no more possess a private religion than he can possess a private sun and moon. The first of the intellectual beauties of the Book of Job is that it is all concerned with this desire to know the actuality; the desire toknow what is, and not merely what seems. If moderns were writing the book we should probably find that Job and his comforters got on quite well together by the simple operation of referring their differences to what is called the temperament, saying that the comforters were by nature "optimists" and Job by nature a "pessimist." And they would be quite comfortable, as people can often be, for some time at least, by agreeing to say what is obviously untrue. For if the word "pessimist" means anything at all, then emphatically Job is not a pessimist. His case alone is sufficient to refute the modern absurdity of referring everything to physical temperament. Job does not in any sense look at life in a gloomy way. If wishing to be happy and being quite ready to be happy constitute an optimist, Job is an optimist. He is a perplexed optimist; he is an exasperated optimist; he is an outraged and insulted optimist. He wishes the universe to justify itself, not because he wishes it to be caught out, but because he really wishes it to be justified. He demands an explanation from God, but he does not do it at all in the spirit in which Hampden might demand an explanation from Charles I. He does it in the spirit in which a wife might demand an explanation from her husband whom she really respected. He remonstrates with his Maker because he is proud of his Maker. He even speaks of the Almighty as his enemy, but he never doubts, at the back of his mind, that his enemy has some kind of a case which he does not understand. In a fine and famous blasphemy he says, "Oh, that mine adversary had written a book!" It never really occurs to him that it could possibly be a bad book. He is anxious to be convinced, that is, he thinks that God could convince him. In short, we may say again that if the word optimist means any thing (which I doubt) Job is an optimist. He shakes the pillars of the world and strikes insanely at the heavens; he lashes the stars, but it is not to silence them; it is to make them speak. In the same way we may speak of the official optimists, the Comforters of Job. Again, if the word pessimist means anything (which I doubt) the comforters of Job may be called pessimists rather than optimists. All that they really believe is not that God is good but that God is so strong that it is much more judicious to call Him good. It would be the exaggeration of censure to call them evolutionists; but they have something of the vital error of the evolutionary optimist. They will keep on saying that everything in the universe fits into everything else: as if there were anything comforting about a number of nasty things all fitting into each other. We shall see later how God in the great climax of the poem turns this particular argument altogether upside down.

When, at the end of the poem, God enters (somewhat abruptly), is struck the sudden and splendid note which makes the thing as great as it is. All the human beings through the story, and Job especially, have been asking questions of God. A more trivial poet would have made God enter in some sense or other in order to answer the questions. By a touch truly to be called inspired, when God enters, it is to ask a number more questions on His own account. In this drama of scepticism God Himself takes up the role of sceptic. He does what all the great voices defending religion have always done. He does, for instance, what Socrates did. He turns rationalism against itself. He seems to say that if it comes to asking questions, He can ask some questions which will fling down and flatten out all conceivable human questioners. The poet by an exquisite intuition has made God ironically accept a kind of controversial equality with His accusers. He is willing to regard it as if it were a fair intellectual duel: “Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.” The everlasting adopts an enormous and sardonic humility. He is quite willing to be prosecuted. He only asks for the right which every prosecuted person possesses; He asks to be allowed to cross-examine the witness for the prosecution. And He carries yet further the correctness of the legal parallel. For the first question, essentially speaking, which He asks of Job is the question that any criminal accused by Job would be most entitled to ask. He asks Job who he is. And Job, being a man of candid intellect, takes a little time to consider, and comes to the conclusion that he does not know.

This is the first great fact to notice about the speech of God, which is the culmination of the inquiry. It represents all human sceptics routed by a higher scepticism. It is this method, used sometimes by supreme and sometimes by mediocre minds, that has ever since been the logical weapon of the true mystic. Socrates, as I have said, used it when he showed that if you only allowed him enough sophistry he could destroy all the sophists. Jesus Christ used it when He reminded the Sadducees, who could not imagine the nature of marriage in heaven, that if it came to that they had not really imagined the nature of marriage at all. In the break up of Christian theology in the eighteenth century, Butler used it, when he pointed out that rationalistic arguments could be used as much against vague religion as against doctrinal religion, as much against rationalist ethics as against Christian ethics. It is the root and reason of the fact that men who have religious faith have also philosophic doubt, like Cardinal Newman, Mr. Balfour, or Mr. Mallock. These are the small streams of the delta; the Book of Job is the first great cataract that creates the river. In dealing with the arrogant asserter of doubt, it is not the right method to tell him to stop doubting. It is rather the right method to tell him to go on doubting, to doubt a little more, to doubt every day newer and wilder things in the universe, until at last, by some strange enlightenment, he may begin to doubt himself. This, I say, is the first fact touching the speech; the fine inspiration by which God comes in at the end, not to answer riddles, but to propound them. The other great fact which, taken together with this one, makes the whole work religious instead of merely philosophical, is that other great surprise which makes Job suddenly satisfied with the mere presentation of something impenetrable. Verbally speaking the enigmas of Jehovah seem darker and more desolate than the enigmas of Job; yet Job was comfortless before the speech of Jehovah and is comforted after it. He has been told nothing, but he feels the terrible and tingling atmosphere of something which is too good to be told. The refusal of God to explain His design is itself a burning hint of His design. The riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man. Thirdly, of course, it is one of the splendid strokes that God rebukes alike the man who accused, and the men who defended Him; that He knocks down pessimists and optimists with the same hammer. And it is in connection with the mechanical and supercilious comforters of Job that there occurs the still deeper and finer inversion of which I have spoken. The mechanical optimist endeavours to justify the universe avowedly upon the ground that it is a rational and consecutive pattern. He points out that the fine thing about the world is that it can all be explained. That is the one point, if I may put it so, on which God in return, is explicit to the point of violence. God says, in effect, that if there is one fine thing about the world, as far as men are concerned, it is that it cannot be explained. He insists on the inexplicableness of everything; “Hath the rain a father? . . . Out of whose womb came the ice?” He goes farther, and insists on the positive and palpable unreason of things; “Hast thou sent the rain upon the desert where no man is, and upon the wilderness wherein there is no man?” God will make man see things, if it is only against the black background of nonentity. God will make Job see a startling universe if He can only do it by making Job see an idiotic universe. To startle man God becomes for an instant a blasphemer; one might almost say that God becomes for an instant an atheist. He unrolls before Job a long panorama of created things, the horse, the eagle, the raven, the wild ass, the peacock, the ostrich, the crocodile. He so describes each of them that it sounds like a monster walking in the sun. The whole is a sort of psalm or rhapsody of the sense of wonder. The maker of all things is astonished at the things He has Himself made. This we may call the third point. Job puts forward a note of interrogation; God answers with a note of exclamation. Instead of proving to Job that it is an explicable world, He insists that it is a much stranger world than Job ever thought it was. Lastly, the poet has achieved in this speech, with that unconscious artistic accuracy found in so many of the simpler epics, another and much more delicate thing. Without once relaxing the rigid impenetrability of Jehovah in His deliberate declaration, he has contrived to let fall here and therein the metaphors, in the parenthetical imagery, sudden and splendid suggestions that the secret of God is a bright and not a sad one semi-accidental suggestions, like light seen for an instant through the cracks of a closed door. It would be difficult to praise too highly, in a purely poetical sense, the instinctive exactitude and ease with which these more optimistic insinuations are let fall in other connections, as if the Almighty Himself were scarcely aware that He was letting them out. For instance, there is that famous passage where Jehovah with devastating sarcasm, asks Job where he was when the foundations of the world were laid, and then (as if merely fixing a date) mentions the time when the sons of God shouted for joy. One cannot help feeling, even upon this meagre information, that they must have had something to shout about. Or again, when God is speaking of snow and hail in the mere catalogue of the physical cosmos, He speaks of them as a treasury that He has laid up against the day of battle — a hint of some huge Armageddon in which evil shall be at last overthrown.

Nothing could be better, artistically speaking, than this optimism breaking through agnosticism like fiery gold round the edges of a black cloud. Those who look superficially at the barbaric origin of the epic may think it fanciful to read so much artistic significance into its casual similes or accidental phrases. But no one who is well acquainted with great examples of semi-barbaric poetry, as in the Song of Roland or the old ballads, will fall into this mistake. No one who knows what primitive poetry is, can fail to realize that while its conscious form is simple some of its finer effects are subtle. The Iliad contrives to express the idea that Hector and Sarpedon have a certain tone or tint of sad and chivalrous resignation, not bitter enough to be called pessimism and not jovial enough to be called optimism; Homer could never have said this in elaborate words. But somehow he contrives to say it in simple words. The Song of Roland contrives to express the idea that Christianity imposes upon its heroes a paradox: a paradox of great humility in the matter of their sins combined with great ferocity in the matter of their ideas. Of course the Song of Roland could not say this; but it conveys this. In the same way the Book of Job must be credited with many subtle effects which were in the author's soul without being, perhaps, in the author's mind. And of these by far the most important remains even yet to be stated. I do not know, and I doubt whether even scholars know, if the Book of Job had a great effect or had any effect upon the after development of Jewish thought. But if it did have any effect it may have saved them from an enormous collapse and decay. Here in this Book the question is really asked whether God invariably punishes vice with terrestrial punishment and rewards virtue with terrestrial prosperity. If the Jews had answered that question wrongly they might have lost all their after influence in human history. They might have sunk even down to the level of modern well educated society. For when once people have begun to believe that prosperity is the reward of virtue their next calamity is obvious. If prosperity is regarded as the reward of virtue it will be regarded as the symptom of virtue. Men will leave off the heavy task of making good men successful. They will adopt the easier task of making out successful men good. This, which has happened throughout modern commerce and journalism, is the ultimate Nemesis of the wicked optimism of the comforters of Job. If the Jews could be saved from it, the Book of Job saved them. The Book of Job is chiefly remarkable, as I have insisted throughout, for the fact that it does not end in a way that is conventionally satisfactory. Job is not told that his misfortunes were due to his sins or a part of any plan for his improvement.

But in the prologue we see Job tormented not because he was the worst of men, but because he was the best. It is the lesson of the whole work that man is most comforted by paradoxes. Here is the very darkest and strangest of the paradoxes; and it is by all human testimony the most reassuring. I need not suggest what a high and strange history awaited this paradox of the best man in the worst fortune. I need not say that in the freest and most philosophical sense there is one Old Testament figure who is truly a type; or say what is prefigured in the wounds of Job.

SOCIAL REFORM VERSUS BIRTH CONTROL

The real history of the world is full of the queerest cases of notions that have turned clean head-over-heels and completely contradicted themselves. The last example is an extraordinary notion that what is called Birth Control is a social reform that goes along with other social reforms favoured by progressive people.

It is rather like saying that cutting off King Charles' head was one of the most elegant of the Cavalier fashions in hair-dressing. It is like saying that decapitation is an advance on dentistry. It may or may not be right to cut off the King's head; it may or may not be right to cut off your own head when you have the toothache. But anybody ought to be able to see that if we once simplify things by head cutting we can do without hair-cutting; that it will be needless to practise dentistry on the dead or philanthropy on the unborn — or the unbegotten. So it is not a provision for our descendants to say that the destruction of our descendants will render it unnecessary to provide them with anything. It may be that it is only destruction in the sense of negation; and it may be that few of our descendants may be allowed to survive. But it is obvious that the negation is a piece of mere pessimism, opposing itself to the more optimistic notion that something can be done for the whole family of man. Nor is it surprising to anybody who can think, to discover that this is exactly what really happened.

The story began with Godwin, the friend of Shelley, and the founder of so many of the social hopes that are called revolutionary. Whatever we think of his theory in detail, he certainly filled the more generous youth of his time with that thirst for social justice and equality which is the inspiration of Socialism and other ideals. What is even more gratifying, he filled the wealthy old men of his time with pressing and enduring terror, and about three-quarters of the talk of Tories and Whigs of that time consists of sophistries and excuses invented to patch up a corrupt compromise of oligarchy against the appeal to fraternity and fundamental humanity made by men like Godwin and Shelley.

Malthus: An answer to Godwin

The old oligarchs would use any tool against the new democrats; and one day it was their dismal good luck to get hold of a tool called Malthus.

Malthus wrote avowedly and admittedly an answer to Godwin. His whole dreary book was only intended to be an answer to Godwin. Whereas Godwin was trying to show that humanity might be made happier and more humane, Malthus was trying to show that humanity could never by any possibility be made happier or more humane. The argument he used was this: that if the starving man were made tolerably free or fairly prosperous, he would marry and have a number of children, and there would not be food for all. The inference was, evidently, that he must be left to starve. The point about the increase of children he fortified by a fantastically mathematical formula about geometrical progression, which any living human being can dearly see is inapplicable to any living thing. Nothing depending on the human will can proceed by geometrical progression, and population certainly does not proceed by anything of the sort.

But the point is here, that Malthus meant his argument as an argument against all social reform. He never thought of using it as anything else, except an argument against all social reform. Nobody else ever thought in those more logical days of using it as anything but an argument against social reform. Malthus even used it as an argument against the ancient habit of human charity. He warned people against any generosity in the giving of alms. His theory was always thrown as cold water on any proposal to give the poor man property or a better status. Such is the noble story of the birth of Birth Control.

The only difference is this: that the old capitalists were more sincere and more scientific, while the modern capitalists are more hypocritical and more hazy. The rich man of l850 used it in theory for the oppression of the poor. The rich man of 1927 will only use it in practice for the oppression of the poor. Being incapable of theory, being indeed incapable of thought, he can only deal in two things: what he calls practicality and what I call sentimentality. Not being so much of a man as Malthus, he cannot bear to be a pessimist, so he becomes a sentimentalist. He mixes up this old plain brutal idea (that the poor must be forbidden to breed) with a lot of slipshod and sickly social ideals and promises which are flatly incompatible with it. But he is after all a practical man, and he will be quite as brutal as his forbears when it comes to practice. And the practical upshot of the whole thing is plain enough. If he can prevent his servants from having families, he need not support those families Why the devil should he?

A Simple Test

If anybody doubts that this is the very simple motive, let him test it by the very simple statements made by the various Birth-Controllers like the Dean of St. Paul’s. They never do say that we suffer from a too bountiful supply of bankers or that cosmopolitan financiers must not have such large families. They do not say that the fashionable throng at Ascot wants thinning, or that it is desirable to decimate the people dining at the Ritz or the Savoy. Though, Lord knows, if ever a thing human could look like a sub-human jungle, with tropical flowers and very poisonous weeds, it is the rich crowd that assembles in a modern Americanized hotel.

But the Birth-Controllers have not the smallest desire to control that jungle. It is much too dangerous a jungle to touch. It contains tigers. They never do talk about a danger from the comfortable classes, even from a more respectable section of the comfortable classes. The Gloomy Dean is not gloomy about there being too many Dukes; and naturally not about there being too many Deans. He is not primarily annoyed with a politician for having a whole population of poor relations, though places and public salaries have to be found for all the relations. Political Economy means that everybody except politicians must be economical.

The Birth-Controller does not bother about all these things, for the perfectly simple reason that it is not such people that he wants to control. What he wants to control is the populace, and he practically says so. He always insists that a workman has no right to have so many children, or that a slum is perilous because it is producing so many children. The question he dreads is “Why has not the workman a better wage? Why has not the slum family a better house?” His way of escaping from it is to suggest, not a larger house but a smaller family. The landlord or the employer says in his hearty and handsome fashion: “You really cannot expect me to deprive myself of my money. But I will make a sacrifice, I will deprive myself of your children.”

One of a Class

Meanwhile, as the Malthusian attack on democratic hopes slowly stiffened and strengthened all the reactionary resistance to reform in this country, other forces were already in the field. I may remark in passing that Malthus, and his sophistry against all social reform, did not stand alone. It was one of a whole class of scientific excuses invented by the rich as reasons for denying justice to the poor, especially when the old superstitious glamour about kings and nobles had faded in the nineteenth century. One was talking about the Iron Laws of Political Economy, and pretending that somebody had proved somewhere, with figures on a slate, that injustice is incurable. Another was a mass of brutal nonsense about Darwinism and a struggle for life, in which the devil must catch the hindmost. As a fact it was struggle for wealth, in which the devil generally catches the foremost. They all had the character of an attempt to twist the new tool of science to make it a weapon for the old tyranny of money.

But these forces, though powerful in a diseased industrial plutocracy. were not the only forces even in the nineteenth century. Towards the end of that century, especially on the Continent, there was another movement going on, notably among Christian Socialists and those called Catholic Democrats and others. There is no space to describe it here; its interest lies in being the exact reversal of the order of argument used by the Malthusian and the Birth-Controller. This movement was not content with the test of what is called a Living Wage. It insisted specially on what it preferred to call a Family Wage. In other words, it maintained that no wage is just or adequate unless it does envisage and cover the man, not only considered as an individual, but as the father of a normal and reasonably numerous family. This sort of movement is the true contrary of Birth Control and both will probably grow until they come into some tremendous controversial collision. It amuses me to reflect on that big coming battle, and to remember that the more my opponents practise Birth Control, the fewer there will be of them to fight us on that day.

The Conflict

What I cannot get my opponents in this matter to see, in the strange mental confusion that covers the question, is the perfectly simple fact that these two claims, whatever else they are, are contrary claims. At the very beginning of the whole discussion stands the elementary fact that limiting families is a reason for lowering wages and not a reason for raising them. You may like the limitation for other reasons, as you may dislike it for other reasons. You may drag the discussion off to entirely different questions, such as, whether wives in normal homes are slaves. You may compromise out of consideration for the employer or for some other reason, and meet him half-way by taking half a loaf or having half a family. But the claims are in principle opposite. It is the whole truth in that theory of the class war about which the newspapers talk such nonsense. The full claim of the poor would be to have what they considered a full-sized family. If you cut this down to suit wages you make a concession to fit the capitalist conditions. The practical application I shall mention in a moment; I am talking now about the primary logical contradiction. If the two methods can be carried out, they can be carried out so as to contradict and exclude each other. One has no need of the other; one can dispense with or destroy the other. If you can make the wage larger, there is no need to make the family smaller. If you can make the family small, there is no need to make the wage larger. Anyone may judge which the ruling capitalist will probably prefer to do. But if he does one, he need not do the other.

There is of course a great deal more to be said. I have dealt with only one feature of Birth Control — its exceedingly unpleasant origin. I said it was purely capitalist and reactionary; I venture to say I have proved it was entirely capitalist and reactionary. But there are many other aspects of this evil thing. It is unclean in the light of the instincts; it is unnatural in relation to the affections; it is part of a general attempt to run the populace on a routine of quack medicine and smelly science; it is mixed up with a muddled idea that women are free when they serve their employers but slaves when they help their husbands; it is ignorant of the very existence of real households where prudence comes by free-will and agreement. It has all those aspects, and many of them would be extraordinarily interesting to discuss. But in order not to occupy too much space, I will take as a text nothing more than the title.

A Piece of Humbug

The very name of “Birth Control” is a piece of pure humbug. It is one of those blatant euphemisms used in the headlines of the Trust Press. It is like “Tariff Reform.” It is like “Free Labour.” It is meant to mean nothing, that it may mean anything, and especially some thing totally different from what it says. Everybody believes in birth control, and nearly everybody has exercised some control over the conditions of birth. People do not get married as somnambulists or have children in their sleep. But throughout numberless ages and nations, the normal and real birth control is called self control. If anybody says it cannot is possibly work, I say it does. In many classes, in many countries where these quack nostrums are unknown, populations of free men have remained within reasonable limits by sound traditions of thrift and responsibility. In so far as there is a local evil of excess, it comes with all other evils from the squalor and despair of our decaying industrialism. But the thing the capitalist newspapers call birth control is not control at all. It is the idea that people should be, in one respect, completely and utterly uncontrolled, so long as they can evade everything in the function that is positive and creative, and intelligent and worthy of a free man. It is a name given to a succession of different expedients, (the one that was used last is always described as having been dreadfully dangerous) by which it is possible to filch the pleasure belonging to a natural process while violently and unnaturally thwarting the process itself.

The nearest and most respectable parallel would be that of the Roman epicure, who took emetics at intervals all day so that he might eat five or six luxurious dinners daily. Now any man's common sense, unclouded by newspaper science and long words, will tell him at once that an operation like that of the epicures is likely in the long run even to be bad for his digestion and pretty certain to be bad for his character. Men left to themselves gave sense enough to know when a habit obviously savours of perversion and peril. And if it were the fashion in fashionable circles to call the Roman expedient by the name of "Diet Control," and to talk about it in a lofty fashion as merely "the improvement of life and the service of life" (as if it meant no more than the mastery of man over his meals), we should take the liberty of calling it cant and saying that it had no relation to the reality in debate.

The Mistake

The fact is, I think, that I am in revolt against the conditions of industrial capitalism and the advocates of Birth Control are in revolt against the conditions of human life. What their spokesmen can possibly mean by saying that I wage a "class war against mothers" must remain a matter of speculation. If they mean that I do the unpardonable wrong to mothers of thinking they will wish to continue to be mothers, even in a society of greater economic justice and civic equality, then I think they are perfectly right. I doubt whether mothers could escape from motherhood into Socialism. But the advocates of Birth Control seem to want some of them to escape from it into capitalism. They seem to express a sympathy with those who prefer “the right to earn outside the home” or (in other words) the right to be a wage-slave and work under the orders of a total stranger because he happens to be a richer man. By what conceivable contortions of twisted thought this ever came to be considered a freer condition than that of companionship with the man she has herself freely accepted, I never could for the life of me make out. The only sense I can make of it is that the proletarian work, though obviously more senile and subordinate than the parental, is so far safer and more irresponsible because it is not parental. I can easily believe that there are some people who do prefer working in a factory to working in a family; for there are always some people who prefer slavery to freedom, and who especially prefer being governed to governing someone else. But I think their quarrel with motherhood is not like mine, a quarrel with inhuman conditions, but simply a quarrel with life. Given an attempt to escape from the nature of things, and I can well believe that it might lead at last to something like “the nursery school for our children staffed by other mothers and single women of expert training.”

I will add nothing to that ghastly picture, beyond speculating pleasantly about the world in which women cannot manage their own children but can manage each other’s. But I think it indicates an abyss between natural and unnatural arrangements which would have to be bridged before we approached what is supposed to be the subject of discussion.

The Criticism

Chesterton, 1930

MR. G. K. CHESTERTON AND MR. HILAIRE BELLOC by Robert Lynd

1. The Heavenly Twins

It was Mr. Shaw who, in the course of a memorable controversy, invented a fantastic pantomime animal, which he called the “Chester-Belloc.” Some such invention was necessary as a symbol of the literary comradeship of Mr. Hilaire Belloc and Mr. Gilbert Chesterton. For Mr. Belloc and Mr. Chesterton, whatever may be the dissimilarities in the form and spirit of their work, cannot be thought of apart from each other. They are as inseparable as the red and green lights of a ship: the one illumines this side and the other that, but they are both equally concerned with announcing the path of the good ship “Mediaevalism” through the dangerous currents of our times. Fifty years ago, when philology was one of the imaginative arts, it would have been easy enough to gain credit for the theory that they are veritable reincarnations of the Heavenly Twins going about the earth with corrupted names. Chesterton is merely English for Castor, and Belloc is Pollux transmuted into French. Certainly, if the philologist had also been an evangelical Protestant, he would have felt a double confidence in identifying the two authors with Castor and Pollux as the

Great Twin Brethren, Who fought so well for Rome.

A critic was struck some years ago by the propriety of the fact that Mr. Chesterton and Mr. Belloc brought out books of the same kind and the same size, through the same publisher, almost in the same week. Mr. Belloc, to be sure, called his volume of essays *This, That, and the Other*, and Mr. Chesterton called his *A Miscellany of Men.* But if Mr. Chesterton had called his book *This, That, and the Other* and Mr. Belloc had called his *A Miscellany of Men*, it would not have made a pennyworth of difference. Each book is simply a ragbag of essays — the riotous and fantastically joyous essays of Mr. Chesterton, the sardonic and arrogantly gay essays of Mr. Belloc. Each, however, has a unity of outlook, not only an internal unity, but a unity with the other. Each has the outlook of the mediaevalist spirit — the spirit which finds crusades and miracles more natural than peace meetings and the discoveries of science, which gives Heaven and Hell a place on the map of the world, which casts a sinister eye on Turks and Jews, which brings its gaiety to the altar as the tumbler in the story brought his cap and bells, which praises dogma and wine and the rule of the male, which abominates the scientific spirit, and curses the day on which Bacon was born. Probably, neither of the authors would object to being labelled a mediaevalist, except in so far as we all object to having labels affixed to us by other people. Mr. Chesterton's attitude on the matter, indeed, is clear from that sentence in *What's Wrong with the World*, in which he affirms: "Mankind has not passed through the Middle Ages. Rather mankind has retreated from the Middle Ages in reaction and rout." And if, on learning some of the inferences he makes from this, you protest that he is reactionary, and is trying to put back the hands of the clock, he is quite unashamed, and replies that the moderns "are always saying 'you can't put the clock back.' The simple and obvious answer is, 'You can.' A clock, being a piece of human construction, can be restored by the human finger to any figure or hour." The effrontery of an answer like that is so magnificent that it takes one's breath away. The chief difficulty of Mr. Chesterton and Mr. Belloc, however, seems to be that they want their clock to point to two different hours at the same time, neither of which happens to be the hour which the sun has just marked at Greenwich. They want it to point at once to 878 and 1789 — to Ethandune and the French Revolution.

Similar though they are in the revolutio-mediaevalist background of their philosophy, however, Mr. Chesterton and Mr. Belloc are as unlike as possible in the spirit in which they proclaim it. If Mr. Chesterton gets up on his box to prophesy against the times, he seems to do so out of a passionate and unreasoning affection for his fellows. If Mr. Belloc denounces the age, he seems also to be denouncing the human race. Mr. Chesterton is jovial and democratic; Mr. Belloc is (to some extent) saturnine and autocratic. Mr. Chesterton belongs to the exuberantly lovable tradition of Dickens; indeed, he is, in the opinion of many people, the most exuberantly lovable personality which has expressed itself in English literature since Dickens. Mr. Belloc, on the other hand, has something of the gleaming and solitary fierceness of Swift and Hazlitt. Mr. Chesterton's vision, coloured though it is with the colours of the past, projects itself generously into the future. He is foretelling the eve of the Utopia of the poor and the oppressed when he speaks of the riot that all good men, even the most conservative, really dream of, when the sneer shall be struck from the face of the well-fed; when the wine of honour shall be poured down the throat of despair; when we shall, so far as to the sons of flesh is possible, take tyranny, and usury, and public treason, and bind them into bundles, and burn them.

There is anger, as well as affection, in this eloquence — anger as of a new sort of knight thirsting to spill the blood of a new sort of barbarian in the name of Christ. Mr. Belloc’s attack on the barbarians lacks the charity of these fiery sentences. He concludes his essay on the scientific spirit, as embodied in Lombroso, for instance, with the words, “The Ass!” And he seems to sneer the insult where Mr. Chesterton would have roared it. Mr. Chesterton and he may be at one in the way in which they regard the scientific criminologists, eugenists, collectivists, pragmatists, post-impressionists, and most of the other “ists” of recent times, as an army of barbarians invading the territories of mediaeval Christendom. But while Mr. Chesterton is in the gap of danger, waving against his enemies the sword of the spirit, Mr. Belloc stands on a little height apart, aiming at them the more cruel shafts of the intellect. It is not that he is less courageous than Mr. Chesterton, but that he is more contemptuous. Here, for example, is how he meets the barbarian attack, especially as it is delivered by M. Bergson and his school: —

In its most grotesque form, it challenges the accuracy of mathematics; in its most vicious, the processes of the human reason. The Barbarian is as proud as a savage in a top hat when he talks of the elliptical or the hyperbolic universe, and tries to picture parallel straight lines converging or diverging — but never doing anything so vulgarly old-fashioned as to remain parallel.

The Barbarian, when he has graduated to be a “pragmatist,” struts like a nigger in evening clothes, and believes himself superior to the gift of reason, etc., etc.

It would be unfair to offer this passage as an example of Mr. Belize’s dominating genius, but it is an excellent example of his domineering temper. His genius and his temper, one may add, seem, in these essays, to, be always trying to climb on one another’s shoulders, and it is when his genius gets uppermost that he becomes one of the most biting and exhilarating writers of his time. On such occasions his malice ceases to be a talent, and rises into an enthusiasm, as in *The Servants of the Rich*, where, like a mediaeval bard, he shows no hesitation in housing his enemies in the circles of Hell. His gloating proclamation of the eternal doom of the rich men’s servants is an infectious piece of humour, at once grim and irresponsible: —

Their doom is an eternal sleeplessness and a nakedness in the gloom.... These are those men who were wont to come into the room of the Poor Guest at early morning, with a steadfast and assured step, and a look of insult. These are those who would take the tattered garments and hold them at arm’s length, as much as to say: “What rags these scribblers wear!” and then, casting them over the arm, with a gesture that meant: “Well, they must be brushed, but Heaven knows if they will stand it without coming to pieces!” would next discover in the pockets a great quantity of middle-class things, and notably loose tobacco....

... Then one would see him turn one’s socks inside out, which is a ritual with the horrid tribe. Then a great bath would be trundled in, and he would set beside it a great can, and silently pronounce the judgment that, whatever else was forgiven the middle-class, one thing would not be forgiven them — the neglect of the bath, of the splashing about of the water, and of the adequate wetting of the towel.

All these things we have suffered, you and I, at their hands. But be comforted. They writhe in Hell with their fellows.

Mr. Belloc is not one of those authors who can be seen at their best in quotations, but even the mutilated fragment just given suggests to some extent the mixture of gaiety and malice that distinguishes his work from the work of any of his contemporaries. His gifts run to satire, as Mr. Chesterton’s run to imaginative argument. It is this, perhaps, which accounts for the fact that, of these two authors, who write with their heads in the Middle Ages, it is Mr. Chesterton who is the more comprehensive critic of his own times. He never fights private, but always public, battles in his essays. His mediaevalism seldom degenerates into a prejudice, as it often does with Mr. Belloc. It represents a genuine theory of the human soul, and of human freedom. He laments as he sees men exchanging the authority of a spiritual institution, like the Church, for the authority a carnal institution, like a bureaucracy. He rages as he sees them abandoning charters that gave men rights, and accepting charters that only give them prohibitions. It has been the custom for a long time to speak of Mr. Chesterton as an optimist; and there was, indeed, a time when he was so rejoiced by the discovery that the children of men were also the children of God, that he was as aggressively cheerful as Whitman and Browning rolled into one. But he has left all that behind him. The insistent vision of a world in full retreat from the world of Alfred and Charlemagne and the saints and the fight for Jerusalem — from this and the allied world of Danton and Robespierre, and the rush to the Bastille — has driven him back upon a partly well-founded and partly ill-founded Christian pessimism. To him it now seems as if Jerusalem had captured the Christians rather than the Christians Jerusalem. He sees men rushing into Bastilles, not in order to tear them down, but in order to inhabit the accursed cells.

When I say that this pessimism is partly ill-founded, I mean that it is arrived at by comparing the liberties of the Middle Ages with the tyrannies of to-day, instead of by comparing the liberties of the Middle Ages with the liberties of to-day, or the tyrannies of the Middle Ages with the tyrannies of to-day. It is the result, sometimes, of playing with history and, sometimes, of playing with words. Is it not playing with words, for instance, to glorify the charters by which medieval kings guaranteed the rights and privileges of their subjects, and to deny the name of charter to such a law as that by which a modern State guarantees some of the rights and privileges of children — to deny it simply on the ground that the latter expresses itself largely in prohibitions? It may be necessary to forbid a child to go into a gin-palace in order to secure it the privilege of not being driven into a gin-palace. Prohibitions are as necessary to human liberty as permits and licences.

At the same time, quarrel as we may with Mr. Chesterton’s mediaevalism, and his application of it to modern problems, we can seldom quarrel with the motive with which he urges it upon us. His high purpose throughout is to keep alive the human view of society, as opposed to the mechanical view to which lazy politicians are naturally inclined. If he has not been able to give us any very, coherent vision of a Utopia of his own, he has, at least, done the world a service in dealing some smashing blows at the Utopia of machinery. None the less, he and Mr. Belloc would be the most dangerous of writers to follow in a literal obedience. In regard to political and social improvements, they are too often merely Devil’s Advocates of genius. But that is a necessary function, and they are something more than that. As I have suggested, above all the arguments and the rhetoric and the humours of the little political battles, they do bear aloft a banner with a strange device, reminding us that organized society was made for man, and not man for organized society. That, in the last analysis, is the useful thing for which Mr. Chesterton and Mr. Belloc stand in modern politics. It almost seems at times, however, as though they were ready to see us bound again with the fetters of ancient servitudes, in order to compel us to take part once more in the ancient struggle for freedom.

2. The Copiousness of Mr. Belloc

Mr. Belloc has during the last four or five years become a public man. Before that he had been acknowledged a man of genius. But even the fact that he had sat in the House of Commons never led any great section of Englishmen to regard him as a figure or an institution. He was generally looked on as one who made his bed aggressively among heretics, as a kind of Rabelaisian dissenter, as a settled interrupter, half-rude and half-jesting. And yet there was always in him something of the pedagogue who has been revealed so famously in these last months. Not only had he a passion for facts and for stringing facts upon theories. He had also a high-headed and dogmatic and assured way of imparting his facts and theories to the human race as it sat — or in so far as it could be persuaded to sit — on its little forms.

It is his schoolmasterishness which chiefly distinguishes the genius of Mr. Belloc from the genius of his great and uproarious comrade, Mr. Chesterton. Mr. Belloc is not a humorist to anything like the same degree as Mr. Chesterton. If Mr. Chesterton were a schoolmaster he would give all the triangles noses and eyes, and he would turn the Latin verbs into nonsense rhymes. Humour is his breath and being. He cannot speak of the Kingdom of Heaven or of Robert Browning without it any more than of asparagus. He is a laughing theologian, a laughing politician, a laughing critic, a laughing philosopher. He retains a fantastic cheerfulness even amid the blind furies — and how blindly furious he can sometimes be! — of controversy. With Mr. Belloc, on the other hand, laughter is a separate and relinquishable gift. He can at will lay aside the mirth of one who has broken bounds for the solemnity of the man in authority. He can be scapegrace prince and sober king by turns, and in such a way that the two personalities seem scarcely to be related to each other. Compared with Mr. Chesterton he is like a man in a mask, or a series of masks. He reveals more of his intellect to the world than of his heart. He is not one of those authors whom one reads with a sense of personal intimacy. He is too arrogant even in his merriment for that.

Perhaps the figure we see reflected most obtrusively in his works is that of a man delighting in immense physical and intellectual energies. It is this that makes him one of the happiest of travellers. On his travels, one feels, every inch and nook of his being is intent upon the passing earth. The world is to him at once a map and a history and a poem and a church and an ale-house. The birds in the greenwood, the beer, the site of an old battle, the meaning of an old road, sacred emblems by the roadside, the comic events of way-faring — he has an equal appetite for them all. Has he not made a perfect book of these things, with a thousand fancies added, in *The Four Men*? In *The Four Men* he has written a travel-book which more than any other of his works has something of the passion of a personal confession. Here the pilgrim becomes nearly genial as he indulges in his humours against the rich and against policemen and in behalf of Sussex against Kent and the rest of the inhabited world.

Mr. Chesterton has spoken of Mr. Belloc as one who “did and does humanly and heartily love England, not as a duty but as a pleasure, and almost an indulgence.” And *The Four Men* expresses this love humorously, inconsequently, and with a grave stepping eloquence. There are few speeches in modern books better than the conversations in *The Four Men.* Mr. Belloc is not one of those disciples of realism who believe that the art of conversation is dead, and that modern people are only capable of addressing each other in one-line sentences. He has the traditional love of the fine speech such as we find it in the ancient poets and historians and dramatists and satirists. He loves a monologue that passes from mockery to regret, that gathers up by the way anecdote and history and essay and foolery, that is half a narrative of things seen and half an irresponsible imagination. He can describe a runaway horse with the farcical realism of the authors of *Some Experiences of an Irish R.M.*, can parody a judge, can paint a portrait, and can steep a landscape in vision. Two recent critics have described him as “the best English prose writer since Dryden,” but that only means that Mr. Belloc’s rush of genius has quite naturally swept them off their feet.

If Mr. Belloc's love of country is an indulgence, his moods of suspicion and contempt are something of the same kind. He is nothing of a philanthropist in any sense of the word. He has no illusions about the virtue of the human race. He takes pleasure in scorn, and there is a flavour of bitterness in his jests. His fiction largely belongs to the comedy of corruption. He enjoys — and so do we — the thought of the poet in Sussex who had no money except three shillings, "and a French penny, which last some one had given him out of charity, taking him for a beggar a little way-out of Brightling that very day." When he describes the popular rejoicings at the result of Mr. Clutterbuck's election, he comments: "The populace were wild with joy at their victory, and that portion of them who as bitterly mourned defeat would have been roughly handled had they not numbered quite half this vast assembly of human beings." He is satirist and ironist even more than historian. His ironical essays are the best of their kind that have been written in recent years.

Mr. Mandell and Mr. Shanks in their little study, *Hilaire Belloc: the Man and his Work*, are more successful in their exposition of Mr. Belloc's theory of history and the theory of politics which has risen out of it — or out of which it has risen — than they are in their definition of him as a man of letters. They have written a lively book on him, but they do not sufficiently communicate an impression of the kind of his exuberance, of his thrusting intellectual ardour, of his pomp as a narrator, of his blind and doctrinaire injustices, of his jesting like a Roman Emperor's, of the strength of his happiness upon a journey, of his buckishness, of the queer lack of surprising phrases in his work, of his measured omniscience, of the immense weight of tradition in the manner of his writing. There are many contemporary writers whose work seems to be a development of journalism. Mr. Belloc's is the child of four literatures, or, maybe, half a dozen. He often writes carelessly, sometimes dully but there is the echo of greatness in his work. He is one of the few contemporary men of genius whose books are under-estimated rather than over-estimated. He is an author who has brought back to the world something of the copiousness, fancy, appetite, power, and unreason of the talk that, one imagines, was once to be heard in the Mermaid Tavern.

3. The Two Mr. Chestertons

I cannot help wishing at times that Mr. Chesterton could be divided in two. One half of him I should like to challenge to mortal combat as an enemy of the human race. The other half I would carry shoulder-high through the streets. For Mr. Chesterton is at once detestable and splendid. He is detestable as a doctrinaire: he is splendid as a sage and a poet who juggles with stars and can keep seven of them in the air at a time. For, if he is a gamester, it is among the lamps of Heaven. We can see to read by his sport. He writes in flashes, and hidden and fantastic truths suddenly show their faces in the play of his sentences.

Unfortunately, his two personalities have become so confused that his later books sometimes strike one as being not so much a game played with light as a game of hide-and-seek between light and darkness. In the darkness he mutters incantations to the monstrous tyrannies of old time: in the light he is on his knees to liberty. He vacillates between superstition and faith. His is a genius at once enslaved and triumphantly rebel. This fatal duality is seen again and again in his references to the tyrannies of the Middle Ages. Thus he writes: “It need not be repeated that the case despotism is democratic. As a rule its cruelty to the strong is kindness to the weak.” I confess I do not know the “rule” to which Mr. Chesterton refers. The picture of the despot as a good creature who shields the poor from the rich is not to be found among the facts of history. The ordinary despot, in his attitude to the common people suffering from the oppressions of their lords, is best portrayed in the fable — if it be a fable — of Marie Antoinette and her flippancy about eating cake.

I fancy, however, Mr. Chesterton’s defence of despots is not the result of any real taste for them or acquaintance with their history: it is due simply to his passion for extremes. He likes a man, as the vulgar say, to be either one thing or the other. You must be either a Pope or a revolutionist to please him. He loves the visible rhetoric of things, and the sober suits of comfortable citizens seem dull and neutral in comparison with the red of cardinals on the one hand, and of caps of liberty on the other. This, I think, explains Mr. Chesterton’s indifference to, if not dislike of, Parliaments. Parliaments are monuments of compromise, and are guilty of the sin of unpicturesqueness. One would imagine that a historian of England who did not care for Parliaments would be as hopelessly out of his element as a historian of Greece who did not care for the arts. And it is because Mr. Chesterton is indifferent to so much in the English genius and character that he has given us in his recent short *History of England*, instead of a History of England, a wild and wonderful pageant of argument. “Already,” he cries, as he relates how Parliament “certainly encouraged, and almost certainly obliged” King Richard to break his pledge to the people after the Wat Tyler insurrection: —

Already Parliament is not merely a governing body, but a governing class.

The history of England is to Mr. Chesterton largely the history of the rise of the governing class. He blames John Richard Green for leaving the people out of his history; but Mr. Chesterton himself has left out the people as effectually as any of the historians who went before him. The obsession of “the governing class” has thrust the people into the background. History resolves itself with him into a disgraceful epic of a governing class which despoiled Pope and King with the right hand, and the people with the left. It is a disgraceful epic patched with splendid episodes, but it culminates in an appalling cry of doubt whether, after all, it might not be better for England to perish utterly in the great war while fighting for liberty than to survive to behold the triumph of the “governing class” in a servile State of old-age pensions and Insurance Acts.

This theory of history, as being largely the story of the evolution of the “governing class,” is an extremely interesting and even “fruitful” theory. But it is purely fantastic unless we bear in mind that the governing class has been continually compelled to enlarge itself, and that its tendency is reluctantly to go on doing so until in the end it will be coterminous with the “governed class.” History is a tale of exploitation, but it is also a tale of liberation, and the over-emphasis that Mr. Chesterton lays on exploitation by Parliaments as compared with exploitation by Popes and Kings, can only be due to infidelity in regard to some of the central principles of freedom. Surely it is possible to condemn the Insurance Act, if it must be condemned, without apologizing either for the Roman Empire or for the Roman ecclesiastical system. Mr. Chesterton, however, believes in giving way to one’s prejudices. He says that history should be written backwards; and what does this mean but that it should be dyed in prejudice? thus, he cannot refer to the Hanoverian succession without indulging in a sudden outburst of heated rhetoric such as one might expect rather in a leading article in war-time. He writes: —

With George there entered England something that had scarcely been seen there before; something hardly mentioned in mediaeval or Renascence writing, except as one mentions a Hottentot — the barbarian from beyond the Rhine.

Similarly, his characterization of the Revolution of 1688 is largely a result of his dislike of the governing classes at the present hour: —

The Revolution reduced us to a country wholly governed by gentlemen; the popular universities and schools of the Middle Ages, like their guilds and abbeys, had been seized and turned into what they are — factories of gentlemen when they are not merely factories of snobs.

Both of these statements contain a grain of truth, but neither of them contains enough truth to be true. One might describe them as sweetmeats of history of small nutritious value. One might say the same of his comment on the alliance between Chatham and Frederick the Great: —

The cannibal theory of a commonwealth, that it can of its nature eat other commonwealths, had entered Christendom.

How finely said! But, alas! the cannibal theory of a commonwealth existed long before Chatham and Frederick the Great. The instinct to exploit is one of the most venerable instincts of the human race, whether in individual men or in nations of men; and ancient Hebrew and ancient Greek and ancient Roman had exhausted the passion of centuries in obedience to it before the language spoken either by Chatham or by Frederick was born. Christian Spain, Christian France, and Christian England had not in this matter disowned the example of their Jewish and Pagan forerunners.

What we are infinitely grateful to Mr. Chesterton for, however, is that he has sufficient imagination to loathe cannibalism wherever he sees it. True, he seems to forgive certain forms of cannibalism on the ground that it is an exaggeration to describe the flesh of a rich man as the flesh of a human being. But he does rage with genius at the continual eating of men that went on in England, especially after the spoliation of the monasteries in the reign of Henry the Eighth gave full scope to the greed of the strong. He sees that the England which Whig and Tory combined to defend as the perfection of the civilized world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was an England governed by men whose chief claim to govern was founded on the fact that they had seized their country and were holding it against their countrymen. Mr. Chesterton rudely shatters the mirror of perfection in which the possessing class have long seen themselves. He writes in a brilliant passage: —

It could truly be said of the English gentleman, as of another gallant and gracious individual, that his honour stood rooted in dishonour. He was, indeed, somewhat in the position of such an aristocrat of romance, whose splendour has the dark spot of a secret and a sort of blackmail.... His glory did not come from the Crusades, but from the Great Pillage.... The oligarchs were descended from usurers and thieves. That, for good or evil, was the paradox of England; the typical aristocrat was the typical upstart.

But the secret was worse; not only was such a family founded on stealing, but the family was stealing still. It is a grim truth that, all through the eighteenth century, all through the great Whig speeches about liberty, all through the great Tory speeches about patriotism, through the period of Wandiwash and Plassey, through the period of Trafalgar and Waterloo, one process was steadily going on in the central senate of the nation. Parliament was passing Bill after Bill for the enclosure by the great landlords of such of the common lands as had survived out of the great communal system of the Middle Ages. It is much more than a pun, it is the prime political irony of our history that the Commons were destroying the commons.

It would be folly to suggest, however, that, conscious though Mr. Chesterton is of the crimes of history, he has turned history into a mere series of floggings of criminals. He is for ever laying down the whip and inviting the criminals to take their seats while he paints gorgeous portraits of them in all the colours of the rainbow. His praise of the mighty rhetoricians of the eighteenth century could in some passages scarcely be more unstinted if he were a Whig of the Whigs. He cannot but admire the rotund speech and swelling adventures of those days. If we go farther back, we find him portraying even the Puritans with a strange splendour of colour: —

They were, above all things, anti-historic, like the Futurists in Italy; and there was this unconscious greatness about them, that their very sacrilege was public and solemn, like a sacrament; and they were ritualists even as iconoclasts. It was, properly considered, but a very secondary example of their strange and violent simplicity that one of them, before a mighty mob at Whitehall, cut off the anointed head of the sacramental man of the Middle Ages. For another, far away in the western shires, cut down the thorn of Glastonbury, from which had grown the whole story of Britain.

This last passage is valuable, not only because it reveals Mr. Chesterton as a marvellous rhetorician doing the honours of prose to his enemies, but because it helps to explain the essentially tragic view he takes of English history. I exaggerated a moment ago when I said that to Mr. Chesterton English history is the story of the rise of a governing class. What it really is to him is the story of a thorn-bush cut down by a Puritan. He has hung all the candles of his faith on the sacred thorn, like the lights on a Christmas-tree, and lo! it has been cut down and cast out of England with as little respect as though it were a verse from the Sermon on the Mount. It may be that Mr. Chesterton's sight is erratic, and that what he took to be the sacred thorn was really a Upas-tree. But in a sense that does not matter. He is entitled to his own fable, if he tells it honestly and beautifully; and it is as a tragic fable or romance of the downfall of liberty in England that one reads his *History*. He himself contends in the last chapter of the book that the crisis in English history came "with the fall of Richard II, following on his failures to use mediaeval despotism in the interests of mediaeval democracy." Mr. Chesterton's history would hardly be worth reading, if he had made nothing more of it than is suggested in that sentence. His book (apart from occasional sloughs of sophistry and fallacious argument) remains in the mind as a song of praise and dolour chanted by the imagination about an England that obeyed not God and despised the Tree of Life, but that may yet, he believes, hear once more the ancestral voices, and with her sons arrayed in trade unions and guilds, march riotously back into the Garden of Eden.

G. K. CHESTERTON, A CRITICAL STUDY by Julius West

I have to express my gratitude to Messrs. Burns and Oates, Messrs. Methuen and Co., and Mr. Martin Seeker for their kind permission to quote from works by Mr. G. K. Chesterton published by them. I have also to express my qualified thanks to Mr. John Lane for his conditional permission to quote from books by the same author published by him. My thanks are further due, for a similar reason, to Mr. Chesterton himself.

TO
J. C. SQUIRE

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I

INTRODUCTORY

The habit, to which we are so much addicted, of writing books about other people who have written books, will probably be a source of intense discomfort to its practitioners in the twenty-first century. Like the rest of their kind, they will pin their ambition to the possibility of indulging in epigram at the expense of their contemporaries. In order to lead up to the achievement of this desire they will have to work in the nineteenth century and the twentieth. Between the two they will find an obstacle of some terror. The eighteen nineties will lie in their path, blocking the way like an unhealthy moat, which some myopes might almost mistake for an aquarium. All manner of queer fish may be discerned in these unclear waters.

To drop the metaphor, our historians will find themselves confronted by a startling change. The great Victorians write no longer, but are succeeded by eccentrics. There is Kipling, undoubtedly the most gifted of them all, but not everybody’s darling for all that. There is that prolific trio of best-sellers, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Miss Marie Corelli, and Mr. Hall Caine. There is Oscar Wilde, who has a vast reputation on the Continent, but never succeeded in convincing the British that he was much more than a compromise between a joke and a smell. There is the whole Yellow Book team, who never succeeded in convincing anybody. The economic basis of authorship had been shaken by the abolition of the three-volume novel. The intellectual basis had been lulled to sleep by that hotchpotch of convention and largeness that we call the Victorian Era. Literature began to be an effort to express the inexpressible, resulting in outraged grammar and many dots. . . .

English literature at the end of the last century stood in sore need of some of the elementary virtues. If obviousness and simplicity are liable to be overdone, they are not so deadly in their after-effects as the bizarre and the extravagant. The literary movement of the eighteen nineties was like a strong stimulant given to a patient dying of old age. Its results were energetic, but the energy was convulsive. We should laugh if we saw a man apparently dancing in mid-air — until we noticed the rope about his neck. It is impossible to account for the success of the Yellow Book school and its congeners save on the assumption that the rope was, generally speaking, invisible.

In this Year of Grace, 1915, we are still too close to the eighteen nineties, still too liable to be influenced by their ways, to be able to speak for posterity and to pronounce the final judgment upon those evil years. It is possible that the critics of the twenty-first century, as they turn over the musty pages of the Yellow Book, will ejaculate with feeling: "Good God, what a dull time these people must have had!" On the whole it is probable that this will be their verdict. They will detect the dullness behind the mechanical brilliancy of Oscar Wilde, and recognize the strange hues of the whole Æsthetic Movement as the garments of men who could not, or would not see. There is really no rational alternative before our critics of the next century; if the men of the eighteen nineties, and the queer things they gave us, were not the products of an intense boredom, if, in strict point of fact, Wilde, Beardsley, Davidson, Hankin, Dowson, and Lionel Johnson were men who rollicked in the warm sunshine of the late Victorian period, then the suicide, drunkenness and vice with which they were afflicted is surely the strangest phenomenon in the history of human nature. To many people, those years actually were dull.

The years from 1885 to 1898 were like the hours of afternoon in a rich house with large rooms; the hours before teatime. They believed in nothing except good manners; and the essence of good manners is to conceal a yawn. A yawn may be defined as a silent yell.

So says Chesterton, yawning prodigiously.

One may even go farther, and declare that in those dark days a yawn was the true sign of intelligence. It is no mere coincidence that the two cleverest literary debutants of that last decade, Mr. Max Beerbohm and the subject of this essay, both stepped on the stage making a pretty exhibition of boredom. When the first of these published, in 1896, being then twenty-four years old, his Works of Max Beerbohm he murmured in the preface, "I shall write no more. Already I begin to feel myself a trifle outmoded. . . . Younger men, with months of activity before them . . . have pressed forward. . . . *Cedo junioribus.*"

So too, when Chesterton produced his first book, four years later, he called it *Greybeards at Play: Literature and Art for Old Gentlemen*, and the dedication contained this verse:

Now we are old and wise and grey,
And shaky at the knees;
Now is the true time to delight
In picture books like these.

The joke would have been pointless in any other age. In 1900, directed against the crapulous exoticism of contemporary literature, it was an antidote, childhood was being used as a medicine against an assumed attack of second childhood. The attack began with nonsense rhymes and pictures. It was a complete success from the very first. There is this important difference between the writer of nonsense verses and their illustrator; the former must let himself go as much as he can, the latter must hold himself in. In *Greybeards at Play*, Chesterton took the bit between his teeth, and bolted faster than Edward Lear had ever done. The antitheses of such verses as the following are irresistible:

For me, as Mr. Wordsworth says,
The duties shine like stars;
I formed my uncle’s character,
Decreasing his cigars.

Or

The Shopmen, when their souls were still,
Declined to open shops —
And cooks recorded frames of mind,
In sad and subtle chops.

The drawings which accompanied these gems, it may be added, were such as the verses deserved. They exhibit a joyous inconsistency, the disproportion which is the essence of parody combined with the accuracy which is the *sine qua non* of satire.

About a month after Chesterton had produced his statement of his extreme senility (the actual words of the affidavit are

I am, I think I have remarked, [he had not],
Terrifically old.)

he published another little book, *The Wild Knight and Other Poems*, as evidence of his youth. For some years past he had occasionally written more or less topical verses which appeared in The Outlook and the defunct Speaker. *Greybeards at Play* was, after all, merely an elaborate sneer at the boredom of a decade; the second book was a more definite attack upon some points of its creeds and an assertion of the principles which mattered most.

There is one sin: to call a green leaf grey,
Whereat the sun in heaven shuddereth.
There is one blasphemy: for death to pray,
For God alone knoweth the praise of death.

Or again (*The World's Lover*)

I stood and spoke a blasphemy —
“Behold the summer leaves are green.”

It was a defence of reality, crying for vengeance upon the realists. The word realism had come to be the trade-mark of Zola and his followers, especially of Mr. George Moore, who made a sacrifice of nine obvious, clean and unsinkable aspects of life so as to concentrate upon the submersible tenth. Chesterton came out with his defence of the common man, of the streets

Where shift in strange democracy
The million masks of God,

the grass, and all the little things of life, “things” in general, for our subject, alone among modern poets, is not afraid to use the word. If on one occasion he can merely

. . . feel vaguely thankful to the vast
Stupidity of things,

on another he will speak of
The whole divine democracy of things,

a line which is a challenge to the unbeliever, a statement of a political creed which is the outgrowth of a religious faith.

The same year Chesterton formally stepped into the ranks of journalism and joined the staff of The Daily News. He had scribbled poems since he had been a boy at St. Paul's School. In the years following he had watched other people working at the Slade, while he had gone on scribbling. Then he had begun to do little odd jobs of art criticism and reviewing for The Bookman and put in occasional appearances in the statelier columns of The Speaker. Then came the Boer War, which made G. K. Chesterton lose his temper but find his soul. In 1900 The Daily News passed into new hands — the hands of G. K.C.'s friends. And until 1913, when the causes he had come to uphold were just diametrically opposed to the causes the victorious Liberal Party had adopted, every Saturday morning's issue of that paper contained an article by him, while often enough there appeared signed reviews and poems. The situation was absurd enough. The Daily News was the organ of Nonconformists, and G. K.C. preached orthodoxy to them. It advocated temperance, and G. K.C. advocated beer. At first this was sufficiently amusing, and nobody minded much. But before Chesterton severed his connection with the paper, its readers had come to expect a weekly article that almost invariably contained an attack upon one of their pet beliefs, and often enough had to be corrected by a leader on the same page. But the Chesterton of 1900 was a spokesman of the Liberalism of his day, independent, not the intractable monster who scoffed, a few years later, at all the parties in the State.

At this point one is reminded of Watts-Dunton's definition of the two kinds of humour in The Renascence of Wonder: "While in the case of relative humour that which amuses the humorist is the incongruity of some departure from the laws of convention, in the case of absolute humour it is the incongruity of some departure from the normal as fixed by nature herself." We have our doubts as to the general application of this definition: but it applies so well to Chesterton that it might almost have come off his study walls. What made a series of more than six hundred articles by him acceptable to The Daily News was just the skilful handling of "the laws of convention," and "the normal as fixed by nature herself." On the theory enunciated by Watts-Dunton, everything except the perfect average is absolutely funny, and the perfect average, of course, is generally an incommensurable quantity. Chesterton carefully made it his business to present the eccentricity — I use the word in its literal sense — of most things, and the humour followed in accordance with the above definition. The method was simple. Chesterton invented some grotesque situation, some hypothesis which was glaringly absurd. He then placed it in an abrupt juxtaposition with the normal, instead of working from the normal to the actual, in the usual manner. Just as the reader was beginning to protest against the reversal of his accustomed values, G. K.C. would strip the grotesque of a few inessentials, and, lo! a parable. A few strokes of irony and wit, an epigram or two infallibly placed where it would distract attention from a weak point in the argument, and the thing was complete. By such means Chesterton developed the use of a veritable Excalibur of controversy, a tool of great might in political journalism. These methods, pursued a few years longer, taught him a craftsmanship he could employ for purely romantic ends. How he employed it, and the opinions which he sought to uphold by its means will be the subjects of the following chapters. Chesterton sallied forth like a Crusader against the political and literary Turks who had unjustly come into possession of a part of the heritage of a Christian people. We must not forget that the leading characteristic of a Crusader is his power of invigorating, which he applies impartially to virtues and to vices. There is a great difference between a Crusader and a Christian, which is not commonly realized. The latter attempts to show his love for his enemy by abolishing his unchristianness, the former by abolishing him altogether. Although the two methods are apt to give curiously similar results, the distinction between a Crusader and a Christian is radical and will be considered in greater detail in the course of this study. This study does not profess to be biographical, and only the essential facts of Chesterton's life need be given here. These are, that he was born in London in 1873, is the son of a West London estate agent who is also an artist and a children's poet in a small but charming way, is married and has children. Perhaps it is more necessary to record the fact that he is greatly read by the youth of his day, that he comes in for much amused tolerance, that, generally speaking, he is not recognized as a great or courageous thinker, even by those people who understand his views well enough to dissent from them entirely, and that he is regarded less as a stylist, than as the owner of a trick of style. These are the false beliefs that I seek to combat. The last may be disposed of summarily. When an author's style is completely sincere, and completely part of him, it has this characteristic; it is almost impossible to imitate. Nobody has ever successfully parodied Shakespeare, for example; there are not even any good parodies of Mr. Shaw. And Chesterton remains unparodied; even Mr. Max Beerbohm's effort in A Christmas Garland rings false. His style is individual. He has not "played the sedulous ape."

But, on the other hand, it is not proposed to acquit Chesterton of all the charges brought against him. The average human being is partly a prig and partly a saint; and sometimes men are so glad to get rid of a prig that they are ready to call him a saint — Simon Stylites, for example. And it is not suggested that the author of the remark, "There are only three things that women do not understand. They are Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," is not a prig, for a demonstration that he is a complete gentleman would obviously leave other matters of importance inconveniently crowded out. We are confronted with a figure of some significance in these times. He represents what has been called in other spheres than his "the anti-intellectualist reaction." We must answer the questions; to what extent does he represent mere unqualified reaction? What are his qualifications as a craftsman? What, after all, has he done?

And we begin with his romances.

II

THE ROMANCER

In spite of Chesterton’s liberal production of books, it is not altogether simple to classify them into “periods,” in the manner beloved of the critic, nor even to sort them out according to subjects. G. K.C. can (and generally does) inscribe an Essay on the Nature of Religion into his novels, together with other confusing ingredients to such an extent that most readers would consider it pure pedantry on the part of anybody to insist that a Chestertonian romance need differ appreciably from a Chestertonian essay, poem, or criticism. That a book by G. K.C. should describe itself as a novel means little more than that its original purchasing price was four shillings and sixpence. It might also contain passages of love, hate, and other human emotions, but then again, it might not. But one thing it would contain, and that is war. G. K.C. would be pugnacious, even when there was nothing to fight. His characters would wage their wars, even when the bone of contention mattered as little as the handle of an old toothbrush. That, we should say, is the first factor in the formula of the Chestertonian romance — and all the rest are the inventor’s secret. Imprimis, a body of men and an idea, and the rest must follow, if only the idea be big enough for a man to fight about, or if need be, even to make himself ridiculous about.

In *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* we have this view of romance stated in a manner entirely typical of its author. King Auberon and the Provost of Notting Hill, Adam Wayne, are speaking. The latter says:

“I know of a magic wand, but it is a wand that only one or two may rightly use, and only seldom. It is a fairy wand of great fear, stronger than those who use it — often frightful, often wicked to use. But whatever is touched with it is never again wholly common; whatever is touched with it takes a magic from outside the world. If I touch, with this fairy wand, the railways and the roads of Notting Hill, men will love them, and be afraid of them for ever.”

“What the devil are you talking about?” asked the King.

“It has made mean landscapes magnificent, and hovels outlast cathedrals,” went on the madman. “Why should it not make lamp-posts fairer than Greek lamps, and an omnibus-ride like a painted ship? The touch of it is the finger of a strange perfection.”

“What is your wand?” cried the King, impatiently.

“There it is,” said Wayne; and pointed to the floor, where his sword lay flat and shining.

If all the dragons of old romance were loosed upon the fiction of our day, the result, one would imagine, would be something like that of a Chestertonian novel. But the dragons are dead and converted into poor fossil ichthyosauruses, incapable of biting the timidest damsel or the most corpulent knight that ever came out of the Stock Exchange. That is the tragedy of G. K.C.’s ideas, but it is also his opportunity. “Man is a creature who lives not upon bread alone, but principally by catch-words,” says Stevenson. “Give me my dragons,” says G. K.C. in effect, “and I will give you your catch-words. You may have them in any one of a hundred different ways. I will drop them on you when you least expect them, and their disguises will outrange all those known to Scotland Yard and to Drury Lane combined. You may have catastrophes and comets and camels, if you will, but you will certainly have your catch-words.”

The first of Chesterton’s novels, in order of their publication, is *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904). This is extravagance itself; fiction in the sense only that the events never happened and never could have happened. The scene is placed in London, the time, about a.d. 1984. “This ‘ere progress, it keeps on goin’ on,” somebody remarks in one of the novels of Mr. H. G. Wells. But it never goes on as the prophets said it would, and consequently England in those days does not greatly differ from the England of to-day. There have been changes, of course. Kings are now chosen in alphabetical rotation, and the choice falls upon a civil servant, Auberon Quin by name. Now Quin has a sense of humour, of absolute humour, as the Watts-Dunton definition already cited would have it called. He has two bosom friends who are also civil servants and whose humour is of the official variety, and whose outlook upon life is that of a Times leader. Quin’s first official act is the publication of a proclamation ordering every London borough to build itself city walls, with gates to be closed at sunset, and to become possessed of Provosts in mediæval attire, with guards of halberdiers. From his throne he attends to some of the picturesque details of the scheme, and enjoys the joke in silence. But after a few years of this a young man named Adam Wayne becomes Provost of Notting Hill, and to him his borough, and more especially the little street in which he has spent his life, are things of immense importance. Rather than allow that street to make way for a new thoroughfare, Wayne rallies his halberdiers to the defence of their borough. The Provosts of North Kensington and South Kensington, of West Kensington and Bayswater, rally their guards too, and attack Notting Hill, purposing to clear Wayne out of the way and to break down the offending street. Wayne is surrounded at night but converts defeat into victory by seizing the offices of a Gas Company and turning off the street lights. The next day he is besieged in his own street. By a sudden sortie he and his army escape to Campden Hill. Here a great battle rages for many hours, while one of the opposing Provosts gathers a large army for a final attack. At last Wayne and the remnants of his men are hopelessly outnumbered, but once more he turns defeat into victory. He threatens, unless the opposing forces instantly surrender, to open the great reservoir and flood the whole of Notting Hill. The allied generals surrender, and the Empire of Notting Hill comes into being. Twenty years later the spirit of Adam Wayne has gone beyond his own city walls. London is a wild romance, a mass of cities filled with citizens of great pride. But the Empire, which has been the Nazareth of the new idea, has waxed fat and kicked. In righteous anger the other boroughs attack it, and win, because their cause is just. King Auberon, a recruit in Wayne’s army, falls with his leader in the great battle of Kensington Gardens. But they recover in the morning.

“It was all a joke,” says the King in apology. “No,” says Wayne; “we are two lobes of the same brain . . . you, the humorist . . . I, the fanatic. . . . You have a halberd and I have a sword, let us start our wanderings over the world. For we are its two essentials.”

So ends the story.

Consider the preposterous elements of the book. A London with blue horse-’buses. Bloodthirsty battles chiefly fought with halberds. A King who acts as a war correspondent and parodies G. W. Stevens. It is preposterous because it is romantic and we are not used to romance. But to Chaucer let us say it would have appeared preposterous because he could not have realized the initial premises. Before such a book the average reader is helpless. His scale of values is knocked out of working order by the very first page, almost by the very first sentence. (“The human race, to which so many of my readers belong, has been playing at children’s games from the beginning, and will probably do it till the end, which is a nuisance for the few people who grow up.") The absence of a love affair will deprive him of the only "human interest" he can be really sure of. The Chestertonian idiom, above all, will soon lead him to expect nothing, because he can never get any idea of what he is to receive, and will bring him to a proper submissiveness. The later stages are simple. The reader will wonder why it never before occurred to him that area-railings are very like spears, and that a distant tramcar may at night distinctly resemble a dragon. He may travel far, once his imagination has been started on these lines. When romantic possibilities have once shed a glow on the offices of the Gas Light and Coke Company and on the erections of the Metropolitan Water Board, the rest of life may well seem filled with wonder and wild desires.

Chesterton may be held to have invented a new species of detective story — the sort that has no crime, no criminal, and a detective whose processes are transcendental. *The Club of Queer Trades* is the first batch of such stories. *The Man who was Thursday* is another specimen of some length. More recently, Chesterton has repeated the type in some of the *Father Brown* stories. In *The Club of Queer Trades*, the transcendental detective is Basil Grant, to describe whom with accuracy is difficult, because of his author's inconsistencies. Basil Grant, for instance, is "a man who scarcely stirred out of his attic," yet it would appear elsewhere that he walked abroad often enough. The essentials of this unprecedented detective are, however, sufficiently tangible. He had been a K.C. and a judge. He had left the Bench because it annoyed him, and because he held the very human but not legitimate belief that some criminals would be better off with a trip to the seaside than with a sentence of imprisonment. After his retirement from public life he stuck to his old trade as the judge of a Voluntary Criminal Court. "My criminals were tried for the faults which really make social life impossible. They were tried before me for selfishness, or for an impossible vanity, or for scandal-mongering, or for stinginess to guests or dependents." It is regrettable that Chesterton does not grant us a glimpse of this fascinating tribunal at work. However, it is Grant's job, on the strength of which he becomes the president and founder of the C.Q.T. — Club of Queer Trades. Among the members of this Club are a gentleman who runs an Adventure and Romance Agency for supplying thrills to the bourgeois, two Professional Detainers, and an Agent for Arboreal Villas, who lets off a variety of birds' nest. The way in which these people go about their curious tasks invariably suggests a crime to Rupert Grant, Basil's amateur detective brother, whereupon Basil has to intervene to put matters right. The author does not appear to have been struck by the inconsistency of setting Basil to work to ferret out the doings of his fellow club-members. The book is, in fact, full of joyous inconsistencies. The Agent for Arboreal Villas is clearly unqualified for the membership of the Club. Professor Chadd has no business there either. He is elected on the strength of having invented a language expressed by dancing, but it appears that he is really an employee in the Asiatic MSS. Department of the British Museum. Things are extremely absurd in *The Eccentric Seclusion of the Old Lady*. At the instigation of Rupert, who has heard sighs of pain coming out of a South Kensington basement, Basil, Rupert, and the man who tells the story, break into the house and violently assault those whom they meet.

> Basil sprang up with dancing eyes, and with three blows like battering-rams knocked the footman into a cocked hat. Then he sprang on top of Burrows, with one antimacassar in his hand and another in his teeth, and bound him hand and foot almost before he knew clearly that his head had struck the floor. Then Basil sprang at Greenwood . . . etc. etc.

There is a good deal more like this. Having taken the citadel and captured the defenders (as Cæsar might say), Basil and company reach the sighing lady of the basement. But she refuses to be released. Whereupon Basil explains his own queer trade, and that the lady is voluntarily undergoing a sentence for backbiting. No explanation is vouchsafed of the strange behaviour of Basil Grant in attacking men who, as he knew, were doing nothing they should not. Presumably it was due to a Chestertonian theory that there should be at least one good physical fight in each book.

It will be seen that *The Club of Queer Trades* tends to curl up somewhat (quite literally, in the sense that the end comes almost where the beginning ought to be) when it receives heavy and serious treatment. I should therefore explain that this serious treatment has been given under protest, and that its primary intention has been to deal with those well-meaning critics who believe that Chesterton can write fiction, in the ordinary sense of the word. His own excellent definition of fictitious narrative (in *The Victorian Age in Literature*) is that essentially “the story is told . . . for the sake of some study of the difference between human beings.” This alone is enough to exculpate him of the charge of writing novels. The Chestertonian short story is also in its way unique. If we applied the methods of the

Higher Criticism to the story just described, we might base all manner of odd theories upon the defeat (*inter alios*) of Burrows, a big and burly youth, by Basil Grant, aged sixty at the very least, and armed with antimacassars. But there is no necessity. If Chesterton invents a fantastic world, full of fantastic people who speak Chestertonese, then he is quite entitled to waive any trifling conventions which hinder the liberty of his subjects. As already pointed out, such is his humour. The only disadvantage, as somebody once complained of the Arabian Nights, is that one is apt to lose one's interest in a hero who is liable at any moment to turn into a camel. None of Chesterton's heroes do, as a matter of fact, become camels, but I would nevertheless strongly advise any young woman about to marry one of them to take out an insurance policy against unforeseen transformations.

Although it appears that a few reviewers went to the length of reading the whole of *The Man who was Thursday* (1908), it is obvious by their subsequent guesswork that they did not notice the second part of the title, which is, very simply, *A Nightmare*. The story takes its name from the Supreme Council of Anarchists, which has seven members, named after the days of the week. Sunday is the Chairman. The others, one after the other, turn out to be detectives. Syme, the nearest approach to the what might be called the hero, is a poet whom mysterious hands thrust into an Anarchists' meeting, at which he is elected to fill the vacancy caused by the death of last Thursday. A little earlier other mysterious hands had taken him into a dark room in Scotland Yard where the voice of an unseen man had told him that henceforth he was a member of the anti-anarchist corps, a new body which was to deal with the new anarchists — not the comparatively harmless people who threw bombs, but the intellectual anarchist. "We say that the most dangerous criminal now is the entirely lawless modern philosopher," somebody explains to him. The bewildered Syme walks straight into further bewilderments, as, one after the other, the week-days of the committee are revealed. But who is Sunday? Chesterton makes no reply. It was he who in a darkened room of Scotland Yard had enrolled the detectives. He is the Nightmare of the story. The first few chapters are perfectly straightforward, and lifelike to the extent of describing personal details in a somewhat exceptional manner for Chesterton. But, gradually, wilder and wilder things begin to happen — until, at last, Syme wakes up.

The trouble about *The Man who was Thursday* is not its incomprehensibility, but its author's gradual decline of interest in the book as it lengthened out. It begins excellently. There is real humour and a good deal of it in the earlier stages of Syme. And there are passages like this one on the “lawless modern philosopher”:

> Compared to him, burglars and bigamists are essentially moral men; my heart goes out to them. . . . Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property that they may more perfectly respect it. But philosophers dislike property as property; they wish to destroy the very idea of personal possession. Bigamists respect marriage, or they would not go through the highly ceremonial and even ritualistic formality of bigamy. But philosophers despise marriage as marriage.

But his amiable flow of paradox soon runs out. The end of the book is just a wild whirl, a nightmare with a touch of the cinematograph. People chase one another, in one instance they quite literally chase themselves. And the ending has all the effect of a damaged film that cannot be stopped, on the large blank spaces of which some idiot has been drawing absurd pictures which appear on the screen, to the confusion of the story. One remembers the immense and dominating figure of Sunday, only because the description of him reads very much like a description of Chesterton himself. But if the person is recognizable, the personality remains deliberately incomprehensible. He is just an outline in space, who rode down Albany Street on an elephant abducted from the Zoological Gardens, and who spoke sadly to his guests when they had run their last race against him.

Until recent years the word mysticism was sufficiently true to its derivation to imply mystery, the relation of God to man. But since the cheaper sort of journalist seized hold of the unhappy word, its demoralization has been complete. It now indicates, generally speaking, an intellectual defect which expresses itself in a literary quality one can only call woolliness. There is a genuine mysticism, expressed in Blake’s lines:

To see the world in a grain of sand
And a Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

And there is a spurious mysticism, meaningless rubbish of which Rossetti’s Sister Helen is a specimen. What could be more idiotic than the verse:

“He has made a sign and called Halloo!
Sister Helen,
And he says that he would speak with you.”
“Oh tell him I fear the frozen dew,
Little brother.”
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Why laughs she thus between Hell and Heaven?)

The trouble about the latter variety is its extreme simplicity. Anybody with the gift of being able to make lines scan and rhyme can produce similar effects in a similar way. Hence the enormous temptation exercised by this form of mysticism gone wrong. There is a naughty little story of a little girl, relating to her mother the mishaps of the family coal merchant, as seen from the dining-room window. He slipped on a piece of orange-peel, the child had explained. “And what happened then?” “Why, mummy, he sat down on the pavement and talked about God.” Chesterton (and he is not alone in this respect) behaves exactly like this coal-heaver. When he is at a loss, he talks about God. In each case one is given to suspect that the invocation is due to a temporarily overworked imagination.

This leads us to *The Ball and the Cross* (1906). In *The Man who was Thursday*, when the author had tired of his story, he brought in the universe at large. But its successor is dominated by God, and discussions on him by beings celestial, terrestrial, and merely infernal. And yet *The Ball and the Cross* is in many respects Chesterton’s greatest novel. The first few chapters are things of joy. There is much said in them about religion, but it is all sincere and bracing. The first chapter consists, in the main, of a dialogue on religion, between Professor Lucifer, the inventor and the driver of an eccentric airship, and Father Michael, a theologian acquired by the Professor in Western Bulgaria. As the airship dives into the ball and the cross of Saint Paul’s Cathedral, its passengers naturally find themselves taking a deep interest in the cross, considered as symbol and anchor. Lucifer plumps for the ball, the symbol of all that is rational and united. The cross

“is the conflict of two hostile lines, of irreconcilable direction. . . . The very shape of it is a contradiction in terms.” Michael replies, “But we like contradictions in terms. Man is a contradiction in terms; he is a beast whose superiority to other beasts consists in having fallen.”

Defeated on points, Lucifer leaves the Father clinging literally to the cross and flies away. Michael meets a policeman on the upper gallery and is conducted downwards. The scene changes to Ludgate Circus, but Michael is no longer in the centre of it. A Scot named Turnbull keeps a shop here, apparently in the endeavour to counterbalance the influence of St. Paul’s across the way. He is an atheist, selling atheist literature, editing an atheist paper. Another Scot arrives, young Evan MacIan, straight from the Highlands. Unlike the habitual Londoner, MacIan takes the little shop seriously. In its window he sees a copy of The Atheist, the leading article of which contains an insult to the Virgin Mary. MacIan thereupon puts his stick through the window. Turnbull comes out, there is a scuffle, and both are arrested and taken before a Dickensian magistrate. The sketch of Mr. Cumberland Vane is very pleasing: it is clear that the author knew what he was copying. Lord Melbourne is alleged to have said, “No one has more respect for the Christian religion than I have; but really, when it comes to intruding it into private life. . . .” Mr. Vane felt much the same way when he heard MacIan’s simple explanation: “He is my enemy. He is the enemy of God.” He said, “It is most undesirable that things of that sort should be spoken about — a — in public, and in an ordinary Court of Justice. Religion is — a — too personal a matter to be mentioned in such a place.” However, MacIan is fined. After which he and Turnbull, as men of honour, buy themselves swords and proceed to fight the matter out. With interruptions due to argument and the police, the fight lasts several weeks. Turnbull and MacIan fight in the back garden of the man from whom they bought the swords, until the police intervene. They escape the police and gain the Northern Heights of London, and fight once more, with a madness renewed and stimulated by the peace-making efforts of a stray and silly Tolstoyan. Then the police come again, and are once more outdistanced. This time mortal combat is postponed on account of the sanguinolence of a casual lunatic who worshipped blood to such a nauseating extent that the duellists deferred operations in order to chase him into a pond. Then follows an interminable dialogue, paradoxical, thoroughly Shavian, while the only two men in England to whom God literally is a matter of life and death find that they begin to regard the slaughter of one by the other as an unpleasant duty. Again they fight and are separated. They are motored by a lady to the Hampshire coast, and there they fight on the sands until the rising tide cuts them off. An empty boat turns up to rescue them from drowning; in it they reach one of the Channel Islands. Again they fight, and again the police come. They escape from them, but remain on the island in disguise, and make themselves an opportunity to pick a quarrel and so fight a duel upon a matter in keeping with local prejudice. But Turnbull has fallen in love. His irritatingly calm and beautiful devotee argues with him on religion until he is driven to cast off his disguise. Then the police are on his tracks again. A lunatic lends Turnbull and MacIan his yacht and so the chase continues. But by this time Chesterton is getting just a trifle bored. He realizes that no matter how many adventures his heroes get into, or how many paradoxes they fling down each other's throats, the end of the story, the final inevitable end which alone makes a series of rapid adventures worth while, is not even on the horizon. An element of that spurious mysticism already described invades the book. It begins to be clear that Chesterton is trying to drag in a moral somehow, if need be, by the hair of its head. The two yachters spend two weeks of geographical perplexity and come to a desert island. They land, but think it wiser, on the whole, to postpone fighting until they have finished the champagne and cigars with which their vessel is liberally stored. This takes a week. Just as they are about to begin the definitive duel they discover that they are not upon a desert island at all, they are near Margate. And the police are there, too. So once more they are chased. They land in a large garden in front of an old gentleman who assures them that he is God. He turns out to be a lunatic, and the place an asylum. There follows a characteristic piece of that abuse of science for which Chesterton has never attempted to suggest a substitute. MacIan and Turnbull find themselves prisoners, unable to get out. Then they dream dreams. Each sees himself in an aeroplane flying over Fleet Street and Ludgate Hill, where a battle is raging. But the woolly element is very pronounced by this time, and we can make neither head nor tail of these dreams and the conversations which accompany them. The duellists are imprisoned for a month in horrible cells. They find their way into the garden, and are told that all England is now in the hands of the alienists, by a new Act of Parliament: this has been the only possible manner of putting a stop to the revolution started by MacIan and Turnbull. These two find all the persons they had met with during their odyssey, packed away in the asylum, which is a wonderful place worked by petroleum machinery. But the matter-of-fact grocer from the Channel Island, regarding the whole affair as an infringement of the Rights of Man, sets the petroleum alight.

Michael, the celestial being who had appeared in the first chapter and disappeared at the end of it, is dragged out of a cell in an imbecile condition. Lucifer comes down in his airship to collect the doctors, whose bodies he drops out, a little later on. The buildings vanish in the flames, the keepers bolt, the inmates talk about their souls. MacIan is reunited to the lady of the Channel Island, and the story ends.

When a stone has been tossed into a pond, the ripples gradually and symmetrically grow smaller. A Chesterton novel is like an adventurous voyage of discovery, which begins on smooth water and is made with the object of finding the causes of the ripples. As ripple succeeds ripple — or chapter follows chapter — so we have to keep a tighter hold on such tangible things as are within our reach. Finally we reach the centre of the excitement and are either sucked into a whirlpool, or hit on the head with a stone. When we recover consciousness we feebly remember we have had a thrilling journey and that we had started out with a misapprehension of the quality of Chestertonian fiction. A man whose memory is normal should be able to give an accurate synopsis of a novel six months after he has read it. But I should be greatly surprised if any reader of *The Ball and the Cross* could tell exactly what it was all about, within a month or two of reading it. The discontinuity of it makes one difficulty; the substitution of paradox for incident makes another. Yet it is difficult to avoid the conviction that this novel will survive its day and the generation that begot it. If it was Chesterton's endeavour (as one is bound to suspect) to show that the triumph of atheism would lead to the triumph of a callous and inhuman body of scientists, then he has failed miserably. But if he was attempting to prove that the uncertainties of religion were trivial things when compared with the uncertainties of atheism, then the verdict must be reversed. The dialogues on religion contained in *The Ball and the Cross* are alone enough and more than enough to place it among the few books on religion which could be safely placed in the hands of an atheist or an agnostic with an intelligence.

If we consider *Manalive* (1912) now we shall be departing from strict chronological order, as it was preceded by *The Innocence of Father Brown*. It will, however, be more satisfactory to take the two Father Brown books together. In the first of these and *Manalive,* a change can be distinctly felt. It is not a simple weakening of the power of employing instruments, such as befell Ibsen when, after writing The Lady from the Sea, he could no longer keep his symbols and his characters apart. It is a more subtle change, a combination of several small changes, which cannot be studied fairly in relation only to one side of Chesterton's work. In the last chapter an attempt will be made to analyze these, for the present I can only indicate some of the fallings-off noticeable in *Manalive*, and leave it at that. Chesterton's previous romances were not constructed, the reader may have gathered, with that minute attention to detail which makes some modern novels read like the report of a newly promoted detective. But a man may do such things and yet be considered spotless. Shakespeare, after all, went astray on several points of history and geography. The authors of the Old Testament talked about "the hare that cheweth the cud." And, if any reader should fail to see the application of these instances to modern fiction, I can only recommend him to read Vanity Fair and find out how many children had the Rev. Bute Crawley, and what were their names. No, the trouble with *Manalive* is not in its casual, happy-go-lucky construction. It is rather in a certain lack of ease, a tendency to exaggerate effects, a continual stirring up of inconsiderable points. But let us come to the story.

There is a boarding-house situated on one of the summits of the Northern Heights. A great wind happens, and a large man, quite literally, blows in. His name is Innocent Smith and he is naturally considered insane. But he is really almost excessively sane. His presence makes life at the house a sort of holiday for the inmates, male and female. Smith is about to run for a special licence in order to marry one of the women in the house, and the other boarders have just paired off when a telegram posted by one of the ladies in a misapprehension brings two lunacy experts around in a cab. Smith adds to the excitement of the moment by putting a couple of bullets through a doctor's hat.

Now Smith is what somebody calls "an allegorical practical joker." But Chesterton gives a better description of him than that.

He's comic just because he's so startlingly commonplace. Don't you know what it is to be in all one family circle, with aunts and uncles, when a schoolboy comes home for the holidays? That bag there on the cab is only a schoolboy's hamper. This tree here in the garden is only the sort of tree that any schoolboy would have climbed. Yes, that's the sort of thing that has haunted us all about him, the thing we could never fit a word to. Whether he is my old schoolfellow or no, at least he is all my old schoolfellows. He is the endless bun-eating, ball-throwing animal that we have all been.

Innocent has an idea about every few minutes, but so far as the book is concerned we need mention only one of them. That one is — local autonomy for Beacon House. This may be recommended as a game to be played *en famille*. Establish a High Court, call in a legal member, and get a constitution. The rest will be very hilarious. The legal member of the Beacon House *ménage* is an Irish ex-barrister, one Michael Moon, who plans as follows:

The High Court of Beacon, he declared, was a splendid example of our free and sensible constitution. It had been founded by King John in defiance of Magna Carta, and now held absolute power over windmills, wine and spirit licences, ladies travelling in Turkey, revision of sentences for dog-stealing and parricide, as well as anything whatever that happened in the town of Market Bosworth. The whole hundred and nine seneschals of the High Court of Beacon met about once in every four centuries; but in the intervals (as Mr. Moon explained) the whole powers of the institution were vested in Mrs. Duke [the landlady]. Tossed about among the rest of the company, however, the High Court did not retain its historical and legal seriousness, but was used somewhat unscrupulously in a riot of domestic detail. If somebody spilt the Worcester Sauce on the tablecloth, he was quite sure it was a rite without which the sittings and findings of the Court would be invalid; and if somebody wanted a window to remain shut, he would suddenly remember that none but the third son of the lord of the manor of Penge had the right to open it. They even went the length of making arrests and conducting criminal inquiries.

Before this tribunal Innocent Smith is brought. One alienist is an American, who is quite prepared to acknowledge its jurisdiction, being by reason of his nationality not easily daunted by mere constitutional queerness. The other doctor, being the prosecutor and a boarder, has no choice in the matter. The doctors, it should be added, have brought with them a mass of documentary evidence, incriminating Smith.

How the defence has time to collect this evidence is not explained, but this is just one of the all-important details which do not matter in the Chestertonian plane. Smith is tried for attempted murder. The prosecution fails because the evidence shows Smith to be a first-class shot, who has on occasion fired life into people by frightening them. Then he is tried for burglary on the basis of a clergyman’s letter from which it is gathered that Smith tried one night to induce him and another cleric to enter a house burglariously in the dark. This charge breaks down because a letter is produced from the other clergyman who did actually accompany Smith over housetops and down through trap-doors — into his own house! Smith, it is explained, is in the habit of keeping himself awake to the romance and wonder of everyday existence by such courses. From the second letter, however, it appears that there is a Mrs. Smith, so the next charge is one of desertion and attempted bigamy. A series of documents is produced, from persons in France, Russia, China, and California recounting conversations with Smith, a man with a garden-rake, who left his house so that he might find it, and at the end leapt over the hedge into the garden where Mrs. Smith was having tea. In the words of the servant "he looked round at the garden and said, very loud and strong: 'Oh, what a lovely place you've got,' just as if he'd never seen it before." After which the court proceeds to try Smith on a polygamy charge. Documentary evidence shows that Smith has at one time or another married a Miss Green, a Miss Brown, a Miss Black, just as he is now about to marry a Miss Gray, Moon points out that these are all the same lady. Innocent Smith has merely broken the conventions, he has religiously kept the commandments. He has burgled his own house, and married his own wife. He has been perfectly innocent, and therefore he has been perfectly merry. Innocent is acquitted, and the book ends.

In the course of *Manalive,* somebody says, "Going right round the world is the shortest way to where you are already." These are the words of an overworked epigrammatist, and upon them hangs the whole story. If *Manalive* is amusing, it is because Chesterton has a style which could make even a debilitated paradox of great length seem amusing. The book has a few gorgeous passages. Among the documents read at the trial of Innocent Smith, for example, is a statement made by a Trans-Siberian station-master, which is a perfectly exquisite burlesque at the expense of the Russian *intelligenzia*. The whole series of documents, in fact, are delightful bits of self-expression on the part of a very varied team of selves. While Chesterton is able to turn out such things we must be content to take the page, and not the story, as his unit of work. *Manalive,* by the way, is the first of the author's stories in which women are represented as talking to one another. Chesterton seems extraordinarily shy with his feminine characters. He is a little afraid of woman. "The average woman is a despot, the average man is a serf." Mrs. Innocent Smith's view of men is in keeping with this peculiar notion. "At certain curious times they're just fit to take care of us, and they're never fit to take care of themselves." Smith is the Chestertonian Parsifal, just as Prince Muishkin is Dostoievsky's.

The transcendental type of detective, first sketched out in *The Club of Queer Trades*, is developed more fully in the two Father Brown books. In the little Roman priest who has such a wonderful instinct for placing the diseased spots in people's souls, we have Chesterton's completest and most human creation. Yet, with all their cleverness, and in spite of the fact that from internal evidence it is almost blatantly obvious that the author enjoyed writing these stories, they bear marks which put the books on a lower plane than either *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* or *The Ball and the Cross*. In the latter book Chesterton spoke of "the mere healthy and heathen horror of the unclean; the mere inhuman hatred of the inhuman state of madness." His own critical work had been a long protest against the introduction of artificial horrors, a plea for sanity and the exercise of sanity. But in *The Innocence of Father Brown* these principles, almost the fundamental ones of literary decency, were put on the shelf. Chesterton's criminals are lunatics, perhaps it is his belief that crime and insanity are inseparable. But even if this last supposition is correct, its approval would not necessarily license the introduction of some of the characters. There is Israel Gow, who suffers from a peculiar mania which drives him to collect gold from places seemly and unseemly, even to the point of digging up a corpse in order to extract the gold filling from its teeth. There is the insane French Chief of Police, who commits a murder and attempts to disguise the body, and the nature of the crime, by substituting the head of a guillotined criminal for that of the victim. In another story we have the picture of a cheerful teetotaller who suffers from drink and suicidal mania. There is also a doctor who kills a mad poet, and a mad priest who drops a hammer from the top of his church-tower upon his brother. Another story is about the loathsome treachery of an English general. It is, of course, difficult to write about crime without touching on features which revolt the squeamish reader, but it can be done, and it has been done, as in the Sherlock Holmes stories. There are subjects about which one instinctively feels it is not good to know too much. Sex, for example, is one of them. Strindberg, Weininger, Maupassant, Jules de Goncourt, knew too much about sex, and they all went mad, although it is usual to disguise the fact in the less familiar terms of medical science. Madness itself is another such subject. There are writers who dwell on madness because they cannot help themselves — Strindberg, Edgar Allan

Poe, Gogol, and many others — but they scarcely produce the same nauseating sensation as the sudden introduction of the note of insanity into a hitherto normal setting. The harnessing of the horror into which the discovery of insanity reacts is a favourite device of the feeble craftsman, but it is illegitimate. It is absolutely opposed to those elementary canons of good taste which decree that we may not jest at the expense of certain things, either because they are too sacred or not sacred enough. The opposite of a decadent author is not necessarily a writer who attacks decadents. Many decadents have attacked themselves, by committing suicide, for example. The opposite of a decadent author is one to whom decadent ideas and imagery are alien, which is a very different thing. For example, the whole story *The Wrong Shape* is filled with decadent ideas; one is sure that Baudelaire would have entirely approved of it. It includes a decadent poet, living in wildly Oriental surroundings, attended by a Hindoo servant. Even the air of the place is decadent; Father Brown on entering the house learns instinctively from it that a crime is to be committed.

Considered purely as detective stories, these cannot be granted a very good mark. There is scarcely a story that has not a serious flaw in it. A man — Flambeau, of whom more later — gains admittance to a small and select dinner party and almost succeeds in stealing the silver, by the device of turning up and pretending to be a guest when among the waiters, and a waiter when among the guests. But it is not explained what he did during the first two courses of that dinner, when he obviously had to be either a waiter or a guest, and could not keep up both parts, as when the guests were arriving. Another man, a “Priest of Apollo,” is worshipping the sun on the top of a “sky-scraping” block of offices in Westminster, while a woman falls down a lift-shaft and is killed. Father Brown immediately concludes that the priest is guilty of the murder because, had he been unprepared, he would have started and looked round at the scream and the crash of the victim falling. But a man absorbed in prayer on, let us say, a tenth floor, is, in point of fact, quite unlikely to hear a crash in the basement, or a scream even nearer to him. But the most astonishing thing about *The Eye of Apollo* is the staging. In order to provide the essentials, Mr. Chesterton has to place “the heiress of a crest and half a county, as well as great wealth,” who is blind, in a typist’s office! The collocation is somewhat too singular. One might go right through the Father Brown stories in this manner. But, if the reader wishes to draw the maximum of enjoyment out of them, he will do nothing of the sort. He will believe, as fervently as Alfred de Vigny, that L'Idée C'est Tout, and lay down all petty regard for detail at the feet of Father Brown. This little Roman cleric has listened to so many confessions (he calls himself "a man who does next to nothing but hear men's real sins," but this seems to be excessive, even for a Roman Catholic) that he is really well acquainted with the human soul. He is also extremely observant. And his greatest friend is Flambeau, whom he once brings to judgment, twice hinders in crime, and thenceforward accompanies on detective expeditions.

The Innocence of Father Brown had a *sequel*, *The Wisdom of Father Brown*, distinctly less effective, as sequels always are, than the predecessor. But the underlying ideas are the same. In the first place there is a deep detestation of "Science" (whatever that is) and the maintenance of the theory incarnate in Father Brown, that he who can read the human soul knows all things. The detestation of science (of which, one gathers, Chesterton knows nothing) is carried to the same absurd length as in *The Ball and the Cross*. In the very first story, Father Brown calls on a criminologist ostensibly in order to consult him, actually in order to show the unfortunate man, who had retired from business fourteen years ago, what an extraordinary fool he was.

The Father Brown of these stories — moon-faced little man — is a peculiar creation. No other author would have taken the trouble to excogitate him, and then treat him so badly. As a detective he never gets a fair chance. He is always on the spot when a murder is due to be committed, generally speaking he is there before time. When an absconding banker commits suicide under peculiar circumstances in Italian mountains, when a French publicist advertises himself by fighting duels with himself (very nearly), when a murder is committed in the dressing-room corridor of a theatre, when a miser and blackmailer kills himself, when a lunatic admiral attempts murder and then commits suicide, when amid much incoherence a Voodoo murder takes place, when somebody tries to kill a colonel by playing on his superstitions (and by other methods), and when a gentleman commits suicide from envy, Father Brown is always there. One might almost interpret the Father Brown stories by suggesting that their author had written them in order to illustrate the sudden impetus given to murder and suicide by the appearance of a Roman priest.

Here we may suspend our reviews of Chestertonian romance. There remains yet *The Flying Inn*, which shall be duly considered along with the other débris of its author. In summing up, it may be said of Chesterton that at his best he invented new possibilities of romance and a new and hearty laugh. It may be said of the decadents of the eighteen nineties, that if their motto wasn’t “Let’s all go bad,” it should have been. So one may say of Chesterton that if he has not selected “Let’s all go mad” as a text, he should have done. Madness, in the Chestertonian, whatever it is in the pathological sense, is a defiance of convention, a loosening of visible bonds in order to show the strength of the invisible ones; perhaps, as savages are said to regard lunatics with great respect, holding them to be nearer the Deity than most, so Chesterton believes of his own madmen. Innocent Smith, of course, the simple fool, the blithering idiot, is a truly wise man.

III

THE MAKER OF MAGIC

Chesterton’s only play, *Magic*, was written at the suggestion of Mr. Kenelm Foss and produced by him in November, 1913, at the Little Theatre, where it enjoyed a run of more than one hundred performances. This charming thing does not make one wish that Chesterton was an habitual playwright, for one feels that *Magic* was a sort of tank into which its author’s dramatic talents had been draining for many years — although, in actual fact, Chesterton allowed newspaper interviewers to learn that the play had been written in a very short space of time. His religious ideas were expressed in *Magic* with great neatness. Most perhaps of all his works this is a quotable production.

Patricia Carleon, a niece of the Duke, her guardian, is in the habit of wandering about his grounds seeing fairies. On the night when her brother Morris is expected to return from America she is having a solitary moonlight stroll when she sees a Stranger, “a cloaked figure with a pointed hood,” which last almost covers his face. She naturally asks him what he is doing there. He replies, mapping out the ground with his staff:

I have a hat, but not to wear;
I have a sword, but not to slay;
And ever in my bag I bear
A pack of cards, but not to play.

This, he tells her, is the language of fairies. He tells her that fairies are not small things, but quite the reverse. After a few sentences have been spoken the prologue comes to an end, and the curtain rises upon the scene of the play, the drawing-room of the Duke. Here is seated the Rev. Cyril Smith, a young clergyman, “an honest man and not an ass.” To him enters the Duke’s Secretary, to tell him the Duke is engaged at the moment, but will be down shortly. He is followed by Dr. Grimthorpe, an elderly agnostic, the red lamp of whose house can be seen through the open French windows. Smith is erecting a model public-house in the village, and has come to ask the Duke for a contribution towards the cost. Grimthorpe is getting up a league for opposing the erection of the new public-house, and has also come to the Duke for help. They discover the nature of each other's errand. Smith's case is, "How can the Church have a right to make men fast if she does not allow them to feast?"; Grimthorpe's, that alcohol is not a food. The Duke's Secretary enters and gives Smith a cheque for £50, then he gives the Doctor another — also for £50. This is the first glimpse we have of the Duke's eccentricity, an excessive impartiality based on the theory that everybody "does a great deal of good in his own way," and on sheer absence of mind — an absence which sometimes is absolutely literal. The Doctor explains in confidence to the Clergyman that there is something wrong about the family of Patricia and Morris, who are of Irish origin. . . . "They saw fairies and things of that sort."

Smith. And I suppose, to the medical mind, seeing fairies means much the same as seeing snakes?

Doctor. [*With a sour smile.*] Well, they saw them in Ireland. I suppose it's quite correct to see fairies in Ireland. It's like gambling at Monte Carlo. It's quite respectable. But I do draw the line at their seeing fairies in England. I do object to their bringing their ghosts and goblins and witches into the poor Duke's own back garden and within a yard of my own red lamp. It shows a lack of tact.

Patricia, moreover, wanders about the park and the woods in the evenings. "Damp evenings for choice. She calls it the Celtic twilight. I've no use for the Celtic twilight myself. It has a tendency to get on the chest." The Duke, annoyed by this love of fairies, has blundered, in his usual way, on an absurd compromise between the real and the ideal. A conjuror is to come that very night. When explanations have gone so far, the Duke at last makes his entry. The stage directions tell us that "in the present state of the peerage it is necessary to explain that the Duke, though an ass, is a gentleman." His thoughts are the most casual on earth. He is always being reminded of something or somebody which has nothing to do with the case. As for instance, "I saw the place you're putting up . . . Mr. Smith. Very good work. Very good work, indeed. Art for the people, eh? I particularly liked that woodwork over the west door — I'm glad to see you're using the new sort of graining . . . why, it all reminds one of the French Revolution." After one or two dissociations of this sort, the expected Morris Carleon enters through the French window; he is rather young and excitable, and America has overlaid the original Irishman. Morris immediately asks for

Patricia and is told that she is wandering in the garden. The Duke lets out that she sees fairies; Morris raves a bit about his sister being allowed out alone with anything in the nature of a man, when Patricia herself enters. She is in a slightly exalted state; she has just seen her fairy, him of the pointed hood. Morris, of course, is furious, not to say suspicious.

Doctor. [*Putting his hand on* Morris's *shoulder.*] Come, you must allow a little more for poetry. We can't all feed on nothing but petrol.

Duke. Quite right, quite right. And being Irish, don't you know, Celtic, as old Buffle used to say, charming songs, you know, about the Irish girl who has a plaid shawl — and a Banshee. [*Sighs profoundly.*] Poor old Gladstone! [*Silence.*]

Smith. [*Speaking to* Doctor.] I thought you yourself considered the family superstition bad for the health?

Doctor. I consider a family superstition is better for the health than a family quarrel.

A figure is seen to stand in front of the red lamp, blotting it out for a moment. Patricia calls to it, and the cloaked Stranger with the pointed hood enters. Morris at once calls him a fraud.

Smith. [*Quickly.*] Pardon me, I do not fancy that we know that. . . .

Morris. I didn't know you parsons stuck up for any fables but your own.

Smith. I stick up for the thing every man has a right to. Perhaps the only thing every man has a right to.

Morris. And what is that?

Smith. The benefit of the doubt.

Morris returns to the attack. The Stranger throws off his hood and reveals himself to the Duke. He is the Conjuror, ready for the evening's performance. All laugh at this *dénouement*, except Patricia, between whom and the Conjuror this bit of dialogue ensues:

Stranger. [*Very sadly.*] I am very sorry I am not a wizard.

Patricia. I wish you were a thief instead.

Stranger. Have I committed a worse crime than thieving?

Patricia. You have committed the cruellest crime, I think, that there is.

Stranger. And what is the cruellest crime?

Patricia. Stealing a child's toy.

Stranger. And what have I stolen?

Patricia. A fairy tale.

And the curtain falls upon the First Act.

An hour later the room is being prepared for the performance. The Conjuror is setting out his tricks, and the Duke is entangling him and the Secretary in his peculiar conversation. The following is characteristic:

The Secretary. . . . The only other thing at all urgent is the Militant Vegetarians.

Duke. Ah! The Militant Vegetarians! You've heard of them, I'm sure. Won't obey the law [*to the* Conjuror] so long as the Government serves out meat.

Conjuror. Let them be comforted. There are a good many people who don't get much meat.

Duke. Well, well, I'm bound to say they're very enthusiastic. Advanced, too — oh, certainly advanced. Like Joan of Arc.

[*Short silence, in which the* Conjuror *stares at him.*]

Conjuror. *Was* Joan of Arc a Vegetarian?

Duke. Oh, well, it's a very high ideal, after all. The Sacredness of Life, you know — the Sacredness of Life. [*Shakes his head.*] But they carry it too far. They killed a policeman down in Kent.

This conversation goes on for some time, while nothing in particular happens, except that the audience feels very happy. The Duke asks the Conjuror several questions, receiving thoroughly Chestertonian answers. ["Are you interested in modern progress?" "Yes. We are interested in all tricks done by illusion."] At last the Conjuror is left alone. Patricia enters. He attempts to excuse himself for the theft of the fairy tale. He has had a troublesome life, and has never enjoyed "a holiday in Fairyland." So, when he, with his hood up, because of the slight rain, was surprised by Patricia, as he was rehearsing his patter, and taken for a fairy, he played up to her. Patricia is inclined to forgive him, but the conversation is interrupted by the entrance of Morris, in a mood to be offensive. He examines the apparatus, proclaims the way it is worked, and after a while breaks out into a frenzy of free thought, asking the universe in general and the Conjuror in particular for "that old apparatus that turned rods into snakes." The Clergyman and the Doctor enter, and the conversation turns on religion, and then goes back to the tricks. Morris is still extremely quarrelsome, and for the second time has to be quieted down. The Conjuror is dignified, but cutting. The whole scene has been, so far, a discussion on Do Miracles Happen? Smith makes out a case in the affirmative, arguing from the false to the true. Suppose, as Morris claims, the "modern conjuring tricks are simply the old miracles when they have once been found out. . . . When we speak of things being sham, we generally mean that they are imitations of things that are genuine.” Morris gets more and more excited, and continues to insult the Conjuror. At last he shouts . . . “You’ll no more raise your Saints and Prophets from the dead than you’ll raise the Duke’s great-grandfather to dance on that wall.” At which the Reynolds portrait in question sways slightly from side to side. Morris turns furiously to the Conjuror, accusing him of trickery. A chair falls over, for no apparent cause, still further exciting the youth. At last he blurts out a challenge. The Doctor’s red lamp is the lamp of science. No power on earth could change its colour. And the red light turns blue, for a minute. Morris, absolutely puzzled, comes literally to his wits’ end, and rushes out, followed shortly afterwards by his sister and the Doctor. The youth is put to bed, and left in the care of Patricia, while the Doctor and the Clergyman return to their argument. Smith makes out a strong case for belief, for simple faith, a case which sounds strangely, coming from the lips of a clergyman of the Church of England.

Doctor. Weren’t there as many who believed passionately in Apollo?

Smith. And what harm came of believing in Apollo? And what a mass of harm may have come of not believing in Apollo? Does it never strike you that doubt can be a madness, as well be faith? That asking questions may be a disease, as well as proclaiming doctrines? You talk of religious mania! Is there no such thing as irreligious mania? Is there no such thing in the house at this moment?

Doctor. Then you think no one should question at all?

Smith. [*With passion, pointing to the next room.*] I think that is what comes of questioning! Why can’t you leave the universe alone and let it mean what it likes? Why shouldn’t the thunder be Jupiter? More men have made themselves silly by wondering what the devil it was if it wasn’t Jupiter.

Doctor. [*Looking at him.*] Do you believe in your own religion?

Smith. [*Returning the look equally steadily.*] Suppose I don’t: I should still be a fool to question it. The child who doubts about Santa Claus has insomnia. The child who believes has a good night’s rest.

Doctor. You are a Pragmatist.

Smith. That is what the lawyers call vulgar abuse. But I do appeal to practice. Here is a family over which you tell me a mental calamity hovers.

Here is the boy who questions everything and a girl who can believe anything. Upon whom has the curse fallen?

At this point the curtain was made to fall on the Second Act. The Third and last Act takes place in the same room a few hours later. The Conjuror has packed his bag, and is going. The Doctor has been sitting up with the patient. Morris is in a more or less delirious state, and is continually asking how the trick was done. The Doctor believes that the explanation would satisfy the patient and would probably help him to turn the corner. But the Conjuror will not provide an explanation. He has many reasons, the most practical of which is that he would not be believed. The Duke comes in and tries to make a business matter of the secret, even to the extent of paying £2000 for it. Suddenly the Conjuror changes his mind. He will tell them how the trick was done, it was all very simple. "It is the simplest thing in the world. That is why you will not laugh. . . . I did it by magic." The Doctor and the Duke are dumbfounded. Smith intervenes; he cannot accept the explanation. The Conjuror lets himself go, now he is voicing Chesterton's views. The clergyman who merely believes in belief, as Smith does, will not do. He must believe in a fact, which is far more difficult.

Conjuror. I say these things are supernatural. I say this is done by a spirit. The doctor does not believe me. He is an agnostic; and he knows everything. The Duke does not believe me; he cannot believe anything so plain as a miracle. But what the devil are you for, if you don't believe in a miracle? What does your coat mean if it doesn't mean that there is such a thing as the supernatural? What does your cursed collar mean if it doesn't mean that there is such a thing as a spirit? [*Exasperated.*] Why the devil do you dress up like that if you don't believe in it? [*With violence.*] Or perhaps you don't believe in devils?

Smith. I believe . . . [*After a pause.*] I wish I could believe.

Conjuror. Yes. I wish I could disbelieve.

Here Patricia enters. She wants to speak to the Conjuror, with whom she is left alone. A little love scene takes place: rather the result of two slightly sentimental and rather tired persons of different sexes being left alone than anything else. But they return to realities, with an effort. Patricia, too, wants to know how the trick was done, in order to tell her brother. He tells her, but she is of the world which cannot believe in devils, even although it may manage to accept fairies as an inevitable adjunct to landscape scenery by moonlight. In order to convince her the Conjuror tells her how he fell, how after dabbling in spiritualism he found he had lost control over himself. But he had resisted the temptation to make the devils his servants, until the impudence of Morris had made him lose his temper. Then he goes out into the garden to see if he can find some explanation to give Morris. The Duke, Smith, the Doctor, and the Secretary drift into the room, which is now tenanted by something impalpable but horrible. The Conjuror returns and clears the air with an exorcism. He has invented an explanation, which he goes out to give to Morris. Patricia announces that her brother immediately took a turn for the better. The Conjuror refuses to repeat the explanation he gave Morris, because if he did, "Half an hour after I have left this house you will all be saying how it was done." He turns to go.

Patricia. Our fairy tale has come to an end in the only way a fairy tale can come to an end. The only way a fairy tale can leave off being a fairy tale.

Conjuror. I don't understand you.

Patricia. It has come true.

And the curtain falls for the last time.

No doubt *Magic* owed a great deal of its success to the admirable production of Mr. Kenelm Foss and the excellence of the cast. Miss Grace Croft was surely the true Patricia. Of the Duke of Mr. Fred Lewis it is difficult to speak in terms other than superlative. Those of my readers who have suffered the misfortune of not having seen him, may gain some idea of his execution of the part from the illustrations to Mr. Belloc's novels. The Duke was an extraordinarily good likeness of the Duke of Battersea, as portrayed by Chesterton, with rather more than a touch of Mr. Asquith superadded. Mr. Fred Lewis, it may be stated, gagged freely, introducing topical lines until the play became a revue in little — but without injustice to the original. Several of those who saw *Magic* came for a third, a fourth, even a tenth time.

The Editor of The Dublin Review had the happy idea of asking Chesterton to review *Magic*. The result is too long to quote in full, but it makes two important points which may be extracted.

I will glide mercifully over the more glaring errors, which the critics have overlooked — as that no Irishman could become so complete a cad merely by going to America — that no young lady would walk about in the rain so soon before it was necessary to dress for dinner — that no young man, however American, could run round a Duke's grounds in the time between one bad epigram and another — that Dukes never allow the middle classes to encroach on their gardens so as to permit a doctor's lamp to be seen there — that no sister, however eccentric, could conduct a slightly frivolous love-scene with a brother going mad in the next room — that the Secretary disappears half-way through the play without explaining himself; and the conjuror disappears at the end, with almost equal dignity. . . .

By the exercise of that knowledge of all human hearts which descends on any man (however unworthy) the moment he is a dramatic critic, I perceive that the author of *Magic* originally wrote it as a short story. It is a bad play, because it was a good short story. In a short story of mystery, as in a Sherlock Holmes story, the author and the hero (or villain) keep the reader out of the secret. . . . But the drama is built on that grander secrecy which was called the Greek irony. In the drama, the audience must know the truth when the actors do not know it. That is where the drama is truly democratic: not because the audience shouts, but because it knows — and is silent. Now I do quite seriously think it is a weakness in a play like *Magic* that the audience is not in the central secret from the start. Mr. G. S. Street put the point with his usual unerring simplicity by saying that he could not help feeling disappointed with the Conjuror because he had hoped he would turn into the Devil.

A few additions may easily be made to the first batch of criticisms. Patricia's welcome to her brother is not what a long-lost brother might expect. There is really no satisfactory reason for the Doctor's continued presence. Patricia and Morris can only be half Irish by blood, unless it is possible to become Irish by residence. Why should the Conjuror rehearse his patter out in the wet? Surely the Duke's house would contain a spare room? Where did the Conjuror go, at the end of the Third Act, in the small hours of the morning? And so on.

But these are little things that do not matter in an allegory. For in *Magic* "things are not what they seem." The Duke is a modern man. He is also the world, the flesh, and the devil. He has no opinions, no positive religion, no brain. He believes in his own tolerance, which is merely his fatuousness. He follows the line of least resistance, and makes a virtue of it. He sits on the fence, but he will never come off. The Clergyman is the church of to-day, preaching the supernatural, but unwilling to recognize its existence at close quarters. As somebody says somewhere in *The Wisdom of Father Brown*, "If a miracle happened in your office, you'd have to hush it up, now so many bishops are atheists.” The Doctor is a less typical figure. He is the inconsistencies of science, kindly but with little joy of life, and extremely Chestertonian, which is to say unscientific. Morris is the younger generation, obsessed with business and getting on, and intellectually incapable of facing a religious fact. Patricia is the Chestertonian good woman, too essentially domestic to be ever fundamentally disturbed. The Conjuror, if not the Devil, is at any rate that inexplicable element in all life which most people do not see.

Nevertheless there is a flaw in *Magic* which really is serious. If I were to see, let us say, a sheet of newspaper flying down the road against the wind, and a friend of mine, who happened to be a gifted liar, told me that he was directing the paper by means of spirits, I should still be justified in believing that another explanation could be possible. I should say, “My dear friend, your explanation is romantic; I believe in spirits but I do not believe in you. I prefer to think that there is an air-current going the wrong way.” That is the matter with the Conjuror’s explanation. Why should the Clergyman or the Doctor — professional sceptics, both of them, which is to say seekers after truth — take the word of a professional deceiver as necessarily true?

There are two works which the critic of Chesterton must take into special consideration. They are *Magic* and *Orthodoxy*; and it may be said that the former is a dramatized version of the latter. The two together are a great work, striking at the very roots of disbelief. In a sense Chesterton pays the atheist a very high compliment. He does what the atheist is generally too lazy to do for himself; he takes his substitute for religion and systematizes it into something like a philosophy. Then he examines it as a whole. And he finds that atheism is dogma in its extremist form, that it embodies a multitude of superstitions, and that it is actually continually adding to their number. Such are the reasons of the greatness of *Magic*. The play, one feels, must remain unique, for the prolegomenon cannot be rewritten while the philosophy is unchanged. And Chesterton has deliberately chosen the word orthodox to apply to himself, and he has not limited its meaning.

IV

THE CRITIC OF LARGE THINGS

The heroes of Chesterton’s romances have an adipose diathesis, as a reviewer has been heard to remark. In plain English they tend towards largeness. Flambeau, Sunday, and Innocent Smith are big men. Chesterton, as we have seen, pays little attention to his women characters, but whenever it comes to pass that he must introduce a heroine, he colours her as emphatically as the nature of things will admit. Which is to say that the Chestertonian heroine always has red hair.

These things are symptomatic of their author. He loves robustness. If he cannot produce it, he can at any rate affect it, or attack its enemies. This worship of the robust is the fundamental fact of all Chesterton’s work. For example, as a critic of letters he confines himself almost exclusively to the big men. When Mr. Bernard Shaw a few years ago committed what Chesterton imagined was an attack upon Shakespeare, he almost instinctively rushed to the defence in the columns of The Daily News. When Chesterton wrote a little book on *The Victorian Age in Literature* he showed no interest in the smaller people. The book, it may be urged in his excuse, was a little one, but we feel that even if it was not, Chesterton would have done much the same thing. Among the writers he omitted to mention, even by name, are Sir Edwin Arnold, Harrison Ainsworth, Walter Bagehot, R. Blackmore, A. H. Clough, E. A. Freeman, S. R. Gardiner, George Gissing, J. R. Green, T. H. Green, Henry Hallam, Jean Ingelow, Benjamin Jowett, W. E. H. Lecky, Thomas Love Peacock, W. M. Praed, and Mrs. Humphry Ward. The criticism which feeds upon research and comparison, which considers a new date or the emendation of a mispunctuated line of verse, worthy of effort, knows not Chesterton. He is the student of the big men. He has written books about Dickens, Browning, and Shaw, of whom only one common quality can be noted, which is that they are each the subjects of at least twenty other books. To write about the things which have already yielded such a huge crop of criticism savours at first of a lack of imagination. The truth is quite otherwise. Anybody, so to speak, can produce a book about Alexander Pope because the ore is at the disposal of every miner. But that larger mine called Dickens has been diligently worked by two generations of authors, and it would appear that a new one must either plagiarize or labour extremely in order to come upon fresh seams. But Chesterton’s taste for bigness has come to his service in criticism. It has given him a power of seeing the large, obvious things which the critic of small things misses. He has the “thinking in millions” trick of the statistician transposed to literary ends.

Or as a poet. The robustness is omnipresent, and takes several forms. A grandiloquence that sways uneasily between rodomontade and mere verbiage, a rotundity of diction, a choice of subjects which can only be described as sanguinolent, the use of the bludgeon where others would prefer a rapier.

Or as a simple user of words. Chesterton has a preference for the big words: awful, enormous, tremendous, and so on. A word which occurs very often indeed is mystic: it suggests that the noun it qualifies is laden with undisclosable attributes, and that romance is hidden here.

Now all these things add up, as it were, to a tendency to say a thing as emphatically as possible. Emphasis of statement from a humorist gifted with the use of words results sometimes in epigram, sometimes in fun, in all things except the dull things (except when the dullness is due to an unhappy succession of scintillations which have misfired). For these reasons Chesterton is regarded as entirely frivolous — by persons without a sense of humour. He is, in point of fact, extremely serious, on those frequent occasions when he is making out a case. As he himself points out, to be serious is not the opposite of to be funny. The opposite of to be funny is not to be funny. A man may be perfectly serious in a funny way.

Now it has befallen Chesterton on more than one occasion to have to cross swords with one of the few true atheists, Mr. Joseph MacCabe, the author of a huge number of books, mostly attacking Christianity, and as devoid of humour as an egg-shell is of hair. The differences and the resemblances between Chesterton and Mr. MacCabe might well be the occasion of a parable. Chesterton has written some of the liveliest books about Christianity, Mr. MacCabe has written some of the dullest. Chesterton has written the most amusing book about Mr. Bernard Shaw; Mr. MacCabe has written the dullest. Chesterton and Mr. MacCabe have a habit of sparring at one another, but up to the present I have not noticed either make any palpable hits. It is all rather like the Party System, as Mr. Hilaire Belloc depicts it. The two antagonists do not understand each other in the least.

But, to a certain degree, Mr. MacCabe's confusion is the fault of Chesterton and not of his own lack of humour. When Chesterton says, "I also mean every word I say," he is saying something he does not mean. He is sometimes funny, but not serious, like Mr. George Robey. He is sometimes irritating, but not serious, like a circus clown. And he sometimes appears to be critical, but is not serious, like the young lady from Walworth in front of a Bond Street shop-window, regretting that she could not possibly buy the crockery and glass displayed because the monogram isn't on right. Chesterton's readers have perhaps spoiled him. He has pleaded, so to speak, for the inalienable and mystic right of every man to be a blithering idiot in all seriousness. So seriously, in fact, that when he exercised this inalienable and mystic right, the only man not in the secret was G. K. Chesterton.

There are few tasks so ungrateful as the criticism of a critic's criticisms, unless it be the job of criticizing the criticisms of a critic's critics. The first is part of the task of him who would write a book in which all Chesterton's works are duly and fitly considered; and the second will not be wholly escaped by him. Concerned as we are, however, with the ideas of one who was far more interested in putting the world to rights than with guiding men and women around literary edifices, there is no need for us to give any very detailed study to Chesterton's critical work. Bacon said "distilled books are like common distilled waters, flashy things." A second distillation, perhaps even a third, suggests a Euclidean flatness. The sheer management of a point of view, however, is always instructive. We have seen an author use his exceptional powers of criticism upon society in general, and ideas at large. How is he able to deal with ideas and inventions stated in a more definite and particular manner? The latter task is the more difficult of the two. We all know perfectly well, to take an analogous illustration, how to deal with the Prussian militarist class, the "Junker caste," and so on. But we differ hopelessly on the treatment to be meted out to the National Service League.

The outstanding feature of Chesterton's critical work is that it has no outstanding features which differentiate it from his other writings. He is always the journalist, writing for the day only. This leads him to treat all his subjects with special reference to his own day. Sometimes, as in the essay on Byron in *Twelve Types*, his own day is so much under discussion that poor Byron is left out in the cold to warm himself before a feebly flickering epigram. In writing of Dickens, Chesterton says that he "can be criticized as a contemporary of Bernard Shaw or Anatole France or C. F. G. Masterman . . . his name comes to the tongue when we are talking of Christian Socialists or Mr. Roosevelt or County Council Steamboats or Guilds of Play.” And Chesterton does criticize Dickens as the contemporary of all these phenomena. In point of fact, to G. K.C. everybody is either a contemporary or a Victorian, and “I also was born a Victorian.” Little Dorrit sets him talking about Gissing, Hard Times suggests Herbert Spencer, American Notes leads to the mention of Maxim Gorky, and elsewhere Mr. George Moore and Mr. William Le Queux are brought in. If Chesterton happened to be writing about Dickens at a time when there was a certain amount of feeling about on the subject of rich Jews on the Rand, then the rich Jews on the Rand would appear in print forthwith, whether or not Dickens had ever depicted a rich Jew or the Rand, or the two in conjunction. Chesterton’s first critical work of importance was *Robert Browning* in the “English Men of Letters Series.” It might be imagined that the austere editorship of Lord Morley might have a dejournalizing effect upon the style of the author. Far otherwise. The t’s are crossed and the i’s are dotted, so to speak, more carefully in *Robert Browning* than in works less fastidiously edited, but that is all. The book contains references to Gladstone and Home Rule, Parnell, Pigott, and Rudyard Kipling, Cyrano de Bergerac, W. E. Henley, and the Tivoli. But of Browning’s literary ancestors and predecessors there is little mention.

It is conventional to shed tears of ink over the journalistic touch, on the ground that it must inevitably shorten the life of whatever book bears its marks. If there is anything in this condemnation, then Chesterton is doomed to forgetfulness, and his critical works will be the first to slip into oblivion, such being the nature of critical works in general. But if this condemnation holds true, it includes also Macaulay, R. L. Stevenson, Matthew Arnold, and how many others! The journalistic touch, when it is good, means the preservation of a work. And Chesterton has that most essential part of a critic’s mental equipment — what we call in an inadequately descriptive manner, insight. He was no mean critic, whatever the tricks he played, who could pen these judgments:

The dominant passion of the artistic Celt, such as Mr. W. B. Yeats or Sir Edward Burne-Jones, lies in the word “escape”; escape into a land where oranges grow on plum trees and men can sow what they like and reap what they enjoy. (*G. F. Watts.*)

The supreme and most practical value of poetry is this, that in poetry, as in music, a note is struck which expresses beyond the power of rational statement a condition of mind, and all actions arise from a condition of mind. (*Robert Browning.*)

This essential comedy of Johnson's character is one which has never, oddly enough, been put upon the stage. There was in his nature one of the unconscious and even agreeable contradictions loved by the true comedian. . . . I mean a strenuous and sincere belief in convention, combined with a huge natural inaptitude for observing it. (*Samuel Johnson*.)

Rossetti could, for once in a way, write poetry about a real woman and call her "Jenny." One has a disturbed suspicion that Morris would have called her "Jehanne." (*The Victorian Age in Literature*.)

These are a few samples collected at random, but they alone are almost sufficient to enthrone Chesterton among the critics. He has a wonderful intuitive gift of feeling for the right metaphor, for the material object that best symbolizes an impression. But one thing he lacks. Put him among authors whose view of the universe is opposed to his own, and Chesterton instantly adopts an insecticide attitude. The wit of Wilde moves him not, but his morals stir him profoundly; Mr. Thomas Hardy is "a sort of village atheist brooding and blaspheming over the village idiot." Only occasionally has he a good word to say for the technique of an author whose views he dislikes. His critical work very largely consists of an attempt to describe his subjects' views of the universe, and bring them into relation with his own. His two books on Charles Dickens are little more than such an attempt. When, a few years ago, Mr. Edwin Pugh, who had also been studying the "aspects" of Dickens, came to the conclusion that the novelist was a Socialist, Chesterton waxed exceeding wrath and gave the offending book a severe wigging in The Daily News.

He loves a good fighter, however, and to such he is always just. There are few philosophies so radically opposed to the whole spirit of Chesterton's beliefs as that of John Stuart Mill. On religion, economic doctrine, and woman suffrage, Mill held views that are offensive to G. K.C. But Mill is nevertheless invariably treated by him with a respect which approximates to reverence. The principal case in point, however, is Mr. Bernard Shaw, who holds all Mill's beliefs, and waves them about even more defiantly. G. K.C.'s admiration in this case led him to write a whole book about G.B.S. in addition to innumerable articles and references. The book has the following characteristic introduction:

Most people either say that they agree with Bernard Shaw or that they do not understand him. I am the only person who understands him, and I do not agree with him.

Chesterton, of course, could not possibly agree with such an avowed and utter Puritan as Mr. Shaw. The Puritan has to be a revolutionary, which means a man who pushes forward the hand of the clock. Chesterton, as near as may be, is a Catholic Tory, who is a man who pushes back the hand of the clock. Superficially, the two make the clock show the same hour, but actually, one puts it on to a.m., the other back to p.m. Between the two is all the difference that is between darkness and day.

Chesterton's point of view is distinctly like Samuel Johnson's in more respects than one. Both critics made great play with dogmatic assertions based on the literature that was before their time, at the expense of the literature that was to come after. In the book on Shaw, Chesterton strikes a blow at all innovators, although he aims only at the obvious failures.

The truth is that all feeble spirits naturally live in the future, because it is featureless; it is a soft job; you can make it what you like. The next age is blank, and I can paint it freely with my favourite colour. It requires real courage to face the past, because the past is full of facts which cannot be got over; of men certainly wiser than we and of things done which we cannot do. I know I cannot write a poem as good as *Lycidas*. But it is always easy to say that the particular sort of poetry I can write will be the poetry of the future.

Sentiments such as these have made many young experimentalists feel that Chesterton is a traitor to his youth and generation. Nobody will ever have the detachment necessary to appreciate "futurist" poetry until it is very much a thing of the past, because the near past is so much with us, and it is part of us, which the future is not. But fidelity to the good things of the past does not exonerate us from the task of looking for the germs of the good things of the future. The young poet of to-day sits at the feet of Sir Henry Newbolt, whose critical appreciation is undaunted by mere dread of new things, while to the same youth and to his friends it has simply never occurred, often enough, to think of Chesterton as a critic. It cannot be too strongly urged that an undue admiration of the distant past has sat like an incubus upon the chest of European literature, and Shakespeare's greatness is not in spite of his “small Latin and less Greek,” which probably contributed to it indirectly. Had Shakespeare been a classical scholar, he would almost certainly have modelled his plays on Seneca or Aeschylus, and the results would have been devastating. Addison’s Cato, Johnson’s Irene, and the dramas of Racine and Corneille are among the abysmal dullnesses mankind owes to its excessive estimation of the past. Men have always been too ready to forget that we inherit our ancestors’ bad points as well as their good ones. Ancestor-worship has deprived the Chinese of the capacity to create, it has seriously affected Chesterton’s power to criticize. Chesterton’s own generation has seen both the victory and the downfall of form in the novels of Mr. Galsworthy and Mr. H. G. Wells. It has witnessed fascinating experiments in stagecraft, some of which have assuredly succeeded. It has listened to new poets and wandered in enchanted worlds where no Victorians trod. A critic in sympathy with these efforts at reform would have written the last-quoted passage something like this:

“The truth is that all feeble spirits naturally live in the past, because it has no boundaries; it is a soft job; you can find in it what you like. The past ages are rank, and I can daub myself freely with whatever colours I extract. It requires no courage to face the past, because the past is full of facts which neutralize one another; of men certainly no wiser than we, and of things done which we could not want to do. I know I cannot write a poem as good as Lycidas. But I also know that Milton could not write a poem as good as The Hound of Heaven or M’Andrew’s Hymn. And it is always easy to say that the particular kind of poetry I can write has been the poetry of some period of the past.”

But Chesterton didn’t; quite the reverse.

So that one comes to the sorrowful conclusion that Chesterton is at his best, as a critic, when he is writing introductions, because then he has to leave the past alone. When he is writing an introduction to one of the works of a great Victorian (Dickens always excepted) he makes his subject stand out like a solitary giant, not necessarily because he is one, but on account of the largeness of the contours, the rough shaping, and the deliberate contrasts. He has written prefaces without number, and the British Museum has not a complete set of the books introduced by him. The Fables of Æsop, the Book of Job, Matthew Arnold’s Critical Essays, a book of children’s poems by Margaret Arndt, Boswell’s Johnson, a novel by Gorky, selections from Thackeray, a life of Mr. Will Crooks, and an anthology by young poets are but a few of the books he has explained.

The last thing to be said on Chesterton as a critic is by way of illustration. For a series of books on artists, he wrote two, on William Blake and G. F. Watts. The first is all about mysticism, and so is the second. They are for the layman, not for the artist. They could be read with interest and joy by the colourblind. And, incidentally, they are extremely good criticism. Therein is the triumph of Chesterton. Give him a subject which he can relate with his own view of the universe, and space wherein to accomplish this feat, and he will succeed in presenting his readers with a vividly outlined portrait, tinted, of course, with his own personality, but indisputably true to life, and ornamented with fascinating little gargoyles. But put him among the bourgeoisie of literature and he will sulk like an angry child.

V

THE HUMORIST AND THE POET

There are innumerable books — or let us say twenty — on Mr. Bernard Shaw. They deal with him as a sociologist, a dramatist, or what not, but never as a humorist. There is a mass of books on Oscar Wilde, and they deal with everything concerned with him, except his humour. The great humorists — as such — go unsung to their graves. That is because there is nothing so obvious as a joke, and nothing so difficult to explain. It requires a psychologist, like William James, or a philosopher, like Bergson, to explain what a joke is, and then most of us cannot understand the explanation. A joke — especially another man's joke — is a thing to be handled delicately and reverently, for once the bloom is off, the joke mysteriously shrivels and vanishes. Translators are the sworn enemies of jokes; the exigencies of their deplorable trade cause them to maul the poor little things about while they are putting them into new clothes, and the result is death, or at the least an appearance of vacuous senescence. But jokes are only the crystallization of humour; it exists also in less tangible forms, such as style and all that collection of effects vaguely lumped together and called "atmosphere." Chesterton's peculiar "atmosphere" rises like a sweet exhalation from the very ink he sheds. And it is frankly indefinable, as all genuine style is. The insincere stylists can be reduced to a formula, because they work from a formula; Pater may be brought down to an arrangement of adjectives and commas, Doctor Johnson to a succession of rhythms, carefully pruned of excrescences, and so on, but the stylist who writes as God made him defies such analysis. Meredith and Shaw and Chesterton will remain mysteries even unto the latest research student of the Universities of Jena and Chicago. Patient students (something of the sort is already being done) will count up the number of nouns and verbs and commas in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and will express the result in such a form as this —

$$\text{Chesterton (G. K.)} = \iint \frac{\text{nouns}^3}{\text{verbs}^2} + \sqrt{{}_c \cdot 2\log_e \text{bn}} - \frac{\sin A}{47}$$

But they will fail to touch the essential Chesterton, because one of the beauties of this form of analysis is that when the formula has been obtained, nobody is any the wiser as to the manner of its use. We know that James Smith is composed of beef and beer and bread, because all evidence goes to show that these are the only things he ever absorbs, but nobody has ever suggested that a synthesis of foodstuffs will ever give us James Smith.

Now the difficulty of dealing with the humour of Chesterton is that, in doing so, one is compelled to handle it, to its detriment. If in the chapter on his Romances any reader thought he detected the voice and the style of Chesterton, he is grievously mistaken. He only saw the scaffolding, which bears the same relation to the finished product as the skeleton bears to the human body.

Consider these things:

If you throw one bomb you are only a murderer; but if you keep on persistently throwing bombs, you are in awful danger of at last becoming a prig.

If we all floated in the air like bubbles, free to drift anywhere at any instant, the practical result would be that no one would have the courage to begin a conversation.

If the public schools stuck up a notice it ought to be inscribed, “For the Fathers of Gentlemen only.” In two generations they can do the trick.

Now these propositions are not merely snippets from a system of philosophy, presented after the manner of the admirers of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. These are quotations which display a quite exceptional power of surprising people. The anticlimaxes of the first two passages, the bold dip into the future at the expense of the past in the third are more than instances of mere verbal felicity. They indicate a writer capable of the humour which feeds upon daily life, and is therefore thoroughly democratic and healthy. For there are two sorts of humour; that which feeds upon its possessor, Oscar Wilde is the supreme example of this type of humorist, and that which draws its inspiration from its surroundings, of which the great exemplar is Dickens, and Chesterton is his follower. The first exhausts itself sooner or later, because it feeds on its own blood, the second is inexhaustible. This theory may be opposed on the ground that humour is both internal and external in its origin. The supporters of this claim are invited to take a holiday in bed, or elsewhere away from the madding crowd, and then see how humorous they can be.

Humour has an unfortunate tendency to stale. The joke of yesteryear already shows frays upon its sleeves. The wit of the early volumes of Punch is in the last stages of decrepitude. Watch an actor struggling to conceal from his audience the fact that he is repeating one of Shakespeare's puns. We tolerate the humour of Congreve, not because it is thoroughly amusing, but because it has survived better than most. Humorous verse stands a slightly better chance of evoking smiles in its old age. There is always its unalterable verbal neatness; tradition, too, lingers more lovingly around fair shapes, and a poem is a better instance of form than a paragraph. Mankind may grow blasé, if it will, but as a poet of the comic, Chesterton will live long years. Take for example that last and worst of his novels *The Flying Inn*. Into this he has pitched with a fascinating recklessness a quantity of poems, garnered from The New Witness and worthy of the immortality which is granted the few really good comic poems. There is the poem of Noah, with that stimulating line with which each stanza ends. The last one goes:

But Noah he sinned, and we have sinned; on tipsy feet we trod,
Till a great big black teetotaller was sent to us for a rod,
And you can't get wine at a P.S.A., or Chapel, or Eisteddfod;
For the Curse of Water has come again because of the wrath of God.
And water is on the Bishop's board, and the Higher Thinker's shrine,
But I don't care where the water goes if it doesn't get into the wine.

There is a lunatic song against grocers, who are accused of nonconformity, and an equally lunatic song in several instalments on being a vegetarian:

I am silent in the Club,
I am silent in the pub,
I am silent on a bally peak in Darien;
For I stuff away for life
Shoving peas in with a knife,
Because I am at heart a vegetarian.

There is a joyous thing about a millionaire who lived the simple life, and a new version of "St. George for Merry England." Tea, cocoa, and soda-water are the subjects of another poem. The verses about Roundabout are very happy:

Some say that when Sir Lancelot
Went forth to find the Grail,
Grey Merlin wrinkled up the roads,
For hope that he should fail;
All roads led back to Lyonnesse
And Camelot in the Vale,
I cannot yield assent to this
Extravagant hypothesis,
The plain shrewd Briton will dismiss
Such rumours (*Daily Mail*).
But in the streets of Roundabout
Are no such factions found,
Or theories to expound about
Or roll upon the ground about,
In the happy town of Roundabout,
That makes the world go round.

And there are lots more like this.

Then there are the *Ballades Urbane* which appeared in the early volumes of The Eye-Witness. They have refrains with the true human note. Such as “But will you lend me two-and-six?”

Envoi
Prince, I will not be knighted! No!
Put up your sword and stow your tricks!
Offering the Garter is no go —
BUT WILL YOU LEND ME TWO-AND-SIX?

In prose Chesterton is seldom the mere jester; he will always have a moral or two, at the very least, at his fingers’ ends, or to be quite exact, at the end of his article. He is never quite irresponsible. He seldom laughs at a man who is not a reformer.

Or let us take another set of illustrations, this time in prose. (Once more I protest that I shall not take the reader through all the works of Chesterton.) I mean the articles “Our Note Book” which he contributed to The Illustrated

London News. They are of a familiar type; a series of paragraphs on some topical subject, with little spaces between them in order to encourage the weary reader. Chesterton wrote this class of article supremely well. He would seize on something apparently trivial, and exalt it into a symptom. When he had given the disease a name, he went for the quack doctors who professed to remedy it. He goes to Letchworth, in which abode of middle-class faddery he finds a teetotal public-house, pretending to look like the real thing, and calling itself "The Skittles Inn." He immediately raises the question, Can we dissociate beer from skittles? Then he widens out his thesis.

Our life to-day is marked by perpetual attempts to revive old-fashioned things while omitting the human soul in them that made them more than fashions.

And he concludes:

I welcome a return to the rudeness of old times; when Luther attacked Henry VIII for being fat; and when Milton and his Dutch opponent devoted pages of their controversy to the discussion of which of them was the uglier. . . . The new controversialists . . . call a man a physical degenerate, instead of calling him an ugly fellow. They say that red hair is the mark of the Celtic stock, instead of calling him "Carrots."

Of this class of fun Chesterton is an easy master. It makes him a fearsome controversialist on the platform or in his favourite lists, the columns of a newspaper. But he uses his strength a little tyrannously. He is an adept at begging the question. The lost art called ignoratio elenchi has been privately rediscovered by him, to the surprise of many excellent and honest debaters, who have never succeeded in scoring the most obvious points in the face of Chesterton's power of emitting a string of epigrams and pretending it is a chain of argument. The case, in whatever form it is put, is always fresh and vigorous. Another epigrammatist, Oscar Wilde, in comparison with him may be said to have used the midnight oil so liberally in the preparation of his witticisms, that one might almost detect the fishy odour. But as with his prose so with his verses; Chesterton's productions are so fresh that they seem to spring from his vitality rather than his intellect. They are generally a trifle ragged and unpolished as if, like all their author's productions, they were strangers to revision. And vitality demands boisterous movement, more even than coherence. Sometimes the boisterousness is apparently unsupported by the sense of the words.

So you have gained the golden crowns and grasped the golden weather,
The kingdoms and the hemispheres that all men buy and sell,
But I will lash the leaping drum and swing the flaring feather,
For the light of seven heavens that are lost to me like hell.

Here the stanza actually goes with such a swing that the reader will in all probability not notice that the lines have no particular meaning.

On the other hand, Chesterton’s poetry has exuberant moments of sheer delight. In one of his essays he is lamenting the songlessness of modern life and suggests one or two chanties. Here they are:

Chorus of Bank Clerks:

Up, my lads, and lift the ledgers, sleep and ease are o’er.
Hear the Stars of Morning shouting: “Two and Two are Four.”
Though the creeds and realms are reeling, though the sophists roar,
Though we weep and pawn our watches, Two and Two are Four.

Chorus of Bank Clerks when there is a run on the bank:

There’s a run upon the Bank —
Stand away!
For the Manager’s a crank and the Secretary drank, and the Upper Tooting Bank
Turns to bay!

Stand close: there is a run
On the Bank.
Of our ship, our royal one, let the ringing legend run, that she fired with every gun
Ere she sank.

The Post Office Hymn would begin as follows:

O’er London our letters are shaken like snow,
Our wires o’er the world like the thunderbolts go.

The news that may marry a maiden in Sark,
Or kill an old lady in Finsbury Park.

Chorus (with a swing of joy and energy):
Or kill an old lady in Finsbury Park.

The joke becomes simply immense when we picture the actual singing of the songs.

But that is not the only class of humour of which Chesterton is capable. He can cut as well as hack. It is to be doubted whether any politician was ever addressed in lines more sarcastic than those of *Antichrist*, an ode to Mr. F. E. Smith. This gentleman, speaking on the Welsh Disestablishment Bill, remarked that it "has shocked the conscience of every Christian community in Europe." It begins:

Are they clinging to their crosses,
F. E. Smith.
Where the Breton boat-fleet tosses,
Are they, Smith?
Do they, fasting, tramping, bleeding,
Wait the news from this our city?
Groaning "That's the Second Reading!"
Hissing "There is still Committee!"
If the voice of Cecil falters,
If McKenna's point has pith,
Do they tremble for their altars?
Do they, Smith?

Then in Russia, among the peasants,

Where Establishment means nothing
And they never heard of Wales,
Do they read it all in Hansard
With a crib to read it with —
"Welsh Tithes: Dr. Clifford answered."
Really, Smith?

The final verse is:

It would greatly, I must own,
Soothe me, Smith,
If you left this theme alone,
Holy Smith!
For your legal cause or civil
You fight well and get your fee;
For your God or dream or devil
You will answer, not to me.
Talk about the pews and steeples
And the Cash that goes therewith!
But the souls of Christian peoples . . .
— Chuck it, Smith!

The wilting sarcasm of this poem is a feature which puts it with a few others apart from the bulk of Chesterton’s poems. Even as bellicosity and orthodoxy are two of the brightest threads which run through the whole texture of his work, so Poems of Pugnacity (as Ella Wheeler Wilcox would say) and religious verses constitute the largest part of the poetic works of G. K.C. His first book of verses — after *Greybeards at Play* — *The Wild Knight* contained a bloodthirsty poem about the Battle of Gibeon, written with strict adhesion to the spirit of the Old Testament. It might have been penned by a survivor, glutted with blood and duly grateful to the God of his race for the solar and lunar eccentricities which made possible the extermination of the five kings of the Amorites. In 1911 came *The Ballad of the White Horse*, which is all about Alfred, according to the popular traditions embodied in the elementary history books, and, in particular, the Battle of Ethandune. How Chesterton revels in that Homeric slaughter! The words blood and bloody punctuate the largest poem of G. K.C. to the virtual obliteration in our memory of the fine imagery, the occasional tendernesses, and the blustering aggressiveness of some of the metaphors and similes. Not many men would have the nerve, let alone the skill, to write:

And in the last eclipse the sea
Shall stand up like a tower,
Above all moons made dark and riven,
Hold up its foaming head in heaven,
And laugh, knowing its hour.

But, at the same time, this poem contains very touching and beautiful lines. *The Ballad of the White Horse* is an epic of the struggle between Christian and Pagan. One of the essentials of an epic is that its men should be decent men, if they cannot be heroes. The Iliad would have been impossible if it had occurred to Homer to introduce the Government contractors to the belligerent powers. All the point would have gone out of Orlando Furioso if it had been the case that the madness of Orlando was the delirium tremens of an habitual drunkard. Chesterton recognizing this truth makes the pagans of the *White Horse* behave like gentlemen. There is a beautiful little song put into the mouth of one of them, which is in its way a perfect expression of the inadequacy of false gods.

There is always a thing forgotten
When all the world goes well;
A thing forgotten, as long ago
When the gods forgot the mistletoe,
And soundless as an arrow of snow
The arrow of anguish fell.

The thing on the blind side of the heart,
On the wrong side of the door,
The green plant groweth, menacing
Almighty lovers in the spring;
There is always a forgotten thing,
And love is not secure.

The sorrow behind these lines is more moving, because more sincere, than the lines of that over-quoted verse of Swinburne’s:

From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods there be —
That no life lives for ever,
That dead men rise up never,
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

This is insincere, because a pagan (as Swinburne was) could have committed suicide had he really felt these things. Swinburne, like most modern pagans, really hated priestcraft when he thought he was hating God. Chesterton's note is truer. He knows that the pagan has all the good things of life but one, and that only an exceptionally nice pagan knows he lacks that much.

And so one might go on mining the *White Horse*, for it contains most things, as a good epic should. Two short stanzas, however, should be quoted, whatever else is omitted, for the sake of their essential Christianity, their claim that a man may make a fool of himself for Christ's sake, whatever the bishops have to say about it.

The men of the East may spell the stars,
And times and triumphs mark,
But the men signed of the Cross of Christ
Go gaily in the dark.
The men of the East may search the scrolls
For sure fates and fame,
But the men that drink the blood of God
Go singing to their shame.

In his last volume of *Poems* (1915) Chesterton presents us with a varied collection of works, written at any time during the last twelve or so years. The pugnacious element is present in *Lepanto*, through the staccato syllables of which we hear drum-taps and men cheering. There is a temptation to treat *Lepanto*, and indeed most of Chesterton's poems, with special reference to their technique, but we must resist this temptation, with tears if need be, and with prayer, for to give way to it would be to commit a form of vivisection. G. K.C. is not a text, praise be, and whether he lives or dies, long may he be spared the hands of an editor or interpreter who is also an irrepressible authority on anapaests and suchlike things. He is a poet, and a considerable poet, not because of his strict attention to the rules of prosody, but because he cannot help himself, and the rules in question are for the persons who can, the poets by deliberate intention, the writers who polish unceasingly. Chesterton has more impulse than finish, but he has natural gifts of rhythm and the effective use of words which more or less (according to the reader’s taste) compensate for his refusal or his incapacity to take pains.

Finally there are the religious poems. From these we can best judge the reality of Chesterton’s poetic impulse, for here, knowing that affectation would be almost indecent, he has expressed what he had to express with a care denied to most of his other works. In one of his essays, G. K.C. exults in that matchless phrase of Vaughan, “high humility.” He has both adopted and adapted this quality, and the results are wonderful. In *The Wise Men* occurs this stanza:

The Child that was ere worlds begun
(. . . We need but walk a little way,
We need but see a latch undone . . .)
The Child that played with moon and sun
Is playing with a little hay.

The superb antithesis leaves one struggling against that involuntary little gasp which is a reader’s first tribute to a fine thought. He could be a great hymn writer, if he would. One of his poems, in fact, has found its way into The English Hymnal, where it competes (if one may use the word of a sacred song) with Recessional for the favour of congregations. If we take a glance at a few of the finest hymns, we shall find that they share certain obvious qualities: bold imagery, the vocabulary of conflict, an attitude of humility that is very nearly also one of great pride, and certain tricks of style. And when we look through Chesterton’s poems generally, we shall find that these are exactly the qualities they possess.

VI

THE RELIGION OF A DEBATER

In his book on William Blake, Chesterton says that he is “personally quite convinced that if every human being lived a thousand years, every human being would end up either in utter pessimistic scepticism or in the Catholic creed.” In course of time, in fact, everybody would have to decide whether they preferred to be an intellectualist or a mystic. A debauch of intellectualism, lasting perhaps nine hundred and fifty years, is a truly terrible thing to contemplate. Perhaps it is safest to assert that if our lives were considerably lengthened, there would be more mystics and more madmen.

To Chesterton modern thought is merely the polite description of a noisy crowd of persons proclaiming that something or other is wrong. Mr. Bernard Shaw denounces meat and has been understood to denounce marriage. Ibsen is said to have anathematized almost everything (by those who have not read his works). Mr. MacCabe and Mr. Blatchford think that, on the whole, there is no God, and Tolstoy told us that nearly everything we did, and quite all we wanted to do, was opposed to the spirit of Christ’s teaching. Auberon Herbert disapproved of law, and John Davidson disapproved of life. Herbert Spencer objected to government, Passive Resisters to State education, and various educational reformers to education of any description. There are people who would abolish our spelling, our clothing, our food and, most emphatically, our drink. Mr. H. G. Wells adds the finishing touch to this volume of denials, by blandly suggesting in an appendix to his Modern Utopia, headed “Scepticism of the Instrument,” that our senses are so liable to err, that we can never be really sure of anything at all. This spirit of denial is extraordinarily infectious. A man begins to suspect what he calls the “supernatural.” He joins an ethical society, and before he knows where he is, he is a vegetarian. The rebellious moderns have a curious tendency to flock together in self-defence, even when they have nothing in common. The mere aggregation of denials rather attracts the slovenly and the unattached. The lack of positive dogma expressed by such a coalition encourages the sceptic and the uneducated, who do not realize that the deliberate suppression of dogma is itself a dogma of extreme arrogance. We trust too much to the label, nowadays, and the brief descriptions we attach to ourselves have a gradually increasing connotation. In politics for example, the conservative creed, which originally contained the single article that aristocracy, wealth and government should be in the same few hands, now also implies adhesion to the economic doctrine of protection, and the political doctrine that unitary government is preferable to federal. The liberal creed, based principally upon opposition to the conservative, and to a lesser degree upon disrespect for the Established Church, has been enlarged concurrently with the latter. The average liberal or conservative now feels himself in honour bound to assert or to deny political dogmas out of sheer loyalty to his party. This does not make for sanity. The only political creed in which a man may reasonably expect to remain sane is Socialism, which is catholic and not the least dependent upon other beliefs. Apart from the inconsiderable number of Socialists, the average politician follows in the footsteps of those gentlemen already mentioned. He is not allowed to believe, so he contents himself with a denial of the other side's promises. Assertion is infinitely more brain-wearing than denial.

Side by side with the increase in those who deny is a growth in the numbers of those who come to regard apathy, suspended judgment, or a lack of interest in a religious matter as a state of positive belief. There are agnostics quite literally all over the place. Belief peters down into acceptance, acceptance becomes a probability, a probability declines into a reasonable doubt, and a reasonable doubt drifts into "it is highly conjectural and indeed extremely unlikely," or something of that sort. Tolerance was once an instrument for ensuring that truth should not be suppressed; it is now an excuse for refusing to bother. There is, in fact, a growing disrespect for truth. A great many men went to the stake years ago rather than admit the possibility that they were wrong; they protested, so far as human endurance allowed them to protest, that they were orthodox and that their persecutors, and not they, were the heretics. To-day a bunch of Cambridge men calls itself "The Heretics" and imagines it has found a clever title. At the same time there is an apparent decline in the power to believe. The average politician (the principal type of twentieth-century propagandist) hardly ever makes a speech which does not contain one at least of the following phrases:

"I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that . . ."

"We are all subject to correction, but as far as we know . . ."

"In this necessarily imperfect world . . ."

"So far as one is able to judge . . ."

"Appearances are notoriously deceptive, but . . ."

"Human experience is necessarily limited to . . ."

"We can never be really sure . . ."

"Pilate asked, 'What is truth?' Ah, my brethren, what indeed?"

"The best minds of the country have failed to come to an agreement on this question; one can only surmise . . ."

"Art is long and life is short. Art to-day is even longer than it used to be."

Now the politician, to do him justice, has retained the courage of his convictions to a greater extent than the orthodox believer in God. Men are still prepared to make Home Rule the occasion of bloodshed, or to spend the midnight hours denouncing apparent political heresies. But whereas the politician, like the orthodox believer once pronounced apologetics, they now merely utter apologies. To-day, equipped as never before with the heavy artillery of argument in the shape of Higher Criticism, research, blue-books, statistics, cheap publications, free libraries, accessible information, public lectures, and goodness only knows what else, the fighting forces of the spiritual and temporal decencies lie drowsing as in a club-room, placarded "Religion and politics must not be discussed here."

All this, with the exception of the political references, is a summary of Chesterton's claim that a return to orthodoxy is desirable and necessary. It will be found at length in *Heretics* and in the first chapters of *Orthodoxy*, and sprinkled throughout all his writings of a later date than 1906 or so. He protests on more than one occasion against Mr. Shaw's epigram, which seems to him to contain the essence of all that is wrong to-day, "The golden rule is that there is no golden rule." Chesterton insists that there is a golden rule, that it is a very old one, and that it is known to a great many people, most of whom belong to the working classes.

In his argument that, on the whole, the masses are (or were) right about religion, and that the intellectuals are wrong, Chesterton is undoubtedly at his most bellicose and his sincerest. His is the pugnacity that prefers to pull down another's banner rather than to raise his own. His "defences" in *The Defendant*, and the six hundred odd cases made out by him in the columns of The Daily News are largely and obviously inspired by the wish, metaphorically speaking, to punch somebody’s head. The fact that he is not a mere bully appears in the appeal to common decency which Chesterton would be incapable of omitting from an article. Nevertheless he prefers attack to defence. In war, the offensive is infinitely more costly than the defensive. But in controversy this is reversed. The opener of a debate is in a much more difficult position than his opponent. The latter need only criticize the former’s case; he is not compelled to disclose his own defences. Chesterton used to have a grand time hoisting people on their own petards, and letting forth strings of epigrams at the expense of those from whom he differed, and only incidentally revealing his own position. Then, as he tells us in the preface to *Orthodoxy*, when he had published the saltatory series of indictments entitled *Heretics*, a number of his critics said, in effect, “Please, Mr. Chesterton, what are we to believe?” Mr. G. S. Street, in particular, begged for enlightenment. G. K.C. joyously accepted the invitation, and wrote *Orthodoxy*, his most brilliant book.

There are few works in the English language the brilliancy of which is so sustained. *Orthodoxy* is a rapid torrent of epigrammatically expressed arguments. Chesterton’s method in writing it is that of the digger wasp. This intelligent creature carries on the survival of the fittest controversy by paralyzing its opponent first, and then proceeding to lay the eggs from which future fitness will proceed in the unresisting but still living body. Chesterton begins by paralyzing his reader, by savagely attacking all the beliefs which the latter, if he be a modern and a sceptic, probably regards as first principles. Tolerance is dismissed, as we have just seen, as a mere excuse for not caring. Reason, that awful French goddess, is shown to be another apology. Nietzsche and various other authors to whom some of us have bent the knee are slaughtered without misery. Then Chesterton proceeds to the argument, the reader being by this time receptive enough to swallow a camel, on the sole condition that G. K.C. has previously slightly treacled the animal.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to assert that at this point Chesterton pretends to begin his argument. As a matter of strict fact he only describes his adventures in Fairyland, which is all the earth. He tells us of his profound astonishment at the consistent recurrence of apples on apple trees, and at the general jolliness of the earth. He describes, very beautifully, some of the sensations of childhood making the all-embracing discovery that things are what they seem, and the even more joyful feeling of pretending that they are not, or that they will cease to be at any moment. A young kitten will watch a large cushion, which to it is a very considerable portion of the universe, flying at it without indicating any very appreciable surprise. A child, in the same way, would not be surprised if his house suddenly developed wings and flew away. Chesterton cultivated this attitude of always expecting to be surprised by the most natural things in the world, until it became an obsession, and a part of his journalistic equipment. In a sense Chesterton is the everlasting boy, the Undergraduate Who Would Not Grow Up. There must be few normally imaginative town-bred children to whom the pointed upright area-railings do not appear an unsearchable armoury of spears or as walls of protective flames, temporarily frozen black so that people should be able to enter and leave their house. Every child knows that the old Norse story of a sleeping Brunnhilde encircled by flames is true; to him or her, there is a Brunnhilde in every street, and the child knows that there it always has a chance of being the chosen Siegfried. But because this view of life is so much cosier than that of the grown-ups, Chesterton clings to his childhood’s neat little universe and weeps pathetically when anybody mentions Herbert Spencer, and makes faces when he hears the word Newton. He insists on a fair dole of surprises. “Children are grateful when Santa Claus puts in their stockings gifts of toys and sweets. Could I not be grateful to Santa Claus when he put in my stockings the gift of two miraculous legs?”

Now this fairyland business is frankly overdone. Chesterton conceives of God, having carried the Creation as far as this world, sitting down to look at the new universe in a sort of ecstasy. “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold it was very good.” He enjoyed His new toy immensely, and as He sent the earth spinning round the sun, His pleasure increased. So He said “Do it again” every time the sun had completed its course, and laughed prodigiously, and behaved like a happy child. And so He has gone on to this day saying “Do it again” to the sun and the moon and the stars, to the animal creation, and the trees, and every living thing. So Chesterton pictures God, giving His name to what others, including Christians, call natural law, or the laws of God, or the laws of gravitation, conservation of energy, and so on, but always laws. For which reason, one is compelled to assume that in his opinion God is now saying to Himself, “There’s another bloody war, do it again, sun,” and gurgling with delight. It is dangerous to wander in fairyland, as Chesterton has himself demonstrated, “one might meet a fairy.” It is not safe to try to look God in the face. A prophet in Israel saw the glory of Jehovah, and though He was but the God of a small nation, the prophet’s face shone, and, so great was the vitality he absorbed from the great Source that he “was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.” That is the reverent Hebrew manner of conveying the glory of God. But Chesterton, cheerfully playing toss halfpenny among the fairies, sees an idiot child, and calls it God.

Fortunately for the argument, Chesterton has no more to say about his excursion in Fairyland after his return. He goes on to talk about the substitutes which people have invented for Christianity. The Inner Light theory has vitriol sprayed upon it. Marcus Aurelius, it is explained, acted according to the Inner Light. “He gets up early in the morning, just as our own aristocrats leading the Simple Life get up early in the morning; because such altruism is much easier than stopping the games in the amphitheatre or giving the English people back their land.” The present writer does not profess any ability to handle philosophic problems philosophically; it seems to him, however, that if Chesterton had been writing a few years later, he would have attempted to extinguish the latest form of the Inner Light, that “intuition” which has been so much associated with M. Bergson’s teachings.

The Inner Light is finally polished off as follows:

Of all conceivable forms of enlightenment the worst is what these people call the Inner Light. Of all horrible religions the most horrible is the worship of the god within. Any one who knows anybody knows how it would work; anybody who knows any one from the Higher Thought Centre knows how it does work. That Jones should worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones. . . . Christianity came into the world firstly in order to assert with violence that a man has not only to look inwards, but to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine captain.

Continuing his spiritual autobiography, Chesterton describes his gradual emergence from the wonted agnosticism of sixteen through the mediumship of agnostic literature. Once again that remark of Bacon’s showed itself to be true, “A little philosophy inclineth man’s mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion.” A man may read Huxley and Bradlaugh, who knew their minds, and call himself an agnostic.

But when it comes to reading their followers, there’s another story to tell. What especially struck Chesterton was the wholesale self-contradictoriness of the literature of agnosticism. One man would say that Christianity was so harmful that extermination was the least that could be desired for it, and another would insist that it had reached a harmless and doddering old age. A writer would assert that Christianity was a religion of wrath and blood, and would point to the Inquisition, and to the religious wars which have at one time or another swept over the civilized world. But by the time the reader’s blood was up, he would come across some virile atheist’s proclamation of the feeble, mattoid character of the religion in question, as illustrated by its quietist saints, the Quakers, the Tolstoyans, and non-resisters in general. When he had cooled down, he would run into a denunciation of the asceticism of Christianity, the monastic system, hair-shirts, and so on. Then he would come across a sweeping condemnation of its sensual luxuriousness, its bejewelled chalices, its pompous rituals, the extravagance of its archbishops, and the like. Christianity “was abused for being too plain and for being too coloured.” And then the sudden obvious truth burst upon Chesterton, What if Christianity was the happy mean?

Perhaps, after all, it is Christianity that is sane and all its critics that are mad — in various ways. I tested this idea by asking myself whether there was about any of the accusers anything morbid that might explain the accusation. I was startled to find that this key fitted a lock. For instance, it was certainly odd that the modern world charged Christianity at once with bodily austerity and with artistic pomp. But then it was also odd, very odd, that the modern world itself combined extreme bodily luxury with an extreme absence of artistic pomp. The modern man thought Becket’s robes too rich and his meals too poor. But then the modern man was really exceptional in history. No man before ever ate such elaborate dinners in such ugly clothes. The modern man found the church too simple exactly where modern life is too complex; he found the church too gorgeous exactly where modern life is too dingy. The man who disliked the plain fasts and feasts was mad on *entrées*. The man who disliked vestments wore a pair of preposterous trousers. And surely if there was any insanity involved in the matter at all it was in the trousers, not in the simply falling robe. If there was any insanity at all, it was in the extravagant *entrées*, not in the bread and wine.

Nevertheless, Christianity was centrifugal rather than centripetal; it was not a mere average, but a centre of gravity; not a compromise, but a conflict. Christ was not half-God and half-man, like Hercules, but "perfect God and perfect man." Man was not only the highest, but also the lowest. "The Church was positive on both points. One can hardly think too little of one's self. One can hardly think too much of one's soul."

At this point agreement with Mr. Chesterton becomes difficult. Christianity, he tells us, comes in with a flaming sword and performs neat acts of bisection. It separates the sinner from the sin, and tells us to love the former and hate the latter. He also tells us that no pagan would have thought of this. Leaving aside the question whether or not Plato was a Christian, it may be pointed out that whereas Chesterton condemns Tolstoyanism whenever he recognizes it, he here proclaims Tolstoy's doctrine. On the whole, however, the mild perverseness of the chapter on *The Paradoxes of Christianity* leaves its major implications safe. It does not matter greatly whether we prefer to regard Christianity as a centre of gravity, or a point of balance. We need only pause to note Chesterton personifies this dualism. *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* is the arrangement of little bits of iron — the inhabitants of London, in this case — around the two poles of a fantastic magnet, of which one is Adam Wayne, the fanatic, and the other, Auberon Quin, the humorist. In *The Ball and the Cross* the diagram is repeated. James Turnbull, the atheist, and Evan MacIan, the believer, are the two poles. We speak in a loose sort of way of opposite poles when we wish to express separation. But, in point of fact, they symbolize connection far more exactly. They are absolutely interdependent. The whole essence of a North and a South Pole is that we, knowing where one is, should be able to say where the other is. Nobody has ever suggested a universe in which the North Pole wandered about at large. This is the idea which Chesterton seems to have captured and introduced into his definition of Christianity.

Democracy, to Chesterton, is the theory that one man is as good as another; Christianity, he finds, is the virtual sanctification by supernatural authority of democracy. He points out the incompatibility of political democracy, for example, with the determinism to which Mr. Blatchford's logical atheism has brought him. If man is the creature of his heredity and his environment, as Mr. Blatchford asserts, and if a slum-bred heredity and a slum environment do not make for high intelligence, then obviously it is against the best interests of the State to allow the slum inhabitant to vote.

On the other hand, it is entirely to the best interests of the State to entrust its affairs to the aristocracy, whose breeding and environment gives it an enormous amount of intelligence. Christianity, by proclaiming that every man’s body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, insists both upon the necessity of abolishing the slums and of honouring the slum-dwellers as sharers with the rest of humanity in a common sonship. This is the case for Socialism, it may be pointed out parenthetically, and Chesterton has let it slip past him. He insists that orthodoxy is the best conceivable guardian of liberty, for the somewhat far-fetched reason that no believer in miracles would have such “a deep and sincere faith in the incurable routine of the cosmos” as to cling to the theory that men should not have the liberty to work changes. If a man believed in the freedom of God, in fact, he would have to believe in the freedom of man. The obvious answer to which is that he generally doesn’t. Christianity made for eternal vigilance, Chesterton maintains, whereas Buddhism kept its eye on the Inner Light — which means, in fact, kept it shut. In proof, or at least in confirmation of this, he points to the statues of Christian saints and of the Buddha. The former keep their eyes open wide, the latter keep their eyes firmly closed. Vigilance, however, does not always make for liberty — the vigilance of the Inquisition, for example. Leaving out of account this and other monstrous exceptions, we might say spiritual liberty, perhaps, but not political liberty, not, at any rate, since the days of Macchiavelli, and the divorce of Church and State.

By insisting specially on the immanence of God we get introspection, self-isolation, quietism, social indifference — Tibet. By insisting specially on the transcendence of God we get wonder, curiosity, moral and political adventure, religious indignation — Christendom. Insisting that God is inside man, man is always inside himself. By insisting that God transcends man, man has transcended himself.

In concluding the book, Chesterton joyously refutes a few anti-Christian arguments by means of his extraordinary knack of seeing the large and obvious, and therefore generally overlooked things. He believes in Christianity because he is a rationalist, and the evidence in its favour has convinced him. The arguments with which he deals are these. That men are much like beasts, and probably related to them. Answer: yes, but men are also quite wonderfully unlike them in many important respects. That primeval religion arose in ignorance and fear. Answer: we know nothing about prehistoric man, because he was prehistoric, therefore we cannot say where he got his religion from. But “the whole human race has a tradition of the Fall.” And so on: the argument that Christ was a poor sheepish and ineffectual professor of a quiet life is answered by the flaming energy of His earthly mission; the suggestion that Christianity belongs to the Dark Ages is countered by the historical fact that it “was the one path across the Dark Ages that was not dark.” It was the path that led from Roman to modern civilization, and we are here because of it. And the book ends with a peroration that might be likened to a torrent, were it not for the fact that torrents are generally narrow and shallow. It is a most remarkable exhibition of energy, a case from which flippancies and irrelevancies have been removed, and where the central conviction advances irresistibly. Elsewhere in the book Chesterton had been inconsequent, darting from point to point, lunging at an opponent one moment, formulating a theory in the next, and producing an effect which, if judged by sample, would be considered bizarre and undirected. The book contains a few perversities, of course. The author attempts to rebut the idea “that priests have blighted societies with bitterness and gloom,” by pointing out that in one or two priest-ridden countries wine and song and dance abound. Yes, but if people are jollier in France and Spain and Italy than in savage Africa, it is due not to the priests so much as to the climate which makes wine cheap and an open-air life possible. No amount of priests would be able to set the inhabitants of the Belgian Congo dancing around a maypole singing the while glad songs handed down by their fathers. No amount of priests would be able to make the festive Eskimo bask in the sun and sing in chorus when there wasn’t any sun and it was altogether too cold to open their mouths wide in the open air. In fact the priests are not the cause of the blight where it exists, just as they are not the cause of the jolliness, when there is any. But *Orthodoxy* is Chesterton’s sincerest book. It is perhaps the only one of the whole lot in the course of which he would not be justified in repeating a remark which begins one of the *Tremendous Trifles*, “Every now and then I have introduced into my essays an element of truth.”

Twice upon a time there was a Samuel Butler who wrote exhilaratingly and died and left the paradoxical contents of his notebooks to be published by posterity. The first (i.e. of Hudibras, not of Erewhon) had many lively things to say on the question of orthodoxy, being the forerunner of G. K.C. And I am greatly tempted to treat Samuel Butler as an ancestor to be described at length. Chesterton might well have said, “It is a dangerous thing to be too inquisitive, and search too narrowly into a true Religion, for 50,000 Bethshemites were destroyed only for looking into the Ark of the Covenant, and ten times as many have been ruined for looking too curiously into that Booke in which that Story is recorded” — in fact in *Magic* he very nearly did say the same thing. He would have liked (as who would not?) to have been the author of the saying that “Repentant Teares are the waters upon which the Spirit of God moves,” or that “There is no better Argument to prove that the Scriptures were written by Divine Inspiration, than that excellent saying of our Savior, If any man will go to Law with thee for thy cloke, give him thy Coate also.” He might well have written dozens of those puns and aphorisms of Butler which an unkind fate has omitted from the things we read, and even from the things we quote. But Butler provides an answer to Chesterton, for he was an intelligent anticipator who foresaw exactly what would happen when orthodoxy, which is to say the injunction to shout with the larger crowd, should be proclaimed as the easiest way out of religious difficulties. Before a reader has finally made up his mind on *Orthodoxy* (and it is highly desirable that he should do so), let him consider two little texts:

“They that profess Religion and believe it consists in frequenting of Sermons, do, as if they should say They have a great desire to serve God, but would faine be perswaded to it. Why should any man suppose that he pleases God by patiently hearing an Ignorant fellow render Religion ridiculous?”

“He [a Catholic] prefers his Church merely for the Antiquity of it, and cares not how sound or rotten it be, so it be but old. He takes a liking to it as some do to old Cheese, only for the blue Rottenness of it. If he had lived in the primitive Times he had never been a *Christian*; for the Antiquity of the *Pagan* and *Jewish* Religion would have had the same Power over him against the *Christian*, as the old *Roman* has against the modern Reformation.”

Here we leave Samuel Butler. The majority stands the largest chance of being right through the sheer operation of the law of averages. But somehow one does not easily imagine a mob passing through the gate that is narrow and the way that is narrow. One prefers to think of men going up in ones and twos, perhaps even in loneliness, and rejoicing at the strange miracle of judgment that all their friends should be assembled at the journey’s end.

But the final criticism of Chesterton’s *Orthodoxy* is that it is not orthodox. He claims that he is “concerned only to discuss . . . the central Christian theology (sufficiently summarized in the Apostles’ Creed)” and, “When the word ‘orthodoxy’ is used here it means the Apostles’ Creed, as understood by everybody calling himself Christian until a very short time ago and the general historic conduct of those who held such a creed.” In other words he counts as orthodox Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Russians, Nonconformists, Lutherans, Calvinists, and all manner of queer fish, possibly Joanna Southcott, Mrs. Annie Besant, and Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy. He might even, by stretching a point or two (which is surely permissible by the rules of their game), rope in the New Theologians. Now this may be evidence of extraordinary catholicity, but not of orthodoxy. Chesterton stands by and applauds the Homoousians scalping the Homoiousians, but he is apparently willing to leave the Anglican and the Roman Catholic on the same plane of orthodoxy, which is absurd. We cannot all be right, even the Duke in *Magic* would not be mad enough to assert that. And the average Christian would absolutely refuse his adherence to a statement of orthodoxy that left the matter of supreme spiritual authority an open question.

In the fifteenth century practically every Englishman would have declared with some emphasis that it lay in the Pope of Rome. In the twentieth century practically every Englishman would declare with equal emphasis that it did not. This change of opinion was accompanied by considerable ill-feeling on both sides, and was, as it were, illuminated by burning martyrs. The men of both parties burned in both an active and a passive sense. Those charming Tudor sisters, Bloody Mary (as the Anglicans call her) and Bloody Bess (as the Roman Catholics affectionately name her) left a large smudge upon accepted ideas of orthodoxy; charred human flesh was a principal constituent of it. The mark remains, the differences are far greater, but, to Chesterton, both Anglican and Roman Catholic are “orthodox.” Of such is the illimitable orthodoxy of an ethical society, or of a body of Theosophists who “recognize the essential unity of all creeds and religions” — the liars! Chesterton tells us that Messrs. Shaw, Kipling, Wells, Ibsen and others are heretics, because of their doctrines. But he gives us no idea whether the Pope of Rome, who sells indulgences, is a heretic. And as the Pope is likely to outlive Messrs. Shaw, etc., by perhaps a thousand years, it is possible that Chesterton has been attacking the ephemeral heresies, while leaving the major ones untouched. In effect, Chesterton tells us no more than that we should shout with the largest crowd. But the largest crowd prefers, just now, not to do anything so clamorous.

The most curious feature about the present position of Christianity is the energy with which its opponents combine to keep it going. While Mr. Robert Blatchford continues to argue that man's will is not free, and Sir Oliver Lodge continues to maintain that it is, the Doctrine of the Resurrection is safe; it is not even attacked. But the net result of all those peculiar modern things called "movements" is a state of immobility like a nicely balanced tug-of-war. Perhaps a Rugby scrum would make a better comparison.

The great and grave changes in our political civilization all belong to the early nineteenth century, not to the later. They belong to the black-and-white epoch, when men believed fixedly in Toryism, in Protestantism, in Calvinism, in Reform, and not infrequently in Revolution. And whatever each man believed in, he hammered at steadily, without scepticism: and there was a time when the Established Church might have fallen, and the House of Lords nearly fell. It was because Radicals were wise enough to be constant and consistent; it was because Radicals were wise enough to be conservative. . . . Let beliefs fade fast and frequently if you wish institutions to remain the same. The more the life of the mind is unhinged, the more the machinery of matter will be left to itself. The net result of all our political suggestions, Collectivism, Tolstoyanism, Neo-Feudalism, Communism, Anarchy, Scientific Bureaucracy — the plain fruit of them all is that Monarchy and the House of Lords will remain. The net result of all the new religions will be that the Church of England will not (for heaven knows how long) be disestablished. It was Karl Marx, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Cunninghame Graham, Bernard Shaw, and Auberon Herbert, who between them, with bowed, gigantic backs, bore up the throne of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

It is on these grounds that we must believe that, even as the Church survives, and prevails, in order to get a hearing when the atheist and the New Theologian have finished shouting themselves hoarse at each other, so must political creeds be in conformity with the doctrines of the Church.

Such is the foundation of democracy, according to Chesterton. Will anybody revise his political views on this basis? Probably not. Every Christian believes that his political opinions are thoroughly Christian, and so entire is the disrepute into which atheism has fallen as a philosophy of life, that a great many atheists likewise protest the entire Christianity of their politics. We are all democrats to-day, in one sense or another; each of us more loosely than his neighbour. It is strange that by the criterion of almost every living man who springs to the mind as a representative democrat, Chesterton is the most undemocratic of us all. This, however, needs a separate chapter of explanation.

VII

THE POLITICIAN WHO COULD NOT TELL THE TIME

Somewhere at the back of all Chesterton’s political and religious ideas lies an ideal country, a Utopia which actually existed. Its name is the Middle Ages. If some unemployed Higher Critic chose to undertake the appalling task of reading steadily through all the works of G. K.C., copying out those passages in which there was any reference to the Middle Ages, the result would be a description of a land flowing with milk and honey. The inhabitants would be large, strong Christian men, and red-haired, womanly women. Their children would be unschooled, save by the Church. They would all live in houses of their own, on lands belonging to them. Their faith would be one. They would speak Latin as a sort of Esperanto, and drink enormous quantities of good beer. The Church — but I have found the passage relating to the Church:

Religion, the immortal maiden, has been a maid-of-all-work as well as a servant of mankind. She provided men at once with the theoretic laws of an unalterable cosmos; and also with the practical rules of the rapid and thrilling game of morality. She taught logic to the student and taught fairy tales to the children; it was her business to confront the nameless gods whose fear is on all flesh, and also to see that the streets were spotted with silver and scarlet, that there was a day for wearing ribbons or an hour for ringing bells.

The inhabitants of this happy realm would be instinctively democratic, and no woman would demand a vote there. They would have that exalted notion of patriotism that works outwards from the village pump to the universe at large. They would understand all humanity because they understood themselves. They would understand themselves because they would have no newspapers to widen their interests and so make them shallower.

In *Magic*, as we have seen, Chesterton’s mouthpiece, the Conjuror, gave us to understand that it was better to believe in Apollo than merely to disbelieve in God. The Chestertonian Middle Ages are like Apollo; they did not exist, but they make an admirable myth. For Chesterton, in common with the rest of us, flourishes on myths like the green bay; we, however, happen not to know, in most cases, when our myths have a foundation. Mankind demands myths — and it has them. Some day a History of the World's Myths will be compiled. It will show humanity climbing perilous peaks in pursuit of somebody's misinterpretations of somebody else's books, or fighting bloodily because somebody asserted or denied that a nation was the chosen one, or invading new continents, physical or metaphysical, because of legendary gold to be found therein, or in fact committing all its follies under the inspiration of myths — as in fact it has done. The Middle Ages are to Chesterton what King Alfred was to the Chartists and early Radicals. They believed that in his days England was actually governed on Chartist principles. So it happens that two Radical papers of the early part of last century actually called themselves The Alfred, and that Major Cartwright spent a considerable amount of energy in inducing the Greeks to substitute pikes for bayonets in their struggles against the Turks, on the grounds that the pike was used in Alfred's England.

So there we have Chesterton believing devoutly that that servile state, stricken with plague, and afflicted with death in all its forms, is the dreamland of the saints. His political principles, roughly speaking, are England was decent once — let us apply the same recipe to the England of to-day. His suggestions, therefore, are rather negative than positive. He would dam the flood of modern legislative tendencies because it is taking England farther away from his Middle Ages. But he will not say "do this" about anything, because in the Middle Ages they made few laws, not having, in point of fact, the power to enforce those offences against moral and economic law which then took the place of legislation.

It is impossible to say to what extent Chesterton has surrendered himself to this myth; whether he has come to accept it because he liked it, or in order to please his friend, Mr. Hilaire Belloc, from whom G. K.C. never differs politically. Once they stood side by side and debated against Mr. Shaw and Mr. Wells, arguing from Socialism to beer, and thence to religion.

In January, 1908, Chesterton accepted the invitation of the Editor of The New Age to explain why he did not call himself a Socialist, in spite of his claim to possess "not only a faith in democracy, but a great tenderness for revolution." The explanation is complicated, to say the least. In the first place Chesterton does not want people to share, they should give and take.

In the second place, as a democrat (which nobody else is) he has a vast respect (which nobody else has) for the working classes. And

one thing I should affirm as certain, the whole smell and sentiment and general ideal of Socialism they detest and disdain. No part of the community is so specially fixed in those forms and feelings which are opposite to the tone of most Socialists; the privacy of homes, the control of one's own children, the minding of one's own business. I look out of my back windows over the black stretch of Battersea, and I believe I could make up a sort of creed, a catalogue of maxims, which I am certain are believed, and believed strongly, by the overwhelming mass of men and women as far as the eye can reach. For instance, that an Englishman's house is his castle, and that awful proprieties ought to regulate admission to it; that marriage is a real bond, making jealousy and marital revenge at the least highly pardonable; that vegetarianism and all pitting of animal against human rights is a silly fad; that on the other hand to save money to give yourself a fine funeral is not a silly fad, but a symbol of ancestral self-respect; that when giving treats to friends or children, one should give them what they like, emphatically not what is good for them; that there is nothing illogical in being furious because Tommy has been coldly caned by a schoolmistress and then throwing saucepans at him yourself. All these things they believe; they are the only people who do believe them; and they are absolutely and eternally right. They are the ancient sanities of humanity; the ten commandments of man.

A week later, Mr. H. G. Wells, who at that time had not yet broken away from organized Socialism, but was actually a member of the Executive Committee of the Fabian Society, wrote a reply to the case against Socialism which had been stated by Chesterton, and, a week earlier, by Mr. Hilaire Belloc. He attempted to get Chesterton to look facts in the face. He pointed out that as things are "I do not see how Belloc and Chesterton can stand for anything but a strong State as against those wild monsters of property, the strong, big, private owners." Suppose that Chesterton isn't a Socialist, is he more on the side of the Socialists or on that of the Free Trade Liberal capitalists and landlords? "It isn't an adequate reply to say [of Socialism] that nobody stood treat there, and that the simple, generous people like to beat their own wives and children on occasion in a loving and intimate manner, and that they won't endure the spirit of Sidney Webb."

A fortnight later, Chesterton replied. But, though many have engaged with him in controversy, I doubt if anybody has ever pinned him down to a fact or an argument. On this occasion, G. K.C. politely refused even to refer to the vital point of the case of Mr. H. G. Wells. On the other hand he wrote a very jolly article about beer and “tavern hospitality.” The argument marked time for two weeks more, when Mr. Belloc once again entered the lists. The essence of his contribution is “I premise that man, in order to be normally happy, tolerably happy, must own.” Collectivism will not let him own. The trouble about the present state of society is that people do not own enough. The remedy proposed will be worse than the disease. Then Mr. Bernard Shaw had a look in.

In the course of his lengthy article he gave “the Chesterbelloc”— “a very amusing pantomime elephant” — several shrewd digs in the ribs. It claimed, according to G.B.S., to be the Zeitgeist. “To which we reply, bluntly, but conclusively, ‘Gammon!’” The rest was mostly amiable personalities. Mr. Shaw owned up to musical cravings, compared with which the Chesterbelloc tendency to consume alcohol was as nothing. He also jeered very pleasantly at Mr. Belloc’s power to cause a stampede of Chesterton’s political and religious ideas. “For Belloc’s sake Chesterton says he believes literally in the Bible story of the Resurrection. For Belloc’s sake he says he is not a Socialist. On a recent occasion I tried to drive him to swallow the Miracle of St. Januarius for Belloc’s sake; but at that he stuck. He pleaded his belief in the Resurrection story. He pointed out very justly that I believe in lots of things just as miraculous as the Miracle of St. Januarius; but when I remorselessly pressed the fact that he did not believe that the blood of St. Januarius reliquefies miraculously every year, the Credo stuck in his throat like Amen in Macbeth’s. He had got down at last to his irreducible minimum of dogmatic incredulity, and could not, even with the mouth of the bottomless pit yawning before Belloc, utter the saving lie.”

By this time the discussion was definitely off Socialism. Chesterton produced another article, *The Last of the Rationalists*, in reply to Mr. Shaw, from which one gathered what one had been previously suspected that “you [namely Mr. Shaw, but in practice both the opposition controversialists] have confined yourselves to charming essays on our two charming personalities.” And there they stopped.

The year following this bout of personalities saw the publication of a remarkably brilliant book by Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw*, in which, one might have expected, the case against the political creed represented by G.B.S. might have been carried a trifle farther. Instead of which it was not carried anything like so far. Chesterton jeered at Mr. Shaw's vegetarianism, denied his democracy, but decided that on the whole he was a good republican, "in the literal and Latin sense; he cares more for the Public Thing than for any private thing." He ends the chapter entitled "The Progressive" by saying the kindest things he ever said about any body of Socialists.

I have in my time had my fling at the Fabian Society, at the pedantry of schemes, the arrogance of experts; nor do I regret it now. But when I remember that other world against which it reared its bourgeois banner of cleanliness and common sense, I will not end this chapter without doing it decent honour. Give me the drain pipes of the Fabians rather than the panpipes of the later poets; the drain pipes have a nicer smell.

The reader may have grasped by this time the fact that Chesterton's objections to Socialism were based rather on his dislike of what the working man calls "mucking people about" than on any economic grounds. He made himself the sworn enemy of any Bill before Parliament which contained any proposals to appoint inspectors. He took the line that the sacredness of the home diminishes visibly with the entrance of the gas collector, and disappears down the kitchen sink with the arrival of the school attendance officer. In those of his writings which I have not seen I have no doubt there are pleadings for the retention of the cesspool, because it is the last moat left to the Englishman's house, which is his castle. It is difficult to believe in the complete sincerity of such an attitude. The inspector is the chief enemy of the bad landlord and employer, he is a fruit of democracy. In the early days of the factory system, when mercilessly long hours were worked by children and women, when legislation had failed to ameliorate the conditions of employment, because the employers were also the magistrates, and would not enforce laws against themselves, the great Reform Bill agitation, which so nearly caused a revolution in this country, came to an end, having in 1832 achieved a partial success. But the new House of Commons did not at once realize how partial it was, and at first it regarded the interests of working men with something of the intensity of the Liberal Government of 1906, which had not yet come to appreciate the new and portentous Labour Party at its true worth. So in 1833 inspectors were appointed for the first time. This very brief excursion into history is sufficient justification for refusing to take seriously those who would have us believe that inspectors are necessarily the enemies of the human race. Chesterton's theory that middle-class Socialists are people who want to do things to the poor in the direction of regimenting them finds an easy refutation. When, in 1910, the whole of England fell down before the eloquence of Mr. Lloyd George, and consented to the Insurance Bill, the one body of people who stood out and fought that Bill was that middle-class Socialist body, the Fabian Society. It is sometimes desirable, for purposes of controversy, to incarnate a theory or objection. Chesterton lumped together all his views on the alleged intentions of the Socialists to interfere in the natural and legitimate happinesses of the working class, and called this curious composite Mr. Sidney Webb. So through many volumes Mr. Webb's name is continually bobbing up, like an irrepressible Aunt Sally, and having to be thwacked into a temporary disappearance. But this is only done for literary effect. To heave a brick at a man is both simpler and more amusing than to arraign a system or a creed. A reader enjoys the feeling that his author is a clever dog who is making it devilishly uncomfortable for his opponents. His appreciation would be considerably less if the opponent in question was a mere theory. In point of fact, Chesterton is probably a warm admirer of Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb. When they founded (in 1909) their National Committee for the Prevention of Destitution, designed to educate the British public in the ideas of what has been called Webbism, especially those contained in the Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission, one of the first to join was G. K. Chesterton.

The word Socialism covers a multitude of Socialists, some of whom are not. The political faith of a man, therefore, must not be judged upon his attitude towards Socialism, if we have anything more definite to go upon. Chesterton overflows, so to speak, with predilections, such as beer (in a political sense, of course), opposition to the Jingo, on the one hand, and to middle-class faddery, such as vegetarianism, on the other, and so on. Anybody might indulge in most of his views, in fact, without incurring severe moral reprobation. But there is an exception which, unfortunately, links Chesterton pretty firmly with the sweater, and other undesirable lords of creation. He is an anti-suffragist.

In a little essay Chesterton once wrote on Tolstoy, he argued that the thing that has driven men mad was logic, from the beginning of time, whereas the thing that has kept them sane was mysticism. Tolstoy, lacking mysticism, was at the mercy of his pitiless logic, which led him to condemn things which are entirely natural and human. This attitude, one feels (and it is only to be arrived at by feeling), is absolutely right. We all start off with certain scarce expressible feelings that certain things are fundamentally decent and permissible, and that others are the reverse, just as we do not take our idea of blackness and whiteness from a text-book. If anybody proposed that all Scotsmen should be compelled to eat sago with every meal, the idea, although novel to most of us, would be instantly dismissed, even, it is probable, by those with sago interests, because it would be contrary to our instinct of what is decent. In fact, we all believe in natural rights, or at any rate we claim the enjoyment of some. Now natural rights have no logical basis. The late Professor D. G. Ritchie very brilliantly examined the theory of natural rights, and by means of much subtle dissection and argument found that there were no natural rights; law was the only basis of privilege. It is quite easy to be convinced by the author’s delightful dialectic, but the conviction is apt to vanish suddenly in the presence of a dog being ill-treated.

Now on a basis of common decency — the basis of all democratic political thought — the case for woman suffrage is irresistible. It is not decent that the sweated woman worker should be denied what, in the opinion of many competent judges, might be the instrument of her salvation. It is not decent that women should share a disqualification with lunatics, criminals, children, and no others of their own race. It is not decent that the sex which knows most about babies should have no opportunity to influence directly legislation dealing with babies. It is not decent that a large, important and necessary section of humanity, with highly gregarious instincts, should not be allowed to exercise the only gregarious function which concerns the whole nation at once.

These propositions are fundamental; if a man or woman cannot accept them, then he is at heart an “anti,” even if he has constructed for himself a quantity of reasons, religious, ethical, economic, political or what not, why women should be allowed to vote. Every suffrage argument is, or can be, based on decencies, not on emotion or statistics.

Chesterton bases his case on decencies, but they are not the decencies that matter. In *What’s Wrong with the World* he insists on the indecency of allowing women to cease to be amateurs within the home, or of allowing them to earn a living in a factory or office, or of allowing them to share in the responsibility for taking the lives of condemned murderers, or of allowing them to exercise the coercion which is government, which is a sort of pyramid, with a gallows on top, the ultimate resort of coercive power. And in these alleged indecencies (the word is not altogether my own) lies Chesterton’s whole case against allowing any woman to vote. Into these propositions his whole case, as expressed in *What’s Wrong with the World*, is faithfully condensed.

Well now, are these indecencies sincere or simulated? First, as regards the amateur, Chesterton’s case is that the amateur is necessary, in order to counteract the influences of the specialist. Man is nowadays the specialist. He is confined to making such things as the thousandth part of a motor-car or producing the ten-thousandth part of a daily newspaper. By being a specialist he is made narrow. Woman, with the whole home on her hands, has a multiplicity of tasks. She is the amateur, and as such she is free. If she is put into politics or industry she becomes a specialist, and as such becomes a slave. This is a pretty piece of reasoning, but it is absolutely hollow. There are few women who do not gladly resign part at least of their sovereignty, if they have the chance, to a maid-servant (who may be, and, in fact, usually is an amateur, but is not free to try daring experiments) or to such blatant specialists as cooks and nursemaids. Nobody is the least bit shocked by the existence of specialist women. Indeed, it is a solemn fact, that were it not for them Chesterton would be unable to procure a single article of clothing. He would be driven to the fig-leaf, and would stand a good chance of not getting even so much, now that so many gardeners are women. We are terribly dependent upon the specialist woman. That is why the amateur within the home is beginning to wonder whether, on the whole, man *is* so very much dependent upon her. She comes to rely more and more upon the specialist women to help her feed, clothe, and nurse her husband. She has so much done for her that she comes to understand the remainder left to her far better. She becomes a specialist herself, and feels kindly towards other specialists. Then she demands a vote and meets Chesterton, who tells her to go and mind the baby and be as free as she likes with the domestic apparatus for making pastry, when her baby is in point of fact being brought up by other women at a Montessori school to be much more intelligent and much more of a specialist than she herself is ever likely to be, and when she knows that her dyspeptic husband has an absolute loathing for the amateurishness that expresses itself in dough.

Then there is the alleged wrongness of permitting women to work in factories and offices. We are all probably prepared to admit that we have been shocked at the commercial employment of women. But it has probably occurred to few of us that the shock was due simply to their commercial employment. It was due to their low wages and to the beastliness of their employers. When they drew decent wages and their employers were decent men we were not the least bit hurt. But when an employer made use of the amateurishness of young girls to underpay them, and then make deductions from their wages on various trivial pretexts, and put them to work in overcrowded factories and offices, then we all felt acutely that an indecency was being committed. The obvious democratic remedy is the duckpond, but in our great cities none remain. So one is sorrowfully brought round to the slower but surer expedient of attacking and destroying the amateurishness of women at the point where it is dangerous to them. Amateurishness has encircled women in the past like the seven rivers of Hades. Every now and again a daring excursion was made in order that the wisdom of those imprisoned within should be added to our store. A good deal of aboriginal amateurishness has been evaporating as the woman doctor has been taking the place of the time-honoured amateur dispenser of brimstone and treacle, and even horrider things. And will Chesterton maintain that it were better for us all if certain women had remained amateurs and had not studied and specialized so that, in time of need, they were enabled to tend the sick and wounded at home, in Flanders and in France, and wherever the powers of evil had been at work?

Lastly, is it decent that women should share the awful responsibility which is attached to the ultimate control of the State, when the State is compelled to use the gallows? If women vote, they are responsible for whatever blood is shed by the State. Yes, but, Mr. Chesterton, aren’t they just as responsible for it in any case? Don’t women help to pay the hangman’s wages with every ounce of tea or of sweets they buy? If capital punishment is obscene, then we can do without it, and a woman’s vote will not make her a sharer in the evil. If capital punishment is morally stimulating to the nation at large, there is no reason why women should not be allowed to share in the stimulation. Now what has become of Chesterton’s decencies? It is indeed saddening that a man who never misses an opportunity to proclaim himself a democrat should take his stand on this matter beside Lord Curzon, and in opposition to the instinctively and essentially democratic views proclaimed by such men as Messrs. H. W. Nevinson and Philip Snowden.

In an article in The Illustrated London News on June 1st, 1912, Chesterton showed whose side he was on with unusual distinctness. The subject of the article was Earnestness; the moral, that it was a bad quality, the property of Socialists and Anti-Socialists, and Suffragists, and that apathy was best of all. It concluded:

Neither Socialists nor Suffragists will smash our politics, I fear. The worst they can do is to put a little more of the poison of earnestness into the strong, unconscious sanity of our race, and disturb that deep and just indifference on which all things rest; the quiet of the mother or the carelessness of the child.

In remarkably similar words, the late Procurator of the Holy Synod of the Russian Church, C. P. Pobedonostsev, condemned democracy in his book, The Reflexions of a Russian Statesman, and praised *vis inertiæ* for its preservative effects. But the Russian had more consistency; he did not merely condemn votes for women, but also votes for men; and not only votes, but education, the jury system, the freedom of the Press, religious freedom, and many other things.

Putting aside the question of woman suffrage, Chesterton’s views on democracy may be further illustrated by reference to the proceedings of the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and the House of Commons, 1909, on Stage Plays (Censorship). He may speak for himself here.

Mr. G. K. Chesterton is called in, and examined.

Question 6141 (*Chairman*). I understand that you appear here to give evidence on behalf of the average man?

G. K.C. Yes, that is so. I represent the audience, in fact. I am neither a dramatist nor a dramatic critic. I do not quite know why I am here, but if anybody wants to know my views on the subject they are these: I am for the censorship, but I am against the present Censor. I am very strongly for the censorship, and I am very strongly against the present Censor. The whole question I think turns on the old democratic objection to despotism. I am an old-fashioned person and I retain the old democratic objection to despotism. I would trust 12 ordinary men, but I cannot trust one ordinary man.

6142. You prefer the jury to the judge? — Yes, exactly; that is the very point. It seems to me that if you have one ordinary man judging, it is not his ordinariness that appears, but it is his extraordinariness that appears. Take anybody you like — George III for instance. I suppose that George III was a pretty ordinary man in one sense. People called him Farmer George. He was very like a large number of other people, but when he was alone in his position things appeared in him that were not ordinary — that he was a German, and that he was mad, and various other facts. Therefore, my primary principle ——

6143. He gloried in the name of Briton? — I know he did. That is what showed him to be so thoroughly German.

Lord Newton. He spelt it wrongly.

Witness. Therefore, speaking broadly, I would not take George III's opinion, but I would take the opinion of 12 George III's on any question.

The taking of the "evidence" took several hours, but it never yielded anything more than this: The local jury is a better judge of what is right and proper than a single Censor. Juries may differ in their judgments; but why not? Is it not desirable that Hampstead and Highgate should each have an opportunity of finding out independently what they like? May they not compete in taste one against the other?

This introduction of the question of dramatic censorship invites a slight digression. Chesterton has a decided regard for a dramatic censorship. A book need not be censored, because it need not be finished by its reader, but it may be difficult to get out of a theatre in the course of a performance. And there are performances of plays, written by "irresponsible modern philosophers," which, to Chesterton, seem to deserve suppression. A suggestive French farce may be a dirty joke, but it is at least a joke; but a play which raises the question Is marriage a failure? and answers it in the affirmative, is a pernicious philosophy. The answer to this last contention is that, in point of strict fact, modern philosophers do not regard happy marriages as failures, and opinion is divided on the others, which are generally the subjects of their plays. But there is no doubt that a jury is better qualified than a single Censor. A French jury decided that Madame Bovary was not immoral. An English jury decided that a certain book by Zola was immoral and sent the publisher to prison. Another English jury, for all practical purposes, decided that Dorian Gray was not immoral, and so on. The verdicts may be accepted. Twelve men, picked from an alphabetical list, may not be judges of art, but they will not debase morality.

Chesterton's personal contribution to the political thought of his day lies in his criticism of the humaneness of legislative proposals. A thing that is human is commonly a very different matter from a thing that is merely humanitarian. G. K.C. is hotly human and almost bitterly anti-humanitarian.

The difference between the two is illustrated by the institution of the gallows, which is human, but not humanitarian. In its essentials it consists of a rope and a branch, which is precisely the apparatus that an angry man might employ in order to rid himself of his captured enemy. Herbert Spencer, seeking in his old age for means whereby to increase the happiness of mankind, invented a humanitarian apparatus for the infliction of capital punishment. It consisted of a glorified roundabout, on which the victim was laid for his last journey. As it revolved, the blood-pressure on his head gradually increased (or decreased, I forget which) until he fell asleep and died painlessly. This is humanitarianism. The process is safe and sure (so long as the machine did not stop suddenly), highly efficient, bloodless and painless. But just because it is so humanitarian it offends one a great deal more than the old-fashioned gallows. The only circumstance which can justify violence is anger. The only circumstance which can justify the taking of human life is anger. And anger may be expressed by a rope or a knife-edge, but not by a roundabout or any other morbid invention of a cold-blooded philosopher such as the electric chair, or the lethal chamber. In the same way, if flogging is to continue as a punishment, it must be inflicted by a man and not by a machine.

Now this distinction (made without prejudice as to Chesterton's views on capital or corporal punishment) holds good through his whole criticism of modern legislation. He believes that it is better that a man and his family should starve in their own slum, than that they should be moulded, by a cumbersome apparatus of laws and officials and inspectors, into a tame, mildly prosperous and mildly healthy group of individuals, whose opinions, occupations and homes should be provided for them. On these lines he attacks whatever in his opinion will tend to put men into a position where their souls will be less their own. He believes that the man who has been costered by the Government into a mediocre state of life will be less of a man than one who has been left unbothered by officials, and has had to shift for himself.

Very largely, therefore, Chesterton's political faith is an up-to-date variety of the tenets of the Self-Help School, which was own brother to the Manchester School. And here we come to a curious contradiction, the first of a series. For Chesterton loathes the Manchester School.

The contradiction comes of an inveterate nominalism. To G. K.C. all good politics are summed up in the words Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. But nobody, not even a Frenchman, can explain what they mean. Chesterton used to believe that they mean Liberalism, being led astray by the sound of the first word, but he soon realized his error. Let a man say "I believe in Liberty" and only the vagueness of the statement preserves it from the funniness of a Higher Thinker's affirmation, "I believe in Beauty." A man has to *feel* Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, for they are not in the nature of facts. And one suspects horribly that what Chesterton really feels is merely the masculine liberty, equality and fraternity of the public-house, where men meet together but never do anything. For Chesterton has not yet asked us to do anything, he only requests Parliament to refrain. He supports no political programme. He is opposed to Party Government, which is government by the Government. He is in favour of Home Rule, it may be inferred; and of making things nasty for the Jews, it may be supposed. But he does not poach on the leader-writers' preserves, and his political programme is left hazy. His opposition to Liberal proposals brings him near the Tories. If the Liberals continue in power for a few years longer, and Home Rule drops out of the things opposed by Tories, the latter may well find Chesterton among their doubtful assets. He will probably continue to call himself a Liberal and a "child of the French Revolution," but that will be only his fun. For the interesting abortions to which the French Revolution gave birth — well, they are quite another story.

Chesterton is a warm supporter of the queerly mixed proposals that are known as the "rights of small nationalities," and the smaller the nationality, the more warmly he supports (so he would have us believe) its demand for self-government. Big fleas have little fleas, alas, and that is the difficulty he does not confront. For Home Rule carried to its final sub-division is simply home rule; the independence of homes. Political Home Rule is only assented to on general principles; apparently on the ground that on the day when an Englishman’s home really does become his castle he will not, so to speak, mind much whether he is an Englishman or an Irishman.

And here we may bid farewell to the politician who is Chesterton. His politics are like his perverse definitions of the meaning of such words as progress and reform. He is like a child who plays about with the hands of a clock, and makes the surprising discovery that some clocks may be made to tell a time that does not exist — with the small hand at twelve and the large at six, for example. Also that if a clock goes fast, it comes to register an hour behind the true time, and the other way round. And so Chesterton goes on playing with the times, until at last a horrid suspicion grips us. What if he cannot tell the time himself?

VIII

A DECADENT OF SORTS

An idea, if treated gently, may be brought up to perform many useful tasks. It is, however, apt to pine in solitude, and should be allowed to enjoy the company of others of its own kind. It is much easier to overwork an idea than a man, and of the two, the wearied idea presents an infinitely more pathetic appearance. Those of us who, for our sins, have to review the novels of other people, are accustomed to the saddening spectacle of a poor little idea, beautiful and fresh in its youth, come wearily to its tombstone on page 300 (where or whereabouts novels end), trailing after it an immense load of stiff and heavy puppets, taken down from the common property-cupboards of the nation's fiction, and not even dusted for the occasion. *Manalive*, as we have seen, suffered from its devotion to one single idea, but the poor little thing was kept going to the bitter end by the flow of humorous encouragement given it by the author. The later works of Chesterton, however, are symbolized by a performing flea, dragging behind it a little cartload of passengers. But it sometimes happens that the humour of *Manalive* is not there, that one weary idea has to support an intolerable deal of prose.

In *An Essay on Two Cities* there is a long passage illustrating the adventures of a man who tried to find people in London by the names of the places. He might go into Buckingham Palace in search of the Duke of Buckingham, into Marlborough House in quest of the Duke of Marlborough. He might even look for the Duke of Wellington at Waterloo.

I wonder that no one has written a wild romance about the adventures of such an alien, seeking the great English aristocrats, and only guided by the names; looking for the Duke of Bedford in the town of that name, seeking for some trace of the Duke of Norfolk in Norfolk. He might sail for Wellington in New Zealand to find the ancient seat of the Wellingtons. The last scene might show him trying to learn Welsh in order to converse with the Prince of Wales.

Here is an idea that is distinctly amusing when made to fill one short paragraph, and might be deadly tedious if extended into a wild romance. Perhaps the best way of summarizing the peculiar decadence into which

Chesterton seemed at one time to be falling is by the statement that up to the present he has not found time to write the book, but has done others like it. And yet the decadence has never showed signs of that *fin de siècle* rustiness that marked the decadent movement (if it was really a movement and not just an obsession) of the generation that preceded Chesterton. He cursed it in the dedication to Mr. E. C. Bentley of *The Man who was Thursday*, and he remained true to the point of view expressed in that curse for ever afterwards.

A cloud was on the mind of men, and wailing went the weather,
Yea, a sick cloud upon the soul, when we were boys together.
Science announced nonentity, and art admired decay;
The world was old and ended: but you and I were gay.
Round us in antic order their crippled vices came —
Lust that had lost its laughter, fear that had lost its shame.
Like the white lock of Whistler, that lit our aimless gloom,
Men showed their own white feather as proudly as a plume.
Life was a fly that faded, and death a drone that stung;
The world was very old indeed when you and I were young.
They twisted even decent sin to shapes not to be named:
Men were ashamed of honour; but we were not ashamed.

The Chestertonian decadence was not even an all-round falling-off. If anybody were to make the statement that in the year nineteen-hundred-and-something Chesterton produced his worst work it would be open to anybody else to declare, with equal truth, that in the same year Chesterton produced his best work. And the year in which these extremes met would be either 1913 or 1914, the years of *Father Brown* and *The Flying Inn* on one hand, and of *Father Brown* and some of the songs of *The Flying Inn* on the other. It was not a technical decline, but the period of certain intellectual wearinesses, when Chesterton’s mental resilience failed him for a time, and he welcomed with too much enthusiasm the nasty ideas from which no man is wholly free.

The main feature indeed of this period of decadence is the brandishing about of a whole mass of antipathies. A man is perfectly entitled to hate what he will, but it is generally assumed that the hater has some ideas on the subject of the reform of the hatee. But Chesterton is as devoid of suggestions as a goat is of modesty. A man may have a violent objection against women earning their own livings, and yet be regarded as a reasonable being if he has any alternative proposals for the well-being of the unendowed and temporarily or permanently unmarriageable woman, with no relatives able to support her — and there are two or three millions of such women in the United Kingdom. But a mere “You shouldn’t” is neither here nor there.

Take this verse. It was written two or three years ago and is from a poem entitled *To a Turk*.

With us too rage against the rood
Your devils and your swine;
A colder scorn of womanhood,
A baser fear of wine,
And lust without the harem,
And Doom without the God,
Go. It is not this rabble
Sayeth to you “Ichabod.”

A previous stanza talks about “the creedless chapel.” Here is a whole mass of prejudices collected into a large splutter at the expense of England. If the verse means anything at all, it means that the English are nearer the beasts than the Turks.

Another of Chesterton’s intellectual aberrations is his anti-Semitism. He continually denied in the columns of The Daily Herald that he was an anti-Semite, but his references to the Jews are innumerable and always on the same side. If one admits what appears to be Chesterton’s contention that Judaism is largely just an exclusive form of contemporary atheism, then one is entitled to ask, Why is a wicked Gentile atheist merely an atheist, while a Jewish atheist remains a Jew? Surely the morals of both are on the same level, and the atheism, and not the race, is the offensive feature. The Jews have their sinners and their saints, including the greatest Saint of all.

They and they only, amongst all mankind,
Received the transcript of the eternal mind;
Were trusted with His own engraven laws,
And constituted guardians of His cause:
Their’s were the prophets, their’s the priestly call,
And their’s, by birth, the Saviour of us all.

Even if Chesterton cannot work himself up to Cowper’s enthusiasm (and few of us can), he cannot deny that the race he is continually blackguarding was preparing his religion, and discovering the way to health at a time when his own Gentile ancestors were probably performing human sacrifices and eating worms. Unquestionably what is the matter with the modern Jew, especially of the educated classes, is that he refuses to be impressed by the Christian Church. But the Christian Church cannot fairly be said to have made herself attractive in the past; her methods of Inquisition, for example. . . .

It is difficult to write apathetically on this extreme instance of a great writer’s intolerance. One single example will suffice. A year or two ago, a Jew called Beilis was put on his trial (after an imprisonment of nearly three years) for the murder of a small Christian boy named Yushinsky, in order that his blood might be used for ritual purposes. Yushinsky, who was found dead under peculiar circumstances, was probably a Jew himself, but that does not affect the point at issue. Mr. Arthur Henderson, M.P., tried to arouse an agitation in order to secure the freedom of Beilis, because it was perfectly evident from the behaviour of certain parties that the prisoner’s conviction would be the signal for the outbreak of a series of massacres of the Jews, and because a case which had taken nearly three years to prepare was obviously a very thin case. Chesterton wrote a ribald article in The Daily Herald on Mr. Henderson’s attempt at intervention, saying in effect, How do you know that Beilis isn’t guilty? Now it is impossible to hold the belief that Beilis might be guilty and at the same time disbelieve that the Jews are capable of committing human sacrifice. When a leading Russian critic named Rosanov, also an anti-Semite, issued a pamphlet proclaiming that the Jews did, in fact, commit this loathsome crime, he was ignominiously ejected from a prominent Russian literary society. The comparison should appeal to Chesterton.

The nadir of these antipathies is reached in *The Flying Inn*, a novel published a few months before the Great War broke out, and before we all made the discovery that, hold what prejudices we will, we are all immensely dependent on one another. In this book we are given a picture of England of the future, conquered by the Turk. As a concession to Islam, all intoxicating drink is prohibited in England. It is amusing to note that a few months after the publication of this silly prognostication, the greatest Empire in Christendom prohibited drink within its frontiers in order to conquer the Turk — and his Allies. A Patrick Dalroy, an Irishman (with red hair), and of course a giant, has been performing Homeric feats against the conquering Turks. A Lord Ivywood, an abstraction bloodless to the point of albinism, is at the head of affairs in England. The Jews dominate everything. Dalroy and Humphrey Pump, an evicted innkeeper, discovering that drinks may still be sold where an inn-sign may be found, start journeying around England loaded only with the sign-board of "The Green Man," a large cheese, and a keg of rum. They are, in fact, a peripatetic public-house, and the only democratic institution of its kind left in England. Every other chapter the new innkeepers run into Ivywood and his hangers-on. As the story wriggles its inconsequent length, the author curses through the mouths of his heroes. He anathematizes teetotallers, brewers, vegetarians, temperance drinks, model villages, æsthetic poets, Oriental art, Parliament, politicians, Jews, Turks, and infidels in general, futurist painting, and other things. In the end, Dalroy and Pump lead a vast insurrection, and thousands of dumb, long-suffering Englishmen attack Ivywood in his Hall, and so free their country from the Turk.

Only the songs already described in Chapter V preserve this book from extreme dullness. Technically it is poor. The action is as scattered as the parts of a futurist picture. A whole chapter is devoted to a picture of a newspaper editor at work, inventing the phraseology of indefiniteness. Epigrams are few and are very much overworked. Once a catchword is sprung, it is run to death. The Turk who by means of silly puns attempts to prove that Islamic civilization is better than European, never ceases in his efforts. The heartlessness of Ivywood is continuous, and ends in insanity.

Parts of *The Flying Inn* convey the impression that Chesterton was tired of his own style and his own manner of controversy, and had taken to parodying himself. The arguments of the already-mentioned Turk, for example, might well pass for a really good parody of the theological dispute in the first chapter of *The Ball and the Cross*. There, it may be remembered, two men (more or less) discussed the symbolism of balls and crosses. In *The Flying Inn* people discuss the symbolism of crescents and crosses, and the Turk, Misysra Ammon, explains, “When the English see an English youth, they cry out ‘He is crescent!’ But when they see an English aged man, they cry out ‘He is cross!’” On these lines a great deal of *The Flying Inn* is written.

We now come to Chesterton’s political decadence, traceable, like many features in his history, to Mr. Hilaire Belloc. The friendship between G. K.C. and the ex-Liberal M.P. for Rochdale bore a number of interesting fruits. There were the amusing illustrations to The Great Enquiry, an amusing skit on the Tariff Reform League, to Emmanuel Burden and The Green Overcoat. But curious artificialities sprang into existence, like so many funguses, under the lengthening shadow of Mr. Belloc. To him is due the far-fetchedness of some of Chesterton’s pleading in support of the miraculous element in religion. To him also is due the growing antipathy against the Liberal Party and the party system in general.

Up to the end of January, 1913, Chesterton had continued his connection with The Daily News. On January 28th there took place, at the Queen’s Hall, London, a debate between Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. Hilaire Belloc. The latter moved “That if we do not re-establish the institution of property, we shall re-establish the institution of slavery; there is no third course.” The debate was an extremely poor affair, as neither combatant dealt, except parenthetically, with his opponent’s points. In the course of it Mr. Shaw, to illustrate an argument, referred to Chesterton as “a flourishing property of Mr. Cadbury,” a remark which G. K.C. appears to have taken to heart. His quarrel with official Liberalism was at the moment more bitter than ever before. Mr. Belloc had taken a very decided stand on the Marconi affair, and Mr. Cecil Chesterton, G. K.C.’s brother, was sturdily supporting him. The Daily News, on the other hand, was of course vigorously defending the Government. Chesterton suddenly severed his long connection with The Daily News and came over to The Daily Herald. This paper, which is now defunct, except in a weekly edition, was the organ of Syndicalism and rebellion in general. In a letter to the editor of The Herald, Chesterton explained with pathetic irony that The Daily News “had come to stand for almost everything I disagree with; and I thought I had better resign before the next great measure of social reform made it illegal to go on strike.”

A week or so later, Chesterton started his series of Saturday articles in The Daily Herald. His first few efforts show that he made a determined attempt to get down to the intellectual level of the Syndicalist. But anybody who sits down to read through these articles will notice that before many weeks had passed Chesterton was beginning to feel a certain discomfort in the company he was keeping. He writes to say that he likes writing for The Daily Herald because it is the most revolutionary paper he knows, "even though I do not agree with all the revolutions it advocates," and goes on to state that, personally, he likes most of the people he meets. Having thus, as it were, cleared his conscience in advance, Chesterton let himself go. He attacked the Government for its alleged nepotism, dishonesty, and corruption. He ended one such article with, "There is nothing but a trumpet at midnight, calling for volunteers." The New Statesman then published an article, "Trumpets and How to Blow Them," suggesting, among other things, that there was little use in being merely destructive. It is typical of what I have called the decadence of Chesterton that he borrowed another writer's most offensive description of a lady prominently connected with The New Statesman in order to quote it with glee by way of answer to this article. The Syndicalist hates the Socialist for his catholicity. The Socialist wishes to see the world a comfortable place, the Syndicalist merely wishes to work in a comfortable factory. Chesterton seized the opportunity, being mildly rebuked by a Socialist paper, to declare that the Fabians "are constructing a man-trap." A little later on he writes, with reference to a controversialist's request, that he should explain why, after all, he was not a Socialist:

> If he wants to know what the Marconi Scandal has saved us from, I can tell him. It has saved us from Socialism. My God! what Socialism, and run by what sort of Socialists! My God! what an escape! If we had transferred the simplest national systems to the State (as we wanted to do in our youth) it is to these men that we should have transferred them.

There never was an example of more muddled thinking. Let us apply it to something definite, to that harmless, necessary article of diet, milk, to be precise, cow's milk. To-day milk is made expensive by a multiplicity of men who have interests in keeping milk expensive. There are too many milkmen's wages to be paid, too many milk-carts to be built, too many shop-rents paid, and too much apparatus bought, simply because we have not yet had the intelligence to let any municipality or county run its own milk-service and so avoid all manner of duplication. Chesterton’s answer to this is: “I used to think so, but what about Lord Murray, Mr. Lloyd George, and Mr. Godfrey Isaacs?” It would be as relevant to say, “What about Dr. Crippen, Jack Sheppard, and Ananias,” or, “But what about Mr. Bernard Shaw, the Grand Duke Nicolas, and my brother?” The week later Chesterton addresses the Labour Party in these words:

Comrades (I mean gentlemen), there is only one real result of anything you have done. You have justified the vulgar slander of the suburban Conservatives that men from below are men who merely want to rise. It is a lie. No one knows so well as you that it was a lie: you who drove out Grayson and deserted Lansbury. Before you went into Parliament to represent the working classes, the working classes were feared. Since you have represented the working classes, they are not even respected. Just when there was a hope of Democracy, you have revived the notion that the demagogue was only the sycophant. Just when there had begun to be an English people to represent, you have been paid to misrepresent them. Get out of our path. Take your money; go.

Regarding which passage there is only to be said that it is grossly unjust both to the Labour Party and to the working classes. It was followed up in subsequent numbers by violent attacks on woman suffrage and the economic independence of women; a proceeding quite commendably amusing in a paper with a patron saint surnamed Pankhurst. A promise to say no more about Votes for Women was followed by several more spirited references to it, from the same point of view. After which Chesterton cooled off and wrote about detective stories, telephones, and worked himself down into an all-round fizzle of disgust at things as they are, to illustrate which “I will not run into a paroxysm of citations again,” as Milton said in the course of his Epistle in two books on Reformation in England.

The most unpleasant feature of The Daily Herald articles is the assumption of superiority over the British working man, expressing itself in the patronizing tone. The British working man, as Chesterton sees him, is a very different person from what he is. If the Middle Ages had been the peculiar period Chesterton appears to believe it was, then his working man would be merely a trifling anachronism of five centuries or so. But he is not even that. Five centuries would be but a trifle compared with the difference between him and his real self. Chesterton’s attitude towards the working man must resemble that of a certain chivalrous knight towards the distressed damsel he thought he had rescued. He observed, “Well, little one, aren’t you going to show me any gratitude?” And the lady replied, “I wasn’t playing Andromeda, fathead, I was looking for blackberries. Run away and play.”

The attitude of the middle-class suburbanite towards the working man and his wife is not exactly graceful, but the former at any rate does not pretend to love the latter, and to find all decency of feeling and righteousness of behaviour in them. Chesterton both pretends to reverence the working classes, and exhibits a profound contempt for them. He is never happier than when he is telling the working classes that they are wrong. He delights in attacking the Labour Party in order to have the supreme satisfaction of demonstrating that working men are their own worst enemies.

At the beginning of August, 1914, the Great War broke out, and everything seemed changed. No man now living will be able to say definitely what effects the war will have upon literature, but one thing is certain: nothing will remain the same. We have already learned to view each other with different eyes. For better or for worse, old animosities and party cleavages have given way to unforeseen combinations. To assert that we have all grown better would be untrue. But it might reasonably be argued that the innate generousness of the British people has been vitiated by its childlike trust in its journalists, and the men who own them. When Mr. Bernard Shaw wrote a brilliant defence of the British case for intervention in the war, his mild denigration of some of the defects of the English nation, a few trivial inaccuracies, and his perverse bellicosity of style made him the object of the attentions of a horde of panic-stricken heresy-hunters. Those of us who had not the fortune to escape the Press by service abroad, especially those of us who derived our living from it, came to loathe its misrepresentation of the English people. There seemed no end to the nauseous vomits of undigested facts and dishonourable prejudices that came pouring out in daily streams. Then we came to realize, as never before, the value of such men as Chesterton. Christianity and the common decencies fare badly at the hands of the bishops of to-day, and the journalists threw them over as soon as the war began. But, unfortunately for us all, G. K.C. fell seriously ill in the early period of the war, and was in a critical state for many months. But not before he had published a magnificent recantation — for it is no less — of all those bitternesses which, in their sum, had very nearly caused him to hate the British. It is a poem, *Blessed are the Peacemakers*.

Of old with a divided heart
I saw my people's pride expand,
Since a man's soul is born apart
By mother earth and fatherland.

I knew, through many a tangled tale,
Glory and truth not one but two:
King, Constable and Amirail
Took me like trumpets: but I knew

A blacker thing than blood's own dye
Weighed down great Hawkins on the sea;
And Nelson turned his blindest eye
On Naples and on liberty.

Therefore to you my thanks, O throne,
O thousandfold and frozen folk,
For whose cold frenzies all your own
The Battle of the Rivers broke;

Who have no faith a man could mourn,
Nor freedom any man desires;
But in a new clean light of scorn
Close up my quarrel with my sires;

Who bring my English heart to me,
Who mend me like a broken toy;
Till I can see you fight and flee,
And laugh as if I were a boy.

When we read this poem, with its proclamation of a faith restored, Chesterton's temporary absence from the field of letters appears even more lamentable. For even before his breakdown he had given other signs of a resurrection. Between the overworked descriptions of *The Flying Inn* and the little book *The Barbarism of Berlin* which closely followed it, there is a fine difference of style, as if in the interval Chesterton had taken a tonic. Thus there is a jolly passage in which, describing German barbarism, he refers to the different ways of treating women.

> The two extremes of the treatment of women might be represented by what are called the respectable classes in America and in France. In America they choose the risk of comradeship; in France the compensation of courtesy. In America it is practically possible for any young gentleman to take any young lady for what he calls (I deeply regret to say) a joy-ride; but at least the man goes with the woman as much as the woman with the man. In France the young woman is protected like a nun while she is unmarried; but when she is a mother she is really a holy woman; and when she is a grandmother she is a holy terror. By both extremes the woman gets something back out of life. France and America aim alike at equality — America by similarity; France by dissimilarity. But North Germany does actually aim at inequality. The woman stands up, with no more irritation than a butler; the man sits down, with no more embarrassment than a guest.

And so on. It runs very easily; we recognize the old touch; the epigrams are not worked to death; and the chains of argument are not mere strings of damped brilliancies. And before 1914 had come to its end, in another pamphlet, *Letters to an Old Garibaldian*, the same style, the same freshness of thought, and the same resurgent strength were once again in evidence. Then illness overcame.

Of all futures, the future of literature and its professors is the least predictable. We have all, so to speak, turned a corner since August, 1914, but we have not all turned the same way. Chesterton would seem to have felt the great change early in the war. Soon he will break his silence, and we shall know whether we have amongst us a giant with strength renewed or a querulous Nonconformist Crusader, agreeing with no man, while claiming to speak for every man. Early in the course of this study a distinction was drawn between Christians and Crusaders. Chesterton has been throughout his career essentially a Crusader. He set out to put wrongs to rights in the same spirit; in much the same spirit, too, he incidentally chivvied about the

Jews he met in his path, just as the Crusaders had done. He fought for the Holy Sepulchre, and gained it. Like the Crusaders, he professed orthodoxy, and, like them, fell between several “orthodoxies.” He shared their visions and their faith, so far as they had any. But one thing is true of all Crusaders, they are not necessarily Christians. And there is that about Chesterton which sometimes makes me wonder whether, after all, he is not “a child of the French Revolution” in a sense he himself does not suspect. He has cursed the barren fig-tree of modern religious movements. But there comes a suspicion that he denies too much; that from between those supple sentences and those too plausible arguments one may catch a glimpse of the features of a mocking spirit. Chesterton has given us the keenest enjoyment, and he has provoked thought, even in the silly atheist. We all owe him gratitude, but no two readers of his works are likely to agree as to the causes of their gratitude. That, in itself, is a tribute. Wherefore let it be understood that in writing this study I have been speaking entirely for myself, and if any man think me misguided, inappreciative, hypercritical, frivolous, or anything else, why, he is welcome.

MR. G. K. CHESTERTON’S POINT OF VIEW
by John Kelman

LECTURE IX

There is on record the case of a man who, after some fourteen years of robust health, spent a week in bed. His illness was apparently due to a violent cold, but he confessed, on medical cross-examination, that the real and underlying cause was the steady reading of Mr. Chesterton’s books for several days on end.

No one will accuse Mr. Chesterton of being an unhealthy writer. On the contrary, he is among the most wholesome writers now alive. He is irresistibly exhilarating, and he inspires his readers with a constant inclination to rise up and shout. Perhaps his danger lies in that very fact, and in the exhaustion of the nerves which such sustained exhilaration is apt to produce. But besides this, he, like so many of our contemporaries, has written such a bewildering quantity of literature on such an amazing variety of subjects, that it is no wonder if sometimes the reader follows panting, through the giddy mazes of the dance. He is the sworn enemy of specialisation, as he explains in his remarkable essay on “The Twelve Men.” The subject of the essay is the British jury, and its thesis is that when our civilisation “wants a library to be catalogued, or a solar system discovered, or any trifle of that kind, it uses up its specialists. But when it wishes anything done which is really serious, it collects twelve of the ordinary men standing round. The same thing was done, if I remember right, by the Founder of Christianity.” For the judging of a criminal or the propagation of the gospel, it is necessary to procure inexpert people — people who come to their task with a virgin eye, and see not what the expert (who has lost his freshness) sees, but the human facts of the case. So Mr. Chesterton insists upon not being a specialist, takes the world for his parish, and wanders over it at will.

This being so, it is obvious that he cannot possibly remember all that he has said, and must necessarily abound in inconsistencies and even contradictions. Yet that is by no means always unconscious, but is due in many instances to the very complex quality and subtle habit of his mind. Were he by any chance to read this statement he would deny it fiercely, but we would repeat it with perfect calmness, knowing that he would probably have denied any other statement we might have made upon the subject. His subtlety is partly due to the extraordinary rapidity with which his mind leaps from one subject to another, partly to the fact that he is so full of ideas that many of his essays (like Mr. Bernard Shaw's plays) find it next to impossible to get themselves begun. He is so full of matter that he never seems to be able to say what he wants to say, until he has said a dozen other things first.

The present lecture is mainly concerned with his central position, as that is expounded in *Heretics* and *Orthodoxy*. Our task is not to criticise, nor even to any considerable extent to characterise his views, but to state them as accurately as we can. It is a remarkable phenomenon of our time that all our literary men are bent on giving us such elaborate and solemnising confessions of their faith. It is an age notorious for its aversion to dogma, and yet here we have Mr. Huxley, Mr. Le Gallienne, Mr. Shaw, Mr. Wells (to mention only a few of many), who in this creedless age proclaim in the market-place, each his own private and brand-new creed.

Yet Mr. Chesterton has perhaps a special right to such a proclamation. He believes in creeds vehemently. And, besides, the spiritual biography of a man whose mental development has been so independent and so interesting as his, must be well worth knowing. Amid the many weird theologies of our time we have met with nothing so startling, so arresting, and so suggestive since Mr. Mallock published his *New Republic* and his *Contemporary Superstitions*. There is something common to the two points of view. To some, they come as emancipating and most welcome reinforcements, relieving the beleaguered citadel of faith. But others, who differ widely from them both, may yet find in them so much to stimulate thought and to rehabilitate strongholds held precariously, as to awaken both appreciation and gratitude.

Mr. Chesterton's political opinions do not concern us here. It is a curious fact, of which innumerable illustrations may be found in past and present writers, that political radicalism so often goes along with conservative theology, and *vice versa*. Mr. Chesterton is no exception to the rule. His orthodoxy in matters of faith we shall find to be altogether above suspicion. His radicalism in politics is never long silent. He openly proclaims himself at war with Carlyle’s favourite dogma, “The tools to him who can use them.” “The worst form of slavery,” he tells us, “is that which is called Cæsarism, or the choice of some bold or brilliant man as despot because he is suitable. For that means that men choose a representative, not because he represents them but because he does not.” And if it be answered that the worst form of cruelty to a nation or to an individual is that abuse of the principle of equality which is for ever putting incompetent people into false positions, he has his reply ready: “The one specially and peculiarly un-Christian idea is the idea of Carlyle — the idea that the man should rule who feels that he can rule. Whatever else is Christian, this is heathen.”

But this, and much else of its kind, although he works it into his general scheme of thinking, is not in any sense an essential part of that scheme. Our subject is his place in the conflict between the paganism and the idealism of the times, and it is a sufficiently large one. But before we come to that, we must consider another matter, which we shall find to be intimately connected with it.

That other matter is his habit of paradox, which is familiar to all his readers. It is a habit of style, but before it became that it was necessarily first a habit of mind, deeply ingrained. He disclaims it so often that we cannot but feel that he protesteth too much. He acknowledges it, and explains that “paradox simply means a certain defiant joy which belongs to belief.” Whether the explanation is or is not perfectly intelligible, it must occur to every one that a writer who finds it necessary to give so remarkable an explanation can hardly be justified in his astonishment when people of merely average intelligence confess themselves puzzled. His aversion to Walter Pater — almost the only writer whom he appears consistently to treat with disrespect — is largely due to Pater’s laborious simplicity of style. But it was a greater than either Walter Pater or Mr. Chesterton who first pointed out that the language which appealed to the understanding of the common man was also that which expressed the highest culture. Mr. Chesterton’s habit of paradox will always obscure his meanings for the common man. He has a vast amount to tell him, but much of it he will never understand.

Paradox, when it has become a habit, is always dangerous. Introduced on rare and fitting occasions, it may be powerful and even convincing, but when it is repeated constantly and upon all sorts of subjects, we cannot but dispute its right and question its validity. Its effect is not conviction but vertigo. It is like trying to live in a house constructed so as to be continually turning upside down. After a certain time, during which terror and dizziness alternate, the most indulgent reader is apt to turn round upon the builder of such a house with some asperity. And, after all, the general judgment may be right and Mr. Chesterton wrong.

Upon analysis, his paradox reveals as its chief and most essential element a certain habit of mind which always tends to see and appreciate the reverse of accepted opinions. So much is this the case that it is possible in many instances to anticipate what he will say upon a subject. It is on record that one reader, coming to his chapter on Omar Khayyám, said to himself, “Now he will be saying that Omar is not drunk enough”; and he went on to read, “It is not poetical drinking, which is joyous and instinctive; it is rational drinking, which is as prosaic as an investment, as unsavoury as a dose of camomile.” Similarly we are told that Browning is only felt to be obscure because he is too pellucid. Such apparent contradictoriness is everywhere in his work, but along with it goes a curious ingenuity and nimbleness of mind. He cannot think about anything without remembering something else, apparently out of all possible connection with it, and instantly discovering some clever idea, the introduction of which will bring the two together. Christianity “is not a mixture like russet or purple; it is rather like a shot silk, for a shot silk is always at right angles, and is in the pattern of the cross.”

In all this there are certain familiar mechanisms which constitute almost a routine of manipulation for the manufacture of paradoxes. One such mechanical process is the play with the derivatives of words. Thus he reminds us that the journalist is, in the literal and derivative sense, a *journalist*, while the missionary is an eternalist. Similarly “lunatic,” “evolution,” “progress,” “reform,” are etymologically tortured into the utterance of the most forcible and surprising truths. This curious word-play was a favourite method with Ruskin; and it has the disadvantage in Mr. Chesterton which it had in the earlier critic. It appears too clever to be really sound, although it must be confessed that it frequently has the power of startling us into thoughts that are valuable and suggestive.

Another equally simple process is that of simply reversing sentences and ideas. “A good bush needs no wine.” “Shakespeare (in a weak moment, I think) said that all the world is a stage. But Shakespeare acted on the much finer principle that a stage is all the world.” Perhaps the most brilliant example that could be quoted is the plea for the combination of gentleness and ferocity in Christian character. When the lion lies down with the lamb, it is constantly assumed that the lion becomes lamblike. “But that is brutal annexation and imperialism on the part of the lamb. That is simply the lamb absorbing the lion, instead of the lion eating the lamb.”

By this process it is possible to attain results which are extraordinarily brilliant in themselves and fruitful in suggestion. It is a process not difficult to learn, but the trouble is that you have to live up to it afterwards, and defend many curious propositions which may have been arrived at by its so simple means. Take, for instance, the sentence about the stage being all the world. That is undeniably clever, and it contains an idea. But it is a haphazard idea, arrived at by a short-cut, and not by the high road of reasonable thinking. Sometimes a truth may be reached by such a short-cut, but such paradoxes are occasionally no better than chartered errors.

Yet even when they are that, it may be said in their favour that they startle us into thought. And truly Mr. Chesterton is invaluable as a quickener and stimulator of the minds of his readers. Moreover, by adopting the method of paradox, he has undoubtedly done one remarkable thing. He has proved what an astonishing number of paradoxical surprises there actually are, lying hidden beneath the apparent commonplace of the world. Every really clever paradox astonishes us not merely with the sense of the cleverness of him who utters it, but with the sense of how many strange coincidences exist around us, and how many sentences, when turned outside in, will yield new and startling truths. However much we may suspect that the performance we are watching is too clever to be trustworthy, yet after all the world does appear to lend itself to such treatment.

There is, for example, the paradox of the love of the world— “Somehow one must love the world without being worldly.” Again, “Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die.” The martyr differs from the suicide in that he cherishes a disdain of death, while the motive of the suicide is a disdain of life. Charity, too, is a paradox, for it means “one of two things — pardoning unpardonable acts, or loving unlovable people.” Similarly Christian humility has a background of unheard-of arrogance, and Christian liberty is possible only to the most abject bondsmen in the world.

This long consideration of Mr. Chesterton’s use of paradox is more relevant to our present subject than it may seem. For, curiously enough, the habit of paradox has been his way of entrance into faith. At the age of sixteen he was a complete agnostic, and it was the reading of Huxley and Herbert Spencer and Bradlaugh which brought him back to orthodox theology. For, as he read, he found that Christianity was attacked on all sides, and for all manner of contradictory reasons; and this discovery led him to the conviction that Christianity must be a very extraordinary thing, abounding in paradox. But he had already discovered the abundant element of paradox in life; and when he analysed the two sets of paradoxes he found them to be precisely the same. So he became a Christian.

It may seem a curious way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who are accustomed to regard the strait gate as of Gothic architecture may be shocked to find a man professing to have entered through this Alhambra-like portal. But it is a lesson we all have to learn sooner or later, that there are at least eleven gates besides our own, and that every man has to enter by that which he finds available. Paradox is the only gate by which Mr. Chesterton could get into any place, and the Kingdom of Heaven is no exception to the rule.

His account of this entrance is characteristic. It is given in the first chapter of his *Orthodoxy*. There was an English yachtsman who set out upon a voyage, miscalculated his course, and discovered what he thought to be a new island in the South Seas. It transpired afterwards that he had run up his flag on the pavilion of Brighton, and that he had discovered England. That yachtsman is Mr. Chesterton himself. Sailing the great sea of moral and spiritual speculation, he discovered a land of facts and convictions to which his own experience had guided him. On that strange land he ran up his flag, only to make the further and more astonishing discovery that it was the Christian faith at which he had arrived. Nietzsche had preached to him, as to Mr. Bernard Shaw, his great precept, “Follow your own will.” But when Mr. Chesterton obeyed he arrived, not at Superman, but at the ordinary old-fashioned morality. That, he found, is what we like best in our deepest hearts, and desire most. So he too “discovered England.”

He begins, like Margaret Fuller, with the fundamental principle of accepting the universe. The thing we know best and most directly is human nature in all its breadth. It is indeed the one thing immediately known and knowable. Like R.L. Stevenson, he perceives how tragically and comically astonishing a phenomenon is man. “What a monstrous spectre is this man,” says Stevenson, “the disease of the agglutinated dust, lifting alternate feet or lying drugged with slumber; killing, feeding, growing, bringing forth small copies of himself; grown upon with hair like grass, fitted with eyes that move and glitter in his face; a thing to set children screaming; — and yet looked at nearlier, known as his fellows know him, how surprising are his attributes!” In like manner Mr. Chesterton discovers man — that appalling mass of paradox and contradiction — and it is the supreme discovery in any spiritual search.

Having discovered the fundamental fact of human nature, he at once gives in his allegiance to it. “Our attitude towards life can be better expressed in terms of a kind of military loyalty than in terms of criticism and approval. My acceptance of the universe is not optimism, it is more like patriotism. It is a matter of primary loyalty. The world is not a lodging-house at Brighton, which we are to leave because it is miserable. It is the fortress of our family, with the flag flying on the turret, and the more miserable it is, the less we should leave it.”

There is a splendid courage and heartiness in his complete acceptance of life and the universe. In a time when clever people are so busy criticising life that they are in danger of forgetting that they have to live it, so busy selecting such parts of it as suit their taste that they ignore the fact that the other parts are there, he ignores nothing and wisely accepts instead of criticising. Mr. Bernard Shaw, as we have seen, will consent to tolerate the universe *minus* the three loyalties to the family, the nation, and God. Mr. Chesterton has no respect whatever for any such mutilated scheme of human life. His view of the institution of the family is full of wholesome common sense. He perceives the immense difficulties that beset all family life, and he accepts them with immediate and unflinching loyalty, as essential parts of our human task. His views on patriotism belong to the region of politics and do not concern us here. In regard to religion, he finds the modern school amalgamating everything in characterless masses of generalities. They deny the reality of sin, and in matters of faith generally they have put every question out of focus until the whole picture is blurred and vague. He attacks this way of dealing with religion in one of his most amusing essays, “The Orthodox Barber.” The barber has been sarcastic about the new shaving — presumably in reference to M. Gillett’s excellent invention. “‘It seems you can shave yourself with anything — with a stick or a stone or a pole or a poker’ (here I began for the first time to detect a sarcastic intonation) ‘or a shovel or a — —’ Here he hesitated for a word, and I, although I knew nothing about the matter, helped him out with suggestions in the same rhetorical vein. ‘Or a button-hook,’ I said, ‘or a blunderbuss or a battering-ram or a piston-rod — —’ He resumed, refreshed with this assistance, ‘Or a curtain-rod or a candlestick or a — —’ ‘Cow-catcher,’ I suggested eagerly, and we continued in this ecstatic duet for some time. Then I asked him what it was all about, and he told me. He explained the thing eloquently and at length. ‘The funny part of it is,’ he said, ‘that the thing isn’t new at all. It’s been talked about ever since I was a boy, and long before.’” Mr. Chesterton rejoins in a long and eloquent and most amusing sermon, the following extracts from which are not without far-reaching significance.

“‘What you say reminds me in some dark and dreamy fashion of something else. I recall it especially when you tell me, with such evident experience and sincerity, that the new shaving is not really new. My friend, the human race is always trying this dodge of making everything entirely easy; but the difficulty which it shifts off one thing it shifts on to another.... It would be nice if we could be shaved without troubling anybody. It would be nicer still if we could go unshaved without annoying anybody —

“‘But, O wise friend, chief Barber of the Strand, Brother, nor you nor I have made the world.

Whoever made it, who is wiser, and we hope better than we, made it under strange limitations, and with painful conditions of pleasure.... But every now and then men jump up with the new something or other and say that everything can be had without sacrifice, that bad is good if you are only enlightened, and that there is no real difference between being shaved and not being shaved. The difference, they say, is only a difference of degree; everything is evolutionary and relative. Shavedness is immanent in man.... I have been profoundly interested in what you have told me about the New Shaving. Have you ever heard of a thing called the New Theology?’ He smiled and said that he had not.”

In contrast with all this, it is Mr. Chesterton’s conviction that the facts must be unflinchingly and in their entirety accepted. With characteristic courage he goes straight to the root of the matter and begins with the fact of sin. “If it be true (as it certainly is) that a man can feel exquisite happiness in skinning a cat, then the religious philosopher can only draw one of two deductions. He must either deny the existence of God, as all atheists do; or he must deny the present union between God and man, as all Christians do.

The new theologians seem to think it a highly rationalistic solution to deny the cat.” It is as if he said, Here you have direct and unmistakable experience. A man knows his sin as he knows himself. He may explain it in either one way or another way. He may interpret the universe accordingly in terms either of heaven or of hell. But the one unreasonable and impossible thing to do is to deny the experience itself.

It is thus that he treats the question of faith all along the line. If you are going to be a Christian, or even fairly to judge Christianity, you must accept the whole of Christ’s teaching, with all its contradictions, paradoxes, and the rest. Some men select his charity, others his social teaching, others his moral relentlessness, and so on, and reject all else. Each one of these aspects of the Christian faith is doubtless very interesting, but none of them by itself is an adequate representation of Christ. “They have torn the soul of Christ into silly strips, labelled egoism and altruism, and they are equally puzzled by His insane magnificence and His insane meekness. They have parted His garments among them, and for His vesture they have cast lots; though the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout.”

The characteristic word for Mr. Chesterton and his attitude to life is *vitality*. He has been seeking for human nature, and he has found it at last in Christian idealism. But having found it, he will allow no compromise in its acceptance. It is life he wants, in such wholeness as to embrace every element of human nature. And he finds that Christianity has quickened and intensified life all along the line. It is the great source of vitality, come that men might have life and that they might have it more abundantly. He finds an essential joy and riot in creation, a “tense and secret festivity.” And Christianity corresponds to that riot. “The more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it had established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild.” It has let loose the wandering, masterless, dangerous virtues, and has insisted that not one or another of them shall run wild, but all of them together. The ideal of wholeness which Matthew Arnold so eloquently advocated, is not a dead mass of theories, but a world of living things. Christ will put a check on none of the really genuine elements in human nature. In Him there is no compromise. His love and His wrath are both burning. All the separate elements of human nature are in full flame, and it is the only ultimate way of peace and safety. The various colours of life must not be mixed but kept distinct. The red and white of passion and purity must not be blended into the insipid pink of a compromising and consistent respectability. They must be kept strong and separate, as in the blazing Cross of St. George on its shield of white.

Chaucer’s “Daisy” is one of the greatest conceptions in all poetry. It has stood for centuries as the emblem of pure and priceless womanhood, with its petals of snowy white and its heart of gold. Mr. Chesterton once made a discovery that sent him wild with joy —

“Then waxed I like the wind because of this, And ran like gospel and apocalypse From door to door, with wild, anarchic lips, Crying the very blasphemy of bliss.”

The discovery was that “the Daisy has a ring of red.” Purity is not the enemy of passion; nor must passion and purity be so toned down and blent with one another, as to give a neutral result. Both must remain, and both in full brilliance, the virgin white and the passionate blood-red ring.

In the present age of reason, the cry is all for tolerance, and for redefinition which will remove sharp contrasts and prove that everything means the same as everything else. In such an age a doctrine like this seems to have a certain barbaric splendour about it, as of a crusader risen from the dead. But Mr. Chesterton is not afraid of the consequences of his opinions. If rationalism opposes his presentation of Christianity, he will ride full tilt against reason. In recent years, from the time of Newman until now, there has been a recurring habit of discounting reason in favour of some other way of approach to truth and life. Certainly Mr. Chesterton’s attack on reason is as interesting as any that have gone before it, and it is even more direct. Even on such a question as the problem of poverty he frankly prefers imagination to study. In art he demands instinctiveness, and has a profound suspicion of anybody who is conscious of possessing the artistic temperament. As a guide to truth he always would follow poetry in preference to logic. He is never tired of attacking rationality, and for him anything which is rationalised is destroyed in the process.

In one of his most provokingly unanswerable sallies, he insists that the true home of reason is the madhouse. “The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason.” When we say that a man is mad, we do not mean that he is unable to conduct a logical argument. On the contrary, any one who knows madmen knows that they are usually most acute and ingeniously consistent in argument. They isolate some one fixed idea, and round that they build up a world that is fiercely and tremendously complete. Every detail fits in, and the world in which they live is not, as is commonly supposed, a world of disconnected and fantastic imaginations, but one of iron-bound and remorseless logic. No task is more humiliating, nor more likely to shake one's sense of security in fundamental convictions, than that of arguing out a thesis with a lunatic.

Further, beneath this rationality there is in the madman a profound belief in himself. Most of us regard with respect those who trust their own judgment more than we find ourselves able to trust ours. But not the most confident of them all can equal the unswerving confidence of a madman. Sane people never wholly believe in themselves. They are liable to be influenced by the opinion of others, and are willing to yield to the consensus of opinion of past or present thinkers. The lunatic cares nothing for the views of others. He believes in himself against the world, with a terrific grip of conviction and a faith that nothing can shake.

Mr. Chesterton applies his attack upon rationality to many subjects, with singular ingenuity. In the question of marriage and divorce, for instance, the modern school which would break loose from the ancient bonds can present their case with an apparently unassailable show of rationality. But his reply to them and to all other rationalists is that life is not rational and consistent but para doxical and contradictory. To make life rational you have to leave out so many elements as to make it shrink from a big world to a little one, which may be complete, but can never be much of a world. Its conception of God may be a complete conception, but its God is not much of a God. But the world of human nature is a vast world, and the God of Christianity is an Infinite God. The huge mysteries of life and death, of love and sacrifice, of the wine of Cana and the Cross of Calvary — these outwit all logic and pass all understanding. So for sane men there comes in a higher authority. You may call it common sense, or mysticism, or faith, as you please. It is the extra element by virtue of which all sane thinking and all religious life are rendered possible. It is the secret spring of vitality alike in human nature and in Christian faith.

At this point it may be permissible to question Mr. Chesterton's use of words in one important point. He appears to fall into the old error of confounding reason with reasoning. Reason is one thing and argument another. It may be impossible to express either human nature or religious faith in a series of syllogistic arguments, and yet both may be reasonable in a higher sense. Reason includes those extra elements to which Mr. Chesterton trusts. It is the synthesis of our whole powers of finding truth. Many things which cannot be proved by reasoning may yet be given in reason — involved in any reasonable view of things as a whole. Thus faith includes reason — it *is* reason on a larger scale — and it is the only reasonable course for a man to take in a world of mysterious experience. If the matter were stated in that way, Mr. Chesterton would probably assent to it. Put crudely, the fashion of pitting faith against reason and discarding reason in favour of faith, is simply sawing off the branch on which you are sitting. The result is that you must fall to the ground at the feet of the sceptic, who asks, "How can you believe that which you have confessed there is no reason to believe?" We have abundant reason for our belief, and that reason includes those higher intuitions, that practical common sense, and that view of things as a whole, which the argument of the mere logician necessarily ignores.

With this reservation, Mr. Chesterton's position in regard to faith is absolutely unassailable. He is the most vital of our modern idealists, and his peculiar way of thinking himself into his idealism has given to the term a richer and more spacious meaning, which combines excellently the Greek and the Hebrew elements. His great ideal is that of manhood. Be a man, he cries aloud, not an artist, not a reasoner, not any other kind or detail of humanity, but be a man. But then that means, Be a creature whose life swings far out beyond this world and its affairs — swings dangerously between heaven and hell. Eternity is in the heart of every man. The fashionable modern gospel of Pragmatism is telling us to-day that we should not vex ourselves about the ultimate truth of theories, but inquire only as to their value for life here and now, and the practical needs which they serve. But the most practical of all man's needs is his need of some contact with a higher world than that of sense. "To say that a man is an idealist is merely to say that he is a man." In the scale of differences between important and unimportant earthly things, it is the spiritual and not the material that counts. "An ignorance of the other world is boasted by many men of science; but in this matter their defect arises, not from ignorance of the other world, but from ignorance of this world." "The moment any matter has passed through the human mind it is finally and for ever spoilt for all purposes of science. It has become a thing incurably mysterious and infinite; this mortal has put on immortality."

Here we begin to see the immense value of paradox in the matter of faith. Mr. Chesterton is an optimist, not because he fits into this world, but because he does not fit into it. Pagan optimism is content with the world, and subsists entirely in virtue of its power to fit into it and find it sufficient. This is that optimism of which Browning speaks with scorn —

“Tame in earth’s paddock as her prize,”
and which he repudiates in the famous lines,
“Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth’s smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!”

Mr. Chesterton insists that beyond the things which surround us here on the earth there are other things which claim us from beyond. The higher instincts which discover these are not tools to be used for making the most of earthly treasures, but sacred relics to be guarded. He is an idealist who has been out beyond the world. There he has found a whole universe of mysterious but commanding facts, and has discovered that these and these alone can satisfy human nature.

The question must, however, arise, as to the validity of those spiritual claims. How can we be sure that the ideals which claim us from beyond are realities, and not mere dream shapes? There is no answer but this, that if we question the validity of our own convictions and the reality of our most pressing needs, we have simply committed spiritual suicide, and arrived prematurely at the end of all things. With the habit of questioning ultimate convictions Mr. Chesterton has little patience. Modesty, he tells us, has settled in the wrong place. We believe in ourselves and we doubt the truth that is in us. But we ourselves, the crude reality which we actually are, are altogether unreliable; while the vision is always trustworthy. We are for ever changing the vision to suit the world as we find it, whereas we ought to be changing the world to bring it into conformity with the unchanging vision. The very essence of orthodoxy is a profound and reverent conviction of ideals that cannot be changed — ideals which were the first, and shall be the last.

If Mr. Chesterton often strains his readers' powers of attention by rapid and surprising movements among very difficult themes, he certainly has charming ways of relieving the strain. The favourite among all such methods is his reversion to the subject of fairy tales. In "The Dragon's Grandmother" he introduces us to the arch-sceptic who did not believe in them — that fresh-coloured and short-sighted young man who had a curious green tie and a very long neck. It happened that this young man had called on him just when he had flung aside in disgust a heap of the usual modern problem-novels, and fallen back with vehement contentment on *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. "When he incidentally mentioned that he did not believe in fairy tales, I broke out beyond control. 'Man,' I said, 'who are you that you should not believe in fairy tales? It is much easier to believe in Blue Beard than to believe in you. A blue beard is a misfortune; but there are green ties which are sins. It is far easier to believe in a million fairy tales than to believe in one man who does not like fairy tales. I would rather kiss Grimm instead of a Bible and swear to all his stories as if they were thirty-nine articles than say seriously and out of my heart that there can be such a man as you; that you are not some temptation of the devil or some delusion from the void.'" The reason for this unexpected outbreak is a very deep one. "Folk-lore means that the soul is sane, but that the universe is wild and full of marvels. Realism means that the world is dull and full of routine, but that the soul is sick and screaming. The problem of the fairy tale is — what will a healthy man do with a fantastic world? The problem of the modern novel is — what will a madman do with a dull world? In the fairy tale the cosmos goes mad; but the hero does not go mad. In the modern novels the hero is mad before the book begins, and suffers from the harsh steadiness and cruel sanity of the cosmos."

In other words, the ideals, the ultimate convictions, are the trustworthy things; the actual experience of life is often matter not for distrust only but for scorn and contempt. And this philosophy Mr. Chesterton learned in the nursery, from that "solemn and star-appointed priestess," his nurse. The fairy tale, and not the problem-novel, is the true presentment of human nature and of life. For, in the first place it preserves in man the faculty most essential to human nature — the faculty of wonder, without which no man can live. To regain that faculty is to be born again, out of a false world into a true. The constant repetition of the laws of Nature blunts our spirits to the amazing character of every detail which she reproduces. To catch again the wonder of common things —

"the hour Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower"

— is to pass from darkness into light, from falsehood to truth. "All the towering materialism which dominates the modern mind rests ultimately upon one assumption: a false assumption. It is supposed that if a thing goes on repeating itself it is probably dead: a piece of clockwork." But that is mere blindness to the mystery and surprise of everything that goes to make up actual human experience. "The repetition in Nature seemed sometimes to be an excited repetition, like that of an angry schoolmaster saying the same thing over and over again. The grass seemed signalling to me with all its fingers at once; the crowded stars seemed bent on being understood. The sun would make me see him if he rose a thousand times."

That is one fact, which fairy tales emphasise — the constant demand for wonder in the world, and the appropriateness and rightness of the wondering attitude of mind, as man passes through his lifelong gallery of celestial visions. The second fact is that all such vision is conditional, and "hangs upon a veto. All the dizzy and colossal things conceded depend upon one small thing withheld. All the wild and whirling things that are let loose depend upon one thing which is forbidden." This is the very note of fairyland. "You may live in a palace of gold and sapphire, *if* you do not say the word 'cow'; or you may live happily with the King's daughter, *if* you do not show her an onion." The conditions may seem arbitrary, but that is not the point. The point is that there always *are* conditions. The parallel with human life is obvious. Many people in the modern world are eagerly bent on having the reward without fulfilling the condition, but life is not made that way. The whole problem of marriage is a case in point. Its conditions are rigorous, and people on all sides are trying to relax them or to do away with them. Similarly, all along the line, modern society is seeking to live in a freedom which is in the nature of things incompatible with the enjoyment or the prosperity of the human spirit. There is an *if* in everything. Life is like that, and we cannot alter it. Quarrel with the seemingly arbitrary or unreasonable condition, and the whole fairy palace vanishes. "Life itself is as bright as the diamond, but as brittle as the window-pane."

From all this it is but a step to the consideration of dogma and the orthodox Christian creed. Mr. Chesterton is at war to the knife with vague modernism in all its forms. The eternal verities which produce great convictions are incomparably the most important things for human nature. No “inner light” will serve man’s turn, but some outer light, and that only and always. “Christianity came into the world, firstly in order to assert with violence that a man had not only to look inwards, but to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine captain.” This again is human nature. No man can live his life out fully without being mastered by convictions that he cannot challenge, and for whose origin he is not responsible. The most essentially human thing is the sense that these, the supreme conditions of life, are not of man’s own arranging, but have been and are imposed upon him.

At almost every point this system may be disputed. Mr. Chesterton, who never shrinks from pressing his theories to their utmost length, scoffs at the modern habit of “saying that such-and-such a creed can be held in one age, but cannot be held in another. Some dogma, we are told, was credible in the twelfth century, but is not credible in the twentieth. You might as well say that a certain philosophy can be believed on Mondays, but cannot be believed on Tuesdays. You might as well say of a view of the cosmos that it was suitable to half-past three, but not suitable to half-past four.” That is precisely what many of us do say. Our powers of dogmatising vary to some extent with our moods, and to a still greater extent with the reception of new light. There are many days on which the dogmas of early morning are impossible and even absurd when considered in the light of evening.

But it is not our task to criticise Mr. Chesterton’s faith nor his way of dealing with it. Were we to do so, most of us would probably strike a balance. We would find many of his views and statements unconvincing; and yet we would acknowledge that they had the power of forcing the mind to see fresh truth upon which the will must act decisively. The main point in his orthodoxy is unquestionably a most valuable contribution to the general faith of his time and country. That point is the adventure which he narrates under the similitude of the voyage that ended in the discovery of England. He set out to find the empirical truth of human nature and the meaning of human life, as these are to be explored in experience. When he found them, it was infinitely surprising to him to become aware that the system in which his faith had come at last to rest was just Christianity — the only system which could offer any adequate and indeed exact account of human nature. The articles of its creed he recognised as the points of conviction which are absolutely necessary to the understanding of human nature and to the living of human life.

Thus it comes to pass that in the midst of a time resounding with pagan voices old and new, he stands for an unflinching idealism. It is the mark of pagans that they are children of Nature, boasting that Nature is their mother: they are solemnised by that still and unresponsive maternity, or driven into rebellion by discovering that the so-called mother is but a harsh stepmother after all. Mr. Chesterton loves Nature, because Christianity has revealed to him that she is but his sister, child of the same Father. “We can be proud of her beauty, since we have the same father; but she has no authority over us; we have to admire, but not to imitate.”

It follows that two worlds are his, as is the case with all true idealists. The modern reversion to paganism is founded on the fundamental error that Christianity is alien to Nature, setting up against her freedom the repellent ideal of asceticism, and frowning upon her beauty with the scowl of the harsh moralist. For Mr. Chesterton the bleakness is all on the side of the pagans, and the beauty with the idealists. They do not look askance at the green earth at all. They gaze upon it with steady eyes, until they are actually looking through it, and discovering the radiance of heaven there, and the sublime brightness of the Eternal Life. The pagan virtues, such as justice and temperance, are painfully reasonable and often sad. The Christian virtues are faith, hope, and charity — each more unreasonable than the last, from the point of view of mere mundane common sense; but they are gay as childhood, and hold the secret of perennial youth and unfading beauty, in a world which upon any other terms than these is hastening to decay.

GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON by Patrick Braybrooke

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CONCLUSION

Preface

It is certain that up to a point in the evolution of Self[v] most people find life quite exciting and thrilling. But when middle age arrives, often prematurely, they forget the thrill and excitements; they become obsessed by certain other lesser things that are deficient in any kind of Cosmic Vitality. The thrill goes out of life: a light dies down and flickers fitfully; existence goes on at a low ebb — something has been lost. From this numbed condition is born much of the blind anguish of life.

It is one of the tragedies of human existence that the divine sense of wonder is eventually destroyed by inexcusable routine and more or less mechanical living. Mental abandon, the exercise of fancy and imagination, the function of creative thought — all these things are squeezed out of the consciousness of man until his primitive enjoyment of the mystical part of life is affected in a very serious way.

Nothing could be more useful, therefore, than to write a book about a man who has done more than any other living writer to stimulate and preserve the primitive sense of wonder and joy in human life. Gilbert Keith Chesterton has never lost mental contact with the cosmic simplicity of human existence. He knows, as well as anybody has ever known, that the life of man goes wrong simply because we are too lazy to be pleased with simple, fundamental things.

We grow up in our feverish, artificial civilization, believing that the real, satisfying things are complex and difficult to obtain. Our lives become unnaturally stressed and tormented by the pitiless and incessant struggle for social conditions which are, at best, second-rate and ultimately disappointing.

G. K. Chesterton would restore the primitive joys of wonder and childlike delight in simple things. His ideal is the *real*, not the merely impossible. Unlike most would-be[vi] saviours of the race, he seeks not to merge a new humanity into a brand new glittering civilization. He would have us awaken once more to the ancient mysteries and eternal truths. He would have us turn back in order to progress.

Science makes us proud, but it does not make us happy. Efficiency makes us slaves — we have forgotten the truth about freedom. Success is our narcotic deity, and weans more men into despair than failure; for, as G.

K.C. has said, ‘Nothing fails like Success.’ We have yet to rediscover the spiritual health that comes with a clear recognition of the part that life cannot be great until it is lived madly and wildly. We have to learn all over again that grass really is green, and the sky, at times, very blue indeed.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is the outcome of many and repeated requests[vii] to the author to write it. While realizing the difficulties involved, he feels that the opportunities he has enjoyed give him at least some qualifications for the task, for not only is he a kinsman of Mr. Chesterton, but also has spent much time in his company.

The book aims to be a popular study of the Writer and the Man. It is dedicated to lovers of the works of G. K.C. and to the wider public who wish to know about one of the most brilliant minds of the day.

PATRICK BRAYBROOKE.

46 Russell Square, W.C. 1
1922.

Chapter One

THE ESSAYIST

It is extremely difficult in the somewhat limited space of a chapter to give the full attention that should be given to such a brilliant and original essayist (which is not always an *ipso facto* of brilliant essayists) as Chesterton. Essayists are of all men extremely elastic. Occasionally they are dull and prosy, very often they are obscure, quite often they are wearisome. The only criticism which applies adversely to Chesterton as an essayist is that he is very often — and I rather fear he likes being so — obscure. He is brilliant in an original manner, he is original in a brilliant way; scarcely any thought of his is not expressed in paradox. What is orthodox to him is heresy to other people; what is heresy to him is orthodox to other people; and the surprising fact is that he is usually right when he is orthodox, and equally right when he is heretical. An essayist naturally has points of view which he expresses in a different way to a novelist. A novelist, if he adheres to what a novel should be — that is, I think, a simple tale — does not necessarily have a particular point of view when he starts his book. An essayist, on the other hand, starts with an idea and clothes it. Of course, Chesterton is not an essayist in the really accepted manner of an essayist. He is really more a brilliant exponent of an original point of view. In other words, he essays to knock down opinions held by other essayists, whether writers or politicians. It would be manifestly absurd to praise Chesterton as being equal to Hazlitt, or condemn him as being inferior to J.S. Mill. Comparisons are usually odious, which is precisely the reason so much use is made of them. In this case any comparison is not only odious; it is worse, it is merely futile, for the very simple fact that there has been no essayist ever quite like Chesterton, which is a compliment to him, because it proves what every one who knows is assured, that he is unique.

There are, of course, as is to be expected, people who do not like his essays. The reason is not far to seek, as in everything else people set up for themselves standards which they do not like to see set aside. Consequently people who had read Lamb, Hazlitt, Hume, and E.V. Lucas astutely thought that no essayist could be such who did not adhere to the style of one of these four. Therefore they were a little alarmed and upset when there descended upon them a strange genius who not only upset all the rules of essay writing, but was at the same time acclaimed by all sections of the Press as one of the finest essayists of the day.

With the advent of Chesterton the essay received a shock. It had to realize that it was a larger and wider thing than it had been before. As it had been almost insular, so it became international; as it had been almost theological in its orthodoxy, so it became in its catholicity well-nigh heretical. Which is the best possible definition of a heresy? It is the expanding of orthodoxy or the lessening of it. Thus Chesterton was a pioneer. He gave to the essay a new impetus — almost, we might say, a ‘sketch’ form; it dealt with subjects not so much in a dissertation as in a dissection. Having dissected one way so that we are quite sure no other method would do, he calmly dissects again in the opposite manner, leaving us gasping, and finding that there really are two ways of looking at every question — a thing we never realize till we think about it. I have in this chapter taken five of Chesterton’s most characteristic books of essays, displaying the enormous depth of his intellect, the vast range of subject, the unique use of paradox. Of these five books I have again taken rather necessarily at random subjects depicting the above Chestertonian attributes, with an attempt to give some idea of what it really means when we say that he is an essayist.

That Chesterton’s book of essays, entitled ‘Heretics,’ should have an introductory and a concluding chapter on the importance of orthodoxy is exactly what we should expect to find. There is a great deal of what is undeniably true in this book; there is also, I venture to think, a good deal that is undeniably untrue. I do not think it is unfair to say that in some respects Chesterton allows his cleverness to lead him to certain errors of judgment, and a certain levity in dealing with matters that are to a number of people so sacred that to reinterpret them is almost to blaspheme.

I am thinking of the chapter in this book that is a reply to Mr. McCabe, an ex-Roman Catholic, who, being a keen logician, is now a rationalist. He accuses Chesterton of joking with the things *de profundis*.

Certain clergymen have also taken exception to Chesterton’s writings on the ground of this supposed levity. It is merely that he sees that the Bible has humour, because it has said that ‘God laughed and winked.’ I do not think he intends to offend, but for many people any idea of humour in the Bible is repugnant, and this view is not confined to clergymen.

In an absolutely charming chapter Chesterton writes of the literature of the servant girl, which is really the literature of Park Lane. It is the literature of Park Lane, for the very obvious reason that it is probably never read there; but the literature is about Park Lane, and is read by those who may live as near it as Balham or Surbiton. What he contends, and rightly, is that the general reader likes to hear about an environment outside his own. It is inherent in us that we always really want to be somewhere else; which is fortunate, as it makes it certain that the world will never come to an end through a universal contentment. It has been said that contentment is the essence of perfection. It is equally true that the essence of perfection is discontent, a striving for something else. This, I think, Chesterton feels when he says of the penny novelette that it is the literature to ‘teach a man to govern empires or look over the map of mankind.’

Rudyard Kipling finds a warm spot in Chesterton’s heart, but he is a little too militaristic, which is exactly what he is not. Kipling loves soldiers, which is no real reason why he should be disliked as a militarist. Many a servant girl loves a score of soldiers, she may even write odes to her pet sergeant, but she is not necessarily a militarist. Rudyard Kipling likes soldiers and writes of them. He does not, as Chesterton lays to his charge, ‘worship militarism.’ He accuses Kipling of a want of patriotism, which is about as absurd as accusing Chesterton of a love of politics. But when he says that Kipling only knows England as a place, he is on safe ground, because England is something that is not bound by the confines of space.

Not being exactly a champion of Kipling, Chesterton turns to a different kind of man, George Moore, and has nothing to say for him beyond that he writes endless personal confessions, which most people do if there are those who will read them. But not only this, poor George Moore ‘doesn’t understand the Roman Catholic Church, he doesn’t understand Thackeray, he misunderstands Stevenson, he has no understanding of Christianity.’ It is, in fact, a hopeless case, but it is also possible that Chesterton has not troubled to understand George Moore.

Mr. Bernard Shaw is, so Chesterton contends, a really horrible eugenist, because he wants to get a super-man who, having more than two legs, will be a vastly superior person to a man. Chesterton loves men. He tells us why St. Peter was used to found the Church upon. It was because he ‘was a shuffler, a coward, and a snob — in a word, a man.’ Even the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Councils of Trent have failed to find a better reason for the founding of the Church. It is a defence of the fallibility of the Church, the practical nature of that Body, an organization founded by a Man who had Divine powers in a unique way and was God.

Presumably, then, the mistake of Shaw is that instead of trying to improve man he wishes to invent a kind of demi-god.

Chesterton has a great deal to say for Christmas; in fact, he has no sympathy for those superior beings who find Christmas out of date. Even Swinburne and Shelley have attacked Christianity in the grounds of its melancholy, showing a lamentable forgetfulness that this religion was born at a time that had always been a season of joy. Chesterton is annoyed with them, and is sure that Swinburne did not hang up his socks on Christmas Eve, nor did Shelley. I wonder whether Chesterton hangs up his socks on the eve of Christmas?

‘Heretics’ is a book that deals with a great number of subjects universal in their scope. The writing is at times too paradoxical, leading to obscurity of thought. There are splendid passages in this book, which is, when all is said, brilliantly original, even if at times a little puzzling.

‘Orthodoxy’ is, I think, one of the most important of Chesterton’s books. The lasting importance of a book depends not so much on its literary qualities or on its popularity, but rather on the theme handled.

There are really two central themes handled in this book. One is of Fairyland, the other is of the defence of Christianity; not that it is either true or false, but that it is rational, or the most shuffle-headed nonsense ever set to delude the human race. The method of apology that Chesterton takes is one that would cause the average theological student to turn white with fear.

The theological colleges, excellent as they are in endeavouring to train efficient laymen into equally efficient priests, usually assume that the best way to know about Christianity is to study Christian books. It is the worst way, because these books are naturally biased in favour of it. It is better to study any religion by seeing what the attackers have to say against it. Then a personal judgment can be formed.

This is, I feel, the method that Chesterton adopts in his deep and original treatise, ‘Orthodoxy,’ which is more than an essay and less than a theological work.

The Chestertonian contention is that philosophers like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche have embarked on the suicide of thought, and that a later disciple to this self-destruction is Bernard Shaw.

In the same way these pseudo philosophers have attacked the Christian religion, ‘tearing the soul of Christ into silly strips labelled altruism and egoism. They are alike puzzled by His insane magnificance and His insane meekness.’

As I have said, the method to realize the worth of Christianity is to read all the attacks on it. This is what Chesterton does. In doing so he discovers that these attacks are the one thing that demonstrate the strength of Christianity. Because the attackers reject it upon reasons that are contradictory to each other. Thus some complain that it is a gloomy religion; others go to the opposite extreme and accuse it of pointing to a state of perpetual chocolate cream; yet again it is attacked on grounds of effeminancy, it is upbraided as being fond of a sickly sentimentalism.

Thus it is attacked on opposite grounds at once. It is condemned for being pessimistic, it is blamed for being optimistic. From this position Chesterton deduces that it is the only rational religion, because it steers between the Scylla of pessimism and avoids the Charybdis of a facile optimism. Regarding presumably the early Church she has also kept from extremes. She has ignored the easy path of heresy, she has adhered to the adventurous road of orthodoxy. She has avoided the Arian materialism by dropping a Greek Iota; she has not succumbed to Eastern influences, which would have made her forget she was the Church on earth as well as in heaven. With tremendous commonsense she has remained rational and chosen the middle course, which was one of the cardinal virtues of the ancient Greek philosophers.

The Christian religion is, then, rational because attacked along irrational grounds; the Church is also reasonable because she has not been swayed by the attraction of heresy nor listened to the glib fallacies of those who always want to make her something more or something less.

The other and lesser contention of the book is the wisdom of the land of the Fairies. This is, Chesterton feels, the land where is found the philosophy of the nursery that is expressed in fairy tales — tales that every grown-up should read at Christmas.

Fairyland is for Chesterton the sunny land of commonsense. It is more, it is a place that has a very definite religion; it is, in fact, really the child’s land of Christ. Take the lesson of Cinderella, says Chesterton; it is really the teaching of the Prayer Book that the humble shall be exalted, because humility is worthy of exaltation.

Or the Sleeping Beauty. Is it not the significance of how love can bridge time? The prince would have been there to wake the princess had she slept a thousand instead of a hundred years.

Yet again the land of the Fairies is the abode of reason. If Jack is the son of a miller, then a miller is the father of Jack. It is no good in Fairyland trying to prove that two and two do not make four, but it is quite possible to imagine that the witch really did turn the unlucky prince into a pig. After all, such a procedure is not a monopoly of the fairies. Lesser persons than princes have been turned into pigs, not by the wand of a witch, but by the wand of good or bad fortune.

‘Orthodoxy’ is probably the sanest book that Chesterton has ever written. It is, I venture to think, the work that will gain for him immortality. It is a book on the greatest of themes, the reasonableness of the Christian religion. There have been many books written to attack the Christian religion, equally many to defend it, but Chesterton has made his apology for the religion on original grounds — the contradictories of the detractors of it. ‘Orthodoxy’ goes alone with Christ into the mountain, and the eager multitudes receive the real philosophy of Chesterton.

The child who has eaten too much jam and feels that too much of a good thing is a truism is rather like the philosopher who, having studied everything, comes to the sad conviction that there is something wrong with the world. The child finds that large quantities of jam are a delusion; the philosopher discovers that the world is even more wrong than he thought it was.

Sitting in his study, Chesterton, looking out on the garden which is the world, discovers that there is something wrong with it, and it is caused by the machinations of the 1,500 odd millions of people who, like ants, crawl about its surface. ‘What’s wrong with the World?’ is the result, and a very entertaining book it is. Like many other sociological treatises it leaves us still convinced that the world is wrong, because we don’t know what we really want.

The pessimist is convinced that the world is a bad place, the optimist is sure that it can be good. That is the point of the book. Chesterton has his own ideas of what is wrong, and he says so with astonishing paradox.

When this book was written, Feminism was demanding votes, and, not getting them at once, became naughty, and tied itself to the House of Commons or pushed policemen over. Chesterton devotes a large section of this book to demanding what is the mistake of Feminism.

‘The Feminists probably agree that womanhood is under shameful tyranny in the shops and mills. I want to destroy this tyranny. They (the Feminists) want to destroy womanhood.’ They do this by attempting to drive women into the world and turn them away from the home. This is what is wrong with the woman’s world: they have it that the home is narrow, that the world is wide. The converse is the truth: woman is the star of the home. It is a pity if she has to make chains — significant word — at Cradley Heath.

Education is not for Chesterton an unqualified success; there is a mistake about it somewhere. In fact, there is ‘no such thing as education.’ Education is not an object, it is a ‘transmission’ or an ‘inheritance.’ It means that a certain standard of conduct is passed on from generation to generation. The keynote of education for Chesterton is undoubtedly dogma, and dogma is certainly the result of a narrowing tendency.

At this present time there is a controversy about the use of our public schools. Whenever a harassed editor in Fleet Street cannot think what to put in those two spare columns, he works up a ‘stunt’ on the use or otherwise of the public schools. This is always exciting, as the public schools hardly ever see the controversy, being blissfully immersed in the military strategy of Hannibal or the political intrigues of the Caesars. Thus the controversy is conducted by those who generally think that commerce is superior to Greek, money-grubbing to good manners.

Even Chesterton must say something about these schools that are the backbone of England. Unfortunately he thinks that they are weakening the country, that the headmasters ‘are teaching only the narrowest of manners.’ But the public schools ‘manufacture gentlemen; they are factories for the making of aristocrats.’ If he is right, the more of these schools there are the better it is for the country.

It is well that he is not averse to Greek. In these days the classics are looked upon as waste of time. Political economy and profiteering are more useful. As he says, a man of the type of Carnegie would die in a Greek city. I am not sure whether this is not unfair. The real use of Greek is that it teaches culture. There is use in Plato’s philosophy; it is quite as useful as the knowledge acquired that results in peers made, not born. I don’t think Chesterton understands the public schools at all well; they are both bad and good, but at least they are very English.

He hasn’t a great deal to say for Imperialism. Imperialism is a very difficult ethic; it is not easy to say whether it is a selfish or an unselfish policy.

Thus we may quite conceivably pat ourselves on the back and say that, as English rule is good for natives, it is only right that we should keep India; but we might find that an equally good and more popular reason for doing so would be to prevent any one else having her. Thus our Imperial policy is a little selfish and a little unselfish.

For Chesterton, Imperialism is something that is both weak and perilous. It is really, he contends, a false idealism which tends to try and make people locally discontented, contented with pseudo visions of distant realms where the cities are of gold, where blue skies are never hidden by yellow fog. But is it a false idealism? If it is, it is that conception which has made men leave their homes in England to build up the Imperial Empire which is the daughter of the Great Imperial Island. The vision may not be always useful, but Imperialism has done much to make England and Empire synonymous.

Business is, according to Chesterton, a nasty thing that will not wait. It hates leisure, it has no use for brotherhood, it is one of the things that is wrong in the world — not, of course, that business is wrong in itself, but the method. Thus he disagrees that if a soap factory cannot be run on brotherhood lines the brotherhood must be scrapped. He would have the converse to be better.

He contends that it is better to be without soap than without society. As a matter of fact, society without soap would be an abomination. Society without any brotherhood would soon cease to be a society at all. Utopia is a little soap, a little society, with a flavouring of brotherhood in each.

Another and obviously good reason that the world is wrong is that it is only half finished. This is a matter for extreme optimism; it is the one great thing that makes it certain that the world will be found all right if it comes to an end. That is, if it delays long enough for the Irish question to be settled.

This is what Chesterton contends in this fine book, that reforms are not reforms at all, rather the same things dressed up in other clothes. Values are set up on false standards. Women in trying to become emancipated are likely to become slaves; the fear of the past is given over to a too delicate introspection of the probable vices and virtues of generations not yet born.

Imperialism is liable to a false idealism, drawing men from Seven Dials to find Utopia in Brixton. The public schools are weakening the country in some respects. Education is not education at all; in fact, we really must start the wrong world over again. I don't quite see where Chesterton proposes we are to start, or exactly how, whether backwards or forwards. Perhaps, as in 'Orthodoxy,' the middle course is the happy and safe one.

'Tremendous Trifles' is a Chestertonian philosophy of the importance and interest of small things. It is a remarkable thing that we never see the things that we daily gaze upon. Chesterton finds scope for all kinds of subjects in this book, from a 'Piece of Chalk' to 'A Dragon's Grandmother.' Provided we believe in dragons, there is good reason to suppose that they have grandmothers. It is not so easy to write a good essay on the subject. Chesterton does so with great skill, and it makes it quite certain to be so intellectual as to hate fairies is a piteous condition.

What he brings out in this particular essay is that what modern intellectualism has done is to make 'the hero extraordinary, the tale ordinary,' whereas the fairy tale makes 'the hero ordinary, the tale extraordinary.'

In this book of short essays it is only possible to take a few, but care has been taken to attempt to show the enormous versatility of Chesterton's mind. It has been said quite wrongly that Chesterton cannot describe pathos. This is certainly untrue. He can so admirably describe humour that he cannot help knowing the pathetic, which is often so akin to humour. I am not sure that this ability to describe the melancholy is not to be seen in one of these essays that narrates how he travelled in a train in which there was a dead man whose end he never knew.

Perhaps there is nothing more interesting than turning out one's pockets — all sorts of long forgotten mementoes cause a lump in the throat or a gleam in the eye; but it is very annoying, on arriving at a station where tickets are collected, to find everything that relates to your past twenty years of life and be unable to find the ticket that makes you a legitimate rider on the iron way. This is what Chesterton describes in a delightful essay.

One day, so Chesterton tells us in the ‘Riddle of the Ivy,’ he happened to be leaving Battersea, and being asked where he was going, calmly replied to ‘Battersea.’ Which is really to say that we find our way to Brixton more eagerly by way of Singapore than by way of Kennington. In a few words, it is what we mean when we say, as every traveller says at times, ‘Home, sweet home.’ I fancy this is what Mr. Chesterton means. It is a beautiful thought — a fine love of the home, a strange understanding of the wish of the traveller who once more wishes to see the old cottage before he journeys ‘across the Bar.’

The sight of chained convicts being taken to a prison causes Chesterton to essay on the ‘filthy torture’ of our prisons, the whole system of which is a ‘relic of sin.’ Perhaps he is right! But is it that the prisons are wrong, or is it that society makes criminals? After all, convicts are chained that they shall not endure a worse penalty for attempted escape. At present prisons are as necessary to the State as milk is to a baby; the thing against them is that they turn criminal men into criminal devils.

At his home in Beaconsfield, Chesterton has a wonderful toy theatre. He writes in this book a sketch about it. This toy theatre has a certain philosophy. ‘It can produce large events in a small space; it could represent the earthquake in Jamaica or the Day of Judgment.’ We must take Chesterton’s word for it. I am not convinced that the toy theatre of Chesterton has added to philosophy; I don’t think it has made any remarkable contribution to thought, nor is it, as he claims, more interesting and better than a West-end theatre; but I do believe that in having amused a few hundred children it has a place in the Book of Life — perhaps near the name of Santa Claus.

While it is true that ‘Tremendous Trifles’ is not nearly as important as some of the Chesterton books, it is true to say that it is a remarkably pleasant book about small things that are really tremendous when we come to study them.

‘The Defendant’ is, as the title suggests, a defence of all kinds of things that are usually attacked by other people.

It takes a brave man to defend ‘penny dreadfuls.’ Chesterton assumes this rôle. He defends them on their remarkable powers of imagination. One has only to study Sexton Blake to discover the intricate psychology of that wondrous personality who can solve the foulest murder or unravel stories that the divorce courts would quail before.

There is something to be said for the skeleton so long as he doesn't come out of his cupboard. Chesterton defends skeletons. 'The truth is that man's horror of the skeleton is not horror of death at all; it is that the skeleton reminds him that his appearance is shamelessly grotesque.' But he sees no objection to this at all. After all, he says, the frog and the hippopotamus are happy. Why, then, should man dislike it that his anatomy without flesh is inelegant?

It is to be expected that Chesterton would write a defence of baby worship, because they are so 'very serious and in consequence very happy.' 'The humorous look of children is perhaps the most endearing of all the bonds that hold the Cosmos together.' Probably we are all agreed that the defence of baby worship is a desirable thing; possibly it is the only point upon which there is universal agreement with Chesterton.

'The Defendant' is a series of papers that are light, but conceal a depth of thought behind them. They demonstrate that there is something to be said for everything which may be a slight solution of the eternal problem that theological professors are paid to try and discover, the problem of evil. It may be that there is really no such thing, but it would be disastrous to these professors to discover this, so the dear old problem goes on from year to year.

As an essayist, Chesterton is never dull: the philosophy contained in his essays is not prosy. The only fault is that he is at times so clever that it is a little difficult to know what he means. But this really does not matter, as a shrewd critic of one of his books made it public through the Press that Chesterton did not know himself what he meant. But I wonder if he did really know?

Chapter Two

DICKENS

If there is fault to be found in Chesterton’s masterly study of Charles Dickens it lies in the fact that in parts of the book the meaning is not always clear, or, rather, it is not always so at a first reading. Whether this may be justly termed a fault depends largely upon what the reader of a critical study demands.

If he desires that he shall read Chesterton superficially and yet understand, he will be doomed to disappointment. Perhaps of all writers Chesterton must be read with the head between the hands, with a fierce determination that the meaning veiled in brilliant paradox shall be sought out.

He is not only a keen critic, he is also a deliberate commentator. The difference is fundamental. The commentator builds upon the foundation the critic has erected; he does not merely state what he thinks about a book or character, rather he explains the criticism already made.

This is the method adopted with regard to Dickens. Chesterton has written a commentary on the soul of Dickens, he has not in any strict sense written a biography; this was not necessary; the difficulty of Dickens lies in the interpretation of his work; his life, though having a great influence on his writings, has been written so often that Chesterton has refrained from building on ‘another’s foundation.’ In a word, it is an intensely original work, far more than our critic’s companion book on Browning.

As was Browning born to a world in the throes of the aftermath of the French Revolution, so was Dickens. Chesterton lays great stress on the youth of Dickens; it is only right that he should do this; the early life of Dickens was probably responsible for the wonderful genius of his art. The blacking factory that nearly killed the physical Dickens gave birth to the literary Dickens. Dickens was, in fact, born at the psychological moment, which is not to say that we are born at the unpsychological moment, but that Dickens was born at a time that allowed his natural powers to be used to the best advantage.

Chesterton feels this strongly. ‘The background of the Dickens era was just that background that was eminently suitable to him’; it was a background that needed a Dickens as much as the pagan world, with all its Greek philosophies, had needed a Christ.

He begins his study of Dickens with a keen survey of the Dickens period. ‘It was,’ he says, ‘a world that encouraged anybody to anything. And in England and literature its living expression was Dickens. It is useless for us to attempt to imagine Dickens and his life unless we are able to imagine his confidence in common men.’

It is this supreme confidence in common men that was the keynote to the wonderful power of Dickens in making characters from those who were in a world sense undistinguished. On this position Chesterton lays great stress. It was this, he thinks, that made him an optimist. It was the same position that made Browning an optimist. It is the disbelief in the Divine image in Man that makes the cynic and the pessimist.

Swift hated men because they were capable of better things but would not realize it. Dickens knew men were kings, though ordinary men; the result was that he loved humanity. It is a queer point of psychology that with the same wish two such minds as Swift and Dickens came to the extremes of the emotions of love and hate.

In some ways Dickens was more than a maker of books, he was a maker of worlds; he tried to make ‘not only a book but a cosmos.’ This may be a curious and obscure kind of clericalism that popularly expresses itself as an effort to run with the hare and follow with the hounds, but is really an heroic attempt to see both sides of the question, and is not a cheap pandering after popularity.

Many critics have disliked Dickens because of this tendency of universalism, a tendency liable to intrude on minds of a giant intellect and a ready sympathy. Chesterton does not think that Dickens was right in this attitude of universalism, and says so with, I think, a certain amount of cheap disdain. ‘He was inclined to be a literary Whiteley, a universal provider.’ Really Dickens wanted to have a say about everything, in which he is strangely like Chesterton.

The result of this was a result that meant the greatest value: it meant and was ‘David Copperfield.’ The book was for Chesterton a classic, and it was so because it was an autobiography. It is in this work that Dickens makes his defence of the rather exaggerated situations in some of his books, for in this book Dickens proves that his greatest romance is based on the experiences of his own life. ‘David Copperfield is the great answer of a romancer to the realists. David says in effect, “What! you say that the Dickens tales are too purple really to have happened. Why, this is what happened to me, and it seemed the most purple of all. You say that the Dickens heroes are too handsome and triumphant! Why, no prince or paladin in Ariosto was ever so handsome and triumphant as the head boy seemed to me walking before me in the sun. You say the Dickens villains are too black. Why, there was no ink in the Devil’s inkstand black enough for my own stepfather when I had to live in the same house with him.”’

This is the point that Chesterton brings out so well. The Dickens characters are not overdrawn because, though they move between book covers, their originals have moved on the face of the earth; they have moved with Dickens and he has made them his own. His brilliant apology for this alleged ‘overdrawing’ is one of the most effective replies ever penned to superior Dickens detractors. It is effective because it is true; it is true because it is obvious that Dickens created that which lay hidden in his own mind, the misery of his factory days.

It is, I think, with this view in mind that Chesterton pays so much attention to that period of Dickens’ life which he spent in the blacking factory, with its crude noise, its blatant vulgarity, its vile language that left the small boy Dickens’ sick, but with a sickness that discovered his literary genius. The factory was the germ that made the great writer. Chesterton is a true critic of Dickens because he has this somewhat singular insight of seeing the importance of the early miseries of Dickens’ life with regard to their influence on his literary output and his queerly favoured delineation of common folks, the sort of people we always meet but hardly ever talk about because we are foolish enough to think them ordinary.

It is from the account of the early life of Dickens that Chesterton gently leads us to the birth of the immortal Mr. Pickwick, that supreme Englishman who is a byword amongst even those who scarcely know Dickens. The birth pangs of the advent of Pickwick was a sharp quarrel ‘that did no good to Dickens, and was one of those which occurred far too frequently in his life.’

Without any hesitation for Chesterton, ‘Pickwick Papers’ is Dickens’ finest achievement, which is a pleasant enough problem if we happen to remember that he also wrote ‘David Copperfield.’ Possibly it is really unfair to compare them. ‘Pickwick Papers’ is not in the strict sense a novel;

‘David Copperfield’ is a novel even if it is an autobiography. At any rate Pickwick was a fairy, and as fairies are pretty elastic he probably was in that category of beings, but he was even more a royal fairy, none other than the ‘fairy prince.’

In Pickwick, Dickens made a great discovery, which was that he could write ordinary stuff like the ‘Sketches by Boz,’ and also could produce Mr. Pickwick and write ‘David Copperfield,’ which was to say that Dickens discovered he had a good chance of being the Shakespeare of literature.

‘It is in “Pickwick Papers” that Dickens became a mythologist rather than a novelist; he dealt with men who were gods.’ That is, no doubt, that they became household gods; in other words, as familiar as the characters of Shakespeare.

There is one tremendous outstanding characteristic of Dickens which Chesterton brings out with considerable force. It is that above all things Dickens created characters. It is almost as if the setting of his books were on a stage where the environment changes but the essentials of the characters remain unchanged.

The story is almost subordinated to the drawing of the principal character; it is almost a modern idea of the psychoanalytical kind of novel that our young novelists love to draw. But still there is the great difference that the characters of Dickens pursue there own way regardless of the trend of events round them.

Naturally the modern novel is inferior to some of Dickens’ works, but they do not deserve the hard things Chesterton says about them. Thus he remarks in passing that the modern novel is ‘devoted to the bewilderment of a weak young clerk who cannot decide which woman he wants to marry or which new religion he believes in; we still give this knock-kneed cad the name of hero.’

This is, I think, unfair. The modern novel is very often still a good healthy love tale; the hero is more often than not a gentleman who has not the brains to be a cad; his trouble about marriage is that he wants to marry the right woman to their mutual well being; he is neither a cad nor a hero, but an ordinary Englishman whom we need not walk half a mile to see; he usually marries a girl who can be seen in any suburb or at any church bazaar. I have dwelt on this at some length, as Chesterton has a tendency to despise modern novelists while being one himself.

At this period, when ‘Pickwick’ had once and for all brought fame to Dickens, it will be interesting to see why Dickens attained the enormous popularity he did. He was, our critic thinks, a ‘great event not only in literature but also in history.’

He considers that Dickens was popular in a sense that we of the twentieth century cannot understand. In fact, he goes so far as to say that there are no really popular authors to-day.

This is probably not entirely true. When we say an author is popular we do not mean that necessarily, as Chesterton seems to suggest, he is a ‘best seller’; rather we call him popular in the sense that a large number of people find pleasure in reading him, even if the subject is not a pleasant one. Dickens was popular in a different way: he was read by a public who wished his story might never end. They not only loved his books, they loved his characters even more. No matter that there might be five sub-stories running alongside of the main one, the central character retained the public affection. His characters were known outside their particular stories, and not only that, this was by no means confined to the principal ones.

They were known, as Chesterton points out, as Sherlock Holmes is known to-day. But even so there is again a difference. People do not speak of the minor characters of Conan Doyle’s tales as they do, for instance, of Smike.

It is now convenient to turn to the Christmas literature of Dickens. I am convinced that Chesterton has very badly misconstrued the character of Scrooge, that delightful person whose one virtue was consistency.

Above everything, Scrooge was consistent; he hated Christmas as we hate anything that does not agree with our temperament. Merry Christmas was nonsense to him because he did not know how to be merry. He was a cold, cynical bachelor, and at that, so far, was perfectly within the law, moral and legal.

But Chesterton, by rather an unfortunate attempt to be too original, has turned him into a filthy hypocrite who needed no appearances of spirits whatever; for he says of Scrooge, ‘He is only a crusty old bachelor, and had, I strongly suspect, given away turkeys secretly all his life.’

When Chesterton says that Scrooge gave away turkeys secretly all his life it is merely saying that the whole attitude of Scrooge to life was a silly and unmeaning pose, which makes him ridiculous, and robs the ‘Christmas Carol’ of all its real worth, that of the miraculous conversion of Scrooge.

But, then, the actual story does not mean much for Chesterton: ‘the repentance of Scrooge is highly improbable.’ If it is true that Scrooge really did give away turkeys secretly, then it is quite obvious that Scrooge never did repent; he was past it. But I fancy that Chesterton has erred badly here; he has attempted without success to put a secret meaning into a simple and beautiful story.

‘Chimes’ is, for Chesterton, an attack on cant. It was a story written by Dickens to protest against all he hated in the nature of oppression. Dickens hated the vulgar cant that only helps to bring self-advertisement: the ethic that the poor must listen to the rich, not because the rich are the best law-givers, but because society is at present so constituted that no other method can be adopted.

Dickens loved the attitude the poor always take to Christmas; it is that attitude which is the proof that at its bedrock humanity is extremely lovable. Chesterton is entirely in agreement with Dickens on this matter. ‘There is nothing,’ he says, ‘upon which the poor are more criticized than on the point of spending large sums on small feasts; there is nothing in which they are more right.’

Dickens did not in any way forget that the real spirit of Christmas is to be found in the cheery group round the blazing fire. ‘The Cricket on the Hearth’ is a pleasant tale about all that we associate with Christmas, that very thing that has made Hearth and Christmas synonymous; yet Chesterton considers this one of the weakest of the Dickens’ stories, which is a surprising criticism for a writer who really loves Christmas as he does.

In a later period of Dickens, Chesterton informs us of his brief entry into the complex and exciting world that has its headquarters in Fleet Street. For a short period Dickens occupied the editorship of the *Daily News,* but the environment was not a very congenial one. Dickens was unsettled with that strange restlessness that seizes all literary men at some time or other. This was the time that saw the publication of ‘Dombey and Son.’ Chesterton thinks that the essential genius found its most perfect expression in this work though the treatment is grotesque. This book is almost, so our critic thinks, ‘a theological one: it attempts to distinguish between the rough pagan devotion of the father and the gentler Christian affection of the mother.’

The grotesque manner of treatment of this work was as natural as the employment of the grotesque by Browning. Dickens must work in his own way, in the manner that suited his inmost soul; he could not be made to write to order. In a brilliant paradox Chesterton says of ‘Dombey and Son’: the ‘story of Florence Dombey is incredible, although it is true,’ which is what many people feel about Christianity. ‘Dombey and Son’ was the outlet for that curious psychology of Dickens which could get the best out of a pathetic incident by approaching it from a grotesque angle. It came, as Chesterton points out in his own inimitable way, ‘into the inner chamber by coming down the chimney.’ Which demonstrates the ever nearness of pathos to humour, of the absurd to the pathetic.

It will not be out of place to refer at this time to some of the defects with which people have charged Dickens. Chesterton does not agree with the critics on these points, but admits that these charges have been levelled against Dickens. It will be advisable to take one or two examples of these alleged flaws.

There is that most popular thing of which Dickens is accused, that of exaggeration. Many people are quite incredulous that there could ever have existed such a character as Little Nell. Chesterton, however, thinks that Dickens did know a girl of this nature, and that Little Nell was based on her. Little Nell is not really more improbable than ‘Eric,’ the famous hero of Dean Farrar, and he was certainly based on a living boy.

People who live in these enlightened days are piously shocked at the amount of drinking described by Dickens. Well-bred and garrulous ladies have shuddered at the scenes described, and have declared that Dickens was at least fond of the Bacchanalian element. So he was, but the reason was not that he loved hard drinking, but that, as our critic brings out, drinking was the symbol of hospitality as roast beef is the symbol of a Sunday in a thousand English rectories. As Dickens described the social life of England he could not leave out its most characteristic feature and shudder in pious horror that the red wine dyed old England a merry crimson.

It would be no doubt an exaggeration to call Dickens a socialist. What he saw was that there was a mass of beings that was called humanity, that the two ends of the political pole were indifferent to this mass. The party to which a man gave his allegiance did not matter as long as that party worked for man’s ultimate good. Chesterton is quite sure that Dickens was not a socialist; he was not the kind that ranted at street corners and dined in secret at the Ritz, nor was he of the kind who said all men are equal but I am a little better. He was a socialist in the sense that he hated oppression of any kind.

‘Hard Times’ strikes a note that is a little short of being harsh. The reason that Dickens may have exaggerated Bounderby is that he really disliked him. The Dickensian characters undoubtedly suffered from their delineator’s likes and dislikes.

About this time Dickens wrote a book that was unique for him; it was a book that dealt with the French Revolution, and was called ‘The Tale of Two Cities.’ Chesterton does not think that Dickens really understood this gigantic upheaval; in fact, he says his attitude to it was quite a mistaken one. Even, thinks our critic, Carlyle didn’t know what it meant. Both see it as a bloody riot, both are mistaken. The reason that Carlyle and Dickens didn’t know all about it was that they had the good fortune to be Englishmen; a very good supposition that Chesterton has still something to learn of that Revolution.

After all, the main point of ‘The Tale of Two Cities’ is the exquisite pathos of it. Whether its attitude to the French Revolution is absolutely accurate does not matter very much for the reader who is not a keen historical student.

With ‘Hard Times’ and ‘A Tale of Two Cities’ Dickens has struck a graver note. This is peculiarly emphasized in ‘Great Expectations.’ This story is ‘characterized by a consistency and quietude of individuality which is rare in Dickens.’ It is really a book with a moral — that life in the limelight is not always synonymous with getting the best out of it. Really, the hero behaves in a sneakish manner. Probably Dickens doesn’t like him, and the writer is still on the stern side.

In 1864, so Chesterton tells us, Dickens was in a merrier mood, and published ‘Our Mutual Friend,’ a book that has, as our critic says, ‘a thoroughly human hero and a thoroughly human villain.’ This work is ‘a satire dealing with the whims and pleasures of the leisured class.’ But this is by no means a monopoly of the so-called idle rich: the hardworking middle and poorer classes have whims and pleasures in a like manner, but have not so much opportunity in indulging in them.

As I have indicated, the story is not the principal part of the Dickens' literature; it is the drawing of characters to which he pays so much attention. It will not be out of place at this time to see what our critic has to say with regard to this tendency of Dickens. It is an essential of Dickens, and is therefore of vast import to any critique on him.

The essence of Dickens, for Chesterton, is that he makes kings out of common men: those folks who are the ordinary people of this strange, fascinating world, those who have no special claim to a place in the stars, those who, when they die, do not have two lines in any but a local paper, those who are common but are never commonplace.

There is a vast difference between the common and the commonplace, as Chesterton points out. Death is common to all, yet it is never commonplace; it is in its very essence a grand and noble thing, because it is a proof of our common humanity; it gives the lie that the Pope is of more importance than the dustman; it makes the busy editor equal to the newsboy shouting the papers under his office windows.

The common man is he who does not receive any special distinction: universities do not compete to do him honour, his name is but mentioned in a small circle. These are those of whom Dickens wrote. 'It is,' says Chesterton, 'in private life that we find the great characters. They are too great to get into the public world.' They are people who are natural — natural in a sense that the holders of high office never can be. Dickens could only write of natural people, so he wrote of common men: 'You will find him adrift as an impecunious commercial traveller like Micawber; you will find him but one of a batch of silly clerks like Swiveller; you will find him as an unsuccessful actor like Crumples; you will find him as an unsuccessful doctor like Sawyer; you will always find the rich and reeking personality where Dickens found it among the poor.'

Not only were the characters Dickens chose common men, they were also 'great fools,' because Chesterton will have us believe that a man can be entirely great while he is entirely foolish. It is no doubt in the spiritual sense so admirably expressed in the Pauline Epistles, where 'foolish in the eyes of the world but wise before God' is a condition that is of merit.

'Mr. Toots is great because he is foolish.' He is great because he has a soul that glorifies his weak and foolish body, not that he is great because, *ipso facto*, he is foolish.

There is a great and permanent value in the writings of Dickens. I cannot do better than quote our critic: ‘If we are to look for lessons, here at least are the last and deepest lessons of Dickens. It is in our own daily life that we are to look for the portents and the prodigies. This is the truth, not merely of the fixed figures of our life, the wife, the husband, the fool that fills the day. Every day we neglect Tootses and Swivellers, Guppys and Joblings, Simmerys and Flashers. This is the real gospel of Dickens, the inexhaustible opportunities offered by the liberty and variety of man. It is when we pass our own private gate and open our own secret door that we step into the land of the giants.’

It will now be convenient to consider the question of the attitude of our critic to the ‘Mystery of Edwin Drood,’ that tale that has produced one of those literary mysteries that are so dear to a number of folks of the kind who would be disappointed were the problem to be finally solved. ‘The Mystery of Edwin Drood’ was cut short by the sudden death that fell upon Dickens on a warm June night some half century ago.

For Chesterton the book ‘might have proved to be the most ambitious that Dickens ever planned.’ It is non-Dickensian in the sense that its value depends entirely on a story. The workmanship is very fine. The book was purely and simply a detective story. ‘Bleak House’ was the nearest approach to its style, but the mystery there was easy to unravel. It was as though Dickens wished in ‘Edwin Drood’ to make one last ‘splendid and staggering’ appearance before the curtain rang down, not to be rung up again until the last Easter morning.

‘Yes,’ says Chesterton, ‘there were many other Dickenses, ‘an industrious Dickens, a public spirited Dickens, but the last one (that is Edwin Drood) was the great one. The wild epitaph of Mrs. Sapsea, “Canst thou do likewise?” should be the serious epitaph of Dickens.’

It is more than fifty years since Dickens died. What is the future of Dickens likely to be? At least, Chesterton has no doubt of the permanent influence of Dickens; he is as sure of immortality as is Shakespeare. The kings of the earth die, yet their works remain; the princes pass on but are not entirely forgotten; writers write and in their turn sleep; but there is that to which in every age we inscribe the word Immortal. It is enough to say that Dickens is immortal because he is Dickens. There is a further reason, that he proved what all the world had been saying, that common humanity is a holy thing. To quote Chesterton: ‘He did for the world what the world could not do for itself.’ Dickens’ creation was poetry — it dealt with the elementals; it is therefore permanent.

In final words he says, ‘We shall not be further troubled with the little artists who found Dickens too sane for their sorrows and too clear for their delights. But we have a long way to travel before we get back to what Dickens meant; and the passage is a long, rambling English road, a twisting road such as Mr. Pickwick travelled.’

‘But the road leads to eternity, because the inn is at the end of the road, and at that inn is a goodly company of common men who are immortal because Dickens made them. Here we shall meet Dickens and all his characters, and when we shall drink again it shall be from great flagons in the tavern at the end of the world.’

What, then, is the essential part of Chesterton’s study of Charles Dickens? It is certainly not a biography; it is for all practical purposes a keen study of what Dickens was, what he wrote, why he wrote as he did, why he has a place in literature no one else has.

There are faults in the book — it would be a poor book if it had none. At times I think Chesterton allows his genius to overcome his critical judgment. Particularly is this so in his strange misconstruction of the character of Scrooge. But this merely demonstrates yet once more that Dickens, like Christ, is unique, because no one has ever completely understood him.

The book is a tribute by a great writer to a greater writer, by a great man to a great man, by a complex personality to a complex personality; above all it is a tribute by a lover of the things of the ‘doorstep’ to a writer who has made the doorstep and the street the road to heaven, because the beings who pass along have been made immortal.

When the critics of Dickens meet at the inn there will be none more worthy of a place close to the Master Writer than Chesterton.

Chapter Three

THACKERAY

There are no doubt thousands of people who would be annoyed to be thought the reverse of well read who nevertheless know Thackeray only as a name. They know that he was a really great English novelist — they may even know that he lived as a contemporary of Dickens — but they do not know a line of any of his works.

In lesser manner Dickens is unknown to very many people of the present day who could tell you intelligently of every modern book that is produced. The reason is, I think, one that is not so generally thought of as might be expected.

It is often said that Thackeray and Dickens are out of date, that they have had their day, that this era of tube trains and other abominations cannot fall into the background of lumbering stage coaches.

This is, I think, a profound and grave error. It is an error because it presupposes that human interest changes with the advent of different means of transport: that Squeers is no longer of interest because he would now travel to Yorkshire by the Great Northern Railway and would have lunch in a luncheon car instead of inside a four-horse stage coach.

The fundamental reason that modern people do not read these great authors is that they are not encouraged to do so. The very best way to instil a love of Thackeray into the modern world is to make the modern world read just so much of him that its voracious appetite is sharpened to wish for more.

In an altogether admirable series of the masters of literature Thackeray finds a place, and treatment of him is left to Chesterton, who writes a fine introductory ‘Biography’ and then takes picked passages from his writings. This is, I think, the most useful means possible of popularizing an author. It requires a good deal of pluck in these days to sit down and steadily pursue a way through a long book of Thackeray unless it has been proved, by the perusal of a selected passage, that riches in the book warrant the act of courage in beginning the work.

In this chapter it will be convenient to pay special attention to the introduction that is so ably contributed by Chesterton. It will only be possible to refer to the passages he has selected from Thackeray, and the reader must judge of the merit of the choosing. It is one of the hardest things possible to choose representative passages from a great writer. Shall he choose those that display the literary qualities of the writer, shall he choose those which depict his powers of drama, shall he select those which bring out the humour of the writer, shall he pick at random and let the passage stand or fall on its own merits? These are questions that must be faced in a work of the nature of Chesterton's Thackeray. What the method has been will, I hope, be clear at the end of this chapter.

It was Thackeray's expressed wish that there should be no biography written of him, a position that might indicate extreme modesty, colossal conceit, or distinct cowardice. Whatever the reason, it has not been entirely obeyed, and rightly. A man of the power of Thackeray cannot live without the world being in some way better; it is only good that those who never knew him in the flesh should at least know him in a book. It is not enough that, as Chesterton points out, he 'was of all novelists the most autobiographical,' which is not to say that he wrote unending personal confessions with a very large I, but rather that his books were drawn from the experiences of his life, a field that is productive of the richest literary worth.

Thackeray was born, we are told, in the year 1811, so that he was a year old when the world received two babies who were like ten thousand other babies, except that they happened to be Browning and Dickens. It was the time when the world trembled, because that mighty soldier Napoleon stood with arms folded, waiting to strike, it knew not where. It was the time when military genius reached its height, a height that could be only brought low by one thing, and that was an English General with a long nose and a cocked hat.

Although Thackeray was born in Calcutta, he was as English as he could possibly be. But he did not forget his Eastern beginning. 'A certain vague cosmological quality was always mixed with his experience, and it was his favourite boast that he had seen men and cities like Ulysses.' Which is to say that he had not only seen the world, he had felt it; if he had not seen a one-eyed giant, he had at least seen a two-eyed Hindu.

His early life followed the ordinary life of a thousand other boys born of Anglo-Indian parents; that was, he went to school, where 'a girl broke his heart and a boy broke his nose,' and he discovered that the nose took longer to mend.

At Cambridge, Chesterton tells us, Thackeray found that it was a quite easy thing to sit down and play cards and lose £1,500 in an evening, a fact that very probably was more useful to him than twenty degrees. Trinity College was the Thackeray College: it has had no more famous son. It was said that Thackeray could order a dinner in every language in Europe, which is to say he could have dined in comfort in any restaurant in Soho.

From Cambridge, we learn, he made his way to the Bar, and at the same time wrote articles in the hope that some editor might keep them from the waste-paper basket. Chesterton tells us an interesting legend that about this time Thackeray offered to illustrate the books of Dickens. The offer was declined, which he thinks was 'a good thing for Dickens' books and a good thing for Thackeray's.' Whether Thackeray ever really did meet Dickens does not matter much; it is at least picturesque; 'it affects the imagination as much as the meeting with Napoleon.'

There has always been what is for Chesterton a silly discussion — a controversy as to whether Thackeray was a cynic. This was because he happened to write first about villains, then about heroes; villains are always more interesting than heroes, and not infrequently are much better mannered. A cynic is a person who doesn't take the trouble to find the motives for things, or he takes it for granted that the motives are never disinterested ones. To say that Thackeray was a cynic because he drew a large number of villains is as untrue as to say Swift was a cynic because he wrote satire. Thackeray wrote about villains because he wished to also write about heroes; Swift was satirical because he had the intelligence to see that his contemporaries were fools when they might have been wise. The cynics are the people of to-day who write books which attribute low motives to every one, which turn love into lust, which care not what is written so long as it can be made certain that there is nothing in the world which has not a hidden meaning.

The first appearance of Thackeray in literature was in 'Fraser's Magazine,' under the pseudo name of Michael Angelo Titmarsh. It is on these unimportant papers that Chesterton thinks was based the attack on Thackeray for being a cynic.

In passing, it is not necessary to say more than that Thackeray's marriage ended in a horrible manner: Mrs. Thackeray was sent to an asylum. 'I would do it over again,’ said Thackeray; which was a ‘fine thing to say.’ It was really carrying out ‘for better or worse,’ which often enough really means for better only.

It will now be well at once to plunge into the very heart of Thackeray, that heart which beat beneath the huge, gaunt frame. The two books which have made his name famous, and what Chesterton thinks of them, must be now gone into.

‘The Book of Snobs’ was one of those literary rarities that has genius in its very name. No one probably really thinks himself a snob; every one likes to read of one. Thackeray brought snobbishness to a classic. There had been books of scoundrels, there had been books of heroes, there had been books of nincompoops, now there was a book of those people who abound in every community, and who are snobs.

‘This work was much needed and very admirably done. The solemn philosophic framework, the idea of treating snobbishness as a science, was original and sound; for snobbishness is indeed a disease in our Society.’

Unfortunately Chesterton is not nearly hard enough on snobbishness. Were it a disease, it might be excusable as being at times unavoidable; it is nothing of the sort, it is a deliberate thing that undermines society more than anything; it is entirely spontaneous, and flourishes in every community, from the Church to the Jockey Club.

‘Aristocracy does not have snobs any more than democracy’; but this ‘Thackeray was too restrained and early Victorian to see.’ There are at the present day a great number of people who will not see that Bolshevism is as snobbish as Suburbia, that the poor man in the Park Lodge is as much a snob as his master, who only knows the county folks. Snobbery is not the monopoly of any one set; even also is it, as Thackeray says,’a mean admiration’ that thinks it is better to be a ‘made’ peer than an honest gardener.

‘The true source of snobs in England was the refusal to take one side or the other in the crisis of the French Revolution.’

The title of ‘Vanity Fair’ was an inspiration. It gives the ideas of the disharmonies that can be found in any market place in any English market town on any English market day. It brings out ‘the irrelevancy of Thackeray.’ A good motto for the book is, for Chesterton, that attributed to Cardinal Newman: ‘Evil always fails by overleaping its aim and good by falling short of it.’ Our critic feels that the critics have been unfair to Thackeray with respect to their denouncement of the character of Amelia Sedley as being much too soft, whereas Chesterton thinks she was really a fool, which is the logical outcome of being the reverse of hard.

But Amelia was soft in a very delightful way. She was ‘open to all emotions as they came’ — in fact, she was a fool who was wise because she has retained her power of happiness, while the hard Rebecca has arrived at hell, ‘the hell of having all outward forces open, but all receptive organs closed.’

It is necessary again to refer to the charge of cynicism that is levelled against Thackeray. The mistake is, as our critic points out, ‘taking a vague word and applying it precisely.’ It all depends upon what cynicism really means. ‘If it means a war on comfort, then Thackeray was, to his eternal credit, a cynic’; ‘if it means a war on virtue, then Thackeray, to his eternal honour, was the reverse of a cynic.’ His object is to show that silly goodness is better than clever vice. As I have indicated, the long and the short of the matter is that Thackeray created a lot of villains, and has therefore been called a cynic by those who don’t even know what the word means, or that there is a literary blessedness in the making of villains to bring out the more excellent virtues of the heroes.

From these two monumental works that were original in every way and might almost be called propaganda, Thackeray passed on to a novel which bore the name of ‘Pendennis.’ It was ‘a novel with nothing else but a hero, only that the hero is not very heroic,’ which makes him all the more interesting, for it makes him all the more human.

But Pendennis is more than a man — he is a type or symbol. He is ‘the old mystical tragedian of the Middle Ages, Everyman.’ It is an epic, because it celebrates the universal man with all his glorious failings and glorious virtues. The love of Pendennis for Miss Fotheringay is a different thing to the ordinary love of man for woman; it is rather the love that is in every man for every woman. This is what I think Chesterton means when he says ‘it is the veritable Divine disease, which seems a part of the very health of youth.’

The Everyman of the Middle Ages was a symbol of what man really was. Chesterton feels that every outside force that came to Everyman had to be abnormal — for instance, ‘Death had to be bony’ — so he contends in

‘Pendennis’ that the shapes that intrude on the life of Arthur Pendennis have aggressive and allegorical influences.

‘Pendennis’ is an epic because it celebrates not the strength of man but his weakness. In the character of Major Pendennis, Chesterton feels that Thackeray did a great work, because he showed that the life of the so-called man of the world is not the gay and careless one that fiction depicts. It is the religious people who can afford to be careless. ‘If you want carelessness you must go to the martyrs.’ The reason is fairly obvious. The worldling has to be careful, as he wants to remain in the world; the religious man, of whom the martyr was the true prototype, can afford to be careless; he is not necessarily careless of life, but he can put things at their proper value. The martyr facing the lions in the Roman arena knew what life really was; the worldly woman spending her life trying to be in the company of titled people has no real idea of the value of it. It is the religious people who know the world; it is the worldly people who know nothing of it.

With the publication of ‘Pendennis’ the reputation of Thackeray reached that position which is sought by all authors, that of being able to write a book that should not, on publication, be put to the indignity of being asked who the writer was. Thackeray was now in the delightful position of being well established, a position that very often results in careless and poor work. It has been said with some truth that once a writer is established he can write anything he likes. This is to an extent true, and such work may even be published and fairly popular, but he will find sooner or later that his influence is on the wane.

In the ‘Newcomes’ Thackeray drew a character in Colonel Newcome, to whom was given the highest of literary honours, that of being spoken of apart from the book — I mean in the way that people speak of Micawber or Scrooge, almost unconsciously, without really having the actual work in which the character appears in mind. Of this book Chesterton says ‘the public has largely forgotten all the Newcomes except one, the Colonel who has taken his place with Don Quixote, Sir Roger de Coverley, Uncle Toby, and Mr. Pickwick.’

Chesterton feels that Thackeray at times falls into the trick common to many writers, that of repeating himself, a trick that is natural, as it does seem in some ways that the human mind, like history, is apt to move in circles. The reason was that in some way Thackeray became tired of Barnes Newcome; the result was that from being a convincing villain he develops into a stereotyped one, the type who fires pistols into the air and is the squire’s runaway son, so often found at the Lyceum.

If Thackeray ‘sprawled’ in the Newcomes he atones for this in ‘Esmond,’ if any atonement is needed for sprawling, which is probably only that Thackeray felt that there is nothing so elastic and sprawling as a human person, whether he be a villain or the reverse.

For Chesterton, ‘Esmond’ is in the modern sense a work of art, which is to say that it was a book that could be read anywhere. ‘It had no word that might not have been used at the court of Queen Anne.’ It is a highly romantic tale, but it is a sad story. It is a great Queen Anne romance; but, ‘there broods a peculiar conviction that Queen Anne is dead.’ The whole tale moves round a complicated situation in which a young man loves a mother and her daughter, and finally marries the mother. This work is, for Chesterton, Thackeray’s ‘most difficult task.’ It is difficult for the reason that the situation of the tale is placed between possibilities of grace and possibilities even of indecency. It is not hard to write a graceful tale, it is easy to write a loose story; it is extremely difficult to write a story that may by a stroke of the pen be either beautiful or merely sordid. But Thackeray manipulates the keys of the tale so that ‘it moves like music,’ an extremely apt metaphor, where harmonies can be made disharmonies by a single note.

It is a strange fact that a sequel is seldom to be compared to its forerunner: ‘Tom Brown’s Schooldays’ is of a schoolboy who is an eternal type; ‘Tom Brown at Oxford’ is a poor book that does not in the least understand Oxford. The fact is, I think, that an author cannot be inspired twice on the same subject — the gods give but sparingly, their gifts do not fall as the rains.

The sequel to ‘Esmond’ that Thackeray wrote, ‘The Virginians,’ is an ‘inadequate sequel,’ which is not to say that it is a poor book, but rather that it is an unnecessary one. Yet, as Chesterton says, ‘Thackeray never struck a smarter note than when, in “The Virginians,” he created the terrible little Yankee Countess of Castlewood.’ In the same way as ‘The Virginians’ was a sequel to ‘Esmond,’ so ‘Philip’ was a sequel (also an inadequate one) to the ‘Newcomes.’

It is strange that in two things at least Thackeray’s life followed the same course as Dickens. Both occupied the editorial chair: Dickens that of the *Daily News*, Thackeray that of the *Cornhill Magazine*. Both left unfinished works: Dickens that of ‘The Mystery of Edwin Drood,’ Thackeray that of ‘Denis Duval.’

Thackeray’s last work, ‘Lovell the Widower,’ is ‘a very clever sketch, but as a novel is rather drawn out.’ ‘The Roundabout Papers’ make very pleasant reading. In one ‘he compares himself to a pagan conqueror driving in his chariot up the Hill of Coru, with a slave behind him to remind him that he is only mortal.’ In 1863, suddenly, Thackeray died, seven years before Dickens also passed away.

Chesterton has in the space of a short introduction given a very clear account of the chief characteristics of Thackeray’s works; it is no easy matter to give in a few lines the essence of a great novel, and Chesterton is not always the most concise of writers. It will now be convenient to take a few of the characteristics of Thackeray and observe what he says of them.

At once he is aware of the fact that there is no writer from whom it is more difficult to make extracts than from Thackeray. The reason is that Thackeray worked by ‘diffuseness of style.’ If he wished to be satirical about a character he was not so directly; rather he worked his way to the inside of the character, got to know all about it, and then began to be satirical. This is what Chesterton feels about the matter; it is no doubt the fairest way of being satirical and the most effective. Many people and writers are satirical without first of all demonstrating upon what grounds they have the right to be so. Satire is a wholly laudable thing if it is directed in a fair minded manner, but if it is only an excuse for bitter cynicism it is altogether contemptible. Thus he says of the Thackerean treatment of ‘Vanity Fair,’ ‘he was attacking “Vanity Fair” from the inside.’ It comes to this: if you want to make an extract from Thackeray you must dive about all over the place to make apparent irrelevancy become relevancy.

If the use of the grotesque was a strength of Browning (as Chesterton contends against other critics), so in the case of Thackeray that which some critics have held to be a weakness — I mean his ‘irrelevancy’ — is for our critic a strength. It was a strength, because it was ‘a very delicate and even cunning literary approach.’ It is the perfect art of Thackeray to get the right situation, not by an assumption of it, but by so approaching it that there is no way out, which is arriving at the situation by the fairest means possible.

‘No other novelist ever carried to such perfection as Thackeray the art of saying a thing without saying it. Thus he may say that a man drinks too much, yet it may be false to say that he drinks.’ What he did was not to say that a man had arrived at such and such a state, but rather that things must change. If, as Chesterton says, Miss Smith finds marriage the reverse of the honeymoon, Thackeray does not say that the marriage is a failure, but that joy cannot last for ever; that if there are roses there are also thorns. It is an admirable method, far better than saying a thing straight out. It is better to tell a man who is a cad that there is such a thing as being a gentleman, than to tell him he is a cad.

In his later life Thackeray was inclined to imitate himself. It is, I think, that the human brain is prone to move in circles. In the case of Thackeray, as our critic points out, in later days he used his rambling style, and, as was to be expected, he rather lost himself. ‘He did not merely get into a parenthesis, he never got out of it,’ which is to say that as Thackeray got older he inherited the tendencies of old age.

I have said earlier in this chapter that the charge against Thackeray of cynicism was one that was founded on a false premise. The charge that his irrelevancy was a weakness is based on another false but popular premise, that the direct method is always the best. It is usually the worst. It is the worst in warfare, it is the worst in literature, but it is possibly the best in literary criticism.

Thackeray had another quality that has laid him open to adverse criticism; that is, his ‘perpetual reference to the remote past.’ This repeated reference to the past may be a matter of conceit, or it may be that the influence of the past is genuinely felt. The reason that, as Chesterton points out, Thackeray referred so much to the remote past, was that he wished it to be known that ‘there was nothing new under the sun’; not even, as our critic says, ‘the sunstroke.’ Chesterton admits that at times Thackeray carried this tendency to an excess; also Thackeray wanted to show that the oldest thing in the world was its youth. Thus in writing of a fashionable drawing-room in Mayfair, if he referred to some classic, it was to ‘remind people how many *débutantes* had come out since the age of Horace.’ It was quite a different thing to the pompous bishop quoting Greek at the squire’s house to show that his doctor’s degree, though an honorary one, had some classical learning behind it, or the small boy translating Horace to avoid the headmaster’s cane. In the case of the bishop and the schoolboy, the use of the classics is, on the one hand, pomposity; on the other, discretion. In the case of Thackeray it was a reverence for the past, that it was a very large part of the present.

There are, then, roughly three main characteristics of Thackeray: his irrelevancy, his rambling style, and his frequent reference to the past. All these, Chesterton makes it clear, are matters in which the strength of Thackeray lies. Not that they are free always from exaggerations. Sometimes Thackeray became lost in his irrelevancy, sometimes he became almost unintelligible in his rambling style, now and then his use of ancient quotation became irritating. ‘Above all things, Thackeray was receptive. The world imposed on Thackeray, and Dickens imposed on the world.’ But it could not be put more truly than that Thackeray represents, in that gigantic parody called genius, the spirit of the Englishman in repose. ‘This spirit is the idle embodiment of all of us; by his weakness we shall fail, and by his enormous sanities we shall endure.’ This is the crux of the matter which Chesterton brings out, that the weaknesses of Thackeray are his strength. He loved liberty, not because it meant restraint from law, but because he ‘was a novelist’; he was open to all the influences round him, not because he had no standpoint, but because he could see merit in selection; he had an open mind, but knew when to shut it.

The passages selected from the various works have been chosen with care. It was evidently by no means an easy task. The passage chosen to show Colonel Newcome in the ‘Cave of Harmony’ gives in one poignant incident his character; the selection from ‘Pendennis’ does much the same. In the passage from ‘Esmond’ the story of the duel is a fine selection; the chapter on ‘Some Country Snobs’ is an apt choosing; the celebrated ‘Essay on George IV’ demonstrates Thackeray in a very different mood. The ‘Fall of Becky Sharp,’ taken from ‘Vanity Fair,’ has not been included without forethought.

Of Thackeray’s poems, Chesterton has included the most significant, and not without due ‘The Cane-Bottomed Chair’ finds a prominent place.

Enough has been said to show that Chesterton is not a critic of Thackeray who has no discrimination in choosing from his works. He knows what Thackeray was, wherein lay his strength and weakness. He has added a worthy companion to his fuller works on Browning and Dickens.

Chapter Four

BROWNING

It will be convenient for our purpose to adhere as closely as possible to the order of Chesterton's book. It is a hard task to do justice to Browning even in a long book; the task is not simplified when, in a chapter, it is hoped to give a criticism of an intricate criticism of Browning.

There are two ways to approach such a task: The first is to take the book as a whole and write a review of it, which is a method liable to a superficiality; the second is to take such a work chapter by chapter, and to piece the various criticisms into an ordered whole. This I have attempted to do. I make no attempt to criticize the method of Chesterton's approach to Browning, or his combination of the effect of his life on his work; rather I wish to take what the critic says and comment on his remarks.

There is undoubtedly a fundamental difference between Browning and Dickens which is at once clear to any critic of these two writers. Dickens was, as I have said in an earlier chapter, born at the psychological moment. Browning happened to be born early in the nineteenth century. I cannot see that it would have mattered had he been born at the beginning of the twentieth. His early life, unlike Dickens, was normal, but it did not affect Browning adversely. Had Dickens' life been uneventful, I think it not improbable that his literary output would have been commonplace instead of, as nearly as possible, divine.

There is no particular account of Browning's family, which was probably a typical middle-class family, which is to say that they were, like many thousands of their kind, lovers of the normal — a very good reason why later Browning should have acquired a love for the grotesque, which many people quite wrongly define as the abnormal.

The grotesque is a queer psychological state of mind; the abnormal is an extreme kind of individualism that is probably insane, provided the opposite is sane.

What is important, as Chesterton feels, is that we shall get some account of Browning's home. It is in the home that we can usually detect the embryo of future activity. The germ, although sometimes hidden, is nevertheless there, which is exactly why the commonplace home life of a genius, before the public has discovered the fact, is interesting.

To quote our critic: ‘Browning was a thoroughly typical Englishman of the middle class,’ and he remained so through his life.

But this middle-class Englishman walking through the streets of Camberwell, as the boys played in the gutters, was Browning, not then the master poet of the Victorian Era, but the young man who could ‘pass a bookstall and find no thrill in beholding on a placard the name of Shelley.’

Browning found his early life in an age ‘of inspired office boys,’ an age that emerged from the shadow of the French Revolution, that extreme method of optimism which Chesterton believes no Englishman can understand, not even Carlyle himself. It was an optimism that was so, because it held that man was worthy of liberty, which is to say that no man is by his nature ever meant to be a slave.

While Browning was living his daily life in Camberwell, Dickens was existing in the blacking factory; yet again it was an age of the beginning of intellectual giants.

The Chestertonian standpoint with regard to the early days of Browning is interesting. It is a ready acknowledgment of the poetic instinct that was being slowly but surely nurtured in the heart of the unknown young man of Camberwell.

It is in this early period of his life that Browning attempts what Chesterton rightly describes as the most difficult of literary propositions, that of writing a good political play. This Browning essayed to do, and wrote ‘Strafford,’ a play that dealt with that most controversial part of history, the time when kings could be executed in Whitehall under the shadow of their own Parliament.

For our critic, Strafford was one of the greatest men ever born with the sacred name of England on his brow. The play was not a gigantic success, it was not a failure; it was, as was to be expected, popular with a limited public, which is very often one of the surest criterions of merit in a book or play. The success of the play was sufficient to assure the public that Browning had brains and, what was more unusual, could put them to a good advantage.

Browning became then ‘a detached and eccentric personality who had arisen on the outskirts; the world began to be conscious of him at this time.’

In 1840 our critic tells us ‘Sordello’ was published. It was a poem that caused people to wonder whether it was really deep, or merely pure nonsense, a distinction some people cannot ever discover in regard to Browning.

Of this poem, its unique reception by the literary world lies in the fact ‘that it was fashionable to boast of not understanding,’ which, as I have said, was an indication that it might be termed extremely clever or extremely stupid. It was not a poem, as has been held by some critics, that was a piece of intellectual vanity. Browning was far too great a man to stoop down to such mere banal conceit. The poem was a very different thing. It was a creature created by the obscurity of Browning’s mind, which, as Chesterton thinks, was the natural reaction for a genius, born in a villa street in South London.

What is the explanation of this poem? What is its meaning? Wherein lies its soul? These are questions every lover of Browning has constantly to ask. Our critic supplies an answer, an answer that is original, and is, I think, true — the poem is an epic on ‘the horror of great darkness,’ that darkness that strangely enough seems to attack the young more frequently than the old.

That which is levelled against Browning, his obscurity, is a very bulwark protecting a subtle and clear mind. This is specially so with a poet who probably of all men so lives in his own poetic world that he forgets his ideas, though clear to himself, are vague to the world occupied with conventionalities.

The real difficulty of ‘Sordello’ lies in the fact that it is written about an obscure piece of Italian history of which Browning happened to have knowledge — the struggles of mediæval Italy. This obscurity is not studied, as in the case of academic distinction; it is natural. The obscurity of many of the passages of St. John’s Gospel is natural because the mind of St. John dwelt on the ‘depths,’ as did Browning’s dwell on the grotesque. The result is the same. Each needs an interpreter, each has an abundance of the richest philosophy, each has an imprint of the Finger of God.

With all the controversy it has caused, ‘Sordello’ has had no great influence on Browningites; its name has passed into almost contempt. Chesterton has done much to give the true meaning of this strange work. With his next poem Browning spoke with a voice that, as our critic says, proved that he had found that he was not Robinson Crusoe, which is to say that he had found that the world contained a great number of people.

Despite the 1,500 millions amongst whom we ‘live and move and have our being’ we are apt to think that we alone are important, which is not conceit but a mere proposition demonstrating that man is a universe in himself while being but an infinitesimal part of the universe.

‘Pippa Passes’ is a poem which expresses a love of humanity; it is an epic of unconscious influence which, no doubt, Browning felt was the key to all that is best and noble in human activity. ‘The whole idea of the poem lies in the fact that “Pippa Passes” is utterly remote from the grand folk whose lives she troubles and transforms.’

Browning’s poetry in the poetical sense was now nearing its zenith. The ‘Dramatic Lyrics’ were published in 1842, possibly about the time that Dickens was returning from his triumphant American tour. These showed, Chesterton thinks, the two qualities most often denied to Browning, passion and beauty. They are the contradiction to critics, other than ours, who regard Browning as wholly a philosophic poet, which is to say a poet who wrote poetry not for its own sake but for purely utilitarian purpose; not that poetry of the emotions is not useful — it is on a different plane.

The poems were those that ‘represent the arrival of the real Browning of literary history’; for in these he discovered what was, for Chesterton, Browning’s finest achievement, his dramatic lyrical poems.

Critics have said that Browning’s poetry lacks passion and the most poignant emotion of human nature, love. Chesterton, on the other hand, considers that Browning was the finest love poet of the world. It is real love poetry, because it talks about real people, not ideals; it does not muse of the Prince Charming meeting the Fairy Princess, and forget the devoted wife meeting her husband on the villa doorstep with open arms and a nice dinner in the parlour. Sentiment must be based on reality if it is to have worth. This is the strong point, for our critic, of Browning’s love poetry.

The next work of importance that came from Browning’s pen was the ‘Return of the Druses,’ which shows Browning’s interest in the strange religions of the East, that queer phantastic part of the world that gave birth to a Western religion which has transformed the West, leaving the East to gaze afar off. This poem is, for Chesterton, a psychological one. It is an attempt to give an account of a human being; perhaps the most difficult task in the world, because it can never hope to solve all sides of the question. The central character of this splendid poem is one ‘Djubal,’ a queer mixture of the virtues of the Deity with the vices of Humanity. He is for Browning the first of a series of characters on which he displays his wonderful powers of apologizing for apparently bad men.

He attempted, to quote our critic, ‘to seek out the sinners whom even sinners cast out,’ which Christ always did, and which His Church does not always do.

Again Browning turned his hand to writing plays, but he was always a ‘neglected dramatist’ in the sense that he had to push his plays; his plays did not push him.

His next play, ‘A Blot on the “Scutcheon,”’ is chiefly interesting, as it was the occasion of a quarrel between its author and that most eccentric of theatrical personalities, Macready. The quarrel was, our critic points out, a matter of money. But Browning failed to see this; he was a man of the world in his poems, but not in his life.

It is interesting here to see what our critic says of Browning about this period before we consider the question of his marriage. ‘There were people who called Browning a snob. He was fond of wealth and fond of society; he admired them as the child who comes in from the desert. He bore the same relation to the snob that the righteous man bears to the Pharisee — something frightfully close and similar and yet an everlasting opposite.’

It has been left for Chesterton to give the truest definition of a Pharisee that has yet been penned, because it is exactly what every man feels but has never expressed in so brilliant a paradox.

That Browning had faults Chesterton would be the last to deny. Faults are as much a part of a great man as virtues. The more pronounced the fault, the more exquisite is the virtue, especially in a man of the character of Browning, a character that had a certain ‘uncontrollable brutality of speech,’ together with a profound and unaffected respect for other people.

Chesterton’s chapter on Browning and his marriage is one of the most homely chapters of the book; it gives the lie to those critics who have glibly said that he has no way in which to reach our hearts or cause a lump in our throats.

The very method of describing how a great man wooed a great woman, how the two loved, married, and disagreed upon certain matters, is one that has an essential appeal to the heart. The exquisite description of the effect of the death of his wife on Browning is pathetic by its very simplicity.

It is enough to say that Browning’s marriage was a successful one, which is not to say that it was entirely free from certain disagreements. The domestic relations of great writers and poets have not always been of the rosiest. Swift did not make an ideal marriage — at least, not on conventional lines. Milton had a wife who utterly misunderstood that her husband was a genius. Dickens was not blessed with matrimonial bliss. Shelley found faith in one woman hard.

But Browning and his wife had no disagreements on their life interests. They were both poets, though of a different calibre. What they really did not see eye to eye upon was something which the human race is still much divided about. This great point of difference was with regard to spiritualism. Browning did not dislike spiritualism; he disliked spiritualists. The difference is tremendous. Unfortunately many of the interpreters of spiritualism have degraded it into a kind of blatant necromancy which is in no way dignified or useful. It is entirely opposed to proper psychic research.

Miss Barrett had been an invalid. Therefore Browning feared that spiritualism might have a really bad effect on his wife. ‘He was sensible to put a stop to it.’

The theory, on the other hand, held by other critics of Browning than Chesterton was that his dislike of spiritualism was fostered by a direct disbelief in immortality, which is as absurd a statement as is possible to make. Spiritualism and Immortality have no necessary connection whatever, though to a certain extent Spiritualism is presumed on the belief in a future life.

But this, as Chesterton points out, was not the reason for Browning’s position; it was entirely that Browning thought ‘if he had not interposed when she was becoming hysterical she might have ended in a lunatic asylum.’

As Browning spent so much of his life in Italy it will be well to see what our critic considers he thought of that country under the blue skies jutting on to the blue seas of the Mediterranean.

‘Italy,’ says Chesterton, ‘to Browning and his wife, was not by any means merely that sculptured and ornate sepulchre that it is to so many of those cultured Englishmen who live in Italy and despise it. To them it was a living nation, the type and centre of the religion and politics of a continent, the ancient and flaming heart of Western history, the very Europe of Europe.’

Browning’s life in Italy was more or less uneventful. It consisted of a conventional method — the meeting of famous Englishmen visiting Italy, the writing of numerous poems, the pleasant domestic life of a literary genius and his wife.

There was only one thing that could break it, and it came in 1861. Mrs. Browning died. ‘Alone in the room with Browning. He, closing the door of that room behind him, closed a door in himself, and none ever saw Browning upon earth again but only a splendid surface.’

During his wife’s life Browning had planned his great work, that of the ‘Ring and the Book.’ In the meantime came the death of his wife, and Browning moved on the earth alone. Of this period of his life, shortly after the death of Mrs. Browning, Chesterton gives us a clear picture. ‘Browning liked social life, he liked the excitement of the dinner, the exchange of opinions, the pleasant hospitality that is so much a part of our life. He was a good talker because he had something to say.’

One of his chief faults, according to our critic, was prejudice. Prejudice is probably an unconscious obeying of instinct; it may even be a warning. Yet it can be and often is entirely unreasonable.

Browning’s prejudice was, Chesterton thinks, the type that hated a thing it knew nothing about, a state of mind that is comparatively harmless. What is dangerous is disliking a thing when we know what it is. The prejudice of Browning was synonymous with his profound contempt for certain things of which he can only speak ‘in pothouse words.’

About this period Browning produced ‘Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangu, Saviour of Society.’ This is ‘one of the most picturesque of Browning’s apologetic monologues.’ It is Browning’s courageous attempt to allow Napoleon III to speak for himself. Yet again Browning ‘took in those sinners whom even sinners cast out.’

Two years later, we are told, Browning produced one of his most characteristic works, ‘Night-cap Country.’ It is an elegant poem of the sicklier side of the French Revolution and the more sensual side of the French temperament.

This is the period in Browning’s life when he produced his most characteristic work. It was that time when he was nearly middle aged, when the lamp of youth was just flickering, and when the lamp of old age was about to be lighted.

Chesterton treats the whole of this period with a calm straightforwardness that we are not accustomed to in his writings. There is no doubt, I think, of all our critic's books, that his work on Browning is the least Chestertonian, which is not in any way to disparage it, but rather to state that the book might have been written by any biographer who knew Browning's works and had the sense to see that his characteristics were such that many of his critics were unfair to him. Chesterton will never allow for an instant that Browning suffered from anything but an evident 'naturalness,' which expressed itself in a rugged style, concealing charity in an original grotesqueness of manner.

It is now convenient to turn to Browning's greatest work, 'The Ring and the Book,' and see what Chesterton has to say about it.

Rumour is really distorted truth, or rather very often originates from a different standpoint being taken of the same thing. Thus a man may say that another man is a good fellow but borrows money too often; another may say of the same man he is a good fellow but talks too much; a third that he is a good fellow but would be better without a moustache. The essential man is the same, but his three critics make really a different person, or, at least, each sees him from a different angle.

As Chesterton so finely points out, the conception of 'The Ring and the Book' is the studying of a single matter from nine different standpoints. In successive monologues Browning is endeavouring to depict the various strange ways a fact gets itself presented to the world.

Further, the work indicates the extraordinary lack of logic used by those who would be ashamed to be denied the name of dialectician. Probably, thinks Chesterton, very many people do harm in their cause, not by want of propaganda, but by the fallaciousness of their arguments for it.

There have been critics who have denied to this work the right of immortality. Chesterton is not one of these; rather he contends such a criticism is a gross misunderstanding of the work. For our critic the greatness of this poem is the very point upon which it is attacked, that of environment. For once and all Browning has demonstrated that there are riches and depths in small things that are often denied to what we think is greater.

'It is an epic round a sordid police court case.' 'The essence of "The Ring and the Book" is that it is the great epic of the nineteenth century, because it is the great epic of the importance of small things.' Browning says, ‘I will show you the relation of man to heaven by telling you a story out of a dirty Italian book of criminal trials, from which I select one of the meanest and most completely forgotten.’

It is then that Chesterton sees that this poem is more than a mere poem; it is a natural acknowledgment of the monarchy of small things, the same idea that made Dickens believe that common men could be kings — that is, in the same category as the Divine care of the hairs of the head. It gives the lie to the rather popular fallacy that events are important by their size. It is once more a position that the stone on the hillside is as mighty as the mountain of which it is only a small part.

Again, ‘The Ring and the Book’ is an embodiment of the spiritual in the material, the good that can be contained in a sordid story; it is the typical epic of our age, ‘because it expresses the richness of life by taking as a text a poor story. It pays to existence the highest of all possible compliments, the great compliment of selecting from it almost at random.’

There is a second respect, he feels, which makes this poem the epic of the age. It is that every man has a point of view. And, what is more, every man probably has a different point of view at least in something.

‘The Ring and the Book,’ to sum up briefly why Chesterton thinks so highly of it, is an epic; it is a national expression of a characteristic love of small things, the germination of great truths; it pays a compliment to humanity by asserting the value of every opinion, it demonstrates that even in so sordid a thing as a police court there is a spiritual spark; in a word, it is an attempt to see God, not on the hill-tops or in the valleys, but in the back streets teeming with common men.

It is now time to turn to two qualities of Browning that are full of the deepest interest, and which are dealt with by Chesterton with the greatest skill and judgment. These two qualities may be described as Browning as a literary artist and Browning as a philosopher. For our purpose it will be useful to take Browning as a literary artist first and see what was his position. Philosophy is usually in the nature of a summing up. The philosophy of a poet is best looked at when the poet has been studied; therefore it is best to follow Chesterton’s order and take Browning’s philosophical position at the end of this chapter.

He feels that in some ways the critics want Browning to be poet and logician, and are rather cross when he is either. They want him to be a poet and are annoyed that he is a logician; they want him to be a logician and are annoyed that he is a poet. The fact of the matter is he was probably a poet!

Chesterton is convinced that Browning was a literary artist — that is to say, he was a symbolist. The wealth of Browning’s poetry depends on arrangement of language. It is so with all great literature: it is not so much what is said as how it is said, in what way the sentences are formed so that the climax comes in the right place.

For all practical purposes Browning was, our critic thinks, a deliberate artist. The suggestion that Browning cared nothing for form is for Chesterton a monstrous assertion. It is as absurd as saying that Napoleon cared nothing for feminine love or that Nero hated mushrooms. What Browning did was always to fall into a different kind of form, which is a totally different thing to saying he disregarded it.

There is rather an assumption among a certain class of critics that the artistic form is a quality that is finite. As a matter of fact, it is infinite; it cannot be bound up with any particular mode of expression; it is elastic, and so elastic that certain critics cannot adjust their minds to such lucidity.

There is, our critic feels, another suggestion — that if Browning had a form, it was a bad one. This really does not matter very much. Whether form in an artistic sense is good or bad can only be determined by setting up a criterion; this is not possible in the case of Browning, because, though he has many forms, they are original ones, which render them impervious to values of good and bad.

Chesterton is naturally aware that Browning wrote a great deal of bad poetry — every poet does. The way to take with Browning’s bad poetry is not to condemn him for it, but to say quite frankly this poem or that poem was a failure. It is by his masterpieces that Browning must be judged.

Perhaps, as he points out, the peculiar characteristic of Browning’s art lay in his use of the grotesque, which, as I said at the beginning of this chapter, is a totally different thing from the abnormal.

In other words, Browning was rugged. It was as natural for him to be rugged as for Ruskin to be polished, for Swift to be cynical (in an optimistic sense), for Chesterton to be paradoxical. Ruggedness is a form of beauty, but it is a beauty that is quite different from the commonly accepted grounds. A mountain is rugged and it is beautiful, a woman is beautiful; but the two features of the aesthetic are quite different. It is the same with poetry. There is (and Browning proved it) a ‘beautifulness’ in the rugged; it is a sense of being ‘beautifully’ rugged.

Enough has been said to make it quite clear that Browning was a literary artist; but, as Chesterton contends, an original one. He did not confine himself to any one form: his beauty lay in the placing of the ‘rugged’ before his readers, the method he used of employing the grotesque.

It is now an excellent time in which to look at Browning’s philosophy and Chesterton’s interpretation of it.

As it is perfectly true to say that every man has a point of view, a position so admirably brought out by Browning in his ‘Ring and the Book,’ so it is also, I think, a truism that every man has (not always consciously) a philosophy. A philosophy is, after all, a point of view; it is not necessarily an abstract academic position; nor is it always a well-defined attempt to discover the ultimate purpose of things. It can be, and very often is, a point of view really acquired by experience.

Naturally a man of the intellect of Browning would have a philosophy, and he had, as our critic points out, a very definite one.

In his quaint way Chesterton tells us ‘Browning had opinions as he had a dress suit or a vote for Parliament.’ And he had no hesitation in expressing these opinions. There was no reason why he should; at least part of his philosophy, as I have indicated, lay in his knowledge of the value of men’s opinions — yet again brought out in ‘The Ring and the Book.’

He had, so we are told, two great theories of the universe: the first, the hope that lies in man, imperfect as he is; the second, a bold position that has offended many people but is nevertheless at least a reasonable one, that God is in some way imperfect; that is, in some obscure way He could be made jealous.

This is, no doubt, a highly unorthodox position. Yet it is a position that thousands have felt does make it plainer (as it did to Browning) — the necessity of the Crucifixion; it was a pandering to Divine jealousy.

These are, as Chesterton admits, great thoughts, and, as such, are liable to be disliked by those Christians and others who will not think and dislike any one else doing so.

This strange theological position of Browning is, I think, indicated in ‘Saul.’

Chesterton usually does not agree with the other critics about most things, but he does at least agree in regard to the fact that Browning was an optimist. His theory of the use of men, though imperfect, is as good an argument for optimism as could well be found. Browning’s optimism was, as our critic says, founded on experience, it was not a mere theory that had nothing practical behind it.

As I have said, Browning disliked Spiritualists; but that is not, our critic thinks, the reason he wrote ‘Sludge the Medium.’ What this poem showed was that Spiritualism could be of use in spite of insincere mediums. It was in no way an attack on the tenets of Spiritualism.

The understanding of this poem gives the key to other poems of Browning’s, as ‘Bishop Blougram’s Apology,’ and some of the monologues in ‘The Ring and the Book’; which is, that ‘a man cannot help telling some truth, even when he sets out to tell lies.’

This may be the right interpretation of these poems, but I think Browning really meant that there is an end somewhere to lying; in other words, lying is negative and temporary; truth is positive and eternal.

The summing up of Browning’s knaves cannot be better expressed than by Chesterton. ‘They are real somewhere. We are talking to a garrulous and peevish sneak; we are watching the play of his paltry features, his evasive eyes and babbling lips. And suddenly the face begins to change and harden, the eyes glare like the eyes of a mask, the whole face of clay becomes a common mouthpiece, and the voice that comes forth is the voice of God uttering his everlasting soliloquy.’

It is the essence of Browning; it is the certainty that however far distant there is the face of God behind the human features.

If there is one characteristic about this study of Browning it lies in the fact that it is a very clear exposition of a remarkable poet. A man might take up the book knowing Browning only as a name; he might well lay it down knowing what Browning was, what he achieved, what his essence was. The book is a masterly study — it lays claim to our sympathies; and never more so than when our critic describes that moment when Browning, alone in the room, saw his wife die.

Chapter Five

CHESTERTON AS HISTORIAN

The reason that Chesterton has written a history of England is that he says no member of the public has ever done so before. This is a thing to be supremely thankful for if true; but it is entirely untrue, for the very obvious fact that history has never been written by any one who is not a member of the public. Every historian is a member of the public. Let him imagine he is not, let him carry this imagination out to a logical conclusion, and he will have a good chance of landing in a prison for failing to pay the king’s taxes.

The very best people to write histories are historians, but they will never deal with history in a popular way. This Chesterton laments. He wants a history that shall be about the things that never ordinarily get into history. If he is told about the charters of the barons, he wishes to hear of the charters of the carpenters. This, he thinks, would make history popular, that word which is always used to denote something rather slight and superficial. He exclaims that the people are ignored, whereas the historian really would not be one at all if he was guilty of this charge.

The fact of the matter is, that the whole of the history of England has been so misunderstood that Chesterton has come to the rescue and has told us what really happened — in fact, all we learnt at school was waste of time; poor Green really wrote an anti-history of this country. The Romans are not of the remote past; the whole of present-day England is the remains of Rome, which is merely to say that our civilization comes down from Rome, a statement that quite able historians have hinted at now and again. No one for an instant is so foolish as to think that the chief remains of the Romans consist of the few broken-up baths and villas up and down the country, when a splendid high road stares them in the face.

Chesterton pays enormous attention to the Middle Ages. They have, he thinks, been rather badly dealt with by historians. Too much attention is, he contends, paid to the time of the Stuarts onwards. Chesterton asks us to contemplate history as we should if we had never learnt it at school. It is, of course, true that we do not learn the essentials of our country in our schooldays. It is of no real importance that William conquered Harold in

1066, but it is of vast importance to know how he behaved as a conqueror, a fact seldom taught. But if we forgot all the history we ever knew, we should not be able to appreciate Chesterton’s history, which aims to reconstruct all that we had believed while pouring over Green in the fifth form.

Chesterton covers so much ground in this book, his treatment is so intricate, his method so full of various peculiar contentions, that the only possible method in a chapter is to take some of the more important points he touches upon and try and discover what he feels about them. It will be well to realize at once that however he may differ from recognized historians, his history loses all its meaning unless the standard historians are known fairly well.

There are probably two tremendous turning points in history — the one occurred at the moment that the fatal arrow entered the eye of Harold at Senlac, the other when Henry VIII set fire to the ecclesiastical faggots that ended in the Reformation. That period which lay between them may roughly be called the Middle Ages, which part of history Chesterton thinks has been badly treated. Whether this is so is a question that opens up a broader one: Has the history of England ever received the attention it deserves? Has right proportion been given to the most important events? Should history be made popular in the modern sense of this much misinterpreted word? These are questions to which no adequate answer can be given in the space of a chapter, nor is it within the scope of this book.

Chesterton is very annoyed to find that to possess Norman blood is, to many people, a hall mark of aristocracy: ‘This fashionable fancy misses what is best in the Normans.’ What he contends, and I think rightly, is that William was a conqueror until he had conquered. Then England passed out of his hands. He had wished it to be an autocracy; instead, it developed into a monarchy— ‘William the Conqueror became William the Conquered.’ This is a line that the ordinary historians do not appear to take, though I fancy they imply it when they say that feudalism didn’t exist in the time of the Georges.

Perhaps one of the most picturesque parts of history is that time when men looked across the sea and saw in the far distance a huge cross that seemed to beckon as the voices later called to Joan of Arc. The Crusades were a time when wars were holy because they were waged for a holy thing. Six hundred years, so Chesterton tells us, had elapsed since

Christianity had arisen and covered the world like a dust-storm, when there arose ‘a copy and a contrary: the creed of the Moslems’; in a sense Islam was ‘like a Christian heresy.’ Historians, so he thinks, have not understood the Crusades. They have taken them to be aristocratic expeditions with a Cross as the prey instead of a deer, whereas really they were ‘unanimous risings.’ ‘The Holy Land was much nearer to a plain man’s house than Westminster, and immeasurably nearer than Runnymede.’ But I am not sure that Chesterton has scored over the orthodox historians who made a good deal out of the fact that Crusade had a close affinity to *Crux*, which word meant a cross that was not necessarily bound up with Calvary.

In dealing with the Middle Ages, he propounds the proposition that the best way to understand history is to read it backwards — that is, if we are to understand the Magna Charta we must be on speaking terms with Mary. ‘If we really want to know what was strongest in the twelfth century, it is no bad way to ask what remained of it in the fourteenth.’ This is a very excellent method, as it demonstrates what were the historical events and what were the mere local and temporary.

Becket was one of those queer people of history who was half a priest and half a statesman, and he had to deal with a king who was half a king and half a tyrant. Every schoolboy knows about Becket, and delights to read of the wild ride to Canterbury, which began with the spilling of Becket’s brains and ended with the spilling of the King’s blood by his tomb.

For Chesterton, Becket ‘may have been too idealistic: he wished to protect the Church as a sort of earthly paradise, of which the rules might seem to him as paternal as those of heaven, but might well seem to the king as capricious as those of Fairyland.’ The tremendously suggestive thing of the whole story of Becket is that Henry II submitted to being thrashed at Becket’s tomb. It was like ‘Cecil Rhodes submitting to be horsewhipped by a Boer as an apology for some indefensible death incidental to the Jameson Raid.’ Undoubtedly Chesterton has got at the kernel of the story that made an Archbishop a saint (a rare occurrence) and an English king a sportsman (a rarer occurrence).

But clever as Chesterton is in regard to this particular story, the ordinary schoolboy would do better to stick to the common tale of Becket that came on the hasty words spoken by a hasty king; he will better understand the significance of the whipping of the king when he can read history back to the days when kings could not only not be whipped, but could whip whom they chose, and put men’s eyes out when they used them to shoot at the king’s deer.

A great part of the Middle Ages is concerned with the French wars, those wars that staggered the English exchequer and made the English kings leaders of armies. The reason of these wars was, Chesterton tells us, the fact that Christianity was a very local thing. It was more — it was a national thing that was bound up with England. ‘Men began to feel that foreigners did not eat or drink like Christians,’ which is to say that the Englishman began his contempt for the foreigner which has resulted in nearly all our wars, and has made the Englishman abroad a supercilious creature, and has made the English schoolboy put his tongue out at the French master.

The French wars were something more than a national hatred, they were a national dislike of foreigners, a dislike that had its probable origin in the Tower of Babel. But this was not the only reason of the incessant French wars — there was a question of policy. France began to be a nation, and ‘a true patriotic applause hailed the later victory of Agincourt.’ France had become something more than a nation; it had become a religion, because it had as its figure a simple girl who believed in voices, and took her part in the struggles of a defeated country.

Chesterton’s chapter is a fine understanding of the French wars; it is an amplification of the mere skeletons of ordinary history, and as such is very valuable.

From being a reasonable national dislike, the French wars ‘gradually grew to be almost as much a scourge to England as they were to France.’ ‘England was despoiled by her own victories; luxury and poverty increased at the extremes of society, and the balance of the better mediævalism was lost.’ It resulted in the revolt connected with Wat Tyler, a revolt that ‘was not only dramatic but was domestic’; it ended in the death of Tyler and the intervention of the boy king, who, in swaying the multitude that was a dangerous mob, ‘gives us a fleeting and final glimpse of the crowned sacramental man of the Middle Ages.’

From this period Chesterton tells us that a rather strange thing happened — men began to fight for the crown. The Wars of the Roses was the result. The English rose was then the symbol of party, as ever since it has been the symbol of an English summer.

Chesterton makes no attempt to follow the difficult path that the Wars of the Roses travel, from the military standpoint, nor the adventures that followed the king-maker Warwick and the warlike widow of Henry V, one Margaret. There was, so he says, a moral difference in this conflict that took the name of a Rose to fight for a Crown. ‘Lancaster stood, as a whole, for the new notion of a king propped by parliaments and powerful bishops; and York, on the whole, for the remains of the older idea of a king who permits nothing to come between him and his people. This is everything of permanent political interest that could be traced by counting all the bows of Barnet or all the lances of Tewkesbury.’

The time when the Middle Ages was drawing near to the Tudors is interesting, because of the riddle of Richard III. Chesterton’s description of this strange king is full of fascination if also it is full of truth: ‘He was not an ogre shedding rivers of blood, yet a crimson cloud cannot be dispelled from his memory. Whether or not he was a good man, he was apparently a good king, and even a popular one. He anticipated the Renaissance in an abnormal enthusiasm for art and music, and he seems to have held to the old paths of religion and charity.’

He was indeed, as Chesterton says, the last of the mediæval kings, and he died hard; his blood flowed over an England that did not know what loyalty was, a country that had nobles who would fly from their king on the first sign of danger; the Last Post of the old kings was sounding, and Richard answered its challenge. His description of this remarkable king is perhaps the best thing in the book, and is certainly far better than the ordinary history that attempts to give the character of a king in a couple of lines.

With the end of the mediæval kings we pass to a period that is none other than the Renaissance, one of the most important epochs in English history, ‘that great dawn of a more rational daylight which for so many made mediævalism seem a mere darkness.’

The character of Henry VIII is one that is a veritable battleground. He is attacked because he found a variety of wives pleasing; he is condoned as a young man who promised to be a great king. There are, as Chesterton points out, two great things that intruded into his reign: the one was the difficulty of his marriages, the other was the question of the monasteries. If Henry was a Bluebeard, he was such because his wives were not a fortunate selection. ‘He was almost as unlucky in his wives as they were in their husband.’ But the one thing that Chesterton feels broke Henry’s honour was the question of his divorce. In doing this he mistook the friendship of the

Pope for something that would make him go against the position of the Church. ‘Henry sought to lean upon the cushions of Leo and found he had struck his arm upon the rock of Peter.’ The result was that Henry finished with the Papacy in the pious hope that it had done with him; Henry became head of the Church that was national, and soon Wolsey fell, to die in a monastery at Leicester.

But this terrible king ‘struck down the noblest of the Humanists, Thomas More, who died the death of a saint, gloriously jesting.’ The question of the monasteries is one that is solved by the simple statement that the King wanted money and the monasteries supplied it. Is there any justification for the crimes of Henry? For Chesterton ‘it is unpractical to discuss whether Froude finds any justification for Henry’s crimes in the desire to create a strong national monarchy. For whether or not it was desired, it was not created.’

Chesterton in an original way has given a very clear account of the difficulties of the reign of Henry VIII, a reign that had perhaps more influence on English history than any other, a reign that showed what the licence of an English monarchy could do and, what is of more importance, what it could not, a reign that showed that the fall of a great man could be so precipitate that the significance of it could not be felt at the time, a reign that showed that the Pope was something more than the friend of the English throne — he was in matters of Church discipline its checkmate. This was the time that England trembled at the devilry of a king and rejoiced at the sun of a new learning that was slowly dispelling the fog of the Dark Ages.

It is usually assumed that Mary was a bad woman because she burned people who were so unwise as not to be at least officially Catholics. Historians have applied the word ‘bloody’ to her, whereas the better word would be fanatic. ‘Her enemies were wrong about her character,’ says Chesterton. ‘She was in a limited sense a good woman.’ If Chesterton means she was a good Catholic he is right, if the burning of heretics is a good thing for a Christian Church. But the fortunate part of the whole affair was that not even burning could restore the power of the Papacy in England in Mary’s time any more than the arrogance of the Roman Catholics to-day can restore the Pope to London and unfrock the Archbishop of Canterbury. Mary was a sincere fanatic, and like most fanatics was an extremely ignorant woman; consequently she could not see that the fire that burnt Cranmer also burnt the last hope of England bowing to the Pope of Rome. I cannot feel that Chesterton has in the least vindicated the character of Mary.

Historians are apt to think that the days of Queen Elizabeth were those in which England first realized that she was great. On the other hand, Chesterton is convinced that it is in this period that ‘she first realized that she was small.’ The business of the Armada was to her what Bannockburn was to the Scots, or Majuba to the Boers — a victory that astonished the victors. The fact of the matter was that Spain realized after the battle that the victory does not always go to the big battalions, which the present Kaiser is no doubt writing in his ‘Imperial’ copybook to-day.

The ‘magnificance of the Elizabethan times has traces in mediæval times and far fewer traces in modern times.’ ‘Her critics indeed might reasonably say that in replacing the Virgin Mary by the Virgin Queen, the English reformers merely exchanged a true virgin for a false one.’ If Elizabeth was crafty it was because it was good she should be so. If she had not been so, the history of England might have found Philip of Spain on the English throne and Mary Queen of Scots a worse menace in England, a menace that by the skill of Elizabeth developed into a headless corpse. Had Elizabeth had a different historical background, she might have been a different Queen; but, as it was, she dealt with it as only a genius could who had followed a maniacal Queen who failed in everything she did.

From the times of Elizabeth, Chesterton moves on to the age of the Puritans, those rather dull people who have always been the byword for those who are more popularly known as Prigs. ‘The Puritans were primarily enthusiastic for what they thought was pure religion. Their great and fundamental idea was that the mind of man can alone directly deal with the mind of God. Consequently they were anti-sacramental.’ Not only in ecclesiastical matters, they were in doctrine Calvinistic — that is, they believed ‘that men were created to be lost and saved,’ a theological position that makes God a Person who wastes a lot of valuable time. It was to a large extent this belief in Calvin that made the Puritans dislike a sacramental principle; it was, of course, quite unnecessary to have one. If a man was either lost or saved, the need of any human meditators was not felt.

It is, of course, true, as Chesterton says, that ‘England was never Puritan.’ Neither was it ever entirely Catholic, neither has it ever been entirely Protestant. It is one of the things to be thankful for that men have ever held different religious opinions. It would be the greatest mistake if ever the Church was so misguided as to listen to the cries that come for unity, a unity that could only be founded on the subordinating of the opinions of the many to the opinion of the few.

I have said at the beginning of this chapter that Chesterton has said that the Middle Ages have not had the historical attention they deserve. Whether this is so is a question that cannot be answered here. What we have to say is whether this book is a valuable one. There are, of course, many opinions expressed in it that do not take the usual historical standpoint, or they have a more original way of expression. I cannot feel that this book is the best of Chesterton’s works, not because it has not some very sound opinions expressed in it, but rather because to understand its import the ordinary histories must be well known. It is perhaps a matter of an unsuitable title, ‘A Short History of England.’ It would have been better to have called it a ‘History of the Histories of England, and the Mistakes therein.’ It would be no use as an historical book in the school sense, but as an original book on some of the turning-points of English history it is valuable. Mr. Chesterton tells us to read history backwards to understand it. This we may well do if we have read it as fully forward as he evidently has.

Chapter Six

THE POET

Amongst the many outstanding qualities of Chesterton there is one that is pre-eminent — his extraordinary versatility. It cannot be said that this quality is always an advantage; a too ready versatility is not always synonymous with valuable work; especially is this so in literary matters. There are quite a number of writers who, without success, attempt to be a little of everything. This is not the case with Chesterton; if he is better as an essayist than as a historian, he is at least good as the latter; if he is better at paradox than at concise statements, he can be, if he chooses, quite free from paradox; if he excels in satire of a light nature, he can also be the most serious of critics if the subject needs such treatment.

It has often been said that a good prose writer seldom makes a good poet. This may be to a certain extent a truism; the opposite is more often the case; that a good poet is quite often a poor producer of prose. There is a good reason for this: the mind of a poet is probably of a different calibre to that of a prose writer; a poet must have a poetical outlook on life and nature; the tree to him is something more than a tree, it is probably a symbol, but to a prose writer more often than not a tree is merely a mass of bark and leaves that adorns the landscape.

Chesterton has written a great many poems, all of which can claim to be poetical in the true sense, but he has only written one really important poetical work. It is a ballad that is important for two things; firstly, it is about a very English thing; secondly, the style of the writing is nothing short of delightful, a statement that is not true of all good poetry. It has been said that Chesterton might well be the Poet Laureate; at least, it is a matter for extreme joy that he is not, not because he is not worth that honour, but because anything that tended to reduce his poetical output would be a serious thing in these days when good poets are as scarce as really good novelists.

The poem that has established Chesterton for all time as a poet is the one he has called with true poetical genius ‘The Ballad of the White Horse.’ There have been many white horses, but there is The White Horse, and he lies alone on the side of a hill down Wiltshire way, where he has watched with a mournful gaze the centuries pass away as the horizon passes away in a liquid blue.

The White Horse stands for something that year by year we are forgetting, those quaint old English feasts that have done so much to make England merry, and have made history into a beautiful legend that bears the name of Alfred. Yet the White Horse is falling into neglect. The author of ‘Tom Brown’s Schooldays’ lamented the fact that people flew past the White Horse in stuffy first class carriages; were he alive now he would lament still more that English men and English women can pass the White Horse without a glance up from the novel they are reading bound in a flaring yellow cover. But there is one great Englishman who will never do this, and that is Chesterton; rather he writes of the White Horse, the lonely horse that is worthy of this splendid poem.

In connection with the Vale of White Horse there are three traditions — one, that Alfred fought a great battle there; another, that he played a harp in the camp of the Danes; a third, that Alfred proved himself a very bad cook who wasted a poor woman’s cake, a poor woman who would willingly have sacrificed cakes every day to have the honour of the king under her roof.

It is of these three traditions that Chesterton writes his poem. Whether they may be historically accurate does not much matter; there is no doubt that the Vale had something to do with the King of Wessex, and popular tradition has made the name of Alfred a national legend.

When Chesterton writes of the vision of the king he is no doubt writing of his own vision of the events that led up to the gathering of the chiefs. The Danes had descended on England like a cloud of locusts; it was the time that needed a National Champion, as time and again in the past the Israelites had needed one. It is one of the strange things of history that a champion has always appeared when he was most needed. The name of the Danes inspired terror; Wessex was shattered —

‘For earthquake following earthquake
Uprent the Wessex tree ...’

The kings of Wessex were weary and disheartened: fire and pillage had laid the countryside bare with that horrible bareness that only lies in the wake of conqueror:

‘There was not English armour left,
Nor any English thing,
When Alfred came to Athelney
To be an English king.’

This was the vision that Alfred had, and he gathered the disheartened chiefs to his side till, in victory, he could bear the name of king.

In the wake of national champions there have ever appeared popular tales demonstrating the human qualities of these giants; if Napoleon could conquer empires, tradition has never forgotten that he once pardoned a sentry he found asleep at his post. If Wellington won the battle of Waterloo by military genius, so popular hearsay has urged that he commanded the Guards to charge ‘La Grande Armée’ in cockney terms. Around the almost sacred name of Alfred many and various are the old wives’ tales, among which the story of his harp is not the least picturesque; it is one on which Chesterton expends a good deal of poetic energy.

From the gist of the poem it is evident that Alfred, in the course of his wanderings, came near to the White Horse, but as though for very sorrow —

‘The great White Horse was grey.’

Down the hill the Danes came in headlong flight and carried Alfred off to their camp; his fame as a harpist had pierced the ears of the invaders:

‘And hearing of his harp and skill,
They dragged him to their play.’

The Danes might well laugh at the song of the king, but it was a laugh that was soon to be turned to weeping when the king had finished his song:

‘And the king with harp on shoulder
Stood up and ceased his song;
And the owls moaned from the mighty trees,
And the Danes laughed loud and long.’

There is in this poem a pleasant rhythm and a clearness of meaning that is absent from much good poetry. Chesterton has caught the wild romantic background of the time when the King of England could play a harp in the camp of his enemies; when he could, by a note, bring back the disheartened warriors to renew the fight; when he could be left to look after the cakes and be scolded when, like the English villages, they were burnt. One of the most popular of the legends is the one connected with Alfred and the woman of the forest. It has made Chesterton write some of his most charming verse.

And Alfred came to the door of a woman's cottage and there rested, with the promise that in return he would watch the cakes that they did not burn.

But —

‘The good food fell upon the ash,
And blackened instantly.’

The woman was naturally annoyed that this unknown tramp should let her cooking spoil:

‘Screaming, the woman caught a cake
Yet burning from the bar,
And struck him suddenly on the face,
Leaving a scarlet scar.’

The scar was on the king's brow, a scar that tens of thousands should follow to victory:

‘A terrible harvest, ten by ten,
As the wrath of the last red autumn — then
When Christ reaps down the kings.’

In a preface to this poem, with regard to that part which deals with the battle of Enthandune, Chesterton says: ‘I fancy that in fact Alfred's Wessex was of very mixed bloods; I have given a fictitious Roman, Celt, and Saxon a part in the glory of Enthandune.’

The battle of Enthandune is divided into three parts. The poetry is specially noticeable for the great harmony of the words with the subject of the lines; it is one of the great characteristics of Chesterton's poetry that he uses language that intimately expresses what he wants to describe. He can, in a few lines, describe the discipline of an army:

‘And when they came to the open land
They wheeled, deployed, and stood.’

It is perfect poetry concerning the machine-like movements of highly-trained troops.

The death of an earl that occurs in a moment of battle: we can almost see the blow, the quick change on the face from life to death; we can almost hear the death gurgle:

‘Earl Harold, as in pain,
Strove for a smile, put hand to head,
Stumbled and suddenly fell dead,
And the small white daisies all waxed red
With blood out of his brain.’

Of the tremendous power of a charge, Chesterton can give us the meaning in two lines that might otherwise take a page of prose:

‘Spears at the charge!’ yelled Mark amain,
‘Death to the gods of Death.’

Whether it be to victory or defeat, the last charge grips the imagination, just as the latest words of a great man are remembered long after he has turned to dust. The final charge of the Old Guard, the remnant of Napoleon’s ill-fated army at Waterloo, the dying words of Nelson, these are the things that produce great poetry.

Some of the verses describing the last charge at Enthandune are the finest lines Chesterton has so far written. It will not be out of place to quote one or two of the best — the challenge of Alfred to his followers to make an effort against the dreaded Danes, at whose very name strong men would pale:

‘Brothers-at-arms,’ said Alfred,
‘On this side lies the foe;
Are slavery and starvation flowers,
That you should pluck them so?’

Or the death of the Danish leader, who would have pierced Alfred through and through:

‘Short time had shaggy Ogier
To pull his lance in line —
He knew King Alfred’s axe on high,
He heard it rushing through the sky;
He cowered beneath it with a cry —
It split him to the spine;
And Alfred sprang over him dead,
And blew the battle sign.’

The last part of the poem is that which gives an account of the scouring of the White Horse, in the years of peace:

‘When the good king sat at home.’

But through everything the White Horse remained —

‘Untouched except by the hand of Nature:
The turf crawled and the fungus crept,
And the little sorrel, while all men slept,
Unwrought the work of man.’

‘The Ballad of the White Horse’ is in its way one of the best things Chesterton has done: it is a fine poem about a very picturesque piece of English legend, which may or may not be based on history. Poetry can, and very often does, fulfil a great patriotic mission in arousing interest in those distant times when Englishmen, with their backs to the wall, responded to the cry of Alfred, as they did when, centuries later, the hordes of Germans attempted to cut the knot of Haig’s army.

For hundreds of years Alfred has been turned to dust, but the White Horse remains, a perpetual monument to the great days when England was invaded by the Danes. ‘The Ballad of the White Horse’ is a ballad worthy of the immortal horse that will remain centuries after the author of the poem has passed out of mortal sight.

In an early volume of light verse Chesterton wrote of the kind of games that old men with beards would delight in. ‘Greybeards at Play’ is a delightful set of satirical verses in which the ardent philosopher confers a favour on Nature by being on intimate and patronising terms with her.

This dear old philosopher, with grey beard and presumably long nose and large spectacles, is full of admiration for the heavenly beings:

‘I love to see the little stars
All dancing to one tune;
I think quite highly of the Sun,
And kindly of the Moon.’

Coming to earth, this same philosopher is full of friendly relations with America, for —

‘The great Niagara waterfall
Is never shy with me.’

In the same volume Chesterton writes of the spread of æstheticism, and that the cult of the Soul had a terrible effect on trade:

‘The Shopmen, when their souls were still,
Declined to open shops —
And Cooks recorded frames of mind
In sad and subtle chops.’

In a small volume of poems called ‘Wine, Water, and Song,’ we have some of the poems that appear in Chesterton’s novels. They have a delightful air of brilliancy and satire, about dogs and grocers and that peculiar king of the Jews, Nebuchadnezzar, who, when he is spoken of by scholars, alters his name to Nebuchadrezzar. We have but room for one quotation, and the place of honour must be given to the epic of the grocer who, like many of other trades, makes a fortune by giving short weights:

‘The Hell-Instructed Grocer
Has a Temple made of Tin,
And the Ruin of good innkeepers
Is loudly urged therein;
But now the sands are running out
From sugar of a sort,

The Grocer trembles, for his time,
Just like his weight, is short.’

The hymn that Mr. Chesterton has written, called ‘O God of Earth and Altar,’ is unfortunately so good and so entirely sensible that the clergy on the whole have not used it much; rather they prefer to sing of heaven with a golden floor and a gate of pearl, ignoring a really fine hymn that pictures God as a sensible Being and not a Lord Chief Justice either of sickly sentimentality or of the type of a Judge Jeffreys.

It must be said that to many people who know Chesterton he is first and foremost an essayist and lastly a poet. The reason is that he has written comparatively little serious poetry; this is, I think, rather a pity — not that quantity is always consistent with quality, but that in some way it may not be too much to say that Chesterton is the best poet of the day; and I do not forget that he has as contemporaries Alfred Noyes and Walter de la Mare.

The strong characteristic of his poetry, as I have said, is the wealth of language; to this must be added the exceedingly pleasant rhythm that runs as easily as a well-oiled bicycle. If Mr. Chesterton is not known to posterity as one of the leading poets of the twentieth century it will be because his prose is so well known that his poetry is rather crowded out.

Chapter Seven

THE PLAYWRIGHT

Nearly eight years ago all literary and dramatic London focused its eyes on a theatre that was known as the Little Theatre. On the night of November 7th the critics might have been seen making their way along John Street with just the faintest suspicion of mirth in their eyes.

The reason was that the most eccentric genius of the day had written a play, and it was to be produced that night, and had the name of Magic, a title that might indicate something that turned princes into wolves, or transported people on carpets to distant lands, or might be more simply a play that dealt with Magic in the sense that there really was such a thing.

The play was a success — I could see that it would be at the moment Mr. Bernard Shaw so forgot himself as to be interested in something he had not himself written. The Press was charmed with the play and went so far as to say, with a gross burlesque of Chesterton, that it was ‘real phantasy and had soul.’ Chesterton by his one produced play had earned the right to call himself a dramatic author, who could make the public shiver and think at the same time, an unusual combination.

I rather fancy that Magic is a theological argument, disguised in the form of a play, that relies for its effects on clever conversation, the moving of pictures, and a mysterious person who may have been a conjurer and may have also been a magician.

When I say that the play is really a theological one, I do not mean to say that it has anything to do with the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Validity of the Anglican Orders, or even the truth of the Virgin Birth; rather it is about an indefinable ‘something’ that is so simple that it is misunderstood by every one.

The play turns upon five people who are thrown together in a room that has a nasty habit of becoming ghostly at times.

The five people are a doctor who is a scientist, who does not believe in anything not material being scientific; a vicar who is a typical clergyman, who thoroughly believes in supernatural things until they are proved, when he becomes an agnostic; a young American who is a cad and a fool; a girl who believes in fairies and goes to Holy Communion, which is the one thing that depicts she has a certain amount of sense; a duke who ends every sentence with a quotation from Tennyson to Bernard Shaw.

These five people are influenced by a Pied Piper kind of fellow who calls himself a conjurer, and is rather too clever for the company.

Apparently the conjurer has been strolling about the garden when he meets Patricia, who thinks he can produce fairies. In due course the conjurer comes into the room, where he has encounters with the various occupants, who don’t believe in his tricks; the conjurer is unlucky enough to meet the young American cad Morris Carleon, who is really quite rude to the conjurer and discovers (so he thinks) all the tricks except one in which the conjurer turns the red lamp at the doctor’s gate blue. This so worries Morris that he goes up to his room with a chance of going mad.

The others beseech the conjurer to explain the trick; he does so, and says it is done by magic, which is the whole point of the play, that we are left to wonder whether it was by magic or by a natural phenomenon.

The conjurer gets the better of the parson, the Rev. Cyril Smith, who believes in a model public house and the Old Testament, and takes a good stipend for pretending to believe in the supernatural.

The result of the whole matter is magic, by which we presume the trick may have been done.

The play is in some ways a difficult one: we are left wondering whether or not Chesterton believes in magic; if he does, then the conjurer need not have been so upset that he had gained so much power of a psychic nature; if he does not, then the conjurer was a clever fraud or a brilliant hypnotist.

One thing is quite certain, Chesterton brings out the weaknesses of the dialectic of the parson and doctor in a remarkable way; he makes us realise that there are some things we really know nothing about; if lamps turn blue suddenly it may quite well be a ‘Something’ that may be magic and might be God or Satan; anyhow, it cannot be explained by an American young man; it is of the things that the clergy profess to believe in and very often do not.

It is, I think, undoubtedly a problem play, and I doubt very much if Chesterton knows what was the agency that did the trick, but I rather think that ‘Magic’ is a great play, not because of the situations, but rather because the more the play is studied the more difficult is it to say exactly what is the lesson of it.

Magic is called a phantastic comedy; it might well be called a phantastic tragedy.

Chapter Eight

THE NOVELIST

There is perhaps no word in the English language which is more elastic than the word novel as applied to what is commonly known as fiction. The word novel is used to describe stories that are as far apart as the Poles. Thus it is used to describe a classic by Thackeray or Dickens, or a clever love tale by Miss Dell, or a brilliantly outspoken sex tale by Miss Elinor Glyn, or a romance by Miss Corelli, or a tale of adventure by Joseph Conrad, or a very modern type of analytical novel by very modern writers who are a little bit young and a big bit old.

I do not think that it is an exaggeration to say that Chesterton as a novelist carries the art yet a step farther and has added elasticity to the word. It would, I think, be probably untrue to say that Chesterton is a popular novelist; he is much too unlike one to be so. That he is read by a wide public is not the same thing; he has not the following of the millions that Charles Garvice had, for the millions who understood him might find Chesterton difficult. Really Chesterton is read by a select number of people who would claim to be intellectual; very up-to-date clergymen rave about his catholicity, high-brow ladies of smart clubs delight in his knave whimsicalities, but the girl in the suburban train to Wimbledon passes by on the other side.

One of the characteristic features of Chesterton’s novels is his clever selection of titles that are by their very nature fit to designate his original works. If in journalism nine-tenths of the importance of an article depends upon its title, it is equally true that the title of a novel is of the same import. Either a title should give some indication of the nature of the book, or it should be of the kind that makes us want to read it; this is the case with regard to the Chesterton novels, their designations are so phantastic that our curiosity is aroused. Thus ‘The Man who was Thursday’ gives no possible explanation of what it is about, but it does suggest that it is interesting to know about a man who was Thursday; ‘The Flying Inn’ may be a forecast of prohibition or it may be a romance of the time when inns shall fly to the ends of the earth; ‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill’ leads us to suppose that perhaps there was a hidden history of that part of London, that Notting Hill can boast of a past that makes it worthy of having been a station on the first London tube.

It is unsafe to prophesy any limit to the versatility of Chesterton, but it is improbable that he could write an ordinary novel; the reason is, I fancy, that he cannot write of the ordinary emotions with the ease that he can construct grotesque situations. This is why I have said that, as a novelist, Chesterton is not popular in the sense that he is read by the masses (that word that the Church always uses to indicate those who form the bulk of the community). As a novelist, Chesterton stands apart, not because he is better than contemporary writers of fiction, but because his books are unlike those of any one else.

I have taken Chesterton’s most famous novels and have written a short survey of their character. They are not always easy to understand — sometimes they seem to indicate alternative points of view; they teem with pungent wit and shrewd observations, they are without doubt phantastic, they are in the true sense clever.

‘THE NAPOLEON OF NOTTING HILL’

At the time of the publication of this book the critics with astounding frankness admitted that, while this was a fine book, they had difficulty in deciphering what it meant. One, now a well-known Fleet Street editor, went farther, and said that possibly the author himself did not know what he meant — a situation in which quite a number of authors have found themselves, especially when they read the reviews of their books.

‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill’ is not an easy book to understand: it may be a satire, it may be a serious book, it may be a prophecy, it may be a joke, it may even be a novel! I think that it is a little bit of a joke, in a degree serious — something of a satire, possibly a prophecy.

The main thing about the book is that a king is so unwise as to make a joke, and an obscure poet is more unwise in taking this Royal joke seriously. Many who have laughed at monarchical wit have found that their heads had an alarming trick of falling on Tower Hill.

In ‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill’ we are living a hundred years on, and we are to believe that London hasn’t much changed; a certain respectable gentleman has been made a king for no special reason — a very good way of having a versatile monarchy and a selection of kings.

Not far off in the kingdom of Notting Hill there resides a poet who has written poems that no one reads. He is a romantic youth, and loves Notting

Hill with the love of a Roman for Rome or of a Jew for Whitechapel. The new king, by way of a joke, suggests that it would be quite a good idea to take the various parts of London and restore them to a mediæval dignity; thus ‘Clapham should have a city guard, Wimbledon a city wall, Surbiton tolling a bell to raise its citizens.’

It so happens that the obscure poet, Adam Wayne, has always seen in Notting Hill a glory that her citizens cannot see; he determines to make the grocers and barbers of that neighbourhood realise their rich inheritance. The new king, for some reason, desires to possess Pump Street in Notting Hill, and this gives the poet’s dream a chance to mature; and he gets together a huge army, with himself as Lord High Provost of Notting Hill. There are some frightful battles in the adjacent states of Kensington and Bayswater, and, after varying fortunes, the Notting Hill Army is defeated, the Napoleon becomes again the poet of Notting Hill, while his citizens have developed from grocers to romanticists, from barbers to fanatics.

That there might be in the future a Napoleon of Notting Hill is highly improbable, that London will ever return to the pomp and heraldry of the Middle Ages is not at all likely; but that in a hundred years Notting Hill will be different is quite possible. If it is not likely that there will be fights between Bayswater and Notting Hill, there may at least be battles in the air unthought of; it may well be that its citizens in times of peace will take a half-day trip, not to Kew Gardens or to Hampton Court, but to Bombay and Cape Town.

‘MANALIVE’

One of the strangest complications that man has to face is the criminal mind. It is so complex that no society has ever understood it; very often it has not taken the trouble to try. No method of punishment has stamped out the criminal; no reformers, however ardent, have freed the world from those who live by violence, kill by violence, and are themselves killed by violence. If crime is a disease, then to treat criminals as wrongdoers is absurd. If every murderer is insane, then hanging is nonsense; if a murderer is sane, then sanity is capable of being more revolting than insanity.

‘Manalive’ may, perhaps, be called a philosophy of the motive for crime; it may be a pseudo philosophy — at least it is an entertaining one — which cannot be said about all serious attempts at moulding the universe into a tiresome system, that is uprooted generally by the next thinker. The book opens with a very strong gale that ends with the arrival at a boarding house of a man who can stand on his head and has the name of Innocent Smith. He is somewhat like the person in the ‘Passing of the Third Floor Back,’ in that he revolutionizes the household, who cannot determine whether he is a lunatic or not; anyhow, he falls in love with the girl of the house. Unfortunately, rumour — a nasty, ill-natured thing — has it that Smith is a criminal. Evidence is collected, and a Grand Jury inquire into the charges, which include Bigamy, Murder, Polygamy, Burglary. It looks as if Smith is in for a very uncomfortable time, and the wedding bells are a long way from ringing.

The second part of the book is concerned with these charges and the conduct and motives of Smith. But Chesterton is a clever barrister, and shows that the motives behind the ‘crimes’ are not only within the law, but are extremely useful and throw a new light on criminology.

The crime of murder of which Smith is accused is one that he is supposed to have perpetrated in his college days. It was nothing less than firing at the Warden. The reason was not at all that Smith wanted to murder the Warden, but, rather, to discover if his theory of ‘the elimination of life being desirable’ was a sincere one. It was not. As soon as the Professor thought he might attain the desired bliss of death, he desired more than anything that he might live. The fact, then, that Smith pointed a pistol at his Warden was perfectly justifiable; it had the eminently good principle of wishing to test a theory.

If Smith was a bigamist he was so with his own wife, only that he happened to like to live with her in various places; if he was a burglar, he was perfectly justified, because he merely robbed his own house — in fact, he does not wish to steal, because he can covet his own goods. Chesterton, on these grounds, acquits the prisoner.

At the end of the book another or the same great gale springs up, and Smith, accompanied by Mary of the boarding-house, disappears. Clever as Chesterton’s explanations of the crimes are, we shall not probably shoot at the Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge in order to demonstrate to him how desirable life really is; we shall not burgle our own sitting-room for the mere excitement of it; we shall not flit with our wife from Peckham to Marylebone, from Singapore to Bagdad, to imagine that we are bigamists or polygamists; rather, we shall sit at home and sigh that all crimes cannot be as easily settled as those Chesterton propounds and shows are not crimes at all.

‘THE BALL AND THE CROSS’

It is usually assumed that a theological argument is a dull and prosy affair that has as its perpetrators either Professors of Theology or Professors of Rationalism. It is, of course, true that many Professors of Theology are dull, but they do not usually argue about theology at all. Professors of Rationalism are equally dull and are seldom happy when not engaged on the hopeless task of trying to understand God when they know nothing about Man and little about Satan.

‘The Ball and the Cross’ is a theological novel. It is, without any doubt, the most brilliant of Chesterton’s novels; it is an argument between a Christian ass and a very decent atheist. Atheists, if they are sincere, are on the way to becoming good Christians; Christians, if they are insincere, are on the way to becoming atheists.

The book opens with a theological argument in the air between a professor and a monk. This becomes to the professor so wearisome that, with great good sense, he leaves the monk clinging to the cross at the top of St. Paul’s Cathedral while he disappears into the clouds in his silver airship.

Having successfully climbed into the gallery, the monk is arrested as a wandering lunatic and taken off to an asylum. Meanwhile, a great deal of excitement is agitating Ludgate Hill, where an atheistic editor runs a paper that propounds (with all the usual insults at Christ, which culminate in an attack on the method of the birth of Christ) the creed of atheism. A particularly slanderous attack on the Virgin Mary results in an ardent Roman Catholic throwing a stone through the blasphemer’s window.

The result is that they are both brought up before the magistrate, and the two men decide to fight a duel.

The whole book really, then, consists of a theological argument between the two, interspersed with attempts to settle their differences by a duel, which is always interrupted at the crucial moment. Finally, after queer adventures, the two arrive in a lunatic asylum, in which they are kept until the place is burned down. It so happens that the chief doctor of the place turns out to be Professor Lucifer, who had left the monk clinging to the Cross at the top of the Cathedral. He is burnt to death in an airship disaster, and the atheist and the Catholic end their adventures.

‘The Ball and the Cross’ is very full of fine passages. It presents the side of the atheist and the Catholic in a brilliant manner. The chapter that describes the trial before the magistrate has got the atmosphere of the police-court to perfection. Not less good is the Chestertonian satire of the comments of the Press on the case, in which Chesterton makes some pungent remarks about Fleet Street ‘stunts.’ Perhaps one of the best things in the book is the argument between the French Catholic girl and Turnbull the atheist on the doctrine of Transubstantiation. This passage must be quoted; it is one of the best arguments for the Sacrament that has been written for those people who can see that (even in these days) bread is a symbol for the Presence of the Life Giver, and wine a symbol for the Presence of the Life Force.

‘I am sure,’ cried Turnbull, ‘there is no God.’

‘But there is,’ said Madeleine quietly; ‘why, I touched His body this morning.’

‘You touched a bit of bread,’ said Turnbull.

‘You think it is only a bit of bread,’ said the girl.

‘I know it is only a bit of bread,’ said Turnbull, with violence.

‘Then why did you refuse to eat it?’ she said.

If ‘Orthodoxy’ is the finest of Chesterton’s essays, ‘Browning’ the best of his critical studies, ‘The Ballad of the White Horse’ the best of his poems, there is, I think, little doubt that this strange theological exposition, ‘The Ball and the Cross,’ is the best of his novels. It should be read by all rationalists, by all self-satisfied Christians, by all heretics, by those who are orthodox, and, above all, it should be read by those millions who pass St. Paul’s Cathedral and seldom if ever give a thought to the ‘Ball and the Cross’ that has made the title of Chesterton’s best novel.

‘THE FLYING INN’

Chesterton is once more a laughing prophet in this book, and he has as sad a state of things to prophesy as had Jeremiah to the Israelites, those people who, if it were not that they find a place in the sacred writings, would be the most silly and futile race of ancient history.

The scene of the story is England, and the last inn is there. We are to imagine that the non-drinking wine dogma of Islam has permeated England. It is a sorry state of things when —

‘The wicked old women who feel well-bred,
Have turned to a teashop the Saracen’s Head.’

The great charm of the book is the poetry that the Irish captain recites to Pump, the innkeeper, the gallant innkeeper who, against all opposition, keeps the flag flying and the flagon full. If the book is a little overdrawn it is, no doubt, because the subject is slightly farcical; the arguments of the Oriental are well put, and, if the discussion of the merits of vegetarianism are a little wearisome, the poetry of a vegetarian is splendid:

‘For I stuff away for life
Shoving peas in with a knife,
Because I am at heart a vegetarian.’

Thus, if we observe queer manners at Eustace Miles we shall know the reason.

No doubt the adventures of the last innkeeper in England would be wonderful; there would be half-day trips to see him; bishops would flock to gaze upon the last relic of a pagan England; the Poet Laureate might so forget himself as to write an ‘Epic of the Last Innkeeper’; editors would be sending lady reporters to give the feminine view of the finish of drinking; publishers would fall over one another in their eagerness to secure the ‘Memoirs of the Last Publican’; the Salvation Army would put the last drunkard in the British Museum as a prehistoric specimen; on the death of this National Hero, the Dean of Westminster would politely offer the Abbey for a memorial service, with no tickets for the best places.

Chesterton gives other adventures to this last innkeeper. He is, we hope, a false prophet for this once. Were there to be no beer perhaps not even the pen of Chesterton would be able to describe the scenes that would take place in England.

‘THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY’

Anarchy is a very interesting subject and is used to denote very different things. It may be something that puts a bullet through a king with the insane hope of ending the monarchy; it may be an act of a God-fearing Protestant clergyman when he attempts to harry the Catholics by denying that the crucifix is the proper symbol of the Christian religion; it may be the act of God when a village is destroyed by an earthquake or an island created by a seaquake.

‘The Man who was Thursday’ is about an anarchist, and we are not sure whether Chesterton is not pulling our respectable legs and laughing that we really believed the party of desperadoes were real anarchists. The fact is, the book starts in a highly respectable suburb that might be anywhere near London and could not be far from it.

There are two poets strolling about under the canopy of a lovely sky; one believes in anarchy, the other doesn't — the one who does invites the one who does not to come with him and see what anarchy is. This he does, and, after a good supper of lobster mayonnaise, the two get down to a subterranean cavern where are assembled half the anarchists of the world, precisely six; they call themselves by the names of the week, with a leader, who is met with later, Sunday.

Syme, the visitor, is appointed as a member, and becomes, Thursday; he has a great many adventures, including breakfast, overlooking Leicester Square, and gradually discovers that the said anarchists, unknown at first to each other, are really Scotland Yard detectives.

The only real anarchist is the poet who believed in it, whose name is Gregory. He has the pious wish to destroy the world; he may be Satan, if that person could ever pretend to be a poet.

What does Chesterton mean by this strange weird tale that is almost like a romance of Oppenheim and is yet like an old-world allegory? Is he laughing at anarchists that they are but policemen in disguise? Is he saying that policemen are really only anarchists? Or does he mean that the Devil masquerades as the spirit of the Holy Day of the week 'Sunday,' or is 'Sunday' really Christ?

Chesterton calls this novel a nightmare; a nightmare is usually a muddled kind of thing with no connections at all; it is a dream turned into a blasphemy. The book may mean several things; it is quite possible that it may mean nothing; there is no need for a novel to mean anything so long as it is readable. 'The Man who was Thursday' certainly is that, but it leaves us with an uneasy suspicion that it is a very serious book and at the same time it may be merely a farce.

Space does not permit us to more than mention Chesterton's two detective books, 'The Innocence of Father Brown' and 'The Wisdom of Father Brown.' They are a highly original series of detective tales. 'The Club of Queer Trades' is a volume of quaint short stories full of Chesterton's genius.

Since Chesterton wrote these books an event has occurred to him which may have a considerable effect on his writings. His novels have always shown a Catholic tendency when they have touched at all on religion. They have not, of course, the propagandist setting of the works of Father R.H. Benson, nor do they have a contempt for other Churches that so often blackens the writings of Roman Catholic apologists.

The event is one that has occasioned the usual mistake in the Press. They have said with loud emphasis, ‘Mr. Chesterton has joined the Catholic Church.’ He has not; there is, unfortunately, no Catholic Church that he could have joined; what he has done is to be received into the Roman part of the Catholic Church.

This is a matter of importance to Chesterton; it is a matter of far greater importance to the Roman Catholics. If the Roman Church is wise she will not put her ban on Chesterton’s writings — his intellect is far beyond the ken of the Pope; his utterances are of more import than all the Papal Bulls. She has secured, as her ally, one of the finest intellects of the day, one of the best Christian apologists.

If, then, we have further novels from the pen of Chesterton we shall expect them to have a Roman bias, but we shall hope that they will not bear any signs that Rome has dictated the policy that has made many of her best priests mere puppets, afraid, not of the Church, but of the Pope, who often enough in history has been a very ignorant man.

Of present-day novelists it is in no way fair to compare them to Chesterton; ‘some contemporary novelists are better than he is, some are worse.’ These are statements the writer of this book has often heard; they are entirely unfair. Chesterton, as I have said, stands apart; his works are for the most part symbolic. This is their difficulty: any of his books may be the symbol for several points of view with the exception of his religious position, which is always on the side of Christianity, and, I think, the Roman Catholic interpretation of it; his dialogue is worthy of Anthony Hope, his dramatic power is intense, his satire is never ill-natured, it is always cutting, his humour is gentle, pathos is rare in his novels, he has never described a woman, he is undoubtedly a philosopher, but he is not one who is academic, above all he is the genial writer of phantastic tales that are as wide as the universe.

Chapter Nine

CHESTERTON ON DIVORCE

It may be somewhat arbitrary to proceed straight away to nearly the end of Chesterton’s ‘Superstition of Divorce’ to find an argument that shows that he doesn’t quite understand what divorce aims at; but it is well, when taking note of a book on an alleged abuse of modern society, to also see that the writer has got hold of the right end of the stick. It is no doubt unfortunate that many marriages said to be made in heaven end in hell. Divorce may be a sign that men have no reverence for marriage, it may equally be an argument that they reverence it very much; but there is no good reason for attributing to divorce only very low motives and one of the lowest that can be found; consequently I have started in the middle of this book.

In a chapter on the tragedies of marriage, Chesterton remarks that ‘the broad-minded are extremely bitter because a Christian, who wishes to have several wives when his own promise bound him to one, is not allowed to violate his vow at the same altar at which he made it.’ What most people who wish for a divorce want is that they shall have, not several wives, but one, who shall prove that Christian marriage is not a horrible farce, that the words of the priest were not a miserable blasphemy. Chesterton has made a very big mistake if he thinks that the exponents of divorce wish the Church to be a party to polygamy; what they want is that the Church shall show a little common sense and not rely on the tradition of hotly disputed texts.

I think it is perfectly clear that Chesterton can see no good in divorce at all. I have said it may be a very good argument for those who wish to make marriage what it is said by the Church to be — a Divine institution. Many people seek divorce, not that, as Chesterton implies, they shall run away with the wife of the man across the square, but that, having been unlucky in a speculation, they wish quite naturally and quite rightly to try again, to the infinite satisfaction of all parties. If the Church does not agree that divorce is ever right, so much the worse for that Divine institution; if the Church is right in holding that marriages are made by God, then civil marriages are not marriages at all, and there is no need to worry about divorce, because the most ardent reformer does not imagine that man can undo the Divine decree; on the other hand, the Church never will face the fact that, if all marriages in a church by a priest are Divine, then it is rather strange that the result of them very often would be more consistent with a Satanic origin.

I am dwelling at some length on this theological argument because, though Chesterton does not base his case on that argument, he undoubtedly considers that divorce is against the Church’s teaching, and the Church to which he now belongs would not allow him to think otherwise. Before I finally leave this side of the question there is one other consideration that must be faced. Whatever the texts in the New Testament relating to divorce may mean, it is rather unfortunate that they are attributed to a bachelor. Whether Christ had any good reason for knowing anything about divorce is not an irreverent one, but it is one that the Church must face to-day.

Another thing that Chesterton does not seem to realize is that many people do not want divorce to marry again, but to be free of a partner who is not one in the most superficial sense of the word; at the same time a separation does not meet the case, as it is always possible that a man or woman may wish to take the matrimonial plunge again. Chesterton seems to think it is amusing to poke fun at those who are sensible enough to wish to make lunacy a sufficient ground for divorce. ‘The process’ he says, ‘might begin by releasing somebody from a homicidal maniac and end by dealing with a rather dull conversationalist.’ He might have added, to make the joke complete, or from some one who snores, or keeps cats, or reads Bernard Shaw.

‘To put it roughly,’ says Chesterton, ‘we are prepared in some cases to listen to a man who complains of having a wife. But we are not prepared to listen at such length to the same man when he comes back and complains that he has not got a wife. In a word, divorce is a controversy about remarriage; or, rather, about whether it is marriage at all.’ To a certain extent Chesterton is right when he says that the controversy about divorce is really about remarriage, but what he forgets is, that for the hundreds who want divorce to be remarried, there are thousands who want it to be unmarried. The reason a man complains of having a wife is, of course, often that he prefers a mistress; but it is equally true that another cause for complaint is that his wife has for him none of the recognized attributes of the normal state of wifehood.

I have always understood that in some sense Chesterton was a journalist of the kind who is rather hard on journalism, but I did not know until I read this book on divorce that he so little understood newspapers and their writers. Commenting on the fact that the Press is sensible enough to use divorce as a news item, he says: ‘The newspapers are full of an astonishing hilarity about the rapidity with which hundreds of thousands of human families are being broken up by the lawyers; and about the undisguised haste of the “hustling” judges who carry on the work.’ I wonder if Mr. Chesterton ever reads the leaders of certain papers, leaders which never fail to regret the enormous amount of divorce there is. If it be true that there is a great deal of news of divorce in the Press, it is because the Press does not give news of an imaginary world that is a Utopia, but of the dear old muddle-headed world as it is. Does Chesterton fail to see that if the newspapers did not report the Divorce Courts, the numbers of cases would increase from thousands to millions. It is useless Chesterton sighing that lawyers have become breakers of families; they have also become restrainers of suicide. If the judges hustle, it is because they are sensible enough to see that most of the divorces are justifiable; when they have not been, they have not been slow to say so.

Yet again Chesterton repeats the somewhat superficial argument against divorce that its obvious effect would be frivolous marriage. The normal person on his or her wedding day luckily does not think about anything beyond the supreme happiness they have found at least at the time. It is lightly said that the modern Adam and Eve think of the chances of divorce before marriage whatever may be the cause of divorce afterwards; at least it will be agreed that it is a failure of a particular two people who thought that their lives together would be a mutual happiness. Therefore, when Chesterton says that divorce is likely to make frivolous marriages he is saying that couples about to marry do so expecting it to be a failure. If this be so, then the young men and women of to-day are more hopeless than they are commonly made to appear by correspondence about them in the papers. If, on the other hand, every couple on marriage knew for a certainty that it was ‘till death us do part,’ it is more than likely that marriage would be a thing that was abnormal, not normal. It might even be that the Church would have to listen to reason, and be disturbed over worse things than divorce, and whether she should endeavour to take a Christian attitude to those who had been unfortunate or indiscreet.

Chesterton is very concerned that the time will come when ‘there will be a distinction between those who are married and those who are really married.’ This is precisely to state what is Utopia. At present many people who are really married are in the chains of slavery; the more who get out of it the better. As the number of those whose marriages are a farce will gradually diminish, thus will divorce be a godsend. Divorce is, in certain cases, a godsend, but the priests refuse to listen to the Divine revelation.

Chesterton sketches at some length the nature of a vow. He considers that Henry the VIII broke the civilization of vows when he wished to have done with his wife. It is quite possible that he did, but it is also possible that she did precisely the same thing. The question in regard to our inquiry is: Is the marriage vow entirely binding even when the other party to the contract has broken it? The opponents of divorce, amongst whom are Chesterton, will quite easily say that it is, yet they cheerfully ignore the fact that in a marriage two persons make a contract, and if one breaks it there is quite a good reason that the vow made is no longer one at all. It is a very interesting question whether a vow should ever be broken. Should Jephthah have broken the vow that sacrificed his daughter? Should Herod have broken his vow that laid the head of John the Baptist on a charger? Should two people remain together when (if they have not broken their actual vows) they have lost the spirit of them? The opponents of divorce, who are so eager over the keeping of the marriage vow, are they as eager that it shall be but a miserable skeleton?

Chesterton does not see any particular reason why the exponents should be anxious to secure easier divorce for the poor man. It is, he thinks, ‘encouraging him to look for a new wife.’ If he has a wife who isn’t one at all, the best thing for him is to look for another who will prove to be so, otherwise he will search for the nearest public-house and a cheap prostitute. Surely it is better that it be granted his first marriage was a failure and let him try decently for a better.

Of course, the most sensible plan would be to give divorce for all sorts of small things; people would soon then tire of it. Chesterton tells us that already in America there is demand for less divorce consequent on the increased facilities over there. In England there is demand for more. Let it be given freely and the demand will soon cease. Why should our policy be dictated by a celibate priesthood? Does Chesterton think that people who hate one another are going to live together as though they were the most ardent lovers? Does he consider that it would be better to have no divorce and no marriage as a consequence? Does he consider that ill-assorted couples will make happy nations? Does he really consider that divorce can destroy marriage? Does he consider that the newspapers print the divorce cases because they have no other copy?

Chesterton’s book is, I think, unfair on some points. He considers divorce is a superstition; he holds that it is pernicious from a social standpoint; he considers that it encourages adultery; he considers that it is the breaking of a vow; but has he ever seriously considered that if all divorce is wrong, that marriage very often is the most miserable caricature of Divinity possible? Has he thought what the state of the country would be if no marriage could ever be broken or a fresh matrimonial start made? If such a thing happened it might make him write a book on the ‘Superstition of Non-Divorce.’

Chapter Ten

‘THE NEW JERUSALEM’

There are four ways of going to Jerusalem — the one is to go as a pilgrim would go to Mecca; another is to go as a tourist in much the way that an American staying in Russell Square might start for a trip round London. Again, it is possible to go to Jerusalem for yet a third reason, that of wishing quite humbly to be in some way a modern Crusader. There is yet a fourth way, which is to be made to go for reasons that are called military and are really political.

‘The New Jerusalem’ is, above all, a massive book. It is the record of a tour, and it is something more, it is an appreciation of the Sacred City on a Hill. It is, in a limited sense, a philosophy of the Holy Land; it deals in a masterly way with problems connected with the Jews; it is so unscholarly as to insist that the scholars who refuse to call the Mosque of Omar that at all are pedantic; it has a fine chapter on Zionism; it describes Jerusalem, not so much as a city, but as an impression that fastened itself on the mind of Mr. Chesterton.

There are some very fine passages in the book that deal with the curious question of Demonology, that peculiar belief which finds a place in the New Testament in the story of the Gadarene swine, and who, Chesterton felt, might still be found at the bottom of the Dead Sea— ‘sea swine or four-legged fishes swollen over with evil eyes, grown over with sea grass for bristles, the ghosts of Gadara.’

One of the most interesting chapters of this book is that which is entitled ‘The Philosophy of Sightseeing.’ There is, of course, a philosophy of everything, of boiling eggs, of race-horses, of the relations of space and time — in fact, Philosophy is a sort of Harrods, that sums up anything from a Rolls Royce to a packet of pins.

To some people there must be almost something incongruous in the idea of sightseeing in the Holy Land, yet it is probable that of the crowds round the foot of the Cross, on which was enacted the world’s greatest blessing, a great part were idle sightseers who, twenty centuries later, might have been a bank holiday crowd on Hampstead Heath. Chesterton found that there was a philosophy in sightseeing; he had been warned that he would find

Jerusalem disappointing, but he did not. He could be interested in the guide who ‘made it very clear that Jesus Christ was crucified in case any one should suppose that He was beheaded.’ He could see that the ‘Christianity of Jerusalem, after a thousand years of Turkish tyranny, survived even in the sense of dying daily’; fascinating as Chesterton found Jerusalem, much as he insists that the ‘sights’ of the city must be seen in their right perspective, yet he has sympathy with the man who only ‘sees in the distance Jerusalem sitting on the hill and keeping that vision’ lest going further he might understand the city and weep over it.

Chesterton devotes a long and careful chapter to the question of the Jews, of whom Christ was the chief; but, notwithstanding, thousands of His so-called followers quite forget this, and scarcely will admit that the Jew has a right to live. The reason is, no doubt, that the Fourth Gospel uses the word ιουδαιος in the sense of those who were hostile, consequently many entirely orthodox Christians are anti-Jewists, quite oblivious of the very reasonable request of St. Paul that in Christ are neither Jew nor Gentile. This is, in brief, the theological side of the vexed question of Zionism. Chesterton makes it quite clear that he thinks it desirable that ‘Jews should be represented by Jews, should live in a society of Jews, should be judged by Jews and ruled by Jews,’ which is of course to say that the Jews should be a nation. But the fact remains, do they wish to be so, and, if they do, is it necessary to them, or even congenial, that it shall be in Palestine? It is no way the province of this book to go into this question; it has been enough to say that it is perfectly evident that Chesterton desires for the Jew the dignity of being a separate nation.

Is there any particular characteristic in this record of Chesterton’s visit to Jerusalem? Is it anything more than an impression of a wonderful experience, when a great writer left his home in Buckinghamshire and passed over the sea and the desert to the city that is older than history and is now new? I do not think that the book can be called more than a Chestertonian impression of Jerusalem, with an appreciation of the vexed history of that strange city which is Holy. It does not forget the problems in connection with Palestine, but it has no particular claim to having said very much that was new about the New Jerusalem. Yet it has avoided the obvious: it is not of the type of book that is read at drawing-room missionary meetings, which are more often than not written in a surprised style, that the places mentioned in the Bible are really somewhere.

I almost feel as if this book is something of a guide-book — in fact, it was inevitable that it should be so. I rather fancy that descriptive writing is for Chesterton difficult; it is a little bit too descriptive, which is to say it is not always easy to imagine the scene he is trying to describe. I am not sure that the Jews will be flattered to be told that Chesterton thinks they are worthy of being a nation; it is slightly patronizing.

Yet the New Jerusalem is a book to read, but it is not of the Holy City that St. John saw in the Revelation; it is of the New Jerusalem of the twentieth century, which is very imperfect, yet is Holy. It is a book of a city that was visited by God, Who did not deem Himself too important to walk in its streets; it is of a city teeming with difficulties; it is of a city that has felt the iron hand of the conqueror; it is finally Jerusalem made into a symbol by the hand of Mr. Chesterton.

Chapter Eleven

MR. CHESTERTON AT HOME

There is a very remarkable fascination about the home life of a great man whatever branch of activity he may adorn. If he is an archbishop, it is interesting to know what he looks like when he has exchanged his leggings for a human dress; if he is a pork millionaire, we like to see whether he enjoys Chopin; if he is a great writer, the interest of his home life is intensified. For the tens of thousands who know an author by his books, the number who know him at home may quite well be measured by the score.

There is always an idea that a great man is not as others; that he may quite conceivably eat mustard with mutton, or peas with a spoon; that his conversation will be of things the ordinary man knows nothing about; that he is unapproachable; that he is, in short, on a glorified pedestal. This love of the personal is demonstrated in the absurd wish people have to know about the private doings of Royalty, it is shown in the remarkable fact that thousands will hang about a church door to see the wedding of some one who is of no particular interest beyond the fact that they are in some way well known; it is again seen in the interest that people display in those parts of a biography that deal with the life of the public man in his private surroundings.

When I first knew Chesterton he was living in a flat in Battersea, a charming place overlooking a green park in front and a mass of black roofs behind. Here Chesterton lived in the days when he was becoming famous, when the inhabitants of that part of London began to realize that they had a great man in their midst, and grew accustomed to seeing a romantic figure in a cloak and slouch hat hail a hansom and drive off to Fleet Street.

Later, Chesterton moved to Beaconsfield, a delightful country town, built in the shape of a cross, on the road from London to Oxford. He has here a queer kind of house that is mostly doors and passages, and looks like a very elaborate dolls’-house; it is rather like one of the Four Beasts, who had eyes all round, except that instead of having eyes all round it has doors all round; and I have never yet discovered which is really the front door, for the very good reason that either of the sides may be the front.

In a very charming essay, Max Beerhobm, one of the best essayists of the day, gives warning to very eminent men that if they wish to please their admirers a great deal depends on how they receive those who would pay them homage. He tells us of how Coventry Patmore paid a visit to Leigh Hunt and was so overcome by the poet's greeting— 'This is a beautiful world, Mr. Patmore' — that he remembered nothing else of that interview. I remember one day it so happened that I had to pay a visit to Anthony Hope. I knocked tremblingly at his door in Gower Street and followed the trim housemaid into the dining-room. Here I found an oldish man with his back to me. Turning round at my entrance he said, without any asking who I was, 'Have a cigarette?' And this is all that I remembered of this visit.

The best way, according to Max Beerbohm, is for the visitor to be already seated, and for the very eminent man to enter, for 'Let the hero remember that his coming will seem supernatural to the young man.'

I cannot remember the first time I saw Chesterton, whether he was seated or whether I was; whether his entrance was like a god or whether he was sitting on the floor drawing pirates of foreign climes or whether he was wandering up and down the passage. Chesterton is so remarkable-looking that any one seeing him cannot fail to be impressed by his splendid head, his shapely forehead, his eyes that seem to look back over the forgotten centuries or forward to those yet to come.

If there is one thing that is characteristic of Chesterton, it is that he always seems genuinely pleased to see you. Many people say they are pleased to see you, yet at the same time there is the uncomfortable feeling that they would be much more pleased to see you leaving. This is not the case with Chesterton: he has the happy advantage of making you feel that he really is glad that you have come to his house. This is not so with all great writers. Carlyle, if he liked to see a person, did not say so; Tennyson did not always trouble to be polite; Swift would receive his guests with a gloomy moroseness; Dickens was a man of moods; conversation with Browning was not always easy. Great men do not always trouble to be polite to smaller ones.

What a wonderful laugh Chesterton has. It is like a clap of thunder that suddenly startles the echoes in the valley; it is the very soul of geniality. There is nothing that so lays bare a man's character as his laugh — it cannot pretend. We can pretend to like; we can pretend to be pleased; we can pretend to listen; we can't pretend to laugh. Chesterton laughs because he is amused; he is amused at all the small things, but he seldom laughs at a thing.

I have often and often sat at his table. He talks incessantly. There is no subject upon which he has not something worth while to say. His memory is remarkable; he can quote poet after poet, or compose a poem on anything that crops up at the table. I do not think it can be said that Chesterton is a good listener. This is not in any way conceit or boredom, but is rather that he is always thinking out some new story or article or poem. Yet he is a good host in the niceties of the table; he knows if you want salt; he does not forget that wine is the symbol of hospitality.

It has been said that Chesterton is one of the best conversationalists of the day. Conversation is a queer thing; so many people talk without having anything to say; others have a great deal to say and never say it. Chesterton can undoubtedly talk well; he has a knack of finding subjects suitable to the company; though he does not talk very much of things of the day; he is naturally mostly interested in books. Given a kindred soul the two will talk and laugh by the hour.

Naturally, Chesterton has to pay the price of greatness: he has visitors who will make any pretence to get into his presence. But many are the interesting people to be found at his home. I remember one day, some years ago, when Sir Herbert Tree called to see him. I do not recollect what they talked about, but the time came for the famous actor to go. The last I saw of him was the sight of his motor-car disappearing and Sir Herbert waving a great hat, while Chesterton waved a great stick. I never saw Tree again. Not long after, the world waved farewell to him for ever.

One of the most frequent visitors to his home is Mr. Belloc, and it is said that he always demands beer and bacon. One day it so happened that Mr. Wells came in about tea-time. He seemed, it is said, gloomy during the meal, and finally the cause was discovered! Mr. Wells also wanted beer and bacon. It was forthcoming, and the great novelist was satisfied. It is at least interesting to know that on one point at least Belloc and Wells are agreed — that beer and bacon are very excellent things.

No word of Chesterton’s home life would be complete without reference to his dog Winkle. Winkle was more than a dog, he was an institution; he had the most polished manners — the more you hurt him the more he wagged his tail; if you trod on his tail he would almost apologize for being in the way. He knew his master was a great man; he had a certain dignity, but was never a snob. But the day came that Winkle died, and was, I am sure, translated into Abraham's Bosom. Chesterton has now another dog, but he will never get another Winkle. Such dogs are not found twice. I am not sure, but I think one day Winkle will greet Chesterton in the Land that lies the other side of the grave.

It is, I think, well known that Chesterton has a great liking for children. He is often to be seen playing games with them or telling them fairy stories; he is an optimist, and no optimist can dislike children. He probably likes children for the very good reason that he is quite grown up; it is no uncommon thing to see him sitting on the floor drawing pictures to illustrate his stories. Which reminds me that Chesterton is a remarkably clever artist. I would solemnly warn any one who does not like his books defaced not to lend them to Chesterton. He will not cut them, he will not leave them out in the sun, he will not scorch them in front of the fire, but he will draw pictures on them. I have looked through many books at his home — nearly all of them have sketches in them. I have not the qualifications to speak of his art; I do not know whether he can be considered a great artist; I do not know whether it is a pity that he does not do more drawing; I do not know whether he can really be called an artist in the modern sense at all — but I do know that at his home there are many indications that he likes drawing, especially sketches of a fantastic nature.

Chesterton does nearly all his work in his little study, a sanctum littered with innumerable manuscripts. He, like most authors of the day, dictates to a secretary, who types what he says. It is, I think, in many ways a pity that so many authors type their manuscripts; for not only are they machine-made, they have not the interest that they should have for posterity. What would the British Museum have lost if all the manuscripts had been typewritten! Chesterton's written hand is extremely elegant. At one time I believe he used to write his own manuscripts. The typewriter is, after all, but one more indication that we live in times when nothing is done except by some kind of machinery; all the same, I could wish that even if typewriters are used famous authors would keep one copy of their writings in their own hand.

It is remarkable the amount of work that Chesterton gets through. He has masses of correspondence, he has articles to write, books to get ready for press, and yet he finds time to help in local theatricals, to give lectures in places as wide apart as Oxford and America (and what is wider in every way than those two places?), that mean all that is best in the ancient world and all that is best in the modern. He can also find time to take a long tour to Palestine to find the New Jerusalem, that city that Christ wept over, not because it was to be razed to the ground, but because its inhabitants were fools.

What are the general impressions that a stranger visiting Chesterton would get? He would, I think, be impressed by his genial kindliness; he would be amazed by his extraordinary powers of memory and the depths of his reading; he would be gratified by the interest that Chesterton displays in him; he would be charmed by the quaintness of his home. That Chesterton has humour is abundant by his conversation; that he has pathos is not so apparent. I am not perfectly sure that he can appreciate the things that make ordinary men sad. It has been said that he is not concerned with the facts of everyday life; if he is not, it is because he can see beyond them — he can see that this is a good world, which makes him a good host; he can look forward across the ages to the glorious stars that shine in the night sky for those who are optimists, as Chesterton is, and are great men in their own homes.

Chapter Twelve

HIS PLACE IN LITERATURE

In a very admirable discussion on the word ‘great,’ in his study of Dickens, Chesterton remarks that ‘there are a certain number of people who always think dead men great and live men small.’ The tendency is natural and is entirely worthy of blame. If a man is great when he is dead, then he was great when he was alive. It is but a re-echo of much of the folly talked during the war, when we were so credulous as to believe that every dead soldier was a saint and every live one a hero. Then, when the war was over, these hero worshippers quietly forgot that the soldiers had been heroes, put up stone crosses to the dead, and did little to remove the crosses from the living.

There are a number of quite well meaning people who will say, without much thought, that Chesterton is a great man, and if you ask them why, they will answer, ‘He is a great writer, he is a great lecturer, he must be great; look at the times he appears in the Press, look at the wealth of caricature that is displayed on him.’ No doubt these are good reasons in their way, but they rather indicate that Chesterton is well known in a popular sense; they are not a true indication that he is great. The public of to-day is inclined to measure greatness by the number of times a person appears in the newspapers, it seldom realizes that greatness is, above all, a moral quality, not a quantity; the fact that a person is in front of the public eye (very often a blind eye) is no indication of true greatness. If it was, then of necessity every Prime Minister would be a great man, every revue actress would be a great woman, every ordinary person would be small.

It is one of the most difficult things possible to determine what is the place a writer takes in literature. It does not make the task easier when the writer is not only alive but is still a comparatively young man in the height of his powers. A pure and simple biography cannot always determine with any satisfaction its subject’s literary standing. Critical studies of classic authors do not usually give any preciseness about the exact niche the subject fills.

Literature is one of the most elastic qualities of the day, of human activity; it cannot be bound by rules, yet has a more or less artificial standard, which is, perhaps, an imaginary line which has style on the one side and lack of style on the other. Yet there is a further difficulty: it is in no way fair to award an author his place in literature entirely by his style, nor is it fair to literature to disregard it.

I have anticipated in earlier chapters some of what must be said in this, but it is not, I think, out of place to attempt to write of the literary qualities of Chesterton and of his place in contemporary literature. With regard to his position in respect of former writers I must say something, but it would not be wise to give any comment of what may be the permanent place of Chesterton in the world of books. He has, I hope, many years of literary output in front of him. It cannot be ignored that his reception into the Roman Catholic Church may greatly influence his future writings; it is too soon to make any effort to predict whether his writings will stand the test of time, whether he will be popular in a hundred years or whether he will have the neglect that has attended some of the greatest of authors.

There is a question that must be faced. Has Chesterton a place in literature at all, if, as is the usual thing, we have to compare him with contemporary writers, or is it that he has such a unique place that it is impossible to compare him to any living writer? Probably, although it is not necessary, it is best to compare Chesterton with some of the greatest writers of the day, and see why it is that he is worthy of a place in the foremost rank. There are, at the present day, a great number of writers who would appear worthy of a foremost place in literature. Those I have chosen have been selected because, in a sort of vague way, people couple them with the name of Chesterton. They are, I think, H.G. Wells, Bernard Shaw and Hilaire Belloc.

I do think that all these writers have a unique place in contemporary literature. Perhaps, of the three, Wells is the greatest, because there is possibly no greater thing than a scientific prophet who is also a brilliant novelist. If Belloc and Shaw are smaller men it is because they deal with smaller matters.

At the present day Chesterton does occupy in contemporary literature a place that no one else does. He is, in a sense, a Dickens of the twentieth century; he is something more, he may even be a prophet. Of course Chesterton has not the enormous following that Dickens had at the height of his powers, but he has that kind of monumental feeling in the twentieth century that belonged to Dickens in the nineteenth: he is typical of this century, being an optimist when ordinary men are pessimistic. As in the nineteenth century Dickens made common men realise their greatness when they themselves felt immeasurably small, so Chesterton makes great men feel small when they are really so.

But in another sense he cannot really be compared to Dickens. Dickens undoubtedly was a delineator of supreme characters. I do not think it can be said that any of the characters of Chesterton would ever be known with the knowledge with which Mr. Pickwick is known. Dickens was not in any sense an essayist; Chesterton is one in every sense. Dickens was a man who really cared very much that all kinds of oppression should be put down; Chesterton, no doubt, cares also, but he rather imagines that things ordinary people quite rightly call welfare work are but forms of slavery. If Dickens hated factories it was because he had hateful experience of them; if Chesterton hates factories it is because he thinks they destroy family life and the home. I have attempted to suggest that Dickens and Chesterton are alike as regards their being monuments of their respective centuries. I have also suggested that they are extremely unlike. Yet I can think of no writer of the nineteenth century who, in ideal, is so near to Chesterton as Dickens; but that at the same time they are also so far apart is but another indication that to place Chesterton in regard to the past is almost impossible.

One thing that Chesterton is not, is an Eclectic; if he is an original thinker, it is because he can see that though black is not really white there is no particular reason why it should not be grey; if Notting Hill can boast of forty fried fish shops he does not see any reason why it could fail to produce a Napoleon. If a party of Dons are sitting round a table discussing how desirable is the elimination of life, he sees that it is a perfectly good ethic for one of the undergraduates to test the theory by brandishing a loaded pistol at the warden’s head. If, as a novelist, he is different to all his contemporaries, it is because he has discovered that the word novel sometimes means something new, sometimes something original, very often something extremely old.

Yet another difficulty for finding an exact niche for Chesterton lies in the fact that he is a bit of everything, and, what is more, these bits are very big and make a large kaleidoscope. He is a theological professor who is so entirely sensible that the public hardly discovers the fact; he does not wear a cap and gown, and quote quite easily from all the Fathers of the ancient Church. He does not apologize for Christianity by reading Christian books.

Rather to learn the Christian standpoint he discovers the tenets of Rationalism; he writes a theological philosophy that might be a discussion between Satan and Christ and puts it into a novel; he writes a dissertation on Transubstantiation and puts it into a tale of anarchy that is so untheological that it mentions Leicester Square and lobster mayonnaise; he is a historian who not only writes history but understands it; he does not consider that William conquered England, but that England conquered William; he says the best way to read history is to read it backwards; he is a historian who does not consider the most important facts are the dates of kings who lived and died.

It has been said that Chesterton is the finest essayist of the day. It would be perhaps fairer to say he is like no living essayist; if he is not a finer essayist than Dean Inge, he is at least as good; he may not be so academic, but he is as learned; if he has not quite the charm of Mr. Lucas he is at least more versatile. His essays sparkle with epigrams, they are full of paradox. He has said that Plato said silly things and yet was the wonder of the ancient world. He can lament that H.G. Wells has come to the awful conclusion that two and two are four, and at the same time be thankful that not even in fairyland can two and two make five; he can state quite calmly that the weakness of Feminism is that it drives the woman from the freedom of the home to the slavery of the world; he can make priggish clergymen, who accuse him of joking and taking the name of the Lord in vain, bite their words by explaining that to make a joke of anything is not to take it in vain. As an essayist, Chesterton stands apart from his contemporaries. Of older essayists I can think of none who could in any way be said to have a similarity to Chesterton.

One of the most interesting things about Chesterton is his position as a poet. I have said, in an earlier chapter, that he might have been the Poet Laureate. I have ventured to say that if posterity did not place him among great poets it would be because he had given more attention to prose. The particular question of Chesterton as a poet opens up a more general one, which is something in the nature of a problem. Would the great classic poets of the last century have been as great if they had not written so much poetry? Had Tennyson written but two long poems; had Browning never written anything but short lyrics; had Wordsworth been content to write few poems, provided these had been an indication of the best work of these particular poets, would posterity have granted them immortality? Will

Chesterton go down to posterity as a poet on account of his fine achievement in his ‘Ballad of the White Horse,’ or will people forget him because he has not written more? I am rather afraid this may be so. Posterity, it is true, likes quality, but it likes it better with quantity.

But I feel that I am dealing with what I had said it would be well to avoid — anything to do with the future of Chesterton. What is Chesterton’s position as a poet to-day? He is, I think, one of the finest of the day; he has a fine sense of humour in poetry; he has great powers of recasting scenes of long-forgotten centuries; he has a fine musical rhythm; but he has not, I think, pathos. I think it is a pity that he does not write epics on events of the day; he might easily find the Poet Laureate’s silence an inspiration; he might write another great poem; it might be better than any more novels.

It is difficult to say whether or not Chesterton is a playwright. His one play was a fine one about a fine subject, but I do not think it had the qualities that would be popular in an ordinary theatre in London. There is a certain suggestion of a problem about it which is a little obscure. We are not sure whether Chesterton is in earnest or joking: it has not probably sufficient action to suit this century, that wishes aeroplanes to dash through the house on the stage, or two or three people to meet with violent deaths in three acts. It is in the nature of a discussion and might be almost anti-Shavian; it would be absurd to attempt to place Chesterton among contemporary dramatic authors, but it is not too much to predict that he might quite easily soon be very near the front rank.

By his critical studies of Browning, Dickens, and Thackeray, Chesterton has proved that there was a great deal more to be said about these classic authors than the critics had seemed to think. Chesterton seldom agreed with those who had written before. What they had considered weaknesses he had considered strength; what he had considered weakness they had considered strength. Possibly no author had been written about more than Dickens, yet there remained for Chesterton to add much that was vital. No poet had been more misunderstood than Browning; no poet had been more attacked for his grotesque style; no critic has written with the understanding of Browning as has Chesterton. In taking extracts from Thackeray, Chesterton has shown a fine appreciation of that novelist’s best work.

It is a difficult thing for a great writer to be a great critic. He is liable to be either condescending or supercilious; he is liable unconsciously to judge all standards by his own; he is likely to be rather intolerant of any opinions but his own; it is easier for a great critic to be a great writer. In the case of Chesterton, because he is a great and original writer he has a brilliant critical acumen that probes deep into the minds of other authors and sees what is stored there in a way that other critics have, perhaps, failed to see, not because they did not choose to look for it, but rather because, almost without knowing it, critics who set out to be critics exclusively are liable to work rather too much by a fixed rule.

It is, I hope, now apparent how difficult it is to say where exactly Chesterton finds a place in literature. Is it as an essayist? Is it as a novelist? Is it as a historian? Is it as a critic? If it is as a novelist, then it is as a writer of peculiar phantasy; if it is as an essayist, it is as a brilliant controversialist; if it is as a historian, it is as a unique critic of history; if it is as a critic, it is as a broad-minded one of not only past great authors but of current events.

I do not know of any writer who is so difficult to place. Wells can quite well be a fine novelist and prophet; Bernard Shaw can easily be called a playwright and a philosopher; Galsworthy is a serious novelist and a playwright who takes the art with proper regard for its powers of social redress; Sir James Barrie is a mystical writer with a message. There are fifty novelists who are interpreters of manners and problems of the twentieth century. But Chesterton is not like any of these. He is not in any sense a specialist; he is really a general practitioner with the hand of a specialist in everything he touches except divorce. In a word, he is that thing in literature that occurs once or twice in every century — an epic. He is the laughing, genial writer of the twentieth century who, in everything he does, earns the highest of all literary honours — to be unique.

Chapter Thirteen

G. K.C. AND G.B.S.

It would be a very interesting problem to try and discover how it is that Gilbert Keith Chesterton and George Bernard Shaw have come to be known so familiarly as G. K.C. and G.B.S. If any of my readers can suggest a solution of this, I hope they will let me know; because, if I calmly headed this chapter G. K.C. and J.M.B. I do not think that any one would guess that I was attempting to compare Chesterton to James Matthew Barrie unless I told them. It would be really quite amusing to do all comparisons by this initial method; we might find in the *Hibbert Journal* an article on the need of Episcopacy headed H.H. Dunelm and Frank Zanzibar, which would be quite simply the Bishop of Durham and the Bishop of Zanzibar on Episcopacy; or, for a rest, we might turn to the *Daily Herald* and find 'J.R.C. attacks L.G.,' which would be quite simply that Mr. Clynes did not see eye to eye with the Premier that a Coalition Government was a national asset.

If we refer to the past, it is not easy to suggest any one who might be known by initials. Charles Dickens was never known as C.D.; Thackeray, when he wrote his 'Essay on the Four Georges' was probably not known as W.M.T. on the Four Georges; but if Chesterton writes a book on America, the Press affirms that there is a new book on America by G. K.C., or we pick up a morning paper and find a large headline on 'G.B.S. on Prisons,' and every one knows who it is. But put a headline, 'Randall on Divorce,' and it is not seen at once that the Archbishop of Canterbury has been addressing the Upper House on a matter of grave ecclesiastical import.

There is a saying about some people being born great, others having that state thrust upon them, others as having achieved it. There is no doubt that Chesterton was born to be great, so no doubt was Shaw, but they went about it in a different way. The public caught hold of the remarkable personality of Chesterton and scarcely a day passed that the Press did not either quote him or caricature him; on the other hand, Shaw caught hold of the public, annoyed its susceptibilities, held it in supreme contempt, raved at it from the stage and platform, and the public, amazed at his cleverness, received him as the rude philosopher who looked a genius, talked like a whirlwind, said that he was greater than Shakespeare, said he was the Molière of the twentieth century, and posed until it was expected of him.

But Chesterton does not pose. If he comes to lecture on Cobbett and talks for three-quarters of an hour on how his hat blew off, it is not a pose, it is the natural inconsequence of Chesterton on the platform. If Shaw is invited to a dinner and writes that he does not eat dinner and does not care to see others doing nothing else, he is posing; but, if so, it is because he is expected to do so.

On almost every subject Shaw and Chesterton disagree; yet they are both men who, in some way, attempt to be reformers. Shaw proceeds by satire and contempt; Chesterton proceeds by originality and good nature, except on the question of divorce, which makes him very angry, and, as I have said, uncritical. Shaw chastises the world and is angry; Chesterton laughs, and, in a genial way, asks what is wrong; and, having found out, attempts to put things right. Shaw would rather have a new sort of world with a superman.

Shaw and Chesterton approach reform from two different ways. Chesterton suggests them by queer novels and paradoxical essays; Shaw puts his ideas into the mouthpieces of those who are known as Shavian characters; he interprets his theories by the Stage, therefore his sermons reach tens of thousands who would not read him if he preached from a pulpit. Thus, if he wants to show that there are no rules for getting married, he puts the problem into a play and wants an extension of divorce; Chesterton, on the other hand, believes that marriage is Divine and that divorce is but a superstition. If Shaw believed that the home narrowed life, was a domestic monarchy, meant a loss of individuality between husband and wife, Chesterton, far from agreeing to this proposition, takes the opposite view that it is the home which is large and the world which is small and narrowing. Probably neither is quite right. For some people the home is narrowing, for others it is the place that affords the widest scope; for some the world is narrow, for others the world is extremely broad — in fact, so broad that they never are able to get free from its immensity.

With regard to religion, whatever opinions Chesterton may hold — as he is now a Roman Catholic — they are no longer of interest. Shaw, on the other hand, is much too elastic a man to imagine for a moment that religion is a thing that is necessarily bound up with an organization which is mainly political; he is not so credulous as to believe that the spiritual can fall vertically to earth because a man kneels before a bishop and becomes a priest. Rather he had a much better plan. He started by being an atheist, the best possible foundation for subsequent theism. From this he became an Immanist, which is that God is in some way dispersed throughout the earth.

If there is one thing upon which we may say that Shaw and Chesterton are identical, it is in the strange fact that neither of them has, I think, ever described an ordinary lover — the sort of person who is nothing of a biological surprise, the kind of person who woos on a suburban court in Surbiton or Wimbledon and marries in a hideous red brick church to the cheerful accompaniment of confetti and the Wedding March. I do not think either of them can really enter into the ordinary emotions of life. They could neither of them write, I fancy, a really typical novel — that is, a tale about the folks who do the conventional things. Chesterton always sees everything upside down. If the man on Notting Hill sees it as a bustling area, Chesterton sees it as a place upon which a Napoleon might fall. Shaw, on the other hand, could not write of ordinary things because he is usually contemptuous of them. If Chesterton thinks education is a failure it is because the conventional method irritates him; Shaw considers that education does not educate a man, it ‘merely moulds him.’

I am not sure that Mr. Skimpole, in his brilliant study of Bernard Shaw, is quite correct when he says ‘the whole case against Chesterton, of course, is that he is a Romantic.’ Why is it a something against him that he chooses to be an idealist? Because, says Mr. Skimpole, ‘he does not seem to have grasped the fact that the most important difference between the Real and the Ideal aspects of anything is that while the Ideal is permanent and unchangeable as an angel, the Real requires an everlasting circle of changes.’ I am rather afraid Mr. Skimpole is talking through a certain covering that adorns his head. Cannot he see that very often the ideal is nothing less than the real? It is no case against Chesterton that he is a Romantic so long as the fact is duly recognized. If he considers certain institutions are permanent which may be said to be ideal (for instance, that marriage is a sacrament), he is just as likely to be as right as is Mr. Shaw when he contends that marriage must be made to fit the times, even if it be granted it is a Divine thing.

If Shaw is unable to see that most earthly things have a heavenly meaning, as Chesterton does, it is so much the worse for Shaw and so much the better for Chesterton. If Chesterton is a dangerous Romantic who likes

Fairyland, at least Shaw is a dangerous eugenist who wants a super-man, and I am not sure that the fairies of Chesterton are not more useful than the ethics of Shaw; there is no doubt that they are less grown up. If Shaw is a philosopher, he is not one of this Universe; he is of another that shall be entirely sub-Shavian. If Chesterton is a philosopher, it is because he can see this universe better upside down than Shaw understands it the right way up.

In fact, the difference between Shaw and Chesterton may, I think, be something like this. They are, as I have said, both reformers, but Chesterton wishes to keep man as he is essentially, and gradually make him something better. Shaw wants to have done with man and produce a super-man. In this way Shaw admits the failure of man to rise above his environment. Chesterton not only thinks he is able to, but tries to prove it in his writings. Thus, if a man is an atheist he can show that he is in time capable of becoming a good theist, but Shaw if he allows some of his characters to be in hell, gets them out of it by attempting to make them strive for the super-man. For Chesterton, Man is the Super-Man; for Shaw, the Super-Man is not Man at all.

In fact, this no doubt is the reason that Shaw is really a pessimist and Chesterton an optimist.

There is, I think, little doubt that Chesterton is a far more important man than Shaw. He has the facility for getting hold of the things that matter; he is never ill-natured; he does not make fun of other people. Much as the writer admires the wit and brilliancy of Shaw, he cannot help feeling that Shaw is a rather cynical personality; Shaw loves to laugh at people, he is inclined to make fun of the martyrs. They were possibly quite mistaken in their enthusiasm, but at least they were consistent. I do not feel convinced that Shaw would stand in the middle of Piccadilly Circus and keep his ideals if he knew that it would involve being eaten by lions that came up Regent Street, as the martyrs faced them centuries ago in Rome, but I have little doubt that Chesterton would remain in Piccadilly Circus if he knew that he would be eaten unless he denied that marriage was a Divine institution.

In a word, Shaw bases his Philosophy and Plays on a contempt for all existing institutions. Chesterton bases his Writings and Philosophy on genial good nature and a respect for the things that are important. Therefore I think that Shaw has not made such a permanent contribution to thought as

Chesterton certainly has; even if it is only in showing that the Christian religion is reasonable.

Chapter Fourteen

CONCLUSION

There was a time in history when the ancient world searched in vain for the truth. It produced men of the type of Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates; they were great philosophers who looked at the world in which they lived and asked what it meant. Was it material? Was it spiritual? Was it temporary? Was it eternal? Men were dissatisfied. And about that time a greater Philosopher came in the wake of a star, and men called Him Christ.

It is the twentieth century, and the Man the ancient world called Christ founded the religion which His followers were to take to the ends of the earth. Yet men are still dissatisfied; philosophers look out of their high-walled windows and watch the modern world, which goes on; men die and are forgotten; creeds spring up for a day and pass; writers produce books, and in their turn pass away.

Of this century Chesterton is one of the great thinkers. It is, I think, a mistake not to take him seriously. If he is phantastic, there is a meaning behind his phantasy; if he laughs, the world need not think that he is frivolous. He is a prophet, and he has honour in his own country.

Chesterton is still a young man; he is young in soul and body. Like Peter Pan he does not grow up, yet he is a famous man; he has written great books, he has written fine poems, he has written brilliant essays, but he has never written a book with an appeal to an unthinking public that reads to kill thought. I wonder whether Chesterton would write a ‘Philosophy for the Unthinking Man’? I think he is the one man of the day who could do it, and I think it might be his greatest book.

I have attempted in this book to draw a picture of the works of Chesterton. They are not easy to deal with; they may mean many things. I have not attempted to forecast the future of Chesterton, strong as the temptation has been, but I have endeavoured to place before those who know Chesterton what it is they admire in him; and for those who only know him as a name, I hope that this book may induce them to read the most arresting writer of the day, who is known in every country as the Master of Paradox, which is to say that he is the Master of the Temple of Understanding.

The Biography

Chesterton with his beloved wife Frances

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

This autobiography was published the same year that Chesterton died in 1936. It describes his happy childhood, the intellectual struggles of his youth and his search for a true vocation. Chesterton includes many anecdotes about literary friends such as Henry James, George Bernard Shaw, and H.G. Wells. Nevertheless, it is the author’s quest for religious conviction and his conversion to Catholicism that are the central components of the non-fiction work.

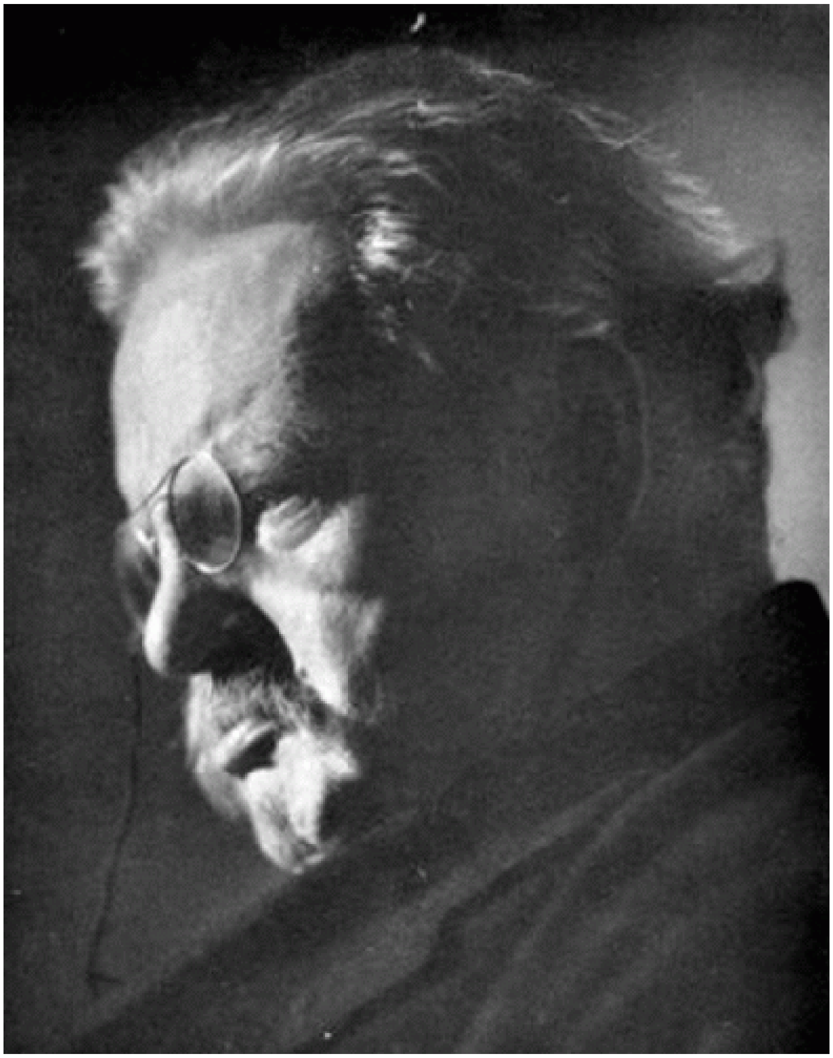

Chesterton, in his final year

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Chapter I: Hearsay Evidence

Bowing down in blind credulity, as is my custom, before mere authority and the tradition of the elders, superstitiously swallowing a story I could not test at the time by experiment or private judgment, I am firmly of opinion that I was born on the 29th of May, 1874, on Campden Hill, Kensington; and baptised according to the formularies of the Church of England in the little church of St. George opposite the large Waterworks Tower that dominated that ridge. I do not allege any significance in the relation of the two buildings; and I indignantly deny that the church was chosen because it needed the whole water-power of West London to turn me into a Christian.

Nevertheless, the great Waterworks Tower was destined to play its part in my life, as I shall narrate on a subsequent page; but that story is connected with my own experiences, whereas my birth (as I have said) is an incident which I accept, like some poor ignorant peasant, only because it has been handed down to me by oral tradition. And before we come to any of my own experiences, it will be well to devote this brief chapter to a few of the other facts of my family and environment which I hold equally precariously on mere hearsay evidence. Of course what many call hearsay evidence, or what I call human evidence, might be questioned in theory, as in the Baconian controversy or a good deal of the Higher Criticism. The story of my birth might be untrue. I might be the long-lost heir of The Holy Roman Empire, or an infant left by ruffians from Limehouse on a door-step in Kensington, to develop in later life a hideous criminal heredity. Some of the sceptical methods applied to the world’s origin might be applied to my origin, and a grave and earnest enquirer come to the conclusion that I was never born at all. But I prefer to believe that common sense is something that my readers and I have in common; and that they will have patience with a dull summary of the facts.

I was born of respectable but honest parents; that is, in a world where the word “respectability” was not yet exclusively a term of abuse, but retained some dim philological connection with the idea of being respected. It is true that even in my own youth the sense of the word was changing; as I remember in a conversation between my parents, in which it was used with both implications. My father, who was serene, humorous and full of hobbies, remarked casually that he had been asked to go on what was then called The Vestry. At this my mother, who was more swift, restless and generally Radical in her instincts, uttered something like a cry of pain; she said, “Oh, Edward, don’t! You will be so respectable! We never have been respectable yet; don’t let’s begin now.” And I remember my father mildly replying, “My dear, you present a rather alarming picture of our lives, if you say that we have never for one single instant been respectable.” Readers of Pride and Prejudice will perceive that there was something of Mr. Bennet about my father; though there was certainly nothing of Mrs. Bennet about my mother.

Anyhow, what I mean here is that my people belonged to that rather old-fashioned English middle class; in which a business man was still permitted to mind his own business. They had been granted no glimpse of our later and loftier vision, of that more advanced and adventurous conception of commerce, in which a business man is supposed to rival, ruin, destroy, absorb and swallow up everybody else’s business. My father was a Liberal of the school that existed before the rise of Socialism; he took it for granted that all sane people believed in private property; but he did not trouble to translate it into private enterprise. His people were of the sort that were always sufficiently successful; but hardly, in the modern sense, enterprising. My father was the head of a hereditary business of house agents and surveyors, which had already been established for some three generations in Kensington; and I remember that there was a sort of local patriotism about it and a little reluctance in the elder members, when the younger first proposed that it should have branches outside Kensington. This particular sort of unobtrusive pride was very characteristic of this sort of older business men. I remember that it once created a comedy of cross-purposes, which could hardly have occurred unless there had been some such secret self-congratulation upon any accretion of local status. The incident is in more ways than one a glimpse of the tone and talk of those distant days.

My grandfather, my father’s father, was a fine-looking old man with white hair and beard and manners that had something of that rounded solemnity that went with the old-fashioned customs of proposing toasts and sentiments. He kept up the ancient Christian custom of singing at the dinner-table, and it did not seem incongruous when he sang “The Fine Old English Gentleman” as well as more pompous songs of the period of Waterloo and Trafalgar. And I may remark in passing that, having lived to see Mafeking Night and the later Jingo lyrics, I have retained a considerable respect for those old and pompous patriotic songs. I rather fancy it was better for the tradition of the English tongue to hear such rhetorical lines as these, about Wellington at the deathbed of William the Fourth,

For he came on the Angel of Victory's wing
But the Angel of Death was awaiting the King,

than to be entirely satisfied with howling the following lines, heard in all music-halls some twenty years afterwards:

And when we say we've always won
And when they ask us how it's done
We proudly point to every one
Of England's soldiers of the Queen.

I cannot help having a dim suspicion that dignity has something to do with style; but anyhow the gestures, like the songs, of my grandfather's time and type had a good deal to do with dignity. But, used as he was to ceremonial manners, he must have been a good deal mystified by a strange gentleman who entered the office and, having conferred with my father briefly on business, asked in a hushed voice if he might have the high privilege of being presented to the more ancient or ancestral head of the firm. He then approached my grandfather as if the old gentleman had been a sort of shrine, with profound bows and reverential apostrophes.

"You are a Monument," said the strange gentleman, "Sir, you are a Landmark."

My grandfather, slightly flattered, murmured politely that they had certainly been in Kensington for some little time.

"You are an Historical Character," said the admiring stranger. "You have changed the whole destiny of Church and State."

My grandfather still assumed airily that this might be a poetical manner of describing a successful house-agency. But a light began to break on my father, who had thought his way through all the High Church and Broad Church movements and was well-read in such things. He suddenly remembered the case of "Westerton versus Liddell" in which a Protestant churchwarden prosecuted a parson for one of the darker crimes of Popery, possibly wearing a surplice.

“And I only hope,” went on the stranger firmly, still addressing the Protestant Champion, “that the services at the Parish Church are now conducted in a manner of which you approve.”

My grandfather observed in a genial manner that he didn’t care how they were conducted. These remarkable words of the Protestant Champion caused his worshipper to gaze upon him with a new dawn of wonder, when my father intervened and explained the error pointing out the fine shade that divides Westerton and Chesterton. I may add that my grandfather, when the story was told, always used to insist that he had added to the phrase “I don’t care how they are conducted,” the qualifying words (repeated with a grave motion of the hand) “provided it is with reverence and sincerity.” But I grieve to say that sceptics in the younger generation believed this to have been an afterthought.

The point is, however, that my grandfather was pleased, and not really very much amazed, to be called a monument and a landmark. And that was typical of many middle-class men, even in small businesses, in that remote world. For the particular sort of British bourgeoisie of which I am speaking has been so much altered or diminished, that it cannot exactly be said to exist today. Nothing quite like it at least can be found in England; nothing in the least like it, I fancy, was ever found in America. One peculiarity of this middle-class was that it really was a class and it really was in the middle. Both for good and evil, and certainly often to excess, it was separated both from the class above it and the class below. It knew far too little of the working classes, to the grave peril of a later generation. It knew far too little even of its own servants. My own people were always very kind to servants; but in the class as a whole there was neither the coarse familiarity in work, which belongs to democracies and can be seen in the clamouring and cursing housewives of the Continent, nor the remains of a feudal friendliness such as lingers in the real aristocracy. There was a sort of silence and embarrassment. It was illustrated in another hearsay anecdote, which I may here add to the anecdote of the Protestant Champion. A lady of my family went to live in a friend’s house in the friend’s absence; to be waited on by a sort of superior servant. The lady had got it fixed in her head that the servant cooked her own meals separately, whereas the servant was equally fixed on the policy of eating what was left over from the lady’s meals. The servant sent up for breakfast, say, five rashers of bacon; which was more than the lady wanted. But the lady had another fixed freak of conscience common in the ladies of the period. She thought nothing should be wasted; and could not see that even a thing consumed is wasted if it is not wanted. She ate the five rashers and the servant consequently sent up seven rashers. The lady paled a little, but followed the path of duty and ate them all. The servant, beginning to feel that she too would like a little breakfast, sent up nine or ten rashers. The lady, rallying all her powers, charged at them with her head down, and swept them from the field. And so, I suppose, it went on; owing to the polite silence between the two social classes. I dare not think how it ended. The logical conclusion would seem to be that the servant starved and the lady burst. But I suppose that, before they reached that point, some communications had been opened even between two people living on two floors of the same house. But that was certainly the weak side of that world; that it did not extend its domestic confidence to domestic servants. It smiled and felt superior when reading of old-world vassals who dined below the salt, and continued to feel equally superior to its own vassals, who dined below the floor.

But however we may criticise the old middle-class, and however heartily we may join in those immortal words of the Song of the Future, which are said to run:

Class-conscious we are, class-conscious we’ll be;
Till our foot’s on the necks of the bourgeoisie,

it has a right to historical justice; and there are other points to remember. One point is that it was partly the real “culture conquests” of this stratum of the middle-class, and the fact that it really was an educated class, that made it unduly suspicious of the influence of servants. It attached rather too much importance to spelling correctly; it attached enormous importance to speaking correctly. And it did spell and speak correctly. There was a whole world in which nobody was any more likely to drop an h than to pick up a title. I early discovered, with the malice of infancy, that what my seniors were really afraid of was any imitation of the intonation and diction of the servants. I am told (to quote another hearsay anecdote) that about the age of three or four, I screamed for a hat hanging on a peg, and at last in convulsions of fury uttered the awful words, “If you don’t give it me, I’ll say ‘at.” I felt sure that would lay all my relations prostrate for miles around.

And this care about education and diction, though I can see much to criticise in it now, did really have its good side. It meant that my father knew all his English literature backwards, and that I knew a great deal of it by heart, long before I could really get it into my head. I knew pages of Shakespeare’s blank verse without a notion of the meaning of most of it; which is perhaps the right way to begin to appreciate verse. And it is also recorded of me that, at the age of six or seven, I tumbled down in the street in the act of excitedly reciting the words,

Good Hamlet, cast this nighted colour off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark,
Do not for ever with thy veiled lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust,

at which appropriate moment I pitched forward on my nose.

What is perhaps even less appreciated is that the particular class I mean was not only cut off from what are called the lower classes, but also quite as sharply from what are called the upper classes. Since then we may say, with all graceful apologies, that this class has split up into the two great sections of the Snobs and the Prigs. The first are those who want to get into Society; the second are those who want to get out of Society, and into Societies. I mean Vegetarian Societies and Socialist Colonies and things of that sort. But the people I mean were not cranks, and, what is more, they were not snobs. There were plenty of people in their time, of course, who were snobbish; but those I mean were really a class apart. They never dreamed of knowing the aristocracy except in business. They had, what has since become almost incredible in England, a pride of their own.

For instance, almost all that district of Kensington was and is laid out like a chart or plan to illustrate Macaulay’s Essays. Of course we read Macaulay’s Essays; and in our simple isolation, often even believed them. We knew all the great names of the Whig aristocrats who had made the Revolution (and incidentally their own fortunes) and those names were written conspicuously all over the Kensington estates. Every day we passed Holland House, that opened its hospitality to Macaulay, and the statue of Lord Holland inscribed with the boast that he was the nephew of Fox and the friend of Grey. The street opposite where we came to live bore the name of Addison; the street of our later sojourn the name of Warwick, the step-son of Addison. Beyond was a road named after the house of Russell, to the south another with the name of Cromwell. Near us, on our original perch in Campden Hill, was the great name of Argyll. Now all these names thrilled me like trumpets, as they would any boy reading Macaulay. But it never so much as crossed my mind that we should ever know any people who bore them, or even especially want to. I remember making my father laugh very much by telling him of the old Scots ballad with the line,

There fell about a great dispute between Argyle and Airlie.

For he knew, as a house-agent, that Lord Airlie's house was actually quite close to Argyll Lodge; and that nothing was more likely than that there might fall about a great dispute, directly affecting his own line of business. He knew the old Duke of Argyll in purely business relations, and showed me a letter from him as a curiosity; but to me it was like a delightful curiosity in a museum. I no more thought of expecting McCallum More to come in any way into my own social existence, than I expected Graham of Claverhouse to ride up on his great black horse to the front-door, or Charles the Second to drop in to tea. I regarded the Duke living at Argyll Lodge as an historical character. My people were interested in an aristocracy because it was still an historical thing. The point is worth mentioning, because it is exactly this difference, whether for good or evil, that justifies a fight or feud of which I shall have to write on a later page. Long afterwards, I had the luck to figure in a political row about the Sale of Peerages; and many said that we were wasting our energies in denouncing it. But we were not. The treatment of a title did make a difference; and I am just old enough to be able to measure the difference it has really made. If, regarding Lord Lome with historical respect, I had been introduced to an unknown Lord Leatherhead, I should have respected him also as something historical. If I were to meet him now, I should know he might be any pawnbroker from any gutter in Europe. Honours have not been sold; they have been destroyed.

One considerable family connected with the family business, merely in the way of business, may be worth mentioning for quite other reasons. The firm was, and indeed still is, agent for the large Phillimore Estate then owned by two brothers who both played considerable public parts; Admiral Phillimore who died long ago and Lord Justice Phillimore, one of the most famous of the modern English judges, who died more recently. We had nothing to do with such people, nor tried to, though I remember more than one quite independent testimony to the magnanimity of the old Admiral. But I mention this vague background of the great Kensington Estate for another reason. For the name of Phillimore was destined in a strange and double and rather ironic fashion, to be entwined with my subsequent adventures in life. The Admiral I never saw; but his son, who must have been a child of about my own age, I was long afterwards to know and love and lose, as a friend and an ally in a cause which would then have seemed fantastically far away from our boyhoods. And the Judge I was destined to see sitting on the seat of judgment, and to give evidence before him on behalf of my brother, who stood in the dock at the Old Bailey and was found guilty of patriotism and public spirit.

My mother’s family had a French surname; though the family, as I knew it by experience as well as tradition, was entirely English in speech and social habit. There was a sort of family legend that they were descended from a French private soldier of the Revolutionary Wars, who had been a prisoner in England and remained there; as some certainly did. But on the other side my mother came of Scottish people, who were Keiths from Aberdeen; and for several reasons, partly because my maternal grandmother long survived her husband and was a very attractive personality, and partly because of a certain vividness in any infusion of Scots blood or patriotism, this northern affiliation appealed strongly to my affections; and made a sort of Scottish romance in my childhood. But her husband, my maternal grandfather whom I never saw, must have been an interesting person too; and something of an historical type, if not an historical character. He had been one of the old Wesleyan lay-preachers and was thus involved in public controversy, a characteristic which has descended to his grandchild. He was also one of the leaders of the early Teetotal movement; a characteristic which has not. But I am quite sure there was a great deal in him, beyond anything that is implied in mere public speaking or teetotalism. I am quite sure of it, because of two casual remarks he made; which are indeed the only two remarks I ever heard of him making. Once, when his sons were declaiming against mode and convention in the manner of all liberal youth, he said abruptly, “Ah, they talk a lot about fashion; but fashion is civilisation.” And in the other case, the same rising generation was lightly tossing about that pessimism which is only possible in the happy time of youth. They were criticising the General Thanksgiving in the Prayer-Book, and remarking that a good many people have very little reason to be thankful for their creation. And the old man, who was then so old that he hardly ever spoke at all, said suddenly out of his silence. “I should thank God for my creation if I knew I was a lost soul.”

Of the other side of my family I may say more when I come to my own memories; but I put this side of the matter first because there is so much more of it that I have received only at secondhand. And this is the part of the book which is forced to be biography and cannot be autobiography. It deals with the things that were just behind me and merely threw their shadows on my earliest path; the things I saw in reflection rather than reality. Of these there were more on my mother’s side; especially that historical interest in the house of Keith, which was mixed up with my general historical interest in things like the house of Argyll. But on my father’s side also there were legends; the nearest and most eminent figure being that Captain Chesterton, who was famous in his day as a reformer of prisons. He was a friend of Dickens, and, I suspect, himself something of a Dickens character. But indeed these first memories and rumours suggest that there were a good many Dickens characters in the days of Dickens. I am far from denying the inference; that a good many Dickens characters are humbugs. It would not be fair to say all I have said in praise of the old Victorian middle-class, without admitting that it did sometimes produce pretty hollow and pompous imposture. A solemn friend of my grandfather used to go for walks on Sunday carrying a prayer-book, without the least intention of going to church. And he calmly defended it by saying, with uplifted hand, “I do it, Chessie, as an example to others.” The man who did that was obviously a Dickens character. And I am disposed to think that, in being a Dickens character, he was in many ways rather preferable to many modern characters. Few modern men, however false, would dare to be so brazen. And I am not sure he was not really a more genuine fellow than the modern man who says vaguely that he has doubts or hates sermons, when he only wants to go and play golf. Hypocrisy itself was more sincere. Anyhow, it was more courageous.

What I can but call a Great Gusto breathed out of that epoch; something now only remembered in the rich and rollicking quotation of Swiveller and Micawber. But the point is that the savour of it could then be found in scores of quite worthy and obscure people; certainly much more worthy than the blatantly Pecksniffian person with the prayer-book; and much more obscure than the eccentric but efficient, and even eminent, prison governor and reformer. To use a trade term of the period, this indescribable sort of relish was by no means only a gentlemen's relish. It was the effect, I think, of that popular humour, which is still perhaps our only really popular institution, working upon the remains of the rhetoric of the eighteenth-century orators, and the almost equally rhetorical rhetoric of the nineteenth-century poets, like Byron and Moore. Anyhow, it was evidently common to countless common or average people, and rather specially to commercial clerks. The clerk came afterwards to figure rather as a mere cheap Cockney with clipped speech; a sort of broken English that seems broken by accident; chipped rather than clipped. But there was a race that really dealt in periods as rounded as Christmas platters and punchbowls. My father told me of a fellow clerk of his youth, or boyhood, who took leave of the tavern or chop-house with a stately message of thanks, which he delivered in a big booming voice, before stalking into the street, "Tell Mrs. Bayfield that the steak was excellent; the potatoes done to a turn; in short a dinner fit for an Emperor." Is not that exactly like "F.B." in the moments when Thackeray was most Dickensian? From the same remote source, I recall another quite Dickensian scene; a bland, round-faced little man in spectacles, the sort that is always chaffed anywhere; and a fellow clerk named Carr, of more mysterious humours; both ghosts from my father's time of apprenticeship. At intervals the more sombre clerk would call out across the office, "Mr. Hannay!" The round face, bright with its smile and spectacles, would bob up with never-failing freshness and expectation: "Yes, Mr. Carr." Then Mr. Carr would fix him with a sphinxlike visage and say in hollow but resounding tones, "Boundless Space!" And then Mr. Carr would turn more briskly to the other clerks, shaking his head, and repeating in a hopeless tone, "He can't grasp it!" I do not know what either of them would have thought of the idea of Professor Einstein entering the office and avenging Mr. Hannay on Mr. Carr, by suggesting that space is not boundless at all. The point is that there is this element of pomp and ritual about jokes; even about practical jokes; indeed even about practical deceptions. It was known in humbler walks, among mountebanks and even monstrosities, as well Dickens knew; and there was something as stately about the cheap-jacks demanding money as the orators demanding fame. One of my own earliest memories is of looking from a balcony above one of the big residential roads of a watering-place, and seeing a venerable party with white hair solemnly taking off a white hat as he walked down the centre of the street, and saying to nobody in particular in the loud voice of a lecturer, “When I first came into Cannon Street — I beg your pardon, Cannon Place ...” a performance which he repeated every day, always falling into the same error to be followed by the same apology. This gave me, I know not why, enormous pleasure; partly, I think, from the feeling that a gigantic clockwork doll had been added to what Mr. Maurice Baring calls the puppet-show of memory. But his importance here is that the rest of his speech seemed all the more polished and faultless for that one strangely recurrent fault; and it always ended with a beautiful peroration, about recalling in the distant future, and in the hour of death, “the kindness I have met with in Cannon Place.” Later, I remember the same seaside paths paraded by a yet more loquacious public character wearing cap and gown, I fear with but little academic authority; but I think he marked a much later stage, because he was acrid and antagonistic, and appealed to his audience by calling them hypocrites and whited sepulchres; which had the curious effect upon that very English crowd of causing them to throw pennies into his mortar-board. But in the earlier stage which concerns me here, a glow of convivial courtesy covered everything; and the wing of friendship could never moult a feather. The amazing patience of our populace then went with a certain pomp, but it was a pompous geniality; and even their jeers were still jovial. Their mockery and their heroism still remain, heaven knows; but they no longer thus combine in the mock heroic. But anybody who heard, or heard of, the men I mention, will be certain to his dying day that Dick Swiveller did say, “When he who adores thee has left but the name — in case of letters or parcels,” or that the poor usher at the party did whisper to each lady in turn, “Had I a heart for falsehood framed I ne’er could injure you.” There was a glow in it; not to be copied by sparks, even when they really sparkle. The world is less gay for losing that solemnity.

Another real Victorian virtue, not to be discredited by many imaginary Victorian virtues, belongs not so much to my generation as to my father’s and grandfather’s; or at least, if I was specially lucky, to my father and grandfather. It should, therefore, be mentioned in this place; if it is illustrated by incidents within my own memory. My own people in any case had a strict standard of commercial probity; but I fancy the standard was stricter in all that more stolid commercial class than in a later time, when the notion of success was mixed up not only with cynicism but with a queer sort of piratical romance. The change may be felt, as in the word "respectable," in the very atmosphere of certain words. The favourite modern ideal in morals and even in religion, especially the religion popularised in the papers for millions of modern business men, is the word "adventure." The most menacing monster in morals, for the business men of my old middle-class, was branded with the title of "adventurer." In later times, I fancy, the world has defended some pretty indefensible adventurers by implying the glamour of adventure. Anyhow, this is not merely my own belated opinion in an age of reaction. It was the opinion of the best even of the old optimists and orthodox economists, who lived when the change was beginning, and believed they were living in an age of reform. My own father and uncles were entirely of the period that believed in progress, and generally in new things, all the more because they were finding it increasingly difficult to believe in old things; and in some cases in anything at all. But though as Liberals they believed in progress, as honest men they often testified to deterioration.

I remember my father telling me how much he had begun to be pestered by great swarms of people wanting private commissions upon transactions, in which they were supposed to represent another interest. He mentioned it not only with the deepest disgust, but more or less as if it were a novelty as well as a nuisance. He was himself in the habit of meeting these unpleasant people with a humorously simulated burst of heartiness and even hilarity; but it was the only sort of occasion on which his humour might be called grim and even ferocious. When the agent, bargaining for some third party, hinted that an acceptable trifle would smooth the negotiations, he would say with formidable geniality, "Oh, certainly! certainly! So long as we are all friends and everything is open and above-board! I am sure your principals and employers will be delighted to hear from me that I'm paying you a small—" He would then be interrupted with a sort of shriek of fear and the kind diplomatic gentleman would cover his tracks as best he could in terror. "And doesn't that prove to you," said my father with innocent rationalism, "the immorality of such a proposal?"

My Uncle Sidney, who was his partner in the business, was a more unanswerable witness, because a more unwilling witness. My father was very universal in his interests and very moderate in his opinions; he was one of the few men I ever knew who really listened to argument; moreover, he was more traditional than many in the liberal age; he loved many old things, and had especially a passion for the French cathedrals and all the Gothic architecture opened up by Ruskin in that time. It was not quite so inconceivable that he might admit another side to modern progress. But my uncle was the very reverse of a laudator temporis acti. He was one of those sensitive and conscientious men, very typical of the modern world, who had the same scrupulous sense of the duty of accepting new things, and sympathising with the young, that older moralists may have had about preserving old things and obeying the elders. I remember him assuring me quite eagerly of the hopeful thoughts aroused in him by the optimistic official prophecies of the book called Looking Backwards a rather ironical title, seeing that the one thing forbidden to such futurists was Looking Backwards. And the whole philosophy, afterwards sublimated by the genius of Mr. Wells, was the duty of Looking Forwards. My uncle, much more than my father, was this scrupulously sanguine sort of man; and the last man in the world to hold any brief for the good old times. But he was also a quite transparently truthful man; and I remember him telling me, with that wrinkle of worry in his brow, which confessed his subconscious and sensitive anxiety, “I’m bound to confess that commercial morality has got steadily worse through my lifetime.”

Of course I admit, or rather I boast, that in anything like sympathy with any such Utopia, such individuals were in advance of the times. But I boast much more that, in the great modern growth of high finance, they were behind the times. The class as a whole was, indeed, dangerously deaf and blind upon the former question of economic exploitation; but it was relatively more vigilant and sensitive upon the latter question of financial decency. It never occurred to these people that anybody could possibly admire a man for being what we call “daring” in speculation, any more than a woman for being what we call “daring” in dress. There was something of the same atmospheric change in both cases. The absence of social ambition had a great deal to do with it. When the restrictions really were stuffy and stupid, they were largely those of ignorance; but this was nothing like so evil and ruinous as the ignorance of the real wrongs and rights of the working classes. Heaven knows, it is even possible that in some cases the reader knows, that I am no admirer of the complacent commercial prosperity of England in the nineteenth century. At the best it was an individualism that ended by destroying individuality; an industrialism which has done nothing except poison the very meaning of the word industry. At the worst it turned at last into a vulgar victory of sweating and swindling. I am only pointing out a particular point about a particular group or class, now extinct; that if they were ignorant of, or often indifferent to the sweating, they were really indignant at the swindling. In the same way, few will accuse me of Puritanism; but I think it due to the Puritan tradition to say that certain notions of social sobriety did have something to do with delaying the full triumph of flashy finance and the mere antics of avarice. Anyhow, there has been a change from a middle-class that trusted a business man to look after money because he was dull and careful, to one that trusts a business man to get more money because he is dashing and worldly. It has not always asked itself for whom he would get more money, or whose money he would get.

I know well I was very fortunate in my own family. But even those less fortunate were not subject to the special evils now commonly labelled Victorian. Indeed, in the modern sense, Victorian was not at all Victorian. It was a period of increasing strain. It was the very reverse of solid respectability; because its ethics and theology were wearing thin throughout. It may have been orderly compared with what came after; but not compared with the centuries that came before. It sometimes boasted of being domestic; but the Englishman’s home was not half so domestic as that of the horrid foreigner; the profligate Frenchman. It was the age when the Englishman sent all his sons to boarding-school and sent all his servants to Coventry. I cannot imagine why anybody ever said that the Englishman’s house was his castle; since he was one of the few Europeans who did not even own his house; and his house was avowedly a dull box of brick, of all the houses the least like a castle. Above all, so far from being stiff with orthodox religion, it was almost the first irreligious home in all human history. Theirs was the first generation that ever asked its children to worship the hearth without the altar. This was equally true, whether they went to church at eleven o’clock, with more decent thoroughness than the gay deceiver with the prayer-book, or were reverently agnostic or latitudinarian, as was much of my own circle. For the most part, it was family life stripped of its festivals and shrines and private cults, which had been its poetry in the past. It was a joke to talk of the heavy father’s heavy furniture, and call the chairs and tables his household gods. It was the fact that he was the first man, for whom there were no household gods but only furniture.

That was the duller side; but there has been even more exaggeration about the darker side. I mean that modern novelists and others have started a trick of writing as if the old middle-class home was almost always a private lunatic asylum, with the lunatic in charge; as in the case of the exceedingly Mad Hatter who inhabited Hatter's Castle. This is a grotesque exaggeration; there were parents with this savage degree of selfishness; I recall not many more than three of them in the whole of our old social circle; but the wrong associations are attached even to them. A few of them may have been religious fanatics. I remember one, who locked up his daughters like prisoners; and one of them said to me, "You see he thinks nobody else can think at all, except himself and Herbert Spencer." I remember another who was an extreme Radical, a champion of liberty everywhere except at home. The point is of some historic importance. Tyrants, religious or irreligious, turn up anywhere. But this type of tyrant was the product of the precise moment when a middle-class man still had children and servants to control; but no longer had creeds or guilds or kings or priests or anything to control him. He was already an anarchist to those above him; but still an authoritarian to those below. But he was an abnormal fellow anyhow; and none of my people bore the least resemblance to him.

What Puritanic element there was in this forgotten society must certainly be allowed for as a part of the picture. It was mostly, among my people, a rather illogical disapproval of certain forms of luxury and expenditure. Their tables would groan under far grander dinners than many aristocrats eat today. But they had, for instance, a fixed feeling that there was something rather raffish about taking a cab. It was probably connected with their sensitive pride about not aping the aristocracy. I can remember my grandfather, when he was nearly eighty and able to afford any number of cabs, standing in the pouring rain while seven or eight crowded omnibuses went by; and afterwards whispering to my father (in a hushed voice lest the blasphemy be heard by the young), "If three more omnibuses had gone by, upon my soul I think I should have taken a cab." In the matter of driving about in cabs, I cannot claim to have kept the family escutcheon unspotted, or to have lived up to the high standard of my sires. But in the matter of their motive for not doing so, I am disposed to defend them, or at least to say that they are much misunderstood. They were the last descendants of Mrs. Gilpin, who told the chaise to stop a few doors from her house, lest the neighbours should think her proud. I am not sure that she was not a healthier person than the smart lady who will be seen in anybody's Rolls Royce, lest the neighbours should think her humble.

Such, so far as I know it, was the social landscape in which I first found myself; and such were the people among whom I was born. I am sorry if the landscape or the people appear disappointingly respectable and even reasonable, and deficient in all those unpleasant qualities that make a biography really popular. I regret that I have no gloomy and savage father to offer to the public gaze as the true cause of all my tragic heritage; no pale-faced and partially poisoned mother whose suicidal instincts have cursed me with the temptations of the artistic temperament. I regret that there was nothing in the range of our family much more racy than a remote and mildly impecunious uncle; and that I cannot do my duty as a true modern, by cursing everybody who made me whatever I am. I am not clear about what that is; but I am pretty sure that most of it is my own fault. And I am compelled to confess that I look back to that landscape of my first days with a pleasure that should doubtless be reserved for the Utopias of the Futurist. Yet the landscape, as I see it now, was not altogether without a visionary and symbolic character. And among all the objects in that landscape, I find myself returning at the last to those which I mentioned first. In one way and another, those things have come to stand for so many other things, in the acted allegory of a human existence; the little church of my baptism and the waterworks, the bare, blind, dizzy tower of brick that seemed, to my first upward starings, to take hold upon the stars. Perhaps there was something in the confused and chaotic notion of a tower of water; as if the sea itself could stand on one end like a water-spout. Certainly later, though I hardly know how late, there came into my mind some fancy of a colossal water-snake that might be the Great Sea Serpent, and had something of the nightmare nearness of a dragon in a dream. And, over against it, the small church rose in a spire like a spear; and I have always been pleased to remember that it was dedicated to St. George.

Chapter II: The Man with the Golden Key

The very first thing I can ever remember seeing with my own eyes was a young man walking across a bridge. He had a curly moustache and an attitude of confidence verging on swagger. He carried in his hand a disproportionately large key of a shining yellow metal and wore a large golden or gilded crown. The bridge he was crossing sprang on the one side from the edge of a highly perilous mountain chasm, the peaks of the range rising fantastically in the distance; and at the other end it joined the upper part of the tower of an almost excessively castellated castle. In the castle tower there was one window, out of which a young lady was looking. I cannot remember in the least what she looked like; but I will do battle with anyone who denies her superlative good looks.

To those who may object that such a scene is rare in the home life of house-agents living immediately to the north of Kensington High Street, in the later seventies of the last century, I shall be compelled to admit, not that the scene was unreal, but that I saw it through a window more wonderful than the window in the tower; through the proscenium of a toy theatre constructed by my father; and that (if I am really to be pestered about such irrelevant details) the young man in the crown was about six inches high and proved on investigation to be made of cardboard. But it is strictly true to say that I saw him before I can remember seeing anybody else; and that, so far as my memory is concerned, this was the sight on which my eyes first opened in this world. And the scene has to me a sort of aboriginal authenticity impossible to describe; something at the back of all my thoughts; like the very back-scene of the theatre of things. I have no shadow of recollection of what the young man was doing on the bridge, or of what he proposed to do with the key; though a later and wearier knowledge of literature and legend hints to me that he was not improbably going to release the lady from captivity. It is a not unamusing detail of psychology that, though I can remember no other characters in the story, I do remember noting that the crowned gentleman had a moustache and no beard, with a vague inference that there was another crowned gentleman who had a beard as well. We may safely guess, I imagine, that the bearded one was by way of being a wicked king; and we should not need much more converging evidence to convict him of having locked up the lady in the tower. All the rest is gone; scenes, subject, story, characters; but that one scene glows in my memory like a glimpse of some incredible paradise; and, for all I know, I shall still remember it when all other memory is gone out of my mind.

Apart from the fact of it being my first memory, I have several reasons for putting it first. I am no psychologist, thank God; but if psychologists are still saying what ordinary sane people have always said — that early impressions count considerably in life — I recognise a sort of symbol of all that I happen to like in imagery and ideas. All my life I have loved edges; and the boundary-line that brings one thing sharply against another. All my life I have loved frames and limits; and I will maintain that the largest wilderness looks larger seen through a window. To the grief of all grave dramatic critics, I will still assert that the perfect drama must strive to rise to the higher ecstasy of the peep-show. I have also a pretty taste in abysses and bottomless chasms and everything else that emphasises a fine shade of distinction between one thing and another; and the warm affection I have always felt for bridges is connected with the fact that the dark and dizzy arch accentuates the chasm even more than the chasm itself. I can no longer behold the beauty of the princess; but I can see it in the bridge that the prince crossed to reach her. And I believe that in feeling these things from the first, I was feeling the fragmentary suggestions of a philosophy I have since found to be the truth. For it is upon that point of truth that there might perhaps be a quarrel between the more material psychologists and myself. If any man tells me that I only take pleasure in the mysteries of the window and the bridge because I saw these models of them when I was a baby, I shall take the liberty of telling him that he has not thought the thing out. To begin with, I must have seen thousands of other things before as well as after; and there must have been an element of selection and some reason for selection. And, what is still more obvious, to date the occasion does not even begin to deal with the fact. If some laborious reader of little books on child-psychology cries out to me in glee and cunning, “You only like romantic things like toy-theatres because your father showed you a toy-theatre in your childhood,” I shall reply with gentle and Christian patience, “Yes, fool, yes. Undoubtedly your explanation is, in that sense, the true one. But what you are saying, in your witty way, is simply that I associate these things with happiness because I was so happy. It does not even begin to consider the question of why I was so happy. Why should looking through a square hole, at yellow pasteboard, lift anybody into the seventh heaven of happiness at any time of life? Why should it specially do so at that time of life? That is the psychological fact that you have to explain; and I have never seen any sort of rational explanation.”

I apologise for this parenthesis; and for mentioning child-psychology or anything else that can bring a blush to the cheek. But it happens to be a point on which I think some of our psycho-analysts display rather unblushing cheek. I do not wish my remarks confused with the horrible and degrading heresy that our minds are merely manufactured by accidental conditions, and therefore have no ultimate relation to truth at all. With all possible apologies to the freethinkers, I still propose to hold myself free to think. And anybody who will think for two minutes will see that this thought is the end of all thinking. It is useless to argue at all, if all our conclusions are warped by our conditions. Nobody can correct anybody’s bias, if all mind is all bias.

The interlude is now over, thank you; and I will proceed to the more practical relations between my memory and my story. And it will first be necessary to say something about memory itself; and the reliability of such stories. I have begun with this fragment of a fairy play in a toy-theatre, because it also sums up most clearly the strongest influences upon my childhood. I have said that the toy-theatre was made by my father; and anybody who has ever tried to make such a theatre or mount such a play, will know that this alone stands for a remarkable round of crafts and accomplishments. It involves being in much more than the common sense the stage carpenter, being the architect and the builder and the draughtsman and the landscape-painter and the story-teller all in one. And, looking back on my life, and the relatively unreal and indirect art that I have attempted to practise, I feel that I have really lived a much narrower life than my father’s.

His mere name, of course, is enough to recall wider memories. One of my first memories is playing in the garden under the care of a girl with ropes of golden hair; to whom my mother afterwards called out from the house, “You are an angel;” which I was disposed to accept without metaphor. She is now living in Vancouver as Mrs. Kidd; and she and her sister had more to do with enlivening my early years than most. Since then, I have met what used to be called the wits of the age; but I have never known wittier conversation. Among my first memories also are those seascapes that were blue flashes to boys of my generation; North Berwick with the cone of green hill that seemed like the hill absolute; and a French seaside associated with little girls, the daughters of my father’s old friend Mawer Cowtan, whom I shall not forget. But indeed I had a whole background of cousins; Tom Gilbert (my godfather, who gave me his last and my first name) had a large family of daughters, and my uncle Sidney a large family of sons; and they all still move in my memory almost like a male and female chorus in a great Greek play. The eldest of the boys, the one whom I once knew best, was killed with my brother in the Great War; but many of the others, I am glad to say, are still friends as well as relations. All these are memorable memories; but they do not resolve that first individual speculation about memory itself. The girl with the yellow hair is an early memory, in the sense in which some of the others have inevitably become later memories, at once expanded and effaced.

Really, the things we remember are the things we forget. I mean that when a memory comes back sharply and suddenly, piercing the protection of oblivion, it appears for an instant exactly as it really was. If we think of it often, while its essentials doubtless remain true, it becomes more and more our own memory of the thing rather than the thing remembered. I had a little sister who died when I was a child. I have little to go on; for she was the only subject about which my father did not talk. It was the one dreadful sorrow of his abnormally happy and even merry existence; and it is strange to think that I never spoke to him about it to the day of his death. I do not remember her dying; but I remember her falling off a rocking-horse. I know, from experience of bereavements only a little later, that children feel with exactitude, without a word of explanation, the emotional tone or tint of a house of mourning. But in this case, the greater catastrophe must somehow have become confused and identified with the smaller one. I always felt it as a tragic memory, as if she had been thrown by a real horse and killed. Something must have painted and repainted the picture in my mind; until I suddenly became conscious about the age of eighteen that it had become the picture of Amy Robsart lying at the foot of the stairs, flung down by Vamey and another villain. This is the real difficulty about remembering anything; that we have remembered too much — for we have remembered too often.

I will take another example of this psychological trick, though it involves the anticipation of much later events in my life. One of these glimpses of my own prehistoric history is a memory of a long upper room filled with light (the light that never was on sea or land) and of somebody carving or painting with white paint the deal head of a hobby-horse; the head almost archaic in its simplification. Ever since that day my depths have been stirred by a wooden post painted white; and even more so by any white horse in the street; and it was like meeting a friend in a fairytale to find myself under the sign of the White Horse at Ipswich on the first day of my honeymoon. But for that very reason, this image has remained and memory has constantly returned to it; and I have even done my best to deface and spoil the purity of the White Horse by writing an interminable ballad about it. A man does not generally manage to forget his wedding-day; especially such a highly comic wedding-day as mine. For the family remembers against me a number of now familiar legends, about the missing of trains, the losing of luggage, and other things counted yet more eccentric. It is alleged against me, and with perfect truth, that I stopped on the way to drink a glass of milk in one shop and to buy a revolver with cartridges in another. Some have seen these as singular wedding-presents for a bridegroom to give to himself; and if the bride had known less of him, I suppose she might have fancied that he was a suicide or a murderer or, worst of all, a teetotaller. They seemed to me the most natural things in the world. I did not buy the pistol to murder myself or my wife; I never was really modern. I bought it because it was the great adventure of my youth, with a general notion of protecting her from the pirates doubtless infesting the Norfolk Broads, to which we were bound; where, after all, there are still a suspiciously large number of families with Danish names. I shall not be annoyed if it is called childish; but obviously it was rather a reminiscence of boyhood, and not of childhood. But the ritual consumption of the glass of milk really was a reminiscence of childhood. I stopped at that particular dairy because I had always drunk a glass of milk there when walking with my mother in my infancy. And it seemed to me a fitting ceremonial to unite the two great relations of a man’s life. Outside the shop there was the figure of a White Cow as a sort of pendant to the figure of the White Horse; the one standing at the beginning of my new journey and the other at the end. But the point is here that the very fact of these allegories having been acted over again, at the stage of marriage and maturity, does in a sense transform them, and does in some sense veil even while it invokes the original visions of the child. The sign of the White Horse has been repainted, and only in that sense painted out. I do not so much remember it as remember remembering it. But if I really want to be realistic about those remote days, I must scratch around till I find something not too much blunted to scratch me; something sufficiently forgotten to be remembered. I make the experiment at this moment as I write. Searching for those lost surroundings, I recall for the first time, at this moment, that there was another shop, next to the milk-shop, which had some mysterious charm for my childhood; and then I recall that it was an oil and colour shop, and they sold gold paint smeared inside shells; and there was a sort of pale pointed chalks I have been less familiar with of late. I do not think here of the strong colours of the common paint-box, like crimson-lake and prussian-blue, much as I exulted and still exult in them. For another boy called Robert Louis Stevenson has messed about with my colours upon that sort of palette; and I have grown up to enjoy them in print as well as in paint. But when I remember that these forgotten crayons contained a stick of "light-red," seemingly a more commonplace colour, the point of that dull red pencil pricks me as if it could draw red blood.

From this general memory about memory I draw a certain inference. What was wonderful about childhood is that anything in it was a wonder. It was not merely a world full of miracles; it was a miraculous world. What gives me this shock is almost anything I really recall; not the things I should think most worth recalling. This is where it differs from the other great thrill of the past, all that is connected with first love and the romantic passion; for that, though equally poignant, comes always to a point; and is narrow like a rapier piercing the heart, whereas the other was more like a hundred windows opened on all sides of the head.

I have made here a sort of psychological experiment in memory. I have tried to think of the things I forget adjoining the things I remember; and in the childish case, though they are without form, I am sure they are of the same tint. I have long remembered the milk-shop; I have only just remembered the oil-shop; I have no notion at all about the next shop to the oil-shop. I am sure it was a shop shining with the same lost light of morning; because it was in the same street under the same sky. I have no notion on what street the row of windows in the long uplifted room looked out, when the white horse head was carved. But I feel in a flash that it was a happy street; or, if we must be pedantic, a street in which I should have been happy. Now it is not like that with even the happiest hours of the later things called love-affairs. I have already mentioned how my honeymoon began before the White Cow of my childhood; but of course I had in my time been myself a calf, not to say a moon-calf, in the sort of calf-love that dances in the moonshine long before the honeymoon. Those day-dreams also are wrecks of something divine; but they have the colour of sunset rather than the broad daylight. I have walked across wide fields at evening and seen, as a mere distant dot in a row of houses, one particular window and just distinguishable head; and been uplifted as with roaring trumpets as if by the salute of Beatrice. But it did not, and does not, make me think the other windows and houses were all almost equally interesting; and that is just what the glimpse of the baby's wonderland does. We have read countless pages about love brightening the sun and making the flowers more flamboyant; and it is true in a sense; but not in the sense I mean. It changes the world; but the baby lived in a changeless world; or rather the man feels that it is he who has changed. He has changed long before he comes near to the great and glorious trouble of the love of woman; and that has in it something new and concentrated and crucial; crucial in the true sense of being as near as Cana to Calvary. In the later case, what is loved becomes instantly what may be lost.

My point here is that we can test the childish mood by thinking, not only of what was there, but of what must have been there. I think of the backs of houses of which I saw only the fronts; the streets that stretched away behind the streets I knew; the things that remained round the corner; and they still give me a thrill. One of the sports of the imagination, a game I have played all my life, was to take a certain book with pictures of old Dutch houses, and think not of what was in the pictures but of all that was out of the pictures, the unknown corners and side-streets of the same quaint town. The book was one my father had written and illustrated himself, merely for home consumption. It was typical of him that, in the Pugin period he had worked at Gothic illumination; but when he tried again, it was in another style of the dark Dutch renaissance, the grotesque scroll-work that suggests woodcarving more than stone-cutting. He was the sort of man who likes to try everything once. This was the only book he ever wrote; and he never bothered to publish it.

My father might have reminded people of Mr. Pickwick, except that he was always bearded and never bald; he wore spectacles and had all the Pickwickian evenness of temper and pleasure in the humours of travel. He was rather quiet than otherwise, but his quietude covered a great fertility of notions; and he certainly liked taking a rise out of people. I remember, to give one example of a hundred such inventions, how he gravely instructed some grave ladies in the names of flowers; dwelling especially on the rustic names given in certain localities. “The country people call them Sailors’ Pen-knives,” he would say in an offhand manner, after affecting to provide them with the full scientific name, or, “They call them Bakers’ Bootlaces down in Lincolnshire, I believe”; and it is a fine example of human simplicity to note how far he found he could safely go in such instructive discourse. They followed him without revulsion when he said lightly, “Merely a sprig of wild bigamy.” It was only when he added that there was a local variety known as Bishop’s Bigamy, that the full depravity of his character began to dawn on their minds. It was possibly this aspect of his unfailing amiability that is responsible for an entry I find in an ancient minute-book, of mock trials conducted by himself and his brothers; that Edward Chesterton was tried for the crime of Aggravation. But the same sort of invention created for children the permanent anticipation of what is profoundly called a Surprise. And it is this side of the business that is relevant here.

His versatility both as an experimentalist and a handy man, in all such matters, was amazing. His den or study was piled high with the stratified layers of about ten or twelve creative amusements; water-colour painting and modelling and photography and stained glass and fretwork and magic lanterns and mediaeval illumination. I have inherited, or I hope imitated, his habit of drawing; but in every other way I am emphatically an unhandy man. There had been some talk of his studying art professionally in his youth; but the family business was obviously safer; and his life followed the lines of a certain contented and ungrasping prudence, which was extraordinarily typical of him and all his blood and generation. He never dreamed of turning any of these plastic talents to any mercenary account, or of using them for anything but his own private pleasure and ours. To us he appeared to be indeed the Man with the Golden Key, a magician opening the gates of goblin castles or the sepulchres of dead heroes; and there was no incongruity in calling his lantern a magic-lantern. But all this time he was known to the world, and even the next-door neighbours, as a very reliable and capable though rather unambitious business man. It was a very good first lesson in what is also the last lesson of life; that in everything that matters, the inside is much larger than the outside. On the whole I am glad that he was never an artist. It might have stood in his way in becoming an amateur. It might have spoilt his career; his private career. He could never have made a vulgar success of all the thousand things he did so successfully.

If I made a generalisation about the Chestertons, my paternal kinsfolk (which may be dangerous, for there are a lot of them still alive), I should say that they were and are extraordinarily English. They have a perceptible and prevailing colour of good nature, of good sense not untinged with dreaminess, and a certain tranquil loyalty in their personal relations which was very notable even in one, like my brother Cecil, who in his public relations was supremely pugnacious and provocative. I think this sort of sleepy sanity rather an English thing; and in comparison it may not be entirely fanciful to suppose there was something French, after all, in the make-up of my mother's family; for, allowing for the usual admixture, they ran smaller in stature, often darker in colouring, tough, extraordinarily tenacious, prejudiced in a humorous fashion and full of the fighting spirit. But whatever we may guess in such matters (and nobody has yet done anything but guess about heredity) it was for another purpose that I mentioned the savour of something racial about such a stock. English in so many things, the Chestertons were supremely English in their natural turn for hobbies. It is an element in this sort of old English business man which divides him most sharply from the American business man, and to some extent from the new English business man, who is copying the American. When the American begins to suggest that "salesmanship can be an art," he means that an artist ought to put all his art into his salesmanship. The old-fashioned Englishman, like my father, sold houses for his living but filled his own house with his life.

A hobby is not a holiday. It is not merely a momentary relaxation necessary to the renewal of work; and in this respect it must be sharply distinguished from much that is called sport. A good game is a good thing, but it is not the same thing as a hobby; and many go golfing or shooting grouse because this is a concentrated form of recreation; just as what our contemporaries find in whisky is a concentrated form of what our fathers found diffused in beer. If half a day is to take a man out of himself, or make a new man of him, it is better done by some sharp competitive excitement like sport. But a hobby is not half a day but half a life-time. It would be truer to accuse the hobbyist of living a double life. And hobbies, especially such hobbies as the toy theatre, have a character that runs parallel to practical professional effort, and is not merely a reaction from it. It is not merely taking exercise; it is doing work. It is not merely exercising the body instead of the mind, an excellent but now largely a recognised thing. It is exercising the rest of the mind; now an almost neglected thing. When Browning, that typical Victorian, says that he likes to know a butcher paints and a baker writes poetry, he would not be satisfied with the statement that a butcher plays tennis or a baker golf. And my father and uncles, also typical Victorians of the sort that followed Browning, were all marked in varying degrees by this taste for having their own tastes. One of them gave all his spare time to gardening and has somewhere in the horticultural records a chrysanthemum named after him, dating from the first days when chrysanthemums came to us from the islands of the Rising Sun. Another travelled in an ordinary commercial fashion, but made a most amazing collection of cranks and quacks, fitted to fill a far better memoir than this, whom he had met in his wanderings, and with whom he had argued and sympathised and quoted Browning and George Macdonald, and done I fancy not a little good, for he was himself a most interesting man; above all, interesting because he was interested. But in my own household, as I have said, it was not a question of one hobby but a hundred hobbies, piled on top of each other; and it is a personal accident, or perhaps a personal taste, that the one which has clung to my memory through life is the hobby of the toy theatre. In any case, watching such work has made one great difference to my life and views to this day.

I cannot do much, by the standard of my nursery days. But I have learned to love seeing things done; not the handle that ultimately causes them to be done, but the hand that does them. If my father had been some common millionaire owning a thousand mills that made cotton, or a million machines that made cocoa, how much smaller he would have seemed. And this experience has made me profoundly sceptical of all the modern talk about the necessary dullness of domesticity; and the degrading drudgery that only has to make puddings and pies. Only to make things! There is no greater thing to be said of God Himself than that He makes things. The manufacturer cannot even manufacture things; he can only pay to have them manufactured. And (in the same way) I am now incurably afflicted with a faint smile, when I hear a crowd of frivolous people, who could not make anything to save their lives, talking about the inevitable narrowness and stuffiness of the Victorian home. We managed to make a good many things in our Victorian home which people now buy at insane prices from Art and Craft Shops; the sort of shops that have quite as much craft as art. All the things that happened in the house, or were in any sense done on the premises, linger in my imagination like a legend; and as much as any, those connected with the kitchen or the pantry. Toffee still tastes nicer to me than the most expensive chocolates which Quaker millionaires sell by the million; and mostly because we made toffee for ourselves.

No. 999 in the vast library-catalogue of the books I have never written (all of them so much more brilliant and convincing than the books that I have written) is the story of a successful city man who seemed to have a dark secret in his life; and who was eventually discovered by the detectives still playing with dolls or tin soldiers or some undignified antic of infancy. I may say with all modesty that I am that man, in everything except his solidity of repute and his successful commercial career. It was perhaps even more true, in that sense, of my father before me; but I for one have never left off playing, and I wish there were more time to play. I wish we did not have to fritter away on frivolous things, like lectures and literature, the time we might have given to serious, solid and constructive work like cutting out cardboard figures and pasting coloured tinsel upon them. When I say this, I come to the third reason for taking the toy theatre as a text; and it is one about which there will be much misunderstanding, because of the repetitions and the stale sentiment that have somehow come to cling to it. It is one of those things that are always misunderstood, because they have been too often explained.

I am inclined to contradict much of the modern Cult of the Child at Play. Through various influences of a recent and rather romantic culture, the Child has become rather the Spoilt Child. The true beauty has been spoilt by the rather unscrupulous emotion of mature persons, who have themselves lost much of their sense of reality. The worst heresy of this school is that a child is concerned only with make-believe. For this is interpreted in the sense, at once sentimental and sceptical, that there is not much difference between make-believe and belief. But the real child does not confuse fact and fiction. He simply likes fiction. He acts it, because he cannot as yet write it or even read it; but he never allows his moral sanity to be clouded by it. To him no two things could possibly be more totally contrary than playing at robbers and stealing sweets. No possible amount of playing at robbers would ever bring him an inch nearer to thinking it is really right to rob. I saw the distinction perfectly clearly when I was a child; I wish I saw it half as clearly now. I played at being a robber for hours together at the end of the garden; but it never had anything to do with the temptation I had to sneak a new paint-box out of my father's room. I was not being anything false; I was simply writing before I could write. Fortunately, perhaps, for the condition of the back-garden, I early transferred my dreams to some rude resemblance to writing; chiefly in the form of drawing straggling and sprawling maps of fabulous countries, inhabited by men of incredible shapes and colours and bearing still more incredible names. But though I might fill the world with dragons, I never had the slightest real doubt that heroes ought to fight with dragons.

I must stop to challenge many child-lovers for cruelty to children. It is quite false to say that the child dislikes a fable that has a moral. Very often he likes the moral more than the fable. Adults are reading their own more weary mockery into a mind still vigorous enough to be entirely serious. Adults like the comic Sandford and Merton. Children liked the real Sandford and Merton. At least I know I liked it very much, and felt the heartiest faith in the Honest Farmer and the Noble Negro. I venture to dwell on the point if only in parenthesis: for on this also there is a current misunderstanding. Indeed there is what may be called a current cant; and none the less so because it is a cant against cant. It is now so common as to be conventional to express impatience with priggish and moralising stories for children; stories of the old-fashioned sort that concern things like the sinfulness of theft; and as I am recalling an old-fashioned atmosphere, I cannot refrain from testifying on the psychology of the business.

Now I must heartily confess that I often adored priggish and moralising stories. I do not suppose I should gain a subtle literary pleasure from them now; but that is not the point in question. The men who denounce such moralisings are men; they are not children. But I believe multitudes would admit their early affection for the moral tale, if they still had the moral courage. And the reason is perfectly simple. Adults have reacted against such morality, because they know that it often stands for immorality. They know that such platitudes have been used by hypocrites and pharisees, by cunning or perversion. But the child knows nothing about cunning or perversion. He sees nothing but the moral ideals themselves, and he simply sees that they are true. Because they are.

There is another blunder made by the modern cynic about the moralising story-teller. The former always imagines that there is an element of corruption, in his own cynical manner, about the idea of reward, about the position of the child who can say, as in Stevenson's verses, "Every day when I've been good, I get an orange after food." To the man made ignorant by experience this always appears as a vulgar bribe to the child. The modern philosopher knows that it would require a very large bribe indeed to induce him to be good. It therefore seems to the modern philosopher what it would seem to the modern politician to say, "I will give you fifty thousand pounds when you have, on some one definite and demonstrated occasion, kept your word." The solid price seems something quite distinct from the rare and reluctant labour. But it does not seem like that to the child. It would not seem like that to the child, if the Fairy Queen said to the Prince, "You will receive the golden apple from the magic tree when you have fought the dragon." For the child is not a Manichee. He does not think that good things are in their nature separate from being good. In other words, he does not, like the reluctant realist, regard goodness as a bad thing. To him the goodness and the gift and the golden apple, that is called an orange, are all parts of one substantial paradise and naturally go together. In other words, he regards himself as normally on amiable terms with the natural authorities; not normally as quarrelling or bargaining with them. He has the ordinary selfish obstacles and misunderstandings; but he does not, in his heart, regard it as odd that his parents should be good to him, to the extent of an orange, or that he should be good to them, to the extent of some elementary experiments in good behaviour. He has no sense of being corrupted. It is only we, who have eaten the forbidden apple (or orange) who think of pleasure as a bribe.

My main purpose here, however, is to say this. To me my whole childhood has a certain quality, which may be indescribable but is not in the least vague. It is rather more definite than the difference between pitch dark and daylight, or between having a toothache and not having a toothache. For the sequel of the story, it is necessary to attempt this first and hardest chapter of the story: and I must try to state somehow what I mean by saying that my own childhood was of quite a different kind, or quality, from the rest of my very undeservedly pleasant and cheerful existence.

Of this positive quality the most general attribute was clearness. Here it is that I differ, for instance, from Stevenson, whom I so warmly admire; and who speaks of the child as moving with his head in a cloud. He talks of the child as normally in a dazed daydream, in which he cannot distinguish fancy from fact. Now children and adults are both fanciful at times; but that is not what, in my mind and memory, distinguishes adults from children. Mine is a memory of a sort of white light on everything, cutting things out very clearly, and rather emphasising their solidity. The point is that the white light had a sort of wonder in it, as if the world were as new as myself; but not that the world was anything but a real world. I am much more disposed now to fancy that an apple-tree in the moonlight is some sort of ghost or grey nymph; or to see the furniture fantastically changing and crawling at twilight, as in some story of Poe or Hawthorne. But when I was a child I had a sort of confident astonishment in contemplating the apple-tree as an apple-tree. I was sure of it, and also sure of the surprise of it; as sure, to quote the perfect popular proverb, as sure as God made little apples. The apples might be as little as I was; but they were solid and so was I. There was something of an eternal morning about the mood; and I liked to see a fire lit more than to imagine faces in the firelight. Brother Fire, whom St. Francis loved, did seem more like a brother than those dream-faces which come to men who have known other emotions than brotherhood. I do not know whether I ever, as the phrase goes, cried for the moon; but I am sure that I should have expected it to be solid like some colossal snowball; and should always have had more appetite for moons than for mere moonshine. Only figures of speech can faintly express the fact; but it was a fact and not a figure of speech. What I said first about the toy theatre may be urged in contradiction, and as an example of delight in a mere illusion.

In that case, what I said first about the toy theatre will be entirely misunderstood. In fact, there was in that business nothing of an illusion or of a disillusion. If this were a ruthless realistic modern story, I should of course give a most heartrendering account of how my spirit was broken with disappointment, on discovering that the prince was only a painted figure. But this is not a ruthless realistic modern story. On the contrary, it is a true story. And the truth is that I do not remember that I was in any way deceived or in any way undeceived. The whole point is that I did like the toy theatre even when I knew it was a toy theatre. I did like the cardboard figures, even when I found they were of cardboard. The white light of wonder that shone on the whole business was not any sort of trick; indeed the things that now shine most in my memory were many of them mere technical accessories; such as the parallel sticks of white wood that held the scenery in place; a white wood that is still strangely mixed in my imaginative instincts with all the holy trade of the Carpenter. It was the same with any number of other games or pretences in which I took delight; as in the puppet-show of Punch and Judy. I not only knew that the figures were made of wood, but I wanted them to be made of wood. I could not imagine such a resounding thwack being given except by a wooden stick on a wooden head. But I took the sort of pleasure that a primitive man might have taken in a primitive craft, in seeing that they were carved and painted into a startling and grimacing caricature of humanity. I was pleased that the piece of wood was a face; but I was also pleased that the face was a piece of wood. That did not mean that the drama of wood, like the other drama of cardboard, did not reveal to me real ideas and imaginations, and give me glorious glimpses into the possibilities of existence. Of course the child did not analyse himself then; and the man cannot analyse him now. But I am certain he was not merely tricked or trapped. He enjoyed the suggestive function of art exactly as an art critic enjoys it; only he enjoyed it a jolly sight more. For the same reason I do not think that I myself was ever very much worried about Santa Claus, or that alleged dreadful whisper of the little boy that Father Christmas "is only your father." Perhaps the word "only" would strike all children as the mot juste.

My fixed idolatry of Punch and Judy illustrated the same fact and the same fallacy. I was not only grateful for the fun, but I came to feel grateful for the very fittings and apparatus of the fun; the four-cornered tower of canvas with the one square window at the top, and everything down to the minimum of conventional and obviously painted scenery. Yet these were the very things I ought to have torn and rent in rage, as the trappings of imposture, if I had really regarded the explanation as spoiling the experience. I was pleased, and not displeased, when I discovered that the magic figures could be moved by three human fingers. And I was right; for those three human fingers are more magical than any magic figures; the three fingers which hold the pen and the sword and the bow of the violin; the very three fingers that the priest lifts in benediction as the emblem of the Blessed Trinity. There was no conflict between the two magics in my mind.

I will here sum up in four statements, which will look very like puzzles upon this page. I can assure the reader that they have a relevance to the ultimate upshot of this book. Having littered the world with thousands of essays for a living, I am doubtless prone to let this story stray into a sort of essay; but I repeat that it is not an essay but a story. So much so, that I am here employing a sort of device from a detective story. In the first few pages of a police novel, there are often three or four hints rather to rouse curiosity than allay it; so that the curate's start of recognition, the cockatoo's scream in the night, the burnt blotting-paper or the hasty avoidance of the subject of onions is exhibited in the beginning though not explained until the end. So it is with the dull and difficult interlude of this chapter; a mere introspection about infancy which is not introspective. The patient reader may yet discover that these dark hints have something to do with the ensuing mystery of my misguided existence, and even with the crime that comes before the end. Anyhow, I will set them down here without discussion of anything which they foreshadow.

First; my life unfolded itself in the epoch of evolution; which really only means unfolding. But many of the evolutionists of that epoch really seemed to mean by evolution the unfolding of what is not there. I have since, in a special sense, come to believe in development, which means the unfolding of what is there. Now it may seem both a daring and a doubtful boast, if I claim that in my childhood I was all there. At least, many of those who knew me best were quite doubtful about it. But I mean that the distinctions I make here were all there; I was not conscious of them but I contained them. In short, they existed in infancy in the condition called implicit; though they certainly did not then express themselves in what is commonly called implicit obedience.

Second; I knew, for instance, that pretending is not deceiving. I could not have defined the distinction if it had been questioned; but that was because it had never occurred to me that it could be questioned. It was merely because a child understands the nature of art, long before he understands the nature of argument. Now it is still not uncommon to say that images are idols and that idols are dolls. I am content to say here that even dolls are not idols, but in the true sense images. The very word images means things necessary to imagination. But not things contrary to reason; no, not even in a child. For imagination is almost the opposite of illusion.

Third; I have noted that I enjoyed Punch and Judy as a drama and not a dream; and indeed the whole extraordinary state of mind I strive to recapture was really the very reverse of a dream. It was rather as if I was more wide-awake then than I am now, and moving in broader daylight, which was to our broad daylight what daylight is to dusk. Only, of course, to those seeing the last gleam of it through the dusk, the light looks more uncanny than any darkness. Anyhow, it looks quite different; of that I am absolutely and solidly certain; though in such a subjective matter of sensation there can be no demonstration. What was the real meaning of that difference? I have some sort of notion now; but I will not mention it at this stage of the story.

Fourth; it will be quite natural, it will also be quite wrong, to infer from all this that I passed a quite exceptionally comfortable childhood in complete contentment; or else that my memory is merely a sundial that has only marked the sunny hours. But that is not in the least what I mean; that is quite a different question. I was often unhappy in childhood like other children; but happiness and unhappiness seemed of a different texture or held on a different tenure. I was very often naughty in childhood like other children; and I never doubted for a moment the moral of all the moral tales; that, as a general principle, people ought to be unhappy when they have been naughty. That is, I held the whole idea of repentance and absolution implicit but not unfolded in my mind. To add to all this, I was by no means unacquainted with pain, which is a pretty unanswerable thing; I had a fair amount of toothache and especially earache; and few can bemuse themselves into regarding earache as a form of epicurean hedonism. But here again there is a difference. For some unaccountable reason, and in some indescribable way, the pain did not leave on my memory the sort of stain of the intolerable or mysterious that it leaves on the mature mind. To all these four facts I can testify; exactly as if they were facts like my loving a toy gun or climbing a tree. Their meaning, in the murder or other mystery, will appear later.

For I fear I have prolonged preposterously this note on the nursery; as if I had been an unconscionable time, not dying but being born, or at least being brought up. Well, I believe in prolonging childhood; and I am not sorry that I was a backward child. But I can only say that this nursery note is necessary if all the rest is to be anything but nonsense; and not even nursery nonsense. In the chapters that follow, I shall pass to what are called real happenings, though they are far less real. Without giving myself any airs of the adventurer or the globe-trotter, I may say I have seen something of the world; I have travelled in interesting places and talked to interesting men; I have been in political quarrels often turning into faction fights; I have talked to statesmen in the hour of the destiny of states; I have met most of the great poets and prose writers of my time; I have travelled in the track of some of the whirlwinds and earthquakes in the ends of the earth; I have lived in houses burned down in the tragic wars of Ireland; I have walked through the ruins of Polish palaces left behind by the Red Armies; I have heard talk of the secret signals of the Ku Klux Klan upon the borders of Texas; I have seen the fanatical Arabs come up from the desert to attack the Jews in Jerusalem. There are many journalists who have seen more of such things than I; but I have been a journalist and I have seen such things; there will be no difficulty in filling other chapters with such things; but they will be unmeaning, if nobody understands that they still mean less to me than Punch and Judy on Campden Hill.

In a word; I have never lost the sense that this was my real life; the real beginning of what should have been a more real life; a lost experience in the land of the living. It seems to me that when I came out of the house and stood on that hill of houses, where the roads sank steeply towards Holland Park, and terraces of new red houses could look out across a vast hollow and see far away the sparkle of the Crystal Palace (and seeing it was a juvenile sport in those parts), I was subconsciously certain then, as I am consciously certain now, that there was the white and solid road and the worthy beginning of the life of man; and that it is man who afterwards darkens it with dreams or goes astray from it in self-deception. It is only the grown man who lives a life of make-believe and pretending; and it is he who has his head in a cloud.

At this time, of course, I did not even know that this morning light could be lost; still less about any controversies as to whether it could be recovered. So far the disputes of that period passed over my head like storms high up in air; and as I did not foresee the problem I naturally did not foresee any of my searches for a solution. I simply looked at the procession in the street as I looked at the processions in the toy-theatre; and now and then I happened to see curious things, two-pence coloured rather than a penny plain, which were worthy of the wildest pageants of the toy-theatre. I remember once walking with my father along Kensington High Street, and seeing a crowd of people gathered by a rather dark and narrow entry on the southern side of that thoroughfare. I had seen crowds before; and was quite prepared for their shouting or shoving. But I was not prepared for what happened next. In a flash a sort of ripple ran along the line and all these eccentrics went down on their knees on the public pavement. I had never seen people play any such antics except in church; and I stopped and stared. Then I realised that a sort of little dark cab or carriage had drawn up opposite the entry; and out of it came a ghost clad in flames. Nothing in the shilling paint-box had ever spread such a conflagration of scarlet, such lakes of lake; or seemed so splendidly likely to incarnadine the multitudinous sea. He came on with all his glowing draperies like a great crimson cloud of sunset, lifting long frail fingers over the crowd in blessing. And then I looked at his face and was startled with a contrast; for his face was dead pale like ivory and very wrinkled and old, fitted together out of naked nerve and bone and sinew; with hollow eyes in shadow; but not ugly; having in every line the ruin of great beauty. The face was so extraordinary that for a moment I even forgot such perfectly scrumptious scarlet clothes.

We passed on; and then my father said, “Do you know who that was? That was Cardinal Manning.”

Then one of his artistic hobbies returned to his abstracted and humorous mind; and he said,

“He’d have made his fortune as a model.”

Chapter III: How to Be a Dunce

The change from childhood to boyhood, and the mysterious transformation that produces that monster the schoolboy, might be very well summed up in one small fact. To me the ancient capital letters of the Greek alphabet, the great Theta, a sphere barred across the midst like Saturn, or the great Upsilon, standing up like a tall curved chalice, have still a quite unaccountable charm and mystery, as if they were the characters traced in wide welcome over Eden of the dawn. The ordinary small Greek letters, though I am now much more familiar with them, seem to me quite nasty little things like a swarm of gnats. As for Greek accents, I triumphantly succeeded, through a long series of school-terms, in avoiding learning them at all; and I never had a higher moment of gratification than when I afterwards discovered that the Greeks never learnt them either. I felt, with a radiant pride, that I was as ignorant as Plato and Thucydides. At least they were unknown to the Greeks who wrote the prose and poetry that was thought worth studying; and were invented by grammarians, I believe, at the time of the Renaissance. But it is a simple psychological fact; that the sight of a Greek capital still fills me with happiness, the sight of a small letter with indifference tinged with dislike, and the accents with righteous indignation reaching the point of profanity. And I believe that the explanation is that I learnt the large Greek letters, as I learnt the large English letters, at home. I was told about them merely for fun while I was still a child; while the others I learnt during the period of what is commonly called education; that is, the period during which I was being instructed by somebody I did not know, about something I did not want to know.

But I say this merely to show that I was a much wiser and widerminded person at the age of six than at the age of sixteen. I do not base any educational theories upon it, heaven forbid. This work cannot, on some points, avoid being theoretical; but it need not add insult to injury by being educational. I certainly shall not, in the graceful modern manner, turn round and abuse my schoolmasters because I did not choose to learn what they were quite ready to teach. It may be that in the improved schools of today, the child is so taught that he crows aloud with delight at the sight of a Greek accent. But I fear it is much more probable that the new schools have got rid of the Greek accent by getting rid of the Greek. And upon that point, as it happens, I am largely on the side of my schoolmasters against myself. I am very glad that my persistent efforts not to learn Latin were to a certain extent frustrated; and that I was not entirely successful even in escaping the contamination of the language of Aristotle and Demosthenes. At least I know enough Greek to be able to see the joke, when somebody says (as somebody did the other day) that the study of that language is not suited to an age of democracy. I do not know what language he thought democracy came from; and it must be admitted that the word seems now to be a part of the language called journalese. But my only point for the moment is personal or psychological; my own private testimony to the curious fact that, for some reason or other, a boy often does pass, from an early stage when he wants to know nearly everything, to a later stage when he wants to know next to nothing. A very practical and experienced traveller, with nothing of the mystic about him, once remarked to me suddenly: "There must be something rottenly wrong with education itself. So many people have wonderful children and all the grown-up people are such duds." And I know what he meant; though I am in doubt whether my present duddishness is due to education, or to some deeper and more mysterious cause.

Boyhood is a most complex and incomprehensible thing. Even when one has been through it, one does not understand what it was. A man can never quite understand a boy, even when he has been the boy. There grows all over what was once the child a sort of prickly protection like hair; a callousness, a carelessness, a curious combination of random and quite objectless energy with a readiness to accept conventions. I have blindly begun a lark which involved carrying on literally like a lunatic; and known all the time that I did not know why I was doing it. When I first met my best friend in the playground, I fought with him wildly for three-quarters of an hour; not scientifically and certainly not vindictively (I had never seen him before and I have been very fond of him ever since) but by a sort of inexhaustible and insatiable impulse, rushing hither and thither about the field and rolling over and over in the mud. And all the time I believe that both our minds were entirely mild and reasonable; and when we desisted from sheer exhaustion, and he happened to quote Dickens or the Bab Ballads, or something I had read, we plunged into a friendly discussion on literature which has gone on, intermittently, from that day to this. There is no explaining these things; if those who have done them cannot explain them. But since then I have seen boys in many countries and even of many colours; Egyptian boys in the bazaars of Cairo or mulatto boys in the slums of New York. And I have found that by some primordial law they all tend to three things; to going about in threes; to having no apparent object in going about at all; and, almost invariably speaking, to suddenly attacking each other and equally suddenly desisting from the attack.

Some may still question my calling this conduct conventional, from a general impression that two bankers or business partners do not commonly roll each other head-over-heels for fun, or in a spirit of pure friendship. It might be retorted that two business partners are not always by any means such pure friends. But in any case, it is true to call the thing a convention in more than the verbal sense of a collision. And it is exactly this convention that really separates the schoolboy from the child. When I went to St. Paul’s School, in Hammersmith, there really was a sort of convention of independence; which was in a certain degree a false independence; because it was a false maturity. Here we must remember once more the fallacy about “pretending” in childhood. The child does not really pretend to be a Red Indian; any more than Shelley pretended to be a cloud or Tennyson to be a brook. The point can be tested by offering a political pamphlet to the cloud, a peerage to the brook, or a penny for sweets to the Red Bull of the Prairies. But the boy really is pretending to be a man; or even a man of the world; which would seem a far more horrific metamorphosis. Schoolboys in my time could be blasted with the horrible revelation of having a sister, or even a Christian name. And the deadly nature of this blow really consisted in the fact that it cracked the whole convention of our lives; the convention that each of us was on his own; an independent gentleman living on private means. The secret that each of us did in fact possess a family, and parents who paid for our support, was conventionally ignored and only revealed in moments of maddened revenge. But the point is that there was already a faint touch of corruption in this convention; precisely because it was more serious and less frank than the tarra-diddles of infancy. We had begun to be what no children are — snobs. Children disinfect all their dramatic impersonations by saying “Let us pretend.” We schoolboys never said “Let us pretend”; we only pretended.

Boys, I have said, wander in threes. Three is certainly the symbolic number for comradeship, even if it is not always exactly the same as friendship. I have had the good luck to enjoy both, as did the Three Musketeers, or the Three Soldiers of Mr. Kipling. The first of my friends, with whom I fought in the field, has since written the best detective story of modern times and still conceals a very powerful sense of humour under the almost impenetrable disguise of a writer on the Daily Telegraph. He was, and indeed still is, remarkable for the combination of an extraordinary gravity of visage with extreme agility and quickness of movement. I used to say that he had the head of a professor on the body of a harlequin. It was a poetic pleasure to see him walk, a little pompously, down the street and suddenly scale a lamp-post like a monkey, with the alleged intention of lighting a cigarette, and then drop down and resume his walk with an unchanged expression of earnestness and serenity. He had extraordinarily well-balanced brains and could do almost anything with them; even writing an ordinary leading article for a London daily. But he could write clear and unadulterated nonsense with the same serious simplicity. It was he who invented that severe and stately form of Free Verse which has since been known by his own second name as “the Clerihew” (his name is Edward Clerihew Bentley) or “Biography for Beginners”; which dates from our days at school, when he sat listening to a chemical exposition, with his rather bored air and blank sheet of blotting paper before him. On this he wrote, inspired by the limpid spirit of song, the unadorned lines,

Sir Humphrey Davy
Detested gravy.
He incurred the odium
Of discovering sodium.

Even in those days I used to draw pictures, or what were called pictures, to illustrate these biographical rhymes; though of course it was not till decades afterwards that we either of us had the notion of publishing a book, or of publishing anything. Long after we had both become incurable scribblers, we remained inconspicuous schoolboys; we never thought we could be anything else; I do not think we very clearly realised that we ever should be anything else; or that our schoolboy days would ever end. In that sense we were as unambitious as children whispering a secret language. Our jokes were all domestic or developed out of the daily affairs of the school; but they covered enough waste paper to stock a library. I remember an interminable romance, for which I was always drawing pictures, and which I still think had a touch of wild fancy. It arose merely from our walking behind three of the masters; two of them, who were young and tall, had between them a third, who was old and very small; so that there seemed a vague suggestion that they were supporting him. On this was based the great constructive theory that the elder master (who was one of the most important persons in the school) was in fact only a clock-work figure, which they carried about with them and wound up to go through his daily round. The dummy and the two conspirators were dragged through an endless reel of long-drawn (and badly drawn) adventures, some scraps of which must still be kicking about the world somewhere. But needless to say, we never thought of doing anything with them, except enjoying them. It has sometimes struck me as not being a bad thing to do with things.

My friend Bentley, indeed, had and has a natural talent for these elaborate strategic maps of nonsense, or the suggestion of such preposterous plots. It is something like the industry which accompanies the fantasy of Father Ronald Knox, when he makes a detailed map of the Barsetshire of Trollope or works out an incredible cryptogram to show that Queen Victoria wrote “In Memoriam.” I remember one day when the whole school assembled for a presentation to a master who was leaving us to take up a fellowship at Peterhouse. The congratulatory speech was made by one of the upper masters who happened to be a learned but heavy and very solemn old gentleman, whose manner and diction were alike ponderous and prosaic. My friend and I were sitting side by side, hopeless of any enlivenment except from the speaker’s solemnity; when the whole assembly was startled as by a thunderclap. The old gentleman had made a joke. What was even more shocking, it was quite a good joke. He remarked that, in sending our friend from this school to that college, we were robbing Paul to pay Peter. We looked at each other with a wild surmise. We shook our heads gravely. It could not be explained. But Bentley afterwards produced a most convincing and exhaustive explanation. He insisted that the elder schoolmaster had devoted his whole life to planning and preparations for that one joke. He had used his interest with the High Master to obtain for the junior master a place on the staff. He had intrigued with the University authorities to get him a Fellowship at that college. He had lived for that hour. He had now made his first and last joke; and probably would soon pass away in peace.

It was the third member of our original trio who brought into our secrets the breath of ambition and the air out of the great world. He was a dark and very thin youth, named Lucian Oldershaw, who looked and in some ways was very sensitive; but about those larger matters he was much less shy than we were. He was the son of an actor and had travelled about the country more than the rest of us; he had been to other schools and he knew much more of the variety of life. Above all, there possessed him, almost feverishly, a vast, amazing and devastating idea, the idea of doing something; of doing something in the manner of grown-up people, who were the only people who could be conceived as doing things. I well remember how my hair stood on end, when he first spoke casually about the official School Magazine; which was to me something like the School Prayers or the School Foundation. None of us had ever dreamed of contributing to it, any more than to the Encyclopedia Britannica. And my new friend, who was somewhat younger than I, spoke lightly about an old idea he had had of establishing some cooperation between all the great school magazines, those of Eton, Harrow, Winchester and the rest. If he had proposed that we should conquer and rule the British Empire, I could not have been more staggered; but he dismissed it as casually as he had called it up, and then proposed in cold blood that we should publish a magazine of our own; and have it printed at a real printer's. He must have possessed considerable persuasive powers; because we actually did. We also founded a small society of boys of our own age, and called it the Junior Debating Club; though nobody, so far as I know, has ever heard of the Senior Debating Club. There was the Union, to which you belonged when you were in the top form, as you did other lawful and appalling things, such as dining with the High Master. But we no more anticipated that at our age, than we anticipated death.

Our debates are still recorded in stray volumes of our strange little paper; the persons of the play being mysteriously represented by their initials, as if they were members of a secret society in a sensational novel; as "Mr. B. emphatically disputed the last speaker's statement," or "These remarks provoked an indignant protest from Mr. C." This and other deadly fascinations render these old volumes the favourite reading of my friend, Mr. Edward Fordham, who was himself a member of the club and delighted in decorating its chronicle with the most magnificent and florid journalese, and in making game in it of himself and others. He is still, I believe, especially attached to a passage in the reports which states, of one of the little boys who formed this society, "Mr. L.D. briefly described the

Governments of France, America, Germany, Austria, Italy and Spain." Sometimes, however, Fordham's own burlesque rhetoric recoiled on his own head. He described one of the innumerable riots of our tea-table by writing, "A penny bun of the sticky order caressingly stung the chairman's honoured cheek, sped on its errand of mercy by the unerring hand of Mr. F." I may remark that I was the chairman; and I was generally honoured in that way. But the printer avenged me; for he rendered the missile as "A peony but of the stick order"; a most suggestive botanical formula. It was the beginning of a long career of martyrdom from misprints; which reached its crown when I wrote of a Nonconformist minister, "a distinguished correspondent," and it came out as, "a distinguished co-respondent."

Our debating club was actually founded and did actually debate, if it can be called debating. This part of the matter did not alarm me much; for I had debated off and on ever since I was born; certainly with my brother, probably with my nurse. But, what was infinitely more bloodcurdling, our paper did actually appear in print; and I contributed to it turgid poems, in which bad imitations of Swinburne were so exactly balanced with worse imitations of the Lays of Ancient Rome, that many of my simpler friends fell under the illusion that I had a style of my own. I have never read those verses since; there are limits to the degradation and despair which even autobiography demands. But I must admit that, for whatever reason, they attracted a certain amount of attention; and our experiment began to float to the surface of the school life and come within range of official attention, which was the last thing I had ever desired. It is only right to say that the magazine contained probably better, and certainly better educated, poetry than mine. Among the small group of twelve that formed our society was Robert Vernede, who also imitated Swinburne, but who was capable of appreciating how well Swinburne imitated the Greek poets. It is melancholy and amusing to reflect that of all those eager Swinburnian echoes, I can only remember an echo of parody; in which the style of Vernède's first choruses, a la Atalanta, were rendered by Bentley in the form of a farewell to him when he departed from the tea-table:

Let the milk that was poured
Be the draught of the cat,
For from under the board
From the seat where he sat

The feet of his boots are departed;
he has widowed the hall of his hat.

Vernède and Bentley were very intimate; and had something in common in their union of immobility and activity; but the immobility of Vernède was not dry and earnest like the other; but somnolent and oriental, like that of a Buddha, or (as his early friends were more prone to inform him) of a cat. He had that oval, almost Japanese face that can be seen in some of the Southern French blood of which he came. He lived to be a fine and promising poet and to write, on the outbreak of the fighting, a noble invocation to the English Sea, which multitudes must still remember. But his full promise as a poet he did not keep; because he kept a better one, and is dead on the field of honour.

For the rest, it is very typical of the difference between the two or three types that the work of E. C. B., my first and in every sense original friend, was the only work in the whole paper which might have been published by the same person fifteen years afterwards. Whatever the other relative merits of our minds, his was by far the most mature; perhaps for the very reason that it largely confined itself to being critical or flippant. Anyhow, the nonsense fables that he wrote for the paper would have made excellent paragraphs in any real paper. There was nothing particularly juvenile about them and, of all men I have known, he is the man whose mind has least changed, has least lost its balance and, above all, had least of the first youthful blunders in finding its balance. He had also, as I have said, a sort of calm versatility; he could carry out other people’s plans and improve them; he could, as the phrase goes, turn his hand to anything. On this absurd little rag of a school paper, the original three wrote letters in rotation, in three imaginary characters; and I think his were the best. Twenty years later, when Belloc and I started a scheme of Ballades for the Eye Witness, Bentley was brought in afterwards, in the same fashion; and I think his were the best. But he was at this time and perhaps for long after, too detached and ironic to become conspicuous in connection with a cause, or any of the things in which youth is generally both communal and combative. When some of us were pretending to be Knights of the Round Table, he was content to be Dagonet the fool, or in other words, the wise man. And it was in the character of a portentously solemn buffoon that he began to draw the attention of the elders. When the old High Master of St. Paul’s School ran his eye through a version of the Dog in the Manger, which described the cattle as being prevented “from refreshing their inner cows” he went into unearthly convulsions of his own extraordinary laughter which, like the other movements of his extraordinary voice, began like an organ and ended like a penny whistle. “That boy looks at the world standing on his head,” said the High Master of St. Paul’s School; and instantly we were in the full blaze of the spot-light.

It is time that something should be said about the masters, and especially the High Master. Immensely important as we thought ourselves in comparison with those remote but respectable enemies, after all they did have something to do with the school. The most eccentric and entertaining of them, Mr. Elam, has already been sketched in brilliant black and white by the pen of Mr. Compton Mackenzie. I have forgotten whether Mr. Mackenzie mentioned what always struck me as the most disturbing eccentricity of that eccentric; the open derision with which he spoke of his own profession and position, of those who shared it with him and even of those who were set over him in its exercise. He would explain the difference between satire and the bitterness of the risus sardonicus by the helpful parable, “If I were walking along the street and fell down in the mud, I should laugh a sardonic laugh. But if I were to see the High Master of this school fall down in the mud, I should laugh a sarcastic laugh.” I chiefly mention his name here for another reason; because he once vented his scorn for what he called “the trade of an usher” in the form of a rhetorical question addressed to a boy: “Why are boys sent to school, Robinson?” Robinson, with downcast eyes and an air of offensive virtue, replied faintly, “To learn, sir.” “No, boy, no,” said the old gentleman wagging his head. “It was because one day at breakfast Mr. Robinson said to Mrs. Robinson, ‘My dear, we must do something about that boy. He’s a nuisance to me and he’s a nuisance to you and he’s a perfect plague to the servants.’” Then, with an indescribable extreme of grinding and grating contempt: “‘So we’ll Pay Some Man. . . .’”

I say I introduce this ancient anecdote for another reason; and it is partly because I would suggest another answer. If ever the problem troubled me in my boyhood, it did not force me in the direction of the lofty morality of Robinson. The idea that I had come to school to work was too grotesque to cloud my mind for an instant. It was also in too obvious a contrast with the facts and the result. I was very fond of my friends; though, as is common at such an age, I was much too fond of them to be openly emotional about it. But I do remember coming, almost seriously, to the conclusion that a boy must go to school to study the characters of his schoolmasters. And I still think that there was something in it. After all, the schoolmaster is the first educated grown-up person that the boy comes to see constantly, after having been introduced at an early age to his father and mother. And the masters at St. Paul's were very interesting; even those of them who were not so obviously eccentric as the celebrated Mr. Elam. To one very distinguished individual, my own personal debt is infinite; I mean, the historian of the Indian Mutiny and of the campaigns of Caesar — Mr. T. Rice Holmes. He managed, heaven knows how, to penetrate through my deep and desperately consolidated desire to appear stupid; and discover the horrible secret that I was, after all, endowed with the gift of reason above the brutes. He would suddenly ask me questions a thousand miles away from the subject at hand, and surprise me into admitting that I had heard of the Song of Roland, or even read a play or two of Shakespeare. Nobody who knows anything of the English schoolboy at that date will imagine that there was at the moment any pleasure in such prominence or distinction. We were all hag-ridden with a horror of showing off, which was perhaps the only coherent moral principal we possessed. There was one boy, I remember, who was so insanely sensitive on this point of honour, that he could hardly bear to hear one of his friends answer an ordinary question right. He felt that his comrade really ought to have invented some mistake, in the general interest of comradeship. When my information about the French epic was torn from me, in spite of my efforts, he actually put his head in his desk and dropped the lid on it, groaning in a generous and impersonal shame and faintly and hoarsely exclaiming, "Oh, shut it. ... Oh, shut up!" He was an extreme exponent of the principle; but it was a principle which I fully shared. I can remember running to school in sheer excitement repeating militant lines of "Marmion" with passionate emphasis and exultation; and then going into class and repeating the same lines in the lifeless manner of a hurdy-gurdy, hoping that there was nothing whatever in my intonation to indicate that I distinguished between the sense of one word and another.

Nobody, I think, ever got past my guard in this matter except Mr. T. R. Holmes and Mr. R. F. Cholmeley, who afterwards became the house-master of my two intimate friends, and who, I am glad to say, has often joined us in later years in our reunions of remembrance. But, somehow or other, a rumour must have begun to circulate among the authorities that we were not such fools as we looked. One day, to my consternation, the High Master stopped me in the street and led me along, roaring in my deafened and bewildered ears that I had a literary faculty which might come to something if somebody could give it solidity. Some time after that, to my cowering terror, he bellowed aloud to a whole crowd of parents and other preposterous intruders, on the occasion of a prize day, that our little magazine showed signs of considerable talent, though it was an unofficial publication on which he "might have hesitated to set his Imprimatur". Somehow we felt it would have been even more crushing if he had set his Imprimatur. It sounded like the thumb of a giant.

Frederick Walker, Head Master of Manchester and afterwards High Master of St. Paul's School, was, as most people know by this time, a very remarkable man. He was the sort of man who may live in anecdotes, like Dr. Johnson; indeed in some respects he was not unlike Dr. Johnson. He was like him in the startling volume of his voice, in his heavy face and figure, and in a certain tendency to explode at what did not seem to be exactly the appropriate moment; he would talk with perfect good humour and rationality and rend the roof over what seemed a trifle. In essential matters, however, his hard-hitting was generally quite right; and had even about it a homely and popular character, that somehow smacked of the north country. It is he of whom the famous tale is told that, when a fastidious lady wrote to ask him what was the social standing of the boys at his school, he replied, "Madam, so long as your son behaves himself and the fees are paid, no questions will be asked about his social standing."

One day I was frozen with astonishment to find my name in an announcement on the notice-board, saying that I was to be accorded the privileges of the highest form, though I did not belong to it. It produced in me a desire to be accorded the privileges and protection of the coal-cellar and never to come out again. At the same time I learned that a special branch of the highest form had actually been created for my two principal friends, in order that they might study for History Scholarships at the Universities. All this seemed like the very universe breaking up and turning topsy-turvy; and indeed all sorts of things happened about this time that seemed to be quite outside the laws of nature. I got a prize, for instance; what was called the Milton Prize for what was called a prize poem; I imagine it was about as bad as all other prize poems, but I am happy to say that I cannot recall a single syllable of it. I do, however recall the subject, not without a faint thrill of irony; for the subject was St. Francis Xavier, the great Jesuit who preached to the Chinese. I recall these things, so contrary to the previous course of my school life, because I am not sorry to be an exception to the modern tendency to reproach the old Victorian schoolmaster with stupidity and neglect and to represent the rising generation as a shining band of Shelleys inspired by light and liberty to rise. The truth is that in this case it was I who exhibited the stupidity; though I really think it was largely an affected stupidity. And certainly it was I who rejoiced in the neglect, and who asked for nothing better than to be neglected. It was, if anything, the authorities who dragged me, in my own despite, out of the comfortable and protected atmosphere of obscurity and failure. Personally, I was perfectly happy at the bottom of the class.

For the rest, I think the chief impression I produced, on most of the masters and many of the boys, was a pretty well-founded conviction that I was asleep. Perhaps what nobody knew, not even myself, was that I was asleep and dreaming. The dreams were not much more sensible or valuable than they commonly are in persons in such profound slumber; but they already had this obscure effect on my existence; that my mind was already occupied, though I myself was idle. Before forming the few special friendships of which I speak, I was somewhat solitary; not sharply unpopular or in any sense persecuted, but solitary. But though I was solitary, I was not sorry; and I think I can claim that I was not sulky. One effect of this was that my first acquaintances, as distinct from my ultimate friends, were odd and scrappy sort of people like myself. These individuals were accidents; one or two of them I fear were disasters. I remember one youth who made one appearance in my daily life, that puzzled me like a detective story. I cannot imagine how I came to cultivate his society; still less how he came to cultivate mine. For he was a brilliant mathematician, and must presumably have worked hard at mathematics; whereas I worked less at mathematics, if possible, than at anything else. Moreover, I was very untidy and he was very tidy, with a large clean collar and an Eton jacket, also a large head very neatly brushed but something odd and perhaps too mature about his froglike face. One day he asked me whether I could lend him a Hall & Knight’s Algebra. So far as enthusiasm for that study was concerned I could answer, “Thy need is greater than mine,” with all the gesture of Sir Philip Sidney; but I had to observe some minimum of attention to the mathematical class; so in lending him the book, I told him I should want it back some time next week. As the time approached, I was much mystified by the fact that I found it quite difficult to get it back. He gave evasive replies; he interposed postponements and hazy promises; till at last I quarrelled with him, using the words of action which are really commoner among schoolboys as words than as actions; but anyhow indicating that I should make an earnest effort to punch his head. To this threat, he ultimately capitulated; and eventually led me to his locker, which he reluctantly opened. And his locker was stuffed from top to bottom with about twenty-five identical copies of Hall & Knight's Algebra, which he had presumably collected by similar arts from similar acquaintances. I believe he left the school later, without any particular scandal; and I hope the poor fellow recovered his mental balance somewhere else. I write in no superior spirit; I was quite capable myself at many early stages of going mad in a quiet way; but not by an exaggerated appetite for Hall & Knight's Algebra.

There was another little boy with whom I walked to school in the same fortuitous fellowship; a very prim and proper little boy, as became the son of the venerable and somewhat ponderous clergyman who held one of the highest scholastic posts in the school. He also was very neat, he also was quite an industrious pupil; and he also had a peculiarity. He was the most fertile, fluent and really disinterested liar I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. There was nothing base or materialistic about his mendacity; he was not trying to cheat anybody or to get anything; he simply boasted like Baron Munchausen in quiet and even tones all the way from Holland Park to Hammersmith. He told the most staggering stories about himself, without lifting his voice or showing the faintest embarrassment; and there was nothing else notable about him at all. I have often wondered what became of him; and whether he followed his father into the Church. It may be retorted by the light-minded, that he may have fallen so low as to write stories, even crime stories, like myself; which some regard as almost tantamount to joining the criminal classes. But I do not believe any of his stories would be probable enough for fiction.

Perhaps the same chapter of accidents, that threw me first in the way of these human curiosities, was responsible for another social accident, of which I am very glad; for it led to my seeing both sides of a very difficult social question; about which a great deal of nonsense is talked on both sides; and the worst nonsense of all by those who talk as if there were no question at all. It must be explained that St. Paul’s School, in schoolboy language, was more than most others a school of “swots.” I need hardly clear myself of the charge of swottishness; and, of course, there were many lazy boys, and some almost as lazy as I. But the diligent type was in a larger proportion than is usual; for the school was chiefly celebrated for winning scholarships at the Universities, rather than for athletics or other forms of fame. And there was another reason why this particular type was conspicuous. To put the point in popular language, there were a great many swots partly because there were a great many Jews.

Oddly enough, I lived to have later on the name of an Anti-Semite; whereas from my first days at school I very largely had the name of a Pro-Semite. I made many friends among the Jews, and some of these I have retained as life-long friends; nor have our relations ever been disturbed by differences upon the political or social problem. I am glad that I began at this end; but I have not really ended any differently from the way in which I began. I held by instinct then, and I hold by knowledge now, that the right way is to be interested in Jews as Jews; and then to bring into greater prominence the very much neglected Jewish virtues, which are the complement and sometimes even the cause of what the world feels to be the Jewish faults. For instance, one of the great Jewish virtues is gratitude. I was criticised in early days for quixotry and priggishness in protecting Jews; and I remember once extricating a strange swarthy little creature with a hooked nose from being bullied, or rather being teased; for the worst torture really consisted of his being lightly tossed from one boy to another amid wild stares of wide-eyed scientific curiosity and questions like, “What is it?” and “Is it alive?” Thirty years afterwards, when that little goblin was a great grown bearded man, utterly remote from me in type and trade and interests and opinions, he had a sort of permanent fountain of thanks for that trifling incident, which was quite embarrassing. In the same way, I noted that strong family bond among the Jews which, as I recognized, was not merely disguised but denied among most normal schoolboys. Doubtless, I came to know the Jews because in this sense they were a little abnormal, as I was then becoming a little abnormal myself. Yet there is nothing I have come to count more normal, and nothing I desire more to restore to its normal place, than those two things; the family and the theory of thanks. And then, in the light of these virtues as seen from within, it was often possible to understand the origin and even the justification of much of the Anti-Semitic criticism from without. For it is often the very loyalty of the Jewish family which appears as disloyalty to the Christian state. As the reader will realise before the end, it was partly what I admired in private friends, especially in two brothers named Solomon, which I came ultimately to denounce in political enemies, in two brothers named Isaacs. The first were good by every standard, the second vulnerable even by their own standard: and yet they had the same virtue.

I am not at all ashamed of having asked Aryans to have more patience with Jews or for having asked Anglo-Saxons to have more patience with Jew-baiters. The whole problem of the two entangled cultures and traditions is much too deep and difficult, on both sides, to be decided impatiently. But I have very little patience with those who will not solve the problem, on the ground that there is no problem to solve. I cannot explain the Jews; but I certainly will not explain them away. Nor have the Jews a worse enemy than the sort of Jew sceptic who sometimes tries to explain himself away. I have seen a whole book full of alternative theories of the particular historic cause of such a delusion about a difference; that it came from mediaeval priests or was burnt into us by the Inquisition; that it was a tribal theory arising out of Teutonism; that it was revolutionary envy of the few Jews who happened to be the big bankers of Capitalism; that it was Capitalist resistance to the few Jews who happened to be the chief founders of Communism. All these separate theories are false in separate ways; as in forgetting that mediaeval heresy hunts spared Jews more and not less than Christians; or that Capitalism and Communism are so very nearly the same thing, in ethical essence, that it would not be strange if they did take leaders from the same ethnological elements. But broadly, the evasions are contrary to common sense; as they were contrary even to the common sense of a boy of thirteen. I do not believe that a crowd on a race-course is poisoned by mediaeval theology; or the navvies in a Mile End pub misled by the ethnology of Gobineau or Max Müller; nor do I believe that a mob of little boys fresh from the cricket-field or the tuckshop were troubled about Marxian economics or international finance. Yet all these people recognise Jews as Jews when they see them; and the schoolboys recognised them, not with any great hostility except in patches; but with the integration of instinct. What they saw was not Semites or Schismatics or capitalists or revolutionists, but foreigners; only foreigners that were not called foreigners. This did not prevent friendship and affection, especially in my own case; but then it never has prevented it in the case of ordinary foreigners. One of these early friends of mine, now Professor of Latin at University College, happened to have all the Jewish virtues, and also all the others there are; he afterwards became a member of the little club already described; and passed through Oxford with distinction; probably greater distinction than my other friends.

Most of the members of our little club, however, thus passed on to the older Universities and were promising figures either on the academic or social and political side; two of them being Presidents of the Oxford and two of the Cambridge Union. Oldershaw, characteristically enough, was almost instantly found immersed and entangled in the establishment of yet another unofficial paper, called the J.C.R., in which were not a few memorable curiosities of literature; including the first work of a pen then unknown to me, but recognisable enough now in lines like, “We slumbered on the firelit ground beside the guns in Burgundy.” Bentley, on being requested by a poetical lady to write something suitable to Wordsworth’s Seat, did not relax his rigid flippancy and composed the simple lines that end:

It seems a pity certainly
That two such men as we
By such a trifle as the Grave
Should separated be.
’Twas ever thus; we might have had
A pleasant afternoon,
But Man is always born too late
Or else he dies too soon.

while Lawrence Solomon, the learned Jewish friend of whom I have spoken, wrote about the best of the parodies of FitzGerald’s Omar, then a fashionable theme, warning undergraduates not to expect a Blue or a First: “For these were not for me; how should they be for you?” As a fact, I think he did get a First; but all of them must have lived to realise the further moral:

For them that win and them that lose the game
For you, for me, the ending is the same,
To climb the stairs to our old College room
Look o’er the door; and see another’s name.

There seemed a general tendency of these schoolfellows of mine to excel in light verse; Fordham, who went to Cambridge, has written many satiric lyrics which have been published and many satiric dramas which ought to be published. If I wind up here some of the stories of my old friends, it is not because I dismiss them from my memories, but because I must admit a multitude of much less interesting people into my memoirs. One contrast in their subsequent careers has always struck me as a curious case of the incalculable individuality and freewill of man. A friend of Fordham, normal, virile and ambitious, popular rather in the sense of fashionable, always struck me as the sort of man who could wear a uniform in camp or court, serving the obvious virtues. When the Great War came, he became an uncompromising and unconventional Pacifist agitator. Another, a friend of Vernède, one of those rare spiritual types in which a Puritan tradition has really flowered into a full Hellenic culture, is the most unselfish man I ever knew in my life, of the sort that is still unsatisfied even with its own unselfishness. I should say he was something rather like a saint; but I should never have been surprised if he had been a Conscientious Objector. As a fact, he went to the Front in a flash like fire; and had his leg shot off in his first battle.

But all this time very queer things were groping and wrestling inside my own undeveloped mind; and I have said nothing of them in this chapter; for it was the sustained and successful effort of most of my school life to keep them to myself. I said farewell to my friends when they went up to Oxford and Cambridge; while I, who was at that time almost wholly taken up with the idea of drawing pictures, went to an Art School and brought my boyhood to an end.

Chapter IV: How to Be a Lunatic

I deal here with the darkest and most difficult part of my task; the period of youth which is full of doubts and morbidities and temptations; and which, though in my case mainly subjective, has left in my mind for ever a certitude upon the objective solidity of Sin. And before I deal with it in any detail, it is necessary to make a prefatory explanation upon one point. In the matter of religion, I have been much concerned with controversies about rather provocative problems; and have finally adopted a position which to many is itself a provocation. I have grieved my well-wishers, and many of the wise and prudent, by my reckless course in becoming a Christian, an orthodox Christian, and finally a Catholic in the sense of a Roman Catholic. Now in most of the matters of which they chiefly disapprove, I am not in the least ashamed of myself. As an apologist I am the reverse of apologetic. So far as a man may be proud of a religion rooted in humility, I am very proud of my religion; I am especially proud of those parts of it that are most commonly called superstition. I am proud of being fettered by antiquated dogmas and enslaved by dead creeds (as my journalistic friends repeat with so much pertinacity), for I know very well that it is the heretical creeds that are dead, and that it is only the reasonable dogma that lives long enough to be called antiquated. I am very proud of what people call priestcraft; since even that accidental term of abuse preserves the mediaeval truth that a priest, like every other man, ought to be a craftsman. I am very proud of what people call Mariolatry; because it introduced into religion in the darkest ages that element of chivalry which is now being belatedly and badly understood in the form of feminism. I am very proud of being orthodox about the mysteries of the Trinity or the Mass; I am proud of believing in the Confessional; I am proud of believing in the Papacy.

But I am not proud of believing in the Devil. To put it more correctly, I am not proud of knowing the Devil. I made his acquaintance by my own fault; and followed it up along lines which, had they been followed further, might have led me to devil-worship or the devil knows what. On this doctrine, at least, there is, mingling with my knowledge, no shadow of self-satisfaction any more than of self-deception. On this one matter, a man may well be intellectually right only through being morally wrong. I am not impressed by the ethical airs and graces of sceptics on most of the other subjects. I am not over-awed by a young gentleman saying that he cannot submit his intellect to dogma; because I doubt whether he has even used his intellect enough to define dogma. I am not impressed very seriously by those who call Confession cowardly; for I gravely doubt whether they themselves would have the courage to go through with it. But when they say, “Evil is only relative. Sin is only negative. There is no positive badness; it is only the absence of positive goodness” — then I know that they are talking shallow balderdash only because they are much better men than I; more innocent and more normal and more near to God.

What I may call my period of madness coincided with a period of drifting and doing nothing; in which I could not settle down to any regular work. I dabbled in a number of things; and some of them may have had something to do with the psychology of the affair. I would not for a moment suggest it as a cause, far less as an excuse, but it is a contributory fact that among these dabblings in this dubious time, I dabbled in Spiritualism without having even the decision to be a Spiritualist. Indeed I was, in a rather unusual manner, not only detached but indifferent. My brother and I used to play with planchette, or what the Americans call the ouija board; but we were among the few, I imagine, who played in a mere spirit of play. Nevertheless I would not altogether rule out the suggestion of some that we were playing with fire; or even with hell-fire. In the words that were written for us there was nothing ostensibly degrading, but any amount that was deceiving. I saw quite enough of the thing to be able to testify, with complete certainty, that something happens which is not in the ordinary sense natural, or produced by the normal and conscious human will. Whether it is produced by some subconscious but still human force, or by some powers, good, bad or indifferent, which are external to humanity, I would not myself attempt to decide. The only thing I will say with complete confidence, about that mystic and invisible power, is that it tells lies. The lies may be larks or they may be lures to the imperilled soul or they may be a thousand other things; but whatever they are, they are not truths about the other world; or for that matter about this world.

I will give one or two examples. We asked planchette, in our usual random fashion, what advice it would give to an acquaintance of ours, a solid and rather dull Member of Parliament who had the misfortune to be an authority on education. Planchette wrote down with brazen promptitude (in these later times it was always very prompt, though not always very clear) the simple words, “Get a divorce.” The wife of the politician was so respectable, and I will add so hideous, that the materials of a scandalous romance seemed to be lacking. So we sternly enquired of our familiar spirit what the devil he meant; possibly an appropriate invocation. The result was rather curious. It wrote down very rapidly an immensely and indeed incredibly long word, which was at first quite illegible. It wrote it again; it wrote it four or five times; it was always quite obviously the same word; and towards the end it was apparent that it began with the three letters “0. R. R.” I said, “This is all nonsense; there is no word in the English language beginning 0. R. R., let alone a word as long as that.” Finally it tried again and wrote the word out quite clearly; and it ran, “Orriblerevelationsinighlife”.

If it was our subconsciousness, our subconsciousness at least had a simple sense of humour. But that it was our subconsciousness rather than our consciousness (if it was not something outside both) is proved by the practical fact that we did go on puzzling over the written word, when it was again and again rewritten, and really never had a notion of what it was, until it burst upon us at last. Nobody who knew us, I think, would suppose us capable of playing such a long and solemn and silly deception on each other. We also, like our subconsciousness, had a sense of humour. But cases of this kind fill me with wonder and a faint alarm, when I consider the number of people who seem to be taking spirit communications seriously, and founding religions and moral philosophies upon them. There would indeed have been some Orrible Revelations in Igh Life, and some Orrible Revelations about our own mental state and moral behaviour, if we had trotted off to the M.P. with our little message from the higher sphere.

Here is another example of the same thing. My father, who was present while my brother and I were playing the fool in this fashion, had a curiosity to see whether the oracle could answer a question about something that he knew and we did not. He therefore asked the maiden name of the wife of an uncle of mine in a distant country; a lady whom we of the younger generation had never known. With the lightning decision of infallibility, the spirit pen said, “Manning”. With equal decision my father said, “Nonsense”. We then reproached our tutelary genius with its lamentable romancing and its still more lamentable rashness. The spirit, never to be beaten, wrote down the defiant explanation, “Married before”. And to whom, we asked with some sternness, had our remote but respected aunt been secretly married before. The inspired instrument instantly answered, “Cardinal Manning”.

Now I will pause here in passing to ask what exactly would have happened to me and my social circle, what would have ultimately been the state of my mind or my general conception of the world in which I lived, if I had taken these spiritual revelations as some spiritualists seem to take some spiritual revelations; in short, if we had taken them seriously? Whether this sort of thing be the pranks of some Puck or Poltergeist, or the jerks of some subliminal sense, or the mockery of demons or anything else, it obviously is not true in the sense of trustworthy. Anybody who had trusted it as true would have landed very near to a lunatic asylum. And when it comes to selecting a spiritual philosophy, among the sects and schools of the modern world these facts can hardly be entirely forgotten. Curiously enough, as I have already recorded, Cardinal Manning had crossed my path as a sort of flaming wraith even in my childhood. Cardinal Manning’s portrait hangs now at the end of my room as a symbol of a spiritual state which many would call my second childhood. But anyone would admit that both states are rather saner than my condition would have been, had I begun to dig up The Crime of the Cardinal, by delving in the distant past of a colonial aunt.

Well, even the guidance of higher and wiser intelligences in a better world did not drive me quite so raving mad as that. But I have sometimes fancied since that this practice, of the true psychology of which we really know so little, may possibly have contributed towards the disturbed or even diseased state of brooding and idling through which I passed at the time. I would not dogmatise either way; it is possible that it had nothing to do with it; it is possible that the whole thing was merely mechanical or accidental. I would leave planchette with a playful farewell, giving her the benefit of the doubt; I would allow that she may have been a joke or a fancy or a fairy or anything else; with the proviso that I would not touch her again with a barge-pole. There are other aspects, concerning things much more my own fault, in which a barge-pole would have been useful; but I may as well finish here the trail of my merely trivial and accidental relations to psychical research; as there will be no need to return to that aspect of it; and I should never think of judging it seriously by such trifles. This progress of the preternatural has gone on spreading and strengthening through my whole life. Indeed my life happens to cover the precise period of the real change; not realised by those occupied only with later changes or alternative spiritual solutions. When I was quite a boy, practically no normal person of education thought that a ghost could possibly be anything but a turnip-ghost; a thing believed in by nobody but the village idiot. When I was a young man, practically every person with a large circle had one or two friends with a fancy for what would still have been called mediums and moonshine. When I was middle-aged, great men of science of the first rank like Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge claimed to have studied spirits as they might have studied spiders, and discovered ectoplasm exactly as they discovered protoplasm. At the time I write, the thing has grown into a considerable religious movement, by the activity of the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, much less of a scientist, but much more of a journalist. I hope nobody will think me such a fool as to offer these fragments of random experience as affecting the real controversy. In the controversy, indeed, through most of my life, I have defended Spiritualism against scepticism; though I should now naturally defend Catholicism even against Spiritualism. But in the times of which I am writing, little crossed our path except stray stories; and the phantoms were sometimes rather phantasmal. There was some talk of wraiths or presences precipitated into distant places, which included a story about a man seen going into a public house who afterwards testified that he had not been present in the body in any such place or for any such errand. There were plenty of other and more plausible stories, which my brother and I repeated with a sort of vague vicarious excitement, without any definite deduction or doctrine; but my father, whose placid Victorian agnosticism on the point we strove in vain to pierce, would listen to a roll of spiritual revelations and shake his head and say, “Ah, it s all very well to talk about these lights and trumpets and voices; but I pin my faith to the man who said he didn’t go into the public-house.”

Most of this happened when I was at the art school; but even when I had left it, this very casual connection was continued, in a queer way, by the coincidence that I worked for a short time in the office of a publisher who rather specialised in spiritualistic and theosophical literature, known under the general title of the occult. It was not entirely my fault, if it was not the fault of the real spiritualists or other real spirits, if I blundered into rather queer and uncomfortable corners of Spiritualism. On my first day in the office I had my first insight into the occult; for I was very vague about the business, as about most other businesses. I knew we had just published a big and vigorously boomed book of the Life and Letters of the late Dr. Anna Kingsford, of whom I had never heard, though many of our customers seemed to have heard of hardly anybody else. My full enlightenment came when a distraught lady darted into the office and began to describe her most complex spiritual symptoms and to demand the books most suited to her complaint, which I was quite incompetent to select. I timidly offered the monumental Life and Letters; but she shrank away with something like a faint shriek. “No, no,” she cried, “I mustn’t! Anna Kingsford says I mustn’t.” Then, with more control, “Anna Kingsford told me this morning that I must not read her Life; it would be very bad for me, she said, to read her Life.” I ventured to say, or stammer, with all the crudity of common speech, “But Anna Kingsford is dead.” “She told me this morning,” repeated the lady, “that I must not read the book.” “Well,” I said, “I hope Dr. Kingsford hasn’t been giving that advice to many people; it would be rather bad for the business. It seems rather malicious of Dr. Kingsford.”

I soon found that malicious was a mild word for Dr. Anna Kingsford. With all respect to her shade, which is to me the shadow of a shade, I should have said then, and I think I should say now, that the more charitable word was “mad.” I mention the matter here because, while it involves no contradiction of the cosmic theory of Spiritualism, it does illustrate the accident by which I bumped into a queer sort of Spiritualist; and it has some relation to a more general view of reason and religion. The lady celebrated in this book was at least queer. Her boast was that she had killed a number of men merely by thinking about them; her excuse was that they were men who defended vivisection. She also had very visionary but very intimate interviews with various eminent public men, apparently in places of torment; I remember one with Mr. Gladstone, in which a discussion about Ireland and the Sudan was interrupted by Mr. Gladstone gradually growing red-hot from inside. “Feeling that he would wish to be alone,” said Dr. Anna Kingsford with delicacy, “I passed out”; and she must now, I fear, pass out of this fragmentary narrative. I hope I do her no injustice; I am fairly sure she was full of many generous enthusiasms; but I pin my faith, as my father would say, to that fine tact and sense of social decorum, which told her that turning completely red-hot is what no gentleman would desire to do in the presence of a lady.

On the whole, the jolliest Spiritualist I ever met, at least until long afterwards, and the psychic enquirer for whom I felt the most immediate sympathy, was a man who firmly believed that he had once got a successful tip for the Derby out of some medium somewhere, and was still pursuing mediums for information of the same kind. I suggested to him that he should purchase The Pink ‘un and turn it into a paper combining the two interests, and sold at every bookstall under the name of The Sporting and Spiritual Times. This, I said, could not fail to lift bookmakers and jockeys into a loftier sphere of spiritual contemplation, not to mention owners, who probably need it quite as much; while it would give to Spiritualism a sound, shrewd and successful business side, vastly increase its popularity, and give to some of its followers an indefinable air of contact with concrete objective matters and what is coarsely called common sense, which some of them, as I felt at the time, seemed in some fashion to lack. I need not speculate on it here.

For the rest, while I am on the topic, I may assure the reader that I have never experienced anything called psychical, which might be a desperate excuse for my subsequent belief in the things called spiritual. I have hardly happened to strike even the queer psychic coincidences that strike almost anybody; unless we count the story treasured in my household as that of the Wraith of Sarolea. Dr. Sarolea, that fiery Flemish Professor of French, is certainly one of the most striking men I have known; but he never struck my path till long afterwards; but it is undoubtedly the fact that we were expecting him to dinner and my wife beheld the unmistakable long figure and pointed beard from a window; after which he vanished utterly from the landscape. What made the story really creepy was that just afterwards a very young Scotsman appeared at the door, asking for Dr. Sarolea. The Scotsman remained to dinner; but not the wraith. He was to have come down with the wraith; who (as it turned out afterwards) had awaited him with some irritation at the National Liberal Club. One theory was that his rage had precipitated his astral body down to Beaconsfield, but was spent just before he reached the house. Another obvious theory, which my more materialistic mind naturally preferred, was that he had been murdered by the young man and hidden in the pond in my garden; but subsequent detective search found this to be unsound. I only mention my alternative theory, which I very much prefer, because it is impossible to mention Dr. Sarolea, even at this premature stage of the story, without saying something about him. Dr. Sarolea is one of the most learned linguists in Europe; he learns a new language every week or so. His library is one of the wonders of the world, not to say the monstrosities of the world. When last I saw him he gave me the impression of buying the neighbouring houses right and left to find room for his library. What, I asked myself, what is more probable than that a man of this sort should find himself in later life in the exact position of Faust? And what is more reasonable, what more probable, than that Mephistopheles should have met him at the corner of the road as he came up from Beaconsfield station; and propounded the old contract, by which, with a single blast of magic, he should be turned into the handsome young man who a moment later was knocking at my door? This psychic theory would be supported by the fact that the young man is now doing well in politics; and quite unshaken, of course, by the fact that Dr. Sarolea (I am happy to say) is still alive and active in Edinburgh. The only difficulty about it is one which also affects my triumphant theory that Shakespeare wrote Bacon (controversially far stronger than the converse), which paralysed my father's faith in the story of the public-house; and leads me to suspect that this rather odd incident was one of those fairly ordinary oddities; as when we mistake a stranger for a friend; and then meet the friend afterwards. In short, the only objection to my complete and convincing psychic theory is that I do not believe a word of it.

All this, of course, happened ages afterwards: I only mention it here in order to disclaim any intention of taking my psychic experience seriously. But touching that early period directly described in this chapter, I have the same reason for alluding to the topic. I merely begin with this example of amateur psychical research, because the very fact that I indulged in it without reason and without result, that I did not come to any conclusion, or really even try to come to any conclusion, illustrates the fact that this is a period of life in which the mind is merely dreaming and drifting; and often drifting onto very dangerous rocks.

In this chapter, the period covered is roughly that of my going to an art school and is doubtless also coloured by the conditions of such a place. There is nothing harder to learn than painting and nothing which most people take less trouble about learning. An art school is a place where about three people work with feverish energy and everybody else idles to a degree that I should have conceived unattainable by human nature. Moreover those who work are, I will not say the least intelligent, but, by the very nature of the case, for the moment the most narrow; those whose keen intelligence is for the time narrowed to a strictly technical problem. They do not want to be discursive and philosophical; because the trick they are trying to learn is at once incommunicable and practical; like playing the violin Thus philosophy is generally left to the idle; and it is generally a very idle philosophy. In the time of which I write it was also a very negative and even nihilistic philosophy. And though I never accepted it altogether, it threw a shadow over my mind and made me feel that the most profitable and worthy ideas were, as it were on the defensive. I shall have more to say of this aspect of the matter later on; the point is for the moment that an art school can be a very idle place and that I was then a very idle person.

Art may be long but schools of art are short and very fleeting, and there have been five or six since I attended an art school. Mine was the time of Impressionism; and nobody dared to dream there could be such a thing as Post-Impressionism or Post-Post-Impressionism. The very latest thing was to keep abreast of Whistler and take him by the white forelock, as if he were Time himself. Since then that conspicuous white forelock has rather faded into a harmony of white and grey and what was once so young has in its turn grown hoary. But 1 think there was a spiritual significance in Impressionism, in connection with this age as the age of scepticism. I mean that it illustrated scepticism in the sense of subjectivism. Its principal was that if all that could be seen of a cow was a white line and a purple shadow, we should only render the line and the shadow; in a sense we should only believe in the line and the shadow, rather than in the cow. In one sense the Impressionist sceptic contradicted the poet who said he had never seen a purple cow. He tended rather to say that he had only seen a purple cow; or rather that he had not seen the cow but only the purple. Whatever may be the merits of this method of art, there is obviously something highly subjective and sceptical about it as a method of thought. It naturally lends itself to the metaphysical suggestion that things only exist as we perceive them, or that things do not exist at all. The philosophy of Impressionism is necessarily close to the philosophy of Illusion. And this atmosphere also tended to contribute, however indirectly, to a certain mood of unreality and sterile isolation that settled at this time upon me; and I think upon many others.

What surprises me in looking back on youth, and even on boyhood, is the extreme rapidity with which it can think its way back to fundamental things; and even to the denial of fundamental things. At a very early age I had thought my way back to thought itself. It is a very dreadful thing to do;

for it may lead to thinking that there is nothing but thought. At this time I did not very clearly distinguish between dreaming and waking; not only as a mood but as a metaphysical doubt, I felt as if everything might be a dream. It was as if I had myself projected the universe from within, with its trees and stars; and that is so near to the notion of being God that it is manifestly even nearer to going mad. Yet I was not mad, in any medical or physical sense; I was simply carrying the scepticism of my time as far as it would go. And I soon found it would go a great deal further than most of the sceptics went. While dull atheists came and explained to me that there was nothing but matter, I listened with a sort of calm horror of detachment, suspecting that there was nothing but mind. I have always felt that there was something thin and third-rate about materialists and materialism ever since. The atheist told me so pompously that he did not believe there was any God; and there were moments when I did not even believe there was any atheist.

And as with mental, so with moral extremes. There is something truly menacing in the thought of how quickly I could imagine the maddest, when I had never committed the mildest crime. Something may have been due to the atmosphere of the Decadents, and their perpetual hints of the luxurious horrors of paganism; but I am not disposed to dwell much on that defence; I suspect I manufactured most of my morbidities for myself. But anyhow, it is true that there was a time when I had reached that condition of moral anarchy within, in which a man says, in the words of Wilde, that "Atys with the blood-stained knife were better than the thing I am". I have never indeed felt the faintest temptation to the particular madness of Wilde; but I could at this time imagine the worst and wildest disproportions and distortions of more normal passion; the point is that the whole mood was overpowered and oppressed with a sort of congestion of imagination. As Bunyan, in his morbid period, described himself as prompted to utter blasphemies, I had an overpowering impulse to record or draw horrible ideas and images; plunging in deeper and deeper as in a blind spiritual suicide. I had never heard of Confession, in any serious sense, in those days; but that is what is really needed in such cases. I fancy they are not uncommon cases. Anyhow, the point is here that I dug quite low enough to discover the devil; and even in some dim way to recognise the devil. At least I never, even in this first vague and sceptical stage, indulged very much in the current arguments about the relativity of evil or the unreality of sin. Perhaps, when I eventually emerged as a sort of theorist, and was described as an Optimist, it was because I was one of the few people in that world of diabolism who really believed in devils.

In truth, the story of what was called my Optimism was rather odd. When I had been for some time in these, the darkest depths of the contemporary pessimism, I had a strong inward impulse to revolt; to dislodge this incubus or throw off this nightmare. But as I was still thinking the thing out by myself, with little help from philosophy and no real help from religion, I invented a rudimentary and makeshift mystical theory of my own. It was substantially this; that even mere existence, reduced to its most primary limits, was extraordinary enough to be exciting. Anything was magnificent as compared with nothing. Even if the very daylight were a dream, it was a day-dream; it was not a nightmare. The mere fact that one could wave one's arms and legs about (or those dubious external objects in the landscape which were called one's arms and legs) showed that it had not the mere paralysis of a nightmare. Or if it was a nightmare, it was an enjoyable nightmare. In fact, I had wandered to a position not very far from the phrase of my Puritan grandfather, when he said that he would thank God for his creation if he were a lost soul. I hung on to the remains of religion by one thin thread of thanks. I thanked whatever gods might be, not like Swinburne, because no life lived for ever, but because any life lived at all; not, like Henley for my unconquerable soul (for I have never been so optimistic about my own soul as all that) but for my own soul and my own body, even if they could be conquered. This way of looking at things, with a sort of mystical minimum of gratitude, was of course, to some extent assisted by those few of the fashionable writers who were not pessimists; especially by Walt Whitman, by Browning and by Stevenson; Browning's "God must be glad one loves his world so much", or Stevenson's "belief in the ultimate decency of things". But I do not think it is too much to say that I took it in a way of my own; even if it was a way I could not see clearly or make very clear. What I meant, whether or no I managed to say it, was this; that no man knows how much he is an optimist, even when he calls himself a pessimist, because he has not really measured the depths of his debt to whatever created him and enabled him to call himself anything. At the back of our brains, so to speak, there was a forgotten blaze or burst of astonishment at our own existence. The object of the artistic and spiritual life was to dig for this submerged sunrise of wonder; so that a man sitting in a chair might suddenly understand that he was actually alive, and be happy.

There were other aspects of this feeling, and other arguments about it, to which I shall have to return. Here it is only a necessary part of the narrative; as it involves the fact that, when I did begin to write, I was full of a new and fiery resolution to write against the Decadents and the Pessimists who ruled the culture of the age.

Thus, among the juvenile verses I began to write about this time was one called “The Babe Unborn”, which imagined the uncreated creature crying out for existence and promising every virtue if he might only have the experience of life. Another conceived the scoffer as begging God to give him eyes and lips and a tongue that he might mock the giver of them; a more angry version of the same fancy. And I think it was about this time that I thought of the notion afterwards introduced into a tale called Manalive; of a benevolent being who went about with a pistol, which he would suddenly point at a pessimist, when that philosopher said that life was not worth living. This was not printed until long afterwards; but the verses were collected into a little volume; and my father was so imprudent as to help me to get them published under the title of The Wild Knight. And this is an important part of the story, in so far as any part of the story is important, because it did involve my introduction to literature and even to literary men.

My little volume of verse was reviewed with warm and almost overwhelming generosity by Mr. James Douglas, then almost entirely known as a leading literary critic. Impetuosity as well as generosity was always one of Mr. Douglas’s most attractive qualities. And he insisted, for some reason, on affirming positively that there was no such person as G. K. Chesterton; that the name was obviously a nom de plume; that the work was obviously not that of a novice but a successful writer; and finally that it could be none other than Mr. John Davidson. This naturally brought an indignant denial from Mr. John Davidson. That spirited poet very legitimately thanked the Lord that he had never written such nonsense; and I for one very heartily sympathised with him. Not very long afterwards, when Mr. John Lane had accepted the manuscript of The Napoleon of Notting Hill, I was lunching with that publisher and fell into a very pleasant conversation with a fair-haired young man on my left, a little older than myself. A more odd-looking man, a little like an elf, bald, black-haired and with a Mephistophelean tuft and monocle, joined in the conversation across the table; and we found that we agreed on a large number of literary subjects and formed, I think I may say, a lasting liking for each other. It was only afterwards that I discovered that the first man was Mr. James Douglas and the second man was Mr. John Davidson.

I am here advancing my story along the literary line, to a point which I have not yet reached on other lines that were rather political or social; but, for the sake of convenience, I may as well complete this part of my rather erratic development here. Perhaps the next most important accident that favoured me, and brought me into relation with the world of letters, was the fact that I wrote a long review on a book about Stevenson; perhaps the first of the rather stupid books written to belittle Stevenson. I defended Stevenson with so much vehemence, not to say violence, that I had the good fortune to attract the attention of very distinguished writers who, though themselves certainly neither violent nor vehement, were very specially Stevensonian. I received a charming letter, and later a great deal of hospitality and encouragement, from Sir Sidney Colvin; to whose house I often went, where I had the pleasure of meeting the lady who was afterwards Lady Colvin, and where I heard Stephen Phillips read aloud his play of "Ulysses". Nobody could have been more magnanimous and considerate than Colvin always was to me; but I think we could never have been at one, as he was at one with Stevenson or even Stephen Phillips. For, except on the subject of Stevenson, we differed upon every subject in earth and heaven; he was both Imperialist in politics and Rationalist in religion; and with all his frigid refinement, he was whatever he was with an unquenchable pertinacity. He hated Radicals and Christian mystics and romantic sympathisers with small nationalities, and in fact everything that I had any tendency to be. But the same link of the love of Stevenson attached me a little later to another very eminent man of letters; Sir Edmund Gosse. In some way I always felt far more at home with Sir Edmund Gosse; because he despised all opinions and not merely my opinions. He had an extraordinary depth of geniality in his impartial cynicism. He had the art of snubbing without sneering. We always felt that he had not enjoyed snubbing but the snub itself, as a sort of art for art's sake, a million miles from any personal malice. It was all the more artistic because of the courtly and silken manner that he commonly assumed. I was very fond of him; and it gives me great happiness to think that one of the last things he must have done was to write me a letter thanking me for another and much later vindication of Stevenson, in a book I wrote long afterwards, indeed only a few years ago. In this letter he said of Stevenson, with a very powerful simplicity coming from such a man, “I loved him; I love him still.” I have no right to use such strong terms in my case; but I feel something like that about Gosse.

About this time I discovered the secret of amiability in another person with a rather misleading reputation for acidity. Mr. Max Beerbohm asked me to lunch; and I have ever since known that he is himself the most subtle of his paradoxes. A man with his reputation might well find offence in the phrase amiability; I can only explain to so scholarly a wit that I put it in Latin or French because I dare not put it in English. Max played in the masquerade of his time, which he has described so brilliantly; and he dressed or overdressed the part. His name was supposed to be a synonym for Impudence; for the undergraduate who exhibited the cheek of a guttersnipe in the garb of a dandy. He was supposed to blow his own trumpet with every flourish of self-praise; countless stories were told about the brazen placidity of his egoism. How, when he had hardly written anything more than a few schoolboy essays, he bound them under the stately title of “The Works of Max Beerbohm.” How he projected a series of biographies called “Brothers of Great Men;” the first volume being “Herbert Beerbohm Tree.” And the first moment I heard his voice, or caught sight of the expression of his eyes, I knew that all this was the flat contrary of the truth. Max was and is a remarkably humble man, for a man of his gifts and his period. I have never known him, by a single phrase or intonation, claim to know more or judge better than he does; or indeed half so much or so well as he does. Most men spread themselves a little in conversation, and have their unreal victories and vanities; but he seems to me more moderate and realistic about himself than about anything else. He is more sceptical about everything than I am, by temper; but certainly he does not indulge in the base idolatry of believing in himself. On this point I wish I were so good a Christian as he. I hope, for the sake of his official or public personality, that he will manage to live down this last affront. But the people who could not see this fact, because an intelligent undergraduate enjoyed an intellectual rag, have something to learn about the possible combination of humility and humour.

Finally, a crown of what I can only call respectability came to me from the firm of Macmillan; in the form of a very flattering invitation to write the study of Browning for the English Men of Letters Series. It had just arrived when I was lunching with Max Beerbohm, and he said to me in a pensive way: “A man ought to write on Browning while he is young.” No man knows he is young while he is young. I did not know what Max meant at the time; but I see now that he was right; as he generally is. Anyhow, I need not say that I accepted the invitation to write a book on Browning. I will not say that I wrote a book on Browning; but I wrote a book on love, liberty, poetry, my own views on God and religion (highly undeveloped), and various theories of my own about optimism and pessimism and the hope of the world; a book in which the name of Browning was introduced from time to time, I might almost say with considerable art, or at any rate with some decent appearance of regularity. There were very few biographical facts in the book, and those were nearly all wrong. But there is something buried somewhere in the book; though I think it is rather my boyhood than Browning’s biography.

I have pursued this literary part of my own biography in advance of the rest. But long before this it was apparent that the centre of gravity in my existence had shifted from what we will (for the sake of courtesy) call Art to what we will (for the sake of courtesy) call Literature. The agent in this change of intention was, in the first instance, my friend Ernest Hodder Williams, afterwards the head of the well-known publishing firm. He was attending Latin and English lectures at University College while I was attending, or not attending, to the art instructions of the Slade School. I joined him in following the English course; and for this reason I am able to boast myself among the many pupils who are grateful to the extraordinarily lively and stimulating learning of Professor W.P. Ker. Most of the other students were studying for examinations; but I had not even that object in this objectless period of my life. The result was that I gained an entirely undeserved reputation for disinterested devotion to culture for its own sake; and I once had the honour of constituting the whole of Professor Ker’s audience. But he gave as thorough and thoughtful a lecture as I have ever heard given, in a slightly more colloquial style; asked me some questions about my reading; and, on my mentioning something from the poetry of Pope, said with great satisfaction, “Ah, I see you have been well brought up.” Pope had much less than justice from that generation of the admirers of Shelley and Swinburne. Hodder Williams and I often talked about literature, following on these literary lectures; and he conceived a fixed notion that I could write; a delusion which he retained to the day of his death. In consequence of this, and in connection with my art studies, he gave me some books on art to review for the Bookman, the famous organ of his firm and family. I need not say that having entirely failed to learn how to draw or paint, I tossed off easily enough some criticisms of the weaker points of Rubens or the misdirected talents of Tintoretto. I had discovered the easiest of all professions; which I have pursued ever since.

When I look back on these things, and indeed on my life generally, the thing that strikes me most is my extraordinary luck. I have already pleaded for the merits of the Moral Tale; but it is against all the proper principles that even any such measure of good fortune should have come to the Idle Apprentice. In the case of my association with Hodder Williams, it was against all reason that so unbusinesslike a person should have so businesslike a friend. In the case of the choice of a trade, it was outrageously unjust that a man should succeed in becoming a journalist merely by failing to become an artist. I say a trade and not a profession; for the only thing I can say for myself, in connection with both trades, is that I was never pompous about them. If I have had a profession, at least I have never been a professor. But in another sense there was about these first stages an element of luck, and even of accident. I mean that my mind remained very much abstracted and almost stunned; and these opportunities were merely things that happened to me, almost like calamities. To say that I was not ambitious makes it sound far too like a virtue, when it really was a not very disgraceful defect; it was that curious blindness of youth which we can observe in others and yet never explain in ourselves. But, above all, I mention it here also because it was connected with the continuity of that unresolved riddle of the mind, which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The essential reason was that my eyes were turned inwards rather than outwards; giving my moral personality, I should imagine, a very unattractive squint. I was still oppressed with the metaphysical nightmare of negations about mind and matter, with the morbid imagery of evil, with the burden of my own mysterious brain and body; but by this time I was in revolt against them; and trying to construct a healthier conception of cosmic life, even if it were one that should err on the side of health. I even called myself an optimist, because I was so horribly near to being a pessimist. It is the only excuse I can offer. All this part of the process was afterwards thrown up in the very formless form of a piece of fiction called The Man Who Was Thursday. The title attracted some attention at the time; and there were many journalistic jokes about it. Some, referring to my supposed festive views, affected to mistake it for “The Man Who Was Thirsty.” Others naturally supposed that Man Thursday was the black brother of Man Friday. Others again, with more penetration, treated it as a mere title out of topsy-turveydom; as if it had been “The Woman Who Was Half-past Eight,” or “The Cow Who Was Tomorrow Evening.” But what interests me about it was this; that hardly anybody who looked at the title ever seems to have looked at the sub-title; which was “A Nightmare,” and the answer to a good many critical questions.

I pause upon the point here, because it is of some importance to the understanding of that time. I have often been asked what I mean by the monstrous pantomime ogre who was called Sunday in that story; and some have suggested, and in one sense not untruly, that he was meant for a blasphemous version of the Creator. But the point is that the whole story is a nightmare of things, not as they are, but as they seemed to the young half-pessimist of the ‘90s; and the ogre who appears brutal but is also cryptically benevolent is not so much God, in the sense of religion or irreligion, but rather Nature as it appears to the pantheist, whose pantheism is struggling out of pessimism. So far as the story had any sense in it, it was meant to begin with the picture of the world at its worst and to work towards the suggestion that the picture was not so black as it was already painted. I explained that the whole thing was thrown out in the nihilism of the ‘90s in the dedicatory lines which I wrote to my friend Bentley, who had been through the same period and problems; asking rhetorically: “Who shall understand but you?” In reply to which a book-reviewer very sensibly remarked that if nobody understood the book except Mr. Bentley, it seemed unreasonable to ask other people to read it.

But I speak of it here because, though it came at the beginning of the story, it was destined to take on another meaning before the end of it. Without that distant sequel, the memory may appear as meaningless as the book; but for the moment I can only leave on record here the two facts to which I managed somehow and in some sense to testify. First, I was trying vaguely to found a new optimism, not on the maximum but the minimum of good. I did not so much mind the pessimist who complained that there was so little good. But I was furious, even to slaying, with the pessimist who asked what was the good of good. And second, even in the earliest days and even for the worst reasons, I already knew too much to pretend to get rid of evil. I introduced at the end one figure who really does, with a full understanding, deny and defy the good. Long afterwards Father Ronald Knox told me, in his whimsical manner, that he was sure that the rest of the book would be used to prove that I was a Pantheist and a Pagan, and that the Higher Critics of the future would easily show that the episode of the Accuser was an interpolation by priests.

This was not the case; in fact it was quite the other way. At this time I should have been quite as annoyed as anybody else for miles round, if I had found a priest interfering with my affairs or interpolating things in my manuscript. I put that statement into that story, testifying to the extreme evil (which is merely the unpardonable sin of not wishing to be pardoned), not because I had learned it from any of the million priests whom I had never met, but because I had learned it from myself. I was already quite certain that I could if I chose cut myself off from the whole life of the universe. My wife, when asked who converted her to Catholicism, always answers, “the devil”.

But all that was so long afterwards, that it has no relation to the groping and guesswork philosophy of the story in question. I would much rather quote a tribute from a totally different type of man, who was nevertheless one of the very few men who, for some reason or other, have ever made head or tail of this unfortunate romance of my youth. He was a distinguished psychoanalyst, of the most modern and scientific sort. He was not a priest; far from it; we might say, like the Frenchman asked if he had lunched on the boat, “au contraire”. He did not believe in the Devil; God forbid, if there was any God to forbid. But he was a very keen and eager student of his own subject; and he made my hair stand on end by saying that he had found my very juvenile story useful as a corrective among his morbid patients; especially the process by which each of the diabolical anarchs turns out to be a good citizen in disguise. “I know a number of men who nearly went mad,” he said quite gravely, “but were saved because they had really understood The Man Who Was Thursday.” He must have been rather generously exaggerative; he may have been mad himself, of course; but then so was I. But I confess it flatters me to think that, in this my period of lunacy, I may have been a little useful to other lunatics.

Chapter V: Nationalism and Notting Hill

At this point of the story I must for a moment go back in order to go on. In the previous pages I have said a good deal about Art, both in the home and the school; of the art I lost by my own fault or gained by my father's merit; of the gratitude I owe to the amateur and the apology I owe to the art-master; of all I was taught without learning it, and all I learnt without anybody teaching it. But in a sketch of the period, this predominance of Art is rather out of proportion to the contemporary position of Science. It was true that I could never exactly be called a scientific character; and even as between the Classical and Modern sides of my old school, I should always have chosen rather to idle at Greek than to idle at Chemistry. But science was in the air of all that Victorian world, and children and boys were affected by the picturesque aspects of it. Several of my father's cronies were scientific either in their hobbies or their profession; one of them, a very delightful schoolmaster named Alexander Watherston, carried about with him a geological hammer, with which he would detach fossils from rocks or walls, to my intense delight; so that the very name of a geological hammer still suggests something primal and poetic like the hammer of Thor. My mother's brother, Beaumont Grosjean, was an analytical chemist by calling, and a man stuffed with humour; I can recall how he professed to have proved by analysis the purity of one single product of current commerce; which was Nubian Blacking; I believe it no longer exists; so I can be neither reproached nor rewarded for the advertisement. But he was so captivated with this one case of commercial probity that he used the name as a moral term of eulogy, saying "No man could have behaved in a more Nubian fashion," or, "Perhaps as Nubian an action as ever did honour to human nature." It was the same scientific uncle who told me various fairy-tales of science, which I regret to say that I believed much less than the fairy-tales of fairyland. Thus he told me that when I jumped off a chair, the earth jumped towards me. At the time I took it for granted that this was a lie; or at any rate a joke. What Einstein has done with it now is another story — or perhaps another joke. But I mention science and the scientific uncle for another reason here.

I am just old enough to remember in infancy the world before telephones. And I remember that my father and my uncle fitted up the first telephone I ever saw with their own metal and chemicals, a miniature telephone reaching from the top bedroom under the roof to the remote end of the garden. I was really impressed imaginatively by this; and I do not think I have ever been so much impressed since by any extension of it. The point is rather important in the whole theory of imagination. It did startle me that a voice should sound in the room when it was really as distant as the next street. It would hardly have startled me more if it had been as distant as the next town. It does not startle me any more if it is as distant as the next continent. The miracle is over. Thus I admired even the large scientific things most on a small scale. So I always found that I was much more attracted by the microscope than the telescope. I was not overwhelmed in childhood, by being told of remote stars which the sun never reached, any more than in manhood by being told of an empire on which the sun never set. I had no use for an empire that had no sunsets. But I was inspired and thrilled by looking through a little hole at a crystal like a pin's head; and seeing it change pattern and colour like a pigmy sunset.

I have already picked two quarrels with better men than myself, who were enthusiasts for childish romance, upon the reality of the romance of childhood. First, I disagree with them when they treat the infantile imagination as a sort of dream; whereas I remember it rather as a man dreaming might remember the world where he was awake. And second, I deny that children have suffered under a tyranny of moral tales. For I remember the time when it would have seemed the most hideous tyranny to take my moral tales away from me. And, in order to make this clear, I must contradict yet another common assumption in the romantic description of the dawn of life. The point is not very easy to explain; indeed I have spent the greater part of my life in an unsuccessful attempt to explain it. Upon the cartloads of ill-constructed books in which I have completely failed to do so, I have no desire to dwell. But perhaps, as a general definition, this might be useful; or, if not as a definition, at least as a suggestion. From the first vaguely, and of late more and more clearly, I have felt that the world is conceiving liberty as something that merely works outwards. And I have always conceived it as something that works inwards.

The ordinary poetic description of the first dreams of life is a description of mere longing for larger and larger horizons. The imagination is supposed to work towards the infinite; though in that sense the infinite is the opposite of the imagination. For the imagination deals with an image. And an image is in its nature a thing that has an outline and therefore a limit. Now I will maintain, paradoxical as it may seem, that the child does not desire merely to fall out of the window, or even to fly through the air or to be drowned in the sea. When he wishes to go to other places, they are still places; even if nobody has ever been there. But in truth the case is much stronger than that. It is plain on the face of the facts that the child is positively in love with limits. He uses his imagination to invent imaginary limits. The nurse and the governess have never told him that it is his moral duty to step on alternate paving-stones. He deliberately deprives this world of half its paving-stones, in order to exult in a challenge that he has offered to himself. I played that kind of game with myself all over the mats and boards and carpets of the house; and, at the risk of being detained during His Majesty's pleasure, I will admit that I often play it still. In that sense I have constantly tried to cut down the actual space at my disposal; to divide and subdivide, into these happy prisons, the house in which I was quite free to run wild. And I believe that there is in this psychological freak a truth without which the whole modern world is missing its main opportunity. If we look at the favourite nursery romances, or at least if we have the patience to look at them twice, we shall find that they all really support this view; even when they have largely been accepted as supporting the opposite view. The charm of Robinson Crusoe is not in the fact that he could find his way to a remote island; but in the fact that he could not find any way of getting away from it. It is that fact which gives an intensive interest and excitement to all the things that he had with him on the island; the axe and the parrot and the guns and the little hoard of grain. The tale of Treasure Island is not the record of a vague desire to go on a sea voyage for one's health. It ends where it began; and it began with Stevenson drawing a map of the island, with all its bays and capes cut out as clearly as fretwork. And the eternal interest of the Noah's Ark, considered as a toy, consists in its complete suggestion of compactness and isolation; of creatures so comically remote and fantastic being all locked up in one box; as if Noah had been told to pack up the sun and moon with his luggage. In other words, it is exactly the same game that I have played myself, by piling all the things I wanted on a sofa, and imagining that the carpet around me was the surrounding sea.

This game of self-limitation is one of the secret pleasures of life. As it says in the little manuals about such sports, the game is played in several forms. One very good way of playing it is to look at the nearest bookcase, and wonder whether you would find sufficient entertainment in that chance collection, even if you had no other books. But always it is dominated by this principle of division and restriction; which begins with the game played by the child with the paving-stones. I dwell upon it here because it must be understood as something real and rooted, so far as I am concerned, in order that the other views I have offered about these things may make any sort of sense. If anybody chooses to say that I have founded all my social philosophy on the antics of a baby, I am quite satisfied to bow and smile.

It is really relevant to insist that I do not know at what exact stage of my childhood or my youth the idea consolidated as a sort of local patriotism. A child has by the light of nature (or perhaps some better light) an idea of fortifying and defending things; of saying that he is the king of the castle, but of being rather glad than otherwise that it is such a small castle. But as it is my whole thesis that there is something very real behind all these first movements of the mind, I do not think I was ever surprised to find that this instinct corresponded to an idea. Only, by a rather curious coincidence in my life, it had only just developed as a private idea, when I found it clinched and supported by a public idea. If I have since gone back to public ideas, or to the outside of my existence, I have tried to explain that the most important part of it had long been in the inside of my life; perhaps a long time before I found it there.

I was one day wandering about the streets in that part of North Kensington, telling myself stories of feudal sallies and sieges, in the manner of Walter Scott, and vaguely trying to apply them to the wilderness of bricks and mortar around me. I felt that London was already too large and loose a thing to be a city in the sense of a citadel. It seemed to me even larger and looser than the British Empire. And something irrationally arrested and pleased my eye about the look of one small block of little lighted shops, and I amused myself with the supposition that these alone were to be preserved and defended, like a hamlet in a desert. I found it quite exciting to count them and perceive that they contained the essentials of a civilisation, a chemist’s shop, a bookshop, a provision merchant for food and public-house for drink. Lastly, to my great delight, there was also an old curiosity shop bristling with swords and halberds; manifestly intended to arm the guard that was to fight for the sacred street. I wondered vaguely what they would attack or whither they would advance. And looking up, I saw grey with distance but still seemingly immense in altitude, the tower of the Waterworks close to the street where I was born. It suddenly occurred to me that capturing the Waterworks might really mean the military stroke of flooding the valley; and with that torrent and cataract of visionary waters, the first fantastic notion of a tale called The Napoleon of Notting Hill rushed over my mind.

I have never taken my books seriously; but I take my opinions quite seriously. I do not mention my fortunately forgotten romance because I wish to emulate the academic seriousness of Mr. Dodgson, who noted the exact conditions of time and landscape in which it first occurred to him that the Snark was after all a Boojum. But this detail of memory has to do with much more practical things. It happens to be the only way of explaining what was very soon to be my position in quite practical politics. It must first be clearly understood that contemporary politics, even in the common sense my own politics, were all driving or drifting exactly the other way. The two great movements during my youth and early manhood were Imperialism and Socialism. They were supposed to be fighting each other; and so doubtless they did, in the sense of waving Red Flags against Union Jacks. But as compared with those dim gropings in my own imagination, the two things were in union; at least as much in union as the Union Jack. Both believed in unification and centralisation on a large scale. Neither could have seen any meaning in my own fancy for having things on a smaller and smaller scale. That fancy itself was indeed too indistinct and instinctive as yet to suggest an alternative theory; and in some vague way I accepted the fashionable theories. I read Kipling and was attracted in many ways, though repelled in others. I called myself a Socialist; because the only alternative to being a Socialist was not being a Socialist. And not being a Socialist was a perfectly ghastly thing. It meant being a small-headed and sneering snob, who grumbled at the rates and the working-classes; or some hoary horrible old Darwinian who said the weakest must go to the wall. But in my heart I was a reluctant Socialist. I accepted the larger thing as the lesser evil — or even the lesser good.

Rather in the sense in which I was a reluctant Socialist, I was even ready to be a reluctant Imperialist. It was rather as the Mr. Burden of Mr. Belloc was a reluctant Imperialist; for indeed I inherited the tradition of an older business world, not unlike Mr. Burden’s. All my instincts told me that I could not entirely lose hold of patriotism; neither then nor at any later time had I any liking for what is commonly connoted by pacifism. I was willing to accept colonial adventure if it was the only way of protecting my country; just as I was willing to accept collectivist organisation if it was the only way of protecting my poorer fellow-citizens. I was willing that Britain should boast of having an empire, if she really had nothing better to boast of. I was willing to let Mr. Sidney Webb look after the poor, if nobody else would look after them, or if (as seemed to be assumed as an axiom of social science) it was quite impossible for them to look after themselves. But nothing of my heart or my imagination went with these wide generalisations; and something inside me was always subconsciously burrowing in the very opposite direction. I remained in this vague but not entirely unhealthy state of mind, hung between an inward instinct I could not follow and an outward expansion I did not really wish to follow, until something happened in the outer world which not only woke me from my dreams like a thunder-clap, but like a lightning-flash revealed me to myself. In 1895 came the Jameson Raid and a year or two afterwards the war with the two Republics of South Africa.

The nation seemed solid for the war. It was far more eager for the South African War than it was afterwards for the Great War. The latter was obviously much more crucial, and in my opinion much more just. But it did not produce that particular impression of a unanimous shout of applause such as marked the campaign for the extinction of President Kruger’s Dutch state. Crowds would doubtless cry both against Kruger and Kaiser; but the Kaiser with his moustaches never became so popular a caricature as the President with his chinbeard. The name became indeed a general term for anything exotic and alien; and a too elegant poet with long curly hair and velvet knee-breeches would be hailed by the apt and descriptive cry of “Kruger!” But the apparent unity covered more influential and instructive groups. Journalism and politics were for the policy of Annexation. Most of the newspapers followed the Daily Mail in its morals if not in its manners. The Liberal Imperialists practically took the lead in the Liberal Party, so that even the opposition could hardly oppose. And it must always be remembered that these pro-war politicians were those who were later charged with moderation or (very absurdly) with anti-patriotism during the war of 1914; Asquith and Haldane and Grey. It seemed that all moderate men were on what was called the patriotic side. I knew little of politics then; and to me the unity seemed greater than it was; but it was very great. I saw all the public men and public bodies, the people in the street, my own middle-class and most of my family and friends, solid in favour of something that seemed inevitable and scientific and secure. And I suddenly realised that I hated it; that I hated the whole thing as I had never hated anything before.

What I hated about it was what a good many people liked about it. It was such a very cheerful war. I hated its confidence, its congratulatory anticipations, its optimism of the Stock Exchange. I hated its vile assurance of victory. It was regarded by many as an almost automatic process like the operation of a natural law; and I have always hated that sort of heathen notion of a natural law. As the war proceeded, indeed, it began to be dimly felt that it was proceeding and not progressing. When the British had many unexpected failures and the Boers many unexpected successes, there was a change in the public temper, and less of optimism and indeed little but obstinacy. But the note struck from the first was the note of the inevitable; a thing abhorrent to Christians and to lovers of liberty. The blows struck by the Boer nation at bay, the dash and dazzling evasions of De Wet, the capture of a British general at the very end of the campaign, sounded again and again the opposite note of defiance; of those who, as I wrote later in one of my first articles, "disregard the omens and disdain the stars". And all this swelled up within me into vague images of a modern resurrection of Marathon or Thermopylae; and I saw again my recurring dream of the unscalable tower and the besieging citizens; and began to draw out the rude outlines of my little romance of London. But above all, perhaps, what began to repel me about the atmosphere of the adventure was something insincere about the most normal part of the national claim; the suggestion of something like a rescue of our exiled representatives, the commercial citizens of Johannesburg, who were commonly called the Outlanders. As this would have been the most sympathetic plea if it was genuine, it was the more repulsive if it was hypocritical.

For this was the best case for the war; that if the Boers were fighting for their country, the British were fighting for their countrymen. Only there was rather a queer look about some of the portraits of their countrymen. It was constantly asserted that an Englishman named Edgar had been murdered; but no portrait of Edgar was published, because it happened that he was entirely black. Other portraits were published; other Outlanders were paraded and they were of other tints and shades. We began to guess that the people the Boers called Outlanders were often people whom the British would call Outsiders. Their names were symbolic as their noses. I remember waiting with a Pro-Boer friend in the midst of a Jingo mob outside the celebrated Queen’s Hall Meeting which ended in a free fight. My friend and I adopted a method of patriotic parody or reductio ad absurdum. We first proposed three cheers for Chamberlain, then three cheers for Rhodes, and then by degrees for more and more dubious and demi-naturalised patriots. We actually did get an innocent cheer for Beit. We got a more wavering cheer for Eckstein. But when it came to our impulsive appeal to the universal popularity of Albu, the irony of our intention was discovered; and the fight began. I found myself in a pugilistic encounter with an Imperialistic clerk, whose pugilism was at least no more scientific than my own. While this encounter (one of many other surrounding conflicts) was proceeding, another Imperialist must have abstracted my watch; the last I ever troubled to possess. He at any rate believed in the Policy of Annexation.

I was called a Pro-Boer and, unlike some Pro-Boers, I was very proud of the title. It expressed exactly what I meant much better than its idealistic synonyms. Some intellectuals indignantly repudiated the term, and said they were not Pro-Boers but only lovers of peace or pacifists. But I emphatically was a Pro-Boer, and I emphatically was not a pacifist. My point was that the Boers were right in fighting; not that anybody must be wrong in fighting. I thought that their farmers were perfectly entitled to take to horse and rifle in defence of their farms, and their little farming commonwealth, when it was invaded by a more cosmopolitan empire at the command of very cosmopolitan financiers. As no less an authority than Mr. Discobolus says in Lear’s Nonsense Rhymes, I thought so then and I think so still. But this sort of militant sympathy naturally separated those who thought as I did from our colleagues who were mere anti-militarists. The consequence was not unimportant to me personally. It was that I found I belonged to a minority of a minority. Most of those who not unnaturally sympathised with the British, disapproved of us for sympathising with the Boers. Most of those who sympathised with the Boers disapproved of us for sympathising with them for the wrong reasons. Indeed, I do not know whether the Jingo or the Pacifist found us the more offensive and objectionable. It was in this rather quaint condition that I naturally gravitated towards a friendship which has since played so considerable a part in my life, public as well as private.

My friends had just come down from Oxford, Bentley from Merton and Oldershaw from “the House”, where they had figured prominently in a group of young Liberals opposed in varying degrees to the current Imperialism; a group containing many names sufficiently famous afterwards; John Simon, now the well-known statesman and advocate, and Francis Hirst, the economist. Soon after our reunion in London, I went to meet Lucian Oldershaw at a little restaurant in Soho. It was in the days before everybody had discovered the whereabouts of Soho; and these small French eating-houses were only valued by a few gourmets on the ground that they were still places where it was possible to eat. I have never been anything so refined as a gourmet; so I am happy to say that I am still quite capable of being a glutton. My ignorance of cookery is such that I can even eat the food in the most fashionable and expensive hotels in London. Sometimes, in those luxurious halls, inhabited by the heroes and heroines of Oppenheim and Edgar Wallace, the food is just a shade too bad even for me. But those who really prefer eating good cutlets and omelets to living on gilt plaster and pantomime footmen had already found their way to delightful little dens off Leicester Square, where in those days a man could get a half-bottle of perfectly good red wine for sixpence. To one of these I went to meet my friend, who entered the place followed by a sturdy man with a stiff straw hat of the period tilted over his eyes, which emphasized the peculiar length and strength of his chin. He had a high-shouldered way of wearing a coat so that it looked like a heavy overcoat, and instantly reminded me of the pictures of Napoleon; and, for some vague reason, especially of the pictures of Napoleon on horseback. But his eyes, not without anxiety, had that curious distant keenness that is seen in the eyes of sailors; and there was something about his walk that has even been compared to a sailor’s roll. Long afterwards the words found their way into verse which expressed a certain consciousness of the combination, and of the blend of nations in his blood.

Almighty God will surely say,
St. Michael, who is this that stands
With Ireland in his doubtful eyes
And Perigord between his hands,
And on his arm the stirrup-thongs
And in his gait the narrow seas

And on his mouth Burgundian songs
And in his heart the Pyrenees?

He sat down heavily on one of the benches and began to talk at once about some controversy or other; I gathered that the question was whether it could be reasonably maintained that King John was the best English king. He judicially decided in the negative; but, by the standards of Mrs. Markham's History of England (to which he was much attached) he let the Plantagenet off lightly. After all, John had been a Regent, and no medieval Regent was a success. He went on talking, as he has, to my great pleasure and stimulation, gone on talking ever since. For this was Hilaire Belloc, already famous as an orator at Oxford where he was always pitted against another brilliant speaker, named F. E. Smith, who later became Lord Birkenhead. Belloc was supposed to represent Radicalism and Smith Toryism; but the contrast between them was more vital, and would have survived the reversing of the labels. Indeed the two characters and careers might stand as a study and problem in the meaning of failure and success.

As Belloc went on talking, he every now and then volleyed out very provocative parentheses on the subject of religion. He said that an important Californian lawyer was coming to England to call on his family, and had put up a great candle to St. Christopher praying that he might be able to make the voyage. He declared that he, Belloc, was going to put up an even bigger candle in the hope that the visitor would not make the voyage. "People say what's the good of doing that?" he observed explosively. "I don't know what good it does. I know it's a thing that's done. Then they say it can't do any good — and there you have Dogma at once." All this amused me very much, but I was already conscious of a curious undercurrent of sympathy with him, which many of those who were equally amused did not feel. And when, on that night and many subsequent nights, we came to talking about the War, I found that the subconscious sympathy had something of a real significance. I have had occasion to say, somewhere or other, that I am an Anti-Vivisectionist and an Anti-Anti-Vivisectionist. Something of the same mystery united our minds; we were both Pro-Boers who hated Pro-Boers. Perhaps it would be truer to say that we hated a certain number of unimaginative, unhistorical anti-militarists who were too pedantic to call themselves Pro-Boers. Perhaps it would be truer still to say that it was they who hated us. But anyhow that was the first link in the alliance. Though his military imagination flung its battle-line far across history from the Roman Legions to the last details of the guns of Gravelotte, and mine was a parochial fancy of an impossible skirmish in Notting Hill, we knew that the moral of the fable and the facts was the same; and when I finished my Cockney fantasy, I dedicated it to him. It was from that dingy little Soho cafe, as from a cave of witchcraft, that there emerged the quadruped, the twiformed monster Mr. Shaw has nicknamed the Chesterbelloc.

It would be grossly unjust to suggest that all or most of the antiwar party were like the prigs I have mentioned; though few of them of course were military in the Bellocian manner. And to one group of them I have a permanent gratitude; the Oxford group which I have already mentioned; and which included my own friends from Oxford. This group was just then enabled to achieve a very important work; which will probably be not without an ultimate effect on history. It managed to buy the old Radical weekly paper The Speaker and run it with admirable spirit and courage in rather a new mood of Radicalism; what some of its enemies might have called a romantic Radicalism. Its editor was Mr. J. L. Hammond, who was afterwards, with his wife, to do so great an historical service as the author of studies on the English Labourer in the last few centuries. He certainly was the last man in the world to be accused of a smug materialism or a merely tame love of peace. No indignation could have been at once more fiery and more delicate, in the sense of discriminating. And I knew that he also understood the truth, when I heard him say the words which so many would have misunderstood; “Imperialism is worse than Jingoism. A Jingo is a noisy fellow, who may happen to make a noise on the right side. But the Imperialist is the direct enemy of liberty.” That was exactly what I meant; the Boers might be making a noise (with Mauser rifles) but I thought it was a noise on the right side. It was at about the same time, and by the same connection, that I was able to begin making a very small noise on the right side myself. As I note elsewhere, the very first articles of mine to appear publicly were art reviews in the Bookman; and the original responsibility of letting me loose in the literary world lies with my friend the late Sir Ernest Hodder Williams. But the first connected series of articles, the first regular job in support of a regular cause, was made possible for me by Hammond and his friends of the new Speaker. It was there that I wrote, along with many pugnacious political articles, a series of casual essays afterwards republished as The Defendant. The name of Defendant is the only thing I cannot defend. It was certainly a quite incorrect and illogical use of language. The papers were in defence of various other things, such as Penny Dreadfuls and Skeletons. But a defendant does not properly mean a person defending other things. It means a person defending himself; and I should be the last to defend anything so indefensible.

It was by the same political connection that I was drawn still further into politics, as well as still further into journalism. The next turning-point of my journalistic fate was the purchase of the Daily News by the Pro-Boer Liberals; for it had belonged up to this moment, like practically every Liberal daily paper, to the Liberal Imperialists. A group of Liberals, of whom Mr. George Cadbury was the principal capitalist and the late Mr. R. C. Lehmann the principal practical journalist, appointed as literary editor my friend Mr. Archibald Marshall, who in his turn had the rashness to appoint me as a regular weekly contributor. Here I wrote an article every Saturday for many years; I was described, in the phrase of the time, as having a Saturday pulpit, rather like a Sunday pulpit. Whatever were the merits of the sermon, it is probable that I had a larger congregation than I have ever had before or since. And I occupied it until I gave it up long afterwards, at another political crisis, the story of which I shall have to tell on a later page.

I began to see a little of the leading politicians, though they seldom talked politics; and I imagine that politicians seldom do. I had already interviewed Lord Morley, when I was given the commission in the English Men of Letters which he edited; and I had been struck by something indescribable which has marked most public men of his profession. He was quite friendly and simple, and I am sure quite sincere; but he was in a manner cautious; and conscious of the possibility that his followers might lead him further than he wished to go. He spoke with a certain fatherly admiration of my friends of the Pro-Boer party, Hammond and Hirst and the rest; but he seemed to warn me that they were too fiery; and I did not want to be warned, being myself on fire. In short, he was a wise and good man; but he was not what numberless and nameless admirers would have thought him; he was not a clear intellectual fanatic; a foe of compromise; a sheer democrat called Honest John. He was a Front-Bench man, though a good one. The same applied to most of the Front-Bench men I have known; and I am glad to say I knew mostly the good ones. I had great joy out of the hearty humours of old Asquith, the late Lord Oxford; and though our conversations were light and even flippant, he was one who rose gloriously to flippancy. Once when he appeared in Court dress, on some superbly important occasion, an uncontrollable impulse of impertinence led me to ask whether the Court sword would really come out of its sheath. “Oh, yes,” he said, shaking a shaggily frowning head at me, “Do not provoke me.” But he also had about the fundamentals of politics and ethics this curious quality of vagueness, which I have found so often in men holding high responsibilities. He did not mind answering a silly question about a sword; but if it had been a sensible question about a super-tax, he would have adopted, however genially, a fencing sort of swordsmanship. He would have faintly felt that he was being heckled, and almost been disposed to ask for notice of that question. I have a difficulty in not darkening the fine shade that I intended; he was very public, as public men go; but they all seem to become hazier as they mount higher. It is the young and unknown who have decisive doctrines and sharply declared intentions. I once expressed it by saying, I think with some truth, that politicians have no politics.

As a fact, the one Front-Bench man who seemed in the days of my youth still eternally young was for me, in those days, on the opposite Front-Bench. The wonderful thing about George Wyndham was that he had come through political life without losing his political opinions, or indeed any opinions. Precisely what gave him such a genius for friendship was that life had left in him so much of himself; so much of his youth; so much even of his childhood. He might never have been a Cabinet Minister; he might have been any common literary or artistic fellow, with a soul to save and some dim and secretive ideas about saving it. He was not always trying, like Charles Augustus Fortescue, “to take a judgment broad and wide”; he had prejudices and private dogmas for which he would fight like a private person. When once or twice the talk of Mr. Asquith turned to religious matters, I found he was fully satisfied with that sort of broad idealism, that rather diluted “essence of Christianity” which is often sincere but seldom significant of any special social decision. But George Wyndham was an Anglo-Catholic as an individual, and would have practised his religion in any state of life. There was about him that edge, like the edge of a sword, which I cannot help preferring to being knocked down with a spiritual sandbag.

George Wyndham had all sorts of odd and original notions; and one of his eccentricities was to set a subject for conversation and ask for opinions all round, as if it were an examination or a game. One day I remember he sternly announced “Japan,” and asked me to start with a few words. I said: “I distrust Japan because it is imitating us at our worst. If it had imitated the Middle Ages or the French Revolution, I could understand; but it is imitating factories and materialism. It is like looking in the mirror and seeing a monkey.” He held up his hand like a master of the ceremonies, “That will do. That is enough;” and passed on to the next, who was I think Major, now General Seeley; who said he distrusted Japan for certain Imperial reasons connected with our Colonies and national defence. Then Mr. Winston Churchill said that what amused him was that as long as Japan was beautiful and polite, people treated it as barbarous; and now it had become ugly and vulgar, it was treated with respect, or words to that effect. Then Charles Masterman, in his manner of luxuriant gloom, said the Japs were Huns who would sweep us off the earth; that they were much stronger and more skilful than we, and were also detestable. Then one or two others spoke, expressing the same negative view, and then Wyndham, in his whimsical way, wound up with one of his extraordinary historical theories (of which he had a large selection) and said the Hairy Ainu was the cousin of the European and had been conquered by these horrid Mongols. “I do think,” he said gravely, “that we ought to come to the rescue of the Hairy Ainu.” And then somebody said with simple wonder; “Look here; we’ve been all round the table; and every manjack of us, for some reason serious or otherwise, seems to hate the Japanese. Why are we not only allies of the Japanese, but forbidden to say a word against them in any of the newspapers? Why is it the fashion or convention to praise the Japs everywhere and all the time?” But at that, I think, Mr. Churchill smiled the inscrutable smile of the statesman; and that veil of vagueness, of which I have spoken, seemed to descend upon everybody; and we never had an answer to the question, either then or since.

Charles Masterman, of whom I have just spoken, was a very remarkable man. He was also a very subtle and curious character; and many of my own best friends entirely misunderstood and underrated him. It is true that as he rose higher in politics, the veil of the politician began to descend a little on him also; but he became a politician from the noblest bitterness on behalf of the poor; and what was blamed in him was the fault of much more ignoble men. What was blamable, as distinct from what was blamed, in him was due to two things; he was a pessimistic official. He had had a dark Puritan upbringing and retained a sort of feeling of the perversity of the gods; he said to me, “I am the sort of man who goes under a hedge to eat an apple.” But he was also an organiser and liked governing; only his pessimism made him think that government had always been bad, and was now no worse than usual. Therefore, to men on fire for reform, he came to seem an obstacle and an official apologist; but the last thing he really wanted was to apologise for anything. He had a startling insight into character, and a way of suddenly expressing it, so that it braced rather than hurt. As Oldershaw once said to me, “His candour is beautiful.” But his melancholy made him contented, where happier men were discontented. His pessimism did the worst work of optimism. In person he was long, loose and lounging; and nearly as untidy as I was.

Apart from these various glimpses of various parties, my main work was on the Daily News, then practically controlled by Mr. Cadbury with Mr. A. G. Gardiner as its well-read and sympathetic editor: and I only dimly appreciated what I now see to have been the process by which the press came to be run like a big business. I remember gazing blankly at the poky little entrance being replaced by a revolving door; then a novelty to me, though probably to nobody else. It reminded me vaguely of a cattle-gate, and I remember asking old Mr. Cadbury whether it was meant to keep cows out of the office. He laughed immensely at this simple jest, having himself an attractive simplicity; but the incident is connected chiefly in my mind with a jest rather less Arcadian. There was working in the office a very prominent journalist of the Nonconformist culture, who took himself so seriously that in any crowd of common men he was certain to be taken frivolously. I am ashamed to say that I circulated, about this bland and blameless publicist, a legend that the mechanical structure of the new door was the key to the mystery of his permanent presence in the office. Again and again he had been thrown out, but with such ill-judged violence that the swinging portal swung him back again into the interior. The more unerring the aim, the more violent the energy, with which old Mr. Cadbury flung him towards the frontsteps, the more certain was his successful contributor to turn up smiling and be swept back to his office and his desk. Thus, I would say, having even then a tendency to moralise along such lines, every mechanical improvement brings a new problem with it. I do not demand faith in the fable, but I have not been discouraged in the moral, by seeing motoring lead to massacre, aviation destroy cities and machines increase unemployment.

Generally, meanwhile, I began to see something of the political world, and especially that allied to our own wing of the Liberal Party; notably in the enjoyment of the hospitality which the late Mr. Cadbury used to extend to large gatherings of his contributors and friends. It was an entertaining experience, especially when it illustrated, as it generally did, the very varied elements of which our party was made up. It was at one of these house-parties of the Cadburys that I first met a man for whom I had a very great regard, apart from the fact that his company was always amusing; I mean Will Crooks, for it always jarred against his whole solid personality to refer to him as Mr. Crooks. I have known a great many Labour members, and liked most of them; quite as much at any rate as Liberal members. The Labour members I knew covered every type from frigid Cambridge dons to eccentric English and Scottish aristocrats. Will Crooks was the only Labour leader I ever knew who reminded me for a single moment of the English labouring classes. His humour really was the humour of an omnibus conductor or a railway porter; and that sort of humour is a much more powerful and real thing than most modern forms of education or eloquence. His criticism on beholding a company of advanced Socialist intellectuals was not that they gave too concentrated a power to the abstraction of the State, or that they followed an impossible ideal unsupported by self-interest, but that, as he put it, “They got no backs to their ‘eads.” His wife also was as representative as a Roman matron; and it is in connection with her that I specially recall the curious clash of types and cultures that went on even inside our own political party. I remember an ethereal little lady with pale blue eyes and pale green garments, who was the wife of a well-known Anti-War journalist. She had a touching timidity in advancing her ideas; but, when they were advanced, they were a very serious business indeed. I remember that Mr. Noel Buxton, whose acquaintance I made about this time, was describing in an animated and amusing fashion the scurry and scamper of his life while contesting a seat at the election. In a dreadful hour, he happened to use the expression; “I just had time to snatch a cutlet—”; and the prophetess in the green garments was goaded, by the god within her, to speak. When Buxton had left the room she did so.

“Do you think that was really necessary?” she said with a painful fixity, like one in a trance. “Man is no better for a cutlet. Man does not really need cutlets."

At this point she received hearty, one might almost say heavy support, from what was probably an unexpected quarter.

"No, my dear," said Mrs. Crooks in resounding tones, "A man doesn't want a cutlet! What's the good of a cutlet? What a man wants is a good chump chop or a bit of the under-cut; and I'd see he got it."

The other lady sighed; it was not quite what she had meant; and she was obviously a little alarmed to advance again against her large and solid opponent and be felled to the earth with a mutton-bone. But that little comedy of cross-purposes has always remained in my memory, as a perfect parable of the two kinds of Simple Life, the false and the true.

The vegetarian lady was really a very charming lady; but a very serious lady. Almost immediately after the above incident, I had to take her in to dinner. We passed through the conservatory, and merely in order to change the subject, in a flippant fashion I pointed to an insect-eating plant and said,

"Don't you vegetarians feel remorse when you look at that? You live by devouring harmless plants; and here is a plant that actually devours animals. Surely it is a just judgment. It is the revenge of the vegetable world."

She looked at me with staring blue eyes that were absolutely grave and unsmiling. "Oh," she said, "But I don't approve of revenge."

This, I need hardly say, shattered and prostrated me altogether; I could only murmur in a vague and sullen manner that of course, if she didn't believe in revenge, what was Christianity coming to, or words to that effect. But she long lingered in my thoughts and her type of thinking has run through all my life and times, like a thread of pale green and blue.

I mixed myself in politics also in other ways; I can hardly say in more practical ways. For the politics were not very practical politics — at least, not when I practised them. Charles Masterman used to swear with derisive gusto that when we went canvassing together, he went all down one side of a street and up most of the other, and found me in the first house, still arguing the philosophy of government with the first householder. This was perhaps unduly darkened by a jovial pessimism which belonged to Charles Masterman. But it is perfectly true that I began electioneering under the extraordinary delusion that the object of canvassing is conversion. The object of canvassing is counting. The only real reason for people being pestered in their own houses by party agents is quite unconnected with the principles of the party (which are often a complete mystery to the agents): it is simply that the agents may discover from the words, manner, gesticulations, oaths, curses, kicks or blows of the householder, whether he is likely to vote for the party candidate, or not to vote at all. I learnt this lesson gradually myself; from a vast variety of human faces and gestures revealed by the opening of front-doors. My friend Oldershaw and I went down together to canvass for a Liberal candidate in the country. It seems strange now to remember that, in our innocence, we did not know anything about him except that he was a Liberal candidate. He was, so far as my knowledge goes, a perfectly worthy and respectable gentleman; but as we passed through that and many other political elections a curious and obscure feeling began to grow in my mind. At the time I was not even conscious of it; even now I do not know how to describe that cold and creeping suggestion of the subconsciousness. When it ultimately rose to the surface and shaped itself, long afterwards in other campaigns, into a half articulate question, I think the question was, "Why is the candidate nearly always the worst duffer on his own platform?" To these elections and by-elections, to which I went in many places, many other speakers also went, always more eloquent and, then at least, much better known than I. There were on the platform men like John Simon and Belloc who spoke as well as it is possible to speak, probably better than they have ever spoken since. And all the time, as often as not, the man we were sending up specially to speak, in the supreme court of Parliament, could not speak at all. He was some solid and dressy tailor's dummy, with a single eye-glass or waxed moustaches, who repeated exactly the same dull formula at every separate meeting. There is something interesting, as a matter of psychology, in this unconfessed half-consciousness in the mind of youth that things are not really right, even while the will and the convictions are ready to shout with loyalty to their perfect and universal rightness. Looking back on it now, after those other political experiences of Marconi days, which I shall have to describe later, I know exactly what it was I felt; I also know exactly what it was I did not understand. I know that what runs modern politics is money; and that the superiority of the fool in the frock-coat over Belloc and Simon simply consisted in the fact that he was richer than they were. But I was then quite innocent of all these things; and especially in the case of the first Liberal candidate I worked for, I shouted with sustained enthusiasm and fidelity. The extraordinary thing, about the first candidate I worked for, is that he got in.

But though I fear I was not of much use to the electioneering, it was ultimately of some use to me; as I saw more of the country life than a Londoner like myself had yet imagined, and encountered not a few entertaining country types. I remember at another election a sturdy old woman of Somerset, with a somewhat menacing and almost malevolent stare, who informed me on her own doorstep that she was a Liberal and I could not see her husband, because he was still a Tory. She then informed me that she had been twice married before, and both her husbands had been Tories when they married her, but had become Liberals afterwards. She jerked her thumb over her shoulder towards the invisible Conservative within and said, “I’ll have him ready by the ‘lection.” I was not permitted to penetrate further into this cavern of witchcraft, where she manufactured Liberals out of the most unpromising materials; and (it would appear) destroyed them afterwards. But she was only one of a number of such quaint and forcible rustics whom I encountered in my political travels. Nor indeed were they the only things that I encountered. For all this funny little fuss of politics was in this case spread out like a sprawling sham fight, or the manoeuvres on Salisbury Plain, over that enormous area of noble hills and valleys which had seen so many vaster struggles in the past, reaching back to that aboriginal struggle of the Pagans and the Christians which is the genesis of all our history. And such primitive things were probably already working their way to the surface of my own mind; things that I afterwards attempted to throw into very inadequate but at least more elemental and universal literary form. For I remember the faint and hazy inspiration that troubled me one evening on the road, as I looked beyond the little hamlet, patched so incongruously with a few election posters, and saw hung upon the hills, as if it were hung upon the heavens, remote as a pale cloud and archaic as a gigantic hieroglyph; the White Horse.

I only mention it here because there will be some misunderstanding even of my accidental and amateurish intervention in politics, if it is not understood that our political idealism, unpopular as it was, was felt inwardly as national and not as international. It was that which was a permanent source of irritation and misunderstanding, both within and without the political party. To us it seemed obvious that Patriotism and Imperialism were not only not the same thing, but very nearly opposite things. But it did not seem obvious, but very puzzling, to the great majority of healthy patriots and innocent Imperialists. It seemed equally puzzling to a great many anti-patriots and anti-Imperialists. Towards the end of this period, we published a book intended to explain our rather peculiar position; it was called England a Nation; it was edited by Oldershaw and had contributions by Masterman and myself and others. One of the contributions came from an Irish Nationalist member, my friend Hugh Law; and it was about this time, naturally enough, that I began to see something of the Irish Nationalists and to feel a strong and special sympathy with Irish Nationalism. Of this I may say more in another place; it is sufficient to remark here that it is to me a considerable satisfaction to think that I have always felt it the first duty of a real English patriot to sympathise with the passionate patriotism of Ireland; that I expressed it through the worst times of her tragedy and have not lost it in her triumph.

Curiously enough, however, my sharpest memory of the puzzle of this patriotic paradox, and the difficulty of making others see what to me was so obvious, is not connected with Ireland or with England; but, of all places in the world, with Germany. Some time after all these events, I had to visit Frankfurt, where I took on rather casually the task of lecturing on English literature to a congress of German schoolmasters. We discussed Walter Scott’s Marmion and other metrical romances; we sang English songs over German beer, and had a very pleasant time. But there was already stirring, even among those mild and amiable Germans, something that was not so pleasant; and though they expressed it quite politely, I suddenly found myself once more in the same difficulty about the national and the imperial notion. For, speaking to some of them at large about literature, as to a merely cosmopolitan world of culture, I touched on this preference of mine for what some consider a narrower national idea. I found that they also were puzzled; they assured me, with that gravity with which Germans alone can repeat what they regard as a platitude, that Imperialismus and Patriotismus were the same thing. When they discovered that I did not like Imperialismus, even for my own country, a very curious expression came into their eyes, and a still more curious notion seems to have come into their heads. They formed the extraordinary idea that I was an internationalist indifferent, or even hostile, to English interests. Perhaps they thought Gilbert Keith Chesterton was an alias of Houston Stewart Chamberlain. Anyhow, they began to talk more openly, but still vaguely; and there grew gradually on my consciousness the conviction that these extraordinary people really thought that I might accept or approve, on some toshy ethnological or sociological ground or other, the extension of the Teutonic Race at the expense even of the impotence or absorption of my own land. It was a somewhat difficult situation; for they said nothing definite that I had any right to resent; it was merely that I felt in the atmosphere a pressure and a threat. It was Der Tag. After thinking a moment, I said, “Well, gentlemen, if it ever came to anything like that, I think I should have to refer you to the poem of Scott that we have been discussing.” And I gravely repeated the answer of Marmion, when King James says that they may meet again in war as far south as Tamworth Castle.

Much honour’d were my humble home,
If in its halls King James should come;
But Nottingham has archers good,
And Yorkshire men are stern of mood;
Northumbrian prickers wild and rude. ...
And many a banner will be torn,
And many a knight to earth be borne,
And many a sheaf of arrows spent,
Ere Scotland’s King shall cross the Trent.

I looked at them and they at me, and I think they understood; and there rose up like an enormous shadow over that drinking-hall the terror of things to be.

Chapter VI: The Fantastic Suburb

When I was a young journalist on the Daily News, I wrote in some article or other the sentence, “Clapham, like every other city, is built on a volcano.” When I opened the paper next day, I found the words confronting me, “Kensington, like every other city, is built on a volcano.” It did not matter, of course, but I was a little puzzled and mentioned it to my immediate superior in the office, as if it were some freak of a fanciful compositor. But he glowered at me in a heavy and resentful manner, which would alone be a confession of guilt, if there were any guilt, and said rather sulkily, “Why should it be Clapham?” And then, as if throwing off the mask, “Well, I live at Clapham.” And he, knowing that I lived at Kensington, had bitterly transferred to that royal borough what he imagined to be a taunt.

“But I was glorifying Clapham!” I cried pathetically, “I was showing it as epical and elemental and founded in the holy flame.” “You think you’re funny, don’t you?” he said. “I think I’m right,” I said, making that modest claim not for the last time; and then, not for the last but perhaps for the first time, the terrible truth dawned upon me.

If you said in a Basque village or a Bavarian town that the place was romantic, some might draw the dreadful deduction that you were an artist, and therefore possibly a madman; but nobody would have any particular reason to doubt that the madman meant what he said. But the citizen of Clapham could not believe that I meant what I said. The patriot of Clapham could not find it credible or conceivable that any remark about Clapham could be anything but a sneer at Clapham. He could not even say the word so that the first syllable of “Clapham” sounded like the last syllable of “thunderclap”. There was utterly veiled from his sight the visionary Clapham, the volcanic Clapham, what I may be allowed to put upon the cosmic map as Thunderclapham. I assured him again and again, almost with tears, that I was warmly sympathetic with any sensitive feelings he might have, if he was really proud of Clapham. But that was exactly the horrid secret. He was not proud or Clapham. The Clapham patriot was ashamed of Clapham.

That Clapham journalist, who glowered at me, has been the problem of my life. He has haunted me at every turn and corner like a shadow, as if he were a blackmailer or a murderer. It was against him that I marshalled the silly pantomime halberdiers of Notting Hill and all the rest. In other words, everything I have thought and done grew originally out of that problem which seemed to me a paradox. I shall have to refer to many problems in these pages, if they are to be truthful pages; and to glance at solutions with some of which the reader may agree, with some of which he may very violently disagree. But I will ask him to remember throughout that this was the primary problem for me, certainly in order of time and largely in order of logic. It was the problem of how men could be made to realise the wonder and splendour of being alive, in environments which their own daily criticism treated as dead-alive, and which their imagination had left for dead. It is normal for a man to boast if he can, or even when he can't, that he is a citizen of no mean city. But these men had really resigned themselves to being citizens of mean cities; and on every side of us the mean cities stretched far away beyond the horizon; mean in architecture, mean in costume, mean even in manners; but, what was the only thing that really mattered, mean in the imaginative conception of their own inhabitants. These mean cities were indeed supposed to be the component parts of a very great city; but in the thoughts of most modern people, the great city has become a journalistic generalisation, no longer imaginative and very nearly imaginary. On the other hand, the modern mode of life, only professing to be prosaic, pressed upon them day and night and was the real moulder of their minds. This, I say by way of preliminary guide or direction, was what originally led me into certain groups or movements and away from others.

What was called my medievalism was simply that I was very much interested in the historic meaning of Clapham Common. What was called my dislike of Imperialism was a dislike of making England an Empire, in the sense of something more like Clapham Junction. For my own visionary Clapham consisted of houses standing still; and not of trucks and trains rattling by; and I did not want England to be a sort of cloakroom or clearing-house for luggage labelled exports and imports. I wanted real English things that nobody else could import and that we enjoyed too much to export. And this was present even in the last and most disputed phase of change. I came to admit that some sort of universality, another sort of universality, would be needed before such places could really become shrines or sacred sites. In short, I eventually concluded, rightly or wrongly, that Clapham could not now be made mystical by the Clapham Sect. But I say it with the greatest respect for that old group of philanthropists, who devoted themselves to the cause of the remote negroes; the sect that did so much to liberate Africa; the Clapham Sect, that did so little to liberate Clapham.

Now it is essential to realise one fact following on the shadowy epic of Clapham and Kensington; that tale of two cities. It is necessary to insist that in those days, when Clapham was Clapham, London was Clapham; nay, Kensington was Clapham. I mean that, at this particular date, the general appearance of London was more plain and prosaic than it is now. There were indeed beautiful corners of Georgian and Regency architecture in many parts of London, and nowhere more than in Kensington. There are some still. But though there was some trace of the older movements in art, there was as yet no trace of the new ones. Morris had broken out here and there like a rash, in the form of wallpapers; but the very dullest phase of dead Victorianism was in most of the wallpapers and nearly all the walls. But London was already unthinkably large, in comparison with its few last relics of eighteenth-century elegance or its first faint signals of aesthetic revival. And that huge thing was a hideous thing, as a whole. The landscape of London was a thing of flat-chested houses, blank windows, ugly iron lamp-posts and vulgar vermilion pillar-boxes; and as yet, of very little else.

If I have at all suggested the modest virtues of my own middle-class group and family, it will be obvious already, I hope, that we were as ugly as the railings and lamp-posts between which we walked. I mean that our dress and furniture were as yet untouched by anything “arty”, in spite of a quite decently informed interest in art. We were even further from Bohemia than from Belgravia. When my mother said that we had never been respectable, she rather meant that we had never been dressy than that we had never been dowdy. By comparison with the aestheticism that has since crawled across London, we were all of us distinctly dowdy. It was the more so in my own family, because my father and my brother and I were negligent about externals we regarded as normal. We were careless in wearing careful clothes. The aesthetes were careful in wearing careless clothes. I wore an ordinary coat; it was due merely to undesigned friction or attrition if it became rather an extraordinary coat. The Bohemian wore a slouch-hat; but he did not slouch in it. I slouched in a top-hat; a shocking bad hat, but not one designed to shock the bourgeois. I was myself, in that sense, entirely bourgeois. Sometimes that hat, or something like the ghost of it, makes a spectral reappearance still, and is extracted from the dustbin or the pawnshop or the British Museum, to figure at the King's Garden-Party. Of course, it may not be the same one. The great original was certainly more suited to a scarecrow in a kitchen-garden than to a guest in a king's garden. But the point is that we never thought about the fashions, or the conventions, sufficiently seriously either to fulfil them or to defy them. My father was in a hundred happy and fruitful ways an amateur; but in no way at all a dilettante. And as this memoir must concern his much less estimable descendant, who actually went to an art-school, he may at least be allowed to boast that, if he failed to be an artist, he never tried to be an aesthete.

In short, the reader (if any) must not be misled at this stage by that Falstaffian figure in a brigand's hat and cloak, which has appeared in many caricatures. That figure was a later work of art; though the artist was not merely the caricaturist; but a lady artist touched on as lightly as possible in this very Victorian narrative. That caricature merely commemorates what the female genius could do with the most unpromising materials. But when I was a boy or a bachelor, my dress and appearance were just like everybody else's, only worse. My madness, which was considerable, was wholly within. But that madness was more and more moving in the direction of some vague and visionary revolt against the prosaic flatness of a nineteenth-century city and civilization; an imaginative impatience with the cylindrical hats and the rectangular houses; in short, that movement of the mind I have already associated with the Napoleon of Notting Hill and the imperfect patriot of Clapham. I had perhaps got no further than the feeling that those imprisoned in these inhuman outlines were human beings; that it was a bad thing that living souls should be thus feebly and crudely represented by houses like ill-drawn diagrams of Euclid, or streets and railways like dingy sections of machinery. I remember speaking to Masterman, very early in our acquaintance, as we watched the harassed crowds pouring through the passages of the Underground to the iron and symbolic Inner Circle, and quoting the words of Kipling about the disabled battleship:-

For it is not meet that English stock
Should bide in the heart of an eight-day clock
The death they may not see.

But I always retained a dim sense of something sacred in English stock, or in human stock, which separated me from the mere pessimism of the period. I never doubted that the human beings inside the houses were themselves almost miraculous; like magic and talismanic dolls, in whatever ugly dolls'-houses. For me, those brown brick boxes were really Christmas boxes. For, after all, Christmas boxes often came tied up in brown paper; and the jerry-builders' achievements in brown brick were often extremely like brown paper.

To sum up, I accepted my environment and the practical fact that all hats and houses were like our hats and houses; and that this Cockney cosmos, so far as a Cockney could see, stretched away to the ends of the earth. For this reason, it fell out, as a rather determining accident, that I first saw as from afar, the first fantastic signal of something new and as yet far from fashionable; something like a new purple patch on that grey stretch of streets. It would not be remarkable now, but it was remarkable then. In those days I had the habit of walking over very wide stretches and circles of London; I always walked to and from my first art-school in St. John's Wood; and it will give some hint or now London has altered to say that I commonly walked from Kensington to St. Paul's Cathedral, and for a great part of the way in the middle of the road. One day I had turned my aimless steps westward, through the tangles of Hammersmith Broadway and along the road that goes to Kew, when I turned for some reason, or more likely without a reason, into a side street and straggled across the dusty turf through which ran a railway, and across the railway one of those disproportionately high bridges which bestride such narrow railway-lines like stilts. By a culmination of futility, I climbed up to this high and practically unused bridge; it was evening, and I think it was then I saw in the distance of that grey landscape, like a ragged red cloud of sunset, the queer artificial village of Bedford Park.

It is difficult, as I have said, to explain how there was then something fanciful about what is now so familiar. That sort of manufactured quaintness is now hardly even quaint; but at that time it was even queer. Bedford Park did look like what it partially professed to be; a colony for artists who were almost aliens; a refuge for persecuted poets and painters hiding in their red-brick catacombs or dying behind their red-brick barricades, when the world should conquer Bedford Park. In that somewhat nonsensical sense, it is rather Bedford Park that has conquered the world. Today, model cottages, council houses and arty-crafty shops — tomorrow, for all I know, prisons and workhouses and madhouses may present (outside) that minimum of picturesqueness, which was then considered the preposterous pose of those addicted to painting pictures. Certainly, if the clerk in Clapham had then been actually presented with such a fantastic cottage, he might have thought that the fairytale house was really a madhouse. This aesthetic experiment was quite recent; it had some elements of real co-operative and corporative independence; its own stores and post-office and church and inn. But the whole was vaguely under the patronage of old Mr. Comyns-Carr, who was not only regarded as the patriarch or the oldest inhabitant, but in some sense as the founder and father of the republic. He was not really so very old; but then the republic was very new; much newer than the new republic of Mr. Mallock, though filled with philosophical gossip of much the same sort, over which the patriarch benevolently beamed and brooded. At least, to quote a literary phrase then much quoted, he was older than the rocks which he sat among, or the roofs he sat under; and we might well have murmured another contemporary tag, a little vaguely perhaps, from memory:-

Match me this marvel, save where aesthetes are,
A rose-red suburb half as old as Carr.

But though I think we all felt, if subconsciously, something dreamily theatrical about the thing, that it was partly a dream and partly a joke, it was not merely a fraud. Intelligent people will insinuate themselves even into an intelligentsia; and important people lived there quietly rather than importantly. Professor Yorke Powell, the distinguished historian, paraded there his long leonine beard and menacing and misleading eyebrows; and Dr. Todhunter, the eminent Celtic scholar, represented the Irish colony in the battles of culture. And in the same connection, if it was a place of shadows it could hardly be called a place of shams, when it contained one who is still perhaps the greatest poet writing in our tongue. There is always something fanciful about the conjunction of the world that the poet sees and the place he lives in; the fancy that the great golden lions of Blake roared and roamed in a small court off the Strand, or that Camberwell may have been haunted by Sordello, couched like a lion and expressing himself rather like a sphinx. And it amuses me to think that under those toy trees and gimcrack gables there was already passing a pageant of strange gods and the head-dresses of forgotten priests and the horns of holy unicorns and the wrinkled sleep of Druidic vegetation, and all the emblems of a new heraldry of the human imagination.

William Butler Yeats might seem as solitary as an eagle; but he had a nest. Wherever there is Ireland there is the Family; and it counts for a great deal. If the reader requires a test, let him ask why there is still a habit of calling this great and often grim genius “Willie Yeats”. Nobody, to my knowledge, talks about “Jackie Masefield”, or “Alfie Noyes”, or (what might be misunderstood by the light-minded) “Ruddy Kipling”. But in the case of Yeats, such familiarity might seem singularly incongruous with his tastes and temper; and analogous to talking of the great Gulliver as “Johnny Swift”. His own tone and temper, in public as well as private expression, is of a fastidiousness the very reverse of such familiarity.

There is no fool can call me friend
And I may drink at the journey’s end
With Landor and with Donne.

I mention it merely as a point of impersonal description, without pronouncing on the problem; it takes all sorts to make a world. I daresay that there are a good many fools who can call me a friend and also (a more chastening thought) a good many friends who can call me a fool. But in Yeats that fastidiousness is not only sincere but essentially noble, being full of a fine anger against the victory of baser over better things, leading him to call the terrible words over the great grave in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, “the noblest epitaph in history.” The reason why, in spite of all this, the largest possible assembly and assortment of fools is probably at this moment calling poor Yeats “Willie,” at any rate behind his back, is to be found in the curious corporate stamp always left by the Irish family as a whole. The intensity and individualism of genius itself could never wash out of the world’s memories the general impression of Willie and Lily and Lolly and Jack; names cast backwards and forwards in a unique sort of comedy of Irish wit, gossip, satire, family quarrels and family pride. I knew the family more or less as a whole in those days; and for long afterward knew and admired those sisters of the poet who maintained in the Cuala industry a school of decoration and drapery not unworthy of the great lines about the heavens’ embroidered cloths. W. B. is perhaps the best talker I ever met, except his old father who alas will talk no more in this earthly tavern, though I hope he is still talking in Paradise. Among twenty other qualities, he had that rare but very real thing, entirely spontaneous style. The words will not come pouring out, any more than the bricks that make a great building come pouring out; they are simply arranged like lightning; as if a man could build a cathedral as quickly as a conjurer builds a house of cards. A long and elaborately balanced sentence, with dependent clauses alternative or antithetical, would flow out of such talkers with every word falling into its place, quite as immediately and innocently as most people would say it was a fine day or a funny business in the papers. I can still remember old Yeats, that graceful greybeard, saying in an offhand way about the South African War, "Mr. Joseph Chamberlain has the character, as he has the face, of the shrewish woman who ruins her husband by her extravagance; and Lord Salisbury has the character, as he has the face, of the man who is so ruined." That style, or swift construction of a complicated sentence, was the sign of a lucidity now largely lost. You will find it in the most spontaneous explosions of Dr. Johnson. Since then some muddled notion has arisen that talking in that complete style is artificial; merely because the man knows what he means and means to say it. I know not from what nonsense world the notion first came; that there is some connection between being sincere and being semi-articulate. But it seems to be a notion that a man must mean what he says, because he breaks down even in trying to say it; or that he must be a marvel of power and decision, because he discovers in the middle of a sentence that he does not know what he was going to say. Hence the conversation of current comedy; and the pathetic belief that talk may be endless, so long as no statement is allowed to come to an end.

Yeats affected me strongly, but in two opposite ways; like the positive and negative poles of a magnet. It is necessary to explain what I mean, not so much for the sake of my own groping notions at this time, as for the sake of explaining the peculiarity of the period; about which most critics seem to be completely wrong at the present time. There was much in Victorian ideas that I dislike and much that I respect; but there was nothing whatever about Victorian ideas corresponding to what is now called Victorian. I am actually old enough to remember the Victorian Age; and it was almost a complete contrast to all that is now connoted by that word. It had all the vices that are now called virtues; religious doubt, intellectual unrest, a hungry credulity about new things, a complete lack of equilibrium. It also had all the virtues that are now called vices; a rich sense of romance, a passionate desire to make the love of man and woman once more what it was in Eden, a strong sense of the absolute necessity of some significance in human life. But everything that everybody tells me now about the Victorian atmosphere I feel instantly to be false, like a fog, which merely shuts out a vista. And in nothing is this more true than in the particular truth I must now try to describe.

The general background of all my boyhood was agnostic. My own parents were rather exceptional, among people so intelligent, in believing at all in a personal God or in personal immortality. I remember when my friend Lucian Oldershaw, who introduced me to this Bohemian colony, said to me suddenly, looking back on the tired lessons in the Greek Testament at St. Paul's School, "Of course, you and I were taught our religion by agnostics;" and I, suddenly seeing the faces of all my schoolmasters, except one or two eccentric clergymen, knew that he was right. It was not specially our generation, it was much more the previous generation, that was agnostic after the fashion of Huxley. It was the period of which Mr. H. G. Wells, a sportive but spiritual child of Huxley, wrote truly enough that it was "full of the ironical silences that follow great controversies;" and in that controversy, Huxley had been superficially successful. So successful, that Mr. Wells, in the same passage, went so far as to say that the Bishops, "socially so much in evidence, are intellectually in hiding." ... How dear and distant it all seems! I have lived to see biological controversies, in which it is much truer to say that the official Darwinians are in hiding. The "silence" following on the first evolutionary controversy was a good deal more "ironical" than Mr. Wells was then aware. But then certainly the silence seemed to be one of religion defeated; a desert of materialism. Men no more expected the myriad mystical reactions now moving all nations than the flat-chested mansions of Pimlico and Bloomsbury had expected to see spreading through the land the crested roofs and cranky chimneys of Bedford Park.

But it was not in this that Bedford Park was eccentric. There was nothing new or odd about not having a religion. Socialism, mostly upon the rather wallpaper pattern of Morris, was a relatively new thing. Socialism, in the style of Bernard Shaw and the Fabians, was a rising thing. But agnosticism was an established thing. We might almost say that agnosticism was an established church. There was a uniformity of unbelief, like the Elizabethan demand for uniformity of belief; not among eccentric people, but simply among educated people. And, above all, among the educated people older than myself.

There were, indeed, fine fighting atheists. But they were mostly fighting something else besides theism. There could be no more virile or valiant type of them than my old friend Archie MacGregor, the artist, who was fighting the Boer War. As we agreed on this, we fell into a strong companionship; but even in those days, I realised that his atheism was not really revolutionary in the matter of morals. It was just the other way. It was not any "new morality," but very decidedly the "old morality" that he was defending against Imperialism, merely on the ground that it was murder and theft. He was defending against the new ethic of Nietzsche the old ethic of Naboth. This, Mr. Wells and the Fabians saw with typical lucidity; that the sentimental Socialists were inconsistent, in saying that a peasant has no right to a field, but a peasantry has a right to an oilfield. Mr. Wells is not really a pacifist any more than a militarist; but the only sort of war he thinks right is the only sort of war I think wrong. Anyhow, broadly speaking, it is a complete mistake to suppose that the rebels who denounced Church and Chapel were those who denounced Empire and Army. The divisions cut across; but they cut mainly the other way. A fighting Pro-Boer like MacGregor was in as much of a minority among atheists as among artists; even in Bedford Park. I soon discovered that, when I emerged into the larger world of artists and literary men. No two men could have been more opposite than Henley and Colvin; and I was later to be in some sense a witness to the duel they fought over the dead body of Stevenson. But they were both stubborn materialists and they were both stubborn militarists. The truth is that for most men about this time Imperialism, or at least patriotism, was a substitute for religion. Men believed in the British Empire precisely because they had nothing else to believe in. Those beacon-fires of an imperial insularity shot a momentary gleam over the dark landscape of the Shropshire Lad; though I fear that many innocent patriots did not perceive the Voltairean sneer in the patriotic lines: "Get you the sons your fathers got, and God will save the Queen." My present prejudices would be satisfied by saying that the last decay of Protestantism took the form of Prussianism.

But I am here describing myself as I was, when pure and unpolluted by such prejudices. And what I wish to attest, merely as a witness to the fact, is that the background of all that world was not merely atheism, but atheist orthodoxy, and even atheist respectability. That was quite as common in Belgravia as in Bohemia. That was above all normal in Suburbia; and only for that reason in this particular eccentric suburb. In that suburb, the type of the time was not a man like Archie MacGregor but a man like St. John Hankin. And the point is that a man like St. John Hankin was not eccentric but centric. He was a pessimist, which is something more atheistic than an atheist; he was a fundamental sceptic, that is a man without fundamentals; he was one who disbelieved in Man much more than he did in God; he despised democracy even more than devotion; he was professedly without enthusiasms of any kind; but in all this he was centric. He was very near to the centre of the culture and philosophy of London at that time. He was a man of real talent; and the memory of some of his amusing literary travesties still remains. I did not dislike him, though many did; but I did in a sense despair of him, as he despaired of everything. But it is entirely typical of the time that his pessimism managed to appear in Punch; and that, almost alone amid those ragged or ridiculous or affected artistic costumes, he always wore evening-dress. He had a low opinion of the world, but he was a man of the world; and especially of the world as it was then.

Now against this drab background of dreary modern materialism, Willie Yeats was calmly walking about as the Man Who Knew the Fairies. Yeats stood for enchantment; exactly where Hankin stood for disenchantment. But I very specially rejoiced in the fighting instinct which made the Irishman so firm and positive about it. He was the real original rationalist who said that the fairies stand to reason. He staggered the materialists by attacking their abstract materialism with a completely concrete mysticism; "Imagination!" he would say with withering contempt; "There wasn't much imagination when Farmer Hogan was dragged out of bed and thrashed like a sack of potatoes — that they did, they had 'um out;" the Irish accent warming with scorn; "they had 'um out and thumped 'um; and that's not the sort of thing that a man wants to imagine." But the concrete examples were not only a comedy; he used one argument which was sound, and I have never forgotten it. It is the fact that it is not abnormal men like artists, but normal men like peasants, who have borne witness a thousand times to such things; it is the farmers who see the fairies. It is the agricultural labourer who calls a spade a spade who also calls a spirit a spirit; it is the woodcutter with no axe to grind, except for woodcutting, who will say he saw a man hang on a gallows and afterwards hang round it as a ghost. It is all very well to say we ought not to believe in the ghost on an ignorant man's evidence. But we should hang the man on the gallows on the same man's evidence.

I was all for fighting for Willie Yeats and his fairies against materialism. I was especially for fighting for Willie Yeats and his farmers against the mechanical urban materialism. But already a further complication had arisen, which I must try to explain; not only to explain myself, but to explain the whole development of the poetry and the period. There had already appeared in that world the beginnings of a reaction against materialism; something analogous to what has since appeared in the form of Spiritualism. It has even taken the yet more defiant form of Christian Science, which denied the existence of the body merely because its enemies had denied the existence of the soul. But the form it took first, or most generally, in the world of which I speak, was the thing commonly called Theosophy; also sometimes called Esoteric Buddhism. It is probable that I must here allow at least for the allegation of a prejudice. If it existed, it was not an orthodox or a religious or even a pious prejudice. I was myself almost entirely Pagan and Pantheist. When I disliked Theosophy I had no Theology. Perhaps I did not dislike Theosophy, but only Theosophists. It is certainly true, I am afraid, whatever the failure in charity, that I did dislike some Theosophists. But I did not dislike them because they had erroneous doctrines, when I myself had no doctrines; or because they had no claim to be Christians, when in fact they would have claimed Christianity, among other things, much more confidentiy than I could myself. I disliked them because they had shiny pebbly eyes and patient smiles. Their patience mostly consisted of waiting for others to rise to the spiritual plane where they themselves already stood. It is a curious fact, that they never seemed to hope that they might evolve and reach the plane where their honest greengrocer already stood. They never wanted to hitch their own lumbering waggon to a soaring cabman; or see the soul of their charwoman like a star beckon to the spheres where the immortals are. Yet I suspect that I am unjust to these people in their real personalities. I fancy it was a combination of three things; Asia and Evolution and the English lady; and I think they would be nicer separate.

Now Yeats was not in the least like these Theosophical ladies; nor did he follow or seek out their special spiritual prophetess, Mrs. Besant, who was a dignified, ladylike, sincere, idealistic egoist. He sought out Madam Blavatsky, who was a coarse, witty, vigorous, scandalous old scally-wag; and I admire his taste. But I do think that this particular Oriental twist led him a dance, when he followed the fakirs and not the fairies. I shall not be misunderstood if I say of that great man that he is bewitched; that is, that Madam Blavatsky was a witch.

For whether or no Yeats was bewitched, it is certain that Yeats was not deceived. He was not taken in by the theosophical smile; or all that shining, or rather shiny, surface of optimism. He, having a more penetrating mind, had already penetrated to the essential pessimism that lies behind that Asiatic placidity; and it is arguable that the pessimism was not so depressing as the optimism. Anyhow, while those highly refined English ladies were stepping from star to star, as from stair to stair, he knew enough of what was meant by the Sorrowful Wheel, to realise that this starry stairway was uncommonly like a treadmill. The more feverish of my friends, in this circle, used to go and sit in rooms full of images of Buddha to calm themselves; though I myself never needed any image of Buddha to encourage me to do nothing or to go to sleep. But Yeats knew something of the mind and not only the face of Buddha; and if he would never have used such Tennysonian terms, he knew that it meant for his own mind, if calm at all, if any calm, a calm despair. In the scheme of mysticism to which he more and more tended after his first more fortunate adventures among farmers and fairies, the ancient religions stood more and more for the idea that the secret of the sphinx is that she has no secret. The veil of Isis was more and more merely the veil of Maya; illusion, ending with the last illusion that the veil of Isis is rent; the last and worst illusion that we are really disillusioned. He said to me once, apropos of somebody’s disappointment about something achieved, “You would not get out of your chair and walk across the room, if Nature had not her bag of illusions.” Then he added, as if against a silent protest, “It isn’t a very cheerful philosophy that everything is illusion.” It was not. I cannot answer for the fairies, but I doubt whether the farmers accepted it; and there was something in one half-grown Cockney journalist which entirely refused to accept it. So that I found myself in this odd double attitude towards the poet, agreeing with him about the fairytales on which most people disagreed with him, and disagreeing with him about the philosophy on which most people agreed with him, though in a much muddier and more prosaic way. Thus, when I read that wonderful poetical play, Land of Heart’s Desire, produced soon after at the Abbey Theatre, I was conscious of the sharp sensation, not so much that I disbelieved in the fairies, as that I disagreed with them. Though I had then no more notion of being a Catholic than of being a Cannibal, my sympathies were all for the Family against the Fairy. They were even then for the priest against the fairy. In all that magic burst of music, there was only one thing said by the fairy with which I fully and entirely sympathised; and that was the line: “I am tired of winds and waters and pale lights.” I do not think I have anything to alter in the sentence of literary criticism that I wrote long after: “There is only one thing against the Land of Heart’s Desire; the heart does not desire it.” Yet I admired the play almost passionately as a play; and in the debates of mere literature, always defended it against stupid jokes about the Celtic Twilight uttered by those who preferred the London Fog. So, later on, when I was on the Daily News, I defended, against the dramatic critic, the dramatic merit of a later play, which is full of good things; the play called Where There Is Nothing There Is God. But I was all groping and groaning and travailing with an inchoate and half-baked philosophy of my own, which was very nearly the reverse of the remark that where there is nothing there is God. The truth presented itself to me, rather, in the form that where there is anything there is God. Neither statement is adequate in philosophy; but I should have been amazed to know how near in some ways was my Anything to the Ens of St. Thomas Aquinas.

There was a debating-club in Bedford Park, on which I first tried my crude ideas with even cruder rhetoric. It deserved better treatment. It was frightful fun. It was called the “I.D.K.”; and an awful seal of secrecy was supposed to attach to the true meaning of the initials. Perhaps the Theosophists did really believe that it meant India’s Divine Karma. Possibly the Socialists did interpret it as “Individualists Deserve Kicking”. But it was a strict rule of the club that its members should profess ignorance of the meaning of its name; in the manner of the Know-Nothing movement in American politics. The stranger, the mere intruder into the sacred village, would ask, “But what does I.D.K. mean?”; and the initiate was expected to shrug his shoulders and say, “I don’t know,” in an offhand manner; in the hope that it would not be realised that, in a seeming refusal to reply, he had in fact replied. I know not whether this motto was symbolic of the agnosticism of men like Hankin or the mysticism of men like Yeats. But both points of view were, of course, present; and I think they pretty well divided that intellectual world between them. Certainly I always preferred the Celtic Twilight to the materialistic midnight. I had more sympathy with the magician’s cloak that clothed the man who believed in magic, or the dark elf-locks of the poet who had really something to tell us about elves, than with the black clothes and blank shirt-front of the sort of man who seemed to proclaim that the modern world, even when it is festive, is only the more funereal. What I did not realise was that there was a third angle, and a very acute angle, which was capable of piercing with the sharpness, and some would say the narrowness of a sword.

The secretary of this debating-club always proved her efficiency by entirely refusing to debate. She was one of a family of sisters, with one brother, whom I had grown to know through the offices of Oldershaw; and they had a cousin on the premises, who was engaged to a German professor and permanently fascinated by the subject of German fairytales. She was naturally attracted also to the Celtic fairytales that were loose in the neighbourhood; and one day she came back glowing with the news that Willie Yeats had cast her horoscope, or performed some such occult rite, and told her that she was especially under the influence of the moon. I happened to mention this to a sister of the secretary, who had only just returned to the family circle, and she told me in the most normal and unpretentious tone that she hated the moon.

I talked to the same lady several times afterwards; and found that this was a perfectly honest statement of the fact. Her attitude on this and other things might be called a prejudice; but it could not possibly be called a fad, still less an affectation. She really had an obstinate objection to all those natural forces that seemed to be sterile or aimless; she disliked loud winds that seemed to be going nowhere; she did not care much for the sea, a spectacle of which I was very fond; and by the same instinct she was up against the moon, which she said looked like an imbecile. On the other hand, she had a sort of hungry appetite for all the fruitful things like fields and gardens and anything connected with production; about which she was quite practical. She practised gardening; in that curious Cockney culture she would have been quite ready to practise farming; and on the same perverse principle, she actually practised a religion. This was something utterly unaccountable both to me and to the whole fussy culture in which she lived. Any number of people proclaimed religions, chiefly oriental religions, analysed or argued about them; but that anybody could regard religion as a practical thing like gardening was something quite new to me and, to her neighbours, new and incomprehensible. She had been, by an accident, brought up in the school of an Anglo-Catholic convent; and to all that agnostic or mystic world, practising a religion was much more puzzling than professing it. She was a queer card. She wore a green velvet dress barred with grey fur, which I should have called artistic, but that she hated all the talk about art; and she had an attractive face, which I should have called elvish, but that she hated all the talk about elves. But what was arresting and almost blood-curdling about her, in that social atmosphere, was not so much that she hated it, as that she was entirely unaffected by it. She never knew what was meant by being “under the influence” of Yeats or Shaw or Tolstoy or anybody else. She was intelligent, with a great love of literature, and especially of Stevenson. But if Stevenson had walked into the room and explained his personal doubts about personal immortality, she would have regretted that he should be wrong upon the point; but would otherwise have been utterly unaffected. She was not at all like Robespierre, except in a taste for neatness in dress; and yet it is only in Mr. Belloc’s book on Robespierre that I have ever found any words that describe the unique quality that cut her off from the current culture and saved her from it. “God had given him in his mind a stone tabernacle in which certain great truths were preserved imperishable.”

I saw a good deal of her later on, on various social occasions of the district; she was a witness to the grand and grotesque occasion on which I rode a bicycle for the first and last time; attired in the frock-coat and top hat of the period on the tennis lawn at Bedford Park. Believe it or not (as the great newspapers say when they tell lies based on ignorance of the elements of history) but it is true that I rode round and round the tennis-court with a complete natural balance, only disturbed by the intellectual problem of how I could possibly get off; eventually I fell off; I did not notice what happened to my hat, but then I seldom did. The image of that monstrous revolving ride has often recurred to me, as indicating that something odd must have happened to me about that time. The lady in question worked very hard as secretary of an educational society in London; and I formed the impression then, which I have not lost, that the worst of work nowadays is what happens to people when they cease working; the racketing of trains and trams and the slow return to remote homes. She was a very alert person, and normally quite the reverse of absent-minded; but she told me once with some remorse that she had been so tired that she had left her parasol in the waiting room of a railway-station. We thought no more of it for the moment; but as I walked home that night, by my custom, from Bedford Park to Kensington, very nearly in the middle of the night, I happened to see the identical railway-station stand up black and bulky against the moonlight; and I committed my first and last crime; which was burglary, and very enjoyable. The station, or that part of the station, seemed to be entirely locked up; but I knew exactly the whereabouts of the waiting-room in question; and I found the shortest cut to it was to climb up the steep grassy embankment and crawl under the platform out upon the line; I then clambered onto the platform and recovered the parasol. As I returned by the same route (still in the battered top hat and the considerably deranged frock-coat) I stared up at the sky and found myself filled with all sorts of strange sensations. I felt as if I had just fallen from the moon, with the parasol for a parachute. Anyhow, as I looked back up the tilt of turf grey in the moonshine, like unearthly lunar grasses I did not share the lady’s impiety to the patroness of lunatics.

It was fortunate, however, that our next most important meeting was not under the sign of the moon but of the sun. She has often affirmed, during our later acquaintance, that if the sun had not been shining to her complete satisfaction on that day, the issue might have been quite different. It happened in St. James’s Park; where they keep the ducks and the little bridge, which has been mentioned in no less authoritative a work than Mr. Belloc’s Essay on Bridges, since I find myself quoting that author once more. I think he deals in some detail, in his best topographical manner, with various historic sites on the Continent; but later relapses into a larger manner, somewhat thus: “The time has now come to talk at large about Bridges. The longest bridge in the world is the Forth Bridge, and the shortest bridge in the world is a plank over a ditch in the village of Loudwater. The bridge that frightens you most is the Brooklyn Bridge, and the bridge that frightens you least is the bridge in St. James’s Park.” I admit that I crossed that bridge in undeserved safety; and perhaps I was affected by my early romantic vision of the bridge leading to the princess’s tower.

But I can assure my friend the author that the bridge in St. James’s Park can frighten you a good deal.

Chapter VII: The Crime of Orthodoxy

I used to say that my autobiography ought to consist of a series of short stories like those about Sherlock Holmes; only that his were astonishing examples of observation, and mine astonishing examples of lack of observation. In short, they were to be “Adventures” concerned with my absence of mind, instead of his presence of mind. One, I remember was called “The Adventure of the Pro-Boer’s Corkscrew”, and commemorated the fact that I once borrowed a corkscrew from Hammond and found myself trying to open my front-door with it, with my latch-key in the other hand. Few will believe my statement, but it is none the less true that the incident came before and not after the more appropriate use of the corkscrew. I was perfectly sober; probably I should have been more vigilant if I had been drunk. Another anecdote, expanded into “The Adventure of the Astonished Clerk”, accused me of having asked for a cup of coffee instead of a ticket at the booking-office of a railway station, and doubtless I went on to ask the waitress politely for a third single to Battersea. I am not particularly proud of this characteristic, for I think that presence of mind is far more really poetical than absence of mind. But I only mention it, at this stage, because it introduces a character who played a considerable part in the fortunes of my friends and myself; and who, in the absorbing narrative of “The Adventure of the Curate’s Trousers”, was cast for the important part of the curate.

I cannot remember exactly where my brother or I first met the Rev. Conrad Noel. I rather fancy it was at some strange club where somebody was lecturing on Nietzsche; and where the debaters (by typical transition) passed from the gratifying thought that Nietzsche attacked Christianity to the natural inference that he was a True Christian. And I admired the common sense of a curate, with dark curly hair and a striking face, who got up and pointed out that Nietzsche would be even more opposed to True Christianity than to False Christianity, supposing there were any True Christianity to oppose. I learned that the curate’s name was Noel, but in many ways his intervention was symbolic of my experience of that strange world. That Intelligentsia of the artistic and vaguely anarchic clubs was indeed a very strange world. And the strangest thing about it, I fancy, was that, while it thought a great deal about thinking, it did not think. Everything seemed to come at second or third hand; from Nietzsche or

Tolstoy or Ibsen or Shaw; and there was a pleasant atmosphere of discussing all these things, without any particular sense of responsibility for coming to any conclusion on them. The company often included really clever people, like Mr. Edgar Jepson, who always seemed as if he had strayed out of Society to smile mysteriously in Bohemia. Here and there it would include a man who had not only cleverness but strong traditional beliefs, which he kept largely to himself; like my old friend Louis McQuilland, who was long content to appear as a modern of the club called the Moderns, dealing in detached epigrams of the Wilde and Whistler fashion; and guarding within him all the time a flame of pure Catholic faith and burning Irish Nationalism, which never appeared save when those sacred things were challenged. But I think it profoundly significant, as a matter of intellectual instincts, that he preferred the almost avowed nonsense of the Decadents to the more high-minded and heretical earnestness of the Fabians. He once said in his wrath, on the occasion of the hundredth eulogy on Candida or Arms and the Man, something which ran (if I remember right) in a Scriptural form, “Stay me with Hitchens, comfort me with Beerbohm; for I am sick of Shaw.”

But a large section of the Intelligentsia seemed wholly devoid of Intelligence. As was perhaps natural, those who pontificated most pompously were often the most windy and hollow. I remember a man with a long beard and a deep booming voice who proclaimed at intervals, “What we need is Love,” or, “All we require is Love,” like the detonations of a heavy gun. I remember another radiant little man who spread out his fingers and said, “Heaven is here! It is now!” which seemed a disturbing thought under the circumstances. There was an aged, aged man who seemed to live at one of these literary clubs; and who would hold up a large hand at intervals and preface some fairly ordinary observation by saying, “A Thought.” One day Jepson, I think, goaded beyond endurance, is said to have exploded with the words, “But, good God, man, you don’t call that a thought, do you?” But that was what was the matter with not a few of these thinkers. A sort of Theosophist said to me, “Good and evil, truth and falsehood, folly and wisdom are only aspects of the same upward movement of the universe.” Even at that stage it occurred to me to ask, “Supposing there is no difference between good and bad, or between false and true, what is the difference between up and down?”

Now there was one thing that I began to note, as I noted on that minor occasion of the debate on Nietzsche. All that clique, in praising the Ibsenite and Shavian drama, was of course very contemptuous of the old Victorian drama. It sneered steadily at the stock types of old farces; at the drawling guardmen and grotesque grocers of Caste or Our Boys. But there was one old farcical type that had become far more false; and that was the comic curate of The Private Secretary: the simpleton who “did not like London” and asked for a glass of milk and a Bath-Bun. And many of the sceptics in that highly scientific world had not, by any means, outgrown the Victorian joke about the curate. Having myself been trained, first on the farce about the curate, and then on the scepticism about the priest, I was quite ready to believe that a dying superstition was represented by such feeble persons. As a fact, I found that they were very often by far the ablest and most forcible persons. In debate after debate I noticed the same thing happen that I have already noted in the debate on Nietzsche. It was the farcical curate, it was the feebleminded clergyman, who got up and applied to the wandering discussion at least some sort of test of some sort of truth; who showed all the advantages of having been tolerably trained in some sort of system of thinking. Dreadful seeds of doubt began to be sown in my mind. I was almost tempted to question the accuracy of the anticlerical legend; nay, even the accuracy of the farce of The Private Secretary. It seemed to me that the despised curates were rather more intelligent than anybody else; that they, alone in that world of intellectualism, were trying to use their intellects. For that reason I begin such adventures with the Adventure of the Curate’s Trousers. For that reason I mention first Mr. Conrad Noel. He had no Bath-Bun. He did not confine himself to a glass of milk. Nobody, with the smallest knowledge of him, could truthfully say that he did not like London.

Conrad Noel, the son of a poet and the grandson of a peer, had all the incalculable elements of the eccentric aristocrat; the sort of eccentric aristocrat who so often figures as a particularly destructive democrat. That great gentleman, Cunninghame Graham, whom I knew more slightly but always respected profoundly, was the same sort of uncompromising rebel; but he had a sort of Scottish seriousness similar to Spanish seriousness; while Noel’s humour was half English and half Irish but always mainly humorous. He delighted, of course, in shocking people and taking a rise out of them. I remember how he used to say, shaking his head with an air of brooding concentration: “Ah, how little people know about the work of a clergyman’s life; such demands on him! Such distracting and different duties! All the afternoon behind the scenes at the Butterfly Theatre, talking to Poppy Pimpernel; all the evening doing a pub-crawl with Jack Bootle; back to the club after dinner, etc.” As a matter of fact, he occupied much of his time with things perhaps equally fantastic but more intellectual. He had a love of nosing out the headquarters of incredible or insane sects; and wrote an amusing record of them called Byways of Belief. He had a special affection for an old gentleman with long grey whiskers, living in the suburbs; whose name, it appeared, was King Solomon David Jesus. This prophet was not afraid to protest, as a prophet should, against what he considered the pomps and vanities of this world. He began the interview by coldly rebuking Conrad Noel for having sent in a visiting-card inscribed, “Rev. Conrad Noel”; since all such official titles were abolished in the New Dispensation. Conrad delicately insinuated, in self-defence, that there seemed to be something about calling oneself Solomon David Jesus, which might raise rather grave problems of identity and a somewhat formidable historical comparison. And anyhow, an old gentleman who called himself King could hardly insist on such severe republican simplicity. However, the monarch explained that his title had been given him by an actual voice speaking out of the sky; and the Rev. Conrad admitted that he could not claim that his visiting-card had been thus written at dictation.

Sometimes, instead of his visiting the New Religions, the New Religions visited him, which was rather more alarming. He and his wife, a very charming little lady whose demureness was perhaps a little deceptive, had gone out to a matinee and came back to find ten Doukhobors eating their tea. Doukhobors, it may be explained to those who have had no such happy visitations, are a sect of Russian Pacifists and practical Communists, who believe in living by mutual hospitality. It is a curious and mystifying circumstance, by the way, that while the Doukhobors lived in Russia and had differences with a foreign authority, they invariably behaved themselves like a band of saints and according to the highest pattern of primitive Christians; but when they crossed to Canada, and came under a British authority, they were strangely demoralised, and degenerated into dangerous fanatics who used to go about stealing horses out of carts and cows out of sheds; because they disapproved of the captivity of animals. Anyhow, Conrad Noel, who certainly would not have thought the worse of them for defying either the Russian or the British Empire, had met a member of this sect somewhere; and I suppose in some hazy and hearty fashion invited him to pay a call some day. He was there with nine others like unto himself, stowing away the muffins and macaroons; and explaining that they would be delighted to pay for so ample and sumptuous a meal; but unfortunately, they did not approve of money. “If, however,” explained the Primitive Christian, “there is any small form of service” — any domestic assistance they could offer in return, they would be delighted thus to discharge the debt. Then was a light of battle to be seen in the eye of Mrs. Conrad Noel, who proceeded in quiet tones to tell them all the things she would undoubtedly like done; there were a great many of them, more than I can recall; but I have a general impression that carrying the grand piano up five floors onto the roof, or carting the billiard-table to the other end of the garden, were typical of the class of tasks to which the tottering and staggering Doukhobors were directed, by that gentle but vindictive lady. It is to be feared that none of them came to the house of that hospitable Christian Socialist again; except indeed one isolated Doukhobor, who struck out a line for himself; for the simple domestic toil with which he paid for his meal consisted in going into Noel’s study and altering Noel’s sermon; blacking out whole passages of it and inserting sentiments of a more unimpeachably Doukhobor tendency. In his case, I suspect that Mr. Noel, as well as Mrs. Noel, began to have doubts about the Doukhobor ideal.

But Mr. Noel certainly never lost his belief in what may be called the Russian Communist ideal; though he would have been as astonished as anybody else if he had been told then of the fortunes that lay before Russian Communism. Here, however, I am chiefly concerned with him as an example of my preliminary prevailing impression of how stupid the anti-clericals were and how much more relatively intelligent the clerics were. From this time also, dates the first faint beginnings of my own divergence from the merely Communist to what is called the Distributist ideal. It was, after all, only the further sub-division of my Notting Hill romance from the street to the house; but it was solidified by Belloc, my Irish friends and my French holidays. But I fancy the first spark flew when a Theosophist, at a drawing-room meeting, was droning on about the immorality of Christians who believed in the Forgiveness of Sins; since there was only Karma, by which we reap what we sow. “If that window is broken,” he said mournfully, “our host [Sir Richard Stapley] might pardon it; but the window will still be broken." Whereupon a spectacled baldish little curate, quite unknown to me, jumped up and said, "But it isn't wrong to break a window. It's only wrong because it's Stapley's window; and if he doesn't mind, why should anybody else?"

Anyhow, it was when I was staying with Conrad Noel, afterwards famous as the parson who flew the Red Flag from his church at Thaxted in Essex, that I happened to be dressing for dinner and made the (it seems to me) very excusable error of mistaking his black clerical trousers for my evening ones. I trust I violated no grave ecclesiastical law, relative to the unlawful assumption of priestly vestments; but Conrad Noel himself was always fairly casual in the matter of costume. The world thought him a very Bohemian sort of clergyman, as it now thinks him a very Bolshevist sort of clergyman. The world would be wiser if it realised that, in spite of this, he was and is a very unworldly sort of clergyman; and much too unworldly to be judged rightly by the world. I did not always agree with his attitude, and I do not now altogether agree with his politics; but I have always known that he glowed with conviction and the simplicity of the fighting spirit. But in those days his external eccentricity was more provocative than is a red rag to a bull or a red flag to a bully. He delighted in making the quaintest combinations of costume made up of the clerical, the artistic and the proletarian. He took great pleasure in appearing in correct clerical clothes, surmounted with a sort of hairy or furry cap, making him look like an aesthetic rat-catcher. I had the pleasure of walking with him, thus attired, right across the vast stretch of South London, starting from Blackfriars Bridge and going on till we saw the green hills beyond Croydon; a very interesting expedition too rarely undertaken by those from the richer side of the river. I also remember one occasion when I was walking away from some meeting with him and with Dr. Percy Dearmer, then chiefly famous as an authority on the history of ritual and of vestments. Dr. Dearmer was in the habit of walking about in a cassock and biretta which he had carefully reconstructed as being of exactly the right pattern for an Anglican or Anglo-Catholic priest; and he was humorously grieved when its strictly traditional and national character was misunderstood by the little boys in the street. Somebody would call out, "No Popery," or "To hell with the Pope," or some other sentiment of larger and more liberal religion. And Percy Dearmer would sternly stop them and say, "Are you aware that this is the precise costume in which Latimer went to the stake?"

Meanwhile my own costume, however calamitous, was the result rather of accident than design; but this was sometime later and my wife had already disguised me as far as possible in the large hat and cloak familiar to caricaturists. But it was also at a sufficiently early date in English history for frock-coats to be worn on formal occasions. I had taken off the cloak and retained the frock-coat and the wide hat; and I must have borne a more or less formless resemblance to a Boer missionary. Thus I walked innocently down the street, with the hairy cap of the aesthetic rat-catcher on one side and the ceremonial biretta and cassock of Bishop Latimer on the other. And Charles Masterman, who always wore conventional clothes in an unconventional manner, a top-hat on the back of his head and an umbrella flourished with derisive gestures, walked behind and pointed at the three of us as we unconsciously filled the pavement and cried aloud, “Could you see three backs like that anywhere in God’s creation?”

I mention this fringe of eccentricity, even of eccentricity in dress, upon the border of the Anglo-Catholic party in the Anglican Church, because it really had a great deal to do with the beginning of the process by which Bohemian journalists, like my brother and myself, were drawn towards the serious consideration of the theory of a Church. I was considerably influenced by Conrad Noel; and my brother, I think, even more so.

I have said very little of my brother so far, in spite of the great part he played in my boyhood and youth; and the omission has been due to anything in the world except oblivion. My brother was much too remarkable a person not to have a chapter to himself. And I have decided, not without thought, that he will be best presented at full length when the time comes to deal with his very vital effect on modern history, and the whole story of the campaign against political corruption. But it is relevant here to remark that he differed from me at the very beginning; and not least in beginning his questions at the beginning. I always retained a sort of lingering loyalty or vague sympathy with the traditions of the past; so that, even during the period when I practically believed in nothing, I believed in what some have called “the wish to believe.” But my brother at the beginning did not even wish to believe; or at least did not wish to admit that he wished to believe. He adopted the extreme attitude of antagonism, and almost of anarchism; largely, no doubt, out of a reaction and as a result of our interminable arguments, or rather argument. For we really devoted all our boyhood to one long argument, unfortunately interrupted by meal-times, by school-times, by work hours and many such irritating and irrelevant frivolities. But though he was ready at first to take up the cudgels for anarchism or atheism or anything, he had the sort of mind in which anarchism or atheism could survive anything except the society of anarchists and atheists. He had far too lucid and lively a mind not to be bored with materialism as maintained by materialists. This negative reaction against negation, however, might not have carried him far, if the positive end of the magnet had not begun to attract him; in the person of personalities like Conrad Noel. It was certainly through that eccentric cleric that my brother began to cease to be anything so barren as a mere anti-clerical. I remember that, when conventional people complained of Noel's wild ways, or attributed to him worse things of which he certainly was not guilty, my brother Cecil answered them by quoting the words of the man healed of blindness in the Gospel: "Whether the man be a sinner or no, I know not; but this I know; that whereas I was blind, now I see."

The old High Church or Anglo-Catholic group, of which Conrad Noel represented the most revolutionary extreme and Percy Dearmer (at least at that time) the most historical and liturgical, was in fact a very fine body of men, to which I for one shall always feel a gratitude like that of my brother and the blind man in Scripture. Its leader, in so far as it had a leader among the higher branches of the Anglican system, was that most fascinating and memorable man, Henry Scott Holland, who moved among younger men like one much younger than they; unforgettable with his humorous frog's face and great stature and voice of bull-like bellowing; as if he were the frog that had conquered the fable and really turned into a bull. In an abstract intellectual sense, of course, their leader was rather Dr. Gore; but anyone who knew his peculiar merits would expect him to seem a thinner and more shadowy figure in the background. Sometimes all of them assembled on one platform, especially on the platforms of the Christian Social Union, which I joined at a later date; and I hope that all who survive of those old friends, from whom I have been sundered in thought but never in sympathy, will forgive me if I recall here any of the follies that enlivened our friendship. I remember when about five or six of us addressed the astonished town of Nottingham, on what we considered to be its Christian duty towards the modern problem of industrial poverty. I remember the faces of the citizens of that great city while I spoke; and I regret to say that I recorded my impressions in some verses, supposed to represent the impressions of a

Nottingham tradesman; they became something of a jest in our little circle and I quote them for the pleasure of recalling those old exhilarating days.

The Christian Social Union here
Was very much annoyed;
It seems there is some duty
Which we never should avoid,
And so they sing a lot of hymns
To help the Unemployed.

Upon a platform at the end
The speakers were displayed
And Bishop Hoskins stood in front
And hit a bell and said
That Mr. Carter was to pray,
And Mr. Carter prayed.

Then Bishop Gore of Birmingham
He stood upon one leg
And said he would be happier
If beggars didn’t beg,
And that if they pinched his palace
It would take him down a peg.

He said that Unemployment
Was a horror and a blight,
He said that charities produced
Servility and spite,
And stood upon the other leg
And said it wasn’t right.

And then a man named Chesterton
Got up and played with water,
He seemed to say that principles
Were nice and led to slaughter
And how we always compromised
And how we didn’t orter.

Then Canon Holland fired ahead
Like fifty cannons firing,
We tried to find out what he meant
With infinite enquiring,
But the way he made the windows jump
We couldn't help admiring.

He said the human soul should be
Ashamed of every sham,
He said a man should constantly
Ejaculate "I am"
...when he had done, I went outside
And got into a tram.

I rather prided myself on these lines, merely because they are, in the main, a very accurate report of the speeches; or of what the speeches probably appeared to be to the audience. And I also disinter them from their dust-bin because they remind me of a characteristic expression of Scott Holland, which I have since found to be a characteristic problem of human life. There was one verse of my doggerel verses which I have omitted, because it would certainly be misunderstood, as Scott Holland himself was misunderstood. He was a man of great clearness and great fairness of mind, and what he said always meant something and was a result of the unpopular sport of thinking. But he was also a man with a natural surge of laughter within him, so that his broad strong mouth seemed always to be shut down on it in a grimace of restraint. I remember that on this occasion he was urging what is probably the best argument for State intervention, tending in the general direction of State Socialism, which was common in the Christian Social Union and pronounced in the definite and defiant Christian Socialists, like Conrad Noel. He said that the Commonwealth, the social authority, was worthy of being regarded in a positive and not merely in a negative light; that we ought to be able to trust the things it did, and not to think only of the things it punished us for doing. The politician should be more than the policeman; he should produce and construct and not merely punish. At this point his immense internal enjoyment of a joke bubbled to the surface and he said, waving his hand to the rigid and respectable

Nottingham audience, “Punishment is an exceptional instrument. After all, it is only occasionally that you and I feel that tap on the shoulder, and that gruff recommendation to ‘come along quietly.’ It is not every day of our lives that we are put in the dock and sentenced to some term of imprisonment. Most of our relations to Government are peaceable and friendly. Why, I suppose that even in this room there are quite half a dozen people who have never been in jail at all.” A ghastly stare was fixed on all the faces of the audience; and I have ever since seen it in my own dreams; for it has constituted a considerable part of my own problem.

I have never understood, from that day to this, any more than he did, why a solid argument is any less solid because you make the illustrations as entertaining as you can. What Holland was saying was perfectly sensible and philosophical. It was that the State exists to provide lamp-posts and schools, as well as gibbets and jails. But I strongly suspect that many, who were sufficiently intelligent not to imagine that he was mad, did imagine that he was flippant. And I myself have made in the course of a less useful life the same curious discovery. If you say that two sheep added to two sheep make four sheep, your audience will accept it patiently — like sheep. But if you say it of two monkeys, or two kangaroos, or two sea-green griffins, people will refuse to believe that two and two make four. They seem to imagine that you must have made up the arithmetic, just as you have made up the illustration of the arithmetic. And though they would actually know that what you say is sense, if they thought about it sensibly, they cannot believe that anything decorated by an incidental joke can be sensible. Perhaps it explains why so many successful men are so dull — or why so many dull men are successful.

But I have also dwelt for a moment on such a meeting and such a group, because I am only too glad, in the light of after events, to testify to the pleasure with which I recall it. When people of many different parties talked of all High Churchmen as high and dry, when they used to talk of the dehumanised detachment of Charles Gore or the despairing depression of Charles Masterman, I had every motive to remember much better and brighter things; and to leave some little record here of how uproariously encouraging was the pessimism of Masterman, how subtly sympathetic the detachment of Dr. Gore. Good friends and very gay companions. ... 0 anima humana naturaliter Christiana, whither were you marching so gallantly that you could not find the natural way?

But I have been carried far ahead of my narrative by these memories of the Anglo-Catholic group, and all the names that naturally follow the mention of the first name of Noel. When Noel first appeared on the horizon of my brother and myself, my brother was frankly anti-religious and I had no religion except the very haziest religiosity. And it is necessary in this chapter to say something of the tendencies by which I shifted nearer and nearer to the orthodox side; and eventually found myself, as I have described, in the very heart of a clerical group of canons and curates. My first introduction, in Sydney Smith’s phrase, came through very wild curates. Conrad Noel might have been the incarnate fulfilment of Sydney Smith’s vision or fancy; and indeed it so happened that, in his case, while the wild curate was in every sense singular, the wild curates were also in the plural. My old friend the Rev. A. L. Lilley now a Canon of Hereford, was then the vicar of a parish in Paddington Green; and his large and genial sympathies expressed themselves in the marked eccentricity of his assistant clergy. For he was one of the two or three Broad Churchmen I have known who were actually broad. His curates were a group which we irreverently referred to at one time as a menagerie; one, I remember, was of gigantic stature with fierce grey hair, eyebrows and moustaches very like Mark Twain. Another was a Syrian and actually, I believe, a runaway monk from some monastery in the desert. The third was Conrad Noel. I have sometimes thought it must have been rather amusing to be a faithful parishioner of Paddington Green.

But the question here is of the intellectual approach, even to so eccentric a borderland of orthodoxy. And the reader must once more reconcile himself, with a groan, to some brief references to real beliefs, and the thing which some call theory, and I call thought. In the purely religious sense, I was brought up among people who were Unitarians and Universalists, but who were well aware that a great many people around them were becoming agnostics or even atheists. Indeed there were two tendencies in what was called the emancipation of faith from the creeds and dogmas of the past. The two tendencies were in flatly contrary directions; and it is thoroughly typical of that world that they were both called by the same name. Both were supposed to be liberal theology or the religion of all sensible men. But, in fact, one half of the sensible men were more and more arguing that, because God was in His heaven, all must be right with the world; with this world or with the next. The other half of them were specially bent on showing that it was very doubtful if there was any God in any heaven, and that it was so certain to the scientific eye that all is not right with the world, that it would be nearer the truth to say that all is wrong with the world. One of these movements of progress led into the glorious fairyland of George Macdonald, the other led into the stark and hollowed hills of Thomas Hardy. The one school was specially insisting that God must be supremely perfect if He exists; the other that, if He exists, He must be grossly imperfect. And by the time I passed from boyhood to manhood, the pessimistic doubt had considerably clouded the optimistic dogma.

Now I think the first thing that struck me as startling was exactly this; that these two schools, which were logically in contradiction, were practically in combination. The idealistic theists and the realistic atheists were allies — against what? It has taken me about two-thirds of my life to find out the answer to that question. But when I first noticed it, the question seemed quite unanswerable; and, what was queerer still, to the people themselves it did not seem even questionable. I myself had sat at the feet of that large-hearted and poetic orator, Stopford Brooke, and I long accepted the sort of optimistic theism that he taught; it was substantially the same as that which I had learnt since childhood under the glamorous mysticism of George Macdonald. It was full and substantial faith in the Fatherhood of God, and little could be said against it, even in theological theory, except that it rather ignored the free-will of man. Its Universalism was a sort of optimistic Calvinism. But, anyhow, that was my first faith, before anything that could really be called my first doubt. But what struck me as extraordinary, even at first, was that these optimists seemed to be in the same camp as the pessimists. To my simple mind, it seemed that there could be no connection except contradiction, between the man whose whole faith was in the Fatherhood of God, and the man who said there was no God or the man who said that God was no Father. I pointed out something of the sort, long afterwards, when liberal literary critics were supposed to class together the philosophies of Meredith and Hardy. It seemed to me obvious that Meredith maintains on the whole that Nature is to be trusted, and Hardy that Nature is not to be trusted. To my innocent mind, these two ideas seemed a little inconsistent. I had not yet discovered the higher synthesis which connects them. For the higher synthesis which connects them consists in wearing liberty ties and curiously shaped beards and hats and meeting in cultured clubs where they drink coffee, or (in darker and more disreputable dens) cocoa. That is the only connection there is between the ideas; but it took me a long time to find it out. These sceptical doctrinaires do not recognise each other by the doctrines. They recognise each other by the beard or the clothes, as the lower animals know each other by the fur or the smell.

I suppose I have got a dogmatic mind. Anyhow, even when I did not believe in any of the things called dogmas, I assumed that people were sorted out into solid groups by the dogmas they believed or disbelieved. I supposed that the Theosophists all sat in the same hall because they all believed in Theosophy. I supposed the Theistic Church believed in Theism. I supposed that the atheists all combined because they disbelieved in Theism. I imagined that the Ethical Societies consisted entirely of people who believed in Ethics but not in theology or even religion. I have come to the conclusion that I was largely mistaken in this idea. I believe now that the congregations of these semi-secular chapels consist largely of one vast and vague sea of wandering doubters, with their wandering doubts, who may be found one Sunday seeking a solution from the Theists and another Sunday from the Theosophists. They may be scattered among many such chapels; they are only connected by the convention of unconventionality, which is connoted by "not going to church." I will give two incidents as examples of what I mean; though they are separated by a long interval of years. In the very early days of which I am now speaking, before I ever dreamed of being myself attached to any formal system of faith, I used to wander about to many assemblies giving lectures, or what were politely called lectures. I may remark that my suspicion was confirmed, by the fact that I very often saw the same people in quite different congregations; especially a worried looking man with dark anxious eyes, and a very aged Jew with a long white beard and a smile carved immutably, like that of an Egyptian image.

On one occasion I had been lecturing to an Ethical Society, when I happened to see on the wall a portrait of Priestley, the great Unitarian of a hundred years ago. I remarked that it was a very fine engraving; and one of the faithful, to whom I was speaking, replied that it had probably been hung there because the place was quite recently a Unitarian chapel; I think he said only a few years before. I was considerably intrigued, knowing that the old Unitarians were as dogmatic as Moslems on the one point of the One God, and that the ethical group were as undogmatic as any agnostics upon that particular dogma. “That is very interesting,” I said. “May I ask whether the whole of your society abandoned Theism all at once and in a body?”

“Well, no,” he replied rather hazily, “I don’t fancy it was exactly like that. I rather think the fact was that our leaders wanted very much to have Dr. Stanton Coit as a preacher, and he wouldn’t come unless the thing was simply an Ethical Society.”

Of course I cannot answer for the accuracy of what the gentleman said, as I did not know him from Adam; but in any case my point here concerns the cloudy condition of the mind of the ordinary audiences, and not of the actual lecturers or leaders. Dr. Stanton Coit himself, for instance, had a perfectly clear idea of an ethic unsupported by theology. But, taking this typical member of the movement, there is something rather extraordinary about what had actually happened, or what he seriously supposed had actually happened. By this theory, God Almighty had been dropped out of the whole business, as a concession to Dr. Stanton Coit. It was generally felt, apparently, that it would be really rather churlish not to meet him on a little thing like that. Now it happened that, years afterwards, a friend of mine enquired after the fortunes of this particular Ethical Society, and was informed that its congregation was somewhat diminished. The reason given was that the distinguished ethical lecturer could hardly be expected to be so active as he had been in earlier days; and that in consequence a number of his followers had now “gone off to listen to Maude Royden.” Now Miss Maude Royden, whatever may be counted controversial in her position, certainly professes to be enough of an orthodox Christian to play the part of a loyal Anglican, and even of an Anglican parson. So that the truly astonishing history of this school of thought, if we regard it as a school of thought, was more or less as follows. They began by believing in the Creation but not the Incarnation. For the sake of Dr. Coit they ceased to believe in the Creation. And for the sake of Miss Royden they agreed to believe in the Creation and the Incarnation as well. The truth of the matter is, I imagine, that these particular people never did believe or disbelieve in anything. They liked to go and hear stimulating lecturers; and they had a vague preference, almost impossible to reduce to any definable thesis, for those lecturers who were supposed to be in some way heterodox and unconventional. And having since had longer and larger opportunities of watching the general drift of such people, and having seen the dark-eyed doubter and the patriarchal Jew in more and more motley and incongruous assemblies, I have come to the conclusion that there never were any large schools of thought, so separate and so static as I innocently imagined in my youth. I have been granted, as it were, a sort of general view or vision of all that field of negation and groping and curiosity. And I saw pretty much what it all really meant. There was no Theistic Church; there was no Theosophical Brotherhood; there were no Ethical Societies; there were no New Religions. But I saw Israel scattered on the hills as sheep that have not a shepherd; and I saw a large number of the sheep run about bleating eagerly in whatever neighbourhood it was supposed that a shepherd might be found.

Amid all this scattered thinking, sometimes not unfairly to be called scatter-brained thinking, I began to piece together the fragments of the old religious scheme; mainly by the various gaps that denoted its disappearance. And the more I saw of real human nature, the more I came to suspect that it was really rather bad for all these people that it had disappeared. Many of them held, and still hold, very noble and necessary truths in the social and secular area. But even these it seemed to me they held less firmly than they might have done, if there had been anything like a fundamental principle of morals and metaphysics to support them. Men who believed ardently in altruism were yet troubled by the necessity of believing with even more religious reverence in Darwinism, and even in the deductions from Darwinism about a ruthless struggle as the rule of life. Men who naturally accepted the moral equality of mankind yet did so, in a manner, shrinkingly, under the gigantic shadow of the Superman of Nietzsche and Shaw. Their hearts were in the right place; but their heads were emphatically in the wrong place, being generally poked or plunged into vast volumes of materialism and scepticism, crabbed, barren, servile and without any light of liberty or of hope.

I began to examine more exactly the general Christian theology which many execrated and few examined. I soon found that it did in fact correspond to many of these experiences of life; that even its paradoxes corresponded to the paradoxes of life. Long afterwards Father Waggett (to mention another very able man of the old Anglo-Catholic group), once said to me, as we stood on the Mount of Olives in view of Gethsemane and Aceldama, “Well, anyhow, it must be obvious to anybody that the doctrine of the Fall is the only cheerful view of human life.” It is indeed obvious to me; but the thought passed over me at the moment, that a very large proportion of that old world of sceptical sects and cliques, to which I had once belonged, would find it a much more puzzling paradox than the paradoxes of Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw. I will not develop the argument here, which I have so often developed elsewhere; I merely mention it to suggest my general sense, even at this stage, that the old theological theory seemed more or less to fit into experience, while the new and negative theories did not fit into anything, least of all into each other. It was about this time that I had published some studies on contemporary writers, such as Kipling and Shaw and Wells; and feeling that each of them erred through an ultimate or religious error, I gave the book the title of Heretics. It was reviewed by Mr. G. S. Street, the very delightful essayist, who casually used the expression that he was not going to bother about his theology until I had really stated mine. With all the solemnity of youth, I accepted this as a challenge; and wrote an outline of my own reasons for believing that the Christian theory, as summarised in the Apostles' Creed, would be found to be a better criticism of life than any of those that I had criticised. I called it Orthodoxy, but even at the time I was very much dissatisfied with the title. It sounded a thinnish sort of thing to be defending through thick and thin. Even then I fancy I had a dim foreshadowing that I should have to find some better name for it before I died. As it was, the only interesting effect of the title, or the book, that I ever heard of, occurred on the frontiers of Russia. There I believe the Censor, under the old Russian regime, destroyed the book without reading it. From its being called Orthodoxy, he naturally inferred that it must be a book on the Greek Church. And from its being a book on the Greek Church, he naturally inferred that it must be an attack on it.

But there did remain one rather vague virtue about the title, from my point of view; that it was provocative. And it is an exact test of that extraordinary modern society that it really was provocative. I had begun to discover that, in all that welter of inconsistent and incompatible heresies, the one and only really unpardonable heresy was orthodoxy. A serious defence of orthodoxy was far more startling to the English critic than a serious attack on orthodoxy was to the Russian censor. And through this experience I learned two very interesting things, which serve to divide all this part of my life into two distinct periods. Very nearly everybody, in the ordinary literary and journalistic world, began by taking it for granted that my faith in the Christian creed was a pose or a paradox. The more cynical supposed that it was only a stunt. The more generous and loyal warmly maintained that it was only a joke. It was not until long afterwards that the full horror of the truth burst upon them; the disgraceful truth that I really thought the thing was true. And I have found, as I say, that this represents a real transition or border-line in the life of the apologists. Critics were almost entirely complimentary to what they were pleased to call my brilliant paradoxes; until they discovered that I really meant what I said. Since then they have been more combative; and I do not blame them.

I first made this discovery at a dinner-party, in connection with another controversy, which must be mentioned because it is relevant here. I think it was a dinner given by the staff of the Clarion, the important and popular Socialist paper of the period, then edited by Mr. Robert Blatchford; a veteran whom I pause to salute across the ages, hoping he will not count me less friendly if I recall these battles of the distant past. As I shall explain in a moment, I had just had a very pugnacious public argument with Mr. Blatchford, which, as I was then a comparatively young though relatively rising journalist, was naturally a landmark in my life. But I remember that there was, sitting next to me at this dinner, one of those very refined and rather academic gentlemen from Cambridge who seemed to form so considerable a section of the rugged stalwarts of Labour. There was a cloud on his brow, as if he were beginning to be puzzled about something; and he said suddenly, with abrupt civility, “Excuse my asking, Mr. Chesterton, of course I shall quite understand if you prefer not to answer, and I shan’t think any the worse of it, you know, even if it’s true. But I suppose I’m right in thinking you don’t really believe in those things you’re defending against Blatchford?” I informed him with adamantine gravity that I did most definitely believe in those things I was defending against Blatchford. His cold and refined face did not move a visible muscle; and yet I knew in some fashion it had completely altered. “Oh, you do,” he said, “I beg your pardon. Thank you. That’s all I wanted to know.” And he went on eating his (probably vegetarian) meal. But I was sure that for the rest of the evening, despite his calm, he felt as if he were sitting next to a fabulous griffin.

That this stage may be understood, it must be realised what the things I was defending against Blatchford were. It was not a question of some abstract theological thesis, like the definition of the Trinity or the dogmas of Election or Effectual Grace. I was not yet so far gone in orthodoxy as to be so theological as all that. What I was defending seemed to me a plain matter of ordinary human morals. Indeed it seemed to me to raise the question of the very possibility of any morals. It was the question of Responsibility, sometimes called the question of Free Will, which Mr. Blatchford had attacked in a series of vigorous and even violent proclamations of Determinism; all apparently founded on having read a little book or pamphlet by Professor Haeckel. The question had a great many amusing or arresting aspects; but the point of it in this place is what I have already suggested. It was not that I began by believing in supernormal things. It was that the unbelievers began by disbelieving even in normal things. It was the secularists who drove me to theological ethics, by themselves destroying any sane or rational possibility of secular ethics. I might myself have been a secularist, so long as it meant that I could be merely responsible to secular society. It was the Determinist who told me, at the top of his voice, that I could not be responsible at all. And as I rather like being treated as a responsible being, and not as a lunatic let out for the day, I began to look around for some spiritual asylum that was not merely a lunatic asylum.

On that day, in short, I escaped from an error, which still entangles many better men than myself. There is still a notion that the agnostic can remain secure of this world, so long as he does not wish to be what is called "other-worldly." He can be content with common sense about men and women, so long as he is not curious of mysteries about angels and archangels. It is not true. The questions of the sceptic strike direct at the heart of this our human life; they disturb this world, quite apart from the other world; and it is exactly common sense that they disturb most. There could not be a better example than this queer appearance, in my youth, of the determinist as a demagogue; shouting to a mob of millions that no man ought to be blamed for anything he did, because it was all heredity and environment. Logically, it would stop a man in the act of saying "Thank you" to somebody for passing the mustard. For how could he be praised for passing the mustard, if he could not be blamed for not passing the mustard? I know it can be maintained that fatalism makes no difference to the facts of our life. Some say that fatalists can still go on punishing or blaming. Some say (professing, with no little humour, to be humanitarian) that they can leave off blaming but still go on punishing. But if determinism made no difference, why should Blatchford thunder furiously from a pulpit about the difference it made? The explanation was to be found in Blatchford himself. He was a very normal man to have come by so abnormal a heresy; an old soldier with brown Italian eyes and a walrus moustache and full of the very sentiments that soldiers have and Socialists generally have not. He was a firm patriot and not a little of a Tory; certainly very much of a Protectionist. But this Determinism appealed to him through another very normal sentiment; the sentiment of undiluted compassion. He called his book of Determinist pamphlets a plea "for the Underdog." And it was obvious that he thought throughout of the sort of poor and disreputable and often oppressed person who can really be called the underdog. To him, and to many other men of healthy but vague modern sentiment, the notion of a sinner really connected itself entirely with the notion of a drunkard or a thieving tramp or some sort of scallywag at war with society. In the grossly unjust social system we suffer, it is probable enough that many of these really are punished unjustly; that some ought not to be punished at all; that some, perhaps, are really not responsible at all. And Blatchford, seeing them driven to prison in droves, felt neither more nor less than a pity for the weak and the unfortunate; which was, at the worst, a slightly lopsided exaggeration of Christian charity. He was so anxious to forgive that he denied the need of forgiveness.

And I awaken from all these dreams of the past suddenly, and with something like a shout of laughter. For the next episode in my life was one of helping certain friends and reformers to fix the terrible truth called Responsibility, not on tramps or drunkards, but on the rulers of the State and the richest men in the Empire. I was trying to put a chain and collar of Responsibility, not on the Underdog, but on the Top-dog. And the next thing that I was to hear about Blatchford was that he also, bursting with indignation, was demanding justice, punishment, vengeance almost without pardon, upon other strong tyrants who had trampled on the weak; and was fiercely nailing the arrogant princes of Prussia with Responsibility for the invasion of Belgium. So do paper sophistries go up in a great fire.

Chapter VIII: Figures in Fleet Street

The profound problem of how I ever managed to fall on my feet in Fleet Street is a mystery; at least it is still a mystery to me. It used to be said by critics that falling on my feet was only a preliminary to standing on my head. But in fact Fleet Street, not to mention my head, was a rather seasick and earthquaky sort of thing to stand on. On the whole, I think I owe my success (as the millionaires say) to having listened respectfully and rather bashfully to the very best advice, given by all the best journalists who had achieved the best sort of success in journalism; and then going away and doing the exact opposite. For what they all told me was that the secret of success in journalism was to study the particular journal and write what was suitable to it. And, partly by accident and ignorance and partly through the real rabid certainties of youth, I cannot remember that I ever wrote any article that was at all suitable to any paper.

On the contrary, I think I became a sort of comic success by contrast. I have a notion that the real advice I could give to a young journalist, now that I am myself an old journalist, is simply this: to write an article for the Sporting Times and another for the Church Times, and put them into the wrong envelopes. Then, if the article were accepted and were reasonably intelligent, all the sporting men would go about saying to each other, “Great mistake to suppose there isn’t a good case for us; really brainy fellows say so;” and all the clergymen would go about saying to each other, “Rattling good writing on some of our religious papers; very witty fellow.” This is perhaps a little faint and fantastic as a theory; but it is the only theory upon which I can explain my own undeserved survival in the journalistic squabble of the old Fleet Street. I wrote on a Nonconformist organ like the old Daily News and told them all about French cafés and Catholic cathedrals; and they loved it, because they had never heard of them before. I wrote on a robust Labour organ like the old Clarion and defended medieval theology and all the things their readers had never heard of; and their readers did not mind me a bit. What is really the matter, with almost every paper, is that it is much too full of things suitable to the paper. But in these later days of the solidification of journalism, like everything else, into trusts and monopolies, there seems to be even less likelihood of anyone repeating my rare and reckless and unscrupulous manoeuvre; of anyone waking up to find himself famous as the only funny man on the Methodist Monthly; or the only serious man on Cocktail Comics.

Anyhow, all will agree that I was an accident in Fleet Street. Some will say a fatal accident, such as is proclaimed on the placards of Fleet Street. But Fleet Street itself was full of such accidents; it might have been called the Street of Accident, as a man whom I am proud to have first met there afterwards called it the Street of Adventure. Philip Gibbs himself accentuated that intellectual incongruity which was the comedy of the place; he carried a curious air of being the right man in the wrong place. His fine falcon face, with its almost unearthly refinement, seemed set in a sort of fastidious despair about ever making it the right place. This was long before he gained his great distinctions as a war correspondent; but he dealt in the same detached way with the other great wars in the past. He had been studying the struggle between the great men of the French Revolution; and had concentrated on what seemed to me an unbalanced yet delicate detestation of Camille Desmoulins. He summoned him before a tribunal of earnest talk, in my presence; and all the time he was talking, I thought how like he looked to those high-minded, hatchet-faced, hard humanitarian idealists among the great revolutionists whom he criticised. David should have painted his profile. I begin with that impression of Gibbs precisely because his figure did seem so detached and cleancut against the background. But I myself was only the background; it was lightly alleged that I could by myself have constituted a back scene. In other words, I belonged to the old Bohemian life of Fleet Street; which has since been destroyed, not by the idealism of detachment, but by the materialism of machinery. A newspaper proprietor in later years assured me that it was a slander on journalism to tell all these tales about taverns and ragged pressmen and work and recreation coming at random at all hours of the night. “A newspaper office is now exactly like any other place of business,” he said with a radiant smile; and I agreed with a groan. The very name of Bohemia has faded from the map of London as it has faded from the map of Europe. I have never understood why the new diplomacy abandoned that old and noble national name, which was among the things that were not lost on Mohacs Field; but it would seem that in both cases the best things are lost in victory and not in defeat. At least I know that I should have been annoyed if, in order to gain with doubtful judgment another strip of territory, I had been suddenly asked to talk about England as West Saxony;

and that is what has happened to the long epic of Serbia, now described as North Slavia. I remember when it was announced that Bohemia was to cease to exist, at the very moment when it came into existence. It was to be called Czechoslovakia; and I went about asking people in Fleet Street whether this change was to be applied to the metaphorical Bohemia of our own romantic youth. When the wild son disturbed the respectable household, was it to be said, "I wish Tom would get out of his Czechoslovakian ways," or, when Fleet Street grew riotous, "I hate these rowdy Czechoslovakian parties." But the question is merely fanciful; for there is very little left in Fleet Street that its worst enemies could call Czechoslovakian. The newspaper proprietor was perfectly right in his facts; journalism is now conducted like any other business. It is conducted as quietly, as soberly, as sensibly as the office of any successful moneylender or moderately fraudulent financier. To such persons, it will indeed seem idle if I recall that the old taverns in which men drank, or the old courts in which they starved, were often full of starving poets and drunken scholars; and all sorts of perverse personalities who sometimes even tried to tell the truth; men of the type of old Crosland, that queer cantankerous man, who hated so many things (including me) but had often justified his great farewell, in which he said bitterly that he had:

... trod the path to hell,
But there were many things he might have sold
And did not sell.

For one thing, it was always said of him that he nearly died of hunger in Fleet Street with a volume of Shakespeare's Sonnets in his pocket.

A man of that impossible sort, of finer spiritual culture and, therefore, of less fame or success, was Johnston Stephen, who was, I am proud to say, my friend. He was of the great Scottish family, of Leslie Stephen and of "J.K.S."; and he was quite as wise as the one and as witty as the other. But he had a certain distinction very difficult to define; the world with which he dealt simplified it by saying he was mad. I should prefer to say that he could not completely digest anything; he refused things of which he thoroughly approved at the last moment, with a movement like that of a bucking horse. Sometimes his objection was profound enough, and always illuminated by an idea; but he lacked the power of final adherence. He once made to me the very sensible remark, “The only little difficulty that I have about joining the Catholic Church is that I do not think I believe in God. All the rest of the Catholic system is so obviously right and so obviously superior to anything else, that I cannot imagine anyone having any doubt about it.” And I remember that he was grimly gratified when I told him, at a later stage of my own beliefs, that real Catholics are intelligent enough to have this difficulty; and that St. Thomas Aquinas practically begins his whole argument by saying, “Is there a God? Apparently not.” But, I added, it was my experience that entering into the system even socially brought an ever-increasing certitude upon the original question. For the rest, while a fierily patriotic Scotsman, he had too much of such sympathy to be popular with many Scots. I remember when he was asked whether the Church was not corrupt and crying out for the Reformation, he answered with disconcerting warmth, “Who can doubt it? How horrible must have been the corruption which could have tolerated for so long three Catholic priests like John Knox and John Calvin and Martin Luther.”

Somebody ought to have written a life of Stephen or collected his literary remains; which were left to vanish as journalistic remains. I once had a notion of doing it myself; it is one of the many duties I have neglected. There was an essay on Burns in my brother’s paper, the New Witness, which was so much better than most essays on Burns, or essays on anything, that it might have made a man’s name if the man had been on the make. He remains to me as a great monument of the futility of the present condition of fame, which is merely fashion. He had indeed violent freaks of temperament; but these did not in the old days extinguish a man like Swift or a man like Landor. If he is remembered in no better way, it is well that I should dedicate this passing note to his memory. He has long since discovered the answer to his only religious difficulty.

All these extremes were too extreme to be typical; the fine fanatic who said what he liked and died; the mere snob or sneak who said what he was told to say and lived, if you can call it living. But it is only fair to Fleet Street to say that there were some who kept their intellectual independence, and yet kept their connection with the working machine of journalism; mostly by having a wide range of variety in their work, and because monopoly was not yet so uniform as to prevent them having some choice of masters; even if it were already a choice of tyrants. Perhaps the most brilliant of these, who might without exaggeration be called the Queen of

Fleet Street, was a lady with whom I have the great honour to be connected; I mean the wife of my brother Cecil. She has always managed to remain a freelance, or the Joan of Arc of a whole company of freelances, though there is one field especially in which her banner has now been displayed to all. She always had a hundred irons in the fire; though only one of her fires is now so big as to be a bonfire and a beacon. Everyone has heard of the Cecil Houses, in which homeless women find that real hospitality, human and humorous, which was incredibly absent from the previous priggish philanthropy; and nearly everyone has read about their origin, in her own astounding book which records her own astounding adventure. She went out without a penny to live among the penniless; and brought back our only authoritative account of such a life. But not everybody understands that flame of angry charity which resents the poor being pestered even more than their being neglected; hating the selfishness of the sweater, but hating more the spiritual pride peculiar to the spy. She has sympathy with Communists, as I have, and perhaps points of agreement I have not. But I know that she stands, first, for the privacy of the poor who are allowed no privacy. She fights after all, as I do, for the private property of those who have none.

It marked a sort of sublimation of the Fleet Street spirit in my sister-in-law that, within healthy limits, she not only could do everything, but she would do anything. Her work was patch-work of the wildest and most bizarre description; and she was almost continuously in a state of hilarious irony in contemplation of its contrast. She would turn easily from a direct and demagogic, though quite tragically sincere, appeal in a Sunday paper against official oppression of poor mothers to an almost cynical modern criticism of the most sophisticated modern plays. She would finish a hard controversial comment on the Marconi Case, full of facts and figures, for the Eye-Witness, and lightly turn to the next chapter in a shamelessly melodramatic and Victorian serial, full of innocent heroines and infamous villains, for “Fireside Romances,” or “Wedding Bells.” It was of her that the story was told that, having driven whole teams of plotters and counter-plotters successfully through a serious Scotch newspaper, she was pursuing one of the side-plots for a few chapters, when she received a telegram from the editor, “You have left your hero and heroine tied up in a cavern under the Thames for a week, and they are not married.”

It was in connection with this last line of journalistic adventure that an incident occurred of greater public, indeed of a certain historic importance. It is not only a landmark in the history of the law, but it throws a lurid light on that curious lawlessness which, in many modern matters, seems to be the principal effect of law. My sister-in-law was contributing to a Sunday paper in serial form one of these gravely, not to say brazenly, romantic romances. In this case something brazen, in the sense of something theatrical and even pantomimic, was perfectly appropriate to the theme, for the villain on whom the tale revolved was represented as a theatrical producer on a colossal scale like that of Cochran or Reinhardt. He was represented as doing various unscrupulous things, as is the humble duty of a bad man in what is only meant to be a good story; but not otherwise of any extraordinary depravity, and even adorned with something of the magnanimity suitable to melodrama. I fear I have forgotten his name; perhaps, as the sequel will prove, it is just as well. But let us suppose, for the sake of argument or narrative, that his name in the story was Arthur Mandeville. Now it so happened that there floated about somewhere in the great dust-cloud of atoms drifting round theatrical circles and occasionally or indirectly connected with theatrical or semi-theatrical enterprises, utterly unknown to anybody connected with the serial or the Sunday paper, a private individual whose name actually was Arthur Mandeville. He was not even an actor in any sense of an actor in action; he was certainly not a manager in any ordinary sense of having any theatre to manage; he was no more in any position remotely resembling that of the man in the story than he was the Sultan or the President of the United States. But he was a man who had once, in a series of other small enterprises, paid salaries to some small company of performers and given some small show somewhere. This man brought an action for heavy damages against the paper, on the ground of a malicious and vindictive blasting of his private reputation; and he won it.

The extraordinary thing was that nobody, from first to last, pretended that there had been any attack upon this man at all. The judge, in giving his judgment in the man’s favour, upon the law of the matter, repeatedly declared that it had been proved up to the hilt that the lady who wrote the story had never even heard of the gentleman who she was supposed to have pursued with her envenomed darts. But the judge was none the less convinced that, as the law stood, the two coincidences of the name and of some shadowy and temporary point of contact with a similar profession, were enough to constitute a case of libel. A considerable section of the literary world awoke to this state of affairs in a condition of not unnatural alarm. It looked as if the trade of the novelist might well be classed among the dangerous trades, if he could not casually call the drunken sailor by the name of Jack Robinson, without some danger of being fined and sold up by all the Jack Robinsons who may happen to be sailing, or to have sailed, all the seas of the world. The ancient question of what should be done with the drunken sailor, if he invariably took a fancy to avenging himself legally upon anybody who should say "Jack Robinson," gave rise to some considerable literary and journalistic discussion at the time.

I remember, in the course of the controversy, that I suggested that we should have to fall back on some alternative to names, such as numbers, in describing the ringing repartees leading up to the duel in which the subtle and crafty 7991 died upon the sword of the too-impetuous 3893; or the vows breathed by the passionate lips of 771 in the ear of 707. But another way of evading the difficulty, to which I was much more attached, was that of equipping all the characters with names so extraordinary, that it was practically impossible that they could be the real names of any real people anywhere; and by way of illustration I wrote a moving love-scene between Bunchusa Blutterspangle and Splitcat Chintzibobs. Fortunately, for general journalistic convenience, my proposals were not accepted; and a much more practical proposal, invented by my sister-in-law, was carried out with complete success. She republished the whole story in book form; and before doing so went round to a number of leading literary men of the day, especially those she knew best, and obtained their permission to use their names for all the characters in the book; retaining her own name, as a graceful acknowledgment, as the name of the original villain. Anyone curious enough to look up that curiosity of literature, will find the most famous persons figuring on every other page in the humblest or most improbable capacities; a dear old stage-door keeper of the name of Bernard Shaw, a cabman known to his comrades in the cab-shelter as Barry Pain, and many others whom I forget. Some little time afterwards, I think, this extraordinary condition of the law was altered, in a typically English manner; that is, not by anything so logical and pedantic as a new law, but simply by another judge saying that the law meant the exact opposite of what the first judge had said it meant. But this queer little affair has some relevance to more real problems that arose, when we found ourselves more seriously engaged in the same strange field of modern British legalism.

There is no Law of Libel. That is why everybody is so much afraid of it. That is why it is so tremendously and tragically and comically typical of a certain spirit that now fills all our social life and institutions; a spirit at once ingenious and evasive. Strange as it will sound, this is the English way of maintaining a Terror. The Latins, when they do it, do it by rigidity; but we actually do it by laxity. In plain words, we increase the terror of law, by adding to it all the terrors of lawlessness. The machine is felt to be dangerous, not so much because it strikes by rule, as because it strikes at random. Or, at any rate, so far as any opponent looking for logical protection from it can calculate, it strikes at random. This is more true of almost all our laws than of any other laws in Christendom. But even lawyers would almost admit that it has come to be very like the truth about the law of libel. Some definitions of libel are so strict that nobody could really apply them; other parallel definitions are so loose that nobody could imagine to whom they could apply. The result is that libel, if nothing else, has become a mere weapon to crush any criticism of the powers that now rule the State.

All this must be kept in mind, when we come to more crucial and exciting events in connection with the Eyewitness; I only mention this incident here to indicate the lively manner in which the lady in question conducted the endless comedy of Fleet Street. In connection with the paper above mentioned, of which my brother was first the sub-editor and then the editor, there were a hundred such anecdotes and amusing episodes. I fancy I can trace the lady’s hand, as well as the editor’s, in one of the most admirably absurd correspondences I have ever seen in the columns of journalism. It all began, if I remember right, with my brother writing something about the meeting between H. G. Wells and Booker Washington, the famous Negro publicist in America, in which some doubt was thrown on how far Mr. Wells understood the difficulties of Mr. Washington, and by inference those of the White South in which he worked. This view was enforced and exaggerated in a letter dated from Bexley, which warned everybody of the real dangers of racial admixture and intermarriage; it was signed “White Man.” This produced a fiery letter from Mr. Wells, humorously headed, “The White Man of Bexley,” as if the man were a sort of monster. Mr. Wells said he did not know what life was like “among the pure whites of Bexley," but that elsewhere meeting people did not always mean marrying them; "The etiquette is calmer." Then, I think, a real Negro intervened in the debate about his nature and destiny; and signed his letter, "Black Man." Then came a more detached query, I should guess from some Brahmin or Parsee student at some college, pointing out that the racial problem was not confined to the races of Africa; and asking what view was taken of intermarriage with the races of Asia. He signed his letter "Brown Man." Finally, there appeared a letter, of which I remember almost every word; for it was short and simple and touching in its appeal to larger and more tolerant ideals. It ran, I think, as follows:

"Sir,
May I express my regret that you should continue a correspondence which causes considerable pain to many innocent persons who, by no fault of their own, but by the iron laws of nature, inherit a complexion uncommon among their fellow-creatures and attractive only to the elite. Surely we can forget all these differences; and, whatever our race or colour, work hand in hand for the broadening of the brotherhood of humanity.
Yours faithfully,
Mauve Man with Green Spots."

This correspondence then ceased.

There were indeed other correspondences which seemed as if they would never cease. To few correspondents was given such power as that of the Mauve Man to paralyse all others with a sense that it was impossible to say or do any more. Some of these controversies are referred to in other connections in this book; some of them, like my own intermittent controversy with Mr. Bernard Shaw, have been going on at intervals for the greater part of our lives. But the controversy to which my sister-in-law was most deeply and warmly committed, as being connected with the work that has since made her so deservedly famous, was the protection of the homes of the poor, especially against an interference more insulting than indifference: the great uniting indignation of our otherwise often diverse group.

She was married to my brother just before he went to the War, in a little Roman Catholic church off Fleet Street; for he was already of that communion. He was twice invalided home; he volunteered three times for the Front and the third time met his death. In another chapter I shall deal with him more individually, and especially with that rarer sort of courage which he showed in politics, under instant threats of imprisonment and ruin. While in the trenches he wrote an excellent History of America and a bacchanalian ballade addressed to his fellow-soldiers, and having the refrain, “It was in Fleet Street that I learnt to drink.” Even his Bohemian loyalty to the legend of the Street of Adventure would hardly have stretched itself to saying, “It was in Fleet Street that I learnt to think.” For indeed he learnt to think in the nursery; and he was one of those who carry a sort of innocence of intellectual intensity through all things in life, whether they are in Fleet Street or at the Front. And my thoughts go back to poor Stephen and many noble madmen I knew, who had that quality, when I recall those lines one of our friends wrote about the Fanatic, or the man who wanted to keep his word; “That great word that every man gave God before his life began;” and who also, it will be remembered, “Had two witnesses to swear he kept it once in Berkeley Square; where hardly anything survives.” For though my brother was the most good-humoured person I ever knew, and could live in good fellowship with absolutely anybody, not only the merely dirty but the really vulgar, what was really deepest in him was a steep and even staggering obstinacy.

He kept his word as none but he
Could keep it; and as did not we,
And round him while he kept his word
Today’s diseased and faithless herd,
A moment loud, a moment strong,
But foul for ever, rolled along.

Chapter IX: The Case against Corruption

My brother, Cecil Edward Chesterton, was born when I was about five years old; and, after a brief pause, began to argue. He continued to argue to the end; for I am sure that he argued energetically with the soldiers among whom he died, in the last glory of the Great War. It is reported of me that when I was told that I possessed a brother, my first thought went to my own interminable taste for reciting verses, and that I said, “That’s all right; now I shall always have an audience.” If I did say this, I was in error. My brother was by no means disposed to be merely an audience; and frequently forced the function of an audience upon me. More frequently still, perhaps, it was a case of there being simultaneously two orators and no audience. We argued throughout our boyhood and youth until we became the pest of our whole social circle. We shouted at each other across the table, on the subject of Parnell or Puritanism or Charles the First’s head, until our nearest and dearest fled at our approach, and we had a desert around us. And though it is not a matter of undiluted pleasure to recall having been so horrible a nuisance, I am rather glad in other ways that we did so early thrash out our own thoughts on almost all the subjects in the world. I am glad to think that through all those years we never stopped arguing; and we never once quarrelled.

Perhaps the principal objection to a quarrel is that it interrupts an argument. Anyhow, our argument was never interrupted until it began to reach its conclusion in the proper form; which is conviction. I do not say that at any particular moment either of us would have admitted being in error; but as a matter of fact, it was through that incessant process of disagreement that we came at last to agree. He began as a more mutinous sort of Pagan, a special enemy of the Puritan, a defender of Bohemian enjoyments, sociable but entirely secular. I began with more disposition to defend in a vague way the Victorian idealism, and even to say a word for Puritan religion, chiefly from a dim subconscious sympathy with any sort or religion. But in fact, by a process of elimination, we came more and more to think that the same sort of non-Puritan religion was the more plausible and promising; and to end eventually, but quite independently, in the same Church. I think it was a good thing that we had tested every link of logic by mutual hammering. I will even add something that sounds too like a boast;

though it is meant to be a tribute. I will say that the man who had got used to arguing with Cecil Chesterton has never since had any reason to fear an argument with anybody.

The editor of the New Statesman, an acute critic of quite a different school from ours, said to me a little while ago, “Your brother was the very finest debater I have ever heard or heard of”, and such editors, of course, had known all the politicians and popular speakers. The qualities of his speaking were those of logic and lucidity combined with a sort of violent and startling courage. Indeed, he illustrated what I think is a common error on the subject of logic. The logician is too often presented as a prig; as a thin and frigid person of a pallid complexion. Both in experience and history, I have generally found that it was very full-blooded and warm-hearted people who had that gift of clear and connected thought. Charles Fox was like that; Danton was like that; and Cecil Chesterton was certainly like that. He had all that I have described as the Chesterton simplicity and steadiness in his personal relations; his affections were particularly fixed and tranquil; but in battle he had a sort of bull-necked pugnacity and intolerance. He did not seem to wish to live and leave a fallacy alive; he certainly could not leave a fallacy alone. The development of his political ideas was for a time decidedly divergent from my own. When I went to work with the Pro-Boers of the Daily News, and generally upheld the Liberal cause, though rather more romantically than many Liberals, he gravitated to a sort of practical Tory Democracy, which was more and more permeated by the Socialism of Sidney Webb and Bernard Shaw. He eventually became an active and effective member of the Fabian Executive. But what was much more important, he had within him a living and most menacing sort of intolerance; a hatred of the real corruptions and hypocrisies of modern politics and an extraordinary idea of telling the truth.

I have already indicated that I myself, though I believed in Liberalism, was finding it dimly difficult to believe in Liberals. It would be truer, perhaps, to say that I was finding it difficult to believe in politics; because the reality seemed almost unreal, as compared with the reputation or the report. I could give twenty instances to indicate what I mean; but they would be no more than indications, because the doubt itself was doubtful. I remember going to a great Liberal club, and walking about in a large crowded room, somewhere at the end of which a bald gentleman with a beard was reading something from a manuscript in a low voice. It was hardly unreasonable that we did not listen to him, because we could not in any case have heard; but I think a very large number of us did not even see him. We shifted and shunted about and collided with each other; I met various friends of mine and exchanged a few words; Bentley and Belloc and Hammond and the rest. We talked in an ordinary fashion; it is possible, though not certain, that one or other of us asked carelessly what was supposed to be happening in the other corner of the large hall. Then we drifted away together, talking about important things, or things which seemed to us important.

Next morning I saw across the front of my Liberal paper in gigantic headlines the phrase: “Lord Spencer Unfurls the Banner.” Under this were other remarks, also in large letters, about how he had blown the trumpet for Free Trade and how the blast would ring through England and rally all the Free-Traders. It did appear, on careful examination, that the inaudible remarks which the old gentleman had read from the manuscript were concerned with economic arguments for Free Trade; and very excellent arguments too, for all I know. But the contrast between what that orator was to the people who heard him, and what he was to the thousands of newspaper readers who did not hear him, was so huge a hiatus and disproportion that I do not think I ever quite got over it. I knew henceforward what was meant, or what might be meant, by a Scene in the House, or a Challenge from the Platform, or any of those sensational events which take place in the newspapers and nowhere else.

This sense of unreality in the party struggle, which was gradually growing upon me, grew much more swiftly on my brother and my friend Belloc; because they were by temperament of a more rapid and resolute sort. They entered into a sort of partnership for the study of the question; and the outcome of that partnership was a book which had a considerable effect; though at that time, of course, it was mostly an effect of irritation or incredulity. They collaborated in a work called The Party System; of which the general thesis was that there were really no Parties, though there certainly was a system. The system, according to this view, was essentially one of rotation; but of rotation revolving on a central group, which really consisted of the leading politicians on both sides; or, as they were called for convenience in the book, “The Front Benches.” An unreal conflict was kept up for the benefit of the public, and to a certain extent with the innocent assistance of the rank and file; but the Leader of the House was more truly in partnership with the Leader of the Opposition than either of them were with their own followers, let alone their own constituents. This was the thesis maintained in the book; and for the moment its immediate importance in this narrative is not so much concerned with its truth or falsehood as with the personal results arising from the alliance of its two authors. For the point of view attracted sufficient attention to lead a few supporters to launch a weekly paper; of which Belloc was the editor and Cecil Chesterton the sub-editor; and to which I contributed first an occasional and eventually a weekly article.

There had never been anything like the Eye-Witness in England before; certainly not within the memory of the oldest men then living. Nor indeed has there ever been anything like it in England since. But its novelty and originality cannot be measured by those who can only compare it with what has happened in England since. It is a paradox palpably true that an original thing cannot at once be successful and still seem original. We can never appreciate how startling it might sound to be told that the earth was round, if we had really and invariably thought it was flat. By this time, so to speak, its roundness has become more flat than its flatness. It has become a dull platitude and only the denial of it would disturb us. So it is with political revolutions; and so it was with the considerable revolution introduced by the Eye-Witness in English journalism. Nobody can measure the change who was not brought up, as I was, in the ordinary newspaper-reading middle-class of the Victorian Age. We need not argue here about all that may be said for and against the idealism, or the optimism, or the sentimentalism, or the hypocrisy or the virtue of the Victorian Age. It is enough to say that it rested solidly on some social convictions, that were not only conventions. One of them was the belief that English politics were not only free from political corruption, but almost entirely free from personal motives about money. It was a point of patriotic pride that set a limit to the fiercest movements of party anger. I can remember that old Tories like my grandfather would actually pause in the full sweep of their denunciations of the demoniac conduct of Mr. Gladstone, to wave away the faintest suggestion that there could be any fiends rending the souls of our statesmen less erected, as Milton says, than the fiends of ambition or jealousy; “Heaven forbid that I should suggest that any English Prime Minister ...” No; Frenchmen might have discovered the negotiable value of coins of the realm; Italians and Austrians might think it well worthwhile to double their income; the statesmen of Bulgaria or Bolivia might have some notion of the meaning of money; but English politicians passed their lives in an absent-minded trance, like that of Mr. Skimpole; kept their eyes fixed on the fixed stars, never enquired whether politics had made them richer or poorer; and received their salaries with a start of surprise.

Well, for good or evil, that is all dead. And what killed it was primarily the journalistic explosion called the Eye-Witness; and especially its dealing with the Marconi Case and the question of the Sale of Peerages. In one sense indeed, as I shall suggest in a moment, the world fell far short of following up the lead of those particular leaders; and there has been nothing since recalling their pointed and personal denunciations. But the general tone has entirely altered. Everybody is familiar with jeers against politicians, jokes about political payments, journalistic allusions to the sale of honours or the Secret Party Fund; above all, nobody is now shocked by them. Perhaps it would be better if they were shocked, or in other words shamed by them. If they were ashamed of them, they might possibly make some attempt to alter them. For that is the weak side of the ultimate result of the revelations. The object of the Eye-Witness was to make the English public know and care about the peril of political corruption. It is now certain that the public does know. It is not so certain that the public does care. And we may well warn the more cynical and realistic generation around us not to be too confident in its superiority to the hoodwinked and humbug-ridden nineteenth century. I know that my Victorian uncles did not know how England is really governed. But I have a strong suspicion that if my Victorian uncles had known, they would have been horrified and not amused; and they would have put a stop to it somehow. Nobody is trying to put a stop to it now.

It is the fashion to divide recent history into Pre-War and Post-War conditions. I believe it is almost as essential to divide them into the Pre-Marconi and Post-Marconi days. It was during the agitations upon that affair that the ordinary English citizen lost his invincible ignorance; or, in ordinary language, his innocence. And as I happened to play a part, secondary indeed, but definite, in the quarrel about this affair, and as in any case anything that my brother did was of considerable importance to me and my affairs, it will be well to pause for a moment upon this peculiar business; which was at the time, of course, systematically misrepresented and which is still very widely misunderstood. I think it probable that centuries will pass before it is seen clearly and in its right perspective; and that then it will be seen as one of the turning-points in the whole history of England and the world.

There are various legends about it. One is, for instance, the legend that we denounced certain Cabinet Ministers because they gambled on the Stock Exchange. It is likely enough that we did make fun of a man like Mr. Lloyd George, who made himself the mouthpiece of the Nonconformist Conscience and called on all the chapels to show forth the old fighting Puritan spirit, when he appeared in a transaction uncommonly like a gamble; just as we should denounce a politician who drank champagne and tried to start a campaign of Prohibition. But we should not denounce him for drinking champagne but for prohibiting champagne. Similarly, we should not denounce a Puritan politician for gambling, so much as for talking as if nobody could ever gamble. My brother, I need not say, was not likely to be shocked at anybody indulging in a bet or a wager; though he might possibly have recommended him to do a flutter on the Derby or the Oaks rather than on the Stock Exchange. But, as a fact, the whole notion that the question was one of merely doing a flutter is a fiction. It is a fiction, which was put up by the politicians at the time, as a mask for the fact. The charge against the Marconi Ministers was that they received a tip, or were "let in on the ground-floor," as the financial phrase goes, by a government contractor whose contract was at the time being considered or accepted by the Government. In fact, on the face of it at any rate, there were all the conditions that go to make up what is commonly called "a secret commission." Whether the acceptance of the tip did or did not affect the acceptance of the contract might be argued; but the question at issue was one of a contract and a tip, and not of an ordinary little flutter in stocks and shares. The pivotal fact of the position, of course, was that the Government contractor was the brother of one of these members of the Government. The very extraordinary monopoly which the Government then granted to the Marconi Company was in fact granted to its managing director, Mr. Godfrey Isaacs, the brother of Sir Rufus Isaacs, then the Attorney General. These facts alone justified at least enquiry; and the first efforts of all the politicians were directed to preventing any enquiry at all.

Until the editor of the Eye-Witness forced the politicians to reveal something, the politicians had begun by protesting that there was nothing whatever to reveal. Mr. Lloyd George spoke of mere rumours, by implication of baseless rumours, “passing from one foul lip to another.” The particular Samuel who happened to be doing a Ministerial job at the moment got up and gratuitously asserted that none of his colleagues had ever had any financial connection with this company; alluding in a distant manner to the Marconi Company. Sir Rufus Isaacs made the same distant denial in almost the same words; in fact he drew quite a quaint picture of the far-off, the almost frigid relations between himself and Mr. Godfrey Isaacs; and spoke of having once met his brother “at a family function,” and heard for the first time of the success of his government contract. Meanwhile my brother, who had succeeded to the full editorship of the paper and renamed it the New Witness, continued a confessedly violent, not to say abusive attack on the Isaacses, but latterly and largely on the previous career of Mr. Godfrey Isaacs as a promoter of ephemeral companies. Eventually, Mr. Godfrey Isaacs prosecuted my brother for the personal libel on himself; much to my brother’s delight. It is a rather remarkable fact that on the very day that my brother’s reply was received, announcing that he intended to justify or prove his statement, the politicians took the first step towards telling some of the truth. The step may at first sight seem odd. It consisted of prosecuting for libel a French paper called Le Matin.

It seems odd; because there were some very conspicuous English papers to be prosecuted. There was the New Witness, roaring aloud week after week to be prosecuted. There was the Morning Post, which said many things nearly as strong; there was Mr. Maxse, in the National Review, who said things quite as strong. I was myself so much amused with the inconsequence of this foreign diversion that I published some verses in the New Witness beginning:

I am so swift to seize affronts
My spirit is so high
Whoever has insulted me
Some foreigner must die.
I made a claim for damage
(For the Times has called me ‘thief’)
Against a paper in Alsace
A paper called Le Juif.
And when the Morning Post unearthed
Some murders I’d devised

A Polish organ of finance
At once apologised.
... I know it sounds confusing
But, as Mr. Lammle said,
The anger of a gentleman
Is boiling in my head.

The actual method, of course, is by this time familiar enough. Some fool who has got the facts wrong is always prosecuted, instead of the serious critics who have got the facts right. And, in the case of Le Matin, the occasion was merely used as an opportunity for the Ministers involved to give their own version of the real facts before it was too late. To the profound astonishment and distress of many, they admitted that, in spite of the reassuring remarks in Parliament, they had in fact received a large number of shares from the American branch of the Marconi Company. Most of the loyal Liberals who followed them were rather flabbergasted; but in the ordinary Party press the matter was duly whitewashed. Of course, the ordinary Tory press would have done exactly the same with an ordinary Tory scandal, of which there were quite as many. But I should like to name and record here, honoris causa and for the credit of himself and the true Radical creed, the name of the late H. W. Massingham, the editor of The Nation, who alone in such a crisis spoke and acted like a man. He was as devoted to the Party of Peace, Retrenchment and Reform, as any of the others; but his devotion took the form of an instant appreciation of its moral danger. He came home from the Matin explanation, shaken and horror-stricken, and he printed in his paper the words, “Political corruption is the Achilles heel of Liberalism.”

Attempts were made afterwards to justify all this inconsistency and contradiction, by explaining that the shares had been taken in the American branch of the enterprise and that the Parliamentary explanations had only referred to “this Company.” I must confess that I should feel very much more charity towards the fiction, if it were not for the explanation. I might easily forget and forgive, after all these years, if the politicians said they had lied as schoolboys lie, out of loyalty to their own class or club; and under certain conventions of Parliamentary self-defence; I might even think that this conventional fidelity was not so much merely dishonourable as a perverted form of honour. But if they say that a statement of that sort was not fiction, because the word “American” was suppressed, then (I grieve to say) I could only conclude that they did not know the meaning of truth. The test is perfectly simple. Suppose they had got up and told the whole simple truth saying, “These Ministers have shares in American but not in English Marconis,” the result would have been a shock; which they meant to avoid and did avoid. In other words, on their own theory of their own action, they meant to deceive and did deceive. That they deceived by a verbal equivocation of the double sense of “this Company” does not make it better, but worse. However, all their moral ideas were in such confusion that we need not necessarily even believe their explanation of their explanation. Their real reason may even have been better than their false excuse; and their lie may have been more loyal than they had the courage to confess.

Another legend about the Marconi Case, floating about like a cloud and obscuring its true outline, is this notion that my brother being convicted and fined the rather nominal sum of £100 was a legal answer to the attack on the Marconi Ministers. This is, as the lawyers say, a question of law as well as fact; and in both it is quite false. Mr. Justice Phillimore, who was opposed to our case in a degree rather beyond the limits of the judicial, was nevertheless a very lucid and precise lawyer; and he left no doubt on this point whatever. In his summing up, he said most emphatically that the jury had nothing whatever to do with the question of whether the politicians had improperly dabbled in Marconis; that their verdict was not to answer that political question one way or the other; that they were concerned solely with whether the individual Godfrey Isaacs, in his career as a company-promoter previous to the Marconi Case, had been unfairly described by the individual Cecil Chesterton. The jury were strongly instructed to find, and did find, that the description of the company-promoter was wrong. But the jury did not find, and were expressly told that they were not competent to find, that the conduct of the Marconi Ministers was right.

Whatever Godfrey Isaacs was really like, he is dead now; and I certainly am not going back to dig up the poor fellow’s defunct companies. There are perhaps only two things to be added to that personal part of the story; and I think they are both worth adding. One is that it is supremely characteristic of my brother that, while he undoubtedly used all the violent vocabulary of Cobbett in attacking Godfrey Isaacs and the rest, he had not in fact the faintest grain of malice, or even irritation. He always spoke of the brothers Isaacs and their set, in private conversation, with perfect good-humour and charity; allowing for their Jewish virtues of family loyalty and the rest, and even finding excuses for the other politicians; though it is extremely typical of the real attitude of our group, which was accused of fanatical Anti-Semitism, that he was always more ready to excuse the Jews than the Gentiles. That is another of the legends about the Marconi Case; that it was an attack on Jews. As Mr. Belloc said, in giving evidence, anybody less like a Jew than Mr. Lloyd George it would be difficult to imagine. And there is to be added to this a curious and ironic conclusion of the matter; for many years after my brother received the Last Sacraments and died in a hospital in France, his old enemy, Godfrey Isaacs, died very shortly after having been converted to the same universal Catholic Church. No one would have rejoiced more than my brother; or with less bitterness or with more simplicity. It is the only reconciliation; and it can reconcile anybody. Requiescat in pace.

Finally, it may be worth noting that the last and least worthy of the legends about the Marconi Case was a notion, which I found floating about at one time, that my brother and Mr. Belloc had parted company on the matter, because Mr. Belloc in his evidence had referred the examiners to my brother as responsible editor of the later issues of the paper. As one who was inside all the councils, and was naturally prejudiced if anything on my brother's side, I may testify that there was never a word of truth in this supposed division or desertion. The policy of my brother, claiming to answer all questions himself, may have been wise or unwise; I myself had my doubts about its wisdom. But such as it was, it was adopted by him in consultation with Mr. Belloc, as a part of their common policy; and on my suggestion, my brother afterwards inserted a note in the paper explaining this simple fact. The result was simple and significant. The Commission never dared to call him at all. For the rest, the political scandal was treated like all other political scandals. A Parliamentary Commission was appointed and reported that everything was very nice; a Minority Report was issued which reported that some things were not quite so nice; and political life (if you can call it life) went on as before. But what makes me laugh is the thought of the poor puzzled, honest and indignant Tories, who read the Morning Post and imagined that a Tory chivalry was storming the fortress of corrupt Radicalism, when they read the Parliamentary Debates on the subject; and especially the passage in which Arthur Balfour said that they must judge men like Lloyd George (whom they knew so well and loved so much) more leniently than they would judge a common outsider. The poor Primrose League must have been horribly mystified by the problem of this mildness on the Front Benches. They would have found the answer to the problem in a book called The Party System.

Soon after the affair had concluded, as such affairs always conclude in modern England, with a formal verdict and a whitewashing committee, all our politics and practical life were turned upside down by the external earthquake of the Great War. There was not so complete a disconnection as some suppose; for Prussia was partly encouraged to attack by a gross exaggeration of the seriousness, I will not say of the Orangeman, but certainly of the seriousness with which the Englishman really regards the Orangeman. And that threat of civil war from Northern Ireland was very largely lashed into extravagance, as an expedient for proving that the Party System did mean something after all. For a very long time past, the Irish Question had been the only life in the English Parliament. It was alive because it was concerned with religion, or with two religions; and when the Irish question was withdrawn, the English Parliamentary Party System visibly fell to pieces. But there were other ways in which the issue of corruption continued to affect the country in wartime; not least in the Dope Scandal and in the fact that firms did brazenly continue to trade with the enemy. But in truth, the evil connection went back further than that. As a fact, it goes back to the very beginning of the War, though few people even began to understand it until long afterwards.

If I were asked who produced or precipitated the Great War (in the instant sense that he prevented it being prevented), I should give an answer that would surprise nearly all sections of opinion, and almost certainly surprise the man himself. I should not say the Kaiser; for that simplification was only one of the series of British bogeys like Kruger before or Mussolini afterwards; though I am quite certain the evil originally arose with the power of Prussia. Still less should I say the Czar of Russia or some Slavonic fanatic who committed a crime at Sarajevo. Long after the acts and attitudes of all these people were recognised, it would have been perfectly possible to avoid the war; and nearly everybody wanted to avoid it. I should say that the fire-eater, who precipitated it when others might have prevented it, was some sort of worthy Quaker of the type of old Mr. Cadbury, whom I knew and served in my youth.

And it all arose out of the existence of the Party System; or rather, in a sense, out of the non-existence of the Party System. When the public theory of a thing is different from the practical reality of that thing, there is always a convention of silence that cannot be broken; there are things that must not be said in public. The fact concealed in this case exactly illustrated the thesis of the book called, The Party System; that there were not two real parties ruling alternately, but one real group, “the Front Benches,” ruling all the time. The fact here was that the foreign policy of Asquith and Grey did not vitally differ from that which would have been pursued by Balfour and Bonar Law. All were patriots upon this point; all were, in my personal opinion, right; but anyhow, all thought that England would have to intervene if Germany threatened France. They all thought so; and if they had all said so, and said so months before, Germany would never have challenged the power of such an alliance. My brother and many millions more would be walking about alive.

The Liberal leaders could not say so; not for fear of the Liberty Party, let alone the people; but for fear of the particular and powerful forces which supported the Liberal Party; and therefore supported the Party System. And under the conditions of our party politics, a party is supported not so much by fighting as by funds. They are called, heaven knows why, in a most extraordinary metaphor, “the sinews of war.” They are provided by the sale of peerages to rich men and all sorts of ignominious methods; but there is no question of such methods here. Many such party supporters, and certainly Mr. Cadbury, were in complete good faith, especially about supporting Peace. But very many of them were Quakers, simply because the Quakers happened to possess a minority of millionaires, a group much smaller but much richer than the Liberal Party as a whole. And the very constitution of modern party politics is such that a government has to placate such supporters, and profess to represent their ideals or prejudices, or whatever we happen to think them. In short, the whole thing was and is a plutocracy; but it was not specially in this case the fault of this group of plutocrats.

That increasing number of intellectuals, who are content to say that Democracy has been a failure, miss the point of the far more disastrous calamity that Plutocracy has been a success. I mean it has been the only sort of success it could be; for Plutocracy has no philosophy or morals or even meaning; it can only be a material success, that is, a base success.

Plutocracy can only mean the success of plutocrats in being plutocrats. But this they enjoyed until a short time ago, when an economic judgment shook them like an earthquake. With Democracy the cast is exactly the reverse. We may say, with some truth, that Democracy has failed; but we shall only mean that Democracy has failed to exist. It is nonsense to say that the complicated but centralised Capitalist States of the last hundred years have suffered from an extravagant sense of the equality of men or the simplicity of manhood. At most we might say that the civic theory has provided a sort of legal fiction, behind which a rich man could rule a civilisation where he could once rule a city; or a usurer throw his net over six nations, where he once threw it over one village. But there is no stronger proof of the fact that it emphatically is plutocracy, and most emphatically is not democracy, that has caused popular institutions to become unpopular, than this example of the pull of the Pacifists upon the Liberal Government just before the Great War. It is only necessary to ask exactly how much such extreme Pacifists counted in the Party Fund, and how much they counted in the Party.

For no electioneering agent, however active and anxious, would have got into an abnormal panic about the votes of the Quakers. He would have given them the normal attention that he would give to the votes of the Plymouth Brethren or the Peculiar People, who would very probably have the habit of voting Liberal. There are not enough individual Quakers to create a landslide of votes at a General Election. By the nature of modern politics, and nobody’s fault in particular, the whole point and pivot of the situation was not the large proportion of men who were Quakers, but the large proportion of Quakers who were millionaires. And since this situation is bad at its best, as with Quakers who were sincere in their Pacifism, we can hardly think too badly of so bad a situation at its worst. At its worst it meant that the worst sort of traitors could and did trade with the enemy throughout the War, that the worst sort of profiteers could and did blackmail their own country for bloodsucking profits in the worst hour of her peril, that the worst sort of politicians could play any game they liked with the honour of England and the happiness of Europe, if they were backed and boomed by some vulgar monopolist millionaire; and these insolent interests nearly brought us to a crash in the supreme crisis of our history; because Parliament had come to mean only a secret government by the rich.

So ended the last considerable attempt to purge Parliament, or the ancient institution of the English. Some years before a similar attempt had been made in France, inspired by the chivalry of Déroulède, who acted much in the military and Christian spirit of Belloc and my brother. That also had failed; and Parliaments continued to prosper; that is they continued to rot. We have lived to see the last phase; when the revolt against that rot in representative institutions broke out further south, in the very gates of Rome; and it did not fail. But it has brought with it changes not wholly comforting to one who loves liberty and the ancient English conception of a Free Parliament. I am proud to have been among those who tried to save it, even if it was too late.

Chapter X: Friendship and Foolery

There are some who complain of a man for doing nothing; there are some, still more mysterious and amazing, who complain of having nothing to do. When actually presented with some beautiful blank hours or days, they will grumble at their blankness. When given the gift of loneliness, which is the gift of liberty, they will cast it away; they will destroy it deliberately with some dreadful game with cards or a little ball. I speak only for myself; I know it takes all sorts to make a world; but I cannot repress a shudder when I see them throwing away their hard-won holidays by doing something. For my own part, I never can get enough Nothing to do. I feel as if I had never had leisure to unpack a tenth part of the luggage of my life and thoughts. I need not say that there is nothing particularly misanthropic in my desire for isolation; quite the other way. In my morbid boyhood, as I have said, I was sometimes, in quite a horrible sense, solitary in society. But in my manhood, I have never felt more sociable than I do in solitude.

I have already figured here as a lunatic; and have now only to add that I have occasionally been a happy lunatic as well as an unhappy one. And as I have mentioned the joy of solitude, it will be suitably erratic to proceed at once to the joy of many jokes with many companions; and above all, it will be well to begin with the best of all my companionships. I am not going to describe my honeymoon, at some of the more comic incidents of which I have already glanced. After we were married, my wife and I lived for about a year in Kensington, the place of my childhood; but I think we both knew that it was not to be the real place of our abode. I remember that we strolled out one day, for a sort of second honeymoon, and went upon a journey into the void, a voyage deliberately objectless. I saw a passing omnibus labelled “Hanwell” and, feeling this to be an appropriate omen, we boarded it and left it somewhere at a stray station, which I entered and asked the man in the ticket-office where the next train went to. He uttered the pedantic reply, “Where do you want to go to?” And I uttered the profound and philosophical rejoinder, “Wherever the next train goes to.” It seemed that it went to Slough; which may seem to be singular taste, even in a train. However, we went to Slough, and from there set out walking with even less notion of where we were going. And in that fashion we passed through the large and quiet cross-roads of a sort of village, and stayed at an inn called

The White Hart. We asked the name of the place and were told that it was called Beaconsfield (I mean of course that it was called Beconsfield and not Beaconsfield), and we said to each other, “This is the sort of place where some day we will make our home.”

The things that come back to me in my memory, as most worth doing and worth remembering, are all sorts of absurd interludes and escapades with my companions, full of their conversation and coloured with their characters. Belloc still awaits a Boswell. His vivacious and awakening personality has shown all the continuity of Dr. Johnson’s; and though he has had personal sorrow and in later years not a little solitude, he was fully entitled to say, like the man in his own song,

For you that took the all in all, the things you left were three,
A loud voice for singing and clear eyes to see
And a spouting fount of life within that never yet has dried.

Bentley or Conrad Noel were characters who could have been put into any comedy; and the levities of Maurice Baring were worthy of some fantastic macaroni or incroyable of the eighteenth century.

Among the memories that are blown back to me, as by a wind over the Downs, is that of the winter day when Belloc dragged us through Sussex to find the source of the Arun. The company included his wife and mine; none of us had been long married, and perhaps we knew less than we do now of the diversity of human temperaments, not to say temperatures. He and I were fond of cold weather; my wife and his wife, who was a very charming Californian, were not. We did find the place where the Arun rose in the hills; and it was indeed, of all the sights I have seen, one of the most beautiful; I might almost say the most classical. For it rose in a (partly frozen) pool in a small grove of slender trees, silver with the frost, that looked somehow like the pale and delicate pillars of a temple. But I think the ladies, though both of them sensitive to scenery, looked on that cold paradise with something of a cold eye. When this began to be discovered, Belloc instantly proposed the remedy of hot rum, in large tumblers at an adjoining inn; and we were puzzled by the fact that the remedy was regarded with almost as much distaste as the disease. However, we ourselves, who did not feel the cold, heartily consumed the rum; and Belloc, who has always had a trick of repeating scraps of recently discovered verse, which happened to please him, would volley out at intervals the lines of Miss Coleridge:

We were young, we were merry, we were very very wise
And the doors stood open at our feast;
When there passed us a woman with the west in her eyes
And a man with his back to the east.

There is no doubt, so far as we were concerned, that we were young and were merry; but I have sometimes doubted since whether we were very, very wise.

We then returned to Belloc’s house; where he rather neutralised the effects of the restoring warmth, by continually flinging open the door and rushing out to a telescope in the garden (it was already a frosty starlight) and loudly hallooing to the ladies to come and see God making energy. His wife declined, in terms of not a little humour; to which he retorted cheerfully:

We were young, we were merry, we were very very wise
And the doors stood open at our feast;
When there passed us a woman with the west in her eyes
And a man with his back to the east.

Needless to say, however, his hospitality terminated with a magnificent feast with wine, and all ended in a glow of gaiety; but there lingers a sort of legend of that day in winter, when some of us were so much more interested in the barometer than the telescope. The feminine aspect of the story was afterwards embodied in an echo of the everlasting refrain:

We were cold, we were bitter, we were very nearly dead,
And the doors stood open by desire,
And there faced us a woman with a cold in her head
And a man with his back to the fire.

Those are the sort of silly things that come back to me in memory; and a real life of anybody would almost entirely consist of them. But a real life of anybody is a very difficult thing to write; and as I have failed two or three times in trying to do it to other people, I am under no illusion that I can really do it to myself. I remember another rather ridiculous private incident which had more of what is called public interest. For it involved the meeting of Belloc and a very famous and distinguished author; and I think the meeting was the most comic comedy of cross-purposes that ever happened in the world. One could write books about its significance, social, national, international and historic. It had in it all sorts of things; including the outside and the inside of England. And yet as an anecdote it would probably seem pointless, so subtle and penetrating is the point.

One summer we took a house at Rye, that wonderful inland island, crowned with a town as with a citadel, like a hill in a mediaeval picture. It happened that the house next to us was the old oak-panelled mansion which had attracted, one might almost say across the Atlantic, the fine aquiline eye of Henry James. For Henry James, of course, was an American who had reacted against America; and steeped his sensitive psychology in everything that seemed most antiquatedly and aristocratically English. In his search for the finest shades among the shadows of the past, one might have guessed that he would pick out that town from all towns and that house from all houses. It had been the seat of a considerable patrician family of the neighbourhood, which had long ago decayed and disappeared. It had, I believe, rows of family portraits, which Henry James treated as reverently as family ghosts. I think in a way he really regarded himself as a sort of steward or custodian of the mysteries and secrets of a great house, where ghosts might have walked with all possible propriety. The legend says (I never learned for certain if it was true) that he had actually traced that dead family-tree until he found that there was far away in some manufacturing town, one unconscious descendant of the family, who was a cheerful and commonplace commercial clerk. And it is said that Henry James would ask this youth down to his dark ancestral house, and receive him with funereal hospitality, and I am sure with comments of a quite excruciating tact and delicacy. Henry James always spoke with an air which I can only call gracefully groping; that is not so much groping in the dark in blindness as groping in the light in bewilderment, through seeing too many avenues and obstacles. I would not compare it, in the unkind phrase of Mr. H. G. Wells, to an elephant trying to pick up a pea. But I agree that it was like something with a very sensitive and flexible proboscis, feeling its way through a forest of facts; to us often invisible facts. It is said, I say, that these thin straws of sympathy and subtlety were duly split for the benefit of the astonished commerical gentleman, while Henry James, with his bowed dome-like head, drooped with unfathomable apologies and rendered a sort of silent account of his stewardship. It is also said that the commercial gentleman thought the visit a great bore and the ancestral home a hell of a place; and probably fidgeted about with a longing to go out for a B and S and the Pink ‘Un.

Whether this tale be true or not, it is certain that Henry James inhabited the house with all the gravity and loyalty of the family ghost; not without something of the oppressive delicacy of a highly cultured family butler. He was in point of fact a very stately and courteous old gentleman; and, in some social aspects especially, rather uniquely gracious. He proved in one point that there was a truth in his cult of tact. He was serious with children. I saw a little boy gravely present him with a crushed and dirty dandelion. He bowed; but he did not smile. That restraint was a better proof of the understanding of children than the writing of What Maisie Knew. But in all relations of life he erred, if he erred, on the side of solemnity and slowness; and it was this, I suppose, that got at last upon the too lively nerves of Mr. Wells; who used, even in those days, to make irreverent darts and dashes through the sombre house and the sacred garden and drop notes to me over the garden wall. I shall have more to say of Mr. H. G. Wells and his notes later; here we are halted at the moment when Mr. Henry James heard of our arrival in Rye and proceeded (after exactly the correct interval) to pay his call in state.

Needless to say, it was a very stately call of state; and James seemed to fill worthily the formal frock-coat of those far-off days. As no man is so dreadfully well-dressed as a well-dressed American, so no man is so terribly well-mannered as a well-mannered American. He brought his brother William with him, the famous American philosopher; and though William James was breezier than his brother when you knew him, there was something finally ceremonial about this idea of the whole family on the march. We talked about the best literature of the day; James a little tactfully, myself a little nervously. I found he was more strict than I had imagined about the rules of artistic arrangement; he deplored rather than depreciated Bernard Shaw, because plays like Getting Married were practically formless. He said something complimentary about something of mine; but represented himself as respectfully wondering how I wrote all I did. I suspected him of meaning why rather than how. We then proceeded to consider gravely the work of Hugh Walpole, with many delicate degrees of appreciation and doubt; when I heard from the front-garden a loud bellowing noise resembling that of an impatient foghorn. I knew, however, that it was not a fog-horn; because it was roaring out, “Gilbert! Gilbert!” and was like only one voice in the world; as rousing as that recalled in one of its former phrases, of those who

Heard Ney shouting to the guns to unlimber
And hold the Beresina Bridge at night.

I knew it was Belloc, probably shouting for bacon and beer; but even I had no notion of the form or guise under which he would present himself.

I had every reason to believe that he was a hundred miles away in France. And so, apparently, he had been; walking with a friend of his in the Foreign Office, a co-religionist of one of the old Catholic families; and by some miscalculation they had found themselves in the middle of their travels entirely without money. Belloc is legitimately proud of having on occasion lived, and being able to live, the life of the poor. One of the Ballades of the Eye-Witness, which was never published, described tramping abroad in this fashion:

To sleep and smell the incense of the tar,
To wake and watch Italian dawns aglow
And underneath the branch a single star,
Good Lord, how little wealthy people know.

In this spirit they started to get home practically without money. Their clothes collapsed and they managed to get into some workmen’s slops. They had no razors and could not afford a shave. They must have saved their last penny to recross the sea; and then they started walking from Dover to Rye; where they knew their nearest friend for the moment resided. They arrived, roaring for food and drink and derisively accusing each other of having secretly washed, in violation of an implied contract between tramps. In this fashion they burst in upon the balanced tea-cup and tentative sentence of Mr. Henry James.

Henry James had a name for being subtle; but I think that situation was too subtle for him. I doubt to this day whether he, of all men, did not miss the irony of the best comedy in which he ever played a part. He had left

America because he loved Europe, and all that was meant by England or France; the gentry, the gallantry, the traditions of lineage and locality, the life that had been lived beneath old portraits in oak-panelled rooms. And there, on the other side of the tea-table, was Europe, was the old thing that made France and England, the posterity of the English squires and the French soldiers; ragged, unshaven, shouting for beer, shameless above all shades of poverty and wealth; sprawling, indifferent, secure. And what looked across at it was still the Puritan refinement of Boston; and the space it looked across was wider than the Atlantic.

It is only fair to say that my two friends were at the moment so disreputable that even an English inn-keeper was faintly at fault in his unfailing nose for gentlemen. He knew they were not tramps; but he had to rally his powers of belief to become completely convinced that they were a Member of Parliament and an official at the Foreign Office. But, though he was a simple and even stupid man, I am not sure that he did not know more about it than Henry James. The fact that one of my friends insisted on having a bottle of port decanted and carrying it through the streets of Rye, like a part of a religious procession, completely restored his confidence in the class to which such lunatics belonged. I have always been haunted by the contradictions of that comedy; and if I could ever express all that was involved in it, I should write a great book on international affairs. I do not say I should become the champion of an Anglo-American Alliance; for any fool can do that, and indeed generally does. But I should begin to suggest something which is often named and has never been even remotely approached: an Anglo-American Understanding.

In those days down at Rye, as I have said, I saw something of Mr. H. G. Wells, and learnt to appreciate that in him which I think made him rebel against the atmosphere of Henry James; though Henry James did really appreciate that quality in Wells. Indeed, Henry James expressed it as well as it could be expressed by saying, “Whatever Wells writes is not only alive, but kicking.” It seems rather unfortunate that, after this, it should have been Henry James who was kicked. But I can sympathise in some ways with H. G’s mutiny against the oak-panelling and the ghosts. What I have always liked about Wells is his vigorous and unaffected readiness for a lark. He was one of the best men in the world with whom to start a standing joke; though perhaps he did not like it to stand too long after it was started. I remember we worked a toy-theatre together with a pantomime about Sidney Webb. I also remember that it was we who invented the well-known and widespread national game of Gype. All sorts of variations and complications were invented in connection with Gype. There was Land Gype and Water Gype. I myself cut out and coloured pieces of cardboard of mysterious and significant shapes, the instruments of Table Gype; a game for the little ones. It was even duly settled what disease threatened the over-assiduous player; he tended to suffer from Gype’s Ear. My friends and I introduced allusions to the fashionable sport in our articles; Bentley successfully passed one through the Daily News and I through some other paper. Everything was in order and going forward; except the game itself, which has not yet been invented.

I can understand a man like Wells feeling that Henry James would show a certain frigidity towards Gype; and for the sacred memory of Gype I can excuse his reaction; but I have always thought that he reacted too swiftly to everything; possibly as a part of the swiftness of his natural genius. I have never ceased to admire and sympathise; but I think he has always been too much in a state of reaction. To use the name which would probably annoy him most, I think he is a permanent reactionary. Whenever I met him, he seemed to be coming from somewhere, rather than going anywhere. He always had been a Liberal, or had been a Fabian, or had been a friend of Henry James or Bernard Shaw. And he was so often nearly right, that his movements irritated me like the sight of somebody’s hat being perpetually washed up by the sea and never touching the shore. But I think he thought that the object of opening the mind is simply opening the mind. Whereas I am incurably convinced that the object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.

The name of Mr. H. G. Wells has already inevitably suggested the name of Mr. Bernard Shaw; and it is a mere accident of the arrangement of this book that he has not figured in it fairly prominently from the first. As I have explained on an earlier page, I myself began with an acceptance of Socialism; simply because it seemed at the time the only alternative to the dismal acceptance of Capitalism. I have also noted that my brother, who took Socialism more seriously or at least more scientifically, became a recognised influence in the Fabian Society and was at that time much more familiar with G. B. S. than I. He was also by the nature of the case, much more in agreement with him. My principal experience, from first to last, has been in argument with him. And it is worth remarking that I have learned to have a warmer admiration and affection out of all that argument than most people get out of agreement. Bernard Shaw, unlike some whom I have had to consider here, is seen at his best when he is antagonistic. I might say that he is seen at his best when he is wrong. Or rather, everything is wrong about him but himself.

I began arguing with Mr. Bernard Shaw in print almost as early as I began doing anything. It was about my Pro-Boer sympathies in the South African War. Those who do not understand what the Fabian political philosophy was may not realise that the leading Fabians were nearly all Imperialists. Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb were in that matter strong Imperialists; Hubert Bland was a still stronger Imperialist; my brother was as strong an Imperialist as Hubert Bland. And even Bernard Shaw, though retaining a certain liberty to chaff everybody, was quite definitely an Imperialist, as compared with myself and my friends the Pro-Boers. Since then a legend has arisen, especially among his stupidest opponents, that Mr. Bernard Shaw is an impudent Irish revolutionary who has always been Anti-British. The truth is that Mr. Bernard Shaw has always been a great deal too Pro-British. The play of John Bull's Other Island is a great deal too Pro-British. It makes the Other Island a great deal too much John Bull's. It credits the English business man with a success in Ireland that he has never had. It suggests indeed that the success is almost due to the stupidity. But in fact the attempts of men like Balfour and Birrell and Wyndham and Morley to rule Ireland might be much more truly described as a brilliant failure than a stupid success. The point was not that stupid men made something out of it, but that clever men made nothing. So it was in this old and determining crisis of the war with the Dutch Republic. As compared with Belloc or myself, Bernard Shaw was definitely in favour of the South African War. At any rate, he was very definitely in favour of the South African Peace, the particular Pax Britannica that was aimed at by the South African War. It was the same, for that matter, with Mr. H. G. Wells; then a sort of semi-detached Fabian. He went out of his way to scoff at the indignation of the Pro-Boers against the Concentration Camps. Indeed he still maintains, while holding all wars indefensible, that this is the only sort of war to be defended. He says that great wars between great powers are absurd, but that it might be necessary, in policing the planet, to force backward peoples to open their resources to cosmopolitan commerce. In other words, he defends the only sort of war I thoroughly despise, the bullying of small states for their oil or gold; and he despises the only sort of war that I really defend, a war of civilisations and religions, to determine the moral destiny of mankind.

I say this as a compliment to the Fabians. I say it as a compliment to their consistency, as well as contradiction of their controversial views. They were and are quite right, holding their views about centralisation, to be on the side of the Big Battalions and the Big Businesses. It is the sentimental Socialists (as Mr. Wells quite truly points out) who are inconsistent, in saying that a peasant has no right to a corn-field, but a peasantry has a right to an oil-field. It is they who are the more nebulous thinkers when they defend small nationalities but not small properties; more nebulous but sometimes much nicer. There is only a thin sheet of paper between the Imperialist and the Internationalist; and the first Fabians had the lucidity to see the fact. Most of the other Socialists have preferred sheets of paper, and they have grown thinner and thinner sheets.

In the same way Mr. Bernard Shaw has been highly flattered by the false charges brought against him; especially the general charge of being a sort of Irish rebel. Anyone who remembers those old times knows that he was, if anything, the very reverse. It was a part of the Fabian cult of commonsense to regard Irish nationalism as a narrow sentimentalism, distracting men from the main business of socialising the resources of the whole world. But I only note this error here to emphasise the fact that my controversy with G. B. S., both logically and chronologically, is from the beginning. Since then I have argued with him on almost every subject in the world; and we have always been on opposite sides, without affectation or animosity. I have defended the institution of the family against his Platonist fancies about the State. I have defended the institutions of Beef and Beer against his hygienic severity of vegetarianism and total abstinence. I have defended the old Liberal notion of nationalism against the new Socialist notion of internationalism. I have defended the cause of the Allies against the perverse sympathy felt by pacifists for the militarism of the Central Empires. I have defended what I regard as the sacred limitations of Man against what he regards as the soaring illimitability of Superman. Indeed it was in this last matter of Man and Superman that I felt the difference to become most clear and acute; and we had many discussions upon it with all sides. It was my friend Lucian Oldershaw who announced his intention of writing an answer to “Man and Superman,” called “Shaw and Oldershaw.”

For in fact all these differences come back to a religious difference; indeed I think all differences do. I did not know myself, at the beginning, what the religious difference was; still less what the religion was. But the difference is this; that the Shavians believe in evolution exactly as the old Imperialists believed in expansion. They believe in a great growing and groping thing like a tree; but I believe in the flower and the fruit; and the flower is often small. The fruit is final and in that sense finite; it has a form and therefore a limit. There has been stamped upon it an image, which is the crown and consummation of an aim; and the mediaeval mystics used the same metaphor and called it Fruition. And as applied to man, it means this; that man has been made more sacred than any superman or super-monkey; that his very limitations have already become holy and like a home; because of that sunken chamber in the rocks, where God became very small.

I have dwelt on this long duel that I may end with the right salute to the duellist. It is not easy to dispute violently with a man for twenty years, about sex, about sin, about sacraments, about personal points of honour, about all the most sacred or delicate essentials of existence, without sometimes being irritated or feeling that he hits unfair blows or employs discreditable ingenuities. And I can testify that I have never read a reply by Bernard Shaw that did not leave me in a better and not a worse temper or frame of mind; which did not seem to come out of inexhaustible fountains of fair-mindedness and intellectual geniality; which did not savour somehow of that native largeness which the philosopher attributed to the Magnanimous Man. It is necessary to disagree with him as much as I do, in order to admire him as much as I do; and I am proud of him as a foe even more than as a friend.

Thus it happened that, while there are few of my contemporaries I like better, we have met more in public than in private; and generally upon platforms; especially upon platforms where we were put up to fight each other, like two knock-about comedians. And indeed he has his eccentricities, rather perhaps to be called consistencies, which often hamper conventional conviviality. Even hostesses, let alone hosts, are sometimes puzzled by a gentleman who has rather more horror of tea than of wine or beer. When I have met him among my more festive friends, he has always stood up starkly for his negative ideals, sometimes to the point of defiance. Among the more joyful of the memories that I am stirring in this chapter were many of the moonstruck banquets given by Mr. Maurice Baring; who in such matters might well have a chapter to himself. The trouble is that I fear the chapter would be found incredible and cast discredit on the rest of this laborious but reliable narrative. It is not for me to do justice here to the godlike joy of life that induced a gentleman to celebrate his fiftieth birthday in a Brighton hotel at midnight by dancing a Russian dance with inconceivable contortions and then plunging into the sea in evening dress. It were not wholly wise perhaps to tell the whole story of that great supper-party in a vast tent in a garden in Westminster; after which eggs were boiled in Sir Herbert Tree's hat (because it was the most chic and shining of the hats of the company); and I remember indulging in a wild fencing match with real swords against a gentleman who was, fortunately, more intoxicated than I. The whole of that great occasion was actually recorded in cold blood, of all places in the world, in a French newspaper. The reason was that a little French journalist, after making a placid and witty speech full of compliments, had then indulged for the rest of the evening in the treacherous Gallic trick of strict temperance. I remember that his article (which was highly unreliable), began with the words, "'I denounce Shaw. He is sober.' Who said these words? These were the words of George Wells;" and continued in an equally personal vein. But it is really true, and I know that Shaw would think it merely consistent and creditable, that he himself got up and sternly protested and then stalked out of the room as a seventeenth-century Puritan might have left a tavern full of Cavaliers.

But even the most sincere seventeenth-century Puritan was in error in supposing that Cavaliers could not be sincere, and even serious. He may often have classed with mere roysterers men of the quality of Donne or Herbert or Sir Thomas Browne. There was a great deal of wisdom as well as wit over the nuts and wine in those riots of my youth; and not only outstanding wisdom but outstanding virtue. It is a coincidence that I have already symbolised such virtue in the surname of Herbert. Maurice Baring himself has recorded in a noble elegy the virtues of the Herbert of his own generation; the second Auberon Herbert, son of the eccentric Individualist, who afterwards inherited the title of Lord Lucas. He was assuredly the good cavalier. Every man was the better for meeting him, in however Bacchanalian an environment; courage and frankness and the love of freedom stood out of him like staring signals, though he was entirely modest and natural; and the battered party name of Liberal meant something so long as he was alive. His courage was of the queerest quality;

casual and as it were, in a quiet way, crazy. He had a wooden leg or foot, having lost the use of one limb in the South African War; and I have known him climb out of the window at the top of a dizzy tower of flats and crawl somehow like a fly to the next window, without railing or balcony or any apparent foothold; and having re-entered by the next window climb out again by the next, so weaving a sort of winding pattern round the top of the building. This story is strictly true; but there were a great many legends in that circle, the growth of which it was amusing to watch. I once smashed an ordinary tumbler at Herbert's table, and an ever-blossoming tradition sprang up that it had been a vessel of inconceivable artistic and monetary value, its price perpetually mounting into millions and its form and colour taking on the glories of the Arabian Nights. From this incident (and from the joyful manner in which Baring trampled like an elephant among the fragments of the crystal) arose a catchword used by many of us in many subsequent controversies, in defence of romantic and revolutionary things; the expression: "I like the noise of breaking glass." I made it the refrain of a ballade which began:

Prince, when I took your goblet tall
And smashed it with inebriate care,
I knew not how from Rome and Gaul
You gained it; I was unaware
It stood by Charlemagne's great chair
And served St. Peter at High Mass.
... I'm sorry if the thing was rare;
I like the noise of breaking glass.

It is only just to our happy company to say that we did not confine ourselves to saying or singing our own lyrics; though Belloc was generally ready to oblige; and the loud and roaring but none the less pathetic song with the chorus:

And the Gates of Heaven are opening wide
To let poor Hilary in

was first heard, I think, at one of these quiet evenings for mutual edification and culture. But we must have sung a vast number of the finest songs in the English language, by poets ancient and modern; and a legend persists that, when Herbert had rooms not far from Buckingham Palace, we sang “Drake’s Drum” with such passionate patriotism that King Edward the Seventh sent in a request for the noise to stop.

I was mainly led to the mention of these idle though agreeable memories, by remarking that his quite unaffected aversion to this sort of thing marked the Puritanic element in Bernard Shaw. He is probably still regarded by many as a buffoon; as a fact he has far too little sympathy with mere buffoonery. His austerity in such things is so much a part of his personality and purity of aim, that one can hardly wish it altered; but the truth remains that the Puritan cannot understand the morality and religion of the Cavalier. In most matters I have found myself rather more in sympathy with Mr. Bernard Shaw than with Mr. H. G. Wells, the other genius of the Fabians, warmly as I admire them both. But, in this matter. Wells was more of my sort than Shaw. Wells does understand the glow and body of good spirits, even when they are animal spirits; and he understands the Saturnalia in which the senator can sometimes relax like the slave. Even here, however, there is a distinction. Shaw has plenty of appetite for adventure; but in his case it would be most welcome as open air adventure. He would not see the fun of cellars or smugglers’ caves; but require a levity in some sense celestial in the literal sense of being sub divo. To put it shortly. Wells would understand larking; but Shaw would only understand skylarking.

I was destined to see some of his skylarking on one occasion at least; and to be privileged to play the fool with him far from the political platform, if not so very far from the theatrical stage. It began by Bernard Shaw coming down to my house in Beaconsfield, in the heartiest spirits and proposing that we should appear together, disguised as Cowboys, in a film of some sort projected by Sir James Barrie. I will not describe the purpose or character of the performance; because nobody ever discovered it; presumably with the exception of Sir James Barrie. But throughout the proceedings, even Barrie had rather the appearance of concealing his secret from himself. All I could gather was that two other well-known persons, Lord Howard de Walden and Mr. William Archer, the grave Scottish critic and translator of Ibsen, had also consented to be Cowboys. “Well,” I said, after a somewhat blank pause of reflection, “God forbid that anyone should say I did not see a joke, if William Archer could see it.” Then after a pause I asked, “But what is the joke?” Shaw replied with hilarious vagueness that nobody knew what the joke was. That was the joke.

I found that the mysterious proceeding practically divided itself into two parts. Both were pleasantly conspiratorial in the manner of Mr. Oppenheim or Mr. Edgar Wallace. One consisted of an appointment in a sort of abandoned brickfield somewhere in the wilds of Essex; in which spot, it was alleged, our cowpunching costumes were already concealed. The other consisted of an invitation to supper at the Savoy, to "talk things over" with Barrie and Granville Barker. I kept both these melodramatic assignations; and though neither of them threw any light upon what we were supposed to be doing, they were both very amusing in their way and rather different from what might have been expected. We went down to the waste land in Essex and found our Wild West equipment. But considerable indignation was felt against William Archer; who, with true Scottish foresight, arrived there first and put on the best pair of trousers. They were indeed a magnificent pair of fur trousers; while the other three riders of the prairie had to be content with canvas trousers. A running commentary upon this piece of individualism continued throughout the afternoon; while we were being rolled in barrels, roped over faked precipices and eventually turned loose in a field to lasso wild ponies, which were so tame that they ran after us instead of our running after them, and nosed in our pockets for pieces of sugar. Whatever may be the strain on credulity, it is also a fact that we all got onto the same motor-bicycle; the wheels of which were spun round under us to produce the illusion of hurtling like a thunderbolt down the mountain-pass. When the rest finally vanished over the cliffs clinging to the rope, they left me behind as a necessary weight to secure it; and Granville Barker kept on calling out to me to Register Self-Sacrifice and Register Resignation, which I did with such wild and sweeping gestures as occurred to me; not, I am proud to say, without general applause. And all this time Barrie, with his little figure behind his large pipe, was standing about in an impenetrable manner; and nothing could extract from him the faintest indication of why we were being put through these ordeals. Never had the silencing effects of the Arcadia Mixture appeared to me more powerful or more unscrupulous. It was as if the smoke that rose from that pipe was a vapour not only of magic, but of black magic.

But the other half of the mystery was, if possible, more mysterious. It was all the more mysterious because it was public, not to say crowded. I went to the Savoy supper under the impression that Barrie and Barker would explain to a small party some small part of the scheme. Instead of that I found the stage of the Savoy Theatre thronged with nearly everybody in London, as the Society papers say when they mean everybody in Society. From the Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith to the yellowest and most cryptic Oriental attache, they were all there, dining at little tables and talking about everything but the matter in hand. At least they were all there except Sir James Barrie; who on this occasion made himself almost completely invisible. Towards the end of the meal. Sir Edward Elgar casually remarked to my wife, “I suppose you know you’re being filmed all this time.”

From what I know of the lady, it is unlikely that she was brandishing a champagne-bottle or otherwise attracting social attention; but some of them were throwing bread about and showing marked relaxation from the cares of State. Then the Original Four, whom destiny had selected for a wild western life, were approached with private instructions, which worked out in public as follows. The stage was cleared and the company adjourned to the auditorium, where Bernard Shaw harangued them in a furious speech, with savage gesticulations denouncing Barker and Barrie and finally drawing an enormous sword. The other three of us rose at this signal, also brandishing swords, and stormed the stage, going out through the back scenery. And there We (whoever We were) disappear for ever from the record and reasonable understanding of mankind; for never from that day to this has the faintest light been thrown on the reasons of our remarkable behaviour. I have since heard in a remote and roundabout way certain vague suggestions, to the effect that there was some symbolical notion of our vanishing from real life and being captured or caught up into the film world of romance; being engaged through all the rest of the play in struggling to fight our way back to reality. Whether this was the idea I have never known for certain; I only know that I received immediately afterwards a friendly and apologetic note from Sir James Barrie, saying that the whole scheme was going to be dropped.

I do not know; but I have often wondered. And I have sometimes fancied that there was another sense, darker than my own fancy, in which the secret put in Barrie’s pipe had ended in smoke. There had really been a sort of unearthly unreality in all the levity of those last hours; like something high and shrill that might crack; and it did crack. I have sometimes wondered whether it was felt that this fantasy of fashionable London would appear incongruous with something that happened some days later. For what happened then was that a certain Ultimatum went out from the Austrian

Government against Serbia. I rang up Maurice Baring at a further stage of that rapidly developing business; and I can remember the tones of his voice when he said, “We’ve got to fight. They’ve all got to fight. I don’t see how anybody can help it.”

If the Cowboys were indeed struggling to find the road back to Reality they found it all right.

Chapter XI: The Shadow of the Sword

I had been living, already for a long time, in the town of Beaconsfield in the County of Bucks; the town which some Colonials imagine to have been named after Lord Beaconsfield the politician. It is rather as if they thought that England had been named after Mr. England the pirate. I am almost tempted to add that I say it with an apology to pirates. I do not know for certain why Disraeli took his title from Beaconsfield, which he scarcely ever visited, rather than from Hughenden, where he lived. But I was told by old Lord Burnham, the founder of the Daily Telegraph, that (as the story ran) he had chosen the title originally intended for Burke, who did live at Beaconsfield and whose legend still clings in many ways to the place. Mr. Garvin, the editor of the Observer, lives in what was once the house of Burke's agent and the oak-tree in my own garden was one of the line of trees that marked the limit of this land. I am glad that Mr. Garvin fits into that political landscape much better than I do; for I admire Burke in many things while disagreeing with him in nearly everything. But Mr. Garvin strikes me as being rather like Burke; in his Irish origin, in his English Conservatism, in his eloquence and gravity and something that can only be called urgency of mind. I once suggested to him that he should appear at a local festival as Burke and I as Fox; a part for which I have no claim except in circumference. But I hope there will never come a dark and difficult hour when political differences become personal, and Mr. Garvin begins to throw daggers about and say that our friendship is at an end.

I have lived in Beaconsfield from the time when it was almost a village to the time when, as the enemy profanely says, it is almost a suburb. It would be truer to say that the two things in some sense still exist side by side; and the popular instinct has recognised the division by actually talking about the Old Town and the New Town. I once planned a massive and exhaustive sociological work, in several volumes, which was to be called "The Two Barbers of Beaconsfield" and based entirely upon the talk of the two excellent citizens to whom I went to get shaved. For those two shops do indeed belong to two different civilisations. The hairdresser of the New Town belongs to the new world and has the spotlessness of the specialist; the other has what may be called the ambidexterity of the peasant, shaving (so to speak) with one hand while he stuffs squirrels or sells tobacco with the other. The latter tells me from his own recollection what happened in Old Beaconsfield; the former, or his assistants, tell me from the Daily Mail what has not happened in a wider world. But I suggest this comparison, merely as an introduction to a parallel matter of local interest; which happens to embody, better perhaps than any other emblem, all those large matters that are more than local. If I wanted to write a book about the whole of this great passage in the history of England, including the Great War and many other changes almost as great, I should write it in the form of a History of the Beaconsfield War Memorial.

The plain primary proposal was that a cross should be set up at the cross-roads. Before the discussion was half over there had entered into it the following subjects of debate: (1) The Position of Woman in the Modern World, (2) Prohibition and the Drink Question, (3) The Excellence or Exaggeration of the Cult of Athletics, (4) The Problem of Unemployment, Especially in Relation to Ex-Service Men, (5) The Question of Support for Hospitals and the General Claims of Surgery and Medicine, (6) The Justice of the War, (7) Above all, or rather under all, for it was in many ways masked or symbolically suggested, the great war of religion which has never ceased to divide mankind, especially since that sign was set up among them. Those who debated the matter were a little group of the inhabitants of a little country town; the rector and the doctor and the bank manager and the respectable trades-men of the place, with a few hangers-on like myself, of the more disreputable professions of journalism or the arts. But the powers that were present there in the spirit came out of all the ages and all the battlefields of history; Mahomet was there and the Iconoclasts, who came riding out of the East to ruin the statues of Italy, and Calvin and Rousseau and the Russian anarchs and all the older England that is buried under Puritanism; and Henry the Third ordering the little images for Westminster and Henry the Fifth, after Agincourt, on his knees before the shrines of Paris. If one could really write that little story of that little place, it would be the greatest of historical monographs.

The first thing to note, as typical of the modern tone, is a certain effect of toleration which actually results in timidity. Religious liberty might be supposed to mean that everybody is free to discuss religion. In practice it means that hardly anybody is allowed to mention it. There is a further qualification of some interest; that in this, as in many things, there is an immense intellectual superiority in the poor, and even in the ignorant. The cottagers of the Old Town either liked the Cross because it was Christian and said so, or else disliked the Cross because it was Popish and said so. But the leaders of the No-Popery Party were ashamed to talk No-Popery. They did not say in so many words that they thought a Crucifix a wicked thing; but they said, in any number of words, that they thought a parish pump or a public fountain or a municipal motor-bus a good thing. But the greater number of them tended to the proposal of a Club Building, especially for ex-service men; where the latter could have refreshment (that is where the Drink Question came in) or play games (that is where the Athletic Question came in) or possibly even share the Club on equal terms with their wives and women-folk (that is where the Wrongs of Women came in) and generally, in fact, enjoy all that we should desire ex-soldiers to enjoy, if there were really any chance of letting them do so. The scheme was in that sense admirable; but, as it proceeded, it became almost too admirable, in the original Latin sense of astonishing. Those who had propounded it called themselves, I need hardly say, the Practical Party. They justly condemned us of the other group as dreamers and mystical visionaries. They set to work to draw up their plans for the Club; and they were certainly plans of the most magnificent completeness. There were to be cricket-fields and football-fields and swimming-baths and golf-courses, for all I know. The incident has a primary moral, with reference to that strange modern notion about what is practical and constructive, which seems merely to mean what is large and largely advertised. By the end of the controversy the plan of the Practical Party had swelled to the ends of the earth and taken on the dimensions of Aladdin’s Palace. There was not the remotest chance of collecting subscriptions for such a scheme; at the rate it was developing it might run to millions. Meanwhile, the vision of the mere visionaries could be realised easily for a few hundred pounds.

And the second moral to the story is this; that the modern mind finds it very difficult to understand the idea of an aim or object. When I was speaking on behalf of the simple stone monument at the cross-roads, I quoted the excellent saying of Mr. Bingley in Pride and Prejudice, when his sister asks him, just before the ball, whether it would not be much more rational if conversation at a ball took the place of dancing; and he answers, “Much more rational, but not half so like a ball.” I pointed out that a parish-pump might seem to some more rational than a Cross, but it was not half so like a War Memorial. A club, or a hospital ward, or anything having its own practical purpose, policy and future, would not really be a War Memorial at all; it would not be in practice a memory of the War. If people thought it wrong to have a memory of the War, let them say so. If they did not approve of wasting money on a War Memorial, let us scrap the War Memorial and save the money. But to do something totally different which we wanted to do, on pretence of doing something else that we did not do, was unworthy of Homo sapiens and the dignity of that poor old anthropoid. I got some converts to my view; but I think that many still thought I was not practical; though in fact I was very specially practical, for those who understand what is really meant by a Pragma. The most practical test of the problem of unmemorial memorials was offered by the Rector of Beaconsfield, who simply got up and said, “We already have a ward in the Wycombe Hospital which was supposed to commemorate something. Can anybody here tell me what it commemorates?”

Anyhow, the Cross was the crux; and it is no pun but a plain truth to put it so. But the curious point is that few of those who found the Cross crucial would admit in so many words that it was crucial because it was the Cross. They advanced all sorts of alternative objections or made all sorts of alternative proposals. One lady wished to have a statue of a soldier, and I shuddered inwardly, knowing what such statues can be; fortunately another lady, with a nephew in the Navy, called out indignantly, “What about the sailors?” Whereupon the first lady said with hasty but hearty apology, “Oh, yes; and a sailor as well.” Whereupon a third lady, with a brother in the Air Force, proposed that this also should be included in the group; and the first lady with large and generous gestures accepted all and every addition of the kind; so that this magnificent sculptural monument was soon towering into tanks and toppling with aeroplanes. It seemed a little dangerous; but it was safer than a market-cross. Other objections to the latter symbol were adduced, probably to cover the real objection; such as the monument as an obstacle to traffic. The local doctor, an admirable physician but a sceptic of rather a schoolboy sort, observed warmly, “If you do stick up a thing like this, I hope you’ll stick a light on it, or all our cars will smash into it in the dark.” Whereupon my wife, who was then an ardent Anglo-Catholic, observed with an appearance of dreamy rapture, “Oh, yes! How beautiful! A lamp continually burning before the Cross!” Which was not exactly what the man of science had proposed; but it could not have been more warmly seconded.

Lastly, the most significant part of this social episode was the end of it. If anyone fails to realise how lasting, or lingering, in spite of everything, are the old social forms of England and its structure as an ancient aristocratic state, he could not do better than consider the last quiet and ironic ending of the great battle of the Beaconsfield War Memorial. There was a huge paper plebiscite in which hardly anybody knew what he was voting for, but which turned up somehow with a narrow numerical majority for the building of the Club. The Club, for which the practical majority had voted was never built. The Cross, for which the more mystical minority had largely forgotten to vote, was built. When the whole fuss of papers and public meetings was over, and everybody was thinking about other things, the rector of the parish raised a quiet subscription of his own among his own co-religionists and sympathisers; got enough money to put up a Cross and put it up. Meanwhile Lord Burnham, the chief landlord of the neighbourhood, equally casually informed the Ex-Service Men and their sympathisers that they could use a hall, which was his property, for their Club, if they liked, they appeared to be perfectly contented; and so far from demanding any other Club, seemed to have become fairly indifferent about the use of this one. So did the Great War pass over Beaconsfield, making the world safe for Democracy and the holding of any number of public meetings full of the revolutionary hopes of the Modern World; and so in the end the whole matter was decided at the private discretion of the Squire and Parson, as it was in the days of old.

There was a sequel, however, involving more serious things. A renewed shock went through the anti-clerical party on finding that the Cross was a Crucifix. This represented, to many amiable and professedly moderate Nonconformists and other Protestants, exactly that extra touch that they could not tolerate. The distinction is all the more clearly to be kept in mind because it is, on the face of it, an entirely irrational distinction. The sort of Evangelical who demands what he calls a Living Christ must surely find it difficult to reconcile with his religion an indifference to a Dying Christ; but anyhow one would think he would prefer it to a Dead Cross. To salute the Cross in that sense is literally to bow down to wood and stone; since it is only an image in stone of something that was made of wood. It is surely less idolatrous to salute the Incarnate God or His image; and the case is further complicated by the relation of the image to the other object. If a man were ready to wreck every statue of Julius Caesar, but also ready to kiss the sword that killed him, he would be liable to be misunderstood as an ardent admirer of Caesar. If a man hated to have a portrait of Charles the First, but rubbed his hands with joy at the sight of the axe that beheaded him, he would have himself to blame if he were regarded rather as a Roundhead than a Royalist. And to permit a picture of the engine of execution, while forbidding a picture of the victim, is just as strange and sinister in the case of Christ as in that of Caesar. And this illustrates something about the whole situation, which grew clearer and clearer to me about this time and initiated the next step of my life.

Of that revolution in my life I shall write more fully later. But for the moment, in the particular connection under consideration, I will say this. The fact that, after all these alarums and excursions, and as the almost inconsequent outcome of so much fuss and turmoil, a carved crucifix does now actually stand in the heart of the little town that is my home, is naturally a source of intense and somewhat ironic joy to me. But, with quite undiminished sympathy and respect for my friends and neighbours who did actually set it up, there is a certain quality in the way in which it came, and the way in which it was accepted, that is not to me entirely acceptable. I do not want the crucifix to be a compromise, or a concession to the weaker brethren, or a makeweight or a by-product. I want it to be a blazon and a boast. I want there to be no more doubt about our all glorying in it than there would have been in any body of old Crusaders pitting the Cross against the Crescent. And if anyone wants to know my feelings about a point on which I touch rarely and with reluctance: the relation of the Church I left to the Church I joined, there is the answer as compact and concrete as a stone image. I do not want to be in a religion in which I am allowed to have a crucifix. I feel the same about the much more controversial question of the honour paid to the Blessed Virgin. If people do not like that cult, they are quite right not to be Catholics. But in people who are Catholics, or call themselves Catholics, I want the idea not only liked but loved and loved ardently, and above all proudly proclaimed. I want it to be what the Protestants are perfectly right in calling it; the badge and sign of a Papist. I want to be allowed to be enthusiastic about the existence of the enthusiasm; not to have my chief enthusiasm coldly tolerated as an eccentricity of myself. And that is why, with all the good will in the world, I cannot feel the crucifix at one end of the town as a substitute for the little Roman Catholic Church at the other.

But I have here introduced the War Memorial in connection with the other matter of the War. I have purposely approached the episode of the War from the wrong end. I have spoken first of certain problems that arose when it was all over; because it happens to illustrate certain peculiarities in my own position and experience. There are certain things to be said that can hardly be said except as by one regarding the War in retrospect; the problem involved had hardly arisen when we only saw it in prospect; and yet, unless I pass on to some such summary, all that I say on this subject may be much misunderstood; especially in the atmosphere that has been spreading during the last ten or twelve years.

I have always suffered from the disadvantage, among my solid and sturdy British countrymen, of not altering my opinions quickly enough. I have generally attempted, in a modest way, to have reasons for my opinions; and I have never been able to see why the opinions should change until the reasons change. If I were really a sturdy and stolid Briton, it would, of course, be enough for me that the fashions change. For that sort of sturdy Briton does not want to be consistent with himself; he only wants to be consistent with everybody else. But having what I am pleased to suppose a sort of political philosophy, I have in many matters retained my political opinions. I thought in the first days of the Home Rule quarrel that Ireland ought to be governed by Irish ideas. And I still think so, even when my fellow Liberals have made the shocking discovery that Irish ideas are ordinary Christian ideas. I thought that England’s action in the South African War was wrong; and I still think it was wrong. I thought that England’s action in the Great War was right; and I still think it was right. I did not learn my politics in the first case from the Daily Mail and I do not propose to learn any others in the second case from the Daily Express. In the first case, I thought and think that Jewish financial power should not dominate England. In the second case, I thought and think that Prussian militarism and materialism should not dominate Europe. Until I alter my view of these two principles, I can see no reason for altering my view of the practical applications of them. Obstinacy of this sort, founded on a cold insensibility to the fluctuations of the market and to all the weight which attaches to the opinions of the two or three men who own all the newspapers, has on the face of it all sorts of disadvantages in dividing an individual from his contemporaries. But it has some advantages; and one advantage is that the man can look, without division of heart or disturbance of mind, at the War Memorial of Beaconsfield.

For the whole point at issue is really there. The Memorial was set up, like the Monument after the Great Fire, to commemorate the fact that something had been saved out of the Great War. What was saved was Beaconsfield; just as what was saved was Britain; not an ideal Beaconsfield, not a perfect or perfectly progressing Beaconsfield, not a New Beaconsfield with gates of gold and pearl descending out of heaven from God; but Beaconsfield. A certain social balance, a certain mode of life, a certain tradition of morals and manners, some parts of which I regret, some parts of which I value, was in fact menaced by the fate of falling into a complete and perhaps permanent inferiority and impotence, as compared with another tradition and mode of life. It is all nonsense to say that in such a struggle defeat would not have been destruction, merely because it probably would not have been what is legally called annexation. States so defeated become vassal-states, retaining a merely formal independence, and in every vital matter steered by the diplomacy and penetrated by the culture of the conqueror. The men whose names are written on the Beaconsfield War Memorial died to prevent Beaconsfield being so immediately overshadowed by Berlin that all its reforms would be modelled on Berlin, all its products used for the international purposes of Berlin, even if the King of Prussia were not called in so many words the Suzerain of the King of England. They died to prevent it and they did prevent it. Let those who enjoy the thought insist that they died in vain.

Conflict came to a head in Europe because the Prussian was insufferable. What would he have been like if he, who was already insufferable, had been shown to be insuperable? What would the Kaiser, with his Mailed Fist and his boasts of being Attila and the leader of the Huns, even in time of peace, have been like if he had issued completely victorious out of a universal war? Yet that is the common-sense question to be asked, if we are asking whether it was worth while for men to fight and go on fighting. It is not the point to put wild and visionary questions about whether the world has been vastly improved by the War; whether Utopia or the New Jerusalem have come out of the War; to ask in that apocalyptic fashion what has come out of the War. We have come out of the War, and come out alive; England and Europe have come out of the War, with all their sins on their heads, confused, corrupted, degraded; but not dead. The only defensible war is a war of defence. And a war of defence, by its very definition and nature, is one from which a man comes back battered and bleeding and only boasting that he is not dead.

Those who now think too little of the Allied Cause are those who once thought too much of it. Those who are disappointed with the great defence of civilisation are those who expected too much of it. A rather unstable genius like Mr. H. G. Wells is typical of the whole contradiction. He began by calling the Allied effort, The War That Will End War. He has ended by saying, through his rather equivocal mask of Mr. Clissold, that it was no better than a forest fire and that it settled nothing. It is hard to say which of the two statements is the more absurd. It settled exactly what it set out to settle. But that was something rather more rational and modest than what Mr. Wells had settled that it was to settle. To tell a soldier defending his country that it is The War That Will End War is exactly like telling a workman, naturally rather reluctant to do his day’s work, that it is The Work That Will End Work. We never promised to put a final end to all war or all work or all worry. We only said that we were bound to endure something very bad because the alternative was something worse. In short, we said what every man on the defensive has to say. Mr. Brown is attacked by a burglar and manages to save his life and property. It is absurd to turn round on him and say, “After all, what has come out of the battle in the back-garden? It is the same old Septimus Brown, with the same face, the same trousers, the same temper a little uncertain at breakfast, the same taste for telling the anecdote about the bookmaker at Brighton.” It is absurd to complain that Mr. Brown has not been turned into a Greek god merely by being bashed on the head by a burglar. He had a right to defend himself; he had a right to save himself; and what he saved was himself, so far no better and no worse. If he had gone out to purify the world by shooting all possible burglars, it would not have been a defensive war. And it would not have been a defensible one.

That is what I mean by saying that for me the War Memorial of Beaconsfield commemorates the rescue of Beaconsfield; not of an ideal Beaconsfield, but of the real Beaconsfield. There are all sorts of things in such an English country town with which I do not agree; there are many which I have tried all my life to alter. I do not like the English landed system, with its absence of peasants and its predominance of squires; I do not like the formless religious compromise of Puritanism turning into

Paganism; but I do not want it discredited and flattened out by Prussianism. The defence of its prestige and independence against an inhuman and heathen hegemony was just. But I am far from certain that a War to End War would have been just. I am far from certain that, even if anybody could prevent all protest or defiance under arms, offered by anybody anywhere under any provocation, it would not be an exceedingly wicked thing to do.

This interlude on the intellectual aspects of the War is necessary; because all I say about the passing details of the War period will be unmeaning, if it is assumed that I sympathise with the rather weak-minded reaction that is going on around us. At the first outbreak of the War I attended the conference of all the English men of letters, called together to compose a reply to the manifesto of the German professors. I at least, among all those writers, can say, "What I have written I have written." I wrote several pamphlets against Prussia, which many would consider violent, though in that moment every one supported their violence. I am still perfectly prepared to support their truth. I hardly know of a word I would alter. I did not take my views from the fever of that fashion; nor with that fever have they passed away.

Immediately after the outbreak of War I was bowled over by a very bad illness, which lasted for many months and at one time came very near to ending so as to cut me off from all newspaper communications and this wicked world. The last thing I did while I was still on my feet, though already very ill, was to go to Oxford and speak to a huge packed mass of undergraduates in defence of the English Declaration of War. That night is a nightmare to me; and I remember nothing except that I spoke on the right side. Then I went home and went to bed, tried to write a reply to Bernard Shaw, of which about one paragraph may still exist, and was soon incapable of writing anything. The illness left certain results that prevented me, even when I had recovered, from doing anything more useful than writing. But I set to work to contribute as much as I could both to the general press and the Government Propaganda; of which there were several departments. And I may remark here that the conduct of the war, whether at home or abroad, was an excellent education for any writer, tending too much to theories, in that complex but concrete matter of the material of mankind; the mystery and inconsistency of man. Man seems to be capable of great virtues but not small virtues; capable of defying his torturer but not of keeping his temper. And I must admit that I was astounded, when writing propagandist literature at the request of various Government Departments, at the small and spinsterish vanities and jealousies that seemed to divide those Departments; and the way in which they kept up their fussy formalities in the full glare of the Day of Judgment. The facts were really very much as they were so cleverly described by Mr. Arnold Bennett in his story of Lord Raingo. I could understand a man being a coward and running away from a German; I can understand, and I hope humbly might emulate, a man fighting and standing firm. But that any Englishman should behave as if it were not a fight between an Englishman and a German, but a fight between a Foreign Office clerk and a War Office clerk, is something that altogether escapes my imagination. I daresay every one of those Government officials would have died for England without any fuss at all. But he could not have it suggested that some two-penny leaflet should pass through another little cell in the huge hive of Whitehall, without making a most frightful fuss. I had imagined that I was, for the moment, of one body with Englishmen from whom I differed on the deepest vitals of the soul; one in that hour of death with atheists and pessimists and Manichean Puritans and even with Orangemen from Belfast. But the forms of the Circumlocution Office could still divide men whom neither God nor devil could put asunder. It was a small thing; but it was a part of that realisation of the real riddle of man, which is hidden from boys and comes only to men in their maturity; and which took on more and more the nature of a religious enlightenment; upon the true doctrine of Original Sin and of Human Dignity. It was part of that belated process of growing up, which must unfortunately precede the splendid attainment of second childhood.

When I first recovered full consciousness, in the final turn of my long sickness, I am told that I asked for Land and Water, in which Mr. Belloc had already begun his well-known series of War articles, the last of which I had read, or been able to understand, being the news of the new hope from the Marne. When I woke again to real things, the long battles before Ypres were over and the long trench war had begun. The nurse, knowing that I had long been incapable of really reading anything, gave me a copy of the paper at random, as one gives a doll to a sick child. But I suddenly asserted in a loud and clear voice that this was an old number dealing with the first attempt before Nancy; and that I wanted all the numbers of the paper that had appeared since the Battle of the Marne. My mind, such as it is, had suddenly become perfectly clear; as clear as it is now. That also was something of a lesson in the paradox of real things, so different from many modern and merely theatrical things. Since then I have known that everything is not a slow and graduated curve of evolution; but that there is in life and death an element of catastrophe that carries something of the fear of miracle.

At my clear and reiterated request, they brought me the whole huge file of the weekly paper; and I read it steadily through, understanding all the facts and figures and diagrams and calculations, and studying them so closely that I really felt at the end that I had not lost so very much of the general history of the War. I found that the pamphlets I had written were already in circulation, especially abroad; all the more successfully because in a sense secretly. My old friend Masterman, in charge of one Propaganda Department, told me with great pride that his enemies were complaining that no British propaganda was being pushed in Spain or Sweden. At this he crowed aloud with glee; for it meant that propaganda like mine was being absorbed without people even knowing it was propaganda. And I myself saw my very bellicose essay called "The Barbarism of Berlin" appearing as a quiet Spanish philosophical study called "The Concept of Barbarism." The fools who baited Masterman would have published it with a Union Jack cover and a picture of the British Lion, so that hardly one Spaniard would read it, and no Spaniard would believe it. It was in matters of that sort that the rather subtle individuality of Masterman was so superior to his political surroundings. In many respects, as I have hinted, he suffered himself to sink too deeply into those surroundings. He allowed himself to be used as a Party hack by Party leaders who were in every way his inferiors. But all that dark humour that was deepest in him came out again, as he grinned over this attack on his success as an intellectual smuggler.

But I am rather proud of the fact that if I wrote a little book called "The Barbarism of Berlin," I also wrote during the War a rather larger book called The Crimes of England. For I was vividly convinced of the folly of England merely playing the Pharisee in this moment of intense moral reality. I therefore wrote a book actually making a list of the real sins of the British Empire in modern history; and then pointing out that in every one of them, not only was the German Empire far worse, but the worst tendencies of Britain had actually been borrowed from Germany. It was a Pro-German policy, the support of the Protestant hero in Prussia or the Protestant princes of Hanover, that had involved us in our mortal quarrel with Ireland and in many worse things. All our recent Imperialism had been praise of Prussia, as an example and an excuse. Nevertheless, to write of the Crimes of England, under that naked title, was at that time liable to misunderstanding; and I believe that in some places the book was banned like a pacifist pamphlet. It was not very pacifist. But all this was to happen later. When I first recovered, I read up, as I have said, the facts of the War. And then, like one resuming the normal routine of his life, I started again to answer Mr. Bernard Shaw There is some foundation for the anecdote told in Colonel Repington's memoirs; that Mr. Belloc and I went on talking through an air-raid and did not know it had begun. I am not sure at what stage we did eventually realise it; but I am quite sure we went on talking. I cannot quite see what else there was to do. But I remember the occasion very well; partly because it was the first air-raid that I had experienced, though I was going to and fro in London all through that period; and secondly because there were other circumstances, which Colonel Repington does not mention, which accentuated the ironic side of the abstractions of conversation and the actuality of bombs. It was at the house of Lady Juliet Duff; and among the guests was Major Maurice Baring, who had brought with him a Russian in uniform; who talked in such a way as to defy even the interruptions of Belloc, let alone of mere bombs. He talked French in a flowing monologue that suavely swept us all before it; and the things he said had a certain quality characteristic of his nation; a quality which many have tried to define, but which may best be simplified by saying that his nation appears to possess every human talent except common sense. He was an aristocrat, a landed proprietor, an officer in one of the crack regiments of the Czar, a man altogether of the old regime. But there was something about him that is the making of every Bolshevist; something I have felt in every Russian I ever met. I can only say that when he walked out of the door, one felt he might just as well have walked out of the window. He was not a Communist; but he was a Utopian; and his Utopia was far, far madder than any Communism. His practical proposal was that poets alone should be allowed to rule the world. He was himself, as he gravely explained, a poet. But he was so courteous and complimentary as to select me, as being also a poet, to be the absolute and autocratic governor of England. D'Annunzio was similarly enthroned to govern Italy. Anatole France was enthroned to govern France. I pointed out, in such French as could be interposed into such a mild torrent, that government required an idée générale and that the ideas of France and D’Annunzio were flatly opposed, rather to the disadvantage of any patriotic Frenchman. But he waved all such doubts away; he was sure that so long as the politicians were poets, or at any rate authors, they could never make any mistakes or fail to understand each other. Kings and magnates and mobs might collide in blind conflict; but literary men can never quarrel. It was somewhere about this stage in the new social structure that I began to be conscious of noises without (as they say in the stage directions) and then of the thrilling reverberations and the thunder of the war in heaven. Prussia, the Prince of the Air, was raining fire on the great city of our fathers; and whatever may be said against Prussia, she is not governed by poets. We went on talking, of course, with no alteration in the arrangements, except that the lady of the house brought down her baby from an upper floor; and still the great plan unfolded itself for the poetic government of the world. Nobody in such circumstances is entirely without passing thoughts of the possible end; and much has been written about ideal or ironic circumstances in which that end might come. But I could imagine few more singular circumstances, in which to find myself at the point of death, than sitting in a big house in Mayfair and listening to a mad Russian, offering me the Crown of England.

When he had gone, Belloc and I walked across the Park with the last rumblings still echoing in the sky, and heard the All Clear signal as we came out by Buckingham Gate, like the noise of trumpets of triumph. And we talked a little of the prospects of the War, which were then in the transition stage between the last peril and the last deliverance; and we parted, not without a certain belated emotion of excitement; and I went along Kensington High Road to my mother’s home.

Among the legends, not to say the lies, that became current about Belloc among people who knew nothing about him, was the legend that he was what was called an Optimist about the War; or that he exaggerated the German casualties in order to make out a case for mere comfort and reassurance. To anybody who knows Belloc this idea is grotesque in the last degree. To begin with, being an animal endowed with the power of thought, he is quite incapable of supposing it to matter whether you are an Optimist or a Pessimist upon a question of fact; or of recommending anybody to be bright and cheerful so that it will not rain tomorrow. Second, in so far as mood and emotion have their legitimate place in life, his mood and emotion are generally not optimistic enough. And third, those persons who have taken the trouble to go into the actual facts and figures about enemy mortality have agreed that his calculations were substantially correct and those of the other party wildly incorrect. The truth is that, at the very beginning of a novel type of trench warfare, everybody's calculations were for a time incorrect; but his were corrected as early as anybody's and were afterwards continually right while the opposite ones were continually wrong. For the rest, what threw out every scientific estimate of the war was a factor that was moral and not scientific; a standing instance of the change of all material things on the pivot of the human will. It was the revolt in Russia. Nobody worth speaking of predicted it; but Belloc himself said the wisest thing in a general fashion about affairs of the kind. In one of his articles in Land and Water, he must have rather puzzled many of his readers, I fear, by an elaborate historical reconstruction of the outlook on the future, in the mind of a Greek official in Byzantium, at the beginning of the sixth century, calculating and combining all the forces of the Roman Empire and the Catholic Church. He noted how much a man might think he had accounted for all the possibilities, the danger of a religious split between East and West, the danger of the barbarian raids on Gaul or Britain, the situation in Africa and Spain, and so on; and then say he had in his hand all the materials of change. "At that moment, far away in a little village of Arabia, Mahomet was eighteen years old."

I need not dwell further on that old and idle quarrel; if the men who ranted about Optimism are remembered at all in serious history, they will be remembered because they quarrelled with Belloc. They were the half-educated proprietors of the Yellow Press of that time, who were annoyed with him for certain relevant remarks he had made about the Sale of Peerages. But it is worth pausing upon for a moment in order to emphasise what was certainly true of all my friends, and I think of all the worthier friends of England; that we never based our convictions on small-minded swagger about Success; that we worked for victory while being entirely ready for defeat; and we never predicted anything about the end of the war, or any other future event; Belloc least of all; as when I heard him say in the first of his London lectures; "It is no part of any speaker or writer to talk about victories being made certain beforehand by this or that. God alone gives victory."

There is another aspect of the way in which the Yellow Press spread panic and political mutiny and called them patriotism and journalistic enterprise. It was apparently supposed that England was in need of being prodded on from behind. My friend Bentley, doing excellent work on the Daily Telegraph, described it more truly as England being stabbed in the back. The Daily Telegraph, indeed, during those days of fever, did an admirable work of medicinal and moral sanitation. But for me and my little group the quarrel had another effect; that we were, in very varying proportions, fighting upon two fronts; regarding the Hohenzollerns and the Harmsworths as equally successful advertisers and equally unsuccessful statesmen. And it fell to me to give a full expression to this double attitude, for a reason that I could never in common conditions have forseen.

I became an editor. It would at any time have seemed to me about as probable or promising as that I should become a publisher or a banker or a leader-writer on The Times. But the necessity arose out of the continued existence of our little paper, the New Witness, which was passionately patriotic and Pro-Ally but as emphatically opposed to the Jingoism of the Daily Mail. There were not too many people who could be trusted to maintain these two distinct indignations, without combining them by the disgusting expedient of being moderate. There were not too many of such people; but I was in a manner one of them. And when my brother went to the Front, he left his paper in my hands, requesting me to edit it until he returned. But I went on editing it because he did not return. For my brother was destined to prove, in a dark hour of doom, that he alone of all the men of our time possessed the two kinds of courage that have nourished the nation; the courage of the forum and of the field. In the second case he suffered with thousands of men equally brave; in the first he suffered alone. For it is another example of the human irony that it seems easier to die in battle than to tell the truth in politics. Human nature is in any case a strange affair; and on the news of my brother’s death, I as editor of his paper was moved to an odd reaction which I cannot altogether explain, but which I could only express by writing an open letter to Rufus Isaacs, Lord Reading, upon the memories of our great Marconi quarrel. I tried to tell him, with all restraint, that I believed he had really acted against my nation, but in favour of his own blood; and that he who had talked, and doubtless despised even in talking, the tedious Parliamentary foolery about having once met his brother at a family function, had in truth acted throughout from those deep domestic loyalties that were my own tragedy in that hour. But I added, “You are far more unhappy; for your brother is still alive.”

It is strange, as I have said, that in a little while his brother was also dead and in the same religious confession as that of my own brother. So ended, symbolically enough, the great Marconi duel; and I continued the editing of my brother's paper, if you can call it editing; and all the other financiers and politicians showed no signs of dying in any faith, or indeed of dying at all. The War worked to its end, in which so many lives were ended; the Germans made their last vast and vain assaults and Foch struck his final blow before Chalons, where Christendom had broken the Huns a thousand years before. But in England the politicians continued to beam benevolently upon us; new noblemen continued to spring into life from somewhat obscure commercial soils; there were any number of flourishing economic ventures, supported by forceful publicity and magnetic personality; and all the powers of the scientific mergers and newspaper combines, that now rule the State, rose slowly into their present power and peace. As the Ancient Mariner remarked, in a moment of melancholy comparison:

The many men so beautiful
And they all dead did lie;
And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.

Chapter XII: Some Political Celebrities

On almost every occasion when I have met somebody, I have met somebody else. That is, I have met a private man who was oddly different from the public man. Even when the character was not the very contrary of the caricature, as outlined in the newspapers, I might employ a licence of language, by saying that it was even more contrary than a contrary. I mean that the relation was more subtle, and the reality on another plane; that when after long experience, I discovered with some amazement that a tribute was true, even when the truth was almost the opposite of the tribute. We all rejoiced, for instance, in the chorus of spontaneous tributes to the late King George the Fifth. And yet the very repetition of testimony, about the honesty of his public service, gave an indescribable impression of routine which made the impression incomplete. I only met him once myself, at the house of the late Lord Burnham, where he was shooting; and for what my impression is worth, he certainly did strike me as about as genuine a person as I ever met. But he was genuine in a rather unexpected way. He was not only honest but frank, and so free and easy in his likes and dislikes that he might have been called indiscreet. G.B.S. said truly of his public talks that they were indeed the King's English; the private were also decidedly Plain English. He was anything but the supreme Permanent Official many eulogies implied; he was not like some reliable solicitor in whom family secrets are locked up, or some doctor congested with the silence of professional confidences; he was much more like a little sea-captain, who keeps a certain silence and etiquette on his quarterdeck; but plenty of anecdotes, not to say anathemas, in his cabin. But there is no substitute for meeting a man, even meeting him for an hour or two; it will always tell us when a real distortion of history or legend is beginning. And if it should ever happen that I hear before I die, among the new generations who never saw George the Fifth, that he is being either praised as a strong silent man, or depreciated as a stupid and empty man, I shall know that history has got the whole portrait wrong.

Sometimes I have had even briefer contacts, with even more curious surprises. I talked to the late Marquess Curzon for only about ten minutes, in an accidental crush, though I had been to his house once or twice; he did not seem to mind the crush; he did not even seem to mind the conversation, or to mind me; he was entirely pleasant and good-tempered. And he said the one thing out of a thousand that hardly anybody, including myself, would have expected Curzon to say. He said how heartily he agreed with me that the cries, catcalls, jokes and jeers of the mob at a public-meeting were very much wittier and more worth hearing than the speeches of statesmen from the platform. I had expressed this view in an Illustrated London News article; but he, who was so often the stateliest of statesmen on the most privileged of platforms, would not have occurred to me as the most ardent supporter of the rabble or the buffoon who championed it. Yet it is unquestionably true that he did on many occasions say and do things, that provoked and even created the popular legend of his unpopular attitude. He was the one and only example of an English aristocrat who presented himself as a Prussian aristocrat; and this is very odd, because English aristocrats may often be cynics but are not barbarians. In a word, they are more subtle; but I sometimes fancy that Curzon in some queer way was more subtle than that subtlety. Everyone knows that there was a sort of heroic artificiality about his bodily life; that he sustained his very posture with difficulty; and I suspect that something of that strain turned itself to a sort of stiff and swaggering joke. He came from Oxford when it was the fashion to be a pessimist in philosophy and a reactionary in politics; and rather as the artistic decadents made themselves out worse than they were, he made himself out more undemocratic than he was. It is typical that many of the tales against him are said to have been invented by himself. But in all that I am merely guessing, from a few words said to me by a man who could not have been as stupid as a Prussian; in other cases, in which I had limited but still longer intercourse, I have noticed the same contradiction.

My first illumination, about the contrast between a human being and his political portrait or caricature, came to me with the case of Lord Hugh Cecil. I believe I met him first at the house of Wilfrid Ward, whom I ought to have mentioned long before as an influence enlightening me in many ways; for he had written in the Dublin Review a most sympathetic critique of Orthodoxy, at a time when many of his world must have thought it a piece of rowdy paradox. He laid down the excellent critical test; that the critics could not understand what he liked, but he could understand what they disliked. “Truth can understand error; but error cannot understand Truth.” It was through his kindness that I was, at a later stage, made a member of the Synthetic Society, which was justly proud of its continuity with the Society in which the great Huxley could debate with the equally great Ward (called. God knows why, Ideal Ward), and in which I was privileged to meet several very pivotal persons, such as Baron von Hugel and my old friend Father Waggett of Palestinian days. But if it be asked why I mention it here, the answer is rather curious. For some reason, there were very few literary men in this group devoted to philosophy; except Wilfrid Ward himself, who was an excellent editor and expositor. But there were all the better sort of politicians, or those who might have been statesmen. There I met old Haldane, yawning with all his Hegelian abysses; who appeared to me as I must have appeared to a neighbour in a local debating-club, when he dismissed metaphysical depths and pointed at me, saying, "There is that Leviathan whom Thou hast made to take his sport therein." But I never forgot that England betrayed him in charging him with betraying England. There also I met Balfour, obviously preferring any philosophers with any philosophies to his loyal followers of the Tory Party. Perhaps religion is not the opium of the people, but philosophy is the opium of the politicians. All of which brings me back to Lord Hugh Cecil.

In Liberal caricatures, and in all the letter-press of Liberalism generally, Lord Hugh Cecil was always depicted as a mediaeval ascetic; it was all very restrained and refined, or he might have been actually denounced as a saint. "F. C. G." always depicted him in a long cassock and a very Italian-looking biretta; and something like a Gothic stained-glass window was introduced, if possible, as the sort of thing he carried about with him. I absorbed all these things in my simplicity; I could not even then feel so much horror of them as did the clientele of the Daily News; but that made it all the easier to believe that an obviously intellectual gentleman was really in love with mediaeval architecture and authority. And then I happened to meet Lord Hugh Cecil. I met him at the house of Wilfrid Ward, that great clearing-house of philosophies and theologies; for the vast and valuable work of Wilfrid Ward largely turned upon the very fact that he was more fully in sympathy with the Cecils and the Balfours and the rest than I myself could ever have been. I listened to Lord Hugh's very lucid statements of his position; nobody who loves logic could be unimpressed by so logical a mind; and I formed a number of very definite impressions about him. One was that he had many quite individual ideas of his own; another that he regarded all such ideas, including his own, in what has been called a dry light. But the strongest impression I received, was that he was a Protestant. I was myself still a thousand miles from being a Catholic; but I think it was the perfect and solid Protestantism of Lord Hugh that fully revealed to me that I was no longer a Protestant. He was, and probably still is, the one real Protestant; for his religion is intensely real. From time to time, he startles the world he lives in by a stark and upstanding defence of the common Christian theology and ethics, in which all Protestants once believed. For the Protestant world in England today is a very curious and subtle thing, which it would not become me to criticise; but this may be said of it without offence, that while it is naturally a little disturbed by a Protestant accepting Catholicism, it is far more terribly disturbed by any Protestant who still preserves Protestantism. And then I thought of the dear old Radical caricatures of the mediaevalist in the cassock; and laughter came as a relief. Old Kensit was a Jesuit compared with Hugh Cecil; for anti-ritualism is only a riotous form of ritualism; and poor old Kensit actually had the simplicity to be photographed with a crucifix in his hand. I once thought it queer that a Cecil should become famous for a revolt against the Reformation. And I have lived to see such men accused by blatant Jingoism of protecting Germany, as once by blatant Radicalism of favouring Rome. But I lived to realise that Hugh Cecil has been as heroically loyal to his house as to his country. No man has been truer to a tradition than he to the tradition of that great Protestant England, which the genius of the founder of his family established.

It was George Wyndham who once confirmed this notion of mine, by noting what he called the extreme Individualism of Lord Hugh Cecil. The commercial character of that compact and patriotic England of recent centuries had much to do, for instance, with Lord Hugh Cecil being so stubborn a Free-Trader. For he is not only an Old Protestant; this chivalric Tory is also most emphatically an Old Radical. He would have been much more at home in the Manchester School than in the Middle Ages. And I have here dwelt so long on his name, with no other basis than having listened to his luminous conversation, because I do seriously think that he stands at the very centre of that recent civilisation today; and might be called the one strong pillar still upholding the England in which I was born. But George Wyndham’s ideas were always flowing in a different direction, as were my own; and they were in a sense marked or measured by our common feeling about this other Conservative statesman. For Wyndham was not a Conservative; he was a Tory; that is, he was capable of being a

Jacobite, which is something as rebellious as a Jacobin. He did not merely wish to preserve Protestantism or Free Trade, or anything grown native to the nation; he wanted to revive things older and really more international. And my first impressions of the falsity of the Party System came to me, while I was still a Liberal journalist, in the realisation of how much I agreed with Wyndham and how much Wyndham disagreed with Cecil.

I first met George Wyndham at Taplow, at the house of Lord and Lady Desborough, who had long been very good friends to me as to many literary people of all colours and opinions; and I felt almost immediately that Wyndham's opinions were at least of the same general colour as my own. And if ever there was a man of whom the word "colour" in his opinions and everything else, recurs naturally to the mind, it was he. He also suffered, of course, from the silly simplifications of the political comments and cartoons. Because he happened to have been in the army, he was always depicted as a drawling guardsman; and because he happened to be a handsome man, it was always insinuated that he was merely a ladies' man. In most essential ways it was curiously untrue. Wyndham was very definitely what is called a man's man. He was passionately fond of the particular things that ladies do not generally like; such as sitting up all night to pursue pertinaciously the same interminable argument, upon all sorts of points of detail and pure logic; so that he would not let his guests go till almost daybreak, unless he had settled to his own satisfaction the meaning of "T. T." in Shakespeare's Sonnets; or what were the private expectations of Chaucer touching the publication of Troilus and Cressida. He was not in any sense a dandy; but in so far as he did dress well, he was totally indifferent to how other men who were his friends might dress, which is another mark of purely masculine companionship. He was a good companion in sporting society as in literary society; but in neither was he anything like what is called a society man. He had huge sympathy with gypsies and tramps; and collected many men of letters (including myself) who looked rather like tramps. The inward generosity which gave a gusto or relish to all he did was really at the opposite extreme to all that mere polish, implied by those who slandered him by calling him "charming." He had first written to me some congratulations upon a letter I had sent to the Westminster Gazette on Religious Education; in which, even at that early date, I suggested that many Anglicans felt that Christ is not entirely disconnected from His own Mother. Wyndham was supported in this by the deep natural mysticism of his wife; a woman not to be forgotten by anyone who ever knew her, and still less to be merely praised by anyone who adequately appreciated her. She always showed a most moving curiosity about where I had picked up this passion for what is called Mariolatry in this Protestant land; and I could assure her with truth, though without any complete explanation, that I had had it in some form from boyhood.

It was at Taplow, at the same time as my first meeting with Wyndham, that I also had my first meeting with the late Earl Balfour; but, though I talked to him fairly often on abstract things, I never came to know him thus personally and certainly never to understand him so well. I do not think he was a very easy person to understand. He was, of course, quite an easy person to misunderstand; having all those external features, whether of elegance or eccentricity, which go to make up a public character; that is, a political cartoon. But in his case the caricatures were even more wildly wide of the mark; and I think that the compliments were worse than the caricatures. His foes in the press depicted him as Miss Arthur; and his friends in the press referred to him gracefully as Prince Arthur; and I do not know which of the two was more misleading. There certainly was nothing feminine about him, in the unchivalrous sense in which that word is used for what is silly or weak or wavering; very much the other way. It is typical of these times that he was always criticised as a cloudy and confusing speaker, when he was in fact a remarkably clear speaker; and anybody could follow him who could follow an argument. Only to the Modern Mind it would seem that lucidity is more bewildering than mystification. As for the contemporary pictures of a drooping lily, they might as well have represented his uncle Lord Salisbury as a little broken snowdrop. But there was really something odd about Arthur Balfour. He was always most pleasant and amiable to me; but he had not the general reputation of being pleasant and amiable to everybody. For him alone might have been invented the true definition: “A gentleman is one who is never rude except intentionally.” But though he was perhaps an aristocrat to excess, he was not in the least like an ordinary excessive aristocrat. I have met many men of his rank; some arrogant gentlemen; and a few really offensive gentlemen. But they had the simplicity of vanity and ignorance; and the case of Balfour was not simple, as he was not the ordinary bad extreme, nor was he the ordinary good extreme; the good squire or even the good knight. Describing Arthur Balfour as Prince Arthur was far less true than describing George

Wyndham as St. George. Wyndham really had that romantic or chivalric touch; in Balfour there was something else that I never understood. I have sometimes thought it was national rather than social. Charles II is often quoted as saying that Presbyterianism is no religion for a gentleman; it is less often quoted that he also said Anglicanism was no religion for a Christian. But it is odd that his brief and distorted memory of the Scots made him say that Presbyterianism is no religion for a gentleman, touching the one country where gentlemen were often Presbyterians. Scotland has been much modified by this Puritan creed long ruling among the nobles, like old Argyll of my boyhood's time. And Balfour had something in his blood which I think was the cold ferocity of Calvinism; a bleak streak sometimes felt when the wind changes even in the breezy voyages of Stevenson. The comparison will show that this is without prejudice; for I had from childhood a romantic feeling about Scotland, even that cold flat eastern coast. It may not be believed, but I have played golf as a lad on the links a bowshot from Whittinghame, in the days when ordinary English people asked, "What is golf?" It came with a rush over the Border, like the blue bonnets, a year or two later; and grew fashionable largely because Arthur Balfour was the fashion. Whatever else it was, his spell was a Scottish spell; and his pride was a Scottish pride; and there was something hollow-eyed and headachy about his long fine head, which had nothing in it of the English squires; and suggested to me rather the manse than the castle. Also, as one who went to neither great University, and has many jolly friends from his, very unlike him, I may be allowed to hint that somehow one did think of him as a Cambridge man.

I have known practically nothing of politicians after the Age of Asquith and Balfour; but I had some knowledge of one other who is also a Scottish type and another sort of Scottish enigma. To me the mystery about Mr. James Ramsay MacDonald was this; that when I knew him slightly, in my youth, in the days when we were all Socialists, he had the name of being rather a cold and scientific exponent of Socialism; the more expansive and even emotional sort of eloquence seems to have developed late in life, in quite poetical speeches I have heard from him when we have since sat on the same platform, being supposed to do something to restore Rural England. But I remember when I was emotional and expansive, and full of early enthusiasm for Blatchford's Merrie England, feeling in him a more than Fabian frigidity, as he said (neatly enough) that Blatchford's popularisation was like a man fully explaining a motor-car by describing a wheelbarrow. On the later occasion, he was really deploring with me the ravages of the motor-car; though I can hardly picture him carrying rusticity so far as to be wheeled about like Mr. Pickwick in a wheelbarrow. But perhaps there was always something about him more suited to tranquil and traditional things. When he was still counted a revolutionary Labour leader with a red tie, I heard Balfour refer to him in Parliament with respectful regret; "confessing myself an admirer of the Parliamentary style of the honourable gentleman," and somehow, when I heard those words, I think I knew that the man with the red tie was destined for a National Ministry. Even then, at least, he looked much more like an aristocrat than most aristocrats do.

But these statesmen were not the kind of men, or even the kind of Scotsmen, with whom I tended to linger. I felt much more kinship with the sort of Scot who, even when he was interested in politics, would never really be allowed in practical politics. A splendid specimen of this type of man was Cunninghame Graham. No Cabinet Minister would ever admire his Parliamentary style; though he had a much better style than any Cabinet Minister. Nothing could prevent Balfour being Prime Minister or MacDonald being Prime Minister; but Cunninghame Graham achieved the adventure of being Cunninghame Graham. As Bernard Shaw remarked, it is an achievement so fantastic that it would never be believed in a romance. Nor can it be said in this case, that the Scots are in a conspiracy to praise each other; for I grieve to say that I heard one of these great statesmen deliver a speech full of the noblest ideals with Cunninghame Graham at my elbow, muttering in my ear in a soft but fierce fashion: "I never could stand a Protestant sermon."

There was a small row or scandal, connected with Cunninghame Graham and his candour in politics, which has always stuck in my memory as a symbol. It explains why I, for one, have always got on much better with revolutionists than with reformers; even when I entirely disagreed with the revolutions or entirely agreed with the reforms. In Ireland it would have been different; but in England, during most of my life, the revolutionists were always Socialists; and in theory, almost always State Socialists. And I had early begun to doubt, and later to deny, the Socialist or any other assumption that involved a complete confidence in the State. I think I had begun to doubt it ever since I met the statesmen. On the other hand, I really did agree with the Liberals on many definite points that had become part of the Liberal programme; such as Home Rule for Ireland and a democratic decentralisation many held to be the death of the Empire. But I always felt, and I still feel, more personal sympathy with a Communist like Conrad Noel than with a Liberal like John Simon; while recognising that both are in their own way sincere. I think the reason is that the revolutionists did, in a sense, judge the world; not justly like the saints; but independently like the saints. Whereas the reformers were so much a part of the world they reformed, that the worst of them tended to be snobs and even the best of them to be specialists. Some of the Liberal specialists, of the more frigid Cambridge type, did faintly irritate me; much more than any mere anarchist or atheist. They seemed so very negative and their criticism was a sort of nagging. One distinguished man, who happened to affect me in this way, was the late J. A. Hobson, not to be confounded with the S. G. Hobson whose excellent economic studies still enlighten our debates; but a most high-minded and public-spirited speaker and writer in his own right. I hesitate to name so honest and earnest a man in a critical spirit; but nobody who recalls, with whatever respect, that gaunt figure and keen and bitter countenance, will pretend that his own spirit was not supremely critical. He was one of the most independent and intelligent of the Liberal critics of Imperialism, and on that point I was wholly with the Liberals; I disliked Imperialism; and yet I almost liked it by the time that Hobson had finished speaking against it. And I remember one occasion when he took the chair at some meeting of or about Aborigines or the native races of the Empire; and he had Cunninghame Graham on his right, while I had the honour of sitting on the other side. Hobson made a very able political speech, but somehow it seemed to me to be a party speech; concerned more for Liberalism than Liberty. I may be wrong; anyhow, I missed something, as he picked holes in the British Empire until it consisted entirely of holes tied together with red tape. And then Cunninghame Graham began to speak; and I realised what was wanting. He painted a picture, a historical picture, like a pageant of Empires; talking of the Spanish Empire and the British Empire as things to be reviewed with an equal eye; as things which brave and brilliant men had often served with double or doubtful effects; he poured scorn on the provincial ignorance which supposes that Spanish Empire-builders or proconsuls had all been vultures of rapine or vampires of superstition; he declared that many of the Spanish, like many of the English, had been rulers of whom any Empire might be proud. And then he traced such figures against the dark and tragic background of those ancient human populations which they had so often either served or conquered in vain.

Now in the course of this speech Cunninghame Graham had occasion to say in passing, touching some local riot and crime; “I have never been able to feel myself that tyrannicide, in certain circumstances, is intrinsically and inevitably indefensible.” Will it be believed that there was immediately a horrible howling fuss about these words; that they were the only words of the speech that anybody bothered to remember; that these were only remembered as an execrable example of the frenzy of the foes of the Empire; and that all the funny people on that platform were lumped together as gory regicides who went about drinking the blood of kings? And all the time, I had been saying to myself that Cunninghame Graham at least had been fair to Empires as Empires — whereas J. A. Hobson had not been fair to the British Empire at all. There was nothing particularly unprecedented or preposterous in what the Scottish Socialist had said about tyrannicide, though we may disagree with it for particular moral or religious reasons. He only said what practically all the great Pagans would have said; what all the admirers of Hermodius and Aristogiton would have said; what many Renaissance theorists, Catholic and non-Catholic, would have said; what all the great French Revolutionists would have said; what practically all the classic poets and tragedians down to modern times would have said. It was no more than was implied in a hundred sacred pictures of Judith or a hundred secular praises of Brutus. But Mr. Hobson would have been shocked, I fear, at the faintest suggestion of the killing of an evil king; but he was not in the least shocked at the implied impossibility of the power of a good king, or the modern ignorance of all that men have meant by kingship.

It was the irritant of this irritation, which seemed to me a little local irritation, against any large views either of loyalty or liberty, that slowly estranged me from political liberalism. But it would not be fair to say so, without adding that I did know men, capable of working with the party, who were really full of something that was not liberalism but liberality. Two men of that type remain in my memory; and it is for their sake and in their sense that I say I am a Liberal. One was Augustine Birrell, who enlivened his politics through literature; and the other was the last Gladstonian, G. W. E. Russell, who did it by inheriting the very real religion of Gladstone. They were both very Victorian, as became their generation; but they inherited an appreciation of all the great Victorians, which covered a great variety. Birrell was a Nonconformist with a very rich comprehension of Newman. Russell was a High Churchman with a quite detached admiration of Matthew Arnold. And they both drew out of these deeper and wider things a certain rich repose in humour denied to the mere men of the Party System. I shall never forget the occasion when old Birrell, roused by the rather vulgar refinement of the popular Puritan press, as expressed by a suave editor who patronised the polysyllabic style of Dr. Johnson, rose like a white-maned lion at the dinner-table where the editor had spoken, and told him that if he wanted to understand the style of Dr. Johnson, he should consult the passage in which Dr. Johnson called somebody the son of a bitch. It was spat out with such virile anger that it sounded alarmingly like a personal remark. And I shall never forget the other occasion, in which Russell figured in what might seem the opposite fashion; for Russell was a sleek, slow-moving, heavy man and had the name of a sybarite; but he was never afraid of being in a minority; and he took the chair at a Pro-Boer dinner when Pro-Boers were most unpopular. At the end his health was proposed by Sir Wilfrid Lawson, the celebrated teetotal fanatic, or shall we say enthusiast, who was also a brave man, and could fight for the few. He was by this time an old man; and anyhow, by some accident, he confused the terms of the toast; calling it a vote of thanks; or what not. I only know that, for some reason, the last scene of this dinner is also astonishingly vivid in my memory. For Russell rose like some vast fish, gazing upwards insolently at the ceiling as he always did, and began: “This toast, which Sir Wilfrid Lawson seems to have a post-prandial difficulty in enunciating ...”

There were many others, of course, who were complete exceptions to anything I have said here about the atmosphere of political Liberalism. One to whom I owe more than to most other people was Philip Wicksteed, the Dante lecturer; but there again, the modern mind had been broadened by a study of narrow mediaeval dogmas. But on the whole, I must confess that I reached a point of practical separation; I did not in the least desire to come any nearer to the imperialism of Curzon, or the cynical patriotism of Balfour, or the patriotic pacifism of Cecil; I am not a Conservative, whatever I am; I am certainly not a Unionist, whatever I am; but the general atmosphere of liberality was too illiberal to be endured.

Mr. Lloyd George’s Insurance Act roughly marks the moment of my disappearance; for I thought it a step to the Servile State; as legally recognising two classes of citizens; fixed as masters and servants. But a comic coincidence helped it; for I had just written The Flying Inn, containing a verse of violent abuse of Cocoa. After all these years, it can do no harm to mention that a Liberal editor wrote me a very sympathetic but rather sad letter, hoping that no personal attack was meant on some of the pillars of the Party. I assured him that my unaffected physical recoil from cocoa was not an attack on Mr. Cadbury; also that the Praise of Wine was a traditional thing not intended as an advertisement for Mr. Gilbey. So I left the Liberal paper and wrote for a Labour paper, which turned ferociously Pacifist when the War came: and since then I have been the gloomy and hated outcast you behold, cut off from the joys of all the political parties.

Chapter XIII: Some Literary Celebrities

I am just old enough to remember what were called Penny Readings; at which the working-classes were supposed to have good literature read to them, because they were not then sufficiently educated to read bad journalism for themselves. As a boy, or even a child, I passed one evening in something curiously called the Progressive Hall; as if the very building could not stand still, but must move onward like an omnibus along the path of progress. There was a little chairman with eyeglasses, who was nervous; and a big stout staring schoolmaster called Ash, who was not at all nervous; and a programme of performers if not eminent no doubt excellent. Mr. Ash read “The Charge of the Light Brigade” in resounding tones; and the audience awaited eagerly the change to a violin solo. The chairman explained hastily that Signor Robinsoni was unfortunately unable to perform that evening, but Mr. Ash had kindly consented to read “The May Queen.” The next item on the programme was a song, probably called “Sea Whispers,” to be sung by Miss Smith accompanied by Miss Brown. But it was not sung by Miss Smith or accompanied by Miss Brown; because, as the chairman somewhat feverishly explained, they were unable to attend; but we were solaced by the announcement that Mr. Ash had kindly consented to read “The Lord of Burleigh.” At about this point a truly extraordinary thing occurred; extraordinary at any time, to any one who knows the patience and politeness of the English poor; still more astonishing in the less sophisticated poor of those distant days. There arose slowly in the middle of the room, like some vast leviathan arising from the ocean, a huge healthy simple-faced man, of the plastering profession, who said in tones as resounding as Mr. Ash’s, and far more hearty and human, “Well, I’ve just ‘ad about enough of this. Good evening, Mr. Ash; good evening, ladies and gentlemen.” And with a wave of universal benediction, he shouldered his way out of the Progressive Hall with an unaffected air of complete amiability and profound relief.

I hardly know why, but that giant has remained in my memory as the one original titan who first rebelled against the Victorians. And I still vastly prefer his colossal common sense and complete good humour to the often petty and sometimes spiteful sneers or sniggers of more recent and cultured critics against the Victorian conventions. But it has warned me that, both for good reasons and bad, there is now a tendency to regard some Victorians as bores, or at least the subject as a bore; and my own memory of men older than myself, in the world of letters, is necessarily a memory of the Victorians, if only of the late Victorians. Even in this respect, of course, the present fashion is very patchy and paradoxical. For instance, there seems to be a much more vivid interest in the lives of such literary men than in their literary works. Any amount is written and rewritten about the romance of Mr. and Mrs. Browning, in plays and pages of biography and gossip. But though their story is rewritten, I rather doubt whether Browning is re-read, or whether Mrs. Browning is read at all. There seem to be more details remembered out of the story of the Brontës than there are details remembered out of the Brontë stories. It is a queer ending for all the aesthetic talk about an artist being only important in his art. Queerest of all, there is more popularity for a book about a man like Palmerston, whose politics are quite dead, than for a book by a man like Carlyle, whose politics would seem partly applicable in these days of reaction and dictatorship. On the whole, despite the giant shadow of the plasterer, I can advance shamelessly as a late Victorian from under the very shadow of Queen Victoria; whose shadow never grows less.

The first great Victorian I ever met, I met very early, though only for a brief interview: Thomas Hardy. I was then a quite obscure and shabby young writer awaiting an interview with a publisher. And the really remarkable thing about Hardy was this; that he might have been himself an obscure and shabby young writer awaiting a publisher; even a new writer awaiting his first publisher. Yet he was already famous everywhere; he had written his first and finest novels culminating in Tess; he had expressed his queer personal pessimism in the famous passage about the President of the Immortals. He had already the wrinkle of worry on his elfish face that might have made a man look old; and yet, in some strange way, he seemed to me very young. If I say as young as I was, I mean as simply pragmatical and even priggish as I was. He did not even avoid the topic of his alleged pessimism; he defended it, but somehow with the innocence of a boys' debating-club. In short, he was in a sort of gentle fuss about his pessimism, just as I was about my optimism. He said something like this: "I know people say I'm a pessimist; but I don't believe I am naturally; I like a lot of things so much; but I could never get over the idea that it would be better for us to be without both the pleasures and the pains; and that the best experience would be some sort of sleep.” I have always had a weakness for arguing with anybody; and this involved all that contemporary nihilism against which I was then in revolt; and for about five minutes, in a publisher’s office, I actually argued with Thomas Hardy. I argued that nonexistence is not an experience; and there can be no question of preferring it or being satisfied with it. Honestly, if I had been quite simply a crude young man, and nothing else, I should have thought his whole argument very superficial and even silly. But I did not think him either superficial or silly.

For this was the rather tremendous truth about Hardy; that he had humility. My friends who knew him better have confirmed my early impression; Jack Squire told me that Hardy in his last days of glory as a Grand Old Man would send poems to the Mercury and offer to alter or withdraw them if they were not suitable. He defied the gods and dared the lightning and all the rest of it; but the great Greeks would have seen that there was no thunderbolt for him, because he had not «ubris» (greek) or insolence. For what heaven hates is not impiety but the pride of impiety. Hardy was blasphemous but he was not proud; and it is pride that is a sin and not blasphemy. I have been blamed for an alleged attack on Hardy, in a sketch of Victorian literature; it was apparently supposed that talking about the village atheist brooding on the village idiot was some sort of attack. But this is not an attack on Hardy; this is the defence of Hardy. The whole case for him is that he had the sincerity and simplicity of the village atheist; that is, that he valued atheism as a truth and not a triumph. He was the victim of that decay of our agricultural culture, which gave men bad religion and no philosophy. But he was right in saying, as he said essentially to me all those years ago, that he could enjoy things, including better philosophy or religion. There came back to me four lines, written by an Irish lady in my own little paper:

Who can picture the scene at the starry portals?
Truly, imagination fails,
When the pitiless President of the Immortals
Shows unto Thomas the print of the nails?

I hope it is not profane to say that this hits the right nail on the head. In such a case, the second Thomas would do exactly what Prometheus and

Satan never thought of doing; he would pity God.

I must leap a long stretch of years before I come to my meeting with the other great Victorian novelist so often bracketed with Hardy; for by that time I had made some sort of journalistic name, which was responsible for my wife and myself being invited to visit George Meredith. But even across the years, I felt the curious contrast. Hardy was a well, covered with the weeds of a stagnant period of scepticism, in my view; but with truth at the bottom of it; or anyhow with truthfulness at the bottom of it. But Meredith was a fountain. He had exactly the shock and shining radiation of a fountain in his own garden where he entertained us. He was already an old man, with the white pointed beard and the puff of white hair like thistle-down; but that also seemed to radiate. He was deaf; but the reverse of dumb. He was not humble; but I should never call him proud. He still managed to be a third thing, which is almost as much the opposite of being proud; he was vain. He was a very old man; and he was still magnificently vain. He had all those indescribable touches of a quite youthful vanity; even, for instance, to the point of preferring to dazzle women rather than men; for he talked the whole time to my wife rather than to me. We did not talk to him very much; partly because he was deaf but much more because he was not dumb. On an honest review, I doubt whether we could either of us have got in a word or two edgeways. He talked and talked, and drank ginger-beer, which he assured us with glorious gaiety he had learned to like quite as much as champagne.

Meredith was not only full of life, but he was full of lives. His vitality had that branching and begetting genius of the novelist, which is always inventing new stories about strange people. He was not like most old novelists; he was interested in what was novel. He did not live in the books he had written; he lived in the books he had not written. He described a number of novels that were really novel; especially one about the tragedy of Parnell. I do not think I agreed very much with his interpretation; for he held that Parnell might easily have recovered popularity, if he had been capable of wanting it; but that he was naturally secretive and solitary. But I doubt whether that Irish squire was really any more secretive than any number of speechless English squires, who were at the same moment conducting exactly the same sort of sex intrigue, and would have been equally angry and equally inarticulate if they had been discovered. Only they never were discovered. For there was no hope that the discovery might delay the deliverance of a Christian nation. But that was the quality that struck me personally about Meredith. Ever on the jump, he could jump to conclusions; so great a man could never be called superficial; but in a sense, being so swift means being superficial. Many cheap parodies of Sherlock Holmes have made him a blunderer; we have yet to read a real comedy of a Sherlock Holmes who was really clever with insufficient data. We talk of a devouring thirst for information; but real thirst does not devour but swallow. So Meredith, for instance, swallowed the current racial theory of dividing the nations by the Teuton and the Celt.

The name of James Barrie dates also from my youth, though of course he was younger than Meredith or Hardy; he has lived to be my very good friend; but he is of all friends the least egotistical; and I connect him largely with intensely interesting memories of these other men and their contemporaries. He remains especially as a witness to the greatness of Meredith; in a world which has rather strangely forgotten him; but he also told me many tales of the men I never met; such as Stevenson and Henley and Wilde; with Wells and Shaw I have dealt in another place in another connection. But there is one impression that has been left in my mind by such memories of such men; and that is the strangely fugitive character of the controversies even about the greatest literary men. Like anybody writing any memoirs, I find that my first difficulty is to convey how immensely important certain individuals appeared at certain epochs. For those men are no longer topics, even when they are still classics. I remember Barrie giving me a most amusing account of a violent scene of literary controversy, in which Henley hurled his crutch across the room and hit some other eminent literary critic in the stomach. That will illustrate a certain importance that seemed to attach to certain intellectual tastes and preferences. For this piece of creative critical self-expression was apparently provoked by the statement, during a discussion about Ibsen and Tolstoy, that one of these great men was great enough to hang the other on his watch-chain. But what strikes me as the grand and grim joke of the whole business, is that the narrator had apparently entirely forgotten whether Ibsen was to hang Tolstoy on his watch-chain or Tolstoy to hang Ibsen on his watch-chain. From which I venture to infer that neither of those giants now seems quite so gigantic to anybody as they then seemed to somebody.

But I have seen Sir James Barrie many times since, and could say many other things about him; only there is something in his own humorous self-effacement that seems to create round him a silence like his own. In the case of the elder Victorians, it was generally true that I met the man only once, upon a sort of privileged embassy; and such impressions may easily be illusions. If it was so in the case of Meredith, it was much more so in the case of Swinburne. For by the time I saw him, he was a sort of god in a temple, who could only be approached through a high-priest. I had a long conversation with Watts-Dunton and then a short conversation with Swinburne. Swinburne was quite gay and skittish, though in a manner that affected me strangely as spinsterish; but he had charming manners and especially the courtesy of a consistent cheerfulness. But Watts-Dunton, it must be admitted, was very serious indeed. It is said that he made the poet a religion; but what struck me as odd, even at the time, was that his religion seemed to consist largely of preserving and protecting the poet's irreligion. He thought it essential that no great man should be contaminated with Christianity. He shook his head over Browning's temptation to that creed.... "Anybody so borné as poor Browning was." He then referred me to his friend's "Hertha" as the crest of his creation; "Then he was quite on top of the wave." And I, who knew my Swinburne backwards, delighting in the poetry and already rather despising the philosophy, thought it was a queer metaphor to use about the real and sincere Swinburne:

It is little enough that a man can save
In the reach of life, in the tide of time,
Who swims in sight of the great third wave,
That never a swimmer shall cross or climb.

I did not think it had been crossed or climbed in the monstrously muddled pantheism of "Hertha"; in which a later Swinburne absurdly attempted to deduce a revolutionary ethic, of the right to resist wrongs, from a cosmic monism which could only mean that all things are equally wrong or right.

Of course, I have only noted here a name or two, because they are the most famous; I do not even say that they are the most worthy of fame. For instance, supposing that we each keep a private collection of our pet pessimists, I have always been more intellectually impressed by A. E. Housman than by Thomas Hardy. I do not mean that I have been impressed by anybody with the intellectual claims of pessimism, which I always thought was piffle as well as poison; but it seems to me that Housman has, more than Hardy, a certain authority of great English literature; which is all the more classic because its English is such very plain English. I could never quite digest Hardy as a poet, much as I admire him as a novelist; whereas Housman seems to me one of the one or two great classic poets of our time. I have had both friends and fellowship in discontent with the Socialists; indeed, I was not discontented with them about conditions with which they were discontented, but rather about the prospects with which they were contented. And there was a sort of official optimism, when the collectivist ticket-collector of the Fabian tram called out, “Next stop, Utopia,” at which something in me not merely heathen, was always stirred to a sympathy with the words of that high heathen genius:

The troubles of our proud and angry dust
Are from eternity and shall not fail.

As everyone knows, the poet was also a professor, and one of the first authorities on the old Pagan literature. I cherish a story about him which happens to concern this double character of the classical and the poetical. It may be a familiar story; it may be a false story. It describes the start of an after-dinner speech he made at Trinity, Cambridge; and whoever made it or invented it had a superb sense of style. “This great College, of this ancient University, has seen some strange sights. It has seen Wordsworth drunk and Person sober. And here am I, a better poet than Person, and a better scholar than Wordsworth, betwixt and between.” But Hardy and Housman, like Henley and Swinburne, and most of the other great men among my elders for that matter, produced on my mind a curious cloudy impression of being all one background of pagan pessimism; though what it was in the foreground, to which they were a background, I did not really know; or at least I was very vague. But some sense of sameness in these very varied persons and positions took the form, in my case, of making me wonder why they were so much divided into literary groups; and what the groups were for. I was puzzled by culture being cut up into sections that were not even sects. Colvin kept one court, which was very courtly; Henley kept another, which was not exactly courtly, or was full of rather rowdy courtiers; in the suburbs Swinburne was established as Sultan and Prophet of Putney, with Watts-Dunton as a Grand Vizier. And I could not make out what it was all about; the prophet was not really a commander of the faithful because there was no faith; and as for the doubt, it was equally common to all the rival groups of the age. I could not understand why it should matter so very much to Mr. Watts-Dunton, if Colvin chose to like one particular new poet or Henley chose to dislike another.

I have known one or two isolated cases also of the mere man of imagination. It is always difficult to give even an outline of men of this kind; precisely because an outline is always the line at which a thing touches other things outside itself. I have already suggested very vaguely, for instance, something of the position of W. B. Yeats; but that is precisely because Yeats does touch some things outside his own thoughts; and suggests controversies about Theosophy or Mythology or Irish politics. But he who is simply the imaginative man can only be found in the images he makes and not in the portraits of him that other people make. Thus I could mention a number of detached and definite things about Mr. Walter de la Mare; only that they would not, strictly speaking, be about him. I could say that he has a dark Roman profile rather like a bronze eagle, or that he lives in Taplow not far from Taplow Court, where I have met him and many other figures in the landscape of this story; or that he has a hobby of collecting minute objects, of the nature of ornaments, but hardly to be seen with the naked eye. My wife happens to have the same hobby of collecting tiny things as toys; though some have charged her with inconsistency on the occasion when she collected a husband. But she and de la Mare used to do a trade, worthy of Goblin Market, in these pigmy possessions. I could mention the fact that I once found a school, somewhere in the wilds of the Old Kent Road, if I remember right, where all the little girls preserved a sort of legend of Mr. de la Mare, as of a fairy uncle, because he had once lectured there ever so long ago. I’ve no idea what spells he may have worked on that remote occasion; but he had certainly in the words of an elder English poet, knocked ’em in the Old Kent Road. But even a thing like this has not strictly speaking anything to do with the subject; the centre and fullness of the subject. And I have never been able to say anything that is, in that sense, about the subject. The nearest I could ever come to judging imaginative work would be simply to say this; that if I were a child, and somebody said to me no more than the two words Peacock Pie, I should pass through a certain transforming experience. I should not think of it especially as being a book. I should not even think of it as being a man;

certainly not as something now so sadly familiar as a literary man. A sacramental instinct within me would give me the sense that there was somewhere and somehow a substance, gorgeously coloured and good to eat. Which is indeed the case. Nor would any doubts and differences about the theoretical or ethical edges of Mr. Yeats's personality affect my appetite, even now that I am no longer a child, for the silver apples of the moon and the golden apples of the sun.

The images of imaginative men are indisputable; and I never wanted to dispute about them. The ideas of logical and dogmatic men (especially the sceptics, those very dogmatic men) are disputable; and I always wanted to dispute about them. But I never wanted to dispute about tastes where there are no tests. I have never taken sides where there are neither tastes held in common nor theses held in controversy; and this has kept me out of many movements. But then I am conscious of a gap or defect in my mind about such matters. I always feel it yawning in me like an abyss (yawning is the correct description so far as I am concerned), when people tell me that something ought to be done for the sake of "the Drama". I think Shaw's Caesar & Cleopatra is a good drama; though to my ethical tastes it is both too Pacifist and too Imperialist. I think Are You a Mason? is a good drama; and my appreciation has nothing to do with a Popish suspicion about Masonry. But to talk about helping "the drama," sounds to me like helping the typewriter or the printing press. It seems, to my simple mind, to depend a good deal on what comes out of it.

But among these literary figures, there was one figure whom I shall put last because I ought to put it first. It was the figure of a contemporary and companion of all that world of culture; a close friend of Meredith; an artist admired as artistic by the aesthetes and even by the decadents. But Alice Meynell, though she preferred to be aesthetic rather than anaesthetic, was no aesthete; and there was nothing about her that can decay. The thrust of life in her was like that of a slender tree with flowers and fruit for all seasons; and there was no drying up of the sap of her spirit, which was in ideas. She could always find things to think about; even on a sick bed in a darkened room, where the shadow of a bird on the blind was more than the bird itself, she said, because it was a message from the sun. Since she was so emphatically a craftsman, she was emphatically an artist and not an aesthete; above all, she was like that famous artist who said that he always mixed his paints with brains. But there was something else about her which

I did not understand at the time, which set her apart as something separate from the time. She was strong with deep roots where all the Stoics were only stiff with despair; she was alive to an immortal beauty where all the Pagans could only mix beauty with mortality. And though she passed through my own life fitfully, and far more rarely than I could wish, and though her presence had indeed something of the ghostly gravity of a shadow and her passing something of the fugitive accident of a bird, I know now that she was not fugitive and she was not shadowy. She was a message from the Sun.

Chapter XIV: Portrait of a Friend

Apart from vanity or mock modesty (which healthy people always use as jokes) my real judgment of my own work is that I have spoilt a number of jolly good ideas in my time. There is a reason for this; and it is really rather a piece of autobiography than of literary criticism. I think The Napoleon of Notting Hill was a book very well worth writing; but I am not sure that it was ever written. I think that a harlequinade like The Flying Inn was an extremely promising subject, but I very strongly doubt whether I kept the promise. I am almost tempted to say that it is still a very promising subject — for somebody else. I think the story called The Ball and the Cross had quite a good plot, about two men perpetually prevented by the police from fighting a duel about the collision of blasphemy and worship, or what all respectable people would call, “a mere difference about religion.” I believe that the suggestion that the modern world is organised in relation to the most obvious and urgent of all questions, not so much to answer it wrongly, as to prevent it being answered at all, is a social suggestion that really has a great deal in it; but I am much more doubtful about whether I got a great deal out of it, even in comparison with what could be got out of it. Considered as stories, in the sense of anecdotes, these things seem to me to have been more or less fresh and personal; but considered as novels, they were not only not as good as a real novelist would have made them, but they were not as good as I might have made them myself, if I had really even been trying to be a real novelist. And among many more abject reasons for not being able to be a novelist, is the fact that I always have been and presumably always shall be a journalist.

But it was not the superficial or silly or jolly part of me that made me a journalist. On the contrary, it is such part as I have in what is serious or even solemn. A taste for mere fun might have led me to a public-house, but hardly to a publishing-house. And if it led me to a publishing-house, for the publishing of mere nonsense-rhymes or fairytales, it could never thus have led me to my deplorable course of endless articles and letters in the newspapers. In short, I could not be a novelist; because I really like to see ideas or notions wrestling naked, as it were, and not dressed up in a masquerade as men and women. But I could be a journalist because I could not help being a controversialist. I do not even know if this would be called mock modesty or vanity, in the modern scale of values; but I do know that it is neither. It occurs to me that the best and most wholesome test, for judging how far mere incompetence or laziness, and how far a legitimate liking for direct democratic appeal, has prevented me from being a real literary man, might be found in a study of the man of letters I happen to know best; who had the same motives for producing journalism, and yet has produced nothing but literature.

In the days when Belloc was known to Bentley and Oldershaw, but not to me, when they were all together in the Radical group at Oxford, Belloc himself chiefly frequented a much smaller group which called itself the Republican Club. So far as I can make out, the Republican Club never consisted of more than four members, and generally of less; one or more of them having been solemnly expelled either for Toryism or for Socialism. This was the club which Belloc celebrated in the fine dedication of his first book; of which two lines have passed into some popular celebrity: "There's nothing worth the wear of winning but laughter and the love of friends;" but in the course of which he also described in more detail the ideals of this fastidious fellowship.

We kept the Rabelaisian plan
We dignified the dainty cloisters
With Natural Law, the Rights of Man,
Song, Stoicism, Wine and Oysters.

We taught the art of writing things
On men we still would like to throttle,
And where to get the blood of kings
At only half-a-crown a bottle.

Of the three other corners of this very Four-Square Gospel of Citizenship, that is of Belloc's three constant colleagues in the old Republican club, one is still, I believe, a distinguished exile and official in Burma; or as his old friends loved to say with sour smiles of affectionate resignation, "a Satrap"; as if he had somehow Medised, or condescended to the oriental barbarism which we call Imperialism. I have no doubt that as a fact he was a happy and highly satisfactory Satrap; but he was the one member of the group whom I never met. The other two Republicans, who were Belloc’s most intimate friends at Oxford, have both in different ways played a considerable part in my own life. One was John Swinnerton Phillimore, son of the old Admiral whose name made a sort of background for the Kensington of my boyhood, afterwards Latin Professor at Glasgow University and one of the first classical authorities of his time; now, alas, only an ever-deepening memory. The other was Francis Yvon Eccles, the distinguished French scholar, whom I now meet all too seldom through his gravitation towards living in France.

Eccles, like Belloc, was the child of one French and one English parent; but there was a certain misleading comedy about the names, as if they had been interchanged like labels. For Eccles, who happened to have the English surname, looked much more like a Frenchman, and Belloc, with the French surname, looked much more like an Englishman; indeed he ended by being the one solitary but symbolic Englishman really looking like the traditional John Bull. It is true that he reached this traditional type through the possession of a square chin like that of the great Emperor of the French, and the subsequent assumption of side-whiskers to satisfy the conventions of the Spaniards. But the combined effect of these foreign influences was that he looked exactly like what all English farmers ought to look like; and was, as it were, a better portrait of Cobbett than Cobbett was. Moreover, the symbol was true; for the roots that hold him to the Downs and the deep ploughlands of South England were even deeper, so far as instinct is concerned, than the marble foundations of the abstract Republic of the Republican Club. I remember drinking a pot of beer with a publican not far from Horsham and mentioning my friend’s name; and the publican, who obviously had never heard of books or such bosh, merely said, “Farms a bit, doesn’t he?” and I thought how hugely flattered Belloc would be.

I knew Eccles in Fleet Street, from the first days of the old Pro-Boer Speaker, of which he was largely the literary adviser; yet it was always inevitable to think of him as sitting outside a café in Paris rather than London. His head, his hat, his arched eyebrows and wrinkled forehead of quite disinterested curiosity, his Mephistophelean tuft, his type of patient lucidity, were far more French than his friend with the French name. Whether or no these externals commonly correspond to characters, they certainly do not always correspond to careers. Thus, John Phillimore, the son of a sailor and coming largely of a family of sailors, himself looked very much more like a sailor than like a don. His dark compact figure and bright brown face might have been on any quarter-deck. On the other hand, by another such carnival comedy of exchange, I always thought that his cousin, who is, I believe, a distinguished Admiral looked much more like a don or a professor. But John Phillimore, as things fell out, had to be a rather unique sort of don; and at once a popular and a pugnacious professor. You could not conduct classes amid the racial and religious chaos of Glasgow, full of wild Highlanders and wild Irish, and young fanatical Communists and old fanatical Calvinists, without possessing some of the qualities of the quarter-deck. Most of the stories about Phillimore read like tales of mutiny on the high seas. It was shrewdly said of him that the effect of the word "gentlemen," as said by him, was like the famous effect of the word "Quirites!", as said by Caesar. On a similar occasion an insubordinate but intelligent Glasgow crowd seems to have instantly grasped the gratifying irony of his appeal, "Gentlemen, gentlemen! I have not yet ceased casting my pearls."

The chief fact relevant to this chapter, however, is that Belloc's career began with the ideals of the Republican Club. To those who talk about ideals, but do not think about ideas, it may seem odd that both he and Eccles have ended as strong Monarchists. But there is a thin difference between good despotism and good democracy; both imply equality, with authority; whether the authority be impersonal or personal. What both detest is oligarchy; even in its more human form of aristocracy, let alone its present repulsive form of plutocracy. Belloc's first faith was in the impersonal authority of the Republic, and he concentrated on its return in the eighteenth century, but rather specially touching its military aspect. His first two books were the very fine monographs on the two most famous of the French Revolutionists; and he was, in that sense, very heartily revolutionary. But I mention the matter here for a special reason, in connection with something in which he was and is rather unique in this country; native and rooted as is his real relation to this country. I have already remarked that to know him well is to know that, as a man, he is English and not French. But there is another aspect in his curious case. In so far as he is a traditionalist, he is an English traditionalist. But when he was specially a revolutionist, he was in the very exact sense a French Revolutionist. And it might be roughly symbolised by saying that he was an English poet but a French soldier.

Now I thought I knew all about Revolutionists long before I met the representative of the Republican Club. I had talked to them in dirty taverns or untidy studios, or more depressing vegetarian hostels. I knew there were differences in cut and colour; and that some were more really revolutionary than others. I knew that some wore pale green neckties and gave lectures on decorative art; while some wore red neckties and made speeches on Trade Union platforms. I have sung “The Red Flag” in hearty chorus with the latter, and William Morris’s “England, Awake” in more refined accents with the former. And though I knew nothing of the comparison with another method, I did more and more realise, with an ever sinking heart, that for some reason we had not got a decent revolutionary song to our name; and that in the matter of producing any respectable sort of Hymn of Hate, my countrymen were a washout.

One weakness of these popular war-songs was that they were not war-songs. They never gave the faintest hint of how anybody could ever make war on anything. They were always waiting for the Dawn; without the least anticipation that they might be shot at dawn, or the least intelligent preparation for shooting anybody else at dawn. “England awake; the long long night is over; faint in the east behold the dawn appear.” They were all like that; they were all Songs Before Sunrise; as if the sun that rose on the just and the unjust did not also rise on the conquered and the conqueror. But the English revolutionary poet wrote as if he owned the sun and was certain to be the conqueror. In other words, I found that the Socialist idea of war was exactly like the Imperialist idea of war; and I was strengthened and deepened in my detestation of both of them. I have heard many arguments against the idea of a Class War; but the argument which discredits it for me is the fact that the Socialists, like the Imperialists, always assumed that they would win the war. I am no Fascist; but the March on Rome gave them the surprise they needed. To say the least, it considerably halted the inevitable proletarian triumph; just as the Boers had halted the inevitable British triumph. And I do not like inevitable triumphs. Also I do not believe in them. I do not think that any social solution, even a more manly one like that of Morris, should be called “as sure as that tomorrow’s sun will rise.”

And then Belloc wrote a poem called “The Rebel,” and nobody noticed the interesting point about it. It is a very violent and bitter poem; it would be much too revolutionary for most of the revolutionists; even those with red ties would blush, and those with pale green ties would turn pale and green with sickness, at such threats against the rich as break out here—“and hack their horses at the knees and hew to death their timber trees,” and the very fine ending, “and all these things I mean to do; for fear perhaps my little son should break his hands as I have done.”

That is not a Song Before Sunrise. That is an attack before sunrise. But the peculiar point I wish to note here, appears in the previous verse about the actual nature of the attack. It is the only revolutionary poem I ever read, that suggested that there was any plan for making any attack. The first two lines of the verse run: “When we shall find them where they stand, a mile of men on either hand?” The Comrades of the Dawn always seemed to be marching in column, and singing. They never seemed to have heard of deploying; into the long line that faces the foe for battle. The next two lines are: “I mean to charge from right away, and force the flanks of their array.” Whoever heard of the Comrades of the Dawn having so complicated an idea as that of turning the enemy’s flank? Then comes the encirclement:

And press them inward from the plains
And drive them clamouring down the lanes,
And gallop and harry and have them down,
And carry the gates and hold the town.

The Pursuit; and then the Holding of the Bridgehead.

Now that is the only Song of the Class War I ever read that has the haziest notion of what a war would be like. In this wild lyric, full of vindictive violence and destruction, there is also in quite swift lyrical form a perfectly clear tactical plan and military map; a definite description of how men may storm a fortress, if it has to be stormed. The violence of this democratic, though doubtless dramatic, utterance goes far beyond anything that any Communist will reach in a hundred years. But it involves also the real character of battle; and a battle, like every human work, is at once designed in its beginning and doubtful in its end. Now the Comrades of the Dawn already annoyed me; because their revolution was wildly undesigned in its beginning, but had no doubt about its end. Just like Imperialism; and the South African War.

That is what I mean by saying that Belloc is an English poet but a French soldier. The man at rest, and therefore the man in reality, is the man of Sussex; but he has been enlarged, or some would say infected, by the foreign influence of those who have known real revolutions and invasions; and if he were called upon to conduct a revolution, he would conduct it as logically as a Parisian mob still conducts a riot. As he once remarked, such a democratic mob can deploy. But I have only taken this chance example to illustrate a general truth about a very remarkable man. I have taken the fact that the ordinary song of revolt is only militant, but his is also military. I mean that it is full of the notion, not only of fighting for the faith, but of getting to grips with the fact. If we are going to fight the rich, or fight the revolt against the rich, or fight resistance to a reasonable redistribution of riches, or fight anything else, this is how it is done. And when I remember all the other romantic revolutionary songs it does not at all surprise me, at least in this country, to realise that no fighting has been done.

Now that is exactly how his contemporaries have missed the whole point about Belloc at every point of his action; for instance, in his historic study, The Servile State. Because the English, of whom I am one, are romantic, and because they delight in the romance that the French are romantic, and delight in the more delirious romance that Belloc is French, they have simply been stone-blind to him when he is entirely scientific. His study of the Servile State is as strictly scientific as a military map is military. There is nothing romantic about it; nothing rollicking about it; nothing even particularly amusing about it, except the two admirable words, “this fool,” which occur in the calm procession of a thousand impartial words in the chapter on The Practical Man. And even excepting that is like accusing Euclid of making a joke, when he proves a proposition with a reductio ad absurdum. Anyone who knows the place of reason in the modern scheme, can imagine what happened. First, before reading what Belloc wrote, the critics started to criticise what Belloc would probably write. They said he threatened us with a horrible nightmare called the Servile State. As a fact, it was his whole point that it was not a nightmare, but something that we were already almost as habituated to accepting as to accepting the daylight. All the time, a thesis as pivotal as that of Adam Smith or Darwin is hardly realised, or even criticised, by anybody as what it is, though it has been criticised quite wildly, conjecturally and at random, as everything that it isn’t. Bernard Shaw roundly asserted that it was a mere revival of Herbert Spencer’s description of all dependence on the State as slavery. And when we pointed out that he could not have read a page of Belloc’s book if he really thought it was like Herbert Spencer’s book, he replied with characteristic gaiety that it was Herbert Spencer's that he had not read. Many supposed that it was a sort of satiric description of a Socialist State; something between Laputa and Brave New World. Others seem still to suppose that the Servile State is a general term for any tyranny or oppressive official State; and even use the term currently in that sense. For it is typical of our time and country that, while no one could say the book was popular, the title of the book was immediately and vastly popular. There was a time when errand-boys and railway-porters said "Servile State"; they did not know what it meant; but they knew about as much as the book-reviewers and even the dons.

The thesis of the book is that the Socialist movement does not lead to Socialism. This is partly because of compromise and cowardice; but partly also because men have a dim indestructible respect for property, even in its disgusting disguise of modern monopoly. Therefore, instead of the intentional result, Socialism, we shall have the unintentional resultant: Slavery. The compromise will take the form of saying, "We must feed the poor; we won't rob the rich; so we will tell the rich to feed the poor, handing them over to be the permanent servants of a master-class, to be maintained whether they are working or no, and in return for that complete maintenance giving a complete obedience." All this, or the beginnings of it, can be seen in a hundred modern changes, from such things as Insurance Acts, which divide citizens by law into two classes of masters and servants, to all sorts of proposals for preventing strikes and lock-outs by compulsory arbitration. Any law that sends a man back to his work, when he wants to leave it, is in plain fact a Fugitive Slave Law.

Now I take that one example of a scientific thesis, maintained in a purely scientific way, to show how very little the intellectual importance of Belloc's work has been understood. The reason of that misunderstanding lies in the other fact about him, which is really foreign and relatively French; the habit of separating in his own mind the scientific from the artistic; the ornamental from the useful. It is true that when a Frenchman designs a park as an ornamental park the paths are very curly indeed because they are only ornamental. When he designs a road, he makes it as straight as a ramrod, like the roads down which French soldiers used to march with all their ramrods; because a road is meant to be useful and is most short when it is straight. Belloc's little Arcadian lyric, "When I was not much older than Cupid and bolder," is very like an ornamental French garden; and his book on the Servile State is very like a French military road. No man is more instinctively witty; and no man can be more intentionally dull.

These two voices of Belloc, so to speak, were so distinct that he could sometimes pass from one to the other and make it seem like two persons speaking; effecting a transition on a platform almost as dramatic as the dialogue of a ventriloquist with his doll. When he stood as a Liberal member for Salford, he often managed to bewilder his hecklers by spraying them with these sharply alternated showers of cold and hot water. Salford was a poor and popular constituency, in which there were many strata of simple and provincial people, retaining the prejudices of our great-grandfathers; one of them being the touching belief that anybody with a French name could be made to cower and grovel by any allusion to the Battle of Waterloo. This was probably the only battle of which the heckler himself had ever heard; and his information about it was limited to the partly inaccurate statement that it was won by the English. He therefore used to call out at intervals, “Who won Waterloo?” And Belloc would affect to take this with grave exactitude, as a technical question put to him upon a tactical problem, and would reply with the laborious lucidity of a lecturer, “The issue of Waterloo was ultimately determined, chiefly by Colborne’s manoeuvre in the centre, supported by the effects of Van der Smitzen’s battery earlier in the engagement. The Prussian failure in synchrony was not sufficiently extensive, etc.” And then, while the unfortunate patriot in the audience was still endeavouring to grapple with this unexpected growth of complexity in the problem he had propounded, Belloc would suddenly change his own note to the ringing directness of the demagogue, would openly boast of the blood of that Pyrenean soldier who had followed the revolutionary army of Napoleon, and risen in its ranks, through all the victories that established a code of justice all over a continent and restored citizenship to civilisation. “It is good democratic blood; and I am not ashamed of it.”

This transition of tone had a tremendous effect, the whole hall rose at him roaring with applause and the investigator of the Belgian campaign was left isolated. But that is exactly the point; that he really was isolated. It is a point, not only in the subtlety of that blend of French and English blood; but also of the rather special subtlety of the English. The English are insular, not so much in the sense of being insolent but simply of being ignorant; but they are not spiteful. Other things being equal, they would rather cheer a Frenchman who was proud of being a Frenchman, as they cheered Napoleon's Marshal at the Coronation of Queen Victoria, than remind him of Napoleon's misfortune at Waterloo. And the same interesting distinction cuts the other way also. We have been told in a tiresome way from childhood about something that was called French rhetoric. To our shame, we have forgotten that there was until very lately a noble thing called English rhetoric. And as distinct from his irony or his objective scientific militarism, the rhetoric of Belloc was thoroughly English rhetoric. There was nothing in it that could not have been said by Cobbett or even by Fox, in the days when the genuine English Radical could address the genuine English crowd. What has weakened that direct popular appeal has been the change that turned nearly all Englishmen into a sort of imitation Londoners; and the rhetoric of Westminster grew more and more pompous and hypocritical while the wit of Whitechapel grew more and more acrid and flippant. But it has been possible, even in my own time, to hear occasionally the voice historic and a virile English demagogue; talking in plain English about primary emotions. Nobody ever did it better, when he chose, than old John Burns, for whom I have spoken and voted so often in the days when I lived in Battersea. To mention one case, as a sort of model; it was natural enough that the old Dock-Strike agitator, having become a Cabinet Minister and in many ways a rather Conservative force, should be assailed by more revolutionary groups as an extinct volcano if not a surrendered fortress. But Burns knew how to deal with that sort of thing when speaking to democrats; by cutting deeper into human facts instead of sliding away upon legal fictions. He was taunted by some Socialists at a Battersea meeting with not having opposed the Royal Grant to Queen Mary or some princess at the celebrations on the appearance of an heir. I can imagine how the smoother sort of Lib-Lab social climber, passing through Parliament into the governing class, would explain away his position in terms of the etiquette of the House. John Burns said, “I am the son of my mother and the husband of my wife. And if you ask me to put a public insult upon a woman who has just borne a child, I will not do it.” That is English rhetoric: and it is as good as any in the world.

But while it is quite a mistake to suppose that there was anything particularly French about the direct democratic oratory that Belloc used in those days, there was another quality which he also used, which I think may really be called a rather French speciality. We generally have some very silly and inadequate notion in our minds when we talk about French wit; and the full richness of that fruit of culture is seldom covered even when we talk of French irony. For the best French irony is nothing so simple as merely saying one thing and meaning the opposite. It is at once exhibiting and withdrawing, in one flash, a series of aspects of a thing; like a man twirling a jewel with twenty facets. And the more brief it is, the more flippant it is, the more seemingly superficial it is, the more there is in that irony an element of mystery. There is always a touch of bewilderment, for the simple, in the tale of such tags as that of Voltaire: “To succeed in the world it is not sufficient to be stupid, you must be well-mannered.” Curiously enough, there is exactly that quality in an ordinary military dispatch, sent out by a very silent and practical soldier; by Foch at the supreme crisis of the Marne. “My right is hard pressed; my left is retreating; situation excellent; I attack.” For it might be all sorts of things besides the quite prosaic and practical thing that it is; it might be a paradox; or a boast; or a bitter jest of despair; and all the time it is in fact a quite correct description of the advantage of his own immediate tactical situation, as exact as a military map. I have never so vividly felt that there was really something French about Belloc, as when he would from time to time suddenly say things like that on a public platform before an entirely puzzled audience. I remember once when he was lecturing on the same campaign in the Great War; a purely technical lecture full of plans and figures. And he paused to say parenthetically that perhaps nobody would ever understand why Von Kluck made his one big blunder before Paris. “Perhaps,” said Belloc, like a man for a moment bemused, “perhaps he was inspired.”

Now you can make all sorts of things out of that; in all sorts of opposite directions. You could make it a Voltairean sneer at divine inspiration, and the disasters it brings; or a dark mysterious judgment like that suggested when “the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart,” or all kinds of other fine shades between the two. But you could never be quite certain that you had got to the bottom of it. So that shining ornamental pond which looks so shallow, and is called French wit, is indeed the deepest of all wells and truth lies at the bottom of it. Finally, it may be remarked, that this very diversity in one man’s methods, and his own habit of keeping these diverse things distinct, is the explanation of the accident by which many people have been disappointed or bewildered or even bored by Belloc in different aspects;

because they were looking for the revelation of one of the legends about him, when he happened to be concentrating with cold ferocity on something much more prosaic or precise. In debating with Bernard Shaw about the Law of Rent, he observed austerely that if they were discussing economics, he would discuss economics, but if Mr. Shaw was making jokes he would be happy to reply in comic verse. To which Mr. Shaw, ever ready to rise to a sporting event, pursued the subject in some delightful doggerel; which Belloc acknowledged with the song about “the strip to the south of the Strand”; then including the Adelphi. But it is typical that his song simply was a song, and could have been sung in any pub as a drinking-song.

One of the most amusing events of my life occurred when I took the chair for a private celebration of Belloc’s sixtieth birthday. There were about forty people assembled, nearly all of them were what is called important in the public sense, and the rest were even more important in the private sense, as being his nearest intimates and connections. To me it was that curious experience, something between the Day of Judgment and a dream, in which men of many groups known to me at many times, all appeared together as a sort of resurrection. Anybody will understand that feeling who has had, as most people have had, the experience of some total stranger stopping him in the street and saying, “And how are the old set?” On such occasions I become acutely conscious of having belonged to a large number of old sets. Most of the people I knew well enough; but some of the younger I had known quite lately and others long ago; and they included, as do all such gatherings, those whom I had intended to enquire about, and never carried out my intention. Anyhow, they were of all sorts except the stupid sort; and the renewed comradeship stirred in me the memory of a hundred controversies. There was my old friend Bentley, who dated from my first days at school; and Eccles, who reminded me of the earliest political rows of the Pro-Boers; and Jack Squire (now Sir John) who first floated into my circle in the days of the Eye-Witness and my brother’s campaign against corruption; and Duff Cooper, a rising young politician I had met but a month or so before, and A. P. Herbert of somewhat similar age; and the brilliant journalist I had long known as Beachcomber, and only recently known as Morton. It was to be, and was, a very jolly evening; there were to be no speeches. It was specially impressed upon me, that there were to be no speeches. Only I, as presiding, was to be permitted to say a few words in presenting Belloc with a golden goblet modelled on certain phrases in his heroic poem in praise of wine, which ends by asking that such a golden cup should be the stirrup-cup of his farewell to friends:

And sacramental raise me the divine
Strong brother in God and last companion, wine.

I merely said a few words to the effect that such a ceremony might have been as fitting thousands of years ago, at the festival of a great Greek poet; and that I was confident that Belloc’s sonnets and strong verse would remain like the cups and the carved epics of the Greeks. He acknowledged it briefly, with a sad good humour, saying he found that, by the age of sixty, he did not care very much whether his verse remained or not. “But I am told,” he added with suddenly reviving emphasis, “I am told that you begin to care again frightfully when you are seventy. In which case, I hope I shall die at sixty-nine.” And then we settled down to the feast of old friends, which was to be so happy because there were no speeches.

Towards the end of the dinner somebody whispered to me that it would perhaps be better if a word were said in acknowledgement of the efforts of somebody else whose name I forget, who was supposed to have arranged the affair. I therefore briefly thanked him; and he still more briefly thanked me, but added that it was quite a mistake, because the real author of the scheme was Johnnie Morton, otherwise Beachcomber, who sat immediately on his right. Morton rose solemnly to acknowledge the abruptly transferred applause; glanced to his own right, and warmly thanked whoever happened to be sitting there (I think it was Squire) for having inspired him with this grand conception of a banquet for Belloc. Squire arose, and with many courteous gestures, explained that the gentleman on his own right, Mr. A. P. Herbert, had been the true and deep and ultimate inspiration of this great idea; and that it was only fitting that the secret of his initiative should be now revealed. By this time, the logic of the jest was in full gallop and could not be restrained; even if I had wished to restrain it. A. P. Herbert rose to the occasion with superb presence of mind, and gave the series quite a new and original turn. He is an excellent speaker; and, as we all know, an admirable author; but I never knew before that he is an admirable actor. For some reason best known to himself, he chose to pretend to be the oratorical official of some sort of Workmen’s Benevolent Society, like the Oddfellows or the Foresters. He did not need to tell us that he was taking this part; in the tone of his voice, he told it in the first few words. I shall never forget the exactitude of the accent with which he said, “I’m sure, friends, we’re all very pleased to see Ex-Druid Chesterton among us this evening.” But he also gave his speech a definite logical direction. He said it was not to ‘im, but to our old and faithful friend Duff Cooper that this pleasant evening was really due. Duff Cooper, sitting next to him, then rose and in resolute and ringing tones delivered an imitation of a Liberal platform speech, full of invocations of his great leader Lloyd-George. He explained, however, that Mr. E. C. Bentley on his right, and not himself, had arranged this tribute to that pillar of political Liberalism, Mr. Belloc. Bentley gave one glance to his own right, and rose with exactly that supercilious gravity that I had seen forty years ago in the debating-clubs of our boyhood; the memory of his balanced eyeglasses and bland solemnity came back to me across my life with such intensity as stirs the tears that are born of time. He said, with his precise enunciation, that he had himself followed through life one simple and sufficient rule. In all problems that arose, he had been content to consult exclusively the opinion of Professor Eccles. In every detail of daily life, in his choice of a wife, of a profession, of a house, of a dinner, he had done no more than carry out whatever Professor Eccles might direct. On the present occasion, any appearance he might have had of arranging the Belloc banquet was in fact a mask for Professor Eccles’ influence. Professor Eccles responded in a similar but even more restrained fashion, merely saying that he had been mistaken for the man next to him, the real founder of the feast; and so by fatal and unfaltering steps, the whole process went round the whole table; till every single human being had made a speech. It is the only dinner I have ever attended, at which it was literally true that every diner made an after-dinner speech. And that was the very happy ending of that very happy dinner, at which there were to be no speeches.

I did not myself make another speech; though I was far from thinking that there had been too much speechifying. Only certain fragmentary words, a memory of a late Victorian poet whom I know, Sir William Watson, floated on the surface of my mind; and it was those words that I should have said, if I had said anything. For what the poet said to his friend is all that I could have added, in a merely personal spirit, to the many things that were said that night about Hilaire Belloc; and I should not have been ashamed if the words had sounded like a vaunt:

Nor without honour my days ran,
Nor yet without a boast shall end;
for I was Shakespeare’s countryman
And were not you my friend.

Chapter XV: The Incomplete Traveller

If these my memoirs are not exactly lavishly dated, as indeed my letters are never dated at all, I hope no one will suspect me of any lack of reverence for that great academic school of history now generally known as 1066 and All That. I have some rudiments of knowledge about what may be called 1066; for instance, I know that the Conquest did not really happen until 1067. But I think the point somewhat unimportant, as compared, let us say, with the current view that the Normans reared towers over Galilee and reigned in Sicily, and helped to give birth to St. Thomas Aquinas, solely that they might make Anglo-Saxons yet more Anglo-Saxon, in the far-off hope of their becoming Anglo-American. In short, I have the deepest respect for 1066; but I shall continue in a humble way to wage a relentless war with All That.

But for me, in any case, compromise and amendment would come too late. I have written several books that were supposed to be biographies; and lives of really great and remarkable men, meanly refusing them the most elementary details of chronology; and it would be a more than mortal meanness that I should now have the arrogance to be accurate about my own life, when I have failed to be thus accurate about theirs. Who am I that I should be dated more carefully than Dickens or Chaucer? What blasphemy if I reserved for myself what I had failed to render to St. Thomas and St. Francis of Assisi. It seems to be a clear case, in which common Christian humility commands me to continue in a course of crime.

But if I do not date my letters, or my literary sketches, when I am at home and am to some extent regulated by the clock and the calendar, still less do I feel capable of such punctuality when the timeless spirit of holiday travel has not only hurled me through space, but knocked me out of time. I shall give only this short chapter to a few notes of travel; because most of the notebooks have already been turned into some other sort of books; on Ireland and America, on Palestine and Rome. I will only touch here on a few things that I happen not to have recorded elsewhere; a visit to Spain; my second visit to America; and my first, but I hope not my last, visit to Poland.

Let me first feed the hunger for dates upon the date-palm of Palestine, if the flippancy be forgiven; and so at least get the first few journeys in their right order; even if I consider some of the subsequent cases in more general style. I can proudly claim that I do know the date of my pilgrimage to Jerusalem; partly because it was a year after the close of the Great War, and partly because when my publishers suggested my going to the Holy Land, it sounded to me like going to the moon. It was the first of my long journeys, through a country still imperilled and under arms; it involved crossing the desert at night in something like a cattle-truck; and parts even of the Promised Land had some of the qualities of a lunar landscape. One incident in that wilderness still stands out in my memory for some strange reason; there is no need to recur here to Palestinian politics; but I was wandering about in the wilderness in a car with a zealous little Zionist; he seemed at first almost monomaniac, of the sort who answers the statement, "It's a fine day," with the eager reply, "Oh, yes, the climate is perfect for our project." But I came to sympathise with his romance; and when he said, "It's a lovely land; I should like to put the Song of Solomon in my pocket and wander about," I knew that, Jew or Gentile, mad or sane, we two were of the same sort. The lovely land was a wilderness of terraced rock to the horizon, and really impressive; there was not a human thing in sight but ourselves and the chauffeur, who was a black-browed giant, the rare but real Jewish type that turns prizefighter. He was an excellent driver; and the rule in those parts is that a Ford can go anywhere if it keeps off the road. He had gone ahead to clear some fallen stones and I remarked on this efficiency. The swarthy little professor beside me had taken a book from his pocket, but replied dispassionately, "Yes; I only know him slightly; between ourselves, I believe he is a murderer; but I made no indelicate enquiries." He then continued to read the Song of Solomon, and savoured those spices that rise when the south wind blows upon the garden. The hour was full of poetry; and not without irony.

The dates of my first and second visits to America have some true significance; for one was about a year after the Palestinian visit, and the other was comparatively recently; in 1930. This is not only because the first was very near the beginning and the second very near the end of the prolonged freak of Prohibition. I will not stop here to argue with any fool who thinks there is something funny about objecting to Prohibition. What is part of the same process is this; that one began with the Boom and the other saw the start of the Slump and what is more important, a profound revolution in the highly intelligent American people. It is not trivial that, touching Prohibition, they had wholly changed; at the beginning even those who disliked it believed in it; at the end even those who liked it disbelieved in it. But it is much more important that, by the end, life-long Republicans told me of their intention to vote for Franklin Roosevelt; even those who had cursed the demagogy of Theodore Roosevelt. The Americans have seen more plutocracy than anybody; but I am not sure they may not see through it sooner than anybody else.

For the rest, my last American tour consisted of inflicting no less than ninety-nine lectures on people who never did me any harm; and the remainder of the adventure, which was very enjoyable, breaks up like a dream into isolated incidents. An aged negro porter, with a face like a walnut, whom I discouraged from brushing my hat, and who rebuked me saying, “Ho, young man. Yo’s losing yo dignity before yo time. Yo’s got to look nice for de girls.” A grave messenger who came to me in a Los Angeles hotel, from a leading film magnate, wishing to arrange for my being photographed with the Twenty-Four Bathing-Beauties; Leviathan among the Nereids; an offer which was declined amid general surprise. An agonising effort to be fair to the subtleties of the evolutionary controversy, in addressing the students of Notre Dame, Indiana, in a series on “Victorian Literature,” of which no record remained except that one student wrote in the middle of his blank notebook, “Darwin did a lot of harm.” I am not at all certain that he was wrong; but it was something of a simplification of my reasons for being agnostic about the agnostic deductions, in the debates about Lamarck and Mendel. A debate about the history of religion with a very famous sceptic; who, when I tried to talk about Greek cults or Asiatic asceticism, appeared to be unable to think of anything except Jonah and the Whale. But it is the curse of this comic career of lecturing that it seems to bring on the lighted stage nothing except comedies; and I have already said that I do not think America takes them any more seriously than I do. The real American commentary was serious and sound; and none more so than that of an industrial master of machinery, who said to me, “People must go back to the farm.”

I had pottered about in France ever since my father took me there as a boy; and Paris was the only foreign capital I knew. I owe it to him that I was at least a traveller and not a tripper. The distinction is not snobbish; indeed it is one rather of epoch than education; half the trouble about the modern man is that he is educated to understand foreign languages and misunderstand foreigners. The traveller sees what he sees; the tripper sees what he has come to see. A true traveller in a primitive epic or folk-tale did not pretend to like a beautiful princess because she was beautiful. It is still true of a poor sailor; of a tramp; in short, of a traveller. Thus he need form no opinion of Paris newspapers; but if he wanted to, he would probably read them. The tripper never reads them, calls them rags, and knows as much about the rags as the chiffonnier who picks them up with a spike. I will give only one case, since it recalls my connection with a very early controversy. All England came to two great moral conclusions about a man called Zola; or rather about two men both called Zola. The first was merely a filthy Frenchman; a pornographer we jailed by proxy even in his publisher. The second was a hero and martyr for the truth, presumably tortured by the Inquisition — just like Galileo. The truth concerned the Dreyfus Case; and as a journalist behind the scenes I soon found out the truth was not so simple. Déroulède said, "Dreyfus may or may not be guilty; but France is not guilty." I say Dreyfus may have been innocent, but Dreyfusards were not always innocent; even when they were English editors. It was my first awful eye-opener about our press propaganda. I am not talking of the conclusion but of the methods of the Dreyfusards. A quite independent intelligent Scot, an Oxford friend of Oldershaw, told me they had practically proposed forgery, by falsifying the size of handwriting. But the only point here is Zola, who was first nasty and then noble; even in his very pictures, his brow grew loftier and his neck less thick. Now I would not go to either extreme about poor Zola; but I happened to be in Paris on the day of his funeral at the Pantheon. Paris was fiercely divided; and I bought one of the fanatical rags in a cafe, in which Maurice Barrès, a pretty detached littérateur, gave his reasons for having voted against the apotheosis; and wrote in one sentence all that I have tried to say here about the pessimists and the atheists and the realists and the rest. He said he did not object to obscenity; "I do not care how far down you force the mind of man; so long as you do not break the spring."

Most of us would not look at such rags as that, of course; but they are full of remarks like that, for anyone who, not content even with condescending to look at them, has the morbid curiosity to read them. And the remark seems to me a more important comment on what Zola stood for than the mere fact that he stood for the Dreyfusard Party, even if he was as trustworthy about Dreyfus as he was certainly untrustworthy about Lourdes.

Now we have not that sort of comment in England; for bulk and business methods and good printing do not provide it. But we have good things of our own to balance its absence; and the best of them are things we hardly ever hear anything about.

After all, the strangest country I ever visited was England; but I visited it at a very early age, and so became a little queer myself. England is extremely subtle; and about the best of it there is something almost secretive; it is amateur even more than aristocratic in tradition; it is never official. Among its very valuable and hardly visible oddities is this. There is one type of Englishman I have very frequently met in travel and never met in books of travel. He is the expiation for the English tripper; he may be called the English exile. He is a man of good English culture quite warmly and unaffectedly devoted to some particular foreign culture. In some sense, he has already figured in this story; for Maurice Baring had exactly that attitude towards Russia and Professor Eccles towards France. But I have met a particularly charming Anglo-Irish academic gentleman doing exactly the same work of penetrating with sympathy the soul of Poland; I have met another searching out the secrets of Spanish music in Madrid; and everywhere they are dotted about on the map, doing not only something for Europe but very decidedly something for England; proving to Lithuanian antiquaries or Portuguese geographers that we are not all bounders and boosters; but come of the people that could interpret Plutarch and translate Rabelais. They are a microscopically small minority; like nearly every English group that really knows what is going on; but they are a seed and therefore a secret. It can only be a comic coincidence, but it is a curious fact, that they are mostly of a certain personal type; tending to slight baldness and agreeable smiles under old-fashioned moustaches. If sociology were a science, which is absurd, I would set up a claim like a Darwinian scientist to have discovered a species. It is remembering these men that I find it easiest to range rapidly, for the purpose of this short chapter, over the different countries in which they are our very unofficial diplomatists.

I love France; and I am glad I saw it first when I was young. For if an Englishman has understood a Frenchman, he has understood the most foreign of foreigners. The nation that is nearest is now the furthest away. Italy and Spain and rather especially Poland are much more like England than that square fortress of equal citizens and Roman soldiers; full of family councils and patria potestas and private property under the Roman Law; the keep and citadel of Christendom. This is evident, for a first example, in the case of Italy. When I first went to Florence, I had only a confused impression that this Italian city was full of English ladies; and that they were all Theosophists. But when I first went to Assisi after I had been to Rome (in more senses than one), I saw that this is not quite fair. There really is a sympathy between English and Italian culture, which there is not as yet between English and French culture. There is really something warm-hearted and romantic gilding those stark cliffs that look across the plain to Perugia; and it is in touch with two nations. The English do appreciate St. Francis as they do not appreciate Pascal or the Curé d'Ars. The English can read Dante in a translation, even when they cannot read Italian, they cannot read Racine, even when they can read French. In short, they have some comprehension of medievalism in Italy; when they have not a glimmer of the granite grandeur of classicism in France. The surname of Rossetti was not altogether an accident. The devotion of my old friend Philip Wicksteed to Dante was an excellent example of what I mean by the typical Englishman with a foreign hobby.

I felt the same when I went to lecture in Madrid; and met that shy and polite Englishman who could have lectured to the Spaniards on their own Spanish tunes and songs. I did not feel that Spanish people were in a difficult sense different from English people; but only that a stupid Puritanism had forbidden the English to show the hearty and healthy emotions the Spanish are allowed to show. The most manifest emotion, as it struck me, was the pride of fathers in their little boys. I have seen a little boy run the whole length of the tree-lined avenues in the great streets, in order to leap into the arms of a ragged workman, who hugged him with more than maternal ecstasy. It may of course be said that this is un-English; which seems an ungenerous reflection on the English. I prefer to say that the Spanish workman, only too probably, had not been to an English public school. But really there are very few English people who would not like it to happen. Puritanism is only a paralysis; which stiffens into Stoicism when it loses religion. That sort of warmth and casualness was my impression of Spain. Oh yes, I saw the Escorial. Yes, thank you I visited Toledo; it is glorious, but I remember it best by a more glorious peasant woman who poured out wine by the gallon and talked all the time.

I recently revisited Spain, if the Catalans will allow me to call it Spain (opinions apart, I am sincerely sympathetic with such sensitive points), for I revisited it with a rush in a car that could only charge down the eastern coast to Tarragona. If I say that I charged, the motion is metaphorical; the motive power was a motor driven by Miss Dorothy Collins who acted as secretary, courier, chauffeuse, guide, philosopher and above all friend, without whom my wife and I would have often been without friends and in need of philosophy. For after crossing France and cresting the Pyrenees like Charlemagne and the Alps like Napoleon (or like Hannibal accompanied by an elephant) she brought me again to Florence, to deliver some lecture, and then returned through Switzerland to Calais, where the great campaign began.

In the course of it, I had two curious experiences in two foreign cafés. One was outside Barcelona, where the proprietor was an authentic American gangster, who had actually written a book of confessions about his own organised robbing and racketeering. Modest, like all great men, about the ability he had shown in making big business out of burglary and highway robbery, he was very proud of his literary experiment, and especially of his book; but, like some other literary men, he was dissatisfied with his publishers. He said he had rushed across just in time to find that they had stolen nearly all his royalties. “It was a shame,” I said sympathetically, “why it was simply robbery.” “I’ll say it was,” he said with an indignant blow on the table. “It was just plain robbery.”

The other day was dateless, even for my dateless life; for I had forgotten time and had no notion of anything anywhere, when in a small French town I strolled into a cafe noisy with French talk. Wireless songs wailed unnoted; which is not surprising, for French talk is much better than wireless. And then, unaccountably, I heard a voice speaking in English; and a voice I had heard before. For I heard the words, “... wherever you are, my dear people, whether in this country or beyond the sea,” and I remembered Monarchy and an ancient cry; for it was the King; and that is how I kept the Jubilee.

Returning through France, I remembered again the riddle, that I had found those far countries so near; but that the two nations that are nearest are those we never understand; Ireland and France. About Ireland, I have already written much; and I have nothing to say because I have nothing to unsay. I have written about Ireland in the hour of her tragedy, after the red dawn of the Easter Rising and the nightmare threat of conscription; and again in the hour of her triumph, when the Eucharistic Congress blazed before millions in the Phoenix Park; and all the swords and the trumpets saluted what was a Phoenix indeed. But there is one more nation, not unlike her in that tragedy and triumph, with a note on which I will end. Some day perhaps I may attempt a fuller study. Here in this chapter I only recall one or two things; not those I could remember, but those I cannot forget.

When I visited Poland, I was honoured by an invitation from the Government; but all the hospitality I received was far too much alive to remind me of anything official. There is a sort of underground tavern in Warsaw, where men drink Tokay, which would cure any official of officialism; and there they sang the marching songs of the Poles. Cracow is now even more the national city because it is not the capital; and its secrets are better explored by men like Professor Roman Dyboski than by anybody entangled in Statecraft. But I saw something of that difficult statesmanship — enough to know that, nothing but nonsense is talked about in the newspapers which discuss what they call the Polish Corridor. The fairest generalisation is this: recent events would be better understood, if everybody saw the self-evident fact that the Poles always have a choice of evils. I met the great Pilsudski; and that grand and rather grim old soldier of fortune practically told me that, of the two, he preferred Germany to Russia. It is equally clear that his rival Dmowski, who also entertained us delightfully in his rural retreat, had decided that, of the two, he preferred Russia to Germany. I had met this interesting man before; for Dr. Sarolea brought him to my house; where the Belgian, in his impish way, had taunted the Pole with his Anti-Semitism, saying persuasively, “After all, your religion came from the Jews.” To which the Pole answered, “My religion came from Jesus Christ, who was murdered by the Jews.” Pilsudski was also very sympathetic with Lithuania; though Lithuanians and Poles were quarrelling at the time. He was enthusiastic for Wilno; and I afterwards found on the frontier a historic site where Poles and Lithuanians are at peace — even when they are at war.

I was driving with a Polish lady, who was very witty and well-aquainted with the whole character of Europe, and also of England (as is the barbarous habit of the Slavs); and I only noticed that her tone changed, if anything to a sort of coolness, as we stopped outside an archway leading to a side-street, and she said, “We can’t drive in here.” I wondered; for the gateway was wide and the street apparently open. As we walked under the arch she said in the same colourless tone; “You take off your hat here.” And then I saw the open street. It was filled with a vast crowd, all facing me; and all on their knees on the ground. It was as if someone were walking behind me; or some strange bird were hovering over my head. I faced around, and saw in the centre of the arch great windows standing open, unsealing a chamber full of gold and colours; there was a picture behind; but parts of the whole picture were moving like a puppet-show, stirring strange double memories like a dream of the bridge in the puppet-show of my childhood; and then I realised that from those shifting groups there shone and sounded the ancient magnificence of the Mass.

One other memory I will add here. I made the acquaintance of a young Count whose huge and costly palace of a country house, upon the old model (for he had quite different notions himself), had been burned and wrecked and left in ruins by the retreat of the Red Army after the Battle of Warsaw. Looking at such a mountain of shattered marbles and black and blasted tapestries, one of our party said, “It must be a terrible thing for you to see your old family home destroyed like this.” But the young man, who was very young in all his gestures, shrugged his shoulders and laughed, at the same time looking a little sad. “Oh, I do not blame them for that,” he said. “I have been a soldier myself, and in the same campaign; and I know the temptations. I know what a fellow feels, dropping with fatigue and freezing with cold, when he asks himself what some other fellow’s armchairs and curtains can matter, if he can only have fuel for the night. On the one side or the other, we were all soldiers; and it is a hard and horrible life. I don’t resent at all what they did here. There is only one thing that I really resent. I will show it to you.”

And he led us out into a long avenue lined with poplars; and at the end of it was a statue of the Blessed Virgin; with the head and the hands shot off. But the hands had been lifted; and it is a strange thing that the very mutilation seemed to give more meaning to the attitude of intercession; asking mercy for the merciless race of men.

Chapter XVI: The God with the Golden Key

Some time ago, seated at ease upon a summer evening and taking a serene review of an indefensibly fortunate and happy life, I calculated that I must have committed at least fifty-three murders, and been concerned with hiding about half a hundred corpses for the purpose of the concealment of crimes; hanging one corpse on a hat-peg, bundling another into a postman's bag, decapitating a third and providing it with somebody else's head, and so on through quite a large number of innocent artifices of the kind. It is true that I have enacted most of these atrocities on paper; and I strongly recommend the young student, except in extreme cases, to give expression to his criminal impulses in this form; and not run the risk of spoiling a beautiful and well-proportioned idea by bringing it down to the plane of brute material experiment, where it too often suffers the unforseen imperfections and disappointments of this fallen world, and brings with it various unwelcome and unworthy social and legal consequences. I have explained elsewhere that I once drew up a scientific table of Twenty Ways of Killing a Wife and have managed to preserve them all in their undisturbed artistic completeness, so that it is possible for the artist, after a fashion, to have successfully murdered twenty wives and yet keep the original wife after all; an additional point which is in many cases, and especially my own, not without its advantages. Whereas, for the artist to sacrifice his wife and possibly his neck, for the mere vulgar and theatrical practical presentation of one of these ideal dramas, is to lose, not only this, but all the ideal enjoyment of the other nineteen. This being my strict principle, from which I have never wavered, there has been nothing to cut short the rich accumulation of imaginative corpses; and, as I say, I have already accumulated a good many. My name achieved a certain notoriety as that of a writer of these murderous short stories, commonly called detective stories; certain publishers and magazines have come to count on me for such trifles; and are still kind enough, from time to time, to write to me ordering a new batch of corpses; generally in consignments of eight at a time.

Any who have come upon traces of this industry may possibly know that a large number of my little crime stories were concerned with a person called Father Brown; a Catholic priest whose external simplicity and internal subtlety formed something near enough to a character for the purposes of this sketchy sort of story-telling. And certain questions have arisen, especially questions about the identity or accuracy of the type, which have not been without an effect on more important things.

As I have said, I have never taken my novels or short stories very seriously, or imagined that I had any particular status in anything so serious as a novel. But I can claim at the same time that it was novel enough to be novel, in the sense of not being historical or biographical; and that even one of my short stories was original enough to do without originals. The notion that a character in a novel must be "meant" for somebody or "taken from" somebody is founded on a misunderstanding of the nature of narrative fancy, and especially of such slight fancies as mine. Nevertheless, it has been generally said that Father Brown had an original in real life; and in one particular and rather personal sense, it is true.

The notion that a novelist takes a character bodily and in all its details from a friend or an enemy is a blunder that has done a great deal of harm. Even the characters of Dickens, at once so plainly creations and so plainly caricatures, were measured against mere mortals, as if there were any mortals who could fit exactly the magnificent mock-heroic stature of Weller or Micawber. I remember my father telling me how some of his contemporaries indignantly purged themselves of the charge of being the model of Mr. Pecksniff; and especially of how the well-known S. C. Hall, the Spiritualist, cleared himself with an eloquence which some found too sublime to be convincing. "How can I be said to resemble Pecksniff?" said this worthy man to my father. "You know me. The world knows me. The world knows that I have devoted my life to the good of others, that I have lived a pure and exalted life devoted to the highest duties and ideals, that I have sought always to set an example of truth, of justice, of probity, or purity and or public virtue. What resemblance can there be between me and Pecksniff?"

When a writer invents a character for the purposes of fiction, especially of light or fanciful fiction, he fits him out with all sorts of features meant to be effective in that setting and against that background. He may have taken, and probably has taken, a hint from a human being. But he will not hesitate to alter the human being, especially in externals, because he is not thinking of a portrait but of a picture. In Father Brown, it was the chief feature to be featureless. The point of him was to appear pointless; and one might say that his conspicuous quality was not being conspicuous. His commonplace exterior was meant to contrast with his unsuspected vigilance and intelligence; and that being so, of course I made his appearance shabby and shapeless, his face round and expressionless, his manners clumsy, and so on. At the same time, I did take some of his inner intellectual qualities from my friend, Father John O’Connor of Bradford, who has not, as a matter of fact, any of these external qualities. He is not shabby, but rather neat; he is not clumsy, but very delicate and dexterous; he not only is but looks amusing and amused. He is a sensitive and quickwitted Irishman, with the profound irony and some of the potential irritability of his race. My Father Brown was deliberately described as a Suffolk dumpling from East Anglia. That, and the rest of his description, was a deliberate disguise for the purpose of detective fiction. But for all that, there is a very real sense in which Father O’Connor was the intellectual inspiration of these stories; and of much more important things as well. And in order to explain these things, especially the important things, I cannot do better than tell the story of how the first notion of this detective comedy came into my mind.

In those early days, especially just before and just after I was married, it was my fate to wander over many parts of England, delivering what were politely called lectures. There is a considerable appetite for such bleak entertainments, especially in the north of England, the south of Scotland and among certain active Nonconformist centres even in the suburbs of London. With the mention of bleakness there comes back to me the memory of one particular chapel, lying in the last featureless wastes to the north of London, to which I actually had to make my way through a blinding snowstorm, which I enjoyed very much; because I like snowstorms. In fact, I like practically all kinds of English weather except that particular sort of weather that is called “a glorious day.” So none need weep prematurely over my experience, or imagine that I am pitying myself or asking for pity. Still, it is the fact that I was exposed to the elements for nearly two hours either on foot or on top of a forlorn omnibus wandering in a wilderness; and by the time I arrived at the chapel I must have roughly resembled the Snow Man that children make in the garden. I proceeded to lecture, God knows on what, and was about to resume my wintry journey, when the worthy minister of the chapel, robustly rubbing his hands and slapping his chest and beaming at me with the rich hospitality of Father Christmas, said in a deep, hearty, fruity voice, “Come, Mr. Chesterton; it’s a bitter cold night!

Do let me offer you an oswego biscuit." I assured him gratefully that I felt no such craving; it was very kind of him, for there was no possible reason, in the circumstances for his offering me any refreshment at all. But I confess that the thought of returning through the snow and the freezing blast, for two more hours, with the glow of that one biscuit within me, and the oswego fire running through all my veins, struck me as a little out of proportion. I fear it was with considerable pleasure that I crossed the road and entered a public-house immediately opposite the chapel, under the very eyes of the Nonconformist Conscience.

This is a parenthesis; and I could add a good many parentheses about distant days of vagabond lecturing. Of those days the tale is told that I once sent a telegram to my wife in London, which ran; "Am in Market Harborough. Where ought I to be?" I cannot remember whether this story is true; but it is not unlikely or, I think, unreasonable. It was in the course of such wanderings that I made many friends whose friendship I value; such as Mr. Lloyd Thomas, then in Nottingham, and Mr. McClelland of Glasgow. But I mention these here only as leading up to that very accidental meeting in Yorkshire, which was to have consequences for me rather beyond the appearance of accident. I had gone to give a lecture at Keighley on the high moors of the West Riding, and stayed the night with a leading citizen ot that little industrial town; who had assembled a group of local friends such as could be conceived, I suppose, as likely to be patient with lecturers; including the curate of the Roman Catholic Church; a small man with a smooth face and a demure but elfish expression. I was struck by the tact and humour with which he mingled with his very Yorkshire and very Protestant company; and I soon found out that they had, in their bluff way, already learned to appreciate him as something of a character. Somebody gave me a very amusing account of how two gigantic Yorkshire farmers, of that district, had been deputed to go the rounds of various religious centres, and how they wavered, with nameless terrors, before entering the little presbytery of the little priest. With many sinkings of heart, they seem to have come finally to the conclusion that he would hardly do them any serious harm; and that if he did they could send for the police. They really thought, I suppose, that he had his house fitted up with all the torture engines of the Spanish Inquisition. But even these farmers, I was told, had since accepted him as a neighbour, and as the evening wore on his neighbours decidedly encouraged his considerable powers of entertainment.

He expanded, and was soon in the middle of reciting that great heart-searching dramatic lyric which is entitled, “My Boots are Tight.” I liked him very much; but if you had told me that ten years afterwards I should be a Mormon Missionary in the Cannibal Islands, I should not have been more surprised than at the suggestion that, fully fifteen years afterwards, I should be making to him my General Confession and being received into the Church that he served.

Next morning he and I walked over Keighley Gate, the great wall of the moors that separates Keighley from Wharfedale, for I was visiting friends in Ilkley; and after a few hours talk on the moors, it was a new friend whom I introduced to my old friends at my journey’s end. He stayed to lunch; he stayed to tea; he stayed to dinner; I am not sure that, under their pressing hospitality, he did not stay the night; and he stayed there many nights and days on later occasions; and it was there that we most often met. It was on one of these visits that the incident occurred, which led me to take the liberty of putting him, or rather part of him, into a string of sensational stories. But I mention it, not because I attach any importance to those stories, but because it has a more vital connection with the other story; the story that I am telling here.

I mentioned to the priest in conversation that I proposed to support in print a certain proposal, it matters not what, in connection with some rather sordid social questions of vice and crime. On this particular point he thought I was in error, or rather in ignorance; as indeed I was. And, merely as a necessary duty and to prevent me from falling into a mare’s nest, he told me certain facts he knew about perverted practices which I certainly shall not set down or discuss here. I have confessed on an earlier page that in my own youth I had imagined for myself any amount of iniquity; and it was a curious experience to find that this quiet and pleasant celibate had plumbed those abysses far deeper than I. I had not imagined that the world could hold such horrors. If he had been a professional novelist throwing such filth broadcast on all the bookstalls for boys and babies to pick up, of course he would have been a great creative artist and a herald of the Dawn. As he was only stating them reluctantly, in strict privacy, as a practical necessity, he was, of course, a typical Jesuit whispering poisonous secrets in my ear. When we returned to the house, we found it was full of visitors, and fell into special conversation with two hearty and healthy young Cambridge undergraduates, who had been walking or cycling across the moors in the spirit of the stern and vigorous English holiday. They were no narrow athletes, however, but interested in various sports and in a breezy way in various arts; and they began to discuss music and landscape with my friend Father O’Connor. I never knew a man who could turn with more ease than he from one topic to another, or who had more unexpected stores of information, often purely technical information, upon all. The talk soon deepened into a discussion on matters more philosophical and moral; and when the priest had left the room, the two young men broke out into generous expressions of admiration, saying truly that he was a remarkable man, and seemed to know a great deal about Palestrina or Baroque architecture, or whatever was the point at the moment. Then there fell a curious reflective silence, at the end of which one of the undergraduates suddenly burst out. “All the same, I don’t believe his sort of life is the right one. It’s all very well to like religious music and so on, when you’re all shut up in a sort of cloister and don’t know anything about the real evil in the world. But I don’t believe that’s the right ideal. I believe in a fellow coming out into the world, and facing the evil that’s in it, and knowing something about the dangers and all that. It’s a very beautiful thing to be innocent and ignorant; but I think it’s a much finer thing not to be afraid of knowledge.”

To me, still almost shivering with the appallingly practical facts of which the priest had warned me, this comment came with such a colossal and crushing irony, that I nearly burst into a loud harsh laugh in the drawing-room. For I knew perfectly well that, as regards all the solid Satanism which the priest knew and warred against with all his life, these two Cambridge gentlemen (luckily for them) knew about as much of real evil as two babies in the same perambulator.

And there sprang up in my mind the vague idea of making some artistic use of these comic yet tragic cross-purposes; and constructing a comedy in which a priest should appear to know nothing and in fact know more about crime than the criminals. I afterwards summed up the special idea in the story called “The Blue Cross”, otherwise very slight and improbable, and continued it through the interminable series of tales with which I have afflicted the world. In short, I permitted myself the grave liberty of taking my friend and knocking him about; beating his hat and umbrella shapeless, untidying his clothes, punching his intelligent countenance into a condition of pudding-faced fatuity, and generally disguising Father O’Connor as Father Brown. The disguise, as I have said, was a deliberate piece of fiction, meant to bring out or accentuate the contrast that was the point of the comedy. There is also in the conception, as in nearly everything I have ever written, a good deal of inconsistency and inaccuracy on minor points; not the least of such flaws being the general suggestion of Father Brown having nothing in particular to do, except to hang about in any household where there was likely to be a murder. A very charming Catholic lady I know once paid my detective priest the appropriate compliment of saying, “I am very fond of that officious little loafer.”

Nevertheless, the incident of the Cambridge undergraduates, and their breezy contempt for the fugitive and cloistered virtue of a parish priest, stood for much more serious things in my life than my unfortunate, but merely professional, heap of corpses or massacre of characters. It brought me in a manner face to face once more with those morbid but vivid problems of the soul, to which I have earlier alluded, and gave me a great and growing sense that I had not found any real spiritual solution of them; though in certain external ways of proportion and practice, they trouble a man less in manhood than they do in youth. They still troubled me a good deal; but I might have sunk more and more into some sort of compromise or surrender of mere weariness, but for this sudden glimpse of the pit that is at all our feet. I was surprised at my own surprise. That the Catholic Church knew more about good than I did was easy to believe. That she knew more about evil than I did seemed incredible.

When people ask me, or indeed anybody else, “Why did you join the Church of Rome?” the first essential answer, if it is partly an elliptical answer, is, “To get rid of my sins.” For there is no other religious system that does really profess to get rid of people’s sins. It is confirmed by the logic, which to many seems startling, by which the Church deduces that sin confessed and adequately repented is actually abolished; and that the sinner does really begin again as if he had never sinned. And this brought me sharply back to those visions or fancies with which I have dealt in the chapter about childhood. I spoke there of the indescribable and indestructible certitude in the soul, that those first years of innocence were the beginning of something worthy, perhaps more worthy than any of the things that actually followed them. I spoke of the strange daylight, which was something more than the light of common day, that still seems in my memory to shine on those steep roads down from Campden Hill, from which one could see the Crystal Palace from afar. Well, when a Catholic comes from Confession, he does truly, by definition, step out again into that dawn of his own beginning and look with new eyes across the world to a Crystal Palace that is really of crystal. He believes that in that dim corner, and in that brief ritual, God has really remade him in His own image. He is now a new experiment of the Creator. He is as much a new experiment as he was when he was really only five years old. He stands, as I said, in the white light at the worthy beginning of the life of a man. The accumulations of time can no longer terrify. He may be grey and gouty; but he is only five minutes old.

I am not here defending such doctrines as that of the Sacrament of Penance; any more than the equally staggering doctrine of the Divine love for man. I am not writing a book of religious controversy; of which I have written several and shall probably, unless violently restrained by my friends and relatives, write several more. I am here engaged in the morbid and degrading task of telling the story of my life; and have only to state what actually were the effects of such doctrines on my own feelings and actions. And I am, by the nature of the task, especially concerned with the fact that these doctrines seem to me to link up my whole life from the beginning, as no other doctrines could do; and especially to settle simultaneously the two problems of my childish happiness and my boyish brooding. And they specially affected one idea; which I hope it is not pompous to call the chief idea of my life; I will not say the doctrine I have always taught, but the doctrine I should always have liked to teach. That is the idea of taking things with gratitude, and not taking things for granted. Thus the Sacrament of Penance gives a new life, and reconciles a man to all living, but it does not do it as the optimists and the hedonists and the heathen preachers of happiness do it. The gift is given at a price, and is conditioned by a confession. In other words, the name of the price is Truth, which may also be called Reality; but it is facing the reality about oneself. When the process is only applied to other people it is called Realism.

I began by being what the pessimists called an optimist; I have ended by being what the optimists would very probably call a pessimist. And I have never in fact been either, and I have never really changed at all. I began by defending vermilion pillar-boxes and Victorian omnibuses although they were ugly. I have ended by denouncing modern advertisements or American films even when they are beautiful. The thing that I was trying to say then is the same thing that I am trying to say now; and even the deepest revolution of religion has only confirmed me in the desire to say it. For indeed, I never saw the two sides of this single truth stated together anywhere, until I happened to open the Penny Catechism and read the words, “The two sins against Hope are presumption and despair.”

I began in my boyhood to grope for it from quite the other end; the end of the earth most remote from purely supernatural hopes. But even about the dimmest earthly hope, or the smallest earthly happiness, I had from the first an almost violently vivid sense of those two dangers; the sense that the experience must not be spoilt by presumption or despair. To take a convenient tag out of my first juvenile book of rhymes, I asked through what incarnations or prenatal purgatories I must have passed, to earn the reward of looking at a dandelion. Now it would be easy enough, if the thing were worth while even for a commentator, to date that phrase by certain details, or guess that it might have been worded otherwise at a later time. I do not believe in Reincarnation, if indeed I ever did; and since I have owned a garden (for I cannot say since I have been a gardener) I have realised better than I did that there really is a case against weeds. But in substance what I said about the dandelion is exactly what I should say about the sunflower or the sun, or the glory which (as the poet said) is brighter than the sun. The only way to enjoy even a weed is to feel unworthy even of a weed. Now there are two ways of complaining of the weed or the flower; and one was the fashion in my youth and another is the fashion in my later days; but they are not only both wrong, but both wrong because the same thing is right. The pessimists of my boyhood, when confronted with the dandelion, said with Swinburne:

I am weary of all hours
Blown buds and barren flowers
Desires and dreams and powers
And everything but sleep.

And at this I cursed them and kicked at them and made an exhibition of myself; having made myself the champion of the Lion’s Tooth, with a dandelion rampant on my crest. But there is a way of despising the dandelion which is not that of the dreary pessimist, but of the more offensive optimist. It can be done in various ways; one of which is saying, “You can get much better dandelions at Selfridge’s,” or “You can get much cheaper dandelions at Woolworth’s.” Another way is to observe with a casual drawl, “Of course nobody but Gamboli in Vienna really understands dandelions,” or saying that nobody would put up with the old-fashioned dandelion since the super-dandelion has been grown in the Frankfurt Palm Garden; or merely sneering at the stinginess of providing dandelions, when all the best hostesses give you an orchid for your buttonhole and a bouquet of rare exotics to take away with you. These are all methods of undervaluing the thing by comparison; for it is not familiarity but comparison that breeds contempt. And all such captious comparisons are ultimately based on the strange and staggering heresy that a human being has a right to dandelions; that in some extraordinary fashion we can demand the very pick of all the dandelions in the garden of Paradise; that we owe no thanks for them at all and need feel no wonder at them at all; and above all no wonder at being thought worthy to receive them. Instead of saying, like the old religious poet, “What is man that Thou carest for him, or the son of man that Thou regardest him?” we are to say like the discontented cabman, “What’s this?” or like the bad-tempered Major in the club, “Is this a chop fit for a gentleman?” Now I not only dislike this attitude quite as much as the Swinburnian pessimistic attitude, but I think it comes to very much the same thing; to the actual loss of appetite for the chop or the dish of dandelion-tea. And the name of it is Presumption and the name of its twin brother is Despair.

This is the principle I was maintaining when I seemed an optimist to Mr. Max Beerbohm; and this is the principle I am still maintaining when I should undoubtedly seem a pessimist to Mr. Gordon Selfridge. The aim of life is appreciation; there is no sense in not appreciating things; and there is no sense in having more of them if you have less appreciation of them. I originally said that a cockney lamp-post painted pea-green was better than no light or no life; and that if it was a lonely lamp-post, we might really see its light better against the background of the dark. The Decadent of my early days, however, was so distressed by it that he wanted to hang himself on the lamp-post, to extinguish the lamp, and to let everything relapse into aboriginal darkness. The modern millionaire comes bustling along the street to tell me he is an Optimist and has two million five thousand new lamp-posts, all ready painted not a Victorian pea-green but a Futuristic chrome yellow and electric blue, and that he will plant them over the whole world in such numbers that nobody will notice them, especially as they will all look exactly the same. And I cannot quite see what the Optimist has got to be Optimistic about. A lamp-post can be significant although it is ugly. But he is not making lamp-posts significant; he is making them insignificant.

In short, as it seems to me, it matters very little whether a man is discontented in the name of pessimism or progress, if his discontent does in fact paralyse his power of appreciating what he has got. The real difficulty of man is not to enjoy lamp-posts or landscapes, not to enjoy dandelions or chops; but to enjoy enjoyment. To keep the capacity of really liking what he likes; that is the practical problem which the philosopher has to solve. And it seemed to me at the beginning, as it seems to me now in the end, that the pessimists and optimists of the modern world have alike missed and muddled this matter; through leaving out the ancient conception of humility and the thanks of the unworthy. This is a matter much more important and interesting than my opinions; but, in point of fact, it was by following this thin thread of a fancy about thankfulness, as slight as any of those dandelion clocks that are blown upon the breeze like thistledown, that I did arrive eventually at an opinion which is more than an opinion. Perhaps the one and only opinion that is really more than an opinion.

For this secret of antiseptic simplicity was really a secret; it was not obvious, and certainly not obvious at that time. It was a secret that had already been almost entirely left to, and locked up with, certain neglected and unpopular things. It was almost as if the dandelion-tea really were a medicine, and the only recipe or prescription belonged to one old woman, a ragged and nondescript old woman, rather reputed in our village to be a witch. Anyhow, it is true that both the happy hedonists and the unhappy pessimists were stiffened by the opposite principle of pride. The pessimist was proud of pessimism, because he thought nothing good enough for him; the optimist was proud of optimism, because he thought nothing was bad enough to prevent him from getting good out of it. There were valuable men of both these types; there were men with many virtues; but they not only did not possess the virtue I was thinking of, but they never thought of it. They would decide that life was no good, or that it had a great deal of good; but they were not in touch with this particular notion, of having a great deal of gratitude even for a very little good. And as I began to believe more and more that the clue was to be found in such a principle, even if it was a paradox, I was more and more disposed to seek out those who specialised in humility, though for them it was the door of heaven and for me the door of earth.

For nobody else specialises in that mystical mood in which the yellow star of the dandelion is startling, being something unexpected and undeserved. There are philosophies as varied as the flowers of the field, and some of them weeds and a few of them poisonous weeds. But they none of them create the psychological conditions in which I first saw, or desired to see, the flower. Men will crown themselves with flowers and brag of them, or sleep on flowers and forget them, or number and name all the flowers only in order to grow a super-flower for the Imperial International Flower Show; or, on the other hand, trample the flowers like a stampede of buffaloes, or root up the flowers as a childish camouflage of the cruelty of nature, or tear the flowers with their teeth to show that they are enlightened philosophical pessimists. But this original problem with which I myself started, the utmost possible imaginative appreciation of the flower — about that they can make nothing but blunders, in that they are ignorant of the elementary facts of human nature; in that, working wildly in all directions, they are all without exception going the wrong way to work. Since the time of which I speak, the world has in this respect grown even worse. A whole generation has been taught to talk nonsense at the top of its voice about having “a right to life” and “a right to experience” and “a right to happiness.” The lucid thinkers who talk like this generally wind up their assertion of all these extraordinary rights, by saying that there is no such thing as right and wrong. It is a little difficult, in that case, to speculate on where their rights came from; but I, at least, leaned more and more to the old philosophy which said that their real rights came from where the dandelion came from; and that they will never value either without recognising its source. And in that ultimate sense uncreated man, man merely in the position of the babe unborn, has no right even to see a dandelion; for he could not himself have invented either the dandelion or the eyesight.

I have here fallen back on one idle figure of speech from a fortunately forgotten book of verses; merely because such a thing is light and trivial, and the children puff it away like thistledown; and this will be most fitting to a place in which formal argument would be quite a misfit. But lest anyone should suppose that the notion has no relation to the argument, but is only a sentimental fancy about weeds or wild flowers, I will lightly and briefly suggest how even the figure fits in with all the aspects of the argument. For the first thing the casual critic will say is “What nonsense all this is; do you mean that a poet cannot be thankful for grass and wild flowers without connecting it with theology; let alone your theology?” To which I answer, “Yes; I mean he cannot do it without connecting it with theology, unless he can do it without connecting it with thought. If he can manage to be thankful when there is nobody to be thankful to, and no good intentions to be thankful for, then he is simply taking refuge in being thoughtless in order to avoid being thankless.” But indeed the argument goes beyond conscious gratitude, and applies to any sort of peace or confidence or repose, even unconscious confidence or repose. Even the nature-worship which Pagans have felt, even the nature-love which Pantheists have felt, ultimately depends as much on some implied purpose and positive good in things, as does the direct thanksgiving which Christians have felt. Indeed Nature is at best merely a female name we give to Providence when we are not treating it very seriously; a piece of feminist mythology. There is a sort of fireside fairytale, more fitted for the hearth than for the altar; and in that what is called Nature can be a sort of fairy godmother. But there can only be fairy godmothers because there are godmothers; and there can only be godmothers because there is God.

What has troubled me about sceptics all my life has been their extraordinary slowness in coming to the point; even to the point of their own position. I have heard them denounced, as well as admired, for their headlong haste and reckless rush of innovation; but my difficulty has always been to get them to move a few inches and finish their own argument. When first it was even hinted that the universe may not be a great design, but only a blind and indifferent growth, it ought to have been perceived instantly that this must for ever forbid any poet to retire to the green fields as to his home, or to look at the blue sky for his inspiration. There would be no more of any such traditional truth associated with green grass than with green rot or green rust; no more to be recalled by blue skies than by blue noses amputated in a freezing world of death. Poets, even Pagans, can only directly believe in Nature if they indirectly believe in God; if the second idea should really fade, the first is bound to follow sooner or later; and, merely out of a sad respect for human logic, I wish it had been sooner. Of course a man might have an almost animal appreciation of certain accidents of form or colour in a rock or a pool, as in a rag-bag or a dustbin; but that is not what the great poets or the great pagans meant by mysteries of Nature or the inspiration of the elemental powers. When there is no longer even a vague idea of purposes or presences, then the many-coloured forest really is a rag-bag and all the pageant of the dust only a dustbin. We can see this realisation creeping like a slow paralysis over all those of the newest poets who have not reacted towards religion. Their philosophy of the dandelion is not that all weeds are flowers; but rather that all flowers are weeds. Indeed it reaches to something like nightmare; as if Nature itself were unnatural. Perhaps that is why so many of them try desperately to write about machinery; touching which nobody has yet disputed the Argument from Design. No Darwin has yet maintained that motors began as scraps of metal, of which most happened to be scrapped; or that only those cars, which had grown a carburettor by accident, survived the struggle for life in Piccadilly. But whatever the reason, I have read modern poems obviously meant to make grass seem something merely scrubby and prickly and repugnant, like an unshaven chin.

That is the first note; that this common human mysticism about the dust or the dandelion or the daylight or the daily life of man does depend, and always did depend on theology, if it dealt at all in thought. And if it be next asked why this theology, I answer here — because it is the only theology that has not only thought, but thought of everything. That almost any other theology or philosophy contains a truth, I do not at all deny; on the contrary, that is what I assert; and that is what I complain of. Of all the other systems or sects I know, every single one is content to follow a truth, theological or theosophical or ethical or metaphysical; and the more they claim to be universal, the more it means that they merely take something and apply it to everything. A very brilliant Hindu scholar and man of science said to me, “There is but one thing, which is unity and universality. The points in which things differ do not matter; it is only their agreement that matters.” And I answered, “The agreement we really want is the agreement between agreement and disagreement. It is the sense that things do really differ, although they are at one.” Long afterwards I found what I meant stated much better by a Catholic writer, Coventry Patmore: “God is not infinite; He is the synthesis of infinity and boundary.” In short, the other teachers were always men of one idea, even when their one idea was universality. They were always especially narrow when their one idea was breadth. I have only found one creed that could not be satisfied with a truth, but only with the Truth, which is made of a million such truths and yet is one. And even in this passing illustration about my own private fancy, this was doubly demonstrated. If I had wandered away like Bergson or Bernard Shaw, and made up my own philosophy out of my own precious fragment of truth, merely because I had found it for myself, I should soon have found that truth distorting itself into a falsehood. Even in this one case, there are two ways in which it might have turned on me and rent me. One would have been by encouraging the delusion to which I was most prone; and the other by excusing the falsehood which I thought most inexcusable. First, the very exaggeration of the sense that daylight and dandelions and all early experience are a sort of incredible vision would, if unbalanced by other truths, have become in my case very unbalanced indeed. For that notion of seeing a vision was dangerously near to my old original natural nightmare, which had led me to move about as if I were in a dream; and at one time to lose the sense of reality and with it much of the sense of responsibility. And again, on the side of responsibility, in the more practical and ethical sphere, it might have forced on me a sort of political Quietism, to which I was really as much of a conscientious objector as to Quakerism. For what could I have said, if some tyrant had twisted this idea of transcendental contentment into an excuse for tyranny? Suppose he had quoted at me my verses about the all-sufficiency of elementary existence and the green vision of life, had used them to prove that the poor should be content with anything, and had said, like the old oppressor, “Let them eat grass.”

In a word, I had the humble purpose of not being a maniac, but especially of not being a monomaniac; and above all, of not being a monomaniac about a notion merely because it was my own. The notion was normal enough, and quite consistent with the Faith; indeed, it was already a part of it. But only as a part of it could it have remained normal. And I believe this to be true of practically all the notions of which my ablest contemporaries have made new philosophies; many of them normal enough at the start. I have therefore come to the conclusion that there is a complete contemporary fallacy about the liberty of individual ideas; that such flowers grow best in a garden, and even grow biggest in a garden; and that in the wilderness they wither and die.

Here again, I am well aware that somebody will ask the natural and normally reasonable question: “Do you really mean that a man cannot object to people being asked to eat grass, unless he accepts your particular creed?” To which I will only answer for the moment, “Yes; I do mean that; but not exactly as you mean it.” I will only add here, in passing, that what really revolts me and everybody else about that famous taunt of the tyrant is that it conveys some suggestion of treating men like beasts. I will also add that it would not remove my objection, even if the beasts had enough grass, or if the botanists had proved that grass is the most nutritious diet.

Now why do I offer here this handful of scrappy topics, types, metaphors all totally disconnected? Because I am not now expounding a religious system. I am finishing a story; rounding off what has been to me at least a romance, and very much of a mystery-story. It is a purely personal narrative that began in the first pages of this book; and I am answering at the end only the questions I asked at the beginning. I have said that I had in childhood, and have partly preserved out of childhood, a certain romance of receptiveness, which has not been killed by sin or even by sorrow; for though I have not had great troubles, I have had many. A man does not grow old without being bothered; but I have grown old without being bored. Existence is still a strange thing to me; and as a stranger I give it welcome. Well, to begin with, I put that beginning of all my intellectual impulses before the authority to which I have come at the end; and I find it was there before I put it there. I find myself ratified in my realisation of the miracle of being alive; not in some hazy literary sense such as the sceptics use, but in a definite dogmatic sense; of being made alive by that which can alone work miracles.

I have said that this rude and primitive religion of gratitude did not save me from ingratitude; from sin which is perhaps most horrible to me because it is ingratitude. But here again I have found that the answer awaited me. Precisely because the evil was mainly of the imagination, it could only be pierced by that conception of confession which is the end of mere solitude and secrecy. I had found only one religion which dared to go down with me into the depths of myself. I know, of course, that the practice of Confession, having been reviled through three or four centuries and through the greater part of my own life, has now been revived in a belated fashion. The scientific materialists, permanently behind the times, have revived all that was reviled in it as indecent and introspective. I have heard that a new sect has started once more the practice of the most primitive monasteries, and treated the confessional as communal. Unlike the primitive monks of the desert, it seems to find a satisfaction in performing the ritual in evening-dress. In short, I would not be supposed to be ignorant of the fact that the modern world, in various groups, is now prepared to provide us with the advantages of Confession. None of the groups, so far as I know, professes to provide the minor advantage of Absolution.

I have said that my morbidities were mental as well as moral; and sounded the most appalling depths of fundamental scepticism and solipsism. And there again I found that the Church had gone before me and established her adamantine foundations; that she had affirmed the actuality of external things; so that even madmen might hear her voice; and by a revelation in their very brain begin to believe their eyes.

Finally I said I had tried, however imperfectly, to serve justice; and that I saw our industrial civilisation as rooted in injustice, long before it became so common a comment as it is today. Anybody who cares to turn up the files of the great newspapers, even those supposed to be Radical newspapers, and see what they said about the Great Strikes, and compare it with what my friends and I said at the same date, can easily test whether this is a boast or a brute fact. But anybody reading this book (if anybody does) will see that from the very beginning my instinct about justice, about liberty and equality, was somewhat different from that current in our age; and from all the tendencies towards concentration and generalisation. It was my instinct to defend liberty in small nations and poor families; that is to defend the rights of man as including the rights of property; especially the property of the poor. I did not really understand what I meant by Liberty, until I heard it called by the new name of Human Dignity. It was a new name to me; though it was part of a creed nearly two thousand years old. In short, I had blindly desired that a man should be in possession of something, if it were only his own body. In so far as materialistic concentration proceeds, a man will be in possesion of nothing; not even his own body. Already there hover on the horizon sweeping scourges of sterilisation or social hygiene, applied to everybody and imposed by nobody. At least I will not argue here with what are quaintly called the scientific authorities on the other side. I have found one authority on my side.

This story, therefore, can only end as any detective story should end, with its own particular questions answered and its own primary problem solved. Thousands of totally different stories, with totally different problems have ended in the same place with their problems solved. But for me my end is my beginning, as Maurice Baring quoted of Mary Stuart, and this overwhelming conviction that there is one key which can unlock all doors brings back to me the first glimpse of the glorious gift of the senses; and the sensational experience of sensation. And there starts up again before me, standing sharp and clear in shape as of old, the figure of a man who crosses a bridge and carries a key; as I saw him when I first looked into fairyland through the window of my father’s peep-show. But I know that he who is called Pontifex, the Builder of the Bridge, is called also Claviger, the Bearer of the Key; and that such keys were given him to bind and loose when he was a poor fisher in a far province, beside a small and almost secret sea.

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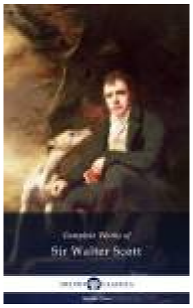

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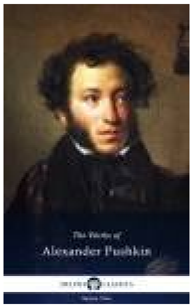

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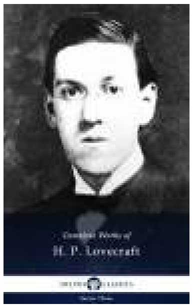
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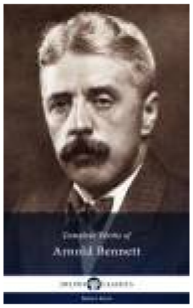
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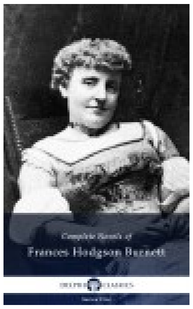

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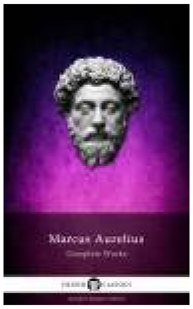

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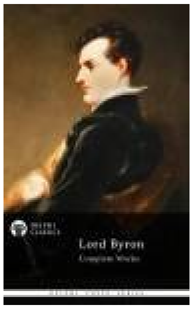

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Roman Catholic Cemetery, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire – Chesterton’s final resting place

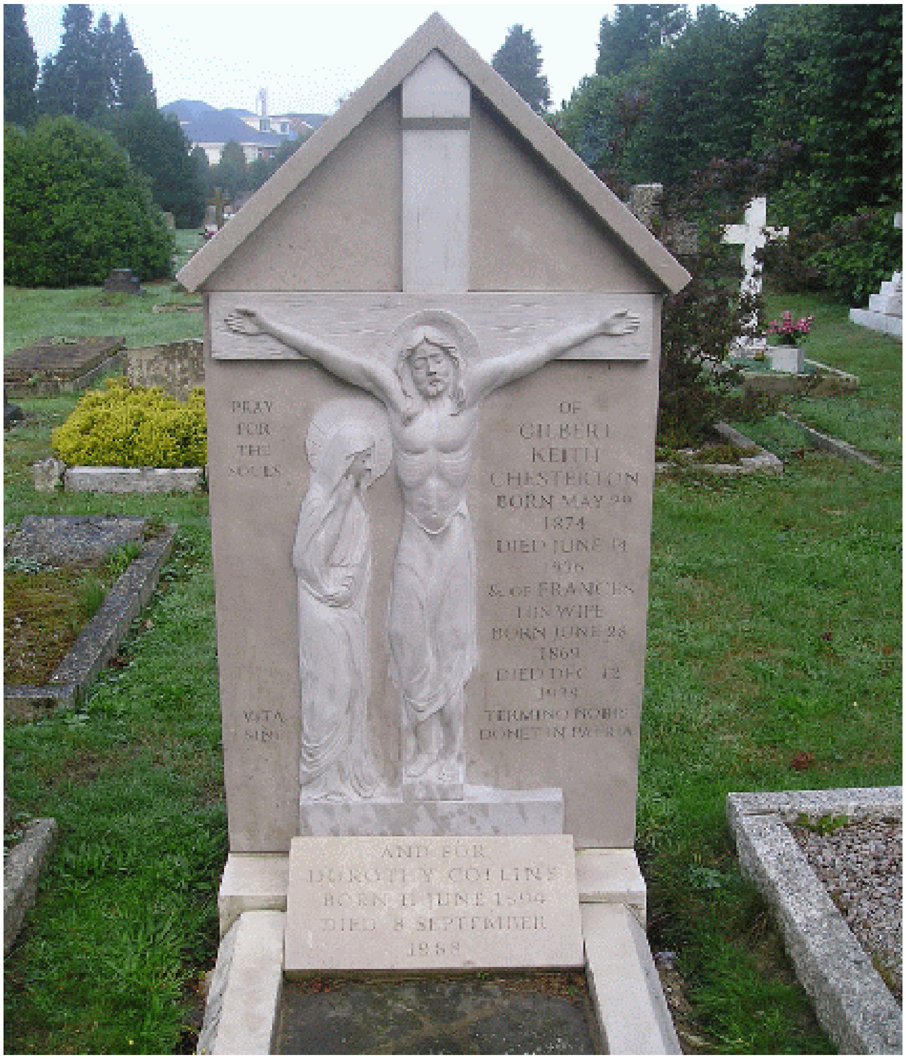
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Chesterton's grave